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The analysis of idiom creativity in three corpus sections“

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1. Introduction

Idiom research is fertile soil for various fields, including linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive studies and even the neurosciences. Interest in figurative language has spawned a considerable number of experiments that seek to understand how our brain stores and processes idioms, how human beings analyse and utilise these expressions. In fact, creativity, and linguistic creativity in particular, never ceases to fascinate humanity. The ability to manipulate and transform even the most frozen and fixed expressions might mean that our mental faculties can unleash an enormous creative potential.

The present thesis focusses on idiomatic creativity exemplified by three lexicogrammatical operations: passivisation, premodification, and number variation and quantification. The major reason for analysing these particular transformations lies in the fact that a number of researchers chose them to test their hypotheses about the flexibility of idiomatic expressions (e.g., Nunberg (1978); Nunberg, Sag & Wasow (1994); Gibbs et al. (1989); Langlotz (2006)). These transformations will be searched for in three corpus sections: fiction, news and spoken English. Therefore, the study could be partly classified as genre analysis, even though the structure/moves will not be taken into consideration. The following chapters will cast light on the specifics of the analysis.

As idiomatic language is a multi-faceted field, it is worth exploring from different angles. Linguistic, psycholinguistic and cognitive-linguistic accounts will be employed in order to explain how idioms are processed, understood, mentally represented and used. First, we need to address the question of what qualifies as an idiom. Terminology in this case is not always clear-cut, as there are a number of terms with overlapping meanings. One of the most general terms is *fixed expression*, which comprises idioms (Moon 1998: 2). As Moon (1998: 2) points out, *fixed expression* is not entirely accurate, because many such items can allow some flexibility. *Idiom* is defined in a narrower and a broader sense. In narrower uses, *idiom* is understood as a “fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical” item (Moon 1998: 4). As a more general term, *idiom* is used to denote multi-word items, “whether semantically opaque or not” (Moon 1998: 4).

Importantly, idioms can be explained in terms of three variables: non-compositionality, fixedness and institutionalisation (Moon 1998: 6-9). Idioms are considered institutionalised because they are universally accepted and recognised as lexical units (Moon 1998: 7). Fixedness presupposes “some degree of lexicogrammatical defectiveness” that restricts idioms’ behaviour and flexibility (Moon 1998: 7). Furthermore, non-compositionality, which denotes “word-by-word interpretation”, is one of the crucial notions in figurative language research (Moon 1998: 8). However, this term is also one of the most debatable in this field, as it cannot be universally

applied to all idiomatic strings (Moon 1998: 8). For example, *rock the boat* is partly compositional, because “we can understand [...] the pertinence of the image” (Moon 1998: 8).

Besides *fixed expression* and *idiom*, there is also *phraseological unit*, which is more common in Slavonic and Germanic traditions (Moon 1998: 5). Gries (2008: 4-5) refers to fixed expressions as *phraseologisms*, which are defined as “the co-occurrence of a form or a lemma of a lexical item and any other kind of linguistic element”. As is evident from the citation, the definition is rather broad. In order to narrow it down, Gries (2008: 5) employs the following criteria: a phraseologism can consist of a lexical item or a grammatical pattern (or both); it can comprise more than two elements; phraseologisms can be frozen and relatively flexible, non-compositional and compositional to some extent. Although the term *phraseologism* captures well the nature of fixed expressions/idioms, for the sake of simplicity only the term *idiom* will be utilised in the present thesis.

In general, the research seeks to address the question of whether creatively transformed idioms are equally distributed in written and spoken discourse. Another aspect of the study is to try to reveal factors influencing the creative potential of figurative language.

The relevance of the thesis lies in the fact that it encompasses several theories in order to explain the nature of figurative language and linguistic creativity in general. Besides, the research also integrates genre analysis to a limited extent in order to see whether idiomatic creativity is pervasive in all genres or more pertinent to one particular domain. Moreover, the thesis contemplates contributing to the existing body of research.

The thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter 2 discusses data and methods adopted for the analysis. Chapter 3 provides a general overview of the genre/discourse theory and attempts to place the research at the interface between genre and discourse studies. Chapter 4 delves into linguistic and psycholinguistic views on figurative language. Chapter 5 seeks to explore idiomatic language from a cognitive-linguistic perspective. Chapter 6 approaches idioms from an unexpected angle – memetics. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 will be devoted to the analysis of three lexico-grammatical transformations in news, fiction and spoken English. Finally, Chapter 10 summarises the findings and discusses the most important aspects of the research.

2. Data and methodology

The research conducted for this thesis is qualitative and corpus-based. Idiom creativity is the key aspect of the paper and will be examined with the help of three lexico-grammatical transformations: passivisation, premodification, and number variation and quantification. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the formulas that will be utilised to find these transformations in the corpora:

Figure 1. Passivisation (Var. 1)

Figure 2. Passivisation (Var. 2)

Figure 3. Premodification and quantification

As is clear from the figures above, passivisation is represented by two formulas, which might help find more examples in the corpora. Premodification and quantification share the same formula, because both occur in a prenominal position. In order to account for these three lexicogrammatical transformations, only V+NP patterns will be selected from the classifications. Even though the formula in Figure 2 is expected to be included in the search represented in Figure 3, their search results considerably diverge.

Passivisation, premodification, and number variation and quantification perform specific functions in discourse. The passive voice emphasises the patient (Biber et al. 1999: 477). It can also be used when “the agent is unknown, redundant, or irrelevant” (ibid: 938). Besides, the passive voice is a typical feature in news as it helps “save space and maximize what is novel” (ibid: 477). According to Biber et al. (1999: 475-481; 935-943), there are two types of passive constructions: short (without an agent) and long (with an agent) passives. It is important to note that the omission of the agent in short passives “means that the verb phrase is more often in clause final position, characteristic of new information” (Biber et al. 1999: 938). This implies that the focus shifts from the doer to the action itself. The end weight theory is also applicable to long passives: “the subject has a higher level of givenness than the agent phrase”; furthermore, “about 90% of the agent phrases bring in new information” (Biber et al. 1999: 941). In this case, the emphasis is laid on the doer of an action. Another interesting observation stems from the fact that

the long passive is very similar to its active counterpart, because it retains all the information and thus cannot be considered impersonal (Biber et al. 1999: 943).

Another lexico-grammatical operation under investigation is premodification. It should be emphasised that premodification in the NP “either restricts its referential scope or adds descriptive detail to a specific referent” (Langlotz 2006: 256). Interestingly enough, the premodifier in an idiomatic expression “does not change the overall idiomatic meaning of the expression, but it is inserted to connect the construction to its context of use” and thus acts as a “topic-indicator” (Langlotz 2006: 199). Besides, the premodifier intensifies the idiomatic meaning (Langlotz 2006: 266-267). Moreover, according to Langlotz (2006: 256), “adnominal modification is only possible if the speaker is able to establish a systematic, directly meaningful and functional relationship between the elaborated literal scene and the target conceptualisation”.

Having analysed number variation in idioms, Langlotz (2006: 245-249) argues that only isomorphic idioms can consistently allow this type of transformation. However, the researcher does not explicitly state what function number variation performs. Rather, Langlotz (2006: 249) hints vaguely that number variation helps emphasise certain questions/issues/problems and reinforce the idiomatic meaning (e.g., *great strides* vs. *a great stride*). However, Langlotz pays no attention to quantification. This issue will be explored in more detail in the analysis.

The investigation of idioms presented in this thesis will be based on two classifications of idioms, one from linguistics (Nunberg 1978) and one from psycholinguistics (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991). The cognitive-linguistic classification (Langlotz 2006) will be discussed in Chapter 5 but will not be applied to the analysis. The main objective is to compare these classifications and identify which of them best describes and explains the creative potential of idioms. Thus, the research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. Which of the classifications better explains/reflects the nature of idioms in terms of creativity and flexibility? 2. What are the conditions that influence idiom creativity and flexibility?

Three linguistic corpora will be employed to search for examples: NOW (Davies 2013), COCA (Davies 2008-) and the BNC (Davies 2004-). One of the limitations that becomes instantly apparent is that these corpora are not identical in terms of different parameters. For example, NOW comprises text samples from all English varieties, whereas COCA illustrates language use exclusively in American English. Furthermore, equalling to 6.8 billion words (as of December 2018), NOW provides an unparalleled insight into the language of online news, while COCA consists of several registers that are much more limited in size. These characteristics might result in discrepancies in the comparison of the genres taken from these two corpora. Therefore, in order to compensate for the size differences, the BNC will also be utilised in the research. Another reason for including this corpus is that both the BNC and COCA have similar sections. It should

be acknowledged that possibilities are rather restricted in terms of finding genres of similar proportions and parameters. Nevertheless, it is expected that the aforementioned limitations will not skew the results.

According to Biber et al. (1999: 1025-1026), in general, idioms are rarely attested in the corpus; they are used in fiction to describe prototypical conversations, less frequently in spoken language, and also in news reportage in order to add “an informal, vivid color to otherwise serious discussion”. Therefore, the lexico-grammatical operations mentioned above will be investigated in three discourses: news, spoken English and fiction. In order to explore them, the following sections from the corpora will be used: spoken, fiction, newspaper and magazine sections from COCA and the BNC. The NOW corpus has no separate sections, as it is entirely devoted to online news. The analysis will be conducted at the interface of discourse and genre analysis. The next chapter will shed light on the specifics of this question.

The following table summarises the idiom classification from a linguistic perspective.

Table 1. Linguistic classification (Nunberg 1978: 225-228)

Nondecomposable idioms (p. 225)	Normally decomposable idioms (p. 226-227)	Abnormally decomposable idioms (p. 227-228)
Kick the bucket Take a powder Shoot the breeze Give a damn Chew the fat Hit the spot Play hooky	Pop the question Pass the buck Draw the line Foot the bill Lay a ghost Blaze a trail Pick holes in Steal the limelight Stir up mud Stretch a point Take note of Keep the pot boiling Find fault Break the ice Pull strings	Line one’s pockets Dip into one’s purse Raise the roof Hit the ceiling Throw in the sponge Meet one’s maker Make tracks Ring a bell Hit/push the panic button Give the gate to Run circles around Shake the dust from one’s feet Take the fifth Carry the torch

Table 1 illustrates Nunberg’s classification of idioms. According to Nunberg (1978: 213), it is the relation of form and meaning that is likely to account for idiom behaviour. It is also important “to talk about idioms as partially analyzable”: for example, *kick the bucket* is not associated with a protracted death, because *kick* refers to a sudden movement (Nunberg 1978: 213-215). In order to analyse the syntactic behaviour of idioms, Nunberg (1978: 218) applies passivisation. It is assumed that speakers are unlikely to passivise *kick the bucket*, because none of the components refer to or hint at dying (ibid: 223-224). Therefore, Nunberg (1978: 225) concludes that non-decomposable idioms cannot be passivised, because it is impossible to identify the ref-

erent of the NP. This means, in turn, that there is no point in topicalising this noun phrase (ibid: 225). Thus, the non-decomposable idioms from Table 1 include phrases which lack referents.

It should be noted that Nunberg (1978) primarily focusses on the semantics of idioms rather than on familiarity. However, in a later paper, Nunberg and his colleagues (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994: 496) stress the fact that familiarity and context have a profound impact on the speakers' ability to establish a connection between idiom constituents and their metaphorical referents. The researchers illustrate their supposition with the following example: once the meaning of the idiom *pull strings* is known and the context is available, the speakers are able to associate this expression with exploiting connections (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994: 496). Nunberg (1978: 226) labels an idiom normally decomposable if "its constituents can be used to refer to the constituents of its referents". For instance, in *pop the question*, *the question* denotes a marriage proposal, whereas *pop* is analogous to "the act of uttering it" (Nunberg 1978: 226-227). The last group is referred to as abnormally decomposable. In this case, "we can identify the referents of their constituent terms, but it is only in virtue of our knowledge of conventional metaphors that we know what the relation is invoked to identify" (ibid: 228). Although *spill the beans* is not included in the list of abnormally decomposable idioms, it might be assumed that the idiom belongs to this group. Even though *beans* is never synonymous with information or secrets, "we arrive at its referent, presumably, by subtraction" (ibid: 222).

Nunberg (1978: 228-229) argues that normally decomposable idioms are the most productive type in terms of passivisation and premodification, because the presence of the referents makes these transformations possible. At the same time, nondecomposable and abnormally decomposable idioms are predicted to be significantly restricted in terms of flexibility because of the vague or absent referent (ibid: 228).

It must be mentioned that there is a more recent study conducted by Nunberg and his colleagues (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994). There the researchers distinguish between "idiomatically combined expressions" and "idiomatic phrases": the first group is used to refer to "idioms whose parts carry identifiable parts of their idiomatic meanings", whereas the second term denotes idioms "whose idiomatic interpretations cannot be distributed over their parts" (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994: 496-497). Idiomatically combined expressions are exemplified by *kick the bucket* or *saw logs*, which are considered prototypical idioms because of their noncompositional nature (ibid: 497). Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994: 496-497) stress the fact that the majority of idiomatic expressions belong to the first group, because they can be semantically analysed to a limited extent (e.g., *spill the beans*). The lack of correspondence between figurative and literal meanings renders idiomatic phrases deficient in lexico-grammatical flexibility (ibid: 508). Thus,

the researchers predict that only idiomatically combined expressions can allow various modifications (ibid: 508).

Although Nunberg, Sag and Wasow's article was published almost two decades after Nunberg's first classification of idioms, there is a clear correspondence between the two studies, albeit with certain differences. Nunberg's original taxonomy (1978) appears to be more fine-grained and consistent, whereas the second work draws no distinction between normally and abnormally decomposable idioms. It might be possible that this subtle difference could give a valuable insight into idiom creativity. Therefore, it has been decided to apply Nunberg's earlier classification to the analysis.

Table 2 exemplifies a psycholinguistic approach towards idiom flexibility (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 229-237).

Table 2. Psycholinguistic classification (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 229-237)

Non-analysable idioms, Type N (p. 229, 231)	Analysable idioms (p. 229)		
	Analysable-opaque, Type AO	Analysable-transparent, AT (229-230; 234-235)	Quasi-metaphorical, Type M (230-231; 235-237)
Spick and span; by and large	Kick the bucket (229, 232-234)	Normally and abnormally decomposable idioms (Nunberg 1978: 226-228, cited in Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230) Pop the question; pass the buck; draw the line; foot the bill; lay a ghost; blaze a trail; pick holes in; steal the limelight; stir up mud; stretch a point; take note of; keep the pot boiling; find fault; break the ice; pull strings; line one's pockets; dip into one's purse; raise the roof; hit the ceiling; throw in the sponge; meet one's maker; make tracks; ring a bell; hit/push the panic button; give the gate to; run circles around; shake the dust from one's feet; take the fifth; carry the torch Normally decomposable idioms (Gibbs et al. 1989: 67, cited in Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230) Pop the question; miss the boat; break the ice; play the market; get	Carry coals to Newcastle (230); give up the ship (230); bury the hatchet (230); count the chickens before they are hatched (230); cross the bridge when one gets to it (236)

		the picture; lose one's grip; perish the thought; close the books; button one's lip; clear the air; cool one's heel; open the door Abnormally decomposable idioms (Gibbs et al. 1989: 67, cited in Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230) Carry a torch; promise the moon; spill the beans; pass the buck; pull the plug; bury the hatchet; hold the fort; grease the wheels; steal one's thunder; hit the sack; crack the whip; pay the fiddler	
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As can be seen from Table 2, the idioms are distributed into two general groups: analysable and non-analysable. In analysable idioms, there is a certain correspondence between idiom components and their metaphorical referents, whereas for non-analysable expressions no such relation exists (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 229). According to Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 223), the main hypothesis underlying this division is that idioms are arranged on “a continuum of compositionality”: “the more analyzable they are, the more flexibly they behave, both syntactically and lexically”. This supposition reminds, of course, of the previous accounts in the linguistic and psycholinguistic literature (e.g., Nunberg 1978; Gibbs & Nayak 1989). At the same time, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 224) theorise that semantic productivity, which comprises syntactic and lexical transformations, may not correlate with semantic analysability. The researchers illustrate this hypothesis with the lexico-grammatical manipulations of the nondecomposable idiom *speaking one's mind* (e.g., “When drugs are involved, it's time to speak your *parental* mind”) (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 224, original emphasis). Thus, even though the idiom *speaking one's mind* is nondecomposable, it can successfully be manipulated (ibid).

It should be stressed that Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 223) ascribe an unusual interpretation to semantic productivity, which is utilised to “create new idiomatic meaning from old ones”. In fact, this supposition is in marked contrast to what Langlotz (2006: 199) states, namely that modified idiom parts “connect the construction to its context of use”. This implies that novel variants extend metaphorical interpretations rather than create new meanings.

Besides semantic productivity, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 228) also distinguish discourse productivity, which is illustrated in (1):

- (1) Tom: Did the old man kick the bucket last night?
Joe: Nah, he barely nudged it.

In the example cited, the literal scene is extended thanks to the semantics of the verb *kick*. Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 221) come to the conclusion that “both the idiomatic and the literal meanings of the verb “to kick” must be available” for the interlocutors in order to manipulate the idiom and understand it in a modified version.

As far as the classification is concerned, only two expressions qualify as non-analysable, namely *spick and span* and *by and large* (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 229). The reason for allocating these idioms to Type N is that for both items “semantic and syntactic analyses are non-functional”; therefore, these idioms “should be neither semantically nor lexically flexible, and should also be nonproductive in discourse” (ibid: 229). Later, however, the linguists admit that the idiom *by and large* can permit some semantic and discourse productivity, albeit very restricted: *by and not-so-large* (ibid: 231). This remark reveals an apparent contradiction to the previous claims. To make matters even more complicated, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 232) conclude that “pure type N idioms may not even exist”, in which case the distinction between analysable and non-analysable idioms becomes nonfunctional.

The analysable-opaque group contains only one item – *kick the bucket*. As there is no correspondence between the idiom parts and the meaning, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 232) predict that lexical substitutions are likely to be seen as a mistake. Passivisation should not be acceptable either, because “there would be no good reason to topicalize or focus” on *the bucket* (ibid: 233). However, the phrase may be productive in discourse as shown in (1).

In analysable-transparent idioms, there is a plausible connection between the idiom parts and the interpretation (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 229). This group comprises both normally and abnormally decomposable idioms from Nunberg’s and Gibbs et al.’s classifications (Nunberg 1978; Gibbs et al. 1989, quoted in Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230). Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 230) unite both types of decomposable idioms, because, according to them, there is no observable difference between these categories, which could influence idiom productivity and comprehension. However, such an argument is clearly debatable: for example, it is increasingly difficult to see how the components of *meet one’s maker* can correspond to the verb ‘to die’.

It should be noted that the most obscure and elusive idiom type is the quasi-metaphorical type. Firstly, it is not clear why the authors decided to adopt such a term. Secondly, Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 230) posit that these idioms “simultaneously refer to an ideal exemplar of a concept (e.g., total surrender) and also characterize some event, person or object as a new instance of that concept”. The question then arises why, for instance, *giving up the ship* (ibid: 230) is an ideal example of “the act of surrendering”. Besides, it seems reasonable to suggest that any idiom from the list might be referred to as a prototypical exemplar of some concept. The researchers predict that quasi-metaphorical idioms are likely to be subjected to lexical and syntac-

tic transformations (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 231). Nevertheless, there is no information about how this group fits into the larger picture of idiom flexibility and productivity. The first three groups reflect a gradual increase in the degree of productivity, whereas the quasi-metaphorical idioms are a standalone type that is not compared to the others. Furthermore, it is not clear why *bury the hatchet* belongs simultaneously to analysable-transparent and quasi-metaphorical idioms.

As there is no convincing explanation of the productivity degree of the quasi-metaphorical group, this idiom type will not be analysed in the corpora. In any case, it becomes apparent that Cacciari and Glucksberg's framework reminds of and interacts with the earlier models proposed by Nunberg (1978) and Gibbs et al. (1989). For the purposes of the present thesis, it will be interesting to see which model provides a more plausible explanation of idiom flexibility and creativity.

