Cultural knowledge and idiorns

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ABSTRACT
The rnost salient features of conventional figurative units such as idiorns cannot be captured without addressing cultural knowledge. Underlying conceptual rnetaphors (as developed in the scope of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor) are not the only linguistically relevant type of knowledge. In order to describe how idiorns function and to uncover their specific sernantic and pragrnatic features, one has to take into account other concepts as well, above all culturally based concepts which govern the inference frorn literal to figurative. Being irregular units of the lexicon idiorns cannot be sufficiently described by rnetalinguistic instrurnents designed for capturing regular rnechanisrns of rnetaphor production. What is needed is a theory specially designed to describe the irregularities of idiorns. To develop such a theory is the rnain airn of rnodern idiorn research. This paper should be viewed as a contribution to such a theory, which we label the Conventional Figurative Language Theory.

KEYWORDS: Conceptual rnetaphor; idiorn sernantics; Conventional Figurative Language Theory; cultural knowledge; irnage cornponent; syrnbolic function

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1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The relevant differences between units of figurative language (among them idioms) and their non-figurative near-synonyms can only be captured if we extend our data and methods and move into fields beyond linguistics in the narrower sense of the word. They cannot be exhaustively described or, more importantly, explained by means of purely linguistic methods. Instead, we have to address various types of extralinguistic knowledge, among them culture-based knowledge, because the differences between figurative and non-figurative lexical units lie precisely in the fact that they encode different types of knowledge.

The most important linguistic feature of idioms (as well as of other conventional figurative units) is that they record and preserve relevant knowledge as part of their content plane (in the form of image traces), including, above all, reflections of the respective culture. This study is concerned with developing a linguistic theory that can take this feature into account. We refer to this theory as *Conventional Figurative Language Theory* (see below).

Theories based on the idea of quasi-universal, body-based metaphors turn out to be insufficient for uncovering specific semantic and pragmatic features of idioms. Concrete features of the metaphor structure play a more important role in determining the actual meaning of an idiom than does the metaphor's schematic structure fixed in the conceptual mapping. In this context, we should look at some of the relevant postulates of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987, 1990, 1993). The question is: which elements of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (CTM) are efficient for the analysis of idioms, and where do we need other conceptual frameworks and metalinguistic tools?

The metalinguistic apparatus proposed in the framework of CTM (cf. the notions of *conceptual metaphor, **metaphoric model, source and target domain**, mapping, conceptual correspondences,* etc.) proved to be efficient for the analysis of all kinds of metaphoric expressions, from novel poetic metaphors to near-universal SPACE-TIME shifts in the semantics of prepositions. This metalinguistic apparatus has been successfully adopted and emulated by many other linguists, cf. e.g. studies on metaphoric expressions in different languages and studies on psycholinguistic aspects of metaphor processing.

As far as idioms are concerned, CTM did not add much to the understanding of their nature. Phraseology, as a field of its own, never played an important part in this theory. The main point stressed in CTM studies is that most idioms are semantically motivated rather than arbitrary (cf. Lakoff, 1987: 448).

The idea that most idioms are motivated is not new. There is a consensus in phraseological studies – in the tradition of Ch. Bally (1919) – that idioms, for the most part, are not "frozen" elements of a language and they usually are not arbitrary either, but clearly motivated by different structures of knowledge (cf. Dobrovol'skij, 1995, 1997).

In what follows we would like to examine to what extent the instrument of *conceptual metaphor* (developed in the scope of CTM) can be used for the idiom analysis. How far does conceptual metaphor explain the specifics of idiom semantics?

2. JDIOM SEMANTJCS AND CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

Let us take an example. One of the general – and seemingly very productive – conceptual metaphors, namely ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER, has been found in many expressions in different languages (Lakoff & Kovecses, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Kovecses, 1990, 1995a, 1995b; cf. also Gibbs, 1990; Gibbs et al., 1997). The assumed "universality" of this metaphor has been a target of criticism from different sides. According to Lakoff, Kovecses and Gibbs, this metaphor is based on physiological experience. The conceptualisation of ANGER as HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER is supported by a physiological explanation in terms of body heat and increasing internal pressure, based on shared ideas about the human body. Due to the essential sameness of human beings and their physiological functioning across cultures, this body-based conceptual metaphor has been regarded as ubiquitous in all cultures, if not "universal".

