The Understanding of English Idioms Belonging to the Semantic Field "Death and to Die" by Non-native Speakers

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Bachelor's thesis
2017

Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur
akademický rok: 2016/2017

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE
(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Lucie Kropáčková**
Osobní číslo: **H140477**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Porozumění anglickým idiomům patřícím k semantickému poli "smrt a zemřít" nerodilými mluvčími**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Studium tematické literatury
Shromáždění materiálů ze slovníků
Formulace hypotézy
Výzkum pomocí dotazníkového šetření u nerodilých mluvčích anglického jazyka
Vyhodnocení dotazníku a formulace závěru

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

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

Seznam odborné literatury:

Ammer, Christine. 2003. The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Čermák, František. 2007. Czech and General Phraseology. Praha: Karolinum.

Kvetko, Pavol. 2006. An Outline of English Phraseology. Trnava: Univerzita Sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave.

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Siefring, Judith. 2004. The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Tereza Outěřická**
                             Centrum jazykového vzdělávání

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **11. listopadu 2016**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **5. května 2017**

Ve Zlíně dne 16. prosince 2016

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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této práce je zjistit jakou znalost idiomů ze semantického pole „smrt a zemřít" mají nerodilí mluvčí anglického jazyka.

Práce je rozdělena na dvě části. V teoretické části je udána definice idiomu, popsáno jejich členění, jejich důležitost a jako poslední jejich vznik. V praktické části jsou prezentovány výsledky z dotazníku, který byl rozeslán mezi nerodilé mluvčí. Prezentace výsledků byla rozdělena na dvě části. V první části jsou okomentovány výsledky z obecných otázek. Část druhá se týká samotných idiomů. Tyto výsledky, udávají přehled o tom, jak nerodilí mluvčí rozumí daným idiomům.

Klíčová slova: idiom, nerodilý mluvčí, nerodilí mluvčí, smrt, zemřít, anglický jazyk, ekvivalent, dotazník

ABSTRACT

The aim of the thesis is to get the overview of the non-native speaker's knowledge of idiomatic expressions belonging to the semantic field "death and to die".

The thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part gives definitions of idioms, describes their division, importance, and origin. In the practical part are presented results of a survey, which was spread among non-native speakers. The presentation of results is divided into two parts. The first part comments on results from the general questions. The second part is focused on the idioms. These results give an overview on the understanding of the particular idioms by non-native speakers.

Keywords: idiom, non-native speaker, non-native speakers, death, to die, English, equivalent, survey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"The language of friendship is not words but meanings."

Henry David Thoreau

What if the meanings are literal and figurative and what if, part of our friends does not come from the Czech Republic? They come from English speaking countries and every time they talk to us, we find out that we do not understand some of the idiomatic expressions they are using. This issue can be one of many which connect the non-native speakers and sometimes create funny situations in our lives.

The aim of my thesis is to get a better overview whether non-native speakers understand idioms from a specific semantic field "death and to die". The thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part contains information about definitions by different dictionaries and linguists. In addition, types of idioms and how idioms are divided from different perspectives by different linguists. The second chapter focuses on importance of idioms among non-native speakers. Moreover, few studies and researchers supporting the fact of importance are described there. At the end of the chapter there are presented four processing theories which deal with understanding of idioms. Lastly, there is a chapter focusing on origin of idiomatic expressions.

The practical part presents the results from a survey. The collected data are presented via charts and followed by a comment. The hypothesis is that non-natives have problems with understanding of idiomatic expressions. What leads to this hypothesis is the semantic field of the idioms – "death and to die". It is assumed that non-native speakers do not idiomatically speak about death on daily basis and therefore, they do not know most of the idiomatic expressions connected to death. The survey was sent among non-native speakers all around the world and was shared on social networks.

The results are divided into two groups: general questions and questions dealing with idioms. In the first group is commented on the general questions and the answers in the charts are divided into three columns, according to the residence of the participants. The rest of the questions are shown on their own and there is no division as it was done in the first part. The data are shown in charts and followed by comments.

I. THEORY

1   DEFINITION OF THE TERM IDIOM

The idioms, a feature of a language clear to native speakers but a possible cause of misunderstanding among native speakers and non-native speakers or non-native speakers on different levels of English.

The word idiom has Latin, Greek and Middle French origin. (Online Etymology Dictionary 2017) The Latin word *idioma* means "peculiarity in language," and Greek *idiomátikos* means "peculiar phraseology."

The definition of an idiom varies, for example, dictionaries give us wide range of them. In the online dictionary called Thefreedictionary.com have been various definitions found. (The Free Dictionary 2017) First of all, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2016) defines idiom as "a speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically and is not understandable from the individual meanings of its elements." "It is the particular grammatical, syntactic, and structural character of a given language." Among one of the Collins's English Dictionary (2014) definitions belongs: "linguistic usage that is grammatical and natural to native speakers of a language." Cambridge Dictionary (2017) defines idioms as "a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own." Moreover, "the style of expression in writing, speech, or music that is typical of a particular period, person, or group."

These following definitions are taken from books by several linguists. Fernando (1996) defines idioms as "a phrase which does not mean anything literally by itself, but can be used in a sentence to mean something indirectly." "It is a specific kind of vocabulary or jargon which is employed in specific contexts." Cacciari (1993) claimed that if a language has had any logical rules, idioms would not have been a part of it. Pavol Kvetko (2005, 103-104) argues that idioms do not have any proper definition. According to him, they can be characterized as they have:

- "a multi-word character" (*a piece of cake, cherry on top*)
- are *institutionalized,* which means that: "They operate as single semantic units."
- belong to a particular language
- the combination of words is mostly fixed (*red tape* – any change in this idiom would change the whole meaning of the expression).

Mona Baker (1992, 63) defines idioms as "frozen patterns of language" where only a little or no changes are allowed. If the meaning is concerned, in most cases the meaning is not clear. She gives a list of things users cannot do with idioms:

- Change the word order. (e.g. *as the fact of a matter)
- Delete or add a word. (e.g. *it's a cake)
- Put a different word. (e.g. *lie six feet under)
- Change the grammatical structure. (e.g. *pushed up the daisies)

The meaning of idioms is "wholly or partially figurative" which means that a listener does not get the sense from the words literally, but she or he needs to know the meaning. To sum it up, an idiom is a unique fixed expression consisting of more words, belonging to a particular language which does not mostly have a clear meaning. Idioms are divided into several types.

1.1 Types of Idioms

Kvetko (2005, 104-108; Kvetko 2006, 19-22, 34-36) differentiates idioms in two of his books. Idioms can be distinguished according to their stability – on *unchangeable idioms* and *changeable idioms*. Idioms belonging to the first group are fixed; they cannot undergo any change *e.g. of course, a piece of cake*. The second group of idioms allows little changes *e.g. final straw – last straw, run the risk – take the risk*. Furthermore, in this group, the change of verb or noun does not affect the meaning. On the other hand, changeable idioms are divided into four subcategories: grammatical, lexical, orthographical and geographical. Kvetko (2005, 104-108) (Kvetko 2006, 19-22, 34-36) divides the idiom from a different point of view, and his classifications will be shown and explained below.

1.1.1 Changeable Idioms

As was mentioned above among these belong four types of variations. First of all are **grammatical variations** which involve either morphological either syntactical or both changes. These changes are connected to the word order, tenses, categories, and articles. For instance *on and off – off and on* or *all the time – the whole time*. Changes which are done to make it grammatically correct are not considered as grammatical variants: *e.g., make up one's mind - he made up his mind - they can make up their minds*. In a case of **lexical variations,** the lexical structure is not strictly given *e.g. cross sb's palm – cross*

sb's hand. Moreover, combinations of grammatical and lexical variations are possible: *e.g. there is no smoke without fire – where there's smoke, there's fire*.

As another type are **orthographic variants** considered. There are possible changes (such as spelling, different usage of small and capital letters or usage of a full stop, hyphen), *e.g. pay lip service – pay lip-service, nosy parker - Nosey parker*). **Quantitative variants** have various optional parts, *e.g., now and then - every now and then, for good - for good and all.* Lastly **geographical variants** vary idioms according to places where they are used; usually on British *take it with a pinch of salt* and American *take with a grain of salt* or *a/the skeleton in the cupboard* (British), *a/the skeleton in the closet* (American) idioms. (Kvetko 2005, 105)

1.1.2   Construction of Idioms

When the **construction** of idioms is concerned, they can be divided into four groups as well. First of all are **verbal idioms** which usually consist of a verb and an object: *kick the bucket, sleep like a log*. They have "a verbal syntagmatic structure." On the other hand **verbless idioms – adverbial idioms** are those where the presence of a verb is omitted: *e.g., black sheep, black horse, at long last.* Among others belong idioms with a **sentence structure** *e.g. it's raining cats and dogs, don't count your chickens before they are hatched, sb's heart is in his mouth.* Idioms which have at least one full word some linguists denote as **"minimal idioms"** those are *e.g. as well as, after all, at least.*

1.1.3   Idioms from a Semantic Point of View

Idioms distinguished according to the **semantic point of view** are following. **Demotivated idioms,** in other words, **pure idioms** have no connection between the literal meaning of words and meaning of the idioms as such. They are completely fixed, *e.g., white elephant – a possession unwanted by the owner but difficult to dispose of –* the meaning do not have anything in common with the animal. **Partially motivated idioms** also known as **semi-opaque idioms,** these have a certain connection between the meaning of words and meaning of idiom as such *e.g. put one's card on the table, have a free hand –* mít volnou ruku in Czech. The free hand symbolizes the ability to be available to help someone. **Semi-idiom** also known as **semi-transparent idioms** are consisted of one word with figurative meaning and other with literal meaning *e.g., foot the bill, promise sb. the moon -* the word *promise* can be understood and acceptable for a learner but the word *moon* represents something impossible to be promised to somebody.

