Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

FACE-ING IDIOMS. A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

Diana V. Burlacu (Ionescu)

Assist., PhD, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: 'Face falling' or 'faces being pictures' are only two idiomatic, face-related expressions apparently marked by Surrealism. As a matter of fact, human faces do mirror their own self but also their self's reactions to external factors. Nevertheless, a two-faced person can certainly mask their genuine feelings, beliefs and thoughts, hence the duality of the face displayed in society. Moreover, faces can hardly ever be separated from eyes, so the present study will also include eye-idioms. How such face- and eye-idioms function and what they semantically convey in English and Romanian languages, as well as the similitudes and the differences in form and meaning between the two lexes, represent the object of analysis in this paper.

Keywords: eye, face, idiom, language, semantics

Motto:

"*Face your face!*"

(*Mehmet Murat Ildan*)

Any human society is basically made up of faces – childish or wrinkled, bright or dark, blank or easy-to-read, round or oblong, pale or rosy, despairing or cheerful – which have become to represent entire personalities and also to be associated with certain identities. Sometimes, the society merely focuses on the faces or the external aspect rather than on the real self of the individual, hence the *face men*. Some other times, people decide to wear 'masks', in order to *save faces* or to *put on a bold face* when *facing up to* reality. At the same time, eyes are usually the first attention-drawing element of a human face, as social contacts are established at their level; therefore, eye-idioms could not have been left out of a mostly practical, comprehensive face-idiom analysis.

Before examining English and Romanian face- and eye-idioms, some theoretical remarks should be made. "Holistic units of two or more words" (in Moon 1998: 2), idiomatic expressions, as "a subset of the fixed expressions in a language community" (Glucksberg 2001: 68), have been regularly termed as "frozen collocations" or "grammatically ill-formed collocations" (in Moon 1998: 2). This lexically and semantically specific domain can be likened to a kind of linguistic Cinderella, embracing various types of such idioms, more or less opaque, syntactically flexible or familiar to the common language user. The so-called *idiom principle* – "a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments" (Sinclair, in Moon 1998: 28), complements another language principle, namely *the open choice principle* – "a way of seeing language text as the result of a very large number of complex choices. At each point where a unit is completed – a word or a phrase or a clause – a large range of choice opens up, and the only restraint is grammaticalness" (Sinclair, in Moon 1998: 28). As a matter of fact, when related to the first principle, grammaticalness is not the only restraint: "at a point in text where the open choice model would suggest a large range of possible choices, the idiom principle restricts it dramatically over and above predictable semantic restraints that result from topic or situational context" (Sinclair, in Moon 1998: 28).

What exactly an idiom encounter triggers is plainly described by Glucksberg – "two sets of operations begin in parallel: ordinary linguistic processing, including lexical access and syntactic parsing, and, simultaneously, retrieval from the phrasal lexicon where idioms-as-long-words are stored" (2001: 76). For example, the derogatory *bacon-faced* depicts a person whose face is compared to the texture and appearance of bacon, so the juxtaposition of the lexical items *face* and *bacon* idiomatically results into "having a corpulent, clean-shaven face, likened to that of a pig" (*TFD*). The Romanian term is even more insulting, devoid of any trace of allusion: *faţă de porc*, 'pig-face'.

Restricting the discussion to idioms as such, illogic is claimed to be one of their main drawbacks: "[w]hat sets idioms apart from most other fixed expressions is their "non-logical" nature, that is, the absence of any discernable relation between their linguistic meanings and their idiomatic meanings" (Glucksberg 2001: 68). Naturally, such a statement is oversimplified, since, on the one hand, a number of idioms are quite transparent, such as *blue in the face* (Rom. *albastru la faţă*), the concrete facial colour one gets when talking too much (as if lacking oxygen) or because of exertion, exasperation or anger. However, such an idiom slightly loses transparency if extended to *until you are blue in the face*, "for a long time" (*TFD*), over and over again, used "to suggest that someone will not listen to what is being said" (*TFD*). On the other hand, certain idiomatic expressions can be etymologically explained (see Linda Flavell and Roger Flavell, *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins*, 1994) – an apparently illogical idiom disambiguates once its linguistic, social or cultural origins can be traced. For example, *to have egg on one's face* (Rom. *a se face de râs, a se acoperi de ridicol*) already caricatures a funny-looking, ridiculous individual:

