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THE IDIOM 'BREAK THE BANK' AND
ITS TRANSFORMATIONS IN AMERICAN MASS MEDIA
(A Corpora-based Analysis)

This paper explores the transformative nature of idioms in mass media, focusing on the frequently encountered idiom "break the bank" and its transformed version "break the internet". Examining the idioms through a mixed-methods approach, the research employs quantitative analysis using corpora from COCA, Google Book Ngram Viewer and dictionaries, along with qualitative methodologies such as critical discourse analysis and semiotic analysis. The investigation seeks to answer key questions regarding the frequency transformation, emergence and social context of these idioms. The study contributes to filling gaps in research on transformed idioms in mass media, offering insights into linguistic innovation and digital communication patterns.

Furthermore, this paper examines the crucial principles that drive the transformation of idioms in the digital-time period. By surveying the change from "break the bank", traditionally linked to financial ruin, to "break the internet", which conveys online popularity, the study highlights how technological improvement and social media advances linguistic creativity. The modified idiom produces big cultural shifts, illustrating how the influence of Internet changes and reshapes language and communication between people. This analysis is not only important in understanding the notion about the idiom evolution but also provides an understanding that the impact of mass media on everyday language can be thoroughly examined and appreciated.

Key words: COCA, American English, idiom, transformed idioms, modification, corpus analysis.

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Американдық БАҚ-тағы «Банкті бұзу» идиомасы
және оның трансформациялары
(корпустық анализ)

Бұл мақала бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарындағы идиомалардың трансформациялық сипатын зерттеуге арналған. Қолданыс жиілігі жоғары болып саналатын «банкты бұзу» идиомасына және оның трансформацияланған нұсқасы ретінде «ғаламторды бұзу» идиомасына назар аударылады. Негізінен аралас әдістер арқылы идиомаларды зерделей отырып, зерттеуде COCA, Google Book Ngram Viewer және сөздіктердің корпустарын пайдалана отырып, сыни талдау және семиотикалық талдау сияқты сапалық әдіснамамен қатар сандық талдау жасалады. Зерттеу осы идиомалардың трансформациялық жиілігіне, пайда болуы мен әлеуметтік мазмұнына қатысты басты сұрақтарға жауап беруге бағытталған. Зерттеу лингвистикалық инновациялар мен сандық коммуникация модельдері туралы түсініктерді ұсына отырып, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарындағы идиомалардың трансформациясы бойынша зерттеулердің қатарын ұлғайтуға мүмкіндік береді.

Сонымен қатар осы мақалада сандық дәуірде идиомалардың трансформациясына ықпал ететін негізгі принциптерді қарастырылады. Дәстүрлі түрде қаржылық дағдарыспен байланысты «банкты бұзудан» орасан зор онлайн-танымалдылықты қамтамасыз ететін «ғаламтордың бұзуға» ауысуды зерделей отырып, технологиялық жетістіктер мен әлеуметтік желілер лингвистикалық шығармашылыққа қаншалықты мүмкіндік беретініне назар аударуға болады. Модификацияланған идиома ғаламтордың әсеріне, тілге және адамдардың арасындағы қарым-қатынасқа өзгеріс енгізе отырып, анағұрлым кең шеңберде мәдени өзгеріске алып келеді. Бұл талдаулар идиомалардың эволюциясын түсіну үшін ғана емес, сонымен қатар бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының күнделікті жағдайда тілге қалай әсер ететінін мұқият зерттеуге, бағалауға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: COCA, американдық ағылшын, идиома, трансформацияланған идиомалар, модификация, корпустық анализ.

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**Идиома «взломать банк»
и ее трансформации в американских СМИ
(корпусный анализ)**

В данной статье исследуется трансформирующая природа идиом в средствах массовой информации. Основное внимание уделяется часто встречающейся идиоме "взломать банк" и ее трансформированной версии "сломать интернет". Изучая идиомы с помощью подхода, основанного на смешанных методах, в исследовании используется количественный анализ с использованием корпусов из COCA, Google Book Ngram Viewer и словарей, наряду с качественными методологиями, такими как критический анализ дискурса и семиотический анализ. Исследование направлено на то, чтобы ответить на ключевые вопросы, касающиеся частотной трансформации, появления и социального контекста этих идиом. Исследование способствует заполнению пробелов в исследованиях трансформированных идиом в средствах массовой информации, предлагая понимание лингвистических инноваций и моделей цифровой коммуникации.

