

# The Contrastive Study of Idiomatic Expressions

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## Abstract

This paper is offered in the belief that it makes the examination of the idiomatic phrase more interesting within the comparative view. The main text contains several languages as the object of semantic and syntactic analysis. Regarding idiomatic expressions(IE) in Korean Language, they build up the logic on evidences of foreign languages with the paradigm of idiomatic expressions. Basically they will be classified with three types in article, such as the idiomatic Fused form(IF), the idiomatic Compound(IC) and the idiomatic old Saying(IS).

In this paper, it is going to be analyzed out the data with the semantic features, such as figuration, prediction, transparency, affection. On the other hand, it has been selected for the syntactic constraint as a word order, modified form, ellipsis, negative and honorific form and so on.

The comparative view in this article is not only for different languages but also for the features in syntactic or semantic limitations. The evidence of considerable experiment has built up the process of contrasting each item closely and it can be made it graph of its linkage. It is also a perfect complement to the demerit of two Diagrams, which is the figure of the restriction in Semantic and Syntactic conditions in paragraph 3, Chart I which is the comparison of IE restrictions in graphical representations compared. It totally puts together in semantic and syntactic conditions to the concerning of mean deviation in a chart. Finally it will be added the

comparison of the checklist, including with the average deviation of constraints, as the result of examinations of IE and shows an attendant figure of the idiomatic old Saying from five different languages.

## 1. Introduction

The rationale for this paper is that comparative study is necessary for taking an objective view of Korean Language. As such, it deserves to be an issue of modern linguistic research which has been increasing our understandings of diverse materials in language and literature for many decades. Regarding idiomatic expressions, it would be better for it to take a contrastive point of view. Research materials in this article are foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Turkish. Of course, it includes several Korean and English examples for the check list.

The framework of this paper is four chapters such as followings. The first chapter is mainly discussed the definition of idiomatic expressions. The second one refers to its distinctive features as a peculiar phraseology in foreign languages. In third chapter, they will be compared with the concerning of semantic or syntactic conditions. Finally, the main text is summarized in the last chapter and examines its weak points for a revised paper.

First, there are several cardinal principles in this research which play an important role in scientific linguistics<sup>1)</sup>. Obviously, the most important fact is setting limits of the range of idiomatic expressions. That means which forms can be included in the category and which can not. We need a clear domain of the definition of these special expressions.

Let me present these four basic constraints of idiomatic expressions(IE) with

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1) According to Wood(1986), they have several forms from the fully opaque phrase to fully predictable phrase in these categories. Cruse(1986) says that collocation, bound collocation and idiom could be distinguished by semantic degree of clearness.

the consideration relating to terminology and notational conventions to be used in the rest of this paper. I shall use the terms principally “*semantic or syntactic conditions, limitation, rules, restrictions...etc*” to refer to a set of distinguishing marks such as figures of speech, conventionality, proverbiality, inflexibility and the dual structure between surface and deep structure in idiomatic expressions.

The main point must be stressed, because beginners often find it difficult to grasp its definition, IE shows the fundamental principles as follows :

- (1) (a) They have more than two different phrases which is double structure.
- (b) They are reconstituted by lexical and semantic changes.
- (c) They could be restricted by syntactic regulations so has few of modifiable forms.
- (d) They have a high frequency of usage over the centuries.

Probably the most judicious remark at present would be that the marks made on the rule may well purely distinguish the idiomatic phrase from the conventional phrase. Basically, it could be kept in order with well used criteria, close semantic relatedness, morphological and lexical changes on the derivative double structure, syntactic and pragmatic limits.

Thus it should be the first step that limits the field of idiomatic expressions, as a main theme. In order to keep the set phrase and the conventional phrase separate, it is important to bear in mind that a basic rule in (1) and its classification of idiomatic expressions which will be applied from the next chapter<sup>2)</sup>. It can be classified into

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2) Some scholars attribute the sorting out to this abstruse topic of IE. Fraser(1970 : 22-42) gives some details of the relative proportions of grammatical changes of IE, Unrestricted, Reconstruction, Extraction, Permutation, Insertion, Adjunction, Completely frozen.

three kinds of idiomatic expressions(IE) as following, the idiomatic Fused form or Fusion(IF), the Idiomatic Compound(IC) and the Idiomatic old Saying(IS) under the category on the whole.

