

German Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions Regarding the Parts of Human Body

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Abstract

The German language has plenty of idioms. Idioms represent an area of language full of figurativeness. It is not possible to cover all existing idioms in this paper and therefore this paper concentrates on one area of idioms with parts of the human body. The student may have trouble understanding the language if they do not know its idiomatic expression. The aim of this paper is to advance knowledge and to understand, what idioms are and how to use them. This paper can help students to improve their language proficiency.

Keywords: idiom, idiomatic expression, figurative meaning

Introduction

In the studies of language, the students may learn grammar and vocabulary. However, without a working knowledge of idioms, slang, proverbs, his speech remains awkward and stilted. The study of idioms should not be neglected. Such a study should be made part of, and integrated with the regular teaching of grammar and vocabulary.

German idioms and idiomatic expressions are widely used in all social circles and circumstances, as well as in conversation, in media and literature. Understanding German idioms can be confusing for non-native speakers, especially students. Idioms have always been difficult to understand. Sometimes, they have problems with the idioms.

According to the curriculum, lots of idioms can be found in the prescribed textbooks for undergraduate students, except for the First year undergraduate. In this paper, German idioms deriving from body parts which are commonly used and frequently found in the textbooks are presented, together with its literal translation and figurative meaning.

Aim of Research

The aim of this paper is to help the Myanmar students who are learning German as a foreign language to understand the figurative meaning of an idiom and to familiarize with commonly used idiomatic expressions, especially regarding the parts of human body. More importantly, it also intends to use idiomatic expressions correctly by learning German idioms.

Data and Method

The required data for this paper have been collected from the textbooks, dictionaries and the different types of books on idioms by Myanmar and German authors. The descriptive method was used in this paper.

Research Question

The research questions for this paper were:

1. What does the idiom mean as a figurative meaning?
2. Why should the students learn German idioms?

Literature Review

In idiom studies, German idioms have been approached from different perspectives, mostly in the field of translation. With regard to this paper, a book

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entitled “ဂျပန်စကားအလင်္ကာ” by U Hla Kyaing (2002), the different types of dictionaries and the prescribed books were used.

Idioms can be considered as a part of a language. An idiom is an expression containing several words which have direct meaning for each word, but together, they express a different meaning peculiar to that language, which are defined in the book Langenscheidt Großwörterbuch (2008, p.567) as “eine sprachlicher Ausdruck (aus mehreren Wörtern), dessen Bedeutung man nicht aus den Bedeutungen seiner Bestandteile ableiten kann. ”.

Longman Idioms Dictionary (1998) defines them as “a sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understand each word separately”. In other words, an idiom is an expression which has a meaning different from that of the joined meanings of its component parts.

In the book “မြန်မာစာသုတေသနစာတမ်းများ” by ဝါမောက္ခဒေါက်တာချိုချိုတင့် (မြန်မာစာ) (2011, pp.93-106) it was suggested that learning idioms is one of the effective ways to study Myanmar language. Some idioms arranged in categories are also presented in that book. In the study of idioms regarding the body parts, the book “ဘာသာအမြင် စာပေအမြင်” by မောင်ခင်မင် (နေဖြူ) (2009, pp.10-27) was also studied.

Findings

Idioms cannot be translated literally and they have figurative meaning. As every language has idioms, there are also many idiomatic expressions in German language. Among them, only idioms with the parts of the human body have been discussed in this paper.

The Head

Head is uppermost part of the human body and seat of intellect (Holman, p. 288). Some idiomatic expressions in German language are concerned with sensation or thought or intellectual power. For example, the German idiom “sich über etwas den Kopf zerbrechen” has a figurative meaning “to cudgel one’s brains/ဦးနှောက်ခြောက်အောင်စဉ်းစားရသည်။”. Some expressions based on movement or position of head can also be found in figurative meaning.

For example, “den Kopf in den Sand stecken” (literal translation “to bury one’s head in the sand/ဦးခေါင်းကိုသဲထဲတွင်တည့်ထားသည်။”) means “to ignore a danger or a problem/ခေါင်းရှောင်သည်။” for adequate equivalent. There are also some idioms with head which are as a rule figurative in their meaning. They are shown in the following table.