Кроме того, в этой статье рассматриваются основные принципы, способствующие трансформации идиом в эпоху цифровых технологий. Изучая переход от "взлома банка", традиционно связанного с финансовым крахом, к "разрушению интернета", обеспечивающему огромную онлайн-популярность, исследование подчеркивает, как технологические усовершенствования и социальные сети способствуют лингвистическому творчеству. Модифицированная идиома приводит к более широким культурным сдвигам, иллюстрируя, как влияние Интернета изменяется и изменяет язык и общение между людьми. Этот анализ не только имеет решающее значение для понимания эволюции идиом, но также делает представление о том, как влияние средств массовой информации на повседневный язык можно тщательно изучить и оценить.

Ключевые слова: COCA, американский английский, идиома, трансформированные идиомы, модификация, корпусный анализ.

Introduction

The idioms prevalent in mass media play a significant role in enhancing communication effectiveness, engaging specific target audience, and conveying messages in a manner that is easily understood and contextually relevant (Lundblom, Woods, 2012). As culturally rich linguistic constructs, idioms shape the way language is used, succinctly conveying complex ideas and reflecting widely accepted social norms and values. However, many idioms used in mass media often undergo transformations determined by the evolving nature of language, as well as changing cultural references they transmit. Different types of media, catering for diverse audiences, become influential agents in the evolution of language and culture. This way transformed idioms not only reflect an ever-changing linguistic landscape, but also contribute semantically to the formation of new binary pairs of signifier / signified.

Idiomatic transformations manifest as creative adaptations with semantic shifts, presenting both challenges and opportunities for language users and researchers. Understanding transformed idioms in mass media is crucial when exploring the intricacies of the impact of cross-cultural or globalized communication and addressing the challenges encountered by language learners. Thus, an in-depth study of the comprehensibility and interpretation of transformed idioms may equally promote effective language teaching and learning in an increasingly interconnected world. Additionally, the exploration of transformed idioms opens avenues for studying the social and cultural phenomena driving linguistic innovation, offering researchers valuable insights into contemporary cultural trends, digital communication patterns, as well as the changes taking place within the collective imagination.

We gathered information from mass media ans samples from corpora. Therefore, understanding transformed idioms in mass media is crucial for several reasons, not least for elucidating the challenges encountered by language learners when encountering unfamiliar idiomatic expressions in mass media discourse. Furthermore, studying transformed idioms offers insights into the evolving nature of language and the complexities of contemporary communication.

Therefore, this article aims to delve into the realm of transformed idioms in mass media by examining a frequently encountered example, *'break the bank'*, and its transformed version, *'break the*

internet'. Examples for the qualitative analysis are drawn from popular magazines, newspapers, television shows and social media platforms, while the quantitative investigation was carried out using corpora provided by COCA (The Corpus of Contemporary American English), Google Book Ngram Viewer and dictionaries.

Materials and methods

Study Design. A mixed approach has been used in this study, with quantitative methods addressing RQs 1 and 3, and qualitative methods being employed to answer RQs 2 and 4. Two quantitative tools were used to this purpose: the Ngram Viewer allowing the examination of diachronic variations of preferred words and expressions, and COCA *(www.americancorpus.org)*, which provided a clear picture of word frequency. COCA was chosen as it is considered to be the only large and balanced corpus of American English (Davies, 2010). It contains more than one billion words and it also covers genres: spoken language, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, TV and movies subtitles, blogs and other web pages, which befits the purposes of this study.

Both the idiom 'break the bank' and its transformed version 'break the internet' were examined for frequency on the Ngram Viewer, then they were equally looked through the data provided by COCA. Next, the use of these idioms was explained together with the type of transformation incurred by the root form. To put this in a broader picture, we also ran a statistical study to find out how frequently this kind of modification occurs against other types.

The qualitative research was conducted through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This involves examining how language use reflects and reinforces societal norms and power relations in texts. Semiotic analysis was also used to investigate the visual and multi modal aspects of mass media discourse, particularly in advertisements, television shows and online platforms, to understand how idioms are transformed and conveyed through non-verbal means. The data collected for sampling was selected from a diverse range of American mass media texts, including TV shows, news items, advertisements, social media content and online chat fora to capture a broad spectrum of language use and discourse practices. Textual analysis was carried out focusing on how transformed idioms are employed, adapted and interpreted within mass media discourse.

