Kick the Bucket or Cash in One’s Chips

An analysis of some English slang expressions for dying

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Abstract

This research analyses some of the slang expressions with the meaning ‘to die’ found in Dictionary of Modern Slang with regard to metaphor and metonymy and whether they have been active when creating the identified slang expressions. It further examines the frequency of these expressions in a large language corpus, and identifies the processes involved in the most frequent expressions. The main findings show that the domain ‘departure’ is the most frequent domain for metaphorical conceptualizations of dying, which suggests that death, like life, can be viewed as a journey. One can speculate that this metaphorical mapping could go back to religious origin, where death is not seen as the end. Several of the expressions are still used within the English language, and the most frequent expressions in the corpus were metonymic in nature and have developed into idiomatic phrases, which are frozen in form.

Keywords: Metaphor, metonymy, idioms, slang, dying
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1 Introduction

Death is as natural part of life as birth is, and is one of the elementary human experiences that we cannot avoid being exposed to. It has become one of life’s mysteries, due to the fact that no one really knows anything about it and is one matter people fear the most. Partly therefore, death has always been considered a taboo topic and people address it in different ways. More specifically, people often use words or expressions which do not reveal the real issue, death or dying.

Marin-Arrése (1996), Fernandez (2006), Galal (2014) are a few scholars who have conducted linguistic research with the focus on death metaphors, but no one has to the best of my knowledge, looked specifically at slang expressions in this context. The previous research shows that people often resort to slang expressions, metaphors, euphemisms or idioms, which gives people a chance to address death and other sensitive topics without being unpleasant. For instance, if a person is very ill and is about to die, people could say ‘He does not have that much time left’, ‘He is about to leave us’. When a person has died, people often refer to it as ‘He has left us’, ‘He is gone’, ’She is no longer with us’. All of these expressions could be conceptualized as DEATH IS DEPARTURE or DYING IS DEPARTURE. Furthermore, the results in the previous research show that death is conceptualized in similar ways and to some degree considered to be universal. A common way of conceptualizing death according to the previous research is DEATH IS A JOURNEY where departure can be a part of the journey.

Slang is considered as an informal language, due to the fact that it often contains of unconventional words or expressions. If we observe the slang expressions for ‘dying’ in the Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang (2010), we find a disparate group of words and phrases which seemingly have little in common, nor do they appear to have anything to do with ‘dying’. Therefore, it was interesting for me to conduct research addressing what kind of metaphors and metonymies have been active when forming slang expression for ‘dying’. A couple of reasons make slang expressions interesting. They are supposedly creative expressions and they do not express anything directly of dying, but indirectly by means of metaphors and metonymies. Secondly, it was interesting to see whether the identified expressions appear at all in a large language corpus, and which are most frequent.
2 Aim

On the basis of the slang expressions found for ‘dying’ in the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* (2010), this paper aims to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of metaphors and metonymies have been active in creating the identified slang expressions for dying?
- How frequent are the identified slang expressions in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* corpus?
- What kinds of processes have been involved in the most frequent expressions and which are most likely to be picked up by the general speech community, judging from the corpus data?
3 Background

3.1 Slang

Slang is considered as something which is easy to use, but difficult to define and although slang has been an accepted term since 1850, its origin is uncertain. Nevertheless, slang today is used among every social class and the stigma it used to have is largely gone, but it is still considered as informal language. Partridge is of the opinion that slang is the quintessence of colloquial language and should be more related to convenience than scientific laws, grammar or philosophical ideas. Furthermore, he states that slang is more affected by the surrounding circumstances than upon intrinsic qualities (Partridge, 2015: 1-7).

Algeo (2011:xxiii) says that slang’s semantic domains are sex, intoxication, violence, death and other domains which might be considered taboo. Thus, Algeo suggests that slang is frequently euphemistic in character. Slang can also be idiom-like in form, as in the phrase cash in one’s chips.

Partridge (2015:7) cites Whitney (1875), who is of the opinion that slang is a product of ‘mental activity and natural delight of language making’. According to Partridge (2015), slang becomes slang when one word or phrase is used outside its original group and when the meaning changes or is applied in other ways. Slang has also been considered as ‘lazy man’s speech’. However, when a word or phrase becomes definite in meaning, it normally ceases to be slang (7).

Eble’s (1996) definition of slang is more detailed. She says that slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases and is solely used to reinforce social identity within different social groups. She states that slang does have some consistent characteristics. Firstly, slang changes very quickly due to the fact that there is a constant supply of new words. However, this does not apply to all slang. A few expressions stay within language, which results in those slang expressions losing their slang status, and being viewed as merely informal language.

Secondly, Eble states that slang is as innovative as ordinary language is in general. Yet there is no proper evidence that slang phrases are constructed within any special or unfamiliar ways. Slang also seems to have some group identifying functions. However, this is nothing general. Lastly, slang vocabulary is not considered to be tied to any
specific geographical areas apart from some slang words which occur in specific regions (18-24).

3.2 Taboo and Euphemisms

Euphemisms is a linguistic feature people can use when addressing topics which are difficult to talk about, such as death or dying. Allan & Burridge (2006) speak of death and the fears people have for it. A few fears they mention are: the fear of losing a person you love, fear of the corruption of the body, and fear of the finality of death (222). According to Allan & Burridge, death is a major taboo subject. Compared to people living in the Middle Ages who were confronted with mortality on an every-day basis, the majority of people today are removed from immediate interaction with death. They concluded that within the newspaper announcements of death they studied, the euphemisms fell into four categories: death as loss, worries about the soul, death as a journey and death as a beginning of new life (223-226).

Fernandez (2006:101) points out that people often resort to euphemisms when talking about death and dying, which is another linguistic feature. Euphemisms are alternative words or expressions which are used in contexts when addressing death or other topics that would be considered taboo. According to Fernandez, people are reluctant to deal with death in straightforward terms. He is of the opinion that people face death with different types of language. They try to soften the effects of what they are saying. Holder (2008: vii) and Robins (1996: 212) say that people resort to euphemisms as a polite way of speaking about taboo and sensitive subjects.

3.3 Idioms

A common definition of idioms is that they are defined as phrases behaving like words; we are not able to understand individual words due to the fact that they do not reveal the meaning of the phrase (Ayto, 2009: vii).

Thus, a key feature for idioms is their semantic opaqueness. Another feature is that words which make up the idioms have a fixed order and there is very little room for changes. They cannot be changed into passive and their key words are almost impossible to substitute with other words. Idioms are sometimes used when talking
about difficult or taboo topics and just spoken one phrase or two at the time. Some idioms are also connected to certain regions (Ayto & Simpson, 2010: vii).

