

序

人对任何事物和现象的认识无一例外地遵循由表及里、由个体到整体、由现象到理论的规律,对我们自身使用的语言也是如此。

习语是人类语言的普遍现象,它存在于任何一种语言之中。习语生动活泼、言简意赅的表达能力,再加之它和特定文化的紧密关联,使它很早就引起了不少学者的注意,并对这一特殊的语言表达方式开展了研究。但初期的研究大多数停留在表层,其成果大多是把一种语言中的习语汇编成册的习语词典之类,或是追溯习语历史及文化渊源的习语故事之类,或是比较两种语言中的习语试图寻找对等的表达方式的习语翻译研究之类。

上个世纪后半叶,语言学的深入和发展为习语的研究提供了坚实的理论支撑和多元化的视角,使得我们对习语的研究有可能从表面向深层发展。上世纪60年代以后,现代语言学研究出现了几个主要的流派,进而形成了几个语言学研究的分支,即形式语言学、功能语言学和认知语言学。不同的视角和不同的侧重使不同的语言学家提出了各自对习语的理解模式。可以说,至此,语言学界对习语的研究已经得到了理论的升华。对这一阶段中出现的各种主要的习语研究的理论模式,本专著做了颇为全面的归纳。但是,只有对前人成果进行归纳是成不了专著的,单纯的归纳也不会达到很高的学术水平。本专著的价值就在于它的作者在前人的研究基础上提出了一个新的解读英语习语的理论模式,她把这一模式称之为“习语的整合处理法”。

顾名思义,整合处理法把习语看作一个整体,在对习语进行解读时不是从某个单一的视角出发,也不是采用某种单一的方法,而是把句法、语义、语用、认知及社会文化等要素一并综合考虑。这样的“综合”法无疑要比先前的“单一”法能更全面、更深入地揭示习语的意义。用这种方法发现的习语的意义势必不会是停留在语言表层的单纯语言意义,而是在特定的文化背景、特定的交际场合

下习语所具有的体现使用者意图、感情和态度的意义,也就是我们通常说的语用意义。“整合处理法”纳入了语用、文化和认知等所谓的“语言外”因素,体现了当今语言学研究的主流和宽广的视角。这样的研究方法显然要比以前单一途径的研究向前大大迈了一步。这正是本专著的学术价值所在。“整合处理法”的提出对今后习语的进一步研究必将具有重要的借鉴意义。

除了它的理论意义外,本专著还具有重大的应用价值。“整合处理法”对于在外语,尤其是英语的教学过程中如何使学生真正理解习语的意义,并且能确切地运用习语,具有很大的指导意义。由于对习语的意义缺乏正确的认识而导致误用,乃至在交际过程中闹出笑话的情况屡见不鲜。“整合处理法”对教师、对学生以及其他使用外语作为工具的人都会带来裨益。本专著的作者是一位有着多年英语教学经验的教师,我想她撰写本专著的灵感(如果写学术专著也可以和艺术家的创作一样是受到灵感的驱动的话)极可能是来源于她本人在教学过程中的亲身体会,在讲授习语时她遭遇到了问题,便开始积极地寻求解决问题的途径和方法,其探索的结果便是她的“整合处理法”,而这一方法的有效性和可行性也很可能已经在她本人的教学过程中得到了验证。

最后值得一提的是,本专著引用的英语习语十分丰富,作者所使用的英语十分规范、地道。这显然也是和作者的教育背景和工作阅历分不开的。我本人感到阅读这本专著并不像阅读某些行文晦涩、对读者不那么友好的学术专著那样艰辛、令人困惑;这次的阅读感受与以前完全不同,流畅的行文、丰富生动的例子使得阅读本专著成为了一种愉悦,一种令人感到满足的学术收获。希望诸位读者能和我分享这一感受。

何兆熊
上海外国语大学
2007年3月

摘要^①

习语作为一种相对固定的表达用语,渗透于人们的日常语言活动,具有形象生动、简洁明快的特点,并且蕴涵着丰富的社会文化信息。然而,习语有何形态特征和意义特征,有何词汇变异和句法转换规律,如何理解和使用等,尚无明确的定论。正是由于习语的多元化特性,习语在语言教学中往往处于边缘化的境遇。一些语言学生对习语的认识停留在囫圇记忆,知其然而不知其所以然的层面上,很少体会到习语的语用价值、认知效应及独特生命力。因此,对习语作全方位的描述和处理是一项艰巨的任务。在第二语言或外语习得领域,习语问题尤为值得关注和探究。

本书首先对习语的形成及其特性作了共时和历时的描述,进而对处理习语的不同方法和模式展开评述,最后从总体整合的视角集中探讨了以概念结构为依据的习语处理方法即整合处理法。

相对个体论而言的整体论注重整体而不偏重于将总体分解或分割成部分,并强调整体的重要性以及部分之间的相互依赖性,这是习语整合处理法的理论依据。现对这一方法作如下概括:

整合处理法的特征之一是:对相关背景知识和信息、形成习语构建成分意义的基本概念以及由此引申出的假设和蕴涵作总体整合。

其次,整合处理法旨在将部分或个体组合成有机的统一体。具体而言,在处理习语时,将句法、语义、语用、认知和社会文化五

① 本书作者王颖,复旦大学文学博士、英语语言文学副教授。曾担任复旦大学外文系副系主任,现为复旦大学教务处副处长,上海市教育评估协会会员,兼任教育部《中国大学教学》审稿专家,香港时代生活丛书出版社及 Reader's Digest Association Far East Limited 特约翻译。主要研究兴趣包括:词汇学、语用学、高等教育教学管理。近年来发表学术论文十余篇,出版《福克纳文集—掠夺者》(上海译文出版社,2004年4月)等译著,编纂《新英汉英语同义词词典》(上海译文出版社,2004年2月),主持上海市高等教育学会研究课题“创新人才培养与通识教育课程优化管理”,并先后荣获上海市优秀教学成果二等奖和一等奖。

大要素整合成有机的统一体。

再者,整合处理法作为一种动态的研究方法将习语看作是实际运用中生成的概念结构。本书主要探讨习语如何以一种在线、实时结构出现在真实的语境中或特定的语篇中,语言学习者如何获得对习语的准确理解或解释。现举例说明。

true to form 的词典释义为“一如往常”。

True to form, John turned up late.

True to form, when it came to his turn to buy the drinks, he said he'd left his wallet at home.

True to form, Hurricane Wilma is projected to come ashore near Naples, Florida in just a few hours.

True to form, Britain has promoted the interests of corporations, not of Africa at the G8 (the Group of the Eight Countries).

(Melbourne Indymedia, July 2005)

从结构上分析,这一习语大体上总是位于句首,且用逗号与句子主体分开。如采用整合处理法就会发现“一如往常”这一词典释义并不确切。以最后一句为例。该句中的 *true to form* 间接地表达了不赞成甚至谴责的态度,暗示了八国集团一再要求非洲发展中国家采取自由贸易政策,为西方发达国家创造有利的贸易环境这一恃强凌弱的行为以及由此造成的使非洲国家丧失贸易调控杠杆、加剧贫穷走势的后果。在这一特定的上下文中, *true to form* 作为一个出现在真实语境中的概念结构具有特定的蕴涵,即“故态复萌”、“故伎重演”。这一意义由该习语的句法、语义、语用及社会文化等要素整合而成。

本书旨在向读者展示在生成和解释习语时,如何通过整合处理法将思想映射到语言中使形式与内涵匹配,并试图扩展这一研究用于语言学习,以最有效的方法来处理语言中的习语现象。

英语习语整合处理法的提出具有一定的原创性。自上世纪60年代以来,随着习语研究的逐渐展开,由形式语言学、功能语言学、认知语言学等不同的理论构架衍生出一系列的习语理解模式,如 Lexical Processing Model (Bobrow & Bell, 1973), Simultaneous Processing Model (Swinney & Cutler, 1979), Configuration Model (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988) 及 Decomposition Processing Model (Gibbs *et al.*, 1989) 等。这些模式的构建无一例外是以母语人群

为适用对象的。就目前而言,针对非母语人群的习语研究尚未形成气候,现有少量文献(Lathey, 1986; Lennon, 1998; Cooper, 1999)局限于提供一些操作层面的教学细节提示。正是在这样的研究背景下,作者尝试探索出一个针对非母语者的英语习语整合处理法,旨在抛砖引玉,一方面对英语习语的教学提供些许启示或参考,另一方面激发对这一领域更深入的兴趣和探究。

全书由六章组成。第一章简要介绍了习语研究的历史背景,展示了理解和掌握习语与语言习得间的必然关联,并对本书的写作意图、总体构架以及语料收集作了概述。

第二章首先探讨了习语形成的一般过程,习语与单词、习语与其他固定表达用语的区别,以及习语内在的多重特性。在此前提下,通过对已有习语定义的比较分析,本章提出了更能如实反映习语多样性的描述性定义,强调了习语在形象生动、简约明快的表达形式下传递出的丰富内涵。

第三章回顾了自上世纪60年代后期以来的习语研究历程。近四十年来,形式语言学、功能语言学以及认知语言学分别从各自的视角出发关注着习语的分类、习语的变异、习语的喻义和本义间的关系等共同问题,并相继确立了各自的习语理解模式。本章对采用这三种研究方法开展的习语研究作了较为详尽的探讨,着重分析比较了各自代表性的成果如Bruce Fraser (1970)的习语固化分级,Fernando (1996),Cacciari 和 Glucksberg (1991, 1993)的习语功能化分类,Vega-Moreno (2001)的关联论判释法,Cacciari 和 Tabossi (1988)的完形模式,Gibbs 和 Nayak (1989)的习语分解模式以及 Gibbs (1994)的隐喻模式。这三种研究方法的启示和整合,奠定了本书后续章节的理论基础。

第四章将视线转向了习语在实际语境中表现出来的词汇特征和句法特征。前一章中所讨论的理论构架在本章中得到了整合并用于分析、归纳采自Riehemann (2001)、Moon (1998)的语料库研究和Cowie 等人(1993)的习语词典的原始例证,同时也包括了作者本人在日常阅读中积累的第一手语料。这些语料所展示的习语变异和句型转换带有一定的规律,对语言教学尤其是习语教学的有效开展具有针对性的指导意义。

第五章提出了适用于非母语者的英语习语整合处理法。这一方法的理论构思,在肯定了形式语言学对习语形态和结构描述的

同时,更强调习语的交际功能、语用价值和认知效应,因而明确了语用能力、形象表达能力和社会文化能力的均衡开发应该贯穿习语教学乃至英语教学的全过程。根据这一原则,结合作者的实际教学积累,习语整合处理法进一步推出了具体的习语处理策略,旨在引导学习者对习语的相关背景信息、内在语义结构以及外部语境等进行分析、推理、联想、类比并加以整合,达到预期的、准确的理解。

第六章对本课题做出总结,认为习语内在的多元特性决定了对习语的研究必须整合形式、功能、认知三个不同的视角加以审视。习语整合处理法体现了这三种研究方法相辅相成的内在联系,是针对非母语者开展英语习语教学的有效途径。本章对如何完善这一方法提出了建议,如进一步探讨习语变异的其他类型以及针对性的教学策略;进一步比较习语的形式化分类与功能化分类间的优势互补关系及对教学的意义;尝试探寻习语的喻义与另一种形象思维倾向——潜在借喻结构之间的关系。

关键词: 整合处理法; 习语理解; 习语可分解性; 习语可变通性

Abstract

Idioms belong to the vast family of fixed expressions including collocations, proverbs, clichés, speech formulas, and so forth that shares some degree of conventionalization of meaning yet at the same time differs in semantic as well as syntactic properties. A large part of our everyday linguistic repertoire is formed by these conventionalized ways of saying things. Nonetheless, the task of describing what an idiom is, and how it is processed and understood, is still a rather challenging and controversial one, particularly in second or foreign language acquisition. Idioms remain to be viewed by a good many language teachers as mere quirks of the language, used randomly or without much motivation. They have been relegated to the sidelines of language teaching. Students are usually left with memorizing idioms as chunks and using them in some gap-filling exercises without much context. With only a superficial knowledge of idioms, they find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in their readings, discussions, debates and communication with native speakers. How idioms are processed by non-native speakers is definitely a non-negligible area deserving keen observation and detailed investigation.

This book starts with a synchronic and diachronic delineation of distinctive properties of idioms, then proceeds on to a critical review of different approaches (formal, functional, and psycholinguistic) and models for processing idioms (the Lexical Processing Model, the Simultaneous Processing Model, the Configuration Model, The Decomposition Processing Model) and finally focuses on a conceptual structure-based approach from the perspective of holistic integration — a holistic approach to English idioms for non-native speakers.

As opposed to atomism, holism is concerned with wholes rather than analysis or separation into parts and emphasizes the importance of

the whole and the interdependence of its components. The holistic approach to English idioms motivated by this theory can be epitomized as follows.

One of the hallmarks of this approach is the holistic integration of information from background knowledge, the concepts underlying constituent word meanings and the assumptions and implications arising from them.

Secondly, this approach aims at organizing parts into an organic, unified whole. To be more specific, holism-based idiom access involves integrating syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and sociocultural factors into an organic, unified whole when an idiom is processed.

Thirdly, as a dynamic approach, the holistic approach treats an idiom as a conceptual structure occurring as an on-line, real-time construction in an actual environment or in a particular text or context.

By way of illustration, evidence is provided to fortify the arguments as presented in this book.

true to form: being or behaving as expected; in the usual, typical or characteristic way (dictionary explanation)

True to form, John turned up late.

True to form, when it came to his turn to buy the drinks, he said he'd left his wallet at home.

True to form, Hurricane Wilma is projected to come ashore near Naples, Florida in just a few hours.

True to form, Britain has promoted the interests of corporations, not of Africa, at the G8 (the Group of the Eight Countries).

(*Melbourne Indymedia*, July 2005)

A structural analysis of the idiom shows that it is invariably positioned at the beginning and separated by a comma from the main framework of the sentence. A holistic examination of the idiom as it occurs in the particular context will reveal the inadequacy of the sole reliance on the syntactic analysis and make it necessary to improve the dictionary explanation. In the last case for instance, the idiom *true to form* in that particular context conveys an indirect reproach of the G8

agreement made for the benefit of rich countries. It hints at the G8's undesirable practice of requiring African countries to pursue the free trade policy and create more favorite business environment for western companies. This goal of free trade for poor countries is a recipe for deepening poverty as it deprives them of levers to regulate trade for development.

The foregoing anatomy of the idiom is a typical example of the holistic approach processing an idiom as an on-line, real-time construction in a natural linguistic habitat.

This book is intended to show the reader how to map thought to language and match form to meaning in the generation and interpretation of an idiom. It seeks to extend the holistic research to language learning so that a non-native speaker can process a language in the most effective possible way.

This book consists of six chapters. A preview of each chapter is provided as follows.

Chapter One highlights the important relationship between idiom comprehension and language acquisition by providing the background knowledge of idiom studies. It also outlines the objective of the book, the process of data collection as well as the configuration of the project.

Chapter Two is devoted to presenting a true-to-life picture of the idiom by examining the general way it is formed, its relationships with the word or other prefabricated chunks, and its peculiar characteristics including decomposability, institutionalization, restrained flexibility, figuration and affect.

Chapter Three turns to review the theoretical studies on idioms over the past few decades since the 1960s covering a variety of topics: idiom classification, idiom variation, idiom use and comprehension, and idiom teaching. The three approaches (formal, functional and psycholinguistic) and the diversified findings are very consequential in laying a solid foundation for the present study. The discussions in this chapter pave the way for an integrated analysis of idiom flexibility and productivity made in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four integrates and applies the theoretical frameworks developed so far to examining the lexical and syntactic features of idioms. By using authentic examples and including naturally occurring variants, this chapter demonstrates that idioms do not always occur in their canonical forms and creative or unpredictable uses arise in authentic discourse. It shows further how idiom compositionality combines with context as well as general world knowledge to constrain or motivate idiom variation and productivity.

Chapter Five brings forth a holistic approach to English idioms for non-native speakers and recommends developing different types of competence and different strategies for holistic access to English idioms. This approach is intended to provide learners with constructive guidelines to make idiom comprehension and language learning more enjoyable and fruitful.

Chapter Six is mainly concerned with pedagogical implications of the present study and suggestions for further exploration.

Key words: a holistic approach; idiom comprehension; idiom decomposability; idiom flexibility

Contents

Chapter One	Introduction	1
1.1	Background of the Present Study	1
1.2	Objective of the Present Study	5
1.3	Data Collection of the Present Study	9
1.4	Organization of the Present Study	11
Chapter Two	Description and Characterization of Idioms	15
2.1	Describing Idioms	15
2.1.1	Formation of Idioms	16
2.1.2	Types of Idiom Collections	17
2.1.3	Relationship: Idioms & Words	18
2.1.4	Relationships: Idioms & Other Fixed Expressions	20
2.2	Characterizing Idioms	23
2.2.1	Distinct Properties	24
2.2.2	General Delineation	50
Chapter Three	Idiom Studies: Different Approaches	53
3.1	Formal Approaches	53
3.1.1	Bruce Fraser (1970)	54
3.1.2	Adam Makkai (1972)	56
3.1.3	Rosamund Moon (1998)	58
3.2	Functional Approaches	62
3.2.1	Jury Strassler (1982)	62
3.2.2	Cristina Cacciari & Sam Glucksberg (1991, 1993)	63
3.2.3	Chitra Fernando (1996)	66
3.2.4	Rachel Giora (1997)	69
3.2.5	Rosa Elena Vega-Moreno (2001)	70

3.3	Psycholinguistic Approaches	74
3.3.1	S. Bobrow & S. Bell (1973)	75
3.3.2	D. A. Swinney & A. Cutler (1979)	75
3.3.3	Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (1980)	76
3.3.4	C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (1988)	78
3.3.5	R. W. Gibbs, Jr. & N. P. Nayak (1989)	80
3.3.6	R. W. Gibbs, Jr. <i>et al.</i> (1990-1995)	86
Chapter Four	Flexibility & Productivity of Idioms	92
4.1	Lexical Flexibility	93
4.1.1	Structural Variety	94
4.1.2	Variation Generation	119
4.1.3	Variation Patterns	120
4.1.3.1	Verb Variation	120
4.1.3.2	Noun Variation	126
4.1.3.3	Modifier Variation	134
4.1.3.4	Miscellaneous Variation	138
4.1.3.5	Variation between American and British English	140
4.1.3.6	False Variation	142
4.1.4	Regularity of Variation	148
4.1.5	Variation Constraint & Comprehension	151
4.1.6	Case Study: Relevance-Driven Variation Comprehension	154
4.2	Syntactic Versatility	156
4.2.1	Nominalization	157
4.2.2	Pronominalization	160
4.2.3	Passivization	161
4.2.4	Topicalization	164
4.2.5	Modification by Relative Clauses	166
4.2.6	There Construction	168
4.2.7	Comparative Construction	170
4.2.8	Other Transformations	172
4.2.9	Nonce Uses of Idioms	174

Chapter Five	A Holistic Approach to English Idioms	183
5.1	Developing Pragmatic Competence	186
5.2	Developing Figurative Competence	199
5.3	Developing Sociocultural Competence	205
5.4	Integrating Processing Strategies	218
Chapter Six	Conclusions	223
6.1	Representation of Idioms	223
6.2	Enlightenment from Previous Studies	226
6.3	Compositionality and Flexibility	233
6.4	Pedagogical Implications	235
6.5	Suggestions for Further Exploration	238
References		241
Appendix I	List of Dictionaries Consulted	255
Appendix II	Tentative Classification of Fixed Expressions in English Lexicon	257
Appendix III	Figurative Patterns Underlying Current English Idioms	260
Appendix IV	English Idioms with Respect to Fraser's Frozen Hierarchy	265
Appendix V	Makkai's Categorization of Idioms	267
Appendix VI	Femando's Categorization of English Idioms	270
Appendix VII	Representative Examples of Conceptual Metaphors	272

Introduction

Idioms are pervasive. A large part of our everyday linguistic repertoire is formed by idioms. They arise in the natural use of natural language. The creation of idioms reflects new ways in which individuals construct concepts of the world and convey them vividly. People enjoy idioms for their incisiveness, their frequent wit, their polish, and their savor. Familiarity with a wide range of idioms and the ability to use them appropriately in context are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of language.

1.1 Background of the Present Study

Discourse will normally require a successful blend of conventionalized and original language. Fillmore (1979) maintains that formulaic language is far more pervasive than is often realized and that mastery of idioms and other formulae contributes to fluent performance characteristic of the able native speaker:

“[...] the strategy of acquiring formulaic language is central to the learning of language; indeed, it is the step that puts the learner in a position to perform the analysis which is prerequisite to acquisition. Formulaic language constitutes the linguistic material on which a large part of their (learner's) analytical activities could be carried out.” (640)

British linguist John Sinclair (1991) goes so far as to suggest that “the idiom principle” may well be the basic underlying principle

of language production under normal circumstances. Drawing on his decades of investigating vast quantities of naturally occurring language as part of the University of Birmingham/Collins Publishers Cobuild project, he puts forward his theory of “the idiom principle” forcefully:

“[...] a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments. To some extent, this may reflect the recurrence of similar situations in human affairs; it may illustrate a natural tendency to economy of effort; or it may be motivated in part by the exigencies of real-time conversation.” (110)

According to Sinclair, there is no doubt of the role of idioms in facilitating interaction by, for instance, indicating the speaker’s/ writer’s attitude, evaluating people or events, directing the discourse, or alluding to shared knowledge or experience.

The last few decades have witnessed, alongside a general move towards sociolinguistics and pragmatics, an important number of studies (Fraser, 1970; Makkai, 1972; Bobrow & Bell, 1973; Swinney & Cutler, 1979; Strassler, 1982; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991, 1993; Gibbs, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995; Fernando, 1996; Giora, 1997; Moon, 1998; Vega-Moreno, 2001) turning their attention to idiom representation and processing that cover semantic, structural, functional and cognitive descriptions of idioms. Various classes of idioms have been proposed. While Fraser and Makkai study mainly the formal aspects of idioms, Fernando’s work classifies idioms according to the function they have in human discourse. According to Fernando and others with the same perspective, idioms in general reflect social norms and beliefs by tapping deeply into the world that accompanies language. Attitudes and norms are often inextricably bound up with idiomatic expressions. People resort to idioms not only to communicate propositional content but also to reflect upon and express attitudes and emotions. In some cases, idioms function as a kind of euphemism, the use of which

makes it more socially acceptable to make comments on events or people than the use of a non-idiomatic expression would be. To learn a culture's idioms, therefore, learners need to be made aware of the context in which the idioms occur. It is very often impossible to infer the meaning of an idiom until it is seen in its immediate context. The people, the settings and the themes involved in any text are indispensable cues for the grasping of idioms' functional force. Through an understanding of the function of idioms it becomes easier to understand the nuances between idioms that appear synonymous. For example, *to lure someone into a trap* and *to walk into someone's trap*, the first describes a negative effect on the person being lured and the second on the actor (Lattey, 1986: 225).

The multitude of types of classification reflects the inherent difficulty in drawing clear dividing lines among idioms. There is no sharp boundary separating categories. There are always differences within categories and similarities between categories that fuzz up any form of classification.

In addition, different models for processing idioms based on carefully conducted experiments and investigations have been recommended by the researchers from semantic, structural, functional, and cognitive perspectives: the Literal Processing Model (Bobrow & Bell, 1973), the Simultaneous Processing Model (Swinney & Cutler, 1979), the Idiomatic Processing Model (Gibbs, 1980), the Configuration Model (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988), the Idiom Decomposition Model (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989), the Conceptual Metaphor Model (Gibbs, 1994), the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997) and the Relevance-Driven Comprehension Procedure (Vega-Moreno, 2001). These models have provided, in one way or another, a semantically adequate, pragmatically feasible or cognitively plausible clarification for the use and comprehension of idioms.

Among various models, the Conceptual Metaphor Model is very influential. To ascertain the way in which abstract terms are conceptualized in the human mind is a challenge which has been undertaken by many philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and linguists. The

leading figures of cognitive linguistics, and in particular its experiential branch, George Lakoff and Raymond Gibbs, have developed a substantial theoretical framework based on how people perceive, conceptualize and categorize the world around them. In his famous publication *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987), Lakoff argues that metaphors play an important role in the way in which people conceptualize the world around them. Metaphors permeate language to the extent that much of our thinking is metaphorical and our everyday experience is reflected in the language we use. This is especially important in the case of idioms, many of which are motivated by metaphorical thinking though people are usually unable to interpret the underlying metaphors. Through the instrumentality of metaphors, the more abstract areas of experience can be conceptualized in terms of more concrete images. We can see this in *hand in glove* which describes two or more people in the close juxtaposition exhibited by a hand and a glove when the hand is wearing the glove (Lakoff, 1987: 271). Based on this assertion, Gibbs brings up a new alternative analysis to the study of idioms and shows that cognitive strategies may be at work when people interpret idioms. Although there may have been different cultural connotations for different speech communities, there are also general social, moral and political values which may prevail in different cultures. Therefore, idioms of different languages may have much in common in terms of the underlying conceptual metaphors. For instance, idioms which make use of parts of the human body are very popular across different speech communities because people share much the same perception of the shape and function of the individual parts of the human body.

There is an indication that interdisciplinarity has become part of idiom research. The multiplicity and intricacy of idioms determine that no single theory or model can fully justify all kinds of idioms used in the panorama of discourse situation. Therefore it is sensible for us to handle idioms of great diversity in a holistic way by incorporating the marrow of theories that have been put forward to account for divergent aspects of idioms.

1.2 Objective of the Present Study

The English language is rich in idioms. The following amusing and delightful poem by R. R. Jordan indicates that native speakers of English can communicate pretty well by using nothing but idioms — in this case, thirty-seven of them.

The Idiomatic English Teacher

by R. R. Jordan

To you who ...
Often do not turn a hair
When replying off the top of your head,
Which should be screwed on the right way.

Often you are up to your eyes in work,
And need eyes in the back of your head.
You also need to keep your nose clean,
As well as keeping it to the grindstone.

Your ears are often burning,
Having kept one of them to the ground.
You often play it by ear,
And have to turn the other cheek
(That was said with tongue in cheek!)

You often live from hand to mouth,
And need to keep your chin up.
Sometimes you have to stick your neck out,
And may even become a pain in the neck!
You should not get a chip on your shoulder,
But must keep abreast of the times.

Usually your heart is in the right place,
And you have no stomach for infighting.
Sometimes you have to chance your arm —
More power to your elbow!

Frequently you have your hands full,
And may become all fingers and thumbs,
But somehow you keep your finger on the pulse.
At bottom you are dedicated,
And are often on your last legs.
Revive! Students think you are the bee's knees!

Fortunately, you have your feet firmly on your ground,
Occasionally you must dig your heels in,
And even put your foot down.
A pity you sometimes put your foot in it!

At times you have to toe the line,
Even though you may tread on someone's toes.
All in all, you are a teacher, from top to toe.

(cited in Gulland & Hinds-Howell, 1994)

The ever-increasing awareness of the pervasiveness of idioms in native speaker performance leads us to rethink our approach to teaching English to non-native speakers. Second or foreign language learners are at a distinct disadvantage in understanding and learning idiomatic expressions of the target language. Apart from the heavy memory load involved, they also face a number of other difficulties. Moon categorized errors in the use of idioms as formal, pragmatic, or stylistic. Formal errors may arise where syntactic rules for idioms are not known or observed, so that items are strangely pluralized or used in an improper tense, aspect, or voice. Pragmatic errors may occur because of an inappropriate awareness of the discourse situation, or through lack of knowledge of a particular evaluative connotation: for instance, *pearl of wisdom* is usually used by native speakers to express sarcasm. Finally, non-native speakers may make stylistic errors by using an expression which is particularly marked for some reason — perhaps formal or informal. Moon (1998) cites evidence that learners tend to shy away from idioms. Perhaps they are aware of potential difficulties or perhaps they are discouraged by previous unsuccessful attempts at using learned idioms.

In the face of so many problems, it is not surprising that teaching materials tend to ignore or avoid idiomatic expressions, or label them as difficult areas. Even some practitioners suggest not trying to present idioms in any systematic way but rather to deal with them as they arise or simply leave them to be absorbed through language experience.

The reality is that we can no longer afford to relegate idioms to the sidelines of English teaching. Although it is possible to converse correctly in non-idiomatic English, a student with only a superficial knowledge of English idioms will find himself/herself at a serious disadvantage in reading, and even more so when he/she takes part in discussions and debates. Non-idiomatic discourse sounds contrived rather than erroneous. Language can be correct but unacceptable when it is unidiomatic. Admittedly we must not underestimate the difficulty of idiom understanding for learners, but neither should we use this difficulty as an excuse to provide our learners with an oversimplified version of the language and deprive them of the fun element in language learning. McCarthy and Carter note:

“The emphasis on problems may itself be dangerous, since it concedes to idioms a problematic status, and thus ignores arguments concerning the naturalness and pervasive normality of such universal relations in language.” (1994: 57)

Therefore how idioms are processed by non-native speakers is clearly an area worthy of investigation. Historically, idiom instruction has not received adequate attention in L2 research. Most idiom-related studies have involved native speakers and remain focused on L1 idiom representation and comprehension (Cacciari, 1993; Cacciari & Levorato, 1989; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988; Gibbs, 1986). Some ESL textbooks, in presenting idioms and devising relevant exercises, merely resort to giving a list of idioms which students are supposed to fill into the gaps of exercises which follow. At other times students are left with memorizing idioms together with their native language equivalents and using them in subsequent exercises. These exercises fail to unveil idioms' complex nature and strong connections with everyday language, and will not guarantee an effective use of idioms in dis-

course. Consequently, learners generally come to regard idioms as unmanageable lexical items detached from real English but indispensable for passing English language examinations.

Blessedly, since the late 1980s, and especially since the late 1990s, a few studies (Lattey, 1986; Lennon, 1998; Cooper, 1999) have made it part of long-term teaching objectives to increase learners' awareness of the power of idiomatic expressions in situational and cultural contexts. These studies have examined the way in which non-native speakers comprehend, learn, and use idioms. They have helped to identify some of the special difficulties non-native speakers encounter in learning idioms and offered some tips on how to teach idioms. Models of L1 idiom acquisition offer a starting point for investigating L2 idiom acquisition and for inspecting the extent to which L1 idiom comprehension models apply to the comprehension of idioms by non-native speakers.

This book starts with a synchronic and diachronic delineation of distinctive properties of idioms, then proceeds on to a critical review of different approaches (formal, functional, and psycholinguistic) and models for processing idioms (the Lexical Processing Model, the Simultaneous Processing Model, the Configuration Model, and the Decomposition Processing Model, etc.) and finally focuses on a conceptual structure-based approach from the perspective of holism — a holistic approach to English idioms for non-native speakers.

One of the hallmarks of this approach is the holistic integration of information from background knowledge, the concepts underlying constituent word meanings and the assumptions and implications arising from them. Secondly, this approach aims at organizing individual parts into an organic, unified whole. To be more specific, holism-based idiom access involves integrating syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and sociocultural factors into an organic, unified whole when an idiom is processed. Thirdly, as a dynamic approach, the holistic approach treats an idiom as a conceptual structure occurring as an on-line, real-time construction in an actual environment or in a particular text or context. It seeks to extend learners' repertoire of idioms

and their mastery of the natural language, thus encouraging a pragmatically appropriate and creative use of idioms.

1.3 Data Collection of the Present Study

Data gathering is an unpredictable process and depends on the quantity and types of the texts encountered or the accuracy of the dictionaries consulted. The importance of working from authentic instances of language in context rather than from concocted examples becomes widely recognized. With the development of corpus linguistics it becomes possible for us to analyze enormous quantities of naturally occurring discourse. We need these vast stores of text in order to collect large numbers of instances and arrive at representative patterns by selecting the most typical of these instances. The increasing use of large corpora saves us aimless and ineffective efforts in data collection. The linguistic phenomena reflected in corpora can be used to “test existing abstract models and hypotheses concerning language, and to establish empirically new models and hypotheses through description.” (Moon, 1998: 47)

My work is in a sense indirectly corpus-based. I do not concentrate on a single corpus for it is not necessarily representative of a language as a whole. If a corpus is to form the basis of an accurate description of a language, it must of course be large enough to yield valid statistics. But size in itself is no guarantee of reliability. However large the corpus, it cannot be used to make absolute generalizations. Therefore for the examples I give in this book, some are cited from Moon (1998), Riehemann (2001) and other idiom researchers who use different corpora; some are taken from various dictionaries (i. e., Cowie *et al.*, 1993), either general or specialized; some are collected from my daily reading, literary and academic; and a few are from my personal correspondence via electronic media. In other words, I attempt to collect as many and balanced examples as possible from a variety of sources. The idioms in this work do not belong to a specific variety of English, such as British, American, or Canadian English,

but are part of a common heritage.

The corpus Moon uses in her studies is the *Oxford Hecor Pilot Corpus* (OHPC), assembled by Oxford University Press in 1991 as part of the *British National Corpus*. This corpus consists of over 18 million words of predominantly British English, including examples of both formal and informal usage. Newspapers such as *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, and *The Financial Times* account for 60% of the samples. Other text samples include scholarly periodicals, professional journals, works of fiction, biography, autobiography, and travel, recreational magazines, advertising, transcribed interviews, lectures, and radio commentaries.

The data Riehemann uses stem from a large newspaper corpus of English, the *North American News Text Corpus* created in 1995 by the Linguistic Data Consortium (LDC). This corpus contains approximately 350 million words. It is chiefly composed of news text taken from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Newsweek*, *Reuters General News* and *Reuters Financial News*. Samples from miscellaneous sources are also included.

I am not claiming that these corpora can give all-inclusive information concerning idiom variations and transformations. However, they do suggest gross tendencies for idiom use and comprehension. They have been carefully designed to provide samples from the repertoire of discourse ranging from literary novels to recreational magazines, newspapers to university textbooks, and government leaflets to advertising. The result is a relatively balanced picture of the language, and the sheer range of the corpora makes it preventable that a high proportion of the material is drawn from just one or two text-genres. Moreover, corpus-based investigations are much more flexible and powerful than random collection of linguistic phenomena. They can prove or disprove intuition about idioms, which is necessary but not always reliable.

Among all the dictionaries I use, the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English*, compiled by Cowie, Mackin and McCaig in

1993, is appealing in its peculiar way. The grammatical and semantic description of idioms is supported by quotations from a variety of sources, both written and spoken. Taken together, the sources span the period from the end of the Second World War to the time the dictionary was compiled. Most of the examples are drawn from daily and weekly press, works of fiction, biography, and history, and radio and television broadcasts. The newspapers quoted include *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Scotsman*, *The Sunday Times*, and *The Times*. The authorized version of the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare are also an important source of many illustrative quotations in the dictionary. With such a substantial collection of examples, the dictionary can thus be said to represent English usage, particularly of the latter part of the twentieth century.

In all cases the main form listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* is also the most frequent form occurring in the two aforementioned corpora. They are in agreement with the characterization of “canonical form” as the most frequently used one.

1.4 Organization of the Present Study

This book consists of six chapters. Chapter One gives a general introduction to the present study. Since idioms are somehow anomalous, irregular and intriguing, traditional and well-tested procedures and criteria have in large measure yielded no results. The field of idioms is so varied and fascinating that describing idioms is a very complex issue which should be looked at from the formal, functional and psycholinguistic points of view. Chapter One makes the point clear by providing the background knowledge of the development of idiom studies. It clarifies the objective of the study as well as the process of data collection.

Chapter Two is intended to describe and characterize the idiom by examining the general way in which it is formed, types of idiom collections and the relationships between the idiom and the word or other prefabricated chunks. What sets the idiom apart from most fixed ex-

pressions is its non-logical nature, that is, the absence of any discernable relation between its linguistic meaning and its idiomatic meaning. Indeed, the presence of this characteristic in many idioms motivates the usual definition of an idiom: a construction whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents. It has led to the deceptively simple view that idioms are merely memorized expressions, nothing more than long words, and so require no further analysis or explanation. To learn an idiom, just memorize its stipulated meaning, and that's that. To present a true-to-life picture of the idiom, this chapter explores a set of distinct properties of the idiom including decomposability, institutionalization, restrained flexibility, figuration and affect. Pulling together all these properties, this chapter ends with a general delineation of the idiom of its own.

From this chapter, we will come to recognize that it is precisely the uniqueness of idioms and their special nature which make them what they are: very apt and precise expressions which can concisely describe people, elaborate ideas, feelings, judgments, and impressions. As Gibbs claims, simple literal phrases do not possess the same kind of specificity about the causation, intentionality, and manner of the human actions referred to by idioms (1992: 503). In other words, idioms are by their very nature richer in terms of their structure and semantic features than literal language.

Chapter Three, largely theoretical, examines the way in which idioms have been treated in earlier works written from the formal, functional, and psycholinguistic perspectives. Over the past few decades since the 1960s, idioms have been receiving constant attention, both in terms of their form and their meaning. There is a good deal of literature available on the idiom concerned with its function, interpretation and usage (Makkai, 1972; Swinney & Cutler, 1979; Peters, 1983; Lakoff, 1987; Nayak & Gibbs, 1990; Gibbs, 1980, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988, 1993; Nunberg *et al.*, 1994; Fernando, 1996). Their views and approaches will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter Four integrates and applies the theoretical frameworks de-

veloped so far to analyze the lexical and syntactic features of idioms. It demonstrates that idioms in authentic discourse do not always occur in their canonical forms. Idiom variations and their syntactic transformations can pose difficulties in comprehension for the learner who uses a reference guide with only the “root” form of an idiom. By using authentic examples and including naturally occurring variants, this chapter aims at getting learners alerted to the fact that despite the generally fixed nature of idioms, creative and unpredictable uses occur. It shows further how word meanings may contribute to lexical flexibility and syntactic versatility, interchanging words without substantially changing meanings and more interestingly, creating new idiomatic meanings.

From this chapter, learners will come to realize that whatever strategies they may use for idiom comprehension, it must be that an idiom’s constituent word meanings are available for interpretation. In general, when an idiom’s constituents bear functional relations to the idiom’s meaning, then operations such as nominalization, passivization, and topicalization will be productive, provided that a plausible communicative intent can be inferred. The constraints of general world knowledge seem as important for idiom flexibility and productivity as are more formal linguistic factors such as analyzability.

Chapter Five proposes a holistic approach to English idioms for non-native speakers which involves looking at the whole dynamic process of idiom generation and comprehension rather than just concentrating on an individual aspect or single model of idiom access. The holistic approach deals with the idiom as an on-line, real-time construction occurring in an actual environment or specific context. It seeks to integrate into an organic entirety all the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and sociocultural factors that contribute to the way the idiom is conceptualized in the human mind. The holistic approach strives for a balanced development of pragmatic competence, figurative competence, sociocultural competence as well as linguistic competence. The primary concern is to build up some key strategies for idiom comprehension and instruction, thus assisting non-native

speakers in their appropriate understanding of English idioms and speeding up their mastery of the authentic language.

Chapter Six draws a conclusion to this idiom study. Admittedly it is impossible to achieve a panoramic survey of the idiom with a restricted study such as this one. However, if through this study, people are made aware of the irresistible and irreplaceable power of the idiom, its distinct properties, its constrained variation and transformation, and its holism-based access, they will feel less inhibited by the potential risk of sounding uneducated and vulgar with a random or heedless idiom use. Instead, they will be helped to make much better use of idioms and communicate more spontaneously in various situations. What is more important, they will have some confidence to pursue their further studies of idioms in a more fruitful way. Some possible directions for further exploration are also suggested in this chapter.

Chapter Two

Description and Characterization of Idioms

An idiom is an expression whose meaning does not seem to follow logically from the combination of its parts and the “rules of language”. The word *idiom* comes from Greek and means *own* or *peculiar*. So an idiom is a mode of expression peculiar to a language which cannot be explained grammatically. Idioms are not only colloquial expressions, as many people believe. They can appear in formal style and in slang. They can appear in poetry, drama and the Bible. Some people refer to idioms as poems in miniature, because they create vivid word-pictures and give the language a more lively hue (Simpson & Mendis, 2003: 420).

2.1 Describing Idioms

Idioms are not a separate part of the language which one can choose either to use or to omit, but they form an essential part of the general vocabulary of the language. In fact, it is difficult to speak or write without using idioms. A native speaker is very often not aware that he/she is using an idiom; a non-native learner makes the correct use of idioms one of his/her main aims, and the fact that some idioms are illogical or grammatically anomalous causes him/her difficulty.

2.1.1 Formation of Idioms

It is generally agreed by idiomatologists (e.g., Makkai, 1972; Cowie *et al.*, 1993) that the process of “idiomaticization” lies in diachronic evolution and the majority of idioms exhibit certain stages in their development. Idiom creation is a matter of great spontaneity. A prospective idiom may be picked up in one sphere of activity, transferred to another, mentioned occasionally, seized upon for perceived effectiveness, then either dropped and forgotten or used on an ever larger scale.

Single individuals are the initial creators but their products need to be taken up by an entire collectivity in order to have a chance of achieving currency in the language. What happens is that an expression initially is used in a straightforward, literal way such that the resultant meaning is simply the sum of the constituents. Then an individual uses the phrase figuratively in a particular situation of communication with his/her interlocutor. Later, casting off the primitive context, the phrase begins to acquire the generalization capacity. Gradually, through various semantic processes, the local speech community, and finally the body of native-speakers assimilate the metaphorical use into their own speech for its aptness, felicity, picturesqueness or even plain illogic. The expression takes on the new, idiomatic meaning and at the same time calcifies syntactically. At a certain stage of this diachronic process, the expression attains the status as an idiom and is committed to dictionaries as part of the national stock of expressions, with a sense not obviously linked to that of the original constituents. Those forms which seem to have no figurative stage are in a minority. In these cases, there is instead a slow hardening, a fixing of the form as a result of countless cases of usage in every conceivable context, for example, *by and large*, *bits and pieces*, *at large*, etc.

In a sense, idioms involve collective coinage including continuous generation of idiom-capable utterances; a natural selection process guided by the degree of usefulness of utterances for social communica-

tions in everyday life; wide acceptance of chosen expressions for general use, and final integration into the authoritative lexicon. The natural use of idioms by the mass of speakers is grounded in the collective role of speakers as generators and testers of idioms.

There are many different sources of idioms. If the source of an idiom is known, it is sometimes easier to imagine its meaning. Many idioms come from the everyday life, from home life, e.g., *make a clean sweep of something*, *hit the nail on the head*. There are many which have to do with food and cooking, e.g., *eat humble pie*, *out of the frying pan into the fire*, *in the soup*. Agricultural life has given rise to *go to seed*, *put one's hand to the plough*, *lead someone up the garden path*. Nautical life and military life are the sources of *when one's ship comes home*, *in the same boat*, *in deep waters*, *cross swords with someone*, *fight a losing/winning battle*. The Bible gives us *turn the other cheek*, *the apple of one's eye* (Seidl & McMordie, 1978).

2.1.2 Types of Idiom Collections

According to Leon Jaeger (1999), in English as well as other languages, there are three main types of collections in which idioms are gathered methodically: a) general language dictionaries; b) glossaries of basic idioms; and c) specialized idiom dictionaries. These three types are distinguishable from each other with their own features.

Idioms in general language dictionaries are structurally marked as a definite part of entries and graphically by italics or bold print. The number of idioms incorporated in such dictionaries under a component word is not usually specified. Actual numbers entailed seem to differ from dictionary to dictionary. But one point is for sure: Inclusion in such dictionaries, particularly in the case of such national institutions as the Oxford dictionaries, indicates authoritativeness as being representative of the national language at a given point in time. That is, idioms admitted in such dictionaries are sanctified by usage and widely accepted throughout the speech community.

Glossaries, as Leon Jaeger has explicated, are represented by smaller volumes claiming specified numbers of idioms, usually in the 3,000 to 5,000 range. Also stipulated is the purpose to aid learners of English to acquire the idioms most commonly used in everyday communications. The chief characteristic of glossaries is to serve effectively as teaching or learning aids.

The third type of collection is specialized idiom dictionaries. Some are based on up-to-date citations from contemporary sources and meant to satisfy the needs of learners of current English. For instance, the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* (Cowie *et al.*, 1993), with a total of 18,000 entries, is meant for speakers of modern English. The other subtype, targeting on researchers or translators, might include antiquated, obsolescent or even obsolete expressions, as in the *English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary* compiled by Aleksandr V. Kunin in 1984, which covers idioms used in English over approximately the last 150 years from Dickens to the present day. Kunin 1984 with about 20,000 entries is meant to satisfy primarily the needs of researchers and of people reading older works of literature in the original.

2.1.3 Relationship: Idioms & Words

Idioms are predominantly figurative structures, while words tend to be perceived as predominantly literal. Idioms are overwhelmingly monosemantic, while words are largely polysemous. Polysemy in words arises from the need to reflect an ever greater complexity of life and thought. Changes of meaning in words, whether by literal or by figurative extension, tend to be cumulative and to consequently widen the range of word meanings. Changes of meaning in idioms tend to be fewer and to occur over long periods of time. It is because there are important differences between idioms and words regarding the spheres of concepts. Words are all-embracing. Speakers use words to formulate their thoughts about all existing things, including those that exist only in their minds. Idioms on the other hand are confined to a sphere of concepts that is relatively stable and long-established, dealing with

the description and characterization of people and their behavior, attitudes as well as interrelations in their everyday lives. In addition, due to a higher level of generalization in idioms, the concepts remain valid over longer periods of time even if partial or total obsolescence of the components occurs.

Idioms and words differ again when it comes to the respective modes of defining unit meaning. Idioms are generally rendered through literal synonyms; the meaning of words is rendered through any method of definition that seems appropriate but most often through description or synonyms, or both.

The most practical way for defining idioms is the use of literal synonyms. Simple substitution, however, is not always appropriate and may require careful adjustments. The main reason is that the meaning of idioms is often particularly rich in shades and has a spectrum of its own, a range of possible applications rather than a single way of using it. For instance, *fall foul of somebody or something* is defined thus: “meet, have confrontations or disagreement with someone or something to one’s disadvantage or in a way that exposes one’s weaknesses, ignorance, misdeeds, etc.” (Cowie *et al.*, 1993:176). Direct substitution with “come into conflict with; quarrel with” will lead to the loss of some shades of meaning.

In sum, what differentiates idioms is that morphologically they are always composite and semantically tend to be figurative. As part of the language, idioms are specialized figurative signs. Expressions of thought may in principle be made up entirely of plain linguistic units. In practice, however, exclusively literal utterances are awkward. In actual usage, the two kinds of thought expression, plain and figurative, are complementary and go hand in hand in sentences as well as in discourse. It is up to the speakers themselves to decide which of the means should be used in each particular case so that their thought might be communicated in the way most advantageous to the attainment of their aims.

2.1.4 Relationships: Idioms & Other Fixed Expressions

What constitutes an idiom? It is inevitable that different analysts come up with somewhat different criteria and different identifications of idioms. For some scholars (Katz and Postal, 1963; Fraser, 1970), and in a broad sense, the term *idiom* is rather inclusive, covering all fixed expressions including proverbs, formulaic speeches, and, at the extreme, even compounds or other kinds of single words (e.g., *anchorman*, *bombshell*, *camp-follower*, *dog-eared*, etc.). Yet for other scholars (Weinreich, 1969; Makkai, 1972; Fernando & Flavell, 1981; Strassler, 1982; etc.), the term *idiom* is a much narrower concept in a more restrictive use. They favor only multiword expressions as candidates for recognition as idioms. Consequently a distinction on this basis is fundamental for idiomatology.

