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Idioms in Context of a Literary Text

DIPLOMA THESIS

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Declaration:

I herby declare that this diploma thesis is completely my own work and that I used only the sources listed in the bibliography.

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1. Introduction

When learning a foreign language, everyone has confronted a situation where one has been able to understand meanings of all the words in a sentence, though one has not been able to identify the meaning of the whole sentence, as something has obstructed the process of interpretation of meaning. Consequently, it represents a rather demotivating aspect of language learning when one can understand all the expressions in a sentence, though he cannot comprehend its overall meaning. This inability to indentify correct meaning of a particular sentence often results from an occurrence of idiomatic expression(s) or phrase(s) within the sentence.

Another complex problem may arise from a sentence where ambiguity of meaning may occur. In other words, we may encounter a sentence where we are familiar with all the words in it again; however our interpretation, which may seem perfectly reasonable, does not correspond with the sentences that surround it, for instance when we consider the sentence *Would the person who took the step ladder yesterday kindly bring it back or further steps will be taken.* The word *step(s)* occurs within the sentence twice; however in each case with a different meaning. To put it differently, the word *step* is part of a noun phrase and its co-occurrence with the noun *ladder* creates a new meaning; however, the traditional meaning of the word *step* remains preserved. While in the second case it forms the verb phrase where the meaning of the word *step* bears a meaning that is more symbolic and the recognition of its meaning may be regarded as a more demanding task than in the first case.

In this thesis our major concern is to shed light on the analogous situations that have been introduced above. We will deal with idioms in context and indicators that signal which meaning is probably intended by speaker(s) whether the literal or the idiomatic. We would like to focus on idioms and their ambiguity and predominantly on the means that reduce this ambiguity at least to some extent.

Obviously, before we can launch our investigation, we will devote our attention to idioms as such. Consequently, we will introduce them rather thoroughly, taking into consideration their semantic, syntactic and grammatical peculiarities. Moreover, as there are several types of idioms and not all of them, of course, can be arranged into one category, we will introduce a classification which should distribute idioms into groups according to their shared qualities.

Last but not least, we will try to prove that they do not represent arbitrary pairings of words, but that their meanings can be regarded as motivated, since

the majority of idioms are based on conceptual metaphors and metonymies. For this purpose, we will introduce the notions of metonymy and metaphor, though these notions will be introduced only briefly.

We assume that when interpreting the semantic meaning of idioms the most reliable identifier will be represented by context. As the notion of context reflects a broad term indeed, we should focus on the aspects that will be beneficial for our purposes. Therefore, we will especially deal with context of situation and its features. We will not neglect the notions considering verbal context and register, as they influence the process of interpretation of meaning as well.

Context will be used for the purposes considering the second task as well, namely the prediction of meaning of idioms from context in which they occur. To put it differently, there is some evidence that one may predict the meaning of an idiomatic expression from the context in which it occurs at least to some degree. Of course, we do not claim that all meanings of idiomatic expressions can be predicted without looking them up in a dictionary. The declared intention is to demonstrate how both motivation and context influence possible interpretation of the semantic meaning of an idiom and consequently, whether the semantic meaning can be applied to interpret its lexical meaning.

For our analysis we have chosen the book *Changing Places* by David Lodge. This book has been chosen, since there is significant evidence that it may contain plenty of the desired expressions i.e. idiomatic expressions. Moreover, the book is celebrated for its verbal humour, and thus we may expect number of ambiguous expressions that will be appropriate for our analysis.

As the book is a representative of the literary genre we will also introduce several peculiarities that a literary book is characterized by. Since these peculiarities may influence or even complicate our interpreting effort.

2. Idioms

2.1 Defining idioms

An expression like *get away with*, *break even* or *turn into* can be difficult to understand, since its meaning is different from the meanings of the separate words in the expression. Expressions like these are called idioms (Swan, 1996: 243).

According to Simpson (2004), idioms have their origin in metaphors which have become fixed phrases in language. They are frequently referred to as clusters of words whose meaning can be hardly deduced from their constituent parts (Simpson, 2004: 93).

Similarly Palmer (1976) describes idioms as "a sequence of words whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the words themselves" (Palmer, 1976: 41). Palmer also adds that idioms of a particular language cannot be translated in other languages easily, e.g. the English idioms *kick the bucket* or *red herring* do not have a direct equivalent in German or French (ibid.: 99).

The Longman Dictionary of Idioms offers a rather complex definition of idioms. It describes idioms as expressions that are rather metaphorical than literal and it adds that these expressions tend to be invariable or fixed in the form which differs them from the common literal expressions. Because of their metaphoric character, it is often impossible to discover their meaning by looking up the individual words in a dictionary (*Longman Dictionary of Idioms,* 1979: viii).

Perhaps the most exhaustive definition of an idiom is presented by Wales in her book *Dictionary of Stylistics* (2001) where she writes that "in linguistics idioms usually denote phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic (idiomatic) in that they are language-specific, not easily translated into another language and in that their meaning is not easily determined from the meanings of their constitutive parts" (Wales, 2001: 198).

To summarize the above written features of idioms, it can be claimed that an idiom is composed of individual words which themselves can appear separately in various linguistics contexts and that the meaning of an idiom can hardly be deduced from its constituent parts, as the constituents assembled together usually create a different meaning than the idiom itself. Consequently, it is often a highly complex

and even unenviable task to translate an idiom into another language without any previous knowledge of its meaning in context[1].

The term idiom has been defined to some extent so far; however, several questions considering the occurrence of idioms, their semantic and grammatical peculiarities of the idioms themselves or their constituent parts have remained unrevealed and they will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

2.2 Occurrence of idioms

It is widely, but wrongly, believed that idioms occur only in colloquial language; however, they appear in formal style and poetry as well, e.g. the Bible, the language of Shakespeare etc. (Seidl, McMordie, 1978: 11). However, these occurrences are rather rare and most idioms belong to informal spoken English rather than to formal written English (*Longman Dictionary of Idioms,* 1979: viii). This view is underlined by Crystal and Davy (1969) who claim that the majority of idioms mark informal or colloquial language, as they are representatives of "colloquial idioms" such as *in a minute*, *the simple truth is*, etc., and thus they are frequently part of the conversational language (Crystal, Davy, 1969: 114).

2.3 Semantic status of idioms

Idioms comprise collocations of a special kind, if we take for example, *kick the bucket* we do not only obtain the collocation of *kick* and *the bucket*, but we have the fact that the meaning of the resultant combination is opaque. "Opaque meaning is not connected with meaning of the individual words, however it is sometimes (though not always) nearer to the meaning of a single word (thus *kick the bucket* equals *die*)" (Palmer, 1976: 98).

If we investigate further, the metaphorical meaning and certain kinds of invariableness of an idiom are related to each other. This can be illustrated by the two well-known phrases *give up the ghost* and *spill the beans*. The meanings are: *to die* and *to reveal something*; *make something known*. These meanings have only very little in common with the literal meanings of the words which constitute the phrases, and thus the substitution of words that are even close in meaning cannot be performed in these

[1] Swan writes about uniqueness of idioms for a particular language; he claims in his book *Practical English Usage* (1996) that "idioms are usually special to one language and cannot be translated word for word (though related languages may share some idioms) (Swan, 1996: 244)

phrases without the loss of their idiomatic meaning. For instance, if we substitute the noun ghost in the sentence *The man gave up the ghost* by other nouns which are closely related to the general meaning of the idiom such as *the man gave up the apparition* or *the man released the ghost,* the idiomatic meaning disappears and the phrase becomes more literal. It is even impossible to replace a noun in an idiomatic phrase by a pronoun, as it is typical of nouns with literal meaning, since the idiomatic meaning will be lost again (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms,* 1979: viii).

In most cases, when an idiom occurs in a sentence, it rarely covers the whole sentence and the remaining words have literal meaning. For instance, when considering the following sentence: *Jane pulled Martha's leg about her boyfriend*. and we apply the recurrent contrast test[2], the following items come out as (minimal) semantic constituents: *Jane, -ed, Martha, about, her, boyfriend, pull- −'s leg*. Obviously, only the last constituent can be described as an idiom, since all the other items can be varied without the loss of idiomatic meaning. Nevertheless, any possible changes considering the words of the idiom *pull one's leg* have the following consequence – the idiomatic meaning is destroyed.

According to Curse (2000), in most cases, it appears vain to search for meaning of individual constituents of an idiom, as the constituent parts do not possess any meaning. The whole meaning of a phrasal unit is related to the phrase and not to its constituent parts. Therefore, idioms are regarded as single units from the semantic point of view. (Cruse, 2000: 73)

If we take into consideration the discussion above, it seems that, from a semantic perspective, idioms function in sentences as single words on behalf of their invariability and their metaphorical meaning which is attached to the whole phrase and not to the individual items which constitute the idiom. To underline the former ideas, a view, which is similar to Curse's definition, is provided by Palmer (1976) who writes that "idioms, semantically, are single units. But they are not single grammatical units like words" (Palmer, 1976: 41). The latter part of the Palmer's definition considering the grammatical peculiarities of idioms will be discussed in the next section.

[2] The "recurrent contrast test" states that semantic constituents can be substituted by some other constituent belonging to the same grammatical class, therefore giving a different meaning. (Cruse, 2000: 70)

2.4 Specific grammatical and syntactic features

"Phrasal idioms have some peculiar grammatical properties, which can be attributed either to the fact that their constituents have no meaning, or to the fact that such meaning is not independently active" (Cruse, 2000: 73).

As it has been already mentioned, even where an idiom functions semantically like a single unit it does not function like a word grammatically. For example, the idiom *keep a straight face* (to remain serious) will not form past tense in the usual pattern by adding *-ed* at the end of the phrases **keep a straight faced*, though it will function in a sentence as a verb, e.g. *She couldn't keep a straight face while she was telling the story*. The whole phrase functions to some extent as a usual sequence of grammatical words, so that the past tense form is *kept a straight face*.

However, there exist a large number of grammatical restraints. Plenty of idioms are formed by a verb and a noun, but although the verb may be transformed in the past tense, the number of the noun has to remain untouched. In the case of *red herring* the noun may be plural, but the adjective cannot take comparative or superlative forms (cf. Palmer, 1976: 98).

Besides the grammatical restrictions, syntactic restrictions occur as well. The syntactic restrictions are predominantly represented by passive forms, as some idioms have passive and others do not. A transitive verb phrase usually can be transformed from the active voice into the passive one. However, in case of idioms, the presence of a transitive verb does not imply that the idiom can be changed into the passive form. For example, the phrases *give up the ghost* and *kick the bucket* involve transitive verbs (*give up, kick*), still none of them can be transformed into the passive form **the bucket was kicked* (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms,* 1979: viii).

Almost all idiomatic phrases are incapable of some grammatical operations which can be easily performed by any literal phrase. The restrictions to these operations vary from idiom to idiom. Some (idioms) are more restricted or "frozen" than others (Palmer, 1976: 98).

2.5 Degrees of idiomaticity

As it has been stated above, the invariability and metaphorical meaning represent usual features of an idiom; however, these two terms are very general in their basic sense and they need to be specified to some extent.