Hamblin & Gibbs (1999) state that idiomatic phrases differ in ‘analyzability’. Some idioms are highly decomposable and contain of parts which independently contribute to their overall figurative meaning while other idioms are considered as non-decomposable and contain of parts which do not contribute to the idiomatic meaning such as *kick the bucket* (25).

Liu (2012) is of the opinion that idiom variation is a ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon and that idioms have an important part in language and culture. Liu says, that knowing a language also means knowing its idioms (105).

Gibbs (2017) states that there are several idiomatic phrases which arise from forgotten historical reasons which lead them to be frozen and dead metaphors. The research which has been done on idioms shows that several idioms are considered to have a specific figurative meaning, mostly motivated by our metaphorical and metonymical knowledge. He mentions that the cognitive linguistics view of idioms assumes that idioms can partially be interpreted, where the figurative meaning gives a small contribution to the metaphorical meaning of an entire phrase. This would suggest that the analysability of idioms allows the phrases to be lexically and syntactically productive. This suggests that if an idiom is analysable it is motivated by widely held conceptual metaphors. Idioms tend to express figurative meanings that reflect metonymic relations which do not take part in speaker’s contemporary understandings. He is of the opinion that idioms are likely to be viewed as clichéd expressions which do not reflect any active metaphorical thinking (40-41).

### 3.4 Metaphor and metonymy

The ‘traditional’ way of looking at metaphors and metonymy is that they are considered to be ‘figures of speech’, in other words ‘as more or less ornamental devices used in rhetorical style’ (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006:114). Some famous metaphor examples are phrases like ‘you are my sunshine’, referring to a person who is happy and bright, ‘he is a walking Encyclopaedia’ suggests he is full of knowledge. We also have famous metonymies; ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’ where the pen refers to ‘the written word’ and swords stands for ‘military aggression and force’. People also use words
metonymically: ‘crown’ stands for a royal person, ‘ears’ for attention and ‘eyes’ for sight etc.

Ungerer and Schmid propose that these two phenomena, metaphor and metonymy, play a crucial role in everyday language. In short, metaphors are built on similarities while metonymies are built on conceptual closeness. Ungerer and Schmid refer to Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003: 7f), who argue that people do not just exploit the metaphor +TIME IS MONEY+ in linguistic terms, people actually conceptualize the target concept TIME through the source concept MONEY. Lakoff and Johnson, suggest that when people use phrases, they establish links between source and target which do not seem to belong together by nature (115-118).

Ungerer & Schmid also refer to Lakoff and Turner’s (1989: 1ff) way of illustrating the conception of metaphor where the human life cycle is conceptualized as first as arriving in the world, going through life and finally leaving or departing at the time of one’s death. Specifically, this means that we look at life as three journeys, and seen as metaphorical expressions (118).

Lakoff & Turner (1989) suggest that metaphors are so common and therefore not always noticed. They state that people use euphemisms when they want to talk about death. Euphemisms they mention are; ‘He passed away’, ‘He is no longer with us’, ‘He has left us’. Speaking of a family member or a close friend as ‘still with us’ refers to that he is still alive but ‘still’ in the phrase indicates forthcoming departure. A person who is considered to be ‘at Death’s door’ is a person slipping away. The saying ‘we lost him’ means that he died; something lost is something absent (1-2), which can be conceptualized as DEATH IS LOSS.

Gibbs (2017:7) proposes that ‘metaphors provide evidence on the embodied foundation of abstract thinking and action while conceptual metaphor theory (hereafter CMT) advances the way we think and understand the links between bodily experiences and ubiquitous thought patterns about abstract topics’. He proposes that metaphors are creative, novel and culturally sensitive which allows people to transcend the normal. Metaphors seem to be rooted in our bodily experiences and unconscious thought patterns (16). Conceptual metaphors also provide a base for people and their understanding of abstract concepts (Gibbs, 2017:18)
According to Handl & Schmid (2011), metaphors are mainly a way of thinking about different topics not just difficult ones. Metaphors are more informative of how speakers and writers perceive specific issues. Figurative structures in a person’s mind arise and are sustained by both linguistic and non-linguistic sources. A so-called ‘Whorfian’ perspective is explained as a figurative thought which is influenced by the conventionalized figurative expressions which are included in the surrounding language(s). Functioning as if a person’s native language teaches the person to talk about TIME in terms of MONEY, he or she will probably conceptualize TIME AS MONEY. On the other hand, an individual’s system of figurative thoughts is formed by non-linguistic perceptions and experiences which rely on individual and personal memories, opinions or attitudes. However, these tend not to develop in isolation, they do develop under influence of socio-cultural models and values which they share with a large group of people (e.g. the culture-specific Japanese conceptualization of ANGER located in the *hara*, ‘belly’; cf. e.g. Matsuki 1995) (2011: 4).

Conceptual metaphor theory is more focused on the interests in conventional examples and mappings. This theory is also able to explain and accommodate linguistic expressions as long as the expressions are compatible with the general metaphorical makeup of the human mind (Handl & Schmid, 2011: 3-7).

### 3.5 Previous research on expressions for death and dying

Death is a universally shared experience and is naturally embodied, which could be a natural reason for comparisons. The following studies have conducted research where English is compared with other languages and where metaphorical conceptualization of death and dying have been analysed. I will address them here to show how the conceptualization of death in many ways is considered universal.

Marín-Arrése (1996) conducted a study of metaphors for death and dying in English and Spanish. The main purpose of her study was to account for how we conceptualize death metaphorically in terms of a limited system of metaphors, metonymies and image-schemas which are grounded in our bodily and social experience. She states that some mappings can be seen as universal while others are culture specific. The mapping DEATH IS SLEEP had a variety of expressions in both languages, and could be considered to be based on the system of beliefs. Other
mappings which had overlapping metaphors based on the system of beliefs were
DEATH IS DEFEAT, DEATH IS A CONTAINER and DEATH IS A JOURNEY. Her
findings reveal that there are parallels between the metaphor systems in both English
and Spanish. She proposes that other studies of languages which are not non-Judaeo-
Christian culture will undoubtedly reveal a different metaphor mapping than those
which are related to religion but could also be accounted for in terms of embodiment
(51).

