

Inner Aspect and the Verbal Typology of Idioms

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Within the study of idioms, there are two well-known and related observations: 1) that if an idiom contains a verb and its external argument it also contains the internal argument (cf. Marantz 1984) and 2) that idioms may be sensitive to *voice* (i.e., passivation) but not TAM (cf. Svenonious 2005). However idioms such as (1) challenge both of these generalizations. Since, it appears that there is both a required subject (2, cf. Bresnan 1982); and, appears to require progressive aspect (3, cf. Svenonious 2005 and Harwood 2013).

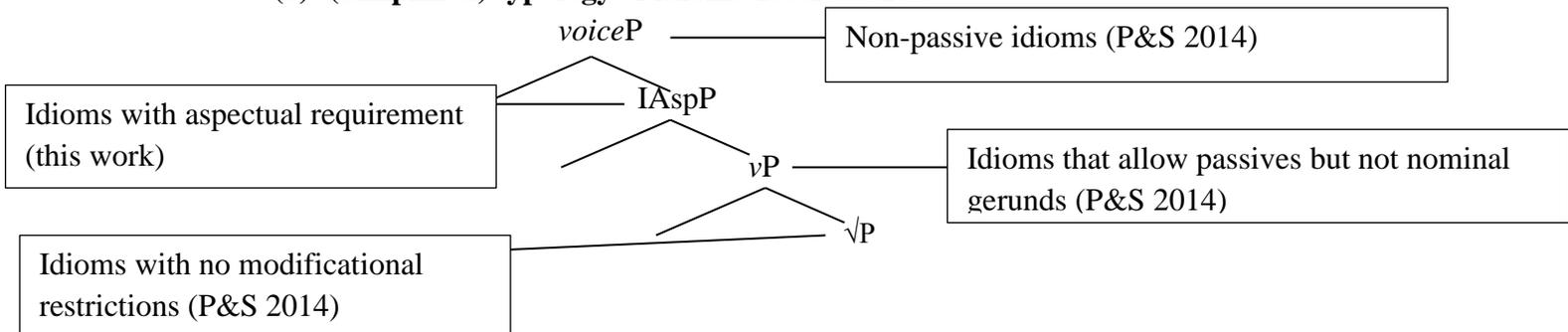
- (1) Something/nothing is eating Bob/ What's eating Bob?
- (2) #The issue is eating Bob.
- (3) #Something/#what will eat/eats/ate Bob

However, based on hitherto unnoticed permissible idiomatic interpretations with conative particles, we argue that these apparent requirements are a mirage and these forms do not pose any challenge to the generalizations given above. The conative particle eliminates both the subject and progressive requirement from the idiomatic interpretation:

- (4) The issue will eat/eats/ate at Bob.

We argue that the conative (4) shows that the idiom in question is sensitive to inner (progressive) aspect (cf. Pylkkänen 2002, Travis 2010, many others) not (outer) progressive (contra Harwood 2013). The conative particle realizes this inner aspectual head and is internal to the *v(oice)P* phase. This supports Svenonious' (2005) argument that idioms are maximally first phase bound. We further argue that the *eat X* idiom is a sub-*voiceP* idiom, maximally sensitive to inner aspect. This allows us to further clarify the typology of idioms from Punske and Stone (2014):

(5) (Simplified) typology of idiomatic structures



As predicted by the typology in (5) the idiomatic interpretation of *eats at X* is available in passive, but not in nominal gerunds.

- (6) Bill was eaten at by the question, until the natural solution arose.
(7) #The question's eating at of Bill stayed until the solution appeared.

Though, under this analysis, a puzzle still remains as to why the restricted forms like (1) should exist at all. We argue that English progressive *-ing* is a default form and generally ambiguous between an inner and outer progressive reading, when a conative particle is not present. We argue that the presence of a valued inner aspectual head which has not been realized by a conative particle prevents the $v(oice)P$ phase from completing and spelling-out. The apparent (outer) progressive *-ing* appears to express the unpronounced inner aspectual head, thus deriving its required presence in the examples without the conative particle.

We argue that the subject restriction also derives from the incomplete phasal status of idiomatic *voicePs* with valued but unrealized inner aspect heads. We assume that phases are variations on Diesing's (1992) mapping domains (cf. Jelinek and Carnie 2003, Jackson 2007). A complete phase (in the relevant examples, one with a conative particle) will license a specific (or existential) subject. An incomplete phase, not being a closure domain, will not, thus leaving us only with the variable (*what, nothing, something*) subjects available.

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