"What is and what is not an idiom is, then, often a matter of degree. It is very difficult, moreover, to decide whether a word or a sequence of words is opaque" (Palmer, 1976: 99). The degree of opaqueness of the individual idioms can be even measured. The measurements have resulted in creation of the term "degrees of idiomaticity", since one *can make up a story*, *make up a fire* or *make up one's face*. (ibid.) "In other words, idiomaticity (the quality of being idiomatic) is a matter of degree or scale. Consequently, some of the phrases may occur in both literal and idiomatic context. Other phrases cannot be used literary in any context, as they posses no literal meaning, thus can be used only idiomatically, e.g. *until/till the kingdom comes*" (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms,* 1979: viii). There also exists what is referred to as a partial idiom, where one of the words represents the typical meaning, while the other has a meaning that is extraordinary to the particular sequence. For example, *red hair* describes colour of hair, but this colour is not exactly red (Palmer, 1976: 99).

Invariability of idioms differs similarly to their idiomaticity. "Some idioms are completely fixed and e.g. *down and out*. Other idioms have a limited number of variants e.g. *up to the/one's ears/eyes neck/eyeballs or in someone's bad books*, which has one variant expressing the opposite meaning, *in someone's good books*. Other idioms are very open and allow a large number of certain types of words (e.g. nouns) to be used in certain positions e.g. *down with + noun*" (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms,* 1979: viii).

2.6 Types of idioms

We have determined what is hidden behind the notion of idiom already. However, it should be effective to introduce some categorization of idioms, as they are regarded as a mixed bag. Since they can comprise metaphors (e.g. *spill the beans*), metonymies (e.g. *throw up one's hands*) pair of words (e.g. *cats and dogs*), idioms with *it* (e.g. *live it up*), similes (e.g. *as easy as pie*), sayings (e.g. *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*), phrasal verbs (e.g. *come up*), grammatical idioms (e.g. *let alone*), and other (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 327). Perhaps the most detailed classification of idioms is provided in *Longman Dictionary of Idioms* (1979) where idioms are divided into several categories:

Traditional idioms

The examples *spill the beans* and *give up the ghost* are types of expressions, which people usually understand by the term idiom. Many of them, like the two examples, are almost full sentences. Only subjects need to be added to make full sentences of the given verb phrases. Other types of idioms are not almost full sentences but rather function like particular parts of speech. An idiomatic noun phrase, for example, will often function in a sentence in the same way a noun would, i.e. as a subject, direct object, or perhaps most frequently, as a complement (*the salt of the earth*).

Idioms in which actions stand for emotions or feelings

A number of idioms which refer to actions that have a specific meaning in English culture may be misunderstood if one is just starting to learn English. It is important to note that these actions are not literal and that the meaning associated with a particular action in English may not be the meaning associated with that action in some other language or culture. Consider the idiom s*tick one's chin out* which in English means to show opposition to something. This same action in other countries may be a sign of agreement, a way of saying "no" etc. The meaning is specific to English-speaking countries. In idioms the action referred to may never really happen. For example, *I wash my hands of it* does not mean that the speaker really perform this action.

Pairs of words

A large number of idioms consist of pairs of words joined by *and* or *or*. Many of these belong to the first group and function as particular parts of speech. For example, the noun phrase *cats and dogs* in *it was raining cats and dogs* functions as an adverb. Many of these phrases cannot be reversed. One could not say *to be at tongs and hammer*, since the right order of the words in the noun phrase is *tongs and hammer*.

Idioms with " it"

A number of idiomatic and verb phrases have the pronoun *it* as a fixed part of the idiom. The pronoun does not refer to a word coming before it as it normally does like in *snuff it* or *live it up*.

Allusions

Certain common phrases and a few single words have special significance in English society and their meanings are often not defined in ordinary dictionaries (*Whitehall, Catch 22*).

Sayings

These are usually complete sentences and can be divided into two groups; the informal sayings (*you can't take it with you, there's always a next time*) and older and more metaphorical sayings (*a rolling stone gathers no moss, all work and no plays makes Jack a dull boy*).

Typical conversational phrases

Some fixed conversational phrases whose meanings are not literal and which therefore may be difficult to understand, such as *how do you do*, *all right*, *so to speak*.

Similes

Similes represent a large number of idioms, which compare a quality, condition, action etc. with a noun (*as easy as pie*). These phrases emphasize the meaning of the first word and can usually be translated by simply putting very in front of it. Certain verbal idioms (*work like a horse*) are also similes and function in a similar way to the adjective phrases.

Archaisms

Archaisms are phrases that are no longer in use. However, several common idiomatic expressions contain archaic or very unusual words and are widely used (*to and fro* and *kith and kin*).

Phrasal verbs

Expressions that consist only of a verb and one or more adverbial particles or prepositions (*put up with, make up* etc.) are another representatives of idioms. (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms*, 1979: ix, x)

2.7 Motivation in idioms

As it has been already mentioned, the overall meaning of an idiom can hardly be recognised from its individual constituent parts. However, according to Kővecses, Szabó (1996), most idioms contain a certain degree of motivation since their bases lay in conceptual metaphors, metaphors, and metonymies. This motivation enables the hearer or reader to recognise the meaning of an idiom to some extent. He speaks about systematic conceptual motivation which is based on the sets of "conceptual mappings or correspondences that obtain between a source and a target domain" (Kővecses, Szabó 1996: 326). To see how the motivation is achieved and simply for better understanding of the terms of conceptual mappings and systematic conceptual motivation, the notions of metaphor, metonymy, and conceptual metaphor should be introduced.

2.8 Metaphor and metonymy

At first, the definitions describing metaphor and metonymy should be mentioned, though they will be described only briefly, as they are not the major concern of this thesis. Hence the definitions given by Hladký (1996) are sufficient for our purposes.

Metaphor can be described as a word or a set of words which is based on similarity but the ground of comparison cannot be directly seen, as in the simile, e.g. *as thin as rake*.

The notion of metonymy "is based on substitution of a word referring to an attribute for a word referring to the thing meant, e.g. a part and a whole, a higher and a lower category, a thing and its place, cause and result etc." (Hladký, 1996: 51, 52).

These two definitions are helpful to reveal the connection between metaphors and metonymies on one side, and idioms on the other, at least to some extent. There is a feature that is characteristic for both metonymies and metaphors – the semantic shift (ibid.). Consequently, we can "view metaphor and metonymy as cognitive mechanisms that relate a domain (or domains) of knowledge to an idiomatic meaning in an indirect way" (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 331). We have seen that metaphors and metonymies play an important part in formation of idioms and this view can be easily illustrated on the idea of conceptual metaphor.

2.9 Conceptual metaphor

"A conceptual metaphor is a set of mappings, correspondences between two domains – the source and the target" Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 335). In other words, a conceptual metaphor comprises two domains of knowledge and the relationship between them can be described by words *is* or *equals* i.e. that one domain is or equals the other. One domain is typically expressed by words which have some physical qualities, while the other is represented by words that are abstract in their meanings. The first is called the source domain and the second the target domain. Commonly, the source domain is used to provide insight to the target domain e.g. *Ideas Are Writing*, *Love Is A Journey* where the words *ideas* and *love* are the target domains and the words *writing* and a *journey* are representatives of the source domains (cf. ibid.: 331). Since conceptual metaphors form bases for most idioms, the view considering the source and target domain can be applied to idioms, as we will see in the next sub-chapter.

2.10 Idioms and conceptual metaphors

In the traditional view, idioms are regarded as "a matter of language alone, that is, they are taken to be items of lexicon that are independent of any conceptual system" (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 328). This traditional view is based on the assumption that the constituent parts of an idiom do not influence the overall meaning significantly. Therefore idioms are classified according to the occurrence of a particular word in them in most dictionaries which deal with the problematic concerning idioms. It should be noticed, that in this case, the linguistic meaning is isolated from the human conceptual meaning and the knowledge which the speakers of a particular language share.

However, plenty of metaphors, on which the idioms are based, have been formed during the historical development of a particular language, they just have not arisen arbitrarily e.g. *the salt of the earth* and *blue blood*. Though, one may find an idiom where the historical development of its metaphorical meaning cannot be recognised, for instance, *a fine kettle of fish* (*Longman Dictionary of English Idioms*, 1979: ix). However, the latter example may be regarded as an exception, since the origin of metaphorical meaning in most idioms can be reasoned from the historical perspective at least to some extent, as the metaphors refer or referred to the human conceptual system (ibid.). Consequently, the historical development may give us some hints about the possible meaning of an idiom as well.

When we take into consideration the conceptual metaphor and the mentioned historical development, we can see that idioms, based on these metaphors, are not only part of the lexicon, but they are also products of the human conceptual system. Thus an idiom represents an expression with a meaning that is not just special to its constituents; however, the meaning of an idiom is based on our general knowledge of the world (cf. Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 330). "In other words, idioms (or at least the majority of them) are conceptual, and not linguistic, in nature" (ibid.).

If this is the case, the knowledge provides motivation for the overall idiomatic meaning and therefore the meanings of idioms can be regarded as motivated and not arbitrary. This view is inconsistent with some of the definitions that have been introduced in the beginning which claim that idioms are arbitrary pairings of words (each with a meaning) and a special overall meaning. However, we have to distinguish motivation from prediction. When meaning of an idiom is motivated it does not correspond with the argument that the meaning of that idiom is fully predictable. In other words, motivation does not equal to prediction, since motivation is a much weaker notion. From time to time, idioms even lack conceptual motivation for their meaning e.g. *kick the bucket*. Unfortunately, but understandably, expressions like *kick the bucket* or *a fine kettle of fish* are the most celebrated examples of idiomatic expressions in the traditional view (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 330).

The idea of motivated meaning is closely related to the occurrence of particular words in number of idioms. The former idea can be regarded as a cognitive mechanism that links domains of knowledge to idiomatic meaning. We have already mentioned that metaphors and metonymies represent these cognitive mechanisms. Another type of cognitive mechanism that can be added to this group is the conventional knowledge (ibid.).

All these conventional mechanisms may influence the general meaning of an idiom (i.e. what concept it has to do with). However, typically it is the conceptual metaphor with its target domain that determines the overall meaning of idioms in most cases. The meaning of idioms can be even introduced more precisely via the ontological mappings which "are correspondences between basic entities and events in the source domain and entities and events in the target domain" (ibid.: 336). For instance, the meaning of the idiom *spit fire* is related to the word *anger* and the idiom is based on the existence of the conceptual metaphor *Anger Is Fire*. The more precise meaning of the idiom, which corresponds with "be very angry", depends on the mapping

"intensity of fire is intensity of anger" between the source domain (*fire*) and the target domain (*anger*) (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 340).

Since we have illustrated how conceptual metaphors can determine meaning of idioms and it can be noticed, that sometimes the meaning can be recognised quite precisely; however, several idioms, predominantly "the proper ones", often lack any conceptual meaning in general and thus their meanings can hardly be directly seen. It should not be forgotten what has been uttered in the beginning, that idioms are often specific to a particular language, i.e. they do not have the direct equivalents in other languages. As a particular language is a part of a particular culture, the familiarity with the culture, where the language is used, can be another useful hint when determining the meaning of idioms. Therefore, several lines will be devoted to this problematic in the following section.

