

ARM AND LEG IDIOMS IN THE BNC AND COCA CORPORA: VIEWS ON THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

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Received: May, 15. 2014.
Accepted: June, 10. 2014.
Original Article
UDK 811.111'282.4
811.111(73)'373.7

Abstract. Phraseological units, primarily idioms are those types of linguistic units which reveal to a great extent how certain linguistic community copes with its surroundings. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how idioms in English language are actually differently used across different genres in British and American linguistic communities, and try to explain those results in light of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The study was conducted on the basis of the idioms that have the same body part, namely arm and/or leg, and those idioms were then compared in two corpora – the BNC (British National Corpus) and COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English).

Keywords: *Arm and leg idioms, BNC, COCA, Cultural difference.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Phraseology as one of the most interesting fields of linguistic study is often mistreated by many linguists because of its close relation to Cognitive Linguistics (CL) which, unlike Chomsky's Generative Grammar for example, is not rule-governed. Rather, CL focuses on the relationship between the language and the mind. Cognitive linguists go from the premise that language is not only rule-governed, but that there is something more than just the form that is, a language is very much connected with extra-linguistic phenomena. The topic of the paper is to prove that those extra-linguistic phenomena such as man's surroundings and experience are to be taken into account as they are most certainly reflected in a language of certain community and/or culture. The figures show that the use of the same idioms, namely arm and leg idioms in British and American

English is somewhat different, and that is indicative of how the conceptual system of those compared communities is differently grounded, to some extent however.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The topic of the paper, however, is idiomatic use of a language and how it is used in two different communities, namely British and American. As noted above, the scope of the analysis was idioms which have arm and/or leg as their head and comparison of those idioms with respect to their use in British and American communities. The process had a few steps. Firstly, all the body part idioms were found, and since it was a rather big number to be analyzed, the scope of the analysis needed to be narrowed. Secondly, the analysis was narrowed to motor body parts only. Thirdly, since even that number was very big, it needed to be reduced by some other criterion, so two body parts that are mostly used in our everyday life were chosen, arm and leg to be precise. All the idioms found with those body parts in the NTC's American Idioms Dictionary are compared in COCA and the BNC corpora, thus providing a practical framework for cultural differences between British and American societies. Although only one language – English is discussed in the corpora-based study, the fact that figures found with the same idioms in British and American societies are very different just shows that the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis should not be a priori disputed. Each idiom found with arm and/or leg constituent is presented in the paper in a form of a table, and the results in those two corpora are thus being compared and discussed.

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3. PHRASEOLOGY MIRRORS CULTURE

Phraseology as a linguistic discipline is the best indicator of how certain society perceives the world. Through the phraseological units, especially idioms we are able to have better knowledge of a certain culture – that primarily refers to culture-specific idioms. It means that there are those idioms that are specific to one culture, but could not be found in some other culture and language due to some external factors such as climate, people, habits, animals in people's surroundings, etc. Every linguistic discipline is always connected to other disciplines, and phraseology is not an exception in that sense. Nick C. Ellis argues the relation between phraseology and CL:

Thus, phraseology resonates with a wide range of research areas within Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Science more generally. Cognition, consciousness, experience, embodiment, brain, self, and human interaction, society, culture, and history are all inextricably intertwined in rich, complex, and dynamic ways in language, so an understanding of language is incomplete without them (Ellis, 2008: 5).

At the core of interest within CL is the study of a language that is embodied – the example thus being metaphors such as MORE IS UP, LESS IS DOWN referring to the fact that when one is healthy, they are in an upright posture, whereas when one is sick they cannot do things as they can when being healthy. In addition, as Lakoff and Johnson put it: “Meaning, therefore, is never disembodied or objective and is always grounded in the acquisition and use of a conceptual system” (1980: 197). Apart from that, CL studies the language which reflects human experience, which is why it is always closely connected to phraseology. For example, the idiom to burry one's head in the sand is a string of words which was used to describe a typical behavior of ostriches when in danger, and was later on given another, non-literal meaning – to describe those people who usually do not confront difficult situation or a problem; rather, they burry their heads in the sand that is, do not confront the challenging situation. That string of words was given certain idiomatic meaning, it was conventionalized by the people, and it no longer meant literally to burry one's head in the sand. The beauty of phraseology is that it really reflects how societies and/or cultures are actually very unique and different. In addition, having a

good knowledge of phraseology of a certain language may play the key role when translating. Corpora-based study of phraseology is especially useful and practical not only for learners and teachers, but also for translators who want to convey the message correctly in the target language. Jean Pierre Colson brings together phraseology and translation studies in his article Phraseology across languages and cultures.

