

A Study of Selected English Business Idioms

Bachelor's thesis
2016



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur
akademický rok: 2015/2016

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Kristýna Štecová**
Osobní číslo: **H11819**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Studie vybraných anglických idiomů v obchodním jazyce**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Studium odborné lingvistické literatury a učebnic zaměřených na výuku obchodní angličtiny
Stanovení cílů práce
Interpretace idiomů a dotazníkové šetření o vnímání idiomů
Analýza vypořizovaných výsledků
Shrnutí výsledků práce

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Cruse, Alan. 2011. Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fernando, Chitra. 1996. Idioms and Idiomaticity. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Mark, and George Lakoff. 1980. "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language." Accessed November 7, 2015. <http://www.cse.buffalo.edu/rapaport/575/F01/lakoff.johnson80.pdf>.

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Yule, George. 2006. The Study of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

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Centrum jazykového vzdělávání

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

13. listopadu 2015

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

6. května 2016

Ve Zlíně dne 12. ledna 2016


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ABSTRAKT

Bakalářská práce se zabývá anglickými idiomy v obchodním jazyce. Práce předkládá výsledky kvalitativního průzkumu mezi lektory anglického jazyka z řad rodilých mluvčích a českých učitelů, kteří mají zkušenost s vedením hodin obchodní angličtiny. Popisuje to, jak ze své pozice vnímají problematiku výuky obchodních idiomů, jakým způsobem přistupují k jejich interpretaci a jaké jsou možnosti výkladu. Odpovědi obou skupin jsou porovnány a vyhodnoceny.

Klíčová slova: idiom, idiomatický jazyk, obchodní angličtina, učebnice obchodní angličtiny, jazyková úroveň

ABSTRACT

The bachelor thesis focuses on English business idioms. It presents results of qualitative survey carried out among Czech and English native speakers who work as English teachers and have experience with running business English classes. It describes their perception of English business idioms, approach towards their interpretation and possible ways of explanation in the class. Answers of both groups are compared and evaluated.

Keywords: idiom, idiomatic language, business English, business English textbooks, language level

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mgr. Hana Atcheson for her guidance, patience and valuable advice. I also want to express my gratitude to my colleagues who willingly agreed to contribute to the research carried out for the purposes of the present thesis.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

”The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

This gnomic aphorism, in other words, indicates that language limits the number of people we can talk to. How can we push our boundaries of communication? Which language is the most profitable to learn? On a global scale, English is undoubtedly language number one. Not in the number of native speakers but in the terms of its use. In addition to this, English is easy in many ways even though this statement can be relative since it depends on learner’s mother tongue. There are, however, few features that make English look easier when compared to other languages. There are no genders, grammatical cases nor difference in pronouns and related verb conjugation when speaking to a friend or your business contact as we can see in other languages such as Spanish, French or German, also widely spoken. Knowledge of English equals access to hundreds of millions of native speakers all over the world as well as hundreds of millions of people who speak it as a second language. When learning a new language one must, besides other, deal with an extensive vocabulary. And that is where idioms step in. What are idioms? When do we use them? And is it truly essential to know them when acquiring new language? The aim of this thesis is to look at idioms and answer the question of the idioms’ origin, usefulness and usage. It focuses on idiomatic expressions used in business English.

The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on idioms in general. Firstly, it provides brief information about English as the language of a global business. Following chapters give definition of idioms (both from dictionaries and by linguists) and describe their classification, features and origin. The last part presents four groups of selected business idioms, explanation of some of them, analysis of the whole group and further comments. Given idioms are later examined in the practical part, too.

The practical part investigates whether business idioms in textbooks are used at every language level and if they need context evaluation to be explained in L1 (Czech language) properly. Survey carried out for the purpose of the present thesis was given to four Czech and four English native speakers who work as English teachers and run business classes in various companies. How important are idioms within business English vocabulary? How much attention are they given in textbooks? Is Czech translation necessary when dealing with idioms in vocational language? Respondents were asked to share their opinion on

these questions. Survey not only probes into their attitude and interpretation but also describes their personal experience with business idioms in business classes. Answers of both groups are compared and evaluated.

I. THEORY

1 ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF A GLOBAL BUSINESS

Commerce across borders is huge business and without a common language it would be impossible or at least slow, difficult and inefficient. English, for its qualities and for historical reasons too, became such a language. It is widely used in advertising, marketing, accounting, finance, banking and other areas of business. The knowledge of English is a great advantage for a lot of professions in today's interconnected world. Simon Nicholas Tweddle, the owner of the Czech real estate agency Sim Property Group s.r.o., says his company offers services to a large number of international and local investors from many countries. For this reason he only employs people who can speak English. (Táborská 2015)

Tsedal Neeley in his article *Global Business Speaks English* states that English is spoken at a useful level by some 1,75 billion people – that's one in every four of us. He also mentions Hiroshi Mikitani, the CEO of Rakuten, a Japanese online marketplace. Mikitani introduced a new company policy, English would be the official company's language. It turned out to be the right move, Rakuten began to grow massively. It acquired companies in France, Germany, Canada or the UK and established joint ventures in Brazil and several Asian countries. (Neeley 2015)

What all these people have to deal with when acquiring new language is, besides grammatical structures or word order, an extensive number of new vocabulary. All learners start with the core vocabulary. Once they learn the basics of language, they move on to higher levels and have to extend the vocabulary as well. Extended vocabulary can include phrasal verbs, academic terms, colloquial expressions or figurative language. And this is where idioms appear. Sooner or later learners encounter them and have to cope with them. Business English is full of terminology in which idioms have their place. For professionals who work in an international business environment it is absolutely inevitable to master them. Undoubtedly, for non-native speakers idioms are challenge, and not only for them. No speaker of any language can say he or she knows all idioms in his mother tongue. The purpose of idioms within vocabulary can be difficult to define, too. However, knowing them is probably more important than it seems. They not only enrich the discourse but also show how well speaker knows the language. Although they are not of much interest in many business classes or business textbooks, they play an important role within business language and certainly deserve attention.

2 DEFINITION OF THE TERM IDIOM

Idioms are part of figurative language together with metaphor, metonymy, simile, alliteration, personification etc. Nonetheless, their definition is not unequivocal. Fernando avers that idioms are rather neglected in lexical studies contrary to other areas of English vocabulary and linguists do not agree on the exact definition. She, however, says that “differences of opinions exist; yet differences among some scholars are balanced by agreements among others.” (Fernando 1996, 2)

From the semantic point of view, idiom is a unit. However, if one wants to say the past tense, verb is in the past tense, not the whole idiom. *Take the bull by the horns* is infinitive. When using the idiom in a speech, speaker says *I took the bull by the horns* or *I will take the bull by the horn* not *I take the bull by the horns-ed*. The change of tense is one of the most common and permitted changes within an idiomatic expression.

Idiom is not only *kick the bucket* type of information. The term idiom actually covers a wide range of various expressions and phrases both single-word and multi-word. Some linguists also include phrasal verbs, proverbs, quotations, greeting, farewells etc. At times types of figurative language overlap and it is complicated to determine the boundaries. Specific types of idioms are presented later in the chapter Classification of idioms.

Following chapters provide definition of idioms from dictionaries and definition by linguists.

2.1 Definition from Dictionaries

Idioms can be interpreted several ways. There are four examples of interpretation from well-known dictionaries.

According to *Macmillan Dictionary* idiom is “an expression whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words. For example, ‘to have your feet on the ground’ is an idiom meaning ‘to be sensible’”.

Similarly, *Longman English Dictionary* says that idiom is “a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word”.

Oxford Dictionary offers more interpretations. The one crucial for this thesis is this: “a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words”.

Cambridge Encyclopedia puts it this way: “Two central features identify an idiom. The meaning of the idiomatic expression cannot be deduced by examining the meanings of

the constituent lexemes. And the expression is fixed, both grammatically and lexically.” (2003, 163)

There is one major issue that all interpretations agree on – idioms cannot be understood by simply translating its components. This is probably the most important feature that differentiates idioms from other expressions.

2.2 Definition by Linguists

Linguists themselves admit that they do not agree on a specific definition of idiom, hence this chapter presents the interpretation of idioms by few of them. Primarily, it is crucial to point out that there are two meanings of a word ‘idiom’. Firstly, it implies a fixed phrase such as *pull the wool over someone’s eyes* or *kick the bucket*. Secondly, it describes ordinary discourse produced by native speakers. Correct English sentence is ‘I will be taking an airplane to Paris tomorrow’. Idiomatic way would be ‘I will be flying to Paris tomorrow’. However, most linguists use the first case when discussing idioms. (Nunberg, Sag, Wasow 1994, 493)

Cruse argues that idioms are “a type of grammatically complex expression whose grammatical constituents are not semantic constituents. Expressions whose meaning can be predicted from the meaning of its semantic constituents can be described as compositional. Idioms are therefore one type of non-compositional expression.” (Cruse 2011, 86)

Fernando in her book *Idioms and Idiomaticity* states that “idioms are indivisible units whose components cannot be varied or varied only within definable limits. No other words can be substituted for those comprising, for example, *smell a rat* or *seize/grasp the nettle*, which take either of these two verbs but no others: thus *grab* is unacceptable. Nor are the words of an idiom usually recombinable”. (Fernando 1996, 30)

Easily put, idioms are not coherent. On the other hand, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow claim that “any unfamiliar phrase can be understood if the context is made informative enough”. (Nunberg, Sag, Wasow, 1994, 495) Other linguists might contradict. The argument is debatable. Context can certainly help nevertheless idioms are more or less accidental set of words that are simply meant to be ‘illogical’. This is what makes them idioms.

