THE NOTION OF IDIOMS IN LINGUISTICS

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Annotation. *This article describes the concepts of idioms, their place in linguistics, and the structure of their use. Also, in the article, the situation of idioms in the sentence structure and their reasons with examples are given.*

Keywords: *idiom, multi-word expression, semantic (non-)compositionality, conventionality, conceptual metaphor, syntax of idioms, meaning of idioms*

ПОНЯТИЕ ИДИОМ В ЛИНГВИСТИКЕ

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Аннотация. *В данной статье описываются понятия идиом, их место в лингвистике и структура их использования. Также в статье приводится положение идиом в структуре предложения и их причины с примерами.*

Ключевые слова: *идиома, многословное выражение, семантическая (не)композиционность, условность, концептуальная метафора, синтаксис идиом, значение идиом.*

Idioms, conceived as fixed multi-word expressions that conceptually encode non-compositional meaning, are linguistic units that raise a number of questions relevant in the study of language and mind (e.g., whether they are stored in the lexicon or in memory, whether they have internal or external syntax similar to other expressions of the language, whether their conventional use is parallel to their non-compositional

meaning, whether they are processed in similar ways to regular compositional expressions of the language, etc.). Idioms show some similarities and differences with other sorts of formulaic expressions, the main types of idioms that have been characterized in the linguistic literature, and the dimensions on which idiomaticity lies. Syntactically, idioms manifest a set of syntactic properties, as well as a number of constraints that account for their internal and external structure. Semantically, idioms present an interesting behavior with respect to a set of semantic properties that account for their meaning (i.e., conventionality, compositionality, and transparency, as well as aspectuality, referentiality, thematic roles, etc.). The study of idioms has been approached from lexicographic and computational, as well as from psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic perspectives.

Idioms introduce a challenge to linguistic theory due to the fact that they are not easily analyzed under a derivational approach to the theory of grammar, such as the one that has been developed within mainstream generative grammar.[2] This challenge follows in part from the way that idioms are usually defined in the literature, conceived of as constituents or series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives it is composed of (Fraser, 1970).

The *compositionality issue* has been conceived in the generative literature as the central reason for the deficient syntactic behavior of idioms. In accordance with this view, it has been argued that "the reluctance of some idiom parts to undergo certain syntactic operations follows from the fact that idioms are not built up in a compositional manner, because a compound idiomatic expression corresponds to one primitive meaning expression" (Schenk, 1995, p. 253).

This, in turn, relates to the so-called *flexibility issue*, that is, how the varying degrees of syntactic flexibility can be captured (Sailer, 2013). "Idioms typically appear only in a limited number of syntactic phrases or constructions, unlike freely composed expressions" (Nunberg et al., 1994, p. 492). The proposal made by Nunberg et al.

(1994) is to explain the variety of "transformational deficiencies" (Fraser, 1970) of idioms by distinguishing between flexible, decomposable idioms, and fixed, non-decomposable idioms. The former, in Nunberg et al.'s terminology, correspond to idiomatically combining expressions (ICEs) and the latter to idiomatic phrases (IPs). Only ICEs permit, to various degrees, syntactic processes such as passivization, modification and quantification, ellipsis, topicalization, and the like, processes that in the recent history of linguistics have sometimes been analyzed as transformational and sometimes as lexical.

What has just been pointed out makes explicit a third *syntax versus lexicon issue* introduced by idioms. If idioms are conceived as multi-word expressions (not as single morpheme or word expressions, cf. Marantz, 1997), the question that arises is how idioms are to be represented in the lexicon, since they are not X° categories. As multi-word constructions, idioms are traditionally conceived to be part of the lexicon; they are generally assumed to be included in a repository of language that lists basic relations between forms of linguistic objects and other properties of these objects. However, because of their common multi-word status, idioms represent a serious challenge for a standard theory of lexical insertion. An alternative analysis, based on a series of correspondence rules between phonological structures, syntactic structures, and conceptual structures, is at the basis of a lexical licensing theory that has been proposed in a seminal work by Jackendoff (1995, 1997a, 2002, a.o.).

Iven these challenges and issues, in the rest of this section devoted to the syntax of idioms (cf. Fellbaum, 2015), the following topics will be dealt with:

1. The categories of idioms.
2. Syntactic properties: constituency, selection.
3. Possible and impossible idioms.
4. Idioms as constructions, with and without a canonical syntax.

Unfortunately, from a cross-linguistic perspective one can find basically lexicographic studies that provide lists of form-meaning pairs for various sorts of lexicalized multi-word expressions. Some of these studies contain in addition to the collection of idioms and their conventionalized meaning information regarding the syntactic manipulations each idiom allows, based on single (or few) speakers' judgements.

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