

Zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen: A pragma–semantic perspective on the Indonesian students’ German idioms

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ABSTRACT

Phraseological competence, particularly the accurate and natural use of idiomatic expressions, remains one of the most persistent challenges in second language (L2) acquisition, since formulaic language requires learners to move beyond literal decoding to context-sensitive, native-like use. At the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, learners of German as a foreign language are expected to deploy frequently occurring idioms in familiar communicative contexts, yet classroom evidence suggests that this competence develops unevenly. This study examines how accurately B1-level German learners use idioms in creative narrative writing, distinguishing structural modifications of idiomatic form from pragmatic incongruities in idiomatic use. Idiomatic tokens (N = 61) identified across eight student-authored narratives were compared against the canonical forms and meanings listed in Duden Redewendungen (2013), the reference standard for this analysis. Structural variation was operationalised using the ‘Cutting the Gordian Knot’ typology (Spasić et al., 2017), which classifies inflection, open slots, modification, passivisation, negation, and syntactic expansion, while contextual and pragmatic fit was assessed separately at the sentence and discourse level. The analysis shows an overall accuracy rate of 82.0%, indicating that creative writing supports the productive use of idioms. Remaining inaccuracies fell into two types: structural or literal-processing errors, arising mainly from first-language transfer and word-for-word translation, and pragmatic missteps, including register mismatches and tonal misalignment with the surrounding context. These findings show that pragmatic competence, rather than structural accuracy alone, is decisive in learners’ progression from declarative idiomatic knowledge to natural, situationally appropriate use.

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INTRODUCTION

Phraseological competence, and idiomatic competence in particular, is widely regarded as one of the clearest markers of proficiency in learning German as a foreign language. Yet, it remains one of the most difficult areas for students to master (Even-Simkin, 2024). Idioms are commonly defined as fixed multi-word expressions whose overall meaning cannot be inferred from the lexical meanings of their individual components or from their syntactic structure (Heringer, 2024); this non-compositionality and semantic opacity require learners to draw on both lexical knowledge and situational understanding rather than on literal

decoding alone (Cain, 2009). The stakes of this difficulty are not merely lexical: idiomatic sentences have been found to trigger heightened activation in brain regions associated with emotional processing, such as the amygdala, suggesting that idioms carry affective as well as figurative meaning and that misreading them can therefore disrupt more than propositional content (Citron et al., 2019). Within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the B1 level corresponds to an independent user who is expected to comprehend and use fixed expressions, common collocations, and frequently occurring idioms within familiar and predictable contexts such as personal experience,

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daily activity, the workplace, and social interaction (Chrissou & Mückel, 2023). Meeting this benchmark, however, depends on more than recognising an idiom's dictionary meaning: learners must also judge the participants, setting, and surrounding discourse of a speech event, since these unstated contextual cues anchor an idiom's interpretation and determine whether its use sounds natural (Strässler, 1982).

A major source of this difficulty lies in how idioms are taught. Language curricula tend to place limited emphasis on idiom instruction, often presenting idioms in isolation rather than embedding them in meaningful context (Mekheimer, 2025). As a result, learners tend to memorise idiomatic meanings without developing an understanding of how these expressions function in authentic communicative use (Ebersberger, 2010), a pattern that reflects a broader difficulty in converting declarative knowledge (knowing what an idiom means) into procedural knowledge (being able to deploy it spontaneously in real communication). Left unaddressed, this gap manifests predictably: errors often arise from first-language transfer, hyper-literal word-for-word translation, or insufficient awareness of the register and cultural meanings embedded in idiomatic expressions (Nosirova, 2023). As Kecskés (2000) argues, mastering idioms requires more than memorising dictionary definitions; it requires understanding the cultural and pragmatic contexts that license their use. Compounding the problem, learners also have limited exposure to authentic language, receive too little contextual support in lessons, and get too little practice with the social and cultural dimensions of idiomatic expressions (Schweigert, 1986).

Creative writing has been proposed as a pedagogical response to this gap. Because comprehension of idioms improves when they appear within a narrative rather than in isolated sentences (Titone & Connine, 1999), and because social and cultural context helps learners move past literal meanings toward figurative sense (Abarna et al., 2022), embedding idioms in student-authored stories offers a more naturalistic route to acquisition than list-based memorisation. Creative writing tasks also build communicative skills by letting learners use language in personally meaningful narratives, supporting retention of idiomatic form and meaning in context rather than through rote memorisation (Feuer, 2011; Kulamikhina et al., 2018). This aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching (Mitchell, 2002): creative writing functions as a conduit for the functional deployment of idiomatic language, contingent on both learners' baseline familiarity with an idiom and the strength of contextual scaffolding, so that narrative composition becomes a strategic space for the authentic integration of idiomatic forms and the

negotiation of meaning within situated discourse (Hinkel, 2017).

Existing research on idioms in language learning has largely approached the topic from a cultural rather than an accuracy-focused angle. Boulaares (2025) argues that teaching the cultural context behind idiomatic expressions is essential for Arabic learners, while Mamarjabova and Rozikova (2025) similarly show that cultural grounding shapes how well learners learn and retain English idioms. Bara (2025) reports that EFL teachers and students regard contextual idiom instruction as a route to cultural awareness, and Suryadimulya et al. (2023) compare Japanese and Indonesian idiomatic expressions to show how idioms encode cultural intelligence across languages. Closer to the present focus on production, Sulikowska (2025) documents how frequently idioms occur in spoken versus written German corpora but does not examine the types of errors learners make when producing idioms themselves.

Taken together, this body of work establishes that idiom use is culturally and contextually conditioned, but it stops short of describing how accurately B1-level learners deploy idioms in their own German creative writing, or what structural and pragmatic errors recur when they do. This study addresses that gap by comparing learners' idiomatic expressions in creative narrative writing against the canonical forms and meanings listed in Duden Redewendungen (2013), classifying the structural variation these expressions undergo, and evaluating their contextual and pragmatic appropriateness. In doing so, it aims to identify common patterns of idiomatic inaccuracy among B1-level learners and to draw pedagogical implications for how idiom instruction can better bridge the gap between knowing an idiom and using it naturally. The remainder of this article outlines the study's methods, presents the resulting patterns of idiom use and misuse, and discusses their implications for idiom-focused language teaching.

METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive research design that integrates quantitative content analysis with contextual precision assessment, focusing on idiomatic deployment in learner-generated creative texts at a public university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Evaluative criteria covered both sentential and discourse-level appropriateness, enabling a granular interrogation of idiomatic integration.

The data comprised eight narrative texts written by undergraduate students at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The study used a qualitative–quantitative descriptive approach, with the researcher as the primary instrument for identifying, coding, and analysing the data. To reduce the risk of

single-rater bias inherent in this design, every coding decision was checked against the canonical entries in Duden Redewendungen (2013) as an external reference standard, and ambiguous cases were re-examined against the full sentential and discourse context before a final classification was assigned; the absence of a second, independent coder is acknowledged as a limitation of the study and addressed further in the Conclusion.

