

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Make Up Your Mind:

An Analysis of Idiomatic Possessive Verb

Phrase Constructions in English

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Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this assignment is my own original work, unless otherwise referenced, as defined by the NTU policy on plagiarism. I have read the NTU Honour Code and Pledge.

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ABSTRACT

Idiomatic constructions, particularly possessive ones, are inadequately described in English grammar. 307 idioms are structurally clustered and their syntactic and semantic aspects discussed. Minimal recursion semantics of idioms indicates the possessive relationships within the expression. Compositionality is found to affect little of idiomaticity. Conceptual metaphors and image schema are suggested as possible means of understanding when literal expressions become non-literal. Findings point to greater shortcomings in available literature than firstly assumed. A novel means of idiom implementation with a focus on easy access and visual representation is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the variety of relevant research and their prevalence in natural language, non-literal language such as idioms have yet to be studied in sufficient detail. This is understandable in one aspect because the definition of an idiom itself is unclear. Examples may be detected easily by a language's speakers, but what constitutes an idiom or its function has been ambiguous. Idioms also seem to defy Saussure's convention on the arbitrary relationship of meaning and expression (Keysar and Bly, 1995) and become extensions of this arbitrariness mixed with basic mental conceptual metaphors (Gibbs Jr. et al, 1989). An explicit definition of idiom, and even being idiomatic, remains elusive. There exists, to the best knowledge of the author, no sufficiently strong argument on what an idiom is. For example, Nunberg et al (1994) describes six traits to identify idioms by but also places a disclaimer that these traits should not guide idiom definition solely.

Idiomatic possessive constructions are slightly easier to define. They are identifiable by syntactic shape as a V/VP before a PP or NP, within which a noun is possessed by another entity that is in turned marked through a reflexive pronoun determiner. They are described in some detail as essentially verb-based 'prototypical idioms' (O'Grady, 1998; Nenonen, 2007). They are also identifiable by agreement between the subject and pronoun within the phrase. Both are contained in a possessive relationship as exhibited in (1) and (2). A noun 'belongs' to a subject through an idiomatic possession marked by a possessive pronoun acting as determiner to indicate ownership of the nominal entity.

- (1) He racks his brains.
(He thinks very hard)
- (2) * He wept her eyes out.

In (1), the pronoun *his*' co-indexes with *he* to indicate that the idiomatic belt belongs to the subject. Possessive constructions are ones in which the subject or object is co-referent with a verb or noun by means of a possessive marker. In such constructions,

such as (1), the subject is co-indexed by the possessive determiner *he*, which also indicates the subject's ownership or possession of the idiomatic *belt*.

This relationship is also maintained by PER and NUM agreement. In this case, both subject and determiner are in the masculine third person singular. In contrast, (2) is ungrammatical because this agreement is breached. The Object possesses the 'eyes' and thus the Subject/Agent cannot carry out the action of the verb.

(3) You destroyed my life.

(4) They sang his praises.

However, this agreement does not always apply. Instead, the idiom still works if the subject is not co-indexed with the determiner of the possessive noun phrase. As seen in (3), the possessive determiner is in first person singular while the subject pronoun remains in the third person. But the sentence is still grammatical because *destroy* is transitive, thus allowing a separate Object *her*, which the possessive determiner is tied to. The difference between the first and second pairs of examples is basically the kind of anaphoric relation in the phrase. While the former is based on a logophor, the latter is based on a cataphor. Both types of anaphor will be discussed.

This paper will study verb phrase idioms where an NP within the phrase co-indexes with either the Subject or Object of the sentence it appears in. This will be done in four parts. In the first part of this paper, the characterisation of idioms and existing assumptions and findings are examined. In the second part, a methodology of sourcing and analysing possessive idioms is outlined. In the third part, the results of each style of analysis are presented and evaluated. Conclusions are given in the last part.

BACKGROUND

Despite the authors' own disclaimers against their publication being a guide to idiom characterisation, Nunberg et al's (1994) description of idioms forms the foundation for much of the available literature and are relatively accurate. For instance, there are two general types of idioms. These are the non-compositional idiomatic phrases (IP), and compositional idiomatically combining expressions (ICE), which is this paper's focus.

Nunberg et al (1994) assume a bilateral division of material, which is not agreeable since compositionality is a gradable rather than dichotomous trait. As seen in the following cases, idioms are compositional but to different degrees.

- (5) I need to catch my breath.
- (6) Ronnie should not rest on her laurels so soon.
- (7) His hands are tied behind his back.

(5) is simpler than (6) and (7) because it is the sum of a literal *breath* and non-literal *catch* whereas (7) has a more complicated compositionality than the other two because the figurative meaning is not contained in *hands* or *back*. Rather, the concept of hands being tied behind contains an overall non-compositional idiomatic meaning.

But what determines compositionality? This term defines the meaning of a phrase as the sum total of the meanings that the comprising POS contain. In other words, the idiomatic senses of an idiom's parts of speech combine to provide a unified idiomatic meaning.

Idiomatic phrases are describable by a set of characteristics which basically identify such constructions as colloquialisms that have fixed shape and structure and are based on a non-existent scenario. But is this description sufficient?

- (8) He destroyed my life.
- (9) I couldn't find my way around town.

Idioms are indeed re-enactments of non-existent scenarios. The act of destruction in (8) entails an irreversible, irreparable change- but life is not literally destroyed, and so this description works. However, there are as many exceptions as there are adherents.

In (9), the *way* is a metaphorical path but the process of finding is literal. The scenario is thus real. Idioms are thus not entirely fictional. Rather, they are perhaps based on a possible physical action from which an expression of partial truth is made. Another point of contention is the purportedly informal nature of idiom use. Contrary to the colloquial argument, there are various idioms used in formal spheres of communication, such as academic discourse (Simpson and Mendis, 2003).

Another aspect that receives little discussion is the possessive aspect of idioms. In possessive idiomatic constructions, two kinds of possessive relations may be observed. These are namely relations of intrinsic and extrinsic possession (Barker, 1995). Intrinsic possession refers to the possessive relationship between nominal parts of speech and is marked by subject co-indexing.

(10) Granny sends her love.

(11) They finally gave us our big break.

In (10), the subject *Granny* is co-indexed with the possessive pronoun determiner *her* - a relationship which also determines that the love that is idiomatically sent to the interlocutor of this sentence belongs via lexical possession to the subject.

On the other hand, (11) is an imperative sentence that lacks this possessive relationship. The subject which is the pronoun before the possessive noun phrase, co-indexes with *our* but the possessor of the *big break* is actually the subject-marking pronoun *they*, and the sentence indicates a transfer of possession.

Extrinsic possession, refers to a possessive relationship between the contents of an expression and a referent outside of the phrase that is present physically outside language boundaries (Barker, 1995). It can be described partly as an aspect of idiomaticity as it relates the default literal meaning to the related figurative interpretation.

Within the general literature, details on prototypical idioms are varied but unexpectedly sketchy. In spite of the quantity and depth of recent research in this area, there is not quite enough to suitably furnish an understanding of the topic at hand. A large part of current literature both within and outside of HPSG lacks any concrete or holistic conclusions and instead describe (Grant and Bauer, 2004), albeit in detail, what an idiom looks like or is made up of.