"Brandreth gives an American origin in the 1960s and a British use in 1972. It has certainly spread rapidly in this country, mainly in journalism. Throwing eggs at an opponent is not uncommon, especially on the political hustings. The idea seems to be that a politician with egg on his face is made to look foolish. Metaphorically, a decision that backfires leaves those responsible with egg on their faces" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 80).

Further down-to-earth explanations are provided in *The Free Dictionary* online:

"To be embarrassed after being caught doing something wrong. Among the possible origins are being red in the face about being told you left a smear of yolk around your mouth after breakfast or the humiliation that performers suffer when unhappy audiences pelt them with raw eggs. Closer to the mark is a barnyard explanation: farm dogs that develop the taste for raw eggs and break into the henhouse for a treat have that hang-dog look when confronted by their angry owners" (*TFD*).

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

Yet, the slang *in a pig's eye*, probably better illustrated by its Romanian counterpart, *la Paştele cailor*, 'at horses' Easter', and also by another porcine idiom – *when pigs fly*, thus never, is still waiting for a precise semantic disambiguation.

However, going back to the *eye* of this analysis, out of semantic and pragmatic reasons, the two sets of idiomatic expressions based on faces and eyes will be tackled upon simultaneously, compared in the two idiomatic languages, Romanian and English, and, whenever necessary, will be clarified by use of concrete examples.

In an old-fashioned expression, the statement that faces mainly indicate the very ***presence*** of an individual is *as plain as the nose on your face*. Such an idea is conveyed by a large number of idioms: *on the face of the earth* (Rom. *de pe faţa pământului*) is a comparative reference to (all) the existing beings or things:

e.g. *She may be the kindest person on the face of the earth*.
Choosing or not to appear publicly or go somewhere is suggested by (*not*) *show one's face* (Rom. *a-şi face apariţia, a-şi arăta faţa*). *De față/ de față cu* means 'which is present' or 'in somebody's presence' (*dexonline*); *face to face* (Rom. *față în față, între patru ochi* adding privacy or discretion, as in *between you and me and the bedpost*) reads as "in each other's presence, opposite one another; in direct communication" (*TFD*), hence *face time*; secondly, as "confronting each other" (*TFD*), also identified with *eyeball to eyeball* (Rom. *ochi în ochi*). *În față*/ *În faţa* (*cuiva*) translates as *ahead* (of) or *in front* (of), whereas *a spune pe față*/(*verde*) *în față* (Engl. *to tell one to one's face, to say something* (*right*) *to someone's face*) signifies *telling something overtly* or *directly* to someone. *Față de* is another suggestive Romanian face-idiom for *in relation/regard to*, while *la faţa locului* (Engl. *on the scene, on the spot*) indicates "at the very place of occurrence" (*dictionary*). The previously mentioned *face man* denotes "a good-looking young man with no personality" (*TFD*), semantically different from *face card*, "a (self-)important person, as with the royal characters in playing cards" (*TFD*). If somebody cannot remember somebody else's name, the idiom *what's his/her face* (Rom. *cum îi zice*) is used instead.

The human face as indicative of the entire being plays a central role in some further idiomatic expressions: *a scăpa*/*a ieşi cu faţa curată* (Engl. *to save one's face* or *land on one's feet*, namely keeping their reputation or dignity after a rough time); *a-şi întoarce faţa* (*de la*) (a figurative meaning assigned to the Engl. *to face away from*) suggests refusal to see or talk to a person anymore; *a prinde față*, symptomatic of the body health, means to recover after some illness, thus getting a healthy glow. *A face față* (*cuiva/la ceva*) translates as *to face* (*somebody/something*), whereas *a pune față în față* means *to face off* or *to compare*. Moreover, *a-l prinde* (*pe cineva*) *la față* is used as *to suit*, to wear a becoming colour or outfit, while *a schimba*/*a face fețe-fețe* visualizes someone's embarrassment or bewilderment on finding out some unpleasant things or news.

