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# Idioms in Scots

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**Abstract**

Despite much research and a great variety of literature on the subject of idioms, the borders of idiomaticity seem very difficult to define. This thesis aims to study how far prototype theory can assist us in the identification of idiom. By gathering and analysing the characteristics of idioms, it is possible to extrapolate gradience where certain features are more, or less prototypical thereby creating a scale of idioms instead of a clear-cut definition. The Scots material is suggested here as a case study: a language variety that is under-researched. This work analysis idioms on four levels: Function, Structure, Lexical and semantic levels. A methodology for a suggested extension of the idiom section of the Historical Thesaurus of Scots is also presented. Apart from adding to current research in Scots, this thesis also provides methodologies for gradience that can be applied to other languages too.

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## 1. Introduction

### An overview of this thesis

**1.1. This study attempts to clarify the notion ‘idiom’ through an examination of a specific body of material: idioms recorded in the language-variety known as Scots.** *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides an extensive definition for idioms: “A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., used in a distinctive way in a particular language, dialect, or language variety; specifically a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from the meanings of the individual words.” (idiom, n., 1./3.). However, this definition as we shall see begs many questions.

**1.2.** The description above is couched in terms of semantic fields, parts of speech, phrasal structure, tense and interchangeability of constituents. Of these features, however, some are more prototypical of the notion than others; consequently, they may be graded to create a scale of characteristics. In order to demonstrate this gradience, a comparatively under-researched body of material, viz. Scots, is analysed as a case-study, drawing on a previous pilot investigation – part of the *Pilot Historical Thesaurus of Scots* project - that serves as a starting point for this thesis. Through the analysis of examples, a set of Scots idiom-characteristics will be placed on a scale of prototypicality, aiming to create a more precise, ‘cognitive’ definition of the notion ‘idiom’.

### Research questions

**1.3.** Many authors have studied idioms, sometimes referred to as ‘multiple word formations’ (hence MWF), e.g. Katz and Postal 1963, Ch. Fernando 1996, A.P. Cowie 1978 and 1999, J. Ayto 2010, R. Moon 1998 to 2015. Nevertheless, describing the exact parameters of what we call idioms is highly complicated. This thesis addresses the problem of defining idioms, assisted by an analysis of an under-researched language variety, Scots.

**1.4.** The problem of defining idioms leads to the following research questions:

- i. How far can prototype theory assist us in the definition/identification of idioms?
- ii. What are the prototypical characteristics of Scots idioms?

**1.5.** The current thesis seeks a clearer definition of the notion ‘idiom’ through a detailed investigation of the characteristics of Scots idioms, with a view to assisting in the identification of further examples in dictionaries and corpora. The methodology demonstrated here, it is hoped, could be applied to other languages or language varieties. The current work thus contributes to Scots lexicography by extending the list of Scots idioms within the *Pilot Historical Thesaurus of Scots* with some 94 further examples.

### **What is an idiom?**

**1.6.** Present-day English uses many expressions commonly known as ‘idioms’, such as the following phrases, taken from the Oxford English Dictionary: *to blow off steam* (steam, n. 7.d), *to go the extra mile* (mile, n.1 P2.b), *penny for your thoughts* (penny, n. P2.a.) or *on the ball* (ball, n1.P1.o.). But defining the notion ‘idiom’ in a robust way has proven surprisingly difficult. This study is not the first to address the issue of defining what we call idioms; the current research builds upon several previous studies. In some early research, non-compositionality was thought to be the key defining characteristic of the notion, whereby the meaning of the whole expression is not to be arrived at from the meanings of its individual parts. For instance, McGuiness in his article ‘On the systematic aspect of idioms’ (2002) argued that, just like in literal language, aspect is compositional in idioms. In the following year, however, Sheila R. Glasbey (2003) claimed that McGuiness’ theory might be true for most but not all idioms.

**1.7.** In more recent scholarly literature prototype theory, an approach basic to cognitive linguistics whereby a category is defined by its core instantiation, has been used to attempt a clearer understanding of the notion. John Taylor in his monograph *Linguistic Categorisation* (1989) argues that prototype theory (developed by the psychologist Eleanor Rosch) can not only be applied to concrete things, such as furniture or animals, but to linguistic notions as well. The current thesis builds on this insight and draws upon other recent scholarly literature with special reference to Scots idioms.

**1.8.** Modern-day dictionaries provide a good starting-point for discussing the meaning of the word *idiom*. The *Oxford English Dictionary’s* (OED) two senses, one linguistic and another non-linguistic, have been discussed in section 1.1, but important additional insights may be gained through consulting advanced learners’ dictionaries, and here those works that are



most commonly used may be referred to. ‘The British Big Five’ is a phrase commonly adopted by English-as-a-second language (ESL) teachers for the most widely-circulated advanced-learner dictionaries, namely:

- (1) *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (referred as OALD henceforth);
  - (2) *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English for Advanced Learners* (hence LDOCE)
  - (3) *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary* (hence COBUILD)
  - (4) *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (hence CALD), and
  - (5) *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (referred as MED henceforth)
- (Xu and Lou, 2015, p 230).

**1.9.** Since this thesis does not only rely on ‘The British Big Five’ but the OED as well, to establish a clearer understanding of the notion of idioms, I apply the phrase ‘Big Five + One’ (hence BFO) when considering all six dictionaries.

**1.10.** Four components commonly appear in the BFO definitions: (1) idioms are non-compositional, (2) they tend to have syntactic fixity/stability, and (3) they are also a manner of expression in language, as well as a non-linguistic meaning, (4) with reference to art, architecture or music, particular to a period, person or group. I call these four components *definition characteristics*, and they are presented in *Table 1*. The first three linguistic definitions will be the concern of this thesis. Questions asked will be: are these three definition characteristics true for all idioms in practice? And are these three characteristics enough to describe idioms or do we rather need a more complex formula? These are some of the questions this thesis aims to answer.

Table 1. The definition characteristics of 'idiom' in the BFO

	Characteristics	Dictionaries					
		OED	OALD	LDOCE	COBUILD	CALD	MED
1.	Non-compositionality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.	Syntactic fixity/stability	✓				✓	
3.	A particular linguistic usage in language exhibited by a person or a group at a particular time or place	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.	A particular style in art, music or architecture of a period or people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**1.11.** As indicated in Table 1, the dictionary definitions in the BFO agree to a certain extent; they all mention non-compositionality and that an idiom is a particular usage in art and music. However, syntactic fixity is only mentioned in OED and CALD. The reason for this difference is probably because idioms - until quite recently - have been grouped with proverbs, collocations and other MWFs; therefore, the unique characteristics of idioms have not been emphasised adequately before. By examining all these characteristics, it can be concluded that they are true for certain idioms and cannot be applied for others; in other words, some of these features are more prototypical than others. It is also worth noting that features 1 and 2 are formal characteristics of the constructions in question, while 3 and 4 are to do with their contextual functions.

**1.12.** The problem concerning the notion of idioms does not only lie in the slight disharmony of dictionary definitions but also in the imprecision of the explanations. The above-mentioned four characteristics from the BFO definitions are not only true for idioms but can also be characteristics of other MWFs, such as collocations, metaphors, proverbs, sayings and phrasal verbs. Nevertheless, the scale of this thesis does not allow me to offer a

comprehensive comparison of all MWFs, so a working definition of the notion ‘idiom’ is required.

### The working definition of idiom in this thesis

**1.13.** In this thesis, the working definition of idioms is as follows: a conventionalised MWF that is non-compositional and also exhibits some of the characteristics in the list given in Table 2. Modern-day examples are ‘blow off steam’ or ‘go the extra mile’. It is thus possible for idioms to be identified/assessed in terms of their nearness or distance to a prototypical construction exhibiting all the characteristics mentioned.

