

Idiom Translation in the Financial Press

Idiom Translation in the Financial Press:
A Corpus-based Study

By

Despoina Panou

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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For Marianna, Spiros and Mary

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FOREWORD

This book is devoted to the investigation of translational aspects of idiomatic meaning. Although plentiful in everyday language, idioms seem to constitute a particularly intriguing issue for translators primarily due to their semantic and syntactic idiosyncrasies. The main objective of this study is to answer two interrelated questions with reference to English-Greek, namely how idioms are translated and which parameters influence translators' choices.

More specifically, this book examines the translation strategies employed in the treatment of idioms in the Greek financial press and by doing so it also touches on interdisciplinary areas of research such as news translation, media studies, linguistics and financial discourse in an effort to shed light on possible parameters regulating idiom treatment in the Greek news press. Acknowledging the importance of context in translating an idiom, it is argued that idiom translation is genre-sensitive and this is linguistically manifested by the outlining of specific syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and idiom-related parameters that influence English-Greek idiom translation in the Greek financial press. On these grounds, it is suggested that an awareness of idioms' sensitivity to genre conventions and a realization of the multiplicity of parameters that affect the choice of idiom-translation strategy are essential for appropriateness to be met in Greek financial news translation, bearing consequences for both translation theory and translator training.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the field of news translation, which is primarily concerned with problems of translating news, “whether print, television or internet based” (Bassnett, 2006:7). Apart from numerous academic publications, this interest is also evident from the organization of international seminars which aim at investigating the multifaceted nature of news translation. More specifically, in April 2004 there was a conference held at the University of Warwick dedicated to exploring the issues surrounding the training of translators working in the media. Following that, there were two seminars in 2005, the first held at the University of Aston and the second held jointly by said university and the University of Warwick, centering on issues that mainly dealt with the translation of discourses of terror. Then, there were two subsequent seminars, one in June 2006 at Warwick and the other at Aston in the spring of 2007, focusing on political discourse and the news. Moreover, the development of this field of study has led to the publication of a number of monographs, among which the influential book by well-known expert in media translation, Yves Gambier, entitled *(Multi)Media Translation. Concepts, Practices and Research* (2001) and the innovative treatise of Susan Bassnett and Esperança Bielsa *Translation in Global News* (2009). Irrespective of the approach adopted by each scholar, there is a general consensus that news translation is an interdisciplinary field that brings together researchers from both media studies and linguistics and by doing so it also touches on other fields of study such as globalization, sociology, text linguistics and international relations, fields that are not directly related to this area of study but for which the basic premise of emphasizing the importance of context and contextualization in studying both translation process and product in the news industry also holds true. In Greece, news translation has also received relative attention in both translation programmes and in academia. The Hellenic American Union offers a two-year programme in General Professional Translation in

which there is a 30-hour course on news translation. Moreover, some translation scholars (e.g. Kaniklidou, 2012; Loupaki, 2010; Sidiropoulou, 2004) have examined the language of press highlighting linguistic preferences across cultures. In particular, Loupaki (2010) has been primarily concerned with investigating ideological conflict in news articles. Her main argument is that news translation can rarely be ideologically free since translators' choices seem to be informed by the newspaper's political orientation (2010:72). Her analysis of Greek translations of English news articles has revealed that translation strategies such as literal translation, omission, addition, neutralization and explicitation can reproduce or erase ideological conflict or even introduce it elsewhere in the target text. On these grounds she concludes that news translation is not as innocent as originally perceived by some readers and raises the question of whether the term "translator" captures effectively all those people involved in the (re)production of news (2010:72).

