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Cultivating ISI: Shaping the Future of Idiomatics in Language Education and Research

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This article advances the evolving field of *Idiomatics*, devoted to the rigorous study of idiomatic and figurative language. It is organized into five main sections, framed by a preamble and a prologue that establish the conceptual stage, and concluded by an epilogue and a coda that reflect on the work's implications and future directions. Positioned between inherited nomenclatures and emergent inquiry, the article confronts a labyrinth of competing terms that have long obscured conceptual clarity. Rather than offering a fixed taxonomy, it proposes a living lexicon shaped by the ethical demands of scholarly precision and the generative possibilities of rhetorical craft. Idiomatics is envisioned not as a static discipline, but as a restless, dialogic practice sustained by communal inquiry and a collective vow that no idiom or shimmer of meaning goes unclaimed. The article outlines eight acts of cultivation through which the International Society of Idiomatics (ISI) might grow—not as a monument, but as a living ecology where language, thought, and form perpetually remake one another. It invites readers to serve as active stewards in shaping a discipline whose evolving contours will guide future generations through the intricacies of idiomatic and figurative expression.

Keywords: Idiomatics, idiomaticity, discursive labyrinth, living lexicon, rhetorical craft, communal inquiry, International Society of Idiomatics (ISI)

Preamble

Before the thread is drawn, before the first turn is taken, there is the threshold. A place between knowing and seeking, between old words and those yet to be named. This is where idiomatics stands—at the entrance of a labyrinth not of stone but of language, woven from centuries of thought and voices that refuse to fade. What follows is not a map, but a reckoning. A recognition that the path ahead coils and uncoils—eight turns for every truth uncovered—in ways no chart can contain, and that every step forward demands both memory and audacity. In the hush before the first step, the thread hums, the walls lean in, and language readies itself to speak. This is the breath held and meaning stirred, the pulse before the thread is seized, where every voice that came before leans close to listen. And so we arrive—where old words falter, new ones gather, and the labyrinth waits, restless and alive.

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Prologue—At the Threshold

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

Such were the immortal opening lines of one of the most celebrated speeches in English literature, delivered by Mark Antony in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act 3, Scene 2).

Unworthy to so much as hold a candle to Shakespeare, let alone stand upon the same line, I shall not presume to ask for your ears—that would be an audacious ask. Instead, with your gracious indulgence, dear readers, I entreat you only to cast your eye (a discerning one at that) upon my line of argumentation, in what I trust shall prove a rigorous, if not always gentle, presentation of epistemological facts and proposals that have traced their course through the literature of *idiomaticity* for over five score years and counting. I come not to bury your phrasing, but to praise its precision, and to chart a path through a discursive maze whose turns have too long confounded even the most patient of wayfarers.

This, at least, I vow: you shall not be obliged to read between the lines, for I mean to mince neither word nor intention—whether in the propositions I advance or the examples I marshal in service of my *logos* henceforth.

Applying the venerable art of persuasion, as framed by Aristotle's immortal triad of *ethos* (ἦθος), *pathos* (πάθος), and *logos* (λόγος), I shall endeavor to illuminate why the discordant chorus of terms affixed to *idiomatic language*, *figurative language*, *formulaic language*, and *multiword expressions* demands, at long last, the drawing of clear and inviolate lines of demarcation. These lines shall not be drawn capriciously, nor in service of idle taxonomy, but in pursuit of conceptual clarity in the nomenclature of *idiomaticity* and the nascent discipline I have named *Idiomatics*[1]. For language, like the mythic labyrinth, is a construct passed from hand to hand—each generation adding passages, raising new walls, and leaving cryptic signs for those who come after. The task before us is to mark these turns with care, lest future wayfarers mistake clever ornament for necessary structure. In this, we join a lineage of lexicon-keepers and meaning-makers, ancient and modern Daedalians whose labor was to give form and passage to what might otherwise remain a tangle of unmarked turns.

In undertaking this task, I shall give voice to both sides of the argument—not as an act of empty concession, but to honor the ethical obligations of the scholar, who must not stifle dissent, even in defense of a dearly held position. To this end, I shall endeavor to temper my own *pathos*, restraining it where it threatens to overrun the cool dominion of *logos*, though no scholar who labors in earnest since the closing years of the last century can wholly disentangle passion from purpose.

My hope endures that this theoretical scaffolding, shaped across several works and still evolving, will serve as fertile ground from which the living idea of ISI—the International Society of Idiomatics—may root itself more deeply and grow. *Cultivating ISI: Shaping the Future of Idiomatics in Language Education and Research* is not a blueprint for static architecture but an effort to cultivate a restless, speaking space where idiomatic inquiry remains unsettled, meaning's pulse moves through every new voice, and the labyrinth of language stays alive. It is an invitation,

not a conclusion—a call for others to step into the labyrinth, leave their mark, and help keep the conversation turning.

And now, dear readers, I extend to you not the role of passive witness but of active architect—to lend your voices, interrogations, doubts, and convictions to a discourse long obfuscated by terminological discord. In so doing, you help shape the living contours of what may, in time, emerge as a coherent and sovereign discipline: *Idiomatics*.

I leave you not with cunning gloss nor words cloaked in ornate deception, but with a plain, enduring truth: in language, as in justice, clarity must outrank cleverness, and the lasting transcend the ornamental. We stand at the entrance to a living labyrinth, its turns inscribed by those before us, its future passages to be cut by those yet to come. The map we draft here must serve not only ourselves but generations of scholars who will inherit and amend these halls. And if, like Daedalus, we find ourselves in a labyrinth of our own making, let it be one whose passages lead not to dead ends but to insight, inheritance, and the enduring pulse of language. Truth, spoken plainly and without artifice, outlives the seductions of embellished rhetoric and the fleeting charm of cunning tongues. By engaging in this discourse, you do more than debate terminology—you shape the lexicon through which future scholars will apprehend, contest, and refine idiomatics.

Let us, then, forswear gloss in favor of plain-spoken rigor, that what we build here may endure not for a season, but for an age. For the truth, once spoken plain, outlives the cunning gloss. And as Cicero himself declared, *"The foundations of justice are that no one shall suffer wrong; then, that the public welfare be the supreme law."* So let it be with language.

