

Observations about the Aspectual Structure of VO Idioms

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1 Introduction

Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) posit that there are two kinds of idiomatic expressions according to whether or not they admit modifications while retaining an idiomatic reading. Accordingly, idioms that allow for modifications are idiomatically combining expressions (ICEs); those that do not are idiomatic phrases (IPs).

Some maintain that idiomatic expressions contain all aspectual categories (McGinnis 2002). Others (Glasbey 2007 & MacDonald 2008) maintain that only ICEs can be said to contain all aspectual categories. IPs, on the other hand, are restricted on their aspectual interpretation: they cannot be aspectually interpreted as accomplishments when read idiomatically.

The main claim of this paper is VO idiomatic expressions that are IPs in Spanish exhibit the same aspectual behavior as IPs in English. This is motivated by the data in (1) that shows that a statement constructed by a verb and its object can be aspectually interpreted as an accomplishment when read literally. It will not be the case, however, that the same verb and its object behave aspectually as an accomplishment when interpreted idiomatically.

(1.a) The girl tipped the can and spilled the beans on the floor.

(1.b) "He ... even spilled the beans to authorities about past crimes he had committed for which they had no knowledge of his role".

(<http://www.wired.com/2014/05/sabu-time-served-sentence/>)

(1.a) and (1.b) share the fact that they are constructed with the same combination of verb and object. They differ in the fact that the salient reading of (1.a) is the literal reading whereas the salient reading of (1.b) is the idiomatic

reading. Moreover, the salient reading of (1.a) exhibits the aspectual structure of an accomplishment, whereas the salient reading of (1.b) has the aspectual structure of an achievement.

This aspectual behavior is mirrored in Spanish also. Consider (2) below:

(2.a) Juan recogió las velas al final del día
Juan gather-3S.PST the sail-PL a.the end of.the day
'Juan gathered the sails at the end of the day.'

(2.b) "Con las mejillas calientes y un gruñido conquistándole el estómago
abanicó la nubecilla de humo y recogió las velas.
Era ya hora de comer y olvidar".
(<http://www.wattpad.com/41304826-la-mala-madre>)
with the cheeks hot and a grun conquering-CLT the stomach
fanned-3S.PST the cloud-DIM of smoke and gather-3S.PL the sail-PL.
be-3S.PST already hour of eat and forget.
'With her cheeks hot and her stomach taking over with a grunt, she
fanned the small cloud of smoke and *gave up*. It was already time to
eat and forget.'

As it was the case with the English counterpart, (2.a) has a salient literal reading whereas (2.b) has a salient idiomatic reading. While (2.a) is an accomplishment, (2.b) is interpreted aspectually as an achievement.

This paper is about the issue of syntactic transparency from an aspectual point of view. That is, a statement like *Mary kicked the bucket* can be interpreted literally as Mary's foot coming into contact with an actual bucket or, idiomatically, as Mary dying. One might expect that a statement containing a VO idiom would exhibit the same aspectual behavior as a statement constructed with the same verb and its object in a non-idiomatic interpretation. In other words, if the statement in its literal interpretation is an accomplishment, then the idiomatic counterpart should be an accomplishment also.

Contrary to that intuition, a statement consisting of an accomplishment-type idiom may exhibit a different aspectual behavior when interpreted non-idiomatically; this aspectual mismatch has already been noted by MacDonald (2008). In addition, MacDonald noted that the mismatch occurs precisely along the division between ICEs and IPs as described in Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994).

I will provide positive evidence that Spanish idiomatic expressions parallel the mismatch found in English. Support for this claim will result from comparing sets of contrasting pairs formed by Spanish VO idioms such as (a) *Ricardo estiró la pata* 'Ricardo died', and a statement using the same verb and the same object but with a non-idiomatic reading such as (b) *Ricardo estiró la pata izquierda* 'Ricardo stretched his left leg'.

