

IDIOMATIC LANGUAGE – THEORY AND APPLICATIONS

Статья посвящена проблеме исследования фразеологического состава языка, описывает роль фразеологизмов как устойчивых словосочетаний в современной лингвистике и методы изучения и преподавания английских фразеологизмов в рамках ESP. Описаны также методы работы и цели научно-исследовательского проекта KEGA, который проходит на Факультете прикладных языков Экономического Университета в Братиславе.

The article deals with idiomatic language as the formulaic language, describes its role in the modern linguistics and presents certain methods used in learning and teaching English idioms especially in the business environment. The KEGA research project Idioms in Business Communication (015EU-4/2017), carried out at the Faculty of Applied Languages, University of Economics in Bratislava, is introduced as well.

Let me start by a metaphor saying that languages are like gardens. If you speak a foreign language somehow, you have the garden, but it is not very nice. You work hard in it - you try to do the best to study the language systematically, ok, but your efforts are not always very efficient. If you speak a language well, your garden is nicely green, and if you master the language, you have nice flowers in the garden. Moreover, if you understand the fact that languages are not only certain linguistic systems, but they represent the culture of native speakers, their way of thinking, your garden with flowers smells very very nicely.

Communication nowadays takes many different forms, especially in various professional settings such as business, international trade, diplomacy, or law. Effective communication is crucial, it is vital in any case, in any situation, in any organisation. The success or failure depend on the art of communicators to express their ideas clearly and coherently. Good and effective interlocutors, very often in the role of negotiators, are a valuable asset for any business.

When speaking we are able to make choices about which lexical units we use – choices that are influenced by our desire to ensure that we really communicate effectively, and by our sense of identity. When we encode language we make judgements about which of our lexical units the listeners or readers will be able to

find in their own lexicons. In some cases we may deliberately introduce them to a new item in order to create space for a shared identity. Non-native speakers may elect not to use large lexicon, may elect not to use for example phrasal verbs or fixed idiomatic expressions, because they associate them with a group with which they do not fully identify.

Options also exist for decoding. That is, as listeners or readers we constantly have to make judgements and choices about what the speaker or writer is most likely to have meant. It is on that basis that a native speaker can intentionally or unintentionally reject the easy mapping of a form produced by a non-native speaker.

As international trade and scientific and political exchange intensify, there is a growing effort on the part of academics, multinational organizations and even governments to improve communication and dialogue. When you are involved in international business and you communicate with English native speakers, you will continuously encounter business English idioms despite the fact that idiomatic language has been considered to be an informal language for many years. Today, idiomatic expressions are believed to be a great part of everyday conversation, either informal or formal and professional. Many people use idioms to make their language more colourful. Linguists affirm that idioms are not just fixed expressions but they can show how metaphorically people tend to think in any setting, in any situation (Fernando, Kvetko, Langlotz, Moon). However, most of the people use idioms even if they do not realise that. These multi-word expressions are used often conventionally and their meaning is dependent thoroughly on the discourse in which it is used. Modern English is typical of the frequent use of phrasal verbs, idioms, sayings and proverbs and English native speakers often use them in all life situations, informal as well formal, including the professional settings, business or diplomatic ones. They even do not modify their vocabulary to aid or help their business partner, who is, after all, speaking in a second language.

As university English teachers, all of us, we fully understand this state of affairs and we fully realize the needs of today's modern world. We realize how important it is to be literate and competent in every field of the human activity. We would like to

have nice aromatic gardens with nice savoury flowers. That is our job, our profession, our mission.

Thus, idioms are like flowers in the garden. The question is what they are like and how to grow them...

Languages like English have a wide range of ways to express meanings using regular and transparent formulations. Yet native speakers tolerate the retention of irregularity and opacity. Sinclair (1987) identifies two principles at work in the language: a) *the open-choice principle*, which works on the assumption that language users have a relatively free choice in composing phrases and sentences where words are concerned, constrained only by grammaticality, and b) *the idiom principle*, which works on the assumption that language users have available to them a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices. Idioms have the potential of appearing anywhere and everywhere, and are marked as occurring in mature written or spoken discourse [3].

