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IDIOMS: AN INTERIM REPORT\*

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As the title indicates, this paper is a report on work in progress; we expect that it will become part of a larger work dealing in considerably greater detail with the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of English idioms. Our purpose here is more modest, namely, to consider the place of idioms in the theory of generative grammar.

Idioms have figured prominently in the generative literature. In particular, they are commonly cited in arguments for the existence of transformations. In view of the recent spate of proposals for non-transformational theories of grammar (e.g., Braine (1978), Bresnan (1981a), Gazdar (1981), Hudson (1976)), the treatment of idioms in generative grammar warrants some attention. In what follows, we will examine some of the better known discussions of idioms, arguing that they are based on faulty (and often unstated) premises. We will then outline a proposal for the treatment of idioms, which is compatible with almost any available theory of syntax.

1. Idiom-based Arguments for Transformations

1.1. One widely repeated argument for the existence of transformations (cf. e.g., Chomsky (1976: 168), Keyser and Postal (1976: 250), Perlmutter and Soames (1979: 106-9)) is based on the fact that certain idioms can appear in more than one syntactic form. For example, both the *a* and *b* sentences of (1) and (2) have idiomatic readings.

- (1) a. Pat spilled the beans.
- b. The beans were spilled by Pat.
- (2) a. The cat is out of the bag.
- b. The cat seems to be out of the bag.

If surface structures are generated directly, so the argument goes, then the *a* and *b* sentences must be distinct idioms. On the other hand, if there are transformations of passivization and raising, then each idiom must be listed only once. They can be inserted into deep structure in their contiguous (2) forms and transformationally broken up, yielding their (b) forms. This simplifies the grammar and captures a generalization. Further, since the parts of the idioms can be indelibly far apart, as illustrated in (3), it is not possible for the grammar simply to list all the surface incarnations of every idiom.

- (3) a. The beans continue to appear to be out of the bag.
  - b. The cat seems to be believed to be out of the bag.
- Thus, posing a single underlying idiom which may be transformationally deformed is claimed to be not only parsimonious but unavoidable.

Not surprisingly, this argument has been answered by some linguists advocating direct generation of surface structures (see especially Bresnan (1981b)). Briefly, the simplest answer to give is that so long as the theory contains rules of some sort relating, e.g., active and passive constructions, then these rules can be used to account for the existence of "transformed" idioms. Specifically, Bresnan and Kaplan's "Lexical Functional Grammar" posits a lexical redundancy rule to account for the active-passive relationship, and Gazdar's "Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar" has a metarule accomplishing the same thing. Either one of these mechanisms would apply to idiomatic as well as non-idiomatic constructions so they would circumvent the argument given above. In short, the argument only shows that a grammar for English must provide some rules for capturing the relationships which have been expressed in terms of transformations; it does not show that the rules in question must be transformations. And no one ever doubted that such relationships as active/passive are rule-governed.

There is, in our opinion, a more fundamental defect in the argument in question. It is the hidden assumption that idioms are arbitrary associations between forms and meanings. Only this assumption licenses the inference from the existence of two forms for an idiom to the need for the non-transformational grammar to list them separately. On the other hand, if (as we shall argue below) the assumption is wrong--that is, if the meanings of idioms are somehow composed from the meanings of their parts--then the fact that actives and their corresponding passives have the same predicate-argument structures would lead one to expect that active idioms would normally have passive counterparts. We will return to this point below.

1.2. This same assumption of semantic non-compositionality of idioms plays a crucial role in another argument for transformations, namely that offered by Wasow (1977). Since non-transformational accounts of the phenomena dealt with there have been developed elsewhere (Bresnan (1981b), Wasow (1979)), we will not discuss this argument here. We do, however, wish to point out that it assumes that idiom "chunks" are semantically empty. It is for this reason that Wasow claimed that they undergo only "structural" rules (viz. transformations) and not "relational" rules, that is, those sensitive to what Chomsky (1965: 117) has called "the semantically significant functional notions (grammatical relations)" of (deep) subject and object.

