From *work one's ass off* to *bite one's face off*: Understanding the degree of idiomaticity through syntactic and semantic inheritance in a network of (originally) resultative constructions

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ENG Abstract: This study is aimed at exploring the degree of idiomaticity of resultatives, such as *work one's ass off* and *bite one's face off*, through a qualitative examination of their verbal forms (e.g., *work*, *bite*), their nominal forms (e.g., *ass*, *face*), and the property of telicity. Based on a random extraction of 1,000 concordances from the English Corpus *enTenTen21*, findings show that the network of constructions is made up of three Types ('Intensification', 'Astoundment', and 'Detachment') and ten Subtypes, with 'body part' being the most frequent category of the nominal forms. Also, the (sub)schemas in the network originate from the inheritance of at least one of the following properties: verbal intensification, (a part of) someone as recipient of an action, and detachment of such a part.

Keywords: Idiomaticity; compositionality; construction grammar; network of constructions; resultativeness

ENG De *work one's ass off* a *bite one's face off*: Análisis del grado de idiomaticidad a través de la herencia sintáctica y semántica en una red de construcciones (originalmente) resultativas

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es explorar el grado de idiomaticidad de los resultativos, como *work one's ass off* y *bite one's face off*, mediante un análisis cualitativo de sus formas verbales (por ej., *work*, *bite*), sus formas nominales (por ej., *ass*, *face*) y la propiedad de telicidad. A partir de una extracción aleatoria de 1.000 concordancias del Corpus en inglés *enTenTen21*, los resultados muestran que la red de construcciones se compone de tres tipos ('Intensificación', 'Asombro' y 'Desprendimiento') y diez subtipos, siendo la categoría 'parte del cuerpo' la forma nominal más frecuente. Asimismo, los (sub)esquemas de la red tienen su origen en la herencia de al menos una de las siguientes propiedades: intensificación verbal, (una parte de) alguien como destinatario de una acción y desprendimiento de dicha parte.

Palabras clave: Idiomaticidad; composicionalidad; gramática de construcciones; red de construcciones; resultatividad

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1. Introduction

Idiomatic expressions have been traditionally regarded as the utmost in combining prefabricated parts in everyday language (see, e.g., Bolinger 1976; Hopper 1998), where the semantics of their constituents loses relevance at the expense of the semantics of the full phrase. In the process of semantic 'readjustment', there is a clear interplay between compositionality, idiomaticity, and creativity (see, e.g., Goldberg 2019; Corver et al. 2019), whereby all idiomatic expressions are (etymo)logically compositional, but their development towards an

idiomatic status suggests a scalar continuum (Kay and Michaelis 2019). One bright-line interpretation of this continuum is through the problematic acknowledgement of compositionality in idiomatic expressions. Unlike researchers such as Marantz (1997), McGinnis (2005), and Mateu and Espinal (2007), who claim that compositional reading is still plausible in the case of idioms and idiomatic expressions, others, such as Glasbey (2007), as pointed out by Merchant (2022), suggest "mismatches in the aspectual properties of some idioms' literal and figurative readings and therefore [they] argue for compositionality with respect to idioms' meanings only" (p. 1117). For instance, in using the metaphorical expression *to blow one's mind* ("to overwhelm one with wonder or bafflement", *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Online* [henceforth MWD11]), speakers are aware of its argument and syntactic structure, as expressed by the way the possessive determiner is syntactically adapted to the individual(s) whose *mind* has been *blown* (e.g., *She blew my mind*; *She blew my sister's mind*). On the other hand, this expression can also be semantically decomposed in order to understand the contribution of its constituents to the meaning of the verbal phrase: *mind* conceptualizes the notions of 'understanding' and 'reasoning' whilst the verb *blow* entails a 'violent' action. Furthermore, the semantic constituency is also bolstered, via analogy, by already-made expressions of similar argument structure, as in *blow one's cool* and *blow one's cover*.

This study, therefore, is based on the notion that the semantic and syntactic decomposition of idiomatic expressions can be of considerable avail in understanding the development and degree of idiomaticity of such expressions. This means that, although their form-meaning combination is variably automatized, resulting in the fact that speakers are not always liable to decompose these expressions, there might be various factors underlying the 'openness', or flexibility, of these expressions to generate new forms, or even new constructions. Following Cover et al.'s (2019) reflections on the continuum of flexibility, the aspectual (*Aktionart*) interpretation of idioms and idiomatic expressions (see Section 2 for a more detailed account of these two denominations) "hinges on the decomposability of its meaning into a verbal part and one or more non-verbal entities" (p. 725). The concept of flexibility is then applied, in the present study, to constructional schemas and subschemas pertaining to the same network of constructions to determine whether idiomatic expressions can be intrinsically compositional provided their structure is open to new morphosemantic alternates. In sum, this work focuses on the degree of idiomaticity, as expressed by schema-based constructions, to assess how their inherited syntactic and semantic properties result in the gradable nature of idiomaticity.

The idiomatic expressions that are used as the data fall within the category of resultatives, which are not treated in this research work as isolated instances of resultative syntax, but rather as being part of a 'family' or network of resultatives (Goldberg 1995; Boas 2003; Goldberg and Jackendoff 2004). By pointing to the completion of an action, these verbal expressions are made up of an apparent direct object, for example *ass* in *work one's ass off* ('to work hard'); however, as corroborated in this study, *one's ass off* is an adverbial intensifier that originates from its status as an argument of the construction. As illustrated in *dance one's shoes off* in (1), *laugh one's face off* in (2), and *kick one's shoes off* in (3), the aspectual property of telicity[1] is linguistically represented through both (i) an intensified action and (ii) the explicit expression of the endpoint of this action. The endpoint is, in turn, conveyed by something that is conventionally detached or removed from an individual. These three examples concur in that someone performs an action (*dance*, *laugh, kick*) to a great or extreme degree, which is also targeted at someone or a part of him/her, causing, say, a clothes item (*shoes*) or a body part (*face*) to become detached/removed from the individual. However, this telic reading of the expressions is not entirely accurate, since *laugh one's face off* is not interpreted by proficient users of English as a resultative, or as an instance of telicity through the act of detachment (as an endpoint). As shown in (2), this idiomatic expression conveys the meaning of 'laughing a lot', which suggests that the other two features are not relevant here. What makes (2) an interesting example is the fact that it stems from a resultative construction, in which its originally hyperbolic meaning (i.e., the *face* detaches from the body due to excessive *laughing*) is reinterpreted with the aim of intensifying the verbal meaning.[2] Expressions such as the ones in (1)-(3) are found in the literature under the denomination of EX-CESS, according to which the improbability of, say, a part of a human body being detached from an individual allows, at the time of utterance interpretation, for conceptualizing the action responsible for such a detachment as being an excessive one (Mateu and Espinal 2007, 37). Interestingly, adverbials such as *one's ass off* and *one's face off* are now so frequent, particularly in AmE, that they have been lexicographically attested as intensifying adverbials (e.g., "intensely, vigorously, or to excess", *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [henceforth OED3]). The expressions under study, as in (1)-(3), pertain to the category of Body Part *Off* Constructions (or BPOCs), which is a term used by Cappelle (2014) to examine the semantics of displacement in caused-motion patterns. In our study, a BPOC is structurally identified as $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$, where three open slots are accentuated: noun (N), verb (V), and possessive determiner (pd); as well as one anchor (invariable) point: *off*. The meanings conveyed by these constituents are abstracted through 'i' (an action verb), 'k' (something that is detached as a result of the action) and 'j' (participants in the action). The semantics of 'j' is also connected to the individual from whom something is