2.11 Cultural background

According to Carter (1997), "proverbs, idioms, metaphors, jokes and text such as newspaper headlines, advertisements and some names for shops involve language use which is central to the culture patterned in and through that language" (Carter, 1997: 167). In other words, when we try to interpret them (and for correct interpretation we have to know their meaning), we need to be familiar with some specific frames of cultural reference, since without the suitable cultural knowledge our interpretation of meaning becomes a testing procedure (ibid.: 168). Obviously, the effort which is needed to interpret the meanings of particular words (in our case idioms) may vary according to the opacity of particular words. The more opaque the words are, the more difficult is the interpretation of their meanings and vice versa. The subject of opacity has been dealt with in the previous section and it has been referred to as degrees of idiomaticity.

The main point of this short section is to show that when interpreting meanings of words that belong to a particular language we need to use the relevant conventional knowledge that is applied in the area where the language is used.

The problematic concerning conventional knowledge of a particular culture, in which a particular language is spoken, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, since the next chapter will be devoted to the notion of context. We will be concerned with the notion of context, as it obviously has significant impact on interpretation of meanings of words. For instance, phrases "*Please write it by hand*"

or “*She has a legible hand*” refer to handwriting and it is typically the context that clarifies that the activity in question is handwriting and not something else (Kővecses, Szabó, 1996: 340).

3. Context

3.1 Defining context

As Wales states in her book *Dictionary of Stylistics* (2001) "context with its numerous variants or modifiers is one of the most widely used terms both in linguistics and literary criticism, and one of the most comprehensive in its range of meanings" (Wales, 2001: 81). Thus introducing a precise and brief definition of context is a challenging task.

As the idea of context represents a broad term, in this thesis we will focus on the aspects of context which help us to interpret meaning or words and text. We will introduce them as shortly, but exactly, as possible, since the list of features includes wide range of items and thus we will concentrate on the most significant of them. Next comment is related to peculiarities that a literary text contains, as we are dealing with idioms inside a literary text, and therefore we will focus on specifics of a literary text. However, firstly, we should determine what context means in general.

Traditionally the term context was considered to refer to words, phrases, sentences, utterances, paragraphs or even chapters that precede or follow particular words, phrases, and so on (Halliday 1989: 6). However this definition can be regarded as old-fashioned and narrow. When we consider the notion of context from the pragmatic point of view, where it is defined as "the physical environment in which a word is used" (Yule 2002: 128), we can easily see that the former definition lacks the aspects that occur outside the text, and still significantly influence the text.

Consequently, the linguists distinguish two basic types of context, namely linguistic context and non-linguistic context, where linguistic context is attributed to the surrounding features of language inside a text, while non-linguistic context refers to text-external features influencing the language and style of a text (Verdonk, 2003: 117).

The former is the concern of semantics, while the latter is dealt with in pragmatics. "Semantics is the study of meanings as they are encoded in the language of texts, that is, independent of writers (speakers) and readers (hearers) set in a particular context, while pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of language in discourse, that is, when it is used in an appropriate context to achieve particular aims" (ibid.: 19). It should be noticed that pragmatic meaning is not alternative to semantic meaning, but complementary to it, since it arises from the reciprocal relationship between semantics and context (ibid.). We should bear in mind the complementariness

of semantics and pragmatics when interpreting meaning of words or sentences, as it may wrongly appear, that for our purposes it would be sufficient to deal with semantics only.

From the semantic perspective, context typically plays important role in determining the actual meaning of words. The procedure of determining meaning of a particular word is realised via contextualization. This procedure helps to avoid possible ambiguity based on polysemy or homonymy, for instance *light* and *flounder* (Wales, 2001: 83).

When we return to the non-linguistic context, i.e. to pragmatic field of study, we encounter a much more complex notion, as it may comprise "any number of text-external features influencing the interpretation of a discourse" (Verdonk, 2002: 19). When specifying the notion of non-linguistic context it will be useful to introduce some of its essential components. The list of components has been introduced by Verdonk in his book *Stylistics* (2002), though the list, of course, does not comprise all the components:

a) the text type (for example, an election poster, a recipe, a sermon)
b) its topic, purpose and function
c) the immediate temporary and physical setting of the text
d) the text's wider social, cultural, and historical setting
e) the identities, knowledge, emotions, abilities, beliefs, and assumptions of the writer (speaker) and reader (hearer).
f) the relationships holding between the writer (speaker) and reader (hearer)
g) the association with other similar or related text types (intertextuality).

(Verdonk, 2002: 19)

The list that is mentioned above is intended for utterances and texts; however, as it has been stated above words normally do not occur alone, but rather they are part of a text i.e. they are contextualised, the list may give us some beneficial hints which should help us when interpreting meaning of individual words – idioms in our case.

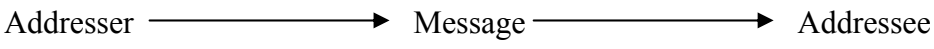
3.2 Literary text and its context

As we shall discuss the meaning of idioms inside a literary text we should introduce several peculiarities which characterise it. We shall see that the context of a literary discourse is differentiated from that of a non-literary text, namely that it

lacks the immediacy of social contact (Verdonk, 2002: 21) i.e. the literary text does not make any connection with the context of our everyday social practice. To summarize the idea, literary discourse cannot be categorized in contrast with the social world we live in (Verdonk, 2002: 21).

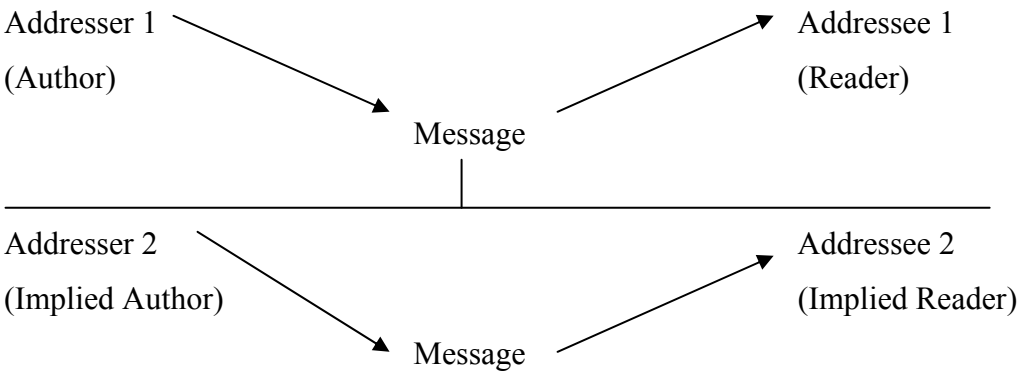
To put it differently, the literary discourse situation differs from the situational context of a traditional discourse. While the production and reception of a spoken message normally take place within a single context of time and place, in a literary text this is not the case, since there usually exists some distance in time and place between the writer (addresser) and the reader (addressee) (Leech, Short, 1981: 257, 258). In other words, "the writer can assume relatively little about the receiver of his/her message or the context in which it will be received" (ibid). For better understanding, it would be beneficial to introduce figures from the book *Style in fiction* (1981):

Figure 1



(*situational context in which discourse occurs*)

Figure 2



(*the discourse situation of literature*)

(Leech, Short, 1981: 257, 259)

We should not view literary texts as having no association to the "real world". If this would be true, we, as readers, would not be able to identify with them. To put it differently, a literary text is characterised by a specific use of language, unlike that of non-literary texts, and thus it challenges our socializing tendency to identify ourselves with abstractions and generalizing concepts (Verdonk, 2002: 21). The process of identifying ourselves with a literary discourse is typically done individually,

therefore several numbers of different meaning of the same literary text may occur simultaneously.

Another peculiarity that is attributed to literary discourses is that words, phrases or sentences which would seem meaningless in "real world" and the speaker (writer) will try to avoid using them, can normally function in a literary discourse. For instance, when considering the following utterance "*The elephant is a funny bird"*, obviously it is nonsense in the world we live in, since an elephant is a mammal and not a bird. However, when we contextualize the utterance into a poem or a fantasy story it may function without any constraints. In cases similar to our example, contextualization is based on the non-linguistic background or situational (exophoric) reference. (Wales, 2001: 82). Situational reference represents a very broad term and thus we should specify it to some degree, though we will not manage to list all the features which characterize it.

According to Wales (2001) situational reference comprises the immediate discourse situation in which the text is produced (e.g. casual conversation between friends), the immediate situational context in which the text occurs (e.g. at a dinner party) and increasingly "remote" environments beyond these (e.g. geographical, social, cultural environment) (Wales, 2001: 82). All these meanings of context have been unified under the term context-of-situation. This term will be discussed more fully in the following section.

3.3 Context of situation

Hladký (1995) describes context of situation briefly, but precisely, as "the non-linguistic background of an utterance" (Hladký, 1995: 101). It can be recognized from the definition that context of situation has already been mentioned, since it covers the notion of non-linguistic context introduced by Verdonk. Halliday (1989) analyses context of situation into three components, field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse; where field represents the "play" – the kind of activity, as recognized in culture, within which the language is playing some parts; tenor is an equivalent for the "players" – the actors, or rather interacting roles, that are involved in the production of the text; mode stands for the "parts" the particular functions that are assigned to the language (Halliday, 1989 : 45, 46). The context of situation corresponds with the immediate environment in which a text is functioning, where the immediate environment is characterized by features defined by Wales in the previous section.

The notion provides the reader with the explanation why certain things have been expressed on a particular occasion (ibid.).

According to Wales (2001) in literature there exist two main types of situational context: "the context or world created and inferred in the text, ideological as well as concrete; and the broad situational context of the non-fictional world, on the given knowledge of which authors and readers inevitably draw (even in science fiction)" (Wales, 2001: 82).

Consequently, our interpretation of the meaning and the theme of a text depends on our judgment of readings corresponding with the co-text and the world of the text, transmitted via our knowledge of reality, and of the relevant historical context for non-contemporary literature (ibid. 83).

3.4 Register

When used, language always performs a certain function and its function is accommodated to specifics of a particular situation. In other words, variation in language corresponds with the variation in the context of situation (Halliday, 1989: 38). To illustrate how language and context of situation influence each other reciprocally, we should introduce the notion of register.

Halliday writes in his book *Language, context and text* (1989) that "register is a semantic concept which can be defined as a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field mode and tenor" (ibid.: 38, 39). However, he also adds that a register must comprise expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonological features, as it represents a configuration of meaning and all these mentioned features participate in realisation of these meanings (ibid.).

Wales (2001) provides significantly shorter, but still helpful, view, as she claims that register is partly determined by the social context (Wales, 2001: 83).

The category of registers can vary from closed to relatively open-ended. To put it differently, there are registers, in which the range of possible meanings is fixed and limited (e.g. the International Language of the Air), while in others, the number is less restricted and many variants may occur (e.g. a conversation among friends). The two presented examples represent two extremes of the scale on which a register can vary. Most of the other registers will be placed somewhere between the two examples (cf. Halliday, 1989).