Idioms are considered to be the inseparable part of the lexicon of any language and have received a lot of attention in the formulaic language. In the literature we can find many definitions by well-known linguists, but, in fact, all of definitions have something in common, and it is the fact that idioms show figurative meanings and they are phrases whose meanings are different from the meaning of each word considered separately. Let me give a few examples how idioms are defined:

“an idiom is a group of words (a phrase) which has a meaning different from the meaning of each word taken separately” [12, p. 359] or *“an idiom is a particular kind of unit: one that is fixed and semantically opaque or metaphorical or, traditionally not the sum of its parts”* [9, p. 4]. Langlotz [8] defines an idiom in the following way: *“idiom is an institutionalised construction that is composed of two or more lexical items and has the composite structure of a phrase or semi-clause, which may feature constructional idiosyncrasy”*. He also explains that *“an idiom primarily has an ideational discourse-function and feature figuration, i.e. semantic structure is derivationally non-compositional”* [8, p. 1]. Kvetko [7] points out that it is not easy to provide the exact definition of idioms. Besides, he explains that idioms are

conventional and they are understood as metaphorical and unique expressions. He generally explains that they carry multi-word character and “*they are institutionalised – i.e. considered as units by a language community*” [7, p. 103]. Linguists admit that idioms represent such part of the lexicon in any language mutation, “*such peculiar linguistic constructions that have raised many eyebrows in linguistics and often confuse newcomers to a language*” [8, p.1].

According to Fernando [2], ideational idioms “*convey impressionistic representations of aspects of the physical, social, and emotional worlds of a language community*” [3, p. 252]. “*They contribute to the subject matter and enable the language user to talk about the world in an impressionistic way and in imagist, metaphorical terms. Typically, they are realized by units smaller than the clause, i.e. nominals, verbals, adjectivals, adverbial, and clauses themselves*” [6, p. 23].

Hrdličková (2017) claims that “*the most common patterns of idioms in Business English are:*

- a) traditional idioms (e.g. get the picture, tie the knot),*
- b) idiomatic compounds (e.g. a glass ceiling, the smart money, hard and fast),*
- c) prepositional idioms (e.g. at the end of the day, from scratch),*
- d) comparisons (e.g. be like talking to a brick wall),*
- e) exclamations and sayings (e.g. You must be joking!, Practice makes perfect), and*
- f) clichés (e.g. a golden handshake, when the going gets tough, the tough get going)”* [6, p. 25].

Predominantly, we can assume that the most frequently discussed features of idioms, based on the above mentioned theoretical outcomes, are the following ones: institutionalisation (idioms are conventionalised units), compositeness (idioms are multi-word expressions that are composed of two or more lexical components), frozenness (idioms are fixed expressions), non-compositionality or semantic opacity (the meaning of idioms as wholes cannot be formed by the sum of its components and their individual meanings).

One common pattern in language acquisition is that learners pass through a stage in which they use a large number of unanalysed chunks of language in certain

predictable social contexts. They use, in other words, a great deal of “prefabricated” language. Finding an appropriate theoretical framework of language use presents its own difficulties, which a good teacher should take into his/her account in order to organize seminars that lead students to use prefabricated language to learn how to produce, comprehend, and analyse the new language.

The extent of prefabricated speech in performed language now seems far greater than once was thought. *“Phraseology used to be the periphery of language, now it has become the heart of it”* [2, p. 4-5]. Much attention in linguistic theory has been directed to *“idioms - complex bits of frozen syntax, whose meanings cannot be derived from the meaning of their constituents, that is, whose meanings are more than simply the sum of their individual parts, e.g. step on the gas, raining cats and dogs”* [10, p. 33]. Nattinger and DeCarrico find the other sorts of formulaic fixed phrases that need to be attended to as well, e.g. *“clichés – that are similar to idioms in that they too consist of patterns that are relatively frozen, but they are unlike them in that the patterns usually consist of larger stretches of language and that their meaning is derivable from the individual constituents, e.g. there is no doubt about it, a good time was had by all”* [10, p. 33] or *“non-canonical phrases that are different from both of the above in that their patterns do not have the typical shapes of English structures, e.g. off with his head, by and large”* [10, p. 33].