One point of criticism comes from Geeraerts & Grondelaers (1995). As these authors have shown, the body-based interpretation of the ANGER metaphor does not apply to various metaphoric expressions that have been described in this way because the relevant cultural background has been ignored, cf. the idioms in (1).

(1)   German *jmdm. läuft die Galle über* "sb.'s gall/bile flows over"
        Italian *avere un travaso di bile* "to have an outpouring of bile"
        Upper Sorbian *žolč so prelije/preliwa někomu* "sb.'s bile flows over"
        Estonian *kellelgi loob sapppahe* "sb.'s bile strikes into the head"
        all meaning 'to become very angry'

According to the physiologically motivated ANGER metaphor, "gall" could be any "container", randomly interchangeable with other hollow organs of the body, but this is not the case. There is a motivating link between the literal reading and the actual meaning that is more convincing than the body-based conceptual metaphor ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER.

The metaphor in (1) cannot be put down exclusively to bodily experience but has to be seen as a cultural product as well. It must be traced back to knowledge about an ancient folk model, i.e. the "humoral pathology" ascribed mainly to Hippocrates of Kos. From classical Greek antiquity and medieval times up to the present, this doctrine is still effective in contemporary idioms. The humoral theory is a typical medieval, analogical way of thinking (therefore, ancient beliefs in physiological effects of emotions can be regarded as "metaphorical" in a broad sense). Four fluid humours of the body, yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm, were believed to regulate the vital processes in the human body. From this followed the doctrine of the four temperaments: The four fluids determined the four prototypical temperaments, which were the choleric, the melancholic, the sanguine, and the phlegmatic temperament. The choleric temperament manifested itself in anger and irascibility of a person's character. This temperament was connected to the yellow bile, as in the idioms

(1). Within this edifice of the humoral doctrine, ANGER was seen as overproduction of yellow bile. In the medieval way of thinking, this fourfold schema was an elaborated semiotic system, which influenced several cultural domains. The old doctrine continued to exist in popular belief for much longer, and the theory of the four humours has influenced the vocabulary of emotion in various European languages, cf. (2). The idioms in (2a) literally mean "to be green of/with envy" and those in (2b) mean "to become green of/with envy", while the idioms in (2c) prefer "yellow" and "green" and those in (2d) "yellow":

(2a)   English *to be green with envy*
        Norwegian *å være gronn av misunnelse*
        Spanish *estar verde de envidia*
        Croatian *biti zelen od zavisti*
        Finnish *olla vihreana kateudesta*
        Maltese *jihdar bl-għira*

(2b)   Italian *diventure verde d'invidia*
        Russian *позеленеть от зависти*
        Lithuanian *pažaliuoti iš pavydo*
        Greek *πρασινίζω από τη ζήλεια μου*

(2c)   Dutch *groen en geel worden van nijd* "to become green and yellow of/with envy"
        Danish *være/blive gul og grøn af misundelse* "to be/become yellow and green of/with envy"

(2d)   German *gelb vor Neid werden/sein* "to become/be yellow with envy"
        Hungarian *elsárgul/sárga lesz az irigységtöl* "to be/turn yellow of/with envy"
        all meaning 'to become or be very envious, very upset or annoyed because one wishes one had someone's possessions, abilities, success, etc.'

For most average native speakers, the relation between GREEN or YELLOW and ANGER (or closely related emotions like ENVY) is not comprehensible anymore, but maybe there are associative links, just because these expressions exist. Connections between particular colours and emotions like 'envy' or 'anger' are to be traced back to knowledge about the ancient humoral doctrine, which ascribed the colours yellow/green, black, red and white to particular emotions (cf. the four temperaments mentioned above). Although this doctrine has become outdated as a result of modern medical science, traces of the doctrine are still effective in contemporary idioms. Various types of knowledge have to be taken into account when explaining the motivational basis of idioms, including tacit knowledge of cultural models remote in time. Therefore, there is reason for interpreting idioms such as (1) by means of traces of the humoral doctrine and not only by the HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER metaphor.

