

# Idioms and Domain Boundaries

Peter Svenonius

*CASTL, University of Tromsø*

Handout for Argument Structure Seminar

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## 1 Claim: Idioms do not span a ‘domain’ boundary

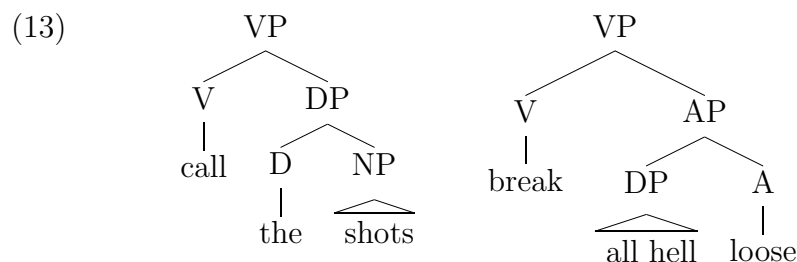
- (1) Idioms do not span a boundary approximately corresponding to Chomsky’s *vP*
- (2) Idioms can contain *vP*-internal material (Marantz (1984))
  - a. *kick the bucket* ‘die’
  - b. *pass muster* ‘meet with approval’
  - c. *pass the buck* ‘shirk responsibility’
  - d. *pass the hat* ‘request donations’
  - e. *bring down the house* ‘stimulate an audience to an enthusiastic response’
  - f. *call off the dogs* ‘stop threatening’
  - g. *call the shots* ‘be in charge’
  - h. *climb the walls* ‘become agitated with boredom’
  - i. *lay an egg* ‘put on a lackluster performance’
  - j. *gum up the works* ‘slow down or complicate operations’
  - k. *miss the boat* ‘be too late’
  - l. *fly the coop* ‘escape’
- (3) They can even contain subjects, presumably introduced within *vP*
  - a. *Heads will roll* ‘people are going to be punished’
  - b. *The shit hit the fan* ‘a seriously bad thing happened’
  - c. *All hell broke loose* ‘the situation became chaotic’
  - d. *The cat is out of the bag* ‘the secret has become known’
  - e. *The jig is up* ‘the deception has come to an end’
- (4) And idioms may consist of material outside *vP*, if they do not also contain *vP*-internal material
  - a. *as X (would) have it* ‘according to X’
  - b. *as X as can be* ‘very much X’
  - c. *be that as it may* ‘despite that’
  - d. *come what may* ‘whatever happens’
  - e. *be going to* in-progress future
  - f. *be about to* immediate future
  - g. PRES *be to* ‘must’
  - h. *could do with* ‘need’
  - i. *couldn’t be X-er* ‘very X’

## 2 Illustration from Causatives

- (5) The inner causative is syntactically opaque (Shibatani 1972; 1973; 1976)
- a. Taroo-wa Hanako-ni zibun-no huku-o ki-sase-ta.  
*Taroo-TOP Hanako-DAT self-GEN clothes-ACC wear-O.CS-PST*  
'Taroo<sub>i</sub> made Hanako<sub>j</sub> put on his<sub>i</sub>/her<sub>j</sub> clothes'
- b. Taroo-wa Hanako-ni zibun-no huku-o ki-se-ta.  
*Taroo-TOP Hanako-DAT self-GEN clothes-ACC wear-CS-PST*  
'Taroo<sub>i</sub> put on his<sub>i</sub> clothes on Hanako'
- (6) Idioms may combine with Inner or Outer cause
- a. Yaji-ga tob-u  
*cheer-NOM fly-T*  
'There was cheering'
- b. Shigeo-ga yaji-o tob-as-u  
*Shigeo-NOM cheer-ACC fly-CS-T*  
'Shigeo cheered'
- (7) Idioms may require Inner cause
- a. Shigeo-ga fuhei-o nar-as-u  
*Shigeo-NOM complaint-ACC ring-CS-T*  
'Shigeo complained'
- b. \*Fuhei-ga nar-u  
*complaint-NOM ring-T*
- (8) Outer cause is not included in idioms
- (9) Compare the distribution of *make*
- a. *make a killing* 'earn lots of money'  
b. *make a night of* 'spend the night doing'  
c. *make a run for it* 'escape'  
d. *make a beeline for* 'go straight to'  
e. *make a pass at* 'direct a romantic overture at'  
f. *make light of* 'downplay'  
g. *make fun of* 'mock'  
h. *make X(self) scarce* 'be absent'  
i. *make hamburger of* 'mess up'  
j. *make off with* 'abscond with'  
k. *make sense* 'be coherent or understandable'  
l. *make waves* 'create a stir'  
m. *make out* 'neck'  
n. *make X's mind up* 'decide'
- (10) \**make DP verb* (where *verb* is part of the idiom but DP is free)
- (11)
- a. *make the fur fly* 'start a fight'  
b. *make X's head spin* 'bewilder X'  
c. *make X's blood boil* 'infuriate X'

