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Bachelor's thesis

CULTURALLY SPECIFIC IDIOMS IN BRITISH ENGLISH
(based on dictionaries and corpora)



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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
АНотація.....	5
INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IDIOM STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS.....	12
1.1. Lexicology and phraseology as branches of Linguistics	12
1.2. Semantic fields and lexical-semantic relations in the English language ...	15
1.3. Defining idioms within the framework of Phraseology	17
1.4. Language and Culture in Linguistic Theory	20
1.5. British Cultural Identity through idioms.....	23
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 1	26
CHAPTER 2. BRITISH IDIOMS IN LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT	28
2.1. Corpus and methodology of the research	28
2.2. Structural-semantic characteristics of culturally specific British idioms ..	31
2.3. Cultural context and pragmatic functions of British idioms.....	37
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2	42
CONCLUSION.....	44
SUMMARY.....	47
REFERENCES	50
APPENDICES	55

ABSTRACT

Tretiak D. I. Culturally specific idioms in the British English. – Bachelor's Thesis.

The present Bachelor's thesis paper investigates culturally specific idioms in the British variety of English. The relevance of the topic stems from the growing interest of contemporary linguistics in the interface between language and culture, as well as the practical need for a deeper understanding of phraseological units that encode national identity. In spite of substantial general work on phraseology, the question of specifically British cultural specificity of idioms continues to be addressed mainly in piecemeal fashion, which leaves a significant gap for systematic study.

The object of the research is constituted by culturally specific idiomatic expressions of the British variety of English. The subject is the structural, semantic, linguocultural and pragmatic characteristics of these idioms. The aim of the paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of a corpus of British culturally specific idioms in order to identify the ways in which British cultural identity is verbalised in phraseology.

The methodological foundation rests on cognitive linguistics, Cultural Linguistics in the sense of Sharifian, the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Kövecses, and the ethnopragmatic framework of Goddard. The empirical base comprises fifty units selected from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (fourth edition, 2020) and the Cambridge Dictionary, with their behaviour traced through the British National Corpus, GloWbE, iWeb and Spoken BNC2014.

The scholarly novelty consists in systematic application of recent theoretical frameworks (Cultural Linguistics, the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory) to the material in question and in a combined corpus pragmatic approach that joins synchronic frequency analysis with diachronic examination of cultural motivations. The main findings of the work demonstrate that culturally specific British idioms cluster around ten key cultural categories, with *cricket terminology*, *tea*, *weather* and *class consciousness* forming the most representative groups.

Keywords: idiom, phraseological unit, cultural specificity, British English, Cultural Linguistics, conceptual metaphor, corpus linguistics, cultural conceptualisations.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Третяк Д. І. Культурно-специфічні ідіоми у британському варіанті англійської мови. – Бакалаврська робота.

Ця бакалаврська робота присвячена дослідженню культурно-специфічних ідіом британського варіанту англійської мови. Актуальність теми зумовлена зростаючим інтересом сучасного мовознавства до взаємодії мови та культури, а також практичною потребою у глибшому розумінні фразеологічних одиниць, що кодують національну ідентичність. Незважаючи на значну кількість загальних праць із фразеології, питання культурної специфічності саме британських ідіом досі розглядається переважно фрагментарно, що залишає суттєву прогалину для систематичного вивчення.

Об'єктом дослідження є культурно-специфічні ідіоматичні вирази британського варіанту англійської мови. Предметом – їх структурні, семантичні, лінгвокультурні та прагматичні характеристики. Метою роботи є комплексний аналіз корпусу британських культурно-специфічних ідіом задля виявлення способів вербалізації британської культурної ідентичності у фразеології.

Методологічну основу становлять когнітивна лінгвістика, культурна лінгвістика у трактуванні Шаріфіана, розширена теорія концептуальної метафори Ковечеша та етнопрагматична модель Годдарда. Емпіричну базу складають п'ятдесят одиниць, відібраних із «Оксфордського словника ідіом» (четверте видання, 2020 р.) та Кембриджського словника, проаналізованих на матеріалі Британського національного корпусу, GloWbE, iWeb та Spoken BNC2014.

Наукова новизна полягає у систематичному застосуванні сучасних теоретичних підходів (культурної лінгвістики та розширеної теорії

концептуальної метафори) до досліджуваного матеріалу, а також у поєднаному корпусно-прагматичному підході, що інтегрує синхронний частотний аналіз із діахронним вивченням культурних мотивацій. Основні результати роботи засвідчують, що культурно-специфічні британські ідіоми концентруються навколо десяти ключових культурних категорій, де найбільш представленими групами є *крикет*, *чай*, *погода* та *класова свідомість*.

Ключові слова: ідіома, фразеологічна одиниця, культурна специфічність, британський варіант англійської мови, культурна лінгвістика, концептуальна метафора, корпусна лінгвістика, культурні концептуалізації.

INTRODUCTION

The present Bachelor's qualification paper is devoted to the linguocultural and corpus based investigation of culturally specific idioms in the British variety of English. Idiomatic expressions occupy a position of particular importance in the lexical system of any language, since they combine the formal stability of fixed multiword units with the cognitive density of metaphorical and metonymic motivation. In the case of British English, idioms have long served as condensed carriers of national experience, encoding the historical, geographical, social and pragmatic specificity of the speech community in which they emerged.

The relevance of the research is determined by several converging factors. The first concerns the steady expansion of Cultural Linguistics as an autonomous research paradigm during the past decade. As Sharifian observes in his programmatic monograph [Sharifian 2017, p. 1], Cultural Linguistics «explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisations», thereby providing a framework within which fixed expressions can be analysed not as isolated curiosities of the lexicon but as instances of cultural cognition entrenched in language. The second factor is the maturation of large electronic corpora that permit empirical observation of idiomatic behaviour. The British National Corpus, the iWeb corpus described by Davies and Kim [Davies & Kim 2019, p. 1], and the Global Web based English corpus introduced by Davies and Fuchs [Davies & Fuchs 2015, p. 1] together provide the means of comparing British usage with that of other varieties of English. Finally, in the educational context of the bachelor's programme in English philology, the analysis of British idiomatic phraseology offers a productive site at which lexicology, semantics, pragmatics and cultural studies converge.

The current state of research on the topic can be summarised as follows. The general theory of phraseology and its English application have been substantially advanced in works that include the historical reconstruction of the discipline by Autelli [Autelli, 2021], the comprehensive volume on formulaic language edited by Trklja and Grabowski [Trklja & Grabowski, 2021], the typological proposals of

Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk, 2021], and the corpus oriented investigations of Parizoska [Parizoska, 2022] and Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi [Rafatbakhsh & Ahmadi, 2019]. The cultural and conceptual dimensions have been explored in the synthesis offered by Sharifian [Sharifian, 2017], in the volume on cultural keywords in discourse compiled by Levisen and Waters [Levisen & Waters, 2017], and in the recent surveys of World Englishes through the lens of Cultural Linguistics by Polzenhagen and colleagues [Polzenhagen et al., 2024] and by Sadeghpour and Sharifian [Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2021]. The pragmatic and ethnopragmatic perspective on Anglo English has been developed by Goddard and Ye [Goddard & Ye, 2015], by Goddard in his monograph on Anglo conversational humour [Goddard, 2018a; Goddard, 2018b], and most recently by van Dorst, Gillings and Culpeper [van Dorst et al., 2024] in their corpus based study of British politeness formulae. The contribution of Ukrainian linguistics to the analysis of English idiomatic phraseology has been substantial and is represented in the present work by the conceptual review of Basaraba on phraseology and the phraseological unit [Басараба, 2020], by the cognitive linguistic studies of Kovaliuk and Kovaliuk on the metaphorical instantiation of English idiomatic expressions [Ковалюк & Ковалюк, 2024], by the work of Mizyn on the syntactic and semantic characteristics of pragmatic idioms [Мизин, 2017] and by the doctoral investigation of Moseichuk on single-word idioms in contemporary English publicistic discourse [Мосейчук, 2009]. At the same time, scholarly attention to the specifically British cultural specificity of idioms remains largely dispersed, with Coombs-Hoar [Coombs-Hoar, 2021] standing out as one of the few comprehensive doctoral treatments dedicated to the formation of English idioms within British culture during the post war period.

The object of the research consists of culturally specific idiomatic expressions of the British variety of English. The notion «culturally specific» is understood here in the sense developed within Cultural Linguistics, namely as the property of a linguistic unit that encodes a cultural conceptualisation distinctive of the speech community of British English speakers, where the conceptualisation may concern

historical events, social practices, geographical realities, sport traditions or interpersonal scripts that are not equally salient in other varieties of English.

The subject of the research is constituted by the structural, semantic, linguocultural and pragmatic characteristics of these idioms, considered both synchronically through their behaviour in contemporary corpora and with attention to the diachronic motivations that explain their cultural specificity.

The aim of the work is to provide a coherent linguocultural and corpus based description of culturally specific idioms in British English, to identify the cultural categories around which they cluster, to characterise the conceptual mechanisms that motivate their figurative meaning, and to outline the pragmatic functions that they perform in present day British discourse.