Moreover, there are expressions that look like idioms but in fact are not idioms at all. Fernando gives an example of *hot potato*. As an idiom, it means ‘embarrassing issue’. However, sentence such as *There is one last hot potato in the pot* does not include any

locution. It simply mentions ‘food item at a high temperature’. This example shows that some idioms are not distinguishable from common set of words and need context to be interpreted the right way or to be interpreted as idioms at all. (Fernando 1996, 4) Interpretations of idiom vary, yet most linguists can agree that idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meaning of the words that make it up and that they are bound. This is probably the most important aspect that language users, especially non-native speakers, should be aware of to avoid misunderstanding or incorrect use of language.

3 FEATURES OF IDIOMS

There are several unique features of idioms that distinguish them from other words. Nevertheless, linguists dealt with the issue differently.

Fernando gives three main properties of idioms (Fernando 1996, 3):

1. Compositeness – idioms are commonly accepted as a type of multiword expression
2. Institutionalization – idioms are conventionalized expressions
3. Semantic opacity – the meaning of the idiom is not the sum of its constituents, in other words, an idiom is often non-literal

Nunberg, Sag and Wasow give more features (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994, 492-493):

1. Conventionality – the meaning of idioms cannot be predicted or at least entirely predicted
2. Inflexibility – idioms typically appear only in a limited number of syntactic frames or constructions
3. Figuration – idioms typically involve metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles, or other kinds of figuration
4. Proverbiality – idioms are typically used to describe a recurrent situation of particular social interest
5. Informality – like other proverbial expressions, idioms are typically associated with relatively informal or colloquial register and with popular speech and oral culture
6. Affect – idioms are typically used to imply a certain evaluation of affective stance toward the things they denote

Apart from conventionality not all these necessarily have to be part of all idioms. Some idioms do not include figuration, for example *by dint of* or *the gift of gab*. These include a word ('dint' and 'gab') that neither appears in another phrase nor on its own. Likewise there are idioms that lack literal meaning (e.g. *malice aforethought* or *method in one's madness*) or idioms that have no register restrictions. (Nunberg, Sag, Wasow 1994, 493)

Idioms may seem rather bound, however Cacciari suggests that "idioms have a syntactic structure that at times is frozen, but on occasions is very flexible and can be

modified in various ways, depending also upon the extent to which the figurative meaning of the string is related to its literal meaning.” She states an example using idiom *to pull somebody’s leg*. If someone says ‘You are pulling my foot’ or ‘You are pushing my leg’ it may appear that the speaker have not learnt the idiom correctly. (Cacciari 1993, XIII)

Likewise, Cruse suggests that “an idiom cannot survive the substitution of any of its constituent elements by a synonym or near synonym”. (Cruse 2011, 87) Nevertheless, language is a vivid system and someone who knows it well can come up with similar formulation to convey a specific situation. Modification such as ‘You are pulling my legs’ can be used when you are told more than one improbable story. Similarly, BBC 6 Minute English podcast *Going where the work is* mentions another example. One of the hosts is explaining brain drain; a situation in which skilled people leave their home country to find better fulfilment. The other host says that opposite situation can happen as well and it is ‘sort of brain gain’. ‘Brain gain’, without a doubt, is not an idiom. Nonetheless, its use does not prevent readers or listeners from understanding. Deciphering the meaning is very simple, especially for native speakers. ‘To gain’ means to acquire, therefore the meaning of the whole phrase is quite clear; it is a situation when people receive experience or education abroad and come back to their home country which can benefit from it. The changed word even rhymes with the original one and therefore, reminds us of it, which might help reader understand the new phrase if the original version is not mentioned at all. This example clearly shows that idioms are not as strict as they may seem and at times allow creativity and adjustments.

Fernando also claims that idioms can be manipulated according to the needs of the speaker and states few examples of possible transformation. These are replacement or substitution, additions, permutations and deletions. (Fernando 1996, 43-52)

Replacement or substitution can be represented by different number or tense, which is inflectional change or by replacement of an article. Variations in tense are very common, for example:

- *He smelt a rat and he kept mum.* (past tense, past time)

(The Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English 1983)

- *Everybody smells a rat in a doctored obituary, even the widow.* (present tense indicating timeless truth)

(The Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English 1983)

- *Yet some of his excuses for his absence lately **had been** pretty thin. Some women **would have begun to smell a rat**.* (past time with the infinitive to smell a rat governed by the past form would, a modal expressing certainty)

(Sparkling Cyanide, Agatha Christie 1957: 50, Pan)

The change of number has the same freedom as the change of tense:

- *We went there one evening. I twisted Richie's arm I said he's your brother-in-law too but they weren't in.*
- *If you can't turn up let us know – if necessary I can twist the arms of a few friends and get them to come.*

However, plurals are not possible in all idioms and similarly, singulars are not possible in others, such as *twiddle one's thumb* (not *twiddle one's thumbs*) or *raining cats and dogs* (not *raining a cat and a dog*).

Additions are permitted only in specific cases, for example *twist sb's arm* → *sb's arm was broken*, yet some additions are acceptable to make the message more precise:

- *Rudyard Kipling took the **art world bull by the horns** when he wrote, "It's clever, but is it art?"*

(The Sydney Morning Herald 4 December 1978:1)

These two instances show a sentence with an added adjective that is treated as if it was literal but in fact it is idiomatic:

- *It is very easy for those academics to look out of their **carpeted ivory towers** across the quagmire of business stagnation.*

(The Australian 8 December 1975)

- *One of his examiners said that this was **a feather in his cap** but he said it was a small **feather**.*

There are idioms that have no possible permutation. If they do it varies from idiom to idiom. "Particle shift is a permutation that can be optional as in *they beat up people* or *they beat people up*. It becomes obligatory when the intervening object is a pronoun" (Fernando 1996, 49):

- *Airliner blew up – Seven masked separatists... forced an Air France airliner to an isolated area... and blew it up.*

(The Sydney Morning Herald 9 September 1976: 5)

Passivization is also very common:

- *On the other hand he's got **crocodile's tears** about interest rates...*
(The Sydney Morning Herald 1 April 1989: 1)
- *Buckets of **crocodile tears have been shed** at dozens of rallies...*
(The Sydney Morning Herald 14 May 1988)
- *Gorbachev **leaves no stone unturned** at the PR meeting.*
(The Sydney Morning Herald 28 May 1988: 1)
- *He released a statement saying that **no stone would be left unturned** to find the culprits.*

Deletion is a common phenomenon, occurs in all levels of language and is given various terms such as contraction or elision. As for idioms, some are already used in their truncated forms (*red herring* comes from *draw/trail a red herring*, *a rolling stone* from *a rolling stone gathers no moss*). Shortened idioms may be difficult for non-native speakers to identify. These can be *the idol has feet of clay* that becomes *X has clay feet*, *dangle the carrot before the donkey* reduces to *dangle a carrot* or just *carrot*.

- *Sunshine dangles **an issue carrot**.* (headline)
(The Australian 15 November 1975: 12)
- *Thatcher waves **trade carrot**.* (headline)
(The Australian 6 August 1988: 3)
- *The Prime Minister has offered some very appealing **political carrots** in his economic program.*
(The Australian 28 November 1975: 10)

There are also less radical examples:

- *This fellow thought the Professor would drop him like a hot potato so he preferred **a bird in the hand*** (a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush)
- *Norman Sherry is the epitome of the **no-stone-unturned** school of biographers...*
(The Sydney Morning Herald 10 June 1989: 85)

Fernando's summarization states two main properties of the lexicogrammatical composition: compositeness and the fixity. "In other words, the less the possibility of replacing the words of an idiom, the stronger its status as a word-like unit." (Fernando 1996, 52)

Idioms are rather poetic part of language that enrich everyday communication and bring playfulness to our discourse. They can carry rather pejorative connotation and are capable of expressing strong emotions both positive and negative. Language is being influenced and changed by every speaker. When speakers produce discourse in their mother tongue they probably use idioms more than they realize and thousands of idioms became a common part of everyday spoken language. It is no wonder, they are so often modified. The language-users should generally feel the limits beyond which the change of idiom cannot be pushed. However, it can be challenge for both native and non-native speakers. Not only to recognize these boundaries but also to resist the urge to alter the phrase to one's personal needs.

As Cacciari suggests idioms “are one of the many ways in which natural languages differ from those artificial languages that experts designed on logical principles – mathematical calculi, computer programming languages, and systems of formal logic.” (Cacciari, 1993, IX) There are more domains in which idiomatic expressions are scarcely used. These could be legal, administrative and technical documents. These areas require strictly formal use of language, they are full of terminology, collocations and specific phrases but idioms for the features stated above (conventionality, figuration or informality) are not suitable instrument.

