

# Anger Idioms in English

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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## SUMMARY

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## **SUMMARY**

This thesis deals with teaching anger idioms in the EFL classroom. The aim is to show how idioms can be taught in EFL using the cognitive linguistic approach, more specifically with motivation. The paper gives an overview of conceptualization of anger, as well as the folk theory of anger and conceptual metaphors which motivate anger idioms in English. EFL textbooks used in Croatian elementary schools show that idioms have traditionally been taught implicitly, using insufficient teaching materials, and are introduced as late as upper primary school. Since studies have shown that even young learners are capable of understanding figurative expressions, they should be introduced to them as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Examples of teaching activities provided in this paper show how idioms could be taught following some general strategies used in the cognitive linguistic approach: explicit teaching, connecting literal and figurative meanings, grouping idioms by motivation or meaning, and discussing and analysing idioms' meanings. The activities follow those general strategies and anger idioms are used as illustrative examples. They show how students can connect literal and figurative meanings of idioms, create their own lists of idioms, group them by motivation, draw their mental images of idioms, or even teach them to their peers, all while learning idioms' meanings and raising metaphor awareness.

Keywords: figurative language, anger idioms, EFL, teaching strategies, cognitive linguistics

## SAŽETAK

Ovaj diplomski rad bavi se poučavanjem frazema za izricanje ljutnje u nastavi engleskoga kao stranoga jezika. Cilj rada je pokazati kako se frazemi mogu poučavati u nastavi engleskoga kao stranoga jezika primjenom kognitivnolingvističkog pristupa, točnije pomoću motivacije. Rad daje pregled konceptualizacije ljutnje, kao i pučke teorije ljutnje i konceptualnih metafora koje motiviraju frazeme za izricanje ljutnje u engleskome jeziku. Udžbenici engleskoga jezika koji se koriste u osnovnim školama u Hrvatskoj pokazuju da se frazemi poučavaju implicitno, uz korištenje nedostatnih nastavnih materijala, i uvode se tek u višim razredima osnovne škole. Budući da su istraživanja pokazala da mlađi učenici razumiju figurativne izraze, oni bi trebali biti uvedeni već u 1. razredu. Primjeri nastavnih aktivnosti opisanih u ovome radu pokazuju kako se frazemi mogu poučavati pomoću nekih općih strategija u kognitivnolingvističkom pristupu, a to su: eksplicitno poučavanje, povezivanje doslovnog i prenesenog značenja, grupiranje frazema prema motivaciji ili značenju, te analiza i razgovor o značenju frazema. Aktivnosti koriste te opće strategije na primjeru frazema za izricanje ljutnje. One pokazuju kako učenici mogu povezivati doslovna i prenesena značenja frazema, sastaviti svoje popise frazema, grupirati ih prema motivaciji, nacrtati i prikazati svoje vizualizacije tih frazema ili ih poučavati svojim vršnjacima, a sve to dok uče značenja frazema i podižu svijest o metaforama.

Ključne riječi: figurativni jezik, frazemi za izricanje ljutnje, engleski kao strani jezik, strategije poučavanja, kognitivna lingvistika

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Idioms, similar to other figurative expressions, are generally more difficult for EFL students to understand than other vocabulary items. This has to do with the traditional approach to teaching idioms and figurative language in general. This approach neglects motivation in language and offers insufficient materials, especially for learning idioms. In the cognitive linguistic approach, motivation plays a major role in both teaching and learning idioms and other figurative expressions. According to Panther and Radden (2011: 9) “a linguistic sign (target) is motivated to the extent that some of its properties are shaped by a linguistic or non-linguistic source and language-independent factors.” This definition also highlights two aspects of motivation: *source*, which could be cognitive or linguistic, and *target*, which is a form or content of the linguistic sign (Panther and Radden 2011: 9).

Cognitive linguistic studies show that the meanings of most idioms are motivated (Kövecses 2010). For example, if we look at the idiom *get steamed up*, there is a link between its literal and figurative meaning. If we imagine our body as a container filled with fluid, or emotions, and the feeling of anger as heat applied to that fluid, we could say that anger is a hot fluid in a container. A pot filled with water steams up when water starts boiling, and we say that we feel a similar reaction in our body when we are angry. Here we can see the connection between the literal and figurative meaning of this idiom. This helps us to understand the meaning of the idiom *get steamed up* which is ‘to feel angry’. One of the cognitive mechanisms which motivates idioms is conceptual metaphor. For example, *get steamed up* is motivated by the ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor.

Teaching idioms using the cognitive linguistic approach means teaching them by explicitly showing the link between literal and figurative meanings. Explicit teaching helps learners understand idioms’ meanings and raises their awareness of metaphor. In activities specifically designed for teaching idioms, students are encouraged to make connections between literal and figurative meanings and link idioms to their personal experiences. All of this leads to better comprehension and memorization of idioms.

The aim of this paper is to show how idioms can be taught in EFL using the cognitive linguistic approach, more specifically with motivation. Anger idioms motivated by conceptual metaphors will be used as illustrative examples. The activities described in this paper are aimed at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but could be modified for younger or older students.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of conceptualization of anger. Section 3 deals with the cognitive linguistic approach to teaching idioms and strategies that can

be used to teach figurative language in EFL. Section 4 provides examples of general strategies and specific activities which could be used to teach idioms using the cognitive linguistic approach. Section 5 discusses how EFL learners could more easily memorize idioms which are taught using the cognitive linguistic approach and the teaching activities described in the previous section. The final section is the conclusion.



## 2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ANGER

### 2.1. *Metaphor and emotion*

Emotions are usually considered to be only feelings, which is why the study of emotions is usually not taken seriously. Lakoff (1990: 380) argues that “emotions have an extremely complex conceptual structure, which gives rise to a wide variety of nontrivial inferences.” When it comes to anger, there are some conventional expressions for expressing anger, but they seem too diverse to find any coherent system of categorisation of those expressions. Lakoff (1990: 381) claims that there actually is a coherent conceptual organization of those expressions and idioms. What is more, much of that organization is metaphorical and metonymic.