The aspectual evidence to corroborate this claim will be obtained by applying a set of aspectual tests, as described by Dowty (1979) and Vendler (1967). The interaction of (1) and (2) with the *almost* test and the *takes x-time* test consistently yield the same result: a VO idiom can have the aspectual structure of an accomplishment when interpreted literally. However, it will not be an accomplishment when interpreted idiomatically if the idiom is an IP. This appears to be true for both English and Spanish IPs.

2 Aspectual types and basic Terminology

De Miguel (1999) is a descriptive essay that provides a detailed introduction to the study of aspect in Spanish. In this section, I will introduce the basic concepts and terminology one can be expected to find when talking about aspect.

The aspectual information of a predicate can be divided into two basic components: the lexical aspect and the grammatical aspect. In rough terms, lexical aspect deals with the information contained in the verb roots. That is why we understand *to die* as a predicate denoting an event that occurs only once whereas *to walk* as a predicate denoting an event that can occur continuously. In traditional grammar the term *Aktionsart* is used to describe these set of properties.

On the other hand, grammatical aspect refers to the information about the event that is expressed through the verb endings. The prototypical example of grammatical aspect information is transmitted by the verb preterite and imperfect conjugations of Spanish where the choice of one over the other determines whether the event described by the predicate is bounded or not.

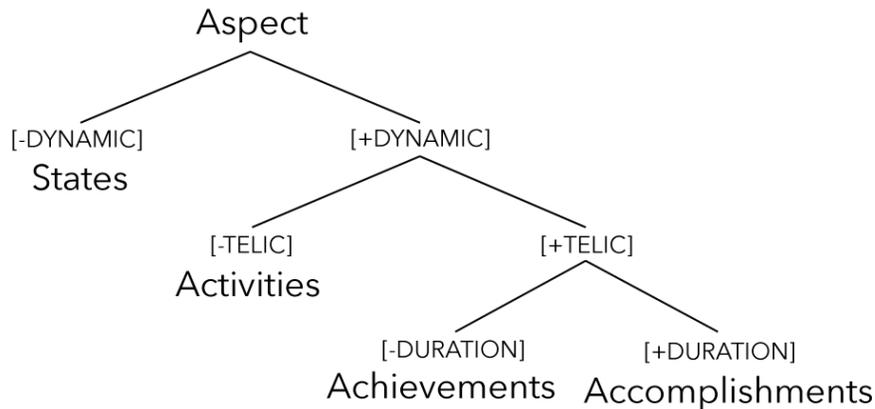
Sometimes it is difficult to tell aspect from time. This difficulty lies in the fact that both concepts are related to the organization of the event. In Spanish, this problem becomes exacerbated because Spanish verbs paradigms synthesize the aspectual information and tense information into a single lexeme. However, this can be alleviated by thinking about tense as an external axis along which the time of the event is arranged in respect to the time of the speech. Aspect, on the other hand, is about how the event is organized internally, independent of the time of speech.

De Miguel classifies predicates relying on three basic parameters: (i) telicity, (ii) duration, and (iii) dynamicity. An event is telic or bounded because there is a point where the event starts and a point where the event ends or culminates. When either one of such points do not exist, the event is said to be atelic (or unbounded). An atelic predicate denotes an event that happens or a property that holds for an undetermined length of time. Regarding duration, a predicate can denote an event that happens instantaneously from those that have a duration. Finally, we can discriminate predicates denoting events that occur from those that

do not occur, rather they simply hold. The most salient feature of a dynamic predicate is change.

Assuming the three parameters to be binary, De Miguel posits the existence of four large predicate groups: states, activities, achievements and accomplishments according to the Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: four aspectual types



Examples (3) through (6) below are intended to give an idea of what each aspectual type of predicate looks like. Consider the state-type predicates in (3), the activity-type predicates in (4), the achievement-type predicates in (5), and finally the accomplishment-type predicate in (6).

(3) Fulgencio tuvo un auto deportivo.
Fulgencio have-3S.PST a car-SING sport
'Fulgencio had a sports car.'

(4) Bilbo tomó vino.
Bilbo drink-3S.PST wine
'Bilbo drank wine.'

(5) Ruperto capturó la liebre.
Rupert capture-3S.PST the hare.
'Rupert captured the hare.'