In order to achieve the stated aim, the following tasks have been formulated. The first task is to review the contemporary state of phraseology, lexicology and the related branches of linguistics, with particular attention to the place of idioms within the broader system of multiword expressions. The second task consists in surveying recent theoretical frameworks for the description of the language and culture interface, especially Cultural Linguistics and Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The third task is to compile, on the basis of authoritative reference works, an empirical corpus of British culturally specific idioms representative of the principal cultural domains. The fourth task involves the structural and semantic classification of the assembled material. The fifth task is the linguocultural interpretation of the units in terms of cultural categories, schemas and metaphors. The final task concerns the pragmatic functions of British culturally specific idioms in spoken and written discourse, with reference to data from Spoken BNC2014.

The methodological basis of the research combines several approaches. The general scientific method of analytical synthesis is employed throughout the theoretical chapter. The descriptive method, accompanied by component and contextual analysis, supports the structural and semantic classification. The cognitive linguistic method, drawing on the four level model of conceptual metaphor

proposed by Kövecses [Kövecses 2017, p. 321], permits the identification of image schemas, source domains and frames that motivate idiomatic figurative meaning. The linguocultural method, formulated within the Cultural Linguistics paradigm of Sharifian [Sharifian, 2017], grounds the interpretation of idioms as carriers of cultural conceptualisations. The corpus method, in line with the methodological guide of Stefanowitsch [Stefanowitsch, 2020], underpins the verification of frequency, distribution and contextual behaviour. Where appropriate, the metaphor identification protocol MIPVU developed in Nacey and colleagues [Nacey et al., 2019] has been consulted for the identification of metaphorically used expressions. The ethnopragmatic perspective of Goddard and Ye [Goddard & Ye, 2015] has informed the analysis of pragmatic functions associated with British keywords such as fair play, understatement and self deprecation.

The empirical material of the work comprises 50 culturally specific British idioms catalogued in Appendix A. The selection has been carried out on the basis of three concurrent criteria. The first criterion is lexicographic attestation in the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, fourth edition [Ayto, 2020], and in the Cambridge Dictionary [Cambridge Dictionary, 2024]. The second is the presence of explicit British or Britishised cultural motivation, established with reference to the Oxford English Dictionary [Oxford English Dictionary, 2024] and to the doctoral monograph of Coombs-Hoar [Coombs-Hoar, 2021]. The third criterion is sufficient frequency in the British National Corpus and the British section of the iWeb corpus to permit corpus observation.

The theoretical significance of the research consists in the consolidation, on the material of British idioms, of the recent integrative paradigm that joins Cultural Linguistics, Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory and ethnopragmatics. The practical value of the obtained results lies in their applicability to the teaching of English lexicology, English phraseology and intercultural communication.

The structure of the work mirrors the formulated tasks. After the introduction, Chapter 1 elaborates the theoretical foundations, moving from lexicology and

phraseology to the definition of idioms, the language and culture interface, and British cultural identity as expressed through idiomatic expressions. Chapter 2 presents the corpus and methodology, the structural-semantic analysis of the assembled material, and the cultural and pragmatic functions of British idioms in discourse. Each chapter closes with concise conclusions. The general conclusions consolidate the findings, and the references list contains forty four open access scholarly sources.

The total volume of the work is sixty pages of main text, with the empirical catalogue and supporting materials placed in the appendices in accordance with the requirements of the educational and scientific institute of philology of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The references list contains forty four sources, all in open access, all published between 2009 and 2026, and none authored by Russian scholars or published in the Russian Federation, in conformity with the academic and ethical standards of the institution.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IDIOM STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS

1.1. Lexicology and phraseology as branches of Linguistics

Any examination of idioms within the British variety of English must begin from a clearly delimited understanding of the linguistic disciplines whose subject matter idioms straddle. Idioms belong, on the one hand, to the lexicon of the language and therefore fall within the domain of lexicology and lexical semantics. On the other hand, by virtue of their multiword character and their internal structural cohesion they form the central object of phraseology. The opening subsection of the present chapter therefore situates idioms at the intersection of these branches, beginning from the broader notion of the lexicon and proceeding to the narrower notion of fixed multiword expression.

Lexicology is conventionally defined as the linguistic discipline that investigates the lexical system of a language, that is, the inventory of words and word equivalents together with the relations holding among them. As Bednárová-Gibová formulates the matter in her contemporary university textbook, lexicology is concerned with the linguistic sign, with words and their meaning, and combines traditional topics with more recent scientific theories of lexical semantics and lexicography [Bednárová-Gibová, 2018]. The textbook of Stojičić and Stamenković aimed at students of English as a foreign language complements this view by foregrounding the historical development of the lexicon, the social stratification of vocabulary and the place of multiword lexical units within the system [Stojičić & Stamenković, 2018]. Both works confirm that lexicology cannot be limited to single word units, since a sizeable proportion of the lexicon is realised through fixed multiword expressions, including idioms.

Phraseology, the second of the disciplines relevant for the present study, is the branch of linguistics dedicated to the description of phraseological units, that is, of fixed and conventionalised multiword expressions. Autelli, in her recent historical reconstruction of the discipline, demonstrates that phraseology «actually has a

centuries long tradition» [Autelli 2021, p. 7] and revises the conventional attribution of its foundation to Charles Bally by tracing earlier scholarly engagement with the topic. The contemporary state of the discipline is captured in the open access volume edited by Trklja and Grabowski under the title *Formulaic Language: Theories and Methods*, which represents an authoritative recent stocktaking of the field [Trklja & Grabowski, 2021]. The introductory chapter to that volume notes that «formulaic language has been defined, labelled and operationalized in many different ways», a remark that reflects both the breadth of the field and the persistent terminological diversity that characterises it [Trklja & Grabowski 2021, p. iv].

The contemporary classification of phraseological units that has gained the widest currency in recent linguistic literature is the one elaborated by Mel'čuk in his 2021 contribution to the *Yearbook of Phraseology* [Mel'čuk, 2021]. Mel'čuk distinguishes three major families of phrasemes. The first family is constituted by lexical phrasemes, which themselves split into pragmatemes (situationally bound formulae such as *mind the gap*), clichés, idioms and collocations. The second family comprises morphological phrasemes. The third family consists of constructional or syntactic phrasemes. Within this typology, an idiom is defined precisely: «A lexemic phraseme is an idiom if it is non compositional» [Mel'čuk 2021, p. 35]. The criterion of non compositionality, that is, of the impossibility of deriving the meaning of the whole from the regular composition of the meanings of the parts, remains the principal criterion that singles out idioms from neighbouring categories of phraseme.

The Ukrainian tradition of phraseological studies has developed its own conceptual apparatus for the description of fixed multiword expressions and has made a substantial contribution to the analysis of English idiomatic material in particular. Basaraba, in her review of the principal approaches to the interpretation of phraseology and the phraseological unit, identifies the central features that distinguish phraseological units from individual words and stable word combinations from free combinations, and argues that the criteria of stability, reproducibility and non-compositionality of meaning together constitute the core diagnostic of phraseological status [Басараба, 2020]. The boundaries of the category

have been further problematised by Moseichuk, whose doctoral investigation of single-word idioms in contemporary English publicistic discourse demonstrates that the criterion of figurative non-compositionality may apply to univocal units as well, so that the category of the idiom is not strictly coextensive with that of the multiword expression [Мосейчук, 2009]. Within the cognitive linguistic strand of Ukrainian research, Kovaliuk and Kovaliuk model the meaning of an English idiom in context as a schematic representation operating on two distinct conceptual levels – the dynamic, instantiated by mental spaces, and the static, realised by frames, conceptual domains and image schemas – and verify the model on the analysis of English idiomatic expressions denoting cooperation [КОВАЛЮК & КОВАЛЮК, 2024]. The work of these scholars confirms that the position of the idiom within the lexicon and within the system of phrasemes can be specified more precisely once the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions are added to the structural diagnostic.

Pamies offers a complementary perspective by introducing the notion of grammatical metaphor and functional idiomaticity, arguing that the distinction between phrasemes and free combinations admits of degrees and is best modelled along a continuum of fixedness [Pamies 2017, p. 69]. Parizoska, in her corpus study of 160 verb phrase idioms in the enTenTen13 corpus, has demonstrated empirically that the structural modifications such idioms accept reduce to four types: alternation between active and passive voice, alternation between transitive and intransitive constructions, directional opposites and nominalisation [Parizoska, 2022]. This finding refines the older binary opposition between fixed and variable expressions by showing that variability is itself patterned.

In sum, lexicology, lexical semantics and phraseology converge in their concern with the lexicon as a structured network in which idioms occupy a recognisable and well defined position. The position of idioms is characterised by non compositionality, by varying but patterned fixedness, by integration into broader semantic fields and by participation in the cognitive and cultural conceptualisation of the speech community.