In teaching such lexical phrases as mentioned above the emphasis should be on teaching them for comprehension and production, and their function in discourse, especially in case of advanced learners and learners of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). In other words, learning to speak means learning to converse. Students need to learn idioms and other sorts of formulaic language not as isolated, planned answers, but rather to learn how to use these structures to create the flow and purpose of a spontaneously unfolding conversation in professional settings. Students can be taught by first illustrating a basic lexical phrase frame, then it is recommended to teach some representative lexical material that appears in the slots within that basic frame, and, finally, teaching some representative variations and expansions of the frame itself in case of variables. Students should also be taught to recognize and

analyse more and more lexical phrase frames on their own as they occur in lecture discourse or in authentic texts.

At the University of Economics in Bratislava a group of experienced teachers participate in an ongoing research that focuses on the English idiomatic expressions in business communication. It is part of the KEGA research project *Idioms in Business Communication* (015EU-4/2017), carried out in Slovakia at the Faculty of Applied Languages of the University of Economics in Bratislava as the research centre under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport in Slovakia. KEGA is Cultural and Educational Grant Agency of Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic supervising research projects in various fields of the academic issues. Our project *Idioms in Business Communication* was in April 2016 one of 36 projects from the University of Economics in Bratislava offered to the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. 10 projects were rejected at an early stage, 26 of them passed to the second round of appraisals and, finally, our research project was one of the three best ones (prof. XY 95,99% Educational support and innovation of doctoral study, prof. XY 95,23% Development of financial literacy in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, Hrdličková - Rusiňáková et al. 93,79% Idioms in Business Communication). The very basic objectives of the KEGA research project are to promote reading literacy and develop communication. As part of the opening discourse of the research team it also focuses on teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) with concentration on idioms and phrasal verbs. It aims at the teaching concept of idiomatic expressions in Business English.

Our theoretical and methodological toolbox consists of ESP studies within pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics. Key research questions include:

- Accounting for the role of English as lingua franca, and, in particular, English phrasal verbs and idioms in business and diplomatic communication.
- Studying whether idiomatic expressions are accelerated or slowed down in Business English, especially in the field of Marketing, Banking and Diplomacy.

We are currently compiling idiom corpora of on-line English texts from e-journals such as The New York Times (www.nytimes.com), The Telegraph (www.telegraph.co.uk), The Financial Times (www.ft.com), Foreign Affairs (www.foreignaffairs.com), The Guardian (www.theguardian.com), The Economist (www.economist.com), Politics, Policy, Political News - POLITICO (www.politico.com), The Diplomat Magazine (www.thediplomat.com), The World Politics Review (www.worldpoliticsreview.com) as well as Business English course books used at the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia, i.e. Market Leader Upper-Intermediate, English for Business Studies Upper-Intermediate, First Insights into Business Intermediate.

- The new corpora take into account the diversity of uses of English idioms.
- These corpora should enable real time studies of how the ongoing use of idioms is adapted in the academic environment as well as in the authentic magazine texts.
- These corpora should enable comparisons of idioms and phrasal verbs used in the above-mentioned contexts.

Within the KEGA research project we try to aim our efforts to develop the students' reading literacy by reading the above-mentioned texts of the Business English textbooks (Upper-Intermediate) as the compulsory literature for our students, the optional textbooks published by the English teachers at the University of Economics in Bratislava (esp. Hrdličková, Z. 2016. *Ideational Idioms in Business English Communication*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Ekonóm) as well as reading the texts from reputable professional on-line journals. This way we also try to lead the students to the ability to distinguish the phrasal verbs and idioms, to the ability to understand that their meaning cannot be derived from individual components and therefore it is necessary to acquire idioms as wholes. By researching the texts and extracting idioms from them a textbook with the current use of idioms is being elaborated and later will be published. It will serve teachers, students, self-taught persons and those who want to improve their English and to be like native speakers

(C2 CEFR) in oral interaction because, we hope, they will have good command of idioms.