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[1]   As proposed by Hu (2020), the aspectual property of telicity is connected with the internal and temporal structure of an event, according to which an event is telic when an endpoint is specified, thus implying that the accomplishment of the action is explicitly specified (pp. 330-331). Telicity, as illustrated in our case studies, involves the notion that for the event to be telic, the action is excessively intensified to the extent that something is detached/removed from the body. Thus, the endpoint specified in these originally telic constructions is the act of detachment/removal, which points to "the result [of] 'non-existence', whence the telicity, evident through the compatibility with endpoint adverbials like in a short time" (Dehé 2002, 15).

[2]   The hyperbolic motivation underlying the making of idiomatic expressions is related to one of the four dimensions proposed by Nunberg et al. (1994): syntactic inflexibility, non-compositionality, conventionality, and figuration. Figuration, which is in fact connected with metaphorical/hyperbolic encoding of these expressions, involves the way "figurative meanings appear to show particular processing properties in comparison to the literal uses of these same expressions" (Espinal and Mateu 2019, n.p.).

detached or removed, which, in some transitive constructions, coincides with the recipient of the action, as with *knock one's hat off*. In this example, someone (the direct object) might be *knocked* so hard his/her *hat* falls off. Although the properties of telicity and detachment are not present in the output semantics of (2), it is undeniable that all these expressions, which also resemble existing constructions such as *work the debt off*, point to a common telic source.

(1)   He DANCED HIS SHOES OFF with Eva and followed Mel's Polka Stars around the area. (*albertaleatribune. com*, 2014)

(2)   The cast was interacting with [the] audience, the most inappropriate humor and we LAUGHED OUR FACES OFF. (*vettix.com*, 2020)

(3)   I pushed him back and handed him the gin, KICKED MY SHOES OFF, and then climbed into the back. (*wattpad.com*, 2019)

In line with Mateu and Espinal's (2007) findings, I agree with the proposition that idiomatic expressions are variably compositional, and that their semantic compositionality contributes to a better understanding of how syntactic and semantic properties are (gradably) readjusted to create new functions. While prior studies have provided evidence on the degree of idiomaticity through statistical, experimental, and corpus-based works (see, e.g., Wulff 2009; Flach 2021), the examination of the degree of idiomaticity should also be approached qualitatively (Liontas 2015), where the idiomatic expressions form part of a network of constructions. Thus, I argue that idiomaticity essentially depends on (i) the morphosemantic alternates of the open slots ([N] and [V]) and (ii) the role of aspectual (e.g., telicity) and argument (e.g., resultativeness) properties. The idea is that both open slots and aspectual/syntactic properties are inherited by (sub)schemas, within a network of constructions (henceforth NetCons_*off*), where the alternation or retention of such properties results in a varying degree of idiomaticity. The analysis of idiomaticity through NetCons_*off* also helps to corroborate the notion that schemas and subschemas follow an orderly and systematic integration, thus allowing a cognitive association between would-be constructions and existing ones. Based on the construction grammar (CxG) approach, this study attempts, therefore, to explore the degree of idiomaticity through (a) a qualitative examination of the morphological and semantic variability of the open slots in the (sub)schemas pertaining to the network of (etymologically) resultative constructions of the structure $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$; and (b) a descriptive analysis of how the inherited properties of telicity and resultativeness might have an impact on the degree of flexibility as expressed by verbal phrases whose original decomposition, as suggested by Mateu and Espinal (2007), is telic and can be represented as follows:

$$<[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off] \leftrightarrow [\text{action SEM}_i \text{ performed (on SEM}_k) \text{ so intensely that SEM}_k \text{ detaches from SEM}_j]>$$

There are three main semantic components being represented in the schema above: (i) an action that is performed intensely or excessively; (ii) a body part or a clothes item belonging to an individual, who may in turn act as the recipient of the action; and finally, (iii) the part (clothes item, body part) that becomes detached/removed from the individual, which is the endpoint of the intensified action, as shown in examples (1)-(3). These semantic components are etymologically involved in the expression of telicity, which is also a constructional feature of resultatives (Wechsler 2010). Although speakers are not literally conveying the aspect of detachment, as in (1) and (2), the notions of intensification and telicity are retained. The example in (3), on the other hand, denotes a non-figurative reading of detachment. These three examples, albeit them being figurative as far as detachment is concerned, are included in the study because their presupposed etymology fits the criteria of intensification and detachment. Expressions such as *have one's day off*, for example, are not included in this study because they do not comply with at least one of the semantic components described earlier. Similarly, the phrasal verbs *take one's clothes off* and *cut/shut one's equipment off*, although conveying the notions of detachment and discontinuation respectively, are excluded from the data because the idea of performing an action (*take* or *cut/shut*) intensely or vigorously, as expressed by telic constructions, is not conceptually possible here. Following the same reasoning, *kick/rip one's shoes off*, as opposed to *take one's shoes off*, due to the violent semantics expressed by [V], is logged for this study: the semantic decomposition of the expression showing that the action of *kicking/ripping* can be performed to excess, causing the *shoes* to be *detached/removed* from the individual wearing them.