We should take into consideration the notion of register, in order to interpret meaning appropriately. When we encounter a text and we are able to allocate it with a particular register, it is the register which provides us with beneficial hints about what will be possibly said or written. Consequently, we can focus on the meanings that are assigned to the particular register only. In other words, we have some expectations and presuppositions that are based on our experience with particular registers and we apply them to predict, at least to some extent, what will be probably uttered. We will devote our attention to it in the next section concerning the speaker and hearer relationship.

3.5 Speaker and hearer

When analysing the use of language in context by speaker (writer) the analyst is more interested in the relationship between the speaker (writer) and the utterance (text) than with the possible relationship among the particular sentences (Yule, 1991: 27). In other words, we can see what importance is attributed to a context-of-situation feature when interpreting meaning. As we are dealing with idioms in a literary text, there is some evidence that most of them will occur in direct or indirect speech or thought acts, which can be regarded as an imitation of a routine conversation, since idioms are typically found in colloquial language. Therefore our major concern in this section will be another component related to context of situation, namely the speaker-hearer relationship. Features related to conversation between the speaker and the hearer can be categorized to some extent. To put it differently, conversation can be regarded as a game which is performed according to its own rules.

Usually, there is shared knowledge between the interlocutors, i.e. "certain kinds of information can be presupposed between them, which makes for linguistic economy" (Wales, 2001: 82). The shared knowledge is sometimes substituted by the term "presuppositions" which refers to what the speaker considers to be the common ground of the interlocutors in the conversation (Yule, 1991: 29). It should be added that the interlocutors share the same intention, namely the effort to make the conversation as economic as possible. This effort is called the "cooperative principle" or "the general principle of conversation" and is related to the ideas written above (ibid.: 31).

However, from time to time, speaker can imply, mean, or suggest something completely different from what s/he literally says. Grice (1975) uses the term "implicature" for these situations. There are conventional and conversational

implicatures. The former is determined by the conventional meaning of the words used, while the latter is based on the general principle of conversation and number of other standards which a speaker will usually obey (ibid.). The mentioned implicatures "are pragmatic aspects of meaning and have certain identifiable characteristics. They are partially based on the conventional or literal meaning of an utterance, produced in a specific context which is shared by the speaker and hearer, and depend on a recognition by the speaker and the hearer of the cooperative principle and its maxims" (ibid.:33).

The above written view rather corresponds with the following statement that an item is said to appear in some context which are expressions that co-occur with it. The occurrence of an item is to some degree determined by its context and in this way can be predicted from it (Hladký, 1995: 101).

When we want to analyse implicatures in an utterance, we should notice that we can hardly recognize the intended meaning of a speaker and therefore we have to rely on a process of inference to obtain an interpretation that will be as parallel as possible to the speaker's intended meaning (Yule, 1991: 33). In our case, we can, however, rely not only on the process of inference, but we can exploit the surrounding context for interpretation of the intended meaning.

3.6 Conclusion of the theoretical body

As we are approaching towards the end of the theoretical part, and only the author and his novel is left to be introduced, we will summarise briefly the main notions which have been mentioned so far.

First of all, we have defined idioms as sequences of words which meanings cannot be deduced from the meanings of their individual constituent parts. However, we have demonstrated idioms to be motivated in most cases, since they are based on conceptual metaphors which result from our conceptual knowledge. Thus, this motivation may reveal the overall meaning of an idiom to some extent.

Secondly, we have dealt with context; predominantly with its impact on words and their interpretation within a text. The notions *context of situation*, *register* and *verbal context* have been mentioned, though the last of these only briefly, since we regard them as the most beneficial aspects of context for purposes concerning our analysis.

Last but not least, we have mentioned several peculiarities of a literary text, since we will certainly encounter them in our analysis, as the material analysed represents

a literary text. However, before we start our analysis, several paragraphs will be devoted to the author's personality and the book itself.

4. Lodge

4.1 Life

"David Lodge has enjoyed an unusual dual status in English literary life over the past four decades, a leading comic novelist who is also one of the foremost literary critics of his generation" (www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/, 2002). He was born in Brockley in South London on 28 January 1935 in a traditional Catholic family. Lodge attended University College in London where he obtained his BA in 1955 and his MA in 1959. He continued with his studies at the University of Birmingham and consequently received a PhD. His following career was connected with the University of Birmingham as well, since he worked as a teacher there from 1960 until 1987 when he retired to become a full-time writer. He retains the title of Honorary Professor of Modern English Literature at University and he continues to live in Birmingham.

Lodge is known as successful writer, essayist, critic, but also as playwright and screen player. His early novels *The Picturegoers* (1960), *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962), *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), are influenced by the suburban upbringing in a traditional Catholic family. The books *Changing Places (1975)*, *Small World (1984)*, *Nice Work (1988)* form the famous trilogy of campus novels and were inspired by Lodge's experience teaching in California in 1964 – 1965. *Therapy* (1995) and *Thinks…* (2001) represent his most recent books.

As a screen player, Lodge adapted *Small World* and *Nice Work* as TV serials for BBC, broadcast in 1988 and 1989, respectively. Nice Work won the Royal Television Society Award (Best Drama Serial) and the author received a Silver Nymph for his screen play at the International Festival in Monte Carlo in 1990.

Lodge is academically interested in the structure of fiction, as he has written several critical books and essays concerning this topic e.g. *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel* (1966) and *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (1977). The interest is can be easily recognised in most of his books, as their structure is profoundly and deliberately chosen and from time to time, the characters serve as the means for presentation of Lodge's ideas and issues of his interest.

4.2 Changing Places – A Tale of Two Campuses

The whole book is a comic novel which focuses on the academic exchange between two fictional universities located in the USA and Great Britain respectively. The English participant, Phillip Swallow, is aged 40 and adjectives as conventional, narrow-minded or silent may be all used to describe his personality. By contrast, Morris Zapp, who is approximately the same age as his colleague, is the embodiment of self-confidence, egoism and self-assurance. However, as the exchange progresses, both of them suddenly start to discover that the new environments are responsible for changes in their behaviour and thinking. Both main characters have affairs with the other's wife and Swallow even has intimacy with Zapp's daughter Melanie without realizing who she is. Swallow and Zapp even consider staying at their new homes permanently. The book ends with an arranged meeting of the two couples in a hotel; the meeting should decide about the future fates of the couples, however, the novel ends without any clear solution to the considered problem.

Lodge masterly uses "the principle of binary structures"[3] in the novel and thereby, he enables to form his story to the desired shape, i.e. the author is able to create the story both predictable and readable simultaneously. The predictability of the whole story represents an important feature which makes the novel amusing to read. In addition, the author provides the reader with the ironic interplay of subject and setting, which may be again slightly connected with the binary structure principle, and the reader is likely to follow the events in the novel and compare them to his/her own experience.

The book is amusing for readers, since the author masterly exploits the idea of the so-called "cultural bump", i.e. that both Zapp and Swallow have certain prejudices about the country which they are leaving for; however, they both fly there with their own cultural background knowledge, according to which they are used to behave in particular situations. The comic arises from the situations that are based upon these cultural bumps and it is often emphasized by the individual characters and their speeches and thoughts.

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[3] Structuralists have used the principle of binarism or binary structures in their studies of literature. The structuturalists have claimed that binary contrasts are primary to human thought and categorization of experience. The principle may be illustrated by the basic principle of "good" and "evil" which is included in religious philosophies throughout the world. It has also occurred in literature in numerous symbolic transformations (*hero v. villain*; *cowboy v. Indian*; *monarch v. usurper*; etc.). (cf. WALES, 2001: 41)

5. Practical part

5.1 Theoretical background

We have introduced basic notions which we expect to be beneficial for the following analysis. Nevertheless, before we commence our analysis, we will provide an accurate description of it, and thus we remain in the theoretical field henceforth for several following paragraphs.

The practical part is based on the issues introduced in the theoretical body of this thesis. Moreover the analysis will follow the books *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose* (1996) by Short and *Discourse Analysis* (1983) by Brown and Yule. Since we are dealing with a literary text, we will take into consideration the peculiarities which characterise it, and these books will provide us with useful hints when interpreting utterances from the book by Lodge.

As we have already mentioned, idioms predominantly occur within colloquial speech. Since in a literary text the colloquial speech can traditionally be found in dialogues among its characters, as the dialogues are considered to be an imitation of conversation in the "real word", we will focus on them in particular, since there is significant evidence that most of the idioms will occur exactly there. However, the author's comments or even descriptions will not escape our attention.

We will deal with idiomatic expressions of all kinds and therefore a classification will be required for more transparent access to individual idioms. Thus, idioms will be classified according to the division provided in the *Longman Dictionary of Idioms* (1979); firstly, since it has already been introduced in the theoretical part and secondly, since it represents a well-known classification which is widely used.

The major concern of the practical part will be the mutual influence among context and idioms occurring within it. In other words, we will observe how context determines the character of an idiomatic expression i.e. whether to interpret it idiomatically or literally.

Our attention will be devoted to the perspective of a non-native speaker who may encounter a number of difficulties when dealing with an idiomatic expression. As it has been mentioned in the beginning, a non-native speaker may understand all words in an idiom, but this fact still avails him/her nothing to be able to understand the meaning

of it. Consequently, the practical part will demonstrate how context contributes to correct interpretation of idiomatic expressions to some extent.

Thus we will deal with the verbal context and the context of situation which combined together will represent the most significant indicators considering the characteristic of a phrase, and simultaneously will reveal possible interpretation of idiomatic expressions.

In the theoretical part we have introduced rather thoroughly the notion of conceptual metaphor, on which most idioms are based. We will exploit it in our analysis, particularly in cases, where context will provide us with little information about the possible meaning of an idiomatic expression. However, we will not rely on them where the meaning will evidently result from the context.

Due to vast amount of idiomatic expressions occurring in the book, it is not possible to include them all into our research. Therefore, we will devote our attention to idioms which comprise some peculiar features in themselves or to idioms where the context in which they occur will be unconventional to their traditional occurrence. The rest of the idioms appearing in the book will be listed in the appendix afterwards. However, this does not apply to phrasal verbs, since they occur in the book abundantly, and thus we will mention only a small portion of them.

The definitions depicting meanings of individual idioms used in our analysis are taken from the *Longman Dictionary of Idioms* (1979) or from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (2005). The definitions will occur in round brackets marked by italics.

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Traditional Idioms

Back to square one – (*back to the original starting point, because a situation has been reached in which no further progress is possible and the work, activity must be begun again*)
Now the teaching has thrown me back to square one.

The sentence occurs in a letter from Zapp to his wife. He speaks about the situation at British universities and compares it to what he knows about universities in his native country (USA).