1.3. Recently, Chomsky (1980) has offered three new arguments for the existence of transformations,<sup>1</sup> all based on idioms. We contend that each of these arguments, upon examination, proves to be based on dubious factual claims and questionable reasoning.

1.3.1. The first argument is that idioms "typically have the syntactic form of nonidiomatic expressions" (p. 149). This "would be an accident if meanings were simply mapped into formal structures. But if the relation between form and meaning is more indirect, mediated through D-structures and S-structures [i.e., deep and surface structures--TW, JAS, GN] it follows that idioms must have the form of independent (S<sub>0</sub>) generated structures." (p. 151). (Of course, an argument for D-structures and S-structures is implicitly an argument for transformations, since the mapping from D-structures to S-structures is taken to be accomplished by transformations.)

The first thing to note about this argument is that there is a substantial number of idioms which do not "have the syntactic form of nonidiomatic expressions."<sup>2</sup> (4) is a partial list.

(4) by and large	kingdom come
trip the light fantastic	No can do.
bauble royal	Handsome is as handsome does.
Would that it were,	every which way
Easy does it.	be that as it may
Believe you me!	in short

Thus, Chomsky's argument is based on a statistical asymmetry, and it is not clear what force this has. The asymmetry could simply be an historical accident (as Gazdar has pointed out in unpublished work), resulting from the fact that most idioms are derived diachronically from non-idiomatic expressions.

Even if it is assumed that the synchronic grammar must explain this asymmetry, it does not follow that deep structures (and hence transformations) are needed. All that is required is that idioms are normally generated by the same rules that generate non-idiomatic expressions, and this is possible irrespective of whether the theory uses transformations. The proposals below are perfectly compatible with non-transformational theories.

1.3.2. Chomsky's second argument is based on the following claim: "there are idioms that appear at both the D- and S-structure levels and idioms that appear only at the D-structure level. But idioms that appear only at the S-structure level are very rare; we can regard this possibility as excluded in principle, with such marginal exceptions as should be expected in the case of idiomatic constructions." (p. 152). Since the standard assumption has been that idioms are inserted into deep structures like ordinary lexical items, this asymmetry is

predicted, and hence is taken as evidence for the existence of transformations.

However, a close examination reveals that the exceptions are by no means so rare or marginal as Chomsky suggests. Braine (1978) has pointed out examples like (5a) which are grammatical only if the idiom is in preposed position, as the contrast between (5b) and (5c) indicates.

(5) a. What the hell did you buy?  
b. I wonder who bought what the hell.

Other: idioms that appear only in wh-questions are *How do you do?* and *What gives?* There are also a number of idioms which are only possible in the passive. (6) gives some of them.<sup>3</sup>

(6) (a) The die is cast. The race is run.  
(b) if the truth be known hoist with one's own peard  
fit to be tied caught short  
born yesterday have it made  
written on water Rome wasn't built in a day.  
when all is said and done

Finally, there are several idioms which are limited to constructions associated with other purported<sup>4</sup> transformations.

(7) hard to take (rough-movement)  
too hot to handle (subject-auxiliary inversion)  
Break a leg! Believe me! (imperative deletion)

Is the Pope Catholic? Believe me! (comparative deletion)<sup>5</sup>

may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb  
more dead than alive  
It is by no means clear that it is desirable for examples like these to be "excluded in principle".

Nevertheless, the relative rarity of idioms like (5)-(7) needs to be accounted for (though not necessarily in the synchronic grammar). One might conjecture that the existence of productive rules like the passive leads to back-formation in question). This would also account for the infrequency of passive-only simple verbs (e.g., *run*). This asymmetry could, if desired, be built into any theory (transformational or not) which has general rules for deriving passives, questions, etc., by stipulating that the evaluation metric makes such structures more "costly" unless they are derived using the general rules.