4 CLASSIFICATION OF IDIOMS

Classification of idioms as well as their definition and features is not united. Fernando in her book *Idioms and Idiomaticity* offers classifications of some linguists who focused on idioms in their works. One of them is Makkai who identifies two major types of idioms (Makkai in Fernando 1996, 3, 5): idioms of encoding and decoding. Idioms of decoding display constructional homonymity with their parallel literal counterpart. On the other hand, idioms of encoding do not show constructional homonymity (Fernando 1966, 42). Makkai later on focuses on idioms of decoding that are classified as lexemic and sememic. Lexemic idioms include:

1. Phrasal verbs (bring up, get away with)
2. Tournures (fly off the handle, rain cats and dogs)
3. Irreversible binomials (salt and pepper, bag and baggage)
4. Phrasal compounds (blackmail, high-handed)
5. Incorporating verbs (eavesdrop, man handle)
6. Pseudo-idioms (spick and span, kith and kin)

Sememic idioms include:

1. Proverbs (Don't count your chickens before they are hatched)
2. Familiar quotations (not a mouse stirring)
3. Idioms of institutionalized politeness (*May I... X?* with interrogative intonation for *I want to... X*)
4. Idioms of institutionalized understatement and hyperbole (I wasn't too crazy about him)

Fernando herself subdivides idioms in three classes: pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms. (Fernando 1996, 35-36)

1. Pure idioms

A pure idiom is “a type of conventionalized, non-literal multiword expression”. Fernando later divides pure idioms into:

- a) Pure idioms invariant, non-literal (devil-may-care, the coast is clear, etc.)
- b) Restricted variance, non-literal (pitter-patter/pita-a-pat, seize/grasp the nettle etc.)

2. Semi-idioms

A semi-idiom “has one or more literal constituents and at least one with a non-literal subsense, usually special to that co-occurrence relation and no other”.

- a) Semi-literal idioms invariant (catch fire, foot the bill, etc.)
- b) Restricted variance (chequered career/history, good morning/day, etc.)

3. Literal idioms

Literal idioms are, as well as pure and semi-idioms, invariant and restrictedly variant, however, they are less semantically complex.

- a) Literal idioms invariant (on foot, on the contrary, etc.)
- b) Restricted variance (opt in favour of/for, for example/instance, etc.)

4.1 Functional categorizations

Fernando also presents the functional categorization using the Halliday conception. There are three major categories: ideational or ‘the state and way of the world’ idioms, interpersonal idioms and relational idioms. (Fernando 1966, 72-74)

Ideational or ‘the state and way of the world’ idioms

Ideational idioms signify message content or characterize the nature of message.

1. Message content

- a) Actions (spill the beans, wear different hats, etc.)
- b) Events (out of the mouth of babes, have blood on one’s hands, etc.)
- c) Situations (be in a pickle, be up a gum tree, etc.)
- d) People and things (a fat cat, a lounge lizard, etc.)
- e) Attributes (lily-white, from A to Z, etc.)
- f) Evaluations (a watched pot never boils, a Trojan horse, etc.)
- g) Emotions (a lump in one’s throat, for one’s blood to boil, etc.)

2. Characterizing the message

- a) Specific information (to be exact/precise, my guess is, etc.)
- b) Non-specific information (kind of/sort of, such and such, etc.)

Interpersonal idioms

Interpersonal idioms fulfil an interactional function or, as well as ideational idioms, they characterize the nature of message.

1. Interactional strategies
 - a) Greeting and farewells (see you later, bye for now, etc.)
 - b) Directives (let's face it, never mind, etc.)
 - c) Agreement (that's true, say no more, etc.)
 - d) Feelers, eliciting opinions (what do you think? how do you feel?, etc.)
 - e) Rejections (you're kidding, I wasn't born yesterday, etc.)

2. Characterizing the message
 - a) Newsworthiness (guess what, what do you know, etc.)
 - b) Sincerity (believe me, as a matter of fact, etc.)
 - c) Calls for brevity (cut the cackle, get to the point, etc.)
 - d) Uncertainty (I daresay, mind you, etc.)

Relational idioms

Relational idioms ensure the cohesion, hence, can aid the coherence. They can be grouped along with conjunctions (e.g. because, but...) and can be divided into idioms which integrate information or sequence information.

1. Integrative
 - a) Adversative (on the contrary, far from, etc.)
 - b) Comparison (on the one hand... on the other, etc.)
 - c) Causal (so that when, no wonder, etc.)
 - d) Concessive (at the same time, etc.)
 - e) Addition (in addition to, what is more, etc.)

2. Sequencing or chaining information
3. Sequencing meta-discoursal information (in the first place, last but not least, etc.)
4. Sequencing temporal information (a long time ago, up to now, etc.)

5 ORIGIN OF IDIOMS

Revealing the etymology of some idioms is not always possible. Cruse says about understanding idioms this: “if metaphor is rooted in universal human experience, it will in all likelihood remain intelligible for a long time. If the metaphor is grounded on some social custom or particular event, then with the passage of time, the knowledge required to interpret it may become inaccessible to the average speaker.” (Cruse 2011, 91)

Example of the first case could be *once in a blue moon*. Most language-users probably know the meaning (happening very rarely, scarcely ever) as it is well-known idiomatic expression but only some can be familiar with the origin of this locution. According to *timeanddate.com* there are two definitions of the blue moon in astronomy. The first says that moon can be blue in colour thanks to a rare type of dust in the atmosphere. The second is associated with the number of full moons in a month or a season. If there are two full moons in the same calendar month or four full moons in an astronomical season, the ‘extra’ moon is called blue moon. This phenomenon occurs every 32 months or so, therefore, the blue moon is used to describe something that happens scarcely. (Time and date AS 2015)

The latter, idiom based on a social custom or particular event, is for example *blue blood* that is mentioned by Fernando. Originally, it described the blue veins of the Spanish people that were visible on their white skin contrary to dark-skinned Moors. Later on, this locution changed its original meaning and signified ‘aristocratic birth’. This meaning preserved till nowadays. (Fernando 1996, 35)

Similarly, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow mention *beard the lion in his den* which originally comes from Scottish and is an example of an idiom whose origin has already been forgotten. Also Cruse states that “they become idioms when the knowledge necessary to interpret them is no longer current.” (Cruse 2011, 88) On the other hand, there are phrases whose meaning is well-known such as *shuffle off this mortal coil* which appeared in Shakespeare’s play Hamlet. These are not called idioms but rather allusions. (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994, 494)

There are locutions whose explanation is not clear. *Break a leg* is one of them. This idiom, means opposite it actually says. *Break a leg* means wishing someone luck, though the idea of breaking does not seem very nice. Cacciari explains this paradox: “to wish a performer good luck before a performance originated with the old superstition that it would

be bad luck to wish someone good luck. Consequently, people started wishing their fellow actors good luck by wishing them bad luck, e.g. a broken leg.” (Cacciari 1993, 58)

Cruse mentions a different reason. According to one theory the idiom *to pull someone's leg* originated at the time of the Great Plague. It was a method of determining whether a body was dead. The semantic change could have been ‘test for signs of life’ → ‘provoke’ → ‘tease’. After disappearance of the knowledge of the original meaning the phrase turned into an idiom. (Cruse 2011, 88)

Some idioms are associated with culture and culture-related issues, such as languages. There is one example that shows how languages use other languages to describe a particular situation with the use of an idiom. When somebody starts speaking about IT stuff and someone else does not understand, an English speaker can respond to it by saying three phrases: ‘It sounds like double Dutch to me’, ‘It is all Greek to me’ or ‘It is all Chinese to me’. Chinese used to describe something incomprehensible, too difficult to understand or unknown appears in many languages. French ‘C’est du chinois’, Italian ‘È cinese per me’, and Hungarian ‘Ez nekem kínai’ mean ‘It is in Chinese’. Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian or Russian language uses it too. Greek is also commonly used in idioms. Spanish people as well as Swedish and Norwegians say ‘It is Greek to me’. (Swanson 2015) It is no wonder that these are one of the most popular. Both Chinese and Greek differs from European languages significantly. Greek belongs to Hellenic branch of Indo-European language family and uses its own alphabet. Chinese is used in this type of idiom for an apparent reason. It is part of Sino-Tibetan language family and for Europeans it is even less intelligible than Greek. (Yule 2006, 183) Nonetheless, there are more variations. Italians say ‘It is Arabic to me’. Germans characterize incomprehensible things as ‘Czech village’, similarly Czechs say ‘Spanish village’.

Lakoff and Johnson in their article *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language* elaborate on cultural aspect in metaphors that sometimes overlap with idioms. They give an example of ‘orientational’ metaphors – those that are associated with spatial orientation. In many cultures, ‘happy is up’ and ‘sad is down’, ‘health is up’ and ‘sickness is down’, ‘active is up’ and ‘passive is down’. However, as Lakoff and Johnson point out not all cultures perceive UP-DOWN orientation the same way as we do. In some passivity is appreciated more than activity. Similar example is the perception of time because “some cultures orient the future in front of us; others orient it in back.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 462) Therefore, we can say ‘We are looking ahead to the weeks to come’ but in some cultures or languages such formulation would be illogical.