And now, let me describe how our KEGA team works and what results we have reached so far in the field of teaching idioms.

395 students of three faculties at the University of Economics in Bratislava, the Faculty of International Relations, the Faculty of National Economy and the Faculty of Commerce in their first academic year have participated in the KEGA project *Idioms in Business Communication* since the winter semester 2017/2018. Within their studying groups they have been divided into two parallel groups – so called the experimental group, in which business English is taught and studied with the focus on idioms, and the controlling group, in which business English is taught and studied without any specific concentration on idiomatic expressions. Thus, the basic difference in teaching methods in the above mentioned two groups are the following ones: students from so called “experimental” courses, resp. KEGA courses, where the same syllabus is studied just with the concentration on idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs as in the controlling groups, have been working all the time with on-line English magazines chosen by them from the above mentioned list of e-journals. They have been supposed to find idioms in the economic or diplomatic texts in the on-line journals, explain them in English using English dictionaries, write short text summaries, and send them to their teacher. Afterwards, they have been informed by their teacher how successfully they had worked with selected idioms. For this student-teacher/teacher-student communication we have used the e-learning university programme moodle.euba.sk. This way students have created their list of idioms and in their seminar presentations used them actively in their speech. Moreover, the experimental groups have used an optional textbook by Hrdličková *Ideational Idioms in Business English Communication* (2016) apart from the basic and compulsory literature *Market Leader Business English Course Book Upper Intermediate* [1]. The topics of the optional textbook copy those ones in the compulsory textbook and provide students with plenty of various exercises with the focus on idioms. Students of controlling groups have studied the syllabus without

doing extra idiomatic work, despite the fact that they have had the same topics in the same compulsory textbook and they also could see how idioms function in the language. But, as mentioned, they haven't been so "busy" doing extra idiomatic work.

At the beginning of Business English course students of both groups were asked to translate 25 English idioms into Slovak in order to find out what they know about idioms and if they understand their meanings. The idioms for the test were chosen from the secondary-grammar-school English text book *New Opportunities* by Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikorzyńska, A. One of the idiomatic test variations is here:

Idiomatic language – KEGA Test – September 20..

Harris, M., Mower, D., Sikorzyńska, A.: *New Opportunities Upper Intermediate Students' Book*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006. 176 p. ISBN 0-582-85423-7.

Translate these idioms into Slovak.

1. He's **knee-deep in** work at the moment. _____
2. He lives in the city and when he goes to the countryside he's **like a fish out of water**.

3. We went to a little cottage in the countryside right **off the beaten track**.

4. The job wasn't **all plain sailing**. _____
5. Science fiction **is right up my street**. _____
6. Nevertheless, the importance of this work is that it has proved this strategy can work. It has been **a breath of fresh air** for gene therapy.

7. I can't **make head or tail of** these instructions. _____
8. When I discovered I had made a mistake, I had to **eat humble pie** and apologise for my behaviour. _____
9. We fought **from the word go**. _____

10. My parents are **giving me a hard time** because they want me to work harder.

11. I'm going to **give it to you straight**. I don't love you anymore.

12. His health **went downhill** after the accident. _____

13. They'll be pleased to see me this afternoon, although **my heart sinks** when I see that Genevieve is on TV this afternoon. _____

