

# PROCESSING COGNATES IN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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U N I K A S S E L  
V E R S I T Ä T

## Background

### Cognates

A corpus study[1] on cognates revealed: Cognates are regularly not translated with their equivalent from the other language – particularly in the case of idioms.

### Idioms

Can we access the literal meaning of words within an idiom? For more details on this discussion and the (non-)compositionality of idioms see [2], [3], [4], or [5]. This has implications on the mental lexicon.

### Mental Lexicon

Is some information stored multiple times in the lexicon?

→ cognates: 1 or 2 lexical entries?

Does each cognate translation require its own entry or are equivalents stored together in one entry?

→ idioms: storage or computation?

Are idioms stored in the lexicon as one unit or is their meaning computed by means of their separate words? [4], [5]

### Research Question

→ Can speakers access the literal meaning of words within idioms?

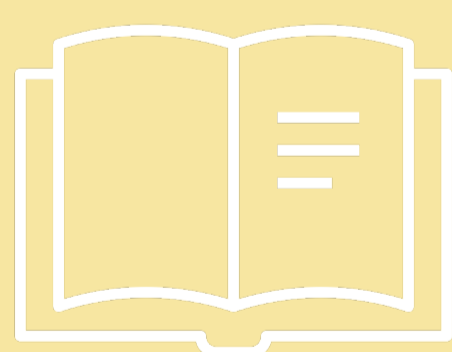
→ Can speakers access cognate meaning within idioms?

## Method

### Participants

- 30 highly-proficient German-English bilinguals

book



Buch

### Procedure

- Word-by-word self-paced reading + lexical decision
- Executed with e-prime 3.0
- Reaction times (RTs) and accuracy were recorded

### Material

3 types of sentences in the SPR (in English):

- Idiomatic VPs + cognates (n = 13)
- Idiomatic VPs + non-cognates (n = 13)
- Fillers = non-idiomatic VPs (n = 26)

Words in the Lexical Decision:

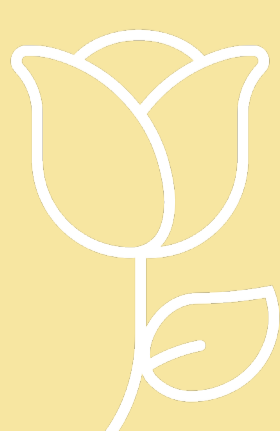
- Exp. Items = German translations of target words from the SPR
- Fillers = German-looking pseudowords

