UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Pedagogická fakulta

Katedra anglického jazyka

SIMONA BOJKOVÁ

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IDIOMS AND IDIOMATIC LANGUAGE

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí práce: Simon GILL, M.A.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem svou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní veškerou literaturu a ostatní informační zdroje, které jsem použila.

V Olomouci ....

Abstract

English is spoken throughout the whole world. Many people learn English because it is a medium for international communication. English as a second language is taught in many countries. Students may face many difficulties while mastering English, and one of the more challenging may be figurative language.

Idiomatic language is used frequently by native speakers of English. Idioms are used in journalism, political speech or in conversations. A student of English will definitely come across idioms in an English-speaking environment, and most likely will be very confused if a literal translation is attempted. Therefore they should become familiar with idiomatic expressions in English courses.

It is important to realize that idiomatical expressions are in every language. Idioms reflect a nation's culture, tradition, moral and humor. Therefore idioms are a necessary part of any language.

Content

Introduction

I am up to my eyeballs in idioms. The word combinations *to be up to your eyes/eyeballs in something* is an idiom which means to have a lot of something to deal with. Now, what are idioms? Are idioms a necessary part of English? Should idioms be learnt and taught in ESL (English as a second language) lessons? Do native speakers use such word expressions?

The aim of this work on idioms is not only to answer the above-mentioned questions, but also to provide the background of idioms in the *Theoretical part,* and more importantly to evaluate the research on idioms in the *Practical part.*

In the *Theoretical part* we will look at the background of English, language spoken largely in the world, and because it is so widespread many people learn English as their second language.

The main focus of this part will be on English idioms. It is necessary to say that idioms feature in each language. Idioms are often not translatable from one language to another. For that reason we will mention some translations of English idioms into the Czech language. Furthermore we will provide definitions of the term *idiom* and other terms such as proverbs, collocations, similes and metaphors. We will sort idioms into various categories like lexicogrammatical or functional. Lastly, we will mention where and when idioms may be used (registers of the language).

In the *Practical part* we will evaluate two questionnaires:

- Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatical Language – Czech Teachers (see Appendix 1)
- Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatical Language – Native speakers (see Appendix 2)

Finally, the results of both questionnaires will be compared with the theses that were set before the research, and these findings will lead to the conclusion of this project on idioms.

Theses - Czech teachers:

1)   They are familiar with idioms.
2) They think that idioms are an important part of English.
3) They do not introduce idioms, and do not include them in their lesson.
4) According them, it is the best time to introduce idiomatic expressions during the intermediate or advanced levels.

Theses - native speakers:

1) They use idioms very often.
2) They use these expressions in neutral and colloquial registers.
3) They apply such expressions in journalism, conversation, broadcasting and political speech.
4) According to them idioms should be introduced and learnt by ESL students.

I. THEORETICAL PART

1   Background of the English Language

McMordie (1968, p. 1-7) characterizes the English language as belonging to the Germanic branch of the great Indo-European family of languages. The language evolved for many years and various conditions and circumstances were encountered before it became we the language we know and speak today. McMordie describes three stages of English – Old English, Middle English and Modern English.

The first period of the English language is called Old English. It was when Teutonic invaders began to come to the British Isles in 499 A.D. and brought the language Aenglisc and started to call their country Aengla-land. The old version was rich in inflections.

After the Norman Conquest in 1066 English acquired a lot of French words. Noble people spoke French and English was to be degraded and forgotten but it still lived on through the lips of the common people. The wars with France led to the dislike of the French language. Therefore English became spoken again, and great contributions to English were made by people like Chaucer. This is considered as the period of Middle English.

Last period of English is called modern English (from 15 century). English was still influenced by various other languages for instance English has taken many words from the Greek language especially

many of today's scientific terms. The process of enrichment and change of English has not stopped.

English has changed a lot since the Teutonic era. It became language that is widely spoken throughout the whole world, and used by many people as their second language.

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary (2005) there are approximately 400 million native speakers of American and British English, and many more are using it as their medium for communication. English is now a primary or official language for Great Britain and Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and it is used widely in India and other countries.

Since English is so widespread, it is used in various kinds of business like art, music, film, sport etc. In other words English is widely used at any international event. The use of English continues to grow. Therefore it is not surprising that so many foreign students want to learn English.

Nowadays it is necessary to speak English in order to communicate internationally. Many people learn English as their second language (ESL), and perhaps struggle with mastering it because of oddities like idioms.

Anyone who learns English comes across idioms and idiomatic expressions since they appear in journalism, broadcasting, political speech, literature and everyday conversations. This work on idioms should be an introduction and a motivation to learn idioms for both ESL learners and ESL teachers.

2 Definition of Idioms

2.2 Idioms - Peculiar Expressions

There are many words used in English that when expressed in a particular combination have more than one meaning, and may not be taken literally. For many students of English idioms may be tough nut to crack. In other words, to learn and understand idioms may be a very difficult task.

Books on idioms and idiomatical language suggest that these expressions are essential part of English. Through the research we will find out to what extent they play an important role in English, and also whether they should be introduced and taught in the English courses or rather, should students of English be left in the fog about it?

2.3 Dictionary and Encyclopedia Definitions of Term Idiom

It is important to define idioms before we start to analyze them. We can find quite a lot of different interpretations of idioms. Some other terms appear in the definitions of an idiom they will be also explained in this chapter.

The word idiom is derived from these words: the French word "idiome", from the Greek word "idioma" (private property, peculiar phraseology), from the word "idiousthai" (to make one's own), or from the

word "idios" (own, private); the New Oxford American Dictionary (2005).

The following are some examples of definitions of word *idiom* found in various sources.

Idiom is:

"1. A group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words (e.g. *rain cats and dogs, see the light*). A form of expression natural to a language, person. Group of people: he had a feeling for phrase and idiom. The dialect of a people or part of a country.

2. A characteristic mode of expression in music or art: *They were both working in a neo-Impressionist idiom.*"

- New Oxford American Dictionary (2005)

"A speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in keep tabs on. The specific grammatical, syntactic, and structural character of a given language. Regional speech or dialect. A specialized vocabulary used by a group of people; jargon: legal idiom. A style or manner of expression peculiar to a given people. A style of artistic expression characteristic of a particular individual, school, period, or medium: *the idiom of the French impressionists; the punk rock idiom.*"

 - The Free Dictionary (2007)

"The language peculiar to a people, to a district, community or a class: dialect. The syntactical, grammatical or structural form peculiar

to a language. An expression in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either grammatically or in having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements. A style or form of artistic expression that is characteristic of an individual, a period, a movement and also of medium or instrument: manner, style."

 - Britannica Encyclopedia (2007)

Another definition from Cambridge Learner's Advanced Dictionary (2003) says: "An idiom is a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word understood on its own: *To have bitten off more than you can chew* is an idiom that means you have tried to do something which is too difficult for you. Formal usage: the style of expression in writing, speech or music that is typical of a particular period, person or group: *Both operas are very much in the modern idiom.*"

The following definition is from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (2007). "An idiom is an expression (i.e. term or phrase) whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal definitions and the arrangement of its parts, but refers instead to a figurative meaning that is known only through conventional use." With the definition there is also a note that those expressions tend to confuse those not already familiar with them. They recommend to students of a new language to learn the idiomatic expressions the way they learn its other vocabulary.

In the opinion of Seidl and McMordie (1990, p. 11) an idiom is a number of words which, when taken together have a different meaning from the individual meanings of each word.

Next, Fernando (1997, p. 1) describes idioms as conventionalized multiword expressions, which are often but not always non-literal and are hardly marginal in English.

Lastly, we will mention definitions from two websites that deal with English. The websites *UsingEnglish.com* (2007) and *The Idiom Connection* (2007) look at idioms as a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words. A typical feature of idioms is that they admit two different interpretations: a literal one and a non-literal (figurative) one. That makes it difficult to understand and ESL students can get easily confused.

Furthermore, idioms are often colloquial metaphors. The most common ones have deep roots, traceable across many languages. Many idioms have translations in other languages but only some can be translated directly.

2.4 Conclusion

To summarize, we presented many explanations of idioms from different sources. In my own words, idioms are expressions with a figurative meaning, which is not expressed by individual words, but with all the words combined.

On the whole, there are four major meanings:

- Idioms as **expressions or phrases** that are **peculiar to themselves**. Their meanings cannot be understood from its individual elements.
- Idioms as **a form of language** that is the syntactical, grammatical or structural form **peculiar to language**.
- Idioms as **a dialect or jargon** peculiar to people.
- Idioms as **a style** or **a form** of artistic expressions.

In this work we will mainly deal with the first above-mentioned meaning (meaning which cannot be understood from its individual elements). Most of the given examples will be expressions or phrases of figurative meaning.

3   Idiomacity and Other Terms

3.1 Idiomacity

We have already explained the term *idiom*. In the literature we may also come across other terminology such as *idiomatic* (adjective) and *idiomatically* (adverb) or *idiomacity* (noun).

It is not very difficult to find the explanation for the words *idiomatic and idiomatically* in a dictionary. *Idiomatic* denotes: "An expression that are natural to native speaker", Fernando (1997, p. 252), or according to the New Oxford American Dictionary (2005) it is: "Appropriate to the style of art or music associated with a particular period, individual, or group for example: *A short Bach piece containing lots of idiomatic motifs."*

However it is impossible to find a definition for the term *idiomacity* in any dictionary*.* We can explain it as a quality obtained from attribution of idioms. Moreover it is what makes the expressions sound suitable and natural to the ear of native speakers.

Fernando (1997, p. 30) says that *idioms* and *idiomacity* are not identical even though they are closely related. They both have a habitual basis and predictable a co-occurrence of specific words, but idioms indicate a narrower range of word combinations than idiomacity. In other words all word combination show idiomacity, for instance habitual collocations such as *shallow complexion*, *catch a bus* or *rosy dawn,* but these combinations are not idioms for their

relatively unrestricted either adjectival or nominal variants.

Only the conventionalized co-occurrence, that is collocations following traditional forms, is the usual principle of idiomatic expressions. Idioms are not grammatically regular, but their irregularity becomes conventionally fixed in a specific order and lexical form. Such expressions we may call *idioms.*

3.2 Other Terms

Idioms are often called as dead metaphors. This might be misleading for ESL learners. In English there are a lot of tropes of similar meaning, and according to some sources sometimes denoting the same meaning, for instance, allusion, analogy, allegory, social formulae or parable but the closest to the idioms are perhaps collocation, proverbs, metaphors and similes.

3.3 Collocations

We have already described collocations while defining the term *idiomacity* (see 3.1 Idiomacity).

As indicated earlier, collocations are words that occur together, their occurrence is habitual. These combinations of words are unrestricted in comparison with idioms.

According Hill (ed. Lewis 2000, p. 51): "A collocation is a predictable combination of words: *get lost, make up for lost time, speak your mind.* Some combinations may be very highly predictable from

one of the component words – *foot the bill, mineral water, spring to mind.* Some "strong" collocations have the status of idioms – *shrug your shoulders* – they are not guessable and are non-generative." There is also said that some collocations are usual for a learner like *eat lunch or take lunch*, while some other are less usual, for instance *have lunch*. Generally, it is good to learn collocations as "chunks".

3.4 Proverbs

"A proverb is a short, well-known statement that gives practical advice about life", defined in Macmillan English Dictionary (2002). To illustrate: *Make the hay while the sun still shines. Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.* Additionally, a proverb or a saying is a combination of words, which is rather restricted and such a word expression denotes a moral meaning.

3.5 Metaphors and Similes

Macmillan English Dictionary (2002) defines a metaphor as: "A word or phrase that means one thing and is used for referring to another thing in order to emphasize their similar qualities."

Wikipedia (2006) explains metaphors (from the Greek: metapherin) as a direct comparison between two or more seemingly unrelated subjects.

Metaphors and similes are two of the best-known tropes, they both describe a comparison: the only difference between a metaphor and a simile is that a simile makes the comparison explicit by using *like* or *as*. In other words, a simile states that A is like B and a metaphor states that A is B or substitutes B for A.

Similes and metaphors could easily be interchanged. They cause confusion because in practice their use is often synonymous.

3.6 Dead Metaphors

Now we will look at the statement that idioms are dead metaphors. We already know what are metaphors but can a metaphor die?

In fact, idioms that lost their metaphoricity over time are traditionally viewed as dead metaphors for instance, *run out of the time, grasp an idea or windfall*. Gibbs (cited in Cacciari 1993, p. 57 - 75) explains why idioms are not dead metaphors.

Firstly, metaphors are thought to be alive and creative and idioms are thought to have been metaphorical once because often we can trace an idiom back to a metaphorical phrase used in earlier stages of the language. To illustrate, in the expression *fork in the road* we can decode the word fork like a road separated into two or more directions. If we can trace metaphorical origin of an idiom, it is not a dead metaphor. But if the once-evocative transferred image is no longer effective we may call an idiom a dead metaphor.

We can divide idioms into two groups; decomposable (*spill the beans, pop the question*) and non-decomposable (*kick the bucket, shoot the breeze*). People's intuition about the analyzability plays an important role in ease of comprehension and ease of learning.

Lastly, Hobbes (cited in Cacciari 1993, p. 32) describes the life cycle of phrase that goes from a metaphor to an idiom. "In the first phase a metaphor is creative and alive, then in the second phase it becomes familiar, established, and less complex. In the third phase a metaphor is already "tired" and finally in the fourth phase a metaphor is a dead one."

3.7 Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to shed a light on idioms and to help eliminate learners' confusion when interacting with either a native English speaker or with a non-native one, in both cases the learner can come across figurative expressions.