14. He's **got a bee in his bonnet** about graffiti. _____

15. I had one problem after another. **The last straw** was when the car broke down.

16. She **let the cat out of the bag** about the surprise party.

17. Don't **make a song and dance** about your homework.

18. London is **a melting pot** with people from every part of the world.

19. Don't be upset, I'm only **pulling your leg** about your girlfriend!

20. They've **put him out to grass** and given him the job of making the coffee.

21. Let's **set the ball rolling**. Who wants to talk first? _____

22. I want to be a chef but I work in a restaurant as **a stepping stone** for the future.

23. All that hard work **has taken its toll** on her health. _____

24. He has travelled **to the four corners of the globe**. _____

25. He is in **a vicious circle**. He's homeless. This means he can't get a good job and so he stays poor. _____

At the Faculty of International Relations, where I have the Business English courses, 77,7% of the first-year students in experimental groups were successful,

they wrote the test for more than 51% (the best one reached 88,3 %) and 22,3%, failed (the worst one reached 43,3%). In the controlling group 52,63%, wrote the test successfully (for more than 51%, the best reached 75%) and 47,37%, had serious difficulties with idioms (the worst one reached only 26,6%). But this was the beginning and the results were only informative for students as well as the teacher.

Some idiomatic expressions were understood and interpreted correctly by the majority, if not all, of the students, e.g. to be like a fish out of water – *nebyť vo svojom živle/svojej koži, cítiť sa ako ryba na suchu* (*He lives in the city and when he goes to the countryside he's like a fish out of water.*), to give it to sb straight – *povedať niečo niekomu na plné ústa/od srdca* (*I'm going to give it to you straight. I don't love you anymore.*), to go downhill – *ísť dolu kopcom s niekým /s niečím /zhoršovať sa* (*His health went downhill after the accident.*), to take its toll on sth – *vyžiadať si/vybrať si svoju daň* (*All that hard work has taken its toll on her health.*).

On the other hand, there were a few idioms in the informative idiomatic test that were not interpreted at all by anybody, for example: to be off the beaten track – *byť od ruky/d'aleko od ostatných miest* (*We went to a little cottage in the countryside right off the beaten track.*), to have a bee in sb's bonnet – *mať chrobáka v hlave/byť niečím posadnutý* (*He's got a bee in his bonnet about graffiti.*), to make a song and dance about sth – *robiť cirkus okolo niečoho/narobiť veľa rečí okolo niečoho* (*Don't make a song and dance about your homework.*).

At the end of each semester in the academic years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 the idiomatic test was written in both groups, the experimental as well as the controlling one. Idioms were taken from the studied materials of the *Market Leader Business English Course Book Upper Intermediate* [1] and *Ideational Idioms in Business English Communication* [5]. The example of one of idiomatic test variations is below.

KEGA Test 1 MLUI (U1 – U4) Winter semester 20../20..

Name:

Date:

Time: 30 mins

TOTAL: 30/.....

Exercise 1 Complete the sentences with the appropriate form of an idiom from the box.

the nouveau riche, keep in the loop, talk at cross-purposes, put it in a nutshell, turning point, get straight to the point, go head to head (+ with), come to mind, be on the same wavelength, a rip-off, in excess of, have an open mind, lose sight of, beat about the bush, face to face

1. He'd better off speaking to colleagues.....
if he has problems with them.
2. A: You and Kevin seem to get on very well together.
B: Yes, we seem to.....
3. Say what you are thinking about. I won't be upset. Don't
..... !
4. To....., we need to manufacture higher-quality products.
5. I wish you would..... and say what you think.
6. The newsletter is published three times a year. It's important to..... the employees.....
7. Don't hold back, Roger. Just say whatever.....
8. The best way to luxury is understatement. Flashy is only for..... and the juvenile supplier.
9. Don't decide until you know all the facts. It's best to..... until then.

10. He said this meant the State-owned utility stood to gain an after-tax profit of just \$2 million – a figure he described as..... for the State.
11. The tobacco industry's best layers will..... with the government in court next week.
12. Carlos Slim is either the world's richest or second-richest man, with a fortune estimated to be..... \$67bn.
13. I think we are..... . I mean next week, not this week.
14. Furthermore, although they may digress in order to elaborate a point and give additional information and details where appropriate, they will not ramble and..... their main message.
15. Eight years later, in 1990, came the second major..... in Slim's career when Mexico decided to privatise its national telecoms company.

Exercise 2 Translate these idioms into Slovak.

