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AVOIDING VIOLENCE: TRANSFORMING LANGUAGE TO FOSTER PEACE

This paper explores the transformative nature of idioms, focusing on the commonly used vivid phrasal idioms which provide violence such as «killing two birds with one stone», «take the bull by the horns», «beat a dead horse», «more than one way to skin a cat», «bring home the bacon» and their transformed versions which promote peace such as «feeding two birds with one scone», «take the flower by the thorns», «water a dead plant», «more than one way to peel a potato or orange», «bring home the bagels» respectively. Examining the idioms through a mixed-method approach, the research employs quantitative analysis using a survey among master students from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, corpora from Sketch Engine, Google Book Ngram Viewer and dictionaries, along with qualitative methodologies such as critical discourse analysis. The investigation seeks to answer key questions regarding the transformed forms of idioms promoting peace. The study contributes to filling gaps in research on transformed idioms while reading them in social networks, articles and while speaking, especially using idioms in proper way which might not be danger to society. Offering insights into linguistic innovation, education and digital communication patterns.

Keywords: transformed idioms, modification, survey, promoting peace, violence, Sketch Engine.

Introduction

Idioms have a significant impact on how we express our feelings and thoughts through language. According to [24], even the most advanced users of English have the risk of struggling with idiom usage if they are not given enough studying time. Erman and Warren [9] showed that idioms are used to explain as much as 50 % of language. They help language learners understand English culture, which

has its roots in the customs and lifestyle of the English people, and provide some insight into English history [7]. However, the significance of these metaphorical expressions goes beyond embellishment. They also shape opinions and serve as pragmatic language that is employed in conveying views and making evaluations, and facilitating and maintaining meaningful communication, as well as establishing sense of solidarity [20]. This study argues that it vivid phrasal idioms are also a way of teaching younger generation pro-peace and pro-harmony and guiding them away from ones that could unintentionally encourage conflict or violence.

If we analyze the popular expression «kill two birds with one stone», it seems like a straightforward example of efficiency at first achieving two goals with a single activity [19]. However, with closer examination, it becomes clear that the underlying imagery is violent and normalizes the use of death as a means to achieve goals. Vivid phrasal idioms with such a content, carefully chosen and woven into everyday conversation, have the power to introduce violence to children and adults. Thus, we gather materials from corpora as it is a source of authentic materials. As in corpora samples can be gathered from children's speech as well, with the express aim of establishing norms for development in language acquisition [23]. We can see that for example in Sketch engine, the idiom «killing two birds with one stone» is popular (Table 1). For instance:

Table 1 – Occurrences in the Corpus for the Idiom «Kill two birds with one stone» (source: Sketch Engine)

Number of hits	9,293
Number of hits per million tokens	0.15
Percent of whole corpus	0.00001509%
Corpus size (tokens)	61,585,997,113

Instead, we ought to promote the usage of idioms that represent the values of harmony and partnership. For example, in the transformed version «feed two birds with one scone», the simple but powerful act of feeding birds as a symbol of care conveys the idea of promoting peace. This is important as nowadays people started to use more altered form of cruel idioms such as «hit two birds with one stone» and «feed two birds with one scone» (Survey results, COCA results). Meanwhile, the Table 2 below demonstrates the comparison of occurrences for «kill two birds with one stone» and its two transformation versions according to Sketch Engine.

Here it can be seen that altered versions appeared and people try to modify idioms in their speech. However, this paper aims to clarify this notion to a lot of people in order to bring peace and empathy between human beings.

Materials and Methods

The study sample consisted of master's students from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, specifically from the English Philology discipline. A total of 20 participants (students and teachers) were selected to ensure a diverse range of perspectives on idiomatic expressions. Purposive sampling was employed to include individuals with advanced linguistic knowledge, as their insights would be particularly relevant to assessing idiomatic transformations [34].

A corpus-based approach was utilized to analyze the frequency and contextual usage of traditional and modified idioms. Linguistic data was extracted from Sketch Engine, Google Books Ngram Viewer, and various lexicographic sources. These corpora were chosen due to their extensive coverage of contemporary English and their ability to provide diachronic and synchronic insights into language evolution [35].

