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CONTENTS

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Vladyslav Bespalyi, Artem Yurchenko, Olena Semenikhina TRAINING COMPUTER SCIENCE TEACHERS: THE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOCUSING ON DATABASES.....	9
Yuliia Bilobrova, Oksana Zharko, Iryna Batenova SPECIFICS OF MODAL VERBS IN INTERCULTURAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT.....	16
Iryna Feketa ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AMONG NATURAL SCIENCES STUDENTS IN PRESENT CONDITIONS.....	23
Andrii Kozachuk, Diana Skakun THE LITERARY STYLE OF BRI LEE'S <i>EGGSHELL</i> SKULL AND ITS DISTINCTIVE FEATURES.....	28
Olga Kulchytska, Andrii Tron ARTIFICIAL VERSUS HUMAN INTELLIGENCE IN ACADEMIC ESSAY WRITING: DO WE HAVE TO COMPETE WITH AI?.....	36
Andriy Leesa, Igor Povkhan BASIC INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE E-LEARNING PROCESS.....	46
Lada Lichman THE MARVELOUS HERTS' AS A LITERARY STRATEGY OF RESISTANCE IN WAR NARRATIVES.....	56
Oleksandr Melnyk PROJECT TECHNOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMPETENCE SYSTEM FOR TRAINING EDUCATORS.....	66
Tetiana Ponomarenko L'IMAGE DU POÈTE DANS LE RECUEIL DE RENÉ CHAR "FUREUR ET MYSTÈRE"	76
Olena Pozharytska PRINT OR PLAY: VERBAL AND MULTIMODAL NARRATIVE PECULIARITIES.....	81
Olena Stepanenko FROM IDEAS TO STANDARDS: BORYS SHALAGINOV'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FORMATION OF FOREIGN LITERATURE AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE.....	87
Yuliia Yevtushenko DEVELOPING THE MECHANISM OF PSYCHOLOGICAL INDUCTION IN MEDICAL STUDENTS.....	93
Nataliia Zlenko, Iryna Smyrnova THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN THE AXIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SPACE.....	105

THE LITERARY STYLE OF BRI LEE'S *EGGSHELL SKULL* AND ITS DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Andrii Kozachuk

Ph.D., Head of Linguistics and Translation Department,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine
e-mail: a.kozachuk@kubg.edu.ua, orcid.org/0000-0002-5508-3152

Diana Skakun

Alumna of the Translation Studies Program,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine
e-mail: dsskakun.if21@kubg.edu.ua, orcid.org/0009-0007-2525-8875

Summary

The paper explores the distinctive features of author's idiostyle in *Eggshell Skull*, a non-fictional memoir by Bri Lee, a contemporary Australian author and lawyer. Despite a growing global interest in Anglophone literature, Australian literary non-fictional texts (particularly memoirs) lack wide representation in linguistic studies. This research aims to identify and classify the key linguistic means in Lee's debut work that contribute to her unique idiostyle.

The methodological framework of the conducted research is based on exhaustive sampling, semantic and pragmatic analysis, classification, and computational methods. Lexical units in the sample were categorized into five primary groups: legal terminology (27.57%), colloquialisms (31.35%), vulgarisms (6.49%), idioms (14.05%), and proper names (20.54%).

The analysis demonstrates that Bri Lee's idiostyle is deeply rooted in her professional legal background and personal experiences. The frequent use of domain-specific vocabulary and culture-specific proper names enhances local coloring, while colloquialisms and idioms contribute to narrative accessibility.

Eggshell Skull emerges as a vivid and multifaceted text that reflects the author's linguistic individuality. This study underscores the perspective for broader idiostylistic inquiry into Lee's complete oeuvre, offering insights into the interplay between language, identity, and genre in contemporary Australian memoir writing.

Key words: Australian literature, colloquialisms, idioms, idiostyle, legal terminology, vulgarisms.

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1. Introduction

Investigating the author's idiostyle can contribute to solving several tasks. It is through idiostyle that an author reveals their vision of the world, creates an artistic representation of reality, and gives their work a distinctive tone. It helps to perceive the chronotope of the text, its national and historical coloring, etc. For the most part, texts by Australian authors have received comparatively less attention from linguists than those written in Great Britain or the USA. Thus, the research of a non-fictional memoir text written by an Australian lawyer appears topical and relevant.