Idiom identification in this study was carried out using a manual pattern-matching approach, in which expressions found in the students' texts were compared with canonical idiom forms listed in Duden – Redewendungen (Duden, 2013). This analytical system was selected to accommodate structural variation, which is commonly observed in learners' natural linguistic production. During the manual pattern-matching process, the analysis considered several types of idiom structural variation based on the Cutting the Gordian Knot technique (Spasić et al., 2017), including (1) inflection, referring to grammatical changes within verbs or nouns; (2) open slots, in which different lexical items may fill certain components of the idiom without altering the idiomatic meaning; (3) modification, involving the insertion of adjectives or adverbs within the idiom structure; and (4) passivisation, referring to syntactic restructuring resulting from the use of passive sentences. In addition to these categories, the study proposed two further criteria of structural variation, namely (5) negation, defined as the addition of negation markers such as *nicht*, *kein*, or *nie* to the idiom structure without eliminating its core idiomatic meaning. However, the interpretation may be restricted or reversed, and (6) syntactic expansion refers to extending the idiom through explanatory clauses, relative clauses, or supplementary modifiers that expand its syntactic scope within the discourse without altering the idiom's core meaning.

After identifying the idioms, each token's contextual and pragmatic fit was scored against its canonical Duden meaning using a binary appropriateness criterion: a token was coded as contextually appropriate (1) when its denotative meaning, register, and pragmatic function aligned with the surrounding sentence and discourse, and as contextually inaccurate (0) when it displayed a semantic shift, a register mismatch, or a pragmatic incongruity relative to its canonical use, following the same procedure illustrated case by case in the Findings and Discussion section. Given the small, purposively selected corpus of eight narratives, the resulting frequencies were then examined descriptively rather than inferentially: cross-tabulation (Alberti, 2024) was used only to profile how appropriate and inappropriate idiom use was distributed across student texts, and the results are reported as descriptive frequency profiling within an exploratory qualitative case study rather than as claims of statistical generalisability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

German Idioms in Creative Writing

Using our filtering method on the students' stories, we identified 52 distinct idiom types, which together account for 61 idiom tokens when repeated occurrences of the same idiom across the narratives are counted. To examine the contextual appropriateness of idiom use, the analysis considered two dimensions: distinct idiom types and their individual occurrences. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distributions of idiom types and occurrences by contextual appropriateness, and Appendix A reports the detailed inventory, including the canonical Duden meanings and example sentences for each token.

Table 1

Distribution of Idiom Types and Occurrences by Contextual Appropriateness

Indicator	Frequency	%
Distinct Idioms Identified	52	100.00
Idiom Type Used Exclusively Appropriately	42	80.76
Idiom Type Used Exclusively Inappropriately	9	17.31
Idiom Type Showing Mixed Appropriateness	1	1.92
Total Idioms Occurrences	61	100.00
Contextually Appropriate Occurrences	50	81.96
Contextually Inappropriate Occurrences	11	18.03

As shown in Table 1, a total of 52 distinct idiom types were identified across 61 occurrences. At the type level, most idioms (80.76%) were exclusively appropriate, 17.31% were exclusively inappropriate, and only one idiom type (1.92%) showed mixed appropriateness, meaning the same idiomatic expression was used both appropriately and inappropriately in different occurrences. A similar distribution was observed at the occurrence

level, with 81.96% classified as contextually appropriate. These findings indicate that idiom use was predominantly contextually appropriate at both type and occurrence levels. Nevertheless, the presence of inappropriate occurrences and a mixed-appropriateness idiom type suggests that appropriate idiom use was not entirely consistent across the analyzed data. The majority of the identified idioms were evaluated as valid based on established lexical

references. Next, as shown in Table 2, we used cross-tabulation to analyse the data. This method helped us examine relationships, patterns, and distributions across categories by organising the results in tables. Based on the cross-tabulation results, learners' overall ability to apply idioms in written texts was classified as very good. Several

narrative texts showed a clear predominance of contextually appropriate idioms, while others showed a relatively higher proportion of contextual inaccuracies. This variation indicated differences in individual learners' ability to comprehend and apply German idioms in context.

Table 2

Comparison of Idiom Accuracy Among Narrative Texts Based on SPSS Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Student Text	Accuracy of idiom use		
	Inaccurate Count (%)	Accurate Count (%)	Total Count (%)
1	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)	11 (100.0%)
2	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)	9 (100.0%)
3	2 (25.0%)	6 (75.0%)	8 (100.0%)
4	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	7 (100.0%)
5	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	7 (100.0%)
6	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	7 (100.0%)
7	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	7 (100.0%)
8	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Total	11 (18.0%)	50 (82.0%)	61 (100.0%)

The study found 61 idiom tokens: 50 (82.0%) were used correctly, and 11 (18.0%) were used incorrectly. This shows that most learners used idioms well at both the sentence and text level (see Appendix B). However, students differed. Some, like Learners 2, 5, 6, and 7, were very accurate, while others, such as Learners 3, 4, and 8, made more mistakes.

Overall, the data show that most students used idioms appropriately, but some still made occasional context-related mistakes. The following sections examine these errors in more detail, focusing on word meaning and literal interpretation to highlight areas for improvement in teaching.

Contextual deviation

The ten cases discussed below are read through three complementary analytic lenses rather than a single denotative comparison against Duden. First, each idiom is checked against its lexical-semantic meaning to establish whether the learner grasped its literal or figurative reference. Second, its pragmatic licensing conditions are considered. As Kecskés (2000) argues, idiomatic competence depends as much on situational and cultural context as on dictionary knowledge, so an idiom can be semantically intelligible yet pragmatically unnatural if the surrounding discourse does not supply the conditions under which native speakers conventionally use it. Third, the evaluative and affective colouring of each idiom is taken into account, since idiomatic expressions are known to carry stronger emotional weight than their literal paraphrases and can therefore shift a sentence's tone even when their propositional content is preserved (Citron et al., 2019). Read together, these three lenses show that most of the deviations documented here are not comprehension failures but instances in which a contextual dimension of the speech event,

its participants, setting, or discourse history, was not fully aligned with the idiom's conventional pragmatic anchor (Strässler, 1982).

„Wir hatten wirklich Schwein!“

According to Duden (2013), the idiom *Schwein haben* (to be lucky) means *Glück haben* (to be lucky) and refers to situations in which a positive outcome results primarily from chance rather than effort or ability. The expression is common in everyday colloquial speech and typically refers to accidental success or narrowly avoided misfortune.

In Text 1, Clara stated, "*Wir hätten wirklich Schwein!* (We would be really lucky!) after achieving success, but immediately attributed this success to her partner's effort. Semantically, the idiom was intelligible, as the situation could be interpreted as fortunate. Pragmatically, however, it was less accurate because it explicitly combined luck with effort (*ohne deinen Einsatz hätten wir das nicht geschafft*; without your efforts, we wouldn't have managed it). The text weakened the idiom's core function of foregrounding chance's predominance.

This created pragmatic ambiguity: the idiom highlighted luck, whereas the surrounding context emphasised human agency. As a result, *Schwein haben* (to be lucky) functioned more as a rhetorical intensifier than as a prototypical idiomatic expression. Although grammatically correct and semantically clear, the idiom was therefore idiomatically less natural, indicating the learner's reliance on the literal meaning (*Glück haben*) without full awareness of its pragmatic constraints. A non-idiomatic alternative, such as *Wir hätten Glück, aber dein Einsatz war entscheidend* (We would be lucky, but your contribution was decisive), would have been more appropriate in this context (see Appendix B, No. 5).

„Sein wahres Gesicht zeigen“

Although the idiom *sein wahres Gesicht zeigen* literally means to reveal one's true character, it is conventionally used with a negative evaluative orientation, referring to the disclosure of an unpleasant or morally questionable side. In the sentence *Clara zeigte in dieser schwierigen Zeit ihr wahres Gesicht: stark, mutig und bereit, sich ihren Fehlern zu stellen* (During this difficult time, Clara showed her true colors: she was strong, brave, and ready to face her mistakes), the idiom was used with a positive meaning to describe personal strength and integrity (see Appendix A, No. 11). While this usage is semantically intelligible, it deviates from conventional idiomatic norms.

