# Table of Contents

1. **INTRODUCTION** ...................................................................................................3

2. **WHAT IS AN IDIOM?** ...........................................................................................5  
   2.1. Collocations ........................................................................................................5  
   2.2. Idioms .................................................................................................................6  
   2.3. Idiomaticity  
      2.3.1 Grading Based on Semantic Intelligibility ...................................................10  
      2.3.2 Grading Based on Frozenness .....................................................................13  
   2.4. SUMMARY ........................................................................................................19  

3. **CHARACTERISTICS OF IDIOMS** .....................................................................21  
   3.1. Figuration .........................................................................................................21  
   3.2. Lexicalization and Institutionalization .........................................................23  

4. **CLASSIFICATIONS BASED ON STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES** ...................27  
   4.1. Syntactic Classification ....................................................................................27  
   4.2. Structural Classification ..................................................................................29  
   4.3. Makkai’s Classification  
      4.3.1 Lexemic Idioms ...........................................................................................32  
      4.3.2 Sememic Idioms ..........................................................................................34  
   4.4. Definition ..........................................................................................................37  

5. **IDIOM COMPREHENSION** ................................................................................39  
   5.1. First Language Comprehension ....................................................................39  
   5.2. Problems in Second Language Comprehension  
      5.2.1 Cultural Differences ...................................................................................43  
      5.2.2 Interference ...................................................................................................45  
      5.2.3 Avoidance .....................................................................................................47  
      5.2.4 Correct Use ..................................................................................................51  

6. **MATERIALS AND METHODS** ...........................................................................53  
   6.1. Objectives of the Study ...................................................................................54  
   6.2. Materials ...........................................................................................................55  
   6.3. Methods of the Study ......................................................................................56  

7. **THE TYPES OF IDIOMS IN TEXTBOOKS** ......................................................58  

8. **THE OCCURRENCE OF IDIOMS IN TEXTBOOKS** .........................................61  
   8.1. Occurrence in Textbooks ...............................................................................61  
   8.2. Variation in Courses .......................................................................................63  

9. **HOW ARE IDIOMS TAUGHT** .............................................................................65  
   9.1. Hints for the Classroom ..................................................................................68  
   9.2. Idioms Taught in Textbooks  
      9.2.1 Texts ...........................................................................................................72  
      9.2.2 Exercises .....................................................................................................73  

10. **CONCLUSIONS** ..................................................................................................77  

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...........................................................................................................80
APPENDIX 1: CHARTS ON BLUE PLANET AND CULTURE CAFÉ ..................84
APPENDIX 2: IDIOMS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER ........................................85
APPENDIX 3: TYPES OF IDIOMS IN TEXTBOOKS ........................................87
1. Introduction

Every natural language has idiomatic expressions, they are an essential part of every language. In idiomatic expressions the literal meanings of the individual words of a phrase are of secondary importance and the emphasis is wholly put on the meaning of the whole word cluster. Hence idioms have two aspects: separate words put together, and a meaning as a single unit. Thus the meaning of the whole is figurative and, in most of the cases, commonly known. A classic example of an idiomatic expression is *to kick the bucket*, which means *to die*.

The idiomatic structures of a language also reflect the culture where the language is spoken. Idioms are very widely used in spoken language, and many of us do not always even notice when we are using an idiom. However, they do not occur only colloquially as Seidl and McMordie\(^1\) state, but they can be found for example in poetry and literature, too. (e.g. Shakespeare, the Bible). Idioms add colour to the language.

Idioms are an essential part of language; one cannot choose either to use them or to omit them, as Seidl and McMordie say (1987, 1). Nevertheless, they are very often omitted by foreign language speakers, consciously or not. Idioms vary in different languages and cultures. This makes a foreign language speaker hesitant in using them. It is important to emphasize the use of idioms to ESL\(^2\) students since there is hardly any situation and language where idiomatic expressions are not used. Without at least some idiom comprehension, ESL students hardly understand the language of, for example media, young people, etc. Slang, for instance, where idiomatic expressions are widely cultivated, is widely used by various groups of people, especially by young people and the media.

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In this study, the purpose is to study what idioms are, what characteristics they have, how they can be classified and how they are learned and understood.

Furthermore, the aim is to study and find out how widely idioms are included in upper secondary English textbooks for Finnish students and how, if at all, they are represented, explained and taught in English textbooks.

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2 English as a Second Language.
2. What is an Idiom?

2.1. Collocations

In natural languages, meanings tend to be spoken or written out in blocks, which are formed by separate words. Moreover, words tend to group together with certain patterns very frequently. This universal tendency of words occurring repeatedly in the same clusters is called ‘constructual tendency’ by Kjellmer. Kjellmer explains in his dictionary of English collocations that some words occur regularly whenever another word is used, they have high constructual tendency (spick tends to occur with and span with a meaning of ‘very clean, very tidy’). In some other cases, the tendency is low, for example the occurs with a large number of words.

In literature, this phenomenon has been found useful and it has been exploited widely. Repeated groupings of words invented by authors have become very familiar to readers. As examples, Kjellmer (1994, ix) gives Homer’s ‘swift-footed Achilles’, ‘laughter-loving Aphrodite’ and ‘wine-dark sea’. What is distinctive in this utilization is that some of the groupings of words found in literature have developed into fixed expressions, which have their own idiomatized meanings, for example ‘Achilles’ heel’.

There is a wide range of groupings of words in natural languages, idiomatic or not, which are commonly used by the speakers of the language. To be able to communicate efficiently, the speaker is to know the ‘constructual tendency’ and the grouping behaviour of the words is the language spoken.

High ‘constructual tendency’ and the phenomenon of words grouping together can be defined under one term, i.e. collocation. Kjellmer defines that collocations are grammatically well-formed recurring sequences of items (1994, xiv). Idioms, according to him, form a subcategory of collocations: “an idiom can be defined as a collocation
whose meaning cannot be deducted from the combined meanings of its constituents” (1994, xxxiii). Kjellmer also states that “the borderland between idioms and other collocations is...a very fuzzy area, since even the least idiomatic of the idioms would normally be collocational, nevertheless” (1994, xxxiv).

In addition, in ODCIE2⁴, the definition of idiom cannot be drawn strictly and no small watertight definition can be made. Instead, idioms and non-idioms should be related along a scale of continuum (ODCIE2, xii). Hence, collocations cannot be completely separated from idioms, and vice versa.

2.2. Idioms

A simple attempt of a definition of an idiom could be that it is a string of words, which, put together, mean something different from the individual words when they stand alone. The two realizations of these constructions, i.e. the literal and idiomatic realizations of the sentence in question, could be treated homonymous⁵ since they have identical constituents, as Gläser⁶ suggests.

Idioms share some features that separate them from literal expressions. Gläser (1988, 268) brings out a list of the central features compiled by Fernando & Flavell (1981). They suggest the following five properties:

1. The meaning of an idiom is not the result of the compositional function of its constituents.
2. An idiom is a unit that either has a homogenous literal counterpart or at least individual constituents that are literal, though the expression as a whole would not be interpreted literally.
3. Idioms are transformationally deficient in one way or another

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⁵ Having the same written or spoken form but different in meaning and origin. (The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1993.)
4. Idioms constitute set expression in a given language
5. Idioms are institutionalized

These general features give a good overall view of idioms. Their meaning is not the sum of their literal components, but idioms have the literal realization as a surface representation which comprises the figurative and idiomatic meaning. Hence, there is a link between the surface representation and the idiomatic meaning. The literal realization of idioms may seem oddly or illogically constructed, syntactically ill-formed, or “ungrammatical”, because idioms are often ‘relics’ of former, older language, the syntactic forms of which have disappeared throughout time. (This will be further discussed in section 3.2.) Syntactically the structure of idioms is more or less fixed and cannot be much altered, thus not all grammatical transformations can not be applied to idioms. The last two features go tightly hand in hand. Idioms form commonly accepted expressions in a language. Their figurative meanings are generally known and can thus be used widely. Irujo\textsuperscript{7} (1986a, 288) and Lennon\textsuperscript{8} (1998, 11) , among others, emphasize that the meaning of an idiom must be institutionalized, it is the feature that separates them from other figurative expressions (e.g. common metaphors). Institutionalization and figuration is discussed more in further sections.

Idioms have both literal and figurative structures syntactically. Some idioms can be interpreted literally, but then the meaning changes, and the use of the idiomatic meaning is more frequent. As regards this feature, Chafe\textsuperscript{9} (1970, 47) argues that many idioms do not have a literal counterpart at all. According to Chafe’s theory, when literal words form an idiomatic meaning only the idiom is present semantically. The literal

\textsuperscript{7} Irujo, Suzanne. ”Don’t Put Your Leg in Your Mouth: Transfer in the Acquisition of Idioms in a Second Language”. \textit{TESOL Quarterly (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages)}, vol 20, no2, June 1986a, 287-304.


words comprising it are present “only postsemantically”(p.47-48). This theory of “postsemanticism” is explained by different kind of processing of literal and idiomatic material, when we are searching for the meanings of them. Concrete, literal units are easy to understand and they “tend to be symbolized directly” as Chafe states. With abstract meaning the case is different. According to Chafe (p. 48), the abstract meaning “must be given a postsemantic literalization” first, i.e. the literal meaning is left in the background, being a “postsemantic unit”, while the abstract, idiomatic unit receives the semantic symbolization. However, according to Chafe, these units are linked together. The postsemantic elements, i.e. the literal meaning remain linked to the new meaning, the idiomatic meaning is only a new symbolization or variation of it.

Idioms are words put together, stored as a single ‘big word’ as Wray\textsuperscript{10} (2000, 465-466) acknowledges. But why do idioms or other formulaicity exist in language? Wray gives two main explanations (2000, 473-479). First of all fixed expressions save effort in processing: they are ready-made expressions for us to use in utterances to express our ideas, so that we do not have to generate the idea into an utterance by ourselves word by word. Thus, fixed language gives us “short-cuts”, they also act as discoursal time-buyers: fixed expressions can be used for bringing in fluency and rhythm and to emphasize certain parts of the speech. While they save effort, they also give the speaker more planning time for the rest of the utterance without losing the turn of speech. Secondly, Wray gives socio-interactional reasons: may functions e.g. greeting, thanking, apologizing, etc. rely of the use of agreed forms. Commands, requests, bargains and politeness are expressed within certain frames in social interaction. Moreover, according to Wray, fixed expressions may be used in social interaction to manipulate others, to assert separate identity and to assert group identity.

The combination of the use of conventional language and originally generated language produced by the speaker is, according to Lennon (1998, 14-15), the ‘marker’ of fluency. Moreover, and correctly, he also points out that on one hand the overuse of conventionalised etc. language is considered as “false fluency” when nothing original is being generated. On the other hand, however, not using any conventionalised language at all requires extra effort from both the speaker/writer and the reader/listener to produce language and to make it comprehensible.

Many different opinions exist among scholars about what can be counted as an idiom or as an idiomatic expression and what cannot. Scholars disagree on classifications of idioms somewhat and have their own views about them. Thus, it is rather difficult to define the term in a simple and thorough way. Hence the phenomenon of idioms should be treated as a continuum instead of tight categorization.

2.3. Idiomaticity

Idiomaticity has been studied for quite a long period of time in linguistic study. Strässler\(^{11}\) (1982, 21) remarks that many works have been written on idioms since the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, but most of them tend to be etymological collections.

Idiomaticity can also be called phraseology. Gläser (1988, 265) clarifies that this is the corresponding term among Soviet and Eastern European linguists when describing set expressions whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of their parts. However, the term phraseology is also used to describe “1) the inventory of phrases or set expressions, and not only idioms; 2) the linguistic sub discipline of lexicology which studies and classifies set expressions (phraseological units in the broadest sense)” (Gläser 1988, 265-266).

Idiomaticity is the core of the notion of idioms. Mainly, the question in idiomaticity is to scale or analyse how idiomatic idioms are, i.e. how unpredictable the meaning of an idiom is from its literal counterpart. Some idioms are wholly idiomatic and the words constituting the idiom seem to have no sensible meaning of their own as a unit without the idiomatic meaning (pseudo-idioms, pure idioms, discussed further in sections 2.3.2 and 4.3.1); some idioms have both literal and idiomatic meanings (metaphorical or arbitrarily different meanings), which are used alongside; some idioms are only partially idiomatic, i.e. one word of it can be taken literally and the rest of them idiomatically (semi-idioms). Thus grading of idiomaticity is a gradual phenomenon; some idioms are considered more idiomatic than others. The rule of thumb might be that the less the idiomatic meaning corresponds to its literal counterpart the more idiomatic it is.

The following sections give some general views about the attempts of grading idiomaticity that have been made.

2.3.1 Grading Based on Semantic Intelligibility

One of the simplest ways of grading idiomaticity is to classify idioms based on the semantic intelligibility of their meaning. Basically, this means that the literal expression of a word string is compared to its idiomatic meaning. The table below gathers two models where idioms are graded by their semantic opaqueness, i.e. how transparent they are: a model by Fernando and Flavell in 1981 (Gläser 1988, 270) and a model by ODCIE2 (1985, xii-xiii). The titles of the classes vary slightly but the principle of classification is the same in both of the models. The models describe idiomaticity as a continuum where in one end there are completely open collocations, which can only be interpreted literally, and in the other end there are true “pure”
idioms, which can only be interpreted idiomatically. The classes that fall in the middle include so called *semi-idioms*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of Idiomaticity</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Open collocations</strong></td>
<td><strong>To cut wood</strong></td>
<td>Not an idiom at all, only a literal meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Restricted collocations or semi-idioms</strong></td>
<td><strong>To skate on thin ice</strong></td>
<td>Can be used both idiomatically and literally. Or have one literal and one figurative constituent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Figurative idioms</strong></td>
<td><strong>To burn one’s bridges</strong></td>
<td>Mostly used as idioms, because the literal meaning is often odd or irrational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Pure idioms</strong></td>
<td><strong>To pass the buck</strong></td>
<td>An idiom, the literal meaning is unintelligible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scale goes from transparent expressions to opaque phrases. The more transparent the expression is, the less idiomatic it is. In class 1 the meaning can be derived straight from its constituents, thus the expression is transparent and literal, with no idiomatic or figurative meaning at all; *to cut wood* means literally to cut wood. Hence class 1 includes all open collocations which can be freely combined with several other elements.

Class 2 includes metaphors that allow both a literal meaning and an idiomatic one; *to skate on thin ice* can be interpreted in two ways, literal and idiomatic: 1) a person is skating on ice, which is thin; or 2) someone is doing something, which is considered risky. Restricted collocations are often a combination of constituents of which one is used in its literal meaning and the other figuratively, thereby the term *semi-idiom* is also used. For example in *to jog one’s memory*, ‘jog’ is used figuratively, while ‘memory’ is to be understood literally in its familiar meaning. The resulting meaning is hence that if someone or something *jogs one’s memory*, they cause one to suddenly remember something that one had forgotten.
Class 3 has metaphors that are more idiomatic than in class 2. Their literal meanings are often rather unintelligible or they may sound funny. However, they are not completely unintelligible. The example *to burn one’s bridges* can be imagined to be done literally, but the idiomatic meaning of it is more commonly used. The literal meaning of the idioms in this class is superseded and only the figurative meaning is used in normal language. In this case, the meaning of *to beat one’s breast* is not as often interpreted literally as in its idiomatic sense: to emphasize or pretend to be very angry or upset about something.

