

THE METAPHORICITY OF IDIOMS IN BUSINESS JOURNALESE A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract: *The paper explores the field of idioms; it identifies, categorises and analyses idioms that are used in business contexts, including their literal, figurative and metaphorical meanings. The analysis, which was conducted with the help of the tools provided by corpus linguistics, encompasses grouping idioms according to the semantic categories of animal idioms, idioms pertaining to agriculture, games, weather and food idioms. Furthermore, the characteristics of idioms are explored in order to capture the metaphoricality or conventionality of idioms. Thus, the analysis of the collected data revealed the use of figurative language ranging from idioms displaying figurative meanings and metaphors to conventional idioms.*

Keywords: *Idioms; metaphors; metaphoricality; business journalese; corpus linguistics*

1 Introduction

The main aim of this research was to analyse the use of idiomatic expressions in business journalese. The corpus-based analysis aimed to prove that business journalese makes use of idiomatic expressions that play the role of creating a stylistic effect. To achieve this, I captured idioms that had a high degree of metaphoricality, and noted their frequency and variations. However, the findings revealed that not all the idioms identified in the corpus displayed a degree of metaphoricality, and conventional idioms were also identified. The variation in idioms was also identified manually. The advantage of the corpus-based approach is that it enables the processing of large sets of data; moreover, it provides information about the frequency of the idioms under investigation.

A characteristic of idioms is their lack of flexibility; as they cannot be modified internally, they fall into the category of unproductive idioms.

(1) ‘Right, stop thinking how much fun parliamentary ping-pong sounds, particularly if a **cat joins in.**’ (*The Guardian*, 3 August, 2015).

Conversely, some idioms can be modified internally, thus falling into the category of productive idioms.

Idioms represent the product of culture, as they reflect the cultural phenomena encapsulated by traditions, customs and proverbs. The idiomatic expressions embedded in proverbs prove this hypothesis:

(2) ‘The **silver lining** is that many women don’t realise how much good stuff there still is in M&S.’ (*The Guardian*, 19 April, 2013). The idiom *silver lining* is part of the proverb **every cloud has a silver lining.**

The entailments between the source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD), coupled with the mental imagery projected onto idioms, represent another perspective on idioms.

2 Literature Review

The theories on which the paper relies are those proposed by Gibbs (1993), Cacciari (1993), Glucksberg (2001), Kovecses (2010), Gentner and Bowdle (2008).

Gibbs (1993) addressed the issue of the metaphoricity of idioms. He compared metaphors and idioms, and referred to the way in which idioms were viewed by scholars, such as dead metaphors, which refers to linguistic units that have lost their metaphoricity and only exist in speakers' mental lexicons.

Gibbs (1993) attempted to prove that the dead metaphor view of idioms was incorrect; he provided evidence to prove his statement, and considered that there were many idioms that were metaphorically alive. Gibbs' (1993) arguments bring into play the issue of figurative language: figurative language use and comprehension. Gibbs (1993) discussed the reasons that scholars assumed that all idioms were dead metaphors, and demonstrated that metaphorical concepts influenced people's understanding of idioms. He provided some examples of idiomatic expressions that were considered to be dead, but which were based on conceptual metaphors. He explained that the dead metaphor view of idioms could be traced to the confusion between dead and conventional metaphors proposed by some scholars. In order to consider an idiomatic expression to be a metaphor, we need to reconstruct the process whereby the original metaphor was understood. As Gibbs (1993) stated, speakers' intuitions are not sufficient for this reconstruction to take place. Some idioms are perceived as dead metaphors even though their roots are metaphorically alive. Idioms originate from metaphors, the metaphoricity process is wrongly seen as finished, but in fact their roots are metaphorically alive.

Another issue that Gibbs (1993) addressed was the non-compositionality of idiomatic expressions, which means that these expressions cannot be subject to syntactic operations because these syntactic and morphological operations will trigger a loss of meaning. These idioms display a certain tense marking, and any change in tense will trigger a change in meaning. They cannot undergo the passivation process without a change in meaning. From a lexical point of view, idioms appear to be lexically frozen. Based on recent evidence, Gibbs (1993) considered that not all idioms should be treated as belonging to the same category, as some idioms cannot be decomposable, while others can. There are idiomatic expressions that can be broken into components, which can contribute to the figurative interpretation of idioms; there are also idioms that cannot be broken into constituent parts, and abnormally decomposable idioms.

Gibbs (1993) considered people's intuitions to be a factor that played an important role in the lexical flexibility of these idioms, as well as in their comprehension. Gibbs (1993) proposed the analysis of idioms from the cognitive linguistics perspective, which entailed discarding the dead metaphor view of idioms

and embracing the conceptual metaphor perspective on idioms. In Gibbs's (1993) view, the figurative meaning of an idiomatic expression can be understood through conceptual metaphors. More specifically, the entailments between the SD and the TD can prompt the understanding of a metaphor-based idiom. Gibbs (1993) summarised this by stating that embracing the dead metaphor view of idioms meant neglecting the study of idioms in favour of other tropes.

Gibbs (1993) proposed another way of examining idioms through the lens of cognitive linguistics. This means that idioms must not be viewed as dead metaphors, but must be viewed as figurative entities that are motivated by the metaphorical entailments between the SD and the TD. Gibbs (1993) showed that in some cases the mappings between SD and TD are conventionalised. Gibbs (1993) concluded that the dead metaphor view of idioms and the cognitive linguistics one should not be seen as two competing theories.

Stock, Slack and Ortony (1993) proposed that idioms were based on the conceptual metaphors that motivated them. Gibbs (1993) explained the relationship that is established between idioms and metaphors; in his view, the metaphoricity of idioms was derived from the figurative relationship that is established between the constituent parts of the idioms. He then highlighted that, in analysable idioms, the constituent parts share the same semantic field as their figurative referents (Gibbs 1993: 66). These constituent parts point to different knowledge domains; in turn, these knowledge domains are conceptualised in terms of metaphor. In brief, the metaphoricity of these idioms is the result of the conceptual metaphors to which the constituent parts of an idiom point. Based on linguistic analyses, Gibbs (1993) highlighted the fact that idioms do not exist as separate semantic units within the lexicon, but reflect coherent systems of metaphorical concepts instead. In the light of this explanation, some idiomatic expressions can be motivated by a conceptual metaphor; in this regard, Gibbs (1993: 67) explained that idioms make sense in the way that they do because they are motivated by conceptual knowledge that is metaphorical.