Knowing the etymology of an idiom is not necessary for its usage. However, idioms or similar illogical group of words, especially the longer ones, can be difficult to remember. Therefore, the knowledge of its origin and the historical or cultural context can not only allow understand the idiom better but also help native and especially non-native speakers retain it.

6 SELECTED BUSINESS IDIOMS

This chapter presents selected business idioms divided into four subchapters: colour-related, food-related, market-related, and number-related idioms. Each chapter presents selected idioms, explanation of some of them, more examples, analysis of the whole group, and further comments. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and The Free Dictionary were used to explain given idioms.

6.1 Colour-related idioms

Red tape - official rules that seem more complicated than necessary and prevent things from being done quickly

Be in the red - the situation of owing money to a bank or making a loss in a business operation

Blacklist - a list of people or groups regarded as unacceptable or untrustworthy and often marked down for punishment or exclusion

Black economy - the part of a country's economic activity which is unrecorded and untaxed by its government

Black Friday - the day after the US holiday of Thanksgiving, regarded as the first day of the Christmas shopping season, on which retailers make many special offers

Be in the black - the situation of not owing money to a bank or of making a profit in a business operation

White-collar worker - people who work in an office or other professional environment

Blue-collar worker - manual workers, particularly in industry

Pink-collar worker - relating to work traditionally associated with women

Green marketing - marketing based on the (supposed) environmentally beneficial qualities of a product, company, etc.

Golden parachute - a large payment or other financial compensation guaranteed to a company executive if they should be dismissed as a result of a merger or takeover

Once in a blue moon – very rarely

Colours are common element of idioms not only the business ones. Idioms usually use the basic colours like red, black or white and hardly ever the extraordinary ones such as beige, azure or pinkish. It is important to stress that colours do not always carry the same meaning. European cultures generally consider white to be pure, clean and innocent, it is a symbol of light, happiness, and the most popular colour of wedding dress. However,

Japanese people wear white at totally opposite occasion - funerals. Also *white-collar worker* has nothing to do with the general perception of white colour. It represents clean formal shirts of people who work in an office. The opposite is *blue-collar worker* indicating blue overall that manual workers wear. *Pink-collar worker* is less common than the first two. Pink is traditionally colour of female clothing, therefore, pink-collar is associated with female professions such as secretaries or nurses.

Red color is probably one of the most frequent colours in idioms. In presented business idioms, *red tape* and *be in the red*, it is associated with negativity or something forbidden. If one is caught *red-handed* he is guilty. Similarly, all traffic lights use red color signs to tell pedestrians to stop. Red draws attention. However, it is also colour of love, passion and seduction as well as energy and joy. On the whole, red means strong emotions, both positive and negative.

Green, on the other hand, represents positivity and prosperity. Green traffic light informs pedestrians they can go. It also embodies well-being, balance, freshness, nature, ecology and healthy environment therefore *green marketing* is based on the environmentally beneficial qualities of a product.

Golden usually stands for luxury, vanity or richness and uniqueness. *Golden parachute* is amount of money given to a top manager when he is leaving the company. *Golden days* is simply good time.

Black, another common colour, is a symbol of negativity or failure. *Black economy* is illegal economy that is uncontrolled and untaxed by government. Surprisingly, *be in the black* is not negative as it means having money on an account. *Black Friday* is related to *be in the black*. As it is stated above, *black Friday* means the day after the US holiday of Thanksgiving, regarded as the first day of the Christmas shopping season. Oxford Dictionary explains the origin of the term as a day when retailers' accounts went from being *in the red* to *in the black*.

6.2 Food-related idioms

Big cheese - an important person

In a nutshell - in the fewest possible words

Apple-pie order - perfect order or neatness

Bring home the bacon - supply material support

Bread and butter - a person's livelihood or main source of income

Nest egg - a sum of money saved for the future

Piece of cake - something easily achieved

Make a mint - making a lot of money

Money for jam - money or reward earned for little or no effort

Sell like hot cakes - be sold quickly and in large quantities

Icing on the cake - an attractive but inessential addition or enhancement

The most common food in the chosen idioms is ‘cake’: *piece of cake*, *sell like hot cakes* and *icing on the cake*. In all examples it implies something easy and positive. In other words ‘sweet’. Both bread and butter belong to basic food, therefore, *bread and butter* idiom represents livelihood. *Bring home the bacon* has similar meaning. The rest of food used in idioms seems to be rather random.

6.3 Market-related idioms

Bull market - a market in which share prices are rising, encouraging buying

Bear market - a market in which share prices are falling, encouraging selling

Black market - an illegal traffic or trade in officially controlled or scarce commodities

Captive market - a group of consumers who are obliged through lack of choice to buy a particular product, thus giving the supplier a monopoly

Niche market - a small, specialized market for a particular product or service

Market is a crucial expression in business vocabulary hence it is no wonder that there are so many ways to describe a specific type of market. *Black market* is similar to *black economy* explained above. Captive is a synonym of captured and *captive market* is a market where customers are forced to buy goods from one supplier due to lack of competition, shortage or other reasons. Customers are simply ‘captured’. *Bull market* and *bear market* describe opposites. One explanation says that “the bear and bull markets are named after the way in which each animal attacks its victims. It is characteristic of the bull to drive its horns up into the air, while a bear, on the other hand, like the market that bears its name, will swipe its paws downward upon its unfortunate prey.” (Investopedia staff 2015)

6.4 Number-related idioms

Nine-to-five - used in reference to typical office hours, often to express an idea of predictable routine

Twenty-four-seven - twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, all the time

Zero hour - the time at which a planned operation, typically a military one, is set to begin

Eleventh hour - the latest possible moment

Fifty-fifty - the same in share or proportion, equal or used to refer to one of two possibilities that are equally likely to happen

Take five - have a short break

Nine-to-five idiom can be difficult to interpret for some non-native English speakers since not all countries have common working hours from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon. This instance shows that idioms can be a cultural thing. *Twenty-four-seven* is easier to interpret – a day has twenty-four hours and a week has seven days all around the world. *Fifty-fifty* seems to be quite logical – if one hundred is perceived as a whole, then sharing half and half means fifty and fifty. *Take five* has probably symbolic meaning – having five minutes break does not seem much but of course, in reality it can last for much longer time. It is similar to *wait a minute* or *just a second* – meaning you want someone to wait for a very short time.

As Cacciari avers “Idioms suffer terrible indignities within linguistics, philosophy, and psychology. Compared to metaphors, which are thought to be ‘alive’ and creative, idioms traditionally have been viewed as dead metaphors or expressions that were once metaphorical, but have lost their metaphoricity over time.” (Cacciari, 1996, 57) The definition, classification, and features of idioms show that they are difficult to handle. There are thousands of them and this paper only looks at a selected group of idioms used in business language. Linguists as well as native speakers and other language users would definitely agree that the distinction of business and ‘normal’ idioms is not always clear. It would be an arduous task to estimate the usage of each business idiom, too. The popularity of idioms in printed business sources could be analysable but there is uncountable number of them used in every day spoken communication. These idiomatic expressions ‘come and go’ within few seconds. The evanescence of spoken language makes it extremely hard to

evaluate their usage and popularity. However, the richness of idioms in its entirety and their pervasiveness in our everyday language is indisputable and thus, worth analysing.

To sum up, the theoretical part provided theoretical background concerning idioms in general. It briefly presented the importance of English in a global business. Definition of idioms was presented by several linguists (Fernando, Cruse, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow) and from dictionaries (Macmillan Dictionary, Longman English Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary and Cambridge Dictionary). Chapter about features of idioms presented Fernando's, Cruse's, Caciari's and Nunberg, Sag and Wasow's interpretation. The classification was based on Fernando's book *Idioms and Idiomaticity* and Makkai's division mentioned in the same publication. It also provided functional categorization using the Halliday concept. Chapter about idioms' origin shortly presented few examples and comments from linguists already mentioned above and also Lakoff and Johnson's approach who dealt with this issue in their journal article *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language*. The last part offered selected business idioms subdivided into four categories, their explanation, analysis, and further comments.

II. ANALYSIS

7 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the practical part is to present English teachers' approach towards interpretation, explanation and methods of teaching business idioms. The survey investigates whether business idioms in textbooks are presented at every language level and if they need context evaluation to be explained in L1 properly. L1 stands for the first language of students, Czech language in this case. Qualitative survey was used for its purpose. It was carried out among four English and four Czech native speakers who work as English teachers in the Czech Republic and have experience with running business English courses. Answers of both groups are compared. Three qualitative research methods were used to carry out this survey: questionnaire, interview and direct observation in the class. Questionnaire was used as the crucial part of the survey followed by interview and observation in the class that were used to complement the data and gain more information about the investigated environment. The questionnaire contained 23 questions for Czech teachers and 21 for native English-speaking teachers divided into three parts and a list of selected business idioms, all of which were presented in the theoretical part of this study. Interviews were made right after direct observation that took place in the respondents' classes.

