

Explaining metaphorical motivation of idioms in French learners' dictionaries

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ABSTRACT

Idioms are challenging for non-natives because what is said differs from what is communicated. It has been demonstrated that the inner form is an important part of idiom semantics and, consequently, “any attempt to analyse figurative language by itself, without the inclusion of extralinguistic knowledge, is doomed to failure” (Dobrovolskij and Piirainen 2022). The explanation of the image component should therefore receive a description in learners' dictionaries. However, French dictionaries poorly represent the inner form in their semantic definition. This paper addresses the following question: How can the explanation of metaphorical motivation in learners' dictionaries be improved? Three possibilities to explain the image component in dictionaries are discussed: a semantic explanation, etymological notes and pictures.

Keywords: etymological notes; image component; inner form; pictures; semantic definition

1. Introduction¹

For a native speaker, the meaning of idioms is inferred rather than explicitly stated, and its acquiring is a passive – in other words, “subconscious” – process (Telija *et al.* in Cowie 1998, 56). However, learners of a new language need to understand the connotations behind the image components. How to describe the metaphorical motivation in learners' dictionaries? In order to answer this question, I will start by explaining the importance of understanding the inner form in Section 2 *On the importance of understanding the inner form*. Section 3 *Motivation* is devoted to connotations, which are considered as a “semantic bridge” (Iordanskaja and Mel'čuk 1980, 191-210) between the phraseological meaning and the inner form. Section 4 *Conventional Figurative Language Theory* presents the model developed within the *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*

¹ I am grateful to Pascale Chamerois and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

(Dobrovolskij and Piirainen 2005), whose main idea is that the inner form is an important part of idiom semantics. The analysis of the examples cited in Section 5 *Case study* proves that idioms' inner form is poorly described in French dictionaries. Finally, Section 6 *Alternatives for explaining the inner form* considers three possibilities to explain the image component in dictionaries: a semantic explanation, etymological notes and pictures. The point is illustrated by French idioms written in *italics* and followed by an English translation and a definition, e.g. *être copains comme cochons*, lit. 'to be buddies like pigs', meaning 'to be good friends'.

2. On the importance of understanding the inner form

Before we discuss what is the *inner form* of an idiom, and how it is presented in dictionaries, we need to take a brief look at three reasons why understanding the image components is essential for the learner: first, to avoid misunderstandings; secondly, to develop intercultural competence, and thirdly, to better memorise idioms.

If learners do not understand the imagery, what strategies can they employ to infer the meaning? First, they can draw on the context to understand what is said; nevertheless, the context is not always enlightening. Secondly, they can transfer the knowledge of the languages they already know to the new language, but this may lead them to attributing an inappropriate meaning to an idiom in L2, based on wrong *connotations*. For example, *être copains comme cochons*, lit. 'to be buddies like pigs', which means 'to be good friends' may be wrongly interpreted as 'to be bad friends' because in European culture pigs have negative connotations. Another problem is the risk of understanding idioms literally. Thus, the French idiom *faire un malheur*, lit. 'to cause misfortune', meaning 'to have a great success', actually means the opposite of its literal meaning.

The image components can be viewed both as products and as measures of values, social norms and conventions, stereotypes, emotions and feelings. They are a component of cultural identity, a "kind of collective philosophy which becomes obligatory for all speakers of that language" (Apresjan 2000, 103). A conscious reflection on motivation gives us a different perspective on our own culture, because "the strange [becomes] familiar and the familiar strange" (Byram *et al.* cited in Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, 58). Thus, idioms help us overcome "cross-cultural deafness" (Telija *et al.* in Cowie 1998, 75) and achieve "human intersubjective understanding" (Morin 2000, 114).

Finally, idioms are motivated lexical units. Cognitive semantics holds that "it is (...) easier to remember and use motivated knowledge than arbitrary knowledge" (Lakoff cited in Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, 326). Therefore, idioms should best be learned through the explanation of their *inner form*, a concept which will be thoroughly developed in the next section.

