A Syntactic Study of Idioms

A Syntactic Study of Idioms:

Psychological States in English and Their Constraints

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A   - Adjective
Adv   - Adverb
AP   - Adjective Phrase
AdvP   - Adverb Phrase
ApplH   - High Applicative
ApplHP   - High Applicative Phrase
ApplL   - Low Applicative
ApplLP   - Low Applicative Phrase
COCA   - The Corpus of Contemporary American English
CP   - Complementiser Phrase
Det   - Determiner
DOC   - Double Object Construction
DP   - Determiner Phrase
FI   - Feature Inheritance
Gen   - Genitive
ICE   - Idiomatically Combining Expressions
IdP   - Idiomatic Phrases
iF[val]   - Valued interpretable features
LF   - Logical Form
O   - Object
OE   - Object Experiencer
P   - Preposition
PF   - Phonetic Form
PP   - Prepositional Phrase
Pr   - Predication
PrP   - Predication Phrase
SC   - Small Clause
SE   - Subject Experiencer
SEM   - Syntax-Semantics Interface
Spec   - Specifier
TP   - Tense Phrase
uF[ ]   - unvalued uninterpretable features
v   - Light / Little Verb
*v*P   - Light / Little Verb Phrase
V   - Verb
VP   - Verb Phrase

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of English phraseology, linguists have shown a constant interest in idioms (cf. Knappe 2004: 3). Undoubtedly, not only are idioms an important part of the language and culture of the society (Ji-Xin 2009), but they also carry more impact than non-idiomatic expressions because of their close identification with a particular language and culture (Nida 2001: 28). The linguistic units which are the core of interest in this book, will be referred to as "phraseological units," "fixed phrases," "idiomatic expressions," "idiomatic phrases," or "idioms" for short. Definitions and various aspects concerning the concept of idioms are reviewed and integrated into a framework which is rooted in the linguistic discipline of phraseology.

Since the general tendencies of present-day English are towards more idiomatic usage (Seidl and McMordie 1978: 1), indeed, it seems to be worth paying attention to the role phraseological units play in a language. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to speak or write English without using idioms (Seidl and McMordie 1978: 4), especially while describing one's emotional or mental condition. In the same vein, Wierzbicka (1972) says that, in contradistinction to thoughts which have a structure that can be rendered by means of words, feelings do not have it. All a person can do, therefore, is "to describe in words the external situations or thoughts which are associated in our memory or in our imagination with the feeling in question and to trust that our reader or listener will grasp what particular feelings are meant" (Wierzbicka 1972: 59). Therefore, it seems that it is interesting and worthwhile to make an attempt to analyse both the language of phraseological units and emotions. In other words, this book is to focus not only on idioms, but also on one's psychological condition. However, the aim of the book is neither to discuss the issues of idioms and emotions from the psychological point of view, nor provide a conceptual analysis of emotional metaphors. Instead, the objective of the book is to analyse idioms referring to psychological states in English from the perspective of syntax, focusing particularly both on the syntactic structure of this specific set of verbal psych-idioms, and on the constraints on the way they are built.

For the purpose of the book, the recent compositional model of idiomaticity, represented by Cacciari and Tabossi (1988); Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting (1989); Gibbs (1990); Cacciari (1993); Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991); and Keysar and Bly (1995, 1999), among many others, is adopted. The compositional model objects to the standard view of idioms as non-compositional strings, typical of generative grammar (Katz and Postal 1963; Fraser 1970; Katz 1973; Swinney and Cutler 1979; Gibbs 1980; and Machonis 1985; among others). Most idioms are viewed here to be flexible and able to undergo syntactic and lexical modifications, in contradistinction to a few totally frozen phraseological units. Hence, following Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow's (1994) taxonomy of idioms, two types of idioms are distinguished, i.e. (i) *idiomatically combining expressions* (e.g. *pull strings* "to use connections"), and (ii) *idiomatic phrases* (e.g. *kick the bucket* "to die"). *Idiomatically combining expressions* (ICEs) are referred to as decomposable / compositional or analysable idioms, and they comprise idioms with a derivable idiomatic interpretation (normally or abnormally, literally or figuratively). *Idiomatic phrases* (IdPs), in turn, are known as non-decomposable / non-compositional, frozen, opaque, or unanalysable, and include idioms with an idiomatic interpretation not derived from their constituent parts.