Moreover, Kvetko adds further divisions of idioms from the semantic point of view these are called *monosemous* and *polysemous* idioms. The majority of idioms is said to be *monosemous,* but few *polysemous* are distinguished. For example *be in the air,* this idiom can be used when something is about to happen or when something is unsure or undecided. (Kvetko 2005, 107) The following definitions were taken from Seidl and McMordie (1978) who divide these idioms into three forms:

- The form of the idioms is irregular, but the meaning is clear: *e.g., do someone proud.*

- The form of the idiom is regular, but the meaning is unclear: *e.g., cut no ice.*

- The form of the idiom is irregular, and the meaning is unclear: *e.g., be at large.*

They point out that it does not matter if the idiom is grammatically correct the thing which matters is the meaning. Even though the idiom is grammatically incorrect, the meaning is clear to the recipient. Kvetko calls these types of idioms as types of irregularities. (2005, 107)

1.2 Special Groups of Idiomatic Multi-word Expressions

A multiword expression such as collocations, proverbs, similes will be described and explained below. (Kvetko 2005, 107-108)

- **Proverbs** – "sayings expressing general truth, popular wisdom or advice" Proverbs can be either metaphorical either non-metaphorical and have a didactic aim. *There's no place like home.* On the contrary, a **saying** lacks the didactic aim and wisdom. **Popular quotations** can be included in proverbs as well, or they can be considered as clichés, and they are characterized as statements claimed by someone known, *to be or not to be: that is the question.*

- **Similes** – describe one thing by comparing it to another, usually by using words *like* and *as.* It makes them well recognizable, *e.g., old as a hill, sleep like a dog.* People are often compared to animals, *e.g., red as a turkey-cock, like a bull in a china shop.*

- **Binomials** are consisted of "two related, similar antonymous or identical words usually joined by a conjunction," *e.g., high and mighty* - very proud*, rain or shine* - does not matter how the weather is. With a few exceptions, individual words belong to the same word class (*up and coming).* Binomials have other features such as rhyme and rhythm - *out and about,* alliteration - *rack and ruin* and unchangeability. **Trinomials** are considered as rare or less frequent. As the title

states those are "three-member combinations, *here, there and everywhere, left, right and center, morning, noon and night.*

- **Phrasal verbs** – "combinations of verb and a particle (adverb or preposition)." Meanings of phrasal verbs are not easy to get from its constituents. Phrasal verbs can be divided into transitive and intransitive phrasal verbs. Whereas the first group needs an object, the second one does not. The other division is into separable and non-separable, *e.g., come across, break up.*

- **Social formulae** – also called as gambits or social phrases. These phrases are used in everyday communication. Can be semi-transparent or completely fixed. They do not correspond with grammatical rules, *e.g., long time no see, how do you do?*

1.2.1 Semantic Relations and Grouping

Idioms can be grouped according to their similarities or differences in their meaning on:

- **Synonymous idioms** – have very close almost the same denotative meaning: *e.g., be rolling in it or have money to burn* - be very rich.

- **Antonymous idioms** – the meaning is opposite or negative, *e.g., eat like a bird - eat like a horse, in cool blood - in hot blood.* The examples show that the included components are contrastive words and different lexical components.

- **Idiomatic semantic field** – idioms belonging to a group according to a general concept *e.g., colors, animals, death, power.* "They may include different types of idioms displaying different types of relations based on similarities, differences, hierarchies, inclusion, and various other relations." (Kvetko 2005, 108-109)

1.2.2 Formal Relations and Grouping

According to the similarities in forms of expression, in the usage of the same formal component and identity of the structure are idioms grouped **formally**. Among these belong:

Homonymous idioms – spoken and written form of these is the same, but the meaning is different, *e.g., hit the roof* – means either rapid increase of price or anger of a person.

Paronyms - also called *"idiomatic false friends"*. Paronyms look similar in their structure but their meaning is different, *e.g., lose heart* - lack courage, *lose one's heart* - fall in love.

Clusters - set of idioms with one common word (lexical component), *e.g., blue: to feel blue* - feel miserable about something, *blue jokes* - humorous anecdote, *out of the blue* - suddenly, *the blues* - referring to police.

Idiomatic **frames** have the same grammatical structure: V + the + N: *hit the bottle, hit the deck, hit the jackpot.*

in + a + N: *in a way, in a flash, in a nutshell.* The meaning can be the same, or partially same or completely different. (Kvetko 2006, 35-36)

Makkai (1972, 25) divides idioms in *idioms of decoding* and *idioms of encoding.* Firstly have a look at these two terms. The *idiom of decoding* is "an expression whose interpretation could not be figured out by someone using only independently learned linguistic conventions." Whereas, an *idiom of encoding* is "an expression which a speaker would not realize is a conventional way of saying what it means, without knowing that fact."

1.3   Properties of Idioms

Among the properties of idioms according to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994, 492-493) belong following.

- **Conventionality** which means that meaning of such idioms is not clear and cannot be predicted: "by a knowledge of the independent conventions that determine

  the use of their constituents when they appear in isolation from one another."
  (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994: 492)

- By **inflexibility** is meant that idioms are appearing in a certain number of constructions or syntactic frames.

- **Figuration** is metaphors, hyperboles, and metonymies. These idioms can be tricky for speakers who do not spot the purpose of figuration motive precisely, but they can understand the literal meaning.

- Idioms which are typical to describe a particular situation of social interest have a feature of **proverbiality.**

- **Informality** is a feature connected to oral cultures, colloquial register or popular speech.

- **Affect** idioms usually evaluate or have an impact on a stance toward the things they denote.

2   IMPORTANCE OF IDIOMS

Idioms play a major role in everyday life, they are part of communication among people, and they occur in written English. Thyab (Thyab 2016) claims that all speakers of English should be aware of the importance of idioms and its using. Particularly in a case of non-native speakers which make them more proficient. In other words, non-native speakers should get used to using them. She admits that for non-native speakers is this process naturally difficult because it confuses them with its meaning, structure, literal meaning and figurative meaning. Anna Cieślicka (2015: 208-245) considers the figurative competence as something essential in learning a language. Furthermore, the knowledge of idioms is a vital component of this already mentioned competence.

Bortfeld mentions that over 8000 idioms are in existence and of course the number has been changing. (Bortfeld 2002) Also, Cieślicka presents the information about a number of figurative expressions which a person says every day. When a lifespan is concerned as sixty years, an average person utters around 4.7 million novel and 21.4 million frozen metaphors during his/her life. That fact makes idioms really important. (Cieślicka, 2015: 209) Furthermore, usage of idioms varies from one field to another (business, journalism, and everyday talk). Idioms appear in every type of language no matter if it is informal or formal. They make the speech shorter, in some cases, strengthen an argument, generalize, "provide stylistic variety" and evaluate. (Gramley and Patzold 1992)

Furthermore, if the discourse is concerned, idioms play different roles. They can give us a name for a thing, describe a situation, give a piece of advice, emphasize, point out an individual or be focused on the whole community. Also, some idioms are used by a specific group of people, during particular occasions or in a different geographical region (Britain, America, and Australia).

Whereas native speakers use idioms every day without thinking of them, non-natives naturally have difficulties with the understanding. Understanding and using of idioms improve non-native's level of language, broaden their horizons and make them sound native-like. Non-natives mostly do not know what idiom based on is and how they should connect it to get the meaning. (Kvetko 2006)

2.1   Idioms and Non-native Speakers

Numbers say that over one billion people speak English. The interesting fact is that there are more non-native speakers than native ones. Therefore the language is shaped

by those who learn English as a second language. (Static Global English, 2010) Using idioms is a piece of cake for native speakers but can cause a lot of misunderstandings and confusion among non-native speakers. This contrast among non-native speakers and native ones is mentioned in Cieślicka's chapter. (2015: 208) It is understandable that non-native speakers find idioms difficult, incomprehensible and confusing. Furthermore, they have to learn them by heart because they lack the ability to identify them and use them correctly. Seidl and McMordie (McMordie and Seidl 1978) point out that for English learners it is hard to guess the correct situation when is appropriate to use the particular idiom. According to the scientific research of Rana Abid Thyab (Thyab 2016) mentioned above, mainly English speakers of Arabic origin lack the ability to use idiomatic expressions correctly.

Native speakers do not have to think of the figurative meanings of idioms, but for non-native speakers it is natural that those expressions confuse them from different reasons. One of them could be that they are told an idiom only on its own without any context, and it is difficult to guess what the native speaker is talking about. Some idioms are used in situations, which do not correspond to the literal meaning of the idiom, *e.g., show you the ropes*. This idiom has its context in sailing and means to show somebody how the job is done. If the recipient can guess the context and metaphorical meaning and is able to make the connection he or she probably understands but for someone who does not have a clue it would be a difficult situation. Another example was found in Fernando's *Idioms and Idiomaticity* (1996, 124-135). She points out that some cultures do not consider a heart as a center of emotions. Therefore members of these communities would be confused by the idiom *she broke my heart,* and they would not probably connect it with the emotions of love.

Thyab (2016) claims that surveys which have been done lately proved there is a link between an idiomatic expression and its meaning. As the link can be considered, "physical experiences, which are universally shared or based on specific domains, which are culturally specific." This feature is called non-arbitrary meaning. It means that even though there are different cultures all over the world, strong similarities exist in everyday situations such as being angry, *e.g., breathe fire* or *let off steam,* refers to something hot in the body. When people are angry their body temperature increase, and they become red and hot. Other examples can be, *lend someone a hand* or *have your hands tied*. A hand presents some action which helps us to understand.