Another study highlighting cross-cultural variation in news translation is Kaniklidou's doctoral dissertation *English-Greek News Creating Narratives: A Translation Perspective* (2012). Adopting a narrative approach, she draws data from three newspapers of mass circulation, namely *I Kathimerini*, *Ta Nea* and *To Vima* and creates a political and a bio-medical sub-corpus where she explores news translation in the Greek press. Findings from both sub-corpora indicate cross-textual and cross-cultural variation as the source-text (henceforth ST) frames are different from the target-text (henceforth TT) frames, thus pointing to the culturally-negotiable character of narratives articulated in the TT newspapers (2012:255). According to Kaniklidou (2012) data analysis reveals an increased mediating behaviour and labelling, participants' repositioning "and selective appropriation to re-tell political and bio-medical stories" (2012:248). This attempt to rewrite political and bio-medical meanings aims at producing, on the one hand, culturally appropriate TTs and on the other hand, at silencing these norms that do not conform with TT cultural preferences (2012:249).

The study of the news-reporting genre has also been of interest to Sidiropoulou (2004:16), who has examined the use of adversative, causal and temporal cohesive devices in various samples of Greek press news material in an effort to foreshadow the ideological significance attached to these linguistic preferences. Drawing from a 20,300-word sample of target versions of Greek press articles, she maintains that there is an explicit preference for counter-argumentation in the Greek version which may partly be attributed to the fact that Greek readers are more readily prepared to take up the role of the denier since they are used to conceptualizing the

world in terms of contrasts (2004:33). Furthermore, the Greek target versions point to a tendency for explicitation of cause-and-effect relationships since the examination of a 12,000-word sample of target Greek news articles reveals that cause-and-effect relationships are almost always transferred in the Greek target text and those who are implicit are made explicit, thus conforming to the reason-giving tendency that seems to dominate Greek press news translation. It seems that Greek translators go to considerable lengths to provide the target readership with reasons in order to facilitate persuasion (2004:37).

Further insight into the norms governing the genre of press news translation with respect to the English-Greek paradigm, is provided through the contrastive analysis of temporal structure in the two cultures. Sidiropoulou's findings (2004:45) indicate that there is tendency on the part of translators-journalists to eliminate time indicators in the Greek target version and this may be justified by virtue of the fact that such information is of marginal importance and may cause unnecessary processing effort on the part of the readers. In addition to that, it has been claimed that in the Greek news reporting context there seems to be a preference for shorter time spans as opposed to the relatively longer ones assumed to be adopted by the English readership (Sidiropoulou, 2004:46). Moreover, the intensification of temporal adverbials was observed in the Greek version and the point was made that it contributes to the creation of dramatic effect by translators which is rooted in the different conceptualizations of the social reality construed by the two cultures. Lastly, a future orientation in the description of time was observed in the Greek version, which contrasts with the preference for past time reference in the English source version, thus highlighting further cross-cultural differences.

The existence of cross-cultural differences was also revealed in the testimonial discourse in press news translation into Greek. In particular, there was a tendency for adverbialization and thematization of constituents of the sentence that refer to the source of information which may be explained as part of the translators' effort to 'actualize' the persuasive force of the sources of informed opinion. Furthermore, a difference in the degree of generalization was observed in the two cultures since in the Greek version there was a preference for omitting names of informed-opinion sources, either because the target readership is unlikely to be familiar with these names or because they are considered of peripheral importance. Moreover, the manipulation of the argumentative 'value' of reporting verbs was observed in an effort to make the illocutionary force of such verbs more explicit. For example, the ST verb *say* was turned into

reassure, confess or *decide* in the target text (Sidiropoulou, 1999:76). This modification was interpreted as a sign of strengthening the argumentative force of the target text and raising “the degree of personal involvement of the authoritative source” (Sidiropoulou, 2004:68). Results have shown that such types of modifications occur in articles dealing with low-importance topics as opposed to high-importance topics in which there was less modification of the authoritative opinions. According to Sidiropoulou (2004:71), in high-importance topics accuracy is more highly valued than appropriateness. In addition to that, perceived readership interest and involvement in the topic dealt with in the article in question also have a say since the translators’ intervention is said to be kept at a minimum in high-interest topics as opposed to low-interest ones which allow for greater degrees of intervention.