fire



Feuer

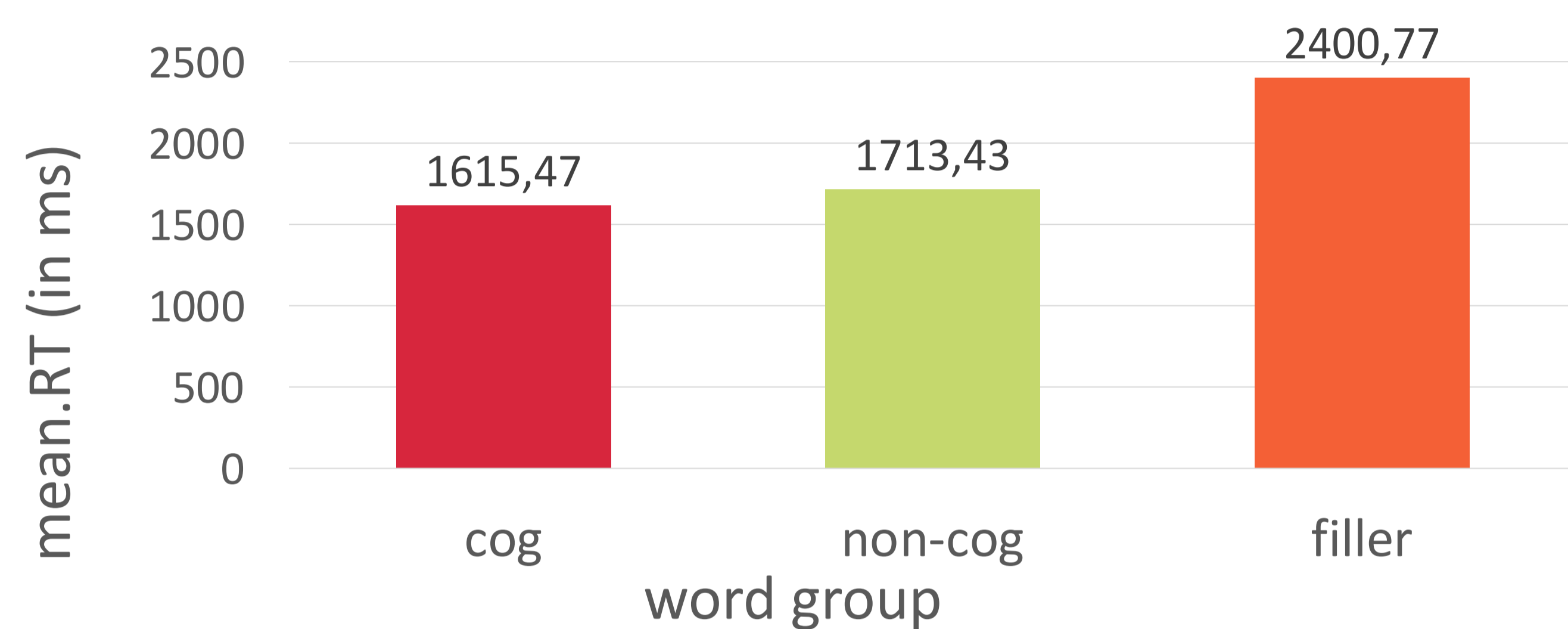
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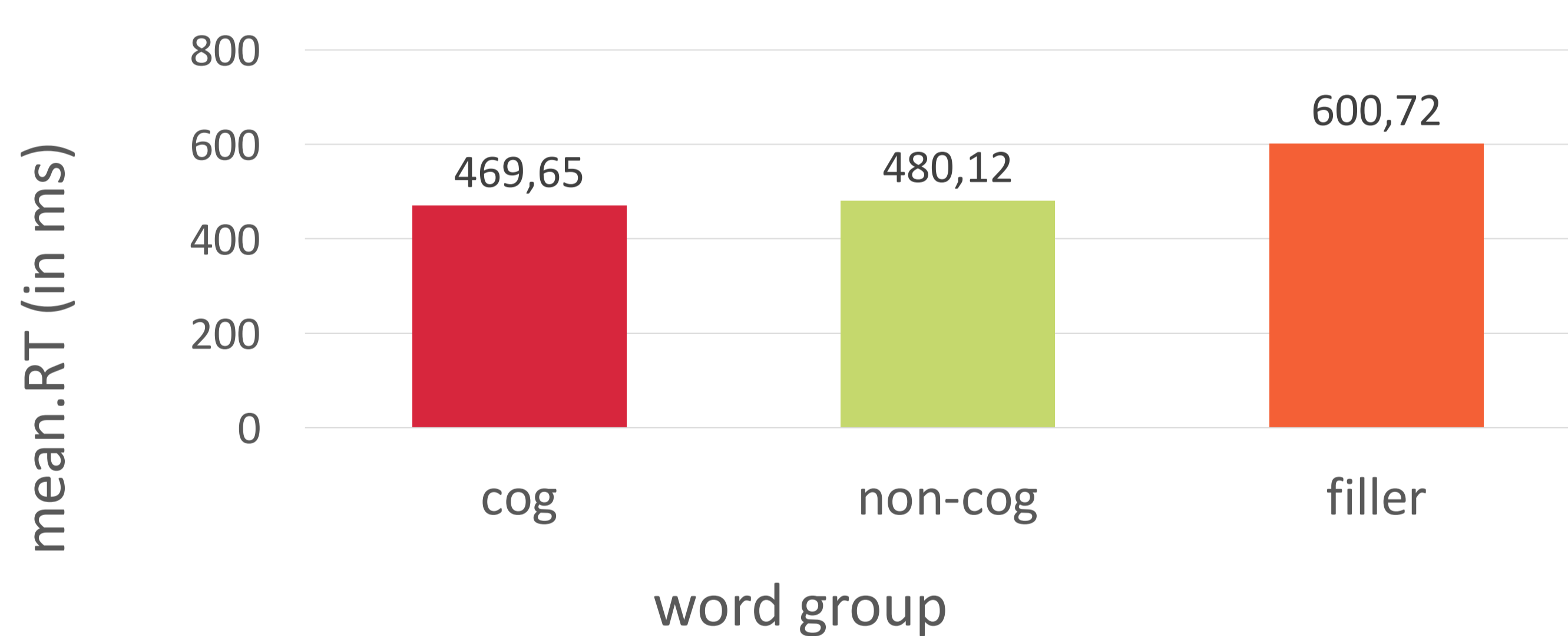
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## Results