On the contrary, *specific domains* are typical for a particular culture and idioms belonging to this domain are hardly understandable and realized. Those idiomatic expressions are connected to something specific for given country. In England, it is for example sailing or horse racing. The cultural overview that is given to the non-native user can be considered as an advantage of these idioms. (Thyab, 2016)

To sum it up and clarify why is understanding and knowing idioms that important especially for non-native speakers was a statement from one of the Wright's books used. Idioms make the language more real and native-like. Wright (1999, 9) says that meeting the idioms is inevitable. These language patterns are so common, and there is no point learning them when an advanced level is reached. They should be learned from the very beginning of the learning process to be understood and correctly used in the future.

2.2 Studies Focusing on Processing, Understanding, and Acquisition of Idioms

Firstly the difference between a *second language* (L2) and a *foreign language* will be clarified. A *second language* is a language which is spoken in a community where the learner lives, for example, French in Arabic countries, Russian in post-Soviet states and Spanish in the Basque country. A *foreign language* is a language which is learned by people with the mostly same native language, probably in a classroom or on a language course and the target language is not spoken in learner's community. For example English in the Czech Republic, Spanish in Germany, etc. (Anna Cieślicka, 2015, 209)

Boers and Demecheleer (2001, 256-257) focused in their experiment on the understanding of *imageable* English *idioms* by French students. Lakoff (1987, 447) defines *imageable idioms* as idioms that evoke a certain image in learners mind. Boers and Demecheleer (2001, 256-257) decided to focus on this topic because England and France are linguistically close to each other but even though both languages "share the same metaphoric themes" the level of "conventionality" can be different. Their aim was to find out whether particular idioms evoke the same scene in French and English student's minds. They collected the data from linguistic corpuses and focused on the variations and level of occurrence. They found out that English has more idioms connected to hats and ships while French domains in a field of food. Boers and Demecheleer assumed that idioms connected to ships and hats would be less familiar to native French speakers than the ones connected to food. The next step of the experiment was to choose 24 idioms which include the imagery of hats, food, ships and sleeves.

The list was rated by the judges who reviewed the difficulty of given idioms. The scale was from 1 - very easy to 5 - very difficult. The authors used only those which scored 2 or 3. (2001, 256-257)

The experiment was carried out by 78 participants from the Libre de Bruxelles University. The students had achieved an intermediate level of English and were given 20 minutes to guess the meanings of particular idioms. Furthermore, they were not given any context and were asked to say whether they have seen such expressions before.

To sum the survey up, 70 students out of 78 stated that they have never seen these idioms, which was a surprise for the authors. Moreover, more than a half said that they know these idioms from French and "mistook them for equivalents of resembling French expressions." According to Kellerman (1978) when learners of one language consider that language to be close to their mother tongue they do not think about "transferability." He also admits that it depends on the advance of students; advanced students are more likely to consider the correct usage of an idiom on the contrary of beginners or intermediate users. The authors of this experiment agreed with Kellerman and stated that "false friends idioms are likely to be deceitful to learners who consider the target language to be close to their mother tongue." (Boers and Demecheller, 2001, 258)

Kecskes (2000) claims that second language users usually "rely on their L1 conceptual system" to produce or comprehend a figurative phrase. He assumes it is because second language users lack the "metaphorical competence" of given language. A statement of Matlock and Heredia (2002) is similar to one of Kellerman (1978). They stated that understanding of literal and figurative meaning depends on learner's proficiency. Therefore beginners must firstly distinguish some connections between "literal and non-literal meanings of figurative expressions." Furthermore, they described the comprehension of idioms and divided the process into three steps. Firstly, an idiom taken from the L2 is literally translated into the L1. Secondly, the learner tries to understand the literal meaning of a given idiom. Thirdly, he or she gets the figurative meaning. They admit that an advance learner can get the figurative meaning without going through the previous two steps. (Matlock and Heredia 2002)

Suzanne Irujo (1986) focused on comprehension of English idioms by Spanish speakers and learners of English. Chosen idioms were similar or identical to Spanish variants, and they were understood better than different and more complicated ones.

2.3   Idiom Processing Theories

Several hypotheses and researches concerning the idiom comprehension have been already made. In the 1970s and 1980s, the hypotheses were focused on the storage and access of idioms in the lexicon. Later in the 1990s there was a little change, and these hypotheses focused on a linguistic process of idiom interpretation. Among the earliest one belongs *the Idiom List Hypothesis* created by Bobrow and Bell in 1973. This assumption claimed that idioms were interpreted literally from their written or spoken form and when the literal meaning did not make sense the listener or reader accessed so-called "a mental idiom list" which was some mental idiom dictionary to be able to understand the figurative meaning. (Searle 1979) Nevertheless, Swinney and Cutler (1979) argue with the statement that idioms were taken as long words. It means that they are stored in a lexicon together with other words. Therefore both of the meanings are processed at the same time, and the most appropriate one wins. Gibbs (1980) agrees with the statement about idioms as a long word in a lexicon, but he calls into question the competitive process. He suggests that meaning of idioms is understood directly.

During 1980 Cacciary and Tabossi (1988) challenged the previous approaches and found out the connection between idioms and its constituents. According to this, they claimed that both meanings are accessed simultaneously. Various studies have been done in the course of time and four of them will be described below.

2.3.1   Idiom Diffusion Model of Second Languages (IDM)

The model was made by Liontas (2002) and says that comprehension of idioms has two stages. The first stage is called *prediction stage*, during that stage hypotheses about the figurative interpretation are formed by L2 learners. These hypotheses can differ depending on the presence of context otherwise he or she has to rely on the literal meaning, transparency of idiom and its semantic distance from L1 idiom.

Furthermore, IDM divides idioms into three levels; *lexical level idioms*, *semi-level idioms* and *post-lexical level idioms*. The most comprehensible are idioms with the exact equivalents in L1 and L2, *e.g., to play with fire x hrát si s ohněm.* The learner can easily refer and comprehend given idiom via *a one-to-one match*. These idioms are called *lexical level idioms,* and mostly no context is necessary. Another group is called *semi-lexical level idioms,* and these idioms slightly differ on its equivalents. Therefore some context would be required, *e.g., it's not my cup of tea x není to můj šálek kávy.* The last group is called *post-lexical level idioms* where the equivalents in L1 are different from L2, e.g. *a piece*

of cake x byla to hračka. The "literal analysis of its constituents" which would help in the first two groups is not enough, in this case, therefore, larger discourse framework, and *top-down strategies* are needed. Jacobs and Rau (1988, 129) claim that the *top down method* "use extensive knowledge of the context of the input, practical constraints, and conceptual expectations based on previous events to fit new information into an existing framework."

The second stage is called *reconstructive stage* where the hypotheses from the first stage are confirmed, and learner gets the full information and can recognize the wrong interpretations. (Liontas 2002; Cieslicka 2015, 219)

Liontas made a study when focusing on adults whose first language was English, but they were learning Spanish, French or German. The members were given idioms from their second language in and out of context. Moreover, their task was to clarify the meaning, say which reading strategies and processes of utilization they used, which image they got during interpretation of these idioms. Also, to describe their "affective states" while interpreting. The study found out that "the transfer of idiomatic knowledge was considerably influenced by context, translation equivalency, a degree of opacity, lexical knowledge, syntactic arrangement and literal meaning." (Herrmann 2008, 23)

2.3.2 Model of Duel Idiom Representation

By Beate Abel (2003) divides idioms on decomposable and non-decomposable. These non-decomposable idioms oblige an *idiom entry*. On the other hand, decomposable idioms are represented by *lexical entries* of their constituents and do not necessarily need to develop an *idiom entry*. If the learner encounters with a particular idiom often, he or she makes its *idiom entry,* but this does not go for non-native speakers who do not encounter with idioms that often as native speakers do. Thus they have to rely on the understanding of idiom constituents to be able to get the figurative meaning. Moreover, in a case of decomposable idioms, the constituents provide a figurative meaning while in a case of non-decomposable they do not. Apart from that decomposable idioms are "lexically more flexible, more quickly processed and syntactically more productive."

Abel made a study on this topic and worked with 110 non-native English speakers. These people had studied English for more than eight years and lived more than a half a year abroad. More specifically they have lived in English speaking country. She asked the students from Germany to decide whether particular idioms are decomposable or non-decomposable in other words "say to what extent individual components of the idiom

contributed to the idiom's overall figurative interpretation." The collected data were compared to native speaker's answers. The results showed that non-native speakers likely judged the idioms as decomposable even though they were non-decomposable and opaque, whereas native speakers denoted these idioms as likely non-decomposable. To be more accurate according to the native speakers were 41.9% of idioms decomposable and 58.1% non-decomposable. The outcome of the study shows that non-native learners of English relied on the literal meaning of idiom constituents and based on this is the meaning of the idiom understood. Furthermore, it gives the probable fact that figurative meaning is less important for non-native speakers. (Beate Abel 2003; Cieslicka 2015, 2019-220)

2.3.3   The Literal Salience Model

The third model which is going to be described is by Anna Cieslicka (2011). The model focuses on *foreign language* learners who do not live in a country where is the L2 spoken. More specifically, how do these people process and acquire idiomatic expressions, while they know them mostly, only from a classroom? She points out one basic difference between learning a new word (lexical item) and learning an idiom (multiword expression). Learning a multiword expression according to her "rarely implies having to establish novel formal representations for its constituent word." It is claimed that language learner knows and has already established these constituents in his or her lexicon and that is essential for acquiring and processing L2 idioms. The model says that figurative meaning of idioms is not as important and salient as the literal meaning. (Cieslicka 2015, 220-221)

2.3.4   Graded Salience Hypothesis

By Giora (2000) stated that salient meanings do not depend on a context because they are taken and activated automatically and the most strongly. It also explains that foreign language learners are acquiring the language in a formal setting and they firstly get the literal meaning of words which becomes quickly encoded in their lexicon. Lately, when they see these words in a figurative phrase they do not get the figurative meaning, but they understand the literal meaning of each idiom constituents. This model also suggests that even though there is a nonsalient idiomatic expression at the beginning by constant repeating or change in time or change in linguistic environment this initially nonsalient expression has become highly salient. This phenomenon can be seen as improving tool of learner's proficiency and lexicon. In case that the student firstly processes the figurative meaning of a phrase and can use the idiom in various contexts this phenomenon is called

a gradual shift in salience which is considered as a function of idiom familiarity. However it is rare to happen to those who study a language in class. (Cieslicka 2015, 221-22)

3 ENGLISH IDIOMS AND THEIR ORIGIN

Language has been changing over the time. New words have been coming into existence through centuries because of wars, new inventions, modern technologies, new experiences, products, social media, etc. These changes have affected idioms as well. On the contrary, some words and idioms are not used that often which after certain time leads to the disappearance.

