

The Meaning of “Meaningless” Idiom Parts

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Overview

1 Introduction

2 Problem

- Motivating meaningfulness
- Intuitive problems with “meaninglessness”

3 Passive

- German passive
- English passive

4 Fronting

- Fronting to Vorfeld in German
- Topicalization in English

5 Analysis

6 Conclusion

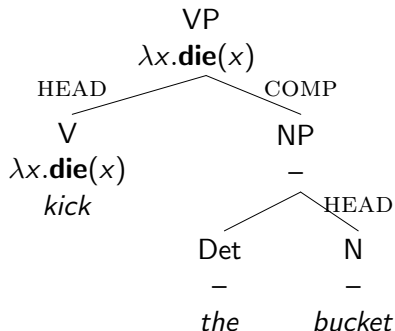
Introduction

- Trend: Lexical analysis of idioms: all idioms that look syntactically “normal” are built regular syntactic processes. (Everaert, 2010; Kay & Sag, ms.; Bargmann & Sailer, 2016; Corver et al., 2016)
- Challenges:
 - ▶ Collocational challenge: How can we ensure that the idiom parts co-occur?
 - ▶ Compositional challenge: How can we get the idiomatic reading?
 - ▶ Flexibility challenge: How can we capture the varying degrees of flexibility (flexible, decomposable idioms vs. fixed, non-decomposable idioms in Nunberg et al. (1994))

Compositional challenge

For non-decomposable idioms: *kick the bucket* 'die':

- The highest (lexical) syntactic head of the idiom has all the meaning of the idiom.
- The other words are “meaningless”



Program for today

- Possible ways of interpreting “meaninglessness”
- Different types of “meaningless” items
(expletives, inherent reflexives, idiom parts)
- Example constructions (passive, fronting in German and English)
- Illustrate a “meaningful” analysis of “meaningless” elements

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Idiom analysis: From fully phrasal to as lexical as possible

syntactically irregular	syn. regular sem. non-decomposable	syn. regular sem. decomposable
<i>trip the light fantastic</i> <i>kingdom come</i>	<i>kick the bucket</i> <i>saw logs</i>	<i>spill the beans</i> <i>pull strings</i>

- All idioms are inserted en bloc (Chafe, 1968; Chomsky, 1981)
- Syntactically irregular or fixed idioms are inserted en bloc (Gazdar et al., 1985; Wasow et al., 1983; Nunberg et al., 1994)
- Only syntactically irregular idioms are inserted en bloc (Kay et al., ms.; Bargmann & Sailer, 2016; Corver et al., 2016)

Decomposable vs. non-decomposable

An idiom is decomposable if and only if an idiomatic reading of parts of the idiom is accessible for some semantic operation (Nunberg et al., 1994).
For example: *internal modification* (Ernst, 1981)

- (1) spill the beans 'reveal a secret'
Alex spilled the well-kept beans. (decomposable)
- (2) kick the bucket 'die'/'stop living'/'finish dying'
Alex kicked the fatal/ peaceful/ long/ ... bucket.
(non-decomposable)

Decomposable \neq paraphrasable \neq transparent

Arguments in favor of a lexical analysis of non-decomposable idioms

- Ordinary syntactic structure and inflectional morphology inside non-decomposable idioms (Kay et al., ms.)
- Insertion of modifiers (Ernst, 1981; Kay et al., ms.)
 - (3) a. They kicked the literal/metaphoric bucket.
b. He really kicked the social bucket at the party last night.
- Fronting of idiom parts in Dutch and German (Schenk, 1995; Nunberg et al., 1994)
- Passivization of idiom parts in French and German (Abeillé, 1995; Bargmann & Sailer, 2016)

The more an idiom looks formally like an ordinary, freely generated phrase, the more plausible is a lexical analysis. Depending on the framework, a lexical analysis might even be required syntactically.

