

*“Peculiar to Themselves”***“Peculiar to Themselves”: Idioms in the Dictionary<sup>1</sup>**PAMELA MUNRO  
UCLA**0. Introduction**

That preeminent Berkeley fieldworker Mary R. Haas declared that people describing a language should produce a grammar, a dictionary, and a body of texts. Of these, my particular love is the dictionary, in part because the dictionary making process generally winds up teaching me a lot about most aspects of grammar. The reason for this is, of course, that to prepare an insightful dictionary we need to know how to write, define, and classify (that is, analyze) the words we’re collecting—and to do any of those, we must understand a lot about grammar.

Some items are especially difficult to put into a dictionary, either because it is hard to decide what form of the word or phrase to enter or because it is hard to decide how to translate the chosen entry and to explain or illustrate its grammatical use. In this paper (which I originally planned to call “How Should I Put That in the Dictionary?”), I will survey some of the problems various such expressions pose for the fieldworker constructing a bilingual dictionary of an unfamiliar target language.

Most of my examples in this paper, taken from dictionaries of four unrelated languages illustrating an extensive typological range—Chickasaw (Munro & Willmond 1994), Mohave (Munro, Brown, & Crawford 1992), San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec (SLQZ; Munro & Lopez et al. 1999), and Wolof (Munro & Gaye 1997)<sup>2</sup>—will involve verbs, and in particular complex verbal idioms each of which has a meaning or syntax “peculiar to itself” (in the words of my American Heritage dictionary). I will consider idioms of the familiar semantically opaque type as well as other expressions whose non-standard syntax must be elucidated for the user, and will discuss “literal translations” and idiomatic structures influenced by majority contact languages. Finally, I will describe how an extensive dictionary corpus can illustrate families of related idioms and the restructuring of syntactic idioms to fit a standard model.

My purpose in this paper is not to dictate a certain way to put idiomatic expressions in the dictionary, though I will mention many relevant considerations.

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<sup>2</sup> I have shortened or otherwise adapted many of the dictionary entries presented as examples. Orthography and other features of each language are described in the dictionaries referenced.

Such decisions are clearly determined in part by the esthetic preferences of dictionary compilers and in part by the structure of the target language. Instead, this paper will be a reminder—to you and to myself—that dictionaries are much more than lists of words, and that a dictionary can be an important resource for linguists as well as the heritage community that may be its first and most basic audience.

My illustration of difficult dictionary entries will begin with something other than verbs, dictionary entries for “expletives” in SLQZ (a Zapotecan (Otomanguean) language of Oaxaca with VSO word order). As (1) shows, this dictionary is trilingual (but with a considerable English bias, as we’ll see later), and the expletives exemplified here are not words like *it* and *there*, but exclamations or oaths.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) **nih bèi'nyande'eh** (mild expl.) {Bribàa'iny Rumoro's zhi', nih bèi'nyande'eh “There was a landslide in Rumoroso, oh shoot | *Hubo un derrumbe en Rumoroso, que suerte*” }  
 §§ Zap. expl. are used in many different syntactic constructions (as described in the Introduction, section 4.37). .  
**nih wrihiny** (mild expl.) {Xi nih wrihiny bèi'nyùu'? “What the heck did you do? | ¿*Qué diablos hiciste?*” }  
**nih wzha'ahn, nih wrihiny nih wzha'ahn, nih wrih wzha'ahn** (strong expl.) {Chih byehtènn, a nih wzha'ahn myee'gr ri'cygah, bdi'cah myee'gr zèenèeg myee'gr dannooohn a'xta' Tijwa'nn steeby zhi' “When we got down, the  fucking migras were right there, the immigration agents appeared and took us to Tijuana again | *Cuando nos bajamos, la chingada migra ya estaba allí, los agentes de inmigración aparecieron y nos llevaron a Tijuana otra vez*”; Que'ity rgui'ihzhdì' nih wzha'ahn la'anng lùà' “He (the son of a bitch) doesn't pay me | *El hijo de la chingada no me paga*”; Que'ity rgui'ihzhdì' nih wzha'ahn liu' lùà' “You don't pay me, you son of a bitch | *No me pagas, tú, hijo de la chingada*”; Nih wzha'ahn liu'! “Screw you! | ¡*Maldito seas!*, ¡*Vete a la chingada!*” }

The entries in (1) show that SLQZ expletives are grammatically slippery. They seem to constitute an independent part of speech, with a morphological structure that looks like either a relative clause, a nominalization, or a certain type of quantifier (Munro & Lopez et al. 1999: 27-28), but unlike these items they can be used in an unexpected variety of syntactic constructions (underlines illustrating these have been added to the translations in (1)), but cannot occur alone as independent exclamations. Many of these uses are like those of comparable words in English or Spanish, but no English or Spanish expletives can be used in all these ways.

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations in the dictionary entries include expl. = expletive, ger. comp. = verb with gerundive complement, impers. id. = impersonal idiom, impers. pssr. id. = impersonal possessor idiom, intr. = intransitive, irr. = irrealis, mod. sscmp. = verb with modal same-subject complement, obj. id. = object idiom, poss. id. = possessor idiom, poss. obj. = possessed object idiom, prep. v. = prepositional verb, pssd. = possessed, pssr. obj. id. = possessor object idiom, sg. = singular, subj. = subject, subj. poss. = subject possesses object idiom, tr. = transitive, Zap. = (SLQ) Zapotec, 3-at = nominative marked noun. Some of these are discussed in the text; the remainder are explained in the dictionaries referenced. Examples in the dictionary entries are translated but not analyzed. Abbreviations in other examples include acc = accusative, asp = aspect, dat = dative, hab = habitual, neut = neutral, nom = nominative, obj = object, perf = perfective, pron = pronoun, prox = proximate, pt = past/perfective, s = singular, ss = same subject, Vfoc = verb focus, with 1, 2, 3 used for person and I, II, III used for the Chickasaw inflectional classes.

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In this case, I've chosen a cop-out: I just give illustrative examples. In the rest of this paper, I will concentrate on issues involving verbs, where this cop-out should not be available: if a verb or verb phrase exists in the language, speakers are able to use it, and the ideal dictionary must tell a learner how they do that.

## 2. Verbs in the Dictionary

Dictionary makers often have to deal with many difficult analytical issues in making decisions about dictionary entries for verbs. The first thing is to decide how to spell the words in the dictionary, how to select the “base” (dictionary entry) form of a verb, how to define this once it is selected (see Munro to appear),<sup>4</sup> and how to convey relatively regular inflectional information.