When the British English is concerned, its rich history, especially after the Norman Conquest, enriched the language a lot. The British started to use French words, and in a case of a lower class, it was because of their contact with French nobility. Religious and church-related terms created the biggest part. So later the language was enriched with the French literature. English adapted words, originally from French, connected to *e.g. fashion, art, administration, and medicine* and it also took some of the following idioms: *faux pas, enfant terrible*. Because Middle English lacked some words, therefore, it was enriched with Latin: *alma mater, persona non grata*, and Italian words: *in flagrante, lingua franca*. Kvetko (2006, 23-26) (Baught, Cable 1993, 155-157, 201)

To America was the language brought by English colonists. English was at that time influenced by Shakespeare and other authors. Later in 19th century was America flooded by immigrants, especially from Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. Immigrants from Europe and Slavic countries came before the World War I. Through the slave trade there were many people from Africa brought into the country, and later immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico and other Hispanics have migrated there. All these changes in the structure of population have been bringing new words, new phrases, and expressions, into the language. (Baught, Cable 1993 331-332)

This process of taking words or idioms from different languages to our own is called *borrowing*. Words or idioms which are translated to the particular language are also considered as *borrowed*. (Kvetko 2006, 25) More sources or ways how idioms have been formed will be presented below.

Kvetko (2006, 23-26) first of all explains a term **idiomatization** as "a process of lexicalization of free expressions combined with the re-evaluation of their meaning." Idioms are the last result of the whole process because they are formed from: free word groups, fixed word combinations, idiomatic derivation from already existing idioms, or by borrowing.

In English, the main sources of idioms come from the past and are inspired by people and their everyday life (such as farming, animals, housing, sports, music, life by the sea, sailing, horse racing, war.) This process is called **idiomatization of free combinations.** Idioms belonging to this group are *e. g., mother's boy, the game is over, the coast is clear*.

The "process of extension of their existing meaning beyond their terminological field into more general spheres" is called **idiomatization of fixed expressions**, *e.g., gold mine, green light, a blank cheque*.

By **idiomatization of citations** is understood "institutionalization" of quotes from famous people such as Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare or Henry Truman, or famous books such as Bible, *e.g., Alpha and Omega, to one's heart content.*

Some of the idioms have an interesting story behind. (Oxford Royale 2014) The well-known idiom *it's raining cats and dogs* has its origin in the 17th century. The story behind is that floods were washed dead animals from the roofs and through the streets which looked like it is literally *raining cats and dogs*. Although the literal meaning does not make any sense, the figurative meaning is connected to the weather, and it means to rain heavily which is something typical for rainy Great Britain. (The Phrase Finder 2017)

Another idiom is connected to the British history regarding sailing, *to know the ropes*. Back at times when operating a ship was an essential skill of men, it was a very often used slang expression. Today it is used in a context of doing a job well.

As was mentioned above, some idioms come from the Bible. For example *to extend the olive branch* is one of them. This expression nowadays means to make peace with someone whom we have had a quarrel. The story behind tells that a dove brought a branch from the olive tree as a symbol of peace to Noah to show him that God's anger is gone and the floods are over. (The Phrase Finder 2017)

The idiom *to throw the baby out with the bathwater* means to throw away something precious with inessential things. (Grammarly 2016) The idiom has German origin, comes from the 16th century and has an interesting story behind. It is said that people were having a bath only once a year and during the process, they did not change the water. Firstly men were washed, women followed, and the last were children and babies. The water was already so dirty that babies were almost not visible, so the mothers had to make sure that they did not throw the babies away with the dirty water.

Lastly, in an idiom *a dark horse* is a connection to horse racing. As *a dark horse* was marked someone who was unlikely to success but in the end, he won. Today the expression can be used in various situations. It can refer to a person or business. (The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms 2004)

II. ANALYSIS

4   INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS

The purpose of the following report is to analyse results of a survey. The questionnaire was published for two weeks, and the aim was to get at least 80 participants from all around the world. The data collected from the questionnaire were used for the practical part of the Bachelor thesis.

The thesis focused on the understanding of English idioms by non-native speakers of English language, and the chosen phrases belong to the semantic fields "Death and to Die." The hypothesis is, as it was mentioned in the introduction that the non-native speakers do not know idioms from this semantic field. What leads to this prediction is mainly the fact that the topic of death and dying is not discussed on daily basis. Facebook was primarily used as a sharing tool.

The survey is divided into two parts, and it has sixteen questions, six of them are open questions. These are asking about the major of participant's studies, whether they have lived in English speaking country, if she or he has some language certificate and also where they come from. The survey was answered by 91 people where the majority, (53) were Czechs and Slovaks. The rest of the respondents (38) come from different countries such as France, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Turkey, Malaysia, Armenia, Basque Country and others which fulfill the goal to spread it among people from different countries and get the data from all corners of the world.

The gained information from the first part of the survey is divided into three groups according to the residence of respondents. These data are used for illustration and mainly for showing the contrast among Czech and Slovak students and students from different parts of the world.

Secondly, in questions concerning idioms were always three idiomatic expressions. However, only one of them was correct. Based on the questions were participants deciding which one of the three phrases is the correct one with the proper meaning corresponding with the literal meaning in the task. The results and data collected from the survey are presented below. In addition, the respondent's comments were not edited and they are supposed to show and present participant's ideas and experience.

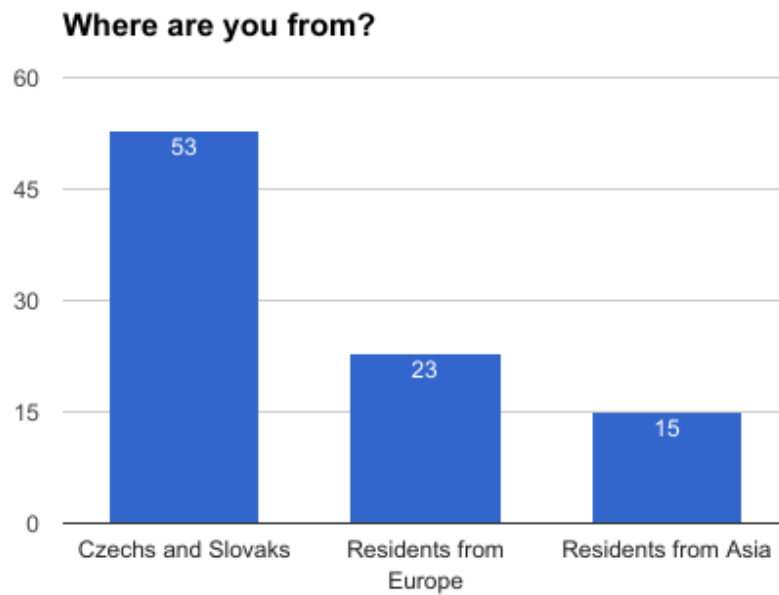## 4.1   Nationality

Where are you from?

Figure 1. The nationality of respondents (source: the author)

In the first question were respondents asked about their nationality. Their answers were divided into three groups because there was the broad range of countries, but most of them have only one representative. The major of them were 48 Czechs and 5 Slovaks, mainly students of the University of Tomas Bata in Zlín. Among residents from Europe belong people from France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Bulgaria, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark, and Austria. The Asian residents who participated come from Malaysia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, and Armenia. Furthermore, participants from Turkey were put to the Asian group because the country is located from its 97% on the Asian continent.

The majority of those interviewed responded that major of their study is English for Business Administration. There were also mentioned programs such as Business with Languages, Management and Economy, International Management, and Pedagogy. The respondents did not state only programs similar to English for Business Administration. Some of them were out of the English fields, for example; Paramedic, Media and Entertainment, Nutrition Science-Prevention of Health, Theology, or even Animation.