Entering the Labyrinth[2] —Threads of Meaning, Webs of Names

In the Labyrinth of idiomatic inquiry, meaning is a thread, names a web that both reveals and obscures. For every definition spun, another tangles the path. This section follows the shifting threads and tangled webs that have illuminated and confounded the study of idiomatic language. Since 1997, I have defined *idiomaticity* —also called *idiomatology* or *phraseology*—as the systematic study of idioms and idiomatic expressions (Liontas, 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1999; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2003; 2008; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2017a; 2017b 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018g). For over a century, this inquiry has wound through a conceptual Labyrinth of definitions, taxonomies, and theories as intricate as Daedalus' design. At its center stands the Minotaur of meaning—the idiom, a linguistic hybrid defying logic and classification. Born of transgression and necessity, it unsettles every system meant to contain it. Neither fully transparent nor wholly opaque, it straddles boundaries, flouts convention, and demands pursuit. Scholars chase it through shifting theoretical corridors, each framework a thread in the hand of a modern Theseus. Whether the Labyrinth was necessary, or the creature truly monstrous, remains the enduring question of idiomatic inquiry—a question that makes condensing a century of thought a Herculean task. Even a humble writer must approach it with apology, mindful of voices lost to brevity's cruel limits. Attempting this in eight brief

paragraphs invokes the Greek eight: balance, renewal, and passage beyond completion. Each paragraph a step in the labyrinth, a fragile harmony within vast complexity, a measured breath in the pursuit of meaning.

Over the years, linguists, etymologists, lexicologists, idiomatologists, and language researchers have wrestled with the peculiar nature of idiomatic and figurative language. Approaches have ranged from sociocultural (Roberts, 1944) and transformational-generative (Katz & Postal, 1964; Weinreich, 1969) to naturalist (Chafe, 1968), syntactic (Newmeyer, 1972, 1974), semantic (Nunberg, 1978), pragmatic (Strässler, 1982), cognitive (Goldberg, 2006), and computational (Sag et al., 2002). Complementary efforts classified idiomatic expressions by frozenness (Fraser, 1970), semantic decomposability (Nunberg, 1978), purity (Fernando, 1996), compositionality (Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991), metaphoric transparency (Moon, 1998), form-meaning relationships (Seidl & McMordie, 1988), structural configurations (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2002), and syntax-semantic-function categories (Cowie et al., 1983). Together, these perspectives shaped a multidimensional understanding of idiomaticity. They also contributed to its intricate categorization.

Efforts to isolate the properties that render an expression idiomatic have centered on grammatical irregularity, figurativeness, conventional phrasing, compositeness, and opacity. Bell (1991) and Nunberg et al. (1994) emphasized structural and figurative traits; Fernando (1996) highlighted compositeness and opacity; Barkema (1996) added compositionality and flexibility. Goldberg (2006) examined cognitive storage alongside morphemes and frames, while Sag et al. (2002) noted challenges in computational processing and translation. Together, these scholars advanced a progressively sophisticated profile of idiomatic forms.

Since 1973, these foundations have produced a dozen hypotheses and models addressing the lexical representation, processing, and comprehension of idioms in first (1973–2015) and second language (1997–2015) contexts—eight and four, respectively. From the Idiom List Hypothesis (Bobrow & Bell, 1973) to the Dual Route Model (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2004, 2012; Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015), each has sought to clarify the cognitive architecture of idiomatic processing. This intellectual history mirrors broader tensions between formalist, cognitive, and usage-based paradigms. In second language research especially, idiomaticity has posed distinct challenges, prompting models such as the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997), the Idiom Diffusion Model (Liontas, 1999, 2002a, 2015a), the Dual Idiom Representation Model (Abel, 2003), and the Literal Salience Model (Cieślicka, 2006). These theories attempt to explain how literal and figurative meanings are accessed, retrieved, and produced, often with conflicting outcomes.

First Language Hypotheses and Models	
Idiom List (Literal First) Hypothesis	(Bobrow & Bell, 1973)
Lexical Representation (Simultaneous Processing) Hypothesis	(Swinney & Cutler, 1979)
Figurative First Hypothesis (or Direct Access Model) and Holistic Hypothesis	(Jiang & Nekrasova, 2007, Wray, 2002)
Idiom Decomposition Model	(Gibbs, 1980, 1995; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs et al., 1989)
Configuration Model	(Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988)
Hybrid Model	(Caillies & Butcher, 2007; Cutting & Bock, 1997; Sprenger et al., 2006)
Constraint-Based Model	(Libben & Titone, 2008; Titone & Connine, 1999; Titone et al., 2015)
Dual Route Model	(Van Lancker Sidtis, 2004, 2012; Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015)
Second Language Hypotheses and Models	
Graded Salience Hypothesis	(Giora, 1997)
Idiom Diffusion Model	(Liontas, 1999, 2002b, 2015a)
Dual Idiom Representation Model	(Abel, 2003)
Literal Salience Model	(Cieślicka, 2006)

Each framework multiplied classificatory schemes while offering valuable insights. Yet after decades of inquiry, idiomaticity remains conceptually diffuse, its ambiguity deepened by Smith (1925) and Hockett (1958). Their sweeping categories collapsed diverse expressions—proverbs, phrasal verbs, slang, and more—into a catch-all 'idiom,' dissolving distinctiveness and inviting circular reasoning that renders any string potentially idiomatic and meaningless.

This theoretical enterprise has spawned a proliferation of terms. Idiomaticity now concerns fixed, multilexemic phrases functioning as single lexemes, whose holistic meanings resist deduction from their parts. The literature variously labels them phrasemes, phraseologisms, idiomatic expressions, lexical bundles, and formulaic language. More recently, scholars have favored the umbrella term *multiword*, covering formulaic sequences, chunks, fixed expressions, multiword lexemes, and multi-morphemic phrases.

Despite varied labels, these expressions share core properties: non-compositional meanings, syntactic-semantic stability, and rhetorical function (Gläser, 1998; Liontas, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2025; Sag et al., 2002). Yet the field remains mired in terminological quagmire—a dilemma flagged by Moon (1998) and Hinkel (2017), and catalogued by Liontas (2019), who identified seventy-three terms. By 2026,

Liontas counted over 110, underscoring the field's deep fragmentation (see Liontas, 2026).

This profusion signals deeper conceptual and practical challenges. The path moves from problem to consequence, response, and resolution: recognizing terminological variety as linguistic complexity, then addressing its classificatory and pedagogical implications. Two responses have emerged—one favoring flexibility, the other systematization—marking successive stages in idiomatics toward clarity.

Tracing the Labyrinth—The Arc of the Idiomatics Argument

Terminological abundance in multiword expression studies reflects linguistic complexity, not scholarly excess. The challenge lies not in variety itself, but in building frameworks that link overlapping categories without collapsing their distinctions. These categories trace threads through the idiomatic Labyrinth. *Idioms* are the hidden chambers—fixed, figurative, and resistant to logic. *Idiomatic expressions* stretch along adjoining passages, blending figuration and convention. *Collocations* mark well-trodden paths where words habitually meet, while *colligations* anchor the structure's grammar-bound walls. Together, they form a shifting maze where meanings elude capture and categories bleed into one another.