(6) Bilbo tomó una jarra de vino.
Bilbo drank-3S.PST one pitcher of wine.
'Bilbo drank one pitcher of wine.'

It is possible to find VO constructions that exhibit the same aspectual structure for both the literal reading and the idiomatic reading. Consider, for instance, *shoot the breeze*. Aspectually, it is an activity for both the idiomatic reading and the literal reading. Similarly, *kick the bucket* is an achievement for both the idiomatic reading and the literal reading. When it comes to accomplishments, things get a bit fuzzier. MacDonalds (2008: 119) reports that *tie the knot* diverges aspectually between the literal reading (an accomplishment) and the idiomatic reading (an achievement).

MacDonald (2008: 114) finds that the mismatch occurs alongside the division that Nunberg, Sag, & Wasaw (1994) proposed between idioms that have their meaning distributed among components and those which do not. That is, idioms of the IP type can exhibit the same aspectual structure of their literal counterpart as long as they are not accomplishments.

The meanings of ICEs "are distributed among their parts" (Nunberg *et al* 1994: 497). When we hear *spill the beans* used to mean 'divulge the information', for example, we can assume that *spill* denotes the event of divulging and *beans* the information that is divulged. On the other hand, IPs "do not distribute their meaning among to their components" (Nunberg *et al* 1994: 491). We can intuitively see what the problem is: for IPs there is a reduction from several (syntactic) components to one (semantic) component. The crucial test will come from verifying that Spanish IP idioms exhibit the same behavior that English IP idioms do, that is, they have the syntactic structure of accomplishments but behave idiomatically as achievements.

3 Two diagnostic tests for aspectuality

This section introduces two tests that can be used to tell accomplishments from achievements, the *almost* test and the *takes x-time* test. As shown in Figure 1, both achievements and accomplishments are telic events, that is, they have a start and they have an end. Both tests are, in principle, capable of targeting either the beginning of an event or its end. I will show that when applied to accomplishments and achievements, both tests are able to target the beginning of the event without problem. When trying to target the end of an event, however, only accomplishments yield felicitous statements whereas achievements do not.

The difference in the results of these tests can be thought as hinging exclusively on the event's duration, that is, both aspectual types are dynamic, both types have a beginning and an end, but whereas the event described by an accomplishment has a distinct duration, an achievement has none. An achievement is, by all intends and purposes, instantaneous. By virtue of being instantaneous, an event ends as soon as it starts. As no time lapses between its start and its ends,

neither tests is able to target the end of an event that has the aspectual structure of an achievement.

3.1. The *almost* test

The *almost* construction is very useful to help diagnose aspectual types because it appears to be sensitive to two elements in the aspectual structure of a predicate. In particular, *almost* is sensitive to the start of an event and the end of an event. When *almost* targets the start of an event, it yields a *counterfactual* reading, that is the event almost starts but critically, it does not. On the other hand, if *almost* targets the end of an event, it yields an *incomplete* reading, that is, the event starts but fails to culminate.

The following are typical examples of each of the four aspectual types. I will examine how each type behaves in combination with the *almost* construction. Let us consider (7) states, (8) activities, (9) achievements, and, finally, (10) accomplishments.

- (7) *Florencio casi fue alto.
Florencio almost be-3S.PST tall.
'Florencio was almost tall.'
- (8) Sancho casi sonrió.
Sancho almost smile-3S.PST
'Sancho almost smiled.'
- (9) Ana casi estornudó.
Ana almost sneeze.3S.PST
'Ana almost sneezed.'
- (10) Luis casi cruzó la calle.
Luis almost cross-3S.PST the street
'Luis almost crossed the street.'

Let us start recalling that aspectual structures can be subdivided into telic and atelic. States and activities are atelic. States have neither start nor end; activities have only a start. Achievements and accomplishments, on the other hand, are telic. They are events with both a beginning and an end. The *almost* construction is incompatible with states, as shown in (7). *Almost* produces a counterfactual interpretation with activities as in (8) when it targets the start of the events and prevents the event from starting.