The theoretical basis of our research relies on the works of researchers in the fields of memoir definition (T. Cherkashyna, B. Paramonov, V. Skopnenko, and others), notions

of idiostyle and text style (N. Bezrebra, V. Muratova, and others), professional terminology (L. Biel, H. J. Kockaert, M. Vakulenko, and others), colloquialisms (B. Fattah, E. Frisella, S. Salih, and others), vulgarisms (L. Andersson, R. Mercury, and others), idioms (W. J. Ball, H. Bortfeld, P. Kvetko, and others), and proper names (E. Mignot, M. Philippe, and others).

The purpose of the research is to highlight the identified stylistic peculiarities of Bri Lee's non-fictional memoir *Eggshell Skull*. To achieve this, we consider it crucial not to focus solely on the text but also on some extralinguistic factors.

At the very beginning of the research, the sample was supplemented with lexemes serving as distinctive features of the text. The research corpus consisted of units selected based on their semantics. For this purpose, the methods of exhaustive sampling and semantic analysis were applied.

Primarily, the selected units belonged to the following groups: legal terms, proper names, colloquial units, vulgarisms, and idioms. In the next stage, involving the method of classification, the units in the sample were classified and properly labeled.

The subsequent stage of the research included semantic and pragmatic analysis. That is, the meaning of each selected unit was considered within the pragmatic and cognitive linguistic paradigms. After a precise analysis, the units underwent further classification at a lower level, which enabled drawing conclusions based on calculations and logical operations.

Thus, the research methods applied included exhaustive sampling, semantic analysis, classification, cognitive analysis, pragmatic analysis, and computational methods.

2. Bri Lee's memoir style-forming factors

Any writer, like any person, uses their own unique habits for selecting lexemes and constructing syntactic structures. These habits depend on many objective factors, such as a person's biography.

Born in Queensland, Australia, Brianna "Bri" Lee is a noted author, investigative journalist, academic, activist, speaker, and qualified (non-practising) lawyer (*Shapter, 2023*). Holding a Master of Philosophy in Creative Writing, Bri Lee has written analyses, opinions, short fiction, essays, and arts criticism (*Bri Lee, n.d.*). The Walkley-nominated author regularly contributes to *The Monthly* and *The Saturday Paper*, has a column at T Mag Australia, and runs writing workshops and a podcast called *Cool Story*.

Bri Lee is currently completing a PhD in law at the University of Sydney and frequently advocates for legal reform, highlighting issues related to women's rights and social equity in the public discourse. Elaborating on her calling to be a writer, Bri states that her experiences with the legal system were "truly shocking," and she felt it was "really important to write about" them (*Unite – Meet Bri Lee, 2024*).

In her interview for *The Guardian*, Bri Lee confesses that work is a key factor in shaping her identity and future. When asked about the secret of her success, she answers, "It is both my greatest asset and my greatest weakness that I almost never switch off" (*Cain, 2024*).

The list of her works includes 2018's *Eggshell Skull*, 2019's *Beauty* (exploring issues of self-worth, society's obsession with physical "perfection," and eating disorders), 2021's *Who Gets to Be Smart* (interrogating the saying "knowledge is power" and investigating educational inequality through the lens of sexism, racism, and classism), and 2024's *The Work*, which follows two young people who face the intersections of power, money, and privilege (*Bri Lee, n.d.*).

As can be seen from the previous paragraph, *Eggshell Skull* is Bri Lee's debut literary work. The daughter of a police officer, she followed in her father's footsteps, pursued a degree

in law, and secured a position as a judge's associate at the Supreme and District Courts of Queensland, Brisbane. On circuit, Bri witnessed numerous cases of sexual abuse and acts of violence against children and women. Not only do offenders frequently go unpunished, but gender prejudice and widespread patriarchal attitudes are also evident in many cases. Facing these injustices within the court, she involuntarily confronted her personal traumatic story – one she had vowed never to reveal – and the enduring effects it had on her mental and physical well-being (Lee, 2018).

In her childhood, Bri experienced sexual assault at the hands of her brother's friend Samuel on the trampoline in the backyard of her own house. Over time, the feeling of shame turned into anger and a resolve to bring her offender to justice (Lee, 2018).