From a pragmatic perspective, the positive framing weakened the idiom's prototypical function, which typically signals a disillusioning or negative revelation. This shift indicated a reliance on the literal interpretation (revealing one's true self) while overlooking the idiom's conventional negative prosody. Consequently, although grammatically correct, the expression was idiomatically less natural, reflecting learners' limited sensitivity to the evaluative and connotative dimensions of idiomatic meaning.

„Zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen“

The idiom *zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen* (kill two birds with one stone) means achieving two separate objectives with a single action. It is typically used when one action yields two clearly separable benefits. Typical examples include contexts where the outcomes differ in nature or domain, such as saving money while improving one's health. In the learner's text, however, the application of this idiom was pragmatically problematic. Visiting Rudi and spending time together with Emma did not constitute two independent or conceptually distinct goals; rather, they were closely intertwined and naturally occurred within the same social activity. As such, the idiom's core semantic-pragmatic requirement was not fully satisfied.

From an idiomatic perspective, the expression therefore appeared forced. The utterance failed to convey the efficiency or strategic optimisation that typically motivates using *zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen*. Instead, it merely described a jointly planned activity, in which the two actions were inherently linked rather than coincidentally combined. This variation suggested that the learner had correctly understood the idiom's general meaning at a declarative level but had not yet fully internalised the pragmatic conditions governing its natural use. Consequently, the idiom was used in a context that lacked the necessary functional contrast between the two goals.

A more idiomatically appropriate formulation would have been a non-figurative alternative, such

as *Gut, dann können wir Rudi besuchen und gleichzeitig Zeit miteinander verbringen* (Fine, then we can visit Rudi and spend time together at the same time) (see Appendix A, No. 17), which correctly reflected the desired meaning without imposing an unnatural idiomatic frame.

„Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.“

The idiomatic proverb *der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* (the apple does not fall far from the tree) is generally well understood semantically. Yet its use does not always align with the pragmatic conventions that govern its typical application. According to Duden (2013), the expression highlights a resemblance in character traits or behaviour between a child and a parent; its idiomatic appropriateness therefore depends on a clear and salient parent-child linkage.

In Texts 1 and 2, the idiom was used appropriately (see Appendix A). In Text 1, Lena's diligence was explicitly linked to her mother, and in Text 2, Tom's industriousness was paralleled with that of his father. In both cases, the usage was semantically consistent with the idiom's lexical meaning. However, Text 1 showed a degree of redundancy, as the same information had already been conveyed through the clause *das Herz deiner Mutter geerbt* (inherited your mother's heart). In Text 2, the idiom felt somewhat stylistically rigid, as it appeared in a relatively ceremonial context that did not fully reflect its typical use in informal, spontaneous communication.

In Text 4, the idiom was applied to describe an entire family characterised by academic achievement across several generations. While the semantic notion of intergenerational similarity was preserved, the idiom's scope was expanded from an individual parent-child relation to a collective family profile. As a result, the expression functioned more as a generalising statement than as a naturally embedded idiomatic utterance, thereby weakening its idiomatic force.

A further marginal case was observed in Text 7, where the idiom was used to describe a relatively trivial shared behaviour, namely losing one's appetite when feeling sad. Although the parent-child link was maintained, the usage was pragmatically weak, as the idiom conventionally highlights salient or defining traits rather than minor, situational behaviours. This pattern suggests a tendency to apply the idiom literally and mechanistically, without sufficient consideration of its pragmatic relevance.

Overall, the findings indicate that learners demonstrate a solid understanding of the denotative meaning of *der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm*, but display shortcomings in their command of its pragmatic dimensions, including contextual relevance, typicality, and situational appropriateness. This distinction mirrors Kecskés's

(2000) observation that idiomatic competence is not exhausted by dictionary knowledge of an idiom's referential meaning but depends on recognising the situational conditions, here, a sufficiently salient parent-child parallel, under which a given form is conventionally licensed. These results show that effective idiom instruction must go beyond lexical meaning to address the social and pragmatic conventions underlying idiomatic usage in German (see Appendix A, No. 4).

„Jemandem Beine machen“

The use of the idiom *jemandem Beine machen* (hurry someone along; spur someone on) in Text 3 (Appendix A) represents a clear idiomatic deviation. According to Duden (2013), the expression conveys the urge to act more quickly, foregrounding a sense of urgency and pressure. In Text 3, however, the idiom describes motivational or emotional support rather than accelerating action.

This resulted in a semantic-pragmatic shift from 'prompting faster action' to 'encouraging perseverance,' which does not correspond to the idiom's conventional meaning. The mismatch suggested that the learner interpreted the idiom broadly as a synonym for 'ermutigen' (to encourage) or 'anregen' (to stimulate / to inspire), overlooking its core pragmatic nuance of urgency. Consequently, although grammatically correct, the idiom was idiomatically inaccurate. More appropriate alternatives in this context would have been *jemandem Mut machen* (to encourage someone) or *jemanden anspornen* (to motivate someone) (see Appendix B, No. 26).

“Das A und O”

In Text 3, the idiom *das A und O* (the be-all and end-all; the most important thing) emphasises the importance of mathematics to the student, based on her personal enjoyment of the subject. In canonical usage, *das A und O* denotes a fundamental principle or indispensable prerequisite of universal relevance (Friedrich, 1966; Ullmann et al., 2009). However, this use did not fully correspond to the idiom's conventional meaning. Rather than expressing something essential or basic in general, the context foregrounded a subjective preference, shifting the meaning from an objective, normative interpretation to an individual one.

Its application in Text 3, therefore, weakened this normative dimension and reduced the idiom to *something personally important*. This case illustrated learners' tendency to interpret idioms literally as expressions of personal importance rather than as markers of general essentiality. For the intended sense, alternatives such as *Mathe war ihre große Leidenschaft* (Math was her great passion) or *Mathe war ihr Ein und Alles* (Math was her everything) would have been more idiomatic (see Appendix B, No. 19).

“Sich ein Herz fassen”

According to Duden (2013), the idiom *sich ein Herz fassen* (to pluck up the courage) means 'seinen ganzen Mut zusammennehmen,' that is, to gather all one's courage to undertake a difficult or risky action. The expression is typically used when a speaker hesitates, feels fear, or faces psychological barriers that must be overcome to make a firm decision.

In Text 5, the idiom is used to describe the protagonist, who decides to enter the world of music despite knowing the considerable risks and uncertainties involved. From a lexical-semantic perspective, the idiom seems appropriate, as it conveys courage in the face of an uncertain future. However, a closer analysis shows pragmatic inaccuracies.

First, the sentence *Er musste sich ein Herz fassen und Hals über Kopf in die Welt der Musik eintauchen* (He had to pluck up the courage and throw himself headlong into the world of music) creates a semantic overlap and potential contradiction by simultaneously using the idioms *sich ein Herz fassen* and *Hals über Kopf* (pluck up the courage; take heart and headlong; hastily and without careful thought). While *sich ein Herz fassen* (to pluck up the courage) implies a deliberate decision reached after inner struggle and reflection, *Hals über Kopf* (headlong; hastily and without careful thought) denotes rashness and a lack of meticulous consideration. The co-occurrence of these idioms thus generates a tension in meaning, as courage rooted in determination contrasts with impulsive action characterised by insufficient reflection.