Although Nunberg et al (1994) have been refuted in later studies and their descriptions been built on by novel means of seeing idioms, these new methods do not actually add much to the understanding. The theory of idioms, for example, refers to an idiom as a phrasal lexical entry which may or not be compositional. How an idiom can be broken down is already commonly known. This theory also gives each construction an interior and exterior argument and assigns the latter as the irregular and therefore idiomatic reading. The extrinsic argument being idiomatic may hold water, considering the extrinsic possession of idioms, but is it right to say that all idiomatic structures are irregular? Idioms can exist as regular expressions, as shown in the examples of this paper that are not unlike literal expressions in syntactic structure and shape and are not marked otherwise by an idiomatic element within the expression.

Attention has also been paid to the internal characteristics of idioms. Ilfill (2000) discusses intentional "breaking" an idiom's assumedly fixed structures and how it may occur. Idioms can be broken through inserting new elements like adverbs or intensifiers or by changing parts within complements in order to specifically alter an idiom towards a novel use (Ilfill, 2002). The process of breaking seems paradoxical, as the alteration that should cause an idiom to lose its figurative meaning instead brings attention to the area that was changed and reinforces the figurative sense. This is an interesting point, and could be expanded on to see how such a paradox unfolds.

Deignan's (2000) analysis on collocation finds that idioms are made up of a verb and a list of specific, limited collocates. In other words, there are only a few things that can be achieved through a figurative verb action. The final actions of each idiom are very different, but are still operated through a relationship of collocation between verb and

complement. Such a finding is in tandem with O'Grady's (1998) continuity constraint as well, which will be discussed in the following section. It also agrees with Gibbs's (1980) assertion on conceptual metaphors as a basis of idiom conception as it suggests that idioms are formed on common, frequent ideas of the same metaphorical action.

In contrast, by describing the idiomatic action in greater detail through new feature values, Riehemann (1997) aims to reconcile the semantics of an idiom with the more definite syntactic component in what she calls the UPS approach. In this approach, words are a property of the phrase they are contained in and these properties in turn will contain information on the derivation of figurative meanings. Such information will only be encoded at the phrasal level, such that the literal meanings of individual word entries are retained in the grammar. The theory is sound but limited to idioms formed independent of lexical rules (Riehemann, 1997) and may not apply as a general solution.

Lastly, previous literature has also attempted to resolve idioms into grammar. Syntactic compositionality has been explained as idioms having a HEAD VERB and COMPS TAIL made up of nouns and other POS by Erbach (1992), who also identifies an overlapping region between syntax and semantics where the characterization of an idiom might be fitted in. These two arguments, however, are not examined in enough detail to apply a conclusion to this paper.

Overall, however, there is inadequate holistic and concrete solutions for reconciling idioms with grammar (Grant and Bauer, 2004). Also, although their arguments are comprehensive, a part of the publications available on the topic are not conclusive and airtight because they are not tested on large enough sets of data. Regardless of whether the arguments of the aforementioned attempts are strong enough or not, however, the current literature does provide good foundation for further research. What it does not provide, in part due to clearly opposing approaches such as Riehemann (1997) and Soehn (2004), is a clear direction or a feasible solution for implementing idioms.

Another point to note is that idioms are also not sufficiently provided for in the online grammar. In the English Resource Grammar Online database, for example, only idiomatic readings are available for nouns and verbs used in idioms. There is no means of tracking idioms as whole phrases, as idiomatic readings only appear as alternative readings to the literal aspect of the original sentence that an idiom may appear in.

Even in looking for individual words' figurative meanings, such an aspect is marked by a single tag (Copestake and Villavicencio, 2002). These markings have yet to also be completely attached to all the relevant words, and so a word that has an idiomatic meaning may not currently display this information in the database. This lag in progress academically translates to an unclear layman understanding of idioms because idioms are not well defined in dictionaries and thesauri (Alexander, 1992) which are also obviously dependent on developments in formal grammar.

In order to improve on the current literature, a possible solution besides further research is to borrow from other theories of grammar and from idiom-related research focussed out of grammar. An example of the former is O'Grady's (1998) adaptation of the hierarchy constraint into a HPSG principle from government and binding theory that is complementary to the continuity constraint. Similarly, Lakoff's (1990) conceptual metaphor theory could be adapted in defining a common foundation for idioms.

Although it was not mentioned previously and is difficult to address within this paper, the bilingual aspect of idioms is another aspect that can be considered in idiom research. Soehn's (2006) and Riehemann's (1997) comparisons on German and English idioms, as well as Espinal's (2000) joint analysis of Catalan and English, are among some of these studies.

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

This paper is motivated primarily by a lack of completed research. There are numerous suggestions and hypothetical solutions to explaining idioms, but there is an insufficient proportion of such research that examines these same solutions on corpus data or codified examples. Despite numerous proposals on how to identify idioms, a comprehensive examination has not been done. Possessiveness has also been looked into, but only within noun phrases. Instead of focusing on just the possessively marked noun phrase, the larger co-indexing with the subject of the expression, as well as its extrinsic properties, should also be examined. Idioms also have yet to be implemented because of unclear characterisation and contentions on compositionality. This leads to two broad questions that, in the process of adding to the extant literature, this paper hopes to answer.

Firstly, how might idioms be represented and applied in a formal grammar? Secondly, how might possession be expressed and what are the implications on compositionality?

This paper aims to answer these questions by analysing idioms in a manner that goes beyond listed descriptions. Along with grouping by syntactic structure, it will also attempt to observe the interaction of the different POS and describe the general compositionality of an idiom. It also aims to add idioms to an existing grammar, and evaluate the findings on idiomatic possessive constructions by comparing them to non-English counterparts.

METHODOLOGY

A. MATERIALS

Data is sourced primarily from the English WordNet, which only elicited about sixty idioms and was thus inadequate for analysis, and then supplemented by idioms from a print edition of the Collins Cobuild Idioms Dictionary. A total of three hundred and seventy idioms were selected, on the primary condition of the noun phrase containing the possessive pronoun determiner one's or its derivatives. An additional motivation for using Collins Cobuild was its use in a number of the publications previously reviewed. These were then checked against another online dictionary resource, Dictionary.com, which is popularly used and whose data is based from several different dictionaries. The data found here can be thus assumed to be comprehensive and reliable. The relative ease of finding instances from the index was another point of consideration for choosing the Collins Cobuild and Dictionary.com had over online corpora.

B. PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

In the initial analysis, idioms are first separated by the possessive determiner one's co-indexing with either the AGENT or OBJECT of a sentence the idiom appears in. The second step is to categorise each case in the two parts according to syntactic shape. Each category is then assigned an alphabetical label, starting with A for basic VP (V ones N) idioms where the Subject is the Agent. Lastly, literal POS in each idiom are identified- a step necessary for semantic analysis, where the ID.REL (idiomatic relationship) for each ARG in a POS needs to be stated. In the second round of analysis, the results of the syntactic and possessive analyses are used as a base for looking at the idioms through MRS (minimal recursion semantics). Using the possessive relationships established, explicit MRSs are generated for each category. Finally, the observations made in the first and second round are used to formulate changes to the English Resource Grammar Online (ERG) database so that idiomatic and possessive aspects of idiomatic possessive constructions are show in parsing.

ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC CLUSTERS

Three-hundred and seventy idioms were clustered first by their syntactic structure. This elicited six initial groups, which resemble closely the five types of possessive pronoun verb phrase idioms identified by Copestake and Villavicencio (2002). The clusters formed in this paper are further elaborations of the five idiom types, with the exception of copular verb idioms being included and reflexivity taken into consideration.

Structure	Type	Example
V NP (PPron + N)	Possessive pronoun in NP	Whet [his] appetite
V NP+ PP (P NP (PPron+ N))	NP and Possessive Pronoun in PP	keep [us] on [our] toes
V NP (PPron+ N) PP (P NP+)	Possessive pronoun in NP and NP in PP	Try [his] hand at [something]
V NP+ PP (P NP (PPron N))	NP and Possessive Pronoun in PP	turn [something] on [its] head
V NP+ NP (PPron+ Adj N)	NP and Possessive Pronoun in NP	give [someone] [my] best

Table 1: verb phrase idiom types identified by Copestake and Villavicencio (2002)

A number of idioms were found to exhibit structures that did not match any of the six groups. These were placed under a seventh group while idioms sorted into the previous groups were further divided on verb type, internal structures and co-indexing. With the exception of Group 7, which consisted of idioms that did not fit anywhere else, each group was split into at least two secondary parts. A tabular description of each cluster is given along with the division of idioms into each groups in Table 2.

	CLUSTER TYPE	STRUCTURE	EXAMPLE	TOTAL
1A	Indexed basic VP	N1 V N1's N2	He racks his brains.	137
1B	Non-indexed basic VP	N1 V N2's N3	I call your bluff.	
1C	Indexed basic phrasal VP	N1 V N1's N2 P	She pins back her ears.	68
1D	Non-indexed basic phrasal VP	N1 V N2's N3 P	Her words preyed on my mind.	
2A	Indexed transitive VP P	N1 V N's 1 N2 PP	I flew off my handle.	24
2B	Non-indexed transitive VP P	N1 V N2's N3 PP	We feasted our eyes on the sight.	
2C	Indexed transitive phrasal VP P	N1 V N1's N2 P PP	She comes out of her shell.	
2D	Non-indexed transitive phrasal VP P	N1 V N2's N3 P PP	They fell out of our favour.	
3A	Indexed VP with post-V NP	N1 V N2 N1's N2	She has a chip on her shoulder.	7
3B	Non-indexed VP with post-V NP	N1 V N2 P N1's N3	It left a bad taste in my mouth.	
4A	Indexed basic VP, post-NP MOD	N1 V N1's N2 XP	You have your heart in the right place.	30
4B	Non-indexed basic VP, post-NP MOD	N1 V N2's N3 XP	He put my nose out of joint.	
5	Indexed VP with double poss. rel.	N1 V N1's N2 P N1's N3	She lets her heart rule over her head.	8
6A	Indexed copular VP	N1 be N1's N2	He is off his rocker.	18
6B	Non-indexed copular VP	N1 be N2's N3	You are my destiny.	
6C	Copular VP (V PP)	N1 be P N1's N2	I am up to my eyes.	
6D	Non-indexed copular VP (V PP)	N1 be P N2's N3	I am on your case.	
7A	S-indexed comparative VP	N1 V N2 P N P N1's NP3	I know this like the back of my hand.	2
7B	Passive prepositional VP	N1 be V P N1's N2	He is tied to her apron strings.	3

Table 2: List of syntactic clusters formed from examined data

A distinction was not made between verb phrases and phrasal verb phrases in Groups 3 to 8 because they essentially behave in the same way, the key exception being that the verb particle is sometimes found at the end of the idiomatic expression instead of being beside the verb. The syntactic difference is also not significant because the particle can be given a movement towards the left side of the clause to where the verb word is, and thus be assumed as part of the verb or verb phrase.

(12) We bring out our biggest guns.

We bring our biggest guns out.

(13) You charm that person's pants off

You charmed off that person's pants.

(14) My knowledge will bite your nose off.

My knowledge will bite off your nose.

For example, in the first and third case, the particles *out* and *off* respectively can be moved towards the front while retaining the meaning of the idiom. In contrast, in the second example, although the phrase might make syntactic sense after the movement, it does not sound natural and is thus marked as an incorrect example.

A. BASIC/CORE STRUCTURE

Group 1 consists of four cluster types labelled 1A to 1D. 1A refers to indexed basic verb phrase idioms, whereas 1C refers to indexed basic phrasal verb phrase idioms. 1B and 1D are the non-indexed counterparts to 1A and 1C respectively. These four cluster types constitute the most basic syntactic structures observed in the sample data. From here, the structure of Group 1 will also be called the core structure because clusters in the groups after it are obtainable by extending or modifying this group's structures.

B. EXTENDED STRUCTURES.

Group 2 also consists of four cluster types and is similar in appearance, with the difference from Group 1 being the presence of a preposition after the basic structure. The difference between verb particle and preposition has already been explained, and all idioms chosen for these cluster types fulfilled the criteria of non-movement. That is to say that the POS in question could not be freely moved towards the right-hand side of the V/VP. Instead, it had to remain at the end of the noun phrase and sometimes attaches with a noun phrase that comes after the idiom.

In this case, the idiom would belong in Group 3, where he required external noun phrase is located in the matrix statement that the idiom is embedded into. The noun that follows is in OBJECT position and the V/VP within the idiom is transitive. In some dictionaries, this Object is indicated by a generic *somebody* or *something* or by the abbreviation *sb* but is not included in the appendix lists as the idiom can still be understood without it.

Group 4 is very clearly marked by a post-NP modifier which is labelled as a generic X/XP, of which the XP may be headed by either a noun, preposition, adjective or conjunction. In some cases, the modifier is a word instead of a phrase, such as 'together' in 'knock one's knees together'. For such instances, because the modifier modifies the verb, it is assumed as part of the verb phrase, meaning the NP is probably embedded into the verb phrase 'knock together'.

(15) He kept his nose to the grindstone.

He kept to the grindstone his nose.

(16) He pits his wits against her.

* He pits against her his wits.

Against her he pits his wits.

The behaviour of the modifier phrase varies depending on its head. When the XP is a noun phrase, it does not modify the NP of the core structure. Instead, it more likely forms a VP with the idiomatic verb within which the NP is embedded. One problem here is that the meaning of the original idiom may not be retained. While the idiom itself means ‘to concentrate’, in the second example sentence, the grindstone and the subject’s nose might be real and the latter literally pointed at the former. The second sentence’s interpretation is also dependent on the speaker’s choice and recognition ability. It is a similar case for preposition-based modifiers, where movement is selectively possible but always loses some feeling of naturalness.

On the other hand, conjunctions prevent the adjunct XP from attaching to either the verb or the noun phrase. It follows up on the action of the core possessive construction rather than elaborating within it. Implementing possessive idioms with adjunct conjunctive phrases may not be as crucial as the other varieties since the frequency of such instances is extremely low. But it is an interesting construction as it seems to be the only group where the verb that corresponds most immediately to the possessive nominal construction lacks telicity. As long as verb phrase and the core structure remains intact, such idioms can possibly be modified by insertions and permutations as well.

(17) (You) pick up your marbles and go home.

* You pick up and go home your marbles.

She picked up her marbles before going home.

Group 5 consists of idioms that contain two noun phrases which co-index with the Subject. The Subject is both the Agent and the Object in the expression.

(18) You don’t know your arse from your elbow.

They are scratching their ears with their elbows.