*Table 2. Possible characteristics of Scots idioms*

<b>No. Possible characteristics of idioms; an idiom can:</b>	
<b>1</b>	contain a transitive verb (and therefore a verb phrase)
<b>2</b>	consist of at least one noun (and therefore a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase)
<b>3</b>	have a minimum of one and a maximum of three parsing phrases
<b>4</b>	are subordinate clauses
<b>5</b>	the constituents of the idioms are polysemous
<b>6</b>	the constituents are unchangeable
<b>7</b>	be descriptive
<b>8</b>	have a figurative meaning

**1.14.** Evidently, the idiom is a very complex notion; it can contain a range of characteristics. Beyond the characteristics flagged in Table 2, other features could also be considered in further research, such as ‘idioms are conventionalised phrases, therefore fossilised and do not change through time’ or ‘the meaning of an idiom might change through time but only toward exaggeration, hyperbolism’. The next section gives an account of some current issues in idiom-studies.

## The evolution of the notion of idioms

**1.15.** The English word *idiom* is related to the French *idiome*, or the Latin *idiōma*. The French word *idiome* has two senses; the first refers to a distinctive form of speech of a particular country, region or people, while the second sense refers to a distinctive style in music, art, architecture and writing. Latin *idiōma*, more specifically, means language or dialect (OED, *idiom*, n.).

**1.16.** The notion of idioms has been studied many times before; however, idiomatic phrases were grouped with other MWFs until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first books that separated idioms from other MWFs was Logan Pearsall Smith's *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English Language*, published in 1925. Pearsall Smith recognises a certain syntactic fixity/stability in idioms by discussing those atypical characteristics which do not seem to follow the laws of grammar, nor the laws of logic. And, from around the middle of the twentieth century onwards, linguists built on this approach by attempting to create a general classification which could be applied to most idioms. Katz and Postal (1963), for instance, studied the transformational grammar of idioms and divided them into two sets: lexical and phrase idioms. Adam Makkai, in his dissertation *Idiom Structure in English* (1972), similarly divided idioms into two different sets: lexemic and sememic. However Makkai also recognised the fuzzy distinction between these categories, and as a solution he created a third category, namely hypersememic idioms which includes semi-idioms viz. phrasal verbs.

**1.17.** Makkai's identification of the fuzzy nature of idiom-categorisation prefigured later scholarship. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English, Verbs with Prepositions and Particles* (1978, Volume I) Cowie and Mackin applied a different approach from their predecessors, when distinguishing idioms from other MWFs, by mapping a range of formulas (such as syntactic and phrasal patterns) to idioms. However, Cowie and Mackin realised that the chosen formulas could be applied to certain idioms, but not to others. They concluded that the borderline between idioms and non-idioms is very fuzzy. Therefore, they classified idiomatic phrases into three groups: idioms, non-idioms and -- the fuzzy area -- semi-idioms (in contrast to the current thesis where the characteristics of idioms make up a scale of idioms instead of groups). Such classifications of idioms were dominated by

structuralist views which demanded clear-cut categorisation even when noting fuzzy boundaries.

**1.18.** However, the current thesis, as already flagged, embraces a different, cognitive approach based on prototype theory, which potentially addresses and solves the question of fuzzy boundaries. As discussed in 1.7 above, this theory was first developed in the 1970s by the psychologist Eleanor Rosch. Rosch argued that a 'bird', for instance, can be described most effectively through its most prototypical features, e.g. 'having feathers', 'having wings', or 'being able to fly', even though not all birds have all these characteristics; a penguin for instance is a bird that has feathers, but its wings are more like flippers and it cannot fly. As this example suggests, the second crucial factor in prototype theory is that some elements in the definition of a category have unequal status, i.e. some elements are more prototypical than others (feathers are something all birds have, but clearly in the case of penguins the ability to fly is not a feature).

**1.19.** John Taylor in his book *Linguistic Categorisation* (first published in 1989) stated that prototypical theory can be applied to a range of linguistic phenomena. With reference to colour terms Taylor demonstrates that there is not a defined borderline among notions; for example, there is a scale of colours that includes blue, turquoise and green, but that there is no definite borderline between blue and green. Taylor argues that, as with colours, the same approach can be applied to linguistic categorisation. Taylor quotes Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance', whereby things may be connected by a series of overlapping similarities where no one characteristic is common to all the things being analysed:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, Olympic games and so on. What is common to them all? ... we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. (Taylor2007:42.)

**1.20.** Other scholars have followed similar approaches. For instance, Dirk Geeraerts in his *Diachronic Prototype Semantics* argues that prototypical categories exhibit degrees of typicality, a family resemblance structure; these categories are blurred at the edges and cannot be defined by a single set of criterial attributes (1997: 10-15). To take a simple

example: a participle is part of the paradigm of verbs, but in terms of function it can behave like an adjective. It is therefore on the boundary between two parts of speech.

**1.21.** This approach has been extended to the study of idioms. Rosamund Moon in *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English* (1998) also acknowledges the fuzzy boundary between idioms, collocations and freely generated phrases and points towards a scale of idioms rather than a strict group (2015: 318-337). Chitra Fernando changes the focus from the comparison of idioms and MWFs to idioms and idiomaticity. She argues that idioms are word combinations alongside other types of expressions which are all within the set of idiomaticity (1996: 19-30). Since these phrases sometimes have different characteristics, they add up to a degree of gradience where some expressions are more, others are less idiomatic; in other words, such constructions can be distributed on a scale of idiomaticity.

**1.22.** More recent work has taken the issues of idiom-definition further. Patrick Hanks (2004) says that one common definition of idioms (viz. the construction's meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts) is a generalisation and oversimplification. He presents a model of idiomaticity as part of a theory of norms and exploitations. His theory assumes that words, in themselves, do not carry meanings; however, their patterns do. Words are ambiguous but patterns are unambiguous. Norms are how words are normally used while exploitations are how people exploit norms to be able to say new things (metaphors, word creations). Hanks argues that our brain stores words in isolation, but apart from words, our brain also stores sets of stereotypical patterns. Linguistic behaviour among the same language users is stereotypical, and if the brain stores these patterns, it probably stores phrases not as sets of words but as stereotypical patterns.

**1.23.** Stefanie Wulff approaches the problem of idiom-definition from a user-based approach (2008). According to the speakers' idiomaticity judgements, the more acceptable a modification is considered, the less idiomatic the phrase is thought to be (e.g., 'I see your important point' is more acceptable than 'He took the plunge slowly'). Wulff's work focuses on phrasal constructions within 'construction grammar' (mainly V NP constructions such as 'take a plunge'). She uses the term *idiom* not for a group of phrases (in line with structuralist views on language) but rather as a characteristic that can be given to any construction. She proposes that, on the idiomaticity continuum, there are highly idiomatic constructions (core idioms), detectable by means of corpus-analysis. As she states: Idiomaticity in its entirety is

purely a psychological construct, which is only real in the head of the speaker' (2010: 3) The idiomaticity continuum represents what is available for the speakers; it is up to them what they choose to be salient and what is less so.

**1.24.** Kovecses and Szabo in their *Idioms: A View from Cognitive Semantics* (1996) agree with the definition of idioms as 'linguistic expressions whose overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent parts' (1996: 326). But as idioms are based on conceptual metaphors and metonymies, they suspect there is a systematic conceptual motivation for the meaning of most idioms. They thus posit three aspects to the notion 'idiom':

First, the general meaning of idioms is determined by the 'source domains' that apply to a particular target domain.

Second, more specific aspects of idiomatic meaning are provided by the 'ontological mapping' that applies to a given idiomatic expression.