3. Metaphorical motivation of the inner form

The term *inner form* may refer to different phenomena². In this work, it will be used to refer both to *the image component* and its *motivation*³. The *inner form* is an important part of idiom semantics (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2014, 2009; Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005; Telija 1998). According to Apresjan, the main feature of idiomatics as a specific area of the lexical system is that the semantics of idioms is usually based on conventional metaphors⁴ (Apresjan 2004, 80). Leaving out high level conceptual metaphors, this paper concentrates on “the basic level of rich mental images” (Piirainen 2007, 536).

It is acknowledged that metaphorical motivation is analogical in nature. According to Apresjan, a word with *connotations* has the potential to be metaphorized. Thus, “an insignificant and pragmatic feature of the original meaning of the word becomes significant and semantic, [making connotations] one of potential sources of semantic and lexical renewal”⁵ (Apresjan 1995, 169, see similar ideas in Gak 2006, 98). *Connotations* function like a “semantic bridge” (term borrowed from Iordanskaja and Mel'čuk 1980, 191-210) or “semantic associations” (Krongauz 2005, 151) between the image component and the phraseological meaning. *Connotations* should receive a consistent description in a dictionary because they: (1) are an element of lexical and phraseological meaning, (2) function within a specific linguo-culture, and (3) have cultural value.

From a synchronic perspective, I distinguish three types of idioms⁶:

1. *motivated* idioms with a “living”, clearly perceived, inner form, e.g. *être comme chien et chat*, lit. ‘to be like cat and dog’, meaning ‘to fight all the time’;
2. *partially motivated* idioms containing words that do not exist in modern French (Gak, 2006, 20), e.g. *à la queue leu leu*, lit. ‘in a *tail/*queue’⁷, meaning ‘in a line’;

2 In (Zaliznjak 2006, 48), for example, *inner form* is the “trace” of the process by which the language created the word. For the detailed distinction between *image component*, *inner form*, and similar concepts such as *etymological memory*, and *literal reading*, see (Dobrovol'skij 2016).

3 “The inner form of a lexical item is the image fixed in its content plane as well as the motivation of its lexicalized meaning, which the speakers derive from the meaning of its constituents” (Dobrovol'skij 2016, 23).

4 «Главная особенность идиоматики как специфической области лексической системы состоит в том, что в основе семантики идиом, как правило, лежит конвенциональная метафора и лишь в редких случаях метонимия» (Apresjan 2004, 80).

5 «Несущественный и прагматический признак исходного значения слова становится существенным и семантическим ... [Коннотации] являются одним из потенциальных источников семантического и лексического обновления [языка]» (Apresjan 1995, 169).

6 Roughly, *motivated* and *partially motivated idioms* correspond to Vinogradov's *frazéologičeskie edinstva*, lit. ‘phraseological unities’, whereas *unmotivated idioms* to *frazéologičeskie srašenija*, lit. ‘phraseological fusions’.

7 Since the imagery is hardly perceptible from a synchronic perspective, it is unfortunately not easy to provide a literal translation of this type of idioms.

3. *unmotivated* idioms are deprived of their inner form, i.e. their imagery is not perceptible, e.g. *il y a belle lurette*, lit. ‘there is a good *hour’⁸, meaning ‘a long time ago’.

From a diachronic perspective, while all of these types were motivated when they were created, their inner form has become dimmed, sometimes even to the point of being completely lost, as in the second and third types⁹. In fact, idioms, like other language units, tend to lose motivation. Thus, most neologisms, while they were initially motivated, become unmotivated over time (Saussure cited in Gak 2006, 20).