In my opinion, any attempt at a hold-all or catch-all classification of idioms seems inadvisable for an all-inclusive trend will make the diversity of idioms overextended. Such a classification would obscure the distinctive nature of idioms. Searching for the nature of idioms is not made easier by such indiscrimination. Among the general rules of classification, the primary one is that items to be assembled in classes should be as homogeneous as possible. Each individual item shares with its class member the greatest number of attributes.

To classify idioms clearly, we need to draw a distinction between idioms and idiomaticity, which are closely related, but not identical. The basis of both is the habitual and predictable co-occurrence of specific words, but with *idioms* signifying a narrower range of word combination than *idiomaticity*. Idioms can be considered a subset of the fixed expressions in a language community. Fixed expressions refer to units which come in various shapes and sizes with varying degrees of fixity and opacity including collocations, idioms, proverbs, sayings, maxims, catchphrases, tags, clichés and formulaic speech. All fixed expressions exemplify idiomaticity by virtue of habitual and predictable co-occurrence of specific lexical items. However, only those expressions which become conventionally fixed in a specific order and

lexical form, or have a restricted set of variants will acquire the status of idioms and be recorded in idiom dictionaries (Fernando, 1996).

Like idioms, collocations are groups of lexical items which repeatedly or typically co-occur, for example, *shrug one's shoulders*, *wag its tail*, *addled eggs/brains*, etc. Collocations have the semblance of idioms; but unlike idioms, they are semantically transparent, compositional and analyzable. Their meanings can usually be deduced from the meanings of their constituent words. The meanings of *fill up*, *eat up*, *drink up*, *dry up*, etc. can be derived from the completive or effected sense of the recurrent constituent *up*; *head for* is not an idiom since *for* with the sense "in the direction of" recurs in *leave for*, *set out for*, etc. In addition, collocations are relatively unrestricted in their adjectival and nominal variants. For instance, collocations such as *rosy cheeks*, *black coffee*, or *catch a bus* show a relatively high degree of variability, especially in the matter of lexical replacement such as *catch a bus*, *catch a train*.

Proverbs conveying succinctly some general wisdom or philosophy are usually in the simple tense and are normally neither syntactically divisible nor substitutable, though creative mutations or distortions are not impossible. Proverbs can be derived from knowledge of the individual constituents but require a metaphoric or analogical interpretive process. As a recognized form of "wisdom" literature, proverbs are traditionally given to customs, legal and ethical maxims, superstitions, prophecies, and other categories of conventional wisdom. They have a bent for laying down rules of behavior, setting standards of good and evil, drawing moral lessons, etc. It is these moralizing and prescriptive attributes that distinguish proverbs from the class of idioms. Based on the dissimilarities of function, proverbs should be left out of the category of idioms whose members did not originate in the same literary genre. However, some proverbs in their shortened or reduced forms are institutionalized and eventually gain idiom status:

a stitch in time

A stitch in time saves nine.

bird in the hand

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

<i>birds of a feather</i>	<i>Birds of a feather flock together.</i>
<i>a rolling stone</i>	<i>A rolling stone gathers no moss.</i>
<i>a red herring</i>	<i>Draw a red herring across the trail.</i>
<i>make hay</i>	<i>Make hay while the sun shines.</i>
<i>clutch at a straw</i>	<i>A drowning man will clutch at a straw.</i>
<i>the last straw</i>	<i>It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back.</i>
<i>faint hearts</i>	<i>Faint hearts never won fair lady.</i>
<i>a new broom</i>	<i>A new broom sweeps clean.</i>
<i>oil and water</i>	<i>Oil and water do not mix.</i>
<i>the sins of the fathers</i>	<i>The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children.</i>
<i>strain at a gnat</i>	<i>Strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.</i>
<i>talk of the devil</i>	<i>Talk of the devil and he appears.</i>
<i>an ugly duckling</i>	<i>An ugly duckling becomes a swan.</i>

The same line of reasoning applies on the whole to sayings, maxims, catchphrases and tags which can be traced back to “wisdom literature” as well.

Clichés, such as *a knight in shining armor*, *the wonder(s) of nature*, *the marvels of science*, *the mystery of life*, *steer the ship of state*, *the human predicament* and *a land fit for heroes to live in*, are expressions that have lost their appeal and become hackneyed through overuse by indiscriminating or unresourceful speakers (Cowie *et al.*, 1993: xi). They are like idioms in that they are so well established in the language that most of them are no longer perceived as phrases coined by someone in particular. Clichés are unlike idioms in two important respects. They are more fixed than idioms in terms of syntactic, morphological and semantic commutability. Their meaning is usually derivable from the semantic sum of the individual constituent parts. The majority of these expressions have become no longer traceable to their origin. An example of this is *sea change*, which comes from Shakespeare's *Tempest*. It is a very typical journalistic cliché used to describe a profound change, but few readers have the knowledge of its exact ancestor. There are many great English authors who

provide their readers with thousands of such expressions, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Thomas Hardy, Percy B. Shelley or Rudyard Kipling, to name a few. Paradoxically, when a phrase becomes too common it loses its original force and becomes so boring that writers or speakers try to avoid it. Thus clichés such as *a trip down memory lane*, *the dumb blonde*, *duty calls* and *explore every avenue* are often condemned as empty rhetoric, without real meanings.

Formulaic speech is described by Pawley as “the use of a fixed form of words to serve a conventional purpose: greeting, introduction, departure, congratulation, commiseration and apology, etc.” (1993: 92). Aspects like the fixedness and generality may well have prompted the authors of idiom collections to assimilate formulaic speech to idioms. Yet such assimilation does not seem to be justified. Formulas are required when what is said and how to say it is more or less set by social convention. Still more importantly, formulas are required in a particular discourse context. The function of idioms, however, is generally achieved within the limits of the sentence. Only through the sentence do they make their mark on discourse.

By excluding the above items, the risk of describing a heterogeneous mass of linguistic objects is reduced. We can move toward a clearer and less error-prone classification and systematization of idioms.

2.2 Characterizing Idioms

An idiom is a sequence of at least two words but under a sentence. The consensus on these size limits is now widespread among researchers. Compounds are not generally included in dictionaries of idioms, though they show some of the features of idioms; compounds can be both literal and non-literal; some idioms can be transformed into compounds, e.g., *boot-licker*, *ice-breaker*, *heart-searching*. These features have led some scholars working in the field of idiomatology to accept compounds as idioms (Katz & Postal, 1963; Fraser, 1970). As to the upper limit of idioms, it is restricted to less than a sentence

for idioms are not themselves utterances of fully structured thought and have to be complemented. They are not capable of building sentences on their own. In fact, the use of idioms in sentence building can be optional; they are not denotatively mandatory and their meaning can as a rule be rendered in plain words, especially if no quality requirements are involved.

The central problem in attempting to define idiom is identifying the properties which will adequately capture all the idioms in a language while excluding all the non-idioms. In order to arrive at a configuration of defining properties of idioms, we need to view the nature of idioms as an outcome of the interaction of a form, a sense and a situational context.

2.2.1 Distinct properties

Continuum of Decomposability

Idioms are a highly diverse community ranging along a continuum of compositionality or analyzability. They vary regarding the extent to which the meanings of their individual constituents contribute to the overall figurative interpretation. The relation between an idiom's form and its meaning may be more or less direct. It may be a one-to-one relation in that each word contributes independently to the figurative interpretation (e.g., *spill the beans*, *pop the question*, *miss the boat*). It may be an all-to-one relation with the literal meaning of the whole phrase being semantically related to the figurative interpretation (e.g., *bury the hatchet*, *push the panic button*). Also, the relation may be none-to-one in that the constituent words neither individually nor as a whole appear to be in any semantic relation to the idiomatic meaning. Idioms of this portion are semantically opaque. For example, the individual words in the idioms *chew the fat*, *shoot the breeze*, and *tongue in cheek* provide no clues to their composite meanings. Another example to demonstrate the semantic opacity of idioms arising from the asymmetry between syntax and sense is the phrase *pull someone's leg*. This expression is believed to come from the old practice of pulling the legs of a man in the process of being hanged, to

speed his death and so spare his agony. By a long process of semantic change this same phrase now means “make gentle fun of”. Quite clearly there is no link between the two expressions synchronically. The semantic opacity of idioms is a powerful asset in avoiding having to say something to the face, a prime motivation for strategies of indirection in social behavior.

In addition, gradations of idiom compositionality imply some correspondence between idioms’ analyzability and flexibility. Decomposable idioms are lexically more flexible, syntactically more productive and more quickly processed than less or non-decomposable ones (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989). Idioms’ flexibility appears to be straightforwardly correlated with their compositionality.

Due to the continuum of compositionality, the semantic interpretation of some idioms appears to be completely unrelated to the meanings of their component words, while the meaning of others can be inferred at least to some extent from their elements. That’s why on the one hand, there are researchers who stress the aspects of semantic opacity of idioms (Katz, 1973); on the other hand, an increasingly popular view asserts some degree of compositionality in the comprehension and production of idioms (Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Wasow, Sag & Nunberg, 1983).

Institutionalization

Institutionalization is the diachronic process involved in the development of idioms. Generally, it is understood as a process of semantic change from literal to figurative meaning, resulting in a tendency towards lexical fixity and semantic opacity which characterize idioms synchronically. To be specific, institutionalization refers to the formation and standardization of a relation among a linguistic regularity, a situation of use, and a population that has implicitly agreed to conform to that regularity in that situation for the sake of general uniformity. This property of idioms implies that an initially *ad hoc* or novel expression is made official, resulting in its currency and acceptance among the wider speech community rather than by a small sub-community (Fernando & Flavell, 1981:17). In other words, an idiom is

an institutionalized expression approved by the usage of the language. Unless an idiom has currency among the members of a specific speech community for a reasonable period of time it cannot be regarded as institutionalized. Institutionalization brings an idiom a powerfully cohesive force. It binds the members of a given speech community and is a manifestation of their identity while it serves to distinguish such a population from others and keeps out the non-members of the community. By selecting an idiom, “a speaker / writer is invoking an ideology, locating a concept within it, and appealing to it as authority.” (Moon, 257)

The degree of currency an idiom has in the community varies. Perhaps it might be more accurate to think of institutionalization in terms of variable degrees rather than as a fixed phenomenon. A number of idioms, for instance, have a very restricted currency because they belong to jargon, the specialist terminology associated with a particular trade, profession or activity. *Black box* is associated with computer technology, *Morton's fork* with history and *Occam's razor* with philosophy. Chitra Fernando and Roger Flavell's mini-survey conducted in 1981 with 50 informants shows that only 26% had heard the phrase *Occam's razor* and only one knew its meaning. Though having indisputable idiomatic status, specialized terms like these have only a very restricted currency in the speech community.

Scale of Flexibility

Idioms are generally of stable form. The individual lexical units of idioms are usually set and cannot easily be deleted or substituted for (Fernando & Flavell, 1981: 38). Idioms such as *off the deep end*, *odds and ends*, and *making out like bandits* are all examples of such fixedness. Variation other than required by grammatical changes of form is often limited. Idioms typically appear only in a restricted number of syntactic frames or constructions (e.g., * *The breeze was shot.*). The syntactic variability displayed in other, freer sequences of words is not permitted for many idioms. Whatever syntactic changes may be normally required in an idiom in the process of integration into a sentence, its core form must remain recognizable to allow clear and

unequivocal identification.

On the other hand, many idioms are not completely inflexible or invariant lexically and syntactically. They sometimes allow lexical variants and are semantically productive. Parts of some idioms can be quantified, modified, or even omitted, lexical elements can be inserted at various points, clauses can be embedded in idiomatic phrases, and so forth. The degree to which this is possible depends on how flexible an idiom is. Idioms can be classified on the basis of their degree of frozenness/flexibility, from very frozen to very flexible.

Idiomaticity in idioms must, therefore, be recognized as a graded concept, relating to the amount of syntactic and lexical variability (Brinton & Akimoto, 1999). A kind of frozenness hierarchy has been proposed by Fraser (1970). In this hierarchy, an idiom at a given level of such a hierarchy, capable of tolerating a given operation, also can tolerate all operations that are allowed by idioms below that level. Gibbs and Gonzales (1985) suggest that the organization of Fraser's frozenness hierarchy may not necessarily be representative of most English speakers' mental lexicon. They empirically establish a frozenness continuum by asking subjects to judge whether idioms in various syntactic forms maintain their idiomatic interpretations.

Figuration

Idioms are remarkably full of figuration which can convey a particular shade of meaning much more strikingly. Quite many of idioms derive figurativeness from religious sources. The Bible, for instance, contributes a number of idioms which are used by both believers and non-believers.

a doubting Thomas (a person reluctant to believe claims in the absence of proof)

a fly in the ointment (something that spoils an otherwise satisfactory situation)

a good Samaritan (one ready and generous in helping those in distress)

a mote in someone's eyes (a trifling fault in another person)

a tooth for a tooth (an act of aggression will be met with the

same retaliation)

a whited sepulchre (a hypocrite; someone who pretends to be pious, righteous)

a wise / foolish virgin (a provident / improvident person)

a wolf in sheep's clothing (an enemy or evil-doer with a friendly appearance)

as old as Methuselah (very old)

be in an ivory tower (engaged in studies cut off from the realities)

be out of the ark (extremely old or old-fashioned)

cast one's bread upon the waters (do good deeds without expecting a good return)

fall by the wayside (begin to be dishonest, immoral, etc.)

flee from the wrath to come (try to escape from the threat of anger or punishment)

flesh pots (sumptuous living or lascivious entertainment)

forbidden fruit (something that is desired because it is disapproved of)

gnashing of teeth (grinding one's teeth)

hold out an olive branch (make peace overtures)

in the land of Nod (have gone to sleep)

kill the fatted calf (demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return)

manna from Heaven (unexpected benefits)

need the wisdom of Solomon (need to make a difficult decision)

on the road to Damascus (see the error of one's own ways)

out-herod Herod (be extremely wicked, cruel, violent, etc.)

play Judas (betray a person)

put one's hand to the plow (voluntarily undertake some task)

return to the fold (come back to a group or community)

sackcloth and ashes (self-abasement and penitence)

see the writing on the wall (appreciate the inevitability of some event)

separate the sheep from the goats (distinguish between those with

or without certain attributes)

strong meat (a set of beliefs, or the language or theme of a book, play thought unsuitable for people who are easily upset)

the feet of clay (unobserved frailty in the character of a greatly admired person)

the lord of creation (races/classes who may think themselves superior to others)

the mark of Cain (disgrace)

the Other Side (the after-world, spiritual life after death)

the prodigal son (a person regretful for being wasteful with money and time)

the promised land (a place or situation in which people expect to find happiness)

the salt of the earth (ordinary people with admirable character)

the tower of Babel (noisy place or conditions)

turn the other cheek (show one has not been intimidated)

wall of Jericho (something seemingly solid but actually destructible)

watch and pray (be alert, attentive, careful, while seeking help and support)

wear one's crown of thorns (have one's own difficulties)

Many other idioms have their figurative origin in the breadth of daily experiences and activities.

Sport

a batting average

a master stroke

a non-win situation

a ringside seat

a second stringer

a sudden death finish/play-off

as smooth as a billiard-ball

be in the saddle

be on a sticky wicket

be on the ball

be slow off the mark

below the belt
call the shots
foul play
get into full string
get one's second running
get one's second wind
go overboard
go the distance
have a second string to one's bow
hit someone below the belt
jockey oneself into position
jump the gun
learn/know the ropes
locker talk
make the running
on the ropes
out of/within bounds
paddle one's own canoe
play with a full deck
roll with the punches
set the pace
skate on thin ice
stay/survive the course
take someone for a ride
take the count
take the wind out of someone's sails
the last lap
the sport of kings
the state of play
throw in the towel
up to scratch
within striking distance
a brain like a sieve
a chip on the shoulder

a feast for the eyes
a foot in the door
a slap on the wrist
an Achilles' heel
bare one's teeth
bind/tie someone hand and foot
box one's ears
bridle one's tongue
burn one's fingers
find one's feet
follow one's nose
get itchy feet
get off on the right foot
get off one's back
get under someone's skin
give someone his/her head
give someone a leg up
give someone the cold shoulder
grease one's palm
hand in glove with someone
hand over fist
hard on someone's heels
have an eye to (doing) something
have a finger in every pie
have a foot in both camps
have a heavy/light heart
have a loose tongue
have a red face
have a roof over one's head
have a roving eye
have green fingers
have hollow legs
have one's hands full
have one's pound of flesh

have something at one's fingertips
head and shoulders above someone
head over heels/ears
hold/stay one's hand
hold one's head high
hold the whip hand over someone
in the flesh
in the teeth of something
in the twinkling of an eye
jog/nudge someone's arm/elbow
keep a stiff upper lip
keep a straight face
keep one's ear to the ground
keep one's eyes peeled/skinned for something
keep one's finger on the pulse of something
keep one's head above water
keep one's head down
keep one's nose to the grindstone
lick/smack one's lips
lift/raise a hand against someone
make one's flesh creep/crawl
make one's hair stand on end
make one's heart bleed
neck and neck with someone/something
never bat an eyelid
not lift/raise a finger
on one's last legs
on the tip of someone's tongue
one's heart and soul
out of hand
out of the corner of one's eye
pain in the neck
pick someone's brains
put one's head in the lion's mouth

put one's shoulder to the wheel
ram something down someone's throat
risk one's neck
scratch one's head
shoot oneself in the foot
show one's hand
show one's teeth
sink one's teeth into something
step on someone's toes
stick one's neck out
stick out like a sore thumb
strengthen someone's hand
tear one's hair
the upper hand
tickle someone's ribs
tie someone's hands
tongue in cheek
turn a blind eye
turn a deaf ear
turn one's back
turn someone's head
turn one's stomach
turn up one's nose at something
twiddle one's thumbs
twist someone's arm
two left feet
under someone's nose
wash one's hands of something
watch one's tongue
win the hand of someone
with one's bare hands
with half an eye
with heart and hand
work one's fingers to the bone

Animals

wring one's hands
wring one's neck
a bird in a gilded cage
a bird of passage
a dark horse
a dog in the manger
a home bird
a lion in the path/way
a mad dog
a sacred cow
a wild goose chase
a wolf in sheep's clothing
at a snail's pace
act/play the goat
as bald as a coot
be an ostrich
beard the lion in his den
bell the cat
can of worms
flog a dead horse
guinea pigs
have a hide like a rhinoceros
have ants in one's pants
hit a bull's eye
hold one's horses
in two shakes of a lamb's tail
like a bat out of hell
like a bear with a sore head
like a bull at a gate
like a bull in a china shop
like a lamb
like water off a duck's back
make a cat laugh
monkey business

Music

pull a rabbit out of the hat
red herrings
sacrificial lambs
score a bull's eye
set/throw the cat among the pigeons
smell a rat
snare and pitfalls
snug as a bug in a rug
solemn as an owl
sour as a crab
start/raise/put up a hare
stir up a hornets' nest
strong as a horse/an ox
sow the dragon's teeth
talk turkey
take the bull by the horns
the rat race
wise as an owl
beat one's drum
blow one's own trumpet
change one's tune
concert pitch
face the music
hit a sour note
music to someone's ears
be a one-man band
play second fiddle
sing for one's supper
strike the right chord
strike a false note
a house of cards
a trump card
back the right/wrong horse
come up trumps

Gambling

Commerce

double or quits
even odds
follow suit
have an ace up one's sleeve
hedge/cover one's bets
hit the jackpot
in/out of the betting
knock spots off something
lay one's cards on the table
not be playing with a full deck
play one's cards right
raise the ante
scoop the pool
show one's cards
the white feather
turn up trumps
a cut-throat price
a trade secret
across the board
at cut rates/prices
clinch a deal
cut-throat competition/rivalry
do a roaring trade in something
drive a roaring line
drive a hard bargain
flood the market
get a fair/square/raw deal
give someone the sack
give someone a blank cheque
one's stock in trade
sell something short

Military

a chink in one's armor
a field day
a flash in the pan

a holy war
a long shot
a Parthian/parting shot/shaft
a pitched battle
action stations
at the double
bite the bullet
close one's ranks
do a double shuffle
draw the enemy's fire
get one's marching orders
give someone the all-clear
give someone carte blanche
go berserk
go like a bomb
hang fire
have a shot in one's locker
hold one's fire
hold/stand one's ground
hold the fort
keep one's powder dry
mark time
meet one's Waterloo
shoot one's bolt
spike someone's guns
spit and polish
stick to one's guns
the awkward squad
the enemy at the gate
the forlorn hope
the thin red line
the top brass
wide of the mark
with flying colors

Legal

a fair hearing
a judgment of Solomon
a watching brief
aid and abet
an act of God
an open and shut case
bang/dead to rights
sober as a judge
cops and robbers
foul play
goods and chattels
law and order
no fixed abode
null and void
of unsound mind
on both counts
on/under false pretences
on/under oath
one's last will and testament
special pleading
take silk
the third degree
wear one's legal hat
with malice aforethought

Theatre

behind the scenes
dress the part
get a big hand
head/top the bill
make one's bow/debut
one's entrances and exits
stage and screen
the dress rehearsal
top the bill
tread the boards

Apparently, many idioms are linked to specific figurative patterns: similes, metaphors, metonymies, personifications, hyperboles, or other kinds of figuration. It is these patterns which determine the distinctness of idioms from other kinds of lexical units. There is also in some of them a noticeable presence of word-play or general jesting.

Similes

as bald as a coot
bright as a button
dead as a doornail
dull as ditch-water
fit as a fiddle/flea
fit someone like a glove
flat as a pancake
fresh as a daisy
get away as clean as a whistle
get on like a house on fire
happy as a lark
hard as nails
keen as mustard
laugh like a drain
like a bat out of hell
like a bear with a sore head
like a bull at a gate
like a bull in a china shop
like a bullet out of a gun
like a cat on hot bricks
like a cat with nine lives
like a fly in amber
like getting blood out of a stone
like a sack of potatoes
like a ship without a rudder
like a shot
like a ton of bricks
like water off a duck's back
mad as a hatter

Metaphors

nutty as a fruitcake
obstinate as a mule
pack someone like sardines
plain as a pikestaff
proud as Lucifer
pure as the driven snow
quick as a flash
right as rain
snug as a bug in a rug
solemn as an owl
stare like a zombie
stick out like a sore thumb
stiff as a board
stiff as a poker
swear like a trooper
thick as mince
thin as a rake
touchy as hell
tough as an old boot
treat someone like dirt
warm as toast
watch like a hawk
white as a ghost
wise as Solomon
a babe in arms
a baptism of fire
a bear with a sore head
a big fish in a little pond
a bird of passage
a bitter pill to swallow
a blind alley
a bolt from the blue
a chosen vessel
a cool hand on a fevered brow

a damp squib
a drop in the bucket
a fly on the wall
a gold mine
a guiding star
a hornets' nest
a horse of another color
a leading/lesser luminary
a lion in the path/way
a mad dog
a nail in someone's coffin
a paper tiger
a red rag to a bull
a rough diamond
a sacred cow
a shot in the dark
a shrinking violet
a snake in the grass
a square peg in a round hole
a stepping stone to something
a sting in the tail
a straw in the wind
a thorn in the flesh
a tough cookie
a weaker vessel
a wet blanket
a willing horse
abandon ship
an Achilles' heel
an old flame
an open book
an open sesame
an ugly duckling
at full throttle

beard the lion in his den
break the ice
ebb and flow
flotsam and jetsam
flutter the doves
fly the nest
grasp at straws
have a bumpy ride
loose threads
muddy the waters
not the only pebble on the beach
on the rocks
one's guardian angel
out of one's depth
play possum
shed crocodile tears
snares and pitfalls
sour grapes
spread one's net
strong meat
take the bull by the horn
the calm before the storm
the carrot and the stick
the cut and thrust
the empty nest
the gravy train
the lion's den
the seven-year itch
the swing of the pendulum
the writing on the wall
tread water
upset someone's applecart
vain as a peacock
walk a tightrope

Metonymies

walk the plank
wide of the mark
a bag of bones
a bundle of nerves
a low profile
a nail in someone's coffin
a private eye
a shoulder to cry on
a stiff upper lip
a stuffed shirt
a word in someone's ear
all thumbs
at the helm
at the wheel
beat swords into ploughshares
behind bars
bill and coo
bite the dust
bread and circuses
bricks and mortar
bury the hatchet
cakes and ale
cloak and dagger
drop one's aitches
dust and ashes
fire and brimstone
flesh and blood
flex one's muscles
follow in someone's footsteps
from the cradle to the grave
from pillar to post
go under the hammer
guns or butter
hard on someone's heels

hate someone's guts
have no stomach for something
hit the bottle
hit the hay
hold the purse strings
hot under the collar
hue and cry
in one's cups
in the hot seat
keep open house
keep the pot boiling
keep one's powder dry
kneel-high to a grasshopper
lend an ear
lick one's wounds
long in the tooth
lose one's grip
lose one's nerve
lose one's shirt
lose one's tongue
lose one's touch
make a splash
make one's flesh creep/crawl
make one's hair stand on end
make one's voice heard
neck and crop
new/fresh blood
not lay a finger on someone
not lift/raise a finger
on a shoestring
on the streets
one's mother's apron strings
one's mouth waters
one's native heath

one's stamping ground
pack one's bags
paddle one's own canoe
risk one's neck
sackcloth and ashes
scissors and paste
set sail
show/fly the flag
snakes and ladders
soothe the savage breast
stamp one's foot
stir one's blood
sweep the board clean
take a back seat
take the floor
take the veil
the brain drain
the distaff side
tickle someone's ribs
tooth and nail
touch a raw nerve
touch one's forelock
town and gown
under someone's nose
under the aegis of something
under the plough
under the same roof
under the thumb of someone
walk down the aisle
win the hand of someone
with flying colors
with one voice
without a stitch on
a blessing in disguise

Hyperboles

a walking dictionary/ calculator
a willing horse
dice with death
first cousin to something
in the teeth of the wind
in the womb of time
make a cat laugh
Mrs. Grundy
rear its ugly head
the eye of the storm
the kiss of death
the long arm of the law
the voice of conscience
the world and his wife
trip off the tongue
until death us do part
a blood bath
a one-horse town
be on cloud nine
be nipped in the bud
be paved with gold
be rolling in the aisles
bite someone's head off
blow something sky-high
breathe fire
call the shots
chilled to the marrow/bone
cost an arm and a leg
cry one's eyes out
eat someone alive
flay someone alive
flog one's guts out
get up someone's nose
grasp the nettle

hang by a hair/thread
hold all the aces
laugh one's head off
like a dog with two tails
make one's heart bleed
milk/suck someone dry
move heaven and earth
never bat an eyelid
not enough room to swing a cat
not fit to wash someone's feet
not for all the tea in China
not worth a row of beans
not worth the paper it's printed on
raise Cain
read the riot act to someone
scream/shout one's head off
shoot the breeze
skin and bone
stink to high heaven
sweat blood
take one's life into one's hands
tear someone limb from limb
tie oneself in knots
turn somewhere inside out
worship the ground someone treads on
would wake the dead

Idioms and figurative patterns are complementary in that patterns do not become realized without the support of concrete expressions. Idioms do not take shape except on the basis of patterns which determine their specific kind of effect. But patterns observably tend to have longer life spans than do idioms. In the English language, countless metaphor idioms have gone out of use over the centuries, while the pattern *metaphor* remains alive and kicking.

Idiom-users may not always identify the precise motive for the

figure involved, but they generally perceive that some form of figuration is involved for enhancing expressivity or heightening effect. Figurativeness makes many idioms appear ambiguous in isolation, or if unfamiliar. The context will probably shed some light on the intended figurative meaning, but not always. Many idioms are therefore indefinite between a literal and a figurative interpretation. *Break the ice*, for instance, can refer either to the crushing of frozen water or to the smoothing of a difficult social interaction. This is the problem confronting non-native speakers and has led to a concentration of research efforts on which of the two meanings becomes available first. What has become particularly clear through studying is that idioms are permanently and inescapably linked to underlying figurative patterns, and that it is those patterns which determine the distinctness of idioms from other kinds of lexical units.

While figurativeness and semantic opacity are closely linked they are not identical, nor is there a necessary cause-and-effect relationship between them. Semantic opacity is a variable relating to the perceptions of the language-user and does not reside in the idiom itself. Figurativeness, on the other hand, is intrinsic to the idiom regardless of the language-user. However, not all idioms are non-literal. Idioms can be ranked in terms of degrees of non-literality just as they can be ranked in terms of degrees of frozenness. The lexical fixity of an idiom and its figurativeness have no inherent connection; however, over time fixity bestows semantic unity on an expression and such unity can lead to this expression becoming less and less connected to its original reference, e.g., the idiom *red carpet*. It now refers not only to a carpet that is red but much more saliently to “especially good treatment”, “respectful or deferential reception and attention”. These latter meanings hold whether a red carpet is present or not.

Affect

Idioms are typically used to describe, explain or appraise a recurrent situation of common social interest in virtue of its resemblance to a scenario involving ordinary, concrete things — *climbing the walls*, *chewing the fat*, *spilling the beans*. Idioms have an affective quality.

They are typically used to imply a certain evaluation or affective stance toward the conditions, situations, or things they denote. For example, *the tip of the iceberg* evaluates the extent of a phenomenon; *nail one's colors to the mast* emphasizes frankness and straightforwardness; *ivory tower thoughts* hints at sort of distance and opposition between pure academic research and applied research; *fan the flames* conveys a negative evaluation of a sociopolitical situation such as racial confrontations or extremism. A language doesn't ordinarily use idioms to describe situations that are regarded neutrally.

Idioms transmit either positive or negative evaluations, sometimes in an intricate manner. *Wash one's hands of* is of religious source; Pilate's symbolic washing of his hands signified his refusal to accept further responsibility for Jesus. If interpreted in the light of its Biblical origin, the idiom conveys a negative appraisal. If interpreted synchronically, then the metaphorical image of *washing hands of* is more likely to be evaluated positively as "not being involved any more in any undesirable affairs". Another typical case is *a rolling stone*. It has two opposed meanings and evaluations. The commoner one is "people who move around a lot and never acquire wealth, position, stability, and so on". It evaluates rolling stones and mobility negatively. The other meaning is "people who move around a lot and never grow stale and sluggish"; it connotes a positive appraisal. The exact orientation for an idiom has to emerge through several factors including its origin and contextual cues.

To the language-user, idioms offer striking, succinct ways of getting across information or messages, not only in terms of referential function, but also in terms of the attitudinal, evaluative one. Attitudinal appraisals of the topic of discourse and of the addressee are inevitably present in communication. People are continually judging others, their actions, their manners, their morals in one way or another. Being endowed with figurative nature, many idioms represent knowledge, experience and institutionalized sociocultural values shared by the majority community members. Employing idioms enables one to convey the attitudinal appraisals regarding the topic of the discourse

and to enliven the effect. Many idioms are simply periphrastic devices to convey negative evaluations less overtly or harshly. *Powder one's nose*, *have one's fingers in the till*, *at rest*, and *on the game* are examples of euphemistic expressions. Therefore, the use of the idiom is not simply a matter of the lexical realization of meaning, but part of the ongoing dynamic interaction between the two parties involved in communication. The selection is semantic, but it also reflects interpersonal aspects of the interaction. In referring to someone *jumping the gun* or *spilling the beans*, the language-user is transmitting his or her understanding of typical consequences of hasty action or of indiscretion. The implicit evaluation is expressed indirectly rather than overtly.

The afore-discussed properties are not absolutes but variables, and they are present in varying degrees. Among them, the most satisfying and sensitive one to establish idioms is undoubtedly the semantic compositionality. In the first place, definitions of idioms by linguists, lexicographers and language teachers are nearly always couched primarily in semantic terms. Such a semantically-based definition is intuitively more fulfilling for the ordinary native speaker. When asked for a definition of "an idiom", his/her first thoughts are that it does not mean what the individual words in it would lead people to expect. Semantic considerations highlight most of the studies in the nature of idioms. There can be little doubt of the primacy of semantic criteria in characterizing idioms and separating idioms from non-idioms. Observation reveals that grammatical structure proves unproductive as a means of distinguishing idioms from non-idioms.

2.2.2 General Delineation

Idioms are multifaceted linguistic objects, whose study involves various viewpoints and different approaches. They are not only complex, but also in many respects elusive, to the point that it will be probably in vain to try and define them accurately. Prototypical idioms like *kick the bucket* have many properties, such as non-compositionality, relative inflexibility, figurativeness, etc., but none of these properties are present in all idioms. Attempts to provide categorical, sin-

gle-criterion definitions of idioms are always to some degree misleading and infeasible. In other words, idioms resist simple definition: Some are best considered large frozen word sequences, while others are quite flexible constructions and allow significant variation. Idioms are characterized by a number of distinct properties: semantic, syntactic, cognitive and sociolinguistic. A definition of idioms must therefore be sufficiently expressive and flexible to handle the full range of combinations of these properties.

Typically, idioms are assumed to be strings of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from the interpretation of their parts. Definitions such as the following are representative of this line of thought:

an expression in the usage of a language, that is peculiar [...] in having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements

(Webster's, 1983: 598)

a group of words in a fixed order having a particular meaning, different from the meanings of each word understood on its own

(Cambridge, 1995: 701)

Definitions based simply on the semantic opaqueness of whole combinations will exclude a large number of semantically transparent idioms. Idioms are not classified as a water-tight category from non-idioms but are related to them along a scale or continuum. There is no clear dividing line between idioms and non-idioms. Borderline cases are inevitable.

Leon Jaeger formulates, in a more strategic manner, his definition of idioms in *The Nature of Idioms: A Systematic Approach* (1999):

Idioms are collectively coined lexical units of two or more words, under sentence-length, that carry a non-literal meaning and aim at achieving specific sound and sense effects.

By this definition, he implicitly declares that idioms are: units of stable form, recognizable on the sound chain; units of stable meaning with a certain degree of semantic integrity; products of collective coinage institutionalized within the given speech community; means of ex-

pression available to all speakers for description, evaluation, appraisal, and so forth.

Leon Jaeger's definition is impressively concise and explicit. However, for the purpose of this study, a working profile of idioms needs to be devised which can be broad as well as flexible enough to embrace the diversity and complexity of idioms. Pulling together the foregoing multiple properties, I attempt to give a general delineation of idioms as follows.

Idioms are conventionalized multiword expressions whose overall figurative meanings usually cannot be derived from combining the meanings of constituent parts. Yet the meanings of quite many idioms are partially predictable from the meanings of their constituents.

Idioms in many cases involve figurative patterns such as metaphors, metonymies or hyperboles. They derive figurativeness from various sources, particularly from daily experiences and activities, and offer striking, succinct ways of getting across information or messages.

Idioms are more or less lexically fixed and syntactically anomalous, which is reflected in the number and restriction of variation and transformation. Some idioms cannot normally admit any type of variation or transformation (e.g., *a red herring*) while others can undergo variation or transformation one way or another. There are idioms that can admit substitution, addition, deletion, passivization, or topicalization, etc. They enrich the language and its use in a peculiar way.

Idioms are of strong communicative force with high interactivity between the writer/reader and the speaker/listener involved. The functional force of idioms therefore can be utilized for a variety of genres including fictions, advertisements, newspaper articles, public speeches and daily conversations. They can be used for a wide range of purposes: generalization, specification, evaluation, appraisal, disapproval as well as some stylistic effects. By using an idiom rather than some non-idiomatic expression in the language, the language user can communicate an attitude towards the event. Idioms function as a kind of euphemism, the use of which makes it more socially acceptable to make a personal comment about an event or relationship.

Chapter Three

Idiom Studies: Different Approaches

Idioms have been the subject of investigation by linguists and psychologists for decades of years. Both groups have been concerned largely with the representation and status of idioms in the lexicon, that is, with the question as to whether idioms are stored, accessed, and subject to grammatical rules in the same way as single lexical items. Whereas the experiments of psychologists by and large have investigated how speakers process figurative meanings of idioms, linguists generally have tried to determine the status of idioms in the lexicon by comparing their syntactic behavior with that of single-word lexical items. The central question is whether or not idioms can be shown to have a meaningful internal structure. The issue of compositionality has been crucial to competing theories of idiom comprehension.

3.1 Formal Approaches

Formal approaches are effective in describing or characterizing the structure, form and classes of idioms, but generally fail to account for the range of lexical patterning. Formal approaches often underplay the role of lexical patterning or the motivation underlying the development and usage of idioms. Research from this perspective has been conducted through the investigation of the syntactic properties of single idiomatic constructions, abstracted from significant context. One of the most serious flaws in syntax-based models of idioms is that many are based on intuition and non-authentic data. Some of the assertions

about transformational potential may not be reliable. They may not be borne out by real evidence. In addition, what constitutes idiomaticity is not only due to the working of transformational constraints on a particular idiom but also the relationship the idiom has with its context.

3.1.1 Bruce Fraser (1970)

Fraser defines an idiom as a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed (1970:22). He studies idioms from the perspective of transformational-generative (TG) grammar. His main concern is to explore the transformational potential of idioms. He suggests that idioms do not form a homogeneous class with respect to the transformations they may undergo. He sets out a hierarchy of seven degrees of idiom frozenness from completely free to completely frozen:

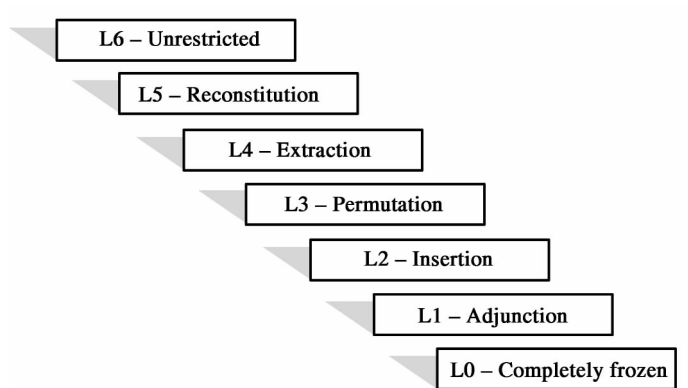


Figure 3.1.1 Fraser's hierarchy of idiom frozenness

L6 — Unrestricted: *read the riot act, throw in the towel, tighten one's belt*

L5 — Reconstitution: *lay down the law, pop the question, spill the beans*

L4 — Extraction: *bone up on, break the ice, give the axe, draw a blank*

L3 — Permutation: *bring down the house, turn back the clock, keep up one's end*

L2 — Insertion: *lend a hand, drop a line, put down one's foot*

L1 — Adjunction: *kick the bucket, pull up stakes, shoot the bull*

L0 — Completely frozen: *face the music, let off the steam, stew in one's own juice*

According to Fraser, idioms can be organized into the frozenness hierarchy ranging from expressions which undergo nearly all traditional transformations without losing their idiomatic meanings (e.g., *read the riot act*) to those expressions which will not undergo even the most simple transformations and still retain their idiomatic interpretations (e.g., *face the music*). Level 5 Reconstitution involves passive transformation or action nominalization transformation. Level 4 Extraction is indicated by particle movement or preposing of prepositional phrases. Level 3 Permutation refers to cases where two consecutive constituents are permuted. Level 2 Insertion involves the placement of some non-idiomatic constituent into the idiom. Level 1 Adjunction refers to gerundive nominalization transformation. While idioms like *kick the bucket* take only the gerundive transformation and are therefore, at L1, others like *throw in the towel, read the riot act* appear to qualify for L6: they can undergo indirect object movement, passive transformation, gerundive and action nominalization transformations.

The most significant feature of this proposed hierarchy is: any idiom marked as belonging to one level is automatically marked as belonging to any lower level. That is, if an idiom is acceptable in a transformation, then it is acceptable in all relevant transformations from the same class, and in all relevant transformations from less disruptive classes. For example, *pass the buck* is analyzed as belonging to L5. This indicates that any reconstitution operation will apply acceptably (the action nominalization does so) and any other operations lower in the hierarchy are also acceptable on this idiom. Thus the extraction operation (passive transformation) and insertion operation (indirect object movement) correctly apply.

Admittedly, the hierarchy of frozenness is based partially upon

Fraser's own intuitions and may not be entirely representative of most English speakers' mental lexicons. Nonetheless, the principles that syntactic variations can be ordered by disruptiveness, and that an acceptable idiom-variation example implies acceptability for all lower-ordered variations of that idiom, are intriguing and empirically testable notions. In this sense, Fraser provides the most insightful treatment of idioms from the transformational-generative standpoint. By discussing the variations an idiom may or may not undergo, he has drawn attention to the stylistic effects that transformations of idioms can achieve. The facts that he brings out are valid and must be accounted for in any theory of language that seeks to describe and account for idioms systematically. His work on the transformational behavior of idioms has resulted in practical applications evident in the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* (1975) and the *Longman Dictionary of English Idioms* (1979), which indicate the transformational constraints on all the idioms listed.

3.1.2 Adam Makkai (1972)

Makkai provides a structural framework which is intended to accommodate all types of English idioms. He classifies idioms as *lexemic* and *sememic*. The main difference between lexemic and sememic idioms appears to be functional. Sememic idioms, distinct from the lexemic type, have an interpersonal role, signifying warnings, requests, evaluations, and so on. Sememic idioms correlate with institutionalized pragmatic meanings: proverbs, familiar quotations, idioms of institutionalized politeness and idioms of institutionalized understatement and hyperbole. Makkai gives greater attention to the structure of the lexemic variety. Six types of lexemic idioms are identified:

phrasal verbs	<i>bring up, get away with</i>
tournures	<i>fly off the handle, rain cats and dogs, be up a creek, build a castle in the air</i>
irreversible binominals	<i>salt and pepper, bag and baggage, assault and battery, shoot and kill</i>

phrasal compounds	<i>blackmail, high-handed, level-headed, The White House, a woman doctor</i>
incorporating verbs	<i>eavesdrop, man handle</i>
	<i>apple-polish, brown-nose, boot-lick</i>
pseudo-idioms	<i>spick and span, kith and kin</i>

According to Makkai, tournure idioms are the most complex of all lexemic idioms and require detailed and specific analysis. A tournure idiom is of a larger size-level than a phrasal verb. It consists of at least three lexical items as in *miss the boat, bite the dust*. A tournure idiom only partakes of morphological (e.g., inflectional) freedom, such as present tense, infinitive, past tense, future tense, etc., while its compulsory internal makeup may not be altered. Thus a tournure such as *kick the bucket* cannot be altered in any way, while, just as any verb in English, it will partake of the regular grammatical freedom every verb has in the language.

Makkai's study is an early example of a highly formal approach to idioms. He offers a set of precisely formulated criteria (e.g., disinformation potential, institutionalization) as well as useful categorizations and sub-categorizations for distinguishing between idioms based on structural or functional differences. He sees the following criteria decisive for the characterization of idioms:

- (1) The term *idiom* is a unit realized by at least two words.
- (2) The meaning of an idiom is not predictable from its component parts, which are empty of their usual senses.
- (3) Idioms display a high degree of disinformation potential. Their parts are polysemous and therefore can be misinterpreted by the listener / reader.
- (4) Idioms are institutionalized, that is, they are conventionalized expressions whose conventionalization is the result of initially makeshift expression.

Makkai's disinformation potential as a criterion of idioms is, however, questionable because adequate contextualization in situational or textual terms substantially reduces the possibility of disinformation in discourse. Anyhow, his work remains one of the most useful

and detailed studies of the structures of English idioms, though his rigorous classifications are difficult to follow through.

3.1.3 Rosamund Moon (1998)

Moon realizes that it is often impossible to assign an idiom to a single category. 25% of idioms in her database have dual classifications. Therefore, a flexible system is preferable to a rigid one. It allows a greater range of information to be recorded and reflects the indisputable fuzziness of boundaries. Moon's studies are corpus-based. One of the most significant results of corpus linguistics is the blurring of divisions and categories that were formerly thought discrete. The linguistic phenomena attested in corpora can be used both to test existing abstract models and hypotheses concerning language, and to establish empirically new models and hypotheses through description. Moon's typology of idioms examines idioms from their lexical and grammatical aspects (1998: 82).

Ill-formed Type

Idioms of this type cannot be parsed according to normal syntactic rules. They are non-compositional. They never or only rarely undergo any transformations at all. The ill-formedness of these idioms often arises from ellipsis, inflections, an archaic mood, or odd uses of word classes such as a non-nominal word may be used as a noun, or an adjective as an adverb.

by and by
by and large
by ear
do the dirty on someone
go for broke
have a down on someone
in one's mind's eye
play fair
swear blind
the ins and outs
through thick and thin

trip the light fantastic

The ill-formedness may also result from deviation of component words from their usual syntactic behavior. Countable nouns, in particular, may be used without determiners in the singular; verbs or prepositions may be used in noun or adjective position.

bring someone to book

come a cropper

down and dirty

face the music

fight tooth and nail

go a bundle on something

go the whole hog

have one's ups and downs

in all weathers

in the know

rain cats and dogs

stand someone in good stead

sweat blood

under lock and key

word of mouth

Grammatical Type

Predicate group

bend one's ear

bury the hatchet

cool one's heels

fall prey to something

get something off the ground

go bust

have an axe to grind

keep tabs on someone

lay one's cards on the table

let off steam

live from hand to mouth

make ends meet

pull one's weight

	<i>put one's finger on something</i>
	<i>set the record straight</i>
	<i>start the ball rolling</i>
	<i>steal one's thunder</i>
	<i>stick to one's guns</i>
	<i>throw in the towel</i>
Nominal group	<i>a blessing in disguise</i>
	<i>a clean sheet</i>
	<i>a flash in the pan</i>
	<i>a wild goose chase</i>
	<i>blot on one's escutcheon</i>
	<i>bread and circuses</i>
	<i>chink in someone's armor</i>
	<i>ivory tower</i>
	<i>light at the end of the tunnel</i>
	<i>neck of the woods</i>
	<i>sour grapes</i>
	<i>pie in the sky</i>
	<i>the salt of the earth</i>
	<i>the straight and narrow</i>
	<i>thin end of the wedge</i>
	<i>Trojan horse</i>
	<i>uncharted waters/territory</i>
Adjectival group	<i>alive and kicking</i>
	<i>bone idle</i>
	<i>cut and dried</i>
	<i>dim and distant</i>
	<i>dressed to kill</i>
	<i>free and easy</i>
	<i>hard and fast</i>
	<i>long in the tooth</i>
	<i>wet behind the ears</i>
Adjunct group	<i>above board</i>
	<i>by the skin of one's teeth</i>

high and dry
in cold blood
in the pipeline
like a bat out of hell
once in a blue moon
through and through
under the counter
under the weather
up for grabs
with half an ear
with one's bare hands
within spitting distance

Moon's study (1998) is devoted exclusively to the use of idioms and fixed expressions in English. Using primarily the *Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus*, with 18 million words, Moon systematically and thoroughly analyzes various important aspects of these distinct English expressions, including the definition, frequency, grammatical structure, variation, meaning, and discoursal functions. In addition to finding that pure idioms are very rare across the board and are more likely to appear in written discourse, Moon also finds surprisingly significant variations of idioms. Moon presents one of the most in-depth corpus-based studies of idioms in English.

Nevertheless the corpus Moon uses has certain limitations: The *Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus* is not a fully balanced corpus of English as there are not much spoken data. It consists almost exclusively of written texts, and more than two thirds of those texts are of journalistic writing. The figures and statistics observed in OHPC may not be considered universal truths. Therefore Moon's study may not be expected to give conclusive information concerning idioms' nature, flexibility and productivity.

Moreover, Moon's study is synchronic, but institutionalization is a diachronic process and historical aspects cannot be ignored. Much of the lexical, syntactic, and semantic deviance of idioms results from historical processes. For example, *through thick and thin* is an ellipsis

of *through thicket and thin wood*. Metaphors, originated from sporting, technical, and other specific domains, are transparent initially. As they become institutionalized and divorced from their original contexts of use, the explanation or motivation for them may become lost or obscure.