3. Genre/discourse theory

It should be noted that the major reason for including genre/discourse literature review is that examples from three sections of the corpora (spoken English, fiction and news) are under analysis in this thesis. Although genre/discourse theory might not seem to be immediately pertinent to idiomatic language, it may shed light on various aspects of idiom usage in different types of discourse. It is also hoped that this theory will be enlightening in terms of language creativity.

First, it is necessary to define genre and discourse. Genre is understood as “a specific text - type used by a specific community of speakers, for specific purposes” (Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 40). In order to capture the definition of discourse, it is important to see how it is related to text. According to Johansen (2002: 87-88), the correspondence between the two terms is identical to that between language and an utterance or a text. This means that similar to language, discourse is a system comprising texts/utterances. Consequently, discourse is defined as “a set of procedures [...] that are bound up with the purposes and objects of text production, and thus it governs (parts of) the individual text”, which also implies that discourses are “manifested in texts” (Johansen 2002: 88). The definition is not unproblematic, as text production is also pertinent to genre.

It is now essential to distinguish between discourse and genre analysis. According to Hyland (2013: 1), discourse analysis focusses on language phenomena “above the sentence” in social contexts, whereas genre analysis is more specific and centres around the language and the structure of texts. Moreover, genre analysis seeks to describe “both texts and the communities that use them” through the investigation of the form and communicative purposes of these texts (Hyland 2013: 1). It is crucially important to stress that genres are always community-oriented (Hyland 2013: 2-3; Hyland 2015: 33). This means that there is always a dialogue between the

writer and the community: the writer creates texts, which “the reader will recognise and expect” (Hyland 2013: 2-3). As a result, genres are established as social practices (Hyland 2013: 5). It appears that this observation renders the distinction between discourse and genre slightly fuzzy, because both are endowed with a socially important and recognisable meaning only in social contexts.

One of the typical examples of discourse analysis can be illustrated with Sinclair and Coulthard’s (2002) investigation of classroom interaction. Their article is concerned exclusively with the structure of classroom discourse (e.g., “opening”, “answering”, “follow-up”) and their functions (Sinclair & Coulthard 2002: 21). Genre analysis can be exemplified by Hyland’s (2015: 36-40) account of the academic bio. As opposed to the investigation of discourse features, Hyland’s descriptions are more fine-grained, because they give an insight into the format and lexis of the online academic biographies. Overall, the basic distinction between the two types of analysis lies in the degree of specificity.

Bhatia (1997: 629) defines genre analysis as the investigation of linguistic characteristics in institutionalised settings, which is similar to Hyland’s definition. Bhatia emphasises three important dimensions in genre theory: “conventional knowledge”, “the versatility of the generic descriptions” and “the propensity for innovation” (Bhatia 1997: 630). Conventional knowledge presupposes that genres have lexico-grammatical constraints, certain communicative purposes and are intended for a specific discourse community (Bhatia 1997: 630). Another aspect is versatility, which can be explained in terms of the correspondence between text and context, language and its users, language and culture (Bhatia 1997: 631). The third component of genre analysis is innovation: although genres possess certain structural and linguistic limitations, they have an innate tendency to evolve and change (Bhatia 1997: 634). This interesting contradiction between genre as a set of strict rules and a natural inclination to change leads to genre mixing (Bhatia 1997: 636). Bhatia (1997: 634) maintains that new forms can emerge only within the framework of established and familiar contexts.

However, context is not the only prerequisite for understanding a genre. There should also be shared conventional knowledge that is instantly available to the discourse community rather than to the outsiders (Bhatia 1997: 646). Bawarshi (2003: 44) also stresses the social nature of genre, which allows “social motives” to become socially relevant and significant. Interestingly enough, different text types “enact and reproduce the desires that prompted them” (Bawarshi 2003: 45). Furthermore, genre controls and determines a writer’s identity, objectives and topics (Bawarshi 2003: 48). In a similar vein, Hyland (2015: 33) perceives a community as a social platform where “we can craft our identities, cement relationships and achieve recognition”.

Rauen (2009: 63) complements genre theory with a crucial remark: texts are social actions that are enacted by language or, more precisely, speech acts; these speech acts, in turn, are exploited and propagated by genres. Thus, Rauen (2009: 64) suggests that the Speech Act Theory might make a valuable contribution to genre analysis.

While many researchers, including the ones mentioned above, think of genres as a wide repertoire of text types created in and for the community and perceive discourse as reflecting broad social contexts, there are voices that clearly stand out. For example, Collin (2012: 86) criticises the conventional discourse/genre framework, because it is difficult to understand “how and why different actors produce and assess generic texts in different ways”. For this reason, he proposes a theory where discourse and genre are represented as symbiosis: on the one hand, “Discourses” make genres possible; on the other hand, “genres motivate and situate Discursive performances” (Collin 2012: 89). To illustrate this synthesis, Collin (2012: 89) provides an example of a teacher applying for a job: the genre of “the teacher employment letter” “motivates a particular performance of teacher Discourse”. Although this is an interesting perspective, it becomes increasingly challenging to disambiguate between a discourse and a genre, and see where one finishes and the other begins. Besides, it is debatable whether the synthesis of the two terms has helped to answer Collin’s initial question about how and why different texts are produced and assessed.

Collin’s theory is reminiscent of Bhatia’s applied genre analytical model (2002: 13; 16), according to which discourse is analysed as genre. Within the framework of this theory, discourse is described on three levels: “*discourse as text*”, “*discourse as genre*”, “*discourse as social practice*” (Bhatia 2002: 16-18) [original emphasis]. The first level involves looking at linguistic features without considering a larger context (Bhatia 2002: 17). The second level takes into account specific contexts in which a text can be interpreted (ibid). Finally, *discourse as social practice* is concerned with socio-cultural questions, participants’ relations and identities (Bhatia 2002: 18).

While genre and genre analysis have been defined many times in meticulous detail, the term *discourse* remains increasingly evasive and obscure. This also applies to Bhatia’s article, which features “discourse forms” (Bhatia 2002: 5), “a discourse community” (ibid: 6-7), and “the universe of discourse” (ibid: 8). However, there is no clear definition of discourse itself. On the one hand, by mingling *discourse* and *genre*, Bhatia has overcome their ambiguity and bridged the gap between the two terms. This synthesis also means a solid and comprehensive model with three layers of understanding discourse. On the other hand, finding differences between discourse and genre analysis becomes a daunting challenge. Nevertheless, despite some

inconsistency, Bhatia's model is a well-grounded and multi-faceted theory, which can easily be applied to text analysis.

Besides genre and discourse, there is register, which also poses a challenge to researchers. The distinction between register and genre is often vague, and in many cases these terms are used interchangeably (Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 40). Deignan, Littlemore and Semino (2013: 46-47) attempt to differentiate between them, claiming that register provides a more detailed framework for linguistic analysis than genre. Another attempt to disambiguate genre and register was undertaken by Nunan (2008). The researcher discusses the genre features only briefly and superficially, whereas the examples (the narrative and the love letter) seem rather lengthy (Nunan 2008: 57-58). Furthermore, no genre analysis is conducted (ibid). However, more credit is given to register analysis, which reflects "the relationship between a text and the situation context surrounding the creation of the text" (Nunan 2008: 58). It is not entirely clear how exactly this term differs from genre or discourse analysis, for example. Nunan (2008: 60) concludes the article stating that genre and register analyses are complementary. He also maintains that the best solution is to start with genre analysis and then "'drill down' into the text" with register analysis (Nunan 2008: 59-60). Nevertheless, the descriptions of both types of analysis considerably overlap (Nunan 2008: 59-60).

In Systemic Functional Grammar, Register has been described in terms of the following dimensions: field, which reflects the social action/situation; tenor, which characterises the participants and their social roles; and mode, which represents the language and its function in the interaction (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 12, quoted in Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 47-48). It appears reasonable to draw parallels between the three components mentioned above and the major features of genre. The first common feature that becomes instantly apparent is tenor that might refer to a discourse community in genre terms. Both focus on the interlocutors and the social functions they perform. Field is likely to denote institutionalised settings, in which linguistic phenomena are scrutinised. Finally, mode might be used to reflect lexico-grammatical features and the communicative purposes of the text. Thus, it appears justified to note that the parameters of genre and register overlap to a significant extent. Whether they possess distinctive characteristics is a matter for speculation. However, in order to avoid confusion, only the terms *genre* and *discourse* will be utilised in the present research.

In order to approach the complexity of media discourse, it is necessary to consider the phenomenon of mass communication, which is defined as "mass-produced communication" (Gerbner 1985: 16). Gerbner (1985: 16, [original emphasis]) emphasises that "the *mass production* of messages" is "the key to the cultural transformation". Theoretically speaking, the notion of objective reporting should be an integral part of these mass-produced messages. However, as

Verschueren (1985: 2) notes, “the idea that reporters should be able to present straightforward facts — and only those facts — died as soon as it was born”. Furthermore, the researcher admits that a considerable number of European and American newspapers “bear the hallmark of the party ideologies”, which control what is published (Verschueren 1985: 4). Another crucial observation in news reporting is that economic concerns might influence the degree of sensationalism in order to kindle or re-kindle an audience’s interest (Verschueren 1985: 3).

It should be acknowledged that an overwhelming number of researchers tackle the question of media text structure rather than focus on a detailed analysis of lexico-grammatical features or stylistic devices (e.g., Bonyardi (2012); Tolson (2006); Gerbner (1985); Van Dijk (1985)). However, one exception is worthy of note. Although the book by Hutton (2013) is not academic, it gives a valuable insight into the language of news – journalese. The book is presented as an extensive list of journalist slang. It thus shows how news is manifested in language. This work is particularly interesting as it provides insider information – Hutton himself is a professional journalist (Hutton 2013: 2). The author emphasises that the language of journalism is vivid and overflows with emotionally charged words, which is done to attract and keep an audience’s attention (Hutton 2013: 7-8). This argument might explain the reason idiomatic language is often manipulated lexically and grammatically in news. Nonetheless, even flowery language can lose its lustre when overused (Hutton 2013: 8). Metaphorical expressions are not the only property of journalese: clichés also occupy a significant place in it (Hutton 2013: 8-9). Thus, the language of newspapers accommodates both innovative and punchy writing, and clichés associated with certain predictability (*ibid*).

As has been mentioned above, fiction is one of the three discourses that will be analysed in this paper. There exists an extensive body of research on literary genres (e.g., Fishelov 1998; Fowler 1982). Nevertheless, not much has been published with regard to literary discourse as a superordinate construct. One of the most plausible explanations might be that literature is too broad and diverse a field to provide compact and universal descriptions. One of the rare exceptions is Steen’s attempt to work out a taxonomy of literary discourse (Steen 1999). Steen (1999: 111-112; 114) adopts a prototype theory in relation to literature. According to this framework, literature is considered as “the superordinate of genres such as the novel, the poem, and the play” (Steen 1999: 114). Most importantly, though, it is defined as “a type of discourse that is characterized by the domain value “artistic,” the content value “fictional,” and the functional value “positively affective””. Such a definition implies a considerable creative potential, which might also be a suitable condition for unconventional idiom usage. One important observation is that Steen (1999: 118) describes fiction as a distinct superordinate. However, the correspondence between literary discourse and fiction is not clearly defined. It should be mentioned that in this

thesis the term *fiction* will be treated as analogous to literary discourse that comprises all literary genres as opposed to non-fiction writing.

Besides, there is ample evidence to suggest that one of the fundamental principles of literary discourse is its inherent tendency to imitate other discourses and domains of life (Johansen 2002: 99-100). Furthermore, Johansen (2002: 97-99) highlights five major aspects of literary texts, two of which are of particular relevance for the present research: “poeticity” and “contemplation”. Poeticity implies the creativity and richness of the language, whereas contemplation denotes pleasure the reader derives from a literary work (ibid). These two features are reminiscent of Hyland’s (2013: 2-3) comment about the dialogue between the writer and the reader in a discourse community. Compared to other discourses, the essential difference lies in the fact that artistic merit of a literary text and the joy it is supposed to bring to the reader are of central importance in literary discourse.

It should be mentioned that the investigation of figurative language within the framework of discourse/genre analysis is rather scarce. One of the rare examples, however, is Deignan, Littlemore and Semino’s (2013) groundbreaking research. It is emphasised that shared knowledge is essential for understanding figurative language (Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 5). The researchers’ framework is the marriage of genre and register analysis (ibid: 55). In this case, genre is analysed only in terms of “discourse community, communicative purpose (or function) and staging”, whereas register reflects linguistic features (ibid: 55). An in-depth analysis of Tony Blair’s speech reveals that he addressed two different audiences and that figurative language contributed substantially to establishing the relationship with these audiences (ibid: 71-87).

One must admit that spoken discourse is not entirely at the same level as news or fiction, which makes them difficult to compare. However, if the news and fiction sections of the corpora were treated as part of written discourse, then the comparison between the sub-groups of written and spoken discourse would appear to be more legitimate and justified. It must be emphasised that the spoken section in COCA and the BNC is not as extensive as news in NOW. Therefore, it would not make sense to split spoken discourse further into smaller sub-sections. Genre-related features of spoken discourse will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

Of central interest for the thesis is the distinction between conventional and novel metaphors, which were analysed in relation to pain perception (Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 268-301). Interestingly enough, metaphorical language enables patients to express pain sensations that would be difficult to convey otherwise (ibid: 269). Conventional pain descriptions are often associated with tissue damage: *a stabbing pain* or *a splitting headache* (Schott 2007; Lascaratou 2007, quoted in Deignan, Littlemore & Semino 2013: 271). Novel metaphors and metonymies, on the other hand, describe pain experiences in ways that are not usually connected to

the conceptual field of pain (ibid: 271). One such example is “a ‘rotten apple’ scenario”: *apple* corresponds to the organism, whereas *rotten* hints at the disease and pain inflicted on the patient (ibid: 296-297). It is not entirely clear what exactly motivates creativity in this context. However, it might be assumed that it is the sensitive nature of pain perception that makes unconventional metaphors possible. Besides, the researchers come to the conclusion that creative usage of metaphors helps depict personal experiences and “individual perceptions of pain” (ibid: 299). One of the most important observations here is that shared knowledge in a discourse community is crucial with regard to figurative language use and understanding (ibid: 307-308). Furthermore, metaphorical language has a strong tendency to “contribute to the main communicative purposes of the relevant genres” (ibid: 307).

Summarising the literature, we can emphasise the following aspects of discourse and genre: while discourse analysis centres around language phenomena in social contexts, genre analysis permits a more fine-grained investigation of text types with regard to their structure, lexis and grammar. Besides, genre analysis also poses a question about writer/community identities and communicative purposes of a text. In reality, however, the distinction between the two terms does not always appear clear and consistent.

Whether the corpus sections *spoken English*, *news* and *fiction* provide a basis for discourse or genre analysis proves to be a challenging question. On the one hand, these sections are quite broad presupposing an overwhelming number of genres and sub-genres. It is then justified to subsume them under the category of discourses. On the other hand, such a classification might pose a problem, because discourse analysis primarily looks at the structure rather than language use. However, the focus of the thesis is the lexico-grammatical analysis of idioms. Nonetheless, it is not fully possible to conduct genre analysis in this case, because this would also imply an examination of structural features and communicative purposes. In the majority of cases, the context in corpora is significantly reduced to a short excerpt. Therefore, it is more appropriate to conceive of the framework as the investigation of three discourses with regard to their lexico-grammatical characteristics, which fits Bhatia’s description of *discourse as text* and *discourse as genre* (Bhatia 2002: 16-17).

4. Linguistic and psycholinguistic views on idiomatic flexibility¹

The reason for combining linguistic and psycholinguistic views in one chapter is that there is a constructive dialogue between researchers from both fields. This fruitful cooperation has given rise to a considerable number of idiom processing models, classifications and experiments. It

¹ The chapter is based largely on a similar section from an unpublished seminar paper *Ice broken – question popped. The analysis of passivisation and extension in idioms* (122250 AR English idioms, supervised by Prof. Keizer).

should be acknowledged that one of the key aspects in idiom studies is compositionality. It breeds much dissent in the literature, because even after decades of research, linguists have not achieved consensus on this topic. Compositionality or analysability is understood as the degree to which the meaning of an idiomatic expression can be inferred from its components (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994: 498). However, in order to fully comprehend this phenomenon, we need to discuss the previous accounts of idiom processing models.

The traditional approach emerged in the 1970s, when idioms were originally perceived as unitary items whose meaning was not based on their constituents (Fraser 1970: 22). Having analysed an extensive list of idiomatic strings, Fraser (1970: 39) proposes a Frozenness Hierarchy based on syntactic transformations idioms can undergo. Although Fraser's study significantly contributed to the field, he failed to connect some degree of grammatical distortion of idiom structure with analysability. Interest in figurative language has spawned a variety of psycholinguistic experiments, which also support the traditional noncompositional approach. For instance, Bobrow and Bell (1973: 343; 346) suggest that an idiom is processed as a word and argue for a separate mode of idiom processing. A later study by Swinney and Cutler (1979) proposes the lexical representation hypothesis, which supports the noncompositional view of idioms. However, this theory differs from Bobrow and Bell's (1973) model: Swinney and Cutler (1979: 525) argue that idioms are retrieved as any other word in the lexicon. They also conclude that idiomatic strings are recognised much faster than their literal controls (Swinney & Cutler 1979: 528).

Similar views are expressed in Chomsky's (1980: 150-151) classical work *Rules and representations*, where he claims that idiomatic expressions are "highly idiosyncratic" and represented as single words, which also means there are special "idiom rules" that prevent their lexico-grammatical modifications.

The 1980s heralded the next stage of idiom processing models. This approach is called compositional and is mainly supported by Gibbs and his colleagues (see, e.g., Gibbs et al. 1989; Gibbs & Nayak 1989). For example, Gibbs et al. (1989: 59) maintain that the internal semantics of idioms can explain why some of them allow syntactic and lexical change, while others do not. Besides, the researchers assume that the figurative meanings of nondecomposable idioms is likely to be disrupted as a result of lexical operations (Gibbs et al. 1989: 59). Hamblin and Gibbs (1999: 34-35) suppose that the figurative meaning of idioms can be predetermined by their main verbs, which implies that even nondecomposable idioms can be analysed to some extent. Hamblin and Gibbs' (1999: 35) experiments confirm that the speakers associate the idiom *kick the bucket* with *dying quickly* or *suddenly*, because "kicking something is often done quickly". Nunberg (1978: 214) expresses the same idea about the meaning of the expression *kick the bucket*. Whether this meaning of the idiom holds true, will be investigated in the analysis. Surprisingly,

the theory about the relevance of the internal semantics of idioms is in stark contrast to Gibbs' (1984: 284, 289) earlier work, where he claims that literal analysis is irrelevant for nonliteral language and never takes place during idiom comprehension.

Hamblin and Gibbs (1999: 34-35) argue that speakers have good intuitions about decomposability of idioms. However, the assumption about speakers' systemic and reliable intuitions was refuted by Tabossi, Fanari and Wolf (2008: 315-316), who failed to replicate Gibbs and Nayak's (1989) experiment. Thus, the accounts of compositionality measures often appear to be mixed and contradictory.

The late 1990s saw the emergence of a new hybrid model designed by Titone and Connine (1999), which was built on extensive research accumulated in previous decades. Their approach is labelled *a hybrid model*, which takes traditional noncompositional and more recent compositional views on board. They criticise the noncompositional approach stating that despite some differences, all the models presuppose that "an idiomatic interpretation results from retrieval of a unitary, and semantically arbitrary phrasal meaning" (Titone & Connine 1999: 1658). The authors of the article note that one of the serious drawbacks of the noncompositional approach is that it does not account for the syntactic flexibility that certain idioms are prone to; it also ignores the fact that idioms possess a distinct internal semantic structure (Titone & Connine 1999: 1658-1659).

