

The Language Applied in the British Press to Portray the Landmark Occasion – Platinum Jubilee of the Queen Elizabeth II – a Case Study

Each of the round anniversaries of the Queen's reign took place in a different socio-political climate, reflecting the dynamics of change in the United Kingdom. Elizabeth II celebrated the Silver Jubilee in 1977, the Golden Jubilee in 2002, the Diamond Jubilee in 2012, the Sapphire Jubilee of her reign in 2017 and finally, in 2022, the Platinum Jubilee. Although so much has changed since the Silver Jubilee, the Queen, through the preservation of her stance, has become a symbol of constancy and stability not only among Britons or Commonwealth citizens but perhaps also among people from other cultural areas of the world. All those anniversaries were abundantly and thoroughly reported in various national newspapers. However, the language applied to present the 2022 Platinum Jubilee by the popular press, and the language employed by the quality press to describe the same event differed significantly. The case study presented in this article shows how popular press representatives such as "Daily Mirror", "The Sun" and "Sunday Mirror" and quality press representatives, "The Guardian" and "The Sunday Times" vary linguistically while delivering the same information to the reader. The case study contains the frequency and choice of idiomatic application, play on words and overall cultural significance.

Keywords: idiomatic expressions, press, culture, language

Die Sprache in der britischen Presse zur Darstellung eines bahnbrechenden Anlasses, des Platin-Jubiläums von Königin Elisabeth II. – eine Fallstudie

Jedes der runden Regierungsjubiläen der Queen fand in einem anderen gesellschaftspolitischen Klima statt, das die Dynamik des Wandels im Vereinigten Königreich widerspiegelt. Elizabeth II. feierte 1977 das Silberne Jubiläum, 2002 das Goldene Jubiläum, 2012 das Diamantene Jubiläum, 2017 das Saphirjubiläum ihrer Regierungszeit und schließlich 2022 das Platinjubiläum. Obwohl sich seit dem Silberjubiläum so viel verändert hat, ist die Queen durch die Bewahrung ihrer Haltung nicht nur unter Briten oder Commonwealth-Bürgern, sondern vielleicht auch unter Menschen aus anderen Kulturkreisen der Welt zu einem Symbol für Beständigkeit und Stabilität geworden. Über alle diese Jahrestage wurde reichlich und ausführlich in verschiedenen überregionalen Zeitungen berichtet. Die Sprache, die von der Publikumspresse zur Präsentation des Platinjubiläums 2022 verwendet wurde, und die Sprache, die von der Qualitätspresse zur Beschreibung desselben Ereignisses verwendet wurde, unterscheiden sich jedoch erheblich. Die in diesem Artikel vorgestellte Fallstudie zeigt, wie populäre Pressevertreter wie "Daily Mirror", "The Sun" und "Sunday Mirror" und Qualitätspressevertreter "The Guardian" und "The Sunday Times" sprachlich variieren, während sie dem Leser die gleichen Informationen liefern. Die Fallstudie untersucht die Häufigkeit und Wahl der idiomatischen Ausdrücke, des Wortspiels und die allgemeine kulturelle Bedeutung.

Schlüsselwörter: Redewendungen, Presse, Kultur, Sprache

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1. Queen Elizabeth II's reign – a quick overview

Elizabeth II's reign covered an extensive range of social history, coinciding with the highs and lows of life in Britain. The late 1960s saw the end of the empire and the obliteration of the remnants of Victorian times. The 1970s were dominated by strikes and inflation and associated social unrest. The ensuing 1980s brought the reign of Thatcherism with its brutal fight against strikers, the Falklands War and the growing conflict in Northern Ireland. At the same time, Princess Diana appeared on the scene. She won the nation's hearts – her marriage to Prince Charles was described as the “wedding of the century”, and the royal family itself increasingly featured in mass culture. The perception of the monarchy as a political institution, is beginning to shift moving to the focus of the popular press, talk shows and breakfast television. This trend continued into the following decade – the 1990s saw a consumer boom and the rapid development of technology.

