

# The Didactics of French Polylexical Sequences in the Light of “Imageability”

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the importance of imageability in French phraseodidactics is highlighted. The paper presents the results of a study conducted in French as a Foreign Language classes (CEFR level B2.2) at the University of Cagliari. Drawing on research in cognitive semantics and phraseology, the methodologies adopted are examined, together with the types of tests administered, the skills targeted, the learner profile addressed, and the learners' language proficiency level. The study aims to contribute not only to the teaching of polylexical sequences but also to the development of memorization strategies in French as a foreign language instruction.

**Keywords:** didactics; imageability; French as a Foreign Language; phraseology; categorization.

## **1. Introduction**

Studies on access to polylexical sequences have shown that an in-depth study of categorization and, consequently, of the ability to memorize could be fundamental to improve learning and teaching strategies.

On the one hand, there is a significant relationship between polylexical expressions and memory. Bybee and Hopper (2001), for example, suggest that those sequences which appear very frequently in common language are likely to be better remembered (Bybee and Hopper 2001, 17).

Barlow and Kemmer (2000), Townsend and Bever (2001) and Wray (2002) emphasize the importance of use and repetition to memorize these sequences.

The discovery of the cognitive strategies involved in the processing phase of a polylexical expression such as, for example, naming of an object (Bonin *et al.* 2002), lexical decision (Cacciari and Tabossi 1988; Keuleers *et al.* 2012), word reading (Ferrand *et al.* 2011) or idiom comprehension time (Bonin *et al.* 2013), could help teachers create didactic sequences more suited to learners.

In our opinion, alongside all this research, we should also emphasize the importance of another process which has never received particular attention

from phraseology theorists. This is “imageability”, the fact that certain “words elicit a sensory experience” (Paivio *et al.* 1968, 4) and, being “more concrete”, imply in the speaker a greater capacity to imagine the referent. In this article, we formulated and tested our hypothesis based on observations carried out in third and fourth year French as a Foreign Language classes at the University of Cagliari. Our article presents two parts: the first introduces the concept of “imageability” by relating it to the learning of polylexical expressions and the second part describes the tests proposed in French language classes and the results of our research.

## 2. Learning polylexical expressions and imageability

Imageability, as highlighted before, is a psycholinguistic variable that indicates the extent to which a word gives rise to a mental image or sensory experience. This term, first used by Paivio *et al.* (1968) and, subsequently, by several theorists (Paivio 1986; Tyler and Moss 1997; Paivio 2007; McDonough *et al.* 2011; Lind *et al.* 2012), shows “the degree of ease or difficulty in imagining an object starting from a word” (Aliffi and Albano 2023, 196). In hindsight, “table is a highly imaginative word in that its meaning is associated with many sensory properties (size, shape, etc.) while hope is low in imageability” (Tyler *et al.* 2002, 476).

Paivio (1968, 1979 [1971], 2007; Paivio *et al.* 1988) confirms that sometimes even certain abstract words can have a high degree of imageability, being able to evoke concreteness, and this depends on the fact that speakers give an emotional and affective connotation (Paivio *et al.* 1968, 7).

In this regard, Paivio argues that the difference between concrete and abstract words depends on dual coding (1979 [1971]), 1986), which represents the way of storing words in memory: concrete words present a verbal representation and a picture; differently, abstract words only show a verbal representation. So, “concrete words are processed faster because they have a high number of semantic properties” (Aliffi and Albano 2023, 196). This hypothesis was highlighted by Jones (1985) and de Groot (1989), who showed that the use of concrete words gives rise to a greater number of sentences and mental associations.

In this regard, Lind *et al.* (2012, 1) argue that imageability “can influence the storage and processing of words in the mental lexicon, as well as other factors such as age of acquisition, frequency, word length and phonological properties”.

Several studies have shown that the imageability factor can influence and facilitate lexical decision tasks (Bleasdale 1987; de Groot 1989), sentence comprehension (Haberlandt and Graesser 1985), memorizing names (Lind *et al.* 2012) or recognizing sentences (Holmes and Langford 1976; Jorgensen and Kintsch 1973).

