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Complementary Idiom Learning Material for Year 8 in  
Estonian Basic School

MA thesis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Idioms are essential if one wants to have good proficiency in English. Native speakers use idioms very frequently in their speech and that makes idiom learning important for EFL students. However, complicated structure and duality in the meaning of idioms make them complicated for learners. This thesis concentrates on creating study cards that will lessen learners' burden of idiom learning and will increase the likelihood of better comprehension and retention of idioms.

This thesis consists of four parts: the introduction, two chapters, and the conclusion. The introduction states the reasons for writing this paper. The first chapter concentrates on the definition of idioms, difficulties that students encounter when they study idioms, and some aspects that help EFL students to learn and retain idioms more efficiently. The second chapter presents the idiom-related exercises in the coursebook and gives the reasons for the idiom learning material development. It is followed by a small-scale case study where students learned the idioms with the help of study cards, follow-up worksheet and a questionnaire with their feedback on the study cards, and the conclusion, which also includes the limitations, and offers options for further research.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

BNC – The British National Corpus

CIDOI – Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms

CL – Cognitive Linguistics

COCA – The Corpus of Contemporary American English

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESL – English as Second Language

F1 – Foreign Language

L2 – Second Language

NCBS – National Curriculum for Basic School

## INTRODUCTION

The meaning of language units or tokens has great value. Depending on how often and how actively some of those units are used, they have a quantitative and qualitative impact on one's vocabulary. Even with a very limited number of words, one can create many different messages. Those messages then create new meanings and new words. Language is a living organism. It changes constantly. The change is brought on by the changes happening in the world. Those changes indicate that language is alive and can adapt to historical events.

The development of semantical structures of language units in a language is a positive aspect. Otherwise, the language would be a computer-produced language unable to interpret the events of everyday life. It would not be a complex, multi-layered dynamic structure whose elements are tied by probable and determining relationships.

Knowing English is very important nowadays. However, it is impossible to have a good command of it without understanding its idioms. An idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from its constituent parts (Vasiljevic 2001:136).

Idiom comprehension makes it easier to read and understand fiction and spoken language. Idioms help to make the language more colourful and enhance it aesthetically. The wide variety of idioms and teaching aspects is all worth paying attention to. In this paper, the author of the thesis will concentrate on visually aided learning of idioms and its implementation. More specifically, the author will create study cards for idiom learning that will accompany the student book materials and possibly will help students to understand and retain idioms better.

Research has shown that students desire to learn idioms (Tran 2013). However, the amount of time dedicated to teaching idioms is not in proportion with the rest of teaching foreign languages (Tran 2013). The complicated structure of idioms is tricky enough for learners to learn independently and thus needs to be guided and helped (Irujo 1986, Vasiljevic 2015).

According to previous studies that have been carried out on this subject, non-native speakers do not encounter idioms as often as native speakers do, and that complicates the acquisition (Abel 2003), which also contributes to the fact that even if a learner knows individual words of the idiom, the whole meaning of it is misunderstood. Also, the author's personal experience shows that idioms are often translated incorrectly, and even advanced learners of English lack the correct understanding of idioms. Thus, it is one of the reasons for this paper – to create a learning material that will help students to memorize idioms more efficiently. Previously, a study by Zyzik (2011) investigated two issues: whether lexical knowledge affects the learning of the idiom's figurative meaning and whether the organization of idioms, thematically or by their formal properties, impacts the learner's performance. The results showed that grouping idioms by theme or the main verb did not provide any palpable advantage in idiom learning, nor did learning idioms with unknown lexical items proved to be any more complex than with familiar words (Zyzik 2011). On the other hand, other research has shown that using images in idiom learning is beneficial (Sinatra 1981, Vasiljevic 2011). Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005) several studies show that the structure of the idiom, accompanied by the image, helped to retain the understanding of the idiom.

Upon examination of the National Curriculum for Basic School in Estonia (2011), it was found that idioms are not specifically mentioned in the subchapter of the foreign language, however, it is said that learners of grades 7-9 should be able to read and understand age-appropriate texts in FL. As the studies in the first chapter of this thesis show, idioms are very common and are present in everyday speech. Hence, it can be assumed that idioms are essential and should be taught to Estonian EFL learners.

Considering findings of previous research (Tran 2013, Vasiljevic 2012, Vasiljevic 2011), how often idioms are used (Cooper 1998, Polio, Barlow, Fine &

Polio, 1977, Zyzik 2009), how important they are in communication, the author of this paper will create learning material for basic school students. The material will consist of English idioms with corresponding images, an Estonian version of the idiom, and example sentences using those idioms in both languages. The selected idioms will accompany the chapters of *Spark 4* (Evans & Dooley 2011) textbook. Each chapter of the textbook will have idioms related to the theme of the chapter. The author decided to create study cards with Estonian translations of the idiom because previous studies have shown that discussing idioms in the mother tongue is beneficial in idiom learning (Vasiljevic 2011, Forssten 2020). In addition, Nation (2001) states that learning from word cards through focused, intentional learning can quickly increase vocabulary. He especially pays attention to using pictures where possible. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to find out if visually aided learning material will promote and make easier the acquisition of idioms if it will support the idiom learning of FL learners, and how the gap in the coursebook teaching of idiomatic expressions can be filled. The outcome of this thesis carries a practical value – it will give teachers additional learning material.

This thesis is divided into two main core chapters followed by conclusion. The first chapter gives an overview of the literature on teaching idioms, including summaries of the previous studies on the same topic. Chapter one will also cover the importance of teaching idioms and will highlight the importance of images in idiom teaching. Chapter two describes the process of creating the study material, testing it out with students with a follow-up worksheet and a questionnaire, where students' feedback on created material is presented.

## CHAPTER 1: TEACHING IDIOMS IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

This chapter addresses the issues of teaching idioms in an EFL classroom. The chapter provides an overview of the definition of idioms, their complexity, and the difficulties that learners encounter when learning idiomatic expressions. Previous research on idiom learning and teaching is introduced.

### 1.1 Definition of idioms

An idiom can be interpreted as a combination of two or more words that carry a meaning that cannot be derived from the purpose of their constituent words (Swinney & Cutler, 1979, Vasiljevic 2001). It is a group of words that have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if they were used as separate words. Zyzik (2011:414) adds to the definition by saying that it is a non-compositional expression, i.e., its meaning cannot be understood by simply knowing the individual words of the phrase. For example, it is difficult to tell that the phrase to *kick the bucket* and to *bite the dust* means to *die*. However, saying that an expression is non-compositional can be problematic, as scholars have pointed out that not all idioms are non-compositional in the same way (Zyzik 2011:415). Most idioms have a fixed composition, meaning that constituent parts are not interchangeable by synonyms: e.g., *crystal clear* cannot be *diamond clear*.

Some idioms are opaque; they lack transparency. The term refers to the fact that it is difficult to explain the connection between the lexical structure of the idiom and its actual meaning. All idioms, regardless of whether they are opaque, transparent, or semitransparent are considered figurative because they realize the criteria of *image requirement*. The image component is “a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure and



the actual meaning of figurative units” (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 2005:14). Thus, those elements help the learners to see the difference between the figurative and the actual meaning. As an example, Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen (2005:15) give the following definition with the “as if” element, which highlights the difference between *to be between a rock and a hard place* and *to be in a very difficult situation*: “facing a situation of choice between two possibilities which both entail difficulties, failure, as if the person pursuing his/her goals was not able to move freely.”

Kövecses (2000:16-17) says that the meaning of most idioms involves three aspects: general, specific, and connotative meaning. By general meaning he suggests that if a learner knows nothing else in terms of an idiom but its source domain and the variety of targets to which that source applies, then he or she will know that the idiom is about one or several targets, but not about targets outside the scope of the source. He explains that specific meaning has to do with the structure of the source domain and the corresponding structure of the target domain. To explain the connotative meaning, he uses idioms related to fire. For example, *to spit fire*. Kövecses says that speakers of English know that fire is dangerous when it is out of control for the thing burning and other objects around it, and so they can make the same inference about anger based on fire: when a person is angry, and the anger is out of control it is both dangerous for the angry person and other around. In other words, we get additional meaning to the idiom – the connotative aspect of meaning. He also claims that all these aspects need to be indicated when giving the meaning of these idioms because “these meanings depend on the relevant mapping(s) between a source and a target.” (Kövecses 2000:29).

Zevgoli (1998:217-219) says that idioms have primary and secondary properties, where primary are represented by idioms’ conventionality (meaning of the idiom cannot be predicted) and invariability (parts of the idiom cannot be replaced by other words, they can

appear in a limited number of syntactic constructions, and that their parts cannot change the verb tense or noun number). Idioms have also secondary properties that are defined by compositionality or analysability, figurative property, informality, and affective property. Where compositional idioms are the ones, whose figurative meaning can be distributed to their constituent parts *to break the ice*, and non-compositional idioms, whose figurative meaning cannot be distributed *to kick the bucket*.

## **1.2 Methods for teaching idioms**

If a teacher wants to raise students' awareness and interest in idiom learning one has to teach idioms and the ways they can be used. It is also crucial for teachers to understand the factors that make idiom acquisition easier for their students because only then successful learning can occur (Liu 2017). An idiom can have two meanings, a literal and a figurative one. This duality of meaning explains why learning idioms causes difficulty for language learners.

