Detelicization Processes in Idiomatic Constructions: A Cognitive Grammar Approach.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present investigation examines **detelicization processes** in idiomatic constructions denoting excessive actions, across English and Italian, from a **Cognitive Grammar** perspective (Langacker 1987, 1999, 2008, Broccias 2003, 2004).

(1) Harry laughed me out of the office *in/*for ten seconds*
(2) Harry laughed his head off *all day long/*in ten minutes*

(3) Giulio lo ha sganasciato (con un pugno) *in/*per due minuti*
Giulio cl.msg has dis-jaw:pstpart.msg with a punch *in/*for two minutes*
'Giulio broke his jaws by punching him'

(4) Giulio si è sganasciato (dalle risa)
Giulio refl-acc is dis-jaw:pstpart.msg from.fpl laugh.pl
*tutto il giorno/*in due minuti*
all the day/ *in two minutes*
'Giulio laughed his head off'

Shifts from Accomplishments to Activities which show respectively the following properties according to the Vendlerian classification:
(1) and (3) ⟶ **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**: Dynamic, Durative and Resultative.
(2) and (4) ⟶ **ACTIVITIES**: Dynamic, Durative and <u>not</u> Resultative.

These aspectual discrepancies can be motivated by considering **high-level cognitive operations** (Fauconnier 2009) that intervene within the **semantic pole** of the above data allowing an **atelic** interpretation of the event.
- ◆ **Image schemas** (Johnson 1987, Cienki 1997, Hampe 2005)
- ◆ **Conceptual metaphor** (Lakoff 1987, 1992)
- ◆ **Conceptual blending** (Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002)
- ◆ **Trajector/Landmark alignment in complex structures** (Langacker 1987, 2008)

2. ANTECEDENTS

McGinnis (2002, 2005)
- Aspectual classes of idioms **compositionally** determined.
- Mismatches, possibly occurring between literal and non-literal readings, have to be attributed to pragmatic reasons.
- The structural component of Idiomatic VPs is derived directly from the syntax.
- *Eat one's words* ('admit to being wrong') has the aspectual properties of *eat one's vitamins* as a sentence like *eat crow* ('lose one's pride') has the same aspectuality of *eat turkey*.

Glasbey (2003)
- Are theories of aspectual composition like Verkuyl (1989) useful to determine the aspectual class of an idiomatic expression given the properties of the verb, subject NP, object NP, PP, AP?
- Lack of a **gradual patient relation** between the event and the object NP.
- The **thematic relations** are claimed to be **different** in the literal and in the idiomatic interpretations.
(5) *Mary and her friends painted the town red in six hours/*for six hours* (literal)
(6) *Mary and her friends painted the town red *in six hours/for six hours* (idiomatic)
'Mary and her friends had an extravagantly good time in town for six hours'

Espinal & Mateu (2010)
- Relevant counterexamples associated with the so-called class of *fake resultatives* (FR) (Jackendoff 1997) are shown to deny the hypothesis according to which aspectuality cannot be altered in idiomatic contexts.
- FR conceptually associated with activities that are performed in an excessive fashion through the activation of **metaphorical modes of thought** in idiom comprehension. The atelic interpretation is motivated by the metaphor INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION.

3. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. **Language is symbolic in nature.** Any linguistic unit is considered as an association between a semantic pole and a phonological pole (*home:* [[HOME]/[həʊm]])
2. Nominal predication profiles a thing like a region in some domain ([CIRCLE] is the domain for [ARC]). A **relational** predication can be atemporal (e.g. adjectives) or **processual** (e.g. verbs).
3. **Trajector-Landmark alignment.** The **trajector** (tr) is the figure in a relational profile. It is the primary focus. The **landmark** (lm) is the secondary focus of attention.
4. Two or more symbolic structures can be combined to form more **composite structures** both at the semantic pole and at the phonological pole.
5. **Image schemas** (Johnson 1987, Cienki 1997, 1998, Hampe 2005, Oakley 2005) are directly meaningful, experiential and embodied preconceptual structures which arise from human bodily movements (SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, CONTAINMENT AND FORCE)
6. **Conceptual metaphors** provide us with a means of comprehending domains of experience that do not have a preconceptual structure of their own. This structure is mapped from the source domain to the target domain (TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN).
7. **Conceptual blending** is a basic operation that involves a projection of the structure of two input mental spaces into a separate space called *blend*, which is integrated into a single conceptual unit. Conceptual **integration** is also involved in grammatical constructions, like the *Caused Motion Construction* that results from the integration of a force dynamic event with a change event (Broccias 2003).

