

THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FRENCH  
AND ENGLISH IDIOMS PERTAINING THE TERM “HEAD”

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After coexisting for centuries, English and French share a rich and entwined history. This long-lasting relationship has resulted in a vibrant interchange of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, writing, and culture, all of which mutually enrich each other by means of borrowings. It is possible to see these interactions between French and English as more than merely a word or a phrase borrowing because they represent some of the techniques by which the two languages have arrived at their current cultural state. It is a profound and ongoing dialogue that has left a lasting imprint. Despite the ongoing exchange and communication between languages, languages maintain distinctive characteristics in fields like grammar and vocabulary, but they also differ greatly in terms of everyday life, cultures, and values. The topic of this paper is much more fascinating to explore in light of all these parallels and discrepancies. The cultural contexts of French and English are thoroughly examined in this article, with an emphasis on idiomatic terms related to body parts more specifically “head”. These idioms provide the perfect perspective through which it is possible to examine the unique characteristics included into these two languages. Idioms have emerged into the languages as fascinating linguistic elements featuring the collective wisdom, values, and perspectives of a culture. This article deals with the comparative study of the specific group of English and French body idioms that contain the term “head”. It focuses on specific features of idioms, their structural patterns and their classification. It is devoted to the comparison and analysis of English and French body idioms from the semantic, lexical and formal points of view.

### 1. be at the head of

être en tête de

Both idioms have the meaning of being in the leading position. They both consist of the auxiliary verb “be” which is followed by the prepositional phrase. The structure is identical both in English and French. But the English idiom uses the definite article, while in French idiom there is no determiner at all, both idioms have been placed into the category of absolute equivalence.

▪ She was a head of year and really took me under her wing. THE GUARDIAN (2021) [1].

▪ The minister should be at the head of the table, that’s the whole point.

▪ Lors du grand spectacle, Paul sera à la tête de la chorale, il conduira tous les chanteurs. – During the big show, Paul will be at the head of the choir, he will lead all the singers.

▪ Quand tu seras grand, tu pourrais être à la tête de ta propre boulangerie si tu adores faire du pain. – When you grow up, you could run your own bakery if you love baking bread [2].

### 2. Keep one’s head

Garder la tête

This pair of idioms is lexically, semantically and syntactically identical. They share the meaning of staying calm despite great hardships. They are moreover realized with the same lexical means and verbs with the same denotation.

▪ It is essential you keep your head, don't panic and are clinical. THE SUN (2008)

▪ United's utility man needs to keep his head and stay in position rather than running forward. THE SUN (2009)

▪ J'essaye de garder la tête mais ce n'est pas facile du tout. – I try to keep your head but it's not easy at all.

▪ Malgré les difficultés, monsieur Erode essayait de garder la tête. – Despite the difficulties, Mr. Erode tried to keep his head calm.

### 3. Lose one’s head

Perdre la tête

In both English and French these idioms are considered to be verbal idioms thus they have the same meaning – to lose control and not act calmly. They are used with the identical syntactic structure and consist of verbs with the same denotation. They both use possessive pronoun in English and definite article in French and therefore they are considered as absolutely equivalent.

- Everything went dark, and Marc just lost his head and couldn't even think what to do.

- It won't work, and you may well lose your head in the process. TIMES, SUNDAY TIMES (2016) [3].

- On perd la tête haute, on aurait aimé continuer nos projets. Le Tregor (2020). We are losing our heads held high, we would have liked to continue our projects. Le Tregor (2020)

- Le montant ferait perdre la tête à plus d'une personne. Angers Info (2021). – The amount would make more than one person lose their mind. Angers Info (2021)

- Je me suis demandé si je n'étais pas en train de perdre la tête. Matthieu, Robert L'enfer fiscal: les victims. I wondered if I was losing my mind. Matthieu, Robert Tax hell: the victims [4].

4. hit one's head against the wall  
se cogner la tête contre les murs

Both English and French idioms are semantically equivalent with the meaning of wasting time to accomplish something that is completely hopeless, to attempt continuously and fruitlessly to accomplish some task or reach a particular objective that is or may seem utterly hopeless. The verbs have the same denotation. The French idiom uses the reflexive form of the verb. In case of these two idioms the morphological deviance is related to the plural form of “walls” that is used in the French idiom as opposed to the singular form of “wall” in the English one.