In our opinion, imageability can also represent an innovative factor for the access, processing and memorization of polylexical sequences. In fact, our hypotheses are: 1) The majority of figurative polylexical expressions show a more

evident imageability factor than non-figurative expressions; 2) While imageability may facilitate semantic activation in free expressions as well, it plays a crucial role in polylexical expressions, where at least one concrete constituent can serve as a cognitive anchor for accessing the global meaning of the unit; 3) A more concrete word could represent an aid in recognizing the idiomatic key of a sequence; 4) Improved memorization of phraseology could take into account the imageability factor.

First, we observed that a good part of polylexical expressions not only show a major agency compared to non-compositional expressions (Albano in press), but they also reveal concreteness. Let us imagine, for example, the French expression *interrompre une relation*, literally translated into English as ‘to interrupt a relationship’ (TLFi 2025). The situation is encoded by means of an abstract noun and a terminative verb which, despite its actional semantics, does not evoke a concrete, imageable referent.

On the other hand, let us think of the idiomatic expression *couper les ponts*, lit. ‘to cut bridges’, meaning ‘cutting ties, to burn one’s bridge’ (TLFi 2025), where we can already observe a more agentive verb, a more concrete noun and, consequently, a greater virtual presence of referents.

Although both verbs are telic, the fixed expression appears to elicit a more vivid sensory mental image than the non-fixed one, as its phraseological fixation promotes a more immediate and holistic conceptualization of the event.

Secondly, we suggest the hypothesis that a fixed expression makes it possible to quickly activate the semantic information of real referents compared to a non-fixed expression. In fact, the scenarios evoked by the fixed expressions establish a conceptual framework in which the dynamics between body, action, space and otherness act.

Moreover, a more concrete word may facilitate the recognition of the idiomatic key of a sequence. As pointed out by Cacciari (1989), the idiomatic signified requires longer processing time in memory, and the identification of an idiomatic key plays a crucial role in idiom comprehension.

Based on studies conducted with Italian-, Spanish-, German- and Turkish-speaking learners (Albano 2016, 2020), we advance the hypothesis that the imageability of a concrete word can support the recognition of this key by activating a broad network of mental associations and visual analogies. While such processes are not specific to fixed expressions, in phraseologisms they acquire a particular relevance, as the activation of multiple mental scenarios may prompt the speaker to move beyond a purely compositional interpretation and to recognize the lexicalized nature of the expression. In free combinations, these associations contribute to meaning construction, whereas in fixed expressions, they may act as a cue for idiomaticity.

Finally, reflection on the imageability of fixed expressions could lead to an improvement in learning and teaching strategies.

### 3. Test imageability in French as a Foreign Language class

#### 3.1. The sample of learners

Our sample comprises 70 Italian-speaking adult learners who study French within the third year of a degree in *Lingue e Culture per la Mediazione Linguistica* (50 students with a CEFR B2.2- level, as attested by examination results) and the first year of a Master in *Lingue e Letterature Moderne Europee e Americane* and *Traduzione Specialistica dei Testi* at the University of Cagliari (a sample of 20 students whose CEFR B2.2 proficiency level was attested through examinations). These students know and study several languages: Italian as a mother tongue, Sardinian as a mother tongue, English as a foreign language (around 5 years) and French as a foreign language (an average of nine years of study at Master's level and eight and a half years at Bachelor's level). They have also studied linguistics. In addition, the teacher introduced the learners to phraseology and cognitive semantics within the French linguistics curriculum.

#### 3.2. Criteria for sampling expressions

Our study focuses on two phraseological categories: collocations and idiomatic expressions. We selected them based on the following criteria: 1) a high degree of metaphoricity (Gréciano 1982; Gibbs 1994; Moon 1998); 2) the difficulty of translation (Hussei 1990; Danell 1993; Lorentzen 1994; Svensson 2004) and 3) the presence of complex scenarios (Langacker 1987, 141; Langlotz 2006, 117).<sup>1</sup>

As González Rey (2021, 62) states, “metaphor, as a figure of speech, is present in the semantic displacement of the constituents of a phraseological unit as well as in the interpretation of its overall meaning”. Adopting the point of view of Lakoff and Turner (1989, 57), a concept is considered figurative when it is understood and structured through the importation of a conceptual structure from a different conceptual domain.

