

Late Transfer of Idioms

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Slides available at: linguist.is/papers
(direct url: linguist.is/pubs/late-transfer-of-idioms/)
(see also, our paper in *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax*)

Introduction

Point of departure:

- Recent developments have made it challenging to reconcile phase theory (Chomsky 2000; 2001) and idioms.
- Marantz (2013) has noted that under certain current theoretical assumptions the domain of idiomatic interpretation is larger than the phase.

This study

We develop a theory of Late Transfer of Idioms (LTol) such that if a phase is an exact subpart of an idiom, Transfer to LF can be delayed to the next higher phase.

- **Goal:** Relax interpretive constraints imposed by phase theory enough to allow idioms to exist while maintaining explanations for certain generalizations attributed to phase theory.

Late Transfer of Idioms (LTol)

The LTol proposal

If a phase is an exact subpart of an idiom, Transfer to LF can be delayed to the next higher phase.

Roadmap:

- Data from Icelandic and Lithuanian (+Polish).
- Background/context on idioms.
- Phase proliferation
- Evidence for LTol
- Exact subparts?
- Implications

Core data

Core data

Generalization

Idioms that are not compatible with canonical passives are compatible with passive types where A-movement is blocked by a covert subject.

Icelandic active: 'take part' = 'participate'

Canonical passive (CanP; ✓ A-movement; 'take part' ≠ 'participate'):

- (1) #Þáttur var tekinn í hlaupinu.
 part.NOM was taken in run.the
 Intended: 'Somebody participated in the run.'

New Imp. Passive (NIP; * A-movement; 'take part' = 'participate'):

- (2) Það var tekið þátt í hlaupinu.
 there was taken part.ACC in run.the
 'Somebody participated in the run.'

Core data

Generalization

Idioms that are not compatible with canonical passives are compatible with passive types where A-movement is blocked by a covert subject.

Icelandic active: 'break the brain' = 'think hard'

CanP: ✓ A-movement; 'break the brain' ≠ 'think hard':

- (3) #Heilinn var brotinn um gátuna.
 brain.the.NOM was broken about puzzle.the
 Intended: 'Somebody thought hard about the puzzle.'

NIP: * A-movement; 'break the brain' = 'think hard':

- (4) Það var brotið heilann um gátuna.
 there was broken brain.the.ACC about puzzle.the
 'Somebody thought hard about the puzzle.'

Core data

Generalization

Idioms that are not compatible with canonical passives are compatible with passive types where A-movement is blocked by a covert subject.

Icelandic active: 'take up the glove' = 'defend'

CanP: ✓ A-movement; 'take up the glove' ≠ 'defend':

- (5) #Hanskinn var tekinn upp fyrir Jón.
 glove.the.NOM was taken up for Jón
 Intended: 'Somebody defended Jón.'

NIP: * A-movement; 'take up the glove' = 'participate':

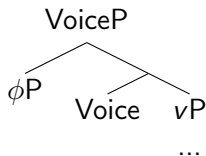
- (6) Það var tekið upp hanskan fyrir Jón.
 there was taken up glove.the.ACC for Jón
 'Somebody defended Jón.'

Icelandic passive-like constructions

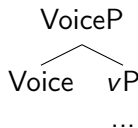
	NIP	CanP	active
Passive morphology	✓	✓	✗
'By'-phrases	✓	✓	✗
Overt external argument	✗	✗	✓
Secondary predication of ext. arg.	✗	✗	✓
Structural case on object	acc	nom	acc
Binding of reflexives	✓	✗	✓
Inalienable body-part interpr.	✓	✗	✓
Preservation of idiomatic readings	✓	✗	✓
Control by external argument	✓	✗	✓
A-movement of an internal arg.	✗	✓	✗
Subject type	ϕ P	-	DP

Icelandic passive-like constructions

(7) a. NIP



b. CanP



For NIP properties, see H.Á. Sigurðsson (1989, 2011), Kjartansson (1991), Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002, 2012, 2013, 2015), Sigurjónsdóttir and Nowenstein (2015), Sigurjónsdóttir (to appear), Barðdal and Molnár (2003), Barðdal (2015), Thráinsson (2007), Benediktsdóttir (2008), Eythórsson (2008), Eythórsson et al. (2016), Jónsson (2009), Árnadóttir et al. (2011), E.F. Sigurðsson (2012), E.F. Sigurðsson and Stefánsdóttir (2014), Schäfer (2012), Ingason et al. (2012, 2013), Ingason et al. (2016), Legate (2014)

Icelandic passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in NIP but not in CanP

1. Structural accusative case on the object in the NIP
nominative in the CanP

NIP with accusative theme – and NO A-movement:

- (8) Var skilið hana eftir heima?
was left **her.ACC** behind home
'Was she left behind at home?'

(Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:117)

CanP with nominative theme – and A-movement:

- (9) Var hún skilin eftir heima?
was **she.NOM** left.NOM.SG.F behind home
'Was she left behind at home?'

Icelandic passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in NIP but not in CanP

2. A-movement blocked in NIP

Neither A-movement nor agreement blocked in CanP

No A-movement in NIP:

(10) *Var hana skilið eftir heima?

was **her.ACC** left behind home

Intended: 'Was she left behind at home?'

(Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:117)

CanP with long-distance agreement (no phiP gets in the way):

(11) Það voru tald-ir hafa verið

there were believed-NOM.M.PL have been

veidd-ir fjór-ir lax-ar.

caught-NOM.M.PL **four salmon-NOM.M.PL**

'People believed there to have been four salmon caught.'

(H.Á. Sigurðsson 2006:293)

Icelandic passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in NIP but not in CanP

3. Binding of reflexives in the NIP

NIP with binding by implicit argument:

- (12) [...] það er drepíð sjálfan sig.
 there is killed self.ACC REFL.ACC

'There is taking of one's life.' (Árnadóttir et al. 2011:48)

NIP with binding by implicit argument:

- (13) Þar er gagnrýnt sjálfan sig.
 there is criticized self.ACC REFL.ACC
 'There is criticizing of oneself there.'

Icelandic passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in NIP but not in CanP

4. Inalienable possession interpretation (cf. MacDonald to appear for Spanish)
 - Inalienable body-part interpretation in the NIP
 - but not in the CanP

NIP with inalienable possession:

- (14) Það var rétt upp höndina.
 there was raised up **the.hand.ACC**
 'Somebody_i raised their_i hand.'

CanP NOT with inalienable possession:

- (15) Höndin var rétt upp.
the.hand.NOM was raised up
 'The hand was raised up.'
 NOT: 'Somebody raised their hand.'

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

Lithuanian active: 'strike the wing' = 'be attracted'

Non-agr. pass.: ✓ A-movement; 'strike the wing' ≠ 'be attracted':

- (16) #Sparnas buvo Jono rėžia-m-a
 wing.NOM.SG.M be.PST.3 Jonas.GEN strike-PPRP-[-AGR]
 aplink Moniką.
 around Monika
 Lit.: 'The wing was struck around Monika by Jonas.'
 Intended: 'Jonas was attracted to Monika.'

Impersonal: * A-movement; 'strike the wing' = 'be attracted':

- (17) Atėjus pavasariui, dažnai rėžia-m-a sparną
 come spring, often strike-PPRP-[-AGR] wing.ACC
 aplink Moniką.
 around Monika
 'When spring comes, one often is attracted to Monika.'

(Milena Šereikaitė, p.c.)

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

Lithuanian active: 'lower the hands' = 'give up'

Agreeing passive: ✓ A-movement; 'lower the hands' ≠ 'give up':

- (18) #Rankos buvo nuleistos.
 hands.NOM were lowered
 Intended: 'Somebody gave up.'

Impersonal: * A-movement; 'lower the hands' = 'give up':

- (19) Prislėgus skoloms, dažnai nuleidžia-m-a rankas
 press.down debts, often lower-PPRP-[-AGR] hands.ACC
 'When pressed by debts, one often gives up.'
 (Milena Šereikaitė, p.c.)

- Polish impersonal *-no/-to* seems to work the same as the impersonal *-ma/-ta* (Anna Kibort, p.c.)

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in the *-ma/-ta* impersonal
but not in the agreeing / non-agreeing passive

1. Structural accusative case on the object in the impersonal,
nominative in the agreeing / non-agreeing passive

Impersonal with accusative theme:

- (20) (Yra) rašo-m-a laišką.
be.PRS.3 write.PPRP-[-AGR] letter.ACC
'One is writing a letter.'

Non-agreeing passive with nominative theme:

- (21) Laiškas (yra) rašo-m-a.
letter.NOM.SG.M be.PRS.3 write.PPRP-[-AGR]
'The letter is being written.' (Šereikaitė 2017:231)

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

2. A-movement blocked in the impersonal,
allowed in agreeing / non-agreeing passive (shown via binding)

No A-movement in the impersonal:

- (22) Kasmēt darbininkus_i (yra) rūšiuoja-m-a
 every.year **employees.ACC** be.PRS.3 divide.PPRP-[-AGR]
 pagal *savō_i/jū_i įsitikinimus.
 according self.GEN/their.GEN beliefs
 'Every year one divides employees_i; according to their_i beliefs.'