Answers to the collocational challenge

- The words *kick*, *bucket*, *spill*, *beans*, ... are ambiguous between a “free” lexeme and an “idiomatically bound” lexeme.
- Each lexical element has a unique lexeme-identifier among its features, LEXICAL-IDENTIFIER (LID) in Sag (2010), but similar idea already in Krenn & Erbach (1994) and “pseudo- θ -roles”.
- A selector can select for the LID value.
idiomatic *kick*: $\left[\text{SUBCAT} \left\langle \text{NP}, \text{NP}[\text{LID } \textit{bucket-id}] \right\rangle \right]$
- How to exclude the free occurrence of idiomatic non-heads?

(4) *Alex told me the $\begin{matrix} \text{beans} \\ [\text{LID } \textit{beans-id}] \end{matrix}$.

- ▶ Their LID values are not compatible with the selection requirement of any other selector (Krenn & Erbach, 1994; Sag, 2010)
- ▶ Collocation module requiring co-occurrence with a selector (Sailer, 2004; Soehn, 2006)

Answers to the compositional challenge

- Decomposable idioms: parts make identifiable meaning contributions (Wasow et al., 1983)
- Non-decomposable idioms: The idiomatic meaning is all in the highest lexical selector.
 - ▶ other elements have no meaning (Everaert, 2010; Kay et al., ms.)
 - ▶ other elements contribute an identity function (Lichte & Kallmeyer, 2016)
 - ▶ other elements redundantly contribute (parts of) the idiomatic meaning Bargmann & Sailer (2016)
 - ▶ doesn't matter, because meaning is assigned to the phase which contains all idiom parts (Corver et al., 2016)?
- Connection to the flexibility challenge:
Semantic/pragmatic constraints on syntactic operations forbidding constituents with empty/ identity-denoting/ redundant semantics.

Three theories of meaningfulness

T1 “meaningless” elements have no semantics

T2 “meaningless” elements denote an identity function.

$\llbracket \mathbf{Id-kick} \rrbracket(x) = x$, if $x = \llbracket \mathbf{kick-die} \rrbracket$ and undefined else.

T3 “meaningless” elements contribute bits of logical form that are also contributed by other elements in the sentence.

	Alex kicked the bucket.	It rained.
T1:	$\exists e(\mathbf{kick-die}(e, \mathbf{alex}))$ <i>bucket</i> : —	$\exists e(\mathbf{rain}(e))$ <i>it</i> : —
T2:	$\exists e(\mathbf{Id-kick}(\mathbf{kick-die})(e)(\mathbf{alex}))$ <i>bucket</i> : Id-kick	$\exists e(\mathbf{Id-rain}(\mathbf{rain})(e))$ <i>it</i> : Id-rain
T3:	$\exists e(\mathbf{kick-die}(e, \mathbf{alex}))$ <i>bucket</i> : kick-die , <i>e</i>	$\exists e(\mathbf{rain}(e))$ <i>it</i> : <i>e</i>

Other “meaningless” elements

- Expletive pronouns

- (5)
- a. **It** was raining.
 - b. We need to hurry **it** up. (Postal & Pullum, 1988)
 - c. **There** are typos on the text.
 - d. **It** is difficult to solve this problem.

- Reflexive pronouns with inherently reflexive predicates (“inherent reflexives”)

- (6) He perjured **himself**/ *him/ *her/ *∅

Other “meaningless” elements

- Positional elements

- (7) a. **Es**/ Gestern war niemand auf der Straße. (DE)
it/ yesterday was nobody on the street
'Nobody was on the street (yesterday).'
- b. Hy het dit nie geweet **nie**. (Afr.)
he has it not known not
'He didn't know it.'

- Argument/case-marking prepositions:

- (8) We rely **on**/ *about/ *∅ your support.

- “Dummy” verbs

- (9) a. Alex **is** nice.
b. Alex **does** not know the answer.
c. Alex tries **to** answer the question.

