



GENDER REPRESENTATION IN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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Annotation *This article explores gender representation in idiomatic expressions across English language discourse. It analyzes how men and women are portrayed through fixed phrases, proverbs, and idioms, many of which reflect deeply rooted cultural stereotypes and social norms. The study highlights how certain idioms reinforce traditional gender roles—often portraying women in domestic, emotional, or passive roles, while men are depicted as dominant, rational, or aggressive. Moreover, the article examines the implications of such expressions in shaping societal attitudes and language learners' perceptions of gender. Attention is also given to the shift in modern usage, where language reform and social awareness movements challenge and sometimes alter these traditional expressions. The paper provides examples from literature, media, and everyday speech to illustrate how idiomatic language both mirrors and perpetuates gendered thinking.*

Keywords: *Gender representation, idiomatic expressions, language and gender, stereotypes, cultural norms, proverbs, sexism in language, feminist linguistics, phraseology.*

Аннотация *Данная статья посвящена изучению гендерного представления в идиоматических выражениях английского языка. Анализируется, каким образом мужчины и женщины изображаются через устойчивые фразы, пословицы и поговорки, многие из которых отражают устоявшиеся культурные стереотипы и социальные нормы. В статье подчеркивается, что ряд идиом закрепляет традиционные гендерные роли: женщины чаще всего предстают в роли домашних, эмоциональных или пассивных персонажей, тогда как мужчины изображаются как доминирующие, рациональные и активные. Также рассматриваются последствия такого языкового представления для формирования общественного сознания и восприятия языка изучающими. Особое внимание уделяется современным тенденциям, связанным с языковой реформой и борьбой за равноправие, которые стремятся переосмыслить или заменить стереотипные выражения. Примеры из литературы, СМИ и повседневной речи демонстрируют, как идиоматический язык отражает и закрепляет гендерные установки.*

Ключевые слова: *Гендерное представление, идиомы, язык и гендер, стереотипы, культурные нормы, пословицы, сексизм в языке, феминистская лингвистика, фразеология.*



Introduction


Language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a mirror reflecting social values, cultural norms, and power relations within a society. Among the various components of language, idiomatic expressions hold a unique place due to their fixed, figurative meanings and widespread use in everyday speech. These expressions often carry implicit messages about gender roles and identities, revealing the deep-rooted stereotypes and attitudes prevalent in a given culture. Idioms and proverbs frequently portray men and women in stereotypical ways—men are often depicted as strong, rational, and dominant, while women tend to be represented as emotional, passive, or domestic. Such portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles and contribute to shaping societal perceptions about what behaviors and characteristics are considered appropriate for each gender. Given the influential role of language in shaping thought and behavior, examining gender representation in idiomatic expressions becomes essential for understanding broader social dynamics. This article aims to analyze how gender is represented in English idiomatic expressions, highlighting both the perpetuation of stereotypes and the evolving nature of language in response to changing social attitudes. By exploring examples from literature, media, and everyday conversation, this study sheds light on the ways idiomatic language both reflects and influences cultural understandings of gender.

Idiomatic expressions are a rich source of cultural information, often encapsulating societal norms and values in a concise and memorable way. When it comes to gender representation, idioms frequently reinforce traditional stereotypes that influence how men and women are perceived. One common pattern in English idioms is the portrayal of men as strong, rational, and authoritative figures. Expressions such as “man of the house”, “wearing the pants”, and “take the bull by the horns” emphasize masculinity, leadership, and decisiveness. These idioms reflect and perpetuate the idea that men should be dominant and in control, both within the family and society at large.

Conversely, women are often depicted in idiomatic language as emotional, passive, or preoccupied with domestic roles. Idioms like “a woman’s work is never done”, “crying over spilled milk”, or “don’t put all your eggs in one basket” (sometimes used in contexts related to women’s decision-making) subtly reinforce notions of women as caretakers, worriers, or risk-averse individuals. Moreover, some expressions carry a negative connotation towards women, such as “old maid” or “a woman scorned”, perpetuating stereotypes about femininity and social expectations.

Category	Idiomatic Expressions about Men	Idiomatic Expressions about Women	Gender Stereotype Highlighted
Authority & Control	"Man of the house", "Wearing the pants", "Take the bull by the horns"	—	Men are dominant and in control
Strength & Courage	"Strong as an ox", "Brave as a lion"	—	Men are strong and brave
Emotional Expression	"Keep a stiff upper lip", "Wear your heart on your sleeve"	"Cry over spilled milk", "Wear your heart on your sleeve"	Men are stoic; women are emotional
Domestic Role	—	"A woman's work is never done", "Housewife"	Women are caretakers and homemakers
Negative Connotations	"Cold fish", "Bachelor"	"Old maid", "A woman scorned", "Bitch"	Negative stereotypes related to gender roles
Risk & Decision Making	"Take the bull by the horns", "Call the shots"	"Don't put all your eggs in one basket"	Men are decisive; women are cautious or passive
Professional Roles	"Top dog", "Big shot"	"Boss lady", "Glass ceiling" (modern usage)	Men as leaders; women overcoming barriers
Aggressiveness & Assertiveness	"Fight like a man", "Hard as nails"	"Bitch", "Catty"	Men's assertiveness seen as positive; women's as negative

The use of idioms with gendered meanings also reveals implicit sexism embedded in language. For instance, the term “bitch” in some idiomatic phrases can be used derogatorily towards women perceived as aggressive or assertive, reflecting societal discomfort with women who defy traditional submissive roles. Similarly, the phrase “mad as a hatter” historically reflects negative stereotypes, sometimes gendered, regarding mental health and behavior. However, contemporary language use shows signs of change. Social movements advocating gender equality have influenced the way idiomatic expressions are perceived and sometimes altered. New idioms emerge or existing ones are reinterpreted to challenge stereotypes—for example, phrases like “boss lady” or “mansplaining” reflect evolving



attitudes toward women's roles in professional and social spheres. Media and popular culture increasingly question and satirize traditional idiomatic portrayals of gender, promoting more balanced or critical perspectives.

Educational settings also play a role in raising awareness about the impact of language on gender perception. Teaching learners about the cultural and social implications of idioms helps develop critical language awareness, encouraging the questioning of stereotypes and promoting inclusive language use. In summary, while many idiomatic expressions continue to reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes, ongoing social changes and linguistic creativity contribute to their transformation. The study of gender representation in idioms thus offers valuable insights into the intersection of language, culture, and social change. Idiomatic expressions serve as a powerful reflection of cultural values and social attitudes, particularly concerning gender roles. This study reveals that many idioms perpetuate traditional stereotypes, portraying men as dominant, rational, and assertive, while often depicting women as emotional, passive, or confined to domestic roles. Such linguistic patterns contribute to reinforcing societal expectations and biases related to gender.

However, language is dynamic, and recent social changes and gender equality movements have begun to influence the way idioms are used and interpreted. New expressions challenge conventional norms, and media discourse often critiques stereotypical idioms, fostering a more inclusive understanding of gender roles. Educators and language users alike have a role to play in recognizing and addressing gender bias in idiomatic language. Understanding gender representation in idiomatic expressions not only enriches linguistic and cultural knowledge but also promotes critical awareness of how language shapes and reflects social realities. Continued research and conscious language practices can contribute to more equitable and accurate gender portrayals in communication.

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