A-movement in the non-agreeing passive:

- (23) Tarnautojai_i (yra) rūšiuoja-m-a
employees.M.PL.NOM be.PRS.3 divide.PPRP-[-AGR]
 Domanto pagal savō_i/jū_i įsitikinimus.
 D.GEN according self.GEN/their.GEN beliefs
 'The employees are divided by Domantas according to their
 beliefs.'
 (Šereikaitė 2017:239)

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

A projected implicit argument in the *-ma/-ta* impersonal
but not in the agreeing / non-agreeing passive

3. Binding of reflexives by an implicit argument in the impersonal

Impersonal with binding by implicit argument:

- (24) Kasmēt PRO_i (yra) rūšiuoja-m-a
 every.year be.PRS.3 divide.PPRP-[-AGR]
 darbininkus pagal savo_i/*jo_i ūsitikinimus.
 employees.ACC according self.GEN/his.GEN beliefs
 'Every year one_i divides employees according to one's_i own
 beliefs.' (Šereikaitė 2017:234)

Lithuanian passive-like constructions

4. Inalienable possession interpretation (cf. MacDonald to appear for Spanish)

Impersonal with inalienable possession:

- (25) Šokio metu (yra) pakelia-m-a rankas
 dance time be.PRS.3 raise.PPRP-[-AGR] **hands.ACC**
 aukštyn.
 upwards
 'During dance, one_i raises one's_i hands upwards.'

Non-agreeing passive NOT with inalienable possession:

- (26) Šokio metu rankos (yra) pakelia-m-a
 dance time **hands.NOM.PL.F** be.PRS.3 raise.PPRP-[-AGR]
 aukštyn.
 upwards
 'During dance hands are being lifted upwards.' (agent lifts someone else's hands) (Šereikaitė 2016)

Section summary

- The NIP in Icelandic, and impersonals in Lithuanian and Polish, which all have a projected implicit argument, preserve idiomatic interpretation
 - A-movement is blocked in these constructions
- Canonical passives often do not preserve the special meaning of idioms
 - A-movement allowed

Verbal idioms

Two types of verbal idioms

What is an idiom?

- Depends on your definition
- Phenomena where you need to consider a larger context than a single syntactic terminal node to determine the interpretation.
- Some idiom studies focus on so-called verbal idioms, often looking primarily at a verb and its complement.
- Harwood et al. (2016) on the proper verbal idiom:

- (27)
- a. It must contain a lexical verb.
 - b. It must have a non-literal interpretation.
 - c. It must be able to interact with productive syntax.
 - d. It must be comprised of lexical items that are found outside of the context of the idiom.
 - e. It must be formed in a manner that obeys the regular syntactic rules of the language.

Not all verbal idioms are equal with respect to displacement

Idiomatic Phrase (IdP):

- (28) a. Somebody **kicked** the bucket.
 b. #The bucket was **kicked**.

Idiomatically Combining Expression (ICE):

- (29) a. Somebody **spilled** the beans.
 b. The beans were **spilled**.

- Nunberg et al. (1994) distinguish Idiomatic Phrases (IdP) which are interpreted as one piece and Idiomatically Combining Expressions (ICE) whose verb and DP subparts appear to map separately to 'reveal' and 'secret', respectively.
- Chomsky (1981:194) suggests that IdP are flagged such that verb-object must be LF-adjacent.
- We focus the inseparable ones (IdP) in the context of phases.

Idioms and phase theory

Phase theory and the PF/LF interfaces:

- Phase theory (Chomsky 2000; 2001) can be used to account for locality effects in syntax by deactivating parts of the structure.
- Phase theory is most interesting if deactivating a certain structure has consequences at the interfaces of syntax with phonology and interpretation.
- Why?
 - There were theories of locality in syntax before phases, so it would be neat if this one can do more.
 - If the same syntactic node has consequences for movement, allomorphy and polysemy resolution (we will return to that) – the theory should account for that.

Problem!

If idiomatic phrases are interpreted as one chunk, the size of that chunk can be larger than a phase according to some current analyses.