Besides the concrete *to put one's face on* (Rom. *a se machia*, *a se aranja*), as if the make-up were a mask, the face also characterizes one's status or dignity in the society, hence *to get face* or *to save face* (Rom. *a-şi salva reputaţia*). Its opposite, *to lose face* (together with the noun *loss of face*) – Rom. *a-şi ştirbi reputaţia*, means losing their social respect and dignity, being publicly humiliated. "Both this expression and the underlying concept come from Asia; the term itself is a translation of the Chinese *tiu lien* and has been used in English since the late 1800s" (*TFD*). Similarly, *to get a black eye* and *to give a black eye*, originating

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

in bruising someone, figuratively signify having one's reputation harmed and, respectively, injure one's repute:

e.g. *The financial scandal will surely give the company a black eye.*

However, even if, ideally, such terms should never be used at all in a *face-saving* society, the derogatory slang focusing on physical defects is over-sufficient: *zit-face, pizza-face* or *crater-face* (Rom. approximately *bubos*) rudely describe a person affected by severe acne or acne-scarred. Geeks or nerds are called *frog-faces* (Rom. *broscoi*), people wearing glasses are *four-eyes* (Rom. *aragaz cu patru ochi*), while bearded men are termed as *fungus-faces* or *fuzz-faces* (Rom. *bărbos*).

In Romanian idiomatic language, objects have 'faces' too, thus outer coverings: *față de masă* (Engl. table cloth), *față de pernă* (Engl. pillow case), *față de plapumă* (Engl. quilt case); the verbal idiom *a da față* (*unui lucru*) (Engl. 'to give face to something') is to polish, to decorate or to beautify.

Closely related to the idea of presence, its opposite, ***destruction*** or ***downfall***, brings the annulment of such existence, namely *disappear/fall/vanish off the face of the earth* (Rom. *a dispărea/se şterge de pe faţa pământului*), together with the transitive *wipe someone/something off the face of the earth* (Rom. *a şterge de pe faţa pământului*) and the similar *to blow up/explode in somebody's face* (Rom. approximately *a se duce pe apa sâmbetei*):

e.g. *The government's attempts at reform have blown up in its face, with demonstrations taking place all over the country* (*TFD*).

An interesting expression, rather a partial self-destruction, is *to cut off one's nose to spite one's face* (Rom. *a-şi tăia craca/creanga de sub picioare*), "to injure oneself in taking revenge against another" (*TFD*).

In what regards the eyes, their primary function is ***seeing***, so many eye-idioms tackle on this idea: *set/lay one's eyes on someone/something* (Rom. *a da cu ochii de cineva/ceva*), thus see or find something or somebody. *Cast an eye/run one's eye over something* (Rom. *a-şi arunca ochii/o privire peste ceva*) implies quickness, the adverbials *in the twinkling of an eye* (Rom. *cât ai clipi din ochi*) and *out of the corner of one's eye* (Rom. *cu coada ochiului*) also meaning 'very quickly'. *Catch/get one's eye* (Rom. *a atrage privirea, a lua ochii*) has an 'attention-drawing' significance, while *stare someone in the face* and *look someone right/straight in the eye* (Rom. *a privi pe cineva drept în ochi/faţă*) focus on the directness of the gaze; seeing is (usually) believing, as in (*not*) *believe one's eyes* (Rom. only negative, *a nu-şi crede ochilor*); *give* (*someone*) *the eye* suggest both romantic interest in someone, similar to *make eyes at* – Rom. *a arunca ocheade*, and unfriendly or hostile looks, best expressed by *give* (*someone*) *the evil eye* – Rom. *a deochea* and *to look at someone cross-eyed* (Rom. *a se uita cruciş*). A biased perspective is triggered by *with a jaundiced eye* (Rom. *cu o părere preconceptă*):

e.g. *My friend is very smart although he always looks at things with a jaundiced eye* (*idcon*), whereas an all-comprising view is stated by *get an eyeful of* (*someone or something*), "to see everything, to see a shocking or surprising sight":

e.g. *We got an eyeful when we saw the accident on the highway* (*idcon*).