Group 5 also consists of idioms where the first pronoun determiner is oneself, such as (19) below. In these idioms, the subject is both the agent and the object because the possessive pronoun co-indexes with the subject of the verb. As a result, the action is conducted by the subject towards himself or herself.

(19) She threw herself at their mercy.

Idioms where the first determiner pronoun is replaced by oneself are also included in Group 5 because *oneself* also means one's own self and so the first pronoun is reflexive and co-indexes with the subject. With such constructions, it is also possible that the third noun, which is contained in the prepositional phrase at the end of the expression could be a separate Object form. However, such cases were not found in the sample data, and so this subtype will remain hypothetical for the extent of this paper.

Group 6 consists of copular verb idioms, which are idiomatic phrases that are converted into VP idioms by attaching a 'be' instead of a verb to the left of the possessed noun phrase. Idioms in Group 6 can also occur with prepositional phrases instead of noun phrases. The copular verb will then change form depending on the PERSON and NUMBER of the Subject. Otherwise, the behaviour of Group 6 idioms is like that of Group 1A and 1B idioms when the copular verb is followed by a possessive noun phrase, and like Group 2A and 2B when followed by a prepositional phrase.

IDIOMS IN MINIMAL RECURSION SEMANTICS

A. MINIMAL RECURSION SEMANTICS

Semantic analysis was done primarily through minimal recursion semantics. Minimal Recursion Semantics (MRS) refers to a formalism used in representing the semantics of a framework such as the ERG. For every defined entity, an MRS structure is created to include a top handle which contains the head and event of the phrase or word, a group of EP or elementary predicates, and tailored sets of constraints that determine the interaction of different predicates. EPs consist of lexical words such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, as well as the arguments that each takes and the characteristics each possesses. These arguments and characteristics are determined by the constraints.

The first task for forming a sufficiently explicit MRS was to examine the idiomatic aspect marking to a literal possessive construction. This marking is not yet indicated in the grammar but suitable phrases for this marking can be identified by the ID.REL, which appears after the verb of idiomatic verbs and marks identity of arguments. The second task is to establish the possessive relationship which is marked by POSS.REL between constituting parts of speech by charting the ARGs.

B. SKETCHING THE MRS

The MRS of an expression is usually expressed as part of a whole expression's semantics. However, a large part of the MRS components are not required to be present for an understanding of idiomaticity. In order to focus on the idiomatic and possessive aspects, they can and should be removed from the MRS in order to provide a compact and truly minimal analysis of the expression itself as opposed to the context that the construction is used in. The process of removal may be explained through (23).

(23) I rack my brains.

(I think with some effort.)

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(24) I rack my brains.

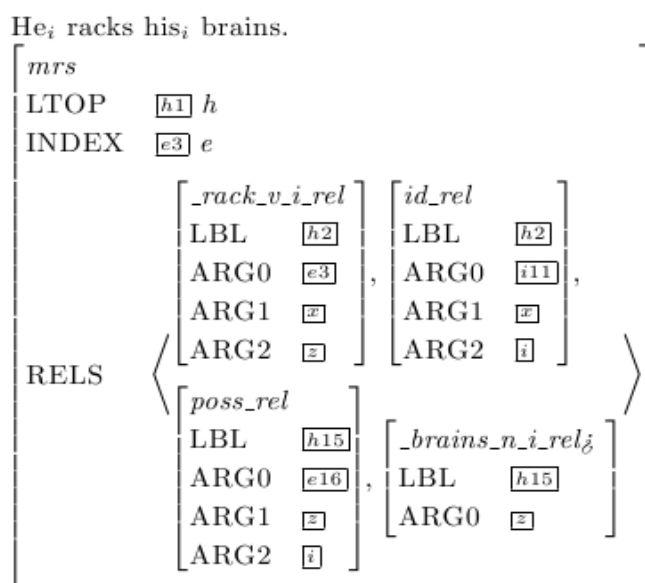
I (lit.) rack my brains.

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The two MRSs above show an idiomatic and a non-idiomatic reading of *rack one's brains* respectively. The first point to note is that *rack* has a specifiable literal meaning in the second example, whereas the non-literal verb is marked by the ID.REL adjacent to it. In isolating the specific elements of an idiomatic construction is then the ID.REL. The other element that should be expressed under RELS in a barer MRS is the POSS. REL, which is found to the left of the noun. In the ERG, it is marked as *poss* but this paper has replaced it with *poss.rel*. The latter will instead indicate not only the noun being a possessive of the Subject, but also co-index with the pronoun to show that it is represented as a possession by the pronoun determiner. The *poss.rel* also shares HEAD with the noun, so the *pronoun* elements do not appear to be necessary and will thus not appear when constructing the basic or extended MRS structures. *pron* elements, which indicate the Agent and Object, are removed as they do not appear within the codified idiom instance and because the MRS can be interpreted just as easily without them.

C. MRS IN BASIC STRUCTURES

In the most basic form of idioms covered here, meaning Group 1A and Group 1B, the subject is the agent and the object of the expression respectively. Within a basic idiom, there are at least three instances of co-index that must occur.



(25) He racks his brains.

Firstly, the feature values between the literal meanings of a verb must correspond to that of the non-literal meaning except that they are idiomatic in nature in the latter's case. In other words, ARG1 of the V/VP and the ID.REL are shared. Secondly, the idiomatic noun must be in a possessive relationship with the subject. This relationship is expressed through the possessive marking determiner *one's* and its different forms. Thirdly, the AGENT of the verb is expressed before the V of the idiom phrase that is embedded in a larger matrix phrase. This means that the ARG2 of the IDREL values must be the same as the ARG2 of the possessive aspect of the idiom, and that leaves the ARG1 of the possessive to also be the ARG0 of the idiomatic N/NP. These characteristics of an idiom are also true for when the object is the agent, such as in the second example of this section, except that the possession will not correlate to the ARG of the ID.REL even though the possessive relationship will remain between the possession and noun. Instead, some new values would be needed. For example, if the ARG2 of the verb in an S/A basic idiom is *x9*, the ARG2 of the noun is *x10*. Subsequently the ARG1 of the possessive relation will also be *x10*. Because there is no possessive tie between the verb and the noun phrase, the ID.REL list does not have to be consistent with the possessive relation. The ID.REL will then remain constant only with the verb's values.

(26) It clouded my judgement

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{mrs} \\ \text{LTOP} \quad \boxed{h1} \quad h \\ \text{INDEX} \quad \boxed{e3} \quad e \\ \\ \text{RELS} \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{l} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{_cloud_v_i_rel} \\ \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h2} \\ \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{e3} \\ \text{ARG1} \quad \boxed{x} \\ \text{ARG2} \quad \boxed{z} \end{array} \right] , \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{poss_rel} \\ \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h13} \quad h \\ \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{e15} \quad e \\ \text{ARG1} \quad \boxed{x} \\ \text{ARG2} \quad \boxed{i} \end{array} \right] , \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{_judgement_n_i_rel} \\ \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h13} \\ \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{z} \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \end{array} \right]$$

In the case of such examples as (26), the MRS properties will be slightly different. Firstly, the object that is located within the possessed noun phrase is marked by *u* values instead

of x values. Secondly, the identity markers of the subject and object are different and spaced further apart as compared to the first example.

