

READINGS IN BASIC ENGLISH *for* Higher Education

Edited by:
RICHARD C. IHEJIRIKA



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ENGLISH**
for
HIGHER EDUCATION

Edited by

Richard C. Ihejirika

Cel-Bez Erudite Books

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Published by Cel-Bez & Co. Publishers

No. 84 Douglas Road, Owerri, Nigeria

Email: cel_bezpublishers@yahoo.com

☎ :08035428158

ISBN 978- 045-211-7

First Published 2008

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Designed, printed and bound in Nigeria by
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all our English teachers at all levels of education, who lit the light on us that is now a source of illumination to many.

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Chapter Four

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT:

By Dan Chima Amadi

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The art of learning a second language, indeed any language, is the acquisition of as many words as possible to enable the user to apply those words to a variety of use. At the heart of the language learning are the rules governing the use of such words. To master the rules of grammar, the learning process cannot be complete if the user is not in a position or has not been able to have at his disposal words and their relations, other ways of forming new words. Vocabulary then is the list of words compiled in alphabetical order, in the case of a dictionary available to a user. They are the words known to a user. In other words, a person's vocabulary is the list of words known or available and used by that individual.

The ability of an individual to improve on his linguistic competence is dependent on his reading skills, mastery over the rules of grammar and the development of the vocabulary. The English Language teacher ought to impart on his students not only the knowledge to shore up more words but to explain how these words function (grammar) and how they are pronounced (phonetics).

Over time, scholars tend to divide the vocabulary into two: passive and active vocabulary. The passive vocabulary are those words which we store unconsciously



and are hardly applied into use. They lie latent in us and are rarely manifested in our day to day communication or writing. The active vocabulary on the other hand are those words we employ regularly to communicate our thoughts and sensibilities.

4.2 WAYS OF IMPROVING OUR VOCABULARY BASE

Developing the vocabulary base is crucial if the student has to improve on his communicative competence. In his speech and in writing, he has to be armed with many words and their alternatives if his work will not appear insipid and tasteless. As in eating, well spiced passages are the readers' delight. The following are some of the ways of vocabulary development:-

1. Affixation – adding affixes or morphemes to word roots. This could be through,
 - a. Prefix – affixes or morphemes added before word roots e.g. fortune from tune, suppose from pose; counter from encounter, demotion from motion etc
 - b. Suffix – affixes or morphemes added to other word roots to form other words. e.g. noiseless from noise, consciousness from conscious, painful from pain etc.

e.g.

ROOT

god

Counter

Late

Self

PREFFIX

ungodly

encounter

translate

unselfish

SUFFIX

godless

counteract

lately

selfishness

Motion

demotion

motionless

Affix is a unit of meaning or morpheme added to a root word to form a new word. The affixes added before or after a root to form another word are called morphemes. Morphemes are linguistic units that make sense e.g. in "reapply", there are two morphemes "re" and "apply". Morphemes can further be divided into free or bound morphemes. Free morphemes are those that can stand on their own, e.g., "apply" in the case of "reapply". But a bound morpheme cannot stand on its own as in the case of "re".

2. **BORROWING** - some words of English are derivatives of other languages. The ability to accommodate these foreign words has been responsible for the growing influence and dynamism of the English Language e.g. debauch - French, piano - Italian, video - Latin, en - masse - French etc.
3. **BLENDING** - This is a process of combining the elements of two different words to form a new word. This is another way of vocabulary development e.g. breakfast + lunch = brunch, motor + hotel = motel, smoke + fog = smog, etc.
4. **CLIPPING** - This is the reduction of a multi-syllabic word to say a single one. Madam to ma, advertisement to ad, Television to TV, etc.
5. **ACRONYM** - The use of acronym in the formation of a word to increase vocabulary base is done by using the first letters of the name of an institution or

Motion

demotion

motionless

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body to form a word e.g. United Nations Organization = UNO, World health Organization = WHO, Others are JAMB, NEPA, PAYE, etc.