2. On idiomaticity through a constructionist approach

CxG offers some interesting perspectives on how compositional and idiomatic patterns are integrated into networks of construction, or constructicons (Fillmore 2006; Fillmore, Lee-Goldman and Rhodes 2012; Fuji 2022). The emergence of a constructicon, defined as "an inheritance network of taxonomically related grammatical patterns" (Diessel 2023, n.p.), demonstrates how constructions, with varying degrees of idiomaticity and productivity, are characterized by the default inheritance of a certain property and the new specifications, or instantiations, of said property. As such, default inheritance, as specified by Booij (2010b), accounts for the particular property that is inherited or replicated from the dominating node (p. 27). This implies that the constructions that originate from the protoconstruction $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$ are made up of inheritable properties that connect idiomatic expressions with constructional schemas. This connection implies that verbal idioms

such as *talk one's ears off* can be related to the idiomatic expression *work one's ass off* because both are presupposed to originate from a telic construction. In this sense, then, not only should phrase structure rules be investigated, but so too should "principles whereby a language can associate semantic and pragmatic interpretation principles with syntactic configurations" (Fillmore et al. 1988, 501). An example of how these interpretation principles are applied is the case of alternates in the open slots [V] and [N]. These slots can be either semantically, pragmatically, or syntactically fixed, or, indeed, a combination of the three. For instance, while [V] in *work one's ass off,* as in (4)*,* is overtly intransitive, [V] in *work one's debt off* is transitive, which suggests that *debt,* as an alternate of [N] and a direct object, as opposed to *ass,* is less liable to becoming part of an idiomatic adverbial. On the other hand, [N] in *one's ass off*, possibly because of its being used with intransitive verbs and the loss of telicity, dissociates from the verbal form in such a way that *one's ass off* undergoes a process of idiomatization, thus leading to the fact that [V] is more open/flexible to other forms of verbs, as distinct from *work*.

(4) Tonight the guys WORKED THEIR ASSES OFF. (*cbc.ca*, 2020)

Despite the fact that telicity, as mentioned before, is presumed to be responsible for the making of *work one's ass off*, the adverbial *one's ass off* has lost all type of connection with its resultative frame, which leads to its being attested as an idiom meaning "intensely, vigorously, or to excess" (OED3). Although this idiomatic adverbial is frequently used after the verb *work* (OED3), it is also possible to find constructions where words of similar semantic nature, as in *laugh* (5) and *butt* (6), are used in lieu of the prototypical *work* and *ass*. The fact that alternates in [V] and [N] might pertain to the same semantic paradigm confirms that (sub)schemas, in spite of their structural variability, are abstracted in a systematic manner. This type of variability confirms Langacker's (1998), and more recently Booij's (2010b), constructionist theories, whereby NetCons_*off* is made up of general or high-level schemas (e.g., $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$), as well as particular or low-level schemas (e.g. $[[V]_i[pd]_j ass off]$, as in *laugh one's ass off, dance one's ass off*), the low-level schemas doing "much, if not most of the work in speaking and understanding" (Langacker 1988, 25). There are also idiomatic schemas that fit the general structure $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$, and also point to a telic etymology, e.g. *knock one's socks off* in (7), *talk one's ears off* in (8), and *bite one's head off* in (9); however, their degree of 'flexibility', i.e., openness to admitting words other than those used in the prototypical schemas, is not as high as in *work one's ass off*.

(5)   It's a sitcom that's really clever where we work hard to make you LAUGH YOUR ASS OFF. (*ew.com*, 2018)

(6)   Did Jennifer Lawrence WORK HER BUTT OFF to become who she is right now? (*quora.com*, 2021)

(7)   He KNOCKED MY SOCKS OFF. He was just a terrific actor. (*pbs.com*, 2019)

(8)   I quirk a brow, remember how she TALKED MY EARS OFF this morning about how useless and boring these parties are. (*wattpad.com*, n.d.)

(9)   I nearly BIT HIS HEAD OFF telling him he wouldn't be so happy if I told him he would be miserable (*juliecampbellphotography.com*, 2014)

The adverbial *off* contributes, as it does in the particular case of telic constructions, such as in (3), to expressing the accomplishment of the verbal action and the detachment of a body part/clothes item. Bearing in mind that telicity and resultativeness are premised to be etymologically associated with the protoconstruction $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$, the adverbial *off*, as an anchor point that is retained in all the constructions within NetCons_*off*, is a 'residual' unit that ensures the inheritance of properties. Therefore, *off* acts as a type of semantic operator that is structurally salient. An effective way of testing the role of *off* is by contrasting *off*-constructions with the same construction without *off*, to see whether the output meaning is affected or not. Excerpts (10)-(12) show three pairs, with one example in each pair where *off* is omitted, and the interpretation of the utterance is therefore changed, proving that the adverbial *off* gradably contributes to the compositionality of the expression. For instance, (10) points to two different actions, one in which a *hat* is simply grasped or picked up, as in (10a), and the other one where a *hat* is removed from the *head*, as in (10b). Alternatively, (11) shows two actions that are similar in nature, but with different degrees of specificity: while the example in (10b) unambiguously refers to the action of removing the *head* from the rest of the body, the utterance in (10a) might refer to either the exact meaning conveyed in (10a), or simply to a cut or a scratch made on the *head*. Finally, the examples in (12a) and in (12b) only differ in that the latter is reiterative[3] and telic, which means that the fact that the action is carried out to completion is underscored. This brief analysis of alternates and

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[3]   In her study on the semantic development of phrasal verbs, Rodríguez-Puentes (2012) offers a five-type classification: (a) literal combinations, whose meaning can be easily deduced form their parts (e.g., *get in, go away*); (b) aspectual combinations, where a verb is combined with a particle that conveys either telic or aspectual meaning (e.g., *play along, fade away*); (c) reiterative combinations, where the meaning of the particle is considered redundant or unnecessary (e.g., *spin around, sit down*); (d) figurative combinations, in which the literal reading of the verb and the particle, which are generally used in a physical context, is extrapolated to a mental context, and there is still a connection between these two meanings (e.g., *throw away* [*one's future*]); and (e) non-compositional combinations, whose meaning cannot be predicted by users (e.g., *give up, pass away*) (pp. 72-77).

their effect on semantic prediction is in line with Warren's (2005) characterization of idiomaticity, according to which "[it] consists in knowing what situations and phenomena require standard expressions although alternatives are normally conceivable—and in knowing what these would be" (p. 36).

(10) a. She TAKES THE HAT.
      b. She TAKES THE HAT OFF.

(11) a. They CUT HIS HEAD.
      b. They CUT HIS HEAD OFF.