Teachers should be very careful while providing the explanations of the above-mentioned terms. The best approach is to provide many examples and to practice as often as possible. It is probably not a good idea to introduce everything at once, but gradually, one after the other.

4   Classification of Idioms

4.1 Introduction – Features of Idioms

To begin with, this chapter is devoted to the types, kinds and classes of idioms. There are many theoretical standpoints and many different opinions among scholars and this disagreement brings divergent classification of idioms.

Before we start to discuss typology of idioms, it is useful to look at the most frequently mentioned features of idioms, Fernando (1997, p. 3):

- Compositeness: idioms are usually multiword expressions (*smell a rat*, *white lie* etc.).

- Institutionalization: idioms are conventionalized expressions.

- Semantic opacity: idioms are often non-literal.

4.2 Various Studies on Idioms

Now we will discuss the typology of idioms. We will present various divisions of some scholars as Makkai, Fraser, Cowie, Strässler and Smith (all cited in Fernando 1997, p. 3-21).

Firstly, Makkai identifies two types of idioms: those of encoding and decoding. Makkai focuses on decoding idioms. Decoding idioms are either lexemic or semenic. To the lexemic group belong: phrasal verbs (*get away with, find out, look up*), tournures (*rain cats and dogs*), irreversible binomials (*salt and pepper*), incorporating verb (*eavesdrop*), pseudo-

idioms (*spick and span*). Senemic idioms are based on cultural pragmatism and have an interpersonal role signifying warnings, request or evaluation. This group consists of proverbs, familiar quotations (*not a mouse stirring*), idioms of institutionalized politeness (*May I…*) and idioms of institutionalized understatement and hyperbole (*I wasn't too crazy about him, he won't even lift a finger.*)

Secondly, Fraser's main concern is to explore the transformational potential of idioms, which according to him varies widely. He proposes a six-level scale: L6 Unrestricted, L5 Reconstitution, L4 Extraction, L3 Permutation, L2 Insertion, L1 Adjunction and L0 Completely frozen. For instance, *kick the bucket* takes only gerundive transformation and therefore it belongs to L1. Others like *read the riot act* qualify for L6 because the word *read* can be replaced by another word like *run riot.* Or another similar example is *checkered career/history.*

Thirdly, Cowie identifies an important class of multiword expressions, namely *semi-idioms*. Semi-idioms draw a sharp line between idioms and non-idioms. These semi-idioms are of two types: those that have figurative senses in the non-literal member of the combination, for instance, *jog* in *jog somebody's memory,* and those that allow restricted lexical variations as in *cardinal error/sin/virtue and grace.* Cowie's principal contribution to study of idiomacity lies in acceptable variability of idioms and to the proper use of their collocates.

Another study by Strässler focuses on the deictic functions of idioms. Strässler's social hierarchy

analyzes the deictic use of idioms in conversations between participants of equal or higher/lower social status in different situations, for example therapist – patient, teacher – student or court – accused.

According to him there are *first*, *second* and *third person idioms*. *First person idioms* cover personal reference. *Second person idioms* denote reference to the communicative partner. *Second person idioms* are also the most restricted as their usage is socially acceptable only among peers. Idioms used for *first* and *second person* reference are marked. Finally, the *third person* or object idioms are the most common; their usage is unmarked and neutral. To conclude, the deictic use of idioms is determined by the social status of the user in relation to his conversational partners. Idioms in this way function as status markers.

Lastly, we will mention classification as stated by Smith. He pays more attention to the structure of idioms rather than the semantics of idioms. According to him, idioms are essentially those forms peculiar to a language, whether they are literal or not. He mentions two types of idiomatic structural peculiarities:

<u>Interlingual (idiosyncrasies)</u>

1) Word combination

- adverbial phrases *(by far, on hand)*

- prepositional phrases *(under his nose)*

- phrasal verbs *(set up, put through)*

2) Habitual collocations

- binominals

- similes

- proverbs

<u>Intralingual (idiomatic transgressions)</u>

- figurative *(go great guns)*

- semi-opaque *(to sail too near the wind)*

- opaque *(curry favor with somebody)*

4.3 Scale of Idiomacity

The existence of idioms or conventionalized multiword expressions also requires a hierarchy of idiomacity. As we have stated earlier, the idiomacity is a feature of both idioms and collocations.

Scholars Cowie and Mackin, Alexander, Carter, Nattiger and DeCarrico (cited in Fernando 1997, p. 32) presented an arrangement of idioms and their sub-classes that overlap with collocations. This ranking shows a clear presentation of idioms and habitual collocations as related, but different lexical types. It is also a comprehensible presentation of their dissimilarity.

Table 4.3.1 Fernando (1997, p. 32) - Multiword expressions

Idioms	Habitual collocations
1. Pure idioms **a) Invariant, non-literal** (smell a rat, the coast is clear, make off with) **b) Restricted variance, non-literal** (take/have forty wings, seize/gasp the nettle)	
2. Semi-literal idioms **a) Invariant** (catch fire, foot the bill) **b) Restricted variance** (blue film/story/joke/gag/comedian/day)	**1. Restricted variance, semi-literal** (explode a myth/theory/notion/belief, catch the post/mail)
3.Literal idioms **a) Invariant** (on foot, arm in arm, VIP, happy New Year) **b) Restricted variance** (for example/instance, happy/merry Christmas)	**2. Restricted variance, literal** (for certain/sure, addled brains/eggs, potato/corn/wood chips) **3. Unrestricted variance, semi-literal** (catch a bus/plane/ferry, run a

	business/company)
	4.Unrestricted variance, literal (beautiful/lovely/sweet woman, smooth/rosy/plump cheeks)
Literal idioms **4. Restricted variance, optional elements usually retained** – even (worse), worse (still), develop (from) (into), abstain (from)	**5.Restricted variance, literal, optional elements usually dropped** – shrug (one's shoulders), nod (one's head), clap (one's hands)

4.4 Variation, Substitution and Other Changes of Idioms

We mentioned some variation or possible substitution of idioms (see Table 4.3.1 above). It is practicable to substitute some elements within idiomatic word combinations but most idioms admit no lexical or article replacement, it is not feasible to say *smell a mouse* instead of *a rat* but it is correct to say either *seize* or *grasp the nettle.*

Several fixed idioms cannot be changed in any part except the tense of the verb, for example, *smell/smelled a rat.* We can modify the number as well. It is wrong to say *rain a cat and a dog,* but it is acceptable to say *fat cats* like in: *This*

neighborhood, with its million-dollar estates, is full of fat cats. Lastly, even the built-in-variation is quite frequent as one's or somebody's *tighten one's way.*

We should also be concerned about addition, permutation and deletion of idioms. Firstly, there is addition. For instance in *twist somebody's arm* we can add *was* as in *somebody's arm was twisted.* Secondly, there is permutation that means possible rearranging of the words as in *John is a rat-smeller* (from idiom *smell a rat).* And last, there is deletion, and also elision or contraction. This means the absence of an element, for example in *rolling stone* (from idiom *a rolling stone gathers no moss).*

It is necessary to say that language-users are innovative. They can make their own substitution in idioms like in this example: "*We should not entirely rely on the Japanese even when they are not bearing gifts* which is a modification of *trust not the Greeks when they come bearing gifts*", Fernando (1997, p. 47).

4.5 Conclusion

Idioms take many different forms or structures. An idiom can be non-literal (pure, figurative), semi-literal or literal.

Seidl and McMordie (1990, p. 13) divide idioms into three forms:

- Form regular, meaning clear as in *give someone to understand.*

- Form regular, meaning unclear as *have a bee in one's bonnet, cut no ice, give somebody the green light.*
- Form irregular, meaning unclear as in *be at large, go great guns.*

Before we use any substitution or variation it is smart to look up an idiom in a dictionary of idioms and see the possible modifications. As for the number, it might be rather difficult because dictionaries of idioms do not list the possible alterations of number.

To conclude, we have to be aware of idioms and collocation as they are related to each other but in fact they are different lexical types. While using idioms we have to be careful about their potential variations. The best practice is to follow dictionary guidance.

5   The Functional Categorization of Idioms

5.1 Introduction

In chapter four we presented typologies termed lexicogrammatical (semantic, grammatical) and now we are going to discuss functional (discoursal expressions) categories. The functional types of idioms, such as greetings, farewells or quotations are idioms used in discourse.

5.2 Halliday's Functional Categorization

Halliday (cited in Fernando 1997, p. 72 – 75) is concerned with discoursal usage of idioms. Functional assortment reveals a more general role; it is the role of idioms within a certain context. Real situations and conversations are the main focus of Halliday's theory.

There are three major groups based on Halliday's functional categorization: *ideational, interpersonal and relational idioms.*

Ideational idioms are divided into two sub-categories:

  1) Message content:
Actions   *(mess about with, twist one's arm)*
Events *(out of the mouth of babes)*
Situations *(be in pickle, be up a gum tree)*
People and things *(a man out of town, a fat cat)*
Attributes   *(cut-and-dried, lily-white)*

Evaluations *(turn back the clock, a watched pot never boils)*

Emotions *(green with envy, lose one's heart)*

2) Nature of the message:

Specific information *(to be exact/precise, the question is)*

Non-specific information *(kind of/sort of, or something)*

    Interpersonal idioms are idioms closely associated with routines of politeness; they demonstrate a social interaction. Interpersonal idioms are of two strategies: *interactional* and *characterizing the nature of the message.*

1) Interactional:

Greetings and farewells *(How are you? bye for now)*

Directives *(let's face it, tell you what)*

Agreement *(that's true, say no more)*

"Feelers" *(How do you feel? What do you think?)*

Rejections *(I wasn't born yesterday. You're kidding/joking.)*

2) Characterizing the message:

Newsworthiness *(Guess what! What do you know?)*

Sincerity *(quite seriously, as a matter of fact)*

Calls for brevity *(get to the point)*

Uncertainty (mind you)

    Relational idioms are textual idioms that can aid the coherence of discourse. There are *integrative* and *sequencing information* idioms.

1)   Integrative:

Adversative *(on the contrary, far from)*

Comparison *(on the other hand)*

Concessive *(at the same time)*

Addition *(what is more, in addition to)*

2)   Sequencing information:

Meta-discoursal *(in the first place, last but not least)*

Temporal *(one day, up to now)*

5.3 Conclusion

We have presented a grouping of idioms from a functional point of view. It is important to realize that there are various viewpoints, none of which have a lesser or a greater importance. Each classification helps us to identify specific areas of idioms, and enables better understanding of such expressions.

6 Grammatical Patterns and Codes of Idioms

6.1 Introduction

We provided several scalar categorizations in the Chapters four and five. We also presented various typologies, some of them are purely semantic (pure, semi-literal, literal idioms), or functional, while others are collocation-based (invariant, restricted or unrestricted variation). We are going to look at the structural arrangement of idioms in this chapter.

6.2 Grammatical Structure of Idioms

The Oxford dictionary of current idiomatic English (1990, vol. 2) defines idioms from the semantic (pure, figurative) and variation (restricted, open) point of view. Here we are more interested in idiomatical construction types such as *phrase idioms* and *clause idioms.*

Table 6.2.1 shows the most common *clause* patterns of idioms:

Clause	Example
Verb + Complement	*go bananas*
Verb + Direct Object	*ease somebody's mind*
Verb + Direct Object + Complement	*paint the town red*
Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object	to do somebody credit
Verb + Direct Object + Adjunct	to take something amiss

Table 6.2.2 displays the most commonly occurring *phrase patterns of idioms:*

Phrase	Example
Noun Phrase	*a crashing bore*
Adjective Phrase	free with one's money
Prepositional Phrase	in the nick of time
Adverbial Phrase	as often as not

Tables 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 contain a good deal of grammatical information. For the most part this is information about syntax. Moreover, this gives us some idea how idioms can be possibly sorted out, and that there are certain grammatical patterns.

6.3 Conclusion

In general, it is good to be aware of the structural forms of idioms, and to be prepared in case a student raises such a question: Why do idioms consist of so many words? It is important to show the student how the idiom can be broken down into smaller elements. The student can be shown how they are formed and that idioms can be a clause or just a small phrase.

7   Where and When to Use Idioms

7.1 Introduction

Now we are going to move away from the theoretical study of idioms, and discuss their practical usage. To do so we will focus on how idioms are integrated in to the English language, and when it is and is not suitable to use such expressions.

Unquestionably, idioms are very difficult to use, and therefore it is very problematic for learners to use them fittingly. Perhaps it is their peculiarity that makes them so tricky and complicated.

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to know them because they are often used in every day conversations. Truth be told, lacking prior knowledge of idioms would have the learner feeling left in the dark, or even worse, completely misinterpreting the speakers intended message or meaning.

In order to illustrate usage of idioms there will be some extracts taken from journalism provided.

7.2 Varieties of a Language

Firstly, there are two terms that can be described as a variety of a language, *a register* and *a style.*

In the opinion of Trudgil (cited in Wikipedia 2006) styles are: "Varieties of a language viewed from the point of formality while register is a specialist language use related to a particular

activity, such as academic jargon." However, both terms are used to define formality of a language. In some Halliday's textbooks (cited in Wikipedia 2006) you may see the term *tenor* instead of style and register.

According to Gal'perin (in Kafka, Elšík & Weberova 2004, p. 53 – 59), word *style* is broad. We speak of style in architecture, literature, fashion, sport or even in learning and teaching. Gal'perin classifies these styles: literary (poetry, emotive prose, drama), public (speeches, essays, journalism), newspaper (headlines, news and commmuniqués, advertisements), academic prose (in humanities, in the natural and social science) and official documents (commercial, diplomatic, legal and military). It can be seen that most of these styles belong to written form of language. Generally, Kafka, Elšík and Weberova (2004, p. 54) define a style as: "The language habits of one person or of group of people at one time, or over a period of time."