Third, connotative aspects of idiomatic meaning can be accounted for by 'epistemic correspondences'.

**1.25.** As Kathrin Steyer (2015) says, since electronic tools for the analysis of corpora have emerged, the scale of possibilities for phraseological analysis has widened. Such possibilities are touched upon in this thesis. The current thesis draws on Prototype Theory and presents a scale of idiom characteristics. I accept Cowie, Mackin and Hanks' notion of patterns, not words, carrying meaning. I share Chitra Fernando's idea of idioms having different characteristics with a degree of variability and follow Moon's ideas on how such variation is scalar/gradable (similarly to Stefanie Wulff's idiomaticity continuum).

**1.26.** My work merges the above-mentioned views with Prototype Theory: idioms belong to a fuzzy category, some are more idiomatic (viz. prototypical) while others are less idiomatic (viz. less prototypical). This thesis presents a range of characteristics that idioms can possess. These characteristics are laid out on a scale, ranging from less prototypical idiomatic characteristics to highly prototypical characteristics. As the idiomatic characteristics, the idioms themselves have a degree of variability, hence a scale of idioms is also presented in this thesis.

**1.27.** The current thesis attempts to provide a clearer understanding of the notion of idioms by gathering potential characteristics of idioms, before grading idioms and their characteristics on a scale of one hundred: ranging from the least (grade-score 1) to the most prototypical characteristics and idioms (grade 100). The characteristics used in this research are based on Scots and may vary among languages. The next section introduces Scots idioms and their history.

### **On Scots Idioms**

**1.28.** Scots idioms have mostly been published alongside sayings, proverbs, collocations and Scotticisms (olim ‘Scoticisms’). Many scholars have been intrigued from around the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards (see e.g. Kelly, 1721: iv) by the uniqueness of Scotticisms; many books, small dictionaries and collections of Scots proverbs have been published on the topic. For instance, the very first collection of proverbs was created in the time of the reformation (1500s) by Archbishop James Beaton of Glasgow (Walker, 2000: xi.). And, by 1598, Reverend David Fergusson had gathered an impressive collection of 911 proverbs which was published in 1641, as part of a large work (Walker, 2000: xi).

**1.29.** In 1661, another substantial collection was released, the work of James Carmichael (Walker, 2000: xi.). In 1721 two relevant studies were published: James Kelly’s *A Collection of Scottish proverbs* (Kelly, 1721), and *A Collection of Scots Proverbs* by Allan Ramsay which included – at the date of its publication, the highest number of proverbs yet collected - 2464 phrases (Ramsay, 1750). However, the largest collection of proverbs collected to date was the work of Andrew Cheviot, *Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Popular Rhymes of Scotland* (1896), which included roughly 5000 entries (Walker, 2000: xi.). Alexander Hislop’s *The Proverbs of Scotland* (1870), recognised the need for a new type of collection, and a new way of arranging and searching data; and so Hislop created a thesaurus of 148 categories (Walker, 2000: xiv.). Although the above-mentioned works are titled as books of proverbs, they included a high number of idioms and other MWFs.

**1.30.** One of the most common definition of idioms (viz., a distinctive form of language or dialect, definition characteristic number 3, see *Table 1.*) was recognised by these authors. Moreover, the debate as whether Scots was a dialect of English or a language in its own right left its mark on certain phrases when editors (such as James Kelly) attempted to



anglicise Scots by changing the spellings and even lexemes of proverbs. Undoubtedly, there were also others, such as David Murison, who kept the original forms of Scotticisms and who emphasised that translating such constructions into English might be misleading, as idioms from a particular variety may have connotations which are absent from others (Murison, 1981: 88).

### **On William Graham: the author of *SWB***

**1.31.** Part of this tradition just discussed, and as we shall see a key figure for this thesis, is William Graham. Graham was a nurse, an organist, a poet and an author. He was born in Carluke in 1913, and, after studying at the University of Glasgow, qualified as a teacher at Jordanhill College in 1935. Graham's works are: *That Ye Inherit* (1968), *Twa-Three Sangs and Stories* (1975), *The Scots Word Book* (1977), *The Talking Quiz Book* (1981), *October Sunset* (1986), and *Scorn, My Inheritance* (1997). Graham was also a founder member, president and honorary vice-president of the Scots Language Society as well as the secretary and president of the Ayr Burns Club (Graham and Philp, 1997: vi.). Until the end of his life, Graham continuously extended his remarkable Scots word and phrase collection which was later donated to the Scots Language Society.

### **The pioneer Scots Word Book**

**1.32.** The *Scots Word Book* was first published in 1977 by The Ramsay Head Press; later editions date from 1978 and 1980. As the author says, his book was created for those who do not feel comfortable with the complexity of Jamieson's and Chambers's dictionaries of Scots, or the 10 volumes of SND (Graham, 1977: 7). Graham also tells us the story of the creation of his book; he collected English words with their Scots equivalents for decades, which had grown to a 'fifteen-page monster' (Graham, 1977: 7). With the encouragement of his friends, George Philp and W. Watson Buchanan, the Scots Word Book was published, including sections on *Scots-English*, *Scots Grammar*, *Idiom*, *Spelling* and *Pronunciation*. As this list of sections suggests, the Scots Word Book is hard to classify; it is essentially a linguistic compendium. In his introduction, Graham emphasises that his book is not a dictionary, only a 'handy guide to Scots'; only those words were listed which had been in regular literary or conversational use in the last two centuries. Graham recognised the

importance of idioms by dedicating a whole section to them, saying that these expressions give 'life and character to a language' (1977: 19).

**1.33.** As part of the Scots Word Book, Graham published the first list of Scots idioms, and this list served as the starting point in the idiom research of the *Pilot Historical Thesaurus of Scots* project (see 2.1.). This list consists of 380 phrases and includes many collocations, phrasal verbs and Scotticisms.

## 2. Methodology

### The Pilot Historical Thesaurus of Scots

**2.1.** The *Pilot Historical Thesaurus of Scots* ([www.scotsthesaurus.org.uk](http://www.scotsthesaurus.org.uk)) (referred to as PHiTS henceforth) was the outcome of a project that started in 2014 and was launched in September 2016. Due to the pressures of time and funding, this pilot project could only cover a few categories, such as ‘*weather*’, ‘*sport*’ and ‘*games*’, and a special category ‘*idioms*’; however, in the long term the project as a whole aims to create a semantic categorisation of the entire content of the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (referred to as DSL henceforth). In so doing, PHiTS follows the model of the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (referred to as HTE henceforth) providing new ways to undertake research on Scots vocabulary.

**2.2.** I had the opportunity to work on the PHiTS project and was responsible for the ‘*idioms*’ section. Due to the small scale of this project, and because idioms are not labelled specifically in the Dictionary of the Scots Language, a distinct list of Scots idioms was necessary for this research. The only list of such idioms published hitherto was created by William Graham (within the *Scots Word Book*, referred to as SWB henceforth), and this resource served as the starting point for both the PHiTS section on idioms and for this thesis.

**2.3.** Graham’s list of Scots idioms needed modifications for a credible study: only idioms also recorded in the DSL were kept to create the core of the PHiTS list. Moreover, while searching for Graham’s list of idioms in the Dictionary of the Scots Language, near-synonyms were revealed and so the collection was extended. As a result, the PHiTS list consists of 380 Scots idioms. Table 3 outlines the work-stages involved in creating the PHiTS idiom list.