The following decades saw the recovery from the crisis triggered by stock market speculation and a never before known medium – social networks allowing information to be circulated without the intermediation of newspaper and broadcasting corporations. Subsequent anniversaries of Queen Elizabeth II's reign (Silver, Gold, Ruby, Diamond, Sapphire, Platinum) clearly show changes in the British people's perception of the monarchy: starting with the Silver Jubilee, where the working class loudly spoke out against Conservative Britain, to the Diamond Jubilee, in which more than seventy countries participated. Crowds in central London totalled 1.2 million. The Diamond Jubilee was a massive triumph of the Queen's popularity and a new credit of trust and respect offered to the monarch. Throughout all these momentous occasions, the British press was always present and ready to report on every step. Re-counting on every event during the jubilee celebrations as promptly and accurately as possible, documenting the unfolding celebratory events in pictures and words.

2. Idiomatic expressions used in the British press

Idiomatic expressions have always been vastly used in the journalistic register. They are a common occurrence in all languages, and they are culture-specific (cf. Liu 2008). The research of Hsu (2020: 24) presents that in the news, idioms can be operated to attain specific effects, such as irony or humour, to captivate readers. In accounts of events, journalists often employ idioms as a shorthand way of stating their points efficiently when idioms can provide images of what is being said.

A different study accomplished in 2021 into the idiomatic application by the British press was conducted by analysing the two leading British periodicals, “The Guardian” and “The Mirror”.¹ While the first represented the quality press, the latter was chosen as the popular press representative.

¹ Research conducted by Coombs-Hoar in the thesis (2021) “Idioms – a Look into Culture. The Formation of English Idioms in the Framework of British Culture (1945–2020)” (University of Rzeszow).

A few crucial facts were taken into consideration in order to make the research objective. Firstly, when comparing the number of articles in each paper it was noticed that “The Guardian” always presented a more significant number of articles than “The Mirror”, although the two were comparable in size and the number of pages. Secondly, the length of the articles in both newspapers was considered and it was noticed that the articles in “The Mirror” were overall shorter, sometimes consisting of just a few lines adorned with a big heading. When analysing the idiomatic frequency in the British press all these points were taken into consideration.

The hand count was presented after each decade (the study covered the years 1945–2020) in order to establish which of the two research subjects, i. e. the quality press or the popular press, employed more idiomatic expressions. The idioms considered for this task were the following types:

1. Pure idioms (cf. Fernando’s 1996 taxonomy of idioms). Conventionalised multi-word expression where a non-literal meaning is inflicted on the idiom as a whole, impossible to deduct without knowing the etymology. Pure idioms are more likely to be found in written discourse (cf. Moon 1998).
2. Proverbial idioms (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). Idioms with a moral, commonly recognisable, cannot be much altered regarding person, tense, anaphors.
3. First base idioms (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). Derived from cultural background, e. g. sayings or proverbs.
4. Familiar quotations as idioms (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). Institutionalised, well known and easily recognised.
5. Irreversible binominal idioms (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). Fixed structure, the word order cannot be reversed.
6. Phrasal compounds (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). Nominal compounds, institutionalised and widely recognised, denoting specific and commonly known object.
7. Incorporating verb idioms (cf. Makkai’s 1972 taxonomy of idioms). First element is a noun or an adjective which is attached to a verb.

Moreover, a qualitative analysis was also conducted to determine what types of idiomatic expressions were used by the popular and what types were preferred in the quality press. The types considered for the task were as follows:

1. Idioms based on metaphor – where the metaphor is perceived as a process of understanding one conceptual domain in terms of a different conceptual domain, e. g. *flip your lid* or *shoot somebody down in flames* (cf. Cambridge Dictionary Online).
2. Idioms based on analogy – linguistic parallels used for creation or remodelling of words or constructions, e. g. *as light as a feather* or *as busy as a bee* (cf. Oxford Idioms Dictionary).
3. Idioms based on metonymy/synecdoche – using one entity in place of another but within the same domain, e. g. *give me a hand* or *set wheels in motion* (cf. Oxford Idioms Dictionary).