Glucksberg (2001: 68) defined idioms as "a subset of the fixed expressions in a language community" and pinpointed the main characteristic of idioms "a construction whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents". Glucksberg (2001) analysed idioms in terms of their compositionality, and highlighted that the degree of compositionality varied greatly among idioms, with some being fully compositional and others not being compositional at all and having syntactic properties. According to Glucksberg (2001), some idioms have arbitrary meanings; their meaning cannot be generated from the syntax and semantics of the idiom's constituents, while others behave like metaphors. Because the literal meanings of such idioms are closely related to their idiomatic meanings, such idioms behave like comparable literal expressions (Glucksberg, 2001: 72-73). Glucksberg proposed a classification of idioms according to the criteria of dimension and compositionality, thus differentiating among noncompositional idioms, partially compositional idioms and fully compositional idioms. The classification according to the dimension of transparency distinguishes: compositional-opaque idioms,

compositional and transparent, quasi-metaphorical idioms, which convey meaning via their allusional content. Glucksberg (2001) observed that compositional idioms were generally more flexible than non-compositional ones.

Cacciari's (1993) study presented an extremely comprehensive study of idioms, as it addressed the structure of metaphors, as well as the processing and interpreting of metaphors by both adults and children. In approaching the issue of literal meaning, Cacciari (1993) combined several perspectives that pinpointed the literal meaning. When she discussed idiomatic language, Cacciari positioned idiomatic language as an anchor for defining metaphorical language. Cacciari (1993) highlighted Gibbs's (1984) theory regarding the 'literal language hypothesis'. By drawing on psycholinguistic studies of literal and figurative comprehension, Gibbs showed that the same processes were in operation in the comprehension of both figurative and literal types of language (Gibbs, 1984, as cited in Cacciari, 1993: 29). Cacciari (1993) also addressed the issue of the compositionality of idioms by highlighting that idioms are so internally heterogeneous that the generalisation of one characteristic to cover the entire class of expressions can be extremely problematic.

Kovecses (2010) approached idioms in relation to metaphors. He exemplified the relationship established between idioms and conceptual metaphors by resorting to the SD of fire. Kovecses (2010) explained that the connections between our conceptual system enable us to understand one domain (fire) in terms of another: anger or love. Kovecses referred to Gibbs (1994) who had found that conceptual metaphors had psychological reality and that they motivated idiomatic expressions. Kovecses (2010) highlighted that what determined the general meaning of an idiom is the TD of the conceptual metaphor that is applicable to the idiom at hand, and that the more precise meaning of the idiom depended on the particular conceptual mappings that applied to the idiom. Kovecses (2010) also dealt with the interpretation and processing of idioms by the students, highlighting that exploiting awareness of metaphor as a channel for learning is advantageous for students' in-depth comprehension and their retention of the meaning of figuratively used words and phrases.

Gentner and Bowdle (2008: 109) defined analogy as a mapping between two represented situations in which common relational structure is aligned. This alignment contains one-to-one correspondence between the mapped elements in the base and target: linguistic metaphors in the composition of an idiomatic expressions fall into this category. Gentner and Bowdle (2008) mentioned a second category: the analogy, the process of comparison, A is (like) B, idioms clustered around conceptual categories fall into that category. Gentner and Bowdle (2008) also addressed the issue of novel and conventional metaphors and the fact that this categorisation could also be extended to idioms.

On the basis of this categorisation I identified novel idioms: **inflationary horse**, as well as conventional ones: **the lion's share**. Idioms relying on metaphors convey meaning by means of similarity and association, idioms relying on metonymies are interpreted on the basis of substitution, quasi-metaphorical idioms

rely on allusion. Idioms lacking metaphoricality are conventionalised. The issue of demetaphorisation/conventionalisation of language is approached by Coşeriu, who stated that language uses its metaphoricality and becomes conventional. (Coşeriu, 2000-2001). This process of conventionalisation also affects idioms.

3 Methods

The analysis of the metaphorical load of the idioms used in the business genre was conducted based on a self-made, 600,000-word corpus encompassing newspaper articles retrieved from British broadsheets: *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Independent*. The articles were collected between 2012 and 2016. The identification of the idioms was facilitated by LancsBox, and consisted of retrieving headwords belonging to different SDs. While the concordancing programme identified the headwords, the figurative meanings were identified via manual processing. The analysis was considered to be complete when complemented by manual coding, which can establish whether the words are used literally or figuratively.

4 Findings

I followed Cacciari's (1993) taxonomy to categorise the idioms. The main issues when analysing idioms pertain to comprehending their meaning in terms of opacity and transparency. The idea of a continuum from opacity to transparency led Cacciari (1993) to hypothesise the existence of four possible types of idioms:

1. completely opaque idioms;
2. retrospectively transparent idioms; that is, the idiom becomes transparent once the reader either knows the meaning or is reminded of the episode or setting in which the idiom originated;
3. directly transparent idioms: The senses of the words lead to the idiomatic meaning of the string; and
4. figuratively transparent idioms, which are idioms that are composed of other idioms or parts of other idioms (Cacciari, 1993: 39).

Idioms pose difficulties in terms of interpreting their meanings, as there are many approaches available. Thus, idioms can be interpreted on the basis of analogy, metaphorical entailments between the SD and the TD, metonymy, allusion, comparison or personification, all of which can facilitate the metaphorical entailments of some idioms.

I identified two cases of compositionality, namely semantically unproductive and semantically productive idioms. Some of the idioms in the corpus supported the hypothesis of non-compositionality, as no modifier or quantifier was added to the idiom. However, there were also semantically productive idioms that were variants of their original forms. Glucksberg (1993) highlighted that semantically productive idioms may appear in everyday conversations and in the

media (Glucksberg, 1993:8). This theory was promoted based on examples collected from a corpus, and mainly characterised nominal idiomatic expressions.

(3) ‘Stella Creasy, Labour’s shadow minister for competition and consumer affairs, said the FCA “must commit to continually reviewing and reducing this cap and as well as ensuring it covers the whole of the industry to make sure none of these **legal loan sharks** slip through their net.”’ (*Financial Times*, 15 July, 2014).

In the example above, the adjectival modification via the adjective *legal* entails a change in the entire meaning of the string; as the meaning of the adjective *legal* contrasts with the features of sharks, the ironic implication is obvious.

Semantic productivity is obtained by adding modifiers; that is, quantifiers and intensifiers. The most frequent modifiers that I identified in the corpus were indefinite articles, numerals, open-class quantifiers and adjectives:

(4) ‘But investors already **kiss a lot of frogs** that don’t turn into princes by screening quoted stocks they never buy, or which do not rise’. (*Financial Times*, 16 December, 2015).

The use of the open-class quantifier *a lot of* does not modify the meaning of the idiomatic expression, but includes the idiom in the category of productive idioms.

(5) ‘**Five elephants in the economic room** that are ignored by all parties. There are five major economic issues that no one is talking about: tax simplification, the euro crisis, robotics, our trade deficit and an ageing workforce’ (*The Telegraph*, 19 April, 2015).

In this example, the cardinal numeral *five* acts as a quantifier without entailing any change in the meaning of the idiom, while the use of the adjective *economic* specifies the context.

