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LANGUAGE

**IDIOMS OF COMPARISON IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE**

BACHELOR THESIS

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Idioms are one of the most common phraseological phenomena that are encountered in everyday language. Alongside proverbs and other fixed expressions, they are frequent in colloquial speech and media. Idioms may be used to describe actions, emotions, objects, people and so on, substituting adjective, adverbs, verbs and nouns. One of the most common uses of idioms is to illustrate someone's or something's features or actions by comparing them or their actions to a certain subject, object or phenomenon. This is the basic description of idioms of comparison.

The relevance of the work.

Idioms have been discussed by numerous authors. Since idioms are difficult to define by a single characteristic, therefore, scholars like Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994), Deignan (2005) and Kvetko (cited in Tkachuk, 2005) provide lists of characteristics that an expression should possess to be considered an idiom. The structural and syntactic features of idioms have been discussed in depth by Yusifova (2013). Lastly, Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999) and Fernando (1996) provide ways of categorizing phraseological units and idioms.

The subject of this paper is idioms of comparison in the English language.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze idioms of comparison with a particular focus on categorization and the distribution of different categories.

To achieve this aim, the following **objectives** have been set:

1. To review the theory related to idioms.
2. To analyze and categorize idioms of comparison based on their syntactic functions.
3. To show the frequency of structural idiom categories.

To achieve the aim, the following **methods** have been used in the present research:

1. Descriptive method was used to overview theoretical data concerning idioms and approaches of idiom classification.
2. Descriptive analytical method was useful in the analysis and categorization of idioms of comparison.
3. Descriptive statistic method was used to analyze the frequency of idiom categories.

Materials and scope. The data for the present study was retrieved from the *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004). In total 174 idioms of comparison were collected from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004).

The structure of the work. The present paper consists of Introduction, Theoretical

and Empirical parts, Conclusion, References and Appendix. The introduction provides an overview of the phenomena of idioms of comparison. Moreover, the relevance, aim, objectives and scope of the research are defined in the introduction. The theoretical part of the paper consists of three sections: in the first section theoretical information about the phenomenon of idioms is provided and the features used by different scholars to define what an idiom is are given, the second section provides a more in-depth look at the structural features of idioms and finally, in the last section different approaches of idiom classification are discussed. In the empirical part idioms of comparison are presented, analyzed and categorized. Additionally, an insight is provided into the frequency of the structural categories of idioms of comparison. Furthermore, the conclusion summarizes the results of the research. The references provides all the sources used while preparing the present paper. Finally, all collected examples of idioms of comparison are provided in the appendix.

1. DEFINING IDIOMS

Idioms are one of the most difficult to define phraseological units. According to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:492), they are difficult to define since they cannot be defined by a single characteristic. In linguistic discussion and lexicographical practice, the term *idiom* does not have an absolute definition and is rather used to describe an ambiguous type of expression, which cannot be defined as a cliché, proverb, saying, etc. Therefore, over the years numerous scholars have provided their own lists of characteristics while attempting to define what makes an expression an idiom. In this chapter several of these characteristic lists, which were provided by different scholars, will be discussed.

The term *idiom* has been defined by *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992:497) as „An expression unique to a language, especially one whose sense is not predictable from the meanings and arrangements of its elements. “ Therefore, an idiom is an expression whose semantic meaning cannot be comprehended by simply knowing the semantic meaning of the units that it is made from. Kövecses (2010:231) confirms this by explaining that the traditional approach to linguistics states that an idiom must contain at least two words and that the meaning of an idiom is not identical to the meaning of its parts.

An idiom has two defining characteristics: an independent semantic meaning and being a multi-word unit. However, some scholars state that an idiom possesses only one mandatory characteristic. According to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:493), an idiom only has one mandatory characteristic – conventionality. According to them, conventionality

conveys that the meaning of an idiom is not the same as the meaning of the words it is made from. However, apart from conventionality, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:492) provide five additional characteristics:

- Inflexibility: idioms are restricted when it comes to syntactic variation, which means that word order and choice is usually fixed.
- Figuration: idioms usually contain some figuration (non-literal language), for example, metaphors, hyperboles and other figures of speech.
- Proverbiality: idioms are frequently used to describe recurring situations (the examples given by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:493) are “becoming restless, talking informally, divulging a secret”) because these situations are familiar to most people.

Therefore, these idioms are well known and sometimes cliché.

- Informality: idioms are mostly related to and used in colloquial speech.
- Affect: idioms usually express some sort of connotation towards the thing or action they are describing.

These characteristics, apart from conventionality, are not mandatory. Nevertheless, Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994:493) state, that they are not completely optional. If an expression does not display any of these characteristics or if it displays very few of these characteristics, it is difficult to define it as an idiom.

Kvetko (cited in Tkachuk, 2005) provides a shorter list of characteristics, which help to determine if an expression is an idiom:

- Lexical complexity and semantic simplicity: an idiom’s meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts.
- Invariability: paradigmatic variants, i. e. alternative forms that can be substituted for each other in a sequence, are limited or non-existent.
- Figurativeness: idioms contain some figurative (non-literal) language.

Two of these characteristics are identical to the features of conventionality and figuration, which were provided by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow. This means that there are some idiom characteristics that are agreed upon by most scholars. This proves to be true when looking over the list of features an idiom should possess, which was provided by Deignan (2005:195):

- Idioms contain two or more words.
- The meaning of an idiom is not clear from its parts; therefore, it cannot be separated into its constituent parts.
- Idioms are lexically fixed; therefore, their constituent parts cannot be replaced by a synonym, without the idiom losing its idiomatic meaning.

- Idioms are grammatically fixed; therefore, they cannot be changed from singular into plural or changed into passive without the idiom losing its idiomatic meaning.

However, similarly to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow, Deignan (2005:196) states that numerous scholars have acknowledged that, with the exception of the fact that an idiom has to be a multi-word unit, these features are not mandatory or rigid.

To summarize, idioms are semi-fixed multi-word units that have a lexical meaning, which is not related to the meaning of their constituent parts. The next chapter will be a more in depth look into the structural features of idioms.

2. STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF IDIOMS

As discussed in the previous chapter, idioms are syntactically or grammatically fixed or semi-fixed, i. e. that idioms possess some degree of syntactic or grammatical restriction. Why this feature is important to idioms and other structural features of idioms will be discussed in this chapter.

Yusifova (2013:133) explains that the form of an idiom is closely linked to its semantic meaning. This connection is created by syntax. Yusifova (2013:134) uses the idiom *kick the bucket* to illustrate this connection. If we separate the idiom into separate grammatical units, namely, a verb, article and noun, the idiom loses its unique meaning and its meaning becomes literal: to strike a bucket with a foot. However, if we do not separate the idiom and regard it as separate grammatical units, in this case a verb, the idiom retains its non-literal meaning: to die.