Kövecses (2010) is of the opinion that our metaphorical conceptualization of death
is very common in our everyday language. Death is perceived as departure but also as
night, darkness and something cold (55). He also proposes that unconventional
metaphorical expressions do not just occur in the realm of arts. He suggests that there
are many creative speakers who may produce linguistic metaphors based on
conventional conceptual metaphors. Some well-known categories of speakers are sports
journalists, politicians, authentic users of slang and so forth (66).

Galal (2013) conducted a study of death euphemisms in English and Arabic. The
aim of his study was to investigate and compare the conceptualization of death
euphemisms in English and in Arabic using conceptual metaphor theory. He concluded
that the speakers of the language share a common human experience; people avoid
mentioning death and use the same euphemistic conceptual metaphors. His findings
indicate that religion plays a crucial soothing role regarding death euphemisms in both
languages. Many specific metaphors in his study draw their consolatory power from
religious beliefs just as in Fernandez study. The metaphors he found are: DEATH IS A
BETTER LOCATION, DEATH IS LIFE, DEATH IS A SUMMONER, DEATH IS
PAYING A DEBT, DEATH IS THE FINAL DESTINATION, DEATH IS A
JOURNEY OF DEPARTURE, DEATH IS LOSS, DEATH IS REGROUPING AND
JOINING, DEATH IS SURRENDER AND SUBMISSIONS, and DEATH IS SLEEP
(158-159).

According to his findings, it seems that many people believe that death is not
necessarily the end. His findings also indicate that fear of death is deeply instilled
within human nature, and the manners we use to avoid death can be considered
universal (166).
Fernandez (2013) studied euphemistic conceptual metaphors in English and Spanish epitaphs, i.e., inscriptions placed on tombstones. One taboo which he says can be considered a timeless taboo is death. Fernandez also states that it is natural that language users are more or less reluctant to deal with death as a phenomenon. Instead of using straightforward terms, they try to soften the effect of what they are trying to say and use euphemisms (100).

Fernandez findings reveal five conceptual mappings for the English epitaphs: DEATH IS A JOURNEY; DEATH IS A REST/ A SLEEP; DEATH IS JOYFUL LIFE; DEATH IS A LOSS and DEATH IS THE END. In Spanish he found seven: LA MUERTE ES UN DESCANSO (‘death is a rest’), MORIR ES SUBIR ES AL CIELO (‘to die is to ascend to Heaven’), MORIR ES VIVIR EN EL RECUERDO (‘to die is to live in memory’), MORIR ES CAER POR DIOS Y POR ESPAÑA (‘to die is to fall for God and Spain’), ESTAR MUERTO ES ESTAR CON EL SEÑOR (‘to be dead is to be with the Lord’), LA MUERTE ES EL FINAL (death is the end) (104).

Lastly, he observes that many of the Spanish mappings rely on Christian beliefs and the act of leaving life and someone behind. The English mappings, on the other hand, emphasise the starting point of a journey, which tend to present a life-like approach to death (115-116).

Kuczok (2016) conducted a study of conceptualizations of death and dying in American English and Polish, where he proposes the abilities we have to describe death are limited due to the fact that when we do experience death, we cannot communicate with those who are still alive. These factors are the reason why we resort to metaphors, which enable us to speak about things that might be disturbing to those who listen. Our lack of abilities suggests that we conceptualize the mysterious reality of death (125-126).

He points out that there are both similarities and differences in how American English and Polish people conceptualize death and dying. Even though they conceptualize death with the help of similar metaphors, they tend to use them differently. The most common conceptual metaphor he found in COCA was DEATH IS LOSS. When talking about loss, we take the perspective of those who are still alive. His conclusion is that it seems evident that metaphors pervade the lexicon of death and structure different networks which we can use to conceptualize death in concrete terms.
He also concludes that there are differences between how Polish and American conceptualize death. The Polish seem to be more pessimistic in their use of metaphors as exemplified by sources domains such as: THE END, LOSS and A SURRENDER. The American conceptualizations of death are based on more positive sources: A REST/ SLEEP; THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY, and THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE. (139).

As a result of these studies, we can assume that some of the mappings which are universal could be based on religious beliefs. Life is also conceptualized as a journey which makes it natural for people to conceptualize death in the same way. Moreover, death is most commonly conceptualized as sleep or a journey. So we could claim that some similarities are due to experience. When people die, they kind of leave someone behind, and they look like they are sleeping.

The mappings which are culture specific are assumed to be more pessimistic, where death is conceptualized as the end or surrender. Conceptualizing death as departure or sleep seem to be more optimistic and based on Christian beliefs.
4 Material and method

4.1 Material

The present study is based on the slang words and expressions collected from one slang dictionary, *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* (2010) (hereafter *ODMS*). The *ODMS* was the most recent edition and included a thematic index, which enables its users to find slang expressions in a particular subject area. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*) was used to define the expressions. The corpus used was *Corpus of contemporary American English* (hereafter *COCA*). *COCA* contains of more than 560 million words of text, equally divided among spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic journals. The spoken language contains transcripts of unscripted conversations from different tv and radio programs.

Most of the identified slang expressions derive from the US: *buy the farm*, *cash in*, *kick off*, *kiss off*, *off it*, *peg out*, *pop off*, *hand in one’s dinner-pail*, *pass in one’s chips*. *Croak*, *kick the bucket*, *snuff it*, *turn up one’s toes*, *go for a Burton; go west* have no definite origin and *cark*, also spelled *kark*, is an Australian expression, and *hop the twig* is a British expression (Table 1).

Table 1. Slang expressions and their definitions from the *ODMS* and the *OED*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slang expressions</th>
<th>Definition from the <em>OED</em> or the <em>ODMS</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>buy the farm</td>
<td>to be killed; to die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cark</td>
<td>intr. To die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cash in</td>
<td><em>(fig)</em>. To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>croak</td>
<td>slang. To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go for a Burton</td>
<td>to be killed; (of a person or thing) to be missing, ruined, destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go west</td>
<td><em>(fig.)</em> To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hand in one’s dinner-pail</td>
<td>To die <em>(ODMS)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to) hop the twig</td>
<td>(also, to hop, to hop off) to die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to) kick off</td>
<td>slang. To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang expressions</td>
<td>Definition from the <em>OED</em> or the <em>ODMS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kick the bucket</td>
<td><em>slang</em> to die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to) kiss off</td>
<td><em>intr.</em> to go away, die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off it</td>
<td>To die, to kill (a person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pass in one’s chips</td>
<td>To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peg out</td>
<td>To die; to be ruined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to) pop off</td>
<td><em>intr.</em> to die,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to)snuff it</td>
<td>To die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to turn up one’s toes</td>
<td>To die</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Method and procedure

After the slang expressions for ‘to die’ had been identified in the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* the expressions were searched for in *COCA* to locate matching sentences where the figurative sense ‘to die’ occurred. The interface made it possible to search for all the inflected forms of the lemma. Thus, *buy the farm* in my presentation also includes *bought the farm, buys the farm* and *buying the farm* etc.

