

Detelicization Processes in Idiomatic Constructions: A Cognitive Grammar Approach.

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This paper examines detelicization processes in idiomatic constructions denoting excessive actions, across English and Italian, from a Cognitive Grammar perspective (Langacker 1987, 1999, 2008). Aspectual interpretation in idiomatic constructions has been the focus of interest of differently oriented studies. Recent claims, within the generative framework, have argued that the aspectual classes of idioms can be compositionally determined (McGinnis 2002) and that the mismatches, possibly occurring between literal and non-literal readings, have to be attributed to pragmatic reasons (McGinnis 2005). However, relevant counterexamples have been claimed to deny this hypothesis. On the one hand, Glasbey (2003) explains the aspectual shifts in idiomatic constructions by arguing the lack of a gradual patient relation between the event and the object NP. On the other hand, Espinal & Mateu (2010) propose a conceptual motivation for the non-compositionality of aspect in idiomatic contexts.

In this piece of research, I deal with the foregoing problem by focusing on two main issues. First, I propose an analysis of idioms and the different systematic patterns they follow in the figurative construction of the excessive meaning due to distinctions between Germanic and Romance languages (Talmy 2000). Second, I argue that the aspectual shifts can be motivated by considering an embodied network of high-level cognitive operations which are integrated at the semantic pole of idiomatic constructions. The typical non-idiomatic/idiomatic minimal pairs analyzed, according to the standard tests for telicity (Vendler 1967), are the following:

English

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|--|----------------------|
| (1) Harry laughed me out of the office <i>in/*for ten seconds</i> | <i>Non-idiomatic</i> |
| (2) Harry laughed his head off <i>all day long/*in ten minutes</i> | <i>Idiomatic</i> |

Italian

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| (3) Giulio lo ha sganasciato con un pugno
Giulio cl.msg has dis-jaw:pstpart.msg with a punch
<i>in/*per due minuti</i>
<i>in/*for two minutes</i>
'Giulio broke his jaws by punching him in two minutes' | <i>Non-idiomatic</i> |
| (4) Giulio si è sganasciato (dalle risa)
Giulio refl-acc is dis-jaw:pstpart.msg (from.fpl laugh.pl)
<i>tutto il giorno/*in due minuti</i>
<i>all the day/*in two minutes</i>
'Giulio laughed his head off all day long' | <i>Idiomatic</i> |

In the present account, I assume non-idiomatic sentences as true resultatives (TR) – sentences whose aspect is telic – and idiomatic sentences as fake resultative (FR) (Jackendoff 1997), since they are conceptually associated to atelic readings and intense (durative) activities. Both TR and FR are claimed to involve the so-called Force Change Schema (Broccias 2003) which results from the integration of a Force Component (FC) with a Change Component (CC) in a single conceptual unit (the *blend* in terms of Fauconnier & Turner 1996).

In the literal readings, the FC causes a change of location (ORIGIN-PATH-GOAL) undergone by an entity (theme). The idiomatic constructions in (2) and (4) involve the activation of the metaphor INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION (Espinal & Mateu 2010), where the CHANGE OF LOCATION undergone by a part of the body is the vehicle to express and comprehend the less concrete target domain (INTENSITY), allowing the speaker to interpret the intense activity at the final level of idiom processing. Crucially, a two-level integration occurs at the semantic pole of idioms, since the *blend* of the Force Change Schema interacts with the target domain conceptualized via the image-schematic structure for SCALE (Johnson 1987). At this point, I claim that the action itself is

conceptualized as intense assuming, at the final level of integration, the role of trajector moving along the scale of intensity (necessarily associated with an open-ended scale (Espinal & Mateu 2010)) and involving no real endpoint in the event. I finally argue that these integrated dimensions of cognition are crucial (i) to characterize the different types of events and (ii) to establish a conceptual consistency in cross-linguistic phenomena related to event processing.

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