Literature review

Transformed Idioms. An idiom is a figure of speech that cannot be understood by simply interpreting the meanings of its individual words. Idioms are used in all languages and cultures and often, although not always, they have a particular meaning that is different from the literal interpretation (Hovhannisyan & Mkrtchyan, 2014). However, idioms can undergo structural and semantic transformations which have the functions of a wordplay. The purpose of this wordplay is to engage the reader or listener's attention to a particular aspect of the text. In the case of structural transformations, an idiom undergoes a modification as a result of addition, insertion, allusion, ellipsis or substitution. When it comes to the semantic transformations, the changes in the context are driven by the inclusion of figures, such as sustained (extended) metaphor and zeugma, and dual actualization (Veisbergs, 2016).

Over the last hundred years, the usage of modified or transformed idioms has been especially prevalent in the language of newspapers and advertising, where idioms have been employed in ways diverging from their conventional dictionary definitions (Veisbergs, 2016). According to Parizoska (2022), such modifications are non-systematic and are created for a particular purpose, while the factors affecting idiom transformations can be semantic, pragmatic or grammatical.

Numerous studies have investigated the frequency and patterns of idiom use in various corpora. Baddorf and Evens (Baddorf, Evens 1998), for instance, utilized three different corpora – the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) corpus, the Dictionary of Old English (DOE) corpus and the corpus of Gutenberg – to analyze 30 idioms with their syntactic variants. Another significant corpus-based study was conducted by Moon (Moon, 1998b), who searched for 6776 common British and American English fixed expressions, including idioms (FEI), in the Oxford Hector Pilot Corpus (OHPC). The OHPC, comprising 18 million words, offers precise data; nonetheless, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the corpus chosen for this study, encompasses over one billion words. It is essential to note that, in 1998, the idiom "break the internet" did not exist; it only emerged in 2003, driven by social media and celebrities` social pages. Therefore, corpus-based analysis becomes imperative for understanding new transformed idioms properly. To date, corpus-based research on transformed idioms has

been scarce, so the purpose of this study is to make a small contribution to filling this gap so that more general conclusions can eventually be drawn. The idiom selected for analysis in this paper is *'break the bank',* which serves as the root of the transformed idiom *'break the internet'.*

Idioms and Their Modifications. Many idioms have semi-fixed or partially variable, shape, according to (Moon, 1998). This variability may involve changing a certain word or words within the idiom. It is important for learners to discern which words to modify, and to extent of the modification, as inappropriate substitutions could result in unnatural word combinations for native speakers. However, if the original words and their substitutions are related, and the change seems deliberate, it can, enhance understanding and communication. Burger, too, categorized modification into two main types (Burger, 1998); formal, which involves incorporating previous examples, and semantic, where idioms alter their meaning within a particular context. Another type of modification, discussed by Dronov (2010) is termed meta communication, this type involves 'inserting an adjectival modifier into an idiom', with the adjective signaling the idiomatic nature of the entire phrase (Paquot, 2015). Such modification are often observed in journalistic style and are commonly found in scientific papers found within corpora like COCA.

For the purposes of this study, we shall nonetheless take into account Virbinc`s (2011) classification of idiom transformations, as it gives a more comprehensive set of categories of modification, each with its related subsets. Examples of these categories and their subsets provided by Virbinc (2011) can be found below, and their the ones we shall use in the discussion of our findings:

Word substitution. Verb substitution. The majority of idioms belonging to this group undergo a change in the verb:

a. Adjective substitution. It is common for an adjective to be replaced either by another adjective or by some other part of speech.

b. Pronoun substitution. The pronoun it, which is constituent element of the idiom 'it will all come out in the wash',i s replaced by the pronoun this to refer back to previous paragraph: Worse, the BBC`s occupational health department, which is responsible for running the scheme, has itself been outsourced too- well, you guessed it.

Expansion. To bring the idiom closer to the text or just add more information, this type of modification expands idioms mostly by appending adjectives, adverbs or prepositional phrases to the underlying form. Most of the base is still present. For example, we can meet: a) premodifier and b) postmodifier.

Shortening. This kind pf change typically involves the verbal portion of the phrase being removed. The verbs 'to be' and have are typically left out since they primarily serve grammatical purposes and are not very important for understanding the meaning of the unit. Since most of the time the reader only needs to remember one aspect of an idiom in order to recollect the entire structure, writers take advantage of the reader`s prior knowledge. in that case journalists while writing headline can shorten idioms.