4.3 WORD RELATIONS

In the day-to-day speech and in formal writing, words have been known to have relations with each other, either in the process of forming new words or to make full meaning in a sentence. The following are instances of word relations.

Homonym -In the case of homonym, these are words with the same spelling and the same sound but have different meanings. Varying usage gives them different meanings. For instance, the word "plant" can be used to mean a living organism as distinguished from a tree and a shrub; it can also mean a factory or a machine for generating electricity. These three meanings stand for three different words, which incidentally have the same spelling.

Homophones

Words in this category have different spellings but the same sound. Applying them in sentences bring out their meaning

e.g. Court and caught
Hale and hail
Night and knight
Sow and so
Wright and right

Polysemey

Also known as polyseme, it is a word with more than one meaning. Like the homophone, usage separates them. But unlike the former, they are seen to have more than one meaning, e.g.:

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| Run | - | Compete – I can run for the chairmanship of my council. |
| Run | - | Move faster – I will always run away from dangerous animals. |
| Foot | - | Leg - My foot is paining me. |
| Foot | - | Afford - I can foot the bill. |

Hyponym

In language, a word is hyponymous when it can share characteristics with other words and so project a certain image. Their relationship could be founded on the fact that they share certain generic properties, e.g. lizards, crocodiles. The property they share is that they are reptiles and are animals of the class reptilla. They are also vertebrates with scales. In the same way hibiscus and daffodils are flowers. Hyponyms tend to remind us that words have origins and associations and the order in which they appear should interest us.

Homographs:

These are words which are spelt alike but they have different origin, meaning, grammar and pronunciation. For instance, the word "wind" can be pronounced /waɪnd/ (verb) or (wind) (noun). Thus, they are two different words that

share the same spelling but different pronunciations. They are therefore homographs. Other examples are lead(n), lead(v), record (n) record (v).

Antonyms

In a sense, antonyms are the opposite of synonyms. The way words are used, it is almost unavoidable to know they have opposite meanings. In the sciences, this nature of words has been fully highlighted e.g

good - bad

give-take

donor - recipient

sympathy - antipathy

ascent - descent

proceed - recede

achievement - failure

dated - new

Scholars like Ndimele (1997:62) have identified a broader meaning for antonyms. They call it semantic opposition. This is an umbrella words to cover all levels of semantic opposition. We might not take this argument beyond this level because of the scope of this paper. It suffices here that words with opposite in meanings are called antonyms.

Synonyms

These are words with different spellings but the same meaning. The nearness in meaning makes them

substituteable in sentences. Ability of a writer or speaker to know other words that can serve his purpose is the hallmark of a good writer or speaker. Constant usage of a particular word or words in the same page or passage gives the impression of limitation. It is for this reason that wide reading is recommended. Words with the same meaning with other words include:

- expensive - dear
- profitable - lucrative
- buy - purchase
- enduring - durable
- big - huge
- keen - close
- fat - big

However, it can be argued that no two words are exactly the same. What can be admitted here is that some words have words with close meanings. For a word to be synonymous with another word, it must agree in all respects, including grammatical properties. Similarly, if such a word is in plural, to be synonymous with another word, that other word must also be in plural. If it is a verb, it must also be a verb and must agree in number and tense to be completely synonymous.

4.4 THE USE OF DICTIONARY

The dictionary from all angles is arguably the best companion of the student, which must be treasured and preserved. The dictionary is so invaluable that a serious

student should not go to a private study without it. This stated, it need be observed that most Nigerian students do not know the immense use the dictionary can be put. True, many know it is a book to discover the meaning and usage words could be put. But the dictionary means much more.

4.4.1 TYPES OF DICTIONARY

Dictionaries can be categorized based on the services they offer. Some dictionaries provide unique services and so can be distinguished from other dictionaries that do not offer this service.

1. Subject dictionaries

The focus of these dictionaries is on specific subject areas and they include Dictionary of Legal Terms, Glossaries of Literary Terms, Dictionary of Mathematics, and Dictionary of Science etc.

2. General dictionaries

They offer services on the general usage words can be put, spelt, parts of speech they belong and the origin of such words. These are the most popular type, which are used across board. e.g. The 20th Century Dictionary, The Oxford English Dictionary and The Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language etc.