4. Idioms based on alliteration – the occurrence of the same letter or sound, e. g. *part and parcel*, *kit and caboodle* or *leave it the lurch* (cf. Oxford Idioms Dictionary).
5. Idioms based on aphorism – a statement of some general principle, an expression of some fundamental truths, e.g. *better safe than sorry* or *every cloud has a silver lining* (cf. Oxford Idioms Dictionary).
6. Idioms based on allusion – draw on general knowledge, cultural aspects and facts, e. g. *15 minutes of fame* or *back to square one* (cf. Oxford Idioms Dictionary).
7. Idioms based on cliché – a phrase or an expression regarded as unoriginal due to overuse, e. g. *read between the lines* or *play your cards right* (cf. Cambridge Dictionary Online).

The research results proved that the quality press used idiomatic expressions as often as the popular press; moreover, as the figures stood for 2020, idioms in the quality press were used even more frequently.² However, the type of idioms differed between the two. Whereas idioms derived from metaphor were more common in the quality press, idioms derived from metonymy or synecdoche were more frequent in the popular press. It is hardly a surprise since the popular press has been directed chiefly to a working-class reader, and the quality press is addressed to the middle and upper classes.³ An additional important observation was the fact that the popular press employed more play on words, which often led to creating new idiomatic entities such as: *Elbowgate*⁴, *Pizzagate*⁵, *Murdochgate*⁶, or *Camillagate tape*.⁷ The suffix *-gate* has been preceded by the name of a person or place to denote a scandal comparable with or likened to the Watergate scandal (cf. Oxford English Dictionary Online).⁸

Since the idea of presenting the news is not only to do it fast and spontaneously but also to make it memorable and extraordinary, the use of idioms makes news extra

² Research conducted by Coombs-Hoar in the thesis (2021) “Idioms – a Look into Culture. The Formation of English Idioms in the Framework of British Culture (1945–2020)” (University of Rzeszow).

³ This finding is supported by the error analysis, which shows an 88 % chance that using different types of idioms, i.e. based on idiom formation/source, depends on the type of press, i.e. popular or quality (cf. Coombs-Hoar see note 1 and 2).

⁴ *Elbowgate* (2016) refers to Justin Trudeau accidentally hitting with an elbow an MP in the parliament.

⁵ *Pizzagate* (2004) refers to an incident when Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson was assaulted with a slice of pizza by an unnamed opposition player following a league game against Arsenal.

⁶ *Murdochgate* (2011) refers to the News of the World phone hacking scandal.

⁷ *Camillagate tape* (1997) a precedence where tapes with private phone calls between Camilla Parker-Bowles and Prince Charles came to light.

⁸ The Watergate scandal – a major political scandal in the United States involving the administration of President Richard Nixon from 1972 to 1974.

attractive to the reader as it makes a headline catchier and more attractive (cf. Abid/Ashfaq/Khan 2016: 18).

3. Idiomatic expressions applied in the popular press and the quality press re-counting the Platinum Jubilee celebrations – a research study

The Platinum Jubilee was celebrated from Thursday, 2nd to Sunday, 5th June 2022, with public events, community activities, and national moments of reflection on the Queen's 70 years of service. Printed media followed the events from the beginning, detailing the smallest news item related to the occasion. Specific newspapers were chosen to compare the language applied by the popular and the quality press while reporting the news. Therefore, popular press representatives selected for this research were:

- “Daily Mirror” – 3rd June 2022,
- “The Sun” – 4th June 2022 and
- “Sunday Mirror” – 5th June 2022.

The titles of quality press chosen for this paper were:

- “The Guardian” – 3rd June 2022,
- “The Guardian” – 4th June 2022 and
- “The Sunday Times” – 5th June 2022.

At first glance, a few facts can be noticed. Firstly, the number of visual aids applied by the popular press, namely photos taken during the Jubilee celebrations, vastly surpasses the textual content. Moreover, the overall language exploited in describing the events was laxer than the language used in presenting the same news by the quality press. To demonstrate, there are a few examples:

- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Aisles apart”, – where Meghan and Harry are reported as second-row royals seating well away from working royals: *The prince and wife Meghan were shoved in the second row at St Paul’s Cathedral – sandwiched between lesser-known members of the Queen’s extended family.*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Celebrations give glimpse of future”, – the newspaper states: *Harry and Meghan were sandwiched between Princess Eugenie’s husband Jack Brooksbank and the Queen’s niece Lady Sarah Chatto... So being plonked behind the...*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Paint the town red, white and blue” – an article about street celebrations around the UK, the paper declares: *Brits partied on yesterday to mark the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee with revellers knocking back record amounts of booze.*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Paint the town red, white and blue”, – a piece about street celebrations around the UK, the paper maintains: *Warren Rudge painted his entire 700sq ft front of his fish and chips shop with*

what he reckons is the biggest Union Jack in the country [...] slapping on 12 litres of paint.

- “Sunday Mirror” (5.6.2022), in the article titled “Party anthem” – the newspaper states: *Mack’s gags included a swipe at Boris Johnson’s government saying: we are here for the party of a lifetime. Finally, we can say party and gate and it’s a positive.*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Meg and Harry in a hurry” – the paper declares: *Harry and Meghan were happy to swing by the Clarence House... but afterwards they were less keen to spend time hobnobbing with the family.*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), in the article titled “Aisles apart”, – the paper says: *The Duke of Sussex, 37, [...] sat next to Jack Brooksbank, the bar manager hubby of his cousin Princess Eugénie.*

Moreover, the play on words and various abbreviations exercised by the popular press is also commendable, for instance:

- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), *Meg and Harry in a hurry,*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), *Paint the town red... white and blue,*
- “Sunday Mirror” (5.6.2022), *Rock ‘n’ Royal,*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), *Aisles apart,*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), *Harry and Meg snub party for Her Maj and dash back to Windsor,*
- “The Sun” (5.6.2022), *Mystery solved... it’s ma’amalade,*
- “Sunday Mirror” (5.6.2022), *Her Maj watches Derby on telly at home in comfies,*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), *Another Megxit.*

Furthermore, following phrases were obtained while analysing “Daily Mirror”, “The Sun” and “Sunday Mirror” for idiomatic expressions present in the articles:

- “Daily Mirror” (3.6.2022), eight articles were found referring to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee consisting of idioms such as:
 - *on the eve of x2,*
 - *leave someone in stitches x2,*
 - *ticked off by...*
 - *staying in the limelight,*
 - *to steal the show x2,*
 - *extend an olive branch,*
 - *on my bucket list,*
 - *passing the torch,*
 - *to celebrate/reach a milestone x4.*
- “The Sun” (4.6.2022), consisted of seven articles referring to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, including idioms:
 - *to rub shoulders with,*
 - *to have an eagle eye for something,*
 - *to be sandwiched between,*

- *to put your feet up,*
- *to be in a saddle,*
- *to paint the town red,*
- *dressed to the nines,*
- *legs it,*
- *crack jokes,*
- *a far cry from.*
- “Sunday Mirror” (5.6.2022), five articles were found discussing the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee consisting of idioms:
 - *to pull it off,*
 - *to top things off,*
 - *to be in stitches,*
 - *had a ball.*

When examining the quality press samples, i.e. “The Guardian” and “The Sunday Times”, a somewhat different picture emerges. Firstly, the extensive graphic content is balanced with the textual part. Moreover, the overall language used to report on the Jubilee celebrations is more formal and reserved. Here are a few examples to illustrate:

- Referring to Harry and Meghan’s decision to leave the UK:
 - “The Sun”: *Another Megxit;*
 - “The Guardian”: *The couple’s decision to ‘step back’ from the royal family and spend more time in the US, or [...] since their controversial exit [...].*
- Referring to Harry and Meghan’s role in the royal family:
 - “The Sun”: *The Sussexes’ status as B-list royals [...];*
 - “The Guardian”: *[...] a more minor position within the royal family or their reduced official status.*
- Referring to Harry and Meghan’s arrival at St Paul’s Cathedral:
 - “The Sun”: *The prince and wife Meghan were shoved in the second row;*
 - “The Guardian”: *During the awkward 15-second walk up the stairs [...].*
- Referring to Harry and Meghan’s quick departure from the St Paul’s after the service: „The Sun“ *Meg and Harry in a Hurry or legs it;*
 - “The Guardian”: *the couple were seen returning straight to Frogmore Cottage, their Windsor home.*
- Referring to the surprised televised sketch with the Paddington Bear:
 - “Sunday Mirror”: *[...] the bear said he keeps his favourite sarnies under his hat;*
 - “The Sunday Times”: *The Monarch finally revealed over the cream tea at Windsor Castle, Her handbag is for storing marmalade sandwiches.*

It is worth noticing that the quality press also uses play on words, however not to the same extent as the popular press, for example:

- “The Guardian”, (3.6.2022), *Mall the merrier. Thousands gather in festive celebration.*
- “The Guardian”, (4.6.2022), *Second-row Sussexes.*

- “The Sunday Times”, (5.6.2022), *Can you Put a Price on the Platinum Jubilee Party?*.

Following phrases were obtained while analysing “The Guardian” and “The Sunday Times” for idioms present in the articles:

- “The Guardian”, 3.6.2022, five articles found referring to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee idioms included:
 - *to celebrate/reach a milestone*,
 - *low key*.
- “The Guardian”, 4.6.2022, eleven articles located referring to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee consisting of idiomatic phrases:
 - *to be in a saddle*,
 - *low key*,
 - *a stone’s throw from*,
 - *lost the dressing room*,
 - *the grassroots*,
 - *at the eleventh hour*,
 - *to go overboard with sth*.
- “The Sunday Times”, 5.6.2022, twelve articles found referring to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee idioms included:
 - *on the eve of*,
 - *a hard/impossible act to follow*,
 - *fall off a perch*.

To summarise, there were 20 articles referring to the Platinum Jubilee celebrations in the popular press over three days of data research and twenty-eight articles in the quality press. Twenty-three different idiomatic expressions were applied by the popular press, whereas only twelve appeared in the quality press (that is 1.15 idioms per article for the popular press and only 0.4 for the quality press; however, to obtain more accurate reading into idiomatic frequency much greater sample would have to be considered). Additionally, on this occasion, as the research shows, the popular press made better use of play on words, devising catchy titles and phrases.

4. Conclusions

Changing society has led to how the news has been shown in the press nowadays and the language applied in the articles. In order to lure a reader, newspapers have become more accessible, i.e. online versions. In recent years, the format of the newspapers has changed, the layout of the articles, and the graphic content. The application of photos, graphs, and extended advertisement gives newspapers a less severe look. Scrutinising only the titles of articles, one can notice puns, buzzwords and general plays on words applied. Tabloids’ eagerness and ease in how it coins new phrases have led to the creation of new expressions.

On the other hand, however, due to political correctness and technological advancement, many well-established expressions and idiomatic phrases have been made redundant. Since language is like a living organism, it constantly evolves, reflecting the cultural elements surrounding it. While the media present the latest news, they are the first to use the language in a way to reflect the best on any reported entity. However, as the research in this paper has shown, the press greatly considers its target audience. Thus, the popular and the quality press choose different linguistic paths in presenting the same information.

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