A related topic is that of frequency differences across languages. It is not at all clear, for instance, that all languages use set phrases in the same proportions. The relative importance of the noun category may vary from language to language and will therefore interfere with the importance of verbal expressions, one of the main categories of set phrases. Identifying a phraseological profile for various languages on the basis of large corpora would be very useful for both language learners and translators, because many errors are due to an insufficient or incorrect mastery of phraseology (Colson, 2008: 198).

When it comes to acquisition of the phraseological units of a certain language, Graeme Kennedy argues that one learns phraseology through implicit learning more likely than through explicit learning (2008: 38). It means that we more likely to memorize and use a collocation and/or an idiom if we hear it many times without paying special attention to it. So, if we hear certain idiom such as armed and dangerous numerous times by a native speaker, which means probably used in the right context then we are more likely to retrieve the idiom later on and use it ourselves in a proper context. As opposed to implicit learning, there is also explicit learning which implies that we must pay attention to it that is, we are aware of the process of learning, which is not the case with implicit learning, and that is a preferable method for learning phraseology. Like everything in life, the best way to learn something, whether a language or something that has nothing to do with it, is by applying the method of retrieving.

4. THE SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS AND IDIOMS

When discussing the field of phraseology and what it focuses on, the inevitable part certainly belongs to the relation between the language and the thought. Neither language, nor thought is completely independent. That

is covered by the term linguistic relativity which was later on known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.

Regardless of the fact that Whorf's work has been many times disputed by many linguists, especially generativists who claim that it is impossible to acquire a language without linguistic competence which is innate, his contribution to the relation between the language and thought must not be completely neglected. Irrespective of some of the shortcomings of Whorf's work, Katz gives him some credit, and argues that when conducting experimental analysis that is, when comparing two languages in usage, it is important to examine whether these differences are indicative of cultural differences, or just the worldview. "In general, the experimental paradigm is to identify two or more languages that differ in some specified way and then to see if this difference is reflected in a corresponding difference in worldview that cannot be traced to cultural differences per se" (Katz, Cacciari, Gibbs, Turner 1998:14).

The paper discusses exactly those differences, i.e. the differences in the worldview between the British and American society which are based on arm and leg idioms found in the BNC and COCA corpora.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The NTC's American Idioms Dictionary showed that there is quite an extensive list of idioms that consist of a body part in English, and the paper would be rather exhaustive if all the idioms were subjected to the analysis, so the criterion was to cover only motor body part idioms. Given the fact that the number of those idioms was rather big as well, next criterion was to take two motor body parts, and those were arm and leg idioms.

All the idioms with arm and leg constituents are enlisted and compared in both corpora, first the BNC, then COCA. However, it must be stressed that the BNC corpus shows results only from 1980s to 1993, whereas COCA shows results from 1991 to 2012, but the queries in the latter were limited to the period from 1990 to 1994 to make it comparable with the BNC results as much as possible. For each idiom, there are two tables, the first one with the BNC results, and the second one with the COCA results. The sections are placed in the first row of both tables. It is to be stressed that

BNC has NON-ACADEMIC section, whereas COCA does not, which to some extent, undermines the results altogether. The second row in both tables represents frequency, i.e. number of tokens, whereas the third represents the frequency of occurrence per million. Each idiom is discussed on the basis of the results found in the corpora.