There is another important point related to the passage from Chomsky cited above. While making much of the purported absence of S-structure-only idioms, he says nothing about how D-structure-only idioms are to be handled. These are expressions like *kick the bucket* or *saw logs* which lose their idiomatic interpretations when they are deformed, as in the passive. Such "transformational deficiencies" have been a major topic of investigation by generativists studying idioms (e.g., Katz and Postal (1964), Chafe (1968), Fraser (1970), Katz (1973), Newmeyer (1974)). For the most part, it has been assumed that the transformational behavior of idioms simply had to be stipulated, either by means of exception features or through encoding in the syntactic structures. (The notable exceptions to this are Chafe and Newmeyer, who both claim that the syntactic behavior of idioms can be predicted, at least in part, on the basis of their meanings. This is a view we also adopt and expand on below). Considerations of learnability suggest that the syntax of idioms is not so arbitrary as most analyses indicate. It is evident that speakers are never explicitly taught e.g., which idioms are passive and which don't; furthermore, our rather robust intuitions in this domain cannot be the result of which idioms we have or have not heard in the passive, for there is considerable cross-speaker agreement, even on relatively rare idioms which may even be novel to some speakers. This suggests that the syntactic behavior of idioms must address this point, and provide a principled account of the "transformational deficiencies". We will

return to this question below.<sup>6</sup>

1.3.3. Chomsky's third argument is the following: "while some idioms undergo movement, as in 'excellent care was taken of the orphans,...etc, we do not find the same idiomatic interpretations in such structures as 'excellent care is hard to take of the orphans...'. There is good reason to believe that the latter construction does not involve movement of a Noun Phrase to the subject position; rather, the subject of the main clause is generated in place. Correspondingly, interpretation of an idiom is ruled out in principle if idiom rules apply at the D-structure level [footnote omitted]" (p. 153). In other words, idiom chunks behave differently with respect to movement and deletion rules: this follows from the assumption that idiom chunks can only be inserted as part of the whole idiom, together with the analysis of the rules in question as movement and deletion transformations. Specifically, if the *touch*-construction is analyzed as involving deletion, not movement (cf. Fiengo and Lasnik (1974)), then the inability of idioms to appear in this construction is explained.

Once again, there are counterexamples to Chomsky's claim, as Berman (1974, p. 261) originally noted.

(8) Some strings are harder to pull than others.

That nerve is easy to touch.

This boat is very easy to rock.

This barrel is, unfortunately, very easy to scrape the bottom of.

His clogsers would be easy to find skeletons in.

Still, Chomsky is unquestionably right that there are many idioms that can passivize but cannot appear in the *touch*-construction. He claims that this difference can be captured as a difference between movement and deletion.

However, the effect of the movement/deletion distinction can be captured (and, indeed, must be if the standard raising/equi differences are to be accounted for) in non-transformational analyses. This is normally done by distinguishing between NP positions which are arguments of the predicates in their clauses (e.g., subject of *try*) and those which are not (e.g., subject of *read*). So, assuming Chomsky is right about the *touch*-construction, adjectives like *hard* could be analyzed as binary predicates, with their (surface) subjects serving as one argument. Of course, such an account requires that idiom chunks like those in (8) can be arguments to predicates, and they must therefore be assigned some independent meaning. This brings us to the central point of this paper, and our main criticism of almost all generative work on idioms.

## 2. The Compositionality of Idioms

It has been taken as axiomatic or definitional that idioms are non-compositional, i.e., that the meaning of an idiom is not a function of the meanings of its parts. (9) quotes a number of well-known linguists to this effect.

(9) a. "I shall regard an idiom as a constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formalities of which it is composed." (Fraser (1970: 22))

b. "Idioms...do not get their meanings from the meanings of their syntactic parts." (Katz (1973: 358))

c. "the meaning of the whole is not a function of the meaning of the parts." (Heringer (1976: 209))

d. "These are idiomatic in the sense that their meaning is non-compositional." (Chomsky (1980: 149))

As indicated above, we take issue with this fundamental and widespread assumption. There are a number of reasons to believe that parts of an idiom should be assigned meanings, contributing to the meaning of the whole idiom.