3.2 Functional Approaches

Idiom use and comprehension is an integral part of everyday communication, and so it should not be surprising to find that it is also an integral part of discourse processing. In discourse processing, the meanings of words and the compositional meanings of phrases and sentences are routinely generated and then used to infer what a speaker intends to convey. There are several functional approaches to the way the idiom is comprehended and used: J. Strassler (1982), A. M. Peters (1983), E. Lattey (1986), C. Cacciari & S. Glucksberg (1991, 1993), J. R. Nattinger (1992), M. McCarthy (1994), C. Fernando (1996), R. Giora (1997) and R. E. Vega-Moreno (2001). These studies establish a broader mode to idioms, particularly as a phenomenon of discourse.

3.2.1 Jurg Strassler (1982)

While Makkai (1972) comments briefly on the function of idioms, the most detailed treatment of the topic comes from Strassler (1982), who analyzes practical functions of idioms, drawing on a body of naturally-occurring data. He is one of the very few analysts to attempt to describe idiom use in naturally-occurring spoken English. His study is the first major work to appear on the function of idioms. Strassler departs from the traditional way of analyzing idioms as a semantic problem and looks at the pragmatics of idiom use. He sees idioms as speech acts that establish social relationships. He restricts his study to spoken interaction and argues that idioms may only be used in certain social situations, and that their use reflects the power relationships of the discourse participants (1982:126).

Strassler finds that idioms are, relatively speaking, infrequent. They occur on average once per 1,150 words in his data. But where idioms do occur in his data, they do so with a degree of predictability, not randomly. He notes that the deictic use of idioms covers personal reference (first person idioms), reference to the communicative partner (second person idioms), and to a third person or object. Idioms are much more likely to occur when a speaker is saying something about a third person or about an object, rather than about the speaker himself/herself or about the communicative partner. They are more likely to be used in third-person discourses (1982: 103). As Strassler's examples indicate, *he really gets on my nerves at times* is less impolite than *you really get on my nerves at times*, and *I shall now hit the roof* is unlikely if not impossible. Thus, third-person deictic function is identified as the commonest function of idioms in Strassler's conversational data. This is attributed to the evaluative function of idioms. The deictic use of idioms is determined by the social status of the user in relation to the conversational partner. Strassler contends that idioms function as status markers and, accordingly their use or non-use among conversational partners is a form of social membership. Therefore, Strassler draws a conclusion on idiom use (1982: 119):

- (1) Do not use an idiom if you believe you are in a social situation which does not allow such usage.
- (2) Do not use an idiom if you are not sure about the present social situation.

It suggests that people should not adopt an idiom randomly without an appropriate understanding of its conventional evaluations and connotations.

3.2.2 Cristina Cacciari & Sam Glucksberg (1991, 1993)

Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991, 1993) propose a functional typology of idioms that is based on their degree of syntactic analyzability and semantic compositionality. They begin with the assumption that idioms, like any other occurrences of natural language, are automati-

cally processed lexically, semantically, and syntactically. Thus, the linguistic meanings of an idiom's constituents are always generated, and then used where applicable. Whether linguistic meanings have any effects on the idiom's syntactic and semantic flexibility, of course, depends on the idiom type.

Then Cacciari and Glucksberg bring forth a classification of idioms into two general types: analyzable and non-analyzable idioms. For non-analyzable idioms (e.g., *by and large*, *spic and span*), no relations between the idiom's constituents and the idiom's meaning can be discerned. Semantic and syntactic analyses are nonfunctional. The search for literal meanings is non-productive and may interfere with comprehension. For analyzable idioms, the results of linguistic analysis will be consistent with the stipulated idiomatic meaning, so comprehension should be facilitated. In other words, the particular relationship between an analyzable idiom's component words and its stipulated meaning, together with pragmatic considerations, will determine how the idiom may be understood and used. Given that an idiom is analyzable, there are at least three ways that the literal meanings of component words can map onto the meaning of the idiom itself: Type AO (Analyzable-Opaque), Type AT (Analyzable-Transparent) and Type M (Quasi-Metaphorical).

In Type AO (e.g., *kick the bucket*), the relation between an idiom's constituents and its idiomatic meaning is not apparent but can be discerned and exploited. The meanings of individual words constrain both its use and interpretation. For the idiom *kick the bucket*, the semantics of the verb *to kick* can constrain interpretation. Kicking is a discrete act, and so one cannot say *he kicked the bucket all week*, even though one could say *he lay dying all week*.

In Type AT (e.g., *pop the question*, *spill the beans*), the constituents of an idiom map directly onto their idiomatic referents. There are clear metaphorical correspondences, therefore one-to-one semantic relations between the elements of the idiom and components of the idiom's meaning. In the idiom *break the ice*, for example, the word *break* corresponds to the idiomatic sense of changing a mood or feel-

ing, and the word *ice* corresponds to the idiomatic sense of social tension. Included in this class of idioms are both the normally and abnormally decomposable idioms of Gibbs, Nayak & Cutting's (1989) classification. Cacciari and Glucksberg see no compelling reason to distinguish between these two subtypes.

In Type M (e.g., *carry coals to Newcastle*), an idiom calls to mind a stereotypical instance of an entire category of people, events, situations, or actions. The literal referent of the idiom is itself an instance of the idiomatic meaning, for example, *giving up the ship* is simultaneously the prototype of surrendering and also a phrase that can refer to any instance of complete surrender; skating on thin ice is a prototypical risky action, and so the phrase *skating on thin ice* can be used to refer to any activity that is as risky as that activity; the action of *burying the hatchet* was once an actual part of the ritual of making peace, but is now used to refer to any instance of peace making in its entirety. Via the mechanism of dual reference, quasi-metaphorical idioms simultaneously refer to an ideal exemplar of a concept and also characterize some event, action or situation as a new instance of that concept.

This classification of idioms into four general types suggests some determinants of idiom comprehension and use. Idiom flexibility and idiom productivity will be governed by the functional relations between an idiom's elements and its meaning. Lexical substitutions, syntactic operations and semantic productivity should be possible whenever those functional relations are preserved. In general, the more compositional an idiom, the more likely will it be available for variation of one type or another, but compositionality alone is insufficient to constrain idiom use. Pragmatic considerations will be equally important.

The insufficiency of compositionality as a determiner of idiom use and productivity is illustrated clearly by quasi-metaphorical idioms. These idioms are fully compositional in that a linguistic analysis yields a completely adequate interpretation. Even though the idiom itself is fully compositional, lexical substitution is highly constrained.

For example, the idiom *carrying coals to Newcastle* refers to any instance of bringing something to a place that already has a surfeit of that something, but *carrying wood to Birmingham* intended as its lexical substitution communicates nothing close to the original meaning. The variation is not communicatively motivated. There should be some communicative or discourse purpose that is served by using an idiom in some form other than the original. The listener or reader must be able to infer a reason for the change. The operation of pragmatic constraints on idiom flexibility and productivity can be further illustrated by the rejection of the passive voice for the idiom *kick the bucket*. *The bucket was kicked by John* is not interpretable as a variation of *John kicked the bucket* because no communicative purpose can be served by topicalizing *bucket*, and so the use of the passive would not be motivated.

3.2.3 Chitra Fernando (1996)

From the mid-1980s onwards discursal functions of idioms have become a focal point in the study of idioms. Fernando follows meticulously the principle of seeking out corpora of naturally-occurring data in support of statements. The fascination of Fernando's work lies in the fact that she moves the idiom study firmly out of the domain of the phrase and the sentence into a consideration of the function of idioms in contexts of communication. She makes valuable contributions to our understanding of the role of idioms in the construction of interpersonal meanings, in the formation of coherent texts, and in the creation of stylistic effects.

Much previous work on idioms focuses on their form to the neglect of their discursal functions. Fernando believes that the three language functions identified by Halliday (1973, 1985) can be usefully applied to idioms. Fernando has retained Halliday's terms *ideational* and *interpersonal* to describe two of the functions idioms perform, but replaced the third term *textual* with *relational*, a term which captures more precisely the connective functions carried out by this idiom type. Ideational idioms are typically specific and imagist in describing the

state and way of the world: *tighten one's belt*, *swan song*, *hen's teeth*, *blue moon*, *fly off the handle*, *eat one's heart out*, *a fat cat*. Ideational idioms convey packages of information about participants, actions, and events, as well as about their attributes and circumstances in the world. Interpersonal expressions fulfill an interactive function. They are high in evaluative and attitudinal information. The primary function of relational idioms is to make explicit the semantic unity of a discourse and strengthen its cohesion and coherence, arguments and narratives being especially good examples of discourse types using them. Fernando's functional categorization (1996) is not intended to be exhaustive, especially in its sub-categorizations. Take the subtypes of ideational idioms for instance:

Actions	<i>do a U-turn</i>
	<i>spill the beans</i>
	<i>twist someone's arm</i>
	<i>wave/offer/ hold out the olive branch</i>
	<i>wear different hats</i>
Events	<i>a tough ride</i>
	<i>have blood on one's hands</i>
	<i>out of one's depth</i>
	<i>out of the mouth of babes</i>
Situations	<i>turning point</i>
	<i>be in deep water</i>
	<i>be in the same boat</i>
	<i>be up a gum tree</i>
	<i>be in a pickle</i>
People and things	<i>a back-seat driver</i>
	<i>a fat cat</i>
	<i>a lounge lizard</i>
	<i>a red herring</i>
	<i>a scarlet woman</i>
Evaluations	<i>a fish out of water</i>
	<i>a Trojan horse</i>
	<i>turn back the clock</i>

Emotions

the tip of the iceberg
a lump in one's throat
down in the dumps
green with envy
walk on air
pile on the agony/gloom

Ideational idioms have been the staple of scholarly work on idioms. The functional range of ideational idioms ensures their ubiquity in a text; they have the potential of appearing anywhere and everywhere. However, ideational idioms with their imagery or implicit metaphors are relatively more common in informal speech, journalism, TV and radio broadcasts. They are used more sparingly in academic discourse, spoken and written. The way ideational idioms are used stylistically depends primarily on the type of discourse. There are many language registers, some of which, like the humanity sciences and social sciences, favor a preponderance of terms of varying degrees of generality. By contrast, other registers like journalism, fiction, and letters are concerned with individuals rather than the faceless collective, the anonymous mass. Ideational idioms can be employed in novel ways to characterize such prominent personalities and to enliven the texts.

Fernando's account of idioms brings us to a very important point regarding the way idioms have been treated in the past. In the categorizations of idioms preceding Fernando, linguists have been mostly concerned with the form of idioms as opposed to their meaning. Fernando leads us to look at the functional aspects which idioms carry within them; how people use idiomatic language to express their opinions, feelings, evaluations, agreement with, or rejection of others' statements. The most valuable point about her account of idioms is that she considers them from the standpoint of the language user. She makes it clear that language should never be detached from the way people think, or from the functions it carries in ordinary speech and writing. The primary function of idioms is to facilitate communication and formulate our thoughts in a uniquely effective way. However, she

fails to explicate the view that the overall figurative meaning of an idiom can be partially predicted from the meanings of its individual parts.

3.2.4 Rachel Giora (1997)

Giora's central proposal is the Graded Salience Hypothesis, which states that salient meanings are always accessed first and automatically. The salience of a word is a function of its conventionality, familiarity, or frequency in a certain linguistic or nonlinguistic context. Meaning salience, Giora argues, is a matter of degree. The most conventional, popular, frequent, familiar, or predictable interpretation is the most salient meaning. The senses of words and fixed expressions are hierarchically organized in our mental lexicon according to their degree of salience; salient meanings are more accessible than less or non-salient meanings. Thus, if a word has two meanings that can be retrieved directly from the lexicon, the meaning more popular, or more prototypical, or more frequently used in a certain community is more salient. Or, the meaning an individual is more familiar with, or has learned recently is more salient. Or, the meaning activated by the previous context, or made predictable by the previous context is the more salient one. Take the English noun *club* as an example. The meaning of "association/organization" is probably more salient for most English speakers than the meaning of "stick".

More precisely, Giora suggests that idiom comprehension involves two stages: an initial activation phase and a later integration phase. The initial phase involves the activation of meanings from the mental lexicon in order of salience and prediction of meanings on the basis of extra-linguistic and contextual knowledge. In the initial phase, salient meanings are always activated, even though they may be contextually inappropriate. In the integration phase, the outputs of the first phase are brought together, so that some meanings are retained for further processing if they contribute to the overall interpretation, while other meanings are suppressed. Salient meanings, Giora contends, are hard to suppress and tend to remain active for further

processing as long as they are not disruptive. They have unconditional priority over less salient ones. Context may facilitate but not inhibit activation of salient meanings. Novel interpretation of a salient meaning involves a sequential process, whereby the salient meaning is processed first, rejected as the intended meaning, and reinterpreted. Novel interpretation must be more difficult to derive; it should require more contextual support for its derivation. Giora shows in detail how her salience-based view of comprehension is supported by the empirical findings of the studies she and her colleagues carried out.

The strength for Graded Salience Hypothesis is: it can explain the apparent inconsistencies in the psychological studies on the processing of literal and non-literal language. While some studies have found no difference between the processing of literal as opposed to non-literal expressions, others have found evidence that non-literal language is processed more slowly and with more difficulty than literal language. The available evidence from Giora's experimental studies undermines both these views, and supports a salience-based view. According to this view, no priority is assumed with respect to literality. The relevant opposition is not between literal and non-literal language, but between salient and less or non-salient language. Given that salient meanings are always activated regardless of context, and salient meanings may be literal or non-literal, there is no difference, in the initial phase, between the processing of both literal and non-literal expressions. The only thing to rely on is salient meanings. On the other hand, due to a difference between the processing of salient and non-salient meanings, an unfamiliar idiom will involve additional processing because the salient meaning will be activated first.

3.2.5 Rosa Elena Vega-Moreno (2001)

According to Vega-Moreno, idioms cannot be paraphrased without loss and that the concept encoded by the use of an idiom goes beyond logical links. For instance, the concept encoded by the idiomatic expression *kick the bucket* contains information about the manner of death, the attitude involved and something imagistic, among other

things. Hence, it seems that an adequate approach to idioms needs to account for the complexity of their conceptual representations. Vega-Moreno attempts at a pragmatic approach to idiom comprehension that accounts for the non-arbitrary relation between an idiom's linguistic form and its figurative meaning. It is based on the pragmatic framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, 1998).

Relevance Theory claims that the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition. Human cognitive systems have evolved in the direction of increasing efficiency and tend to maximize relevance automatically (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, 1998). Our perceptual system tends to pick up sounds and sights that are potentially relevant to us. Our memory retrieval mechanisms tend to activate the assumptions potentially relevant in the context. Our inferential systems tend to draw the greatest possible cognitive effects from the combination of the new information and context. Sperber & Wilson define Relevance in terms of processing effort and cognitive effects. The greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance; the smaller the processing effort, the greater the relevance.

This pragmatic theory postulates a relevance-driven comprehension procedure. Idioms are mentally represented and processed as structured phrasal concepts and understood following considerations of relevance. Idioms do not form a homogeneous group. For some idioms, one of the concepts encoded by the idiom string may provide a better clue to the intended interpretation than the rest, as in *spill the beans*, *break the ice*, *bark up the wrong tree*, *fed up to the back teeth*. For some idioms, the whole string is metaphorical, as in *pull strings*, *sit on the fence*, *stab someone in the back*, *hit the target*. Some idioms seem to involve words which are used literally, as in *promise the moon*, *cost an arm and a leg*, *start from scratch* or metaphorically, as in *take under one's wings*, *pluck up courage*. As an idiom is encountered, both the concepts underlying the individual constituents in the string and the concept underlying the idiom as a whole unit are activated. Precisely which of this activated information is accessed and processed on-line follows from consideration of relevance.

Guided by the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, the hearer/reader follows a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects. The hearer/reader starts considering possible hypotheses in order of accessibility until his/her expectations of relevance are satisfied, at which point he/she stops. In aiming at achieving sufficient cognitive effects by investing as little processing effort as possible, an initially shallow compositional processing of the string in context will often result in an automatic narrowing or broadening of the encoded concepts, so that intended interpretations start to be derived.

For example, in understanding an utterance containing the idiom *tied to mother's apron strings*, the hearer/reader takes the encoded concept TIE and considers that tying denotes virtually any process in which some degree of attachment is involved. This broad concept is then continuously adjusted as new information derived from the rest of the utterance is processed. At some point during this process, the concept encoded by the idiom string as a whole is retrieved from memory. The hearer/reader starts considering the assumption that someone with this property is too close to their mother, not independent enough for their age, and so on. These assumptions are added to the context in their order of accessibility to derive the set of intended cognitive effects (e.g., the speaker/writer's boyfriend is very immature; he needs to be more independent; the speaker/writer is unhappy with the situation, etc.).

The amount of processing effort invested in deriving the intended interpretation depends on the ease with which the hearer/reader can arrive at a set of cognitive effects that satisfies his/her expectations of relevance. The greater the contextual clues and degree of familiarity with the idiom, the more easily the idiom meaning can be derived, and hence the lower the amount of processing effort that needs to be invested in processing the string. For a familiar idiom, the hearer/reader arrives at the intended meaning directly, soon after retrieving the concept encoded by the string from the memory without the concepts encoded by the constituent words being processed. The literal meanings of the individual constituents in familiar idioms are often not

processed, though they may be activated. In understanding an unfamiliar idiom, the hearer/reader cannot retrieve any pre-existing figurative concept and is forced to rely on a word-by-word analysis of the string. The hearer/reader may process the concepts encoded by the constituent words in a very shallow manner, adjusting word and idiom meaning until he/she arrives at an interpretation that is relevant in the expected way. In understanding an idiom variant, neither retrieval nor computation alone is sufficient. Both retrieval of the original form and meaning of the idiom as well as some linguistic processing are often necessary to infer the *ad hoc* concept intended by the speaker/writer. The hearer/reader may spontaneously retrieve the encoded figurative meaning but, in order to arrive at the intended meaning and effect, he/she will also need to process the string in a literal fashion. In this case, extra cognitive (e.g., humorous) effect rewards the extra effort invested.

Relevance Theory challenges the traditional belief that the computation of the literal interpretation is necessarily prior to the retrieval of the figurative meaning. A literal interpretation is only one possibility among many and not necessarily the one to be preferred. Speakers do not aim at literalness but at relevance. The language user does not need to process the literal meaning of every encoded concept as it is encountered. Instead, only some highly accessible assumptions from the encoded concepts are processed on-line by following a path of least effort in deriving implications. Crucially, the amount of processing effort invested in deriving the intended interpretation is highly constrained by the relevance-driven comprehension procedure and so kept as low as possible in looking for the intended cognitive effects. It is because of this, and because of the context-dependent construction of idiom meaning that the effort invested in processing the encoded concepts during idiom comprehension varies from utterance to utterance.

To sum up, Vega-Moreno pursues the view that speakers do not aim at literalness or at figurativeness but at optimal relevance. The comprehension of idioms is achieved through just the same processing mechanisms as the comprehension of non-idiom strings. That is, in

understanding an idiom, as in understanding any other instance of language, the hearer/reader is guided by the relevance-driven comprehension procedure. The intended interpretation is obtained from integrating information, derived in its order of accessibility, from background knowledge, the concepts underlying constituent word meanings individually and the assumptions and implications arising from combining them. Explicit and implicit content available at the time of utterance is mutually adjusted until the hearer/reader arrives at an interpretation that satisfies his/her expectations of relevance. The amount of processing effort invested, and the depth of processing of the encoded concepts, is highly constrained at every stage by the search for an optimally relevant interpretation. Issues of familiarity, frequency of use, and contextual bias, among others, may allow an earlier activation of highly relevant features.

Vega-Moreno's account does not deny the fact that word meanings are activated and may be accessed in comprehension but recognizes that computation is costly and should be avoided whenever possible. The hearer/reader decodes the string and often arrives at the intended idiomatic meaning without deriving the literal interpretation of the expression. This also explains why we often do not realize that idioms may have a literal reading too. This account is congruent with the findings that show subjects do not take longer to understand idioms than literal strings (Swinney & Cutler, 1979; Ortony *et al.*, 1980). Vega-Moreno's account has acknowledged the partial contribution of word meaning in idiom understanding but has also shown the pragmatic constraints imposed on this contribution. It provides a semantically adequate and pragmatically plausible explanation for the use and comprehension of idioms.

3.3 Psycholinguistic Approaches

Over the last few decades, psycholinguistic idiom research has been dominated by several approaches to idiom representation and comprehension. These are the Literal Processing Model (Bobrow &

Bell, 1973), the Simultaneous Processing Model (Swinney & Cutler, 1979), the Idiomatic Processing Model (Gibbs, 1980), the Configuration Model (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988), the Idiom Decomposition Model (Gibbs & Nayak, 1989) and the Conceptual Metaphor Model (Gibbs, 1994).

3.3.1 S. Bobrow & S. Bell (1973)

Bobrow and Bell have proposed the Literal Processing Model based on the idiom list hypothesis. It states that idioms are represented in a mental idiom list, separate from and independent of the mental lexicon. When an idiom is encountered it is first processed literally, but if that meaning does not fit for the context, the idiom will be accessed from the special mental idiom list and non-literal meaning will be retrieved. That is, we must first derive the literal meaning of an idiom. Secondly, we test this meaning against the context. Thirdly, if the literal meaning fails to make sense, only then do we seek an alternative, non-literal meaning. This serial, three-stage model indicates that literal interpretation is an obligatory process and non-literal interpretation is triggered only when the literal interpretation is rejected as incongruous. It implies that comprehending non-literal meanings of utterances requires more time and effort than comprehending literal meanings.

The Literal Processing Model is rejected easily by the reliable findings (Swinney & Cutler, 1979; Gibbs, 1980; Glucksberg, 1993) that idioms are understood at least as quickly as comparable literal expressions. If expressions must always be analyzed literally before any idiomatic meanings are sought, then literal meanings should always be understood more quickly than idiomatic ones. The fact is that familiar idioms are understood at least as quickly as their literal counterparts.

3.3.2 D. A. Swinney & A. Cutler (1979)

Swinney & Cutler try to account for rapid idiom comprehension by the Simultaneous Processing Model. Grounded in the lexical representation hypothesis, the model assumes that idioms are stored directly

in the mental lexicon as long, morphologically complex words along with all other words. During the comprehension, the process of recognition of an idiom starts at the beginning of the string, in parallel with the computation of its literal meaning. The figurative and literal meanings of the idiom are processed simultaneously. However, because computing is a longer process than retrieving, the idiomatic meaning of the string becomes available before its literal one.

A major problem for the Simultaneous Processing Model is that many idioms behave like ordinary phrases, not like words. Many idioms can survive lexical substitutions and undergo syntactic operations and retain their meaning in a different syntactic form. These phenomena — the syntactic and lexical flexibility of at least some idioms — effectively challenge the plausibility of the comprehension model.

3.3.3 Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (1980)

Gibbs' central argument is that the computation of literal meaning is not an obligatory process in idiom comprehension. People can directly access an idiom's meaning without processing literal meanings at all.

Gibbs finds that idioms in context can be understood more easily than comparable literal expressions and the conventionality of an idiom affects how easily it is understood. This basic finding leads him to propose the Idiomatic Processing Model developed from the direct access hypothesis: People can bypass literal meanings entirely, and so the most familiar, conventional meaning of a word or a phrase will be the first meaning that people may arrive at. Hence, if the idiomatic meaning of a word string is highly conventional, then that meaning will be accessed before any literal meanings. Idiom access does not require the lexical, syntactic, and semantic processing required for full linguistic analysis. The computation of the literal meaning of an idiom does not run in parallel with the process of recognition of its figurative meaning. Rather, it occurs after that process, and starts only when the idiomatic meaning fails to integrate into context.

The direct access hypothesis, however, is inconsistent with the

notion that language comprehension is non-optional. In general, people cannot inhibit idioms' language-processing system. If someone attends to a word, for example, then they cannot ignore that word's meaning. Even if people are asked explicitly to ignore the word's meaning, the meaning still comes through. It has been well illustrated by Stroop's classic color-naming experiment (Stroop, 1935: 651). The subject was told to pay no attention to the word names and simply report the color of the ink the words were printed in. However, the name of the word seemed to interfere with the observer's ability to report the color of the ink. The observer was slower to properly identify the color of ink when the ink was used to produce color names different from the ink. That is, the observer was slower to identify red ink when it spelled the word *blue*. The Stroop effect indicates that the fast and automatic processing of the word name interferes with the reporting of the ink color. Given the automaticity of the language-processing system, people should not be able to suppress the literal meanings of constituent words, no matter how conventional an idiom may be.

These three psychological models of idiom comprehension are based on the same supposition that all idioms are non-compositional. The individual words comprising an idiom contribute nothing to the meaning of the idiom itself. They all assume that the meaning of the idiom is stored in a separate mental idiom list. The idiom itself is devoid of any internal syntactic or semantic structure. Idiom meanings are apprehended by direct memory retrieval, not by linguistic processing.

The three differ in relatively unimportant ways. Firstly, according to Bobrow and Bell, the literal meaning is accessed first and only after its rejection is the idiomatic meaning retrieved. Secondly, Swinney and Cutler assume parallel activation of both the literal and the figurative meaning with the figurative one having a processing advantage because it is fixed and is stored in a separate list. Thirdly, Gibbs assumes that an idiom's figurative meaning can be activated without the literal meaning being processed first. Linguistic processing may be bypassed entirely if an expression is recognized immediately as an idi-

om. His studies have shown that, given an appropriate context, the idiomatic meaning is processed faster than the literal meaning.

Unfortunately, empirical findings (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988) suggest that idioms simply do not behave as do single words without internal structure. Even when a phrase has a highly conventional meaning, the dominant meanings of the constituent words of that phrase may be activated along with the idiomatic meaning of the phrase as a whole. All the three non-compositional views are unable to account for idiom flexibility. Storing idioms as lexical items is problematic since on that basis very little modification is expected. In fact, Gibbs himself later adopts a more compositional view of idiom comprehension.

3.3.4 C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (1988)

Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) report direct evidence on the activation of literal meanings during idiom comprehension. They find that the literal meaning of *heaven* in *he was in seventh heaven* is activated immediately while the idiomatic meaning is not activated until 300 millisecond later. The Configuration Model they have proposed dispenses with the strict separation of the literal or figurative meaning. The model claims that the processing of an idiomatic string takes place literally, until sufficient input in the string renders it recognizable as an idiom. Only at this point is the idiomatic meaning activated. In other words, the overall meaning of an idiom is associated with a certain word configuration; its meaning is activated as soon as there has been sufficient input to recognize that configuration as an idiom. The specific point for intuitive awareness of idioms is referred to as the idiomatic key. There is no evidence of any idiomatic meaning at all until the key word in the configuration is encountered, at which point the idiomatic meaning is fully activated.

According to Cacciari and Tabossi, idioms vary in their predictability. Without a context that can bias interpretation toward idiomatic meaning, idioms with early key words should be recognized faster than those with late key words. Depending on the position of the idio-

matic key within the configuration, processing time may vary. This fact cannot be explained by the three “first generation” models and makes the Configuration Model superior to them.

Cacciari and Tabossi admit there are various factors that may speed up the activation of idiomatic meanings. A sentential context, for example, can direct one’s comprehension of a fragment toward its idiomatic completion, rendering the activation of its meaning faster. Likewise, pragmatic inconsistency may provide important cues to idiom comprehension. For instance, the occurrence of *kicked the bucket* in the context of an old and sick man renders the literal action of kicking rather implausible and thus speeds up the activation of the figurative meaning. Nevertheless, none of the cues is essential to idiom comprehension, though they may facilitate the semantic activation of an idiom. At least in the absence of contextual biases, the semantic activation of an idiom does not take place until after its key, whose position in the string determines when during the processing of the idiom its meaning becomes available.

Glucksberg (1993, 2001) points out further that the constituents of compositional idioms tend to become polysemous with use. He cites *spill the beans* as an example. The lexical form *spill* includes an extra sense “reveal” and the lexical form *bean* includes a figurative sense “secret”. According to his account, understanding an idiom such as *spill the beans* is a matter of selecting the appropriate sense of each of its constituent words online so that the string can be recognized as a configuration. Idioms are said to be processed literally until, at some point after the beginning of the string, the configuration emerges and the idiomatic meaning is activated. Literal and figurative processing run in parallel for a while until the idiomatic meaning is taken as the intended interpretation. Idioms can be processed faster than literal expressions because it is not necessary to process all idiom words to recognize the configuration.

The Configuration Model stresses that the meanings of the individual words in configurations can play important roles in discourse. Firstly, they can play a role in immediate idiom comprehension. Sec-

only, they may be involved in the syntactic and lexical flexibility of idioms, i. e., they might enable people to produce as well as understand syntactic and lexical variants of familiar idioms such as *not spill a single bean*. Finally, the individual elements of an idiom may play a consequential role in ongoing discourse, as in:

Harry: Did the old man *kick the bucket* last night?

Sandy: Nah, he barely *nudged it*!

The verb *nudge* in this case can only be understood by reference to the verb *kick*. The discourse meaning of *barely nudge* can be interpreted as “not even close to dying” by analogy with *kick*. But the Configuration Model is not clear about how the keys of an idiom are to be specified. Besides, it is unable to account for conceptual integrity and holism, and it does not offer any cognitive principles to tell apart acceptable from unacceptable idiom variants.

3.3.5 R. W. Gibbs, Jr. & N. P. Nayak (1989)

Gibbs & Nayak (1989) advance the Decomposition Model stating that idioms differ in compositionality. In most cases, the idiomatic meaning is somehow recovered from the meanings of the individual constituents in the string. Meaning of the individual words can actually contribute to the overall figurative meaning of the idiom. During processing people try to analyze an idiomatic expression compositionally and assign independent idiomatic meanings to the individual parts of the idiom, which then can be combined to form the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase. This implies that access of the meaning of an idiom is dependent on its compositionality. Gibbs and Nayak demonstrate how idiom parts contribute to the figurative interpretation of the idiom as a whole with some examples of quantification, modification by insertion of adjectives or relative clauses, and topicalization for emphasis (1989: 109):

blaze an important / pioneering / valuable trail
kick the filthy habit
leave no legal stone unturned
pull a string or two

pull powerful / secret / illegal strings
Those strings, he wouldn't pull for you.
touch a couple of nerves
touch a nerve that we didn't know existed

Because they have independent identifiable meanings, these parts can be quantified, modified and moved like the parts of any literal expressions.

The Decomposition Model distinguishes three classes of idiom compositionality; normally decomposable, abnormally decomposable, and non-decomposable.

A normally decomposable idiom is one whose parts map directly onto their idiomatic referents, for instance, *pop the question*. This idiom is normally analyzable because the parts *pop* and *the question* directly refer to “suddenly ask” and “marriage proposal”. The analyzability of an idiom does not depend on that word string being literally well formed. For instance, *pop the question* is literally anomalous but semantically decomposable. All that matters for an idiom to be viewed as decomposable is for its parts to have meanings, either literal or figurative, that contribute independently to the phrase’s overall figurative interpretation.

For an abnormally decomposable idiom such as *carry a torch*, the idiom’s individual components relate to their referents metaphorically instead of directly. That is, *torch* in this idiom does not refer directly but rather metaphorically to “warm feelings”, there is no clear semantic relation between *torch* and *warm feelings*.

A non-decomposable idiom such as *spic and span* has no parts that map onto the idiomatic meaning of “perfectly neat, clean and orderly”. The individual constituents in the string do not contribute, either literally or metaphorically, to the figurative interpretation of the whole idiom.

According to the extensive series of studies conducted by Gibbs and his colleagues, people can reliably discriminate among the three idiom types.

Normally Decomposable Idioms:

bet on the wrong horse (make a mistake)
break the ice (start a conversation)
button one's lip (stop talking)
clear the air (resolve dispute)
close one's eyes to something (ignore something)
eat one's words (take back what one has said)
get the picture (understand the situation)
hang by a thread (be in a difficult situation)
hit the sauce (drink liquor)
lay down the law (give strict orders)
lead the field (be ahead of the competition)
let off the steam (release tension)
lose one's grip (lose control)
miss the boat (lose opportunity)
pat on the back (give praise)
play with fire (experiment with danger)
pop the question (propose marriage)
rack one's brain (search one's memory)
rock the boat (cause disturbance)
scrap the bottom of the barrel (use whatever's left)
sound the death knell (herald the end)
swallow one's pride (humble oneself)
take a back seat (take a subsidiary position)

Abnormally Decomposable Idioms:

blaze the trail (be the very first in doing something)
bury the hatchet (resolve a dispute)
call the shots (make the decision)
carry a torch (have affection for someone)
carry the can (accept the responsibility)
cook one's goose (get into trouble)
crack the whip (use authority)
get down to brass tacks (get to the problem)
grease the wheel (make things go smoothly)
hit the sack (go to bed)

-
- jump through a hoop* (obey an order)
lay an egg (make a mistake)
line one's pocket (embezzle funds)
make waves (attract attention)
on a shoestring (with very little money for starting a business)
pass the buck (shift responsibility)
play second fiddle to (to have a smaller role)
promise the moon (offer more than one can give)
pull the plug (withdraw the support)
push the panic button (start panicking)
rear its head (manifest its presence)
spill the beans (reveal a secret)
steal one's thunder (take attention from someone)
turn the tables (reverse the positions)

Non-decomposable Idioms:

- chew the fat* (talk aimlessly)
close ranks (be supportive)
cook one's goose (get into trouble)
cool one's heels (wait impatiently)
face the music (take responsibility)
give the bounce (to get rid of)
give the sack (fire from job)
go for broke (risk everything)
hit home (affect personally)
kick the bucket (die)
knock on wood (hope for luck)
make the scene (arrive at party)
pack a punch (to be powerful)
play the field (to date several people)
raise the roof (to get angry)
shoot the breeze (talk casually)
speak volumes (reveal a lot)
take the cake (be the limit)

Gibbs and Nayak find that differences in idiom flexibility can be attributed to differences in semantic decomposition. The more decomposable an idiom is, the more flexible it behaves. Internal modification does not impair idiomatic processing of a decomposable idiom. But internal modification of a non-decomposable idiom will render idiomatic processing impossible. The parts of a non-decomposable idiom can be neither modified nor moved. External modification modifying the overall meaning of the expression will not affect idiomatic processing of either decomposable or non-decomposable idioms. The following examples can be thought of as external modification in the sense that the scope of the adjective is external to the idiom. That is, the modifiers modify parts of the idiom syntactically but not semantically:

We're initially drawn into them by the discovery of corpses and the question of who made them kick their respective buckets.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 54)

A friend of mine whose husband has been sawing some major logs every night of their marriage has tried everything.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 55)

The nouns modified in these non-decomposable idioms do not carry part of the meaning of the idiom. The relevant parts of these two sentences mean “who made them die, respectively” and “snoring in a major way”.

The Decomposition Model contends that people's intuition about the analyzability of idioms also plays an important role in determining their syntactic productivity. Syntactically productive idioms are those that retain their figurative meanings when seen in a variety of syntactic constructions, whereas unproductive idioms are “frozen” in that they lose their figurative interpretations when syntactically altered. Results from Gibbs and Nayak's experimental studies (1989: 133-134) demonstrate that normally decomposable idioms (e.g., *pop the question*) are much more syntactically productive than non-decomposable idioms (e.g., *chew the fat*). Abnormally decomposable idioms are found to be relatively limited in their syntactic behavior. People find it difficult to syntactically alter abnormally decomposable idioms because their in-

dividual parts do not refer to components of the idioms' real-world referents, but only to some metaphorical relations between the components and referents. Consequently, it does not make much sense to either focus on the individual parts, as is done when passive is applied, or bring some components to the beginning of the sentence, as is done when topicalization is applied. These findings suggest that the syntactic versatility of idioms is not an arbitrary phenomenon, but can be explained at least partially in terms of an idiom's semantic analyzability.

The analyzability of idioms also plays an important role in their online interpretations and ease of learning. The results of a series of reading-time studies (Gibbs, Nayak & Cutting, 1989) showed that people take significantly less time to process decomposable idioms than to read the non-decomposable expressions. These data suggest that people attempt to do some compositional analysis when understanding idiomatic phrases. When an idiom is decomposable, readers can assign independent meanings to its individual parts and will quickly recognize how these meaningful parts combine to form the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase. On the other hand, a strict compositional analysis of semantically non-decomposable idioms provides little information about the figurative meanings of these expressions. Consequently, meanings of non-decomposable phrases require additional processing effort.

Gibbs and Nayak stress that their advocacy of the Idiom Decomposition Model does not mean that no other variables influence the syntactic behavior of idioms. It is clear that the metaphoric relations between an idiom's individual components and their real-world referents play an important role in determining the syntactic flexibility of idioms. Another source of variance in the syntactic productivity of idioms involves the age of an idiom. Some analyses (Gibbs & Gonzales, 1985) have shown that the older an idiom is, the more syntactically frozen it will be. A person's familiarity with an idiom and its figurative meaning has also been found to be a significant predictor of syntactic flexibility (Reagan, 1987). Familiarity might enhance language-users' awareness of what the individual components in an idiom

contribute to its overall figurative interpretation. Finally, the frequency of an idiom in the language might also affect people's intuitions about its syntactic versatility. An individual's limited experience with an infrequent idiom should have some influence on that person's perception of the analyzability of the expression.

The Decomposition Model has been highly influential and well tested (Cacciari, 1993; Gibbs, Nayak & Cutting, 1989; Gibbs, Nayak, Bolton & Keppel, 1989). The essence lies in its assertion that whatever account of idioms is proposed, it needs to acknowledge the role that constituent words play in their comprehension.

The Decomposition Model is additionally appealing because of its strong predictions about the syntactic flexibility of idioms. This is in contrast with the Configuration Model under which syntactic flexibility seems a more or less arbitrary factor. The Configuration Model makes no distinction between compositional and non-compositional idioms: The meaning of any idiom is accessed as soon as the configuration is recognized. Idiomatic processing of a string is dependent on the presence of the key words, in any order. The difference in syntactic flexibility of idioms is unaccounted for. The Decomposition Model has initiated detailed research on the construct of decomposability and the role of syntactic productivity in people's interpretation of idioms. Lack of the focus on compositionality might be one reason why the results of the previous four models are very heterogeneous and difficult to compare. Gibbs and his colleagues have started the systematic investigation of an idiom's degree of decomposability, which is an influencing variable with regard to comprehension or representation.

3.3.6 R. W. Gibbs, Jr. *et al.* (1990-1995)

With the development of his psycholinguistic research, Gibbs and his colleagues realize that the Decomposition Model is limited to the linguistic level, whereas conceptual aspects during idiom comprehension are not considered. They are greatly inspired by the work of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), who assume that language use is constrained and motivated by pre-existing metaphorical schemas in our mind.

These deep-seated conceptual metaphors are supposed to be grounded in our bodily experience and embedded in our cultural and ideological framework. Therefore, Gibbs and his colleagues (Gibbs, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990; Nayak & Gibbs, 1990) carry out an investigation of idioms at the cognitive level to determine the degree to which conceptual metaphors motivate the meaning of idioms. Their reaction time studies indicate that conceptual metaphors are automatically activated during idiom comprehension. The Conceptual Metaphor Model proposed is the product of their persistent empirical studies.

Gibbs and his co-researchers claim that quite a number of basic conceptual metaphors can be observed in idioms. One example is the conceptual metaphor DANGER IS FIRE or DANGER IS HEAT, as in

a baptism of fire
a hot potato
get one's fingers burned
go up in smoke
in the hot seat
play with fire
sit on a volcano

Another example is SITUATIONS ARE VEHICLES which can be seen in

a sinking ship
abandon ship
in the same boat
miss the boat/bus
rock the boat
run a tight ship

A further conceptual metaphor is LIFE IS SEA:

a fish out of water
batten down the hatches
be plain sailing
go off the deep end
in deep water

keep one's head above water
nail one's colors to the mast
out of one's depth
sail close to the wind
sail under false colors
swim with the tide
take the plunge
take the wind out of someone's sails
test the water(s)
the calm before a storm
tread water
trim one's sails

The Conceptual Metaphor Model suggests that people have consistent mental images, including the causes and consequences of actions in their mental images, for different idioms with similar figurative meanings (Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990). For anger, people share the knowledge about the behavior of heated fluid or vapor building up and escaping from containers. Thus when understanding an idiom for anger, people's metaphorical mapping of knowledge from a source domain (heat or internal pressure in a container) onto a target domain (the anger emotion) helps them achieve the intended interpretation. These metaphorical mappings between source and target domain knowledge are often conventionalized so that they become a spontaneous part of our everyday cognition.

Gibbs and his collaborators further clarify that in the case of decomposable idioms, the mapping between an individual component and its idiomatic referent is more transparent or conventional. In the idiom *let off the steam* for instance, *let off* and *steam* are mapped with their figurative referents "release" and "anger" effortlessly because the underlined conceptual metaphors are MIND IS A CONTAINER and ANGER IS HEAT IN A CONTAINER (Lakoff, 1987: 380). In this case, the mapping from the literal meaning of *steam* through the conceptual metaphors to the figurative meaning anger is empirically and cognitively understandable. With abnormally decomposable idi-

oms the mapping is less transparent or less conventional. Thus, the idiom *spill the beans* has the noun *beans* that only indirectly relates to the concept of “secret”, though the verb *spill* directly maps onto the idea of “revealing” or “exposing”. The conceptual metaphors for the idiom are MIND IS A CONTAINER and IDEAS ARE PHYSICAL ENTITIES. Finally, in the case of non-decomposable idioms such as *shoot the breeze*, none of its individual components can be mapped with the meanings of the words in its idiomatic definition “to talk without purpose”. There is no discernible conceptual metaphor at work.

It is noteworthy that, even though we may have many idiomatic phrases that refer to a single concept, some of these idioms may be motivated by different underlying conceptual metaphors. For instance, the idioms *blow your stack* and *jump down your throat* both express extreme degrees of anger and both belong to the angry behavior prototype. Yet each reflects a separate conceptual metaphor. The former reflects ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER. The latter reflects ANGRY BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR. People’s judgments about the appropriateness of an idiom are definitely influenced by coherence between the metaphorical information in a discourse context and the conceptual metaphor underlying an idiom’s figurative meaning.

Another important consequence of the conceptual view of idioms is that they should not be identical in meaning to their literal paraphrases. For example, idioms like *spill the beans* cannot simply be paraphrased as “to reveal a secret”. Literal paraphrases are not constrained by conceptual metaphors in the way idioms are limited. Consequently, phrases such as *reveal the secret* will be appropriate in most contexts regardless of the cause of the revelation, the intentionality of the act, or the manner in which it is done. This is not the case for *spill the beans*. Idioms have very specific figurative meanings derived from the underlying conceptual metaphors that motivate their figurative interpretations. Literal phrases are not motivated by the same conceptual metaphors and consequently are less specific in meaning. There are also

semantic as well pragmatic constraints on idioms' use that go beyond the scope of a simple paraphrase. These constraints, such as conceptual metaphors, semantic nuances and context coherence, show that people possess much more knowledge of idioms than simple paraphrases.

In sum, according to Gibbs, conceptual metaphors are figurative schemas of thought which are nonlinguistic and represented at a general cognitive level. Figurative meanings of idioms are motivated by various conceptual metaphors that exist independently as part of our conceptual system. This model offers a very important insight into the ways in which features may be systematically transferred between source and target domains. It is not intended to provide clear-cut rules for the interpretation of an idiom. Rather an awareness of underlying metaphorical schemas is pedagogically valuable. It can help by foregrounding similarities and providing a basis from which unfamiliar idioms can be understood. While not all idioms are explainable in terms of metaphorical constructs, there are very clearly strong metaphorical systems at work within quite a few idioms. In a sense idioms are products of our conceptual system and not simply a matter of language. We can make use of conventional real-world knowledge about the nature of things to interpret figurative meanings.

Although highly influential, this model is not free from criticism (Keysar & Bly, 1999; Glucksberg *et al.*, 1995). Keysar and Bly investigate the transparency of idioms and argue that conceptual metaphors only account for a few cases and that intuitions concerning transparency and conceptual metaphors are partly a product of the links created as a result of the conventional use of the idiom. Glucksberg and his colleagues conduct empirical studies on the extent to which conceptual metaphors motivate the meaning of idioms but fail to find evidence for automatic activation.

In spite of voice of criticism, the strength of the Conceptual Metaphor Model is undeniable. With the identification of conceptual metaphors, it implies that when people encounter idioms in discourse, three kinds of meanings are available: the specific meaning assigned to

the idiom, the meaning(s) of the linguistic constituents, and the meaning(s) of the conceptual metaphor(s). In addition, the conceptual view of idioms offers a reasonable alternative to the traditional, dead metaphor view of idioms. However, it is inappropriate to conclude that people automatically instantiate conceptual metaphors each and every time they encounter an idiom. The Conceptual Metaphor Model does not suggest that all idioms are motivated by conceptual metaphors. It does not necessarily predict that conceptual metaphors influence all aspects of idiom understanding. Quite a few idioms are dead indeed or have meanings that are arbitrarily determined as matters of convention. At the same time, there exists a wide range of idioms such as *by and large*, *go for broke* that resist a conceptual analysis. Yet, a large proportion of idioms can be understood as being motivated partially by conceptual metaphors which are very much alive and part of our everyday thinking and reasoning. Idiomatic language is remarkably complex and each idiom demands its own analysis in terms of its syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and conceptual properties.

Interdisciplinarity has become part of idiom research. Linguists supply the facts and analyses on which psycholinguists base their models and experiments; psycholinguists in turn confront linguistic models with psycholinguistic findings. Various studies on idiom comprehension in linguistics and psycholinguistics have tackled issues such as whether literal meanings contribute to idiom processing, whether context facilitates recognition of idiomatic meanings, whether idioms are decomposable and whether conceptual metaphors play significant roles in how idioms are understood. The theoretical models that have been examined do not, and should not, proclaim that there is a single answer to the question of how idioms are understood. As we learn more about the complexity of idioms, it seems increasingly likely that no single theory or model can account for all kinds of idioms and all kinds of discourse situations. The elaboration of idioms leaves us, at present, with no other alternative than to embrace the plurality of theories that have been proposed to account for different aspects of idioms.

Chapter Four

Flexibility & Productivity of Idioms

Various studies have been directed towards the idiom's lexical and syntactic flexibility. Gibbs and his colleagues (1989:105) examine the relationship between analyzability and flexibility by classifying idioms into three types: normally decomposable, abnormally decomposable and non-decomposable. They find that decomposable idioms are more lexically and syntactically flexible than abnormally decomposable and non-decomposable idioms. For example, normally decomposable idioms are acceptable as pronominalized constructions. However, people are less willing to use abnormally decomposable and non-decomposable idioms in pronominalized constructions. The findings confirm a strong relationship between an idiom's internal semantics and its lexical or syntactic versatility.

Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 228) classify idioms as analyzable-opaque (e.g., *kick the bucket*), which allow no lexical substitution and little syntactic flexibility; analyzable-transparent (e.g., *break the ice*), which allow both types of alteration if the semantics of each element, the relationship among elements, and the overall meaning are respected; quasi-metaphorical (e.g., *give up the ship*), which allow both types of flexibility if the metaphorical nature is respected; and non-analyzable (e.g., *by and large*), which permit no change.