Usually, native speakers only have a synchronic view of motivation. Their role in the explanation of the living *inner form* turns out to be decisive: it is what distinguishes *inner form* from *etymology* (Baranov and Dobrovol’skij 2014, 130)¹⁰. Those naïve explanations are also called *folk etymology* or “semantic etymology” (Iordanskaja and Mel’čuk 1980, cited in Apresjan 1995, 169), and result from “quiproquos, meta-analysis or re-analysis” (Béguelin 2016, 18). For Saussure, it takes precedence over scientific etymology, because it provides access to the speaker’s linguistic representations, and to their epilinguistic knowledge¹¹ (Béguelin 2016, 20). And even if this pseudo-etymology has some disadvantages such as subjectivity¹² and non-predictability¹³, it has to be explained to students.

Before exploring how *inner form* is explained in French dictionaries, I will outline some relevant aspects of *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*.

4. Conventional Figurative Language Theory

Conventional Figurative Language Theory studies single-word and multi-word units based on indirect nomination that are part of the language system, are highly conventional, and are recognized by users of a given linguo-culture (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 2005, 2022). Its main idea is that the image component functions as a semantic bridge between what is said and what is meant.

8 As in the previous example, the imagery is not perceptible at all from a synchronic perspective, therefore, it is not easy to provide its literal translation. According to TLFi, *lurette* vient du mot *heure*, *heurette* (time, hour).

9 «со временем внутренняя форма может затемняться и даже полностью утрачиваться» (Apresjan 2003, XXV).

10 «Роль носителя языка [...] оказывается решающей: именно этим внутренняя форма отличается от этимологии» (Baranov and Dobrovol’skij 2014, 130).

11 «Saussure disqualifie [...] l’étymologie savante ; en contrepartie, il réhabilite l’étymologie populaire qui [...] donne accès aux représentations linguistiques du locuteur, à son savoir épilinguistique» (Béguelin 2016, 20).

12 For the subjectivity, see, for example, (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 2022; Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, 325).

13 In fact, “semantic motivation of idioms [...] can only be established a posteriori” (Weinreich 1969 cited in Kuiper 2007, 55).

The authors distinguish four types of motivation: semantic, syntactic, intertextual, and index-based¹⁴. Here, only *semantic metaphorical motivation* will be discussed.

The problem is that “usually, in phraseological dictionaries the image-metaphor is not included in the explanation”¹⁵ (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2009, 8). To solve this problem, Dobrovol'skij (2007, 798) introduced the image component into lexical definitions by “operators such as ‘like X’, ‘is perceived as X’, ‘is associated with X’, ‘is analogous to X’, ‘is described as X’, etc.”. Thus, the explanation of the Russian idiom *vodit' za nos*, lit. ‘to lead by the nose’ in Table 1 (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2009, 352) comprises two parts:

Table 1: *Водить за нос* (to lead by the nose)

ВОДИТЬ ЗА НОС (кого-л.) [-з'ангъс]. Говорить что-л. кому-л., скрывая истинное положение дел, своё истинное мнение или намерение – часто обещать сделать что-л. кому-л. и не выполнять обещанного, что осмысливается как совершение над этим лицом некоторого очевидного действия, которое его унижает и ставит в беспомощное положение и которое, тем не менее, им не замечается.

It begins with a traditional semantic definition: “to tell something to somebody, hiding the real state of affairs, the real opinion or intention, frequently, not to accomplish the promised thing”. The second part is devoted to the image component and is introduced by the operator ‘what is perceived’: “what is perceived as an action humiliating the person and putting him/her in dependent position, but the person does not notice it”.

5. Case study

How is the image component described in French dictionaries¹⁶? I started by selecting four idioms from the list of idioms which were not understood by my international European and Asian students, but which I expected to find in printed dictionaries (Gaston 2009, DesRuisseaux 2009, Rey and Chantreau 1993, Vigerie 1992 and Galisson 1984):

1. *vache à lait*, lit ‘milk cow’, meaning ‘someone or something being exploited’;
2. *avoir d'autres chats à fouetter*, lit. ‘to have other cats to whip’, meaning ‘to have other things to do’;
3. *mener en bateau*, lit. ‘to lead on a boat’, meaning ‘mislead, trick someone’;
4. *mouton noir*, lit. ‘black sheep’, meaning ‘a person rejected by others’.