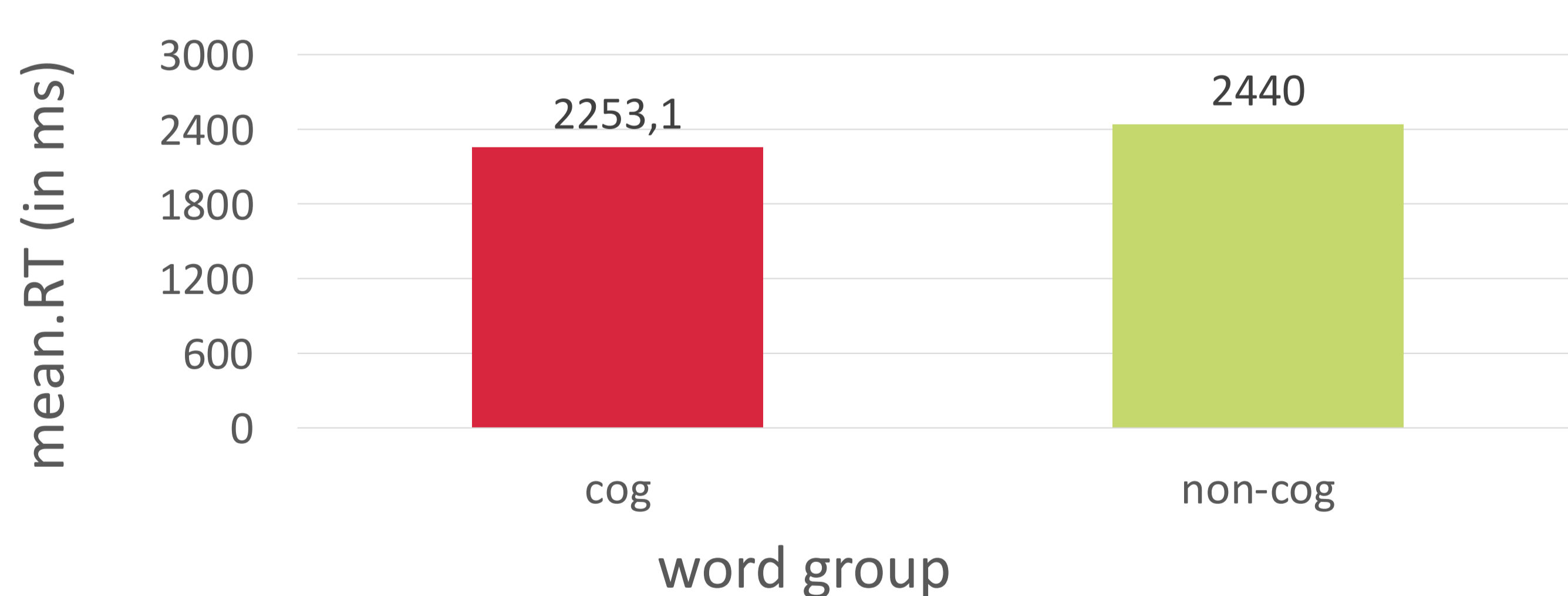
### RTs for the Lexical Decision



### RTs for target word in sentence



### RTs for target word + spill over in sentence



## Discussion

Participants had no trouble accessing the literal meaning of the words within the idiomatic phrases. However, whether speakers can access cognate meaning within idioms (= cognate facilitation) is not yet sufficiently clear. This requires further research – a follow-up study is in planning.

**References:** [1] Weissbecker, K. (2022, Aug. 5) 'That is where the shoe pinches' – cognates in context and in translation [Poster presentation]. ISBPAC 2023, Tromsø. [2] Gibbs, R.W. (1993). Why idioms are not dead metaphors. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (Eds.), *Idioms. Processing, structure and interpretation* (pp. 57-78). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. [3] Fellbaum, C. (1993). The determiner in English idioms. In: C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi (Eds.), *Idioms. Processing, structure, and interpretation*. (pp. 271-295). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. [4] Jackendoff, R. (2002). *Foundations of language*. Oxford UP. [5] Jackendoff, R. (2007). *Language, Consciousness, Culture*. MIT Press.