The following table presents a comparative analysis of the occurrences of the idiom «kill two birds with one stone» alongside its modified variants, which have been suggested as more neutral or non-violent alternatives.

Table 2 – Comparison of Occurrences for «Kill two birds with one stone»

	‘Kill Two Birds with One Stone’	‘Hit Two Birds with One Stone’	‘Feed Two Birds with One Stone’
Number of hits	9,293	621	56
Number of hits per million tokens	0.15	0.01	0
Percent of whole corpus	0.00001509%	0.000001008%	0.093e-8%
Corpus size (tokens)	61,585,997,113	61,585,997,113	61,585,997,113

The data demonstrates that the traditional idiom «kill two birds with one stone» remains dominant in usage, whereas its modified counterparts are significantly less frequent. These findings align with previous studies on idiomatic persistence and linguistic inertia, which suggest that deeply ingrained idioms are resistant to change despite social and cultural shifts [36]. A structured survey was designed to assess participants' familiarity with traditional idioms associated with violence and their willingness to adopt transformed versions that promote a more peaceful and inclusive discourse. The survey consisted of two primary components: closed-ended questions measuring recognition, frequency of use. Open-ended questions exploring participants' attitudes and reasoning regarding idiomatic transformation and its potential implications for communication. Survey responses were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google

Forms. The methodology followed best practices for language attitude research, ensuring that the questions were designed to minimize response bias [37].

The collected quantitative data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including mean comparisons and frequency distributions, to identify trends in participants' attitudes toward traditional and modified idioms. Additionally, qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic coding [38] to uncover recurring perspectives on the role of language transformation in promoting non-violent discourse. To provide a comprehensive understanding of idiomatic evolution, the survey results were triangulated with corpus data from Sketch Engine and Google Ngram Viewer. This mixed-method approach facilitated an empirical assessment of usage trends and social acceptance, reinforcing the interplay between linguistic frequency and attitudinal shifts in idiomatic expression [39].

Idioms and Their Modification

Studies of English idioms conducted in electronic corpora show that their forms are relatively variable [5]. Changes which idioms undergo include lexical substitution, addition, ellipsis, pluralization, passivation, nominalization, etc. However, still little do we know about the way they are used. A substantial number of idioms have one or more variant forms. Also, Corpus evidence suggests that verb phrase (VP) idioms are especially prone to variation [5, p. 280]. Meanwhile, Raymond Gibbs [14] challenges the traditional view of idioms as «bits and pieces of fossilized language» and argues that the traditional approach fails to account for the metaphorical thought process of contemporary language speakers. According to Gibbs, studying idioms provides a unique opportunity to understand the rich and flexible nature of natural language and human thought [14, p.5].

Next, for example «killing two birds with one stone» can be transformed into several versions as «hit two birds with one stone» and «feed two birds with one scone». Therefore, we decided to analyse idioms which provide peace and offer educators to teach their students in peaceful way. It is also recommended not to use cruel idioms in speech. In order to determine the structural modifications, we conducted a study of modified idioms in the Sketch Engine corpora. In addition, master's program students were surveyed in order to know their position related to this topic. The present study aims to compare traditional and modified ways of idiom usage in society.

Idioms and Education

Glaser [15] uses the term «phraseological unit» with the eastern European linguistic tradition, while McCarthy [22], Makkai [21] and Fernando [11] opted for the term «idiom». Other linguists [5, p. 289; 16] preferred to call them «phrasal verbs». In this paper we use the term idiom.

Although idioms are important while teaching English, they pose great difficulties for learners [26; 29; 30; 31]. Especially while teaching pre-school and primary school students cruel idioms as «killing two birds with one stone» can prevent cruelty and even be dangerous for the children. We believe it is important to teach children to peaceful language. Although there is no known reason behind the transformations of the idiom ‘kill two birds with one stone, the shift from «kill» to «feed» appears to have started when educators, aiming to employ a more politically correct language to reflect awareness of animal rights and display more animal-friendly attitudes, started substituting certain. Teachers recognize that, while certain idioms may seem innocuous, they convey underlying meanings and can potentially send controversial messages to students, potentially normalizing animal abuse, such as the idiom in question [8]. Therefore, corpus-based analysis and survey among future and master’s program students become imperative for using new transformed idioms properly. Recent research has highlighted the crucial role of language in promoting peaceful discourse and in discouraging violence. Scholars have emphasized the influence of idiomatic expressions on shaping attitudes and behaviors, particularly in educational settings.