Grammatical modification. All modifications related to grammar as passive voice, nominal forms and etc.

a) Nominalization.
b) Comparative Modification.
c) Number Modification.
d) Passive Voice Modification.

Coordination. This kind of change deals with merging idioms that are not quite the same. Two or more idioms must contain at least one similar ingredient that is utilized in only one and left out of the other in order to be combined.

In this paper we chose word substitution transformed idiom as 'bank' can be omitted and changed by 'internet'. For example, 'break the bank' and 'break the internet'.

Research Questions.

- RQ1: Does the corpora data indicate that the frequency of the idiom 'break the bank' is that of a popular idiom in American mass media?

- RQ2: What type of transformation characterizes the altered idiom 'break the internet'?

- RQ3: When did this transformed or altered idiom become noticeable in American mass media and what is its frequency pattern?

- RQ4: What does the data suggest about the social context in which it appeared?

Result and discussion

The definitions of the two idioms were retrieved from the online Cambridge Dictionary, as it is considered one of most the effective tools in vocabulary learning tool (Ambarwati, Mandasari, 2020). According to this dictionary (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), the idiom 'break the bank' means 'it costs too much' – so much so that it may cause financial difficulty – while 'break the internet' is defined as "to post (= publish) something on the internet that causes a very large amount of interest, shock, or excitement, with a large number of people

sharing or reacting to what you have posted" – so much so that it may cause online systems to crash (ibid.) Therefore, both idioms convey the idea of something being excessive and potentially damaging, although at first sight these phrases may appear unrelated. However, their similarities become apparent when observing their evolution over time. It is very likely 'break the bank' was transformed into 'break the internet' owing to the increased popularity of internet use both by those who post materials online and those who read these materials and often respond to them.

This transformation reflects how language evolves in time and how technology influences communication. The change from 'break the bank' to 'break the internet' emphasizes how influential online media has become in producing and spreading new language. As technology and internet continue to develop, more expressions will probably be created as language adapts to our new needs.

Google Ngram Viewer. As can be seen from Figure 1, the idiom 'break the bank' gained prominence after 1891 and it is attributed to Charles De Ville Wells, who won a substantial sum in a Monte Carlo casino during that period (Biography of Gambler and Con Man Charles Wells Part 1, n.d.). At the time, each gaming table had a bank of 100,000 francs, and if a player won more than there was in the bank, the table was declared 'broke' and covered with a black cloth until more funds could be raised (ibid.). Despite questions regarding the legitimacy of his win, given Mr Well's shady past as a con man, the expression 'break the bank' originated from this notable incident (ibid).
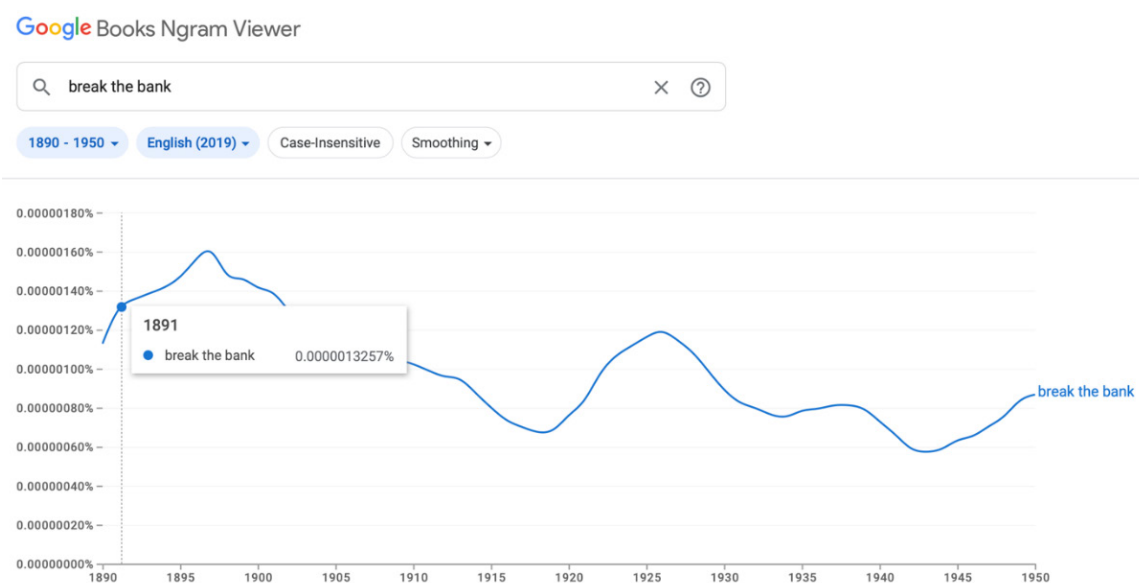