Although the compositional views present a plausible explanation for idiom representation and access, this theory is not without flaws either. Titone and Connine (1999: 1665) acknowledge that despite the fact that idiomatic constituents often map onto idiomatic meanings, it is not entirely clear to what extent a complete literal analysis of an idiomatic expression is conducted.

Titone and Connine's (1999) model has made it possible to reconcile the two views. It involves the understanding of idioms simultaneously as unitary and compositional word strings (Titone & Connine 1999: 1666). The researchers hypothesise that as opposed to decomposable idioms, nondecomposable expressions may impede processing because of the difference between idiomatic and literal meanings (ibid: 1667). Thus, Titone and Connine's criticism of compositional and noncompositional approaches seems justified, as neither of the models provides satisfactory insights into the nature of idioms. Most importantly, though, Titone and Connine's experiment explicitly shows that the degree of compositionality not only matters but also predetermines the way idioms are processed, retrieved and comprehended.

It is worth mentioning that in recent years, there have appeared a number of studies that undermine and criticise earlier research on idioms. For instance, Cieřlicka (2013: 478) admits that one of the serious drawbacks of previous studies is their inconsistency in terms of methodol-

ogy and idiom classification. Besides, she expresses scepticism about the notion of compositionality in general, because varying degrees of analysability may not reflect the way idioms are actually stored and processed (Cieślicka 2013: 499). This view is supported by Nordmann, Cleland and Bull (2014: 87-88, 90-91), whose results indicate low levels of agreement among the participants and unreliable ratings of compositionality as well as familiarity. They also emphasise that analysability is problematic because of its individual and subjective character (Nordmann, Cleland & Bull 2014: 90).

Importantly, compositionality is not the only variable tested in psycholinguistic experiments. Familiarity is also believed to play a decisive role in idiom processing. Previous studies (e.g., Tabossi, Fanari & Wolf 2009) explicitly state that familiarity correlates significantly with the speed of idiom recognition and processing. Therefore, it might be assumed that prior knowledge of the idioms under consideration may potentially enhance associative links. Nordmann, Cleland and Bull (2014: 92) maintain that once the meaning of an idiom is learnt, compositionality may be difficult to judge adequately, which indicates that familiarity affects the way idioms are perceived.

Another important observation is that the degree of analysability is closely correlated with semantic similarity:² the more decomposable an idiom is, the more related its literal and idiomatic meanings are (Titone & Connine 1999: 1669; Cieślicka 2013: 477). This argument appears to be a priori knowledge, because decomposable idioms presuppose that they are close to compositional language and that idiom constituents are directly mapped onto their idiomatic referents, thus proving that idiomatic and literal meanings are close (Glucksberg 2001: 73; Levorato & Cacciari 1999: 52-53).

It is important to emphasise that one of the recent studies (Rommers, Dijkstra & Bastiaansen (2013)) supports the traditional view on idioms, which treats idiomatic expressions as analogous to long words with no internal structure. Rommers, Dijkstra and Bastiaansen's approach reminds of the earlier experiments in the 1970s (e.g., Bobrow & Bell 1973; Swinney & Cutler 1979). The researchers employed EEG recordings to assess semantic processing of literal sentences and opaque idioms. The results suggest that idiomatic contexts do not trigger literal processing of constituent words (Rommers, Dijkstra & Bastiaansen 2013: 773). The findings lend support for the representation of idioms as unitary items: when they are used in context, their literal processing can be deactivated (Rommers, Dijkstra & Bastiaansen 2013: 774-775), in which case the concepts of semantic similarity and compositionality are rendered irrelevant. Nevertheless, one of the crucial observations here is that Rommers, Dijkstra and Bastiaansen

² The question of idioms and semantic similarity was explored in an unpublished research proposal for 160142 SE Seminar in Psycho, Patho- or Neurolinguistics: Communicative Efficiency in Natural Language (with Dr. Graff).

(2013: 765) selected Dutch idioms in terms of their opacity based on their intuition. Therefore, it is difficult to judge to what extent the results can be applied to English and if it is possible to discard the previous accounts favouring the compositional approach. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present thesis, it is assumed that the internal semantics of idioms plays a prominent role in flexibility and creativity. Otherwise, it becomes increasingly challenging to account for punning and manipulations of the literal scene.

Another recent attempt to create a more successful approach towards idiomaticity was undertaken by Wulff (2010). In *Rethinking idiomaticity*, Wulff (2010: 163-164) defies previous studies and approaches figurative language from a quantitative corpus-based perspective, which is believed to be more objective than user-centred studies. Having subjected various expressions to statistical scrutiny, Wulff (2010: 166) confirms that idiomatic language cannot be “reduced to non-compositionality”. The researcher also proposes a new model – *a constructicon* – that has a vertical and a horizontal axes (Wulff 2010: 166-167). The vertical axis reflects the degree of schematisation, which shows that “complex constructions create a continuum [...] with regard to how open their slots are for lexical substitution” (ibid: 166). The horizontal axis represents the collocation-idiom continuum (ibid: 167). The constructicon is depicted in Figure 4 below.

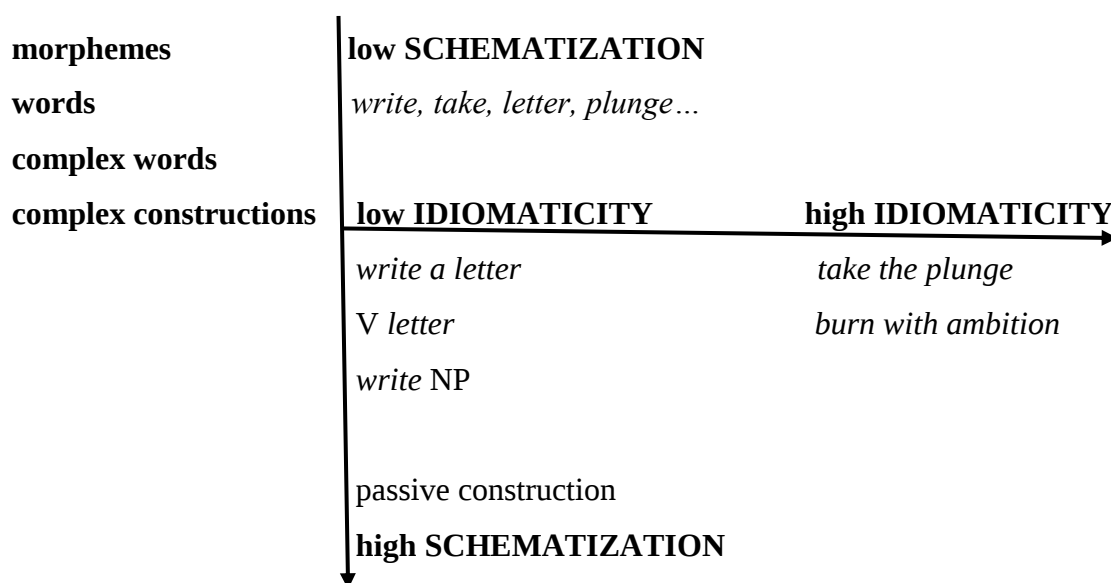


Figure 4. Constructicon (Wulff 2010: 167).

Figure 4 illustrates the continuum of different constructions, where idiomaticity is located on the horizontal axis. The major hypothesis is as follows: the more idiomatic an expression is, the farther it is from the vertical axis, which is equal to “high IDIOMATICITY” (Wulff 2010: 167). Wulff (2010: 166) also states that idioms are schematic (i.e. delexicalised) to a very limited extent, which implies they can allow only minimal lexico-syntactic disturbances.

Even though the constructicon provides tangible evidence of the idiomatic spectrum, Wulff has not attempted to position idiomatic expressions along the horizontal axis. This fact makes it difficult to apply the model to idioms. For instance, where would *ring a bell* or *stir up mud* be accommodated? The major problem with these expressions could be that they have a plausible literal reading. Then it is not abundantly clear if literality would shift the phrase closer or farther from the vertical axis.

Whether the criticism of the correlation between different variables (e.g., analysability/compositionality, literality or familiarity) and idiom flexibility in recent works is justified is difficult to determine. However, it is highly likely terms used to describe figurative language are abstract notions, which makes them increasingly difficult to measure and objectively capture. In any case, it appears reasonable to argue that the classification of idioms into strictly decomposable and nondecomposable may seem crude and can be criticised by those who suggest that compositionality is a continuum rather than a matter of two distinct groups (see, e.g., Nordmann, Cleland & Bull 2014: 93). However, prototype theory tackles this question differently. One of the typical examples employed in linguistic categorisation is a colour range: even though colours are represented in “a smooth continuum” and “there is no physical basis for the demarcation of discrete colour categories”, “people do recognize discrete categories” (Taylor 2013: 3). Thus, prototype theory reconciles the existence of a continuum with people’s ability to classify different objects/phenomena.

Overall, it becomes apparent that the literature on compositionality does not lend support for conclusive and consistent results, even though a substantial number of attempts have been undertaken since at least the 1970s. It might be possible that compositionality/analysability studies are too narrow an approach to account for idiomatic representation and usage. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss another dimension of idiom flexibility based largely on Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

5. The cognitive-linguistic perspective on idiom flexibility and creativity

Before approaching idiom creativity and flexibility, we need to shed light on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which was first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]), and its place in cognitive linguistics. The theory rests on the assumption that human thought processes are essentially metaphorical and that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life” (Lakoff & Johnson 2003 [1980]: 3). One of their most famous examples is ARGUMENT IS WAR, which reflects the way we conceptualise and describe arguments in terms of war (e.g., *I demolished his argument; his criticisms were right on target*) (ibid: 4-5). This implies that these conceptual links between ar-

gument and war are entrenched in our mind and culture (ibid). Therefore, metaphor transcends linguistic boundaries and encompasses the domain of human thought and cognition (ibid: 6).

Having analysed a number of conceptual metaphors (e.g., GOOD IS UP, SAD IS DOWN), Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]: 15-18) discover that they prove to be consistent, well-structured and motivated. In fact, Lakoff and Johnson's book can be treated as a successful attempt to work out a comprehensive system of conceptual metaphors covering various fields: for example, orientational metaphors (e.g., UP/DOWN) (ibid: 15-19), ontological metaphors (e.g., THE MIND IS A MACHINE) (ibid: 25-29), personification (e.g., INFLATION IS A PERSON) (ibid: 33-40), etc. Thus, the researchers prove that it is possible to conceptualise any experiences via metaphor (ibid: 41).

In response to Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Vega Moreno (2007: 133-134) writes that even though literal scenes evoked by idioms may help establish a connection between figurative and literal readings, there is not enough evidence to conclude that these mental images underlie our thinking mechanisms. Despite the fact that Vega Moreno (2007: 137) acknowledges Conceptual Metaphor Theory as worth pursuing, she points at its inconsistency. One of the issues, for example, is that conceptual metaphors are assumed to motivate figurative rather than literal language (Vega Moreno 2007: 137). Vega Moreno (2007: 137) concludes that the fact that "conceptual metaphors motivate only the use and understanding of figurative" language leads to a significant discrepancy: metaphorical and literal language appear to differ fundamentally, which is in marked contrast with the previous claims about a close similarity between the two.

Another important aspect within the cognitive framework is Relevance Theory, which stresses the fact that the hearer tends to interpret a metaphorical expression contextually rather than literally (Vega Moreno 2007: 123). This supposition is reminiscent of some psycholinguistic experiments (e.g., Levorato & Cacciari 1999). However, Vega Moreno (2007: 125) emphasises that the question of metaphor comprehension is even more complex than that: figurative language should be placed at the interface between semantics and pragmatics. This statement is exemplified by the following phrase: *John is a lion* (Vega Moreno (2007: 125). On the one hand, the figurative meaning of the utterance "contributes to the truth-conditional content" and is true if John is a brave person (ibid). On the other hand, the meaning of the whole utterance is beyond the sentence level and is context dependent (ibid). Thus, Vega Moreno shows that metaphor functions simultaneously on both levels.

As a matter of fact, Vega Moreno (2007: 139) concludes that conceptual metaphors can hardly be considered metaphors; instead, they are analogies or parallels we tend to draw when describing life as a journey. Besides, Vega Moreno (207: 139) claims that "conceptualising life

as a journey would imply we cannot think of life without thinking of journeys”, which, according to the researcher, cannot possibly be true. Thus, by supposedly debunking the conceptual theory, Vega Moreno (2007: 140) supports Relevance Theory, according to which the human mind seeks relevance and does not distinguish between metaphorical and literal modes of processing.

It should be acknowledged that Langlotz’ (2006) book on idiom creativity is arguably one of the most influential works combining idiom research and cognitive linguistics. It is important to state that Langlotz (2006: 15-22) criticises orthodox views on idiom processing and seeks to work out his own model largely based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Langlotz’ (2006: 22) critique of the traditional approach is based on the fact that the old paradigm of idiom research does not rely on empirical data and does not try to explain lexico-grammatical deficiencies of idiomatic expressions. Besides, Langlotz (2006: 44) also notes that although psycholinguistic studies have made a substantial contribution to idiom research, they have not managed to provide a “well-balanced linguistic model of idiomatic constructions”.

Having analysed previous models of idiomatic language use, Langlotz (2006: 45) gradually comes to the question of conceptual metaphors originally explored by Lakoff (1987). In order to understand figurative language, speakers should motivate it, i.e. “to understand why the idiom has the idiomatic meaning it has with a view to its literal meaning”. Thus, *the tip of the iceberg* is motivated, because it is possible to draw parallels between the common knowledge about icebergs and a small visible part of a bigger problem (Langlotz 2006: 45). This implies that “people can activate rich conceptual knowledge by means of which the literal meaning of the idiom can be mapped onto its idiomatic meaning” (Langlotz 2006: 46). Interestingly enough, although several idioms are opaque, a vast number of figurative expressions are based on “well-structured systems of conceptual metaphor”, which is supported by the empirical evidence (Langlotz 2006: 173).

Another example of a motivated idiom is *grasp the nettle*: *grasp* = DEAL WITH PROBLEM; *the nettle* = PROBLEM (Langlotz 2006: 54). If an idiom is motivated, it is also analysable (ibid). This, in turn, influences its grammatical behaviour (ibid: 54-55). Another dimension of idiom theory is analysability, which is defined as the correspondence between idiomatic and literal constituents in an idiomatic expression (Langlotz 2006: 28). This term is illustrated with *pull strings*, where *pull* stands for *use/exploit* and *strings* denotes *connections* (Langlotz 2006: 27). Thus, analysability appears to be synonymous with the notion of compositionality, which has been previously discussed as the ability to infer the meaning on the basis of the idiom elements (Nunberg et al. 1994: 498).

One of the most important observations in Langlotz’ (2006: 93) theory is that many idioms are motivated and analysable and therefore have an innate tendency for creativity. However, mo-

tivation and analysability (also isomorphism) are only two layers of a more complex construct – transparency (Langlotz 2006: 111). The third layer is compositionality, which Langlotz (2006: 111) understands as “the direct literal contribution of a constituent to the idiomatic meaning”. Apparently, compositionality is a problematic notion, because it overlaps with analysability. What makes the matters even more complicated is that both terms are components of transparency.

Compositionality is exemplified by the expression *shoot a glance*, which is labelled “*partially compositional*” because it “can be interpreted literally on the level of the idiomatic meaning” (Langlotz 2006: 112) [original emphasis]. Nevertheless, the phrase with the same verb – *shoot the breeze* – qualifies as non-compositional and ill-formed, because *shoot* is “ungrammatically collocated with an inanimate noun” (ibid). The same explanation could be provided for the first idiom, as it is impossible to literally shoot a glance.

It should be emphasised that the term ‘motivation’ is not unproblematic either. It becomes increasingly challenging to see clear-cut boundaries between motivation and analysability/isomorphism: motivation describes the speaker’s ability to establish a conceptual link between the literal scene and the idiomatic meaning; analysability reflects “a possible correspondence between the formal structure of the construction and its idiomatic meaning” (Langlotz 2006: 114-115). Thus, it is evident that motivation, analysability as well as compositionality are three facets of one concept. Furthermore, Langlotz (2006: 119) later confirms that analysability is “an effect of motivation”.

Another stumbling block to the terminology distinction is that “isomorphism cannot exist without some degree of motivation”, whereas “the opposite is very common” (Langlotz 2006: 119). The researcher suggests considering the following examples: while *spill the beans* is considered isomorphic and partially motivated, *spin one’s wheels* is fully motivated but not isomorphic (Langlotz 2006: 119). This classification begs the question of why exactly the second idiom, for example, is deemed to be fully motivated. It might be assumed that it would be easy to uncover the connection between spinning wheels and stagnation only if the speaker were familiar with the idiom. Otherwise, nothing seems to point explicitly at doing something without any progress or success.

Even though the distinction between the terms is not entirely consistent, they lay the foundation for the multi-faceted model of idiom creativity. Langlotz (2006: 128) hypothesises that the degree of transparency affects the creative potential and variability of idioms. This theory is reflected in the classification in Table 3 (Langlotz 2006: 128-135).

Table 3. Cognitive-linguistic classification (Langlotz 2006: 128-130)

1. Core types: idioms with an inconspicuous, fully compositional literal meaning

(Langlotz 2006: 128-130)
a. “Idioms with literal compositionality, (global) motivation and figurative-literal isomorphism, e.g.: grasp the nettle, take the bull by the horns, spill the beans, burst/prick the bubble, upset the applecart, etc.”
b. “Idioms with literal compositionality, global motivation, constituent motivation, and figurative-literal isomorphism, e.g.: swallow the bitter pill, jump on the bandwagon, make headway, etc.”
c. “Idioms with literal compositionality and global motivation, e.g.: grit one’s teeth, spin one’s wheels, turn the page, go round in circles, etc.”
d. “Idioms with literal compositionality but with neither motivation nor isomorphism, e.g.: kick the bucket, pop your clogs, bite the dust, buy the farm, carry the can, trail your coat, etc.”
2. Marginal types: idioms with conspicuous or non-compositional literal meanings (Langlotz 2006: 131-133)
e. “Idioms with a compositional but experientially unrealistic literal meaning: blended metaphorical idioms, e.g.: cook the books, rack one’s brains, like greased lightning, etc.”
f. “Partially compositional idioms, e.g.: know one’s onion, look daggers at sb., rain cats and dogs, etc.”
g. “Literally non-compositional, constructionally idiosyncratic idioms, e.g.: trip the light fantastic, come up roses, shoot the breeze, go places, etc.”
h. “Literally non-compositional idioms with cranberry morphs, e.g.: the whole kit and caboodle, put the kibosh on sth., cock a snook, blow the gaff, etc.”
i. “Idioms with absent literal compositionality due to the presence of highly specialised word-meanings and garden-path constituents, e.g.: hide your light under a bushel, have had one’s chips, across the board, chomp at the bit, kick the bucket, etc.”

Table 3 illustrates Langlotz’ multi-dimensional approach to idiom transparency, which includes three levels, i.e. compositionality, isomorphism and motivation. What becomes instantly apparent from the classification is that going down the list, the idioms gradually lose one of the components. This means that in *1a* the idioms are fully transparent, whereas in the last groups none of the three aspects is present, meaning that these expressions are opaque.

As has been previously mentioned, the boundaries between the terms are not clear-cut, with compositionality being the most challenging to decipher. According to Langlotz (2006: 127), compositionality can be partial (a direct contribution of elements to the idiomatic meaning) and literal (a plausible literal scene). There is also literal non-compositionality that means that no plausible literal scene can be evoked (ibid). It becomes apparent that these parameters describe different aspects. Literal (non)compositionality is reminiscent of the term *literality* discussed and tested in various psycholinguistic papers (e.g., Libben & Titone 2008; Tabossi, Arduino & Fanari 2011; Titone & Connine 1994). Literality implies that an idiom has a plausible literal reading. In the case of Langlotz’ theory, compositionality is understood as “the direct literal contribution of a constituent to the idiomatic meaning” (Langlotz 2006: 111). The term ‘literal (non)compositionality’ appears to be problematic and controversial: while an idiom can have a

plausible literal reading, it may not be compositional at the same time (e.g., *kick the bucket*). Thus, it would be more logical if literality were a separate aspect not related to compositionality.