When it comes to conceptualization of emotions, it is normal to assume that members of different cultures interpret their emotions in different ways. At the same time, it would not be unusual to have some similarities in different cultures, because people in general talk about certain emotional concepts which are either the same or each other’s counterparts in some other cultures. Kövecses (2005: 139) suggests “that there are certain conceptual metaphors that are at least near-universals and that their near-universality comes from universal aspects of bodily functioning in emotional states.” To prove this, it is important to examine how people talk about their emotions across different cultures. In this process, all linguistic evidence for different figurative ways of expressing emotions, including metaphors and metonymies, should be looked into. What is more, as many figurative linguistic expressions related to emotions as possible should be studied in several languages.

Kövecses (2005) offers an example of figurative expressions for love in English and Hungarian, which are, genetically, two unrelated languages. He looked at some women’s magazines in English and Hungarian with his students and analysed figurative expressions for expressing emotions in general and, more specifically, for expressing love. The conclusion of that analysis of women’s magazines is that the same metaphors and metonymies for expressing emotions exist in both languages, despite them being completely unrelated.

### 2.2. *The folk theory of anger*

The common folk theory of the physiological effects of anger lists typical effects such as increased body heat, internal pressure, agitation, and so on. This folk theory states that when anger increases, its physiological effects also increase. From the folk theory comes a system of

metonymies for anger based on the physiological effects that they are connected with, for example, *hot under the collar* is connected to body heat. These metonymies and expressions “indicate the presence of anger via its supposed physiological effects” (Lakoff 1990: 383).

The folk theory of physiological effects was the basis for Lakoff and Kövecses’ (1987) characterization of folk understanding of anger in English as a prototypical cognitive model of anger. The suggested cognitive model goes as follows:

#### 1. Offending event

Wrongdoer offends self.

Wrongdoer is at fault.

The offending event displeases self.

The intensity of the offense outweighs the intensity of the retribution  
(which equals zero at this point), thus creating an imbalance.

The offense causes anger to come into existence.

#### 2. Anger

Anger exists.

Self experiences physiological effects (heat, pressure, agitation).

Anger exerts force on the self to attempt an act of retribution.

#### 3. Attempt to control anger

Self exerts a counterforce in an attempt to control anger.

#### 4. Loss of control

The intensity of anger goes above the limit.

Anger takes control of self.

S exhibits angry behavior (loss of judgment, aggressive actions).

There is damage to self.

There is danger to the target of anger, in this case, the wrongdoer.

## 5. Retribution

Self performs retributive act against wrongdoer (this is usually angry behavior).

The intensity of retribution balances the intensity of offense.

The intensity of anger drops to zero.

Anger ceases to exist.

(Lakoff and Kövecses 1987: 211)

The metaphors and metonymies for expressing anger are what assembled and created this model. When compared to the cognitive models of anger in Chinese and Japanese, each of them is composed of several consecutive stages, and they all have “an ontological, a causal, and an expressive aspect” (Kövecses; 2005: 145). The *ontological* aspect of the model gives insight into the ontological status and nature of anger, but it also includes physiological processes which people associate with anger. The second aspect, the *causal* part of the model, shows anger (and its counterparts) as an emotion that a certain situation has caused. The *expressive* part of the model shows how anger is expressed across cultures. In this model, the *control* component of the model actually comes before the *expressive* part, and it manifests in different stages: trying to control the expression of anger, and the loss of control over expressing anger. The last two parts of the model are closely linked together, and could be referred to as one aspect of this model, the *expression* aspect.

### 2.3. Metaphors of anger in English

Each conceptual metaphor has a source domain, and a target domain. “The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain” (Kövecses 2010: 4). When looking into metaphorical mappings between these two domains, it can be concluded that the mappings are only partial, which means that only parts of the source domain are utilized in conceptual metaphors. This means that the part utilized in conceptual metaphor provides structure only for part of the concept of the metaphor. Since several source domains are needed to understand all aspects of the target domain, the source domains simultaneously form the structure and content of abstract concepts or conceptual metaphors.

Lakoff (1990: 386) states that “the structural aspect of conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences between a source domain and a target domain”. There are two types of these correspondences: ontological and epistemic. The first type, ontological correspondences, are those between “the entities in the source domain and the corresponding entities in the target domain” (Lakoff 1990: 387). In the case of anger metaphors, the body in the target domain corresponds to the container in the source domain. The second type, epistemic correspondences are those “between knowledge about the source domain and corresponding knowledge about the target domain” (Lakoff 1990: 387). In this case, just like the intense heat in a container causes internal pressure and agitation, intense anger produces body heat, agitation, and internal pressure.

The most general metaphor for anger in English, ANGER IS HEAT, is formed from the folk theory of physiological effects (Lakoff 1990). This metaphor actually has two versions, in one of which the heat is applied to fluids, and in the other to solids. In the first version of this metaphor, applying heat to fluids, we get the ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor. This metaphor is motivated by heat, internal pressure and agitation mentioned in the folk theory (Lakoff 1990). In the second version, when the general metaphor is applied to solids, we get ANGER IS FIRE. This second version of the metaphor is motivated by heat and redness from the folk theory. As anger increases and gets more intense, the physiological effects of anger also increase. As opposed to this, “when there is no heat, the liquid is cool and calm” (Lakoff 1990: 384). Therefore, there is also no anger, because coolness indicates a lack of anger. The basis for the central metaphor is provided by the folk theory of physiological reactions, and it indicates detailed correspondences between the source and target domain.