The importance of teaching idioms is conditioned on the fact that they are as frequently used as about 7000 idioms per week by an average native speaker (Polio, Barlow, Fine & Polio, 1977). Zyzik (2011:3) claims that multiword units, such as phrasal verbs, collocation, and idioms, make up about 50 percent of a language. Wray (2000:463) says that idioms are a vital element in language learning. This means that idioms are essential in language learning, and they cannot be left out. In other words, a learner cannot choose to ignore idioms when learning English. The significance of teaching idioms because of their high-frequency usage in native speakers' language use has also been researched and emphasized. (Irujo 1986, Vasiljevic 2011, Vasiljevic 2012). However, learners need to be able to retain individual lexical items in the input, otherwise, they will fail to retain the multi-word phrases

(Vasiljevic 2012:77). Incidental acquisition of idiomatic expressions is highly unlikely. There are several reasons for that. Even if learners understand all the constituent elements

The Cognitive Linguistic (CL) approach is preferred by many scholars when it comes to language learners. (Boers 2011, Evans 2007, Evans & Green 2006, Kövecses 2000, Kömur and Cimen 2009, Tyler 2012) because several studies have shown that learners' ability to understand and memorise idioms is closely tied to their general cognitive and linguistic abilities. The Cognitive Linguistic approach believes that learners may need to memorize some of the vocabulary, but this approach gives them some specific strategies that help to acquire new vocabulary, and it also pays attention to systematic explanation, as it helps learners to retain and reproduce lexical items easier (Tyler 2012:6-7).

Evans and Green (2006:48-49) say that cognitive linguistics can be divided into two main areas: cognitive semantics and cognitive (approaches to) grammar. They stress that cognitive linguistics emphasizes the role of meaning, whereas the traditional approach to linguistics emphasizes the role of grammar. They also say that in the light of cognitive linguistics "a model of meaning (the cognitive semantics) has to be delineated before an adequate model of grammar can be developed" and that "cognitive semantics have employed language as the lens through which these cognitive phenomena can be investigated" (Evans and Green 2006:48-49). On the other hand, they also stress that both, cognitive approaches to grammar and cognitive semantics, should be complementing each other and not be seen as separate fields of study (Evans and Green 2009: 49-50).

Several scholars have investigated how to use the CL approach in figurative language teaching. (Charteris- Black 2002, Kövecses 2000, Kömur and Cimen 2009, Chen and Lai 2003) Charteris-Black (2002: 102-105) says that there is some evidence that learners may rely on L1 conceptual basis when dealing with unfamiliar figurative language in L2. He also adds that the CL approach can be beneficial for learners of figurative language and offers

systematic pedagogical methods in L2. Chen and Lai (2003) advocate the CL approach as a useful method because it allows students to understand how the idioms are used in everyday speech by providing contextual background, not simply memorizing them. Kövecses (2000:25) supports that by saying that “students might need to be taught about the notion of conceptual metaphors in an explicit way before they can use the strategy of employing metaphors and discovering new ones in the foreign language.” Liu (2017) says that

Lattey (1986:226) suggests that an effective way of learning idioms is pragmatic categorization: based on the individual (e.g. *to show one’s true colours*), on the world (e.g., *something is touch and go*), on relationships (e.g., *to lend someone a helping hand*), and on individual and the world (e.g., *not to know the first thing about something*.) She says that her approach helps learners to understand idiomatic expressions with reverse or opposite perspectives when they are presented together and that similar idioms can be discussed in the same lesson. She also stresses that it is important to explain to learners the smallest details in the meaning of idioms, as it will affect how they will be used in the future.

Liu (2017:121) suggests a method of raising students’ awareness about idioms by developing a habit of watching for idioms in everyday language use. With the help of a teacher, learners can be taught to notice idioms, and write them down along with their meanings.

### **1.3 Mother tongue in idiom learning**

Several studies have shown that the mother tongue plays a vital role in idiom acquisition (Irujo 1986, Cooper, 1999, Charteris-Black 2002, Vasiljevic 2011, Liu 2017, Forssten 2021). However, it cannot be established exactly to what extent the mother tongue helps in idiom acquisition in the foreign language. Liu (2017:65-67) says that the learners

use L1 as a first strategy to comprehend the idiom. However, this strategy is successful only when the idiom has an identical meaning in L2. If the meaning is different, then L1 can, in fact, interfere with the correct understanding of the idiom.

Another successful strategy that learners use when dealing with idioms is contextual information. It has proven to be very helpful when learners need to guess from the context in order to understand the meaning of the idiom. (Cooper 1999, Charteris-Black 2002, Liu 2017)

Vasiljevic (2011) claims that discussing idioms in one's mother tongue benefits idiom learning. Forssten (2021) concludes, after carrying out research with Estonian learners that explaining idioms in the mother tongue is the most helpful strategy in idiom teaching. She also writes that young Estonian learners benefit from idioms that have identical meanings in Estonian and that it is best to leave idioms with figurative meaning for older students. However, she mentions that idioms, which learners are most likely to come across frequently, need to be taught regardless of age.

The study by Irujo (1986:298) showed similar findings to Forssten's (2022) that advanced EFL students can use their knowledge of idioms in their mother tongue when they need to understand or produce idioms in L2. It is an example of the concept of transfer which is based on the idea that previous learning impacts the subsequent learning Irujo (1986:288). In other words, the forms and patterns of the mother tongue are imposed on the target language. If they are very similar, the positive transfer happens, if they are different, the learner tries to transfer the patterns of the mother tongue to the target language, which causes the negative transfer. The mistakes that occur in situations like that are called interference errors (Irujo 1986:289). Irujo also mentions that highly colloquial idioms with difficult vocabulary should be avoided in EFL setting because students will have difficulty producing and understanding them correctly (Irujo 1986:299). Liu (2017) states similar findings: even

if learners understand the meaning of the idiom but its meaning in L1 is very different from L2 then they would still be intimidated in using those idioms due to the fear of not using them correctly.

#### **1.4 Using images when teaching idioms**

According to Sinatra (1981), using images not only provides situational content for language learning but students tend to memorize better when they can tie meaning to an image. Haber (1970) claims that if children are taught to connect pictures to words, their memory will improve dramatically. Several studies (Szczepaniak and Lew 2011 Vasiljevic 2013) indicate the positive impact of pictorial support on both idiom acquisition and their linguistic forms. Szczepaniak and Lew (2011) conclude that using images in teaching idioms has a positive impact on the idiom retention rate. The participants that had picture-equipped material performed on average 13% better on instant recall and 22% better on delayed recall rates rather than entries that were not visually aided (Szczepaniak and Lew 2011:340).

In the experiment that was carried out by Kövesces et al. (2008), students from the experimental group were taught to learn idioms with the help of keywords and images. Consequently, the goal of using images was to create a connection to meanings to be stored in memory. The keywords and the images were associative mediators whose role was to provide meaningful connections between idioms and their definition, in other words, to help store and recover pairs that belonged together. It became evident that the use of those mediators helped to produce better retention than simple repetition. In addition to that, the creative work involved in this kind of learning seemed to have a favorable influence on the memorization and retention process. The further findings of the same research demonstrated that it is crucial for students to understand the connection between the literal and figurative

meanings; only then will they be able to use that comprehension when they try to understand a new expression.

### **1.5 Selecting idioms for the study material**

If we take into consideration what previous researchers have suggested (Irujo 1986, Liu 2008 and 2017, Zyzik 2009, Forssten 2021), then the following aspects need to be kept in mind when choosing idioms for L2 teaching materials: how frequently idioms are used, how transparent they are in their figurative meaning and how similar they are to L1 idioms. We also need to consider the needs of students and their abilities to use their native language to comprehend and produce idioms in L2. However, Liu (2003) highlights the following issue: there is not enough empirical data on which idioms are the most essential or most widely used – the authors of research publications quite often reflect their intuition, rather than any empirical data (Liu 2003:672), which in turn results in studies covering idioms that EFL students do not encounter that often in real-life situations.

This research by Zyzik (2009) supports the abovementioned findings of Liu (2003). Firstly, Zyzik claims that idioms that have identical meanings in L1 and L2 will be the easiest for learners to memorize. The ones that are only partially similar will likely cause difficulties. Secondly, she adds that context is essential for EFL learners. Zyzik gives an example of a study by Cooper (2009: 246-249), who explored the comprehension strategies of L2 learners. Most common strategies included guessing from context, discussing idioms, and using the literal meaning. And thirdly, she finds that teaching idioms according to the theme is a potentially helpful approach. She also adds that discussing the origin of the idiom can be beneficial for the learners (Zyzik 2009:4).

Some helpful insights on which idioms are the most common are presented in the research by Kövesces (2000: 3), where he claims that idioms that have to do with the human body are the most common. He also suggests that those idioms should be taught first and predominantly in FL context.

Teachers often want to use “most useful” and “most frequent” idioms. Significant work to help teachers and learners was done by Liu (2003) when he came up with a list of the most frequently used idioms in spoken American English by a close concordance search and analysis of three contemporary American English corpora. This list is one of the primary sources for the selection of the idioms for the study cards in this paper. Another helpful resource is Longman grammar of spoken and written English (Biber et al. 1999) which has a chapter on frequently used idioms. The results of Boers et al. (2009) study show that learners better retain idioms that have words that they have encountered previously or are very well familiar with those words. He adds that when such idioms are presented with pictures, successful retention and recollection can occur (Boers et al. 2009:377). It is important to bear in mind those findings when selecting the idioms for the study cards. Park & Chon (2019) add that if learners are familiar with high-frequency words, better comprehension and retention of idioms can occur. However, they add that teachers constantly need to remind learners that the literal meaning of the idioms is often different from its metaphorical meaning (Park & Chon 2019:232)

Taking into account the previous research (Vasiljevic 2011, Vasiljevic 2012, Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005, Zyzik 2013), the author of the present thesis concluded that productive and successful teaching of idioms can be done when several methods are combined: when idioms are grouped according to the theme (e.g. food, sport, body parts, etc related idioms), through exposure to meaning in the mother tongue, giving the information of the origin of the idiom, using images related to the idiom meaning, and carrying out



exercises using the idioms. Based on these findings, the author will be able to create complementary study material for *Spark 4* (Evans and Doley 2011) that incorporates all these aspects.

