

Property-denoting objects and incorporation in idiomatic constructions¹

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1. Goal

The primary goal of the present study is to gain more insight into the meaning of idiomatic expressions, by dealing with some structural and semantic aspects of nominal expressions within VP/PP idioms. I aim at providing an account of the generic reading corresponding to object Nouns in VP/PP idioms by arguing that they are property denoting expressions, and that they are subject to a process of complex predicate formation. I put forward the hypothesis that V/P to N/Cl lexical selections determine N/Cl to V/P abstract incorporations. Finally, I suggest that there is a strong structural uniformity among apparently different classes of VP/PP idioms.

2. The data

In this paper I shall refer to the following types of idiomatic constructions. (The examples given, followed by the literal translation and the English gloss, are taken from Catalan).

(1) TYPOLOGY OF IDIOMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS

T1. Bare NP, no D (V+N) *passar llista*

pass list 'to call (the) roll'

(P+N) *per força*

by force 'against one's will'

T2. DP, fixed D (V+DP) *mossegar-se els llavis*

bite+Cl the lips 'to bite one's lip / tongue'

(P+DP) *a l' aire lliure*

in the air free 'outdoors'

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T3. QP, fixed Q	(V+QP) <i>no tenir un clau</i>	
	not have a nail	'not to have a penny / red cent'
	<i>costar un ronyó</i>	
	cost a kidney	'to cost the earth'
T4. CI	(V+CI) <i>ballar-la</i>	
	dance+it	'to be in a jam / fix'
	<i>no saber on dar-les</i>	
	not know where give+them	'to feel trapped'

With regard to the data in (1) several properties should be pointed out.

First, it should be remarked that whereas Vs always allow inflectional morphology, their object nouns don't. The number of the object (either NP, DP, QP or CI) is undetermined, unpredictable and lexically fixed (Bianchi 1993:355).

Second, what is common to all five types of idioms in (1) is the existence of V/P to N/CI selections. These L-selections between lexical heads are fixed in the lexicon in accordance with specific lexical instructions, and are independent from the transitive or intransitive alternates that might exist within the language being considered.²

² To take an example, Catalan V+CI idioms are not derived from their transitive or intransitive alternates by means of a lexical operation of argument reduction (Reinhart 1996); they are not reduced forms, but different lexicalized forms. Some arguments in support of this claim are the following:

1) there are cases where there are no such alternates,

- (i) *dinyar-la* [idiom] vs. **dinyar*
 pass away+CI
 'to kick the bucket'

2) sometimes instead of argument reduction, we seem to find argument expansion,

- (ii) *cansar-s'hi* [idiom] vs. *cansar* vs. *cansar-se*
 tire+CI
 'to take it easy' 'to tire' 'to get tired'

and 3) they are associated with different verb concepts, with different truth-conditions and, therefore, with different logical and θ -structures, as illustrated in (iii).

- (iii) *ballar-la* [idiom] vs. *ballar* vs. *fer balls*
 dance+CI
 'to be in a jam' 'to dance' 'to dance'

ballar-la < θ_1 , θ_s >

ballar < θ_1 , θ_2 >

fer balls < θ_1 >

It should be noticed that the first argument of *ballar-la* is an experiencer, whereas the first argument of *ballar* is an agent, a controller; in addition, *ballar-la* has a generic situation argument, which neither the

Third, what is idiosyncratic from one language to the other and from one idiom to the other is a particular Head-to-Head chain, which sometimes -with regard to the subset of idiomatic structures taken into account in this paper- just involves V/P and N/Cl, but other times is extended to D and Q. By contrast, what is general is (a) the existence of specific complex predicate relationships, formed at the latest at the level of LF, which contribute to the generic reading associated with these sequences and which, I would like to claim, follows from a property denoting interpretation of the object incorporated into the selecting head. Also general in Romance languages is (b) the mapping between a bare NP_{pl} and a non-inclusive reading, and the mapping between a definite DP_{pl} and an inclusive reading (Laca 1990). Consider the data in (2), which show the fact that different object formats are associated with different readings: non-inclusive, inclusive, or even an existential reading over events or situations.

(2) **NON-INCLUSIVE OBJECTS**

- a. *fer mans i mànigues*
 make hands and leaves 'to give it one's all'

INCLUSIVE OBJECTS

- b. *posar els punts sobre les is*
 put the dots over the i's 'to dot the i's and cross the t's'
- c. *tocar totes les tecles*
 play all the keys 'to turn one's hand to anything;
 to be a jack-of-all-trades'

EXISTENTIAL QUANTIFICATION OVER SITUATIONS

- d. *tirar una galleda d'aigua freda (a algú)*
 'to throw a bucket of cold water (on somebody); to dash someone's hopes'

Fourth, what is different from one type of idiom to the other is the D selection: T1 has no D, T2 and T4 have a fixed D/Cl, and T3 idioms fix a quantifier form. In addition, it

transitive nor the unergative variants have. The unergative verb has only an external argument. Therefore, they are different verbs, with different lexicoconceptual structures.

is interesting to notice the existence of cross-linguistic variations on the D selection in object position, as the examples in (3) illustrate explicitly.³

- (3) a. *non chiudere occhio* [I] / *no tancar L'ull* [C]
 not close (the) eye 'not to sleep a wink'
- b. *caer en manos de* [S] / *to fall into THE hands of* [E]
- c. *to go away with one's hands empty* [E] / *anar-se'n amb LES mans buides* [C]
- d. *prometre LES monts et LES vaux* [OF] / *prometre monts et merveilles* [MF])
 'to promise the earth'

These variations suggest that, when the bare nominal of an idiomatic construction combines with a D there is no type-changing effect (Chierchia 1998), from a property denoting type expression to an individual denoting expression, since what is expected is that the same semantic analysis is provided to these V+object idioms across languages and across different stages of the same language, quite independently of the presence or absence of an explicit D. From this claim it follows that an appropriate analysis of functional projections, especially of D and Q, is strongly required in order to provide a full understanding of the syntax and semantics of idioms (Nunberg et al. 1994).