Idioms related to Animals

Many researchers have delved into animal-friendly idioms, stressing the importance of being mindful of our language and urging others to rethink harmful practices and use words that show kindness and respect towards animals [27]. A comprehensive exploration of linguistic speciesism can be found in A. Stibbe’s book «Animal Erased» [28], which sheds light on how animals are significantly disappearing from our thoughts and conversations, both in terms of their actual existence and how we talk about them.

Experts in this field focus on examining how animals are represented in language, taking a critical approach [6]. Notable researchers in this area include Stibbe [27; 28], Dunayer [8], Fill & Peter Mühlhäusler [12], and Reinhard Heuberger [17; 18]. However, research on animal idioms has mainly focused on lexicography, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and computational perspectives, as to the analysis of other idiomatic expressions [10]. Cook & Sealey [6, p. 315] stress the need to critically examine how animals are depicted in language and discourse, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in ecolinguistics. This means bringing together researchers from different fields to gain a better understanding of the complex relationships between language, culture, and the natural world. Thus, it is essential to critically evaluate how animals are represented in language and investigate alternative ways of talking about them that challenge harmful stereotypes and foster empathy and respect. This critical analysis can help identify and address instances of speciesism in language and encourage the use of non-discriminatory language.

In many cases, the substitution strategy is combined with various stylistic and rhetorical devices, such as alliteration, rhyme, humour, and fun. The use of alliteration and rhyme helps create memorable and catchy expressions [1]. For example, «bring home the bacon» was replaced with «bring home the bagels», using alliteration and rhyme to make the animal-friendly idiom more appealing and easier to remember [25].

Research Questions

RQ1: What form of idioms (traditional or transformed) do «English Philology» master's program students prefer to use?

RQ2: How can idioms with violent connotations be transformed into peaceful ones?

RQ3: How can the altered versions of idioms with violent connotations affect society?

Results and Discussion

The definitions of the five selected idioms were retrieved from the Cambridge dictionary [19], which is widely recognized as one of the most effective tools for vocabulary learning and lexical research [2]. The idiom «kill two birds with one stone» conveys the idea of accomplishing two tasks with a single action. Similarly, «take the bull by the horns» means to confront a problem directly and confidently, while «beat a dead horse» refers to the futility of continuing to pursue a lost cause. The expression «more than one way to skin a cat» highlights that a particular goal can be achieved through multiple methods, whereas «bring home the bacon» signifies earning a living or providing financial support, particularly for one's family. Beyond their literal meanings, these idioms reflect historical and cultural perspectives that often involve violent, aggressive, or animal-related imagery [33]. The gradual transition from «kill» to «hit» and then to «feed» in the idiom «kill two birds with one stone» demonstrates a broader linguistic trend toward positive, non-violent language. In this context, the modified idiom «feed two birds with one stone» promotes a caring mindset, shifting the focus from aggression to nourishment. This transformation was spearheaded by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, USA) in 2018, as part of a campaign advocating for animal-friendly language [25]. The organization published a list of 166 common animal-related idioms along with 88 suggested alternatives, urging the public to adopt expressions that align with modern ethical concerns about animal welfare and environmental consciousness. PETA's initiative sparked a widespread public debate on the role of language in shaping social attitudes and ethical norms. While supporters argue that idiomatic modifications can foster more empathetic communication, critics view such changes as unnatural alterations to established linguistic conventions [13]. Despite this resistance, the ongoing dissemination of modified idioms through digital platforms, educational discourse, and media

discussions suggests that these linguistic adaptations are gradually gaining recognition, particularly among younger generations and progressive educational institutions [13].

RQ1: What form of idioms (traditional or transformed) master students prefer to use?

Overall, twenty master's program students from Kazakh National University were surveyed and asked to choose the idioms that they would use in their speech. They were given papers with root form of idioms and transformed ones. In addition they were informed about Topic, Research and were informed that each student will be coded. The paper and brief information about transformed idioms were given.

Figure 1 below shows the index of the students' choices. As it can be seen, traditional idioms were chosen by demonstrating 29 %, whereas their versions excluding violent language made 71 %.