Since the constituent parts of an idiom cannot be viewed as separate grammatical units, in a sentence idioms function as a single word. Therefore, according to Yusifova (2013:134), when examining a sentence one must treat an idiom as a word. Furthermore, since idioms possess an independent semantic meaning, Yusifova (2013:134) states that the only difference between idioms and lexical units is morphological structure due to the fact that when analyzing an idiom one must consider all of its parts. Kövecses (2010:232) adds that idioms can have the same sense relationships that are found between words: homonymy, polysemy, synonymy and antonymy. For example the idiom *as clear as day*, which means „very easy to understand“, has an obvious antonym – *clear as mud*, which means „not at all easy to understand“ (Siefring, 2004).

As discussed in the previous chapter one of the defining characteristics scholars bring up when defining idioms is fixedness. However, according to Fernando (1996:30), the elements that make up an idiom can be changed to a specific point. Lexical change is possible in some idioms, for example, in the idiom *as clear as a bell* the adjective *clear* can be interchanged with *sound* and the idiom will retain its meaning: “perfectly clear” (Siefring, 2004). Moreover, Yusifova (2013:135) points out that some grammatical changes are possible within idioms, for example, changes related to verb tenses and moods (passive, active voices). Changes related to verb tenses are possible in almost all idioms. Changes from singular to plural and vice versa are also common. However, in some cases the plural or the singular form of an idiom is impossible. For example, it is not possible to change the idiom *sell like hot cakes* into a singular form or to change the idiom *work like a charm* into a plural form (Siefring, 2004).

To sum up, idioms are an independent part of a lexicon and the whole phraseological unit functions as a single word. Furthermore, the structure of an idiom can be varied up to a point. Most idioms allow changes related to verb tenses and mood. Changes from singular to plural are also possible. Various approaches to idiom classification will be discussed in the next chapter.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF IDIOMS

Idioms are a phraseological unit; therefore, the classification systems provided by scholars for phraseological units apply to idioms as well. Idioms can be classified based on many different features: their theme, structure and semantics. In this chapter several systems of phraseological unit and idiom classification will be looked over.

The first system of classification that will be overviewed is thematic classification. According to Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:242), this is the traditional way of categorizing phraseological units. This approach classifies units based on the theme they are related to. Some examples of themes would be idioms related to animals, nature or food. Despite the fact that this classification principle is not related to etymology, it is occasionally referred to as etymological. It is important to note that while in some cases the theme of a phraseological unit is related to its meaning, it is not required when classifying a unit under a specific theme. An example of this type of classification would be idioms related to animals, for example, the idiom *drink like a fish* which means „to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, especially habitually“ (Siefring, 2004). The meaning of this idiom is not related to animals; however, its form makes it related to the animal theme. It is also important to point out that the *thematic* approach to classification, while useful in some cases, does not take into account the phraseological unit's linguistic features. This system is simply based on the form of the unit.

Vinogradov (cited in Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova: 1999) provides an approach to classifying phraseological units and therefore idioms, that relies on their semantic aspects. This approach is based on how much semantic cohesion there is among a phraseological unit and its constituent parts. The degree of semantic cohesion is based on how much the meaning of a phraseological unit is related to the meaning of its constituent parts. If the meaning of a phraseological unit is barely related or completely unrelated to the meaning of its components, then the degree of semantic cohesion is high. Vinogradov (cited in Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova 1999) provides three categories that are based on this aspect:

- Phraseological combinations – units whose meaning is only partly changed from the meaning of the words they are made from. The meaning of the unit can be figured out just by knowing the meaning of its components. An example of a phraseological combination would be the idiom *dry as dust*, which means „extremely dry“ (Siefring, 2004). As can be seen, the idioms meaning is closely related to the meaning of its constituent parts.

- Phraseological unities – units whose meaning differs from the meaning of its components. These units are motivated, in other words, the meaning of the expression is based on a metaphor. This metaphor is obvious and straightforward. An example of a phraseological unity would be the idiom *rare as hen's teeth*, which means that something is „extremely rare“ (Siefring, 2004). The metaphor used in the idiom is easily understandable because hen do not have teeth.

- Phraseological fusions – phraseological units whose meaning is completely different than the meaning of its components. However, unlike phraseological unities, these units are demotivated, in other words, their meaning cannot be determined from a metaphor or the metaphor on which their meaning is based on is unclear and ambiguous. An example of a phraseological fusion would be the idiom *get on like a house on fire*, which means „have a very good and friendly relationship“ (Siefring, 2004). The meaning of the idiom is completely unrelated to the meaning of its components and the metaphor on which it is based on, if it is indeed based on a metaphor, is unclear.

Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:247) do note that Vinogradov's classification system is to some extent flawed. The first flaw is the fact that this system does not take into account the structural features of a phraseological unit. Moreover, the difference between phraseological unities and phraseological fusions is vague. The difference is vague because what one person may see as a demotivated unit may be seen by another as a motivated one. The scholars also add, that the more a person is knowledgeable of a language and its history, the fewer unmotivated units they will encounter in this language. An example of this vagueness between phraseological unities and phraseological fusions can be illustrated by the idiom *deaf as an adder*, which means „completely or extremely deaf“ (Siefring, 2004). To the average individual this idiom may seem unmotivated, however, if one possesses knowledge about the Bible, they would see this idiom as motivated, because according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004:75) “The traditional deafness of an adder is based on an image in Psalm 58:4: the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear”.

Phraseological units may also be classified based on their structural features. According to Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248), the structural approach to classifying phraseological units is based on the fact that these units are able to fulfill the same syntactic functions that can be fulfilled by words. Following this approach, phraseological units can be classified into five groups:

- Verbal – units that can perform as verbs. For example, it is possible to replace the verb *boast* in the sentence *John always boasts in class* with the idiom *blow your own trumpet*, which means “talk openly and boastfully about your achievements” (Siefring, 2004).

This results in the sentence *John always blows his own trumpet in class* where the idiom functions as a verb.

- Substantive – units that can function as nouns. For example, in the sentence *Shyness prevents people from experiencing life to its fullest* the noun *shyness* can be replaced with the idiom *a faint heart*, which means “timidity or lack of willpower preventing you from achieving your objective” (Siefring, 2004). This results in the sentence *A faint heart prevents people from experiencing life to its fullest* where the idiom replaces the noun.

- Adjectival – units that can function as adjectives. For example, the adjective *happy* in the sentence *When I saw her she seemed happy* can be replaced by the idiom *happy as a clam*, which means “extremely happy; perfectly contented with your situation” (Siefring 2004). This results in the sentence *When I saw her she seemed happy as a clam* where the idiom functions as an adjective.

- Adverbial – units that can function as adverbs. For example, in the sentence *He barely survived the operation* the adverb *barely* may be replaced by the idiom *by the skin of your teeth*, which means “by a very narrow margin; only just” (Siefring, 2004). This results in the sentence *He survived the operation by the skin of his teeth* where the idioms functions as an adverb.

- Interjectional – units that can function as interjections. For example, the exclamation *bloody hell*, which is defined by the online *Oxford English Living Dictionary* (2018) as an expression “used to express anger, annoyance, or shock, or simply for emphasis.”

The main issue that one may have with structural or semantic methods of classification is that they do not take into account either the semantics of the idiom or the structure of the idiom. This can be bypassed by combining the structural and the semantic approach to idiom classification.

