

Why the butterflies in your stomach can have big wings: combining formal and cognitive theories to explain productive extensions of idioms

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- ▶ Example (Egan 2008: 392):
 - (1) If you let this cat out of the bag, a lot of people are going to get scratched.

The problem with direct access theories

Mapping theories

Problems with mapping theories

A hybrid account

Conclusion

The problem with direct access theories

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 - ▶ or at the word level, e.g. Kay et al. (2015); Bargmann & Sailer (2018).

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- ▶ Isn't this just 'word play' or 'meta-linguistic' in some way?
 - ▶ Definitely not meta-linguistic in the conventional sense of talking *about* language.
 - ▶ There is no definition of word play, but even if there were and idiom extensions were to fall into that category, they would still involve language and should therefore be worthy of analysis.

Mapping theories

- ▶ Idioms are not conventional pairings of form and meaning (i.e. lexical items), but rather conventional pairings of meanings.

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- ▶ CONVENTION: when we talk about kicking a contextually salient bucket, we're actually talking about dying.

- ▶ Pulman (1993): idioms are ‘quasi-inference’ rules:
 - ▶ $\forall x, y. \mathbf{cat}(x) \wedge \mathbf{bag}(y) \wedge \mathbf{out-of}(x, y) \approx \exists a, z. \mathbf{secret}(z) \wedge \mathbf{revealed}(a, z)$
- ▶ Egan (2008): idioms involve a ‘pretence’:
 - ▶ “If somebody reveals a secret, pretend there’s some salient cat that they’ve let out of a bag.”

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- ▶ Idioms like these are constrained by their literal meaning, not by their form (just as a mapping approach would predict).
 - ▶ (Although, not all idioms share this property ...)

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then we have a classic four-part analogy:

	kicking the bucket	::	dying
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(7) **Lexical idiosyncrasy** (*cranberry words*):

- He left me in the lurch.
- They took umbrage at that.

(8) **Syntactic idiosyncrasy**:

- We tripped the [?? light fantastic] all night long.
- This was [?? by and large] a success.
- It's no use beating about the bush.

Idioms are not syntactically free



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 - (9) a. Alex kicked the bucket.
b. #The bucket was kicked by Alex.
 - (10) a. The strings that Kim pulled got Alex promoted.
b. ?#The beans that Julian spilled caused a lot of drama.

- ▶ Swinney & Cutler (1979): subjects recognise sentences with idioms faster than paired controls without.
- (11)
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 - (11) a. pain in the neck vs. pain in the foot
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- ▶ Similar findings reported elsewhere (Estill & Kemper 1982; Cronk 1992, 1993).
- ▶ But if idioms involve first recognising the literal meaning, then computing the idiomatic one should be *more* taxing, not less.

- ▶ For (at least some) idioms, the mapping approach is not correct.

A hybrid account

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- ▶ **PROPOSAL:** the two theories handle different parts of the data—there are two different uses of idioms.

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- ▶ Syntactically restricted vs. freer

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- ▶ The extended cases require a form of the mapping theory, augmented by a theory of analogy (to which we turn shortly).
- ▶ Lexical entries for idioms/idiom parts contain both
 1. their idiomatic meaning, directly encoded, and
 2. information about the conventional relationship between the source and target domain (i.e. the metaphorical mapping).

Example

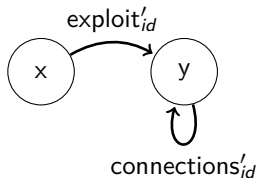
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- (14) a. Alex tried to pull some strings,
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▶ Assume (14a), interpreted idiomatically, is true in the real world.