Under this assumption for telicity, it is expected for the telic predicates, (9) and (10), to be able to yield both a counterfactual interpretation and an incomplete interpretation when the *almost* construction targets the start and the end of the event respectively. I take the fact that achievements and accomplishments exhibit the same behavior to the *almost* test as evidence that achievement predicates and accomplishment predicates share a common structure. Therefore, if it is true that a predicate denotes an event with a start, it should yield a counterfactual reading when the *almost* test targets the start of the event, preventing from starting at all. Such reading exists, consider (11) and (12).

- (11) Ana casi estornuda, pero logró contenerse.
Ana almost sneeze-3S.PRE but manage-3S.PST hold-CLIT back
'Ana almost sneezes, but she managed to hold it back.'
- (12) Luis casi cruza la calle, pero decidió no hacerlo.
Luis almost cross-3S.PRE the street but decide-3S.PST not do-CLIT
'Luis almost crosses the street, but he changed his mind.'

Similarly, given that they are telic predicates, (9) and (10) by definition have an ending. They are expected to yield an incomplete reading when the end of the event is targeted by the *almost* construction. Consider (13) and (14)

- (13) *Ana casi estornudó, pero una vez que comenzó a estornudar
decidió no hacerlo más.
Ana almost sneeze-3S.PST but once that start-3S.PST to sneeze
decide-3S.PST not do-CLIT more
'*Ana almost sneezed, but once she started sneezing she decided not to
do it anymore.'
- (14) Luis casi cruzó la calle, pero una vez que comenzó
a cruzarla decidió regresar.
Luis almost cross-3S.PST the street but once that start-3S.PST.CLIT
to cross-CLIT decide-3S.PST return
'Luis almost crossed the street, but once he started crossing the street,
he turned around.'

(13) and (14) make evident that there is a difference between achievements and accomplishments: whereas accomplishments have no problems generating an incomplete reading, achievements are incapable of doing so. A possible explanation of this difference is that achievements in reality do not denote events that have an ending. A different explanation (and the one I will assume it is the correct one) is that achievements do have an ending, but since the time that lapses

between the start and the end of the event is zero, the *almost* test is unable to target the end of an event. The fact that achievements are instantaneous, causes them to yield infelicitous results when incomplete readings.

3.2 the *takes x-time* test

The *takes x-time* construction exhibits a similar behavior to the *almost* construction in that it is also sensitive to the limits of an event. If *takes x-time* targets the start of an event, the construction yields the time that lapses before the event starts, in the sense of a "preparation time". On the other hand, if *takes x-time* targets the end of the event, it yields the time that lapses between the start of the event and its end. Let us consider the following sentences illustrating the interaction between the *takes x-time* construction and the four aspectual predicate types (15) states, (16) activities, (17) achievements, and (18) accomplishments.

- (15) *Florenció tomó 10 minutos en ser alto.
 Florencio take-3S.PST 10 minutes in be tall
 'Florencio took 10 minutes to be tall.'
- (16) Sancho tomó un minuto en sonreír.
 Sancho take-3S.PST un minute in smile
 Sancho took a minute to smile.
- (17) Ana tomó dos minutos en estornudar.
 Ana take-3S.PST two minutes in sneeze
 'Ana took two minutes to sneeze.'
- (18) Luis tomó un minuto en cruzar la calle.
 Luis take.3S.PST one minute in cross the street
 'Luis took one minute to cross the street.'

As expected, states (15) produce infelicitous statements when combined with the *takes x-time* construction given that they lack a start (or an end). Activities (16), achievements (18) and accomplishments (19) all yield a reading of the time that must lapse before the event actually starts. Notice that this reading is more salient when an inchoative reading is forced on them (compared to *Luis took a minute to start crossing the street*). By definition, the two telic predicates are expected to also yield an reading of the time lapses to the end of the event.

It is not the case, however, that (17) denotes an event such that Ana started to sneeze and two minutes later she finished to sneeze. Also for (17), the available reading is only the one yielding the time lapsed before the start of the event. The

reading targeting the end of the event does not exist. As before with the *almost* test, the *take x-time* test is incapable of targeting the end of the event.