1.2. Semantic fields and lexical-semantic relations in the English language

Lexical semantics addresses the meaning aspect of the lexicon. In the substantial chapter contributed by Stringer to the Handbook of Research on Bilingual and Intercultural Education, lexical semantics is defined as the branch of linguistics concerned «with inherent aspects of word meaning and the semantic relations between words» [Stringer 2019, p. 180]. Stringer further specifies that the lexicon is best modelled as «an interactive network with multiple types of connections between elements», an approach that captures both paradigmatic relations of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy and syntagmatic relations of collocation and selectional restriction [Stringer 2019, p. 183].

The notion of the lexical or semantic field is similarly characterised by Stringer as «a grouping of lexical items that have a general conceptual association» [Stringer 2019, p. 184]. The relevance of this notion for the study of idioms becomes particularly evident when culturally salient fields are considered. The British lexical field of weather, for instance, accommodates not only single lexemes such as *rain*, *cloud*, *storm* and *mist*, but also a dense network of idiomatic units that include *raining cats and dogs*, *under the weather*, *right as rain*, *every cloud has a silver lining* and *save for a rainy day*. The presence of so many idioms within a single conceptual field signals that British speakers have culturally elaborated the field beyond what mere referential need would require.

The cognitive linguistic perspective on lexical semantics, exemplified in the recent SpringerBriefs synthesis by Winters and Nathan [Winters & Nathan, 2020], reinforces this network conception. The authors emphasise the centrality of prototype theory, of polysemy as a radial network of meanings and of the conceptual metaphor in the structuring of lexical meaning. From this perspective, the lexicon is viewed not as a stable inventory of discrete units with fixed denotations but as an organised cognitive resource in which figurative extensions, idiomatic crystallisations and culturally entrenched mappings constitute structural elements of the system rather than peripheral curiosities. The implication for the present study is

direct: British idioms are to be analysed not as exceptions to the regular lexicon but as fully fledged components of the cognitively structured lexical network of British English.

The semantic field perspective allows researchers to identify the relative density of idiomatic elaboration across cultural domains. Where the inventory of idioms accumulates in particular fields, this accumulation can be interpreted as a signature of cultural elaboration. As Sharifian observes in his programmatic monograph on Cultural Linguistics [Sharifian 2017, p. 7], «cultural categories are those culturally constructed conceptual categories that are primarily reflected in the lexicon». The British weather field, the British sport field with its dense cricket subfield, the British class field with its specialised vocabulary of upper crust, blue blood and silver spoon, and the British tea field provide especially rich examples of culturally elaborated lexical networks.

Among the semantic relations relevant to idiomatic phraseology, the relations of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy warrant explicit attention. Idiomatic expressions may stand in synonym-like relations to single lexical items or to other idioms: *kick the bucket*, *meet one's Maker* and *pop one's clogs* all conventionalise the concept of death, but each invokes a different register and cultural frame. Similarly, the idioms *on the wagon* and *off the wagon* stand in a relation of antonymy. Hyponymic organisation is visible in the cricket field, where the general category of idiomatic expressions derived from sport contains a subcategory of cricket idioms. The recognition of these relations is essential for the thematic categorisation undertaken in Chapter 2 of the present work.

The broader network of lexical-semantic relations also includes collocation, which differs from idiomaticity by virtue of its partial compositionality. The expression *strong tea* exemplifies this pattern: the pairing is conventional, but the meaning is still computable from the parts. The boundary between idiom and collocation is thus a gradual one, and its operationalisation requires the application of the non-compositionality criterion discussed in the preceding subsection. The

significance of collocation for the study of British English lies in the fact that culturally specific collocational preferences may shade into full idiomaticity over time, a process that is observable in the diachronic dimension of the British corpus data.

1.3. Defining idioms within the framework of Phraseology

The contemporary definition of the idiom is the product of converging lines of investigation that come from cognitive linguistics, from corpus linguistics, from the typological tradition associated with Mel'čuk and from the pragmatic perspective recently advanced by Alghazo and colleagues. Although terminological variation persists, the core properties on which the literature converges may be summarised under five headings: non compositionality of meaning, structural fixedness, multiword status, conventionality and figurative or culturally embedded motivation.

Table 1.1 below brings together the principal definitions of the idiom that have been proposed in scholarly works published between 2015 and 2025 and that are referenced throughout the present study.

Table 1.1

Comparative survey of idiom definitions in the literature of 2015 to 2025

Author, year	Definition or core property	Page
Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk, 2021]	«A lexemic phraseme is an idiom if it is non-compositional». Idioms are positioned within a tripartite system of lexical, morphological and constructional phrasemes.	p. 35
Kovács [Kovács, 2016]	Idioms are reviewed against various classifications, with emphasis on degrees of fixedness, transparency and motivation.	p. 86

Table 1.1 (continued)

Author, year	Definition or core property	Page
Pamies [Pamies, 2017]	Idioms are characterised through grammatical metaphor and functional idiomaticity, with different degrees of fixedness placed on a continuum.	p. 69
Trantescu and Reiss [Trantescu & Reiss, 2022]	Idioms «arise from our more general knowledge of the world (embodied in our conceptual system)» and reflect cultural conceptual fields shared by speakers.	p. 533
El Yamani et al. [El Yamani et al., 2025]	Idioms «are not merely strings of words or frozen patterns of language; rather, they are creative and motivated» by underlying conceptual metaphors and embodied experience.	p. 10
Alghazo et al. [Alghazo et al., 2022]	Idioms «are essentially used as pragmatic messages which are heavily laden with implicatures and contextual effects», integrating fixed semantic content with variable speaker meaning.	Abstract
Cambridge Dictionary [Cambridge Dictionary, 2024]	«A group of words in a fixed order that has a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own».	s.v. idiom

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [Alghazo et al., 2022; Cambridge Dictionary, 2024; El Yamani et al., 2025; Kovács, 2016; Mel'čuk, 2021; Pamies, 2017; Trantescu & Reiss, 2022].

As table 1.1 indicates, the seven authoritative formulations differ in emphasis but converge on the recognition of three constitutive properties. First, all definitions presuppose multiword status. Second, all definitions invoke some form of semantic

non compositionality, whether stated in the strict logical sense of Mel'čuk or in the looser cognitive sense of El Yamani and colleagues. Third, the more recent formulations, such as those of Trantescu and Reiss [Trantescu & Reiss, 2022] and of Alghazo and colleagues [Alghazo et al., 2022], add a further dimension by explicitly linking idiomatic meaning to cultural and pragmatic embeddedness.

The non compositionality criterion admits of degrees, a fact that has been increasingly emphasised in recent literature. Trantescu and Reiss illustrate the point through the analysis of English heart idioms, observing that idioms «arise from our more general knowledge of the world (embodied in our conceptual system)» [Trantescu & Reiss 2022, p. 533]. They further note that «people that belong to the same culture possess common information about various conceptual fields» [Trantescu & Reiss 2022, p. 534]. From this perspective non compositionality is not a logical defect of an expression but a cognitive and cultural property: the meaning of an idiom is not derivable from its parts taken separately, but it is fully derivable from its parts considered against the background of the relevant cultural conceptualisations and conceptual metaphors of the speech community.

The pragmatic angle introduced by Alghazo and colleagues [Alghazo et al., 2022] enriches this picture further. According to their account, idioms are «composed of fixed semantic content, plus a variant speaker related meaning» [Alghazo et al., 2022, Abstract]. This characterisation acknowledges that the conventional meaning of an idiom does not exhaust its functional value in discourse. The use of an idiom is itself a pragmatic act that conveys evaluation, emphasis, solidarity, irony, humour or social positioning. The pragmatic dimension of idioms has also been independently elaborated within the Ukrainian tradition: Mizyn, in her examination of the syntactic and semantic characteristics of pragmatic idioms in the English language, demonstrates that pragmatic idioms occupy a structurally distinguishable position within the broader system of phrasemes by virtue of their conventional pairing with recurrent communicative situations and the speaker meanings they are designed to convey [Мизин, 2017].

Among the categories from which idioms must be carefully distinguished are the following four neighbours: collocations, pragmatemes, clichés and proverbs. Collocations, as conceptualised in the framework of Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk 2021 p. 34], are non compositional in a weaker sense. Pragmatemes are situationally bound formulae whose conventional meaning is anchored to a recurrent communicative situation, as in *mind the gap*. Clichés are fixed expressions whose figurative content has become conventional through high frequency repetition. Proverbs constitute self contained complete utterances with prescriptive or generalising content.

From the corpus linguistic perspective the operationalisation of the idiom category proceeds through observable behaviour. The thematic corpus study of Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi reports that, of 1506 idioms drawn from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 15.5 per cent had zero frequency, 48.2 per cent occurred between one and forty times, and 36.3 per cent occurred more than forty times [Rafatbakhsh & Ahmadi, 2019]. This observation directly motivates the methodological choice in the present work to consult, in addition to general corpora, the BNC, the Spoken BNC2014 and the GloWbE corpus, all of which contain a substantial component of British data.

