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Editorial: Psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and phraseology

Whatever phraseological units currently exist, they must exist in the brains of living speakers. If they exist in a speech community, that is only because they exist in the brains of members of that community. Hunting for them directly in live brains is, however, difficult. That leaves neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic experimentation. Over the last few decades, experimental approaches to phraseology have expanded and there are now well-tested experimental techniques for investigating what form phraseological units may take in the human brain. Most of these techniques have focussed on idioms, non-compositional multiword units. This is for the good reason that native speakers know that the great majority of idioms have two different semantic readings, a literal and a figurative reading. In both speech production and speech perception it may be supposed that the idiomatic reading is the meaning of a phraseological unit, but the literal reading is, in most cases, not the result of a lexical unit existing. So we can presume that the idiom is listed as a single item in the mental lexicon.

The situation with restricted collocations may be more difficult. Canonical examples like *red wine* and *white wine* are idiomatic in that one word does not have quite its dictionary meaning while the other does. But what of *put out (the cat)* and *put out (the fire)*? In the case of the cat it may involve just opening the door to allow the cat to put itself out. In the case of the fire perhaps the *put* is figurative but then it so often is. What of *set fire to* something? This can be regarded as completely compositional. Yet native speakers know that what one does when one sets fire to something cannot be done to everything that is flammable. Although it is compositional it has small idiosyncrasies. One does not, for example, set fire to a cigarette. One lights a cigarette. How big does something flammable have to be for it to be able to set fire to? Are such selectional properties absolute or probabilistic? Are they idiolectally idiosyncratic?

Such questions lead to the desirability for a serious psycholinguistic study of storage and retrieval of phraseological units in the minds of speakers. It may be that different kinds of units are stored in different ways. For example, restricted collocations may be stored as likelihoods that the use of one word will be followed by another even though the meaning of the collocation is compositional and that there are other choices available. Do such probabilities differ from speaker to speaker?

As is so often the case, it is for the linguists to provide hypotheses for psycholinguists and neurolinguists to investigate. This requires a cooperative cross-disciplinary approach. However difficult this often is, building bridges is one of the desiderata for the study of the data which phraseologists investigate. The *Yearbook of Phraseology* is a place where that can happen.