Figure 1 – Ngram Analysis

Figure 2 (below) shows that, following some fluctuation from 1891 to 1950 and a period of stagnation between 1950 – 1975, the frequency of the idiom *'break the bank'* rose persistently until around 2010, with just a small drop thereafter. To date, it seems that 2011 was the year when the popularity of the idiom stood at its highest point – at 0.0000048341%.

Despite remaining a popular expression, the idiom *"break the bank"* continued to lose its prominence, decreasing to 0.0000044114% in 2019 (Figure 2).

On the other hand, a new idiom, *'break the internet',"* emerged in approximately 2003, which experienced a sharp increase in usage until around 2011, when it stood at 0.0000002021% (Figure 3). The popularity of the new idiom was affirmed in 2014 by a magazine cover featuring Kim Kardashian (source: https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/18/tech/ feat-2014-memes-hashtags/index.html) and titled *"Break the internet",* which became a viral sensation. The individual responsible for the title remains unidentified; however, the expression gained prominence through extensive usage and dissemination (Biography of Gambler and Con Man Charles Wells Part 1, n.d).
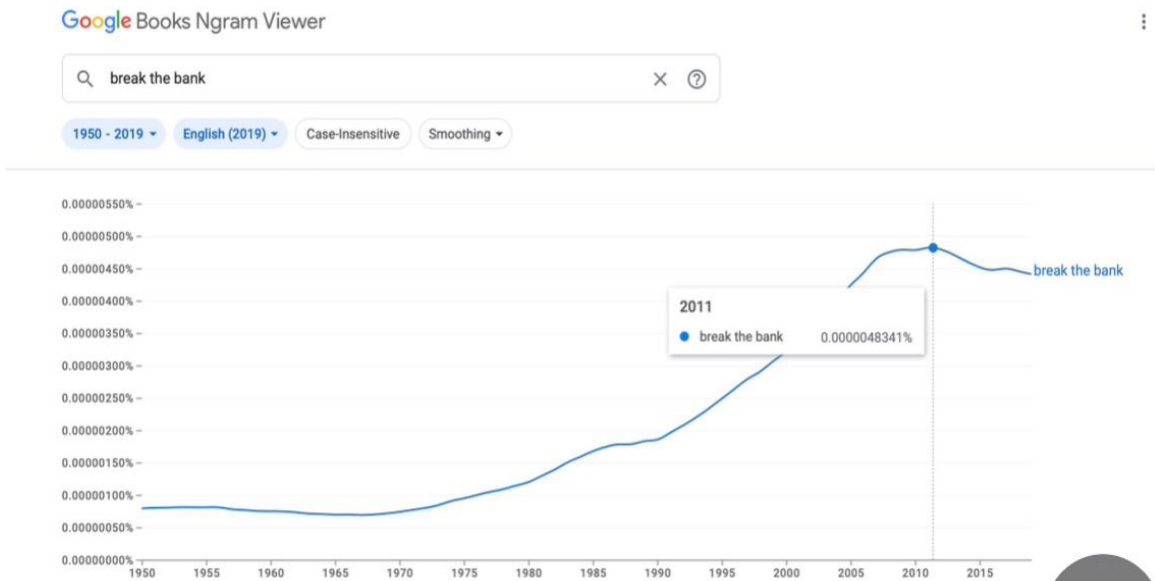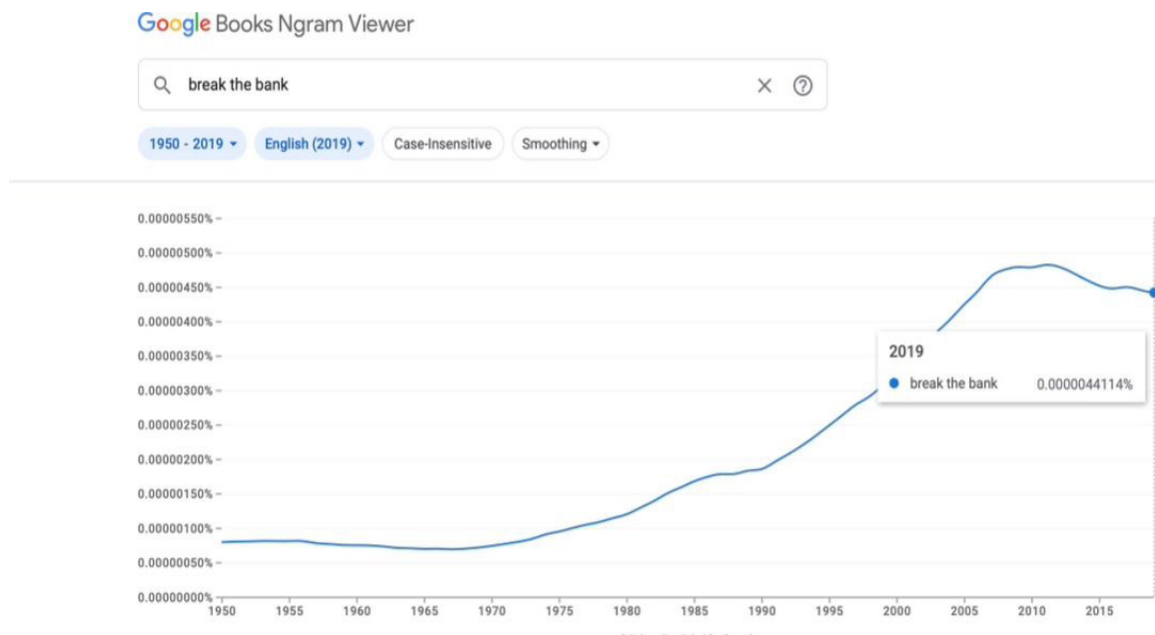
Figure 2 – Ngram Analysis