7.1 Profile of respondents

Four Czech teachers and four English native speakers were chosen as respondents for this survey.

Non-native speaking English teachers

Two respondents have university degree in English, one of them studied also economics, marketing, social studies and pedagogy. One respondent majored in performing arts, the last one graduated from Economic and Business Secondary School. One of them received TEFL certificate, one TOEIC certificate and one completed British Council's Basics for an English Classroom course. Their teaching experience ranges from 3 to 8 years, the experience in business classes from 2 to 4 years. Companies they teach for specialise in kitchen utensils and accessories, agricultural and industrial tyres, IT, retail, technologies, and building materials. Most of the classes have no specialization, some are focused on customer service and accounting.

Native English-speaking teachers

Three English native speakers come from the United States (California, Illinois, North Carolina), and one is from Australia (Perth). One of them studied English for Business Administration in the Czech Republic, one got Bachelor Degree in Management at Appalachian State University, one has Bachelor Degree in Finance and Accounting and Master Degree in Management Information Systems, the last one graduated from High School focused on visual home decoration. One respondent received TEFL certificate. Their teaching experience ranges from 3 to 5 years, the experience in business classes from 2 to 5 years. Companies they teach for specialise in printing and reproduction technology, IT and programming, kitchenware development, CNC machines, retail, travel service, and pharmaceuticals. Most of the classes have no specialization, some are focused primarily on emails, telephoning, presentations, speaking skills or business trips.

7.2 Description of investigated environment

Direct observation was carried out in several business classes. These classes took place in companies specialized in portal milling machines, industrial tyres and multi-spindle lathe service. The groups consisted of maximum four students who work in customer service, accounting, quality control, and economic department. Lessons encompassed conversation, reading, translation from Czech into English and listening exercises. Each course takes place once a week. Two of them last for one hour, one for one hour and half. All of the courses have intermediate level which corresponds to B1 level according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Textbooks used in these lessons include *International Express Intermediate*, *Total English Intermediate* and *Technicky vzato* (internal documents of Lingua language school that focus on technical English).

8 IDIOMS IN BUSINESS TEXTBOOKS

In the second part of the survey, respondents were asked to assess the use of business idioms in textbooks (generally), state if they are presented at every language level and from which level it is appropriate to teach business English. Then, they worked with selected business idioms and evaluated for which level they are appropriate and how often they encounter them. This is the list of selected business idioms from the survey:

LIST OF SELECTED BUSINESS IDIOMS

Colour-related idioms:	Food-related idioms:	Number-related idioms:
Red tape	Big cheese	Nine-to-five
Be in the red	In a nutshell	Twenty-four-seven
Blacklist	Apple-pie order	Zero hour
Black economy	Bring home the bacon	Eleventh hour
Black Friday	Bread and butter	Fifty-fifty
Be in the black	Nest egg	Take five
White-collar worker	Piece of cake	
Blue-collar worker	Make a mint	Market-related idioms:
Pink-collar worker	Money for jam	Bull market
Green marketing	Sell like hot cakes	Bear market
Golden parachute	Icing on the cake	Black market
Once in a blue moon		Captive market
		Niche market

Concerning the level at which business idioms appear, respondents' answers differ. Three of the Czech native speakers agree that it is impossible to teach business idioms at the lowest levels. However, some suggest trying to implement them as soon as possible as they can be useful for students. Ideally from A2 level. Nimble students may be able to understand them even if they do not know how to form more sophisticated sentences. English native speakers have similar point of view. Two of them state that some simple idioms may appear at lower levels but from their own experience they know that it is not appropriate to focus on them when teaching absolute beginners. General rule would be increasing the amount of idioms along with the increase of English business level.

Respondents also speculate about the level from which business English itself should be taught. Some point out that it can hardly be taught from A1 level. One has experienced

teaching business English from A1 although it comes with certain disadvantages as especially the lexis can be considered difficult by learners and thus requires more work. There is a slight difference between Czech and English native speakers' opinions on this issue. The latter group avers that the most suitable level to start learning business English is B1 or even B2. They perceive teaching business language at lower levels as nonsense based on the fact that students would have a more difficult time comprehending the material. Moreover, difficulties they would face could be demotivating for them. Czech native speakers hold the view that the suitable level to start learning business English is A2. There is probably no official standpoint from which level it should be taught. If a company wants its employees to study English because they need it at their workplace, it is practicable to teach even low level students. However, English business textbooks usually start at B1 level.

As for the use of idioms in these textbooks, common business textbooks usually do not present idioms as a separated group of specific vocabulary, for example as phrasal verbs, although they comprise huge portion of English vocabulary. Many students do not even know the term 'idiom' at all, thus do not realize they learn them. They are more familiar with proverbs, sayings or something they most often call just 'phrase'. Idioms are naturally included in texts, articles and listening but students are not told they are dealing with them. Nowadays there is a wide offer of English business textbooks. Respondents stated that they use Business Result, Market Leader, ProFile or Lifestyle, but the most frequent that all of them mentioned is International Express published by Oxford University Press. Intermediate level textbook in the fifth unit offers colour idioms exercise in the vocabulary section:

Fill in: black, green, white, red, black, blue, grey, red, blue

A company 'in the _____' owes money.

Electrical equipment in the house like fridges and washing machines are called '_____ goods'.

When something happens 'out of the _____', it is unexpected.

Getting a '_____ light' means that you can start a project.

Someone who 'sees _____' is very angry.

Some people call having interesting and new ideas '_____ sky thinking'.

'_____ Monday' was the day the stock markets crashed.

A company 'in the _____' has more money than it owes.

The amount of corporation tax companies should pay is a '_____ area'.

Not only does the book present idioms separately, it also encourages students to think about idioms and compare them with the ones in their mother tongue; following exercise asks them to think of some colour idioms in their culture and say how they can be explained in English. This exercise is then followed by listening about colour meanings. In some parts of the listening, colour idioms are mentioned again:

If you are feeling this colour, it means you are feeling sad and unhappy. (part about the blue colour)

We also use the colour with certain words to give a negative meaning, for example, 'list', and 'Monday'. When we use the colour with the word 'market', it means the illegal trade of goods or money. (part about the black colour)

Pre-intermediate level textbook does not offer any idiom exercise. Similarly, upper-intermediate level textbook has no such exercise. It does not mean, however, that there are no idioms. In one of the listening exercises, 'niche market' and 'red tape' are mentioned. Nonetheless, no explanation is given. Two speakers discuss their move abroad and new jobs:

*I'm lucky in that I'm a reservoir engineer. It's quite a **niche market**, so although there aren't many posts, the ones that exist are pretty well paid.'*

*'Actually, the company I work for here did most of the paperwork, so it was surprisingly easy. As you can imagine, there is quite a lot of **red tape**, but they arranged our flights and got our belongings shipped out...'*

Quick-witted students can be able to deduce the meaning from the context and that is probably what authors rely on.

However, books are not the only teaching source teachers have at their disposal. They also use materials from company, their correspondence, emails, and internal documents. Most respondents confirm that if they want to focus specifically on business idioms, they have to bring their own materials or newspaper articles which are a great teaching source in business classes. Textbooks can deliberately avoid using idioms. People who create these books are definitely skilled and experienced professionals but that can be the main problem. They know they write the textbook for non-native speakers. On the other hand, newspaper articles are written by people for native speakers and are often full of words that these people use on a day-to-day basis. Such articles are more difficult for learners but theoretically reflect the 'real world' more than textbooks. They are authentic and move students from the classroom into the real world although one respondent said he thinks that they use more obscure idioms. Another respondent avers that articles written for a broader

international audience that he uses (e.g. from www.bloomberg.com) do not include as many idiomatic language. One respondent uses also videos from international business leaders that provide the opportunity to listen to typical business English used by native speakers (e.g. www.englishcentral.com). The use of idioms is quite wide and students get the chance to learn a lot of them in a short time. Some respondents say they do not use textbooks at all, other use mainly them and think that in higher level textbooks there is enough space devoted to idioms.

As for the frequency and level suitable for selected business idioms, some respondents described them separately, others in groups. The two groups, Czech and English native speakers, take various approaches. One Czech respondent said that all of the idioms are suitable for all levels when the need comes and the ones that have similar counterpart in L1 are easier to remember thus, can be introduced at early levels more comfortably. Another respondent agrees that idioms as *piece of cake*, *take five* or *black Friday* can be used from A1 level. He would start with the others at A2 level. The other two see market idioms as very rare and useful only for those students who deal with market-related issues on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, rest of the idioms are rather easy and suitable for wide range of students. More respondents mention that *blue-collar worker* and *white-collar worker* are the most frequent idioms from the group and also the ones that students are most often familiar with.

English native speakers think that suitable level for most of these idioms to start at is B1. They concurred in the opinion that idioms are an integral part of the language but they would not burden their students with them at the beginning of the learning process. However, English native speakers as well as Czech native speakers consider types of workers (especially the blue and white one) to be the most habitual ones of all. One respondent stated that she encounters some of the food and number idioms few times a week, colour idioms, on the other hand, are not so common and market ones are seen as rather complicated, less used and appropriate only for students who use or need to learn more specific vocational language.