First of all, parts of idioms can be modified, either by means of adjectives, as in (10), or by means of relative clauses, as in (11).

(10) leave no legal stone unturned  
beat our nuclear swords into plowshares  
make the musical scene

(11) Pat got the job by pulling strings that weren't available to anyone else.  
Your remark touched a nerve that I didn't even know existed.

It is important to note that these are examples of the meaning of the idiom. Thus, for *modification*, that is, modification of only part of the meaning of the idiom. Thus, for example, *leave no legal stone unturned* does not mean *legally leave no stone unturned*. It means (roughly) that all legal methods are used, not that it is legal to use all methods. In order to modify part of the meaning of an idiom by modifying a part of the idiom, it is necessary that the part of the idiom have a meaning which is part of the meaning of the idiom.

Similarly, parts of idioms can be quantified, as in (12).

(12) pull a string or two

touch a couple of nerves  
That's the third gift horse she's looked in the mouth this year.  
Again, the quantification may affect only part of the idiom's meaning: *touch a couple of nerves* is not the same as *touch a nerve a couple of times*. The fact that it is possible to quantify over idiomatic *nerves* and *strings* like this indicates that some part of the meanings of these idioms is identified with these expressions.

Parts of idioms may also be emphasized through topicalization, as in (13).

(13) Those strings he wouldn't pull for you.  
His clogsers you could find skeletons in.

Those windmills not even he would tilt at  
It would not make sense to bring a part of an idiom into focus in this way unless these parts had identifiable meanings in their idiomatic uses.

Finally, parts of idioms can be omitted in elliptical constructions (what is usually referred to as "VP deletion"), as in (14).

(14) My goose is cooked, but yours isn't.

We thought the bottom would fall out of the housing market, but it didn't.  
We had expected that excellent care would be taken of the orphans, and it was.  
It has been convincingly argued by Sag (1976, 1981) and Williams (1977) that the antecedents of the missing elements in such constructions must be semantic units. Since the antecedents in these examples are parts of idioms (e.g., *cooked* in the first example), it follows that these idiom parts must have meanings of their own.<sup>7</sup>

This, then, is our fundamental break with the previous generative literature on idioms: we claim that the pieces of an idiom typically have identifiable meanings which combine to produce the meaning of the whole. Of course, these meanings are not the literal meanings in the parts. Rather, idiomatic meanings are generally derived from literal meanings conventionally, but not entirely arbitrarily, ways. The mechanisms governing this meaning transfer are complex and poorly understood, and it is not our purpose here to attempt to explicate them (see Nunberg (1977) for a discussion of some of the issues involved). Our explicit aim here is to show that the syntactic properties of idioms which have been the focus of the generative literature are largely predictable from the semantic properties of the idioms in question.

## 3. Some Examples

We contend that the syntactic versatility of an idiom is a function of how the meanings of its parts are related to one another and to their literal meanings. We will argue for this contention by examining more closely a small number of idioms with different syntactic and semantic properties. We believe that our examples are representative of the diverse behavior of idioms, though we make no claim that they represent an exhaustive or even a systematic

taxonomy of idiom types.

3.1 Consider first idioms like those in (4), which do not have normal syntactic structure. Since the rules of semantic composition for any language are presumably formulated so as to combine the meanings of the parts of well-formed syntactic constituents (see, e.g., Dowty, Wall, & Peters (1980) or Gazdar (1981)), they should not be applicable to expressions which do not conform to the normal syntactic rules of the language. Hence, these expressions must receive their interpretations in nonstandard ways, e.g., by stipulation in the lexicon.<sup>8</sup> If this is the case, then we would expect idioms like those in (4) to exhibit little or no syntactic variation, for when their form is changed, the grammar provides no way to interpret them. This expectation is borne out:<sup>9</sup>

- (15) a. \*It is done by easy.  
b. \*Handsome seems to be as handsome does.