Other “meaningless” elements

- Some uses of articles

- (10) a. Ich mag (**die**) Maria/ **die** Sonne. (DE)
I like the Maria/ the sun
Definite article with names and unique nouns
- b. Alex ist (**eine**) Vegetarierin. (DE)
Alex is a vegetarian
Indefinite article with predicative nouns

- Verbal particle

- (11) hurry **up**, look s.th. **up**, ...

Summary

- Lexical analysis of non-decomposable idioms is well motivated.
- “Meaningless” elements are systematically present in the languages of the world.
- But: they are typically short, functional elements rather than full constituents and open class words.
- Intuitive problems with “meaningless” semantics.
- Look at diagnostic constructions (passive, fronting) to determine what “meaningless” means.

Inherent reflexives have no meaning?

- Same form as “ordinary” reflexives.
- English: very very few inherently reflexive predicates.
- Whenever we use an inherent reflexive pronoun, there is an argument in the same clause with the same ϕ features.

Parts of non-decomposable idioms have no meaning?

(12) kick the bucket

- If the entire idiom has a meaning, why should it come from the verb not the noun?
- *bucket list*
- How do “extra adjectives” find their semantic argument?

(13) Domain delimiters

- a. With that dumb remark at the party last night, I really kicked the social bucket. (Ernst, 1981, 51)

A recent tempest in the publishing teapot had its effect on the bookstores in the area. (Ernst, 1981, 54)

Diagnostic contexts

- Underlying assumption: Syntactic constructions/operations impose syntactic, semantic and/or pragmatic constraints on the elements they contain/apply to and the contexts in which they can be used.
- Apparently similar syntactic constructions/operations in different languages may have different restrictions.
- Hypothesis: Whether or not an idiom can occur in a particular syntactic construction depends on the properties of the idiom and the requirements of the construction. (Nunberg et al., 1994)
- Looking at
 - ▶ “meaningless” selected NPs
 - ▶ in passive and fronting in German and English

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Passive in German

Passive with transitive and intransitive verbs, special readings with unaccusatives

- (14)
- a. Die Katze wurde gefüttert.
the cat was fed
 - b. Auf Tagungen wird intensiv diskutiert.
During conferences is intensively discussed
'People discuss intensively during conferences'
 - c. Hier wird nicht angekommen, sondern nur abgefahren.
here is not arrived but only departed
(Müller, 2013, 305)

'One doesn't arrive here, but only depart.'

Passive in German

No passive with impersonal verbs

(15) (Müller, 2013, 295)

- a. Dem Studenten graut vor der Prüfung.
the.DAT student is.terrified of the exam
- b. *Dem Studenten wird von der Prüfung gegraut.
the.DAT student is of the exam terrified

Passive is only possible if there is an active subject.

Expletive active subjects

No passive with verbs requiring expletive subjects

- (16) a. Gestern regnete es heftig.
yesterday rained it heavily
'It rained heavily yesterday.'
- b. *Gestern wurde heftig geregnet.
yesterday was heavily rained

... unless there is a causative (Müller, 2002, 131)

- (17) a. Es hat die Stühle nass geregnet.
it has the chairs wet rained
'The rain caused the chairs to become wet.'
- b. Die Stühle wurden nass geregnet.
the chairs were wet rained

Expletive active subjects

Problem for empty semantics:

- (18) a. *Gestern wurde geregnet.
yesterday was rained
- b. Die Stühle wurden nass geregnet.
the chairs were wet rained
'The rain caused the chairs to become wet.'

- In both cases, the subject is an expletive.
- If we forbid passivization for verbs with semantically empty subjects, the causative variant cannot be generated.

Inherent reflexives

No passive with inherently reflexive verbs

- (19)
- a. Dafür schämen wir **uns** wirklich.
for this are.ashamed we ourselves really
'We are really ashamed for this.'
 - b. Schäm dich!
be.ashamed yourself 'Be ashamed!'
 - c. *Dafür werden wir wirklich geschämt.
for this are we really been.ashamed

Unexpected if the reflexive has no meaning, as we find passive with intransitive verbs.