Table 3. Work stages of the PHITS idiom section

<b>Stage 1</b>	Phrases from the SWB were filtered; idioms were separated from other multiple word formations (MWF henceforth)
<b>Stage 2</b>	The PHITS idioms were mapped onto the <i>DSL</i>
<b>Stage 3</b>	The PHITS idioms were mapped onto the <i>Scots Thesaurus</i> and categories where idioms appeared were recorded
<b>Stage 4</b>	The PHITS idioms were mapped onto the <i>Historical Thesaurus of English</i> and further categories were recorded
<b>Stage 5</b>	A combined data-set was created with the results from stages 2, 3 and 4.

### Stage 1

**2.4.** During stage 1, Scots idioms were collected from the second and third editions of the Scots Word Book. Some of the idioms are non-fossilised collocations e.g. *feelin bit wabbit*, phrasal verb constructions such as *taen on wi*, proverbs e.g. *He'll gie me a haun an he's a man at aa*, or a preposition difference between English and Scots such as *He's angry at me* (opposed to the English *angry with*). These phrases are different from typical idioms that are fossilised (or partially fossilised) expressions, and are shorter than a sentence but longer than a phrasal verb. In stage 1, the idioms were separated from other MWFs and recorded in an Excel table as presented in the Scots Word Book. Table 4 presents those MWFs omitted from the SWB list and not included in the PHITS idiom collection.

Table 4. SWB-list phrases omitted when creating the PHITS idiom collection

No able for	Cruppen doun	Get ane's licks	Taen wi
Five efter ten	Be cried	Creish the luif	Tak a guid bucket
I hae yin an aa	Deil kens!	Made up wi	Tak a rise out o
He'll gie me a haun, an he's a man at aa	Caa a dram	Like ane's meat	Tak inowre
I wad raither dae onieething as ask ye	A drap o the auld kirk	Nae faurer gane than	Tak somebody on
Ask at him what he's ettin to dae	Draw tae	Tak a notion o	Tak the len o
He's angry at me	Dree out ane's life	A strucken oor	Tak til anesel
She's aye at me	Drive on	Pease-brose and pianaes	Tak the haun aff
Auld langsyne	Be easy til	A braw penny	Tak to, of water
The wound's aa better	Hae an ee til	Pitten about	D'ye tell me that!
He was only a bit laddie	Pit somebody's ee out	Play the plug	To a thocht
I'm feelin a bit wabbit	Faa out on	Plunk the schuil	Are you throu?
I feel black affrontit	Faa tae	No worth a preen	Tak a turn
In a blink	Fair ti middlin	I wad raither dae this as that	No a haun's turn
I've never seen the like in aa my born days	The feck o	Rax somebody's neck	Tyne ane's fuit
Ye'll no fin the brither o't / brither it in monie a lang day	In grand fettle	Risin fower	Tyne the gate o
I hae nae brou o this	A fiddler's biddin	An early rise	Tyne the road
It's aa by nou	As fou's a wulk	In room o	Tyne time on
He's by his best	Gae doun the brae	See me that brush	Wait on
I'll drap in on ye i the bygaun	Gie somebody up his fuit	Get shiftit	The waur o
Will ye no byde a wee?	No a haet	The sorrow a scrap	Weir in
A cadger's curse	Hauld in wi	Souk in wi	A wee
Cheek up	Haud up	Steik ane's gab	Weill-dune-tae
Guid Claes	Haud wi	Steik ane's hert	Weill on
Never as much as said "Collie, will ye lick?"	Haud hame	No a steik	Weill tae
Come back on	Haud wide o	Haud the stick owre	No weill
Come o	Steik ane's hert	Stick up to	Dree ane's weird
Come owre	Hing in wi	Stickit minister	In the wey
Come tae	A hungry welcome	Rin like stour	You'll get what-for
Come throu	Fine I ken	Taen on wi	Win owre
Creep in / out	Leese me on	Taen up wi	Win awa
			Birl the wulkies

**2.5.** Graham chose to list idioms in alphabetical order, using both lexical and grammatical words for that purpose; for example, *Aff the gleg* is at the beginning of the list, under letter

A. However, sometimes the English equivalent determines the location in Scots Word Book; thus, *Efter* is placed between *Aff* and *Agley*. Due to his uncertain use of alphabetical order, some phrases are repeated in the SWB list. While the meaning of the repeated phrases sometimes differs (*to gang agley* is recorded as *to go astray* and as *to miscarry*), others do not (*tak the gee* meaning *to take offence, to take the sulks*). Another issue with the Scots Word Book is that words and phrases are recorded with distinct spelling variations (such as *nae ferlie* and *nae ferly*). Due to multiple definitions and spelling variations Graham recorded 12 duplicate idioms in the Scots Word Book (see Table 5); these phrases are only listed once in the PHITS list.

Table 5. Douplicate idioms in the SWB list

Gang agley	Ahint the haun	Come speed	Come the peter owre
Doun i the mou	Dree ane's weird	Nae smaa drink	Tak the gee
Hauld the stick owre	Tak ane's haun aff	Tak something ill out	Tak the len o

## Stage 2

**2.6.** During stage 2, the idioms derived from the Scots Word Book in Stage 1 were checked in the Dictionary of the Scots Language, and their URLs, definition and senses were recorded in the Excel table, as exemplified in Table 7 below. When checking the SWB-derived idioms against DSL, the SWB phrases did not always agree with the dictionary in terms of spelling and precise form; the phrases initially derived from the Scots Word Book were therefore modified in line with the more authoritative records supplied by the Dictionary of the Scots Language.

Table 6. Exemplification of the representation of idioms in PHITS state 2

Idiom	Definition	URL	Sense
never to die o winter	to survive, pull through all difficulties or hardships	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/winter_n1_v">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/winter_n1_v</a>	1. / 2.

**2.7.** Occasionally, the Scots Word Book phrase was only partially listed in the Dictionary of the Scots Language such as *come to the bit* (DSL), cf. *What it comes to the bit naebody cares* (SWB); the DSL usage was therefore chosen when finalising the PHITS list. Very occasionally, the person within the phrase appeared differently in the Dictionary of the Scots Language

from the Scots Word Book, e.g. SWB's *What ails you at...?* was changed to DSL's *What ails one at* in the PHiTS list. In some cases, the DSL offered a slight variation on the SWB form, and the DSL version was recorded in the PHiTS list: *Cry baurley-gummil* (SWB) was therefore replaced by *barla-fumble* (PHiTS). Occasionally the spelling of a SWB idiom is distinct from the spelling in the DSL; for example, SWB's *crap and ruit* is spelt in DSL as *crap and root/reet*, and the latter was therefore chosen for the PHiTS list. Certain phrases involve lexical differences such as *in a crack* (as in the Scots Word Book), *within a crack* in DSL, and thus the latter was chosen for PHiTS. With regard to determiners, there were many differences among the idioms in the Scots Word Book and the Dictionary of the Scots Language, e.g.: *blaw I the lug* (SWB), cf. *blaw in ane's luggis* (DSL), *auld hech how* (SWB) as opposed to *the auld hech how* (DSL). In all such cases, the DSL usage was adopted in the PHiTS list.