In the instances identified in the corpus, the adjectival modifier played three roles:

1. to intensify the literal meaning of the idiomatic expression;
2. to act as a metalinguistic comment about the idiom; and
3. to act as a pragmatic element.

The latter case is illustrated in the example below, in which the adjective *predatory* refers to a salient feature of sharks that pertains to the category of hunting animals:

(6) ‘Lord Freud, minister for welfare reform, said credit unions offered an alternative to vulnerable people and were the antidote to **predatory loan sharks** or high-interest lenders’. (*Financial Times*, 16 April, 2013).

The use of the adjective *predatory* has a pragmatic effect, as it intensifies the meaning of the idiom **loan shark**, which is transparent; that is, its meaning is easily understood based on the constituent elements. The metaphorical implication is rendered by the context, namely the analogy between the hunting animals and the role of lenders in the banking environment.

The above examples do not pose difficulties in understanding or interpreting idioms by non-native speakers, the transparency of the constituent elements ensures the understanding of the idiomatic expressions. Two mechanisms are involved in both cases: antithesis in the **legal loan shark**, and analogy and association in the **predatory loan shark**; as shown above, lenders are compared to hunting animals and the lenders are associated with features pertaining to hunting animals. All these arguments include this idiomatic expression in Cacciari’s (1993) fourth category of figuratively transparent idioms. Consequently, quantification can modify idiomatic expressions by extending or narrowing their meaning.

The sources of the metaphoricity of the idioms included:

1. semantic motivation;
2. cultural motivation;
3. the origin of the idiom; and
4. phonological motivation, which was usually realised via alliteration and assonance.

Semantic motivation relies on the use of linguistic metaphors; in other words, the idioms rely on linguistic metaphors or metonymy. Among the factors that assist in interpreting the meanings of the idioms, mention should be made of the context, as the business context facilitates the meaning of the idioms **golden goose** and **white elephant**.

My findings revealed that animal idioms were the most frequent and productive. Idioms used in business contexts belonged to the following SDs: animals, games and sports, weather and natural phenomena.

1. Animal idioms

Animal idioms appeared to mainly be governed by transparency; most of them were semantically transparent, and three categories were identified: semantically transparent idioms, quasi-metaphorical idioms and retrospectively transparent idioms.

A. Semantically transparent idioms

Idioms falling into this category include **boardroom dinosaur**, **sitting duck**, **chicken-and-egg**, **by/at the snail's pace**, they rely on the principle of analogy; that is, the salient features of animals and the animals' behaviour are mapped onto people, investors, entrepreneurs and other actors in the business arena.

(7) 'Business review 2014: **boardroom dinosaurs** and corporate ghosts'. (*The Guardian*, 26 December, 2014)

(8) 'Portugal would be **a sitting duck**'. (*The Telegraph*, 02 February, 2015)

(9) 'lack of progress procuring projects is matched **by the snail's pace** in attracting private sector investment'. (*The Telegraph*, 01 January, 2013), the idiom is transparent and is based on analogy, snails are known for their being slow.

(10) '**The cat-and-mouse game** of companies issuing earnings guidance and then trying to beat it is often ridiculed as meaningless by academics and corporate-governance types.' (*The Economist*, 20 April, 2013). The transparency of the idiom is obvious, semantically it refers to games and sports.

B. Quasi-metaphorical idioms

Quasi-metaphorical idioms convey meaning via their allusional content, examples which fall into this category include: **canaries in the coal mine**, **rabbit hole**, **frog-kissing**, **cash cow**, **black swan**, **game of chicken**, **golden goose**, **cat-and-mouse game**, **rat hole**. The allusion that they trigger in the reader's mind represents the most powerful tool for understanding and interpreting quasi-metaphorical animal idioms. They can either encapsulate the wisdom in proverbs and fairy tales, or their meaning can be based on the allusion to fairy tales; in the case of **golden goose**, **black swan** and **kissing a frog**, the allusion to fairy tales is obvious.

In other cases (**black swan**), the schemata activated in the comprehension and motivation of idioms is the antithesis, as the bound collocation **black swan** is motivated by antithesis.

(11) 'RBS gives funds **frog-kissing opportunity**'. (*Financial Times*, 16 December, 2015)

(12) 'The oil industry is the **golden goose** there and they know that it has to be protected,' said Mr Ferrier'. (*The Telegraph*, 27 July, 2015).

Two mechanisms are involved in the motivation of the figurative meaning of the idiom the **golden goose**, namely allusion because it refers to a profit-generating situation (its meaning is based on the allusion to the fairy tale) and analogy, as a goose is a large animal that provides a significant quantity of meat.

(13) 'This was a **black swan**, this implied the collapse of the Italian economy and even in that extreme hypothesis only two banks had capital shortfalls that were not even below Basel requirements,' said Giovanni Sabatini, director-general of the Italian Banking Association'. (*Financial Times*, 27 October, 2014)

(14) 'The European Central Bank last June became the first major central bank to head down the **rabbit hole** and now imposes a levy of 0.2 per cent a year on deposits that eurozone banks park in its coffers'. (*Financial Times*, June 1, 2015).

The allusion to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is obvious, and it is this allusion that facilitates the interpretation of the idiom. The idiom **rat hole** is based on the same principle:

(15) 'This is all a far cry from the dusty, cramped "**rat hole**" the airline inhabited for decades before its move earlier this year, according to Howard Millar, its deputy chief executive and chief financial officer, who steps down this month after nearly 23 years'. (*The Telegraph*, 30 November, 2014), and the analogy with the living habits of rats is extremely powerful.

C. Retrospectively transparent idioms: **white elephant, dog days**.

(16) 'But there remains a danger that, even if no further technical hitches arise, the enormous project will end up being a **white elephant**'. (*The Economist*, July 6, 2013). The origin of the idiom is rooted in Siam, where a white elephant was considered to be a sacred animal; it was not allowed to work despite generating huge costs to keep. The kings of Siam used to give white elephants to people who had displeased them, thus ruining them financially, as the receivers needed to spend huge sums on their white elephants. The idiom makes an allusion to Siam and refers to a situation that is not financially profitable.

(17) '**Dog days** for Zynga'. (*The Economist*, 6 July, 2013). The origin of the idiom is rooted in the Latin phrase *dies canicularis*, and currently has a metaphorical meaning; it refers to a period of inactivity and encompasses the period from July to early September.

With regard to their compositionality, animal idioms fall into two main categories:

1. idioms in which constituent elements can be mapped individually, such as **loan shark, sitting duck, bulls and bears, bull market, bear market** and **boardroom dinosaur**; and

2. idioms in which the constituent elements cannot be mapped individually, such as **a frog-kissing opportunity, white elephant** and **inflationary horse**.

