

202123--UNEDITED

## **The Semiotic Structure and Semantic Composition of English Frozen Similes**

### **ABSTRACT**

In traditional rhetoric, similes form an independent category of tropes. And English frozen similes are frequently treated as a subset of idioms. This article explores English frozen similes on the basis of all the similes (221 altogether) in *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (1998). Addressed in terms of the semiotic topic-vehicle approach are the semiotic structure of English frozen similes and their semantic compositionality. Two conclusions are drawn from this study. First, the iconic structure of English frozen similes generally involves attribution of feature(s) from the semiotic vehicle to the theme. One interesting finding in this regard is **that more** than half of English frozen similes attribute nonhuman features to human beings, whereas personifying similes are few and far between. Second, English frozen similes, by virtue of the interaction between the semiotic theme and vehicle, show a high degree of semantic compositionality, and their linguistic constituents display a low degree of fixedness. Thus it is questionable to subsume English frozen similes within the general category of idioms.

*Key Words:* English frozen similes, idioms, semiotic structure, semantic composition, theme, vehicle, analogy

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## **The Semiotic Structure and Semantic Composition of Frozen English Similes**

### **ABSTRACT**

In traditional rhetoric, similes form an independent category of tropes; moreover, frozen English similes are frequently treated as a subset of idioms. This article explores frozen English similes on the basis of all 221 similes in the *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (1998). Addressed in terms of the semiotic topic-vehicle approach are the semiotic structure of these similes and their semantic compositionality. Two conclusions are drawn from this study. First, the iconic structure of frozen English similes generally involves attribution of feature(s) from the semiotic vehicle to the theme. One interesting finding is that more than half of such similes attribute nonhuman features to human beings; whereas, personifying similes occur with much less frequency. Second, frozen English similes, by virtue of the interaction between the semiotic theme and vehicle, show a high degree of semantic compositionality, and their linguistic constituents display a low degree of fixedness. Thus, it is questionable to subsume frozen English

[Edited by Dr R, continued]

similes within the general category of idioms.

**Keywords:** frozen English similes, idioms, semiotic structure, semantic composition, theme, vehicle, **analogy**

Editor's Notes:

- (1) When two or more adjectives precede the same noun, the correct order with regard to categories is as follows: determiner, quality, physical description, nationality, material, qualifying noun, and main noun. Therefore, "frozen" must *precede* "English"—not vice versa.
- (2) Why are the words "that more" highlighted in gray? These words are used correctly in that sentence. However, I deleted a verbose prepositional phrase preceding the highlighted words.
- (3) The phrase "few and far between" is a trite and redundant colloquialism which should be avoided in formal academic English. Therefore, I deleted this phrase.
- (4) All "keywords" should appear in the abstract to which they are attached. However, I do not see the word "analogy" in this abstract. I recommend that this word be deleted.

P.S.: The primitive grammar checker in MSWord incorrectly thinks that "which" should introduce only non-restrictive adjective clauses. This concisely explains the squiggly green lines appearing under my usage of "which" to introduce a restrictive clause in Note 3, in which context a native speaker would more likely say "which" than "that."

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