For phrasal verb-based constructions, the MRS of the nouns will be described in almost exactly the same way as they were in the basic idioms. The difference is that the preposition is within the VP and does not affect the possessive relationship like a separate preposition would. Instead, the preposition helps to dictate the metaphorical direction of the verb, such as in (27).

(27) He throws his life away.

$$\left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{mrs} \\
 \text{LTOP} \quad \boxed{h1} \quad h \\
 \text{INDEX} \quad \boxed{e3} \quad e \\
 \\
 \text{RELS} \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{l}
 \left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{_throw_v_i_rel} \\
 \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h2} \\
 \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{e3} \\
 \text{ARG1} \quad \boxed{x} \\
 \text{ARG2} \quad \boxed{z} \\
 \text{ARG3} \quad \boxed{h12}
 \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{id_rel} \\
 \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h2} \\
 \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{i11} \\
 \text{ARG1} \quad \boxed{x} \\
 \text{ARG2} \quad \boxed{y}
 \end{array} \right], \\
 \\
 \left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{poss_rel} \\
 \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h14} \\
 \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{e15} \\
 \text{ARG1} \quad \boxed{z} \\
 \text{ARG2} \quad \boxed{y}
 \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{_l_life_n_of_i_rel}_i \\
 \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h1} \\
 \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{z}
 \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l}
 \text{away_p} \\
 \text{LBL} \quad \boxed{h3} \\
 \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{e3} \quad \text{ARG0} \quad \boxed{x}
 \end{array} \right]
 \end{array} \right\rangle
 \end{array} \right]$$

Although phrasal verb-based idioms were separated in the syntax section, semantically they should be clustered with basic verb phrase idioms. This is because the ARGs taken by each corresponding POS is essentially the same with the exception of one preposition assumed into the verb phrase, which is encoded with the particle instead of just “VERB_v_i_rel” in a basic verb phrase. It is assumed that the MRS of this group will resemble the previous group greatly.

D. MRS IN EXTENDED STRUCTURES

In verb phrases that end with prepositions or prepositional phrases, the verbs are mostly transitive and therefore an object to the action of the verb should be included in the expression of the idiom. The MRS of the verb and noun phrase that includes the reflexive possessive should be similar to the basic verb phrase idioms, and ARGs should be given for the preposition phrase that follows the noun phrase. An additional argument ARG3 are added to the verb and noun before the PP. For example, in the second example here, the verb's ARG0 is the preposition's ARG 1.

(28) I wrapped my finger around you.

(29) They hang on to his coattails.

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} mrs \\ LTOP \quad \boxed{h1} \quad h \\ INDEX \quad \boxed{e3} \quad e \\ \\ RELS \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{l} \left[\begin{array}{l} _hang_v_on_i_rel \\ LBL \quad \boxed{h2} \quad h \\ ARG0 \quad \boxed{e3} \\ ARG1 \quad \boxed{x5} \\ ARG2 \quad \boxed{x9} \quad x \end{array} \right] , \left[\begin{array}{l} _to_p \\ LBL \quad \boxed{h2} \quad h \\ ARG0 \quad \boxed{e10} \\ ARG1 \quad \boxed{u12} \\ ARG2 \quad \boxed{x11} \quad x \end{array} \right] , \left[\begin{array}{l} poss_rel \\ LBL \quad \boxed{h15} \quad h \\ ARG0 \quad \boxed{e17} \quad e \\ ARG1 \quad \boxed{x11} \\ ARG2 \quad \boxed{i17} \end{array} \right] , \left[\begin{array}{l} _coattails_n_of_i_rel_j \\ LBL \quad \boxed{h15} \\ ARG0 \quad \boxed{x11} \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \end{array} \right]$$

Another kind of extended structure is seen where internal modifiers occur either after the verb phrase or after the noun phrase. This part of the analysis only describes how the possessive relationship is accounted for under minimal recursion semantics. Other instances of internally modified possessive idioms are available in the appendix.

(30) He put my nose out of joint.

Post-NP modifier phrases start with nouns, prepositions and even conjunctions among others. The nominal content is also idiomatic and requires an additional argument ARG3 to be added to the verb and preposition- *out of* in the case of (30) – as well as an argument ARG1 to the noun of the possessive NP. This allows the verb and noun to co-index with the state of being described in the modifier and to complete the possessive relationship between the modifier phrase and noun with the possessive determiner.

(31) We let our emotions show.

In (31), the modifier is an additional verb instead, which should be expressed with the 'let'. In other words, the idiomatically possessed N/NP is allowed to be seen. This implies that the action of showing is also probably possessed by the subject.

Alternatively, the possessive NP itself is embedded into the compound verb 'to let show', in which case the MRS will also have to be changed. But this will affect the categorisation of idioms because such idioms could now belong to idioms modified post-NP and to idioms where the possessively related parts of speech are embedded in a verb phrase. This would mean repeated data and over-specification. It could be rectified by allowing dual categorisation, but such an overhaul may be too drastic and is unlikely to singlehandedly solve the over-specification problem.

E. MRS of idioms in Groups 6 and 7

Possessive relationships are relatively easy to explain in double co-indexing idioms because the semantic and syntactic descriptions are relatively similar. If two possessive NPs exist in the same idiom, the preposition can tie in NP2 with NP1. The semantics of such cases will not be discussed here as a result. Instead, a more problematic pair of such idioms will be examined, so called problematic because they are very different in structure and hinder a template from being formed for the group.

<i>mrs</i>	LTOP	h1	h					
	INDEX	e3	e					
RELS	<	[keep_v_i_rel] LBL h2 h ARG0 e3 ARG1 x5 ARG2 x10 ARG3 h9	,	[id_rel] LBL h2 ARG0 e3 i ARG1 x10 ARG2 i15	,	[id_rel] LBL h2 ARG0 e4 i ARG1 x10 ARG2 i28	,	>
		[poss_rel] LBL h13 h ARG0 e15 e ARG1 x10 ARG2 i15		[-card_n_i_rel] LBL h14 ARG0 x10				
		[-close_a_to] LBL h21 h ARG0 e22 e ARG1 x10		[poss_rel] LBL h27 h ARG0 e29 e ARG1 x23 ARG2 i28		[-chest_n] LBL h27 h ARG0 x23		

(32) He keeps his cards close to his chest.

