



American Expression E0514 Kick the bucket

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"Kick the bucket" is a well-known idiom that means to die or pass away. The phrase has its origins in medieval times and has been an integral part of English colloquial language for centuries. Though the exact etymology is not entirely certain, there are several theories that shed light on its probable origins.

One popular theory relates to the slaughtering of animals for food. In traditional farming communities, a slaughtered animal, like a pig, would be hung from a beam or tree branch by its legs after being killed. To drain the blood from the carcass, someone would have to kick the bucket (a bucket or pail), which was placed under the animal's head to catch the blood. Over time, this act became associated with death, and the phrase "kick the bucket" began to be used metaphorically to refer to human mortality.

Another theory links the phrase to the concept of suicide. In the past, people who intended to take their own lives would sometimes stand on a bucket or stool and then kick it away, causing them to hang themselves. This gruesome method of ending one's life gave rise to the idiom's association with death.

"Kick the bucket" as a phrase gained popularity in literature during the 17th and 18th centuries. It appeared in works by notable authors like William Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, and Samuel Butler, further cementing its place in the English language.

Today, "kick the bucket" is commonly used in informal conversations, literature, and media to talk about death humorously or euphemistically. It provides a way to discuss a sensitive topic with a touch of lightheartedness, making it a popular choice in various contexts.

As with many idioms, the literal meaning of "kick the bucket" might not be immediately evident to non-native English speakers or those unfamiliar with the phrase's origin. However, due to its widespread usage and portrayal in popular culture, its meaning is generally understood even without knowing its historical background.

In conclusion, "kick the bucket" is an idiom with a colorful history that dates back centuries. While its exact origin may be uncertain, the phrase has become ingrained in the English language as a euphemism for dying. Whether used to discuss serious matters or as a casual expression in everyday conversations, "kick the bucket" continues to play a role in enriching the linguistic landscape of the English-speaking world.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some common idioms or expressions related to death or mortality in your native language? How do they compare to the English idiom "kick the bucket"?
2. In what ways do idioms enrich a language and culture? Can you think of any other idioms that have interesting historical or cultural origins?
3. The use of euphemisms in language is prevalent when discussing sensitive topics like death. What are some other examples of euphemisms used in various cultures, and how do they shape our understanding of delicate subjects?
4. Do you believe that humor can be an effective coping mechanism when dealing with difficult topics like death? How can language and idioms, such as "kick the bucket," help people approach such subjects in a more light-hearted manner?
5. Language constantly evolves over time, and certain idioms may lose their original meaning or become outdated. Can you think of any idioms or expressions that have fallen out of use in recent years? How do these changes reflect shifts in societal values and attitudes?