- Some adults are obviously never going to agree with you on this, so it's no use hitting your head against the wall trying to convince everybody.

- She feels like she

has been beating her head against the wall trying to understand that math equation.

- Ils devraient arrêter de se cogner la tête contre les murs ; ça ne les avance en aucun cas.- They should stop hitting their heads against the walls; it doesn't advance them in any way.

- Quand je n'arrivais pas à résoudre ce casse-tête, je me sentais comme si je me cognais la tête contre les murs tellement c'était frustrant. – When I couldn't solve this puzzle, I felt like I was hitting my head against the walls because it was so frustrating.

- Ma sœur était si perdue en essayant de comprendre ses devoirs de maths qu'elle avait l'impression de se cogner la tête contre les murs. – My sister was so lost trying to figure out her math homework that she felt like she was hitting her head against the walls [5].

5. from head to foot  
de la tête aux pieds

These both idioms are lexically and semantically identical with the meaning of completely covering the whole body. Here the French idiom uses body part in plural form "feet", whereas English refers to "foot" in the singular form.

- Colin had been put into a bath and been scrubbed from head to foot.

- The youth had been burnt from head to foot and never stood much chance. SUNDAY TIMES (2009)

- He had sustained shrapnel wounds from head to foot. SUNDAY TIMES (2015) [6].

- Nous n'hésitâmes pas à choisir le premier, un naturel roux de la tête aux pieds, qui n'avait jamais quitté son île, et en connaissait tous les endroits accessibles [7]. We did not hesitate to choose the first, a natural redhead from head to foot, who had never left his island, and knew all the accessible places.

- Elle la regarda de la tête aux pieds et sans doute son examen fut-il favorable car elle sourit à Minette d'un large sourire accueillant et quitta la salle. - She looked at her from head to toe and no doubt her examination was favorable because she smiled at Minette with a broad

welcoming smile and left the room [8].

6. have a (good) head on one's shoulders  
avoir la tête (bien) sur les épaules

Corresponding on the syntactic and semantic level, both of the idioms mean to have common sense. The English idiom expresses the faculty of “good sense” by having a good head realized with an adjective which is followed by a noun, to have good judgment and be able to make good decisions. The French idiom focuses on the issue that the head is “attached quite well” to the shoulders and uses a noun that is followed by an adverb. With the meaning of staying calm in a difficult situation and being composed of verb + noun constituents, the two idioms are semantically and syntactically identical. However, they show a deviance in terms of different places of a noun and adjective in the noun phrase. The English idiom uses adjective as a pre-modifier of the noun, but in the French idiom the adjective is positioned after the noun.

▪ I suppose she has a very good head on her shoulders. She really knows the facts and she doesn't let the pressure get to her.

▪ We're looking for a person who is shrewd and has a good head on their shoulders.

▪ J'ai plutôt la réputation d'être très pragmatique et d'avoir la tête sur les épaules – et non d'être le genre de femme dont un gentleman mal intentionné pourrait abuser. (Stephanie LAURENS, Indocile Angelica, 2016)- Rather, I have a reputation for being very pragmatic and having a good head on my shoulders– and not being the kind of woman who might be taken advantage of by a gentleman with ill intentions. (Stephanie Laurens, Indocile Angelica, 2016)

▪ Benjamin, lui aussi semble avoir la tête sur les épaules. Même si un ami proche chauffeur de bus a totalement sombré, il tente de relativiser : C'est un sport et un jeu comme un autre... Et il faut bien mourir un jour, je vis bien, je fais ce que je veux » tranche-t-il.- Benjamin also seems to have his head on his shoulders. Even though a close bus driver friend has completely collapsed, he tries to put things into perspective: “It's a sport and a game like any other... And you have to die one day, I live well, I do what I want” he says.

### 7. get something into one's head

s'enfoncer quelque chose dans la crane

These idioms have the meaning of starting to believe something. From the lexical point of view the French counterpart uses skull, while the English idiom points to the head. Similarly, there is a difference in the denotation of the verbs, French focuses on the reflexive and more expressive verb with the meaning of sink into or press whereas English uses neutral verb get.

