

ON TRACK: IDIOM PRESENTATION IN AN UPPER SECONDARY EFL COURSE BOOK

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kivettyneet ilmaisut ovat ilmaisuja, jotka muodostuvat useammasta kuin yhdestä sanasta. Kivettyneitä ilmaisuja ei kuitenkaan jaeta erillisiin osiin sanatasolla, vaan ne käyttäytyvät ennemminkin kuten yksittäiset sanat. Kivettyneet ilmaisut jaetaan eri alaluokkiin ja idiomit ovat yksi kivettyneiden ilmaisujen alaluokista. Perinteisesti määriteltynä idiomit ovat monisanaisia yksikköjä, joiden merkitys on vaikeaselkoinen ja rakenne muuttumaton. Tämä tarkoittaa, ettei idiomien merkitys ole määriteltävissä vain lisäämällä sen yksittäisten sanojen merkitykset yhteen. Idiomien juuret ovat syvästi kulttuurissa ja ne voidaankin nähdä kielen opiskelijan ikkunana kohdekielen kulttuureihin. Kuitenkin idiomit ja niiden piilomerkitykset voivat aiheuttaa ongelmia kielen opiskelijalle.</p> <p>Tekstikirjoilla on rooli idiomien opettamisessa, ja siksi tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää miten lukion englannin oppikirjassa idiomit ovat esillä. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin laadullista sisällönanalyysia. Analyysissä tarkasteltiin kontekstia, jossa idiomit esiintyivät ja sen perusteella luotiin neljä erillistä kategoriaa: idiomit teksteissä, idiomit sanalistoissa, idiomit tehtävissä ja selkeästi erillisesti opetetut idiomit.</p> <p>Analyysissä selvisi, että vaikka kurssikirja sisältää idiomeja, se ei tarjoa oppilaille strategioita tai tietoa kuinka tunnistaa idiomeja tai kuinka analysoida niitä. Kirja tarjoaa tarkempaa tietoa idiomeista informaatiolaatikossa, joka kuitenkin antaa melko suppean määritelmän eikä neuvo oppilaita sen enempää strategioista, kuinka idiomien merkityksiä voi yrittää analysoida. Tehtävissä esiintyvät idiomit on upotettu tehtäviin, joissa oppilas kohtaa idiomeja ja joutuu myös itse käyttämään niitä. Oppilas ei kuitenkaan välttämättä ymmärrä, että kyseessä on idiomi, sillä se ei käy tehtävissä ilmi, vaan idiomeja kohdellaan kuten muitakin sanoja ja lauseita, jotka esiintyvät tehtävässä. Kuitenkin idiomeja esiintyy kirjan päätöksissä, joten idiomien tärkeys on huomioitu.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Formulaic language, in general, refers to various types of sequences that are processed as whole entities rather than broken down into individual components even though they consist of more than one word (Wray 2002:4). Part of formulaic sequences are idioms, which are an interesting subcategory due to their non-logical nature. Traditionally idioms are labelled as multi-word units that have opaque meaning and have fixed structure (Langlotz 2006: 2). This means that the meaning of those expressions cannot be derived simply by adding together the meanings of single components and that the structure of the expression is somewhat established.

In foreign language learning, idioms can be seen as a cultural window into the target language since idioms are deeply rooted in culture (Granger and Meunier 2008: 248, Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 89). However, because idioms are not processed as regular phrases, but instead need to be learnt as units, they can pose difficulties for a foreign language learner (Carter & Schmitt 2004: 4). It is suggested that English learners should be taught to recognise idioms and their characteristics. Here EFL textbooks play a crucial role in teaching idioms since idioms are often omitted from learner targeted speech (Mäntylä 1997, Irujo 1986 cited in Wray 2002: 182). Thus, this paper aims at investigating how an EFL course book *On Track 1* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014) presents and teaches idioms.

A previous study concerning idioms and EFL textbooks was conducted over a decade ago, thus, the EFL textbooks used in that study are partly outdated (Runosalu 2005). A more recent study is an MA thesis from 2012 which investigated formulaic sequences in two different EFL textbooks (Ylisirniö 2012). However, the study did not concentrate specifically on idioms but had a wider perspective as also other types of formulaic sequences were investigated. As a continuation of these two studies, the present study focuses on idioms in a current EFL textbook that is being used in upper secondary schools in Finland. The course book was published in 2014, thus, it is relatively new and represents the current time and pedagogy.