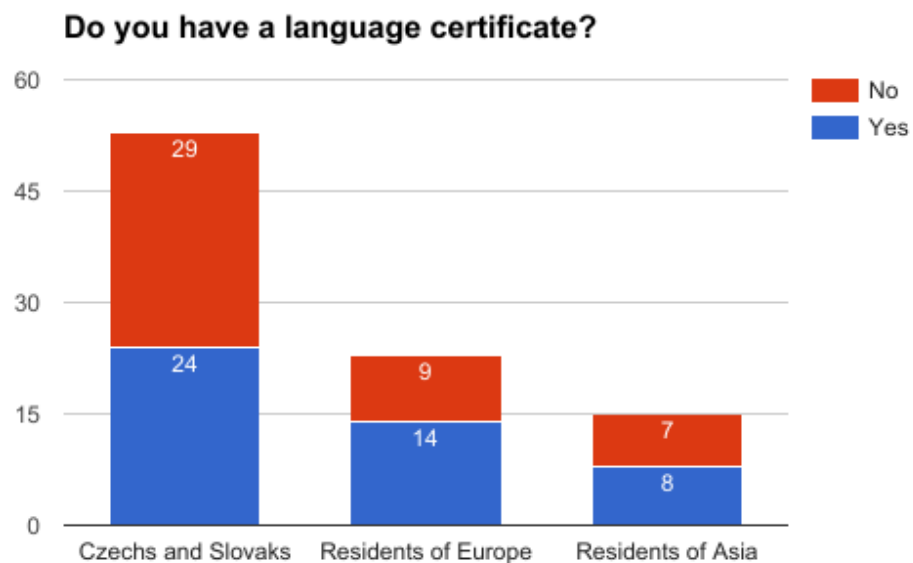## 4.2 Language Certificates

Figure 2. Language certificates (source: the author)

In the second question were respondents asked about their language certificates. The results are represented in the chart above; the red color represents the answer no, whereas blue one represents the opposite. The numbers of Czech and Slovaks students who have and do not have a language qualification are almost equal. To be more specific one out of five Slovaks stated that he or she obtained a language certificate. According to the number of respondents (20), it can be assumed that a standard certificate of English language in the Czech Republic is the First Certificate in English (FCE) followed by Cambridge English Advanced (CAE). People with FCE certificate are supposed to be at the B2 level of English and CAE indicates C1 level. The students said that they gained these certificates mostly on language schools. On the other hand, the other students from Europe mentioned mainly TOEIC as their language certificate. Lastly, the majority of Asian respondents have got International English Language Testing (IELT) which is considered to be the most extended exam of English language in the world. (British Council 2017) Unfortunately, it cannot be said on which level of English are people who participated and stated that they do not have any language certificate.

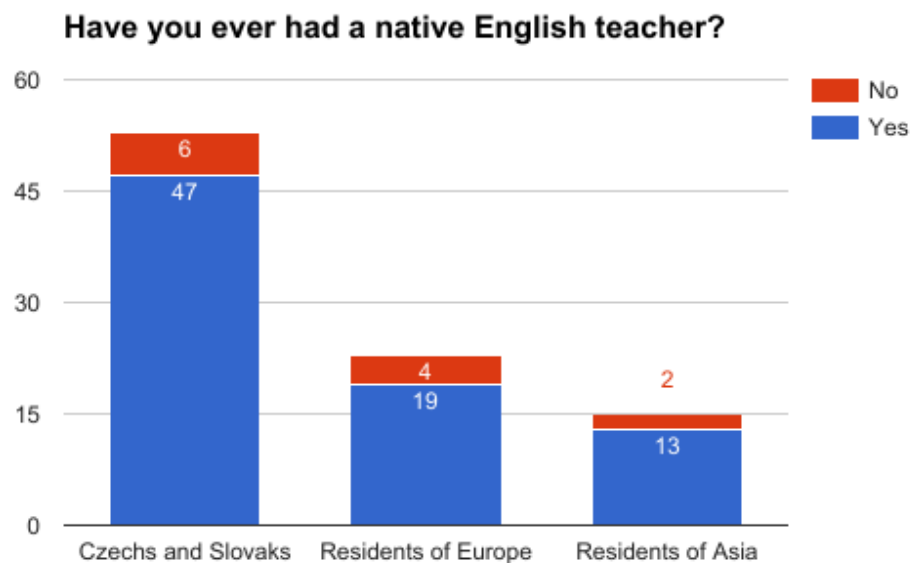## 4.3 Experience with Native English Teachers

Figure 3. The experience with native English speaker as a teacher (source: the author)

The bar chart shows that vast majority of respondents have had a native English teacher. This fact could have had a positive effect on their language skills. Rana Abyd Thiab (2016) points out the importance of having a native English teacher. The reason she mentioned is that native English teacher uses idioms during their classes more often than non-natives, even though they usually have a degree from universities abroad.

Some of the participants shared their experience in more detail. These answers are listed below:

"Yes, I had a two Irish and one Nigerian-Irish native speaking English teachers."

"Yes, for around ten years. He is from Northern Ireland (County Derry)."

"Only on my Erasmus in Ireland."

"Yes. One from the USA and one from England.

4.4 Experience with Living in English Speaking Country

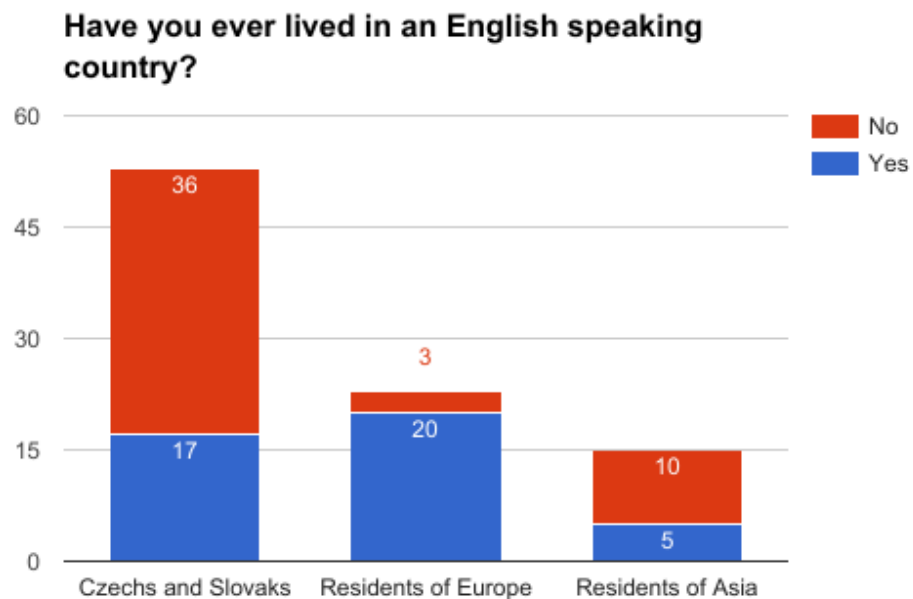### Have you ever lived in an English speaking country?

Figure 4. Living in an English speaking country (source: the author)

Although more than a half of the Czech and Slovak respondents do not have the experience with living in an English speaking country, those who have had, pointed out different countries where they have lived or stayed for some time and use English to communicate. Among these countries are for example Austria, Norway, and Malta. Residents of these countries are known for a good level of English, reasons such as their TV is subtitled and not dubbed or they come from a rich country so they can afford travelling more than others are supporting this fact. In Malta, English is the second official language. (Fluent in 3 months 2017) The first two countries were mentioned in connection to Erasmus and studying experience whereas Malta was mentioned because of summer jobs opportunities.

Czechs and Slovaks who stated that they have and experience in living in English speaking countries, mentioned these countries: Ireland, Canada, USA, and England. The majority of Europe participants mentioned Ireland. They were either staying there on Erasmus or worked during summer. The Asian respondents answered that they have lived in the USA, England, and Ireland. The purpose of their stay was either working or studying. Furthermore, some respondents have more experiences abroad than others. *"Ten months in Norway, and 3-4 month in Ireland."*

"Texas - 3 months, working, New York - 3 months, working, Austria - 1 year, studying in English, England - 3 months, working."

"Yes, Ireland-Erasmus - 5 months, England - job - 3 months."

"Currently living in Canada, quite frankly hope to never come back, since fall 2016."

"In Malta for one month because of English summer school and in Lake Placid, NY because of a summer job."

"I was working as an au pair for half a year in England and half a year in Scotland as a general assistant."

"I studied in the USA for one year of high school on an exchange program."

5 THE ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONS DEALING WITH IDIOMS

As it was mentioned above, the survey is divided into two parts. In this part the understanding and knowledge of the idioms belonging to the semantic field "death and to die" will be analysed. The data will be presented in figures as it was done with the first part. This section is not divided into three groups, and all the data are collected and presented together because there is not a sample big enough to do a separate analysis. Based on the data the conclusion will be created.

The participants were supposed to allocate following idioms with its literal meaning. These idioms were the exact equivalents:

- Have one foot in a grave (Ammer 2003, 354)
- Kick the bucket (Ammer 2003, 582)
- Go to meet one's maker (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 101)
- Go to one's eternal resting place (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 101)
- Be six feet under (Siefring 2004, 114)
- Buy the farm (Siefring 2004, 43)
- Go to glory (Siefring 2004, 123)
- Pushing up the daisies (Siefring 2004, 231)
- Pass away (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 174)
- Snuff it (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 214)

These following idioms were the incorrect equivalents:

- Have a foot in a both camp (Ammer 2003, 191)
- From the cradle to the grave (Ammer 2003, 230)
- Kick the habit (Ammer 2003, 582)
- Kick up one's heels (Ammer 2003, 584)
- Go backwards (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 99)
- Go to the wall (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 101)
- Close one's eyes to (Ammer 2003, 946)
- Sleep the sleep of the just (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 101)
- Cut the ground from under (Ammer 2003, 246)
- Suit down to the ground (Ammer 2003, 279)
- Come the old soldier over someone (Siefring 2004, 60)
- Be on your back (Siefring 2004, 12)
- In one's glory (Ammer 2003, 534)

- The heavens opened (Siefring 2004, 141)
- Black box (Siefring 2004, 26)
- Go belly up (Siefring 2004, 21)
- Pass something over in silence (Bočánková, Kalina 2007, 174)
- Pass out (Ammer 2003, 775)
- Mess with someone's head (Siefring 2004, 187)
- To be at death's door (Siefring 2004, 75)

The idioms were searched in following books: The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms (2004), The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (2003), and Frazeologický slovník (2007).

Idioms in sets are similar on purpose. The idioms connected to death are not following any criteria, except they belong to the semantic field. The rest of the idioms are similar to the exact equivalent on purpose. The respondents were told not to use a dictionary and this similarity was supposed to prove whether they know the expressions or not.