3. **Bilingual or Foreign Language Dictionary**

As the name implies, they offer foreign words and their equivalent in other languages, e.g., Igbo – English Dictionary by Igwe.

4. **Dictionary of synonyms and antonyms**

These are the thesaurus that provide word alternatives (synonyms) and those with opposite meanings – (antonyms). They are usually the handbook of writers and are very useful for everyday use. e.g – Rogets Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases.

5. **Dictionary of quotations.**

This kind makes available different quotations for the use of everyone on wide ranging subjects or themes with the names of such authors and the books where they can be found. They are very useful when one is preparing to make a speech or deliver a paper e.g. Familiar Quotations by John Barlett.

6. **Dictionary of abbreviations and acronyms**

In this case, they provide information on acronyms of words like UNO, WHO, FAO etc. Although this would be found in conventional dictionaries, they are more elaborate in dictionaries of abbreviations and acronyms e.g. Abbreviations Dictionary by R. Desola

4.4.2. USES OF DICTIONARY

a. **Provides information on word classes.**

The dictionary not only informs us of the part of a speech a word belongs, but also such minute details like the other divisions the word belongs. If a word is a verb, the dictionary tells you if it is transitive (v) or intransitive verb (iv), countable or uncountable noun etc.

b. **Etymological roots of words.** Some words in English are derivatives of other languages like Latin, French and German. The dictionary helps users to have recourse to the original meaning for a fuller appreciation and interpretation. For instance, the verb is derived from the Latin word “verbum” as debauch is a French word. This background information helps in both pronunciation and usage.

c. **Order of definitions.**

The dictionary not only defines a word but also gives other definitions of that word. It gives a graphic or historical development of a word so that users can have up-to-date knowledge. Let us take the word crusade as an example. Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines it as (n) a military expedition under the banner of the cross to recover the Holy Land from the Turks. It also defines it as any daring or romantic undertaking, a concerted action to further a cause – vt. Any one who goes on such a mission is considered a crusader.

d. **Word Pronunciation**

In the dictionary, we find not only the meaning or how to use a word but how that word is pronounced. This is important if we have to understand ourselves in any language. The dictionary provides this very useful guide and the stress patterns of words. The dictionary is the last authority if we have to avoid open disagreement as it gives the exact spellings of words and puts a final seal on any argument.

e. **Cross-references and easy location of words.**

For the sake of scholarship and every day usage, the dictionary is arranged in such a way as to enable us find words which can help us in business, commerce, politics, diplomacy, indeed in any sphere of life. We are led on how to locate such words and how to use them. For instance, it is not easy to give ample space for every word. But this has been made easy through cross-referencing. Instead of writing down every word as a topic, a word can be located through other words. You can locate invasion through invade or donation through donor.

f. **Abbreviations and international bodies.** The dictionary provides comprehensive list of world bodies, institutions, books of the bible, Koran, Laws in science and religious bodies. It gives information on nation states and basic elements about them.

g. **Other varieties in English**

It is in the dictionary that we can also find other varieties of English and how they are spelt in those regions. We have such varieties like Canadian English, English in South Africa, English in Australia and New Zealand, West African English etc. and the peculiarities associated with each can be found in the dictionary. The dictionary tells you why this is so and the level of the second language interference. For instance, Canadians use both British and American Versions of English simultaneously i.e. color and colour, traveller and traveler and center and centre. But South Africans tend to restrict themselves to the British version.

h. **Conventionality of words.**

Since words in English are by nature either used by a certain group of people because of the level of their education or their usage are restricted because they offend the sensibilities of puritans, the dictionary takes time to explain in which of the groups the words belong. For instance, the dictionary differentiates a colloquial word from a vulgar one. It also states if a word is within the old or modern English. If a word is for the conversation only, the dictionary says so. If it is for journalistic, academic or specialist purposes, such things are usually highlighted. In short, the dictionary has made learning easy.