### Near-synonyms recorded

**2.8.** The Dictionary of the Scots Language entry corresponding to the Scots Word Book idioms revealed further variations. For example, in the Dictionary of Scots Language entry of *on the bash* (in both the SWB and the DSL lists), *on the jee* is also recorded. Further examples are constructions linked to SWB's (and DSL's) *gee ane's ginger* (SWB): *jow one's ginger*, *gee one's beaver*, *jee/jow one's jundie*, *gee/jow one's jundie*. All such near-synonyms recorded in the Dictionary of the Scots Language have also been included in the PHiTS list. Some SWB idioms are not quite identical to the ones in the DSL; in such cases the DSL equivalents were chosen for the PHiTS list. An example is *no a haet* (SWB), which has been replaced by *the deuce a haet*, *fient the haet* and *deil a hate* in the PHiTS list. Constructions in the Dictionary of the Scots Language with minor variations (such as spelling, derivatives, and the alternation of determiners) were included within the same PHiTS entry; for example: *gude conceit/consaet/consate/conceit*, or *tak (ane) to the fair*. However, if the variations were more major (e.g. in the case of lexical differences including prepositional alternations), the idioms were entered in separate entries within the PHiTS list, such as *keep a calm souch*, *keep a quiet souch*, *keep a sober souch* and *keep a lown souch*. In sum, the following idioms from Dictionary of the Scots Language have been added to the list developed from the Scots Word Book to create the PHiTS idioms' list:

Table 7. Idioms in the PHiTS list from DSL in addition to those from te SWB

auld hech how	drouk the miller	gie laldie	earn saut to ane's kail
back or fore	aff o' one's eggs	at length an' lang	I've seen mysel
back and forret	fa through with (one's) claes	at lang an the last	I saw me
on back o'	fause fa	at lang and length	nae sheep('s) shank bane
on the jee	fout fa	at the lang and the length	keep a quiet souch
fidler's bid	gude fa	at the last an' the lang	keep a sober souch
not to haud nor bin'	shame fa	i' the length o' the lang	keep a lown souch
bind nor haud	pit on a faiple	lang and lent	rab and stow
at the bit	in the faut	look like one's meat	stick and stow
blaw in ane's luggis	faut o'	pit on the high pan	stock and stow
a braw penny	sma' ferlie	lay ane's lugs on ane's neck	stick and stiver
a gey penny	tae to the fore	outower the lugs	stick and stour
be down the brae	tae til the fore	mak a puir mou(th)	stick and stower
gae doon the brae hill	aff ane's fit / feet	pigs and whistles	rap and stow
bring out o'er the coals	gie up the fit	pit the gas in a peep	stab and stow
become guid for	lose the fit	hard putten till	stock and stow
a five-aicht(s) / -er	miss the fit	ill putten till	pit doon a hack
ugly conceit / consaet / consate / concait	slip the fit	hard putten to	haul doon a hack
within a crack	come the gate	ill putten to	get the goo
gie ane's crack(s)	tak gate	sair putten to	tak the goo
root / reet and crap	jee one's beaver	get the road	mak a rue
grease the luif	jee / jow one's jundie	on ane's saft side	hae a' ane's back teeth up
fient the haet	gee /jow one's noddle	up ane's saft side	think lang to
the deuce a haet	do a gank on	saut one's kail	think grete schame
kens faar	gang hale-heidit intae	saut for one's kail	thraw ane's gruntle(s)
doon o' mouth	han(d) to ni(e)v(e)	saut to one's brose	on ane's way to
dree the weird	give one the heave	saut for one's brose	be in the wey o'
dreep a dyke wa'	on the heid o(f)	saut to one's parritch	this while
nae sma' drink	a hunger and a burst	saut for one's parritch	this while o' days
think nae sma' drink o' onesel',	juist na	saut to one's potage	anes and aye
think anesel nae sma drink	juist that na	saut for one'spottage	

### Stage 3

**2.9.** During stage 3, the PHiTS idioms were mapped onto the semantic categories created for the *Scots Thesaurus* (Macleod et al 1990, referred as ST henceforth) as this work provided



potential semantic categories and was based on the Dictionary of the Scots Language. Since the index of the ST does not include MWFs, the constituents of the PHITS idioms listed were used to identify appropriate semantic categories. These referred categories were eye-scanned to find the idiom; however, only a small percentage of idioms were mapped with this methodology. The low representation of idiom can be explained by that the ST was based on the *Concise Scots Dictionary*, which was admittedly a much shorter edition of the Dictionary of the Scots Language. An example of a PHITS idiom's ST semantic category is recorded in Table 9 below.

Table 8. Semantic categorisation of PHITS idiom 40. in the ST

no. of idiom	Idiom	English equivalent	Index	Headword	Category	Name of Category	Name of subcategory	Definition
40	Blaw i the lug	Wheedle	wheedle	lug	15.5.1	15. Character, Emotions, Social Behaviour	5. Social Behaviour 1. Persuasion	Fatter, wheedle, cajole

#### Stage 4

**2.10.** After mapping the PHITS idioms onto the ST, the next step was to map these phrases to the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, referred to as HTE henceforth. Like the Scots Thesaurus, HTE does not label idioms specifically, although, being derived from the OED, it did - like OED itself - include some Scots idioms. The procedure was as follows: first, the Scots idiom was searched for (e.g. *dree one's weird* is in HTOED category 02.05.02.01 | 04 vi), and then any English near-equivalent (e.g. *crook one's little finger* in HTOED category 01.07.02.22.01 vi, for Scots *cock the wee finger*). If the phrase under analysis still could not be matched to any category, it was given the category of the idiom's meaning (*a cadger's curse* in HTOED category 02.02.08.01 | 12.11 n *Unimportance :: that which is unimportant :: worthless*).

#### Stage 5

**2.11.** After completing all these stages, each PHITS idiom was assigned to at least one semantic category. The result of the pilot project was a comprehensive list of Scots idioms, categorised in the manner of a thesaurus. This list of idioms developed for the PHITS project was used as the starting-point of this thesis.

### The ten PHiTS idioms selected for analysis in this thesis

**2.12.** The next stage for the thesis was to create a prototypical scale of idioms and their characteristics. The scale of this thesis did not allow me to analyse all the 380 PHiTS idioms identified; therefore, ten idioms were selected for analysis. As the list of idioms was in an alphabetical order, to avoid potential skewing of results, phrases were selected from across the list. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, 77<sup>th</sup>, 115<sup>th</sup>, 153<sup>rd</sup>, 191<sup>st</sup>, 229<sup>th</sup>, 267<sup>th</sup>, 305<sup>th</sup>, 343<sup>rd</sup>; (hence very 38<sup>th</sup>) PHiTS idiom was selected to be the source of gathering more idioms. The 10 selected idioms can be viewed in appendix 2 and in Table 10.

Table 9. The ten PHiTS idioms selected for this thesis

No. of idiom	Idiom	Definition	DSL URL
1	a(w) ae (w)oo	all the same	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/oo_n1_v1">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/oo_n1_v1</a>
39	blaw in ane's luggis	to flatter, wheedle, cajole	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lug_n">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lug_n</a>
77	get on the crack	to start a conversation	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/crack_n1">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/crack_n1</a>
115	a peeled egg	a rich inheritance	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/egg_n">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/egg_n</a>
153	gang to the gate	set out on a journey	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/gate">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/gate</a>
191	in the heid o(f)	deeply involved in	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/heid_n_adj_v">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/heid_n_adj_v</a>
229	lay ane's lugs on ane's neck	to be crestfallen	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lug_n">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lug_n</a>
267	lose ane's rag	to lose one's temper	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/rag_n1_v1">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/rag_n1_v1</a>
305	souk the laverocks oot o' the lift	to be extremely persuasive	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/souk">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/souk</a>
343	this side of time	in this world, while life lasts	<a href="http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/time">http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/time</a>

### Idioms collected for this thesis

**2.13.** One of the aims of the current thesis was to collect further idioms from the Dictionary of the Scots Language. For the PHiTS project, SWB idioms were searched in the DSL and if the exact idiom could not be found, then a near-synonym was chosen (such as *blaw i the lug* in the SWB was changed for the DSL form, *blaw in ane's luggis*). This methodology was followed in the PHiTS project; however, the methodology of the current thesis is an expansion of that adopted for PHiTS. In the current thesis, instead of selecting only the SWB (or near-equivalent form of the SWB) idiom, for this thesis, all the idioms were pulled out from the ten selected PHiTS idioms' DSL entries (see Table 10.). For example, the DSL entry

of idiom *blaw in ane's lug* also includes *to blaw a cloud*, *blaw a cauld coal*, *blaw the coal*, *blaw the horn*, *blaw you south*, *blaw up the horn*, *mak' a btawn horn o' a thing*. Each of the ten selected PHiTS idioms revealed further idioms except one: *lose ane's rag*. In total, 94 idioms were pulled out from the Dictionary of the Scots Language using this methodology. The current thesis analyses therefore not only the ten selected PHiTS idioms (Table 10.) but also all the 94 further idioms which have been pulled out, hence the total of 104 Scots idioms.