Furthermore, this book follows the theoretical approaches according to which the syntax of a verbal predicate and the range of syntactic realizations of its arguments are determined by a verb's semantic representations (e.g. Croft 2012; Dowty 1991; Goldberg 1995; Jackendoff 1990; Langacker 1987; Pinker 1989; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998; van Valin and LaPolla 1997; and Grafmiller 2013). Consequently, the study relates to the syntax-semantics interface within which phraseological units are to be better comprehended. The semantic dimensions of idiomaticity, the event structure of verbal predicates, and their aspectual properties are to be discussed, as well.

The syntactic study is based on the database of 161 English verbal idioms which describe one's emotional / mental / psychological condition, and hence correspond to standard psychological verbs (psych-verbs), e.g. *to love*, *to fear*, *to annoy*, or *to matter to*. On the basis of the well-known studies represented by Belletti and Rizzi (1988), Pesetsky (1995), and Landau (2010), among others, it can be specified that psych-verbs express (a change in) mental or/and emotional state and a relation between the two arguments: an *Experiencer* and the *Cause* / *Theme* of such a psychological condition. Cross-linguistically and within different languages, psych-verbs are classified similarly to the three-way division offered by Belletti and Rizzi (1988), as in (0.1) below.

(0.1) Belletti and Rizzi's (1988) tripartite classification of psych-verbs:
      Class I: *Mark **loves** bats*.   (SE psych-verbs)
      Class II: *The bats **frightened** Mark*.   (OE psych-verbs)
      Class III: *This film **appeals to** Joanne*. (OE psych-verbs)

    As shown in (0.1), an Experiencer can be realized as either a subject (class I) or as an object (class II and class III). In addition, in the overview of some crucial syntactic approaches to psych-verbs, the focus is laid on Object Experiencer (OE) psych-verbs, and their "special" syntactic properties, called "psych-effects," revealed in their non-agentive reading (cf. Belletti and Rizzi's 1988 unaccusative approach to OE psych-verbs, Landau's 2005, 2010 locative approach, Fábregas and Marín's 2015 layer theory, and Grafmiller's 2013 recent account of psych-verbs). Indeed, what makes OE psych-verbs special and worth analysing is their aspectual ambiguity, (between stative, eventive non-agentive and eventive agentive reading) rather than their Experiencer argument (cf. Arad 1998, 1999; Landau 2010; Alexiadou and Iordachioaia 2014; among others).
    With reference to psych-verbs, the psychological idioms under scrutiny, such as those in (0.2) and (0.3), are to become the object of syntactic analysis carried out in this book.

(0.2) The examples of idioms and the SE (class I) psych-verbs they correspond to:
    a. Y **loves** X:
        carry a torch for X
        fall head over heels in love with X
        have a soft spot for X
        set Y's heart on X
    b. Y **enjoys** X**:**
        paint the town (red)
        raise the roof
        have a ball
        kick (up) Y's heels
        get a buzz out of X

(0.3) The examples of idioms and the OE (class II-III) psych-verbs they correspond to:
    a. X **annoys** Y (class II):
        get the hump
        raise Y's hackles
        get a rise out of Y

   put Y through wringer
   give Y the pip
   drive Y batty / nuts/ bananas / bonkers / crazy
  b. X **depresses** Y (class II):
   upset the applecart
   dampen/damp Y's spirits
   cast a gloom / a shadow over Y
   take the wind out of Y's sails
   cut Y down to size
   give Y a bad / hard time/ the blues / the run around
   bring Y low
  c. X **appeals to** Y (class III):
   float Y's boat
   whet Y's appetite
   set / put Y on Y's ear

  Importantly, both the psych-predicates and the psychological VP-idioms to which the predicates correspond, comprise a participant who experiences some emotional or mental state, i.e. an *Experiencer* (Y), and a *Stimulus / Causer / Cause / Target* (X), which has contributed to this specific state or become a target of it. The Experiencer (Y) may be situated either in the subject position, i.e. in Subject Experiencer (SE) psych-verbs, as illustrated in (0.2), or in the object position, *viz*. in Object Experiencer (OE) psych verbs, as shown in (0.3). In short, the idioms in question are to correspond to the psychological states referred to by psych-predicates.