### 3 Idioms and constituency

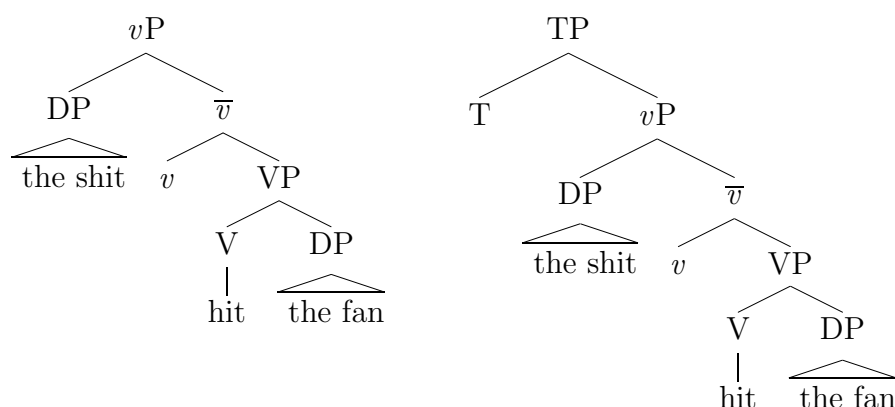
(12) A fairly common assumption: Idioms are constituents, listed in the lexicon



(14) Tense is not part of most verbal idioms, even those in which the subject is included

- a. The shit hits the fan
- b. The shit hit the fan
- c. The shit has hit the fan
- d. The shit will hit the fan
- e. The shit might hit the fan

(15) T merges outside *vP*



(16) But: Parts of idioms can be ‘open’

- a. *keep tabs on DP* ‘keep apprised of DP’s actions’
- b. *part company with DP* ‘leave DP’
- c. *close ranks behind DP* ‘collectively support DP’
- d. *close the door on DP* ‘rule out DP’
- e. *fall in love with DP* ‘develop intense emotional obsession with DP’
- f. *fly in the face of DP* ‘run counter to DP’
- g. *hold a candle to DP* ‘compare favorably to DP’ (NPI)

(17) Especially possessors

- a. *bend DP’s ear* ‘talk a lot to DP’
- b. *breathe down DP’s neck* ‘put pressure on DP’
- c. *clip DP’s wings* ‘restrict DP’s freedom’
- d. *cramp DP’s style* ‘interfere with DP’
- e. *get under DP’s skin* ‘irritate DP’
- f. *bet DP(self)’s bottom dollar* ‘be certain’
- g. *drown DP(self)’s sorrows* ‘drink to relieve depression’

- (18) Other discontinuous idioms
- know DP from Adam* ‘have any familiarity with DP’ (NPI)
  - drop DP a line* ‘contact DP’
  - give DP the time of day* ‘show respect for DP’ (NPI)
  - haul DP over the coals* ‘reprimand DP’
  - get DP across* ‘communicate DP’
- (19) Parts of idioms can be modified
- The shit hit the proverbial fan
  - The DHS kept close tabs on us
  - We laid an occasional egg
  - (Things will settle down as soon as) a few heads have rolled