Regarding the expressions with a high overall frequency *cash in, kick off, off it*, a manageable number of sentences were collected from *COCA* to determine which ones had a figurative sense of dying. All the other expressions with a lower overall frequency were gone through sentence by sentence. The expression *turn up one’s toes* was searched by collocates TURN+ toes to find sentences which were figurative in their sense. *Cark, go for a Burton, hand in one’s chips, hop the twig* and *pass in one’s chips* are not a part of the analyses due to the fact that they did not occur in *COCA* corpus.

I made the decision that *COCA* is the corpus which suits my study best. The majority of the expressions derive from the US which makes *COCA* the most suitable corpus. *COCA* is considered to be one of the largest English corpora containing more than 560 million words of text. There are most likely not many slang words in *COCA* due to the fact that it does not include much spontaneous talk. Therefore *COCA* is
merely used as an indication of how these expressions have been accepted in the general language.

Sentences were copied from COCA and used in the results to demonstrate how the expressions are used. Due to the human factor some sentences which match the figurative sense ‘to die’ may have been missed.
5 Results and analyses

5.1 Semantic processes

This results section presents what kind of semantic processes have been active when creating the identified slang expressions for ‘dying’. First, the section begins with presenting the expressions which are metonymic in structure; *croak, buy the farm, kick the bucket* and *turn up one’s toes*. After this, the section presents the expressions which are metaphorical in form; *cash in, go west, kick off, kiss off, off it, peg out, pop off, snuff it*.

5.1.1 Croak

The literal definition found in the *OED* for croak is ‘the deep hoarse sound made by a frog or raven. Used as a verb, it is defined ‘to utter a deep, hoarse, dismal cry, as a frog or a raven’. This might therefore be the basic sense of from which the slang sense of dying has derived, which can be understood in different ways. Here we are dealing with expressions for ‘dying’, where the whole model for dying includes a heart that stops beating and life ending with the last breath. Therefore, we might assume that this latter aspect is where this expression for ‘dying’ derives from. We could say that the expression is a metonymic phenomenon due to the fact that it linked to the sense of dying. Common knowledge is that the last breath can be a croaking, sighing sound. Thus, there is a metonymy present where a part (the last breath) of an event stands for the whole event (to die) which results in the PART-FOR THE WHOLE metonymy.

Below are some expressions found in *COCA* which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

1) Merry whispered, her voice a mere croak.
2) “Yes,” said the woman in a croak.
3) Not so fitting if I croak in a hospital
4) Old Man Walsh croaked his wife with rat bait, ‘stuff like that

The majority of the examples found in *COCA* refer to the basic sense and are literal in their meaning, as examples 1 and 2. These two sentences refer to a croaking sound. Sentences 3 and 4 on the other hand have figurative uses of *croak* which refer to ‘to die’ (3) and ‘to kill’ (4). Their relation is the hoarse croaking sound people have when they sore in the throat and the hoarse sound when someone takes their last breath.
5.1.2 Buy the farm

The figurative meaning for *buy the farm*, according the *OED*, is ‘to the notion that a farmer whose farm is damaged by a military plane crash would be owed restitution by the government] : (of a pilot or aeroplane) to crash fatally; (hence) to be killed; to die.’ Another definition found in the *ODMS* is fairly similar: ‘to crash an aircraft, usu. fatally, to be killed (in action), hence more generally, to die’. Therefore, we might assume that this is the kind of event where this expression for ‘dying’ derives from.

All of the different interpretations – death of a pilot, money to buy a farm – are both parts of the same general context. Now we can say that the expression is a metonymic expression linked to the sense of dying. Parts of the model stands for another part, a PART-FOR-PART metonymy. This phrase is considered an idiomatic expression where the meaning is not revealed in the phrase – a soldier pays for a farm with his life (dying).

Below are some expressions found in *COCA* which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

5)  (... father to shake his head again and tell him he was crazy to *buy the farm* when land prices were so high,

6)  Our wedding day was also John's birthday. The day we *bought the farm* was Nora's.

7)  Now it was time to *buy the farm*, for me to meet my maker.

8)  The wind is strong (Struggles with the kite) and the kite pulls the woman around until finally...crash! The kite *buys the farm*.

This expression is used both in a literal and a figurative sense. Sentences 5 and 6 are literal; someone is actually buying a farm. Examples 7 and 8 are expressions found in *COCA* which are figurative in their sense. Sentence 8 is an example of a wider sense of *buy the farm*; things, a kite, cannot die but is here used referring to the kite crashing and being destroyed.

5.1.3 Kick the bucket

The figurative sense for *kick the bucket* in the *OED* is ‘to die (slang)’. *Kick* means ‘to strike (anything) with the foot’ and *bucket* is defined as ‘a beam or yoke on which anything can be hung or carried’.* At phrases.org.uk*, one theory is presented which suggests that this expression derives from the notion that people hanged themselves by standing on a bucket. Another theory proposes that a wooden frame which was used to hang animals up before slaughter was called a bucket. The animals were likely to
struggle or spasm after death and ‘kick the bucket’. One of these theories might be the underlying motivation for developing into an expression for ‘dying’. The formative context is lost, but both models suggested here refer to a person or an animal being hanged. Kicking the bucket when dying gives us a PART-FOR-PART metonymy. The bucket is a part of the dying process, when it is kicked away the person dies.

The expression’s origin is very obscure, and studies have been done on idiomatic expressions consisting of parts which do not contribute to their idiomatic meaning. The verb ‘kick’ is, according to Hamblin & Gibbs Jr (1999), in this specific phrase implying quickness and suddenness; therefore the whole phrase indicates that someone is dying quickly (25). Idioms like this one are foremost learned as frozen phrases. *Kick the bucket* is also, like the previously discussed *buy the farm*, metonymic in its form due to the relation of dying.

Below are some expressions found in *COCA* which have a literal meaning, or are figurative in their sense:

9) He works backwards, *kicking the bucket* ahead of him like a troublesome dog.
10) They're waiting for me to *kick the bucket* cause then they'll get more money.
11) Kaleb *kicked the bucket* in the forties, but our families kept fightin'.
12) I'll bet, that when old Karl finally *kicks the bucket*, he'll do right by him in his will.