(12) a. He TICKED THE ITEMS ON THE LIST.
      b. He TICKED THE ITEMS ON THE LIST OFF.

The examples in (10)-(12) posit that the particle *off* partakes in the formation of new actions by adding more semantic specificity: the explicit designation of the accomplishment of the action through the act of detachment. In (10), however, the effects of semantic specificity result in a completely new action: (10a) and (10b) are never found as synonyms, so they are not interchangeable in any context. Also, although the examples above conform to the protoconstruction $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$, their syntactic and semantic properties seem to be connected through the lexicographical meanings of the adverbial *off*, for instance, "so as to be separated from support",[4] as with (10b) and (11b), or "used as an intensifier",[5] as with (12b). In addition, while *off* acts as a morphosemantic operator in these less metaphorical cases, there are examples in which $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$ develops into fully non-compositional constructions. For instance, (13) shows various examples of *write off*, where (13a) and (13b) are connected to the notion of something that is eliminated from the books or written records, while (13c) conveys the semantics of someone that is dismissed. This means that, following Rodríguez-Puentes' (2012) classification (see footnote 3), figurative and non-compositional combinations are not only dependent on the semantics of constituents, but also on the semantic development undergone by the full phrase: *write off* ('to delete from the books') → *write off* ('to minimize one's relevance in a certain situation').

(13)[6] a. He had long since WRITTEN OFF THE MONEY.
         b. One of Pete's friends WROTE HIS CAR OFF there.
         c. The Government can WRITE OFF VOTERS motivated by environmental issues.

What is irrefutable, as shown in examples (11) and (12), is that idiomaticity is characterized by multifactorial and scalar properties (Wulff 2008, 8), whence habitual co-occurrence results in idiomatic, (non)canonical expressions while those expressions that have "become conventionally fixed in a specific order and lexical form, or have only a restricted set of variants, acquire the status of idioms" (Fernando 1996, 30). This suggests that idiomaticity is best depicted in the form of a continuum, whose endpoints are compositional clauses and idioms, as in *kick the ball* and *kick the bucket*, respectively, and where idiomatic expressions are potential idioms or idioms in the making. The conventionally fixed structure of idiomatic expressions depends on (i) the openness/flexibility of [V] and [N] to accept alternates belonging to a semantically related field and (ii) the effects of such openness on the compositionality of the full expression. For instance, (14a) and (14b) share a similar structure, including the intensifying expression *one's socks off* (OED3); the former refers to an action (i.e., *dance*) that is also literally expressed by [V], while the latter, on the other hand, denotes an action (i.e., *astound/amaze*) which is figuratively represented by [V]. As such, idiomaticity should be linked to the semantic openness of constituents, which implies that when the semantic restriction is hardly ever broken, the expression falls within the status of idiom. To demonstrate this idea, examples (14c) and (14d) are elaborated through the substitution of [V] to test the effect of semantic restriction on idiomaticity: (14c) is semantically and syntactically correct and retains the intensification of the verb *study*, although *study* and *dance* are not semantically related; (14d) keeps the semantic restriction of [V] by using the verb *beat*, which is not so semantically different from *knock*, thus importing the original semantics of 'to astound or amaze'. Finally, example (14e) demonstrates that the semantics of the full expression affects its own grammaticality: the phrasal verb *wear off* ("to gradually decrease", MWD11) is intransitive and the verb *to wear* does not accept intensification, which is why, despite the semantic likelihood of *wear* and *socks* being used in the same idiomatic expression, **wear one's socks off* does not make sense.

(14) a. DANCE one's socks off
      b. KNOCK one's socks off
      c. STUDY one's socks off
      d. BEAT one's socks off
      e. *WEAR one's socks off

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4   Example taken from MWD11.
5   Example taken from MWD11.
6   All these examples are taken from *Collins English Dictionary* (henceforth COD23).

3. Methodology

This study is based on two methodological stages: data compilation and data analysis. The data compilation stage is corpus-based: it involves a random extraction of 1,000 concordances from the English Web Corpus *enTenTen21* (*Sketch Engine*),[7] with the search query: [tag="V.*"] [tag="PP.?"] [tag="N.*"] [word="off"] [tag="SENT"]. The results include forms that conform to the structure $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$. The form [pd] is conveniently maintained in the query to examine the role of the target of the intensified action in the protoconstruction $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$, as well as to confirm whether, regardless of the idiomatic nature of phrases, it is conventionally adapted to the syntactic frame of the expression. Phrasal verbs such as *turn off* and *write off*, as mentioned in Section 1, are excluded from the study because their present-day semantics does not appear to have developed from a telic construction; for instance, something is not *taken* or *written* intensely or vigorously, although the case of *take* does involve a detachment (or removal) of, say, a piece of clothing. In sum, the units used in the study were extracted on the basis of being originally telic and resultative, while also fitting the following semantic structure [action SEM_i performed (on SEM_k) so intensely that SEM_k detaches from SEM_j]. This structure constitutes a unified schema that includes both transitive and intransitive forms.

The total number of type constructions extracted from the corpus is 188. This number includes all alternate permutations, as in *work one's <u>ass</u> off* and *work one's <u>butt</u> off*, which, although similar in meaning, are counted separately on the basis of the varying semantics of [N]. This compilation stage, from a qualitative perspective, sheds light on how idiomatic expressions, such as *one's ass off* and *one's face off*, are integrated into NetCons_*off*. Also, the schemas and subschemas pertaining to NetCons_*off* are associated through the salient properties of telicity, detachment, and intensification.

The data analysis stage includes both a descriptive and a qualitative examination of the data. The qualitative analysis, based on Diessel's (2023) filler-slot association, allows for establishing NetCons_*off*, in which the morphosemantic categories of the open slots (i.e., [N] and [V]) are correlated with the semantic development of the anchor point and the utterance interpretation (e.g., the adverbial *off* is believed to receive and modulate the meaning conveyed by the full construction). NetCons_*off*, which is made up of abstract schemas and their specific subschemas, offers a clear picture of how the properties inherited by default from dominating nodes (Booij 2010b, 27) are also responsible for the making of both highly idiomatic forms and meta-grammatical patterns (Kay 2002, n.p.). The descriptive analysis of the semantic and syntactic properties of [V] and [N] is also of help in assessing if there is any correlation between semantic restriction and structural variability. The elaboration of NetCons_*off* also involves grouping constructions through their being flexible to accept new expressions, which leads to a more accurate depiction of their degree of idiomaticity, from a qualitative point of view. This type of descriptive analysis is based on Jackendoff's (2002) and Cappelle's (2008) storage principles, whereby in order to better understand the degree of idiomaticity that affects forms of similar structure, we need to operationalize morphosemantic heterogeneity in order to establish "the organizational principles pertaining to the way in which the total stock of linguistic units can efficiently and plausibly be represented in a descriptive grammar." (Cappelle 2008, 172).