## 4 V and P

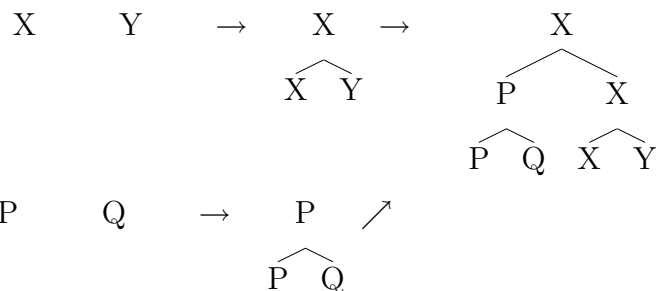
- (20) There are many idioms of the form in (21), but few of the form in (22).
- (21) Verb-particle constructions
- rip DP off* ‘plagiarize DP’
  - take DP on* ‘challenge DP’
  - clue DP in* ‘inform DP’
  - crack DP up* ‘amuse DP’
  - live DP down* ‘become dissociated from DP’
  - put DP out* ‘inconvenience DP’
- (22) Verbs with prepositions
- confide in DP* ‘share a secret with DP’
  - grow on DP* ‘become attractive to DP’
  - get to DP* ‘begin to irritate DP’
  - toy with DP* ‘manipulate DP’
  - guard against DP* ‘be wary of DP’
  - gun for DP* ‘have hostile intentions toward DP’
- (23) When the form of P is predictable from the meaning of the collocation, then P is not a frozen part of the idiom
- toy with DP*                      *depend on DP*
  - play with DP*                      *rely on DP*
  - mess with DP*                      *count on DP*
  - screw with DP*                      *bank on DP*
  - fuck with DP*                      *lean on DP*
  - fool with DP*                      *call on DP*
  - fight with DP*                      *hinge on DP*
  - lock horns with DP*              *base DP on DP*
  - pick a fight with DP*              *build on DP*
  - get tough with DP*              *rest on DP*
- (24) So even some of the examples in (22) are not Verb-Preposition idioms, just verbal idioms which appear with PPs

## 5 An Extension Condition

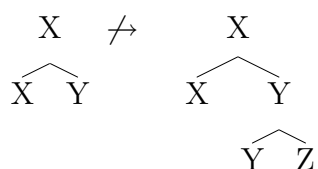
(25) The structural generalizations made in §3 suggest that idioms have structure in the lexicon

(26) The patterns of discontinuous idioms suggests a weakening of the EXTENSION CONDITION (Chomsky 1993)

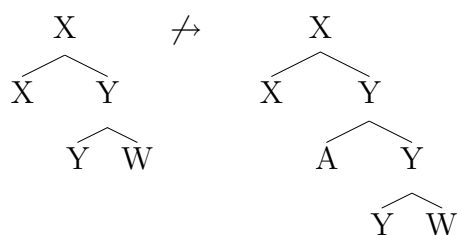
(27) Extension Condition: Merge targets roots



(28) Illicit under EC: Inserting a complement



(29) Illicit under EC: Late adjunction

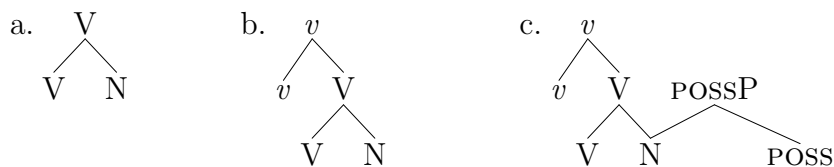


(30) An alternative to the EC which would still rule out (28) and (29):