Koonin (cited in Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova, 1999:250) provides a way to classify phraseological units based on both their semantic and structural features. This approach groups phraseological units into four categories based on their communicative function, which is influenced by the unit’s semantic and structural features:

- Nominative – phraseological units with only one meaningful component, for example, *blue-chip*, which means „reliable, giving the highest return“ (L. Flavell & R. Flavell:1994). This group also includes coordinative phrases, like *wear and tear*, and idioms that have a predicative structure, like *see the elephant* (Siefring, 2004).

- Nominative-communicative – phraseological units that are converted into sentences when a verb used in a units formation is used in the passive voice. For example, the

idiom *to take someone aback* when transformed into passive voice becomes a sentence: *someone is taken aback* (Siefring, 2004).

- Phraseological units that do not fall into the nominative or the nominative-phraseological categories and interjectional expressions.
- Communicative phraseological units -this category includes proverbs and sayings. It is possible to sort some idioms under this category. L. Flavell & R. Flavell (1994:24) point out that the boundaries between idioms and proverbs can sometimes be unclear and there is some overlap between them. For example, both *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004:2) and *McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms* (2003:692) include the proverb *there is no accounting for taste* even though they are idiom dictionaries. Therefore, some idioms can be categorized as communicative phraseological units.

Fernando's (1996:35) provides another classification method based on the semantic features of an idiom. Fernando classifies idioms into three sub-classes:

- Pure idioms – non-literal multi word expression. For example, the meaning of the idiom *the cat's whiskers* is “an excellent person or thing” (Siefring, 2004). The meaning of the idiom is completely unrelated to the expression's literal meaning, therefore, it is a pure idiom.
- Semi-idioms – multi-word expressions that contain at least one word that is literal and at least one word that has a special subsense. For example, the idiom *to catch a cold*, which means “to become infected with a cold” (Siefring, 2004). In this idiom the word *cold* is literal, however, *catch* is not but it possess the subsense *become infected* when it accompanies the word *cold*. Semi –idioms are to some extent lexically variable.
- Literal idioms – expressions that display one of the features generally associated with idioms: restricted variation. However, they do not display the same semantic complexity as pure idioms and semi-idioms do. One of the examples Fernando (1996:36) provides is *waste not, want not*.

This method is mainly biased on how transparent an idiom's meaning is. However, despite being based on the transparency of an idiom's meaning, this method does not run into the same problem as Vinogradov's classification system because the difference between the three subgroups provided by Fernando are not as vague as the differences between phraseological unities and phraseological fusions.

To sum up, phraseological units and idioms may be categorized based on their theme, semantic features, structural features or both their semantic and structural features.

4. IDIOMS OF COMPARISON IN ENGLISH

4.1. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The idioms of comparison used in this research and their definitions have been gathered from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004). Entries from the dictionary that are marked as proverbs have been omitted in this research. The examples of the usage of the idioms have been gathered from the online British National Corpus. In total 174 idioms of comparison have been gathered. 56 out of 174 idioms were presented in the empirical part of this paper.

The research was carried out by gathering the idioms of comparison and categorizing them using the structural classification method provided by Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248). According to this method the idioms were grouped into 4 groups: verbal, substantive, adjectival and adverbial. No idioms of comparison fitting the category of interjectional have been found. The research consists of three parts. Firstly, the descriptive analytic method was used to identify and classify the idioms of comparison. In the examples of the usage of the idioms of comparison the idioms have been underlined. Secondly, the descriptive analytic method was used to analyze variations found in each idiom category. In the final part of the research the descriptive statistical method was used to show the frequency of each category of idioms of comparison. This frequency was used to determine which category is the most prominent in idioms of comparison.

4.2. VERBAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

4.2.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF VERBAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

Based on the criteria set out by the structural approach of categorizing phraseological units a total of 39 verbal idioms of comparison have been found during the research. As described by Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248) for a phraseological unit to be considered verbal it has to function as a verb when used in a sentence.

(1) *She'd had to work like a Trojan to achieve it, but it had been worth every drop of blood, sweat and tears.*

As can be seen from the example above, the idiom *work like a Trojan* which means “work extremely hard” (Siefring, 2004) replaces the verb *work*. In most cases, the verb in a verbal idiom of comparison corresponds with the action indicated in its meaning, in other words, it is literal. However, this is not always the case as illustrated in the example below:

(2) *I need this like a hole in the head.*

This idiom is “used to emphasize that someone has absolutely no need or desire for something” (Siefring, 2004). The idiom’s verb *need* does not match the action described in its definition. The verb and the action are antonymous.

Idioms that fall into this category most commonly follow these types of structures: *verb + like + noun* or *verb + like + noun phrase*. Idioms that use these structures can be seen in the examples below:

(3) *It's the mild weather, you know. Makes the viruses breed like rabbits. And vice versa, no doubt.*

(4) *He twisted and squirmed and kicked the air and went on yelling like a stuck pig...*

Some variation of this structure is also possible.

(5) *E. g. He got together a serious amount of cash and called a meeting with the skaters to ask them what they wanted; 3 skaters turned up. Normally following that kind of response the ramp idea would go down like a lead balloon.*

As seen from the idiom *go down like a lead* below that is used in the example (5), the *verb* in the structure *verb+like+noun/noun phrase* is replaced by a *phrasal verb*. However, this is not the only variation of this structure that has been found during the research.

(6) *She'd thrown herself at him, and then when she'd panicked he'd dropped her like a hot potato... what a fool she'd been!*

(7) *Cranston took to the food like a duck to water, smacking his lips, draining the blackjack, and shouting for the taverner's pot boy to come and fill it again.*

In some cases the *verb/phrasal verb+like+noun/noun phrase* structure may be expanded by adding a pronoun (as seen in example (6)), a noun or a noun phrase (seen in example (7)) after the *verb/phrasal verb*. This results in the structure *verb/phrasal verb+something/someone+like+noun/ noun phrase*.

(8) *United didn't lie down and die. They gave as good as they got.*

Another variation has been found of the *verb+like+noun/noun phrase* structure where the preposition *like* is replaced with the preposition *as* (as seen in example (8)).

(9) *'You look as if you'd seen a ghost,' was her greeting. I told her what had happened outside.*

Finally, it was found that a few idioms follow a separate structure of *verb+as if+verb phrase* (as seen in example (9)).

4.2.2. VARIATIONS OF VERBAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

In this chapter several possible lexical variations and grammatical changes of verbal idioms of comparison, which were observed during the research, will be analyzed.

Firstly, several verbal idioms that show lexical variation have been found. The most obvious examples of lexical variation can be found in idioms that have the *verb/phrasal verb+something/someone+like+noun/ noun phrase* structure since *something/someone* can be replaced by any pronoun or noun/noun phrase. An example of this kind of lexical variation can be seen in the examples below:

(10) *I don't suppose it's serious, but he's so terrified of Blue Ear Disease that he watches them like a hawk.*

And it's putting me off, having you watching me like a hawk all the time.

These two examples show how the pronoun *someone* in the idiom *watch someone like a hawk* allows for lexical variation.

(11) *THE Osaka, the fashionable Japanese strain of ornamental cabbage,' is selling like hot cakes, a London florist says.*

Tickets for the concert evening at the King's Hall will be going on sale soon and we can expect them to go like hot cakes.

