

“Victoria de Girón” Medical Sciences School

Colloquial expressions involving parts of the human body

Lic. Frans Carlos Castellanos Caballero, Lic. Daisy Pérez Sol, Lic. Isabel Alfonso Rivero y Lic. José M. Hernández Imbert

The fast and dialectical development of sciences and technology has brought about the necessity to interchange information among scientists of all countries. And with this, the urgent need to learn the language of communication, English.

Though Cuba is not a developing country, Science and Technology have greatly improved and efforts have been made to achieve an effective learning of English language.

In Cuba, English is taught as a compulsory subject from junior high school up to university. In Medical Sciences Schools, students study English during the whole course. Physicians, nurses, paramedical and health personnel in general attend international courses and events and fulfil international missions in countries where English is spoken. So, on the one hand they should master the language used for medical sciences and, on the other hand, the language for a comprehensive communicative relationship doctor-patient, which may include colloquial language. Idiomatic devices that are used in scientific English are one of the problems which medical students face.

Colloquial English is the language that people use in conversation. The words used in colloquial expressions do not bear the meaning they normally have. This language is used by any type of people, the difference lies in time, place and occasion involved.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this work is to illustrate colloquial expressions involving parts of the human body to avoid doctor-patient gaps in communications.

CONCLUSIONS

Medical knowledge is constantly changing and the language spoken by patients is vastly different from country to country all over the world. We hope this work, about the idioms of parts of the body and other words and phrases connected with, will be of great help to our doctors of this new millennium.

1. Dialogue # one:

- **Family doctor:** At last, you come to see me, Bob.
- **Patient:** I didn't want to, doc, but Linda *twisted my arm*.

§ Arm:

- **Generic significance:** either of the two long parts of the upper body which are fixed to the shoulders and have the hands at the end.

§ To twist someone's arm

- **Semantic connotation:** to make it difficult for some one to refuse to do something.
- **Spanish equivalence:** convencer a alguien de algo.

2. Dialogue # two:

- **Family doctor:** How have you been, Mildred?
- **Relative:** Fine, thanks. But my husband *spent the weekend on his back*. That's why, I've come to see you.
- **Family doctor:** Oh, what's wrong with him?

§ Back:

- **Generic significance:** the part of the body that is opposite to the front, from your neck to the top of your legs.

§ To spend time on one's back:

- **Semantic connotation:** to lay in bed because of illness or injury.
- **Spanish equivalence:** permanecer en cama por una enfermedad o dolencia.

3. Dialogue # five:

- **Patient:** (lowering her jeans, for an injection) I want it in the right cheek.

- **Doctor:** OK

§ **Cheek:**

- **Generic significance:** the soft part of your face which is below your eye and between your mouth.

§ **Cheek:**

- **Semantic connotation:** either of the two halves of your bottom.

- **Spanish equivalence:** gluteos(s).

6. Dialogue # six:

- **Psychologist:** So, how do you feel now?

- **Patient:** Oh, I had spent two months worrying about this problem and now, I'm glad *to get it off my chest*.

- **Psychologist:** That sounds better.

§ **Chest:**

- **Generic significance:** the upper front part of the body of humans, between the stomach and the neck, enclosing the heart and lungs.

§ **To get something off one's chest:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to free yourself of your worries by telling someone about something worrying that you have been keeping secret.

- **Spanish equivalence:** sacarse una preocupación de adentro.

7. Dialogue # seven:

- **Relative:**... and I told my wife *to keep her chin up* in spite of what happened to her.

- **Doctor:** That's the way it should be.

§ **Chin:**

- **Generic significance:** the part of a person's face below their mouth.

§ **To keep one's chin up:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to be happy and positive even though you are in a difficult situation.
- **Spanish equivalence:** mantener la frente en alto.

8. **Dialogue # eight:**

- **Relative:** My daughter says the sun's going down on her but, I think, the point is she *is wet behind the ears*.
- **Psychologist:** Maybe you're right.

§ **Ear:**

- **Generic significance:** either of the two organs, one of each side of the head, by which people hear sounds, or the piece of skin and tissue outside the head connected to this organ.

§ **To be wet behind one's ears:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to be young and inexperienced.
- **Spanish equivalence:**

9. **Dialogue # nine:**

- **Doctor:** This disease is infectious. It can be spread from person to person easily, especially by air.
- **Patient:** And I *was at her elbow* all the time that's why I got it.

§ **Elbow:**

- **Generic significance:** the bony point at which the arm bends.

§ **To be at someone's elbow:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to be close beside and a little behind someone.
- **Spanish equivalence:**

10. Dialogue # ten:

- **Doctor:** You've got the flu so, should drink lots of liquids...and stay in bed for two days.
- **Mother:** *I see eye to eye with you*, doc.
- **Son:** But I couldn't 'cause I've got a match tomorrow...

§ **Eye:**

- **Generic significance:** one of the pair of organs of seeing in the faces of humans.