**2.14.** In order to create a prototypical scale of idioms and their characteristics, linguistic analysis was carried out on these 104 idioms. There were four levels of language analysed: function, structure, lexical and semantic. With regard to the function level, the parts of speech of the idioms and the number of constituents were recorded. The structure level focuses on the parsing phrases of Scots idioms. For the lexical level, the descriptive and the figurative senses of Scots idioms are analysed. Finally, the semantic level focuses on the polysemy of these phrases.

### **Grading the characteristics of idioms**

**2.15.** The linguistic analysis was carried out in Excel tables, using tools such as filtering, find and select, and text formulas. One Excel sheet was dedicated to each linguistic level (function, structure, lexical and semantic levels). Column A in each Excel sheet contains the serial number of the idiom (from 1-104), Column B includes the idiom itself (e.g. *a(w) ae (w)oo*), while the rest of the columns deal with each linguistic level in turn, with further subdivisions. Each column is named after its purpose. For example, within the function level, one column is dedicated to each part of speech, thus Column E is named as 'N', as an abbreviation for noun, Column C is named as 'Vt', as the abbreviation for transitive verb etc. To exemplify: in the case of the idiom *to play heids an' heels*, Column A gives the serial number of the idiom (42.), Column B cites the idiom itself, and since this phrase includes a transitive verb and two nouns, and is built up from 4 words, ticks have been placed in Columns C, E and K. (See Table 11. for a visual representation) Such analysis was undertaken for all 104 idioms see appendix 4-7.

Table 10. Function level analysis of idiom no 42.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
no. of idiom	Idiom	Vt	Vi	N	Adv	Adj	Det	Prep	3	4	5	6	7	8
		grade-points												
42	to play heids an' heels	✓		✓						✓				

**2.16.** After the analysis of all 104 Scots idioms, it was possible to determine how many phrases include nouns, transitive and intransitive verbs, adverbs, adjectives, determiners and prepositions, using a simple filtering in the Excel document. By filtering those cells which include a tick, it was possible to add up the number of those idioms that include a particular characteristic, for example 'having a noun'.

**2.17.** By using the percentage tool in the Excel, it was also possible to count the percentage of Scots idioms including nouns. Since all the 104 idioms include nouns, this characteristic was graded at 100; thus, 100% of the Scots idioms include this feature (see Table 12). It seems plausible to argue that the more a characteristic appears, the more prototypical it is. Consequently, the feature that is true for all idioms (100%) is equal to 100 grade points, the most prototypical possible. This analysis was carried out for each characteristic in each linguistic level, resulting in a table presenting grades for all Scots idioms analysed, and allowing for gradings/comparisons to be made along a continuum of 'more/less' idiomatic.

Table 11. The grades for the function analysis of idiom 42.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
no. of idiom	Idiom	Vt	Vi	N	Adv	Adj	Det	Prep	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
		grade-points													
42	to play heids an' heels	47		100						36					183

### Grading idioms

**2.18.** The process might be exemplified for the idiom *to play heids an' heels*. This idiom receives 100 grade points for including a noun, 47 for including a transitive verb, and 36 for including four words. The sum of these characteristics' grade points is 183. Since this idiom has three characteristics in the grammatical level, the maximum value of the grade points is 300 (as each characteristic can reach a maximum of 100%). The sum of the characteristics' grade points of idiom *to play heids an' heels* is 183, which is 61% of the possible maximum

amount of 300. Consequently, the grade points for *to play heids an' heels* are 61. See Table 13. for a visual representation of the process of calculating grade points for this idiom.

Table 12. The sum of the function level grades of idiom no 42.

Grammatical level																
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
no. of idiom	Idiom	Vt	Vi	N	Adv	Adj	Det	Prep	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	Grade
grade-points																
42	to play heids an' heels	47		100						36					183	61

**2.19.** The grade points for each idiom and for each level can be calculated likewise. The process of calculating grade points of the rest of the levels for the same idiom can be seen below. (In the calculations, the values are rounded up from 0.5.)

Table 13. The structure level grades for idiom no 42.

Structure level													
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
No. of idiom	Idiom	VP	NP	AdvP	AdjP	PP	1	2	3	4	sub cl	Total	Grade
grade-points													
42	to play heids an' heels	63	58						26		100	247	62

Table 14. The lexical level grades for idiom no 42.

Lexical level						
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
No. of idiom	Idiom	Constituents changeable? NO      YES		Polysemous	Total	Grade
grade-points						
42	to play heids an' heels		75	97	172	86

Table 15. The semantic level grades for idiom no 42.

Semantic level					
A	B	C	D	E	F
No. of idiom	Idiom	descriptive	figurative	Total	Grade
grade-points					
42	to play heids an' heels	87	99	186	93

**2.20.** Hence, it can be concluded that the idiom *to play heids an' heels* scores 61 in the grammatical, 62 in the syntactic, 86 in the lexical and 93 in the semantic level. By adding these figures up (302) and calculating percentage (with regard to all four levels, 100% is equal to 400 grade points) we receive 76, the final prototypical grade for this idiom.

Table 16. The summary of the grades of idiom no 42.

Summary of levels							
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
No. of idiom	Idiom	Function grade	Structure grade	Lexical grade	Semantic grade	Total	Final Grade
42	to play heids an' heels	61	62	86	93	302	76

**2.21.** This analytic procedure was applied to all the Scots idioms. The received grades on the prototypical scale vary from 1 (the least) to 100 (the most prototypical). Idiom no.42 *to play heids an' heels* is towards the prototypical end of the set with 76 grade points.

### 3. The Findings

**3.1.** This thesis aimed to investigate how far prototype theory can assist us in the definition/identification of idioms by creating a scale of the characteristics. To illustrate this gradience, characteristics of Scots idioms were gathered and analysed. Idioms were also graded on a scale of prototypicality, where the more prototypical in terms of characteristics an idiom was, the higher grades it received.

**3.2.** The characteristics of idioms were grouped in four levels: function, structure, semantical, and lexical levels. The Function Level includes part of speech of idioms as well as the number of constituents. Syntactic structure, i.e. the number of syntactic phrases and the type of clause, make up the Structure Level. The Lexical level focuses on the polysemy and interchangeability of the constituents, while the semantic level, addresses whether the idioms under analysis are descriptive or figurative. A summary of the levels can be seen in Table 18.

Table 17. Summary of linguistic levels

Levels	Characteristics	
Function level	parts of speech	noun
		preposition
		determiner
		adjective
		adverb
		transitive verb
		intransitive verb
	number of constituents	three words
		four words
		six words
		five words
		seven words
		eight words
Structure level	syntactic structure	prepositional phrase
		noun phrase
		verb phrase
		adjective phrase
		adverb phrase
	number of phrases	one phrase
		two phrases
		three phrase
		four phrases
	other	subordinate clause
Semantic level		polysemous
Lexical level		participants do NOT change
		descriptive
		figurative

**3.3.** The focus of this current chapter is on linguistic analysis with regard to these four levels: discussion of each level starts with the expectations, continues with the findings, and then

finishes with a short summary and a demonstration of results. The linguistic analysis was based on 104 idioms particularly selected for the current thesis (Appendix 3) according to the methodology outlined in Chapter 2.

