

## The treatment of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions in learners' dictionaries

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Metaphorical and idiomatic expressions constitute an area of difficulty for (Italian) learners of English as a foreign language not only, as easily expected, for productive purposes, but also in decoding activities, in particular in the field of reading comprehension. It is therefore useful to see if and how metaphorical and idiomatic expressions are treated in the OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH (OALD) and in the LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH (LDOCE), the two Learners' Dictionaries (LD's) on which Italian learners most heavily rely and from which they expect help in decoding written texts, as no use of the language can be effective and communicative if metaphors and idioms are not decoded by the addressee.

"Language", as L. Urdang says (1979: 51), "is metaphor". If one agrees with him and realizes what pedagogic implications are involved in his concept in the field of EFL learning, one cannot but adhere to his "frank plea to lexicographers to include metaphor in dictionaries" (1979: 47). In order to support the plea and to draw attention to certain characteristics of idioms, in the first part of this paper I shall analyse, among the definitions that the concept of metaphor and the concept of idiom have been given, those that, in my opinion, are more relevant to find acceptable lines along which certain metaphorical and idiomatic expressions could be included and/or better treated in LD's, and to provide a theoretical framework against which the examples given in the second part of this paper can be aptly illustrated.

### 1. Working definitions of "metaphor" and of "idiom"

1.1 According to Dubois et al. (1979: 187), a metaphor "consists of the use of a concrete word to convey an abstract meaning without any element expressing comparison [*similitudo brevior*]; by extension a metaphor is the use of a word instead of another word whose meaning assimilates to that of the former. Many figurative meanings are lexicalised metaphors" [my translation]. So, a metaphor is not the traditional "*similitudo brevior*", but it involves a substitution, a change in (the kind/quality of the) meaning. According to Jakobson (1966: 40), the relation of assimilation between the two meanings (the meaning of the substituted word and the meaning of the substituting one) is based either on paradigmatic similarity or on syntagmatic contiguity. In the first case (paradigmatic similarity) the linguistic expression is a metaphor proper, e.g.:

	gold	
golden hair		blond hair

where “golden” means “like gold in colour” and where “golden” and “blond” have the same external referent (i.e. gold), so that “golden hair” is hair that ‘looks like’ gold.

In the second case (syntagmatic contiguity), the linguistic expression is usually a metonymy, e.g.:

Downing Street = Residence of the Prime Minister, hence British Government where the two terms (“Downing Street” and “British Government”) have the same intrinsic referent (i.e. the residence), so that “Downing Street” ‘is’ (equivalent to) the British Government. Very often metonymy – the ‘is’ type of relation – is regarded as a sub-section of metaphor in the sense of the ‘looks-like’ type of relation, on the basis that they both refer to, and evoke, an image, regardless of the external or intrinsic character of the image itself (be it “gold” or “residence”). In this paper I will use the phrase “metaphorical expression” as an omni-comprehensive term, but I will keep distinct the terms “metaphor” and “metonymy” (according to Jakobson’s and Weinrich’s theories) and consider metonymy, as a working definition, just in the sense of “the place or the institution instead of the event” (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 38).<sup>1</sup>

1.2 The reference to the images that metaphors convey brings out another characteristic element of their nature: their socio-cultural value, which is particularly relevant in pedagogic lexicography. With respect to this it is important to notice that, according to Weinrich (1976), the metaphorical world is by definition meta-individual, as it constitutes the heritage of a community as part of that community’s *langue*, to the exclusion of its members’ *parole*. So each metaphor is integrated in a “metaphorical field”,<sup>2</sup> as Weinrich puts it (1976: 44), only if it is accepted by a community in as far as the image it conveys must be shared by the community’s members. It is rather easy to ‘generate’ a metaphor when at least the addresser and the addressee share the same socio-cultural values, but it is extremely difficult to ‘perpetuate’ a metaphor, to establish or fix it, as the metaphorical field must be not only synchronically but also diachronically shared by all, or a large majority of, the community’s members. For instance, on the occasion of the Greenpeace affair, which took place in France in the summer of 1985 and which nearly caused the French President’s ‘impeachment’, some jour-

<sup>1</sup> I have not taken into consideration synecdoches (in the “pars pro toto” sense) for three main reasons: they are much less frequent, in my corpus (composed of political articles drawn mainly from *The Economist*), than metonymies and metaphors; they are, usually, transparent even to a foreign learner; and, finally, at least the most frequent among them are included in dictionaries.