9 INTERPRETATION OF IDIOMS

As for the function of idioms, there was no significant difference between Czech and English native speakers interpretation. Czech native speakers described the function of an idiom as an integral part of colloquial language. They see it as authentic language that sounds naturally, it carries the possibility to express things differently, in an easier or shorter way, and make a speech more interesting. It brings playfulness to the discourse and makes it more colourful and faster, which is a tendency that occurs in all areas of language.

English native speakers state that the function of an idiom is to be able to put two or more words together and produce something that has a different meaning than the words have on their own. Therefore, allowing the speakers to express themselves in a different way. Other two say that the function of an idiomatic expression is to quickly get across an idea without using a lot of words. It is obvious that some of the respondents see idioms as a shorter modification of ordinary way of speaking, however, that is not always true. Not all idioms are shorter than the non-idiomatic version. For example *Once in a blue moon* is by far much longer than saying 'rarely'. Some admit that idioms are not shorter but somehow 'more attractive' than the conventional way of speaking. One of them notices and points out that idioms are also a function of a specific language group as they vary in different areas even in the same language (differences in the UK and in the US). Using idioms makes it easier to communicate an idea based on shared experiences.

9.1 Explanation of idioms in class

Respondents were offered two possible ways of interpreting an idiom – its direct explanation and idiom in a sentence using the context evaluation – and asked to evaluate its effectiveness. Example:

Idiom: be in the red

- 1) *Be in debt, having no money on account*
- 2) *They earned \$10 000 but they spent \$15 000. That's why they are now in debt.*

Speaking about English native speakers, one respondent claims that the second approach is better because it allows the person to see how it should be used in context and it is more unlikely that he will make a mistake when using it on his own. Another respondent avers that each idiom requires its own approach. Sometimes it is necessary to explain the idiom because for non-native speakers hearing it in context will not help them

to understand it. On the other hand, using the idiom in context is definitely needed so that the students understand how it is used in a real situation. All in all, using both methods is definitely the best. The third respondent agrees with the statement that both versions are necessary, i.e. the first one to give the meaning and the second one to show an example. He personally likes to use idioms in sentences. The last respondent only speculates about the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches; the first one is good because it explains the meaning of the idiom but does not give a suitable example for a deeper understanding. The second gives the idiom meaning on how it can be used but it does not explain the actual meaning of the idiom. It follows that he also sees the combination of both approaches as the best way to go.

There was no significant difference in Czech native speakers' point of view. Two of them think that a combination of both methods is suitable. Another respondent agrees but points out that idioms should be first seen in the context and only then explained. Examples help memorize the idiom as you can recall the story. The last one chooses the second approach saying that in this case students are given a chance to think about the language and try to figure the meaning out by themselves, which is the main advantage. The disadvantage is it takes a longer time than "normal" explanation. The first approach is more straightforward so there is very little possibility of misunderstanding (advantage), however, the students do not think and they just write down what they are told (disadvantage).

Respondents were also asked to give sentence examples that would be suitable for the purpose of the second approach. Not all respondents gave examples of all selected idioms but most of them proposed at least some. As for the idiom already mentioned above, *be in the red*, there were four suggestions:

1. *Many students are in the red after finishing university.*
2. *This month I will be in the red.*
3. *You shouldn't be in the red when you apply for a mortgage.*
4. *After the unsuccessful investment, the company was suddenly in the red.*

It is obvious that some sentences are nice examples showing how to use the phrase but would not be enough to display the meaning of the idiom itself. This would be probably the first and the second sentence. The second one is too short and simple to explain the idiom. It would only be understandable in the context of a longer conversation in which lack of money is somehow mentioned. The first sentence has similar problem. Students can be a lot of things after finishing university. Deducing that they are in debt is too difficult

without any other information. Idiom in this sentence shows an important cultural context. It was suggested by one of the English native speakers, an American, who is used to the fact that students pay for studying at university. For Czech students, who do not have to pay for it, such message could be rather incomprehensible. The first thing one might think about fresh graduates could be that they do not have a job, lack skills or even have little money but not that they are in debt as they did not have to take a student loan, unlike American students. The third and the fourth sentences are slightly better for the purpose of the idiom explanation without saying it, the fourth probably being the best of all of them. Expression ‘investment’ implies money moreover the sentence says it was unsuccessful. Therefore, students might be able to infer *be in the red* means ‘be in debt’.

Another idiom respondents dealt with was *once in a blue moon*:

1. *My parents live in Australia, so I see them once in a blue moon.*
2. *I don't go on business trips very often, just once in a blue moon.*
3. *He wins at pool once in a blue moon.*
4. *He won the lottery twice. That only happens once in a blue moon.*

The first example was suggested by the English native speaker from Australia. When presenting such sentences in the class, students could deduce the meaning if they knew few important facts, at least the one that their teacher comes from Australia. Then it should not be difficult to imagine that he most probably does not see his parents very often, thus, rarely. The second sentence seems to be a perfect example as it directly says ‘not very often’ in the first part of the sentence. Therefore, *once in a blue moon* is easily understandable because it only specifies what has already been said. The third and the fourth sentences are very similar however the fourth one is a bit more apposite. The third one is too short to explain the idiom, the fourth one starts by saying that someone won the lottery twice and adds how often this happens. It should be very easy for the students to realize how often this can happen.

Bring home the bacon was another idiom some of the respondents applied themselves to:

1. *She works hard to bring home the bacon.*
2. *My wife doesn't work so it's up to me to bring home the bacon.*
3. *The husband went on a paternity leave and the wife was the only one bringing home the bacon.*

4. *If Jane stays home with kids, her husband must go to work so he can bring home the bacon.*

The first sentence is once again not very long however, some students might understand it because ‘working hard’ combined with idiom *bring home the bacon* slightly implies that this has something to do with a salary. The second, third and the fourth one are very similar. Two of them mention ‘going to work’, and one ‘paternity leave’. They seem to be long enough and sufficient. These three sentences could be a suitable example of presenting the idiom in context without the necessity to provide any other explanation.

One of the idioms from the selected food-related idioms respondents looked at was *piece of cake*:

1. *I’ve done that a million times. It will be a piece of cake for me.*
2. *That project was a piece of cake.*
3. *Setting up a Facebook page for your company is a piece of cake, anyone can do it.*
4. *This race will be a piece of cake for me since I’ve been training for months.*

Idiom in the second sentence could only be understandable with more extensive information of the context. The third sentence is relatively sufficient thanks to the last part of the sentence. When one says that anyone can do it that means it is not difficult. Consequently, *piece of cake* is something that is really easy. The first and the fourth sentence should be easily understandable by students. The Czech translation of this idiom is totally different nevertheless the English version is more or less deducible as ‘cake’ should logically have positive meaning.

One of the number-related idioms respondents managed to make up a sentence with was *twenty-four-seven*:

1. *Websites like BBC are updated twenty-four-seven.*
2. *Some of the big supermarkets never close. They are open twenty-four-seven.*
3. *The factory is working twenty-four-seven.*
4. *To be a mother means being in charge of twenty-four-seven.*

Idiom *twenty-four-seven*, as already mentioned in the practical part, is uncomplicated and easily comprehensible for Czech students because Czech language uses the same phrase. Therefore all of the presented sentences should be enough to show the idiom in the context and give its explanation at the same time, even the shortest one, the third one. With little knowledge of how websites like BBC work, the first sentence would be appropriate

as well. The second one is absolutely clear even if students did not know what *twenty-four-seven* is supposed to mean because saying that supermarkets ‘never close’ is comprehensible enough. The last sentence was made up by one of the female Czech native speakers and maybe especially women would relate to this since they could imagine how much as mothers they must be ‘on standby’. *Twenty-four-seven* in this case is over-exaggeration (called ‘hyperbole’ in literature) contrary to the rest of the sentences where the meaning is literal. Nonetheless, it is still intelligible because Czech language uses the phrase in both meanings, too.

Sentences with idiom *take five* were also suggested by few respondents:

1. *You look like you need a break. Why don't you take five and start again after lunch.*
2. *Ok, you have worked hard today so take five.*
3. *Let's take five and finish it after we get some rest.*
4. *After practising for three hours, the dancers looked tired so the instructor told them to take five.*

This idiom is not as clear as the previous one although Czech language uses a phrase that is partly similar (*to take twenty*). The second sentence is not much comprehensible, the first, third, and the fourth one are much better. The first includes the explanation of the idiom in the first part (a break), the third uses similar indicator (get some rest) and the last one relies on mentioning that the dancers were tired.

Not many respondents managed to think up example sentences including market-related idioms. One of the few they worked with was *black market*:

1. *If it is illegal you can definitely find it on the black market.*
2. *Which black market did you buy your ingredients from?*

The first sentence is clear-cut, expression ‘illegal’ says it all. The second sentence is rather misleading and does not say much. However, Czech language uses the same idiom and black carries negative connotation which was also seen in the group of colour-related idioms therefore, meaning of this idiom should not be too difficult for students to reveal.