We can claim that just over 70 % out of 100 % the students choose modified idioms that convey peace. It indicates that using idioms that encourage harmony and positivity is becoming more and more popular these days. The tendency toward altered idioms is indicative of a desire for harmonious and comprehending language. It is clear from our ongoing investigation into how language affects our ideas and communication that altered idioms are crucial in creating an atmosphere of respect for one another [4]. By modifying these idioms to promote animals vocabulary, we can create a more compassionate and inclusive language that aligns with our evolving values and concerns.

This pattern demonstrates how language is dynamic and flexible enough to change with our shifting social structures.

Participants' Idiom Preference

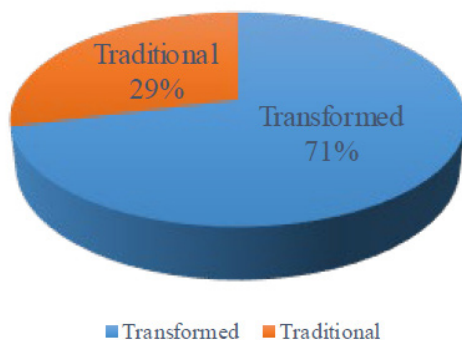


Figure 1 – Participants' choices in usage of idioms

RQ2: How can idioms with violent connotations be transformed into peaceful ones?

The expression «kill two birds with one stone» dates back to 1656 when it appeared in Thomas Hobbes' writing. In the questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance, he used it to convey the idea of trying to address two arguments with one answer but satisfying neither [13, p. 4]. Even before it, a similar phrase was found in «The Proverbs of John Heywood» in 1546: *'I will learne to stop two gaps with one bush.'* There is also a possible link to the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus, where Daedalus, an ingenious inventor, is said to have used a stone to kill two birds and take their wings.

This myth is best known for the part where Icarus' wings, made with wax, melted when he flew too close to the sun [3]. Afterwards, transformed versions appeared as PETA wanted to change violent idioms into peaceful ones.

In more recent times, transformed versions of these idioms have appeared as part of a campaign by the people for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, to change idioms with violent meanings into peaceful ones. PETA has long been a recognized voice in support of animal welfare. Their campaign addresses a fascinating but frequently overlooked topic: the violent overtones present in many idioms relating to animals. PETA hopes to promote a more compassionate and nonviolent style of speaking by offering benign substitutes for these terms. The project is motivated by the understanding that language shapes our understanding of the world and, consequently, our well-being. Idioms, as «kill two birds with one stone» or «beat a dead horse» are common in our daily speech. While most people use these idioms without any intent of harm towards animals, PETA believes that the hidden violence in these expressions exists.

Table 3 – Root forms of five idioms and their modifications according to PETA

Original Idiom	Transformed Idiom
1. Kill two birds with one stone.	Feed two birds with one scone.
2. Take the bull by the horns.	Take the flower by the thorns.
3. Beat a dead horse.	Water a dead plant.
4. More than one way to skin a cat	More than one way to peel an orange.
5. Bring home the bacon.	Bring home the bagels

In tables 3 and 4 we find real-world examples of both versions used in media and everyday language. This contrast not only showcases the cultural relevance of idioms but also emphasizes the importance of adapting language in a way that aligns the contemporary values. As society continues to evolve and become more

aware of ethical consideration, such modifications of idioms serve as an important reminder of the power of language and its impact on perceptions of animals and the environment.

RQ3: How can the altered versions of idioms with violent connotations affect society?

Negative idioms have the ability to shape opinions, sway conduct, and eventually affect the social foundation of our societies. They may hinder the development of a more inclusive and compassionate society by supporting prejudiced ideas and stereotypes, which may worsen inequality in society [32]. Therefore, while using and discussing these idioms may appear insignificant, this linguistic change has the ability to significantly lower the level of social acceptance of violence.

It encourages people to consider the consequences of their speech more carefully. This increased consciousness can then be translated into more compassionate behaviour toward other people and animals. The goal of this article is to advance a more inclusive and respectful culture, not merely to modify slang.

