

TRIP THE FREAKING LIGHT FANTASTIC: SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE IN ENGLISH
VERBAL IDIOMS

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ABSTRACT

Anissa Neal: Trip the freaking light fantastic: Syntactic structure in English idioms
(Under the direction of J. Michael Terry)

In past scholarship, idioms have been discussed from a mostly semantic perspective; authors have been primarily concerned with how idiomatic meaning is composed and stored (Swinney and Cutler 1979; Gibbs 1980; 1986). This thesis investigates idioms' syntactic behavior and concludes that all verbal idioms of English have stored, internal syntactic structure. Vacuous modification (i.e. modification that does not contribute to the semantics of the phrase), metalinguistic modification (i.e. modification that indicates non-literal readings), aspect, and subject-oriented adverbs (SOAs) are used to test a variety of idioms for evidence of syntactic structure.. There are restrictions on the syntactic processes some idioms can undergo (i.e. passivization and raising constructions). However, this is not due to their lack of internal syntax, but how their meaning is mapped onto the internal syntax.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Idioms have been a focus of linguistic interest for quite some time (Weinreich, 1969; Chomsky, 1980; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989). Although a precise definition is difficult to find, and I will not attempt to give one here, roughly speaking, idioms are phrases within a language whose primary meanings are not straightforwardly predictable from their constituent parts. The literal meanings of *bite*, *the*, and *dust*, for example, do not predict *die* as a meaning for the idiom *bite the dust*. The relationship between these expressions and their meanings stands in stark contrast to that of non-idiomatic phrases. Without additional context, *bite the apple*, which is not an idiom, has only a literal meaning, something like “sink one’s teeth into a small round fruit”. It is this contrast that has caught the attention of so many linguists. On the surface, idioms appear like any other phrase of the language, but they have idiosyncratic and, in most cases, unpredictable meanings attached to them. How these meanings interact with the syntax, then, is of great interest. For the most part, non-idiomatic phrases allow adverbial modification and can undergo passivization. Consider *bite the tasty, red apple* and *the red apple was bitten*. Both of these literal phrases are perfectly acceptable. This is not the case with a large class of idioms. Consider *bite the choking dust* and *the dust was bitten*. The phrases *bite the choking dust* and *the dust was bitten* lose their idiomatic meaning related to *bite the dust*. They have only their literal meanings, however pragmatically odd they may be. Facts like these have led researchers to a variety of positions regarding the syntactic structure of idioms, with most being variants of the claim that

despite first appearances, idioms are not actually built like other phrases in the language, hence their inability to undergo normal language processes (Keizer, 2016).

Contrary to these claims, I argue that all idioms have stored, internal, hierarchical syntax, that is, an internal structure just like any literal phrase. This is a strong claim, one that raises a variety of questions, first and foremost, regarding the restrictions on idioms like those shown above. If all idioms have syntactic structure, just like other phrases of the language, why are there such stringent limits on the syntactic processes some types of idioms can undergo (e.g. modification and passivization)? To address this evident conundrum, this thesis takes the stance that while all idioms have internal, hierarchical structure, it is how idiomatic meanings are mapped to their syntactic structures that matters most.

This focus on mapping is not new. For example, it plays a particularly important role in the idiom classifications developed by Nunberg, Wasow, and Sag (1994). They argue that in the case of an idiom like *spill the beans*, the idiom's meaning, here "reveal a secret", is distributed across the phrase's lexical parts in whatever syntax it may, or may not, have. Therefore, "reveal" is mapped to "spill" and "the beans" maps to "the secret". However, in the case of idioms like *bite the dust* "die", the meaning is not distributed across the parts in the same way. The whole meaning of "die" is mapped to whatever syntax the idiom may or may not have. Because of this imbalance of a single, meaning mapping to a complex structure made of parts, there are operations, particularly those involving movement, that cannot work as they fail to preserve the intended meaning. However, not all idioms exhibit this type of behavior, as *the beans were spilled by Clara* is perfectly acceptable because the meaning can map to individual parts, which can then be moved and retain the meaning. This thesis shifts the focus to the phrase structure itself, that question of what the meaning is actually mapping to.

The goal of this thesis is to provide evidence and argumentation for the (admittedly sizeable) claim that all idioms have internal, hierarchical syntax. This requires more than a plausible explanation for why some idioms do not work in some syntactic operations; the inability of an idiom to undergo a certain process is not conclusive. It requires a positive argument for the existence of internal syntax. To that end, the thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 reviews previous approaches to the syntactic and semantic storage of idioms. One popular view of idiomatic storage is that while meanings are stored, there is no storage of the idiom's (as an idiom) structure. A focus of Chapter 2 is the presentation of evidence that idioms are stored, whether full or flat. Chapter 3 introduces vacuous modification and metalinguistic modification. These modifications are possible with all types of idioms. Next, Chapter 4 will focus McGinnis' (2002) argument that aspect in idioms is composed through the syntax, and, since idioms have aspect, they have syntax. There are challenges to McGinnis' argument, however, as Glasbey (2003) identifies a class of idioms that fail McGinnis' aspect test. Glasbey argues that aspect for this class of idioms is not compositional, not built through the syntax, but rather stored with the idiom itself. This introduces a caveat, a class of idioms that may have no internal syntax. Chapter 5, similar to McGinnis' aspect argument, uses another syntactic phenomenon, subject-oriented adverbs, to claim internal structure in all idioms. It proceeds to test idioms of different types on their interpretation in subject-oriented structures, critically the idioms from the class identified by Glasbey that fail McGinnis' aspect test. Chapter 6 will then expand upon this claim, specifically in reference to how the structure-meaning mapping can result in certain restrictions on some idioms' ability to undergo different linguistic processes. Lastly, Chapter 7 will conclude with a discussion of the claims outlined in this thesis, as well as areas for further research and consideration

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Chomsky (1955, 1956) used his famous sentence *colorless green ideas sleep furiously* to argue for an independent, syntactic component of the language faculty. Speakers judge the sentence to be perfectly grammatical from a syntactic perspective, but semantically odd at best, suggesting two separate systems: one syntactic, the other semantic. This divide is relevant in regards to idioms. Crucial to the argument that idioms are stored with internal, hierarchical structure is the assertion that idioms have syntactic complexity. That is, it is a debate as to whether the syntax of an idiom is stored in individual parts or as a singular whole. This is a separate issue from whether or not idioms have semantic complexity. Preexisting scholarship thus far has primarily asked whether an idiom is assigned a single, whole meaning or if the meaning can be built from the constituent parts, that is, are idioms semantically complex. This thesis focuses on the syntax and whether idioms have a full, articulated syntactic structure, as I claim, or if they are flat, concatenated strings. The issue here is the degree to which idioms are syntactically complex. Clear pictures of both meaning and structure, are integral to a comprehensive understanding of the nature of idioms.

When considering the syntactic structure of idioms, there are three basic options to consider¹. First, assuming that idiomatic phrases are stored separate from their constituent parts (e.g. the idiom *bite the dust* is stored separate from the words *bite*, *the*, and *dust*), an idiom may be stored as a concatenated string of words with no internal hierarchical structure. Such a structure would be mapped onto the idiom's meaning, itself stored either in parts or as a whole. Second, it is possible that the idiom's form is represented with an internal, hierarchical structure; it is a single entity with articulated syntactic parts. Once again, it could map to meaningful parts or a whole meaning. The third option is to abandon the assumption that idioms are stored altogether. The idea here is that there is no independent storage of the idiom (as an idiom) separate from its parts. Idiomatic phrases are built in the syntactic component of the grammar like any other phrase, and they activate their idiosyncratic meanings in the conceptual system directly without the intermediary step of activating a stored representation of the idiom as a whole. Like the second, this third possibility also involves the building of a hierarchical phrase structure for the idiom. That structure, however, is not stored, so the idiom as an idiom has no representation outside of the conceptual system. Of the three possibilities outlined above, the first and third options have been argued for or assumed within the literature. The following section will work through relevant works that have previously addressed idiomatic representation and follow the above described possibilities.

¹It is of course entirely possible that idioms might be stored with an amount of structure somewhere in between full syntax and a concatenated string, but that option will not be explored in this thesis. The options discussed above are basic possibilities, though it is recognized that these are not the only possibilities.

2.1 Long Word Models: Lexical Representation and Direct Access Hypotheses

One of the first models proposed to explain how idiomatic meanings are stored, accessed, and comprehended is Swinney and Cutler's Lexical Representation Hypothesis (Swinney and Cutler, 1979). This model argues that both idiomatic forms and meanings are stored together as a whole, single entity; the idiomatic form is stored as a whole with an attached whole idiomatic meaning. The idioms are "stored and retrieved from the lexicon in the same manner as any other word" (525). As soon as the first word is accessed, analysis of both the literal and idiomatic interpretation begins where "individual words are accessed from the lexicon and structural analysis is undertaken on these words at the same time that the lexical access of the entire string (which is merely a long word) is taking place" (525). For example, *kick*, *the*, *bucket*, and *kick the bucket* are stored in the same way in the lexicon. As this is a parallel model, both literal and figurative processing run in tandem until the context determines the correct interpretation. Should the idiomatic meaning fit the context, the semantic meaning of the idiom is mapped to the stored "long word" representation, a term coined by Swinney and Cutler, representation. Should the literal meaning fit the context, the semantic meaning of the literal phrase is determined like any other phrase in the language.

A key argument in Swinney and Cutler's work is to argue that idioms are stored as single wholes, for both meaning and syntax, and processed just like any other word in the language. The authors' focus is on how the semantic structure of an idiom is represented in the conceptual space, so it follows that they do not discuss the syntactic representation that these stored words may have. What they propose, in regards to semantic representation, would be viable with both proposals on syntactic representation, that is, storage with or without internal structure. However, based on their description of the Lexical Representation Hypothesis, they

make certain assumptions that hint at a belief that there is no hierarchical structure in the stored syntactic forms that the conceptualized meanings map to. For them, it seems, that the long word that maps to the idiomatic meaning is a flat structure of concatenated strings with no hierarchical structure. It is a stored representation, but a representation that is stored without an articulated syntax. The fact that the authors describe the idiom mapping process as “lexical access” and the non-idiomatic one as “structural analysis” further suggests that this is how they view the idiom’s syntactic representation. Swinney and Cutler’s main concern is with the semantic representation of idioms, so these claims about syntactic structure receive less attention in their work and are largely assumptions drawn from their discussion of the semantic representations of idioms.

An alternative to the Lexical Representation Hypothesis is a similar model developed by Gibbs, the Direct Access Hypothesis (Gibbs, 1980; 1986). The key difference between the two is that where the Lexical Representation Hypothesis is a parallel model, Direct Access is serial. As soon as an idiom is encountered, it is first processed figuratively, and the literal interpretation is only processed if the context does not facilitate the figurative meaning. The speakers “comprehend the meanings of idioms more or less directly without first computing their literal interpretations” (18). Both Direct Access and Lexical Representation accept the “long word” view for how meaning and syntactic form are represented. For Gibbs, as well as Swinney and Cutler, all idioms are stored in the lexicon as “long words.” The only point of difference between this model and Lexical Representation is that under Direct Access figurative processing occurs before literal processing, instead of both occurring at the same time, as Lexical Representation claims.

While this “long word” terminology, used by proponents of both Lexical Representation and Direct Access suggests a flat representation with no hierarchical structure,

the idea of a “long word” can be understood in a different way. Psycholinguistic experimentation suggests that that derived words like “government” are stored as wholes, whereas inflected words like “cats” are stored with their morphological parts (Rubin, Becker, and Freedman, 1979; Taft, 1981; Smith and Sterling, 1982). Strictly speaking, to say that idioms behave like long words does not say whether or not they are syntactically complex.

2.2 Against Storage: The Configuration Hypothesis

The Configuration Hypothesis (Cacciari and Tabossi, 1988) is one of the first proposals in the literature that directly addresses the syntactic storage of idioms. It was developed to account for perceived weaknesses in the Lexical Representation and Direct Access Hypotheses. Under the Configuration Hypothesis, while there is storage of an idiom’s semantic representation, there is no storage of syntactic representations. Idioms are built like any other phrase of the language, and a required “idiom key” activates the stored idiosyncratic meaning when enough of the idiom has been processed to activate the idiomatic meaning. In contrast to Lexical Representation and Direct Access, the Configuration Hypothesis maintains that idioms are not stored as single entities but rather built using the words already in the grammar. All idioms are made of words already present in the lexicon. For example, the words that build the idiom *spill the beans* “reveal the secrets” are the same words that build the non-idiomatic phrase *spill the beans* “let loose legumes.” For all of these phrases, the words *spill*, *the*, and *beans* are stored like normal words of the lexicon. To achieve the idiomatic meaning, a required activation threshold, the “idiom key,” must be reached. At this point, the idiomatic meaning is fully recognized. Although it remains somewhat ill-defined, a flaw the authors of this hypothesis note, the idiom key remains crucial to describing how the speaker accesses the idiomatic meaning as it

defines the point where a conglomeration of normal words is then mapped to an idiomatic meaning.

Since the idiom is built like any other phrase in the language, requiring no special storage, the issue of whether the syntactic representation is stored with or without hierarchical structure is avoided. This benefit comes with some drawbacks, however, regarding recognition and production. Let us first consider recognition. The Configuration Hypothesis does well in situating its claims within the realm of speaker recognition. As a model that advocates for activation, speakers need only reach the idiom key to activate the idiomatic meaning, whether or not this meaning is stored in parts or as a whole. There is no description of how the stored meaning is represented in the conceptual space once the meaning has been already activated. It is equally likely, based off the descriptions by Cacciari and Tabossi, that the meaning could be stored as either a whole or in parts. They specify that the parts leading to the activation point are individual parts (i.e. words in the lexicon), but whether the idiom key activates an entire meaning or if the words leading up to the idiom key all activate individual parts of meaning that then the contribute to the whole idiomatic meaning remains unaddressed. This is not as pressing an issue for this thesis as the focus remains on syntactic structure, but this is still an important consideration to address when discussing this hypothesis.

Moreover, if, as the Configuration Hypothesis assumes, the speaker builds the idiom like any other phrase of the language, then there must be some hierarchical, syntactic structure, at least until the idiom key is reached, since it is equally possible that, for recognition, the incoming phrase could be literal. For example, as a speaker hears *kick the ...* they have no way of knowing whether that phrase is going to end with *bucket* giving an idiomatic reading, *table* giving a non-idiomatic reading, or even *bucket* but with a non-idiomatic meaning. The speaker would begin

with hierarchical structure, since both the idiom and literal phrases are just like any other phrase in the grammar. But once the idiom key is reached does the speaker continue building structure or stop once they know it is an idiom? This inquiry is particularly relevant for idioms that have an idiom key earlier in the word, for what would the remaining words have as syntactic structure if they have any at all. In sum, the Configuration Hypothesis, compared to Lexical Representation and Direct Access, is a novel approach to theories on idiomatic storage, both in meaning and in syntax. While not without its limitations, as discussed above, Cacciari and Tabossi argue that the Configuration Hypothesis is a more accurate model.

To support this claim, the authors use three experiments to test the predictions that Lexical Representation and Direct Access make in regards to idiomatic comprehension. Experiment 1 explores what happens when participants are given a single idiom without context. The authors conduct a lexical decision task with three different priming targets: idiom target (i.e. a word that would be primed by the figurative interpretation of the idiom), literal target (i.e. a word that would be primed by the literal interpretation of the idiom), and control (i.e. a completely unrelated word). Experiment 1 finds that the idiomatic target has a faster reaction time than the literal and control, a finding that seems to support the Direct Access Hypothesis. Sans context, the idiomatic meaning is processed first.

However, Cacciari and Tabossi consider a number of alternatives that could also explain the results of Experiment 1. They find a possibly confounding factor in predictability, and they choose to further investigate how this factor could have impacted the reaction times in the first experiment. For the authors, a predictable idiom is one in which the participant could predict the idiomatic meaning well before the last word. If that were the case, it would be impossible to tell if the faster reaction times were due to the accuracy of the Direct Access

Hypothesis or because the experimental material facilitated an idiomatic reading since the participants could recognize the phrase as an idiom before reaching the last word (i.e. predictable). In order to investigate this possible confounding variable, they ran Experiments 2 and 3.

Experiment 2 is organized in the same manner as Experiment 1, except for a change in experimental stimuli. The idioms in the second experiment have been specifically chosen so that participants were unlikely to guess the idiomatic meaning of the phrase until the last word. Experiment 2 finds that when given this type of non-predictable stimuli, participants have faster reaction times with the literal target. From this, the authors conclude these results are unexplainable by both Lexical Representation and Direct Access, and idioms of this type (i.e. unpredictable) are “initially processed only literally” (676). Experiment 3 takes these results a step further and attempts to determine how much time it takes for the figurative meaning to become active. The priming targets are delayed by 300 ms after the idiom, and participants’ reaction times show that the literal target is still faster, even after the delay.

The results of all three experiments cannot be explained by either Lexical Representation or Direct Access. The Lexical Representation Hypothesis cannot explain any of the three experiments, and the Direct Access Hypothesis cannot explain Experiments 2 and 3. This leads Cacciari and Tabossi to conclude that the reason both these models fail is because of their shared assumption, that the idiomatic meaning is stored as a “long word”. For both models, context determines whether the idiomatic or literal meaning is the correct interpretation. When the context is removed, as done in these three experiments, neither of the models can explain the results. The only remaining similarity between the two models is their shared support for the storage of the idiom as a “long word” with a single, whole meaning mapped to it. Per the authors

reasoning, if neither model can accurately account for the results found in the experiments, and the only remaining aspect they agree on is the idea that a “long word” in the lexicon maps to a single, whole meaning, then it is this idea that is the flaw in their argumentation. Cacciari and Tabossi instead propose the Configuration Hypothesis, which argues that idioms are not stored at all, but rather built through the usual processes of the grammar. Idioms are built and processed like any other phrase of the language until an “idiom key” is reached, and the idiomatic meaning is activated (678). Under this hypothesis, there is no special idiom entry, no “long word” in the lexicon because the idioms are made from words already in the standard lexicon.

2.2.1 Against the Configuration Hypothesis: Frequency Effects Imply Storage

The Configuration Hypothesis is built upon predictability. But what is Cacciari and Tabossi’s predictability actually describing? The introduction of predictability ensured there was no longer any way Lexical Representation or Direct Access could be correct, thus allowing the authors to do away with storage of meaning. However, what would make an idiom more or less predictable outside of frequency of use is not at all clear. The authors describe the unpredictable stimuli they use as “pretested and selected so that people were not likely to complete the fragments preceding the last word of the expression idiomatically” (675). It seems likely, then, that idioms that “people were not likely to complete” would be the idioms that people encounter the least. If one encounters an idiom frequently, then they would be more likely to recognize it as an idiom, and, therefore, complete the fragment before the last word. Frequency effects show that words that are seen more frequently are recognized faster than words that are seen less frequently. Cacciari and Tabossi’s conceptualization of predictability would seem to be describing frequency effects without actually naming them as frequency effects. If idioms show frequency

effects, however, that would suggest there is some degree of storage of the idiom as a whole because frequent idioms are recognized just like frequent words.

Another issue the Configuration Hypothesis encounters is explaining how non-canonical idioms are processed. These are idioms that do not follow grammatical rules, such as *trip the light fantastic*, *be that as it may*, and *make believe*, phrase structures that would never be uttered by a native speaker outside an idiomatic context. A more detailed description of this type of idiom is given in the next section. Per the Configuration Hypothesis, these non-canonical idioms are built like any other phrase of the language, but how is this done if these idioms do not follow normal phrase structure rules? There are no grammatical rules in the English language that would produce “trip the light fantastic” non-idiomatically. Nevertheless, these idioms exist. One possibility is that the word constituents of these idioms are stored separately from their literal counterparts. In *trip the light fantastic* there might be two versions of *fantastic* stored in the lexicon: one that appears with this one, specific idiom and one that appears in all other constructions. While possible, this process seems unnecessarily strenuous. If there is separate storage of single words for specific idioms, would it not be easier to simply store the idiom wholesale? If any idiom were going to be stored as a “long word”, it would likely be the non-canonical idioms, as no native speaker would ever produce them non-idiomatically. Storage, once again, presents an explanation. It should be noted, however, that these idioms also raise a challenge under the proposal argued in this thesis. The claim is that all idioms are stored with internal, syntactic structure. For non-canonical idioms, the question then becomes what type of structure are these idioms stored with? How could these idioms have hierarchical structure when no structure would produce them? My response to this is syntactic reanalysis. These non-

canonical idioms are stored with a reanalyzed² structure. They have internal syntax, but it is an internal syntax that was generated from the reanalysis of the non-canonical form. That structure is then stored.

...

Past attempts have been made to understand how meaning, and to some extent structure, are represented in idioms. Despite the differences in approaches to idiomatic representation discussed above, the overall conclusion is that there is some degree of storage for idioms. This thesis considers the above hypotheses as integral starting points for further steps to understanding not only the internal structure of idioms, but also the mapping relationship between meaning and structure. Considering the Lexical Representation Hypothesis, the Direct Access Hypothesis, and the Configuration Hypothesis together covers all of the basic possibilities discussed in this chapter's introduction, save for the second. The first two hypotheses argue for storage of meaning, and based on assumptions made from their argumentation, a storage of the whole idiom form as well; these are the "long word" hypotheses. The latter hypothesis does away with storage completely, arguing that idioms are built just like any other literal phrase of the language, but requiring a special activation threshold to reach the idiomatic meaning. However, Section 2.2 works through the advantages and disadvantages of zero storage, concluding with the likely possibility that at least some idioms, frequent ones, are in fact stored.

²How speakers reanalyze these constructions is still unclear. I consider this an important area for future research.

2.3 Semantic and Syntactic Complexity: Variation in Idioms

The researchers discussed above consider all idioms to have a single, fully stored meaning. For them, there is no semantic complexity. Lexical Representation and Direct Access consider this whole semantic storage with whole syntactic storage; idioms stored like “long words.” The Configuration Hypothesis also supports whole semantic storage, but instead allows for idioms to be built, instead storing their entire form like the above theories “long word.” However, it was shown, using frequency effects, that there is likely some storage of an idiom’s form, that it is not built every time a speaker utters it. So, to conclude, there is storage of both form and meaning. However, storage does not wholly address the organization of what is stored. Is the storage of meaning semantically complex, as in, does it have multiple, meaningful parts, or, as the Lexical Representation and Direct Access Hypotheses claim, one single meaning? Is the storage form syntactically complex? Does it have internal structure or is it a flat, concatenated string?

Let us begin with semantic complexity. Researchers (Nunberg, Wasow, and Sag, 1994; Gibbs and Nayak, 1989; Gibbs et al., 1989) have used different terms to classify idioms depending on their semantic complexity, but, despite what term is used, they describe the same features. Semantic complexity, termed compositionality by Nunberg, Wasow, and Sag (1994), is “the degree to which the phrasal meaning, once known, can be analyzed in terms of contributions to the parts” (498). Idioms that are semantically complex, that is, the meaning of the idiom relies, usually figuratively, on the parts that constitute the idiom, are “idiomatically combining” expressions (Nunberg et al., 507), also referred to as decomposable (Gibbs et al. 1989, Abel, 2003). Idioms that have a meaning assigned to the whole idiom, that is, idioms where the meaning cannot be distributed across the parts, are “idiomatic phrases” (Nunberg et. al, 1989),

referred to as nondecomposable by others (Gibbs et al. 1989; Abel, 2003). These above terms classify idioms by their distribution of the meaning across constituent parts. An idiom like *spill the beans* “reveal the secret” is idiomatically combining because the meaning of “reveal” and “secret” can be understood as distributing to *spill* and *beans*, respectively. An idiomatic phrase, such as *kick the bucket* “die”, on the other hand, has no such semantic distribution; the meaning of “die” is applied wholesale to the phrase *kick the bucket*, not individual parts.

The above describes semantic complexity. Now, consider syntactic complexity. Syntactic complexity is concerned with whether or not there is an internal, hierarchical structure. There is the possibility that idioms are complex phrases with internal syntax, and there is the possibility that idioms are completely without structure, completely flat phrases. While a phrase can be both semantically complex and syntactically complex, they are still separate domains of complexity, one concerned with if and how meaningful parts are distributed and one concerned with the internal organization of structure. However, semantic complexity does help derive predictions regarding the likelihood of syntactic complexity, although that is not to say that syntactic complexity depends upon semantic complexity. I consider this likelihood as a scale: at one end are idioms most likely to have internal syntax and at the opposite end are those most likely to have no internal syntax. Literal phrases, phrases uttered non-idiomatically, definitely have syntactic structure. Therefore, idioms that are the closest approximates to literal phrases would be most likely to have syntactic structure. In non-idiomatic phrases, such as *spill the sauce*, each individual word has an associated meaning. This is to be expected, as this is how language works; the verb *spill* means “spill”, the noun *sauce* means “sauce” and so on. Idioms that are idiomatically combining or decomposable come closest to achieving this compositional nature of literal phrases because even though their meaning is idiosyncratic, and, therefore,

unpredictable, that meaning can still be distributed across constituent parts in a close approximation to how meaning is distributed in literal phrases. *Spill the beans*, despite the fact that *spill* does not mean “spill”, still has a meaning of “reveal” tied to it. If any idiom were going to have syntactic structure, it would be this class that behaves most similar to the literal phrases.

Next are nondecomposable idioms. As idioms with meanings that cannot be distributed across constituent parts, these are less likely to have syntactic structure than the decomposable idioms, as there is no way to assign individual meaning to the constituent parts, but rather a meaning applied to the entire idiom. However, both decomposable and nondecomposable idioms are still syntactic phrases. The phrase *drop the mic* can be used literally to mean “drop a piece of sound equipment” or idiomatically “do something impressive”, and *spill the beans* can still mean, non-idiomatically, to “let loose legumes.” In this sense, decomposable and nondecomposable idioms are different from idioms that lack both semantic complexity and, as argued by Nunberg et al., syntactic complexity. Referred to by Nunberg et al. as “idioms which do not ‘have the syntactic form of nonidiomatic expression’” (515), these non-canonical idioms have meanings that cannot be distributed to their parts, and their syntactic structure does not follow the rules of the grammar. Examples of these types of idioms include *trip the light fantastic*, *by and large*, *believe you me*, and *would that it were*. Non-canonical idioms are phrases that would never be produced by a native speaker in a literal context, and, thus, are the least likely to have internal syntactic structure. However, they are perfectly acceptable when used idiomatically.

Semantic complexity and syntactic complexity are separate components of idioms, each concerned with different features. However, it is the correspondence between these separate features, meaning and structure, that allows for predictions on the likelihood of internal syntax.

These predictions are important for two reasons. First, it creates a range of data that must be thoroughly investigated. The predictions of syntactic likelihood generated from meaning-structure correspondence, are predictions that must all be satisfied if an argument regarding internal syntactic structure of idioms is to be truly comprehensive of all idioms. Second, and somewhat more importantly, is that it highlights the significance of the meaning-structure correspondence. Not all meanings are stored in the same way, as shown by the different idiom classifications discussed above. Different types of meaning storage results in a difference in how that meaning is mapped to structure. Therefore, idioms will exhibit different behavior in how the meaning-structure correspondence, which helps shed further light on the different syntactic behavior idioms exhibit. This thesis aligns more with the claims of Nunberg et al. in that there are different classifications of semantic complexity, and it does agree that there is semantic storage. This semantic storage may not be the same for all idioms, though. It depends on how the meanings are distributed across the parts, on their semantic complexity, but it is still stored.

CHAPTER 3

MEASURES OF SYNTAX: VACUOUS AND METALINGUISTIC MODIFICATION

Let us first begin with a measure of syntax, that is, a process sensitive to syntax, that is applicable across all types of idioms. The following sections introduce evidence showing that certain types of modifications, vacuous and metalinguistic, are possible for all types of idioms. Adverbial modification of this type is particularly useful because it (1) modifies the verb, in this case the idiom, directly and (2) is limited to specific placements in the structure, as adverbs cannot be placed randomly.

3.1 Vacuous Modifiers

Introduced by McClure (2011), vacuous modifiers are modifiers that do not contribute semantic content to the sentence. Referred to as “expressives” by McClure, they have a “high degree of connotative or affective content” but do not affect “the truth conditions of a sentence” (2). Examples of these types of modifiers are words like *freaking*, *goddamn*, *motherfucking*, and *old*³. Non-vacuous modifiers, in contrast, do add semantic content to the sentence. These have the power to change the meaning of a sentence.

³It should be noted that in this case, as a vacuous modifier, *old* is not contributing semantic meaning to the sentence. This differs from the other use of *old* where it actually refers to something of advanced age. How speakers interpret the usage of *old* depending on the context remains to be seen.

(1) Yulia kicked the goddamn bucket.

‘Yulia died (emphatic)’

(2) Yulia kicked the rusty bucket.

‘Yulia struck a rusty pail’

(1), which contains a vacuous modifier, still maintains its idiomatic reading. (2), however, containing a non-vacuous modifier, can no longer mean “die”, having lost its idiomatic reading.

This type of modification is possible across all idiom types.

(3) Khadija spilled the freaking beans

‘Khadija revealed the secret (emphatic)’

(4) Khadija sawed freaking logs all night

‘Khadija snored all night (emphatic)’

(5) Khadija cut the motherfucking rug

‘Khadija danced (emphatic)’

(6) Khadija tripped the freaking light fantastic

‘Khadija danced nimbly (emphatic)’

(7) Khadija made fucking believe she didn’t hear Tom

‘Khadija pretended she didn’t hear Tom (emphatic)’

Most notable is that, first, these vacuous modifiers are felicitous with all types of idioms, and, second, they are not randomly placed. This becomes particularly relevant for non-canonical idioms. If an idiom were to be lacking in syntax, it would be the non-canonical idioms. They are idioms that would never be formed under the normal rules of grammar. However, these vacuous modifiers are successful with them and do not work when placed elsewhere.

- (8) Trip the freaking light fantastic
- (9) *Trip freaking the light fantastic
- (10) *Trip the light freaking fantastic
- (11) Freaking trip the light fantastic

While these vacuous modifiers work with all idioms, the more pertinent question is why they do so. The only difference between the modification in (1) and (2) is that the first modification has an actual impact on the truth condition of the sentence. A person kicking a rusty pail is not the semantic equivalent to a person kicking a pail; the modification produces a difference in meaning. The vacuous modifier, on the other hand, does no such thing. There is perhaps an emotive or pragmatic difference, but not a semantic one. This holds true across all idioms. For example, in decomposable idioms, the individual parts have meaning. Therefore, these meaningful parts can be distributed across the syntax. Nondecomposable idioms do not have meaningful parts, but only one, single meaning applied wholesale to the entire structure. Non-canonical idioms follow in the same vein as nondecomposable idioms. This type of modification, one that does not impact the semantics of the sentence at all, is perfectly acceptable for the express reason that it does not create a semantic change in meaning. It is irrelevant whether the idiom maps a single meaning to the internal structure or a variety of meaningful

nothing is being added to the meaning regardless, which allows for this type of modification to work with all types of idioms.

Another important clarification is that while idioms of all types can be modified by vacuous modifiers, some idioms can be used successfully with non-vacuous modifiers. Consider the examples below; the non-vacuous modifier is bolded.

- (12) It looks like Benecio [sic] Del Toro just spilled the **official** beans on his involvement in Star Wars Episode VIII.

Keizer (2016: 995)

- (13) Visit your shop for no reason at all even if it's just to shoot the **bicycling** breeze!

Keizer (2016: 995)

- (14) Bugsy kicked the **social** bucket (when s/he committed that faux pas at the party)

McClure (2011: 3)

- (15) It was the chef's own unbridled ego that cooked his **organic free-range** goose.

McClure (2011: 5)

(12) contains a decomposable idiom. As such, its individual meanings can be mapped to parts of the syntax, similar to a literal sentence, therefore, making modification of this type of idiom quite easy. The modifier is still modifying a meaning; it just happens to be the idiomatic meaning. The beans themselves are not "official" but the secret that was revealed is.

The remaining examples contain nondecomposable idioms. This may seem strange because, as aforementioned, nondecomposable idioms contain single, whole meanings mapped to a complex structure. That should make it difficult to modify at an idiosyncratic level since there are no individual pieces with meaning to be modified. This intuition is correct, in fact. Consider (13) through (15). The highlighted modifier is not modifying the noun it precedes, but

rather the entire idiosyncratic meaning of the idiom. (13) is describing the topic of conversation had, one about bicycles. (14) describes a type of death, a social one, not a type of bucket. (15) is particularly interesting. Described by Ernst (1981) this example involves “conjunctive modification,” as the word “goose” is being used in “two conjoined propositions” (McClure, 5). In one, “goose” participates in the idiomatic reading: *cook someone’s goose* “damage or ruin someone”. In the other, it participates in the reading of a chef cooking that specific type of bird. This creates somewhat of a play on words. While it is still unclear what allows conjunctive modification in nondecomposable idioms, McClure posits it has to do with the part of the idiosyncratic idiom being a literal referent. All of these modifications are acceptable for nondecomposable idioms because they contribute more meaning to the entire idiosyncratic meaning, not a specific part. Unlike the modifications found in decomposable idioms, like (12), these modifications are not concerned with a part of the idiosyncratic meaning, but rather are applied to the whole of it. Despite the above examples, vacuous modifiers, thus far, are still the only modifiers applicable to all idioms. Non-vacuous modifiers like the ones above do not work with non-canonical idioms.

- (16) *After taking two classes, Becky thought she could trip the salsa light fantastic
‘After taking two classes, Becky thought she could dance salsa nimbly’

3.2 Metalinguistic Modifiers

Similar to vacuous modifiers, metalinguistic modifiers are modifiers that “comment on the status of the [item] as a linguistic object, rather than a physical object” (McClure, 2). These include words like *metaphorical*, *proverbial*, and *figurative*. Unlike the vacuous modifier, these metalinguistic modifiers do impact the truth condition of a sentence, as idiomatically “kicking a metaphorical bucket” is quite different than idiomatically “kicking the bucket”; it indicates a

sense of removal from the literal. Like the vacuous modifiers, these metalinguistic modifiers work with all idioms.

- (17) Geri pulled the proverbial strings to get Loretta that swanky, new job.
- (18) Jason ate metaphorical crow after seeing the inaccurate spreadsheet.
- (19) Aysha buried the figurative hatchet and let Fatima have her book back.
- (20) Beth tripped the metaphorical light fantastic when out with Yael this weekend.

Metalinguistic modifiers do change the truth conditions of the sentence, but they are still able to be used with all types of idioms. These types of modifiers do not need the individual pieces to have an assigned meaning. They can, as seen in (17), but it is not a necessary requirement. The function of these modifiers is to express a degree of removal from the literal world, in a sense making the meaning even more idiomatic. In doing this, they address the whole, idiomatic meaning, not just individual parts.

...

The types of modifications discussed above illustrate how there are syntactic processes that work with all idioms. Not all idioms can undergo all types of modification, as seen in (2), but all types of idioms can be modified by vacuous and metalinguistic modifiers. These modifications make no requirements on the meaning of the idiom, but operate at a separate level, either completely non-semantic (i.e. vacuous modifiers) or non-literal (i.e. metalinguistic modifiers). This is the first piece of evidence in supporting the claim for syntactic structure in all idioms. The next chapter continues investigating processes sensitive to syntax and their behavior with idioms using aspect.

CHAPTER 4

MEASURES OF SYNTAX: ASPECT

The bulk of literature on idioms centers on the semantic. McGinnis' (2002) article is one of the first to focus purely on the syntactic complexity of idioms, specifically on aspect. McGinnis claims that aspect is compositional and systematic in all idioms. That is, the verb phrase of an idiom will have the same aspectual properties as any other verb phrase with "the same syntactic properties" (668). McGinnis is a proponent of Distributed Morphology (henceforth DM), which argues that "structural components of meaning are bundled into lexical items manipulated by the syntax, while idiosyncratic components are added post-syntactically from a list known as the Encyclopedia" (667). She is using the aspect found in idioms as an argument for where structural meaning is composed, stating that it is composed prior to the idiosyncratic meaning, since the aspect found in idioms matches the aspect of literal counterparts, not one based off their idiosyncratic meaning. In particular, the author is pushing back against Jackendoff's (1997) theory of Representational Modularity (henceforth RM), which claims all meaning is composed in the conceptual system, which would predict that idioms would not match their literal counterparts, making it noncompositional in idioms (667). For McGinnis, the presence aspect that matches the literal counterpart in idioms shows that aspect is a component of structural meaning, which is derived from the syntax, not the conceptual system. Aspect comes from the syntax of the idiom, not the meaning of the idiom. The "syntactic components of meaning," which includes aspect, are "bundled into lexical items," that is, stored

with lexical items, that are then combined in the syntax. Therefore, for DM, all idioms have aspect composed in a separate feature from their idiosyncratic meaning. This is in opposition to RM, which would argue that the aspect is not composed but is instead arbitrarily assigned and stored to the idiosyncratic meaning.

Idiomatic *Hermione was kicking the bucket for weeks* “Hermione was dying for weeks” is an unacceptable phrase, but non-idiomatic *Hermione was dying for weeks* is not. For McGinnis, this is due to the fact that the idiom *kick the bucket* does not have the same aspect of its idiomatic meaning, intransitive “die”, but rather the aspect of transitive “kick” (668). The non-idiomatic sentence *Hermione was kicking the bucket for weeks* is still unacceptable, just like the idiomatic one because of the aspect that comes with *kick*. These aspectual properties are present in all verbal English idioms, and the author explains these facts by distinguishing between “two types of semantic information...the *structural* and *idiosyncratic* components of meaning,” first proposed by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1998) (McGinnis, 667).

Aspect, the author argues, is a part of the structural component of meaning, not the idiosyncratic because it “interacts with structural components of the sentence” (668) and is built by the syntax. For example, *walk home*, with a complement, has a different aspect than *walk*, which has no complement. The atelic reading, states and activities, is possible with *walk*, as in *Thea walked for/*in two hours*. The telic reading, accomplishments and achievements, is possible with *walk home*, as in *Thea walked home in/*for two hours*. There is a structural difference that is reflected in the aspect. McGinnis uses the verb *hang* as an example of this. When *hang* has a singular DP complement, a telic reading: *Hermione hung a picture in/*for five minutes*. When the complement is a bare plural or mass DP, only atelic readings are possible: *Hermione hung pictures/laundry for/*in an hour*. The actual structure of the phrase, singular DP

complement vs. bare plural or mass DP complements, impacts aspect even though the meaning of the verb *hang* is maintained. Both *hang a picture* and *hang pictures* involve the act of hanging a picture; the verb *hang* does not have a different meaning in these two phrases, and there is no significant difference in the semantic meaning of the phrases based on which syntactic structure is used. Aspect, however, is sensitive to the differences in these two structures. This is also found in idiomatic phrases.

The author notes that two different idioms, both containing *hang*, mirror the aspectual properties discussed above. The idiom *hang a left* “turn left” has the same aspectual properties as *hang* with a singular DP complement, seen in *hang a picture*. The idiom *hang fire* “wait” has the same aspectual properties as *hang* with a bare plural or mass DP, seen in *hang laundry/pictures*.

- (21) a. Hermione hung a left in five minutes.
b. Hermione hung a left for five minutes.

- (22) a. Hermione hung fire for a week.
b. *Hermione hung fire in a week.

(McGinnis, 668)

The idioms *hang a left* and *hang fire* in no way have the same idiosyncratic meaning as non-idiomatic phrases *hang a picture* and *hang laundry*; obviously, turning left is not the semantic equivalent of hanging a picture, and waiting is not the semantic equivalent of hanging laundry. However, there is a clear connection between the two different structures that make use of *hang* that is not reliant solely upon semantic meaning. Aspect is impacted by the structure of the syntactic representation, not the idiosyncratic meaning, of the idiom, which follows from the argument of DM.

Therefore, McGinnis' model could fit with either argument regarding storage. These structural components that are composed by the syntax could be composed and stored, wholesale, with the syntactic representation of the idiom, or they could be built together as the idiom itself is built; both are possible.

4.1 Is Aspect Enough?

McGinnis argues that all idioms fit within the DM paradigm; all idioms have syntactic structure that is composed separately from their idiosyncratic meanings. However, Glasbey⁴ (2006) draws into question the applicability of such an argument across all idioms. Glasbey is in agreement with McGinnis in that her argument is applicable to some idioms; some idioms do have compositional aspect, but not all. Those that fall into this latter category, idioms without compositional aspect, instead have their aspectual information stored with the idiom, rather than computed. That is, some idioms, instead of following the DM argumentation, instead appear to follow RM. Glasbey uses the idiom *paint the town red* "party in a wild manner" to illustrate how compositional aspect is not found in all idioms. Consider the following examples below.

(23) Mary and her friends painted the town red for a few hours.

'Mary and her friends partied in a wild manner for a few hours.'

(24) ?Mary and her friends painted the town red in a few hours.

'Mary and her friends partied in a wild manner in a few hours.'

(Glasbey, 2)

Based on the judgments of Glasbey's informants, (24) does not combine easily with *in-*adverbials, as *paint the town red* "party in a wild manner" aligns more closely to a state or

⁴Many thanks to Hui An for bringing this article to my attention. See also Glasbey (2003).

activity. Following from McGinnis, the aspect found in this idiom should be the same as in the literal interpretation if, as she claims, all aspect is compositional in idioms. Next consider the below examples where *paint the town red* has been modified for a clearer literal meaning, with *shed* replacing *town* and *green* replacing *red*.

(25) ?Mary and her friends painted the shed green for a few hours.

‘Mary and her friends covered the shed with green paint for a few hours.’

(26) Mary and her friends painted the shed green in a few hours.

‘Mary and her friends covered the shed in green paint for a few hours.’

(Glasbey, 3)

These judgements differ from the ones found in (24). It appears that the literal reading is more felicitous with *in*-adverbials, those that usually work with accomplishments and achievements. The aspect of the idiom is different from that of the literal phrase, contra McGinnis.

Despite these differing results, Glasbey does not completely disregard McGinnis’ argument; compositional aspect is still a possibility. When aspect is composed for some idioms, the process results in an aspect that is the same as the literal counterpart, for others, the process results in an aspect that differs from the literal counterpart, one that relies on the idiosyncratic meaning. Where these differences arise, according to Glasbey, is the input into that process. Glasbey follows Krifka (1992) in describing the process of compositional aspect, which considers thematic relations as input. As Glasbey notes, in the literal phrase *paint the town red* (or, for ease, *paint the shed green*) there is a thematic relation of “gradual patient” that indicates “a gradual change in state of one of the participants in the eventuality” (Glasbey, 8). This thematic relation, however, is not present in the input of the idiom *paint the town red*. There is no sense of gradual change for the idiomatic phrase; it is closer to a state or activity than an

accomplishment. Thus, compositional aspect can be impacted by information on thematic relations.

Glasbey takes this line of reasoning further and suggests that there is a class of idioms that have different thematic relation information than their literal counterparts. These are Nunberg et al.'s "idiomatic phrases," or nondecomposable idioms. Idioms with meanings that cannot be distributed to their constituent parts, examples being *bite the dust* and *saw logs* "sleep." For Glasbey, it is "more natural to think of aspectual information being attached to the complete lexical phrase, i.e. stored in long term memory" (10). Thus, Glasbey predicts that idioms that have a different aspect than their literal counterpart have noncompositional, stored aspect. Idioms that fall within this class, then, should fail McGinnis' test. This appears to be true of some idiomatic phrases. Consider the example below. According to McGinnis, it should have the same aspect as the literal counterpart, aspect that is compositional. According to Glasbey, it can have stored aspect, and that aspect may differ from the aspect of the literal counterpart, as the pre-composed aspect can combine with "aspectual information from elsewhere" (10).

(27) *hang an arse* 'loiter' (obsolete)

- a. Charlie hung an arse for five minutes outside the pub.
- b. *Charlie hung an arse in five minutes outside the pub.

Per McGinnis, *hang* and a complement DP should produce a telic reading, one that is compatible with *in*-adverbial modification. The example above is, however, more compatible with the atelic reading. The combination of *hang* and a DP complement, non-idiomatically, denotes accomplishment or achievement, such as *hanging a towel* or *hanging the curtains*. Despite its appearance with this form, (27) actually describe a state or activity; this is the same issue described by Glasbey with *paint the town red/paint the shed green*. For idiomatically combining

expressions, i.e. decomposable idioms, Glasbey predicts that they can have compositional aspect. Since their meanings can be distributed across their constituent parts, the meaningful parts can act as input in the composition process. In some cases, this produces aspect that is the same as the non-idiomatic counterpart, and in others it does not; the thematic relations of the idiom can match or not match the thematic relations of the non-idiom (10). Compositional aspect is maintained, but only for a specific type of idiom, only for idioms where there is a full correspondence between meaning and structure, and, even then, the aspect is still derived in part from thematic relations determined by how the meaningful parts are distributed across the constituents.

Both McGinnis and Glasbey support compositional aspect. For McGinnis, aspect is composed in the structural component, separate from the idiosyncratic meaning, for all idioms, in full support of DM. For Glasbey, thematic relations play an important role in the composition of aspect, but only idiomatically combining phrases, where meaning can be distributed to individual parts, have compositional aspect, in partial support of DM. Idiomatic phrases must have stored aspect, aligning more with RM. Even if McGinnis and Glasbey agreed completely on compositional aspect for idiomatically combining phrases, there is still an entire class of idioms found by Glasbey that do not work under McGinnis. It is impossible to argue that all idioms have internal syntax based on the aspectual argument, for there appears to be at least some idioms that fail the test. Therefore, another test is needed. Like aspect, it must be something assumed to be structural, something that could reliably suggest syntactic structure. Furthermore, it would have to work with all classes of idioms, critically those identified by Glasbey that fail McGinnis' aspect test, idioms that have a different aspect than their literal counterparts. Vacuous and

metalinguistic modifiers can be used with this class of idioms, but Chapter 4 will look at a further independent argument in the form of subject-oriented adverbs.

CHAPTER 5

MEASURE OF SYNTAX: SUBJECT-ORIENTED ADVERBS

In the previous section, McGinnis (2002) investigates the behavior of aspect in regards to idioms, and finds that there are structural effects from aspect that appear in idioms, concluding from this that all idioms have syntactic structure. Glasbey (2006) responds to this claim by identifying a group of idioms that do not follow McGinnis' proposed pattern. I use both McGinnis and Glasbey to conclude that there is syntactic information stored with idioms, separate from their idiosyncratic meanings. This section takes this conclusion a step further. Using subject-oriented adverbs (henceforth, SOAs), I claim that all idioms have internal, hierarchical syntax. SOAs are, as the name suggests, adverbs that relate attributes to the subject. Words such as *willingly*, *calmly*, and *wisely* are some commonly used SOAs that add further description to a characteristic maintained by the subject, whether it be the surface-subject or the logical subject. For example, in the sentence *Isadore directed Phillip willingly*, the subject, *Isadore*, is the one with the *willing* attribute. In the passive sentence, *Isadore was willingly directed by Phillip*, however, either Isadore could be willing to be directed by Phillip or Phillip could be directing Isadore in a willing manner. In idioms, these SOAs work just as well, examples being *Creta willingly shot the breeze* and *Justine wisely spilled the beans*. It would appear, then, that subjecthood is maintained, as SOAs work perfectly well with idioms. This suggests that idioms have a position in the syntax relegated to subjects, and, therefore, must have internal syntax.

Critical to this argument, is the idea that subjecthood is a syntactic, and therefore structural, notion. For SOAs to be diagnostic of structure, the component they are sensitive to, that is, subjecthood, must be a structural position. An example of this can be seen in the interpretation of passive structures containing SOAs. In the sentence above, *Isadore was willingly directed by Phillip*, there are two possible interpretations. The non-passive equal, *Phillip directed Isadore willingly*, where only Phillip is the one who is willing, there is only one interpretation. Therefore, a change in structure (i.e. passivization) has an impact on the reading of the SOAs, indicating that this is likely a structural effect. The finer details of subjecthood as a structural component continue to be debated, and there are those against the idea, but for the purposes of this paper, subjecthood is considered positional, and, therefore, syntactic.

If SOAs, as I claim, can be used as an indicator of internal structure, and all idioms have internal, hierarchical structure, then SOAs should behave the same as their non-idiomatic counterparts. For example, the sentence *John has gladly prepared dinner for Kat* has two readings: (1) James was glad to prepare dinner for Kat and (2) James made the dinner for Kat in a glad manner. Change the placement of the SOA, as in *James gladly has prepared dinner for Kat* and only one reading is available: James was glad to prepare dinner for Kat. These same effects can be seen in idioms as well. Take the idiom *shoot the breeze*. In *Elia has gladly shot the breeze with Marc all afternoon* there are still two possible readings: (1) Elia was glad to shoot the breeze (i.e. converse idly) with Marc all afternoon and (2) Elia shot the breeze (i.e. conversed idly) with Marc in a glad manner. When the placement changes, *Elia gladly has shot the breeze with Marc all afternoon*, only the former reading remains, just as in the non-idiomatic sentences. SOAs, which are sensitive to the syntactic position of subject, appear to behave the same in idiomatic and non-idiomatic sentences. Idioms, therefore, must have syntactic structure in order

to produce the same differences in reading as the non-idiomatic sentences, which definitely have internal syntax.

It is also important to note the assumption I make regarding idioms and their theta roles. Theta roles are determined by the syntax, and the thematic relations are then determined by the semantics. Although related, these systems are built in separate areas. In the discussion in aspect, it was shown how while an idiom and its literal counterpart, such as *paint the town red* and *paint the shed green*, can have the same theta roles, they differ in thematic relations (i.e. the literal phrase requires a “gradual patient” while the idiom does not). Now, consider these English idioms that have full subjects within them, such as *the roof caved in* “something bad happens”, *shit happens* “bad/uncontrollable things occur”, *the shit hit the fan* “the situation becomes bad”, and *when/until the fat lady sings* “a long time from now”. These idioms come with a subject built in; therefore, they should work with SOAs just like any verbal idiom. However, this is not the case.

(28) *The roof caved in on James willingly.

(29) *The shit gladly hit the fan.

(30) The game is not over until the fat lady willingly sings.

(30) is the most felicitous, but none of the above examples work as well as *Elia shot the breeze with Marc all afternoon*. For (28) and (29), the issue is due to what the subject is; both are non-sentient entities incapable of controlling external activities. As described by Matsuoka (2013), this is a selection restriction on the SOAs; they require a subject to some degree of agency (590). This is not the case for (30), as there is a sentient subject. The position is present, even given entirely with these idioms, but the semantics of the position are not compatible. Furthermore, one explanation for the behavior of (28) and (29) would require that the structure of the idiom be

analyzed in order for one to determine that having the subject position is not enough, that thematic relation must meet specific restrictions. This would require the presence of an articulated syntactic structure.

The following sections will further investigate the interaction of SOAs and idioms. First, the following section will discuss the history of subjects in linguistic theory, and how subjecthood can be conceptualized as a syntactic notion. The second section will present evidence that shows how different idioms behave with SOAs and the differences in readings they produce. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a summary of the proposed claims.

5.1 Subjecthood as a Matter of Syntax

Beginning with Chomsky (1965), subjecthood is defined in clear syntactic terms as the NP immediately dominated by S rather than a “core primitive[] of grammatical theory” (Matsuoka, 2013). That is, the idea of a subject is conceptualized positionally; anything in the position Spec of S is the subject. Alternatively, others (Perlmutter, 1980; Bresnan, 2001) considered subjecthood not as a position, but rather a clustering of certain, likely semantic, features. Under this conceptualization, it was a conglomeration of properties, not a specific position in the syntax, that defined subjecthood. The positional view came under threat in the 1970s and early 1980s, when it was noted that while subjecthood as a position worked quite well for English, it had less explanatory power cross-linguistically. Researchers moved away from subjecthood as a position, and toward subjecthood as a primitive with a varying degree of different properties, depending on the language. The variation of properties allowed for more cross-linguistic consensus. Proponents of this approach are Relational Grammar (Perlmutter, 1980) and Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan, 2001), which both treat subjects as primitives.

However, with the development of IP structure (Chomsky, 1986), support for syntactic movement, and a split between the layers of syntax into lexical and functional, the cross-linguistic irregularities that were an issue under the initial positional hypothesis became less concerning. X-bar Theory and the Internal Subject Hypothesis allowed for a distinction between lexical and functional projections, grouping lexical projections beneath the functional, inflectional projection. Following this logic, subjects, lexical projections, move from their lexical position, where they are assigned thematic roles, to the functional position, if they have features that must be checked in the morphosyntax. This movement then links the two positions, one lexical and one functional, and helps further explain why properties related to subjects are often distributed over multiple positions. Subjecthood as a syntactic notion was a plausible, and strong, argument once again. Researchers continue to debate the finer details how properties related to subjecthood are distributed, where the subject position actually resides, and whether a position can be explicitly described in the grammar (Kroeger, 1993; McCloskey, 1997; Cardinaletti, 2004), but there seems to be a shared consensus that subjecthood is determined by the syntax. This is the view that this paper will follow.

5.2 Subjecthood in Subject-Oriented Adverbs

As briefly mentioned, I agree with others who are in support of subjecthood as a syntactic notion. This is, in part, because of the range of facts that can be accounted for if one conceptualizes subjecthood as a matter of syntax. First, consider passivization, a process that requires the movement of syntactic parts. Regardless of whether semantics plays a role, passivization necessitates movement within the syntax. Thus, this process becomes particularly interesting when considered with SOAs.

(31) Clythia followed Alexi contentedly.

(32) Alexi was contentedly followed by Clythia.

In (31) only *Clythia*, as the subject, is given the *content* attribute by the SOA. In (32), either *Alexi* or *Clythia* could be *content*. In both sentences, *Clythia* as *content* remains a possible reading. This is true even in (32) when *Clythia* no longer remains in the subject position; *Alexi* occupies it. The same cannot be said for (31) where under no reading would Alexi be considered *content*. Only in (8b) is it possible that *Alexi* or *Clythia* be *content*. The only distinction between (31) and (32) is that in (32) *Alexi* is acting as the surface subject, as it has now been moved into the subject position through passivization. However, *Clythia*, as seen in (31), is the logical subject, and, occupied that same subject position before the passivization process. This is why, in (32), both readings are possible. Both occupied the subject position at some point, thus allowing for multiple readings from the SOAs.

Another interesting phenomenon, one that Matsuoka (2013) focuses on, regards the interpretation of sentences such as (33) and (34) which contain object-oriented readings of the SOAs.

(33) John sent Bill willingly to the doctor.

(34) Mary put Susie contentedly on the bed.

(Matsuoka, 2013: 587)

There are two readings available here: (1) John sent Bill in a willing manner to the doctor and (2) John sent Bill, who was willing, to the doctor. These two readings are only available when there are, what Matsuoka terms, locative PP constructions (587). Without the locative PP, there is no interpretation of the object as being given the SOA attribute, as seen when one compares (33) to (31). If SOAs, as the name implies, actually modify the subject, then how is it possible that some

constructions produce readings where the object is also a possible reading? For Matsuoka, this question is answered through syntax. In short, the author uses small clauses and anaphoric PRO to argue that the object remains connected to a deeper subject position (599). Once again, the position of an item in the syntax, appears to affect the interpretation of SOAs.

SOAs, then, can be thought of as a diagnostic of subjecthood, and, if subjecthood is syntax, a diagnostic of syntactic structure. This allows for clear predictions regarding the syntactic structure of idioms. If all idioms have internal syntax, then they should all behave the same as their non-idiomatic counterparts with SOAs, even the ones determined by Glasbey to fail McGinnis's aspect test. All types of idioms, even the non-canonical ones, should act the same. Furthermore, the differences in meaning produced by changing the position of an SOA (i.e. *John has gladly prepared dinner for Kat* and *John gladly has prepared dinner for Kat*) should also be reflected in idioms as well. The following sections will look at data from all types of idioms to investigate this claim.

5.3 Positional Differences in SOAs

As briefly mentioned in Section 4.2, different interpretations are available depending on where the SOA is placed in the sentence. Below are six examples grouped according to their possible interpretations creating three different groups. The main verb is bolded, the auxiliary is italicized, and the SOA is underlined.

(35) Post-verbal, one reading: manner

- a. James **prepared** dinner for Kat gladly.
- b. James *has* **prepared** dinner for Kat gladly.

‘James prepared dinner in a glad manner’

(36) Pre-verbal, one reading: subject-oriented

- a. Gladly, James prepared dinner for Kat.
- b. James gladly *has* **prepared** dinner for Kat.

‘James was glad to prepare dinner’

(37) Intra-verbal, both readings

- a. James gladly **prepared** dinner for Kat.
- b. James *has* gladly **prepared** dinner for Kat.

‘James prepared dinner in a glad manner’ or ‘James was glad to prepare dinner’

As shown above, depending on the placement of the SOA, one or two readings may be available. When the SOA comes after the verb, both main and auxiliary, the only possible reading is one that describes the manner in which the subject did something, as seen in (35). In contrast, when the SOA comes before the verb, the SOA relates an emotional state or attitude to the subject, as seen in (36). Lastly, when the SOA is intra-verbal, that is, between the auxiliary and the main verb, both meanings are possible interpretations, as seen in (37). If, as I claim, all idioms have syntactic structure, and SOAs, which are sensitive to subject (i.e. a syntactic notion), are acceptable with idioms, then idioms of all types should produce the same nuances in meaning as their literal counterparts.

5.4 Data

SOAs are structural. To be interpreted accurately, there must be syntactic positions. Furthermore, changes of these positions result in changes of meaning. If, idioms have internal syntactic structure, then they should (1) maintain their idiomatic meaning when used with SOAs, across all different positions, and (2) maintain their idiomatic meaning regardless of their classification. The last requirement is crucial. All idioms, particularly those identified by

Glasbey as failing McGinnis’ test, must work with SOAs. The below sections present data to support the two outlined specifications. They are organized as thus: idiomatically combing (decomposable) and idiomatic phrases (nondecomposable), idioms similar to those identified by Glasbey, and non-canonical. The organization reflects the likelihood of syntactic structure, as discussed in Section 2.3.

5.4.1 Decomposable and Nondecomposable

The class of decomposable idioms refers to idioms with a meaning that can be distributed across their constituent parts while nondecomposable idioms have a single, whole meaning. It should be noted that these, like the term non-canonical, are terms referring to the semantic complexity of the idiom. However, as discussed in Section 2.3, when considered with syntactic complexity, these two separate features can create predictions regarding the internal structure of idioms. Decomposable idioms are the starting point of this current section, since they are the most likely to have internal, syntactic structure.

Table 1. Examples of Decomposable Idioms

(38) <i>spill the beans</i> ‘reveal secrets’		
Post-VP	Letha spilled the beans <u>foolishly</u> to Carl	Manner reading: Letha told Carl a secret in a foolish manner
	Letha had spilled the beans <u>foolishly</u> to Carl	
Pre-VP	<u>Foolishly</u> , Letha spilled the beans to Carl	Subject-oriented reading: It was foolish of Letha to tell Carl the secret
	Letha <u>foolishly</u> had spilled the beans to Carl	
Intra-VP	Letha <u>foolishly</u> spilled the beans to Carl	Both readings available
	Letha had <u>foolishly</u> spilled the beans to Carl	
<i>learn the ropes</i> ‘learn the basics’		
Post-VP	Richard learned the ropes <u>willingly</u>	Manner reading: Richard learned the basics in a willing manner
	Richard had learned the ropes <u>willingly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Willingly</u> , Richard learned the ropes	

	Richard <u>willingly</u> had learned the ropes	Subject-oriented reading: Richard was willing to learn the basics
Intra-VP	Richard <u>willingly</u> learned the ropes	Both readings available
	Richard had <u>willingly</u> learned the ropes	
<i>lift one's spirits 'make some happy'</i>		
Post-VP	Manasi lifted Isla's spirits <u>eagerly</u>	Manner reading: Manasi made Isla happy in an eager manner
	Manasi had lifted Isla's spirits <u>eagerly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Eagerly</u> , Manasi lifted Isla's sprits	Subject-oriented reading: Manasi was eager to make Isla happy
	Manasi <u>eagerly</u> had lifted Isla's sprits	
Intra-VP	Manasi <u>eagerly</u> lifted Isla's spirits	Both readings available
	Manasi had <u>eagerly</u> lifted Isla's sprits	
<i>play with fire 'do something dangerous'</i>		
Pre-VP	Ansel played with fire <u>stupidly</u>	Manner reading: Ansel did something dangerous in a stupid manner
	Ansel had played with fire <u>stupidly</u>	
Post-VP	<u>Stupidly</u> , Ansel played with fire	Subject-oriented reading: It was stupid of Ansel to do something dangerous
	Ansel <u>stupidly</u> had played with fire	
Intra-VP	Ansel <u>stupidly</u> played with fire	Both readings
	Ansel had <u>stupidly</u> played with fire	

Nondecomposable idioms are less likely than decomposable idioms to have syntactic structure. They are normal phrases of the language, but have a single idiosyncratic meaning attached to them. Unlike decomposable idioms, their meanings cannot be distributed across the constituent parts, making them less like literal phrases than decomposable idioms. However, the examples below provide evidence that these idioms can still maintain their idiomatic meaning when used with SOAs.

Table 2. Examples of Nondecomposable Idioms

<i>shoot the breeze 'converse idly'</i>		
Post-VP	Keris shot the breeze with Fiona <u>willingly</u>	

	Keris had shot the breeze with Fiona <u>willingly</u>	Manner reading: Keris conversed idly with Fiona in a willing manner
Pre-VP	<u>Willingly</u> , Keris shot the breeze with Fiona	Subject-oriented reading: Keris was willing to converse idly with Fiona
	Keris <u>willingly</u> had shot the breeze with Fiona	
Intra-VP	Keris <u>willingly</u> shot the breeze with Fiona	Both readings available
	Keris had <u>willingly</u> shot the breeze with Fiona	
<i>pull someone's leg 'tease'</i>		
Post-VP	Jonas pulled Eli's leg <u>stupidly</u>	Manner reading: Jonas teased Eli in a stupid manner
	Jonas had pulled Eli's leg <u>stupidly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Stupidly</u> , Jonas pulled Eli's leg	Subject-oriented reading: It was stupid of Jonas to tease Eli
	Jonas <u>stupidly</u> had pulled Eli's leg	
Intra-VP	Jonas <u>stupidly</u> pulled Eli's leg	Both readings available
	Jonas had <u>stupidly</u> pulled Eli's leg	
<i>eat crow 'realize a mistake'</i>		
Post-VP	Uma ate crow <u>reluctantly</u>	Manner reading: Uma realized her mistake in a reluctant manner
	Uma had eaten crow <u>reluctantly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Reluctantly</u> , Uma ate crow	Subject-oriented reading: Uma was reluctant to realize her mistake
	Uma <u>reluctantly</u> had eaten crow	
Intra-VP	Uma <u>reluctantly</u> ate crow	Both readings available
	Uma had <u>reluctantly</u> eaten crow	
<i>build castles in the air 'daydream'</i>		
Post-VP	Ellie built castles in the air <u>contentedly</u>	Manner reading: Ellie daydreamed in a content manner
	Ellie had built castles in the air contentedly	
Pre-VP	<u>Contentedly</u> , Ellie built castles in the air	Subject-oriented reading: Ellie was content to daydream
	Ellie <u>contentedly</u> had built castles in the air	
Intra-VP	Ellie <u>contentedly</u> built castles in the air	Both readings
	Ellie had <u>contentedly</u> built castles in the air	

<i>hit the sack 'go to sleep'</i>		
Pre-VP	Lia hit the sack <u>eagerly</u> after studying for days	Manner reading: Lia went to bed in an eager manner
	Lia had hit the sack <u>eagerly</u> after studying for days	
Post-VP	<u>Eagerly</u> , Lia hit the sack after studying for days	Subject-oriented reading: Lia was eager to go to bed
	Lia <u>eagerly</u> had hit the sack after studying for days	
Intra-VP	Lia <u>eagerly</u> hit the sack after studying for days	Both readings
	Lia had <u>eagerly</u> hit the sack after studying for days	

It should be noted that not all SOAs can be used with all idioms. However, the reason for this is not due to the lack of syntax, but rather due to the meaning of the idiom itself. Let us consider the prototypical decomposable idiom *kick the bucket*, which, for now, will be defined as “die.”

(47) *kick the bucket + calmly/foolishly*

- a. ?Dina kicked the bucket calmly/foolishly.
- b. ?Dina had kicked the bucket calmly/foolishly.

Manner reading: Dina died in a calm/foolish manner.

- c. ?Calmly/Foolishly, Dina kicked the bucket.
- d. ?Dina calmly/foolishly had kicked the bucket.

Subject-oriented reading: Dina was calm when she died/It was foolish of Dina to die.

- e. ?Dina calmly/foolishly kicked the bucket.
- f. ?Dina had calmly/foolishly kicked the bucket.

Both readings.

The sentences in the above example are uncomfortable at best. It may appear as if SOAs cannot work with this idiom. However, consider the following sentences, which are perfectly acceptable.

(48) *kick the bucket + unwillingly*

- a. Dina kicked the bucket unwillingly.
- b. Dina had kicked the bucket unwillingly.

Manner reading: Dina died in an unwilling manner.

- c. Unwillingly, Dina kicked the bucket.
- d. Dina unwillingly had kicked the bucket.

Subject-oriented reading: Dina was unwilling to die.

- e. Dina unwillingly kicked the bucket.
- f. Dina had unwillingly kicked the bucket.

Both readings.

The only difference between (47) and (48) is the SOA. While SOAs are a useful test in determining syntactic structure, one must also remember that they are contributing meaning to the sentence. Just because an SOA cannot work with an idiom does not necessarily mean that idiom lacks syntactic structure. Furthermore, consider the literal use of *die*.

(49) Giselle had calmly died in her sleep

(50) Jason foolishly died after ignoring the stop sign

It appears, then, that *kick the bucket* has a slightly more complex meaning than simply “die”, perhaps a meaning that requires a lack of volition or unknowingness on the part of the

participant. Even in literal sentences sans SOAs where “die” would be acceptable, *kick the bucket* is not.

(51) Jesus died for our sins.

(52) ?Jesus kicked the bucket for our sins.

(53) Andy died after years of struggling against the disease.

(54) ?Andy kicked the bucket after years of struggling against the cancer.

While (52) may be due more to social register or pragmatic usage, (54) seems inappropriate based on the surrounding context of a long, drawn out battle with a sickness. Other death-centered idioms, such as *buy the farm*, *bite the dust/biscuit*, and *pop one’s clogs*, show similar restrictions on what SOAs can and cannot occur with them. The key point of this discussion is that not all idioms can occur with all SOAs. This is not due to a lack of syntactic structure, but is a result of restrictions on the idiosyncratic meaning of the idiom. The inability of an idiom to appear with an SOA is not conclusive evidence that there is no syntactic structure in idioms because they fail to work with an SOA. The literal sentence *The deadly bomb slowly exploded* is strange due to the fact that the nature of an explosion requires it be quick, and, thus, does not make sense when used with *slowly*. There is nothing ungrammatical about this sentence, however. The same applies for the phrases in (52) and (53). Their inability to occur with that particular SOA is semantically based, not structurally.

5.4.2 Glasbey’s Gap: Differing Aspect in Idioms

These are the idioms identified by Glasbey that fail McGinnis’ aspect test. Their idiomatic aspect is different than that of their literal aspect. While many of these types of idioms are nondecomposable, not all nondecomposable idioms have differing aspectual properties, as evidenced by the previous section.

Table 3. Idioms with Differing Aspect

Idiomatic Aspect	Literal Aspect
<i>bury the hatchet</i> ‘make peace’	
Holly buried the hatchet for two days with Allison	*Holly buried the box for two days with Allison
*Holly buried the hatchet in two days	Holly buried the box in two days
<i>bust a gut</i> ‘work very hard’	
Jada busted a gut for three hours working on her essay	*Jada busted a vending machine for three minutes trying to get snacks
*Jada busted a gut in three hours working on her essay	Jada busted a vending machine in three seconds trying to get snacks
<i>cut a rug</i> ‘dance’	
Edna cut a rug for hours at the club last weekend	*Edna cut an apple for two minutes this Sunday
*Edna cut a rug in hours at the club last weekend	Edna cut an apple in two minutes this Sunday
<i>deliver the goods</i> ‘keep a promise’	
Mona delivered the goods for years after learning the secret	*Mona delivered the cake for two minutes after leaving the bakery
*Mona delivered the goods in years after learning the secret	Mona delivered the cake in two minutes after leaving the bakery
<i>give the cold shoulder</i> ‘ignore’	
Henry gave to cold shoulder to Lynn for two days	?Henry gave the red book to Lynn for two minutes
*Henry gave the cold should to Lynn in two days	Henry gave the red book to Lynn in two minutes
<i>give someone grief</i> ‘annoy or cause pain’	
Uriel gave Flora grief for three years after she cheated on him	*Uriel gave Flora tools for three minutes after she asked for them
*Uriel gave Flora grief in three years after she cheated on him	Uriel gave Flora tools in three minutes after she asked for them
<i>make the welkin ring</i> ‘celebrate loudly’	
Dylan made the welkin ring for days after the announcement	*Dylan made the cake for days after the announcement
*Dylan made the welkin ring in days after the announcement	Dylan made the cake in days after the announcement

The table above lists some of the idioms that have a different aspect as idioms than their literal counterparts. According to Glasbey, it is this class of idioms that have stored, noncompositional syntax. Therefore, these idioms presented a problem for the argument that aspect could be used as a syntactic measure for syntax in all idioms. However, the subject-oriented adverbs approach hoped to rectify this gap. If all idioms, including the ones shown above, work with SOAs, then this is strong evidence for the internal syntax of all idioms.

Table 4. Examples of Idioms with Differing Aspect

(55) <i>paint the town red</i> ‘party in a wild manner’		
Post-VP	Gabe and Griffen painted the town red <u>eagerly</u>	Manner reading: Gabe and Griffen partied wildly in an eager manner
	Gabe and Griffen had painted the town red <u>eagerly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Eagerly</u> , Gabe and Griffen painted the town red	Subject-oriented reading: Gabe and Griffen were eager to party wildly
	Gabe and Griffen <u>eagerly</u> had painted the town red	
Intra-VP	Gabe and Griffen <u>eagerly</u> painted the town red	Both readings available
	Gabe and Griffen had <u>eagerly</u> painted the town red	
(56) <i>bury the hatchet</i> ‘make peace’		
Post-VP	Keris buried the hatchet with Fiona <u>willingly</u>	Manner reading: Keris made peace with Fiona in a willing manner
	Keris had buried the hatchet with Fiona <u>willingly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Willingly</u> , Keris buried the hatchet with Fiona	Subject-oriented reading: Keris was willing to made peace with Fiona
	Keris <u>willingly</u> had buried the hatchet with Fiona	
Intra-VP	Keris <u>willingly</u> buried the hatchet with Fiona	Both readings available
	Keris had <u>willingly</u> buried the hatchet with Fiona	
(57) <i>bust a gut</i> ‘work very hard on something’		
Post-VP	Jonas busted a gut on the essay <u>gladly</u>	Manner reading: Jonas worked very hard on their essay in a glad manner
	Jonas had busted a gut on the essay <u>gladly</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Gladly</u> , Jonas busted a gut on the essay	Subject-oriented reading: Jonas was glad to work on the essay
	Jonas <u>stupidly</u> had pulled Eli’s leg	
Intra-VP	Jonas <u>gladly</u> busted a gut on the essay	Both readings available
	Jonas had <u>gladly</u> busted a gut on the essay	
(58) <i>cut a rug</i> ‘dance’		
Post-VP	Lois cut a rug at the afterparty <u>gleefully</u>	Manner reading: Lois danced at the afterparty in a gleeful manner
	Lois had cut a rug at the afterparty <u>gleefully</u>	
Pre-VP	<u>Gleefully</u> , Lois cut a rug at the afterparty	Subject-oriented reading: Lois was gleeful to dance
	Lois <u>gleefully</u> had cut a rug at the afterparty	
Intra-VP	Lois <u>gleefully</u> cut a rug at the afterparty	Both readings
	Lois had <u>gleefully</u> cut a rug at the afterparty	
(59) <i>deliver the goods</i> ‘keep a promise’		
Post-VP	Theo delivered the goods <u>anxiously</u> after many years	

	Theo had delivered the goods <u>anxiously</u> after many years	Manner reading: Theo kept the secret after many years in an anxious manner
Pre-VP	<u>Anxiously</u> , Theo delivered the goods after many years	Subject-oriented reading: Theo was anxious to keep the secret after many years
	Theo <u>anxiously</u> had delivered the goods after many years	
Intra-VP	Theo <u>anxiously</u> delivered the goods after many years	Both readings
	Theo had <u>anxiously</u> delivered the goods after many years	
(60) give someone the cold shoulder ‘ignore’		
Post-VP	Phillip gave Drew the cold shoulder <u>willingly</u> after he betrayed him	Manner reading: Phillip ignored Drew in a willing manner after a betrayal
	Phillip had given Drew the cold shoulder <u>willingly</u> after he betrayed him	
Pre-VP	<u>Willingly</u> , Phillip gave Drew the cold shoulder after he betrayed him	Subject-oriented reading: Phillip was willing to ignore Drew after a betrayal
	Phillip <u>willingly</u> had given Drew the cold shoulder after he betrayed him	
Intra-VP	Phillip <u>willingly</u> gave Drew the cold shoulder after he betrayed him	Both readings
	Phillip had <u>willingly</u> given Drew the cold shoulder after he betrayed him	
(61) give someone grief ‘annoy or cause pain’		
Post-VP	Claudia gave Kara grief <u>rudely</u> by constantly taunting her	Manner reading: Claudia annoyed Kara in a rude manner constantly
	Claudia had given Kara grief <u>rudely</u> by constantly taunting her	
Pre-VP	<u>Rudely</u> , Claudia gave Kara grief by constantly taunting her	Subject-oriented reading: It was rude of Claudia to annoy Kara constantly
	Claudia <u>rudely</u> had given Kara grief by constantly taunting her	
Intra-VP	Claudia <u>rudely</u> gave Kara grief by constantly taunting her	Both readings
	Claudia had <u>rudely</u> given Kara grief by constantly taunting her	
(62) make the melkin ring ‘celebrate loudly’		
Post-VP	Spencer made the melkin ring <u>carelessly</u> even when her landlord warned her to stop	Manner reading: Spencer celebrated loudly in a careless manner even when her warned her to stop
	Spencer had made the melkin ring <u>carelessly</u> even when her landlord warned her to stop	
Pre-VP	<u>Carelessly</u> , Spencer made the melkin ring even when her landlord warned her to stop	Subject-oriented reading: It was careless of Spencer to party loudly even when her landlord warned her to stop
	Spencer <u>carelessly</u> had made the melkin ring even when her landlord warned her to stop	
Intra-VP	Spencer <u>carelessly</u> made the melkin ring even when her landlord warned her to stop	Both readings
	Spencer had <u>carelessly</u> made the melkin ring even when her landlord warned her to stop	

5.4.3 Non-canonical

Lastly, there are the non-canonical idioms. If any idiom were to be saved as a single whole, sans internal syntax, it would be these. They are phrases that the grammar would never produce under in non-idiomatic circumstances. It should be noted that these idioms are fairly rare, unsurprisingly given their ungrammatical nature, and somewhat difficult to classify, but (63) gives a short list.

(63) *trip the light fantastic, no can do, believe you me, easy does it, make believe/certain, do away with*

Not all of the idioms listed above are verbal, and some, such as *no can do* can be difficult to categorize. The examples below use only the verbal idioms.

Table 5. Examples of Non-canonical Idioms

(64) <i>trip the light fantastic</i> ‘dance nimbly		
Post VP	Esperanza tripped the light fantastic in the club <u>eagerly</u>	Manner reading: Esperanza danced nimbly in an eager manner
	Esperanza had tripped the light fantastic in the club <u>eagerly</u>	
Pre VP	<u>Eagerly</u> , Esperanza tripped the light fantastic in the club	Subject-oriented reading: Esperanza was eager to dance nimbly
	Esperanza <u>eagerly</u> had tripped the light fantastic in the club	
Intra VP	Esperanza <u>eagerly</u> tripped the light fantastic in the club	Both readings available
	Esperanza had <u>eagerly</u> tripped the light fantastic in the club	
(65) <i>make believe</i> ‘pretend’		
Post VP	Helene made believe that she didn’t hear Duncan <u>gladly</u>	Manner reading: Helene pretended she didn’t hear Duncan in a glad manner
	Helene had made believe that she didn’t hear Duncan <u>gladly</u>	
Pre VP	<u>Gladly</u> Helene made believe that she didn’t hear Duncan	Subject-oriented reading: Helene was glad to pretend she didn’t hear Duncan
	Helene <u>gladly</u> had made believe that she didn’t hear Duncan	

Intra VP	Helene <u>gladly</u> made believe that she didn't hear Duncan	Both readings available
	Helene had <u>gladly</u> made believe that she didn't hear Duncan	

The non-canonical idioms, those most likely to be stored without any structure, show the ability to be modified by SOAs.

5.4.4 Object-Oriented Readings

Briefly mentioned in Section 4.2, there are some locative PP phrases that produce an object-oriented reading, see examples (33) and (34). In verbal idioms with a similar structure,

(66) *send to the showers* 'eject someone from a game or position'

Hayden sent Toby reluctantly to the showers.

- a. 'Hayden ejected Toby from the game reluctantly'
- b. 'Toby was reluctant to be ejected from the game by Hayden'

(67) *put on the map* 'bring to prominence'

Hayden put Toby willingly on the map.

- a. 'Hayden brought Toby to prominence willingly'
- b. 'Toby was willing to be brought to prominence'

A comprehensive investigation of these object-oriented readings is given in Matsuoka (2013), but, relevant for the purposes of this thesis, is the ability of idioms to produce these object-oriented meanings as well. While there are not many idioms that fit the locative PP requirements, producing the object-oriented meaning, the few that exist are successful.

...

To summarize, subject-oriented adverbs are structures that require, and are sensitive to, a subject position in the syntax. Idioms of all types can be used successfully with SOAs, in particular the idioms identified by Glasbey that failed McGinnis' aspect test. Furthermore, the idioms also show the same variation in interpretation that is present in literal phrases when used with SOAs. Based off of evidence from subject-oriented adverbs, idioms show internal, syntactic structure.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In their discussion on the semantic complexity of idioms, Nunberg et al. address how the idea of semantic compositionality (i.e. complexity) allows for idioms to function in syntactic operations, such as passivization. The authors are mostly pushing back against the idea that idioms, or at least the idiomatically combining expressions, lack semantic complexity, and, particularly, that the “relationship between meaning and form in idioms is arbitrary” (515). As discussed in Section 2.3, there are classes of idioms, idiomatically combining (decomposable idioms) expressions, where this relationship is not arbitrary, and the meaning is purposefully distributed across the constituent parts, usually metaphorically. Nunberg et al. “assume[] that the basis for particular restrictions on the distribution of idioms is fundamentally semantic in nature,” which is similar to the stance that this thesis takes (518). I agree that the restriction is partially due to semantics. The mapping between the meaning of the idioms and the structure of the idiom is what results in restrictions on certain idioms. The meaning alone is not what drives the different behavior, but rather how that meaning maps to the parts of the idiom that constitute its structure. Furthermore, since Nunberg et al. focus on the semantic complexity and how that influences different syntactic operations, their discussion of how meaning is distributed in idiomatically combining idioms is similar to this meaning – structure correspondence. They are concerned with addressing the fact that some idioms are, in fact, semantically complex, and how those differences in complexity allows for them to participate in syntactic processes that would

be unlikely were they not semantically complex. This thesis is concerned with the semantic complexity and how syntactic complexity plays a role when considered with semantic complexity. While all idioms are syntactically complex, only some idioms are semantically complex. Nunberg et al. are correct in noting that the processes found to be successful with idiomatically combining expression are related to semantics. Certain processes, such as passivization or raising constructions, appear to be sensitive to the semantics of the phrase they are operating on; they not only require movable pieces, but meaningful pieces as well.

(68) The cat was let out of the bag by Georgina.

(69) The cat seemed to be let out of the bag by Georgina.

(70) The strings were pulled by crafty, old Trent.

(71) The strings seemed to be pulled by crafty, old Trent.

(72) ?The bucket was kicked by Toby.

(73) ?The bucket seemed to be kicked by Toby.

Only some idioms maintain their idiosyncratic meaning under passive and raising constructions. As shown above, (72) does not have the same idiomatic meaning in a passive construction as it does in an active one. This is not the case for (68) and (70).

Chapter 3 illustrated how there are some syntactic processes, vacuous and metalinguistic modification, that are possible for all idioms. Therefore, it is not that idioms lack an internal, syntactic structure which disallows them from undergoing some processes that, on the surface, appear to be syntactic, but rather some processes rely on parts having individual meanings. All idioms have internal syntax. The trouble arises when the idiosyncratic meaning of the idiom is

mapped to that internal syntax. Modifications that do not upset or impact the meaning of the sentence, like vacuous and metalinguistic modifiers, work across all idioms because they do not interact with the semantic meaning. They either apply wholesale to the meaning of the idiom, as vacuous modifiers do, or operate of a different level of meaning, one concerned with the literal vs. non-literal interpretation, as metalinguistic modifiers do. Passivization and raising constructions, despite their syntactic movement, are, to a degree, concerned with meaning. These processes use movement, which is syntactic, but the parts they are moving must have an individual meaning, which is semantic. Therefore, the meaning-structure correspondence differs across different types of idioms, thus leading to the variation seen in the processes all idioms can do and the processes only some idioms can do.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Past research regarding idioms has mostly focused on the semantics of idioms, but their syntax is equally as important. Understanding the syntactic structure of idioms is crucial to fully understanding idioms themselves. The main goal of this thesis was to present evidence to support the claim that all idioms of English are stored with internal syntax. Using subject-oriented adverbs as a measure that is sensitive to syntax, I tested a variety of idioms to determine if they were acceptable in such a construction. Finding that they were, I concluded that all idioms have internal syntactic structure. Furthermore, an idiom's inability to function in certain syntactic constructions, such as passivization and raising, did not indicate a lack of structure, but rather a difference in how the meaning mapped to the structure. Table 6 summarizes these findings. Both semantics and syntax contribute to making idioms as interesting as they are, so having an articulated understanding of the syntax in idioms is essential.

This thesis makes a strong claim regarding the storage and structure of idioms. Therefore, there are many areas of further research that could be thought-provoking and illuminating. First, one could consider the validity of this claim cross-linguistically. This thesis focused purely on English idioms, using verbal idioms as the examples. Furthermore, the use of subject-oriented adverbs as an indication of syntactic structure may be limited to English. In different languages, other constructions could act as a useful metric. Investigating these differences would contribute to a greater understanding of syntax cross-linguistically. Another area of interest, mentioned

briefly in earlier sections, is understanding how non-canonical idioms are analyzed. As I argued, these idioms, despite their non-canonical form, still have stored internal syntax through reanalysis. This leaves the questions of not only how speakers are reanalyzing these types of idioms, but whether or not speakers are reanalyzing them in the same way. Further investigation into this process is needed.

Table 6. Summary

Idiom Type	Vacuous Modification	Metalinguistic Modification
Decomposable Ex. <i>spill the beans</i>	✓ Doreah spilled the goddamn beans to Fiona	✓ Doreah spilled the proverbial beans to Fiona
Nondecomposable Ex. <i>shoot the breeze</i>	✓ Leda shot the goddamn breeze with Joseph	✓ Leda shot the proverbial breeze with Joseph
Differing Aspect Ex. <i>cut a rug</i>	✓ Viola cut the goddamn rug at the party	✓ Viola cut the proverbial rug at the party
Non-canonical Ex. <i>trip the light fantastic</i>	✓ Esmeralda tripped the goddamn light fantastic at the club	✓ Esmeralda tripped the proverbial light fantastic at the club
Idiom Type	Aspect	SOAs
Decomposable Ex. <i>hang fire</i>	✓ lit: Hanna hung pictures for an hour id: Hanna hung fire for an hour	✓ Yael has willingly hung fire
Nondecomposable Ex. <i>play with fire</i>	✓ lit: Bria played with cats for two hours when she saw them id: Bria played with fire for two hours when she snuck our	✓ Denise has willingly played with fire
Differing Aspect Ex. <i>cut a rug</i>	✗ lit: Horteze cut an apple in five seconds id: Horteze cut a rug for three hours at the club	✓ Clara has willingly cut a rug
Non-canonical Ex. <i>trip the light fantastic</i>	? No true literal equivalent	✓ Sascha has willingly tripped the light fantastic

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