4.5 CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION

In an attempt to establish the meaning of a word, we can approach it from two levels – denotation and connotation. We use denotation to refer to the dictionary, the hard-core level of it or the literal meaning of a word. At the level of science, when words are used, they usually refer to the denotative meaning of it. When we use the word 'have', it is usually made to signify possession. Using it to mean other things is possible but it is no longer denotative.

However, when we use the implied meaning of the word "have", it is now connotative, which is to use the word at other levels or degrees. For example, the same word can mean affluence or riches if we say

He is one of the haves.

When a word is used in a different context, its meaning can acquire a new status or meaning. Connotative usage of words is usually affected by writers who want to convey special meanings or play on their readers' emotion to achieve certain effects. Thus, a writer can state:
Obi's last appearance at the panel nailed him.

Here, 'nail' does not mean the iron, which a carpenter uses to hold pieces of wood together. It is used to mean 'convict'. In other words, the word is used connotatively.

4.6 FIGURES OF SPEECH

Every discipline has its own language and this much can be said of literature. To understand literature, one needs to have a good grasp of this language and devices which writers and critics alike have been using to communicate the tenor and sensibility manifest and inherent in the written word. The writer uses language to communicate his thought. In doing a critique, the critic subjects the work of the artist to thorough analysis.

Yet, the question need be asked, why do we need to subject the language of literature to critical analysis? For the simple reason that the artist uses language, this tool need be examined. The artist's purpose is embossed on the pages of his work. His vision is hidden in his words and his objectivity and prejudices are engraved in his art. Since the artist's vision runs deep, his language need be put under close scrutiny. As the vehicle to transmit his thought, language is the blood of his art.

We might take another look at the life of the artist. The art did not begin with him and will not end with him. The whole concourse of art precedes him and will outlive him. There were great pieces before he began and many masterpieces will be written after him. Along the line, once he did not begin the art, he must have borrowed no matter how tangentially from others before him. He will no doubt leave legacies after him but it need be stated that the hog started long before him. Therefore, he must have in an attempt to render his thought fallen under a mode, under a laid down structure which preceded him. It is

undeniable that some artists had in their brilliance laid down new structures, new identities which later artist followed; but try as they might have, they would have discovered that they have in one way or another fallen under a mode, under a literary pack. It is this mode we want to talk about. Some of these modes include, alliteration, metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism, bathos, climax, synecdoche, irony, sarcasm, anti-climax, personification, oxymoron, Imagery, satire, symbolism, paradox, epigram, diction, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia and rhythm. This is the language of the art, the language of literature. We cannot let go the language of the artist as he does not let go the ills of his society. The artist is accountable to society in his language as the society sees its ills from his art. As he beams light on the ills of his society and age, so will society examine his language. For he must first show marks of competence before the society can enter his clinic for examination. The society cannot be treated by a virulent, malignant cerebral moll. As the blood is screened before transfusion to ensure it is free from HIV/AIDS virus, so will the language of literature be preened before endorsement.

A writer uses language at two levels: first at the literal or denotative level (also called literal meaning) and secondly at the figurative level where words are put into use as distinct from their standard meaning. When a writer uses language at figurative level, his objective is to achieve some special meaning or effect. M.H. Abrams believes

that such figures are the “ornaments” of language, and integral to the functioning of language (1981:63). Since art vibrates at these two levels, it is important to evaluate the writer’s use of language, to establish his true intent.

But taken from another level, art is susceptible to varying interpretations. The critic in evaluating a work of art could take it to other levels, thereby giving fuller interpretations to a writer’s work. In serving this purpose therefore, the critic has entered as a referee, the pivot where important art may revolve. Thus, the artist while writing about his society could achieve universality. As Oladele Taiwo rightly observes, “to be truly universal, you have to be truly local”.

Figures of speech are those sayings that are not applied in the usual dictionary meaning way but are used to achieve a particular effect.

Alliteration

This is the repetition of some consonants or letters in lines of a poem to make it achieve musical effect. The consonants that are repeated are so close that their application could easily be noticeable. For example Shakespeare describes life as

It is a tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

The “t” in the first line

“fs” in line two constitute the alliteration.