Nunberg and Wasow (1994) argue for a distinction between "idiomatic phrases" (e.g., *saw logs* "snore"), where the idiomatic meaning is not distributed over the parts, and "idiomatic combinations" (e.g., *spill the beans* "disclose the information"), where the

parts carry identifiable portions of that idiomatic meaning. Idiomatic phrases are opaque and non-decomposable, whereas idiomatic combinations are opaque but decomposable. Idiomatic combinations tend to be available for lexical variation and syntactic transformation. They can be modified (*leave no legal stone unturned*), quantified (*touch a couple of nerves*), negated (*not spill a single bean*), pluralized (*drop a hint/drop hints*), passivized (*the decks were cleared*), topicalized (*his closets, you might find skeletons in*), nominalized (*running of the gauntlet*), elliptical (*my goose is cooked but yours isn't*), and changed in order (*put a good face on*).

4.1 Lexical Flexibility

Idioms are idiosyncratic syntactic structures which can be more or less fixed. They have canonical forms. It means for each idiom there is a particular fixed phrase which is conventionally recognized by speakers of the language as the normal form this idiom takes, and which is used much frequently. Examples of canonical forms are *run the show*, *call the shots* and *make waves*. Though idioms have strongly preferred canonical forms, yet they frequently occur in non-canonical forms. The lexical integrity of idioms is not always inviolate. Variation is very widespread within idioms. The results of Gibbs' (1989) and Glucksberg's (1991) studies show that the canonical forms of idioms are subject to considerable lexical variations. Parts of idioms can be substituted, modified, deleted or inverted without their original implications being changed at the same time. The occurrence of idiom variation is too common to be ignored. According to Riehemann (2001), on average, the canonical forms of idioms account for about 75% of the occurrences of decomposable idioms and 97% of the occurrences of non-decomposable idioms. Decomposable idioms show much more variation than non-decomposable idioms (25% vs. 3%) both in terms of varied examples and in terms of types of variation. The common use of idiom variants in everyday speech provides evidence of the flexibility and creativity of our minds. Lexical flexibility of idioms enables the

language user to manipulate them in the service of particular communication intent and unusual effects.

4.1.1 Structural Variety

Idioms cover a great range of construction patterns. According to Cowie and his colleagues (1993 xi), the majority of English idioms can be classified under two general headings: clause idioms and phrase idioms. Within these major groupings are several dominant sub-categories. The most common clause patterns include: [verb + complement] pattern, [verb + direct object] pattern, [verb + direct object + complement] pattern, [verb + indirect object + direct object] pattern, and [verb + direct object + adjunct] pattern.

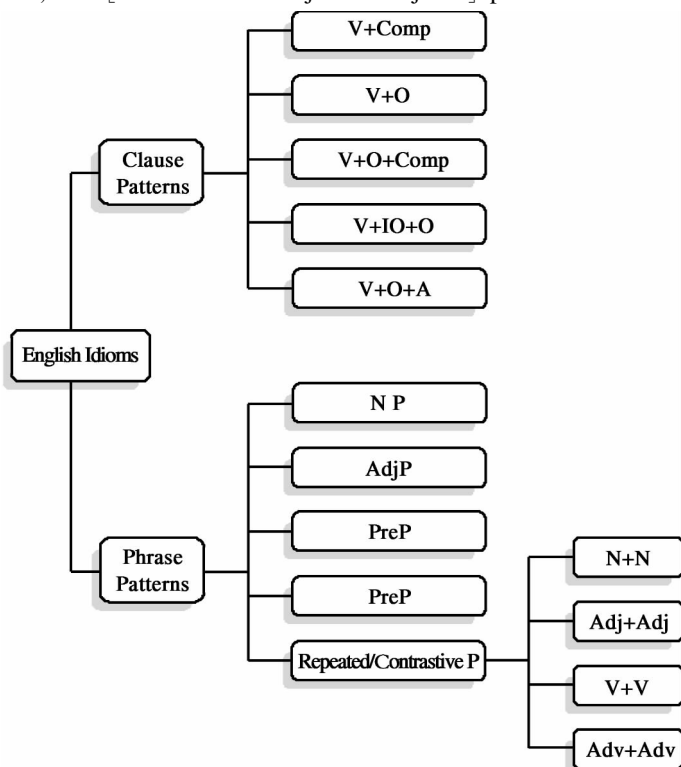


Figure 4.1.1 Structural Classification of English Idioms

[V + Comp]

pattern

bend over backwards
(not) come amiss
go berserk
be a dab hand at something
be a real ringer for someone
be all Greek to someone
be downhill all the way
be for the birds
be half the battle
be loud in one's praise
be new to the game
be no great shakes
be no oil painting
be sitting pretty
be taken short
be tantamount to something
be the bee's knees
be the cat's pajamas
be the drink talking
be the thin end of the wedge
be three sheets in the wind
be touch and go
bulk large
come alive
come clean
come true
come unstuck
fall flat
fall short
feel the part
get even with
get high on something
get uptight
go blue in the face

go broke
go crackers
go haywire
go native
jump through hoops
mean curtains
preach to the choir
prove too hot to handle
steer clear of something
wear thin

[V + O] pattern *bay the moon*
beat the band
beggar all description
bell the cat
bite the dust
blacken the picture
blaze the trail
blow one's mind
blow one's own trumpet
blow one's top
blow the gaff
box one's ears
break cover
break fresh ground
break one's duck
break one's fall
break one's neck
break the bank
break the ice
break the spell
bridle one's tongue
brook no delay
burn bridges
burn one's fingers

burn the midnight oil
bury the hatchet
carry one's cross
carry the can
catch someone's fancy
cause a ripple
change one's spots
chew the fat
clear the air
clear the decks
click one's heels
climb the wall
clip someone's wings
cook one's goose
cook the books
cool one's heels
corner the market
count one's chicken
cover one's tracks
crack a bottle
cry wolf
cut one's own throat
cut the Gordian knot
(not) cut the mustard
dig a pit
dish the dirt
do one's nut
down tools
draw blood
draw someone's fire
drive a hard bargain
drive a roaring trade
earn one's keep
eat humble pie

explore a myth
face the music
feather one's own nest
fight a losing battle
find one's feet
find one's tongue
fit / foot the bill
flog a dead horse
flutter the doves
fly the coop
fly the flag
generate lots of buzz
get a double take
get a whiff of something
get someone's goat
gild the lily
hatch a plot
hit the bottle
hit the hay
hit the jackpot
hold one's liquor
hold the floor
hold the purse strings
hold the ring
jump the gun
jump the queue
keep the ring
know one's onions
know the ropes
line one's pocket
lose one's grip
lose one's marbles
lose one's shirt
lose the thread

marry money
meet one's maker
meet one's match
meet one's Waterloo
miss the boat
move heaven and earth
never bat an eyelid
not mince one's words
open Pandora's box
open the ball
open the floodgates
overstep the mark
pass the buck
pocket one's pride
pull the plug
raise Cain
rally the troops
rule the roost
run the gauntlet
rush one's fences
score a bull's eye
scrape the barrel
scratch the surface
see service
sell the pass
settle one's hash
shed crocodile tears
shoot one's bolt
show one's hand
smell a rat
soft pedal something
soothe the savage breast
sound the knell of something
sow the dragon's teeth

sow the seeds of something
spike someone's guns
spill the beans
splice the mainbrace
split hairs
spread one's net
spread one's wings
spring a leak
square the circle
stand the strain
stay the course
steal someone's thunder
steal the scene / show
stem the flow / tide
strengthen someone's hands
stretch the arm of coincidence
strike a bad patch
strike a chord
strike gold
sugar the pill
swap horses in mid-stream
sweat blood
take a back seat
take a firm line
take a knock
take a lot of sticks
take a powder
take a step
take one's medicine
take someone's drift
take someone's measure
take the biscuit / cake
take the floor
take the plunge

take the rap
take the strain
take umbrage at something
take wing
talk shop
tar and feather someone
tell tales
tighten one's belt
toe the line
top the bill
touch one's forelock
tread water
turn one's coat
turn the corner
turn the scale
upset someone's applecart
use one's loaf
walk a tightrope
walk the plank
warm the cockles
watch every penny
watch one's tongue
wave a magic wand
wave the flag
wear one's hat
wear the trousers
weather / ride the storm
weave one's spell
weigh anchor
weigh one's words
weigh the evidence
wet behind the ears
wet one's whistle
wet the baby's head

[V + O +
Comp] pattern

win the day
work the oracle
worship the ground someone treads on
wreak havoc
wring one's hands
wring one's neck
catch someone napping
bleed someone white
catch someone red-handed
drive someone mad
eat someone alive
find someone wanting
get something straight
get one's nose out of joint
hold someone / something dear
keep one's powder dry
kill something stone dead
leave someone standing
milk someone dry
paint the town red
put the record straight
send someone crazy
set one's sights high
shake someone rigid
stop something stone dead
strike someone dumb
sweep the board clean
 [V + IO + O]
 pattern
give someone the tip
do oneself a disservice
do someone / something justice
do someone a favor
do someone a good turn
do someone credit
drop someone a line

[V + O + A]
pattern

give someone a big hand
give someone a rough ride
sell someone a pup
show someone a clean pair of heels
deal someone a blow
spin someone a yarn
burn the candle at both ends
avoid something like the plague
beard the lion in his den
blow something sky-high
carry something too far
cast one's net wide
draw it mild
fit someone like a glove
flay someone alive
keep something under wraps
make bricks without straw
make one's flesh creep
need something like a hole in the head
pack someone like sardines
put a stake in the ground
put one's foot in one's mouth
rub salt in an old wound
sell something short
take something amiss
take something for gospel
take something hard
tell a hawk from a handsaw
throw cold water over something
treat someone like dirt
trip the light fantastic
watch something like a hawk
wear one's learning lightly

As for phrase idioms, the most commonly occurring patterns are

noun phrase pattern, adjective phrase pattern, prepositional phrase pattern, adverbial phrase pattern, and phrase pattern with a repeated or contrastive element, which may be a noun, adjective, verb, or adverb.

[NP] pattern

a pain in the neck
a big fish in a little pond
a big shot
a bitter pill to swallow
a blessing in disguise
a blind alley
a blind spot
a blood bath
a blot on the landscape
a bolt from the blue
a brass farthing
a bright spark
a buffer zone
a bundle of nerves
a calamity Jane
a can of worms
a captive audience
a cardinal error
a cash cow
a chapter of accidents
a chequered career
a chink in one's armor
a chip off the old block
a chosen vessel
a city slicker
a clean sheet
a close call
a closed shop
a cock and bull story
a cog in the machine

a cold fish
a cold snap
a cool hand on a fevered brow
a counsel of perfection
a damp squib
a dead duck
a den of thieves
a different kettle of fish
a dog-eat-dog world
a dog's dinner
a double cross
a doubting Thomas
a drop in the bucket
a drug on the market
a dummy run
a Dutch treat
a fairy tale
a false dawn
a family tree
a feast for the eyes
a feather in one's cap
a fisherman's story
a flight of fancy
a gold mine
a good mixer
a good Samaritan
a Gordian knot
a grass widow
a guiding star
a guinea pig
a hat trick
a home bird
a hornets' nest
a horse of another color

a hot spot
a jack in an office
a lightning visit
a lion in the path
a lone wolf
a low profile
a ministering angel
a mixed blessing
a mixed-up kid
a moonlight flit
a nail in someone's coffin
a narrow shave
a one-man band
a paper tiger
a Roman holiday
a rough diamond
a round robin
a roving eye
a rule of thumb
a sacred cow
a shining light
a short fuse
a shot in the dark
a shrinking violet
a sitting duck
a skeleton in the cupboard
a slip of tongue / pen
a smart aleck
a snake in the grass
a sore point
a split second
a sprat to catch a mackerel
a square peg in a round hole
a stepping stone

a stickler for something
a stiff upper lip
a sticky wicket
a stitch in time
a storm in a teacup
a straw in the wind
a straw man
a stuffed shirt
a stumbling block
a taste of one's own medicine
a think tank
a thorn in the flesh
a tough cookie
a vicious circle / spiral
a Walter Mitty
a wandering Jew
a weaker vessel
a wet blanket
a whipping boy
a white elephant
a white lie
a white night
a whited sepulchre
a wild goose chase
a willing horse
a wolf in sheep's clothing
action stations
an Achilles' heel
an acquired taste
an angel of light
an apple for the teacher
an Aunt Sally
an ivory tower
an old wives' tale

an olive branch
an open sesame
an ugly duckling
an unwritten law
an uphill task
another cup of tea
Big Brother
brownie points
crumbs from the table
crunch time
daylight robbery
dead pan
Dutch courage
every inch a gentleman
first cousin to something
forbidden ground
foul play
loose threads
not the only pebble on the beach
one's guardian angel
one's salad days
one's stamping ground
one's stock in trade
one's strong suit
one's vital statistics
Simon Pure
sour grapes
sticky fingers
strong meat
the bane of one's existence
the bare bones
the black sheep of the family
the calm before the storm
the cold war

the dress rehearsal
the end of the road
the fast lane
the final curtain
the fruit of one's labor
the gravy train
the herd instinct
the law of the jungle
the lesser of two evils
the lion's share
the long arm of the law
the salt of the earth
the seven-year itch
the sticking point
the straight and narrow
the swing of the pendulum
the thick end of the stick
the third degree
the tip of the iceberg
the tower of Babel
the unkindest cut of all
the upper crust
the voice of conscience
the white feather
the widow's cruse
the writing on the wall
third wheel
uncharted waters/territory
wall-to-wall carpeting
wolf whistles
big as saucers
All Greek
all shipshape and Bristol-fashion
bone idle

[AdjP] pattern

born under a lucky star
clear cut
crystal clear
dead from the neck up
dead to the wide
few and far between
fit as a fiddle / flea
flat as a pancake
keen as mustard
fleet of foot
green with envy
hard on the pocket
home and dry
hopping mad
hot under the collar
hungry as a hunter
larger than life
long in the tooth
much of a muchness
not fit to wash someone's feet
not worth a row of beans
nutty as a fruit-cake
obstinate as a mule
par for the course
proud as Lucifer
quick as lightning
smooth as a pebble
snug as a bug in a rug
so near and yet so far
sober as a judge
solemn as an owl
sound in wind and limb
sour as a crab
stark raving bonkers

stiff as a poker
still as a statue
straight as a ramrod
the worse for wear
thick as thieves
thin as a lath
tickled pink
touchy as hell
tough as an old boot
true as steel
vain as a peacock
warm as toast
well heeled
wide of the mark
wise as Solomon
worldly wise
worth one's salt
yellow as a guinea
above one's station
against the clock
around the corner
at any price
at first blush
at full throttle
at one blow
at one's fingertips
at someone's bidding
at the drop of a hat
at wit's end
behind closed doors
behind the scene
between a rock and a hard place
between Scylla and Charybdis
between the devil and the deep blue sea

[PrepP] pattern

beyond all measure
beyond the pale
by any means
by common consent
by courtesy of someone
from rags to riches
by a whisker
by fair means or foul
by hook or by crook
by the same token
by virtue of something
close to the knuckle
for dear life
for kicks
from all accounts
from the cradle to the grave
from pillar to post
in a jiffy
in a nutshell
in aggregate
in all conscience
in black and white
in broad daylight
in high places
in hot water
in leaps and bounds
in one's cup
in step
in the heyday of something
in the hot seat
in the round
in the same boat
in the womb of time
like a bull in a china shop

*like a cat with nine lives
like a dog with two tails
like a fly in amber
like a hot knife through margarine
like a red rag to a bull
like a sack of potatoes
like a ship without a rudder
like water off a duck's back
like wildfire
not for all the tea in China
of good standing
of the first magnitude
of the same stripe
of one's own accord
off the hook
off one's own bat
off the cuff
off the record
on a firm footing
on a shoestring
on an even keel
on one's tod
on pins and needles
on short commons
on tap
on the horizon
on the same page
on the wane
on top of trends
on the dot
on the home front
out of the blue
out of the woods
out on a limb*

over my dead body
straight from the shoulder
through someone's good offices
through thick and thin
to someone's face
to the tune of something
under cover of something
under one's own steam
under false pretences
under someone's nose
under the aegis of something
under the counter
under the wire
up hill and down the dale
with bated breath
with flying colors
with gusto
with might and main
with one's back to the wall
with the ease of hindsight
without a hitch
without fear or favor
far afield
flat out
full in the face
full steam ahead
hand in glove
here below
like a bat out of hell
like a bullet out of a gun
like a cat on hot bricks
like a fly in amber
until death us do part

[AdvP] pattern

Phrase pattern with a repeated or contrastive element:

[N + N]

pattern

odds and ends
a boon and a blessing
a man or a mouse
a rough and tumble
a snare and a delusion
airs and graces
assets and liabilities
beauty and the beast
bill and coo
bits and bobs
blood and thunder
board and lodging
body and soul
Box and Cox
brain versus brawn
bread and circuses
bricks and mortar
cakes and ale
cash and carry
change and decay
cloak and dagger
decline and fall
dribs and drabs
dust and ashes
end to end
entrances and exits
fame and fortune
fire and brimstone
flesh and blood
flora and fauna
flotsam and jetsam
guns or butter
hawks and doves
head to tail

heart to heart
hide and seek
hit and miss
hue and cry
hustle and bustle
ifs and buts
Jekyll and Hyde
kith and kin
law and order
milk and water
neck and crop
nip and tuck
nooks and crannies
rock n' roll
root and branch
sackcloth and ashes
scissors and paste
smash and grab
snakes and ladders
snares and pitfalls
spit and polish
stage and screen
stresses and strains
sugar and spice
sweetness and light
swings and roundabouts
the birds and the bees
the carrot and the stick
the cut and thrust
the highways and byways
the ins and outs
the nuts and bolts
the ups and downs
thrills and spills

[Adj + Adj]
pattern

thrust and parry
tit for tat
town and gown
twists and turns
waifs and strays
wear and tear
wheeling and dealing
wheels within wheels
wind and weather
wit and wisdom
word or sign
fair and square
alive and kicking
black and blue
calm and collected
cut and dried
dead and alive
dim and distant
fair or foul
fast and furious
fine and dandy
fit and proper
free and easy
frills and furbelows
hale and hearty
high and dry
high and low
high and mighty
near and dear
null and void
rough and ready
safe and sound
signed and sealed
spick and span

[V + V]

pattern

wet or fine
wild and woolly
bow and scrape
bill and coo
born and bred
bow and scrape
chop and change
cut and run
divide and rule
ebb and flow
eff and blind
fight or flight
fret and fume
hire and fire
huff and puff
hum and haw
kill or cure
push and pull
rise and fall
sole and heel
stand and deliver
toil and moil
win or lose

[Adv + Adv]

pattern

wine and dine
far and wide
by and by
come thick and fast
ever and anon
far and near
first and last
hard and fast
here and now
hither and thither
loud and long

neck and neck with something
off and on
slowly but surely
through and through
to and fro
well and truly

According to Cowie (1993) and Moon (1998), correlating idiom variation with the structural types suggests that it is particularly strong with clause idioms, less strong with phrase idioms.

4.1.2 Variation Generation

Language-users tend to produce idiom variants in two ways: inadvertently, with no communicative intent, and deliberately, to communicate an intended modification of an original idiom. In the former case, unmotivated synonyms may be used in place of the original words, often without making the idiom unrecognizable. In the latter case, idiosyncratic variations are created to fit certain discourse-specific contexts. The language user intentionally creates novel idiom forms by using words that bear an interpretable relation to the original, as in *pour the beans*. This variant of *spilling the beans* communicates that someone is disclosing secrets quite lavishly. It denotes a more vigorous and scandalous disclosure of information than usual. A particular communicative intent can be inferred from an interpretable relation between the original constituents and their substitutes. Lexical variants in this case demonstrate the ability of people to create new idiomatic meanings by changing relevant aspects of an idiom's individual elements. They are motivated by communicative intentions and so they should be informative. *Crack* and *break* in *break / crack the ice* are mere lexical substitutions of one another without contextual or communicative motivations. But *shatter* in *shatter the ice* creates a new idiomatic meaning, something like "break down an uncomfortable and stiff social situation flamboyantly in one fell swoop" (Gibbs, 1994). Thus, this is an example of deliberate variation.

4.1.3 Variation Patterns

4.1.3.1 Verb Variation

Verb variation is the commonest type. In the following clusters, the verb varies, sometimes alternates with a verb + particle combination, but there is no real change in the meaning of the idiom, although there may be register distinctions. The alternating verbs may not be synonymous in other contexts.

<i>act the goat</i>	<i>play the goat</i>
<i>adopt a high profile</i>	<i>keep a high profile</i>
<i>bang heads together</i>	<i>knock heads together</i>
<i>be carved in stone</i>	<i>be set in stone</i>
<i>be driven from pillar to post</i>	<i>be pushed from pillar to post</i>
<i>be glued to the spot</i>	<i>be rooted to the spot</i>
<i>be taken short</i>	<i>be caught short</i>
<i>beam from ear to ear</i>	<i>grin from ear to ear</i>
	<i>smile from ear to ear</i>
<i>beat one's brains</i>	<i>cudgel one's brains</i>
	<i>rack one's brains</i>
<i>beat the daylights out of</i>	<i>knock the daylights out of</i>
	<i>thrash the daylights out of</i>
<i>beat the tar out of someone</i>	<i>knock the tar out of someone</i>
	<i>whale the tar out of someone</i>
	<i>hip the tar out of someone</i>
<i>bend the rules</i>	<i>stretch the rules</i>
<i>bind someone hand and foot</i>	<i>tie someone hand and foot</i>
<i>bite someone's head off</i>	<i>snap someone's head off</i>
<i>blow away the cobwebs</i>	<i>brush away the cobwebs</i>
	<i>clear away the cobwebs</i>
<i>blow up in one's face</i>	<i>explode in one's face</i>
<i>bring someone down a peg</i>	<i>take someone down a peg</i>
<i>bring something into play</i>	<i>call something into play</i>
	<i>put something into play</i>
<i>broaden one's horizons</i>	<i>extend one's horizons</i>

	<i>enlarge one's horizons</i>
	<i>widen one's horizons</i>
<i>break loose from something</i>	<i>cut loose from something</i>
	<i>tear loose from something</i>
<i>bury one's head in the sand</i>	<i>hide one's head in the sand</i>
<i>bust someone's balls</i>	<i>break someone's balls</i>
<i>carry one's liquor</i>	<i>hold one's liquor</i>
<i>carry one's tail between one's legs</i>	<i>have one's tail between one's legs</i>
<i>cast a veil over something</i>	<i>draw a veil over something</i>
	<i>throw a veil over something</i>
<i>cast lots for something</i>	<i>draw lots for something</i>
<i>cast new light on something</i>	<i>shed new light on something</i>
	<i>throw new light on something</i>
<i>cast one's net wide</i>	<i>spread one's net wide</i>
<i>catch someone off balance</i>	<i>throw someone off balance</i>
<i>catch someone's fancy</i>	<i>take someone's fancy</i>
	<i>tickle someone's fancy</i>
<i>catch someone's drift</i>	<i>get someone's drift</i>
<i>cause a stir</i>	<i>make a stir</i>
	<i>create a stir</i>
<i>change horses in midstream</i>	<i>swap horses in midstream</i>
<i>change one's coat</i>	<i>turn one's coat</i>
<i>clutch at a straw</i>	<i>grasp at a straw</i>
	<i>grab at a straw</i>
	<i>seize at a straw</i>
	<i>snatch at a straw</i>
<i>collect one's wits</i>	<i>gather one's wits</i>
<i>come apart at the seams</i>	<i>fall apart at the seams</i>
<i>come thick and fast</i>	<i>fall thick and fast</i>
	<i>grow thick and fast</i>
<i>cut something to ribbons</i>	<i>tear something to ribbons</i>
<i>dish the dirt</i>	<i>spill the dirt</i>
<i>point a moral</i>	<i>draw a moral</i>

<i>drink the cup of sorrow</i>	<i>drain the cup of sorrow</i>
<i>drive someone up the wall</i>	<i>send someone up the wall</i>
<i>drop something in someone's lap</i>	<i>dump something in someone's lap</i>
<i>earn one's spurs</i>	<i>win one's spurs</i>
<i>explode in one's face</i>	<i>blow up in one's face</i>
<i>extend an olive branch</i>	<i>hold out an olive branch</i>
	<i>proffer an olive branch</i>
<i>fall foul of someone/something</i>	<i>run foul of someone/something</i>
<i>fall into place</i>	<i>drop into place</i>
	<i>slide into place</i>
<i>fill someone's shoes</i>	<i>step into someone's shoes</i>
<i>fit the bill</i>	<i>fill the bill</i>
<i>flay someone alive</i>	<i>skin someone alive</i>
<i>fling mud at someone</i>	<i>sling mud at someone</i>
	<i>throw mud at someone</i>
<i>frighten the life out of someone</i>	<i>scare the life out of someone</i>
<i>get a standing ovation</i>	<i>receive a standing ovation</i>
<i>get someone's back up</i>	<i>put someone's back up</i>
<i>get something into shape</i>	<i>knock something into shape</i>
	<i>lick something into shape</i>
<i>gild the pill</i>	<i>sugar the pill</i>
<i>give the alarm</i>	<i>raise the alarm</i>
	<i>sound the alarm</i>
<i>go into one's shell</i>	<i>retreat into one's shell</i>
	<i>withdraw into one's shell</i>
<i>go sour</i>	<i>turn sour</i>
<i>grab the headlines</i>	<i>hit the headlines</i>
	<i>make the headlines</i>
<i>grasp the nettle</i>	<i>seize the nettle</i>
<i>grin like a Cheshire cat</i>	<i>smile like a Cheshire cat</i>
<i>hang loose</i>	<i>stay loose</i>

<i>have forty winks</i>	<i>take forty winks</i>
<i>have two bites at the cherry</i>	<i>make two bites at the cherry</i>
<i>hit a bull's eye</i>	<i>score a bull's eye</i>
<i>hit the right note</i>	<i>strike the right note</i>
<i>hold a gun to someone's head</i>	<i>have a gun to someone's head</i>
<i>hold on like grim death</i>	<i>put a gun to someone's head</i>
<i>hold one's ground</i>	<i>hang on like grim death</i>
<i>hold someone at bay</i>	<i>stand one's ground</i>
<i>jog someone's arm to do something</i>	<i>keep someone at bay</i>
<i>jump on the bandwagon</i>	<i>nudge someone's arm to do something</i>
	<i>hop on the bandwagon</i>
<i>keep one's cards close to one's chest</i>	<i>climb on the bandwagon</i>
	<i>hold one's cards close to one's chest</i>
<i>keep the balls in the air</i>	<i>play one's cards close to one's chest</i>
<i>knock some sense into someone</i>	<i>juggle the balls in the air</i>
<i>lay one's cards on the table</i>	<i>talk some sense into someone</i>
	<i>throw one's cards on the table</i>
<i>lead the life of Riley</i>	<i>place one's cards on the table</i>
<i>let off steam</i>	<i>put one's cards on the table</i>
<i>(not) lift a finger</i>	<i>live the life of Riley</i>
<i>lift a hand against someone</i>	<i>blow off steam</i>
<i>look daggers at someone</i>	<i>(not) raise a finger</i>
<i>make a face</i>	<i>raise a hand against someone</i>
<i>make a faux pas</i>	<i>shoot daggers at someone</i>
<i>make a scene</i>	<i>pull a face</i>
<i>make faces at someone</i>	<i>commit a faux pas</i>
<i>make one's flesh creep</i>	<i>create a scene</i>
<i>milk someone dry</i>	<i>pull faces at someone</i>
	<i>make one's flesh crawl</i>
	<i>suck someone dry</i>

<i>pass the hat</i>	<i>send the hat</i>
	<i>take the hat</i>
<i>pick holes in an argument</i>	<i>punch holes in an argument</i>
	<i>poke holes in an argument</i>
	<i>shoot holes in an argument</i>
<i>play havoc with something</i>	<i>wreak havoc with something</i>
<i>press the panic button</i>	<i>push the panic button</i>
<i>prey on someone's mind</i>	<i>play on someone's mind</i>
<i>proclaim upon the housetops</i>	<i>cry from the housetops</i>
	<i>declare from the housetops</i>
	<i>shout from the housetops</i>
<i>put someone out to grass</i>	<i>turn someone out to grass</i>
	<i>send someone out to grass</i>
<i>put someone straight</i>	<i>set someone straight</i>
<i>put one's head/neck</i> <i>on the block</i>	<i>lay one's head/neck on the block</i>
<i>put one's oar in</i>	<i>stick one's oar in</i>
<i>quake in one's boots</i>	<i>shake in one's boots</i>
<i>rain cats and dogs</i>	<i>pour cats and dogs</i>
<i>raise one's sights</i>	<i>set one's sights high</i>
<i>ram down someone's throat</i>	<i>shove down someone's throat</i>
<i>rest on one's oars</i>	<i>lean on one's oars</i>
<i>separate the sheep from</i> <i>the goats</i>	<i>sort out the sheep from the goat</i>
<i>scream blue murder</i>	<i>yell blue murder</i>
	<i>cry blue murder</i>
<i>set the ball rolling</i>	<i>start the ball rolling</i>
<i>set the cat among the pigeons</i>	<i>put the cat among the pigeons</i>
<i>set the record straight</i>	<i>put the record straight</i>
<i>shake like a jelly</i>	<i>tremble like a jelly</i>
	<i>wobble like a jelly</i>
	<i>quiver like a jelly</i>
<i>shed crocodile tears</i>	<i>weep crocodile tears</i>
<i>show one's mettle</i>	<i>prove one's mettle</i>

<i>show the flag</i>	<i>fly the flag</i>
	<i>wave the flag</i>
<i>slog one's guts out</i>	<i>sweat one's guts out</i>
	<i>work one's guts out</i>
<i>smack one's lips</i>	<i>lick one's lips</i>
<i>soften the blow</i>	<i>cushion the blow</i>
<i>start a hare</i>	<i>raise a hare</i>
	<i>put up a hare</i>
<i>steer a middle course</i>	<i>hold a middle course</i>
<i>steer clear of something</i>	<i>keep clear of something</i>
<i>step on someone's toes</i>	<i>tread on someone's toes</i>
<i>stick out like a sore thumb</i>	<i>stand out like a sore thumb</i>
<i>stretch a point</i>	<i>strain a point</i>
<i>strike a bad patch</i>	<i>hit a bad patch</i>
<i>suit someone's book</i>	<i>fit someone's book</i>
<i>take a pew</i>	<i>grab a pew</i>
<i>take one's pound of flesh</i>	<i>demand one's pound of flesh</i>
<i>take root</i>	<i>strike root</i>
<i>take someone's drift</i>	<i>get someone's drift</i>
<i>throw a party</i>	<i>give a party</i>
<i>throw in the towel</i>	<i>toss in the towel</i>
<i>tighten one's belt</i>	<i>draw in one's belt</i>
	<i>pull in one's belt</i>
<i>tip the balance</i>	<i>swing the balance</i>
	<i>turn the balance</i>
<i>touch one's forelock</i>	<i>tug one's forelock</i>
	<i>pull one's forelock</i>
<i>touch someone on the raw</i>	<i>catch someone on the raw</i>
<i>tread a fine line</i>	<i>walk a fine line</i>
<i>tread under foot</i>	<i>trample under foot</i>
<i>turn a deaf ear to something</i>	<i>seal one's ears to something</i>
	<i>shut one's ears to something</i>
<i>turn on one's heel</i>	<i>spin on one's heel</i>
<i>turn someone around</i>	<i>twist someone around one's finger</i>

one's finger

wind someone around one's finger

wrap someone around one's finger

upset the applecart

overturn the applecart

walk on air

float on air

wash one's dirty linen in public

air one's dirty linen in public

watch one's step

mind one's step

wave the white flag

show the white flag

weather the storm

ride the storm

4.1.3.2 Noun Variation

Noun variation is only slightly less common than variation of verbs. The varying nouns are broadly synonymous, but there are some cases where the nouns are not synonymous outside the idioms, and may even belong to different semantic fields. Variant nouns sometimes reflect general/specific distinctions.

a cat on a hot tin roof

a cat on hot bricks

a change of front

a change of face

a chink in one's armor

a crack in one's armor

a close shave

a close squeak

a cog in the machine

a cog in the wheel

a den of iniquity

a den of vice

a drop in the bucket

a drop in the ocean

a fisherman's tale

a fisherman's yarn

a flutter in the dovecotes

a rustle in the dovecotes

a household name

a household word

a leap in the dark

a shot in the dark

a lion in the way

a lion in the path

a lone wolf

a lone bird

a mixed bag

a mixed bunch

a narrow escape

a narrow squeak

a pot of gold

a crock of gold

a quantum leap

a quantum jump

a one-man band

a one-man circus

<i>a rod to beat someone with</i>	<i>a stick to beat someone with</i>
<i>a sitting duck</i>	<i>a sitting target</i>
<i>a skeleton crew</i>	<i>a skeleton staff</i>
<i>a skeleton in the closet</i>	<i>a skeleton in the cupboard</i>
<i>a sudden death finish</i>	<i>a sudden death play-off</i>
<i>a thorn in one's flesh</i>	<i>a thorn in one's side</i>
<i>a thumbnail portrait</i>	<i>a thumbnail sketch</i>
<i>a tower of strength</i>	<i>a pillar of strength</i>
<i>a vicious circle</i>	<i>a vicious spiral</i>
<i>a walking dictionary</i>	<i>a walking calculator</i>
<i>a war of nerves</i>	<i>a battle of nerves</i>
<i>add fuel to the flames</i>	<i>add fuel to the conflagration</i>
	<i>add fuel to the fire</i>
<i>an iron fist in a velvet glove</i>	<i>an iron hand in a velvet glove</i>
<i>an uphill struggle</i>	<i>an uphill battle</i>
<i>as fit as a fiddle</i>	<i>as fit as a flea</i>
<i>as flat as a fluke</i>	<i>as flat as a flounder</i>
<i>as hard as iron</i>	<i>as hard as rock</i>
<i>as mad as a hatter</i>	<i>as mad as a March hare</i>
<i>as silent as the grave</i>	<i>as silent as the tomb</i>
<i>as sour as vinegar</i>	<i>as sour as a crab</i>
<i>at the helm</i>	<i>at the tiller</i>
<i>at the top of the tree</i>	<i>at the top of the ladder</i>
<i>be the cat's pyjamas</i>	<i>be the cat's whiskers</i>
<i>be a double-edged sword</i>	<i>be a double-edged weapon</i>
<i>break the space barrier</i>	<i>break the class barrier</i>
<i>burn one's boats</i>	<i>burn one's bridges</i>
<i>burn something to a cinder</i>	<i>burn something to crisp</i>
<i>castles in the air</i>	<i>castles in Spain</i>
<i>chew the fat</i>	<i>chew the rag</i>
<i>chill the spine</i>	<i>chill the marrow</i>
<i>clench one's hands</i>	<i>clench one's fists</i>
	<i>clench one's teeth</i>
<i>cloud one's brain</i>	<i>cloud one's vision</i>

<i>die in harness</i>	<i>die in one's boots</i>
<i>draw someone's teeth</i>	<i>draw someone's fangs</i>
<i>drive a roaring trade</i>	<i>driving a roaring line</i>
<i>drop a brick</i>	<i>drop a clanger</i>
<i>easy game</i>	<i>easy prey</i>
<i>find one's voice</i>	<i>find one's tongue</i>
<i>forbidden ground</i>	<i>forbidden territory</i>
<i>fray at/around the edges</i>	<i>fray at/around the seams</i>
<i>from head to foot</i>	<i>from top to toe</i>
<i>give someone the push</i>	<i>give someone the shove</i>
<i>give the alarm</i>	<i>give the alert</i>
<i>go down the drain</i>	<i>go down the plughole</i>
<i>go off one's food</i>	<i>go off one's oats</i>
<i>hang by a hair</i>	<i>hang by a thread</i>
<i>hang on by one's fingertips</i>	<i>hang on by one's fingernails</i>
<i>(not) harm a hair of someone's head</i>	<i>(not) touch a hair of someone's head</i>
<i>hatch a plot</i>	<i>hatch a scheme</i>
<i>have a chill on one's liver</i>	<i>have a chill on one's kidneys have a chill on one's bladder</i>
<i>have a green thumb</i>	<i>have green fingers</i>
<i>have a hide like a rhinoceros</i>	<i>have a skin like a rhinoceros</i>
<i>have a ringside seat</i>	<i>have a ringside view</i>
<i>have the nerve to do something</i>	<i>have the cheek to do something</i>
<i>head over heels</i>	<i>head over ears</i>
<i>hit the deck</i>	<i>hit the dirt</i>
<i>hit the sack</i>	<i>hit the hay</i>
<i>hit the ceiling</i>	<i>hit the roof</i>
<i>hold a pistol to someone's head</i>	<i>hold a gun to someone's head</i>
<i>hot on someone's tracks</i>	<i>hot on someone's trail</i>
<i>in a jiffy</i>	<i>in a tick</i>
<i>in all one's glory</i>	<i>in all one's majesty</i>

<i>in full flow</i>	<i>in full spate</i>
	<i>in full flood</i>
<i>in someone's blood</i>	<i>in someone's genes</i>
<i>in the teeth of the wind</i>	<i>in the teeth of gale</i>
<i>jog someone's arm to do something</i>	<i>jog someone's elbow to do something</i>
<i>just the job</i>	<i>just the ticket</i>
<i>keep one's mouth shut</i>	<i>keep one's trap shut</i>
<i>know like the back of one's hand</i>	<i>know like the palm of one's hand</i>
<i>know one's onions</i>	<i>know one's stuff</i>
<i>laborers in the vineyard</i>	<i>toilers in the vineyard</i>
<i>lead someone a merry chase</i>	<i>lead someone a merry dance</i>
<i>leave someone holding the baby</i>	<i>leave someone holding the bag</i>
	<i>leave someone holding the parcel</i>
<i>lick someone's shoes</i>	<i>lick someone's boots</i>
<i>lose one's mind</i>	<i>lose one's marbles</i>
<i>lose the drift of something</i>	<i>lose the thread of something</i>
<i>make one's bow</i>	<i>make one's debut</i>
<i>miss the boat</i>	<i>miss the bus</i>
<i>monkey business</i>	<i>monkey tricks</i>
<i>mother's boy</i>	<i>mummy's boy</i>
<i>near/close to the bone</i>	<i>near/close to the knuckle</i>
<i>never set the world on fire</i>	<i>never set the Thames on fire</i>
<i>no end of a fuss</i>	<i>no end of a flap</i>
<i>odds and ends</i>	<i>odds and sods</i>
<i>on the edge of one's seat</i>	<i>on the edge of one's chair</i>
<i>one's bit of skirt</i>	<i>one's bit of fluff</i>
	<i>one's bit of crumpet</i>
<i>one's last resort</i>	<i>one's last ditch</i>
<i>open the floodgates</i>	<i>open the sluice gates</i>
<i>pack a punch</i>	<i>pack a wallop</i>
<i>part of the furniture</i>	<i>part of the furnishings</i>
<i>pay the price for something</i>	<i>pay the penalty for something</i>

<i>pile on the agony</i>	<i>pile on the gloom</i>
<i>pitch a line</i>	<i>pitch a yarn</i>
<i>play both ends against the middle</i>	<i>play both sides against the middle</i>
<i>promise someone the earth</i>	<i>promise someone the moon</i>
	<i>promise someone the world</i>
<i>put one's head on the block</i>	<i>put one's neck on the block</i>
<i>rake over the ashes</i>	<i>rake over the past</i>
<i>rain cats and dogs</i>	<i>rain buckets</i>
<i>rose-colored spectacles</i>	<i>rose-colored lenses</i>
<i>run rings round someone</i>	<i>run circles round someone</i>
<i>search one's heart</i>	<i>search one's soul</i>
<i>set the scene for something</i>	<i>set the stage for something</i>
<i>shake like a jelly</i>	<i>shake like a leaf</i>
<i>sharpen someone's brain</i>	<i>sharpen someone's wits</i>
<i>shut one's mouth</i>	<i>shut one's trap</i>
	<i>shut one's gob</i>
<i>sing from the same song sheet</i>	<i>sing from the same hymn sheet</i>
<i>sleep like a log</i>	<i>sleep like a top</i>
<i>smack one's lips</i>	<i>smack one's chops</i>
<i>small beer</i>	<i>small potatoes</i>
<i>smooth the path</i>	<i>smooth the way</i>
<i>spring into life</i>	<i>spring into action</i>
<i>stand on one's own two legs</i>	<i>stand on one's own two feet</i>
<i>steal the show</i>	<i>steal the scene</i>
<i>stick in one's throat</i>	<i>stick in one's craw</i>
	<i>stick in one's gullet</i>
<i>strain every nerve</i>	<i>strain every sinew</i>
<i>sweep something under the carpet</i>	<i>sweep something under the rug</i>
<i>take a curtain</i>	<i>take a bow</i>
<i>take a firm line</i>	<i>take a firm stand</i>
<i>take a load off someone's mind</i>	<i>take a weight off someone's mind</i>

<i>take the cake</i>	<i>take the biscuit</i>
<i>tear someone to pieces</i>	<i>tear someone to shreds</i>
<i>teeter on the brink of something</i>	<i>teeter on the edge of something</i>
<i>the answer to a maiden's prayer</i>	<i>the answer to a nun's prayer</i>
<i>the best of a bad lot</i>	<i>the best of a bad bunch</i>
<i>the dirty end of the stick</i>	<i>the thick end of the stick</i>
<i>the end of the road</i>	<i>the end of the line</i>
<i>the eye of the storm</i>	<i>the eye of the whirlwind</i>
<i>the loose ends</i>	<i>the loose threads</i>
<i>throw a spanner in the works</i>	<i>throw a wrench in the works</i>
<i>throw a tantrum</i>	<i>throw a wobbly</i>
<i>throw in the towel</i>	<i>throw in the sponge</i>
<i>throw one's hat into the ring</i>	<i>throw one's cap into the ring</i>
<i>throw someone to the dogs</i>	<i>throw someone to the lions</i>
	<i>throw someone to the wolves</i>
<i>thump the tub</i>	<i>thumb the Bible</i>
<i>tip the balance</i>	<i>tip the scale</i>
<i>use one's head</i>	<i>use one's loaf</i>
<i>up stakes</i>	<i>up sticks</i>
<i>upon my soul</i>	<i>upon my word</i>
<i>wash one's dirty linen in public</i>	<i>wash one's dirty laundry in public</i>
<i>wear the trousers</i>	<i>wear the breeches</i>

The noun variation may take the form of singular or plural of the same noun.

<i>a calamity Jane</i>	<i>Calamity Janes</i>
<i>a cool hand on a fevered brow</i>	<i>cool hands on fevered brows</i>
<i>a crashing bore</i>	<i>crashing bores</i>
<i>a dark horse</i>	<i>a couple of dark horses</i>
<i>a dead duck</i>	<i>dead ducks</i>
<i>a den of iniquity</i>	<i>dens of iniquity</i>

<i>a doubting Thomas</i>	<i>doubting Thomases</i>
<i>a dry run</i>	<i>dry runs</i>
<i>a false dawn</i>	<i>false dawns</i>
<i>a feather in one's cap</i>	<i>feathers in one's cap</i>
<i>a flash in the pan</i>	<i>flashes in the pan</i>
<i>a flight of fancy</i>	<i>flights of fancy</i>
<i>a fly in the ointment</i>	<i>flies in the ointment</i>
<i>a founding father</i>	<i>founding fathers</i>
<i>a freak of nature</i>	<i>freaks of nature</i>
<i>a hornets' nest</i>	<i>hornets' nests</i>
<i>a nail in someone's coffin</i>	<i>nails in someone's coffin</i>
<i>a name to conjure with</i>	<i>names to conjure with</i>
<i>a near miss</i>	<i>near misses</i>
<i>a necessary evil</i>	<i>necessary evils</i>
<i>a nine day wonder</i>	<i>nine day wonders</i>
<i>a stickler for something</i>	<i>sticklers for something</i>
<i>a stiff letter</i>	<i>stiff letters</i>
<i>a straw in the wind</i>	<i>straws in the wind</i>
<i>a surprise packet</i>	<i>surprise packets</i>
<i>a tale of woe</i>	<i>tales of woe</i>
<i>a think tank</i>	<i>think tanks</i>
<i>a turn of phrase</i>	<i>turns of phrase</i>
<i>a watching brief</i>	<i>watching briefs</i>
<i>a whistle stop</i>	<i>whistle stops</i>
<i>an eager beaver</i>	<i>eager beavers</i>
<i>an olive branch</i>	<i>olive branches</i>
<i>break rank</i>	<i>break ranks</i>
<i>climb the wall</i>	<i>climb the walls</i>
<i>clutch at a straw</i>	<i>clutch at straws</i>
<i>cut a caper</i>	<i>cut capers</i>
<i>drop a hint</i>	<i>drop hints</i>
<i>give a blank cheque</i>	<i>give blank cheques</i>
<i>give a hostage to fortune</i>	<i>give hostages to fortune</i>
<i>go down the tube</i>	<i>go down the tubes</i>

<i>have a bee in one's bonnet</i>	<i>have bees in one's bonnets</i>
<i>have a screw loose</i>	<i>have a few screws loose</i>
<i>have a shot in one's locker</i>	<i>have several shots in one's locker</i>
<i>have a thick head</i>	<i>have thick heads</i>
<i>have a thick skin</i>	<i>have thick skins</i>
<i>have a wicked tongue</i>	<i>have wicked tongues</i>
<i>like a bat out of hell</i>	<i>like bats out of hell</i>
<i>like a lamb to the slaughter</i>	<i>like lambs to the slaughter</i>
<i>lose one's shirt</i>	<i>lose one's shirts</i>
<i>make/pull a face</i>	<i>make/pull faces</i>
<i>make one's name</i>	<i>make one's names</i>
<i>on tiptoe</i>	<i>on tiptoes</i>
<i>pack the house</i>	<i>pack houses</i>
<i>paddle one's own canoe</i>	<i>paddle one's own canoes</i>
<i>ring a bell</i>	<i>ring bells</i>
<i>smoke like a chimney</i>	<i>smoke like chimneys</i>
<i>skin and bone</i>	<i>skin and bones</i>
<i>stress and strain</i>	<i>stresses and strains</i>
<i>strike a bad patch</i>	<i>strike bad patches</i>
<i>sweep the board clean</i>	<i>sweep the boards clean</i>
<i>take a knock</i>	<i>take knocks</i>
<i>take the initiative</i>	<i>take initiatives</i>
<i>take the wind out of someone's sail</i>	<i>take the wind out of someone's sails</i>
<i>test the water</i>	<i>test the waters</i>
<i>the fruit of one's labor</i>	<i>the fruits of one's labors</i>
<i>the king of the castle</i>	<i>kings of the castle</i>
<i>the tip of the iceberg</i>	<i>tips of icebergs</i>
<i>touch one's forelock</i>	<i>touch one's forelocks</i>
<i>wet one's whistle</i>	<i>wet one's whistles</i>
<i>take a potshot at someone</i>	<i>take potshots at someone</i>

Noun variations do not have changed meanings, but the mental images aroused may differ considerably: for example, the images generated by *burn one's boats* and *burn one's bridges*. The distinctions

are therefore greater than those between many verb variations.

4.1.3.3 Modifier Variation

This type of variation appears considerably less than that of verbs or nouns, because there are fewer component adjectives or adverbs in idioms. The varying modifiers are sometimes broadly synonymous.