The accomplishments in (18) have no problems yielding such interpretation. It is the case that (18) can denote an event such that Luis started crossing the street and one minute later he reached the opposite sidewalk.

The anomalous results produced with the *almost* construction and validated by the *takes x-time* construction suggest that even though both achievements and accomplishments are telic predicates, there is an aspectual difference between the two that causes the incompatibility of the tests when they try to target the end of an achievement. The diagram below summarizes the findings thus far.

Table 1 - interaction of the tests with all four aspectual types

	states	activities	achievements	accomplishments
<i>almost</i> construction	incompatible • a state does not start. It holds.	compatible • yields a counterfactual reading .	compatible • yields a counterfactual reading when it targets the start of the event. • it is incapable of yielding a incomplete reading .	compatible • yields a counterfactual reading when it targets the start of the event. • yields an incomplete reading when it targets the end of the event.
<i>takes x-time</i> construction	incompatible a state does not start. It holds.	compatible • yields a start of event reading .	compatible • yields a start of event reading when it targets the start of the event. • it is incapable of yielding a end of event reading .	compatible • yields a start of event reading when it targets the start of the event. • yields an end of event reading when it targets the end of the event.

4 Examining the split

As mentioned earlier, Numberg *et al* (1994: 531) observe that it is common in literature to associate an idiom's conventionality in meaning with lack of compositionality in meaning. They posit that a sizeable group of idioms can, and in fact, are capable of undergoing operations such as clefting, passivization, and quantification among other and still retain their idiomatic interpretation.

Numberg *et al* (1994) propose that idioms can be divided into two groups: *idiomatically combining expressions* (ICE) and idiomatic phrases *per se* (IP). Inasmuch as ICEs are expressions whose idiomatic interpretation is distributed

among their lexical components, IPs appear to be atomic in meaning. As consequence, it is possible to modify ICEs (respecting certain semantic criteria) while preserving their idiomatic integrity, whereas any modification done to an IP results in the loss of their idiomatic reading.

An example of an ICE is *pull strings*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary indicates that 'pull strings' means 'exert hidden influence or control'. In that sense, there is a clear correlation between 'pull' and 'exert' and between 'string' and 'influence or control'. The idiomatic meaning is distributed between these two components. It is possible to introduce modifications to the idiom while maintaining the idiomatic interpretation. Consider, for instance, *Jon pulled a variety of strings (so Bill would get the job)* (taken from MacDonald 2008: 115). IPs, on the other hand, do not appear to accept any modification. Consider the IP *kick the bucket*. Merriam-Webster says that it means "to die". Consider *Jon kicked the metal bucket*. It will not elicit an idiomatic interpretation; only the literal meaning is available.

Numberg *et al* (1994) conclude that IPs are stored in the lexicon. Their idiomatic interpretation is a unity, fixed. I will assume that their aspectual structure is also fixed. We will operate under the assumption that any operation that can be applied to an idiom and preserves the idiomatic interpretation should be available and identical to an operation performed in sentential syntax yielding a non-idiomatic interpretation. In Numberg *et al* (2008: 515) own words, "*idiomatically combining expressions must have the syntax of non-idiomatic expressions*". If this were not to be the case, we will have two syntactic apparatuses operating side-by-side, something that would be very difficult to argue for in the Generative perspective. My general conclusion is that accomplishments require additional computations before going to LF. Stretching this assumption to account for achievements too, one can assume that accomplishments are not stored in the lexicon. Sentential syntax takes care of all the derivations needed to form sentences whose predicates are aspectual accomplishments – idiomatic or not –.

In order to classify idioms into ICEs and IPs, I applied two kinds of modifications to the idioms: the addition of a modifier (adjectival or quantifier) and topicalization. The modified expressions that are capable of yielding an idiomatic interpretation will be considered ICE. Those that lost the idiomatic interpretation in favor of a literal one will be considered IPs. We expect the ICEs to be a larger group than the IPs, following Numberg *et al* (1994: 497).