Being the basis for the ANGER IS HEAT metaphor, the folk theory of physiological effects of anger states that increased body heat impacts anger, but also that agitation is an important effect of anger. The folk theory also links agitation with insanity. This overlapping of theories provides the basis for a “new” metaphor, ANGER IS INSANITY. Because of this overlap and link between anger and insanity, “expressions that indicate insane behaviour can also indicate angry behaviour” (Lakoff 1990: 390). It is important to mention that generalization happens when talking about emotions and their effects. The folk theory views anger as a form of energy, and when one applies enough input energy to a body, it begins producing output energy. Because of this, input energy that produces internal heat is viewed as the source of anger. This internal heat can also function as input energy and produce different forms of output energy. If we

connect this to the ANGER IS INSANITY metaphor, it is also viewed as a highly energized state, and insane behaviour is considered to be a form of energy output.

Despite having no historical linguistic connections, different languages use the same conceptual metaphors and metonymies to express emotions. It is unlikely that these metaphors have been transmitted cross-culturally. The more likely option is that across different cultures, people compare and analyse different processes and thoughts with natural laws and their own body and bodily functions. It was shown that across cultures, when speaking figuratively, the human body is viewed as a container, and anger is generally viewed as HEAT, thus, various cultures use the ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor. According to Kövecses (2005: 162), “the cultural models of anger and its counterparts are the joint products of metaphor, metonymy, (possibly universal) physiology, and cultural context.” It is claimed that there was a joint evolution of the cultural model, the broader cultural context, the metonymies, and the container metaphor, and in this joint evolution, all the elements evolved together and contributed to each other’s development.

Since anger generally is viewed as a negative emotion, some more anger metaphors have emerged in English, e.g. ANGER IS AN OPPONENT and ANGER IS A DANGEROUS ANIMAL. Both of these metaphors present anger as something bad, mostly because of its effects and consequences. Both metaphors draw attention to the issues of control or loss of control over one’s behaviour while a person is angry, and the DANGEROUS ANIMAL metaphor also indicates that anger is an animal with an appetite. Another anger metaphor draws motivation from minor pains, burdens, etc. It is THE CAUSE OF ANGER IS A PHYSICAL ANNOYANCE metaphor. This metaphor views the person getting angry as a victim, and involves an “offender” who is doing something to the victim, or in the case of anger, making them angry.

#### *2.4. Conceptual metaphor and idioms*

As Kövecses (2010: 231) states, “most traditional views of idioms agree that idioms consist of two or more words and that the overall meaning of these words cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent words.” The traditional view sees idioms as a special part of larger category of words, assumed to be a matter of language alone. In this view, idioms are items of the lexicon, and independent of any conceptual system. In this approach, idioms have certain syntactic properties and a meaning that is special and relative to the meanings of the words and forms that compose certain idioms. Idioms are seen as independent from each other, and the linguistic meaning of idioms is separate from encyclopaedic knowledge and any conceptual

system. As Kövecses (2010) argues, this kind of view and attitude towards idioms is one of major obstacles in efficient teaching and learning of idioms in foreign language classrooms.

In the cognitive linguistic view of idioms, if we look at expressions such as *do a slow burn* or *spit fire*, which are idioms for expressing anger, both are related to some aspects of fire. In these two examples, and some other figurative expressions like *spark off*, *snuff out* and *fan the flames*, several words related to the domain of FIRE are used to form idioms. In those expressions, it is the conceptual domain of FIRE that participates in creating different idiomatic expressions, rather than the individual words. Kövecses (2010: 233) argues that from this, a generalization can be made that most idioms are products of human conceptual system instead of being a matter of language alone, as the traditional view suggests. The meaning of an idiom comes from our general knowledge of the world incorporated in our conceptual system. This further proves the point that idioms are conceptual, rather than linguistic in nature. Since we can rely on our general and conceptual knowledge to make sense of the meanings of idioms, it can be concluded that their meanings are not arbitrary, but motivated, mostly by our knowledge. A cognitive mechanism that links idiomatic meanings to domains of knowledge is the motivation for appearance of certain words in many idiomatic expressions. The relevant cognitive mechanisms which motivate idioms are metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge.

In the following section we will look into the traditional and cognitive linguistic approach to teaching idioms.

### 3. TEACHING IDIOMS

#### *3.1. Idioms in EFL textbooks*

Despite the fact that the traditional view sees vocabulary as less important than teaching and learning grammar, idiomatic expressions are so common in the English language that it would be hard to understand others, and to speak and write without the use of those expressions. This leads to the conclusion that learning idioms must be one of the integral parts of learning English, specifically vocabulary. Irujo (1986) offers several explanations for why idioms are difficult to learn in a second language, and why learners are not taught idioms. The first reason for difficulties with learning idioms is the fact that their meanings are not literal and that most idioms have literal counterparts, which can confuse learners. Another reason why learners struggle with idioms is the lack of appropriate exposure to idioms. This has to do with native speakers avoiding to use idioms when speaking with second language learners, and with the fact that second language learners are exposed to idioms mostly in non-interactive situations in which they cannot clarify meaning and get feedback on the use of a certain idiom. Another problem occurs when learners have managed to grasp the meanings of some idioms, but they still have difficulties using them correctly, mainly because they vary in formality, and because many idioms have grammatical constraints in the sense that we cannot use them either way – e.g. you can “flip your lid”, but you cannot “flip somebody else’s lid”. The final reason why learners do not learn idioms is because second-language teachers do not teach them well. Second-language teaching materials mostly ignore idioms or put them under the category “other expressions”. If teachers do not provide additional materials which include more practice, the materials are not sufficient for learning idioms. Another common problem with exercises involving idioms is that they do not require the production of idioms, but only recognition of certain phrases or filling in idioms with the missing words.

