Detelicization Processes in Idiomatic Constructions: A Cognitive Grammar Approach*

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In this paper, we deal with aspectual shifts in idiomatic constructions from a Cognitive Grammar perspective (Langacker 1987, 2008). Idioms have been claimed to preserve the aspectual interpretation when showing the same structure as their literal counterparts (McGinnis 2002). Recent studies have provided relevant counterexamples in which the aspectual class in idiomatic contexts undergoes a shift from the literal reading (Espinal & Mateu 2010) and have pointed out how the durative activities can be explained in terms of metaphorical modes of thought activated in idiom processing. In the present investigation, we propose a dynamic approach to aspect in idiomatic contexts as an interaction of high-level cognitive operations (Fauconnier 2009) that are claimed to be involved in the figurative meaning construction and in the conceptual interpretation of aspect. We deal with two main patterns of intensive meaning construction: English *V one's* BODY PART *out/off* idioms and Italian Denominal Verbs of Removal (DVRs) idioms.

Keywords: *aspectual shifts, blending, cognitive grammar, idiomatic constructions, metaphor*

1 Introduction

Lexical aspectual interpretation of 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 and that the mismatches, possibly occurring between literal and non-literal readings of verbal constructions, have to be attributed to pragmatic or accidental reasons (McGinnis 2002, 2005). A number of examples pointed out in these studies show that the aspectual class of an idiomatic expression can be determined following the properties of the syntactic components, demonstrating indeed the compatibility between identical structures that involve different interpretation.

In this paper, we provide an analysis of (lexical) aspectual shifts occurring in idiomatic contexts from a Cognitive Grammar (CG) perspective (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008, 2009, Broccias 2003). In particular, we deal with relevant counterexamples, across English and Italian, which can be claimed to refute the hypothesis of aspectual composition.

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LITERAL

(1) *John laughed me out of the office.* (English)

(2) *Gianni lo ha sganasciato (con un pugno)* (Italian)
Gianni CL.ACC has dis-jaw-PASTPART.MSG with a punch
'Gianni broke his jaws by punching him.'

IDIOMATIC

(3) *John laughed his head off.* (English)

(4) *Gianni si è sganasciato (dalle risate).* (Italian)
Gianni CL.REFL is dis-jaw-PAST.PART.MSG from-FPL laughters
'Gianni laughed his head off.'

In order to account for the detelicization processes implying a shift from the accomplishments in (1) and (2) to the activities in (3) and (4) (in terms of Vendler 1967, see Section 4), we propose a network of high-level cognitive operations (Fauconnier 2009) that intervene in idiomatic interpretation and are integrated at the semantic poles of non-literal constructions. Furthermore, these high-order cognitive processes are argued to give rise to varying degrees of relevance according to whether the sentence is interpreted figuratively or literally (providing access to two or more conceptual domains). These claims will allow us to address the two main questions of the paper: (i) can we determine the aspectual properties of idiomatic constructions according to the same principles we would use for non-idiomatic ones? (ii) To what extent can the gradable activation of high-level cognitive operations be claimed to represent a kind of consistency for the explanation of grammatical phenomena in cross-linguistic perspective?

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we provide an overview of previous accounts of the phenomenon in order to point out their limits and highlight some parts that can be used as a point of departure in the present study. In section 3 we introduce the theoretical framework of CG, whose main tenets are followed in the present analysis. In section 4 we introduce the notion of (lexical) aspect followed in the investigation and in section 5 we provide an analysis of the data by describing the main patterns in the languages of interest and the grammatical phenomenon of aspectual shifts in idiomatic constructions. In section 6 we describe the proposal by taking into account the main high-level cognitive operations involved in the conceptual interpretation of aspect and the related detelicization processes, before providing a conclusion and further points to be developed in future research in section 7.

2 Previous Accounts

Three previous and differently oriented accounts of aspectuality in idiomatic contexts are fundamental for the purposes of the present paper: McGinnis (2002, 2005), Glasbey (2003, 2007) and Espinal & Mateu (2010).

McGinnis (2002, 2005) argues that the aspectual interpretation of idioms is completely systematic and that the aspectual properties of an idiom are fully compositional since they combine the properties of its syntactic constituents. The claim that aspect is defined in the same way in non-idiomatic and idiomatic readings of

equivalent structures is theoretically influenced by the main tenets of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993) according to which structural components of meaning are assembled and manipulated by the syntax and idiosyncratic components are added post-syntactically as part of the encyclopedia. As can be seen in (5) and (6), syntactic derivation has consequences for idiomatic aspectuality, in the sense that an idiom like *kick the bucket*, would have the same aspectual properties as a VP plus a definite complement. In more detail, Marantz (1997), from which (5) and (6) are adapted, argues that *kick the bucket* "carries the semantic implications of a transitive verb phrase with a definite direct object" and that under an idiomatic reading "is aspectually similar to *pass away* whereas *die* is more like *jump* or, perhaps, *fall*". From both the analyses of McGinnis (2002) and Marantz (1997), however, the aspectual properties that they attribute to *kick the bucket* are not entirely clear and the use of the progressive to highlight the differences between the two verbs is misleading.[1]

(5) *Hermione was dying for weeks.*

(6) **Hermione was kicking the bucket for three weeks.*

(McGinnis 2002, 212)

The VP in this analysis is characterized by a compositional structural meaning and a non-compositional idiosyncratic meaning. The former will have the same aspectual properties as any VP with the same syntactic properties.

The hypotheses provided by McGinnis may be true as far as certain classes of idioms are concerned, but relevant counterexamples can also be found. Glasbey (2003, 2007) calls into question theories of aspectual composition like Verkuyl (1989) and methods to determine the aspectual class of an idiomatic expression given the properties of verb, subject NP, object NP, PP, AP and so on.

(7) *Mary and her friends painted the town red in six hours/*for six hours.*

(8) *Mary and her friends painted the town red for six hours/*in six hours.*[2]

(9) *Mary took her pigs to market in two hours/*for two hours.*

(10) *Mary took her pigs to market for two hours/*in two hours.*[3]

(Glasbey 2003)

The discrepancies in aspectual interpretation between the literal readings in (7) and (9) and the idiomatic readings in (8) and (10) are due in Glasbey's approach to the different thematic relations involved. In particular, in the idiomatic readings (associated to activities) a lack of gradual patient relation between the event and the object NP is claimed since there is no point at which the event is partially or completely accomplished.