Have one's eye on (*someone or something*) – Rom. *a pune ochii pe cineva/ceva* is to want somebody or something and hoping to get them, summarized by the intentional *with an eye to*

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

(Rom. *în vederea*) and underscored by *give one's eyes/eyeteeth* (*to do/for something*) – Rom. *a-şi da sufletul/ochii din cap*. To end with, our human eyes are emphatically termed as *the naked eye* (Rom. *cu ochiul liber*), the idiom *to the naked eye* signifying "as something is seen exactly as you look at it" (Rom. *la prima vedere*):

e.g. *To the naked eye, it looked like there was little damage to the car after the accident, but actually there was much damage* (*idcon*).

In comparison, *in one's mind's eye*, identically formed in Romanian, *cu ochii minţii*, refers to one's imagination.

Watchfulness or ***vigilance*** is another concrete qualification of the face, more exactly, of eyes. *To be all eyes* (Rom. *a fi numai ochi şi urechi*, the Romanian counterpart including the ears, too) needs no further explanation, while eager public attention "for someone to appear or something to happen" (*idcon*) translates as *all eyes are on* (*someone or something*). A series of verbal idioms focus on the same idea: *to keep an eye on* (*something/someone*) – *to have one's eye on, to keep an eye out for, to keep one's eye on the ball* – the suggestion coming from playing games, *to keep one's eyes open, to keep one's eyes peeled for* and even *to have one's eyes glued to* (*something*) – Rom. *a fi cu ochii pe* (*ceva/cineva*), *a fi cu ochii în patru*. The epitome of alertness is *an eagle eye* (Rom. *ochi de vultur*) – "unusually sharp visual powers; keen ability to watch or observe" (*dictionary*). At the same time, shut eyes may suggest unawareness or ignorance – *go into something with one's eyes closed/shut* (Rom. *a avea ochii închişi*), while open eyes denote the opposite: *go into something with one's eyes* (*wide*) *open* (Rom. *a avea ochii larg deschişi*):

e.g. *The young man went into the job with his eyes closed but he was very successful* (*idcon*).

The couple went into the construction contract with their eyes wide open (*idcon*).

Raising awareness translates into *opening* (*someone's*) *eyes to* (*something*) – Rom. *a deschide ochii asupra* (*a ceva*). However, closed eyes may also be a sign of expertise, *able to do something with one's eyes closed/shut* (Rom. *a face ceva cu ochii închişi*).

Certain idioms relating to ***appearance*** or ***first impression*** have, in fact, an economic indication: *to take something at face value* (Rom. *a lua ceva drept bun*) "has referred to the monetary value printed on a bank note, stock certificate, bond, or other financial instrument since the 1870s" (*TFD*) and means "accept[ing] from its outward appearance" (*TFD*). Similarly, *at face value* or *on the face of it* (Rom. *după aparenţe*) is "from outward appearance; from what something first appears to be" (*TFD*):

e.g. *You can't always take a manufacturer's advertisements at face value; they're bound to exaggerate* (*TFD*).

It's important that the current period of economic growth is not taken at face value by the government, as there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done (*TFD*).

The Romanian idiomatic language boasts a widely used idiom, *de/pentru ochii lumii* (Engl. 'for the eyes of the world'), which means acting or saying something in order to *get face*, in such a way that pleases the society or the others, rather than being an illustration of one's personal beliefs or behaviours. Formally similar, *in the public eye* is semantically different: "visible to everybody, in public" (*idcon*), meaning simply to be famous, instead of trying to prove something to get the society's approval.