Let us now turn to EFL textbooks which are used in primary schools in Croatia. I have looked at eighteen EFL textbooks by different publishers, more specifically, into figurative expressions taught in these textbooks, the tasks including those expressions, and the way they are introduced in the lesson. I found that there are few expressions and tasks involving those expressions, and they are included only in upper primary textbooks at that. This shows that teaching materials are not sufficient for learning idioms and other figurative expressions. What is more, lower primary textbooks completely ignore the existence of figurative language.

Figurative expressions are introduced in the fifth grade. Some expressions that are included are *the early bird catches the worm* and *a piece of cake*. Both of these expressions are only mentioned in the text, and their translations are offered in the “dictionary” section at the end of the textbook. There are no other explanations of these expressions, nor tasks in which they need to be used. Another fifth-grade textbook includes the expression *couch potato*, also in the text. However, in this case the expression is explained in the text, and its translation is offered at the end of the textbook. In the sixth grade, phrasal verbs with *up*, *in*, and *out* are gradually introduced. In tasks involving those items, students have to circle the meanings of phrasal verbs and check their answers in the text. These types of tasks only require students to recognise the correct translation, or the correct phrasal verb, instead of asking them to produce those expressions. In the seventh grade some more figurative expressions and phrasal verbs are introduced, for example *keep a promise* and *get on (somebody's) nerves*. These constructions are categorised as “expressions” in the textbooks. Students have to look at the expressions in groups and try to figure out their meanings, but they are supposed to use either the dictionary section of the textbook or ask the teacher for help. There are no illustrations or clues which could indicate the meanings of those “expressions”. In the eighth grade, figurative language is also referred to as “expressions” and the tasks, just like those in seventh grade textbooks, only require students to recognise the definitions and translations of the expressions. Again, there are no illustrations or tasks which require the production of idioms and other types of figurative language.

As can be seen from the tasks including figurative expressions in EFL textbooks used in Croatia, the claims which Irujo (1986) made in her paper are still supported more than 30 years later. Lower-primary students in Croatia are not exposed to figurative language at all, more specifically idioms, during the first four years of their primary education. Upper-primary students are exposed to figurative language to some extent, but the materials do not offer appropriate exercises, and there is no explanation of the meanings of figurative expressions. What is more, the tasks in upper-primary textbooks are focused either on the recognition of idioms or translating their meaning, without the production of those expressions, which is not enough for students to understand the meanings of those idioms and learn to use them. This is the root of the problem with teaching and learning idioms and other figurative expressions in EFL classes in Croatian primary schools. Unless the EFL teacher prepares additional materials and explanations, students will not be able to fully understand the meanings and uses of idioms in English.



### 3.2. *The cognitive linguistic approach to teaching idioms*

Piquer Píriz (2008) states that vocabulary teaching in EFL was neglected for a long time, and the focus was traditionally placed on grammar. According to the author, “the gradual development of the L2 lexicon is a fundamental part of the process of learning a foreign language” (Piquer Píriz 2008: 219). Some lists of core English vocabulary show that speakers tend to use a limited number of lexical items in communication in different situations. The most common words, as shown by those lists, are function words like pronouns, prepositions and determiners, but also some nouns, verbs, and adjectives. While, in theory, learners could memorize a relatively low number of basic words in order to get by, these words usually have multiple senses which are context dependent. This suggests that it is not sufficient for learners to understand only the core meaning of a certain highly frequent word, but they should be aware of the semantic extensions of that word.

In the traditional view, “the relationships among the different meanings of a polysemous word are arbitrary and learning them must largely be a matter of blind memorisation” (Piquer Píriz 2008: 220). It might be that because of this view the formulation of systematic pedagogical approaches to dealing with polysemy were discouraged. In contrast to the traditional view, in the cognitive linguistic approach “polysemy is often motivated by metaphors and metonymies grounded in experiential correlations of a physical and social nature” (Piquer Píriz 2008: 220). To support this, Piquer Píriz gives the example of the noun *head* and its semantic extensions. The three semantic extensions all have different meanings but are at the same time metonymically linked to the basic meaning of *head*. All of these meanings and uses of *head* reflect our knowledge of functions associated with our bodies and body parts. Barlow and Kemmer (2000) argue that a foreign language learner can only learn usage patterns for certain word combinations appropriate to certain circumstances, instead of learning all the meanings of the words in the foreign language. The argument for this view is that speakers tend to generalize the circumstances and events in which they use certain vocabulary. If they did not generalize, they would not know which words and word combinations to use in situations they have not encountered before. It is important for speakers to master the basic meanings of frequently used words in English and to be aware of the regular principles of meaning extension in order to be able to understand and produce those words with other meanings related to the basic meaning.

In her three studies with young EFL learners in Spain, Piquer Píriz (2008) examined meaning extensions of words related to body parts. For her studies she selected three words: *hand*, *mouth*

and *head*. Those words were chosen because they are highly polysemous, frequent in English, and are appropriate core lexemes, because EFL learners already knew their prototypical meanings. Students had to choose certain semantic extensions in the tasks of the study, but they worked in smaller groups in order to relax more and to have the opportunity to discuss their choice with their peers. The studies show that children are able to understand and identify a variety of semantic extensions of the words which they learnt before, even at the age of 5. Furthermore, those results support Winner (1988), Vosniadou and Ortony (1989) and Cameron (1996), who all claim that knowledge of the world plays a very important role in young learners' understanding of figurative meanings. Piquer Píriz (2008) also argues that EFL teachers and designers of teaching materials should pay attention to particular expressions related to domains of knowledge that children are becoming aware of and include those expressions and semantic extensions in their lessons and materials. Furthermore, at all ages and stages, it is important to encourage and foster the capacity for figurative thinking because it has beneficial effects and leads to the development of some useful strategies for understanding polysemous words.