## **CHAPTER 2. IDIOM STUDY MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND STUDENTS' FEEDBACK**

In this chapter, the author of this thesis will concentrate on the idioms presented in the *Spark 4* textbook, Intermediate (Evans and Dooley 2011), the findings in the previous chapter, and the expected learning outcome mentioned in the National Curriculum for Basic School (2011). The idioms will be selected for the study cards, and the study material will be created. The follow-up questionnaire is in two parts: the first part was immediately after studying the idioms with the help of the study cards, and the second part with the final question was after completion of the worksheet.

The results of the questionnaire were expected to show if the study cards are helpful for the students and whether they can be used as complementary study material to the textbook. The results of the questionnaire will be discussed and analysed.

### **2.1 Idioms in *Spark 4* student's book.**

To create the study cards, the author chose *Spark 4* Intermediate student's book (Evans & Dooley 2011), which is the main coursebook for the students in grade 8 who will be using the created study materials. The book consists of eight modules. Each module touches upon different subjects related to the main topic: Module 1 deals with free-time activities, festivals, superstitions, and special days; Module 2 covers feelings and coincidences; Module 3 teaches about technology, gadgets, computers, and robots; Module 4 teaches about accidents, health-related issues, survival; Module 5 includes art, music, dance; Module 6

tells about social problems and volunteer work and environment; Module 7 is about jobs, careers and working life and the final Module 8 is about money, spending money and university education. The themes in the coursebook will be the underlying factor for the selection of idioms for the study cards.

Upon closer inspection, it was found that there are no separate exercises on idiom learning. However, each chapter includes activities with different phrasal verbs that are sometimes idiomatic in their meaning (Kövesces 2000, Liu 2009, Zyzik 2009). Each module has an exercise with three sentences where students need to decide which particle goes with the given verb. For example, there is the verb *keep* in Module 1, and students need to choose between *off/down*, *on/out*, and *on/up*. There is also a study skill section that says that to remember the phrasal verb better, students can try and draw pictures of them.

In the light of what Liu (2008:132-152) claims that for successful idiom retention, students need to have exposure to the practice of idioms in different kinds of activities, that they need to be familiar with the background of the idioms and know the meaning of an idiom in their mother tongue, the author of the thesis decided to create the study cards. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of the thesis, each idiom will have two cards: one with the idiom itself, accompanied by an image depicting the idiom and a translation of the idiom, and another card with a sample sentence containing the idiom in both English and Estonian. In addition to the cards, the teacher will explain the origin of the idiom because several studies have shown that discussing the origin of the idiom in both F1 and F2 is beneficial. (Boers et al 2007, Boers 2008, Vasiljevic 2011, Forssten 2021)

## 2.2 Selecting idioms for the study cards

One of the most important steps in developing the study material was deciding what idioms are the most suitable and that would meet the demands of the students. According to Grant & Nation (2006:11), figurative idioms stand for a large group of idiomatic phrases and are worthy of learners' attention in the first stages of idiom learning. In order to identify such idioms, the author of the thesis investigated the topical content of *Spark 4* student's book (2011). Once the textbook was investigated the following sources were considered: research carried out by Liu (2003) where he compiled a list of the most frequent idioms across three corpora of spoken American English, Kövecses's (2000) statement that idioms that are related to the human body should be taught in the first place, the *Theme panels* in *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (1998) where idioms are grouped according to the topic they are used to comment on (e.g., anger, business, dishonesty, health, intelligence, and stupidity) and the BNC (The British National Corpus), where the frequency of idioms and their constituent words can be established. However, Liu (2003:676) says that frequency should not be the only factor in choosing idioms, as "pure frequency often leaves out some important and useful items."

Another helpful resource for selecting the idioms is *Idioms Organiser* by Wright (2002), where idioms are organized according to four different criteria: (1) areas of metaphor (e.g., *time is money*, *business is war*, *life is a journey*); (2) individual metaphors (e.g., *a bee in his bonnet*, *as the crow flies*, *on its last legs*); (3) topics (e.g. *health*, *animals*, *feelings*); (4) key words ( e.g., *know*, *of*, *on*, *end*, *life*).

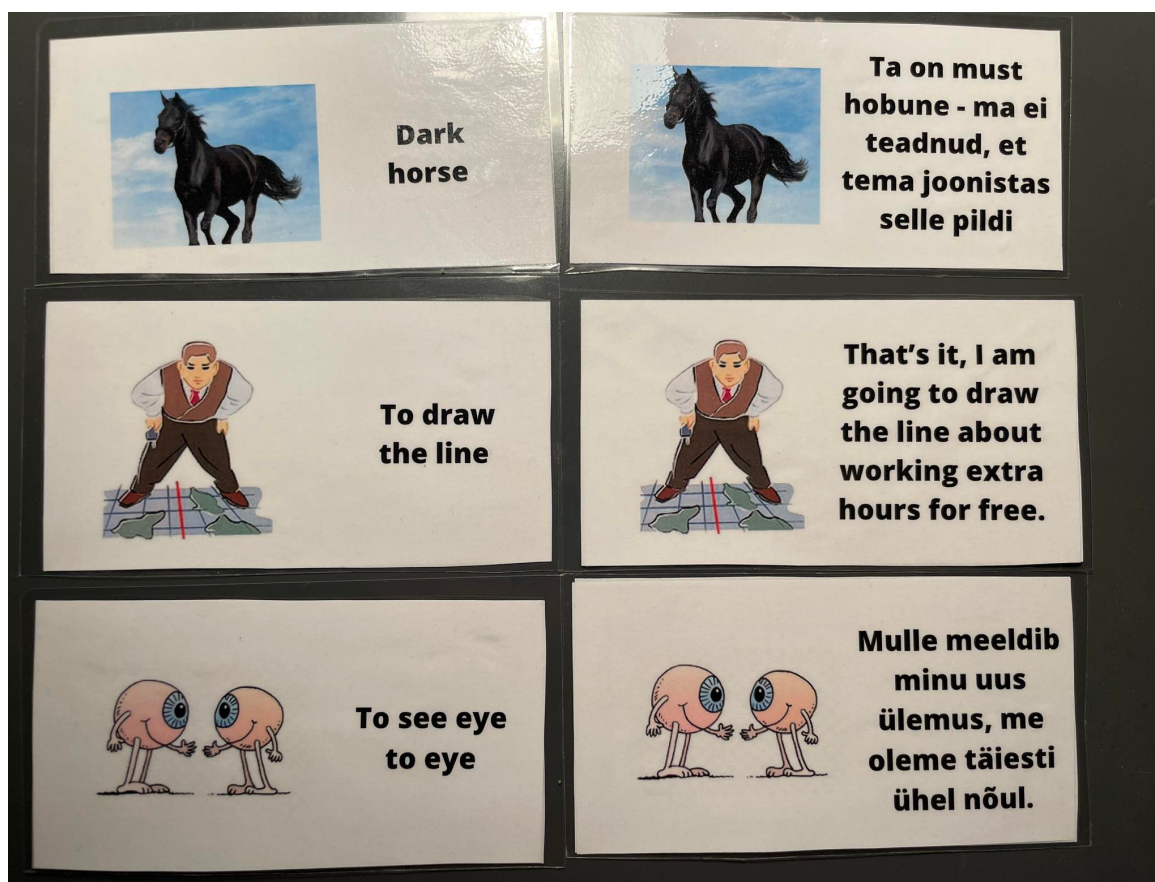
Zevgoli (1998:221-224) suggests that learners should begin learning idioms with the following criteria: they have a high frequency of occurrence, similar equivalent in L1, and analysability; in other words, they should have a constituent part that can be understood

literally. She also suggests that teachers should keep in mind learners' knowledge of cultural aspects and choose idioms that would be connected to the subjects that learners are familiar with. The same idea is backed up by Irujo (1986), who says that if learners and their teacher share the same mother tongue, then idioms with identical meanings in L1 and L2 should be chosen. However, the author of the thesis decided to include some idioms that do not have similar meanings in L2 because, as Forssten (2021) says, older students can be introduced to idioms with a figurative meaning. Another factor for deciding on which idioms to use for the study cards was suggested by Lattey (1986), who said that similar idioms should be discussed in the same lesson.

Based on the abovementioned findings, including the themes in Spark 4 student's book (2011), the following topics were selected: Home, Feeling & Emotions, Technology, Work & Business, Accidents & Disasters, Art, Social Problems & Human Relationships, Health & Body, Life & Living. Thus, 30 idioms were selected (see Appendix 1).

The next step was finding the meaning of selected idioms in Estonian. *The English-Estonian idioms dictionary* (Hanko & Liiv1999) was consulted for that purpose. However, some idioms, e.g., *mouse potato*, which are quite recent in English, were not present in that dictionary, and other internet sources were referred to. (Appendix 2) Since learners need to be familiar with the origin of the idioms (Irujo 1986, Boers et al. 2007, Vasiljevic 2011, Forssten 2021), the origin of the selected idioms needs to be established. *The Dictionary of Idioms and Their Origins* (1992) was consulted for that purpose. However, that dictionary lacked some of the newest idioms. Thus, additional sources were consulted, such as *The Idioms* and *Using English*, which both provided significant insight into the origin of some idioms. The list of 30 idioms with their translations was compiled (see Appendix 2).