- I don't know the exact price, but \$500 is a good **ballpark figure**.
.....
.....
- Manufacturers often feel they are **fighting a losing battle** against counterfeiting.
- If you **play your cards right**, you'll get the promotion.
.....
- Organisations have been moving toward more team-based work models, and **whether** people **like it or not**, groups are an integral part of their lives.
.....

5. Much communication in the workplace is written **for the sake of** documentation.
6. When effective, it can lead to more cooperation among employees and a greater understanding of **the 'big picture'** or larger function of an organisation.
7. Moreover, good listening skills constitute an important asset in communication; **half-hearted** listening interferes considerably with effective management.
8. **The bottom line** is that the globalization of world commerce has an impact on all of people – global business customers.
9. Although networking is not exactly **quid pro quo**, it includes the element of exchange.
10. Enjoy **long-term** friendships.
11. Monthly company-wide meetings can be a good way of **keeping** everyone **up to date** with what's going on in each department.
12. Surely, a monthly report is sufficient – or is it simply that Head Office wants to **keep an eye on** us and know what we're up to each day?
13. **Look before you leap** into franchising.
14. These **fly-by-night** companies 14.
are more concerned with **making a quick buck** than with sustaining growth over a long period. 15.

The test results were much better in the experimental groups compared to the controlling ones. All students passed the test, no one failed. The best one wrote the test for 93,33% as in the controlling group, and the worst one was written for 61,66%, it means still passed. But in controlling groups 85% passed the test (reached more

than 51%, the best one reached 93,33%) and 15% failed (the worst one reached only 38%).

In general, Exercise 1 did not cause any big problems in both groups, but the remarkable differences were in Exercise 2 – translation into Slovak. The difficulties were caused by misinterpreting the meaning of idioms or by the fact, that the students could not find the appropriate Slovak idiomatic expression due to the fact they did not know the Slovak idiom or in the Slovak language there is no idiom for the situation like in English. In that case we accepted at least the correct description of the meaning, i.e. it is very important for us to know that a student understands and can use an idiom in English correctly.

Among those idioms in the test, approximately a half of them were understood and correctly interpreted by all students in the experimental group, e.g. fighting a losing battle – bojovať vopred prehratú bitku (*Manufacturers often feel they are fighting a losing battle against counterfeiting.*), look before you leap – dvakrát merať, raz strihaj (*Look before you leap into franchising.*), keep an eye on st/sb – dozerateľ, dohliadať na niečo, na niekoho (*Surely, a monthly report is sufficient – or is it simply that Head Office wants to keep an eye **on** us and know what we're up to each day?*)

A bit problematic idioms remained the following ones: quid pro quo – protihodnota/aký požičaj, taký vráť (*Although networking is not exactly quid pro quo, it includes the element of exchange.*), fly-by-night – pochybný/pokútny/s pochybnou povest'ou (*These fly-by-night companies are more concerned with making a quick buck than with sustaining growth over a long period.*). In these cases students didn't write anything if they couldn't understand the meaning or they did, but incorrectly. In the experimental group there were a few students who managed even these problematic idioms while in the controlling group in these cases no one gave the correct answer.

In general, tests demonstrated better results in the experimental group than in the controlling group. There idioms were taught and studied within the communicative context and with the specific concentration on them using various methods including

reading authentic texts in on-line newspapers and magazines as well as discussions aimed at idioms. In the controlling group idioms were part of the studying materials but mostly just mentioned. If there was no specific attention paid to these fixed expressions supported by various pedagogical methods less perceptive students couldn't benefit much. The KEGA project reveals the need to apply more effective methods in teaching English idioms, especially the need to study them within the large communicative context. This way the advanced students could be taught how to comprehend idioms and produce them in their professional settings.

In the whole process of teaching and learning idioms within ESP moodle has played a very important role. Moodle as an e-learning management programme (moodle.euba.sk) represents the supportive environment for the independent nature of learning in higher education, the modern way how to improve not only the reading and writing ability of students but also the way through which they could demonstrate their ability of analysing and self-learning. Moreover, this method has been attractive and natural for the students and into certain extent this electronic student-teacher /teacher-student communication has been fun for both. Some of students even said that it was more motivating for them.