Most of the expressions found in *COCA* are figurative in their sense (10-12). Therefore only one example, (9), is presented which is literal in its meaning. These examples, which are found in *COCA*, do not clearly illustrate Hamblin & Gibbs’ (1999) statement about quickness and suddenness; they only refer to someone dying (10-12). However, sentence 11 could indicate someone dying quickly due to the fact that being in ‘the forties’ can be considered as a young for dying.

### 5.1.4 Turn up one’s toes

In the *OED* *turn up one’s toes* is defined as ‘to die’. According to *idioms.thefreedictionary.com*, the expression ‘alludes to the position of the toes when one lies flat on one’s back without moving’. The figurative sense for this expression is ‘to die’. The literal sense for *turn up one’s toes* is lying down with your toes pointing up, which might be an underlying motivation for this expression. Thus, we have a PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy present.
This expression can also be considered to be idiomatic in its form due to the relation its parts have with the sense of ‘dying’.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

13) He lay back, his legs stiffened out and his toes turned up, and because he was drunk it seemed to her that it took a very long time.
14) Do I wear little old peasant shoes that turn up at the toes?
15) Well, I figure when it’s time to finally turn up my toes I’ll be shot or hung.
16) "Are you retiring? " Retired? I’ll retire when my toes turn up.

Most of the expression found in COCA are literal (13-14). However, two sentences refer to the figurative sense of ‘dying’ (15-16).

5.1.5 Cash in

Cash in refers according to the OED ‘to settle accounts in the game of poker; hence in general use, to clear accounts; to close up a matter. (Sometimes trans. with checks as object.)’. It is also used in a figurative sense and it refers to ‘dying’. However, when we have the case of dying, the phrase cash in can be seen as ending an activity, which is very similar to dying- the ending of life. The metaphor mapping could represent LIFE IS A GAME or LIFE IS A CASINO where dying the target domain is understood as cashing in chips the source domain.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

17) He stood, gathering up his winnings. "Think I'll cash in," he said, glancing at the red-faced man across the table.
18) It’s not the only way the Trumps are cashing in on their sojourn in the White House.
19) no, no, I am worried- see, this sort of comedy cashes in on an atmosphere that is increasingly intimidating to women.
20) Name’s Joe. I’m the brother-in-law to Tripper Lynch and I have drove all night to get here – Tripper cashed in, you now. Last night, twenty past ten. A busted aorta.

The first sentence, (17), literally means the event of ‘cashing in chips’ at a casino, whereas the other sentences have developed into other metaphorical or figurative meanings which are presented in the latter examples (18-19). The salient aspect for this expression is to ‘cash in’ as in making money or a profit. Another aspect is the figurative meaning which also relates to making profit, taking advantage of a situation as in the last sentence.
There could also be a link to lingering religious ideas of the afterlife rewarding us for leading a good life, or the opposite. Although not being a religious metaphor, the underlying model of ‘cashing in’ when dying, suggests that something is going to be rewarded, which could indicate a religious connection. The last sentence (20), refers to the figurative sense for ‘dying’.

5.1.6 Go west

Go is the most general verb of motion in English, used to express literal or figurative movement explained in the OED, ‘(i) irrespective of the point of departure or destination, (ii) away from a place, person, or thing, or (iii) towards a place, person, or thing, or in a particular direction.

The figurative sense of go west might derive from the sun which sets in west – a new day begins with the sun rising and ends as the sun sets – or leaves. In the matter of death, death is often conceptualized as movement or leaving, for instance as departure. This might be where this phrase, go west, for dying derives from. The metaphor mapping applied here could then be DEATH IS A JOURNEY, where dying, the target domain, corresponds to departure, the source domain.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

21) We'll hop a train and go west.
22) After graduation, he went west, a VISTA volunteer working in Oregon.
23) It was early evening, the day gone west, the city's people turned homeward
24) Reynolds, during the war one heard the expression gone West. What did it mean?" In response to his explanation, she cracked her knuckles and stifled a sob.

Most of these sentences, (21-23), found in COCA refer to ‘west’ as in direction. The last sentence, (24), refers to figurative meaning ‘to die’. The choice of west is probably not random due to the relation or link DYING IS DEPARTURE has with the sun; its journey; arriving in the morning – and leaving/departing in the evening (setting in the west). Another possible link is between the light of the sun and the idea that when we die there is darkness. As the sun sets in the west, it becomes dark and the day ends, and thus metaphorically, when we go west – we die. The mapping applied could be DEATH IS THE END.
5.1.7 Kick off

*Kick off* used as a verb literally means to ‘throw off (shoes) by kicking or jerking the foot’. In a figurative sense the nominal use of *kick off* means ‘the start, beginning; an inaugural or opening’. Regarding the nominal sense for *kick off* it refers to something beginning. In the latter definition, we have something coming off which is similar with the phrase *go off*. *Go off* is in some cases another expression used for leaving which is most likely where this phrase derives from in matter of death.

When talking about death, leaving is similar to dying – leaving life. Therefore, the mapping applied in this metaphor could represent DYING IS DEPARTURE, where dying, the target domain, corresponds to departure, the source domain.

Below are some expressions found in *COCA* which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

25) My next guest helped *kick off* the entire ceremony.
26) I would sit down on the sofa, *kick off* your shoes, take off your trousers.
27) We’re *kicking off* Mother’s Day early with an audience full of moms and daughters.
28) I been working like a damn coolie since I was fifteen years old. And when I *kick off*, they’re going to throw me in a pauper’s grave like this one, (…).

Most of the expressions found in *COCA* have a figurative meaning (25-27); to begin something or a literal meaning; taking off shoes. This expression has developed and is quite frequently used in different figurative senses, to *kick off* something refers to a new beginning or to taking your shoes off more quickly. Sentence 28 is an example found in *COCA* which refers to ‘dying’.

5.1.8 Kiss off

The figurative meaning in the *OED* for *kiss off* is ‘to dismiss, get rid of, kill; (b) intr. to go away, die’. The literal sense of *kiss off* would be when we kiss someone goodbye when someone is leaving, leaving is similar to dying – leaving life. The metaphor here applies a mapping which might represent DYING IS DEPARTURE, where dying the target domain corresponds to kissing off – departure as the source domain.

Below are some expressions found in *COCA* which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

29) Leave my family, tell my friends to *kiss off*, and change careers?
30) He’s already *kissed off* Colorado and Nevada and New Mexico.
31) So she *kissed off* the dub scene and took evening courses to become a chef.
32) Y’see how it works, Stumpy... they booya your whole career, then when you’re about to kiss off, they put ya on a pedestal. That’s what being a legend’s all about.