  Moreover, the bipolar division of idioms into IdP and ICEs (cf. Nunberg *et al*. 1994; Harwood *et al*. 2016) is of much significance in the syntactic study of psychological idioms, and the constraints on the way these idioms are built, which is to be undertaken in the book. Even though some previous analyses of idioms (e.g. Nunberg *et al*. 1994; O'Grady 1998; and Bruening 2010) are expected to be useful, not all puzzles of idiomaticity can be resolved by relying on them. Therefore, the most current research, performed within the scope of the Phase Theory and the *Idioms as Phases Hypothesis* (cf. Svenonius 2005; Stone 2009; Harwood 2013, 2016, 2017; Harley and Stone 2013; Kim 2014, 2015; and Corver *et al*. 2017; among others) is chosen to address certain syntactic problems that idioms pose. As a result, the analysis of psychological idioms in the light of the Phase Theory, provides some evidence for DPs, ApplHP, and PrPs phases that can be formed in verbal idioms, in addition to vPs.

  The book is organised in four chapters. The aim of Chapter One is to present the definitions of an idiom, taken both from dictionaries,

encyclopaedias, and put forward by linguists (e.g. Pulman 1993; Gläser 1998; Knappe 2004; Mäntylä 2004; Carine 2005; Liu 2008; and O'Dell and McCarthy 2010; among many others), and to discuss different semantic dimensions of idiomaticity. Among the most crucial characteristics of idioms presented here, there is idiom metaphoricity, idiom literalness, familiarity, predictability, and idiom (non-)compositionality, among others. This chapter deals with idiom taxonomies, models and hypotheses of idiom representation and processing, as well, offered by Makkai (1972), Nunberg (1978) and his followers, i.e. Gibbs and Nayak (1989) and Titone and Connine (1999), but also by Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991), Sag, Baldwin, Bond, Copestake, and Flickinger (2002), and the classification of idioms by Yoshikawa (2008), to list just a few. For the sake of this book, the bipolar taxonomy of idioms, offered by Nunberg *et al.* (1994), and adopted by Harwood *et al.* (2016), has been adopted, in which idioms are divided into *idiomatically combining expressions* (ICEs), and *idiomatic phrases* (IdPs).

Chapter Two sheds light on predicates which denote a mental or emotional condition, such as *fear, love, worry, frighten,* or *surprise*, which a human participant (Experiencer) experiences. Consequently, this part of the book is devoted to providing a brief, yet not truly comprehensive, analysis of psychological verbs. The chapter opens with a discussion concerning the fundamental syntactic, semantic and aspectual characteristics of psych-verbs. Then, both the working definition of psych-verbs, offered by Landau (2010), and the tripartite syntactic classification of these predicates (class I, II, and III), proposed by Belletti and Rizzi (1988), are presented as the ones adopted for the sake of the book (cf. Dowty 1991; Pesetsky 1995; and Landau 2010). Chapter II also deals with the event structure of psych-predicates (Vendler 1967; Dowty 1979; Grimshaw 1990; and Alexiadou and Iordăchioaia 2014; among others). To be precise, the discussion concerns the aspectual typology of class I-III psych-verbs within the Lexicon-Syntax Interface, and the syntactic tests to distinguish between stative, eventive non-agentive, and eventive agentive readings of class II OE psych-verbs (cf. Arad 1998, 1999). Finally, this chapter offers a brief overview of the syntactic approaches to psych-verbs, most discussed in the literature, i.e. Belletti and Rizzi's (1988) unaccusative approach to OE psych-verbs, Landau's (2005, 2010) locative approach, Fábregas and Marín's (2015) layer theory, and Grafmiller's (2013) recent account of psych-verbs.