To sum up the present subsection, the idiom is here understood as a fixed multiword expression whose conventional meaning is non compositional in the cognitive cultural sense and whose use carries pragmatic value beyond mere reference. This characterisation positions idioms within the system of phrasemes, distinguishes them from collocations, pragmatemes, clichés and proverbs, and provides the conceptual basis for treating culturally specific idioms as carriers of cultural conceptualisations.

1.4. Language and Culture in Linguistic Theory

The integration of cultural considerations into the analysis of language has been a steady trend in twenty first century linguistics, and the past ten years have witnessed the consolidation of Cultural Linguistics as a recognisable framework.

The opening sentences of Sharifian's monograph state the position with programmatic clarity: «Cultural Linguistics explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisations» [Sharifian 2017, p. 1], where cultural conceptualisations are subdivided into cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors. Cultural schemas «capture beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behaviour as well as values» [Sharifian 2017, p. 7]; cultural categories «are those culturally constructed conceptual categories that are primarily reflected in the lexicon» [Sharifian 2017, p. 7]; and cultural metaphors are conceptual mappings whose source or target domain is itself culturally constituted.

The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture edited by Sharifian provides the broader context. The handbook collectively defends the position that languages «carry the cultural cognition of speech communities» [Sharifian 2015, p. 5], a position that is operationalised in the chapter by Risager on linguaculture. Risager defines linguaculture as the perspective that «focuses on culture in language or the cultural dimensions of language» and identifies three interrelated dimensions: a semantic and pragmatic dimension, a poetic dimension and an identity dimension [Risager 2015, p. 87, 91].

A particularly productive notion within Cultural Linguistics is that of the cultural keyword. Levisen and Waters define cultural keywords as «words around which whole discourses are organised» and emphasise that such words «are culturally revealing, difficult to translate and semantically diverse» [Levisen & Waters 2017, p. 1]. The British inventory of cultural keywords is rich and well documented. Goddard and Ye identify cultural keywords as «the concepts within which indigenous cultural psychology is framed» [Goddard & Ye 2015, p. 71].

The metaphorical dimension of language and culture relations is best handled within the multilevel framework of Kövecses [Kövecses, 2017]. At the level of image schemas, British idioms are anchored in universal schemas such as CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, BALANCE and UP DOWN. At the level of domains, the British inventory privileges domains drawn from the meteorological,

sporting, alimentary and historical experience of the speech community. At the level of frames, specifically British frames such as the cricket frame, the tea drinking frame, the queueing frame and the pub frame structure idiomatic expressions in distinctive ways. Finally, at the level of mental spaces, idioms are deployed in interaction to construct shared cultural ground between participants.

Polzenhagen and colleagues, in their authoritative 2024 survey of World Englishes through the lens of Cultural Linguistics, formalise this insight with the proposition that varieties of English «are shaped by their respective speakers' cultural cognition» [Polzenhagen et al., 2024, Abstract]. The volume edited by Sadeghpour and Sharifian on Cultural Linguistics and World Englishes makes the same point at greater length, with explicit case studies showing «how one and the same language may be associated with different systems of cultural conceptualisations» [Sadeghpour & Sharifian 2021, p. 3, 9].

Goddard's analysis of the cultural specificity of Anglo conversational humour makes the point with particular force. Goddard observes that the meanings of words such as *to joke* and *to tease* «are much more English specific than is commonly recognised» [Goddard 2018b, p. 487] and warns that adopting English humour categories without reflection «risks introducing an Anglocentric bias into our theoretical vocabulary» [Goddard 2018b, p. 488]. The dense lexicalisation of tentativeness in British conventional formulae is itself an idiomatic signature of British communicative culture, as documented quantitatively by van Dorst, Gillings and Culpeper, who in their corpus based study of 50 conventionalised politeness formulae in the BNC2014 distinguish three pragmatic types: tentativeness, deference and solidarity [van Dorst et al. 2024, p. 39].

The notion of cultural specificity at stake in the present research can therefore be made precise as follows. A British idiom is culturally specific if and only if its conventional figurative meaning is not derivable without reference to a cultural conceptualisation, schema, category, frame or keyword that is distinctive of the British speech community. Two operational tests follow from this definition. The

first is the comparative test: a culturally specific British idiom either lacks an equivalent in other Englishes or differs in frequency and connotation. The second is the etymological or cultural motivation test: a culturally specific British idiom can be traced to a documented cultural source that is part of the historical, geographical or social experience of British speakers.

1.5. British Cultural Identity through idioms

The verbalisation of British cultural identity through idiomatic expressions constitutes a particularly productive site for the application of the Cultural Linguistics framework. The opening sentences of Sharifian's monograph [Sharifian 2017, p. 1] provide the theoretical anchor, but the specific content of British identity as crystallised in idioms requires independent investigation, since the category of «British» itself is a complex cultural construction rather than a transparent geographical or political label.

The cultural keyword most often associated with British emotional culture is undoubtedly stiff upper lip. Dixon's monograph on the history of British emotional life [Dixon, 2015] documents the curious fact that the expression originated in early nineteenth century American sources before being adopted as a British self description in the period from approximately 1900 to 1937. Whatever its precise origin, the idiom is now firmly embedded in British cultural discourse and serves as the lexical anchor of a broader semantic field that includes *keep one's chin up*, *keep calm and carry on*, *muddling through* and the family of stoic locutions documented in Coombs-Hoar's doctoral monograph on the formation of English idioms in British culture between 1945 and 2020 [Coombs-Hoar, 2021].

Idioms such as *play with a straight bat* encode a cultural schema of fair play; idioms such as *not my cup of tea* reflect a cultural category, namely the British conceptualisation of preference through tea drinking; and idioms such as *under the weather* realise a cultural metaphor in which weather and bodily condition are systematically linked. The cricket idioms *hit for six*, *sticky wicket*, *play with a*

straight bat, *off one's own bat* and *it's not cricket* originate in the technical vocabulary of cricket and have been extended to the description of life situations in general. They reflect the historical importance of cricket as a national sport and as a vehicle of Victorian moral education, in which the values of fair play, honourable conduct and sporting behaviour were articulated through the lexicon of the game [Coombs-Hoar, 2021].

The class and aristocracy dimension of British cultural identity is encoded in idioms such as *blue blood*, *born with a silver spoon in one's mouth* and *the upper crust*, which belong to the upward orientation of class metaphors, in which higher position is encoded through visible markers of nobility. The expression *keeping up with the Joneses* captures the lateral pressure of class anxiety, an anxiety that has been documented as particularly salient in the British social context. The expression *U and non U*, coined in 1954 by Alan Ross and popularised by Nancy Mitford in 1955, codifies the sociolinguistic awareness of class differences in vocabulary.

The monarchy group encodes the institutional centrality of the Crown through expressions such as *the Queen's English*, *the royal we* and *fit for a king*. The history group preserves traces of formative historical events, with *meet one's Waterloo* and *Hobson's choice* as the most prominent examples. The geography group anchors idioms in specific British places: *carry coals to Newcastle* relies on the historical role of Newcastle as a coal exporting port, *send to Coventry* is traced to the English Civil War, and *from Land's End to John o'Groats* indexes the longitudinal extension of Great Britain.

British idioms participate in the three dimensions of linguaculture identified by Risager [Risager 2015, p. 87, 91]. Semantically and pragmatically they activate cultural conceptualisations in interaction; poetically they exploit metaphor, alliteration and rhythmic patterning, as in *right as rain*, *come rain or shine* and *raining cats and dogs*; and at the identity dimension they index membership in the British speech community. The hierarchical model of Kövecses [Kövecses, 2017] permits a clear articulation of why British idioms are simultaneously universal, in

their image schematic grounding, and culturally specific, in their frame and mental space realisations.

In summary, British cultural identity is verbalised in idiomatic expressions through the three analytical instruments of Cultural Linguistics distinguished by Sharifian – cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors – and their application to the material is the principal task of the empirical chapters that follow. The next chapter applies this conceptual apparatus to a corpus of 50 British culturally specific idioms.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 1

The theoretical foundations elaborated in the present chapter permit several consolidated conclusions that prepare the empirical chapters of the work.

First, idioms occupy a recognisable and structurally well defined position within the lexicon of British English. They belong simultaneously to the lexical system, where they participate in semantic fields and lexical relations, and to the system of phrasemes, where they are distinguished by non compositionality and varying degrees of fixedness. The current consensus in phraseology, articulated in the volume of Trklja and Grabowski [Trklja & Grabowski, 2021] and in the typological proposals of Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk, 2021], identifies idioms as non compositional lexemic phrasemes that admit patterned but limited variation, the four principal types of which were established empirically by Parizoska [Parizoska, 2022].

Second, semantic fields and lexical-semantic relations provide the structural context within which British idioms are organised. The density of idiomatic elaboration within particular cultural domains, notably weather, tea, sport and class, is itself diagnostic of cultural elaboration and constitutes the empirical basis for the thematic categorisation in Chapter 2.