These sentences have different figurative meanings (29-31), except sentence 32, which refers to the figurative sense of ‘dying’. Most of the findings in COCA relate to saying good bye.

5.1.9 Off it

Off used as an adverb is defined in the OED as ‘expressing motion or direction from a place’. Moving away is similar with leaving and death is often conceptualized as someone departing- leaving life. When looking at off used as a verb and with the same reference as the previous expression kiss off, the same metaphor mapping is applied here, DYING IS DEPARTURE, where dying, the target domain, is understood as departure, the source domain. Off used in transitive form has a figurative sense of ‘killing’.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

33) (...) the wall around the house so the ball would bounce off it.
34) his outside to his insides, until Sammy pulled him off it.
35) He offed some of his own children. He offed various of his wives.
36) I wanted him dead, and now I’m supposed to care that somebody offed him?

The word off is generally according to the findings in COCA corpus used as an adverb; relating to a direction in which something is moving. However, offed as in the sentences 35-36, is used as an expression for ‘killing’ as noted above.

5.1.10 Peg out

The definition for peg out as a verb in the OED refers to ‘to Peg off, or away, to go off quickly’ or as slang ‘to die’. When dealing with the topic of dying this expression refers to the same metaphor mapping as kiss off and off it; DYING IS DEPARTURE where dying the target domain is understood as departure the source domain.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

37) Here, an animal skin has been pegged out on the ground.
38) crude geometry of a child, those first white settlers pegged out a community around a slender marsh, (...)
39) Dear Cancer victim. Don’t you owe your readers not to speak of many editors your life? It would be one thing if your imminent demise had been announced by someone else, but since you yourself promised it, don’t feel you ought to make good? Do consider pegging out before too much longer.

According to the findings in COCA, the literal examples found (37) correlate more with the definition ‘to mark out’ in the OED or to attach something to the ground (38). However, this expression has a very low frequency in COCA, one sentence referred to the figurative sense. The last sentence, (39), has the figurative sense of dying; ‘(…) do consider pegging out before too much longer’ refers to a person wishing someone ‘to die’.

5.1.11 Pop off

Pop used as a verb followed by off is defined in the OED as ‘to move or go somewhere quickly or unexpectedly, esp. for a short time.’ Death is, as we have stated earlier, sometimes conceptualized as movement, or as leaving. The metaphor mapping applied here could be DYING IS DEPARTURE, where dying, the target domain, corresponds to the source domain, departure.

Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

40) she was positively gleeful, anxiously waiting for him to pop off and clear the way for me.
41) Fuentes stressed that he wasn’t popping off because of his or the team’s recent woes.
42) But what if I pop off in two years and I’ve lost one of them to this?
43) We’ll either go in a plane crash or we’ll be popped off by some loony.

A few of the findings from COCA refer to ‘dying’ (42-43). This expression today generally means something being removed from something or leaving quickly, and they are figurative in their meaning as the examples above show (40-41).

5.1.12 Snuff it

The figurative sense for snuff as a verb followed by it or out in the OED is ‘to die’. The literal definition for snuff it on oxforddictionaries.com is ‘to extinguishing a candle or a flame; trim the charred wick from a candle’. In the matter of death, we could conceptualize that a person is a candle and the life is represented by the light which is put out- life ends. We could apply a mapping DEATH IS THE END, where death, the target domain, corresponds to end, the source domain.
Below are some expressions found in COCA which have a literal meaning or are figurative in their sense:

44) Tom poised the cigarette over the ashtray, ready to snuff it out.
45) fires, maybe we should be hitting it from two directions. Surrounding it and snuffing it out.
46) Want a double lifetime. I don't want to snuff it.
47) I'm afraid he's snuffed it,' said Truffler Mason, at last finding a topic appropriate to

This expression, snuff it, occurred only 36 times in COCA; it is most commonly used as a phrase to figure something out or put out fires or cigarettes (44-45). Two sentences are presented here (46-47) which matched the figurative sense of ‘dying’.

5.1.13 Summary

Four of the expressions were metonymical in their form; croak; buy the farm; kick the bucket and turn up one’s toes. Only croak and turn up one’s toes had a metonymic relation alive and recoverable. The other two, buy the farm and kick the bucket are idioms in their form as frozen expressions, and their metonymic relation seems to be lost. However, they are considered to be metonymical due to their relation to ‘dying’.

Five expressions: kick off, kiss off, off it, peg out and pop off where mapped DYING IS DEPARTURE where off reoccurs in several of the expressions. A related metaphor is DEATH IS A JOURNEY. In addition, we have one metaphorical expression with the mapping DEATH IS THE END. Finally we have one expression cash in with the mappings LIFE IS A CASINO/ LIFE IS A GAME. The conclusion we can draw from the results is that death is most commonly conceptualized as a person leaving when dying - departing.
As Table 2 illustrates, the most common semantic process is metaphorical mapping, and DYING IS DEPARTURE is the most common mapping applied. Metonymical mapping is also common; PART-FOR-PART and PART-FOR-WHOLE.

### 5.2 Frequency in COCA

When considering the frequency of occurrence of these expressions, the results indicate that the slang expressions for ‘dying’ vary a lot in their frequency in COCA corpus. The overall frequency is not as high for the expressions: *buy the farm*, *croak* and *kick the bucket* as for *cash in*, *kick off* and *off it* in COCA. On the other hand, the metonymical expressions are more frequent in a figurative sense than the metaphorical ones (Table 3).

Regarding the results from COCA, we might assume that the frequency for the metonymical expressions could also be higher in a figurative sense, in corpora such as GloWbE and NOW, which include more informal language.