4. ANALYSIS

A) The aspectual shifts in (1)/(2) and (3)/(4) are explained in the present account by claiming the intervention of high-level cognitive operations
- activated in idiom comprehension
- integrated at the semantic poles of the composite structures

B) The Force Change Schema (Broccias 2003) is used to represent the semantic poles of the data (literal and idiomatic)
- (1)/(3)= TR (true resultatives); (2)/(4)= FR;
- The schema in TR is aimed at encoding a change of location;
- in FR the change of location is the source structure used to express the intensity of the action.
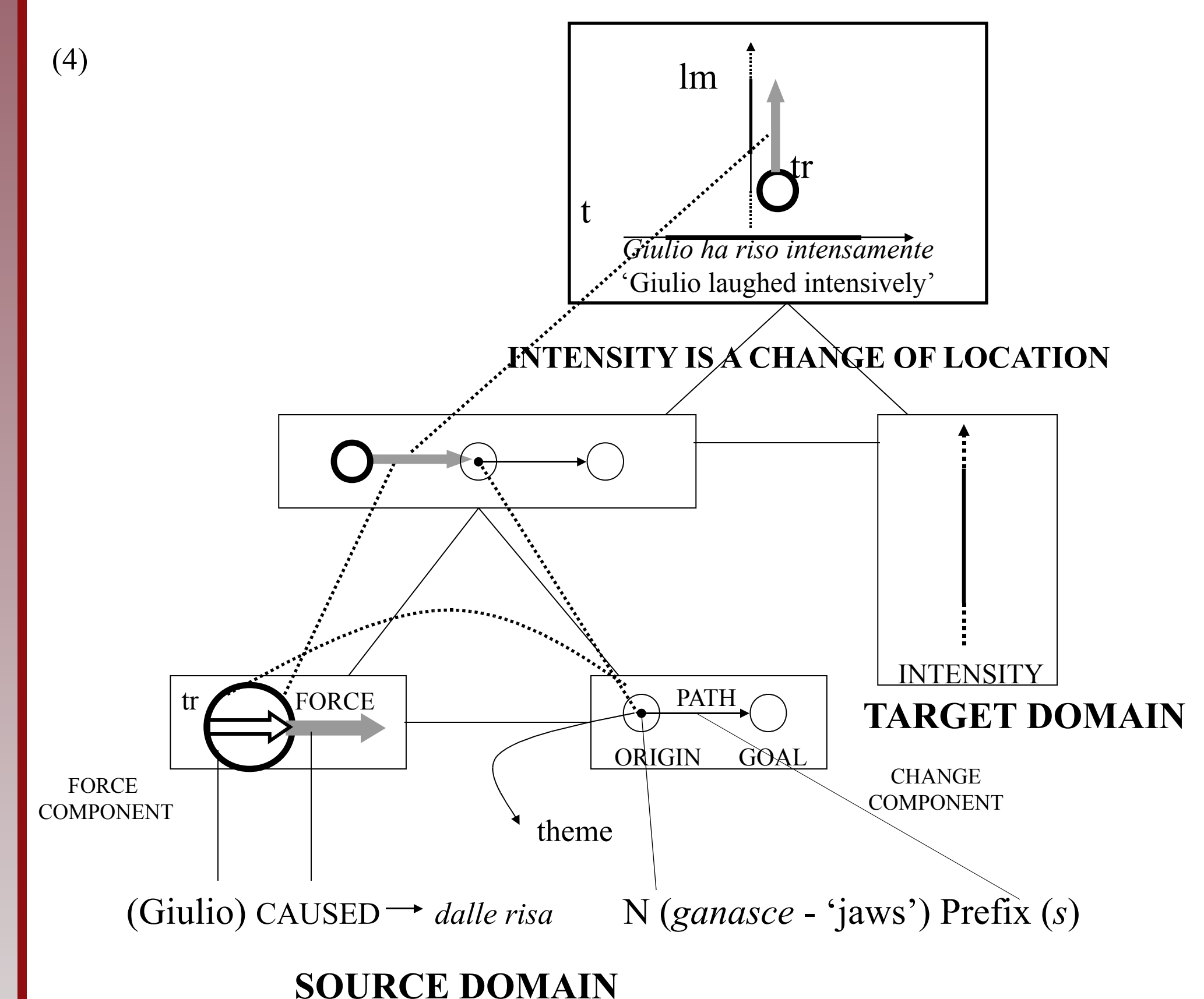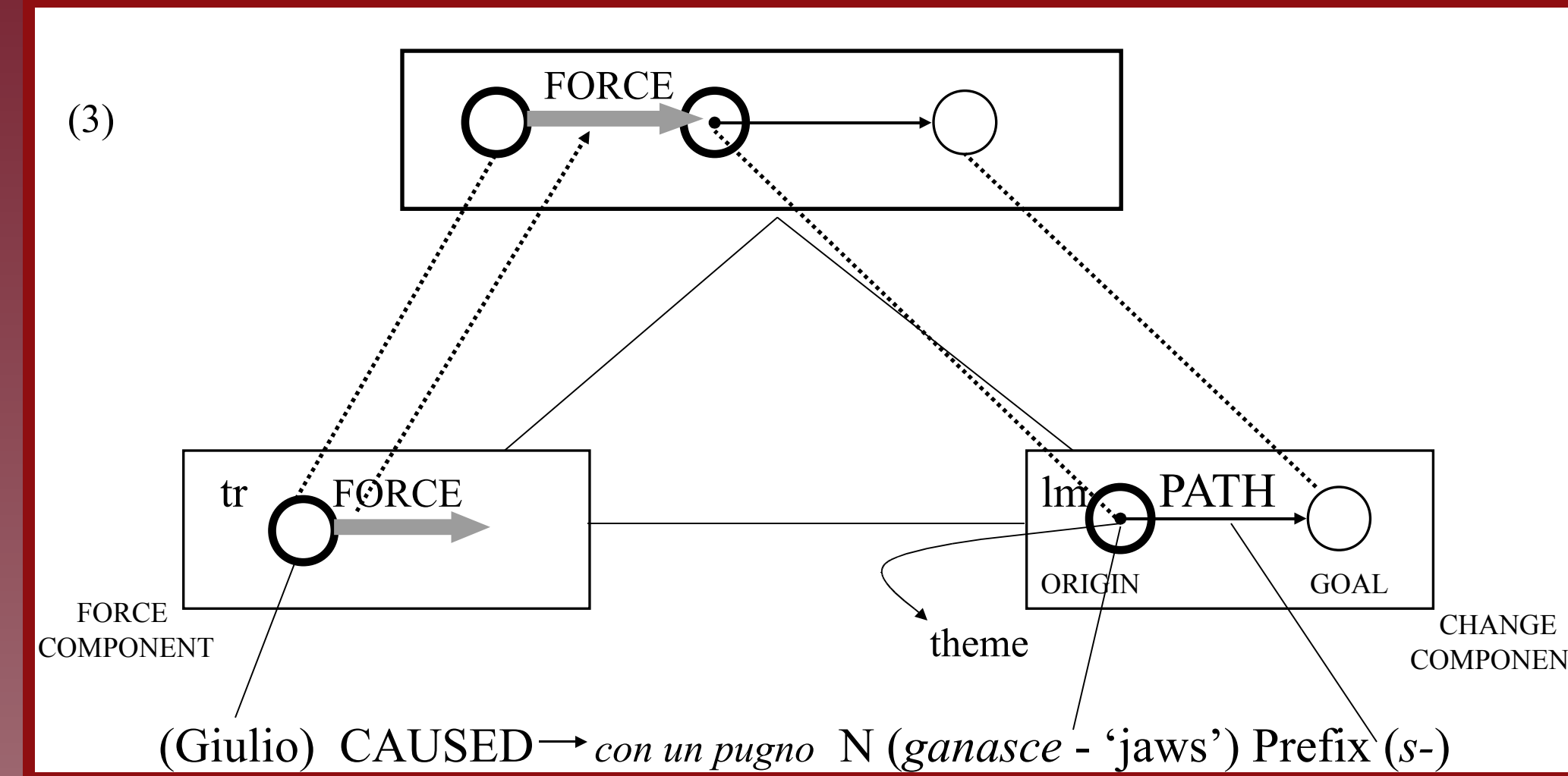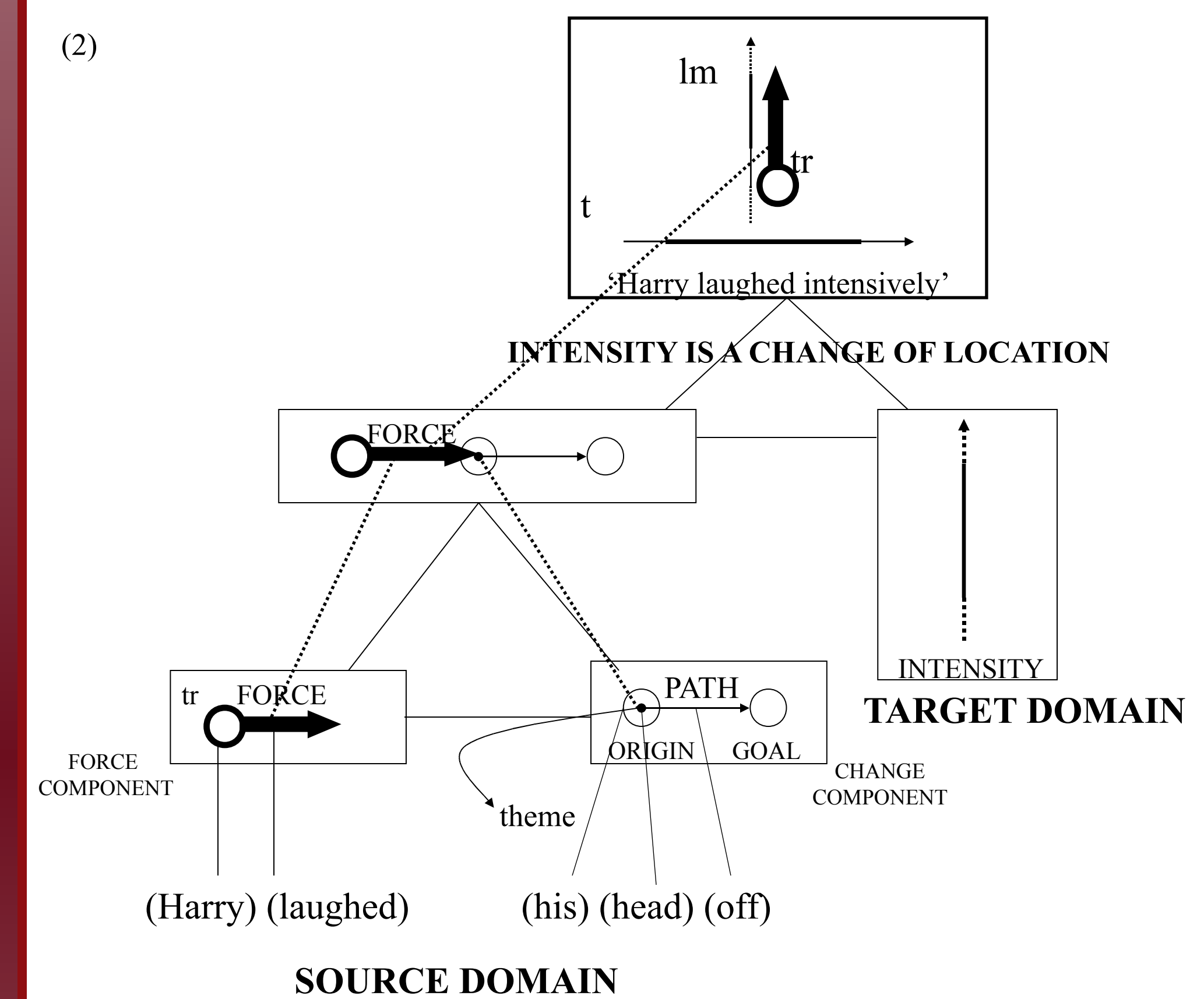
