

Displacement and Subject Blocking in Verbal Idioms: Evidence from Passive-Like Constructions in Icelandic*

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Abstract

This paper examines passive-like constructions in Icelandic and argues that idioms cannot be interpreted via traces and that the loss of idiomatic interpretation under passivization depends on the availability of displacement. We develop a mechanism of Late Transfer of Idioms which accounts for the observed facts.

1 Introduction

This paper uses evidence from passive-like constructions in Icelandic to shed light on the mechanisms that constrain idiomatic interpretation. We argue that idioms cannot be interpreted via traces and that the loss of idiomatic interpretation depends on the availability of displacement.

Example (1) shows the Icelandic idiom *taka þátt* ‘participate’, literally ‘take part’. The idiomatic meaning is lost in a Canonical Passive (CanP) as shown in (2), but a passive-like New Impersonal Passive (NIP)¹ (3) retains the idiomatic meaning.² Note that we use # throughout to indicate the loss of idiomatic meaning.

- (1) Jón tók þátt í hlaupinu.
John.NOM took part.ACC in run.the
‘John participated in the run.’

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¹The NIP has been investigated in detail in recent years. See, e.g., Kjartansson (1991), Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002, 2012, 2013, 2015), Maling et al. (2011), Barðdal and Molnár (2003), Benediktsdóttir (2008), Eythórsson (2008), Jónsson (2009), H.Á. Sigurðsson (2011), E.F. Sigurðsson (2012), Ingason et al. (2013), Legate (2014), Thráinsson et al. (2015).

²This contrast between the NIP and the CanP was observed in Kjartansson (1991) and further explored in E.F. Sigurðsson (2012). See also Indriðadóttir (2014).

- (2) # Þáttur var tekinn í hlaupinu.
 part.NOM was taken in run.the
 Intended: ‘Somebody participated in the run.’
- (3) ✓ Það var tekið þátt í hlaupinu.
 there was taken part.ACC in run.the
 ‘Somebody participated in the run.’

We assume that the idiom consists of the verb and its direct DP object here. Note that the accompanying PP *í DP* ‘in DP’ generally involves the preposition *í* ‘in’. Although this modifier usually has a fixed form we assume that it is in some sense more loosely connected with the idiomatic structure than the DP object, perhaps by virtue of being a structural adjunct. The same applies to other similar idiom modifiers.

For Chomsky (1981:194), certain verbal idioms require that the verb and its direct object are adjacent at LF. We adopt a version of this position below and suggest that idiomatic phrases cannot in general be interpreted via traces. The NIP provides a novel type of evidence in favor of such an analysis because most accounts assume that some kind of a covert subject is present in NIP sentences like (3) (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002; H.Á. Sigurðsson 2011, E.F. Sigurðsson 2012; Ingason et al. 2013; Legate 2014).³ The covert subject blocks displacement of the direct object to the subject position and thus it ensures that the verb and its object are adjacent. No underlying subject is present in a CanP so even if the underlying object stays low in such a construction, as in (4), the availability of displacement revokes the idiomatic interpretation.

- (4) # Það var tekinn þáttur í hlaupinu.
 there was taken part.NOM in run.the
 Intended: ‘Somebody participated in the run.’

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents some background on verbal idioms. Section 3 develops our analysis that the loss of idiomatic

³Although see Eythórsson (2008); Jónsson (2009) for an alternative point of view.

interpretation depends on the availability of displacement. Section 4 discusses the analysis of idioms where the determiner is part of the idiomatic phrase. The section furthermore proposes a theory of Late Transfer of Idioms. Section 5 concludes.

2 Verbal idioms

Several types of expressions can be considered to be idiomatic. We constrain our discussion to the so-called verbal idiom as defined by Harwood et al. (2016).

- (5) a. It must contain a lexical verb.
- b. It must have a non-literal interpretation.
- c. It must be able to interact with productive syntax.
- d. It must be comprised of lexical items that are found outside of the context of the idiom.
- e. It must be formed in a manner that obeys the regular syntactic rules of the language.