Table 1. Comparison of the idiom arm in arm in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	3	39	2	4	1	3	11
PER MIL	0.30	2.45	0.28	0.38	0.06	0.20	0.53

COCA						
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994
FREQ	7	42	12	7	1	69
PER MIL	0.08	0.49	0.13	0.08	0.01	0.66

Idiom (1) means that "two persons are linked or hooked together by arms" (NTC's American Idioms Dictionary 2000: 11). As results from both tables show, it seems that the American linguistic community uses the idiom more than the British across all genres. The possible reason for that may lie in the fact that the Americans are considered to be rather friendly people, whereas the British are considered to be somewhat cold when social affairs are in question.

Table 2. Comparison of the idiom armed and dangerous in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	2	1	5	0	0	0
PER MIL	0.00	0.13	0.14	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.00

COCA						
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994
FREQ	6	9	4	0	0	19
PER MIL	0.07	0.11	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.18

Idiom's meaning, according to the NTC's American Idioms Dictionary is "said of an armed person who is suspected of a crime and has not been captured and who is likely to resist arrest" (2000: 12). As it is obvious from the tables, the Americans tend to use the idiom generally more than the British. That is not surprising given the fact that most of the action movies we are exposed to on TV are American movies. Another possible explanation for such results is that the Americans led many wars through their history – Vietnam War, American War of Independence and many others. The British led many wars as well, and conquered many territories across the world which gave them the title of being the most imperialistic power in the world. Notwithstanding, the frequency of occurrence of the idiom across genres is not that high when compared to the American results. There might be two reasons. Primary reason is technical by its nature because the BNC corpus covers only period from 1980s to 1993, and it is taken from the American dictionary

of idioms, whereas COCA covers the period from 1990 to 1994. The other reason may be the fact that the British are rather conservative nation and do not like to be exposed on the world's stage too much, while the Americans are considered to be more liberal and more democratic nation which, in reality, wishes to dominate the world, and wants to be the one that other nations would be intimidated by. So, it may be possible to conclude that in the American society fighting is deeply rooted and it is reflected in its idiomatic use of language. However, from all the results from both of the tables, one result in the BNC table strikes out, and that is section NEWSPAPER and number 0.48 while the same in the COCA table is 0.00. Probable reason for that may be the fact that the idiom is frequently used in British journalistic style; perhaps it is mostly used by politicians to show how powerful they (the British) are. It could be considered that such a high number in NEWSPAPER section is an indicator of politicians' and other leaders' demagogical tool of persuasion.

Table 3. Comparison of the idiom armed to the teeth in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	4	2	0	1	0	2
PER MIL	0.00	0.25	0.28	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.10
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	12	12	8	6	1	39	
PER MIL	0.13	0.14	0.09	0.07	0.01	0.38	

Idiom (3) means “heavily armed with deadly weapons” (2000: 12), and is another example of culture-specific and deeply-rooted feature of the American society. Numbers in the COCA table are all higher than in the BNC table, despite the fact that the COCA table lacks two sections – NON-ACADEMIC and MISCELLANEOUS. Pretty much the same explanation from the above could be applied here as well.

(4) Comparison of the idiom busy as a one-armed paperhanger in the BNC and COCA

*Not found neither in the BNC, nor in COCA

Despite the fact that that idiom was taken from the NTC's American Idioms Dictionary, it was strange not to find it in any genre in either of the corpora, not even in COCA which would be least expected. The idiom means “very busy”(2000: 14).

Table 5. Comparison of the idiom cost an arm and a leg in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	1	1	2	1	0	0	0
PER MIL	0.10	0.06	0.28	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	1	1	1	0	0	3	
PER MIL	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03	

When one says that something costs an arm and a leg, it means that it “costs too much” (NTC's American Idioms Dictionary, 2000: 78). The idiom is such that it can only be used in somewhat less formal pieces of writing, so it is no surprise at all to see figures 0.00 in both tables in the section ACADEMIC because academic type of writing has its own regularities and writing style, and usage of such an idiom would be considered rather inadequate. As it is evident from the tables, the idiom is mostly used in informal communication, both oral and written – sections SPOKEN, FICTION, MAGAZINE. The data from both tables do not give us any interesting piece of information on possible cultural differences between those two linguistic communities, only that it is slightly more used in British English than in American English.