A similar phenomenon has been observed in metaphor treatment in English-Greek news translation where there is a relationship between the topic dealt with in the news articles and the metaphor-translation strategy adopted. In more detail, Sidiropoulou (2004:80) argues that the retainment or literalization of a metaphor is determined in accordance with her *psychological remoteness thesis* in which it is maintained that metaphors retain their metaphorical status when the topic dealt with in the article is psychologically remote to the Greek target readership whereas when there is psychological immediacy to the topic dealt with, then metaphors do not survive the intercultural filter. According to Sidiropoulou (2004) some issues “are too ‘hot’ to be part of a language game employing metaphors” (2004:81). She concludes that the estimation of the psychological remoteness of a newspaper article is an ideological issue suggesting that metaphors are pragmatic/cognitive phenomena involving varying cultural assumptions (2004:83). On these grounds, she argues (2004:83) that metaphor treatment in the English-Greek news press involves different conceptualizations across cultures. Taking as a starting point Sidiropoulou’s claim (2004:83) that “the same environment, or the same data can be organized in different conceptual ways across cultures”, this book attempts to explore the issue of idiom transference in the field of news translation. It is claimed that idiomatic expressions in English (source) and Greek (target) press news also present an interesting research area. In fact, the importance of idioms in human language as well as their ubiquity in the general vocabulary of our linguistic repertoire has been observed by linguists and language teachers alike (Chafe, 1968:111; Jackendoff, 1997:177; Liu, 2008:xiii). Actually, mastery of idioms has been an important indicator of second-language proficiency since many second-language learners rarely learn or use idioms appropriately (Yorio, 1989:64). Even though there is a growing

body of research on issues pertaining to idioms, such as their definition, classification, comprehension, usage patterns and functions, there has been a marked absence of research into idiom translation. The present study endeavours to bridge this gap to some extent by examining the translation strategies employed in the treatment of idioms in the Greek financial press (Panou, 2013a). In particular, its aim is to subject translators' preferences regarding English-Greek idiom translation to critical scrutiny so as to shed light on current trends as well as constraints regulating idiom treatment in the Greek financial press.

1.2 Approaching idiom translation: some theoretical preliminaries

In contrast to metaphors which have been investigated in financial texts (e.g. Henderson, 1982; Henderson, 1994; Henderson, 2000; Boers, 1999; Charteris-Black, 2000) and in business media discourse (Koller, 2004; Koller, 2005), there are only a few studies on idiom translation in financial texts (Koester, 2000; Handford and Koester, 2010), and to my knowledge, the issue of idiom treatment in the Greek financial press has not been the focus of any research to date. Consequently, research on idiom translation has been lacking and the absence of an adequate idiom-translation model leaves both translators and educators with insufficient knowledge of appropriate idiom-translation strategies. Therefore, in an attempt to bridge the gap between linguistic theory and educational practice, this study examines the translation strategies employed in the treatment of idioms in the Greek financial press in the hope of helping not only translators but also foreign language instructors and students.

More specifically, having taught English for ten years in both the public and private sector, mostly preparing students for English language certificate examinations and for entrance into tertiary education, I have noticed that there is a problem in, firstly, comprehending, and secondly, translating idioms. In both General English and specialized texts, there seems to be a tendency to omit idioms and this has urged me to investigate why idioms are not always translated but instead are preferably omitted. Instead of choosing to study idiom translation in General English texts or literature texts, the present study focuses on press news, and in particular, financial texts and seeks to determine: a) how idioms are transferred from the source language (henceforth SL) A (English) to the target language (henceforth TL) B (Greek) and b) which parameters influence the translators' choices.

The assumption behind this choice is that although translators of General English or literature texts may have a background in literature or the social sciences, translators of financial texts are, in most cases, financially literate, and they probably specialize or even have a diploma in Business Administration, Finance or Accounting but may not necessarily have a humanities background, meaning that they may not have explored the fields of linguistics, philosophy, classics and history in depth. So it could be the case that whenever they come across an idiom, they do not necessarily recognize it, and even when they do so, they may not always fully comprehend the idiom, tending to omit it on the basis that arriving at an accurate translation would prove too difficult and time-consuming. Furthermore, translators of financial texts, falling under the rubric of journalist translation, may assume that there is no need to come up with an equivalent idiomatic expression in the target version since producing a clear and accurate paraphrase of the content of the idiom will effectively capture its meaning. This tendency to paraphrase or omit the idiom(s) in question may be a result of the general conventions that govern press-news translation and it is worthwhile investigating to which extent general translation procedures such as omission and elaboration influence idiom translation in the Greek financial press.