Figure 3 – Ngram Analysis

The idiom 'Break the bank' began to become less common in 2010. Nevertheless 'Break the internet' emerged and gained popularity in the same year. Hence, I believe that the transformation in these idioms began in 2010.

Corpus Analysis. The frequency and context of usage for the two idioms was equally examined using COCA, which provided only 16 instances for the idiom *'break the internet'* (see Figure 5 below).

The notes accompanying the corpus mention that modified variations of idioms are seldom utilized in mass media, which appears to be contradicted by the Ngram Viewer data. However, COCA does not take into account variants such as 'broke the internet', 'breaking the internet' or 'internet-breaker'; on the other hand, Ngram Viewer only analysis an idiom's frequency against itself, so there is no actual contradiction between the two data sets.

Figure 4 – Ngram Analysis

Figure 5 – 'Break the internet' in context (Corpus Analysis)

The transformed idiom *'break the internet''* seems to be more commonly employed online rather than in other type of media – 8 instances vs. 3 each in magazines and spoken language and 2 each on TV or in movies (Figure 5). This observation suggests that websites and social media platforms play a more significant role in introducing new idioms than the more traditional media types. Having said that, the original form of the idiom continues to be used more frequently than the transformed one. Sample instances of the idiom *'break the bank'* are provided in Figure 6.
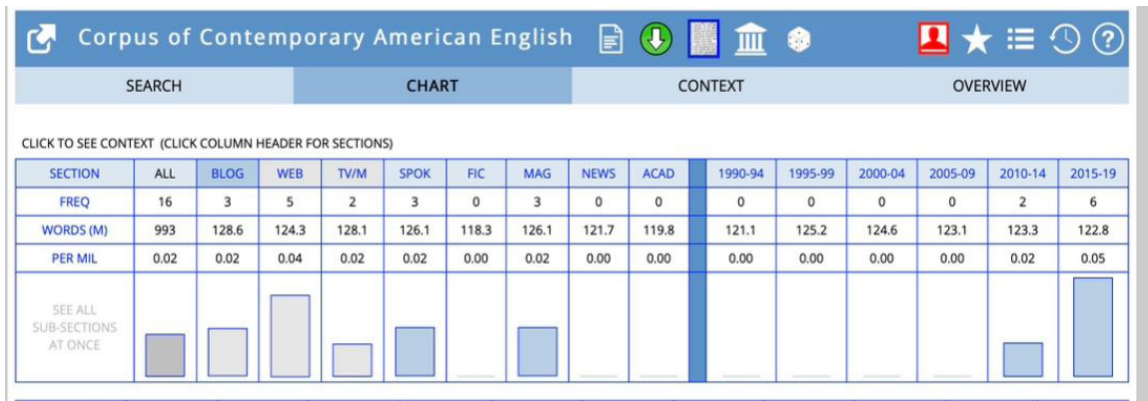
Figure 6 – Frequency of the idiom 'break the internet'