Critics may argue that changing idioms is a pointless that will not produce noticeable change. However, history has demonstrated that language evolves throughout time and has a significant impact on mental processes. Similar to how offensive language and racial slurs have been eliminated from civil discourse to promote inclusivity and respect, we can also polish our vocabulary to make it less harsh and more sympathetic.

When harmful idioms are altered to be more inclusive, it can have a positive impact on society by promoting a more respectful and harmonious environment. These altered idioms can help dismantle stereotypes and discrimination, promoting inclusivity and equality. By using language that is inclusive and considerate of diverse backgrounds, we can contribute to a more welcoming and respectful society for all.

Table 4 – Examples of root forms of five idioms and their modifications

Original Idiom	Transformed Idiom
<i>Kill two birds with one stone.</i> It was like, ‘Man, we’re going to kill two birds with one stone and get a good safety and a good punt returner.’ (2017, News, Chicago Sun-Times)	<i>Feed two birds with one scone.</i> Feed two birds with one scone?» If you attract hordes of birds in my city of Chicago by feeding them you will be shot. (web, http://www.wwtdd.com/2018/12/peta-asks-us-to-stop-speciesism-with-phrases-like-feed-two-birds-with-one-scone/)

<p><i>Take the bull by the horns.</i> But individually, we also have to take the bull by the horns and help ourselves lose invisible status. (web, huffingtonpost.com)</p>	<p><i>Take the flower by the thorns.</i> «Be the guinea pig.» Say: «Be the test tube.» Instead of: «(Beat a dead horse.)» Say: «Feed a fed horse.» Instead of: «Take the bull by the horns.» Say: «Take the flower by the thorns . (web, https://www.fox29.com/news/peta-calls-for-end-to-anti-animal-language)</p>
<p><i>Beat a dead horse.</i> So much, in fact, that Judge Catherine Eagles at one point said, «We're about to beat a dead horse» (2012, GBS_ This Morning)</p>	<p><i>Water a dead plant.</i> Wenger can never be a small figure in the eyes of any Arsenal fan – past, present or future. For how long do you water a dead plant? (web, http://outsideoftheboot.com/2016/03/21/arsene-wenger-no-longer-immune-from-the-normal-parameters-of-success/)</p>
<p><i>More than one way to skin a cat</i> But my student turned a profit. There's more than one way to skin a cat in the real estate biz. (Mov, Cheerleader Chainsaw Chicks)</p>	<p><i>More than one way to peel an orange.</i> Proof that there's more than one way to peel an orange, we've also seen some publishers actually take down their paywalls! (web, https://xtremepush.com/how-covid-19-has-impacted-online-publishing-and-how-brands-can-win/)</p>
<p><i>Bring home the bacon.</i> This is about the people who work hard to bring home the bacon and want to keep it. (Blog, http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/10/why-occupy-wall-street-is-not-the-tea-party-of-the-left/)</p>	<p><i>Bring home the bagels</i> It's probably his mother asking him to bring home bagels. (web, https://bostonreview.net/fiction-arts-society/mike-jeffrey-all-places-without-windows)</p>

Conclusion

The integration of nonviolent idioms into everyday discourse plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it shapes thought, social identity, and cultural norms [40]. As previous research in linguistic relativity suggests, the metaphors and idiomatic expressions embedded in a language influence cognitive processing and behavioral patterns [41]. Thus, by consciously adopting idioms that promote collaboration and nonviolence, we contribute to a linguistic shift that reinforces peaceful social interactions.

A key implication of this study is the necessity of systematically integrating peaceful idioms into educational curricula and public discourse. In language education, educators should incorporate nonviolent phraseology into school

textbooks, second language acquisition programs, and teacher training materials. Critical Discourse Analysis highlights how language use in educational settings perpetuates or challenges social ideologies, emphasizing the importance of equipping learners with the ability to recognize and use idioms that align with principles of empathy and inclusivity. Beyond formal education, media discourse plays a central role in shaping linguistic norms and public perceptions [42]. Journalistic guidelines, editorial policies, and digital content moderation strategies should encourage the use of peaceful idioms in news reporting, political discourse, and public communication. The normalization of such idioms in mass media can contribute to shifting societal attitudes, reducing the implicit reinforcement of aggressive or conflict-laden expressions. Furthermore, digital literacy programs and social media campaigns can promote awareness of the impact of language choices on social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Future research should explore the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic dimensions of nonviolent idioms, examining their cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects on individuals and communities. Experimental studies in corpus linguistics and neurolinguistics could provide empirical data on the subconscious impact of idiomatic expressions, offering deeper insights into how language shapes perceptions of peace and violence. Moreover, longitudinal studies on language change could assess the extent to which nonviolent idioms gain traction in different socio-cultural and linguistic contexts.