The two examples above show another type of lexical variation. An idiom may have two forms that differ slightly but retain the same meaning. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) two forms of this idiom are given: *sell like hotcakes* and *go like hot cakes* but both of these forms have the same meaning:” be sold quickly and in large quantities”.

Moreover, lexical variations where a whole new element has been added to a verbal idiom of comparison have been found during the research.

(12) *Mr Cottle was making a close scrutiny of his boiled egg, tapping it to excess, as though otherwise it might rise like a blunt rocket and escape.*

The original form of this idiom is given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004): *rise like a rocket (and fall like a stick)*. According to the dictionary the meaning of this idiom is “rise suddenly and dramatically (and subsequently fall in a similar manner)”. In example (12) the adjective *blunt* is added to the idiom in order to modify the noun *rocket*. The meaning of the idiom does not change with the addition of this new element. This demonstrates that new lexical elements may be introduced into a verbal idiom of comparison without changing the core meaning of an idiom.

Secondly, it was found that verbal idioms of comparison display grammatical changes. Since the main component of the form of a verbal idiom of comparison is a verb or phrasal verb, when used in a sentence, the verb belonging to the idiom follows the same rules as regular verbs when it comes to grammatical change. According to Eastwood (1994:76) a verb has five distinct forms: the base form, the s-form, the past form, the ing-form and the past/passive participle. These forms are used to create the tense and mood of the verb as well as the gerund and participles of the verb. During the research it was found that the verb or phrasal verb of verbal idioms of comparison can be changed to display all of these five forms.

(13) *They live in barracks... and are allowed a shilling a day upkeep. On this meagre subsistence allowance they die like flies'.*

The verb of the idiom used in the above example has what according to Eastwood (1994:76) is a base form. This form may also be called the zero infinitive.

(14) *She eats like a horse and never gains an ounce.*

According to Eastwood (1994:76), the second verb form is the s-form. The s-form is achieved by adding an –s to the end of a zero infinitive or base form. This form can be seen in the idiom used in example (14).

(15) *Instead, a message came through during the first part of the show that Sigourney loved Julian, and was asking specifically to be seated next to him. They got on like a house on fire and didn't stop talking afterwards -- it was Julian and Robert who wound each other up.*

(16) *He dialled Mallachy immediately, in case she should pre-empt him. Mallachy laughed like a drain.*

The third verb form is the past form. This form differs between regular and irregular verbs. An irregular verb's past form is shown in the idiom used in example (15) and a regular verb's past form is shown in the idiom used in example (16).

(17) *Rachel moved with a hoarse cry, groping blindly for support, trying to reach the sofas, shaking like a leaf.*

The ing-form is achieved by adding –ing to the end of a base form of a verb. An example of this verb form is seen in the idiom used in example (17).

(18) *Apart from the penalty he worked like a beaver.*

(19) *In our childhood Irina and I fought like cat and dog.*

(20) *Everyone retired early that night and I, for one, slept like a log.*

According to Eastwood (1994:76), the last verb form is the past or passive participle. The construction of this verb form differs in regular and irregular verbs. In regular verbs, as seen in the idiom used in example (18), this form is created by adding –ed at the end of the base form. On the other hand, when it comes to this verb form irregular verbs have a unique construction that differs from verb to verb as seen in examples (19) and (20).

Furthermore, during the research it has been found that parts of verbal idioms of comparison besides the verb or phrasal verb may also undergo grammatical changes.

(21) *The only sadness was that they all appeared to smoke like chimneys.*

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004), the noun *chimney* that is used in the idiom *smoke like a chimney* is singular, however, in example (21) the noun is changed to plural in accordance with the pronoun *they*.

In summary, verbal idioms of comparison can undergo both lexical variation and grammatical change.

4.3. SUBSTANTIVE IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

4.3.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SUBSTANTIVE IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

Substantive idioms are described by Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248) as idioms that can function like nouns when used in a sentence. Based on this criterion a total of 2 substantive idioms of comparison have been found during the research.

(22) *... said what's the matter, you've got a face as long as a fiddle?*

As can be seen from example (22) the idiom *a face as long as a fiddle* substitutes a noun in this sentence According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004), The meaning of this idiom is “a dismal face “. This idiom’s meaning does not correspond with its form, therefore, the meaning of the idiom figurative.

(23) *Look at her through your binoculars... mutton dressed as lamb. Some of em never want to retire.*

The idiom in example (23) is used to refer to “aged or old woman dressed in a style suitable for a much younger woman” (Sieftring, 2004). Just like the previous idiom, the meaning of the idiom is non-literal.

It has been found that substantive idioms of comparison do not follow a similar structure. However, a common structure could be absent from these examples but may be present if more examples of substantive idioms of comparison were found.

4.3.2. VARIATIONS OF SUBSTANTIVE IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

During the research no lexical variation or grammatical change was found in substantive idioms of comparison. This might be due to the small amount of substantive idioms of comparison found during the research.

4.4. ADJECTIVAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

4.4.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ADJECTIVAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

Based on the criterion set out by the structural approach of categorizing phraseological units a total of 107 adjectival idioms of comparison have been found during the research. According to Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248), a phraseological unit is regarded to be adjectival if it can replace an adjective when used in a sentence. This is displayed in the example below:

(24) *And now, here was this boy standing by the big pool, as cool as a cucumber and wearing his helmet.*

The meaning of the idiom used in example (24) is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004): “perfectly cool or self-possessed”. This idiom replaces the possible adjectives: *composed*, *collected* or *cool*. It is common that in adjectival idioms of comparison the meaning of the idiom is closely related to the adjective of the idiom. However, although the adjective in the meaning and the form of the idiom may be the same, the idioms meaning expresses a certain degree of intensity. This can be demonstrated by analyzing the following example:

(25) *When he made *The Dirty Dozen* in 1967, he failed to turn up to film the final scene, when he and Charles Bronson drive a huge weapons carrier across a bridge. Producer Ken Hyman went in search for him and found him in a bar in Belgravia' as drunk as a skunk'.*

The idiom used in example (25) means “extremely drunk” (Siefring, 2004). While the adjective *drunk* in the meaning of the idiom corresponds with the adjective in the idiom’s form, the meaning of the idiom is modified by the adverb *extremely*. This adverb changes the degree of intensity of the adjective. The change in the degree of intensity is present in many adjectival idioms of comparison as demonstrated by the three examples below:

(26) *'You sound as though you think the travellers are all good as gold if you're just a bit nice to them.'*

(27) *He always talked nicely to the Men even though they could not understand a word he said. He made himself as meek as a lamb, hoping perhaps that they would give him an extra morsel of food or some other favour.*

(28) *He was a good player but bald as a coot. It was a sunny day and Gorman's head was glistening in the sun.*

The meanings of the idioms used in the examples above are given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) respectively: “extremely well-behaved”, “very meek”, “completely bald”. In each case, the adjectives are modified by adverbs, namely *extremely*, *very* and *completely*. All these adverbs increase the degree of intensity of an adjective by a certain amount.

However, in some adjectival idioms of comparison the adjective in the form of the idiom and in the meaning of the idiom do not correspond. This can be seen in the example below:

(29) *I was given the opportunity to have a rehearsal with him but I declined because I am not like the professionals who can rehearse in detail and then put it over as fresh as a daisy when the time comes.*

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004), this idiom means “very bright and cheerful”. After consulting the online *Oxford English Living Dictionaries* (2018) it was found that even though the adjective present in the idioms form, i. e. *fresh*, has many meanings, none of them can be interchanged with the idiom’s meaning.

Idioms that belong to this category generally follow these structures: *as+adjective+as+noun/noun phrase*, *adjective+as+noun/noun phrase* or *adjective+like+noun phrase*. Examples of idioms that use these structures are given below:

(30) *You don't have to worry about those sheep, Seb, they're as snug as bugs in a rug out there, but I've given them some more hay, just in case.*

(31) *E.g. Packed like sardines, the motley crowd of tourists, me included, masochist that I am, could not land on Staffa.*

(32) *So how do you go about learning about your PC. Ideally you need just a little one-to-one tuition, preferably after you have struggled on your own for a bit to discover which bits are clear as daylight and which are clear as mud.*

Some variations of these structures have also been found.

(33) *It may not be a perfect match, but from what I can gather, it's as near as dammit.*

As can be seen from the example above, the structure of the idiom is similar to the *as+adjective+as+noun/noun phrase* structure but the *noun/noun phrase* has been replaced by an *exclamation*:

(34) *Look at that, the ancient Barmaid Inn, rebuilt in 1420 and still as good as new!*

The idiom *as good as new* has a structure that is similar to the *as+adjective+as+noun/noun phrase* structure as well, however, the *noun/noun phrase* at the end is replaced with an *adjective*.

However, not all adjectival idioms of comparison follow these structures. Instead some have *like+noun phrase* or *like+gerund phrase* structures. Examples of idioms that use these structures are provided below:

(35) *They were like two peas in a pod, both with the same high cheekbones and widow's peak.*

(36) *'Christ, she's tight-arsed, isn't she? Getting a story out of her is like getting blood out of a stone.'*

A variation of the structure *like+noun phrase* that includes a *verb/phrasal verb* in the beginning of the structure has been found during the research.

(37) *He was built like a brick shithouse and he plonked himself down right in front of the stage.*

(38) *'He can only drive a specially-adapted car and that would stand out like a sore thumb if he was moving about doing something related to terrorism', Mrs Drumgoole said.*

The structure of the idiom used in example (37) is the *like+noun phrase* structure that has been altered to include a *verb*. The idiom used in example (38) has the same *like+noun phrase* structure, however, in this case, a *phrasal verb* is added to the beginning of the structure.

4.4.2.

VARIATIONS OF ADJECTIVAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

This chapter includes analysis of several possible lexical variations and grammatical changes of adjectival idioms of comparison that have been found during the research.

Firstly, adjectival idioms of comparison have been found to show lexical variation. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) several idiom entries have slight lexical variation but retain the same meaning.

(39) *The river is 'sacred', the trees' incense-bearing', the forests' ancient as the hills', together with the exoticism of Xanadu, these words combine to lend an uneasy sense of overbearing power to the scene, an uncomfortable mist of the religious and the natural.*

A mother can seem both ageless and as old as the hills to her child.

In some cases the adjective in an idiom can be interchangeable. As can be seen from the examples above, the idioms are similar with the only difference being the adjective used in the idiom. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) two forms of this idiom are given: *ancient as the hills* and *old as the hills*, however both of these forms have the same meaning: “of very long standing or very great age”.

Due to their structure some adjectival idioms of comparison allow for endless variability of the adjective.

(40) *Sam was as ordinary as they come and proud of it.*

She's old money and as snooty as they come, while he's the typical self-made second-generation Italian who wants to buy himself a piece of class.

A winner of two handicaps this season, Azhar is as tough as they come and should be able to hold his own in this stronger company.

In the above examples three different variations of the idiom *as – as they come* are given. The blank in the idioms structure can be replaced with any adjective. This is also the case with the idioms *as – as all get out*, *as good as –* and *– as sin*.

Other parts of an idiom besides the adjective can also be interchangeable.

(41) *But even the safest-seeming science is going to be obsolete sooner or later; obsolete taxonomy, like that of Swainson or Agassiz, is as dead as the dodo, and those who took the risks of Darwinism usually found it interesting and fruitful.*

The campaign was as dead as a dodo.

In the examples above, it can be seen that one of the lexical variations possible in adjectival idioms of comparison is the interchangeability between the definite and indefinite articles.

(42) *'Poor old soul, he was as mad as a hatter,' Otley said.*

'It was a new bike and served you right, anyway,' he said.' You were as mad as a March hare.'

As seen from the example above, the only difference between the idioms is the noun phrases that are used in the idioms. Both of these idioms, i. e. *mad as a hatter* and *mad as a March hare*, are listed under the same entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) and are given the same meaning: “completely crazy”.

Furthermore, adjectival idioms of comparison allow the addition of new elements. These elements are inserted in order to modify the *noun* or *noun phrase* present in the idiom's structure.

(43) *Growing apples is as easy as apple pie, if you are Joan Greenway of Highfield Nurseries.*

(44) *Their as different as chalk and bloody cheese.*

The original version of the idioms used in examples (43) and (44) are given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) as *easy as pie* and *as different as chalk and cheese* respectively. In example (43) the attributive noun *apple* is added to modify the noun *pie*. In example (44) the adjective *bloody* has been inserted in the noun phrase to modify the noun *cheese*. This shows that while using an adjectival idiom of comparison the user of the idiom may insert new elements without the idiom losing its meaning.

As noted by Eastwood (1994:252), the form of an adjective does not change. This means that adjectives are not modified by number, gender or case. However, it has been

observed that in adjectival idioms of comparison other elements of an idiom besides the adjective can undergo grammatical change.

(45) *She had eyes as bright as buttons, a sharp wit and the most beautiful pair of shoulders I have ever clapped eyes on.*

Even though, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) the noun *button* in the idiom *as bright as a button* is singular, in example (45) the noun is changed into plural in accordance with the noun *eyes* which is modified by the whole idiom as an adjective.

To sum up, during the research it has been found that adjectival idioms of comparison can undergo both lexical variation and grammatical change.

4.5. ADVERBIAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

4.5.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ADVERBIAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

Based on the definition set out by the structural approach of categorizing phraseological units a total of 26 adverbial idioms of comparison have been found during the research. According to the structural approach to phraseological unit classification that Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248) provide, units are considered adverbial if they can be used as adverbs when used in a sentence.

(46) *And when you couldn't reach no higher, you'd get hold of the truss and chuck it on your head, and go up the ladder like the deuce with it.*

The idiom *like the deuce*, whose meaning is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) as “very fast”, is used to replace the adverb *fast*. Of course the idiom adds additional meaning that would not been present if only the adverb was used.