Class 4 is the end-point of the process of idiomatization. Word-combinations in pure idioms have become idiomatic through constant re-use and finally the literal meaning is completely congealed and not used at all. Class 4 includes pure idioms whose meanings cannot be derived at all from its constituents. *To pass a buck* does not mean passing on a dollar, but refusing to accept responsibility for something and trying to pass the responsibility to someone else.

If we interpret these models strictly, only idioms in class 4 are classified as true idioms. This would make the notion very limited and the number of idioms. Expressions that are often used in their literal meanings also may have widely accepted, figurative meanings, which make them as much idioms as those so called pure idioms. It is the context and the purpose of the speaker or writer that comprises the ultimate meaning whether meant idiomatic or not. In this sense, any open collocation can be interpreted figuratively. The difference between figurative speech and idioms is that idioms are conventionalized figurative expressions, to put it simplified.

The semantic transparency of idioms is affected by several factors as Boers & Demecheleer\(^\text{12}\) (2001, 255-256) point out. First of all, some idioms have constituents

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that individually contribute to the overall interpretation and hence tend to be more transparent than idioms that have non-decomposable constituents. Boers & Demecheleer compare two idioms as an example: *to pop the question* is more decomposable than *to kick the bucket*, since *to pop* can be interpreted as ‘asking’ and *the question* as ‘the marriage proposal’. The latter idiom can not be decomposed in this way.

Another point they make is that idioms that reflect a common metaphoric theme are more transparent than idioms that are not based on a common metaphor. For example *to let off steam* or *she erupted* both refer to a common metaphoric theme of ‘anger is heat’ and can hence be more easily interpreted than, for example, *to sell someone down the river* which means ‘to do something that harms a group of people who trusted you, in order to gain money or power for yourself’.

In addition, a clear etymological origin of the word used in an idiom and culture-specific groundings affect an idiom’s degree of semantic transparency.

2.3.2 Grading Based on Frozenness

Frozenness is an aspect of idiomaticity. Idioms are said to be frozen in the sense that they allow a very restricted amount of variation both syntactically and lexically without the idiomatic meaning being altered. That is, the form and/or word order of an idiom cannot be changed freely. Idiomatic frozenness may also be called fixity or fixedness, stability or invariability.

Frozenness is a gradual phenomenon, in other words, a straight division between frozen collocations and free collocations cannot be made. However, most idioms are completely frozen but some of them allow certain variation. Idiomatic phrases differ in the extent to which they can undergo syntactic operations and still maintain their idiomatic interpretation. Hence idioms can be classified into different
scales depending on how frozen they are. Frozenness falls into the category of idiomaticity and to its scales: they define how fixed an idiom is structurally, i.e. idioms are “more or less invariable in form” or word order (LDEI2\textsuperscript{13}, 1979, VIII). Invariability also affects the idioms in the way that they often cannot be changed or varied. LDEI2 (ibid.) reminds us that in spite of all the above restrictions that idioms may have, they usually permit some normal grammatical operations, such as alteration of tenses.

Frozenness in idioms results in restrictions in grammatical transformations: passive formation, changes of word order and transformation to interrogative or relative clauses are limited when it comes to idioms.

LDEI2 (1979: xiv-xix) notes that even though many idioms are so frozen that one cannot put any additional words within the phrase, some exceptions contradict this rule: adjectives and adverbs are often permitted to be inserted within many idioms, e.g. to go \textit{(all) to pieces}. Secondly, but perhaps not so preferably, impolite and swearwords can be added to otherwise frozen idioms acting as intensifiers, e.g. \textit{he went the whole bloody / damn hog} (=do something thoroughly, or too well) (but can any word of the appropriate class be inserted? \textit{à} depends on the idiom, how much variation they allow).

Moreover, some idioms can be widely varied. Some give rise to another word forms (e.g. \textit{to split hairs} \textit{à} hair-splitting) and some permit wide variations, e.g. \textit{day in, day out} \textit{à} where \textit{day} can be replaced by almost any word which denotes a period of time (week, night, month, year, etc). Nevertheless, LDEI2 (1979, xv) notes that hours, minutes and seconds are not used in this way.

Makkai\textsuperscript{14} (1972, 122-123) covers the question of frozenness and restricted grammatical transformations by his \textit{morphological bans}. “The compulsory plural and compulsory singular ban” means in use, that in idiomatic expressions the plural and

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Longman Dictionary of English Idioms}, 1979, vol 2.
singular form cannot be changed just like that. Makkai gives the following illustration as an example: *hammer and tong*. Here, Makkai implies that the second form is not grammatically correct. Nevertheless, this is a bad example because no singular form of *tongs* exists, there is no word *tong* in the English language. A better example illustrating Makkai’s first ban would be for example *to the skin of my teeth*.

“The compulsory binomial link ban” in Makkai’s study means that *and* is compulsory in binomials and cannot be omitted, e.g. in *cloak and dagger*.

The variation of articles in an idiomatic expression is restricted by “the definite and indefinite article ban”. The indefinite article cannot be changed into definite one and vice versa, e.g. *to burn the midnight oil* ≠ *to burn a midnight oil*.

Bruce Fraser (1970, 22-42) developed a frozenness hierarchy according to transformational behaviour of idioms. Idioms have syntactic restrictions that allow few transformations. Again, some idioms allow a larger amount of transformations, others may be fully restricted. Fraser’s hierarchy is composed according to this idea. This hierarchy ranges from completely frozen idioms to free collocations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Transformations allowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L6-Unrestricted</td>
<td>open a window</td>
<td>open a window</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5-Reconstitution</td>
<td>let the cat out of the bag</td>
<td>tell by mistake sth that was being kept secret</td>
<td>Passivization, nominalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4-Extraction</td>
<td>hit the nail on the head</td>
<td>be exactly right in one’s opinion</td>
<td>Insertion of an adverbial of place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3-Permutation</td>
<td>bring the house down</td>
<td>loud claps and cheers of the audience to praise a good performance</td>
<td>Reshuffling of the constituents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2-Insertion</td>
<td>lend a hand</td>
<td>help someone</td>
<td>Insertion of constituents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1-Adjunction</td>
<td>burn the candle at both ends</td>
<td>try to do too many things in too short period of time</td>
<td>Gerundive nominalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to understand Frazer’s hierarchy, an explanation is needed for the transformations that belong to each level. The headings of the levels give some clues, but need to be explained in more detail. Fraser clarifies his levels as follows (1970, 37-38). The examples are taken from the list Fraser has given as representatives to every level of his hierarchy (1970, 40-41).

Level L0-Completely Frozen contains idioms, that cannot be interpreted literally and allow no transformations at all.\(^{16}\)

Level L1-Adjunction involves the application of the gerundive nominalization, for example *to burn the candle at both ends* can be nominalized using the gerund, i.e. the *ing* –form and the *of* –genitive with the result of *the burning of the candles at both ends*.

Level L2-Insertion means here placing a non-idiomatic constitute into the idiomatic expression. In the simplest case an additional adverb or adjective is inserted into the sequence, e.g. *to lend a helping hand*. Fraser also includes the indirect object movement into this level, as it uses the insertion operation, according to him. This involves sentences that have an indirect object which does not belong to the idiomatic sentence, and the places of the direct and indirect object are changed. Hence the indirect object is a non-idiomatic constitute inserted inside the idiom sequence. For example, in *John lent a hand to Mary* the direct object is *a hand* and the indirect one is *Mary*. By changing the places of the objects the sentence would be *John lent Mary a hand*.

Level L3-Permutation also involves indirect object movement as above, but in this case the idiom itself contains both a direct and indirect object by nature, no non-idiomatic constituent is hence inserted into the sequence. Another rule given by Fraser
applying this level is particle movement rule, which relates to idioms of the form verb-particle-noun phrase. The idea behind this rule is the same as in indirect object movement rule, only now the particle and the noun phrase change places. E.g. *To bring the house down* \(\rightarrow\) *to bring down the house*.

L4-Extraction has a number of transformations set by Fraser. In the particle movement rule, the particle is extracted from the idiom, e.g. *look up sth* \(\rightarrow\) *look sth up*. The second instance of extraction is preposing of prepositional phrases. In this case, the preposition of an idiom is extracted from the verb, e.g. *depend on* \(\rightarrow\) *on whom we can depend*. L4-Extraction also allows the passive transformation, where the extraction concerns the direct object noun phrase. When passivized, it is placed outside the idiom, in the subject noun phrase position, e.g. *Her father hit the nail on the head* \(\rightarrow\) *The nail was hit on the head by her father*. Again, Fraser points out that in cases where the entire sentence is idiomatic (e.g. proverbs) and if they permit passivization, the appropriate level for them in this hierarchy would be L5 - Reconstitution, not L4-Extraction.

In level L5-Reconstitution, the syntactic function of the idiom can again be altered. Now the verb phrase of an idiom allow to be nominalized and thus can function as a subject of the sentence, e.g. *She let the cat out of the bag* \(\rightarrow\) *Her letting the cat out of the bag*…

Level L6-Unrestricted represents the other end of the hierarchy: no idiom can belong to this level, because a string of words that allows all the possible transformations can only be a literal word cluster.

Fraser makes an important point about his frozenness hierarchy by stating that “any idiom marked as belonging to one level is automatically marked as belonging to any lower level” (1970, 39). This means that an idiom marked, for example, to level L3-

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16 L stands for *lexeme*. 
Permutation, allows naturally all the operations as stated on that level, but also the transformations included in the lower levels, levels L2-Insertion and L1-Adjunction.

Additionally, Fraser (1970, 41) comments that different speakers may allow different variations to the same idioms: one may allow a special transformation to an idiom that another person would not permit. In fact, this can be seen in Fraser’s example-idioms collected for every level (1970, 40-41). Unfortunately, not many of them seem to allow all the transformations that Fraser suggests and when operations are done, the sentences are clumsy, as the above examples may show. (This only shows that idioms are most often taken as they are and not transformed into any other grammatical form among English speakers.) Nevertheless, Fraser’s theory of frozenness hierarchy is still today valid, often quoted and referred to.

In her study, Anne Cutler17 (1982, 317) examines whether syntactic frozenness could be correlated with the period of time that the idiom has occurred in a language. She compared a number of idioms, used by Fraser at his different levels of frozenness, to the Oxford English Dictionary18 (henceforth OED) to find out the earliest citation marked for each idiom. It should be noted that the result of Cutler’s study is only approximate, since Fraser lists only 131 idioms and assigns them to the levels of frozenness by himself, and written sources for both OED and literary texts in general were smaller in earlier centuries than in later. Cutler’s study shows that even though frozenness and age do not correlate completely, there exists a reliable tendency that the older the idiom is the more frozen it is (Cutler 1982, 319). Cutler gives two reasons why this should be so. First, syntactic freezing seems to be a gradual process which may last for (decades or) centuries. Second, an idiom becomes syntactically frozen when the

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meaning of it is no longer apparent, since its original literal reference has become obscured. “Hence, for example ‘let off steam’ would belong to Fraser’s level 0”, because steam engines have nowadays been replaced by electric machines (Cutler 1982, 319)

So called pseudo idioms in archaic forms are a result of frozenness, they cannot be altered at all. In modern English, the idiomatic meaning is the only meaning pseudo idioms have left. In earlier times, the words in pseudo idioms also had a literal meaning. For example, *hither and yon* is an archaic form or an pseudo idiom that means ‘here and there’. Neither ‘hither’ nor ‘yon’ are used alone in modern language.

2.4. Summary

Idiomaticity is the main characteristics of idioms, the main core of the phenomenon. The strings of words in idioms gain one, separate meaning which is something different than the literal meanings of the lexical words that form the idioms. Idiomaticity has been attempted to grade: the more idiomatic the expression is, the further away its meaning is from the literal meanings of the consisting words. This grading is based on the semantic intelligibility of their meaning. If the meaning is completely transparent from the literal words, the expression is not an idiom. If the literal meaning seems totally unintelligible, the phrase is opaque and we have reached the other end of the scale of the idiomaticity, the idiom is then considered a “pure idiom”.

Frozenness, as an aspect of idiomaticity enhances the scale of idiomaticity in the sense that the structure of idioms tends to be the more fixed the more idiomatic the idiom is.
Idiomaticity in expressions is further discussed in section 5.2. The focus there will be on second language learners and their problems in producing and comprehending idiomatic language. The next section will give some characteristics that idioms have and take a look at how idiomatic expressions are created.
3. Characteristics of Idioms

The Finnish saying of ‘a dear child has many names’ applies well to the concepts concerning the characteristics of idioms. The concepts vary almost as often as the study. Idioms can be studied as a part of lexicology, phraseology, semantics or syntactics, or even within a pragmatic point of view. The term idiom refers to a fuzzy category of characteristics that an idiomatic expression may pose depending on what kind of an idiom it is. To make the case even more complicated, idiomatic expressions can be divided into many related categories, e.g. sayings, proverbs, formulae, clichés, allusions, etc., which bring in more concepts and characteristics. An all-defining, single-criterion definition is thus impossible to draw.

Nunberg\textsuperscript{19} (492-498) criticizes the attempts to classify idioms and to define their characteristics narrowly. Studies tend to overgrammaticize the phenomena when trying to explain “what makes idioms idioms” by categories and characteristics and trying to make the phenomena regular. Nunberg (1994, 493) argues that only the characteristic of conventionality applies to all idioms, other characteristics are not obligatory.

However, when speaking of idioms, the main characteristics that often come up in studies are figuration, lexicalization and institutionalization and they are thus worth looking at is this paper, too.

3.1. Figuration

Figuration or “figure of speech” refers to a group of words that are used to describe someone or something in an unusual or perhaps poetic way. For example, if we

describe our genes as ‘selfish’, the meaning of the word is interpreted figuratively. Idioms involve figuration as one of their characteristics. The meaning of an idiom becomes figurative, not a concrete sum of the words realizing it.

Metaphoricality is the most familiar form of figuration to most of us. A metaphor is a figure of speech, where the words or phrases are used to express or indicate something which is different from the literal meaning, for example *I’ll make him eat his words* is meant figuratively. In some occasions, the figurative meaning is not so straightforward, it may vary according to interpretation. For example, the metaphor *a lifetime is a day* can be interpreted in many ways depending on what *a day* is taken to symbolize. Glucksberg & McGlone\(^\text{20}\) (1544-1545) give two interpretations: on one hand a day can be understood as a rather short time span. Thus the metaphor could mean that life is short. On the other hand, a day can also symbolize the stages of existence (morning=birth/childhood, noon=adulthood, afternoon=old age, night=death). With this interpretation the metaphor takes a completely different meaning, that life is long.