The translation difficulty concerns the impossibility of translating the entire expression or some of its constituents into a foreign language.

Finally, the presence of complex scenarios concerns the conceptual framework within which the dynamics between body, action and otherness operate and the status of the action depends on the type of negotiation between the body and otherness, the degree of intentionality or agency of the subject (Albano in press).

To construct the tests, we selected 17 idiomatic expressions and 10 collocations in French based on multiple criteria: metaphoricity, translation difficulty,

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1 By *complex scenarios*, we refer to conventionalized conceptual configurations that involve multiple participants, relations, and event phases, and that require the activation of a structured scene rather than a single, isolated image.

and the presence of complex scenarios (see Table 1). These items were confirmed to correspond to CEFR B2/C1 level (González Rey 2007). In addition to dictionaries (Rey and Chantreau 2003 [1989]; TLFi 2025), the selection process involved consulting authentic corpora and French as a Foreign Language teaching materials, ensuring that choices were supported by empirical data rather than intuition alone.

The idiomatic expressions are listed below (see Table 1):

**Table 1:** The idiomatic expressions

No.	French expression	Literal translation	Meaning
1	mettre de l'eau dans son vin	to put water in one's wine	to moderate one's stance
2	parler français comme une vache espagnole	to speak French like a Spanish cow	to speak French very badly
3	filer à l'anglaise	to leave in the English way	to leave discreetly
4	tourner sept fois sa langue dans sa bouche	to turn one's tongue seven times in one's mouth	to think before speaking
5	avoir un bœuf sur la langue	to have an ox on the tongue	to keep a secret
6	rompre le pain avec quelqu'un	to break bread with someone	to end a relationship
7	casser du sucre sur le dos de quelqu'un	to break sugar on someone's back	to criticize someone behind their back
8	fermer son parapluie	to close one's umbrella	to die
9	avoir un haut-le-cœur	to have a high heart	to feel nauseous
10	avalier sa gaffe	to swallow one's blunder	to die
11	plier bagage	to fold luggage	to leave
12	dévisser son billard	to unscrew one's billiard	to die
13	voir trente-six chandelles	to see thirty-six candles	to see stars (after a hit or shock)
14	boire en Suisse	to drink in Switzerland	to drink alone
15	être un rat d'hôtel	to be a hotel rat	to be a hotel thief
16	faire son beurre	to make one's butter	to make a profit
17	faire feu sur quelque chose ou sur quelqu'un	to fire on something or someone	to attack at something or someone

Below are the ten selected collocations and/or terminological collocations relating to different specialized fields (cycling, navigation, economics) (see Table 2):

**Table 2:** The collocations and terminological collocations

No.	French Expression	Literal Translation	Meaning
1	donner un coup de fer	to give a hit of iron	to iron
2	parler chiffons	to speak rags	to talk about clothes
3	chercher querelle	to seek quarrel	to pick a fight
4	couper les ponts	to cut the bridges	to cut ties, to burn one's bridge
5	franchir un obstacle	to cross an obstacle	to overcome an obstacle
6	mordre dans son guidon	to bite into one's handlebar	to pedal hard
7	veiller au grain	to watch over the grain	to be vigilant
8	couper les vivres	to cut the living	to cut financial support
9	ranger le vent	to put away the wind	to adjust to the wind (navigation)
10	empannage chinois	Chinese tacking	to change tack by passing through a tailwind (sailing)

The free and semi-free verbs and expressions, showing the paraphrase of the selected phraseologisms, are:

**Table 3:** The selected free and semi-free verbs and expressions

No.	French Expression	Literal Translation
1	se modérer	to moderate oneself
2	parler très mal le français	to speak French very badly
3	fuir discrètement	to flee discreetly
4	réfléchir avant de s'exprimer	to think before speaking
5	garder fermement un secret	to hold a secret firmly
6	cesser la relation avec quelqu'un	to cease a relationship
7	critiquer une personne absente	to criticize an absent person
8	achever de vivre	to finish living
9	avoir un spasme œsophagien	to have an oesophageal spasm
10	mourir	to die
11	s'en aller	to go away
12	être bouleversé	to be upset
13	voler	to steal
14	mettre à profit	to make (good) use of
15	rechercher la dispute	to seek argument
16	repasser	to iron
17	parler à propos de vêtements	to talk about clothes
18	interrompre une relation	to interrupt a relationship