As we can see, Bri Lee explores a variety of broad social issues, namely sexual assault and abuse, the flaws of the legal system, power and privilege, patriarchy, and gender inequality – confronting past trauma and seeking healing.

As previously mentioned, *Eggshell Skull* is a non-fiction memoir divided into a prologue, 25 chapters, and acknowledgments. Cherkashyna and Paramonov, after analyzing numerous works on the genre varieties of non-fictional literature, distinguished four main branches: literary biography, historical nonfiction, fictional journalism, and memoirs (Cherkashyna & Paramonov, 2021: 79).

But a question arises: what exactly is a memoir? According to Skopnenko and Tsymbaliuk, a memoir is a set of autobiographical notes or literary memories about past events participated in or witnessed by the author (Skopnenko & Tsymbaliuk, 2007: 235). Couser explains that a memoir is a nonfiction genre because it depicts real people, not imagined ones (Couser, 2012).

Thus, the overall analysis of the text shows that it corresponds to the basic features of the genre. Therefore, we can conclude that the analyzed book is an example of a non-fictional piece – namely, a memoir.

3. Stylistic features of *Eggshell Skull* as a non-fictional memoir

In various communication situations, individuals employ particular styles of communication characterized by unique phonetic, grammatical, and lexical features. The same goes for the author's individual style in literary works that is one of the fundamental concepts in both contemporary linguistics and translation studies.

To illustrate its contentious nature, here is a list of terms currently employed to refer to it, namely authorial style, idiostyle, individual style, idiolect, etc. At first glance, these terms appear nearly synonymous, yet there are distinctions among them. Generally, the speech style of a particular person is called idiolect, while the terms authorial style, individual style, and idiostyle pertain only to a writer and are used interchangeably by the majority of scholars. Since the objective of our research is not to evaluate the pros and cons of the terminology in linguistic studies, we will adopt the more commonly understood term idiostyle.

The notion of idiostyle can be understood as the set of expressive means chosen by the text author due to some objective factors and accessible for observation by means of analysis of the means of its realization (Bezrebra, 2009: 8; Muratova, 2014: 121).

Therefore, evaluating the author's idiostyle and outlining its distinctive features requires examining at least a couple of their works, ideally their entire oeuvre.

After classifying the units of sample, we may state the following linguistic means of the text style realisation as legal sector-specific terminology, idioms, colloquial lexis, vulgarisms,

and wide use of various proper names. Now, we propose to examine each category in further depth, accompanied by the examples from the text we have studied.

The first linguistic phenomenon to be considered is professional terminology. The idea of a term is the primary concept of terminology. In his article *Term and terminology: basic approaches, definitions, and investigation methods*, Vakulenko defines a term as “a word or a collocation that refers to a certain concept in a particular field of human endeavor” (Vakulenko, 2014: 18). Moreover, terms should have no synonyms, be stylistically neutral, and be independent of the context to convey their meaning. Accordingly, terminology is “a set of terms of a particular field of science, as well as the doctrine of the formation, composition, and functioning of terms” (Rysanivskiy et al., 2004: 683). As previously mentioned, the plot of *Eggshell Skull* is based on the author’s 2-year-long experience working as a judge’s associate. Since “legal terminology is present not only in highly specialized legal discourses but also permeates other domains and general language”, it is one of the key linguistic means that define the idiosyncrasy of the studied book (Biel & Kockaert, 2023, p. 1). For example:

(1) *It noted that of all the weeks in the year we had for work, only two would consist of civil law* – (Lee, 2018: 17).

(2) *When the prosecutor had finished stepping the girl through her evidence-in-chief, she underwent three hours of cross-examination* (Lee, 2018: 30).