German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
den Kopf hängen lassen	Someone hangs his head.	to be despondent မျှော်လင့်ချက်မဲ့နေသည်။
einen klaren Kopf haben	to keep a clear head	to remain level-headed ခေါင်းအေးအေးထားသည်။
etwas mit seinem Kopf bezahlen	to pay for something with one’s head	to pay for something with one’s life အသက်ကိုလောင်းကြေးထပ် သည်။
jemandem raucht der Kopf	Someone’s head is smoking.	It’s got one’s head spinning. ခေါင်းမီးတောက်သည်။
kein Dach über dem	not to have a roof	to be homeless

German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
Kopf haben	over one's head	အိုးမဲ့အိမ်မဲ့ဖြစ်သည်။
sich etwas durch den Kopf gehen lassen	to cross one's mind	to have some thoughts about something ပြန်လည်စဉ်းစားတွေးတောသည်။

The Face

Face is an important part of the body, because we speak face to face, when we communicate with each other. As a figurative meaning to this there is an idiom in German language. The German idiom “das Gesicht verlieren” is literally translated as “to lose one's face”, but the meaning is “to be humiliated, to do something which makes other people stop respecting you/ မျက်နှာပျက်စရာကိစ္စတစ်စုံတစ်ရာဖြစ်သည်။ ”. The expression “jemandem etwas ins Gesicht sagen” (to tell someone something to his face) means “to tell someone directly about himself / တစ်စုံတစ်ခုအကြောင်းကိုတိုက်ရိုက်ပြောဆိုသည်။ ”.

We can also read feelings from someone's face. Face can reflect the inside feeling. So the German idiom “sein wahres Gesicht zeigen” (to show ones true face) is “to show one's true color/ ဇာတိရုပ်ပေါ်လာသည်။ ” in English and Myanmar. In terms of the body part face, there are also some idioms as follows.

German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
andere Gesichter sehen wollen	to want to see new faces	to want to have a change အပြောင်းအလဲတစ်ခုလိုလားသည်။
Gesichte haben	to have faces	to have visions စိတ်ကူးစိတ်သန်းရှိသည်။
jemandem ins Gesicht lügen	to lie to one's face	to tell a bare-faced lie မျက်နှာပြောင်တိုက်သည်။
zwei Gesichter haben	to have two faces	to have two sides to one's character စရိုက်နှစ်မျိုးရှိသည်။

The Facial Features

It includes several features such as facial hair, eye, nose etc. Here German idioms with some facial features are presented. Some are explained with the examples and some are shown in the table.

The Facial Hair

Facial hair is any or all of fine filaments growing unaccountably from the skin of the human head. Based on this, man use idioms with hair to express the uncertainty. For example, when we say “an einem Haar hängen”, we don't mean that “it hangs on a hair”, but rather that “it is not a sure thing to say/ မသေချာမရောရာဖြစ်သည်။ ”. Normally, a human hair has a very thin size. The German idiom “etwas um Haaresbreite entgehen” literally means “to escape by a hairbreadth” and figuratively means “to have a narrow escape/ သိသိလေးကပ်လွတ်သည်။ ”. There are also some German idioms which are referred to a figurative meaning to a thin hair.

The Eyes

Eye is an organ of sight (Holman, p. 214). Based on this ability, there are many idioms. Some of the examples are “etwas springt in die Augen” (to stare

something in the face or to be obvious/ မြင်ကွင်းရှေ့ရောက်လာသည်။), “vor etwas die Augen verschließen” (to close one’s eyes to something/ မမြင်ဟန်ဆောင်သည်), “ein Auge zudrücken” (to overlook an error leniently/ မမြင် ဟန်/မသိဟန်ဆောင်သည်။).

We can use eyes not only as an organ. Eyes can open our knowledge and eyes are also window into the soul. The German phrase “jemandem die Augen öffnen” literally translates as “to open one’s eyes”, but the meaning is “to educate someone/ လမ်းညွှန်ပြသည်။”.

The Ears

Idioms using ear figuratively refers to its ability, hearing. For example, the German idiom “die Ohren spitzen” literally means “to sharpen the ears”. As an English and Myanmar equivalent, it means “to try to get news from a distance/ နားစွင့်သည်။ ”. If someone listens carefully, we can also use the idiom “lange Ohren machen” (to make long ears/ အာရုံစိုက်နားထောင်သည်။). Based on the ability, there are also some idioms as follows:

1. jemand kommt etwas zu Ohren (it has come to my ears) means “to know the one’s secret / သတင်းပေါက်ကြားသည်။”.
2. jemandem sein Ohr leihen (to lend someone his ear) means “to listen what someone like to tell / သူတစ်ပါးပြောလိုသည်ကိုနားထောင်ပေးသည်။”.
3. etwas noch im Ohren haben (to have something in ear) means “to hear again something/ ပြန်လည်ကြားယောင်နေဆဲဖြစ်သည်။”.