14 More about types of motivation in (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2022, sect. 4.4).

15 «Обычно во фразеологических словарях образ-метафора не включается в толкование» (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2009, 8).

16 Our aim is not to undermine the value of dictionaries, but rather to address and improve their weaknesses.

I looked up the four idioms in the five above-mentioned dictionaries, and it turned out that while each idiom was included in at least one of the dictionaries, none of the four idioms was included in all of the five dictionaries (see Table 2):

Table 2: Idiom representation in dictionaries

Dictionary	<i>vache à lait</i> , lit. 'milk cow'	<i>avoir d'autres chats à fouetter</i> , lit. 'to have other cats to whip'	<i>mener en bateau</i> , lit. 'to lead on a boat'	<i>mouton noir</i> , lit. black sheep
Rey 1993	+	+	+	-
Gaston 2009	+	+	-	+
Galisson 1984	-	+	+	-
Vigerie 1992	+	-	-	-
DesRuisseaux 2009	+	-	-	-

The first one, *vache à lait*, is included in four out of five, whereas the last one, *mouton noir*, is described only in one dictionary. I have therefore limited my choice to the idiom that is best represented, the first one. Let us consider how it is defined in four dictionaries (Table 3):

Table 3: Definitions of *vache à lait*, lit. 'milk cow' in paper dictionaries

Dictionary	Definition
DesRuisseaux, 2009, 471	VACHE À LAIT. <i>Être une vache à lait.</i> Se faire exploiter.
Gaston, 2009, 221	<i>Une vache à lait</i> : personne exploitée ; aussi activité lucrative.
Rey, Chantreau, 1993, 777	Fam. Vache à lait "personne qu'on exploite, qui est une source de profit pour d'autres". Se dit aussi des choses, des entités.
Vigerie, 1992, 170	Vache à lait. Personne ou chose qu'on exploite, dont on tire profit continu; allusion à la vache laitière.

What the analysis of those definitions indicates is that the above-mentioned dictionaries provide learners only with the traditional semantic explanation, which is 'someone or something being exploited'. It should be pointed out that the last one explains the metaphor: 'allusion to the milk cow' (bottom line). However, this explanation is circular because the explained word *à lait*, lit. 'milk' is defined through the same word *laitière*, lit. 'milk cow'. It follows that none of the four explanations helps learners to understand the image component.

This raises the following question: how could metaphorical motivation be presented in learner's dictionaries?

6. Alternatives for explaining the inner form

In my opinion, the best way to explain the metaphorical motivation is through semantic explanation (cf. Sect. 4. *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*). Let us compare this approach with etymological notes and illustrations.

6.1 Semantic explanation

Following the principles of *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*, a metaphor could be included in a definition and receive the following explanation:

Table 4: Image component in semantic definition

(être une) *vache à lait* – une personne ou une chose dont on tire régulièrement profit, comme d'une bonne vache placide donnant beaucoup de lait sans contrepartie.

The proposed definition contains both the traditional explanation in the first part: 'someone or something regularly used to another's advantage', and the explanation of the inner form in the second part: 'like a good placid cow that gives a lot of milk without receiving anything in return'.

6.2 Etymological notes

The second alternative concerns etymology. Some studies show that etymological notes do not have a positive effect on idioms retention (Szczepaniak and Lew 2011). In fact, they can pose different problems for learners. Let us consider the idiom *mener quelqu'un en bateau*, lit. 'to lead someone on a boat' meaning 'mislead, trick':

Table 5: *Mener quelqu'un en bateau*, lit. 'to lead someone on a boat' meaning 'mislead, trick' (Rey and Chantreau 1993, 59-60)

Mener (emmener) qqn en bateau "tromper, duper". [...] La forme *bateau*, dans ce contexte, s'explique par la confusion initiale avec les mots de la famille de *bateleur* [...] [C]omme le fait remarquer Wartburg, l'expression (attestée en 1867) continue d'anciennes locutions comme **estre estonné du bateau, être étourdi du bateau** (du XVI^e au XIX^e s.), où *bateau* est en réalité l'ancien mot *baastel* "instrument de l'escamoteur" (qui a donné *baasteler, baasteleur. bateleur*).