Colloquialisms also perform a crucial role in the realization of Bri Lee’s idiosyncrasy. In linguistics, colloquial language is an extremely broad notion that includes “all the forms and linguistic units of informal language variations” (Fattah & Salih, 2022). Therefore, colloquialism is an informal word or phrase used in a familiar and unconstrained context, in contrast to formal language or academic writing. After analyzing the works of different scholars, Fattah and Salih outline the following morphological forms of colloquialisms: single words, clipped words, contractions, phrasal words, aphorisms, idioms, and acronyms (*Ibid.*: 80–81). Writers use colloquialisms to represent natural speech patterns (both in dialogues and first-person narrations), reveal a character’s background, imply a specific social perspective, and create an engaging and original narrative voice (Frisella, 2017: 3). Among other informal language variations, colloquialisms are the most inclusive, as they are used by a significant number of people and have a rather broad communication range. It is useful to examine some examples of colloquialism usage in Bri Lee’s *Eggshell Skull*:

(3) *‘I’ll bet you brought a suitcase full of incredible clothes home from the States?’ Evelyn asked me* (Lee, 2018: 15).

This sentence illustrates the usage of the contracted colloquial phrase *I’ll bet you*, adding a sense of personal involvement and enhancing the relaxed conversational tone between two friends who have not seen each other for a long time. Furthermore, there is also an informal clipped word *the States*, created by means of the middle-clipping and standing for *The United States of America*.

(4) – *walking to Maccas at half past ten, was perfectly safe compared to being a girl whose mum brought home a new boyfriend* (Lee, 2018: 36).

In this case, a colloquialism *Maccas* presented by a single word is used. As found in the *Collins Online Dictionary*, *Maccas* refers to the commonplace Australian name for the popular American fast-food chain *McDonald’s* that became widespread since the 1990s (*Collins Online Dictionary*, 2025). Using this distinctly Australian colloquialism, the author adds a local and cultural sense to the sentence, while its shorter and quicker to say form contributes to a relaxed conversational style.

One more point to be considered is the usage of vulgarisms. Frequently seen as a type of obscene language alongside cursing, profanity, blasphemy, taboo words, and expletives,

vulgarisms are “expressions that are crude, raw, and from off the streets” (*Mercury*, 1995: 29-30). In their book *Bad language*, Andersson and Trudgill state that various types of “bad language” are employed to refer to something that is stigmatized or forbidden in the swearer’s culture, should not be perceived literally, and conveys strong attitudes and emotions (*Andersson*, 1990: 53). These scholars also outline four primary functions performed by this linguistic phenomenon, namely (1) expletive indicating personal emotions and is not directed at anyone; (2) abusive possessing derogatory character and person-directed; (3) humorous taking the form of abusive words but performing the opposite playful rather than offensive function; and (4) auxiliary so-called “lazy swearing” that is used as a speech style (*Ibid.*: 61). So, now we propose to consider a few examples of Bri Lee’s usage of vulgarisms in the studied memoir:

(5) *As I walked to work the next morning, I felt like shit* (Lee, 2018: 42).

In this sentence, the vulgarism *felt like shit* performs an expletive function, expressing strong frustration of the narrator with the jury’s verdict in the previous trial. The author could have used a stylistically neutral and mild *feel bad*; however, the colloquial, raw, and emotive nature of the used vulgarism only intensifies the emotional weight, making her distress more relatable and vivid to the readers.

(6) *I still had pimples and lived at home eating my mum’s spaghetti — why the fuck was I the one standing there taking the verdict?* (Lee, 2018: 33).

In the phrase “— why the fuck was I the one standing there taking the verdict?”, the vulgarism *fuck* serves an auxiliary function because it modifies the question for emphasis and makes the sentence sound more authentic, intensifying the sense of emotional turmoil and injustice.

The frequent usage of idioms also significantly contributes to the realization of Bri Lee’s idiostyle in the studied memoir. In her article *Comprehending Idioms Cross-Linguistically*, Bortfeld clarifies the notion of idiom as a fixed expression that means something different from what a literal interpretation of its separate constituents would suggest (*Bortfeld*, 2003: 217). In his *Practical Guide to Colloquial Idiom*, Ball points out four main characteristics of idioms as a linguistic phenomenon, namely: (1) a fixed word order and composition, allowing only minor grammatical changes (usually of tense and person); (2) no false analogies, as their meanings are non-transferable and specific; (3) once established, an idiom has an unequivocal meaning for everyone in the right context; (4) non-literal interpretation unless the context is revealing (*Ball*, 1958: 6-7). From a semantic point of view, Slovak scholar Kvetko proposes to distinguish (1) unchangeable idioms that are absolutely fixed and undergo no modifications, and (2) changeable idioms that allow certain variations, namely grammatical, lexical, orthographic, and geographic ones (*Kvetko*, 2009: 104-105). The next two examples illustrate the usage of idioms in the studied text:

(7) — *over ten different kinds of docks, and it seemed like the cherry on top of a sundae of reasons why juries got things wrong* (Lee, 2018: 28).