3.2 Our next example is one of the most extensively discussed idioms in the language: *kick the bucket*. Syntactically, it is invariable, except that *kick* gets conjugated, and the word *proverbial* may be inserted. Semantically, it is rather opaque, although, as Nunberg (1977) points out, it does inherit from *kick* a non-durative sense. (That is, it cannot be used in place of *dying* in sentences such as *Pat is slowly dying*.)

We propose to analyze this idiom as having the syntactic structure of a normal verb phrase. In this instance, however, the idiomatic meaning is not composed from idiomatic interpretations of the parts. Rather, the idiomatic meaning is assigned to the whole phrase, without being distributed to its constituents.<sup>10</sup> The absence of an idiomatic interpretation for *The bucket was kicked by Pat* is attributable to the fact that the VP *kick the bucket* does not appear in this sentence.<sup>11</sup> Other syntactic deformations that break up the verb phrase are also ruled out. Agreement, however, will naturally occur, since *kick the bucket* is syntactically a normal VP (see Gazdar, Pullum, & Sag (1981) for a formal account of English agreement). Similarly, nothing in the syntax precludes modifiers from appearing, but, since the proper parts of the idiom have no idiomatic meanings of their own, any modification will have to be "external" (Ernst (1980))--i.e., modifying the interpretation of the idiom as a whole (or, in the case of *proverbial*, signaling that a non-literal interpretation is intended).

3.3 A very similar example is *saw logs*, meaning "sleep". Here, too, we have syntactic inflexibility, except for conjugation and external modification (e.g., *Pat sure is sawing a lot of logs* meaning roughly "Pat sure is sleeping a lot"). Formally, we treat this idiom just like the previous one: assign normal syntactic structure with idiomatic meaning assigned to the whole VP, but not to its parts.

- (16) a. Logs were sawed by all the campers.  
b. How many logs did Pat saw?

3.4 Consider next another widely discussed idiom: *take advantage of*. We claim that the meaning of this idiom is a function of the (idiomatic) meanings of its parts. More specifically, *take* is assigned a meaning roughly paraphrased as "derive", *advantage* means something like "benefit", and *of* marks the source. These paraphrases are not exact; indeed, we maintain that no exact paraphrases of these expressions exist. Further, the idiomatic interpretations of these words are such that they cannot sensibly be composed with anything

but each other. Formally, this idea can be expressed by treating the idiomatic intension of *take* as a partial function which is only defined on the idiomatic intension of *advantage*.

This analysis will allow the parts of the idiom to be separated syntactically, so long as their interpretation are composed in the permitted manner. Thus, the fact that this idiom can appear in passive and "raised" forms is accounted for.

(17) Advantage seems to have been taken of Pat.  
Further, it allows for the possibility of internal modification (but only by modifiers with the idiomatic sense of *advantage* in their domains). This possibility is realized in the phrase *take unfair advantage of*.

Finally, this analysis permits ellipsis of part of the idiom in some cases but not in others. For example, (18a) sounds odd because the idiomatic sense of *advantage* cannot be composed with the sense of *shocked at*, but (18b) has no such mismatch, and is hence good.<sup>12</sup>

- (18) a. \*Pat took advantage we were shocked at of some of the tourists.  
b. Students take greater advantage of the recreational facilities than they take of the academic facilities.

3.5 *Spill the beans* is very much like *take advantage of* in almost every relevant way. The most notable difference is that it has a literal interpretation which is related in a fairly transparent way to its idiomatic interpretation.<sup>13</sup> The analogy between literally spilling beans and divulging information that was to have been kept secret (to paraphrase, roughly, the idiomatic interpretation) is quite intuitive. Hence, the assignment of parts of the idiomatic sense to parts of the idiom may seem more natural in this case. Thus *spill the beans* like a great many other idioms, is a metaphor which has become conventionalized.