Table 6. Comparison of the idiom pay an arm and a leg in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
PER MIL	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14

*Not found in COCA

The meaning of the idiom (6) is quite the same as the meaning of the idiom (5), its usage is informal as the note in the Dictionary says (2000: 309), and there is a similar idiom expressing the same content, but with the different body part constituent – pay through the nose for something. Since the idiom is not found in COCA corpus we may consider it to be predominantly used by the British, although the use of the idiom is not a big one even in the BNC, but it is most certainly used in informal contexts, as the results show.

Table 7. Comparison of the idiom put the arm on (someone) in the BNC and COCA

*Not found in the BNC

COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	2	2	0	0	0	4	
PER MIL	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04	

According to the Dictionary, the idiom's meaning is “to put pressure on someone” (2000: 331). The idiom is not found in the BNC, but is in COCA which again may be interpreted as British people being somewhat more of pacifists by nature than American people. On one hand, the Americans are considered to be loud, aggressive in obtaining

their goals, and intrusive in a way, whereas the British lack that type of reputation. In addition, the Americans lead wars even nowadays (think of Iraq), although the figures are illustrative of only the period from 1990 to 1994 which shows once more that the above adjectives are more or less true of them. The British on the other hand, are considered shy and non-aggressive in their approach, but also non-intrusive. That may be the cause of not finding the idiom in the BNC corpus.

(8) receive someone with open arms

*Not found neither in the BNC, nor in COCA with neither pronoun

The meaning of the idiom is to “greet someone eagerly” (Dictionary, 2000: 338). The problem with the idioms having someone as their constituent is that when entered in the query in that form, the results are not given in either corpus. The problem was solved by entering all the pronouns in the query, but not all of them are enlisted in the paper and subjected to the comparison. With those idioms which have that constituent in its canonical form there was no special criterion to choose only one pronoun; rather, it was done by a random choice. This idiom in the above mentioned period was not found in the corpora so cultural differences could not be seen in that sense.

(9) welcome someone with open arms

Its meaning is identical with the one in (8). With the idiom (9) pronoun them was chosen, and the results were as follows:

Table 9. Comparison of the idiom welcome them with open arms in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	1	0	0	1	0	2	
PER MIL	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	

As opposed to the idiom (8), the idiom (9), which is differed from the idiom (8) only in its verbal constituent, gives results in both corpora. As expected, the Americans tend to use it slightly more than the British which is again an indicator of how the Americans are more open-hearted and straightforward type of people. Section NEWSPAPER in COCA corpus shows that it is very likely to find the idiom in the newspapers, probably in the context of politics. For example, sentence such as President Clinton welcomed his Russian colleague with open arms is very likely to be found at that period in their newspapers.

It should be emphasized, however, that with the constituent him the BNC corpus showed higher figures than in COCA, but altogether, considering all the constituents, the Americans do tend to use this idiom more than the British.

Table 10. Comparison of the idiom shot in the arm in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	1	0	0	1	0	2	
PER MIL	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	

The meaning of the idiom (10) is “a boost; something that gives someone energy” (Dictionary, 2000: 360), and it is informal in its use. The tables show that the Americans tend to use this informal idiomatic expression more than the British, especially in SPOKEN and NEWSPAPER sections. It is well-known that when it comes to being formal (this even applies to linguistic formality), British people are very formal, while American people have rather relaxed and casual approach to life. Sometimes there is a lack of respect vivid in human affairs, especially in the case of authorities due to that laid-back approach, and omission of formalities. However, one thing also needs to be kept in mind – the constituents that the idiom is consisted of. The constituent shot refers to the shot given from doing drugs by injecting it through the needle into your vein, which consequently gives you the energy. Needless to say, the figures would probably be much higher if different period of time was chosen, say 2000 to 2004. The point here is again the fact that phraseology mirrors culture; the nineties were kind of beginning of the drug era. Today, however, that number is much higher in both corpora.

Table 11. Comparison of the idiom take up arms against (someone) in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	0	0	0	3	2	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.13	0.05
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	0	0	2	4	2	8	
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.08	

Idiom’s meaning is “to prepare to fight against someone or something” (2000: 398). In a way, the results are expected, i.e. it is not such a surprise to discover the idiom is more used by the Americans than by the British. Especially interesting figures are those in the sections MAGAZINE and NEWSPAPER which are much higher in COCA corpus than in the BNC, and could again be interpreted as

being a culture-reflecting mirror. The beginning of the nineties was globally very dynamic period of time and that is especially vivid in terms of politics that the Americans led. In addition, Peggy Whitley, a researcher in the field of American cultural history, describes the nineties in the United States as:

The 90s have been called the Merger Decade. On the domestic front, some big issues were health care, social security reform, and gun control - debated and unresolved throughout the whole decade. Violence and sex scandals dominated the media starting with the Tailhook affair in which Navy and Marine Corps fliers were accused of sexually abusing 26 women. President Clinton kept the gossip flowing as several women accused him of sexual misconduct. Violence seemed a part of life. In 1992 South-Central Los Angeles rioted after four white policemen were acquitted of video-taped assault charges for beating a black motorist, Rodney King. 1993 brought terrorism to the American shores as a bomb was detonated in the garage beneath the World Trade Center. That same month of February saw four agents of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms killed during an unsuccessful raid on the Branch Davidian cult compound in Waco, Texas led by David Koresh (<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade90.html>, Whitley, Peggy, American Cultural History, copyright 1999, last updated 2/2011).

Also, it is well known that, at the time (in 1990), the Gulf War took place. It was a war between UN governed coalition of 34 states and Iraq which previously annexed Kuwait, and by doing so, represented a threat to the world peace. Wars that the Americans led were not the only turmoil that shed their lives; there were also sex crimes, problems with drugs, racial issues, general dissatisfaction with Clinton's politics, and many other. All of these factors influenced the American society to wake up, to express their opinions, to liberalize and democratize society in every aspect, to fight for their rights. In that light, the frequency of occurrence of the idiom to take up arms against (someone), especially in the media is not surprising at all. This is once more an example that the changes in language go hand in hand with the changes in the society that uses that language, and that is expressed exactly in phraseology of a certain language. The fact that the idiom is not that used in British English again shows how the British are not so open and liberal when it comes to expressing their opinions on the social affairs that their country is subjected to.

(12) twist someone's arm

With the idiom (12), the same problem as in (9) was encountered, so my was chosen for comparison instead of the canonical someone's.

Table 12. Comparison of the idiom twist my arm in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	2	2	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.20	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	0	0	0	1	0	1	
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	

The idiom means to „force or persuade someone” (2000: 419). As the results from the table show, the figures are higher in that period of time in the BNC corpus, especially in informal communication (sections SPOKEN and FICTION). If it was said in the previous example that the Americans are more open to express their opinions, then as the results in this example show, the British are more likely to be persuaded and convinced by their participants in the conversation, and therefore more readily accept whatever they are told. The use of the idiom with all the constituents (your, his, her, its, our, their) is such that the advantage is given to the BNC corpus.

Table 13. Comparison of the idiom up in arms in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	13	12	6	11	4	1	3
PER MIL	1.30	0.75	0.83	1.05	0.24	0.07	0.14
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	30	6	15	17	1	69	
PER MIL	0.33	0.07	0.17	0.20	0.01	0.66	

The idiom's meaning is “rising up in anger; very angry. Also literal when actual weapons are involved” (2000: 422). In case of this idiom, and based on the results of both corpora, we may reach the same conclusion from the above about the nature of both the British and the Americans.

Table 14. Comparison of the idiom break a leg in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	2	8	2	5	0	0	5
PER MIL	0.20	0.50	0.28	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.24
COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	0	15	5	2	0	22	
PER MIL	0.00	0.18	0.06	0.02	0.00	0.21	

“Good luck! Also literal. Theatrical slang” (2000: 47). This idiom in particular does not shed any light on the cultural differences between those two linguistic communities as the common number across genres in both corpora is the same – 22, which shows that wishing someone good luck is rather universal in both societies.