The Nose

Nose, one of the five senses, is an organ of smelling. But most of idioms using nose do not express smelling. They just describe about mocking, lie and roughness to someone. If you translate “jemandem eine lange Nase machen” (to make someone a long nose), word by word, you could hardly guess that the expression actually means “to mock someone /သရော်သည်။”. When you say “jemandem eine Nase drehen”, you don’t mean “to roll one’s nose”, but rather “to lie someone/လိမ်လည်လှည့်ဖြားသည်။”. The German idiom “jemandem die Tür vor der Nase zuschlagen” is “to close the door before the nose”, which translates as “to behave roughly with someone/ရိုင်းပြစ်စွာဆက်ဆံသည်။”.

The Mouth

As an organ for speaking, man uses the idioms with mouth for speaking figuratively. The German phrase “den großen Mund haben” (to have a big mouth) means “to be a show-off/ကြွားဝါပြောဆိုသည်။”. This German idiom „jemandem Honig um den Mund schmieren” literally means “to smear someone around the mouth”. Its figurative meaning is “to say as someone likes/ မြှောက်ဝင့်ပြောဆိုသည်။”.

We can also use the mouth for eating. That’s why some idioms refer to this meaning. For example, the German expression “jemand läuft das Wasser im Mund zusammen” (to flow the water together in the mouth) means “it makes my mouth water/သရေယိုသည်၊ သရေကျသည်။”.

German idioms with facial features can be found in the following table. There are also some facial features like eyelash, tongue, which are not included to the above explanation. But in terms of body parts, here especially facial features, they are also collected from the books.

Body parts	German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
Hair	aufs Haar genau	to a hair's breadth	to be exact တိကျသေချာသည်။
	ein Haar in der Suppe finden	to find a hair in the soup	to find a snag အပြစ်ရှာသည်။
	jemandem die Haare vom Kopf fressen	to eat the hairs from someone's head	to eat a lot of food when someone else has paid for it သူတစ်ပါးကျွေးလျှင် အများကြီးစားသည်။
Eyes	jemandem ein Dorn im Auge sein	to be a thorn in someone's eye	to be a thorn in someone's side မျက်စိဆံပင်မွေးစူးသည်။
	kein Auge zutun	to close no eye	not be able to sleep အိပ်မရဖြစ်သည်။
	keine Augen im Kopf haben	to have not eyes in your head	to be careless သတိမထားမိသည်။
	seinen Augen nicht trauen	not to trust your eyes	very surprised or shocked to see something မယုံနိုင်ဖြစ်သည်။
Ears	ganz Ohr sein	to be all ears	listen to someone with interest ဂရုတစိုက်နားထောင်သည်။
Nose	jemandem etwas unter die Nase reiben	to rub someone under the nose	to be pleasant to someone ယဉ်ကျေးပျူငှာစွာ ဆက်ဆံသည်။
	an der Nase herumführen	to show someone around the nose	to give someone the run-around နားလှည့်ပါးရိုက်လုပ်သည်။
Mouth	den Mund halten	to hold the mouth	not to say your opinion ရေငုံနှုတ်ပိတ်နေသည်။
	einen großen Mund haben	to have a big mouth	to be cheeky အပြောကြီးသည်၊ လူပါးဝသည်။
	jemandem den Mund verbieten	to forbid the mouth of someone	to be silenced ရေငုံနှုတ်ပိတ်နေသည်။

The Neck

Neck is the part of the body connecting the head to the rest of the body. It is found out that some idioms are used with a figurative meaning, based on the position of neck.