The aim of Chapter Three is first and foremost to elicit psych-verbs which constitute a representative set of this type of predicates; and then to determine idioms which correspond to the psych predicates listed, and

which are to be analysed in Chapter Four. To meet these objectives, the methodology adopted in data selection is explained. It involves two stages of the corpus study. In the first stage the most frequent class I and III psych-verbs (cf. Belletti and Rizzi 1988), with the top occurrence in *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA), are elicited; the top psych-verbs of class II are adopted after Grafmiller (2013). In the second stage of the corpus study, idiomatic phrases corresponding to the psychological verbs just selected are searched. Following the convenient typology suggested in Belletti and Rizzi (1988), the data are divided into three classes, in the same way as their psych-verbal equivalents. The elicited idioms are arranged according to the twelve syntactic patterns they exhibit, while the exemplary sentences for those idioms, taken from the COCA and/or obtained *via* the Google Search, are listed in APPENDICES 1-3. The search results are extensively commented upon.

Chapter Four lays the theoretical foundations for the analysis of English psychological idioms, elicited in Chapter Three. One of the central concerns of this analysis is to decide, in the light of the recent approaches within generative grammar, which of the theories provides the best insight into the syntactic rules idioms are governed by. With this in mind, the chapter first deals with the semantic properties of both *idiomatically combining expressions* (compositional) and *idiomatic phrases* (non-compositional) (cf. Nunberg *et al.* 1994), with special reference made to psych-idioms. Then, syntactic and semantic flexibility of *psychological idiomatically combining expressions* is thoroughly discussed, with the exemplary sentences, taken either from the COCA Corpus, obtained *via* the Google Search, or tested against native speakers' judgments. Furthermore, Chapter Four deals with syntactic constraints imposed on idiomaticity by the grammar. The most important approaches to the behaviour of idioms are reviewed, *viz.* Nunberg *et al.*'s (1994) semantic alternative to the *Hierarchy Constraint*, and O'Grady's (1998) *Continuity Constraint*. Finally, the syntactic structure of psychological idioms is examined within the scope of the Phase Theory (cf. Svenonius 2005; Stone 2009; Harwood 2013, 2016, 2017; Harley and Stone 2013; Kim 2014, 2015; and Corver *et al.* 2017; among others) to check the validity of the phase-bound approach for the data analysed. Last but not least, some space is devoted to the position of an Experiencer and the aspectual properties the idioms under scrutiny reveal, with some reference made to the aspectual structure of psych-verbs to which psychological idioms correspond.

Chapter Four is followed by the final part of the book, *viz.* Summary and Conclusions, which gathers the main points from all the four chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS DEFINING AN IDIOM

1.1 Introduction

The aim of Chapter One is to present the definitions of the notion of an idiom and its characteristics. The chapter comprises five sections. Section 1.2 provides a wide range of definitions of an idiom, taken from dictionaries and encyclopaedias, followed by the definitions put forward by linguists. Section 1.3 discusses different dimensions of idiomaticity, meant here as the characteristics of idioms. This part of the chapter opens with an analysis of idiom metaphoricity, and the notion of metaphor and figurative language. Then, various taxonomies of idioms, idiom processing mechanisms, their metaphorical interpretation, as well as analysability and ambiguity of idioms are studied. Besides, this section deals with idiom non-compositionality, i.e. the fixedness of form and internal structure of idioms. Finally, among the characteristics of idioms analysed here, there is idiom literalness, familiarity and predictability, with the focus laid on the role of context, well-formedness of idioms, and the level of their formality. Section 1.4 concentrates on the models and hypotheses of idiom representation and processing commonly referred to in the literature. In section 1.5, the working definition of an idiom is established, on the basis of the aforementioned dimensions of idiomaticity. Finally, section 1.6 summarises all the aspects discussed in this chapter.

