Affective Semantics across Contextual Frames:
Semantic Prosody vs Sentence-Level Annotation in the *feel blue* Corpus

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This study examines how contextual framing modulates affective and sensorimotor meaning in idiomatic expressions, using *feel blue* as a case study. The idiom's entrenched affective polarity and low sensorimotor grounding make it an ideal testing ground for theories of semantic prosody [1], dual coding [2], and context availability [3]. Drawing on 2,178 corpus concordances extracted from the enTenTen20 corpus via Sketch Engine, we contrast two levels of context: the Semantic Prosody Zone (SPZ)—a ±5-lemma window of content words—and the Sentence frame in which the idiom occurs. Valence, arousal, and dominance were annotated using the NRC VAD Lexicon [4], and concreteness via the Brysbaert et al. (2014) norms [5]. Paired Wilcoxon tests compared the two levels. Results show that valence remains stable across contexts, whereas arousal and dominance are significantly higher in SPZ than in Sentence contexts, indicating semantic dilution of affective activation when the idiom is embedded in a higher-level discourse frame (Fig. 1). Concreteness is invariant, confirming the idiom's abstract profile (Fig. 2). These findings demonstrate a dimension-specific sensitivity to contextual framing: affective activation is sensitive to discourse level, evaluative polarity is lexically anchored, and sensorimotor grounding is robust.

According to context-availability theory, abstract meanings become more grounded in semantically rich contexts. However, the invariance of concreteness across both frames suggests that idiomatic meaning—being affectively anchored but perceptually abstract—does not benefit from a shift to a higher-level discourse frame. In *feel blue*, such a shift does not produce a 'concreteness gain', because the idiom lacks sensorimotor referents to begin with.

Methodologically, SPZ-based annotation provides a scalable framework for identifying contextual modulation in corpus-based affective semantics. The results refine semantic prosody theory by quantifying how local evaluative cohesion attenuates at the Sentence level—that is, within a higher-level discourse frame—and they bridge corpus linguistics with psycholinguistic modeling by showing that affective, but not sensorimotor, meaning is dynamically tuned to contextual framing.

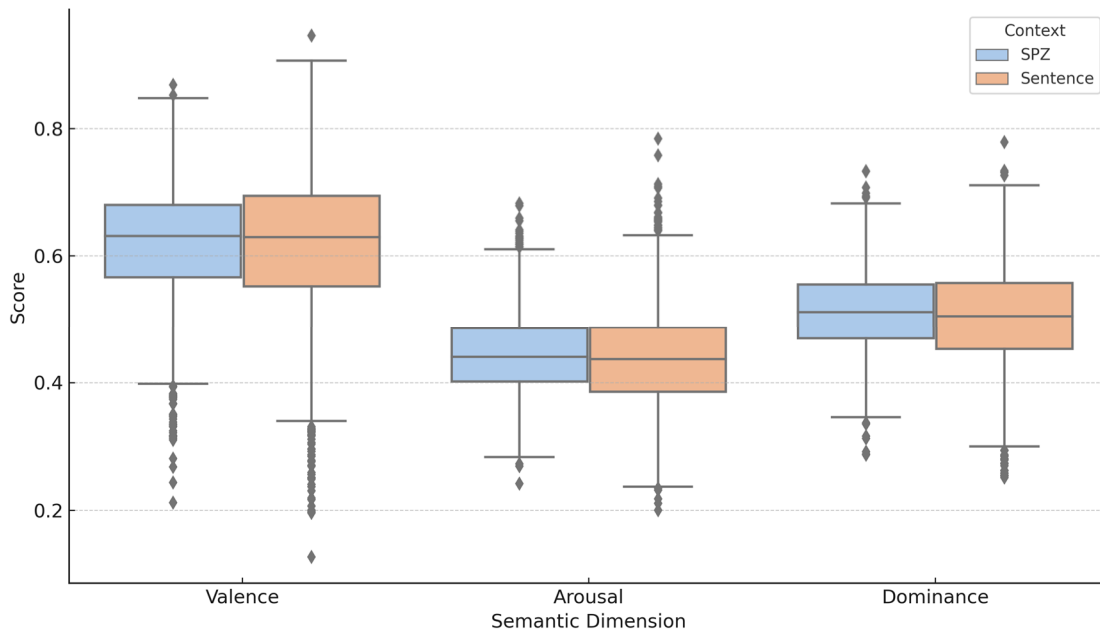Figure 1. Boxplots of valence, arousal, and dominance across context levels (SPZ vs Sentence)
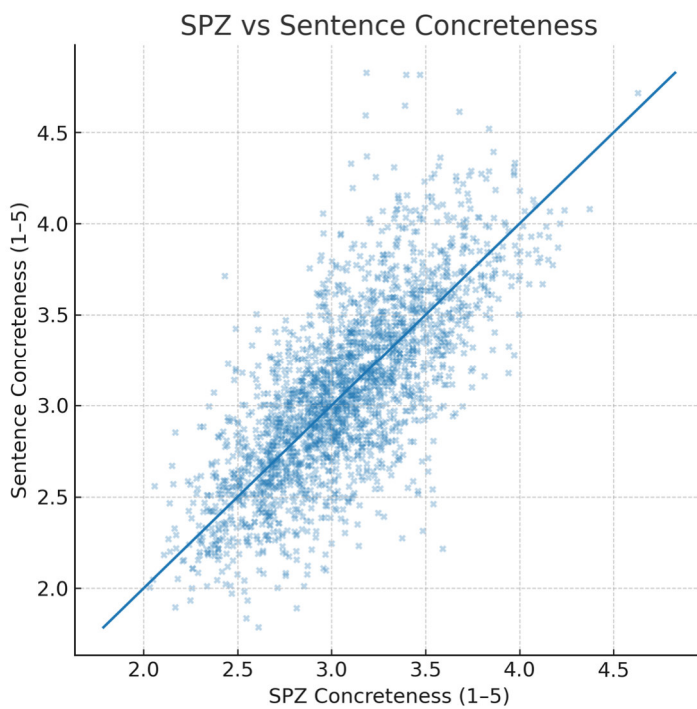

Figure 2. Scatterplot of concreteness showing near-identity of values across contexts

References

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