

ON THE GRAY AREAS OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The central core of research in this chapter is the morphological, syntactic and semantic blocking of general principles applied to canonical expressions in English, or as it might be called in traditional references: focusing on grammar behaviour, especially in relation to *'the breaking of the rules'*.

RESUMEN

El núcleo central de la investigación de este capítulo es el bloqueo morfológico, sintáctico y semántico de los principios generales aplicados a expresiones no-canónicas en inglés o, como se podría denominar en referencias tradicionales, trata de la conducta gramatical, especialmente en relación con *'la ruptura de las reglas'*.

RÉSUMÉ

Le noyau central de l'investigation dans ce chapitre est le blocage morphologique, syntaxique et sémantique des principes généraux appliqués aux expressions non canoniques en anglais, ou, comme on pourrais appeler en références traditionnels, il s'agit de la conduite grammatical, spécialement en relation avec *'la rupture des règles'*.

1. INTRODUCTION

To be direct about the matter, our interest in this area of language is due to the complexity of these expressions either from their formal

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appearance or their semantic result. GAL¹ is a problematic linguistic term as many others, which refers to obscurity of meaning through formal typical or atypical deviations.

Some of the pieces that compose this area of language (for example there are complete academic books listing idioms, sayings and proverbs) have been treated in one way or other, but as a whole we often feel resigned to provide adequate explanations of meaning². Inherent features often block morphological and syntactic general principles and provide an exceptional field of study to motivate creativeness.

In this sense, our central core of research is the morphological, syntactic and semantic blocking of general principles applied to canonical expressions in English, or as it might be called in traditional references focusing on grammar behaviour, especially in relation to 'the breaking off the rules'.

From the point of view of teaching, this field in general, has not been exhaustively analysed since it has been maintained as something that has to be learnt by heart. This is probably true, due to the fact that attention has been paid to form, and to internal meaning deciphering, but not to internal grammatical understanding. It is our purpose to provide new ways of focusing the treatment of these structures in combination.

2. OVERVIEW

Everyday non-canonical and idiomatic phrases are an integral part of the English language that are used and heard constantly. Some of them are very common phrases widely and frequently used, well understood and generally agreed upon meaning. However, very often, the widely understood meaning of the phrase seems to have nothing to do with the words that compose the phrase and they keep forming a big area of realisations in both oral and written mediums.

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper: Academic language/lectures (AL); Cambridge Dictionary of Idioms (CDI); Canonical (C); Clichés (CL); Collocations (CO); Extended from or in relation to a Canonical referent (ECR); Gray area(s) (GA/GAs); Gray areas of language (GAL); Idioms (I); Non-canonical expressions (NC); Opaque (O); Spoken Language (SL); SUNDAY TIMES (ST).

² See, for instance, Lipka (1971, p. 215) 'Such collocations must be learnt as complete expressions, which are automatically triggered and reproduced'.

Linguistics is the study of our knowledge of language in its all dimensions and the Lexicon consists of words and the rules of formation. Dictionaries, the most exhaustive written documents, and speakers are the best examples we have. Whereas dictionaries normally provide the necessary information to interpret single and complex items and their units of meanings, spontaneous corpus of oral data would define the way items are used and demonstrate their importance in the actual state of the language. Dictionaries include a list of words containing acoustic and graphological information, but also syntactic and semantic. Besides, they also provide information about (I: kick the bucket), (CL: it's a hard life) and CO in their varied typology (compounds, set phrases and non-canonical expressions in combination), etc. Given that language is in constant development, they need to be revised constantly in order to incorporate new realisations, but care must be taken, as some only enjoy a certain period of time. Now and thanks to development of technology this task, in spite of its complexity is easier to hold.

This view of unlimited linguistic production leads us to distinguish non-canonical expressions from regular expressions. A regular expression is a pattern that describes a set of strings. In concrete manifestations of language regular expressions are constructed in a similar way to arithmetic expressions, by using various operators to combine smaller expressions. For example, a sentence is said to be canonical if it follows the normal patterns that a language follows; thus, it might consist of a predicate (the essential constituent), and the sometimes optional ones, the subject and complement.

At the level of phrase that constituent which contains or is not restricted to include the normal constituents the various types of phrases do accept.

At the level of word, those realisations follow the conventional rules of formation. Lexical items at any of these levels, which do not follow formal or semantic conventional parameters, are considered to belong to the Gas of language and to be non-canonical from either a formal or a semantic point of view. Though they can be considered to be of irregular nature, they do not belong to the field of irregularities already incorporated into the language.

Sub-categorisation in grammar, as well as in all other disciplines of study is the way to differentiate deviations of the behaviour of realisations that have something in common: GA in language. This complex superordinate term, which includes diverse realisations put together under the nuclear core of idiomacity, though deriving from canonicity by exten-

sion and arrangement, provides basis and material enough to be treated independently in spite of its formal elements. Besides, due to the fact that some GAs are the result of semi-finished products of language certain categories are to be established.

Nobody doubts that all language processes of any kind are rich in linguistic interest. Studying them will provide us with good insight into the innovative resources of language; but altering the shape of focusing topics and patterns of language does not always result in an entirely new discovery³.

During the last decades of the xxth century, a great improvement in the understanding of the behaviour of languages in all its dimensions has been achieved, showing that the power of language is extraordinary, in the sense that understanding language is to understand the self and understanding the self is to understand society and the world.

In relation to that there exist complex areas of language in English, which deserve a better understanding in order to facilitate human relations. They are especially complicated for non-natives but they are not easy for natives either. That one can, probably, survive without many of them, might be true, but they are there, conforming the whole, and sometime or another one has to face them.

If we take into account that simple meanings are not simple at all, as they rely on remarkable cognitive mapping capacities, and on human ability to resolve massive under-specification, complex meaning is to be thoroughly analysed and group together for general understanding.

Expressions that show complex meaning extended from simple canonical representations of language in one way or another, in one time or another, are being produced spontaneously. In fact, we are not conscious of performing these operations when we speak, think or listen. Thus, they are rather mind-language forms combined together with knowledge or experience of the world, which are little by little being conformed to a rule, in spite of their a-grammaticality.

Whether they are the result of the deep thought of intellectuals and become popular, they came into use through popular wisdom, or through

³ In 1884, Gold Brown in the introductory notes to his *Grammar of English Grammars*, affirms, 'Of all the works of man, language is the most enduring, and partakes the most of eternity. And, as our own language, so far as thought can project itself into the future, seems likely to be coeval with the world, and to spread vastly beyond even its present immeasurable limits there cannot easily be a nobler object of ambition than to purify and better it' (p. 665).

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the need of combining meaning, when a word for it does not yet exist, it is not a matter of importance here. The fact is that these expressions are quite abundant as our sample of the corpus of data shows in everyday language as used in mass media.