3. Head approach unified with phrase structure

O'Grady (1998) postulates that idioms are subject to a grammatical principle that defines their general architecture in terms of a continuous chain of head-to-head relationships.

(4) **THE CONTINUITY CONSTRAINT** (O'Grady 1998:284)

An idiom's component parts must form a chain

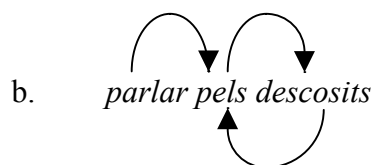
Considering this constraint, the first idiom of each one of the four types given in (1) show the patterns of chains specified in (5). Verbs select Clitics and Nouns, Nouns select specifiers, and the Negative marker *no* 'not' selects a Verb.

³ In (3) I stands for Italian, C for Catalan, S for Spanish, E for English, OF for Old French, and MF for

- (5) a. *passar llista*
 b. *mossegar-se els llavis*
 c. *no tenir un clau*
 d. *ballar-la*
-

Accordingly, within idiomatic constructions the limit between what is an argument and what is an adjunct gets fuzzy, since a defining property of idioms is the existence of one or several head-to-head lexical selections. To take an example, although a verb such as *parlar* 'to speak' does not select a PP, within the idiomatic construction *parlar pels descosits* 'to talk too much, to talk nineteen to the dozen', this verbal head is involved (following O'Grady 1998) in an idiosyncratic complex chain of Head-to-Head relationships, which is totally independent from the thematic and syntactic requirements of the verb in non-idiomatic constructions. This complex chain is composed of a V-to-P, a P-to-N, and a N-to-D selection.

- (6) a. *parlar pels descosits*
 talk through the unstitched 'to talk too much, to talk nineteen to the dozen'



Notice furthermore that, although the lexical choices made explicit within idiomatic constructions are fixed (that is, selectional restrictions are the result of specific Head-to-Head relationships), a precise characterization of idioms cannot exclusively rely on a head approach such as The Continuity Constraint, nor on a phrasal approach such as The Listeme Hypothesis (Di Sciullo-Williams 1987). This is because neither the specific semantic distinctions (such as the inclusive vs. non-inclusive readings of the

object, related to their DP vs. NP linguistic form; see (2)) nor the specific syntactic processes in which some phrasal idioms are involved could be accounted for following a pure lexicalist approach, since –with various degrees of restrictions- they enter into the computational system and undergo several syntactic and semantic processes that affect nonidiomatic phrases (Everaert 1996:3; O'Grady 1998:288). Among these syntactic processes the following ones should be mentioned: topicalization, left-dislocation, and focalization of object Nouns (in a subset of T2 idioms) (see (7) and (8)); clitic climbing (see (9) and (10)); the optional presence of non-selected degree quantifiers and modifiers in prenominal object position (see (11) and (12); and, finally, the existence of particular binding relations involving open positions (clitics and possessives) and their binder (which is either the subject or the indirect object), within a subset of T2 idiomatic constructions (see (13)).

- (7) a. *perdre el temps*
waste the time 'to waste time'
- b. El temps que m'ha fet perdre!
the time that me has made waste
- (8) a. *alçar la veu*
raise the voice 'to raise one's voice'
- b. LA VEU em sembla que va haver d'alçar
the voice me seems that PAST have to raise
- (9) a. *fer-la petar*
make+Cl chat 'to chat'
- b. Va arribar i la va fer petar una estona
(S)he arrived and was chatting for a while
- (10) a. *caure-li la cara de vergonya (a algú)*
fall+Cl the face of shame (to someone) 'to be ashamed'
- c. *Li hauria de caure la cara de vergonya*
(S)he should be ashamed

analysis of disjunct constituents, and in Sportiche's 1999 D-splitting analysis of reconstruction).

The previous discussion has shown that the syntax of verbal idioms raises several questions, among others: (1) how should different idioms be generated?, (2) how should they be syntactically analysed?, (3) how are they introduced into the numeration?, (4) how should the absence or presence of a D be dealt with?, and (5) what sort of theoretical implications, if any, can be drawn -from the syntax and the semantics of verbal idioms- with regard to the analysis of bare NPs?

In addition, several questions on the semantics of verbal idioms should also be approached, among others: (1) what is the difference between idioms and regular structures which license a generic interpretation?, (2) what is the difference between idiomatic constructions and light verb constructions with regard to complex predicate formation?, (3) how is the property denoting interpretation of the object predicted?, (4) how is the quantificational reading over the event or situation predicted?, and (5) which part of the semantics of an idiom is predicted from lexical specifications and which part is predicted from LF operations?

In this paper only a few number of these questions will be approached.

4. Main general theses

The analysis of VP/PP idioms I shall put forward in the rest of the paper is based on the assumption that they are COMPLEX PREDICATES, at the latest at LF. The semantics of object Noun follow from an analysis according to which they are considered to identify not a kind, but a PROPERTY. Bare NPs, DPs and generic clitics (such as *la* 'it' / *les* 'them' in (1), those whose extension is a generic situation) denote properties. Nominal expressions in the object position of VP/PP idioms, like all weak nominals, are interpreted via semantic INCORPORATION.⁵

⁵ Additional assumptions required in order to fully account for the syntax and the semantics of VP/PP idioms are the following ones:

- (i) A clear distinction must be made between the level where L-selection chains are projected and the level where functional projections are specified.
- (ii) Head-to-head relationships among lexical heads, which might follow either from argument structure requirements or from L-selection, are on the basis of meaning transfers and metaphorical displacements.

4.1. Complex predicates and genericity

In the rest of the paper I shall focus on the claim that idiomatic expressions form complex predicates, because the lexicon already encodes a chain between at least two properties, one of which corresponds to the nominal expression. This claim is based on two hypotheses: (1) the object Noun of VP/PP idioms denotes a property (which prevents NPs from identifying kinds or entities, even if the category D is projected), and (2) incorporation is an interface consequence (Roeper 2000) which has the effect of merging predicates in accordance with L-selectional restrictions (Safir 1995): an output operation required in order to interpret object Nouns and Clitics.