- When will you finally get it into your head that Margie is not coming back?

- One day, Brice got it into her head that we all hated her.

- Enfonce-toi bien dans le crâne que j'plaisante pas : le pôle sud est vachement plus froid que le pôle nord ! – Get it into your head, I'm not kidding: the South Pole is a lot colder than the North Pole! [9].

### 8. Have eyes in the back of one's head

Avoir les yeux dans le dos

The English version expresses the faculty of seeing everything by means of having eyes on the reverse side of the head, while the French one points to the back. Although semantically equivalent with the meaning of knowing everything that is happening around, both idioms refer to different body parts. The English idiom uses a composite preposition in the back of, syntactically both idioms follow the same structure.

- Elle avait les yeux dans le dos: elle remarquait littéralement chaque petit détail.

- M. George Duroy a les yeux dans le dos et il est toujours attentif au moindre signe de problème. - Mr. George Duroy has eyes in the back of his head and is always attentive to the slightest sign of a problem.

- Parents of teenagers need to have eyes in the back of their heads, especially nowadays.

### 9. Put an idea into one's head

Mettre la puce à l'oreille de qu'un

While having the same meaning of making someone want to do something they had not thought about before, both idioms differ

lexically, consisting of different body parts. From the syntactical point of view both idioms follow the same pattern with the difference in the noun phrase, which is in English expressed by someone 's head, whereas in French there is the preposition of (ear of someone).

- Don't go putting an idea into his head. He can't afford a new car, you know he has financial problems.

- We're not moving, don't even try to persuade—what put that idea in your head?

- 3 décembre 1940 – Il m'intimide de plus en plus, ce qui est anormal et devrait me mettre la puce à l'oreille. Cette puce puisqu'il faut l'appeler par son nom, est-ce qu'elle n'aurait pas deux ailes et un carquois ? [10]. He intimidates me more and more, which is abnormal and should alert me. This flea, since we have to call it by its name, wouldn't it have two wings and a quiver?

- Les étonnants effets d'un médicament prescrit aux diabétiques ont mis la puce à l'oreille des médecins : la metformine pourrait allonger l'espérance de vie, ralentir le vieillissement du cerveau, voire prévenir le cancer ! (Adeline Colonat, Pourrait-on rester jeune grâce à une pilule de jouvence ?, Science & Vie le 19 avril 2017). The astonishing effects of a drug prescribed for diabetics have alerted doctors: metformin could extend life expectancy, slow down brain aging, and even prevent cancer! (Adeline Colonat, Could we stay young thanks to a youth pill?, Science & Vie April 19, 2017) [11].

#### 10. Talk one's head off

Casser les oreilles à qu'un

Both the English and French idioms share the same meaning of talking to someone for a long time. Lexically, however, the English idiom refers to the head, while in French the plural form of ear is used. Moreover, in English it is one's head that is talked off, while in French the structure uses dative and goes as to break ears to someone.

- Je vais encore casser les oreilles de mes voisins !- I'm going to talk my neighbors' head off again!

- Je vois surtout que tu vas bien nous casser les oreilles avec ça ! — (Delphine Bouquet, Éva, graine d'artiste, 2011)- Above all, I see that

you are going to talk our head off with that! (Delphine Bouquet, *Éva, graine d'artiste*, 2011) [12].

- Oh my God, I am so exhausted: she talked my head off.

- Brad is shy at first, but will undoubtedly talk your head off once you get to know him

11. be off one's head

ne plus avoir sa tête

With the meaning of being mad the semantic equivalence is achieved in both languages. The idioms suggest an image of being without head, nevertheless, they use different verbs and syntactic structure. Here the English idiom uses verb be (being without one's head), whereas the French one uses have (having no more one's head).

- Terry must be off his head going out in this weather!

- Hanse was off her head as usual.