This first step will serve as a necessary means to settle the kind of linguistic object we will be dealing with. Further analysis will obligate us to enter into formal distinctions. In general, they operate as follows:

- The phrase once made sense, in spite of referring to something obsolete.

1. Drop a dime.

- The phrase might make sense only if you know some relatively obscure piece of information.

2. Drop the hammer (SL).

- The phrase makes reference to a popular story or event.

3. Battling windmills (SL).

- Rhyme, either for entertainment value, or for emphasising the focus of the topic, is the core of the phrase; this can be obtained through various means:

- Repetition

4. Even steven; Hocus pocus, etc. (SL).

5. I am the real Easter Bunny, hop hop! (www.winamilliondollars.com).

- Spontaneous repetition

6. a) Yes, he must have a bob or two,

- b) Bob's your uncle (SD).

- The original wording of the phrase has been altered in its repeated use. This includes abbreviations and mispronunciations.

7. Half cocked' (To be less than fully prepared) ← going off Half cocked (SL).

8. On the wagon (not to drink alcohol) ← on the water wagon (SL).

- Other categories are phrases that are reasonably obvious as their meaning is transparent, such as:

9. Clip someone's wings (reduce someone's mobility) (AL).

10. Run up a bill (AL).

- Two lexical items including different categories are combined

11. Lame duck (ST/SP).
12. Run up [perform quickly] put up with [tolerate] (SL).

or even combining grammatical items

13. So as [in the manner that], so as to,

which represent one unit of meaning, ranging from the transparent to the totally opaque.

- Two phrases, partially transparent, may appear in combinations with another phrase that they overlap, that is the case of *fluent command* and *command of a language* in,

14. Fluent command of a language (AL).

- Others are just typical sayings that provide a semi-transparent implicit assumption about the topic in action, going further than its conceptualization, as for example,

15. An apple a day keeps the doctor away (SL).

- Some performances can suffer atypical deviations from a formal point of view, apart from non-grammatical word order; they are common expressions, such as,

16. What about my cup of tea? (SL).

One of the more striking characteristics is that most phrases, in spite of their canonicity are so overused that they have lost their conceptual meaning. In sum, since meaning is so intangible it is difficult to find to persons who might agree on the same meaning of a word or expression, what is obvious to one person can be obscure to another, as it is exemplified in 17,

17. *Keep it under your hat* [to keep something secret] (AL).

If the essence of science is to adopt only those theoretical categories, which it is impossible to do without, either because they are conceptually necessary, or because they are empirically unavoidable, then these performances need to have a well developed specific place in the mind of individuals as well as in grammar, otherwise individual's linguistic creativeness would not develop freely. In linguistics, in spite of Chomsky's minimalist theory, it would be impossible to follow this mechanism except for a primary stage of learning and for formal understanding.

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In that sense, one could think that all of them constitute idiomatic combinations, which are relevant in the sense Bolinger (1966) speaks of,

“there may be used as ‘prefabs’, which the speaker need not create himself but which he retrieves from meaning”.

Another plank in the GAL is the idea that they are superfluous, and probably they are if you overuse them. This might probably be applied to sayings, proverbs, and clichés, and some opaque collocations, but not in general, to those originating from looser associations and finishing in compounding and set phrases, which form an essential part of language. However, rejecting this type of linguistic projection to follow, for example, the minimalist programme ideas would make the use of communicative acts rather tedious. In fact, Chomsky’s later view of language might be very important, interesting and applicable for designing automatic programmes in order to deal with canonical expressions, which often lead us to straightforward communication. In spite of man’s desire to develop perfection, there is no doubt that human language evolved, a fact which Chomsky has recognised several times, though he is very tentative when considering the details of its evolution. He has also observed that the fact of its evolution should lead us to consider the usefulness of language in certain situations and probably this, though difficult to demonstrate, could be the reason for the existence of unusable sentences and also the reason for the lack of correspondence between formal and semantic production in concrete realisations. This conception would, no doubt, be more a matter of philosophy of language.

3. STATE OF THE ART

The connection between the frequency of certain types presented in spoken and/or in the written medium reflects their difference in use as well as their complexity and their importance for instructional or informative purposes. The fact that they are not homogeneous in spite of having core and peripheral examples, in great many occurrences, does show their behaviour to resemble that of lexical units proper, at times from a formal point of view and more frequently from a semantic line of action. This leads us to the problem that borderline cases produced by lexical items in combination come about in a good number of canonical expressions. It was my primary purpose to submit all the data to

any of the banks of English available in order to find out their frequency. This would show the importance of the lexical units that compose these pieces of language and might make it relevant both for linguistic treatment and for tuition purposes. For the moment, of the total corpora, I have only submitted some of the examples analysed in the study at hand, as a sample model.

As will be shown in this analysis, wholesome of them are found and others are not included in any of the dictionaries utilised, such as: The online *Cambridge Set of Dictionaries*, or the *Cobuild English Dictionary*, as lexical units proper in spite of specific semantic relevance.

Separate parts of the GAs of language, are being treated independently. The majority of these are also analysed as a joint group especially as idiomatic expressions. Detailed analysis of their form and meaning can be found in specific dictionaries as two main referents:

- Dictionaries categorised as general language compilers.
- Dictionaries of Phrasal verbs.
- Dictionaries of Idioms.
- Grammars and linguistic studies.

As a general rule dictionaries provide lexical information about terms. Depending on the type of dictionary (i.e., general, comprehensive, syntactic, semantic) the information given is or is not exhaustive.

In grammars and linguistic treatment, their behaviour has been especially considered in relation to their associative form and their use but not as a process of pattern reformation.

In this study we will be dealing with grammatical patterns of reforming and reinforcement both under a lexical and a structural conception. Thus, this type of language, normally studied as fixed idiomatic expressions or as lexical items proper or not, depending on the degree of their canonicity can be positioned.

We will also study those grammatical patterns the meaning of which is distinguished from their conceptual meaning, in spite of their identical form, acquiring, thus, some sort of idiomaticity, at least from a semantic point of view.

Thus, for example: from cart/horse, in the following conversation, recorded in London in January, 1999-08-17, the phrase marked in bold has been uttered:

18. a) She seems to have picked up all kinds of **lame ducks [helpless, failing business]** and traumas.
- b) Oh yes! That's her vocation.

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- c) Perhaps it is. She should have been a Minister.
- d) Yeah, but the trouble with her is she puts **all her socialist carts before the horses** (doing things in the wrong order).