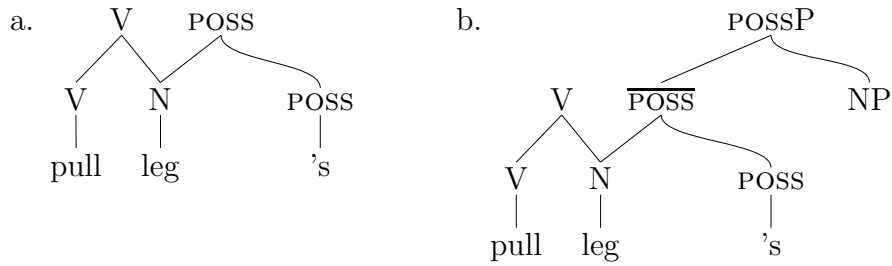
Merge targets any node, but only an undominated node may project

(31) Consequence:

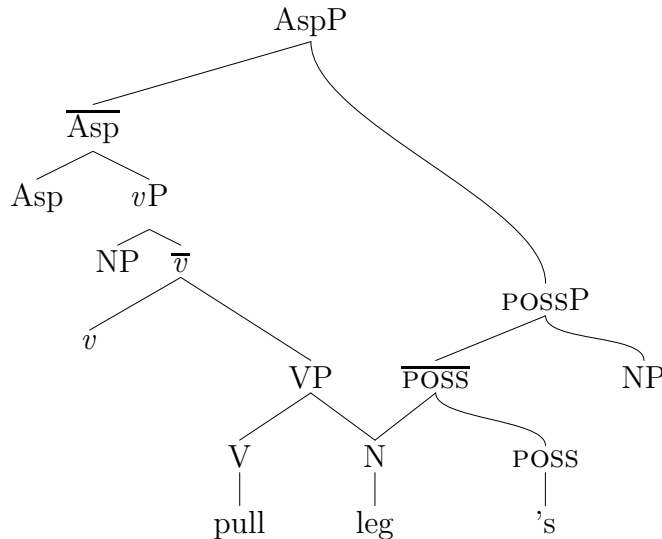
Selection of a non-root node creates a multi-rooted structure



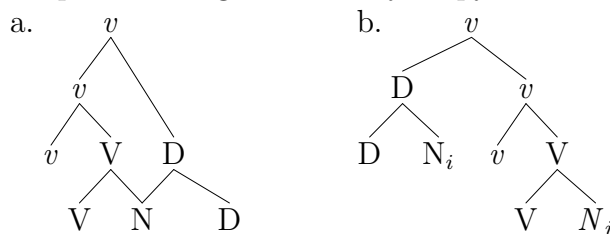
(32) A possessor merges without a dominated node having to project



(33) Multi-rooted structures are resolved by Rmerge (multidominance)



(34) Compare Rmerge to Sideways copy

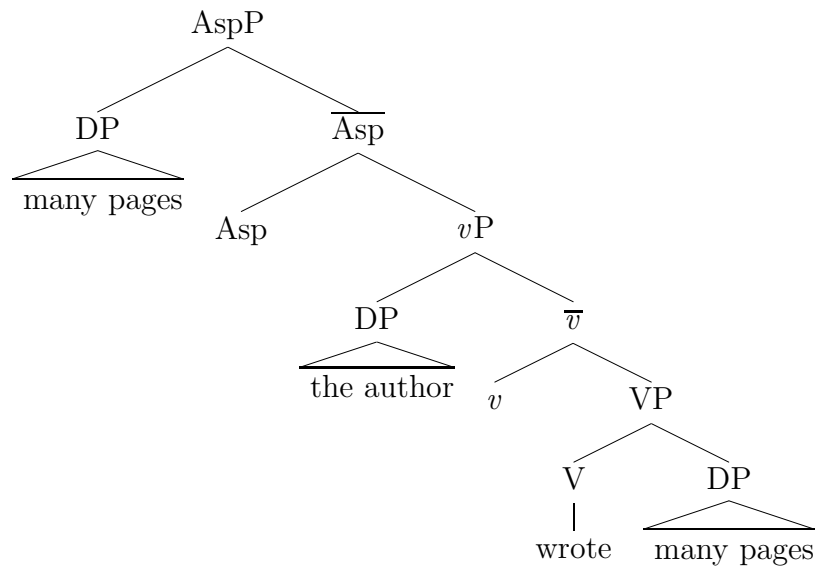


(35) Support for structures like those in (33)b from reconstruction facts: Sportiche (2003), Williams (2003); arguments for multidominance rather than copies: Starke (2001), Gärtner (2002)