In the first category, the lexical units **bull** and **bear** proved to be highly productive constituent elements, as they yielded the following compounds: **bull market, bulls and bears, bull run** and **bear market**, their plural forms yield: **Euro bulls, China**

bulls, closet bulls, New York Red Bulls. In general, bulls and bears are associated with markets and investors; that is, the salient features of bulls and bears are mapped onto investors. The adjectives *bullish* and *bearish* retain the same meanings, and are mainly used in market-related or financial contexts such as **bullish securities, bullish indicators, bullish investors** and **bearish investors**. There were innumerable examples of idiomatic expressions which comprised the headwords **bull** and **bear**.

The sources of the metaphoricity of the idioms falling into the category of animal idioms included:

1. semantic motivation;
2. cultural motivation;
3. historical motivation, or the origin of the idiom, such as **canaries in a coal mine, a white elephant, dog days, and a feather in the cap**;

(18) 'Ian Fletcher at HIS Automotive says even the smaller deals now represent significant investment: "Unfortunately our homegrown industry isn't as big as it once was, so **it's a feather in the cap**.'" (*The Guardian*, 24 October, 2015), it conveys the meaning of achievement and makes allusion to hunters' and soldiers' habits of sticking a feather in their caps in order to show their success or achievements.

(19) 'Yet these humble entities turned out to be the proverbial **canaries in the coal mine**: their spasm was one of the first signs of the impending credit crunch'. (*The Economist*, December 19, 2015).

4. phonological motivation, which is usually realised via figures of speech, such as prototypical alliteration. The idiomatic expression **cash cow** is based on alliteration as well as on an analogy with the features of a cow, mainly its eating habits:

(20) 'Big Blue's former PC division is now a **cash cow**, Mr Yang declares, smiling broadly. So too is the Chinese market, where the firm has a vast distribution network and universal brand awareness: "We have two **cash cows**.'" (*The Economist*, 24 May, 2014).

(21) 'Some companies are waiting for the RSPO brand to become better known by consumers, but of course that is a bit of **a chicken and egg situation**,' says Morley.' (*The Guardian*, 12 December, 2014). This idiom is used figuratively in order to refer to the origin of a situation and it is rooted in the proverb: "Which comes first the chicken or the egg?"

Animal idioms were both verbal and nominal, and bound collocations prevailed within this category. Analogy plays an important role in nominal animal idioms, while personification characterises verbal animal idioms:

(22) 'Investors such as pension funds had been **egging** the banks **on** to make more profits by taking more risk'. (*The Guardian*, 30 September, 2015)

(23) 'Executives would regularly join tax avoidance experts from other banks for a "**cow-eating**" club to eat and drink to excess.' (*The Guardian*, 11 February, 2013) The idiom also makes reference to the eating habits of the cow.

Idioms comprising the headword *dog* rely on analogy and allusion, and display different degrees of metaphoricity. Comparison and allusion are involved in the following example retrieved from the corpus:

(24) 'Sometimes described **as sheep**, they may be better thought of as **spring lambs**: skittish and quick to take flight.' (*Financial Times*, 15 February, 2015).

The semantic class of animal idioms displayed a high degree of metaphoricity and linguistic creativity, and proved to be productive. Examples of animal idioms that displayed linguistic creativity, productivity and metaphoricity included **legal/predatory shark, inflationary horse, gold bug**.

(25) 'Mr O'Neill said the "trillion dollar question" is whether the Fed and fellow central banks will wake up one day to find that the **inflationary horse** has already bolted.' (*The Telegraph*, 24 November, 2015).

(26) 'Tumbling price has **goldbugs** nervous. **Goldbugs** are nervous. After a decade-long bull run the yellow metal has this week tumbled to its lowest levels since July, more than \$300 down from a more than \$1,900-an-ounce record high of 2011.' (*Financial Times*, 21 February, 2013).

(27) 'High-frequency traders referred to their prey as "**whales**", "**low-hanging fruit**", "**dumb money**" or "dinner". (*The Guardian*, 7 June, 2014). The nominal idioms in this example were used figuratively and had an evaluative function.

(28) 'In fact, she thinks, the lack of talented staff is "the biggest issue most organisations are facing. You have **to fish in a bigger pond** to fill those gaps. So of course you should look at women too".' (*The Guardian*, 21 July, 2015)

Most of the animal idioms can be clustered around the category of quantity metaphors: to egg on, to flock, flocking, swarm:

(29) 'The current **flock of competitors** caught on to the new environment early on.' (*The Economist*, 6 December, 2014).

Idiomatic expressions are motivated by conceptual metaphors: Animal metaphors are conceptualised in terms of companies, markets and investors.

The conceptual categories underlying this semantic class are:

1. COMPANIES ARE ANIMALS:

(30) 'These firms are the **big dogs** of private detection'. (*The Economist*, 5 January, 2013), it makes analogy to the role of dogs as guardians.

2. MARKETS ARE ANIMALS: In general, idioms comprising **bull** and **bear** can be included in this category: **bull markets, bear markets**.

(31) 'After hitting an intraday high on May 23 of 15,942.6, Japan's main index fell as low as 12,548.2 in today's trading, a fall of 21pc, meaning it entered a **bear market** - widely defined as a fall of 20pc or more'. (*The Telegraph*, 7 June, 2013)

(32) 'But with the US Federal Reserve about to raise rates, investors are growing concerned that the six-year **bull market** in credit is about to come to a juddering halt'. (*The Telegraph*, 8 December, 2015).

(33) 'This week a report showing a slump in China's imports and exports in November was read differently by **bulls and bears**'. (*The Economist*, 12 December, 2015).

(34) 'Even China's **bullish securities** regulators admitted markets had become frothy before they turned down'. (*The Guardian*, 8 July, 2015).

3. PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS: Loan sharks and variants thereof, such as **legal sharks** and **predatory sharks**, fall into this category. All the idioms pertaining to this category were characterised by the fact that humans based on features from animals' behaviour.

4. INVESTORS ARE ANIMALS:

(35) 'Some big asset managers are seeing turmoil in the corporate debt market as a buying opportunity, betting that **bearish investors** such as Carl Icahn and Jeffrey Gundlach are overly pessimistic about junk bonds'. (*Financial Times*, 16 December, 2015).

(36) 'But looking ahead, it is likely that **the bears** will cast an effective shadow for the first time in a while'. (*Financial Times*, 8 December, 2014).

(37) 'And while Indian brides may always favour the metal it is the retail investor who really powers a bullion **bull run**, usually via gold exchange traded funds'. (*Financial Times*, 1 October, 2014)

(38) 'While it's no longer a taboo to be positive on the euro, most are what I call "**closet bulls**" - that is, they have not yet deployed real money,' he argues'. (*Financial Times*, 14 January, 2013)

The metaphorical implications lie in the association of the market and of investors with bulls and bears; both bulls and bears are powerful animals, and the analogy between these animals and the movements of the market is the key to interpreting idioms containing bull(s) or bear(s). The meanings of these two idiomatic expressions are fixed.