Let me first consider some arguments for the claim that idiomatic expressions have genericity effects.

A. It should be noted that the generic, property-denoting, interpretation of the object NP is independent from the tense of the clause. Hence, although the present tense entails the absence of aspectual morphology (Delfitto 1998), only a small subset of idioms is lexicalized for present. Notice the contrast between (14a) and (14b).

- (14) a. En Joan *va* passar llista
 D Joan PAST pass list 'Joan called roll'
- b. Toco fusta!
 touch+PRES wood 'touch wood!; knock on wood!'

B. The property-denoting interpretation of the object is also independent from the presence of an extensional adverb of quantification overtly realized (Delfitto 1998:14). In idiomatic constructions we obtain a property-denoting (or generic) reading for the object Noun without it being the case that we have a habitual sentence. In other words,

(iii) The inclusive vs. non-inclusive readings of plural objects (either DPs or NPs), the existential reading of the indefinite quantifier *un* 'a', and the inclusive semantic effect of the adjunct quantifier *tot* 'all' (either a VP adjunct or a DP/NP specifier), follow from the existence of quantificational properties of XPs which are represented outside the domain in which predicative structure is represented. Specific unification procedures between these different layers or planes of syntactic representation will be required in accordance with lexical instructions (Head-to-Head dependencies among N-D-Q).

Space considerations prevent me from going into details about these assumptions.

the property-denoting interpretation of the object NP does not necessarily correlate with a generic quantification over time intervals, since no frequency reading is involved unless a specific Q-adverb (*sovint* 'often', *sempre* 'always') is introduced within the sentence, sometimes co-occurring with a temporal modifier, as illustrated in (15a,b).

- (15) a. *Sovint* passa llista *en començar la classe*
 '(S)he often calls roll at the beginning of the class'
 b. *Quan s'acosten les dates d'exàmens, sempre* toco fusta
 'When exams are close, I always touch wood'

Object bare plurals of idiomatic structures cannot supply the primary restriction on adverbial quantification over individuals (Brugger 1994, McNally 1995). Rather, the examples in (16) and (17) illustrate the fact that adverbial quantifiers naturally express quantification over situations or events.

- (16) a. *tenir melics per lligar*
 have navels to tie 'to have a lot on one's plate'
 b. *Tenen sempre melics per lligar*
 'They always have a lot on their plate'
 c. (often e: [have-lot-on-plate (t, e)])
- (17) a. *ballar-la*
 dance+it 'to be in a jam / fix'
 b. *Aquests pobres sovint la ballen*
 'These poor guys are often in a jam'
 c. (often e: [be-in-jam (g, e)])

C. Notice also that genericity over objects is even obtained with singular bare count Nouns, as the following French and Catalan examples illustrate.

- (18) FRENCH
 a. *conter fleurette*
 say flower+DIM 'to woo (someone)'

- b. *rouler carrosse*
wheel coach 'to show off (something)'
- c. *avoir pignon sur rue*
have cornice on street 'to be wealthy'
- (19) a. *fer denteta*
make tooth+DIM 'to show off'
- b. *fer boca*
make mouth 'to whet one's appetite'
- c. *passar llista*
pass list 'to call (the) roll'

Genericity is linked to the fact that the object N is not an argument in these constructions, but a property, which strongly suggests that at some level of representation the object N forms a complex predicate with the V.

D. Notice furthermore that V+N complex units can be modified by a manner adverb which modifies jointly the V and the N.

- (20) a. *Li feia denteta descaradament*
'(S)he showed off to him blatantly'
- b. *Va passar llista ràpidament*
'(S)he called roll quickly'

Some T1 and T2 idiomatic constructions even allow the eventual splitting of a V+object adjacent relationship by means of quantifiers and modifiers which are independent from the lexical selection, and which are optional VP adjuncts. This is illustrated in (21b) and (22b).

- (21) a. *fer via*
make way 'to hurry up'

- b. *fer més/molta/poca/força/una mica de via*
 make more/much/little/a lot/a little of way 'to hurry up [to a certain degree]'
- c. **fer una/tota la via*
 make a/every the way
- (22) a. *passar la mà per la cara (a algú)*
 pass the hand on the face (to someone)
 'to be far better (than someone)'
- b. *passar ostensiblement la mà per la cara (a algú)*
 pass ostensibly the hand on the face (to someone)
 'to be far better (than someone) ostensibly'

Although very few idioms allow free quantification in prenominal position, those which do are not interpreted as denoting quantification over the object noun. That is, the scope of the degree quantifiers in (21b) is always over the whole predicate, not over the property denoted by the object, which seems to follow from the hypothesis that in idiomatic constructions the Verb plus the object Noun form a complex predicate at some syntactic level of meaning representation. In this respect, it is also important to point out that only degree quantifiers which have a predicative function can split the V+object constituency. Consequently, the contrast between (20b-c) is due to the fact that the sequences in (21b) mean to hurry up to a certain degree (they do not mean to make a certain amount of way), whereas the sequences in (21c) include an existential/universal Q.

In parallel terms, the adverbial modifier that occurs in prenominal position in (22b) can only modify the whole predicate.

So far, I have attempted to show that the generic interpretation associated with VP/PP idiomatic constructions is independent from various properties of the clause. The next step must be to provide some arguments in support of the claim that the object N of idiomatic constructions denotes a property. I am aware of the fact that these arguments

must be noncircular with regard to the incorporation process I postulate for the complex predicate formation process.

4.2. Arguments for claiming that the object Noun denotes a property

A. Bare count nouns in object position of VP idioms are interpreted as mass nouns. The argument is based on the following line of reasoning:

1. Plural NPs and DPs with a generic reading are expected in object position (as illustrated in (23a,b)). Bare NPs match the non-inclusive reading, and DPs the inclusive reading (Laca 1990). But, in regular syntax the generic/habitual reading can only take place with plural objects (see the contrast between (23c,d)). That is, singular NPs with a generic reading are not expected in object position. The only singular object NPs which are expected in this type of sentences in Romance languages such as Spanish and Catalan are mass nouns (as illustrated in (23e); Pease-Gorrissen 1980, Laca 1990). Also important is the fact that Modern French does not allow bare mass nouns without a D (Anscombe 1991), which was the wellformed structure in Old French (see the contrast in (24)).