Table 15. Comparison of the idiom as crooked as a dog's hind leg in the BNC and COCA

*Not found in the BNC

COCA						
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994
FREQ	0	1	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01

When someone says he/she is as crooked as a dog's hind leg, they mean that they are "dishonest" (2000: 15). The idiom is not found in the BNC corpus, but is found in COCA corpus, though only in section FICTION. The only comment that could be made is that the idiom is typically more American than British, at least when that period of time is in question. Given the fact that many affairs struck the USA in the beginning of the nineties, and many people were caught in dishonest acts, the use of the idiom comes as no surprise. All the affairs were the result of the free market reforms that took place in the beginning of the nineties which perfectly favored those who wanted to earn a lot of money by privatizing big corporations and firing many people. These were the things that led to a higher unemployment rate, loss of the middle class, and general dissatisfaction. Consequently, those people who were in favor of the introduction of the new capitalist politics became extremely wealthy. Hind leg of the dog was taken to represent dishonesty because dogs, when having to answer to their physiological needs, they raise their leg to do it. They also mark their territory by doing so, and in that sense the idiom is also used to describe people's behavior when conducting certain act of dishonesty such as adultery, corruption, bribery, etc. In addition, Lakoff and Johnson claim: "In general, which values are given priority is partly a matter of the subculture one lives in and partly a matter of personal values" (1980: 23). Obviously, such dishonest pattern of behavior is more typical of the Americans than it is of the British since the idiom was not found in the BNC, which is illustrative of the American subculture and the values they share. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that when discussing culture-specific features of a certain society, the Hypothesis may lead us on the slippery slope of whether we are dealing with real experience-based differences between two societies, or we are dealing with stereotypes. Basically, we may argue that the Hypothesis, also known as linguistic relativism could account for cultural relativism as well.

We may define cultural relativism as the view according to which the validity of

principles, values, statements, theories and the like is exclusively relative to the culture within which they have developed. There might be other forms of cultural relativism forms which relativize some but not all the fundamental notions of a conceptual scheme but this is the most radical one (Massimo Dell'Utri 2008: 76).

(16) get one's sea legs

Again, the problem is canonical constituent one's which is substituted with a constituent your.

It should be emphasized, however, that the results were shown only for constituents my and your, and not in both of the corpora.

Table 16. Comparison of the idiom get your sea legs in the BNC and COCA

*Not found in the BNC

*Not found in the BNC

COCA						
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994
FREQ	0	0	1	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01

The idiom means "to become accustomed to the movement of a ship at sea; to be able to walk steadily on the constantly rolling and pitching decks of a ship" (2000: 141). The idiom is not found in the BNC corpus, but is found in COCA, though not in a big number. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the figures is that the idiom is typically American, and it is found in that period only in section MAGAZINE, namely Science News-Magazine of the Society for Science and the Public. In addition, the idiom is found in a slightly higher number in COCA corpus with the constituent your.

(17) on someone's or something's last legs

The canonical constituent someone's was substituted with the constituent his.

Table 17. Comparison of the idiom on his last legs in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05

COCA						
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994
FREQ	1	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01

The meaning of the idiom is "to be almost worn out or finished" (2000: 291), and it is always used in informal contexts, as the figures show. There is no significant difference between the figures of the two corpora which is an indicator that the idiom is no more British than it is American, and is a part of everyday communication in both linguistic communities. When all the constituents, i.e. pronouns are considered, it is slightly more used in the BNC than in COCA.

(18) pull someone's leg

The canonical constituent someone's was substituted with the constituent my. Again, not all the pronouns function as a constituent in the idiom; some – like your, her, its, their – are found neither in the BNC, nor in COCA.

Table 18. Comparison of the idiom pull my leg in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
PER MIL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10

COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	0	1	0	0	0	1	
PER MIL	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	

To pull someone's leg means "to kid, fool, or trick someone" (2000: 324), and it is used in informal contexts as well. As the figures show, the idiom is more used in the British community than in the American. However, the same idiom, but with the constituent our is found more within the American linguistic community than the British. It could be said that the idiom is rather universal, like break a leg is, and no significant culture-specific features could be drawn from the results.

(19) stretch one's legs

In this idiom, the constituent one's was substituted with the constituent our. Of course, not all of the possible constituents were found in both corpora.