Metaphor

It is sometimes called condensed simile. This is where one thing is likened to another. For example, where one thing is applied to another; here, they are not compared.

- a. Emeka is a lion in the field
- b. John is a horse.

Simile:

This is where two distinctly different things are compared. Where one thing is compared with another using such words like “like” and “as”. Examples are
“Each flower is scented like an incense bowl”
“Twists like a crooked pin”

Metonymy:

This is a situation where an entire group of people or things are represented in an image. For example:

- a. The pen is the sword
- b. The crown is happy

Synecdoche

This is a device by the writer where he uses a part for the whole or the whole for a part. Examples are:

- a. Tell him all hands must be on deck.
- b. He has about ten mouths to feed in his house

Irony

It is a literary device made popular by the Greeks where a character could say something that is not actually the case. There is dissimilarity between what is said and the actual position of things.

There are different types of irony. They include:

(a) Verbal Irony – what the speaker says will be different from what he means like when Mark Anthony asserts, “ Brutus is an honourable man.” After his complicity in the assassination of Caesar, Brutus even if he was considered honourable in the past could no longer claim that title.

(b) Dramatic Irony – Here in a story, the audience and the author could be better informed than the characters. So when the characters say something that the audience knows is not true, the audience could only laugh. This is called dramatic irony. An example is the story of king David in the Bible when he was confronted by Nathan after killing Uriah and taking his widow. The story told by Samuel about a rich man and a poor man is a dramatic irony.

- a. **Socratic Irony** –This is lifted from the dialogues of Socrates where he feigns ignorance while showing zeal to be educated. The style is unique to Socrates.
- b. **Sarcasm** – This is another form of irony that is characterized by superfluous praises. For example “ You are the most beautiful woman in the world. Believe me, you are”

Bathos or Anti-Climax

This is the exploitation of a literary device to elicit pity by cataloguing a character's woes in the order of descent. For example:

- a. John was killed, his wife was arrested, and they stopped her salary.
- b. Saddam was deposed, his children killed, now he faces trial.

Hyperbole

This is a device **where** a statement is given excessive praise to draw humour. For example:

- a. The robbers attacked with a million tanks.
- b. The policemen got gifts from all the people who attended the rally.

Euphemism

Here an attempt is made to reduce the impact or severity of an action in a speech. Examples are:

- a. The old man kicked the bucket- this means that he died.
- b. The Judge said that he was given a brown envelope- this means that he was bribed.

Climax

This is a literary device where the writer or speaker makes a statement in the order of ascent. The famous statement of Caesar is a climax

- a. Veni, vidi, vici – I came, I saw, I conquered.

- b. The battle was short, sure, sharp and decisive.

Paradox

Underneath a statement, which appears contradictory, there is some meaning. This kind of literary device makes the speaker sound very intelligent. Examples are:

- a. More haste less speed if we have to succeed
- b. God did not create the city, men did.

Personification

In this case, an inanimate object is addressed as if it were a human being. For example:

- a. O Justice, thou art fled to British beasts
And men have lost their reason.
- b. Your hand is heavy, Night upon my brow.

Oxymoron

Sometimes, critics call it condensed paradox. This is a device where contradictory expressions or terms are placed side by side. It is somewhat antithetical and made to heighten effect. For example:

- a. His faithfulness kept up faithless
- b. The wise fool was here and there

Epigram

This is a clever irony of saying something in a witty, thrifty manner. The statement might sound contradictory but the condensed meaning soon comes to the fore. For example:

- a. Mirror what you can see
- b. Fall on the enemy but spare his life.

Satire

It is a kind of writing where the writer exposes the inherent vices prevalent in a society in a light-hearted way. Writers to escape possible prosecution often use this kind of ridicule or mockery.

For example:

- a. The Jero plays by Wole Soyinka
- b. Animal farm by George Orwell.

Symbolism

It is the use of images to stand for certain meanings. These images could be objects but made to represent something.