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

Shallowness may also be linked to the outer appearance, so *be just a/another pretty face* explains as "to be physically attractive but lack any distinguishing achievements, intelligence, abilities, or other personal characteristics" (*TFD*). Its negative counterpart (*not*) *be just a/another pretty face* (Rom. *a-l duce capul/ a avea ceva în cap*) highlights exactly such psychical qualities, also expressed by *more to* (*someone or something*) *than meets the eye* (Rom. *mai mult decât pare*) – thus, more interesting or complicated.

As previously mentioned, faces connote ***physical beauty*** or ugliness, the latter being inferred by the sexist *butterface* (but-her-face), as well as by two other idiomatic expressions: *a face only a mother could love* and the bivalent *a face that would stop a clock* (Rom. *urât ca noaptea*/*dracul*, 'ugly like the night or the devil') – "a face that is strikingly or shockingly unattractive" (*TFD*), or, less frequently, "a face that is strikingly or shockingly attractive" (*TFD*):

e.g. *She is extraordinarily bright, but her face could stop a clock* (*TFD*).

He walked down the street – tall, muscular, and with a face that could stop a clock – and everyone stared to admire his beauty (*TFD*).

Expressiveness is, naturally, also connected with the face: (*written*) *all over somebody's face* (Rom. *a i se citi pe faţă*) – "showing what you think of something by your expression" (*TFD*); *a game face* is "a figurative or literal facial expression denoting a mental attitude of determination or resolve in the face of an imminent and difficult task, activity, or workload" (*TFD*), echoing the resolute face of a gamer. On the contrary, *a blank look on one's face* or *a poker face* (Rom. *figură inexpresivă*), indicative of the expressionless poker sharks, suggests "a facial expression with no emotional articulation, usually implying befuddlement, incomprehension, or being overwhelmed by something" (*TFD*). The colloquial *to stand there with one's bare face hanging out* (Rom. *a sta cu ochii pierduţi*) means "to stand someplace looking helpless and stupid" (*TFD*):

e.g. *Say something. Don't just stand there with your bare face hanging out* (*TFD*).

Moreover, even if it retains the lack of expression, *without batting an eye/ not bat an eye* (Rom. *fără a clipi*) adds self-assurance, too. Finally, *have* or *keep a straight face* (Rom. *a avea o figură serioasă*) or *to be straight-faced* is an 'expressive' antonym of *to make faces*/*a face* or *to pull a face/faces at someone* (Rom. *a se strâmba*), thus making grimaces.

Sadness is usually one of the main emotions expressed by faces: *a long face* (Rom. *o faţă prelungă, o figură tristă*) and the culturally-related idiom *to have a face like a wet weekend*, allusive of the rainy British days (Rom. *o faţă de înmormântare*, 'a mourning face'). Extreme sadness translates into (hard) crying: *to cry one's eyes out* (Rom. *a plânge în hohote*) and *not a dry eye in the house*:

e.g. *There was not a dry eye in the house when the manager gave the farewell speech* (*idcon*).

Potential sadness is conveyed by *wipe the/that smile off* (*one's*) *face* (Rom. *a şterge zâmbetul/rânjetul de pe faţa cuiva*) and also *be laughing on the other side of* (*one's*) *face* (Rom. *a-i trece pofta de râs, a nu-i mai arde de râs*): "if you say someone who is happy will be laughing on the other side of their face, you are angry about the thing that is making them happy and think that something will soon happen to upset them" (*TFD*). Another state of (extreme) sadness may be triggered by *to fall flat on one's face* (Rom. *a eşua lamentabil*), to blunder.