(23) SPANISH

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. | La gente lleva perros a la playa | (Pease-Gorrissen 1980:ex. 2a) |
| | 'People take dogs to the beach' | |
| b. | La gente lleva los perros a la playa | (Pease-Gorrissen 1980:ex. 2b) |
| | 'People take dogs to the beach' | |
| c. | *Pedro lee libro | (Pease-Gorrissen 1980:ex. 26) |
| | Pedro reads book | |
| d. | Pedro lee libros | (Pease-Gorrissen 1980:ex. 23) |
| | 'Pedro reads books' | |
| e. | Juan vende vino | (Pease-Gorrissen 1980:ex. 28) |
| | 'Juan sells wine' | |

(24) FRENCH

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|------------------|
| a. | Boire de l'eau | |
| | drink of the water | 'to drink water' |

b. *boire eau

2. T1 idioms illustrate the fact that bare NPs can be either singular or plural, count or mass nouns. We find significantly bare singular NPs in idiomatic expressions, even in French, which is very important with respect to the facts described in regular constructions. Some relevant examples are given in (25), (26), and (27).

(25) FRENCH

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. | <i>conter fleurette</i> | |
| | say flower | 'to woo (someone)' |
| b. | <i>faire mine de</i> | |
| | make face of | 'to look as if one would like to' |

(26) CATALAN

- | | |
|----|----------------------|
| a. | <i>passar llista</i> |
| b. | <i>fer boca</i> |

(27) ITALIAN

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| a. | <i>battere cassa</i> | |
| | beat box | 'to ask for money' |
| b. | <i>chiudere bottega</i> | |
| | close store | 'to give up' |

It should be noted that, at least with regard to these idiomatic constructions, the argument for postulating an expletive D is quite implausible.

3. If a singular count noun can occur without a D in the object position of idiomatic constructions, it must be interpreted as a mass noun (as made explicit in (28a,b)); and, because of this, it is possible to find idioms involved in figurative processes (such as the part-whole schema, illustrated in (28c)).

(28) FRENCH

- a. *prêter main-forte* hand > help 'to help (someone)'
 b. *rouler carrosse* car > wealth 'to show off (something)'
 c. *avoir pignon sur rue* cornice > house, property 'to be wealthy'

In addition, it should be pointed out that argument A is coherent with Van Geenhoven's (1998:23) claim that "an incorporated count noun can be interpreted as a mass noun".

B. Object nouns of idiomatic constructions do not denote individual-type arguments or kinds, which are assumed (following Carlson 1977) to be entities. This claim is even true when they are fixed with a [+ DEF] D, as the following T2 idioms explicitly illustrate.

- (29) a. *passar el rosari*
 pass the rosary 'to say one's rosary'
 b. *tornar la pilota (a algú)*
 turn the ball (to someone) 'to turn the tables (on someone);
 to put the ball on someone else's court'

C. Object nouns of idiomatic constructions do not quantify over individuals (as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of (30b) and (31b)); therefore, they are not quantifiers.

- (30) a. *enganxar-se els dits*
 catch+Cl the fingers 'to get one's fingers burnt'
 b. *El president s'hi ha enganxat els *deu* dits, en aquell afer
 the president Cl has burnt the ten fingers on that affair

- (31) a. *passar llista*
 pass list 'to call (the) roll'
 b. *En Joan no va passar *una* llista en començar la classe
 D Joan not PAST call a roll at begin the class

These examples support the hypothesis that object Nouns are property-denoting expressions, and that an operation which turns a property into a generalized quantifier (e.g. an existential closure operation in the last example; Chierchia 1998) is not relevant at all with regard to this set of structures. (I would like to take notice of the fact that the existential interpretation associated with an idiom such as *passar llista* 'to call (the) roll' is not contributed by a supposed DP syntactic structure associated with the object noun, but by the lexical semantics of the extensional verb *passar* 'to pass, to check').

At this point, it is also significant that those idioms which lexically specify a quantifier form (T3 idioms) either denote existential quantification over situations or events (as in (32)) or degree quantification over predicates (as in (33), below), but they do not denote any sort of quantification over individuals. Let us first consider the examples in (32).

- (32) a. *costar un ronyó*
 cost a kidney 'to cost the earth'
- b. *tirar una galleda d'aigua freda (a algú)*
 'to throw a bucket of cold water (on somebody); to dash one's hopes'

When any of these idioms is the main predicate of a syntactic structure, the meaning of the whole proposition is that there exists an event or situation, an event of a costing type or an event of a throwing type and, furthermore, it is claimed that (32a) is a costing-earth (or a costing-a-lot) type of event, while (32b) is a throwing-bucket-of-cold-water type of event.

Now, consider the set of data in (33):

- (33) a. *tocar {totes les / massa / moltes} tecles*
 play all the / too much / many keys 'to turn one's hand to anything;
 to be a jack-of-all-trades'
- b. *posar (tots) els cabells de punta*
 put all the hair of up
 'something makes (all) someone's hair stand on end'
- c. *de totes passades*

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| | of all | passing | 'one way or another' |
| d. | <i>ésser tot</i> | <i>orelles</i> | |
| | be | all ears | 'to be all ears' |

These examples illustrate the fact that, even though the quantifier form *tot* 'all' can sometimes occur in adnominal syntactic position of VP/PP idioms, and sometimes can even agree in gender and number with the object N (as in (33a,b,c)), it denotes a quantification over the whole predicate, and it codifies a strengthening of the inclusive reading.⁶

In this respect, it should further be noticed that the apparent universal force of *tot* is cancellable without contradiction (see (34)). Therefore, *tot* is not a universal Q in these sequences.