Although the meaning in combination *in lame duck* goes beyond the conceptual meaning, provided by the items in question as well as by the collocation itself at its primary stage, the formal flexibility of accepting modifiers, determiners and numeratives (he is a lame duck, he is a stupid lame duck, there are two lame ducks in the white house now, etc.) facilitates the extension of meaning, and shows that they are canonical from a formal perspective have a semitransparent nature from a semantic approach as long as you know the meaning of both constituents and some of the relations of world referents. The result is that of ECR, because no specific principles block general linguistic behaviour from a formal point of view.

Several idiomatic expressions are being used so that is not neither unusual nor obscure. For example 'put the socialist carts before the horses' in 19,

- 19. He did not put all his socialist carts before the horses, otherwise (...),

shows that it can be creatively transmitted. It can be seen that it is an idiomatic expression of semitransparent nature. In addition its meaning can be deduced out of the meaning of the parts that constitute this piece of language and certain knowledge about the exterior world. Those are idiomatic phrases that are being extended out to canonical formation; there is a predicate and a complement and the gaps can be filled in quite freely.

In a sense, it appears to be a kind of negotiation process between sociocultural improvement and change, versus linguistic production and arrangement. At least, there is no doubt that semantic extension is produced on the basis of individuals and their community behaviour.

'Lame duck' [helpless, failing business], which according to the Cambridge Dictionary of English means: [someone or something that is not effective at what they do]; can not be deduced out of the meaning in the first entry of 'lame' in the dictionary: [(esp. of animals) not able to walk correctly because of physical injury to or weakness in the legs or feet].

The fact that 'lame' is being included in the Dictionary of Idioms and in the International Dictionary of General terms as a second entry, and 'lame duck' as set phrase, shows that these combinations are rather arbitrary and eclectic, as their idiomatic nature is produced essentially

when they combine. Even though one could possibly say *an old lame horse*, it is not in use. Besides, the formal restriction with regard:

- to number
- to the use of determiners,
- to word order or
- to the use of comparatives,

shows that expressions of this type involve or are involved within the non-literal use of language. This expression appears quite frequently, as in

20. Bill Clinton's a classic **lame duck** (ST, 27 September, 1999).

As Lyons (1968, p. 202) signals 'Grammatical independence is demonstrated by the tests of interruptibility and positional mobility'. Applied to most examples in the corpora in general and to *lame duck*, it can be shown **duck lame* to be impossible, without destroying the sense, whereas *lame gymnast* and *duck donald*, and such are not. Besides, both *duck and lame* as separate units may be used in a good number of occurrences. Cf.

21. A blind alley
 - (a situation or method that you have tried and discovered to be of no use. CDI),
22. A close shave/call
 - (a situation where something unpleasant or dangerous nearly happened. CDI),
23. A red letter day
 - (a day that is very important or very special. CDI).

For instance whether an expression, such as 'a red letter day', is semantically contradictory or not to other expressions containing 'red', such as 'to be in the red' [in the debt, in the minus] or 'by red tape' [bureaucratic routine]. Official rules, which do not seem necessary, make linguistic reinforcement to happen very slowly. This semantic distance should help us to distinguish phrases of idiomatic nature⁴, which

⁴ Chomsky (1965, p. 191) points out that *decide on a boat*, meaning 'choose (to buy) a boat', contains the collocation *decide on* (close construction in his terminology), whereas *decide on a boat*, meaning 'make a decision while on a boat' is a free combination (in his terminology: loose association). On the other hand free combinations allow substitution.

often have begun to be used as CO from CO proper: confer 'a blind alley', with 'a blind date' [date between to people who have never met] or 'a blind spot' [area in the retina of the eye which can not see].

Those examples above provide illustrations of the semantic bipartite action set phrases can follow: natural transparency or O presentation of meaning.

As a matter of fact, what is interesting is that we are about or within the compounding process, i.e. adding together two stems that are simply roots. And it seems to be the case that some do have limits, they restrict number of compounds or the process of becoming compounds and derivational additions, which some combinations refuse to enter in, and others do not.

In this sense my 'leif-motive' is to try to demonstrate that this study can not turn out to be a blind alley and I reserve the right to use phrases of idiomatic nature whenever relevant to meaning construction, favouring discourse.

As Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 16) point out:

"Although conversational partners can have a range of communicative purposes, these usually involve a focus on the lives and interests of the interlocutors themselves",

They go on to say that

"the interlocutors share the same physical and temporal context, and often share extensive personal background knowledge".

Thus, one might say that the choice of idiomatic phrases differs according to various individualistic and social circumstances, involving degrees of informality and formality. Moreover, any native speaker feels sensitive of the probabilistic relationship between the components of these expressions.

As far as the GAs are concerned, some (especially clichés) are mostly found in spoken rather than in written language. However, all the subcategories have their place both in oral and written documents and contribute to enriching communicative utterances, in which several pragmatic and semantic interactive intentional processes are involved. One must not forget that some of the most well known CL come from conceptualisations used by great English writers. They have initiated their way as quotations and gradually they lost their conceptual origin.

24. You put all your generative knowledge before the horses, etc.).

Thus, it is evident that extended combinations out of existing fixed idiomatic expressions are being incorporated into spoken discourse. At least by certain groups immersed in one specific topic, then in flexible written documents and later on in formal writing as well, for example [-jump out of the frying pan (and) into the fire = to go from a bad situation to an even worse one]

25. Many kids who run away from unhappy homes discover they've jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire⁵ (ST).
26. a) You know, he is at it again but he really wants you know just to sit down.
 - b) Like they just talk about how they both feel.
 - c) Out of the frying pan into the deep freeze this time.

Where two friends are discussing a third's friend's stormy marriage. They use this type of figurative language just to point out that they are making things even worse. Thus, *they jump out of the frying pan into the fire /into the deep freeze*, where a kitchen instrument is being used as point of reference for comfort as, hunger produces anger and you can solve your hunger with a frying pan if you have something to fry. They go from the hot to a cold relationship and both lexical units in combination draw attention to different emotional responses with a particular meaning to be discovered. Understanding and interpreting varies from person to person and the field of linguistic pragmatics would have a lot to say on that. Nonetheless, unless you applied what can be called the logical principle (see Sperber and Wilson: 1986) which pragmatics should have made clear if it existed, without cues, you have an idea, but many possibilities to interpret it incorrectly: [their marriage is getting worse (worse and worse); they were happily married and they are getting to divorce; they hate each other; they don't mind each other's suffering; he/she is the guilty one, etc.]. It is being extended into other meaningful structural forms, from one non-canonical lexical unit, denoting the same thing, in this case a negative connotation, which in terms of polarity implies the denial of a positive situation.

Interior monologue of a man in his 70s in a pub in London (nobody cares),

⁵ [Results for 'Out of the frying pan into the deep freeze' Document count: out (79220) of (237653) the (239301) frying (210) pan (191) into (45929) the (5282) deep (876) freeze (969)].

