Some remarks on the interpretation of idiomatic expressions

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"you came through and stuck a very welcome feather in the DIUG cap"

(1) Idioms (*kick the bucket*)
  a.   noncompositional interpretation
  b.   regular syntactic structure

(2) Chomsky (1980, *Rules and representations*):
     Argument for autonomous syntax

(3) Idiom is an interpretive process (interface phenomenon): 'idiom rule'

(4) But traditionally: idiom = phrasal word (listeme)

(5) Today: at least some idioms support the idiom rule (or something like it)

(6) Idiom rule:
  a.   syntax (Merge) creates a structure [kick [the [bucket]]]
  b.   interface: match structure to lexicon/encyclopaedia
  c.   lexicon: *kick the bucket* = die

(7) Addition: matching at the interface must involve type/token resemblances

(8) Needed for idiom modification (*John kicked the **proverbial** bucket*)

(9) Two types of modification
  a.   movement (*tabs were kept, the headway that they made*)
  b.   adverbial/adjectival modification (*John kicked the proverbial bucket*)

(10)   Two basic types of idioms:
  a.   transparent   (*make + headway = DO + PROGRESS*)
  b.   non-transparent   (*kick the bucket = DIE*)

(11) Roughly (Nunberg/Sag/Wasow, *Language* 1994)

IDIOM \\\ MODIFICATION	movement	adverbial
transparent	✓	✓
non-transparent	✗	✓

(12) Adverbial modification with non-transparent idioms limited
(Ernst 1980 'Grist for the linguistic mill' *Journal of Linguistic Research*;
McClure 2011 'Modification in non-combining idioms' *Semantics and Pragmatics*)

a. metalinguistic (*John kicked the **proverbial** bucket*)
b. hypallage (***Dracula** kicked the **blood-soaked** bucket*)
c. ambiguous (*It was the chef's unbridled ego that cooked his **organic free-range** goose*)
d. *regular (*John kicked the [*brown] bucket*)

(13) Layered derivations approach to idioms
    a. create idiom in separate derivation
    b. idiom acquires special sound-meaning properties at the interfaces (idiom rule)
    c. insert idiom in the numeration for the next derivation as a single item

(14) Works well for some idioms
manusje van alles 'factotum'
ten lange leste 'finally'

(15) Prediction: no modification at all (Generalized Integrity Principle)
    a. hij is een   manus-je van   alles
      he is a   *name*-DIM of   everything 'he is a factotum'
    b. *van alles is hij een manusje
    c. hij is een manusje van   (*het   spreekwoordelijke)   alles
                            the   proverbial

    except morphological (= interface phenomenon)
    d. zij   zijn   manusje-**s** van   alles
      they   are   -PL

(16) If so, this is not the model for idioms that allow modification

(17) type/token organization   *brown bucket = bucket*

(18) possible derivation
    a. create *brown bucket* in subderivation
    b. interface: decide that *brown bucket* is a token of the type *bucket*
    c. create *kick the brown bucket* in the next derivation
    d. interface: decide that this is the idiom meaning *DIE*
    e. use it in the next derivation as a single item

(19) Problem: (12d) is ungrammatical, so adjectival modification is too much already

(20) intersectivity does not give you type/token organization

(21) adjectival modification of idioms is always non-intersective
    a. metalinguistic: comment on the use of a particular expression
    b. hypallage: adjective modifies the subject/action
    c. ambiguous: play on the homophony of a part of the idiom and a regular expression

(22) Ambiguous modification may call for parallel structures (grafting, banyan trees)
      (Svenonius, 2006, 'Extending the extension condition to discontinuous idioms' *Linguistic Variation Yearbook*)
    a. structure I: idiom *cook his goose*
    b. structure II: regular expression *organic free-range goose*

(23) not needed if the adjective is taken to be nonintersective (epithetic)
      #(It was funny to observe that) when his ego cooked his goose, it was an organic free-range goose)
      (It was funny to observe that) when the chef cooked his goose, it was an organic free-range goose

(24) Intermediate conclusion:
      Adverbial/adjectival modification of non-transparent idioms may be derived in a layered-derivation approach using type/token resemblance at the interfaces

(25)
TOKEN	TYPE	MEANING
cooked his organic free-range goose [non-intersective]	cooked his goose	caused his demise

(26) That won't work for the movement modification of transparent idioms

(27) Hij **heeft** **de bloemetjes** weer eens **buiten** **gezet**
he has the flowers once again outside put:PART
'He partied once again.'

(28) Layered derivations are not illuminating here
a. create *de bloemetjes buiten zetten*
b. interface: interpret as 'party'
c. enter into next numeration as a single item
d. prediction: no modification (Generalized Integrity), contrary to fact

(29) there may be a type/token resemblance
TOKEN *de bloemetjes weer eens buiten zetten*
TYPE   *de bloemetjes buiten zetten*

(30) but the kind of modification is too productive and too varied
De bloemetjes heeft-ie weer eens buiten gezet
the flowers has he once again outside put:PART

(31) again, banyan structures (Svenonius 2006) may be needed here

(32) but alternatively
a. create *hij heeft de bloemetjes weer eens buiten gezet*
b. interface: match XP *de bloemetjes weer eens buiten gezet* with information in the lexicon/encyclopaedia
c. decide on the type/token resemblance with *de bloemetjes buiten zetten*
d. interpret *de bloemetjes weer eens buiten gezet* as PARTY + aspectual adverb AGAIN

(33) how (un)constrained is this?

(34) building on observations by Fanselow and Lenertová (2011, Left peripheral focus: mismatches between syntax and information structure, *NLLT*), it seems that **linear order** is relevant

(35) a. Hij heeft (weer eens) **de bloemetjes** (weer eens) **buiten gezet**
b. **De bloemetjes** heeft-ie (weer eens) **buiten gezet**
c. * **Buiten** heeft-ie (weer eens) **de bloemetjes** (weer eens) **gezet**

(36) a. Hij heeft **de handdoek** **in de ring** **gegooid**
he has the towel in the ring throw:PART 'he threw the towel'

b. **De handdoek** heeft-ie **in de ring gegooid**

c. * **In de ring** heeft-ie **de handdoek gegooid**   (literal reading OK)

(37) It's the relative order of the idiomatic elements that counts

   a.   Hij   heeft   *Piet*   **de wacht**   **aangezegd**

       he   has   Pete   the waiting?   announced

       'He conditionally ended his relation with Pete.'

   b.   *Piet*   heeft-ie   **de wacht aangezegd**

   c. !   **De wacht** heeft-ie   *Piet*   **aangezegd**   (crossing nonidiomatic element)

(38) Verb second never causes any problems

   a.   Hij   **zet** (weer eens)   **de bloemetjes** (weer eens)   **buiten**

   b.   Hij   **gooit de handdoek in de ring**

   c.   Hij   **zegt**   *Piet*   **de wacht aan**

This follows if V2 is an interface (PF) phenomenon.

(39) Mechanism: if you can reduce the expression to an idiom, you can interpret it as such

   (de bloemetjes)   (heeft-ie   buiten gezet)

   (de bloemetjes)   (~~heeft-ie~~   buiten gezet) *is sufficiently like*

   (de bloemetjes)   (buiten zetten)

   (buiten)   (heeft-ie   de bloemetjes gezet)

   (buiten)   (~~heeft-ie~~   de bloemetjes gezet) *is not sufficiently like*

   (de bloemetjes)   (buiten zetten)

(40) Extraposition of idiomatic material limited to adjuncts (Veld 1993, *Postverbal constituents in Dutch and Turkish*, Amsterdam diss.)

   a. *   dat hij **de handdoek**   **gooit**   **in de ring**

          that   he the towel   throws in the ring

   b.   dat hij **eieren** (voor z'n geld)   **kiest** (voor z'n geld)

          that   he eggs   for his money   chooses   'that he settles for less'

   c. *   dat hij **voor z'n geld** **eieren** **kiest**

   d. *   **Voor z'n geld** **kiest**   hij **eieren**

At least a partial sensitivity to linear order

(41) Open position: no ordering constraints

   dat hij (**aan** *z'n boek*) **de laatste hand**   (**aan** *z'n boek*) **legt**   (**aan** *z'n boek*)

   that   he on his book   the last hand   lays

   'that he finishes his book'

(42)   hypothesis: reduction from token to type is possible when linear order is kept constant

(43)   works nicely for OV-languages, but not at all for VO-languages like English
    a. they **made headway**
    b. **headway** was **made**
    c. **what kind of headway** did they **make?**

(44)   in at least some cases:
    idiom is fully transparent, i.e. results from metaphorical use of individual elements

(45)   idioms below the word level
    a. V-*v* combinations: outputs of separate derivations
    b. **give/get the creeps** > [CAUSE/START to **HAVE] the creeps**
        (Richards, 'An idiomatic argument for lexical decomposition' *LI* 2001)
        not clear that these are not compositional
        (Stephen Wechsler 2008, 'Idioms, light verbs and lexical decomposition' NORMS
        workshop paper.)

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