- (34) a. La manera de fer d'en Joan és *tocar totes les tecles*, però sovint no dona l'abast
'John can turn his hand to anything, but he often cannot cope'
- b. La Maria és *tota orelles*, però aquesta vegada no va sentir com la criticaven
'Maria is all ears, but this time she didn't realise she was being criticized'

⁶ *Tot* 'all' introduces some logical procedures on the inferential phase, which must be distinguished from universal quantification. Its semantic constraints encode instructions on the proposition expressed (Wilson-Sperber 1993, Espinal 1996), in the sense that a strengthening of inclusiveness must be inferred (equivalent to an anti-pragmatic weakening effect, in Brisson's 1997 terms). This relates to the fact that the Q in (i) has a collective reading, but not a distributive interpretation, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the sequences in (ii).

- | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------|
| (i) a. | En Joan <i>toca totes les tecles</i> | INCLUSIVE READING |
| | 'Joan turns his hand to anything' | |
| b. | Se'm van <i>posar tots els cabells de punta</i> | |
| | 'It made my hair stand on end' | |
| (ii) a. | *En Joan <i>toca cadascuna</i> de les tecles | |
| | D Joan turns each one of his hand to anything | |
| b. | *Se'm van <i>posar cadascun</i> dels cabells de punta | |
| | it made each one of my hair stand on end | |

The strengthening of the inclusive reading can additionally be reinforced by means of an appropriate adjunct manner adverb, as the following examples make explicit:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| (iii) a. | En Joan <i>toca completament</i> totes les tecles |
| | 'Joan turns his hand to absolutely everything' |
| b. | Se'm van <i>posar absolutament</i> tots els cabells de punta |
| | 'It really made my hair stand on end' |

To conclude, this discussion suggests that such meaning instructions as an existential quantification over situations or events, a degree quantification over predicates, or a strengthening of the inclusive reading, although relevant at the level of LF, appear not to be relevant at the same layer/plane where complex predicate formation is represented.

D. Object nouns of VP idioms do not designate a discourse referent, therefore they are not referential expressions (Simatos 1997). Object nouns, either singular or plural, with either a fixed D or a zero D, are non-specific and non-referential, and allow no discourse transparency.

This is tested by pronominalization (as in (35b)), by the lack of discourse transparency (as in (36b)), by de fact that they do not allow relative clauses (as in (37b)), and by the impossibility of allowing a question over the object noun (as in (38b)). Syntactically, this argument relates to the fact that case is not assigned to these nominals.

- (35) a. *no tenir un clau*
not have a nail 'not to have a penny / red cent'
- b. *Un clau, no *el* té per poder-se comprar un jersei gruixut
a penny not CL has to be able to buy a jumper thick
- (36) a. *passar el rosari*
pass the rosary 'to say one's rosary'
- b. Va estar passant el rosari durant tota la tarda. *Al final, *el* va perdre
'(S)he was saying her rosary during the whole afternoon'. At the end,
(s)he lost it
- (37) a. *treure el geni*
take out the temper 'to lose one's temper'
- b. *No va aconseguir treure el geni *que* volia
not PAST achieve to lose the temper that wanted
- (38) a. *passar llista*
pass list 'to call roll'

- b. - En Joan ha passat llista a classe. - *Quina? / - A quina classe?
'Joan called roll in class' - which [list]? / - Which class?

To conclude this section, I adopt the view that object nouns of idiomatic constructions have a generic reading, no matter whether they are singular or plural, because they denote properties, similar to the reading attributed to existential bare nominals in English, and to all bare plurals in Romance (McNally 1995, McNally-Van Geenhoven 1998). They have a generic interpretation, but crucially they cannot be construed as referential generic expressions, that is, they cannot denote kinds.

Following McNally-Van Geenhoven (1998:1), when a nominal denotes a property, then it is said to be weak, as opposed to strong.

4.3. Arguments for claiming that the object Noun is weak

See the definition of weak given in (39):

- (39) WEAK (McNally-Van Geenhoven 1998:1)
A nominal α is WEAKLY INTERPRETED (or WEAK, for short) in a context C
iff α denotes a property in C

Being weak has also a number of consequences with regard to the interpretation of object nominal expressions in idiomatic constructions. Among them, I should mention the following:

A. Object Nouns must take narrow scope with respect to any other operators in the same clause. In (40) to (42) I refer to scope taking elements such as negation, intensional predicates such as *creure* 'to believe', and modals such as *poder* 'may, to be possible' (McNally 1995: 3-4); in (40c) a represents the denotation of *en tota la tarda* 'during the whole afternoon', and loc identifies events occurring in a.

- (40) a. *no obrir boca*
not open mouth 'not to say a word'

- b. En tota la tarda en Joan *no* va obrir boca
'During the whole afternoon Joan did not say a word'
- c. $\neg(\exists e: \text{loc}(e, a))$ [say-word (j, a, e)]
- (41) a. *alçar la veu (a algú)*
raise the voice 'to raise one's voice (to someone)'
- b. En Joan *creu* que sa mare li alçarà la veu
'Joan believes that her mother will raise her voice to him'
- c. believe (j, $\wedge(\exists e: [\text{raise-voice}(m, j, e)])$)
- (42) a. *treure's un pes de sobre*
take out a weight of on 'to take a load off one's mind'
- b. (Si hi parlem,) ens *podrem* treure un pes de sobre
'(If we talk to them), that will possibly take a load off our mind'
- c. $\forall(\exists e: [\text{take-load-off-mind}(t, e)])$

It is the case that object Nouns of idiomatic constructions differ from indefinite NPs in the sense that they are always unambiguously assigned narrow scope.

B. Object Nouns lack a *de re* interpretation. It is not possible to understand the object Noun as denoting a specific object and, therefore, as having a definite interpretation.

- (43) a. *carregar el mort (a algú)*
charge the dead (to someone) 'to put the blame (on someone);
make someone a scapegoat'
- b. *El mort, l'han carregat al Rector
the blame, it has been put to the Rector

Consequently, they do not allow a presuppositional force, as the sequence in (44b) makes explicit.