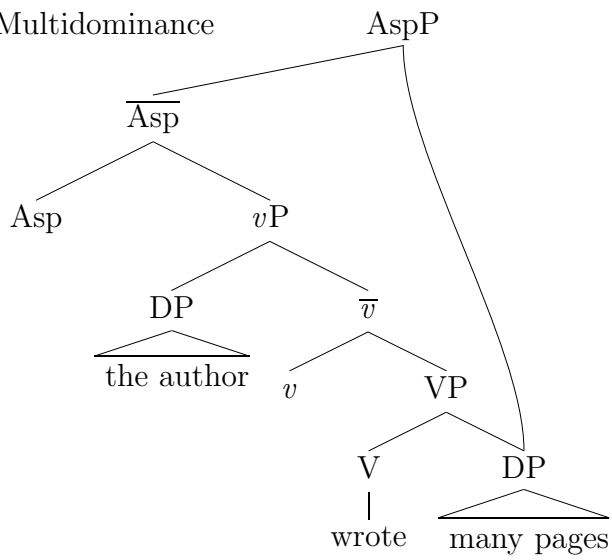
(36) Object DP is licensed outside VP

- Multiple positions for object DPs: Johnson (1991), Travis (1992), Bowers (1993)
- Object Case-checked in SpecAgr<sub>O</sub>: Chomsky (1993), Koizumi (1993), Watanabe (1993), Collins and Thráinsson (1993)
- DPs scramble, NPs remain V-adjacent: Diesing (1992), Haeberli (2002)
- Connection between object licensing and aspect: Hoekstra (1992), Mulder (1992), van Hout (1998)
- Object DP licensed in SpecAspP, outside VP: Borer (2005)