        In further articles, Kovecses (1995b, 1995c) deals with Geeraerts' and Grondelaers' criticism, providing a corrective according to which both opinions are right: ANGER is a CONTAINER metaphor and, at the same time, based on the pre-scientific humoral theory. These

two influences seern to **operate** at two different **levels** of abstraction: at the generic level, which "gives us a sense of sirnilarity in the conceptualisation of anger across [...] cultures", and at a less generic level where "significant differences in conceptualisation, concerning especially the causal and the expressive aspects of the concept" are focused (Kovecses, 1995b: 143). However, speakers may **have** a vague idea of the (pseudo)-causal connection between "gall" and "bile" on the one hand and the concept of ANGER (or ENVY) on the other. This rneans that the conceptual rnetaphor determines that ANGER is in a container while culture determines which container (i.e. which of **several hollow** organs) is chosen.

Even if this kind of connection contradicts rnodern scientific knowledge, it **does** not irnpede the processing of idiorns like (1) and (2). There are rnany expressions in natural language that are conceptually based on ideas **rejected** in the course of developrnent of scientific knowledge. Nowadays they rnay be interpreted in terrns of culture **because all** these old rnodels of the world are **part** of our "cultural rnernory". These "wrong", "unscientific" ideas can **provide** rnotivating links for understanding such expressions. There are other cases where the addressing of conceptual rnetaphors for discovering rnotivating links interacts with the addressing of other structures of knowledge. **Several** studies on CTM use the following idiom (3) as an **example** of the ANGER-AS-HEAT rnetaphor.

(3)   English *to hit the ceiling* 'to suddenly becorne very angry'

Analysing idiorns like *blow your stack, flip your lid* and *hit the ceiling,* Gibbs (1993: 66-68) put the rnotivation of these expressions down to two conceptual metaphors: ANGER IS PRESSURISED HEAT and THE MIND IS A CONTAINER. This can be true for idiorns like *blow your stack* and *flip your lid,* but it is less plausible for (3). Rather, the rnotivation in (3) seerns to be based on the behaviour of people in a state of strong ernotion, like **jumping** or other unintended physical activities. There is sorne linguistic **evidence** for this assurnption: compare the Gerrnan idiorns (4a) and **(4b).** They **have** nearly the sarne **lexical** structure as (3); however, they express not **only** the idea of ANGER but **also** the idea of JOY: **strictly** speaking, **(4a)** refers to ANGER and (4b) to JOY.

(4a)   German *an die Decke gehen* "to go to the ceiling" 'to suddenly becorne very angry'
(4b)   Gerrnan *an die Decke springen* "to spring to the ceiling" 'to suddenly becorne very happy'

Thus, it seerns more convincing to put the actual rneaning of idiorns like (3) and (4) down to not **only** the ANGER-AS-HEAT rnetaphor but at the sarne **time** to **some typical** behavioural syrnptorns of strong ernotions. The CONTAINER rnetaphor **does** not seern to be very relevant in this case, **because** the structure of the underlying mental irnage points to strange or insane behaviour rather than to processes inside the body or the rnind.

It remains unclear why a distinction is drawn between the idioms *to climb the walls* (always assigned to the metaphor ANGER IS INSANE BEHAVIOUR) and *to hit the ceiling* (exclusively assigned to the CONTAINER metaphor). As result, two idioms sharing very similar image components are considered to be mutually exclusive with regard to their underlying conceptual metaphors (cf. Lakoff, 1987: 390, 385).

Focussing on ANGER metaphors as the exclusive explanatory basis of motivation is not correct, since the German idioms (4a) and (4b) have different meanings, which does not contradict the underlying image. Assuming that these two closely related meanings are based on entirely different conceptual metaphors seems to be counterintuitive.

There are many ANGER-idioms in European languages which are based on the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS UNCONTROLLED BEHAVIOUR, cf. (5).