2. IDIOMS

2.1 The definition and characteristics of an idiom

When defining an idiom one is often faced with a problem of various definitions. The term “idiom” or “idiomatic” is often used either to refer to specifically to idioms or to formulaic language in general. Formulaic language can be seen as an umbrella term to various types of different sequences which are processed as a whole rather than distinct words (Wray 2002:4). Hence, these chunks of words seem to function as single units even though they consist of more than one word.

Since the term formulaic sequences is an umbrella term and, in fact, consists of many different forms and sub-types, it is difficult to form an exhaustive list of characteristics and definitions which would apply to all subtypes (Carter and Schmitt 2004:2). However, as Carter and Schmitt (2004:3) list, the most used criterion includes institutionalization, fixedness, and non-compositionality. Therefore, idioms are one subcategory of formulaic sequences, as traditionally idioms have been labelled as multi-word units that have opaque meaning and have fixed structure (Langlotz 2006: 2). But the “non-logical” nature of idioms makes them distinct from most other fixed formulaic expressions, meaning that there seems to be no logical link between the literal and non-literal meaning of an idiom (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001:68). In short, idioms are multi-word fixed expressions which have figurative properties.

Traditionally idioms are viewed as non-compositional phrases that act like words (Langlotz 2006:19). These vocabulary items are processed as a whole and, hence, they are not broken down into individual components (Philip 2011: 17). Non-compositionality means that the meaning cannot be formed on the basis of the semantics of the components (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 72). Compositionality also refers to the ease to analyse the meaning of an idiom based on the meanings and syntactic roles of each component (Philip 2011: 18).

However, the traditional view of idioms as non-compositional units is too simplistic (Langlotz 2006: 26). Glucksberg and McGlone adopt a wider view on determining compositionality. According to Glucksberg and McGlone (2001) compositionality should be seen as a varying feature. On one end of the continuum are idioms whose meaning cannot be derived from the semantic meaning of their components, while on the other end are idioms that are more compositional (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 70-73).

Alongside the compositionality, transparency is one of the main characteristics of idioms. Idioms can either be transparent, semi-transparent or opaque (Mäntylä 2004: 29). Compositionality refers to the literal meaning of each component whereas transparency refers to the extent to which the metaphorical meaning of an idiom can be detected from the overall literal meaning (Mäntylä 2004). Transparent idioms create a clear image between the metaphorical and literal meaning (Mäntylä 2004: 29). Opaque idioms, on the other hand, do not provide a logical link between the metaphorical meaning and the literal meaning, thus, etymology is needed for the interpretation (Mäntylä 2004: 29). For instance, *give the green light* is a transparent idiom whereas *kick the bucket* is an example of an opaque idiom (Mäntylä 2004: 29).

Another essential characteristic of an idiom, alongside compositionality and transparency, is the fixedness in form (Mäntylä 2004). Generally frozen idioms are viewed to be more idiomatic than idioms which allow more variation in their form (Philip 2011: 19). But here again, the degree of frozenness varies depending on the idiom. Although frozenness is one of the main attributes of an idiom, still many idioms allow some variation in form, for instance in grammar (Pulman 1993, McGlone et al. 1994 cited in Mäntylä 2004:33). However such variations may shift the meaning or the nuances of the idiomatic meaning since the idiomatic meaning is tightly bound to the fixed wording (Mäntylä 2004: 34, Philip 2011: 16). A change in grammar or substitution of constituents can result in situation where the metaphorical meaning is not the primary meaning but the dominant meaning is the literal one (Philip 2011: 16).

As stated earlier, the meaning of an idiom cannot be established simply by adding together the meanings of its single components, but instead it works as an item of vocabulary and the meaning needs to be attached to it (Philip 2011: 16). However, in order to attach that meaning to an idiom, it must be institutionalised. This means that the meaning is recognised by all (Philip 2011: 15). Institutionalisation guarantees the correct interpretations since the meaning can be opaque. If the idiom is not institutionalised, one is compelled to analyse the meaning of each component separately instead of treating that multi-word item as a single word. This, on the other hand, is no guarantee for a correct interpretation (Philip 2011: 16).