Second, the idiom *sich ein Herz fassen* appears to function primarily as a rhetorical embellishment rather than as an organically motivated element of the narrative. The text offers limited insight into the protagonist's internal conflict or emotional struggle leading up to the decision. As a result, the idiom lacks the typical pragmatic preconditions that usually license its use, namely a clearly articulated phase of doubt, fear, or internal deliberation. This omission aligns with the affective dimension idioms are known to carry: because idiomatic phrases tend to encode a stronger emotional charge than their literal paraphrases (Citron et al., 2019), an idiom built around inner struggle loses its pragmatic footing when the narrative does not first establish that struggle.

Although the idiom is not semantically incorrect in isolation, its use in Text 5 can be considered idiomatically imprecise because it combines with another idiom that conveys an opposing pragmatic nuance. For greater coherence and idiomatic naturalness, a formulation such as *Er musste sich ein Herz fassen, um in die Welt der Musik einzutreten* (He had to pluck up the courage

to enter the world of music) (without adding *Hals über Kopf*) would have been more appropriate.

“Alles auf eine Karte setzen“

According to Duden (2013), the idiom *alles auf eine Karte setzen* (put everything at stake; put all one's eggs in one basket) means *alles riskieren* (to risk it all), that is, to stake everything on a single option without retaining alternative courses of action. It is typically used to describe a radical decision involving a high degree of uncertainty, in which all hopes and resources are invested in one definitive move.

In Text 8, the idiom initially appeared appropriate, as starting one's own business is commonly associated with risk. However, closer examination uncovered a pragmatic mismatch between the idiom and its textual context. The adjacent text did not sufficiently convey the notion of total or irreversible risk, as it lacked explicit reference to the absence of choices or to all-or-nothing commitment.

As a result, the idiom functioned primarily to express determination or courage rather than an all-or-nothing gamble, leading to a semantic-pragmatic shift from *risking everything* to merely *trying something new*. This case demonstrated that, although learners grasped the idiom's general meaning, their knowledge of its pragmatic intensity and contextual licensing conditions remained limited (see Appendix B, No. 49).

Nicht auf den Kopf gefallen sein

In Text 4, the idiom *‘nicht auf den Kopf gefallen sein’* (‘be no fool; be clever or resourceful’) initially appeared acceptable, but closer analysis revealed a partial mismatch with its conventional meaning. According to Duden (2013), the idiom denotes intellectual sharpness or quick-wittedness, typically referring to individuals who display cognitive agility or sound judgement.

In the text, the expression was used to describe Max's parents, who eventually accepted his nontraditional career choice. Here, the idiom conveyed open-mindedness or sensibility rather than mental acuity. As their acceptance resulted from reflection over time rather than immediate insight, the idiom's prototypical function was weakened.

Consequently, the idiom functioned as a general positive evaluation rather than a marker of intellectual competence, showing a pragmatic dilution of meaning. This case illustrated learners' tendency to rely on an idiom's broad, positive connotation while overlooking the more specific semantic and pragmatic constraints that govern its natural use in German (see Appendix B, No. 32).

„Kleinvieh macht auch Mist“

According to Duden (2013), the idiom *Kleinvieh macht auch Mist* (every little bit helps; small gains

add up) conveys the idea that even small gains are valuable and is typically used in contexts involving tangible, cumulative results, especially financial or material benefits. In Text 8, the idiom was used to reflect George's appreciation of little, ongoing progress in his business.

While this use was semantically intelligible, it was pragmatically less accurate. The idiom was applied to abstract personal progress rather than to concrete or material outcomes, which represents a shift from its conventional domain of use. Moreover, the expression served more as a motivational reflection than a proverbial comment on the utility of small gains, thereby diluting its pragmatic force.

This pattern shows that while learners have assimilated the idiom's denotative meaning, they have yet to internalise its situational and pragmatic constraints. For the communicative intent at hand, non-idiomatic alternatives such as *jeder kleine Schritt zählt* (every small step counts) or *jeder Fortschritt ist wichtig* (every bit of progress matters) would have more precisely captured the intended nuance (see Table 1, No. 52).

CONCLUSION

As the idiom *zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen* (to kill two birds with one stone) suggests, this study pursued two main objectives: assessing learners' idiomatic competence and examining typical patterns of inaccurate idiomatic use. Across the corpus of 61 idiom tokens drawn from eight student-authored narratives, 50 tokens (82.0%) were used contextually appropriately and 11 (18.0%) inaccurately (see Table 2). The findings further showed that these inaccuracies were systematic rather than random. First, learners relied heavily on dictionary definitions and treated idioms as ordinary vocabulary items. As a result, idioms were often semantically intelligible but pragmatically inappropriate, which explains why they appeared “correct” yet sounded unnatural to native speakers. Second, inaccuracies frequently arose from contextual overextension, in which learners applied idioms to contexts wider or more abstract than is customary. This semantic broadening weakened the idioms' conventional pragmatic constraints, reducing them to loosely expressive or motivational devices. Third, register mismatches contributed to unnatural usage, as idioms associated with informal or evaluative contexts were used in formal contexts. Finally, certain inaccuracies resulted from redundant or conflicting idiom use, either when an idiom merely repeated an already explicit meaning or when multiple idioms with incompatible connotations were combined within a single clause.

From a teaching perspective, these results show that idiom instruction should focus more on real-life use and context. Instead of teaching only definitions, lessons should target the pragmatic

dimension, where learners' inaccuracies clustered, through targeted phraseological interventions. Semantic prosody mapping would have learners collect authentic contexts of an idiom and sort them by the evaluative orientation the idiom typically carries, which would have alerted them to the negative prosody of *sein wahres Gesicht* (show one's true colors) *zeigen* (Case 2). Collocate compatibility drills would have learners test which contexts, participants, and co-occurring expressions an idiom accepts or resists, for example, why *Hals über Kopf* (head over heels/in a rush) clashes with *sich ein Herz fassen* (to pluck up the courage) within one clause (Case 7), or why *zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen* (kill two birds with one stone) requires two clearly separable goals (Case 3). Such activities can help students move from knowing what idioms mean to using them naturally.

These conclusions should be read in light of the study's limitations. The corpus comprised 61 idiom tokens drawn from only eight student-authored narratives, which is sufficient for an exploratory, qualitative account of error types but too small to support claims of statistical generalisability to the broader population of B1-level learners of German; the frequency counts and percentages reported here should therefore be read as descriptive of this particular corpus rather than as population estimates. In addition, contextual appropriateness was coded by a single rater against the Duden reference standard, and while ambiguous cases were re-examined against the fuller discourse context as described in the Methods section, no second, independent coder verified these judgements; some residual subjectivity in borderline cases cannot be ruled out. Future studies would benefit from a larger, more diverse corpus, a second rater with whom inter-rater reliability could be formally calculated, and a systematic mapping of the six-part structural variation typology onto individual idiom tokens, which the present study illustrated only qualitatively through case analysis. Despite these constraints, the patterns identified here, particularly the recurring gap between structurally correct and pragmatically felicitous idiom use, offer a useful starting point for designing idiom instruction that treats context, not just definition, as the primary object of learning.

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The author used ChatGPT, an AI-based language tool, to assist with language editing, improving academic phrasing, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The AI tool was not used to generate research data or determine the research findings. The author reviewed and revised the AI-assisted text and takes full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and integrity of the article.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

Author 1 contributed to conceptualization, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and writing the original manuscript. Author 2 contributed to data collection, literature review, and manuscript revision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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APPENDIX A

This appendix presents the detailed inventory of German idioms identified in the students' narrative texts, including the canonical meanings from Duden (2013) and the example sentence(s) for each token.