To complete the descriptive study of idiomaticity, the data analysis also encompasses, based on the typology of the (sub)schemas included in NetCons_*off*, the examination of how telicity, and therefore the argument of resultativeness, is variably inherited by low-order schemas. The idea is to demonstrate that telicity, being the original aspect of the event, is variably readjusted into the subschemas, and that the "proto-properties" of intensification and detachment, as a result of dissimilar readjustment, generate varying degrees of idiomaticity and flexibility.

4. Results and discussion

This section is organized as follows. Section 4.1 presents the network of constructions, or NetCons_*off*. A brief description of each subschema is also provided, where special emphasis is given to their semantic and syntactic features. There is also an introductory account, based on lexicographical information, of the role of the adverbial *off* in the semantic categorization of the schemas. Section 4.2 provides an account of how telicity, and its decomposed properties of intensification and detachment, is variably inherited by low-order schemas. This section is expected to unravel the correlation between telicity/resultativeness and degree of idiomaticity. In Section 4.3, based on the data compiled and categorized in Section 4.1, I discuss how the semantic properties of alternates in [V] and [N] partake in the process of idiomaticity, where semantic restriction or specificity is also relevant to understanding the syntactic co-dependency of [N] and [V]. Finally, Section 4.4 provides some concluding remarks and reflections on the aspects of idiomaticity and compositionality.

4.1. The network of constructions

The case of NetCons_*off*, which is primarily based on filler-slot relations (Diessel 2023, 16),[8] is made up of three open slots ([N], [V], and [pd]) and an anchor point (*off*). While an open slot is filled with any word pertaining to a set of words characterized by the same grammatical category, an anchor point is morphologically invariable. In our case, the anchor point is the adverbial *off*, which is also the rightmost constituent of the construction. Since our research questions are based on the idiomaticity of expressions such as *work*

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one's ass off or *talk one's ear off*, the structural constituency of [[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] has been conventionally set up to accurately trace the full development of idiomatic and compositional constructions within a specific network. Also, by limiting the structure of the search query, the resulting data become more manageable. Although the open slot [pd], as commented in Section 2, can be a form of covert transitivity, its relevance to the filler-slot analysis is semantically limited. So, based on the semantic taxonomy of alternates ([N] and [V]) and the output semantics of the idiomatic expression as such, Table 1 provides an overview of the Types and Subtypes identified in the corpus. There are three Types: Type 1 'Intensification', Type 2 'Astoundment', and Type 3 'Detachment', each of which is also briefly described in terms of transitivity and the semantic value of 'k'. Table 1 also includes a list of the idiomatic expressions and idioms that were annotated from the corpus. Rather than logging the full expressions in a traditional, lexicographical manner, as in *work one's butt off*, I have opted for depicting the different permutations of [N] and [V] and their token frequency (f) in the corpus, e.g., [V] = *work*, [N] = *butt*, (f) = 7.

Table 1: Types and Subtypes of the structure [[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] (and their frequencies), as extracted from the Corpus *enTenTen21* (*Sketch Engine*).

Type 1 Intensification					
Subtype 1a					
<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_i$ performed intensely]>					
Intransitive					
k = 'body part (buttocks)'					
[V]	**[N]**	**(f)**	**[V]**	**[N]**	**(f)**
argue	*ass*	1	*play*	*ass*	5
audition	*ass*	1	*play*	*butt*	2
block	*ass*	1	*play*	*tail*	2
block	*butt*	1	*run*	*ass*	2
boogie	*butt*	1	*sin*	*ass*	1
brag	*ass*	1	*sing*	*butt*	1
campaign	*ass*	1	*smoke*	*ass*	1
compete	*tail*	1	*study*	*ass*	1
cry	*ass*	1	*sweat*	*ass*	2
dance	*ass*	4	*swing*	*ass*	1
dance	*butt*	2	*twerk*	*derriere*	1
fight	*tail*	1	*walk*	*butt*	1
grind	*butt*	1	*walk*	*tail*	1
hustle	*ass*	1	*work*	*#ss*	1
laugh	*arse*	1	*work*	*arse*	2
laugh	*ass*	26	*work*	*ass*	20
laugh	*bun*	1	*work*	*assets*	1
laugh	*butt*	5	*work*	*azz*	1
laugh	*half-ass*	1	*work*	*butt*	7
laugh	*hiney*	1	*work*	*hind-end*	1
laugh	*keister*	1	*work*	*rear*	1
laugh	*tail*	1	*work*	*tail*	11
lie	*ass*	2	*write*	*ass*	1
Subtype 1b					
<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_i$ performed intensely]>					
Intransitive					
k = 'body part (head)'					
[V]	**[N]**	**(f)**	**[V]**	**[N]**	**(f)**
bark	*head*	1	*record*	*head*	1
blabber	*mouth*	1	*rockandroll*	*face*	1
crow	*head*	1	*scream*	*head*	15
cry	*head*	1	*sing*	*face*	1

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
dance	*face*	2	*sweat*	*balls*	1
eat	*face*	1	*talk*	*ears*	3
laugh	*head*	21	*yawn*	*head*	1
laugh	*skull*	1	*yell*	*head*	3
puke	*face*	1			

Subtype 1c

$<[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off] \leftrightarrow$ [action SEM$_i$ performed intensely]$>$

Intransitive

k = 'body part (limbs and abdomen)'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
dance	*legs*	1	*work*	*abdomen*	1
talk	*arm*	2	*work*	*heart*	1

Subtype 1d

$<[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off] \leftrightarrow$ [action SEM$_i$ performed intensely]$>$

Intransitive

k = 'clothes'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
act	*socks*	1	*play*	*socks*	1
bless	*socks*	1	*pry*	*shoes*	1
bore	*pants*	1	*quiz*	*socks*	1
bore	*socks*	1	*rock*	*socks*	3
charm	*socks*	1	*romp*	*guts*	1
dance	*pants*	2	*scare*	*pants*	1
dance	*socks*	3	*ski*	*pants*	1
network	*socks*	1	*sue*	*pants*	1