2.2 Idioms in foreign language learning and teaching

2.2.1 Idioms and the foreign language learner

Playing with language and with idioms is a natural tendency and an everyday activity, appearing both in spoken and in written language (Prodromou 2003: 42). Idioms are deeply rooted in culture and learning idioms is one way to immerse oneself in the target culture (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 89, Granger and Meunier 2008: 248). Wray (2002: 182) points out that native speakers often assume that certain expressions are widely known and a part of basic vocabulary when, in fact, these expressions can be highly idiomatic and, therefore, cause problems for language learners who have not necessarily encountered them before. Mäntylä (2004) suggests that perhaps non-native learners of English are not expected to use idioms in their speech but that non-native speakers need to recognise meanings behind idioms.

As explained above, one reason for foreign language learners to learn idioms is to understand the opaque meanings of idioms when encountered in native speech and not so much the utilisation of idioms in learners' own production. However, if the aim is native-like fluency, idioms have a great influence in language fluency. Sequences whose meanings are not simply the sum of the meaning of the components, including idioms, can assist a non-native speaker to sound more like a native-speaker (Wood 2010: 58). Wood (2010) acknowledges the link between fluency and formulaic sequences. He emphasises the importance of social identity, belonging and successful experiences as a communicator. He explains that less controlled

processing and reliance on formulaic sequences, and idioms, can result in feeling of belonging and positive experiences (2010:74-83)

Most idioms, even the compositional and transparent ones, cannot be interpreted only on the basis of the literal meaning and, moreover, literal meaning can interfere with interpretation of the correct metaphorical meaning (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 87). In addition, since idioms may have dual-meanings, indicating that alongside the metaphorical interpretation the idiom has also a sensible literal meaning, it can cause troubles for non-native speakers when only the literal meaning is taken into account.

In addition, some idioms require culture-specific knowledge for the interpretation of the expression (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 87). Second or foreign language learners may lack that knowledge which makes it even harder to form a correct interpretation. Similarly, translating or interpreting idioms on the basis of one's own mother tongue often leads to incorrect interpretation (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 87). Native speakers have intuition in their favour, meaning that native speakers' competence also includes shared knowledge of language and culture (Prodromou 2003: 45).

2.2.2 Idioms and foreign language teaching

As explained earlier, there is a natural tendency to play with language and playing with idioms is an everyday activity appearing both in spoken and written language (Prodromou 2003: 42). In contrast, non-native learners of English may not have much contact with texts and speech produced by English-speaking societies and their contact with English is restricted to classroom and, thereby, to input by non-native teacher (Prodromou 2003: 45). Here what is worth noticing is that the input by non-native teacher and material which neglect the idiomaticity and idioms leads to a situation in which students might acquire high levels of skills but lack in idiomaticity and, hence, in natural language skills (Prodromou 2003). What is in contradictory to learning idioms as whole units, however, is that an input which is targeted to second language learners does not necessarily include idioms since idioms are often omitted from speech as if learners were protected from idiomatic language (Irujo 1986

cited in Wray 2002: 182). This reinforces the notion that if students ought to also learn idiomaticity, textbooks should not neglect teaching also idioms.

Mäntylä (1997) argues that instead of teaching the learners idioms so that they can adopt them in their own production, it is crucial for the learners to recognise idioms. Moreover, she continues, learners should be taught suitable strategies to analyse the meaning of idioms, since, although the meaning is figurative, the meaning can be interpreted with the help of the literal meaning. In her study she found out that the subjects often relied too heavily on their mother tongue when defining the meaning of an idiom. This led to a situation where subjects concentrated on single words and which, in turn, led to a literal interpretation. Mäntylä (1997: 188) speculates that if idioms had had more focus in foreign language teaching, the idiom interpretation task could have been easier for the subjects. In similar vein, Mäntylä (1997: 182) suggests that it could be worth it to teach learners about the characteristics of idioms.

The previous study concerning idioms and English course books used in Finnish schools was conducted over ten years ago. In her MA thesis Runosalo (2005) studied two English course books used in upper secondary school. The objective was to find out how these books expressed and taught idioms. Runosalo found out that both of the course books contained idioms but only one of the two consciously brought up the idioms, for instance, in exercises. In 2012 Ylisirniö wrote an MA thesis on formulaic sequences in two upper secondary school English books. He investigated what kinds of formulaic language these books presented and how those sequences were presented. His study had a wider perspective than Runosalo's but as idioms are also formulaic language, his study also concerns idioms and English upper secondary course books. Ylisirniö found idioms, collocations, lexical phrases and phrasal verbs in the two books and, out of all formulaic sequences, idioms were most presented. Ylisirniö made an interesting remark on how idioms were presented: in one book there were exercises concerning idioms but none of the exercises actually consisted of metatext which would have explained the phenomenon of idioms, including characteristics and how they function (Ylisirniö 2012: 87).