No.	German Idiom	Freq.	Meaning in English	Context in Creative Writing	Meaning in English	Contextual Appropriateness
1	<i>den Gürtel enger schnallen</i>	1	tighten one's belt; cut back on spending	Text 1: „Sie wusste, dass sie den Gürtel enger schnallen musste, um über die Runden zu kommen.“	Text 1: “She knew that she had to tighten her belt in order to make ends meet.”	1
2	<i>zum Fenster hinauswerfen</i>	2	throw money down the drain; waste money	Text 1: „Mama, du hast das ganze Geld für diese neue Kaffeemaschine zum Fenster hinausgeworfen!“ Text 1: Rechnungen wurden verspätet bezahlt, und viele der neuen Investitionen hatten sich nicht ausgezahlt. „Mama, du hast das ganze Geld für diese neue Kaffeemaschine zum Fenster hinausgeworfen!“	Text 1: “Mom, you threw all that money away on this new coffee machine!” Text 1: The bills were paid late, and many of the new investments had not paid off. “Mom, you threw all that money away on this new coffee machine!”	1 1
3	<i>in den sauren Apfel beißen</i>	2	bite the bullet; do something unpleasant out of necessity	Text 1: Clara seufzte. „Ich dachte, es würde neue Kunden anlocken. Aber manchmal muss man eben in den sauren Apfel beißen und zugeben, dass man einen Fehler gemacht hat.“ Text 5: Als Steve beschloss, seinen Job zu kündigen und seinen Traum zu verfolgen, wusste er, dass er in den sauren Apfel beißen musste, um seine Leidenschaft für die Musik zu leben.	Text 1: Clara sighed. “I thought it would attract new customers. But sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and admit that you have made a mistake.” Text 5: When Steve decided to quit his job and pursue his dream, he knew that he would have to make a difficult choice in order to live out his passion for music.	1 1
4	<i>der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm</i>	4	The apple doesn't fall far from the tree	Text 1: „Lena, weißt du, ich habe gesehen, wie hart du arbeitest. Du hast wirklich das Herz deiner Mutter geerbt. “Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm, das merkt man.“ Text 2: Nach der Schule und dem Besuch bei Rudi erzählte Tom seiner Mutter von der Präsentation. Sie war stolz auf ihn und sagte: „Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm. “Dein Vater war auch immer so fleißig.“ Text 4: Die Familie Smith war bekannt für ihre Intelligenz. Smith arbeitete als Arzt in einem Krankenhaus, Katie als Forscherin, und der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm. Die älteren Geschwister hatten bereits erfolgreich die akademische Laufbahn ihrer Eltern eingeschlagen. Text 7: Mit traurigem Gefühl wollte Katarina nicht zu Abend essen. Dieses Verhalten erinnerte ihre Mutter an sich selbst. Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.	Text 1: “Lena, you know, I have seen how hard you work. You really have inherited your mother's heart. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, that's clear.” Text 2: After school and visiting Rudi, Tom told his mother about the presentation. She was proud of him and said, “The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Your father was always hardworking, too.” Text 4: The Smith family was known for its intelligence. Smith worked as a doctor in a hospital, Katie as a researcher, and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The older siblings had already successfully followed their parents' academic career paths. Text 7: Feeling sad, Katarina did not want to eat dinner. Her behavior reminded her mother of herself. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.	1 1 0 0
5	<i>Schwein haben</i>	1	be lucky; have a stroke of luck	Text 1: “Wir hatten wirklich Schwein!” Clara lachte und sagte: „Vielleicht, aber ohne deinen Einsatz hätten wir das nicht geschafft.“	Text 1: “We were really lucky!” Clara laughed and said, “Maybe, but we wouldn't have managed it without your efforts.”	0
6	<i>Blut und Wasser schwitzen</i>	1	be scared stiff; sweat blood from fear or anxiety	Text 2: Er war so nervös, dass er Blut und Wasser schwitzte.	Text 2: He was so nervous that he was sweating blood.	1
7	<i>über die Runden kommen</i>	1	make ends meet; manage to get by	Text 1: Sie wusste, dass sie den Gürtel enger schnallen musste, um über die Runden zu kommen.	Text 1: She knew that she had to tighten her belt in order to make ends meet.	1

8	<i>sich vor jdm. in Acht nehmen</i>	1	beware of someone; be on one's guard	Text 1: „Du arbeitest zu viel und achtest nicht auf deine Gesundheit. „Du solltest dich wirklich in Acht nehmen.“	Text 1: “You work too much and don’t take care of your health. You really should be careful.”	1
9	<i>das Bett hüten müssen</i>	1	have to stay in bed; be confined to bed because of illness	Text 1: Ihre Rückenschmerzen wurden schlimmer, und sie fühlte sich jeden Tag erschöpfter. Schließlich musste sie eines Morgens doch das Bett hüten.	Text 1: Her back pain grew worse, and she felt more exhausted every day. Eventually, one morning, she had to stay in bed after all.	1
10	<i>kein Blatt vor den Mund</i>	1	speak one's mind; not mince one's words	Text 1: Während Clara krank war, übernahm Lena das Café. Lena war wie ihre Mutter: fleißig, entschlossen und ohne Angst, kein Blatt vor den Mund zu nehmen, wenn es um ehrliche Kritik ging.	Text 1: While Clara was ill, Lena took over the café. Lena was like her mother: hardworking, determined, and unafraid to speak her mind when it came to honest criticism.	1
11	<i>sein wahres Gesicht zeigen</i>	1	show one's true colors; reveal one's real character	Text 1: Clara zeigte in dieser schwierigen Zeit ihr wahres Gesicht: stark, mutig und bereit, sich ihren Fehlern zu stellen.	Text 1: During this difficult time, Clara showed her true colors: she was strong, brave, and ready to face her mistakes.	0
12	<i>blau machen/ blauer Montag</i>	1	play hooky; skip work without a valid reason	Text 2: Leider war sein bester Freund Rudi, der ihn sonst beruhigen konnte, nicht da. Tom dachte kurz, dass er blau machte, hörte aber, dass er wirklich krank war.	Text 2: Unfortunately, his best friend Rudi, who usually helped calm him down, was not there. For a moment, Tom thought he was playing hooky, but then he heard that Rudi was genuinely ill.	1
13	<i>[nicht] bei der Sache sein</i>	1	be [un]focused; [not] pay attention to what one is doing	Text 2: Während des Unterrichts bemerkte seine Lehrerin, dass er nicht ganz bei der Sache war.	Text 2: During the lesson, his teacher noticed that he was not quite paying attention.	1
14	<i>jdn. im Auge behalten</i>	1	keep an eye on someone; watch someone closely	Text 2: „Tom, ich werde dich heute im Auge behalten,“, sagte sie lächelnd. Das machte ihn noch nervöser.	Text 2: “Tom, I’ll be keeping an eye on you today,” she said with a smile. That made him even more nervous.	1
15	<i>mit Ach und Krach</i>	1	by the skin of one's teeth; with great difficulty	Text 2: Als er endlich an der Reihe war, schaffte er es, die Präsentation mit Ach und Krach zu halten.	Text 2: When his turn finally came, he managed to give the presentation by the skin of his teeth.	1
16	<i>ohne Fleiß kein Preis</i>	2	no pain, no gain; success requires effort	Text 2: Als er endlich an der Reihe war, schaffte er es, die Präsentation mit Ach und Krach zu halten. „Ohne Fleiß kein Preis,“ dachte er, als seine Mitschüler applaudierten. Text 7: Und es stellte sich heraus, dass es wahr war: Als Katarina auf die Bühne trat, war ihr Auftritt wirklich gut und beeindruckend. Sie wusste, dass ohne Fleiß kein Preis!	Text 2: When his turn finally came, he managed to give the presentation by the skin of his teeth. “No pain, no gain,” he thought as his classmates applauded. Text 7: And it turned out to be true: when Katarina stepped onto the stage, her performance was really good and impressive. She knew that hard work pays off!	1 1
17	<i>zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen</i>	1	kill two birds with one stone	Text 2: In der Pause fragte ihn seine Freundin Emma, ob sie später zusammen Rudi, der krank war, besuchen wollten. „Klar,“ sagte Tom, „dann können wir zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen, ihn besuchen und Zeit zusammen verbringen.“	Text 2: During the break, his friend Emma asked him whether they could visit Rudi, who was ill, later. “Sure,” Tom said. “Then we can kill two birds with one stone: visit him and spend time together.”	0
18	<i>das Handtuch werfen</i>	1	throw in the towel; give up	Text 2: Am Abend machte Tom seine Mathe-Hausaufgaben, die er nächste Woche abgeben musste. Er hatte große Schwierigkeiten und sagte „Ich glaube, ich werfe das Handtuch und werde Emma morgen früh bitten, mir zu helfen.“	Text 2: In the evening, Tom worked on his math homework, which he had to hand in the following week. He was having great difficulty and said, “I think I’ll throw in the towel and ask Emma to help me tomorrow morning.”	1
19	<i>das A und O</i>	1	the be-all and end-all; the most important thing	Text 3: Endlich ist der Tag der Mathe-Olympiade gekommen. Für Laura war Mathe das A und O, sie liebte Zahlen und Logikrätsel.	Text 3: At last, the day of the Mathematics Olympiad had arrived. For Laura, math was the be-all and end-all; she loved numbers and logic puzzles.	0
20	<i>auf der Kippe stehen</i>	1	hang in the balance; be in a critical or uncertain situation	Text 3: Ihr Erfolg stand auf der Kippe, und sie musste ihr Bestes geben.	Text 3: Her success was hanging in the balance, and she had to do her best.	1

