

**METAPHORICAL EXTENSION AND VARIATION IN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS
WITH MOTION VERBS. MATERIALS FOR A THEORETICAL, USAGE AND
CONTRASTIVE DICTIONARY
(REFERENCE 1003040012)**

ELENA DE MIGUEL & OLGA BATIUKOVA
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

The aim of this article is to present the research project “Metaphorical Extension and Variation in Idiomatic Expressions with Motion Verbs. Materials for a Theoretical, Usage and Contrastive Dictionary” and the research group of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM, Madrid Autonomous University) that is carrying it out. The project is co-financed by the autonomous Government of Madrid Region and UAM, and its duration at this stage is of one year, till 31st December 2006. The previous project related to the same issue and which has contributed especially to the theoretical basis of the dictionary, has been developed for two years, from 1st September 2003 till 31st December 2005. The research group is integrated by Elena De Miguel (project supervisor), professors Azucena Palacios and Ana Serradilla, PhD student Romana Radulescu and external collaborator Olga Batiukova.

1. The object of study

The project deals with idiomatic expressions formed with motion verbs. The analysis has been restricted to one group of verbs in order to achieve the established aims. The motion verbs have been chosen for the following reasons: in the first place, motion verbs undergo metaphorical extension frequently (as in Spanish *la carretera sale del valle y llega hasta la montaña* ‘the road starts [lit.: goes out of] in the valley and reaches the mountain’, *la carretera va del valle a la montaña* ‘the road goes [i.e. stretches] from the valley to the mountain’), and this peculiarity enables them even to take part in periphrases as auxiliary (i.e., semantically vacuous) verbs, as in *voy a enfadarme* [to go], *vengo diciendo últimamente que* [to come], *Juan anda preocupado* [to walk], etc. In addition, there is a big amount of literature dedicated to motion verbs (cf. Cifuentes, 1999, 2006, Talmy, 2000, Morimoto, 2001 and Van Der Zee and Slack, 2003, among others), which delimits the area, establishes its basic notions and therefore facilitates the development of new hypotheses and analyses.

The present project deals with idiomatic expressions in standard Spanish as well as in different varieties of Latin American Spanish with the aim of analysing them from the point of view of both types of variation, geographic (dialectal) and social (diastratic).

At the same time, we are interested in carrying out a comparison with similar metaphorical expressions in other languages: Germanic (English), another Romance



language (Romanian) and Slavic (Russian). We believe that the contrastive analysis will allow us to confirm the theoretical validity of our general hypothesis and to progress in the study of particular phenomena.

2. The main hypothesis and theoretical framework

We take as our starting point the premise that the lexicon is a less idiosyncratic and irregular level than it has been traditionally assumed and that its internal organization permits to account for a great part of morphological and syntactic phenomena of the languages. In addition, we assume that a lot of semantic processes responsible for the emergence of figurative interpretations of words (polysemy, metaphor, metonymy and meronymy) can be accounted for from this new perspective, which confers to the lexicon a regular and productive organization, capable of generating meaning extensions from semantic primitives, in line with the theoretical model known as the Generative Lexicon (Pustejovsky, 1991, 1995, etc.).

The guiding hypothesis of this project is that the words have lexically underspecified definitions, which are potentially made precise or specific in different contexts through the mechanisms of “lexical features agreement” (in terms of Bosque, 2004), which validate their combination (process known as *co-composition*) or alter them semantically (process known as *coercion*). The mentioned processes are not free, i.e. they are determined by the minimal semantic information provided by the underspecified lexical definitions. It is due to these mechanisms that metaphorical extensions are generated as well as meaning extensions and reductions typical of the light verbs: for instance, *coger un constipado* ‘to catch a cold’, which means ‘to undergo the transition from being healthy to having a cold’. These kind of extensions, in turn, are involved in “special” combinations of words usually called idiomatic.