## 2. The Classification System of IE

It might be necessary to classify the system of idiomatic expressions among items, it could be classified with the idiomatic Fused form, the idiomatic Compound, the idiomatic old Saying in this dissertation. The fused form simply changes its sense for implication during the process of word formation. However, the idiomatic fused form(IF) partially differs from it, which absolutely changes its functional shift and meaning at the same time.

On the other hand, IC has phonetic pause between components and can be changed word order by parentheses such as adverbial phrases. The idiomatic old Saying, IS could be distinguished by transparency grades, which IF shows its opacity of meaning but IS has relatively clear sense and could have historical backgrounds. These three types will be applied to a case in this paper.

### 2.1. The Paradigm of Chinese IE

It shows that the division between IF, IC and IS in Chinese does not have enough description, which becomes particularly evident in the case of semantic and lexicological features. Let me explain the paradigm of it with the instance (2).

- (2) (a) 马后炮
- (b) 不胫而走, 屡试不爽
- (c) 吃定心丸, 开倒车, 拍马屁
- (d) 多一位菩萨, 多一炉香, 功亏一篑

To illustrate, I'll demonstrate how to classify each example from the different forms in instances of (2), which are all included in idiomatic expressions. As can be seen, the idiomatic fused form (IF), (2a, b) is often based on semantic changes, basically four syllables are simplified as a set phrase and it generates figurative meanings. However, (2c) shows us that vocabulary items fits together as a recognized compound. If it consists of a pair of syllables, it tends to be the case that a component in the sentence, actually most of them is the objective, coincides with a predicate verb. For instance, '拍马屁' from (2c) which originally means 'ingratiate oneself' presents its meaning of 'flattery or curry favour with one's boss' with the sentence form such as "拍领导的马屁". Besides, it could be grammatically restructured in the case of "马屁拍得挺有对水平" in another sentence.

However, the idiomatic old Saying (2d), still holds a syntactical features in reserve. So it could refer to IF as the top of the ranking within the fixed phrase and it could be the idiomatic old Saying in stages.

## 2.2. The Paradigm of Turkish IE

It is true that Chinese has more typical distinctions than Turkish which has grammatical similarities to Korean. Hence it is more interesting to find out the difference between three categories, IF, IC and IS in Turkish for the contrast discussions. I will examine these instances through the syntactic constraints, such as making an error in the arrangement of words or adnominal forms, combining tense or negative expressions and ellipsis. This can be illustrated in the following way.

- (3) (a) İki yüzlü  
 (b) Ağzından bal damlamak  
 (c) Dort gözle beklemek  
 (d) Sabrın sonu selamet, Ateş yolmayan yerden duman çıkmaz

For examples given so far, one might suppose that it would have completely different structure if we make a change of the arrangement of words or modifier form. For instances, the meaning of “Beklemeden dort gözle” is basically different from the original signification of being on the tiptoe of expectation from (3c), ‘Dort gözle beklememk’. It also shows a strange meaning with the negative sentence, “Dort gözle beklememk”, either. At the same time, in the case of an ellipsis of constituent, especially ‘olmak’ phrase in Turkish<sup>3)</sup>, the substantives of the idiomatic fused form, noun phrase such as (3a), the rule does not hold the case. It tells us that each morpheme is firmly united all in one and it finally becomes the idiomatic fused form, IF.

The first pattern could be generated more easily if there is high frequency and relevance which is basically the main constraint for idiomatic expressions. In this analogy, if one of the adjacent syllables has a low functional load, there are great possibilities to be expressed with the idiomatic form in dialogues.

### 2.3. The Paradigm of Japanese IE

Let us now examine the various types of IE in Japanese. It is deemed to be true that the basis of this distinction and classification schemes as IF, IC and IS are by all means applicable to this language, too. IF can be illustrated in the following way.

- (4) (a) うの目, たかの目  
 (b) 猫の手も借りたい  
 (c) 二足の草鞋を履く  
 (d) 坊主憎けりゃ袈裟まで憎い

3) There has recently been an attempt to reargue about proverb ‘olmak’ in Turkish. It actually has a similar function to ‘Ha-’verb in Korean. : cf. Kimheekyong(2002 : 39-42) .

(i) Kulağı alışık olmak      (ii) Kafası boş olmak      (iii) Tüyleri diken diken olmak

The instance of (4) could be failed to distinguish the same grammatical categories, but it might be unnecessary to make these distinctions explicit on the semantic point for which IE are used. These four examples of the sequence of IF, IC and IS, are highly frequent in spoken language and quite distinct in meaning.

