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IDIOM VARIATION IN BUSINESS ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

Abstract

This paper deals with the variation of idioms from sport which are used to talk about competition in business, e.g. *a level playing field*. In business English textbooks they are listed in one form, whereas corpus data show that they occur in two or more lexical and/or syntactic forms. Furthermore, it has been shown that alterations result in a change in the overall meaning of the idiom and that different variation types serve specific functions. In order to explore the variability of idioms included in business English textbooks, we conducted two corpus studies of ten competition idioms. The aim is to show that competition idioms vary lexically and syntactically, and that there may be considerable differences between the textbook form and those in which the idioms occur in the corpora. In addition, we will give a cognitive linguistic account of how different variation types affect the idiomatic meaning and what functions they fulfil. The findings may have implications for teaching figurative language in ESP given that (1) idiom variation presents a challenge to non-native users of English, (2) idioms are frequently creatively exploited in discourse, and (3) idioms are used not only to convey information but also evaluation.

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Key words

idioms, variation, business English, textbook, corpus.

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