<i>a bad apple</i>	<i>a rotten apple</i>
<i>a chink in one's armor</i>	<i>a chink in the intellectual armor</i>
<i>a close shave/squeak</i>	<i>a narrow shave/squeak</i>
<i>a different kettle of fish</i>	<i>another kettle of fish</i>
<i>a dry run</i>	<i>a dummy run</i>
<i>a hard nut to crack</i>	<i>a tough nut to crack</i>
<i>a hard row to hoe</i>	<i>a rough row to hoe</i>
<i>a level playing field</i>	<i>an even playing field</i>
<i>all to no avail</i>	<i>all to little avail</i>
<i>as easy as falling off a log</i>	<i>as simple as falling off a log</i>
<i>as obstinate as a mule</i>	<i>as stubborn as a mule</i>
<i>as silent as the grave</i>	<i>as quiet as the grave</i>
<i>as stiff as a ramrod</i>	<i>as straight as a ramrod</i>
<i>break fresh ground</i>	<i>break new ground</i>
<i>close to the bone</i>	<i>near the bone</i>
<i>cut a fine figure</i>	<i>cut a neat figure</i>
	<i>cut a handsome figure</i>
<i>cut one's own throat</i>	<i>cut each other's throats</i>
	<i>cut one another's throats</i>
<i>explore every avenue</i>	<i>explore a lot of avenues</i>
<i>fire the first shot</i>	<i>fire the opening shot</i>
<i>get a fair deal</i>	<i>get a square deal</i>
<i>get into murky waters</i>	<i>get into uncharted waters</i>
<i>go through a bad patch</i>	<i>go through a sticky patch</i>
<i>hard on the heels of something</i>	<i>hot on the heels of something</i>
<i>have a nodding acquaintance</i>	<i>have a bowing acquaintance</i>
<i>have a pink fit</i>	<i>have a blue fit</i>
<i>have a wicked tongue</i>	<i>have a spiteful tongue</i>

	<i>have a malicious tongue</i>
	<i>have a sharp tongue</i>
<i>hit a nerve</i>	<i>touch a nerve</i>
<i>in common parlance</i>	<i>in vulgar parlance</i>
<i>in full measure</i>	<i>in ample measure</i>
<i>in the first flight</i>	<i>in the top flight</i>
<i>make great strides</i>	<i>make enormous strides</i>
	<i>make tremendous strides</i>
<i>new blood</i>	<i>fresh blood</i>
<i>on a firm footing</i>	<i>on a sound footing</i>
<i>on a short leash</i>	<i>on a tight leash</i>
<i>on safe ground</i>	<i>on firm ground</i>
<i>shining light</i>	<i>leading light</i>
<i>strike someone dumb</i>	<i>strike someone speechless</i>
<i>take a firm line</i>	<i>take a strong line</i>
<i>take the King's shilling</i>	<i>take the Queen's shilling</i>
<i>the best thing since sliced bread</i>	<i>the greatest thing since sliced bread</i>
<i>the common run</i>	<i>the normal run</i>
	<i>the ordinary run</i>
	<i>the general run</i>
<i>the dirty end of the stick</i>	<i>the thick end of the stick</i>
<i>the happy mean</i>	<i>the golden mean</i>
<i>tread/walk a fine line</i>	<i>tread/walk a thin line</i>

There are some cases of idioms where the variation involves addition of a modifier, which can be an adjective, a quantifier or a nominal group. Thus one version is simply a fuller version of the other, adding emphasis, specificity or precision.

Addition of an adjective

<i>a change of front</i>	<i>a sudden change of front</i>
<i>a gentleman's agreement</i>	<i>an unspoken gentleman's agreement</i>
<i>a knife through butter</i>	<i>a hot knife through butter</i>
<i>a think tank</i>	<i>an intellectual think tank</i>
<i>be the thin end of the wedge</i>	<i>be the thin end of a very thick</i>

	<i>wedge</i>
<i>beat a retreat</i>	<i>beat a hasty retreat</i>
<i>beat swords into plowshares</i>	<i>beat terrifying swords into plowshares</i>
<i>bury the hatchet</i>	<i>bury the partisan hatchet</i>
	<i>bury the ethnic hatchet</i>
	<i>bury the historical hatchet</i>
<i>call the shots</i>	<i>call the daily shots</i>
	<i>call the creative shots</i>
	<i>call the artistic shots</i>
	<i>call the final shots</i>
<i>call the tune</i>	<i>call the political tune</i>
<i>carry weight</i>	<i>carry scientific weight</i>
<i>cause a stir</i>	<i>cause a considerable stir</i>
<i>come a cropper</i>	<i>come a mighty copper</i>
<i>cut a dash</i>	<i>cut a tremendous dash</i>
<i>cut the cord</i>	<i>cut the umbilical cord</i>
<i>draw a blank</i>	<i>draw a complete blank</i>
<i>draw blood</i>	<i>draw the first blood</i>
<i>fire a shot across someone's bows</i>	<i>fire a warning shot across someone's bows</i>
<i>foul one's own nest</i>	<i>foul one's own academic nest</i>
<i>gain ground</i>	<i>gain enormous ground</i>
<i>get the edge of someone's tongue</i>	<i>get the rough edge of someone's tongue</i>
<i>give someone a break</i>	<i>give someone an even break</i>
<i>go the distance</i>	<i>go the full distance</i>
<i>grasp the nettle</i>	<i>grasp the daunting nettle</i>
<i>have a leg to stand on</i>	<i>have an economic leg to stand on</i>
<i>in bloom</i>	<i>in full bloom</i>
<i>in conjunction with someone</i>	<i>in close conjunction with someone</i>
<i>keep tabs on someone/something</i>	<i>keep close tabs on someone/something</i>
	<i>keep constant tabs on someone/</i>

	<i>something</i>
	<i>keep secret tabs on someone/some- thing</i>
	<i>keep loose tabs on someone/some- thing</i>
<i>leave no stone unturned</i>	<i>leave no legal stone unturned</i>
<i>leave the lump</i>	<i>leave the whole lump</i>
<i>light the touch paper</i>	<i>light the blue touch paper</i>
<i>like a knife through butter</i>	<i>like a hot knife through butter</i>
<i>like lightning</i>	<i>like greased lightning</i>
<i>make a splash</i>	<i>make an ostentatious splash</i>
	<i>make an enormous splash</i>
<i>make waves</i>	<i>make considerable waves</i>
	<i>make additional waves</i>
<i>not a hundred miles away</i>	<i>not a thousand miles away</i>
	<i>not a million miles away</i>
<i>pack a punch</i>	<i>pack a hard punch</i>
<i>play a cat-and-mouse game</i>	<i>play an irresponsible cat-and- mouse game</i>
<i>pull strings</i>	<i>pull political strings</i>
<i>shoot holes in one's argument</i>	<i>shoot huge holes in one's argument</i>
<i>stem the tide of something</i>	<i>stem the rising tide of something</i>
<i>strike a chord</i>	<i>strike a universal chord</i>
	<i>strike a dissonant chord</i>
	<i>strike a hopeful chord</i>
<i>take a curtain</i>	<i>take a triumphant curtain</i>
<i>the climate of opinion</i>	<i>the financial climate of opinion</i>
	<i>the economic climate of opinion</i>
<i>the high ground</i>	<i>the moral high ground</i>
<i>to the life</i>	<i>to the horrible life</i>
<i>wear one's hat</i>	<i>wear a legal hat</i>
	<i>wear an official hat</i>
	<i>wear an administrative hat</i>

Addition of a quantifier

<i>cause a ripple</i>	<i>cause a few ripples</i>
<i>clinch a deal</i>	<i>clinch a couple of deals</i>
<i>fall on deaf ears</i>	<i>fall on many deaf ears</i>
<i>spill the beans</i>	<i>spill mountains of beans</i>
<i>raise hell</i>	<i>raise too much hell</i>
<i>break the mold</i>	<i>break some molds</i>
<i>lose ground</i>	<i>lose a lot of/a great deal of ground</i>
<i>shed crocodile tears</i>	<i>shed a few crocodile tears</i>

Addition of a nominal group

<i>bury the hatchet</i>	<i>bury the family hatchet</i>
<i>make waves</i>	<i>make sales waves</i>
<i>strike a chord</i>	<i>strike the Third-World chord</i>
<i>take a back seat</i>	<i>take a public-relation back seat</i>
<i>bite the bullet</i>	<i>bite the reform bullet</i>
<i>break the mold</i>	<i>break the Hollywood mold</i>
	<i>break the suit-and-tie mold</i>
	<i>break the action-comedy mold</i>
<i>lead the field</i>	<i>lead the Duma field</i>
	<i>lead the three-candidate field</i>
<i>level the playing field</i>	<i>level the mortgage playing field</i>
	<i>level the employment playing field</i>
	<i>level the international-trade playing field</i>
	<i>walk a precarious tightrope</i>

4.1.3.4 Miscellaneous Variation

In the following cases, the variation involves an inserted adverb, prepositional phrase, or infinitive.

<i>a tough nut</i>	<i>a tough nut to crack</i>
<i>be in floods</i>	<i>be in floods of tears</i>
<i>bite the bullet</i>	<i>bite the bullet of reality</i>
<i>burn one's boats</i>	<i>burn one's boats behind one</i>
<i>cause a ripple</i>	<i>cause a ripple on the surface</i>
<i>clear the decks</i>	<i>clear the decks for action</i>

fall on deaf ears

fall on apparently/seemingly deaf ears

give someone enough rope

give someone enough rope to hang

have a second string

have a second string to one's bow

in two shakes

in two shakes of a lamb's tail

lose one's heart

lose one's heart to something

on a limb

out on a limb

on one's uppers

down on one's uppers

on the button

right on the button

pass the hat

pass the hat around

put flesh on something

put flesh on the bones of something

put/set someone straight

put/set someone straight on something

see the light

see the light of day

shoot something down

shoot something down in flames

snug as a bug

snug as a bug in a rug

split one's side

split one's side with laughter

swap horses

swap horses in midstream

take a firm line

take a firm line on/against something

the driving forces

the driving forces behind something

turn in one's grave

turn over in one's grave

twist the knife

twist the knife in the wound

There are some other cases where the variation involves the change of a prepositional or adverbial particle, which is mostly conventional.

a bolt out of the blue

a bolt from the blue

a chip of the old block

a chip off the old block

by all accounts

from all accounts

by leaps and bounds

in leaps and bounds

by the skin of one's teeth

with the skin of one's teeth

by the fire

round the fire

fray at the edges

fray around the edges

further along the road

further down the road

<i>go round in circles</i>	<i>go around in circles</i>
<i>in full throttle</i>	<i>at full throttle</i>
<i>in the shadow of someone</i>	<i>under the shadow of someone</i>
<i>in the spotlight</i>	<i>under the spotlight</i>
<i>live by one's wits</i>	<i>live on one's wits</i>
<i>on the right lines</i>	<i>along the right lines</i>
<i>out of the frying pan into the fire</i>	<i>from the frying pan into the fire</i>
<i>out of thin air</i>	<i>from thin air</i>
<i>out of wedlock</i>	<i>outside wedlock</i>
<i>part company with someone</i>	<i>part company from someone</i>
<i>rap someone on the knuckles</i>	<i>rap someone over the knuckles</i>
<i>straight off</i>	<i>straight out</i>
<i>the first step in something</i>	<i>the first step towards something</i>
<i>throw one's weight about</i>	<i>throw one's weight around</i>

4.1.3.5 Variation between American and British English

It would be inappropriate to attempt any rigorous analysis of lexical distinctions between British and American idioms. The learner, however, needs to get aware of some common cases of variation.

BrE	AmE
<i>a bargaining counter</i>	<i>a bargaining chip</i>
<i>a rough diamond</i>	<i>a diamond in the rough</i>
<i>a storm in a teacup</i>	<i>a tempest in a teapot</i>
<i>a tall story</i>	<i>a tall tale</i>
<i>all over the shop</i>	<i>all over the lot</i>
<i>all round</i>	<i>all around</i>
<i>at a loose end</i>	<i>at loose ends</i>
<i>at a pinch</i>	<i>in a pinch</i>
<i>at the double</i>	<i>on the double</i>
<i>bang to rights</i>	<i>dead to rights</i>
<i>be all plain sailing</i>	<i>be all clear sailing</i>
<i>be at the end of one's tether</i>	<i>be at the end of one's rope</i>
<i>be in the firing line</i>	<i>be on the firing line</i>
<i>be on tenterhooks</i>	<i>be on pins and needles</i>

<i>be right up your street</i>	<i>be right up your alley</i>
<i>beat about the bush</i>	<i>beat around the bush</i>
<i>bits and bobs</i>	<i>bits and pieces</i>
<i>blow one's own trumpet</i>	<i>blow/toot one's own horn</i>
<i>blow one's top</i>	<i>blow one's stack</i>
<i>come to the fore</i>	<i>be at the fore</i>
<i>draw breath</i>	<i>draw a breath</i>
<i>draw the short straw</i>	<i>get the short end of the stick</i>
<i>eat humble pie</i>	<i>eat crow</i>
<i>fall through the net</i>	<i>fall through the cracks</i>
<i>flog a dead horse</i>	<i>beat a dead horse</i>
<i>get a kick from something</i>	<i>get a kick out of something</i>
<i>get into one's stride</i>	<i>hit one's stride</i>
<i>get on like a house on fire</i>	<i>get along like a house on fire</i>
<i>go cap in hand</i>	<i>go hat in hand</i>
<i>go off at a tangent</i>	<i>go off on a tangent</i>
<i>haul someone over the coals</i>	<i>rake someone over the coals</i>
<i>have an ace up one's sleeve</i>	<i>have an ace in the hole</i>
<i>have green fingers</i>	<i>have a green thumb</i>
<i>hit the road</i>	<i>hit the trail</i>
<i>in the driving seat</i>	<i>in the driver's seat</i>
<i>Joe Bloggs</i>	<i>Joe Blow</i>
<i>Joe Public</i>	<i>John Public</i>
<i>jump the queue</i>	<i>jump the line</i>
<i>keep one's hair on</i>	<i>keep one's shirt on</i>
<i>kick one's heels</i>	<i>cool one's heels</i>
<i>let off steam</i>	<i>blow off steam</i>
<i>like turkeys voting for Christmas</i>	<i>like turkeys voting for Thanksgiving</i>
<i>mind the shop</i>	<i>mind the store</i>
<i>not by a long chalk</i>	<i>not by a long shot</i>
<i>off the peg</i>	<i>off the rack</i>
<i>oil the wheels</i>	<i>grease the wheels</i>
<i>out of order</i>	<i>out of line</i>

<i>play truant</i>	<i>play hooky</i>
<i>plough one's own furrow</i>	<i>plow one's own furrow</i>
<i>pull strings</i>	<i>pull wires</i>
<i>red as a beetroot</i>	<i>red as a beet</i>
<i>rub shoulders with someone</i>	<i>rub elbows with someone</i>
<i>scream blue murder</i>	<i>scream bloody murder</i>
<i>small beer</i>	<i>small potatoes</i>
<i>take one's hat off to someone</i>	<i>tip one's hat to someone</i>
<i>the lie of the land</i>	<i>the lay of the land</i>
<i>throw a spanner in the works</i>	<i>throw a wrench in the works</i>
<i>touch wood</i>	<i>knock (on) wood</i>
<i>tried and tested</i>	<i>tried and true</i>
<i>turn in one's grave</i>	<i>roll in one's grave</i>
<i>turn on sixpence</i>	<i>turn on a dime</i>
<i>turn Queen's evidence</i>	<i>turn State's evidence</i>
<i>within spitting distance</i>	<i>within shouting distance</i>

In fact, many of these distinctions between parallel idioms are not clear-cut. There is a tendency of mutual influence: American variations become established in certain registers of British English while some typical British variations are occasionally found in American English.

4.1.3.6 False Variation

False variants are expressions which are similar in form but not in meaning, and so are apt to give rise to errors. The learner needs to get aware of pitfalls of this kind, which abound in idioms.

- (1) a. *run wild*: indulge in unrestricted activities, usually of a fairly harmless nature

The children run wild for a week, exploring every corner, climbing every tree.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 486)

- b. *run riot*: spread to an excessive or uncontrollable extent
If by that time the population was not fed, and housed, famine and disease would run riot through Germany.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 486)

- (2) a. *a bargain counter*: a service area in a store where the goods are sold at less than their usual price

You need to be fairly careful not to be taken in by the bargain counters in some stores. Very often they're full of shoddy goods that they wouldn't dream of selling normally.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 45)

- b. *a bargaining counter*: a special advantage, a position of strength in negotiation, disputes, etc., which one can use to offset, or outweigh, some advantages possessed by the other side

Comparatively unproductive groups — pensioners, the chronic sick, students in training — have no bargaining counters. All they can do to push their claims for more money is to make a big enough nuisance of themselves.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 45)

- (3) a. *a lame duck*: a disabled or disadvantaged person, ship, vehicle etc. ; an organization or business firm, not able to function effectively, especially because of financial difficulties

UCS has been labeled by the Government as a prime species of lame duck which unless it took steps to get up and walk, would be cut down as an example to the rest of industry.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 339)

- b. *a dead duck*: a plan, project, scheme or undertaking which is either abandoned, or doomed to fail

After the evictions and the demolition all we have is a stretch of ugly waste ground as a memorial to another of the Council's dead ducks.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 133)

- (4) a. *the last word*: someone or something that cannot be surpassed, or that sets a new standard as yet unchallenged

"Yield to the Night": A somber condemned cell drama

focused on convicted murderess and understanding prison official. Until "Room at the Top", this was the last word in British cinema realism.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 341)

- b. *have the last word*: be the final authority or judge in an office or argument

If the negotiations fail and the Government says that the outcome is unsatisfactory, the people must have the last word in a referendum.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 266)

- (5) a. *cast one's net wide*: cover a wide field of supply, activity, inquiry etc.; make sure that no source of obtaining what one wants is overlooked

It's about time you started casting your net out a bit wider isn't it? Most people are thinking seriously about husbands at your age.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 94)

- b. *spread one's net*: prepare to catch someone or to get someone in one's power or influence

When the police had gathered fresh men and spread the net systematically over the area, a suspect would be picked up even if it were pitch dark.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 516)

- (6) a. *cool one's heels*: be kept standing or waiting usually with some loss of dignity; be prevented from doing something one wants to do until some time has elapsed

So you may imagine how unhappy it makes me to have to cool my heels at Newhaven, waiting for the trains to run again.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 116)

- b. *kick one's heels*: find oneself with nothing particular to do

Sent to kick his gilded heels around the Mediterranean, Maximilian's liberal deportment in Italy roused resentful

suspicious — never quite quenched — in his elder brother the Emperor Franz Joseph.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 333)

- (7) a. *dead and alive*: lack animation; lacking interest in oneself, others or one's surroundings; without a lively atmosphere of active interested engagement

These civic receptions are pretty dead-and-alive affairs as a rule. You won't miss much by not going.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 133)

- b. *more dead than alive*: in a poor physical condition owing to illness, shock or injury

It wasn't till the early hours of the morning that a policeman found him lying, more dead than alive, in the side street where he had been beaten up.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 388)

- (8) a. *a different kettle of fish*: someone or something quite different from someone or something else previously mentioned; another matter, subject, altogether; another cup of tea

Peter Terson has specialized in studies of the way society tramples on instinctive adolescent energy. But his latest play is a very different kettle of fish: an amiable farcical romp.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 141)

- b. *a fine kettle of fish*: a disagreeable, muddled, perplexing state of affairs

"Here's a fine kettle of fish," John said, returning to the car. "The petrol pump's empty and there isn't another for 40 miles."

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 186)

- (9) a. *from top to toe*: over the whole length of one's body; in every part of one's being, nature, character

So the St Michael label is synonymous with good sense, and the housewife clothing her child in St Michael from

top to toe feels the warm glow of the prudent.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 208)

- b. *from top to bottom*: throughout every part of something
The War Office, from top to bottom, has been splendid, and every section, both military and civil, has spared no effort to help us get ready for the battle.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 210)

- (10) a. *hold the floor*: speak, or address an audience, at great length or with determination to finish what one has to say; monopolize a conversation or discussion
Politicians and farmers expressed the pros and cons of entry. But it was Geoffrey Rippon fresh from the Luxembourg negotiations, who held the floor.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 285)

- b. *take the floor*: rise to address a meeting
Almeyda, opening the Friday afternoon session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development here in Santiago, invited the former American Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara, to take the floor.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 532)

- (11) a. *hold one's fire*: not fire a gun immediately, because one does not know where one's enemy is, to save ammunition; refrain from saying or doing something, especially of a critical or aggressive nature, until one learns more or until the right moment comes
"He should have telephoned if he couldn't be here."
"Well, hold your fire — he may have met with an accident."

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 285)

- b. *hang fire*: fail to fire, or delay in firing; fail to be carried out and completed as expected, or suffer delay in being carried out
The completed play had hung fire for five years, with no one willing to chance his arm on a fairly spectacular

production.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 250)

- (12) a. *hot at something*: quite accomplished or able in a particular activity, skill, branch of knowledge, etc.

Ask Jimmy about it. He's pretty hot at diagnosing engine troubles.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 289)

- b. *hot on something*: an enthusiastic devotee of something
I was also hot on cross-country running. I boxed in the RAF, too, and I'm a bit of a tennis nut.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 290)

- (13) a. *at the outside*: at the most; as a maximum

I doubt if this factory makes more than 500 cars a year at the very outside.

- b. *on the outside*: used to describe how someone appears
On the outside she seems calm, but I know she's quite worried.

(Toby, 2001 : 344)

Learners need to be wary of those apparently identical idioms. There may be subtle but crucial distinctions in meaning, usage or register, which may lead to misreading and misunderstandings (Moon, 1998 : 60). For example, *pull the strings* and *pull strings* are two very similar idioms with different although related meanings: *pull the strings* means “being in control of everything that another person or organization does” while *pull strings* means “exploit connections; get something one wants by using one’s friendship with powerful and influential people” (Nunberg *et al.*, 1994). Here are some typical uses:

- (14) a. *pull the strings*

Karadzic still pulls the strings from behind the scene.

Even from jail, he seemed to continue to pull the strings of the underworld in Marseille.

He's the guy who's really pulling the strings in the mayor's office.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 74)

b. *pull strings*

The architect on the project pulled strings with city officials, who awarded a grant for exterior restoration.

He spent a year pulling strings to get the script to a large selection of well-known actresses nearly 40 and older.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 74)

Some other examples: *a shot in the dark* vs. *a stab in the dark*.

The former means “an intelligent or lucky guess” while the latter means “a sheer guess”; *give someone a hand* (assist a person) is different from *give someone a free hand* (authorize a person to act as he/she sees fit). A person *sees the light* finally understands the real situation while a person *sees the light at the end of the tunnel* is close to finalizing a time-consuming project.

4.1.4 Regularity of Variation

In addition to variation patterns as discussed in the previous section, there is a certain amount of regularity underlying lexical variations of some idioms, the knowledge of which, according to Moon (1998), will be beneficial to the learner in idiom processing.

Notion of possession For some variations, verbs such as *have*, *get*, *give*, *take*, and *develop* alternate with each other to convey the notion of possession. The idea of possession or deprivation can also be transported by a prepositional phrase headed by *with* or *without*.

<i>develop a thick skin</i>	<i>have a thick skin</i>
<i>get a line on something</i>	<i>have a line on something</i>
<i>get a raw deal</i>	<i>have a raw deal</i>
<i>get cold feet</i>	<i>have cold feet</i>
<i>get someone's number</i>	<i>have someone's number</i>
<i>get the measure of someone</i>	<i>have the measure of someone</i>
<i>get the wind up</i>	<i>have the wind up</i>
<i>give a fair crack of the whip</i>	<i>have a fair crack of the whip</i>
<i>give full play</i>	<i>have full play</i>

<i>give someone kittens</i>	<i>have kittens</i>
<i>take Hobson's choice</i>	<i>have Hobson's choice</i>
<i>take one's pound of flesh</i>	<i>have one's pound of flesh</i>
<i>have a chill on the liver</i>	<i>with a chill on the liver</i>
<i>have a chip on one's shoulder</i>	<i>with a chip on one's shoulder</i>
<i>have a clear head</i>	<i>with a clear head</i>
<i>have a constitution of a horse</i>	<i>with a constitution of a horse</i>
<i>have a flea in one's ear</i>	<i>with a flea in one's ear</i>
<i>have a kick like a mule</i>	<i>with a kick like a mule</i>
<i>have a red face</i>	<i>with a red face</i>
<i>have a roving eye</i>	<i>with a roving eye</i>
<i>have a screw loose</i>	<i>with a screw loose</i>
<i>have a sting in the tail</i>	<i>with a sting in the tail</i>
<i>have a sweet tooth</i>	<i>with a sweet tooth</i>
<i>have a thick skin</i>	<i>with a thick skin</i>
<i>have a wicked tongue</i>	<i>with a wicked tongue</i>
<i>have a will of iron</i>	<i>with a will of iron</i>
<i>have all marks of something</i>	<i>with all marks of something</i>
<i>have an edge to one's voice</i>	<i>with an edge to one's voice</i>
<i>have an eye to (doing) something</i>	<i>with an eye to (doing) something</i>
<i>have bigger fish to fry</i>	<i>with bigger fish to fry</i>
<i>have blue blood in one's veins</i>	<i>with blue blood in one's veins</i>
<i>have clean hands</i>	<i>with clean hands</i>
<i>have elbow room</i>	<i>with elbow room</i>
<i>have eyes at the back of one's head</i>	<i>with eyes at the back of one's head</i>
<i>have feet of clay</i>	<i>with feet of clay</i>
<i>have hollow legs</i>	<i>with hollow legs</i>
<i>have nothing between one's ears</i>	<i>with nothing between one's ears</i>
<i>have one foot in the grave</i>	<i>with one foot in the grave</i>
<i>have one's feet on the ground</i>	<i>with one's feet on the ground</i>

<i>have one's lines crossed</i>	<i>with one's lines crossed</i>
<i>have one's marbles</i>	<i>with one's marbles</i>
<i>have one's tail between one's legs</i>	<i>with one's tail between one's legs</i>
<i>have second sight</i>	<i>with second sight</i>
<i>have something on the go</i>	<i>with something on the go</i>
<i>have the devil's own luck</i>	<i>with the devil's own luck</i>
<i>have the gift of the gab</i>	<i>with the gift of the gab</i>
<i>have the guts</i>	<i>with the guts</i>
<i>have the nerve to do something</i>	<i>with the nerve to do something</i>
<i>keep a straight face</i>	<i>with a straight face</i>
<i>know all the answers</i>	<i>with all the answers</i>
<i>put one's feet up</i>	<i>with one's feet up</i>
<i>stick one's nose in the air</i>	<i>with one's nose in the air</i>
<i>have no axe to grind</i>	<i>without an axe to grind</i>
<i>haven't an earthly</i>	<i>without an earthly</i>
<i>not have a stitch on</i>	<i>without a stitch on</i>
<i>not have a roof over one's head</i>	<i>without a roof over one's head</i>
<i>not have a shot in the locker</i>	<i>without a shot in the locker</i>
<i>not have a stitch on</i>	<i>without a stitch on</i>

Causative vs. resultative One variation denotes a state, process, or action, and another variation signals the cause or result of the state, process or action.

<i>bring something to a head</i>	<i>something comes to a head</i>
<i>cross one's fingers</i>	<i>keep one's fingers crossed</i>
<i>get/set/start the ball rolling</i>	<i>keep the ball rolling</i>
<i>give someone the score</i>	<i>know the score</i>
<i>have one's ear to the ground</i>	<i>keep one's ear to the ground</i>
<i>have someone on a string</i>	<i>keep someone on a string</i>
<i>have something up one's sleeve</i>	<i>keep something up one's sleeve</i>
<i>lend an air of something</i>	<i>have an air of something</i>

<i>let something go hang</i>	<i>something may go hang</i>
<i>let the cat out of the bag</i>	<i>the cat is out of the bag</i>
<i>make someone's blood boil</i>	<i>one's blood boils</i>
<i>make someone's hair stand on end</i>	<i>one's hair stands on end</i>
<i>open the floodgates</i>	<i>the floodgates are open</i>
<i>prick the bubble</i>	<i>the bubble bursts</i>
<i>put an old head on young shoulders</i>	<i>have an old head on young shoulders</i>
<i>send a chill down someone's spine</i>	<i>a chill runs down someone's spine</i>
<i>send/throw someone into raptures</i>	<i>go into raptures</i>
<i>set tongues wagging</i>	<i>tongues are wagging</i>
<i>show someone the ropes</i>	<i>learn/know the ropes</i>
<i>take the wraps off something</i>	<i>the wraps come off something</i>
<i>teach someone a lesson</i>	<i>learn a lesson</i>
<i>teach someone the ropes</i>	<i>know the ropes</i>
<i>throw a fit</i>	<i>have a fit</i>
<i>wipe the slate clean</i>	<i>the slate is clean</i>

4.1.5 Variation Constraint & Comprehension

In spite of the alteration in form, idiom variants remain recognizable and interpretable. It has been widely assumed that variant idioms can be understood by means of a sequential process that involves at least six discrete operations:

- (1) Recognize the expression as an intentional variant of the original idiom, not simply a speaker/writer's error;
- (2) Retrieve the meaning of the original idiom;
- (3) Activate word meanings of both variant and original idioms;
- (4) Compare the word meanings of the two idiom forms;
- (5) Identify the relation between those word meanings; and
- (6) Take this relation between the word meanings to infer the relation between the meanings of the original and variant idi-

oms.

This kind of sequential, multistep model implies that variant idioms should take considerably longer to understand than idioms in their original forms. Even if some of these operations can be done in parallel, variant idioms still take much more time to process than original idioms.

However, the results of McGlone and his colleagues' experiments (1994: 170) conclude: Idiom variants are understood naturally, involving a little more effort in some cases, and the extra effort invested in processing them is rewarded with extra effects not available by the original form. Variants of familiar idioms are understood quite readily. The familiarity of an idiom in its original form can facilitate its variant comprehension, and the more familiar the original idiom, the more comprehensible the variant. This has been explained earlier by Sam Glucksberg (1991): The constituent words of familiar idioms acquire, through repeated use in idiom contexts, the meanings that are appropriate for the idioms in which they appear. After these idiom-specific meanings have been acquired, idiom variants that preserve the relationships among the constituent idiomatic concepts can be understood via ordinary linguistic processing. This makes rapid and easy comprehension of idiom variants possible.

More crucially, our ability readily to understand idiom variants is partly due to idiom decomposability. The semantic analyzability of idioms, according to Gibbs (1994), exerts some influence on people's intuition about lexical flexibility. Some idioms appear to be lexically adaptable surviving alteration in form without serious disruption of their figurative meanings. For instance, *button one's lips* can be changed to *fasten one's lips* without damaging the figurative meaning of the expression. Similarly, the phrase *eat one's words* can have its verb changed into *swallow* without disrupting its overall figurative interpretation. Other idioms seem to be lexically frozen. Changing any of their individual components might disrupt their figurative meanings. For example, *kick the bucket* cannot be changed into *kick the pail* or *boot the bucket* without losing the idiomatic sense of the expression.

Language users tend to be more at ease in their use of semantically analyzable idioms in terms of their lexical flexibility.

Analyzability, however, accounts only partially for lexical flexibility. It is not a sufficient determinant of idiom flexibility. Even an idiom as non-decomposable as *by and large* can be lexically varied, as when someone says *by and not-so-large* to express disagreement with a generalization. On the other hand, not all decomposable idioms can be subject to lexical variation. Take *carrying coals to Newcastle* for example. A literal, linguistic analysis yields a full adequate interpretation, provided that one is familiar with the cultural allusion. Even though this idiom is fully compositional and transparent, lexical variation as in *carrying wood to Birmingham* does not make much sense.

In addition to semantic decomposability and familiarity, the lexical flexibility of an idiom is constrained jointly by the idiom's overall figurative meaning, the meanings of its constituents, and the relationship between its constituents and its meaning components. The multiplicity of constraints on the use and interpretation of idiom variants is well illustrated by the idiom *break the ice*, an example provided by Sam Glucksberg (1991). The idiom refers to a more or less discrete event that will result in a relaxation of a stiff, awkward, chilly social situation. Substituting the word *crack* for *break* in this idiom is relatively acceptable. The concept of abrupt breaking is preserved and the metaphorical relation between the physical temperature and interpersonal frigidity is also preserved. In contrast, the word *crush*, *grind*, or *shave* would not be acceptable in this idiom, even though these actions are perfectly appropriate to the actual object, *ice*. *Crush/grind/shave the ice* will not be identified as the variants of *break the ice* because in these expressions, the relationship between the constituents and the meaning components in *break the ice* is not preserved.

Furthermore, contextual cues can enhance our perception of idiom variants. According to the results of some exploratory studies (Gibbs, 1990, 1992, 1995; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990; Nayak & Gibbs, 1990) conducted, idioms in their original form are understood more quickly than their variants. When context was specifically appro-

priate, then both the original and variant forms are facilitated. Context facilitates comprehension of original and variant idioms to the same degree. Motivated and contextualized variants can be understood more rapidly than comparable literal expressions. Our general world knowledge also plays an indispensable role in variant interpretation. The phrase *pop the questions* would normally be difficult to interpret because one usually proposes marriage to only one person at a time. If, however, the question popper happens to be a notorious bigamist, then pluralization of the word *question* will make sense (Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991). The constraints of general world knowledge, together with discourse context, seem as important for idiom flexibility as are more formal linguistic factors such as semantic decomposability. The particular processing route taken depends upon the type and amount of variation imposed on the original idiom (McGlone *et al.*, 1994: 180).

In sum, the aforementioned factors combine in one way or another in order to determine whether a particular idiom variant is applicable or not. The essential principle of lexical variation constraint is: Any lexical variations that (a) respect the semantics of each constituent, (b) preserve the relationship between the idiom's constituents and meaning components, and (c) respect the idiom meaning itself should be acceptable and interpretable provided that a reasonable communicative intent can be inferred.

4.1.6 Case Study: Relevance-Driven Variation Comprehension

Idioms are pervasive in everyday communication. The diversity of the idiom implies that no single perspective, whether formal, functional or psycholinguistic, will be fully sufficient to account for the whole range of lexical flexibility. The internal semantics of the idiom and the discourse context will always be two of the major determinants of idiom use and variation. In the following case, relevance-driven comprehension procedure provides a rather feasible approach to idiom variation.

According to Giora (1999), a language user aiming at optimal relevance should not alter the original form of the idiom unless he/she wants to communicate something other than, or additional to, what he/she would communicate by using the original form. Idiom variants should be pragmatically motivated and this motivation is measured in terms of cognitive effects. Understanding an idiom variant requires the investment of extra processing effort.

Tom came in and poured the beans!

In processing the sentence, the contextual cues biasing idiomatic meaning and the similarity of the novel string with the original idiom trigger the concept *spill the bean* in the hearer's/reader's mind. With the original idiom meaning highly activated, the novel concept *pour the beans* is now under construction.

Following a path of least effort, the hearer/reader considers possible assumptions about the concept *pour the bean* to make sense of the speaker's/writer's use of that particular string. These assumptions can be all-embracing, including the manner in which the action "pour" is performed, the intentionality of the behavior and its potential consequence. They are critical to the derivation of contextual implications and accessed in order of relevance. That is, the hearer/reader may take the meaning encoded by the original idiom and adjust it with information that arises as a result of ongoing exposure to the novel string. This process of conceptual blending and information integration continues until an interpretation is achieved that satisfies the expected relevance.

This relevance-theoretic account of idioms presents promising lines of thought which might allow us a better understanding of idiom variants. In the relevance-theoretic account of idioms, the mental representation of idioms as concepts with internal structure allows the idiom to enjoy a certain degree of lexical flexibility which is not unconstrained. Strong pragmatic principles grounded in the nature of human cognition operate to tell apart acceptable from unacceptable variants.

Apparently, relevance-driven comprehension procedure offers a cognitive explanation for the distinction between acceptable and unac-

ceptable idiom variants. The approach implies that a speaker/writer aiming at optimal relevance does not put the hearer/writer to unnecessary processing effort. An idiom variant demands extra effort and needs to be pragmatically motivated. Hence, the extra processing effort that the variation requires needs to be rewarded with extra effects not achievable by the original form or communication would not be completely successful.

However, Giora seems to have overly stressed the pragmatic motivation for idiom variation. As afore-discussed, there are quite many idiom variants that have been produced inadvertently, with no communicative intent transmitted. Near-synonyms, for instance, have been used in place of the original words without being pragmatically motivated. They simply become conventionalized with repeated usage.

4.2 Syntactic Versatility

An advance by Gibbs and Gonzales (1985) is the empirical determination of idiom flexibility, rather than relying on their own introspections. Thirty-two idioms are each put into 5 syntactic operations, and these 160 examples are given to each of 34 subjects. The syntactic operations used by Gibbs and Gonzales are Nominalization, Adverb Insertion, Particle Movement, and Passive, etc. Analyses of the data demonstrate a relationship between idiom processing and idiom flexibility, with the 10 most flexible idioms processed more slowly than the 10 least flexible idioms. According to Gibbs (1989), idioms vary with respect to syntactic operations they allow. Some idioms, as in *John laid down the law*, are syntactically flexible, since they can be seen in a variety of syntactic formats without losing their figurative interpretations. Other idioms, as in *it's raining cats and dogs*, are syntactically frozen because they cannot be syntactically altered without disrupting their figurative interpretations. What determines the syntactic productivity of idioms?

Gibbs' conclusion is: People's intuitions about the syntactic versatility of idioms are affected by the analyzability or decomposability

of these idioms. Normally decomposable idioms are found to be much more syntactically flexible than non-decomposable idioms. Abnormally decomposable idioms are not found to be syntactically flexible, because each part does not directly refer to some component of the idiomatic referent. Non-decomposable idioms tend to display much more syntactic frozenness. The syntactic versatility of idioms is not an arbitrary phenomenon, perhaps due to unknown historical reasons, but can be explained in terms of an idiom's semantic decomposition.

Based on their investigation, Fernando and Flavell (1981) suggest a principle that explains differences in the syntactic behavior of idioms: Any syntactic operations that satisfy both the semantics and pragmatics of the idiom's elements and the idiom's meaning would be acceptable, given that a communicative purpose can be served. To be specific, any syntactic operations that respect the semantics of each element, preserve the relationship between the idiom's elements and meaning components, and respect the idiom meaning itself should be acceptable and interpretable provided that a reasonable communicative intent can be inferred. Syntactic operation on an idiom will be acceptable if and only if it produces a comprehensible difference in interpretation, that is, a reasonable communicative intention for the syntactic operation can be inferred. For example, passive transforms would be acceptable as in *the ice was finally broken*. However, the passive form will not be acceptable for *John kicked the bucket* because there would be no motivation for it.

4.2.1 Nominalization

Nominalization is the process by which a noun phrase is derived from any other kind of unit. According to Gibbs and Gonzales (1985), there are two specific forms of nominalization in terms of idioms. In the first kind, verbs occur as verbal nouns or they are replaced by cognate nouns:

break the ice

ebb and flow

fall short

a break in the ice

the ebb and flow of something

a short-fall

<i>hustle and bustle</i>	<i>hustle and bustle</i>
<i>kick someone in the teeth</i>	<i>a kick in the teeth</i>
<i>lose face</i>	<i>a loss of face</i>
<i>rap someone on the knuckles</i>	<i>a rap on the knuckles</i>
<i>rise and fall</i>	<i>the rise and fall of something</i>
<i>spread one's wings</i>	<i>the spread of one's wings</i>
<i>stab someone in the back</i>	<i>a stab in the back</i>
<i>toss and turn</i>	<i>the toss and turn</i>
<i>weigh the evidence</i>	<i>the weight of evidence</i>

In the second kind, a different lexical item altogether is formed, often involving the inversion of the original lexical elements:

<i>a nail in someone's coffin</i>	<i>a coffin nail</i>
<i>a nine-to-five mentality</i>	<i>a nine-to-fiver</i>
<i>blaze a trail</i>	<i>a trail-blazer, trail-blazing</i>
<i>break the ice</i>	<i>an ice-breaker</i>
<i>call someone names</i>	<i>name-calling</i>
<i>chatter like a magpie</i>	<i>chattering magpie</i>
<i>chill the spine</i>	<i>a spine-chiller</i>
<i>cleanse the stables</i>	<i>a cleansing of the stables</i>
<i>click one's heels</i>	<i>heel-clicking</i>
<i>drag one's feet</i>	<i>foot-dragging</i>
<i>draw a moral</i>	<i>a drawer of morals</i>
<i>dread the moment</i>	<i>the dreaded moment</i>
<i>drop names</i>	<i>name-dropping</i>
<i>eat one's words</i>	<i>word-eating</i>
<i>feather one's nest</i>	<i>a nest-featherer</i>
<i>flex one's muscles</i>	<i>muscle flexing</i>
<i>fly a kite</i>	<i>kite-flying</i>
<i>fly high</i>	<i>a high-flyer</i>
<i>gild the pill</i>	<i>the gilded pill</i>
<i>give someone the thumbs down</i>	<i>a thumbs-down</i>
<i>grind one's teeth</i>	<i>teeth-grinding</i>
<i>huff and puff</i>	<i>huffing and puffing</i>

<i>keep the pot boiling</i>	<i>a pot-boiler</i>
<i>lick one's boots</i>	<i>boot-licking</i>
<i>make a match</i>	<i>a matchmaker, matchmaking</i>
<i>pass the buck</i>	<i>buck-passing</i>
<i>pick someone's pocket</i>	<i>a pickpocket</i>
<i>prime the pump</i>	<i>pump-priming</i>
<i>rack one's brains</i>	<i>brain-racking</i>
<i>scratch one's head</i>	<i>head-scratching</i>
<i>set the pace</i>	<i>pacesetter</i>
<i>shoot a line</i>	<i>a line-shooter</i>
<i>shrink heads</i>	<i>a head-shrinker</i>
<i>sit on the fence</i>	<i>a fence-sitter</i>
<i>smack one's lips</i>	<i>lip-smacking</i>
<i>split hairs</i>	<i>hair-splitting</i>
<i>stab someone in the back</i>	<i>a back-stabber; back-stabbing</i>
<i>stamp one's foot</i>	<i>foot-stamping</i>
<i>steal the scene</i>	<i>a scene-stealer</i>
<i>stop the show</i>	<i>a show-stopper</i>
<i>take the mickey</i>	<i>a mickey-taker, mickey-taking</i>
<i>thump the tub/Bible</i>	<i>a tub-/Bible-thumper</i> <i>tub-/Bible-thumping</i>
<i>tickle someone's ribs</i>	<i>a rib-tickler</i>
<i>tighten one's belt</i>	<i>belt-tightening</i>
<i>trail one's coat</i>	<i>coat-trailing</i>
<i>turn one's stomach</i>	<i>stomach-turning</i>
<i>twiddle one's thumbs</i>	<i>thumb-twiddling</i>
<i>twist someone's arm</i>	<i>arm-twisting</i>
<i>walk a tightrope</i>	<i>a tightrope walker, tightrope walking</i>
<i>wave the flag</i>	<i>a flag waver, flag waving</i>
<i>wipe the slate clean</i>	<i>a clean slate</i>
<i>wash one's dirty linen</i>	<i>dirty linen washing</i>
<i>watch the clock</i>	<i>a clock-watcher, clock-watching</i>
<i>wave the flag</i>	<i>a flag-waver; flag waving</i>

wine and dine

wining and dining

4.2.2 Pronominalization

Pronominalization refers to the replacement of a noun phrase by a pronoun, conceived as a syntactic process.

(1) *pull strings*

Kim's family pulled some strings on her behalf, but they weren't enough to get the job.

(2) *break the ice*

Pat tried to break the ice, but it was Chris who succeeded in breaking it.

(3) *spill the beans*

We worried that Pat might spill the beans, but it was Chris who finally spilt them.

(4) *let the cat out of the bag*

Once someone lets the cat out of the bag, it's out of the bag for good.

(5) *have a bone to pick with*

I had a bone to pick with them, but they were so nice that I forgot about it.

(6) *lay down the law*

Fred finally laid down the law with his son, but Buzz didn't lay it down with his.

(7) *keep tabs on*

Although the F. B. I. kept tabs on Jane Fonda, the C. I. A. kept them on Vanessa Redgrave.

(Nunberg *et al.*, 1994: 502)

(8) *drop names*

The book is strictly for members and sympathizers but as there are thousands of them, it is sure to give a lot of pleasure. It is unpretentious, it can present names without dropping them, and the tone is contagiously warm.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 159)

(9) *hold the floor*

There was no interrupting her tirade. She had the floor and meant to hold it.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 285)

- (10) *put one's foot in one's mouth*

Opening my mouth and putting my foot in it is almost a hobby of mine. I try not to but it just keeps popping up there like some esoteric form of aerobics.

(*Good Housekeeping*, cited in Chang, 2004)

4.2.3 Passivization

Passivization is the process of structuring a sentence so that the grammatical subject is the person or thing which experiences the effect of an action rather than causing the effect.

- (1) *sound the death knell*

A death knell for California Gov. Pete Wilson's presidential ambition was sounded at an event that received little coverage.

- (2) *shed crocodile tears*

Buckets of crocodile tears have been shed at dozens of public rallies.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 107)

- (3) *leave no stone unturned*

He released a statement saying that no stone would be left unturned to find the culprits.

It was suggested that further leaks of privileged information might subsequently have taken place. Mr. William Whitelaw promised that no stone would be left unturned, but again this did not soothe all doubts.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 345)

- (4) *twist someone's arm*

His arm has been twisted hard by several MPs. He has undergone a dramatic conversion and now campaigns vigorously for our exit from the Common Market.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993 : 569)

- (5) *eat someone alive*

He'll be eaten alive if he tries anything on with Babara.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 163)

- (6) *drop a hint*

His visit to France, which was to have started last Tuesday, was postponed on his plea of influenza. Dark hints were dropped about a "diplomatic illness".

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 159)

- (7) *turn blind eyes*

Blind eyes have been turned all the way along to breaches of safety regulations.

- (8) *break the ice*

By the time we'd done a similar thing in the local church as part of the village music festival the ice was well and truly broken.

(Moon, 1998: 176)

- (9) *bury the hatchet*

Those two are the best of friends now. The hatchet was buried years ago.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 82)

- (10) *tie someone hand and foot*

Having your mother to stay here will be worse than having an infant in the house. I'll be tied hand and foot! I'll go mad!

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 65)

- (11) *catch someone red-handed*

An atmospheric pressure cabinet may cause some burglars to be caught red-handed, for it is connected with the police through a central station, and the burglar unwittingly "contacts police" when he tampers with the safe.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 96)

- (12) *change horses*

Your style skids from cliché to cliché. Apron strings are outgrown, age-old rivals contend, and horses are changed

in midstream.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 99)

- (13) *clear the decks*

... ordering that all British women and children, and all non-essential British male civilians, were to be evacuated from Palestine at once. The decks were now cleared for action.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 104)

- (14) *blaze a trail*

He's a sound enough physicist and I'm glad to have him in my laboratories but I can't see any trails being blazed by him.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 69)

- (15) *call someone's bluff*

They thought of me as having definitely chosen a life of cosy provincial mediocrity and, outwardly, I had. I should have gone mad if my bluff had been called and I'd been asked to settle into that position for good.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 88)

- (16) *draw someone's teeth/fangs*

Scottish independence, the speaker said, was more a matter of personal characteristics than of national ambition. In any case, the teeth of the Scottish Lion had been drawn over three centuries ago.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 157)

- (17) *give someone a leg up*

He is determined to achieve whatever he does achieve in life on his own terms. He doesn't want to be given a leg up by his family.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 228)

- (18) *split hairs*

These days it's no good just doing surgery, y'know. The hairs of specialization are split finer than that. In America, so they tell me, they have a man for the right kidney

and another for the left kidney.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 515)

(19) *tar and feather someone*

As if to illustrate the right as opposed to the wrong way of employing IRA punishment methods, a young man at the weekend in Londonderry was tarred and feathered for looting. Another had his long hair cut for theft.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 539)

Why are some idioms able to undergo passivization and others not at all? What is the motivation behind idiom passivization? As Gibbs and Nayak (1989: 102) say, semantic decomposability of idioms partially determines their potential of passivization. Non-decomposable idioms such as *shoot the breeze* and *kick the bucket* are not subject to passive constructions. But no matter how analyzable some idioms may be, they cannot be always used in the passive voice. Furthermore, people somehow learn about the passivizability of idioms, even though they are not systematically taught which idioms are syntactically flexible and which are not. This implies that the idiom passivization has a close relationship to our cognitive abilities. According to the study conducted by Hirotohi Yagihashi (2003:52), idiom passivization requires a salient NP in an idiom, as the subject of a sentence, with a concrete referent or concept, and also a correspondence between a figurative meaning and the passive construction schema. The idiom *let off the steam*, for instance, focuses on the emotional change in a person suggesting that anger or frustration gradually fades away. If this idiom were used in the passive voice, the sentence would background the agent instead of foregrounding the *steam*, which is different from what the idiom emphasizes on.