Yet, they have the limit of word declensions so few of the sentence patterns like another instance of other foreign languages are doing in this paper.

However, this would normally imply not merely that IE are addressed on (1c, d) but also that the set phrase has contrastive stress on its additional features<sup>4)</sup>. In reality, it is perfectly possible to have its own intonation contour without a special stress as one of the peculiar phrase in pragmatics.

#### **2.4. The Paradigm of English IE**

Turning to the comparative survey of the semantic and syntactic condition, I will examine the constraint order in details(in chapter 3.1) which works on these principles. In the meanwhile, it might be more interesting to take an instance from the practical sentence in English from now. It is actually divided into two classes in Korean, the declinable phrase which is functioning as the predicate in a sentence and the indeclinable phrase, so called the substantives in Korean grammar, which is usually a noun phrase or a nominative case in IF. The instance of (5) marks a typical character of English idiomatic expressions which may be more familiar than other languages.

(5) (a) Jack of all trades, and master of none.

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4) Nine further points should be mentioned for the sake of completeness. According to the Dictionary of American Idioms(1984), there are restrictive use labels in idiomatic expressions such as, slang, informal, formal, literary, vulgar, substandard, nonstandard, archaic and regional.

- (b) He turned absolutely green when he saw my new Jaguar car.
- (c) You've often been offered this job, and the offer may not remain on the table for too long. So you'd better take this one while you have the chance. You need to strike when the iron is hot.
- (d) Time and tide waits for no man.

The example (5) offers a reclassification of the idiomatic Fused form. It could be divided into two types, as the declinable which generally has the form of description in the sentence, such as (5b, 5c), and the substantives which has the nominative or subjective case, such as (5a). Another difficulty arises here, though, within the kind of constraints represented by other instances until now, it is not clear what kind of rule there could be for them in particular. At least, it is sure that (5b) 'turn green' had changed the word order because of an adverb 'absolutely', which means the declinable phrase could make an inflection or conjugation form with no holds barred.

Finally, it seems somewhat indispensable for a comparative view with the semantic constraint to IC, (5c) and IS, (5d). Except possibly for the distinction between IC and IF, (5d) 'Time and tide waits for no man' shows a sharp restriction contrastively with the semantic point of view for IS. Because it does not have a conjugated form with syntactic limitations in IS.

### 3. The Comparative Table of Idiomatic Expressions

Consider, first, the idea that the reader's interest prefers to distinctive explanations and at least it starts to partly understand the idiomatic set phrase. Now it is going to be more easily through three diagrams and one chart in this chapter<sup>5)</sup>. We

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5) It must be stressed at the outset with the graphics, because this research is so new, few of its results are uncontroversial for IE discussion. Besides, it might have faults and lack extra information and misunderstandings of materials in foreign languages needed to deal with its weakness.

can illustrate it graphically with the semantic and syntactic restrictions first and then make the comparison of the IE restrictions together.

### 3.1. The Restraint of Syntactic Conditions

It allows me to depict the features of IE in a diagram with the restraints of semantic conditions, such as transparency, figuration, prediction, affection<sup>6)</sup>. It may show the direction in which a balance of comparative view has to represent the figure of restriction in semantic conditions as to *Diagram I*.

**Diagram I. The Figure of the restriction in Semantic Conditions<sup>7)</sup>**

| Semantic Features<br>Classification |   | Figuration | Prediction       | Transparency | Affection |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------|------------------|--------------|-----------|
|                                     |   | IF         | The Substantives | --           | --        |
| The Declinable phrase               | - |            | -                | --           | -         |
| IC                                  |   | ++         | ++               | ++           | ++        |
| IS                                  |   | +          | +                | +            | +         |

It must be stressed that all the semantic features in *Diagram I*, the substantive of IF in Korean is the most restrictive form among Idiomatic Expressions. On the other hand, IC shows the most transparent aspects in other classifications. IF could be distinguished from others by transparency grades, which shows its opacity of meaning<sup>8)</sup>. The transparency index is based on semantic factors such as a synthetic

6) Grice(1975) argues that the supplemental test requires quite a number of the elements as a distinction for idiomaticity, such as calculability, context dependence, translatability, paraphrasability, commitment, reiterability, incontrovertibility, interaction with grammar, normality etc.