[1] As pointed out by the reviewer in (5) and (6) there is an overlap of verbal aspect and lexical aspect. If only event structure is considered, neither *Hermione died for weeks nor *Hermione kicked the bucket for weeks would be acceptable.

[2] Under an idiomatic reading *paint the town red* = 'to have an extravagantly good time in town.'

[3] *Take pigs to the market* = 'to snore.'

Espinal & Mateu (2010) show that metaphorical modes of thought can be provided as an explanation for the changes in aspectual interpretation by analyzing examples that can be associated with the class of fake resultatives (Jackendoff 1997).

(11) *John laughed his butt off all day long/*in ten minutes.*

(12) *John worked his guts out all day long/*in ten minutes.*

In (11) e (12), the idiomatic sentences are associated to atelic readings and involve durative activities which are motivated by the activation of the conceptual metaphor INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION in idiom comprehension, contrary to what occurs in true resultatives, having literal meaning and involving a telic reading.

(13) *The audience laughed the actor off the stage in/*for ten seconds.*

(14) *She worked the splinter out of her finger in/*for ten seconds.*

(Mateu & Espinal in press)

According to Goldberg (1995), resultative constructions are metaphorical extensions (via the activation of the metaphor A CHANGE OF STATE IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION) of the caused-motion construction. Mateu & Espinal (in press) argue that, in these cases, the *telos* (the final goal) is mapped from the source domain of caused-motion constructions to the target domain of resultative constructions, fulfilling the conditions of the Invariance Principle (Lakoff 1993).The same is not true in (11) and (12), where the Invariance Principle appears to be violated (Mateu & Espinal in press).

We acknowledge the role of the conceptual metaphor in the definition of aspect in idiomatic contexts but at the same time we claim that it is insufficient to account for the cognitive modes of thought involved in meaning construction. In the following sections, we will further analyze the SOURCE-TO-TARGET mappings by means of blending operations.

3 Theoretical Framework

The present analysis draws on the main assumptions of Cognitive Grammar (CG) as developed in Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008) and further extended in Broccias (2003, 2004, 2006). Other theoretical assumptions within the Cognitive Linguistics/Semantics framework, such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, 1992), Image Schemas (Johnson 1987, Cienki 1997, 1998) and Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002) are also applied to the analysis and are fundamental for the cognitive account of lexical aspect in idiomatic contexts proposed in the investigation. We introduce the main tenets of CG in this section while the other notions will be described in more depth as the proposal will be developed. CG is a model which proposes a view of grammar as a structured inventory of conventional linguistic units (Langacker 1987, 57). Any linguistic unit is defined as an association between a semantic

pole and a phonological pole. In each linguistic unit, the two structures are interconnected by symbolic links and they are accessed in a unitary fashion.[4]

All familiar expressions conventionally used in a language are part of the lexicon[5] and are organized among them by very basic cognitive phenomena such as association, automatization, schematization and categorization. Since language is dependent on these phenomena, it is considered as an integral part of human cognition. CG also argues that grammar embodies imagery. Imagery is involved in any linguistic expression since, for the purposes of the expression itself, the scene is structured in a particular way according to which certain aspects are made more salient with respect to others. The same event can be construed differently depending on the part emphasized. The construction of meaning is therefore dependent on conceptualization that in turn involves imaginative abilities like metaphors, metonymies and blending.

One of the most relevant tenets of CG – fundamental for the purposes of the schemas advanced in the following sections – is the notion of trajector/landmark alignment. In a relational predication, the trajector (tr) is the primary focus of attention while the landmark (lm) is the secondary focus. Although the asymmetry between the two entities motivates the universal subject/object distinction, its application is far more general given the fact the trajector/landmark alignment broadly concerns the internal structure of relational predications at any level of organization (Langacker 1987, 231-232). Trajector and landmark are not defined in terms of semantic or conceptual content and they can refer to any cognitive domain.

(15) *The lamp is above the table.*

(16) *The other guests all left before we arrived.*

(Langacker 2008, 71-72)

In (15), *above* instantiates a relation of spatial location between *the lamp* (the trajector) and *the table* (the landmark). In (16), the event of leaving (*the other guest all left*) is the processual trajector with respect to the processual landmark of the event of arriving (*we arrived*). Strictly connected to the trajector/alignment issue is the distinction between nominal and relational predications. Any linguistic expression profiles a thing or a relationship. In the former case, a nominal predication is involved. In the latter, we have a relational predication. Furthermore, relationships can be either processual or non-processual. A processual relationship (or more simply a process) involves a positive

[4] A linguistic item like *moon* is seen in CG as made up of the semantic pole [MOON] which stands for the complex conceptualization of the unit (Langacker 2008, 15) and the phonological pole [mu:n]. The correspondence between the two poles is represented by a slash which separates the two poles, rendered orthographically uppercase and lowercase, respectively. A fundamental claim in CG is that complex structures are formed out of simpler ones. Lower-level and higher-level structures constitute a symbolic assembly that depending on its complexity will be more or less analyzable. The single units are divided by a hyphen.

[MOON]/[moon]
[[[MOON]/[moon]]-[[LESS]/[less]]]
[[[[MOON]/[moon]]-[[LESS]/[less]]]-[[NIGHT]/[night]]]

(Langacker 2008, 16)

[5] The notion of lexicon in CG is far different from the definition given in Generative Grammar according to which lexical entries constitute the full set of the irregularities of the language (Chomsky 1965) and are separated from rule-based grammar.

temporal profile and this is the case for verbs (indicated by the heavy line, cf. Figure 1). Non-processual relationships involve a single configuration through time and correspond to adjectives or prepositions. Processes and non-processual relationships are also different in terms of the type of mental scanning involved. Scanning is another general cognitive ability claimed in CG and refers to the conceptualization of the scene involved in the profiled relationship. When a complex scene is scanned, various parts of the event are accessed either by summing or superimposing them. These two ways of conceptualization correspond to the two modes of event scanning advanced in CG: sequential and summary scanning (Langacker 1987, 248-249; 2008, 82-83).