TYPE 2 ASTOUNDMENT

Subtype 2a

$<[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off] \leftrightarrow$ [action SEM$_i$ causes SEM$_j$ to be astounded]$>$

Intransitive

k = 'body part'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
bite	*face*	3	*rock*	*face*	2
blow	*testicles*	2	*tear*	*head*	3
knock	*head*	4	*tear*	*skin*	1

Subtype 2b

$<[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off] \leftrightarrow$ [action SEM$_i$ causes SEM$_j$ to be astounded]$>$

Intransitive

k = 'clothes'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
beat	*socks*	1	*knock*	*socks*	55
bite	*kneecaps*	1	*rot*	*socks*	1
bite	*pants*	2	*try*	*socks*	1
blast	*socks*	1	*wow*	*socks*	2
blow	*socks*	17			

TYPE 3 DETACHMENT					
Subtype 3a					
<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_i$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_j$ performed on SEM$_k$ intensely (to the extent of SEM$_k$ being detached from SEM$_j$)]>					
Transitive					
k = 'body part (head)'					
[V]	**[N]**	**(f)**	**[V]**	**[N]**	**(f)**
beat	head	1	peel	face	1
bite	head	10	pull	lips	1
bite	tongue	1	punch	head	2
blow	face	1	rip	eyeballs	1
blow	head	13	rip	face	8
burn	lips	1	rip	head	8
chew	eyelids	1	shave	beard	2
chew	face	1	slice	head	2
chop	head	7	snap	head	1
claw	face	1	snatch	head	2
gnaw	face	1	tear	head	3
kick	face	1	tear	nose	1
lick	face	2	wrench	head	1
melt	face	2			
Subtype 3b					
<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_i$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_j$ performed on SEM$_k$ intensely (to the extent of SEM$_k$ being detached from SEM$_j$)]>					
Transitive					
k = 'body part'					
[V]	**[N]**	**(f)**	**[V]**	**[N]**	**(f)**
bite	arm	1	pop	dick	1
bite	dick	1	pop	finger	1
bite	hand	1	pull	arm	1
bite	legs	3	rip	arm	2
blow	arm	1	rip	nuts	1
chew	arm	1	saw	arm	1
chop	arm	3	shoot	hooves	1
chop	knees	1	shoot	legs	1
chop	feet	1	shoot	testicles	1
freeze	ass	3	shrug	hand	1
freeze	butt	2	slash	arm	1
freeze	nipples	1	slice	heart	2
freeze	nips	1	slice	arm	1
freeze	tail	1	slide	neck	1
freeze	you-know-what	1	slit	throat	1
freeze	fingers	1	snatch	hand	1
melt	arm	2			

Subtype 3c

<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_j$ performed on SEM$_k$ intensely (to the extent of SEM$_k$ being detached from SEM$_j$)]>

Transitive

k = 'clothing'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
blow	*helmet*	1	*pull*	*stock*	1
blow	*outfit*	1	*rip*	*clothes*	4
blow	*socks*	14	*rip*	*mask*	1
kick	*shoes*	2	*rip*	*pants*	1
knock	*glasses*	1	*rip*	*shirt*	1
knock	*hat*	3	*shake*	*wig*	1
pop	*head*	1	*slip*	*jacket*	1
peel	*tint*	1	*slip*	*shoes*	1
pop	*helmet*	1	*slough*	*skin*	1
pry	*helmet*	1	*suck*	*shoes*	1
pull	*hood*	1	*tear*	*blanket*	1
pull	*gloves*	1	*tear*	*bow*	1
pull	*niqab*	1	*tear*	*clothes*	1
pull	*shirt*	1			

Subtype 3d

<[[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] ↔ [action SEM$_j$ performed on SEM$_k$ intensely (to the extent of SEM$_k$ being detached from SEM$_j$)]>

Transitive

k = 'part of something'

[V]	[N]	(f)	[V]	[N]	(f)
blow	*door*	3	*shoot*	*propeller*	1
knock	*shell*	1			

The data in Table 1 provides specific information on each of the constructional types identified in the 1,000 instances randomly extracted from the corpus. Their typology is based on the utterance interpretation of the concordances and the semantic category of the nominal component [N]. Therefore, Type 1 and Type 3, for instance, are called, respectively, 'Intensification' (e.g., *work one's butt off*) and 'Detachment' (e.g., *bite one's arm off*) because these are, in point of fact, their salient pragmatic functions. This distinction does not deny the fact that *work one's butt off* was built upon the aspect of detachment as the endpoint of an action, but the property of intensely undertaking an action is more salient than the hyperbolic idea of detaching the *butt* from the body. On the other hand, *bite one's arm off* retains the hyperbolic notion that an *arm* is violently detached from the body, where the action of aggressively *biting* and its result (in the form of dismembering) are also perceived as a form of intensification. Although most cases in Type 3 are constructed on figurativeness, there are some instances, as in *chop one's head off* in (15), where the reading of violent action and detachment is literal.

(15) They say you'll leave in 2011 and the Taliban will CHOP THEIR HEADS OFF. (*plp.org*, 2023)

In general terms, from a quantitative point of view, six (out of the ten) subschemas involve a body part as an alternate of [N], accounting for nearly 71 % (133 out of 188) of the [[V]$_i$[pd]$_j$[N]$_k$*off*] types logged in Table 1. This confirms that a body part is conventionally the thing that is detached, which also suggests that this type of expression is mostly used with respect to humans.[9] Interestingly, most of the idiomatic expressions are included in one of the three categories, and only two idioms, with an apparently resultative frame, were excluded, since their output semantics does not coincide with any of the unified schemas in NetCons_*off*: *eat one's head off* ("to verbally abuse", *Green's Dictionary of Slang* [henceforth GDoS]) and *wear one's face off* ("to kiss intensely", GDoS). In addition to these exceptions, another three expressions were not categorized in this study because their meanings do not seem to be linked to the aspect of telicity, where the endpoint of the action is the act of detachment: *fight one's way off*, *wax one's legs off*, and *dust one's uniform off*. Although

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[9]   Only five animal-related cases were found.

these expressions coincide in that all three convey the notion of an intensified action, their accomplishment is not conveyed by a detached part, but rather by the thoroughness of the action.