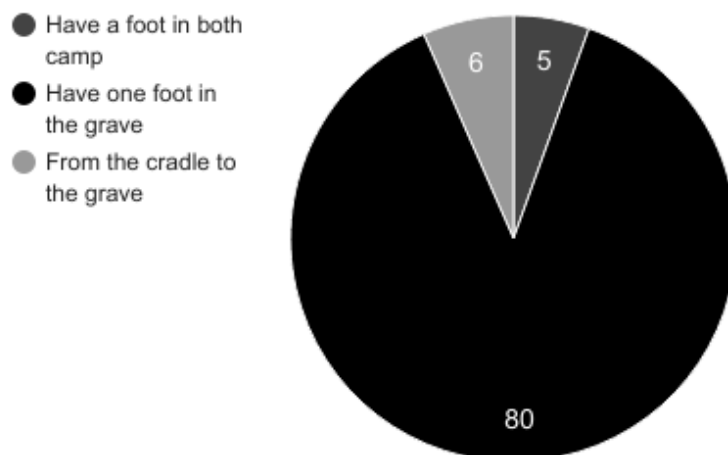## 5.1 Which of these idioms mean to be almost/near to death?

Figure 5. Have one foot in the grave (source: the author)

The idiom to *have one foot in the grave* is apparently one of the very well known among non-native speakers. Its meaning can be easily derived, and it can be considered

as an *imaginable idiom.* As it is evident from the figure, the vast majority of respondents answered correctly. The meaning can be easily derived, and what was interesting, even though there is an equivalent in Czech; *být jednou nohou v hrobě,* the incorrect answers were stated by the Czech respondents.

The idiom has its origin in the 17th century, and the meaning was not the same as it is today. At that times was the literal meaning to be "trapped by death" without a chance to escape. However, during that time it was barely used and its usage increased after a sitcom on BBC - One Foot in the Grave in the 90s. (Phrases.org.uk 2017)

The other two idioms which were in the set of answers have the different meanings. *Have a foot in both camps* means "to be connected to two groups with opposing interests." (Cambridge Dictionary 2017) Moreover, the last one *from the cradle to the grave* means to be, or stay, or do something for person's whole life. (Cambridge Dictionary 2017) The word foot in the former idiom and grave in the second one probably confused the respondents, and that could be the reason why they answered incorrectly.
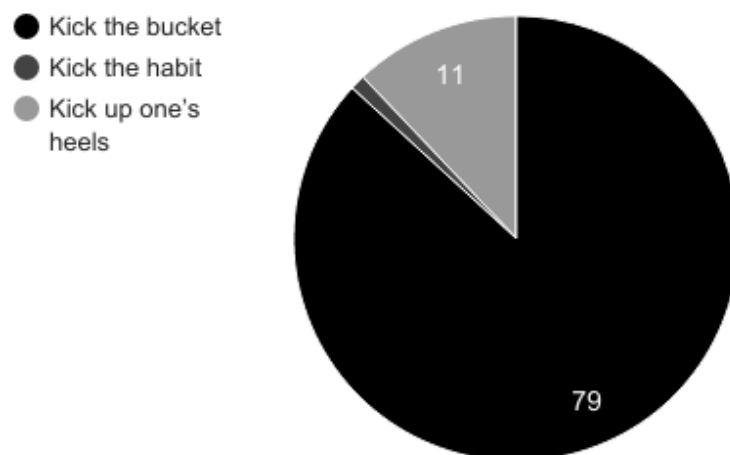
5.2   Which of these idioms mean to die?

Figure 6. Kick the bucket (source: the author)

Kick the bucket is also often used informal idiom for expressing someone's death. As it is presented in the figure, the vast majority knew this idiom. With a focus on wrong answers, it was found out that more than a half of the wrong answers were done

by the Czech respondents. The reason can be the Czech idiom *natáhnout bačkory.* Heels are a type of shoes as well as slippers which could be the reason why they made a mistake.

The idiom has its connection with committing suicide when people hang themselves. They were standing on the bucket with the rope around their neck, and as they kicked the bucket away, they died. The origin is not clear, but there are two possible explanations. Firstly, the origin is considered to be in the 18th century and based on the evidence it comes from two French words *trebuchet* (to balance) and *buque* (to yoke). The other possible fact is that a bucket has its additional meaning: "*a beam or yoke used to hang or carry items.*" (Phrase.org.uk 2017)

The expression is widely used in a newspaper as it was found in the corpus: News on the Web. (NOW, 2017) Various examples were found, from different types of newspaper from all around the world, *e.g., The Independent, Irish Times, MetroNews Canada etc.* The frequent occurrence was also discovered in the Corpus of American Soap Operas, (CASO 2017) mainly from 2000-2011. By comparing the COCA and British National Corpus, the usage in America is more often, furthermore, the highest occurrence was in the 1910s, 1950, and the 1980s.

The two idiomatic expressions used it the set were: *kick the habit* and *kick up one's heels.* The first one means to give up something harmful which was an individual doing for a long time, for example, smoking. The second means to have fun, or to enjoy some activity, however, in 15th century it had a different meaning - to be killed. (Ammer 2003, 584)

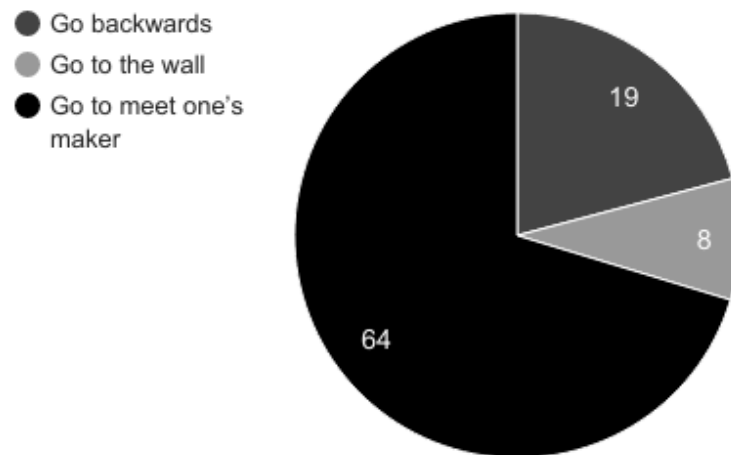## 5.3   Which of these idioms mean to decease?

Figure 7. Go to meet one's maker (source: the author)

If it is compared to the first two figures, in this case, the right answer was not that clear to the respondents. However, the majority of them responded correctly. By the maker in this idiom is meant God. When someone is ready or *goes to meet the maker*, it means he or she is going to die and meet God in heaven. The idiom can be used in both cases either if the death is natural or if it is caused by someone else. (Urban Dictionary 2017)

What makes idioms in this set similar is the same structure - go somewhere, but their figurative meaning is different. What was interesting the meaning of an idiom *go to the wall* is connected to business and means to bankrupt, be defeated, be destroyed or either to take an extreme position, (The Free Dictionary 2017), but when a person says *go to the wall on something* or *for something/someone* the meaning completely changed. It means to do as much as possible for the person or take a significant risk. The contexts found on CASO, and COCA shows more usage in this later mentioned context. When the newspapers are concerned, the idiom connected to business is widely used. Based on the various corpuses (COCA, CASO, BNC, and NOW) the idiom to *go backwards* is commonly used in everyday life. (COCA 2017), (CASO 2017), (BNC 2017), (NOW 2017)

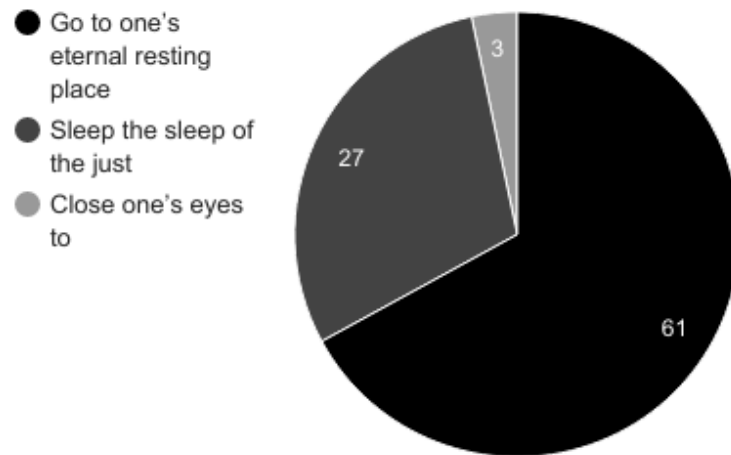## 5.4 Which of these idioms mean to close your eyes forever?

Figure 8. Go to one's eternal resting place (source: the author)

As it is showed in this figure above, neither here was the correct answer stated easily. More than a half ticked the correct idiom, but almost one third was tempted by the idiom *sleep the sleep of the just*. The literal meaning of this idioms leads to the conclusion that the sleep of the just will be connected to the eternal rest, but it is not true. This idiom refers to the uninterrupted and deep sleep which is not disturbed by anything and anyone. (Oxford Dictionaries 2017) The one connected to death is, in this case, an idiomatic expression to *go to one's eternal resting place*. The last idiom from this set is *close one's eyes to* (Dictionary 2017) which mean to ignore or refuse to admit something. Also, these idioms are consisting of words which can be connected to death: sleep, and closed eyes could have led to the confusion of non-native respondents.