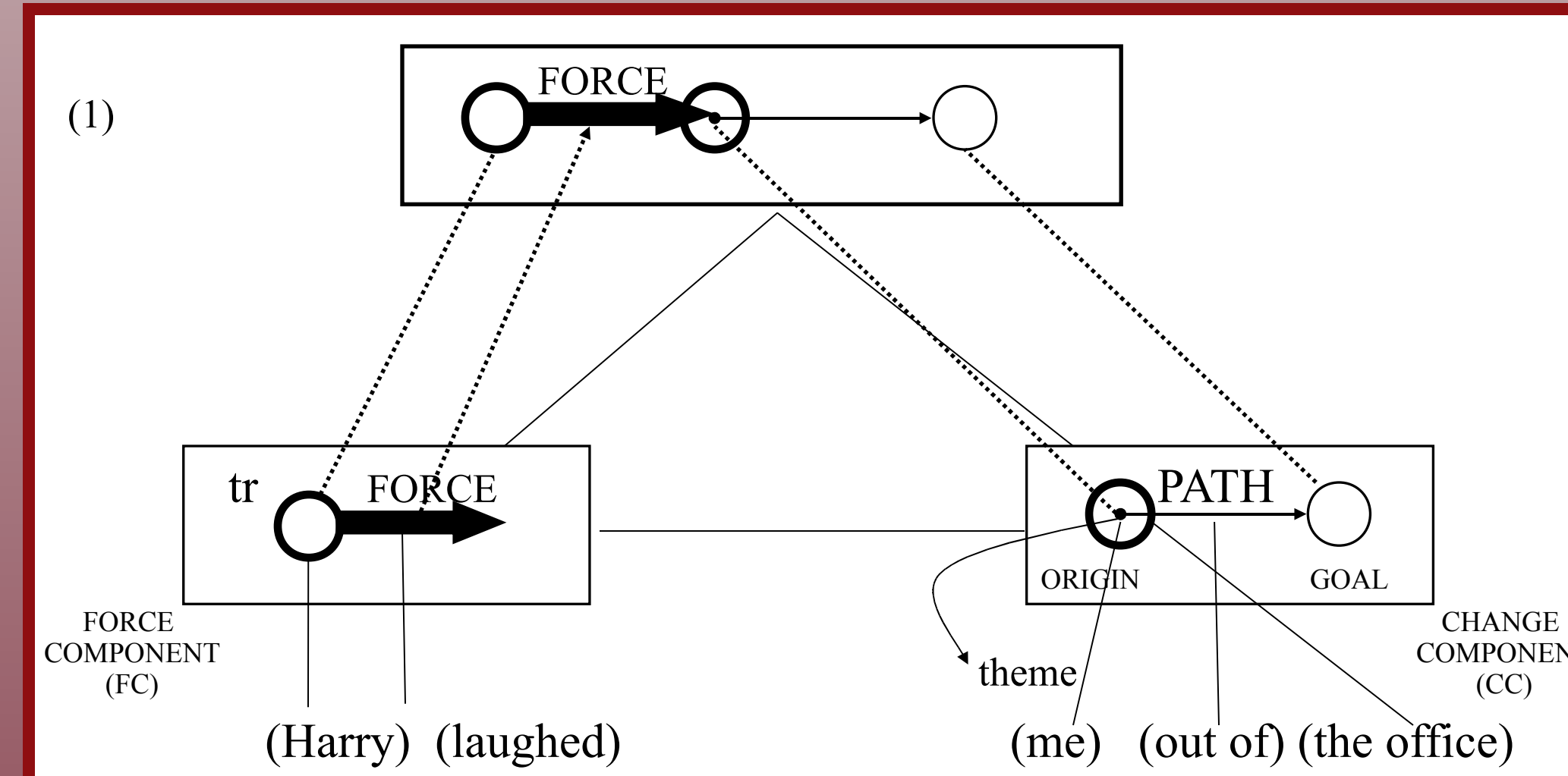**C) Phonological pole of the FCS**
English:
- **NP₁ V NP₂ XP**
- the activity interpreted as intense is encoded in the idiom (V is the productive slot of the construction *work/laugh/cough* one's head off).