1.2 The definition of an idiom

The study of idioms is generally considered problematic for the majority of linguists. In his book *Idiomatic Creativity*, Langlotz (2006) argues that "idioms are peculiar linguistic constructions that have raised many eyebrows in linguistics and often confuse newcomers to a language" (Langlotz 2006: 1). They constitute a "subset of the fixed expressions in a language community" (Glucksberg 2001: 68), and on account of their complex nature, idioms give rise to a broad range of definitions. Thus, it is extremely difficult to provide a brief definition of an idiom, encompassing

all entities subsumed under this label. What is more, linguists have not reached any solution in form of a unified approach and view related to idioms so far, nor is it possible to offer in this book an explicit description of what the term *idiom* refers to. Nevertheless, in this section of the book, an attempt will be made to provide some clues as to how to define an idiom. The starting point in the discussion is an encyclopaedic and a dictionary definition, presented in section 1.2.1, followed by the concepts of linguists and scientists regarding the definitions of an idiom, outlined in section 1.2.2.

1.2.1 Dictionaries and linguistic encyclopaedias as the sources of definitions of the notion of idiom

To begin with, the word *idiom*, dating back to 1565-1575, derives from Latin idioma "special property," and from Greek ἰδίωμα–idiōma, "special feature, special phrasing." As defined by McArthur (1992: 495) in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, *idiom* means a combination of words which have a figurative meaning owing to their common usage. Meetham and Hudson (1969) in *The Encyclopaedia of Linguistics, Information and Control* describe an idiom as "a habitual collocation of two or more words whose combined meaning is not deducible from a knowledge of the meanings of its component words and of their grammatical syntagmatic relations to each other" (Meetham and Hudson 1969: 667).

Besides, in their book *English Idioms and How to Use Them*, Seidl and McMordie (1978) stress that, even though some idioms may be completely regular and logical, "an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone. The way in which the words are put together is often odd, illogical or even grammatically incorrect" (Seidl and McMordie 1978: 4).

Additionally, Simpson and Weiner (1989), in *The Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM*, rank an *idiom* as a smaller unit within language, defining it as "a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., peculiar to a language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one" (Simpson and Weiner 1989: sub verbo *idiom* n. 3a). However, this definition comprises not only idiomatic phraseological units and idiomatic word-formation products, but also non-lexical "idioms" or typical grammatical constructions (cf. Knappe 2004: 14).

What is more, in his *Longman Dictionary of Idioms*, Hill (1990) underlines the metaphorical rather than literal nature of idioms, and maintains that "[t]hey are also more or less invariable or fixed in form or order in a way that makes them different from literal expressions. Because they are metaphorical, one cannot usually discover their meanings by looking up the individual words in an ordinary dictionary" (Hill Long 1990: viii).

Finally, in her *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Neufeldt (1991) offers a more detailed definition of an idiom which is seen as "a phrase, construction, or expression that is recognized as a unit in the usage of a given language and either differs from the usual syntactic patterns or has a meaning that differs from the literal meaning of its parts taken together" (Neufeldt 1991: 670).

In a nutshell, encyclopaedic and dictionary definitions of an idiom treat it as a habitual unit of language, the meaning of which cannot be deduced by summing up the meanings of its individual components. Instead, idioms are fixed phraseological units by their long usage and have to be learned as a whole.

1.2.2 Linguists' and scientists' definitions of an idiom

Being aware of the fact that providing a definition for the term *idiom* is a challenging and difficult task, a great tribute should be paid to linguists and other scientists who have approached this problem from various angles throughout the history of language. Some of the definitions given by the specialists will be provided now before the specific characteristics of idioms are discussed.

First of all, an idiom is conventionally defined as "a complex expression whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of its elements" (Weinreich 1969: 26). And some decades earlier Willey (1939) formed a definition, saying:

> Idiom or idiomatic phrase (...) is a phrase the meaning of which cannot be deduced from its component parts. The following are examples of idiomatic phrases: *to bring about* (accomplish); *to bring to pass*; *to carry out* (make effective, accomplish); *to come by* (obtain); *to go hard with* (to be painful or harmful to); *to put up with* (tolerate, endure); *to set about* (begin). An examination of these phrases shows that the meaning of each (when used in its idiomatic sense) belongs to the phrase as a single element, and is not a composite effect made by joining the meanings of its parts. The peculiarity of such phrases becomes apparent if we compare them with phrases that are not in this sense idiomatic; as, "to get to the

city," "to sleep late in the morning" where every word has a meaning that
is contributory to the meaning of the phrase.

