FUN WITH IDIOMS: DA STEPPT DER BÄR!
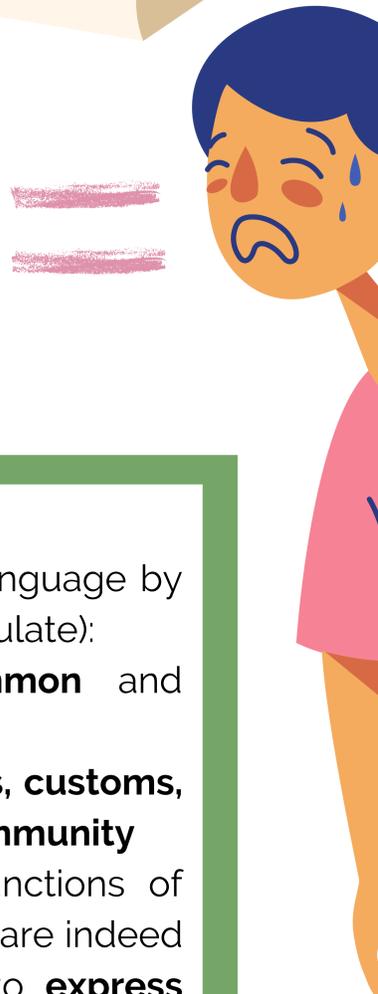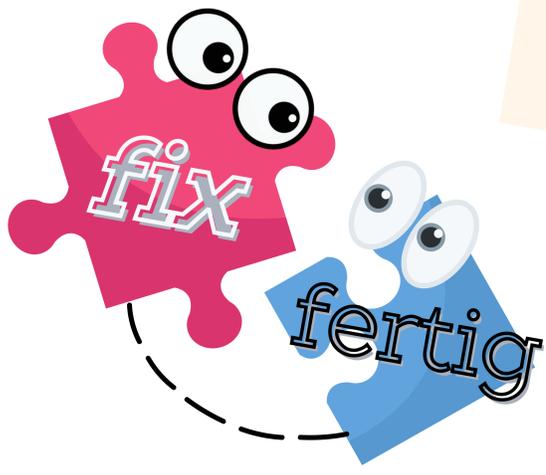
Figurative language "allows mouths and hands to share hearts and minds"
Colston (2015: 3-4)

WHAT IS FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE?

By figurative language we refer to a set of linguistic strategies by which the meaning of what we say **does not correspond to the literal interpretation** of the message.

BUT WHY SAY SOMETHING... WITHOUT ACTUALLY SAYING IT?

The special thing about figurative language is that it allows us to express some **very special hidden meaning**, which says a lot about the **speaker** and their **communicative intent**!

Some categories of figurative language:
- Idioms
- Similes
- Metaphors
- Hyperbole
- Irony
- [...]

IDIOMS: WHAT ARE THEY?

Idioms are part of the linguistic strategies included in figurative language. They are **expressions consisting of specific words**: when we find these precise **word combinations**, we need to recover a special, figurative meaning, which goes **beyond** the simple **combination of individual words**.

Imagine that a German friend comes to you, with an exhausted face, saying "ah, I'm so **fix und fertig**! (literally, "**quick and ready**")"; only if we can retrieve the figurative meaning of the idiom (**müde sein**, i.e. **"to be tired"**) can we really understand what our friend wants to communicate.

fix *fertig*

Tomaten auf den Augen haben ("to have tomatoes on the eyes")

METAPHOR: KNOWING is SEEING

Nur Bahnhof verstehen ("to understand train station only")

CULTURAL FACT: soldiers at the end of World War I only wanted to hear the word "train station", as this would have meant to return home

WHY DO WE USE IDIOMS?

Very often idioms make their way into language by exploiting two strategies (which may cumulate):
- they can be motivated by **common** and **recurring metaphors**
- they can originate from **cultural facts, customs, and habits specific** to a **language community**

Thanks to this, the communicative functions of idioms can be particularly effective. They are indeed used to be **humorous**, to **persuade**, to **express emotions**, to **emphasize**.

The clearer the relationship between the idiom's figurative meaning and its metaphorical/cultural origin (which motivates the words of the idiom), the more **transparent** the idiom is.

HOW GOOD DO YOU THINK YOU ARE AT GUESSING THE MEANING OF IDIOMS OF OTHER LANGUAGES? TRY TO MAKE THE IDIOMS TRANSPARENT IN OUR KAHOOT QUIZ, AND GUESS THE MEANINGS!

5. nacht des wissens