Inherent reflexives

A restriction on the active subject, not on the passive subject: Reflexive interpretation of passive only possible with stressed *von* 'by'-phrase.

- (20)
- a. Alex_i hat sich_i den Fuß amputiert.
Alex has herself the foot amputated
'Alex has amputated her own foot.'
 - b. Alex wurde der Fuß amputiert.
'Alex's foot was amputated (by someone else).'
 - c. Alex_i wurde der Fuß von ihr_i selbst amputiert.
Alex was the foot by her self amputated

Active subjects must be a distinguishable argument of the verb.

Expletive active complements

No particular restriction: When imperative is possible, so is the passive:

- (21) a. Wahrscheinlich bringt Alex/ Rauchen **es** nicht.
probably brings Alex/ smoking it.ACC not
'Alex/Smoking is probably of no use.'
- b. *?Bring es endlich mal!
bring it finally once 'Be useful for once!'
- c. *Wahrscheinlich wird **es** nicht gebracht.
probably is it not brought
- (22) a. Sie hat **es** ihm ordentlich gezeigt.
she has it him properly shown
- b. Zeig es ihm endlich mal!
show it ihm finally once 'Give it to him finally!'
- c. Endlich wurde **es** ihm mal so richtig gezeigt!
finally was it.NOM him once so really shown

Expletive active complements

Problem for empty semantics

If expletives and inherent reflexives are both analyzed as having empty semantics, the difference in passivization cannot be derived.

Idioms

Idioms passivize just like other VPs.

- (23) Bei Gehirntod ist alles vorbei. Dann ist der Löffel abgegeben, es wurde ins Gras gebissen und in die Kiste gehüpft.
'After a brain death, it is all over. Then, one kicked the bucket, bit the dust, "jumped into the box"' (www)

Intransitive verb:

- (24) ins Gras beißen (non-decomposable)
in.the gras bit
'bite the dust', 'die'

Idioms

Transitive verb:

- (25) a. jm einen.ACC Bären aufbinden (decomposable)
so.DAT a bear on.fasten
'pull s.o.'s leg'
- b. Ich glaube, mir wurde ein Bär aufgebunden.
'I think my leg was pulled.'
- (26) a. die Ohren spitzen (transparent, non-decomposable)
the ears prick
'listen carefully'
- b. Überall im Land werden jetzt die Ohren gespitzt.
'Everywhere in the country, people start to listen carefully.'
- (27) den Löffel abgeben (non-decomposable)
the spoon away.give
'kick the bucket', 'die'

Idioms

Verbs that do not have a passive, don't have it when used in idioms either (Dobrovolskij, 2000):

- (28) a. jm einen Korb geben
so.DAT a basket give
'turn so. down'
- b. einen Korb bekommen
a basket get
- (29) *Hier werden Zeitungen bekommen.
here are newspapers gotten
Intended: 'One can get newspapers here.'
- (30) a. aber mir wurde ein Korb gegeben
but me.DAT was a basket given
'but I got turned down' (www)
- b. *aber es wurde auch ein Korb bekommen
but it was also a basket gotten
Intended: 'but some people got turned down'

Problems for empty semantics:

- Difference between idiom parts and inherent reflexives

English passive

- Passive is the promotion of a non-subject.
- I will ignore prepositional passive.
- Kuno & Takami (2004): Passive subjects are topics
- Ward & Birner (2004): Passive subjects are relatively discourse old, i.e., not the discourse-newest element in the clause.

Need to concentrate on the active object!

Expletive active complements

No passive for expletive complements (Postal & Pullum, 1988; Kay et al., ms.)

- (31) a. Even this man is essentially just winging it. (attested)
b. *It is just being winged (essentially) by this man.

Expletive active complements

(32) *It was winged.