Figure 6 demonstrates the frequency of occurrences for the idiom 'break the internet' among various media types and time duration. The graphic presentation clearly indicates that the idiom is especially used in online platforms, reflecting its digital conception and the internet-based context in which it succeeds.

Building on this investigation, we now turn our attention to another transformed idiom, 'break the bank'. In contrast to 'break the internet', this idiom shows a different pattern of usage across numerous genres. Thorough examples of 'break the bank' in context are shown in Figure 7.

The full table from the figure above shows 245 instances for the idiom *'break the bank',* which is used in 8 different genres – blogs, websites, TV/movies, spoken language, fiction, magazine, news, academic.

Figure 7 – 'Break the bank' in context (Corpus Analysis)

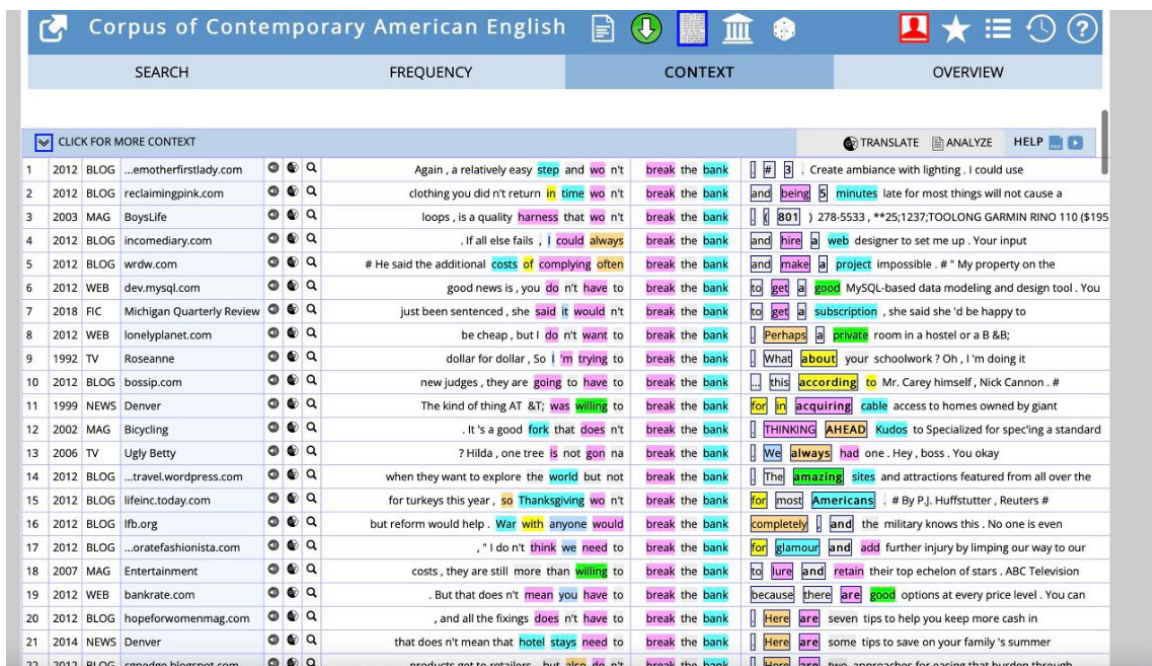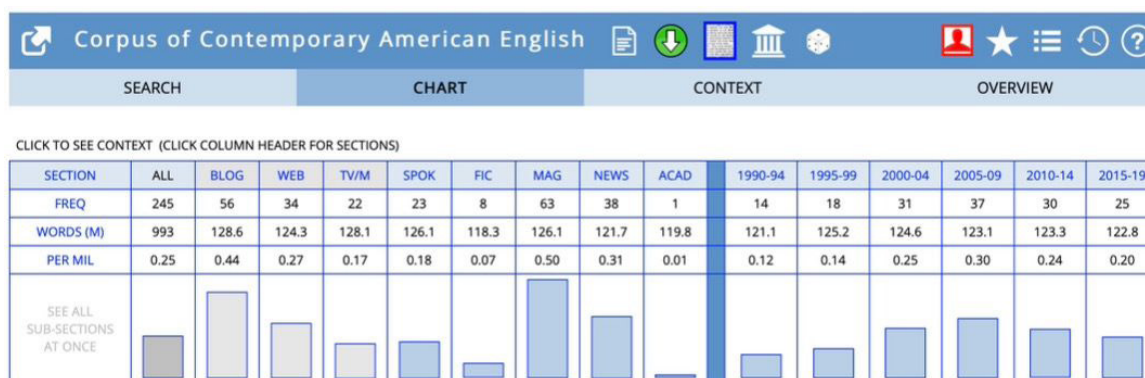| SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	245	56	34	22	23	8	63	38	1	14	18	31	37	30	25
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	0.25	0.44	0.27	0.17	0.18	0.07	0.50	0.31	0.01	0.12	0.14	0.25	0.30	0.24	0.20