27. Morning⁶ day, morning night
I been free the whole day through and night
Morning day, morning night

In spite of his Irish pronunciation showing loneliness and desperation, even a foreigner could probably deduce that he had read James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Repetition of lexical items (morning, day, night) produces reinforcement of self-pragmatic interaction intended, apart from calling attention).

Different feelings can be produced out of a monologue of this type. But in 'constructio' this is the result of omitted underlying structures involving a focus on unknown interests to the interlocutors, and perhaps to the speaker himself. Spontaneous linguistic reflections or interior monologues may not mean anything or may be full of meaning. Again, we are within the field of pragmatics as far as interaction or lack of interaction is being achieved and this has much to do with the addressee being in an active or passive state in relation to the speaker.

Whereas the previous examples are found in the CDI and in the C. International Dictionary of English, amongst others, 28 and 29, meaning *to keep something secret*, are not, in spite of their idiomatic nature and polymorphism acceptability. Whereas in 28 one could think that a proper CO (power struggle) could be the core of idiomacity, in 29 neither the focus construction nor the CO (close to) force to the appropriate non-literal meaning.

28. **Keep the power struggle within yourself**, and you'll be okay. (A power struggle is a fierce, unpleasant or violent competition for power).
29. This is the time to keep your cards close to your vest. <http://www.lfmm.com/Horoscope/weekly/99Nov26.html> Taurus

Extended from *keep/play your cards close to your chest* (to not tell anyone what you plan to do).

Probably due to the fact that more popular ones such as 'keep sth under your hat', as in 30,

30. I've got some interesting news, but you must promise *to keep it under your hat for the moment*.

As a matter of fact, the external knowledge of the world might help to deduce the meaning out of context. As for the customs to keep

⁶ [Document count: morning (493) day (7400)].

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lover-notes and money under the hat or the vest was very common, but they still belong to the non-literal use of language, at least from a semantic point of view. Besides, the fact that they are somewhat transparent and are ECR allows some change ranging from physical to emotional referents:

This is the time to keep [or you should keep] all your incredible cards close to your vest

31. Keep the /your lover's notes under your hat/ vest.
32. Why **settle for rubber chicken or lousy lasagna** when you can dine well on your next flight? <http://baseball.about.com/library/weekly/aa102899.htm> (Oct., 25th).

In 32 any pragmatic understanding can be applied to every day 'hard life' in order to move people from a high to a lower degree of dignity. It is clear, though, that the conceptual meaning of eating 'chicken' or 'lasagna' has been extended to the non-literal use of language, though it maintains its formal canonicity.

4. LINGUISTIC TREATMENT

To really understand why this is possible or necessary we would take for granted that a corpus planned for the study of language, as was appropriately devised by Kloss (1977)⁷, denoting changes by deliberate planning the actual corpus or shape of a language, would not reflect the immense possibilities language has; especially, if a specific corpus for this area, taken at random, as when language is being selected is not produced spontaneously, is not included, fixing the right variables and frequencies. Even though creativeness can be dangerous, understanding behaviour of language from a descriptive point of view means to accept the actual state of it, that is, what is being produced by its own speakers, limited by the linguistic and socio-cultural restrictions proper.

From a purely linguistic point of view, two of the key concepts in any theory of language, which are to be taken into account, are canonicity and non-canonicity. But again, very precise boundaries are to be

⁷ Examples are: Standardization, coding of morphology and spelling, the development of specialized vocabulary; propagating particular attitudes to some groups of people, and so on.

proposed since vagueness and neutrality do not provide the necessary arguments for linguistic conduct.

We will not refer to C expressions, which are well-studied both in grammars and analysed and diverse theories in linguistics, and provide various means of interpretability except to point out that they constitute the formal background of NC ones.

These areas of language are, no doubt, the very last result of linguistic involution with cognition and they represent the most advanced linguistic representations elaborated by mental processes, with

- a) metaphors, ellipsis, metonymy and iconicity,
- b) and also with the misuse of the language and the tendency to economise.

Until now, formal C expressions, with the exception of a great number of atypical semantic deviations, would depend on grammar centrality as interpreted during the classical and Chomskian earlier period. For instance, Ross (1967) proposed several syntactic constraints on the operation of grammatical rules. Constraints on canonical expressions have been stated especially in purely semantic arguments, but not all of them in purely syntactic terms, which reflect organising principles apparently unique to grammar, which are sometimes assumed to be universal.

Constraints on NC reflect organising principles apparently unique to grammar deletion and semantic expansion of conceptualised meaning, i.e. a meaning that goes beyond the basic meaning in spite of the formal C or NC formation.

Due to the fact that concrete manifestations of language are said to be arbitrary in their selection of items and systematic in that they can express similar meanings, these pieces of language cannot be considered to be universal from a formal point of view. However, they might be understood to be universal from a semantic point of view in spite of their different formal behaviour/ even though similar significative units follow different morphological and syntactic patterns. The exception is clearly those expressions having one only community world referent.

Thus, one can assume that they are not universal because they do not demonstrate a similar formal appearance. More particularly some of them do not normally fit into the mould of autonomous modular syntax. Formal differences are normally apparent because they are influenced by the social behaviour of individuals and by individuals' proposals, which are being, accepted and transmitted in spite of their opacity.

However, linguistic and cognitive studies are not far from each other, and this offers no new information, if we analyse certain concepts present in academic thought since classical times.

From a purely descriptive approach, constraints on NC expressions reflect organising principles apparently unique to grammar deletion and semantic expansion of conceptualised meaning.

Some units, however, follow different morphological and syntactic patterns in different languages, as different languages are said to be able to express similar ideas following different formal patterns.

Formal differences most commonly occur because they are influenced by the social behaviour of individuals and by individuals' proposals, which are being accepted and transmitted in spite of their opacity.

This, apparently, should not constitute a major problem as people do learn how to handle non-natural form and meaning mappings; see Chomsky (1965)⁸ where he affirms that systems that cannot be acquired under 'natural' conditions may still be acquired if approached as part of a game.

Thus, it seems evident that whereas traditional and medieval scholars have been concentrating on the fact of trying to make divisions in grammar, Renaissance grammarians seemed to be right in repudiating the excess of a logical approach to grammar and thus, in returning to the actual behaviour of words. And, as a matter of fact, what has been done in and after the sixties could have been done, before because scholars of other periods should have had the main tools to focus on language behaviour: How we use language and the rules of formation.

To begin with, samples of concrete manifestations of language within the field of interpretative language from a linguistic prospective would show blocking of general principles, established both in linguistic and grammar studies. A great number of them have already been fixed but others are still in flux and they may enjoy a certain period of popularity or they may be incorporated within the language system as an interesting or essential part of a communicative act. Many of the points to be made here are part of current formal and semantic linguis-

⁸ The influence of the *Tractatus* by Wittgenstein is reflected in Chomsky's work and both his work and generative grammar work would probably have been rejected before it emerged, if we look at the difference in interpreting language between Wittgenstein's earlier and later work.

tic behaviour in the way psychologists treat the problems of structure and meaning and in the way cognitivism should be regarded.