3.6 A central feature of our analysis of the last two examples is the claim that the dependency between the verbs and their objects is semantic, that is, that the inability of idiomatic *the beans* to appear with any verb other than *spill* is due to the incompatibility of its meaning with any other verb. Thus, such idioms are regarded as the limiting case of selectional restrictions, viz., the case where the semantic domain of a verb is a singleton set. It is natural to ask whether there are any idiomatic verbs with non-singleton domains. Our theory leads one to expect to find them, whereas a theory that claimed that the dependency was purely between the forms supports no such expectation. In fact, there are several examples.

- (19) a. hit the hay/sack  
b. lose one's mind/marbles  
c. take a leak/piss/shit/crap  
d. get off one's ass/rear (end)/behind/bush.....  
There are also cases where the same NP (with the same interpretation) may be the object of more than one idiomatic verb, as we would expect.

- (20) a. play one's cards close to one's chest/lay one's cards on the table  
b. keep/lose one's cool.

Such examples lend credence to our semantic account of idiom dependencies.

3.7 Finally, we want to consider syntactically highly versatile idioms like those in (8). We will take *pull strings* as a typical example. These cannot be analyzed in exactly the same manner as those in the previous two sections because of examples like (21).<sup>14</sup>

- (21) a. Pat pulled strings that Chris had no access to.  
b. The strings that Pat pulled helped Chris get the job.  
If we were to say that the idiomatic sense of *strings* was in the domain only of the idiomatic *pull* (following our analysis of *spill the beans*, etc.) then sentences like (21) could have no idiomatic readings. We must allow the idiomatic sense of *strings* to be in the domain of other functions, including the intensions of *have access to* and *help Chris get the job*. But if we do this, then we will permit an idiomatic interpretation of *strings* in examples like (22).

- (22) a. Chris had no access to strings.  
b. Strings helped Chris get the job.

This appears, at first glance, to be a *reductio* of our treatment of idioms: either we exclude (21) on their idiomatic readings, or we assign idiomatic interpretations to (22).

However, rather than abandon our approach altogether, we propose to bite the bullet by letting the grammar assign idiomatic readings to (22). Support for this decision is provided by the fact that these sentences may be used in contexts where the full idiom *pull strings* has already appeared.

(23) Pat and Chris graduated from law school together with roughly equal records. Pat's uncle is a state senator, and he pulled strings to get Pat a clerkship with a state supreme court justice. Chris, in contrast, didn't have access to any strings, and ended up hanging out a shingle.

Hence, it seems that the oddness of (22) is not syntactic or semantic; rather, it is a consequence of conditions of use. It is evident that in actual language use, the distinct readings of an ambiguous expression are not equally salient. The order and degree of preference among readings are determined by a number of complex and poorly understood factors, probably including at least the hearer's beliefs about the speaker and about the world, the topic of conversation, the speech registers in use, and relative frequency of usage of the readings. In particular, in the case of idiomatic expressions, it has been established (Swainy and Cutler (1979)) that hearers exhibit a strong preference for idiomatic over literal interpretations. It seems plausible to conjecture further that they exhibit a very strong preference for a literal interpretation when the idiom is incomplete. This would be the case, for example, if idioms are stored in memory as chunks, with the meanings of their parts accessible only through decomposition of the meanings of the wholes. Then all the parts of an idiom would have to be explicitly present for an idiomatic interpretation to be assigned, but once such an assignment had been made, the parts could be used in isolation, wherever semantically appropriate.<sup>15</sup>

In short, we claim that the central difference between idioms like *pull strings* and those like *spill the beans* is that the object of the former in its idiomatic sense may be an argument to many predicates other than the verb in the idiom. However, conditions of use, which block access to the idiomatic senses of idiom chunks except in contexts where the entire idiom is present, serve to partially mask the semantic versatility of these chunks.

It is worth mentioning that no previous work we are aware of proposes any sort of a principled account of examples like (21) and (22). Thus, while the proposal in this section involves some hand-waving references to ill-understood conditions of use, it is nevertheless an advance over the previous literature.