Verbal idioms are known to split into two classes based on whether the idiomatic meaning is retained if the direct object undergoes displacement such as in passivization. For example, the English expression *kick the bucket* ‘die’ can only be interpreted literally in the passive (6) whereas *spill the beans* ‘reveal the secret’ can be interpreted idiomatically regardless of the active/passive distinction (7).

- (6) a. John kicked the bucket.
- b. # The bucket was kicked (by John).

- (7) a. Mary spilled the beans.
- b. The beans were spilled (by Mary).

Nunberg et al. (1994) observe that it is important whether the idiomatic material is mapped onto a special meaning as a whole or whether subparts of the idiom can be mapped onto subparts of the resulting interpretation. Descriptively, we can say that *kick the bucket* is mapped onto ‘die’ by some mechanism but in the case of

spill the beans, *spill* is mapped onto ‘reveal’ and *the beans* onto ‘the secret’. The former type is referred to as an *idiomatic phrase* whereas the latter is referred to as an *idiomatically combining expression*.

Consistently with the idea that *idiomatic phrases* form a whole, Lebeaux (2009:xix) finds that the availability of passivization correlates with whether the determiner position is fixed as part of the idiom, as in (8), or free to vary, as in (9).

- (8) a. kick the bucket
 b. # kick all the bucket
 c. # Some men kicked some buckets.

- (9) a. take advantage of
 b. take some advantage of
 c. take a lot of advantage of

A fixed idiom-internal determiner as in *kick the bucket* is generally incompatible with passivization which preserves the special meaning whereas a variable determiner slot as in *take advantage of* generally allows for passivization.

- (10) a. # The bucket was kicked.
 b. Advantage was taken of John.

Although the full details of how idiomaticity works are without doubt more nuanced than this description suggests, the general tendency, which seems too systematic to be a coincidence, is along the following lines.

(11)	Idiomatic Phrases Verb-Noun interpreted as one Lose meaning in passivization Idiom-internal determiner	Idiomatically Combining Expressions Verb-Noun interpreted compositionally Retain meaning in passivization Variable determiner position
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The verb and its object are in some sense interpreted separately in Idiomatically Combining Expressions. In contrast, Idiomatic Phrases form one semantic unit and

it is of interest to understand the mechanism that revokes their idiomatic interpretation in a Canonical Passive.

3 LF adjacency and the availability of displacement

According to Chomsky (1981:194), certain verbal idioms require the verb and its direct object to be adjacent at LF. This includes *kick the bucket*.

(12) # The bucket was kicked.

Let us assume that the verbal idioms in question are true *Idiomatic Phrases* in contrast to *Idiomatically Combining Expressions*. We can then generalize the LF adjacency requirement as follows.

(13) **LF adjacency requirement for idioms**
Idioms cannot be interpreted via traces.

The reason that Idiomatically Combining Expressions allow for passivization, then, is that the idiomatic interpretation is resolved separately for the verb and its object.

(14) ✓ The beans were spilled.

Here, *the beans* resolves to ‘the secret’ and *spilled* to ‘revealed’. The trace of the object can express the ‘secret’ meaning via the trace because the verb and the object are not interpreted as one whole.

Let us now refine the proper characterization of the preconditions for the special meaning of Idiomatic Phrases, building on Chomsky’s proposal. Under our account, the loss of idiomatic interpretation depends on the availability of displacement of the direct object. If the object can move, idiomatic interpretation is lost. The verbal idiom *taka þátt* ‘take part’ \approx ‘participate’ is demonstrated in the following example.

- (15) Jón tók þátt í hlaupinu.
 John.NOM took part.ACC in run.the
 ‘John participated in the run.’
 ‘take part’ ≈ ‘participate’

The phrase ‘take part’ does not retain the special meaning ‘participate’ when passivized with a Canonical Passive.

- (16) # Þáttur var tekinn í hlaupinu.
 part.NOM was taken in run.the
 Intended: ‘Somebody participated in the run.’

The loss of the ‘participate’ meaning in the passive is consistent with the view that the loss of idiomatic interpretation depends on the availability of movement for the direct object.