But: Expletives can appear as passive subjects (Kay et al., ms.)

- (33)
- a. There was believed to be another worker at the site besides the neighbors who witnessed the incident.
 - b. It was rumored that Great Britain, in apparent violation of the terms of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, had taken possession of certain islands in the Bay of Honduras.

Problems for empty semantics:

If we forbid semantically empty passive subjects, we cannot derive the data in (33).

Inherent reflexives

No passive for inherently reflexive verbs

- (34) a. They perjured themselves.
b. *They were perjured (by themselves).

Problem for empty semantics:

Same as with expletives, as we cannot distinguish between inherent reflexives and expletives.

Passive with idioms

Transitive, decomposable

- (35) a. The beans have been spilled.
b. The strings were pulled.

Transitive, non-decomposable

(36) *The bucket was kicked.

(37) When you are dead, you don't have to worry about death anymore. . . . The bucket will be kicked.

(38) saw logs 'snore' (non-decomposable, transparent)
I excitedly yet partially delusional turned to Alexandria to point out the sun as it set and all I see is eyelids and hear logs being sawed. Come on! I can't say too much because I wasn't far behind as I was catching flies [= sleeping] about a minute later. (www)

Problem for empty semantics:

“Meaningless” elements should not appear as subjects at all. However, idiom parts can, if they satisfy the overall discourse restrictions on passive subjects.

Passive with “meaningless” elements

- Germ. passive:
 - ▶ Blocking passive for expletive subjects except if resultative.
 - ▶ Distinguishability-condition of the active subject not derivable if inherent reflexives are meaningless.
 - ▶ If inherent reflexives and idiom parts are meaningless, why can idiom parts passivize?
- Engl. passive: The three types of “meaningless” elements behave differently!

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Vorfeld fronting in German

- Declarative main clauses require a constituent in the pre-V2 field.
- 3 types of Vorfeld-fillers (Frey, 2006):
 - ▶ *Formal movement*: Topic (element otherwise in the first position of the Mittelfeld)
 - ▶ *Base generation*: Positional expletive (Vorfeld-es)
 - ▶ *\bar{A} -movement*: Stressed constituent, contrastive interpretation

Pars-pro-toto fronting

(Fanselow, 2004, 12): Contrastive focus can be on a constituent only parts of which have been fronted:

- (39) Was ist mit dem Buch passiert? What happened to the book?
- a. [Meiner FREUNDin] habe ich 's geschenkt.
my.DAT girlfriend have I it given
'I gave it to my girlfriend as a present.'
 - b. [Meiner FREUNDin geschenkt] hab ich's.

Expletives

(Müller, 1999, 387): *Es* 'it' as a subject can be in the Vorfeld—expletive or not—, but cannot be stressed (*ergo*: formal movement).

- (40) a. weil **es** geregnet hat.
because it rained has
'because it rained'
- b. **Es/ *ES** hat geregnet.
'It rained.'

Object-*es* cannot be in the Vorfeld—expletive or not.

- (41) a. Gestern haben die Kinder **es** gelesen.
yesterday have the children it read
'The children read it yesterday.'
- b. ***Es/ *ES** haben die Kinder gestern gelesen.

Problem for empty semantics:

Parallel behavior of expletive and unstressed non-expletive *it* unexpected.

Inherent reflexives

Reflexive pronouns can be fronted if stressed. Inherent reflexives cannot be stressed and, thus, not fronted unless inside a PP (Müller, 1999, 387).

- (42) SICH/ [Sich selbst]/ *Sich hat Maria eine Postkarte geschickt.
Herself has Maria a postcard sent
'Maria sent a postcard to herself.'
- (43) *Sich hat Peter geschämt.
himself has Peter been-ashamed
Intended: 'Peter was ashamed of himself.'

Inherent reflexive

Note that the entire PP is “meaningless”

- (44) Duane moves into a hotel room in one of the most disgusting parts of New York.

