

### **Idioms through Time and Technology: the Signature of a Culture**

By Iulian Mardar. Newcastle upon Tyne: "Cambridge Scholars Publishing", 2022, 224 pp., ISBN 1-5275-7639-6

Iulian Mardar's book, *Idioms through Time and Technology: the Signature of a Culture* is a laborious research and meditation, whose intention is clearly stated in its very title. It prepares the readers for the recognition of a special - fully successful - effort of conjugating the information and analyses made by the author in a coherent and relevant scientific approach. This scientific approach turns out to be a complex one (considering the established objectives as well as the large number of questions to which Iulian Mardar tries to provide a well-documented and reasoned answer), "a struggle and a challenge", to use the author's words, a theoretical and practical endeavour not easy at times and with surprising results, "difficult to anticipate" - as the author himself confesses.

Idioms/idiomatic expressions, which form the core of this study, do not represent a novelty in themselves; the book complements existing studies in the field - those designed in the spirit of Chomskyan syntactic theories (Weinreich, 1969; Fraser, 1970), semantic approaches to idiomatic expressions (Makkai, 1972; Wood, 1986), as well as functional approaches (Fernando, 1996). Iulian Mardar's contribution to the field is, however, an important one, subsumed into a number of two directions of study and analysis with particular advantages for future lexical and lexicographical studies. On the one hand, the book provides a new perspective on idioms by offering clearer criteria by which idioms themselves can be differentiated from other fixed expressions with a non-idiomatic character, and on the other hand, it relies on the identification and the questioning of idioms in the form of sentences based on irony, as well as on the process of de-idiomatization.

The book is structured into four chapters. The first chapter, *A New View on Idioms*, aims to establish new criteria for differentiating between idioms and other non-idiomatic expressions (complex verbs, proverbs, slang

words). The need for this study comes from an objective reality that the author identifies: the presence in the works dedicated to the inventory and study of idioms of many other non-idiomatic expressions that unjustifiably increased the number of the former and became susceptible of creating confusion in the mind of those dedicated to the study of this problem. Considering that this is primarily due to the fact that the existing definitions of the idiom themselves leave room for ambiguity, and in order to achieve the objectives set for the rest of the research, the author aims to provide his own definition - a "guide" in the selection of the actual idioms (which he considers, in the book, as "the highest manifestation of creativity in language"). In this sense, authorized voices, well-known in the field, are quoted, no matter how different the points of view advanced by them. Before providing his own definition, Iulian Mardar clearly synthesizes the works of the previous contributions in the field, progressively selecting the elements that will constitute his own position, shaping his own definition that will become operative throughout the book. Through these processes, the author's definite qualities as an analyst are revealed. In the selection process, the author's options are expressed unambiguously, he indisputably taking responsibility for them: "my opinion is that..."; "I cannot agree under any circumstances with..."; "my own conclusions" or "I strongly believe in...".

The criteria for differentiating between proper idioms and non-idiomatic expressions are established through a process characterized by analytical rigor and subtle discriminations. The contrastive approach and logical deduction are intertwined with intuition and the technique of *the first thing that comes to mind* - the latter two signaling the process of observing the structures of spoken English in various contexts for a period of more than twenty years (as the author mentions), as well as the interesting experiments carried out by him, in the sustained effort to research the deeper levels in the structure and functions of language.

What is also remarkable, in the same chapter, and with particular merit for the development of the field of study, is the identification of the existence of idiom-sentences based on irony, the so-called *IBIS-es* (Irony Based Idiomatic Sentences) and the *similidioms* (first mentioned in the Preface of the book), a new terminology for categories of comparisons as well as the use of the de-idiomatization process to demonstrate that "idioms can be

derived from fixed-form comparative constructions", as the author states.

Chapter 2, *The Influence of Technology and Society on Stupid and Crazy Idioms*, aims at identifying how time and technology (through numerous fields of activity) have contributed to the production of idioms. The theme - chosen by the technique of *the first thing that comes to mind* - brings to the fore idioms with the meaning of *crazy* and/or *stupid* - which will constitute the lexical background for the analysis. The large number of these idioms, the frequency of their use, as well as the fact that they are based on two negative characteristics, give the author the possibility - on the one hand, to contrastively establish the difference between English and Romanian, a situation illustrated in meticulously conceived tables and based on the analysis method of the statistical data that highlight the productivity of these idioms at the level of the two languages, and, on the other hand, to prepare the ground for the analyses in the next chapter.

Therefore, Chapter 3, *On Negative, Positive and Neutral English and Romanian Idioms*, recovers the idea of negativity from Chapter 2 and provides definitions for negative, positive and neutral idioms, before elucidating the issue of the differences between their numbers, based on a comparative study between English and Romanian. The study of two of the most authoritative voices in terms of word inventory - the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms and the Romanian Phraseological Dictionary - helps the author express some preliminary conclusions. Faithful to the working style applied throughout the work, the author theorizes, tests, formulates preliminary conclusions and then validates these conclusions after re-testing them, at another higher level of analysis, delimited thematically, to be sure that he does not miss any aspect unexplained. Thus, the preliminary conclusions in this chapter pass the test of evidence through the thorough analysis of idioms from the two languages on the thematic axis related to the animal kingdom - more precisely, to four of the most present animals in man's life and his daily activities - the *dog*, the *cat*, the *horse* and the *bull*.

The analysis is continued in Chapter 4, *Culturally Marked Idioms - Idioms which Spill the Beans*, which is dedicated to the connection between the idioms used and the culture from which they originate. Returning to the two thematic categories of idioms - which constituted the subject of Chapters 2

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and 3, respectively - represents yet another proof of the thoroughness of the research method imposed by the author of the book. Chapter 4, through the examples provided, the arguments made and the conclusions formulated, is, in fact, the one that makes the readers return to the title of the book and pay attention to its last part: *The signature of a Culture* - more precisely - to understand the fact that the patterns and the subjects on which the idioms are based reflect the mentality of a nation.

The merits of this book are multiple; we would recall, first of all, the fact that they are related to the extent and quality of information. The book is also remarkable due to the personal touch, to the author's own convictions clearly stated, to his good mastery and use of the bibliography based on the most famous dictionaries and books whose authors are concerned with the problem of idioms.

The book is also notable due to the thorough treatment of theoretical information as well as of examples, the source of which are not only dictionaries and specialist books, but also American and British sitcoms or forums such as yahoo answers, wordreference or usinglish. To these there are added the examples collected - as a true ethnomethodologist - by the author himself, from the usual conversations carried out in more or less formal contexts - conversations whose protagonists were native or non-native speakers of the English language. Another strength of the book is the applied nature of the research and the presence of the glossaries of terms at the end of it, so useful and carefully compiled.

In conclusion, Iulian Mardar's book, besides being "reader-friendly" (as the author himself calls it), is an authentic and real documentation and study, which is part of the most modern trends in linguistic research.

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