<sup>2</sup> In analogy with the concept of semantic field Weinrich created the term “metaphorical field”, defining it as “the semantic homeland of a metaphor” (Weinrich 1976: 79).

nalists coined the metaphorical expression “Waterpeace” in analogy to “Watergate” and its consequences for the American President Nixon.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor, although highly socio-culturally connotated, was too specifically dated and did not outlive the affair itself, perhaps because Mitterand was not impeached after all, nor did he resign (as Nixon did). In other words, the metaphor was generated but not perpetuated. For this reason there are relatively few and somehow limited metaphorical fields, although the possibility of using words and phrases in a metaphorical, figurative sense is virtually infinite; and for this reason “Watergate”, which was, technically speaking, a metonymy (the place for the event) and has become, for its connotative value, a metaphor (the place and the event as a referent for ‘political débâcle due to dishonest management etc.’), should be included in LD’s (and indeed in any dictionary), while “Waterpeace” does not even apply for consideration. It is true, as many lexicographers maintain, that culture-specific metaphorical meanings belong to the encyclopedia and not to the lexicon of a given language, but it is also true that many of them, metonymies in particular, are more often, and sometimes even exclusively, used in their metaphorical rather than in their denotative sense. For instance “The White House” is not just the residence of the USA President, but it is much more often metonymically used for the American President’s policy etc.

1.3 With respect to these considerations and within the limits and purposes of this paper, those metaphorical expressions that function as *established, fixed connotations* where the evoked referent’s properties are *immutable* and whose meaning, mediated by the referent, is, at least up to a point, *transparent*, although not always and not necessarily univocal (see 1.4), can be defined, for lexicographic purposes, as “metaphors”. It might be argued that not all metaphors are connotated as the associations on which they are based are not always, not necessarily and/or no longer emotive. This is definitely true for those kinds of ‘metaphor’ used instead of a specific denotative term lacking in the language: there is no ‘emotion’ conveyed by a phrase such as “the leg of the table”. Strictly speaking, that use of *leg* could be considered as metaphorical (“polysemy is metaphorical extension”, Urdang 1979: 49; “polysemy is the product of metaphorical creativity”, Lyons 1977: 567), although it is not a metaphor according to the above-mentioned and to the following considerations.

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<sup>3</sup> The expression “Waterpeace” appeared in several Italian newspapers and I wrongly assumed, at the time, that it was an American coinage. I later found out that the English expression for that affair (or at least one of them) was “Pacific Watergate” (E 31-9-85: 10). As L. Urdang remarked at Zürich, a more probable and incisive terminology would have used “gate” (given the meaning of this word) rather than “Water” to form a new, metaphorical compound (cf. the more recent “Irangate”). I nonetheless decided to make use of the example, just for the sake of the argument, as its function was supposed to be that of showing how it would have not been lexicographically relevant anyway.

Almost all words may be used in a figurative, connotative way: in metaphors one phrase substitutes for another, perhaps less concise, or less appropriate, or less effective, but existing (e.g. 'rose' for beauty, youth etc.), whereas there is no other less concise, less appropriate or less effective word for *leg*. In addition to this, that use of *leg* does not constitute a text: according to Weinrich (1976: 88), metaphors – like idioms, which are units above word-level – are never composed of single lexemes, which may have figurative meanings, but of a 'text', however small it may be. A compound<sup>4</sup> seems to be, in his theory, the minimal textual unit. His example is the German *Windrose*, equivalent to the English *compass-card*, an expression that brings out another element typical of Weinrich's analysis: each metaphor (oxymoron in particular) is contradictory, i.e. a *Windrose* is not a 'real' "rose", though it is in the convention of figurative language, just as, in Weinrich's example (1976: 66) – the 'locus classicus' state = ship – a state is not a (real) ship, though it is by convention. The same considerations apply to lexicalised metaphors (cf. 2.2).

Going back to the metaphorical use of *leg*, it is true that the semantic field of *leg*, i.e. "parts of human body", becomes the metaphorical field of "the leg of the table", but the existence of and the belonging to a metaphorical field are not the only, though necessary, conditions to satisfy in order to define a figurative use as a "metaphor". Moreover, as Lakoff and Johnson point out (1980: 51–55), such a use of *leg* is idiosyncratic, unsystematic and isolated and does not interact with other metaphors. It is, in their terminology, a "dead" metaphor, as opposed to the metaphors "we live by". For all these reasons the use of *leg* in "the leg of the table" is not a metaphor, and perhaps, paradoxically, because of this it is included in dictionaries.

