

Cognates in Idioms in the Mental Lexicon

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Abstract title: What cognates in idiomatic expressions can tell us about the bilingual mental lexicon

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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?

→ idioms: storage or computation?

Are idioms stored in the lexicon 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 cognates within idioms?

Method

Participants

- 30 highly-proficient German-English bilinguals

Procedure

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

Material

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

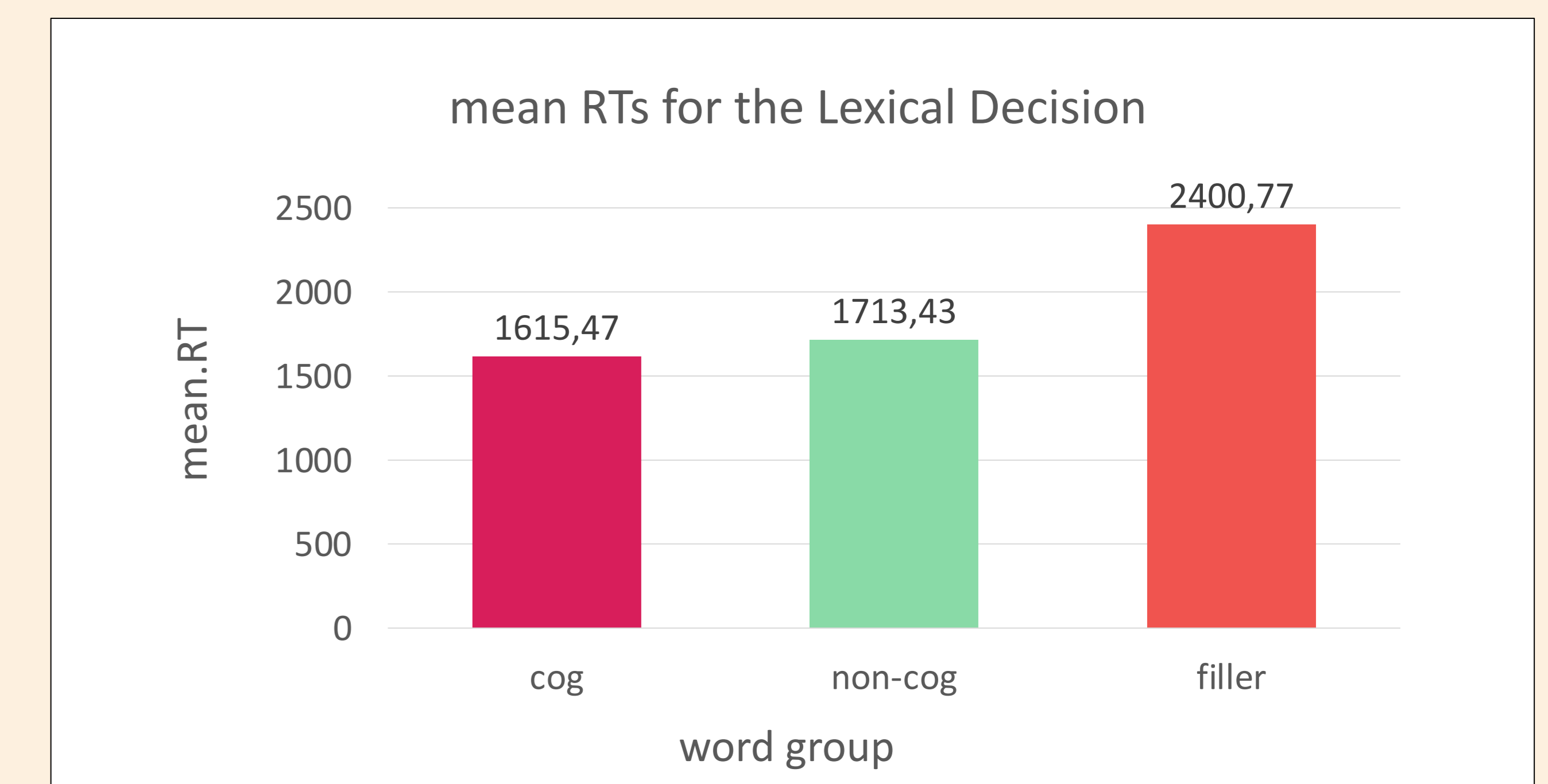
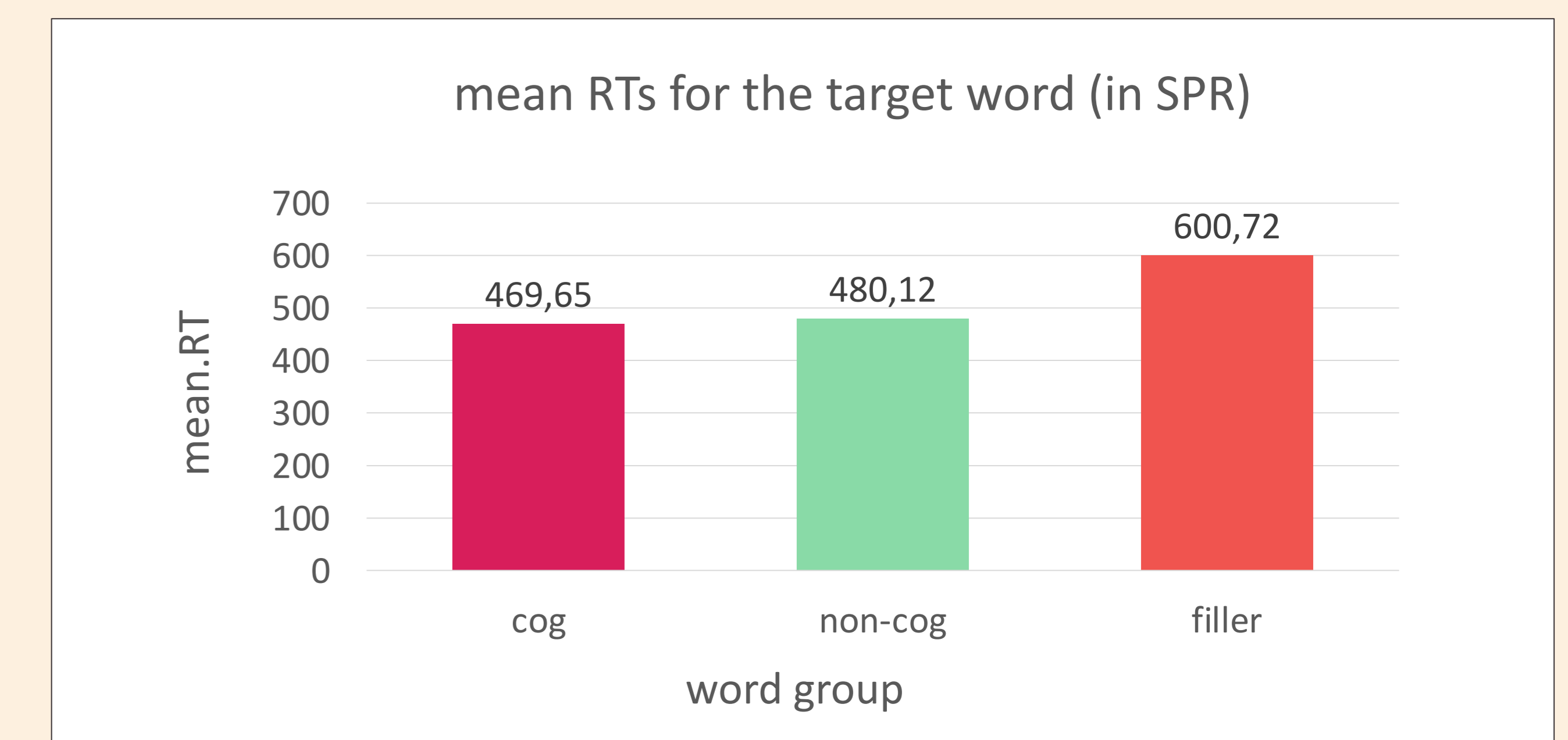
- Idiomatic VPs + cognates (n = 13)
- Idiomatic VPs + non-cognates (n = 13)
- Fillers = non-idiomatic VPs (n = 26)

Words in the Lexical Decision:

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



Results



The results for accuracy are similar to the ones for RTs:
cognates = 99,7 % non-cognates = 99,5 % fillers = 94,9 %

Discussion

Participants had no trouble accessing the words within the idiomatic phrases and identifying their translations in the Lexical Decision. However, whether speakers can access cognates within idioms is not yet sufficiently clarified and requires further research.