3. The objectives

a. The main objective of this research is to deepen the analysis of universal mechanisms and processes that trigger the creation of idiomatic expressions and further meaning retrieval by the speaker.

b. More generally, we set out to study the procedures that govern the relationships between the words and to determine how these relationships are reflected in the syntax.

c. One of the metatheoretical aims consists in proving the efficiency of the lexical-generative approach, which allows accounting for the generation of meaning extensions from semantic primitives and the decoding of these new meanings by the speaker. More specifically, we make use of James Pustejovsky's *The Generative Lexicon*, which stratifies the lexicon in various sublevels and, more importantly, postulates the existence of linguistic mechanisms that guarantee its internal cohesion on the one hand, and its flexibility on the other hand.

d. In addition to the mentioned theoretical aims, the research we are bringing about has a number of obvious applications: the study of different context of use of Spanish metaphorical expressions and the formulation of the rules governing the emergence and use of these expressions will unavoidably have an effect on the elaboration of didactic handbooks (Spanish as foreign language, correct use of Spanish lexicon, etc.).

e. To the objectives listed above can be added concrete and visible benefits. Thus, the suggested analysis will result in the elaboration of a short Dictionary of Idiomatic Expressions. A number of recent studies explode the hypothesis according to which certain identifiable aspects of word meaning impact on their combinations with other words and intend to apply it to the elaboration of dictionaries of collocations (see Bosque, 2001, 2004). However, our research pretends to result in a novel and original reference book because it goes beyond the existing works in various aspects: in the first place, we are concerned with a concrete group of lexical items, which has not been studied yet from this perspective; on the other hand, our dictionary will present information not only about the interpretation of idiomatic expressions, their translation and contexts of use, it will also refer to the mechanisms that allow their generation and decoding. In addition, this dictionary will constitute a useful reference book for scholars, students of Spanish as foreign language, translators, journalists, teachers of Spanish (as first and second language) and for native users of Spanish.

f. Among practical objectives we include also the presentation of the results of our research at linguistic research meetings and the organization of a Conference at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid with the participation of experts in the study of the lexicon, with whom we could confront the validity of our research hypotheses, results and conclusions. Thus, we expect to consolidate our aim of creating an influential center of lexical studies at UAM. Within our previous project we managed to fulfil our purpose: the First International Conference "Lexical Structures and the Structure of the

Lexicon” was organized, with Ignacio Bosque, José Luis Cifuentes, Kazumi Koike, Carlos Piera, Leonor Ruiz Gurillo, Manuel Seco, Raffaele Simone and Gerd Wotjak as invited speakers, among others. In the beginning of this year has been published a volume (“Lexical Structures and the Structure of the Lexicon”, Peter Lang) with the results of the conference.

4. Previous treatments of the idiomatic expressions and further elaboration of the theoretical perspective

The linguistic research pays currently a considerable attention (within different theoretical models and perspectives) to the study of the lexicon. Researchers working within the cognitive, functional as well as some generative approaches (labelled as “projectionist”), among others, try to establish what kind of information is represented in the lexicon, how this information is encoded in words, what mechanisms allow to connect the words and their meaning and to what extent lexical information determines grammatical processes.

The interest in these and other questions related to the lexicon emerged in the middle 60s within syntactic models, when some authors pointed to the necessity of establishing lexical restrictions for syntax-specific processes (cf. Newmeyer, 1980). This line of research has been developed in various directions and has gain a high level of formal precision within the treatments of the level called lexicon-syntax interface (there are a number of proposals, see De Miguel, 1992, Moreno, 2003, Mendikoetxea, in press, and Batiukova, 2006, for the review of some of them). In the last years this proposals made a qualitative jump descending from the level of lexical items (which are not considered atomic entities any longer) to the level of their internal structure; is being tested the hypothesis that at least some sublexical properties of the words determine crucially their participation in certain grammatical processes and their interpretation in context.

One of the most widely known representatives of this new perspective, consisting in decomposing the meaning in highly structured semantic primitives (cf. Wotjak, 2006), is Pustejovsky (1991, 1995, 2000), whose model has made a great impact because it provides a researcher with efficient tools to account for certain lexical-syntactic and purely semantic phenomena that have remained unexplained so far. The author suggests that there exist two kinds of structures in the lexicon, the Event Structure (ES) and the Qualia Structure (QS), which encode word-internal or sublexical

information referring to the phases of the event and certain properties related to the denoted entity (such as the form, internal constitution, the bringing about and the purpose) respectively. For example, the qualia structure of the noun *novel* would specify that its function is to be *read* (telic role), that it is brought about by the process of *writing* (agentive role), that it is characterized as a *book* among other objects (formal role) and that it constitutes a part of a larger domain, *narrative* (constitutive role) (see Pustejovsky, 1995: 78). The resort to the kind of information presumably encoded in the event structure and the qualia structure has allowed to make progress in the study of a number of apparently asystematic phenomena, for instance, the idiomatic expressions.