- (44) a. *fer llit*
make bed 'to take to one's bed'

- b. *Hi ha diverses coses que a la Maria no li agrada fer, *especialment* llit
there are several things that Maria doesn't like to make, especially bed

Preliminar conclusion. On the basis of all the previous arguments, I take it that we cannot give a coherent semantics of idioms until we provide an explanation of the correlation among: (1) the weakness of nominals (semantically, they denote properties; and syntactically, they are case-less objects), (2) the narrowest scope of weak nominals (with regard to negation, intensional predicates, modals, etc.), (3) the lack of a *de re* interpretation for the object noun (i.e. it is not possible to understand the object NP as denoting an argument), (4) the predicate modification of quantifiers and other external modifiers in prenominal position (i.e. it turns out that only quantifiers which quantify over the event, or have a predicative function, can split the V/P+object adjacency), and (5) the meaning of *tot* 'all' (i.e. in the sense that it codifies a strengthening of the inclusive reading). I defend the view that what provides this coherent analysis is Noun incorporation.

But, before moving into this analysis, I would like to explore the limit between idiomatic constructions (mainly T1 and T2 idioms) and light verb constructions, from a lexical, a syntactic, and a semantic point of view, since this contrast is going to provide a first understanding of the difference between property denoting objects (determined by L-selection within a predicative structure) and regular objects (determined by θ -assignment within argument structure).

4.4. Light verb constructions vs. idiomatic constructions

Consider the data in (45) and (46), which include light verb examples.

- (45) a. *passar penes / ànsia / por*
pass griefs/anxiousness/fear 'to be in trouble/anxious/afraid'
- b. *tenir set / fred*
have thirst/cold 'to be thirsty/cold'
- c. *fer fred / justícia*
make cold/justice 'it's cold/to make justice'

- (46) a. *fer la vora* = *voretar*
make the hem 'to hem'
- b. *treure la pell* = *espellar*
take out the skin 'to skin'
- c. *donar una bufetada* = *bufetejar*
give a slap 'to slap in the face'
- d. *passar l'escombra* = *escombrar*
pass the broom 'to give it a sweep'

With regard to the properties of the nominal expressions, notice first that the nominals in (45) are abstract nouns, have no explicit D in prenominal position, and are not fixed for number; accordingly, they are interpreted as mass nouns. The light verb constructions in (46), on the other hand, include count nouns, which are not fixed for number either, and the object noun is preceded by a free D, which guarantees its interpretation as an argument.

Now, consider the two paradigms in (47) and (48), which introduce idiomatic constructions built over the same verbal heads.

- (47) a. *passar llista*
pass list 'to call (the) roll'
- b. *tenir ull*
have eye 'to have an eye (for something)'
- c. *fer denteta*
make tooth+DIM 'to show off'
- (48) a. *fer les mans / fer les paus*
make the hands / make the peace 'to have a manicure/to make peace'
- b. *treure el ventre de pena*
take the belly out of grief 'to eat well'
- c. *donar la cara (per algú)*
give the face (for someone) 'to stand up (for someone)'
- d. *passar el rosari / passar la maroma*

- pass the rosary / pass the rope 'to say one's rosary / to walk the rope'
- e. *tenir la butxaca foradada*
 have the pocket with a hole 'to be spendthrift'

The nominals in (47) include only count nouns, are fixed for having no D, and are lexically fixed for number. By contrast, the idiomatic expressions in (48) include both abstract and count nouns, they are fixed for number, and for the D; notice, furthermore, that the object nouns of a subset of them denote inalienable body parts and sometimes extended inalienable objects.

Although both light verb constructions in (45) and idiomatic constructions in (47) and (48) involve a generic reading for the object, and the formation of abstract complex predicates, only light verb constructions are to be analysed in terms of θ -argument structures. Following Grimshaw-Mester (1988), I am going to assume that a function of complex predicate formation by argument transfer from the nominal to the verb is relevant in (45). On the other hand, the object count noun in (46), is the internal argument of the predicate, a structural relationship regulated by θ -assignment. By contrast, the object nominals of idiomatic constructions have no argument structure to be transferred, and therefore have no contribution to θ -marking (Simatos 1997a, 1997b).

From this perspective it is important to point out that in idiomatic structures lexical verbs do not θ -mark their complements; they have a partially specified argument structure, since they only θ -mark the external argument in subject position.

With respect to lexical specifications, both idiomatic constructions and light verb constructions seem to be subject to some sort of lexical restrictions on the permissible V+N combinations. This is illustrated in (49).

- (49) a. *passar / fer / tenir* por vs. **donar / *posar* por
 b. *donar / clavar* una bufetada vs. **passar* una bufetada
 c. *passar llista* vs. **fer / *tenir / *donar / *posar llista*
 d. *donar la cara (per algú)* vs. **posar / *tenir / *fer la cara (per algú)*

In light verb constructions of the type seen in (45) the V co-occurs with an abstract N, but 1) each one of the verbal heads does not seem to specify a morphological slot for a

specific N, and 2) the V is not fixed (since other light verbs can substitute for it). On the one hand, the N is allowed to show a certain morphosyntactic variation, since it can be either singular or plural; and, on the other hand, it can be preceded by a Q which quantifies over the properties denoted by the object noun. Contrasting to these constructions, the V+N adjacent relationship of an idiomatic construction is totally fixed. Hence, (49c,d) show that idiomatic constructions are subject to some very specific H-to-H lexical chains: a specific V head selects a unique complement N, with a unique morphology.

Syntactically, light V constructions allow, quite generally, a modifier preceded by an expletive specifier in prenominal position. See the examples in (50):

- (50) a. *fer fred* *'it's cold'*
 b. *Fa un fred de mil dimonis*
 make a cold of one thousand devils *'it's awfully cold'*
 c. *tenir gana* *'to be hungry'*
 d. *Tinc una gana que m'aixeca*
 have a hunger that raises me up *'I'm extremely hungry'*

This possibility is absolutely discarded in the case of idiomatic structures.