Sometimes there are symbols that have gained universal acceptance. For instance the cross is seen as a sign of Christian values or Christ's crucifixion. White is generally regarded as representing purity while green represents agriculture. However, a writer can use a word to represent a meaning in the manner he wants.

Onomatopoeia

Where the sound of a word indicates its meaning is called onomatopoeia. Examples include: screech, bang, harsh, hiss, etc.

Pun

This is the device of playing upon words that may be similar in sound but different in meaning. Shakespeare used it a lot in his writings. The title of the play *Love's Labour Lost* is itself a pun.

Enjambment

It is mostly used in poetry where the continuation of the sense without pause is done beyond the line. In other words, the meaning of the line is fully developed in the next line. This literary encroachment of one line into another gives a poem unity if it is well arranged, and the reader must see it as a literary device. For example: the poem, "The Poor" by Ossie Enekwe is a good example:

The antennae of the 'poor'
like reeds
quake before
a palace of gold.

Diction

Through diction, we enter the writer's own choice of words. In trying to express his thought, the writer implants his personality; that is the level of his thought, the depth of his education, his vision, his manners, objectivity and prejudices, his wisdom and his style. Whatever he writes, he has chosen and, it reflects any or all of the above. Obi Maduakor (1991:27) divides the writer's diction into four external features; Formal (used by learned men in serious writing), Colloquial (words of

every day speech), Technical (words from the professions) and Scientific (words drawn from the sciences). In the writings of Wole Soyinka, his choice of words are usually drawn from the learned vocabulary. Robust language is synonymous with him.

4.7 IDIOMS

The origin of idioms can be traced to the Greek word, which means 'make one's own'. It is therefore an expression or saying that can be appropriated to one's own advantage. The dynamism of English as a Language, which admits the incorporation of these idioms, some of which have foreign origin into the everyday speech and writing is in itself a good thing. It must be admitted that idioms thrive in any Language and they are used to refresh or invigorate writings or speeches. Like in some words in any Language, idioms that have been over used can become unpopular and so can be discarded.

IDIOM	MEANING	APPLICATION
To spark off the cuff	Without adequate preparation	The building could not be completed because Mr. Ifeka sparked off the cuff
To have the ball in one's court	To be in a position to act, holding the opportunity	When his father paid his fees, he made it clear that the ball was now in his court.
To jump the gun	To act before	The Chairman felt that

	something is due	the comment was like jumping the gun.
To find one's feet	To feel at home	If you are humble and work hard, you will soon find your feet.
To shed crocodile tears	To be insincere	The suspect was merely shedding crocodile tears when he saw the police.
To cast pearls before the swine	To waste favour on the undeserving	When you give a car to such an old woman, it is like casting the pearl before the swine.
Across the board	Without exception	The senate decided that the punishment of the erring students must be across the board.
Blaze a trail	To make a pioneering effort	The party men are in support of Mrs. Okeke because they believe she is a trailblazer.
To play to the gallery	To act in a way to gain popularity	The people were not convinced because they believed that the speaker was playing to the gallery.
All and Sundry	Everyone, collectively.	The priest's appeal to the congregation was that the contribution

should be by all and Sundry.

Under lock and key

Safe, well protected.

The Police made it clear that the valuables were under lock and key.

To bite more than one can chew

Take a task one cannot carry through.

At the end of the day, the man discovered that by marrying two wives he had bitten more than he could chew.

OTHER IDIOMS

To twist the lion's tail - To insult someone of affluence or influence.

To come to grief - To end up in ruin

To be in the red - To be broke or in financial distress with a bank.

To go to town - To act extravagantly/popularize.

To pass the buck - To avoid responsibility or pass it to another person.

A storm in a teacup - Make unnecessary fuss

A red-letter day - A significant day.

The sword of Damocles - Imminent or constant danger.

To burn the midnight oil - To study late into the night

To cut one's coat according to one's cloth - To live within one's means

A wolf in a sheep's clothing - One that hides wicked

intentions under the guise of gentleness.

To develop cold feet - To withdraw interest in what one is doing.

To let sleeping dog lie - To let to rest a matter that may cause trouble

To read the riot act - To threaten punishment.

