

## Is there a “grammar of idioms”?

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Corpus data refute the view of idioms as lexically and syntactically fixed “long words” that is implied by dictionary entries. Nor are deviations from an idiom’s “canonical” form necessarily tied to semantic transparency or metaphoric status of its constituents. Rich variations, often context-specific, include grammatical operations like passivization, relativization and topicalization. My talk will focus on lexical variations in VP idioms, such as substitution of semantically and/or phonologically related words, both intra- and crosslingually, in spoken and sign language. The data suggest that production and reception of idioms require access to all levels of grammar.

I propose constraints on the lexical variability of idioms that are consistent with models of the mental lexicon as well as with psycholinguistic theories of idiom processing and that can account for the fact that speakers recover the meaning of idioms even when they deviate from the “canonical” form.