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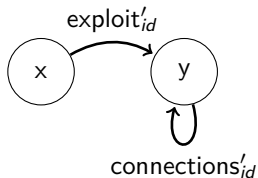
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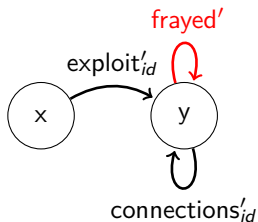
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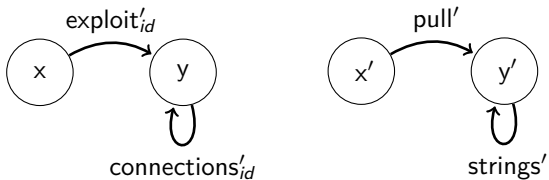
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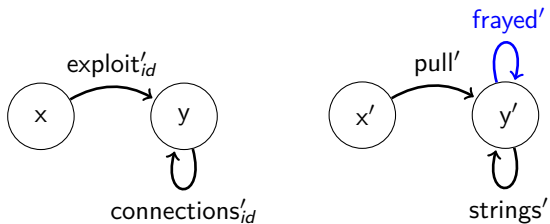
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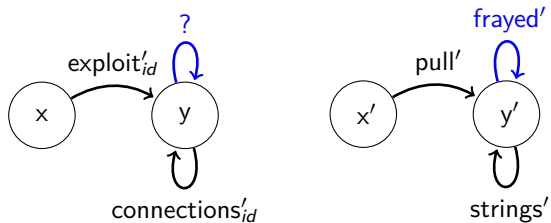
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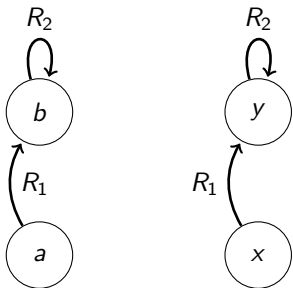
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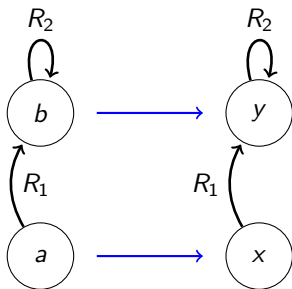
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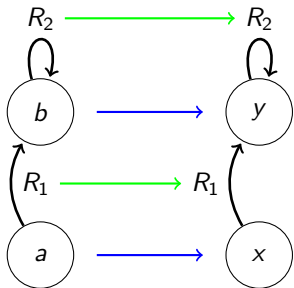
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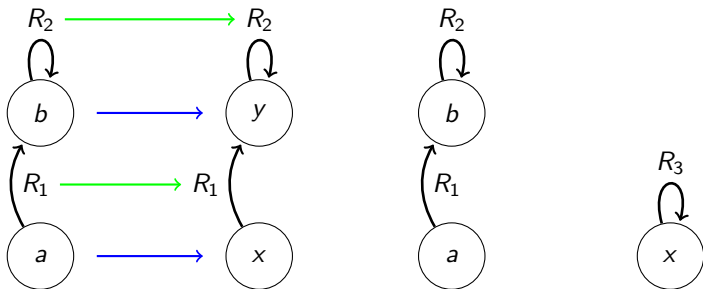
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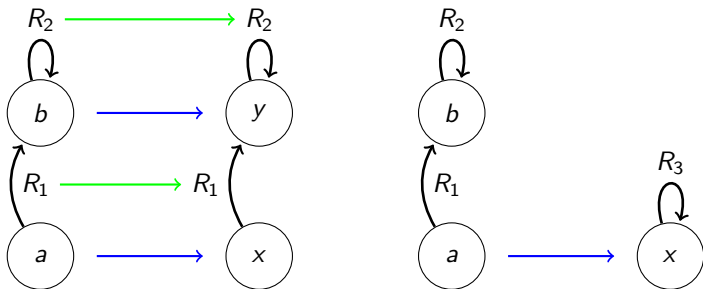
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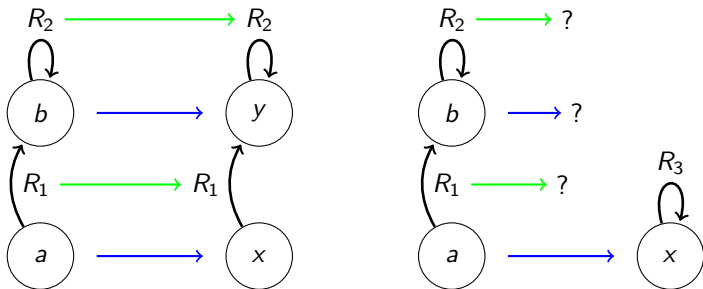
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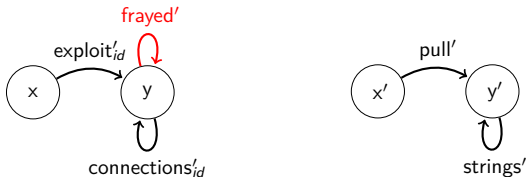
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Conclusion

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- ▶ Two kinds of idiom use: core and extended.
- ▶ Core use is unmarked/default, but metaphorical route can be coerced.

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