Apart from abiding by such conventions, there are instances where translators do not capture the meaning of an idiom accurately. This ineffective capturing of idiomatic meaning may cause misunderstandings which can have unintended, and often funny, rude or confusing side-effects. For example, on *The Economist* website, the following comment was made about the 20th May 2010 article *Europe's three great delusions*:

Europeans, perhaps not the Brits, are quite used to an adequate Health Care system and a Tertiary Education, both of which do not *cost and arm and a leg*. (retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/16163376/comments>)

In a television morning programme aired by a Greek channel, which includes national and local news as well as daily analysis of newspapers' front pages, the aforementioned idiom was translated literally, thus confusing viewers about the actual meaning of the source-text idiom. It could be the case that because the topic of conversation was the healthcare system, the idiom, which made reference to two body parts, was not interpreted metaphorically but literally, thus giving the statement a sense of exaggeration and confusing viewers by leading them to ponder whether the literal or idiomatic meaning of the words *arm* and *leg* was being employed. This incident would not have been noticed had it not been for the presenter of a satirical talk show, who realized the incoherence of the

translated message and made fun of the literal translation of the idiomatic expression. This misunderstanding, which was the result of the ineffective capturing of the idiom's meaning, is indicative of a flawed idiom translation.

Having observed the pitfalls of idiom translation described above on more than one occasion, I have decided to address the problem by posing the following questions:

1. What translation strategies are employed in the treatment of idioms in the Greek financial press?
2. Which parameters influence the translators' choices?

These key questions could be further broken down into a number of more specific research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between idiom-thematic category and idiom-translation strategy employed ?
2. Which idiom-translation strategy is mostly employed in transferring English idioms into the Greek financial press?
3. Which syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive, genre and idiom-related parameters influence idiom translation ?

The answers to these questions may enable translators to make more informed and effective translation choices and develop better strategies in rendering the source-language idiom into the target-language. Thus, research on idiom-translation strategies in the Greek financial press can prove particularly fruitful for the language needs not only of translators but also of students and teachers who can analyse the nature of idiomatic meaning and how it can be comprehended and eventually translated more effectively. In this respect, students preparing for language certificates in which the element of translation is one of the tested skill components, e.g. English exams leading to the Greek state certificate of language competence known as KPG (i.e. *Kratiko Pistopiitiko Glossomathias*) could be significantly facilitated by acquiring a deeper understanding of the meaning of a particular idiom instead of simply learning it by heart and then, perhaps, forgetting it. Hence, the professional motive for writing this book lies in a desire to investigate and analyse idioms and their translation in financial texts in an effort to pinpoint the cultural and stylistic issues that arise when translating English idioms into Greek in the hope of enhancing translators' interest in and sensitivity to idioms.

1.3 Methodology

A corpus-based approach is used to identify and analyse idiom-translation strategies in the Greek financial press. Specifically, a 101,202-word sample of 2009 Greek news material taken from the Sunday edition of *Kathimerini* newspaper, translated from the newspaper *The Economist*, was contrasted with its source version with respect to the way idiomatic expressions are rendered. For the purposes of the current research, a new idiom-typology was proposed based on two hyper-categories; inward/thought-related and outward/communication-related idioms. Inward idioms were further subdivided into cognitively-oriented idioms, that is, think-based idioms and affectively-oriented idioms, that is, feel-framed idioms whereas outward idioms included the subcategories of general outward idioms and business idioms. Both manual and software search were combined in order to find out how idioms have been translated in the Greek financial press. The combination of both manual and software search enabled me to find 100 idioms in the data which yielded 121 instances of idiomatic expressions in total.