Kövecses (2010: 233) suggests that “by providing them with cognitive motivation for idioms, learners of foreign languages should be able to learn the idioms faster and retain them longer in memory.” Kövecses (2010: 234) further proposes “that the transparency, or motivation, of idioms arises from knowledge of the cognitive mechanisms (...) and that these link idiomatic meanings to literal ones.” In their experimental study, Kövecses and Szabó (1996) tested the difference in learning idioms between students who learned them through memorization and those who learned them with motivation or through conceptual metaphors. The results show that the students who learned idioms with motivation performed roughly 25% better than those who learned idioms in the traditional way. The study shows that foreign language learners could have significant benefits from activities designed to improve their awareness of metaphor and metonymy. By raising learners' awareness of metaphor and metonymy, foreign language teachers can speed up their vocabulary learning. Experts in vocabulary acquisition agree that teachers can not rely on learner's incidental vocabulary acquisition alone, because it is inevitably a slow process of acquiring new vocabulary (Kövecses 2010: 239). In order to accelerate the process of vocabulary learning, it is important to draw students' attention to lexical items, and to stimulate storage of those items in students' long-term memory.

A process which improves learners' chances of learning new words and phrases is elaboration. This process includes “the association of the item with a particular context, connecting it with already known L2 items belonging to the same lexical field, comparing it

with items in the mother tongue that happen to be similar in form or meaning, associating it with a mental picture, and so on” (Kövecses 2010: 239). Associating an expression with a mental image is also known as dual coding, and the mental image functions as way of remembering that lexical item. Taking advantage of dual coding and making learners aware of the metaphorical nature of words and expressions makes them aware of the concrete source domains and contexts in which those expressions were used in their literal senses.

When learning a language, children who are native speakers acquire polysemous words in everyday communication and interactions with others. On the other hand, young foreign language learners are often introduced only to the basic meaning of a word, which means that they associate one word with only one meaning. The reason for this is that, traditionally, figurative language was associated with a stage of cognitive development which is advanced and not found in children. Because of that, figurative meanings do not often appear in EFL textbooks, especially in the early stages of learning. In Croatia, children start learning English at age 6 or 7, so there are some semantic extensions which are relevant to the social, physical, and communicative world of EFL learners at a young age. According to most scholars who study child language, children speak but also think figuratively from an early age, and figurative capacity is not a competence only adults have (Piquer Píriz 2008: 222).

Research has shown that the natural discourse of a language flourishes with idioms (Kovecses 2010: 240). They are stored in the native speaker’s memory as pre-made chunks of discourse. These chunks can be quickly retrieved from memory while speaking, which aids fluency. Since foreign language teachers’ aim is for learners to come as close as possible to native speakers’ fluency and way of processing and producing discourse, learners have to master a large number of multiword items.

In order to facilitate the learning of idioms, teachers can select and group idioms in ways which raise students’ awareness of metaphor and stimulate elaboration. Idioms can be grouped according to the conceptual metaphor which motivates them or the target domain that they refer to. Furthermore, it is helpful and sensible to first introduce idioms made up of familiar lexical items, and just a few new phrases. After that, more expressions can be gradually added to groups of expressions, so that students are able to associate newly learned vocabulary with the expressions learned before without the risk of mental “overcrowding”. Another strategy which increases the chances of students memorizing idiomatic expressions is categorizing them according to the conceptual metaphor or target domain that they have previously been introduced to. In addition, dual coding can be a useful strategy for teaching figurative language. For example, if we want to explain the meaning of the idiom *two peas in a pod*, we could show

an image of two (or more) peas in a pod and compare it to people who are similar. This strategy is useful because later on, students are likely to evoke that image in their minds and remember the meaning of the expression more easily. Brainstorming about the meaning of an idiom is another useful strategy. For example, the teacher could ask students to brainstorm about the meaning of the idiom *have steam coming out of your ears*. When thinking about this idiom, students can connect it with anger through the ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor: they can evoke the mental image of steam coming out of a container, i.e. someone's ears when they are angry. Croatian students of English can connect it to the Croatian equivalent *para ide na uši* komu, which has similar lexis.

In the following section I will show how anger idioms can be taught in the EFL classroom using the cognitive linguistic approach.

## **4. TEACHING ANGER IDIOMS USING THE COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH**

### *4.1. General strategies*

#### *4.1.1. Teaching idioms explicitly*

When teaching idioms, just like other vocabulary items, one of the most used strategies is explicit teaching. This is done in a way that students are aware they are learning something new, and teachers get feedback on students' comprehension. During explicit idiom teaching to intermediate and advanced students, teachers usually provide them with vocabulary lists. These lists mostly consist of new vocabulary items, in this case idioms, and their meanings. Traditionally, those idioms are sorted either alphabetically or according to some pragmatic and functional criteria. However, the results of Boers's (2000) experiments show that students are more likely to reproduce target vocabulary items if they are grouped according to motivation – conceptual metaphors and source domains. This strategy requires comprehension only, which Irujo (1986: 237) lists as a flaw of most teaching materials used in second language classrooms. Other activities that Irujo (1986) mentions which lack practice of production of new language are: multiple choice tasks, matching idioms and their definitions, substituting idioms with their definitions, and completing a text using the given list of idioms.