[MIT sich] schleppt der junge Mann einen Korb, ...
with himself drags the young man a basket, ...
'The young man drags a basket ...' (www)

Pars-pro-toto focus on *einen Korb mit sich schleppen* 'drag a basket'.

- (45) Wir sollten was neues versuchen. 'We should try something new.'

[MIT sich] bringt/ [IN sich] birgt das natürlich die Gefahr,
with itself brings/ in itself contains this of course the danger
dass es nicht klappt.
that it not works
'This entails the risk that it doesn't work.'

Idioms

Schenk (1995), Webelhuth & Ackerman (1999), Nunberg et al. (1994):
Idiom chunks can be fronted, decomposable or not.

Fanselow (2004): Contrastive interpretation.

- (46) a. Den Löffel hat er abgegeben.
the spoon has he away.given
'He died.' (Trotzke & Zwart, 2014, 138)
- b. Den Löffel habe er noch nicht abgeben wollen, ...
the spoon has he yet not away.give want
'He didn't want to die yet' (IDS corpora)
- (47) Am Hungertuch müssen wir noch nicht nagen.
on.the hungercloth must we not yet gnaw
'We are not down on our uppers, yet' (Fanselow, 2004, 22)

Problem for empty semantics:

If fronted element is semantically empty, it is difficult to establish the focus.

Topicalization in English

Ward & Birner (1994): Fronted elements in English must be (linked to) discourse-old information. There is no pars-pro-toto fronting.

- (48) What happened with the book?
*[To my girlfriend] I gave it.

No topicalization of expletives and parts of non-decomposable idioms.

- (49) a. *It, Alex winged.
b. *The bucket, Alex kicked.

Inherent reflexives

Reflexive pronouns can only be fronted when used contrastively, which is excluded for inherent reflexives:

- (50) a. *Herself Alex watched in the mirror.
b. HerSELF Alex watched in the mirror, not Chris.
- (51) *Herself Alex perjured.

Empty semantics?

Possible constraint: Meaningless elements cannot be fronted.

Ban on fronting unstressed reflexives?

Summary of the discussion

- Three types of potentially “meaningless” elements: expletives, inherent reflexives, parts of non-decomposable idioms.
- General
 - ▶ Ambiguity: Reflexives as non-empty and empty? Plain expletive vs. cataphoric expletive?
 - ▶ Idioms: How do domain modifiers find their argument?, *bucket list*
- Germ. passive:
 - ▶ Blocking passive for expletive subjects except if resultative.
 - ▶ Distinguishability-condition of the active subject not derivable if inherent reflexives are meaningless.
 - ▶ If inherent reflexives and idiom parts are meaningless, why can idiom parts passivize?
- Engl. passive: expletives, inherent reflexives, and idiom parts all behave differently.
- Germ. fronting: Pars-pro-toto focus needs to be connectable to the rest of the focus constituent.
- Engl. fronting: Ban on unstressed reflexive for both ordinary and inherent reflexives.