7) My formulation is based on three diagrams in Kimheekyong(2006), for a different account, see e. g. Kimheekyong(2005). Let me introduce the meaning of signs, '- -': Very restricting, '-': Limited, '+': Free competition, '++': Nonrestrictive.

meaning of constituent elements. Hence, the semi-transparent grade is IS, as we can confirm it the second in the ranking from the above diagram. As the verb phrase generally has fully predictable setting<sup>9)</sup>. IC has on the top of the listing of transparent among IE.

This diagram gives undue value to the semantic views, it might have a lot of faults in syntax or morphology. Hence it would be better to find a proper complement to the weak side of *Diagram I*. Therefore we can make it up by marking the restriction of syntactic conditions in *Diagram II*. The details are tabulated in *Diagram II* as follows :

**Diagram II. The Figure of the Restriction in Syntactic Conditions**

| Classification |                       | Factors Syntactic |    | A Word Order | A Qualified form | An Ellipsis form | A Negative form | An Honorific form |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|                |                       |                   |    |              |                  |                  |                 |                   |
| IF             | The Substantives      | -                 | -- | -            | --               | --               |                 |                   |
|                | The Declinable phrase | ++                | ++ | +            | +                | ++               |                 |                   |
| IC             |                       | +                 | +  | -            | +                | +                |                 |                   |
| IS             |                       | --                | -- | -            | --               | -                |                 |                   |

As shown in the table, it can be confirmed that the substantive of IF in Korean has a more severe limitation than the declinable one, even though they belongs to the same category IF. The facts could be brought to light that the the substantives and the declinable phrase in Korean do run counter each other with semantic regulations. They

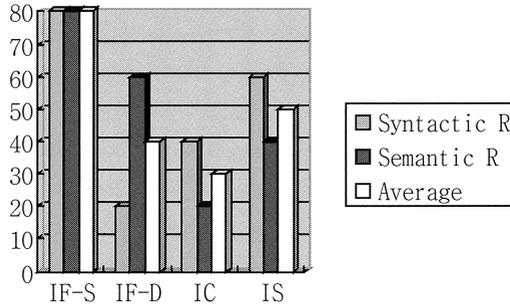
8) Allen(1975) suggests that the role of phonetic could be feature the opacity as elements of segment with strict compounds and loose compounds. On the other hand, it arises a problem with the morphological concepts 'transparency', see Bybee(1985) and Ullmann(1962).

9) According to Cruse(1986), the opacity has a great influence on idiomatic meaning. It's proved that in the set phrase more than one of the elements should be fully indicated for the implication.

are truly in contrary order for the restriction in syntactic conditions. Going down through the checklist, it can be seen that IS also cannot be inflected easily than IC, which shows a very different figures with semantic rules. To be exact, it is also a case to the contrary with semantic limitation in *Diagram I*, either.

Let us turn now to a detailed examination of the total constraints of IE and their graphical representations compared. Here is a comparison of IE restrictions in *Chart I*.

**Chart I. The Comparison of IE Restrictions**



According to *Chart I*, idiomatic expressions show completely different aspects between the semantic and syntactic constraints. Besides, the substantives or nominative case conflicts with the declinable phrase or the predicative case to the syntactic constraints. That is to say the substantives, which is indeclinable parts of speech in Korean grammar, has most regulated by syntactic limitations, but the declinable phrase, which is the manner or narration is namely beyond the restrictions. Finally, we can say that the Idiomatic Fused form, IF takes a serious complexion on limitations, even though the declinable of IF operates remarkable changes in syntactic regulations, as the reader can confirm it in *Diagram II*. As previously stated, IF has generally restrictive features in semantic areas. Precisely, the declinable of IF is changed the practical features with syntactic restrictions well, it seems to have a

characteristic of being semantically severe but freely conjugating. It has no other conjecture to offer IC gets a top status of being free itself from rules among the idiomatic expressions. However, it might be the virtue of IS categorizes it into conspicuous characteristics with the syntactic constraints. Finally, the order of the controlled IE in the syntactic limitation is the substantive of IF and then the Idiomatic old Saying. The next is Idiomatic Compound and the declinable phrase of IF. However, the finding of survey it turns out well that the syntactic constraints disagree with the semantic result except the substantive of the Idiomatic Fused form. Obviously it reverses the order from the substances and the declinable of IF, IS and IC in semantic constraints to the substances, IS, IC and the declinable of IF in syntactic regulations.

### 3.2. The Comparison of the Idiomatic old Saying

There are similar expressions between Korean idiomatic expressions and other languages namely IS in this paper. In this chapter, I will quote the comparative table of the Idiomatic old Saying within 5 different foreign languages, such as Chinese, English, Turkish and Japanese together<sup>10)</sup>.