Fostering an intentional shift toward peaceful idioms is not merely a linguistic endeavor but a social and ethical imperative. By embedding nonviolent expressions in education, media, and public discourse, we contribute to a broader cultural transformation that aligns language with values of empathy, cooperation, and nonviolence. These seemingly small linguistic adjustments can have far-reaching consequences, influencing how individuals and societies conceptualize conflict and resolution in the long term.

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ЗОРЛЫҚ-ЗОМБЫЛЫҚТЫҢ АЛДЫН АЛУ: БЕЙБІТШІЛІКТІ НЫҒАЙТУ ҮШІН ТІЛДІ ӨЗГЕРТУ

Бұл мақалада идиомалардың трансформациялық табиғаты зерттелді. Әсіресе зорлық-зомбылықты білдіретін жиі қолданылатын жарқын фразалық идеомаларға «екі қоянды бір оқпен өлтіру», «бірден қолға алу», «уақытты босқа өткізу», «жалғыз шешім емес», «өмір сүру үшін ақша табу» және олардың «бір уақытта екі маңызды нәрсені орындау», «гүлді тікенектерінен ұстау», «өлі өсімдікті суару», «жұмай, домалату», «үйге бауырсақ әкелу» сияқты бейбітшілікті білдіретін өзгерген нұсқаларына назар аударылады. Идиомаларды аралас тәсілмен зерттеу кезінде әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университетінің магистратура студенттерінің сауалнамасын пайдалана отырып, сандық талдау жасалынды, Sketch Engine материалдары, Google Book Ngram Viewer және сөздіктер, сондай-ақ дискурсты сыни талдау ретінде сапалық әдістер қолданылды. Зерттеу бейбітшілікті білдіретін идиомалардың түрлендірілген түрлеріне қатысты негізгі сұрақтарға жауап беруге бағытталған. Бұл зерттеу трансформацияланған идиомаларды әлеуметтік желілерде, мақалаларда және ауызекі тілде оқығанда, әсіресе қоғамға қауіп төндірмейтін идиомаларды дұрыс қолданғанда, олқылықтардың орнын толтыруға көмектеседі. Ол лингвистикалық инновациялар, білім беру және сандық коммуникация модельдері туралы түсінік береді.

Кілтті сөздер: трансформацияланған идиомалар, модификация, сауалнама, бейбітшілікке ықпал ететін, зорлық-зомбылық, Sketch Engine.

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ПРЕДОТВРАЩЕНИЕ НАСИЛИЯ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ УКРЕПЛЕНИЯ МИРА

В этой статье исследуется трансформирующая природа идиом. Основное внимание уделяется часто используемым ярким фразовым идиомам, которые выражают насилие, таким как «убить двух зайцев одним выстрелом», «взять быка за рога», «зря терять время», «не единственное решение», «зарабатывать на жизнь» и их трансформированным версиям, выражающие мир, такие как «выполнять два важных дела одновременно», «взять цветок за шипы», «поливать мертвое растение», «не мытьем, так катанием», «принести домой бублики» соответственно. При изучении идиом с помощью смешанного подхода использовался количественный анализ с использованием опроса студентов магистратуры Казахского национального университета им. аль-Фараби, материалов Sketch Engine, Google Book Ngram Viewer и словарей, а также качественные методы, как критический анализ дискурса. Исследование направлено на то, чтобы ответить на ключевые вопросы, касающиеся трансформированных форм идиом, выражающих мир. Это исследование помогает восполнить пробелы в исследованиях трансформированных идиом при чтении их в социальных сетях, статьях и в устной речи, особенно при правильном использовании идиом, которое может не представлять опасности для общества. Оно дает представление о лингвистических инновациях, образовании и моделях цифровой коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: трансформированные идиомы, модификация, опрос, способствующий миру, жестокость, Sketch Engine.

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