One of the examples of a literally compositional idiom is *buy the farm* (Group 1*d*). While the expression has a meaningful literal scene, its constituents do not hint at dying. Therefore, the idiom indeed seems literally compositional (in Langlotz' terms) but not isomorphic or motivated. However, *bite the dust* also belongs to this group. It seems highly unlikely that this idiom has a plausible literal scene. It might be assumed that 2*e* would be more suitable for this expression.

Another controversy lies in the fact *kick the bucket* features twice in the classification (1*d* and 2*i*). It seems justified to suggest that the idiom better fits into 1*d* as it has a literal interpretation but no contribution to the idiomatic meaning.

The question then arises how idiom creativity is realised. Langlotz (2006: 188) notes that idiom variability “involves the mental manipulation of the idiomatic activation-set and its integration with other pre-established symbolic units and constructional schemas”. This presupposes that a novel variant is the result of complex computation and processing. Creative coding is exemplified by *grasp the nettles*, which is mentally manipulated in order to make it more suitable for the context (Langlotz 2006: 191). In this case, the computation model looks as follows: 1) firstly, the interlocutor mentally activates [TACKLE A PROBLEM], the base form of the expression *grasp the nettle* and its literal scene; secondly, as *grasp the nettle* is motivated and isomorphic, it allows lexico-grammatical adaptation for specific purposes; finally, the idiom can undergo pluralisation in order to denote several problems/issues (Langlotz 2006: 191-192). Thus, Langlotz (2006: 193-194) proves that the semantics of the formal structure of an idiom has a profound impact on its creative potential.

Nevertheless, not all idioms allow such computation. For instance, *kick the bucket* is considered a prototypically opaque idiom that should not allow any modifications (Langlotz 2006: 221). Even tense transformations are rather limited, as the semantics of the verb *kick* can refer only to dying quickly and unexpectedly (ibid). Furthermore, *the bucket* does not refer to death, which means that no lexico-grammatical adaptations of this unit are possible (Langlotz 2006: 221). This example reflects the compatibility constraint (ibid).

In order to prove his hypothesis about idiom creativity, Langlotz (2006: 249) tests the idioms from his classification in the corpus. The analysis reveals that, for instance, number variation is fully compatible with isomorphic idioms and does not occur with opaque expressions “due to the absence of a transparent semantic basis to which this grammatical adaptation could be applied” (Langlotz 2006: 249).

The same conclusion can be drawn about passivisation: semantic analysability appears to be a necessary prerequisite for this grammatical operation (Langlotz 2006: 251). In contrast,

opaque idioms observe the same principle as in number variation, i.e. they cannot be transformed (Langlotz 2006: 252-253). Thus, *bite the dust*, for example, cannot be passivised, because it does not correspond to the intransitive verb *die* (ibid). Moreover, the same argument seems to be true for adnominal modification: opaque idioms do not tend to collocate with pre- or postmodifiers (Langlotz 2006: 256).

It might be inferred that transparency is the fundamental aspect influencing the variation potential of idioms, which was corroborated by the empirical data found in the BNC (Langlotz 2006: 255). Finally, Langlotz (2006: 271) confirms that idioms can be systematically transformed and manipulated if “it is possible to ascribe a motivated and/or analysable structure to an idiomatic configuration”.

Despite the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Langlotz’ classification, his model is one of the most detailed accounts of idiomatic expressions. One of the indisputable advantages of this theory is that Langlotz has managed to extend the boundaries of the familiar compositionality/decomposability issue into the cognitive domain. This perspective is enlightening as to the nature of figurative language, as it treats idioms as “cognitive micro-models” and “pre-coded complex-scenes” (Langlotz 2006: 173). Nevertheless, due to the complexity and contradictions of this model, it seems increasingly challenging to compare and juxtapose it with other classifications. Therefore, it will not be taken into account in the analytical part. However, the cognitive-linguistic perspective will be employed in order to extend linguistic and psycholinguistic accounts. One must admit that cognitive-linguistic views provide a useful window to the way human beings conceptualise their experiences. Furthermore, taken together with the linguistic and psycholinguistic views, the cognitive-linguistic perspective may substantially enrich idiom research. Therefore, the analysis will draw heavily on the cognitive framework.

Similar views are expressed in other cognitive linguistic studies. For instance, Omazić (2008: 70) states that speakers rely on cognitive concepts when analysing even the most opaque idioms. The cognitive perspective is a powerful tool in understanding figurative language: for example, the domain FIRE can be mapped onto the more abstract notion of LOVE as in *to burn with love* or *to have the hots for somebody* (Omazić 2008: 71). It should be emphasised that idiom interpretation is facilitated through three aspects: “conceptual metaphor and metonymy”, the “knowledge of the language” with structural, semantic and pragmatic characteristics, and the knowledge of cultural and historical facts (Omazić 2008: 72).

Idiom transformations include the following steps: the addressee recognises the lexical, semantic and conceptual relation with the original idiomatic expression, compares the two versions relying on the three aspects mentioned above, and recognises the communicative purpose (Omazić 2008: 73-74). If, however, the novel variant violates grammaticality and is transformed

beyond recognition, it is likely to be perceived as a mistake (Omazić 2008: 77). The question then arises to what extent idioms can be modified in order to stay creative. In this case, the notion of wordplay discussed by Langlotz (2006: 201-203) is particularly relevant and useful. Langlotz (2006: 202) illustrates wordplay with the help of the example taken from Glucksberg (Glucksberg 2001: 73, quoted in Langlotz 2006: 202). In fact, the same instance was discussed much earlier in Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 221, 228) in connection with the discourse productivity of idioms.

As is evident from Example (1), the literal scene is manipulated “in terms of an inferential analogy: *kick the bucket* : *not nudge the bucket* = *die* : *not die*” (Langlotz 2006: 202). Importantly, Langlotz (ibid) classifies the dialogue in (1) as wordplay, “because the elaborative modification (*he barely nudged it*) could not trigger the idiomatic meaning if it were used in isolation, i.e. without the previous activation of the idiom’s canonical form and meaning”. Furthermore, Langlotz (2006: 202-203, original emphasis) highlights three aspects of wordplay, namely “stylistic markedness/conspicuousness”, “ambiguity”, and “context-dependency”. The first aspect indicates that the formal structure of an idiom is deliberately “adapted in a striking or stunning way” in order to “add further semantic richness” (ibid: 202-203). In the case of ambiguity, both literal and figurative are exploited to describe the context (ibid: 203). Finally, context-dependency implies that the punning effect of a manipulated idiom is bound to and understood only in context (ibid: 203).

Having analysed the playful language of children’s books, Munat (2007: 180) concludes that novel items are not “extragrammatical or rule-changing” – “they exploit the potential of the system in unusual ways”. Moreover, the researcher confirms that “it is the context which determines the nature of the novel word” (Munat 2007: 181). Linguistic creativity also proves that the system is flexible enough to allow and accommodate several novel items “in response to the demands of context”. It appears that the same observations could be applied to idiomatic creativity, because idioms also exploit the potential of the system in order to reach specific communicative goals.

Creativity in children’s literature and journalism displays parallel trends as both seek to achieve various stylistic effects (e.g., metaphor, word play, willful error) and fit into the context (Renouf 2007: 70-71). Interestingly, the substantial increase in the frequency of a particular expression is closely correlated with the surge in the creative usage of this expression (Renouf 2007: 72). For example, *weapons of mass destruction* are remodelled as *weapons of mass distraction* or *weapons of mass entertainment* (Renouf 2007: 73). This suggests that “words which make a sufficient impression on the public imagination will also spawn a number of productive and creative variants” (Renouf 2007: 87).

Although neither Munat (2007) nor Renouf (2007) attempts to fit their descriptions into the compositionality/decomposability or cognitive-linguistic framework, their research is enlightening as to the nature of linguistic creativity.

Summarising, the cognitive-linguistic perspective provides fertile soil for metaphor theory. It offers a plausible explanation of how we perceive and conceptualise our experiences with the help of metaphor. Although some authors (e.g., Vega Moreno 2007) emphasise certain inconsistency in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this framework is arguably one of the most thoroughly investigated and well-grounded.

6. A memetic account of idiomatic language

It should be noted that figurative language has never been approached from evolutionary linguistics (to my knowledge). However, it seems interesting to try to theorise about idioms in memetic terms.

One of the basic assumptions underlying this theory is that “cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission”, because “a form of evolution” is their common ground (Dawkins 2008 [1976]: 378). In order for humanity to survive, genetic material needs to be replicated and passed on to other generations. Thus, in evolutionary terms, the gene is a basic replicating unit (ibid: 380). Dawkins (ibid: 380) coins the term *meme* to refer to a replicator in culture and hypothesises that memes, similar to genes, “propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via [...] imitation”. Although there is no clear definition of a meme, the term may refer to cultural ideas or concepts that spread like viruses and parasitise human minds (e.g., tunes or catch-phrases) (ibid: 380-381). In fact, Dawkins’ groundbreaking work has given rise to a myriad of studies in natural sciences, psychology, philosophy and linguistics.

The question arises who is responsible for replication and cultural transmission, humans or their memes. It is also important to understand who benefits from these processes. Dennett (2008: 429) adopts a vision of human beings as passive hosts carrying memes. He also maintains that it is only memes that benefit from replication and propagation (ibid: 429) but does not seem to provide sufficient empirical evidence to support this claim. Besides, this bold supposition then begs the question of creativity: how do memes contribute to the creation of various art forms if humans are seen merely as carriers?

It should be emphasised that one of the fully-fledged linguistic works that relies on memetics is Croft’s (2000) evolutionary framework. Contrary to Dennett’s radical beliefs, Croft (Croft 1990: 257, quoted in Croft 2000: 4) theorises that it is not languages that change, but that people change language through social interaction.

Croft (2000) draws parallels between Dawkins' understanding of memes and linguistic evolution. Language change is realised with the help of replication: normal, altered and differential (Croft 2000: 3-4). While normal replication ensures the stability of the system, altered replication creates “variants of a structure” and is thus synonymous with innovation (ibid: 3-4). Differential replication is responsible for propagation (and also loss) and reflects an increase or decrease in usage of a linguistic pattern (ibid: 3-4). Another important aspect of the evolutionary framework is selection. In the neo-Darwinian theory, “organisms that are better adapted to the ecological conditions of the environment will have a greater likelihood of survival and reproduction – i.e. they are selected” (Croft 2000: 20). According to Croft (2000: 32), it is social factors (e.g., overt or covert prestige) that affect selection and propagation in language change. Besides, social factors play the same role in the selection process as “ecological factors do in biology” (Croft 2000: 32).

Croft (2000: 12) argues that in linguistic transmission the utterance is analogous to DNA. Based on the analogy with Dawkins' meme, Croft (2000: 28) proposes a *lingueme* that makes up the structure of an utterance. He also posits that “utterance selection is the primary locus of language change” (Croft 2000: 30).

As has been previously mentioned, idioms are relatively infrequent in the corpus. Following the biological logic, we might assume that idioms compete with their literal counterparts in the *lingueme* pool. Consider, for instance, *die*, *kick the bucket* and *bite the dust*. It might be hypothesised that *die* should be substantially more frequent than its figurative variants, because it is literal and neutral, whereas *kick the bucket* is not compositional and does not show much respect to the deceased.

It should be noted that idiomatic language could also be described in terms of replication. Idiomatic expressions in their standard form and use conform to linguistic conventions and thus exemplify normal replication. The passivised version as in *the bucket was kicked* is a noticeable deviation from the convention and may not even be recognised by the members of the community. This modified idiom then reflects altered replication. In other words, it is innovative and creative usage of the idiom. As Croft (2000: 31) states, altered replication spawns a number of alternative variants of a single *lingueme*. In a similar manner, an idiom may potentially have a variety of unconventional variants: for example, *not a single bean was spilled*; *to spill political beans* etc. This poses a question of whether such alternatives can be universally selected and differentially perpetuated. Creatively transformed idioms might be challenging for understanding, especially outside the context. They are, however, more likely to remain fine examples of playful language and attest to an almost limitless creative potential of a human mind. These observations are reminiscent of wordplay discussed by Langlotz (2006: 201-203) (see Chapter 5).

Whether the memetic account of idiomatic language can provide a plausible explanation of its use is an open question. Nevertheless, the familiar topic has been tackled from an unconventional perspective. It is also hoped that memetics has succeeded in enriching the theory of idiomatic creativity.

7. The analysis of idiomatic creativity and flexibility in written discourse

This section investigates two typical instances of written discourse, namely newspaper and magazine articles, and fiction. One of the crucial aspects that distinguishes written language from spoken discourse is that “a written sentence has a static existence: its author can construct it over an extended period of time, rethinking and revising according to need” (Biber et al. 1999: 1066). In contrast, spoken language has a dynamic nature, which implies that it is “constructed and interpreted under real-time pressure” (ibid). This fundamental difference between the two types of discourse may have a strong influence on their creative potential.

7.1 The analysis of idiomatic creativity and flexibility in news articles

What follows is a significantly reduced version of genre analysis. One of the crucial differences from conventional genre analysis is that the notions of *discourse as text* and *discourse as genre* (in Bhatia’s words (2002: 16-18)) have been adopted in the present thesis. This means that even though discourse is too broad a domain, discourse can be approached and described from the point of view of genre features. It is important to acknowledge that the analysis of structure/moves is not feasible within the framework of the current study, because only short extracts with the given linguistic feature are available. However, it is possible to hypothesise about the potential target audience, communicative purposes and the question of identity.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, genre always implies the interaction between the writer and the discourse community. Therefore, the question of identities appears to be particularly important. Although the voice of journalists is largely suppressed in newspaper articles, it is still possible to infer the writer’s view. For example, the following extract illustrates the author’s attitude towards the event:

- (2) What did Joan Rivers make of the Teutonic model Heidi Klum? ‘The last time a German looked this hot was when they were pushing Jews into the ovens.’ Sadly, Rivers died in September, aged 81. And with her **bucket kicked**, the world became that bit dimmer. She was the last of the adult comics, the end of the line of quick-quipping stand-ups for whom nothing was beyond a joke. And to those who took offence at her infamous ‘meanness’, no apology was forthcoming. Ever. ‘You’re offended? Oh, grow up!’ was her all-purpose retort” (NOW 2015 GB, Spiked) [emphasis added].

The excerpt cited is interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, based on the context, it becomes apparent that Joan Rivers’ gallows humour was not widely appreciated. It is possible that the

author employs the modified version of *kick the bucket* to accentuate the lack of sympathy and respect. Thus, the identity of the journalist surreptitiously emerges in the text. Alternatively, the passivisation of the idiom may be utilised to mirror Rivers' style. Secondly, the idiom *kick the bucket* is almost unanimously hailed as one of the most frozen and fixed expression, which, according to Nunberg (1978: 212) and Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 233), should not allow passivisation or any other alteration of the structure. However, the writer has obviously overstepped linguistic limits and conventions in order to lay heavy stress on the attitude towards the situation described. Thus, it appears that journalistic writing goes beyond stating the obvious fact of dying. Rather, it adds emotional colouring to the otherwise bleak event.

Every newspaper and online news platform have their own target audience. It seems reasonable to suggest that the discourse community in this case is broader and more homogenous compared to the smaller scientific circle in Hyland's (2015) study, for instance. It might be hypothesised that news is primarily directed at people who want to stay tuned and find out more about the political and economic situation and social events. Besides, in the example cited the journalist describes Joan Rivers' death in derogatory terms and provokes the readers with the question ("What did Joan Rivers make of the Teutonic model Heidi Klum?"), which might hint at shared cultural knowledge between the author and his or her audience.

Within the framework of the present thesis, it is assumed that creatively transformed idioms are a powerful tool in identity construction. It might also be hypothesised that the creativity of figurative language not only enriches news reportage but also fulfils communicative purposes in an effective and efficient way. Communicative goals in news may primarily involve informing the readership about recent events, entertaining and even influencing the audience's opinion.

It is vitally important to note that the pressure of the news reportage format may be a strong motivating factor in expressing more within limited space, especially if it is a news article (Dianova 2017). Another crucial feature of media discourse is that present-day journalism is "an information-saturated market" (Duignan n.d.). Furthermore, "increasing consumer demand" has "stiffened journalistic competition" (ibid). These factors may explain at least partially the abundance of creatively used idioms. Besides, transformed idiomatic expressions as an aspect of the journalist's identity might help maximise the novelty and draw the readership's attention to the pressing issue.

7.2 The analysis of passivised idioms in news articles

It should be acknowledged that the majority of the idioms from the linguistic and psycholinguistic classifications have a plausible literal reading (i.e. literality). For instance, *draw the line* or *carry the torch* have both literal and idiomatic interpretations. An overwhelming number of ex-

amples from COCA show that literally and grammatically well-formed idioms are not easily passivised. Consider the following examples:

- (3) The collar and **pockets are lined with soft fleece**, and the silky, 100-percent recycled polyester shell slips neatly under a jacket. (COCA 2008, MAG: Backpacker) [emphasis added].
- (4) For example, when production turned to dairy Thing at the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century, **the roof was raised** to accommodate feed for the cattle (COCA 1998, MAG: Magazine Antiques) [emphasis added].
- (5) You will walk on snow where **the only other tracks were made by a mink** (COCA 1993, MAG: field and stream) [emphasis added].

As is evident from the excerpts above, the expressions can only be given a literal interpretation. Similar items include *hold the fort*, *ring a bell*, *clear the air* and *get the picture*. It might be assumed that it is literal well-formedness that impedes an idiomatic interpretation of the passive construction.

A study conducted by Gibbs et al. (1989) investigated the effect of literality on idiom flexibility. The researchers maintain that decomposability is not the only characteristic that contributes to the unconventional use of idioms (Gibbs et al. 1989: 62). They theorise that grammaticality and literality might also have a profound impact on flexibility: literally well-formed items should be more easily subjected to alterations (ibid). Importantly, Gibbs et al. (1989: 63) established a lack of correlation between flexibility and literal well-formedness, which indicates that their hypothesis was not corroborated.

In fact, Gibbs et al.'s results can be supported by ample evidence from the NOW corpus:

- (6) Check and see how many billions in profits the different oil companies made in the last quarter - I guarentee [sic] **their pockets are lined so heavily now they can't walk!!!** (NOW 2011 US) [emphasis added].
- (7) We see the return of the gombeen tactic of saying one thing and doing quite another, terrifying the people into believing that we have no option but at the same time, setting aside? 2.5bn in fees to make sure **the gombeen's pockets are lined with silk despite the people's misery** (NOW 2010 IE) [emphasis added].

Examples (6) and (7) prove that literally plausible readings do not affect the creative potential of idioms. In (6) the journalist passivises the idiom in order to draw the readership's attention to the companies' rapacious policy. Furthermore, the effect is amplified via hyperbole – *so heavily they can't walk*. Example (7) is particularly interesting, since here the author exploits the double meaning of the expression. On the literal level, many types of fabric, including silk, can be sewn onto the inside of a pocket. Moreover, silk is usually associated with prestige, high quality and prosperity. Thus, *silk*, i.e. the gombeen's wealth, is opposed to the sorry state of the population. Another example illustrating hyperbole is cited in (8):

- (8) Hype. We use this word so carelessly. A film gets lost in pre-hype. **The earth and moon is promised** during promotions -- also incredible over hype (NOW 2018 PK) [emphasis added].

The earth and moon is used to depict the audience's great expectations. For this reason, it might be assumed that the hyperbole permits extending the original idiom and may be enough to license passivisation in this case.