(5)   Dutch *door het behang gaan* "to go through the wallpaper"
           Dutch *dan wordt het huis te klein* "then the house becomes too small"
           Finnish *hyppia seinille* "to jump up to the walls"
           German *die Wande hochgehen* "to climb up the walls"
           English *to go through the roof/hit the roof*
           all meaning 'not to be able to control oneself; to suddenly become very angry'
           Dutch *op de kast zitten* "to sit on the cupboard"
           'to be very angry'

Idioms (5) only refer to those elements of the ROOM-frame that can be interpreted as BOUNDARIES. ANGER is seen as a state in which a person goes beyond the boundaries, i.e. the limits pre-determined by a given culture.

Our general impression of some of the well-known applications of CTM for the analysis of concrete idioms is that in many cases the conceptual links that are postulated are arbitrary. Sometimes alternative explanations can be put forward. These explanations may be based on cultural knowledge (as in (1-2)) or on direct experience (as in (3-4)), although even in the latter case culture may be involved to a large extent, as is shown by traditional anthropological research dealing with emotions and their quasi-symptoms across cultures. Sometimes the apparatus of conceptual metaphors proves to be efficient for grouping idioms according to their image components (as in (5)). In other cases (as in (1-2)), the image component goes back to tacit etymological knowledge.

From a purely linguistic point of view, it is not so important under which conceptual metaphor given idioms have to be subsumed. This is, so to speak, a "classification task".') What is crucial is to find out how the image component contributes to the actual meaning in each concrete case, and how it determines the contextual behaviour of a given idiom. Thus, a glance at corpus examples containing the idioms *hit the ceiling, go through the roof, blow your stack, flip your lid* shows that they are not interchangeable in all possible contexts, cf. also Gibbs (1993). It is the task of linguistic research to discover the relevant semantic

differences and correlate them (where necessary) with the image components, which are mostly encoded in the lexical structure, i.e. on the level of concrete frames, rather than on the abstract level of conceptual metaphors. Trying to solve this task seems much more promising than constructing conceptual metaphors to cover groups of idioms whose image components have something in common.

ldioms based on the same conceptual metaphor often reveal semantic differences that cannot be explained on the basis of rather abstract metaphoric models. It is obvious that we need a more sensitive tool of analysis than conceptual metaphor for explaining fine-grained semantic differences between near-synonymous idioms.

3. CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN CONTRASTIVE IDIOM ANALYSIS

The concept of culture has been addressed repeatedly in the previous section. The role of culture becomes even more obvious when we compare idioms from different languages (or dialects). What seems "natural" in one language and unquestionable from the perspective of one's own culture may turn out to be idiosyncratic and conventional from the perspective of another linguistic variety and culture (see Piirainen, 2004a, b). In the realm of idioms, the identical nature of the human body provides less motivating links between mental imagery and actual meanings than do cultural specifics. For a detailed typology of cultural aspects underlying figurative units compare Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen (2005). In what follows, we will discuss only some elements of cultural knowledge that are relevant to idiom analysis

An example for the relevance of cultural knowledge can be taken from the domain of number symbolism. Many idioms containing a number constituent can be interpreted only by means of culturally bound semiotic knowledge, which provides the motivational link between the figurative and literal reading. For example, it is not possible to explain why the English idioms (6-7), the Lithuanian idiom (8) and the German idioms (9-10), which are semantically equivalent, differ in view of the number constituent without taking cultural phenomena into account.

(6)   English *to be on cloud nine*

(7)   English *to be in seventh heaven*

(8)   Lithuanian *devintam(e) danguj(e) (būti)* "(to be) in the ninth heaven"

(9)   German *auf Wolke sieben sein/schweben* "to be/float on cloud seven"

(10)   German *im siebten Himmel sein* "to be in the seventh heaven"
        all meaning 'to be extremely happy because something good has happened to you recently, to be in a state of perfect bliss, extreme happiness and satisfaction'