The very fact that a connotation becomes fixed, established, makes it lose its emotive nature, limiting its evocative powers to the raising of an image. So, the difference between a connotation and a metaphor, in the sense already specified, lies not in the semantic area, but in the personal, limited character of the former vs. the impersonal (or shared), extended character of the latter.

To conclude, those metaphorical expressions (metonymies in particular) that can be defined as fixed, socio-cultural connotations, apply for lexicographic consideration: but, obviously, fixed connotations are not, 'tout court', metaphors.

1.4 To come to the second concept to be analysed – idiomaticity – it must be said that idioms can be metaphorical expressions (but cf. Moon, in this volume): for the purposes of this paper I want to consider them as distinct from metaphors. One of the factors differentiating idioms from metaphors is meaning opaqueness vs. transparency. In the case of metaphors and metonymies the (original) relation of similarity of contiguity with the referent is still retrievable – through

<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere (1976: 76) Weinrich defines a metaphor as a "word", but only as a working definition.

comparison — for at least the major part of the metaphorical text and/or for its constituents, whereas the relation between figurative and literal meaning is irretrievable for the constituents of idiomatic expressions which, consequently, result in meaning opaqueness. The loss, in use, of the original, literal, in a word denotative, meaning in the case of idioms leads, as a consequence, to the absence of any connotation associated with it. Idioms may have different stylistic values or pertain to different registers: they have different degrees of pragmatic appropriacy, but usually they do not evoke, nor are they based on, socio-cultural shared associations in the sense metaphors do. There is no such thing as an ‘idiomatic field’ in analogy to Weinrich’s metaphorical field. For instance, when using the expression “to kick the bucket”, nobody would see in his/her imagination a pig hanging on a ‘bucket’, which was what the Englishmen of the XVI century presumably saw when the expression entered the *langue* with the then obvious, transparent meaning of “to die”.

Thus connotation is the second element differentiating metaphors from idioms. It follows that metaphors, as against idioms, cannot be easily isolated and decontextualised: based, as they are, on a more or less extensive connotation sharing, they need a co-text and a context to be fully understood. Their meaning, if considered discretely, might be ambiguous, whereas idioms are unambiguous, meaningful units on their own, meaning the same thing in all contexts. For example the metaphorical use of proper names is particularly significant in this sense, as Weinrich (1976: 92) says: does a sentence like “He is the Napoleon of letters” refer to Napoleon the winner of Austerlitz or the loser of Waterloo? Only contextual and co-textual clues can disambiguate it. On the other hand, the meaning of an idiom such as “to kick the bucket” is absolutely univocal. On the whole, however, the great majority of metaphors are used unambiguously. In fact, what makes metaphorical expressions and, in particular metonymies, qualify, like idioms, for dictionary entries is their repetitive, unambiguous character (but for a few exceptions), due not only to their referring to a limited number of metaphorical fields, but also to their being, in the sense already specified, fixed connotations. Analogously, idioms may be considered as fixed collocations, where semantic and usage valency is immutable (apart from morphological and inflectional changes that are normally possible and apart from a few idioms that allow lexical variability (Benson 1985)), and whose meaning, no longer mediated by the original, literal meaning, results in a univocal, opaque, semantic unit, a definition on which, whatever the approach in analysing idioms (Mackin 1978; Wallace 1979; Cowie 1981; Benson 1985), there is large consensus.

It is true that restricted collocations are not idiomatic (cf. Aisenstadt and Wallace, 1979) in so far as they are semantically transparent, but it is also true that idioms are composed of elements that collocate with each other in a unique way, in the sense that they cannot be substituted by any other element (apart from a very few exceptions, as already mentioned). The difference between a fixed collocation and an idiom lies in the semantic opaqueness of the latter and

in its figurative function. So, idioms are opaque, fixed collocations, but fixed collocations are not necessarily idioms. If the figurative sense of a whole composite is the only existing one, then the expression is an “idiom proper” (Cowie 1981); if a literal interpretation of it is (still) possible, the expression is a “figurative idiom”. Figurative idioms may be labelled as “metaphors which are not yet fossilized” (in the sense of ‘petrified’: cf. Leech 1974 and Lyons 1977: 536–547) (Cowie 1981: 229), whereas idioms proper may be defined as ‘fossilized metaphors’, where the process of fossilization has turned the meaning transparency of metaphors into the meaning opaqueness of idioms. (Cf. Lyons 1977: 550, “idioms frequently originate, of course, in metaphor”).<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps on the basis of these considerations that idioms – contrary to other metaphorical expressions – have long been given lexicographic attention: most of them are included in the OALD and in the LDOCE and are signalled by different typefaces, although with some (remarkable) differences in their treatment, as shown in the following examples.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The treatment of idioms and other metaphorical expressions in the OALD and in the LDOCE