It is important to note that several idioms from both normally and abnormally decomposable groups permit extending the literal scene beyond the idiomatic expression itself:

- (9) It was not lost on Sri Lankans and just illustrated the farce of Canadian politicians behaving like puppets **with their strings being pulled by the LTTE supporters** in Canada (NOW 2014 LK) [emphasis added].
- (10) If successful, it will water down Ruto's presidency. For the dynasties, it will make him a puppet president whose **control strings are pulled by the dynasty-friendly Prime Minister** and other people placed in strategic positions (NOW 2018 KE) [emphasis added].
- (11) For now, the party appears to be united. Factions are null. **Hatchets are buried -- but not so deeply they can not be dug up again** after Election Day (COCA 2004, NEWS: Washington Post) [emphasis added].

It is interesting to note that *puppets* and *strings* in (9) and (10) are naturally associated with a theatrical context. The obvious analogy between political manipulations and a puppet theatre produces a vivid conceptual scene. Furthermore, in (9) the passivised idiom contains the premodifier *control*. *Pull strings* already presupposes the exploitation of somebody's influence. *Control* seems to duplicate the meaning of the connections used. Thus, the phrase appears to be an instance of pleonasm, which intensifies the idiomatic meaning. Example (11) proves that the hatchet scenario is an effective way of describing political confrontations. *Hatchet* naturally co-occurs with *bury*, *deeply* and *dig up* in the same context. Therefore, the opponents can resolve their problems (*bury the hatchet*) and potentially re-ignite their conflict (*dig up the hatchet*). Besides, the plural form of *hatchets* highlights the range of controversial issues. It might be assumed that it is primarily the context and decomposability that permit extending the idiomatic meaning. One must admit that the extracts in (9), (10) and (11) remind of wordplay in Langlotz' (2006: 202) terms (see Example (1)). For (9) and (10), stylistic markedness, which is one of the aspects of wordplay, may be particularly relevant, because it helps "add further semantic richness" (Langlotz 2006: 202-203). In the case of (11), all the three dimensions appear to be pertinent: the extended literal scene is stylistically marked; both literal and metaphorical interpretations are activated (ambiguity in Langlotz' (2006: 203) terminology); finally, the manipulated variant is likely to be understood only in context (context-dependency (Langlotz (2006: 203))).

Another notable example is illustrated in (12):

- (12) Where our communities come together, not pull apart. A place where communication and collaboration thrive, and negativity withers. Proactive, not reac-

tive. **Doors are opened instead of slammed shut.** A place that champions expertise not silences it (NOW 2018 CA) [emphasis added].

The excerpt above is based on the antithesis of distinct concepts: *come together/pull apart*, *thrive/wither*, *proactive/reactive*, *opened/slammed shut*, *champion/silence*. It might be argued that it is the context in the first place that triggers the series of opposing concepts. Furthermore, it is also plausible that the journalist manipulates the metaphorical and literal scenes: if new opportunities are associated with open doors, people can also be bereft of these opportunities and the doors then slam shut. In this case, the creative usage of the idiom *open the door* is supported both by the context and the extended metaphorical concept. Besides, the passive voice (*doors are opened*) is licensed by the absence or even irrelevance of the agent, which was previously discussed in Biber et al. (1999: 938).

Special attention should be focussed on the fact that a few idioms have either ambiguous or slightly different meanings compared to their normal usage:

- (13) **The question was popped:** What can Toyota and CAMPI do about the mayhem Manila traffic? In its heyday, General Motors it bought tramways and public transport and tore up the tracks to make way for the motorcar as the wave of the future (NOW 2016 PH) [emphasis added].
- (14) What frightened the parent was the community had embraced and accepted her son in a way he had never experienced in his entire life. Those are **very deep psychological strings being pulled** and that seduction is wrapped in racist ideology (NOW 2017 CA) [emphasis added].

The idiom in (13) could be reformulated as ‘the question was asked’. That the journalist refers to a marriage proposal is a highly unlikely possibility. On the other hand, the description of the source says the excerpt is taken from a Philippine news website, which means that *pop the question* may be synonymous with ‘ask/pose a question’ in this variety of English. Alternatively, the phrase *pop the question* may not have been intended as an idiom. Rather, the phrase may exemplify a special use of the verb *pop*. In comparison with its conventional meaning and usage, *strings being pulled* in (14) seems to allude to a different conceptual scene. Rather than referring to the connections, the expression could indicate that the integration of the person into the community has had a profound impact on him. The journalist may refer to the strings of the soul or to the fact that the situation has struck a highly sensitive chord with the protagonist of the article.

In the sample of extracts collected, both short and long passives can be found.

- (15) You better work, bitch, "she snaps, dishing out capitalist advice from the inside. But Britney is simultaneously the star, the product and the victim of this brutal credo, and if there's **a whip being cracked**, it's the one that's been on her back for 17 years (NOW 2016 GB) [emphasis added].

In (15), the short passive is used to emphasise the action of whipping, which is in accord with Biber et al.'s (1999: 938) analysis of the short passive. Besides, there seem to be a number of factors in Britney's life that push her and make her work hard. The literal scene is extended to *that's been on her back* to attract attention to the unconventional usage of the idiom.

Example (16) illustrates the long passive.

- (16) As if winning, and the losing, her crown wasn't pain enough, Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez (L), also has to live with the fact every year **her birthday thunder is stolen by Christmas** (NOW 2015 AU) [emphasis added].

In this case, the emphasis shifts to the agent as in the active voice, which was described in Biber et al.'s (1999: 941-943) account of the passive voice. The agent in the coda position also conveys new information, which makes the agent more marked than in the active voice (Biber et al. 1999: 941). It might be assumed that this extract has indeed a double focus, namely the premodified and passivised idiom, and the agent. Another crucial observation here is that the agent is an inanimate noun, which is an unlikely doer of the action. The title of the article – “How to survive Christmas when it's also your birthday” – suggests that the main character's birthday coincides with Christmas celebrations. The combination of the modified idiom and the long passive has enabled the author of the article to create a vivid image of a person, for whom “Christmas Day is a constant disappointment” (NOW 2015 AU). The use of the long passive may also imply that the author of the article deliberately blames Christmas rather than Ariadna Gutierrez' friends and family who seem to ignore her on her birthday.

One of the major research questions of the thesis focusses on the linguistic and cognitive-linguistic classifications, namely on the approach that best reflects the nature of idiomatic language in terms of creativity and flexibility. In Nunberg's (1978) classification, the principal variable is the degree of analysability, which leads to the distinction between decomposable and nondecomposable expressions. Moreover, decomposable idioms are not homogeneous: Nunberg (1978: 225-228) differentiates between normally and abnormally decomposable idioms. Thus, Nunberg (1978: 228-229) predicts that while normally decomposable idioms should be the most flexible, the other two groups of expressions are unlikely to allow any lexico-grammatical alterations. The reason is that the constituents of abnormally decomposable and nondecomposable idioms cannot fully map onto their metaphorical referents (Nunberg 1978: 228). On the other hand, the psycholinguistic classification treats the majority of idiomatic expressions as analysable and therefore lexically and syntactically flexible. Even *kick the bucket* is seen as analysable, even though it is entirely opaque (see Table 2).

The evidence obtained from the corpora suggests that the truth is somewhere in between: both classifications explain successfully the creative potential of figurative language, albeit with some reservations.

As far as passivisation is concerned, there are certain conditions that either favour or block it. Transitivity is one of the major factors in this respect: only transitive verbs can be passivised (Langlotz 2006: 249). Thus, the alternation between active and passive permits manipulating the syntax of the sentence “without changing the content of the reported scene: *John kicked a ball* vs. *The ball was kicked by John*” (Langlotz 2006: 249-250). Langlotz (2006: 251-252) also insists that certain idioms cannot undergo passivisation because the verbs they refer to are intransitive: for instance, *bite the dust* means *die*. This implies that the intransitivity of *die* prevents *bite the dust* from becoming passivised (ibid). Moreover, as has been previously stated, analysability contributes substantially to the flexibility of idioms. Thus, the absence of a metaphorical referent makes it impossible for nondecomposable opaque idioms to be passivised (Langlotz 2006: 253-254). Otherwise, passivisation would lead to the following result: **the dust was bitten* = **was died* (ibid).

Surprisingly, most of the nondecomposable idioms from Tables 1 do allow passivisation, as in the excerpt below:

- (17) **More than the breeze will be shot** during the Timmins Bowhunters' 3D archery competition (NOW 2010 CA) [emphasis added].

The passivised idiom in (17) fits well into the shooting context, which might be the major reason for the wordplay. Another notable example is the proverbial *kick the bucket*:

- (18) Constantine is a weary, dapper, neo-noir demon-hunting chainsmoker who carries the unfortunate burden of knowing that, when **his bucket's kicked**, he's going down, not up (NOW 2012 GB) [emphasis added].

In fact, this is the second passivised version of the idiom (the first example is provided at the beginning of the chapter). The existence of such instances defies deeply seated beliefs about frozen idioms expressed by the proponents of linguistic, psycholinguistic and cognitive linguistic frameworks. Nevertheless, one must admit that *kick the bucket* is one of the most unlikely candidates for passivisation, as none of its components corresponds to death – this is the major reason why Nunberg qualifies *kick the bucket* or *shoot the breeze* as nondecomposable and highly inflexible items. The notion of wordplay brought up by Langlotz (2006: 202-203) may be particularly pertinent here: the manipulated idiom *his bucket's kicked* is stylistically marked and adds emotional colouring to the protagonist's death; besides, the understanding of the idiom may not be possible outside the context, which makes the phrase context-dependent.

Whether the passivisation of nondecomposable idioms is a mere idiosyncrasy is an open question. However, the results prove that even the most frozen items can be transformed, which supports the psycholinguistic classification. Besides, the notion of wordplay from the cognitive-linguistic perspective sheds light on the novel variants from the nondecomposable group.

As predicted by Nunberg, the normally decomposable group proves to be the most productive in terms of flexibility. The only exception is *stir up mud*, which is utilised only literally in the corpora. Importantly, Nunberg is also right in claiming that abnormally decomposable idioms should not be particularly productive. The findings corroborate this argument. The expression *hit the ceiling* is worth mentioning, as it is one of the few passivised examples from this group. However, its meaning is not synonymous with being enraged. Rather, it refers to reaching the limits:

- (19) First of all, it is important to note that we really don't know what President Obama will do if **the debt ceiling is hit**. He will then be subject to contradictory laws (NOW 2013 US) [emphasis added].

The debt ceiling in (19) metaphorically describes financial resources that might be stretched to the limit. Placed in the political and economic context, the phrase is further specified by the pre-modifier *debt*.

Another idiom worth discussing is *take the fifth*, which also belongs to the abnormally decomposable group. The question arises whether it can indeed be qualified as such. It is important to note that this expression is one of the most inflexible and unproductive in the sample collected. It is possible that only speakers of American English would be able to recognise it, as it refers to the Fifth Amendment of the American Constitution. Without knowing the legal context, one is unlikely to grasp its meaning. One of the most probable reasons why this expression is inflexible is that the ordinal number might impede topicalisation. Otherwise, the context should state explicitly what *the fifth* refers to. Although *take the fifth* is classified as an abnormally decomposable idiom (Nunberg 1978: 227-228), it is more likely to be a fixed phrase rather than an idiom. *The fifth* is utilised as an abbreviation of the Fifth Amendment. Therefore, the phrase is literal rather than metaphorical.

Even though the vast majority of idioms do permit passivisation, they are not equally flexible. Some items may have only a very restricted number of creative instances (e.g., *perish the thought*), whereas others are increasingly popular and productive (e.g., *spill the beans*), as the corpora suggest. Overall, the corpus findings prove that both Nunberg and Cacciari and Glucksberg are right but in different respects. It is also apparent that neither of the classifications is flawless. Although the majority of idioms can be subjected to lexico-grammatical manipulations, Cacciari and Glucksberg's (1991) taxonomy still seems oversimplified. The researchers claim

that there is no difference between normally and abnormally decomposable idioms, because “there is no principled reason why this distinction should be functional either in idiom comprehension or idiom productivity” (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230). This observation is corroborated by the findings: at least one third of the analysable-transparent idioms in Cacciari and Glucksberg’s classification is almost totally unproductive and inflexible. However, the analysis of normally and abnormally decomposable expressions justifies the distinction proposed by Nunberg.

7.3 The analysis of premodification of idioms in news articles

The investigation of premodification reveals tendencies that are quite similar to those found in passivisation. It should be stressed that premodification enables the author to manipulate the literal scene in order to “fulfil the function of providing more fine-grained conceptual micro-models against which the idioms’ context-specific meanings can be assessed” (Langlotz 2006: 266). Langlotz (2006: 267) argues that adjectives of quality (e.g., *most ponderous applecart of all; even higher mountain to climb* (Langlotz 2006: 266-267)) “must be interpreted as intensifiers on the level of the idiomatic meaning”. Furthermore, Langlotz (2006: 268) defines another group of premodifiers, namely topic indicators or classifiers (e.g., “*political, financial, economic, intellectual, legal, tax or energy*”). Furthermore, topic indicators are divided into external and internal premodifiers (Langlotz 2006: 268). While internal premodifiers define “the idiomatic head-noun”, external topic indicators “classify the idiomatic meaning as a whole” (Langlotz 2006: 268). Langlotz (2006: 269) notices that isomorphic (i.e. analysable) idioms favour internal modifiers in most cases. However, if the idiomatic head noun has no metaphorical referent, its premodifier “can only be interpreted adverbially” or externally (Langlotz 2006: 270-271). As in the case of passivisation, the degree of analysability and motivation is predicted to play a decisive role in the literal scene manipulation (Langlotz 2006: 271).

As far as premodification is concerned, the nondecomposable group is increasingly productive. Therefore, these expressions deserve special attention.

- (20) Because he's got a cool flaming sword? I think we're all waiting for the day when **Beric kicks the final bucket**, and this season is going to be it (NOW 2018 US) [emphasis added].
- (21) Nonetheless, fans are still expecting **Iron Man to kick the iron bucket** at some stage in the near future (NOW 2018 GB) [emphasis added].

Cacciari and Glucksberg (2001: 228-229) attribute the limited analysability of *kick the bucket* to the semantics of the main verb. Nevertheless, the examples cited above prove that the semantics of *bucket* can also be successfully played with. Interestingly, *kick the bucket* already presupposes the terminal stage of life. The premodifier *final* seems to intensify this meaning, making the

phrase pleonastic. Example (21) mentions Iron Man, whose disappearance from the cinematic stage or his death is described by analogy with an iron bucket. Although neither *bucket* nor *kick* hints at dying, the authors in both articles have succeeded in transforming the idiom creatively and playfully.

In Langlotz' (2006: 270-271) terms, *final bucket* can be reanalysed adverbially: 'when Beric finally dies', in which case the phrase involves an external topic indicator *final*. According to Langlotz' (2006: 268), external adjectives describe "the idiomatic meaning as a whole". Interestingly, *the iron bucket* in (21) could be interpreted as an internal classifier. This observation contradicts Langlotz' (2006: 271) theory, according to which premodified idiom head nouns with absent metaphorical referents should not be compatible with internal topic indicators.

Another example containing the idiom *kick the bucket* is slightly ambiguous, because it is not abundantly clear what the premodifier refers to:

- (22) If having a passionate affair is something you want to **tick off your bucket list** before **you kick the same bucket**, you should first read the cautionary tale of Dido and Aeneas in Book 4 of Virgil's Aeneid (NOW 2018 AU) [emphasis added].

In (22), there are two versions of the same expression, namely *the bucket list* and *kick the same bucket*. *The bucket list* could be paraphrased as 'to accomplish all the things before one dies'. The phrase is based in the idiom *kick the bucket*, which results in the expression *the same bucket*. This wording appears to be not only ill-formed, but also repetitive and even inappropriate. In general, the evidence from the corpora proves that *kick the bucket* is compatible with premodification, especially if there is a classifying or topic indicating adjective, which is illustrated in (21) and in the excerpt below:

- (23) But the death of the author may have had another, still more painful, consequence: the demise of writing's economic viability. In dying as author **the writer kicks the financial bucket** as well [...] (NOW 2016 IE) [emphasis added].

As is evident from (23), the context makes it possible for the idiom to be used with an attribute. *The financial bucket* can hardly be seen as ambiguous or idiosyncratic, because *economic validity* familiarises the reader with the context and enables the journalist to use the idiom creatively. Besides, as Langlotz (2006: 270-271) notices, the lack of decomposability is closely correlated with the use of external topic indicators. Thus, *the financial bucket* can be reconceptualised as 'to die financially'.

Several researchers such as Nunberg (1978: 214) or Hamblin and Gibbs (1999: 35) associate the expression *kick the bucket* with a sudden rather than a protracted death, because the main verb *kick* denotes a quick action. However, the corpus findings do not confirm this claim: nothing in Examples (2), (18) and (20)-(23) hints at dying quickly or suddenly.

Similarly, *shoot the breeze*, which belongs to the same nondecomposable class, easily co-occurs with adjectival modifiers if the topic/domain is explicitly described in the context.

- (24) Launched in a pit of Trump-induced despair by former aides to President Obama at the start of this year, Pod Save America says it is a "no bullshit-conversation about politics" [...]. Jon Favreau [...] and Tommy Vietor **shoot the political breeze** [...] (NOW 2017 GB) [emphasis added].

Example (24) features *Trump-induced despair*, *President Obama*, *politics* that create optimal conditions for idiom transformation. The classifying adjective *political* is employed to characterise the conversation. Even though the idiom *shoot the breeze* is nondecomposable, its premodified version could result in the following re-interpretation: ‘to have a political conversation/discussion’. Thus, *political* could qualify as an internal topic indicating premodifier. Other similar instances include *shoot the baseball breeze* (NOW 2017 CA) and *shoot the intellectual breeze* (NOW 2010 US).

Interestingly, *give a damn* is not productive with regard to passivisation but readily allows premodification:

- (25) If you **give even the slightest damn** about other animals, this is hugely important work (NOW 2017 IE) [emphasis added].
(26) [...] Jos? **gives quite a noticeable damn** about Conor McGregor (NOW 2017 IE) [emphasis added].

In both (25) and (26), the adjectives of quality are placed before the constituent *damn*, which, according to Langlotz (2006: 267), reinforces the idiomatic meaning rather than specifies the situation described. Besides, *the slightest damn* is employed in the superlative form, which, according to Langlotz (2006: 267) further strengthens the figurative meaning.

It is interesting to note that *play hooky* rarely occurs in the corpora. Besides, no passivised versions of the idiom have been found. However, the NOW corpus yields one example with premodification:

- (27) The last parliamentary pin-up **to play ostentatious child-related hooky** was David Miliband, who as Foreign Secretary skipped a state visit by the Saudi king for the birth of an adopted son in America (NOW 2011 GB) [emphasis added].

The complex premodifier in (27) can be viewed as describing a quality rather than indicating a topic. The author of the article might have wanted to draw a parallel between skipping an official meeting and missing classes at school. *Ostentatious child-related hooky* shows disrespect and exaggerates the foreign secretary’s absence from the meeting. It is highly probable that this idiom is rarely transformed creatively, because it contains a cranberry morph *hooky*, which makes it an unlikely candidate for topicalisation and premodification.

Surprisingly, *pop the question* is compatible with premodification but appears in a different meaning:

- (28) So please, if we cringe when **you pop the meet-the-folks question**, don't freak on us. Know that we're really just shaking in our boots (COCA 2010, MAG: Cosmopolitan) [emphasis added].
- (29) Finally, someone in the audience **popped the obvious question**: If this is such a great, smart pig, why does he only have three legs? (COCA 1991, MAG: Mother Jones) [emphasis added].

The excerpts above clearly show that the phrase *pop the question* in these cases is not related to the idiom's original meaning of a marriage proposal. The same tendency is observed in (13) where *pop* is a contextual synonym of *ask*. In (28) and (29), *pop* might substitute *ask/pose* because it is more conversational and highlights an unexpected character of the situation. While (29) is closer to literal language, (28) seems more metaphorical, as it exploits the semantics of the verb *pop* to show that the person is taken off-guard. Besides, *the question* is premodified by the complex hyphenated phrase that specifies and narrows down the context.