- Eh ! mon Dieu ! est-ce dans un pareil moment que vous devez écouter les scrupules d'une femme qui n'a plus sa tête ? Voyons, profitez de son sommeil. (1844. *Les Mystères de Paris*, roman en cinq parties et onze tableaux)- Hey! my God ! Is it at such a moment that you must listen to the scruples of a woman who is off her head? Let's see, enjoy his sleep. (1844. *The Mysteries of Paris*, novel in five parts and eleven paintings)

- Un homme qui se soûle d'un bout de l'année à l'autre, n'a plus la tête à lui, et il y a des maris, très-jaloux à vingt ans, que la boisson rend très-coulants à trente sur le chapitre de la fidélité conjugale (1877, *L'Assommoir*). A man who gets drunk from one end of the year to the next is off his head, and there are husbands who are very jealous at twenty but drink makes them very drunk at thirty. on the chapter of marital fidelity (1877, *L'Assommoir*).

12. Be over head and ears in work

Avoir du travail au-dessus la tête

This pair of idioms corresponds on the syntactic and semantic level. They have the meaning of being extremely busy, the two idioms differ in the use of verbs. The English idiom uses verb be, which expresses the notion of being totally immersed in work as opposed to have in French



with the idea of having a lot of work.

- The poor student has been over head and ears in work and studies having very little time for his relatives.

- Ils avaient du travail au-dessus la tête jusqu'à la fin du premier semestre.

13. Have one's head in the clouds

être dans la lune

From the semantic point of view, these idioms convey the same meaning which means being unaware of what is going around. They lexically differ in the use of verbs and also other lexical means. The English idiom conveys the notion of having one's head in the clouds, while the French idiom focuses on being on the moon.

- You'll never be able to run the family business – he's always got his head in the clouds.

- Tom roams around all night with his head in the clouds.

- Clara, à Mme Pinchard. – Madame préfère-t-elle des oreillers en plumes ou en crin ? (Silence de Mme Pinchard). Madame désire-t-elle des oreillers en plumes ou en crin ? (Même jeu.) Ah, ça ! qu'est-ce qu'elle a ? Elle est dans la lune ! (Georges Feydeau, *Le Dindon*, 1896). Clara, to Mrs. Pinchard. – Does Madame prefer feather or horsehair pillows? (Silence from Mrs. Pinchard). Does Madame want feather or horsehair pillows? (Same game.) Ah, that's it! what does she have? She has her head in the clouds! (Georges Feydeau, *Le Dindon*, 1896).

- Un homme distrait ou trop accessible aux utopies est dans la lune, et l'on dit assez fréquemment un peu partout d'un homme de mauvaise humeur qu'il est mal luné (*La Revue scientifique*, 1910). A man who is distracted or too accessible to utopias has his head in the clouds, and it is quite frequently said almost everywhere that a man in a bad mood is in a bad mood (*The Scientific Review*, 1910).

In this article I attempted to demonstrate that idioms are dynamic expressions of culture rather than static objects. They reflect the continuous evolution of language and capture the spirit of a nation at a particular moment in time. Their depth and the dynamic character of the language are both revealed when we study them in the context of

their historical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. The study of idiomatic expressions becomes a direct window into the larger truth – that language is a living, breathing organism undergoing an ongoing evolution. It flourishes, changes, and adapts due to the speakers' combined experiences. Recognizing this dynamic character strengthens the function of the language as a lively representation of human expression throughout time and societies by fostering a deep respect for its adaptability and durability. The study deepens our comprehension by examining the intricacies, the origins and applications of these terms. The research provides a nuanced perspective on societal perspectives on interactions by shedding light on these cultural nuances, so improving our understanding of how language is embedded within larger cultural contexts. It is essential to comprehend colloquial language and particulars of culture in order to advance successful cultural diplomacy initiatives. This paper can help improve understanding and communication between distinct cultures and enlighten international relations by providing insights into linguistic and cultural diversity.

This paper provide an in-depth academic research of idiomatic expressions with the term “head”. The knowledge acquired can be used in a variety of contexts, such as teaching one language through the other. Gaining knowledge concerning the usage of idiomatic language gives people the skills and necessary tools they need to successfully negotiate in a variety of linguistic environments. This article offers the possibility to broaden the scope to other Francophone or Anglophone countries in addition to comparing linguistic features between French and English-speaking countries. The research enhances cross-cultural understanding by identifying both common and unique characteristics through comparative analysis. By offering a thorough understanding of the linguistic and cultural landscape, this method can further navigate in the investigation of the cross-cultural influence between these two languages.