Four core characteristics of idioms were introduced above. Opaqueness refers to the difficulty to form a link between the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning (Mäntylä 2004: 29). Fixedness is one of the main attributes of idioms and, generally, frozen idioms are viewed to be more idiomatic, however, many idioms allow some variation in form (Philip 2011: 19, Pulman 1993, McGlone et al. 1994 cited in Mäntylä 2004:34). Idioms are also a natural part of language and they are deeply rooted in culture. This means that many native speakers often assume that certain expressions are widely known and part of basic vocabulary but also that idioms provide a window to the target language (Wray 2002: 182, Granger and Meunier 2008: 248). In foreign language learning idioms can pose difficulties since they are non-compositional, often opaque and fixed in form. Mäntylä (1997) suggests that learners should at least learn to recognise idioms and strategies how to analyse them. Here textbooks have a crucial role in idiom teaching since idioms are often omitted from speech targeted to learners (Irujo 1986 cited in Wray 2002: 182).

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 The aim and the research questions

As noted earlier, idioms are a natural part of everyday language and function as a cultural window to the target language (Prodromou 2003: 42, Granger and Meunier 2008: 248). However, idioms can pose difficulties for an EFL learner since their meaning is often opaque. It is suggested that learners should be at least taught how to recognise idioms (Mäntylä 1997). Since idioms are often omitted from speech targeted to learners, the role of EFL materials in teaching idioms is significant (Irujo 1986 cited in Wray 2002: 182). Therefore, the focus in this study is on idioms and an EFL course book. My aim is to investigate how an EFL upper secondary school course book teaches idioms. The research question of the present study is:

How does the course book present idioms?

The research question aims at investigating the way the course book presents idioms and the way idioms are taught. Does the textbook explicitly guide students in the use of idioms or are

idioms taught implicitly. Therefore the aim is to look at the context in which the idioms appear, i.e. in texts only, in exercises only, or in both.

3.2 The data

The data includes one EFL course book used in Finnish upper secondary schools. I chose an upper secondary school course book because students in upper secondary school have studied English for several years and their language skills are more advanced, hence, it can be assumed that upper secondary school EFL books would contain more idioms than those used in comprehensive school.

I used *On Track 1* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014) published by Sanomapro. *On track, 1* is used in the first compulsory course of English in upper secondary school. The course contents relate to linguistic diversity, English language as a global phenomenon and language skills as a tool to increase cultural knowledge (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2016). Thus, it can be assumed that the book would also contain references to idioms which are also a cultural phenomenon.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The aim of this study is to describe the presentation of idioms in an upper secondary school course book, thus, for this study I used content analysis as the method of analysis. Content analysis is a qualitative method of analysis which provides tools for systematic and objective analysis of documents and it aims at describing and understanding the phenomenon (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018:117). In content analysis, the relevant parts are selected from the irrelevant ones in the original data. The data is then analysed in order to find similarities and/or differences. On the basis of these similarities and/or differences the researcher is able to form different categories or themes into which these selected parts can be grouped (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 123-124).

In my study, I first systematically went through the course book and selected all idioms in the book. All the parts of the course book were analysed; texts, vocabulary lists, exercises and grammar units. For this, I used the idiom definition described in the theory section. In addition, I used two different idiom dictionaries: *Oxford dictionary of English idioms* (2009) and *Longman dictionary of English idioms* (1980). If the expression was not found in either of the dictionaries, it was not counted. After discovering all the idioms in the book, I listed the idioms and marked the page where I found them. Since my aim is to find out how this course book presents idioms I also described the context in which they appeared. For instance, *exercise, text or vocabulary list*. After this, I was able to form categories and label the idioms.

4. ANALYSIS

The aim of the study is to find out how the course book *On Track 1* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014) presents idioms. Therefore, the idioms were labelled according to the context in which they appeared. In order to detect idioms in the course book, word “chunks” were first searched. As explained earlier, idioms are multi-word items that act like single words. One criteria was also the degree of transparency of the idioms but this criterion caused problems since some idioms are more transparent than others, yet they are still considered as idioms. For this reason two types of idioms dictionaries were used to check if the phrase is an idiom or not.