§ **To see eye to eye with someone:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to agree.
- **Spanish equivalence:** estar completamente de acuerdo con lo que otra persona dice.

11. Dialogue # eleven:

- **Doctor:** So, how is your son today--?
- **Relative:** I guess, we'll soon have him *back on his feet again*.
- **Doctor:** That's it.

§ **Feet:**

- **Generic significance:** the parts of the body at the bottom of the legs on which a person stands and moves.

§ **Back on one's feet again:**

- **Semantic connotation:** healthy.

- **Spanish equivalence:** recuperado.

12. Dialogue # twelve:

- **Doctor:** And how could you hammer yourself?
- **Husband:** I don't know. It just happened.
- **Wife:** Doc, the point is he *is all fingers and thumbs*.

§ **Finger(s):**

- **Generic significance:** any of the long thin jointed parts of the hand, those which are not thumbs.

§ **Thumb:**

- **Generic significance:** the short finger that is at an angle to the other fingers, making it possible to hold and pick things up easily.

§ **(Am) to be all thumbs or (Aus or Br) to be all fingers and thumbs:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to move your hands in rude way.
- **Spanish equivalence:** ser torpe.

13. Dialogue # thirteen:

- **Patient:** You told me I must try *to keep my hair on*.
- **Psychologist:** So?

§ **Hair:**

- **Generic significance:** the mass of thin threadlike structures on the head of a person, or any of these structures that grow out of the skin of a person.

§ **To keep one's hair on:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to stay in calm when you are angry.

- **Spanish equivalence:**

14. Dialogue # fourteen:

- **Doctor:** How is going with your father, Jaime?
- **Relative:** Doc, it's getting worse. He's *losing money hand over fist* and spending it just on alcohol drinks.
- **Doctor:** Don't worry. Let's see what we can do about it.

§ **Hand:**

- **Generic significance:** the part of the body at the end of the arm that is used for holding, moving, touching and feeling things.

§ **Fist:**

- **Generic significance:** a hand with the fingers and thumb held tightly in.

§ **To lose money hand over fist:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to lose a lot of money and very quickly.
- **Spanish equivalence:** gastarlo todo en un dos por tres.

15. Dialogue # fifteen:

- **Psychologist:** What happened next?
- **Patient:** I asked what was wrong, but he just **bit my head off**.

§ **Head:**

- **Generic significance:** the part of the body that contains the eyes, nose, mouth, ears and the brain.

§ **To bite one's head off:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to speak to someone angrily.

- **Spanish equivalence:**

16. Dialogue # sixteen:

- **Relative:** It was a sad and hard situation for Lay. Her father's death *followed on the heels of* her mother's operation.

- **Doctor:** That's it.

§ **Heel:**

- **Generic significance:** the rounded part of the foot.

§ **To follow on the heels of another:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to happen very soon after something.

- **Spanish equivalence:** ocurrir inmediatamente despues de otro acontecimiento.

17. Dialogue # seventeen:

- **Doctor:** So, how is your husband?

- **Relative:** Doc, *my jaw dropped* when I saw him. He's great.

- **Doctor:** Indeed, we'll send him back soon.

§ **Jaw:**

- **Generic significance:** the lower part of your face that moves when you open your mouth.

§ **Your jaw dropped:**

- **Semantic connotation:** you looked very surprised.

- **Spanish equivalence:** quedarse boquiabierto.

18. Dialogue # eighteen:

- **Patient:** Well, my husband may not come. He *is knee--deep in work*.
- **Psychologist:** But this is a pair therapy. Both of you should come.
- **Patient:** OK. We'll try it.

§ **Knee:**

- **Generic significance:** the middle joint of the leg, which allows it to bend.

§ **(Fig) to be knee-deep in something:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to have a lot of (work).
- **Spanish equivalence:**

19. Dialogue # nineteen:

- **Relative:** I believed my son when told me he'd lost his medicine but I later found out he *was pulling my leg*.
- **Doctor:** Kids! That's why we suggest to keep them out of their reach.

§ **Leg:**

- **Generic significance:** one of the parts of the body of a human that is used for standing or walking.

§ **To pull someone's leg:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to try to persuade someone to believe something that is not true as a joke.
- **Spanish equivalence:** tomarle el pelo a alguien.

20. Dialogue # twenty:

- **Doctor:** How is your grandma'?
- **Relative:** Well, she claims to be in favour of the treatment, but so far she *has only paid lip service to the idea*.

- **Doctor:** Smarty. Doesn't she?

§ **Lip:**

- **Generic significance:** (the area around) one of the two narrow delicate pieces of flesh which form the top and the bottom edges of the mouth and are darker than the surrounding skin.

§ **To pay lip service to something:**

- **Semantic connotation:** to agree with it but doing nothing to support it.

- **Spanish equivalence:** estar de acuerdo solo de palabra.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. Cambridge International Dictionary. Cambridge University Press 1995.

Perez Sol, Daisy. Trabajo de Curso Mimiografiado ISPEJ “Enrique José Varona”.