We can observe evidence that it is the availability of movement rather than actual overt movement that is relevant by considering a passive of ‘take part’ in which the underlying object stays low.⁴

- (17) # Það var tekinn þáttur í hlaupinu.
 there was taken part.NOM in run.the
 Intended: ‘Somebody participated in the run.’

The example shows that the availability of displacement is sufficient to lose the idiomatic interpretation even if the surface position of ‘part’ is low. It should be noted here that there is some speaker variation in whether individual verbal idioms lose their special meaning when the theme remains low in a Canonical Passive and this means that there exist speakers who do in fact get the special meaning in examples like (17). Importantly, for those speakers it is crucial that the theme does not move overtly, meaning that displacement is still important, although for them it is overt movement that counts rather than just the availability of movement (see also

⁴An indefinite DP can stay in situ in expletive constructions in Icelandic, even if it is the structurally highest argument. This includes the expletive (canonical) passive, as in (17), where an indefinite argument stays in object position (see, e.g., H.Á. Sigurðsson 1996, Thráinsson 2007:271–273, Eythórsson 2008).

Kjartansson's (1991) discussion of, e.g., *drepa tittlinga*, literally 'kill buntings', which means 'blink one's eyes').

An analysis in terms of the availability of displacement is further supported by the New Impersonal Passive (NIP) which is similar to a Canonical Passive (CanP) but it contrasts with the CanP in that it always retains the special meaning of verbal idioms (see Kjartansson 1991; E.F. Sigurðsson 2012). The meaning of the CanP and the NIP is truth-conditionally equivalent, although some contrast in discourse function has been detected (Sigurjónsdóttir and Nowenstein 2016).

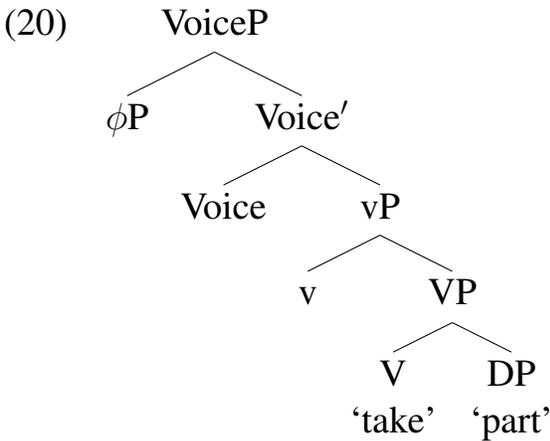
- (18) ✓ Það var tekið þátt í hlaupinu (af Einari).
 there was taken part.ACC in run.the (by Einar)
 'Somebody (/Einar) participated in the run.'

The NIP combines characteristics of actives and passives. The NIP resembles a CanP in that the main verb shows passive morphology, the verb 'be' is involved and by-phrases can be used to express the agent.⁵ It resembles an active in that the underlying object is realized with accusative case and it stays in a low *v*P-internal position even if it is definite, a configuration which is ruled out in passives due to the Definiteness Effect (Milsark 1977). The Definiteness Effect rules out low definite themes in Canonical Passives.

- (19) Það var étið brauð(*-ið).
 there was eaten bread(-the)
 'Some (*the) bread was eaten.'

We follow Legate (2014) in accounting for these mixed properties by positing a silent pronoun in Spec, Voice of NIP which is smaller than a full DP pronoun. This small pronoun is a ϕ -bundle of semantic type $\langle e, t \rangle$ which restricts the agent role without saturating it. The compositional semantics of ϕ P and Voice' is formally driven by the operation Restrict in the sense of Chung and Ladusaw (2004).

⁵Although early work on the NIP did not assume that by-phrases were available in the construction (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002), subsequent work has revealed that NIP speakers can indeed use by-phrases in the NIP (Jónsson 2009; E.F. Sigurðsson and Stefánsdóttir 2014; see also discussion in Eythórsson 2008).



The presence of ϕ P in Spec,Voice accounts for why the theme in the NIP stays an object despite the passive appearances of the construction. Its semantics furthermore explains why the NIP is compatible with a by-phrase because the agent role remains unsaturated at the VoiceP level.