### Expectations

**3.4.** It was hypothesised that some linguistic features will prove to be more prototypical than others. As pointed out in chapter 1 (see Table 1) non-compositionality and syntactic fixity/stability are often included in the definition of idioms; consequently, non-compositionality and syntactic fixity/stability were expected to be highly prototypical of Scots idioms. When compiling the idiom list for the current thesis, some of the criteria were that an idiom should consist of at least three words although not a main clause. Accordingly, subordinate clauses were also expected to be highly prototypical for Scots idioms. These hypotheses will be tested in what follows.

### Function Level

**3.5.** Following the analysis of the part of speech in Scots idioms, it can be concluded that all the studied Scots idioms contain a noun, 83% contain a determiner, 64% a preposition, 63% a verb, 19% an adjective and 14% of idioms include an adverb. Concerning verbs, 47% of the phrases include a transitive and 16% an intransitive verb. The outcome demonstrates that containing a noun is an outstanding prototypical characteristic of idioms, while determiners and prepositions are quite prototypical too; see Table 19 for a visual representation.

*Table 18. Findings of part of speech analysis on idioms*

Part of Speech	Noun	Determiner	Preposition	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
% idioms	100%	82%	64%	63%	19%	14%

**3.6.** As idioms are fossilised phrases, they have their own forms, including certain part-of-speech combinations. As we have previously noted (Table 19), nouns and determiners are very prototypical for Scots idioms; hence a combination including these parts of speech was predicted to be the most common. The results show that 22% of the phrases consist of the combination of a verb, a noun, a determiner and a preposition (not necessarily in this order). 18% of the phrases are built up from a verb, a noun and a determiner, and 17% of



the idioms consist of a noun, a determiner and a preposition (not necessarily in this order). It can be concluded that Scots idioms, prototypically, seem to include a noun and a determiner (as predicted), and often a preposition and/or a verb as well. In Table 20, the combinations highlighted in yellow are the most common, and therefore the most prototypical forms of idioms.

Table 19. Findings of part of speech combinations in idioms

N
N + Prep
N + Det + Prep
N + Adj
N + Adj + Det
N + Adj + Det + Prep
N + Adj + Prep
N + Adv + Prep
N + Adv + Det + Prep
V + N
V + N + Adj + Det
V + N + Adj + Det + Prep
V + N + Adj + Prep
V + N + Adv
V + N + Adv + Det
V + N + Adv + Det + Prep
V + N + Adv + Prep
V + N + Det
V + N + Det + Prep
V + N + Prep

**3.7.** If certain part-of-speech combinations are more prototypical than others, then the number of words in a prototypical idiom might be predicted as well. In the current thesis, the definition of ‘word’ is the smallest lexical unit which has a pragmatic or semantic content (Lyons 1968: 202-204). As has been flagged in section 3.4. idioms made up by three or four words were expected to achieve the highest scores in this study. The results support the predictions, as 38% of the idioms are made of three words, 36% of four words, while only 12% of the phrases include five words, 10% consist of six, 4% of seven words and only 1% include eight words. See Table 21 for a visualisation of the findings.

Table 20. Findings on number of constituents of idioms

Number of constituents	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight
% of idioms	38%	36%	12%	10%	4%	1%

**3.8.** To sum up the findings of this section: a prototypical Scots idiom will include a noun, a determiner, and three or four constituents, while the least prototypical ones include eight constituents and/or an adverb.

### Structure level

**3.9.** The research so far has already shown the salience of nouns and determiners; therefore, noun phrases and verb phrases may be expected to be the most common structures in Scots idioms. The results show however that 66% of idioms include at least one prepositional phrase, 63% a verb phrase, 58% a noun phrase, 10% an adverb phrase and 3% an adjective phrase; the prepositional phrase is the most prototypical structure, although it is true that noun and verb phrases are also common. See Table 22 for a visual representation.

Table 21. Findings on syntactic phrase analysis of idioms

Syntactic phrases	PP	VP	NP	AdvP	AdjP
% of idioms	66%	63%	58%	10%	3%

**3.10.** Combinations of these structures can be identified as well. Table 22 demonstrates the dominance of prepositional phrases, verb phrases and noun phrases, and so a combination of these phrases was expected to be quite prototypical. The outcome shows that 25% of the idioms consist of the ‘verb phrase and noun phrase’ formula and 21% are built up from the ‘verb phrase and prepositional phrase’ formula. Table 23 lists all the combinations; the combinations highlighted in yellow are the most prototypical formulas.

Table 22. Findings on syntactic phrase combinations of idioms

AdjP	+	PP
AdvP	+	PP
NP		
NP	+	PP
VP	+	AdvP + PP

VP	+	PP				
VP	+	NP				
VP	+	NP	+	AdvP		
VP	+	NP	+	AdvP	+	PP
VP	+	NP	+	PP		
PP						

**3.12.** The results show that there are Scots idioms that include only one syntactic structure (13%); however, the majority (60%) of the idioms are made of two syntactical phrases.

There are also some Scots idioms that include three and even four phrases; however, none of the expressions is longer than four syntactical phrases. See Table 24 for a visual representation.

*Table 23. Findings on the number of syntactic phrases in idioms*

Number of syntactic phrases	One	Two	Three	Four
% of idioms	13%	60%	25%	2%

**3.13.** The last point for analysis within the structure focuses on the type of clauses Scots idioms have. It has already been argued (in 1.13.) that the examined phrases are not main clauses), but rather subordinate clauses. As expected, the outcome shows an overwhelming dominance of subordinate clauses; consequently, this characteristic is highly prototypical.

**3.14.** Despite the prediction that most Scots idioms would include noun phrases and verb phrases, prepositional phrases proved to be the most prototypical construction. The expectations and the results of the combination of syntactic phrase structures appear to agree: the ‘verb phrase + preposition phrase’ formula and the ‘verb phrase + noun phrase’ combination proved to be very prototypical tokens of Scots idioms. It can also be concluded that one of the most prototypical characteristic of Scots idioms is being a subordinate clause.

### Lexical level

**3.15.** This level focuses on the polysemy of idioms. In this thesis, the definition of polysemy is taken from the OED: “The fact of having several meanings; the possession of multiple meanings, senses, or connotations”. A high number of Scots idioms were expected to be

polysemous as idioms are phrases which are non-compositional and – apart from their literal sense - also express a figurative meaning (as discussed in section 1.11). The results show that almost all idioms are polysemous except no 11. *mak' a btawn horn o' a thing*, no 50. *to be at heid an qix wi* and no 99. *auld wife's sookers*. Despite idioms being conventionalised phrases, their constituents may vary.

**3.16.** Changeability of elements in an idiom is not in comparative terms common; however examples may be found. 15% of the examined idioms may alter either due to a change of words (*to get - or gie - one's heid in one's hans*), including or excluding plural (*head(s) an hills*), spelling (*heids an(d) thra(w)s*), either omitting or adding a participant (*aff one's eggs* or *aff o' one's eggs*). As the results show, unchangeability is a strongly prototypical characteristic among Scots idioms.

### Semantic Level

**3.17.** This level focuses on descriptive and figurative characteristics of Scots idioms. As the OED points out, idioms are non-compositional (as in section 1.11.), therefore a high number of the idioms were predicted to be descriptive and figurative. The expectations proved to be accurate as 99% of the studied idioms have a figurative sense and 87% of them are descriptive; suggesting that these features are quite prototypical

### Summary

**3.18.** The first aim of this thesis was to create a prototypical scale of the characteristics of Scots idioms. Another aim was to extend the currently only available and reliable list of Scots idioms within the PHITS. The second aim has been fulfilled as with the help of ten PHITS idioms, another 94 were collected (working with the total of 104 idioms). An extensive linguistic analysis was also carried out on the 104 Scots idioms. This analysis is made up from four parts, embracing four levels of linguistics: function, structure, lexical and semantic angles. After analysing the data, each character trait receives a grade between 1 and 100, where 1 is the least prototypical and 100 is the most prototypical.