2.1 In the OALD idioms are placed, printed in bold italic type, in the entry for the “most” important word in the idiomatic phrase or sentence (OALD 1980: XVI). In the LDOCE “an idiom is usually found under the word that has the most idiomatic meaning” (LDOCE 1978: XXVI), printed in bold roman type. Apart from the fact that it would be very difficult (and time-consuming) for a foreign learner to decide what is the most “important” or the most “idiomatic” word, very often what is considered as the most “important” word in the OALD does not coincide with what is considered as the most “idiomatic” word in the LDOCE, and the same expression is treated as an idiom in one dictionary and not in the other.

For instance, *make do* is placed under *make* in the OALD and under *do* in the LDOCE: “make” is more important than “do” according to the OALD, whereas “do” is more idiomatic than “make” for the LDOCE. On the semantic level the definitions given are very similar and both dictionaries record the usual colloca-

<sup>5</sup> Lyons distinguishes between “petrification” and “fossilization”: “petrification” is “the process by which syntactic compounds are institutionalized as lexemes” (1977: 536); “fossilization” takes place when the rule by which word-compounds “are derived from the simple lexemes of which they are composed is no longer productive in the present stage of the language system” (1977: 547).

<sup>6</sup> All the examples are drawn from texts (cf. Note 1) actually read during classes by Italian Political Science students learning English (for Academic Purposes) as part of their curriculum.

tion “with sth”, from which the meaning of the collocation found in the text analysed<sup>7</sup> – “without sdy” – was easily inferrable.

*Do time* (The Economist – from now on “E” – 25-5-85: 19) is placed in both dictionaries in the entry for *time* and given the same definition, i.e. “a period of imprisonment”, but in the OALD it is considered as an idiom (where “time” is more important than “do”), whereas it is not in the LDOCE. The expression, given its semantic opaqueness, is likely to be identified as idiomatic by any learner for whom it would be very difficult to retrieve it under the tenth meaning, out of 50, printed in italics like the examples.

*Make the running* (E 25-5-85: 20), a figurative idiom according to Cowie’s definition, is considered as an idiom in both dictionaries and placed in the entry for *running*. It is given the following definitions: “the speed at which a race is run, a relationship develops, etc.” (LDOCE); “set the pace, fig., lit.” (OALD). Both dictionaries take into consideration the co-existence of a literal and a figurative meaning, although recorded differently, but the expression “set the pace” given in the OALD is itself idiomatic (and is considered as such in the same dictionary!). Only a cross-reference to *pace* makes its opaque meaning transparent.

*Go bust* (E 6-7-85: 19), an idiom in both dictionaries, is placed in the entry for *bust* 2 (verb) in the OALD and for *bust* 5 (adj.) in the LDOCE. The definition given is identical, “to fail”, but the OALD also adds the clearer “to run out of money”.

Finally, *jump the gun* (E 25-5-85: 21), an idiom proper, is treated as such in both dictionaries and given the same, clear definition: “to start too soon”.

2.2 These few examples show that in spite of the consensus on the definition of the concept of idiomaticity, idiomatic expressions are not always considered as such and that they are treated differently at various levels. If this is true for idioms, it is even more true for other metaphorical expressions, on which theoretical definitions are less agreed. All sorts of metaphorical expressions (here an umbrella term) can find a territory, whose boundaries are not clear cut as their differentiating elements or conditions (reference to a metaphorical field, textuality, contradiction: connotation, semantic opaqueness/transparency, collocation) often overlap, in an idealized continuum like the following:

	metaphorical expressions				
figurative use	lexicalised metaphors	metonymy	metaphor	idioms	
leg	wet blanket?	Downing Str.	Watergate?	figur.	
mouth	blackleg	Watergate?	swathed in	proper	
(Lyons 1977: 552)			ermine +		
			others not		
			isolatable and		
			not includable		

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately I have lost the original text – chosen by a student – whose title was “Making do without Neves” (the late Brazilian President), for which I have no reference.