In order to find suitable images to accompany the selected idioms, several internet sources were addressed. (See references for the sources where images were taken



This picture illustrates what the study cards look like. There is an idiom accompanied by the image: on one side, it is in English; on the other, it is in Estonian. There is also a card with an example sentence in both languages.

### 2.3 Testing the study cards

In order to test the study cards, some idioms were selected for the upcoming lesson that was connected to the topic of the lesson. For example, the subject of several lessons was

technology, computers, and work-life. Thus, the following idioms were selected: *mouse potato*, *get your wires crossed*, *busy as a bee*, *take the bull by the horns*, and *reinventing the wheel*. Prior to using the study cards, the discussion of the nature of the idioms took place. The teacher, together with the students, discussed different idioms in both languages. Students gave their ideas about idioms and talked through some examples in both English and Estonian with the teacher. The purpose of this discussion was to make sure that students understood idioms.

On the day of the study, there were twelve students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade who were all sitting in pairs. Each pair got cards with the idioms. Considering the previous studies (Boers et al. 2007, Vasiljevic 2011, Forssten 2021, Kövecses, Csabi & Beréni 2008, McLennan 1994), the following procedure for idiom learning was chosen: (1) students will elaborate on the possible meaning of the idiom, (2) discuss the idiom in the mother tongue, (3) teacher will introduce the origin of the idiom and an example sentence, (4) students practice composing their example sentences. The study cards were used in all these procedures.

Thus, in the first part of the lesson, the students got to see the card with the image and the idiom in English, and they had to come up with the idiom's meaning without looking at the translation. Once some possible versions were suggested, the students were encouraged to turn the card over and read the Estonian meaning of the idiom. After that, the students were asked to come up with the possible origin of the idiom. Then the teacher introduced the actual origin of the idiom in both English and Estonian. In the next step, the students were encouraged to take the second card and read the example sentence first in English, then in Estonian. And finally, the students had to come up with their examples using those idioms orally. The final stage of the activity helps students put the new idiom into practice and shows the teacher whether students understood the idiom correctly.

Because the cards were supposed to cover all coursebook topics throughout the school year, there was a separate lesson following the one where idioms connected to the topic of technology were introduced, where all 30 study cards were introduced in one lesson. The procedure of the lesson was the same as with the cards dedicated to the topic of technology. After the students were introduced to the idioms, they filled in the questionnaire, where they gave their feedback on the study cards. Two days later, students got a worksheet with the tasks on the idioms that they learned from the study cards, which helped see whether the cards worked. (See Appendix 5) The worksheet ended with the final question of the questionnaire, which aimed at revealing students' opinions about what helped them in remembering the idioms when completing the worksheet. It was an open-ended question where students had to express their opinion.

## **2.4 Students' feedback**

To determine if the visually aided study cards helped the learners memorise the idioms better, the students had a worksheet to complete after two days of using the study cards. Immediately after using the study cards, the students had the first part of the questionnaire to fill in. The questionnaire's questions were compiled based on the suggestions of several studies (McLennan 1994, Boers et al 2007, Csabi & Beréndi 2008, Vasiljevic 2011, Forssten 2021) propose certain procedures for teachers when figurative language is taught. In other words, the author of the thesis wanted to establish if following those procedures was beneficial for the students. The results of the questionnaire will help the author understand what alterations need to be made to the study cards or if their use is not beneficial to the students. Another purpose of this part was to see how students usually learn idioms and to what extent did the study cards help them. Twelve students took part in the case study. First,



the questionnaire results will be presented, followed by the results of the worksheet. The questionnaire had ten questions, five of which were closed questions and had the option of choosing the most appropriate answer. All the questions are also open questions and have an option of writing additional comments. The questionnaire was written anonymously. The questionnaire participants were of different levels in English, with an average grade in the class of 4.3.

The first question was to identify how students find learning the idioms. There were three options: very difficult, difficult, quickly, and easily. Two students indicated that it is difficult for them, whereas the other ten said that they memorise idioms easily and quickly.

The second question of the questionnaire was to see how students usually learn the idioms. Seven out of 12 students wrote that they simply memorise the idiom. Two students said that they translate the idiom into Estonian, which helps them memorise it. One student mentioned that it helps to imagine the situation of the idiom. Two students said that learning the words of the idiom helps to remember the entire phrase.

The next question was to determine if the study cards helped them to understand the idioms better. The students had to choose from three options: no, still difficult; a little bit; yes, they helped me a lot. There was also a space left for additional comments. Seven students said the study cards helped them a lot, and five students said that the cards helped a little bit. Additionally, the students wrote the following comment: that it was a fun way to learn idioms; the images helped to understand the idioms better; with cards, it is easier to memorise the idioms, and the images helped to get the idea better, but they already knew most of the idioms beforehand.

Question number 4 inquired whether images on the cards helped them memorise the idioms better. Ten out of 12 students said that the images did help, whereas two students wrote that they helped only a little because they were already familiar with the idioms. In

addition to that, some students wrote some additional comments: that seeing an image helped them understand the idiom better; that some images are fun and that make them easier to remember; images give hints to the possible meanings of the idioms.

Question five asked whether discussing the idioms in Estonian helped to understand and memorize them better. Ten students said that it helped a lot. Additionally, six out of those 10 wrote that it helps them when they can translate something into their mother tongue. Two out of 12 marked the option *a little bit* option without further comments. The following question asked if discussing the origin of the idiom help them understand and memorise the idioms. Two students marked the *yes; it helped me a lot* option with additional comments that it helped them understand why some idioms have their meaning. One student out of those two wrote that discussing idioms, in general, helped a lot. The rest of the 12 students (10 students) claimed that the discussion helped only a little bit. Some students reported that discussion helped only with some idioms. Question seven asked whether some idioms were more accessible to memorise than others. All students answered yes; however, all of them had different idioms and reasons. The most common answer was that if an idiom was short, it was easier to understand and remember. Also, they wrote that if an idiom had a very similar meaning in Estonian, it was easy to remember. Their examples included *water off a duck's back, skating on thin ice, like father, like son; the apple does not fall far from the tree*.

The next question invited the students to state if some images helped them understand and remember the idioms better. All the students wrote that there were indeed some images that allowed them to understand and remember the idioms more easily. Three students reported that they found all the images helpful. One student wrote that only some helped without additional comments. The rest had similar answers that included the following

idioms: *the black sheep*; *the apple of the eye*; *like father, like son*; *white lie*; *mouse potato*; *skating on thin ice*; *to feel blue*.

Question number nine was to show whether some images made it more difficult to understand and remember the idioms. Eight students wrote that there were no images that made it more difficult for them. However, three students reported that the image of *to bring home the bacon* did not help them, as they thought it does not depict the idiom correctly. Two students wrote that images of *not to lift a finger* and *to give a hard time* did not help them in any way, and they would replace them with different images.

The last questions of the questionnaire asked if there was anything that the students would change. Ten students wrote that they would not change anything. Three of those ten wrote that there could be more idioms used. The last two students out of the 12 reported that they would replace two images: *not to lift a finger* and *bring home the bacon*, as those images did not help to understand the idiom, in their opinion.

Students needed to answer one additional question after completing the worksheet with the idiom exercises. The question asked what specifically helped them remember the idioms they needed to complete the activities: whether it was the images, the discussion in Estonian, the discussion of the origin of the idioms, or anything else. The answers included the following statements: the discussion of the idioms during the previous lesson was mentioned by eight students; five students mentioned images and example sentences; two students mentioned example sentences in Estonian, and six students reported that discussing idioms in Estonian helped them a lot. Three students said they knew all the idioms and did not need any help with the worksheet. However, only one of these three had all the tasks completed correctly.

What helped to remember the idiom	Number of students responded
<i>1 Discussion of the idiom in general</i>	8 (66%)
<i>2 The images</i>	5 (41%)
<i>3 Completing example sentences in the last lesson</i>	5 (41%)
<i>5 Discussion of the idioms in Estonian</i>	6 (50%)
<i>4 Example sentences in Estonian</i>	4 (30%)
<i>5 No help was needed</i>	3 (25%)
Total number of students	12

Table 1. Activities that helped to remember the idioms

## 2.5 The results of the worksheet

In order for the author to see whether the study cards helped students to retain the meaning of the idiom, a follow-up worksheet was created that included tasks with idioms introduced two days earlier. While completing the worksheet, the students needed to remember the meanings of the idioms and did not have the study cards in front of them.

### 2.5.1 Results of task 1: Matching the idioms to their meaning

The first worksheet task was the idiom matching task, where students had to match the English meaning of the idiom to the Estonian one. All the idioms were from the study cards that students were introduced to during the previous lesson. The number of correct

answers showed the effectiveness of the exercise. There were ten idioms in the first task, to which students needed to find the right meaning in Estonian.

12 students took part in the writing of the worksheet. All the students managed to excel in this task and match the idioms correctly.

Table 2 below shows the results of the first exercise.

Sentence, Idiom	Correct responses
<i>1 to be over the moon</i>	12
<i>2 mouse potato</i>	12
<i>3 take the bull by the horns</i>	12
<i>4 to live on the breadline</i>	12
<i>5 to get the picture</i>	12
<i>6 see eye to eye</i>	12
<i>7 bring home the bacon</i>	12
<i>8 let the cat out of the bag</i>	12
<i>9 to get wires crossed</i>	12
<i>10 like father, like son</i>	12
Total	120/120
	(100%)

Table 2. Number of correct answers from task 1.