It should be noted that *The Economist* refers to itself as a newspaper although it is published in the form of a glossy magazine. However, it is registered in the Post Office as a newspaper; therefore, it will be referred to as such. *The Economist* newspaper was selected for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of the most influential publications, reporting developments in international business and world affairs through a range of formats, from magazines and newspapers to conferences and electronic services. Secondly, practical reasons came into play when choosing this newspaper since translated articles from *The Economist* appear in *Kathimerini* newspaper on a daily basis. Hence, this corpus-driven study was significantly enhanced by the availability of numerous financial, political and technological articles that have been translated into Greek from the original newspaper *The Economist*. In Table 1-1, which follows, the main issues addressed in each chapter of the book are summarized.

Table 1-1. Main issues addressed in each chapter of the book

CHAPTER	MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED IN EACH CHAPTER
Chapter 1 <i>Introduction</i>	What is the research aim of the present study? What is the background? What is the importance of this study? What is the methodology adopted? What is the outline of the book?
Chapter 2 <i>Linguistic and Translational Aspects of Idioms</i>	What are the significant issues and challenges in defining idioms? What is translation and what is its relationship with language and thought? Which translation model will form the backbone of this study? What are the translator's problems when dealing with idioms? What are the computer's problems when dealing with idioms? What idiom-translation strategies have been proposed so far? Which idiom-translation model will be employed in this study?
Chapter 3 <i>Methodology</i>	Which source(s) will be used so as to gather financial articles? Where will the translation of these articles be found? Which idiom typology will be used? Which tools will be necessary for extracting the idioms under question?
Chapter 4 <i>Idiom Translation in the Greek Financial Press</i>	Which idiom-thematic category is encountered more frequently in the corpus in question? Which idiom-translation strategy is mostly employed in transferring English idioms into Greek? Which strategies have been employed for the translation of inward and outward idioms in the Greek financial press?
Chapter 5 <i>Parameters Affecting Idiom Translation</i>	What parameters influence idiom adherence? What parameters influence idiom literalization? What parameters influence idiom deletion? What parameters influence idiom compensation? What parameters influence idiom mistranslation? How are English idioms in headlines translated into Greek? What kind of idiom-translation model emerges from the analysis of all the above parameters?
Chapter 6 <i>Conclusions</i>	What is the contribution of this study? What are its limitations ? What are its implications? What are its future directions?

1.4 Book outline

The present book consists of six chapters as summarised below:

The first chapter serves to introduce the background of the research by providing a brief overview of the literature on news translation in general and within the English-Greek paradigm. Moreover, it introduces the key research questions, justifies the choice of methodology and explains the significance of this study.

In Chapter 2, the main definitory axes of idioms are briefly discussed and a preliminary definition of the term *idiom* is provided. In more detail, an overview of the diverse views on idiom definitions is given, ranging from early theories of idiomaticity to more recent ones. Furthermore, the translation model that will be adopted for the present study is explored in detail as well as some translational aspects of idioms. In addition, the kinds of difficulties translators face when translating idioms are outlined and the strategies that have been proposed to help them carry out the task of idiom translation are analysed.

Chapter 3 restates the aims and objectives of the research and clarifies the research questions in the context of the literature reviewed. Then, an explanation and justification of my proposed methods of data collection and analysis is given, while in Chapter 4 the idiom-translation strategies adopted in the Greek financial press are critically examined.

Chapter 5 proceeds with a discussion of the parameters influencing English-Greek idiom translation as well as the kinds of constraints that could be possibly regulating idiom treatment in the Greek financial press. It is proposed that idiom translation is genre-sensitive and that this is linguistically manifested by the outlining of specific syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and idiom-related parameters that seem to influence the rendering of English idioms in the Greek financial press.

Finally, Chapter 6 highlights the study's contribution to idiom translation and closes with a discussion of the limitations, implications and future directions of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LINGUISTIC AND TRANSLATIONAL ASPECTS OF IDIOMS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter an overview of the diverse views on idiom definitions will be given and a detailed examination of House's model of translation quality assessment, that will form the basis for the analysis of the data, will be provided. Having placed the focus of research on the idiom-translation strategies used in financial texts, research related directly to idiom translation will be reviewed and a new model of idiom translation will be finally proposed.