Third, the contemporary definition of the idiom synthesises five constitutive properties: multiword status, non compositionality of meaning, structural fixedness, conventionality and cultural pragmatic embeddedness. The pragmatic dimension, brought into sharp focus by Alghazo and colleagues [Alghazo et al., 2022] and supported by the ethnopragmatic perspective of Goddard [Goddard, 2018b], is decisive for the analysis of British idioms, since it directs attention to the speaker meanings and cultural scripts that idioms instantiate.

Fourth, the integration of Cultural Linguistics, Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory and ethnopragmatics provides the most adequate theoretical framework for the analysis of culturally specific idioms. The framework permits the

identification of cultural schemas, categories and metaphors at four levels of conceptual organisation, from image schemas to mental spaces, and offers operational criteria for the recognition of cultural specificity.

Fifth, the verbalisation of Britishness in idiomatic expressions can be approached through the notion of the cultural keyword. The keywords fair, joke, tease, cuppa, weather, queue and stiff upper lip, among others, organise networks of idiomatic expressions that collectively constitute a synoptic record of British cultural cognition. The application of these insights to a corpus of fifty British idioms is the subject of Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2. BRITISH IDIOMS IN LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1. Corpus and methodology of the research

The empirical part of the present study rests on a deliberately combined methodology that brings together three complementary procedures: lexicographic selection, corpus verification and linguocultural interpretation. The combination is designed to ensure that each unit included in the analysis is simultaneously attested in authoritative reference works, observable in contemporary British usage and motivated by an identifiable cultural source. The triangulation of these three procedures is intended to neutralise the limitations that each procedure exhibits in isolation. Stefanowitsch in his open access guide to corpus methodology insists on the importance of combining quantitative observation with qualitative interpretation [Stefanowitsch, 2020].

The first step in the assembly of the empirical material consisted in lexicographic selection. The principal source of headwords was the fourth edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms compiled by Ayto, which contains over ten thousand figurative expressions and which represents the most authoritative recent reference work on the topic [Ayto, 2020]. The Cambridge Dictionary online platform served as a complementary source [Cambridge Dictionary, 2024]. Etymological information was retrieved from the Oxford English Dictionary online platform [Oxford English Dictionary, 2024] and cross checked against the doctoral monograph of Coombs-Hoar [Coombs-Hoar, 2021]. The application of two tests – the comparative test across varieties of English and the test of cultural motivation – produced a working corpus of fifty units, which constitutes Appendix A of the present paper.

The second step consisted in corpus verification. Five corpora of contemporary English were employed for this purpose. The corpora are listed in table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

Corpora and reference works employed in the empirical analysis

Corpus	Size	Composition	Period	Reference
BNC (1994 release)	100 million words	balanced British written and spoken	1980s to 1993	[Stefanowitsch, 2020, p. 87]
Spoken BNC2014	11.5 million words	face to face conversational British English	2012 to 2016	[Love et al. 2017, p. 319]
GloWbE	1.9 billion words	web pages from 20 English speaking countries	around 2012	[Davies & Fuchs 2015, p. 1]
iWeb	14 billion words	six varieties of English including British	around 2017	[Davies & Kim 2019, p. 1]
Reference dictionaries	over 10,000 idioms	Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (4th ed.) and Cambridge Dictionary	2020 to 2024	[Ayto, 2020]; [Cambridge Dictionary, 2024]

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [Ayto, 2020; Cambridge Dictionary, 2024; Davies & Fuchs, 2015; Davies & Kim, 2019; Love et al., 2017; Stefanowitsch, 2020].

The third step consisted in linguocultural interpretation, performed within the framework of Cultural Linguistics elaborated by Sharifian [Sharifian, 2017], with

use of the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Kövecses [Kövecses, 2017] and of the ethnopragmatic perspective formulated by Goddard and Ye [Goddard & Ye, 2015]. The interpretation proceeds at the four levels of conceptual organisation distinguished by Kövecses, namely image schema, domain, frame and mental space, and identifies the cultural categories, schemas and metaphors operative in each unit. Where appropriate, MIPVU principles documented by Nacey and colleagues [Nacey et al., 2019] were consulted in the identification of metaphorically used expressions.

The structural classification adopted in the present work follows the contemporary phraseological consensus represented in the typological proposals of Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk, 2021] and in the analytical work of Naciscione [Naciscione, 2020]. Six structural types are distinguished: verb phrase idioms, noun phrase idioms, prepositional and adverbial idioms, simile based idioms, binomial and rhythmic idioms, and sentential or clausal idioms. The semantic classification proceeds along the two complementary axes of source domain and cultural category.

A number of operational decisions should be stated explicitly. First, idiomatic variants are treated as a single unit if they share the same conceptual core. Second, idioms with attested American origin that have been thoroughly absorbed into British identity discourse are retained as Britishised units, with explicit annotation in Appendix A. Third, the unit of analysis is the conventional figurative form as recorded in the dictionary entry, with allowance for the systematic structural variation documented by Parizoska [Parizoska, 2022]. Fourth, the etymologies offered for individual idioms acknowledge the documented variability of the historical record and clearly distinguish between historically attested and folk etymological sources.

2.2. Structural-semantic characteristics of culturally specific British idioms

The structural classification of the fifty units of the empirical corpus is presented in table 2.2 below, which lists the six structural types and provides representative examples for each.

Table 2.2

Structural typology of culturally specific British idioms (n=50)

Structural type	Examples from the British corpus	Quantity (n=50)
Verb phrase idioms (V + complement)	hit for six; spill the beans; meet one's Waterloo; pull one's leg; carry coals to Newcastle; rob Peter to pay Paul; spend a penny; send to Coventry; play with a straight bat; have one's cake and eat it; keep one's chin up; save for a rainy day	17
Noun phrase idioms (N + modifier)	a stiff upper lip; the Queen's English; the lion's share; a storm in a teacup; blue blood; Hobson's choice; Dutch courage; the upper crust; a sticky wicket; hair of the dog; a fair-weather friend	12
Prepositional and adverbial idioms	under the weather; on the wagon; off one's own bat; in a pickle; in a different league	5
Simile based idioms	right as rain; drunk as a lord	2
Binomial and rhythmic idioms	come rain or shine; from Land's End to John o'Groats; bob's your uncle (formulaic)	3

Table 2.2 (continued)

Structural type	Examples from the British corpus	Quantity (n=50)
Sentential and clausal idioms	it's not cricket; bob's your uncle; raining cats and dogs; every cloud has a silver lining; keeping up with the Joneses; born with a silver spoon in one's mouth; cost an arm and a leg; not my cup of tea; one for the road	11

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of the empirical corpus presented in Appendix A; classification follows [Mel'čuk, 2021; Naciscione, 2020].

The distribution presented in table 2.2 calls for the following analytical commentary. The verb phrase type, with seventeen units of the fifty, is the most numerous structural class. This finding is consistent with the corpus distribution observed by Parizoska in her study of 160 English idioms, where verb phrase idioms also dominated the inventory [Parizoska, 2022]. Within the British material the verb phrase idioms display a marked preference for transitive structures, in which the verb takes a culturally specific direct object that supplies the figurative anchor: *hit for six* includes the cricket score, *spill the beans* includes the food noun, *meet one's Waterloo* includes the historical place.

Noun phrase idioms, with twelve units, constitute the second most numerous class. Within this group the recurrent pattern is the presence of a culturally salient modifier that combines with a generic head noun: a stiff upper lip, the Queen's English, the lion's share, blue blood, Hobson's choice, Dutch courage. The modifier is the carrier of cultural specificity, while the head noun supplies a recognisable conceptual anchor.

Sentential and clausal idioms, with eleven units, occupy the third most numerous position. This class includes the most pragmatically marked items of the British inventory, such as *it's not cricket*, *every cloud has a silver lining* and *keeping*

up with the Joneses. These units typically function as evaluative comments on a situation rather than as referential descriptions, and their pragmatic profile is closer to the idiom as pragmatic message described by Alghazo and colleagues [Alghazo et al., 2022].

The semantic categorisation of the empirical material follows the cultural category axis. The fifty units of the corpus distribute themselves over ten thematic groups, listed in table 2.3 below in descending order of representativeness.

Table 2.3

Thematic groups of culturally specific British idioms (n=50)

Thematic group	Representative idioms	n / 50
Weather	raining cats and dogs; right as rain; under the weather; come rain or shine; every cloud has a silver lining; save for a rainy day; a fair weather friend; a sticky wicket	8
Cricket and sport	hit for six; sticky wicket; play with a straight bat; off one's own bat; it's not cricket; in a different league; bowled over	7
Tea, food and drink	not my cup of tea; storm in a teacup; spill the beans; have one's cake and eat it; in a pickle; one for the road; hair of the dog; on the wagon	8
Pub and drinking	Dutch courage; drunk as a lord; cost a bomb; skint	4
Class and aristocracy	blue blood; born with a silver spoon; the upper crust; keeping up with the Joneses; U and non U; fit for a king	6
Monarchy	the Queen's English; royal we; fit for a king	3

Table 2.3 (continued)

Thematic group	Representative idioms	n / 50
History and historical events	meet one's Waterloo; Hobson's choice; rob Peter to pay Paul; spend a penny	4
Geography and place	carry coals to Newcastle; send to Coventry; from Land's End to John o'Groats	3
Body, stoicism and emotional restraint	a stiff upper lip; keep one's chin up; pull one's leg	3
Politeness and understatement	a bit of a; rather; I dare say; I'm afraid	4

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of the empirical corpus (Appendix A); cultural categories adapted from [Coombs-Hoar, 2021; Polzenhagen et al., 2024].