Processes are characterized by sequential scanning when apprehended as a continuous series of transformations constituting the evolution of a complex scene (e.g. *to enter)*. Non-processual relationships involve summary scanning which is an additive way of scanning an event, since in a single configuration all the facets of the relation are available at the same time (e.g. *into*).

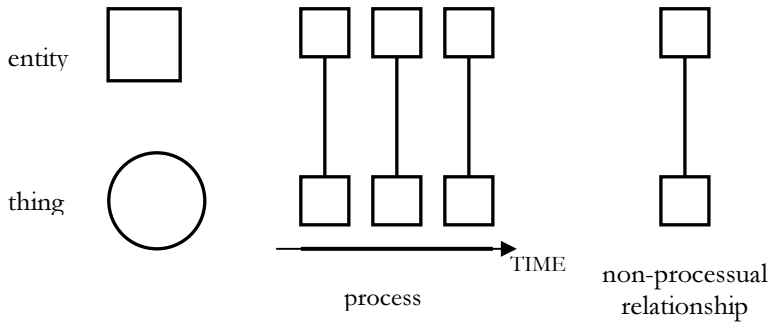

Figure 1. Schematic representations in CG.

The diagrams in Figure 1 depict how the semantic poles of the grammatical classes – described above - and the relationships between them look like. These are recurrent notational devices in CG and are employed to represent lower and higher-level constructions. The notion of construction within CG has received increasing attention in the latest developments of the theory (Langacker 2008, 183). Constructions are, in particular, defined as composite structures resulting from the integration of lower-level component structures both at the semantic and at the phonological pole (see above in footnote 1 the compositional path of the composite structure for *moonless night*). The structural composition of assemblies can be either specific or schematic: specific assemblies constitute linguistic expressions whereas more schematic assemblies correspond to constructional schemas, namely conventionally established patterns which provide a sort of guides to combine symbolic assemblies. The compositional path followed by component structures to form composite expressions is determined by correspondences (or overlaps) between entities at different levels of the structures. In the diagrams correspondences are represented by dotted lines which connect entities at different levels of representation.

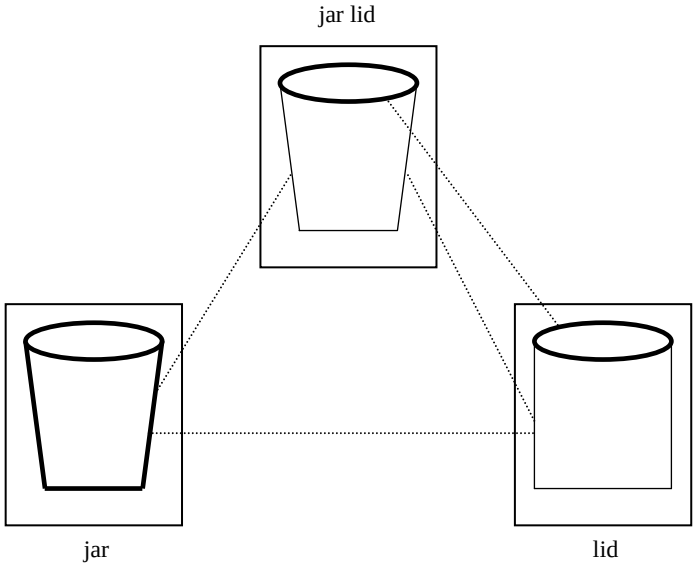

Figure 2. Composition of *jar lid* (adapted from Langacker 2008, 164)

The interaction of cognitive processes at the semantic pole of idiomatic constructions, whose intervention is claimed to be one possible explanation for the detelicization processes, will be represented by the combination of the above theoretical assumptions and notational devices.

4 On Aspect

In the field of Cognitive Linguistics, particular attention has been devoted to grammatical aspect and mental representations (Bergen & Wheeler 2010, Madden & Zwaan 2003). Additionally, accounts focusing on the conceptualization of the internal structure of events have been recently provided (Becker et al. 2011). However, a dynamic approach to aspect in idiomatic contexts as an interaction of high-level cognitive operations (Fauconnier 2009) has been insufficiently addressed, especially in a contrastive manner. The analysis presented here is essentially focused on the lexical aspect of different classes of predicates. Even though the strategies of regulating such complex aspectual combinations and predict their semantic implications have resulted in a huge variety of theories and reformulations of the conceptual properties to be attributed to the single classes (cf. Comrie 1976, Dowty 1979, Dahl 1985, Michaelis 2004, Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998, Croft in press), we assume as a starting point Vendler's well-known classification (Vendler 1967) into four different categories of lexical aspect.

a. States: *be sick* [stative, durative, atelic]
b. Activities: *sing, run* [non-stative, durative, atelic]
c. Achievements: *reach* [non-stative, punctual, telic]
d. Accomplishments: *build* [non-stative, durative, telic]

Generally speaking, these classes are defined according to three binary distinctions: stative/non-stative, punctual/durative, telic/atelic. The present analysis is concerned with detelicization processes, namely aspectual shifts from a telic to an atelic interpretation of

a predicate when an idiomatic expression has the same syntactic structure, or at least the same verb phrase, as a non-idiomatic counterpart. In particular, states describe situations that are conceptualized as both stative and durative since they do not change and last over time. Activities describe both dynamic events and processes and involve a change over time. Additionally they do not have an inherent endpoint. Processes are also instantiated by the Achievement class which also provide a culmination of the event in a exact point in time (punctual events).

Accomplishments involve a process resulting in a change of state that lasts in time. The typical diagnostic procedure to define the aspectual class of a verb is the temporal modification with *in*-phrases and *for*-phrases (Vendler 1967), more recently labeled in Croft (in press) as the container and durative adverbials (Croft in press). They are commonly used to distinguish between telic and atelic events, indicate respectively the length and the span of time over which the event occurred. These diagnostics will provide the analysis with a preliminary assessment of the aspectual properties concerning the data whose patterns are described in the next section.