Yet this maze is no formless tangle. Its threads, though winding and knotted, weave a larger design—a linguistic tapestry of texture and pattern. Within its fabric, *idioms* become vivid knots—fixed, figurative, and opaque, while *idiomatic expressions* extend the weave to include phrasal verbs and conventional phrases with flashes of figuration. *Collocations* appear as recurring patterns in the fabric, semi-compositional and often literal, and *colligations* stitch grammar into the design, binding words by syntactic rule rather than meaning (Firth, 1957, 1968; Siepmann, 2005). The result is a richly textured continuum where boundaries blur and meanings shift with each interpretive turn (Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009; Peters, 2016).

Context complicates matters further, as a single phrase may serve different functions in different uses (Girard, 2004). Terminological variation across linguistic traditions and reference works exacerbates the difficulty: what one scholar deems an *idiom*, another classifies as an *idiomatic expression* or *collocation*, shaped by differing criteria and priorities (Cowie, 1981). Rapid or automated classification compounds the problem, overlooking subtle semantic and pragmatic shades, and yielding oversimplified, often faulty labels (Bartsch, 2004; Gablasova et al., 2017; Walker, 2011). This tangled web of overlapping terms continues to vex theory and pedagogy alike, leaving scholars and learners adrift in uncertain categories (Grant & Bauer, 2004).

Confronting this complexity requires disentangling the nuances and intersections of these categories. Instead of enforcing rigid boundaries, it is wiser to embrace language's fluidity and design frameworks that honor both difference and overlap. This fosters scholarly precision, pedagogical clarity, and a flexible, informed approach to navigating the intricate terrain of multiword expressions. Alternatively, a call for *authoritative*, *definitive*, and *comprehensive* descriptions and terminology in *idiomatology* offers a pragmatic path. Clear distinctions among free combinations,

collocations, and idioms proper—anchored in compositionality, conventionality, and sociopragmatic variation—assert a normative claim about the field's aims.

Together, these positions reveal two interdependent dimensions of scholarly inquiry. The first confronts the absence of a coherent, universal nomenclature, urging rigorous theoretical refinement. The second embraces terminological plurality, proposing provisional frameworks that honor ambiguity while inching toward conceptual clarity. This ongoing discourse reflects both the provisional limits and the aspirational horizon of idiomatics: a discipline still tracing its contours, yet resolute in developing tools for systematic, empirical, and pedagogical progress. These stances do not conflict but rather chart successive movements—diagnosis followed by considered resolution.

In navigating this conceptual labyrinth, rhetorical strategies are indispensable for making complexity intelligible without flattening it. Antithesis, metaphor, and balanced phrasing serve not as ornament, but as instruments for tracing an epistemic landscape where categories bleed and meanings shift. What follows is an effort to chart this unsettled terrain, where promise and paradox entwine.

Navigating the Labyrinth—Between Fertility and Fragmentation

This conceptual labyrinth is inevitable. Decades of interdisciplinary research across applied linguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, corpus studies, and pedagogy have created a dense network of terms. This diversity reflects layered scholarly exploration—a living cartography of linguistic inquiry, continually redrawn by its participants, where categories gain meaning as much from proximity as from internal logic.

This abundance poses a paradox. While multiple terms sustain epistemic fertility —enabling nuanced distinctions, operational clarity, and cross-disciplinary exchange —they also reflect language's inherent slipperiness and context-dependence. Such plurality fuels intellectual vitality, preventing overgeneralization, promoting idea migration across paradigms, and fostering hybrid methodologies that broaden inquiry. Conversely, unchecked proliferation risks conceptual confusion. Overlapping or vague terms obscure rather than clarify, creating redundancy masked as innovation. Without stable, context-sensitive definitions, research fragments, hindering synthesis and theory-building. Increasingly opaque jargon alienates newcomers, erecting barriers to accessibility. When terminology becomes unstable and overly context-dependent, epistemic relativism threatens shared standards and durable meaning.

What emerges is neither chaos nor rigid order but a living labyrinth—dynamic, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting. The challenge lies not in the labyrinth itself but in the absence of a metadisciplinary framework to navigate it. Labyrinths can be traversed with a guiding thread; the true problem arises when no one holds that thread, and taxonomy becomes an end rather than a means. Thus, while this labyrinth reflects the richness and nuance of language studies, it demands navigational tools commensurate with its complexity.

What is needed is not terminological consolidation, but a meta-taxonomy: a cartographic thread to navigate the labyrinth without flattening its contours. No one enters a maze to stay lost; the task is to traverse, interpret, and emerge. And like

Theseus of old, the scholar must carry a thread—conceptual clarity spun from theoretical rigor, operational precision, and rhetorical acuity—to chart complexity without severing its intricacies. Threading meaning through multiplicity is the task ahead.

Threading the Labyrinth—A Framework for Idiomatics Analysis

This section advances a defensible, operational framework for analyzing *idiomatics* in English, capable of mapping the intricate contours and recurring paths of this conceptual labyrinth. By clarifying category boundaries and attending to the registers and usage domains in which idiomatic and formulaic constructions circulate, it offers a conceptual thread through apparent disorder, rendering it intelligible for descriptive and applied inquiry. The goal is not to escape the labyrinth, but to make it traversable, interpretable, and ultimately habitable for future scholarship.

What follows is no attempt to flatten complexity into false simplicity, but to furnish a conceptual map—a series of clear signposts for navigating *idiomatics*. This framework distinguishes several interrelated yet analytically discrete categories: *idioms*, *idiomatic expressions*, *multiword expressions*, *collocations*, and *colligations*, while attending to the registers and domains in which they circulate. These categories inevitably intersect with broader *formulaic* and *figurative language*, warranting their inclusion. Each serves as a fixed point along the conceptual thread, ensuring scholars do not lose their way amid shifting figurative expression. To secure conceptual clarity and scholarly defensibility, the classification clarifies what speakers know about idiomatic language and how they enact it in discourse. We begin, fittingly, with idioms.

Idioms are fixed, conventionalized multiword expressions whose meanings cannot be inferred from their parts (Bortfeld, 2003; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988; Cutler, 1982; Fernando, 1996; Gibbs, 1980, 1995; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs et al.,1989). They convey culturally embedded figurative meanings that render literal interpretation implausible. Marked by semantic opacity, figurative intent, and structural fixity, idioms resist syntactic and lexical variation without losing integrity (e.g., *break the ice, cost an arm and a leg*, *know the ropes*, *under the weather*). Table 1 lists 10 idioms that are fully figurative, opaque, and fixed, permitting limited interpretive flexibility.

Table 1. *Idioms*

Idiom	Meaning
Barking up the wrong tree	Making a wrong assumption.
Bite the bullet	Endure something unpleasant bravely.
Burn the midnight oil	Work late into the night.
Cry over spilt milk	Waste time worrying about irretrievable mistakes.
Hit the books	Study hard.
Hit the sack	Go to bed.
Kick the bucket	Die.
Let the cat out of the bag	Disclose a secret.
Pull someone's leg	Tease or joke with someone.
Spill the beans	Reveal a secret.

