

Idiot-matic Expressions

Originally from the US, I've been living and working many years now in Mexico teaching English as a foreign language (EFL to those in the biz). As such, I've had the privilege to see my beloved maternal language from a different perspective, that of the learner trying to make sense of it all. Fortunately, I can help them...well, not always. You see, responding and/or trying to respond to thousands of students' questions over the years, I've learned a truly important lesson about teaching English- it's bloody bonkers! (to borrow from the original authors) Or as one of my students pointed out, *es una maldita locura*. Or rather, it's fucking nuts.

And that right there is a good example to kick this party off. How/when/where/ and why did the humble and wholesome "nut" get associated with things considered outside the realm of *normal*?

"Ya know mate, those peanuts over there, they just don't look right."

"Yea, tell me about it! There is something definitely not right about peanuts, and don't even get me started on those bloody walnuts!"

Speaking of walnuts, it's not that hard (actually they quite are) to relate them to male testicles, which are actually quite soft, but please, let's focus on appearance and shape for this comparison shall we.

"Dude, she kicked me right in the *nuts*!" – a crystal clear reference

"Damn, she must be *nuts*." - sorry students, can't help you here.

And some questions I just have no answer for.

"Tichur, can ju please tell me, how is it a *fuck* can be *flying*?"

"Hmm, good question Manuel! Where did you hear this?"

"Well, last night, I wachid a movie called Platoon and I hear dis. The actor, a soldier, he say he don't give the fucks flying anymore. I don't understand tichur. What are the *flying fucks*?"

Being in a hurry to get to my next class I would chuckle, then tell him that he heard wrong. I would say that the actor actually said "flying Ducks" and he was upset because he had none to give, which is considered an honorable gift during wartime when there is little food to be found.

Unfortunately, I did *give a flying fuck* and my conscious got the best of me. Besides, he was my student and he deserved an honest answer.

“Honestly Manuel, I have no clue.”

“Really tichur!?”

“Well, it means he doesn’t care anymore about something. But remember, this a very strong expression and you should probably not use it.”

“Ok tichur, but still, I don’t understand how the fucks they fly??”

“Neither do I Manuel. Perhaps we’ll never know.”

And perhaps some things are best left to the imagination. Mine suggests that a scandalous pair of trapeze artists invented some daring new moves in the big tent while the rest of the circus slept, and of course, they cared little about what others thought one way or the other.

“And now... for the first time ever in the Big Tent, please welcome
The Flying Fucks!”

I can almost hear the crowd cheering...ok some are smirking, some jeering.

Let’s look at another baffling idiom from the popular “*give/don’t give*” category. Or maybe, you just *don’t give a shit*.

Admit it, you’ve used it, and probably felt good about it. But did you ever stop to think about it? Seems to me that somewhere along the line, we got this one backwards. Wouldn’t the gifting of human waste seem to imply a lack of care/concern/empathy? Or perhaps, once upon a time, *shit meant something*, long before *shit hit the fan*. Perhaps then, the expression was taken literally.

My dear friend,

As a token of my heart-felt concern, please accept this lovely assortment of feces I’ve prepared especially for you.

Yours truly,

Giving a shit

Ok, enough potty humor. Let’s go outside where, depending on where are, it may be *raining cats and dogs* right now. Say what!? This expression is so *off the wall* and *out in left field* that it required some serious investigation.

Following no less than 10 minutes of in-depth Googling, I've discovered that even the experts don't know the origin of this idiom.

It's raining buckets- of course. Makes perfect sense. In France: *It's raining like a pissing cow (Il pleut comme vache qui pisse)*. A bit vulgar, but sure, why not. And in South Africa and Namibia: *It's raining old women with clubs. (Ou vrouens met knopkieries reen)*. A bit sexist perhaps, but even this makes sense! I can imagine how a heavy rain in this country could foreshadow all kinds of scary consequences such as floods, famine and disease. And let's be honest, what's scarier than old women with clubs!

But *cats and dogs!* WTF!? They are warm and cuddly for the most part, even part of our families, and unless in some other time or place other than the one I have existed, they appear to have absolutely nothing in common with water droplets- not in shape, form, size, color, level of transparency, nor typical movement patterns whether in a state of resting, falling or licking of oneself. Sorry students. I've got nothing, and must admit that this expression leaves me with the same dumbfounded expression worn by my dog, Ramses. And just to be clear, Ramses has never, ever been seen falling from the sky, or for the matter, from any altitude higher than my living room sofa (roughly 2 feet). He does, however, lick himself quite often, and despite all the comments and disgusted faces made by human onlookers, he doesn't seem to *give a shit*.

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