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

The opposite of sorrow, ***happiness*** or ***love***, is represented by quite a few idioms: *a iubi pe cineva ca lumina ochilor/ca pe ochii din cap* – approximately Engl. *apple of one's eye* and *a nu avea ochi decât pentru* (*cineva*) – *only have eyes for* (*somebody*), *a i se scurge ochii după* (*cineva*) – Engl. 'have eyes flowing out to (somebody)' or *a sorbi din ochi* (*pe cineva*) – Engl. *to feast one's eyes on* (*somebody*). *Have stars in one's eyes* (Rom. *a-i străluci ochii*) reads as "to have an appearance or feeling of very great happiness, to be obsessed with show business" (*idcon*). Moreover, *make eyes at* (*someone*) – Rom. *a arunca ocheade*, *a face cuiva ochi dulci* means "to try to attract someone, to flirt with someone" (*idcon*). Another 'happy' idiom is *to put a smile on one's face,* the Romanian counterpart restricting the smile to the lips, *a aduce zâmbetul pe buze*, but *to laugh in someone's face* (Rom. *a râde în faţa/nasul cuiva*) implies ridicule and mockery. Last, *a sight for sore eyes* (Rom. *o încântare, o mângâiere*) refers to a welcome sight, usually after some unpleasant moments.

Further 'visual' ***emotions*** are: embarrassment – *to give someone a red face*, *to be red in the face* (Rom. *a face să se înroşească*, *a se înroşi*); surprise – the recognizable *eyes pop out* (*of one's head*) (Rom. *a face ochii mari*) and the emphatic *hit* (*someone*) *right between the eyes*; *raise eyebrows* denotes causing both (shocking) surprise and disapproval; annoyance – *get in someone's face* (approximately Rom. *a călca pe nervi*), and its opposite, *get out of one's face*; anger – *to have a face like thunder* (Rom. *a-i tot tuna şi fulgera*) and displeasure – *to screw up one's face* (Rom. *a se strâmba*). Resignation is connoted by some verbal idiomatic expressions, such as: *to face the facts/ face it* (Rom. *a accepta adevărul*) and *face the consequences* or *face the music* (Rom. *a suporta consecinţele, a nu avea încotro*), thus to accept criticism, punishment or other observations for one's deeds.

Intoxication can be easily seen from a person's walking, but also from their face; thus, the slang *to soak one's face* implies heavy drinking, which may result into *be out of* (*one's*) *face* (Rom. *a se face criţă*) – "to be heavily intoxicated by drugs or alcohol, especially to the point of becoming unconscious, nonsensical, or out of control" (*TFD*). Since the common point is alcohol, the idiom *Here's mud in your eye*! should be mentioned here, as a toast for *Drink up*!

Due to their anatomic overlap, a mouth is sometimes idiomatically replaced with a face, as in the slang *Bag/Shut your face!* when abruptly silencing someone, or *to stuff one's face*, eat a lot, all the time, probably valid for someone whose *eyes are* (not) *bigger than their stomach*.

The next category of face- and eye-idioms, triggering abstract meanings, has actually stemmed from the concrete significations of the two body parts. Some first examples are *to do an about-face* (Rom. *a face stânga împrejur*) or *to about-face*, which indicate "a turn of 180° from the position of attention" (*dictionary*), thus "a complete, sudden change in position, direction, principle, attitude, etc." (*dictionary*). The same ***change*** of belief or attitude is formally expressed by *a volte-face* (Rom. *întoarcere împrejur*):

e.g. *In the early 90's he made a complete political volte-face, moving from the Republican Party to the Democrats* (*TFD*).

Moreover, the real-life *slap in the face*, *smack in the face* and *a kick in the face*, gradually describing the beat on a face, figuratively mean ***disappointment*** and ***insult***, namely "a thoroughly devastating or disappointing setback or failure" (*TFD*). A plain insult is suggested by *to spit in* (*someone's*) *eye*, but is enhanced with ***criticism***, too, in *be in one's face* (Rom. *a scoate ochii cuiva*), thus constantly criticising someone. Besides, the last idiom (and the

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

adjectival *in-your-face*) brings the idea of "a provocative attitude, as if ready to fight or argue" (*TFD*).