Italian:
- Italian: **NP₁ V NP₂ PP** where the resultant state is obtained through a tensed verb and a prepositional phrase encoding the manner by which the resultant state is obtained (Talmy 2000, Broccias 2004);
- the excessive action is not encoded in the idiomatic verbal phrase but occurs as part of a PP adjunct (the CAUSE by which the displacement of the body part occurs). This is represented at the semantic pole of (4) where the causing event in the Force Component is non-specific and could be omitted at the phonological pole (grey arrow is intended to represent the non-specificity of the causing event).

D) Integration
- Literal reading: **one-level integration**
- Idiomatic reading: **two-level integration**
  - ➤ Activation of the metaphor INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION (INTENSITY= target domain; CHANGE OF LOCATION= source domain)
  - ➤ The first integration occurs between the two input components within the SOURCE DOMAIN (as the literal reading)
  - ➤ The second between the blend of the SOURCE DOMAIN and the TARGET DOMAIN

(1)

(Harry) (laughed) (me) (out of) (the office)

(2) 'Harry laughed intensively'
INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION
(Harry) (laughed) (his) (head) (off)
SOURCE DOMAIN

(3)
(Giulio) CAUSED⟶*con un pugno* N (*ganasce* - 'jaws') Prefix (*s-*)

(4)
Giulio ha riso intensamente
'Giulio laughed intensively'
INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION
(Giulio) CAUSED⟶ *dalle risa* N (*ganasce* - 'jaws') Prefix (*s*)
SOURCE DOMAIN

5. DISCUSSION

- **(1): FC** describes the energy flow instantiated by an intransitive V (*laugh*) conceptualized in a forcible fashion. The FORCE causes - at the **CC** - the change of location undergone by an entity (**figure**) from an **origin**, through a **path** (*out of*) towards a **goal**. The origin is in bold since it is specified at the phonological pole (*office*). Even if the goal is not specified the resultant state is given by the path and the origin (*out of the office*). FC and CC are integrated in a **single conceptual unit** (Fauconnier & Turner 1996).

- **(2):** *V one's head off* idiom. **FCS** determines a change of location undergone by a body part (related to the subject) and caused by the force exerted by the **trajector** (*Harry*) through the action exemplified by V (*to laugh*). All of this occurs in the source domain (CHANGE OF LOCATION).
There is another **integration occurring at a second level** where the *blend* of the FCS interacts with the target domain (INTENSITY) conceptualized via the **image-schematic structure for** SCALE (Johnson 1987). The **event** itself (*to laugh*) is characterized as intense assuming, at the final level of integration, the **role of trajector** moving along the open-ended scale of intensity and **profiling no endpoint in the event**. The intensity scale has been claimed to be necessarily associated with an **open scale**.

- **(3)-(4):** the description of the semantic poles of the English minimal pair is also representative of the **Italian data**. Crucially, the displacements (literal and figurative) are expressed by **denominal verbs of removal** of the type FIGURE-verbs (or LOCATUM-verbs). They refer to events of **caused motion**, where the verb stem lexicalizes a FIGURE (in terms of Talmy 2000), namely an object that can be moved from the GROUND expressed as the direct object (von Heusinger & Schwarze 2004). The general structure of denominal verbs provides no specification for the MANNER element and this is related to the lack of specification of the causing event claimed above. The arrow within the trajector denotes the subject as **source and recipient** of the energy exerted in the causing event (reflexive).

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Constructions that are instantiations of accomplishments when interpreted literally **do not necessarily preserve aspectuality** under an idiomatic interpretation.
- **High-level cognitive operations** (metaphors, image schemas, blending) are activated by the speaker in idiom comprehension and can motivate aspectual discrepancies.
- Different structures, according to **typological distinctions** (English - activity expressed by the verb within the idiom which encodes the manner element; Italian - manner element = PP adjunct) involve equivalent cognitive structures.
- Idioms are not intepretive anomalies (Gibbs 1994) but figurative meanings of idioms are motivated by existing **conceptual mappings.**

7. REFERENCES

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