Adverbial idioms of comparison have several different types of structure. Idioms that fall into this category most commonly follow the structure *like+noun/noun phrase* as seen in the examples given below:

(47) *Opposition groups are springing up like mushrooms, calling ever more boldly and openly for reforms -- freedom of opinion, democracy, justice, freedom to travel.*

(48) *We were on dipped-beam; the instruments glowed orange in front of the delicious, straight-armed, black-skirted, Doc-shoed, crop-blonde, purse-lipped Verity; my angelic bird of paradise, driving like a bat out of hell.*

During the research several adverbial idioms of comparison were found that do not follow this common structure.:

(49) *'Aye, right where you sit,' Maggie replied quick as a flash, which earned a laugh from Susan.*

The idiom *quick as a flash* that is presented in example (49) follows the structure *adjective+as+noun phrase*.

(50) *Of course, the coroner drank as if there was no tomorrow and when he had had his fill, leaned back against the pillar of the huge fireplace, belched, and pronounced himself satisfied.*

The idiom *as if there was no tomorrow* that is used in example (50) also has a distinct structure that can be expressed as *as if+adverb phrase*.

4.5.2. VARIATIONS OF ADVERBIAL IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

During the research several possible lexical variations and grammatical changes of adverbial idioms of comparison have been found. Analysis of these lexical variations and grammatical changes has been provided in this chapter.

Firstly, during the research it has been found that lexical variation is possible in adverbial idioms of comparison.

(51) *Travis had enough work to last three weeks but, on account of you, he must have worked like the devil.*

Even Americans round the table, who didn't give him a snowball in hell's chance of getting approval to his plan, had to admit that he was still in there, fighting like a demon for a lost cause.

In some cases the *noun* or *noun phrase* in an adverbial idiom of comparison can be interchangeable. In the examples above, the only difference between the idioms is the *noun phrase*. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) both forms of the idiom used in the above

examples are given: *like the devil* and *like a demon* and both of these forms have the same meaning: “with great speed or energy”.

(52) *Then a fiercer gust of wind almost blew her from the path and she hung on to bag and box like grim death.*

Would she scream insults, or perhaps cling on to him for grim death and beg for another chance?

In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) two forms of the idiom *like grim death* are given: *like grim death* and *for grim death*. In this lexical variation the preposition *like* is replaced with the preposition *for*. The change does not affect the meaning of the idiom at all since the meaning given by *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) for both forms of the idiom is the same: “with intense determination”.

Another lexical variation found in adverbial idioms of comparison is the optionality of certain elements of the idiom.

(53) *Cuts through the racket like a knife through butter.*

With a south-westerly wind filling her sails, Seawitch was slicing through the sparkling waves like a hot knife through butter.

In *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) two versions of the idiom used in the above examples are given: *like a knife through butter* and *like a hot knife through butter*. This means that the adjective *hot* is optional when using the idiom and does not change its meaning, which according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) is “very easily; without any resistance or difficulty”.

Moreover, it has been found that it is possible add a new element into an adverbial idiom of comparison without the idiom losing its meaning.

(54) *Well, you know, if, if they come like the bloody clappers there!*

I think she must have heard me because she ran off like the clappers towards the quay.

The original version of the idiom used in the above examples is given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) as *like the clappers*, the meaning of this idiom is also given: “very fast or very hard”. In example (54), the adjective *bloody* is added to the idiom *like the clappers* in order to modify the noun *clappers*; however, the addition of this adjective to the idiom’s form does not alter its meaning.

Secondly, some grammatical changes have also been noticed in adverbial idioms of comparison. Some idioms have two versions which show grammatical differences between them.

(55) *He's dropped like a ripe plum into your hand and you fail to recognize the possibilities.*

The rest of us had to scrape and scrounge for the girls, Michael, but whatever you had they always fell into your hands like ripe plums.

In the above examples, two different versions of the idiom *like a ripe plum* are given. One of the versions is singular (*like a ripe plum*) while the other is plural (*like ripe plums*). Both of these versions are provided in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004).

(56) *His eyes clung to her like thirsty leeches, watching for any movement, the revolver trained on her back.*

However, the idiom used in example (56) is not provided in the plural form in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004). This means that the idiom *like a leech* was pluralized by the user of the idiom. Additionally, the idiom shows lexical variation because a new element, the adjective *thirsty*, was added to the idiom in order to modify the noun *leeches*. Despite the lexical variation and grammatical change the idiom still retains its meaning which is given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004): “persistently or clingingly present”.

In conclusion, adverbial idioms of comparison can undergo both lexical variation and grammatical change.

4.6. QUANTATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDIOMS OF COMPARISON

In total 174 idioms of comparison have been gathered from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004). The number of verbal, substantive, adjectival and adverbial idioms of comparison is presented in Table 1 below:

Verbal	39	22%
Substantive	2	1%
Adjectival	107	62%
Adverbial	26	15%

Table 1. The frequency of each category of idioms of comparison

As Table 1 shows idioms of comparison most frequently fall into the adjectival category comprising 62% of the total collected examples. However, idioms of comparison are rarely substantive and only comprise 1% of the total collected examples.

4.7.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to categorize and analyze idioms of comparison and to give a statistical insight into the distribution of different categories. This aim has been achieved by completing the objectives which were set at the beginning of the paper; therefore, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Idioms are by nature difficult to define by using just one characteristic. Therefore many scholars provide numerous characteristics that help to identify idioms. While each scholar provides their own criteria, it has been found that the 3 most often mentioned characteristics that define an idiom are:

- Idioms are multi-word units.
- The meaning of an idiom cannot be determined from the meaning of its constituent parts.
- Idioms usually have some degree of syntactic, lexical or grammatical inflexibility.
- In a sentence idioms function as individual words and that their elements can be varied to a certain degree

Furthermore, scholars have provided many different phraseological unit classification methods. An overview of these methods provided insight that phraseological units can be classified by theme, structure, semantic features, and communicative function.

2. In total 174 examples of idioms of comparison were collected from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004). These idioms were categorized into *verbal*, *substantive*, *adjectival* and *adverbial* categories using the structural approach to categorizing phraseological units provided by Antrushina, Afanasyeva and Morozova (1999:248). No idioms of comparison that fit the interjectional category were found. The collected examples have shown that idioms in the *verbal*, *adjectival* and *adverbial* categories share a common structure or structures. Furthermore, it was found that *verbal*, *adjectival* and *adverbial* idioms of comparison allow for lexical variation and grammatical change. No common structure, lexical variation or grammatical change has been found while analyzing *substantive* idioms of comparison.

3. The analysis of the frequency of the collected examples helped to determine what category most idioms of comparison belong to. Idioms of comparison collected from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (2004) mostly fall into the adjectival (62%) category. Idioms of comparison that belong to the verbal (22%) and adverbial (15%) categories are less common. Finally, idioms of comparison very rarely are substantive (1%).

It can be concluded that idioms of comparison can be used in sentences in order to replace verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs. However, they cannot substitute interjections since no interjectional idioms of comparison have been found during the research. Furthermore, with the exception of idioms that fall into the substantive category, idioms of comparison allow for lexical variation and grammatical change.