Furthermore, the element in Spec,Voice crucially blocks the underlying object from being able to move to the subject position and thus it explains why verbal idioms always retain their idiomatic interpretation in the NIP even if they do not in the Canonical Passive. A few more examples of true Idiomatic Phrases in Icelandic are given below.

- (21)
- a. Jón reif kjaft við Maríu.
John.NOM tore mouth.ACC with Mary
'John directed foul language at Mary.'
'tear mouth' \approx 'use foul language'
 - b. Siggí braut heilann um gátuna.
Siggí.NOM broke brain.the.ACC about puzzle.the
'Siggí thought hard about the puzzle.'
'break the brain' \approx 'think hard'
 - c. Jim tók upp hanskann fyrir Anton.
Jim took up glove.the.ACC for Anton
'Jim defended Anton.'
'take up the glove' \approx 'defend'

The examples demonstrate the verbal idioms *rífa kjaft* 'tear mouth' \approx 'use foul language', *brjóta heilann* 'break the brain' \approx 'think hard', and *taka upp hanskann*

‘take up the glove’ \approx ‘defend’ as used in the active voice. None of these special meanings are compatible with a Canonical Passive (22) but all of them are preserved in the New Impersonal Passive (23).

- (22) a. # *Kjaftur* var rifinn við *Maríu* (af *Jóni*).
 mouth.NOM was torn with *Mary* (by *John*)
 Intended: ‘Somebody (/John) directed foul language at *Mary*.’
- b. # *Heilinn* var brotinn um *gátuna* (af *Sigga*).
 brain.the.NOM was broken about puzzle.the (by *Siggi*)
 Intended: ‘Somebody (/Siggi) thought hard about the puzzle.’
- c. # *Hanskinn* var tekinn upp fyrir *Anton* (af *Jim*).
 glove.the.NOM was taken up for *Anton* (by *Jim*)
 Intended: ‘Somebody (/Jim) defended *Anton*.’
- (23) a. ✓ *Það* var rifið *kjaft* við *Maríu* (af *Jóni*).
 there was torn mouth.ACC with *Mary* (by *John*)
 ‘Somebody (/John) directed foul language at *Mary*.’
- b. ✓ *Það* var brotið *heilann* um *gátuna* (af *Sigga*).
 there was broken brain.the.ACC about puzzle.the (by *Siggi*)
 ‘Somebody (/Siggi) thought hard about the puzzle.’
- c. ✓ *Það* var tekið upp *hanskann* fyrir *Anton* (af *Jim*).
 there was taken up glove.the.ACC for *Anton* (by *Jim*)
 ‘Somebody (/Jim) defended *Anton*.’

As far as we know, the contrast above is exceptionless. All verbal idioms which lose their special meaning in the CanP, retain it in the NIP. This fact supports our account that the loss of idiomatic interpretation depends on the availability of movement. The NIP has an unpronounced subject which blocks the raising of the theme to the subject position.

Independent evidence for our proposal that the availability of displacement is crucial comes from PP complement idioms. The object of a preposition cannot raise out of its base generated position by A-movement and accordingly such idioms always preserve their special meaning under passivization. We can demonstrate this by considering the Icelandic idioms *taka í taumana*, literally ‘take in

the reins’, which means ‘put an end to something (by some kind of an intervention)’, and *spýta í lófana*, literally ‘spit in one’s own palms (of the hands)’, which means ‘work harder’, shown in the active voice below. Note that Icelandic *í* ‘in’ is a preposition in the examples in (24) and it takes an accusative complement; *taka í eitthvað*, ‘take in something’, literally means ‘pull at something’.

- (24) a. Íslendingar tóku í taumana.
Icelanders took in reins.the
‘The Icelandic people put an end to something.’
‘take in the reins’ \approx ‘put an end to something’
- b. Liðið spýtti í lófana.
team.the spat in palms.the
‘The team worked harder.’
‘spit in one’s own palms’ \approx ‘work harder’

The idiomatic interpretation is unaffected if we passivize these sentences as shown in (25) below.⁶

- (25) a. ✓ Það var tekið í taumana (af Íslendingum).
There was taken in reins.the (by Icelanders)
‘Somebody (/the Icelandic people) put an end to something.’
- b. ✓ Það var spýtt í lófana.
there was spat in palms.the
‘Somebody worked harder.’