#### *4.1.2. Connecting literal and figurative meanings*

Irujo (1986: 239-240) lists several activities used to practice comprehension and production of idioms, and some are used to practice one or the other. In order to teach students “to infer meaning from context and to deal with figurative speech”, Irujo (1986: 239) proposes an activity in which an idiom is used in context and, at first, replaced with another fitting word or phrase, while the figurative meaning is discussed after the exercise. The figurative meaning of the idiom is discussed before activities for comprehension and production, such as making up stories and dialogues, charades, or acting out, and these activities “help students to realize the absurdity of literal meanings, and at the same time they provide a link from literal to non-literal meanings” (Irujo 1986: 239). The rest of the proposed activities, the ones used to practise production, rely on lists of idioms, preferably written by students and consist of thematically related idioms. If we look at Irujo's (1986: 238) criteria for choosing which idioms to teach,

*transparency* could be another criterion for creating a list of idioms. Students will understand certain idioms better and easier if the connection between their literal and figurative meanings is more obvious. If we look at idioms such as *have steam coming out of your ears* or *get steamed up*, students are more likely to understand that *have steam coming out of your ears* means ‘very angry’ and *get steamed up* means ‘to get angry’ because the mental images that they create for those idioms are familiar to them from animated movies and other media which they were exposed to as children. On the other hand, if they look at idioms such as *go ballistic* and *go off the deep end* which both mean ‘to suddenly become very angry’, they would have some trouble understanding the meanings of those idioms because they are not familiar with the conceptual metaphors motivating them.

#### 4.1.3. Grouping idioms

Psycholinguistic experiments have shown that any kind of grouping, even grouping idioms by transparency level, leads to better memorization than no grouping at all (Skoufaki 2008). Grouping idioms which have something in common encourages students to think about the way in which idioms are connected. One of the criteria for making a list of idioms could be the same meaning, e.g., *flip your lid* and *go ballistic* both mean ‘to suddenly become very angry’. Another way to group idioms is by the conceptual metaphor that motivates them, e.g. ANGER IS HEAT.

Boers’ (2000: 554) three learning experiments have shown that “a lexical organization along metaphoric themes or source domains can facilitate retention of unfamiliar figurative expressions.” The aim of the first experiment was to show how much learners’ metaphor awareness effects learning new vocabulary. In this experiment the vocabulary was organized by metaphoric themes similar in the participants’ L1 and L2. The results show that, in the domain of emotions, learners’ understanding and awareness of metaphoric themes behind unfamiliar vocabulary can help with learning that vocabulary. The purpose of the second experiment was to see how metaphor awareness affected the reproduction of novel terminology in active usage. This experiment has shown that the group of participants who were encouraged to associate the figurative items with their source domains were far more likely to reproduce them in active use. The third experiment was similar to the one conducted by Kövecses and Szabó (1996) and wanted to test the cognitive semantic approach “which raises learners’ awareness of the conceptual metaphors behind figurative language.” (Boers 2000: 559). This final experiment suggests that studying expressions categorized by orientational metaphors makes students more likely to correctly fill in the gaps meant to elicit these expressions. Boers

(2000: 566) lists some specific objectives for raising learners' metaphor awareness: recognition of metaphor as a common ingredient of everyday language, recognition of metaphoric themes behind many figurative expressions, recognition of the non-arbitrary nature of many figurative expressions, recognition of possible cross-cultural differences in metaphoric themes, and recognition of cross-linguistic variety in figurative expressions. These objectives are followed by descriptions of some metaphor awareness raising activities through which learners fulfil the objectives. Some of the activities include thinking about learners' own language and its metaphors, thinking about some metaphoric concepts and themes, decoding figurative expressions on their own, etc. Boers (2000: 569) concludes that "the metaphoric themes or source domains behind multiple figurative expressions constitute a useful framework for lexical organization." What is more, Kövecses (2010: 239) states that students who learn in a motivated way perform better in idiom-related tasks than others, and also benefit from metaphor awareness raising activities.

#### *4.1.4. Discussing and analysing idioms' meanings*

As already mentioned, teaching idioms explicitly is one of the most common strategies in teaching idioms, as well as vocabulary in general. Explicit teaching and discussions with students are important because idioms do not have literal meanings, so students most likely will not be able to learn the meanings of idioms implicitly, or on their own. What is important is for students to figure out on their own why idioms have certain figurative meanings. For example, when we say that someone has steam coming out of their ears, we do not mean that literally, but we want to say that the person is angry. Teachers could ask their students why they think the idiom *have steam coming out of your ears* means to be angry and how they picture that situation when they hear the idiom. This strategy is very useful for teaching older students because they are capable of discussing metaphors and figurative expressions, as well as thinking about and expressing their emotions and ideas more extensively. What is more, this strategy could also be used with younger learners, because Piquer Píriz (2008) suggests that children reasoned figuratively at a young age.

## 4.2. Activities for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade

### 4.2.1. Idioms to teach

I have made a list of idioms which I would teach to Croatian 7<sup>th</sup> grade EFL students. The list will be used in all the examples of activities which I would carry out in EFL classes with 7<sup>th</sup> graders. When choosing idioms for my list, I tried to combine the criteria mentioned in the previous section. Conceptual metaphors that motivate the idioms which I selected are ANGER IS HEAT and ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. The meanings of those idioms are the following: ‘feel (very) angry’, ‘say/do a lot because you are angry’, and ‘something makes you very angry’. Here is the list of idioms:

#### ANGER IS HEAT

- 1) *do a slow burn*
- 2) *be hot under the collar*
- 3) *lose your cool*

#### ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER

- 1) *get steamed up*
- 2) *have steam coming out of your ears*
- 3) *make your blood boil*
- 4) *blow off steam*

I have picked these idioms because 7<sup>th</sup> grade students should not have any trouble understanding their meanings. The vocabulary of these idioms is simple, they are fairly transparent, the connection between literal and figurative meanings of the idioms is very clear, and they either have an equivalent or an expression that is very similar in Croatian, considering that I would do these activities with Croatian EFL learners.

### 4.2.2. Warm-up activity

The introductory activity that I would do with my students is talking about anger and its physical manifestation. I would ask my students the following questions:



Do you ever feel angry?

Is there anything specific that makes you angry?

In what situations do you get angry?

When was the last time someone got you very angry? What did they do that made you feel angry?

After that, we would discuss the physical manifestation of anger.

Teacher: When you look at an angry person, how can you tell they are angry? What are some physical signs of being angry?

Students: When someone is angry, they get red in the face and neck. Most people also shake when they are angry.