All these idioms are based on the well-known conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP, and are, therefore, comparable with expressions like *to be in high spirits, on top of the world, to be walking on air, high,* etc. However, to properly analyse idioms (6) to (1 O), it is necessary to point out that the words CLOUD and HEAVEN and their equivalents in the other languages evoke associations with religious concepts like PARADISE, which are significant for motivating

links between the actual meaning of the idioms and the images underlying them. The function of these constituents is to evoke such religious associations and, at the same time, point to the concept UP, whereas the numerals NINE and SEVEN contribute to the idea of great height. Both numerals point to a large quantity, to something like 'many' (which intensifies the idea: many clouds or heavens on top of one another represent a very great height). Besides this, both NINE and SEVEN provide the idea of a very special number, of a prototypical number, being more important than, for instance, SIX or EIGHT. However, if we restricted ourselves to the metalanguage of conceptual metaphors, it would remain unexplained why one of the English idioms and the Lithuanian idiom prefer NINE whereas both German idioms prefer SEVEN. This question can only be answered if we take cultural phenomena into account, since the interpretations of idioms (6-10) are all based on knowledge about relevant cultural conventions.

The idiom-type (7)/(10) "to be in seventh heaven" is really widespread across many languages: compare idioms literally meaning "to be in [the] seventh heaven", e.g. Icelandic *að vera í sjounda himni;* Danish *være i syvende himmel;* Dutch *in de zevende hemel zijn*; Welsh *bod yn y seithfed nef*; French *être au septieme ciel;* Spanish *estar en el séptimo cielo;* Russian *быть на седьмом небе*; Czech *byt v sedmém nebi;* Serbian *biti na sedmom nebu;* Greek *είμαι στον έβδομον ουρανό;* Hungarian *a hetedik mennyországban van* or Maltese *qiegħed fis-seba' sema* – all of them meaning 'to be extremely happy because something good has happened to you recently'.

All these languages use SEVEN in this idiom-type, even the languages English and Finnish. Whereas both languages prefer NINE in many other expressions, both languages follow the biblical version with SEVEN in this case: Finnish *olla (kuin) seitsemanessa taivaassa* "to be (as) in [the] seventh heaven" (cf. also Estonian, closely related to Finnish: *seitsmendas taevas olema* "to be in [the] seventh heaven", and Latvian, closely related to Lithuanian: *būt kā septītajās debesis* "to be as in seventh heaven"). The conception of this idiom-type originates from different cultural traditions. It is connected with ancient cosmogony, on the one hand, where the universe was thought to consist of several concentric spheres (the numbers variable from seven to eleven). The cabbalists, on the other, maintained that there are seven heavens, each rising one above the other, the seventh being the abode of God and the highest class of angels. The seventh heaven, first mentioned in the Apocrypha, is described in the Talmud (cf. e.g. Endres & Schimmel, 1985: 143ff.). Thus, this idiom-type is also motivated by intertextual phenomena.

The different choices of NINE and SEVEN in (6-10) are rooted in a historical context. SEVEN is a special, outstanding number in Western cultures. Its relevance originates from long Jewish and Christian symbolic traditions, from symbolism in the Old and New Testaments, in biblical exegesis and other codes connected to Christian religions throughout the centuries. Currently, the SEVEN plays the same role in the numerical symbolism of all European cultural areas and is obviously more important than the NINE. This, however, has not always been so. The number NINE was of great significance in the North-European cultural area with clear

difference to SEVEN which never played a vital role. The Old-Germanic mythology is overloaded with NINE-symbolism. The North-Germanic cosmogony, for example, postulates the existence of nine worlds. The time period of nine days was of special importance. Nine nights and nine days made up a legally significant period of time.

In the course of history, this symbolically relevant number has been displaced by SEVEN, the significant number of Christian symbolism. Traces of a former competition between the numbers SEVEN and NINE can be seen in the distribution of these numbers in idioms (6-10). The English phraseology still hands down certain elements of this Old Germanic numeric symbolism (e.g. *a stitch in time saves nine; nine tailors make a man; to look nine ways; a nine days' wonder),* whereas German exclusively follows the Christian tradition.