	Telic/Atelic	*in* PPs	*For* PPs
States	ATELIC	No	Yes
Activities	ATELIC	No	Yes
Accomplishments	TELIC	Yes	No
Achievements	TELIC	Yes	No

Table 1. Telicity vs. Atelicity in lexical aspectual classes

5 Aspectual Shifts In Idiomatic Constructions

We provide an analysis of English and Italian idiomatic constructions denoting excessive actions by means of a figurative displacement or breaking of a body part, in order to show how some classes of idioms may involve an aspectual shift with respect to a literal reading of a VP.

LITERAL

(17) *John laughed me out of the office in ten seconds/*for then seconds.* (English)

(18) *Gianni lo ha sganasciato (con un pugno)* (Italian)
Gianni CL.ACC has dis-jaw-PAST.PART.MSG with a punch
*in due minuti / *per due minuti.*
in two minutes/ *for two minutes
'Gianni broke his jaws by punching him *in two minutes.*'

IDIOMATIC

(19) *John laughed his head off for ten minutes/*in ten minutes.* (English)

(20) *Gianni si è sganasciato (dalle risate)* (Italian)
Gianni CL.REFL is dis-jaw-PAST.PART.MSG from.FPL laughters
*tutto il giorno / *in due minuti.*
all the day / *in two minutes
'Gianni laughed his head off *all day long*.'

In (17) and (18), as demonstrated by the compatibility with the container adverbial, the literal events have the aspectual properties of an accomplishment. The same modification is not appropriate in (19) and (20) where the idiomatic events can be characterized as durative (intensive) activities and are fine with the durative adverbial. The problem is twofold and can be summarized by the following questions: (i) how can we explain the change in aspectual interpretation from the literal reading to the idiomatic reading? (ii) how can we motivate the systematic correlation (in the two languages of interest) between the intensive action denoted by the idiomatic interpretation and the change of location undergone by a body part expressed in the linguistic structure?

We will propose that the discrepancies related to the aspectual properties can be accounted for by considering the cognitive operations involved in the conceptual interpretation of aspect and that the idiomatic reading entails the excessiveness of the action because of the activation of two domains of experience. The result will be a two-level integration model: at the first level, the integration will affect the two sentence components giving rise to the single conceptual unit *John laughed his head off* (as in the literal construction *John laughed me out of the office*); at the second level, the integration will affect the two domains of experience implicated via metaphorical activation. For the time being, we want to focus on the idiomatic data and the systematic patterns they follow in the construction of the intensive meaning.

In the English pattern *V one's* BODY PART *out/off* (for other accounts of this class of idioms see Jackendoff 1997, Mateu & Espinal 2007, in press, Espinal & Mateu 2010), four elements are part of the idiomatic structure: an intransitive verb construed in a forcible fashion, a possessive determiner coreferential with the subject, the body part which undergoes the figurative displacement and the directional particle. Crucially, the verb is conflated with the supporting event and expresses the action that at the final level of idiomatic interpretation can be characterized as excessive. The Italian pattern contains systematically a denominal verb of removal (DVR) whose verb stem is formed by a deprivative prefix and the name of the body part figuratively displaced. Interestingly enough, contrary to what happens in English, the supporting event, namely the action that is interpreted as excessive, is not part of the idiomatic structure but it is expressed as an optional adjunct. This is consistent with the predictions claimed in the distinction between satellite-framed and verb-framed languages (Talmy 2000) according to which languages of the former type (Germanic, generally Indo-European except Romance) lexicalize motion events by expressing the directional path as an adjunct (satellite) and the supporting event as conflated within the verb root; the latter (among the others Romance, Polynesian, Semitic) express the path[6] as lexicalized within the verb root and the supporting event as an adjunct.

[6] In terms of Talmy's typology (1985, 2000) the prefix of a denominal verb would be considered as a satellite. In fact, verbal prefixes in Romance have been proposed as a counterexample to Talmy's generalization. Other studies have shown that some types of prefixed verbs correspond to a weak satellite-framed pattern (Acedo-Matellàn and Mateu 2010). However The crucial thing of

While DVRs have received much attention from formal semantic (Kiparsky 1997) and morphological (von Heusinger & Schwarze 2006) perspectives, less has been said on their idiomatic use. In order to account for the behaviour of DVRs in idiomatic contexts, I resort to the analysis of von Heusinger & Schwarze (2006). They propose a distinction of DVRs depending on the nature of the nominal base and, in particular, drawing on the notion of FIGURE and GROUND (in terms of Talmy 1985) they establish the following subtypes: FIGURE verbs (*sbucciare* 'to peel' > *buccia* 'peel') and GROUND -verbs (*sbarcare* 'to disembark'> *barca* 'boat'). In the former, the verb stem encodes the FIGURE, namely an entity that is moved or located with respect to the GROUND, expressed as the direct object. In the latter, the verb stem lexicalizes the GROUND, that is the fixed entity from which the FIGURE – in turn expressed as the direct object – is moved. I argue that idiomatic DVRs are mainly associated with FIGURE -verbs, and this is consistent with the claim that, generally speaking, denominal verbs are of this type (Kiparsky 1997). In the present analysis, I point out a nontrivial difference between literal and idiomatic DVRs: although the root is derived from the same nominal base, literal DVRs are causative transitive verbs whereas idiomatic DVRs are almost exclusively causative reflexive verbs. This implies that (as concerns FIGURE -verbs) they will assume the following dissimilar configurations:

(21) LITERAL DVRs (e.g. *sviscerare* 'to gut'): $[s\text{-}[\text{FIGURE}]_N]_V$

(22) IDIOMATIC DVRs (e.g. *sviscerarsi (in lodi)* 'to bestow praise'):
$[s\text{-}[\text{FIGURE}]_N\ [\text{GROUND}]_{CL}]_V$

The structure in (22) consists of the prefix *s-* which has a negative/deprivative meaning, the verb root derived from the nominal base and the clitic *–si*. The clitic has a reflexive interpretation and is coreferential with the subject (as the possessive determiner in English pattern). In fact, in reflexive constructions (direct reflexive) have be claimed to involve two participants which denotatively coincide (Masini, in press). Since the nominal base has the role of FIGURE, the *–si* element corresponds to the GROUND. Hence, I claim that the subject of idiomatic DVRs has a complex twofold role: it is the experiencer and, given the systematic coincidence with the clitic, it is also the fixed entity from which the removal occurs.