Idiomatic expressions constitute a highly problematic and not clearly delimited area, which includes what is usually called idioms (like *meter la pata*, 'to put one's foot in it'), collocations (of the type of *rogar encarecidamente* 'to kindly beg') and metaphorical extensions (*salir el sol* 'the sun sets', lit.: 'goes out'). In spite of this, the study of idiomatic expressions has been paid a considerable attention lately and there are a number of recent publications on this topic: cf., for instance, *Diccionario fraseológico* by Manuel Seco *et al.* (2004). This increasing development is not only related to the interest in lexical studies (see above); the new approaches have provided theoretical foundations and precise methodological tools for a productive and efficient analysis of this kind of expressions. One of the most representative instances of these studies is *Diccionario REDES (Las palabras en su contexto, Words in their context)* edited by Ignacio Bosque (2004); the conception and creation of this dictionary has benefited precisely from Pustejovsky's proposal concerning semantic extensions of lexical items in different contexts. One of the main claims made in Bosque (2004) is that there are no free combinations of words, within and also outside the area of idioms and collocations; there exist certain rules of lexical selection that determine the compatibility of lexemes. Note, for instance, that the expression *desear ardientemente* 'lit.: to wish fervently' turns ungrammatical if we substitute *wish* by other verb: *trabajar ardientemente* 'to work fervently' is not acceptable, for whatever reason.

As we have mentioned already, according to Pustejovsky's hypothesis the words have underspecified lexical definitions that are made precise through certain well established principles and mechanisms (coercion, co-composition and selective binding). As a result, the word meaning is modified: extended or reduced. Within our previous project (FG05) we assumed this hypothesis and took for granted that it could be useful to account for at least some semantic processes (such as polysemy, metaphor,

metonymy and meronymy), in which the meaning of the expression cannot be deduced straightforwardly from the meaning of the words that make it up. We have in mind such easy cases as *tomar una taza de té* ('to have a cup of tea'), which is interpreted metonymically, not literally. Note that this phenomenon cannot be considered fortuitous or idiosyncratic given that it is observed in a lot of languages; we can suppose therefore that it has to do with the same universal lexical mechanism. In Pustejovsky's terms, the noun *cup* is characterised lexically as 'container or receptacle' that may contain something. When it is selected as direct object by a verb like *romper* 'to break', the retrieved information is 'container'. When it is selected by a verb like *tomar* 'to take, to have', in turn, the retrieved meaning is 'contained liquid' (through the mechanisms of coercion and co-composition). The general idea is that these mechanisms operate in all the languages: speakers of any language interpret 'to have a cup of tea' as 'to drink tea' and not as 'to ingest a solid object' (cf. Climent, 2000, and De Miguel, 2003). Thus, the phenomenon of metonymy, considered usually as special or rhetoric, turns out to be a regular process, perfectly explainable as a consequence of the properties of the words and the operation of certain principles that allow also to predict its impact on the syntax and the semantic interpretation.

If this hypothesis is valid, it could account for similar behaviour of idiomatic expressions in such different languages as Spanish, English, Russian and Romanian, without resorting to cultural or encyclopaedic explanations. In the case of motion verbs, which are the object of study of our project, there are a lot of idiomatic expressions reinterpreted as referring to the area of the conversation: *salirse del tema* ('to get off the point', lit.: 'to come out of the theme'), *ir al grano* ('to get straight to the point', lit.: 'to go to the grain'), *entrar en materia* ('to go straight into the subject'), etc. The fact that similar expressions can be found in other mentioned languages cannot be considered as mere coincidence: cf. Russian *vychodit'/vyjti iz sebja* ('to lose one's temper', lit.: 'to go out oneself') and *xodit' vokrug da okolo* ('to beat about the bush', lit.: 'to go around') or Romanian *a bate câmpii* ('to beat about the bush', lit.: 'to beat the fields') and *a se ține de-o parte* ('to keep out of something', lit.: 'to keep on one side').