The conclusion of this section is that the loss of idiomatic interpretation depends on the availability of displacement.

⁶Note that we follow Árnadóttir et al. (2011:72–73) in taking by-phrases to be available in impersonal passives (including PP passives), see our example (25a), even though they are not always felicitous and their use in impersonal passives may be more restricted than in other types of passives. For attested examples, see Árnadóttir et al. (2011:73, n. 40). For the view that by-phrases in impersonal passives are normally ungrammatical or infelicitous, see H.Á. Sigurðsson (1989:322, n. 48), Thráinsson (2007:270), Jónsson (2009:294).

4 Idiom-internal determiners

According to a generalization by Lebeaux (2009:xix), the availability of passivization which preserves idiomatic meaning correlates with whether the determiner position is a fixed part of a verbal idiom, as in (8), repeated as (26), or free to vary, as in (9), repeated as (27).

- (26) a. kick the bucket
 b. # kick all the bucket
 c. # Some men kicked some buckets.

- (27) a. take advantage of
 b. take some advantage of
 c. take a lot of advantage of

The systematicity with which Lebeaux's generalization is borne out seems to be too robust to be a coincidence. The relevant passivization judgments for (26) and (27) are shown below; (10) is repeated as (28).

- (28) a. # The bucket was kicked.
 b. Advantage was taken of John.

The generalization extends to Icelandic as shown below for idioms which require the definite article to be in the determiner position. The following are examples of idioms which do not preserve their special meaning when passivized, as shown above in (22), and the special meaning also depends on a specific element in the determiner position.

- (29) a. að brjóta [✓heilann/#∅ heila/#einhvern heila/#allan heilann]
 to break [brain.the/a brain/some brain/all brain.the]
 'to think hard'
 b. að taka upp [✓hanskann/#∅ hanska/#einhvern hanska]
 to take upp [glove.the/a glove/some glove]
 'to defend'

The definite article in Icelandic is usually expressed as a suffix on the noun whereas there is no overt indefinite article in the language. Note that while the definite article is realized as a suffix, we assume that it is base generated at a canonical D projection above *nP* and subsequently merges with the noun, e.g., via a morphological operation of Local Dislocation as proposed in Ingason (2016).⁷

The generalization does not involve the definite article in particular but rather the situation when the determiner position is fixed. This means that there are also verbal idioms which require an indefinite object and the Icelandic examples below demonstrate this.

- (30) a. að taka [✓ þátt/#þáttinn/#einhvern þátt/#allan þáttinn]
to take [a part/part.the/some part/all part.the]
'to participate'
- b. að rífa [✓ kjaft/#kjaftinn/#einhvern kjaft/#allan kjaftinn]
to tear [a mouth/mouth.the/some mouth/all mouth.the]
'to use foul language'

Again, a fixed determiner position, here with the indefinite article which is realized phonologically as \emptyset , correlates with the unavailability of (canonical) passivization that retains the idiomatic interpretation, cf. (2) and (22). These examples are interesting because the indefinite article works the same as the definite article for the purpose of Lebeaux's generalization even if it is not pronounced.

As is often the case with generalizations, there exist examples which at first sight seem to prove them wrong. For example, even if *taka þátt* 'take part' \approx 'participate' normally requires an indefinite \emptyset article, it is possible to construct a scenario where *einhver* 'some' appears in the determiner position.

⁷For other analyses of the morphosyntax of the internal structure of the Icelandic (and Scandinavian) noun phrase, see H.Á. Sigurðsson (1993, 2006); Delsing (1993); Vangsnes (1999); Julien (2005); Harðarson (2014); Pfaff (2015).

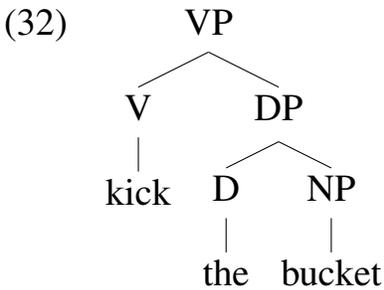
(31) (Context: Talking about a chess tournament.)