Another one was *niche market*:

1. *My idea has created this niche market.*
2. *Your product is very specific and I think it would do well on a niche market.*

Niche market is rather specific business term that many students might not be familiar with even in their mother tongue (the Czech translation could be ‘segment trhu se specifickými produkty’). The first sentence would not probably help them at all. The second one is a bit better. Nevertheless, the clarification still would be needed. As most respondents pointed out in other parts of the survey, market-related idioms belong to the more difficult ones and would almost always need extensive explanation.

Respondents were supposed to make up sentences that on their own would be sufficient to explain the meaning of an idiom without any other information. Not all did so however, as they stated earlier in the questionnaires not all of them take this approach in their classes when it comes to business idioms although they admit it is one of the possible ways to go. It is obvious that making up a sentence that would clearly and briefly present the idiom in the context and explained its meaning at the same is not an easy task. It is not only students who have hard time interpreting business idioms in class. Teachers also face a great deal of difficulties.

9.2 The use of Czech language in the class

Respondents evaluated to what extent Czech students need the translation of idioms into their mother tongue. English native speakers also stated if they are able to translate some idioms into Czech and if they do it. Their knowledge of Czech is different. One of them was born in the Czech Republic but grew up in the USA and although she was exposed to Czech language since she was a child she speaks and understands only little. The other three moved to the Czech Republic as adults. One of them learnt Czech in Prague for one year and is able to communicate at a very good level. The last two know only basic phrases. The Czech-born American stated that she usually does not translate idioms and based on what she noticed in her classes students do not need the translation into Czech because it often does not help them understand the idiom better. Sometimes it might confuse them even more. The American respondent with good knowledge of Czech said that he is only able to translate idioms that have a Czech equivalent (e.g. *black economy* or *black market*). He said that translation can help students if the particular idiom has an equivalent in Czech. This applies to beginners mainly. However, he holds the same view as the previous respondent and says that generally it is better to learn the phrase without translation because it does not help in the understanding. The last two respondents admitted they are not able to translate business idioms into Czech. One of them pointed out

that he would do it if he could because translation is good for students especially when the idioms are really strange and thus difficult to interpret.

Czech respondents not only answered if students need the translation but also if they, as Czech native speakers, think they are in an advantage compared to their native English-speaking colleagues. Speaking about students' needs of translation, one avers that they do not need it at all. One says it depends on the level (lower levels definitely need it) another it depends on the idiomatic expression. If there is a word similar to the Czech one it is usually quite easy since students can guess it. If not then it can be trickier and it is necessary to explain it in different words. Two respondents stated that they often translate idioms, especially the more obscure ones, because it is easy and they can immediately check that students use it correctly. Furthermore, when reaching dead-end during explanation in English it is unreasonable to insist on using the foreign language only. As some of the respondents highlight for some students it can be also stressful since not all feel secure about their English.

As for the opinion whether they are in an advantage because of their knowledge of Czech, all of them agree that it certainly is an advantage especially when teaching lower level students where Czech translation is almost always inevitable. One respondent's experience is that knowing the learners first language can help to find the better way how to teach the meaning as one can easily imagine the situation or example that would relay the meaning more efficiently. Moreover, some learners require the Czech translation to fully grasp the matter of language. Another says that he appreciates the possibility to use the students' mother tongue but tries to avoid it anyway. Translating might seem as a fast way but all teachers know the way it works – easy come, easy go. The point is to explain students they should not want the fastest way but rather the one for permanent knowledge.

On the whole, it seems that English and Czech native speakers do not take significantly different approaches. English native speakers are demanded because they are native speakers. Not only do they have perfect knowledge of the language and speak the right accent but they also know the culture of the particular country. All these are qualities required and highly appreciated by students. Native speakers most often teach people who have already reached higher level of English and can do without their mother tongue in the class. The use of Czech is not expected. As idioms represent rather specific part of English vocabulary, it is understandable that some of the native speakers allow students to find Czech translation. Getting knowledge and understanding a new phrase is what the teaching process is about. When all possible ways of interpreting in the English language fail it is

the students' first language that can step in and help. Attitude of the Czech teachers is more or less the same. They are more likely to be asked to teach low level students therefore, have to be prepared for the use of Czech language. With higher level students some of them try to avoid using Czech even when dealing with more difficult idioms, some prefer their direct translation (when possible) to prevent misinterpretation. Furthermore, every teacher knows that each student is different and learns differently. What works in one class does not have to work in another.

9.3 Students' attitude towards business idioms

When asked about problems they deal with when interpreting an idiom, respondents' answers differed quite noticeably. From English native speakers only one person mentioned a difficulty he faces; the meaning of an idiom can be lost because the words do not fit grammatically, going from English to Czech. One of the Czech native speakers said that she has no problems because she thinks that most of business idioms are easy to explain and students understand them. Another stated that his most common issue with idioms is that there is no short Czech equivalent and that makes it hard for students to comprehend and also use the idiom. One respondent points out that every once in a while it is challenging to find the proper explanation of some business idioms and that some learners are reluctant towards them as they perceive them as something of higher knowledge. The last of them said that students try to translate them word for word. Unfortunately, this is a common problem. Far too many students tend to translate texts word for word. Almost all respondents confirmed that they have several students with this bad habit. For some of the learners it is difficult to accept the fact that the language they learn works differently than their mother tongue. Some are simply afraid to interpret it their way. Regardless, word for word translation occurs from English into Czech and vice versa quite often. This type of translation does not lead to correct formulation but often allows understanding to certain extent. However, word for word translation of idioms in most cases causes nothing but terrible misunderstanding. Therefore, students should be taught and reminded to take any foreign language freely and not to insist on strict interpretation. That probably applies to idioms more than any other part of English vocabulary.

9.4 Innovative ways of teaching business idioms

Respondents were asked whether they have tried an innovative way of teaching business idioms. Few of them suggested role-plays, practising them on phone or in real business situations. Peer discussion is also valuable because some students may have a better understanding than others and a task based on discussion can juice up the whole class. Another respondent perceives idioms as a spice of language learning process and carefully chooses only few every once in a while. Another respondent has the same opinion, saying that keeping it to three or four at a time is a key, also quizzing students in later lessons so they remember, and let them use the idiom to describe their own experience. One respondent says she sometimes gives her students sentences with idioms and simply has them guess the meaning based on the context of the sentence. Many times they are able to figure out the meaning without her giving the definition. Moreover, giving them translation makes students lazy. Another one points out that some idioms can create funny images if thought of literally. For example *bring home the bacon* is funny if you picture the person actually going to the store and buying a kilo of bacon to bring home. A kilo of bacon is rather expensive so this can reinforce the actual meaning of the idiom that the person who buys the bacon has the money to do it. Thus, small analysis of some idioms can be interesting for students and also help them grasp the meaning and remember it. Few respondents suggested that some idioms are inconspicuously integrated into every lesson. One of the most suitable and universal idioms would be *Let's get down to business* when starting the lesson and *Let's call it a day* at the end. It is not an innovative way but definitely an effective one. It takes both little time and effort and shows students situations suitable for such expression.

One respondent suggested rather extraordinary activity to teach business idioms that he personally tried. He used materials created by Kaplan College that show English idioms as literally depicted pictures, e.g. big cheese, to brainstorm, snowed under, red tape or lemon law. 'Big cheese' (an influential person) is depicted as the highest skyscraper in the city dressed as a business man. Picture 'to brainstorm' (trying to come up with new ideas) shows a huge brain with lightning over a person's head. 'Snowed under' (having too much work) is pictured as a person working on laptop, surrounded by a lot of documents and covered with snow. 'Red tape' (a set of bureaucratic rules that slow or stop progress) is drawn as a person sitting at the desk in an office tied by a long red tape. 'Lemon law' (an American law that protects purchasers of faulty cars) is simply a car in the shape of lemon

with puncture. Students were asked to work in pairs, describe these pictures to each other and draw it with colour pencils. The whole process was accompanied by instrumental music.

This type of teaching uses method of so-called suggestopedia. It is a holistic teaching method that works with both left and right brain and uses all types of memory – visual, audio and kinaesthetic. It was developed by the Bulgarian educator Georgi Lozanov, it involves colours, music, and play in the teaching process and uses special materials that respect the way brain naturally works. This experimental way was used to compare how well students remember idioms when they learn it as a text (Big cheese → an influential person) and when they interpret it their own creative way. Music helped activate the right brain and switch on the ‘relaxing mode’. Students spent several minutes drawing a picture they did not see but that was described to them, which was crucial – they interpreted it the way they saw it in their heads. Moreover, the pictures were nonsense that means peculiar. All this later helped them recall the idiom itself. Besides, students were not told they were drawing idioms at first. They were ‘learning without being taught’.

To conclude, respondents, both Czech and English native speakers, agreed that idioms comprise rather wide portion of English vocabulary, that they are crucial part of everyday language, and thus deserve attention. They were not able to assess how much linguists neglect this area, however they are in contact with learners striving for good English knowledge and they know that teaching these people idioms is a challenge. There is no universal teaching style or method that can be used in every class with every student. Teaching not only business idioms or conventional idioms but generally is often about improvisation. Not using idioms can contribute to non-native impression, which is acceptable for a lot of students. If they only want to be understood and be able to communicate, very little is needed. One can do without grammar rules, proper pronunciation and other aspects of language. Using what some students call ‘Indian English’ is a level they are simply satisfied with.