Idiomatic Expressions form a broad, flexible category encompassing idioms and other conventional, fixed phrases with clear or partially figurative meanings, facilitating fluent, context-sensitive interaction across social and pragmatic domains (Bobrow & Bell, 1973; Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991; Caillies & Butcher, 2007; Cieślicka, 2006; Hinkel, 2017; Liontas, 2019; Titone & Connine, 1999). Unlike idioms, whose metaphorical meanings are opaque and irreducible, idiomatic expressions are often transparent or contextually inferable, serving polite, social, or pragmatic functions and allowing greater syntactic and lexical flexibility (e.g., *come up with an idea*, *go broke*). A persistent confusion involves *categorical slippage*—the assumption that all idiomatic expressions are idioms. This blurring obscures a crucial theoretical and pedagogical distinction. Idioms function as figurative puzzles, demanding distinct learning strategies and interpretive skills because they resist literal decoding and embed culturally specific meanings (e.g., *Burn the midnight oil*, *spill the beans*). In contrast, expressions such as *How's it going?* or *Nice to meet you* perform social functions without semantic shift. In short, *idiomatic expressions* are routine, formulaic phrases vital for natural, context-sensitive interaction. Table 2 outlines their defining features; Table 3 illustrates 24 classic examples distinct from idioms.

Table 2. *Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions Summary*

Aspect	Idioms	Idiomatic Expressions
Meaning	Figurative, non-literal	Literal or contextually clear
Function	Express figurative meaning	Social/pragmatic (greetings, offers, etc.)
Transparency	Opaque, non-compositional	Transparent or near-transparent
Usage frequency	Routine, sometimes colorful or vivid	Frequent in everyday conversation
Example	"Hit the books" / "Kick the bucket"	"How are you?" / "Please, come in."

Table 3. *Idiomatic Expressions*

Idiomatic Expressions with Explanations	
By the way. — phrase to introduce additional information. **Can I help you?** — offer of assistance. **Can't complain.** — informal, routine "fine" reply. **Help yourself.** — invitation to take or serve oneself. **Hold on a second.** — request to wait briefly. **How are you?** — routine greeting. **How's it going?** — informal greeting asking how someone is. **I beg your pardon.** — polite request to repeat or apologize. **I'm afraid not.** — polite way to refuse or deny something. **I'm just kidding.** — phrase signals a comment was made in jest. **It's up to you.** — expression leaving a decision to the listener. **Keep in touch.** — request to maintain contact.	**Keep me posted.** — request for regular updates. **Long time no see.** — informal greeting after a long absence. **Make yourself at home.** — invitation to be comfortable. **Nice to meet you.** — polite phrase upon introduction. **No worries.** — reassurance meaning "It's not a problem." **Please, come in!** — invitation to enter. **See you later.** — common farewell. **Sorry to keep you waiting.** — polite apology for a delay. **Take it easy.** — casual sign-off or relax suggestion. **That sounds good.** — expression of agreement or approval. **What's going on?** — casual check-in on someone or events. **What's the matter?** — inquiry about a problem or concern.

Multiword Expressions (MWEs) form a large subset of formulaic language, encompassing any combination of two or more words functioning as a single unit in communication. This broad category includes *idioms* (e.g., *throw in the towel*), *collocations* (e.g., *strong tea*), *phrasal verbs* (e.g., *give up*), *compound nouns* (e.g., *traffic jam*), *fixed expressions* (e.g., *by and large*), and conventional *idiomatic expressions* (e.g., *What's up?*). What unites them is prefabricated, conventionalized use, though they vary in fixity and in the transparency or opacity of their meanings (Arnon & Christiansen, 2017; Hinkel, 2017; Sag et al., 2002). Importantly, not all MWEs are idiomatic. While idiomatic expressions form a prominent subset, marked by figurative or socially conventional meanings and relatively fixed phrasing, many other MWEs—such as collocations or phrasal verbs—remain semantically transparent or grammatically flexible while still functioning as formulaic units in discourse.

Alongside the three primary classifications of idioms, idiomatic expressions, and multiword expressions, *figurative language* and *formulaic language* occupy distinct, though occasionally overlapping, domains within the broader landscape of linguistic expression.

Figurative Language engages meaning and imagery, drawing on figures of speech such as *metaphor*, *simile*, *personification*, and *hyperbole* to evoke symbolic, affective, and imaginative meanings beyond the literal. It includes both conventional idioms and novel constructions that animate discourse. Phrases like "time is a thief" or "she runs like the wind" exemplify this creative use of language to stir emotion and conjure vivid mental images (Ibáñez et al., 2010; Liontas, 2018c).

Formulaic Language, by contrast, comprises fixed or semi-fixed sequences routinely stored and retrieved as 'prefabricated units.' These include *idiomatic expressions*, *multiword expressions*, *collocations*, *phrasal verbs*, *sentence frames*, *speech formulas*, *clichés*, and *routine social exchanges*. Some, like *idioms*, are figurative, though many are not. What unites them is neither grammar nor etymology but the fact that they are learned, internalized, and used as wholes rather than assembled word by word in real time (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012; Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015; Wray, 2002, 2013, 2017). This foundation supports fluent, culturally attuned expression by providing habitual patterns and sociolinguistic polish beyond isolated vocabulary or grammar. In essence, *figurative language privileges creativity and imagery; formulaic language prioritizes prefabricated fluency and social conventionality*. Their paths intersect—many idioms are figurative—but they serve distinct communicative purposes. Their overlaps are meaningful, yet their boundaries remain conceptually vital. It is within these parameters that *collocations* and *colligations* emerge: the subtle, often invisible ligatures binding words by habit and grammatical necessity, shaping both the sound and the sense of natural language. Here, the architecture of patterned expression comes sharply into focus—crystal clear, some might argue.

Collocations are habitual pairings of words that co-occur with statistically significant frequency—more often than chance would predict. These may be *lexical* (e.g., *catch a cold*, *make a deal*, *strong coffee*) or *grammatical* (e.g., *come to an agreement*). Unlike idioms, their meanings are typically transparent or conventional rather than figurative. Defined by their predictability in natural usage and semantic compositionality, *collocations* permit limited variation without altering core meaning (Granger, 1998; Laufer, 2010; Lewis, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2003). They range from fully to semi-compositional and are classified by lexical or grammatical type and degree of fixity. At their core, *collocations* reflect the patterned preferences of a language: the *word + word* tendencies that shape fluent, *idiomatic expression*.

Colligations are habitual *grammatical* environments associated with a word or phrase—not about which specific lexical items co-occur, but how a word tends to behave grammatically: what parts of speech it aligns with or which grammatical structures it typically selects or triggers (e.g., *verb + preposition + noun/gerund*). The term retains theoretical relevance within *idiomatics*, involving the preferential pairing of a word with particular grammatical structures or function words (Firth, 1957, 1968; Siepmann, 2005). For example, *depend* colligates with *on*, typically followed by a noun phrase or gerund clause (e.g., *depend on someone*, *depend on doing something*). Conceptually, *colligations* chart *word + grammar* preferences within the patterned architecture of natural language.