For instance, "wet blanket" (Lyons 1977: 548) is not a blanket, though it is in the convention of figurative language, so the condition of contradiction is satisfied; it is a text (lexicalised metaphors are compounds); but it is not inscribed in a metaphorical field, so it is not a metaphor, according to Weinrich's standards. It is a restricted, opaque collocation (indeed an idiom, entered in the ODCIE, for the OALD, but not for the LDOCE which treats it as a compound) but it is not specifically connotated. This shows how difficult it is to assign an expression to one class rather than to another. Like "wet blanket", which shares some of the characteristics of both lexicalised metaphors and idioms, "Watergate" can be considered as a metonymy or as a metaphor (cf. 1.2), a category into which fall other expressions, not isolatable and therefore not includable in dictionaries, particularly in the case of "continuous metaphors", i.e. metaphors that make use of more than one successive comparison (Dubois et al. 1979).

Metonymies are usually absent in both dictionaries, and even when they are included and properly defined, something is missing: for instance, the metonymical meaning of "Downing Street" is clearly recorded, but the metonymical meaning of "Number 10", which has the same referent and is equally effective (and perhaps even more used, cf. the recent political slogan "Next Stop Number 10"), is absent.<sup>8</sup>

Metonymies, to resume the considerations already made and reinforce Urdang's plea, should be included in LD's not only for their cultural, communicative value, but also for their frequency of use. Among metaphorical expressions they are perhaps the most easily isolatable and definable for their syntagmatic aspect; although rather transparent to the (cultivated) native speaker, they are, on the whole, rather opaque to the average foreign learner, who is, after all, the actual addressee of these dictionaries.

2.3 A different case is that of metaphor (proper), a concept that, being based on a paradigmatic relation pertaining to the dimension 'text', cannot be analysed discretely. For example, a metaphor such as the following one (a "continuous metaphor"), although clearly referring to a specific metaphorical field (the world of school), cannot possibly be included in any dictionary because of its very textual nature: "Most victim nations [victims of sanctions] are inconvenienced and would prefer the sanctions lifted. Disobedient schoolboys rarely enjoy being beaten. But how much, if at all, will they change in order to avoid pain?" (E 14-9-85: 13). Once the appropriate relation between the real world and the metaphorical world has been understood and the relation 'victim nations — schoolboys, beaten, pain — sanctions' textually established, the meaning of the meta-

<sup>8</sup> The LDOCE records that "Downing Street" is the "London Street in which, (at Number 10) the Prime Minister officially lives; the Government of Great Britain", but it says nothing, for instance, under the entry for "ten".

phor becomes absolutely clear. The meaning of these types of metaphor – contrary to idioms – is the sum of the literal meanings of their constituents.

There are other cases in which some metaphorical expressions, not clearly classifiable, are somehow included in the OALD and in the LDOCE, although not always satisfactorily.

*Hold one's nose* (E 25-5-85: 15) is an expression that, probably because of its semantic transparency, is not considered as an idiom in either dictionary. The fact that it is not recorded in the ODCIE either reinforces this opinion, although, strangely enough, it is treated as an idiom in the CULD. It is, however, a difficult expression to understand in a context referring to the relationship between the British Government and the Irish Sinn Fein. The definitions given in the OALD and in the LDOCE for *hold* (“keep in or with the hands”, “to keep . . . with the hands”) although making explicit reference to the use of the verb for parts of the body, do not say anything about the causes or aims, such as CULD “because of a bad smell”, that, in a figurative, metaphorical sense, become essential.

Another case is exemplified by the metaphor “to go back to be swathed in ermine” (E 25-5-85: 21) referring to a British Minister of Education who was formerly a don and who was supposed to leave his office before a certain date and go back to his University. Nothing was explicitly mentioned in the text, so that the expression was obscure and the use of a dictionary necessary. The definitions given for *ermine* in the two dictionaries are the following:

1) a small animal whose fur is brown in summer and white (except for its black pointed tail) in winter; 2) (U) its fur; garment made of this fur; dressed in ermine; a gown trimmed in ermine. (OALD)

1) the name given in winter, when its fur turns white, to a STOAT; 2) the white fur of this animal often worn, esp. formerly, by important people, such as kings and judges. (LDOCE)