### Table 2. Semantic processes for the slang expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Metaphorical/metonymical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croak</td>
<td>PART-FOR-WHOLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy the farm</td>
<td>IDIOM/ PART-FOR-PART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kick the bucket</td>
<td>IDIOM/ PART FOR PART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash in</td>
<td>LIFE IS GAME/ LIFE IS A CASINO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go west</td>
<td>DEATH IS A JOURNEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kick off</td>
<td>DYING IS DEPARTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss off</td>
<td>DYING IS DEPARTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off it</td>
<td>DYING IS DEPARTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peg out</td>
<td>DYING IS DEPARTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop off</td>
<td>DYING IS DEPARTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snuff it</td>
<td>DEATH IS THE END</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn up one’s toes</td>
<td>IDIOM/ PART-FOR-WHOLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Searches and overall and figurative frequency in COCA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search</th>
<th>COCA</th>
<th>Figurative sense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BUY the farm</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cark</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASH in</td>
<td>2438</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROAK</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO for a Burton</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO west</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAND in one’s dinner-pail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOP the twig</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KICK off</td>
<td>3744</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KICK the bucket</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KISS off</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFF it</td>
<td>1105</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS in one’ chips</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEG out</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POP off</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNUFF it</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURN up one’s toes</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that only three expressions, *buy the farm*, *croak* and *kick the bucket*, of the 17 found are frequent expressions for ‘dying’ in COCA corpus. These expressions are more salient in their figurative sense than the other expressions. Metonymical expressions can also be considered as ‘safe’ expressions for dying due to the fact that they are opaque, and their relation to dying has been lost.

One reason for the expressions not found nor having a high frequency in a contemporary language corpus might be the fact that slang changes very rapidly or disappears. Another reason might be that COCA does not include informal spontaneous speech, which is where slang normally occurs.

Finally, the results reveal that only nine expressions of the 17 found in ODMS still to some degree occur in a figurative sense for ‘dying’ in a contemporary corpus as COCA.
5.3 The processes for the most frequent expressions

The semantic processes which have been involved in the most frequent expressions are metonymical mappings. The most frequent expressions for ‘dying’ in the COCA corpus are: buy the farm, croak and kick the bucket. The mappings applied for these expressions are PART-FOR-WHOLE (croak) and PART-FOR-PART (buy the farm, kick the bucket). DYING IS DEPARTURE was the most common mapping for the metaphorical expressions go west, kick off, kiss off, off it, peg out and pop off. However, these expressions did not occur frequently in a figurative sense in the COCA corpus.

The slang expressions buy the farm and kick the bucket are both metonymic in their character. Metonymies are created through conceptual closeness and in these two expressions the contextuality has been lost, which can lead to two things: the expression is lost due to the fact that no one understands it, or it becomes an idiomatic expression which is learnt as a frozen expression. In these two expressions, we have two frozen forms which still occur in a contemporary language corpus. Furthermore, both phrases, buy the farm and kick the bucket, fit the main criterion for idioms: semantic opaqueness. They are frozen in their form and meaning and they have very little room for changes; they cannot for instance be changed into passive form, the farm was bought, or the bucket was kicked, without losing their figurative sense. On the whole, if they are changed, they become literal in their meaning. These two phrases, as well as croak and turn up one’s toes, are also considered to be metonymic because they refer to events that are linked to dying. They have also developed into specific figurative meanings, which are partly motivated by the metaphorical and metonymical knowledge we have (Gibbs, 2017).

A common factor for almost all the metaphorical expressions where dying was conceptualized as departure is the adverb off. Off used as a verb with it is defined in the OED as ‘to depart; (slang) to die’, but the directionality of the adverb could be a contributing factor for the mapping DYING IS DEPARTURE. There is also the matter of funerals where people say goodbye to their loved ones who have died.

Allen and Burridge (2006) are of the opinion that death being such an important taboo has brought people to believe that death is the beginning of new life. Consequently, instead of dying and disappearing, we are leaving or departing to something else, which might be a significant factor for the mapping DYING IS
DEPARTURE being the most common one. Similarly, the most common mapping refers to a basic experiential movement; a person who dies moves away from the living, in other words departs.

The differences are clear between the metaphorical and metonymical expressions; metaphors are built on similarities while metonymies are built on conceptual closeness. These phrases, which most commonly derive from the US, are no longer bound to any specific areas or regions; they have become a part of the English language in general.

In sum, the results in the present research show that the overall frequency of occurrence, including literal as well as other figurative senses, is higher than the frequency of the figurative sense ‘to die’ for most of these expressions. The metonymical expressions are the most frequent ones in COCA corpus. However, the metaphorical ones are more likely to be picked up a general speech community but not as expressions for ‘dying’.
6 Discussion

The results of the present study show that there is a wide selection of expressions which can be used when addressing difficult topics such as death and dying. Metonymical expressions can be considered as ‘safer’ expressions while metaphorical expressions have a wider field of use. The metonymical expressions are opaque and do not raise the same type of emotions.

Metonymical and metaphor mappings seem to be most common when it comes to the slang expressions in the present study. The most common metaphorical mapping is DYING IS DEPARTURE, where dying is conceptualized as a journey – moving on to another destination more specifically, the beginning of a new journey. However, it also indicates that the ways people conceptualize dying could be connected to the experience people have of someone dying and saying goodbye to them.

Metonymical expressions for ‘dying’ were more frequent in COCA corpus than the metaphorical ones. The main reason for this might be that metonymies are opaque and could be easier to use then talking about difficult topics such as death or dying.

Research question number one asked: What kinds of metaphors and metonymies have been active in creating the identified slang expressions for ‘dying’?

The most common mapping was DYING IS DEPARTURE, which occurred five times in the expressions found in the ODMS. The results in the present study reveal the similarities people have when conceptualizing death, even though they derive from different time periods. The results are also in keeping with with the research conducted by Marin-Arrèse (1996), Kövecses (2010), Fernandez (2013), Galal (2016), where death is most commonly conceptualized as journey, partially based on religious beliefs. Kövecses (2010) along with Fernandez (2013) also suggest that people’s metaphorical conceptualization of death is perceived as departure. It is concluded in the present research that the most common metaphorical mapping used is DYING IS DEPARTURE.

Departure is part of a journey, in the present research more specifically considered as the beginning of a new journey – moving on to another place. Considering the fact that life is a journey and dying is departure, one might assume that dying would be perceived as the end of the journey – reaching end station, but none of the expressions found in the present research indicates that. One difference between death and dying is
that death is considered as a state whereas dying is the process: going from one state (living) to another (dying) – a journey. Conceptualizing dying as departure might indicate that people were religious in some way, due to the fact that departing in the present study refers to leaving to another place – a better place, like heaven. Another aspect could be cultural. When people die, we say goodbye to them, our loved ones, at funerals, which is very common tradition in many parts of the world.

Kuczok’s (2016) study suggests that death is perceived as loss. Such a metaphorical mapping is a part of our embodied experiences based on religious beliefs, and in some way even culture specific. Most of the slang expressions in the present study derive from the US, and according to Kuczok’s (2016) study, Americans tend to have a more positive way than the Polish when conceptualizing death, which could be an indication of a reason for the mapping DYING IS DEPARTURE being such a common result.