(23) *Gianni si è scervellato per capire cosa non andava.*
Gianni CL.REFL is dis-brain-PAST.PART.MSG to understand what not go-PAST
'Gianni racked his brain to understand what was wrong.'

The patterns in the two languages represent a productive procedure of constructing excessive meaning. In fact, many occurrences demonstrate the different ways of structuring the displacement/removal of a body part (in (33) the removal involves a part that blocks the body) according to the previous considerations taken into account.

DVRs in the examples provided is that the supporting event is expressed as an adjunct outside the idiomatic structure.

(24) *to laugh one's head off* (English)
'to laugh intensively.'

(25) *to cry one's eyes out*
'to cry intensively.'

(26) *to cough one's lungs out*
'to cough intensively.'

(27) *to work one's butt off*
'to work intensively.'

(28) *to sing one's heart out*
'to sing intensively.'

(29) *sganasciarsi* (Italian)
to dis-jaw-REFL
'to laugh one's head off.'

(30) *sbellicarsi*
to dis-bowel-REFL
'to laugh one's head off.'

(31) *scervellarsi*
to dis-brain-REFL
'to think/concentrate intensively.'

(32) *sviscerarsi*
to dis-gut-REFL
'to bestow intensive praise.'

(33) *scatenarsi*
to dis-chain-REFL
'to do something in an intensive fashion.'

6 Analysis

With the aim of proving that aspectual discrepancies can be motivated by considering high-level cognitive operations that intervene and are integrated at the semantic pole of idiomatic constructions, we resort to the following theoretical tools:

i. conceptual metaphor:[7] INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION (Espinal & Mateu 2010) (see section 2)

[7] It is crucial to remind that, in Cognitive Linguistics, conceptual metaphor refers to the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is known as the source domain. The conceptual domain that is understood in this way is the target domain. Thus the source

ii. Force Change Schema (FCS) (Broccias 2003)
iii. image schema SCALE (Johnson 1987)
iv. trajector/landmark alignment in complex structures (Langacker 1987, 2008)

The data provided in (17) and (18) – associated with literal readings – can be claimed to be true resultatives. We have already seen that examples such as (19) and (20) have been defined as fake resultatives since they are conceptually associated with atelic readings and there is no semantic relation between the V and the NP. More precisely, there is no semantic constraint of patienthood over the NP (Goldberg 1995, 99-100).

The FCS has been claimed to represent the semantic pole of transitive resultative constructions (Broccias 2003, 52) as in the following examples:

(34) *John hammered the metal flat.*

(35) *Sally danced herself to fame.*[8]

The FCS is a composite structure which results from the integration (in terms of Fauconnier & Turner 1996) of a force component (FC) and a change component (CC). In a sentence like the one reported in (17) *John laughed me out of the office*, *John laughed me* would be the part related to the force component whereas *(me) out of the office* would be the change component. The V is an intransitive verb that is construed here in a forcible fashion and can be considered as the skewing element of the construction (Langacker 2009). Skewing is nothing other than a discrepancy between a verb's meaning and the composite meaning of an expression it appears in (Langacker 2009, 256). There are special cases in which the skewing element is the construction itself.

In all the schemas proposed below, a bottom-up reading is implied as analytical order. However, we claim that the semantic interpretation of the structures occurs as a whole and in a very automatic fashion. The schema in Figure 3 represents how the FCS looks like and captures the semantics of the true resultative construction of the English literal reading provided in sentence (17). The FCS is a variant of the billiard-ball model (Langacker 2008, 103) whose grammatical realization is the typical transitive clause. At the FC, the trajector *John* exerts the force instantiated by the verb *to laugh* (an intransitive verb used transitively in the construction) over the landmark *me*. The two entities[9] are represented with the notational device for a thing (see section 3). At the CC, the force causes the displacement of the element that corresponds to the landmark from an origin to a goal. The path *out* is instantiated by an arrow. The entities that are not in bold are not specified in the linguistic structure. In this sense, even if *out of the office* could be considered as the resultant state, no specific entity representing the goal is expressed in the sentence. The dotted lines indicate the correspondences between the entities of the

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domain of the journey is commonly used to explain the target domain of life (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The structure of a conceptual metaphor corresponds to the following formula: TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN (e.g. LOVE IS A JOURNEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, QUANTITY IS DIRECTIONALITY).

[8] Interestingly enough, Broccias (2003, 178) points out a distinction between (34) and (35). The former conveys a visible condition, the latter a not visible condition. When a not visible condition is involved the event is said to be carried out in an above-the-norm fashion.

[9] We have seen above that an entitity could be either a thing or a process. The notational device to represent a thing is a circle whereas a process is represented via entities (squares) interconnected one to each other.

two components that are integrated in the single conceptual unit (the blended space). Blended spaces are the result of projecting the source onto the target domains. Furthermore, they are hybrid (Langacker 2008, 51) in the sense that they combine and foreground selected features of each input space. In the same way, at the end of idiom comprehension, the speaker will select the intensive activity because the final level of integration will be in the foreground with respect to the process of integration.