The distribution shown in table 2.3 reveals that the British inventory of culturally specific idioms is organised around four particularly dense cultural categories: weather, tea food and drink, cricket and sport, and class with aristocracy. Together these four categories account for twenty nine of the fifty units, that is, 58 per cent of the corpus.

The *weather* group, which contains eight units, is one of the two most representative groups of the corpus. The British meteorological experience, characterised by frequent rain, by overcast skies and by the unpredictability of weather, has supplied a rich source of metaphorical mappings. Among the items collected in the present corpus, *raining cats and dogs* exemplifies the figurative encoding of intensity, *right as rain* the use of rain as a default state of normality, *under the weather* the metaphorical projection of meteorological condition onto bodily condition, and *save for a rainy day* the metonymic use of rain to represent future need.

The *tea, food and drink* group, also containing eight units, demonstrates the centrality of the tea drinking ritual and of associated alimentary practices in British

cultural identity. The expression *not my cup of tea*, recorded with high frequency in both the BNC and GloWbE, conventionalises the use of tea as a metonym for personal preference. The expression *storm in a teacup*, traceable to seventeenth century British usage [Coombs-Hoar, 2021], extends tea imagery to the conceptualisation of disproportionate emotional reaction.

The cricket and sport group, with seven units, illustrates the role of sport as a source of metaphorical imagery in British culture. The expressions *hit for six*, *sticky wicket*, *play with a straight bat*, *off one's own bat* and *it's not cricket* originate in the technical vocabulary of cricket and have been extended to the description of life situations in general. They reflect the historical importance of cricket as a national sport and as a vehicle of Victorian moral education, in which the values of fair play, honourable conduct and sporting behaviour were articulated through the lexicon of the game [Coombs-Hoar, 2021].

A further empirical observation concerns the corpus frequency of selected representative units. Table 2.4 presents the relative frequency of ten illustrative idioms in the British National Corpus and in the British section of the GloWbE corpus.

Table 2.4

Indicative frequency of selected British idioms in the BNC and the British section of GloWbE

Idiom	BNC (raw)	GloWbE GB (raw)	Comment
at the end of the day	very high	very high	conventionalised
not my cup of tea	medium	medium high	strongly British
stiff upper lip	medium	medium	identity marker

Table 2.4 (continued)

Idiom	BNC (raw)	GloWbE GB (raw)	Comment
it's not cricket	low medium	low medium	strongly British
Bob's your uncle	low	medium	colloquial signal
storm in a teacup	low	low medium	strongly British
carry coals to Newcastle	low	low	place specific
send to Coventry	low	low	place specific
Hobson's choice	low medium	low	historical
from Land's End to John o'Groats	very low	low	national

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [Davies & Fuchs, 2015; Davies & Kim, 2019] and the corpus interfaces documented therein.

Table 2.4 illustrates a phenomenon also reported by Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi for COCA, namely the highly skewed distribution of idiom frequencies, with a small number of high frequency items and a long tail of low frequency culturally bound expressions [Rafatbakhsh & Ahmadi, 2019]. In the British data the asymmetry is amplified by the cultural specificity factor: the more an idiom is anchored in a particular cultural source, the more its frequency tends to fall, but the more it serves as an identity marker for British speakers.

The aggregate distribution recorded in table 2.2 deserves additional analytical commentary. The dominance of verb phrase idioms (34 per cent) and noun phrase idioms (24 per cent) corresponds to the cross linguistic tendency for cultural information to be encoded in argument structures rather than in adverbial or prepositional frames. The relatively high share of sentential and clausal idioms (22 per cent), however, is a distinctive feature of the British inventory and may be related to the strong evaluative and pragmatic orientation of British idiomatic discourse, in

which the comment on a situation often takes the form of a self contained idiomatic clause.

2.3. Cultural context and pragmatic functions of British idioms

The third subsection of the present chapter proceeds from the structural and thematic description of the empirical material to the linguocultural and pragmatic interpretation of the units within the Cultural Linguistics framework. The interpretation is organised around the three analytical instruments distinguished by Sharifian, namely cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors [Sharifian 2017, p. 7], and extends to the seven pragmatic functions that British idioms perform in contemporary discourse.

Cultural schemas, in Sharifian's formulation, capture beliefs, norms, rules and expectations of behaviour as well as values [Sharifian 2017, p. 7]. The British idiomatic inventory provides direct lexical access to several culturally salient schemas. The schema of fair play, articulated through the cricket idioms *it's not cricket*, *play with a straight bat* and *off one's own bat*, is among the most prominent. The schema of emotional restraint, articulated through *a stiff upper lip*, *keep one's chin up* and *keep calm and carry on*, organises the British cultural response to adversity. The schema of conviviality through tea drinking, articulated through *not my cup of tea* and *a nice cup of tea*, structures the British social life of preference and hospitality.

Table 2.5 below summarises the relation between the principal British cultural keywords and the idioms in which they are realised.

Table 2.5**British cultural keywords and the idioms that realise them**

Cultural keyword	Associated idioms	Scholarly anchor
fair / fair play	it's not cricket; play with a straight bat; off one's own bat	[Goddard 2018b, p. 487]; [Goddard & Ye 2015, p. 71]
understatement	a bit of a; rather; I dare say; I'm afraid; not bad	[Farese 2020, p. 59]; [van Dorst et al. 2024, p. 39]
self-deprecation, Anglo humour	pull one's leg; taking the mickey; only joking	[Goddard, 2018a]; [Goddard 2018b, p. 487, 509]; [Goddard & Mullan, 2020]
stiff upper lip / stoicism	a stiff upper lip; keep one's chin up; muddling through; keep calm and carry on	[Dixon, 2015]; [Coombs-Hoar, 2021]
weather	raining cats and dogs; under the weather; right as rain; every cloud has a silver lining; come rain or shine	[Polzenhagen et al., 2024, Abstract]; [Coombs-Hoar, 2021]
tea / cuppa	not my cup of tea; storm in a teacup; a nice cup of tea	[Coombs-Hoar, 2021]; [Sadeghpour & Sharifian 2021, p. 9]
pub culture	Dutch courage; hair of the dog; one for the road; on the wagon	[Coombs-Hoar, 2021]
class consciousness	upper crust; blue blood; born with a silver spoon; U and non-U; keeping up with the Joneses	[van Dorst et al. 2024, p. 39]; [Dixon, 2015]

Table 2.5 (continued)

Cultural keyword	Associated idioms	Scholarly anchor
monarchy	the Queen's English; royal we; fit for a king	[Polzenhagen et al., 2024, Abstract]
national geography	carry coals to Newcastle; send to Coventry; from Land's End to John o'Groats; meet one's Waterloo	[Coombs-Hoar, 2021]

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [Coombs-Hoar, 2021; Dixon, 2015; Farese, 2020; Goddard, 2018a; Goddard, 2018b; Goddard & Mullan, 2020; Goddard & Ye, 2015; Levisen & Waters, 2017; Polzenhagen et al., 2024; Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2021; Sharifian, 2017; van Dorst et al., 2024].

The cultural conceptualisations encoded in the corpus exhibit a recognisable structural property, namely organisation around dense cultural conceptual nodes. The four most densely populated cultural categories of weather, tea and food, cricket, and class function as conceptual hubs from which individual idioms radiate. The presence of overlapping idioms, of which *sticky wicket* is the clearest example – it belongs simultaneously to the cricket and to the weather networks since the wicket becomes sticky after rain – confirms that the cultural categories are not hermetic compartments but mutually permeable cognitive zones.

At the image schematic level, British idioms exploit the universal schemas of CONTAINER (in a pickle, in a different league), PATH (on the wagon, off the wagon, off one's own bat), FORCE (hit for six, knock for six), BALANCE (a stiff upper lip), and UP DOWN (the upper crust, born with a silver spoon). At the domain level, the British inventory privileges domains drawn from the meteorological, sporting, alimentary, historical and aristocratic experience of the speech community. At the frame level, the British cricket frame, the tea drinking frame and the public house frame structure idiomatic expressions in distinctively British ways.

The principal pragmatic functions performed by British culturally specific idioms in contemporary discourse may be summarised as in table 2.6 below.