A ***confrontational*** signification, also previously pointed out, is further inferred by the preliminary *face off* (the nominal *face-off*), the concrete *come face to face with* (Rom. *a se confrunta cu ceva/cineva*), *face someone with something, fling something up in someone's face* (Rom. *a pune/trânti ceva în faţa cuiva*), as well as by *face down*, as a sign of intimidation and victory, *face head-on, face out* and *face up to* (Rom. *a ţine piept*), all ways of confronting something/someone openly or courageously. Opposition is again stated by *in the face of* (Rom. *în ciuda/ în faţa*) or *fly in the face of something*, "to be the opposite of what is usual or accepted":

e.g. *These recommendations fly in the face of previous advice on safe limits for alcohol consumption* (*TFD*).

The slightly formal *to set one's face against something/doing something* means to oppose or to refuse to do something, refusal being traced, as well, in *throw something back in somebody's face* (Rom. *a o trânti în faţa cuiva*) and *slam/shut the door in one's face* (Rom. *a trânti/închide uşa în faţa cuiva*), figuratively refusing/restricting one's access to a certain opportunity or help. On the contrary, *see eye to eye with someone* (Rom. *a fi de aceeaşi părere*) involves agreement and similar opinions.

Professionalism is another quality 'written' on faces, namely *have a good eye/an eye for* (*something*) and *cast a* (*professional/expert*) *eye over* (*someone/something*) – Rom. *a avea ochiul format pentru* (*ceva*). A certain degree of 'expertise' is also required by *to have eyes in the back of one's head* (Rom. *a avea ochi la spate/ceafă*), thus knowing what is happening behind someone's back.

Up to one's eyeballs in (*something*) (Rom. *până peste cap în ceva*) may sometimes connote lack of professionalism – "to have a lot of something, to be much involved or busy with something" (*idcon*).

To end with, in Romanian, ***deceit*** has both eyes and eyebrows – *e cu ochi şi cu sprâncene*, similar to a *bald-faced lie*, to be discussed below, while in English, it takes the form of wool over eyes, more specifically *to pull the wool over someone's eyes* (Rom. *a arunca praf în ochi* – Engl. *throw dust in someone's eyes*). The etymological explanation is provided by the same Flavell and Flavell:

"At one time anyone who considered himself a gentleman would wear a powdered wig. Such creations were humorously referred to as 'wool' because the curls looked rather like a fleece. The wigs tended to be ill-fitting and cumbersome and were easily pushed over the wearer's eyes so that he could not see what was going on around him. This made him an easy victim of theft or pranks. Judges wear wigs to the present day and some authorities suggest that the expression may have been used in courts of law when lawyers, who had succeeded in a skilful deception, would boast at having pulled the wool over the judge's eyes" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 204).

Another form of (self-)deceit is *to close one's eyes to something*, identically translated into Romanian as *a închide ochii la* (*ceva*) or *to turn a blind eye to something*, "to ignore something, to pretend that something is not really happening" (*idcon*):

e.g. *I won't close my eyes again to your rude behaviour!*

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

A sub-category, possibly labelled as 'obvious deceit' or 'brazen dishonesty', include *barefaced/bald-faced/bold-faced lie* (Rom. *minciună neruşinată/sfruntată*), "a blatantly obvious and/or impudent untruth, one in which the liar does not attempt to disguise his or her mendacity" (*TFD*), together with its derivative, *barefaced/bald-faced/bold-faced liar* (Rom. *mincinos neruşinat*):

e.g. *Everyone knows he is just a bald-faced liar. It's a wonder anyone believes a thing he says anymore* (*TFD*).

Still a liar, yet not overtly called so – rather a hypocrite, is *om* (*taler*) *cu două fețe*, identical with the nominal derivation form *fățarnic*, a *two-faced man.* The opposite idea of deceitfulness is verbally expressed by *a* (*se*) *da pe față*, namely to unmask or to reveal one's true intentions or actions.