For example:

German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
Hals über Kopf	neck over heads	in a hurry/rush အရေးတကြီး၊ အလျှင်စလို
jemandem auf dem Nacken sitzen	to sit on one's necks	to breathe down one's neck ကုပ်ခွစီးသည် (အတင်းအကြပ်ပြုစေသည်။)

jemandem den Nacken beugen	to bend the neck	to bow ဒူးထောက်အညှစ်သည်။
jemandem im Nacken sitzen	to sit in the neck	to be on one's tail နောက်ယောင်ခံလိုက်သည်။
so einen Hals haben	to have such a neck	to be angry စိတ်ဆိုးဒေါသထွက်သည်။

The Shoulders

Shoulder is the joint near the neck that attaches the arm to the human body, allowing it to move around. We use the shoulder to carry something. The figurative meanings of some idioms are also referred to that. The German idiom “etwas auf fremde Schulter abladen” literally means 'to unload something on someone else's shoulder,' but the English and Myanmar equivalents are “to carry a load on one's shoulder/အပြစ်ပုံချသည်။”.

The German phrase “jemandem die kalte Schulter zeigen” (to show someone the cold shoulder) means “to reject/ignore somebody/ငြင်းပယ်သည်။”. The German expression “etwas auf die leichte Schulter nehmen” (take something on the light shoulder) means “to take something lightly/အလေးအနက်မထား

ဘဲဆောင်ရွက်သည်။” in English and Myanmar.

The Back

The human back is the large posterior area of the human body (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_back). In the German language, there are also some idioms with the human back, which have the figurative meaning of supporting, cover, betrayal and neglect. These idioms are shown as follows:

German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
jemandem den Rücken stärken	to strengthen one's back	to support someone တစ်စုံတစ်ယောက်ကိုပံ့ပိုးကူညီသည်။
jemandem in den Rücken fallen	to fall into one's back	to betray someone သစ္စာဖောက်သည်။
jemandem/etwas im Rücken haben	to have someone/something in the back	to support/cover someone/something တစ်စုံတစ်ယောက်ကိုပံ့ပိုးကူညီသည်။
mit dem Rücken zur/an der Wand stehen	to stand with one's back to the wall	to be in a bad situation အခက်အခဲကြုံတွေ့သည်။

The Arm

In this section, the German idioms with the arm are presented. Parts of the arm also include 'hand' and 'finger'. Some idioms with these body parts can be found in the following examples, especially to describe management, skill, engagement, friendship and relationship and so on.

Body Parts	German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
Arm	jemandem mit offenen Armen empfangen	to receive someone with open arms	to welcome someone very warmly တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုလှိုက်လှဲစွာ ကြိုဆိုသည်။
	jemandem unter	to grab someone	to help someone

Body Parts	German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
	die Arme greifen	under the arms	တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုကူညီသည်။
Hand	etwas in die Hand nehmen	to take something in hand	to take control တစ်စုံတစ်ရာကို စိတ်ကြိုက်စီမံဆောင်ရွက်သည်။
	etwas mit der linken Hand machen	to do something with the left-hand	to be skillful to do something တစ်စုံတစ်ရာကို ကျွမ်းကျင်ပိုင်နိုင်သည်။
	für jemanden die Hand ins Feuer legen	put one's hand in the fire for someone	to vouch for someone တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုအာမခံသည်။
	jemandem die Hand fürs Leben reichen	to give someone the hand for life	to engage someone မင်္ဂလာပြုရန် ကမ်းလှမ်းသည်။
	zwei linke Hände haben	to have 2 left-hands	to be not skillful in doing something တစ်စုံတစ်ရာကို ကျွမ်းကျင်ပိုင်နိုင်ခြင်းမရှိသည်။
Finger	jemanden um den (kleinen) Finger wickeln	to wrap someone around your (little) finger	to influence a person so that he/she does everything for someone တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုလိုရာကြိုးဆွဲနိုင်သည်။
Thumb	jemandem die Daumen drücken	to put the thumbs for someone	to wish somebody luck, to cross your fingers for somebody တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုအောင်မြင်ရန်ဆုတောင်းပေးသည်။

The Leg

We need the legs to go from a place to another place. Leg is also an active organ of the body like hand. Based on this, some idioms with the body part leg means “the changes of places and situation”.

1. Beine kriegen (to get legs) means “something is lost/ပျောက်ဆုံးသည်၊ ပျောက်ဆုံးသည်။”;
2. lange Beine machen (to make someone long legs) means “to run away/အေးသို့ထွက်ပြေးသည်။”;
3. mit einem Bein im Grabe stehen (to have one foot in the grave) means “to be close to die /သင်္ချိုင်းသို့ခြေတစ်ဖက်လှမ်းနေသည်။”;
4. wieder auf die Beine kommen (to come again upon the leg) means “to recover from something/ပြန်လည်ကျန်းမာသည်၊ နုလန်ထူးသည်။”.