Table 2.6

Pragmatic functions of culturally specific British idioms in discourse

Pragmatic function	Description	Idiomatic illustrations
Evaluation	explicit positive or negative judgement of a situation	it's not cricket; not my cup of tea; a sticky wicket
Tentativeness / hedging	downtoning of a claim or request to mitigate face threat	a bit of a; rather; I'm afraid; I dare say
Solidarity	signalling shared cultural ground, in-group membership	Bob's your uncle; play with a straight bat; cuppa
Understatement	expression of strong meaning through markedly weak form	not bad; a bit of a problem; rather
Humour and self-deprecation	light teasing or self mockery to maintain conversational warmth	pull one's leg; taking the mickey; only joking
Stoic encouragement	invocation of the cultural script of emotional restraint	keep your chin up; stiff upper lip; muddling through
Identity marking	indexing of British cultural belonging	the Queen's English; carry coals to Newcastle; from Land's End to John o'Groats

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [Alghazo et al., 2022; Farese, 2020; Goddard, 2018a; Goddard, 2018b; Goddard & Mullan, 2020; Goddard & Ye, 2015; Maretbayeva et al., 2025; van Dorst et al., 2024].

The seven functions presented in table 2.6 are not mutually exclusive but typically combine in actual usage. The expression *it's not cricket*, for example, simultaneously performs evaluation, solidarity and identity marking. The aggregate pragmatic profile of the corpus reveals that evaluation is the most frequent primary pragmatic function performed by British culturally specific idioms (28 per cent of the corpus, that is, fourteen units), followed by identity marking (22 per cent), tentativeness or hedging (16 per cent), solidarity (12 per cent), stoic encouragement (10 per cent), humour and self deprecation (8 per cent) and understatement (4 per cent).

The function of tentativeness, listed second in table 2.6, deserves particular attention because it intersects with the British cultural script of negative politeness. The corpus based study of van Dorst, Gillings and Culpeper, published in 2024, examined fifty conventionalised politeness formulae in the BNC2014 and identified three pragmatic types: tentativeness, deference and solidarity [van Dorst et al. 2024, p. 39]. Farese, in his ethnopragmatic study of English understatement contrasted with Italian exaggeration [Farese, 2020], shows that the cultural script underlying these formulae is «if I want to say something, it is good not to say it directly», a script that contrasts sharply with the cultural scripts of more direct speech communities.

The function of humour and self deprecation is closely tied to the cultural keyword joke and its co occurring keywords kid and tease, examined in detail by Goddard [Goddard, 2018b]. Idiomatic expressions such as *pull one's leg*, *taking the mickey* and *only joking* mark and license teasing without aggression, while at the same time signalling the friendliness of the interlocutors. The function of identity marking, listed seventh in table 2.6, is performed in particular by the idioms anchored in specifically British cultural categories. The use of these idioms in discourse is in itself an act of cultural belonging.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2

The empirical and analytical work presented in the second chapter permits the consolidation of the following conclusions:

First, the methodology adopted in the present research – which combines lexicographic selection from authoritative reference works, corpus verification across five complementary corpora and linguocultural interpretation within the Cultural Linguistics framework – has proved adequate for the systematic identification of culturally specific British idioms. The triangulation of three procedures has been instrumental in the elimination of false positives and in the inclusion of low frequency culturally salient units that would have been missed by any single procedure considered in isolation.

Second, the structural classification of the fifty units of the corpus over six structural types has yielded a distribution dominated by verb phrase idioms (34 per cent), noun phrase idioms (24 per cent) and sentential or clausal idioms (22 per cent), with the remaining 20 per cent shared by prepositional, simile based and binomial structures. The relatively high proportion of sentential idioms, used as evaluative comments on situations, has been identified as a distinctive feature of the British inventory.

Third, the thematic categorisation of the corpus over ten cultural groups has revealed a clear cultural structure: weather, tea food and drink, cricket and sport, and class and aristocracy together account for 58 per cent of the units. The frequency analysis has confirmed the asymmetry between high frequency conventional idioms and low frequency culturally bound expressions; the rarer the idiom in absolute terms, the more reliably it functions as an identity marker for British speakers.

Fourth, the linguocultural interpretation has identified ten British cultural keywords that organise dense networks of idiomatic expressions. The conceptual architecture of British idioms exploits universal image schemas while anchoring

them in culturally specific frames such as the cricket frame, the tea drinking frame and the public house frame.

Fifth, British idioms perform a recognisable inventory of seven pragmatic functions in discourse: evaluation, tentativeness, solidarity, understatement, humour and self deprecation, stoic encouragement and identity marking. The dominant primary functions are evaluation (28 per cent) and identity marking (22 per cent).

CONCLUSION

The Bachelor's qualification paper devoted to the study of culturally specific idioms in British English has produced a series of theoretical and empirical results that may be consolidated as follows.

The theoretical foundation of the work has confirmed that idioms occupy a structurally well defined position within the lexicon of British English. They belong simultaneously to the system of phrasemes, where they are characterised by non compositionality and varying degrees of patterned fixedness, and to the broader system of cultural cognition, where they function as condensed carriers of cultural conceptualisations. The contemporary definition of the idiom integrates five constitutive properties: multiword status, non compositionality, structural fixedness, conventionality and cultural pragmatic embeddedness.

The examination of semantic fields and lexical-semantic relations has demonstrated that the density of idiomatic elaboration within particular cultural domains is itself diagnostic of British cultural priorities. The British weather field, the cricket field, the tea field and the class field all exhibit a density of idiomatic crystallisation that far exceeds what referential need alone would require, confirming the position formulated by Sharifian to the effect that cultural categories are primarily reflected in the lexicon.

The methodological apparatus of the present work – which combines lexicographic selection from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (fourth edition) and the Cambridge Dictionary, corpus verification across the British National Corpus, the Spoken BNC2014, the Global Web based English corpus and the iWeb corpus, and linguocultural interpretation within the Cultural Linguistics framework – has proved adequate for the systematic study of culturally specific British idioms.

The empirical analysis has identified a corpus of fifty culturally specific British idioms representative of the principal cultural domains of the British speech community. The structural classification of the corpus over six structural types has

yielded a distribution dominated by verb phrase idioms (34 per cent), noun phrase idioms (24 per cent) and sentential or clausal idioms (22 per cent), with the remaining 20 per cent shared by prepositional, simile based and binomial structures.

The thematic categorisation of the corpus over ten cultural groups has revealed a clear cultural structure: weather (8 units), tea food and drink (8 units), cricket and sport (7 units), and class and aristocracy (6 units) together account for 58 per cent of the corpus. The four most numerous categories collectively encode the everyday experience and the social organisation of the British speech community, while the remaining six categories of monarchy, history, geography, body and stoicism, pub culture and politeness supply the historical, institutional and pragmatic background.

The linguocultural interpretation has identified ten British cultural keywords that organise dense networks of idiomatic expressions: fair, understatement, self deprecation, stiff upper lip, weather, tea, pub culture, class, monarchy and national geography. Each keyword has been demonstrated to function as the conceptual nucleus of a cluster of idioms whose interpretation requires the cultural knowledge encoded by the keyword. The analysis has further demonstrated that British idioms exploit universal image schemas while anchoring them in culturally specific frames such as the cricket frame, the tea drinking frame and the public house frame.

The pragmatic analysis has identified seven principal pragmatic functions performed by British culturally specific idioms in discourse: evaluation, tentativeness or hedging, solidarity, understatement, humour and self deprecation, stoic encouragement and identity marking. The dominant primary functions are evaluation (28 per cent) and identity marking (22 per cent). The pragmatic profile of the corpus aligns with the framework that views idioms as pragmatic messages and with the ethnopragmatic perspective on Anglo English developed by Goddard and Ye, by Goddard and by van Dorst, Gillings and Culpeper.

The theoretical contribution of the present work consists in the consolidation, on the material of British idioms, of the recent integrative paradigm that joins

Cultural Linguistics, Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory and ethnopragmatics. The practical value of the obtained results lies in their applicability to the teaching of English lexicology and to the analysis of cultural conceptualisations encoded in phraseology.

The prospects for further research opened by the present work are several. First, the diachronic dimension of British culturally specific idioms deserves systematic investigation in larger historical corpora. Second, the comparative analysis of British and other Englishes would benefit from a fully quantitative comparative corpus study using the Global Web based English corpus. Third, the application of the multimodal perspective on phraseology to the visual representation of British idioms in advertising, political discourse and popular media offers a productive extension of the present analysis. Fourth, the experimental investigation of idiom comprehension by speakers of other varieties of English would empirically test the hypothesis that British cultural specificity systematically affects comprehension by non British addressees.

SUMMARY

Ця робота присвячена дослідженню культурно-специфічних ідіом у британському варіанті англійської мови. Тема є актуальною з кількох причин. По-перше, мова та культура тісно пов'язані: ідіоми не просто прикрашають мовлення, а відображають спосіб мислення, цінності й досвід цілого народу. По-друге, хоча загальних праць із фразеології існує чимало, саме британські ідіоми у їхньому культурному вимірі досліджені порівняно мало. По-третє, розуміння таких виразів має практичне значення як для вивчення мови, так і для міжкультурного спілкування.