Below is one example of texts sent by students to their teacher through moodle with highlighted idioms and explained them in English.

U.S. and China Play Chicken on Trade, and Neither Swerves

SHANGHAI — At the heart of the intensifying trade dispute between the United States and China is a fundamental question: Which country is more willing to endure *short-term* pain for the *long-term* gain of playing a leading role in high-tech industries.

China has embarked on an aggressive and expensive plan to retool its economy for the future as it moves to dominate in robotics, aerospace, artificial intelligence and more. President Trump has said China's approach relies on unfair and predatory practices, and on stolen American technology. And even as Chinese leaders say they

want to avoid a trade war, they are defending their plans and showing little sign of *backing down*.

Mr. Trump's threat to sharply escalate the administration's tariffs on Chinese imports shows that neither side has yet gone far enough to persuade the other to compromise. Bigger and broader tariffs may be necessary to get China's attention.

China's \$300 billion plan for government assistance, Made in China 2025, calls for helping *cutting-edge* industries by providing low-interest loans from state-controlled banks, guaranteeing large market shares in China and offering extensive research subsidies. The goal is to help Chinese firms acquire Western competitors, develop advanced technology and construct immense factories with considerable economies of scale.

It is an agenda that China would probably *go to great lengths* to protect. "We will not start a war — however, if someone starts a war, we will definitely fight back," Gao Feng, the commerce ministry spokesman, said at a news conference in Beijing on Friday. "No options will be *ruled out*." For the United States, victory in such a war would be difficult to verify, much less achieve.

China could say it plans to ease back on government support. But that could be difficult to quantify because of the country's opaque political system and the state's control of information.

China could *back off* from rules that favour local competitors and require American companies to share technology if they want access to the Chinese market. For example, foreign automakers face pressure to transfer electric-car technology to their local partners, and foreign technology companies are increasingly required to submit to security reviews. Foreign businesses have long complained that many of the rules they must follow are unwritten.

China's government-financed campaign is already *paying off* in some ways. Drive into downtown Shanghai from Pudong International Airport and you pass a

seemingly endless series of huge hangars and vast, glass-walled design centers, all part of the country's effort to create a commercial aircraft manufacturing giant to rival Boeing or Airbus. Travel to factory districts in Shanghai and on the outskirts of many other Chinese cities and you see enormous, newly built factories ready to *churn out* electric cars, the batteries they use and other components.

cutting edge= the most forward part of a trend; the leading part of a trend, the most modern stage of development in a particular type of work or activity

go to great lengths = to try extremely hard to achieve a result

to back off= to physically move backward away from something or someone

back down =to retreat from a particular idea or course of action, often in a conflict.

to rule out= to make something impossible. To eliminate, prevent, preclude, or cancel someone or something as a possibility.

pay off= <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/pay+off>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/06/business/us-china-tradeendgame.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fbusiness>

To sum up, based on our ongoing research findings it is possible to claim that fixed lexical phrases, idioms, are inseparable part of informal as well as formal linguistic contexts, including professional ones, such as marketing, financing, diplomacy. They provide an effective unit for measuring linguistic variation. However, there remain questions about the most effective methods for introducing these phrases to students, to non-native speakers. The learning process is a long and difficult one, needs patience and persistence, like the gardening. The more experienced the speaker, the more they draw on different kinds of units to maintain communication. Concentrating on these phrases, rather than on complete sentences enables learners to manipulate the direction of discourse effectively. On the other hand, our research and experience from language teaching with the focus on idioms has demonstrated the need to introduce these fixed phrases in the communicative

context. Based on the whole context and by means of reading comprehension trainings, presentations and through active use of idioms in learning language students are able not only to draw the meaning from the context, but they are able to maintain discussions on professional topics in the fields of economics, especially marketing, finances, banking as well as diplomacy. Real interaction allows production and monitoring of language at the C1 level and enables learners to speak and negotiate their own way. The KEGA project *Idioms in Business Communication* has shown that these methods seem to be very effective for further language acquisition.

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