Without any given context, the reader may rely on his/her knowledge from some board games, where a similar guideline meaning *back to the starting point* may occur. Consequently this would match with the definition written in brackets above to some extent. When the reader investigates further, it appears to him/her that Zapp describes the British concept of teaching at universities as rather unsystematic and peculiar. Consequently, his experience gained during his former teaching career in the USA seems to be worthless and he is forced to adjust to the methods used in Britain, though he finds them inconvenient. The meaning of the phrase is idiomatic, though the literal meaning may help when interpreting the meaning of the idiom, as it has been shown above.

Better the devil one knows – (*prefer to keep or suffer something that one knows from experience is quite bad, rather than to change it for something that might be even worse*)
I don't say there may not be something of the better-the-devil-you-know attitude behind it…

The sentence occurs within a telephone conversation between the Vice-Chancellor of Rummidge University who is offering Zapp the opportunity to become the Head of the Department in Rummidge. Zapp seems taken by surprise and he does not believe that the rest of the department would accept his promotion. However, he is reassured by the Vice-Chancellor that everyone in the department associates his name with the *Chair of English* and he provides Zapp with an explanation as well. The explanation commences by the sentence which is mentioned above.

In this particular case, we should take into consideration the words in the phrase itself, as they seem to convey more information about the phrase than the context. In the Christian society, the *devil* is traditionally understood as the embodiment of evil itself. Thus, the word *devil* usually refers to something bad. To put it differently, the word *devil* is negatively motivated. Consequently, when we replace it by the word *evil* in the original phrase, we slightly reveal the meaning of the idiom.

The context of situation provides little information about the meaning of the phrase. However, it can be applied to indicate the idiomatic character of the phrase, since there is no reference to devil before and after the dialogue.

Bite one's heads of – (*to shout at someone angrily, to scold someone*)
Afraid I'd bite their fucking heads off, I suppose, and so I would have done, but what are friends for anyway?

The sentence is part of a letter from Zapp to his wife. He incorrectly assumes that Swallow reviewed, rather critically, his article published in a scientific magazine four years ago. He is angry for two reasons; firstly, that the standard of the review does not match the usual norms and secondly, that at least one of his colleagues must have read it, but did not inform him about it. He ponders why his colleagues have concealed from him that such a review was published.

The phrase is obviously used idiomatically here, as the literal meaning would represent a rather brutal act of violence and an inappropriate response to the situation discussed. However, when the reader searches for the meaning of the phrase, s/he may encounter several difficulties. In this particular case, there are several indicators which express the anger, for instance, the f-word; however, we lack any direct evidence to the words *shout* or *scold*. The reader may recognize only that the response of Zapp would have taken place in an angry manner.

Draw the line – (*to set limits to one's own or to another person's behaviour esp. when one refuses to go past these limits*)
I' am a reasonably tolerant person but I draw the line at providing a room in my house for Mr. Zapp to have it off with his pregnant girl-friend, and…

The phrase is incorporated in the letter from Swallow to his wife. His wife (Hillary) has told him that a pregnant girl (Mary) has moved into their house. Moreover, Morris Zapp has his hand in it. Of course, Swallow has got some objections to

the newly formed situation, as he has always considered himself to be the decisive factor about the matters considering his living.

The meaning is again idiomatic, as *drawing a line* literally would not show us much about the Swallows attitude. The meaning of the phrase can be recognized as well. We can use the contrast between the first part of the sentence, where Swallow describes himself as a tolerant personality, and the second part which commences with the word *but*, which implies contrast to the previous sentence. Thus the reader may interpret the second part of the sentence, which is partly covered by the phrase, as an expression of Swallow's disagreement about the newly-constituted situation.

Getting into one's stride – (*to become accustomed to or increasingly interested in an activity*)
Getting into his stride, Morris demonstrated that Mr. Elton was obviously implied to be impotent, because…

The sentence represents part of the discussion over the non-sexual and sexual love in the novels by Jane Austen. Zapp wants to demonstrate his profound knowledge about Austen and her novels in general, since one of his students misunderstood the concern or the task assigned to him by Zapp. Therefore Zapp talks about the topic excitedly and at length.

The context of situation implies that the phrase occurs idiomatically here. However, the meaning of the phrase remains rather obscure, even if we take into account the context in which it appears. The reader is left to rely on the information s/he has learned about Zapp so far. There is significant evidence that he is an expert on Jane Austen and her novels, as this area has represented his major concern of his academic publications and articles.

The meaning of the phrase can be inferred to some degree from the literal meaning of individual words. When we combine our previous knowledge about Zapp's interest for novels by Jane Austen with the literal meaning of the phrase, which can be stated as *to walk in a manner that one is accustomed to*, *and thus to walk with ease,* we may claim that Zapp (Morris) presented the topic handily, since he moved *in a manner which he was accustomed to and additionally, in an area which was well-known to him*.

The definition obtained from our analysis corresponds only fairly with the definition written above. In this particular case, to understand the meaning of the phrase fully, requires a dictionary.

Go to the wall – (*to suffer ruin; be put aside as worthless or helpless*)
Here, for instance, it's a jungle in which the weakest go to the wall.

Swallow compares the differences in treatment of university teachers in Britain and USA. He refers to the policy that is applied in the USA with this sentence. While in the USA the teachers are measured according to their academic effort and achievements, which is a slightly surprising fact for Swallow, in Britain it seems to be the matter of loyalty and faithfulness. Finally, he compares the American system to a "jungle where the weakest is eaten".

Again the context determines that the phrase is used idiomatically here. In this case, the context helps us to identify the meaning of the phrase as well. It implies that the weakest is somehow excluded from the rest.

Grinding one's teeth – (*to make a determined effort to remain calm and not express one's true feelings of anger, disappointment or fear*)
Before you start grinding your teeth and fingering your horsewhip, let me finish.

The sentence occurs in a letter from Dèsirèe (Zapp's wife) to Zapp. The letter is a response to the previous Zapp's request. He has received an anonymous letter via which he was informed that Swallow shares living with Melanie, Zapp's daughter from his first marriage. He feels personal dislike towards the person of Phillip Swallow, since Zapp considers him to be the author of the critical review which has damaged his established reputation. Therefore, he requested his wife to find out whether the situation described in the anonymous letter is true or not.

The sentence appears at the beginning of the Dèsirèe's letter. However, it is slightly implied what information will follow via the mentioned phrase. The meaning of the phrase is idiomatic again, though it is possible that Zapp will actually grind his teeth literally when he receives the letter. However, it rather refers to a situation, which seems to be unpleasant for Zapp. Moreover, he lacks the control needed to change the situation to his satisfaction as well, which even emphasize annoyance resulting from that situation. The phrase can be regarded as an indicator what kind of information will follow. The reader may recognize that the situation will be unpleasant for Zapp without any further reading.

In the thick of (something) – (*in the busiest or most active part of an activity*) "*Robert's taking the eleven-plus next year, and it won't be long before Amanda's in the thick of O Levels."*

It is a quotation of a direct speech produced by Swallow. He is talking to his boss about his children and their possible educational troubles which may occur while he will be away from his family.

It is obvious from the words which surround the phrase *in the thick of* that it is used idiomatically here; however, the reader may slightly predict its meaning as well. From the given context, the nouns *eleven-plus* and *O Levels* refer to stages of education and the word *thick* in collocations like *thick smoke, thick fog* refers to situations which cause difficulties to people, and thus we may interpret the phrase as to *be in a difficult part of something*.

Lightning never strikes in the same place twice – (*the same accident or misfortune cannot happen twice to the same person in the same situation, used when speaking of something unusual, esp. something bad*)
Oh, well, you know what they say: a lump of frozen urine never strikes in the same place twice.

The phrase occurs during a conversation between Zapp and Mary. Since *a lump of frozen urine* damaged the roof of the house where Zapp was staying at, consequently, he was obliged to move to Swallow's apartment. As the roof has been repaired, Zapp prepares to return to the original place of residence in Rummidge. Mary asks whether Zapp has considered the possibility that the accident may happen again. Zapp's response is written in italics above.

The sentence is obviously based on the idiom *lightning never strikes in the same place twice*. Nevertheless, the substitution of the phrase *a lump of frozen urine* for the word *lightning* has caused the loss of idiomatic meaning. Thus the meaning of the phrase seems to be literal, even though the word *strikes* may be regarded as exceedingly emphatic. However, it should be added that the object which probably fell from a plane, endangered lives of the people living in the house.

Put one's foot down – (*to drive faster; to be very strict in opposing what somebody wishes to do*)

In the longest tunnel, safe from police observation, he put his foot down and heard with satisfaction…

The sentence appears in the author's description depicting the manner in which Zapp drives in his sports car through a tunnel in Rummidge.

When analyzing the phrase *put one's foot down*, we will first focus on the interpretation of its meaning. The context of situation announces that Zapp is driving in his car. We also know that he is driving in a tunnel, and thus the police are not able to see him. When these two facts combined with our conceptual knowledge concerning car driving, we may easily anticipate that Zapp, when driving, performs an illegal act.

Moreover, when considering the mutual relationship between the phrase, its context and our conceptual knowledge, we may rather exactly determine which activity is hidden behind the phrase. Consequently, we may infer that *put one's foot down* means to *speed up* or *accelerate* in the context of driving a car.

Interestingly, the phrase functions both literally and idiomatically here as a driver has to perform the activity (*put his/her foot down*), in order to accelerate. However, the context evidently determines that the idiomatic meaning is senior to the literal due to correct interpretation of the text.

Make up your mind – (*to decide; come to a decision*)

I'm trying to say in context, so to speak, and make up your own mind up about it all.

The sentence represents part of the letter from Swallow to Hillary where he is admitting having an affair with Dèsirèe, Zapp's wife. He persuades Hillary to fly to him to America, since he wants to discuss the future considering their mutual relationship with her.

The particular context surrounding the phrase implies its idiomatic occurrence. The idiomatic meaning of the phrase may be recognised when taking into account the verbal and situational context in which it occurs.

Swallow has described a number of aspects that should shed new light on the mutual relationship with Hillary. In fact, he has offered her several ideas to think over. Thus, we expect the meaning of the phrase to differ from the definition of meaning written above. We reckon that the meaning of the phrase equals *to think*

over all the possible variants and then decide what to do. Our statement is underlined by the verbal context occurring in the sentence, namely the second part of the sentence *and make up your own mind up about it all* signals that Hillary should not only *make up her mind* in the sense provided in the brackets above.

Poke one's nose into – (*to concern oneself with something or ask unwanted questions about someone else's affairs*)
If Dempsey wants to poke his nose into such matters, let him.

The sentence appears in a letter from Swallow to his wife. Swallow replies to the subject concerning his promotion. He and his wife believe that there exists a list where names of the people who deserve a promotion are written, and Swallow should be one of them. The reader already knows that the promotion is intended not for Swallow, but for one of the Swallow's younger colleagues, Dempsey. Hillary (Swallow's wife) learns from the Dempsey's wife that Dempsey has been informed that he should receive the promotion. Consequently the sentence provided above is Swallow's response to the Hillary's question whether is there any evidence that he should be promoted as well.

The phrase is used idiomatically. The context that surrounds the phrase can be regarded as a sufficient argument. The overall meaning of the phrase can be predicted only to a certain degree, as we cannot see any direct connectedness between the meaning of the phrase and what is happening in Swallow's mind. If the phrase would be used in a negative statement, the meaning of the phrase would have become more evident.

