Definite feminine clitics and telicity in idioms
BCGL 8: The grammar of idioms

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Telicity and articles

- Similarities between the reference type of NPs/DPs and the temporal/aspectual constitution of VPs: Krifka (1989, 1992, 1998); also Dowty (1979), Jackendoff (1991).

- The presence of articles correlates with a telic reading of an activity verb:

to drink beer	ATELIC
to drink a beer	TELIC
to read novels	ATELIC
to read a/the novel	TELIC

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Aspectual meaning and compositionality in idioms

- McGinnis (2002): the aspectual meaning of idioms is structural, systematic and compositional, and it is to be distinguished from their idiosyncratic, encyclopaedic, non-syntactically transparent meaning (see also Marantz (1997), Espinal and Mateu (2010)):

non-idiomatic

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

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Data: Definite Feminine Clitics and idioms (Espinal 2009) I

(1)   Catalan

     a.   ballar-la
         dance-3ACC.F.SG
         'to suffer.'

     b.   tirar-les   amb bala.
         throw-3ACC.F.PL with bullet
         'to speak wryly.'

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Data: Definite Feminine Clitics and idioms (Espinal 2009) II

(2)   French

     a.   l'echapper   belle
           3ACC.F.SG-escape nice
           'escape from a danger'

     b.   se   les   rouler
           SELF 3ACC.F.SG roll
           'do nothing'

Data: Definite Feminine Clitics and idioms (Espinal 2009) III

(3)   Italian
   a.   passarla   liscia
        pass-3ACC.F.SG smooth
        'get away scot-free'
   b.   spararle   grosse
        shoot-3ACC.F.PL big.F.PL
        'tell tall stories'

Data: Definite Feminine Clitics and idioms (Espinal 2009) IV

(4)   Spanish

    a.   armarla
        arm-3ACC.F.SG
        'make trouble'

    b.   pirárselas
        go-CL-3ACC.F.SG
        'leave'

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Aim and hypothesis

AIM

- We reassess McGinnis' (2002) claim that the aspectual meaning of idioms is completely systematic on the basis of Catalan verbal idioms with inherent definite feminine clitics (IDFC).

HYPOTHESIS

- IDFC that encode abstract semantic objects play a major role when shifting the expected telicity of a basic transitive change of state predicate to convey an ATELIC eventuality.

Transitive change of state verbs: tirar 'to throw' I

(5)   **non-idiomatic verb with definite DP** $\rightarrow$ TELIC

a.   Va   [$_V$ tirar] [$_{DP}$ la   pilota] a l'altra
      PAST.3SG   throw   the.F ball   to the.F-other
      banda del   carrer en un moment.
      side   of.the street in a   moment
      '(S)he threw the ball to the other side of the street in
      an instant.'

b.   #Va   [$_V$ tirar] [$_{DP}$ la   pilota] a l'altra
      PAST.3SG   throw   the.F ball   to the.F-other
      banda del   carrer durant una bona   estona.
      side   of.the street during a.F good.F time
      '(S)he threw the ball to the other side of the street
      during a long period of time.'

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Transitive change of state verbs: tirar 'to throw' II

(6)   **idiomatic verb with feminine clitic** → ATELIC

    a.   #Va   començar el discurs
           PAST.3SG start   the discourse
           tirant-les   *amb bala* en un moment.
           throwing.3ACC.F.PL with bullet in a   moment
           '(S)he started the discourse speaking wryly in an instant.'

    b.   Va   començar el discurs
           PAST.3SG start   the discourse
           tirant-les   *amb bala* durant una bona
           throwing.3ACC.F.PL with bullet during a   good
           estona.
           time
           '(S)he started the discourse speaking wryly during a long period of time.'

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Transitivized unaccusative change of state verbs: passar 'to pass' I

(7) **non-idiomatic** → TELIC

a. Va   [$_V$ passar] [$_{DP}$ la   prova] en cinc minuts.
   PAST.3SG   pass   the.F test   in five minutes
   '(S)he passed the test in five minutes.'

b. #Va   [$_V$ passar] [$_{DP}$ la   prova] durant tota
   PAST.3SG   pass   the.F test   during all.F
   la   tarda. (OK AS ITERATIVE, ONLY.)
   the.F afternoon
   '(S)he passed the test during the whole afternoon.'