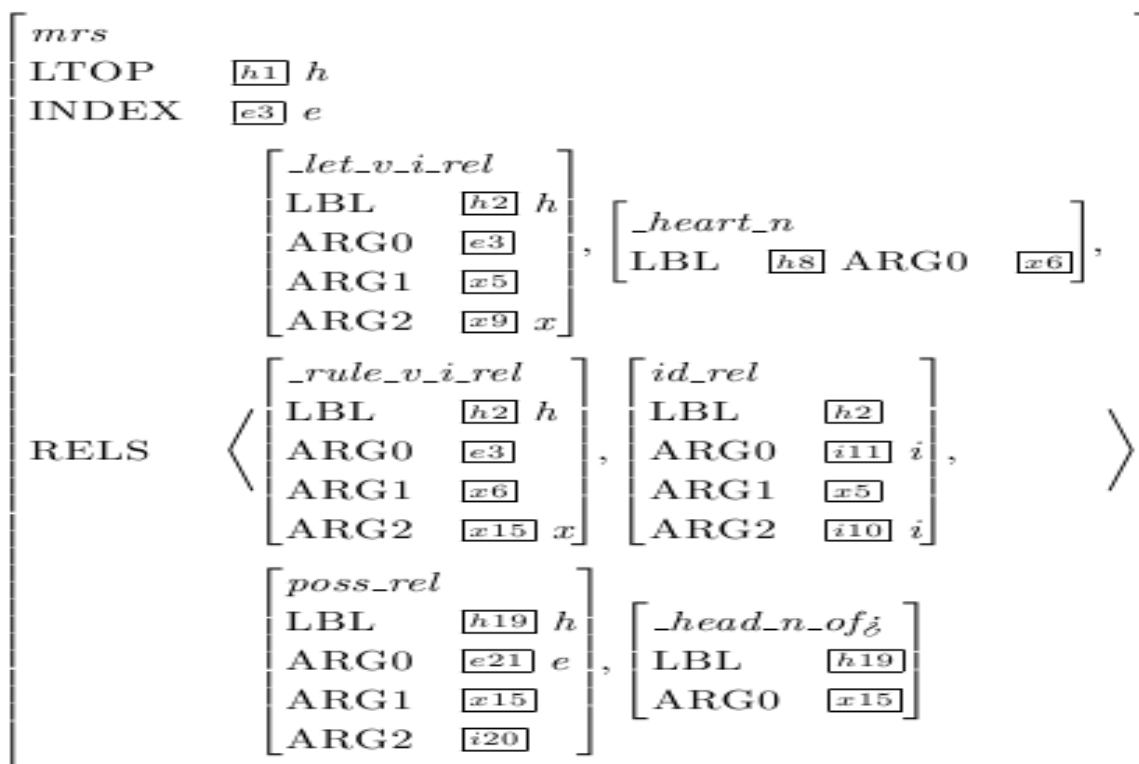
In (32), NP2 is still part of a prepositional phrase. But the boundary of the phrase is not clear. This is because there are two readings that are almost equally plausible available in the ERG. In the first possibility, *close* is an adjective' before the PP *to his chest*. In the second possibility, *close to* is a preposition before NP2.

(33) To let one's heart rule one's head

a. His heart rules his head.

<i>mrs</i>	LTOP	[h1] h		
	INDEX	[e3] e		
		[<i>_heart_n</i>		
		LBL [h8] ARG0 [x6]],	
	RELS	[<i>_rule_v_i_rel</i>],	
		LBL [h2] h		
		ARG0 [e3]		
		ARG1 [x6]		
		ARG2 [x15]],	
		[<i>id_rel</i>		
		LBL [h2]		
		ARG0 [i11] i		
		ARG1 [x5]		
		ARG2 [i10] i],	
		[<i>poss_rel</i>		
		LBL [h19] h		
		ARG0 [e21] e		
		ARG1 [x15]		
		ARG2 [i20]],	
		[<i>_head_n_of_j</i>		
		LBL [h19]		
		ARG0 [x15]]	

b. His heart rules his head (and he allows this act).



On the other hand, the issue with this example is similar to (31). The possessive NP2 can be accounted for as mentioned already and there is no structural ambiguity. But assessing the idiomatic aspect is difficult. The most feasible solution would be to treat ‘rule of’ as a noun, whereby the nominalised act of ruling is allowed by the Subject.

The last group of idioms, refer to idioms which lack an actual verb. This verb is instead filled in for by the copular verb ‘be’.

(34) He is my rock.

(35) We are on our best behaviour.

In ‘be’ idioms, the V/VP does not have an IDREL value set. This is because ‘be’ may substitute a regular verb in function but it does not contribute in meaning. ‘Be’ idioms are also difficult to prove as idioms, since some of them cannot be parsed by the DELPH-ERG demonstrator. Here, it is recommended that the noun should have ARG1

and ARG2 along with the regular values in order to make up for this and so the MRS of 'be' idioms should consist of the possessive relationship and an idiomatic argument marker on the right side of the noun.

F. OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Some idioms are made up of more than one morpheme with a non-literal meaning.

(36) I retraced my steps.

<i>mrs</i>	LTOP	h2 <i>h</i>																																																												
	INDEX	e3 <i>e</i>																																																												
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For example, in () there is an additional set of values after the ID.REL values that deals with the morpheme *re*. The idiom meaning of retracing is rooted in the base verb *trace*. The label (LBL) and ARG1 of this extra set correlate to the LBL and ARG0 of the idiomatic verb 'trace' respectively. This point should be noted in the semantics of idioms, because although one can retrace (meaning to recall or remember) one's memories, the same memories cannot be traced (meaning found out of discovered).

Such a difference is obvious considering 're' is derivational in this instance, but it also implies a limit on what kind of actions can be made to be idiomatic and what actions cannot. This limit may be studied further by examining, for example, verb-noun collocates to determine possible constraints on idiomatic action. The quantity of such idioms, however, is very little in the samples and probably not salient in existing corpora, and implementing it may not even be necessary since *retrace* is lexicalised on its own.

IMPLEMENTATION OF IDIOMS

Using the syntactic and semantic analysis given previously, idioms can now be implemented into a formal grammar or lexicon. Since the data was examined through minimal recursion semantics, a system that relies on MRS would be helpful for implementation. One possible system for implementation is the English Resource Grammar, which currently provides a comprehensive Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) analysis of English. Another option is the creation of a new database exclusively for idiomatic expressions, which will be discussed after the ERG, which uses the examined collocates and sketched MRSs as a base.

A. ENGLISH RESOURCE GRAMMAR

As a preliminary attempt, idioms were implemented on the LKB (Linguistic Knowledge Builder) with the intention of adding content to the English Resource Grammar Online (ERG), as either verb-noun collocates or as individual idiomatic words. Currently, the ERG system does not contain any rules to accommodate idiomatic possessive constructions with the exception of basic reflexive possessive constructions. In other words, only Group 1A is currently accounted for. Some verbs are marked by the ID.REL tag but this does not appear to be significant.

Based on the syntactic and semantic analyses of the previous sections, a few changes are proposed here. A rule should firstly be established to better display possessive relationships, especially in the non-basic idioms. A measure should also be proposed that helps identify the hierarchical transfer of idiomatic meaning from word to phrase. The idiomatic aspects of both verbs and nouns have to be described in the grammar too.

Adding new idiom types, as well as an idiom marker, is the first necessary step towards extending the ERG. To provide syntactic content, each verb-noun combination was entered along with coding on clause structure. A definition and an example sentence to advise the use of the specific idiom were also provided.

Semantic content, on the other hand, included idiomatic tags on each POS entered and their corresponding semantic information.

The ERG will be useful in implementing the structural and possessive characteristics of an idiom. Assuming possession and the ID.REL are correctly marked, the appropriate non-literal reading of an expression is retrievable. But, the ERG currently does not have an idiomatic identifier and figurative readings would not be readily identifiable. There are also generating lapses. Some copular verb phrases, for example, do not produce any parses even though the sentence is grammatical and the idiomatic verb phrase codified. Unless these issues are addressed, adding data will not enrich the ERG.

B. CONSTRUCTING AN IDIOMATIC CORPUS

Instead of contributing to an existing system, the idioms examined here could be used in a new database, much like the SAID database (Kuiper et al, 2003). The style of syntactic data examination in this paper is similar to SAID's construction with regards to sample clustering and internal analysis and the operation of such a corpus suggests the feasibility of a corpus made up of idiomatic verb phrase constructions only.