Idioms have also multiple meanings, i.e. literal and figurative, but what makes an idiom an idiom, is that idioms have only one conventionally accepted figurative meaning motivated by the context, which separates them from metaphors. Metaphors are one of the main sources of idioms and hence metaphoricality one of the main characteristics.

The difference in the distinctions of idioms and other figurative language is flickering, because many idioms are frozen metaphors (i.e. figurative expressions which have acquired conventionalized meanings as Irujo explains (1986a, 288)). Reagan\(^\text{21}\) (12-13), too, among others, states that the majority of idioms are derived from metaphors.


and in fact are dead or “frozen” metaphors, but continues by saying that a metaphor is not an idiom: the meaning of an idiom is retained even when the original metaphor is forgotten. On the other hand, as Irujo (1986a, 288) explains, if the conventionalized meaning of idioms which are frozen metaphors were unknown, they can be fairly easily interpreted metaphorically resulting the same meaning.

Besides metaphoricality, idioms also use other forms of figuration, e.g. metonymy and hyperboles. In metonymy, the word denoting an attribute or adjunct of a thing is substituted to denote the thing itself. For example ‘the crown’ is used for ‘the queen’, even though crown is only one thing symbolizing royalty. An idiomatic expression ‘to lend a hand’ is another example of metonymy. With this expression a person is not asking someone else literally to borrow him a hand, but asking him to help him. Often extra pair of hands are helpful, for example when lifting something heavy, hence the expression. Hyperbole means exaggeration or excess. It is a figure of speech that has an exaggerated statement included in it which is used to make a special effect of strong feeling or strong impression. Some examples could be ‘not worth the paper it’s printed on’ or ‘as cold as a witch’s tit’.

Figuration characterizes the aspect of non-literalness of idioms. Nor metaphors, nor metonyms or hyperboles are to be interpreted literally.

3.2. Lexicalization and Institutionalization

The previous section already mentioned that in order to become idiomatic an expression has to be conventionally accepted. The process involves both lexicalization and institutionalization.

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Idiomatic expressions are often treated by scholars the same way as lexical words: they function as one semantic unit and have one meaning. When a multi-word idiom is handled as a unit of one single meaning, it is lexicalized. Moon\textsuperscript{23} (36) puts the process of lexicalization neatly into words: it is a “process by which a string of words and morphemes becomes institutionalised as part of the language and develops its own specialist meaning and function”. In this process, lexicalization and institutionalization go hand in hand; a string of words is not properly lexicalised if the meaning or function of it is not commonly and widely enough known. When the meaning and function become accepted and widely recognized in a language, the process of lexicalization has come to the end and the then idiomatic meaning has become institutionalized.

Institutionalization is a matter of the lexicalization of idioms. To become a commonly known lexicalized unit, an idiom has to be institutionalized. The idiom and especially its idiomatic meaning must be commonly known and used to become institutionalized in a language. Institutionalization requires a certain amount of frequency in use. However, as Moon points out (1998, 7), most idioms are rather infrequent: they may be restricted to certain registers and uses of speech or to certain accents or dialects of the English language.

Non-compositionality refers to the unanalysability of units. It is firmly tied with institutionalization: the string of words of an idiom can sometimes be interpreted literally, but the meaning does not remain the same idiomatic and institutionalized one. The non-compositionality of idioms means that they should be interpreted as one single unit, even when the word strings are grammatically incorrect.

Another question may be raised at this point: where do idioms come from? Moon (1998, 40) remarks that institutionalization is also a diachronic process; it has historical aspects, which have an effect on the lexical, syntactic and semantic anomalousness of idiomatic expressions. For example in pseudo idioms, such as *kith and kin*, words are included which are no longer used in everyday language alone, but have remained in the particular idiom²⁴. Furthermore, some today syntactically ill-formed idioms have had a slightly different form earlier in the history but have been reduced to their ill-formed form in their idiomatic meaning. For example *through thick and thin* (‘through good and bad times in marriage’) is an ellipsis²⁵ of *through thicket and thin wood* (Moon 1998: 40). Moreover, some other syntactically ill-formed expressions may be well formed in various dialects.

The process of lexicalization and institutionalization is constantly in progress. New idioms emerge and old ones disappear. David Crystal²⁶ observes that from a linguistic viewpoint there are two main sources that created many idiomatic expressions in to the English language since the final decades of Renaissance, namely the works of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible (i.e. the Authorized Version). For example: *It’s Greek to me* (Julius Caesar, I, ii); *cold comfort* (King John, V, vii); *eat sour grapes* (Ezk. 24); *out of the mouths of babes* (Mt. 21); *the root of the matter* (Jb. 19). The sources where idioms emerge are plentiful; the following list gives some of them:

- Metaphors (from sporting, technical or other specialist domains)
- Shakespeare, the Bible and other culturally major works/authors
- Catchphrases (from TV, films, politics, journalism, etc.)
- Calquing (loan translations i.e. compound words or phrases that are literal translations of the parts of foreign expression)
- Hyphenation (e.g. *baby-sit*, *on first-come-first-served basis*)

²⁴ These kind of words, that do not have an independent meaning, are called *cranberry morphs*. (Why? *Cran* does not mean anything, unlike *blueberry* or *strawberry*. This is in itself a metaphor or an idiom?)
²⁵ Ellipsis is the linguistic term of shortening clauses by leaving out (unnecessary) words.
Idiomatic expressions often emerge from every-day situations, home life, agriculture
life, food and cooking, nautical life, body parts, animals, colours, etc. Seidl and
McMordie (1987, 5) observe that sometimes the meaning of an idiom becomes clearer
in the speaker’s mind and is easier to understand when the origin of the idiom is known.

Studying the origins of idioms would require a whole different study, the
sources are so plentiful. In this study, the emphasis will be on the concept of idiom and
what characteristics they have. The next section will shortly look at some attempts of
classifying idioms based on their structural properties.
4. Classifications Based on Structural Properties

Since idioms are complicated to define, the task of classifying them in watertight categories seems to be a mission impossible. Nevertheless, several attempts have been made. Idioms have been divided into classes according to different properties they have. They can be classified according to their syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic properties.

The following paragraphs will introduce three different ways of categorizing idioms. It cannot be said that these are the only right ones, but they are fairly thorough and worth looking at, in order to understand idioms better.

4.1. Syntactic Classification

A simple way of classifying idioms is to make a typology of them according to their structural properties, which, basically, means their syntactic features and roles in a phrase, clause or sentence. ODCIE2 (1985, xi) classifies idioms under three headings: phrase idioms, subjectless clause idioms and sentence idioms. ODCIE2 offers only major and the most common patterns, but observes/remarks that there are also other patterns and that they have also several sub-categories. However, we do not need to get into them in detail in this paper, so I will present only the main categories given by ODCIE2 (ibid.):
1. Phrasal idioms (the most commonly occurring phrase patterns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun Phrase</td>
<td><em>A crashing bore</em></td>
<td>Sb who irritates his listeners with an excess of dull, uninteresting talk; an excessively tedious task, situation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectival Phrase</td>
<td><em>Free with one’s money</em></td>
<td>Generous with one’s money, over-ready to offer sth not welcome by sb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional Phrase</td>
<td><em>In the nick of time</em></td>
<td>At precisely the right, or most opportune, moment; just in time not to be too late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial Phrase</td>
<td><em>As often as not</em></td>
<td>About as many times as not, fairly frequently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Subjectless clause idioms (verbal idioms) (ODCIE2, xi):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V + Complement</td>
<td><em>Go beserk</em></td>
<td>Become filled with a maniacal fury which drives one to attack people or property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V + Direct Object</td>
<td><em>Ease someone’s mind</em></td>
<td>Give sb relief from worry, guilt or fear; set sb’s mind at rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V + Direct Object + Complement</td>
<td><em>Paint the town red</em></td>
<td>Enjoy a lively, boisterous time in public places, often attracting the notice of, or causing some disturbance to, other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V + Indirect object + Direct Object</td>
<td><em>Do somebody credit</em></td>
<td>A person’s achievements, actions etc are in his or sb else’s favour; his achievements show, or add to, his or sb else’s good qualities, ability or worth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V + Direct Object + Adjunct</td>
<td><em>Take something amiss</em></td>
<td>Be offended by sth said or done that was intended to have this effect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Sentence idioms, e.g. proverbs (*A bird in a hand is worth two in the bush*).

In this kind of classification idioms are taken as grammatical patterns, the semantic meanings are wholly put aside. Hence, the definition of idioms, with the complicated issues of idiomaticity and frozenness, should be already defined before structural classification is made. After all, the structural patterns introduced here are also very
common and usable in literal word clusters. Therefore, no definition of an idiom can be
drawn only according to its structural or syntactic behaviour.

4.2. Structural Classification

Strässler (1982, 15-16) agrees with the rest of the scholars that there exist a
vast number of approaches or interpretations concerning the taxonomy of idioms. He,
however, gives a versatile introductory list of types of idioms used in many categories:

1. a) Sayings (*let the cat out of the bag*)
   b) Proverbs (*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*)
2. Phrasal verbs (*to give in*)
3. Prepositional verbs (*to look after*)
4. Tournure\(^{27}\) idioms (*to kick the bucket*)
5. Binomials\(^{28}\) (*hammer and tongs*)
6. Frozen similes\(^{29}\) (*as cool as a cucumber*)
7. Ungrammatical, but generally accepted and widely used expressions, (*it’s me,
   who did you see*)
8. Logical, connective prepositional phrases (*in fact, for instance*)
9. Phrasal compounds (*red herring*)
10. Incorporating verb idioms (*to baby-sit*)
11. Formula\(^{30}\) expressions (*at first sight, at least*)

Strässler comments that probably not all scholars accept all these listed categories to
their own approaches of idioms, since it is still argued whether some word clusters
should be counted as idioms or not. Some scholars may not make any distinction
between *phrasal* and *prepositional verbs*, some categorize *formula expressions* and
*prepositional verbs* as belonging to the same group, and some do not even distinguish
*frozen similes* and *binomials* as separate classes (Strässler 1982, 16). These differences
in categorizing can be seen for example in Lennon’s (1998, 11-30) classification of
idiomatic expressions. For the most part, the classes go hand in hand with Strässler’s

\(^{27}\) I.e. “full” idioms.
\(^{28}\) Has two nouns with *and* –construction.
\(^{29}\) *Simile* is an expression which describes a person or thing as being similar to someone or something
   else.
\(^{30}\) An established piece of wording.
classes, but some dissimilarities raise when dealing with *phrasal* and *prepositional verbs* and *formula expressions*. Lennon’s classification ignores *phrasal verbs* completely and he places all *prepositional phrases* under *formula expressions*. He divides formula expressions into two classes: 1) *social formulae*, whose meaning is not immediately transparent, e.g. *how do you do*; 2) *conventional discoursal formulae*, which also include prepositional expressions, such as *by the way*.

Moreover, Lennon classifies *catchphrases* as one separate class of their own, whereas Strässler has left them out in his list. *Catchphrases* are literary, historical, biblical or popular media quotations and allusions, which have become commonly accepted and used, e.g. *all the world’s a stage* (Shakespeare).

What catches the eye in Strässler’s list of categories is his category of *ungrammatical expressions*. It can be argued whether there are any ungrammatical idioms or expressions at all. Some oral expressions may sound even less grammatical, for example, *Bill’s gotta lotta bottle* (=a lot of courage). This Strässler’s type could be comparable to Lennon’s class of *Literal Stock Phrases*. It includes expressions which are tied to specific situations and contexts in a social intercourse, e.g. *may he rest in peace*. These expressions often date back a long time and may thus sound ungrammatical and be even taken as such (cf. Strässler), but are only archaic language.

4.3. Makkai’s Classification

Adam Makkai’s “Idiom Structure in English” (1972) is still today one of the best surveys done on idioms, even though it has its shortcomings, as many scholars note (e.g. Strässler 1982, 43; Moon 1998, 11). Nevertheless, his study of idioms is wide and often used as a reference.
In order to understand Makkai’s classifications properly, we should first introduce us to Makkai’s theory of idiomaticity areas.

According to Makkai’s study (1972, 117), there are two idiomaticity areas in English, to either of which an idiom can belong: *lexemic and sememic* idiomaticity areas. The lexemic idiomaticity area, or ‘the class of polylexonic lexemes’, as Makkai himself calls the group, consists of expressions of more than one word, which are “subject to a possible lack of understanding, despite familiarity with the meanings of the components, or the erroneous decoding: they can potentially mislead the uninformed listener, or they can disinform [sic] him” (Makkai 1972, 122). Makkai’s term *disinformation* has to do with misunderstanding an idiom whereas *misinformation* is involved with hearing homonyms. *Disinformation* occurs when an idioms is decoded, or understood in a semantically erroneous way. *Misinformation*, on the other hand, occurs when a listener accidentally gets mixed up with two homonyms occurring in similar environments, for example *she bears children* can have two different meanings when heard: *she carries children* or *she gives them birth* (ibid.).

The semantic idiomaticity area, or ‘the class of polysememic semems’, involves expressions with more than one word, which have both a logical literal meaning and a moral or a deeper meaning, e.g. proverbs. Makkai’s (1972, 129) theory is, that there are two sememic networks involved in decoding a polysememic sememe, i.e. an idiom belonging to the semantic idiomaticity area. One network is for the literal expression, and the other is for the moral. These networks are tied together through a hypersememic link Makkai’s hypersememic link (ibid. 130) consists of the general cultural knowledge or consciousness of a mature native speaker. The link helps the listener to understand and decode the moral or the deeper meaning of the word cluster correctly by using his/her inner cultural knowledge.
Using this criterion, Makkai divides all idioms either under the category of *lexemic idioms* or under the category of *sememic idioms*. Lexemic idioms are shorter and function as parts of speech whereas sememic idioms function as sentence idioms. OCDIE 2 makes the same distinction (cf. 4.1 above).