19	dépasser une difficulté	to overcome difficulty
20	se courber en avant pour un pédalage forcé	to bend forward for forced pedalling
21	changer d’amure en passant par le vent arrière	to change tack by passing tailwind
22	cesser d’alimenter financièrement	to cease financial support
23	se rapprocher de la direction de la brise	to move closer to the wind direction
24	tomber	to fall

We have also added false paraphrases (isolated verbs or verbal expressions) to these examples, which act as distracters:

**Table 4:** The false paraphrases

No.	French Expression	Literal Translation	Meaning
1	avaler un liquide	to swallow a liquid	to swallow a liquid
2	être très vigilant	to be very vigilant	to be very vigilant
3	prêter attention	to lend attention	to pay attention
4	écouter	to listen	to listen
5	déménager	to move house	to move house
6	être prudent	to be careful	to be careful
7	faire une chute	to take a fall	to fall
8	s’en prendre violemment à quelque chose ou quelqu’un	to take yourself violently to something or someone	to attack something or someone violently
9	pédaler sans style	to pedal without style	to pedal without style

### 3.3 The tests

To understand the contribution of imageability on students’ correct responses and the relationship between imageability and lexicalization, we conducted a survey based on three tests, using a psycholinguistic approach (Levorato 1993) and inspired by the test proposed by Albano (2014). The tests include 27 expressions (idiomatic expressions and collocations) (see Table 1).

Test 1 asked students to rate each expression in terms of imageability using a 10-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “low imageability” (i.e., the expression evokes very few or vague mental images) and 10 represented “high imageability” (i.e., the expression evokes vivid and detailed mental images).

Test 2 required students to evaluate the degree of conventionalization (fixedness) of each expression, also on a 10-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to “low fixedness” (i.e., the expression is highly flexible and can be freely modified) and 10 to “high fixedness” (i.e., the expression is highly conventionalized and resistant to modification).

In both tests, participants indicated their judgment by assigning a numerical value from 1 to 10 to each expression, thereby allowing a fine-grained measurement of perceived imageability and fixedness.

Test 3 was divided into two parts. In the first part, students completed a multiple-choice exercise, selecting the most appropriate paraphrase for each item from six options: one correct answer, four distractors, and one open-response option allowing them to propose their own paraphrase. In the second part, students were asked to justify their choice, providing a written explanation of the cognitive reasoning behind their answer (Albano 2020). This design allowed us to assess both the learners' recognition of fixed expressions and their understanding of the underlying conceptual mechanisms.

Test 3 asked students to indicate the meaning of each proposed expression and to justify their choice in Italian or French. The test focused on 15 items, including idiomatic expressions, collocations, and semi-free expressions (e.g., fr. *parler chiffons*, lit. 'to talk rag', meaning 'to talk about clothes'; fr. *dévisser son billard*, lit. 'to unscrew one's billiard table', meaning 'to die'; fr. *mordre dans son guidon*, lit. 'to bite down on one's handlebars', meaning 'to pedal hard'; fr. *tourner sept fois sa langue dans sa bouche*, lit. 'to turn seven times his/her tongue in his/her mouth', meaning 'to think before speaking'; fr. *avalé sa gaffe*, lit. 'to swallow one's blunder', meaning 'to die'; fr. *filer à l'anglaise*, lit. 'to go away in the English style', meaning 'to leave discreetly'; fr. *être un rat d'hôtel*, lit. 'to be a hotel rat', meaning 'to be a hotel thief'; fr. *donner un coup de fer*, lit. 'to give an iron shot', meaning 'to iron'; fr. *boire en Suisse*, lit. 'to drink in Switzerland', meaning 'to drink alone'; fr. *casser du sucre sur le dos de quelqu'un*, lit. 'to break sugar on the back of someone', meaning 'to criticize someone behind their back'; fr. *avoir un haut-le-cœur*, lit. 'to have a high hearth', meaning 'to feel nauseous'; fr. *plier bagage*, lit. 'to bend luggage', meaning 'to leave'; fr. *faire une chute*, lit. 'to do a fall', meaning 'to fall'; fr. *faire feu sur quelque chose ou sur quelqu'un*, lit. 'to shoot someone', meaning 'to attack something or someone violently'; fr. *ranger le vent*, lit. 'to put away the wind', meaning 'to catch the wind').

