

## Aspect compositionality, abstract objects and information structure in idioms

**The problem.** The degree of compositionality of idioms has always been a lively debate (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994; Pitt & Katz 2000), but it has been refuelled recently concerning the way aspect is composed in idiomatic VPs. Marantz (1996) and McGinnis's (2002) position is that the aspectual meaning of idioms is structural, systematic and compositional, and it is to be distinguished from their idiosyncratic, encyclopaedic, non-syntactically transparent meaning (see also Marantz 1997, Espinal & Mateu 2010; cf. Glasbey 2003, 2006, who maintains the classical distinction made by Nunberg et al. (1994) between compositional idiomatically combining expressions, and noncompositional idiomatic phrases):

1. *non-idiomatic* a. Hermione hung a picture in five minutes. TELIC  
b. Harry hung pictures/laundry for/#in an hour. ATELIC
2. *idiomatic* a. Hermione *hung a left* in five minutes. 'to turn left' TELIC  
b. Harry *hung fire* for/#in a week. 'to wait' ATELIC

Crucially, McGinnis proposal runs into trouble when we consider Catalan verbal idioms that incorporate definite feminine clitics (see (Espinal 2009) for a description of the phenomenon in a wide range of languages). Note the case of the accomplishment predicate *tirar* 'to throw' (3a), which gives rise to an atelic predicate (3b) when used idiomatically in combination with a definite feminine clitic:

3. a. Va [v *tirar*] [DP *la pilota*] a l'altra banda del carrer en un moment TELIC  
PAST throw the ball to the other side of the street in a moment  
/#durant una bona estona. (OK as iterative, only)  
during a good time  
'(S)he threw the ball to the other side of the street in an instant.'
- b. Va començar el discurs *tirant-les amb bala* #en un moment ATELIC  
PAST start the discourse throwing them with bullet in a moment  
durant una bona estona.  
during a good time  
'(S)he started the discourse speaking wryly during a long period of time.'

A similar shift will be discussed for other predicates, like the unaccusative achievement predicate *passar* 'to pass' (4a), which shifts its expected telicity to an atelic interpretation when co-occurring with the IDFC *la* 'it' (*passar-la magra* 'to suffer' lit. 'to pass it thin') (4b):

4. a. La prova, la va passar en cinc minuts /#durant tot el dia.  
the.F test it.F PST.3SG pass in five minutes during all the day  
'The test, (s)he passed in five minutes/#during the whole day.'
- b. Va *passar-la* #en cinc minuts /durant tot el dia.  
PST.3SG pass. it.F in five minutes during all the day  
'(S)he suffered #in five minutes/during the whole day.'

All in all, these data present a problem for compositionality. Why is it the case that definite feminine articles and clitic pronouns in object argument position of idiomatic expressions do not contribute to telicity? Why does Catalan oppose regular and idiomatic meanings regarding definite feminine DPs and pronouns?

**Analysis.** We defend the hypothesis that inherent definite feminine clitics (IDFC) that encode abstract semantic objects (indeterminate objects, properties, propositions, facts, atemporal situations; see Asher 1993) play a major role when shifting the expected telicity of the predicates in (3)-(4) to convey an ATELIC eventuality. Our analysis separates morphosyntactic definiteness from semantic abstract object denotation (Asher 1993, Moltmann 2013), and

defends that reference to abstract objects in information structure configurations is what matters at the time of constraining the aspectual properties of Catalan verbal idioms with inherent clitics.

Assuming a basic <B(ackground),F(ocus)> structure of information packaging (Krifka 2007), when the background contains a highly salient antecedent that is referentially identifiable, the definite clitic co-refers with this antecedent (5a); this structure constrains the telicity of the predicate by combining the V with an incremental theme (Dowty 1991), resulting in a non-idiomatic telic reading.

5. a. Aquella prova, la va passar.  
 that test it.F.SG PAST.3SG pass  
 ‘That test (s)he passed.’

b.  $\langle \lambda x \lambda e [V(e) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(e)=x](\text{aquella prova}_i), \langle \text{la}_i \text{ va passar} \rangle \rangle$

When there is no highly salient referential antecedent available, the IDFC *les* (lit. them.F.PL) picks up a conventional abstract indeterminate object denotation narrowly restricted by the context of utterance (i.e. *the words* in 6a), and it is pseudo-incorporated to form a complex predicate with the verb (P-V in (6b); Dayal 2011).

6. a. La Maria les tira amb bala.  
 the Mary them.F.PL throw with bullet  
 ‘Mary speaks wryly.’

b.  $\langle \lambda P \lambda e [P-V(e)] (\text{the words}), \langle \text{les}_i \text{ tira}_i \text{ amb}_i \text{ bala} \rangle \rangle$

The output is a complex predicate P-V (*les-tirar\_amb\_bala*), where the abstract clitic contributes a property P that modifies the property denoted by the verb. Therefore, the incorporated clitic cannot be analysed as an incremental theme, yielding the unexpected ATELIC reading.

This process can take a further step when there is no antecedent available in a salient B position for the inherent definite feminine clitic (7):

7. a. Durant la guerra la va passar magra.  
 during the war it.ACC.FEM.SG PAST.3SG pass.INF thin  
 ‘During the war, she suffered.’

b.  $\langle \lambda P \lambda e [P-V(e) \ \& \ \text{durant\_la\_guerra}(e)](s), \langle \text{la}_i \text{ va pasar magra} \rangle \rangle$

(s= situation)

Just as in (6), the clitic *la*, which stands for a generic situation, is semantically pseudo-incorporated into the verb. We conceive that *s* saturates the property P that modifies the verb, resulting in a reading according to which the verb incorporates an abstract-type anaphora, which refers back to a generic situation taking place during the war.

To sum up, in this talk we will discuss that (i) the IDFC denote an abstract object, represented by a property P, which stands for abstract objects, and (ii) this property P is composed with the verbal predicate, by pseudo-incorporation, as a result of which the property-type anaphor modifies the predicate. Thus, the composed predicate lacks an incremental theme, and it is necessarily atelic. This analysis maintains a compositional building of aspect in idioms, while explaining contrasts in Romance languages that McGinnis’ analysis could not explain.

**Asher.** 1993. *Reference to abstract objects in discourse*. Kluwer. **Dayal.** 2011. Hindi pseudo-incorporation. *NL&LT* 29, 123-67. **Espinal.** 2009. Clitic incorporation and abstract semantic objects in idiomatic constructions. *Linguistics* 47, 1221-71. **Krifka.** 1998. The origins of telicity. In *Events and grammar*, 197-235. Kluwer. **McGinnis.** 2002. On the systematic aspect of idioms. *LI* 33, 665-72. **Nunberg** et al. 1994. Idioms. *Lg* 70, 491-538.