#### 4. Conclusions

Examples like those above show that many idioms have both syntactic and semantic internal structure. Further, it is clear that idioms cannot be analyzed in a uniform fashion: there is a range of idiom types, differing along various syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. To a large extent, the syntactic behavior of idioms is determined by the semantic relationships among their parts. The failure to recognize this fact has been the central weakness of most generative discussions of idioms.

Of course, what we have sketched here is only a prolegomena to a substantive theory of idioms. In order genuinely to explain the behavior of an idiom, it would be necessary to explicate the meaning transfer mechanism deriving the idiomatic interpretation from the literal one. Hence, a full account of idioms must await a theory of meaning transfers. While no such theory is in the offing, we believe that many of the puzzles about idioms which have exercised generativists are solvable, once fundamental misconceptions are abandoned.

#### FOOTNOTES

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1. Chomsky cautions the reader that there is some question as to whether the issue of the existence of transformations has any empirical content: "should the base generate S-structures directly or should it generate D-structures which are mapped by the rule 'Move  $\alpha'$  into S-structures'? It is not entirely obvious that this is a real empirical question... That is, it might be that these two theories are simply two ways of understanding a single and somewhat more abstract theory, yet to be properly formulated, which expresses the fundamental properties shared by these two variants" (p. 149). We will not address this issue here--but see Bresnan (1981a) and Gazdar (1981) for arguments that the question is not vacuous.

2. Chafe (1968) took the existence of such "idioms which are not syntactically well-formed" (p. 114) as an "anomaly in the Chomskyan paradigm." Just what Chafe had in mind is not clear to us. It is certainly true that such idioms receive no systematic treatment in transformational terms, but it is equally true that no one has been able to offer a systematic treatment of them in any terms. Since there is only a relatively small number of such idioms, and since they have little or no syntactic flexibility (see section 3.1 below), any theory of grammar can deal with them simply by listing them. Unfortunately, no available theory can do better than this.

3. It is not clear whether fixed expressions like *Children should be seen and not heard*, *A woman's work is never done*, *A good time was had by all*, or *water solid than done* should be included in this list, for while they are conventionally used only in their passive forms, their interpretations appear to be completely identical.

4. While all of the constructions illustrated in (7) have been claimed to involve transformations in their derivations, we are not attributing this claim to Chomsky.

5. There are many other idioms that involve comparative constructions, e.g., *old as the hills*, *colder than a witch's soul*, *Ker their hell/fall get out*, etc. However, these generally can be analyzed as uses of *than* as a preposition (see Hankamer (1973)), in which case comparative deletion need not be involved in their derivations.

6. Although our proposals are not formulated within the theory that Chafe (1968) criticizes (viz., the standard theory of transformational grammar), they are not essentially incompatible. Hence, we see no basis for Chafe's claim that "transformational deficiencies" constitute another "anomaly in the Chomskyan paradigm."

7. Bresnan (1981b) argues that genuine idiom chunks may not serve as antecedents for anaphors (specifically, pronouns). The examples in (14) provide what we think are clear counterexamples to her claim. She supports her contention with the following examples (her judgments):

(i) \*Although the F.B.I. kept tabs on Jane Fonda, the CIA kept them on Vanessa Redgrave.  
(ii) \*Tabs were kept on Jane Fonda by the F.B.I., but they weren't kept on Vanessa Redgrave.

While we agree with Bresnan that there are some idiom chunks which cannot be antecedents for anaphors (e.g., *the bucket* in *kick the bucket*), we disagree with her claim that *tabs* in *keep tabs on* is one of them. In fact, we find the examples in (i) and (ii) quite acceptable, as do others we have questioned. (ii) sounds still better. (iii) We thought tabs were being kept on us, but they weren't.  
While we do not explicitly address the question of anaphoric reference to idiom chunks in what follows, we believe that our treatment of idioms could provide the basis for a principled explanation of the behavior of idiom chunks with respect to anaphora.

8. This is clearly not the whole story for idioms like *No com do* or *Long time no see*, which, though syntactically nonstandard, appear to be semantically composed. However, there is nothing to prevent a syntactically nonstandard idiom from having a special semantic composition rule associated with it.