### 2.5.2 Results of task 2: Gap-Filling Task

The second task of the worksheet was a gap-filling exercise, where the students had to choose the correct idiom from the list given. There were 10 sentences with idioms in this

exercise, different from the previous one. The students also had to use the idiom in the correct tense. As in the first task, all the idioms were familiar to students from the previous lesson. If the gaps were left empty, then they were considered as incorrect answers.

There were 120 possible correct answers. The students managed to produce 101 correct answers. One student left the entire exercise empty. The results of another 11 students are as follows: 11 correct answers were in sentences 4, 6, 7 and 10, which included the idioms *busy as a bee*, *on the tip of my tongue*, *the apple of the eye* and *skating on thin ice*. 10 correct answers were given in sentences 1, 8 and 10, which included idioms *to draw the line*, *my hands are tied*, and *the apple does not fall far from the tree*. The rest of sentences, 2, 3, and 5 had 9 correct answers and included the idioms *to reinvent the wheel*, *to feel blue*, and *to get the picture*. However, the sentence with the idiom *to feel blue* had to be written in continuous tense *feeling blue*, and it was written correctly by six students.

Table 3 below shows the number of correct answers by the students. The overall percentage of the completed task, which was calculated by adding together the correct answers, then multiplying by 100 and divided by the number of possible correct answers, is also presented in the table below.

Sentence, Idiom	Correct responses
<i>1 draw the line</i>	10
<i>2 to reinvent the wheel</i>	9
<i>3 to feel blue</i>	6+3*
<i>4 to be busy as a bee</i>	11
<i>5 to get the picture</i>	9
<i>6 on the tip of my tongue</i>	11
<i>7 the apple of the eye</i>	11
<i>8 my hands are tied</i>	10
<i>9 the apple does not fall far from the tree</i>	10
<i>10 skating on thin ice</i>	11
Total	101/120 (84%)

Table 3. The number of correct answers from task 2.

\*Students chose the correct idiom but did not use the correct tense

### 2.5.3 Results of Exercise 3: Producing Sentences with the Idioms

In the final part of the worksheet, students had to come up with their own sentences with the idioms that were given to them. Again, all the idioms were familiar to them. There were 12 idioms, consequently, students had to produce 12 sentences including those idioms. Sentences that were left empty were considered as incorrect answers. Different from the previous task, where one student left the whole task not done, all students had completed at least some sentences.

Four students managed to produce all 12 sentences. Another two students wrote the meaning of the idiom, not the sentence including one in some of the sentences. For example, with the idiom *to let the cat out of the bag* one student wrote *she told me his secret* and with the idiom *not to lift a finger* they wrote *he is too lazy*. The rest of the participants had different results. The sentences that everyone wrote correctly were 11 and 12 which included idioms *black sheep* and *life is not a bed of roses*. The following sentences had 11 correct answers: 6 and 10 which included the idioms *behind my back* and *to lift a finger*. Sentences with 9 correct answers were 1 and 3 with the idioms *dark horse* and *to be on cloud nine*. Sentences 4, 5, and 8 had eight correct answers, which included idioms *blind as a bat*, *to let the cat out of the bag* and *to give a hard time*. The least number of correct answers had sentences 2, 7, and 9 with the idioms *water off a duck's back*, *storm in a teacup*, and *white lie*.

Table 4 below shows the number of correct answers by the students in exercise three. The overall percentage of the completed exercises, which was calculated by adding together the correct answers, then multiplying by 100 and divided by the number of possible correct answers, is also presented in the table.



Idiom	Correct responses
<i>1 to be on cloud nine</i>	9
<i>2 storm in a teacup</i>	7
<i>3 dark horse</i>	9
<i>4 blind as a bat</i>	8
<i>5 to let the cat out of the bag</i>	8
<i>6 behind my back</i>	11
<i>7 water off a duck's back</i>	7
<i>8 to give a hard time</i>	8
<i>9 white lie</i>	7
<i>10 to not lift a finger</i>	11
<i>11 black sheep</i>	12
<i>12 life is not a bed of roses</i>	12
Total	119/144
	(75%)

Table 4. Number of correct answers from task 3.

The focus of the worksheet was to show if students remember the idioms and are able to use them in different exercises. Therefore, any grammatical mistakes were disregarded, and the answer was considered correct as long as an appropriate idiom was used.

#### 2.5.4 Discussion of worksheet and questionnaire results

In addition to enabling the students to share their opinion about the created study cards, the students had a worksheet to complete that would show if they had acquired the idioms presented in those cards. The findings discussed here are based on their relevance to the

research question – to demonstrate whether *Spark 4* student' book (Evans & Dooley 2011) can be supplemented to enrich students' access to different idiom learning activities and learning material.

The results in the first two tasks of the worksheet showed that the students, with the help of the study cards, were able to match and choose correct idioms based on the context. However, several students wrote in the questionnaire that they were familiar with the idioms prior to using the study cards; the author cannot attribute the high rate of correct answers to the study cards alone. In addition to that, we need to consider the students' answers to the question following the worksheet, where students mentioned discussion of the idioms as the most helpful way of the idiom learning.

In the final task of the worksheet, the students had to demonstrate correct idiom acquisition. Only two of the idioms were used correctly by all students – *life is not a bed of roses* and *the black sheep*. If we consider the answers to the questionnaire, then several students wrote that the image of the black sheep helped them to memorise and understand the idiom better; hence this could possibly be regarded as the defining factor in the results of this question. *Life is not a bed of roses* was thoroughly discussed and explained with the learners in the last lesson when the study cards were introduced to the students. The high number of correct answers can be attributed to the fact that in the open question that followed the worksheet, students were invited to think about what helped them to complete the worksheet. The most often answer was that general discussion of the idioms helped the most. This fact could also be observed in the answers to the rest of the questions in the last task, where several students compiled sentences very similar to the ones discussed during the previous lesson. For example, the teacher used one of the students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to explain the idiom *dark horse*. There is a girl who is very quiet, and she recently had an exhibition of her paintings in the school, but no one in her class was aware of her drawing abilities. In

addition to that, the sentence of this idiom on the study card was also connected to drawing – *she is such a dark horse – I had no idea she painted that picture*. As a result, there were five students who wrote that sentence on the worksheet. A similar situation was with *the black sheep*, where four students wrote sentences about their families, as it was the sentence on the study cards, and it was mentioned during the discussion during the last lesson.

The idioms with the least number of correct answers were *storm in a teacup*, *water off a duck's back*, and *white lie*. All these idioms are figurative, and perhaps that is the reason for such low results. It is likely that these are the difficulties that several researchers (Gibbs 1980, 1986, Kecskes 2000, Cieslicka 2006, Vasiljevic 2012) mention that even if learners understand individual words of the idiom, they may fail to understand the figurative meaning. And even if they do understand the figurative meaning, they are still likely to rely on their mother tongue's conceptual system when processing the input of a foreign language. Another reason could be that the meaning of these phrases in L2 is quite different from L1. As it was stated in the first chapter of the paper, where findings by Zyzik (2009) state that the closer the meaning in L1 and L2, the easier it is for learners to memorise. However, it was a conscious choice of the author to include some idioms that are not identical in both languages.

Based on the analysis of the results of the questionnaire and the worksheet, it can be concluded that overall, students found the study cards as a helpful resource in the idiom understanding and retention. However, the visual part of the study cards did not prove to be the most important. As it became evident from the answers of the students that general discussion of the idioms was of the greater help. Nevertheless, having images on the study cards was still regarded as somewhat helpful. Thus, the answer to the main research question of this paper is that visual elements of the learning material are helpful only as a complementary aid to other aspects included in using those study cards. The results of the

questionnaire support the findings in the first chapter of the thesis: combined methods in idiom learning are the best way to teach idioms. Considering the second research question, if the gap in the coursebook teaching of idiomatic expressions can be filled, it can be assumed that indeed it can with the help of those study cards. The students' responses show that they like using the cards and they found them helpful. Thus, the cards can be used to liven up the idiom teaching.

## **2.6 Discussion**

The aim of this thesis was to create a study material that would complement the *Spark 4* (Evans & Dooley 2011) coursebook in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and that would possibly help learners to remember and learn idioms better. The author of this thesis wanted to find out whether visually aided learning material promotes and makes it easier for learners to remember and learn the idioms. Another purpose was to establish if this created material could help to fill the gap in the coursebook teaching of idiomatic expressions.

The author of this thesis would like to remind that prior to the introduction of the study cards, there was a discussion with the students about what idioms are, where the teacher, together with the students, gave some examples of different idioms in English and Estonian different from the ones on the study cards so that the students would be aware of what to expect from the study cards.

Based on the answers to the first question of the questionnaire, where ten out of twelve students, which is 83%, responded that learning new idioms is easy for them, it can be assumed that learners do not find learning idioms too difficult. However, keeping in mind that their textbook lacks any exercises on idioms, it can be presumed that they do not

encounter idioms that often, and therefore their opinion is most likely based on their average ability to learn English because the incidental acquisition of idiomatic expressions is highly unlikely (Vasiljevic 2012).

The second question was to determine how students usually learn and memorise idioms. The answers gave insight into what can be changed and how students can be guided in the way they learn the idioms. The results showed that seven out of twelve simply memorize the idiom. However, the long-term effect of that method has been proved to be ineffective because learners need not only memorise the expression but understand its literal and figurative meaning as well (Vasiljevic 2012:77). Two students said that they translated the idiom into Estonian, and that helped them to memorise it. However, this way of idiom acquisition can potentially be hindered, as learners tend to rely on L1 conceptual systems when they process the input of L2 and may understand the literal meaning in L2 before the figurative one (Gibbs 1980, 1986, Kecskes 2000, Cieslicka 2006, Vasiljevic 2012). It also implies to the answers of another two students, who stated that they tend to learn the words of the idiom to understand it.