In conclusion, *face*-ing idioms in English and Romanian proved quite a challenge, especially on how to organize such face- and eye-idioms, the semantic criterion prevailing. Even if the borderline between concreteness and abstractness was many times blurred, such a distinction seemed the best choice – the analysis began with the concrete meanings assigned to faces and eyes, namely appearance and destruction, seeing, vigilance, physical beauty, expressiveness, emotions and even intoxication, and continued with the more or less opaque connotations, such as change of belief, criticism, confrontational states, professionalism and deceit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

* *The Idiom Connection*. Copyright 1997-2016 by Idiom Connection, http://www.idiomconnection.com/eyes.html (*idcon*)

* *Dictionary.com*. Copyright © 2016 Dictionary.com, LLC. http://www.dictionary.com/ (*dictionary*)

Flavell, Linda, Flavell, Roger (1994). *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins.* London: Kyle Cathie Ltd.

Glucksberg, Sam (2001). *Understanding Figurative Language. From Metaphors to Idioms.* Oxford Psychology Series, No. 36. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goodreads. Copyright © 2016 Goodreads Inc. Mehmet Murat Ildan, http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/face?page=2.

Moon, Rosamund (1998). *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English. A Corpus-Based Approach.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

* *Noul dicționar explicativ al limbii române.* Copyright (C) 2004-2016 dexonline, https://dexonline.ro (*dexonline*)

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

* *The Free Dictionary* by Farlex. Copyright © 2003-2016 Farlex, Inc. http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ (*TFD*)

***

"about-face". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 8 Oct. 2016. <Dictionary.com http://www.dictionary.com/browse/about-face> (*dictionary*)

"all over face." Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms. 2006. Cambridge University Press 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/all+over+face (*TFD*)

"at face value." McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs. 2002. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/at+face+value (*TFD*)

"at face value, take." The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms by Christine Ammer. 2003, 1997. The Christine Ammer 1992 Trust 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/at+face+value%2c+take (*TFD*)

"bacon-faced." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 22 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/bacon-faced (*TFD*)

"bald-faced lie." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/bald-faced+lie (*TFD*)

"be just a pretty face." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/be+just+a+pretty+face (*TFD*)

"be laughing on the other side of face." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/be+laughing+on+the+other+side+of+face (*TFD*)

"be out of (one's) face." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/be+out+of+(one%27s)+face (*TFD*)

"blank look on (one's) face." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/blank+look+on+(one%27s)+face (*TFD*)

"blow up in face." Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms. 2006. Cambridge University Press 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/blow+up+in+face (*TFD*)

"blue in the face." Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms. 2006. Cambridge University Press 22 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/blue+in+the+face (*TFD*)

"cut off nose to spite face." Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms. 2006. Cambridge University Press 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/cut+off+nose+to+spite+face (*TFD*)

"eagle eye". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 8 Oct. 2016. <Dictionary.com http://www.dictionary.com/browse/eagle--eye> (*dictionary*)

"egg on your face." Endangered Phrases by Steven D. Price. 2011. Steven D. Price 22 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/egg+on+your+face (*TFD*)

BDD-A25410 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)

"face card." McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions. 2006. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/face+card (*TFD*)

"face man." McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions. 2006. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 28 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/face+man (*TFD*)

"face (that) would stop a clock." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/face+(that)+would+stop+a+clock (*TFD*)

"face to face." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 24 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/face+to+face (*TFD*)

"fly in the face of." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 7 Oct. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/fly+in+the+face+of (*TFD*)

"game face." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 4 Oct. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/game+face (*TFD*)

"a kick in the face." Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. 2015. Farlex, Inc 15 Sept. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/a+kick+in+the+face (*TFD*)

"lose face." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 8 Oct. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/lose+face (*TFD*)

"on-the-scene". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 30 Sep. 2016. <Dictionary.com http://www.dictionary.com/browse/on-the-scene> (*dictionary*)

"stand there with one’s bare face hanging out." McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions. 2006. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 6 Oct. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/stand+there+with+one%e2%80%99s+bare+face+hanging+out (*TFD*)

"a volte-face." Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2nd ed.. 2006. Cambridge University Press 25 Sep. 2016 http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/a+volte-face (*TFD*).

BDD-A25410 © 2016 “Petru Maior” University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:19:35 UTC)