Consider the following statement, an idiom (19) *recoger las velas* 'gather the sails'. As shown in (19.b) and (19.c), *recoger las velas* fails to yield a idiomatic reading if modified in any way, as a result, we conclude it is an IP.

(19.a) *recoger las velas*

literal meaning: 'to gather the sails'

idiomatic meaning: 'to calm oneself, to resist one's urges, to give up'

- (19.b) #Juan recogió la vela mayor
Juan gather.3S.PST the sail main
literal meaning: 'Juan gathered the main sail.'
idiomatic meaning: not available

- (19.c) #Las velas Juan no las quiso recoger.
the sails Juan not CLIT want.3S.PST gather
literal meaning: 'the sails, Juan did not want to gather (them).'

idiomatic reading: not available

IPs, notwithstanding their syntactic structure, have the aspectual structure of an achievement when interpreted idiomatically. Glasbey (2007: 10) suggests that for idioms "it is more natural to think of aspectual information being attached to the complete lexical phrase, i.e. stored in long term memory". My intuition agrees with this statement: the encapsulated meaning of idiom IPs is an indication that they emerge from the lexicon with atomic meaning, and I posit here, with the aspectual structure of an achievement. Fortunately, we have developed a method that will allow us to support or refute what our intuition is telling us. I will test this by subjecting (19) to the aspectual tests developed in section 3.

(20) below shows the results of applying the *almost* test and the *takes x-time* test to the literal reading of (19). (21) shows the same interaction considering an idiomatic interpretation. I expect that the literal interpretation of (21) will have the aspectual properties of an accomplishment whereas (21) will exhibit the aspectual structure of an achievement.

- (20.a) Juan casi recogió las velas
Juan almost gather-3S.PST the sails.
'Juan almost gathered the sails.'

- The counterfactual reading is available. Juan thought about picking up the sails, but decided against it.
- The incomplete reading is also available. Juan started to pick up the sails but something interrupted him so he could not finish picking the sails up.

- (20.b) Juan tomó diez minutos en recoger las velas.
Juan take-3S.PST ten minutes in gather the sails
'Juan took ten minutes to gather the sails'.

- the start of event reading is available. Juan took 10 minutes to get ready and start picking the sails up.
- the end of the end is also available. Juan started picking the sails up and 10 minutes later he was done.

The results shown in (20) confirm that the aspectual structure of (19) corresponds to that of an accomplishment when interpreted literally. The *almost* test elicits both counterfactual and incomplete interpretations which we take as an indication that both the start of the event and the end of the event are targetable by the *almost* test. Finally, the *takes x-time* test corroborates this result by eliciting both a start of the event and an end of the event reading.

Let us consider now an idiomatic interpretation for *recoger las velas* (21).

(21.a) Juan casi recogió las velas
Juan almost gather-3S.PST the sails.
'Juan almost gave up.'

- the counterfactual reading is available. Juan thought about giving up, but decided against it.
- the incomplete reading is not available. It is not the case that Juan gave up, sometime passed, then he decided to stop giving up.

(21.b) Juan tomó diez minutos en recoger las velas.
Juan take-3S.PST ten minutes in gather the sails
'Juan took ten minutes to give up.'

- the start of event reading is available. Juan took 10 minutes to decide he was going to give up.
- the end of event it is not available. It is not the case that Juan gave up, 10 minutes passed, then he decided to stop giving up.

The results outlined in (20) and (21) confirm that the predicate *recoger las velas* on its idiomatic interpretation has the aspectual properties of an achievement, whereas the same predicate on a literal interpretation behaves as an accomplishment. These results can be presented as evidence that IP idioms in Spanish exhibit the same aspectual behavior as IP idioms in English.

5 Conclusions

A statement consisting of a verb and its object may have an idiomatic reading in addition to its literal reading. If the idiom is an IP, the application of the *almost* test

and the *take x-time* test reveal an aspectual mismatch between the literal reading and the idiomatic reading. Predicates that are accomplishments when interpreted literally, will not be accomplishments when interpreted idiomatically; they will be achievements.