In this chapter, the idioms found in the course book are presented in four different categories. The categories are:

1. *Idioms embedded in text*
2. *Idioms found in vocabulary lists*
3. *Idioms in exercises*
4. *Explicitly taught idioms*

The course book is divided into four different parts, which are called units. Each unit then consists of four different chapters that are called topics in the book. Three of the topics

include a longer text, while the fourth topic does not include an actual text but pronunciation practices or theme vocabulary. For instance, in units one and two there is one topic about pronunciation and in units three and four there is a topic about theme vocabulary so that means that these topics do not concentrate on a text but instead on pronunciation or vocabulary. Other topics have one longer main text, which is called a key text and then exercises concerning the topic. So in total, the whole book has 12 longer texts. There are also shorter texts in each topic, which may relate to the key text or exercises. For example, small info boxes. The term text refers to both key texts and these shorter texts. After every key text there is a vocabulary list which provides the Finnish equivalent for the English word and also the phonetic transcription of the English word. All of the vocabulary lists in the course book are constructed in this way. The fourth category, *Explicitly taught idioms*, means those idioms that are taught by also providing knowledge on idioms as a phenomenon. Idioms in exercises, on the other hand, refers to those idioms which were found in exercises, but the exercises did not raise awareness specifically on idioms.

The course book contains 23 different idioms, which altogether occur 47 times as some are repeated in the book (see Appendix). The idioms were found in key texts, shorter texts, vocabulary lists and in exercises. In addition, the book provides information on idiom characteristics and, thus, explicit knowledge on idioms. The book also contains a grammar unit but the unit did not contain any idioms. 20 of the unique idioms appear in texts, mostly in key texts. 15 of the idioms are brought up in vocabulary lists and 10 in exercises. The remaining 2 of the idioms were in “an information box” which provided knowledge on idioms and examples of them. This means that most of the idioms appear in texts. Next, I will discuss each of the categories in more depth. Since all of the longer key texts include a vocabulary list and most of the idioms embedded in the texts can also be found in vocabulary lists, I will discuss the two categories in the same section.

4.1. Idioms in texts and vocabulary lists

The course book is divided into four units, which all contain four longer key texts. The topics of the texts concern the lives of teenagers. For example, online friendships, student exchange, social media and family. In addition, each unit also includes shorter “information boxes”. The

function of these information boxes is to provide additional knowledge. For instance, one key text is about a South African exchange student in Finland so the topic includes an information box about different languages in South Africa. Each unit also contains either a theme vocabulary or pronunciation section. Most of the idioms found in texts were embedded in the key texts of the units. Only one idiom, *by far* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 59), was found in a shorter info box about languages in South Africa.

It can be assumed that the main texts are more prominent in teaching and that they form the core for each unit. Therefore, idioms are placed in texts where the students are very likely to encounter them. In addition, altogether, there are twenty idioms in the main texts and every unit that was included in the analysis contains idioms, thus, it can be assumed that the course book recognises, at least, to some degree the importance of idioms. Irujo (Irujo 1986 cited in Wray 2002: 182) has suggested that learners are somewhat “protected” from idiomatic language in speech but, according to the number of occurrences in *On Track 1*, this does not apply to written input.

Most of the idioms which were found in the main texts appeared also in the vocabulary list after the text. This means that the students rarely have to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar or odd phrases but they can rely on the vocabulary lists. This gives a notion that the students are expected to rely on vocabulary lists when it comes to determining the meaning of an unfamiliar phrase instead of guessing or inferring. Although it is almost an impossible task for a learner to analyse and infer opaque idioms, it is possible to analyse more transparent and compositional idioms. It is suggested that it would be useful for the learner to learn to recognise idioms and learn strategies how to analyse idioms (Mäntylä 1997). What is worth noticing in the presentation of idioms in the texts in *On track 1* is that many very transparent idioms which are reasonably easy to analyse, such as *face to face* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 29, 32) and *the bigger the better* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 14, 16), appear also in the vocabulary lists. On the other hand, a less transparent idiom *do the rounds* (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 163) does not appear in the vocabulary list, thus, the students do not have the possibility to check the meaning of the phrase or check whether their guess about the meaning is correct. As Boers and Lindstromberg (2008: 380) state learners often need guidance in idiom guessing process and it is crucial that they are able to infer the correct meaning.