Another possibility is the creation of a visual idiom corpus. Most corpora are text-based, and the contents, being mostly literal, are also compositional. This suggests entries should perhaps be presented as whole phrases. However, some idioms are still highly compositional, such as *catching one's breath* and the idiomatic parts of speech should also be taken into account and included alongside the phrases. This would cause over-specification as a word entry would appear twice in a search query as both an idiomatic word and as part of a phrase. Accommodating this issue in a one-dimensional text corpus is definitely possible, but a visualised interface might be more helpful.

Providing a user interface that does not require familiarity with the query syntax would increase the corpus's accessibility to a wider audience. Such a corpora can also be used in teaching idioms in English as a first or second language, thus addressing the pedagogical qualms mentioned in the first chapter. Input can be sourced from dictionaries or online corpora, and then processed using minimal recursion semantics to establish the kinds of arguments possible for each POS. Collocates can then be built to supply the chains linked to a certain entry and semantic information retrieved when that entry is retrieved.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. SEMANTIC OBSERVATIONS

The MRSs generated for each group display the internal possessive relationship among the different parts of speech. However, they do not provide detail on the extrinsic possession of an idiom. It has also been established that the POSS.REL and ID.REL do not hold these aspects inside them and so the next logical assumption is that it should be in the figuratively interpreted parts of speech, meaning the verbs and nouns.

Any idiomatic expression is the carrying out of a metaphorical or physically non-occurring action on to an entity that is just as non-existent and metaphorical (Nunberg et al, 1994). It is then possible to suppose that there are basic actions carried out within the expression that are in turn being expressed through other basic actions. Lakoff's (1990) conceptual metaphor theory seems to qualify this because all metaphors, including idioms, are founded on the mental visualization of a literal image. This image is interpreted, through the context of the used expression, to provide the intended meaning. The use of conceptual metaphors to explain the containment of figurative meaning is especially beneficial in understanding idioms that have little or negligible compositionality.

- (37) You should put your foot into the water before complaining.
 You should at least try before complaining.

- (38) I must pull my socks up.
I must make some effort now.

Non-compositional or nearly non-compositional idioms contain parts of speech, as previously mentioned, that are hard to quantify with figurative sense. The literal tasks referenced here are simple physical tasks that require the use of voluntary effort. But neither of these actions are actually required for the expressions in (37) and (38) to be complete because what they really mean are shown in their paraphrases. There does not appear to be another way of explaining such idioms. The notion of conceptual metaphors as bases for idioms is also corroborated by psycholinguistic research which indicates individual speakers can, to an extent, understand idioms through mental visualization (Gibbs and O'Brien, 1990). However, this is only possible on the assumption of speaker knowledge, and only surely effective if the action is graphic and not far removed from the idiomatic meaning.

One last observation made was the apparent restriction of subjects as agents in idiomatic verb phrases. It seems that most, if not all, verb-noun combinations in the sample studied consist of either abstract concept nouns being possessed by the agent, which can use this possession freely, or by actions that maybe generally assumed as actions that can only be done by humans. One such case for this is the treatment of love and affection, as seen here.

- (39) Please send my love to her.
(10) Granny sends her love.
(40) The dog sent the cat its love.

An idiomatic transfer of emotion or sentiment is common in human communication, but does not sound as natural if a non-human subject were to carry out this same action. In fact, a non-human subject can act out idiomatic or abstract actions- but only if the subject is humanized or personified. This phenomenon can be further evaluated in a later study.

B. SYNTACTIC OBSERVATIONS

In the syntactic analysis, all clusters were divided into two variations. One part contained indexed phrases, where the subject co-indexed with the possessive pronoun of the noun phrase within the core structure. The other part contained non-indexed phrases, in which the co-indexing of the first type was not present. For example, 1A and 1C were indexed phrases while 1B and 1D were non-indexed phrases.

However, the division between indexed and non-indexed phrases cannot be marked as clearly as the clusters suggest. This also in part the reason why, in the appendix, the examined idioms are not categorised by any of the syntactic or semantic groupings. With the exception of some idioms, such as the more conventionalised expressions, all idioms can be non-indexed simply by using a possessive form that is not in agreement with the PERSON and NUMBER of the Subject. This violates the shapes of the clusters formed, obviously, and makes syntactic analysis difficult. It also raises the additional question of how these clusters can be restored.

The solution proposed in this section is to insert the adjective *own* before the possessive noun phrase from the core structure, in order to tie the referent of the possessive determiner back to the subject by denoting an exclusive ownership or possessive relationship between the Subject and the possessed noun like so:

(40) I run my ship.

She runs his ship.

I run my own ship.

*She runs his own ship.

In the first example, the subject and the noun in the possessive noun phrase co-index, whereas it co-indexes with the object in the second example. But with the addition of the *own* to the possessive noun phrase, the subject cannot co-index with the object.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

This paper has deconstructed to a quantifiable detail the structure and semantic behaviour of idiomatic possessive constructions. It has also discussed two means of implementing idioms and suggested a process for these means.

Although provisions for entering idioms into the ERG were made, they were not carried out in full. A suitable immediate follow-up to this study would be to run the data through a corpus of reasonable size, such as the Oslo Corpus, and assess the accuracy of this paper's analysis. Another possibility is to attempt the suggested modifications to the ERG system and examine to what extent the system can identify idiomatic readings after these steps.

A primary concern expressed in the review of extant literature was that there was no standardised means of identifying idioms. The aim of this paper was to implement constructions already codified and kick-start the addition of such structures into regular grammar. Various proposed methods exist, such as the Frozenness Hierarchy (Fraser, 1970) and Barkema's (1997) criteria for idiomatic noun phrases. However, these do not appear to have been sufficiently tested, especially on large scale corpora in the case of the former. Another area to explore is idioms which include the reflexive pronoun *oneself* or its derivations.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF ALL IDIOMS STUDIED

Achieve one's goals	Change one's tune
Balance one's books	Change one's mind
Bawl one's eyes out	Charm one's pants off
Be a legend in one's time	Chase one's tail
Be fixed in one's way	Check one's temper
Be off one's food	Close one's eyes to
Be off one's rocker	Close one's heart to
Be on one's back	Cock one's ears
Be on one's best behavior	Collect one's thoughts
Be one's bitch	Collect one's wits
Be one's destiny	Color one's eyes
Be one's life	Come out of one's shell
Be one's master	Come to one's senses
Be one's own man	Confront one's demons
Be one's rock	Cook one's goose
Be out of one's head/mind	Cool one's heels
Be set in one's ways	Count one's chickens before they hatch
Be tied to one's apron strings	Cross one's fingers
Be too big for one's breeches/boots	Cry one's eyes out
Be up to one's eyes	Cut one's teeth
Be up to one's neck	Cut your losses
Be upon one's good behavior	Dash one's hopes
Be worth one's salt	Deliver on one's promise
Beat a path to (one's door)	Destroy one's life
Believe one's ears	Dirty one's hands
Bite one's head off	Dirty one's hands
Bite one's nose off	Do one's bit
Bite one's tongue	Do one's best
Blow one's trumpet	Do one's level best
Blow one's stack	Do one's utmost
Blow sand in one's eyes	Drag one's feet/heels
Break one's neck	Draw one's fire
Break one's back	Drop into one's bundle
Bring out one's biggest guns	Drop one's bundle
Burn one's fingers	Earn one's bones
Burn one's pocket	Earn one's spurs
Cash in one's chips	Eat one's hat
Catch one's eye	Eat one's head off
Catch one's fancy	Eat one's heart out
Catch one's breath	Eat one's words