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**«ԳԼՈՒԽ» ԵԶՐՈՒՅԹԸ ՊԱՐՈՒՆԱԿՈՂ ԻԴԻՈՄՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԵՄԱՏԱԿԱՆ  
ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ ԵՎ ՖՐԱՆՍԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ**

*Էլլա Սարգսյան*

**Ամփոփում**

***Հանգուցային բառեր.** գլուխ, իդիոմատիկ արտահայտություններ, փոխառություն, համեմատական ուսումնասիրություն, համարժեք հասկացություններ, զուգահեռներ, բառապաշար, իմաստային և շարահյուսական նույնական միավորներ*

Դարեր շարունակ անգլերենն ու ֆրանսերենը կիսում են հարուստ պատմություն: Այս երկարատև հարաբերությունը հանգեցրել է քերականության, արտասանության, բառապաշարի, գրի և մշակույթի աշխույժ փոխանակմանը, որոնք փոխառությունների միջոցով փոխադարձաբար հարստացնում են միմյանց: Հնարավոր է ֆրանսերենի և անգլերենի միջև այս փոխազդեցությունները տեսնել որպես ավելին, քան պարզապես փոխառնված բառ կամ արտահայտություն, քանի որ դրանք ներկայացնում են որոշ մեթոդներ, որոնցով երկու լեզուները հասել են իրենց ներկայիս մշակութային վիճակին: Դա խորը և շարունակական երկխոսություն է, որը մնայուն հետք է թողել: Չնայած լեզուների միջև շարունակական փոխանակմանը և հաղորդակցությանը, լեզուները պահպանում են տարբերակիչ առանձնահատկություններ այնպիսի ոլորտներում, ինչպիսիք են քերականությունը և բառապաշարը: Այս հոդվածում մանրակրկիտ ուսումնասիրված են ֆրանսերենի և անգլերենի մշակութային ենթատեքստերը՝ շեշտը դնելով մարմնի մասերի, ավելի կոնկրետ՝ «գլուխ» եզրույթի հետ կապված բառակապակցությունների վրա: Այս բառակապակցությունները տալիս են հեռանկար, որի միջոցով հնարավոր է ուսումնասիրել այս երկու լեզուներում ներառված եզակի բնութագրերը: Այս իդիոմները հայտնվել են լեզուներում որպես հետաքրքրաշարժ լեզվական տարրեր, որոնք ներկայացնում են մշակույթի հավաքական իմաստությունը, արժեքները և հեռանկարները: Այս հոդվածը վերաբերում է «գլուխ» եզրույթը պարունակող անգլիական և ֆրանսիական մարմնի արտահայտությունների կոնկրետ խմբի համեմատական ուսումնասիրությանը:

## СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ФРАНЦУЗСКИХ И АНГЛИЙСКИХ ИДИОМ, ОТНОСЯЩИХСЯ К ТЕРМИНУ «ГОЛОВА»

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### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** *голова, идиоматические выражения, заимствование, сравнительное исследование, эквивалент, параллели, термины, лексически, семантически и синтаксически идентичные единицы*

После многовекового сосуществования английский и французский языки имеют богатую и переплетенную историю. Эти длительные отношения привели к яркому взаимодействию грамматики, произношения, лексики, письма и культуры, которые взаимно обогащают друг друга посредством заимствований. Можно рассматривать эти взаимодействия между французским и английским языками как нечто большее, чем просто заимствование слов или фраз. Это глубокий и продолжающийся диалог, который оставил неизгладимый след. Несмотря на постоянный обмен и общение между языками, языки сохраняют отличительные характеристики в таких областях, как грамматика и лексика, но они также сильно различаются с точки зрения повседневной жизни, культуры и ценностей. Тема этой статьи гораздо более интересна для изучения в свете всех этих параллелей и несоответствий. Культурные контексты французского и английского языков тщательно рассматриваются в этой статье с акцентом на идиоматические термины, связанные с частями тела, в частности с термином «голова». Эти идиомы предоставляют идеальную перспективу, через которую можно исследовать уникальные характеристики, включенные в эти два языка. В этой статье рассматривается сравнительное изучение конкретной группы английских и французских идиом с термином «голова». Она фокусируется на конкретных особенностях идиом, их структурных моделях и их классификации и посвящена сравнению и анализу английских и французских идиом с семантической и лексической точек зрения.