- (51) a. *tenir ull* *'to have an eye'*
 b. **tenir un ull de mil dimonis*
 c. *fer denteta* *'to show off'*
 d. **fer una denteta que m'aixeca*

Light V constructions also allow quite freely various quantifiers over the properties denoted by the object noun.

- (52) a. *Fa molt / bastant / força / tant de fred*
it's very/quite/pretty/so cold
- b. *Tinc molta / una mica de / força / tanta gana*
I'm very/a little/pretty/so hungry

This property should be contrasted to the optional occurrence of a quantifier form in a very limited subset of T1 and T2 idioms, but it is very important to notice that within idiomatic constructions only quantifiers which denote a degree quantification over predicates are allowed (as illustrated in (53) and (54)). In addition, T3 idioms encode a Q which splits the V+object adjacency, and which denotes either existential quantification over situations (as illustrated in (55)) or quantification over predicates (entailing a strengthening of the inclusive reading, as illustrated in (56)).

- (53) a. *fer via* 'to hurry up' **degree Q over predicates**
b. *fer més/molta/poca/força/una mica de via*
'to hurry up to a certain degree'
c. **fer una/tota la via*
make a/every the way
- (54) a. *treure el geni* 'to lose one's temper' **degree Q over predicates**
b. *treure més/molta/poca/força/una mica el geni*
'to lose one's temper to a certain degree'
c. **treure cada el geni*
take out each the temper
- (55) a. *costar un ronyó* 'to cost the earth' **existential Q over situations**
b. *tirar una galleda d'aigua freda (a algú)*
'to throw a bucket of cold water (on somebody)'
- (56) a. *de totes passades* **Q over predicates**
'in one way or another'
b. *ésser tot orelles*
'to be all ears'

The examples in (53) and (54) illustrate a free quantification in adnominal syntactic position, which is interpreted as entailing predicate quantification, not a quantification over the object noun. The examples in (55) illustrate fixed quantification in adnominal position, interpreted as entailing existential quantification over situations. The examples in (56) illustrate a fixed quantification in adnominal position, designed to keep the inclusiveness effect of the definite D, and to convey a strengthening interpretive effect over the whole predicate.⁷

From a syntactic perspective, it is also important to point out that light verb constructions differ from idiomatic constructions with regard to case assignment. The object of a light verb construction has morphological case (e.g. either partitive case, as in (57a), or accusative case, as in (57b)), whereas the object of an idiomatic construction lacks morphological case (see above examples (35b) and (36b)). The V in idiomatic structures does not case mark the object N, therefore, no partitive pronouns and no accusative pronouns are allowed. See the ungrammaticality of (58a,b).⁸

- (57) a. De por, *en* va passar tota la nit
of fear CI PAST pass whole the night
'(S)he was frightened the whole night'
- b. La vora, *la* va fer en un no-res

⁷ With regard to quantification, there appears to be a distinction between regular constructions and light verb constructions on the one hand, and idiomatic constructions on the other hand. Thus, in the dialect spoken in Mallorca both regular constructions and light verb constructions optionally allow the preposition *de* 'of' after the the quantifier *molt* 'very', whereas in idiomatic constructions this possibility seems to be obligatory (J. Rosselló, p.c.). See the contrast between the light verb construction in (i) and the idiom in (ii).

- (i) a. fer fred
make cold 'it's cold'
- b. Fa molt (de) fred
makes very of cold 'it's very cold'
- (ii) a. *fer via*
make way 'to hurry up'
- b. Farem molta *(de) via
make very of way

⁸ Pronominalization of the object noun, however, is something which is constrained by the degree of lexicalization of the phrasal expression. Thus, whereas the examples in (58) are fully ungrammatical, native speakers may accept specific right dislocations of object nouns interpreted as denoting properties.

- (i) a. Encara n'haurem de *fer* al final, de *via*
'At last we'll still have to hurry up'
- b. Per a aquestes coses en té molt, d'*ull*
'(S)he has a keen eye for these things'

I would like to thank E. Bonet, T. Cabré and J. Mateu for discussion on these examples.

the hem CI PAST make in no time
'(S)he formed the hem in no time'

- (58) a. *De llista, *en va passar en començar la classe*
of list CI PAST pass at beginning of class
b. *La llengua, *mossegueu-vos-la*
the tongue bite+you+it

A final syntactic difference between these two types of structures is that, whereas adjunct constituents can be integrated within idiomatic syntactic constructions, they are never part of light verb constructions for thematic reasons: “adjuncts, since they are not listed in the argument structure, cannot be transferred” (Grimshaw-Mester 1988:218). See the contrast between (59) and (60).

- (59) a. **tenir contra el govern*
have against the government
b. **fer pels descosits*
make through the unstitched
- (60) a. *mirar contra el govern*
look against the government 'to look crossed eyed'
b. *parlar pels descosits*
talk through the unstitched 'to talk too much'

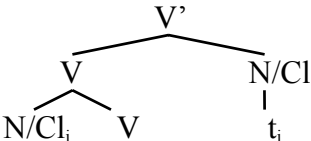
To sum up, it is important to remark at this point that there are various morphosyntactic aspects indicating that a particular nominal expression is the object of a weak VP: the morphological adjacency with the verb, the lack of morphosyntactic case, the lack of quantification or modification over the object N, and the well-formedness of bare singular count nouns in object position. The object N of light verb constructions differ also from the object N of idiomatic constructions with regard to the fact that they allow relative clauses, and they can easily be pronominalized and topicalized.

4.5. Noun incorporation

Morphosyntactically, the V head of VP idioms (and, by extension, the P head of PP idioms) has a morphological requirement which is the motivation for incorporation, a

Select operation. The V° is associated with a morphological subcategorization frame for hosting the incorporee. This is illustrated in (61a), where X stands for either a noun denoting a property or a clitic denoting a generic situation. Following Guasti (1993), I should say that the presence of this kind of slot on the host triggers substitution of the incorporee into it at some level of representation. My hypothesis is that VP idioms are complex predicates formed by Noun incorporation; that is, object nouns, even the generic clitics *la* 'it' / *les* 'them' in T4 idioms, are incorporated into the V at LF (see Safir's 1995:282 concept of abstract incorporation).