5. BUSINESS IS WAR:

(39) 'Germany will have to yield in dangerous **game of chicken** with Greece' (*The Telegraph*, 2 February, 2015).

(40) Buffett has said that Berkshire Hathaway's size makes meaningful acquisitions increasingly difficult to come by and has described finding such deals as "**elephant hunting**". (*The Guardian*, 10 August, 2015).

The idiom **elephant hunting** refers to the practice of targeting profitable customers and rich investors; it describes a difficult situation and it is based on an analogy with the hunting of elephants.

Variant idioms in this category displayed language creativity: They either used words that did not match (**inflationary horse**) which was a semantically anomalous combination or they were based on original idioms; for example, **spring lamb** is based on the original idiom **spring chicken**, **inflationary horse** is based on the original idiom **dark horse**.

The examples pertaining to the category of animal idioms were governed by transfer, analogy, the animals' features were transferred to the meanings of idioms.

2. Idioms containing parts of the body

This category of idioms was semantically and lexically very rich, as body parts were used creatively to conceptualise the business arena; it consisted of an equal ratio of verbal and nominal idioms. The main characteristics included transparency: **to bring to one's knees**, **to turn a blind eye**, **breakneck growth** and **to live from hand to mouth**; with regard to figurative use, **to get one's fingers burnt** involved compositionality.

(41) 'The president of the European parliament, Martin Schulz, reflecting the deep anger felt in Brussels at the erratic negotiating tactics adopted by Tsipras and Varoufakis, said Greek voters should blame Tsipras **for bringing the country to its knees**.' (*The Guardian*, 2 July, 2015)

(42) 'Some of these idioms are transparent: A veteran EU diplomat in Athens said the Troika is so determined to extract money that it has **turned a blind eye** to some of the dubious deals tailored to the interests of powerful oligarchs.' (*The Telegraph*, 28 February, 2015).

(43) 'Given this tendency, China's long spell of **breakneck growth**—of more than 6% a year since 1977—already stands out.' (*The Economist*, 25 October, 2014).

(44) ‘As it turned out, such experiences were good preparation for life at Ryanair in the early days, when it had just six planes and **was living hand to mouth.**’ (*The Telegraph*, 30 November, 2014).

(45) ‘Starbucks **got its fingers burnt** by the reaction and was forced to admit it did not invent the Duffin.’ (*The Telegraph*, 8 October, 2013)

The nominal idioms displayed a high degree of conventionality.

(46) ‘Brazil and India are catching up, though with some **teething troubles**: India’s offset rules have been rewritten since it embraced offsets in 2005, but remain confusing.’ (*The Economist*, 25 May, 2013).

(47) ‘Here’s hoping that Fosun’s retreat from Kleinwort does not give fellow Chinese investors **cold feet.**’ (*Financial Times*, 21 December, 2015).

(48) ‘The surest of historical **rules of thumb** implies that 20 years from now, China’s economy, measured by market exchange rates, will probably still be smaller than America’s.’ (*The Economist*, 25 October, 2014).

The headword **nose** proved to very flexible and was included in the composition of nominal idioms and bound collocations, such as **hard-nosed+** noun, as in **hard-nosed investors, hard-nosed executives** and **at nose-bleed level**.

(49) ‘With equities already **at nose-bleed levels** it is hard to know exactly where to seek refuge.’ (*The Telegraph*, 24 November 2015).

(50) ‘The soonest the licences will be awarded is in early 2014. So his successor will make the call, assisted by a committee of wise men, and—perhaps—with politicians **breathing down his neck.**’ (*The Economist*, 25 May, 2013).

(51) ‘We repaired the bank’s balance-sheet and **fought the system tooth and nail** on governance,” he says, “but the system fought back.”’ (*The Economist*, 4 January, 2014).

Phonologically motivated idioms within this category included **fleet-of-foot**, based on alliteration.

(52) ‘Allied to Google’s fearless ambition, and its increasingly strategic approach to investment, is also the **fleet-of-foot** behaviour that will underpin its future growth. Google might shoot past the \$1000-a-share mark before the year is out.’ (*The Telegraph*, 29 June, 2013).

3. Idioms that contained SDs derived from games

The idioms within this category mainly referred semantically to competition and success; they relied on verbs and made use of lexis drawn from the primary domains of games and gambling, such as **be ahead of the game, take the eye off the ball, and a level playing field**. Idioms in this category also made reference to games in general, or to specific games such as boxing and wrestling:

(53) ‘Yet, after weeks **on the ropes**, African Bank, the biggest purveyor of such loans, has had to be rescued from near-bankruptcy.’ (*The Economist*, 16 August, 2014), used figuratively the idiom refers to imminent collapse.

The idea of competition is rendered via the idiom **be ahead of the game**:

(54) ‘Moreover, in a world with rising demand for ethical products and services, organisations that focus on fulfilling human and ecological needs **are ahead of the game.**’ (*The Guardian*, 1 October, 2014).

Idioms using lexis from the repertoire of games included:

(55) ‘**To hit that jackpot** he will have to pull off a hat-trick.’ (*The Economist*, 6 July, 2013)

Compared to animal metaphors, this category was less frequent in the corpus, but was found to be equally productive and gave rise to variants based on original

idioms; for example, **to widen the goalposts** relies on the original idiom **to move the goalposts**:

(56) ‘After bowing to political pressure, the Bank of Japan said it would buy potentially unlimited amounts of government bonds and **widen the goalposts** on inflation to allow prices to rise 2 per cent instead of 1 per cent.’ (*Financial Times*, 22 January, 2013)

The variant idiom **have eyes on the ball** relies on the original idiom **keep eyes on the ball**:

(57) ‘Kelly does make some observations about individuals involved at the time. He takes issue with an assertion by Neville Richardson, who ran the Britannia and then the enlarged Co-op bank business until July 2011, that the bank was in good shape when he left and the management must **have taken their eyes of the ball** following his departure. “My view is that the board did not **have its eye on the ball** in the first place,” said Kelly.’ (*The Guardian*, 30 April, 2014)

It is worth mentioning the capacity of nominal idioms to collocate with multiple verbs. One such example is the nominal idiom **level playing field**, which proved to be highly productive, mainly due to its ability to collocate with verbs. Thus, the analysis yielded many combinations of verbs, which resulted in the following collocations: **to compete, to be, the need for, to create, to ask for** and **to call for**:

(58) ‘He wants other countries to raise their standards of labour, environmental and intellectual-property protection so that American companies will be able **to compete on a level playing field** and, perhaps, pay decent middle-class wages once again.’ (*The Economist*, 12 October, 2013)

(59) ‘All we are asking for is **a level playing field**.’ (*Financial Times*, 24 November, 2015)

(60) ‘He called for **a level playing field** on tax to ensure retailers with stores could compete with Amazon, which minimises its UK tax bill by routing sales through Luxembourg.’ (*The Guardian*, 5 June 2013).