Section summary

- Some verbal idioms do not preserve their special meaning in a canonical passive.
- In some sense, those are interpreted as one chunk.
- This raises concerns about the chunk being larger than a phase if phases determine the chunks that are sent to LF.

Phase proliferation and Late Transfer of Idioms

How does phase theory fit with idioms?

Transfer and idiom locality

Let us entertain the idea that material needs to be phase-theoretically active in order to be interpreted as one chunk.

- Let us say that v and C define the phase edges.
- The hypothesis that fixed agents do not form idioms with verbs with variable objects (Marantz 1984; Svenonius 2005) seems like good news.
- v defines the boundary for idiomatic interpretation.

(30) [v kick [DP the bucket]]

Important point

- It is currently common to assume more phases than C and v .

More phases! Part I

Consider Appl:

- Ditransitive idioms.

(31) Somebody **gave the devil his due**. (Bruening 2010:536)

- If Appl is a phase (Sigurðsson 2012), ditransitive idioms are a problem under any version of phase locality.

(32) [_v [ApplP the devil [Appl his due]]]

More phases! Part II

Consider D:

- Idioms with noun phrases.

(33) Somebody **kicked the bucket**.

- If D is a phase (Svenonius 2004; the edge of the noun phrase), the basic idiom case is an issue.

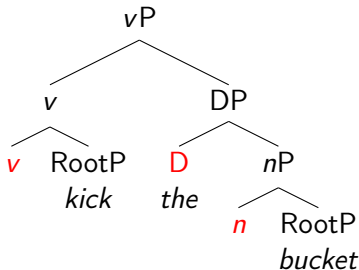
(34) [**v** kicked [**D** bucket]]

- We do not have to give up right away: We might appeal to something like the second version of Phase Impenetrability (PIC2) and make the next higher phase trigger Transfer.
- Is that weak enough?

More phases! Part III

Consider category-defining heads (v , n , a):

- Idioms with verbs, nouns and/or adjectives.
- If category-defining heads define phase edges (Marantz 2001), lexical categories are an issue.



- Does anyone want to make the two roots somehow be phase-active at the same time?
- What if there is an Appl phase there, too?

Do we really want v , n , a to be phases?

Possible responses:

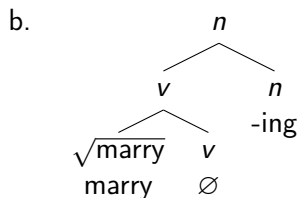
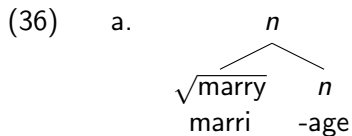
- Maybe only some phases count for idiom locality.
 - Less elegant; no grand unified point for PF/LF Transfer.
- Maybe v , n , a are in fact not phases.
 - Loss of neat explanations for restrictions on contextual allomorphy and polysemy resolution.

What do we do?

- We want to pursue the possibility of late transfer to LF, but only in certain restricted cases: When you have built an exact subpart of an idiom, you can delay Transfer to LF.
- Let us briefly outline why we do not want to give the v , n , a phases up too easily.

Phase locality and allomorphy

(35)	(derived) nominal	gerund
	marri-age	marry-ing
	destruct-ion	destroy-ing
	refus-al	refus-ing
	confus-ion	confus-ing



(cf., Chomsky 1970, Marantz 1997, Embick 2010)

Phases and polysemy resolution

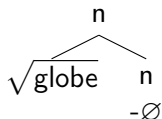
Phase locality and meaning (Marantz 2013, see also Arad 2003)

A meaning of a root that has been excluded at an inner phase head is unavailable at an outer phase head

- (37) a. $\sqrt{\text{globe}}$ 'abstract sphere, something spherelike'
 b. $\sqrt{\text{globe}}$ 'the world'

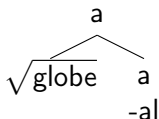
Noun:

- ✓ 'spherelike'
- ✓ 'world'



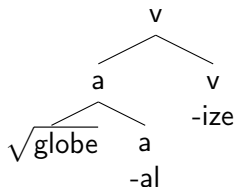
Adjective:

- * 'spherelike'
- ✓ 'world'



Adj-derived:

- * 'spherelike'
- ✓ 'world'



Section summary

- There are good reasons to believe that there are more phase edges than in the original version of phase theory.
- We want to such theories to be compatible with the way in which idioms work.
- This leads us to Late Transfer of Idioms (LTol).

Evidence for LTol

The proposal

Late Transfer of Idioms

If a phase is an exact subpart of an idiom, Transfer to LF can be delayed to the next higher phase.