4.2. Idioms in exercises

Idioms were found in eleven exercises. This is 7% out of all the exercises in the book. The number is relatively small but it needs to be pointed out that every unit contains exercises with idioms. These exercises are related to the texts and their vocabulary and phrases. The most common type of exercise is a phrase hunt in which the students are given a Finnish phrase and their task is to find the English equivalent in the text. This exercise seems to be quite common in *On Track 1* since it appears almost every time after a new text. The exercise functions as a tool to make the learners take a look at the text and notice important phrases but it does not provide learners with opportunities to use those phrases and idioms. A similar kind of exercise where idioms can be found was an A/B- exercise in which students work in pairs. They are either A or B and both of them have phrases in English in their box. They take turns and read aloud the phrase and the listener has to translate that into Finnish. In this exercise, like in the phrase hunt, the learners are matching the English phrase with the Finnish equivalent.

Most of the idioms that are first encountered in the main texts are later brought up in the exercises and students' attention is raised. This means that the idioms are not simply embedded in the text and taught implicitly. However, the exercises do not explicitly raise attention on idioms even though idioms appear in the exercises. This means that the phrases are not highlighted as idioms but they are treated like the other phrases or words in the exercise. This raises the question whether the student can recognise an idiom which is relatively frozen and somewhat opaque from the more ordinary phrases. For instance, in the "phrase hunt" exercise the learner is guided to search the expressions from the text and copy them on the line. The expressions in the phrase hunt include idioms and regular phrases which are not necessarily frozen or ambiguous yet they are treated the same way in that exercise.

Most of the idioms found in the exercises also appear in the texts and in vocabulary lists. However, there is one exercise in which the idiom appears only in the exercise but not in the text or in the vocabulary list. The exercise is a multiple choice type of exercise in which the

students have to choose the correct answer according to the text they have read. The idiom *all walks of life* appears in one of the options when the question is: “The author recommends that people should” (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 124) Here what is worth noticing is that since the idiom is not mentioned earlier in the text or vocabulary list the learner most likely has to make his/her own interpretation of the meaning or use a dictionary.

On the other hand, there is an example in which the idiom appears in the text and in an exercise but it is not translated in the vocabulary list. The exercise is a pair activity where the partners have to explain in English to each other the meanings of bolded expressions in sentences. In the exercise, the idiom *do the rounds* appears in the sentence “If news or a joke or flu does the rounds it is” (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 166) and the task is to explain its meaning in English. Here the learners are again “on their own” meaning that the correct answer is not found in the vocabulary list. Instead the learner can use the sentence in the exercise as a help to interpret the meaning but most likely the learner has to also look at the sentence and context in which it appears in the main text.

4.3. Explicitly taught idioms

As Mäntylä (1997: 182) suggests, it might be worth teaching learners about the characteristics of idioms. Although the exercises themselves do not include any information about idioms, *On Track 1* provides some information on what idioms are. On page 100 there is an info box with a headline “What’s an idiom?”. The info box explains that idioms are phrases which are hard to understand even though the meanings of the single words are familiar. The info box also contains two examples of idioms: *over the moon* and *drive up the wall*.

The info box does explain one of the core characteristics of idioms. Most idioms cannot be interpreted only on the basis of the literal meaning of the words and, in fact, the literal meaning can interfere the correct metaphorical meaning. Since some idioms also have sensible literal meaning it can cause trouble for a foreign language learner (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 87). The info box emphasises that the literal meaning of the idiom *over the moon* is very different from the idiomatic meaning of having a strong feeling of happiness.

However, the info box does not present any learning strategies for learning idioms or strategies of how to analyse them. The book says that the actual meaning of an idiom is different than the literal one but it does not make the learners aware that in fact the literal meaning can harm the inference process. Moreover, direct translation on the basis of one's own mother tongue often leads to false interpretation, but the info box does not raise this issue (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 87). Mäntylä's study (1997) found that the subjects often relied too much on their mother tongue, which led to a literal interpretation of the idiom. This is an aspect which foreign language learners should be aware of and, therefore, it is odd that the info box does not include information on how to analyse idioms or information on the difficulties that lie in idiom interpretation.