Summarized succinctly: *idiomatic language* consists of fixed, conventional expressions with non-literal meanings (Liontas, 2018e); *figurative language*

comprises creative, imaginative constructions (Liontas, 2018c); and *formulaic language* encompasses prefabricated, routinized sequences, some figurative, many not (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012; Van Lancker Sidtis et al., 2015; Wray, 2002, 2013, 2017).

In language teaching, drawing clear lines between idioms, idiomatic expressions, and MWEs reveals whether the focus lies on figurative treasures or the broader, prefabricated rhythms of speech—each a vital thread in the rich tapestry of *idiomatics* where true fluency takes shape. Yet to cultivate genuine idiomatic competence and performance across the second language curriculum, the intricate architectures of *formulaic sequences*, *collocations*, *colligations*, and *figurative turns* must be grounded in a coherent framework of *structure*, *meaning*, *function*, *register*, and *usage*. These domains are constitutive—forming the scaffolding for fluent, naturalistic, context-appropriate language. Neglecting them leaves learners adrift in a sea of isolated phrases, untethered from the currents of real discourse. Thus, patterned language instruction must begin systematically from Day One, threading *idiomatic competence* as an integral, performative asset—not mere ornament—in learners' repertoires. We begin with *structure*.

Structure denotes the syntactic pattern underlying a multiword expression, specifying the grammatical arrangement of its elements (e.g., verb + noun phrase, adjective + preposition + noun). It reveals the preferred configurations idioms, idiomatic expressions, collocations, and colligations adopt, exposing structural regularities within language. In *idiomatics*, structure complements meaning and compositionality by mapping grammatical frameworks that sustain and conventionalize patterned expressions.

Meaning designates the semantic content an expression conveys—literal, figurative, or idiomatic. It captures the sense derived from the phrase as a whole, independent of its parts, distinguishing transparent, partially inferable, and opaque interpretations within communicative contexts. This dimension anchors the phrase's interpretive value to its discourse situation.

Function denotes the pragmatic role an expression performs in discourse, shaping speaker intent, listener reception, and social interaction. In *idiomatics*, idioms serve multiple functions: expressing attitudes, emotions, and evaluations; modulating statements; adding rhetorical vividness; fostering solidarity; and enabling indirectness, humor, euphemism, and conversational flow. They operate as versatile discourse devices encoding both meaning and social function within conventionalized language.

Register and Usage Domains classify expressions by the communicative settings in which they typically occur—formal, informal, business, legal, social, or general—reflecting pragmatic appropriateness relative to audience, context, and purpose. This domain encompasses regionalisms (e.g., *"He's fixing to leave"* in Southern U.S. English, meaning *"about to leave"*), occupational jargon (e.g., *"Close the books"* in accounting, meaning *"finalize financial records"*), conversational tone (e.g., *"With all due respect…"* as a formal, face-saving preface to disagreement), medium sensitivity (e.g., *"spill the tea"* in digital discourse, rare in formal writing), and sociolinguistic marking (e.g., *"Bob's your uncle"* in British English, *"throw shade"* in colloquial slang).

Structure, meaning, function, register, and usage form the foundation for *idiomatic competence* and *performance*. Both are essential for authentic, nuanced, and socially attuned discourse. Competence is internalized idiomatic-figurative knowledge of meanings, contexts, functions, and connotations—knowing what expressions mean, when, where, and how to use them. Performance is their fluent, timely, and culturally tuned delivery in real-world interaction. One governs, the other enacts. Instruction must cultivate both.

True mastery in *Idiomatics* is not a matter of possession, but of presence—the grace to move through language's unpredictable currents, to speak with precision, and to choose the phrase that carries its weight in memory, culture, and time (Liontas, 2018f). It is spoken not from the tongue alone, but from the marrow.

In this light, the Labyrinth is no mere puzzle of stone and shadow. It is the tangled inheritance of idiomatic expressions, the winding corridors of ancestral stories and ritual turns of phrase. Memory moves as both guide and riddle, offering glimpses but no certainties. Yet wisdom is not won by wandering alone. The Labyrinth demands an exit.

It is not enough to know the paths, to hoard scripts, to chart every turn. One must step into the daylight, voice steady, words sharpened, and tell the tale. A story long trapped in the maze is a story half-lived, its truths dimmed, its lessons unsung. In the end, it is not the map we clutch, but the line we deliver when the curtain lifts and the world leans forward. The Labyrinth yields only to those bold enough to walk, speak, perform—not merely to know the way, but to leave footprints where the map once was.

And so, dear readers, we arrive at the threshold. Beneath its vaulted corridors echo the idioms of centuries—whispered in agorae, sung in taverns, woven into sermons, cast like runes upon parchment and screen. The maze was never meant to be a home but a crucible. Competence dwells within its walls; performance waits beyond them. The thread we carry is not mere tradition but a lifeline spun from wisdom, precision, and the will to cross from knowing to becoming. For this is the true labor of *Idiomatics*: to step forth from inherited scripts into the uncharted daylight of living speech, where language breathes, pulses, and acts. Not to name the walls, but to scale them. Not to memorize the steps, but to compose new ones. The scholar's charge is to perform the tale: to speak it clean, to speak it true, and thereby ensure that no story, no idiom, no living utterance perishes for lack of a teller.

Let us then, as Cicero counseled in *De Oratore* and as clarity demands, forswear cunning gloss in favor of enduring truth. The lines we draw today, the discipline we name, and the performances we summon shall outlast ornament, outlive the maze, and echo long after theory's passage fades.

For the truth, once spoken plain, outlives all gloss.

What, then, I humbly ask, shall we make of this charge? Who among us will raise the standard for Idiomatics, not as a scattered curiosity, but as a discipline forged in rigor, performance, and truth? Shall we leave the living idiom to languish beneath the weight of borrowed categories and dusty glossaries? Or shall we together build the house it deserves, a house with many rooms for every voice, every utterance, every flicker of the human pulse made word?

This is the labor before us. This is the promise of ISI: to cultivate a field where no idiom need apologize for its strangeness, where no turn of phrase dies unnamed, and where the future of language education and research is shaped not by convenience but by courage. Will we take up this work? Will we answer the call? Will we blaze paths for others to follow?

A path is born in the walking—etched by the press of footsteps, shaped by choices cast upon uncertain ground. No path exists until a soul moves through the wild, marking the way by the sheer fact of going. Wisdom is no paved road but a shimmering trace, a line of echoes left by those bold enough to tread where none have dared, leaving in their wake a path for others to follow, to forge their own turns, to walk with purpose, to widen the way, and, yes, to press beyond. The paths we mark at this hour will bear the weight of those yet to come. Let them be worthy. Let them lead beyond the maze.