The usage of the language determined by situations is crucial for our study of idioms. Situations occur in various places and require different rules and conventions. We can rank such circumstances into a formality scale.

As stated by Joos (cited in Wikipedia 2006) there are five styles in spoken English: *Frozen, Formal, Consultative, Casual and Intimate.* Again, there is only little agreement for how the spectrum of formality should be divided.

We will sort out the formality scale into three levels: *formal, neutral and informal.* Formal level

includes definitions, regulation rules. Conversations such as presentations, lectures, and speeches can be placed in the neutral level. The informal level is determined in conversations within groups of friends or acquaintances. These classifications apply for both spoken and written style.

Now we have categorized the formality of the situations. Therefore, we can state in which levels the idiomatic expressions occur. Idioms are sometimes used in the neutral level, but more often feature in the informal level.

7.3 Labeling Formality of Idioms in a Dictionary

We have already mentioned that it is important to use the dictionary whenever we feel unsure about the usage or meaning of an idiom. At this time we should look up the label for an idiom, which tells us when it is appropriate to use it.

We have already described three possible levels of formality of a register in the previous sub-chapter 7.2. However, if we look into Oxford Idioms: Dictionary for Learners of English (2001) we find labels that show how formal, how common, or in what type of language the idioms are used. Idioms can be labeled as *formal, informal (colloquial), slang, offensive, spoken or written, literary, old-fashioned or old use*. The idioms that are not marked are considered to be *neutral.* Also, it should be noted that idioms are labeled as British or American English.

Furthermore, some labels convey the attitude of the speaker as *approving or disapproving* and *humorous or ironic*. Also, fixed phrases or proverbs are labeled as *sayings.* Lastly, some labels show the context in which the idiom is usually used for instance *law, business, technical, sport or politics.*

To illustrate here are a few examples from the Oxford Idioms: Dictionary for Learners of English (2001, p. 202 – 203). If we look up the verb *lay* we can see various idiomatic expressions such as *lay something bare.* This is neutral and means to reveal something, which has never been seen before. *She laid bare her feelings for him.* Another word combination may be *lay somebody to rest.* That is marked as formal. Next, we have an example that shows how the idiom is used in a sentence: *He was laid to rest beside his parents.* Then there is the informal idiomatic expression *to lay it on the line,* which means to tell somebody/something in an honest, direct and forceful way. *She laid it on the line telling us that we would fail the exam unless we worked harder.*

As a result, we see that a dictionary helps us not only with register (formal, neutral or informal) but gives us more detailed information that helps us to use an idiomatic expression properly.

7.4 Occurrence of Idioms in Journalism

To start with, the most common usage of idiomatical expressions is in the spoken form (broadcastings, speeches or conversations). Since spoken words are harder to trace, we can easily look

up some examples of idioms in written form in journalism (magazines or newspapers).

When we look at newspapers or magazines we notice that idiomatical expressions occur quite often. I searched through the New York Times, Metro and also The Economist.

For instance I found these idiomatical expressions:

"… But kids in the good schools in Chinese cities are *leaving our children in the dust…"* from: Kristof, ND 2006, *Chinese Medicine for American Schools,* New York Times, 27 June, p. A17. In this particular example there is the idiom *to leave somebody/something in the dust,* which means to leave somebody/something far behind. It is an unmarked idiom.

"…It's no surprise that a public school education would not *pass muster* with modern-day super-parents…" or "…If you can't afford to send your child to private schools, any school district will *fit the bill* as long as you are willing to support your child with your time…" Both sentences are taken from: Which School Is Right for My Child 2006, New York Times: Editorial letters, 16 November, p. A34. The first idiom *to pass muster* means to be good enough. It is a neutral expression. The second idiom *to fit the bill* means to be suitable for a purpose, it is considered an informal expression.

"…says Beckford, 30, who was a military-supply specialist at a base in Iraq that was a sitting duck for around-the-clock attacks…", Homeless after Iraq 2006, Metro, 26 June, p.4). In this extract we can

find two idiomatic expressions: *to be a sitting duck,* meaning that somebody or something is very easy to attack or criticize; and the word combination *around-the-clock,* meaning for twenty-four hours without stopping. Both expressions are unmarked.

"…You might think that they would *be up in arms about* "The Da Vinci Code.", Churches and the DaVinci Code 2006, The Economist, 20 May, p. 34. In this extract the idiom *to be up in arms* means to be very angry and protesting very strongly. It is an unmarked idiom.

7.5 Conclusion

We have discussed the formality of idioms in this chapter. Idioms are used in neutral and informal registers.

It is very important to use an idiom appropriately. Nobody wants to be embarrassed at a formal meeting by calling somebody *a big wheel*. This idiom is strictly a part of informal vocabulary. We should be very careful when using idiomatic expressions. The best is to look them up in a dictionary and check the formality of the idiomatic expression.

We have presented a few examples through extracts taken from newspapers and magazines to support the fact that idioms do occur in written form of journalism. However the spoken form of broadcasting, conversations or speeches are significantly richer with such expressions.

8 Translation of English Idioms

8.1 Introduction

In the first place, we have to state that the translation of an English idiomatic expression into another language can be very difficult and we will hardly ever find an identical expression.

We are particularly interested in English-Czech translations in this project. We will demonstrate a few examples of such conversions.

8.2 English and Czech Idioms

As a matter a fact there are a lot of idiomatical word combinations in English that are widely used. In any case, any learner of English will struggle with the translation of the idioms. The Czech learner of English has to realize that the Czech language may not often use the same idioms as the English language does, and sometimes the expressions must be translated in a liberal way.

For this reason it is necessary to have a dictionary of idioms. We can find some idioms in any advanced learner's dictionary of English, but ideally we should use Oxford Idioms: Dictionary for learners of English (2001). Unfortunately, with both references we will only get the definition and explanation of the idiom in English because there is no translation to Czech provided.

Thus for beginning learners of English we recommend using dictionaries of idioms which give Czech explanations of such word combinations.

In particular, we found three dictionaries that are suitable for learners:

- Kroulík B 1993, *Anglicko/Český slovník*, Nakladatelství Svoboda - Libertas, Praha.
- Rojahn C & Bollinger S 2005, *Anglické idiomy,* CP Books, Brno.
- Chromečka J 2004, *Stručný česko-anglický slovník frází a idiomů,* Montanex, Ostrava.

Kroulík's (1993) and Rojahn's (2005) dictionaries are suited for English-Czech translations because they are sorted out according to English keywords. To illustrate, in Kroulík's dictionary (1993, p. 98) we can find this word combination: *kettle of fish* (keyword is kettle) used in the following sentence: *He has got himself into a fine kettle of fish*. The Czech translation is *Dostal se do pěkné kaše.* In this example we can see that the English idiom *to get into a fine kettle of fish/be in a pretty pickle/in a tight corner* are equivalents to the Czech phrase *být v pěkné kaši.*

The dictionary listed last (Chomečka 2004), is useful for Czech-English translations. The alphabetical order of Czech keywords enables us to find the English equivalents like *umět v tom bruslit* (keyword bruslit in Chromečka 2004, p. 7) which translates into English as *know the ropes.*

Moreover, if we look up a proverb like *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,* the Rojahn (2005, p. 21) gives us the Czech parallel *lepší vrabec v hrsti než holub na střeše*. This saying cannot be translated word for word, but there are quite a few idiomatic word combinations which are very similar. For instance, *tonoucí se stébla chytá* can be translated as *a drawning man will clutch at a straw* (Rojahn, p. 208*).*

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to compare both English and Czech idiomatic expressions. For the basic facts that Czech is an inflectional language and it does not have a fixed word order to its sentence structure. English has a strict word order, and it is not an inflectional language. Both languages belong to different language families. Lastly, the multiword expressions are culturally dissimilar in both languages as well.

8.3 Conclusion

In summary, learners of English will need the translation of English idioms. We have shown through examples that English idioms cannot be interpreted word for word. Consequently, the English idioms are not usually of the same meaning as the Czech ones. When translating, it is best to use the aid of a bilingual dictionary of idioms.

9 Summary of the Theoretical Part

"Idiomatic expressions belong to the vast family of fixed phrases, clichés, proverbs, speech formulas, and so forth, that shares some degree of conventionalization of meaning. Defining what an idiomatic expression is, is still rather difficult and controversial," Cacciari (1993, p. 27).

The influence on English by other languages contributed to its development as well as its evolution including the formation of new words. English culture and traditions helped to create multiword expressions such as proverbs. English became important medium for international communication. Many people learn it as their second language.

We presented several definitions. It is important to realize that there are different interpretations of idiomatic word combinations. In particular, an idiom is an expression or a phrase of peculiar meaning. Furthermore, it can be a form of language, dialect, or jargon peculiar to people, and a style or a form of artistic expression. Idioms express idiomacity that is a mark of conformity with the usage of language.

There are many terms that are related to idioms. For example: collocation, metaphors, similes, and proverbs. Undoubtedly, these expressions are often very confusing for learners of English. It is

important to provide a clear definition of each term and enough practice; practice makes perfect.

The chapters four and five were devoted to the classification of idioms and chapter six to the grammatical patterns. These chapters analyze idioms from semantic, grammatical, or discoursal points of view. It is also important to realize that idioms can be modified, especially a number and a tense can be changed within idiomatic expressions.

We provided an explanation of a register. There is no agreement among scholars for the definition of the register. In particular, we can say that there are three registers: formal, neutral, and informal. Idiomatic expressions are used in neutral but more often in informal register. Equally important is to realize that labeling of idioms is different in each dictionary.

We discussed the translation of idioms. We advised to use bilingual dictionaries of idioms. We should not translate multiword expressions word for word because it is not always possible. Both languages, Czech and English, are different and we have to take their dissimilarities into consideration before we translate something.

On the whole, the area of study on idioms is broad. I tried to present a brief and basic outline of multiword expressions. I want to increase interest in idioms, and perhaps in the Practical Part of my project I will confirm that figurative language is an important part of the English language, and that idioms should be taught in English lessons.

II. PRACTICAL PART

10 Introduction to the Research

To begin, the reader of the Theoretical Part of my diploma work should be knowledgeable enough about idioms, particularly in definitions, structures, dictionaries or practice. Yet the reader may still not be sure how much the multiword combinations are used in English and whether it is important to learn them.

It was mentioned several times in the Theoretical Part that figurative language is crucial in English. It was also stated that learners of English should become familiar with idiomatical expressions.

Now, we are getting to the point to prove it all. In my research I questioned Czech teachers of English and American native speakers, and their viewpoints will either confirm or disprove my theses.

Finally, we will provide the opinions of Czech teachers on teaching idioms, and also native speakers' points of view on usage of these expressions. We shall see how much attention is paid to idioms in English lessons in Czech schools, and how much American native speakers use idioms.

11 Questionnaire on Idioms Completed by Czech Teachers

11.1 Introduction

I am going to present an evaluation of the questionnaire completed by Czech teachers (see Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatic Language - Czech Teachers, Appendix 1). The questionnaire consists of 14 questions. Questions one through six are of a statistical nature, while questions seven through 14 are focused on idioms. I have collected 55 completed questionnaires by Czech teachers. I will evaluate the opinions of the teachers, and finally I will compare their answers with my theses.

11.2 Questions 1 - 6

Questions *one through six* were included in the questionnaire to find out some statistical data such as gender, age, teachers' education in English, schools teachers teach at and lastly textbooks used by the Czech teachers. All these questions helped me to find out the experience and proficiency of the teachers in English. Both were relevant to their knowledge of the figurative language.
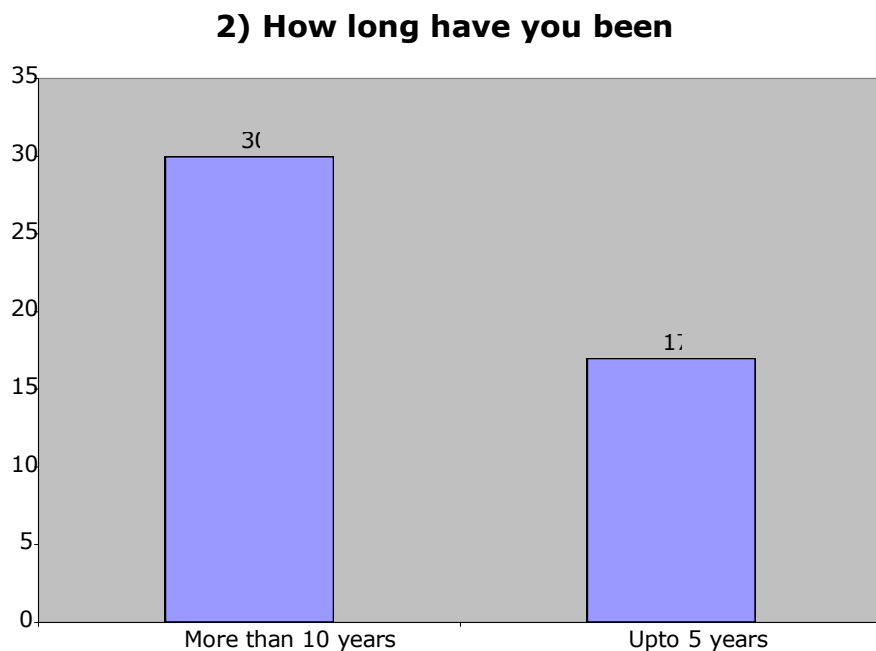
Now, I will present a graphic outline and commentary of the questions *one to six*.
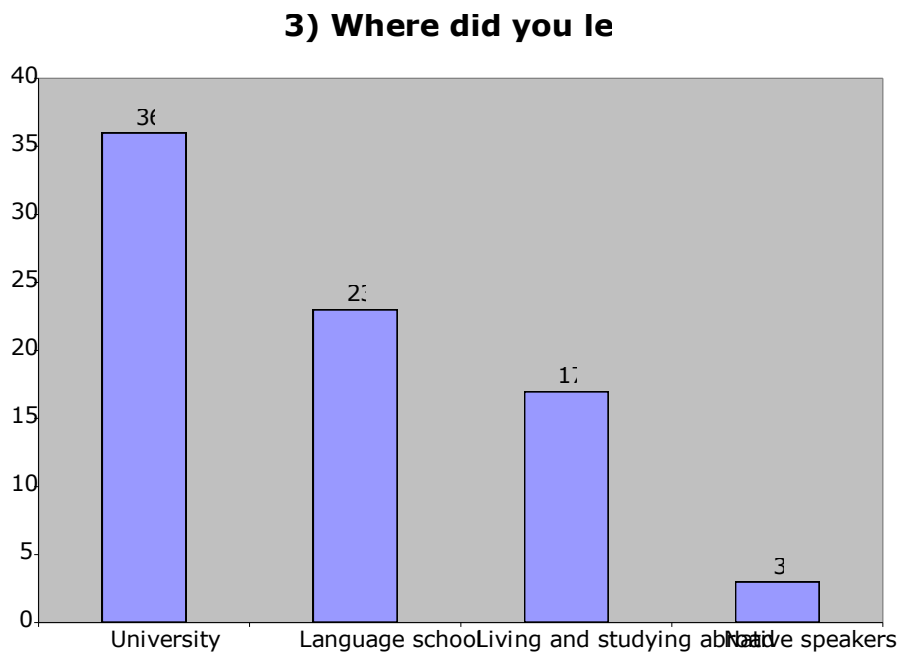
Graph 11.2.1