21	<i>aus der Haut fahren</i>	1	fly off the handle; lose one's temper	Text 3: <i>Laura machte einen Fehler, der sie fast aus der Haut fahren ließ, aber sie zwang sich, ruhig zu bleiben.</i>	Text 3: Laura made a mistake that almost made her lose her temper, but she forced herself to remain calm.	1
22	<i>das Eis ist gebrochen</i>	1	the ice is broken; the awkwardness has been dispelled	Text 3: <i>Nach einer kurzen Pause kamen Lauras Freunde zu ihr und sprachen ihr Mut zu. Mit diesen Worten war das Eis gebrochen, und sie fühlte sich ein wenig besser.</i>	Text 3: After a short break, Laura's friends came over and encouraged her. With those words, the ice was broken, and she felt a little better.	1
23	<i>alle Register ziehen</i>	1	pull out all the stops; use every available means	Text 3: <i>In der nächsten Runde zog Laura alle Register. Als ein schwieriges Problem auftauchte, dachte sie daran, aufzugeben.</i>	Text 3: In the next round, Laura pulled out all the stops. When a difficult problem came up, she thought about giving up.	1
24	<i>die Finger nicht davon lassen</i>	1	have nothing to do with someone or something; keep one's hands off it	Text 3: <i>Aber sie beschloss, die Finger nicht davon zu lassen. Am Ende gab Laura ihre Antwort in einem Zustand der Angst ab.</i>	Text 3: But she decided not to give up on it. In the end, Laura submitted her answer while feeling anxious.	1
25	<i>das Gesicht verlieren</i>	1	lose face; suffer a loss of reputation	Text 3: <i>Als die Gewinnerin bekannt gegeben wurde, war Laura sehr nervös und hatte Angst, die Matheolympiade diesmal nicht zu gewinnen. Laura hatte Angst, vor allen anderen das Gesicht zu verlieren, wenn sie versagte.</i>	Text 3: When the winner was announced, Laura was very nervous and afraid that she would not win the Mathematics Olympiad this time. She was afraid of losing face in front of everyone if she failed.	1
26	<i>jemandem Beine machen</i>	1	hurry someone along; spur someone on	Text 3: <i>Ihre Lehrerin war sehr stolz und lobte Laura. Ihre Lehrerin war sich sehr sicher, dass sie es schaffen konnte, sie brauchte nur jemanden, der ihr Beine machte, um sie anzutreiben.</i>	Text 3: Her teacher was very proud and praised Laura. The teacher was sure that Laura could do it; she just needed someone to spur her on.	0
27	<i>aus der Art schlagen</i>	2	be unlike the rest of one's family; be the exception	Text 4: <i>Das jüngste Kind der Familie Smith schlug aus der Art im Vergleich zu seinen Geschwistern.</i> Text 5: <i>Viele sagten, dass er aus der Art schlägt, weil er seine sichere Karriere aufgab, aber Steve war fest entschlossen, Bäume ausreißen zu können und seine Träume zu verwirklichen.</i>	Text 4: The youngest child in the Smith family was different from his siblings. Text 5: Many people said that he was different from the rest because he gave up his secure career, but Steve was determined to achieve great things and make his dreams come true.	1 1
28	<i>mehrere Eisen im Feuer haben</i>	1	have several irons in the fire; have more than one option	Text 4: <i>„Während seine Geschwister in der akademischen Welt mehrere Eisen im Feuer hatten, entschied sich Max dazu, Künstler zu werden.“</i>	Text 4: “While his siblings had several irons in the fire in the academic world, Max decided to become an artist.”	1
29	<i>Jemandem die Daumen drücken</i>	1	keep one's fingers crossed for someone; wish someone luck	Text 4: <i>Seine Eltern drückten ihm die Daumen und hofften, dass er zur ursprünglich geplanten Familienaufbahn zurückkehren würde, doch Max blieb bei seiner Entscheidung.</i>	Text 4: His parents kept their fingers crossed for him and hoped that he would return to the family career path originally planned for him, but Max stuck to his decision.	1
30	<i>Jemandem auf die Finger schauen</i>	1	keep a close eye on someone; watch someone's actions	Text 4: <i>Jedes Mal, wenn seine Eltern ihm auf die Finger schauten, wurde er in seiner Wahl nur bestärkt.</i>	Text 4: Every time his parents kept a close eye on him, he became even more convinced of his choice.	1
31	<i>Hals über Kopf</i>	3	headlong; hastily and without careful thought	Text 4: <i>Max hat schließlich den Weg gezeigt. Hals über Kopf baute er seine Karriere als berühmter Graffiti-Künstler auf. Seine Eltern, die anfangs skeptisch waren, waren Gottlob nicht auf den Kopf gefallen und begannen schließlich, Maxs Leidenschaft und Mut zu schätzen.</i> Text 5: <i>Steve war fest entschlossen, Bäume ausreißen zu können und seine Träume zu verwirklichen. Er musste sich ein Herz fassen und Hals über Kopf in die Welt der Musik eintauchen, auch wenn er wusste, dass es riskant war.</i> Text 7: <i>Am nächsten Tag ging Katarina Hals über Kopf zum Kurs, obwohl es nicht ihr regulärer Kurstag war</i>	Text 4: Max eventually showed the way. He built his career as a famous graffiti artist headlong. His parents, who had initially been skeptical, were fortunately no fools and eventually began to appreciate Max's passion and courage. Text 5: Steve was determined to achieve great things and make his dreams come true. He had to pluck up the courage and throw himself headlong into the world of music, even though he knew it was risky. Text 7: The next day, Katarina rushed to the course, even though it was not her regular class day.	1 1 1