<div align="right">(Willey 1939: 221)</div>

In addition, for Weinreich (1969), "any expression in which at least
one constituent is polysemous, and in which a selection of a subsense is
determined by the verbal context, is a phraseological unit (…). [Thus,] a
phraseological unit that involves at least two polysemous constituents, and
in which there is a reciprocal contextual selection of subsenses, will be
called an idiom" (Weinreich 1969: 42). Consequently, Weinreich's
definition recognizes idioms as phraseological units or multiword
expressions which comprise lexical items that function with two or more
related meanings, i.e. they are polysemous. These meanings ("subsenses"),
contextually dependent, may be combined to form either a literal or an
idiomatic meaning (cf. Everaert's 2010: 83 example of the idiom *kick the
bucket* "to die").

Similarly, Lipka (2002) identifies idioms with phraseological units;
and consequently, he forms a definition as follows: "A phraseological unit
is a semantic unit consisting of a group of word-forms not beyond the
sentence level" (Lipka 2002: 89). This definition makes "phraseological
units" comparable to word-forms as concrete realizations of lexemes. On
the abstract level, a phraseological unit recognized this way may be seen
as the realization of a "phraseme," while the word-forms may be seen as
realizations of "lexemes" (cf. Lipka 2002: 84, 89-90, 94-96). A "lexeme"
will be treated then as an independent sign on the abstract linguistic level
of the lexicon. It embraces both "simple lexemes" as morphologically non-
composite lexemes, and "complex lexemes" as morphologically including
more than one segment (morpheme or formative). In Lipka's (2002: 89-
90) terminology, the notion of "complex lexeme" also covers "phrasal
lexemes" or "discontinuous lexical items," which relate to the notion of
idiomatic phraseological units as understood here (cf. Knappe 2004: 6).
Going further, Lipka (2002: 87) introduces the term "lexematic formative"
to distinguish phraseological combinations of formatives (e.g. *put up with*
"bear, tolerate") or those containing one or more of such formatives (e.g.
tit and *tat* in *tit for tat* "revenge") from word-formation products
containing so-called "cranberry morphemes" such as *Fri* in *Friday* and
cran in *cranberry*. Yet, these also fall under the definition of formatives as
"minimal formal units without identifiable meaning" (Lipka 2002: 87).

What is more, Adkins (1968: 149) names idioms as modes of
expression or phrases which are peculiar to a given language, and which
are the basis for understanding the language, since they constitute a large
part of it. Wadepuhl (1928) comments that "any construction that could

not be translated literally from one language into the other has been considered an idiom" (Wadepuhl 1928: 68). Having noticed that idioms are hardly ever translated literally, Adkins (1968) adds that often the dictionary is of little aid to provide the meaning of a particular expression. Idioms have meanings different from the meanings of the words which compose them. Moreover, idioms cannot be understood from the way they have been formed, which has been exemplified by Adkins ((1968: 149) by means of idioms such as, *make a beeline for*, meaning "to take the shortest route," and *be short-handed*, meaning "to have insufficient help." Other idioms are composed of verbs and prepositions, such as *to fill in*, meaning "to substitute for" or "to complete the blanks on a form," or built of verbs and adverbs such as *to look forward*, meaning "to anticipate."

Besides, O'Dell and McCarthy (2010) define an idiom as a fixed expression whose meaning is not immediately obvious from looking at the individual words in the idiom (cf. McCarthy and O'Dell 2002). Likewise, Fraser (1970) treats idioms as multi-word phraseological units, whose meaning is not predictable from their constituent parts, "I shall regard an idiom as a constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed" (Fraser 1970: 22; cf. Makkai 1972). In short, Fraser (1970) underlines the fact that the individual elements of an idiom cannot provide the overall meaning of the idiom. Correspondingly, Palmer's (1986: 36) view of a genuine idiom implies a phrase covering more than one word, whose meaning is unpredictable from the individual idiom constituents. Additionally, he notices that even though idioms behave like single words in semantic perception, grammatically they cannot be recognized as such units since idioms normally do not undergo changes (e.g. cannot form the past tense).