Another idiom belonging to the same normally decomposable group is *pass the buck*. In Example (30), the meaning of making someone else responsible seems to be emphasised thanks to the internal premodifier *blame*:

- (30) There's a communications deficit as well. The truth was not revealed. [...] There's navel gazing and **passing the blame buck** around (NOW 2017 LK) [emphasis added].

The author emphasises the lack of responsibility by employing the pleonastic phrase *the blame buck*. Thus, the premodified idiom performs an emphatic function in this context.

It should be stressed that the normally decomposable expressions, as has been originally anticipated, are frequently subjected to premodification. The vast majority of the idioms in this group contain both adjectives of quality and classifiers. Interestingly, although *stir up mud* has no passivised variants, it features once with a premodifier. One of the possible reasons might be that the possibility of premodification depends on the type of premodifier rather than on analysability.

- (31) A story that may be just **more stirring of the Brexit mud** -- as witnessed on both referendum sides -- isn't worth page 97 (NOW 2016 GB) [emphasis added].

Much discussed and notorious, *Brexit* makes part of the idiom *stir up mud*, where it functions as an internal topic indicating premodifier. The transformation is well motivated by the association of Brexit with something highly questionable, obscure and hardly justified. Based on Langlotz' analysis, *Brexit* falls into the category of a topic indicating premodifier that helps place the idiom into the political context.

As an overwhelming number of news articles touch upon the most relevant and pressing socio-economic issues, many idioms are aptly manipulated in order to depict the political situation. Examples (32)-(34) illustrate this phenomenon:

- (32) But it is clear that **Trump has pulled the economic plug** on an international climate agreement that has been a shambles from Day One and now has no basis for continued existence (NOW 2017 CA) [emphasis added].
- (33) Armored assault boats did exist back in England, but they remained a well-guarded secret; heaven forbid invaders would use them and thus **spill the British beans** (COCA 2007, MAG: Military History) [emphasis added].
- (34) Vice-president Constantino Chiwenga, former head of the armed forces, also **dipped into the public purse** ahead of the polls [...] (NOW 2018 ZA) [emphasis added].

The *economic plug* (32), the *British beans* (33) and the *public purse* (34) contain topic indicating premodifiers that provide fine-grained descriptions of the current political climate. Langlotz (2006: 269) emphasises that only the internal interpretation is suitable for isomorphic (i.e. analysable) idioms. It seems reasonable to suggest that the modified idiom in (32) could also be reanalysed adverbially ‘economically, Trump has pulled the plug’. In this case, the re-interpretation is external. Even though *dip into somebody’s purse* belongs to the abnormally decomposable group, it is highly productive in political contexts: *dipping into the national purse* (NOW 2017 ZA), *dipping hands into government purse* (NOW 2013 NG). In the second example, *hands* is added, which extends the literal scene even further.

Similar to the majority of other normally decomposable idioms, *foot the bill* readily allows premodification. Since *bill* is used literally, both quality and classifying premodifiers often precede it:

- (35) Disney didn't forget about those big kids - adults - who **foot the vacation bill** (COCA 2011, NEWS: Chicago Sun-Times) [emphasis added].
- (36) At \$1,000 a day, it was unlikely the client would want **to foot such an extravagant bill** (COCA 1999, NEWS: San Francisco Chronicle) [emphasis added].

The *vacation bill* in (35) refers to the money spent on the holidays. The premodifier *vacation* qualifies as an internal classifier. In (36), the journalist’s message is clear – the adjective *extravagant* refers to an enormous sum of money and could be labelled as an adjective of quality, which serves to intensify the idiomatic meaning.

It is important to mention that creatively transformed idioms can be found not only in politically-oriented news, but also describe other domains in media discourse:

- (37) That way, there is no chance of being interrupted, and you and your husband can **break the sexual ice** (COCA 2011, MAG: Redbook) [emphasis added].

In Example (37), *break the sexual ice* is used to describe the relief of the sexual tension between the spouses. The much-discussed idiom can be reanalysed in the following way: *ice* is analogous

to tension and *break* means diffusing this tension. Therefore, *the sexual ice* can be reformulated as ‘the sexual tension’, which indicates that *sexual* is an internal classifier that defines the idiom head noun.

It should be acknowledged that Nunberg’s predictions about the flexibility of abnormally decomposable idioms seem to be supported by the corpus findings. In fact, the vast majority of expressions from this group strenuously resist any lexico-grammatical modifications. Interestingly, *hit the ceiling* is used again to denote ‘to reach the limit’:

- (38) The US government will likely **hit the debt ceiling** sometime in October, according to government budget watchers (COCA 2013, NEWS: Christian Science Monitor) [emphasis added].

Similar to (19) in the analysis of passivisation, Example (38) illustrates the same meaning – ‘to reach the limit’. However, no manipulated instances of this idiom denoting ‘extremely angry’ have been found in the corpora. The same tendency can be traced in *ring a bell*:

- (39) [...] Arizona policymakers are **ringing the alarm bell** raising concerns about potential damage to our state's economy [...] (COCA 2016 NEWS: Arizona Daily Star) [emphasis added].

Ring the alarm bell is a motivated metaphor, because it exploits the image of ringing (church) bells in the event of danger or in order to summon the townsfolk. In a similar fashion, *the alarm bell* draws the country’s attention to the pressing problem. Nevertheless, it does not correspond to the idiom’s original sense – ‘to remind somebody of something or sound familiar’. Alternatively, these could be two distinct metaphors exploiting the same image of bells. Only two examples from COCA reflect the idiomatic meaning related to reminding of something:

- (40) The first lady's favorite has become an OVERNIGHT sensation, and he's not looking back By now, you would have to live under a rock on the most deserted of islands if **the name Jason Wu didn't ring a fashion bell** (COCA 2009, MAG: Harpers Bazaar) [emphasis added].
- (41) But when a totalitarian government gets together with large financial and manufacturing concerns, **doesn't that ring a 20th-century historical bell?** (COCA 1997, MAG: Rolling Stone) [emphasis added].

The fashion context makes it possible for the idiom to be premodified by a topic indicator *fashion* in (40). In this extract, *ring a fashion bell* could be paraphrased as ‘recognise a famous designer’. In Example (41), the author of the article utilises a compound classifying premodifier that refers to the painful experience of the 20th century. It might be assumed that such an unusual transformation allows expressing a complex concept in a compact and creative way. Even though the idiom belongs to the abnormally decomposable group, the corpus findings suggest that it is significantly less flexible than the proverbial *kick the bucket* or *shoot the breeze*.

There are a number of other abnormally decomposable expressions that consistently defy both passivisation and premodification. These include *raise the roof*, *throw in the sponge*, *meet one's maker*, *run circles around*, *shake the dust from one's feet*, and *take the fifth*. It must be acknowledged that the fact that these idioms have not been retrieved from the corpora does not mean that creative transformations of these phrases are not possible. Their creative instances may be later added to the NOW corpus as it is daily updated. The rigidity of the expression *take the fifth* has already been discussed in connection with passivisation. As far as the other idioms are concerned, it is increasingly challenging to see why no creative instances have been retrieved. Nunberg's main argument about the correspondence between idiom components and metaphorical referents appears to be legitimate. However, this observation does not elucidate a paradoxical creative potential of nondecomposable idioms.

The analysable-transparent group is arguably the most problematic and inconsistent. This class is too heterogeneous, as it comprises two distinct groups of expressions, namely normally and abnormally decomposable idioms. To make matters worse, Nunberg and Gibbs et al. use different idioms in their classifications with only a few coinciding items (e.g., *break the ice* or *pop the question*). If only Gibbs et al.'s idioms belonged to the analysable-transparent group, it could be argued indeed that no observable difference could be seen between the two types of idioms. However, Nunberg's expressions significantly complicate the situation and make Cacciari and Glucksberg's claims highly debatable. Whereas Nunberg's normally decomposable idioms can systematically be transformed in media discourse, his abnormally decomposable expressions remain mostly rigid. In Gibbs et al.'s classification, about 65% of expressions in both groups can be used creatively.

Despite certain inconsistencies, the analysable-transparent group does reveal interesting examples that shed light on linguistic creativity.

- (42) Allegations of corruption abound, and it is virtually impossible **to get a clear financial picture** of the paper (COCA 2011, MAG: Newsweek) [emphasis added].
- (43) [...] the NBA sewed it closed (no doubt to the delight of the NCAA, which had suddenly **lost its lucrative grip on the country's top amateur talent**) (COCA 2016, MAG: Slate Magazine) [emphasis added].

In Examples (42) and (43), the writers employ topic indicators *financial* and *lucrative* respectively in order to specify the context. *Its lucrative grip* in (43) is particularly curious. Originally, the expression *lose one's grip* is associated with the loss of control. The author of the article aptly exploits the meaning of the phrase to transform it into the loss of the financial control over the player/team. Thus, this modification is well compatible with the analysability of the idiom. Other similar examples retrieved from COCA include *losing their formidable grip on state politics* (COCA 2013, NEWS: Atlanta Journal Constitution) and *losing his already-tenuous grip on his*

wife's around-the-clock care (COCA 1999, NEWS: Denver Post). Both instances comprise the adjectives of quality (*formidable* and *already-tenuous*), which strengthen the meaning of losing control.

- (44) **Button your well-meaning lip** and pray for the best. You never know, maybe your sister-in-law likes to drink water from a martini glass (COCA 1998, MAG: Cosmopolitan) [emphasis added].

Button your well-meaning lip in (44) is a rare instance of this idiom in the corpora, especially in a modified version. The phrase is synonymous with ‘keep quiet’ or ‘stop talking’. The premodifier *well-meaning* does not usually collocate with *lip* in a literal sense. However, the metaphorical reading effectively conveys an idea of keeping the character’s opinions to him- or herself. It might be assumed *well-meaning* is an internal adjective of quality that specifies the idiomatic head noun.

The excerpt below illustrates how the author can manipulate the literal scene by extending the food context:

- (45) Like any terrific storyteller, she knows the value of leaving certain things untold. So unless she decides **to spill the many-flavored beans** herself, all we can do is guess what happened (COCA 2007, MAG: Entertainment Weekly) [emphasis added].

Although beans can hardly be many-flavoured, both items belong to the conceptual field FOOD. From the point of view of decomposability, *beans* is analogous to secrets and *many-flavoured* stands for *various secrets/different pieces of information*. Although *spill the beans* is considered abnormally decomposable, it can be used creatively, especially when the conceptual field (e.g., FOOD) is activated and expanded.

- (46) A program in Long Beach, California, that tracks the use and overuse of emergency medical services. These are two of the initiatives aimed at using technology **to grease the creaky wheels of government** (COCA 2014, MAG: Popular Mechanics) [emphasis added].

In (46), *creaky wheels* has a plausible literal reading, which reminds of Langlotz’ (2006: 202-203) notion of wordplay. Ambiguity, as one of the aspects of wordplay (ibid: 203), is especially relevant for the discussion of Example (46), because both literal and figurative meanings are activated in this context. The idiom could be considered strongly motivated, because the literal scene hints at a mechanism, whose cogs, wheels and other components need oiling in order to function properly. Likewise, the mechanism of power/government also requires servicing in order to work efficiently. The premodifier *creaky* successfully manipulates the literal scene as well as adds vividness to the metaphorical meaning. If something is creaky, it is not in a good condition. Therefore, *creaky wheels of government* alludes to an inefficient system with old-fashioned principles. Interestingly, the idiom *grease the wheels* is most often followed by a postmodifier:

of government in (46); to grease the wheels of the legislative machine (COCA 2003, MAG: U.S. News & World Report). It might be assumed that the classifying postmodifier is necessary in this case, as it specifies what these wheels belong to. As in the case of *many-flavored beans* in (45), *the wheels of the legislative machine* masterfully manipulates the conceptual field MECHANISMS in order to draw parallels between a machine with numerous components and a complex legislative system. Besides, it seems reasonable to assume that *the legislative machine* is not positively connoted. Rather, it reminds of a robotic and ruthless system replete with bureaucratic traps and obstacles.

Another creative instance worth discussing is taken from the magazine *Astronomy*:

- (47) As May ends, T7 will have faded to around magnitude 3.0 and **the nearly Full Moon will have stolen the comet's thunder**. In early June, as the Moon leaves the evening sky, the 4th-magnitude comet will drift past Alpher (COCA 2004, MAG: *Astronomy*) [emphasis added].

The creativity of this example is based primarily on personification. The idiom *steal one's thunder* is usually applied to human beings rather than to inanimate objects. However, in this case the author describes the Moon and the comet as antagonists struggling to get a better place in the universe. The image is strengthened by the antithesis in the second sentence: *as the Moon leaves [...] comet will drift past*.

In general, the analysis of premodification has revealed the same tendencies as in passivisation. Nunberg adequately captured the distinction between normally and abnormally decomposable idioms with regard to their flexibility. At the same time, Cacciari and Glucksberg's hypothesis accounts successfully for the creativity of nondecomposable expressions, because the semantics of certain idiom components can be exploited in order to produce a novel variant (e.g., *the iron bucket*). It should be acknowledged, however, that the analysable-transparent group is rather problematic, because it fails to provide any conclusive evidence in terms of idiom flexibility.

7.4 The analysis of number variation and quantification of idioms in news articles

It should be noted that number variation and quantification have fewer instances in the corpora than passivisation and premodification. One of the possible explanations could be that number variation is significantly restricted for many idioms as in *shoot the breeze*, *give a damn*, *stir up mud*, *steal one's thunder*. Langlotz (2006: 247, 249) notices that number variation is typically compatible with isomorphic expressions but is blocked for idioms whose "NP-heads are uncountable mass nouns or plural invariable nouns". While premodification and passivisation of idioms display similar tendencies, number variation does not appear to be equally consistent and

frequent, which may be explained by grammaticality constraints (e.g., mass nouns) and the absence of “an autonomous figurative reading” of the head noun (Langlotz 2006: 249). Moreover, for many idioms number variation is “is non-functional and incompatible with the idiomatic meaning because it would prevent the evocation of the source domain” (ibid).

As has been previously mentioned, number variation points at and highlights a number of questions/issues/problems and reinforces the idiomatic meaning (e.g., *great strides* vs. *a great stride*) (Langlotz 2006: 249). Although Langlotz (2006) does not address the question of quantification, it might be hypothesised that this transformation performs similar functions as number variation, the difference being that quantification further specifies the number of questions/issues involved.

According to Biber et al. (1999: 248-259), there are different grammatical tools that help indicate number, namely inflection, determiners and quantifying nouns. It should be mentioned that the samples collected from the corpora display all the three ways of showing number. In the case of inflection (e.g., *unnecessary panic buttons* (NOW 2018 ZA)), the plural suffix -s is added to the idiom components.

Another way of showing the amount of something is to employ determiners (e.g., *many/much, all* etc.). Biber et al. (1999: 258, original emphasis) divide determiners into predeterminers (“*all, both, half*”), central determiners (“articles, demonstrative determiners, and possessive determiners”) and postdeterminers (“cardinal numerals and quantifying determiners”). The extract below illustrates a quantifying postdeterminer *every*:

- (48) The two men, brothers in their early 20's, were friends with their Shiite colleagues for years. They all lived together in the mixed neighborhood of Hurriya. **The Shiites pulled every string they could** to free them, calling powerful political parties and police and army contacts (COCA 2006, NEWS: New York Times) [emphasis added].

Every string in (48) is likely to refer to every connection that the Shiites could use to save their friends. *Every string* may also be paraphrased as ‘all the possible strings’ or ‘connections’. The journalist employs hyperbole in this case to emphasise the urgency of the situation. Another example comprising a quantifying determiner is provided below:

- (49) And American taxpayers are **footing most of the bill** for this ill will, despite some \$13 billion pledged at a U.N. donors' conference last week (COCA 2003, MAG: Newsweek) [emphasis added].

Footing most of the bill in (49) is quite close to its literal counterpart. Therefore, quantification fits naturally into the financial context.

As Biber et al. (1999: 257) emphasise, there is not always a clear-cut boundary between quantifying nouns and quantifying determiners, as they have similar functions. However, *a lot of/lots of* is treated as a determiner (ibid). In Example (50), the context suggests that Oprah is

resolving many conflicts or problems, which is expressed unconventionally through the quantification of the idiom *bury the hatchet*.

- (50) **Oprah is burying a lot of hatchets** these days. With her show set to end May 25, she has attempted to mend fences with such famous former friends as Whoopi Goldberg, Roseanne Barr, and Rosie O'Donnell (COCA 2011, MAG: Newsweek) [emphasis added].

The journalist approaches the issue discussed creatively by utilising two idioms with a similar meaning (*bury the hatchet* and *mend fences*). The duplication of the same idea might be used to reinforce the idiomatic meaning and catch the reader's attention.

In the vast majority of examples, the idiom constituents are pluralised. The extract below illustrates the opposite tendency.

- (51) "They realize they can keep things to themselves." A kid who once **spilled every bean** may now say, "It's a secret" (COCA 2004, MAG: Parenting) [emphasis added].

A similar case is also found in (48), where the quantifying determiner *every* is analogous to *all the connections*. Thus, it appears reasonable to assume that the singular forms of the idioms in (48) and (51) are in fact closer to their pluralised versions.

It is interesting to note that the idioms subjected to quantification belong almost exclusively to Nunberg's normally decomposable expressions and Gibbs et al.'s abnormally decomposable items from the analysable-transparent group. It is increasingly challenging to explain the unequal distribution of the examples in this case. Following Nunberg's logic, it is analysability that should trigger number variation. Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 230) maintain that different types of idioms behave in a similar way. However, the corpus findings suggest the opposite: in fact, only two-thirds of the analysable-transparent group proves to be productive in terms of flexibility.

Quantifying nouns are another tool used for marking number. It is a heterogeneous group that comprises nouns denoting containers (e.g., *a packet of biscuits*), shapes (e.g., *a wedge of bronze*), large quantities (e.g., *loads of books*) etc. (Biber et al. 1999: 252-254). Biber et al. (1999: 257, original emphasis) also notice that "combinations of quantifying nouns plus *of* specify the reference of a following noun".

- (52) The woman was accused of abuse with children. In particular, the press leaked the story when her son, Collins, accidentally **spilled a sack of beans** (NOW 2018 SG) [emphasis added].
- (53) Apple has finally pulled back the curtain, revealing its 2016 flagship smartphone to the world - **spilling several cans of beans** about the CPU, camera, storage, screen and features in the process (NOW 2016 SG) [emphasis added].

Both *a sack of beans* in (52) and *several cans of beans* in (53) metaphorically describe large quantities of information that have been revealed. The quantifying nouns accompanying *beans* could be considered a hyperbole that helps reinforce the idiomatic meaning.

Example (54) contains a unit noun *a bit of* that is a sub-class of quantifying nouns (Biber et al. 1999: 250; 252). Unit nouns “make it possible to split up an undifferentiated mass and refer to separate instances of a phenomenon” (Biber et al. 1999: 250).

- (54) "All the things I'd seen my brother do, I knew it was going to be hard," said Jerece, who **stole a bit of thunder** for himself by developing an innovative idea for the community service project [...] (COCA 1998, NEWS: Houston Chronicle) [emphasis added].

Thus, *thunder* in (54) could be synonymous with *his brother's success* in this context. It might be hypothesised that the author has also employed litotes (*a bit of thunder*), deliberately understating the scale of success Jerece has actually achieved.

It appears that one of the crucial distinctions between number variation and quantification is the degree of specificity. The transformation from the singular *push/hit the button* to *unnecessary panic buttons* (NOW 2018 ZA) reflects the transition from the definite number to the indefinite plural form. An overwhelming number of instances subjected to quantification show a high degree of definiteness as in *most of the bill* in (49) or *every bean* in (51). Even in *several cans of beans* in (52), in which no exact quantity is specified, the degree of specificity seems higher than in *panic buttons* (NOW 2018 ZA).