### 4.3.1 Lexemic Idioms

Makkai divides all *lexemic idioms* longer than one word and shorter than a sentence into six types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal verb idioms</td>
<td><em>give in</em></td>
<td>to admit to be defeated or not to be able to do sth; to agree to do sth against one’s will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournure idioms</td>
<td><em>to fly off the handle</em></td>
<td>suddenly and completely lose one’s temper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irreversible binomial idioms</td>
<td><em>spick-and-span</em></td>
<td>very clean and tidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal compound idioms</td>
<td><em>the White House</em></td>
<td>the president of the U.S. and his officials; the official home of the president of the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating verb idioms</td>
<td><em>to baby-sit</em></td>
<td>to look after or mind somebody’s children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo-idioms</td>
<td><em>kith and kin</em></td>
<td>somebody’s relatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Makkai 1972: 135-169)*

The class of *phrasal verb idioms* includes both phrasal and prepositional verbs, with the constituent structure of verb + adverb. In addition to its one or more idiomatic meanings, a phrasal verb can carry a separate literal meaning, too. An example of this could be the phrasal verb *put up* (Makkai, 135-6):

*Put up those books on the shelf* ‡ literal
*I'll put up the Browns overnight* ‡ ‘accommodate’
*They put me up to it* ‡ ‘give the idea’

*Tournure idioms* consist of at least three words and they have a phrase-like structure. *Tournure* is a mode of expression and means, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “the turning of language or of a phrase”. Tournure idioms are the type of expressions that people generally identify idioms with. The most commonly used
example of idioms, *to kick the bucket* (to die) belongs to this group. Tournure idioms are often verbal idioms, beginning with a verb. Makkai lists some special features for them, too (1972, 153-4). Some tournure idioms have a compulsory *it*, which is either between the verb and the adverb, or at the end of the word sequence, e.g. *to have it out* (to discuss or argue a problem or disagreement very openly with somebody to solve the problem), *to come off it with sb* (said when one thinks what somebody is saying is untrue or wrong) (Makkai 1972, 148). This compulsory *it* differentiates this kind of tournure idioms from phrasal verb idioms. Tournure idioms often contain a compulsory definite or indefinite article, which are essential to the idiomatic meaning of the word string. Since tournure idioms have a phrase-like structure, they can be very similar to sememic idioms, which are sentence idioms. However, these groups differ from each other in the way that sememic idioms allow syntactic variation whereas tournure idioms do not: they can only be varied inflectionally (past tense, future tense, etc.) (Makkai 1972, 148).

**Irreversible binomial idioms** have a fixed structure in the way that their word order cannot be reversed. Thus, for example *spick-and-span* (very clean and tidy) cannot be reversed into *span-and-spick* without it losing its idiomatic meaning of very clean and tidy. Makkai (1972, 164) notes that irreversible binomials which contain a cranberry morph, e.g. *kith and kin* (= someone’s relatives) should not be counted as irreversible binomials but classified into the group of *pseudo-idioms*.

By *phrasal compound idioms* Makkai (1972, 168) refers to nominal compounds which refer to a specific, generally known object, using common nouns, e.g. *White House*. To make these kind of compounds idiomatic, they first have to be

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31 See Makkai’s morphological bans in ch. 3.3.
32 A word that does not have an independent litera meaning of its own, perhaps because of it being a relic of older language, only existing in the idiomatic phrase.
institutionalised and widely recognised in their specific meanings. Makkai even argues that in this respect all proper nouns could be counted as idioms, even personal names.

In *incorporating verb idioms* the first element is either a noun or an adjective, which is attached to a verb, e.g. *to baby-sit, to sight-see*. For Makkai, compound verbs are idiomatic, because their literal interpretation can be ambiguous. For example when *to baby-sit* is interpreted literally, it may mean ‘to make baby or babies sit’ or ‘sitting with regard to, or on account of a baby or babies’ (Makkai 1972, 168). Not all incorporated nouns are idiomatic, for example *to man-hunt* can only be interpreted literally. It could be argued that only a possible ambiguity in interpreting a meaning does not make the word string idiomatic, but this is Makkai’s view.

The last type in Makkai’s classification is *pseudo-idioms*. This group includes all idioms in the lexemic idiomaticity area which have a cranberry morph as a constituent, e.g. *hither and yon (= in many different directions or places, in a disorganized way; here and there), kit and caboodle (=the whole lot; everything; the whole gang), tit for tat (= an action where sb takes revenge on another person for what they have done by doing sth similar to them)* (Makkai 1972, 340).

### 4.3.2 Sememic Idioms

Makkai divides his sememic idioms into nine types according to their origin or function in a language. These kind of sentence idioms carry many discoursal functions, which I will not analyze in this paper. The following table includes Makkai’s classification of sememic idioms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sememic idiom</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-base idioms</td>
<td><em>Never to get to first base.</em></td>
<td>To fail to achieve the first state of significance in an activity, rendering future success unlikely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idioms of institutionalized politeness</td>
<td><em>May I ask who’s calling?</em></td>
<td>Identify yourself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idioms of institutionalized detachment or indirectness</td>
<td><em>It seems that…. I can’t seem to find my glasses.</em></td>
<td>I’m unable to find my glasses (but I refuse to give up).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idioms of proposals encoded as questions</td>
<td><em>How about a drink?</em></td>
<td>I’m offering you a drink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idioms of institutionalized greetings</td>
<td><em>How do you do!</em></td>
<td>Greeting. Good day!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbial idioms with a moral</td>
<td><em>Curiosity killed the cat.</em></td>
<td>One may pay dearly for one’s curiosity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar quotations as idioms</td>
<td><em>A little more than kin, and less than kind.</em> <em>(Hamlet I.ii.65)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Idiomaticity in institutionalized understatement | *It wasn’t too bad.*  
*It wasn’t exactly my cup of tea.* | Approval. Displeasure. |
| Idiomaticity in institutionalized hyperbole | *As cold as a witch’s tit*  
*He won’t lift a finger.* | Extremely cold. He is very idle. |

(Makkai 1972, 172-179)

*First-base idioms* are based on a cultural institution, saying or proverbs which have arisen from culturally specialized fields, e.g. American baseball (*never to get to first base* ‡ to fail to achieve the first state of significance in an activity, rendering future success unlikely.

*Idioms of institutionalized politeness* are imperatives in traditional, polite forms. Makkai counts these kinds of turns of speech as idioms by the fact that they could be answered literally but very seldom are, unless the person making a literal reply to these ‘questions’ deliberately wishes to be rude or is kidding. For example in *Do you mind if I…* the person informs that they are going to do sth and they don’t expect you to resist it. These kind of questions are not usually answered *Yes, I do (mind)!*
Idioms of institutionalized detachment or indirectness are traditional forms of speech which indicate detachment or indirectness, e.g. *it seems to be snowing* ‡ it is snowing (but I hate to say so).

Idioms of proposals encoded as questions are similar to idioms of institutionalized politeness. Again, if answered literally, they indicate misunderstanding, or deliberate refusal to co-operate, e.g. *Why don’t you sit over here?* (come and sit down here) ‡ because I don’t like that chair!

Idioms of institutional greetings are lexemically inalterable. They are usually used in greetings and they are not expected to be answered literally. However, *how are you* can be answered literally, if it is meant to be asking physical condition.

Proverbial idioms with a moral have a standard format, they are widely recognized and they cannot be much altered for person, tense or anaphorically.

Familiar quotations as idioms have to be institutionalized and familiar enough to be fairly sure of being recognized. Often the person using them invokes authority.

Idiomaticity in institutionalised understatement lessens the impact of a blunt statement or denotes approval of something.

Idiomaticity in institutionalised hyperbole means basically exaggerated terms that have been accepted in a wide use and become idiomatic. They are used in speech and writing where people exaggerate what they are saying in order to make something sound more impressive than it really is. Idiomatic hyperbole is often considered as vulgar.
4.4. Definition

Idioms are hard to define and drawing a definition is not easy. The previous sections in this paper have studied the characteristics and classifications of idioms and therefore an attempt of a definition suitable for this study would be in place here.

For this study, as idioms were counted idiomatic expressions of two or more words which have a meaning that cannot be deducted from the single words that form it. The idiomaticity of idioms varies according to the case and in this definition only fairly restricted expressions are included in order to limit the number of idioms analysed in the empirical study.

The following types of idioms are included in this definition as regards the semantic transparency: 1) completely opaque idioms (*trip the light fantastic*) 2) semi-opaque idioms i.e. figurative idiomatic metaphors (*burn the candle at both ends*) and 3) semi-transparent phrases (*jog one’s memory*) which are restricted collocations i.e. collocations that are used more in their idiomatic meaning.

The structural definition follows Makkai’s classification, the idioms defined in this study would fall into his lexemic classes of tournure idioms (*kick the bucket*), irreversible binomial idioms (*hammer and thong*) and idiomatic phrasal combinations (*red herring* or *dead meat*). Moreover, I have separated similes such as *like a bat out of hell* as their own class. The structural variation of the expressions is more or less limited, hence their syntax is fairly frozen and unaltered.

The following expressions have not been taken into this definition, although they may as well be counted as idioms: phrasal verbs (*give in*), prepositional verbs (*look after*), Makkai’s sememic idioms, proverbials (*a bird in a hand is worth two in the bush*), pseudo-idioms (*kith and kin*), incorporating verb idioms (*to baby-sit*). The reason for leaving these classes out of the definition is that the number of the findings from the
textbooks had to be limited. Phrasal verbs are widely used in English but I wanted to concentrate on the more peculiar cases of the language, hence they are left out from this study. Different kinds of compound words, such as Makkai’s phrasal compound nouns and incorporating verb idioms would have brought the definition of idiom too close to common collocations and as the study concentrates on idioms that foreign language students might have problems with, they were decided to be left out, too. Makkai’s sememic idioms, other sentence idioms and proverbs were not included to limit the area of study. None of Makkai’s pseudo-idioms were found in the textbooks studied, hence this class was also left out of the definition.

The definition used here undoubtedly represents a very traditional view of idioms. This is by no means meant to be applied as a definite, all-inclusive definition of idioms, but is only used for this study.
5. Idiom Comprehension

The unpredictable meanings of idiomatic expressions may result in that idioms may present a language learning problem. Cooper\(^{33}\) (233) stresses that the problem touches practically all groups of language users and learners: native speakers, language-disoriented students, and bilingual and L2 learners. Cooper’s point is that it is almost impossible to master all of the idioms of a language completely.

The way that idioms are processed and comprehended in the brain differ somewhat whether it is a native language speaker (L1 speaker from hence on) or a second language speaker (L2 speaker from hence on) who is using the language. Psycholinguistic studies on idiom comprehension give some answers why idiomatic expressions are more difficult for L2 speakers.

The following paragraphs go into the issues of idiom comprehension, native speakers’ and language learners’ differences in learning idioms, pitfalls for second language learners in idiom comprehension and using idiomatic language.

5.1. First Language Comprehension

How do people process idioms? Do they comprehend the literal meaning first and only then the idiomatic meaning, or vice versa? Or do people automatically compute both the literal and idiomatic meanings of idioms at the same time? There have been varying opinions in the processing models for idiomatic and literal meanings, and whether the processing modes differ from each other. There are four models which suggest how native speakers process and comprehend idiomatic expressions: 1. literal first hypothesis, 2. the simultaneous process hypothesis, 3. the figurative first hypothesis and 4. the composition model.
One of the earliest studies in this field was Bobrow and Bell’s\textsuperscript{34}, study in 1973 which concluded the ‘\textit{literal first hypothesis}’. The hypothesis states that there are separate modes of processing the literal meaning of an idiomatic phrase and the figurative meaning of a phrase. The latter mode, according to Bobrow and Bell’s hypothesis, normally stays inactive and is only activated when the literal interpretation of the idiom does not give an appropriate meaning to the expression. According to Lee\textsuperscript{35} (1994, 142) this theory suggests that in the process, the literal meaning is searched first but if it does not match the context, it is interpreted figuratively by accessing an “idiom words dictionary”, ‘the mental lexicon’ for a correct, conventionalized interpretation. Cooper (1999, 234-237) states that findings from later studies show that idioms are understood at least as quickly as comparable literal expressions.

In 1979, Swinney and Cutler\textsuperscript{36} produced a response to Bobrow and Bell’s research. They suggested that idiomatic expressions should be treated as long words which are stored and retrieved from ‘the mental lexicon’ along with all other words. Swinney and Cutler’s theory has been called ‘\textit{the simultaneous processing hypothesis}’ because of its conclusion of the processing modes of both the literal and figurative meanings being started at the same time when the first word of the phrase is heard. The more fitting interpretation is chosen. Swinney and Cutler also argued that there exists no special idiom list, as the first hypothesis suggested, nor any special processing mode for idiomatic expressions.

‘The figurative first hypothesis’ by Gibbs\(^\text{37}\) in 1980 gave an alternative solution. He suggested that, because the literal meaning of idioms is not relevant in understanding them, the figurative meaning is always processed before the literal one. Gibbs argues that if the meaning of an idiomatic expression remains obscure, only then the literal interpretation is resorted to.

The results of Gibbs’ reading time experiments in his study in 1986\(^\text{38}\), comparing the reading times and interpretation times of literal and idiomatic sentences, confirmed that people did not automatically compute both the literal and figurative meanings of idiomatic expressions during comprehension (1986, 27). Conventional, figurative idiomatic sentences were not read faster than literal sentences in Gibbs’ study. Gibbs notes further that there is no clear evidence that people computed the literal meanings of idioms during the understanding process. Nevertheless, he does not either agree with the proposal that in order to understand idiomatic phrases a distinct mode of processing should be involved in. Gibbs (1986, 28) concludes his study by stating that “literal processing is not a default mode of understanding normal discourse”.

“Speakers and hearers know the meanings of many conventional, formulaic utterances and appear to comprehend their nonliteral meanings immediately, even if their literal interpretations do not make sense”.

Glucksberg (1993)\(^\text{39}\) added to Gibbs’ hypothesis that idiom access is completed faster than processing the literal meaning because the lexical, syntactic and semantic processing are not needed as in full linguistic analysis. In this manner, familiar idioms are understood more quickly than corresponding literal expressions.

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Each of these models for idiom comprehension are given support from different researchers, and none of them could have been argued as being the superior theory by the year 1992. Other studies (e.g. Gibbs & Gonzales 1985; Schweigert 1986; Popiel & McRae 1998; Cronk & Schweigert 1992; Lakoff 1982; Boers and Demechenleer 2001) have shown, among other things, that frozenness, familiarity, level of transparency and literalness also affect the comprehension and processing of idioms.

However, in 1994, Gibbs\textsuperscript{40} introduced a model that supersedes the three models given above. His \textit{composition model} is based on reading-time experiments. The findings show that decomposable idioms, i.e. transparent idioms in which the figurative and literal meanings are close (e.g. \textit{hit the jackpot}), are processed faster compared to nondecomposable, opaque idioms, where the literal meaning gives no clue for the figurative meaning (e.g. \textit{kick the bucket}). Idioms range along a continuum of compositionality or analyzability. Gibbs’ composition model relates closely to the characteristic of idiomaticity discussed earlier in this paper\textsuperscript{41}. The more idiomatic the idiom and the more separate its literal representation is from the idiomatic meaning, the more difficult it seems to be to process.

Gibbs’ (1994, 285) research suggest that decompositional analysis is attempted when people are trying to understand idiomatic phrases. In the case of a decomposable idiom, people can assign independent meanings to individual parts of the idiom and will recognize how the meaningful parts, put together, form the overall figurative interpretation. Simultaneously, the normal language processing mode goes on automatically, processing the grammatical structures, lexical items and semantic analysis.

\textsuperscript{40} Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. \textit{The Poetics of Mind, Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994

\textsuperscript{41} See section 2.3
5.2. Problems in Second Language Comprehension

The above models are concerned with the comprehension of idioms of native language speakers. As regards second language learners and speakers, the case is naturally somewhat different. The way in which idioms are comprehended and processed by L1 speakers gives a basis for studying the comprehension of idioms of the L2 learners. What is problematic here, is to which extent the native speaker idiom comprehension models can be applied when L2 speakers are in question.

5.2.1 Cultural Differences

Native speakers already possess a “rich repertoire” of idiomatic expressions and they are familiar with the meanings and uses of conventional language. L1 speakers acquire idioms through lexicalisation: memorising idioms as single semantic units which have one separate meaning. Hence the meanings of the idioms they have memorised are clear to them. However, idiom processing is different among L2 speakers and the models given above do not apply to them due to the “transfer of training obstacle” as Lee (1994, 143) suggests. This means basically, that L2 speakers learn idioms together with grammar, pronunciation and spelling. The natural lifeworld for language does not exist in the classroom, and the natural lexicalization process is almost completely lacking. Lee argues (1994, 143) that L2 speakers are able to use idioms that they have learned in the classroom and idioms that they are familiar with in their native language, but they rarely process foreign idioms that they do not know figuratively and if they do, they often use those idioms inappropriately.

Cultural differences also cause confusion in idiom comprehension. To put it simplified, cultures which are similar to each other and share common features do not
have too much trouble in understanding the idioms of each other. However, cultures that
differ from each other do not have the arbitrary link between them and hence idiomatic
expressions can be more easily misinterpreted and cause problems. Lee (1994, 142) is
concerned with the cultural information gap that idioms may cause between L1 and L2
speakers coming from different cultures: “idioms are culturally and relationally
saturated symbols that are efficient for in-groups yet problematic/unpredictable for out-
groups”. According to Lee, a common idiom comprehension model used by L2
speakers is a *literal-only model*, while L1 speakers may have several models of
processing idioms (1994, 157). As a result, idioms may result to a communication
breakdown between L2 and L1 speakers.

Every language and culture produces rich idiomatic expressions. Boers &
Demechenleer (2001, 255-257) state that even straightforward images that idioms
display in one culture, may not be interpreted so self-evidently in another and may not
bring the same conventional images in the minds of learners of that language (2001,
256). Distant cultures will encounter most problems in comprehension whereas more
closely related cultures may have more subtle differences in idioms. If the languages
and cultures are similar, and from the same origin (e.g. germanic languages), they often
have similar (and even some the very same) idiomatic expressions. Similar cultures
often have the same metaphorical themes, for example the theme of ‘anger is heat’,
which was mentioned in section 2.3.1. Since idioms often have their origin in
metaphors, similar cultures tend to have more similar idioms too.

Boers and Demechenleer continue by explaining how even closely related
cultures may share the same metaphorical themes, but their degrees of conventionality,
which make idioms idioms, may be different. For example, imagery of hats or ships is

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42 Discussed in section 3.2.
wider in English than in French, and imagery of food is wider in French than in English. Here hats, ships and food form metaphorical themes. In their study, Boers and Demechenleer hypothesized that idioms relating to a metaphoric theme that has wider imagery in one culture than in the other will most probably cause more comprehension problems among language learners than if the imagery is wider or equally wide in their native culture.

Boers and Demechenleer (2001, 255) use the term *imageable idioms* for figurative expressions that bring a conventional scene or image to the native speaker’s mind. The term for these associated conventional images was originally created by George Lakoff in 1987. Boers and Demechenleer suggest that the semantics of many imageable idioms are not arbitrary, but nevertheless, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences cause problems in comprehension. They state that a high degree of imageability of idioms make them more semantically transparent (2001, 255): “The lower the degree of semantic transparency of an idiom, the more a language learner will have to rely on contextual clues to figure out its meaning. For idioms with high transparency, on the other hand, the lexical components may serve as primary pointers.” However, on the other hand, Boers and Demechenleer’s study shows that the likelihood of negative transfer from L1 increases when learners perceive the two languages and cultures as close to each other. They call these misinterpreted idioms as “false friend idioms” (2001, 255).

5.2.2 Interference

The influence of previous learning affecting subsequent learning is called

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transfer or interference. In language learning this means that the forms and patterns of the native language affect the learning of the second language. Both negative and positive interference can take place in language learning. In positive interference the learner utilizes the native language in producing correct second language forms or patterns. In negative interference, the influence of native language forms or patterns results to incorrect second language forms and patterns.

Irujo (289) suggests that similar idiomatic patterns are easy to learn because they can be successfully transferred from the native language. Different patterns would, in contrast, be difficult to learn because of the L1 interference. According to Irujo (1986a, 290), however, idioms that have equivalents in the learners’ native language are often judged as ungrammatical by L2 learners and therefore tend to be omitted in usage. Irujo’s studies show that both positive and negative interference are used in idiom comprehension, but the use of L1 varies by individual. However, her studies found more evidence of negative interference when producing or comprehending idioms that were similar in both languages than when the students were producing or comprehending totally different idioms (1986a, 295-298). Similarities between languages encourage interference, since idioms are not always considered nontransferable. Foreign language students tend to have the idea that idiomatic expressions in their native language can not have the same equivalents in the target language. In her later study, Irujo (1993, 215) came to the conclusion that negative interference seems to be the strategy that less proficient learners in particular often rely on when they do not know the correct idiom. In this case, the students rely too much on the similarities between the languages and tend to translate the idiom from their native language into the target language.

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Cooper’s (1999, 238-254)) research also shows that the native language affects L2 idiom processing, even though L2 learners are less likely to transfer L1 knowledge when they perceive the meaning as figurative. According to Cooper, L2 learners’ recognition of idioms might be influenced by several factors: the context of the idiom, the literal meaning, the meaning of a particular word in the idiomatic phrase, the learner’s own experiences and background knowledge and the equivalent (if any) expression in the native language. The results of Cooper’s (1999, 244) studies showed that the major stumbling block for L2 learners in comprehension often was the fact that there is not a clear and close relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of the idioms. In recognizing the idiom, the thought processes of the L2 learner were slower, more deliberate and hence more tractable compared to those of native speakers. Interference from their native language was most obviously affecting L2 learners’ processing the idiomatic meanings, even though they did not often used the L1 idioms as a straight key to the target language idioms. The L2 learners’ idiom comprehending problems were solved by experimenting and evaluating possible answers or through trial and error. Cooper concludes his research that the best model for L2 learners idiom comprehension appeared to be by employing a variety of strategies in a trial-and-error fashion.

5.2.3 Avoidance

Studies first studies of avoidance as a linguistic phenomenon were made in the 1970s (e.g. Schrachter 1974; Tarone, Cohen & Dumas 1976; Kleinmann 1977). However, studies of avoidance in the use of idioms are yet today rare.

Sometimes second language learners encounter such difficulty using English idioms that they prefer to avoid them altogether. According to Irujo (1986a, 287), this
may result either from trials of transferring a part of an idiom from their native language to the target language or confusing and misusing a part of an idiom they have heard but have not learned to master.

The main reason why students tend to avoid idioms seems to be the fear of not getting the idioms right, as Irujo (1993, 205-206) remarks. She also explains that many language learners perceive idioms as language-specific and therefore not transferable to L2. The lack of usage of idioms may also be caused by the “simplified foreigner talk” that native speakers address learners, as Irujo remarks. Additionally, non-native speakers often “frame” idioms when using them and announce that they are using a figure of speech – just in case they will not use the idiom correctly! (1993, 296).

Some experimental evidence stated by Irujo (1993, 206) show, nevertheless, that idioms are not avoided as a category (Hulstijn & Marchena 1989). However, phrasal verbs, which had identical equivalents in the learners’ native language were avoided, interestingly enough. Thus, there exist evidence that too similar idiomatic forms (in both languages) are being avoided by learners.

Irujo’s later study (1993) investigated L2 learners would avoid using idioms if they were to choose from either an idiom or a non-idiomatic phrase. The results showed (1993, 210-215) that learners were not avoiding idioms but they attempted to use them. They got the identical idioms correct but different idioms were much more difficult to reproduce correctly.

In her discussion part, Irujo (1993, 215) introduces a theory of avoidance by Blum and Levenston⁴⁵ (1978). They divide avoidance into apparent avoidance and true avoidance. According to this theory, true avoidance presupposes conscious choice of replacing idioms with alternative expressions, whereas apparent avoidance is caused by

lack of vocabulary; the learner simply does not know the idiom. Laufer⁴⁶ (2000, 186) agrees on this theory: the learner can not avoid something that they do not know in the first place. Hence the term avoidance is an indicator of the difficulty learners may have with idioms. The difficulty results both from L1 – L2 differences and L1 – L2 similarity: the learners feel insecure in using certain structures, which are identical in both languages. Laufer (2000, 187-188) introduces a three-dimensional framework of types of L1-L2 differences and similarities of idioms: concept – form – distribution.

1. **Conceptual differences** refer to categories which are present in one language but do not exist in another. For example: Finnish does not have articles, like English.

2. **Formal similarity** refers to two languages using the same linguistic elements to express the intended meaning. Formal difference occurs when the meaning is expressed by different means. For example, the passive voice in English and French is expressed by the verb ‘to be’ and the past participle. In some other languages the case is different, for example in Swedish the passive can be formed⁴⁷ by adding a suffix –s to the stem of the main verb, e.g. Affären stängs klockan 20. = The shop is closed at 8 pm.

3. **Distributional difference** refers to cases where the structure which exists in both languages is used in different conditions or for different purposes in each language.

Based on these L1 – L2 relationships, Laufer distinguishes four degrees of idiom similarity between the languages:

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⁴⁷ In Swedish the passive can also be formed by the combination of the verb to be and the past participle, but the meaning of this construction emphasizes the result of the action.
1. Total formal similarity: exact equivalents L1 and L2
2. Partial formal similarity: partial translational equivalents
3. Lack of formal similarity or formal difference: different idioms in L1/L2, but the same meaning
4. Distributional difference: no idiomatic counterpart in L2

Laufer (2000, 194-195) concludes that idioms were not avoided as a category. He explains the lack of subjects’ resistance to idioms by a cognitive view: the meaning of many idioms is not arbitrary but conceptually motivated. Whether most idioms in different languages are or are not based on similar metaphors is not the issue, but idioms exist in all language and hence the category of idioms is familiar to all language learners. However, differences exist between languages, and L2 learners will face “unreasonable idiomaticity” as Laufer calls the cases where L1 uses literal expressions while L2 also has an idiomatic option, or vice versa. This may be an explanation for some avoidance of idioms of degree 4 (non-idioms in L1). In partially translated idioms, the metaphor on which the idioms are based, is the same or similar in both L1 and L2, but the entire representation of the metaphor is slightly different. Laufer assumes that avoidance of these kind of idioms “can be explained by the possible confusion of the entire structure due to its partial similarity and not to the metaphor as such.

The avoidance of idiom use seems to be related to the language level of language learners. Idioms are not avoided as a category, but avoidance is related to the degrees of L1 and L2 similarity: partial formal similarity and distributional difference seem to be factors that enhance avoidance.
5.2.4 Correct Use

Watson\(^\text{48}\) deals with idioms and their appropriate usages in her study, and problems for L2 speakers to choose the appropriate idiom in a situation. In particular, her study concentrates on the problematics of idiom usage perceived by learners of English. Quite correctly, Watson (1998, 15) divides the learners of English into two groups according to their tendencies to use idioms: they either tend to over-use them “because they feel that using them makes them sound English”, or they under-use them because they think that they are inappropriate and too informal in most situations. The range of idioms is very wide, and thus many of them can be used in most situations, also in formal ones.

Instead of a strict division of idioms into categories of formal and informal, Watson (1998, 17) underlines the effect the used idiom has in the particular context being the most important thing to remember when there is appropriateness of using a particular idiom. For example, some idioms have characteristics of being very emphatic and exaggerated or even offensive or critical or impolite, slightly humorous, deliberately ironic or shocking, or they may imply disapproval, and thus not suitable in every situation. Watson’s advice is, especially for learners of English, to consider the appropriateness of the ‘message’ of an idiomatic expression, rather than the particular words which convey it (1998, 17).

Idioms containing clearly offensive words can be easily avoided when not appropriate, but for L2 learners idioms with neutral vocabulary may cause problems. As an example, Watson (1998, 18) gives the idiom ‘to pop one’s clogs’, which indicates no sorrow nor respect to the person who has died. Watson highlights that learners should

be explained that “the expression does not suggest any sensitivity or compassion” so that they will be aware why this expression is informal (ibid.).

Idiomatic expressions can be perceived in various ways also due to differences in cultural and social norms of the learners: “for example negative implications of ‘pulling rank’ and ‘jobs for the boys’” may not be clear to learners who “view rank, status, and social or family connections very positively” (Watson 1998, 18).

As the last point, Watson (1998, 18) states that idioms have very often various shortened forms, partial references and/or other variations/exploitations that the L2 learner should be aware of. Some of them, e.g. ‘silver lining’ have become “an item of language” in their own rights (Watson 1998, 18). The variations, shortened forms, etc., may confuse the L2 learner if they have been strictly taught that idioms have more or less frozen forms. As a solution, Watson suggests that sometimes it is better to focus on the metaphor only, not explaining the original idiom it is based on, and illustrate how it can be used in the variations (1998, 19). However, simply focusing on metaphors does not give the learners all the characters that idiomatic expressions have/comprise – this makes the task of teaching idioms complicated and challenging.
6. Materials and Methods

The National Board of Education in Finland has set up a new framework curriculum for upper secondary education. The framework curriculum states that the teaching of foreign languages should improve the cultural knowledge of the students and sets a target for students to be able to communicate in a way that is characteristic to the target language and its culture\textsuperscript{49} (\textit{Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet} 2003, 87).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages by the Council of Europe, with its common reference levels\textsuperscript{50} in languages, has also been taken as a basis of the Finnish upper secondary school curricula. Until now, a common reference levels on which all the European countries base their language teaching did not exist.

According to these curricula, the objective for the A-level syllabus\textsuperscript{51} of a foreign language is that the student will achieve the common reference level of B2 as the minimum (OPH 2003, 87). The levels aimed at the upper secondary school vary from A2.2 to B2.1 and even the very lowest level requires at least a few idiomatic expressions to be mastered. The following chart presents the common reference levels aimed at in Finnish upper secondary schools. The descriptions are translated from the Finnish framework curriculum (OPH 2003, 198-201).

\textsuperscript{50} The scales in common reference levels range from A (basic user of a language) to B (independent user) and C (proficient user). Each level has two divisions, which are further divided into subcategories.
Table x: Common Reference Levels: Speaking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic User, Waystage</td>
<td>A2.2</td>
<td>Can understand fairly well familiar, everyday vocabulary and some idiomatic expressions. Can use several simple grammatical structures and some more demanding structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent User, Treshold</td>
<td>B1.1</td>
<td>Can use quite a large vocabulary connected to everyday life. Additionally uses some common phrases and idioms. Uses several different kinds of grammatical structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1.2</td>
<td>Can use quite a large vocabulary and common idioms. Additionally uses various structures and even complex phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent user, Vantage</td>
<td>B2.1</td>
<td>Can use the structures of a language in a versatile way and has quite a large vocabulary, idiomatic and conceptual vocabulary included. Shows a growing skill to react appropriately in various situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new framework curriculum for upper secondary education has now been adopted into use to all upper secondary schools in Finland. The renewed objectives for language learning stated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages created a need for publishers to renew the course books to follow the new objectives for language learning. This study compares two English textbook series, of which one follows the old framework curriculum and the other follows the new framework curriculum for upper secondary schools.

6.1. Objectives of the Study

In this work, the main objective of the study is to look at two upper secondary school English textbooks to find out the number of idiomatic expressions that appear in them. The focus will be on those idiomatic expressions that can not be understood literally and furthermore on idioms which do not have straightforward Finnish equivalents.

The empirical study is involved with finding the number of occurrence of the above kind of idioms in both textbook series, how idioms are divided into different courses and how idioms are expressed and taught in these textbooks. The study is a

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51 English as the first foreign language, starting in the third form.
comparative study between two textbook series published by the same publisher. One of the series is published in the mid 1990s following the framework curriculum of the time and the other is a brand new textbook series, following the new framework curriculum with the Common European Framework of Reference in Languages. The newer textbook series is partly yet in preparation. The final topic of interest in this study is to find out whether the criteria set by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages have changed the number of idiomatic expressions and the way they are expressed in textbooks.

6.2. Materials

As material, I have used three course books of two different upper secondary school textbook series published by Otava: Blue Planet and Culture Café. For this study three course books in each series was enough as material. The choice of taking the first three course books of each series into the study was based on the fact that the series of Culture Café is not yet complete and hence not yet in use, but the first three textbooks of both the series were fairly easily available and used in Finnish upper secondary schools.

Both of the textbook series are widely used in Finnish upper secondary schools. Blue Planet is older than Culture Café which is designed to replace the former textbook series within a couple of years. The first course books of Culture Café are already in use and the rest of them will gradually be taken in use when their preparation will be completed and the books published. Both textbook series have been designed and compiled by almost the same team of people, with the exception of only a couple of changes. Therefore, there is an extra interest studying whether there are any differences
in the number and quality of idiomatic expressions presented in the textbooks, and in the way they are being presented and taught.

6.3. Methods of the Study

The idioms studied here represent a fairly traditional view in order to limit the number of findings from the textbooks. The definition of idioms used in this study was stated in section 4.4. in this paper.

The idiomaticity of the expressions were checked from four dictionaries, Longman *Idioms Dictionary*; Oxford *Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English, Vol 2: Phrase, Clause and Sentence Idioms*; Longman *Dictionary of English Idioms, Vol 2* or *Word Wise: A Dictionary of English Idioms*. If the idiom was not listed in one of them, it was dropped out of the material.

I further narrowed the area down by accepting only idioms that do not have Finnish equivalents at all in order to focus the study towards idiomatic expressions that are culturally marked and which would most probably be the most difficult for the Finnish speaking students to understand.

All idioms that fit into the definition stated above were picked and listed. All the course books were read from cover to cover and the idioms were picked from texts and exercises, songs, extracts, essay titles, titles, headlines and instructions for exercises.

The findings in the textbooks were coded systematically so that it would be easier to return to the location in the textbook where the idiom was found. The codes give information of the textbook series, number of the course, number of the text, and the page number where the idiom was found. Additionally, the code includes information if the idiom is used in an exercise where the students are engaged in using the idiomatic expression themselves. For example, the idiom *in a nutshell* was found in
Blue Planet course book 2, in text 9, on page 44 and in an exercise and hence its code is BP2:9,44e.
7. The Types of Idioms in Textbooks

The definition restricted the number of idioms found in the studied textbooks. Following the definition, 64 idioms were found in *Blue Planet* and 92 idioms in *Culture Café* and the idioms could be fairly easily classified into four different types.

Accordingly, the findings were divided into following types of idiomatic expressions:

- tournure idioms (e.g. *eat one’s heart out* BP2:13, 61e\(^5^2\))
- similes (e.g. *as bold as brass* CC2:7, 71e)
- idiomatic phrasal combinations (e.g. *a dark horse* CC2, 10, 90e)
- binomials (e.g. *rant and rave* BP2:4, 23).

The terms are mostly taken from Makkai, but the quality of the idioms in these classes will slightly vary from Makkai’s definition. The distribution of the types of idioms picked from the textbooks can be seen in the following diagram\(^5^3\):

Tournure idioms were the most numerous group of idioms in the studied textbooks. The term is taken from Makkai’s classification, but the criterion for idioms of this type had to be slightly loosened. In section 4.3.1 Makkai’s tournure idioms are described as idioms of at least three words which have a phrase-like structure, often beginning with a verb. This was followed as the basic rule in classifying the types of tournure idioms in this study, too. Hence, the expressions that are traditionally considered as idioms and begin with a verb were counted here as tournure idioms. These included for example: *laugh one’s head off* (BP2:3, 20e), *twist someone’s guts* (BP1:14, 60), *blow a fuse*.

\(^{52}\)Blue Planet, course 2, text 13, page 61, an exercise
(CC1:2, 24), eat humble pie (CC3: 5, 41). However, there were some expressions that fitted the definition according to semantic intelligibility, but seemed to fall out of all four types of idioms. These kinds of expressions were idioms beginning with a verb but they had only two words in them, not three as was Makkai’s minimum. These kinds of idioms, such as play hooky (BP3:3, 22e) and play truant (BP3:1, 7) were included in the type of tournure idioms. Additionally, a few sayings or catchphrases such as look who’s talking (BP2:19, 88e) or it takes two to tango (CC2:3, 31e) were also included in this class.

Similes were the second biggest group of idioms. Similes are metaphorical expressions that describe something by comparing it to something else. In this study, only idiomatic similes were accepted in order to leave out common metaphors. Most of the similes were easily recognized, as they either begin with as or like, for example: as cool as a cucumber (CC2:7, 71e), as white as a ghost (BP 1:18, 74), (drive) like a bat out of hell (BP3:7, 37e). However, there were again some cases that were slightly ambiguous. Not all expressions started with words as or like, but they still were similes in a way that they described something by using comparison, e.g. stone cold (CC3:2, 18e), wide open (CC3:2, 18e). I decided to include these kinds of expressions into the group of similes, too.

Phrasal combinations and binomials were the groups with the smallest number of findings. Expressions that had two parts, which were connected with the word and, were counted as binomials. Makkai calls these expressions irreversible binomial idioms (cf. section 4.3.1.), because the word-order of the parts can not be reversed. Binomials found in the textbooks were, for example: rant and rave (BP2:4, 25e), hide and seek (CC2:21e).

53 For the lists of idioms in each class, see appendix 3.
As phrasal combinations were counted idiomatic nominal compounds, which were mostly adjective-noun compounds e.g. *a death trap* (BP1:20c, 83) and *a dark horse* (CC2:10, 90e). The only exception in this class was the idiom of *a catch-22 situation* (BP1:13, 56), which was not a clear adjective-noun combination but still included in this class.

The distribution of idioms into these four classes and the difference in the textbook series can be seen in the table below.

Culture Café had a higher number of all types of idioms except from phrasal combinations, which were more numerous in Blue Planet. The number of occurrences and the distribution of idioms between different course books are further discussed in the next section.
8. The Occurrence of Idioms in Textbooks

Language in both Blue Planet and Culture Café textbook series is modern and up-to-date. Spoken language is emphasized, which can be seen in many phrases and ways to express oneself in spoken situations. Texts and extracts of literature are authentic, the material is well compiled and it suits to every type of learner, leaving the students and the teacher space to choose from texts and tasks and to work on their own projects. Students are encouraged from the beginning to be independent and take the responsibility for their own learning process. Working on portfolios and self-evaluation is part of this process in all of the course books.

The textbooks of both Blue Planet and Culture Café had surprisingly numerous idiomatic expressions included into the texts and exercises, even though the textbooks studied here were only the first three coursebooks. All of these courses are mainly aimed at students studying their first year at upper secondary school. The themes for the courses in both the textbook series follow the framework curriculum set by the National Board of Education: 1. Young people and their world, 2. Communication and Free time, 3. Studying and Work.

8.1. Occurrence in Textbooks

As assumed, the more recent textbook series, Culture Café included more idiomatic expressions than the older one, Blue Planet. Using the criterion for idioms stated above, the total number of idioms found in the textbooks of Culture Café was 92 and 64 in the textbooks of Blue Planet. All the occurrences of idioms, also the number of recurrences of the same idiom in different contexts, have been included into this total number.
If the recurrences of the same idiom are left out, the number of separate idioms used in the textbooks is found out. In *Culture Café* there were altogether 83 different idioms used in the three course books. The number in *Blue Planet* was a little lower, 58 separate idioms.

If the numbers of separate idioms are set against the numbers of total occurrences and the textbook series are compared, the occurrence rate of separate idiomatic expressions is, surprisingly, slightly higher in *Blue Planet*. 90,6% of its idioms were separate idioms and hence 9,4% of the idioms recurred again in some other context. In *Culture Café* 90,2% of the total number of idioms was separate. However, the difference in rate is by no means crucial.

The number of idioms found in exercises was also higher in *Culture Café* (63) than in *Blue Planet* (26). Set against the total number of idioms, 68,5% of the idioms in *Culture Café* occur in exercises, whereas the percentage for *Blue Planet* is only 40,6%. Students will learn idiomatic expressions more effectively if they use them actively, hence the more idioms there are in exercises the more it indicates that the students are encouraged to actively use them in their language. The numbers are illustrated in the chart below.

![Chart 1: Blue Planet vs Culture Café: total number of idioms](chart.png)
Each column in the chart shows that the newer textbook series includes and uses more idioms both in texts and in exercises.

8.2. Variation in Courses

The assumption was that the number of idioms would increase in the textbooks steadily while the courses and level of requirement go forward, but the figures show a different view. A strictly limited definition of the concept of idiom may influence the result somewhat: if all idiomatic expressions would have been taken into the study, the number of idioms would most probably have been higher course by course, as the level of language and degree of difficulty raises the more authentic, complex and versatile the language gets in the textbooks.

In *Blue Planet* the number of idioms increases at first, but starts to decrease in the third course book, as the following chart shows.

![Chart 2: Blue Planet](image)

As regards *Culture Café*, the chart looks somewhat different. The first coursebook has the highest number of idioms both in texts and exercises. In the following course books the number decreases considerably.
Even the number of idioms from the second coursebook to the third one decreases a little. One reason for the high peak in the first course book of *Culture Café* can be explained by the fact that there is a separate text and an exercise that focus especially on idiomatic expressions.

If the course book series are compared to each other (see appendix 1), courses 2 and 3 are very similar in both of them, when the amount of idioms is concerned. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that in fact there is at least the same amount of idioms, if not more, in the second and third course books of *Blue Planet* than in *Culture Café*, even though it is older than the latter. Only the first course book of *Culture Café* seems to be superior to the first course book of *Blue Planet*.

However, throughout the line *Culture Café* has more idioms included into exercises, which forces students to use idioms and hence learn them more actively than merely reading them in a text.
9. How Are Idioms Taught

The ultimate goal in language learning is that the learner would reach the level of fluency in the target language, a native-like command. Some level of fluency in English is also required from the Finnish upper secondary school students, as the national frame curriculum states (cf. ch. 6, 44-45).

ODCIE2 (1979, vi), among others, underlines that fluency is distinguished by “familiarity with a wide range of idiomatic expressions, and the ability to use them appropriately in context”. Lennon discusses the issue of fluent language and concludes that fluent language is compiled of a blend of formulaic, conventionalised language and original language produced by the speaker (Lennon 1998, 14-15). He points out that, on one hand, overuse of conventionalized language is considered as “falce fluency” when nothing original is being generated. On the other hand, however, not using any conventionalized language at all would first of all sound artificial and clumsy and requires extra effort from both the speaker and the listener to produce language and to make it comprehensible. The learner has to realize the fact that native speakers tend to have a preference for certain sequences of words over others which may seem to be just as possible and applicable. This applies especially to idiomatic expressions as Wray (2000, 463) suggests.

Idiomatic language was long considered as a non-central and of limited importance area of language learning. Lennon mentions as ‘evidence’ of this the several separate books of collections of idioms published as an optional adjunct to grammars and dictionaries (Lennon, 1998, 17). Now the situation has improved somewhat, but there still is some insufficiency of teaching material concerning idiomatic expressions to foreign language learners in textbook series.
Many psycholinguistic and speech production studies show that in discourse, meanings seem to be accessed by ‘chunks’ of several words rather than by single word units. Hence, as Lennon suggests, also fixed expressions should be learned as early as possible, since knowledge of them eases language production and helps comprehension (Lennon 1998, 18).

Learning and teaching idioms have many points to be taken into consideration since idioms are so problematic in nature in general. How to present and teach idioms in the classroom effectively? It seems, unfortunately, that textbooks for students do not give much stress on the phenomenon of idiomaticity. Therefore, many studies suggest various methods for teachers to bring idioms into their teaching. Many fine methods to teach idioms in context with the text and with wonderful authentic methods and input are the best way to teach idioms in principle, but as Cornell54 (4), argues (it is too impractical and the treatment would be too time consuming. Nowadays the time and resources become more and more limited in the classroom, hence idioms as one phenomenon of a language will not be give much time and they will be treated rather superficially. To bring some idea of idioms to the students anyway, Cornell suggests using learning lists of idioms (1999, 4-5) with proper exemplification.

Another question with teaching idioms is which idioms to choose. Criteria are often made by the frequency and familiarity of idioms, and rightly so. However, there are some problems that should be taken into account. For example, idioms are often restricted to quite a narrow area of usage and hence the frequency of an idiom can not be compared to the frequency of normal vocabulary. Secondly, however common an idiom may be it can still be very seldomly used in conversation and hence the frequency

in real use can be rather low (Cornell 1999, 5-6). Idioms also tend to shafe into clichés. L2 learners need to know when there is an idiom and when a cliché in question.

Teaching and learning idioms also involve the question of registers in language. Idioms are often restricted to registers of spoken or informal language and may thus cause problems for L2 speakers of not known properly, as Cornell (1999, 7) reminds.

Cornell criticizes the whole attempt of trying to learn a language as a system and criticizes the views that see languages too much from the viewpoint of systemized functions and rules. By and large, it is true that most language teachers can operate quite well with the usual definition of the idiom, which would be something among the lines of “an expression consisting of more than one word, whose composite meaning is not deducible from the normal meanings of its constituent parts” (1999, 2).

Cornell is mainly concerned with the issue of whether some idioms should be given special attention in language teaching, because of their particular features of misleading or confusing learners. These are so called “covert” idioms that learners may not identify as idioms at all. Even though Cornell’s study is made from the standpoint of English being the native language and German (and German idioms) treated as the L2 to be learned, he discusses some general issues in treatment of idioms in language learning and raises some fundamental questions (1999, 3-4) of whether idioms should be given separate treatment in language learning, what frequency considerations should be taken into account and whether the limited range of use raises problems in using idioms correctly.

When reading a new piece of text in foreign language, language learners often rather tend to quess the meanings from the text (encouraged by the teacher or not) if it proves difficult to understand otherwise, than to immediately lean on the wisdoms of
dictionaries. It is argued whether the ability to guess from the context is a significant skill or not. However, as Cornell (1999, 8) points out, it is clear that rather often, and even with the help of a dictionary, students can end up into a meaning that totally distorts the text and may even be read as near-nonsense within its context.

Problems in idiom comprehension for L2 learners should be taken into account in L2 teaching. The basic difficulties in learning idioms listed by many researchers are involved with the non-literalness of idioms: they do not mean what they say and the correct use of idioms.

9.1. Hints for the Classroom

Teaching idioms is a challenging task for teachers, nevertheless idioms should not be omitted from the curriculum. First of all, the origin, meaning and purpose of the term idiom should be explained and discussed, as Deaton (1992, 473) suggests. The fact that idioms may reflect a metaphoric theme that seems absent from the L2 learners’ culture should be informed to the learner as Boers and Demechenleer (2001) highlight. Because similarities in idioms in L1 and L2 seem to cause the most problems for L2 learners according to several studies, the learners should also be informed the risk of being mistaken. Contextual and lexical clues should be encouraged to be studied, since the comprehension problem could easily be solved by carefully looking at them, as for example Cornell (1999, 8-10) suggests, among others.

Deciding which idioms to teach can be a difficult task for the teacher. Irujo (1986b, 238-240) gives a list of some basic issues that could help making the decision:

1. frequency of use

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2. transparency
3. appropriateness
4. simplicity of form and vocabulary
5. similarity to first-language idioms
6. students’ own choices

Idioms that are used most frequently in ordinary conversation and reading would be the most obvious to be taught to L2 learners, too. Transparent idioms, where the figurative meaning is easily accessible are easy to understand and hence those should be included into teaching in Irujo’s opinion. However, most of the idioms are not transparent, but still widely in use. Hence also L2 learners should at least be aware of them and learn them too. Irujo does not comment this fact at all in her suggestion. By the term appropriateness, Irujo refers to the fact that idioms that are merely restricted to a colloquial or very informal registers are not worth while to teach. Only those idioms that might be useful to L2 learners should be taught. Idioms that are simple in form and vocabulary, i.e. have simple grammatical patterns, are more easily adopted by L2 learners and hence should be included into the teaching programme. The same goes to idioms that are similar to L2 learners native language. The last issue in Irujo’s list refers to idioms that the students themselves want to learn how to use. Irujo suggests that students can keep idiom notebooks in which they write down idioms that they hear or encounter in conversations, on television, in reading, etc.

Irujo’s guidelines restrict a great deal the material and amount of idioms that could be taught. Hence she also underestimates the L2 learners’ abilities to understand idioms. Following Irujo’s guidelines, only the most frequently used, semantically transparent, and idioms that are simple and identical to the native language are being

included into the teaching programme. This might be appropriate with L2 learners who are only learning the basics, but far too simplified to more advanced students. The last point of Irujo’s list, however, gives some space for more complicated idioms to be learned.

Somewhat contradictorily, Irujo later emphasizes that teaching idioms should be integrated into the programme and included into all levels of second and foreign language learning (1986b, 240). Following only the above guidelines, the advanced level students will gain a limited range of idioms into their active use.

Irujo concludes that many students are interested in learning idioms even though they realise that it is an area where they have difficulty. Irujo’s emphasis lies in providing students opportunities to practice using idioms in non-threatening situations. This will give them confidence to use idioms in their own production. Comparing and contrasting the literal and figurative meanings of idioms and idioms in the first and second languages and such classroom activities have been successful in enabling students to recognise, interpret and produce idioms correctly. Irujo states these methods to be some strategies to overcome learners’ ‘idiom-phobia’ and create positive transfer in idiom acquisition.

The suggested activities for the classroom should encourage students to practice their skills to guess the idiomatic meaning from context. For example, activities which compare literal and figurative meanings help L2 learners to realise the difference in them. Irujo (1986a, 295) gives some examples of these:

- matching pictures showing literal and idiomatic meanings
- drawing or acting out literal meanings
- idiom charades
- making up stories or dialogues in which the literal use of an idiom creates a misunderstanding or a humorous situation.

These exercises teach the students to recognize idioms. Other kinds of exercises can be used to teach production of idioms, for example (Irujo 1986a, 299):

- add-on stories
- retelling stories
- writing or presenting short plays, stories, dialogues, etc.
- role-play situations.

In these exercises the collection of idiom lists can be utilized.

Many L2 teaching materials seem to either ignore idioms entirely or put them to the ‘other expressions’ section of vocabulary lists, without providing exercises or other aids to learning. Much of the effort of teaching idioms is left to the teacher, who is expected to provide additional exercises and practice. Materials designed specifically to teach idioms do, of course, provide exercises to help learners. Usually teachers are such in a hurry with the curricula, that not much extra time is left for additional exercises.

If there are specific exercises teaching idiomatic expressions in the teaching material, they should not only concentrate on recognizing the idioms as it is the case in many exercises. Irujo (1986b, 236-238) has studied some of the ready made teaching material and states that in some cases, the exercises could be completed by only manipulating the (physical) structure of the idiom and hence it was possible to do the exercises without any knowledge of the meaning of the idiom. Exercises should involve both understanding and production of idioms. This way the students will gain idioms in their active language use. Exercises which are involved only in matching the idiom with its definition or multiple-choice exercises require only the recognition and comprehension of idioms but do not ask the students to produce the idioms themselves.
9.2. Idioms Taught in Textbooks

Idioms fitting into the definition in this study occurred throughout both of the textbook series studied here. Idioms were found in texts, titles, headlines and headings, essay titles, song lyrics, exercises and instructions for exercises. Because idioms are an integral part of the culture in the target language, it could be assumed that this fact is enunciated together with new idiomatic expressions, for example by explanations, in vocabulary lists and especially by exercises.

9.2.1 Texts

Authenticity is aimed at in both textbook series and therefore idiomatic expressions are quite many in their texts. However, when there is an idiom within the text, there is no indication of the idiomaticity of these expressions. The text based vocabulary lists or the alphabetical vocabulary lists make no difference, which could be considered as an apparent shortcoming. Suggested translations are given for the idioms in the vocabulary lists, but the fact that they are idioms or idiomatic has been omitted from the translations. Thus the explaining is left to the teacher, as well as how and where to use idioms.

Both of the textbook series often use funny expressions, word play, suitable idiomatic expressions or proverbs as titles or in instructions of exercises. The titles or headings lighten up and bring humour to the exercise and create both an interest and a nicer atmosphere to starting the work than if the exercises were only numbered. For example, *Blue Planet*\(^5\) has a listening comprehension exercise that is titled as *Having a ball*. The listening extract tells about a female football player, how she chose football as her sport and how big a part it plays in her life.

\(^5\) *Blue Planet: Book 2*, s. 65.
9.2.2 Exercises

Both textbook series have idioms included into the texts of exercises, but in this context they are not explained or translated. Neither Blue Planet nor Culture Café have vocabulary lists for exercises compared to some other upper secondary school English textbook series. In these cases the students have to conclude the meaning of the idiom either by the clues in the context or check the meaning from another source.

In the following paragraphs I will introduce the exercises that were specifically involved in teaching idioms in the textbooks.

The three course books of Blue Planet studied here do not have any specific exercises at all that would focus on idiomatic expressions or explain the idiomaticity in language. This is a major defect, because there are quite a plenty of idioms included within the texts and exercises. Idioms are not taught actively in these three textbooks, the understanding remains superficial and based on this, the students will not be able to use idioms correctly and may even avoid using them.

Culture Café has taken a step further in this respect. Each course book had exercises that focused especially on idiomatic expressions. There were altogether five exercises that concentrated especially on idiomatic expressions. Already the second unit in book 1 makes the students acquainted to idioms. At the end of the unit there is a so called ’appetizer’ section with an exercise on idioms. The ‘appetizer’ sections in Culture Café have various short exercises to whet the students’ appetite for the topic being discussed. These ‘appetizers’ can be games, tests, quizzes, songs, revision exercises, fact boxes about the topic, further information on the topic, etc. The ‘appetizer’, at the end of unit 2, first of all explains the concept of idioms by saying that idioms are common in everyday English and that their meaning is often difficult to

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Culture Cafe: Book 1, s. 25. Appetizer: Warm up with idioms.
predict. The actual exercise is a multiple choice, where ten expressions are given and each expression has three idioms to choose from. The students’ task is to match the sentence with the correct idiom. For example, (Culture Café: Book 1, p. 25):

2. If someone is very annoying, they are
   a) a sight for sore eyes.
   b) giving you the cold shoulder.
   c) a pain in the neck.

This is a typical exercise where the students are involved with the recognition and comprehension of idioms, but are not required to use the idiom themselves. At this stage, in the first course, these kinds of exercises are suitable, but further on the exercises should require production as well.

Another exercise on idioms in the same course book is in unit 7. The title of the exercise is *Idiomatic English* and the student’s task is to choose an idiom out of two choices to a Finnish expression. For example, (Culture Café: Book 1, p. 57):

5. Pidetään yhteyttä.
   a) Let’s not miss the point.
   b) Keep in touch.

Again, the exercise is a multiple choice exercise and does not encourage the students to produce idioms in their own language.

Book 2 of *Culture Café* has another ‘appetizer’ exercise that deals with idioms with a title *Who was black as ebony?* In the instructions it is explained that people use colourful expressions or idioms in writing or speaking when they want to enliven the language or make the expressions more colourful. The students’ task is to choose suitable adjectives to fill in the sentences. For example, (Culture Café: Book 2, p. 71):

bold cheap cool clean dull free good hard right

1. He may look dangerous, but his heart is ____________ as gold.
2. They had an ‘Everything Must Go’ sale, and things really were ______________ as dirt.

After that the students are asked to think of the equivalent similes for these expressions in Finnish.

Another idiom exercise in book 2 is in unit 10. The exercise has eight idioms which have the word horse in them. The title of the exercise itself, Horsing around, gives the students an idea what the exercise is about. The task is to match the sentences into correct explanations. The idioms were for example (Culture Café: Book 2, p. 90):

- Never look a gift horse in the mouth.
- Hold your horses!
- I’m not sure about Ted; he’s a bit of a dark horse.

In this exercise it was not mentioned that the sentences were idiomatic or proverbial.

Also in book 3 there is an exercise on idioms in Culture Café. Again, the title, Dead affected, already gives a hint about the contents. This time the exercise is about intensifying adjectives and their idiomaticity. The task is to match the given words to adjectives and to the Finnish translations. For example, (Culture Café: Book 3, p. 18):

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</table>

1. ______________ new
2. ______________ black
3. ______________ rich

The idiomaticity of these expressions is not mentioned, but it must be at least somewhat familiar to the students due to the previous exercises.

In fact, all the exercises presented in Culture Café are somewhat insufficient for teaching idioms, because they involve only understanding the idiom. Multiple choice
exercises, matching the idiom with its definition, choosing a correct word to make the idiomatic expression correct, etc. are all exercises which do not require actual production of idioms. Nevertheless, the improvement compared to *Blue Planet* is significant. At least *Culture Café* had some specific exercises designed to teach idioms compared to *Blue Planet* which had none of them included into the textbooks.
10. Conclusions

One of the objectives of this study was to look at the concept of idiom and study its characteristics. The first part of this paper concentrates on those aspects. The view of idioms presented in this paper is rather traditional and narrowly restricted. The idea was to discuss the main characteristics and properties of idioms and then in the empirical part concentrate on a more specific group of idioms, i.e. expressions that are semantically more or less opaque in English, fairly fixed in their structure, and in particular idioms that do not have equivalent expressions in Finnish.

As regards the characteristics of idioms, idiomaticity is the core of the notion. Idioms are strings of words put together whose meaning is not the sum of the words but something else. The literal meanings of the single words are left aside and the meaning of the word string is treated as one meaning, as one big lexical word. Idiomaticity was studied in section 2.3. and even though some classifications or grading of idiomaticity has been attempted to make, the categories have to be treated as being fuzzy and only tentative efforts to put a framework around the wide-ranging phenomenon. Idiomaticity is a gradual phenomenon creating a continuum of idioms.

Idioms have been tried to categorize and classify in different types and groups. Section 4 introduced some of the traditional classifications of idioms. Again, since idioms are so wide and far between, strict categories are impossible to make, but when studying the concept of idioms, these should also be introduced.

Section 5 with the theme of idiom comprehension brought up the issue of idiomaticity and the problems idiomaticity causes to second language learners. Cultural differences and first language interference can even lead to conscious avoidance of using idioms.
The empirical study concerned with two textbook series: *Blue Planet* from the mid 1990s and *Culture Café*, which is more recent and still partly under preparation. The national framework curriculum was applied to all upper secondary schools at the beginning of 2005. The former textbook series follows the old national curriculum and the latter is designed to be appropriate in language teaching following the principles of the new national curriculum. With The Common European Framework of Reference in use, the goals for language learning were also somewhat refined. Not until now do we have common targets with the rest of the Europe on what criteria the language learning and result should be based. The ability to use idiomatic language is emphasized in both The Common European Framework of Reference as in the Finnish framework curriculum. One of the research questions was to study how the criteria set by the new framework curriculum have changed the number of idioms in the textbooks and the way idioms are expressed in the textbooks.

The textbook series include quite many different idiomatic expressions. Idioms were found both in texts and in exercises. Also idioms by the restricted definition in this study were found in the textbooks. Idioms that do not have a Finnish equivalent are a specific part of the culture of English and therefore they should be handled and taught in textbooks.

The older textbook series, *Blue Planet*, had many idiomatic expressions, but they were not taught or explained in any way. The newer textbook series had clearly adopted the principles of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the framework curriculum set by the National Board of Education. The cultural emphasis was higher and the idiomatic features of language were consciously brought up in *Culture Café*. Idioms were no longer taught within the vocabulary, but they were raised up as a specific entity.
Following the national framework curriculum for the upper secondary school, *Culture Café* textbook series has brought up a goal for learning also idiomatic language. The national framework states that the students should be able to communicate in a way that is characteristic to the target language and its culture (OPH: Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet. 2003, 87). Not only was the number of idioms found in *Culture Café* higher than in *Blue Planet*, idioms were also consciously taught to students via various exercises and activities.