In Chickasaw (a Muskogean language with SOV word order spoken in Oklahoma) and Wolof (a West Atlantic language with SVO word order spoken in Senegal), verbs can be entered in the dictionary in the unaffixed (“bare”) form, used in Chickasaw with third person subjects, in imperatives, and in infinitival-like complements, and in Wolof in non-negative main clauses:

- (2) *Chickasaw*  
**imilhlha** to be scared, wild, afraid (III)  
**malili** to run (mainly sg. subj.), to go (of a machine); to make a run (in baseball); to run for office (I)  
**tikahbi** to be tired (II)
- (3) *Wolof*  
**fecc** to dance (intr.)  
**laabir** to be compassionate; to be open, friendly (of a person) (intr.)

For many languages, the decision as to what verb form to list in the dictionary is more complex. When a bare stem form of verbs is not an independent word, I believe it should not be used as a dictionary entry, a feeling generally echoed by native speakers. In Mohave (a Yuman language with SOV word order spoken on the California-Arizona border), for example, “realis” (citation) forms of verbs appear with either *-k* or *-m* (4);<sup>5</sup> these two suffixes are used both on independent verbs and in a variety of grammatical constructions, though they drop before other affixes:

- (4) *Mohave*  
**imkwilyk=k** get up (out of bed)  
**imkwiilyk=m** lie in bed turning around; be upset (of the stomach) §  
'Itionych imkwiilyktm. My stomach is upset. | 'Imkwiilykm. I lie in bed tossing and turning.

In SLQZ, verbs have six or seven “aspectual” forms differentiated by prefixes. In our dictionary, verbs are listed in the habitual (5), though this means that a third of the dictionary entries start with *r-* (see Munro 1996):

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<sup>4</sup> I cannot consider here reasons why in some languages it is best to define verbs with ‘to’ but in others it is not (but see Munro to appear). (Regarding selection of a base, see also Albright 2002.)

<sup>5</sup> The analysis described here was influenced by the work of Gordon (1986) on Maricopa and by the form in which verbs are cited in Gordon, Heath, and Munro (in preparation).

- (5) *SLQZ*  
**rbahb** itches | *le pica (le da comezón)* {Ua's rbahb ni'a' "My foot really itches | *El pie de veras me pica*" }  
**rdùu'b** sweeps | *barre*

Language-specific heuristics should tell the user how to use the listed dictionary entry verbs in sentences. In some dictionaries these are just assumed, but it is better if they are stated clearly somewhere, probably in the introduction to the dictionary.

If there are different inflectional classes of verbs (comparable to the different conjugation classes in many European languages), the dictionary entry should specify this, as with the Mohave *-k* or *-m* verbs. Chickasaw presents a more complex case. The language has a simple nominative-accusative case marking opposition for noun phrases (6) (accusative marking can be omitted in such sentences, with no apparent affect on meaning; cf. Munro 1999). But Chickasaw intransitive verbs exhibit three different morphological agreement patterns (7),<sup>6</sup> and transitive and ditransitive verbs can display an even greater range of inflectional possibilities, just a few of which are exemplified in (8). (The intransitive verb classes are largely semantically governed (Payne 1982), though there are many exceptions (Munro & Gordon 1982).)

- (6) Ihoo-at chipot-a sh<sub>Q</sub>'ka-tok.  
 woman-nom child-acc kiss-pt 'The woman kissed the child'
- (7) Malili-li. 'I run' (inflection class I)  
 run-1sI  
 Sa-tikahbi. 'I am tired' (inflection class II)  
 1sII-be.tired  
 Am-ilhlha. 'I am afraid' (inflection class III)  
 1sIII.dat-be.scared
- (8) Chi-sh<sub>Q</sub>'ka-li. 'I kiss you' (inflection classes I,II)  
 2sII-kiss-1sI  
 Chin-taloowa-li. 'I sing to you, I sing for you' (inflection classes I,III)  
 2sIII.dat-sing-1sI  
 Ofi'-a sa-banna. 'I want the dog' (inflection class II, noun object)  
 dog-acc 1sII-want  
 Ofi'-a am-alkaniya. 'I forget the dog' (inflection class III, noun obj.)  
 dog-acc 1sIII.dat-forget  
 Ofi'-a chim-a-li. 'I give the dog to you'  
 dog-acc 2sIII-give-1sI (inflection classes I,III, noun object)

The dictionary user also needs to know which word in multi-word verb entries is the (main) verb (for inflectional and other syntactic purposes). In Chickasaw (9) and Mohave (10), for example, the verb is the last word of such entries, while in Wolof (11) and SLQZ (12) it is the first word of the entry.

<sup>6</sup> We mark the three classes as (I), (II), and (III), as shown in (2). A similar approach is adopted by Martin & Mauldin (2000). Other dictionaries, such as Sylestine et al. (1993), follow the approach of listing the first person singular form (an especially good approach for Alabama, which not only has different classes but which allows different positioning of the agreement affixes). For more about these how we handle the data in (8) for Chickasaw, see Munro & Willmond (1994).

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(9) *Chickasaw*

**naalhpisa' oppani** to break the law (I) § Naalhpisa' ishoppani  
ishhonkopakmat. If you steal you'll break the law.  
~ *naalhpisa'* 'law', *oppani* 'to break' :: 'to break the law'  
The example's first verb has the second person singular I prefix *ish-*.

(10) *Mohave*

**mavar suuvii=k** make gravy § Mavar 'asuvviik. I made gravy.  
~ *mavar* 'flour', *suuvii=k* 'make mush' :: 'to make flour into mush'  
The verb in the example has the first person prefix '-.

(11) *Wolof*

**jot kepp** to fit just right (tr.) {Jot na ma kepp. It fits me just right.}  
~ *jot* 'to fit', *kepp* (ideophone; no “literal” meaning) :: 'to fit'  
The verb in the example is followed by the third person singular neutral clitic  
*na* and the first person singular object clitic *ma*.

(12) *SLQZ*

**rdàa' guehehll** harvests corn | *pizca maíz* {Caldàa' Gye'eihlly guehehll  
Mike is harvesting corn | *Miguel está pizcando maíz*}  
~ *rdàa'ah* 'breaks', *guehehll* 'cornfield' :: 'to break the cornfield'  
The progressive aspect prefix *ca-* replaces habitual *r-* on the example's verb.

On the line beginning with ~ after multiword dictionary entries I list the meanings of component words; at the end of this line, following ::, I give the “literal” meaning of the expression. The examples in (9-12) illustrate a variety of types of “idiomatic” expressions: none of them could be predicted on the basis of knowledge of the component words and their syntax. (9) is a transparent collocation (perhaps calqued from English), included in the dictionary since not all languages would express the concept with this metaphor; (10) is easily understood but unpredictable; (11) is a verb plus an ideophonic complement; and (12) is a completely unpredictable idiom. In each case, the example in the entry confirms that the first (9, 10) or last (11, 12) word of the entry is the verb, as explained following the ~ line after each entry.

I'm now going to go on to discuss problems for this general approach to verb entries: cases where it is hard to write definitions and, in particular, idioms, both typical semantic idioms and “syntactic idioms” using nonstandard constructions.

### 3. Difficult Definitions

Difficulties arise when there is a mismatch between the syntax of the target language and the semantics or syntax of the defining language. The translation of SLQZ *ryu'làaa'z* (13), for example, is completely unproblematic in English—this verb is remarkably like English *like* or *love*. But only one of the four definitions of this verb (the second) was easy to translate into Spanish. Our dictionary followed a rule that the syntax of definitions should match that of entries—but the most natural way to say ‘like’ in Spanish is with the verb *gustar*, which expresses the liker as an indirect object and the like-ee as the grammatical subject. Therefore, in definitions 1, 2, and 4 the natural Spanish translation with *gustar* appears in parentheses following a syntactically more parallel definition. (I'll return to another *gustar* problem later.)

- (13) **ryu'làà'a'z** 1. likes (something) | *disfruta, quiere, ama (le gusta) (algo)* (tr.) {Ryu'là'aza' colooru nsua'll "I like (the color) blue | *Amo el (color) azul (Me gusta el (color) azul)*"}; 2. loves, desires (someone) | *quiere, desea, ama (a alguien)* {Ryu'làa'za' liu' "I love you | *Te amo*"}; 3. likes to | *disfruta (le gusta)* {mod. sscmp.; used with irr.; Ryu'làà'a'z Gye'eihlly ygyà'ah "Mike likes to dance | *Miguel disfruta bailar, A Miguel le gusta bailar*"; Ryu'làa'zëng ygyà'ng "He likes to dance | *Disfruta bailar, A él le gusta bailar*"}; 4. likes | *disfruta (le gusta)* {ger. comp.; Ryu'làà'a'z Gye'eihlly gahl rgyà'ah "Mike likes dancing | *Miguel disfruta bailar*"; Ryu'làa'zëng gahl rgyà'ah "He likes dancing | *Él disfruta bailar*" }

The examples in (14) illustrate a different problem. The seemingly "logical" subject of these verbs is a non-surfacing agent (the subject's parents) for the first entry and a non-subject (the child) for the second. *Have* is a useful verb that often allows construction of English definitions in cases like these, but this approach is seldom possible in Spanish and may be awkward in English (in some cases, speakers interpret such 'have' constructions as causatives). In these Spanish definitions we used an 'is the one that' construction whose implications are different from those of the Zapotec and English, but which works to show the verbs' grammatical relations.

- (14) **rahcgaan** has her betrothal arrangements negotiated (of a young woman) | *es por quien se negocian arreglos esponsales (dícese de una joven)* {A guhcgaan zhyà'a'p "The girl has had her betrothal arrangements negotiated (her parents have agreed to the arrangements) | *La muchacha es por quien se han negociado arreglos esponsales (sus padres han aprobado los arreglos)*" }  
**rbèe' te'ihby laad** has (his child) move out of the family home (for instance, when the child gets married) | *es a quien se le muda (un hijo o una hija) de la casa familiar (por ejemplo, cuando el hijo se casa)* {Blè'ng zhii'inyëng te'ihby laad "He had his child move out | *Él fue a quien se le mudó un hijo de la casa familiar (su hijo ya salió de la casa familiar)*" }  
 ~ *rbèe'eh* 'puts', *te'ihby* 'one', *laad* 'side' :: 'to put to one side'

#### 4. Verbal Idioms

Idioms raise similar, but often even more tricky problems of definition and presentation. An idiom, as we normally use the term, is a phrase whose meaning is not transparently computable from its component words.<sup>7</sup> I will be concerned here only with idioms containing verbs, like some of the examples already presented. In English, the majority of verbal idioms are verb phrases—they can be predicated of a subject. Familiar examples like *to bark up the wrong tree*, *to spill the beans*, and *to let the cat out of the bag* require only a single subject argument; they thus have an open (or, in the terminology of Marantz (1984: 27), free) subject position.<sup>8</sup>

Some similar idioms from Wolof and Chickasaw are given in (15) and (16):

<sup>7</sup> English idioms (cf. Marantz 1984; Nunberg, Sag, & Wasow 1994; Manaster-Ramer 1993) are cited with *to* before the verb. An included subject is preceded by *for*; with the following free position shown by an ellipsis. Other non-subject free positions are represented by "(someone)".

<sup>8</sup> Marantz calls these "object idioms".

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- (15) *Wolof*  
**bëgg dee** to take lots of risks, live dangerously; to be exhausted, really tired (intr.)  
 ~ *bëgg* ‘to want’, *dee* ‘death’ :: ‘to want death’  
**tëgg tulli sabar** to keep changing one’s story, keep saying different things (intr.) {Tëgg na tulli sabar. He kept saying different things.}  
 ~ *tëgg* ‘to beat (a drum)’, *tulli* ‘to accompany a lead drummer’, *sabaru* ‘to dance the *sabar* with a drum accompaniment’ :: ‘to drum and dance the *sabar*’ (a traditional dance)<sup>9</sup>
- (16) *Chickasaw*  
**chipota hayoochi** to get pregnant (often, accidentally) (I) § Chipota hayooshtokoot ittihaalalla’chi. She’s going to get married because she got pregnant.  
 ~ *chipota* ‘child’, *hayoochi* ‘to find’ :: ‘to find a child’  
**holisso kashof?** to get divorced (I)  
 ~ *holisso* ‘paper’, *kashoffi* ‘to clean’ :: ‘to clean the paper’

English and other languages have additional more complex types of idioms with open subject positions. In some, the object must be possessed by the subject, as in *to shoot one’s wad*, *to hold one’s horses*, or (with two possessed non-subjects) *to wear one’s heart on one’s sleeve*. Wolof and SLQZ examples are in (17) and (18):

- (17) *Wolof*  
**ând ag ay buumi nafaam** to hold one’s horses, not get carried away (intr.: poss. obj.) {Ândal ag say buumi nafa! Hold your horses!}  
 ~ *ând* ‘to go’, *ag* ‘with’ *ay buum* ‘ropes’, *nafaam* ‘his traditional purse or pouch’ :: ‘to go with the strings of one’s purse’  
**topp nafsoom** to live one’s life without direction, act without thinking (intr.: poss. obj.) {Bul topp sa nafsu. Don’t act without thinking. (line from a Kiné Lam song)}  
 ~ *topp* ‘to follow’, *nafsu* ‘nose’ :: ‘to follow one’s nose’
- (18) *SLQZ*  
**rchi’ih ru’ni** shuts up, gets quiet | *se calla* {subj. poss.; Bchi’ëng ru’ëng “He shut up | *Él se callô*”}  
 ~ *rchi’ih* ‘fills in (a hole)’, *ru’uh* ‘mouth’ :: ‘to fill in one’s mouth’  
**rgwèèe’ dii’zh nyèu’ lohni** says one thing but means another | *dice una cosa pero quiere decir otra* {Rgwèèe’ Gye’eihlly dii’zh nyèu’ lohni “Mike says one thing but means another | *Miguel dice una cosa pero quiere decir otra*”}  
 ~ *rgwèèe* ‘says’, *dii’zh* ‘word’, *nyèu* ‘closed up’, *lohoh* ‘face, to’ :: ‘to say a closed up word to oneself’

Another type of verb phrase idiom is transitive, with a open object (or possessor of object) position as well as a open subject position, much like English *to give (someone) the shirt off one’s back* or *to clean (someone’s) clock*, or SLQZ (19):

<sup>9</sup> This expression may actually be some kind of verb-verb-verb compound.

- (19) **ràa'nny gue'ehcy x:tàa'ah** keeps a secret for | *le guarda un secreto a* (prep. v.) {pssr. obj. id.; Ràa'nnya' gue'ehcy x:tàa'ng "I'm keeping the secret for her | *Le estoy guardando un secreto*" }  
 ~ *ràa'nny* 'sits down on', *gue'ehcy* 'head / on top of', *dàa'ah* 'petate (woven mat)' :: 'to sit down on top of (someone's) petate'  
**rtyu'uh x:bààa'n** baptizes | *bautiza* {pssr. obj. id.; Rtyu'uh bxuuhahz x:bàa'nèmm "The priest baptizes him | *El sacerdote lo bautiza*" }  
 ~ *rtyu'uh* 'cuts off', *x:bààa'n* 'tail' :: 'to cut off (someone's) tail'

There are, however, other types of idiom which do not have open subject positions. One of these is the clausal idiom, which is fully specified lexically, but can occur in different constructions, varying for tense/aspect/modality and polarity. (Clausal idioms are thus different from proverbs, whose non-lexical features are fixed.) The best known English example (to linguists) is *for the shit to hit the fan* (where the citation with *for* and *to* specifies an idiom with a fully specified subject, verb, and other arguments, only whose non-lexical component is open); others are *for the shoe to be on the other foot*, *for the cat to be out of the bag*, and *for the fat lady to sing*. Other languages also have such idioms, for instance Chickasaw (20):

- (20) **Siitanat imihoo fammi** for Satan to whip his wife: (idiom) for there to be rain and sun at the same time

Like the English examples, this expression can be used in different tenses and in various constructions.

And still other idioms have open non-subject positions, with an open object or other oblique position, comparable to English idioms like *for what to be eating ...?*, *for the vultures to be circling...*, *for fortune to smile on ...*, or *for a little bird to tell ...*<sup>10</sup> Mohave, for example, has metaphorical idioms that work like (21):

- (21) **'anyach ka'aak=k** get sunstroke (idiomatic object expression: "the sun kicks" the affected person, the object of ka'aak) ['anya+ch] § 'Anyach nyaka'aakm. I got sunstroke ("the sun kicked me").

In the example sentence in (21), the person with sunstroke is a grammatical object (the speaker, 'me'), the syntactic subject is the word 'sun'.

Mohave also has many idioms in which the open position is the possessor of the subject. The most basic ways to say 'be happy' and 'be sad' in Mohave are

- (22) **iiwanych 'ahot=k** be happy (idiomatic possessor expression) {pl. iiwanych 'ahuut} § 'Iiwanych 'ahuuttaahanm. We're very happy.  
 ~ *iiwa* 'heart', *'ahot=k* 'be good' :: > 'for ...'s heart to be good'  
**iiwanych 'alay=k** be sad (idiomatic possessor expression) § 'Miiwanych 'alayk. You're sad.  
 ~ *iiwa* 'heart', *'alay=k* 'be bad' :: > 'for ...'s heart to be bad'

These examples also have parallels in English, such as *for ...'s tongue to be hanging out*, *for ...'s heart to bleed*, *for ...'s stock to be going up*, or *for ...'s*

<sup>10</sup> The existence of this type of English idiom has been the subject of some controversy (Marantz (1984: 27, 313)) but these structures are far from rare in other languages, as the examples illustrate.

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*chickens to come home to roost*. Such idioms often involve body parts. As (22) shows, an idiom with a non-subject open position may often be translated with normal syntax (thus, the syntax of ‘for ...’s heart to be good’ does not match that of *to be happy*).

Finally, the open position may be the possessor of a non-subject, as in English *for the ball to be in ...’s court* or the following SLQZ idiom:

- (23) **zh:àà'n** 1. bottom, buttocks, rear end | *trasero, nalga* {pssd. only;  
zh:àà'nùu' “your bottom | *tu trasero*” } ...  
**zi'ihcydihzy càa gyi'biihahz zh:àà'nèng** he’s still inexperienced and ignorant, he’s still wet behind the ears (he still has dry excrement in his bottom) | *él todavía es ignorante y sin experiencia, él todavía es un escuincle (todavía tiene excremento seco en el trasero)* {impers. pssr. id.}  
~ **zi'ihcydihzy** ‘just’, **càa** ‘is hanging’, **gyi'biihahz** ‘dry excrement’, **zh:àà'n** ‘buttocks’ :: ‘for there to be dried excrement hanging in ...’s bottom’

As the examples above show, my dictionaries have varied considerably in terms of when and how I give “literal” translations for idioms (as in (20-21) and (23) above) and how I specify their grammatical structure. Colorful metaphors are intriguing to everyone, so including some of these paraphrases can enliven a dictionary. Sometimes these translations may have scholarly value, revealing the influence of other languages (I recently learned that the Chickasaw (20) may well be calqued from English, for example, and the second SLQZ idiom in (19) may come from Spanish (Lance Foster and Heriberto Avelino, p.c.’s)). However, I feel that including all such cutesy paraphrases has the effect of suggesting inappropriately that the target language of the dictionary conveys all such expressions through fully accessible metaphors, though surely the metaphors involved in the majority of such idioms are defunct. This is why I usually do not provide such paraphrases (as in (10), (12), (15-19) and (22)), including them only when speakers themselves point them. But such decisions clearly involve rather delicate judgment calls.

Making the grammatical structure of some idioms clear to the dictionary user can be a more challenging task. The only idiom above with an open non-subject whose structure is fully apparent from the dictionary entry presented above is (21). Although I discussed “idiomatic object expressions” like this in the introduction to the Mohave dictionary, there were so few of them that I could take the space to give a user-friendly presentation. Normally, however, because there is such a variety of different idiomatic construction types, I describe their structure carefully *only* in the introduction to the dictionary, where syntactic labels like those in the entries above are explained. There are pitfalls in this approach, of course, since many users (even linguists!) often skip an introduction. But when dealing with idiomatic syntactic structures of the sort I’ll describe more fully in the next section, it does not seem feasible to have a long description of the structure repeated in each entry.

## 5. Idiomatic Syntax

The popular conception of idioms mentioned in the last section refers only to meanings that don’t add up to the actual sense of the idiomatic phrase. However, a phrase may contain all the right semantic elements, but be syntactically idiomatic in that its grammar does not fit the standard (or most usual) patterns of the language. This is in fact one of the normal meanings of *idiom*: my American Heritage dictionary’s first definition of this word is “a speech form or an expression in a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from

the individual meanings of its elements, as in *keep tabs on*" (1993: 674). In this section I will discuss systematic cases of deviation from expected syntax.

### 5.1

Let me start with some data from Chickasaw that has been discussed at length elsewhere (Munro & Gordon 1982,<sup>11</sup> Munro 1999). As we saw in (6), ordinary Chickasaw transitive sentences have nominative-accusative case marking on nouns. This is true even when the verb includes a dative applicative prefix (and would trigger III-dative agreement like that in (7-8) with a non-third person argument):

- (24) Ihoo-at            chipot-a    in-taloowa-tok.  
       woman-nom    child-acc    dat-sing-pt  
       'The woman sang for the child'

Some Chickasaw sentences containing two nouns, however, have more than one nominative, as in (25):<sup>12</sup>

- (25) Chipot-aat ofi'-at    im-illi-tok.    'The child's dog died,  
       child-nom    dog-nom    dat-die-pt    The child had his dog die'

(25) is related by Possessor Raising to the more basic sentence pattern shown in (26). This construction can be used when the speaker wishes to highlight the discourse salience of the first nominative marked noun (the derived subject).

- (26) Chipota    im-ofi'-at    illi-tok.    'The child's dog died'  
       child        dat-dog-nom    die-pt

(26) is an intransitive sentence whose subject is a possessed noun phrase (in Chickasaw, genitive nouns are unmarked, possessed nouns agree with non-third person possessors, and alienably possessed nouns have a dative prefix). Chickasaw has several types of multiple nominative sentences, all of which share two important properties. First, it is the "derived" subject ('child' in (25)) rather than the "old" or original subject ('dog') which passes a variety of syntactic subject tests. Second, the old subject is syntactically inert—unlike the derived subject, it cannot be freely moved or focussed, for example.

Chickasaw idioms like those in (27) are Possessor Raising structures with a specific noun—always marked nominative—filling the old subject role:

- (27) **chipotaat imalla** to have a baby, give birth (III) § Chipotaat amalla. I had a baby.  
       ~ *chipota* 'child', *imalla* 'to arrive for' :: 'for ...'s child to arrive'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I do not have space to discuss a second multiple nominative construction, Oblique Subject, in which an underlying dative object is promoted to subject. Both constructions are lexically governed, as marked in the dictionary.

<sup>12</sup> As far as I know (25) has identical truth conditions to the simpler sentence in (26). The 'have' translation in (25) is used to reflect the subjecthood of the first noun in (25); note, however, that *have* does not indicate an indirect causative in this translation.

<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, this example might come from 'for a child to arrive to ...', indicating an Oblique Subject origin (cf. fn. 11). It is sometimes not easy to tell whether a given multiple nominative originated via Possessor Raising or Oblique Subject.

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**holissaat inkashofa** to get a divorce (III) § Maryat holissaat inkashofatok.  
Mary got a divorce.  
~ *holisso* ‘paper’, *kashofa* ‘to be clean’ :: ‘for ...’s paper to be clean’

Superficially, these expressions look similar to clausal idioms like (28) (comparable to (20), but with an intransitive verb), in that the entries in (27) and the one in (28) contain a nominative marked noun followed by a verb.

(28) **Chokfaat Achiili** for it to be Easter (when the rabbit lays eggs—a joke) §  
Chokfaat Achiilikrṅa... on Easter (in the future)...  
~ *chokfi* ‘rabbit’, *achiili* ‘to lay eggs’ :: ‘for the rabbit to lay eggs’

However, (28) is a complete clause, while the expressions in (27) have an open subject position, like many of the idioms considered in the last section. The syntax of the idioms in (27) is different from that of most of the verb entries in (15-19), since those in (27) do not include an object, but rather a nominative-marked old subject. The entries in (27) follow the rule of the Chickasaw dictionary that (unless otherwise indicated) subject inflection (here with the III/dative set, specified by “(III)”) appears on the last word of the verb’s entry.

## 5.2

Wolof and SLQZ have a much wider range of types of idiomatic verbs whose syntax does not follow standard patterns. Despite the enormous typological disparity between these two languages, their idiomatic structures are very similar. In this section I will survey several types of Wolof and SLQZ idioms with highly parallel syntax and discuss their treatment in dictionaries of these languages.

Wolof “object idioms” and SLQZ “impersonal idioms” are like Mohave (21), with an open object position. In the following examples from Wolof, the verb is not the first item in the dictionary entry, in contrast to the normal pattern. The ellipsis in the boldfaced entries signals the unusual word order (most inflectional clitics end up in that position, as the examples show).

(29) **cat...dugg** to suffer a downfall (after tempting fate through one’s good fortune) (intr.: obj. id.) {Cat dugg na Yaasin. Yacine suffered as a result of her good fortune.}  
~ *cat* (‘evil fate’), *dugg* ‘to go into’ :: ‘for evil fate to go into...’  
**yaram...dab** to put on a lot of weight (intr.: obj. id.) {Yaram dafa ma dab. I put on a lot of weight. | Ayda yaram dafa ko dab. Aïda put on a lot of weight.}  
~ *yaram* ‘weight’, *dab* ‘to catch up with’ :: ‘for weight to catch up with ...’

The last example sentence in (29) could be translated ‘Weight caught up with Aïda’ or ‘Aïda, weight caught up with her’ (*Aïda* is topicalized, but not a syntactic subject): These idioms are identified in the dictionary as intransitive, since they “take” only one argument. They are called “object idioms” because the argument added to them is a syntactic object.

Here are some SLQZ examples:

(30) **rbih bxu’udy** is creased, is wrinkled, is pleated | *está doblado, está arrugado, es arrugado, está plisado, es plisado* {impers. id.; Rbih

- bxu'udy x:casoonëng 'His pants are pleated | *Sus pantalones son plisados*' }  
 ~ rbiḥ 'sits', bxu'udy 'wrinkle' :: 'for pleats to sit on ...'  
**rnnàa'az x:lyiàa'** gets a fever | *agarra fiebre (le da fiebre)* {impers. id.;  
 Mnnàa'az x:lyiàa' la'annng 'He got a fever | *Agarró fiebre, Le dio fiebre*' }  
 ~ rnnàa'az 'grabs', x:lyiàa' 'fever' :: 'for fever to grab ...'

The added argument appears at the end of the sentence here, in the SLQZ object position. (Thus, for instance, a post-verbal pronoun like *la'annng* 'him' (in the last example) can never be used to indicate a syntactic subject.) These idioms are called "impersonal" because they have a filled subject position and their most discourse-salient argument is a non-subject. As the examples show, there is a very English-centric slant to this whole analysis, which considers these expressions as non-standard because they do not have the same subject as the English translation.

Sometimes the SLQZ grammatical relations show a parallelism with Spanish. For instance, consider the parenthesized Spanish translation of the last SLQZ entry in (30). The natural way to say 'he gets a fever' in Spanish uses the verb 'give' with an indirect object 'him' (a non-subject), just as in the SLQZ expression. Other SLQZ "impersonal" expressions include Spanish loans and mimic Spanish syntax:

- (31) **rdèèi'dy gaan** feels like (doing something relatively important) | *tiene ganas de (hacer algo relativamente importante)* {impers. id.; followed by irr.; Que'ity rdèi'dydi' gaan la'annng ycwàa'ng gyèe'ts lohreb 'He doesn't feel like writing a letter to them | *El no tiene ganas de escribirles a ellos*' }  
 ~ rdèèi'dy: 'gives', gaan < Spanish *ganas* 'wishes'<sup>14</sup> :: 'for "wishes" to give ...' (cf. Spanish *le dan ganas*)  
**ruhny gwu'ast** likes | *disfruta (le gusta)* {impers. id.; Ruhny gwu'ast naa' biien 'I like wine | *Disfruto el vino, Me gusta el vino*'; Ruhny gwu'ast liu' biien 'You like wine | *Disfrutas el vino, Te gusta el vino*' }  
 ~ ruhny 'does', gwu'ast < Spanish *gusta* 'pleases' :: 'for "pleases" to do ... (something)' (cf. Spanish *gustar*)

Although *ruhny gwu'ast* is influenced by Spanish *gustar* (*gwu'ast* is derived from the inflected form *gusta*) and more similar to it than to English *like*, there are differences between the SLQZ and Spanish impersonal structures: in SLQZ (32), the liked item is a second object (not a subject, as in Spanish); the liker is a first object (not an indirect object, as in Spanish); and *gwu'ast* is in subject position:

- (32) R-uhny gwu'ast naa' biien. 'I like wine'  
 hab-do liking pron.1s wine

Wolof "possessive idioms" and SLQZ "possessor idioms" are like Mohave (22), with an open possessor of the grammatical subject position. Here are some Wolof examples (again, the ellipsis in the entry words shows that the verb follows):

- (33) **gémminñam...buur** to have all one's teeth (intr.: poss. id.)  
 ~ gémmiñ 'mouth', buur 'to be full' :: 'for ...'s mouth to be full'  
**lámminñam...tar** to have a sharp tongue; to always have an answer; to always have something to say (intr.: poss. id.) {Lámminñam dafa tar. She

<sup>14</sup> *Gaan* (31), *gwu'ast* (31), and *nesesitaar* (43) are not used alone with the meanings indicated.

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has a sharp tongue, She always has an answer, She always has something to say.)  
 ~ *lāmmin̄* ‘tongue’, *tar* (‘to be sharp’), ‘to be oppressive’ (Fal et al. 1990) ::  
 ‘for ...’s tongue to be sharp’

Here are some SLQZ examples:

(34) **dehts** back...

**rcah dehtsəng** he has to buy drinks for everyone (because of losing a bet or forgetting a commitment, for example) | *él les tiene que disparar las bebidas a todos (por haber perdido una apuesta o por olvidar un compromiso, por ejemplo)* {pssr. id.; Que’itydi’ dehts Gye’eihlly ycah “Mike won’t have to buy drinks | *Miguel no tendrá que disparar las bebidas*” }

~ *rcah* ‘hangs (on the tree, of fruit)’ :: ‘for ...’s back to hang’

**gue’ehcy** head...

**bèi’ny cwe’eenn làa’iny guehs nu’uh gue’ehcyəng** he doesn’t understand, he’s in the dark, it’s as if he has his head in a pot | *él no entiendo, es como si él tuviera la cabeza en una olla* {pssr. id.; Bèi’ny cwe’eenn làa’iny guehs nuuh’ gue’ecya’ “I don’t understand | *No entiendo*” }

~ *bèi’ny cwe’eenn* ‘like’, *làa’iny* ‘in’, *guehs* ‘pot’, *nu’uh* ‘is inside’ :: ‘for it to be like ...’s head is inside a pot’

In these SLQZ expressions, the only syntactic reflex of the subject of the English translation is as the possessor of the grammatical subject of the expression, which appears at the very end of the entry sentence, as in this example from the second entry in (35):

(35) B-èi’ny cwe’eenn làa’iny guehs n-u’uh gue’ehcy=əng.  
 perf-do account in pot neut-be.in head=3s.prox  
 ‘It’s like his head is in a pot’

In the SLQZ dictionary, such “possessor idioms” are given as indented sub-entries under the main entry for these inflected words (whose definitions are ellipted in (34) and (37) below), the possessed subjects (with copious cross-references and a clear indication in the index of where the full entry is to be found). We felt that it wouldn’t make sense to leave this possessed subject (especially a body part word such as the headwords in (34)) hanging uninflected at the end of such an expression, so these indented idioms are listed with arbitrary third person singular proximate pronominal inflection, forming a complete sentence (as is shown by the definitions in (19)).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> There is an asymmetry between the English and Spanish translations of SLQZ verbs like those in (34). Thus, the bare third person verbs in English match the usage of the bare SLQZ verbs, since each requires a third person subject to form a complete sentence; however, a bare third person verb constitutes a complete sentence in Spanish (a pro-drop language). We include the subject pronoun *él* in Spanish translations like those of the first and second idioms in (34) to help suggest that these actually include an overt subject (the proximate clitic =əng).

## 6. Dictionary Corpuses, Idioms, and Comparative Syntax

Where do the idioms in my dictionaries come from? You cannot elicit for idioms. Only rarely would a speaker be able to come up with answers to a question like, “Tell me some expressions that don’t mean what you would think they would mean from the words they contain.” Asking a speaker for other expressions that contain a particular verb or noun might produce some results, but it’s a pretty hit-or-miss technique. The place for a fieldworker to find idioms—in the broad sense I use that term, of words and phrases whose meaning and/or syntax must be listed in the dictionary—is natural speech, hopefully supplemented by transcribed and analyzed texts. (Haas knew what she was talking about—both grammar and texts are necessary to ensure a good dictionary.) But a comprehensive dictionary can itself constitute a corpus of data about idioms. While preparing this paper, I found examples that help support some general observations concerning the syntax of idioms, and I discovered new evidence showing how idiomatic syntax like that I described in the preceding section can be restructured more conventionally.

### 6.1

Nunberg, Sag, & Wasow (1994) argue, for example, that the existence of families of related idioms is evidence for treating idioms componentially. Thus, in the two pairs of Wolof possessive idioms in (36), either the subject or the verb can be replaced by another with a similar meaning, indicating that speakers must be aware of the meaning of the idioms’ component parts:

- (36a) **coonoom...jééx** to feel relieved (intr.: poss. id.)  
**coonoom...wàcc** to be soothed, relieved; to be less tired (intr.: poss. id.)  
 ~ *coono* ‘tiredness’, *jééx* ‘to be all gone’ / *wàcc* ‘to go down’ :: ‘for ...’s tiredness to be all gone / go down’
- (36b) **fitam...tëf-tëfi** to have heart palpitations; to have heartburn (intr.: poss. id.)  
**xolam...tëf-tëfi** to have heart palpitations; to have heartburn (intr.: poss. id.)  
 ~ *xol* ‘heart’ / *fit* ‘courage’ / *tëf-tëfi* ‘to jump up and down’ :: ‘for ...’s heart / courage to jump up and down’

Similarly, (37) is a variant of the second SLQZ idiom in (34) illustrating creative elaboration based on speakers’ clear understanding of the meaning of the idiom’s parts. As the note after entry (37) shows, this is an ongoing process (but one that could not happen if the idiom were treated by speakers as an unanalyzable unit):

- (37) **gue'ehcy head...**  
**bèi'ny cwe'eenn te'ihby gami'izh gyiia' nu'uh gue'ehcyèng** he doesn't understand, it's as if he has his head in a girl's blouse | *él no entiende, es como si él tuviera la cabeza en la blusa de una joven* {psr. id. used by men}  
 §§ When a young man says, “Bèi'ny cwe'eenn te'ihby gami'izh gyiia' nu'uh gue'ecya” (“I don't understand | *No entiendo*”), a friend may joke, “Bèi'ny cwe'eenn làa'iny casoon tyu'c me'eu a'ti” (“No, it's like (it's) in dirty underpants | *No, es como (si tuvieras la cabeza) en calzones sucios*”).

6.2

An extensive, analyzed dictionary corpus may reveal sets of related entries one of which has idiomatic syntax (as in section 5) and one of which does not.

Consider first the Mohave idiomatic expressions in (22) above. These idioms have an open possessor of subject position: to say ‘I am happy’, for instance, one says ‘My heart is good’, and so on. Mohave verbs with first person subjects have a glottal stop prefix, but no glottal stop is added to the verb in the example in the first entry (instead, the first person glottal stop appears on the possessed subject noun); the Mohave second person prefix *m-* appears on the possessed subject rather than the verb in the second entry example: thus, what we think of as the subject is not the grammatical subject of the expression. Is this simply an English-centric definition? Perhaps not, given that Mohave also has expressions like those in (38) and (39):

- (38) **iiwany 'ahot=k** be happy § 'Iiwany 'a'ahotk. I am happy.  
**iiwany 'alay=k** be sad, feel bad § 'Iiwany 'a'alayk. I'm sad.
- (39) **wa 'ahot=k, wa 'ahoot=k** be happy, nice, generous § Wa ma'ahootk.  
 You're nice.  
**wa 'alay=k** be sad § Wa ka'alaymotm. Don't be sad.

In these verbs, the “logical” subject is treated as the grammatical subject of the verb of the expression (as shown by the appearance of the first person glottal stop prefix on the last words of the examples in (38) and the second person *m-* and imperative *k-* prefixes on the last words of the examples in (39)). The verbs in (38) are possessor raising structures: in these expressions, the possessor of the original subject ‘heart’ is the subject of the verb (though ‘heart’ is still marked for the same possessor). The verbs in (39) are even farther from the original structure, with *wa* ‘heart’ stripped of its first syllable and no longer marked for possessor.

The pattern of development seen in (22) > (38) > (39) (whose directionality seems clear, given the original semantics; cf. Munro (1976)) occurs in other languages as well. Thus, alongside the second Wolof entry in (33) we find (40):

- (40) **tar làmmiñ** to have a sharp tongue; to always have an answer; to always have something to say (intr.) {Ayda dafa tar làmmiñ. Aida has a sharp tongue.}

The first verb has the sharp-tongued person only as the possessor of the subject ‘tongue’. In the second, however, the sharp-tongued person is the subject of the verb.

A comparable change affects Chickasaw multiple nominative constructions like those in (25). Speakers sometimes restructure such sentences to resemble ordinary dative object constructions like (24), as with (41) (cf. Munro (1999):

- (41) Zak-at ofi' im-illi-tok. ‘Zak’s dog died’  
 Zak-nom dog dat-die-pt

(41) is an alternative to the Possessor Raising structure (25) (itself derived from (26)). Every Chickasaw speaker I have surveyed uses this novel construction with some verbs.

The change from Chickasaw (26) to (25) to (41) is similar to the Mohave and Wolof examples since each has an apparent subject + verb + object pattern in which

the “object” is the original subject of the verb and the syntactic subject originally played a different semantic role (possessor), as schematized in (42):

- (42) *Chickasaw* (possessor + possession subject) + intransitive verb (26)  
 > derived possessor subject + old possession subject + verb (25)  
 > possessor subject + unpossessed possession + verb (41)  
*Mohave* (possessor + possession subject) + intransitive verb (22)  
 > derived possessor subject + (possessor + possession) + verb (38)  
 > possessor subject + (unpossessed possession-clitic + verb) (39)  
*Wolof* (possessor + possession subject) + intransitive verb (33)  
 > possessor subject + verb + unpossessed possession (40)

The best syntactic analysis of derived constructions like those in the examples in (39), (40), and (41) is far from clear. What is certain is that speakers restructure the original constructions in order to show that the possessor is more salient in the discourse than the possessed item. Usually the possessor is higher on an animacy scale than the possession and, since the possession is very often a part of the possessor’s body, the change can be seen as a type of metonymy.

### 6.3

Many of these changes also remove a conflict between the target language structure and the English translation: thus, ‘I am happy’ has a subject ‘I’, and so do the derived Mohave structures (38) and (39); ‘Aida has a sharp tongue’ has a subject ‘Aida’, and so does the example in Wolof (40). The translation of Chickasaw Possessor Raising structures like (25) or the new structure in (41) often does not change from the original possessed subject structure, but ‘have’ translations sometimes work with these (e.g. ‘Zak had his dog die’), and other such derived Chickasaw structures can express concepts like ‘I got a divorce’ (27, from ‘my paper is clean’).

The principal case where I earlier worried about English-centric definitions concerned the SLQZ constructions exemplified in (31), in which there was a clear mismatch between “impersonal” (quite likely Spanish influenced) syntax and English translations whose subjects corresponded to SLQZ non-subjects. But speakers can also express the semantic non-subjects of such constructions as syntactic subjects. (43) presents two SLQZ verbs that can be used in both “impersonal” and more English-like constructions (contrast the first and second definitions in each entry):

- (43) **ràa'izynah dìi'zh** 1. gets hurt by words, gets offended by words | *se ofende, se siente (por lo que se dice)* {impers. id.; Ràa'izynah dìi'zh Gye'eihlly “Mike is hurt (by words) | Miguel *se siente (por lo que se dice)*”; Que'ity dìi'zh chàa'izynah la'anng “He won't be hurt (by words), Words won't hurt him | *Él no se sentirá (por lo que se dice), Las palabras (lo que se dice) no lo lastimarán*”}; 2. gets hurt by words, gets offended by words | *se ofende, se siente (por lo que se dice)* {Que'ityëng chàa'izynàa'ng dìi'zh “He won't be hurt (by words) | *Él no se sentirá (por lo que se dice)*”} > ràa'izy “hits | *golpea*”  
 ~ ràa'izynah ‘hits hard’, dìi'zh ‘word’ :: (1) ‘for the word to hit .... hard’;  
 (2) ‘for ... to hit the word hard’  
**ruhny nesesitoaar** 1. needs | *necesita* {impers. id.; Ruhny nesesitoaar nàa' mùuully “I need money | *Necesito dinero*”}; 2. needs | *necesita* {Runya'

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nesesitaar mùuully “I need money | *Necesito dinero*”; te’ihby bùunny nih ruhny nesesitaarih “a person who needs it | *una persona que lo necesita*” }  
 ~ ruhny ‘does’, *nesesitar* ‘to need’ (infinitive) < Sp. *necesitar* :: (1) ‘for “to need” to do ...’; (2) ‘for ... to do “to need”’

Consider the examples in (44):

- (44a) R-uhny nesesitaar nàa' mùuully. ‘I need money’  
 hab-do to.need 1s.pron money  
 (44b) R-uny=a' nesesitaar mùuully. ‘I need money’  
 hab-do=1s to.need money

In (44a), the syntactic subject appears to be the borrowed infinitive *nesesitaar*. ‘I’ is expressed here with a pronoun that can only be interpreted as a non-subject. In (44b), however, ‘I’ is the syntactic subject, indicated with a subject clitic on the verb. Using borrowed Spanish infinitives after *ruhny* ‘does’ is a productive process in SLQZ, but usually such expressions work like ordinary transitives, with the “logical” subject as their syntactic subject, as in (44b). (44a) is unusual in that the “logical” subject appears in object position and “impersonal” non-subject form.

### 7. Conclusion

The idiom restructurings I have surveyed in the preceding section seem to reflect a trend toward unity of syntax and semantics, with the actual subject of the discourse becoming the syntactic subject as well.

Such changes, however, may result in complications in the structure of the verb phrase. If MY TONGUE SHARP changes to something that looks as if it ought to mean I SHARP TONGUE, what does this mean? Does SHARP actually become a transitive verb, with TONGUE as its object? Perhaps SHARP and TONGUE are somehow compounded or incorporated together, forming a more complex but still intransitive verb with the syntactic role of the original subject even further diminished. I suggested in Munro (1976) that Mohave verbs like those in (38) and especially (39) might be best analyzed as involving incorporation, and such an idea has also been suggested for the Chickasaw and SLQZ constructions just surveyed.

However, an incorporation approach does not always work. Consider (45), which shows different uses of the Chickasaw verb *kaniya*, which means ‘get lost’, ‘go away’, or even (in its suppletive plural form *tamowa*) ‘elope’. These sentences illustrate Possessor Raising, as in (26)-(25), with a semantic change when the Possessor Raising construction is used in (45b) to express the transitive verb ‘lose’.

- (45a) Keeli j-holiss-aat kaniya-tok. ‘Keeli’s book got lost’  
 Keeli dat-book-nom get.lost.s-pt  
 (45b) Keeli-at holiss-aat in-kaniya-tok. ‘Keeli lost her book’  
 Keeli-nom dog-nom dat-get.lost.s-pt

The innovative structure (46) shows more changes. The lost item (‘book’), which, like the “old subject” in (41), is not only not marked nominative, but is more individuated (marked for possessor) and, significantly, actually marked accusative. Further, a second object noun in the sentence (licensed by the locative applicative prefix *aa-*) intervenes between this erstwhile old subject ‘book’ and the verb.

- (46) Keeli-at i-holisso-a holissaapisa' aa-in-kaniya-tok.  
 Keeli-nom dat-book-acc school loc-dat-get.lost.s-pt  
 'Keeli lost her book at school'

The word order and the accusative marking argue against any assumption of incorporation in this case, suggesting rather that the verb (*in*)*kaniya* has actually acquired a new meaning in this construction, 'lose', whose grammatical relations are more like those we conceptualize in English.

Like many of the other idioms surveyed in this paper, the new uses of *kaniya* shown in (45b) and (46) represent dead metaphors, idioms whose "literal" meaning is certainly not accessed by speakers every time they use the idiomatic structure, although that meaning may be fully or partially accessible with conscious thought, and although certain parts of that meaning continue to be felt. (Thus, in its original intransitive use *kaniya* refers only to a single entity getting lost or going away, a feature retained even in the 'lose' sentences (45b) and (46)—although Chickasaw does not distinguish nouns like 'dog' and 'book' for number, such sentences can only be used to talk about losing a single dog or book.)

Noticing idioms in the languages you do fieldwork on is important, and putting them in the dictionary can be an interesting challenge. In this paper, I have very briefly surveyed a variety of idiomatic verbal expressions from four very different languages, and described some of the decisions I made in deciding how to put these into dictionaries. Dictionaries are often unappreciated as contributions to linguistic analysis, so I have also tried to illustrate some of the ways in which they can be more than simply lists of words. Diverse languages may have quite similar types of idiomatic verbs which pose problems for the dictionary maker, but which may contribute to a general understanding of how idioms work and are analyzed. Finally, the restructuring of idiomatic, nonstandard syntax often produces a striking parallelism with English, a language in which grammatical subjecthood is far more strongly correlated with discourse salience than is true in many other languages.

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