It should be stressed that the integration of several lexico-grammatical transformations within one idiomatic expression is a pervasive feature of the language of news. Examples (55), (56) and (57) illustrate passivisation and premodification. *An ugly line* in (55), which functions as an internal adjective of quality, emphasises a negative attitude to the activist's programme. Even though *technological ice* in (56) is unlikely to exist as a literal phrase, the internal classifying premodifier restricts the sense of the idiom and refers to the technological breakthrough or innovation. In (57), the adjective *deep* successfully collocates with *pockets*. The expression helps specify the situation and refers to vast sums of money. Besides, the wordplay in this case is based on ambiguity, i.e. the integration of both literal and idiomatic interpretations. While premodification in the examples cited restricts their “referential scope” and simultaneously “adds descriptive detail to a specific referent”, passivisation topicalises the action (Langlotz 2006: 256).

- (55) The disabled rights activists who rallied around Walker Lampley said they had no quarrel with Norris discussing the issue, but saw **an ugly line being drawn** in her program (COCA 1991, NEWS: Washington Post) [emphasis added].
- (56) Justice Technology was actually a technology company. # Once **the technological ice was broken**, there was no stopping Glickman, Richter, and Sandler (COCA 1998, MAG: Inc.) [emphasis added].

- (57) But that is a tall order to expect from Sharif and Co. whose **deep pockets are lined mainly by their industrial ventures** (NOW 2014 PK) [emphasis added].

The extracts in (58) and (59) exemplify the combination of passivisation and quantification. As quantification is quite similar in scope and position to premodification, it seems reasonable to assume that this transformation also enables the writer to delimit the context and intensify the idiomatic meaning (Langlotz 2006: 266-267).

- (58) One might not guess that **some of the strings are pulled** in Washington. # Ten percent, or about \$ 130,000, of the center's \$ 1.3 million budget comes from the National Endowment for the Arts (COCA 1995, NEWS: Atlanta Journal Constitution) [emphasis added].
- (59) **Many doors were opened** to me because of sports. It was like a springboard for everything I'm doing today (COCA 1997, NEWS: Houston Chronicle) [emphasis added].

Some of the strings in (58) denotes connections in the upper echelons of government, whereas *many doors* in (59) indicates numerous opportunities the person has been given. Overall, it appears that double transformations amplify the idiomatic meaning and help concentrate on the issue under consideration. Another plausible reason for using the passive voice in (58) and (59) is to conceal the agent who is either unknown or not relevant, as Biber et al. (1999: 938) point out. In these cases, from a communicative point of view, the passive voice seems the most natural and appropriate grammatical choice.

Interestingly, number variation and quantification, and premodification frequently occur together in the same idiom:

- (60) I am not suggesting that Zia's is blazing **new culinary trails**, but in some ways that's a good thing (COCA 2010, NEWS: Chicago Sun-Times) [emphasis added].
- (61) It's something I've never felt compelled to do but after talking to several agents and publishers they've been supportive and that will hopefully **open up some new doors** for me (COCA 2009, NEWS: Denver Post) [emphasis added].
- (62) Truth be told Pirates plays the most exciting brand of football in the league. We attack with menace and our confidence on the ball is second to none. [...] We do not need to **push unnecessary panic buttons** now, we just need to work on a few things (NOW 2018 ZA) [emphasis added].

In (60), the modified idiom refers to exploring new ways of cooking. Both transformations fit logically into the culinary context. The same example could also be explained from the point of view of the decomposition hypothesis: *trail* is associated with new opportunities, whereas *blaze* stands for exploring/opening new ways. The idiom is normally decomposable in Nunberg's terms. It becomes apparent that *blaze the trail* can easily be adapted to a specific context. The same can be said about *new doors* in (61), which belongs to the same conceptual field NEW OPPORTUNITIES. Even though the constituents of *push/hit the panic button* in (62) do not easily map onto their metaphorical referents, the idiom can still be passivised, premodified and quanti-

fied (as the corpora prove). In (62), it is the context that helps infer the meaning: the author of the article warns the team against doing something spontaneous or badly thought-out. In this case, *unnecessary panic buttons* may be reconceptualised as careless actions. Besides, as noted above, the plural form in *unnecessary panic buttons* exemplifies the transition from the definite to indefinite number of careless actions. It might be assumed that the combination of two transformations enables the writer to strengthen the metaphorical meaning and draw the audience's attention to the discussed issue.

7.5 A brief summary of the analysis of lexico-grammatical transformations in media discourse

The analysis of three lexico-grammatical transformations shows that media discourse is highly productive in terms of idiom creativity. Various factors could explain this phenomenon. Firstly, it may be media discourse itself that encourages journalists to use playful language and creatively transform even the most frozen and opaque idioms. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the language of news abounds with emotionally charged words that are used to grab the audience's attention (Hutton 2013: 7-8). Besides, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994: 493) stress the fact that idioms "are typically used to imply a certain evaluation or affective stance toward the things they denote". It might be inferred that idiomatic language, especially when it is creatively modified, can be exploited as a powerful tool for crafting the journalist's identity and forging a close relationship with the readership. Secondly, the type of idiom and transformation may also account for a vast number of creative instances used in news articles. The corpus findings suggest that normally decomposable idioms are increasingly flexible, whereas the creative potential of the abnormally decomposable group is significantly restricted, which was predicted by Nunberg (1978: 228). Interestingly enough, the majority of nondecomposable idioms readily allow passivisation and premodification. However, number variation and quantification are not as productive and frequent as the other two transformations. Langlotz (2006: 249) emphasises that this may be due to grammaticality constraints and the lack of isomorphism. The psycholinguistic classifications proves to be problematic, because it is not as homogenous as the researchers originally claimed (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1991: 230). The evidence from the corpora suggests that there is indeed a significant difference between normally and abnormally decomposable expressions. However, the psycholinguistic views may be helpful in explaining the productivity of nondecomposable idioms such as *kick the bucket* or *chew the fat*: Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991: 232) maintain that almost all idioms can be analysed and manipulated to some extent.

Although frequency is not taken into account in the analysis, it may closely correlate with the productivity of idioms. A number of items are rather scarce in the sample collected (e.g.,

meet one's maker; shake the dust off one's feet). The fact that very few creative instances have been identified does not, however, mean that these idioms cannot be used in an unconventional way. Rather, it is their overall infrequency that hinders lexico-grammatical operations.

8. The analysis of idiomatic creativity and flexibility in fiction

As has been previously mentioned, literary discourse is quite broad and comprises a substantial number of genres and sub-genres. One of the most important observations is that literature tends to mimic real life at least partially. According to Dancygier (2011: 413), “literary production has to be based in some reality, even a science fiction reality, where various real bits are integrated into a brave new world”. As the researcher notices (Dancygier 2011: 413), in an ordinary conversation, “all participants are physically present, and they take turns making their contribution to the exchange”. In a novel, for example, “there is an extended turn of the narrator” (ibid). Moreover, the presence of the author, “although not physical, is built into the text itself in the form of first or third person narration, the distinction between dialogue and narration” (ibid). Thus, the personality of the author/narrator may filter into the text with the help of a certain form as well as specific linguistic and stylistic features.

As in the case of media discourse, creatively modified idioms might contribute to the construction of identities and enable the writer to establish a connection with discourse participants. Whether this is the case or not, will be proved or disproved in the analysis below.

As far as the target audience is concerned, it is increasingly difficult to single out one particular discourse community that is interested in a work of fiction. It may not be even relevant or useful in this case. It should be emphasised that literature, irrespective of genres, is usually associated with artistic merit. Thus, the most general communicative purposes of fictional discourse may be to bring pleasure to the readership, to entertain, and, in some cases, to draw the audience's attention to some pressing issues of the society.

8.1 The analysis of passivised idioms in fiction

It should be noted that the sample collected from the fiction section in COCA is significantly smaller than in news. Even fewer examples have been retrieved from the BNC. One of the interesting observations is that no passivisation has been found in the nondecomposable idioms. Furthermore, the majority of items subjected to passivisation come from the normally decomposable groups in Nunberg's and Gibbs et al.'s classifications. However, even within these groups the examples are rather scarce. Consider the instance below:

- (63) But **the ice was broken**, and maybe something else as well... the firewall she, like most single women in Manhattan who'd been dashed against the rocks of their romantic aspira-

tions, had erected around herself (COCA 2005, FIC: Otherwise engaged) [emphasis added].

The excerpt in (63) shows that the idiom *break the ice* is not only passivised but also extended. It might be assumed that the author conveys the idea of a strong and emotionally closed woman, whose defences have finally collapsed. This is reinforced with the help of the metaphorical extension and passivisation. Besides, the passive voice seems a logical grammatical solution in this example, as the agent is not relevant or even known. As Biber et al. (1999: 938) point out, the use of the short passive lays heavy emphasis on the verb phrase in the coda position, which is associated with new information.

Another unusual example is provided in (64):

- (64) Or high-school sweethearts unexpectedly reconnect. Worlds shift. **Cosmic strings are pulled** (COCA 2011, FIC: The wedding writer) [emphasis added].

The extract above is slightly ambiguous, because the premodifier *cosmic* implies that the idiom does not mean ‘to use connections’. Rather, it is reminiscent of the earlier instances cited from the news section (see, for example, (14)). In the excerpt quoted, the author utilises the short passive, as the agent is not only unknown but is also likely to be irrelevant in this case. Together with the topic-indicating premodifier *cosmic*, the idiom refers to some invisible force that has made it possible for the people to meet and fall in love with each other. It might be hypothesised that the classifier *cosmic* is external, because it could be paraphrased as ‘on the cosmic scale’.

In the sample collected, the idiom *pull strings* is relatively productive. Another example given below shows the original sense of the expression – ‘to exploit connections’.

- (65) With Sherise using her influence on Jonah, **some powerful strings were pulled** that put Porter in a bad light at his firm (COCA 2016, FIC: Almost doesn't count) [emphasis added].

In fact, *using her influence* anticipates the idiom *pull strings*. The idiom appears to be a logical continuation of the phrase in the first part of the sentence. Interestingly, the author combines passivisation with the quantifying determiner *some* in order to add vagueness. Thus, the protagonist has exerted influence over unknown people to “put Porter in a bad light” (COCA 2016, FIC: Almost doesn't count).

Example (66) belongs to the normally decomposable group from Gibbs et al.’s classification. It should be emphasised that although the extract is classified as fiction, it is taken from the magazine *Esquire*, which does not seem to be the most typical literary source.

- (66) When it came to his past and his history with lightning, scars aside, he had the reticence of a cold-war spy: The book was closed on cloud-to-ground, on hexes, on lightning-rod drummers, and the mystical crowd. [...] **The book was closed on media interviews, on**

direct one-on-one confrontations with big bolts (COCA 2001, FIC: Esquire) [emphasis added].

The official website of the magazine (*Esquire*) does not explicitly state whether they publish excerpts from novels or short stories. However, if Example (66) were classified as belonging to media discourse, this would make even a stronger case for idiomatic creativity in the language of news. The extract cited in (66) is interesting for at least two reasons: firstly, the idiom *close the book* is used with the short passive; secondly, the same idiomatic expression is included into the anaphoric repetition. Taken together, these two devices strengthen the idea of putting an end to the activities described. Furthermore, the passive voice brings the fact of ending/finishing to the fore without disclosing the agent.

Even fewer creative examples have been identified in the abnormally decomposable group from Gibbs et al.' (1989) classification. Presented below are the only three instances retrieved:

- (67) She certainly knew, as all skillful organizers know, that nothing happens in a committee unless **the wheels are greased** (COCA 1994, FIC: Scandal in Fair Haven) [emphasis added].
- (68) He had expected to be the deliverer of the news and then the great consoler, but Mrs Hogan was making light of it. [...] Sean felt **all his thunder being stolen** from him (BNC 1991, W_fict_prose) [emphasis added].
- (69) The Navy would be happy to help. They usually were, where Russian satellites were concerned. **The Cold War hatchet had been buried in a shallow, well-marked grave** (COCA 2004, FIC: Analog Science Fiction & Fact) [emphasis added].

The wheels are greased in (67) emphasises an impersonal action, because the agent is either unknown or irrelevant. *Thunder* in (68) is accompanied by the quantifier *all* in order to emphasise that Mrs. Hogan bereft the character of the story of his eagerly anticipated role. Example (69) is particularly curious, because the author manipulates and extends the literal and metaphorical readings of the idiom. Furthermore, both passivisation and premodification are applied in this case. *The Cold War* is a classifying premodifier referring to the conflict between the USSR and America that spanned several decades. The passive voice helps draw attention to the end of the conflict itself and renders the agent obsolete. *A shallow, well-marked grave* implies that the old ghosts have not been laid to rest and another conflict is likely to erupt anew.

Summarising, on the one hand, Nunberg's predictions have proved to be justified in the case of abnormally decomposable idioms, whereas the transparent-analysable group does not provide any conclusive evidence in terms of idiom creativity. On the other hand, the number of examples retrieved from COCA and the BNC is substantially smaller than that in the news section. Therefore, it is increasingly challenging to make strong claims about the behaviour of idioms in fiction. Nevertheless, it might be hypothesised that the literary format itself is the key to understanding the lack of creatively transformed idioms. In the majority of cases, the length of

literary works, especially novels, is not as limited as news articles. Furthermore, fiction is almost devoid of the sensationalism found in news reportage. Thus, there is no urgent need to manipulate the language to make the title or the content catchy and even scandalous, as is the case with media texts. It might also be theorised that literary writing is more conventional than journalism. This might be a plausible explanation to the very restricted number of examples extracted from the corpora. The combination of these factors allows stating that creatively transformed idiomatic language is hardly utilised as an identity construction device in fiction.

The last but not the least, NOW is significantly bigger than COCA or the BNC. There are more chances to find fresh and creative language in NOW, because it is updated on a regular basis.

8.2 The analysis of premodification of idioms in fiction

It should be emphasised that the examples retrieved from COCA and the BNC reflect the same dynamics in terms of flexibility and creativity of idioms as in the news section. However, the number of instances is not as vast as in NOW. Interestingly, premodification is significantly more frequent and productive in fiction than passivisation.

The findings have revealed that the majority of nondecomposable expressions (4 out of 7) are subjected to premodification.

- (70) And you people tell me the Communists are running rampant in the outlying provinces and that if **Mikaso kicks the damned bucket** we could lose all ties to the Philippines (COCA 1991, FIC: Sky Masters) [emphasis added].

Kicks the damned bucket in (70) is premodified with an adjective of quality, which helps strengthen the idiomatic meaning and emphasise the spoken character of the derogatory analogue of the verb ‘to die’ even more. In McClure’s (2011: 2) classification of premodifiers, *damned* is labelled as an expressive, which carries “a high degree of connotative or affective content” but has no “impact on the truth conditions of a sentence”. This implies that premodifiers such as *damned* add vividness to the idiom but do not change the meaning. Example (71) belongs to the same class of nondecomposable items:

- (71) Ben didn't keep me long since I wasn't much good for **shooting even the mildest breeze** after that (COCA 1995, FIC: Fantasy & Science Fiction) [emphasis added].

In the extract above, the writer plays with the semantics of the word *breeze*: *even the mildest breeze* is used to denote ‘even the shortest/most superficial conversation’. The creativity of this instance may be based on Langlotz’ (2006: 202-203) notion of wordplay, in particular on its aspects of ambiguity and context-dependency.

In another interesting example, the author exploits the image of a trail and adds a negative tinge to it:

- (72) [...] when Alexander Belas, after whom Kubiváros's ship was named, **blazed a bloody trail** to the throne (COCA 2008, FIC: The Seven Sins: the tyrant ascending) [emphasis added].

A bloody trail has both literal and metaphorical interpretations in this context, which reminds of ambiguity as one of the aspects of wordplay. Besides, *bloody* could be seen as an internal classifier, as it defines the idiom head noun *trail*. The modified phrase stresses the fact that the protagonist has ascended to power ruthlessly manipulating or even killing others.

The following example illustrates an unusual case of premodification:

- (73) Her husband was able **to pull enough important-people strings** to keep Dev from escaping with every penny, and property in Vermont is relatively cheap (COCA 2010, FIC: Fantasy & Science Fiction) [emphasis added].

Enough important-people strings in (73) might be considered pleonastic, as the original idiom already presupposes exploiting important connections in order to achieve something. The author seems to emphasise the idiomatic meaning with the help of this compound premodifier.

The abnormally decomposable group is the least productive in Nunberg's classification. However, one item deserves special attention:

- (74) And you're colder than the sea, locked inside a faltering body and a breaking mind, locked into a tumult of regret and the terror of going **to meet a vengeful Maker** (COCA 2012, FIC: Mystery Writers of America presents vengeance) [emphasis added].

In the previous analytical chapters, the expression *meet one's maker* proves to be one of the most inflexible. Nevertheless, in Example (75), *Maker* is premodified by an adjective of quality. This phrase may allude to God's wrath. Furthermore, the whole excerpt may exemplify a rapid emotional escalation. Finally, *a vengeful Maker* marks the climax of this progression.

Another idiom from the same group is *carry the torch*, which is frequently utilised in Olympic contexts. The premodifier *burning* in (76) is well compatible with literal and figurative readings:

- (75) Regine married another man and moved away from Copenhagen to the West Indies, but Kierkegaard, the knight of faith, **carried a burning torch**, in the form of his philosophy, for her the rest of his days (COCA 1998, FIC: Ploughshares) [emphasis added].

As is clear from the extract quoted, the author employs the interplay between the two interpretations to reinforce the idiomatic meaning and render the literal scene more vivid (wordplay in Langlotz' (2006: 202-203) terms). But for the phrase *in the form of his philosophy* that extends and clarifies the idiom, the figurative meanings could have been blocked or seen obscure.

The investigation of the expressions from Gibbs et al.'s classification confirms the previous observations: the inconsistency and irregularity of these idioms in terms of creative usage do not lend support for a well-grounded theory. Only about one third of the items in the normally and abnormally decomposable groups can allow premodification. This remark obliterates any boundaries between these two types of idioms. In the creative instances found, one idiom deserves a careful inspection in particular:

- (76) An invisible plague was eating at his body, breaking the sentences, eroding the corners of the words. **He had lost his already loose grip on reality**, and his words were irretrievably lost in dark depths of esotericism (COCA 2013, FIC: World Literature Today) [emphasis added].

The extract in (77) effectively conveys the idea of the character losing control over his mental faculties and his life in general. The premodifier of quality *already loose* highlights the protagonist's tenuous connections with reality. *Lost* is utilised twice to bring the situation to a dramatic climax.

8.3 The analysis of number variation and quantification of idioms in fiction

As far as number variation and quantification are concerned, these transformations are barely used in fiction. Number variation is illustrated below:

- (77) She smiled; it was time **to lay old ghosts to rest** (COCA 2013, FIC: Balancing act) [emphasis added].

Lay old ghosts in (79) can be reanalysed as 'stop worrying about old problems'. The pluralisation in this example also reflects the transition from the definite singular to the indefinite plural.

Another idiom worth discussing is *give a damn*, which is surprisingly productive with quantification:

- (78) And we're like furniture in the clubs, no one thinks we're listening or paying attention or **give half a damn** (COCA 2017, FIC: Fantasy & Science Fiction) [emphasis added].

In the example cited, the determiner *half* does not refer to a certain amount. Rather, it is utilised to exaggerate the idea of carelessness. In this respect, the determiner *half* is close to premodifiers of quality that are used to strengthen the idiomatic meaning.

One of the most curious and flexible idioms is *spill the beans*:

- (79) "How did you get Crowley **to spill that particular bean**?" # "In vino veritas," she tells him (COCA 2017, FIC: Analog Science Fiction & Fact) [emphasis added].

Number is aptly manipulated in (79) in order to lay heavy stress on one particular secret or piece of information that Crowley divulged. Although *beans* is not usually associated with any type of

information, this constituent frequently undergoes premodification and quantification both in news and fiction.