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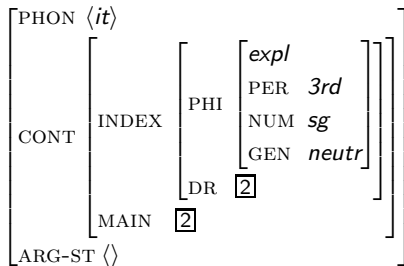
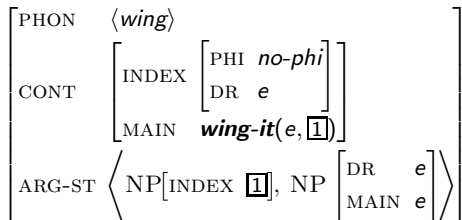
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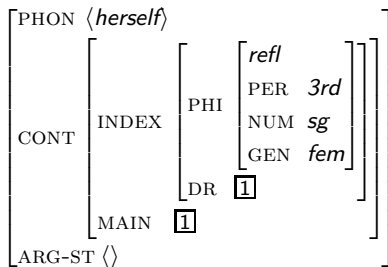
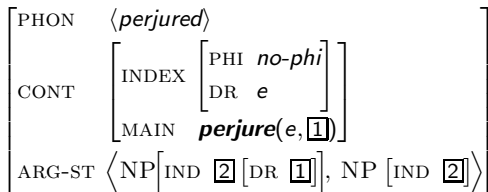
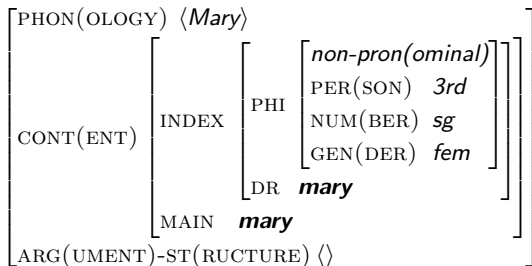
Framework

- Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Pollard & Sag, 1994):
 - ▶ surface-oriented syntax, monostratal
 - ▶ complex feature structures instead of complex syntactic structures
 - ▶ constraint-based
- Lexical Resource Semantics (Richter & Sailer, 2004): linguistically motivated version of underspecified semantics (Pinkal, 1996; Egg, 2011)
- Local semantics:
 - ▶ parts of the semantic contribution “visible” to a selector
 - ▶ semantic selectional restrictions: main semantic predicate
 - ▶ argument-identification, binding constraints: index (both ϕ -features and semantic index)

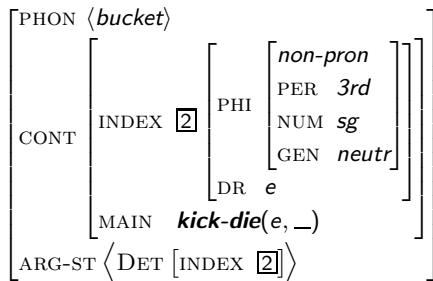
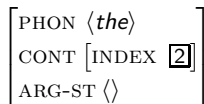
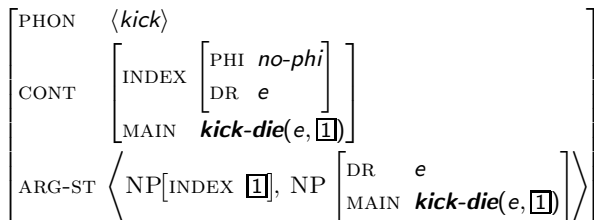
Verb with expletive argument



Inherently reflexive verb



Non-decomposable idiom: *kick the bucket*



German passive

Distinguishable active subject is demoted:

(52) Passive Lexical Rule (German):

a. Input: $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \mid \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } \boxed{1} \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \text{NP} [\text{DR } \boxed{A}], \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{2}], \dots \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{n}] \rangle \end{array} \right]$

where \boxed{A} is distinct from all $\boxed{1}, \dots, \boxed{n}$

b. Output: $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \mid \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } \boxed{1} \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{2}], \dots \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{n}], (\text{PP}[\textit{von}, \text{DR } \boxed{A}]) \rangle \end{array} \right]$

Resultative

- (53) a. Es regnet.
rain(*e*)
b. Es regnet die Stühle nass.
cause-become(*e'*, **rain**(*e*), **wet**(*s*, **the-chairs**))

(54) Lexical Rule for resultatives of unergative verbs (à la (Müller, 2002, 241)):

- a. Input:
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } e \\ \text{MAIN } \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{2} \rangle \end{array} \right]$$
- b. Output:
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } e' \\ \text{MAIN } \text{cause-become}(e', \boxed{2}, \text{pred}(s, \boxed{3})) \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{1}, \text{NP} [\text{DR } \boxed{3}], \text{XP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{DR } s \\ \text{MAIN } \text{pred}(s, \boxed{3}) \end{array} \right] \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

When applied to *rain*, subject has DR-value *e*, which is distinct from DR values of the output and its other arguments. \Rightarrow Passive rule can apply!

