ELF, or taken broadly SLU, phraseological patterning differs from ENL. SLA researchers classify non-standard instances of conventional phraseology as errors and consider them as a consequence of L2 users’ general insensitivity to phraseological patterning and ensuing operation on the open-choice principle where idiom principle would be a preferred option (e.g. Granger 1998; Wray 2002). ELF researchers, while rejecting the ‘error’-conceptualisation, are divided on the underlying processes. Seidlhofer and Widdowson (2007) and Seidlhofer (2009, 2011) suggest that conformity to ENL phraseology in ELF context would both conflict with the cooperative imperative and lay a misplaced territorial claim resulting in ‘unilateral idiomaticity’ since neither knowledge of ENL phraseology is likely to be shared nor ENL community as such is relevant here. Instead, ELF users actively engage in idiomatising, or creating on-line idiomatic expressions on the open-choice principle. Pitzl (2009, 2012) in a similar vein holds that ELF users tend to construct idiomatic expressions from individual words building on their semantic properties and re-metaphorising the idiom as a result. Whereas Mauranen (2005, 2011, 2012) emphasises that after all ELF users get phraseological units approximately right, which suggests holistic, even though inexact, representation and operation on the idiom principle.

The question whether it is the idiom principle or open-choice ELF users adhere to is no trivial one as it has direct implications for characteristics of cognitive processing in SLU. This paper will discuss the phenomena observed in ELF phraseology from the perspective of Sinclair’s conceptualisation of meaning including the idiom principle, delexicalisation and meaning-shift. This essentially theoretical discussion will be informed by empirical findings obtained from the comparison of five L2 use corpora with five language exposure corpora. L2 use corpora contain Master’s thesis drafts written by non-native English students, language exposure corpora, on the other hand, publications from the students’ reference lists.

Keywords: phraseology, a meaning-shift unit, idiom principle, approximation, re-metaphorisation, idiomatising