Expand one's knowledge
 Explode in one's face
 Fall on one's face
 Fall on one's feet
 Fall out of one's favour
 Feast one's eyes on
 Feather one's nest
 Feel in one's bones
 Feel one's oats
 Feel one's way around
 Fight for one's life
 Fight one's demons
 Find one's better half
 Find one's niche
 Find one's tongue
 Find one's way
 Flip one's lid
 Flip one's wig
 Fly off one's handle
 Follow one's nose
 Gather one's wits
 Get back on one's feet
 Get into one's stride
 Get off one's butt
 Get off one's chest
 Get one's act together
 Get one's bearings
 Get one's head around
 Get one's walking papers
 Get under one's skin
 Get up off one's butt
 Gird up one's loins
 Give a piece of one's mind
 Give one's best
 Give the rough edge of one's tongue
 Go about one's business
 Go into one's shell
 Grease one's palms
 Grit one's teeth
 Hang on to one's coattails
 Have bags under one's eyes
 Have egg on one's face
 Have one's big break
 Have one's cake and eat it
 Have one's head in the clouds
 Have one's moments
 Have one's back against the wall
 Have one's ducks in a row
 Have one's foot on
 Have one's hands tied behind
 Have one's heart in the right place
 Have one's heart set on
 Have one's sights on
 Have one's way
 Have one's way with
 Have one's wits about you
 Have second string to one's bow
 Hide one's light under a bushel
 Hold one's fire
 Hold one's liquor
 Hold one's ground
 Hold one's horses
 Hold one's own
 Increase one's knowledge
 Keep one's distance
 Keep one's eye on
 Keep one's hair on
 Keep one's head down
 Keep one's heart in one's boots
 Keep one's nose clean
 Keep one's nose out
 Keep one's nose to the grindstone
 Keep one's pecker up
 Keep one's shirt
 Keep one's word
 Keep one's cards close to one's chest
 Keep one's chin up
 Keep one's eyes off
 Keep one's hands off
 Keep one's mouth shut
 Keep one's seat warm
 Keep one's wits about you
 Keep under one's hat
 Kick one's heels

Knock one's head against a brick wall
 Knock one's head up
 Knock one's knees together
 Know one's onions
 Know one's place
 Know one's are from one's elbow
 Know something like the back of one's hand
 Land on one's fee
 Laugh one's ass off
 Laugh up one's sleeve
 Leave a bad taste in one's mouth
 Leave in one's hands
 Leave one to one's devices
 Lend one's ear to
 Lend one's ear
 Let grass grow under one's feet
 Let one's chance slip by
 Let one's emotions show
 Let one's hair down
 Let one's heart rule one's head
 Let one's guard down
 Lick one's chops
 Lie through one's teeth
 Line one's pockets
 Live beyond one's means
 Live one's nerve ends
 Look to one's laurels
 Lose one's edge
 Lose one's footing
 Lose one's grip on reality
 Lose one's ground
 Lose one's heart
 Lose one's identity
 Lose one's individuality
 Lose one's marbles
 Lose one's mind
 Lose one's opportunity
 Lose one's patience
 Lose one's rag
 Lose one's right arm
 Lose one's shirt

Lose one's spirit
 Lose one's strength
 Lose one's time
 Lose one's tongue
 Lose one's value
 Lose one's heart
 Lose one's hold on
 Lose one's life
 Lose one's nerve
 Lower one's sights
 Make one's mind
 Make one's peace
 Make up one's mind
 Meet one's maker
 Meet one's match
 Mince one's words
 Mind one's business
 Mind one's p's and q's
 Nail one's color to the mast
 Occupy one's thoughts
 One's back
 Open one's eyes
 Open one's heart
 Overplay one's hand
 Pack one's bags
 Paddle one's own boat/canoe
 Part one's hair on the left
 Pat oneself on one's back
 Pay one's dues
 Pay one's respect to
 Pick up one's ears
 Pick up one's marbles and go home
 Pin back one's ears
 Pit one's wits
 Pit one's wits against
 Poke one's nose into
 Pop one's clogs
 Pour out one's heart
 Prepare one's grounds
 Present one's case
 Press one's luck
 Prey on one's mind
 Prick up one's ears

Project one's voice
 Pull in one's horns
 Pull one's hair out
 Pull one's stomach in
 Pull one's chestnuts out of the fire
 Pull one's socks up
 Pull one's weight
 Pull up one's socks
 Push one's luck
 Put on one's thinking cap
 Put one's back into
 Put one's best foot forward
 Put one's feet up
 Put one's mind at rest/ to rest
 Put one's roots down
 Put one's shoulder to the wheel
 Put one's eggs into one basket
 Put one's head above the parapet
 Put one's head in the noose
 Put one's head on the block
 Put one's mind into
 Put one's nose out of joint
 Put one's toe in the water
 Quake in one's boots
 Raise one's eyebrows
 Ram down one's throat
 Refresh one's memory
 Rest on one's laurels
 Rest on one's oars
 Retrace one's steps
 Ride on one's wave
 Roll up one's sleeves
 Roll up one's sleeves
 Run one's eye over
 Run one's ship
 Run one's eye over
 Scratch one's ear with one's elbow
 Seal one's lips
 See beyond the end of one's nose
 Sell one's birthright
 Send a shiver down one's spine
 Send one's love
 Serve one's time
 Serve out one's apprenticeship
 Serve out one's time
 Set one's heart on
 Set one's sights
 Set one's face against
 Shake one's head
 Sharpen one's axe
 Shoot one's mouth off
 Shore up one's base
 Shrug one's shoulders
 Sit on one's hands
 Sit on the edge of one's seat
 Sow one's wild oats
 Sow one's oats
 Speak one's mind
 Spin one's wheels
 Spread one's wings
 Stand on one's own feet
 Stick one's nose into
 Stick one's oars into
 Stick to one's games
 Stick to one's post
 Stick to one's words
 Swallow one's pride
 Take one under one's wing
 Take one's breath away
 Take one's life into one's hands
 Talk one's books
 Talk through one's hair
 Taste one's own medicine
 Teach one's grandmother to suck
 eggs
 Tear one's hair out
 Throw in one's lot
 Throw in one's two cents worth
 Throw one's hat in
 Throw one's leg
 Throw one's life away
 Throw one's toys out of the pram
 Throw one's voice
 Throw one's cap over the mill
 Throw one's hat into the ring
 Throw one's resources into

Throw one's weight behind
Throw oneself on one's mercy
Throw over one's company
Tie to one's apron strings
Tighten one's belt
Toot one's own horn
Toy with one's food
Try one's hand at
Try one's hand at
Turn one's back on
Turn one's back on
Turn up one's toes
Twiddle one's thumbs

Use one's loaf
Vote with one's feet
Walk one's dog
Wash one's hands of
Waste one's breathe
Watch one's p's and q's
Wear one's agenda (with pride)
Wear one's heart on one's sleeve
Weep one's eyes out
Wend one's way
Win one's spurs
Wrap one's finger around
Wrap one's legs