**3.19.** Characteristics such as including a noun, a prepositional phrase, consisting of three words, two syntactic phrases, being polysemous and fossilised, having a figurative sense and being descriptive are the most prototypical features of Scots idioms. In this study,

combinations of parts of speech and parsing phrases are also studied; however, these are not included in the final scale of gradience due to the wide variability of formulas.

**3.20.** The most dominant levels of analysis are the lexical and semantic levels, where all characteristics scored above 75 grade points. From the lowest to the most prototypical these are: unchangeability, being descriptive, the constituents being polysemous and the meaning of the idioms being figurative. The least surprising results are probably in these levels. Table 25 illustrates this scale of prototypicality. By using the grade points of the characteristics, the studied Scots idioms have been graded, with idiom no 50 *to be at heid an aix wi* being the least prototypical and idiom no 63 *heid o' the road* the most prototypical Scots idiom.

Table 24. Summary of the findings on the characteristics of idioms

Levels	Characteristics		Grade
Function level	parts of speech	noun	100
		preposition	64
		determiner	83
		adjective	19
		adverb	14
		transitive verb	47
		intransitive verb	16
	number of constituents	three words	38
		four words	36
		six words	12
		five words	10
		seven words	4
		eight words	1
Structure level	syntactic structure	prepositional phrase	66
		noun phrase	58
		verb phrase	63
		adjective phrase	3
		adverb phrase	10
	number of phrases	one phrase	13
		two phrases	60
		three phrase	26
		four phrases	2
	other	subordinate clause	100
Semantic level		polysemous	97
		participants do NOT change	75
Lexical level		descriptive	87
		figurative	99

## 4. Conclusion

**4.1.** It has been established in this thesis that there is not a sharp dividing line among idioms, word combinations, proverbs and other expressions; however, certain characteristics are more likely to appear in idioms than in other multiple word formations. The current thesis focuses on these features and argues that some idiom characteristics are more prototypical than others, and that these characteristics can be placed on a scale of prototypicality.

**4.2.** The current thesis uses data from the PHITS project, a pilot study including a section on 380 Scots idioms. Out of the 380 phrases, ten were selected then used to access further 94 idioms in the DSL. The ten selected and the 94 collected (hence 104) Scots idioms underwent linguistic analysis in order to create a prototypical scale of the characteristics of idioms and also a scale of Scots idioms.

**4.3.** In the first chapter, the research questions of the current thesis were introduced:

- i. How far can prototype theory assist us in the definition/identification of idioms?
- ii. What are the prototypical characteristics of Scots idioms?

The first research question indicates that there is some confusion over the definition of idioms, in that not all dictionary definitions agree, and the borders of what we call idioms seem to be too restricted. In section 1.10, the 'British Big Five + One' (BFO) dictionaries' definitions of *idiom* were presented, and then the working definition for this thesis of the notion *idiom* was established. The current study offers a practical definition of the notion that takes account of fuzzy borders and places the idioms under analysis on a prototypical scale (as referred in 1.26-1.27.). Hence the answer for the first research question is positive; prototype theory can assist us in the definition of idioms. However, further research is required to see how far this theory can help us in the identification of idioms.

**4.4.** An answer to the second research question required the study of the characteristics of idioms. The current thesis focuses only on Scots, and consequently it is possible that certain characteristics might not be true for idioms in other languages. It may well be that there are further characteristics that are true for other languages but not for Scots idioms. However, it is hoped that the methodology developed here might have a wider application beyond the

study of Scots. The scale of gradience allows an alternative definition of idioms where the lowest score represents the least prototypical idioms (and their characteristics) and the highest score the most prototypical ones. This scale does not have a sharp borderline; it captures shades of idioms. The current thesis provides two scales: a scale of Scots idioms (Appendix 10) and a scale of the characteristics of Scots idioms (Appendix 9).

**4.5.** Once Scots idioms were scaled along a cline, their characteristics were collected, analysed and then graded according to how often such characteristics appeared. If a characteristic appeared in all the studied phrases (such as ‘including a noun’), it received the maximum score (100 grade-points). In this context, greater frequency correlates with prototypicality. Certain characteristics only scored a few points, such as idioms ‘consisting of four phrases’ – scoring 2 grade-points – indicating that these characteristics can be true for Scots idioms, but are not prototypical ones. The list of all the characteristics can be seen in Appendix 9.

**4.6.** The research in this thesis indicates that the constituents of idioms can be any part of speech; however, nouns and determiners dominate (with verbs, adjectives and prepositions also quite typical in Scots idioms). Scots idioms are typically made up of three or four words; typically, they also include a prepositional phrase, a verb phrase and/or a noun phrase and are built from usually two phrases. From a semantic point of view, Scots idioms are typically subordinate clauses; their constituents are polysemous, unchangeable, descriptive and have a figurative sense. The characteristics mentioned above are of course not exclusive, and are only prototypical for Scots idioms. Other phrases which do not have all these features can still be called idioms, but they are less prototypical. In sum, the most prototypical characteristics of Scots idioms are:

Table 25. The most prototypical characteristics of Scots idioms

Characteristics of Scots idioms	Prototypicality Grade
consist of at least one noun	100
are subordinate clauses	100
have a figurative meaning	99
have a minimum of one and a maximum of three of parsing phrases	98
the constituents of the idioms are polysemous	97
are descriptive	87
contain a determiner	83
the constituents are unchangeable	75
contain a prepositional phrase	66
contain a verb phrase	63

**4.7.** The result of this thesis provides a graded scale of 104 Scots idioms, where some are more and others less prototypical. For example, idiom no 50 *to be at heid an aix wi* ('to be involved, esp. in a meddlesome or contentious way, with a person or affair') scores only 50 grade points, while idiom no 63 *heid o' the road* ('to denote a roving, restless disposition') scores 80, thus being more prototypical. These two instances present the two poles of prototypicality in Scots idioms. That certain phrases are more prototypical than others reflects the complexity of idioms. The current thesis proves that it is possible to have a clearer understanding of what we call idioms, even though, of course, the current work identifies only those characteristics which are true for the idioms studied in this thesis, i.e. Scots.

**4.8.** The current thesis is a pilot study providing data and methodology for future research work, including work on other languages. Studies in other languages, however, might follow the methodology set out in the current thesis to collect and analyse idioms and their characteristics. More research is needed on the distinct characteristics of idioms, in distinct languages. The semantic fields of these idioms can be also researched.

**4.9.** Further research questions are also possible. Frequency, for instance, is not necessarily equal to prototypicality. By way of example, one of the most prototypical pieces of furniture



can be 'chair'; however 'to sit on it' and 'to have four legs' are arguably not the most common characteristics among furniture (which is more likely to be 'we put things on them', 'we store things in them'). Similarly, fossilisation and conventionality might also be prototypical characteristics, as well as the possibility of a change in meaning of the idiom throughout time, and hyperbolism. It would be beneficial to look at the surroundings of idioms and to see if any combinations of features are more prototypical than others.

**4.10.** Despite these further questions, the current thesis has provided a methodology for extending the PHITS list and also presenting a grading system for the definition of Scots idioms. This research serves as the starting-point of many other works ahead, which examine the complexity of defining idioms as well as for further work on the Scots language.

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