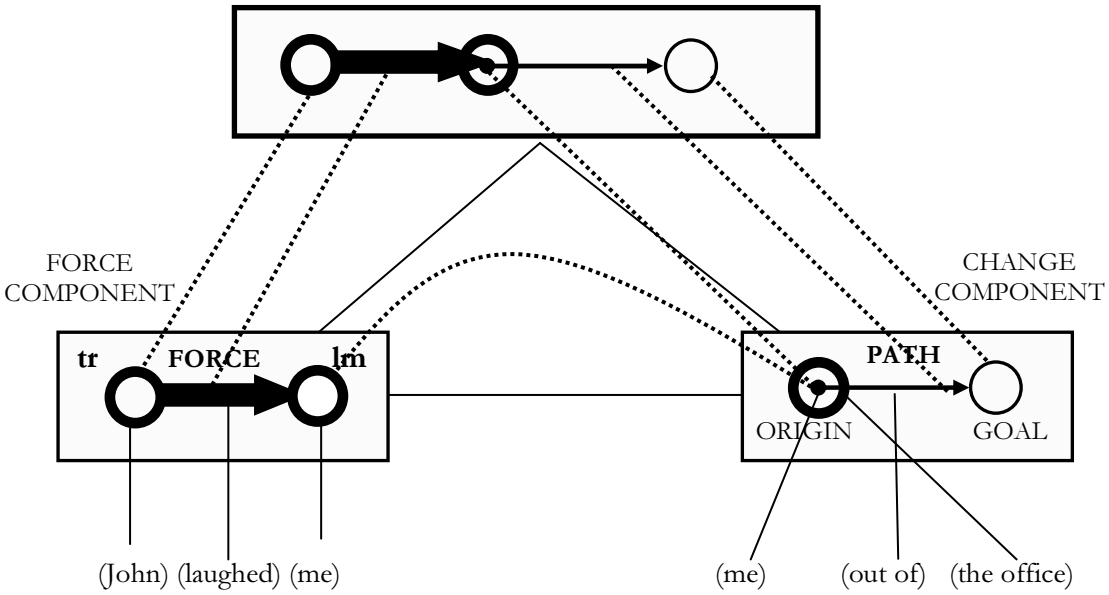

Figure 3. *John laughed me out of the office.*

But, what happens with fake resultatives? Can we use the FCS to represent the semantic pole of the idiomatic construction in (19) *John laughed his head off*? The point we make in the present paper is that true resultatives (literal expressions) do not imply the activation of two domains of knowledge which interact at the conceptual level. Fake resultatives (idiomatic expressions), where a more concrete SOURCE DOMAIN is used to express an abstract TARGET DOMAIN, do. The interaction between these two domains is well-expressed by the conceptual metaphor postulated in Espinal and Mateu (2010) INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION. Our proposal is based on an extended version of the FCS consisting of two levels of integration, as represented in (42). At the first level, as in (41), the integration between the FC and the CC results in a single conceptual unit. Thus, we have a force exertion (*to laugh*) from a trajector (*John*) over a landmark (*head*) at the FC, and a displacement (*head off*) from an origin (which must correspond to the trajector) toward a goal (not specified in the linguistic structure and for this reason not in bold) at the CC. We claim that the first-level integration occurs within the source domain, that is the CHANGE OF LOCATION. This domain, in turn, interacts with the target domain INTENSITY conceptualized via the image-schematic structure for SCALE, giving rise to the final level of integration where the event itself (*to laugh*) is argued to assume the role of trajector moving along the open-ended scale of intensity and providing, thus, no

inherent endpoint in the event[10]. In fact, as defined in Johnson (1987, 123) the image schema SCALE may either continue indefinitely in one direction or may terminate at a definite point. The concept of intensity has been argue o involve an open-ended scale (Espinal & Mateu 2010, 1407), hence we stipulate the indefinite value of the abstract concept (∞). Again, the dotted lines indicate the correspondences between the entities of the two components that are integrated into a single conceptual unit.

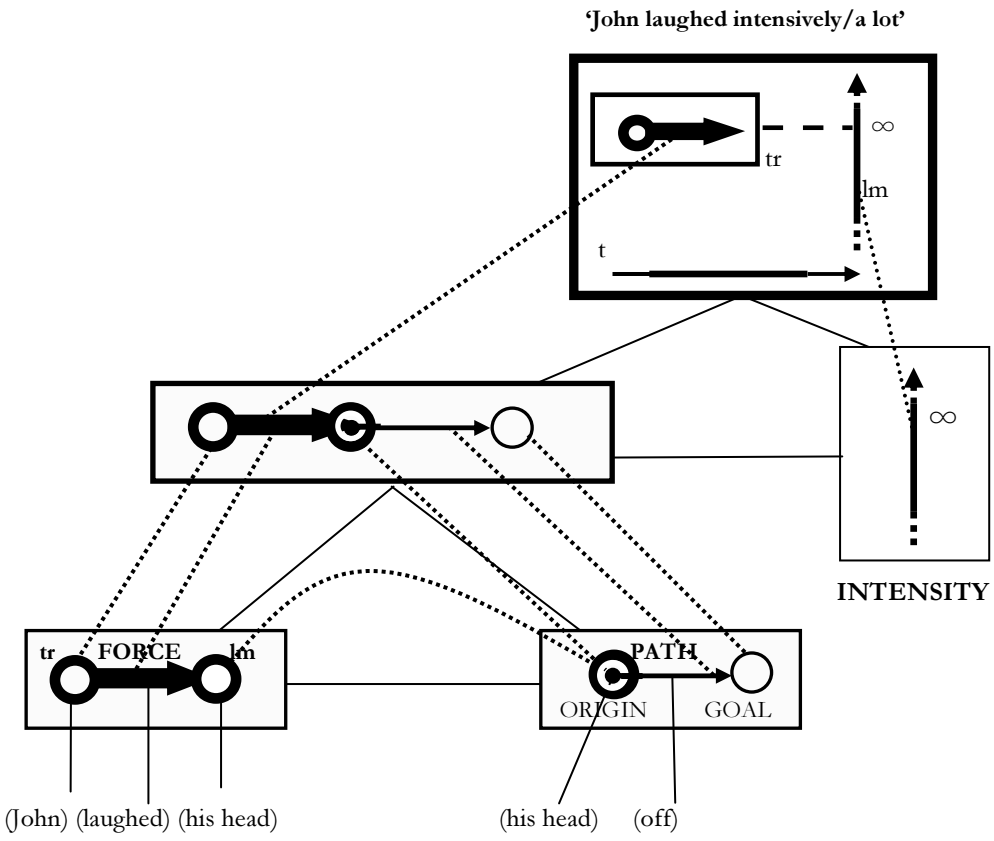

Figure 4. *John laughed his head off.*

At the final level of idiom interpretation what is salient is the single conceptual unit of the second-level integration. This point is consistent with the claim that the relation between component and composite structures is an instance of background vs. foreground (Langacker 2008, 60). We take this observation as valid also as far as conceptual levels are concerned and provide a representation in Figure 5 where the interaction of conceptual domains is assumed to generate blended spaces. In this sense, the role of blending is central in grammar since "far from being an independently set of forms, grammar is an aspect of conceptual structure and its evolution." (Fauconnier & Turner 2002, 383-384).