**Diagram III. The Check List of IS**

| Korean            | Chinese | English   | Turkish                                  | Japanese       |
|-------------------|---------|---|--|----------------|
| 백지장도<br>맞들면 낫다    | 人多好办事   | Many hands make<br>light work                         | Bir elin nesi var<br>iki elin sesi var   | 三人寄れば<br>文殊の知恵 |
| 세 살 버릇<br>여든까지 간다 | 从小看到老   | What is learnt in<br>the cradle lasts to<br>the grave | Yedisinde neyse<br>yetmişinde de<br>odur | 雀百まで<br>踊り忘れぬ  |

10) It is compiled with Idiomatic Expressions of Korean Language from Kimheekyong(2006 : 16).

I'm grateful for discussions and comments to whole professors and instructors in the conference.

|               |                |   |   |            |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|------------|
| 호랑이도 제 말하면 온다 | 说(到)曹操, 曹操(就)到 | Speak of the devil and he appears         | 1. İyi insan lafının üzerine gelir<br>2. İti an çomağı hazırla <sup>11)</sup> | 噂をすれば影が差す  |
| 고생 끝에 낙이 온다   | 大难不死, 必有后福     | No pain, no gain (No gains without pains) | Sabrın sonu selamet   | 苦あれば楽あり    |
| 믿는 도끼에 발등 찍힌다 | 关门养虎, 虎大伤人     | In trust is treason                       | Güvendiğim dağlara kar yağdı  | 飼い犬に手をかまれる |
| 티끌 모아 태산      | 涓涓细流汇成海        | Many a little makes a mickle              | Damlaya damlaya göl olur  | 塵も積もれば山となる |

#### 4. Conclusion

Let me consider the main text in total and summarize it for the conclusion.

There are four basic conditions for getting the kernel of idiomatic expressions, which are introduced in chapter 1., they have more than two different phrases which are double structures, reconstituted by lexical and semantic changes and could be restricted by syntactic regulations. At the same time, they have few modifiable forms and high frequency of usage.

In order to clarify the classification of idiomatic expressions(IE), it can be defined as a boundary with the Idiomatic Fused form(IF), the Idiomatic Compound(IC) and the Idiomatic old Saying(IS). Among idiomatic expressions, the idiomatic fused from simply differs from the idiomatic compound with no pause phonologically. IF absolutely changes its functional shift and meaning at the same time, hence it is impossible to change its word order. The idiomatic old Saying, IS could be easily distinguished from others in semantic views, such as figures of speech, conventionality, proverbiality, inflexibility. Meantime it is estimated that IS has the dual structure which is surface structure and deep structure. It touches the core of the subject that

11) They are used in different situations each whether an expecting person is appeared and the other way.

IF and IC could not have the same structure, because IF generates entirely different meanings by enlarging or reducing the sense. On the other hand, IC basically shows only figurative sense in idiomatic set phrase. To the point, the meaning of IE can be predicated in the order of IC, IS and IF. It can be crucially stressed that the feature of IS makes it possible to draw an analogy from the whole out of parts.

We can catch the point more clearly that the opacity of IE often does work in reverse to syntactic limitations. Therefore, the substantives of IF in Korean can not have a variety within the category, on the other side the declinable form in Korean could be conjugated under no restraint. IS vitally marks comparatively restrictive aspects such as no conjugated form and impossible to transform grammatically. This can be easily confirmed in *Diagram II*, the substantive of IF turns it up strongly and then the second is definitely IS under the limit of the syntactic boundaries. With all the same category, the declinable of IF adds a dimension of practicalities and frequency throughout the history.

To sum up, idiomatic expressions show completely different aspects between the semantic and syntactic constraints. Precisely, the order of the limits in the syntactic is the substantive of IF and then IS, IC and the declinable of IF, However, it can be told briefly that syntactic constraints are contrary to semantic limitations except the substantive of IF. In short, it decisively becomes reverse the order to the substances and the declinable of IF, IS and IC in semantic restrictions.

There is in fact a dearth of hard evidence on any of the issues raised here with pragmatics. I must make it clear that the frequency of idiomatic expressions used in daily life discussed in this paper later, though it is widely used in the world, cannot at present be supported by scientific evidence. Besides, that is not to say distinctly that all new types from our traditional patterns of IE have been included in this checklist, even though the matter has now been brought to light. These findings imply that syntactic and semantic constraints would benefit the competent user of each

Language.

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