Following Baker (1988) and Safir (1995), incorporation is a Merge operation, which has the structure described in (61b).

- (61) a. $[X^{\circ}_--]$ (Guasti 1993)
 b.  (Safir 1995)

Accordingly, the difference between incorporation at an abstract level of representation and incorporation in the lexicon is that only the former does not result in a visible amalgam of the incorporee with its host. This is what differentiates the following (a) idiomatic examples from the (b) compound examples.

- (62) a. *(no) badar boca* V+N **abstract incorporation**
 not open mouth 'to keep one's mouth shut'
- b. *bocabadat* N+V **compound incorporation**
 mouth opened 'open-mouthed'
- (63) a. *trencar-se el coll* V+N **abstract incorporation**
 break+Cl the neck 'to break one's neck'
- b. *colltrencar-se* N+V **compound incorporation**
 neck breck 'to break one's neck'

Notice that both abstract incorporation (formed at LF) and compound incorporation (formed in the lexicon) involve a N/Cl that refers to a generic or unspecific class. That is, object Nouns/Clitics of

idiomatic constructions, as well as object Nouns in verbal compounds, lack a referential reading, and denote properties.⁹

My claim, therefore, is that abstract Noun incorporation is the most appropriate analysis we can provide for the semantic complex predicate interpretation of idiomatic constructions, as well as for the set of structural properties they make manifest.

Let me now briefly consider how this abstract Noun incorporation is going to be determined, and how functional projections of Ds and Qs are to be syntactically analysed in idiomatic constructions.

Following O'Grady (1998), the L-selection between lexical heads is always more prominent than the dependency relationship between a lexical head and a functional head.



Accordingly, I will adopt the view that this Head-to-Head relationship between a V/P and a N/CI is what constrains the complex semantic predicate formation, by N/CI incorporation at the level of LF (Van Geenhoven 1992, 1998; see also Masullo 1992 and Wonder 1990). It is the most prominent lexical relationship, which -most significantly- is morphologically specified and structurally encoded as a result of L-selection. Therefore, I conclude that V/P to N/CI lexical selections determine N/CI-to-V/P abstract incorporations.

With regard to this relationship among lexical heads, the Ds and Qs which appear in T2 and T3 idioms seem to be expletive for complex predicate formation, since they do not contribute to predicate representation. This apparent expletiveness suggests that T2 and T3 constitute two classes of idioms very close to T1 and, therefore, that there is a strong

⁹ In this sense, the analysis I put forward for Romance VP idioms and verbal compounds differs from the one presented in Baker (1988). Baker opposes English compound formation to Noun incorporation in Indian languages, an opposition based on the fact that English compounds have a generic interpretation and are words formed in the lexicon, whereas incorporated N in Indian languages allow a referential interpretation and are formed by means of a syntactic process. I would like to remark that such an opposition is not relevant with regard to the set of Romance data being considered in this paper.

structural uniformity among the apparently different classes of VP/PP idioms exemplified in (1). Furthermore, notice that such an approach can only follow from a hypothesis according to which it is postulated that Ds and Qs (and, more generally, everything non thematic or non predicative associated with a N, e.g. definiteness, plural number, inclusiveness, and quantification) are represented outside the VP domain (Sportiche 1999). This analysis will allow us to conclude that what are apparently distinct syntactic classes of idioms have in common a property denoting object, plus a separate quantificational spectrum of grammatical properties (either denoting plurality, inclusiveness or existential quantification).

Actually, the presence of a D (a supposed expletive D, as postulated for inalienable constructions by Vergnaud-Zubizarreta 1994)), seems to be invisible to the abstract incorporation process. In other words, the D -which is lexically fixed, and relevant, when plural, for an inclusive semantic effect (see (2b,c)- does not interfere with the Head-to-Head relationships between lexical heads, and does not interfere with the covert Noun incorporation process.

Similarly, the Q encodes non-thematic information: it must be made explicit for the inclusive semantic effect of *tot* 'all', and for the existential quantification over situations or events driven from *un* 'a' in T3 idioms. However, it is supposedly expletive with regard to complex predicate formation, thus suggesting that the inclusive interpretation of the object, as well as the quantification over events or situations, though relevant at the level of LF, appears not to be relevant at the same layer/plane where complex predicate formation is represented.

An empirical argument in support of a syntactic partitioning between quantificational properties of XPs (D, Num, Q) and predicative properties of NPs and Clitics (Sportiche 1999) follows from the fact that a contrastive analysis of the form of idioms, either among different languages (Catalan, English, French, Italian and Spanish; see the data in (3) above), or among different diachronic stages of one single language (see the French data in (65)), reveals that both the selection of a D/Q and the selection of a particular D/Q fluctuate arbitrarily and, therefore, that Ds and Qs are to be represented

outside the complex predicate representation, which is basically determined from Head-to-Head relationships among lexical heads.

- (65) FRENCH (Rey-Chantreau 1991)
- a. *promettre les monts et les vaux* (XVc) > *prometre monts et merveilles*
'to promise the moon'
 - b. *faire rouler un/le carrosse* (XVIIIc) > *rouler carrosse*
'to show off (something)'
 - c. *il y a anguille sous roche* > *il y a une anguille sous la roche*
'I smell a rat'

5. Conclusion

To conclude, an analysis based on a morphologically driven Noun incorporation process, which takes place at the latest at LF, and a syntactic partitioning between the layer/plane of predicate relationships and the layer/plane of functional properties (D, Q, Number), seems to be the most accurate one in order to provide an appropriate account of the genericity of VP idioms. Following this approach, it is not necessary any longer to assume that D/Q of idiomatic expressions are expletive, since quantificational properties of Ds and Qs must be represented outside the domain in which predicative structure is represented. I have argued that the genericity of idiomatic constructions follows 1) from the fact that object Nouns always denote properties, and 2) from the fact that idiomatic constructions are always subject to a predicate formation process via incorporation at the layer/plane where predicate relationships are expressed.

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