Nevertheless, companies working in an international environment are likely to demand highly skilled people in terms of foreign language. Interpreting and translation cost a lot of money as well as time. Nowadays, English is widely spoken especially among young generation and knowing it is not a competitive advantage anymore. Nonetheless, really good level of English knowledge can be a considerable asset. Companies will always choose the best candidates. Good level of English, including the use of suitable idioms,

naturally indicates an experienced person and thus, appreciation and respect. This is something employers will always look for. Therefore, it is worth learning (business) English and without a doubt, it is worth devoting oneself to learning (business) idioms. Sooner or later it pays off.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the thesis was to analyse English business idioms and present English teachers' point of view. The hypothesis proposed that English business idioms in textbooks are presented at every language level and that they need context evaluation to be interpreted in L1 (students' first language) properly. A qualitative research including questionnaire, direct observation in the class and interview was conducted to prove the hypothesis.

The theoretical part provided brief information about English as the language of a global business and theoretical background concerning idioms. This included definition of idioms both from dictionaries and by linguists, classification of idioms, their features and origin. It also presented four groups of selected business idioms that were later examined in the practical part, too.

The practical part presented opinions and approach of four English and four Czech native speakers who work as English teachers and have experience with running business classes. They not only shared their opinions and approach but also their suggestions and own experience. Along with questionnaires, direct observation in respondents' classes and interviews with teachers and shortly with students, too, was carried out to complement the collected data and get an overall image of the investigated issue.

As for the hypothesis, the survey disproved that business idioms are presented at every language level. However, respondents held different views on this. Based on the discussion during the interviews, it is evident that business English itself is not usually taught from the lowest level, A1. It follows that business idioms can hardly be presented at all language levels. Although, some of the respondents have taught the lowest level students business English it is not a common practice.

Concerning the second part of the hypothesis, the answer is equivocal as respondents take various approaches towards interpretation of idioms. They proposed example sentences that in their opinion were comprehensive enough to interpret an idiom. Context of some of the sentences was helpful and long enough to explain the idiom without translation therefore it might seem that context evaluation is necessary and at the same time enough to interpret an idiom. On the other hand, some respondents said that they prefer direct translation of business idioms and do not rely on the context evaluation because they want to avoid misinterpretation. As some of them stated, each business idiom (and also student) is different and requires its own way of interpretation.

It is difficult to generalize the outcome of the survey as there were significant differences in answers to some questions and, on the other hand, agreement in others. However, the survey was a qualitative one therefore the main objective was not to get an overall result but to examine investigated environment and present few respondents' ideas and attitude. However, it is important to stress that all respondents agreed on the statement that idioms are an integral part of everyday language and partly show how well speakers master it. Hence, Wittgensten's quote can be adjusted and put this way:

"The limits of my idioms are the limits of my English."

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APPENDICES

P I Questionnaire among Czech teachers

P II Questionnaire among native English-speaking teachers

APPENDIX P I: QUESTIONNAIRE AMONG CZECH TEACHERS

Dear respondents,

The purpose of the thesis is to analyse business idioms. The survey has two goals: find out if business idioms are presented at every language level and if they need context evaluation to be explained in L1 properly. L1 stands for mother tongue, Czech language in this case.

The survey consists of three parts. The first one presents you, respondents, and probes into information about your teaching experience. The second one examines if idioms occur at all English levels. The third part deals with the interpretation of an idiom and how it is explained in the class. There is also list of selected business idioms at the end.

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

PART 1

1. Name:
2. Achieved education:
3. Field of study:
4. State if you received a certificate or took part in training programme for teachers (e.g. TESOL):
5. Years of teaching experience:
6. Years of teaching experience in business classes:
7. Specify the focus of your business classes (if possible):
8. State what companies you teach for specialise in:

PART 2

1. Business idioms are presented at every language level – do you agree or not? Why?

2. From which level do you think it is appropriate to teach business English? (use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A1-C2) Why?
3. Which Business English textbooks do you use?
4. Look at the list of idioms at the end – how often do you encounter them when you teach? (You can describe them as a whole, in groups or separately)
5. For which level do you think the selected idioms are suitable? Why? (see the list at the end of the questionnaire)

PART 3

1. In your opinion, what is the function of idioms?
2. Which approach is better – explaining simply the meaning of an idiom (see example a) or presenting text with idiom in the context (example b)? What are advantages and disadvantages of both methods?

Example: a) be in the red – be in debt, having no money on account

b) be in the red – They earned \$ 10 000 but they spent \$15 000.

That's why they are now in the red.

3. Look at the given idioms. Can you make up a sentence for each (or at least some of them) that, in your opinion, would be suitable and sufficient to explain the idiom? (see the list at the end of the questionnaire)
4. What materials do you use in the class (business textbooks, newspapers, articles from webpages etc.)? Can you compare the use of idioms in these sources? How often are they used?
5. What problems do you face when you interpret an idiom?
6. Do you feel that students need translation into Czech when they learn a new idiom?

7. Do you have any tips or suggestions on how to teach/interpret idioms? Have you ever tried any innovative ways?
8. Do you think you are in an advantage in comparison to native speakers because of your knowledge of Czech? Do you use it to translate idioms? Why? Why not?
9. Does the translation into Czech help?
10. When do you generally use Czech in the class?

LIST OF IDIOMS

Colour-related idioms:

Red tape
 Be in the red
 Blacklist
 Black economy
 Black Friday
 Be in the black
 White-collar worker
 Blue-collar worker
 Pink-collar worker
 Green marketing
 Golden parachute
 Once in a blue moon

Food-related idioms:

Big cheese
 In a nutshell
 Apple-pie order
 Bring home the bacon
 Bread and butter
 Nest egg
 Piece of cake
 Make a mint
 Money for jam
 Sell like hot cakes
 Icing on the cake

Number-related idioms:

Nine-to-five
 Twenty-four-seven
 Zero hour
 Eleventh hour
 Fifty-fifty
 Take five

Market-related idioms:

Bull market
 Bear market
 Black market
 Captive market
 Niche market

APPENDIX P II: QUESTIONNAIRE AMONG NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS

Dear respondents,

The purpose of the thesis is to analyse business idioms. The survey has two goals: find out if business idioms are presented at every language level and if they need context evaluation to be explained in L1 properly. L1 stands for mother tongue, Czech language in this case.

The survey consists of three parts. The first one presents you, respondents, and probes into information about your teaching experience. The second one examines if idioms occur at all English levels. The third part deals with the interpretation of an idiom and how it is explained in the class. There is also list of selected business idioms at the end.

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

PART 1

1. Name:
2. Achieved education:
3. Field of study:
4. State if you received a certificate or took part in training programme for teachers (e.g. TESOL):
5. Years of teaching experience:
6. Years of teaching experience in business classes:
7. Specify the focus of your business classes (if possible):
8. State what companies you teach for specialise in:

PART 2

1. Business idioms are presented at every language level – do you agree or not? Why?
2. From which level do you think it is appropriate to teach business English? (use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A1-C2) Why?
3. Which Business English textbooks do you use?
4. Look at the list of idioms at the end – how often do you encounter them when you teach? (You can describe them as a whole, in groups or separately)
5. For which level do you think the selected idioms are suitable? Why? (see the list at the end of the questionnaire)

PART 3

1. How would you, as a native speaker, describe the function of an idiom?
2. Which approach is better – explaining simply the meaning of an idiom (see example a) or presenting text with idiom in the context (example b)? What are advantages and disadvantages of both methods?

Example: *a) be in the red – be in debt, having no money on account*

 b) be in the red – They earned \$ 10 000 but they spent \$15 000.

 That's why they are now in the red.
3. Look at the given idioms. Can you make up a sentence for each (or at least some of them) that, in your opinion, would be suitable and sufficient to explain the idiom? (see the list at the end of the questionnaire)
4. What materials do you use in the class (business textbooks, newspapers, articles from webpages etc.)? Can you compare the use of idioms in these sources? How often are they used?
5. Do you feel that students need translation into Czech when they learn a new idiom?

6. Are you able to translate some idioms into Czech? Do you do it?
7. What problems do you face when you interpret an idiom?
8. Do you have any tips or suggestions on how to teach/interpret idioms? Have you ever tried any innovative ways?

LIST OF IDIOMS

Colour-related idioms:

Red tape
 Be in the red
 Blacklist
 Black economy
 Black Friday
 Be in the black
 White-collar worker
 Blue-collar worker
 Pink-collar worker
 Green marketing
 Golden parachute
 Once in a blue moon

Food-related idioms:

Big cheese
 In a nutshell
 Apple-pie order
 Bring home the bacon
 Bread and butter
 Nest egg
 Piece of cake
 Make a mint
 Money for jam
 Sell like hot cakes
 Icing on the cake

Number-related idioms:

Nine-to-five
 Twenty-four-seven
 Zero hour
 Eleventh hour
 Fifty-fifty
 Take five

Market-related idioms:

Bull market
 Bear market
 Black market
 Captive market
 Niche market