The semantic processes which have been active are most likely due to the fact of people fearing death and the lack of knowledge of dying. This could be explained as people were in need of expressions to deal with the taboo topic. To some degree, this might suggest that people were affected by religious beliefs. People turned to expressions which refer to someone leaving instead of dying.

Fernandez (2013) stated that people in different times create their own taboos, but death is considered as a time-less taboo. Death being a time-less taboo, might be another reason for the similarities in how dying is perceived. In his previous research from 2006, he proposed another important factor, which is the fear people have when they are dealing with death and dying. People try to soften the effects in different ways when addressing it.

The frequency of occurrence in a large language corpus, such as COCA, vary a lot depending on what we are searching for. If we search for single words, the frequency is higher than when searching for expressions which contain of several words. Research question number 2 asked: how frequent are the identified slang expressions in the Corpus of Contemporary American English?

The present research reveals that the most frequent expressions in COCA corpus are metonymical in their form: buy the farm, croak and kick the bucket. It is of significant importance to consider the fact that metaphorical expressions are based on
similarities while metonymical are based on closeness and sometimes learned as frozen expressions, which is also a consequence of their metonymic nature. In order to understand them when they do not reveal their meaning, after their formative context has been lost, people need to learn the metonymical expressions as idioms. Metaphorical expressions, on the other hand, are to some degree easier to understand due to the fact that they are based on conceptual similarity. Similarities can be considered more stable compared to the contextual closeness of metonymies, which can be lost over time.

The present study shows that we have a departure schema where a lot of different verbs can be used to indicate departure. As a result, the metonymical expressions have become more frequent in a figurative sense for ‘dying’ in COCA corpus than the metaphorical ones.

The metonymical expressions buy the farm and kick the bucket have to some degree remained and transformed into idiomatic expressions, and the frequency in COCA indicates that these expressions are no longer considered to be slang, but informal idiomatic expressions. The metonymical expressions in the present research are still used in a figurative sense and their overall frequency is also higher in more informal corpora such as GloWbE and NOW.

The metonymical expressions croak, buy the farm, turn up one’s toes and kick the bucket are also considered euphemistic. Moreover, it is common knowledge that people use different types of language in different social settings, so some might say buy the farm or kick the bucket while others might say ‘he passed away’ depending on informal and formal situations. The metaphorical expressions cash in, go west, kick off, kiss off, off it, peg out, pop off and snuff it have a higher overall frequency due to the fact that they have developed in to several other metaphorical expressions. Metaphorical expressions being built on similarities could explain the higher frequency in COCA and in other corpora.

Off being a general factor for the metaphorical expressions is in a way interesting. The definition in the OED is ‘motion away or direction from place’, which could be understood as going away from life and therefore a reason why it occurs with expressions referring to ‘dying’. Another reason could be the adverb sense being
directional. The general usage of the adverb is with verbs, which we can see in this research in the expressions *kick off*, *kiss off* and *pop off*.

The expressions which did not occur at all in *COCA* such as *cark, go for a Burton, hand in one’s dinner-pail, hop the twig* and *pass in one’s chips* are probably not included in *COCA*. After all slang is informal and spontaneous speech which is not included in *COCA* corpus. These expressions are also similar in their form to the metonymical expressions in the present study. However, *pass in one’s chips* is to some degree, similar to *cash in* and could be metaphorically mapped as LIFE IS A CASINO or LIFE IS A GAME.

Research questions three asked: What kind of processes have been involved in the most frequent expressions and which are most likely to be picked up by the general speech community, judging from the corpus data?

Metonymical mapping is the process which occurs with the most frequent expressions in *COCA* corpus. The metonymical expressions in the present research *croak, buy the farm, kick the bucket* and *turn up one’s toes* do not reveal their meaning. *Buy the farm* and *kick the bucket* have become idiomatic, in other words definite in their meaning and ceased to be slang. Gibbs (2017) stated that idioms tend to express figurative meanings that reflect metonymic relations which do not take part in the speaker’s contemporary understandings.

The expressions which are most likely to be picked up by the general speech community are all of the expressions which occur in the results in the present study. The metaphorical ones due to similarity and their creativity of changing into different figurative expressions and the metonymical expressions learned as fixed expressions or used in a literal sense.

The most common metaphorical mapping was *DYING IS DEPARTURE*, where departure refers to basic experiential movement; a person who is dying is moving away from the living, in other words departing and we say goodbye. The model, which these expressions could be based on are LIFE IS A JOURNEY and DEATH IS A JOURNEY. We experience life and death similarly due to the fact everyone is born, live their life and finally die. Several of the metaphorical expressions have a semantic meaning of leaving or departing, which were also common in the previous research presented. The dying person can be considered the traveller; otherwise there is no information about
death being a journey. One mapping applied was DEATH IS A JOURNEY, which also indicates that death is a part of life’s journey and not considered as the end.

Slang, which used to be spoken by the low and disreputable people, has today become more accepted and is not considered to be a lower-class language. It has become a language spoken within every social-group, but as informal speech. Slang only becomes slang when used outside the social group and is considered as language making due to the fact that slang is connected to speech and provides language with new expressions and words (Partridge: 2015).

Since language is constantly changing and evolving, people today do not hop the twig, nor do they kick off when they die, but people might kick the bucket or croak. Furthermore, kick off is still used today as announcing a beginning of something, a new work period or a happening and has also been adapted within the Swedish language. A reason for these changes is that slang is considered to be a linguistic phenomenon which changes quickly due to the constant supply of new words (Eble, 1996). She also proposed, that some slang stays within language and as a consequence, they lose their slang status, but still sustain as informal language.

It would be interesting to conduct further studies on expressions for death and dying. One such study could be a comparison between British English and American English to see which metaphorical or metonymical mappings are most common, and to see if death and dying are conceptualized in the same way in these two cultures, which in many ways are considered modern, and has their way of perceiving death and dying changed over time?

Most of the slang expressions derive from the US, which in Kuczok’s (2016) study indicated that they were more positive in their way of conceptualizing death; could this be the fact for British slang expressions for dying as well? These types of studies can be important in a general sense; people in different social settings need a language for difficult topics which is considered safe to use.
7 References


# Appendix

## 8.1 Searches and frequency for the slang expressions in different corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search</th>
<th>COCA</th>
<th>COHA</th>
<th>Wikipedia Corpus</th>
<th>BYU-BNC</th>
<th>GloWbE</th>
<th>NOW</th>
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<tr>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>17835</td>
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