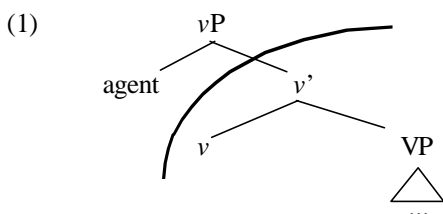


5.

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A Three-Legged Chicken

Marantz 1997, building on observations of Marantz 1984, claims that the domain for “special meanings” is v' .



The idea is that the head that projects an agent provides a boundary across which idiomatic elements cannot be created. In other words, the list of semantically idiosyncratic words or phrases (what we normally think of as the “lexicon”) cannot contain any piece of phrase structure that includes/dominates an agent position. One of the generalizations that, according to Marantz, falls out from this hypothesis is the nonexistence of idioms containing fixed agentive pieces. Any idiom which does contain a subject must be such that the subject is not an agent. “The shit hit the fan” is not a counterexample since we don’t interpret this expression agentively.

In Kannada, there is an idiomatic expression which fits this descriptive generalization but is not explained by the “domain of special meanings” hypothesis.

- (2) tannu hid-id-a kooL-ige muuru keelu
 self-NOM catch-PST-REL chicken-DAT three legs
 ‘The chicken that one caught has three legs’

The idiom in (2) means that the person being referred to (i.e., the person who caught the three-legged chicken) is persisting to hold an unreasonable position despite evidence to the contrary (Amritavalli 1991). This idiom has the form of a possession sentence in which the possessor subject is marked with dative case and the possessed element is not morphologically casemarked. The subject itself is a complex NP containing a relative clause. Although the subject itself is not an agent, the subject contains a relative clause which includes an agent position. The agent position inside the relative clause can be filled by any NP, as in (3), although (2) is the most polite way of using the expression.

- (3) alec hid-id-a kooL-ige muuru keelu
 Alec catch-PST-REL chicken-DAT three legs
 ‘The chicken that Alec caught has three legs’

This idiom fits Marantz’s descriptive generalization because it does not have a fixed agent. However, the idiom requires building syntactic structure that includes the agentive *v*P. This is because the agent position is contained within a relative clause (which, in turn, is inside the subject of the possession relation). The structure of (2) is as in:

- (4) [IP [NP [CP [IP self-NOM t_i catch]-REL][NP chicken_i-DAT]] [NP three legs]]

The complex NP subject contains a relative clause CP, which includes an agentive verb with an agent. Because the relative clause is an obligatory part of this idiom, the idiom requires building a structure larger than (1), namely the relative CP inside the subject NP. Therefore, maintaining Marantz’s explanation of the “no-fixed-agent idioms” generalization would require either complicating the inclusion relation over which the domain of special meanings is defined or else allowing nonmonotonic structure composition, so that the agent can be merged into its nonroot position inside the idiom.

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