[10] As suggested by the reviewer the conceptual metaphor activated could also be: INTENSITY IS A CHANGE OF LOCATION ON A SCALE.

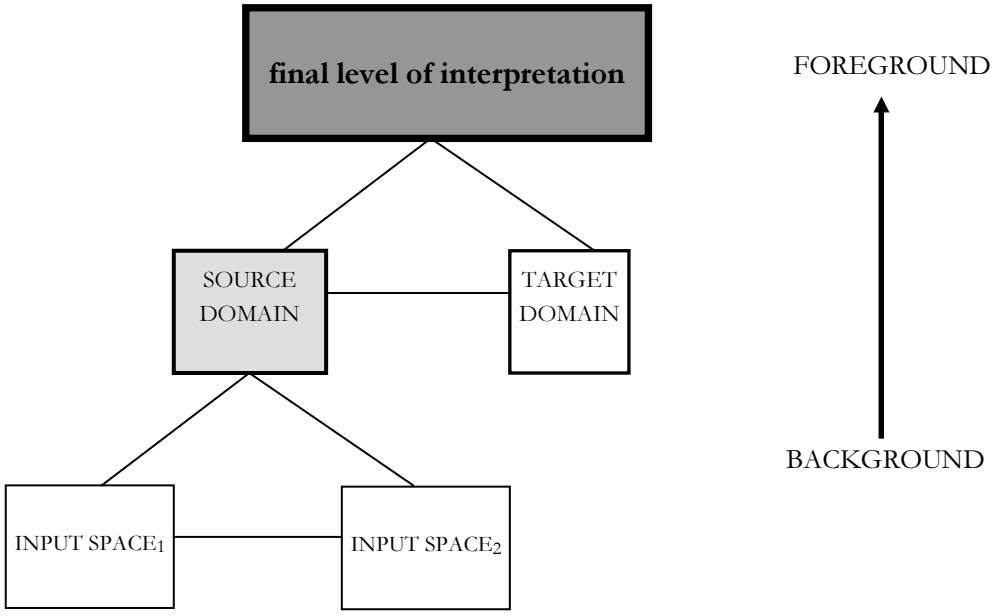

Figure 5. Blended spaces as foregrounded units

The semantic poles in Figure 3 and Figure 4 are analogously representative of the Italian examples analyzed in section 5 and repeated again here below.

(36) *Gianni lo ha sganasciato (con un pugno).*
Gianni CL.ACC has dis-jaw-PAST.PART.MSG with a punch
'Gianni broke his jaws (by punching him).'

(37) *Gianni si è sganasciato (dalle risate).*
Gianni CL.REFL is dis-jaw-PAST.PART.MSG from.FPL laughters
'Gianni laughed his head off.'

We have claimed that, contrary to what happens in English, the supporting events *con un pugno* and *dalle risate* are not part of the expressions in (36) and (37) which are fine even omitting the two PPs. As far as the idiomatic reading is concerned, the supporting event denotes the action that is interpreted as excessive at the end of idiom processing. It is not part of the idiomatic structure and is expressed as an optional adjunct. Technically, the supporting events are, in these cases, the events which cause the displacement/breaking of the body part (literally or figuratively), in the sense that it is by punching him that Gianni broke his jaws and it is by laughing that Gianni's head has undergone a displacement.

In Figure 6, as it has been said in the description of the schemas related to the English minimal pair, at the FC we notice a force exerted from a trajector over a landmark, *Gianni* and *ganasce* (the nominal base of the DVR which expresses the figure), respectively. At the CC, the landmark undergoes a displacement from an origin to a goal, again not specified in the linguistic structure. The two components are integrated into a single conceptual unit. As the presence of the causing element is not strictly part of the linguistic structure the force is represented in grey.

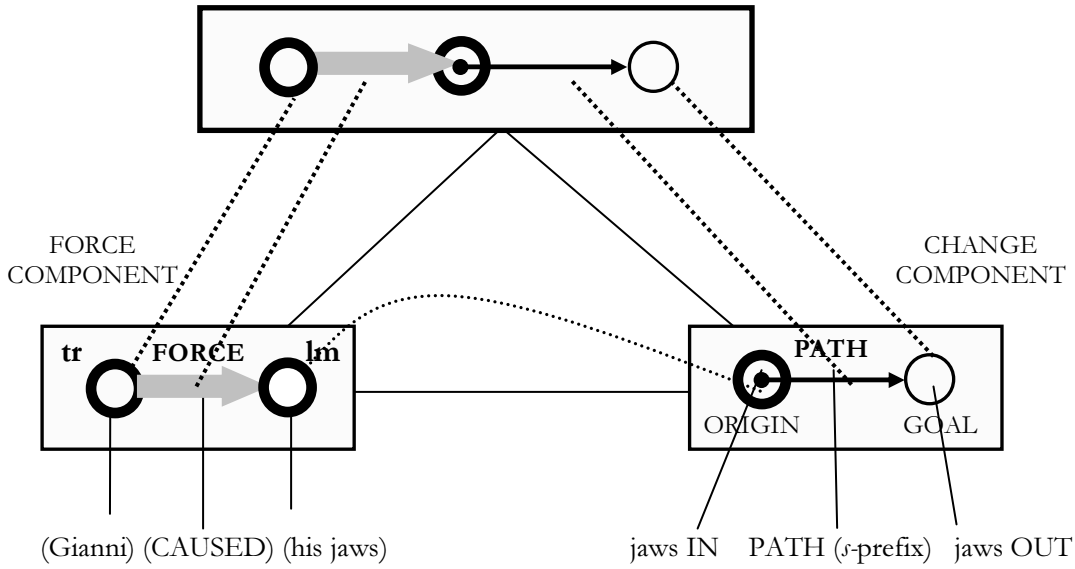

Figure 7. *Gianni lo ha sganasciato (con un pugno).*

In Figure 7, the activation of the same conceptual metaphor claimed in Figure 4 entails the interaction between the target domain INTENSITY and the source domain CHANGE OF LOCATION, domain from which the more concrete conceptual structure is imported. The first-level integration occurs within the source domain where the single conceptual unit results from the two input spaces, the FC and CC. The two components are structured exactly in the same way as the literal reading, except for the landmark being included within the trajector. This is due to the reflexive construction of the idiomatic DVR and it is represented by the arrow within the trajector which denotes the subject being the source and the recipient of the energy exerted in the causing event. The lack of specification of the causing event is related to the behaviour of the DVR which provides no specification for the manner element. In other words, *sganasciarsi* could be associated with more causing events and its high generic interpretation is represented again by using the grey arrow device. The second-level integration results from the interaction between the single conceptual unit at the source domain and the open-ended scale of INTENSITY. At the final level of interpretation, no endpoint will be profiled since the event will assume the role of trajector moving along the image schema for (the open-ended) SCALE used as a characterization for the abstract concept of INTENSITY.