English passive

Active subject must be distinguishable and passive subject must be relatively discourse old

(55) Passive Lexical Rule (English):

a. Input: $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \mid \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } \boxed{1} \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \text{NP} [\text{DR } \boxed{A}], \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{2}], \dots \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{n}] \rangle \end{array} \right]$

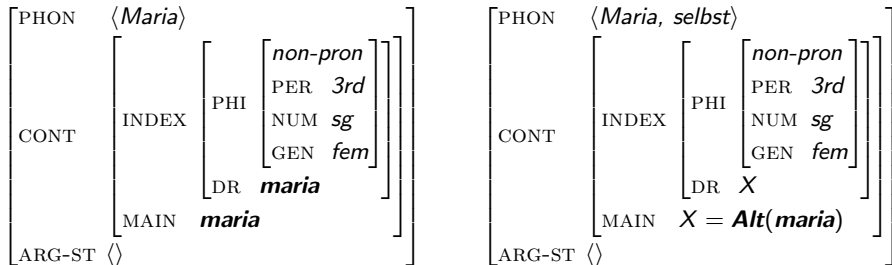
where \boxed{A} is distinct from all $\boxed{1}, \dots, \boxed{n}$

and $\boxed{2}$ is not the newest element in the discourse.

b. Output: $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CONT} \mid \text{INDEX} \mid \text{DR } \boxed{1} \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{2}], \dots \text{XP} [\text{DR } \boxed{n}], (\text{PP}[\textit{by}, \text{DR } \boxed{A}]) \rangle \end{array} \right]$

Stressed/ *selbst* Version of nominals

- Eckardt (2001): *selbst* is an identity function
- Here: *selbst*: contributes the alternative set of its argument and place its argument in the focus of the sentence.
- (there is more going on: ordering alternatives, ...)



- NP-*selbst* has a different index than NP.
- Therefore: *selbst*-insertion impossible with inherently reflexive verbs, which require index-identity of the inherent reflexive.

Fronting

German

- pars-pro-toto fronting: idiomatic Vorfeld-constituent carries the meaning of the idiom, so we can detect what needs to be in the focus.
- phonological conditions on \bar{A} -fronting: must be taken care of

English

- Fronted constituent must make a non-redundant semantic contribution, which is not the case for our “meaningless” items.

Summary

- Expletives often share their index with the verb.
Inherent reflexives share their index with a co-argument.
Idiom parts share their index and their main semantics with the head of the idiom.
- Restrictions on passive can be modelled.
- Fronted elements: Giving them a semantics allows us to see whether they have “enough” semantics and to which semantic part of the rest of the sentence they need to be connected.

Overview

1 Introduction

2 Problem

- Motivating meaningfulness
- Intuitive problems with “meaninglessness”

3 Passive

- German passive
- English passive

4 Fronting

- Fronting to Vorfeld in German
- Topicalization in English

5 Analysis

6 Conclusion

Conclusion

- Lexicalized analyses of non-decomposable idioms raise questions of the semantics of “meaningless” idiom parts.
- These can be related to other, more grammaticalized, “meaningless” elements.
- Empty semantics runs into empirical problems and/or misses generalizations.
- A redundancy-based analysis is more flexible and seems more adequate.

Extension of the redundancy-based approach

- Argument-marking preposition: standard approach in HPSG (Pollard & Sag, 1994)
- Verbal particles: *hurry up*, co-referential with the selecting verbs
- Positional expletives (Vorfeld-es): requires a non-generic reading of the event
- Redundant articles:
 - ▶ Definite article with proper names (*die Maria*) and unique nouns (*the sun*) (Sailer & Am-David, 2016)
 - ▶ Definite article within idioms (*kick the bucket*)

Thank you for your attention




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