A wild goose chase - A fruitless venture.

To fight tooth and nail - To endeavour spiritedly.

To bear the palm - To be outstanding, to be distinguished in something.

To kill in cold blood - To kill deliberately without provocation.

To sit on the fence - To be uncommitted in an issue.

To give a piece of one's mind - To voice one's opinion/ scold someone.

To set the Thames on fire - To do something outstanding.

To stand on ceremony - To insist on strict compliance.

To see eye to eye – To agree / to submit on an opinion.

To turn a deaf ear to - To ignore.

To be a black sheep - To be a traitor.

To put one on his mettle - To rouse one to do his best.

A bone of contention - A subject of dispute.

To set one's teeth on edge - To irritate.

To be at cross-purposes - To operate against each other.

On the spur of the moment - Without hesitation, to do something impromptu.

To rule with a heavy hand - To be tyrannical.

To have it at one's finger's end - To know something thoroughly.

In the nick of time - At the right time.
 To live from hand to mouth - To barely have enough for subsistence
 To stir up the hornet's nest - To invite someone's anger through an act
 To bury the hatchet - To put an end to a dispute.
 To nip in the bud - To stop an event before it happens.
 In the teeth of - In defiance of.
 To be hand and glove - To be intimate with someone.
 At dagger's drawn - To be in deep hostility with someone.
 To keep the wolf from the door - To ward off danger/to ward off hunger.
 To hunt with the hound and run with the hare - Double - dealing.
 A pyrrhic victory - A victory at a great cost.
 Heads I win, tails you lose - To always insist on getting an advantage.
 Achilles heel - One's weak point.
 A Herculean task - A task difficult to accomplish.
 To have too many irons on fire - To be engaged in too many tasks.
 A Gordian knot - An intricate problem.
 To take French leave - To be absent or leave without permission.
 To let the grass grow on one's feet - To procrastinate.
 At one's wit's end - To be at complete loss.
 Splitting hair - To dispute over petty issue.
 A flash in the pan - A sudden single effort.
 To kill the goose that lays the golden egg - To lose

valuable source of income.

To cross the Rubicon – To take a decisive step from which there is no retreat.

To pull the wool over one's eyes – To hoodwink or mislead.

To nail the lie on the counter – To expose publicly.

A Machiavellian policy – A policy achieved by fair or foul means.

A white elephant – An expensive or useless possession.

To sail with every wind – To make every change of circumstance to one's advantages.

A Dutch courage – Courage induced by alcohol.

Draconian laws – Oppressive laws.

To sow the wind and reap the whirlwind – To indulge in wickedness only to suffer the consequences.

To fish in troubled waters – To court trouble or be meddlesome.

A fly on the wheel – A person who over-estimates his self-importance.

To be a fair weather friend – To be a friend when the going is good.

To have the gift of the gab – To be eloquent.

To strain at the leash – To show deep desire to do something.

Hook, line and sinker – Completely.

Lock, stock and barrel – Everything.

To take up the gauntlet – To accept a challenge.

To cut corners – Not to do something well in order to save time.

To be on tenterhooks – To be anxious.

To apply Fabian tactics - delay tactics.
To be like the Joneses - To desire to live like an affluent person.
To be born with a silver spoon – To be born into wealth.
To take the bull by the horns - To exhibit courage or tackle a challenge.
Work to rule – To slow down work in protest.
To strike while the iron is hot - To act decisively.
To clean the Augean stable - To bring an improvement in an establishment by correcting abuses.
To take it at one's stride - To do something at one's pace/Act without any great effort.
The die is cast – To take an irrevocable step.
To ride on tiger's back - To trust a dangerous person.
To look at something with jaundiced eyes - To be biased.
To be at logger heads - To quarrel with someone / To be in dispute.
To spill the beans - To reveal a secret.
To be swept off one's feet - To overwhelm with emotion.
To bell the cat - To undertake a dangerous assignment.

EXERCISE

1. Using your dictionary, compile a list of 50 English idioms. Your list should not include any idiom already listed in this chapter.



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