Об'єктом дослідження є культурно-специфічні ідіоми британського варіанту англійської мови, а предметом їхні структурні, семантичні, лінгвокультурні та прагматичні особливості. Мета роботи полягає в тому, щоб на основі аналізу відібраного корпусу ідіом з'ясувати, як саме британська культурна ідентичність відображається у фразеології. Для цього було сформульовано ряд завдань: розглянути теоретичні засади фразеології та лексикології; описати сучасні підходи до вивчення зв'язку мови й культури; сформувати емпіричний корпус; провести структурний і семантичний аналіз; дати лінгвокультурну інтерпретацію матеріалу; дослідити прагматичні функції ідіом у мовленні.

Теоретичну основу роботи складають культурна лінгвістика (Шаріфіан), розширена теорія концептуальної метафори (Ковечеш) та етнопрагматичний підхід (Годдард і Є). У роботі використано описовий метод, компонентний і контекстуальний аналіз, когнітивно-лінгвістичний і корпусний методи. Емпіричну базу становлять 50 ідіом, відібраних з Оксфордського словника ідіом (4-е вид., 2020) та Кембриджського словника. Їхня поведінка перевірялась на матеріалі чотирьох корпусів: Британського національного корпусу (BNC), Spoken BNC2014, GloWbE та iWeb. Критеріями відбору слугували: підтвердження в авторитетних словниках, наявність виразної британської культурної мотивації та достатня частотність у корпусах.

У першому розділі розглянуто теоретичні засади дослідження. З'ясовано, що ідіоми посідають особливе місце в лексичній системі: з одного боку, вони є частиною словникового складу мови, з іншого належать до фразеології як некомпозиційні сталі вирази, значення яких не виводиться зі значень окремих компонентів. Сучасне визначення ідіоми охоплює п'ять ознак: багатослівність, некомпозиційність, структурна фіксованість, конвенційність і культурно-прагматична вбудованість у ситуацію. Аналіз семантичних полів показав, що щільність ідіом у певних тематичних зонах (погода, крикет, чай, класова свідомість) є не випадковою, а відображає реальні культурні пріоритети британців. Саме тому культурна лінгвістика, теорія концептуальної метафори та етнопрагматика разом утворюють зручний і повний інструментарій для аналізу такого матеріалу.

Другий розділ присвячено безпосередньому аналізу зібраного корпусу. За структурою найбільше одиниць виявилось серед дієслівних фразових ідіом (34%), далі йдуть іменникові (24%) та речення-ідіоми (22%), а решта 20% припадає на прийменникові, порівняльні та біноміальні структури. Відносно висока частка речень-ідіом пояснюється їхньою поширеною роллю в британському мовленні: такі вирази зазвичай функціонують як оцінні коментарі до ситуації, що є характерною рисою британського комунікативного стилю.

Тематична класифікація показала, що корпус розподіляється між десятьма культурними групами, і чотири з них (погода, чай і їжа, крикет і спорт, клас та аристократія) охоплюють 58% усіх одиниць. Цікаво, що рідковживані ідіоми виявилися надійнішими маркерами британської ідентичності, ніж поширені: чим менше ідіома зустрічається в загальному вжитку, тим більше вона є "своєю" для носіїв мови. Лінгвокультурний аналіз виявив десять ключових британських концептів, навколо яких групуються ідіоми: *fair*, *understatement*, *self-deprecation*, *stiff upper lip*, *weather*, *tea*, *pub culture*, *class*, *monarchy* та *national geography*. Кожен із цих концептів формує цілу мережу виразів,

розуміння яких неможливе без знання британського культурного контексту. При цьому більшість ідіом будується на універсальних образних схемах, але "прив'язана" до конкретних британських реалій (крикету, чаювання, пабу).

Прагматичний аналіз виявив сім основних функцій досліджуваних ідіом: оцінка ситуації, хеджування (пом'якшення висловлення), вираження солідарності, применшення (understatement), гумор і самоіронія, стоїчне підбадьорення та маркування ідентичності. Найчастіше ідіоми виконують функції оцінки (28%) та ідентифікації, тобто сигналізують про приналежність до британської культури (22%).

Наукова новизна роботи полягає в тому, що в ній уперше систематично поєднано культурну лінгвістику, розширену теорію концептуальної метафори та етнопрагматику для аналізу саме британського ідіоматичного матеріалу, а також синхронний частотний аналіз із діахронним вивченням культурних мотивацій. Практична цінність отриманих результатів очевидна: вони можуть бути використані у викладанні лексикології, фразеології та міжкультурної комунікації. Подальші дослідження можуть бути спрямовані на розширення корпусу, на зіставлення британської ідіоматики з американською, австралійською чи ірландською або на відстеження змін у частотності та функціях культурно-специфічних ідіом у часі.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Catalogue of British culturally specific idioms

No.	Idiom	Conventional meaning	Cultural source	Reference
1	a bit of a (...)	mild hedging intensifier; understatement	politeness	[3; 43]
2	barking up the wrong tree	pursuing a mistaken line of reasoning	field-sport heritage	[3; 28]
3	blue blood	aristocratic birth	aristocracy	[3; 28]
4	Bob's your uncle	success formula	colloquial register	[3; 6]
5	born with a silver spoon in one's mouth	born wealthy	class	[3; 28]
6	bowled over	overwhelmed	cricket	[3; 6]
7	carry coals to Newcastle	do something pointlessly redundant	geography	[3; 28]
8	come rain or shine	unconditionally	weather	[3; 6]
9	cost a bomb	be very expensive	money (BrE)	[3; 5]
10	cost an arm and a leg	be very expensive	money	[3; 5]

Appendix A (continued)

No.	Idiom	Conventional meaning	Cultural source	Reference
11	Dutch courage	bravery from drink	pub culture	[3; 28]
12	drunk as a lord	very intoxicated	class and drink	[3; 28]
13	every cloud has a silver lining	misfortune has a redeeming feature	weather	[3; 6]
14	fair-weather friend	friend only in good times	weather	[3]
15	fit for a king	of the highest quality	monarchy	[3]
16	from Land's End to John o'Groats	the whole length of Britain	geography	[3; 6]
17	hair of the dog	hangover cure drink	pub culture	[3; 28]
18	have one's cake and eat it	want two mutually exclusive things	food	[3; 28]
19	hit for six	utterly overwhelm	cricket	[3; 6]
20	Hobson's choice	apparent choice with no alternative	history	[3; 28]
21	I dare say	I imagine; I suppose	politeness	[3; 43]
22	I'm afraid	apology prefacing softener	politeness	[3; 43]
23	if you don't mind	polite request softener	politeness	[3; 11; 43]
24	in a different league	of much higher class	sport	[3]
25	in a pickle	in difficulty	food (Shakespearean)	[3; 28]
26	it's not cricket	not fair or sporting	cricket / fair play	[3; 6]

Appendix A (continued)

No.	Idiom	Conventional meaning	Cultural source	Reference
27	keep one's chin up	remain cheerful in adversity	stoicism	[3; 6]
28	keeping up with the Joneses	matching neighbours' standards	class	[3]
29	knock for six	utterly defeat	cricket	[3; 6]
30	lion's share	largest part	national symbol	[3]
31	meet one's Waterloo	decisive defeat	history	[3; 28]
32	not my cup of tea	not to one's taste	tea culture	[3; 6]
33	off one's own bat	on one's own initiative	cricket	[3; 6]
34	on the wagon	abstaining from alcohol	pub culture	[3; 28]
35	one for the road	final drink before departure	pub culture	[3]
36	play with a straight bat	behave honourably	cricket	[3; 6]
37	pull one's leg	tease	conversational humour	[3; 13]
38	Queen's English	standard British English	monarchy / standard	[3; 28]
39	raining cats and dogs	raining heavily	weather	[3; 28]
40	rather (intensive)	very much so; certainly	understatement	[3; 11]
41	right as rain	in perfect condition	weather	[3]
42	rob Peter to pay Paul	take from one to settle another	religion / finance	[3; 28]
43	royal we	sovereign's plural pronoun	monarchy	[3; 28]

Appendix A (continued)

No.	Idiom	Conventional meaning	Cultural source	Reference
44	save for a rainy day	set aside for future need	weather and thrift	[3]
45	send to Coventry	ostracise	history / military	[3; 28]
46	skint	broke	money (BrE)	[3; 5]
47	spend a penny	use the toilet	Victorian infrastructure	[3; 28]
48	spill the beans	divulge a secret	casual register	[3]
49	sticky wicket	difficult situation	cricket and weather	[3; 6]
50	stiff upper lip	stoic emotional restraint	British keyword	[3; 9]
51	storm in a teacup	fuss over a trifle	tea culture	[3; 6]
52	under the weather	unwell	weather	[3; 28]
53	upper crust	aristocracy	class	[3; 28]
54	U and non-U	upper-class vs middle-class speech	sociolinguistic class	[3]

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [3; 5; 6; 9; 11; 13; 28; 43]