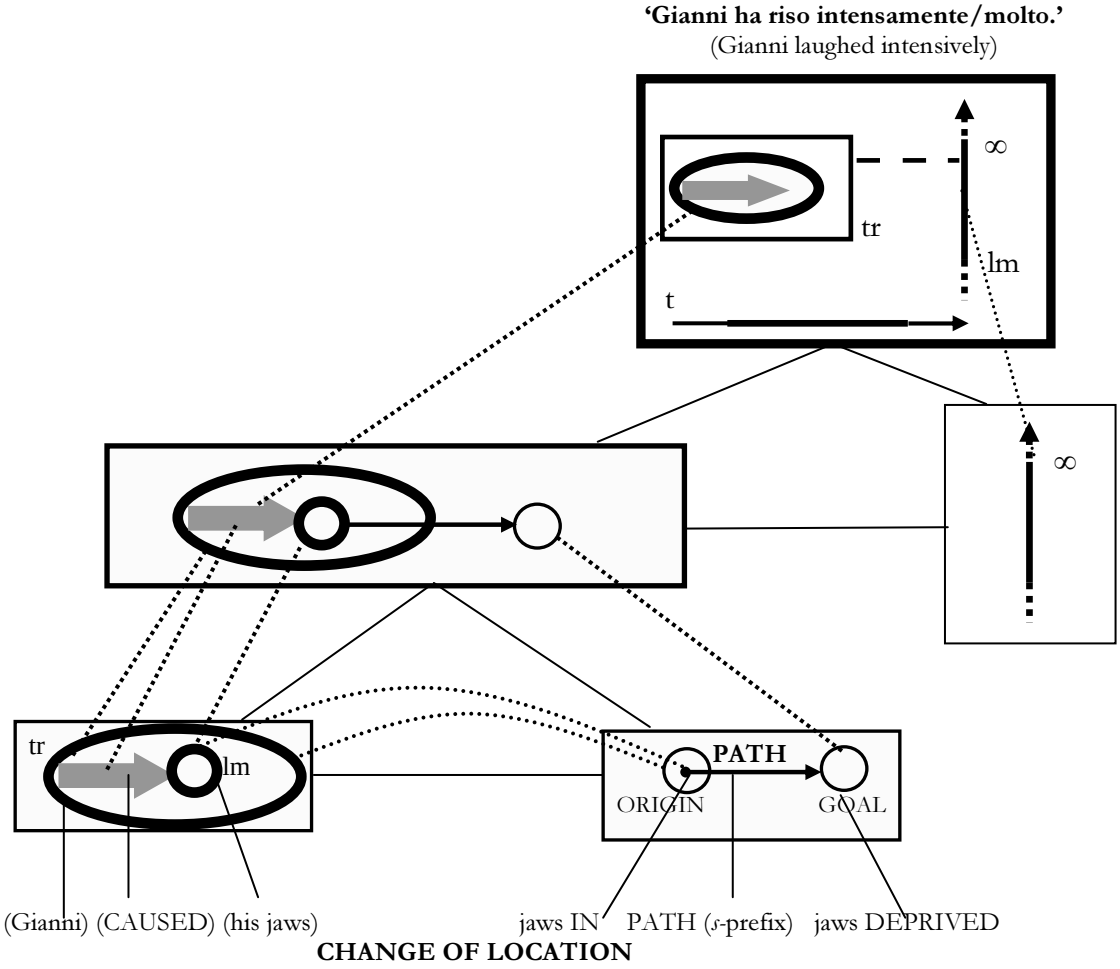

Figure 7. *Gianni si è sganasciato (dalle risate).*

At this point, an analytical question may emerge from the description of the schema in Figure 7: how does the generic causing event denote the specific event of *ridere intensamente/molto* ('to laugh intensively/a lot')? The answer is straightforward and is related to theoretical assumptions. The purpose of a semantic pole is to represent a semantic schema covering very generic structures. In the precise case of the idiomatic DVR *sganasciarsi*, even if the causing event denoting the excessive action is optional in the linguistic structure, the only accessible meaning, through a process of lexical association, is the intensive/excessive laughing.

7 Conclusions

Idiomatic expressions denoting intensive actions have been claimed, in this paper, to involve a shift toward an atelic reading when the same verbal construction is found in literal and idiomatic contexts. We have dealt with two main patterns of intensive meaning construction in English and Italian, respectively: *V one's* BODY PART *out/off* idioms, topic of interest of previous analyses, and DVRs idioms, to our knowledge never accounted for in idiomatic domain. In particular, previous studies (Espinal & Mateu 2010), focused on English fake resultatives such as *John laughed his head off*, have resorted to conceptual

metaphor theory to argue that constructions that are instantiations of accomplishments when interpreted literally do not necessarily preserve aspectuality under an idiomatic interpretation. We have argued that a network of high-level cognitive operations is needed to deal with aspectual shifts in idiomatic expressions and that metaphorical modes of thought are insufficient to account for all the cognitive activities involved in figurative meaning construction. Furthermore, we claim that these dimensions can be established as elements of conceptual consistency in idiom processing.

We leave for further research analyses of classes of idioms involving aspectual shifts toward telic readings and other possible conceptual domains to be associated with the use of motion verbs in idioms in order to provide a more solid ground to confirm that figurative meanings are not merely due to interpretive incongruities but are motivated by existing conceptual mappings (Gibbs 1994, Gibbs et al. 1997).

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