Jóhannes tók **einhvern** þátt í mótinu en hætti svo.
 Jóhannes took some part in competition.the but quit then

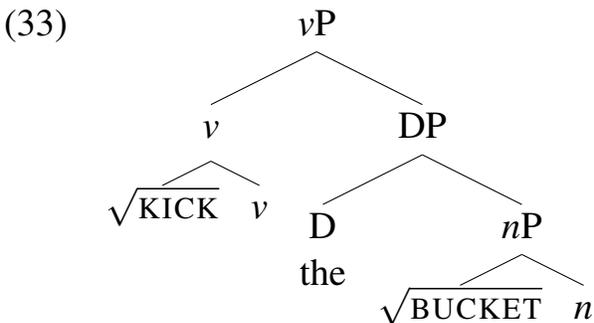
‘Jóhannes participated in some part of the competition but then he quit.’

This example, which was pointed out to us by Höskuldur Thráinsson (p.c.), looks like a counterexample to Lebeaux’s generalization because the determiner position varies in a verbal idiom that does not passivize. However, there is something special about this example that makes it different from other examples with the same idiom and therefore we do not believe that its availability is reason enough to immediately abandon the generalization. We will not develop an extensive account of this example here, but it is suggestive that ‘some’ seems to be quantifying over something eventive whose locus is presumably higher in the clause, rather than the direct object glossed as ‘part’. The sentence could be uttered felicitously to describe a situation in which Jóhannes played the first few rounds in a chess tournament before quitting. In that case, ‘some’ may have undergone Quantifier Raising to a position in which it quantifies over the events which describe the rounds in the competition. Note that it is possible to manipulate the context for (30b) in a similar way to make the use of *einhvern kjaft* ‘some mouth’ felicitous by having the quantification apply to some eventive/temporal aspect of the structure rather than the direct object. We leave further analysis of this phenomenon for future work.

The fact that verbal idioms involve the verb and the DP which is its complement raise questions about phase theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001), because the phase is generally considered to define the amount of material which undergoes Transfer to the interfaces. This issue is discussed in Harwood et al. (2016) and their references. The details of the problems that arise depend on the implementation of the theory of syntax and phases, but under basic assumptions, if the edge of the noun phrase, e.g., DP, defines a phase boundary (Svenonius 2004, 2005; Chomsky 2008), then *kick* and *bucket* do not undergo Transfer to LF in the same phase cycle, yet they seem to be interpreted as one unit.



The D phase is a problem if we believe that the phase determines the possible size of idiomatically interpreted structure. As an example of theoretical assumptions which make the problem even more severe, some analyses assume that lexical roots combine with category-defining heads which also define phase boundaries (Marantz 2001, 2007). If *kick the bucket* involves a necessarily phase-local configuration of the lexical material denoted by the roots $\sqrt{\text{KICK}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{BUCKET}}$, then it is puzzling if the two are separated by a v -phase, a D-phase and a n -phase.



Again, tweaking the implementation in various ways can of course get us closer to having the two pieces be closer to each other, but our tweaks run into the danger of weakening the explanatory power that motivated the relevant phase boundaries in the first place. A theory with category-defining heads as phase boundaries successfully accounts for various phenomena in allomorphy and interpretation (Arad 2003; Embick 2010; Marantz 2013; Ingason and E.F. Sigurðsson 2015; Ingason 2016) and therefore we should not walk lightly down a path which abandons them.

Canonical verbal idioms as defined above are interesting because they can be compared directly and systematically with respect to syntactic operations which apply to verbs and their direct objects, such as passivization. However, we should

try to not forget, while developing our theory of idiomatic interpretation, that special interpretation properties sometimes do appear to be associated with larger structures which clearly cross phase boundaries, according to at least some theories, as evidenced by idiomatic phrases like the following.

(34) give the devil his due (Bruening 2010:536)

The status of such expressions will without doubt remain an active area of investigation, but they do raise reasonable concerns about the role of phases in idiomatic interpretation. Here, it appears that both objects of a ditransitive form a part of an idiomatic expression. If we assume an applicative structure for ditransitives in which Appl is a phase head—as proposed for some Appl heads in McGinnis 2001, and all Appl heads in H.Á. Sigurðsson 2012; Wood and H.Á. Sigurðsson 2014—the two objects are separated, at least, by both the Appl phase and the phase defined by the edge of the direct object noun phrase, e.g., D.