As our corpora corroborates, there are a good number of forms, which vary in complexity and cannot be introduced cyclically, for which a meaning cannot be deduced out of the separate parts that constitute them. Thus, they have to be learnt and analysed independently for their use and reviewed from time to time in different contexts for their linguistic analysis adequacy.

If the basic interaction for cognitive linguistics is the part-part and the partwhole relation with preference given to the latter, following a different line from structural linguistics where the whole is different from the parts, and preference to the parts is given, then both formal and semantic possibilities would have to be opened to discussion through the analysis of traditional patterns or innovative patterns proposed.

Discussion of lexical noncanonical expressions is more frequent in the context of inter-language comparison since lexeme for lexeme translation is frequently unsatisfactory and often impossible. At this state it is often said that they need a nonliteral translation or rather the finding of a sememe equivalent (cf. *In Rome do as Romans do/ a donde fueres haz como vieres*). This might be true, but from a coherent prospective of language learning, internal deciphering is also a complex matter especially when dealing with expressions of an O nature.

Under the label of GAs we shall deal with certain lexical units of linguistic interest due to their formal behaviour and more due to their semantic behaviour, which ranges from semi-transparent to opaque. In this sense, the behaviour of English I, CL, NC and CO will be very briefly analysed to delimit a clear-cut cognitive influence, as well as a well-defined area of predominance in written and spoken corpora.

Within the GAs of language, constituents that form lexical modules proper in their own right, at least from a semantic scope, do often range from a transparent or semi-transparent interpretability to the totally opaque one. Especially the latter, are formed by units which very often present problems for internal interpretation, due to the fact that they are normally fixed expressions, which are not frequently used, that refer to very specific and concrete actuation of a community or of individuals in a community. These expressions are referred to in linguistic treatment as exemplified in the following illustration:

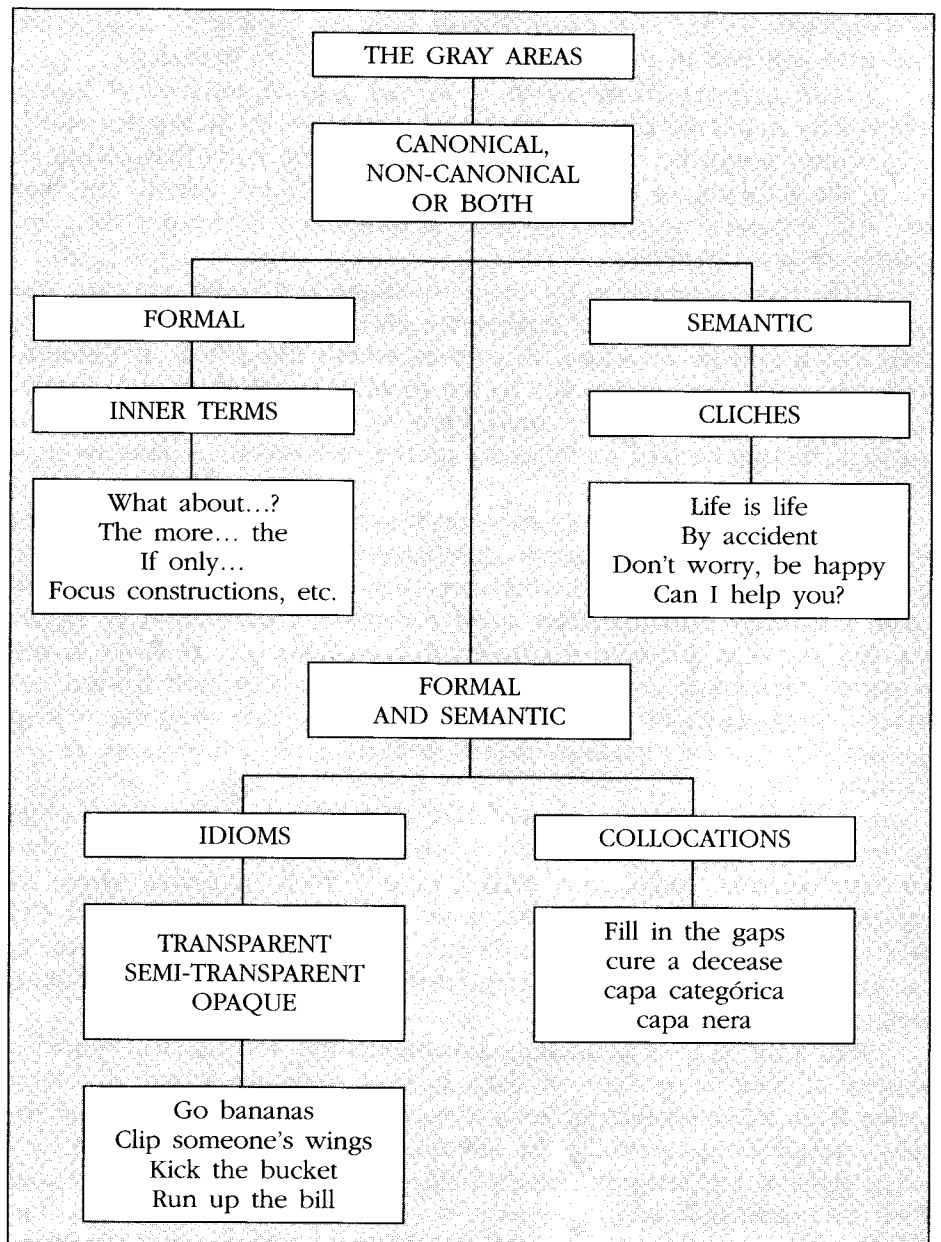


Table I. The gray areas of language.

4.1. *Lexicon, Syntax and Morphology*

Lexicon can be considered as something that is irregular. There are some things in the lexicon that can be undertaken either in Morphology or in Syntax. Morphology and Syntax are independent generative systems, for there are independent rule systems for building words and for building phrases. Syntactic generation is unmarked with respect to morphological generation and the role of the lexicon is no more than a list of syntactic and morphological irregularities.

The lexicon triggers activation of the morphological component.

If a lexical item is specified as morphological, it must of course be included as (part of) a word.

Lexical items can be underspecified in various ways: one type of underspecification concerns their locus of axioms (that is, syntax or morphology). This explains certain otherwise mysterious phenomena.