1) Are
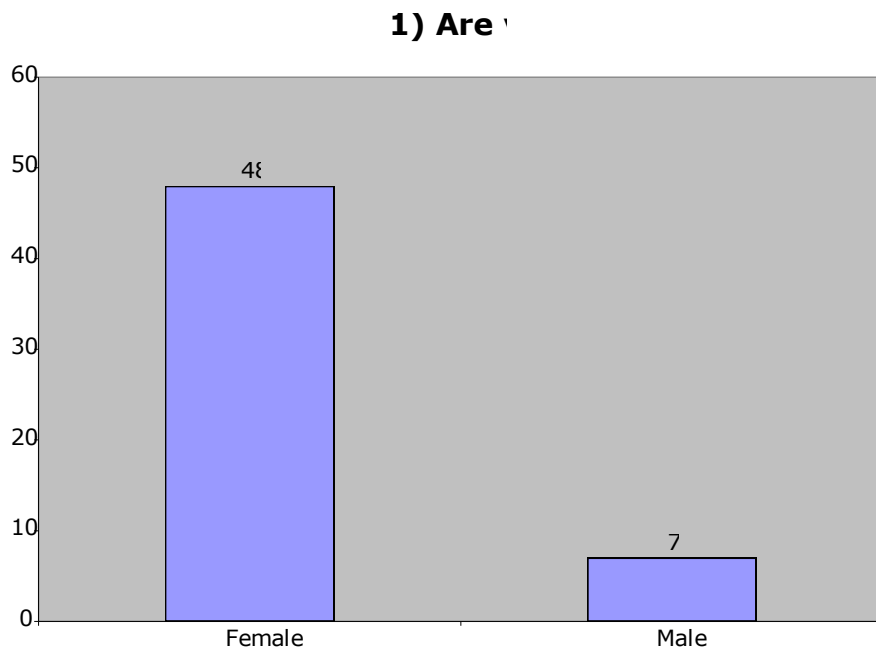
The first graph 11.2.1 shows that there are significantly more women than men in the position of English teachers in Czech schools. There are 48 female teachers (87.3 %) and only seven male teachers (12.7 %) who took part in my research.

Graph 11.2.2

2) How long have you been

I summed up the length of the teachers' experience in teaching English; there are 17 teachers with experience up to five years, and 30 teachers have more than 10 years experience (see graph 11.2.2). Overall, there were more experienced teachers who answered the questionnaire. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience teaching English should be familiar with idioms, and therefore should answer that idioms are an important part of English.
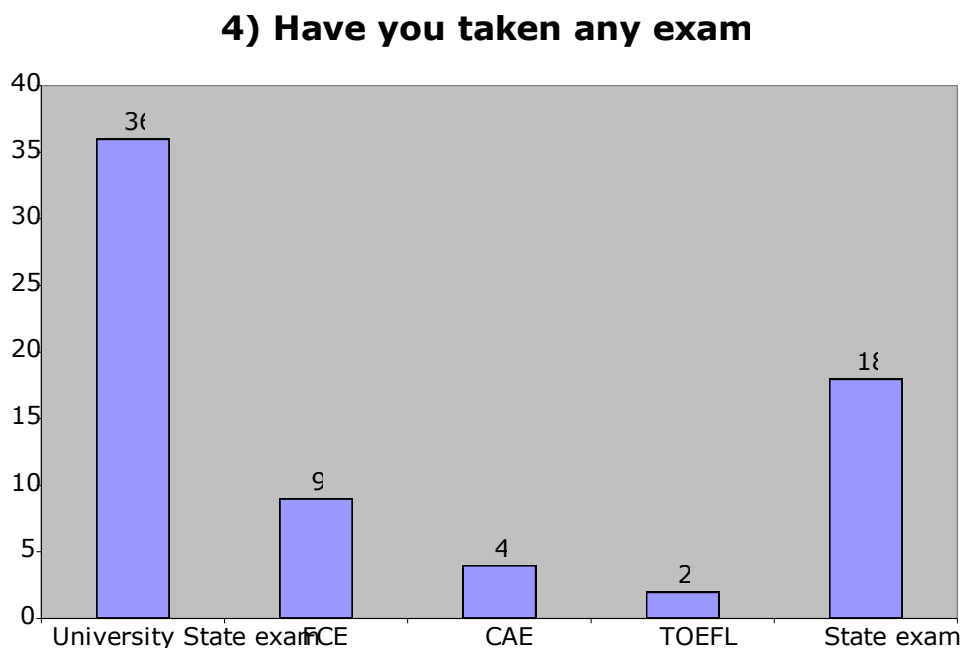
Graph 11.2.3

3) Where did you le

The graphs 11.2.3 (above) and 11.2.4 (below) are focused on the teachers' education in English. According to graph (11.2.3) 36 teachers achieved their education at University, 23 teachers attended a language school while 17 teachers lived and studied abroad. Some teachers also selected option "D – other" stating that they learned English from a

native speaker. Generally, a native speaker plays an important role in learning English because learners, through the interaction with native speakers, improve and enrich their knowledge of English. A student of English should be in touch with either written or spoken authentic English all the time for instance in; movies, newspapers, radio stations, travels. Such experiences are very beneficial to them.
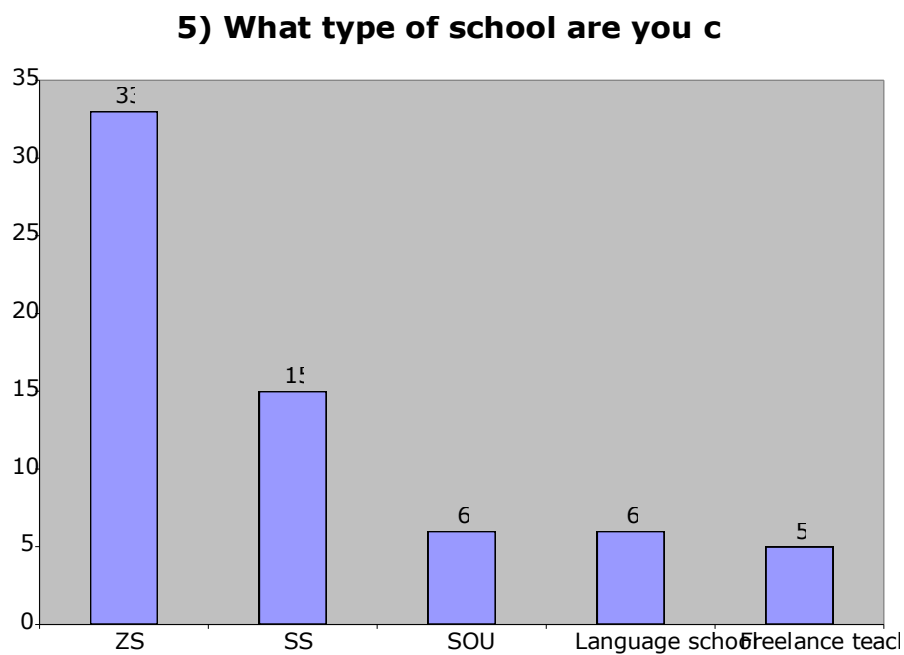
Graph 11.2.4

4) Have you taken any exam

There are various certificates or exams in English available that show a learner's proficiency in English. The graph 11.2.4 shows that some of the questioned teachers took Cambridge exams: First Certificate of English, FCE (total nine), and Certificate in Advanced English, CAE (total four). Then two teachers stated that they passed TOEFL (the Test of English as a Foreign Language). Lastly, 18 teachers passed a Czech State Exam in English.

On the whole, most of the teachers have a university degree, and the remainder obtained various certificates. This means there are more teachers who became proficient in English enough to be familiar with idioms, and be aware of the importance of figurative language in English.
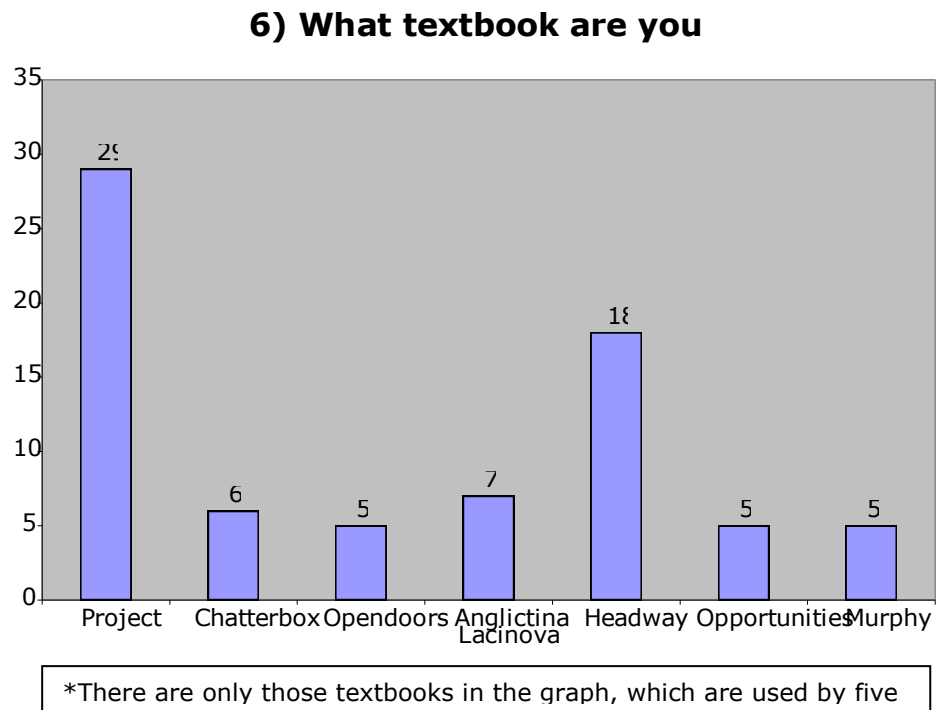
Graph 11.2.5

5) What type of school are you c

Then, the graph 11.2.5 shows that 33 teachers teach at elementary school, ZŠ (Základní škola). Twenty-one teachers teach at high school (SŠ, SOU). Six teachers teach at a language school and five teachers are also freelance teachers. Most questioned teachers teach at elementary schools, and their pupils are usually at the elementary or intermediate levels for proficiency of English. Therefore, idioms may or may not be included in the teaching plans

because they might be too difficult to understand at these levels.

Graph 11.2.6

6) What textbook are you

*There are only those textbooks in the graph, which are used by five

Finally, I wanted to find out which textbooks are used by the teachers. Graph 11.2.6 displays only those textbooks that appeared more than five times in the questionnaires. Those textbooks are *Project, Chatterbox, Opendoors, Angličtina Lacinová, Headway, Opportunities* and *Murphy*. The total amount of textbooks listed by the teachers is 22. Other textbooks that are used in the lessons are: *Chit Chat, Stepping Stones, The Good Grammar, New English File, International Express, The Cambridge English Course, PET – objective, Think Fist Certificate, New English for You, Toy Box* etc.

Teachers use Project and Headway the most in their lessons. I am not going to discuss the content

of idioms in each textbook for simple fact; most of the textbooks do not include idioms as a subject of study and practice like for instance, articles or prepositions. But a good textbook should include authentic language, and authentic language may contain figurative language. An experienced and an educated teacher should not avoid figurative language. More importantly, a teacher should be ready to cast light on idioms rather than leave the students in the haze.

On the whole, the majority of the questioned teachers are experienced and well educated in English. They are expected to know that idioms are important and necessary for the study of English. The next sub-chapter will discuss idioms from the teachers' point of view.

11.3   Questions 7 – 14

To begin, questions seven through 14 (see Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatic Language – Czech Teachers, Appendix 1) are crucial for my work on idioms. The answers to these questions will help me with my theses.

Graph 11.3.1

7) What do you understand by the term "idiomatic language"?
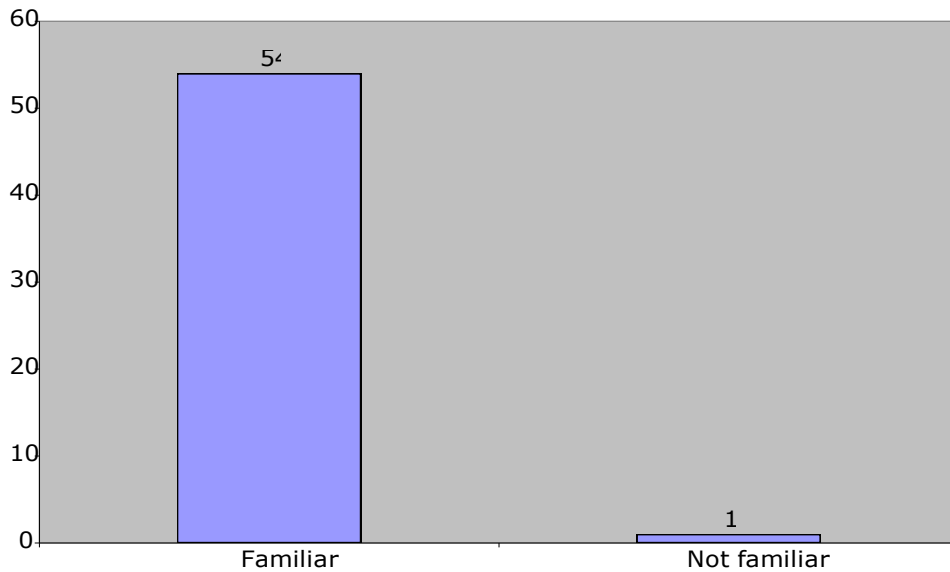
The seventh question was focused on the term "idioms" itself (see graph 11.3.1). Teachers defined this term and their familiarity with it. Fifty-four teachers were familiar with this term; only one teacher was not sure what this term denoted. Some teachers provided an example of an idiom: *sink my teeth into something, to be top banana, it won't be much of a party, it is a hard nut to crack, out of woodwork, to see eye to eye, pull my leg, it's not my cup of tea or it's raining cats and dogs.*

Other teachers came up with either their own definition or provided a dictionary definition. I will present some of these definitions. The term "idioms and idiomatic language" according to some teachers denotes:

"A group of words that has a different meaning."

"An expression with a meaning that you cannot guess from the meanings of the separate words."

"Translator's hard nut to crack."

"A group of words with a different meaning than each would have if interpreted individually."

"A word structure that has a specific meaning."

"Something you cannot translate word for word into Czech."

"Stabilized word connection."

"Something that has strict usage and no rules."

"A phrase or sentence with a special meaning."

"Compound phrases whose meaning is different from the meaning of its particular elements."

"A funny connection of words, hardly translatable into other languages."

"Things you can't translate well."

"Phrases that can't be literally translated but give "flavor" to the language."

"A group of words with different meaning when used together than when used individually."

"The sentences that can't be translated into other languages."

"Expressions that can't be translated word for word."

"Expressions and clauses that can't be translated literally, idioms translated literally can make you idiot."

All of the above-cited definitions are correct in some way, but some of them are not very accurate. As result, most of the definitions are not far from the dictionary definition by stating that idioms are of different or specific meaning. Personally, I think it is very positive that most of the teachers are able to define idioms.

The following comments and graphs will be dealing
with teaching idioms.

Graph 11.3.2

8) Do you think that idioms are i
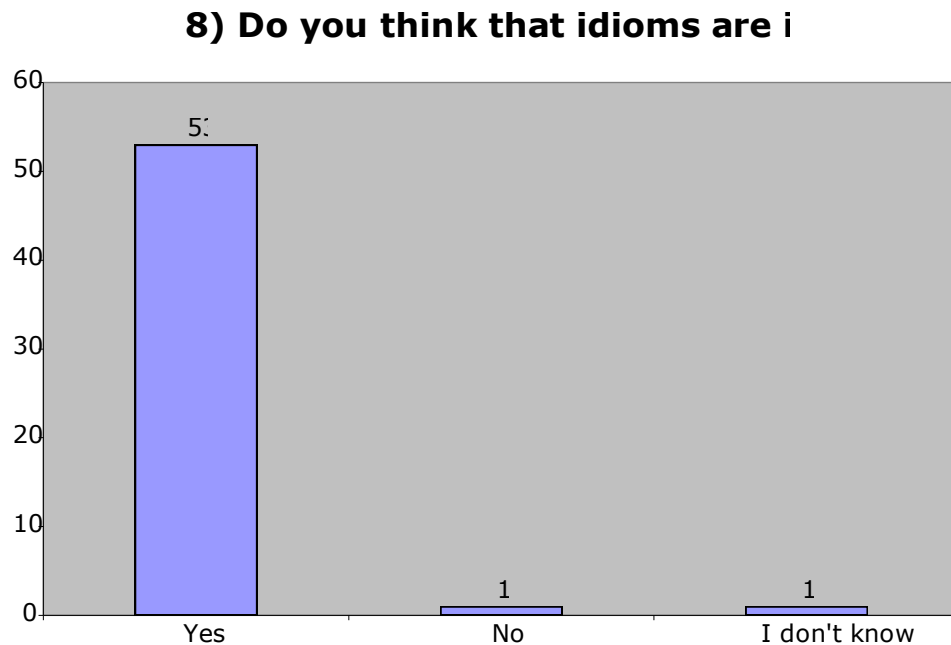
Fifty-three teachers think that idioms are
important in English. Only one teacher thinks it is
not crucial, and also one teacher did not know
whether idioms are important in English. All teachers
of English have to be knowledgeable enough to know
that figurative language is a necessary part of
English. And as the results show (see table 11.3.2),
the majority of teachers are aware of the serious
role of idioms in English.
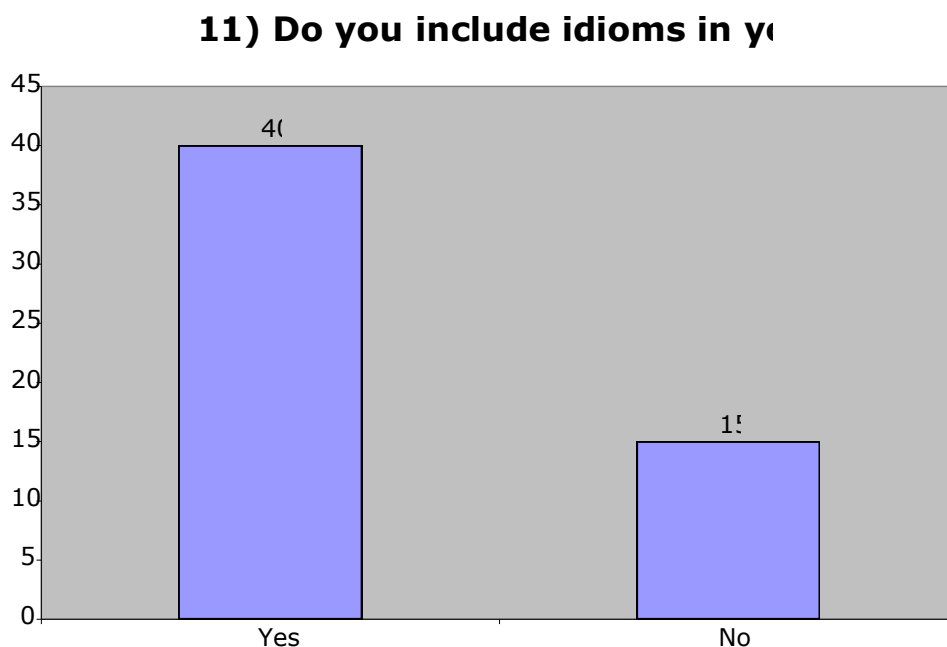
Graph 11.3.3

9) If you answered "Yes". Idioms a
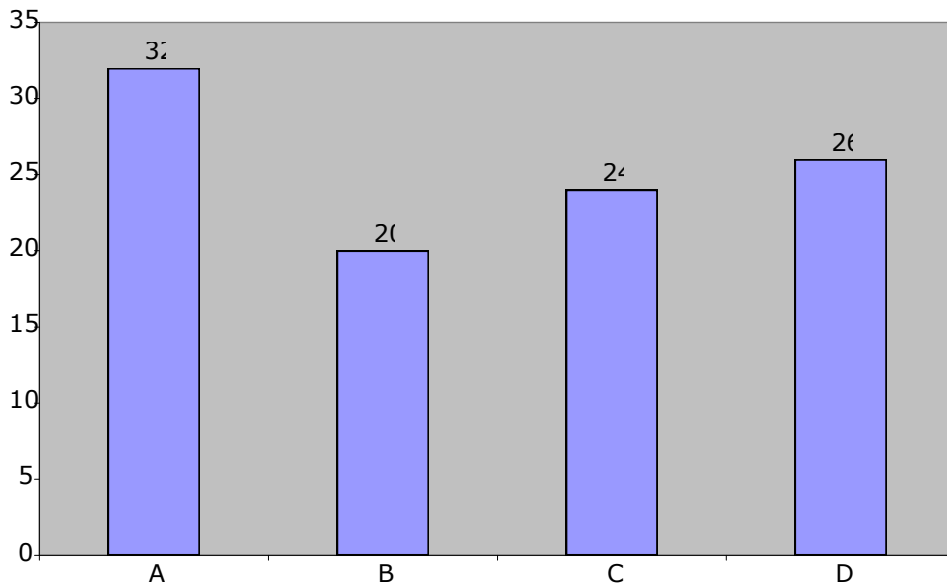
A - Idioms are a necessary part of English.
B – Learners should be introduced to idioms.
C – Knowing idioms shows learner's proficiency in English.
D – Knowing idioms makes learners' life in English speaking environment easier.

Graph 11.3.3 reflects the positive opinions of the teachers regarding the importance of idioms. The most frequent answer was that idioms are a necessary part of English (32 teachers). Twenty-six teachers think that knowing idioms helps learners to communicate easier in an English-speaking environment. Twenty-four teachers think that idioms show learner's proficiency in English. Finally, 20 teachers think that idioms should be introduced to learners. The fact that the majority of the teachers, 53, find idioms important and only 20 teachers think idioms should be introduced to the learners is very disappointing. In other words, all teachers who think that idioms are important in English, and taking

either one of the presented reasons into consideration should introduce idioms to the learners.

Furthermore, there was only one negative answer on question 10 (see Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatic Language – Czech Teachers, Appendix 1) saying that idioms are not fundamental in English because learners do not need idioms in everyday English. The majority of teachers are of the opposite opinion. Learners will certainly hear figurative language in everyday conversations, and therefore just for this reason, learners should become familiar with idioms.
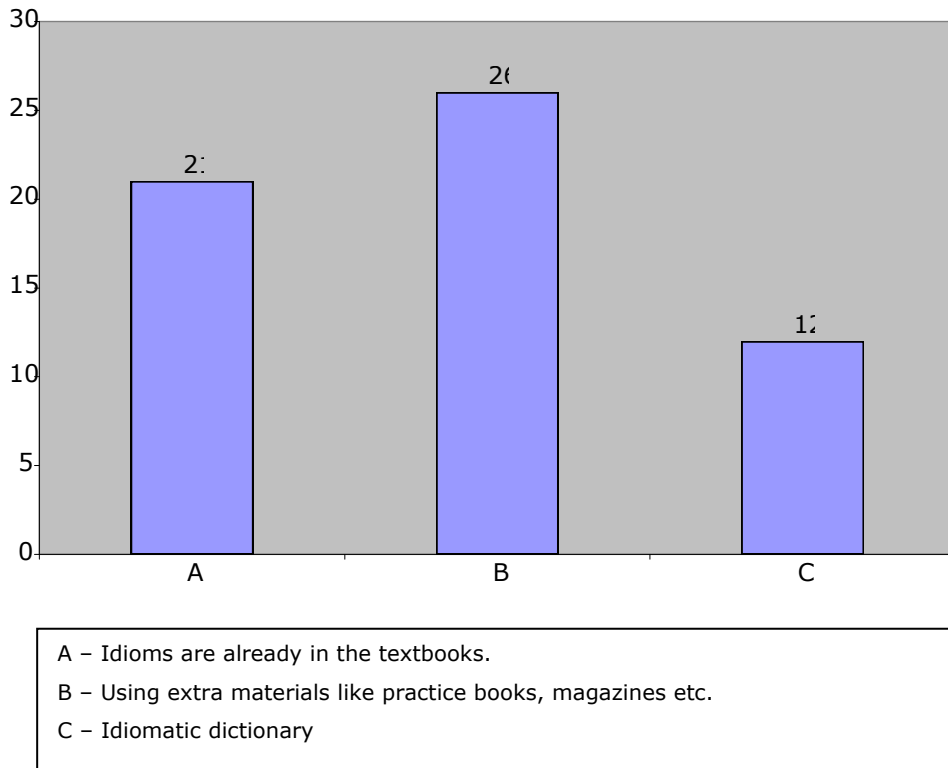
Graph 11.3.4

11) Do you include idioms in y

Graph 11.3.4 displays appearance of idioms in lessons. Forty teachers do include idioms in lessons, and 15 teachers do not include idioms in lessons. In my opinion, if the majority of teachers think that

idioms are important in English, they should all
include idioms in their lessons.

Graph 11.3.5

12) If you answered "Yes". What


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A – Idioms are already in the textbooks.
B – Using extra materials like practice books, magazines etc.
C – Idiomatic dictionary
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The graph 11.3.5 shows that 26 teachers use
supplementary materials like practice books,
magazines, reading texts and songs when teaching
idioms. Twenty-one teachers use textbooks like
Project, Headway and *Opportunities*. Twelve teachers
also use idiomatic dictionaries. As I already said
when evaluating textbooks (see graph 11.2.6), most
textbooks do not usually include idioms as part of
the grammar or practice, but all of textbooks include
to some degree figurative language.

As a matter of fact, *Project* and *Headway* are the most used textbooks by the teachers in their lessons (see graph 11.2.6). These textbooks were again the most mentioned ones as the sources for teaching idioms. As a result of this, we can say quite a lot of teachers (21, see graph 11.3.5) face idioms in the textbooks. In my opinion, when figurative language appears it is a great opportunity for the introduction and practice of idioms.

Graph 11.3.6

13) If you answered "No". I do not
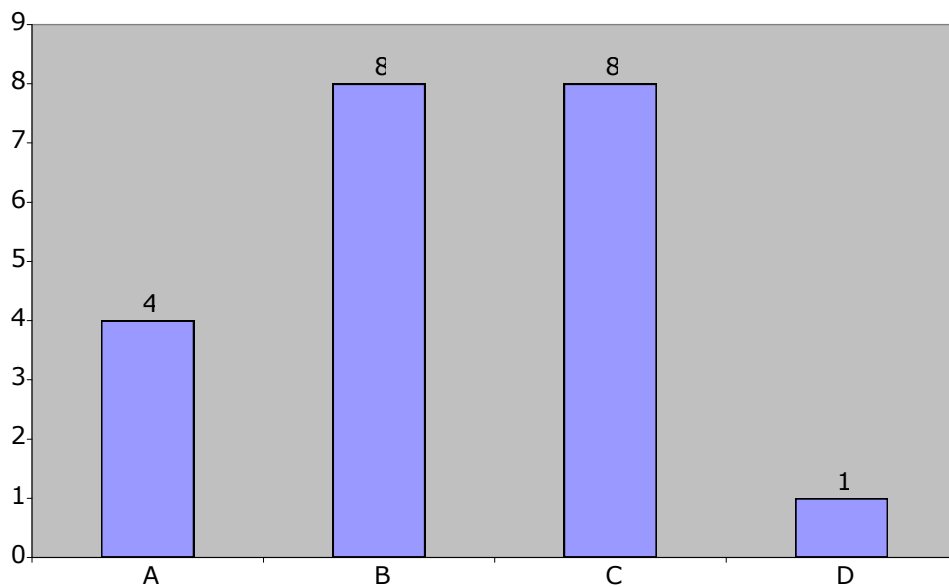
A – Idioms are very difficult to teach.
B – Idioms are not included in the textbook(s) that I use.
C – Knowing idioms is not necessary for learners at the levels I teach.
D – I do not feel familiar with idioms.

Graph 11.3.6 shows the reasons why teachers do not include idioms in their lessons. Two of the most common reasons were that idioms are not included in the textbooks they use, and that it is not necessary

to know idioms at the levels they teach. Both reasons seem to be relevant.

I mentioned several times the fact that all textbooks have figurative language, but it may only appear in conversations or articles, and no extra attention is paid to it. It is good to be aware of idioms at all levels. It does not mean it is necessary to learn idioms by heart like other vocabulary. All learners of English know that it is hard to remember any vocabulary that is rare and peculiar.

Four teachers expressed that idioms are very difficult to teach, and they are indeed! One teacher does not feel familiar enough with idioms, which is absolutely correct since idioms are very confusing. But even this hard nut has to eventually be cracked.

Graph 11.3.7

13) When is the best time to sta
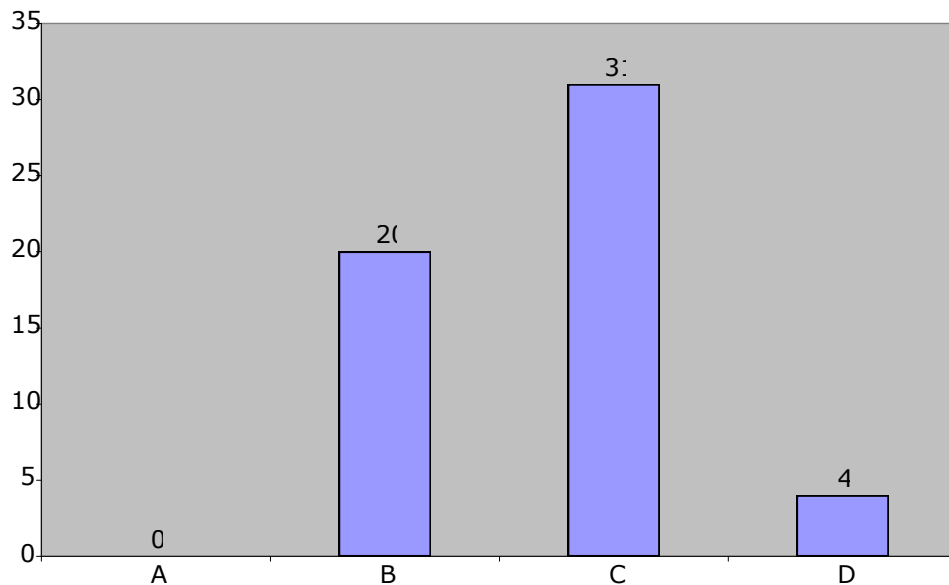
A – I think it is not necessary to teach idioms.
B – I think at the very beginning of learning English.
C – I think it is better later i.e. at intermediate level.
D – I think it is better at advanced level.

The last graph 11.3.7 includes teachers' points of view regarding the question when is the best time to start teaching idioms. Surprisingly, nobody picked the first answer stating that it is not necessary to teach idioms. Finally, all the teachers came to the conclusion that it is necessary to introduce figurative language at some level. Thirty-one teachers think it is better to introduce idioms later at the intermediate level. But 20 teachers think it is good to start with the introduction of idioms at the very beginning level. Lastly, four teachers prefer to introduce idioms at an advanced level.

To conclude, it is very positive that all of the questioned teachers are of the opinion that idioms should be introduced at some point. In my opinion,

idioms should be introduced gradually at the very beginning of learning English. Some of the teachers added in the option "E" of question 14 (see Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatic Language – Czech Teachers, Appendix 1): "When a pupil comes across an idiom, it should be explained." "It doesn't matter when, if they need an idiom I use it." "It should come gradually like all other vocabulary when learning English." "Introduction of idioms should be natural and contextual."

11.4   Evaluation of Theses

After evaluating the Czech teachers' questionnaires, I am able to state whether my theses are right or wrong. Here are the theses I set before I questioned 55 Czech ESL teachers:
1)   They are familiar with idioms.
2)   They think that idioms are an important part of English.
3)   They do not introduce idioms, and do not include them in their lesson.
4)   According them it is the best time to introduce idiomatic expressions during the intermediate or advanced levels.

The first thesis proved correct (see graph 11.3.1). Fifty-four teachers are familiar with idioms. The second thesis may be considered valid as well. Graph 11.3.2 shows that 53 teachers considered idioms an important part of English.

The third thesis proved to be absolutely wrong, and in my opinion this is good. Teachers do introduce and include idioms in their lessons. Lastly, the fourth thesis may be considered to be proven because the majority of the teachers think that it is better to introduce idioms later at intermediate level, but also quite a lot of the teachers (20) think idioms should be taught at the start of learning English.

11.5   Conclusion

This research verified that idioms are according to Czech ESL teachers necessary in English. It was also proven that idioms appear in some teaching plans. All the teachers agreed, and I do agree with them that it is necessary to teach idioms. Figurative language may be difficult but perhaps this work will encourage both teachers and learners to teach or learn idioms, and I hope it will increase their interest in figurative language.

12 Questionnaire on Idioms Completed by Native Speakers

12.1   Introduction

To start, the main focus of this work on idioms is to prove that idioms are important in English, which is the reason why idioms should be taught and learnt.

Firstly I addressed 55 Czech teachers of English to find out their opinions on idioms (see Chapter 11 of the Practical Part).

Then I got an idea to question native speakers, Americans in the United States of America, on this topic as well. Sub-chapter 12.2 shows what native speakers think about figurative language and its usage. Lastly, we will also find out whether idioms, according to native speakers, should be introduced and learnt by learners of English.

## 12.2   Evaluation of the Questionnaire

Thirty-eight native speakers of English completed the questionnaire. Each native speaker was asked five questions (see Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatical Language – Native Speakers, Appendix 2). There is no statistical data from this questionnaire, because it was designed to be completed by people of various, age, gender and education.

Graph 12.2.1

1) Do you use such expression
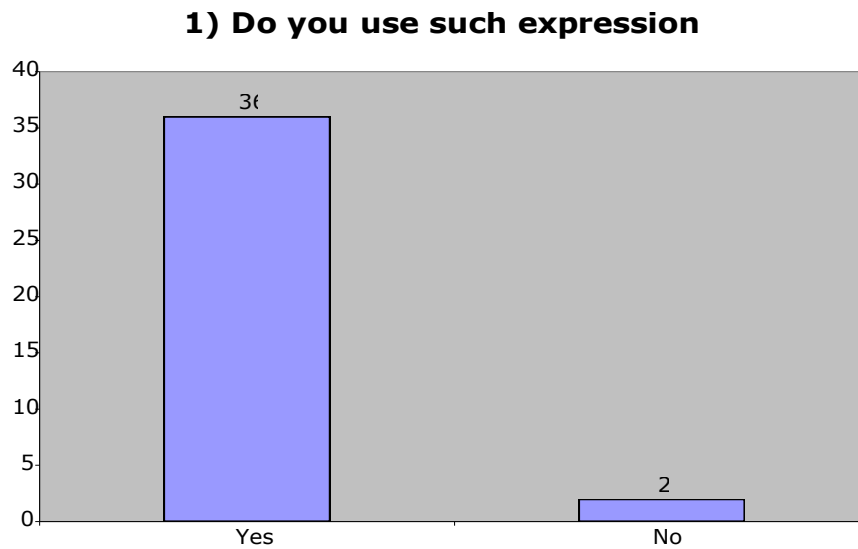
Graph 12.2.1 displays native speakers' opinions on the usage of idioms in their language. As a result, we see that 36 questioned Americans answered "Yes". This means that the majority of the native speakers use such expressions in their language.

Graph 12.2.2

**2) In which variety of language are exp**
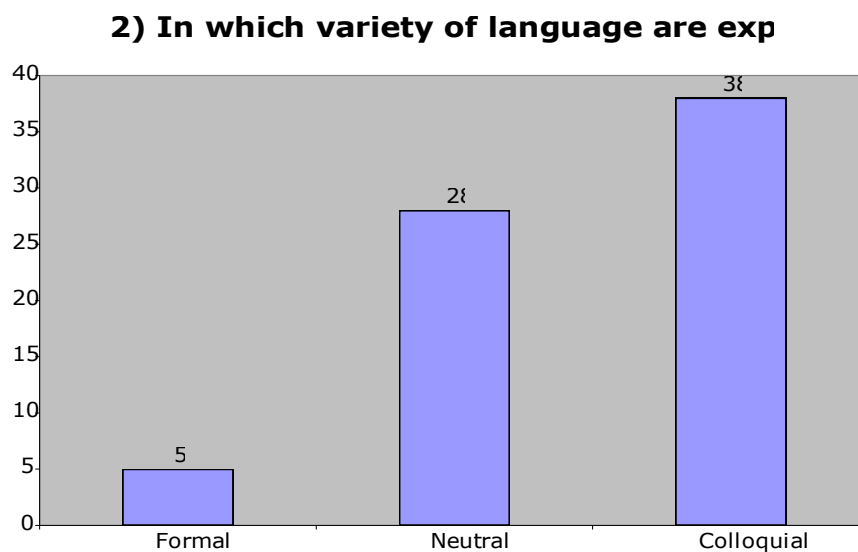
Graph 12.2.2 shows that, according to all 38 respondents idioms are the main feature of the

colloquial register. Twenty-eight Americans also think that idioms are used in the neutral register. Finally, five Americans are of the opinion that idioms are used even in the formal register.

It was already mentioned in the Theoretical Part of this work (see Chapter seven of the Theoretical Part), figurative language belongs to the neutral and informal register. Native speakers were correct with the placing of idioms to these registers.

Graph 12.2.3

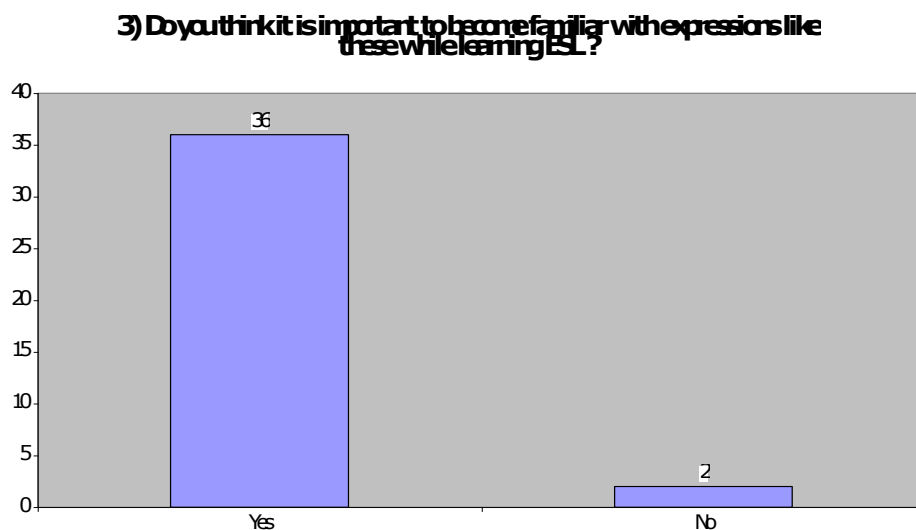**2) According to you, expressions**
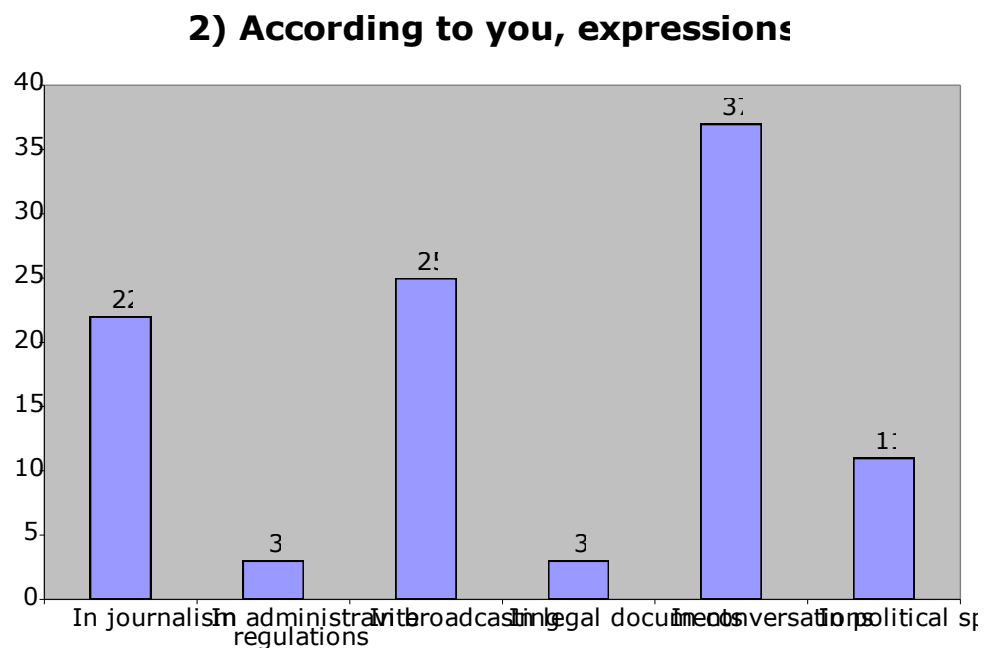
Graph 12.2.3 expresses respondents' opinions on the practical usage of idioms. Thirty-seven native speakers believe that idioms are used in conversations, while 25 think idioms are used in broadcasting and 22 think idioms are used in journalism. Eleven native speakers are of view that idioms can be used in a political speech. Lastly,

three respondents would look for idioms in administrative regulations.

Figurative language is used in the above-mentioned situations except in administrative regulations; idioms are not used in any formal documents and speeches. As the native speakers confirmed with their answers, figurative language appears the most in conversations.
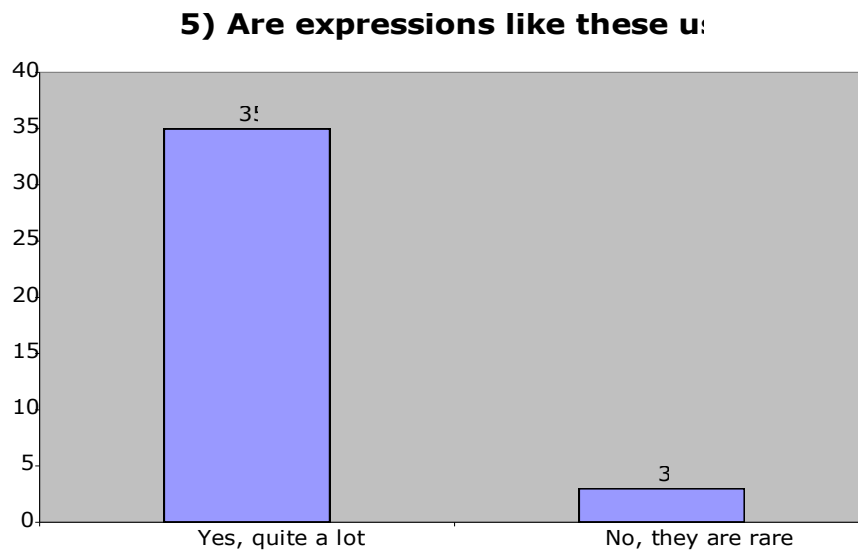
Graph 12.2.4

3) Do you think it is important to become familiar with expressions like these while learning ESL ?

Following graph 12.2.4 presents the opinions of the native speakers regarding the learning of idioms. Thirty-three respondents share the view that the students of English should learn idioms. Two native speakers do not think that it is necessary to learn idioms.

Native speakers use idioms in their language. Therefore, in order to understand and be able to communicate in an English-speaking environment it is necessary to know figurative language.

Graph 12.2.5

5) Are expressions like these u

The last graph (12.2.5) shows that 35 native speakers think that idioms are used a lot in English, and three respondents think that they are rare. This again reconfirms the fact that it is important to teach and learn idioms.

12.3   Evaluation of Theses

Before I gave this questionnaire on idioms to the native speakers, I set a few theses about native speakers. Now I am going to compare the theses with the answers.

The theses I set are:
1) They use idioms very often.
2) They use these expressions in neutral and colloquial register.

3) They apply such expressions in journalism, conversation, broadcasting and political speech.
4) According to them idioms should be introduced and learnt by ESL students.

I have evaluated all questionnaires filled out by the native speakers, and I have presented all their opinions on idioms. As a result, I can state that all the theses I set forth have been proven by the majority of the native speakers.

Lastly, just the fact that the native speakers encourage learners of English to learn and become familiar with idioms should be taken into consideration by both teachers and as well as learners.

12.4   Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of questioned native speakers are of the opinion that idioms do appear in various situations like broadcasting, journalism, political speech, but mainly in conversations, and therefore they are not rare in English.

Furthermore, native speakers use such expressions quite often, and for that reason they also encourage learners to become familiar with idioms. Idioms will help learners to understand and communicate better, either with native speakers or with non-native English speaking people.

13 Practice Makes Perfect

13.1   Introduction

I have presented some facts about idioms in the chapters of the Theoretical Part. I have also submitted opinions of Czech teachers and American native speakers on idioms (see Chapters 11 and 12 of the Practical Part).

From the research it is obvious that teachers of English are familiar with idioms and include them in their lessons.

Most textbooks include some idiomatical expressions for instance, the New Headway – Work Book (Soars 1996 p. 71) included an exercise on animal idioms (see Appendix 3). Unfortunately, idioms are not included plentifully. Teachers must be very creative and prepare additional materials for their students.

Therefore I am going to offer some ideas for teaching idioms.

13.2   Topical Classification of Idioms

In fact, if we look at the books for practice idioms, we realize that nearly all of them are structured according to themes. This is a particularly good part of Smith's (cited in Fernando 1997, p. 19) account for idioms. He categorized idioms on the basis of their imagery: the sea, birds, woods, sheep, etc.

Specifically, idioms consisting of body parts are dominant in English. For instance, *keep somebody at arm's length, armed to the teeth, be up to one's eyebrows in work, heart to heart, not make heads or tails of something, to be on one's last leg, be a nail in somebody's coffin etc.* A very good source for idioms related to certain topics is the NYC's Thematic Dictionary of American Idioms (Spearce 1997).

Moreover, the thematic organization of idioms is the best way to familiarize students to idioms. Idioms cover a wide range of topics. Particularly, when learning colors, students can learn a few idioms containing color like *out of blue* or *to give somebody the green light*. The idioms can take up the whole lesson or can be used as a warm up exercise. We can use various types of exercises; mostly it depends on the learners' proficiency.

Types of possible exercises:

- Matching (idiom with a picture or an explanation of idiom)

- True X False

- Look up idioms in the text

- Guessing the meaning (from text, picture or recording)

- Multiple-choice

- Complete conversations using idiomatic expressions

- Rewriting sentences using an idiomatic expression

- Crosswords, puzzle

- Role play

Here are some of my own ideas from teacher training. Firstly, I included the idiom "*to break the ice*" in the introductory lesson of my training. I presented various phrases related to this idiom, and through these, students learned the idiom.

I tried to expose various interesting activities to pique interest for idioms. Firstly, I showed a picture of broken ice. Pupils guessed the topic. Secondly, I put a poster "to break the ice" on the board with the phrases. Then a simple game followed. Students had a table with phrases "*to break the ice*" like *Where are you from? What is your hobby? What is your favorite food?* Pupils then circulated through the class and completed the table using the phrases. Finally they had to come up with their own phrases as homework assignment. I tried to come back to this idiom in the following lessons as a warm-up activity. Example of the table "to break the ice":

Phrase	Name:	Name:	Name:
Where are you from?			
What is your hobby?			
What is your favorite food?			
...			

Secondly, I introduced the idiom " *to make small talk".* The students knew the literal meaning of both words, but nobody knew the figurative meaning denoting a polite conversation about unimportant or uncontroversial matters, especially engaged in a social occasion. I submitted a few phrases that are

used, for instance: *How are you. What's up? How have you been? What are you up to? See you later. Talk to you soon.*

Again students got familiar with this idiom through practice. I picked an exercise (see Appendix 4) from the New Headway (2000). This time I presented a picture of people in "*small talk*" conversation. Students tried to come up with some phrases they use in conversations. Then I presented a poster with small talk phrases. I also played a recording with small talk conversations. Children were given a table and were supposed to match phrases of the small talk conversations as they heard them for example *Have a good weekend – Same to you. How are you? – Fine, thanks. Cheers. – Cheers. Bless you. – Bless you*. Finally, students were asked to perform such conversations in pairs. Also this idiom was repeatedly practiced in the following lessons.

To conclude, the best way for presenting idioms is according to themes. Idioms should be an addition to the main topic. I have presented the above-mentioned idioms to the various levels of students and they were in both successful. Idioms have to be taught slowly, gradually and through a lot of practice.

13.3   Suitable Practice Books for Idioms

We have already mentioned dictionaries of idioms as good sources for idioms. Undoubtedly, they are very important when learning idioms. Dictionaries can even be used for various exercises. For instance, children can look up idiomatic expressions containing a color, or they can try to find the Czech equivalents of idioms to the English ones.

However, there are also various practice books available. These books consist of various exercises for practicing multiword expressions. I depict some of them and consider their suitability for learners.

Title:	Watkins, D 2001 *The Idiom Adventure – fluency in speaking,* Pearson ESL, New York.
Description:	This practice book includes: introduction to both student and learners, mixed exercises (matching, T x F, crosswords puzzle, role-play, reading, rewriting sentences, dialogues, fill the gaps). Chapters are divided into: learning the idiom, finding the idioms in advertisements, using the idioms.
Suitability:	It is a very interesting book, it includes authentic language such as advertisements, it is rich on photographs and illustrations. It provides wide diversity of exercises

	therefore it is fitting for various levels.

Title:	Feare, RE 1980, *Practice with Idioms,* Oxford University Press, New York.
Description:	This book distinguishes idioms as transitive, intransitive, nominal, adjective and adverbial. There are only a few types of exercises like matching and fill the gap. Chapters consist of guessing the meaning from context, definition correspondence, explanation of idioms, learning grammar rules, multiple-choice exercise, writing exercise and review.
Suitability:	It is suitable for advanced learners, but some of the exercises can be modified. There are no illustrations or photographs. It has a lot of practice, but of similar exercises. It does not cover all four skills. I would not recommend this practice book.

Title:	Collis, H 1987, *101 American English Idioms (Understanding and speaking English like an American),* McGraw Hill, New York.*
Description:	This book is divided into chapters according to themes. For instance, *All together now, Getting ahead, Watch out, Friend or foe*, etc. There is a picture

	of a situation which denotes the idiom and then there is a short text in which the idiom is incorporated.
Suitability:	This is a funny and an interesting practice book. This enables learners to talk about the idiom, and guess an idiom from the picture. There is authentic language. Students can come up with other similar idiomatic expressions. Since it is thematic a practice book it is easy to include it with the lessons. I recommend this book to teachers especially because it enables creativity with forming exercises. It is suitable for learners as well because it does not need guidance.

*There is the same book on proverbs: Collins, H 1992, *101 American English Proverbs (Understanding language and culture through commonly used sayings)*, Passport books, Chicago. (see Appendix 5)

Title:	Broukal, M 1994, *Idioms for Everyday Use (the basic text for learning and communicating with English Idioms),* NTC, Chicago.
Description:	It is a thematic oriented practice book. For instance, there are chapters like color, food, numbers, parts of the body, people, animals etc. There are various exercises to illustrate, matching, Y x N

	questions, dialogues, fill in the gaps. The practice is managed through reading, conversation, and discussion tasks. There is a review of all units.
Suitability:	I highly recommend this book; it is illustrated and very colorful. There are thematically oriented chapters. All tasks are comprehensible and enable variation. Therefore it is fitting to many levels.

Title:	Gray, LS 2000, *Practice Makes Perfect: Idiomatic English,* McGraw Hill, New York.
Description:	Also in this publication the chapters are thematic-based (school, work, satisfaction, etc.). There are various exercises such as fill in the blanks, matching, and complete sentences. Practice is provided through reading, speaking and writing.
Suitability:	It is a good book but there are no illustrations, so the learner might get the impression that it is too factual. Overall the book is suitable for all levels.

Title:	Watcyn-Jones, P 1990, *Test your English Idioms,* Penguin Books, London. (see Appendix 6)

Description:	This practice book has various exercises for idioms. There are illustrations, cross-words, matchings, true – falls and fill in words. Exercises are comprehensible and interesting. It is sorted out according to topics but also for instance, word classes – prepositions, adjectives.
Suitability:	I highly recommend this book. It is a great practice book for idioms because it enables practice of various idioms. It is suitable for intermediate level. It is witty and I think students will have fun working with this practice book.

13.4   Conclusion

To summarize, both teachers and learners may come across idiomatical expressions in a textbook. However idioms are not usually included in textbooks. Therefore it is necessary to use additional sources such as practice books.

Furthermore, I have mentioned only a few practice books. There are more practice books for idioms available in bookstores or libraries. I feel the books I have discussed offer a good starting point for studying idioms. I have presented the basic layout of each book, and for the most part they do not differ that much, but there are some particular parts in each book that make them all worth looking

at. It is the teachers' or learners' choice to decide which is the best for their particular course of study.

Lastly, I recommend to teachers the thematic oriented practice books simply for the reason that it is more convenient to integrate idioms that way into the lesson plan.

14 Summary of the Research

The research based on two questionnaires completed by Czech teachers and American native speakers has produced various opinions on idioms. Now, are their points of view similar?

Czech teachers and native speakers of English came to the conclusion that idioms are used in English frequently, and are a necessary part of English (Czech teachers 96.4%, native speakers 92.1%). Both, Czech teachers and American native speakers, agree that idioms should be included in English lessons.

According to native speakers idioms appear mostly in conversations, journalism and broadcasting. A learner of English will most certainly come across idioms in an English-speaking environment. Therefore, the research proved the fact that figurative language is useful to learn when studying English.

Conclusion

The main focus of this project was *idioms*. Idioms are expressions which are peculiar for their figurative meaning. Bacon said (cited in Kroulík 1993, p. 8): " The genius, wit and the spirit of a nation are discovered by their proverbs and idioms." I decided to ascertain this truth with the help of Czech teachers and American native speakers. My aim was to find out whether idioms are still used in English, and whether it is necessary to learn them in ESL lessons.

The Theoretical Part deals for instance with English as a second language, definitions of idioms, classifications of idioms or translation of idioms. There are valuable contributions of linguists. It is not an easy task to learn idioms and master their usage. Still, most of the scholars encourage learners to learn and become familiar with figurative language. Worrall (1964) says about idioms in the foreword of his dictionary: "Too many students learn "book English", too few learn to use the current phrases, which are common in our daily speech ... and the foreign student who wishes to speak English fluently will need to have them at his finger ends."

In the Practical Part I discussed questionnaires completed by Czech teachers of English and American native speakers. Both groups of respondents came to agreement that idioms are important in English and are used very often, especially in conversations.

Czech teachers are also consistent in the idea that idioms should be introduced and taught at some level.

I stressed throughout my project that idioms are important in English, and I supported this statement with the research. But among ESL learners, figurative language is not used and learned, as it should be. They hardly use idioms in their conversations. Mainly native speakers of English use idioms, and there are less native speakers than ESL speakers. ESL speakers do need to know idioms so crucially.

In order to preserve humorousness and originality of the English language idioms should be learned and used in English. It would be a pity to erase idiomatic expressions from English. Lastly, according to Rebeková (2004, p. 6): "Idioms are a tough nut to crack for ESL students but learning idioms brings also a lot of fun."

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatical Language – Czech Teachers

Dear Sir or Madam,

my name is Simona Bojková. I am a student of English and Civics at Palacky University in Olomouc. I am writing my diploma work on Idioms and idiomatic language.
I would like to ask you kindly to complete this questionnaire. Your experience will help me with my thesis.
This questionnaire is anonymous. I give you my word that I will keep your answers secret and I will not misuse them.
Thank you very much!

Please circle your answers, If you would like to circle more then one option feel free to do it. Although it is not always possible!

1) Are you:
   A) Female
   B) Male

2) How long have you been teaching English?_____

3) Where did you learn English?
   A) A)University
   B) Language school
   C) Living and studying abroad
   D) Other, please specify:_____

4) Have you taken any exam (test) of English? e.g. state exam, FCE, CAE etc.
   A) Yes, please specify:_____

   B) No

5) What type of school are you currently teaching at?
   A) ZŠ
   B) SŠ
   C) SOU
   D) Language school
   E) Other, please specify:_____

6) What textbook are you working with? (If you use more then one, please write those you use the most)Your textbook(s):_____

7) What do you understand by the term "idioms and idiomatical language"?
   A)   I think it is:_____
   B) I do not know.

8) Do you think that idioms are important in English?
   A) Yes
   B) No
   C) I don't know.

9) If you answered "Yes". Idioms are important because:
   A) Idioms are a necessary part of English.
   B) Learners should be introduced to idioms.
   C) Knowing idioms demonstrates learners' proficiency in English.
   D) Knowing idioms makes learner's life in an English-speaking environment easier.
   E) Other reason(s),please specify:_____

10) If you answered "No". Idioms are not important because:
   A) Idioms are very difficult to teach.
   B) Learners do not need idioms in everyday English.
   C) I am personally not familiar with idioms.
   D) Other reason(s):_____

11) Do you include idioms in your English lessons?
    A) Yes
    B) No

12) If you answered "Yes". What sources do you use?
    A) Idioms are already in the textbook. Please
       specify in which book:_____
    B) Using extra materials like practice books,
       magazines etc.
    C) Idiomatic dictionary
    D) Other source(s), please specify:_____

13) If you answered "No". I do not teach idioms
    because:
    A) Idioms are very difficult to teach.
    B) Idioms are not included in the textbook(s)
       that I use.
    C) Knowing idioms is not necessary for learners
       at the levels I teach.
    D) I do not feel familiar with idioms.

14) When is the best time to start teaching idioms?
    A) I think it is not necessary to teach idioms.
    B) I think at the very beginning of learning
       English.
    C) I think it is better later i.e. at
       intermediate level.
    D) I think it is better at advanced level.
    E) Other, please specify:_____

Appendix 2

Questionnaire about Idioms and Idiomatical Language – Native Speakers

Dear Sir or Madam,
My name is Simona Bojkova. I am a student of English and Civics at Palacky University in Olomouc. I am writing my diploma work on Idioms and idiomatic language.
I would like to ask you kindly to complete this questionnaire. Your answers will help me with my thesis. This questionnaire is anonymous. I give you my word that I will keep your answers secret and I will not misuse them.
Thank you very much!

All the questions are related to the underlined idiomatic expressions. Please read these examples before you answer the questions. More than one answer can be selected for questions #2 and #3.

…" **Yet some of his excuses for his absence lately had been *pretty thin*."**…
…"**Some women would have begun to *smell a rat*."**…
…" **The Australian public, until Mr. Menadue *let the cat out of the bag*, did not realize just what the department *was up to.*"**…

1)   Do you use such expressions in your language?
     A)   Yes
     B)   No

2)   In which variety of language are expressions like
     these used?
     A)   Formal (definitions, instructions – one way
          participation, no interruptions)
     B)   Neutral (two-way participation,
          interruptions allowed, background
          information provided, grammar and wording
          important)
     C)   Colloquial (in group friends and
          acquaintances, interruptions common, wording
          and grammar not important)

3)   According to you, expressions like these are used:
     A)   In journalisms
     B)   In administrative regulations
     C)   In broadcasting
     D)   In legal documents
     E)   In conversations
     F)   In political speech

4)   Do you think it is important to become familiar
     with expressions like these while learning ESL
     (English as a second language)?
     A)
     B)   No

5)   Are expressions like these used in English a lot?
     A)   Yes, quite a lot
     B)   No, they are rare

     Feel free to write here any comments you may have
on this subject:

Appendix 3

Vocabulary: 10 Animal idioms (Soars & Soars 1996, p. 71)

Vocabulary

10 Animal idioms

1 The list of idioms below all contain the names of animals. Look at the cartoons and write in the name of the animals.

a to smell a _____

b to set the _____ amongst the _____

c to behave like a _____ in a china shop

d to sort out the _____ from the _____

e to make an _____ of yourself

f to talk until the _____ come home

g to be gentle as a _____

h to be unable to say boo to a _____

i to have a _____ party

j to be like water off a _____'s back

2 Read the situation and complete the idiom from Exercise 1 which describes it.

a I hadn't seen my old school friends for ages, so we stayed up talking for most of the night. We talked _____

b The test was very difficult. It showed the teacher which students had done the work and which students hadn't. It really sorted out _____

c My brother's getting married on Saturday and he's going out with all his mates the evening before. He's having a _____

d Our dog's very big and fierce-looking but he's very good with babies and children. He's as _____

e I didn't believe a word that salesman said about that car. I knew he was lying about the number of miles it had done. I really smelt _____

f It doesn't matter how much you get angry with her, it has no effect. It's like _____

g The interview was terrible. I forgot everything I wanted to say, and I couldn't answer their questions either. I really made _____

h Careful! You're so clumsy. You're knocking everything off the table. You're like _____

i I didn't know that Bob knew nothing about Anna and Peter. When I told him he went white. I think I've really set _____

j Maisie is such a shy little girl; she never puts her hand up, she can't say _____

⚠ It is important to be able to recognize idioms when you hear or read them, but it can be very difficult to use them naturally and successfully in conversation yourself!

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Appendix 4

Every English: Social Expressions 1 (Soars & Soars 2000, p. 13)

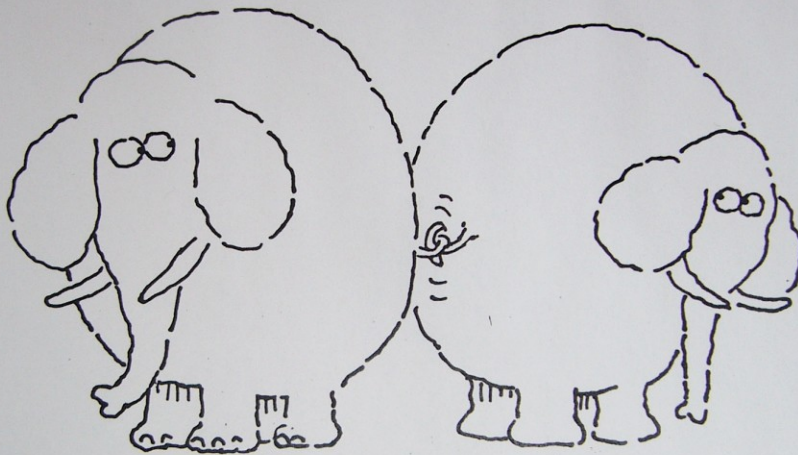## Appendix 5

"Make Ends Meet" (Collis 1987, p. 85)

Make Ends Meet

(pay one's bills)

It's almost impossible trying to keep up with the high
    cost of living.
It's true. Things are so expensive nowadays that it's
    very difficult to **make ends meet**.
You know, even with Lucie's salary, our combined in-
    come is **hardly enough to pay all the bills**.

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Appendix 6

"What are they saying? 2" (Watcyn-Jones 1990, p. 30 – 31)

19 What are they saying? 2

Look at the drawings below and try to work out what the people are saying. Mark the appropriate letter (a–l) in each of the speech bubbles. Choose from the following:

a "The doctor told me to take it easy."
b "I was in such a hurry this morning that I picked up the wife's by mistake."
c "You were saying, Mr Brown, that you were given the sack from the garage . . ."
d "He's as soft as butter, once he realises that you're not going to hurt him."
e "Is this the short cut you were telling me about?"
f "Mirror, Mirror on the wall . . . tell me a little white lie."
g "I'm just turning in. Would you tell the milkman to leave an extra pint?"
h "Why don't you act your age, George? If you're prepared to say 'Sorry' then I'm prepared to say 'I forgive you'."
i "He's been as good as gold, Mrs Jones. We've been playing cowboys and Indians."
j "Yes, I'm on a banana diet again. Why? Does it show?"
k "Hello, I'm Paul. It's my job to get rid of you!"
l "Yes, Susan, I'd love to come round for a chat. Peter won't mind. He said he wanted an early night."

ANOTACE

Jméno a příjmení:	Simona Bojková
Katedra:	Katedra Anglického jazyka
Obor:	Učitelství pro 2. stupeň Základní Školy: Anglický jazyk - Občanská výchova
Vedoucí práce:	Simon GILL, M.A.
Rok obhajoby:	2007

Název práce:	Idiomy a idiomatický jazyk
Resumé:	Práce se zabývá anglickými idiomy a idiomatickými frázemi. Idiomatika je v anglickém jazyce velmi důležitá. Mnohdy je velmi obtížné těmto výrazům pro jejich figurativní význam rozumět. Cílem práce je objasnit pojem *idiom* a také prokázat jejich důležitou roli a častý výskyt v anglickém jazyce. Zároveň by tato práce měla motivovat studenty anglického jazyka ke studiu této problematiky.
Klíčová slova:	idiom, fráze, idiomatická fráze, přísloví, frazeologie, figurativní jazyk
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	idiom, phrase, idiomatic phrase, idiomatic and figurative language, proverb, multiword expression
Počet Příloh vázané v práci:	6
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Jazyk práce:	Anglický

ANNOTATION

Name and Surname:	Simona Bojková
Department:	English Language
Major:	Teaching English in Grades 6-9 of Basic School: English - Civics
Supervisor:	Simon GILL, M.A.
Year of Defense:	2007

Title:	Idioms and Idiomatic Language
Résumé:	This project is on idioms and idiomatic language. Idioms are a necessary part of English. Idioms are usually very difficult to comprehend for their figurative meaning. The aim of this project is to explain term idioms and prove their importance and usage in English. Lastly, the work should motivate a student of English to learn idioms.
Key Words:	idiom, phrase, idiomatic phrase, idiomatic language, figurative language, proverb, multiword expression
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