
Creativity and recontextualization: Lexical substitution in English verbal idioms

Jelena Parizoska
University of Zagreb
jelena.parizoska@ufzg.hr

Modifications of idioms, i.e. creative changes of their conventionalized forms and meaning, are widespread across different types of discourse. Furthermore, corpus-based studies have shown that the most common type of modification is lexical substitution. Here are two examples from the enTenTen13 corpus:

- (1) Her company has *skyrocketed through the ranks* of other marketing businesses. (rise through the ranks)
- (2) As a loyal consumer of Wikipedia, I will *defend it to great lengths*. (go to great lengths)

One of the key issues in the research of idiomatic creativity is the extent to which lexical components can be changed, and recognizability has been established as one of the most general constraints. It is also argued that an idiom's base form serves as the organizing frame into which salient elements of new domains of knowledge are projected (Omazić & Čačija 2020). This can be tied in with the notion of recontextualization in discourse studies of metaphor (Semino et al. 2013). For instance, the substituting verb may be similar in meaning (example 1) or the entire expression may be recontextualized in a different domain (example 2). This raises the question of which idiomatic components ensure recognizability.

The aim of this study is to show that recognizability is dependent on whether the substituting verb belongs to the same or different domain as the idiomatic component. We will also show that the creation of novel expressions is constrained by the figurative meanings of lexical patterns within a given idiom. We conducted a study of 100 verbal idioms in the enTenTen13 corpus. Two groups of results were obtained. Firstly, when the substituting verb belongs to the same source domain, the idiom is recognizable based on nominal components or prepositional phrases which denote spatial relations (e.g. *skyrocket through the ranks*). Secondly, when an idiom is recontextualized, the components which serve as the organizing frame specify the setting of a situation, most commonly manner (e.g. *defend something to great lengths*). Overall, this study shows that the prerequisite for creative use are the figurative meanings of lexical patterns within individual expressions. This means that idiomatic creativity, even lexical substitution, is not boundless.

References: • Semino, E. et al. (2013). Metaphor, genre, and recontextualization. *Metaphor and Symbol* 28(1), 41–59. • Omazić, M. & R. Čačija (2020). Dynamic model of PU modification. In M. Omazić & J. Parizoska (eds.), *Reproducibility and Variation of Figurative Expressions: Theoretical Aspects and Applications*. Białystok: University of Białystok Publishing House, 51–67.