That's the way the cookie crumbles. – (*that's how things are and one must accept them, used to when something unfortunate has just happened*)
…(he) tries out on his tongue certain half-forgotten intonations and phrases: "cigarettes…primarily…Swiss on Rye to go…have it checked out… that's the way the cookie crumbles…"

It can be seen that in this case, the reader is left without any context that is directly related to the idiom, as s/he only obtains a list of phrases which hardly have any impact on each other. Even "the setting" provides only little help; Phillip Swallow is thinking about several peculiarities that occur in English used by Americans. In this particular situation, there are no indicators that would help to reveal the hidden

meaning. As the phrase belongs to the group of the "most celebrated" idioms, its motivation can be scarcely recognized as well. According to the given context, we assume that the phrase is used idiomatically here, however, the word *phrases* appearing in the text is the only indicator which underlines our hypothesis. It should be added that the phrase is to be placed somewhere on the top of the scale of idiomaticity.

With one's tail between one's legs – (*in a sad or unhappy manner*)
He'll be back with his tail between his legs.

The phrase occurs in the conversation between Hillary and Zapp. They are talking about Swallow and the probability of his return beck home to Rummidge. While Zapp thinks that Swallow will stay in the USA, Hillary is confident that he will be glad to return home. The sentence written in italics actually represents Hillary's formulation of her belief.

It is obvious that the phrase is used idiomatically here, as Swallow of course is not equipped with a tail. The phrase evidently refers to the manner in which a dog walks after it has been beaten. The meaning of the phrase may be recognized from the situational context. As the reader already knows, Swallow has had two affairs in America recently and he is presently living with Zapp's wife Dèsirèe. However, Hillary does not believe that their mutual relationship can be functional in future, since she regards her husband as man who *needs some stability*, and from this opinion results her confidence that Swallow will return home in a humble manner.

To summarize the idea, it is the situational context in combination with conceptual knowledge concerning behaviour of dogs which reveal the idiomatic meaning of the phrase.

5.2.2 Idioms in which action stands for emotions and feelings

Be in the driver's seat – (*to be the person in control of a situation*)
Once in the driver's seat, you could do whatever you liked.

The statement is part of Zapp's consideration whether to connect his future career with Rummidge University, since he has been offered the Head-of-the-department seat. He considers the pros and cons and the main advantage seems to be the control which he would obtain if he agreed.

As Zapp is not driving a car, when pondering over the possibility of staying in Rummidge, it seems evident that the phrase occurs idiomatically here. The meaning of the phrase can be interpreted easily, as the idiom is based on an activity (driving a car) which the readers are expected to know from their everyday situations. When we approach the phrase from the literal perspective, it is the driver who decides in which direction to go at what speed, in other words, the driver has got the control over the car. Consequently, when we apply the literal perspective on the idiom its meaning becomes evident. The meaning is even underlined by the remaining words occurring in the sentence *you could do whatever you liked*.

Bite something back – (*to stop yourself from saying something or from showing your feelings*)

The word "Sorry" rises to Morris lips, but he bites it back.

The sentence represents the author's comment on what is happening in Zapp's mind. The sentence follows immediately after the conversation between Zapp and his fellow passenger (Mary Makepeace). Mary speaks about her plans in England, one of which is the visit of her great-grand mother's grave. Zapp replies to that in an impolite manner, as he asks whether is she going to burry her unborn child there. This incompetent remark interrupts the whole conversation, since Mary seems obviously offended, and therefore refuses to continue in it.

The meaning of the phrase can be recognised with ease, as Zapp feels regret about what he has uttered, however, he does not want to show his personal feeling to his colleague, and thus he *bites it back*. The meaning of the phrase is idiomatic, since when we apply the literal meaning of the words to the given context, their inappropriateness is evident. The overall meaning of the phrase is even underlined by the characteristic of Zapp formerly given by the author in the book, since he is described there as a man who scarcely admits his mistakes. The reader can follow the fact, that Zapp actually does not pronounce the word physically and the story (conversation) proceeds by a different sentence.

Get the hang of it – (*to learn how to do or to use something; to understand something*)

But when they finally get the hang of it, they began to play with almost frightening intensity…

The sentence occurs in a letter from Swallow to Hillary (his wife). He is describing a game that he has invented himself and which he played with his American colleagues at one party. He writes that the colleagues misunderstood him firstly, since they were playing the game in a different manner than Swallow intended.

Again it is the context of situation that signals that the phrase should be interpreted idiomatically and we can even predict the meaning of the phrase with ease. The word *but* indicates the contrast between the two events, namely between the misunderstanding and the following comprehension. This indicator helps to detect the meaning of the whole phrase which can be written *when they finally understood the rules...*

Get it into one's head – (*to make someone understand*)
"*Can't you get it into your head that I don't care where you keep your big, fat circumcised prick?"*

The sentence occurs during an argument between Zapp and his wife Dèsirèe. They are discussing their mutual divorce and Dèsirèe mentions several affairs that her husband has had so far. Zapp tries to convince his wife that besides the mentioned affairs there are no other reasons to divorce him. However, Dèsirèe responses that his affairs are of less importance to her and the reasons fro the divorce lie in the Zapp's personality itself.

The given context implies that the phrase is used idiomatically here. The use of negative in the beginning of the sentence signals anger of the person who is speaking. The context provides us with sufficient hints for the interpretation of the meaning, as well, since the speaker endeavours to convince the hearer that his affairs are not the source of her annoyance. Consequently the reader may substitute the phrase *get into your head* by the words *realise*, *understand* or *see*.

Put one's finger on – (*not to be able to identify what is wrong or different about a particular situation*)
But if there were no children in the picture he couldn't put his finger on any reason why he should be in need of a wife.

Swallow is reflecting his relationship with his wife Hillary and he comes to the conclusion that he needs his wife only as a person who looks after his children.

The meaning of the phrase can be recognised easily in this particular context, though its meaning is obviously idiomatic. Since when we interpret the given phrase literally and we will regard *reasons* as observable and tangible objects in addition, we can easily see that Swallow is not able to point on the reason, which would explain his status of being married, with his index finger.

Rack one's brain – (*to think very hard or for a long time about something*)
"Well…" Phillip racks his brains.

The phrase occurs during the conversation between Boon and Swallow. It is actually a response to the previous sentence uttered by Boon, who asks Swallow whether is he (Swallow) able to identify him (Boon). The meaning of the phrase is idiomatic, though the literal meaning can help the reader to reveal the correct meaning of the phrase. When the particular context of situation is taken into consideration, and the reader knows the literal meaning of the words used in the idiom, which can be written as *to torture his brain*, the overall meaning of the phrase becomes rather clear. In addition, the reader can regard the word *well* as a sign of hesitation or not to be sure about the correct response, and thus trying to obtain more time for the answer, s/he can certainly substitute the phrase with the meaning written in brackets above.

Stand on one's two feet – (*to act for oneself, be dependent on nobody else*)
"I stand on my own two feet and without a pair of balls round my neck."

The sentence occurs during a conversation between Swallow and Dèsirèe, as they are discussing their common future. The conversation slightly implies that Swallow considers divorcing Hillary if Dèsirèe would divorce Zapp and consequently would marry him (Swallow). However, Dèsirèe wants to take only the first step, but she feels that the idea of marrying has crossed Swallow's mind. Consequently she utters the mentioned sentence to clarify her future plans to Swallow.

The phrase occurs idiomatically here. We may recognise two main signals that underline the previous statement. The first one is embodied in the context of situation; as the interlocutors can see each other directly, therefore the situation does not demand the information that would be conveyed if the phrase would have occurred literary here. We assume that both participants taking part in the conversation follow the cooperative principle, and thus they want to convey information which they presume to be unknown to the hearer.

The second signal can be found in the Swallow's response to the Dèsirèe's opinion about marriage in general. The author describes that *he looked hurt* after hearing that. It seems evident that whether Dèsirèe would be standing on one foot or two feet, it would have had no negative, if any, impact on the Swallow's feelings.

The meaning of the phrase can be predicted, however, one may find it a difficult task to solve. The sentence itself scarcely reveals the meaning of the phrase. The context yields us with more purposeful information. When we consider the sentence that precedes the one we are analysing, where Dèsirèe regard herself as a *free woman* with no binding obligation towards any man, it may slightly reveal the meaning of the phrase. However, we have to investigate further in this particular case.

First of all, we should bear in mind that the whole conversation is concerned with the topic of marriage and divorce. These words are closely related to the ideas of *freedom* on one side and *obligations towards another person* on the other. In other words, marriage involves taking into considerations beliefs, attitudes of the other person. Thus we may imply that the word *free*, used by Dèsirèe, refers to taking responsibility for her own decisions and acts.

Secondly, the expression *without a pair of balls around my neck* apparently refers to man's genitals, and as it represents a metaphor it refers to men in general. Consequently, we assume that the Dèsirèe's intended meaning can be written as follows: "*Things seem to be easier for me without a man around my neck.*" However, it should be added that the expression is based on the idiomatic expression *ball and chain* meaning a problem that prevents one from doing what one would like to do.

When we combine the context of situation, our conceptual knowledge concerning marriage and the two metaphorical meanings of the above-mentioned expression we can recognise the meaning of the idioms *stand on one's feet* rather easily. However, the analysis we have provided for our interpretation represents a relatively complex procedure. Moreover, it is even based on the knowledge of the idiom *ball and chain* to some degree, and therefore the reader may not understand the meaning of the idiom fully.

Take it for granted – (*to believe something is true without first making sure that it is*)
She took it for granted that we should sleep together.

This sentence is embodied in a letter from Swallow to Hillary, where Swallow admits that has been unfaithful to Hillary with Melanie, Zapp's daughter. He describes,

of course from his own perspective, under which circumstances his unfaithfulness happened.

In contrast to Hillary, the reader is exactly informed about the string of events in this delicate situation, since the author has already enabled him/her to observe how the Swallow's unfaithfulness took place. Therefore he can compare the author's version to the version provided by Swallow and consequently, recognise particular differences among them. Moreover, we may see from the letter that Swallow is anxious about the possibility of losing his wife, since Melanie seems not to be particularly interested in Swallow.

Therefore the reader may recognise that the letter is written in persuasive manner. Swallow portrays himself as a victim of the whole incident. In other words, as Hillary has no chance to investigate the "real state of affairs", Swallow is trying to exploit this fact to his own profit, and thus he writes about this plight situation as if it has been an accident.

It is significantly appealing that the context described above fairly corresponds with our definition of the idiom. As a result of this, the reader may infer the meaning of the phrase and s/he can substitute it by words which have similar meaning, for instance, *It was obvious for her to sleep with him.*

The phrase is used idiomatically here; however, the literal meaning provides us with useful hints in order to interpret its meaning correctly.

Take up one's stand – (*to declare one's position, loyalty, opinions and prepared to fight or to defend them against attack)*
Phillip took up his stand some four yards away from the woman.

The sentence represents part of the author's description of the first encounter between Dèsirèe and Swallow.