But what shape shall these lines take? Who will name the contours of this emerging discipline? What principles shall we honor, what traditions must we break, and what new lexicons will we dare compose? Shall we cling to borrowed maps, or chart the terrain of Idiomatics by the shifting constellations of living speech?

The answers to these questions must not descend as edicts from elsewhere. They must rise in the power of our own scholarly voices. We—the researchers, the teachers, the tellers of tales worth telling—are the ones called to claim this ground, to stake its borders not in stone but in fierce dialogue, unflinching inquiry, and the vow that no idiom, no figure, no shimmer of language will be left unseen, unspoken, or unclaimed.

This is our charge. And it begins now.

Charting New Lines—The Promise of ISI

The reader encountering the title of this article, *Cultivating ISI: Shaping the Future of Idiomatics in Language Education and Research*, could be forgiven for anticipating certain scholarly rituals: a manifesto, a taxonomy, a crisp delineation of aims, or a history of idiom studies rendered in tidy chronologies and authoritative claims. One might reasonably expect a programmatic scaffold: mission statements, methodological proposals, and an inventory of the terminological fissures and conceptual disputes long dividing the field. Such expectations are neither naïve nor misplaced, for they rise from a discipline eager for coherence. I have elsewhere laid those stones in their proper order (Liontas, 2021, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025).

And yet, as I cautioned at this article's opening, I come not to bury your phrasing, nor merely to praise the precision of prior taxonomies, but to pursue what lies beyond them. I asked not for your ears then, nor shall I presume to command them now; I seek only your discerning eye and your honest reckoning with the lines we might yet draw together. *Charting New Lines—The Promise of ISI* stands not in opposition to our title's charge, but as its first, essential act: the initial, tender mapping from which all further cultivation must humbly proceed.

It is precisely because those taxonomies, mappings, and terminological architectures have been surveyed, mapped, and named that this piece now turns—

not in dismissal of those efforts, but in quiet acknowledgment of the labor that still waits in their wake. This marks not a departure from our guiding metaphor, but a reflective turn within it. Let us then return not to the graveyard of old taxonomies, but to the living soil of possibility. The task is not to read between inherited lines, but to inscribe new ones—and to ask, as Cicero once did, what truths they shall outlast.

To inscribe new lines that endure beyond the present, we must continue to cultivate Idiomatics by clarifying its disciplinary boundaries, conceptual language, and intellectual aims, while concomitantly cultivating ISI as the living framework through which the field will take root, flourish, and endure. The discipline's vitality rests upon this twin, interdependent labor: the simultaneous cultivation of Idiomatics and ISI. We begin with the former.

Cultivating Idiomatics

Cultivating Idiomatics—the art and science of idiomatic and figurative language—begins with this seminal truth: claiming responsibility for its future requires charting its lines, tracing its boundaries, and declaring the principles by which it shall flourish. This is more than bestowing a matching name upon a society; it is about building a field, fostering growth, and making space to thrive. Cultivation founds traditions, builds communities, mentors stewards, and sharpens tools for future harvests. It tends an intellectual inheritance with care and foresight. The word itself suits idioms—organic, rooted, and evolving. Born in the mouths of people, idioms are shaped by fears, loves, jokes, superstitions, rebellions, and longings. Each generation inherits this treasury not as fixed code, but as a living current—a pulse that beats in time with history and leaves its mark upon the age.

Like language itself, Idiomatics lives with us, alive and speaking here and now. At its heart, idiomatics is the study of how meaning survives by changing. How phrases fossilize, then crack, then flower again in new soil. How language resists ossification by endlessly renewing itself in the mouths of the many. It is a living labyrinth because every passage was once walked by another, though none walks it the same way twice. Every turn of phrase bears the fingerprints of those who spoke it, bent it, and passed it on. These idioms are the living veins of language's long memory. Idiomatics, then, is not the cataloging of dead things, but the study of how language breathes, adapts, and remembers—time's own handprint upon the tongue.

To cultivate the field of idiomatics is to tend not only its practitioners and ideas but also the language by which it names, explains, and interrogates its subject. Without precise, coherent terms, no inquiry finds its voice, no soil nourishes what seeks to grow, and no tradition takes root. Idiomatics—a discipline born of metaphor and bound to the ineffable—has long wandered in a Babel of competing names, tangled in a labyrinth without a center. Put differently, before shaping its future, we must reckon with the nomenclature we inherit: clear the stones, chart the lexicon, and untangle meaning's thickets. And just as the Eleusinian rites once sanctified the ancient mysteries veiled from ordinary sight, so must we consecrate the names that bestow coherence upon the world, carrying them beyond mere survival toward sophrosyne (σωφροσύνη)—the flourishing born of wisdom and balance—ever

mindful of the venerable Hellenic maxim meden agan (μηδὲν ἄγαν), 'nothing in excess,' which tempered Greek thought and civic virtue alike.

Before tilling the field, we must first chart its lines, discern the promise the soil holds, imagine what might one day flourish there, and reckon with the labor those harvests will demand. For you reap what you sow; a harvest without intention yields only what chance permits. This is not evasion but necessity. What lies before us is not an institution awaiting founders, but an intellectual inheritance awaiting its rightful claimants—a field whose yield will depend on the wisdom of the hands that turn its soil.

I claim no green thumb, but this I know: to cultivate is not mere growth or development. It is careful, deliberate nurturing, tending an idea, a practice, or a community with sustained effort and vision. The word calls to mind more than growth; it summons the patient preparation of soil, seed planting, vigilant sheltering of fragile shoots, and steady guidance toward fruition. It speaks of intentionality, artistry, foresight, and the reckoning every harvest exacts.

This article began where lasting cultivation must: with language itself—mapping the terminological labyrinth, planting order in the soil of inquiry, and gathering scattered voices into a concerted chorus. Only then can the discipline rise—not as a cacophony of tongues, but as an enduring edifice, bearing the weight of harvests to come. No edifice endures where words are brittle, where language fractures, and where creative thought lingers unfinished in dark labyrinthine corners—lest the Minotaur of confusion lurks to devour the field entire. This, at least, I have sought to accomplish.

And fittingly, this reckoning unfolded in eight deliberate turns—echoing the ancient Greek symbol of balance, renewal, and the eternal passage beyond completion. Eight turns, eight reckonings, eight threads unwound in a living maze not of stone, but of meaning. To chart them is to trace the enduring ambition to master what resists mastery. A task Daedalian in its intricacy; yet to forsake it is to abandon the very art of language itself.

The work of clearing the stones and preparing the ground became a metaphor for reckoning with the tangled thickets of meaning we have inherited. It was necessary to tame the Babel of competing terms and voices, to restore coherence where too long there had been only cacophony. This required an urgent act of naming, a painstaking untangling of terminological threads wound tightly in a labyrinth with no discernible center.