Some idioms carry a negative meaning. For example, The German phrase “jemandem ein Bein stellen” means literally “to put someone one leg”. However, its figurative meaning is “to get someone off the ground/ခြေထိုးသည်။”. “die Beine unter den Tisch stecken” (to put the legs just under the table) means idiomatically “not to help someone/တစ်ဦးတစ်ယောက်ကိုအကူအညီမပေးဘဲနေသည်။”.

Body Parts	German Idioms	Literal Translation	English / Myanmar Equivalent
Knee	jemanden in die Knie zwingen	to force someone to their knees	to conquer someone အနိုင်ရသည်။
	weiche Knie haben	to have weak knees	to feel weak with fear or nervousness ကြောက်စိုးတုန်သည်။
Foot	jemanden auf dem falschen Fuß erwischen	to catch someone on the wrong foot	to meet somebody unprepared မမျှော်လင့်ဘဲရုတ်တရက်ဆုံတွေ့သည်။
	kalte Füße bekommen	to get cold feet	to abandon a project because of anxiety စွန့်လွှတ်သည်။

Discussion

Idioms are a part of a language. To better understand the language, idioms and idiomatic expressions should also be studied. Idioms cannot be translated literally. It is important to know its figurative meaning so that we can use an idiom correctly. The German language is rich in idioms. Through this paper, idioms regarding the body parts which are commonly used in the prescribed books and in everyday conversation are presented, with literally translation and an equivalent in English and Myanmar.

As a result, some idioms could easily be understood, because they have an exact equivalent in other language. Some idioms need the literal translation to understand, in the case of not finding a proper equivalent. However, the literal translation of the idiom can cause confusion, because its meaning is not predicated from the meaning of their constituents.

It is possible to speak German without using idioms, but we cannot fully express the sayings and understand others, if we do not know the most common idioms. It could be difficult for the students who are learning German as a foreign language to understand the meaning of an idiom. However, they should learn the idioms. Idioms give a deeper insight into the German language and the culture, because many German idioms have origin in the history, literature, religion, customs and traditions. Furthermore, learning German idioms can enhance your language skills and provides different advantages such as better understanding and new vocabulary.

Conclusion

Idioms are commonly used in the German language, both in speech and in writing. Learning German idioms can help improve the understanding of the language and make the language proficiency of the students lively and complete like a native speaker. In this paper some German idioms with body parts has presented. In future studies, it is suggested to study the origins of the idioms and the idioms which are most commonly used in everyday life. This paper can be assumed to be useful and helpful to the students.

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- ကြည်ကြည်စိန်၊ ဒေါ်၊ (၂၀၁၉)၊ “*ထူးခြားဆန်းပြားမြန်မာစကားအပိုင်း (၁)*”၊ Mandalay University of Foreign Languages Research Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1၊ မန္တလေးနိုင်ငံခြားဘာသာတက္ကသိုလ်။
- ခင်မင်၊ မောင်၊ (ခန့်ဖြူ)၊ (၂၀၀၉)၊ “*ဘာသာအမြင်စာပေအမြင်*” (ဘာသာစာပေသုတေသနစာတမ်းဆောင်ပါးဆု)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ပုဂံစာအုပ်တိုက်။
- ချိုချိုတင့်၊ ပါမောက္ခဒေါက်တာ(မြန်မာ)၊ (၂၀၁၁)၊ “*မြန်မာစာသုတေသနစာတမ်းများ*” ရန်ကုန်၊ Wisdom House စာပေ။
- မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့၊ (၁၉၉၁)၊ “*မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်ရန်ကုန်*” ဖိုတိုလစ်သိုပုံနှိပ်စက်ရုံ။
- လှကြိုင်၊ ဦး၊ (ပါမောက္ခ)၊ (၂၀၀၂)၊ “*ဂျာမန်စကားအလင်္ကာ*”၊ ဂျာမန်ဘာသာဌာန၊ ရန်ကုန်နိုင်ငံခြားဘာသာတက္ကသိုလ်။
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