Idioms, collocations, and semi-free expressions were mixed to evaluate learners' sensitivity to the phenomenon of fixedness, i.e., the degree to which a multiword expression is conventionalized and resistant to modification (González Rey 2021).

Moreover, Test n. 3 arises from an integration of the approaches of Bally (1951 [1909], II, 51), Lüger (1999), Lewis (1993), Ettinger (2001), González Rey (2007) and Cavalla *et al.* (2009). Our test is not intended to represent a didactic sequence but rather addresses the need to understand how to construct a didactic sequence for an adult Italian-speaking audience in a university context.

### 3.4 Results and data analysis

The analysis of the data showed that, in most cases, learners tended to perceive idiomatic expressions, collocations, and terminological collocations as “more visual”. This is illustrated in the graph below, where students’ assessments indicate a high degree of imageability for expressions such as fr. *parler français comme une vache espagnole*, lit. ‘to talk French as a Spanish cow’, meaning ‘to speak French very badly’; fr. *tourner sept fois sa langue dans sa bouche*, lit. ‘to turn seven times his/her tongue in his/her mouth’, meaning ‘to think before speaking’; fr. *avoir un bœuf sur la langue*, lit. ‘to have a beef on the tongue’, meaning ‘to keep a secret’; fr. *rompre le pain avec quelqu’un*, lit. ‘to break the bread with someone’, ‘to end a relationship’; fr. *casser du sucre sur le dos de quelqu’un*, lit. ‘to break sugar on the back of someone’, meaning ‘to criticize someone behind their back’; fr. *voire trente-six chandelles*, lit. ‘to see thirty-six candles’, meaning ‘to be stunned (after a hit)’; fr. *faire son beurre*, lit. ‘to do his/her butter’, meaning ‘to make a profit’.

It should be noted that these results reflect students’ subjective perceptions rather than an intrinsic visual quality of the expressions themselves.

Figure 2 shows the results of the second test concerning the degree of frozenness of each expression. In this regard, learners are perfectly aware of the difference between free expression and fixed expression. Highly fixed expressions include, for instance, fr. *filer à l’anglaise*, lit. ‘to go away in the English style’, meaning ‘to leave discreetly’; fr. *dévisser son billard*, lit. ‘to unscrew one’s billiard table’, meaning ‘to die’ et fr. fr. *voire trente-six chandelles*, lit. ‘to see thirty-six candles’, meaning ‘to be stunned (after a hit)’. It can also be observed that certain expressions, such as fr. *se courber en avant pour un pédalage forcé*, lit. ‘bending forward for forced pedalling’ or fr. *changer d’amure en passant par le vent arrière*, lit. ‘to change tack by going downwind’, receive a substantial number of “more fixed” responses. This tendency can be explained by the presence of semi-free elements, namely terminological sequences (fr. *pédalage forcé*, lit. ‘forced pedalling’; fr. *changer d’amure*, lit. ‘to change tack’; fr. *vent arrière*, lit. ‘tailwind’) that are conventionalized within specialized domains (cycling and navigation). While the expressions as a whole remain compositionally transparent, the relative lexical stability of these elements may have led learners to perceive them as more fixed.

Regarding Test 3, a total of 1,050 responses were collected (70 students × 15 items), of which 64.9% (682/1,050) were correct, 31.2% (328/1,050) incorrect, and 3.8% (40/1,050) omissions. The results suggest that performance in Test 3 may have been facilitated by the tasks carried out in Tests 1 and 2. It should be noted that these earlier tests did not provide definitions or paraphrases; rather, they required learners to assess degrees of imageability and fixedness. Such tasks likely promoted the formation of stable mental associations between expressions and conceptual representations, which were subsequently mobilized during the paraphrase-recognition task in Test 3.