(61) ‘A group of challengers, led by Paul Lynam, chief executive of Secure Trust Bank, lobbied the Treasury in September over the capital disadvantage and **the need for a level playing field** for new banks.’ (*Financial Times*, 24 November, 2015)

The noun phrase **level playing field** turns into the variant verbal phrase **to level the playing field** via conversion of the original idiom:

(62) ‘Andrea Leadsom, the City minister, said the Coalition had introduced reforms to “**level the playing field**” and was committed to improving competition.’ (*The Telegraph*, 23 November, 2014)

The reference to car racing in the idiom **be in the driving seat** conceptualises companies as vehicles.

COMPANIES ARE VEHICLES:

(63) ‘Perhaps, but with the notoriously bureaucratic Tokyo side **in the driving seat** (Mr Saito is the TSE’s former head) many fear the deal will simply produce a bigger target for low-cost rivals to knock over.’ (*The Economist*, 5 January, 2013).

This category of idioms displayed a decreased level of metaphoricality, as the idioms were more conventionalised and their computing was immediately available to readers. Idioms referring to competition conceptualised the business arena as a playing field and as a driving force.

4. Idioms with SDs in agriculture

Many idioms that are used in business English are semantically realised via words belonging to the SD of agriculture, such as **to bear fruit, to see the fruits** and **to**

harvest. This category is characterised by the prevalence of verbal idioms, with the collocational power of verbs resulting in figurative idioms.

In most cases, the figurative meaning mapped onto the primary meaning, which facilitated the computing and interpretation of these idioms, such as idiomatic expressions containing the verbs **to harvest**, **to weed out** and **to reap** when used figuratively:

(64) ‘Banks are under pressure **to weed out suspicious transactions**, but they are drowning in data.’ (*The Economist*, 5 January, 2013).

The idioms falling into this category conveyed the meaning of fertility:

(65) ‘“The insurance industry **is brimming with fertile soil**. The room for growth is gigantic,” said analysts at Huatai Securities.’ (*Financial Times*, 13 December, 2015)

of economic growth and wealth:

(66) ‘I need to remind foreign pharmaceutical companies that because they occupy a leading position in the industry and **reap huge amounts of commercial profits**, they should also bear a great responsibility to society and the public.’ (*The Guardian*, 15 July, 2013), and of success and achievement: to bear fruit, to see fruit.

A characteristic of this category is compositionality, which is due to the capacity of the idioms to be modified by intensifiers:

(67) ‘And that’s before anyone starts talking about new runways in the South East, which the Government **has kicked into the long grass** – or at least until after the election.’ (*The Telegraph*, 1 January, 2013).

The idiomatic expression **a hard nut to crack** was modified by the comparative *harder* in order to convey a higher degree of intensity:

(68) ‘But the rival may be a **harder nut to crack**.’ (*The Telegraph*, 20 November, 2015)

Another characteristic is their transparency, which governs the meaning of nominal idioms:

(69) ‘Moreover, this impressive performance is the result of the sort **of root-and-branch reform** most euro-zone countries have shirked.’ (*The Telegraph*, 6 December, 2014); **Root-and-branch** is characterised by semantic relations and metaphorical correspondences between the components of the idiom and the meaning of the idiom.

(70) ‘This outsourcing model is now used for nearly 60% of farmland in Argentina, where strong property-rights protection and inheritance laws make it **ripe for leasing**.’ (*The Economist*, 4 January, 2014).

The category comprises quasi-metaphorical idioms (Glucksberg, 1993), as their meaning can be mapped based on the allusional content. The meaning of the nominal idiomatic expression **a bowl of cherries** cannot be understood based on the meanings conveyed by its constituent elements:

(71) ‘Life is hardly **a bowl of cherries** for most small entrepreneurs trying to enter the Middle Kingdom.’ (*The Telegraph*, 18 October, 2014).

It is part of the saying **life is not a bowl of cherries**, which has been modified for stylistic purposes; the quantifier *hardly* that replaces the negation *not* conveys pragmatic contextual implications.

Idioms which use lexis from the SD of agriculture can be grouped according to the categories: ECONOMY IS A PLANT, FINANCES ARE FRUIT.

This category of idioms outnumbered the other categories in terms of the frequency of personifications and figurative uses. As is clear based on the examples collected

from the corpus, this category of idioms included both metaphorical and conventionalised idioms.

5. Idioms referring to money

The idioms referring to money displayed the following characteristics: metaphorical motivation, phonological motivation, figurative uses and transparency. Moreover, they were encountered in different contexts, such as with reference to profit, debts, prices and investments. Phonologically motivated idioms rely on assonance:

(72) ‘They didn’t have the fiscal or investment discipline to invest in their industry or save for a rainy day when they were **flush with cash**.’ (*The Guardian*, 3 December, 2014).

This category of idioms includes idioms in which the figurative meaning is derived from the literal meaning;

(73) ‘A ‘flash crash’ can knock a trillion dollars off the stock market in minutes as elite traders **fleece the little guys**.’ (*The Guardian*, 7 June, 2014).

and it also includes examples in which the literal meaning is different from the idiomatic meaning:

(74) ‘**Eye watering prices** are paid for companies with less than 50 employees using a “this time it’s different” formula based on clicks, eyes, views, or active members to persuade investors to part with their savings.’ (*The Telegraph*, 9 February, 2015).

The literal meaning of the idiomatic phrase **money-pit** is different from its idiomatic meaning:

(75) ‘Air India, the state-owned carrier, is a **money-pit**.’ (*The Economist*, 29 November, 2014).

Literal idioms pertaining to money included **tight fist** and **money-pit**:

(76) ‘Unlock these **tight-fisted** corporate treasuries, and apparently many of our problems would be over.’ (*The Telegraph*, 25 February, 2013).

Metaphorically motivated idioms conceptualise money/cash as wealth.

MONEY IS WEALTH

Nominal idiomatic expressions, such as **mountains of cash**, **mountains of debt**, **money-spinner** and **nest egg** conceptualise money as wealth. The role of idiomatic expressions encompassed within this category is to express exaggeration, as in **cash mountain** and **mountain of unpaid debt**:

(77) ‘Forests of newly built but nearly abandoned apartment complexes with names such as Fortune Plaza and Golden Riverside ring central Yuncheng while, on the outskirts of town, the district’s largest steel mill has gone bust, leaving **mountains of unpaid debt** and nearly 10,000 idle workers.’ (*Financial Times*, 16 April, 2014).

(78) ‘Coalition ministers too regularly cite the fabled corporate “**cash mountain**” as one of the chief barriers to growth.’ (*The Telegraph*, 25 February, 2013)

(79) ‘Although fares on the Underground are now among the most expensive of any metro system worldwide—a one-stop ride costs up to £4.50, or \$7.34—the system is no **money-spinner**.’ (*The Economist*, 5 January, 2013)

(80) ‘Households with more than £1m of total net wealth are predominantly older, having had more years to build their **nest eggs**.’ (*Financial Times*, 18 December, 2015).

