

Abstract

According to the standard definition phraseology deals with multi-word lexical units, i.e. word combinations. Voices claiming that even complex words composed of two or more meaningful units may qualify for the status of (lexical) phrasemes/idioms, especially when their meaning is non-compositional, are still very isolated, in spite of the fact that linguistic literature is teeming with references to idiomatic compounds and derivatives (Chap. 3). In fact, the only systematic treatment of lexical idioms seems to be that offered by Čermák (2007), who focuses primarily on lexical idioms in Czech. The aim of the thesis is therefore to explore the situation in English and attempt to develop a useful definition of, and especially criteria for, distinguishing lexical idioms from other complex lexemes and provide an outline of the main types of lexical idioms obtaining in English. After an introduction (Chap. 1) and the presentation of state-of-the-art approaches to phraseology and the relevant information about phraseological units and their features (Chap. 2), the thesis reviews Čermák's theory of lexical idioms which inspired their quantitative study in Czech (Chap. 4). The core part is the analysis of two samples. The first one, gathered from the BNC, includes a random selection of 1000 single-word lemmas and served as a testing ground for not only separating simple lexemes from complex ones, but especially for identifying potential lexical idioms and thus for recasting the initial definition of lexical idioms with an emphasis on semantic anomaly. The second sample, based on the OED, consists of 500 preselected lexemes exhibiting semantic anomalies (sometimes combined with other types of anomaly) whose analysis revealed them to range from central to peripheral lexical idioms and display a variety of types in terms of anomaly combinations (Chap. 5 and 6). The conclusions of the thesis (Chap. 7) largely support Čermák's findings about Czech lexical idioms, yet pointing out specific features of English lexical idioms, and argue for the recognition of the category of lexical idioms in English and their legitimate inclusion within the scope of phraseology, although as a borderline category shading off into compositional non-idiomatic lexemes.