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APPENDIX

Idioms of comparison gathered from The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms

Verbal idioms of comparison

1. **Sell (or go) like hot cakes** be sold quickly and in large quantities. (page 44)
2. **Work like a beaver** work steadily and industriously, informal (page 19)
3. **Fight like cat and dog** (of two people) be continually arguing with one another (page 47).
4. **Running (or rushing) about like a headless chicken** acting in a panic stricken manner and not thinking clearly about what should be done (page 52).
5. **Drink like a fish** drink excessive amounts of alcohol, especially habitually. (page 86)
6. **Take to something like a duck to water** take to something very readily. (page 88)
7. **Come down like a ton of bricks** exert crushing weight force or authority against someone. Informal (page 38)
8. **Grin like a Cheshire cat** have a broad fixed smile on your face (page 51).
9. **Work like a charm** be completely successful or effective (page 50)
10. **Die (or drop) like flies** die or collapse in large numbers. (page 112)
11. **Fit like a glove** (of clothes) fit exactly. (page 123)
12. **Watch someone like a hawk** keep a vigilant eye on someone, especially to check that they do nothing wrong. (page 138)
13. **Need something like a hole in the head** used to emphasize that someone has absolutely no need or desire for something. Informal (page 146)
14. **Eat like a horse** eat heartily and greedily. (page 149)
15. **Drop someone or something like a hot potato** quickly abandon someone or something. Informal (page 149)
16. **Get on (or along) like a house on fire** have a very good and friendly relationship. (page 150)
17. **Laugh like a drain** laugh raucously; guffaw. British informal (page 168)
18. **Go down (or over) like a lead balloon** (especially of a speech, proposal, or joke) fail; be a flop. Informal (page 169)
19. **Shake (or tremble) like a leaf** tremble greatly, especially from fear. (page 169)
20. **Lie like a trooper** tell lies constantly and flagrantly. (page 172)

21. **Look (or feel) (like) a million dollars** (of a person) look (or feel) extremely good. Informal. (page 189)
22. **Go down (or drop or fall) like ninepins** topple or succumb in large numbers. (page 200)
23. **Bleed like a (stuck) pig** bleed copiously. (page 218)
24. **Squeal (or yell) like a stuck pig** squeal or yell loudly and shrilly. (page 219)
25. **Sweat like a pig** sweat profusely. Informal (page 219)
26. **Breed like rabbits** reproduce prolifically. Informal (page 235)
27. **Read someone like a book** be able to understand someone's thoughts and motives clearly or easily. (page 238)
28. **Rise like a rocket (and fall like a stick)** rise suddenly and dramatically (and subsequently fall in a similar manner). (page 244)
29. **Have eyes like saucers** have your eyes opened wide in amazement. (page 252)
30. **Sleep like a log (or top)** sleep very soundly. (page 266)
31. **Smoke like a chimney** smoke tobacco incessantly. (page 268)
32. **Swear like a trooper** swear a great deal. (page 283)
33. **Work like a Trojan** work extremely hard. (page 298)
34. **Look as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth** appear deceptively gentle or innocent. Informal. (page 43)
35. **Look as if you have seen a ghost** look very pale and shocked (page 122)
36. **Dressed (up) like a dog's dinner** wearing ridiculously smart or ostentatious clothes. British informal. (page 82)
37. **Be in like Flynn** seize an opportunity; be successful. Australian. (page 113)
38. **Give as good as you get** respond with equal force or vehemence when attacked. (page 123)
39. **Treat someone like dirt** treat someone contemptuously or unfairly. (page 80)

Substantive idioms of comparison

40. **A face as long as a fiddle** a dismal face. (page 100)

41. **Mutton dressed as lamb** a middle-aged or old woman dressed in a style suitable for a much younger woman. British informal (page 195)

Adjectival idioms of comparison

42. **As easy (or simple) as ABC** extremely easy or straightforward (page 1)
43. **Happy as a clam** extremely happy; perfectly contented with your situation.
44. **As American as apple pie** typically American in character. (page 6)
45. **As different as chalk and cheese** fundamentally different or incompatible. British (page 49)
46. **cool as a cucumber** perfectly cool or self-possessed (page 62)
47. **Done like (a) dinner** utterly defeated or outwitted. Australian & Canadian informal. (page 79)
48. **As long as your arm** very long, informal (page 9)
49. **As bald as a coot** completely bald. (page 14)
50. **As blind as a bat** having very bad eyesight. Informal (page 28)
51. **As busy as a bee** very busy or industrious. (page 42)
52. **Like the cat that's got (or who's stolen) the cream** self-satisfied; having achieved your objective. British informal (page 48)
53. **crazy like a fox** very cunning or shrewd (page 65)
54. **Drunk as a lord** (or **skunk**) extremely drunk. (page 87)
55. **Dead as a (or the) dodo** 1. No longer alive. 2. No longer effective, valid, or interesting. Informal (page 74).
56. **Deaf as an adder** (or **post**) completely or extremely deaf. (page 75)
57. **Like a dog with two tails** showing great pleasure; delighted. (page 82)
58. **Like a dying duck in a thunderstorm** having a dejected or hopeless expression. Informal (page 87)
59. **As clear (or sound) as a bell** perfectly clear (or sound). (page 21)
60. **As bright as a button** intelligently alert and lively, informal (page 38)
61. **Clean as a whistle** 1. Extremely clean or clear. 2. Free of incriminating evidence. Informal (page 54)
62. **Cross as two sticks** very annoyed or grumpy. British informal (page 66)
63. **Dead as a doornail** (or **as mutton**) completely dead (page 74).
64. **Straight as a die** 1. Absolutely straight. 2. Entirely open and honest. (page 78)

65. **Like getting blood out of a stone** extremely difficult and frustrating. (page 29)
66. **As brown as a berry** (of a person) very suntanned. (page 39)
67. **Fresh as a daisy** very bright and cheerful. Informal (page 71).
68. **As near as dammit** (or **damn it**) as close to being accurate as makes no difference. Informal. (page 71).
69. **As clear as day** very easy to see or understand (page 55)
70. **Clear as mud** not at all easy to understand. (page 55)
71. **As cold as charity** very cold (page 58)
72. **Dry as dust** 1. Extremely dry. 2. Extremely dull (page 87)
73. **Dull as dishwater** (or **ditchwater**) extremely dull. (page 88)
74. **Like nothing on earth** very strange. Informal (page 91)
75. **Easy as falling off a log** very easy. Informal (page 91)
76. **Easy as pie** very easy. Informal (page 91)
77. **Fit as a fiddle** in very good health. (page 104)
78. **Like shooting fish in a barrel** done very easily. (page 108)
79. **Fit as a flea** in very good health. (page 110)
80. **Like gold dust** very valuable and rare. (page 125)
81. **As good as** very nearly –. (page 126)
82. **As good as gold** extremely well-behaved. (page 126)
83. **As good as new** in a very good condition or state, especially close to the original state after damage, injury, or illness. (page 126)
84. **Full as a goog** very drunk. Australian informal (page 127)
85. **Silent** (or **quiet**) **as the grave** very quiet. (page 128)
86. **Merry** (or **lively**) **as a grig** full of fun; extravagantly lively. (page 130)
87. **Happy as a sandboy** extremely happy; perfectly contented with your situation. (page 136)
88. **Hard as nails** 1. Very hard. 2. (of people) insensitive or callous; without pity. (page 136)
89. **Hard as the nether millstone** callous and unyielding. (page 136)
90. **Like a hen with one chick** (or **chicken**) absurdly fussy and overanxious. (page 142)
91. **Rare** (or **scarce**) **as hen's teeth** extremely rare. (page 142)
92. **Ancient** (or **old**) **as the hills** of very long standing or very great age. (page 144)