Furthermore, Kavka (2003) discusses the expressions with idiomatic nature in general, defining them as "multiword chunks consisting of elements, or constituents, which are bound together lexically and syntactically" (Kavka 2003: 12). Yet, he further makes a division of these idiomatic expressions into *collocations* (that are semi-compositional) and *idioms proper* (genuine idioms that are characterized with non-compositionality and invariability), and mentions that idioms are "a non-literal alternative from possible options of a literal interpretation" (Kavka 2003: 14, 25).

Then, the picture of an idiom as "a unique and fixed combination of at least two elements some of which do not function in the same way in any other combination (of the kind) or occur in a highly restricted number" is presented by Čermák (2007: 142). Moreover, he stresses that *anomaly* is

one of the core characteristics of idioms since "the more anomalies a phraseme displays, the more idiomatic it is and vice versa" (Čermák 2001: 7). Thus, according to Čermák (2007: 84), syntagmatic and paradigmatic deviations are mainly emphasized as the chief features of idioms.

On the other hand, Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow (1994) underline idiom unpredictability and conventionalism when they say, "Idioms are conventionalised: their meaning or use can't be predicted, or at least entirely predicted, on the basis of a knowledge of the independent conventions that determine the use of their constituents when they appear in isolation from one another" (Nunberg *et al.* 1994: 492). Having presented the examples of the idiom *kick the bucket* which means "to die" and *spill the beans* "to reveal a secret," they conclude that the meanings of both idioms and their forms do not result from any basic grammatical principle or from our knowledge of the world, but simply have to be learned.

In addition, Fernando (1996: 1) treats idioms as multiword expressions which are conventionalised and usually with a non-literal nature, though not in all cases. Besides, she believes that expressions which demonstrate a tendency towards higher variability may show idiomaticity, but they cannot be considered as genuine idioms. Fernando (1996) states her stance as follows: idioms are "indivisible units whose components cannot be varied, or only varied within definable limits" (Fernando 1996: 30). And to develop her definition of the term, she adds that "only those expressions which become conventionally fixed in a specific order and lexical form, or have only a restricted set of variants, acquire the status of idioms and are recorded in idiom dictionaries" (*ibid*.: 31). Thus, as specified by Fernando, the invariance of idioms is one of the best characteristics of idioms.

Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are often treated by linguists the same way as lexical units which function as one semantic entity and have one meaning. As explained by Moon (1998), when a multi-word idiom is recognized as a unit of one single meaning, it is lexicalized. Lexicalization is a "process by which a string of words and morphemes becomes institutionalised as part of the language and develops its own specialist meaning and function" (Moon 1998: 36). In this process, lexicalization and institutionalization accompany each other indispensably, and a string of words is not properly lexicalised if its meaning or function is not known widely enough. As soon as the meaning and function of the expression have become accepted and generally recognized in a language, the process of lexicalization comes to an end, and then the idiomatic meaning becomes institutionalized. Additionally, institutionalization requires a certain amount of frequency in use. However, as Moon (1998: 7) points

out, most idioms are rather infrequent, i.e. they may be restricted to certain registers and uses of speech, or to certain accents or dialects of the English language. Schraw *et al*. (1988: 424) conclude that both lexicalization and familiarity contribute to the likelihood of idiomatic preferences, while only lexicalization contributes significantly to the comprehension of idiomatic meanings.