4.2.4 Topicalization

Topicalization refers to the placement of a topic at the beginning of a sentence. It will not make sense to emphasize parts of idioms in this way unless these parts have identifiable meanings in their idiomatic uses.

- (1) *pull strings*

Those strings, he wouldn't pull for you.

- (2) *a skeleton in the closet*

His closets, you might find skeletons in.

- (3) *tilt at windmills*

Those windmills, not even he would tilt at.

- (4) *spill the beans*

The other beans, she will probably spill later.

- (5) *drive a hard bargain*

That hard a bargain, only a fool would drive.

(Nunberg *et al.*, 1994: 501)

- (6) *flood the market*

In Western economies if the market shows signs of being flooded by a commodity, be it wheat, coffee or butter, production will be cut back.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 192)

- (7) *come thick and fast*

The first guests were announced. Thick and fast they came, filling the Hampstead double drawing-room.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 111)

- (8) *give oneself airs*

They're all snobs, even Julie who's only ten years old. You never saw such airs as that child gives herself.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 222)

- (9) *an open question*

Mr. Buckle maintains that, as a choreographer, Nijinsky has influenced all the best of his successors. Stravinsky and Ansermet thought that his choreography suffered from his ignorance of music, which they probably exaggerated. The question therefore remains open and Mr. Buckle may be right.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 441)

4.2.5 Modification by Relative Clauses

It is important to note that in order to modify part of the meaning of an idiom by modifying a part of the idiom, it is necessary that the part of the idiom should have a meaning which is part of the meaning of the idiom.

(1) *bury the hatchet*

They eventually buried the hatchet that has been swinging around on the island for the last 25 years.

(Riehemann, 2001: 79)

(2) *pull strings*

Robert McNamara's new book justified all the strings Clinton pulled as a young man to keep his precious hide out of harm's way in Vietnam.

(Riehemann, 2001: 75)

(3) *on the bandwagon*

Many Californians jumped on the bandwagon that Perot had set in motion.

(Nunberg, 1994: 500)

(4) *spill the beans*

Many diplomatic wives find it easier not even to know the beans they must not spill.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 514)

(5) *take a lot of sticks*

They always seemed so cheerful in spite of all the sticks they took.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 534)

(6) *drop a brick*

Mary did not realize what a brick she had dropped when she asked her hostess if the soup came out of tin.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 158)

(7) *raise hell*

What we are hoping is, the amount of hell we can raise in the United States and the heat that G. E. takes will make

them cooperate.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 79)

- (8) *break the ice*

Arabs hoped the ice that had shrouded Middle East peace talks since the Israeli election had been broken.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 119)

- (9) *canvass the idea*

The idea that the Blue Nile might be blocked or poisoned at its source in Ethiopia as a means of destroying Egypt had been canvassed in every age.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 92)

- (10) *a double bind*

The double bind I found myself in was very simple : If I left the country now I would not be allowed back, but if I stayed, I would be forbidden employment, and probably imprisoned.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 154)

- (11) *clutch at the straw*

Another straw at which we can clutch is that if real snow arrives in the near future it will be falling on cold slopes and so will last reasonably well.

(Moon, 1998 : 324)

- (12) *on a firm footing*

Lord Simonds said that the applicant might proceed on the footing that there was jurisdiction, but should confine himself to the single question before the committee.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 431)

- (13) *shoulder a burden*

The mood of idealistic imperialism has been replaced by an almost bitter determination to see to it that “undeserving” allies and “ungrateful” client states should now shoulder some of the burdens which Americans themselves have suddenly discovered to be oppressive.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 499)

4.2.6 There Construction

(1) *a cloud in the sky*

Everything seems going smoothly, there is not a cloud in the sky, when suddenly there is a case, an issue, a human story in which the newspapers take an interest.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 108)

(2) *a straw in the wind*

There are straws in the wind that this type of political campaign may take over sometime in the future from the industrial militancy of the present executive.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 523)

(3) *break the ice*

There was certainly ice to be broken between Palestinians and Israelis.

(Riehemann, 2001: 119)

(4) *bury the hatchet*

There are some very sharp hatchets to bury.

(Riehemann, 2001: 78)

(5) *cover the ground*

When I started to study Economics I didn't realize there was such a lot of ground to be covered.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 120)

(6) *draw a moral*

A riffle through the daily papers turned up little to lighten the general gloom except an item that told how when a wolf escaped in a zoo, people were put behind bars. There is obviously a moral here somewhere waiting to be drawn.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 157)

(7) *get more kicks than halfpence*

There's more kicks than halfpence in editing a collection of contemporary verse. I'll never do it again.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 219)

(8) *give free play to something*

There's a little free play on most steering-wheels but there's something wrong if you can turn it as much as three inches without getting engagement with the wheel.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 226)

- (9) *have a heavy heart*

There were many heavy hearts in the little fishing village that night.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 264)

- (10) *have a sting in the tail*

The Sugden family turns out to see Joe get his meal. But there's a sting in the tail sprung upon them all.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 275)

- (11) *huff and puff*

There's a fair amount of huffing and puffing in Mr. Mintoff's attitudes. But his performance is matched in London.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 291)

- (12) *pay the piper*

There is a piper to be paid some time.

(Riehemann, 2001 : 77)

- (13) *rhyme or reason*

The country, already burdened with Cambodian refugees, cannot quite look after its own; there are better reasons here for inter-country adoption than in Korea, but there is little rhyme or reason to the manner in which it is conducted.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 268)

- (14) *twist someone's tail*

That bedraggled old institution, the family, has taken quite a pounding lately, and John Hopkins is not the man to stand idly by while there are tails to be twisted and hands to be slapped.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 569)

4.2.7 Comparative Construction

(1) *a double cross*

The Italians had said they were fed up with the war. It seemed that at any given moment they were prepared, if we would land on the mainland of Italy, to come in with us. I remarked that this looked like the biggest double cross in history.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 154)

(2) *a low profile*

Such ideas excited medieval man and led to such gigantic projects as building Winchester Cathedral. Today's practicing Christians tend to adopt a lower profile. There is a search for the essentials in the faith in greatly changed conditions.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 368)

(3) *a narrow escape*

Tim had a narrow escape from the clutches of Barbara last year. I had an even narrower one this Christmas after she claimed I proposed to her at the office party.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 394)

(4) *a smooth operator*

What Raine has is an iron hand in an iron glove which is beautifully wrought so that people don't realize that the glove is made of iron until it hits them. She's quite the smoothest operator in the place.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 506)

(5) *as nutty as a fruit-cake*

The characters in Don Sleeve's new comedy series "Filthy Showers" are all nuttier than fruit-cakes.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 25)

(6) *as snug as a bug in a rug*

There's a nice little pension and a cottage on the estate coming to him when he retires. He'll be snugger than a bug

in a rug there.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 28)

- (7) *as wise as Solomon*

He made the wrong choice of career, we know now; but he couldn't have known it then, not if he had been wiser than Solomon.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 32)

- (8) *bury the hatchet*

It is one of the sharpest hatchets left in the post-Cold War world.

(Riehemann, 2001: 79)

- (9) *carry weight*

Legal penalties and moral obligations will inevitably carry less weight than fear of reprisals by violent criminals and their associates.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 94)

- (10) *get one's slice of the cake*

Our problem cities desperately need a bigger slice of the national cake. A Commission should be empowered to direct resources to the urban black spots within our cities.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 220)

- (11) *hard on the pocket*

These price increases are always hardest on the pocket of the lowest-paid worker.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 163)

- (12) *keep tabs on*

But Baucus, who supported the reintroduction of wolves, wants better tabs kept on wolves.

(Riehemann, 2001: 77)

- (13) *take a lot of sticks*

That woman has taken more sticks in the last two years than anyone could deserve.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 534)

- (14) *near and dear*

There was no need for questions; she talked as any woman talks on that old, old subject nearest and dearest to herself, that is, her own experiences, feelings and opinions.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 395)

(15) *raise hell*

The more hell they raise, the better Clinton looks.

(Riehemann, 2001: 78)

(16) *someone's strong suit*

Unfortunately lyricism is not Robbins' strongest suit, and the Mozartian quality of the music was not really translated into dance.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 526)

4.2.8 Other Transformations

Other transformations include ellipsis, conjunct movement and coordination with other idiomatic or non-idiomatic items. Ellipsis indicates the omission of one or more elements from a construction, especially when they are supplied by the context.

(1) *cook one's goose*

My goose is cooked, but yours isn't.

(2) *keep tabs on*

We thought tabs were being kept on us, but they weren't.

(3) *the bottom falls out of something*

We thought the bottom would fall out of the housing market, but it didn't.

(Nunberg *et al.*, 1994: 501)

(4) *keep/lose one's head*

As always she has kept her head while others around her have been losing theirs.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 331)

Conjunct Movement:

(5) *Sue came to terms with Jane.*

Sue and Jane came to terms.

(6) *Tom is at loggerheads with Jack.*

Tom and Jack are at loggerheads.

- (7) *Andrea tied the knot with George.*

Andrea and George tied the knot

Coordination with other Idiomatic or Non-Idiomatic Items;

- (8) *by force of arms*

But for the presence of British troops, the minority might have succeeded in seizing power by terrorism and force of arms.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 204)

- (9) *by force of circumstance*

He hopes that a degree will give him access to at least some policy-making role in graphic education, a subject in which he has grown interested first by force of circumstance but later by choice.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 204)

- (10) *earn a raspberry*

Telling them that they are interesting examples of contemporary sociology might earn you a clump round the earhole from Terry or a verbal raspberry from Bob, marginally the more civilized of the two.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 229)

- (11) *generate more heat than light*

We have generated a lot of heat, a lot of screaming, but over 24 years our roles have evolved.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 215)

- (12) *have the vision to do something*

Macmillan had the vision, but not the guts to face his own destiny.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 255)

- (13) *hold the purse strings*

The hero of Moravia's new novel is an Italian filmwriter with pretensions to direction, hampered by the need to keep in with a mogul who holds court and purse strings.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 286)

(14) *keep one's mouth shut*

Your mouths should be kept shut, and your eyes open.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 331)

(15) *lose face*

The longer they withhold a collective agreement, the more money and face both sides will lose.

(Riehemann, 2001: 103)

(16) *lose ground*

Tom Lasorda was asked to consider these six wins in nine games, in places where the Los Angeles Dodgers typically lose, both games and ground.

(Riehemann, 2001: 112)

(17) *make waves*

... the stage is set for Capt. Meara, a 22-year veteran of the force, to make history, and then some waves.

(Riehemann, 2001: 103)

(18) *take a back seat*

It is a fine line we walk as we try to teach our daughters to take the reins of the world, not a back seat.

(Riehemann, 2001: 123)

4.2.9 Nonce Uses of Idioms

Idioms are often used in an inventive manner for a particular occasion, involving some peculiar lexical or syntactic manipulations. Many idioms can be manipulated according to the communicative needs of the language-user and syntactically transformed in various ways with their parts being modified, focused, quantified, or omitted and moved around. It can provide some sort of striking effect such as humor or pun. The ability to invent nonce constructions of idioms is indicative of a language user's proficiency. On the other hand, the dynamic nonce use of the idiom is suggestive of its flexibility and productivity. Such semantically productive idiom variants appear both in everyday conversation and in the media.

One striking example (McGlone *et al.*, 1994: 170) appeared in

a *New York Times* article on the rise and fall of the Wall Street firm Drexel Burnham Lambert. After making a fortune on junk bonds, the senior executives at Drexel awarded themselves huge cash bonuses. As a direct result of this bonus distribution, Drexel's cash reserve was depleted, forcing the firm into bankruptcy. In this context, the meaning of this twist on a familiar idiom is clear.

Drexel's senior executives, not content with collecting one golden egg after another, seem to have insisted then on eating the goose.

The golden goose is said to be eaten instead of killed to imply unseemly greed in addition to simply destroying a source of wealth.

Nonce uses of idioms can be achieved through lexical substitution, insertion, and deletion or splitting to make the idiom more appropriate in its context.

(1) *a damsel in distress*

The team have set their tale in that storybook time when knights were bold and brave in shining armor, minstrels sang of love and battle, damsels were distressed and all the castles looked like something out of Disneyland.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 130)

(2) *a diamond of the first water*

The great Lord Salisbury was a sickly baby and grew up into a frail introverted schoolboy. At Oxford he was still "a neurotic of the first water".

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 140)

(3) *a double cross*

And the lovers of power, the councilor, the footballer, the treble-crossing womanizer, and a thousand others are all there.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 154)

(4) *a judgment of Solomon*

The Judge offered a Solomon-like compromise. I should place a set of my fingerprints in a sealed envelope and submit them, not to the university but to the court, there to re-

pose until the litigation was finally resolved.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 326)

(5) *a needle in a haystack*

Over the years, Cullers has helped develop ways to use computers to probe through dense “haystacks” of space signals in hopes of finding the one precious “needle”: an intelligent message from another world.

(Riehemann, 2001: 92)

All I could do was to go on searching, alone, at random, like a man approaching a haystack with a piece of cotton in his pocket, ready to thread the first needle he finds with it.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 397)

(6) *a rolling stone*

And, indeed, she could be depended upon to go her own way, gathering any money that came within her path. Perhaps if a stone rolls slowly enough it will gather moss, and what Alice Cresset gathered, she didn't waste on foolishness.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 482)

(7) *a skeleton in the cupboard*

But the two main compartments were his business life and his home. Now at a moment's notice he had to improvise a third compartment, a secret one, a cupboard for a skeleton. Lew Archer moves through the flashy corrupt world of Southern California, opening the cupboards and the skeletons fall out.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 503)

(8) *a square peg in a round hole*

... education which is more concerned with developing individuals than with moulding them into pegs suitably rounded to fit an array of round holes.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 516)

(9) *a voice crying in the wilderness*

The British love of comfort and chintz, Colefax & Fowler

and country houses, taken together with an innate mistrust and misunderstanding of modern architecture, makes Silvestrin almost a lone voice crying in the architectural wilderness.

(Moon, 1998: 176)

- (10) *a wolf in sheep's clothing*

It is true, as Elizabeth Longford says, that Churchill described Attlee as "a sheep in sheep's clothing". Yet when Colville asked him which of his Labor colleagues he respected most, he replied, "Attlee".

(Cowie et al., 1993: 596)

- (11) *an iron fist in a velvet glove*

Does that velvet voice (I wonder) conceal a tongue of iron? Has he threatened his cast with dismissal if it does not constantly increase productivity?

(Cowie et al., 1993: 318)

- (12) *beard someone in his den*

Each time the principal boy left the stage, Virginia wondered whether she should get up and go through the pass-door at the side of the stage, and beard her in her dressing room for the promised interview.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 57)

- (13) *born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*

Inheritance isn't a crime, and few of us would have spat out a silver spoon if we had found one with our mouths at birth.

(Moon, 1998: 171)

- (14) *bread and circuses*

In a society of Mr. Crosland's choosing, the significance of education is that it serves in part as a job-qualification, in part as a distraction — part bread, part circus.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 76)

- (15) *burn the candle at both ends*

He works 18 hours a day. He burns the candle at five

ends. He might look like this huge heavyweight boxer, but his family and friends have worried about his health for years.

(Moon, 1998: 170)

(16) *buy a pig in a poke*

Until the wells are sunk nobody will know for sure whether or not this is bonanza time for the oil industry, but it would be surprising if every poke were opened without there being a fairly plump pig at the bottom of several of them.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 83)

(17) *climb on the bandwagon*

Many companies hustled into the Eighties hotel boom, ignoring the principle of the old-fashioned “personalized” proprietor. They assumed they would make megabucks out of country-house hotels whose managing directors sat in an office block somewhere, leaving managers to run them all. Long established hotels also have the edge over the bandwagon crowd in that they have “customer muscle” — in other words, return business.

(Sunday Telegraph, cited in Chang, 2004: 177)

(18) *count one's chickens*

I should have known better than to start counting my criminals before they were behind bars.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 118)

(19) *cut the Gordian knot*

His good temper, crispy approach and fairness make him the perfect disentangler of a disputed Notts County penalty decision (Gordian Notts, as it were), illustrating his points with flashbacks.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 128)

(20) *fit someone like a glove*

Welsh actor Clifford Evans has virtually cornered a market in Top People parts: he has played a Lord Chancellor, the Head of a British Secret Service agency and fits glove-like

into the role of a retired politician in the Sunday play.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 190)

- (21) *flog a dead horse*

One looked in vain for the professional touch, some hint of the craftsman's skill. Detection, it seems, is very largely a question of flogging a horse until its death is beyond question.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 192)

- (22) *generate more heat than light*

If these fundamental questions are to be discussed in your pages, may we please have more light and less heat with our physics and metaphysics?

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 215)

- (23) *guns or butters*

In the current Soviet Five-Year Plan, great emphasis is laid on improving the living conditions of the Soviet people. In short, it comes down to: fewer missiles, more butter.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 248)

- (24) *have a will of iron*

But though her warm Mid-Western accent might lull certain innocents into believing in the motherly image, opponents know that she also has a whim of iron.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 278)

- (25) *hold the purse string*

Many a small child has been dressed up to the nines in the hope that, by tugging at the heart-strings of an elderly relative, he will loose the purse strings.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 286)

- (26) *like a bull in a china shop*

I broke a thermometer and he told Sister he did it. He's really awfully sweet, you know. But he does make me feel like a piece of china in a bull shop sometimes.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 354)

- (27) *like a cat that stole the cream*
From that moment the debate was lost. Churchill sat up, gloating at his critics with a discreet twinkle like a cat presented with an unexpectedly large bowl of cream.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 354)
- (28) *pack someone like sardines*
We were packed together, eager sardines well up in the sky, a loading far above the engineering specifications.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 447)
- (29) *shoot the breeze*
I carried my gun at the ready, safety lock on, but I had no desire to shoot anything more than the breeze.
(Riehemann, 2001: 82)
- (30) *sugar the pill*
The danger here is of the personality more familiar in the world of showbiz used as sugar on the pill of a solid program. Such false casting will only disappoint the viewers.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 222)
- (31) *the calm before the storm*
Every time the pain receded he hoped it was going for good, but each recession proved to be no more than a calm before another storm.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 89)
- (32) *the talk of the town*
There is the plain speaker who tells his immediate superior that the affair he is having with his secretary is the talk of the office and that he had better be careful.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 538)
- (33) *the thin red line*
(teachers' demonstration outside Parliament) *The principals needed their principles to keep them warm; it grew minute by minute windier and colder. To one of the press cameramen it was a good joke: "You've got the thin blue line here all right." (blue refers to hands and faces going*

blue from cold)

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 550)

- (34) *turn someone's heads*

I observe women a lot. Basically I think we are vain. A woman's happiness is how many heads she can turn.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 568)

- (35) *use a sledgehammer to crack a nut*

The paper's editorial described the section as "a nasty piece of work" which gave the police "a considerable measure of arbitrary and unchallengeable judgment". Using it against the hippies was like relying on "an earth-mover to crack a nut".

(Moon, 1998: 157)

The idiom flexibility, however, is not completely unconstrained. The principles that govern syntactic operations upon idioms are pragmatically based. Syntactic operations must be motivated by communicative intent, so any change that they produce in an idiom's meaning must be interpretable in context.

In sum, some idioms cannot normally admit any type of variation (e.g., *a red herring*), while others can accept variations both of the lexical kind and of the grammatical kind. These variations can be very confusing. It is therefore important to highlight the versatility of idioms and the differences between base and variant structures so that learners might be especially aided in processing the language. The tendency is towards people relying more and more on manipulated idioms in order to express clear, to-the-point notions and opinions. Idiom variations in general are of two sorts: normal variations which are part of the language system, and variations which show innovative, rule-breaking novelty. Both types of variations suit the communicative purposes of language users. Conventional grammatical transformations enable them to produce the correct form of the idiom demanded by the linguistic context; innovation enables them to display their wit and skill in handling the vocabulary.

Basically there are two major issues in terms of idiom flexibility

and productivity. The first concerns compositionality. To what extent are idioms compositional, that is, to what extent can the meaning of an idiom be derived from the meanings of its constituents? In other words, idioms comprehension and use can be done in terms of degrees of analyzability or degree of semantic composition. Idioms lie on all parts of such a continuum ranging from those which are most lexicalized and non-decomposable to those which are highly decomposable and lexically flexible. How any figurative utterance is understood depends on its degree of analyzability or how each of its separate components relates to the expression's overall nonliteral interpretation. The second issue concerns the syntactic versatility of idioms. To what extent does an idiom's meaning depend on its syntactic form, and to what extent can an idiom be open to syntactic analysis and transformation? More studies of lexical and syntactic variation are needed, to ascertain which idioms repeatedly show up in real text as frozen and which idioms occur as fluid; and to classify and correlate the different kinds of variation.

Chapter Five

A Holistic Approach to English Idioms

The previous chapters are designed to pave the way for the genesis of a holistic approach. Holism as a philosophical concept is diametrically opposed to atomism. Where the atomist believes that any whole can be broken down or analyzed into its separate parts and the relationship between them, the holist maintains that the whole is primary and often greater than the sum of its parts. The holist looks at things or systems in aggregate in order to know their nature or purpose better. A holistic perspective views all the differences and apparent divisions in a matter as interdependent aspects of an underlying whole. The holistic outlook appears appropriate when an explanation involves many diverse factors, each of which is important; when the patterns or connections among those factors are significant; and when those patterns can be observed in the particular case under study. A holistic approach to idioms can be epitomized as follows.

One of the hallmarks of this approach is a holistic integration of information from background knowledge, the concepts underlying constituent meanings individually and the assumptions and implications arising from them.

Secondly, this approach aims at organizing parts into an organic, unified whole. To be more specific, holism-based idiom access involves integrating syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and sociocultural factors into an organic, unified whole when an idiom is processed.

Thirdly, as a dynamic approach, it treats an idiom as a conceptu-

al structure. This book is primarily concerned with the way an idiom occurs as an on-line, real-time construction in an actual environment or in a particular text or context.

By way of illustration, evidence is provided to fortify the arguments as presented in this paper.

true to form: being or behaving as expected; in the usual, typical or characteristic way (dictionary explanation)

True to form, John turned up late.

True to form, when it came to his turn to buy the drinks, he said he'd left his wallet at home.

Turn to form, Hurricane Wilma is projected to come ashore near Naples, Florida in just a few hours.

True to form, Britain has promoted the interests of corporations, not of Africa, at the G8 (the Group of the Eight Countries).

(*Melbourne Indymedia*, July 2005)

A structural analysis of the idiom shows that it is invariably positioned at the beginning and separated by a comma from the main framework of the sentence. A holistic examination of the idiom as it occurs in the particular context will reveal the inadequacy of the sole reliance on the syntactic analysis and make it necessary to improve the dictionary explanation. I once tried this idiom on a native speaker and his instinctive reaction to its usage was that “it is used to say that someone is behaving in the way that you expect him or her to behave, especially when this is annoying”, as exemplified by the last one of the four given sentences. The idiom *true to form* in that particular context conveys an indirect reproach of the G8 agreement made for the benefit of rich countries. It hints at the G8's undesirable practice of requiring African countries to pursue the free trade policy and create more favorite business environment for western companies. This goal of free trade for poor countries is a recipe for deepening poverty as it deprives them of levers to regulate trade for development.

The foregoing anatomy of the idiom *true to form* is a typical example of the holistic approach processing an idiom as an on-line, real-time construction in a natural linguistic habitat.

turn up trumps: (of a person or situation) has a better performance or outcome than expected (dictionary explanation)

The athlete turned up trumps again , finishing first in the 100 meters.

Engineers turned up trumps again. Engineering students from Flinders have once again take the top places in the annual Student Papers Competition run by the UK Institution of Electric Engineers.

The weather was very bad but fortunately we turned up trumps with our hotel-there were games rooms for the children and even a swimming pool.

My friend turned up trumps and lent me the money to go on holiday.

The idiom *turn up trumps* occurs with one of the four different structures (“finishing first in the 100 meters”, “take the top places in the annual competition”, “with our hotel” , and “lent me the money to go on holiday”) to form an on-line, real-time construction to convey a different concept (“be superior to peers”, “complete the competition successfully; achieve a good result”, “end well; lucky enough to have a better situation”, and “be especially generous or helpful”) through a holistic integration of linguistic or extra-linguistic factors.

These examples show us how to map thought to language and match form to meaning in a holistic approach. The holistic approach to be activated in idiom access involves developing different types of competence and different strategies. The traditional Presentation-Practice-Production approach still has some explanatory power for learners to be exposed to multi-word chunks of language. It moves from simple repetition of fixed routines to gradual substitution and variation, to encourage confidence, fluency and creative language use. It aims to assist learners in their acquisition of native speaker type chunks and instill in them an awareness of the existence of these chunks and an ability to recognize them in discourse.

5.1 Developing Pragmatic Competence

The ideal a foreign language learner pursues is a mythical native-speaker-like linguistic competence. Yet, a good knowledge of a foreign language is much more than just that. Acquiring linguistic competence is only one of the dimensions of the language learning process. It might be sufficient for transmission of information but hardly adequate to comprehend and communicate subtle meanings hidden between the lines.

Idioms are of strong communicative force. That is why according to research findings (Moon, 1998) they are predominant in conversations, lectures, advertisements, newspaper articles, prose fiction and public speeches, where the interaction between the writer/reader or speaker/listener is high. They are used to indicate the writer's/speaker's attitude towards the persons or events denoted and perform special functions such as evaluation, emphasis, description, warning, and indirect disapproval. The native speaker knows, for instance, that expressions such as *be no great shakes* are more likely to crop up during relaxed conversations between friends than on an official occasion. Guidance is essential for a non-native speaker to identify, or to use appropriately, idioms which are restricted in various ways. Certain variable factors need to be pointed out to the learner: the relationship between the correspondents, the setting where the communication takes place, and the degree of seriousness or light-heartedness.

Therefore, teaching idioms from a function-based perspective is of paramount consequence. The functional force of idioms should be investigated and exposed to learners. They should be encouraged to distinguish between formal and informal, between complimentary and derogatory, between general and special in order to fully understand the discourse. Through an understanding of the function of idioms it also becomes easier to understand the nuances between idioms that appear synonymous.

An idiom considered formal tends to reflect a distant rather than a

close relationship, be associated with an official setting, and suggest a serious or elevated tone; an idiom considered informal reflects an intimate rather than a distant relationship, a domestic rather than an official occasion and an easy, relaxed attitude. Most idioms, however, are neutral in the sense that they fall somewhere between the formal and informal. Teachers can attempt to give general guidance with specific illustrations.

- (1) *a chosen vessel* (formal)

Like many others who have the arrogance to see themselves as chosen vessels for the regeneration of the world, he was narrow-minded and bigoted in the extreme.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 102)

- (2) *a tough cookie* (informal)

Now he was a tough cookie! At a bridge table, or a chess board, at a word game — the psychological pressure he put on you to lose was usually irresistible.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 564)

- (3) *come a cropper* (informal)

He was performing “stunts” on his bike as boys will, caught his foot in the chain and came a real cropper.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 110)

- (4) *dead to something* (formal)

I do not know of any spur to increasing my capacity for response than the realization that I am dead to something in which better-equipped people find delight.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 135)

- (5) *donkey’s years* (informal)

It’s donkey’s years since I’ve eaten semolina pudding. I didn’t think people made it any more.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 154)

- (6) *drips and drabs* (informal)

She had concocted the whole story from dribs and drabs of gossip picked up at the back doors and in the shops.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 158)

- (7) *drop one's aitches* (informal)

"And when she has to make a public appearance, it's embarrassing for both of them."

"Why should it be?" Randall asked. "You mean she drops her aitches or something?"

(Cowie et al., 1993: 158)

- (8) *go broke* (informal)

In the depression of the "thirties", when everyone was going broke and all the properties were coming under the hammer at a knocked down price, the McConchies were prudently buying land.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 233)

- (9) *give someone the sack* (informal)

You'll give me the sack if you keep dropping in here when I'm supposed to be working.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 231)

- (10) *in a measure* (formal)

There is a theory that there are "murderees", people themselves in a measure responsible for the crimes committed against them.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 310)

- (11) *in common parlance* (formal)

If an expression is in common parlance one tends to use it regardless of strict accuracy, as a woman will talk of "hoovering" her carpets though her vacuum cleaner may be of a different name and manufacture altogether.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 303)

- (12) *in days of yore* (formal)

I believe, sir, palaeontologist is the word for one who studies the fossilized remains of the prehistoric monsters that used in days of yore to roam the earth.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 303)

- (13) *null and void* (formal)

Now, 33 years later, Prague's anger at the (Munich,

1938) *Agreement has not diminished. The Czechoslovak Government wants it declared null and void from the moment it was signed.*

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 422)

- (14) *take forty winks* (informal)

His father, Nick, says that when the TV production team joined him and Annie in their smallish sitting-room in Oxford and the lights began to warm up, Benjamin reacted by taking forty winks.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 205)

- (15) *the glad tidings* (formal)

Staff representatives were given the glad tidings that, since the unions were engaged in a wage restructuring exercise with British Rail, the staff too should benefit from a parallel exercise.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 233)

- (16) *too big for one's boots* (informal)

Archaeology stands at the point of collision between art and science, and there are archaeologists who feel that in invading their art, science has got too big for its boots.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 221)

- (17) *wet one's whistle* (informal)

Are you coming out to wet your whistle, Dad, or do you want to watch the rest of that programme?

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 581)

- (18) *win the hand of someone* (formal)

Their father had been surprised that neither of them had won the heart and hand of an officer in the RAF.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 591)

- (19) *without fear or favor* (formal)

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr. William Whitelaw, proclaimed to the people of Ulster "We will not desert you. We will do our duty to you all without fear or favor."

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 595)

- (20) *world without end* (formal)

In my job I get the occasional word of praise, some useful suggestions, and complaints world without end.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 599)

Some idioms serve to carry a positive appraisal on the part of the speaker or writer.

- (21) *carry an olive branch*

When the Palestinians arrived in Madrid carrying olive branches they presented a different image ... they presented a different picture from Yasser Arafat pistol on hip.

(Fernando, 1996: 143)

- (22) *full marks to someone*

Prof. Lehmann received financial support from the American Philosophical Society and the North American Foundation, plus leave of absence from De Paul University, to write his book. Full marks to all three institutions.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 226)

Some idioms serve to reflect the speaker's unfavorable or frivolous attitude towards the persons, events, etc. which they denote.

- (23) *a back-seat driver* (derogatory)

There are too many back-seat drivers in this department. This is my project and I'm the one who's in charge.

(Toby, 2001:17)

- (24) *a devil of time* (derogatory)

Poor soul, she deserves a holiday and I hope she enjoys it. She's had a devil of time these last two years.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 139)

- (25) *a dog in the manger* (derogatory)

To these major attitudes towards "Them" may be added one or two minor but recurrent ones, the "I ain't a gentleman, you see" attitude: a dull dog-in-the-manger refusal to accept anything higher than one's own level of response.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 151)

- (26) *a fat cat* (derogatory)

More than 500 senior NSW fat cats — all of whom are entitled to salary packages of at least \$70,000 a year — will be demoted or have their wages cut substantially if the NSW Labor Party is elected to office.

(Fernando, 1996 : 144)

- (27) *a jack in office* (derogatory)

But he really must repair the damage. If he doesn't use the authority that becomes him, all the little jacks-in-office and the ignorant arrivistes will win.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 323)

- (28) *a red herring* (derogatory)

There will be many red herrings, personal attacks and low blows by men at the end of their patience.

(Fernando, 1996 : 247)

- (29) *a whited sepulchre* (derogatory)

The revelation not only shocked Mary, but made her wonder how many more of her hitherto respected elders might be whited sepulchres.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 588)

- (30) *eat like a horse* (derogatory)

Cosmo was eating little, Matthew was pretending to eat sparingly, but putting a surprising amount away, and Dorothy Merlin was eating like a horse, stuffing food into her small frame.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 164)

- (31) *frills and furbelows* (derogatory)

Finger-bowls and napkin rings and flowers! If she would cut out the frills and furbelows and learn to cook a decent meal she would make a better job of running a guest-house.

(Cowie et al., 1993 : 208)

- (32) *muddy the waters* (derogatory)

Recent research findings have muddied the waters considerably-scientists are having to re-examine all their existing

theories.

(Toby, 2001: 316)

- (33) *mutton dressed as lamb* (derogatory)

There's absolutely nothing worse than mutton dressed as lamb. The sort of middle-aged or elderly trendies who try to get with it are digging a pit for themselves of no mean depth. A middle-aged don (= a middle-aged university lecturer) in a Beatle haircut is one of the most offensive sights known to man.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 393)

- (34) *rest on one's laurels* (derogatory)

I know you got a very good degree from Oxford but what are you going to do with your life now? You can't rest on your laurels for ever, you know.

(Toby, 2001: 405)

- (35) *the common herd* (derogatory)

—“*Why on earth study Sanskrit, when there are so many modern languages that could be useful to him?*”

—“*Oh, that's Steve all over-anything to be different from the common herd.*”

(Cowie et al., 1993: 113)

Some idioms connote a lightly humorous or quietly mocking view of the persons or things they refer to.

- (36) *a cool hand on a fevered brow* (facetious)

Florence Nightingale was a very determined and business-like woman, not just a ministering angel flitting about the wards with her famous lamp in order to lay a cool hand on fevered brows — though she did that, too.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 116)

- (37) *a damsel in distress* (facetious)

The students come to him with personal problems too; he seems to have a way with tormented youths and damsels in distress.

(Cowie et al., 1993: 130)

- (38) *a shrinking violet* (facetious)
I remember him there, a long, thin, silent shadow behind Chapman's corpulence. One has heard of shrinking violets; here was a shrinking cactus.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 500)
- (39) *enough to sink a battleship* (facetious)
We've had hundreds of applications since we advertised. People with enough degrees to sink a battleship have written in.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 258)
- (40) *for the nonce* (facetious)
This year he thought he would let a swan get on with motherhood, but that meant getting dad (here = male swan) out of the way for the nonce.
(Cowie et al., 1993: 200)
- (41) *in flagrante* (facetious)
One of the gentlemen was caught in flagrante with the wife of the club's President, which of course caused a huge scandal.
(Toby, 2001: 158)
- (42) *in the land of Nod* (facetious)
"Father's in the land of Nod. I think."
"Well, leave him be; he's had a tiring day. And don't turn off the TV or he'll wake up."
(Cowie et al., 1993: 339)
- (43) *the third degree* (facetious)
"Look here," I said, losing patience, "what's all this third degree stuff in aid of? I'm asking to open an account, not to manage the Bank of England."
(Cowie et al., 1993: 551)
- (44) *tread the boards* (facetious)
Melina Mercouri had trodden many boards before achieving world fame in "Never on Sunday".
(Cowie et al., 1993: 566)

(45) *trip the light fantastic* (facetious)

A lot of the fellows that went to the Saturday night discos spent more time leaning on the wall or drinking in the bar than tripping the light fantastic and so the girls danced with each other, or got fed up and stopped going.

(Cowie *et al.*, 1993: 566)

It is important to note that few idioms are exactly equivalent. Even when they share the same stylistic or emotive overtones, two synonymous idioms will be found to differ to some extent. The learner should be alert to these fine differences.

If there has been a certain resistance to the teaching and the learning of English idioms, it is because of their very complex nature. Every idiom has its own syntactic, semantic and pragmatic configuration. Learners must be made aware that the meaning, use and structure of idioms can be acquired with success. It can be done by exploiting all the semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, cognitive and sociocultural information available. Elsa Lattey (1986: 222) develops a pragmatic classification of idioms according to the following parameters:

- (i) Interaction of individuals
 - lend someone a hand*
 - be hard on someone's heels*
 - have someone on one's hands*
 - hold a candle to someone*
 - go to bat for someone*
 - throw a scare into someone*
 - put a spoke in someone's wheel*
 - walk into someone's trap*
- (ii) Interaction of the individual and the world
 - take up arms for something*
 - burn one's bridges behind one*
 - know something inside out*
 - keep the ball rolling*
 - let something take its course*
 - take something for gospel*
 - cut the Gordian knot*
- (iii) Focus on the individual
 - keep a stiff upper lip*

- throw in the towel*
be a real live wire
a horse of another color
bridle one's tongue
hot under the collar
show one's teeth
 (iv) Focus on the world
go down the drain
not worth a tinker's damn
forbidden fruit
know no bounds
the run of the mill
a straw in the wind
the swing of the pendulum

In presenting idioms to students, the teacher can further subcategorize the four pragmatic parameters into positive, neutral, and negative. For example, the teacher can choose to group *talk one's head off*, *talk oneself blue in the face*, *talk oneself hoarse*, and *talk someone's ear off* together because they all have a negative effect on someone — in the first three cases it is the agent, while in the last case it is the one acted upon.

The grouping together of idioms with comparable or reverse perspectives is pedagogically rewarding. Similar or contrasting idioms are treated in the same group, and the teacher and students can work at defining and understanding the fine nuances of difference among them. For instance, in Parameter (i) Interaction of Individuals, we can have a positive group including *go to bat for someone*, *stand up for someone*, and *stick up for someone*. All of these seeming equivalents obviously express a positive interface between the agent and someone mentioned in the idiom. But there are nuances that should be considered and pointed out to the learner. *Go to bat for someone* can be an initiatory move, while *stand / stick up for someone* is more likely to be used to describe behavior in an argument or fight that is already in progress (Lattey, 1986: 227).

It can also be a pedagogical advantage for the teacher to present

idioms in a thematic approach by grouping together those relevant to a broad subject area concerned. Discussions can be conducted by asking learners to draw upon their personal experiences and background knowledge. For instance, idioms such as *steer clear*, *at arm's length*, *keep something at bay*, *keep a low profile*, *give someone a cold shoulder*, *have an axe to grind*, *jump on the bandwagon*, *get your teeth into something* all denote some form of involvement and interest, drawing attention to relations such as these should certainly help learners to master these idioms. An Idiom Wall in the classroom can be developed where learners can post some theme-related idioms such as “risk” :

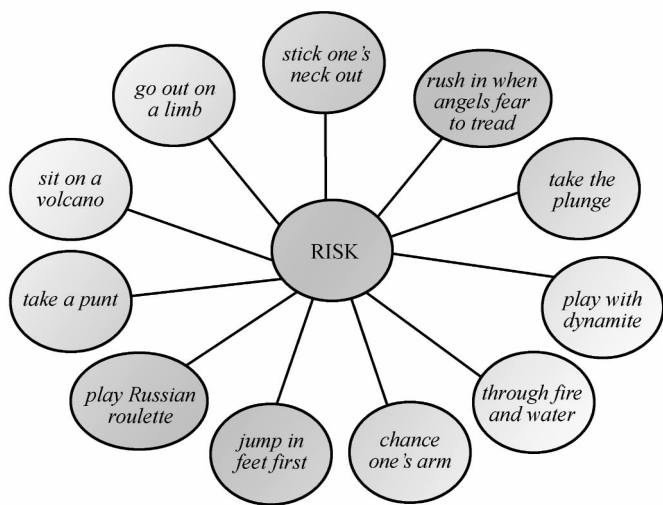


Figure 5.1-1

A further example is the theme “difficulty” which gives rise to many idioms as well.

One of the problems associated with building up the pragmatic competence is the implication that everything must be practiced in real interactive contexts or at the very least in well-designed simulations. For practical reasons, however, it may never be possible to recreate in

the classroom the precise natural conditions under which idioms occur. The first step is to raise students' awareness of idiom usage and function. Even the most traditional kinds of exercises and activities can benefit students a great deal. Controlled practice related to function such as gap-filling and multiple-choice activities prove to be effective. It can avoid focusing merely on semantic meaning. Excerpts from authentic discourse that provides a context for each idiom are very popular among students. The more samples of idioms in authentic discourse learners are exposed to, the more focused and systematic practice they get in idiom comprehension. Such samples collected over time provide useful teaching and learning resources. And it is certainly beneficial to encourage learners to connect idioms with their personal experiences. Free production of idioms can usually only work after an intensive period of controlled practice of some sort.

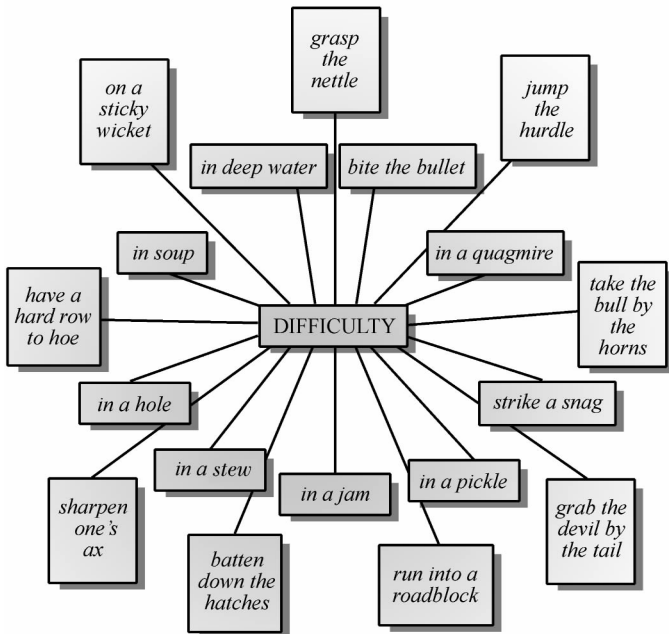


Figure 5. 1-2

Sample Controlled Exercises:

Exercise A

Directions: Work in groups. Make sure the literal meaning of each lexical item is known to each group member.

Task: (1) Try to work out the meaning of these idioms by guessing, analyzing, and associating with your general world knowledge.

- (2) Do you have idioms in your language which have the same meaning as some of these? Some L1 idioms will help you to arrive at the solution, but sometimes there will be false friends.

a storm in a teacup

have one's heart in one's mouth

have a bone to pick with someone

cut off one's nose to spite one's face

drink like a fish

be like a cat on hot bricks

pull someone's leg

make a mountain out of a molehill

Exercise B

Directions: This exercise is best done in groups. You are encouraged to use the context for meaning clues rather than puzzling over the surface meaning of the idiomatic units devoid of context.

Task: Express the underlined sections of the following text with language which expresses the same meaning more or less.

I was feeling a bit down in the dumps because it was raining cats and dogs, so I went to see Bill. Bill drinks like a fish because his work drives him up the wall. He is an EFL teacher. But he would never leave you in the lurch. Today I found him like a cat on hot bricks because he was bored. We decided to kill two birds with one stone by going to the pub and the launderette. We had a bone to pick with the barman in any case because he had forgotten to reserve the dartboard for us the previous day. We decided that not to go to the pub in protest would be just cutting off our noses to spite our faces.

We did not want to make a mountain out of a molehill either.

(excerpted from Lennon, 1998)

To summarize, pragmatic competence is the ability to integrate semantic knowledge and world knowledge so as to arrive at an understanding of pragmatic meaning. In his article on “Meaning” for the website of the *Linguistic Society of America*, William Ladusaw distinguishes between three levels of meanings; the semantic one, the syntactic one, and the pragmatic one. The first two levels are predominantly linguistic in nature. On the pragmatic level, “our assessment of what someone means on a particular occasion depends not only on what is actually said but also on aspects of the context of its saying and an assessment of the speaker” (Ladusaw, 2004). Inferring the meaning of an idiom requires grammatical and situational knowledge, as well as an ability to see its relationship with the context. In other words, inference depends on access to different kinds of information. The inferential depth depends on the multiplicity of meanings available, as well as on the situation and function of the discourse and most importantly on the variable linguistic, pragmatic, and cognitive skills of the individual.

5.2 Developing Figurative Competence

Since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrated that far from being something peripheral to plain speech, metaphors provide an underlying structure to language, there have been suggestions that the metaphorical structure of language should be exploited in second or foreign language teaching. Primary metaphors of river flowing, or of containers, or of growth, of falling and rising, of the human life cycle, of health and sickness, recur again and again as concrete physical characteristics are ascribed to abstract qualities. If we accept that much of language is metaphorical, imaginative yet conventionalized, and structured in terms of underlying conceptual metaphors, then we will discover structure in the idiom which used to be regarded as arbitrary. According to the cognitive view, many idioms are products of our

conceptual system and not simply a matter of language. In other words, a proportion of idioms are conceptually motivated and reflect coherent systems of metaphorical concepts which link literal meaning with figurative meaning. They have at their basis conceptual metaphors which connect the concrete and abstract areas of knowledge, thus facilitating the process of meaning inference. This point is supported by Gibbs (1992) who claims that our sense of what idioms mean partially depends on our tacit understanding of the conceptual metaphors that link these phrases with their figurative meanings. It is precisely because idioms are evocative of different metaphorical information that these phrases play such a significant role in our everyday communication (1992: 505).

This has important pedagogical implications. According to Levorato & Cacciari's study (1992), the ability to comprehend and produce idioms is inseparable from the development of figurative language. Figurative language plays an important role in discourse as well as in the cognitive structuring of everyday experience. It facilitates the comprehension and communication of abstract thought by representing them in tangible form. There are three characteristics of figurative language that are important for its acquisition. The first characteristic is a gap between the speaker's words and his/her communicative intentions. A typical example of this is irony, where the intended meaning can be the exact opposite of the explicit meaning. Another criterion that can distinguish literal from figurative language is the latter's conventionality: it departs from its original meaning and acquires new meanings by means of strongly held conventions. Idioms are perfect examples of this. The third difference between literal and figurative language is that figurative language is generally more dependent on the context than literal language is. There is no doubt these three characteristics play a crucial part in the learner's acquisition of figurative language, which is linked very closely to the development of cognitive processes in general. In order to be able to understand idioms it is necessary for the learner to develop figurative competence.

Levorato and Cacciari (1992: 416) further specify figurative

competence as a coordinated set of abilities including:

- (i) the ability to understand the dominant, inessential and additional related meanings of a word;
- (ii) the ability to suspend a purely literal-referential strategy; this is a prerequisite for figurative language comprehension. When perceiving the incongruence of a literal interpretation with the contextual information, the learner can go beyond purely literal strategies to resolve the discrepancy;
- (iii) the ability to use contextual information and activate inferential processes in order to construct a coherent semantic representation and to integrate it with the lexical and semantic information carried by the figurative expression;
- (iv) the ability to understand and create figurative language by means of the lexical and syntactic transformation of preexisting expressions as well as to retrieve the conceptual structures involved.

Figurative competence is not acquired all at once, but is pieced together in the course of linguistic and cognitive development. The acquisition process can follow parallel paths instead of being a sequential progression from step to step. At the end of the developmental process these abilities will be highly integrated. According to Levorato & Cacciari (1992), the ability to use contextual information plays a crucial role in understanding how figurative competence evolves over time. Context not only makes it possible to suspend the literal interpretation of the idiom, but also gives the semantic information necessary to assign coherence to the text and to extract the figurative sense of the idiom. In other words, context enables the learner to go beyond the local piece of information and reach the global sense of the discourse.