Table 1 also provides a summary outline of how the (Sub)Types are integrated into a hierarchical network, where common salient properties are entrenched into unified schemas. The schematization of (Sub)Types posits that their differentiating morphosyntactic and semantic properties are connected to each other in the form of a hierarchical model. What this means is that these properties are inherited and readjusted in low-order constructions, which is, turn, reflected on the aspects of syntactic/semantic variability and degree of flexibility. Table 1 includes three subschemas whose semantic structures have been modeled on the data extracted from the corpus: [action SEM_i performed intensely], [action SEM_i causes SEM_j to be astounded], and [action SEM_i performed on SEM_k intensely (to the extent of SEM_k being detached from SEM_j)]. These semantic structures are differentiated through the alternates [V] and [N]. In fact, low-order schemas, and their instantiations, are further specified on the grounds that 'k' shifts into specific semantic categories, e.g., k = 'buttocks', as in *work one's ass off*. A unified schema, which is represented as [action SEM_i performed (on SEM_k) so intensely that SEM_k detaches from SEM_j], includes the properties of telicity and intensification, whose endpoint is represented through the act of detachment.

The taxonomization illustrated in Table 1 is aimed at making a finer-grained distinction of the schemas, particularly through the semantic alternation of [N]. The arrangement of the dataset in Table 1 also allows for hierarchically associating schemas and subschemas in order to predict how their inherited properties are involved in the process of idiomaticity, or its lack thereof. The following sections will illustrate how alternates of [N] conform to the specific syntactic properties of the expression, which guarantees unambiguity; for example, *butt*, in *laugh one's butt off*, is predominantly understood as an identification of the action, not as a part being detached.

4.2. Reinterpretation of telicity and its effect on the degree of idiomaticity

Based on Diessel's (2023) proposal of a network of constructions and their being arranged along a continuum, all the types conforming to the protoconstruction $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$ can be examined horizontally, where the continuum is made up of two endpoints, one of which, as stated by Diessel, includes "constructions that have some salient properties in common" and the other being where "horizontal links combine constructions that form some kind of contrast or opposition" (p. 60). What this means is that in between the two poles, there are multiple cases showing varying degrees of idiomaticity,[10] and where the open slots are semantically liable to relations of similarity (abstracted schemas) and contrast (alternation). A general feature of the (sub)schemas is their high variability, which can be problematic as far as their qualitative description of idiomaticity is concerned. However, Types 1-3, which generally include idiomatic expressions, can be abstracted in the form of an idiomatic continuum whose endpoints are compositional phrases and idioms (see Figure 1), where the presupposition that idioms are the phraseological capstones of idiomatic expressions is underscored. The continuum represented in Figure 1 provides an approximate picture of how close each Type stands to the two endpoints.
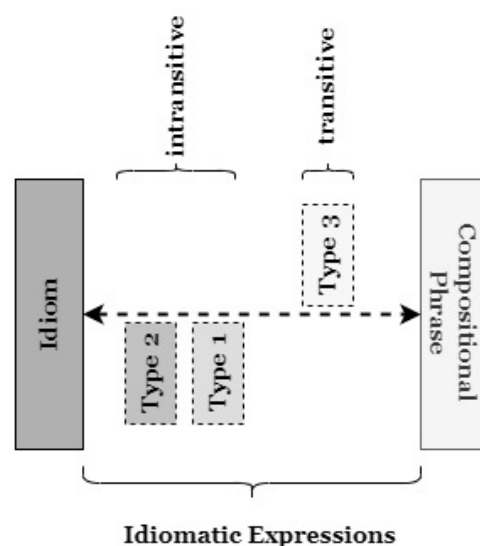

Figure 1. Types 1-3 along the idiomatic continuum.

Figure 1 also suggests that Types 1-3 might have undergone different etymological routes from their telic sources. For instance, Type 1 and Type 3, being the most frequent ones, differ in that the former has been

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10   This is also in line with Nunberg's (1994) studies on compositionality, which he defined as "the degree to which the phrasal meaning, once known, can be analyzed in terms of the contributions of the idiom parts" (p. 498).

revamped in such a way that the intensification of the verbal action becomes the salient feature inherited from the telic protoconstruction (see Figure 2 for a representation of constructional inheritance and salient properties). Figure 2 does not imply that telicity or resultativeness is replaced by intensification; what it means instead is that the phrase undergoes a semantic adjustment where the act of detachment is blocked. Therefore, what is perceived by users is that the action is intensified, which is saliently extrapolated to other verbal constructions. The blocking of detachment, within the original frame of telicity, seems to have bolstered the spread of expressions such as *one's ass off* and *one's face off*. Their being coined as idioms themselves is not related to the denotational semantics of *ass* or *face* (i.e., an *ass* or a *face* does not detach more easily or frequently than, for instance, an *arm*), but rather to the colloquialization of the adverbial function of intensifying, as in the case of *ass*, or even perhaps with the fact that some of the actions being intensified are produced through the *face* or the *head*, as with *laugh* and *scream*, for instance.
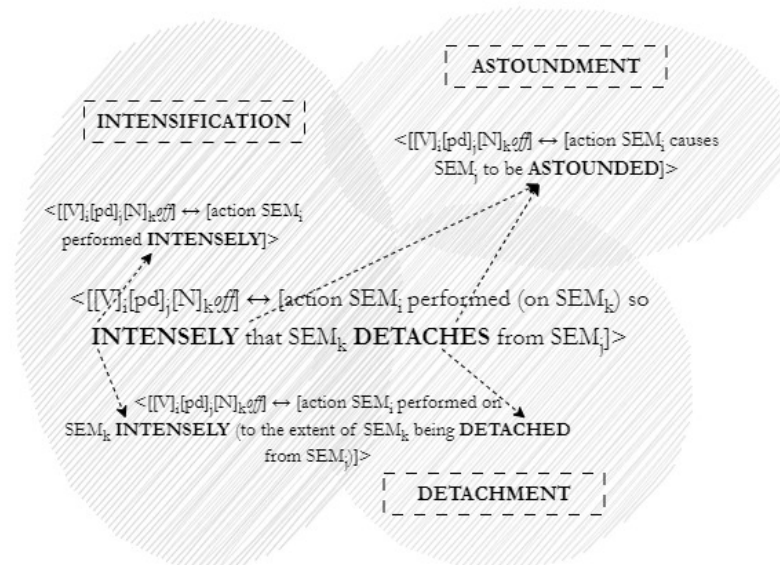

Figure 2. Default inheritance and salience in NetCons_*off*.