INVESTORS ARE ANGELS

This conceptual category is realised by means of the idioms **business angles**, **angel funding**:

(81) ‘There has also been a proliferation of new **business-angel networks**, venture capitalists, private-debt funds and crowdfunding platforms of increasing scale and variety.’ (*The Economist*, 16 August, 2014).

(82) ‘A growing number of companies are seeking crowdfunding investment in addition to other forms of finance such as venture capital or “**angel**” **funding**.’ (*Financial Times*, 20 February, 2015).

The idioms identified in this category differed from an inventory of idioms identified in dictionaries of idioms.

6. Idioms with SDs of weather and natural phenomena

Weather-related idioms are lexically realised via lexis from the repertoire of natural phenomena and weather, and their meanings are closely associated with the natural phenomena to which they refer. Idioms in this category display literal (**to calm a storm**), idiomatic (**to save for a rainy day**) and metaphorical meanings (**shifting sands**).

(83) ‘They didn’t have the fiscal or investment discipline to invest in their industry or **save for a rainy day** when they were flush with cash.’ (*The Guardian*, 3 December, 2014).

The metaphoricity of the idiom **shifting sands** lies in the use of the plural form of the noun *sand*, which implies the shift from abstract to concrete:

(84) ‘Dubai’s stockmarket. **Shifting sands**.’ (*The Economist*, 28 June, 2014).

This category is also characterised by a lack of variation, although stylistic variants of the idiom **the perfect storm** were found; the headword *storm* proved to be highly productive, as it formed part of many idiomatic expressions and collocations pertaining to money, economics, banking and finances: **the perfect storm**, **inflationary storm**, **inflation storm**, **to weather a storm** and **to calm a storm**.

All these variants represent extensions of **perfect storm**.

(85) ‘The **perfect inflation storm** is gathering. Andrew Oxlade on how savers are being forced to gamble with their money.’ (*The Telegraph*, 14 January, 2013).

(86) ‘Savers may face further years of “financial repression” as a perfect **inflationary storm** gathers.’ (*The Telegraph*, 14 January, 2013).

Idiomatic expressions which fall into this category are clustered around the following categories:

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE DISASTERS:

(87) ‘Chief executive Andy Clarke blamed the intensifying price war and a **blizzard of discount vouchers** for the deterioration.’ (*The Guardian*, 18 November, 2014).

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ARE WEATHER.

Within the same category, the verbal collocation **to weather a storm** clustered around weather-related idioms semantically makes reference to hard times:

(88) ‘Building societies had “**weathered the storm**” thanks to their strong reputations, she said, with their low-risk business models, deposit-based funding, high levels of capital and ethical outlook.’ (*The Financial Times*, 19 August, 2015)

7. Colour idioms

Lexically, some idiomatic expressions within this category referred to jobs and were mainly related to the rewards and benefits of the work done, such as **golden hello** and **golden goodbye**:

(89) ‘Shareholders will be given the right to hold binding votes on compensation of executives and directors. It could also see the banning of “**golden hellos**” and “**golden goodbyes**”.’ (*The Telegraph*, 2 March, 2013)

The idioms which belong to this category are transparent, their meaning relies on the meaning of the constituent elements:

(90) ‘Mr Hickey notes there has been a progressive increase, since the beginning of this year, in confidence among the **white-collar recruiter’s** City clients to hire people and among staff to move jobs.’ (*Financial Times*, 7 October, 2013)

(91) ‘**Silver workers** turning their backs on retirement’ (*The Telegraph*, 10 January, 2013)

Other idioms in this category refer to economic phenomena and display a negative connotation: black market, black economy:

(92) ‘Leo Melamed, the Chicago Merc’s chairman from 1968 to 1973, had learned firsthand about the value of currency trading from the **black markets** in Tokyo, where he lived briefly as a refugee from Nazi Germany.’ (*The Economist*, 11 May, 2013).

(93) ‘In Athens, officials reacted with barely disguised glee to the report, saying it confirmed that the price exacted for the €110bn (£93bn) emergency package was too high for a country beset by massive debts, tax evasion and a large **black economy**.’ (*The Guardian*, 5 June, 2013).

(94) ‘Egypt’s **black-hole** economy is potentially the kingdom’s most expensive foreign policy commitment.’ (*The Guardian*, 30 December, 2015).

The structure of the idioms in this category was colour adjective + noun, and their meaning was transparent: **silver worker**, **black market** and **golden parachute**. It comprised variant idioms, such as **black-hole economy**:

(95) ‘The government has slashed **red tape** and made more credit available to startup firms.’ (*The Economist*, 24 October, 2015).

This category encompasses conventional idioms that are mainly used in contexts pertaining to money, such as the case of (to be) **in the red** or **in the black**, which is connected to the accounting practice of using red and /or black in order to signal a loss or a positive situation for a company:

(96) ‘Although equities were **in the red** on Friday, their losses was not nearly as steep as the previous session when markets were roiled by the US Federal Reserve signalled it could start reining in stimulus measures this year.’ (*The Telegraph*, 21 June, 2013).

(97) ‘Welcome to the Alice in Wonderland world of negative interest rates, a topsy-turvy universe where central bankers are so alarmed at the prospect of weak inflation that they have cut borrowing costs below zero, in effect charging financial institutions to leave their accounts **in the black**.’ (*Financial Times*, 1 June, 2015).

A limited number of idioms were used figuratively within this category:

(98) ‘Financial changes are ways of moving in the air: Italian bankers, like their contemporaries in other countries, have a history of keenly negotiating their **golden parachutes**.’ (*Financial Times*, 1 October, 2013)

The idiomatic expressions which contained colours and referred to jobs relied on metonymy. According to Herschbert-Pierrot (2003):

La métonymie du vêtement peut servir de désignatif à une catégorie socio-professionnelle: au XIXe siècle on disait ainsi «les blouses» pour «les ouvriers» (par opposition à l’habit du bourgeois). Aujourd’hui on parle des «blouses blanches» pour qualifier les médecins, on peut désigner, dans l’industrie les

agents de maîtrise (par opposition au bleu de travail des ouvriers). (Herschberg Pierrot, 2003: 193)

8. Idioms referring to time

The idioms referring to time were transparent and were clustered around the conceptual category TIME IS MONEY:

(99) ‘That doesn’t sound like much, because the **blink of an eye** is 300ms.’ (*The Guardian*, 7 June, 2014).

(100) ‘But one of the big selling-points of boutique banks is **round-the-clock access**, often to senior executives.’ (*The Economist*, 6 December, 2014).

(101) ‘**There is no ticking clock of a finite life** and there is always a readily available pool of capital.’ (*Financial Times*, 4 January, 2015).