5.5 Which of these idioms mean to be dead and buried?
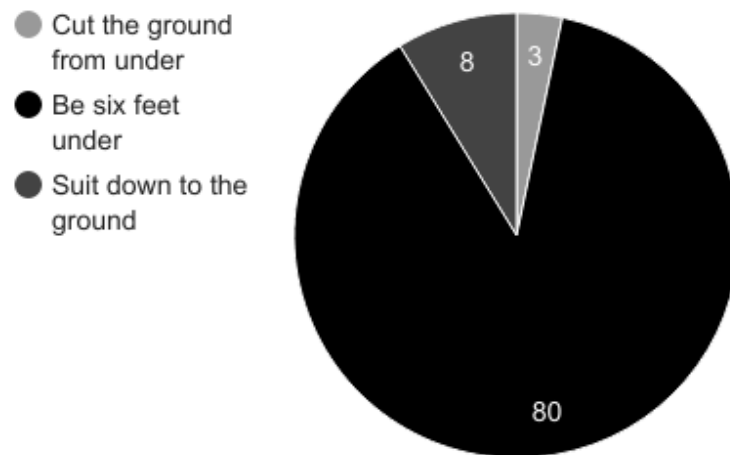

Figure 9. Be six feet under (source: the author)

All of the three idioms in the set have two common words, these are; under and ground. The ground can be among others connected to the place where the bodies are buried, and these bodies are usually buried under the ground. However, based on the figure it can be assumed that the idiom *to be six feet under* belongs to the group of commonly used and known idioms. Why six feet? During the Great Plague in London was a mortality of people extremely high. There was an enormous amount of corps every single week. People at that time believed that the cause of a great spread is because of shallow graves. So the Mayor of London came up with the solutions and ordered to make the graves at least six feet under. Lately, it was discovered that from the scientific point of view, the depth does not influence a spread of the disease, the cause of the spread is usually an insect. (Funeralfund.com 2013)

The figurative meanings of following idioms were taken from the Cambridge Dictionary. (2017) By the idiom *cut the ground from under (somebody's feet)* can describe the situation when a person make an idea of someone else less right or when he or she does something before or better than the other person. (Cambridge Dictionary 2017) The idiomatic expression *suit down to the ground* is not connected to the death at all. This expression expresses when something fits perfectly to someone.

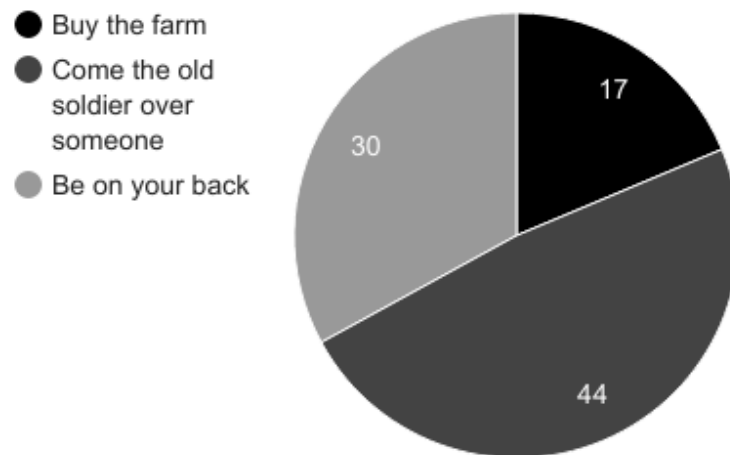## 5.6 Which of these idioms mean to die in combat?

Figure 10. Buy a farm (source: the author)

The figure above is the first case of an incorrect answer. The participants stated the idiom *come the old soldier over someone* as the equivalent of to die in combat. The elements which could have helped them to choose might be word combat and soldier, words which fit together. The word old can evoke a feeling of not being able to fight anymore and the need of being replaced by someone else. Although the respondents clearly stated this idiom as a correct one, it has a different meaning. This expression can be used when someone is given a task because he or she is skilled enough to do that on the contrary to someone less qualified. (Siefring 60, 2004) The second idiom; *be on your back* describes the situation when a person is lying in his bed and is recovering from a bad illness. (Siefring 12, 2004)

The correct equivalent for the one in a question is *buy a farm*. After a more detailed research by using corpuses was founded that this idiom is not commonly used. Various usage of this expression was found but none of them was used in the context connected to death. (COHA 2017) The idiom has its origin in the USA and was used in the military during wars. It is said that the pilot of the plane who had a crash had to pay the money to the owner of a farm whose land the plane crash destroyed. (Siefring 43, 2004) The other story says that when the pilot died, his benefit was paid to his family and should serve them as a source of money for living and for example to buy a farm. The Phrase Finder

(2017) gives a couple examples where the idiom was used in its death context: "He's bought it, he is dead - that is, he has paid with his life." "The police dispatcher says a plane just bought the farm." This idiom has a shorter version: *He bought it* which is the same as a Czech one *koupil to*.

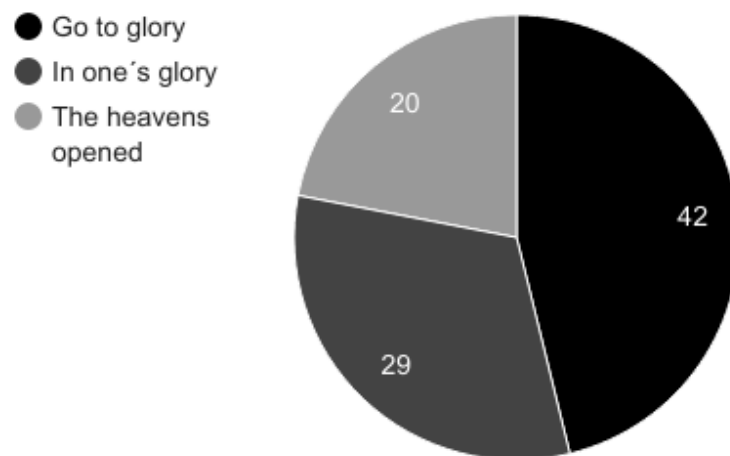## 5.7 Which of these idioms mean to die and go to the heaven?

Figure 11. Go to glory (source: the author)

The respondents correctly denoted the right answer. On the web page of Macmillan Dictionary is stated that *go to glory* is an old-fashioned phrase which means to die and go to heaven. (Macmillan Dictionary 2017) The fact of being an old-fashioned expression supports the research on COHA. The frequency of this phrase is low and found back at times, from the 1830s until 1970s. (COHA 2017) The origin of this phrase was not discovered, but all the various meanings of the word glory are connected to positive things such as joys, beauty, rejoice or pride. The only meaning connected to religion and saints is *a glory = aureola.*

To be in one's glory refers to being happy, feeling joy and enjoying herself/himself. The idiomatic expression *the heavens opened* does not mean that the heaven has opened for accepting new dead men but for expressing a sudden change in the weather with a strong rain. (The Free Dictionary 2017) According to the obtained data from COCA (2017) and BUY-BNC (2017) this idiom is commonly used.

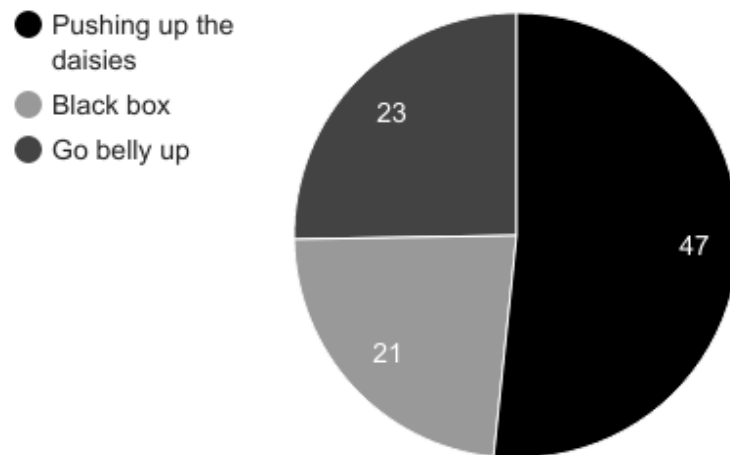## 5.8 Which of these idioms mean to be dead and buried?

Figure 12. Pushing up the daisies (source: the author)

Slightly more than a half of the questioned denoted *be pushing up the daisies* as an idiom connected to death. Although the idiom had firstly appeared in a poem by Wilfred Owen about the First World War: "There is a cemetery full of heroes pushing up daisies." (Dictionary.com 2017) The expression itself was developing from the 1840s. Originally *to turn up your toes to the daisies* changed into shorter *to turn up your toes.* Daisies were used in this context because these flowers were usually growing on the graves. Another connected death idioms using the word daisy are following: *under the daisies, kick up daisies.* (Siefring 71, 2004) (Dalzell and Victor 2005, 1798)

The other two idioms were chosen by almost the same amount of people. The *black box* is not a casket but a device used in airplanes and can be removed from the plane as a package. It records the flight, and in a case of some tragedy, the data from the *black box* are used as the evidence. The idiomatic expression *to go belly up* is connected to business and means to fail, not to lie in the grave belly up. (Dictionary.com 2017) (The Free Dictionary 2017)

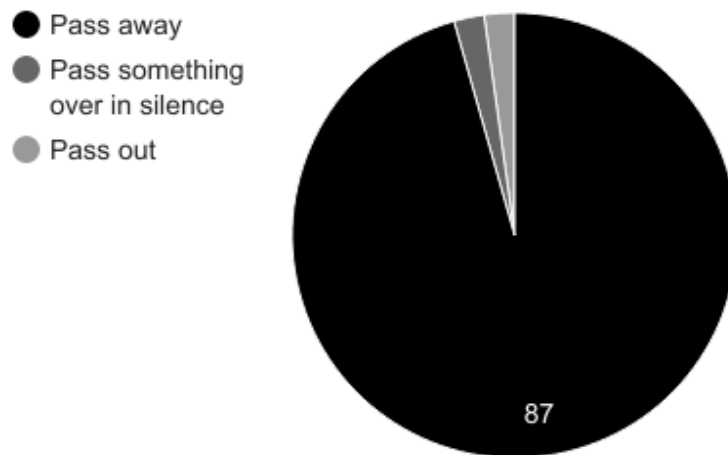## 5.9 Which of these idioms mean to die?