The vision, always, was of a discipline rising as a unified, harmonious edifice—its language tempered, its metaphors coherent, its voice one in concert. And so I close this labor, modestly, acknowledging what remains unfinished. Each step a beat in this ancient cycle, each word a stone in the path toward a language worthy of the field it seeks to hold, each act a turn within the labyrinth of tomorrow. Whether this passage leads to clarity or to yet another chamber of mirrors remains to be seen. But as Daedalus once shaped his maze with craft and foresight, so too must we shape our language.

We approached language as *logos*: the ordering principle, the kosmos (κόσμος) of thought, where names are not mere labels but acts of consecration. Yet if I have leaned upon *logos* (λόγος) in this reckoning, it is because the labyrinth demands clear threads. No argument, however, lives by reason alone. *Ethos* (ἦθος) breathes through the devotion to inquiry itself—the quiet fidelity to those who came before

and those yet to come. *Pathos* (πάθος) moves in the unspoken urgency to preserve, reshape, and pass meaning forward, lest the living pulse of language fall still. In their weave lies the true art of speech—not merely to persuade, but to endure. (For a more detailed discussion of the art of persuasion, see Liontas, 2025.)

For the very stem of idiomatics proclaims it so, from the heart of its own etymology. Along the old paths of memory, it becomes clear that this reckoning with language's order is no modern conceit, but an ancient summons, etched in the marrow of the word itself. To name a field *Idiomatics* is to confess that meaning is no drifting vapor, but particular, situated, bound to tongue, time, and place—that without clarity, we consign ourselves to wander endlessly through a maze of our own devising. The question is no longer whether this reckoning must come, but whether we shall rise to meet it. Shall we forever pace these labyrinthine corridors, deaf to the ancestral summons that calls us by name—or shall we, at long last, name the center, claim the mantle, and in that naming, find our way home?

I aim to ignite the spark that lights idiomatics' future, orchestrating its growth as a harmonious, multifaceted movement, and weaving its threads into a rich fabric interlacing heritage, innovation, and lasting connection within language education and research. In quiet devotion, I nurture what breathes and stirs, guiding its slow unfolding with patient hands, like a gardener watching tender shoots, mindful of the promise the harvest still holds. It is toward this cultivated future, and the gathering of hands to tend it, that we now turn.

Cultivating ISI

To chart a future for ISI is to sow a new field—not to fence in, but to cultivate; not to impose, but to nourish. This future will not rise as a carved monument, fixed and unyielding, but as a living ecology of breath, thought, and enduring spirit. It summons not guardians of a brittle order, but stewards of a restless, fertile idea—a seed entrusted to capable hands and generous, forgiving soil. Like any enduring garden, its flourishing will depend upon deliberate, faithful tending. Eight distinct acts of cultivation shall ready this ground and coax forth its promise, each one an essential labor in the forging of a common harvest, where at last the heart of idiomatics may take root, stretch toward the light, and thrive:

- **First**, we loosen the earth, fingers deep in old soil, clearing the tangled undergrowth of misnomers, misconceptions, and worn-out frames, making space for what waits to be born.
- **Second**, into this hollowed earth, we plant a single, shimmering seed no storm will uproot: the knowing that idiomatics, radiant and unruled, has always sought its own wild grove.
- **Third**, we feed it with memory, the stories of those whose words once fell like rain upon this very ground.
- **Fourth**, we claim common ground, a meeting-place of voices where difference does not divide, but multiplies the strength of soil and root.
- **Fifth**, we kneel to witness the first green signs—the fragile, reckless shoots of thought breaking through—granting them light, time, and space to take their shape, carrying the pulse of something unnamed.

- **Sixth**, we cut with wisdom, trimming not to control but to reveal, so what grows may rise unbroken, true to its nature, fierce in its becoming.
- **Seventh**, we raise a canopy, a shelter woven not from rules but of openness, a lattice against the blight of narrowness, where every new branch tilts toward light, toward the infinite possible.
- **And eighth**, we leave the gate unbarred, the paths unmarked, so those yet unborn of this vision might enter, might plant, might shape this restless, living grove.

And so, ISI begins to take its shape—not as a monument, but as a living design in the spirit of Daedalus: a structure not built to entrap, but to transform. In this labyrinth, each turn leads not to a dead end, but to another clearing, another question, another invitation to begin again.

To cultivate ISI is to plant a seed deep in the soil of a thousand whispered traditions, nurturing a fellowship of kindred minds who honor the past, read the pulse of the present, and dream futures yet unfolding. Cultivation is no mere preservation—it is the restless, tender art of shaping a sacred space where ideas dance, collide, and bloom anew. ISI stands not as a vault of silent knowledge, but as an open, shifting terrain of inquiry—a living labyrinth, forever unfurling its winding paths. It cradles the living pulse of this endeavor, preserving without freezing, honoring without binding, and leaving its doors wide as the dawn for those yet to come—to explore, reshape, and carry the wild, unruled flame of this living art onward: sowing, tending, and harvesting futures no map can chart.

To build a society devoted to this work is not merely to catalogue or classify, but to tend the soil from which meaning endlessly grows. The work of idiomatics belongs not to the past alone, but to the restless, ever-becoming present. Each generation inherits this living labyrinth, its passages reshaped with every speaker's breath, altered by every voice bold enough to enter. Like Daedalus' fabled creation, this labyrinth is neither fixed nor linear. It shifts with each mind that walks its winding corridors, where every turn marks a moment of reckoning, discovery, or revision. Its walls are not barriers but thresholds—places where inherited wisdom meets untamed insight, where idiomatic inquiry refuses the final answer. To travel this space is to accept that meaning, like language itself, evades capture—and that it is the restless pursuit, not the conclusion, that keeps the labyrinth of idiomatics alive, its passages reshaped with each seeking voice.

ISI's cultivation is the tending of a restless, living terrain—a structure forever open, its corridors shifting with thought, its pulse quickened by every new voice. To trace its contours is to follow unwritten paths, thresholds opening endlessly toward what language might yet become. It is the careful stewardship of a living ecology, where ideas bloom and decay, where language remakes itself, and where meaning drifts like pollen from one mind to the next. The work of ISI is to keep this field breathing—to tend its passages, leave its doors unlatched, and let meaning chase itself through restless, luminous turns. Its worth lies in its movement, in its capacity to remain ancient and new, familiar and strange (see Liontas, 2024c, 2025).