2.2 Terminological aspects of idioms

There seems to be considerable variation in the literature as to what constitutes an idiomatic expression. This section aims at outlining the variety of different ways in which idiomatic expressions have been dealt with in linguistic and applied linguistic theories. Even a cursory look at the terminological aspects associated with the field of *idiomaticity* in general, and in particular with the term *idiom*, is enough to cause a sense of bafflement and confusion. This is mainly due to the fact that the phenomenon of idiomaticity is too complex to be defined in terms of a single property since it lacks monolithic uniformity. As such, it has led many linguists to steer almost completely clear of it; to name a few, Bloomfield (1926, 1933), Harris (1951), Chomsky (1957, 1965), Saussure (1916) and Lyons (1963, 1968). Even those linguists who have shown an interest in this 'problematic' area of linguistic enquiry and have attempted to provide a definition of the term, have unfortunately reached no agreement because an all-embracing definition as well as a presentation of the multiple criteria that will adequately capture all the idioms in a language while excluding all the non-idioms is still lacking.

In this section an attempt is made to give a brief overview of the main definitions posited by linguists for the linguistic category under investigation and to denote a working definition of the term *idiom*. Starting from the root of the term, one may notice its Greek origin since the word *idiom* stems from the Greek lexeme *idios*, meaning 'own, private, peculiar' (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989:624). The term *lexeme* may be perceived as a minimal unit of syntactic analysis (Lyons, 1963:12), the fundamental unit of the lexicon (Matthews, 1974:22) or perhaps more simply as a dictionary word or abstract unit of vocabulary (Bauer, 1988:246). In other words, it is an abstract entity which lacks inflectional marking, e.g. *runs*, *ran* and *running* are forms of the English lexeme *run*.

It is worth noting that the words *idiom* and *idiomatic* were originally used in Greek and French to denote dialectical variability and, hence, peculiarity. Nowadays, they have become a vessel for any type of peculiarity whether this has to do with art and music or language and linguistics. Thus, if one wanted to subsume the meaning of the term *idiom* under two broad categories, then they would come up with two main uses. First, the word *idiom* depicts a particular way of expressing something in music, art, writing, and so on, which characterizes a person or a group and secondly, it refers to a particular lexical collocation which exhibits a certain degree of phraseological peculiarity. The second use of the term, though much more common in English, is perhaps too broad since it embraces many kinds of multi-word items, whether semantically opaque or transparent (e.g. *to chew the fat* vs. *how do you do*). On the other hand, narrower uses of the term restrict it to a particular kind of unit and acknowledge its fixedness and semantic opaqueness (e.g. *kick the bucket*). According to Cruse (1986:39), a semantically non-transparent expression may be described as semantically opaque. In other words, the constituents' meanings do not relate directly to the meaning of the compound as a whole.

Another definition of what constitutes an idiom is given by Sadock (1974). Drawing from pragmatics and specifically speech-act theory, Sadock (1974) uses the term *idiom* to refer to a conventionalized formula with an illocutionary function, e.g. *Can you pass the salt?*. Furthermore, he claims that some lexico-grammatical strings such as *let's* and *why don't you* are processed as idioms since they have a different meaning from the sum of their semantic components.

Given the above controversial definitions, it can be seen that this chaotic terminological situation cannot be easily resolved since some linguists, like Alexander (1978, 1979) and Carter (1987) prefer to use the very general term *fixed expression* whereas others like Glässer (1986a),

Cowie (2001) and Naciscione (2011) opt for the term *phraseological unit*. Another approach to dealing with this terminological abundance is the one adopted by Moon (1998:2) who opts for the term *fixed expressions and idioms*, which is abbreviated to FEIs throughout her book.