32	<i>Nicht auf den Kopf gefallen sein</i>	1	be no fool; be clever or resourceful	Text 4: Seine Eltern, die anfangs skeptisch waren, waren Gottlob nicht auf den Kopf gefallen und begannen schließlich, Maxs Leidenschaft und Mut zu schätzen.	Text 4: His parents, who had initially been skeptical, were fortunately no fools and eventually began to appreciate Max's passion and courage.	0
33	<i>Bäume ausreißen können</i>	1	be full of energy; feel capable of great things	Text 5: Viele sagten, dass er aus der Art schlägt, weil er seine Karriere aufgab, aber Steve war fest entschlossen, Bäume ausreißen zu können und seine Träume zu verwirklichen.	Text 5: Many people said that he was different from the rest because he gave up his career, but Steve was determined to achieve great things and make his dreams come true.	1
34	<i>sich ein Herz fassen</i>	1	pluck up the courage; take heart	Text 5: Er musste sich ein Herz fassen und Hals über Kopf in die Welt der Musik eintauchen, auch wenn er wusste, dass es riskant war.	Text 5: He had to pluck up the courage and throw himself headlong into the world of music, even though he knew it was risky.	0
35	<i>etwas auf seine eigene Kappe nehmen</i>	1	take responsibility for something; take something upon oneself	Text 5: Schließlich war er bereit, etwas auf seine eigene Kappe zu nehmen,	Text 5: Finally, he was ready to take responsibility for it himself.	1
36	<i>In die Brüche gehen</i>	1	fall apart; break down or come to an end	Text 5: Denn er wollte nicht, dass sein Traum in die Brüche geht.	Text 5: Because he did not want his dream to fall apart.	1
37	<i>einem einen Floh ins Ohr setzen</i>	1	put an idea into someone's head that they cannot stop thinking about	Text 6: Am Morgen hatte Niklas die Idee, in ein neues Geschäft zu investieren. Er erzählte Leon begeistert davon: "Stell dir vor, wie viel wir verdienen könnten!" Doch Leon hatte Zweifel. "Niklas, du hast mir wirklich einen Floh ins Ohr gesetzt." "Bist du sicher, dass das klappt?"	Text 6: In the morning, Niklas had the idea of investing in a new business. He told Leon about it enthusiastically: "Just imagine how much we could earn!" But Leon had doubts. "Niklas, you've really put an idea in my head that I can't stop thinking about. Are you sure this will work?"	1
38	<i>die Hosen anhaben</i>	1	wear the pants; be in charge	Text 6: Niklas Frau Laura mischt sich ein. "Niklas, du hast immer diese verrückten Ideen." "Du tust so, als würdest du die Hosen anhaben, aber am Ende geht alles schief!"	Text 6: Niklas's wife, Laura, joined the conversation. "Niklas, you're always coming up with these crazy ideas. You act as if you're the one in charge, but in the end everything goes wrong!"	1
39	<i>für die Katz sein</i>	1	be for nothing; be a waste of time or effort	Text 6: Am Nachmittag trafen sie sich mit einem Geschäftspartner, um die Details zu besprechen. Doch nach langen Diskussionen merkte Leon, dass die ganze Sache für die Katze sein könnte.	Text 6: In the afternoon, they met with a business partner to discuss the details. But after lengthy discussions, Leon realized that the whole thing might be a waste of time and effort.	1
40	<i>sein eigenes Nest beschmutzen</i>	1	besmirch one's own nest; speak badly of one's own family or group	Text 6: Leon fühlte sich, als würde Niklas das eigene Nest beschmutzen, indem er eine riskante Entscheidung traf, die auch seine Familie gefährden könnte.	Text 6: Leon felt as though Niklas was damaging his own family's interests by making a risky decision that could also endanger his family.	1
41	<i>andere Saiten aufziehen</i>	1	take a tougher line; adopt a stricter approach	Text 6: Der Partner stellte sich als unzuverlässig heraus, und das Geld war fast weg. Laura stellte Niklas zur Rede: "Ab jetzt musst du andere Saiten aufziehen und vernünftiger sein!"	Text 6: The partner turned out to be unreliable, and the money was almost gone. Laura confronted Niklas: "From now on, you need to take a tougher line and act more sensibly!"	1
42	<i>auf dem hohen Ross sitzen</i>	1	be on one's high horse; act arrogantly	Text 6: Am Ende musste Niklas zugeben, dass er sich geirrt hatte. "Ich hätte nicht so auf dem hohen Ross sitzen sollen", sagte er zu Leon und Laura. "Ich wollte zu viel und habe euch dabei nicht zugehört."	Text 6: In the end, Niklas had to admit that he had been wrong. "I shouldn't have acted so arrogantly," he said to Leon and Laura. "I wanted too much and didn't listen to you."	1
43	<i>für jemanden durchs Feuer gehen</i>	1	go through fire for someone; do anything for someone	Text 6: "Kein Problem, Niklas." "Du weißt, ich gehe immer noch für dich durchs Feuer, aber vielleicht hörst du das nächste Mal ein bisschen mehr auf mich."	Text 6: "No problem, Niklas. You know I'd still go through fire for you, but perhaps next time you could listen to me a little more."	1
44	<i>mit Leib und Seele dabei sein</i>	1	be wholeheartedly involved; be devoted to something	Text 7: Eines Tages sagte sie zu Katarinas Mutter: "Ihre Tochter ist mit Leib und Seele dabei, wenn sie Geige lernt."	Text 7: One day, she said to Katarina's mother, "Your daughter is wholeheartedly devoted to learning the violin."	1
45	<i>Ab durch die Mitte</i>	1	get out of here; move along quickly	Text 7: Ihre Mutter schrie und zog sie ins Haus. "Heute wird es stürmisch." Also ab durch die Mitte und zurück in dein Zimmer!"	Text 7: Her mother shouted and pulled her into the house. "It's going to be stormy today. So move along quickly and get	1

					back to your room!"	
46	mit den Hühnern schlafen gehen	1	go to bed very early; go to bed with the chickens	<i>Text 7: Das Training war einen Monat lang so hart, dass Katarina immer mit den Hühnern schlafen ging.</i>	Text 7: The training was so intense for a month that Katarina always went to bed very early.	1
47	die Flinte ins Korn werfen	1	throw in the towel; give up too soon	<i>Text 7: Aber ihre Geigenlehrerin sagte, "Werf nicht so schnell die Flinte ins Korn, Katarina. Ich werde dich unterstützen, du schaffst das"</i>	Text 7: But her violin teacher said, "Don't give up so quickly, Katarina. I'll support you; you can do it."	1
48	von der Hand in den Mund leben	1	live hand to mouth; spend what one earns on immediate necessities	<i>Text 8: George war ein einfacher Mann, der jahrelang von der Hand in den Mund lebte. Sein Job als Verkäufer brachte ihm gerade genug ein, um die Miete zu bezahlen.</i>	Text 8: George was a simple man who had lived hand to mouth for years. His job as a salesperson earned him just enough to pay the rent.	1
49	alles auf eine Karte setzen	1	put everything at stake; put all one's eggs in one basket	<i>Text 8: Eines Tages beschloss er, alles zu ändern. „Ich werde alles auf eine Karte setzen und mein eigenes Geschäft eröffnen“, sagte er zu sich selbst.</i>	Text 8: One day, he decided to change everything. "I'm going to risk everything and open my own business," he said to himself.	0
50	etwas auf die hohe Kante legen	1	put money aside; save up	<i>Text 8: Mit dem wenigen Geld, das er auf die hohe Kante gelegt hatte, begann er, ein kleines Cafe zu planen.</i>	Text 8: With the little money he had saved, he began planning a small café.	1
51	Kopf und Kragen riskieren	1	risk one's neck; put one's life or existence at risk	<i>Text 8: Er wusste, dass er Kopf und Kragen riskierte, denn wenn das Cafe scheitern würde, wäre er pleite.</i>	Text 8: He knew he was risking everything, because if the café failed, he would be bankrupt.	1
52	Kleinvieh macht auch Mist	1	every little bit helps; small gains add up	<i>Text 8: George erkannte, dass er mit seiner Idee erfolgreich war. Kleinvieh macht auch Mist, dachte er, als er jeden Tag kleine Fortschritte machte und Kunden gewann.</i>	Text 8: George realized that his idea was succeeding. "Every little bit helps," he thought as he made small advances and gained customers every day.	0