And so it is that the *International Society of Idiomatics* must rise not as a monument, but as a garden: a breathing, speaking, restless space where meaning's

pulse thrums in every turn of phrase, every wayward idiom, every cultural echo folded into the words we trade. In that spirit, we do not seek to escape the labyrinth, but to keep it alive—to wander its mutable paths, name its thresholds, rekindle forgotten chambers, and leave new trails for those who follow. For keeping it alive is not the terminus of our labor, but the soil from which movement stirs, invention kindles, and inheritance passes, breath to breath, from elder tongues to young ears. It is ground where new trails thread their way into the yet-to-be, where old idioms bloom in unexpected mouths, where meaning, reckless and radiant, endlessly remakes itself—a living terrain where each turn holds memory and the shimmer of futures unclaimed.

Shaping the future of idiomatics in language education and research rests upon this shared commitment: We do not abandon the labyrinth, nor flatten it into a map. We keep it breathing—restless, speaking, unfinished. Its breath is not a destination but a beginning. Life here is the start of purpose. Tending this living terrain is no final act, but the pulse of a field forever in motion. Ever forward. Ever open. Doors unlatched, corridors unmarked—purposefully so, that those yet unborn might enter, wander, reshape the restless, luminous turns of meaning, and name the world anew.

Epilogue—A Living Labyrinth

If it has been my fortune to guide you, dear readers, through the intricate passages of idiomaticity's conceptual labyrinth, then let this closing reflection serve not as a terminus but as a recognition that the labyrinth was never meant to be escaped.

Having traced these winding turns of nomenclature and epistemological reckoning, we arrive at a clearing—though not an ending. For language—idiomatic language most of all—is no fixed monument but a living labyrinth: its walls ever shifting, its passages shaped by those who dare to map and remap its course. We are, each of us, Daedalians, architects of meaning and keepers of inherited turns, fashioning paths where others saw only tangle.

If, in myth, Daedalus crafted a maze to confound, let ours be a labyrinth of passage, inheritance, and return—a space where each generation leaves its cipher upon the walls, not to trap meaning but to set it loose upon the air. Here, in this fellowship of idiomatics, the pulse of past speech quickens in the present tongue, and the future waits to be named.

Let this be not a closing but a reckoning with lineage; a nod to those lexicon-keepers before us, and an invitation to those who will follow. The living lexicon is ours to tend. If clarity must outrank cleverness, it falls to us to chart passages wide enough for truth, narrow enough for rigor, and enduring enough to house the inheritance of words yet to be spoken.

Like Daedalus' masterwork, the labyrinth was fashioned not merely to confound but to give form to what defies easy containment: a living system of meaning, mutable and ever-shifting, marked by the footsteps of those who traverse its corridors.

So too is the field of idiomatics. It is no static relic, no fixed architecture of definitions admired behind glass. It is a living inheritance, passed from one

generation of scholars to the next, each leaving their mark upon its walls, each rethreading Ariadne's line, and each reinterpreting the maze's shape according to the pulse of their age. Both idiomatic and figurative expressions live because we use them, challenge them, distort them, and pass them on. The discipline born of their study must do no less.

To cultivate ISI is to tend this living labyrinth—to recognize that our task is not to erect final walls but to shape passages wide enough for future thought and to leave threads for those yet to come. It is to honor inherited foundations while daring to redraw the map. Eight turns we have taken together, not as a march toward resolution but as an embrace of the recursive, the unfinished, and the necessary work of meaning-making in motion.

In Daedalus' time, the labyrinth imprisoned the Minotaur—a creature half bull, half human. In ours, it carries the echo of our own inquiries and the promise that idiomatics will remain not a discipline of static definition but of living conversation: a place where each generation might enter, read the marks upon the wall, and leave their own.

And so, I invite you now not to seek an exit from this labyrinth, but to dwell within it—to continue its making, its questioning, and its living renewal. For in this enduring maze, it is not escape that defines us, but cultivation; not closure, but the patient tending of meaning through time and space.

So let it be said one final time: the future of idiomatics in language education and research belongs not to those who decorate meaning, but to those who dare to name it. Beyond these labyrinthine walls, let our words be spoken plainly, spoken naturally, spoken unapologetically—for it is not ornament that endures, but the pulse of words well told, and the truths they dare to bear.

Are your ears ringing yet?

They should. Listen closer. Listen deeply. Listen fully. The maze is never silent.

The architecture is built… now walk the halls with me one last time.

Coda to the Labyrinth[3]

The labyrinth was never meant to be escaped, neither Daedalus' nor ours. It was fashioned to be entered, inhabited, and kept alive by those who refuse easy exits.

Here's to the ones who stay.
The Labyrinthians. The Idiomatists. The Meaning-Seekers.

The ones who wander the labyrinth, not to escape it, but to keep it breathing.
The ones who know that language winds through time like a restless vine,
threading meaning from tongue to tongue, hand to hand, breath to breath.
The ones who pulse with the hours and shift with the seasons of memory.

They are the ones who see the writing is always on the wall—
half-faded, half-unwritten, awaiting the next hand.
And they believe idioms are not relics, but inheritances.
They do not mistake silence for absence, nor tradition for conclusion.

For they know this was never a citadel of fixed stone, but a living terrain—
a restless, speaking ground, meant to be walked, spoken into, and unsettled.

They know not to flatten the map, not to seal the doors, not to remain silent.
They are the ones who rise to reach further, question deeper, and imagine bolder.

When the past leans in and the future answers,
they steady the thread, even when others let it fall.

In the moment of becoming, they lift their voices higher, leave new marks in the air, and shape new turns for those yet to come.

And so the thread passes. Its pulse endures. Forever unfinished. Forever theirs. Because the ones brave enough to believe they can reshape meaning are the ones who do.

To the ones who stay, we extend not a hand for handshake, but an open page. Those who would help inscribe the future of idiomatics will find the margins waiting, the ink wet still. Correspondence and expressions of intent may be directed to John I. Liontas, University of South Florida, via liontas@usf.edu.

Endnotes

[1] The term *idiomatics* stems from the Greek *ἰδίωμα (idiōma)*, meaning "peculiarity" or "distinctive feature," itself from *ἴδιος (idios)*, "one's own." At its core, *idiomatics* concerns particular, situated expressions whose meaning transcends the literal. Its etymology demands specificity and precision, for idioms mark the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of a community. To name this field is to undertake the labor of charting particularities and forging a lexicon equal to the forms it seeks to hold. Thus, the very stem of *idiomatics* "shouts it so," urging its stewards to dispel Babel's din and honor the distinctive life of language.

[2] The metaphor of the labyrinth first whispered to me in 2019, when I gave a passing name to the maze of idiomaticity (Liontas, 2019). For six years it lingered, restless and half-formed, weaving through the corridors of my thought. Only now does it find its full shape—no longer a fleeting image, but a living architecture threading this work from foundation to spire.

[3] We must tend the names by which we know the world, for without them, coherence falters. We must tend the idioms that bind meaning to life, lest particularity dissolve into *Babel's din*. And we must speak wisely, guided by sophrosyne (σωφροσύνη) and meden agan (μηδὲν ἄγαν) that language may flourish in balance, neither in excess nor in silence.

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