For instance, irregular plurals, which are stored in the lexicon would be built into morphology. This includes the generation of complex words and is where you build, for example, verbs. Therefore, these are formed by word-formation rules, a marked way of building morphological surface structures which in compounds is the result of a 'constructio figurata' syntactic representation has not been proven totally solved, since specific principles concerning the varied forms block the general principles to be applied. Moreover, syntax involves the generation of syntactic structures, an unmarked way of building morphological structures.

There are some expressions in the lexicon, which can be realised either in Morphology or in Syntax, and both levels of study can block each other or even themselves in certain constructions. For example, Morphology blocks syntax in some comparatives, wherever you can apply *-er*, the general rule is blocked, (so in *bigger* versus **more big*, *bigger* blocks *more big*), i.e. a general form is blocked by a more specific form. Perhaps, it is better to say that general principles are being blocked by specific principles or that there are not general principles to be applied in certain situations, than to talk about rules and their exceptions. However, grammar of languages must be either built according to general and specific principles or conform to rules, though very tentatively explained. This does not mean that the precepts of grammar run in our heads as we use language. There is no need to repeat the rule⁹ but the rule is there, underlying our linguistic production.

⁹ Wittgenstein makes a comparison with games: If there are no rules there is no game, and chess, for example, is like a language in this sense. When we use language

Morphology blocks itself by accepting the forms of irregular verbs (in usage one cannot use the general form for past tenses with the verb go; one must say went). Syntax blocks morphology, for example, when there exists a more specific use of the present perfect versus the past tense and syntax might block syntax itself as far as the minimal link condition is concerned, since there are instances that do not follow the general laws of English syntax.

Some idiomatic expressions follow general principles of English Syntax and Morphology; thus information stored in lexicon should be kept to a necessary minimum.

Hence, it is not necessary to specify the VO order of syntactic idioms such as: *Pull someone's leg* [informal: to tell someone something that is not true as a way of joking with them]

33. Is he really angry with me or do you think he's just pulling my leg? [usually in continuous tenses, CDI]

or the righthheadedness of the morphological idiom

Beefeater. <eat beef> er>

Semantics: member of the Royal-Guard

Simple compounds: Unpredictable semantics is one reason for lexical listing:

- to hand-make,
- to base-generate,
- to chomsky-adjoin,
- to window-shop,
- to air-condition, etc.,

in some of which the general morphological rule is blocked as in 'to chomsky-adjoin' initially due to the lexical rule of conversion and the insertion of the first element in a verbal compound later on and also because there are things that are built morphologically, but which are not in the lexicon. In fact the general rule of syntax is blocked as well; they are the result of complex mental processes reducing *constructio justa* and conforming *constructio figurata*. (i.e. to adjoin as Chomsky

we choose words to fit the occasion. In a lecture given in 1930 in San Francisco he reassures that grammatical rules are arbitrary, but their application is not. There cannot therefore be discussion about whether this set of rules or another is the correct rule for the word 'not'; for unless the grammatical rules are given 'not' has no meaning at all. When you change the grammatical rules you change the meaning of the word.

does, to follow Chomsky's adjoining principle). Whether they are words created for special purposes or for a special occasion to alter the general morphological and syntactic principles or to provide flexibility to linguistic development, is a question that actual diachrony cannot substantiate.

Apart from obvious typical morphological and syntactic constructions there is a tendency to assign deviations to the informal use of language. However, when you look at 'realia' (authentic materials) the number of occurrences of some of them are very frequent and the question is,

Are there separate rule systems for building formal and informal language?

Or Is the informal use of certain constructions the synchronic state of a posterior formal diachronic state?

And are the GAs of language the result of language misunderstanding or mis-production?

To provide a phonological example, 40 years ago the pronunciation of question was still /kwɛʃən/ and the informal way was /kwɛstʃən/ or /kwɛstjən/ and nowadays the former is obsolete and the informal became standardised. The older form of /sɪn/ was /sɪŋ/ but through the process of enervation the /ŋ/ was dropped. The lexical formal 'constructio' for invalid chair was wheel chair (still current in USA) and for 'on the wagon' was "on the water wagon".

Moreover, alternative forms vary from place to place and are diverted and distorted, which might make us think that English is in a state of a prochain realisation, splitting into different codes which might result in different languages if we take into account the diverse varieties.

4.2. *Formal and semantic interrelations*

From a morphological perspective, the English language is being characterised by a series of lexical processes, which can also be extended to other linguistic levels, especially semantics. They mark the edge between the synchronic and diachronic state of language. Depending on their location they also mark the differences between varieties. Due to its relevance we shall mention especially, the following:

- The lexical rule of conversion, in which we can include the following phenomena affecting the line of action from past synchrony to present,

4.2.1. Conversion

Under the lexical conversion process, from a formal a superficial formal approach, one part of speech becomes another, (cf. Jespersen (1909-1949) and his theory of Ranks and his distinction of the function of the words). For example, nouns gradually become verbs, or on the other way round. Moreover, certain items move from looser associations to close constructions or collocations, acquiring, thus, a very specific meaning or even uniqueness, as in 34

34. Can't make it for **thanksgiving** [Holiday for expressing thanks]
news@pop3.about.com

4.2.2. Lexical rules of acceptability and cohyponims

Lexical and semantic rules of acceptability, potentiality in use, and grammaticality and agrammaticality govern actual use, and which usually involve the others, of creations such as that in 35 above in bold, due to its complexity and underlying representation: For giving thanks, to give thanks, in which, as can be seen the compound is converted in a lexical unit proper; but a double process is involved, the conversion of an infinitive into a gerund and a nominalisation of a primary verbal form. This, probably due to the need to economise, is a real phenomenon of language creativeness. Thus, simple direct conversion, i.e., conversion in compounding and/or in derivation are real phenomena transforming language. Obviously, there are affixes, especially suffixes, which are very productive. For example, if you need an abstract noun that has not been compiled yet, probably you need the suffix *-ness*, as in *populateness* ←-*populate* (see Oro, 1982, pp. 275-277).

As can be seen, this procedure cannot only be considered morphologically, since syntax also plays a very important role in order to justify linguistic change to synchronic actuation. In addition, lexical sememes have been extended to other syntactic field of syntax: Or, as the following examples in bold, which constitute a combination of lexical and grammatical units by making an independent lexical semantic unit proper bound to a head, demonstrate, syntagmemes playing a proper conceptual role can also be reduced to a lower rank.

35. (...) as she plays the mother who knows best to a **know-it-all daughter**. news@pop3.about.com

36. **From the witty to the idiotic**¹⁰ and the carefully crafted to the **I-put-this-up-in ten-minutes**, independent web sites provide a great way to kill time and have some fun.
37. It is dangerous to leave it in the street.

