

## DEFINITE FEMININE CLITICS AND TELICITY IN IDIOMS

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1. A long debated issue in the linguistic literature is the existence of similarities between the reference type of NPs/DPs and the temporal/aspectual constitution of VPs (cf. Krifka 1989, 1992, 1998, from the perspective of formal event semantics, and Jackendoff 1991, from conceptual semantics). Thus, the presence of articles correlates with a telic reading of a predicate whose head is a transitive activity verb, which otherwise should be atelic (cf. the activity vs. achievement alternation of transitive verbs). This is illustrated in (1) and (2).

1. a. drink beer                             ATELIC  
   b. drink a/the beer   TELIC
2. a. read novels                         ATELIC  
   b. read a/the novel   TELIC

McGinnis 2002 makes the claim that, in spite of the so-called non-compositionality of phrasal idioms (cf. idiomatic phrases, Nunberg et al. 1994), the very same pattern extends to idiomatic VPs that contain either a singular DP vs. a bare plural or a mass noun. See the data in (3) and (4) (her exs. (13) and (14)).

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

She concludes that the aspectual meaning of idioms is structural, systematic and compositional, and it is to be distinguished from their idiosyncratic, encyclopedic, non-syntactically transparent meaning (see also Marantz 1997, Espinal & Mateu 2010).

### 2. Hypothesis

In this paper, we reassess McGinnis’s position on the basis of Catalan verbal idioms that incorporate definite feminine clitics (see Espinal 2001, 2009 for a description of the phenomenon in a wide range of languages).

5. a. La Maria *les tira amb bala*.  
   the.F Mary them.F throw with bullet  
   ‘Mary speaks wryly.’  
   b. La Carme *la balla*.  
   the.F Carme it.F dances  
   ‘Carme is suffering.’

We defend the hypothesis that inherent definite feminine clitics (IDFC) that encode abstract semantic objects (indeterminate objects, properties, propositions, facts, atemporal situations; cf. Asher 1993) play a major role when shifting the expected telicity of a basic transitive change of state predicate such as *tirar* ‘to throw’ to convey an ATELIC eventuality.

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

A similar shift happens in the case of the unaccusative achievement predicate *passar* ‘to pass’, which shifts its expected telicity to an atelic interpretation when coappearing with a definite DP that refers to a property-denoting object (7b), as well as when co-occurring with the IDFC *la* ‘it’ (even in combination with an overt secondary predicate) (7c).

7. a. Va [v passar] [DP la prova] en cinc minuts / #durant tota la tarda. (OK AS ITER.)  
 PAST pass the test in five minutes during whole the afternoon  
 ‘(S)he passed the test in five minutes / during the whole afternoon.’
- b. Va *passar el rosari* #en cinc minuts / durant tota la tarda. ATELIC  
 PAST pass the rosary in five minutes during whole the afternoon  
 ‘(S)he prayed in five minutes / during the whole afternoon.’
- c. Va *passar-la prima* #en cinc minuts / durant tota la infantesa. ATELIC  
 PAST pass it.F thin in five minutes during whole the childhood  
 ‘(S)he suffered in five minutes / during her/his whole childhood.’

### 3. Analysis

We defend an analysis that separates morphosyntactic definiteness from semantic abstract object denotation (Asher 1993, Moltmann 2013), and we argue that reference to abstract objects in information structure configurations is what matters at the time of constraining the aspectual properties of Catalan verbal idioms with inherent clitics.

In formal terms, and assuming a basic <B(ackground),F(ocus)> structure of information packaging, we will argue that the IDFC, in the cases at stake, is part of the denotation focus (Krifka 2007). When the background contains a highly salient antecedent that is referentially identifiable, the definite feminine clitic co-refers with this antecedent (8a); this structure constrains the telicity of the predicate by combining the V with an incremental theme (Dowty 1991), resulting in a non-idiomatic telic reading. By contrast, when there is no referential antecedent for the pronoun, the clitic does not co-refer, the V does not combine with an incremental theme, resulting in an idiomatic atelic reading (8b). We will argue that this is to be considered a last resort reading of the clitic when no referential antecedent is available.

8. a. [Aquella dansa]<sub>i</sub> la<sub>i</sub> va ballar < $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda e [P(\text{aquella dansa}_i)(e)]$ , <la<sub>i</sub> va ballar>>  
 that dance it PAST dance
- b. Durant la guerra la va ballar < $\lambda \mu \lambda P \lambda e [\mu - P(e) \ \& \ \text{durant la guerra}(e)]$ , <la va ballar>>  
 during the war it PAST dance

In structure (8b) the clitic introduces a metavariable  $\mu$  over a variety of abstract semantic objects, unlike regular clitics, which contribute individual variables. We claim that the presence of formal objects of the sort  $\lambda \mu$  is what triggers idiomatic formation. In (8b) *la va ballar* is to be conceived as a complex predicate, the output of an operation of predicate formation by means of which the non-referential clitic forms a semantic compound with the predicate denoted by the verb and is semantically incorporated into the verb as a modification of the property P denoted by the verb (8b) (Dayal 2011). The contrast between (8a-b) predicts that only the former can be resumed by a factual predicate such as *això va passar* ‘it took place’. This prediction is borne out (Espinal 2009).

The non-referential inherent clitic may also restrict the verb’s internal argument by a process of unification of features (9), relevant when the indeterminate object represented by the metavariable  $\mu$  (i.e., *les* lit. them.F seems to stand for *the words*) overlaps with the denotation of the internal argument of the V (Farkas and de Swart 2003, 2004). See the representation in (10) (where  $\infty$  stands for overlapping), which we postulate as the logical form of the predicate in (5a).

9. Replace the relevant selecting features x of a verbal predicate with the set of features  $\mu$  contributed by the abstract object in the background.
10. < $\lambda \mu \lambda P \lambda x \lambda e [P(x)(e) \ \& \ \mu \infty x]$ , <les tira amb bala>>

We conclude that TELIC to ATELIC shifts are constrained by the presence of an abstract semantic object in the Background of the information structure. This object conveys abstract anaphora and is not interpretable as an incremental theme, the clue to understand incremental relations between objects and events (Krifka 1998). Moreover, in line with Corver’s (2013) hypothesis regarding an affective use of some linguistic expressions, we conclude that idiomaticity (as affectivity) follows from a marked use of available functional atoms (and operations) in the grammar.

### Selected references

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