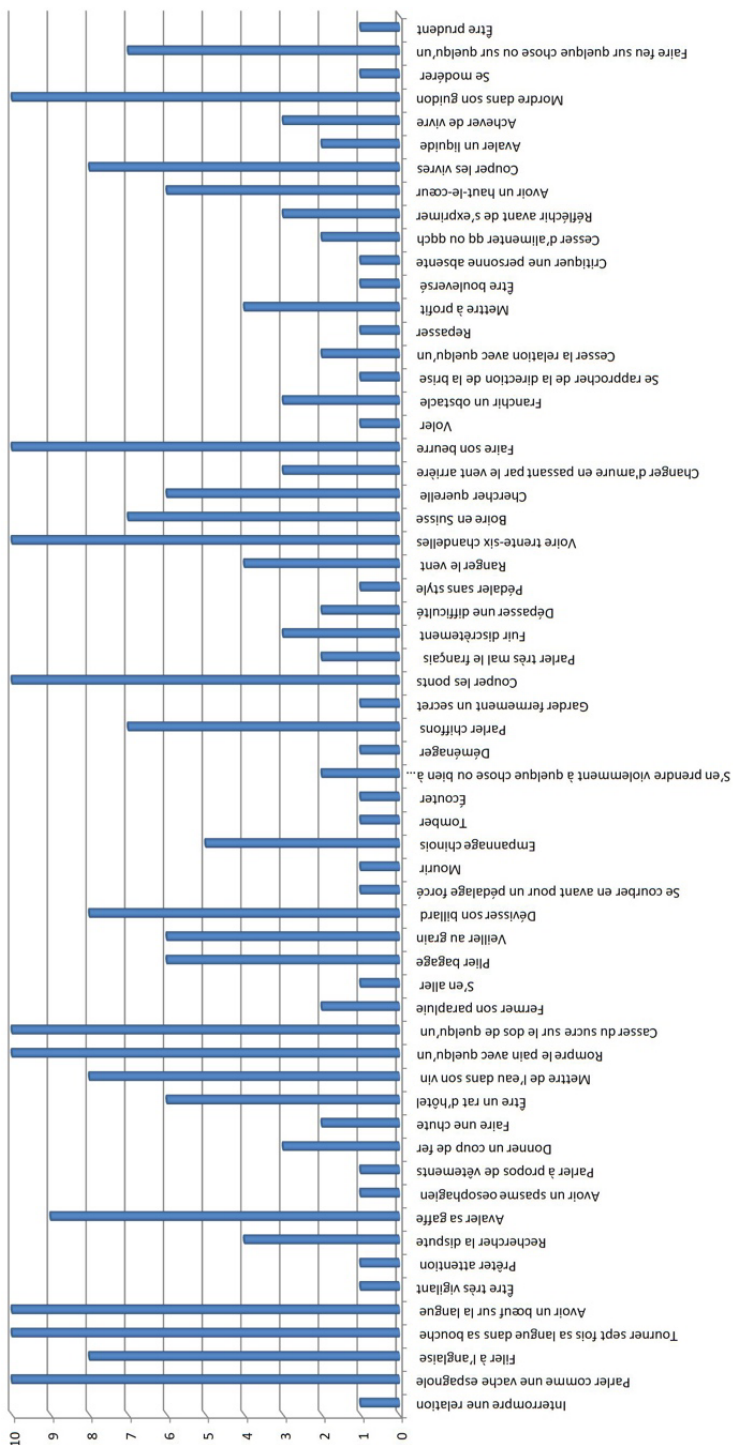
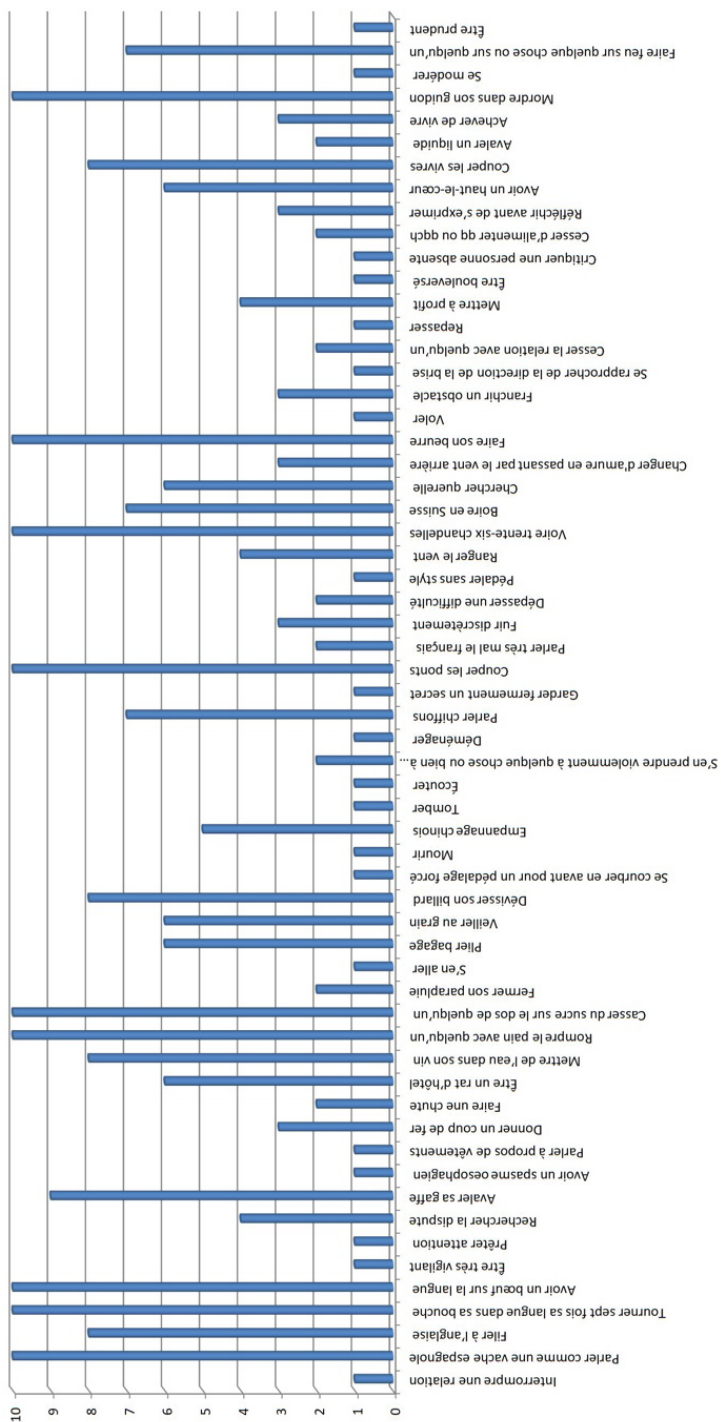