Figure 8 – Frequency of the idiom 'break the bank'

It is apparent that the idiom *'break the bank'* is most used in magazines and blogs at 63 and 56 instances respectively. However, occurrences are also found in news and on websites, with indices of 38 and 34, respectively. In everyday conversation, the idiom appears in 23 instances, whereas in TV/movies it appears 22 times. It is noteworthy that such idioms are less commonly used in academic and fictional contexts. As it is clearly seen from this analysis, currently there is a continued use of both the original and transformed versions of the idiom. In today's changing world, it is crucial for readers to effectively comprehend idiomatic expressions in mass media that have been transformed in some way.

The goal of this article is to advance more inclusive and a culture to modify language. Critics may argue that changing idioms is a useless that will not result in tangible change. But as history has demonstrated, language changes throughout time and has a significant impact on mental processes. Due to changes some challenges might occur; for example, these challenges are sometimes faced even by native speakers, let alone non-native English learners (Mantyla, 2004). Given these challenges, corpus analysis is important to understand idioms by analyzing and providing correct definitions, as well as introducing their altered versions. Moreover, according to Cooper a language is full of idiomatic expressions, which include similes, metaphors, phrasal verbs, and figurative speech. Cooper estimated that a person is expected to use about 20 million idioms in 'over a lifetime 60 years' (Cooper, 1998). This highlights the significance of idioms and underscores the importance of investigating them. Therefore, we mostly focused on idioms and their modification in order to analyze and try to understand new idioms. This paper examined the

modified version of idiom 'break the bank' which has undergone lexical variation to become 'break the bank'. This modification is likely influenced by the social networks and celebrities everyday slang and word usage. We determined whether traditional or transformed one is commonly used among people by giving their concordances via corpus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings illuminate the intricate relationship between language, media, and cultural shifts. As dynamic linguistic components, idioms undergo adaptation over time, a process significantly hastened by the influence of the internet and mass media. The emergence of internet-centric expressions, exemplified by *'break the internet',* coexists with the sustained popularity of the original form, *'break the bank'.*

This study not only contributes valuable insights into linguistic innovation and digital communication patterns but also underscores the importance of understanding transformed idioms in navigating the complexities of cross-cultural and globalized communication. The evolving nature of idioms, as witnessed in this research, emphasizes the dynamic interplay between language, technology, and cultural expression.

As we move forward in a technology-driven world, our idiomatic expressions will continue to evolve, and mirror the changing dynamics of our communication landscape. Further research in this domain is encouraged to unveil the inherent changes in the nature of idioms, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their evolving role in contemporary communication.

Furthermore, language tend to change naturally over time. Language change and and where the

features and usage of language is always undergo permanent shifts. Educators should integrate both traditional and transformed idioms into their curricula and to illustrate this dynamic nature of language. Both highlighting cultural and technological influences, teachers can demonstrate students how idioms change over time. Using digital tools such as COCA or NgramViewer can enhance students` research skills by allowing them to explore idiom usage in various contexts and media. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also promotes critical thinking, media literacy, and a deeper understanding of contemporary communication.

The structural and organizational framework of mass media is reflected in the professional ethics and convictions of reporters. The analysis of these ethics show that the legal ownership of resources utilized is accurate and acceptable. The processing and analysis of data from the COCA and Ngram Viewer adhered strictly to ethical norms and considerations.

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