Abstract

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This article reports on a survey on the use of figurative word combinations in texts produced by high school students in multilingual urban school environments in Sweden. The data consist of essays written by 175 students and have been collected for the research project Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings. The texts have been divided into five different categories according to the students’ linguistic backgrounds. It was found that the figurative word combinations in the data can be classified into three main categories according to their degree of conventionalization: (1) conventionalized word combinations, (2) partially modified conventionalized word combinations and (3) novel word combinations. Conventionalized word combinations appear to be the most frequently used type in the data, followed by partially modified and novel figurative word combinations, respectively. The results also support the initial hypothesis that the salience and types of figurative expressions in the participants’ texts can, at least to some degree, be linked to the participants’ linguistic background; L1 students use more conventionalized word combinations than L2 students, whereas modifications of conventionalized figurative expressions are more frequent in the L2 students’ texts. The study also shows that the students create novel figurative word combinations based on a great variety of source domains.

Keywords: phraseology, youth language, figurative language, conventionalization, Swedish.