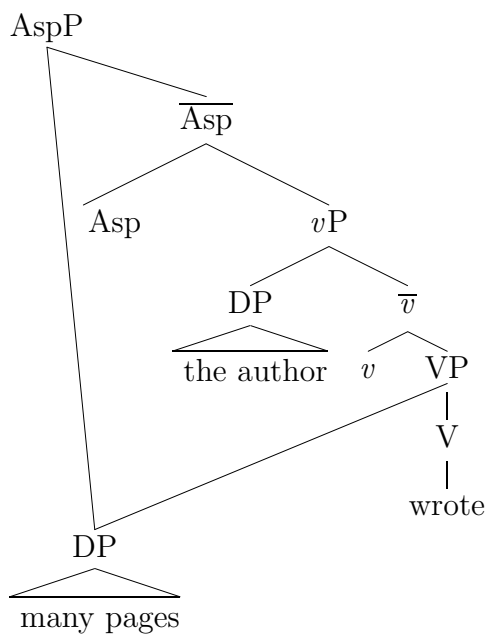
(37) Copy



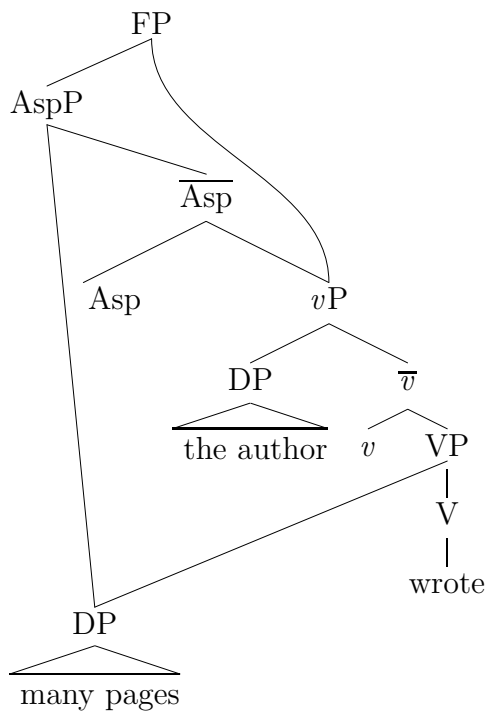
(38) Multidominance



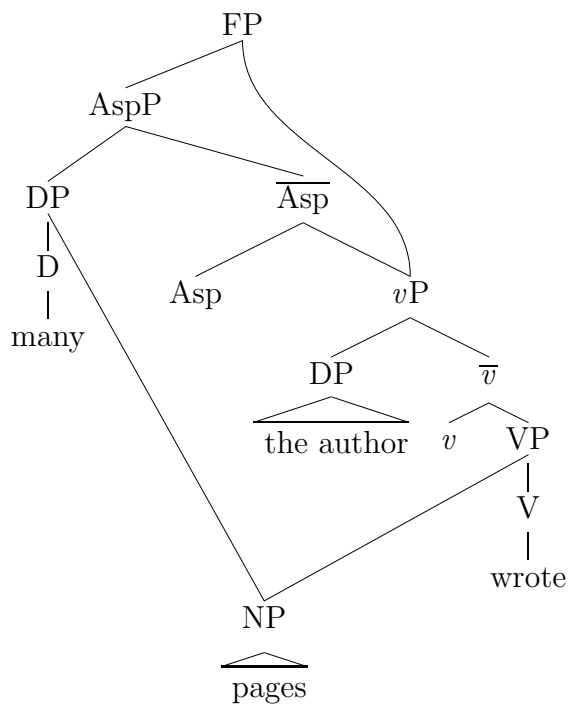
(39)



(40) Remnant fronting of *v*P



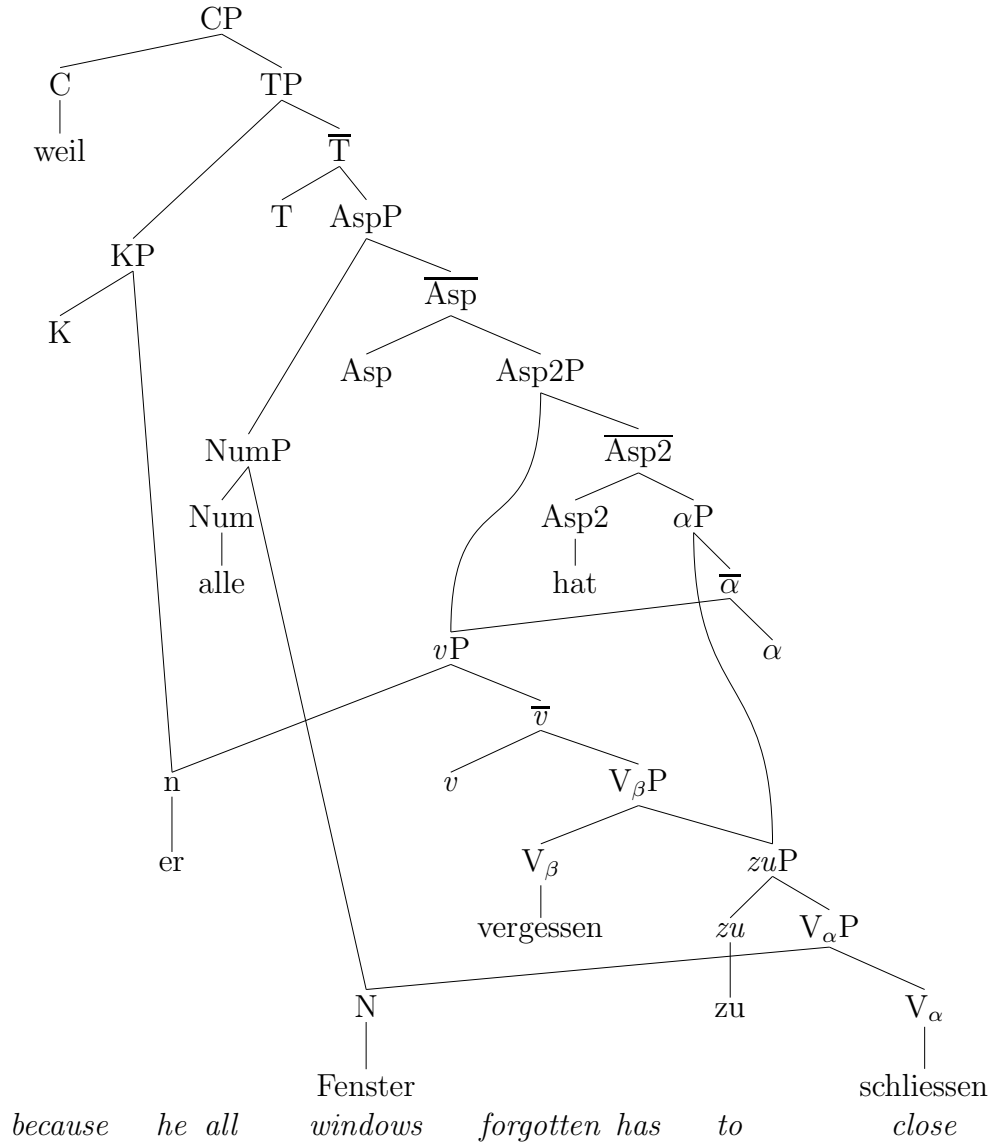
(41) Combined with multi-root (Banyan) approach to DP