From the cognitive perspective (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) these parallelisms could be attributed to general cognitive processes, but it still remains to be accounted for how they are materialized in the syntax of different languages. The hypothesis we handle does provide necessary tools to explain how this "jump" into the syntax occurs (due to the principles and mechanisms mentioned above), independently from the

validity of the basic assumption underlying this approach, which can be characterized as universal and generative, and, therefore, different in various aspects from the cognitive model (see Fodor and Lepore, 1998, for criticism of Pustejovsky's framework). On the other hand, the existence of dialectal variation we are going to deal with as well does not make the hypothesis less viable because we hope to prove that it also derives from the general processes typical of each variety.

5. The distribution of work within the research group

The distribution of work within the project is established according to the specialization and the research interests of each member:

–Definitive establishment of the corpus will be shared by all the group. The collection of data is carried out by the PhD student Romana Radulescu and the external collaborator Olga Batiukova under the supervision of Azucena Palacios, an expert in variation and field work. In this phase of the project the field work will be undertaken as well.

–The validation of general hypotheses will be supervised by Elena De Miguel, whose research is concerned with lexical processes in Spanish from the perspective of the Generative Lexicon.

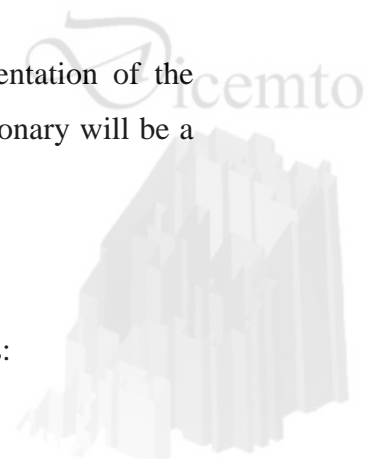
–The analysis and comparison of corpus data (idiomatic expressions in standard Spanish, their dialectal and sociolectal varieties and the corresponding expressions in English, Russian and Romanian) will require the collaboration of all the members of the group and will be coordinated by Ana Serradilla, who has a wide experience in the study of idiomatic expressions, and by Azucena Palacios. Olga Batiukova and Romana Radulescu will contribute the knowledge of their mother tongues to the comparative study.

–The consolidation of the theoretical basis and definitive establishment of the analysis will be a task shared by Elena De Miguel, Olga Batiukova and Romana Radulescu.

–Finally, the organization of a scientific meeting for the presentation of the results of the project and the elaboration and publication of a short dictionary will be a collective work of the group.

6. The applicability of the project

The results of our research could be applied to the following areas:



–Foreign language learning. It is often the case that non-native speakers with a high level of proficiency in foreign language do not manage to have a good command of the use of idiomatic expressions as regards to their meaning (because it cannot be deduced from the meaning of separate lexical items) and their context of use (the register and situation in which they can be used). This diminishes their competence even when quiet acceptable level has been acquired. For this reason, the study of mechanisms involved in the generation and interpretation of the mentioned expressions will facilitate considerably their correct acquisition by the students.

Among the possible beneficiaries of the results of this project can be mentioned Russian and Romanian immigrants residing in Madrid Region.

–Lexicography. As it has been mentioned above, this project opens the possibility of creating Dictionaries of Idiomatic Expressions that, apart from their meaning and possible translations, refer to their context of use, their possible variants in other registers and, especially, the mechanisms determining their generation and behaviour.

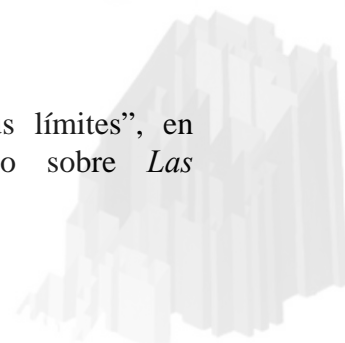
7. Coordination with other related projects

Since the beginning of the project we have maintained contact with researchers and research groups in Japan (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Kobe University of Foreign Studies, Nihon University), Slovenia (University of Ljubljana) and Italy (the research group of Università degli Studi Roma III, lead by Raffaele Simone, who is planning to create a center of lexical studies “Centro sulla parola”).

The participants of the present research project form, together with some linguists of the above mentioned foreign research institutions, the group UPSTAIRS, *Unidad para el Estudio de la Palabra. Estructura interna y relaciones sintácticas* (*Research Unit for Study of the Word. Internal Structure and Syntactic Relations*), which is being evaluated at present in order to be included into the Register of Officially Recognized Research Groups of UAM.

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