I have demonstrated that the behavior of Spanish idiomatic phrases appears to parallel this behavior. In order to account for this assessment, I first gathered a corpus of idiomatic phrases. I subjected each idiom to two tests: (a) topicalization of the object and (b) modification of the object by addition of an adjective or a quantifier. I classified as IPs those statements that retained their idiomatic reading after being modified. Given the space limitation, the entire corpus will not be provided, but I would be happy to share it if contacted by my email address.

For this article, I chose only one IP *recoger las velas* 'to give up, to resist one's urges, to calm down' to be tested. The results of subjecting each statement to the *almost* test and the *take x-time* test was consistent: both tests were capable of targeting the start of the event for the literal reading and the end of the event, indicating the statement is an accomplishment. Concordantly, for the idiomatic reading, both tests were capable of targeting the start of the event and incapable of targeting the end of the event yielding infelicitous statements. This is taken as evidence that the statements are achievements when interpreted idiomatically.

It is clear that a larger number of IP idioms need to be tested in order to lend weight to the conclusion that IP idioms in Spanish behave as IP idioms in English from an aspectual point of view.

Throughout this essay, I learned that one must pay close attention to detail when working with idiomatic expressions. MacDonald (2008: 114) indicates that ICEs can be modified "as long as the semantics of the modification is consistent with the meaning of the idiom." ¿Consistent in which sense? This is too vague. Let us take, for instance, the case of the *echar la casa por la ventana* (literal meaning: to throw the house out of the window. Idiomatic meaning: to overindulge, to waste). This idiom admits some modifications (22.a) and (22.b), but not (22.c).

(22.a) Juan echó toda la casa por la ventana.

Literal meaning: Juan threw the entire house out of the window.

Intended meaning: Juan really spared no expense.

(22.b) Juan echó la casa nueva por la ventana.

Literal meaning: Juan threw the new house out of the window.

Intended meaning: Juan spared no expense celebrating the new house.

(22.c) *Juan echó la casa blanca por la ventana.

Literal meaning: Juan threw the white house out of the window

Intended meaning: not available.

How can we predict what kind of modification will be able to preserve the idiomatic interpretation? Do these modification form a "natural" group?

Even though MacDonald warns that none of the idioms he studied behaved unambiguously as an accomplishment, I personally had a very hard time finding an IP (that has a non-idiomatic accomplishment counterpart) that responded consistently to all the aspectual types. Sometimes the difficulties were caused by the lexical meaning of the verb. For instance, *estirar la pata* (literal interpretation: to stretch the leg. Intended interpretation: to die) is an ideal candidate to be tested, except that the meaning denoted by the idiom yields anomalous results when forced to have a telic interpretation. One can only die once, after all.

Another candidate to be tested is *apretarse el cinturón* (literal meaning: to cinch one's belt. Intended meaning: to watch one's expenses due to lack of resources). *Apretarse el cinturón* can range in meaning between an achievement and a realization. Idiomatically, it can denote an activity. The ambivalence caused me a lot of "white noise" when trying to pin down a particular reading. Should we consider these idioms to be ICEs or IPs? The last difficulty I had while working with idioms is the need for informants to be familiar with the idioms *a priori*. If an informant is not familiar with an idiom, he or she will not be able to yield any significant insights. This might seem to be obvious, but it severely impeded the formation of a working corpus.

Finally, I will like to point out that the corpus I created for this paper appears to contradict an observation done by Numberg *et al* (1994) "the class of idiomatic phrases is much smaller than the class of idioms defined by the criteria of predictability" (p. 497). By predictability, I understand the degree of discrepancy between the idiomatic meaning and the meaning that a speaker would derive by the individual components of the expression. I find this definition to be a little bit vague, but putting that aside, this led me to believe that most of the idioms I was going to find would be of the ICE type. Once the corpus started taking shape, I was surprised to find that the majority of the idioms I found, more than 70%, are IPs. Clearly, there is a lot to be studied about idioms.

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