Teacher: How do you feel (in physical terms) when you're angry?

Students: I feel hot and start sweating, my face is red, my heart starts beating fast, I feel pressure in my head. When I get really angry, I feel like I'm going to explode.

#### *4.2.3. Gap-filling*

Before giving the list of idioms to my students, I would give them a sentence or two. In each sentence the idiom would be used in context but would be left out. I have chosen the following sentences for this activity:

The teacher did a slow burn when he saw that nobody has done their homework.

Mom got steamed up when she noticed that I didn't make my bed.

Mom had steam coming out of her ears when my brother broke her favourite vase.

The teacher got hot under the collar when he noticed that some students were cheating on exams.

It makes my blood boil when I hear that someone is being bullied.

I cleaned the whole house because I had to blow off steam. That's how angry her words and actions made me.

John lost his cool when he found out that his friend was stealing from him.

After getting their worksheets, students would have to write a word or phrase that fits in the context of each sentence. They would most probably fill in the gaps using phrases like 'get

angry' or 'get very angry'. When they have filled in the gaps with the appropriate words or phrases, I would tell them the correct idioms which fit into each sentence and show them that they have already guessed each idiom's meaning. After that, we would discuss the meanings of these idioms and whether some of them mean more intense anger than others, if some of the idioms describe actions that people undertake while angry or the beginning of anger.

#### 4.2.4. *Connecting literal and figurative meanings*

Another activity that I would do with my students is connecting the literal and figurative meaning of idioms, and evoking mental images of these idioms. The students are divided into four groups. Groups 1 and 2 are given the first part of my idioms list, i.e. idioms based on the ANGER IS HEAT conceptual metaphor. Groups 3 and 4 get the second part of my list, i.e. idioms based on the ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor. The students would not be given the conceptual metaphor that the idioms are based on. The task for groups 1 and 3 is to draw literal representations of their idioms. Groups 2 and 4 have to draw the figurative meanings of the given idioms. Then, based on their conceptual metaphor, two groups get together and match drawings representing the literal and figurative meanings of idioms. When they have matched the drawings, they have to use idioms in sentences of their own. After that, the two groups which worked together on the same conceptual metaphor present their drawings and visualizations of idioms, together with the sentences to the other two groups.

#### 4.2.5. *Discussing idioms' meanings*

Next, we would briefly discuss the conceptual metaphors motivating these idioms, which are also present in the Croatian language and culture.

Teacher: Do you know any anger idioms in Croatian? Some are similar to the ones we mentioned.

Students: *Ide mi para na uši!*

Teacher: Good job! That's the literal equivalent of *have steam coming out of your ears*. Do you know any other similar idioms?

Students: *Kipim od bijesa*.

Teacher: Good one! Do you know what's this idiom's English counterpart?

Students: *Boiling with anger*. / *Boiling with rage*.

Teacher: That's right. As you can see, many of these anger idioms are connected to heat, steam, boiling, and some kind of fluid. Do you have any idea why that is so?

Students: Because when we get angry, we feel hot and like we are boiling.

Teacher: Yes, that's a very good guess! We can actually think of our body as a container with a fluid inside. If we feel hot when we are angry, we can say that ANGER IS HEAT. When we apply that heat, or anger, to the fluid in our container, or body, we start to feel hot, we feel like we are boiling. That is why we can also say that ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. We get all of the idioms that we've mentioned from these two metaphors.

#### *4.2.6. Making up stories*

In this activity, I would ask my students to make up as many sentences or stories using the literal meaning of the idioms from our list. For example:

When I got to work today, I heard that some of my students were bullied. It made my blood boil, so I had to try to cool it off. Putting an ice pack on my forehead didn't help, so I went to hospital where they made me take an ice bath, which thankfully helped.

When they are done writing their stories and sentences, they would read them out loud. After each student's example, we would comment on why the literal use of idioms sounds strange, and why it makes the story funny and unusual. We would also discuss the idiomatic meaning of each idiom and try to describe this meaning with our subjective feeling of anger.

Following the discussion in the previous activity, the students would go back to their visual representations of idioms and try to explain how these expressions are connected with their own feelings and experiences of anger. Then, their task would be to think of situations and examples of their own in which they would use each of the idioms from the list. Afterwards, they would have to discuss whether they would use more than one idiom from our list in the same situation or not, and why.

#### *4.2.7. Grouping idioms which have the same conceptual motivation*

The following activity is creating a list of idioms with my students. First, we would again discuss the conceptual metaphors which are the basis for these idioms. We would connect the conceptual metaphors ANGER IS HEAT and ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER and their

similarities with Croatian conceptual metaphors and students' subjective feeling of anger. The connection with Croatian conceptual metaphors could be seen in expressions such as *biti vruće glave* (*hot headed*) and *kipjeti od bijesa*, which has a similar meaning as *be steamed up* or *boil with rage*. This connection with the domain of HEAT in both English and Croatian can make learning these anger idioms a bit easier (Geld, Tadić and Stanojević 2014: 259). Students would then have to sort the idioms, which they are by now familiar with, into these two conceptual metaphors. Afterwards, we would check their categorization, and correct any potential mistakes.

Another useful activity which could help students both connect the literal and figurative meanings and help them solidify mental images and their understanding of idioms is creating dialogues or short plays. Students work in pairs. Their task is to agree on a situation in which their characters argue about something, keeping in mind that they have to use as many anger idioms as possible. Each pair first has to discuss the exact topic of their dialogue or imaginary argument. Then, they have to agree on their roles and start writing the text of their dialogue/short play. After they have written their dialogues, they practice acting the dialogue out. While a pair of students is acting out their dialogue, the rest of the class takes notes about the topic of the dialogue, how many anger idioms were used, and how well the pair has acted out their dialogue. After each pair of students is done acting out their dialogue, another pair of students summarizes the previous pair's dialogue.