Likewise, both Everaert *et al*. (1995: 3-5; 2010: 81) and Fernando (1996: 2-3) define idioms, or phraseologisms, so-called in Polish linguistic literature, as always conventionalised multiword expressions, characterised by semantic opacity, i.e. the fact that the meaning of the whole is not the sum of the components (cf. Szymańska 2008: 116). "Idioms are conventionalized linguistic expressions which can be decomposed into potentially meaningful components and exhibit co-occurrence restrictions that cannot be explained in terms of rule-governed morphosyntactic or semantic restrictions" (Everaert 2010: 81). Moreover, for Everaert (2010), idioms include "all formulaic expressions including sayings, proverbs, collocations" (Everaert 2010: 77). Similarly, Kjellmer (1994) considers idioms as a type or subset of collocation, while others consider "restricted collocations" (e.g. *cardinal error* / *sin* / *virtue* / *grace*) to be a type of idiom (Cowie and Mackin 1975; Cowie, Mackin, and McCaig 1983).

Similarly, for Saberian (2011a: 1231), the term "idiom" has been used to cover a wide variety of different types of multi-word units (MWUs), which are treated as vocabulary items consisting of a sequence of two or more words. These words constitute a meaningful and inseparable unit. Yet, Grant and Bauer (2004) state that the term MWU refers to both idioms as well as open and restricted collocations, excluding phrasal verbs. However, for Grant and Bauer (2004), open collocations are the freest kind of MWU, while core idioms are the most restricted ones. Similarly, Aisenstadt (1979) argues that collocations differ from idioms as "R[estricted] C[ollocation]s are not idiomatic in meaning; they do not form one semantic unit; their meaning is made up as the sum of the meanings of their constituents. They have a much greater variability and usually occur in patterns with a number of interchangeable constituents" (Aisenstadt 1979: 1).

What is more, according to Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1988), some conditions should be met to name a phrase idiomatic or not, since "constructions may be idiomatic in the sense that a large construction may specify a semantics (and/or pragmatics) that is distinct from what might be calculated from the associated semantics of the set of smaller constructions that could be used to build the same morphosyntactic object" (Fillmore *et al*. 1988: 501). Furthermore, Fillmore *et al*. (1988: 506-510)

distinguish between substantive (lexically filled) and formal (lexically open) idioms. Substantive idioms are lexically fixed (e.g. *once upon a time*), while formal idioms as abstract patterns show special semantics and/or pragmatics, and permit some lexical variation (e.g. *the sooner the better*, i.e. "the x-er the y-er," where x and y can correspond to various adverbs or adjectives). Fillmore *et al*. (1988: 505) also distinguish grammatical idioms (when words can fill expected places in grammatical structures) and extragrammatical ones (with anomalous structures, e.g. *by and large* "generally speaking").

Szymańska (2008: 116-117) adds that it is grammatical idioms and formal idioms that, from the point of view of Construction Grammar, contribute profoundly to the most revealing insights into the mechanism of form-meaning pairings or constructions (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Goldberg 1995; Fillmore and Kay 1995; Fillmore 2001; among others). To be more precise, the basic assumption of Construction Grammar, as referred to by Szymańska (2008: 111), is the fact that the linguistic knowledge of a language user is best represented in terms of constructions, i.e. language patterns "dedicated to some particular semantic or pragmatic purpose" (Fillmore 2001: 36). Besides, Szymańska (2008) points out that some idiomatic expressions may show certain systematicity, and may be internally structured, becoming recognizable to language users as semantically more constrained options of more regular patterns. She also states that, from the perspective of Construction Grammar approach, the fact that grammatical structures (including formal idioms) convey meaning independent of lexical items may actually prove linguistic creativity of the expressions in question (Szymańska 2008: 146).

Additionally, due to the fact that some idiomatic strings have both a literal and a non-literal meaning; contextual clues appear to be helpful to distinguish whether a given MWU has a literal or an idiomatic interpretation. Alexander (1987) defines idioms as "multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rules of use" (Alexander 1987: 178).

Furthermore, Langlotz (2006: 2) admits that the heterogeneity of linguistic terminology surrounding idioms encountered by linguists is really troublesome. That heterogeneity of idiomatic expressions stands in a dialectical relation to the abundance of linguistic terminology developed to capture and classify these constructions. Langlotz (2006) defines an idiom as "an institutionalized construction that is composed of two or more lexical items and has the composite structure of a phrase or semi-clause, which may feature constructional idiosyncrasy. An idiom primarily has an ideational discourse-function and features figuration, i.e. its semantic