Traditional assumptions such as the Acquisition via Exposure Hypothesis (Schweigert, 1985) contend that idioms are merely long words that the learner has to learn in a rote manner, i. e. by hearing it being used and idiom acquisition could be due to the frequency of exposure to idioms. These assumptions fail to take into account the role of context in the comprehension and production of idioms. Research

results (Levorato & Cacciari, 1992) indicate that the learner chooses an idiomatic interpretation more often in an idiomatic context than in a literal context or without a context. The processing of contextual information aids the learner to disambiguate utterances in context and understand the figurative sense of an idiom. In order to build a coherent representation of the discourse, the learner will use several sources of information, including the actions described in the context, as well as the meanings of the words composing the idiom, and the possible images conveyed by the idiom. Context acts as the general framework allowing the integration of those possible sources of information and therefore the comprehension of the idiom.

Another ability among the aforementioned, which is equally vital for the learner, is the one to make sense of idioms with the help of conceptual metaphors. A cognitive analysis relying on the metaphorical basis of idioms can be enjoyable as well as useful in the teaching of idioms to second or foreign language learners. If learners are made aware of the cognitive structures which underlie idioms, they will be able to grasp the figurative meanings of idioms more easily and they will probably retain these idioms in their memory for a longer time. Such teaching techniques can involve the collecting of idioms relating to a particular conceptual metaphor by the teacher, writing them up on the board and making the students supply images which come to their mind when they see a particular idiom. In this way, conceptual metaphors are bound to come up in the process of eliciting students' images. One example is the conceptual metaphor CLOTHING IS CONCEALMENT (Moon, 1998: 205):

a wolf in sheep's clothing
an iron fist in a velvet glove
draw a veil over something
handle without gloves
have a bee in one's bonnet
keep one's shirt on
keep something under one's hat
one's best bib and tucker

take the veil
throw down the gauntlet
trail one's coat
turn one's coat
with gloves off

Another example is the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS INSANITY (Lakoff, 1987: 204), according to which anger is a negative emotion producing undesirable physiological reactions. It leads to an inability to function normally.

bang one's head against the wall
climb the wall
drive someone round the bend
drive someone up the wall
fit to be tied
foam at the mouth
go bananas
go berserk
go bonkers
go out of one's mind
tear one's hair out
throw a tantrum

Some further examples are the conceptual metaphors HEART IS THE SEAT OF EMOTION and HEAD IS THE SEAT OF REASON (Fernando, 1996: 125-126), according to which the heart symbolizes the passion, affection and vitality while the head stands for the spirit and the rational intellect.

the affection vs. the intellect

<i>break someone's heart</i>	<i>above/over someone's head</i>
<i>eat/sob one's heart out</i>	<i>get something into one's head</i>
<i>have a heart of stone</i>	<i>get one's head round something</i>
<i>have a heavy/sinking heart</i>	<i>go soft in the head</i>
<i>have one's heart in one's mouth</i>	<i>go off one's head</i>
<i>in good heart</i>	<i>have a clear head</i>

<i>leave one's heart behind</i>	<i>have a good head for something</i>
<i>lose one's heart</i>	<i>have a thick head</i>
<i>make one's heart bleed</i>	<i>have one's head in the clouds</i>
<i>pour one's heart out</i>	<i>have one's head turned</i>
<i>search one's heart</i>	<i>hold one's head high</i>
<i>steal one's heart</i>	<i>keep one's head</i>
<i>take something to heart</i>	<i>lose one's head</i>
<i>wear one's heart on one's sleeve</i>	<i>out of/off one's head</i>
<i>win someone's heart</i>	<i>scratch one's head</i>

An awareness of underlying metaphorical constructs is pedagogically cherished. It can help foreground similarity and provide a basis from which the meaning of unfamiliar idioms can be derived.

Admittedly, not all idioms can be dealt with in this way. There may be different cultural connotations for different speech communities. But there are also general social, moral and political values which will find a common ground with different cultures. Therefore, figurative language may have much in common in terms of the underlying conceptual metaphors. For instance, Idioms which make use of parts of the human body are very popular across different speech communities because people share much the same perception of the shape and function of the individual parts of the human body. As far as figurative competence is concerned, even if only a modest proportion of idioms can be made accessible to learners via conceptual metaphors, it will certainly be an achievement and a step forward in the teaching of idioms. It is obvious that further research into figurative language is necessary to find how much use can be made of metaphors, particularly in second or foreign language teaching.

Overall, teaching and learning of idioms can be made more enjoyable if both teachers and students focus on the conceptual framework which motivates the figurative meaning of some idioms. The complete acquisition of figurative competence represents the skills of a truly competent learner: the ability to break down an idiom into its component parts and to make semantic inferences about these; the

ability to comprehend idioms even when they have been subjected to lexical substitutions or syntactic transformations; and more interestingly, the ability to generate new idioms by means of syntactic and lexical variations on existing idioms. *Shatter the ice* is not only an example of lexical flexibility but also an example of semantic productivity because it creates a new idiomatic meaning “break down an uncomfortable and stiff social situation flamboyantly in one fell swoop” (McGlone *et al.*, 1994: 169-170).

5.3 Developing Sociocultural Competence

Many language learners realize when they set out to learn a new language, they are faced with a truly Herculean task, for it is not just the language they want to acquire, but also the immense world of culture, history, conventions and customs which they need to know in order to get as close as possible to the level of a native speaker and use the language creatively. Idioms as part of sociocultural knowledge are considered one of the most difficult aspects of the language to master. When students of foreign languages reach an advanced stage of language learning, they may be confronted with a dilemma: if I learn an idiom, will I be able to use it properly in the right context? Or should I avoid learning idioms altogether so as not to make a fool of myself by using them incorrectly?

Sociocultural competence has become a significant part of foreign language teaching. The need for our students to develop sociocultural competence derives from the close relationship between culture and language. On the one hand, the material and intellectual context of human life largely conditions the way people think, and consequently conditions the way they communicate with one another. Since life contexts differ vastly from one place to another, each language constitutes a culturally specific phenomenon. On the other hand, language also fulfils a function of accumulation and transmission. It expresses the cultural legacy and social experience of a people and transmits them from generation to generation. Such a function strengthens the

bond between the language and the culture. Therefore, to master a foreign language, it is not sufficient for the learner to merely acquire the knowledge of the language system. The learner needs to familiarize himself / herself with values and norms of conduct of the target culture. In other words, the learner needs to develop the sociocultural competence which “[...] aims at the assimilation and proper management of the distinctive features in the target culture, particularly those embedded in the target language” (Vegas Puente, 1997).

Many idioms are in a sense an instantiation of cultural features derived from social structures, rituals and some other cultural phenomena. As part of the national cultural heritage, idioms reflect cultural singularity contained in the language system. They express cultural singularity in an evident, concrete manner.

They begin as phrases with literal meanings that have been lost or virtually forgotten. “I stopped at the bar to *wet my whistle*.” means to have a drink. The literal meaning of this phrase comes from England, many years ago, when pubs served drinks in ceramic cups. They attached a whistle to the rim of each cup, and so, when customers finished their drinks, they could blow the whistle to attract the attention of the waiter or waitress. Most native speakers understand and use hundreds or thousands of idioms without necessarily knowing their origins.

Therefore language learners should be aware that many idioms are strongly tied to the culture and history of the people that generate them. There are the multitude of expressions that originate from sailor (*plain sailing*, *spend money like a sailor*) or soldier (*bury the hatchet*, *a running battle*) speech, from the language of huntsmen (*a red herring*, *cover one's tracks*) or contact with all sorts of animals (*kill the fatted calf*, *rub the wrong way*), from life in the open air (*be out of wood*, *wind and weather*) or at home round the dinner table with family (*crumbs from the table*, *the head of the table*) or from a number of games (*fair play*, *foul play*) and pastimes like music and dancing (*be in tune*, *trip the light fantastic*). It is apparent that their origins unfold stories that justify their real meanings. Learning these cul-

tural-specific idioms constitute a significant part of the process of acculturation. These idioms are interesting but potentially problematic for the learner and will be best taught through explanation and analysis focusing on their origins. An awareness of the source can provide some illuminating background knowledge for idiom comprehension and help learners see how idioms are passed down through generations and transform over time. The historical context of idioms enables learners to hypothesize in a more related way the meaning of unfamiliar idioms.

armed to the teeth (be heavily armed)

Origin: This is a pirate phrase originating in Port Royal Jamaica in the 1600's. Having only single shot black powder weapons and cutlasses, pirates would carry many of these weapons at once to keep up the fight. In addition they carried a knife in their teeth for maximum arms capability.

a dark horse (a person who hides their feelings, plans, activities, etc.)

Origin: This idiom comes from horse racing. Horses than often won races were darkened to hide their identity so that more money could be won from the betting.

a double whammy (two unpleasant situations or events that happen at the same time and cause problems for someone)

Origin: This idiom comes from the 1950s American cartoon L'il Abner , in which one of the characters could shoot a whammy (= put a curse on someone) by pointing a finger with one eye open, or a double whammy with both eyes open.

albatross around one's neck (burdened by stigma or shame from a past deed)

Origin: From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner". An albatross, a symbol of good luck, landed on the ship and was killed by the captain while the ship was becalmed. The killing was thought to be the reason for a prolonged becalming. The Captain was forced to wear the albatross as a reminder of the wrong he had done.

at the eleventh hour (raise an issue right before an important deadline)

Origin: On a 12-hour clock (rather than the 24-hour clock used by scientists, the military, *et al.*,) the hours of 12 noon and 12 midnight seem to hold special significance. De-marking the transition from morning to afternoon and the end of the day, they are often used as deadlines (high noon, the stroke of midnight). To come at “the eleventh hour” implies that it comes in the last hour before the deadline. The choice of “the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” as the time to end WW I was quite apt.

bite the bullet (pay a painful price and move on)

Origin: *Bite the bullet* may have originated in the civil war. The patient who bit the bullet was cooperating with the surgery. In times of war when anesthetics was in limited supply or unavailable, surgeries such as limb amputations or the removal of a bullet or arrowhead was a pretty desperate and painful affair, with the patient fully conscious and feeling the pain. To ease the pain the patient was given a lead bullet to bite as the surgeon started to work with knife and saw. The bullet was given to let the patient focus his energy and attention on the biting instead of the cutting and pain. It may also have helped to reduce the screaming. Why bite on a bullet? Made of lead, bullets are malleable. Although quite strong they will actually deform somewhat when bitten hard so that teeth would not break. Bullets are also readily available in times of war.

blow off some steam (enjoy oneself by relaxing normal formalities)

Origin: Boilers are commonly used in steam heating systems and steam engines. The boilers contain water that is heated by burning some fuel such as oil. The heated water turns to steam, which is then sent through a system of radiators (in the case of heating systems) or harnessed by a steam engine. The steam creates considerable pressure in the boiler. If the pressure becomes too great, there is a danger of the boiler ex-

ploding. Hence boilers are equipped with safety valves called *blow off* valves that open if the pressure becomes too great. *Blowing off steam* prevents explosions by relieving the pressure in a boiler and venting excess steam.

called on the carpet (be held accountable for a mistake, offense, or a lie)

Origin: In military parlance, *called on the carpet* refers to having to present oneself to a superior officer, report at attention and receive a disciplining for some offense. Sometimes a defense is allowed, but often, the communication is quite simple, clear, and unidirectional, with the recipient being forced to stand at attention while the abuse takes place. Although no longer true, there was a time when only the top officers had carpet in their offices. Hence the carpet referred to the office of a senior officer.

can't hold a candle to (be far less competent than someone else)

Origins: Before electric lights, someone performing a task in the dark needed a helper to hold a candle to provide light while the task was performed, much as a helper might hold a flashlight today. Holding the candle is of course the less challenging role. Someone who is not even qualified to hold the candle is much less competent than the person performing the actual.

chew the fat (talk about unimportant things)

Origin: The Inuit (different from Eskimos) used to chew on pieces of whale blubber almost like chewing gum. The blubber took quite a while to dissolve, so it helped pass the time while they were doing something else.

crocodile tears (phony tears)

Origin: It was often thought that crocodiles shed tears that slid down into their mouths, moistening their food and making it easier for them to swallow. Hence the tears appear to be an expression of emotion but are in fact a means to make it easier to swallow (possibly the observer).

dressed to the nines (dressed flamboyantly, dressed well)

Origins: Common lore has it that a tailor making a high quality suit uses more fabric. The best suits are made from nine yards of fabric. This is because a good suit has all the fabric cut in the same direction with the warp, or long strands of thread, parallel with the vertical line of the suit. This causes a great amount of waste in suit making, but if you want to go “dressed to the nines”, you must pay for such waste.

fifth Beatle (someone who missed out on an opportunity for success)

Origin: Refers to Pete Best, an original member of the Beatles who was very talented but was replaced by Ringo Starr shortly before the band’s arrival in the US. The Beatles of course went on to be fabulously successful, and Pete Best became a footnote in history. Some think Pete Best was pretty badly treated as he was dumped from the group. The Beatles and their publishers hid this fact as they managed their press like no previous musical group in history. He was apparently very talented.

half cocked (be less fully prepared)

Origin: The phrase was originally “ going off half cocked ”. “Cocked” refers to the action of cocking a gun. Interestingly the term cocking a gun comes from flintlock muskets of 17th century; the hammer was very ornate and resembled a rooster. The half cock position of the cock on a flint or cap lock weapon was a “safe” position to which the cock was drawn to permit the flint lock or the cap lock. The cock could be placed in the half cock position while, hopefully, not risking having the weapon go off accidentally. Pulling the trigger of a flintlock at “half cock” will not fire the weapon. The hammer, which contains the flint, will not strike the frizzen with sufficient force to produce a spark and the primer charge in the pan will not be ignited. The loading process of a flintlock is quite involved. Particularly in the heat of battle, it was easy to forget to draw the hammer to “full cock” position and continue with the platoon, change position (with

the loaded gun in “safe” mode) , shoulder the weapon to be fired , and pull the trigger with the result being that nothing happens.

hat trick (the accomplishment of three successes or wins)

Origin: “Hat trick” originated from the English game of Cricket. The term originally referred to a bowler retiring three consecutive batsman with three consecutive balls. This is roughly equivalent to a pitcher in baseball striking out three consecutive batters using only three pitches to each! This was considered quite an accomplishment and was traditionally rewarded with a hat. The term is now used for other sports, always referring to an accomplishment of three. A popular use today is three goals by a single player in one game of hockey or soccer.

irons in the fire (having or pursuing multiple opportunities simultaneously)

Origin: Blacksmiths traditionally worked iron into shape by hammering. The iron being worked would be heated in the fire until it was red-hot and malleable. The Smith removes the iron from the fire and shapes it with repeated blows from a hammer. They need to work quickly before the iron cools. Once the iron is cool, it becomes brittle and cannot be hammered. Once removed from the fire, the iron cools quickly. It takes longer to heat the iron to red-hot than it takes for it to cool. Blacksmiths work more efficiently by having multiple pieces of iron in the fire heating simultaneously. In that way, the Smith can always have a piece of iron red-hot and ready for hammering. The cooled piece would be returned to the fire if it needed more hammering.

knock on wood (if good luck is willing)

Origin: In medieval times, people believed in mischievous creatures known as sprites. Sprites are actually spirits or ghosts who were reputed to enjoy causing trouble and wreaking havoc in the lives of the living. Among the most mischievous were wood sprites. If you were to mention something good, the

wood sprites would try to foul it up. The thought was that if you knocked on the wood when you said these things, the wood sprites would not be able to hear you because of the knocking sound. Hence they would leave you alone.

let the cat out of the bag (divulge a secret)

Origin: At medieval markets, unscrupulous traders would display a pig for sale. However, the pig was always given to the customer in a bag, with strict instructions not to open the bag until they were some way away. Later the buyer would find he'd been conned when he opened the bag and found it contained a cat, not a pig. Therefore, *letting the cat out of the bag* revealed the secret of the con trick. Visitors to London can still get fleeced like this on Oxford Street every day of the week at the "auctions" that take place there. It's an opportunity to see a true Medieval craft still in use today.

live hand to mouth (have difficulty supporting yourself)

Origin: During the Great Depression and other times of economic scarcity, people often did not know when or where the next meal was coming from. In such a case, when you get something in your hand that can be eaten, it goes into the mouth immediately; therefore *live hand to mouth*.

live the life of Riley (have an easy life)

Origins: *Living the life of Riley* was popularized by a radio show of the 1940s, in which Chester A. Riley was a sort of layabout, working class Brooklyn riveter who always managed to do everything with the minimum of effort, just getting by. The show about this typical family man was very funny and very popular, sweeping the whole country.

loose cannon (a person who is out of control or unpredictable)

Origin: On sailing ships that had cannons, it was important that they be secured. Cannons are very heavy, and a loose cannon on a ship's deck in a rough sea could be thrown about in an unpredictable fashion, causing a lot of damage. More than just needing to be lashed down during normal travel, cannons nee-

ded to be secured during use, or else the recoil would send the cannon on its way causing injury or damage.

once in a blue moon (happen only on rare occasions)

Origin: Two full moons in the same month are extremely rare, though they do happen. A second full moon has come to be called a blue moon. This is apparently because the Maine Farmers Almanac used to list the date of first moon in red text, and the second moon in blue.

paint the town red (party and celebrate with enthusiasm in bars)

Origin: This phrase originated with the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers used to wash the walls of a newly-conquered town or city with the blood of the vanquished. This was usually accomplished with a great degree of gusto, hence the term being applied to a great night on the town.

push the envelope (do something in an extreme way)

Origin: This idiom comes from the airplane industry. A plane's envelope was the limit of its performance. Test pilots would need to push the edge of the envelope to see what the plane could and could not do.

rain cats and dogs (a very hard rain)

Origin: When the bubonic plague was rampant in London, humans were apparently not the only victims of the plague. Cats and dogs were also afflicted, many died in the streets. After a particularly hard rain, street gutters could be awash in the bodies of cats and dogs.

read between the line (listen to what is implied, not what is explicitly stated)

Origin: Early in the days of sending secret messages people would write in substances that would only be revealed on plain paper with the use of a re-agent. For instance, lemon juice is normally transparent on paper, but when heated (say over a candle flame) it becomes discolored. Many people will probably remember the "Secret Agent" pens, which had a writing tip at one end and a revealer at the other. Obviously a courier de-

livering a blank piece of paper was a bit of a give-away, so the author of the message would write a seemingly innocuous letter in ink and then write the secret message in the spaces in between. The recipient would then have to treat the letter and read between the lines of the letter to get to the real message.

skeletons in the closet (have something to hide about one's past)

Origin: It comes from the fairy tale of Blue Beard and his closet. He gave all the keys of the house to his wife when he left on business, forbidding her access to only one room, a closet at the end of a long corridor. She opened it, of course, and there she found the dead bodies of his previous wives.

steal someone's thunder (spoil someone's attempt to surprise or impress)

Origin: In the eighteenth century, John Dennis invented a machine that made the sound of thunder, and used it in his own play. The play was not a success, and was replaced by another play by a different company. When Dennis went to the opening night, he was angry to hear his thunder machine being used.

show one's true colors (reveal one's true intentions, personality, or behaviors)

Origin: An early use of the word "color" is flag, pennant, or badge. Early warships often carried flags from many nations on board in order to elude or deceive the enemy. The rules of civilized warfare called for all ships to hoist their true national ensigns before firing a shot. Someone who finally *shows his true colors* is acting like a warship which hails another ship flying one flag, but then hoisted their own when they got in firing range.

take up the gauntlet (accept someone's invitation to fight or compete)

Origin: In medieval times a knight threw his gauntlet at the feet of another knight as a challenge to fight. If he accepted the challenge, the other knight would pick up the glove.

the bottom line (the end result or conclusion)

Origin: It is a reference to the standard accounting reports. These in-

clude the Income Statement, Balance Sheet, and Statement of Cash Flows. In each of these reports, a variety of financial figures are provided. Some are positive and some are negative. But “the bottom line” of each report provides the net of all the figures. In that sense the bottom line of each report is generally the most important indicator of the financial position. Anyone wanting the quick story would look first to the bottom line of each report.

three sheets to the wind (very drunk, highly intoxicated)

Origin: The phrase comes from 18-19th century English Naval terminology. The original phrase was “three sheets in the wind” and referred to the erratic behavior of a ship that has lost control of all of its sails. In nautical terminology sheets are the ropes that adjust the position of the sails relative to the wind. The speed and direction of a sailing ship is controlled by the number of sails raised on each mast, the angle of the sails to the wind (trim of the sails), and the position of the rudder. If the sheets used to control the sails are to break or have been released, the sheet is said to be “in the wind”. One can imagine a sail thrashing wildly in a strong wind with its sheet (the control ropes) blowing about. It would be very difficult to regain control of such a sail. Prior to the 1810’s it was common for ships to have three masts, (fore, main, and mizzen). If the sheets on all three masts are “in the wind”, the ship loses all steering control. The ship’s lack of control is likened to that of a stumbling drunk.

turkey shoot (very easy to accomplish)

Origin: Originally a turkey shoot was a contest in which muzzle loaded guns were used to shoot turkeys. Turkeys are very easy to shoot. They are large and move slowly. Despite the fact they are birds, turkeys don’t fly very well. Turkeys are not very intelligent animals. In modern turkey farms, the birds sometimes forget to drink and die of dehydration, despite the fact that a water supply is tied to their bodies. They sometimes die

of heart attacks when scared by loud noises. Today the term turkey shoot continues to be used for shooting contests, usually held around Thanksgiving. In the modern turkey shoots, targets are substituted for turkeys. Often a turkey is awarded as a prize to the winner. The phrase was further popularized by the Marianas Turkey Shoot, the name given to an aerial battle fought with Navy aircraft in World War II that took place in the Marianas Islands.

wear one's heart on one's sleeve (show all your emotions and feelings)

Origin: The heart is often used as a symbol of one's feelings of love and passion. To fully display the heart in a conspicuous place like the sleeve is to make one's feelings clearly visible. Why the sleeve is chosen as the place to display the emotions is unclear. The phrase is used in Shakespeare's *Othello*, in a line spoken by Iago: "I will wear my heart upon my sleeve" (1.1.65). Iago's plan, in context, is to feign openness and vulnerability in order to gain the trust of Othello, and then use this trust to destroy Othello.

wet behind the ears (be unworldly, naive and inexperienced)

Origin: When a baby is born, it is covered with mucous and fluid. It takes a little while for the baby to dry off. Protected areas, such as the area behind the ears, take a bit longer. *Wet behind the ears* refers to a time shortly after birth before being completely dry.

worth its salt (be competent, reasonably skilled)

Origin: Salt has been a valuable commodity in many cultures throughout history. Salt is sodium chloride. It can be obtained from mines or the oceans. Today salt is commonly mined from large deposits left by dried salt lakes. Modern mining and transportation methods have made salt an inexpensive commodity. Salt is an effective food preservative and before refrigeration was widely available, the demand for salt as a preservative was much greater. The human body requires salt for

the regulation of fluid balance. Salt used as a seasoning adds to the taste of many foods. Because of salt's high value, it was used as a method of exchange. Roman soldiers received a salt allowance as part of their pay. In fact the word "salary" is derived from the Latin "salarium" meaning "of salt". To say that someone is "worth his salt" is to say they have earned their pay.

As is illustrated, idioms are the patrimony of a culture and tradition. They represent centuries of life in a determined sociolinguistic context and geographical setting and are therefore the heart and soul of a linguistic community. They bear a close relationship to the extralinguistic world since they display objects, phenomena, actions, and qualities of reality. It is precisely this culture-bound nature that makes them unmanageable for the learner who does not belong to the same linguistic community. A non-native speaker cannot automatically tap into the shared linguistic or cultural heritage that native speakers have. In presenting these cultural-specific idioms, teachers need to emphasize the culturally singular values contained in them and enable students to manage such information effectively when communicating. Defective knowledge of the target culture, especially of the cultural implications embedded in the idiom, frequently causes breakdowns in communication.

As a result, the idiom becomes an important channel for strengthening sociocultural competence and building up culture-specific background knowledge through practical study of the target language. With the development of sociocultural competence, students' cultural literacy will be gradually improved. They will become increasingly familiar with the relevant background knowledge of people, places, events and ideas broadly shared by all the literate members of the target culture. The role of sociocultural competence for idiom comprehension and native-like language proficiency will never be overstressed.

5.4 Integrating Processing Strategies

The balanced development of pragmatic, figurative and sociocultural competence provides a powerful supporting structure around which idiom processing strategies can be developed in a feasible manner. As it is observed, native speakers of English may react to an idiom in a split second without having to stop and deliberate on its meaning. On the other hand, when non-native speakers encounter an unknown idiom, their thought processes in recognizing an idiom are slower and more deliberate than those of native speakers, no matter how proficient they are in the target language. They must somehow evaluate and screen a series of possible meanings in a trial-and-error manner in order to arrive at a plausible interpretation.

What kinds of strategies can the learner employ to comprehend the idiom? The word *strategy* comes from the ancient Greek term *strategia* meaning the art of war. It involves the optimal management of troops, ships, or aircraft in a planned campaign. In nonmilitary settings, the *strategy* concept has been applied to non-adversarial situations, meaning a plan, step, or conscious action towards achievement of an objective. To be specific, idiom processing strategies are actions taken by the teacher and learner to make idiom comprehension easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.

Cooper proposes a heuristic approach in which “learners are encouraged to learn, discover, understand, or solve problems on their own by experimenting, by evaluating possible answers or solutions, or through trial and error” (Cooper, 1999: 255). He examines the comprehension processes that non-native speakers employ when they attempt to interpret the meanings of English idioms at the moment they are encountered. The purpose of his study is to provide some tips on the on-line idiom processing for non-native speakers of English. The term *on-line* refers to the immediate thought processes activated in the minds of learners as they try to comprehend a given idiomatic expres-

sion on the spot.

According to Cooper, the idiom comprehension techniques fall into two groups: preparatory techniques and guessing techniques. The preparatory ones allow the learner to clarify and consolidate knowledge about the expression, to gain more time before uttering a guess, and to gather additional information in order to make a better informed guess about the idiom's meaning. Personally I do not see the possibility, and in fact the need of making such a clear-cut distinction. Therefore, partially derived from Cooper's insights and partially born of my own grappling with language instruction, I bring forth a new strategy system covering seven main types of strategies in a coherent and consistent way. These strategies have been field-tested through practical classroom use.

Strategy RR (repeating the idiom and requesting its information): the learner repeats the idiom and requests information when he/she does not know its meaning. It's a way of gaining time before a possible interpretation comes to mind.

Strategy DA (discussing and analyzing the idiom): the learner and his/her peers exercise skills of logical thinking to solve the linguistic puzzle represented by the unknown idiom. The strategy is particularly applicable for decomposable idioms because their individual components contribute systematically to their figurative meanings. The learner may process these expressions in a way the semantic representations of each component are accessed and combined according to the normal syntactical rules of the language. Discussing and analyzing idioms may also give the learner more time to clarify thoughts before having to come up with a meaning.

Strategy GC (guessing from context): by using the context, the learner understands the situation in which the idiom is embedded and can clearly infer or interpret the meaning from the context. The high degree of conventionality of idioms makes them quite flexible semantically so that

their meaning may vary with the context. In different contexts *break the ice* might mean “start a conversation,” “to get over embarrassment,” “to overcome suspicion,” or “to start up a friendship.”

Strategy LM (using the literal meaning): being aware of the metaphorical aspect of idioms, the learner employs this strategy and concentrates on the literal meaning of the expression as a key to the figurative meaning. This can imply considering the literal meaning of the entire string, and possible outcomes. For example, *asleep at the switch* implies being not careful, not alert, and *darken one's door* means coming into a person's house as a visitor with his/her shadow darkening the door (used especially when this is not desired, e.g., because the visitor has offended those who live in the house).

Strategy BK (using the background knowledge): the learner makes use of prior knowledge (e.g., etymological knowledge of the idiom, knowledge of the social and cultural context involved) and associations to explain and clarify the idiom and its context.

Strategy AF (analogizing to a familiar idiom): the idiomatic phrase is interpreted by analogy to a known idiom. It can be an idiom in his/her native language that is identical to the English idiom to aid the interpretation. The learner can also look for another English idiom that is similar to some extent. For example, search for another idiom having the same conceptual metaphor, or having a related word (e.g., a synonymous or antonymous word), or having the same verb in the same position, and interpret the unfamiliar idiom accordingly.

Strategy ME (making a metaphorical extension): the idiom is interpreted via metaphorical extension of the action or state described in the idiom. Take for example *grease the wheels*: greasing the wheels allows the machinery to start

moving, so the idiom means “go faster”. In *a straw in the wind*, *straw* is a symbol of weakness, of no direction. The whole idiom is a metaphorical extension of a straw blowing helplessly in the wind.

The rank ordering of strategy use yields the following results: Guessing from context was the strategy used most frequently, followed by discussing and analyzing the idiom, using the literal meaning, using background knowledge, repeating and requesting information, referring to an L1 idiom, and using other strategies including resorting to imagination and creativity, finding out the communicative intention of the speaker, and so on.

The theoretical models of comprehension of idioms in L1 can apply to the comprehension of idioms by second or foreign language learners to some extent. They adequately describe several of the specific strategies. For instance, the Literal Processing Model describes Strategy LM; the Decomposition Model may be a good reflection of Strategy DA; and the Conceptual Metaphor Model mirrors Strategy AF. However, these models are each too limited in scope to account for the whole range of strategies that can be employed by the non-native learner. Because the comprehension process is a dynamic procedure varying from individual to individual, and because it involves the integration of lexical, syntactic, functional, cognitive and socio-cultural factors, several strategies need to be used at a time. Research in the field of second/foreign language teaching (Cooper, 1998 & 1999; Abdullah & Jackson, 1999) has shown that learners do not use a single strategy while encountering an unknown idiom; instead, they utilize a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate idioms. The holistic approach building on the balanced development of pragmatic, figurative and sociocultural competence allows us to account for the quality of variability inherent in the process of understanding second or foreign language idioms. It seems to epitomize the way non-native learners can process idioms most effectively. Moreover, as the learner gets assisted and dexterous in employing these strategies, their pragmatic, figurative and sociocultural compe-

tence will be further fostered and enhanced.

To sum up, the holistic approach to English idioms seeks to unify major contributions from various idiom studies into an organic whole with an emphasis on interconnections of different approaches, integration of different factors and empowerment of the learner. It works to stimulate in learners “a more practiced eye, a more receptive ear, a more fluent tongue, a more involved heart, and a more responsive mind” (Oxford, 1990: ix). It encourages teachers to assist learners in fostering these qualities by developing their idiom capacity in a comprehensive and practical fashion. It is the key to greater learning autonomy and more efficient language acquisition.

Learning idioms is a very good way to improve our understanding and use of a foreign language. A good command of idioms will generate confidence and respect. The accurate and appropriate use of idioms is one distinguishing mark of a sophisticated command of the language and a reliable measure of the proficiency of the language learner. Avoiding the use of idioms gives language a bookish, stilted, unimaginative tone. However, the complexities are so formidable “that many students view them [idioms] with the trepidation of a man approaching a well-planted minefield” (Cowie *et al.*, 1993: x). Although this complex nature cannot be changed, to work on this nature and fully expose it to learners will change the general reticence towards idiom teaching and learning. Learners need guidance in considerable detail. Information in depth needs to be provided. Teachers and learners should work together to restore the fun to the study of language. Actively playing with language, celebrating its wit and creativity may help overcome difficulties in language learning and give a lot of satisfaction on a tough way to the native-like proficiency. Idioms as peculiar and playful elements of language are vital to one’s success as a fluent foreign language speaker.

Conclusions

If natural language had been designed by a logician, idioms would not exist.

Philip Johnson-Laird, 1993

According to Leon Jaeger (1999), language as a whole appears to be structured along two lines; morphologically, its units can be ordered into single words and word combinations; semantically, they can be organized into carriers of plain and figurative meaning. Expressions of thought may in principle be made up entirely of linguistic units perceived as plain. In practice, however, exclusively literal utterances are rare. The two kinds of thought expression, plain and figurative, are somehow integrated in sentences as well as in discourse. Idioms are multiword expressions which are predominantly figurative. Idioms enable the use of the conventional and the creation of the new in order to communicate with others in ways that are familiar, but at the same time strikingly interesting.

6.1 Representation of Idioms

In this book, after a general introduction, I have put forth in Chapter 2 a general description and characterization of the English idioms, including its generation process, its distinction from other subsets of fixed expressions and its definition in a broad sense.

The generation of idioms is often a diachronic process of evolu-

tion exhibiting certain stages. Single individuals are the initial creators of idioms which need to be taken up spontaneously by an entire collectivity in order to achieve currency in the language. The process of idiom formation is a natural selection one involving individual creation, collective adoption and dictionary authorization based upon usefulness for social communication. When idioms eventually acquire the generalization capacity, the majority of them have cast off the primitive context in which they were born.

Just like all community members are potential idiom creators, all aspects of community life, the customs, beliefs, rites, and events, are sources of inspiration for idioms. So are the occupations of community members, their leisure activities, their attitudes in various life situations, their dealing with each other, their strengths and weaknesses, their physical and moral peculiarities, etc. It is the whole way of life of the community that will in the end come out in idioms. Everyday activities in major fields of social life, agricultural, domestic, nautical, and military etc., are those in which human interaction is most frequent and intense, thus most likely to spur idiom creation and institutionalization.

Idioms have a potential for enhancing expressivity. The concrete origination from national customs, beliefs, natural and social environments as well as collective observation and imagination contribute to extraordinary diversity among idioms. This kind of diversity comes about through unique combinations of the thing meant and the thing said. In spite of ongoing diversity it remains probable to classify idioms as homogeneously as possible.

To classify idioms more clearly, I have attempted to draw a distinction between idioms and idiomaticity. All fixed expressions display idiomaticity by virtue of habitual and predictable co-occurrence of specific lexical items. As a subset of fixed expressions, idioms differ from collocations, proverbs, clichés, and social formulae in some ways. Collocations are semantically transparent and analyzable, with their meanings directly derived from the meanings of their constituents. They are less restricted with a high degree of variability. Pro-

verbs are peculiar with their moralizing and prescriptive attributes. They convey some general wisdom or standards of behavior succinctly. They are recognized as a product of wisdom literature which idioms do not originate in. Clichés are more fixed than idioms in terms of lexical and syntactic operations. Their meanings are usually derivable from the sum of the individual constituents. With the loss of their original force, clichés tend to be avoided for becoming hackneyed through overuse. In spite of fixedness and generality, formulaic speech differs from idioms significantly. It is used to accomplish conventional purposes such as greeting, departure, congratulation, etc. and occurs in a particular social context and discourse context.

I have then specified distinct properties of English idioms. English idioms range along a continuum of decomposability. The extent to which the meanings of individual constituents contribute to the overall interpretation varies. The relation between an idiom's form and its meaning can be transparent, semi-transparent or opaque. Idioms also range along a scale of flexibility, from very flexible to very frozen. Some idioms are inflexible and invariant lexically and syntactically. Some allow operations such as quantification, modification, substitution, deletion, or passivization with their core form recognizable and their idiomatic meaning retained. Gradations of idiom compositionality imply some conformity between idiom analyzability and flexibility. Decomposable idioms are lexically more variable and syntactically more productive. A given string of words is not idiomatic once and for all, but gradually acquires its idiomaticity. The development of many idioms undergoes institutionalization, a process of semantic change resulting in lexical fixity to some extent. Institutionalization of idioms also implies recognition and acceptance among community members. With institutionalization, idioms gradually secure national identity to become a verified means of mutual recognition as members of a particular speech community. Many idioms are linked to similes, metaphors, personifications, hyperboles or other kinds of figuration. Users may not always identify precise motive for the figurative pattern involved, but they can generally perceive the expressiveness and effec-

tiveness enhanced. Idioms also have an affective quality. In addition to description and explanation, they are typically used for conveying attitude, evaluation, emphasis or judgment.

Taking these properties into account, I have attempted a general delineation, rather than a simple definition of idioms. Idioms are conventionalized multiword expressions whose overall meanings usually cannot be deduced from the meanings of constituent parts, though the meanings of quite many idioms are partially predictable from constituent meanings. Idioms are more or less lexically fixed and syntactically peculiar, subject to restrained lexical variation and syntactic operation. Many idioms are of figurative nature, reflected in their association with similes, metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles, and other figurative patterns. Idioms are used for a variety of functional purposes including generalization, specification, evaluation, appraisal, disapproval, emphasis and euphemism. Such a broad and flexible profile of idioms can better incorporate the diversity and complexity of idioms.

In sum, the most distinctive feature of idioms is that they have the semantic unity of single words but the grammatical flexibility in varying degrees. Their semantic unity and the consequence of such unity, non-literality and opacity can serve the communicative needs of the language-user in both the conventional and novel manners. Their conventional uses, however, dominate their novel ones. Conventional forms are easier to use for communicating concisely, intelligibly, and fluently with the minimum effort.

6.2 Enlightenment from Previous Studies

The sketch of the distinct features of idioms enables us to gain a better insight into idiom studies conducted by both linguists and psycholinguists. Chapter Three represents my effort to pinpoint and evaluate fundamental differences between various approaches of idiom processing. While researching earlier studies in this field, I have read a great deal of linguistic and psycholinguistic literature on the internal semantics and syntactic behavior of English idioms. I am pleasantly

surprised by the wealth of interesting generalizations based on detailed investigation and experiments.

In this chapter, I have reviewed idiom studies for the past few decades from different perspectives: formal, functional and psycholinguistic. The mutual concern for these competing and complementary theories of idiom comprehension has been the issue of compositionality, that is, whether or not idioms can be shown to have a meaningful internal structure.

Formal approaches to idioms are effective in specifying the form and classes of idioms, but often tend to be intuition-based. Representative researchers of formal approaches are Bruce Fraser (1970), Adam Makkai (1972) and Rosamund Moon (1998).

Fraser sets out a hierarchy of frozenness to explore the transformational potential of idioms. The crucial significance for this hierarchy is: Syntactic variations of idioms can be ordered in different levels. Any idioms marked as belonging to one level is acceptable not only in all transformations of this level but also in all relevant transformations of lower levels. Fraser provides the most perceptive treatment of idioms from the transformational-generative standpoint.

Makkai's study (1972) is another example of a highly formal approach to idioms. He formulates a set of rigorous criteria upon which are detailed categorizations and subcategorizations of English idioms. The simplest group of idioms is lexemic idioms (e.g., *hot dog*, *black-and-white*, *hand in glove*), idioms that correlate readily with individual parts of speech. Tournure idioms, or phraseological idioms (e.g., *pull someone's leg*, *build castles in the air*) tend to be more flexible than lexemic idioms. Because of the versatility of these tournure idioms in both form and function, they seem to be more stimulating to explore and more difficult to use appropriately. The weakness with Makkai's study lies in the fact that he downplays the role of situational or textual context, particularly in the case of lexemic idioms.

Compared with her forerunners' studies, Moon's research is less intuition-based. Rather it is corpus-based, covering a greater range of information about English idioms: the definition, frequency, gram-

matical structure, variation, meaning and discursal function. Her typology of idioms is more flexibly descriptive and empirically sound. The limitations of her study lies in the corpus she adopts. The *Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus* seems somehow confined to journalistic writing and may not reflect the whole picture of English idioms. In fact, drawing conclusions on the statistics valid for a specific corpus is not satisfactory as statistics for a particular item can vary between corpora. A single corpus is not necessarily representative of a language as a whole.

Functional approaches constitute a broader mode to idioms. Idioms are used in situational contexts and consequently should be learned in such contexts. It seems desirable to look for a pragmatic way of classifying idioms, recognizing that they have to do with interactions and interrelationships that occur in particular situational contexts. Among a larger number of researchers with functional perspective, Strassler (1982) is the first to depart from the traditional way of treating idioms as a mere semantic issue. Focusing on the deictic use of idioms, he shows how idioms function as a social status marker and serve as a means to establish social relationships.

Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991, 1993) propose a functional typology of idioms on the assumption that the particular relationship between an idiom's component words and its stipulated meaning, together with pragmatic considerations, will determine how the idiom may be understood and used. Idiom flexibility and productivity are governed by pragmatic constraints as well as idiom compositionality. Even a fully compositional idiom can defy lexical substitution or syntactic transformation which is not communicatively motivated.

Fernando (1996) advances functional approaches by applying Halliday's account of language functions to her idiom study. Idioms are often used to describe interpersonal actions and relationships or the relationship of an individual to the world around him/her. A classification of idioms from a pragmatic viewpoint is appropriate both in terms of capturing the range of idiom types and of organizing them in a way useful to the language learner. Fernando's functional categoriza-

tion of ideational idioms, interpersonal idioms and relational idioms has highlighted the role of idioms in the construction of interpersonal relationship, in the conveyance of attitude and emotion, in the formation of coherent text, and in the creation of stylistic effects. However, the contribution of constituent meanings to the overall figurative meaning of an idiom receives little attention in her account of idioms.

Giora's Graded Salience Hypothesis (1997) is based on a function of idiom conventionality, familiarity or frequency in certain linguistic or nonlinguistic context. The most conventional, popular, frequent, familiar interpretation is the most salient. Salient meanings are always activated and tend to remain active during idiom processing. They have unconditional priority over less salient meanings. However, focusing on salient meanings, Giora seems to be evasive about an idiom's figurative nature.

Vega-Moreno (2001) handles idioms under the pragmatic framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, 1998). She proposes a relevance-driven comprehension procedure. Its central assumption is that idioms are understood following considerations of relevance and a path of least effort to achieve sufficient cognitive effects. The intended interpretation of an idiom is obtained from integrating information derived, in order of accessibility, from background knowledge, the concepts underlying constituent meanings and the implications from combining them. The amount of processing effort invested in the idiom is highly constrained by the search for an optimally relevant interpretation. The strength of Vega-Moreno's account is: It acknowledges partial contribution of word meaning in idiom understanding but has meanwhile shown that the amount of processing effort should be kept as low as possible in looking for the intended cognitive effects. Vega-Moreno provides a plausible explanation for idiom comprehension in both semantic and pragmatic sense.

Psycholinguistic approaches to idioms have undertaken significant development. The first generation of this perspective consists of Bobrow and Bell's Literal Processing Model (1973), Swinney and Cutler's Simultaneous Processing Model (1979), and Gibbs' Idiom

Processing Model (1980). They are all based on the same assumption that an idiom is non-compositional, with its meaning stored in a separate mental list. The idiom itself is devoid of any internal semantics or structure. These three models have been challenged by Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) with their empirical findings. The central problem with these models lies in their denial of idiom's internal structure and evasiveness about idiom flexibility.

According to the non-compositional view of idioms, learning the meanings of idioms requires the formation of arbitrary links between idioms and their nonliteral meanings (e.g., *spill the beans* "to reveal a secret", *button one's lip* "to keep a secret", *lose one's marbles* "to go crazy"). No explanation can be provided as to how people come to acquire rules for knowing which transformations apply or don't apply to which idioms. Though not explicitly taught, yet people somehow learn about the syntactic behavior of most idioms, including relatively rare and novel phrases. The syntactic behavior of idioms cannot be predicted solely on the basis of their grammatical form or figurative meaning but must be due in part to some relation between their figurative meanings and their individual components.

Cacciari and Tabossi's Configuration Model (1988) is superior to the models of the first generation because it dispenses with the rigorous separation between literal or figurative meaning and foregrounds the role the meaning of an individual word plays in idiom comprehension. The Configuration Model claims that idiom processing takes place literally until sufficient input renders it identifiable as an idiom. The idiomatic meaning is not fully activated until the idiomatic key is encountered. The model thus explains why the processing time for idioms varies; it depends on the position of the key word in the configuration. No answer to the same question has been provided by any of the first generation models. The Configuration Model in addition suggests that learners can take into consideration the key word in order to make sense of an idiom. Inference of meaning of the idiom is facilitated and made easier once the learner finds the key word in an idiom. However, the Configuration Model has its own feet of clay: It fails to go fur-

ther to account for differences in idiom flexibility. It has not explained why some idioms can be lexically altered and still retain their figurative meanings whereas other idioms cannot be lexically altered without losing their figurative meanings.

The Decomposition Model proposed by Gibbs and Nayak (1989) can be considered a significant step forward in idiom studies. The model is extraordinarily influential for it initiates systematic investigation of an idiom's degree of decomposability. It brings idiom compositionality, a crucial variable in idiom comprehension, into limelight for the first time, asserting that the access of the meaning of an idiom is dependent on its compositionality which can be distinguished into three types: normally decomposable, abnormally decomposable and non-decomposable. The compositionality of an idiom does not depend on that word string's being literally well formed. For instance, *pop the question* is literally anomalous but semantically decomposable. In fact, many semantically non-decomposable idioms are literally well formed (e.g., *chew the fat*, *hit the sauce*, *give the sack*). Gibbs and Nayak further demonstrate that the lexical flexibility of idioms is not an arbitrary phenomenon, but depends specifically on how the internal semantics of these phrases relate to their overall figurative interpretation. Difference in idiom flexibility can be partially attributed to difference in idiom compositionality. Usually the more decomposable an idiom is, the more flexible it behaves. On the basis of a series of experiments conducted, Gibbs and Nayak conclude that compositionality has important implications for idiom comprehension: People take less time to process decomposable idioms than non-decomposable ones; meanings of non-decomposable idioms require extra processing efforts; the idiom decomposability permits a compositional parsing strategy to be used when decomposable idioms are comprehended because the individual components contribute systematically to the figurative meanings of these phrases. The supremacy of this model rests on its strong prediction about idiom flexibility: Those idioms that are decomposable, with the meaning of the individual components contributing to the idioms' figurative interpretations, tend to be both syn-

tactically versatile and lexically flexible. The problem is how to help learners determine precisely whether an idiom is semantically decomposable or not. In some cases it will be a decomposable idiom for some students and a non-decomposable one for others. So it is by no means straightforward to classify all idioms correctly.

Gibbs and his colleagues have been tirelessly persistent in their empirical studies of idioms. Inspired by the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1987), they have advanced the Decomposition Model to the cognitive level and put forth the Conceptual Metaphor Model.

Gibbs and his colleagues employ different methodologies to capture what people ordinarily, and unconsciously, do when they comprehend and make sense of idioms. One way to uncover people's metaphorical knowledge for idioms is to examine their mental images of groups of idioms with similar figurative meanings about revelation (e.g., *spill the beans*, *let the cat out of the bag*, *blow the lid off*), anger (*blow one's stack*, *hit the ceiling*, *flip one's lid*), insanity (*go off one's rocker*, *lose one's marbles*, *bounce off the walls*), and secretiveness (*keep it under one's hat*, *button one's lip*, *keep in the dark*) (Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990). Overall, experiment participants' descriptions of their mental images are remarkably consistent for different idioms with similar figurative meanings. Their responses to the questions about the causes and consequences of the actions described in their images are also highly consistent. These empirical findings have uncovered the active presence of conceptual metaphors, that is, metaphors that actively structure the way we think about different domains of experience. It shows that the meanings of many idioms are motivated by people's conceptual knowledge and the study of idioms reveals significant aspects of how people ordinarily think. For instance, the idioms *blow one's stack*, *flip one's lid*, *hit the ceiling*, *get hot under the collar*, *lose one's cool*, and *get steamed up* appear to be motivated by the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER. It is through the conceptual metaphor that the mapping between an individual component and its idiomatic referent can be accomplished. In the case of normally decomposable idioms,

the mapping is more transparent or conventional; in the case of abnormally decomposable idioms, the mapping is less transparent or conventional; in the non-decomposable idioms there is no mapping because there is no underlying conceptual metaphor involved. The Conceptual Metaphor Model is pedagogically valuable. It suggests that teachers may guide students to make full use of the conceptual metaphor to interpret unfamiliar idioms.

