

Kinegrams as complex predicates between the idiomatic and the literal

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Kinegrams include expressions like "shake one's head", "blush", "prick one's ears". In their literal meaning, they typically describe an activity or physical reaction or state. In their idiomatic meaning, they refer to the social meaning, the purpose or the consequence conventionally associated with their literal meaning. Being idioms, kinegrams have a conventionalized wording and they can be used even if only the idiomatic and not the literal meaning is true.

What makes kinegrams particularly challenging for any theory of idioms is that they are occur in so-called conjunction modification as in "He bit his thirst-swollen tongue" (Ernst 1981). In such data, the idiomatic meaning is communicated ("he stopped himself from saying something") and, at the same time, it is said that "he had a thirst-swollen tongue".

Findlay, Bargmann & Sailer (2018) develop a theory which allows to access the literal and the idiomatic reading of an expression simultaneously. I will show that this theory provides the necessary tools to capture the challenging and seemingly contradictory properties of kinegrams.

The data on conjunction modification show that even non-decomposable idioms have an internal semantic structure as they allow for access to the literal meaning of part of the idiom.