(42) Restructuring and scope, Bobaljik and Wurmbrand (2003)

weil er alle Fenster vergessen hat zu schliessen  
*because he all windows forgot has to close*  
 ‘because he has forgotten to close all the windows

(43) A banyan tree analysis (Svenonius 2004b)



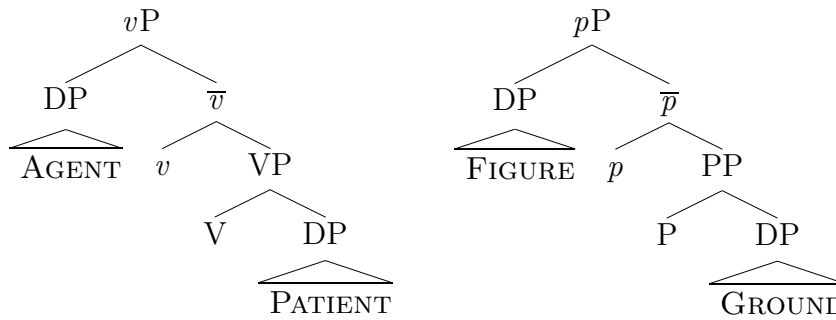
## 6 Particles and Prepositions

(44) Basic Figure–Ground asymmetry in prepositional semantics (Talmy 1978, Talmy 2000, Svenonius 1994, Svenonius 2004a)

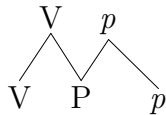
- a. fly the firefighters up (*the firefighters* = FIGURE)
- b. fly up the mountain (**the mountain** = GROUND)

- (45)
  - a. roll *the car* down **the slope**
  - b. stick *the knife* in **the butter**
  - c. slide *the envelope* under **the door**
  - d. dribble *honey* all over **the manuscript**

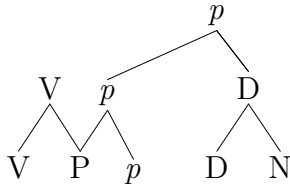
(46) From Svenonius (2003)



(47) A verb-particle collocation can be stored in the lexicon in the following form:



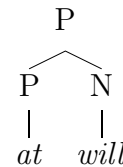
(48) A Figure argument can be merged in to the *p* projection