Table 19. Comparison of the idiom stretch our legs in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	3	1	0	0	0	3
PER MIL	0.00	0.19	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14

COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	0	2	1	0	0	3	
PER MIL	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03	

Idiom's meaning is "to walk around after sitting down or lying down for a time" (2000: 382). The figures in the tables show again that there is the absence of any significant difference in the use of the idiom. It is equally distributed in British and American English when all the constituents are considered. The idiom is very literal as well which contributes to the non-existence of any relevant culture-specific difference between British and American community.

(20) with one's tail between one's legs

In this idiom in particular, we have two canonical constituents in the same form – one's – that needs to be substituted with another constituent – his in this case, which would enable us to get the proper results in the query.

Table 20. Comparison of the idiom with his tail between his legs in the BNC and COCA

BNC							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
FREQ	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
PER MIL	0.00	0.19	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05

COCA							
SECTION	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC	1990-1994	
FREQ	2	2	0	1	1	6	
PER MIL	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.06	

This idiom carries the following meaning: "appearing frightened or cowardly, like a frightened or defeated dog; appearing threatened or humiliated" (2000: 437). The idiom is slightly more used in American English than in British English, and that applies not just to the idiom with the constituent his, but also your, its and their. The section ACADEMIC is interesting because the idiom never occurred in British English up to 1993, while it did occur in American English from 1990 to 1994. Again, like with some other idioms, these figures do not reflect any significant culture-specific features. Perhaps they just show that the Americans focus more on the public appearance than the British, and try harder to avoid public embarrassment of any kind, but again, we might be dealing with stereotyping.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Phraseology is only one of the fields within linguistics that focuses not only on the intra-linguistic phenomena, but also the extra-linguistic phenomena that are even more important. The most important parameter when discussing phraseology is certainly culture. Phraseology flirts to a great extent with Cognitive Linguistics because it studies the relation between the language and the thought which is very relevant when brought in connection with culture. When discussing those culture-specific aspects of language, the term linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, plays the key role in the study. The authors of the Hypothesis go from the premise that language's nature represents the world (view). That is why phraseology is very interesting scope of study that can be brought in connection with the Hypothesis as all culture-specific features of a certain community are reflected in the phraseological corpus of a certain language. Within its scope of study, phraseology investigates phenomena such as collocation, metaphor, metonymy and idioms. The paper primarily focuses on idioms that have motor body part(s), precisely arm and/or leg as their idiomatic head. Two dialects of English, British and American are compared in the paper. The comparison is based on the

two corpora, the BNC and COCA. Arm and leg idioms are subjected to a case study which cast some light on the cultural differences between those two linguistic communities. The comparison may have a few downsides, the most significant being the technical one in which the BNC corpus provides the figures from 1980s to 1993, and COCA up to 2012, but the queries in COCA corpus were limited to the period from 1990 to 1994. A general conclusion is that the Hypothesis should not be completely neglected, though not fully accepted as well. Moreover, we may agree that it actually leads towards stereotyping as the conclusions drawn from the figures are not facts per se; rather, they are kind of generalizations which are a result of stereotyping. However, the results of the corpora-based study of arm and/or leg idioms in British and American English show that the Hypothesis holds water in some cases, and that phraseology does indeed reflect how participants of a certain linguistic community cope with the world around them. That is especially true of the idiom as crooked as a dog's hind leg which is not found in the BNC corpus, but is in COCA corpus which says a lot about the nature of the Americans. Also the idiom to take up arms against (someone) is found in a higher number in COCA than in the BNC corpus which is again an indicator of how the Americans are more eager to fight for their rights. The idiom also illuminates how certain events at the time shook the American public scene, which is also indicative of how culture and language are intertwined more than we can imagine. Another reason is the fact that the idioms were taken from the American dictionary of idioms which goes hand in hand with such slightly favorable results on the part of the American linguistic community. Nonetheless, the research also showed that there were those idioms which are rather universal in their usage that is, they are found in approximately the same number in both corpora, which cannot shed any light on the cultural differences between the British and the Americans. Those are idioms such as break a leg or stretch one's legs. To sum up, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis will always play a significant role when analyzing culture-specific features of two or more linguistic communities and/or societies, but it must be treated and analyzed with special care as it may lead towards some misleading conclusions.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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