The study in this paper can be seen only as a beginning of research on idioms in these textbooks. This study gives only superficial clues about the idiomatic language that is used in the textbooks. Not all idiomatic expressions were taken into account in this study. Moreover, the different types of idioms that were found could have been studied more thoroughly. More research should also be done on the teaching of idioms in these textbooks. Now there were only the textbooks available for the study. The research could be taken into a bit further and include the teacher’s material in the study as well, so that a more thorough view of the language teaching and teaching idioms could be reached. Additionally, there could be student groups who have these textbook series in use involved in the study.
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Appendix 1: Charts on *Blue Planet* and *Culture Café*

### Blue Planet vs. Culture Café: COURSE 1

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<th>Idioms in exercises</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Planet</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Café</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Idioms in alphabetical order

Blue Planet

1. as white as a ghost (BP1:18, 74)
2. be bitten by a (clowning) bug (BP3:17, 79)
3. blue-collar worker (BP3:11, 53e)
4. bold as brass (BP2:20, 91)
5. bread-and-butter letter (BP1:7, 31e)
6. burn the candle at both ends (BP3:1, 8)
7. cast one’s net wide (BP3:12, 54)
8. catch-22 situation (BP1:13, 56)
9. cut and dry (BP 1:13, 57 song)
10. dead meat (BP 1:16, 68e)
11. death trap (BP 1:20c, 83)
12. Dog Days (the) (BP 2:19, 89e)
13. early bird (be an) (BP 2:7, 36e)
14. eat one’s heart out (BP 2:13, 61e)
15. feel a little out of sorts (BP 2:20, 95)
16. food for thought (headline) (BP 3:14, 64)
17. get a life (BP 2:17, 80e)
18. get one’s kicks (BP2:14, 65)
19. get one’s mouth water (BP 2:17, 81e)
20. give sb a big hand (BP 3:8, 41e)
21. give sb a break (BP 1:11, 48)
22. give sb a break (BP 2:7, 35)
23. go bust (BP 1:2, 13e)
24. going strong (still) (BP 3:18, 84e)
25. have a ball (BP 2:14, 65e)
26. have a bee in the bonnet about sth (BP 1:9, 41)
27. have a nerve to do sth (BP 2:6, 31)
28. have the nerve (to do sth) (BP 3:18, 82)
29. hear it through the grapevine (BP 2:15, 70)
30. ins and outs (the) (BP 3:12, 56)
31. ins and outs of… (the) (BP 3:essay title, 94)
32. keep a cool head (BP 3:12, 58e)
33. kick sb’s ass up (BP 2:4, 23)
34. laugh one’s head off (BP 2:3, 20e)
35. lie it on (too) thick (BP 3:12, 55)
36. let off steam (BP 1:9, 41)
37. let sb off the hook (BP 1:11, 49)
38. like a bat out of hell (BP 3:7, 37e)
39. look who’s talking (BP 2:19, 88e)
40. lose heart (don’t) (2 BP:1, 10)
41. make it a day for sb (BP 1:9, 41)
42. middle name (be sb’s) (BP 3:15, 68 song)
43. off the top of one’s head (BP 2:17, 78)
44. off the top of one’s head (BP 2:17, 78)
45. play hooky (BP 3:3, 22e)
46. play hooky (BP 3:3, 23e)
47. play truant (BP 3:1, 7)
48. play truant (BP 3:3, 23e)
49. pull one’s weight (BP 3:11, 51)
50. put in a good word for sb (BP3:12, 55)
51. put one’s nose to the grindstone (BP 2:16, 75e)
52. rant and rave (BP 2:4, 23)
53. shout one’s head off (BP 2:4, 25e)
54. smash hit (BP 2:9, 47e)
55. soaked to the bone (BP 2:16, 75e)
56. spread like wildfire (BP 2:3, 18)
57. sweat like a pig (BP 2:16, 75e)
58. take a step (forward) (BP 1:11, 48)
59. take it all the way to the edge (BP 2:4, 23)
60. twist sb’s guts (BP 1:14, 60)
61. walk of life (BP 3:14, 66)
62. white-collar worker (BP 3:11, 53e)
63. work one’s fingers down to the bone (BP 3:2, 17 song)
64. you name it (BP 3:17, 78)
| 1. | as black as ebony (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 2. | as bold as brass (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 3. | as bold as brass (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 4. | as cheap as dirt (cc2: 7, 71e) |
| 5. | as clean as a whistle (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 6. | as cool as a cucumber (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 7. | as cool as a cucumber (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 8. | as dead as a doornail (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 9. | as dull as ditchwater (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 10. | as good as gold (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 11. | as hard as nails (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 12. | as right as rain (cc2:7, 71e) |
| 13. | at all costs (cc1:4, 41e) |
| 14. | at the cutting edge of sth (be) (cc3:10, 78) |
| 15. | be a drag (cc1:intro, 7) |
| 16. | big time (cc2: 6, 57) |
| 17. | blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song) |
| 18. | blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song) |
| 19. | blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song) |
| 20. | blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 21. | boil down to sth (cc1: 6, 48) |
| 22. | brand new (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 23. | chase rainbows (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 24. | cold feet (get) (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 25. | come to terms with (cc1: 8, 61)) |
| 26. | count one’s blessings (cc1: 8, 61e) |
| 27. | cross one’s heart (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 28. | cross one’s heart and hope to die (cc1: 2, 24song) |
| 29. | cross your fingers (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 30. | dark horse (be a) (cc2: 10, 90e) |
| 31. | dark horse, a (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 32. | different kettle of fish, a (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 33. | do’s and don’ts (the) (cc3: 1, 10e) |
| 34. | dressed to kill (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 35. | eat humble pie (cc3: 5, 41) |
| 36. | eat humble pie (cc3: 5, 42e) |
| 37. | fall off the wagon (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 38. | fast asleep (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 39. | filthy rich (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 40. | get lost (cc2: intro, 5) |
| 41. | give sb a cold shoulder (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 42. | hate sb’s guts (cc2: 19) |
| 43. | have half the mind (cc2: intro, 5) |
| 44. | hide and seek (cc2: 21e) |
| 45. | hold your horses (cc2: 10, 90e) |
| 46. | holy cow (cc2: 5, 45) |
| 47. | hush your mouth (cc1: 3, 28e) |
| 48. | in full swing (be) (cc3: 5, 41) |
| 49. | ins and outs of (the) (cc3: 8, 61e) |
| 50. | it takes two to tango (cc2: 3, 31e) |
| 51. | keep in touch (cc1: 7, 54) |
| 52. | keep in touch (cc3: 8, 58) |
| 53. | keep in touch with sb (cc1: 7, 53) |
| 54. | keep sth at bay (cc3: 5, 41) |
| 55. | kiss and tell (cc2: 3, 32e) |
| 56. | let one’s hair down (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 57. | live and learn (cc1: intro, 5) |
| 58. | make/cut a long story short (cc1: intro, 7) |
| 59. | need a hand (cc1: 6, 52song) |
| 60. | need a hand (cc1: 6, 52song) |
| 61. | odd man out (cc3: 9, 69e) |
| 62. | off-the-wall (cc1: 6, 48) |
| 63. | on cloud nine (be) (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 64. | on one’s high horse (be) (cc2: 10, 90e) |
| 65. | over the edge (tip sb) (cc1: 8, 61) |
| 66. | over the moon (be) (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 67. | pain in the neck, a (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 68. | pitch black (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 69. | play the second fiddle (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 70. | plenty fish in the sea (cc1: 7, 54) |
| 71. | pros and cons (cc2: 9, 85e) |
| 72. | put one’s best foot forward (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 73. | real pain for sb (be a) (cc3: 9, 67) |
| 74. | serve sb right (cc1: 2, 23e) |
| 75. | set the ball rolling (cc3: 2, 21e) |
| 76. | sight for sore eyes, a (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 77. | snap out of it (cc1: 4, 41e) |
| 78. | spend a penny (cc1: 7, 54) |
| 79. | spick and span (cc3: 3, 26e) |
| 80. | stark naked (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 81. | start from scratch (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 82. | start from scratch (cc3: 7, 55e) |
| 83. | stone cold (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 84. | swim with the tide (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 85. | take a rain check (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 86. | take sb for a ride (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 87. | take the rough with the smooth (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 88. | talk through one’s hat (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 89. | wet behind the ears (get) (cc1: 2, 25e) |
| 90. | what on earth (cc1: intro, 7) |
| 91. | wide awake (cc3: 2, 18e) |
| 92. | wide open (cc3: 2, 18e) |
Appendix 3: Types of Idioms in Textbooks

Similes

as black as ebony (cc2:7, 71e)
as bold as brass (cc2:7, 71e)
as bold as brass (cc2:7, 71e)
as cheap as dirt (cc2:7, 71e)
as clean as a whistle (cc2:7, 71e)
as cool as a cucumber (cc2:7, 71e)
as cool as a cucumber (cc2:7, 71e)
as dead as a doornail (cc2:7, 71e)
as dull as ditchwater (cc2:7, 71e)
as good as gold (cc2:7, 71e)
as hard as nails (cc2:7, 71e)
as right as rain (cc2:7, 71e)
as white as a ghost (BP1:18, 74)
bold as brass (BP2:20, 91)
brand new (cc3: 2, 18e)
fast asleep (cc3: 2, 18e)
filthy rich (cc3: 2, 18e)
like a bat out of hell (BP 3:7, 37e)
spread like wildfire (BP 2:3, 18)
stark naked (cc3: 2, 18e)
stone cold (cc3: 2, 18e)
sweat like a pig (BP 2:16, 75e)
wide awake (cc3: 2, 18e)
wide open (cc3: 2, 18e)

Binomials

cut and dry (BP 1:13, 57 song)
hide and seek (cc2: 21e)
ins and outs (the) (BP 3:12, 56)
ins and outs of (the) (cc3: 8, 61e)
ins and outs of… (the) (BP 3:essay title, 94)
kiss and tell (cc2: 3, 32e)
live and learn (cc1: intro, 5)
pros and cons (cc2: 9, 85e)
rant and rave (BP 2:4, 23)
spick and span (cc3: 3, 26e)

Phrasal Combinations

big time (cc2: 6, 57)
blue-collar worker (BP3:11, 53e)
catch-22 situation (BP1:13, 56)
dark horse (be a) (cc2: 10, 90e)
dark horse, a (cc1: 2, 25e)
dead meat (BP 1:16, 68e)
death trap (BP 1:20c, 83)
Dog Days (the) (BP 2:19, 89e)
early bird (be an) (BP 2:7, 36e)
middle name (be sb’s) (BP 3:15, 68 song)
smash hit (BP 2:9, 47e)
white-collar worker (BP 3:11, 53e)
Tournure Idioms

at all costs (cc1:4, 41e)
at the cutting edge of sth (be) (cc3:10, 78)
be a drag (cc1:intro, 7)
be bitten by a (clowning) bug (BP3:17, 79)
blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song)
blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song)
blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 24 song)
blow a fuse (cc1: 2, 25e)
boil down to sth (cc1: 6, 48)
burn the candle at both ends (BP3:1, 8)
cast one’s net wide (BP3:12, 54)
chase rainbows (cc1: 2, 25e)
come to terms with (cc1: 8, 61)
count one’s blessings (cc1: 8, 61e)
cross one’s heart (cc1: 2, 25e)
cross one’s heart and hope to die (cc1: 2, 24song)
cross your fingers (cc1: 2, 25e)
different kettle of fish, be a (cc1: 2, 25e)
dressed to kill (cc1: 2, 25e)
eat humble pie (cc3: 5, 41)
eat humble pie (cc3: 5, 42e)
eat one’s heart out (BP: 2:13, 61e)
fall off the wagon (cc1: 2, 25e)
fast asleep (cc3: 2, 18e)
feel a little out of sorts (BP: 2:20, 95)
food for thought (headline) (BP 3:14, 64)
get a life (BP 2:17, 80e)
get cold feet (cc1: 2, 25e)
get lost (cc2: intro, 5)
get one’s kicks (BP2:14, 65)
get one’s mouth water (BP 2:17, 81e)
give sb a big hand (BP 3:8, 41e)
give sb a break (BP 1:11, 48)
give sb a break (BP 2:7, 35)
give sb a cold shoulder (cc1: 2, 25e)
go bust (BP 1:2, 13e)
going strong (still) (BP 3:18, 84e)
hate sb’s guts (cc2: 19)
have a ball (BP 2:14, 65e)
have a bee in the bonnet about sth (BP 1:9, 41)
have a nerve to do sth (BP 2:6, 31)
have half the mind (cc2: intro, 5)
have the nerve (to do sth) (BP 3:18, 82)
hear it through the grapevine (BP 2:15, 70)
hold your horses (cc2: 10, 90e)
hush your mouth (cc1: 3, 28e)
in full swing (be) (cc3: 5, 41)
it takes two to tango (cc2: 3, 31e)
keep a cool head (BP 3:12, 58e)
keep in touch (cc1: 7, 54)
keep in touch (cc3: 8, 58)
keep in touch with sb (cc1: 7, 53)
keep sth at bay (cc3: 5, 41)
kick sb’s ass up (BP 2:4, 23)
laugh one’s head off (BP 2:3, 20e)
lay it on (too) thick (BP 3:12, 55)
let off steam (BP 1:9, 41)
let one’s hair down (cc1: 2, 25e)
let sb off the hook (BP 1:11, 49)
look who’s talking (BP 2:19, 88e)
lose heart (don’t) (2 BP:1, 10)
make it a day for sb (BP 1:9, 41)
make/cut a long story short (cc1: intro, 7)
need a hand (cc1: 6, 52song)
need a hand (cc1: 6, 52song)
odd man out (cc3: 9, 69e)
off the top of one’s head (BP 2:17, 78)
off the top of one’s head (BP 2:17, 78)
off-the-wall (cc1: 6, 48)
on cloud nine (be) (cc1: 2, 25e)
on one’s high horse (be) (cc2: 10, 90e)
over the edge (tip sb) (cc1: 8, 61)
over the moon (be) (cc1: 2, 25e)
pain in the neck, a (cc1: 2, 25e)
pitch black (cc3: 2, 18e)
play hooky (BP 3:3, 22e)
play hooky (BP 3:3, 23e)
play the second fiddle (cc1: 2, 25e)
play truant (BP 3:1, 7)
play truant (BP 3:3, 23e)
plenty fish in the sea (cc1: 7, 54)
pull one’s weight (BP 3:11, 51)
put in a good word for sb (BP3:12, 55)
put one’s best foot forward (cc1: 2, 25e)
put one’s nose to the grindstone (BP 2:16, 75e)
real pain for sb (be a) (cc3: 9, 67)
serve sb right (cc1: 2, 23e)
set the ball rolling (cc3: 2, 21e)
shout one’s head off (BP 2:4, 25e)
sight for sore eyes, a (cc1: 2, 25e)
snap out of it (cc1: 4, 41e)
soaked to the bone (BP 2:16, 75e)
spend a penny (cc1: 7, 54)
start from scratch (cc1: 2, 25e)
start from scratch (cc3: 7, 55e)
swim with the tide (cc1: 2, 25e)
take a rain check (cc1: 2, 25e)
take a step (forward) (BP 1:11, 48)
take it all the way to the edge (BP 2:4,23)
take sb for a ride (cc1: 2, 25e)
take the rough with the smooth (cc1: 2, 25e)
talk through one’s hat (cc1: 2, 25e)
twist sb’s guts (BP 1:14, 60)
walk of life (BP 3:14, 66)
wet behind the ears (get) (cc1: 2, 25e)
what on earth (cc1: intro, 7)
work one’s fingers down to the bone (BP 3:2, 17 song)
you name it (BP 3:17, 78)