Question three invited the students to answer whether using the study cards helped in the idiom retention. That question was an important one for the author, as it gave an understanding of students' attitudes towards the study cards and their possible use in the future. Since majority of the students found the study card helpful, it can be assumed that the gap in the textbook idiom teaching can be filled, especially if we take into account that focused, intentional learning form word cards can quickly increase learners' vocabulary (Nation 2001).

Question four was very important for the purpose of the paper, as it determined whether students thought that images helped them in the idiom retention and understanding. Several studies have suggested that using images is efficient in idiom learning (Haber 1970,

Sinatra 1981, Kövesces et al. 2008, Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, Vasiljevic 2013). Thus, the visual part of the study cards was expected to be an important one to benefit the students. The results showed that most of the students did find the images helpful. However, as it will become evident from the last question of the questionnaire, the students did not consider images as the most important and helpful element of the study cards.

The answers to questions five and six support the idea of Boers et al (2007) and Forssten (2021) who suggest that idioms should be discussed during the teaching phase in both, English and the mother language. The students responded that it helps them a lot when they translate idioms into Estonian. On the other hand, Boers et al (2007) recommend discussing the origin of the idiom also. Szczepaniak and Lew (2011) add that results could be better if there is an accompanying image that depicts the idiom when a discussion occurs. From the answers of the students, it can be concluded that perhaps the discussion of the origin of the idioms is not the most important aspect of idiom learning for this group of students.

The answers to question seven back up the suggestions of several researchers (Irujo 1986, Liu 2008, Zyzik 2009, Forssten 2021) regarding what idioms should be chosen for L2 teaching materials: they mention frequency, transparency, and how similar they are to L1 idioms. Several students reported that if an idiom has a similar meaning in Estonian, it is easier to remember it e.g., *skating on thin ice*, *the apple does not fall far from the tree*, *water off a duck's back*. They also mentioned that the shorter the idiom is, the easier it is to remember e.g., *mouse potato*.

Next two questions were to help to gain an understanding of whether the images chosen for the study cards were helpful or on the contrary, made it more difficult to understand and retain the meaning of the idioms. All students reported that there were at least some images that helped them. The most common idioms mentioned were *the black*

*sheep; the apple of the eye; like father, like son; white lie; mouse potato; skating on thin ice; to feel blue.* There were three images that students mentioned as not helpful and that they would change: *to give a hard time, to bring home the bacon, and not lift a finger.* The present data support the theory of Boers et al (2007) that the idiom accompanying images should be as literal as possible so that learners have no difficulty understanding them. Thus, if the cards are to be used in the future, the images need to be replaced.

The final question investigated students' opinions if there was anything that they would change about the study cards. The results show that most students found the cards interesting and helpful and that the number of idioms could be increased.

It should be mentioned that the students had one extra question that followed the last exercise of the worksheet. It was an open question that inquired into what aspect of the study cards helped them to complete the worksheet or if they helped at all. The results of the answers show that as many as 66% of the students, eight out of twelve, found the general discussion of the idioms helpful. Additionally, six out of twelve stated that discussing the idioms in Estonian helped them. The results of students' opinions are very similar to the findings of Vasiljevic (2011) and Forssten (2021) whom both conclude that discussion of the idioms in one's mother tongue is beneficial.

It is important to note that the opinions of some students changed after completing the worksheet. If in the first part of the questionnaire, ten students said that images helped them to memorise the idioms, then in the final question, after the worksheet, only five students wrote that images helped. Similarly, ten students wrote that general discussion of the idiom helped in the first part of the questionnaire, and only eight found it helpful after completing the worksheet. The discussion of the idioms in Estonian was mentioned as helpful by ten students in the first part, and only six students mentioned it in the final question. Perhaps, with this group of students, the suggestions of Liu (2017:121) should be considered, where

he says that learners should develop the habit of noticing idioms in everyday use and write them down together with their meaning.

The results of the last question show that the images on the study cards were not the most important element for the students. Thus, the author of this thesis can conclude that even though the visually aided study cards can be used to enrich the idiom learning because the research shows that such cards have a positive impact on the idiom retention rate Szczepaniak & Lew (2011) However, the image part of the study cards is not that helpful on its own and general discussion in both languages is required to support the visual element.



## Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to develop visually aided study cards for idiom learning and find out whether this material will support, promote, and make easier the acquisition of the idioms and if it can be used as complementary study material for the main textbook *Spark 4* (Evans & Dooley 2011) in grade 8. In order to achieve it, the author of this thesis studied the National Curriculum for Basic School (2011) and identified the gap in the textbook exercises on idiom learning to state the reasons for the development of this learning material.

The thesis begins by stating the importance of knowing idioms as they are very frequent in English, and they help to make the language more colourful and enhance it aesthetically. It continues with the definitions of idioms and addresses the issues of teaching idioms in an EFL classroom. An idiom can be understood as a combination of several words that have a meaning that cannot be derived from the meanings of its individual words (Swinney & Cutler 1979, Vasiljevic 2001). Idioms can be opaque, transparent, and semitransparent. All idioms are considered figurative in their meaning. Kövecses (2000:1617) states that the meaning of most idioms involves three aspects: general, specific, and connotative meaning, and they need to be explained to the learners when introducing new idioms.

The research in chapter one states that it is crucial for teachers to understand the factors that make idiom acquisition easier for their students, as only then can successful learning occur (Liu 2017). Boers et al. (2007:56) suggest a certain procedure for teachers when figurative expressions are introduced: students, with the help of teachers, discuss possible meanings and the background of the idioms, where teachers refine or rectify their explanations. In another study, Boers (2008) suggests using images along with a discussion

of the etymological background of idioms. This idea is also backed up by Szczepaniak and Lew (2011), who say that using images that represent the literal meaning of the idioms results in better idiom retention and acquisition.

The importance of the mother tongue was presented next. Several studies show that the mother tongue is a vital element in idiom learning (Irujo 1986, Cooper 1999, Charteris-Black 2002, Vasiljevic 2011, Liu 2017, Forssten 2021). Students use L1 as the first strategy to comprehend idioms, and they should be encouraged to use their mother tongue when discussing the origin and meaning of idioms, as it will aid in the retention of the idioms.

The chapter continued with findings regarding using images in idiom learning. Several researchers (Haber 1970, Sinatra 1981, Kövecses 2008, Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, Vasiljevic 2013) state that using images in FL learning helps the learners to memorise new words and expressions. In the experiments carried out by Kövecses (2008) and Szczepaniak and Lew (2011), where students had picture-equipped material, it became apparent that the use of those images resulted in better retention of the idioms.

Chapter two conducted the analysis of the expected learning outcome mentioned in NCBS (2011) and the idiom exercises, or their lack of, in the textbook *Spark 4* (Evans & Dooley 2011) to formulate the reasons for the development of the study cards. The results of the analysis of the textbook and the national curriculum, along with the ones from the first chapter, suggest that the idiom study cards need to include different kinds of aspects of idiom learning: learners need to know the meaning of the idioms in their mother tongue, they need to be able to discuss their origin, and there should be an image depicting the meaning of the idiom. This chapter also described the process of selecting the idioms and the images for the study cards. It was followed by an explanation of the methodology used for their piloting and evaluation of the students' feedback, the results of the worksheet, and the interview.

The students' responses showed a positive perception of the study cards, which helped to answer one of the research questions of this thesis – that those cards can be used as complementary study material for the main textbook in grade 8. The results also helped to answer the second research question – the visual elements of the study cards did not prove to be the most important aspect of idiom learning. The students found the discussion of the idioms more effective in idiom learning and retention.

The author of this thesis admits that due to a limited number of participants in the case study, the results cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, the study cards were assessed to be suitable by the students of grade 8 for idiom learning and hopefully serve their purpose in the classroom.

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## Appendix 1 Idiom topics

Topic	Idiom items
<b>Home and Family</b>	The apple doesn't fall far from the tree; like father, like son.
<b>Feelings and emotions</b>	Be over the moon; be on cloud nine; to feel blue; like water off a duck's back
<b>Technology, Work &amp; Business</b>	Mouse potato; get your wires crossed; reinvent the wheel; busy as a bee; take the bull by the horns;
<b>Accidents and disasters</b>	skating on thin ice; a storm in a teacup,
<b>Art</b>	Get the picture; draw the line; white lie; the black sheep of the family.
<b>Social problems and Human Relationships</b>	Dark horse; not lift a finger; see eye to eye; give sb a hard time; a let the cat out of the bag; hands are tied
<b>Health and Body</b>	Behind my back; on the tip of one's tongue; the apple of one's eye; blind as a bat.
<b>Life &amp; Living</b>	Bring home the bacon; Life is not a bed of roses; living on the breadline

## Appendix 2 Translation of the idioms

- Apple of the eye – kellegi silmatera
- A dark horse – must hobune, tundmatu isik
- A storm in a teacup – kärbsesest elevanti tegema
- Be over the moon – rõõmust hüppama
- Black sheep of the family – must lammas
- Behind one's back – kellegi seljataga, kellegi eest salaja
- Blind as a bat – pime kui kana, poolpime.
- Bring home the bacon – raha koju tooma
- Busy as a bee – usin kui mesilane
- Draw the line – piiri tõmbama
- Get the picture – asjast selget pilti saama
- Get your wires crossed – juhtme kokku ajama.
- Give somebody a hard time – kellelegi tüli tegema, raskusi tekitama.
- Hands are tied – käed on seotud
- Let the cat out of the bag – saladust välja lobisema
- Life is not a bed of roses – elu pole meelakkumine, pole lust ja lilepidu!
- Like water off a duck's back – nagu hane selga vesi
- Mouse potato – nutisõitlane
- Not to lift a finger – ei liiguta sõrmegi
- On the tip of one's tongue- keele peal olema
- Reinventing the wheel – jalgratast leiutama
- See eye to eye – kellegagi täiesti ühel nõul olema
- Take the bull by the horns – härjal sarvist võtma
- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree – käbi ei kuku kännust kaugemale – like father, like son
- To be in the breadline – Peost suhu elama, vaevu ära elama, tasuta toidu järjekord
- To be on cloud nine – õnnemäe tipus olema
- To skate on thin ice – libedal jääl kõndima, ohtlikus vüi ebamugavas olukorras olema.
- White lie – hädavale, süütu vale

### Appendix 3 Origin of the idioms

A white lie – a harmless lie. Most dictionaries state that the term originated in the 1740s. It refers to the idea that white is good and pure, and black is the polar opposite of it. However, some sources state that the first use of the term can be traced back to a letter that was written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The writer states:

Mouse potato - a person who spends a great deal of time using a computer. The idiom got its meaning from the *couch potato*.