APPENDIX B

This appendix presents the German idiom types identified in learners' narrative texts, along with their frequency and contextual appropriateness.

No.	German Idiom	Meaning in English	Freq.	Contextual appropriateness
1	<i>den Gürtel enger schnallen</i>	tighten one's belt; cut back on spending	1	Appropriate (1)
2	<i>zum Fenster hinauswerfen</i>	throw money down the drain; waste money	2	2 appropriate, 0 inaccurate
3	<i>in den sauren Apfel beißen</i>	bite the bullet; do something unpleasant out of necessity	2	2 appropriate, 0 inaccurate
4	<i>der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm</i>	the apple doesn't fall far from the tree	4	2 appropriate, 2 inaccurate
5	<i>Schwein haben</i>	be lucky; have a stroke of luck	1	Inaccurate (0)
6	<i>Blut und Wasser schwitzen</i>	be scared stiff; sweat blood from fear or anxiety	1	Appropriate (1)
7	<i>über die Runden kommen</i>	make ends meet; manage to get by	1	Appropriate (1)
8	<i>sich vor jdm. in Acht nehmen</i>	beware of someone; be on one's guard	1	Appropriate (1)
9	<i>das Bett hüten müssen</i>	have to stay in bed; be confined to bed because of illness	1	Appropriate (1)
10	<i>kein Blatt vor den Mund</i>	speak one's mind; not mince one's words	1	Appropriate (1)
11	<i>sein wahres Gesicht zeigen</i>	show one's true colors; reveal one's real character	1	Inaccurate (0)
12	<i>blau machen/blauer Montag</i>	play hooky; skip work without a valid reason	1	Appropriate (1)
13	<i>[nicht] bei der Sache sein</i>	be [un]focused; [not] pay attention to what one is doing	1	Appropriate (1)
14	<i>jdn. im Auge behalten</i>	keep an eye on someone; watch someone closely	1	Appropriate (1)
15	<i>mit Ach und Krach</i>	by the skin of one's teeth; with great difficulty	1	Appropriate (1)
16	<i>ohne Fleiß kein Preis</i>	no pain, no gain; success requires effort	2	2 appropriate, 0 inaccurate
17	<i>zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen</i>	kill two birds with one stone	1	Inaccurate (0)
18	<i>das Handtuch werfen</i>	throw in the towel; give up	1	Appropriate (1)
19	<i>das A und O</i>	the be-all and end-all; the most important thing	1	Inaccurate (0)
20	<i>auf der Kippe stehen</i>	hang in the balance; be in a critical or uncertain situation	1	Appropriate (1)
21	<i>aus der Haut fahren</i>	fly off the handle; lose one's temper	1	Appropriate (1)
22	<i>das Eis ist gebrochen</i>	the ice is broken; the awkwardness has been dispelled	1	Appropriate (1)
23	<i>alle Register ziehen</i>	pull out all the stops; use every available means	1	Appropriate (1)
24	<i>die Finger nicht davon lassen</i>	have nothing to do with someone or something; keep one's hands off it	1	Appropriate (1)
25	<i>das Gesicht verlieren</i>	lose face; suffer a loss of reputation	1	Appropriate (1)
26	<i>jemandem Beine machen</i>	hurry someone along; spur someone on	1	Inaccurate (0)
27	<i>aus der Art schlagen</i>	be unlike the rest of one's family; be the exception	2	2 appropriate, 0 inaccurate
28	<i>mehrere Eisen im Feuer haben</i>	have several irons in the fire; have more than one option	1	Appropriate (1)
29	<i>Jemandem die Daumen drücken</i>	keep one's fingers crossed for someone; wish someone luck	1	Appropriate (1)
30	<i>Jemandem auf die Finger schauen</i>	keep a close eye on someone; watch someone's actions	1	Appropriate (1)
31	<i>Hals über Kopf</i>	headlong; hastily and without careful thought	3	3 appropriate, 0 inaccurate
32	<i>Nicht auf den Kopf gefallen sein</i>	be no fool; be clever or resourceful	1	Inaccurate (0)
33	<i>Bäume ausreißen können</i>	be full of energy; feel capable of great things	1	Appropriate (1)
34	<i>sich ein Herz fassen</i>	pluck up the courage; take heart	1	Inaccurate (0)
35	<i>etwas auf seine eigene Kappe nehmen</i>	take responsibility for something; take something upon oneself	1	Appropriate (1)
36	<i>In die Brüche gehen</i>	fall apart; break down or come to an end	1	Appropriate (1)
37	<i>einem einen Floh ins Ohr setzen</i>	put an idea into someone's head that they cannot stop thinking about	1	Appropriate (1)
38	<i>die Hosen anhaben</i>	wear the pants; be in charge	1	Appropriate (1)
39	<i>für die Katz sein</i>	be for nothing; be a waste of time or effort	1	Appropriate (1)
40	<i>sein eigenes Nest beschmutzen</i>	besmirch one's own nest; speak badly of one's own family or group	1	Appropriate (1)
41	<i>andere Saiten aufziehen</i>	take a tougher line; adopt a stricter approach	1	Appropriate (1)
42	<i>auf dem hohen Ross sitzen</i>	be on one's high horse; act arrogantly	1	Appropriate (1)
43	<i>für jemanden durchs Feuer gehen</i>	go through fire for someone; do anything for someone	1	Appropriate (1)
44	<i>mit Leib und Seele dabei sein</i>	be wholeheartedly involved; be devoted to something	1	Appropriate (1)
45	<i>Ab durch die Mitte</i>	get out of here; move along quickly	1	Appropriate (1)
46	<i>mit den Hühnern schlafen gehen</i>	go to bed very early; go to bed with the chickens	1	Appropriate (1)
47	<i>die Flinte ins Korn werfen</i>	throw in the towel; give up too soon	1	Appropriate (1)
48	<i>von der Hand in den Mund leben</i>	live hand to mouth; spend what one earns on immediate necessities	1	Appropriate (1)
49	<i>alles auf eine Karte setzen</i>	put everything at stake; put all one's eggs in one basket	1	Inaccurate (0)
50	<i>etwas auf die hohe Kante legen</i>	put money aside; save up	1	Appropriate (1)
51	<i>Kopf und Kragen riskieren</i>	risk one's neck; put one's life or existence at risk	1	Appropriate (1)
52	<i>Kleinvieh macht auch Mist</i>	every little bit helps; small gains add up	1	Inaccurate (0)