The meaning of the idiom *the cherry on top of a sundae* given in *Cambridge Dictionary* is “something that makes something that is already good even better, or perfect”. There are three possible variants of this idiom without changing its original meaning, namely *the cherry on the cake* (BE), *the cherry on top* (shortened), and *the cherry on the sundae* (AE) (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 2025). Thus, we can state the cherry on top of a sundae falls under changeable lexical-geographical idioms. Despite strong cultural ties between Australia and Great Britain, the author uses the AE variation of this idiom, since the narrated events take place shortly after her long trip around the USA. It is worth mentioning that this idiom is usually used positively; however, in this context, it implies a touch of irony — the narrator is enumerating reasons why

juries get things wrong, and “the cherry” (i.e., kinds of docks) is yet another flaw “on top of a sundae” (i.e., legal system).

(8) *I felt completely out of my depth. This space belonged to the Evelyns and Alexandras of the world* (Lee, 2018: 16).

According to *Collins Online Dictionary*, the idiom *out of one's depth* means that somebody is “in a situation that is much too difficult for them to be able to cope with it” (*Collins Online Dictionary*, 2025). It is a changeable grammatical idiom that vividly highlights the narrator's sense of helplessness without extra words.

Another important aspect of Bri Lee's idiosyle is the frequent usage of proper names. In their work *Introduction: Proper names and the lexicon — an exposition*, Mignot and Philippe define proper names as “words or expressions (of several words) mainly used in noun phrases that refer to contextually unique individuals (people, places, institutions, etc.)” (Mignot & Philippe, 2022: 1). *Eggshell Skull* contains a myriad of various proper names, including geographical objects, local brands, periodicals, etc., indicating the author's general tendency to localization. This helps to create a clear image of the location and circumstances in which the events take place. Furthermore, proper names play an important role in collecting and transmitting cultural information, which defines their value for the text interpretation. The following examples illustrate how Bri Lee applies proper names for the realization of her idiosyle:

(9) *Once, years ago, I'd found out that her parents paid for her to get it cut regularly at Oscar Oscar* – (Lee, 2018: 14).

(10) – *that Mr. Baker's house was near Yeronga Train Station, and my gut dropped* (Lee, 2018: 39).

Taking into account everything mentioned above, we may say that analyzing the idiosyle of a particular author and outlining its characteristic features requires studying several of their works, and ideally, their entire oeuvre. However, in our research, only Bri Lee's debut book was considered, serving as a representative example of her idiosyle. The author conveys her idiosyle through the usage of various linguistic means, namely professional terminology (27.57%), colloquialisms (31.35%), vulgarisms (6.49%), idioms (14.05%), and proper names (20.54%).

4. Conclusions

Eggshell Skull is a non-fictional memoir that serves as a representative example of the idiosyle of the well-known contemporary Australian author Bri Lee. When discussing memoirs as a non-fictional genre, researchers define them as first-person narratives in which the writer was a direct witness or participant in events, recollected from their own memories and experiences. The distinctive features of a memoir include subjectivity, an emphasis on a particular topic or period, retrospective and autobiographical elements, confession, and others.

Among the most typical linguistic means of idiosyle realization are proper names, professional legal terms, idioms, colloquialisms, and vulgarisms. Colloquial lexemes, together with idioms and vulgarisms, constitute more than half of the considered linguistic means. They make the text more vivid and natural, thus bringing it closer to the target audience. Professional terminology accounts for more than a quarter of the sample units and enables the author to provide more detailed descriptions of professional situations. The extensive use of proper names adds precision.

Consequently, we can conclude that Bri Lee's idiosyle is multifaceted and recognizable. Therefore, her works, in particular the studied memoir *Eggshell Skull*, have significant potential

for further research. We see prospects for future studies in outlining the distinctive features of Bri Lee's idiosyncrasy based on her entire body of work.

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