(102) ‘At Aviva, we need to be simple, understandable and **as predictable as a Swiss clock**,’ says Mr Wilson. Shareholders may worry that it proves more difficult than it looks.’ (*Financial Times*, 7 March, 2013)

As can be seen from the examples taken from the corpus, this category mainly comprised nominal idioms. The idiom **fly-by-night** is polysemous; the conventional idiom employing a literal meaning refers to a travelling entrepreneur, while the metaphorical one implies the meaning of entrepreneurs who appear and disappear rapidly and who cannot be trusted:

(103) ‘But with little government oversight and inexperienced clients, the sector’s reputation was tarnished by **fly-by-night operators** offering worthless degrees.’ (*The Economist*, 28 June, 2014).

9. Food idioms

This category was underrepresented in the corpus, the binomial **bread and butter** and the idiom **take something with a pinch of salt** were encountered.

(104) ‘A discussion on strategy inadvertently demonstrates the parlous state of the discipline that has provided McKinsey with its **bread and butter**.’ (*The Economist*, 6 September, 2014)

(105) ‘Quarterly sales figures should always **be taken with a pinch of salt**.’ (*The Telegraph*, 16 December, 2015)

10. Idioms containing musical instruments

Another category of underrepresented idioms was the one with the SD in musical instruments, both idioms identified in this category were conventional:

(106) ‘In the company founded by Thomas Edison in 1892, scientists and engineers increasingly found themselves **playing second fiddle** to the Masters of the Universe at the GE Capital division.’ (*The Economist*, 28 June, 2014)

(107) ‘While we do not like **to blow our own trumpet** too often, forgive us for recalling that we argued in 2009 interest rates could stay at 0.5pc for as long as five years in response to prolonged fiscal tightening, weak bank lending and a sluggish recovery.’ (*The Telegraph*, 6 March, 2014).

11. Miscellanea

Idioms expressing disagreement/ arguments can be clustered around the conceptual category BUSINESS IS WAR:

(108) ‘Traditional business thinking dictates that profit and purpose **are at odds** with each other, that doing good will cost the company money.’ (*The Guardian*, 28 August, 2014).

(109) ‘Greece and its creditors remain **at loggerheads** and time is running out to secure a deal before funding expires, yet investors in Europe appear remarkably relaxed.’ (*Financial Times*, 17 February, 2015)

Idioms which refer semantically to success and failure

The idiomatic expressions pertaining to this category were conventional and displayed literal meanings. Moreover, they were underrepresented in the corpus.

(110) ‘With the results season **in full swing**, a host of heavyweight earnings announcements once again drew the attention of dealers and analysts.’ (*The Telegraph*, 30 April, 2013).

(111) ‘Professions that stick with rigid salary structures lose talent to more flexible ones: one reason why America’s school system is in such a parlous state is that **high-flyers** refuse to join a profession in which the only way to get ahead is to get older.’ (*The Economist*, 25 October, 2014).

(112) ‘It’s a malaise we see in many companies and you don’t have to be very big **to fall into this trap**,” says Bill Fischer of IMD business school.’ (*Financial Times*, 27 February, 2015)

Idioms implying the meaning of negotiations

The idioms falling into this category had SDs in different repertoires; they were conventional idioms and could be interpreted easily. Their meanings were idiomatic:

(113) ‘The threat hanging over such creditors, which include senior bondholders, will allow banks to **drive a hard bargain** with them when offering to exchange bonds for shares.’ (*The Economist*, November 7th 2015)

(114) ‘Oxfam’s director of campaigns and policy, Ben Phillips, said: Britain is becoming a deeply divided nation, with a wealthy elite who are seeing their incomes spiral up, while millions of families are struggling **to make ends meet**.’ (*The Guardian*, 17 March, 2014).
and metaphorical:

(115) ‘He recalls working at a small company, early in his career, where the **bottleneck** was caused by a sales manager and a production general manager who endlessly circulated sales dockets back to each other’s desks. “My conclusion was you need two people to make a bureaucracy,” he says.’ (*Financial Times*, 27 February, 2015).

Idioms containing family members

Bound collocations that contain family members can be included in the category ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM: **sister company**, **infant industry** and **parent company**; the inanimate metaphor **sleeping partner** falls into the same conceptual category.

The analysis of the findings demonstrated that idioms should not be viewed as isolated semantic and lexical units. Idioms differ in terms of their behaviour: some idioms accept modifiers, other idioms cannot be modified. The modification of idiomatic expressions triggers the phenomena of productivity, composability, flexibility. Their metaphoricity lies in the figurative use of words, the use of words pertaining to different SDs and TDs, the use of abstract nouns in the composition of idioms, cultural motivation, historical motivation, constituents with metaphorical origins, and their capacity to be grouped according to a conceptual category. The corpus evidence revealed that the figures of speech embedded in idioms were: metaphors, assonance, alliteration: **cash cow**, **fat finger**, metonymic substitution: **silver workers**, **white-collar recruiter**, comparison: **as predictable as a Swiss clock**.

Their creativity lies in the exploitation of the figurative meanings of their components. Idioms can be used humorously (**closet bulls**), ironically (**big dogs**), and with the purpose of exaggerating (**mountains of unpaid debt**).

5 Conclusions

Idioms are deeply rooted in the culture and the history of a language; they reflect cultural phenomena as encapsulated by traditions, customs and proverbs. Idioms reflect cultural aspects, such as connections with fairy tales (**kissing a frog, black swan** and **golden goose**), connections to traditions and customs (**a feather in the cap**), and occupations that are characteristic of the UK, such as canaries in the coal mines; the use of lexis from sailing highlights idioms related to the geographical location of the UK. Idioms become transparent for the members of the linguistic community and opaque for foreign learners.

The analysis of the data demonstrated that, when used in the business genre, these idioms highlighted different conceptualisations of the business world and the actors within it. Some of the idioms conveyed metaphorical meanings due to their internal structure or to the linguistic metaphors or figures of speech on which they relied; others were part of a larger category, while others were culturally, historically or phonologically motivated.

The main mechanisms in the idioms that were identified in the corpus investigation were allusion, antithesis, analogy, transfer, substitution and figurative use. The collocations displayed idiomatic meaning (frequent in the corpus) and were divided into verbal and nominal collocations. The presence of these semantic categories of idioms in the business genre reflects the representations of the business arena, create stylistic effects, distil the message conveyed by journalists.

Some idioms were motivated by historical underpinnings, such as **white elephant, dog days** and **on the ropes**, while others had metaphorical underpinnings. As can be seen from the findings of the analysis, the roles of idioms in business jargone were to evaluate, to diagnose and to exaggerate. The idioms that are used in the business genre bring stylistic effects to the surface, exploit the resources of the language, display creativity and represent a good means of portraying different representations of the business arena.

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