The sentence alone provides us with sufficient information to interpret its meaning. From the given context, it is evident, that the writer speaks about physical distance among two people, rather than about their distance in their opinions and believes, thus the phrase is used literally here. Another important signal which supports our statement is hidden in the possessive pronoun *his*. As in the particular context appears only one male character, and in addition is represented by Swallow himself, the possessive pronoun must refer to the only male character occurring in this

particular context. Consequently, it would sound fairly strange if would have declared loyalty to his own opinions, as there occurs no argument in the text.

It should be added that the idiomatic meaning of the phrase is kept unrevealed, since there are no indicators, which would slightly condemn the meaning.

The penny drops – (*the meaning of a remark, joke, etc. is finally understood, the desired effect is gained after a period of misunderstanding*).
The penny drops thunderously inside Morris Zapp's head.

The situation that precedes the given sentence is related to Zapp's wondering about the fact him being the only man (male) on the board of the plane. He is discussing this unusual situation with his fellow passenger (woman) who asks him who has given him the ticket. He reveals that it was one of his students (female) and the woman reacts to the new information by an expression that has similar meaning to the phrase *the penny drops*, namely by *now all is clear*. The passengers are all women, as they need an abortion which is illegal in the USA, however not in Great Britain. Zapp is now able to understand the whole situation and thus *the penny drops inside his head*. In fact, we can claim that the penny has dropped twice successively, since the woman has figured out why is Zapp on the plane with all these women.

The meaning is again idiomatic and can be regarded as highly predictable from the given context. The meaning is even underlined by a sentence that implies the sound of a coin that is dropped which can be considered as another hint for the correct interpretation of the meaning.

To break the ice – (*to ease the nervousness or formality in a social situation by a friendly act*)
Carol said: "Our leader had a neat idea to break the ice".

The sentence is part of the discussion taking place at a party where Swallow and three other young people occur. They are discussing social situations where the persons involved do not know each other, and thus have problems to speak among themselves. One of them (Carol) provides a solution how to encourage people to speak in a relaxed manner in those situations.

As there is no evidence of *ice* in the former as well as in the latter conversation, the phrase occurs idiomatically in the text. The meaning of the phrase is recognisable, since the particular context actually discusses the meaning of the phrase itself.

The phrase may be substituted by words as *to reduce tension* or *make the people feel more comfortable*.

5.2.3 Pairs of words

Hither and thither – (*in different directions, first one way and then another*)
He (Phillip Swallow) ran hither and thither between the shelves of Eng. Lit. like a child in a toyshop – so reluctant to choose one item to the exclusion of others that he ended up empty-handed.

The author introduces one of the major characters of the whole book by describing his qualities.

The meaning of the phrase considered, may be recognized from the comparison of the activity (*run hither and thither between*) to a situation which is assumed to be known to the reader (*like a child in a toyshop).*. The main indicators are the words *run* and the mentioned comparison. Thus, we may assume that the phrase can be substituted by the following words: *to run aimlessly from one place to another*.

Pins and needles – (*the uncomfortable prickly feeling one gets in a part of one's body when a full supply of blood comes back to it after having been partially blocked*)
It seemed entirely natural that, coming out of the Pussycat Go-go, dazzled by the sunbeams slanting low over Cortez Avenue, and a trifle unsteady on his feet because of the liquor and the pins and needles, he should collide with Melanie Byrd herself, as if she had materialized on the pavement in obedience of her wishes.

The sentence is the author's description of the situation that immediately follows Swallow's visit to a striptease club. The author enables the reader a deeper insight into the Swallow's mind. Swallow wishes to be with Melanie, the girl he has had an affair with recently, and indeed he encounters her accidentally.

However, this accidental encounter is insignificant for our analysis, since we are especially concerned with the phrase *pins and needles*. The phrase is used idiomatically here, as no words, which are semantically related to the traditional meanings of *pins* and *needles*, occur in the surrounding context. The meaning of the phrase is only fairly indicated by the description provided by the author in the preceding sentence: ...*His foot had gone to sleep again*...The reader may recognise that Swallow has troubles with his

leg, still the connection between Swallow's "sleepy leg" and the phrase *pins and needles* is not expressed evidently.

Taking into account the part *...and a trifle unsteady on his feet because of the liquor and the pins and needles…*, we obviously deal with two referents that describe the reasons for Swallow's unsteady walk. The word *liquor* implies that Swallow is slightly drunk, and thus the idiomatic expression *pins and needles* must refer to a different source for his unsteady walk. As the only apparent reason for this type of walk comes into question in the form of his problems with his leg, we may regard it as the most appropriate solution to our problem.

However, the meaning of the idiom still remains hidden in the expression *to have troubles with one's leg*. In other words, we are not able to specify what kind of troubles is meant.

5.2.4 Idioms with *it*

Take it easy – (*not to hurry, become excited and anxious, work too hard etc.*)
"Take it easy, Phillip." Melanie smiled apprehensively…

The phrase is part of a conversation between Swallow and Melanie. Swallow endeavours to persuade Melanie to return back to his apartment, however, Melanie refuses and subsequently Swallow becomes more intrusive, since he has just been to a striptease club and he is even slightly drunk. Melanie utters the sentence, in order to make Swallow feel less excited.

The phrase occurs idiomatically here, since the literal meaning would not suit to the particular context. Its meaning can be predicted rather easily. Firstly, the phrase *take it easy* represents a well-know idiom and thus we hardly expect any difficulties when interpreting its meaning. Secondly, from the given context, the reader may recognise that Swallow's behaviour induces uncomfortable feelings to Melanie. As a result of this, the reader may substitute the idiom by the phrases *calm down* or *relax*.

Take one's word for it – (*to accept a statement as true without making certain of the facts*)

Anyway, take my word for it, I wrote a dashing piece on "Apollonian-Dionysian Dialectic in the novels of Jane Austen" for this collection…

The sentence occurs in a letter from Zapp to Dèsirèe. He is complaining about a critical review of his article which he has encountered recently. He is asking his wife whether she remembers this particular article. He assumes that his wife has forgotten all about it, and therefore he considers necessary to inform her about the perfection of his article.

From the given context, it seems evident that the phrase is used idiomatically here. The most reliable indicator is again the context of situation. As the reader already knows the relationship between Zapp and his wife is not optimal and additionally, Dèsirèe does not believe his stories. Therefore, Zapp needs to stress that in this particular case he is talking the truth and consequently, uses the idiomatic expression as a reassurance for his wife. The meaning of the idiom *take one's word for it* can be predicted rather easily. Finally, the idiom can be substituted by phrases as *you can bet, I swear etc.*

5.2.5 Allusions

Humbert Humbert – (*refers to the main character of the novel "Lolita" by Nabokov*)

The fact is that the man is entirely unprincipled where women are concerned, and while he's not, as far as I know, another Humbert Humbert, I feel he might have an insidiously corrupting influence on an impressionable girl of Amanda's age.

This sentence occurs in a letter from Swallow to Hillary. Swallow has learned that Zapp had a dinner with the rest of Swallow's family where Zapp has made an impression on Amanda, Swallow's daughter. Swallow is not particularly happy hearing that, since he dislikes Zapp and Amanda seems to be his "darling" and therefore he wants to prevent other possible Zapp's visits of his family.

The *Humbert Humbert* phrase refers to the main character of the novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov. When the reader is familiar with the book he may discover its meaning easily. However, without any previous knowledge, the meaning interpretation becomes a testing procedure. Of course, one may recognise that Swallow's intention is to prevent Zapp from visiting his family again, whatever the real intention may be. We may assume that Swallow is in fact afraid of the possible seduction of his wife Hillary by Zapp and the "worrying" about Amanda should hide the real fear. However, this is not concern of our analysis. The phrase occurs idiomatically here, as there appears no character of this name in the book. The reader may see from the given

context that the allusion refers to a man who feels comfortable in a company where mainly women are concerned. Still, the lack of knowledge of the novel by Nabokov announces only little about the "type of female" in which a man referred to as a *Humbert Humbert* is interested.

5.2.6 Sayings

All's well that ends well. – (*something difficult ends happily or satisfactory, there is no need to complain or be disappointed about any trouble it may have caused*)
All's Well That Ends Well?

The idiom occurs during the conversation between Zapp and the woman, the fellow passenger. They are discussing whether Zapp bought the whole "abortion package" which also contained the excursion to Stratford upon Avon where a Shakespeare's play should be performed to the patients who will undergo the surgery. The idiom *All's Well That Ends Well* expresses his respond to that. The author provides the reader with a pun and intertextuality simultaneously, since the phrase is written in capital letters. Therefore, it obviously refers to the play by William Shakespeare which bears the same title. When the reader approaches the task of interpretation from the literary perspective, s/he may claim that Zapp is asking whether the play will be the one he mentions or some other. The evidence that may lead towards this interpretation is predominantly underlined by words as: *Stratford upon Avon*, *a play* and *All's Well That Ends Well*.

However, the reader should take into consideration the idiomatic meaning of the phrase as well. The major concern of their conversation is abortions, the reader may know that an abortion is a rather dangerous bargain for a woman, and consequently the meaning of the phrase would match to the definition given above. Thus we can claim that the meaning of the phrase is ambiguous in the given context. However, the ambiguity does not arise arbitrarily, but occurs as the speaker's intention.

5.2.7 Typical conversational phrases

Be my guest – (*used to give somebody permission to do something that they have asked to do*)

"Be my guest," says the girl.

The phrase is part of a conversation taking place between Zapp and a fellow passenger (woman) on a plane. It represents a response to an acknowledgement from Zapp who has been told by the woman that "*his fly is open*".

The meaning of the phrase is therefore definitely idiomatic, it could be even substituted by another well-know phrase *your welcome*.

Never mind – (to take no notice of something; don't worry about something)

Never mind the cigar.

The sentence constitutes part of the dialogue between Zapp and Hillary. For better understanding, we should provide a rather detailed description of the context of situation in this case.

The author describes first mutual encounter of Zapp and Hillary. They meet in originally Swallow's office which is occupied by Zapp during the exchange. Hillary is sent there by her husband in order to find a book which her husband considers useful for his teaching in America. When she stands in front of the door of Swallow's office she knocks, however, she does not come in, as she waits for Zapp to open the door from inside. Zapp's intention is to open the door; however, he collides with a chair and as a result of this drops his cigar, which rolls under the table. After a while, Hillary finally enters the room and sees Zapp under the table looking for his cigar. After a short explanation and a fruitless endeavour, Zapp finally gives up his search and uses the sentence *Never mind the cigar*.

From the context described above, we may see that the phrase occurs idiomatically in this case. However, the idiomatic meaning of the phrase may be disclosed rather easily for two basic reasons.

Firstly the phrase *never mind* belongs to the category of well-known expressions used in everyday speech, and thus it is believed that the reader, who is able to cope with an English literary text, is familiar with the meaning of the phrase.

Secondly, Hillary's response to the sentence uttered by Swallow signals the meaning of the phrase as well, since her reply indicates that she is not worried about the cigar, but about the carpet.