Transitivized unaccusative change of state verbs: passar 'to pass' II

(8) **idiomatic verb with phrasal object** $\rightarrow$ ATELIC

   a. #Va   *passar el   rosari* en cinc minuts.
      PAST.3SG pass the.F rosary in five minutes
      '(S)he prayed in five minutes.'

   b. Va   *passar el   rosari* durant tota la
      PAST.3SG pass the.F rosary during all.F the.F
      tarda.
      afternoon
      '(S)he prayed during the whole afternoon.'

Transitivized unaccusative change of state verbs: passar 'to pass' III

(9) **idiomatic verb with feminine clitic** → ATELIC

a. #Va   *passar-la*   *prima*   en cinc minuts.
    PAST.3SG pass-3ACC.F.SG thin.F.SG in five minutes
    '(S)he suffered in five minutes.'

b. Va   *passar-la*   *prima*   durant tota
    PAST.3SG pass-3ACC.F.SG thin.F.SG during all.F
    la   infantesa.
    the.F childhood
    '(S)he suffered during her/his whole childhood.'

Analysis

- We defend an analysis that separates morphosyntactic definiteness from semantic abstract object denotation (Asher 1993, Moltmann 2013),

- We argue that semantic abstract object denotation [=undeterminate objects, propositions, properties, facts, atemporal situations; see Asher (1993)] plays a major role at the time of constraining the aspectual properties of Catalan verbal idioms with inherent clitics.

- We adopt Krifka's (2007) basic ⟨B(ackground),F(ocus)⟩ structure of information packaging, and we argue that the clitic, in the cases at stake, is part of the denotation focus.

$\langle B, F \rangle$ structure: argument clitic

(10)   [Aquella dansa]$_i$ la$_i$ va   ballar.
            that   dance   3ACC.F.SG PAST.3SG dance
            'That dance, (s)he danced.'

> $\langle \lambda x \exists e[V(x)(e)](\textit{aquella dansa}_i),$ $\langle \textit{la}_i \textit{ va ballar} \rangle \rangle$
>   BACKGROUND   FOCUS
>
> - This structure constrains the telicity of the predicate by combining the V with an incremental theme (Dowty 1991, Krifka 1992), resulting in a non-idiomatic telic reading.
> - Pronominal clitics encode the presence of an unsaturated argument position (Delfitto 2002).

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$\langle B, F \rangle$ structure: predicate modification I

(11) Durant la   guerra *la*   *va*   *ballar.*
       during the.F war   3ACC.F.SG PAST.3SG dance
       'During the war (s)he suffered.'

$\langle \lambda\mu\lambda e[\mu\text{-}V(e)\&\text{durant-la-guerra(e)}],$ $\langle$ la-va-ballar$\rangle\rangle$
         BACKGROUND   FOCUS

$\langle B, F \rangle$ structure: predicate modification II

$\langle \lambda \mu \lambda e[\mu\text{-}V(e)\&\text{durant-la-guerra}(e)], \, \langle \text{ la-va-ballar} \rangle \rangle$

- Idiomatic constructions with IDFC encode functional abstraction over argument positions of the verbal predicate (Espinal 2009).
- V+IDFC idiomatic constructions encode λ-abstraction over a range of non-referential topics that denote abstract objects.
- IDFC are neither syntactically nor semantically bound (Heim and Kratzer 1998).

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$\langle B, F \rangle$ **structure: predicate modification III**

> ### $\langle \lambda\mu\lambda e[\mu\text{-}V(e)\&\text{durant-la-guerra}(e)], \langle$ la-va-ballar$\rangle\rangle$
>
> - The logical status of IDFC is μ, a metavariable that ranges over a variety of abstract semantic objects ($\neq$ individual entities).
> - μ-V is a complex predicate, where μ modifies the property denoted by the verb (Dayal 2003, 2011).
> - 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.

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$\langle B, F \rangle$ **structure: unification**

- IDFC may also restrict the verb's internal argument by a process of unification of features (Farkas and de Swart 2003).

- This applies when the antecedent of the clitic denotes an indeterminate object.

(12)   Va   començar el   discurs   *tirant-les*   *amb*
         PAST.3SG start   the discourse throwing.them with
         bala.
         bullet
         '(S)he started the discourse speaking wryly.'