The definition consists of two parts: first, the semantic explanation – 'mislead, cheat' – and then the etymology – "The form *bateau*, in this context, can be explained by the initial confusion with words in the *bateleur* (swindler) family [...] [A]s Wartburg points out, the expression (attested in 1867) is a continuation of the old expressions such as *estre estonné du bateau, être étourdi du bateau* (from the 16th to the 19th centuries), where *bateau* is actually the old word

baastel “instrument of the swindler” (which gave rise to *baasteler*, *baasteleur*: *bâteleur*)” (my translation). I must point out that the metalanguage used in this example may prove confusing not only for beginning learners, who have a limited vocabulary, but also for native speakers.

The second problem with etymology is that it is not systematically indicated in all dictionaries and may also differ from one dictionary to another. Thus, for *vider son sac*, lit. ‘to empty one’s bag’ ‘to say all the reproaches accumulated for a long time’ dictionaries offer two etymologies: (1) ‘the bag where in the old days, all the exhibits for a trial were piled up’¹⁷; and (2) ‘in classical times, the phrase had a precise physiological meaning: ‘to defecate or purge’ (*bag* = ‘belly, stomach’)¹⁸. Which one is the authentic etymology? Which one will facilitate the memorization of the image component: the literal meaning of *sac*, lit. ‘bag’ (which refers to the object), or its metaphoric *sac*, lit. ‘stomach’ use?

The metalanguage used, as well as the difficulty to ascertain the authenticity of the etymology, may disorient students. However, can we conclude that the etymology is of very little help for international learners? I do think that, on the contrary, it can be useful in some cases, especially for idioms with illogical inner forms like (1) *faire un malheur*, lit. ‘to cause misfortune’ ‘to have a great success’ and (2) *être copains comme cochons*, lit. ‘to be buddies like pigs’ ‘to be good friends’, where the imagery and the meaning are contradictory. Thus, Rey and Chantreau (1993) point to an antiphrase for the first and to a misunderstanding for the second example (i.e. *cochon*, lit. ‘pig’ is not an animal, but (latin) *socius* ‘comrade, associated’). This kind of etymological notes could help learners understand and memorise idioms.

6.3 Pictures

My last point concerns pictures¹⁹. The French multiword unit *faire un dessin*, lit ‘to draw a picture’ has two meanings: a literal one, ‘to draw a picture’, and a figurative one, ‘to explain clearly, comprehensibly and unequivocally’. Thus, when the hearer does not understand what the speaker is saying, the latter may say *Tu veux que je te fasse un dessin?*, lit. ‘Do you want me to draw you a picture?’, implying that pictures are more explicit than words. To what extent can pictures be useful for students? Some studies “point to a facilitative role of pictorial illustrations on short- and long-term retention of both form and meaning of idioms” (Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, 323, 330). Let us consider how nouns and verbs can be drawn.



17 « Le sac, c’est celui dans lequel, autrefois, on entassait toutes les pièces d’un procès » (Cellard 1986, 34).

18 « La loc. a eu à l’époque classique un sens physiologique précis : « déféquer ou se purger » (*sac* = « ventre, estomac ») » (Rey, and Chantreau 1993, 710).

19 Studies on the role of images in understanding and learning idioms are extensive, see among others (Dobrovolskij and Piirainen 2022, Szczepaniak and Lew 2011, Boers and Lindstromberg 2008, Caillies and Butcher 2007, Littlemore and Low 2006, Glucksberg 2001 and Gibbs and O’Brien 1990, 1993).