Reinventing the wheel - to waste time trying to do something that has already been done successfully by someone else. Most often, the idiom is used as an admonishment against wasting time and effort. The term *reinvent the wheel* dates back to the 1970s and was often used as a business and advertising metaphor.

To live on the breadline - The 'breadline' is the situation where you are just able to feed yourself and your family. If you had any less, you would go below the breadline and not be able to survive.

To be on cloud nine – to be very happy. In the 1896 edition of the International Cloud Atlas, clouds were assigned numerical orders. The highest cloud was given the number 9. It is the highest reaching cloud and rises up to 10km into the sky. Thus, being on top of it would mean that you are, in a sense, “on top of the world.”

Get your wires crossed - If people get their wires crossed, they misunderstand each other, especially when making arrangements.

Black sheep - Someone who is the black sheep doesn't fit into a group or family because their behaviour or character is not good enough.

Bring home the bacon - A person who brings home the bacon earns the money that a family lives on.

See eye to eye – expression from the Bible. When you agree with someone.

To lift a finger – expression for the Bible about who do not do anything to improve the situation.

Bed of roses – old English expression, first time found in a poem by Christopher Marlowe in 1599.

Apple doesn't fall far from the tree - the proverb is difficult to date and to pin down the origin of. All of the early uses of 'the apple never falls far from the tree' in English refer

to it as a translation from one of several different European languages. For example, the earliest use of the proverb in English is found in Benjamin Thorpe's translation of Rasmus Rask's *Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue*, published in 1830.

Like father like son – comes for the Latin expression *Qualis pater, talis filius*.

To be over the moon – comes from a 16<sup>th</sup> century nursery rhyme “hey Diddle, Diddle!

To feel blue - a phrase coined from a custom among many old deepwater sailing ships. If the ship lost the captain or any of the officers during its voyage, she would fly blue flags and have a blue band painted along her entire hull when returning to home port.

To be a busy bee – the phrase originates from something that bees are known for: being busy and hard working.

Skating on thin ice - the phrases *skating on thin* and *on thin ice* came into use in the 1800s and allude to the fact that ice that is too thin to support someone's weight will break and cause the skater to fall into the water.

Storm in a teacup - both idioms a *tempest in a teapot* and a *storm in a teacup* seem to have originated in Scotland in the early half of the 1800s.

Dark horse - this was originally horse racing expression. A dark horse was one that little was known about and so and was difficult to place odds on. The figurative use later spread to other fields and has come to apply to anyone who comes under scrutiny but is previously little known.

To take the bull by the horns - The saying undoubtedly originated in America, where it was a common but risky job to struggle with bulls. Controlling a bull was a part of rancher's everyday working life throughout west America and was often done for entertainment at festivals.

To get the picture – to understand something completely.

Blind as a bat - when someone has a faulty vision, we can allude to it as blind as a bat. Talking about its origin it comes in the class of idioms derived from animals. This is a figure of speech that is based on the assumption that bats cannot see properly.

To let the cat out of the bag – the phrase referred to is the *cat o' nine tails*, which was used to flog ill-disciplined sailors. Again, this has sufficient historical record to be at least possible. The cat o' nine tails was widely used and was referred to in print many years prior to the first use of 'let the cat out of the bag'. The 'nine tails' part of the name derives from the

three strands of cord that the rope lashes were made from. Each of the cords was in turn made from three strands of string. When unbraided a piece of rope separated into nine strings. The 'cat' part no doubt alluded to the scratches that the knotted ends of the lash made on the victim's back, like those from a cat's claws.

To draw the line - It probably came to court from France. In the early days, lines were drawn to establish the boundaries of the court. By as early as the middle of the eighteenth century the idiom, "to draw a line" was used to mean establishing a limit for something.

On the tip of my tongue - the origin of this phrase is uncertain. It might have come from the psychological phenomenon named *Tip of the tongue (TOT)*. People experiencing this phenomenon are able to recall a few of the things regarding the actual thing they are trying to remember.

Water off a duck's back - Used since the early 1800's, the expression alludes figuratively to the fact that the oils in the feathers of ducks' cause water to run straight off their backs without the ducks getting wet.

Apple of an eye - the idiom "apple of one's eye" actually refers to the pupil of the eye. In ancient times, the pupil was believed to be a round, solid object comparable to an apple. Since the pupil is essential to vision, it was held to be something very precious. Thus, when you call someone the "apple of your eye," you are telling them that they are cherished.

Hands are tied - According to the American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, this idiom was first recorded in print in 1642. It alludes figuratively to having one's hands physically restrained because they were bound by someone else.

## Appendix 4 Students questionnaire

Please select the most accurate answer and write some other comments.

1. Do you find learning and memorizing new idioms difficult?

Very difficult. Difficult. I memorize them quickly and easily.

2. How do you usually memorise idioms?

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3. Do these study cards help you to understand the idioms better?

No, it is still difficult. A little bit. Yes, they help me a lot.

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4. Do the images on the cards help you to memorise the idioms easier?

No, it is still difficult. A little bit. Yes, they help me a lot.

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5. Does discussing the idioms in Estonian help to understand and memorize them better?

No, it is still difficult. A little bit. Yes, it helps me a lot.

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6. Does discussing the origin of the idioms help to understand and memorise the idioms better?

No, it is still difficult. A little bit. Yes, it helps me a lot.

---



7. Are there some idioms that were easier to remember? If so, which ones and why?

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8. Were there some images that helped you to understand the idiom better? If so, which ones and why?

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9. Were there some images that made it more difficult for you to memorise the idiom? If so, which one and why?

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10. If there is anything that you would change about the study cards, what would that be?

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11. What helped you to remember the idiom when completing the worksheet? Did you remember the image? The discussion of the idiom in Estonian? Discussion of the origin of the idiom? Anything else?

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## Appendix 5 Worksheet

### 1. Match the idiom to their meaning

- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. To be over the moon        | 1. Nutisõitlane                 |
| b. Mouse potato               | 2. Leiva lauale tooma           |
| c. Take the bull by the horn  | 3. Asjast selget pilti saama    |
| d. To live on the breadline   | 4. Olema ühel nõul              |
| e. Get the picture            | 5. Saladust välja lobisema      |
| f. See eye to eye             | 6. Käbi ei kuku kännust kaugele |
| g. Bring home the bacon       | 7. Peost suhu elama             |
| h. Let the cat out of the bag | 8. Võtma härjal sarvest         |
| i. To get wires crossed       | 9. Hüppama õnnest               |
| j. Like father like son       | 10. Ajada juhtmed kokku         |

### 2. Fill in the gaps with the correct idiom

Draw the line, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, to reinvent the wheel, to feel blue, to be busy as a bee, skating on thin ice, to get the picture, on the tip of my tongue, the apple of the eye, hands are tied.

1. He can't expect you to work for free at the weekend. You need to talk to him and .....
2. It is really quite easy, you do not need .....
3. It was a sad autumn day and she was ..... because she missed him very much.
4. I don't know how she does it. She has five kids and three jobs, she is always.....
5. You need to explain it better so that they .....
6. What was his name?! I don't remember, but it is .....
7. He loves his daughter so much, she is his .....
8. I can't do anything to help you .....
9. He looks exactly like his mother, it's true what they say .....

10. You will get in trouble for being late all the time. You are .....  
..... with your boss.

**3. Write sentences using those idioms.**

1.To be on cloud nine

.....

2. Storm in a teacup

.....

3.Dark horse

.....

4.Blind as a bat

.....

5.To let the cat out of the bag

.....

6. Behind my back

.....

7.Water off a duck's back.

.....

8. To give a hard time

.....

9.White lie

.....

10.To lift a finger

.....

11.Black sheep

.....

12.Life is not a bed of roses

.....

What helped you to remember the idiom when completing the worksheet? Did you remember the image? The discussion of the idiom in Estonian? Discussion of the origin of the idiom? Anything else?