Fig. 1: The results of Test 1



In the majority of cases, learners appeared to combine metaphorical, metonymic, and analogical cognitive operations with contextual cues and cross-linguistic analogies (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Kövecses 2006; Boers and Lindstromberg 2008; Monneret 2018). This is illustrated by the idiomatic expression fr. *mordre dans son guidon*, lit. ‘to bite down on one’s handlebars’, meaning ‘to pedal hard’ as shown by student 32 (“I see the image and I chose the answer which gave me this image”) and student 41 (“I saw the mental scene of someone destroying the handlebars”).

Concerning the interpretation of fr. *tourner sept fois sa langue dans sa bouche*, lit. ‘to turn seven times his/her tongue in his/her mouth’, meaning ‘to think before speaking’, we can observe an analogical reasoning. In this regard, student 10 states that “meaning is thinking before expressing because we turn the tongue to find the words”. Likewise, the expression fr. *avalier sa gaffe*, lit. ‘to swallow one’s blunder’, meaning ‘to die’ gives rise to reasoning of a “visual” nature: student 14 affirms that “to die because swallowing a blow, a mistake, something that hurts us = a little bit of dying”.

A final example of analogy is the expression fr. *ranger le vent*, lit. ‘to put away the wind’, meaning ‘to catch the wind’, which obtained good results on the interpretative level. Student 54, for example, states that the expression means “to approach the direction of the breeze, it gives me the feeling of running with a tailwind”, and student 62 shows that the meaning is linked to the “idea of confusion of the wind which is put away, reorganized, we find the direction, the route”.