4.2.3. The lexical rule of petrification or fossilisation

In certain situations, the meaning of some words, probably due to obscure inherent connotations of the relation between the lexical unit and one's knowledge of the world, are fossilized and new ones, normally more appropriate or economical, emerge and take a place in communication. One can speculate about the reason for this, but pure linguistic reasoning cannot scientifically demonstrate this type of events. In fact social and psychological reasoning might be needed in order to justify both definite deletion and new insertion of lexical units.

In this sense, *wheel chair* used for both *invalid chair* and *baby chair* has been substituted probably due to technological advances and a reasonable increase of reality. Actually, all of them are developing collocations. Obsolete forms are declined to be used, in spite of their grammaticality, under both, general or specific reference.

As far as GA phrases are concerned, they are correctly defined as terms. They have a precise meaning that is well understood in a specific field, science, art, profession, or subject. If used outside the boundaries of a specific context, their meaning becomes obscure and what is more they might make no sense at all. Phrases such as in 38 and 39.

38. To push to the limit.
39. **Flying by the seat of your parts**, [meaning: To do something without planning]

are clear to many knowledgeable about aircraft. In fact 39 referring to the 'bottom part' nor to the front part, but which, at first glance, many would relate to testicles, has nothing to do with them in spite of the use of the same morphological word but representing different sememes. Thus, knowledge of the world, which usually facilitates the interpretation of all items, is especially important in understanding the developing intention of GA's meaning and development; Nonetheless there also exist certain situations in which it fails.

¹⁰ [Document count: From (37482) the (46824) to (41674) the (6000) 46833 results found, top 100 sorted by date. (Cobuild bank of English)].

4.2.4. Rules of aplicability and interpretability

C is a term nowadays applied to linguistics by extension, in the sense of the forms that follow normal patterns of structural behaviour. The application of the term does go beyond the conceptual or basic interpretative meaning in a direct sense with the values of the agent, which implies selection, or being controlled by the rules. Whether rules are perfect or not, is not a matter of discussion here.

However, we must define exactly what must be understood by canonicity, in the sense that, as far as synchronic studies are concerned, we can either follow strict rigorous inflexible grammar, called by some grammar of rigidity (although this seems to be out of fashion) or a descriptive grammar. Within the latter we must admit not only what is grammatical but what is appropriate if understandable and potential in use.

Thus, probably, the best solution is to distinguish between use and usage of a language in order to delimit sub-fields of interest which would in turn promote clear cut solutions to interpret those that are NC proper as well as those which are atypical deviations from canonical ones, due to specific uses in defined situations they vary due to style, age, local influence, and so on.

Apart from that, with respect to behaviour there are grammatical procedures, such as grammaticality; –acceptability or unacceptability, and potentiality or actual potentiality and understandability or interpretability¹¹. The latter can be applied both to phrase and clause level or to context, and are characterised by conforming to a rule. For instance, it is well known that in order to explain the meaning of words

- one might provide the meaning,
- or the meaning can be elicited through textual (anaphoric or cataphoric reference), extralinguistic (external world reference) or linguistic clues (sense relations or meaning types),

¹¹ It is true that grammatical constructions must be produced conforming to a rule but some people do produce constructions which are understandable in spite of their grammaticality. Whether one is able to set the limits between acceptability and unacceptability would lead us to a grammar of rigidity which, no doubt, would put off a wide variety of idiolects and dialectal forms. For example, Lyons (1981, p. 28) signals that unacceptable sentences are those which are 'unalterable in all normal contexts other than those involving metalinguistic reference'. Definitions of this type are rather dangerous as they might lead to cohort linguistic change, which is being produced by individuals and their groups, when they introduce either lexical or syntactic modifications in the language of a community. Some go along and others are lost on the way but form part of a language.

– or one might refer to the form of the majority of lexical items by paying attention to the lexical rule of conversion.

As for 'there is', 'there was' and 'there will be' a lot of conversion happening, which provides diversity both formal and semantic, and variability, coining and petrifying words and expressions according to linguistic taste and utility. In addition, other linguistic procedures particularly those referring to styles and modes of style, should probably be considered non-canonical in one way or other.

From a semantic understanding¹², whether it is possible, or not, to talk about canonicity is rather complex. Meaning is so intangible that it is rather difficult to find two people, who might agree on the same meaning conception; however, there are terms that are logical in their own dimension.

In fact, disagreement among individuals might be explained by considering some misconduct of their atypical behaviour in facing logical linguistic affairs or by being betrayed by some kind of mental inference. In this sense, we agree with Coseriu, when he refers to Humboldt's belief that languages are not learnt but created. 'Created' must be understood in the sense of linguistic interaction with thought. Therefore when you lack elements of structure, if you let it go, it is when more atypical semantic deviations are produced.

As a matter of fact, typical constructions already fixed in mind's collectivity, when there is an attempt, are difficult to be fossilised. However, alternative forms are working simultaneously for long periods of time. This is quite common with lexical linguistic changes in English, as well as in most languages. It does not only affect phonological and graphological devices of lexical syntax, but also to syntax, especially as far as word-order and other syntactic processes such as elision, substitution or insertion are concerned. Typically accepted deviations of this type are very often justified by emphasis or contrast as in the case of adverbials or auxiliaries. However, those processes are atypical deviations of language and form part of the big field of the GAs of language in spite of their canonicity. Nevertheless, they block general forms, both in use and usage, sometimes from a syntactic point of view and sometimes from both a morphological and a syntactic perspective.

¹² This is not the same as Quirk and Starvick's (1966, p. 10) grammaticality, which has been defined as a 'deviation from a normal English', a type of construction which a native speaker would recognise as, at least, unacceptable.

For instance the tendency of certain social groups of young people to avoid the use of the auxiliary of grammatical present perfect, as in

* I've seen him in the morning.

This is a common feature of rapid speech as well. Well-educated speakers, under certain circumstances also use this form. Thus, on occasion it becomes hard to distinguish the diachronic from the synchronic, comparing the historical changes which the constructions in question have undergone; or the way synchronic rules are operating now, in the sense of historical and generativist rule oriented treatment. Furthermore the structuralist system-oriented device, would depend on morpheme theory and presents problems of over neutralisation.

Whether or not those atypical deviations are made typical may not be a matter of grammar¹³ but a question of need within the dimension of subjective expressions of feelings of both individuals themselves and the community. Besides, this does not imply that those constructions are grammatically anomalous but that they are devices of language, which might make communication simpler or more complex, depending on the context in which they are inserted. On a different line, this is an argument that corroborates, Lyons (1981, p. 14) remarks. Following other scholars, especially Jespersen, by extension of his theory of ranks, he states that

'most language utterances (...) depend for their interpretation upon the context in which they are';

A fact which the majority of scholars of the second half of the xxth century agree upon.