Even though the book contains relatively large number of idioms, the exercises that relate to the main text do not provide any explicit guidance on idioms. In addition, the info box simply tells briefly what idioms are but it does not contain any tasks relating specifically to idioms. For instance, Boers and Lindstromberg (2008: 379-380) suggest that tasks which include categorising idioms on the basis of their metaphorical meaning or tasks which contain guessing with the help of context are more effective.

The info box does not make any reference to idioms as a cultural phenomenon and it does not provide the opportunity to see idioms as a cultural window into the cultures of English language. As discussed above, relying too heavily on one's mother tongue often leads to incorrect interpretation of an idiom. Perhaps learners need to be more aware that idioms are deeply rooted in culture. In addition, the cultural nature of idioms can function as motivation to learn idioms.

5. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that most of idioms found in *On Track 1* are embedded in key texts. These key texts are longer texts and most of the chapters, or topics as they are referred to in *On Track 1*, are constructed around these texts. It can be assumed that these key texts are

prominent in teaching, thus, students are very likely to encounter these idioms. Most of the idioms that appear in texts also appear in vocabulary lists where the Finnish equivalent is given. Therefore, students rarely have to guess the meaning of the phrases. It is almost an impossible task to analyse opaque idioms but it is possible to analyse more transparent ones (Mäntylä 1997). Therefore it is surprising that many very transparent idioms are translated in the vocabulary lists whereas a less transparent idiom is not.

Ylisirniö (2012: 87) found in his MA thesis that the upper secondary EFL book he studied did not provide any metatext in exercises to explain the phenomenon of idioms. The same appears in *On Track 1*. Idioms are found in exercises but none of the exercises provide explicit guidance on how to treat them. However, *On Track 1* does provide some explanation on idioms and their characteristics. The “What is an idiom” information box provides a definition of idioms as phrases that are hard to understand even though the meanings of the single words are familiar (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2014: 100). The information box does not give any other idiom characteristics, for instance, fixedness or cultural aspects. The information box also fails to inform the readers about the possible difficulties with idioms, such as, relying too much on the literal meaning or interpreting the meaning on the basis of one’s mother tongue. Since idioms are deeply rooted in culture, they provide a window to the target language but also cause problems when learners tend rely too much on their mother tongue when interpreting the meaning of an idiom (Glucksberg and McGlone 2001: 89, Mäntylä 1997).

According to Mäntylä (1997) it is crucial for the learners to recognise idioms and to learn suitable strategies to analyse them. This supports the view that although the book provides some explanation on idioms, the information box should also include more information about the characteristics of idioms and the difficulties they may pose. In a similar vein, the information box should contain some exercises which focus on idioms and provide possibilities for learners to learn strategies on how to infer their meaning.

Since this study concentrated on only one book and the idioms in it, I was able to analyse the book very thoroughly and focus on the different contexts within the book. The study gave multiple examples of the strengths and weaknesses regarding the way the book presents

idioms. On the other hand, the data consists of only one course book, therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all EFL books. There can be differences between the EFL books from different publishers as well as differences depending on the grade to which the books are targeted. Future studies could focus on investigating how other *On Track* books teach idioms. There are six compulsory courses in Finnish upper secondary school and the *On Track* series provides books for all of these courses. Future studies could also concentrate on idioms in EFL books used in comprehensive school since it seems that no previous study focuses on EFL books of that level. Moreover, it would be interesting to find out learners' opinions on idioms and the process of learning them. Therefore, future studies could include the aspect of learners' opinions.

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APPENDICES

Idiom	Texts	Vocabulary lists	Exercises	Explicitly taught idioms	Page number
the bigger the better	X	X	X		14, 16, 17
face to face	X	X	X		29, 32, 34
from the word go	X	X	X		57, 58, 61
go downhill	X	X	X		56, 58, 61
by far	X				59
for one thing	X		X		67, 72
cause a stir	X	X	X		84, 86, 87
as far as something goes	X	X			83 , 86
not know from Adam	X	X			96, 97
over the moon				X	100
drive up the wall				X	100
the tip of the iceberg	X	X			106, 108
play it safe	X	X			120, 122
better to be safe than sorry	X	X			120, 122
all walks of life			X		124
down under	X				131
get fed up	X	X	X		136, 137, 138
tie the knot	X	X	X		139, 141, 142
by and large	X	X			163, 165
be at heart	X	X			163, 165

child's play	X				163
do the rounds	X		X		163, 166
go off rails	X	X			164, 166