As Fernando and Flavell (1981:19) point out idiomaticity is a phenomenon too complex to be defined in terms of a single property. Hence, the attempt by experts or non-experts to define idiomaticity on the basis of a single criterion seems to be an elusive one. Nevertheless, the fact that linguists and non-linguists alike are becoming increasingly keen to contribute to this field is indicative of two major developments: the acknowledgment of the ubiquity of idioms in human language and the realization that an interdisciplinary approach to the study of idioms can give new insights into the field, extend these insights into other areas of linguistic study, and more importantly, shed some light on the hotly debated issues of idiom comprehension, processing and translation.

Given this confusing terminology, the following clarifications should be made: whenever I use the term *idiom* or *idiomatic expression* I am only referring to those phrases whose meaning cannot be derived compositionally from the meaning of its individual words. Whenever I refer to the study of idiomaticity or use the term *idiomatic meaning* I am hereafter referring to the study and meaning of these phrases and not of any others.

Even though scholars have different theoretical positions on what constitutes an idiomatic expression, it should be mentioned that there seems to be a consensus on the four most frequently mentioned features of idioms. The first one is *institutionalization* meaning that idioms are conventionalized expressions recognized and approved by the usage of the language (Bauer, 1983:48). It is worth mentioning that Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:493) consider this to be the only necessary feature of an idiom given the variability of all other ones.

The second is *semantic opacity* which is manifested by the fact that the meaning of an idiom is not the sum of its constituent parts. In fact, some researchers (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow, 1994; Cacciari and Levorato, 1998) argue that idioms do not constitute a homogeneous group but vary in terms of their transparency and/or opaqueness. The notion of transparency is very important because it reveals how the form of an idiom is motivated by its meaning on both the literal and figurative level.

Another frequent characteristic of idioms, the third one, is *formal rigidity*, or to borrow Moon's term (1998:7) 'lexicogrammatical fixedness', which presupposes rigidity and inflexibility and implies some degree of lexicogrammatical defectiveness of the idioms in question. The

fourth feature is *compositeness* indicating that idioms are considered to be multi-word expressions (e.g. *shoot the breeze*, *hot potato*, etc.) even though scholars such as Hockett (1958) have accepted single morphemes as idioms. It should be mentioned that Philip (2011) mentions two more features of idioms which are semantic in nature. The first one is *salience*, which is a rather subjective concept and refers to a belief about what words mean, and the other one is *truth conditions*, which indicate whether a word is being used literally or metaphorically and differentiate idioms from other phrasal sequences (2011:23). A more recent study (Penttilä, 2010) has shown that some additional idiom attributes are *pragmatic constraints* and *partial lexical openness*. For example, *do a Dianagate* is an idiomatic construction that is lexically partially open since the position of the proper noun can be taken by any proper noun (Penttilä, 2010:155).

Given the fact that there is no consensus as to the characteristics attributed to idiomatic expressions, I will provide my own working definition of the term *idiom* based on four central criteria, adopting Penttilä's (2010:149) definition which claims that an idiom is an:

- (i) institutionalized
 - (ii) non-compositional
 - (iii) syntactically restricted
 - (iv) multiword expression
- (Penttilä, 2010:149)

Furthermore, acknowledging the graded nature of idioms, I will endorse Penttilä's proposal that "idioms and non-idioms form a continuum in which idiomaticity is a matter of degree rather than a dichotomous notion" (2010:149). In other words, non-compositionality in an idiom may be either total (e.g. *trip the light fantastic*) or partial (e.g. *lose one's cool*). Similarly, idioms are prototypically defined as syntactically restricted compared to non-idiomatic word combinations but recent studies (e.g. Langlotz, 2006; Moon, 1998) have shown the paradoxical flexibility of fixed expressions. In addition to that, multiwordiness has also generally been assumed to be a necessary characteristic of a prototypical idiom but formulas such as *cheers* (used for toasting) have come to be regarded as highly idiomatic (Warren, 2005:39). In light of the above, my own working definition of the term *idiom* is the following:

An idiom is an institutionalized construction that is composed of two or more lexical items and it is non-compositional either totally or partially. Moreover, it tends to be fixed and syntactically restricted.