

Creative Idiomaticity as the expression of shared cultural knowledge in ELF

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Choice of corpus and methodology

- Online virtual communities and ELF
- **Research data:** topic on the Stargate forum Gateworld:
 - 146,000 words, 75,000 NNS contributions
- Corpus scanned **manually** for **deviating** or **creative idiomaticity**.
- Minor quantitative with **AntConc** corpus analysis tool.
- **Dictionaries** and two **online corpora** (BNC and COCA) to cross-check the non-standard expressions emerging from the corpus.

Research question:

IF idiomatic language IS deeply-entrenched in the culture of reference (Prodromou 2008) AND ELF has a functional nature

Is it **unnecessary** (Seidlhofer and Widdowson 2007), and / or **counterproductive** (Seidlhofer 2004) in ELF talk especially in a **virtual community** context?



Findings

- 19 “deviating” uses of ENL idiomaticity
- Creative manipulations of **existing** ENL expressions
- Innovative expressions created from scratch
- **Ping-pong punning** (Crystal 2001)

Example 1:

S1: I didn't call you a fish. That was the verb "to pout"
S2: **Fish is man's best friend**
S1: In that case → 
S2: Kate got **fished** big time
S1: LOL!! And a new anti-saying is born ... "**to be fished**"
S3: If you want to talk about fish, talk about **how fishy the second half of S4 smells**.
S1: **Like a sock** you mean

Ping-pong punning session containing:

- **communication failure** → is immediately clarified
- **creative variation** on an existing ENL expression
- **lexical innovation** by **semantic extension**: get fished'
 - 'being hit on the head with a fish' (see emoticon)
 - **figurative meaning**: a character 'gets fished' when written off the show.
- **standard use** of an ENL expression
- **marked wordplay** on an ENL expression : the variation is a reference to the posters' common "culture".

Example 2:

S1(NS): They will deny the shows missteps for as long as possible.
S2: Why take the blame if you can play "**spin the bottle of blame**" with everyone else?

- S2 **aware** of using a **non-standard** formulation (inverted commas).
- The expression exploits the popularity of the game, evoking the image a bottle spinning and pointing randomly at someone.

Example 3:

S1 (NS): I'm hoping this will give her something [...] to get her teeth into and take the character to very new places.
S2: Yup, places like **Fordville**

- S2 exploits the literal meaning of the ENL expression 'take to new places'
- **Lexical innovation by compounding** (surname plus the city suffix **-ville.**) , playing on the name of a character written off the show.

Example 4

S1: **Stinky socks**
S2: a washing machine
S1: I don't think there is a machine in teh [sic] world that could wash this **pile of rubbish**. Or stinky socks for that matter.
S2: We must burn it all! Burn I tell you! **BURN!** I think **451 degrees Fahrenheit** would do the trick quite nicely.
S1: We'd risk to die from stench.

- **Contextual inaccuracy**: rubbish is not associated with washing machines - communication **not** hindered.
- **Science fiction (pop culture)** reference
- Both users move fluidly between the literal and metaphorical levels of meaning
- Exchange built upon the (implied) ENL expression *to stink* – to be bad

Remarks

- Creative idiomaticity and lexical innovation especially on the **science-fiction theme** – cohesive factor in multilingual / -cultural environment.
- **Essential aspect** of their communicating habits – expression of a common cultural knowledge built over time.
- Insider language and idiomatic language:
 - **reinforce group identity** and contribute to **establish a deeper level of commonality** in the conversation.
 - **Compensate** the linguistic and cultural **heterogeneity** of their group.