The number SEVEN is not known in Lithuanian phraseology. Although Christianity had a great deal of influence on the culture of Lithuania, Lithuanian figurative language did not adopt SEVEN as a relevant number symbol but remained in agreement with earlier folk traditions that preferred NINE: e.g. *devynis kailius (nu)lupti* "to take off nine skins" '≈to take someone for a ride', *devintas vanduo nou kisieliaus* "the ninth water on the fruit pudding" 'a distant relative', *devyni amatai, dešimtas badas* "nine trades, the tenth (is) hunger" 'said about a person who has many occupations and is not able to earn his living', *devyni dangūs galvoj(e) pasidare* "to have nine heavens made in the head" 'said about a person who has beaten or punched his/her head violently and became dizzy', *devynios galybės* "nine quantities" 'very many' *devintq prakuitq braukti* "to wipe off the ninth sweat from one's forehead" 'to be very exhausted from the work'. In this regard, Lithuanian differs from languages like German and even English, preserving more traces of the old Pre-Christian number symbolism.

In the Lithuanian ethnic culture, there are many rituals containing the NINE as a symbolic number. For example, the baking of the *Vėlinių pyragas* (the All Saint's Day's pie) was a ritual. The pie was baked by taking three spoonfuls of flour from each of nine cups. Another example is the *Devintines,* the commemorative ceremony of the deceased, held nine days after death. The Lithuanian folklore tells about nine goddesses, the rulers of human lives. In Lithuanian fairy tales the "nine lakes and the nine seas" (Lithuanian *už devyniy júry ir mariy)* are known. Compare in contrast to this, the "seven seas" in ancient cultural traditions. Finally, the *devyngalvis,* the "nine-headed" dragon is of importance in Lithuanian mythology. Against this background, it becomes clear why the NINE and the SEVEN are used in the same symbolic function across languages and why some languages prefer the SEVEN whereas the other prefer the NINE. Thereby, a relevant explanation must be given in terms of culture. Here we are dealing with culturally based divergence among various languages. All in all, idioms such as those discussed in this section, can only be interpreted by means of four different types of knowledge: the conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP, the "rich image", number

syrnbolism and the intertextual connections (see Dobrovol'skij/Piirainen 1997, 2000, 2005 for more details).

4. IDIOMS IN THE CONVENTIONAL FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE THEORY

The previous discussion has shown that it is not possible to exhaustively describe idioms using just the apparatus of CTM. The reason for this is that CTM was not developed with the intent to analyse irregular features of idiom semantics and pragmatics. CTM is aimed at discovering general cognitive rnechanisms governing cross-categorical conceptualisations. Such a gap calls not for the extension of CTM but rather a new theory. In Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen (2005) we developed such a theory, namely the *Conventional Figurative Language Theory* (CFLT). Central to this theory is the idea that there is a specific conceptual structure underlying the meaning of a figurative unit. This conceptual structure, which we call *image component,* is based on mental imagery and is an element of the plane of content of a given figurative unit. Thus our basic assumption can be formulated as follows: The image component (a specific conceptual structure rnediating between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of figurative units) is a relevant element of their plane of content.

Traditional structuralist approaches to figurative language made a strong distinction between "diachronic (etymological)" factors and "synchronical" ones. In general the differentiation between "etymological derivation" and "synchronical rnotivation" is not so important from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics because both are based on comparable conceptual operations. Hence from our point of view research on the motivation of figurative units cannot refrain from including etymological description as a constituent part. This does not mean that etymology always influences actual rneaning and brings about relevant usage restrictions, but it cannot be excluded a priori. There are sufficient exarnples to show how the "etymological memory" of an idiom determines its behaviour in discourse. After clarifying the etymology of a given idiom, the second task is to check for possible linguistic consequences, i.e. certain usage restrictions, traceable back to the etymology.

Obviously, such linguistic consequences can be detected in the field of gender-specific usage restrictions (cf. Piirainen, 2001). There are various cases of such usage restrictions in different languages. The usage restrictions may be traced back to relevant etymological phenomena if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- The inner form of the idiom in question points to a concept that once was prototypically and exclusively related with either females or males respectively (e.g., a garment, a gesture).

- The significance of this concept in question has been lost in the present.