Both definitions no. 2 refer to the function of ermine fur as a garment, but they hint in a very different linguistic way and with rather different metalinguistic force at the pragmatic aspect connected with ‘when’ and ‘who’ wears ermine garments, an aspect absolutely essential for understanding the metaphorical use of the term. The OALD gives the example “a gown trimmed in ermine” that is – *in se* – of no help to the learner. The cross-reference to “gown” clarifies the concept: “gown . . . 2) loose, flowing robe worn by members of a University, judges etc.”. In the LDOCE there is a direct hint at ‘who’ makes use of ermine fur, but as the Minister could not possibly go back to be a king (!), the choice is between a “judge” and an “important” person, a rather unsatisfactory solution. Moreover the definitions in both dictionaries are very difficult to understand in terms of textual cohesion. Definitions no. 2 can be read only after and if definitions no. 1 have been understood. In the OALD definitions “its” and “this” are obviously anaphoric (cf. Marelló, in this volume), in the LDOCE definitions “its” (def. 1) is cataphoric and “this animal” (def. 2), referring to “stoat”, necessitates a cross-reference to the entry for this term. If this is one of the few cases in which a met-

aphorical usage, more or less satisfactorily, is included in the two dictionaries, the intrinsic difficulty of the definitions given runs the risk of blurring the lexical element, not to mention the attempt at clarifying its metaphorical use.

To sum up, the following are a few lines along which Urdang's plea can be supported and implemented. First, what is transparent to a (cultivated) native speaker (not only linguistically, but also socio-culturally) might be altogether opaque to a foreign learner. Secondly, certain metaphorical meanings, in particular metonymies, are often more frequently used than the denotative meanings they come from. Thirdly, connotation, which, strictly speaking, "must have become denotation to qualify for dictionary entry" (Ayto 1983: 97), is, nevertheless, extremely relevant for a full understanding and appreciation of certain metaphorical uses (such as, for instance, those associated with the concept of 'dogness', i.e. 'man's best friend', already lexicographically accepted in both dictionaries). Finally, the linguistic, textual treatment of the definitions of metaphorical expressions could be given more attention, to avoid the risk that the dictionary – a useful instrument for comprehension – might become a hindrance.

The (frequent) metaphorical expressions that meet Jacobson's and Weinrich's standards apply and indeed qualify for lexicographic consideration. Frequency of use is one of the more relevant factors, as for all the other entries, on which the selection and inclusion of metaphorical expressions should be based. Another determinant factor is their 'fossilization'. Everyday language, as Lakoff and Johnson argue (1980), is highly metaphorical, as well as political language that usually draws its images from history and/or from the history of culture: recent culture, perhaps, has not yet established itself, lexicographically speaking, so that an expression like "Gaulian moments" (E 8-3-1986: 11) might well be absent in dictionaries. On the other hand, the figurative use of "Byzantine" in "Byzantine scale" (E 6-7-85: 14) (properly defined as "complicated" in the LDOCE but absent in the OALD) and the metaphorical use of "Florentine" in "Florentine skills of manoeuvre" (E 8-3-1986: 12), (absent in both dictionaries) could be considered as typical cases of connotation that has established itself lexicographically, as there is "no linguistic ascertainable trace of connotational link with the original denotative sense" (Ayto 1983: 86). These senses are not only rather frequent, but also established.

As for idioms, for the majority of them the problem is not that of their inclusion, but that of their treatment which, although rather satisfactory from the point of view of explanation, could be improved, in particular to avoid too many cross-references and not to rely too much on learners for the attribution of the status of idiomaticity on the one hand and for the placement of idiomatic ex-

pressions on the other. Ease of retrievability of entries and sub-entries is, after all, one of the requirements of good Learners' Dictionaries.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The treatment of idioms in the new edition of the LDOCE (1987) is considerably different. They are listed "at the first MAIN word in the phrase" but for two cases: 1) "if the idiom starts with a very common verb (such as have, get, make, or take) it is shown at the next main word"; 2) "if one of the words in the idiom is variable, the idiom is shown at the main invariable word" (1987: F 32—33). This partly invalidates the arguments put forward in this paper, particularly in as far as the placement of idioms is concerned (though cf. *make do* listed at the entry for *make*, which, in spite of being "very common" is obviously considered as less common than *do*). Other major differences between the two editions, with regard to the above-mentioned examples and considerations, concern the printing of *do time* (dark type) and the definition of *ermine*.

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