8.4 A brief summary of the analysis of lexico-grammatical transformations in fiction

As has been stated above, literary discourse lacks sensationalism found in media texts. This could be one of the major reasons the fiction section of the corpora has revealed fewer modified idioms than news articles. Moreover, media texts have an attention-grabbing function that might be explained at least partially by the pressure of the format. In contrast, literary texts, especially novels, have more space and freedom to describe various ideas or issues. Besides, fiction often imitates reality and every-day speech, in which case modified idioms may be seen as an odd turn of phrase.

As far as passivisation is concerned, this type of transformation was not found with non-decomposable idioms. The majority of passivised expressions belong to the normally decomposable group. With regard to premodification, an overwhelming number of nondecomposable and normally decomposable expressions are highly productive and flexible, leaving the abnormally decomposable group in a sizeable minority. Number variation and quantification are barely used in literary discourse, which makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions. Even though the number of premodified and quantified idioms is considerably lower in fiction than in news articles, both types of transformation reflect similar tendencies in these two corpus sections.

9. The analysis of idiomatic creativity and flexibility in spoken discourse

As far as spoken discourse is concerned, conversation is one of its most prototypical types. As Biber et al. (1999: 1041) state, conversation cannot be easily defined in terms of communicative purposes. However, “its primary function appears to be to establish and maintain social cohesion through the sharing of experience” (ibid). Besides, conversation can perform other functions, too: for example, exchanging information, entertaining or discussing business issues (ibid).

Another crucial feature is that conversation is characterised by “face-to-face interaction” and “an immediate physical context of time and space” (Biber et al. 1999: 1042). Moreover, interlocutors share “a large amount of specific social, cultural, and institutional knowledge” (ibid). It should also be noted that spoken language has distinct lexico-grammatical features such as a high frequency of personal pronouns and elliptical constructions (Biber et al. 1999: 1042-1043). Compared to written language, conversation is not usually characterised by “elaborated forms of noun phrase structures, containing noun heads with various forms of modification” (Biber et al. 1999: 1044). This also implies that “attributive adjectives [...] are markedly rare in comparison with the other registers” (ibid).

Furthermore, one of the fundamental principles of conversation is that it is interactive, which means that two or more interlocutors are involved (Biber et al. 1999: 1045). Conversation is also typically spontaneous and has a repetitive repertoire of lexico-grammatical patterns, which may be explained by the pressure of the online production of speech (Biber et al. 1999: 1048-1949; 1066). It might be assumed that the above mentioned features considerably restrict the creative potential of the language, especially with regard to idioms.

9.1 The analysis of passivised idioms in spoken English

It is vitally important to note that within the spoken section of COCA and the BNC, the majority of instances belong to media discourse nonetheless (e.g., SPOK: ABC, SPOK: CNN). The BNC displays a more diverse selection of spoken samples (e.g., S_conv, S_classroom etc.). Very few creative examples found in the BNC come from casual conversation transcripts or business meetings.

Another interesting observation is that the creatively modified instances are scattered throughout the classifications, which prevents us from identifying particular patterns of idiom distribution. The extracts below illustrate the examples from spoken media discourse:

- (80) Another question that's been raised by reporters is whether or not **strings were pulled** to get him in the National Guard during Vietnam (COCA 1999, SPOK: NBC_Today) [emphasis added].
- (81) That's when **the debt limit ceiling** is hit and the government runs out of money to pay its own bills (COCA 2013, SPOK: CNN NEWSROOM 12:00 PM EST) [emphasis added].

Strings were pulled in (80) is topicalised in order to conceal the agent and lay stress on the connections used “to get him in the National Guard” (COCA 1999, SPOK: NBC_Today). Example (81) is curious not only with regard to passivisation but also with regard to the topic indicating premodifier *the debt limit*. Similar instances have already been described in the previous chapters (e.g., (38)). *The debt ceiling* seems to be a productive and frequent collocation in media texts. However, the passivised version of the idiom *hit the ceiling* in its original sense (i.e. ‘to be enraged’) has not been attested in the corpora.

It might be hypothesised that the passive voice is used not only to remove the agent from the context but also to deliberately add vagueness to the statement:

- (82) President-elect Bush has already lost one of his nominees, Linda Chavez for secretary of labor. **The plug was pulled** on her very quickly, and he replaced her with Elaine Chao, a very able person (COCA 2001, SPOK: CNN_Novak) [emphasis added].

The context in (82) makes it abundantly clear that the president is directly or indirectly responsible for Linda Chavez’ resignation and soon “he replaced her with Elaine Chao”. Biber et al. (1999: 939) remark that “the reason for the suppression of the agent is not that it is generic, the

agents are specific, but their identity is either not at issue or it does not need to be stated". Despite the fact that the agent is known, the writer avoids revealing it in a straightforward manner.

Another interesting example is taken from a business meeting:

- (83) [...] you know they are a relatively minor tour operator [...] What it does and I think we're also dealing with a with a with a, people like (-----) right and (-----) is probably arguably worse right who've never really had any sort of responsibility before and they not quite sure where **the lines are drawn** (BNC 1994, S_meeting) [emphasis added].

The person in this story is blaming a tour operator for some issues that are not clear from the context. The speaker utilises the passivised idiom *draw the line* in order to make a disparaging remark about the operator's unacceptable behaviour. Besides, the transformed idiom is a rare example of number variation in spoken discourse. Another situation with a violent reaction is reflected in the following excerpt:

- (84) We either freeze to death or starve to death. (SP:PS5GT) They don't care about anybody. **Their pockets are lined**, that's all I've got to say (BNC 1993, S_brdcast_news) [emphasis added].

The speaker employs the short passive in the expression *their pockets are lined* to avoid saying explicitly who is to blame. However, the idiom suggests that the author hints at corruption. Thus, the topicalisation in this case highlights the dishonest behaviour of the other party involved.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of instances are retrieved from news transcripts suggests that the media domain is the most fertile soil for language creativity. However, the number of examples is rather limited. This may be due primarily to the nature of conversation: it is more spontaneous than a written text. Furthermore, the passive voice and passivised idioms in particular are not a prototypical feature of a conversation. As Biber et al. (1999: 476) confirm, the passive is a pervasive feature of academic writing and news. However, passive constructions cannot be considered a default option in spoken language.

9.2 The analysis of premodification of idioms in spoken English

The investigation of premodified idioms has revealed a curious tendency: almost half of expressions in each idiom group underwent lexico-grammatical transformations. Almost equal proportions of creative instances support Cacciari and Glucksberg's claims about the lack of differences between various idiom types.

It must be noted, however, that the vast majority of examples belong to spoken media discourse. Other subsections of spoken discourse do not seem to display a propensity for idiom innovation.

Within the nondecomposable group, the idiom *give a damn* is worth mentioning:

- (85) You need the rest. (SP:PS0WS) (screaming) **I couldn't give a blooming damn!** (SP:PS0WN) I don't care (BNC 1992, S_conv) [emphasis added].

In the example cited, *blooming* emphasises and intensifies the idiomatic meaning of not caring about the problem. As the expression is clearly nondecomposable and opaque, the premodifier *blooming* cannot specify the head noun *damn*. According to McClure (2011: 2), *blooming* qualifies as an expressive, which adds emotional colouring to the whole phrase.

In the normally decomposable group, *draw the line* and *foot the bill* are particularly productive in news reportage:

- (86) The bill I sign today upholds these humane ideals and **draws an important ethical line** to guide our research (COCA 2006, SPOK: CNN_LiveFrom) [emphasis added].
 (87) So it begs the question nationally -- who should have to **foot this inflating bill**? (COCA 2003, SPOK: CNN_LiveSun) [emphasis added].

Example (86) contains a complex premodifier *important ethical*, which stresses the guiding principle of the speaker's research. *Inflating* in (87) may be seen as an internal classifying premodifier, which places the idiom into the political and economic context, and as an adjective of quality, which reinforces an idea of an outrageously big bill. Furthermore, the transformed expression may be used to express indignation and frustration.

It should be mentioned that, although normally decomposable, the expression *keep the pot boiling* rarely features in the corpora. Its modified version in (89) is manipulated in order to describe the political aspect of the interlocutor's life:

- (88) COLIN POWELL: I think having come this far and made this decision, I need to move back into private life, find other things to use my energies and talents on, and not **keep the political pot boiling** any more at this time (COCA 1995, SPOK: ABC_Breaking) [emphasis added].

Thus, the speaker in (88) draws a parallel between his political career and a boiling pot. If the cooker is turned off, the food stops being prepared, which is analogous to the indeterminate pause in Mr. Powell's career. Thus, *political* is likely to be interpreted as an internal topic indicator synonymous with 'a political career'.

As has been previously mentioned, *take the fifth* is one least productive expressions of all the idioms. This may be due to the fact that the legal phenomenon that this idiom describes is rooted in the American society, which makes this item geographically restricted. The example provided below is the only transformed idiom retrieved from COCA:

- (89) Why are they so anti-Russia? With all the threats we face, why Russia? COHEN# Well, in a word, and again let me **take the political Fifth Amendment** (COCA 2017, SPOK: TUCKER CARLSON TONIGHT 9:00 PM EST) [emphasis added].

The Fifth Amendment of the American Constitution primarily means that “a witness may refuse to testify if doing so would have him or her self-incriminate” (*HG.org* n.d.). The classifying premodifier *political* in (89) delimits the context and allows the speaker not to elaborate on the issue discussed.

Another interesting case is illustrated in (90):

- (90) How do you they think he would do against Hillary and maybe most important, who do you get a sense they would trust more, Hillary or Biden, **to carry the Obama torch**? (COCA 2015, SPOK: Fox News Sunday) [emphasis added].

The Obama torch in (90) is an unusual instance, because the author utilises *Obama* as a nominal classifying premodifier instead of transforming it into the genitive case. Another similar example is *carrying the Kennedy torch* (COCA 1999, SPOK: ABC_Special), which is based on the same principle. In both cases, the modified idioms describe the traditions associated with these presidents. Thus, *Obama* and *Kennedy* are internal classifying premodifiers utilised to narrow down the scope of the traditions mentioned.

9.3 The analysis of number variation and quantification of idioms in spoken English

It should be noted that number variation and quantification are too infrequent in spoken language to draw definite conclusions. Besides, the creative instances are not uniformly distributed within the classifications. The same tendency was observed in fiction.

It should be stressed that the nondecomposable group has revealed a curious instance of quantification:

- (91) Senator, let's **chew some more fat** on this absentee ballot (COCA 2000, SPOK: CNN_Crossfire) [emphasis added].

Chew some more fat could be reformulated as ‘let’s talk more about it’. The quantifying determiner *some more* does not describe the constituent *fat*. Rather, it specifies the idiom’s metaphorical counterpart *talk*. Interestingly, the previous linguistic accounts (e.g., Nunberg (1978)) largely reject the idea of manipulating the constituents of nondecomposable idioms, as these idiom parts have no referents. Nevertheless, the evidence proves the opposite. The common ground and the shared cultural context seem to play a prominent role in the transformation capacity of idioms. Otherwise, the meaning of the modified expression is likely to be lost.

Unlike published news reportage, spoken media discourse has very few examples with quantifying nouns. One exception is quoted below:

- (92) He's demanded they be freed, establishing a connection, solidarity between them. It doesn't necessarily mean there's an operational connection between these attacks, but we're already being able **to draw a number of lines between them** (COCA 2015, SPOK: CNN NEWSROOM 10:30 AM EST) [emphasis added].

Even though the idiom *draw the line* in (92) is pluralised to emphasise several demarcation lines, the extract is slightly ambiguous, as the reporter does not make it abundantly clear what *a number of lines* exactly refers to.

Interestingly enough, *steal one's thunder* is exceptionally productive in terms of quantification. The constituent thunder is frequently accompanied by quantifying determiners: *to steal some of his thunder* (COCA 2000, SPOK: CNN_Politics); *you've stolen all my thunder* (BNC 1993, S_pub_debate). In both cases, the determiners describe the extent to which the person's success has been undermined and emphasise a high degree of specificity.

The last but not the least, the normally decomposable idiom *miss the boat* is a rare occurrence in the corpora. The excerpt below illustrates the quantification and premodification of this expression:

- (93) By 1950, McCarthy seemed to have **missed all the big boats**. He faced re-election in two years with the reputation among reporters as the worst senator in Washington (COCA 2000, SPOK: NPR_ATC) [emphasis added].

The extract in (93) is curious for at least two reasons. Firstly, *the boat* is pluralised, which could be paraphrased as *a number of opportunities*. Secondly, *boats* is premodified by the adjective of quality *big*. This feature lays heavy stress on the fact that McCarthy has lost several good chances. Moreover, the second sentence reinforces the idea conveyed by the transformed idiom. The manipulation of its literal scene is well compatible with the metaphorical meaning of wasted opportunities. Besides, the author of this excerpt employs the double meaning of the expression, which reminds of ambiguity (one of the components of wordplay in Langlotz' (2006: 202-203) terms).

To conclude, the corpus findings largely confirm the claims expressed by Biber et al. (1999: 1025): idiomatic expressions “are generally rare in conversation. That is, these idioms are used more commonly to represent stereotyped dialogue in fiction than in actual conversation”. Therefore, creatively transformed idioms are rather scarce in spoken discourse. The sole exception is spoken media discourse, which is enormously prolific in terms of linguistic creativity.

9.4 A brief summary of the analysis of lexico-grammatical transformations in spoken English

Compared to media and literary discourses, spoken language is substantially poorer in terms of idiomatic creativity. One of the central aspects of conversation is spontaneity and the pressure of the online production of speech (Biber et al. 1999: 1048-1949; 1066), which results in repetitive vocabulary and grammatical constructions. It should be emphasised that the modified idioms

come almost exclusively from the news subsection of spoken discourse. This further confirms that media discourse, both written and spoken, is the richest source of language creativity.

Due to the very restricted number of passivised instances collected, it is increasingly challenging to reach firm conclusions. As Biber et al. (1999: 476) point out, the passive voice is less frequent in spoken language than in writing. The investigation of premodification has revealed unusual patterns: almost the same percentage of idioms in each group are creatively transformed. This observation is in accord with Cacciari and Glucksberg's (1991: 230) argument about the lack of difference between normally and abnormally decomposable idioms. However, the most likely explanation may stem from the overall irregularity of idiomatic expressions in spoken discourse. The same tendency is observed in number variation and quantification.

10. Discussion and conclusion

The thesis has attempted to integrate several theories in order to account for idiomatic creativity in spoken and written discourses. The corpus findings suggest that media discourse, both written and spoken, is the most productive in terms of idiom creativity, and leaves fiction and spoken language in a sizeable minority. This may be explained by the nature of news reportage itself: journalists often employ emotionally charged language to rivet the audience's attention to the issue discussed. Biber et al. (1999: 1026) state that "many colloquial idioms are used occasionally in news reportage, lending an informal, vivid color to otherwise serious discussion". It is assumed that creatively transformed idioms are not only an attention-grabbing device but they also contribute substantially to the construction of a writer's identity and help express his or her views. This supposition is further corroborated by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994: 493) who emphasise that idioms "are typically used to imply a certain evaluation or affective stance toward the things they denote". Furthermore, Deignan, Semino and Littlemore (2013: 71-87) confirm that figurative language allows successfully establishing the relationship with the audience, proving that idioms perform an identity crafting function.

The novelty of the research lies in the fact that several perspectives are integrated in order to account for the creative capacity of idiomatic language. The comparative analysis of the linguistic and psycholinguistic classifications reveals the following tendencies: firstly, as predicted by Nunberg (1978: 228), normally decomposable idioms are significantly more productive than abnormally decomposable items; secondly, Cacciari and Glucksberg's (1991: 229-237) analysable-transparent group is problematic, since the members of this group vary greatly in their creative potential. These aspects apply to all the three corpus sections, i.e. news articles, fiction and spoken English. The nondecomposable group, however, behaves differently in different discourses. It is mostly productive in news reportage. Nondecomposable expressions, as the corpora

show, can be both passivised and premodified, especially in news articles. This result is in accordance with Cacciari and Glucksberg's (1991: 230-231) hypothesis, according to which almost all idioms can be analysed and manipulated to some extent. Number variation and quantification, however, are not particularly common in any of the idiom types, mainly due to grammaticality constraints and the lack of isomorphism mentioned by Langlotz (2006: 249).

A number of idioms have shown not to be productive (e.g., *shake the dust off one's feet*). This may be due the overall infrequency of these expressions. The fact that manipulated instances have not been retrieved from the corpora does not, however, imply that transformations are completely blocked. Rather, these idioms may be found later as the corpora continue amassing new examples. Other factors influencing the creative potential include familiarity, which is closely correlated with the ability to manipulate figurative language (see Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994: 496), and context that often points at shared cultural knowledge between the writer and the discourse community. Without familiarity and context, transformed idioms may be misinterpreted or seen as a mistake. It should be acknowledged that, besides linguistic and psycholinguistic views, the cognitive-linguistic perspective has considerably contributed to the understanding of figurative language. The notion of wordplay discussed by Langlotz (202-203) is particularly pertinent. A vast number of idioms could be analysed from this point of view (see, for example, (9)-(11) in Chapter 7.2).

Among the three discourses analysed, spoken discourse deserves special attention. One thing to bear in mind is that in the COCA the majority of subsections in spoken discourse are devoted to news. Unlike COCA, the BNC has a wider variety of spoken subsections. However, almost all the creative instances were found in news reportage. The question then arises to what extent these news transcripts are spontaneous. It might be assumed that they are likely to be partly scripted, as the language of journalism abounds in clichés that help quickly and efficiently choose a good turn of phrase. In other subsections (e.g., conversation or business meetings) creatively manipulated idioms are almost non-existent. It may be hypothesised that lexicogrammatical transformations of idiomatic expressions may be associated with additional production efforts. Therefore, idiomatic creativity is rather scarce in spontaneous language.

To conclude, idiomatic creativity is a multi-dimensional field that could be approached from different angles. One must admit that even though decomposability provides a valuable insight into the lexical and syntactic behaviour of idioms, this variable is certainly not enough to understand the nature of figurative language. Therefore, one of the most important observations in this thesis is that it is the combination of factors (genre/discourse, context, familiarity and analysability) that affects the creativity of idiomatic expressions. Regarding the linguistic and psycholinguistic classifications, neither of them is ideal. Both of them provide keen and truthful

observations but in different aspects. It is hoped that the thesis has enriched the existing body of research and has laid the foundations for the application of the multi-dimensional approach in future studies.

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Corpora

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12. Appendix

Abstract

Linguistic creativity and metaphoricity are unique qualities of human beings. The thesis has attempted to shed light on the creative usage of idioms from linguistic, psycholinguistic, and cognitive linguistic perspectives. Besides, genre/discourse theory is integrated into the analysis in order to explain idiomatic creativity from the point of view of identity construction and the relation between the writer and the discourse community. Moreover, idiomatic creativity is approached from a memetic perspective, according to which linguistic innovation could be explained in terms of normal and altered replication. The most important conclusion of the research is that the combination of factors predetermines the creative potential of idiomatic language, namely context, genre/discourse, decomposability and familiarity.

Zusammenfassung

Sprachkreativität und Metaphorik sind einzigartige Eigenschaften der Menschen. In der vorliegenden Masterarbeit sind diverse Ansichten über die Kreativität der Idiome dargestellt: linguistische, psycholinguistische und kognitiv-linguistische. Darüber hinaus wird auch die Genre- und Diskurstheorie dazu angewendet, um die Kreativität der Idiome unter dem Aspekt der Gestaltung der Identität und des Autor-Rezipient-Verhältnisses zu analysieren. Die Kreativität der Idiome wird aus der Sicht der Memetik betrachtet, die die Sprachkreativität im Sinne der normalen und veränderten Wiedergabe erklärt. Die wichtigste Feststellung der Studie ist, dass die Kombination der Faktoren, nämlich Kontext, Genre/Diskurs, Zerlegbarkeit und Kenntnis des Idioms, das Kreativitätspotenzial der Idiome vorbestimmt.