We have also observed that interpretation is influenced by the mother tongue or by other languages. This is, for example, the case of student 2, who, while interpreting the expression fr. *filer à l’anglaise*, lit. ‘to go away in the English style’, meaning ‘to leave discreetly’, says “to flee discreetly because I thought of the Italian *defilarsi* [lit. ‘to sneak away’]” or the case of student 33 who states that “*prendere i bagagli e partire* [lit. ‘take your bags and leave’] such as in Italian”.

In Test n. 3, errors concern the literal translation, due to cross-linguistic influence. Students translate the expression using their mother tongue, relying on lexical, phonetic and conceptual analogy relationships. We observe, for example, certain cases of word transparency for the semi-free expression fr. *faire une chute*, lit. ‘to do a fall’, meaning ‘to fall’ commented by student 36 “to be without style and in Italian *fare una caduta di stile* [lit. ‘to do a fall of style’, meaning ‘faux pas’]”; for the idiomatic expression fr. *faire feu sur quelque chose ou sur quelqu’un*, lit. ‘to shoot someone’, meaning ‘to attack something or someone violently’ translated by student 25 “to shoot at someone, it reminds me of Sardinian *mettere fuoco* [lit. ‘to put on fire’, meaning ‘to shoot’]” and for the phraseologism fr. *être un rat d’hôtel*, lit. ‘to be a hotel rat’, meaning ‘to be a hotel thief’, paraphrased by student 63 as “study too much, such as *topo di biblioteca* [lit. ‘a mouse of library’, meaning ‘a bookworm’] in Italian”.

The incorrect answers are linked to conceptual analogy, allowing learners to create relationships between two conceptual domains.

This is the case of the idiomatic expression fr. *faire feu sur quelque chose ou sur quelqu'un*, lit. ‘to shoot someone’, meaning ‘to attack something or someone violently’, which was paraphrased “to attack so violently and therefore to burn, to have an exaggerated reaction” by student 41. We also take into account fr. *avoir un haut-le-cœur*, lit. ‘to have a high hearth’, meaning ‘to feel nauseous’ where the cultural references linked to the nobility of the heart are highlighted by student 37 who affirms that the meaning is “to be proud, when the heart beats very strongly it is high, it is what happens when we are proud” or by student 12 who affirms “to be generous who has a high heart, high feelings”.

Other students activated, on a conceptual level, characteristics related to certain cultural domains: student 24, who affirms that the expression, fr. *être un rat d'hôtel*, lit. ‘to be a hotel rat’, meaning ‘to be a hotel thief’, means “travel a lot because mice move quickly” and student 2, who interprets the expression fr. *donner un coup de fer*, lit. ‘to give an iron shot’, meaning ‘to iron’, as “to fight because iron is a weapon”.

The motivations given by the learners show that pre-knowledge linked to mental images influences translation.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this work, our main objective is to formulate a preliminary hypothesis in order to understand the contribution of imageability to the interpretation of phraseologisms in the French language.

The results obtained from the three tests highlighted that the students subjected to meta-reflection on imageability and on lexicalization correctly translated the proposed expressions.

What emerges from this study is that students are aware that phraseologisms are culturally motivated. They try to activate their linguistic, cultural and historical knowledge relating to the target language in order to translate the expression. Indeed, students focused their attention on the specificity of the conceptual relationships of the expressions, and they arrived at new inferences, showing how conceptual metaphors work and operate in the dynamics of an imaginative nature.

The work of meta-reflection on the conceptual associations that emerge during the process of delimitation, identification and translation of a phraseologism must be explained in French as Foreign Language classes by promoting the didactization of the mental process of memorization.

In our opinion, memorization process needs several conditions. It is necessary, firstly, to highlight the process of observing the form of expression; secondly, to work on the process of decoding the expression; then, stimulate

learners to look for analogies and similarities through a process of narrativization and creation of mental scenarios. Finally, it is desirable to give rise to a global memorization of expressions by transmitting a method of constructing mental images by allowing the learner a certain creativity and freedom, so that learning becomes an individual act in an open and active process.

This article cannot be exhaustive and in no way claims to provide definitive answers to the questions asked. Although the number of students is not sufficient to draw generalizable conclusions, it may nevertheless provide a good starting point for asserting the explicitness of imageability and underlying mental images may indeed prove an asset in the appropriation of phraseology.

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