

Title: Cards on the table. Variations in content and expression in Swedish idioms
Language: Swedish
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Abstract

The dissertation recounts how thirty-six Swedish idioms consisting of a verb and complement are used in contemporary newspaper material found in the Bank of Swedish – Linguistic Reference Databank of Göteborg University. All the expressions occur at least once per million running words in a corpus of almost 33.7 million running words. The idioms include *få kalla fötter* (literally: get cold feet) meaning '(suddenly) feel strong apprehensions' /concerning a person; due to a particular event or the like; referring to his participation in a particular context/. A fundamental objective is to survey variation in content of the studied idioms. Analyses were performed using semantic roles. The semantic analyses show that many of the idioms demonstrate considerable complexity. It also emerges that slightly more than half of the idioms studied show limited semantic variation in the material. The semantic content of the remaining expressions varies more, but none of the idioms can be regarded as polysemous. Many of the idioms are characterized by diffuse borders and a certain vagueness and lack of acuity of meaning. The full meaning of most of the idioms does not emerge until the idioms are put in a context. Idioms demonstrate clear similarities to ordinary lexemes. Another important question in the dissertation has to do with expressive variation in the relevant idioms. Idioms are traditionally regarded as fixed units that cannot be varied in terms of expression. The dissertation studies variation related to grammatical categories, forms of lexical variation, and construction switches. The expressions show sharply limited variation with respect to number and definiteness. Alternation between active and passive construction does not occur in many idioms. Lexical variation and inserted adjuncts are however relatively common. The expressions studied differ in the material to a varying extent. The variation seems to be connected to some form of compositionality, but perhaps even more to the type of figurative content of the idioms. Obviously metaphorical idioms tend to vary in expression to a greater extent than metonymic (or less palpably metaphorical) expressions.

Key words: Swedish, idioms, fixed expressions, phraseology, lexicology, semantic roles, variation, corpus, metaphor, compositionality, lexicography

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