9. One counterexample to this claim is *trip the light fantastic*, which permits conjugations on *trip*. Hence, it must be analyzed as having some internal structure, with *trip* labeled as a verb.

10. An alternative would be to assign *kick* an idiomatic sense meaning (non-durative) "thrust", and the *bucket* no sense at all. This idea gains plausibility from the colloquial use of *kick* and *kick off* meaning "the suddenness".

However, it raises the problem of explaining why, e.g. *Fai rested the bucket* cannot be used to mean "Fai rested".

11. We assume (with most current theories) surface structure semantic interpretation.

12. Our proposals also lead to the prediction that the *advantage of take advantage of*, but not the *logs of saw logs*, can be the antecedent of an anaphoric pronoun under certain circumstances. We believe that this is a correct prediction, but, the facts are open to debate:

(i) *Advantage was taken of her, but it wasn't taken of him.*

(ii) *The idiot saw logs, but he sawed them.*

(iii) *Fido didn't saw logs, but he sawed them.*

(iv) *Fido didn't saw logs, but he sawed them.*

13. Another difference worth mentioning is that the idiomatic NP's differ with respect to definiteness. This fact (which presumably reflects a semantic difference) accounts for the marginality of *spill the beans* in comparative constructions analogous to (18b):

(i) *They spilled more of the beans to the Times than they spilled to the Post.*

Note, however, that parts of *spill the beans* can be elliptical.

(ii) *I was worried that the beans might be spilled, but they weren't.*

(iii) *I was worried that the beans might be spilled, but they weren't.*

(iv) *I was worried that the beans might be spilled, but they weren't.*

14. Examples like these have been attributed to Jim McCawley.

15. For idioms like *take advantage of* and *spill the beans*, the parts are semantically appropriate only in combination with the other parts (see sections 3.4 & 3.5). Hence, examples like (i) and (ii), analogous to (21), have no idiomatic readings.

(i) *Fai will never forgive the advantage you took of me.*

(ii) *Fai spilled the beans that Chris had entrusted him with.*

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## S e m a n t i c s

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Meaning is a fact of language because of a constant and firmly established association between a given segment of conceptual material and a given piece of linguistic expression. It is always an abstraction from the concrete facts of extralinguistic experience. Meaning must be carefully distinguished from the purport (sozhdaznaniye) of utterances, which can be conceived and passed on only in interpretable contexts - larger chunks of discourse and (or) in special contexts of situation. Concrete utterances with their situation-bound purports are facts of speech.

Meaning as the content of words (and word-like nominative phrases or "morphemes") cannot be equated with concepts. Although, like the latter, it is a reverberation in the human consciousness of phenomena, relationships, qualities and processes of reality, it becomes a fact of language only when a constant and indissoluble connection is established between the reverberation and a certain sound-complex or (phonetic-orthographic) "caul" or "envelope". The latter is indispensable not only because it is the physical expression of the content and the vehicle for communicating it to other people, but also because without it the particular meaning could not come into being, exist and develop. This is the only way for morphemes (primarily, of course, the "monolexic" ones) to be "definitely moulded" and "to take as much or as little of the conceptual material of the whole thought as the genius of the language cares to allow". I am pleased to find the same general idea expressed in a recent publication: "... a semantic prototype associates a word or phrase with a prelinguistic, cognitive schema or image; and ... speakers are equipped with an ability to judge the degree to which an object (or, if you prefer, the internal representation thereof) matches the prototype schema or image". In the Soviet semantic tradition the "semantic prototype" under the name of "basic nominative meaning" (osnovnoye nomenativnoye znachenije) has long been the generally accepted foundation of lexical-phraseological research and (most important) widely ranging lexicographic analyses and descriptions.

As far as ontology is concerned we could go no further in our discussion of the relationship between expression and content in the "moulding" of linguistic meaning. Heuristically, however, it is necessary to dwell on the different kinds, or types, of the connection. Briefly the main varieties can be presented as follows: