

BBC Learning English

Q and A of the Week 你问我答

Idiom or phrase? 成语还是短语?


英伦网

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Rob: Hello and welcome to Question and Answer of the Week. Today I'm feeling a bit under the weather. But Helen, I came into work because I didn't want to leave you in the lurch.

Helen: Oh, Rob, 你怎么说话成语连篇呢? 你知道成语有时候很难理解, 也许你需要给我解释一下你刚才说的成语到底是什么意思?

Rob: Ah, well, that's because we're going to be talking about idioms in our programme today. Just then I said I was feeling 'under the weather', which means I'm not feeling great.

Helen: Rob 说她今天 under the weather 这是一个成语 idiom 意思是她身体不舒服, 不过她仍然坚持来上班了, 因为她不愿意让我为难 in the lurch. When you leave someone 'in the lurch', you leave them at a time when they need you.

Rob: Today we're going to answer the following question from Ling Tommy, from Hong Kong:

Question

Hello, my name is Tommy, can you tell me the difference between an idiom and a phrase?

Helen: Ling Tommy 想知道成语和短语这两个概念有什么不同。

Rob: Well, we just talked about two idioms, Tommy, which are: 'to feel under the weather' and 'to leave someone in the lurch'. What do you notice about these expressions?

Helen: The first thing I noticed is that they're not very logical... I mean, you're not literally 'under the weather'. 成语是一种比喻的表达和字面意思不是一回事。

Rob: Ah, so an idiom is an expression that's not predictable by looking at the words – it has a meaning that's metaphorical.

Helen: 成语往往是一种比喻的表达, 比如刚才 Rob 说的那个成语, 字面意思是'在天气之下', 这显然不合乎逻辑, 但是所有讲英语的人都知道, 这个成语是借助天气一词来表示一个人身体不舒服 under the weather.

Rob: So, an idiom is a group of words that can't be understood simply by looking at the literal meaning of the words. A phrase is slightly different –

it can refer to a group of words that combine to have a conceptual meaning.

Helen: A phrase 是短语，所谓短语就是由两个或两个以上的词组成的词组，表达一个具体的意思。Can you give me some examples?

Rob: Right, let's see Helen... Well, examples of phrases could be 'nice to meet you' or 'have a nice day'. And in grammar, the definition of a 'phrase' is simply a group of words without a verb, so 'the little girl' or 'my best friend', are also phrases.

Helen: 短语就是把两个以上的单词组成一个单元，表达一个固定的，具体的意思，比如 nice to meet you 很高兴认识你。英语对短语的语法定义为不含动词的词组 a phrase. 比如 my best friend.

Rob: So, the difference between an idiom and a phrase is that an idiom is metaphorical and the meaning can't be understood by the literal meaning of the words. In a phrase like 'nice to meet you', there is a meaning but it's usually clear and logical.

Helen: 下面我们听两个例句，其中的第一个包含一个成语，第二个例句中包含的是一个短语。

Examples

I'm really not on the ball today. I didn't get enough sleep last night.

"Thanks for your time." "My pleasure."

Rob: So in the first sentence we heard the idiom 'I'm not on the ball' which means someone is not really concentrating. We're not really on top of a ball, so the expression is not literal – and so it's an idiom. But in the second sentence 'Thanks for your time' and 'My pleasure'... Well, they're phrases.

Helen: 以上大家听到的成语是 on the ball. 讲话的人说他今天精神不集中，迟钝，不机灵，这同球 ball 没有任何关系，纯属比喻，因此这是一个成语；而后一个例句中的 thank you for your time 谢谢你的时间，以及 my pleasure 不客气 意思很容易从字面上去理解，直截了当，这便是短语。

Rob: Well, I hope we've answered your question, Tommy. Helen, why don't we try to speak only in idioms?

Helen: Let's give it a go. I could *talk for England* so I'd be *pleased as punch* to talk only in idioms.

Rob: Or maybe we should *throw that idea out of the window*. Tommy and other listeners might not be able to *get their head around* what we're talking about!

Helen: 如果大家希望了解更多的新成语和新短语，请登陆我们的 BBC 双语教学网页 www.bbcukchina.com 如果遇到英语学习上的问题请给我们发电子邮件，我们的邮箱是: questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk.

Rob: So long!

Helen: What's so long?

Rob: It's an idiom Helen - it means bye.

Helen: Ah. Goodbye!