Please yourself – (*used to tell somebody that you are annoyed with them and do not care what they do*)
Melanie shrugged: "Please yourself."

Though the phrase occurs in a dialogue, it is part of a letter from Dèsirèe to Zapp. In other words, it is part of the conversation between Melanie and Dèsirèe described in a letter.

Since he has recently obtained an anonymous letter, where he has been informed that his daughter Melanie lives together with Swallow, the professor he is exchanging with. Consequently, he sent his wife Dèsirèe to find out whether the information conveyed in the letter is true or not. During Dèsirèe's investigation, she encounters Melanie, but not Swallow. She asks Melanie whether she can wait there for Swallow and Melanie replies to Dèsirèe's request by the sentence written in italics above.

The definition given in the brackets above implies that there should be some annoyance between the speaker and hearer. However, we cannot recognise any argument or annoyance among Dèsirèe and Melanie. Thus we assume that the definition in brackets hardly corresponds with the meaning of the phrase in this particular context.

We may interpret Melanie's response to Dèsirèe's request in the following manner: *If you wish to wait here for Swallow, then you can, you would not cause any troubles by your waiting to anybody.* Or we can substitute the idiom by phrases expressing agreement, for instance, *Yes, you can (wait here), Of course* etc.

The phrase is used idiomatically here, though the idiomatic meaning differs from the idiomatic meaning given in the brackets above.

5.2.8 Similes

Like a shot – (*very quickly; at once*)
He was off like a shot and I followed him to the front door.

The sentence occurs in a letter from Hillary to Swallow, where she describes the sudden change in Zapp's behaviour during one evening which he spent with the rest of the Swallow's family. The reader is less surprised than Hillary by the sudden change

in Zapp's behaviour, as s/he already knows that Zapp has just encountered the critical review on his article published in a scientific magazine. He wrongly believes that the author of the review is nobody but Swallow himself. As he is annoyed, he leaves the house hastily. The last sentence slightly corresponds with the view given by Hillary.

In this case, even the words that surround the idiomatic expression represent sufficient indicators to reveal the intended meaning. The idiom is based on a comparison.

Quick as a flash – (*very quickly*)
…he snaps back, quick as a flash.

The phrase occurs within an author's comment considering Zapp's movement.

In this particular situation, the reader may almost directly see the intended meaning, since the word *quick* which defines the idiom itself appears in it as well. Evidently, the degree of idiomaticity here is rather low and this predominantly simplifies the process of interpretation. The meaning of the phrase is idiomatic, since it is based on the comparison, and thus on a simile.

5.2.9 Phrasal verbs

Get away with – (*to do something wrong and not be punished for it*)
We shouldn't have let them get away with it.

The sentence is a part of a dialogue between Swallow and Zapp. The four main characters of the story, namely Swallow, Zapp, Dèsirèe and Hillary, have met to clarify their future plans. They prepare to go to bed; however, the problem is who will sleep with whom, as there are only two beds for four persons. The problem is solved by Hillary and Dèsirèe, since their suggestion is finally accepted, and consequently persons of the same gender sleep together. Zapp seems obviously disappointed, and utters his disagreement by the sentence written in italics above.

The interpretation of meaning becomes more difficult, as the author's text is written in the style of a screenplay. Consequently, the reader is left without the writer's descriptions, which has already appeared as beneficial hints for interpretation of idiomatic expressions and their meanings. We should rely on our knowledge concerning what has been uttered by individual characters so far and we should mainly focus on the suggestions provided by Zapp. His perspective about the problem included

either Hillary or Dèsirèe. This information does not significantly reveal the meaning of the idiom. However, when we combine the information with Zapp's statement in which he claims that hotel rooms arise in him sexual desire, we slightly reveal the meaning of the phrase. In other words, the reader may alternate the sentence by *We shouldn't have accepted their suggestion*.

The meaning of the phrase *get away with* can be recognised when taking into consideration the phrase *get away* (*to succeed in leaving a place*) and the preposition *with*. When combined together, its meaning can be written *to succeed in leaving a place and even to manage to leave it with something*. It is evident that the meaning obtained at the end of our analysis varies from the meaning in the brackets in the beginning; still the basic idea remains preserved.

Make up – (*to invent a story, especially in order to trick or entertain somebody*)
Are you making it up?

The question is part of the conversation between Zapp and Hillary. He tells a rather incredible story which happened to him that day. The story is quite thrilling and amusing, still Hillary's responses are expressed in a cold manner, as she has had an argument with her husband recently and she fears that her husband will never return home to her. Zapp lacks this knowledge, and therefore suspects that Hillary does not believe in truthfulness of his story.

The idiomatic expression *make up* can be interpreted variously, as it comprises several variants of possible meanings. We have introduced only one of them, since the context of situation dispels any doubts about the correctness of our choice.

The first indicator is represented by the story itself, as its character seems to be rather incredible to believe. Consequently, the lack of interest shown by Hilary guides the reader nearer to the meaning written above.

However, the verbal context represents the most reliable indicator in this particular situation. *Do you believe what I'm telling you or do you think I'm making it all up?* is the sentence uttered by Zapp, which immediately precedes the following Hillary's response written above. When the reader analyses Zapp's question, the obscurity in meaning disappears.

5.3 Conclusion of the practical body

We analysed several idiomatic expressions in the context of a literary text. Our intention to interpret meanings of them without using a dictionary met with success in most cases. To put it differently, the meanings of the idioms analysed were revealed mainly due to the context in which they appeared or due to our conceptual knowledge about the metaphors comprised in the individual idioms.

However, it should be stressed that this procedure includes several subjective features, namely the level of knowledge that a non-native speaker share both about the language and its culture, the amount of information provided by the context, the degree of opaqueness of individual idiomatic expressions and last but not least, the frequency of occurrence of individual idioms.

We have classified idioms into several groups according to which it is possible to recognise various strategies appropriate for interpretation of meanings of individual idiomatic expressions. The appropriateness of particular strategies varies according to the individual words. For example, the meanings of representatives of group concerning *typical conversational phrases* can be deduced easily, since their frequency of occurrence in language is enormous, and thus most of the non-native speakers know them by heart. Consequently, any possible analysis based on context or conceptual knowledge seems to be redundant here.

Context can be regarded as the most reliable indicator when dealing with *traditional idioms* and i*dioms in which action stands for emotions and feelings* i.e. when dealing with idiomatic expressions that are placed on the top of the idiomatic scale. The reasons can be directly seen; firstly their metaphorical meaning, on which they are based, is hardly recognisable; secondly, the frequency of their use is lower in comparison to conversational phrases.

By contrast, our conceptual knowledge seems to be appropriate when analyzing allusions, similes and sayings, since the access to metaphors, on which these expressions are based, is easier than in the cases of traditional idioms. We do not claim that these metaphors on themselves reveal the meanings of individual idioms belonging to the above-mentioned categories; however when we contextualise them (the metaphors), we can predict their meaning with ease.

From time to time, to reveal a meaning of an idiom insists the interplay of all the aspects mentioned above; however, these represent rather marginal cases.

The choice of strategy which the reader (hearer) selects for interpretation of meaning depends entirely on his/her belief; however we assume that the choice of strategy for the individual groups of idioms will correspond with our allocation of strategies to the particular groups of idioms mentioned above.

6. Conclusion

The analysis has verified that idiomatic expressions represent a typical feature of colloquial speech, as the majority of them concerning our analysis have occurred in direct or indirect speech acts, and thus we can claim that they are traditionally associated with informal rather then formal situations (Wales, 2001: 198). However, we should not forget the idioms which appeared in the writer's descriptions or comments, thus outside the direct and indirect speech acts. These serve as evidence that there is scarcely any discourse without some idioms occurring in it (ibid.)

As far as the reciprocal relationship between context and idioms is concerned, we can declare that context in its verbal or situational form represents a competent indicator when dealing with idiomatic or literal meaning of an idiom. In other words, it is often the context which determines the correct interpretation of a phrase, though we have encountered occurrences where the ambiguity of interpretation has remained, even after the process of contextualization (e.g. *put one's foot down, that's the way the cookie crumbles*).

When taking into account the perspective of a non-native speaker, we have ascertained that context along with our conceptual knowledge reveal the meaning of individual idiomatic phrases substantially, and thus even a non-native speaker of English can predict the meanings of idioms in a text to some extent.

On the contrary, as we have encountered several occurrences, where the meaning remained concealed, we can state that the procedure concerning prediction of meaning of an idiomatic phrase has subjective character, as it is based on the degree of idiomaticity of the particular idiom and on the amount of information resulting from the particular context in which it occurs.

As we have analysed idiomatic expression within a literary text, we should not forget to mention the peculiarities we have dealt with. In contrast to a typical discourse occurring in the "real world", the literal text frequently provides the reader (hearer) with some special knowledge of what is being uttered. In other words, in a literary text the reader is often enabled to observe the thoughts and feelings of individual characters which is definitely not the case in the traditional discourse.

On the contrary, in the traditional discourse we (as hearers) have the possibility to directly hear and observe what is being uttered and how it is done, while in a literary text we (as readers) have to rely on the information conveyed by the writer.

To summarise the idea, the analysis of idiomatic expressions within a literary text differs from the analysis within a traditional discourse situation, since the reader (hearer) relies on different indicators when interpreting the text.

Eventually, when a non-native speaker encounters a phrase where s/he is able to understand all the words, which constitute it, but not its overall meaning, and s/he lacks a handful dictionary, s/he can attempt to discern the meaning of the phrase with the help of context and his/her conceptual knowledge of the metaphorical meaning which the idiomatic phrase comprises.

7. Resume

This diploma thesis focuses on idiomatic expression in context of a literary text. It sheds light on the indicators which determine the speaker's (writer's) intention when using an idiom in a sentence. Therefore the notion of idiom with its lexical, syntactical and semantic peculiarities is introduced in the theoretical part. Beside idioms, the theoretical part deals with context and the characteristic features of a literary text. The part devoted to the notion of context focuses on the context of situation and the context inside a literary text. The practical part analyses idioms selected from the book *Chaging Places* by David Lodge. The major concern is to demonstrate how the individual indicators can help to a non-native speaker to reveal meanings of individual idioms. The appendix includes idiomatic expression occurred in the analyzed text.

Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na idiomatické výrazy v kontextu literárního textu. Všímá si především indikátorů, kteří určují záměr mluvčího (pisatele) při užití idiomatického ve větě. Proto, je v teoretické části představen pojem idiomu se svými lexikálními, syntaktickými a sémantickými zvláštnostmi. Vedle idiomů, se teoretická část věnuje kontextu a charakteristickým znakům literárního textu. Část, která se zabývá kontextem, se zaměřuje na situační kontext a kontext v literárním textu. Praktická část analyzuje idiomy vybrané z knihy od Davida Lodge *Changing Places*. Hlavním záměrem je ukázat, jakým způsobem mohou jednotlivé indikátory napomoci člověku, jehož rodným jazykem není angličtina, ke správné interpretaci jednotlivých idiomů. V příloze jsou uvedeny idiomatické výrazy, které se objevily v analyzovaném textu.

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