Using large text corpora shows that at present these lexical units can also refer to female or male persons respectively (except from all kinds of ironic or jocular use). Thus the gender-

restrictions originating from the inner form of the idioms are stable components of their semantic structure. A good example is the idiom (11):

(11)   German seinen Hut *nehmen* "to take one's hat"
         'to resign from one's post, office, to step down (referring to men)'

The inner form of this idiom is based on a physical action. In former times, middle class men used to wear a hat in public. They had to take the hat off entering a room. If a man was leaving he took his hat, and the expression denoting this action developed the meaning 'to leave a group, to say goodbye' (cf. Rohrich, 1991: 776). Of course, women also wore hats in public, but were not obliged to take them off when entering a room. Therefore, a woman who was going to leave did not have to take her hat. The consequence is that this idiom was originally restricted in its use and referred exclusively to males. Though the custom of wearing a hat in public has changed and the action of "taking the hat" no longer is of any irnportance, the gender-specific restriction of this expression still has an impact on its usage. The restriction to males clearly emerges from frequency analysis. Among more than 500 text examples drawn from the lnternet only one example has been found with reference to a woman, to be precise, to a female minister. The text examples reveal another peculiarity of this idiom: the person resigning has to be socially important and their resignation has to have some consequences for a given social group. Either they come from a higher occupational group, such as ministers, directors, managers, chairmen and the like, or they are, e.g., a popular sportsman leaving a club. This usage restriction can be interpreted as correlating with the etymology. The etymologically relevant feature 'belonging to the middle class' (wearing a hat was left up to middle class men) corresponds with the social irnportance of the resigning person. So the elements of etymological knowledge (labelled here "etymological memory") may have synchronic relevance.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Cognitive Theory of Metaphor is important for investigations into the phenomenon of figurative language because it provides the researcher with a well-developed metalinguistic apparatus. In many cases, applying this apparatus allows us to explain many properties of figurative units that could not be captured in the framework of any traditional approach. The explanatory power of CTM is especially high in cases where we need an explanation as to how a particular novel metaphor works. Speakers creating a new metaphor in order to be able to talk about a difficult, barely structured situation propose, by using this metaphor, a way of structuring the given situation, i.e. an original view on it. The metaphor is therefore not just a

means of naming but also a way of conceptualising the world. CTM is the only theory which calls attention to this fact and offers appropriate tools of analysis.

However, conventionalisedjigurative **metaphors,** including idioms, have a different function and a different cognitive and communicative value. What they have in common with individual novel metaphors is their origin, i.e. they often use the same mappings; but their value in understanding a situation is quite different. This fact has not received enough attention so far. Conventional figurative metaphors, especially idioms, contribute much less to the structuring of unstructured situations than do novel metaphors, but they rather convey different kinds of knowledge that they have accumulated in the course of their functioning in the language. This does not mean that the metalinguistic apparatus of CTM cannot be applied to the description of idioms. However, what is needed, in addition to that, is a theory specially designed to describe the irregularities in the realm of conventional figurative language, including, among other things, idioms. Such a theory was proposed in (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005). We label it the **Conventional Figurative Language Theoty.**

As for the question concerning linguistically relevant conceptual traces in the semantic structure of idioms, we can state that some idioms reveal usage restrictions due to mental images fixed in their lexical structure. However, this does not mean that all idioms behave in this manner. Obviously, many idioms are indifferent towards the underlying images. We suggest that even in such cases (i.e. where no relevant combinatorial constraints can be found) certain traces of the source concept are implicitly present in the structure of the target concept. These traces can become explicit in contexts that focus on the image in question. In other words, parts of the mental image underlying the actual meaning of a given idiom belong to its plane of content, even if they may not be qualified as components of its semantic structure in the strict sense.

NOTE:

1) It is evident that subsuming all possible metaphorical expressions of different languages under the same conceptual metaphor would be an important step of linguistic analysis. It would enable us to compare idioms with other kinds of metaphorical expressions and enlarge the explanatory basis. For example, expressions like **to be down, to be low** on the one hand and **to be beaten to the ground, one S spirits reach rock bottom** on the other (all going back to the conceptual metaphor SAD/UNHAPPY IS DOWN) are analysed separately in the framework of traditional lexicology because of their different status in the taxonomy of lexical units. The cognitive approach allows us to put taxonomic differences aside and semantically and pragmatically analyse related lexical units across boundaries between taxonomic classes.

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