

The Use of Idioms Containing the Lexemes “Good” and “Bad” in English Literary Texts: A Pragmatic and Linguocultural Perspective

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Abstract. This article explores idioms containing the lexemes “good” and “bad” in English literary texts through the lens of pragmatics and linguocultural analysis. Drawing from both classical and modern literary works, the study investigates how such idioms reflect not only the values and judgments of the speaker but also deeper cultural scripts embedded in language. As a teacher and researcher, I have personally observed that many of these idioms carry rich emotional and evaluative functions, often going unnoticed in traditional linguistic descriptions. By applying a contrastive and context-sensitive approach, this article aims to highlight their discursive relevance and cultural resonance.

Keywords: *phraseological units, idioms, good and bad lexemes, pragmatics, cultural semantics, English literature, stylistic nuance, emotional expression, evaluative meaning*



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Introduction. Idioms are more than mere figurative expressions; they are culturally loaded and pragmatically potent tools of communication. In my own teaching experience, I have often encountered how idioms such as “a good egg” or “bad blood” spark curiosity among students due to their metaphorical yet evaluative content. Idioms with the lexemes “good” and “bad” are particularly noteworthy for their semantic transparency and pragmatic ambiguity. They serve as a linguistic mirror reflecting moral, emotional, and societal norms. Their recurring presence in literary discourse makes them valuable material for deeper exploration.

As noted by (Cowie, 1998), idioms are “conventionalized multiword expressions whose meaning cannot always be inferred from the literal meanings of the individual components.” Their pragmatic power lies in their ability to convey evaluation, irony, and social stance with brevity and cultural familiarity.

Theoretical Framework. This research draws on the classification of idiomatic pragmatic functions as developed by V. N. Telia (1996), such as emotional expressiveness, evaluative stance, and social-role identification. Wierzbicka’s (2003) concept of cultural scripts is also instrumental in analyzing how idioms encode shared cultural assumptions. My analysis also incorporates stylistic variation across genres, drawing parallels between idioms in British and American literary traditions.

Observation from Practice. While reading with my students passages from novels by (Dickens, 1848), (Faulkner, 1936), and Fitzgerald, I often encouraged them to analyze the pragmatic nuances of idioms. Students found that the same idiom could express sarcasm, approval, or moral warning depending on context. For instance, the phrase “go to the bad”—initially unclear—became more vivid once students linked it with the decline of a character’s integrity in (Dickens, 1848)’s works. This type of contextual learning underscores the functional richness of idioms.

Pragmatic and Linguocultural Functions of Idioms. Idioms with “good” frequently serve to praise or encourage, though in certain contexts they can be ironic. Take “as good as gold”—a seemingly innocent phrase, often applied to children, that may sometimes be used with gentle sarcasm by adult characters.

Conversely, idioms with *"bad"* often convey social deviance or conflict. *"A bad apple"* doesn't just label an individual; it implies a threat to communal harmony. In American literature, this idiom often appears in police or criminal settings, reinforcing collective values about morality and order.

The table below illustrates some examples that I have compiled and discussed with students:

Table 1.

Functional and Semantic Classification of "Good" and "Bad" Idioms in Literary Usage

No	Idiom	Literary Example & Source	Denotative Meaning	Pragmatic / Connotative Function
1	good egg	"He may not be bright, but he's a good egg." — P.G. Wodehouse	Kind or decent person	Trust, moral approval, interpersonal reliability
2	bad apple	"One bad apple spoils the barrel." — John Steinbeck	Harmful individual	Moral corruption, social danger
3	in good faith	"They acted in good faith..." — Harper Lee	Honest intent	Integrity, ethical conduct
4	as good as gold	"She's as good as gold..." — Charles Dickens	Very well-behaved	Obedience, positive reinforcement, sometimes irony
5	bad blood	"There was bad blood between the families..." — William Faulkner	Hostility or resentment	Deep-seated enmity, familial or social tension

Stylistic

Diversity

and

Cultural

Framing

One cannot ignore the stylistic functions idioms serve within narrative voice and character development. For example, *"good grief!"* — widely known from the Peanuts comic strip — functions as a socially accepted form of frustration. In contrast, older expressions like *"go to the bad"* carry a moralistic tone typical of 19th-century literature. Such usage not only reveals character disposition but also frames the reader's interpretation within a certain cultural ethos.

Conclusion

Through analyzing idioms containing *"good"* and *"bad"* within literary texts, we uncover more than idiomatic meaning. We unveil pragmatic intentions, emotional undertones, and cultural perspectives embedded in the language. As an educator and researcher, I believe such idioms are essential for language learners to grasp the interplay between words, context, and culture. By integrating personal experience, real literary examples, and linguistic theory, this article offers a practical and culturally attuned approach to phraseological analysis.

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