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**To be the  
black sheep  
of my family**



**White lie**



**Olla must  
lammas**



**Süütu vale**



**I have always  
been the black  
sheep of my  
family, they  
love comedies,  
I love horror  
movies.**



**It was just a  
little white lie,  
it doesn't  
really matter.**



**Ma olen alati  
must lammas  
olnud meie  
peres, neile  
meeldivad  
komöödiad, aga  
mulle õudukad.**



**See oli väike  
süütu vale, sel  
pole tähtsust.**



**To lift a  
finger**



**To give a  
hard time**



**Liigutada  
sõrme**



**Tülitama**



**He is so lazy,  
never lifts a  
finger around  
the house.**



**I don't like my  
new boss, he is  
giving me a  
hard time.**



**Ta on nii laisk,  
et ei liiguta  
sõrmegi kodus.**



**Mulle ei meeldi  
mu uus ülemus,  
ta kogu aeg  
tülitab mind.**

LIKE WATER OFF  
A DUCK'S BACK



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Water off a  
duck's back**

MY HANDS  
ARE TIED



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Hands are  
tied**

LIKE WATER OFF  
A DUCK'S BACK



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Hane selga  
vesi**

MY HANDS  
ARE TIED



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Käed on  
seotud**

LIKE WATER OFF  
A DUCK'S BACK



IDIOMLAND.COM

**He didn't  
really care, it  
was water off  
a duck's back.**

MY HANDS  
ARE TIED



IDIOMLAND.COM

**I can't do  
anything about  
it, my hands  
are tied.**

LIKE WATER OFF  
A DUCK'S BACK



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Tal oli ükskõik,  
nagu hane  
selga vesi.**

MY HANDS  
ARE TIED



IDIOMLAND.COM

**Ma ei saa  
midagi sinna  
parata, mu käed  
on seotud.**



**Behind  
my back**



**On the tip  
of my  
tongue**



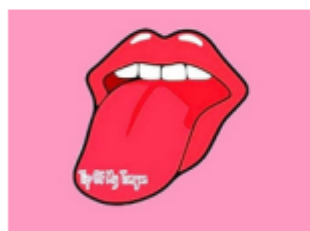
**Minu  
seljataga**



**Keele peal**



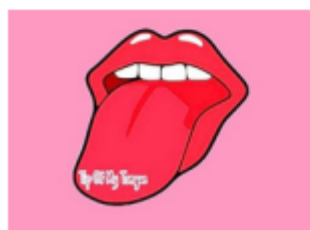
**They always  
gossip behind  
my back.**



**His name is  
on the tip of  
my tongue.**



**Nad alati  
räägivad  
minust mu  
seljataga.**



**Ta nimi on  
mul keele  
peal.**





**To draw  
the line**



**To let the  
cat out of  
the bag**



**Tõmbama  
piiri**



**Lobiseda  
saladuse  
välja**



**That's it, I am  
going to draw  
the line about  
working extra  
hours for free.**



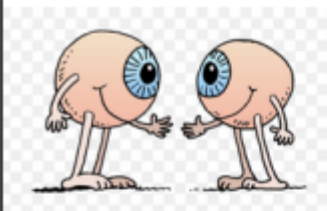
**Everyone  
knows it now,  
somebody let  
the cat out of  
the bag.**



**Mulle aitab,  
ma tõmban  
piiri tasuta  
ületunde  
tegemisele.**



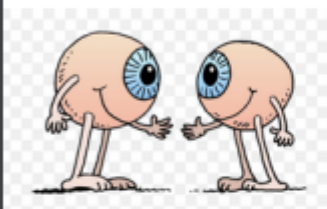
**Kõik teavad  
seda nüüd,  
keegi lobises  
saladuse välja.**



**To see eye  
to eye**



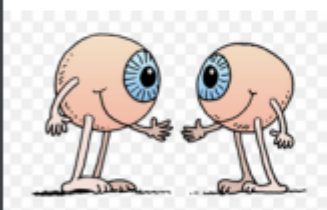
**Blind as  
a bat**



**Olla täiesti  
ühel nõul**



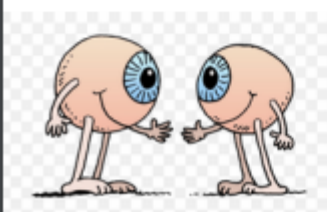
**Pime nagu  
kana**



**I like my new  
boss, we  
really see eye  
to eye.**



**He can't see a  
thing, he is  
blind as a bat.**



**Mulle meeldib  
minu uus  
ülemus, me  
oleme täiesti  
ühel nõul.**



**Ta ei näe  
midagi, pime  
nagu kana.**



**To get the  
picture**



**To take the  
bull by the  
horns**



**Saama  
asjast aru**



**Võtma  
härjal  
sarvest**



**Ok, I get  
the picture  
now.**



**I took the bull  
by the horns  
and made the  
necessary  
changes.**



**Hästi, nüüd  
ma sain  
asjast aru.**



**Ma võtsin  
härjal sarvest  
ja tegin  
vajalikke  
muudatusi.**



**Breadline**



**Dark  
horse**



**Elada  
peost  
suhu**



**Must  
hobune**



**When I was a  
student, I was  
so poor that I  
was almost  
living on a  
breadline.**



**She is such a  
dark horse - I  
had no idea she  
had painted that  
picture.**



**Kui ma olin  
üliõpilane,  
ma olin nii  
vaene, et  
elasin peost  
suhu.**



**Ta on must  
hobune - ma ei  
teadnud, et  
tema joonistas  
selle pildi**



**Storm in a  
teacup**



**Skating on  
thin ice**



**Kärbsest  
elevanti  
tegemine**



**Kõndida  
libedal  
jääl**



**The whole  
matter is  
a storm in  
a teacup.**



**He is late  
again, he is  
really skating  
on thin ice  
with his boss.**



**Kogu see  
asi on  
kärbsest  
elevanti  
tegemine.**



**Ta jäi jälle  
hiljaks, ta  
tõesti kõnnib  
libedal jääl oma  
ülemusega.**





**To get  
wires  
crossed**



**To be busy  
as a bee**



**Ajada  
juhtmed  
kokku**



**Olla usin  
nagu  
mesilane**



**I thought we were  
going shopping  
and Maria  
thought we were  
going to see a  
movie, we totally  
got our wires  
crossed.**



**She is busy as  
a bee with  
this new  
project.**



**Ma arvasin, et me  
lähme shoppama,  
aga Maria arvas,  
et me lähme filmi  
vaatama, me  
täiesti ajasime  
juhtmed kokku.**



**Ta on usin  
nagu mesilane  
uue projekti  
kallal.**



Oh so blue...

**To feel  
blue**



**Mouse  
potato**



Oh so blue...

**Olla  
väga  
nukker**



**Nutisõitlane**



Oh so blue...

**I was  
feeling blue  
after he  
left me.**



**He is always  
on his  
computer.  
He is a real  
mouse  
potato.**



Oh so blue...

**Ma olin  
väga nukker,  
kui ta mind  
maha jättis.**



**Ta on alati  
arvutis,  
tõeline  
nutisõitlane.**



**To be over  
the moon**



**To be  
on cloud  
nine**



**Hüppama  
õnnest**



**Olla  
seitsmendas  
taevas**



**He was over  
the moon  
because of his  
exam results.**



**He was on cloud  
nine after  
winning the  
competition.**



**Ta hüppas  
õnnest eksami  
hinne pärast.**



**Ta oli  
seitsmendas  
taevas,  
kui ta võitis  
võistluse.**





Like father, like son.

**Like father  
like son**



**Apple doesn't  
fall far  
from the tree.**



Like father, like son.

**Käbi ei kuku  
kännust kaugele**



**Käbi ei kuku  
kännust  
kaugele.**



Like father, like son.

**He is as smart as  
was his dad, like  
father like son.**



**She is just like  
her mum.  
Well, the Apple  
doesn't fall far  
from the tree.**



Like father, like son.

**Ta on sama tark,  
kui ta isa.  
Käbi ei kuku  
kännust kaugele.**



**Ta on täpselt  
nagu ta ema.  
Käbi ei kuku  
kännust  
kaugele.**



**To bring  
home the  
bacon**



**To reinvent  
the wheel**



**Tooma  
raha koju**



**Jalgratast  
leiutama**



**In their family  
she brings  
home the  
bacon.**



**It is very  
easy, don't  
reinvent the  
wheel.**



**Nende peres  
tema toob  
raha koju.**



**See on väga  
lihtne, ole  
vaja  
jalgratast  
leiutama  
hakata.**



**Bed of roses**



**Apple of  
the eye**



**Lust ja  
lillepidu**



**Silmatera**



**For him life  
has never  
been a bed  
of roses.**



**She is her  
father's apple  
of the eye.**



**Tema jaoks  
elu pole  
kunagi  
olnud lust ja  
lillepidu.**



**Ta on tema  
isa silmatera.**

# RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Olga Sturm

Complementary Idiom Learning Material for Year 8 in Estonian Basic School

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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on koostada õppekaardid idioomide õpetamiseks Eesti üldhariduskoolide põhikooliastmes õppivatele õpilastele, mida saaks kasutada täiendavana materjalina Spark 4 (2011) õpikuga idioomide õpetamisel ja selgitada välja, kas piltide kasutamine idioomide õpetamisel aitab õpilastel paremini aru saada ja meelde jätta inglise keelsed idioomid.

Töö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest peatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses kirjeldatakse uurimistöö teema olulisust, autori isiklikku motivatsiooni ja lõputöö struktuuri. Esimeses peatükis analüüsitakse varasemaid uurimusi idioomide õpetamise teemal. Lisaks tutvustatakse erinevaid idioomide õpetamise meetodeid, kus erilist tähelepanu pööratakse emakeele ja piltide kasutamisele idioomide õpetamisel. Teises peatükis räägitakse kuidas õppekaardid olid loodud. Samuti arutatakse kuidas neid kasutati õpilastega ja milliseid tulemusi saadi õpilastele suunatud küsimustikust ja töölehest, kus õpilased andsid tagasisidet nendele kaartidele. Kokkuvõttes esitatakse uurimuse tulemusi.

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Märksõnad: inglise keele idioomid, idioomide õpetamine, õppekaardid.

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Olga Sturm

11.05.2022