- les=les paraules 'the words'

$\langle B, F \rangle$ **structure: unification**

$\langle \lambda x \lambda e[V(x)(e) \& \exists \mu[\mu \infty x], \langle \text{les-tira-amb-bala} \rangle\rangle$

- (Reformulated) *unification* (Espinal 2009): Replace the relevant selecting features x of a verbal predicate with the set of features μ contributed by the abstract object in the background.

- Unification applies when the indeterminate object represented by the metavariable μ (i.e., *les* stands for 'the words' in *tirar-les amb bala*) overlaps with the denotation of the internal argument of the V [∞=overlapping].

Predictions: predicate anaphora I

- VP idioms containing IDFC characteristically denote atemporal situations.
- The abstract non-referential status of the IDFC contributes a generic atemporal reading incompatible with a factual predicate anaphora in the subsequent discourse (Espinal 2009).
- TEST: idioms with IDFC cannot serve as antecedents of factual predicate anaphoras.

Predictions: predicate anaphora II

- *Això va pasar* 'it took place' requires that the antecedent refers to a factual event, which involves times and locations. (See also Delfitto 2004) for discussion on the factual resumptive anaphoric expression *la cosa* 'the thing')

(13)   Aquella dansa la   va   ballar. I això
          that   dance 3ACC.F.SG PAST.3SG dance and that
          va   passar al   segon bis.
          PAST.3SG happen at-the second encore
          'That dance was danced. And it took place at the second encore.'

Predictions: predicate anaphora III

- *Això va pasar* 'it took place' requires that the antecedent refers to a factual event, which involves times and locations. (See also Delfitto 2004) for discussion on the factual resumptive anaphoric expression *la cosa* 'the thing')

(14)   Durant la guerra *la*   va   ballar. #I això
        during the war   3ACC.F.SG PAST.3SG dance and that

        va   passar també a la seva   família.
        PAST.3SG happen too   at the his/her family
        'During the war (s)he suffered. And it took place too to his/her family.'

Predictions I

- When the IDFC has an abstract object denotation and the antecedent of the clitic is a salient topic referring also to an abstract object, the predicate is still atelic.

(15) [Aquelles paraules] *les*   *va*   *engegar sense*
      those   words   3ACC.F.PL PAST.3SG throw   without
      engaltar durant una bona   part de la   reunió.
      take.aim during a.F good.F part of the.F meeting
      'Those words, (s)he throw without hesitation during part of the meeting.'

Predictions II

- When the IDFC has an abstract object denotation and the antecedent of the clitic is a salient topic referring also to an abstract object, the predicate is still atelic.

(16)   [Amb aquella broma de mal gust] *la*   *va*
with that.F joke of bad taste 3ACC.F.SG PAST.3SG

ben *jugar* al   seu   soci   durant els   deu
well play to-the his/her partner during the.PL years

anys   abans del   judici.
before of-the trial

'With that bad joke (s)he fooled his/her partner for the ten years preceding the trial.'

Predictions: other clitics I

- When the inherent clitic, even if it is not definite feminine, has an abstract object denotation and the antecedent of the clitic is a salient topic referring also to an abstract object, the predicate is still atelic.

(17)　　[La　seva　　situació] era difícil,　però *se'n*
　　　　the.F his/her.F situation was difficult but　SELF-of.it
　　　　va　　　*sortir* molt bé　al　　llarg de tot el　judici.
　　　　PAST.3SG result very well to-the long of all　the trial
　　　　'(S)he was in a difficult situation, but (s)he managed very well during the trial.'

Predictions: other clitics II

(18)   [Quines   idees!] No sé   pas com
       which.F.PL ideas!   not know.1SG NEG how
       s'ho   *va*   *enginyar* tan bé   durant tot
       SELF-3ACC.NEUT PAST.3SG think   so   well during all
       el   judici.
       the trial
       'What ideas! I don't know how (s)he managed so well
       during the whole trial.'

Conclusions

- We conclude that TELIC to ATELIC shifts in idioms with IDFC 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).

- In line with Corver (2013) hypothesis regarding an affective use of some linguistic expressions, we foresee that *idiomaticity* (as *affectivity*) follows from a marked use of available functional atoms (and operations) in the grammar: abstract object denotation, unification, incorporation/modification.

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Thank you!

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