#### 4.2.8. Additional activities

One of the additional activities that can be done with students is them thinking about ways to teach anger idioms to someone else. They would have to use our list of idioms and any other aids and materials to try and teach anger idioms to their peers or maybe even younger students. They would have the freedom to make a presentation, a poster, write a story or play, or even act out the idioms in order to explain their meanings to others. After that, they have to provide their "students" with a few tasks in which they have to use idioms in sentences.

Another, a bit more time-consuming activity which could be useful in teaching idioms and connecting literal and figurative meanings, as well as practicing producing idioms, is making a short stop motion animation with students. Students work in smaller groups, around 4 or 5 students per group. The first step in this activity is to write a story containing dialogues and using as many anger idioms from our list as possible. The second step is to think about characters, props, and the backdrop of their animations. They could, for example, use Lego

bricks and toys to create both the backdrop and character movement and dialogues. Another option could be to draw the backdrop and use some other toys or puppets as characters for the animation. The third step of this activity is to record the animation. This could be done using an app on their smartphones or a camera and later editing and creating the animation on a computer. Either way, students would do most of the work alone, but they would be able to ask the teacher for help any time during the process. The fourth and final step in creating our stop motion animations is recording the narration and dialogues of the story. After creating the stop motion animations is done, we would watch them together and then comment on who has done a good job presenting idioms, and who could have worked out the story or dialogue a bit more in order to explain and represent the meanings of idioms in a better and clearer way.

The following activity might come after the students have categorized idioms according to conceptual metaphors which motivate them and organize their idioms list. Since they have made the connection between conceptual metaphors and idioms in English and Croatian, students would be asked to try and find Croatian equivalents for the idioms on their list. If they cannot find the literal equivalent in Croatian, they should think of a Croatian idiom which has the most similar meaning to its English counterpart. After they have done this for every idiom on the list, we discuss their work and if we agree with the proposed equivalents or not.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The suggested activities help students practice groupwork, cooperation, expressing their creativity, and thinking outside the box, all while making them use and think about newly learned idioms. The activities are very useful for teaching anger idioms, but also idioms in general, because students are required to think about different conceptual metaphors, source domains, meanings and forms and uses of idioms.

When discussing conceptual metaphors which motivate idioms, students learn how idioms are used and why they have certain meanings. Students' metaphor awareness is also raised using this activity, because they learn about metaphoric themes, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic references, idioms' meanings and form, etc.

During the discussion about the "symptoms" of anger, students are able to make connections between their personal feeling of anger, and the idiomatic expressions used to express this emotion, which helps them in understanding the figurative meanings of anger idioms. Several written exercises enable students to practice the use of anger idioms, as well as the spelling of each idiom. While drawing literal and figurative meanings of anger idioms, students create mental images of each idiom, and are unaware of the process of dual coding while doing this exercise. The drawing exercise also makes students reflect on both English and their own language, culture, and figurative expressions in their language, which helps them in creating visual representations of each idioms' literal and figurative meaning.

Grouping idioms by conceptual motivation further raises students' metaphor awareness and helps them in understanding motivation behind each idiomatic expression, which at the same time helps them understand those expressions more easily. Connecting these groups, or conceptual metaphors with their first language helps with visualization of idioms in other activities.

Teaching idioms to their peers and making stop motion animation for other students involves expressing students' creativity while practising the use of new idioms through creating tasks for their own "students". These activities might also help in considering other metaphoric themes and source domains, depending on the ideas and idioms that students hear from their peers. Some new ideas and idioms might help students connect their meanings to conceptual metaphors from their idioms list and help them further consider some cross-cultural and cross-linguistic references.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to show how idioms can be taught in EFL using the cognitive linguistic approach, more specifically with motivation.

The traditional approach to teaching EFL almost completely ignores figurative language. On some occasions when figurative language is taught, it is done using insufficient materials and unsuitable strategies. On the other hand, when using the cognitive linguistic approach, teachers create materials and activities which help EFL learners comprehend the meanings of idioms and memorize them more quickly. This is done by following teaching general strategies used in the cognitive linguistic approach.

Some general strategies used in the cognitive linguistic approach are teaching idioms explicitly, connecting literal and figurative meanings, grouping idioms, and discussing and analysing idioms' meanings. Examples of activities described in Section 4 follow these general strategies. When doing these activities, students are introduced to idioms, they connect their literal and figurative meanings, create mental images of certain idioms, group idioms by different criteria such as conceptual metaphor or meaning, raise metaphor awareness, and discuss and analyse idioms' meanings. Anger idioms used in these activities were selected because of their simple vocabulary, transparency, and the fact that most of those idioms have equivalents in Croatian.

I believe that figurative language should be taught explicitly, even from a young age, since younger students and children are also capable of understanding figurative expressions and certain conceptual metaphors. EFL teachers should implement teaching more figurative language in their curriculum. They should prepare lists of idioms and other figurative expressions for their students, appropriate for their age and level of knowledge. What is more, implementing more figurative expressions, especially idioms, in the EFL classroom as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> grade could help raise learners' metaphor awareness, understand native speakers more easily, and understand other figurative expressions and conceptual metaphors more effortlessly. The activities described in Section 4 have not been tried out in a classroom setting yet. They are intended to be used when teaching anger idioms, and as a template for teaching other idioms as well.

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## **IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA**

Ovom izjavom, ja, Filip Gorščak, student Učiteljskog fakulteta u Zagrebu, izjavljujem i svojim potpisom jamčim da sam samostalno istražio literaturu, proveo istraživanje i napisao diplomski rad na temu: Anger Idioms in English. Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio diplomskog rada nije napisan na nedozvoljen način ni prepisan iz kojega necitiranog rada.

Zagreb, srpanj 2022.

Potpis studenta: \_\_\_\_\_