93. **Safe as houses** thoroughly or completely safe. British. (page 150)
94. **Keen as mustard** extremely eager or enthusiastic. British informal. (page 159)
95. **High as a kite** intoxicated with drugs or alcohol. Informal (page 162)
96. **Large as life** (of a person) conspicuously present. Informal (page 173)
97. **Mad as a hatter** (or **a March hare**) completely crazy. Informal (page 181)
98. **Mad as a (cut) snake** crazy or eccentric. Australian informal (page 181)
99. **Meek as Moses** (or **a lamb**) very meek. (page 186)
100. **As artful** (or **clever**) **as a wagonload** (or **cartload**) **of monkeys** extremely clever or mischievous. British informal (page 191)
101. **Like a monkey on a stick** restless and agitated. (page 191)
102. **As common as muck** of low social status. British informal (page 194)
103. **Nutty as a fruitcake** completely crazy. Informal (page 205)
104. **Like watching paint dry** (of an activity or experience) extremely boring. (page 211)
105. **Flat as a pancake** completely flat. (page 212)
106. **Like peas** (or **like as two peas**) **in a pod** so similar as to be indistinguishable or nearly so. (page 215)
107. **Clean** (or **neat**) **as a new pin** extremely clean or neat. (page 219)
108. **Pissed as a newt** (or **fart**) very drunk. Vulgar slang (page 221)
109. **Plain as day** (or **the nose on your face**) very obvious. Informal (page 221)
110. **Plain as a pikestaff** 1. Very obvious. 2. Ordinary or unattractive in appearance. (page 221)
111. **Poor as a church mouse** (or **church mice**) extremely poor. (page 224)
112. **Pretty as a picture** very pretty. (page 227)
113. **Pleased** (or **proud**) **as Punch** feeling great delight or pride (page 230)
114. **Pure as the driven snow** completely pure. (page 231)
115. **Be like putty** (or **wax**) **in someone's hands** be easily manipulated or dominated by someone. (page 232)
116. **Thin as a rake** (of a person or animal) very thin. (page 237)
117. **Red as beetroot** (of a person) red faced, typically through embarrassment. (page 240)
118. **Rough as bags** lacking refinement; coarse. Australian & New Zealand informal (page 247)
119. **Packed like sardines** crowded very close together. (page 252)
120. **Sharp as a needle** extremely quick witted. (page 258)

- 121. Be built like a brick shithouse** (of a person) have a very solid physique. Vulgar slang (page 259)
- 122. Sick as a dog** extremely ill. Informal (page 262)
- 123. Sick as a parrot** extremely disappointed. Humorous (page 262)
- 124. Snug as a bug (in a rug)** extremely comfortable. Humorous (page 269)
- 125. Sober as a judge** completely sober. (page 269)
- 126. Stand (or stick) out like a sore thumb** be very obviously different from the surrounding people or things. (page 270)
- 127. Like a streak (of lightning)** very fast. Informal (page 280)
- 128. Thick as thieves** (of two people) very close or friendly; sharing secrets. Informal (page 289)
- 129. Thick as two (short) planks** very stupid. Informal (page 289)
- 130. Tight as a tick** extremely drunk. Informal (page 292)
- 131. Tough as old boots** very sturdy or resilient. (page 296)
- 132. Right as a trivet** perfectly all right; in good health. British informal (page 298)
- 133. True as Bob (or God)** absolutely true. South African informal (page 299)
- 134. Like turkeys voting for Christmas** used to suggest that a particular action or decision is hopelessly self-defeating. Informal (page 300)
- 135. Warm as toast** pleasantly warm. (page 307)
- 136. Silly as a wheel** very silly. Australian (page 310)
- 137. Like something the cat brought in** (of a person) very dirty, bedraggled, or exhausted. Informal (page 48)
- 138. As bold as brass** confident to the point of impudence. (page 32)
- 139. As game as Ned Kelly** very brave. Australian (page 119)
- 140. Like death warmed up** extremely tired or ill. Informal (page 75)
- 141. Right as rain** (of a person) perfectly fit and well, especially after a minor illness or accident. Informal. (page 236)
- 142. Like a bear with a sore head** (of a person) very irritable. British informal (page 18)
- 143. Like a cat on a hot tin roof (or on hot bricks)** very agitated, restless, or anxious. (page 48)
- 144. Like water off a duck's back** a remark or incident which has no apparent effect on a person. (page 88)
- 145. Sure as eggs is eggs** (also **sure as fate**) without any doubt; absolutely certain. (page 282)

146. As – as they come used to describe someone or something that is a supreme example of the quality specified. (page 59)

147. As – as all get out to a great or extreme extent. North American. Informal (page 121)

148. – As sin having a particular undesirable quality to a high degree. Informal (page 263)

Adverbial idioms of comparison

149. Like a dose of salts very fast and efficiently. British informal (page 84)

150. Like a bat out of hell very fast and wildly .informal (page 16)

151. Like a bull at a gate hastily and without thought. (page 40)

152. Like a bull in a china shop behaving recklessly and clumsily in a place or situation where you are likely to cause damage or injury. (page 40)

153. Like the clappers very fast or very hard. British (page 54)

154. Like the deuce very fast. (page 76)

155. Like blazes very fast or forcefully, informal (page 27)

156. Like the devil (or a demon) with great speed or energy.(page 77)

157. Like a dream very well or successfully. Informal (page 86)

158. Like nobody's business in no ordinary way; to an extremely intense degree, informal (page 42)

159. Quick as a flash (especially of a person's response or reaction) happening or made very quickly. (page 110)

160. Like a blue-arsed fly in an extremely hectic or frantic way. British vulgar slang (page 112)

161. Like (or for) grim death with intense determination. (page 130)

162. Like a (hot) knife through butter very easily; without any resistance or difficulty. (page 162)

163. Like a lamb to the slaughter as a helpless victim. (page 166)

164. Like a leech persistently or clingingly present. (page 170)

165. Like lightning (or like greased lightning) very quickly. (page 174)

166. Like a moth to the flame irresistibly attracted to someone or something. (page 192)

- 167. Like mushrooms** suddenly and in great numbers. (page 195)
- 168. Like a ripe plum** (or **ripe plums**) used to convey that something can be obtained with little or no effort. (page 223)
- 169. Like pulling teeth** extremely difficult or laborious to do. Informal (page 229)
- 170. Like a scalded cat** at a very fast speed. (page 253)
- 171. Like sin** vehemently or forcefully. Informal (page 264)
- 172. As if there was** (or **as though there were**) **no tomorrow** with no regards for the future consequences (page 295)
- 173. Like water** in great quantities. (page 308)
- 174. As if you own the place** in an overbearing or self-important manner. Informal (page 210)