Evidence for LTol I: (Availability of) Movement

Active and New Passive: ('take part' = 'participate')

Canonical passive: A-movement: No idiom reading!

- (38) #Þáttur var tekinn í hlaupinu.
 part.NOM was taken in run.the
 Intended: 'Somebody participated in the run.'

Canonical Passive: A-movement possible: No idiom reading!

- (39) #Það var tekinn þáttur í hlaupinu.
 there was taken part.NOM in run.the
 Intended: 'Somebody participated in the run.'

Formal reason for why movement potential is enough?

- Covert movement changes idiom material?
- Case features or phonology part of idiom?

Some speakers: Overt movement is required to lose the idiom.

Evidence for LTol I: (Availability of) Movement

Other passive types without movement preserve the idiomatic reading.

PP idiom passives preserve the idiom reading:

- (40) Það var tekið [í taumana].
 there was **taken** [in reins.the]
 'Somebody put an end to something.'

LTol: No A-movement allowed out of the PP.

NIP-like ability passives preserve the idiom reading:

- (41) Það er ekki takandi þátt/*þáttur í því.
 there is not **takeable** part.ACC/*NOM in it
 'It is not possible to participate in it.'

LTol: Covert nominative subject blocks A-movement.

Evidence for LTol II: Fixed determiner slot

- (42) a. ... kicked the bucket.
 b. #The bucket was kicked.
- (43) a. ... took advantage of John.
 b. ✓ John was taken advantage of.

Correlation: Idioms that do not passivize have fixed determiner slots as opposed to idioms that passivize (Lebeaux 1988).

- (44) a. kick **the** bucket
 b. #kick **all the** bucket
- (45) a. take advantage of
 b. take **some** advantage of

LTol: The DP must be an exact idiom subpart to delay Transfer.

An interesting apparent counterexample

Passivization-resistant idiom allows 'some' (H. Thráinsson p.c.):

- (46) Jóhannes tók einhvern þátt í skákmótinu.
 Johannes took some part in chess.competition.the
 'Johannes played some rounds at the chess competition.'

This should not be possible, but ...

- The interpretation we get in those cases seems to involve quantification over events rather than individuals, i.e. 'for some of the rounds played, Jóhannes participated'.
- We are not sure how to analyze this – but it might be relevant that the quantification applies at a high level in the structure.

Evidence for LTol III: No agent idioms

It is commonly observed that fixed agents do not form idioms with verbs with variable objects (Marantz 1984; Svenonius 2005; Harley and Stone 2014).

✓ Variable subject (*X/Y/Z kicked the bucket*):

- (47)
- a. X **verbed** K.
 - b. Y **verbed** K.
 - c. Z **verbed** K.

* Variable object

- (48)
- a. **K verbed** X.
 - b. **K verbed** Y.
 - c. **K verbed** Z.

LTol: Variable objects can never license Late Transfer to LF.

Section summary

Evidence for Late Transfer of Idioms

- **I:** (Availability of) A-movement reflects a difference in the embedded material (e.g., marked for covert movement) that blocks LTol.
- **II:** Variable material at the edge of the noun phrase is incompatible with LTol (Lebeaux's generalization).
- **III:** Verbal idioms cannot have a variable complement because that would block LTol.

Zeroing in on 'exact subparts'

Exact subparts?

Late Transfer of Idioms

If a phase is an exact subpart of an idiom, Transfer to LF can be delayed to the next higher phase.

So what is an exact subpart?

- Crucially includes all complements.

Further cases to consider:

- **Head movement:** Does not interact with interpretation.
- **Variable adjuncts:** Do not block LTol. Possibly late merged (Lebeaux 1988) or placeholder merged (Ingason & Sigurðsson 2016).
- **Specifiers:** More elusive analysis.

(49) ... pull **someone's** leg.

Implications

Implications

- Late Transfer of Idioms is in line with recent developments of phase theory, such as den Dikken (2006), where it is argued that it is necessary in some cases to extend phases (see also Gallego and Uriagereka 2006; and Bobaljik 2012 on PF issues)
- LTol allows idioms larger than a phase and this is empirically motivated.
- Such large idioms require that each embedded phase is an exact subpart of an idiom.

Late Transfer of Idioms

If a phase is an exact subpart of an idiom, Transfer to LF can be delayed to the next higher phase.

FYI: The call for papers for NELS 48 in Iceland is out!
Submission deadline 15 May. Conference 27-29 October.