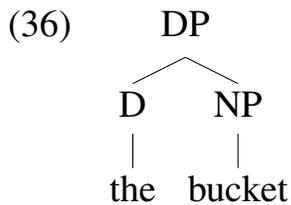
It seems, then, that perhaps it is more fruitful to admit that phases, even if they constrain polysemy resolution in the interpretation of related meanings of individual roots (Marantz 2013; Ingason and E.F. Sigurðsson 2015; Ingason 2016), do not limit the size of structure which gets a special interpretation of the *kick the bucket* type. According to Marantz (2013:105), “For the issue of root [...] polysemy, the relevant domain for ‘fixing’ meaning appears to be the phase, while for idioms, the domain is clearly larger.” Marantz goes on to discuss *kick the bucket* in particular, and proposes that idiom formation is “on top” of polysemy resolution.

We propose an alternative analysis which allows for delayed Transfer to LF if the structure which has been built at the phase head is a part of an idiom. This approach is similar to the mechanism which manages delayed Transfer to PF in the analysis of suppletive allomorphy in Bobaljik (2012).

(35) **Late Transfer of Idioms**

If a phase head is part of an idiom, Transfer to LF is delayed until the next higher phase.

We should note that while Late Transfer of Idioms allows for large idioms, it does not allow for idioms in which an embedded position in the idiom is variable, cf. Marantz (1984) and Harley and Stone (2014) on the lack of ‘agent idioms’ and Lebeaux’s generalization discussed above. In order to delay LF Transfer at the D-phase, the whole structure built so far must be a proper subpart of an idiomatic phrase. For example, the following subtree is an exact subpart of the idiom *kick the bucket*, and thus it allows for Late Transfer.⁸



If the determiner is replaced with something else, like *kick some bucket*, or if the direct object position contains a trace, as in the passive, rather than the exact subtree which the idiom demands, delayed transfer at DP is not permitted and this means that idiomatic interpretation is unavailable.

Our Late Transfer of Idioms hypothesis is further supported by fMRI studies of embodied action semantics and premotor cortex activation which have demonstrated the absence of congruent somatotopic activation in idioms like *kick the bucket* (Aziz-Zadeh et al. 2006; Nevins 2015). A kicking-associated activation which is found with the verb *kick* is not triggered by the idiom, suggesting that idiomatic phrases are indeed shipped to LF in one piece. Consider, for example, the following examples.

- (37) a. John kicked the ball.
 b. John kicked the bucket.

The finding is essentially that an example like (37a) triggers the kind of a response

⁸Interestingly, our approach does raise the possibility that phase edges are excluded from this “exact subpart” requirement, if edges are in spellout domains distinct from their heads and complements, as proposed by Marantz (2007, 2008). This could capture idioms with open embedded specifier positions, such as *pull X’s leg*. We set investigation of this possibility aside for future research.

that is associated with a physical kicking activity whereas (37b) does not. This contrast would be surprising if the root $\sqrt{\text{KICK}}$ in each case was already processed as part of the Transfer of the root to LF but it is an expected consequence of our Late Transfer of Idioms. Thus, our analysis gains independent support from neurolinguistic evidence.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we used evidence from passive-like constructions in Icelandic to clarify the status of idiomatic interpretation and its relationship with the grammar. We argued that idiomatic phrases cannot be interpreted via traces and that the loss of idiomatic interpretation in passivization depends on the availability of displacement. We proposed that Late Transfer of Idioms permits the grammar to delay shipping a structure off to LF if the phase which has been built is an exact substructure of an idiomatic phrase. According to this analysis, traces do not count for licensing Late Transfer of Idioms and the determiner position must contain exactly what is specified as part of the idiomatic phrase. One apparent counterexample which we encountered with a variable determiner seems to be related to quantification in which the quantifier raises to a higher position to quantify over events and does not participate in the semantics of the noun phrase where it appears on the surface.

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