(49) There is no similar way of storing a V and P in the lexicon with an open space for the Ground

(50) Note that P and the Ground can be stored

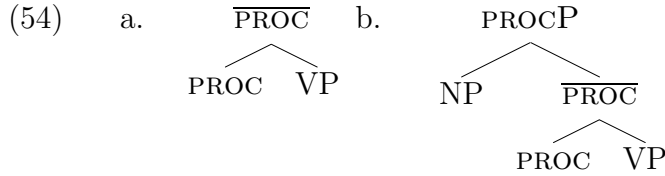
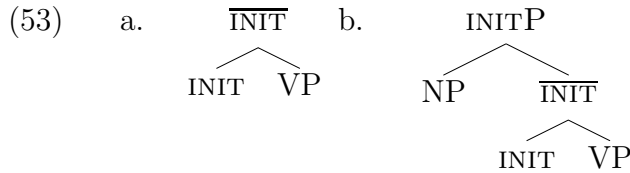
- |    |                            |                          |
|----|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. | <i>at will</i>             | <i>at a loss</i>         |
| b. | <i>at work</i>             | <i>under the weather</i> |
| c. | <i>at best</i>             | <i>up a creek</i>        |
| d. | <i>below par</i>           | <i>in a pickle</i>       |
| e. | <i>in limbo</i>            | <i>on the take</i>       |
| f. | <i>in love</i>             | <i>on the run</i>        |
| g. | <i>in luck</i>             | <i>in the hole</i>       |
| h. | <i>in gear</i>             | <i>for the birds</i>     |
| i. | <i>on time</i>             | <i>to the letter</i>     |
| j. | <i>by hook or by crook</i> | <i>by no means</i>       |



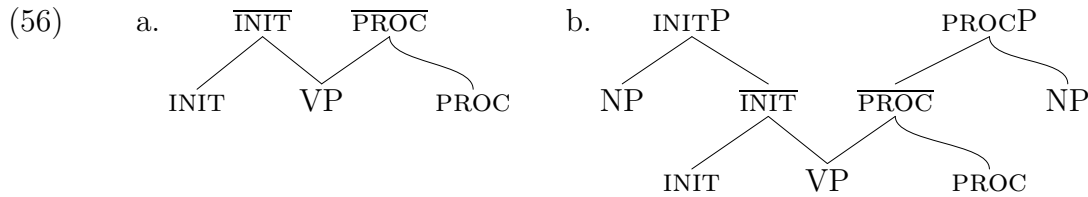
## 7 Another solution

(51) A result of this story so far is that there can be no transitive *v*-V idioms, i.e. verbs with an obligatory external argument and an obligatory internal argument cannot be listed *v*-V complexes. That is because the same considerations that prevent merge in the complement of P when something dominates P prevent merge in the complement of V when something dominates V.

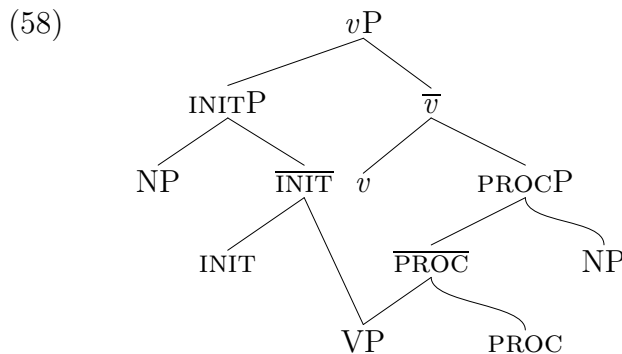
(52) Following Borer (2005) and Ramchand (2005), thematic roles are assigned in the specifiers of functional heads dominating VP.



(55) The Banyan tree model makes it possible for two thematic role assigning heads to relate different arguments to the same VP event.



(57) The two thematic role assigning projections are related by a ‘leads to’ relation (Ramchand 2005) which can be overtly syntactically represented as *v*.



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