It is relatively easy to draw and to recognise concrete animate and inanimate objects existing in real or fictional worlds. Verbs can have one (e.g. *casser sa pipe*, lit. 'to break his pipe' 'to die') or several actants²⁰ (e.g. *donner sa langue au chat*, lit. 'to give his/her tongue to the cat' 'not know the answer to a question, to a riddle, and to ask the person who knows the solution' (Table 6):

Table 6: Examples of illustrations of one- and bi-actant idioms

Picture	Idiom
	<i>Casser sa pipe</i> 'mourir'
	<i>Donner sa langue au chat</i> 'ne pas savoir la réponse à une question, une devinette et demander la solution à la personne qui le sait'

However, some nouns, such as collective nouns, are difficult to represent and/or to identify on drawings because of their visual characteristics. Let us consider the picture for *chercher la petite bête*, lit. look for a small beast', 'to be too fussy, too meticulous' (Table 7):

Table 7: Example of wrong interpretation of pictures



Picture	Idiom
	<i>Chercher la petite bête</i> 'être trop pointilleux, trop méticuleux'

The bug on the picture could be interpreted as a louse and also correspond to the idiom *chercher des poux*, lit 'look for lice' meaning 'seek to provoke conflict', and it could therefore be a misleading picture.

²⁰ I think that idioms that have two or more illustrated actants increase chances to be recognised by natives.

Another problem arises when the referent is used in an unusual lexical or syntactic environment. Thus, a soup cannot be made from a grimace, as in the idiom *soupe à la grimace*, lit. ‘grimace soup’, referring to someone who ‘expresses dissatisfaction by behaving in an unpleasant manner’ (Table 8). Similarly, it is difficult to convey in a drawing the presence of the definite article in *porter LA culotte*, lit. ‘wear THE pants’, ‘the person, usually the woman, who is in charge within the couple’, and how it affects the meaning of the noun *culotte*, lit ‘the pants’ (Table 8). Today, in French, *une culotte*, lit. ‘the pants’ most often means ‘an undergarment’: women and men wear panties under their clothes. Only rarely now is *une culotte*, lit. ‘pants’ used meaning ‘an outer garment, generally worn by men’ (TLFi). In the phrase *porter LA culotte*, lit. ‘wear THE pants’, the presence of the definite article *LA*, lit. ‘THE’ implies that only the head of the family wears *LA culotte*, lit. ‘THE pants’, and that the woman who wears it therefore takes on the “male role”. Thus, the meaning changes according to the use of the definite article.

Table 8: Example of unusual lexical and syntactic environment

Picture	Idiom
	<i>Soupe à la grimace</i> ‘manifester son mécontentement en se comportant de manière désagréable’
	<i>Porter la culotte</i> ‘la personne, généralement la femme, qui commande au sein du couple’

A number of challenges arise when it comes to representing idioms graphically: How is it possible to incorporate a grimace in a soup? How is it possible to convey the presence of definite article *LA culotte*, lit. ‘THE pants’, which is an essential element in the phraseological meaning? How can we draw the reader’s attention to the objects that need to be interpreted rather than on objects that are not significant? How can we draw image components that are not clearly perceptible, such as obsolete words (e.g. *à la queue leu leu*, lit. ‘in a *tail/*queue’²¹,

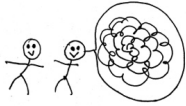
21 Since the imagery is hardly perceptible from a synchronic perspective, it is unfortunately not easy to provide a literal translation of this type of idioms.

'in a line')? In constructions consisting of *adjective* (tertium comparationis) + *comme*, lit. 'like' + *noun* (comparatum) how can we draw comparisons (tertium comparationis)? For example, how can we draw and recognise the sweetness of a lamb in *doux comme un agneau*, lit. 'sweet as a lamb', meaning 'extremely kind'?

Moreover, a number of idioms rely on verbs for the construction of meaning. I believe that the grammatical information is important not only to understand the meaning, but also to use idioms, and that therefore, both nouns and verbs must be graphically represented. Let us consider some examples.