Figure 13. Pass away (source: the author)

Idioms in the question had a common word *to pass*. As it is evident from the figure, the respondents did not have any difficulties in choosing the exact equivalent. *Pass away* is a common idiom and its usage dates back to 1810. During that times it was used in different contexts, *e.g., "You have had some trouble lately, but it will soon pass away, and forever."* (COHA 2017) Nowadays the idiom is mainly used for expressing the death of somebody. Furthermore, the frequency of usage is more common in the USA, more specifically in its spoken form, than in the UK. Additionally, the frequency is increasing since 2005 until nowadays. (COCA 2017) (BYU-BNC 2017)

Pass something over in silence means to ignore some fact which the person does not like silently without any comment or anger. *Pass out* is widely used idiom expressing a losing of consciousness for a short time. Based on the data from COCA the idiom is commonly used in USA more than in UK. (COCA 2017)

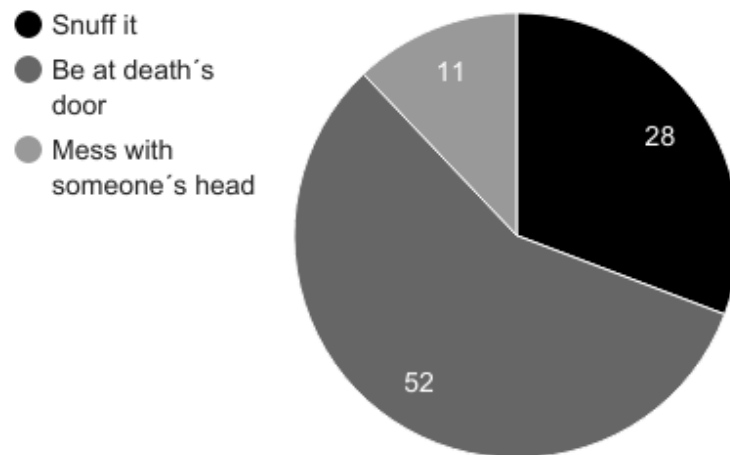## 5.10 Which of these idioms mean to die or to be killed?

Figure 14. Snuff it (source: the author)

In the diagram above happened the same as in figure number ten. The right equivalent for being dead or killed is *to snuff it*. More than a half of the respondents believe that *be at death's door* is the exact equivalent. The idiom means to be almost or near to death, often used for exaggeration, not to die. To *snuff it* can be connected to the extinguishing of candles. This question was a bit tricky. Obviously, the respondents do not know this idiom, and they picked the one which was familiar to them: *be at death's door*. By a look to the corpuses (COCA, NOW, CASO 2017) was discovered that more than *snuff it* is used *snuff it out* which means to get rid of something, eliminate, or destroy.

The Free Dictionary (2017) provides an example: "The Nazis snuffed out the life of many Jewish children." On Collin's dictionary (2017) was found a table showing the occurrence of the expression in ten years, more specifically from 1998-2008. The usage of the idiom is fluctuating and has been decreasing especially since 2007.

The third idiom *mess with someone's head* is referring to making someone feel anxious or frustrated. (English Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017)

5.11 Have you ever seen these idioms? If yes, where was it?

The last question of the survey was asking about respondent's knowledge of the idioms. Whether they have seen them, heard them or known them. If the answer was yes, they were supposed to give more detailed answer.

One third of the people replied that they have never seen these idioms:

"Not really. I have not known almost any of them."

"Unfortunately I have not seen them."

"Not sure, the vast majority I have encountered for the very first time."

Some of them added that they were making their decision based on their language sense:

"I haven't seen these idioms before. I just guessed the close meaning."

5.11.1 Education

The answers of those who have experienced these idioms were similar. They said they had seen them in textbooks at school, universities or in language schools which they have attended:

"I have seen a couple of them in our JAC classes in Zlín, e.g., pushing up the daisies,
to pass away, to kick the bucket."

"Yes I have seen many of them, probably in high school."

"Yes, some of them. In some of the textbook when I was studying English in Secondary school."

5.11.2 Leisure Activities

The other often answered seeing them in books, movies, and series:

"Not all of them but mainly yes and I think it is either because I heard them in a TV show, I watch them in English, or either because I read it on some website."

"Some of them yes. I've mainly seen them in films or serials."

"Yes, some of them, in books or series."

5.11.3 Similarity with Particular Mother Tongues

Some respondents said that some of the idioms were similar or even the same at their mother tongue:

"Some of them. In the Bulgarian language, we have some that have the same meaning
or similar one. For example, to kick the bucket have the exactly same meaning."

"Some of them are the same in French, some others I've seen in books or movies,
but a few idioms were totally unknown to me."

5.12 Summary of the Survey

As it was stated in the introduction and also in the introduction to the analysis one of the aims was to spread the survey among as many nationalities as possible. The evidence that the objective was met is represented in the first figure. Another goal was to have at least 80 participants and this requirement was also met with 91 respondents.

Interesting and surprising was the fact that the vast majority (87%) has had the experience of attending classes taught by a native English teacher. Other chart shows that less than a half of the respondents have had an experience with living abroad especially in particular countries such as: Norway, Ireland and Malta. High number of them stated that Erasmus, a summer job or programs such as Work & Travel were their reasons to go abroad.

At the beginning of the second part were listed idioms which were used. Firstly, the exact equivalents were given and secondly, there was the rest of the idioms which were used. The idioms in each set were similar to each other, either all of them contained the same word, or they included words which can be somehow connected to death and dying but only one of the idiom was the correct equivalent.

The results were very good but they do not support the hypothesis stated in the introduction. By the analysis of the data, it was discovered that more or less majority of the respondents were able to choose the correct equivalent. There were only two cases when the respondents completely failed. One was in a question number six and second in the last question. As it is explained in the comments below these charts, the idiom *buy the farm* was discovered to not being commonly used as well as the idiom to *snuff it*.

It is assumed that respondents either knew these idioms or they were using their language sense and guess. However, the number of respondents is too low to make any significant conclusions.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the thesis was to find out whether non-native speakers of English understand idioms from the semantic field "death and to die". Therefore there was used a survey which was spread among people from different corners of the world. The respondents were identifying the right idiom to the equivalents in questions.

The hypothesis proposed that non-native speakers will not know the majority of the idioms and they will not be able to assign the correct idiom to the exact equivalent. Apart from two cases were respondents successful and this fact does not prove the hypothesis. As it is seen in the practical part, each question has its own chart with the following comment. The comment usually includes the information about the origin of the idiom, the meaning of all the idioms in the set, and frequency of usage. Various corpuses were used to get the data and in some cases, it was not successful. In some comments, when the majority of wrong answers were made by Czechs or Slovaks, I used my own assumptions of why this is. Even though the results were interesting and gave a little overview, the number of respondents was too low to give us a precise answer about knowledge of idioms from this specific semantic field.

The theoretical part gave examples of various definitions taken from dictionaries or books by different linguists. Secondly, there was a detailed division of idioms from different points of view. I also focused on the importance of idioms and used several examples concerning idioms and non-native speakers which were found in various publications. In addition, various cases of studies or surveys were described in this chapter as well. The end of the second chapter was about Idiom Processing Theories; their development, purpose, and belief, moreover, when practical examples were found they were presented there either. And eventually, there was a short chapter about the origin of idioms and a brief history of English language.

Even though the results of this particular survey were surprisingly good, there still can be some friend in the future who can get us to the tricky situation, maybe by an idiom from a different semantic field.

"There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met."

William Butler Yeats

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IDM   Idiom Diffusion Model of Second Language

FCE   the First Certificate in English

CAE   Cambridge English Advanced

IELT   International English Language Testing

TOEIC   Test of English for International

COCA   Corpus of Contemporary American English

COHA   The Corpus of Historical American English

CASO   Corpus of American Soap Operas

NOW   News on the Web

BNC   British National Corpus

L1   First language

L2   Second language

N   Noun

LIST OF FIGURES

APPENDICES

P I Questionnaire among non-native speakers

APPENDIX P I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello everyone,

This questionnaire focuses on understanding of English idioms by NON-NATIVE speakers of English. The collected data will be used for my Bachelor thesis. Please fill it in and I will be more than happy if you share it with your non-native English-speaking friends and family members in case they speak English as well. Please do not use any dictionaries.

Thank you very much for your time.

The general questions:

1. Where are you from?
2. Do you have a language certificate? If yes, which one?
3. What was your major of study at the University/High school?
4. Have you ever had a native English teacher?
5. Have you ever lived in English speaking country? (Erasmus, Internship, working…)

The questions dealing with idioms:

6. Which of these idioms mean to be almost dead?

a)   Have a foot in both camp

b)   Have one foot in the grave

c)   From the cradle to the grave

7. Which of these idioms mean to die?

a)   Kick the bucket

b)   Kick the habit

c)   Kick up one's heels

8. Which of these idioms mean to decease?

a)   Go backwards

b)   Go to the wall

c)   Go to meet one's maker

9. Which of these idioms mean to close your eyes forever?

a) Go to one's eternal resting place

b) Close one's eyes to

c) Sleep the sleep of the just

10. Which of these idioms mean to be dead and buried?

a) Cut the ground from under

b) Be six feet under

c) Suit down to the ground

11. Which of these idioms mean to die in a combat?

a) Buy the farm

b) Come the old soldier over someone

c) Be on your back

12. Which of these idioms mean to die and go to the heaven?

a) To buy the farm

b) Come the old soldier over someone

c) Be on your back

13. Which of these idioms mean to be dead and buried?

a) Pushing up the daisies

b) Black box

c) Go belly up

14. Which of these idioms mean to die?

a) Pass away

b) Pass something over in silence

c) Pass out

15. Which of these idioms mean to die or to be killed?

a) Snuff it

b) Mess with someone's head

c) Be at death's door

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16. Have you ever seen these idioms? If yes, where?