The merit of the Conceptual Metaphor Model derives from its innovation of the traditional view of idioms according to which, there is no particular reason why we might create so many different expressions to convey roughly the same idea or concept, and the link between an idiom and its figurative meaning is arbitrary and cannot be predicted from the meanings of its individual words.

6.3 Compositionality and Flexibility

Obviously, various linguistic and psycholinguistic studies on idioms have now identified some crucial factors that codetermine how idioms are being processed: compositionality and flexibility, context and function, conceptual metaphor, familiarity and frequency, etc. Among all these variables, compositionality appears to be indisputably pivotal. In the past fifteen years, it has been recurrently demonstrated that many idioms, contrary to the traditional view, are at least partly analyzable or decomposable (Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs, Nayak, Bolton & Keppel, 1989; Lakoff, 1987). The contribution that the parts make to an idiom's meaning may not be a literal one. All that matters is that the part contributes some independent meaning to the phrase's figurative interpretation. These studies have demonstrated that the compositionality of an idiom has a significant influence on its syntactic productivity as well as lexical flexibility.

Based upon data from diverse sources, I have ventured in Chapter Four to sort out possible ways in which canonical forms of idioms may vary in authentic discourse. This is an area which I consider especially worthy of my mental and intellectual exertion because idiom flexibility

or productivity has been a Cinderella in the traditional view which holds that idioms are non-compositional chunks bereft of internal semantics. What is more important, idiom flexibility or productivity enables the language user to achieve particular communication purposes and unusual effects, or even create new idiomatic meanings by substituting, modifying, deleting, and inverting parts of idioms.

I have first of all focused on lexical variants, among which verb variation is the commonest type, and there is no real change in meaning of the idiom. Noun variation is slightly less common than verb variation and often involves some change in the mental image aroused. Modifier variation concerns addition of an adjective, a quantifier or a nominal group. The language user's familiarity with an idiom in its original form can promote the comprehension of its variant. But idiom decomposability contributes more significantly to his/her intuition about lexical flexibility. Decomposable idioms tend to be more survivable with regard to lexical variation. Contextual cues can likewise enhance the user's perception of idiom variants. When context is specifically appropriate, both the original and variant forms of idioms are facilitated. The language user's general world knowledge also plays an indispensable role in variant interpretation. With all these constraints as well as facilitations, there emerges the general principle for lexical variation: Given a reasonable communication intent, any lexical variation that respects the semantics of each constituent, preserves the relationship between the idiom's constituents and meaning components, and respects the idiom meaning itself should be acceptable.

The syntactic behavior of idioms is governed by the same principle. To be specific, any syntactic operation that values both the semantics and pragmatics of the idiom's constituents and the idiom's meaning should be acceptable, given that a communicative purpose can be served. Syntactic versatility of idioms is well illustrated by the diverse syntactic operations on idioms including nominalization, pronominalization, passivization, topicalization, ellipsis, conjunct movement, comparative construction, coordination with nonidiomatic

items, and modification by relative clauses. Idiom flexibility or productivity is best displayed in the dynamic nonce use of the idiom.

6.4 Pedagogical Implications

Idioms are used in various forms of discourse and communicative contexts. Learning to use them properly is extremely important for acquiring a good command of authentic language. Pulling together an assortment of theoretic frameworks proposed from different perspectives, I have advanced in Chapter Five a holistic approach for English idiom comprehension, an approach constructed specially for non-native speakers. In addition to linguistic competence, the approach brings up other types of competence for idiom comprehension: pragmatic competence, figurative competence, and sociocultural competence.

Why pragmatic competence? Idioms are of strong communicative force. They are never just neutral alternatives to literal equivalents. Idioms always comment on the world in some way, rather than simply describe it. Idiom selection is not random and unmotivated, but can be linked to features of language choice at the discourse level. Context is obviously one of the most relevant variables in terms of pragmatic consideration. Idioms are used in situational contexts and consequently should be presented and learned in such contexts. Admittedly, we must accept the possibility and the need of many kinds of idiom classifications based on different sorts of relationships and serving different purposes since no classification is a single, universal proposition. However, a pragmatic classification of idioms will be more user-friendly than an elaborate one from the semantic or syntactic standpoint.

To strengthen pragmatic competence, learners need to develop the ability to identify, and to use appropriately, idioms of different functions. For instance, the function of idioms as evaluative devices seems to be a regular pattern across a wide variety of text types and a wide range of spoken discourse in different situational contexts

(Moon, 1998). Learners should be guided to observe idiom use at close quarters and learn to distinguish between distinct stylistic or emotive overtones: formal or informal, complimentary or derogatory, general or special and so on. The theme-based grouping of idioms drawing upon learners' personal experience or background knowledge will be unquestionably beneficial for improving their pragmatic competence. But controlled practice relating to idiom functions should always be the first step toward pragmatic competence development. A learner with adequate pragmatic competence is capable of integrating semantic, discoursal, situational and general world knowledge so as to arrive at the intended interpretation of the idiom and, in case of need, to generate a new idiom by means of lexical or syntactic variation on an existing one.

As recurrently demonstrated, a proportion of idioms are motivated by underlying conceptual structures which facilitate meaning inferences by providing some connection between the concrete and abstract areas of knowledge. The ability to comprehend and produce idioms is inseparable from the development of figurative competence. To build up figurative competence, a correlative set of abilities are to be taken into consideration: The ability to understand both the dominant and extraneous meanings of a word; the ability to go beyond purely literal strategies when perceiving the semantic incoherence resulting from a literal interpretation; the ability to activate inferential processes and integrate information from diverse sources to restore a coherent semantic representation; last but not least, the ability to retrieve the conceptual metaphor involved and understand figurative language appropriately (Levorato & Cacciari, 1992). In fact, the ability of retrieving conceptual metaphors has been increasingly crucial for grasping figurative meaning of idioms. To raise learners' awareness of cognitive structures underlying idioms, a couple of teaching techniques have been recommended: collecting idioms relating to a particular conceptual metaphor, posting them on the board and making students supply mental images about them. As far as figurative competence is concerned, recovering conceptual metaphors is worth the effort, even if

only a moderate number of idioms might be made accessible to learners via conceptual metaphors. The development of figurative competence implies the growth of the whole conceptual system. It is a process involving a multitude of linguistic and cognitive skills. It gives the learner a greater control over his/her idiom capacity and communicative possibilities.

The third type of competence recommended by the holistic approach is sociocultural competence. To master a foreign language, the learner needs to get familiar with values, norms and customs of the target culture. As part of the national cultural heritage, many idioms represent centuries of social life in a geographical setting and reflect cultural features derived from the historical development. Idioms are strongly tied to the culture and history of the people that generate them. There is a need for learners to be exposed to consciousness-raising activities with specific emphasis on the origin of the idiom and the sociocultural context it is embedded in. It can provide some illuminating background knowledge for idiom comprehension and social communication. The role of sociocultural competence is irreplaceable because in all the cultures concerned, idioms are felt by native speakers to be vividly characteristic of national identity and a verified means of mutual recognition as members of the same speech community. The acquisition process of the three types of competence follows parallel paths instead of being a sequential course.

In order to assist the learner to integrate the linguistic, pragmatic, figurative and sociocultural competence and improve his/her idiom capacity, the holistic approach of idiom comprehension further specifies a variety of strategies the learner can employ. These include repeating the idiom and requesting its information, discussing and analyzing the idiom, inferring from the context and literal meaning of the idiom, using background knowledge, analogizing to a familiar idiom, and making metaphorical extension. Learners do not resort to a single strategy while encountering an unfamiliar idiom; instead they tend to utilize several strategies at a time to comprehend, evaluate and appreciate the idiom. Since idiom comprehension and acquisition is a dy-

namic procedure involving a multitude of variables, it is advisable to adopt the holistic approach which allows us to explore the vivacious aspect of language with greater adaptability and enjoyment.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Exploration

Some possible directions for further research are suggested by the findings of this research. Firstly, the relationship between idiom decomposability and idiom flexibility has been a pivotal issue in this book. Patterns of lexical variation, variation regularity, variation constraint, and variation comprehension have been covered to some extent, but not in an exhaustive manner. It remains to be seen whether there are systematic relations between the type of idiom variation and the choice of processing strategies. And the relationship between the formal classification of idioms and the functional typology of idioms remains obscure.

Secondly, most of the focus on the conceptual basis of idioms has been on the role that the metaphorical factor plays in motivating what idioms mean figuratively. However, other figurative schemes of thought also give rise to different idioms and help motivate idiom meanings. For example, some idioms are motivated by figurative schemes of thought like metonymy (e.g., *on the tip of someone's tongue*, *under the thumb of someone*, *take the floor*, *from the cradle to the grave*). An idiom with underlying metonymic constructs reflects some salient aspect of an object, idea, or event and then stands for the whole object, idea, or event. With perhaps hundreds of idioms that are created by the metonymic structure of thought, it would be interesting to direct some empirical research toward this aspect of idioms.

Last but not least, a number of recent researches have looked at the role of familiarity in people's immediate comprehension of idioms. Highly familiar idioms are generally understood more rapidly than are less familiar phrases. Learners choose fewer literal interpretations with familiar idioms and more literal interpretations in unfamiliar idioms.

(Schweigert, 1991; Schweigert & Moates, 1988). Idioms also differ in the extent to which their literal or figurative sense is perceived as more familiar. For example, some idioms, such as *pull someone's leg*, are predominantly seen in figurative contexts, whereas others, such as *take one's medicine*, have literal and figurative uses that are roughly equal in occurrence. The extents to which an idiom has a dominant literal or figurative meaning can influence the difficulty people have understanding these phrases when used in their nonliteral meanings (Popiel & McRae 1988). These various findings support the idea that difficulty in idiom processing partly depends on the familiarity of these phrases. To what extent does familiarity integrate with other variables and enhance the effect of context in idiom comprehension? What is the exact role of familiarity in idiom comprehension and production and how can it be reflected in the holistic approach? To bring forth an adequate account of idiom use and acquisition, these questions have yet to be examined in detail.

To sum up, idioms can be found in many spheres of human life and communication. Idioms express in a few words what would require many more words to express in literal terms. They maintain discourse relations by providing in a concise way a wealth of information about how people think of the world around them. Indeed, what makes idioms so fascinating is the way they involve the imagination, make abstract meanings more concrete, add a wealth of meaning to simple concepts, and finally, make the commonplace conversation more interesting. It is partially through idioms that the truly creative nature of human expression reveals itself. Idioms are in a sense the poetry of daily discourse.

The multifaceted nature of idioms renders it virtually impossible for any single approach or methodology to fully capture idioms. The picture that emerges from various studies is still rather incomplete. Different approaches coexist in the field, and a variety of topics remain debatable. In fact, quite a few aspects concerning idioms are still waiting to be investigated in an appropriate way. However, along with divergences, convergent attitudes, at least on some issues, are

starting to surface. In particular, the view that the meanings of the constituent words of an idiom do play a role in its comprehension is now winning a growing consensus among researchers. I hope that this book, with its effort to bind the different trends of research into a coherent framework, will make a modest contribution to the further development of an interdisciplinary perspective on idiom studies.

References

- Abdullah, K. & Jackson, H. 1999. Idioms and the language learner. *Language in Contrast*, Vol. I (1), 83-107.
- Abel, B. 2003. English idioms in the first language and second language lexicon: A dual representation approach. *Second Language Research*, 19, 329-358.
- Altenberg, B. 1998. On the phraseology of spoken English: the evidence of recurrent word-combinations. In A. P. Cowie (ed.) *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Application*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 101-122.
- Andersen, R. 1988. *The Power and the Word: Language, Power and Change*. London: Paladin Grafton Books.
- Bauer, L. 1983. *English Word-formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloor, T. & Bloor, M. 1995. *The Functional Analysis of English: A Hallidayan Approach*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Blum-Kulka, S. & Levenston, E. 1987. Lexical-grammatical pragmatic indicators. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 9, 155-70.
- Bobrow, S. & Bell, S. 1973. On catching on to idiomatic expressions. *Memory and Cognition*, 1, 343-346.
- Bonvillain, N. 1993. *Language, Culture and Communication: The Meaning of Messages*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Brinton, L. J. & Akimoto, M. (eds.) 1999. *Collocational & Idiomatic Aspects of Composite Predicates in the History of English*.

- Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Bulut, T. Idiom processing in L2: through rose-colored glasses. Sept. 2004 <<http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/bulut-yazici/article.pdf>>.
- Cacciari, C. & Glucksberg, S. 1995. Imagining idiomatic expressions: literal or figurative meanings? In Everaert, M, *et al.* (eds.) *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 43-56.
- Cacciari, C. & Glucksberg, S. 1991. Understanding idiomatic expressions: the contribution of word meanings. In G. B. Simpson (ed.) *Understanding Word and Sentence*. North-Holland: Elsevier Science Publishers. 217-240.
- Cacciari, C. & Tabossi, P. (eds.) 1993. *Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cacciari, C. & Tabossi P. 1988. The comprehension of idioms. *Journal of Language and Memory*, 27, 668-683.
- Cameron, L. & Low, G. (eds.) 1999. *Researching and Applying Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R. & McCarthy, M. 1988. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Coady, J. & Huckin, T. (eds.) 1997. *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colombo, L. 1993. The comprehension of ambiguous idioms in context. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms, Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 163-185.
- Cooper, T. C. 1998. Teaching idioms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31, 255-266.
- Cooper, T. C. 1999. Processing of idioms by L2 learners of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 233-262.
- Cornell, A. 1999. Idioms: an approach to identifying major pitfalls for learners. *IRAL*, Vol. 5 (2), 140-158.
- Coulmas, F. (ed.) 1997. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Ox-

- ford; Blackwell.
- Cowie, A. P. 1988. Stable and creative aspects of vocabulary use. In R. Carter & M. McCarthy (eds.) *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London; Longman. 126-137.
- Cowie, A. P. 1992. Multiword lexical units and communicative language teaching. In P. Arnaud & H. Bejoint (eds.) *Vocabulary and Applied Linguistics*. London; Macmillan. 1-12.
- Cowie, A. P. (ed.) 1996. *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Application*. Oxford; Oxford University Press.
- Cronk, B. C., Lima, S. D. & Schweigert, W. A. 1993. Idioms in sentences: effects of frequency, literalness, and familiarity. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 22, 59-82.
- Cruse, D. A. 1986. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, N. C. 1997. Vocabulary acquisition: word structure, collocation, word-class. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (eds.) *Vocabulary, Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 122-139.
- Erman, B. & Warren, B. 2000. The idiom principle and the open choice principle. *Text*, Vol. 20 (1), 29-62.
- Ernst, T. 1981. Grist for the linguistic mill: idioms and "extra" adjectives. *Journal of Linguistic Research*, Vol. 1 (3), 51-68.
- Estill, R. B. & Kemper, S. 1982. Interpreting idioms. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 6, 559-568.
- Everaert, M., van der Linden, E. J., Schenk, A. & Schreuder, R. (eds.) 1995. *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fellbaum, C. 1993. The determiner in English idioms. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi. (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 271-296.
- Fernando, C. 1996. *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. Oxford; Oxford University Press.
- Fernando, C. & Flavell, R. 1981. On idioms: Critical views and

- perspectives. *Exeter Linguistic Studies*, 5, 18-48.
- Fillmore, L. W. 1979. Individual differences in second language acquisition. In C. J. Fillmore, D. Kempler, and W. S. Y. Wang (eds.) *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behavior*. Academic Press.
- Fraser, B. 1970. Idioms within a transformational grammar. *Foundations of Language*, 4, 109-127.
- Gairns, R. & Redman, S. 1986. *Working with Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galinsky, A. D. & Glucksberg, S. 2000. Inhibition of the literal: Metaphors and idioms as judgmental primes. *Social Cognition*, 18, 35-54.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1980. Spilling the beans on understanding and memory for idioms in conversation. *Memory and Cognition*, 8, 149-156.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1984. Literal meaning and psychological theory, *Cognitive Science*, 8, 275-304.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1986. Skating on thin ice: Literal meaning and understanding idioms in conversation. *Discourse Processes*, 9, 17-30.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1987. Linguistic factors in children's understanding of idioms. *Journal of Child Language*, 14, 569-586.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1991. Semantic analyzability in children's understanding of idioms. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 34, 613-620.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1992. What do idioms really mean? *Journal of Memory and Language*, 31, 485-506.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1993. Why idioms are not dead metaphors. In C. Cacciari and P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 57-77.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1994. *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1995. Idiomaticity and human cognition. In M. Everaert, E. J. van der Linden, A. Schenk & R. Schreuder (eds.) *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 97-116.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1999. Researching metaphors. In L. Cameron & G. Low (eds.) *Researching and Applying Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 29-47.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. & Gonzales, G. P. 1985. Syntactic frozenness in processing and remembering idiom. *Cognition*, 20, 243-259.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. & Nayak, N. P. 1989. Psycholinguistic studies on the syntactic behavior of idioms. *Cognitive Psychology*, 21, 100-138.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr., Nayak, N. P., Bolton, J. L. & Keppel, M. E. 1989. Speakers' assumptions about the lexical flexibility of idioms. *Memory & Cognition*, 17, 58-68.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr., Nayak, N. P. & Cutting, C. 1989. How to kick the bucket and not decompose: analyzability and idiom processing. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 28, 576-593.
- Gibbs, R. W. & O'Brien, J. E. 1990. Idioms and mental imagery: the metaphorical motivation for idiomatic meaning. *Cognition*, 36, 35-68.
- Glass, A. L. 1983. The comprehension of idioms. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 12, 429-442.
- Glucksberg, S. 1993. Idiom meanings and allusional content. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 3-26.
- Glucksberg, S. 2001. *Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Glucksberg, S., Brown, M. & McGlone, M. S. 1993. Conceptual metaphors are not automatically accessed during idiom comprehension. *Memory and Cognition*, 21, 711-719.
- Glucksberg, S., Gildea, P. and Bookin, H. B. 1982. On understanding nonliteral speech: Can people ignore metaphors? *Jour-*

- nal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 21, 85-98.
- Grauberg, W. 1989. Proverbs and idioms: mirrors of national experience? In G. James (ed.) *Lexicographers and Their Works*. Exeter: University of Exeter. 94-99.
- Giora, R. 1999. On the priority of salient meanings: Studies of literal and figurative language. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, 919-929.
- Giora, R. & Fein, O. 1999. On understanding familiar and less-familiar figurative language. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, 1601-1618.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1973. *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotics; The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. & Hasan, R. 1976. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Halliday, M. A. K. & Hasan, R. 1989. *Language, Context, and Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. & Hasan, R. 2000. System and text: making links. *Text*, Vol. 20 (2), 201-210.
- Hamblin, J. L. & Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1999. Why you can't kick the bucket as you slowly die: Verbs in idiom comprehension. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 28 (1), 25-39.
- Hasan, R. 1995. The conception of context in text. In P. Fries & M. Gregory (eds.) *Discourse in Society; Systemic Functional Perspectives*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation. 183-283.
- Hatch, E. 1992. *Discourse and Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hatch, R. & Brown, C. 1996. *Vocabulary, Semantics and Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoey, M. 1991. *Patterns of Lexis in Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Howarth, P. 1998. Phraseology and second language proficiency. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 19 (1), 24-44.
- Irujo, S. 1986. A piece of cake: Learning and teaching idioms. *ELT Journal*, 40, 236-241.
- Irujo, S. 1986. Don't put your leg in your mouth: Transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20, 287-304.
- Irujo, S. 1993. Steering clear: Avoidance in the production of idioms. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 205-219.
- Jackendoff, R. 1995. The boundaries of the lexicon. In M. Everaert *et al.*, (eds.) *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 133-165.
- Jaeger, L. 1999. *The Nature of Idioms*. Bern: European Academic Publishers.
- Katz, J. 1973. Compositionality, idiomaticity, and lexical substitution. In S. Anderson & P. Kiparsky (eds.) *A Festschrift for Morris Halle*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 357-376.
- Katz, J. & Postal, P. 1963. Semantic interpretation of idioms and sentences containing them. *Quarterly Progress Report of the MIT Research Laboratory of Electronics*, 70, 275-282.
- Kavka, S. & Zybert, J. Glimpses on the history of idiomaticity issues. 26 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL01/kavka.pdf>>.
- Keysar, B. & Bly, B. 1995. Intuition of the transparency of idioms: can one keep a secret by spilling the beans? *Journal of Memory and Language*, 34, 89-109.
- Keysar, B. & Bly, B. 1999. Swimming against the current: Do idioms reflect conceptual structure? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, 1559-1578.
- Kjellmer, G. 1991. A mint of phrases. In K. Aijmer & B. Altenberg (eds.) *English Corpus Linguistics*. London: Longman. 111-127.
- Ladusaw, W. Meanings. Dec. 2004 <<http://www.isadc.org/index2.php>>.

- Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G & Kovecses, Z. 1987. The cognitive model of anger inherent in American English. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (eds.) *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 195-221.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lattey, E. 1986. Pragmatic classification of idioms as an aid for the language learner. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 3, 217-233.
- Laufer, B. 1997. What's in a word that makes it hard or easy. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 140-155.
- Leech, G. N. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lemke, J. L. 1998. Resources for attitudinal meaning: evaluation orientations in text semantics. *Functions of Language*, Vol. 5 (1), 33-56.
- Lennon, P. 1998. Approaches to the teaching of idiomatic language. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 11-30.
- Levorato, M. C. 1993. The acquisition of idioms and the development of figurative competence. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 101-128.
- Levorato M. C. & Cacciari, C. 1992. Children's comprehension and production of idioms: The role of context and familiarity. *Child Language*, 19, 415-433.
- Lewis, M. 1993. *The Lexical Approach*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
- Lewis, M. 1996. Pedagogical implications of the lexical approach. In J. Coady & T. Huchin (eds.) *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 255-270.

- Lewis, M. 1997. Implications of a lexical view of language. In J. Willis & D. Willis (eds.) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan. 10-16.
- Liu, D. 2003. The most frequently used spoken American English idioms: A corpus analysis and its implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 671-700.
- Low, G. 1988. On teaching metaphor. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 9 (2), 125-147.
- Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makkai, A. 1972. *Idiom Structure in English*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Martin, J. R. 1992. *English Text: System and Structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Martin, J. R. et al., 1997. *Working with Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- McCarthy, M. 1990. *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCarthy, M. 1991. *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M. & Carter, R. 1994. *Language as Discourse: Perspectives for Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- McCarthy, M. & O'Dell, F. 1994. *English Vocabulary in Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGlone, M. S., Glucksberg, S. & Cacciari, C. 1994. Semantic productivity and idiom comprehension. *Discourse Processes*, Vol. 17(2), 167-190.
- Moon, R. 1992. Textual aspects of fixed expressions. In P. Arnaud & H. Bejoint (eds.) *Vocabulary and Applied Linguistics*. London: Macmillan. 13-27.
- Moon, R. 1994. The analysis of fixed expressions in text. In M. Coulthard (ed.) *Advances in Written Text Analysis*. London: Routledge. 117-135.
- Moon, R. 1997. Vocabulary connections: multiword items in English. In N. Schmitt and M. McCarthy (eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press. 40-63.
- Moon, R. 1998. *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English: A Corpus-based Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nattinger, J. R. & DeCarrico, J. S. 1992. *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- National Urban Alliance. Phrases with origins. 11 Oct. 1998 < <http://members.aol.com/MorelandC/HaveOrigins.htm> >.
- Nayak, N. P. & Gibbs, R. W. Jr. 1990. Conceptual knowledge in the interpretation of idioms. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 119, 315-330.
- Needham, W. P. 1992. Limits on literal processing during idiom interpretation. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 21, 1-16.
- Newmeyer F. J. 1974. The regularity of idiom behavior. *Lingua*, 34, 327-342.
- Nicolas, T. 1995. Semantics of idiom modification. In M. Everaert *et al.* (eds.) *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 233-252.
- Nunberg, G., Sag, I. A. & Wasow, T. 1994. Idioms. *Language*, 70, 491-538.
- Ortony, A., Schallert, D. L. Reynolds, R. E. & Antos, S. J. 1978. Interpreting metaphors and idioms: Some effects of context on comprehension. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 17, 465-477.
- Oxford, R. L. 1990. *Language Learning Strategies*. Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Palacios Martinez, I. M. Negative polarity idioms in modern English. 5 Apr. 2005 < <http://nora.hd.uib.no/icame/ij23/npime.pdf> >.
- Palmer, F. R. 1981. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pawley, A. 1993. A language which defies description by ordinary means. In W. Foley (ed) *The Role of Theory in Language Description*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 87-129.
- Pawley, A. & Syder, F. H. 1983. Two puzzles for linguistic theory:

- nativelike selection and nativelike fluency. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (eds.) *Language and Communication*. London: Longman. 191-225.
- Peters, A. M. 1983. *The Units of Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peterson, R. R. & Burgess, C. 1993. Syntactic and semantic processing during idiom comprehension: Neurolinguistic and Psycholinguistic Dissociations. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 201-223.
- Pinnavaia, L. The grammaticalization of English idioms: a hypothesis for teaching purposes. Jan. 2002 <<http://www.ledonline.it/mpw/allegati/mpw0102/pinnavaia.pdf>>.
- Popiel, S. & McRae, K. 1988. The figurative and literal senses of idioms. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 17, 475-487.
- Prinz, P. M. 1983. The development of idiomatic meaning in children. *Language and Speech*, 26, 263-271.
- Reagan, R. T. 1987. The syntax of English idioms: Can the dog be put out? *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 16, 417-441.
- Riehemann, S. A constructional approach to idioms and word formation, Aug. 2001 <<http://doors.stanford.edu/sr/sr-diss-pdf>>.
- Rose, J. H. 1978. Types of idioms. *Linguistics*, 203, 55-62.
- Schmitt, N. & McCarthy, M. 1997. *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schweigert, W. A. 1985. The comprehension of familiar and less familiar idioms. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 15, 33-45.
- Schweigert, W. A. 1991. The muddy waters of idiom comprehension. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 20 (4), 305-314.
- Schweigert, W. A. & Moates, D. R. 1988. Familiar idiom comprehension. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 17, 281-296.
- Simpson, R. & Mendis, D. 2003. A corpus-based study of idioms in academic speech. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 419-441.

- Sinclair, J. 1991. *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. 1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. 1998. Pragmatics and time. In R. Carston & U. Uchida (eds.) *Relevance Theory: Applications and Implications*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 1-22.
- Strassler, J. 1982. *Idioms in English: A Pragmatic Analysis*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Stroop, J. R. 1935. Studies of interference in serial verbal reactions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 18, 643-662.
- Stubbs, M. 1995. Collocations and cultural connotations of common words. *Linguistics and Education*, Vol. 7 (4), 379-390.
- Swan, M. 1997. The influence of the mother tongue on second language vocabulary. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (eds.) *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 156-180.
- Swinney, D. A. & Cutler, A. 1979. The access and processing of idiomatic expressions. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 18, 523-534.
- Tabossi, T. & Zardon, F. 1993. The activation of idiom meaning in spoken language comprehension. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (eds.) *Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 145-162.
- Teliya, V. *et al.*, 1998. Phraseology as a language of culture: its role in the representation of a cultural mentality. In A. P. Cowie (ed.) *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Application*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 55-75.
- Thompson, G. 1996. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Titone, D. A. & Connine, C. M. 1994. Comprehension of idiomatic expressions: Effects of predictability and literality. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*, 20, 1126-1138.

- Van de Voort, M. E. C. & Vonk, W. 1995. You don't die immediately when you kick an empty bucket: A processing view on semantic and syntactic characteristics of idioms. In M. Everaert *et al.*, (eds.) *Idioms: Structural and Psychological Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 283-299.
- Vega-Moreno, R. E. 2001. Representing and processing idioms. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 13, 73-107.
- Vega-Moreno, R. E. Relevance theory and the construction of idiom meaning. Sept. 2004 < [phon.ucl.ac.uk / publications / WPL / 03papers / rosa. pdf](http://phon.ucl.ac.uk/publications/WPL/03papers/rosa.pdf)>.
- Vegas Puente, J. C. Different views on sociocultural competence. 15 Sept. 1997 < [http:// www. wilstopley. com/LCS/articles/jp. htm](http://www.wilstopley.com/LCS/articles/jp.htm)>.
- Wasow, T., Sag, I. A. & Nunberg, G. 1984. Idioms: An interim report. In S. Hattori & K. Inoue (eds.) *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Linguistics*. The Hague: CIPL. 102-115.
- Weinert, R. 1995. The role of formulaic language in second language acquisition: a review. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 16 (2), 180-205.
- Weinreich, U. 1969. Problems in the analysis of idioms, In J. Puhvel (ed.) *Substance and Structure of Language*. University of California Press. 23-81.
- Wierzbicka, A. 1992. *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wood, F. T. 1981. *A Definition of Idiom*. Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Wray, A. 1998. Protolanguage as a holistic system for social interaction. *Language and Communication*, 18, 47-67.
- Wray, A. 2000. Formulaic sequences in second language teaching: principle and practice. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 21 (4), 463-489.
- Yagihashi, H. Idiom passivization: where do syntax and semantics meet. Sept. 2003 < [http://www. flet. keio. ac. jp/colloq/arti](http://www.flet.keio.ac.jp/colloq/arti)>.

cles/Col-25. html〉.

- Yorio, C. A. 1989. Idiomaticity as an indicator of second language proficiency. In K. Hyltenstam & L. K. Obler (eds.) *Bilingualism across the Lifespan: Aspects of Acquisition, Maturity, and Loss*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix I

List of Dictionaries Consulted

- Ammer, C. (ed.) 1997. *The American Heritage Dictionary of idioms*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Barnhart, P. K. 1987. *The Barnhart Dictionary of English Etymology*. New York: Wilson.
- Benson, M., Benson, E. & Ilson, R. 1986. *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Boatner, M. T., Gates, J. E. & Makkai, A. 1995. *A Dictionary of American Idioms*. Woodbury, NY: Barron.
- Cowie, A. P. & Mackin, R. 1975. *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English: Verbs with Prepositions and Particles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cowie, A. P., Mackin, R. & McCaig, I. R. 1983. *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cowie, A. P., Mackin, R. & McCaig, I. R. 1993. *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flavell, L. & Flavell, R. 1992. *Dictionary of Idioms and Their Origins*. London: Kyle Cathie Limited.
- Gilman, E. W. (ed.) 1994. *Merriam Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., Publishers.
- Gulland, D. M. & David, G. H. 1994. *The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Klein, E. 1971. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

- Long, T. H. (ed.) 1979. *Longman Dictionary of English Idioms*. London: Longman.
- Matthews, P. H. 1997. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maxwell, K. et al., (eds.) 1998. *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Procter, P. (ed.) 1995. *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Renton, N. E. 1990. *Metaphorically Speaking: A Dictionary of 3800 Picturesque Idiomatic Expressions*. New York: A Time Warner / Company.
- Seidl, J. & McMordie, W. 1983. *English Idioms and How to Use Them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sinclair, J. (ed.) 1995. *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Spears, R. A. 1987. *NTC's American Idioms Dictionary*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Stern, K. (ed.) 1998. *Longman Idioms Dictionary*. Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- Summers, D. 1993. *Longman Language Activator*. Hong Kong: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Toby, J. 2001. *Oxford Idioms Dictionary for Learners of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Urdang, L & Abates, F. R. 1983. *Idioms and Phrases Index*. Detroit: Gale Research Company.

Appendix II

Tentative Classification of Fixed Expressions in English Lexicon

Types of Fixed Expression

Examples

I Idioms

(i) irreversible binominals

spick and span;
red tape;
toss and turn;
twist and turn;
ups and downs;
wax and wane;
warp and woof;
wear and tear

(ii) compound idioms

egghead;
blackmail;
underfoot;
wildgoose;
heartbreaking;
mouth-watering;
light-hearted;
level-headed

(iii) full idioms

run up a bill;
tear off ;
smell a rat;
rain cats and dogs;

(iv) semi-idioms

be in the doghouse
 beefy-looking;
 a fat salary;
 dead drunk;
 wake the dead;
 a walking dictionary;
 a white lie;
 a wildcat scheme;
 a false alarm

II *Proverbs*

A watched pot never boils;
 A stitch in time saves nine;
 Walls have ears;
 Too many cooks spoil the broth

III *Stock phrases*

When all is said and done;
 a recipe for disaster;
 a vicious circle/ spiral;
 May he/she rest in peace;
 Keep taking the tablets
 That's another fine mess you got
 me into;

IV *Catchphrases*

Watch this space;
 What do you think of it so far?
 What the butler saw;

V *Allusions/ Quotations*

(literary, historical, biblical and
 popular media)

All the world's a stage;
 a catch-22 situation;
 Revenge is sweet;
 the emperor's new clothes;
 sweetness and light;
 a Trojan horse;
 meet one's Waterloo;
 Big Brother;
 one's salad days;
 the Midas touch
 as sober as a judge;

VI *Idiomatic similes*

VII *Discoursal expressions*

(i) social formulae/clichés

as old as the hills;
as daft as a brush;
quick as a flash;
snug as a bug in a rug;
solemn as an owl;
slippery as an eel

(ii) connectives; structuring devices

Long time no see;
bottoms up;
How do you do?
with all good wishes;
How's it going?
get well soon

(iii) conversational gambits

Once upon a time;
Finally;
To conclude;
In a nutshell;
Last but not least
We'll now take questions from the floor;
Guess what!
I wondered if I could have a word;
You said it;
believe me
We're just good friends;
It's not what you think!
Forgive and forget!

(iv) stereotypes

(*Quoted from* Everaert *et al.*, 1995)

Appendix III

Figurative Patterns Underlying Current English Idioms

ADYNATON

(the impossibility device)

*be up in the clouds , move heaven and earth ,
jump down someone's throat , steal
someone's thunder , a storm in a tea-cup ,
sweat blood , a think tank , have butterflies in
one's stomach , have a frog in one's throat ,
go through the roof , have a tin ear*

ALLITERATION

(the repetition of initial identical consonant
sounds or any vowel sound in successive or
closely associated syllables)

*aid and abet , black and blue , part and par-
cel of something , through thick and thin ,
weak as water , spick and span , stress and
strain , through thick and thin*

ALLUSION

(makes brief reference to a historical or liter-
ary figure , event or object)

*Historical : cross one's Rubicon , a Trojan
horse , meet one's Waterloo*

*Biblical : baker's dozen , turn the other
cheek , the writing on the wall , the Other
Side*

Mythological : the apple of discord , a Hercu-

lean task, open Pandora's box, an Achilles' heel, an Aladdin's cave, hold/keep someone at bay, the sword of Damocles

Literary: sour grapes, an open sesame to something, one's salad days, in the womb of time, worldly wise, Big Brother, a brave new world, shuffle off the mortal coil, tilt at windmills, turn swords into ploughshares

ANTITHESIS

(conjoining contrasting ideas)

for better or for worse, more dead than alive, the beginning of the end, ups and downs, hither and thither, rise and fall, sink or swim, wax and wane, body and soul, brain versus brawn, first and last, give or take something, high and low, the ins and outs, off and on, through thick and thin

EUPHEMISM

(circumlocution to palliate something unpleasant)

the call of nature, the oldest profession, pass away, the oldest profession, in straitened/reduced circumstances, one's vital statistics, cross the Great Divide, live on borrowed time, break wind, breathe one's last, a four-lettered word, off the back of a lorry, go to powder one's nose, not pull punches, have sticky fingers

HENDIADYS

(subordination by a conjunction of two elements, one of which becomes an attribute or adjunct to the other)

loud and clear, fast and furious, thick and fast, short and sweet, spick and span, slow and steady, peace and quiet, puff and blow, safe and sound, with might and main, hard and fast, pure and simple, risk life and limb

- HOMOEOTELEUTON (sameness or similarity of endings)
huff and puff, make or break, near or dear, wear and tear, wheel and deal, hire and fire, the highways and byways, toil and moil, wine and dine, flotsam and jetsam, high and dry, thrills and spills
- HYPERBOLE (exaggeration to emphasize a point)
wet to the bone, go through the roof, cry one's eyes out, over my dead body, hit the ceiling/roof, a hole in the wall, in the twinkling of an eye, not for all the tea in China, beat one's brains out, hang by a hair, scream/shout one's head off
- IRONY (expressing a meaning directly opposite that intended)
look a perfect sight, come to a fine pass, feed the fishes, this vale of tears, beat one's breast, a brave new world, hold court, pearls of wisdom
- METAPHOR (treat something as if it was something else)
a hard nut to crack, the thin end of the wedge, have an ace up one's sleeve, let the cat out of the bag, rest on one's oars, a home bird, a horse of another color, an odd fish, an open book, go the extra mile
- METONYMY (substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, proper name for one of its qualities or vice versa)
from the cradle to the grave, pick somebody's brain, go under the knife, marry money, behind bars, hit the bottle, hot under the collar, pack one's bags, scissors and paste, lend an ear, lick one's wounds, long in the tooth

ONOMATOPOEIA	(use or invention of words that sounds like their meaning) <i>a slap in the face , huffing and puffing , make a splash , ooh and aah , be barking up the wrong tree</i>
OXYMORON	(a condensed paradox) <i>a white crow , living death , the noble savage , a holy terror , go hot and cold</i>
PARONOMASIA	punning , playing on the sounds and meanings of words <i>last but not least , in dribs and drabs , the nitty gritty , near and dear , hustle and bustle , the nuts and bolts of something , a silly billy , thrills and spills , town and gown , wear and tear</i>
PERSONIFICATION	(a figure that endows animals , ideas , abstractions and inanimate objects with human form) <i>Uncle Sam , Dame Nature , Davy Jones , John Bull , the long arm of the law , stretch the arm of coincidence , a walking dictionary , in the womb of time , a pregnant pause</i>
SIMILE	(explicit comparison between two different things) <i>as black as pitch , bold as brass , tough as leather , nervous like a cat on hot bricks , run like greased lightning , like water off a duck's back , mad as a hatter , nutty as a fruitcake , obstinate as a mule , pack someone like sardines , plain as a pikestaff , proud as Lucifer , pure as the driven snow , quick as a flash , snug as a bug in a rug , solemn as an owl , stare like a zombie</i>
SYNECDOCHE	(substitution of part for whole , genus for

species, or vice versa)

the talk of the town, be a dab hand at something, under the same roof, one's own flesh and blood

TOPOTHESIA

(description of imaginary, non-existent places)

the back of beyond, the middle of nowhere

(Based on Jaeger, 1999)

Appendix IV

English Idioms with Respect to Fraser's Frozen Hierarchy

L5-Reconstitution

blow the whistle on, cast pearl before swine, crack the whip over, hit the high points, keep one's words, kill the goose that lays the golden egg, lay down the law, let the cat out of the bag, make the best of a bad deal, make the punishment fit the crime, pop the question, pull some strings, read the riot act to, spend money like water, spill the beans, take the liberties with, tip the scale at, toe the line, thrown in the sponge

L4-Extraction

add up to, ask for, auction off, bear down on, belong to, boast of, bone up on, bow down to, break the ice, break the news to, call attention to, check up on, close up, draw a blank, get control over, give the axe to, give a wide berth to, hit the nail on the head, lose sight of, make use of, pay attention to, poke fun at, qualify for, rely on, respond to, scream at, try for, wait on, worry about

L3-Permutation

bring down the house, give away the show, keep up one's end, keep up one's guard, put down one's foot, put down something to, put on a good face, put on some weight, teach new tricks to an old dog, the cat has someone's tongue, turn back the clock, wipe up the floor with

someone, let one's hair down

L2-Insertion

bear witness to, do a good turn to, drop a line to, give chase to, give ground to, give hell to, give the back of one's hand to, give the benefit of the doubt to, lend a hand to, pay homage to, care for, depend on, feel for, fish for, harp on, hit on, look for, marvel at, run into, set upon, stick to

L1-Adjunction

kick the bucket, aspire to, repent of, stand for, encroach on, burn the candle at both ends, angle for, bank on, look in on, bring oneself to, catch fire, clamor for, dance up a storm, give birth to, give ear to, knock off work, pull up stakes, put pen to paper, shoot the bull, stir up trouble, turn over a new leaf

L0-Completely Frozen

bite off one's tongue, bleed one white, blow one's cool, bear on, rail at, beware of, build castles in the air, dawn on, dip into one's pocket, face the music, get up one's energy, kick over the traces, let off the steam, pluck up courage, sit on pins and needles, stew in one's own juice, turn a deaf ear

(*Quoted from Makkai, 1972*)

Appendix V

Makkai's Categorization of Idioms

Types of Lexemic Idioms

Class L/1: Phrasal Verb Idioms

be taken aback, bring about, come across, run across, get along with, get at something, do away with, make away with, cut back, drop back, get back at, set back, stand by, come down with, dress down, hand down, live down, look down on, mark down, play down, talk down, fall for, stand for, fall in with, get in on, lay in, live in, put in for, be off, bring off, call off, change off, head off, lay off, make off, play off, show off, pass on, take on, burn out, call out, fall out, follow out, hold out, make out, pass out, ride out, play out, turn out, come up with, run through, do up, draw up, face up to, put through, live up to, mark up, pass up, put up, show up, speak up, turn up, turn upon

Class L/2: Tournure Idioms

break the ice, bite the dust, bury the hatchet, let the cat out of the bag, fly off the handle, miss the boat, kick the bucket, pass the buck, be up a creek, blow a fuse, give someone a blank check, make heads and tails, rain cats and dogs, through thick and thin, by fits and starts, over hill and dale, beat one's gums, blow off steam, blow one's top, cross someone's palm, put on airs, get off someone's back, be at sixes and sevens, be above board, be well off

Class L/3: Irreversible Binomial Idioms

by and large, hale and hardy, hem and haw, nip and tuck, from stem to stern, assault and battery, might and main, aches and pains, to bits

and pieces, bread and butter, cloak and dagger, fair and square, cut and dried, heads or tails, hard and fast, high and dry, high and mighty, nooks and crannies, nuts and bolts, part and parcel, peaches and cream, pepper and salt, rant and rave, skull and bones, wear and tear, bag and baggage, bear and forbear, sink and swim, shoot and kill, the rise and fall, hue and cry, odds and ends, the rank and file, spick and span, tit for tat, nip and tuck, hocus pocus, hugger-mugger, humpty-dumpty

Class L/4: Phrasal Compound Idioms

The White House, woman doctor, book worm, cat's paw, egghead, flea market, lion's den, lion's share, pigeonhole, pipe dream, rat race, hornet's nest, goose flesh, shoplifter, steam roller, downfall, small fry, black sheep, blue ribbon, black market, cold war, duck soup, good egg, green light, hot potato, iron curtain, red carpet, red herring, red light, red tape, white elephant, snake in the grass, ace in the hole, castle in the air, fish out of water, fly in the ointment, jack of all trades, man in the street, pie in the sky, dog-eared, lily-livered, sharp-tongued, tight-fisted, red-handed, neat as a pin, sharp as a tack, poor as a church mouse, fit as a fiddle, chatter like a magpie, drink like a fish, squeal like a stuck pig

Class L/5: Incorporating Verb Idioms

to apple-polish, to brown-nose, to boot-lick, to manhandle, to straphang, to mastermind, to eavesdrop, to henpeck, to blackmail, to whitewash, to bootleg, to blacklist, to baby-sit, to sight-see

Class L/6: Pseudo-Idioms

Chit-chat, dilly dally, fiddle faddle, hankey pankey, hara-kiri, helter skelter, hocus pocus, hum drum, mish mash, spick and span, tit for tat, topsey-turvey, zig-zag

Types of Sememic Idioms

Class S/1: First Base Idioms

to have two strikes against one, never to get to the first base

Class S/2: Idioms of Institutionalized Politeness

May I ...? Could you ...? Would you mind ...?

Class S/3: Idioms of Institutionalized Detachment or Indirectness

It seems that ... It seems to ...

Class S/4: Idioms of Proposals Encoded as Questions

How about ...? Shall we ...? Would you like to ...? Why don't you (he, she, we, they) ...?

Class S/5: Idioms of Institutionalized Greeting

How do you do? How are you? So long.

Class S/6: Proverbial Idioms

The gods help those who help themselves.

It is not fine feathers that make fine birds.

Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.

Birds of a feather flock together.

Don't carry coals to Newcastle.

Don't wash your dirty linen in public.

Too many cocks spoil the broth.

Curiosity kills the cat.

Any port in a storm!

Class S/7: Familiar quotations as Idioms

Frailty, thy name is woman! (Hamlet, I. ii. 146)

Neither a borrower, nor a lender be. (Hamlet, I. iv. 90)

Brevity is the soul of wit. (Hamlet, II. ii. 95)

Class S/8: Idiomaticity in Institutionalized Understatement

I wasn't too crazy about ...

It didn't exactly turn me on.

It wasn't exactly my cup of tea.

Class S/9: Idiomaticity in Institutionalized Hyperbole

He (She) won't even lift a finger.

Big deal!

It really goes to town!

(Quoted from Makkai, 1972)

Fernando's Categorization of English Idioms

- 1 Invariant and non-literal:
spill the beans, smell a rat, etc.
- 2 Invariant and literal
nothing loath, upside down, inside out, etc.
- 3 Invariant and both literal and non-literal
roll out the red carpet, do a U-turn, the tip of the iceberg, a fat cat, etc.
- 4 Variant and non-literal
rain/pour cats and dogs, pitch black/dark, etc.
- 5 Variant and both literal and non-literal
a dog's breakfast/dinner, a lone wolf/bird, the loose ends/threads etc.
- 6 Invariant with a specialized subsense in one item
catch one's breath, drop names, foot the bill, move house, a white lie, etc.
- 7 Variant (restricted) with a specialized subsense in one item
keep one's cool/temper, a thumbnail portrait/sketch, explode a myth/belief/theory/notion, a blue film/gag/joke/story/comedian, thin/flimsy excuse
- 8 Invariant and literal with specialized connotations
hammer and sickle, arm in arm, on foot, by hand, etc.
- 9 Variant (restricted) and literal

a crash course/programme, dodge/duck the issue, prove one's case/point, do the necessary/ needful, etc.

10 Collocations: restricted and literal

addled eggs/brains, shrug one's shoulders, stark naked, wag its tails, etc.

11 Unrestricted with a specialized subsense

catch a bus/tram/ferry/plane, etc, run a business/company/firm/shop/theatre, etc.

12 unrestricted and literal

weak/ strong/ black/ white/ sweet/ bitter/ Turkish, etc. coffee, etc.

(*Quoted from Fernando, 1996*)

Appendix VII

Representative Examples of Conceptual Metaphors

DANGER IS FIRE or DANGER IS HEAT

a hot potato, crash and burn, get one's fingers burned, go up in smoke, in the hot seat, like a moth to the flame, play with fire, pull out of the fire

LIFE IS A VEHICLE or SITUATIONS ARE VEHICLES

a sinking ship, abandon ship, an easy/smooth/tough ride, in the same boat, miss the boat/bus, push the boat out, rock the boat, run a tight ship

LIFE IS SEA

a fish out of water, go off the deep end, in deep water, keep one's head above water, out of one's depth, pour oil on troubled waters, swim with the tide, take the plunge, test the water(s), tread water

LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME

a house of cards, a trump card, come up trumps, cover/hedge one's bets, double or quits, even odds, follow suit, have an ace up one's sleeve, hit the jackpot, in/out of the betting, knock spots off something, lay one's cards on the table, not be playing with a full deck, play one's cards close to one's chest, play one's

*cards right, raise the ante, scoop the pool, show one's cards,
turn up trumps, the white feather*

(*Quoted from Moon, 1998*)