Verbs are often more difficult to represent than nouns. The first difficulty can be illustrated by the verb *raconter*, lit. 'to tell' in *raconter des salades*, lit. 'to tell salads', 'to tell well-argued lies to convince the other person' (Table 9):

Table 9: Drawing verbs

Picture	Idiom
	<p><i>Raconter des salades</i> 'dire des mensonges argumentés afin de convaincre l'interlocuteur'</p>

In fact, it is difficult to graphically represent the verb *raconter*, lit. 'to tell' in a clear way. The problem is that pictures are rarely suitable for illustrating certain verbs, such as verbs of perception (e.g. *n'y voir que du feu*, lit. 'to see only fire', 'believe everything is said') and verbs denoting repetitions (e.g. *reprendre du poil de la bête*, lit. 'to take again the hair of the beast' 'to regain strength and courage').

Another problem that raises a number of challenges is how to draw verbs like *avoir*, lit. 'to have' and *être*, lit. 'to be'. Let's take two examples: *avoir un coup de foudre*, lit. 'to have a thunderbolt', 'to fall in love at first sight', and *être fleur bleue*, lit. 'to be a blue flower', 'to be an overly sensitive person'. We could draw only objects, i.e. *un coup de foudre*, lit. 'a thunderbolt', and *fleur bleue*, lit. 'a blue flower'. However, pictures of a thunderbolt and a blue flower without verbs may not be sufficient to interpret them as an idiom. Learners need to know that these nouns acquire phraseological meaning only in presence of the verbs *avoir*, lit. 'to have' and *être*, lit. 'to be'. They also need to know that these verbs cannot be substituted by another verb.

Illustrating becomes even more complicated for the following verbal forms:

- negative: *ne pas avoir les yeux en face des trous*, lit. 'not to have one's eyes in front of one's eyeholes', 'not being wide awake': if we draw the eyes next to the eyeholes, there is a good chance that the reader will fail to identify the eyesockets; moreover, as explained earlier, only the verb *avoir*, lit. 'to

- have' – not another verb – can be used in this idiom, and it is difficult to represent graphically;
- passive: *se faire rouler dans la farine*, lit. 'to be rolled in the flour', 'be manipulated': if we draw a person who is rolling in flour, it won't be enough, because s/he is not involved in the action, but s/he is subjected to it. In fact, it seems difficult to represent an action which the subject receives rather than performs;
 - past: *poser un lapin*, lit. 'to put a rabbit', 'not to come to an appointment', usually used in past: it is not enough to draw a rabbit, because we would have to represent the rabbit being put there by someone who is no longer there.

Idioms are difficult to recognise and to interpret through pictures. Pictures can hardly be used to make the meaning of idioms clear and explicit. One of the reasons for that probably lies in the discrepancy between the complexity of idiom semantics on the one hand and the simplicity and the staticity of pictures on the other hand. Moreover, idioms are non-compositional, while pictures are compositional. This means that pictures allow at best to illustrate all of the lexical components of the idiom separately. Finally, they are not predictable: limited to retrospective use, they do not guarantee access to the idiom. Therefore, pictures cannot be considered as a key component in explaining the imagery but can merely complement the semantic definition and be useful as a mnemonic technique.

7. Conclusion

What can be concluded from this study? Idioms are semantically complex and cannot, therefore, be fully described in purely semantic terms without taking into account their inner form. It is important for learners to understand the motivation of idioms to develop intercultural competence, to avoid misunderstandings, and to better memorise idioms. Therefore, the inner form should receive a rigorous and systematic description in dictionaries.

Three strategies to explain the *image* component in dictionaries have been explored: a semantic explanation, etymological notes and pictures. It seems that each of them provides an additional channel for memorising the inner form and can help learners understand and remember metaphorically motivated idioms. However, this analysis indicates that explicit techniques of the *Conventional Figurative Language Theory*, which consist in explaining the metaphorical motivation in the semantic explanation, are the best means to convey the inner form of idioms.

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