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POLITENESS MAXIMS IN ENGLISH IDIOMS

МАКСИМИ ВВІЧЛИВОСТІ В АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ ІДІОМАХ

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Human communication is a fundamental aspect of social interaction. Through language, individuals express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others. Every communicative exchange involves two primary participants: the speaker and the listener. For communication to be effective, the listener must accurately interpret the speaker's words, as the intended message may go beyond the literal meaning. In some cases, the speaker may convey a hidden or implied message [2, p. 32], requiring the listener to engage in thoughtful interpretation to comprehend the underlying intent.

Politeness serves as a hallmark of human civilization and stands as a key criterion in social interactions. Geoffrey Leech defines the principle of politeness as the practice of minimizing the use of impolite expressions in communication. His concept distinguishes between “self”, representing the speaker, and “other”, referring to the interlocutor or conversational partner [3, p. 80]. An utterance is considered polite when it contains respectful language, avoids direct commands, and demonstrates consideration for the listener's feelings.

Geoffrey Leech introduced six maxims of politeness to extend earlier work on the concept. These maxims include the tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, and sympathy maxim [3, p. 80–83]. Their purpose is to create a comfortable communicative environment by encouraging speakers to consider the listener's feelings and maintain social harmony. Brown and Levinson emphasize the importance of mutual respect and emotional consideration in conversations [1, p. 61]. Ultimately, the principle of politeness promotes respectful and considerate communication that avoids offending others.

This paper examines 37 English idioms related to communication, sampled from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, through the framework of Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Maxims (1983) [3, p. 80–83]. These idioms,

which express the meanings of bluntness, empathy, secrecy, social cohesion, tact, etc. are analyzed for their alignment with or deviation from six basic politeness principles. The selected idioms illustrate the reinforcement and challenge of norms of considerate interaction, reflecting the tension between directness and social harmony inherent in communicative process.

The *Tact Maxim*, which prioritizes minimizing cost to others, is exemplified by idioms like “mum’s the word – say nothing; don’t reveal a secret, informal” [4, p. 195], a pledge of secrecy that avoids potential harm or embarrassment by withholding sensitive information. Conversely, the idiom “get a word in edgeways – contribute to a conversation with difficulty because the other speaker talks almost incessantly” [4, p. 92] criticizes interlocutors who dominate conversations, indirectly pointing to a violation of tact due their failure to allow equitable participation. Similarly, “not to put too fine a point on it – to speak bluntly” [4, p. 107] and “call a spade a spade – speak plainly or bluntly, without avoiding issues which are unpleasant or embarrassing” [4, p. 271] express truth-telling preferred to diplomatic phrasing, often at the expense of the listener’s comfort. The idiom “lead with your chin – behave or speak incautiously” [4, p. 169] illustrates tactlessness, depicting communication that is recklessly forthright, disregarding possible social repercussions.

The *Generosity Maxim*, focusing on self-effacement, is embodied in the idiom “take someone’s word (for it) – believe what someone says or writes without checking for yourself” [4, p. 318], which denotes trusting others’ statements without verification, thereby privileging their perspective over one’s own skepticism. However, “talk the talk – speak fluently or convincingly about something or in a way intended to please or impress others” [4, p. 286] criticizes performative speech, which prioritizes impression management over genuine action, violating generosity by focusing on self-presentation rather than substantive contribution.

The *Approbation Maxim*, which encourages praise and discourages dispraise, is upheld in idioms like “a man (or woman) of his (or her) word – a person who keeps the promises that they make” [4, p. 317] and “someone’s word is their bond – someone keeps their promises” [4, p. 318], both of which commend reliability and integrity. In contrast, the unit “have swallowed a dictionary – use long and obscure words when speaking” [4, p. 78]) humorously disparages verbose or pretentious speech, indirectly critiquing the speaker’s attempt to elevate themselves through complex language. The phrase “who’s she – the cat’s mother?” [4, p. 258], as a reproof for impolite reference, further underscores societal expectations of respectful address.

The *Modesty Maxim* is exemplified by the idiom “a man (or woman) of few words – a taciturn person” [4, p. 317]. However, the maxim is

challenged by idioms like “the gift of the gab – the ability to speak with eloquence and fluency” [4, p. 123], which, while complimentary, draws attention to eloquence in a way that could conflict with cultural norms of humility.

The *Agreement Maxim* is verbalized by the idiom “speak the same language” [4, p. 167], which denotes shared understanding, fostering unity. However, “have (got) another think coming” [4, p. 290] and “speak for yourself” [4, p. 271] disrupt harmony by outright rejecting shared perspectives, emphasizing individual dissent. These idioms designate the tension between collective accord and personal authenticity.

The *Sympathy Maxim* in communication is fixed in the idioms “speak (or talk) of the devil” [4, p. 77], a lighthearted acknowledgment of coincidence that fosters camaraderie through shared humor. In addition, the unit “have a frog in your throat – lose your voice or find it hard to speak because of hoarseness or an apparent impediment in your throat” [4, p. 117] denotes empathy to speakers experiencing vocal difficulties, which meets the maxim’s emphasis on compassionate engagement.

Certain idioms inherently challenge the abovementioned politeness norms. For instance, “be open with – speak frankly to; conceal nothing from” [4, p. 208], while advocating honesty, risks breaching tact if frankness becomes abrasive. The idiom “promises, promises – used to indicate that the speaker is skeptical about someone’s stated intention to do something” [4, p. 229] and “the word on the street – a rumour or piece of information currently being circulated” [4, p. 318] reflect societal skepticism toward unverified claims and illustrate how gossip and doubt undermine trust. Additionally, “speak in tongues – speak in an unknown language during religious worship” [4, p. 271] though originating from religious practice, denotes alienation of interlocutors through unintelligibility, which violates clarity and cooperation.

The idioms analyzed in the research reveal the complex correlation between linguistic expression and politeness strategies. Some idioms, like “give someone the time of day – be pleasantly polite or friendly to someone” [4, p. 293], express respectful engagement; however, others, such as “talk dirty – speak about sex in a way considered to be coarse or obscene” [4, p. 80], “make a noise – speak or act in a way designed to attract a lot of attention or publicity” [4, p. 201], “talk (or speak) in riddles – express yourself in an ambiguous or puzzling manner” [4, p. 241], or “stick your neck out – risk incurring criticism, anger, or danger by acting or speaking boldly” [4, p. 276], deliberately subvert decorum. Adhering to Leech’s framework, this analysis of idioms reveals the cultural values embedded in everyday language, and the importance of politeness in communication. Thus, effective communication requires both speakers and listeners to adhere

to principles of politeness. The interlocutors' failure to observe them can lead to discomfort and misunderstandings in their interactions.

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THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: CONTENT ANALYSIS BASED ON THE WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN RESEARCHERS

ПОНЯТТЯ І СУТНІСТЬ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ: КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛІЗ ЗА МАТЕРІАЛАМИ СУЧАСНИХ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ДОСЛІДНИКІВ

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Міжкультурна компетентність є однією з найважливіших концепцій сучасного світу, що охоплює широкий спектр галузей знань, таких як лінгвістика, педагогіка, соціологія, психологія, міжкультурна комунікація тощо. У глобалізованому суспільстві, де взаємодія між культурами відбувається на різних рівнях, наявність міжкультурної компетентності стає необхідною умовою для ефективного спілкування та порозуміння. Цей термін уживається в різних контекстах, і, відповідно, дослідники пропонують різні дефініції. Тому важливо здійснити контент-аналіз наявних визначень, щоб узагальнити й уточнити основні