4.3. *Other specific features of language: ambiguity and diversity*

There are other linguistic factors, which in spite of being represented identically in different languages, at least from a purely semantic point of view, might easily lead to erroneous versions and it is here where the translator needs to make more effort on the concentration of grammatical accuracy and thought conveyance. Some of these errors are

¹³ As Wittgenstein has stated in one of his lectures (BX), grammar circumscribes language. A combination of words, which does not make sense, does not belong to language. Sense and nosense have nothing in common. By nosense we mean unmeaning scratches of sounds or combinations.

probably due to internal dyadic interpretation either from the formal or semantic point of view or both. Some of these are:

Surface structure representations of deep structure and underlying structure realisations: ambiguity and Lexical diversity. For instance, comparisons must be stated fully to avoid confusion,

40. Arsenal wants this game more than Liverpool (does).

41. Honda is better and faster (...).

(Automobile advert.);

It appears to be the case that it is not canonical to mix metaphors (i.e. making things to appear more vivid)

4.4. *Ambiguities and multiple readings*

These features of languages are probably the result of underlying structural representations, arising generally from some sort of under-specified nature of linguistic forms in combination. Forms, such as those constructed with -ing forms in English representing a relative clause in underlying structure or verbal and adjectival predicates are notorious examples of dubiously interpretability out of their context, as in

42. Visiting friends can be funny,

43. She was a good professor.

Intricate connections between conceptual structure, meaning and grammar do provide the necessary tools to disambiguate this type of structures in context through either anaphoric or cataphoric reference.

However, identical situations can also be produced in other languages and there is no need to specify the precise meaning. If L1 shows ambiguity, it might possibly be because the writer means for it to be ambiguous. It is precisely under circumstances of this type when the translator must show his domain of comprehension and production, his mastery of the linguistic system and of parallel or identical production and, in sum, of textual analysis.

Special attention must be paid to texts in which symbolisation, i.e., this game which leads to real semantic representations, is not directly related to world referents. And furthermore, what might constitute one of the most exhaustive development of the individual from a linguistic point of view is often labelled by some scholars as private language realisations. As a matter of fact, there would be no point in studying language behaviour if a complete set of rules could be pre-programmed, depriving individuals of freedom to use the language.

Specific language producing meaning beyond the common types of meaning is often included under special figures of speech, as follows:

- Metaphor: an expression which describes a person or object in a literary way by referring to something that is considered to possess similar characteristics to the person or object you are trying to describe ['The mind is an ocean' and 'the city is a jungle' are both metaphors].
- Simile: (the use of) an expression comparing one thing with another; the use of 'as' or 'like'

44. My Sara is as rare as Indian Pearl! (Prarie Sketches, p. 64).

Both are comparisons. A simile is a comparison used for illustrations or teaching, as shown in 44 and 45

45. She is like a butterfly.

46. it was a night like any other night.

A metaphor is also a comparison, which is implied within a canonical sentence, as shown in 47

47. She is a butterfly.

In English when we speak of a **crane** on a construction site, for instance, we apply the name of a bird to a machine. All languages use metaphors in some situation or other; however the use of conceptual referents in other languages to represent L1 metaphors might not make sense, as not all languages follow the same patterns in order to extend referential meaning. It is only in this type of realisations when equivalence in comparative studies and synonymy within the internal process might be justified.

Similes, metaphors as well as all idiomatic expressions of all kinds might follow identical procedures in different manifestations of languages.

It is well known in linguistics, that certain metaphors have lost their conceptual meaning and have become fixed idioms. These are to be translated by the form that is being used in the target language or, if this is not possible, by the natural synonym of the original language. In certain situations to make the comparison more explicit a simile might be used but that would deviate the meaning from the world referent represented.

As Müller (1864, p. 351) has pointed out:

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'A metaphor is one of the most powerful engines in the construction of human speech, and without it, we can hardly imagine how any language could have progressed beyond the simplest rudiments'.

Put at its simplest, this specific behaviour of language can be viewed as a special type of indirect speech, and it constitutes a violation of the behaviour of formal canonical expressions. This violation signals that literal meaning and real meaning are different.

As Crystal (1971) indicates:

'the idea that words have different degrees of co-occurrence with other words is basic to such familiar concepts as idioms'.

I would add that it has to be extended to all expressions which are to be included under the non-literal use of language. Occasionally, situations restricted to a particular community of speakers, are extended to ordinary language, as shown in 48 and 49.

48. Pass that dish to number 6.

49. That chair is fantastic.

Whether or not substituting the part for the whole or the whole for a part cannot be included under the ranger of metaphor is something that has not been proved yet.

– There are many other figures of speech¹⁴ which can cause meaning problems and not all different languages use all of

¹⁴ **Euphemism:** the use of a lexical unit similar in meaning instead of the one with the most direct meaning so as not to be offensive. Whereas in formal language one would use the expression *he died*, in informal language *he kicked the bucket*, would be used. But in order to be tentative one might say *he passed away*, *he went home* or perhaps *he fell asleep*. Not all languages follow the same patterns when establishing what can be said and how it can be said.

Hyperbole: one of the figures of speech used to deliberate ly exaggerate in order to produce a dramatic communicative effect, as in *This book weights a ton!*

Litotes: Like the hyperbole it is an emphatic statement rejecting the opposite idea, as in *she was not a little Academic!*

Irony: It is that figure of speech normally expressing ridicule or mockery by means of saying something and meaning the opposite.

Apostrophe: a digression in discourse, especially a turning away from an audience to address an absent or imaginary person, a figure of speech in which something not alive is addressed directly.

Personification: an abstract idea is personified as having personality or the qualities, thoughts or movements of a living being.

Metonymy: an attribute or commonly associated feature is used to name or designate something, for example: 'The pen is mightier than the sword'.

them. When they are used, they denote a certain attitude in the speaker who tries to rouse some sort of emotional response in the hearer.

5. CONCLUSION

Linguistic treatment of concrete manifestations of language cannot be thoroughly analysed using only one linguistic level by itself. Languages are far more complex and independent than it is easy to show that an inherent contradiction in the application of principles proposed along the history of linguistics are inevitable. However several principles are fundamental assumptions for the development of language interpretation and the understanding of language's realisations.

Thus, probably one can talk of grammatical prototypes and grammatical deviations.

Taking into account the colossal amount of scholarly writing about linguistics, one may think that there is nothing left to write about, as far as this field of studies is concerned. Moreover, considering that probably most things have been said in one way or another, though this might not be the real problem, it is high time to re-assure in grammar and linguistics, concepts such as definitions, grammatical levels and the like. However, the real problem is how all this knowledge can be put together in an interactive context to contrast the main ideas from generality to specificity.

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Synecdoche: a more inclusive term is used for a less inclusive term or via versa; for example 'the law' for 'a policeman'. It is similar to metonymy but a part denotes the whole or on the other way round.

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