Type 3, on the other hand, has retained the argument structure of telicity through literal and figurative readings. The former, which is more frequent, involves all the properties of the protoconstruction, where the verbal action turns into an act of dismembering, as in Subtypes 3a and 3b, and where the act of removing one's clothes, as in Subtype 3c, is performed through an intensified, even violent, act, as shown in *rip one's clothes* and *pull one's shirts off*. The figurative constructions are based on the notion that dismembering or detaching a body part is an act of extreme violence, which means that whatever is expressed in [V] is performed to the most excessive degree, e.g. *punch one's head off*. So, although the denomination of Type 3 is 'Detachment', the examples that are included in this group also involve the idea of intensifying the verbal action, as opposed to Type 1, where the notion of detachment, as suggested above, is semantically blocked. Type 3, including the non-figurative cases of Subtype 3a, are the only remaining instances of present-day telicity of the type $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$, for example, *kick one's shoes off, shave one's beard off*.

Type 2 conveys a more complex reinterpretation of the telic features inherited from the protoconstruction. Denominated as 'Astoundment', the subschemas are made up of forms of [V] that are mismatched in terms of the original meaning of the verbal forms. For instance, *bite* in *bite one's head off* and *tear* in *tear one's skin off* indicate that the verbs are semantically devoid of their original meaning, and a constructional semantics dominates. This, as a point of fact, is felt as a high degree of idiomaticity, as opposed to *laugh* and *work* in examples (5) and (6), respectively. Along with the property of intensification, which is likely rendered by the hyperbolic action of dismembering, as in *knock one's head off*, or by that of violently removing one's clothes, as in *beat one's socks off*, what stands out in Type 2 is that its structure resembles, to a greater extent, those of Subtypes 3a and 3b. This poses an interesting issue in terms of the ambiguity of similar expressions such as *bite one's head off* (Subtype 2a) and *bite one's legs off* (Subtype 3b). The fact that the reading of the former is unambiguously related to an action that causes someone to be astounded, rather than *biting* intensely, is also perhaps indicative of higher idiomaticity. In addition, no correlation is found between forms such as *one's socks off* and *one's head off* and Type 2, since these forms are also used in Type 1 under the pragmatic function of intensification, as in *rock one's socks off* and *sue one's pants off*.

Finally, let us take a look at one of the exceptions that was not included in the study: *bite one's head off* ("to yell at someone or to be very critical of someone especially very suddenly and without a good reason", MWD11). This idiom shows a total mismatch between the constituents [V]/[N] and the output semantics of the expression to the extent that someone who is unaware of its meaning has lower chances of figuring out what is meant, even if the meanings of the constituents are known to the speaker. Figuratively, a connection can be made between the verbs *bite* and *hurt*, and between *head* and *mind*, which explains why *hurting one's mind*

can be interpreted as 'being hurt through the ears or feelings'. Still, this expression might have been built after the structure $[[V]_i[pd]_i[N]_k off]$ to analogically (and covertly) import the features of an intensified action, as well as the loss of a body part due to the effects of this action.

4.3. The effects of [N] and [V] on the degree of idiomaticity

The open slots [V] and [N] are important to retaining telic properties inherited from the semantic structure [action SEM_i performed (on SEM_k) so intensely that SEM_k detaches from SEM_i], where there might be a correlation between the verbal action that is intensified ([V]) and something ([N]) that is detached/removed. This correlation should be particularly salient in the case of transitive constructions, (e.g., Type 3), where a body part or a garment can be the recipient of the action in itself, as a direct object, leading to its being detached or removed from the body. Therefore, on a more literal level, the fact that a *head* can be *chopped* from the rest of the body (as in *chop one's head off*), or a *wig* can be *shaken* until it falls (as in *shake one's wig off*), makes complete sense to the canonical decomposition of Type 3: [N] → body part/clothes item/equipment part; [V] → vigorous/aggressive action. On the other hand, at a more figurative level, these canonical properties are retained, since a *face* can be *ripped*, for instance, until it detaches from the *head*, which is interpreted as hyperbolic and figurative. This confirms that inherited aspects such as intensification or detachment are not only contextually dependent, but are also linked to the speaker's ontological conceptualization of realities such as action verbs and their effects on, say, body parts.

Type 1 and Type 3 also differ in how the input semantics of [N] partakes in the emergence of intensification and detachment, respectively. While [N] in Type 1, in particular Subtype 1a, is not semantically linked to the verbal action, [N] in Type 3 retains a logical association with the action verb, regardless of the degree of figurativeness expressed by the construction. For instance, *shoot one's feet off*, which pertains to Type 3, expresses a plausible notion whereby someone's *feet* can be *shot* so violently, indeed to the extreme of someone losing both *feet*; on the other hand, *laugh one's butt off* and *argue one's ass off*, for example, due to the semantic mismatch between *laugh/argue* and *ass/butt*, and even hypothetically assuming that the speaker is not aware of *one's butt/ass off* acting as intensifying adverbials, can lead to ambiguous interpretations: Is one's *butt* being *laughed at*? Is one's *butt* something to *argue about*? This ambiguity, which is unthinkable to proficient speakers of English, is indicative of the high degree of idiomaticity of expressions such as *one's ass off*, which are unlikely to undergo semantic decomposition. Likewise, the fact that Type 1 is generally made up of intransitive verbs (e.g., *play*, *laugh*, *work*) results in a clear disconnection between [V] and [N].

Perhaps of a more significant nature is the fact that blocking the aspect of detachment motivates the idiomatization of $[[pd]_i[N]_k off]$ as a type of adverbial, where [N] generally denotes the buttocks (*ass*, *arse*, *butt*, *tail*, *hiney*, *bun*), the head, or socks, as units of intensifiers. The cases of [N] meaning the buttocks remains the most frequent intensifying adverbial (47 out of 84 construction types in Type 1). Also, the use of the *head* as a form of [N] (Subtype 1b) has gained some frequency, possibly because the function of intensifying is connected with actions that are mouth-related, as in *laugh*, *cry*, and *scream*. This explains why *one's head off* is described as an idiom modifying the verb as being "very loudly or without restraint" (MWD11). By the same token, the use of *one's socks off*, particularly in Subtype 1d, is confirmed as an intensifier, where [N] dissociates from [V] in such a way that noncanonical examples such as *network one's socks off* make perfect sense. Following the patterns of *one's head off* and *one's socks off* through analogy, other idiomatic expressions are also common: *one's face off* and *one's pants off* (see Table 2 to confirm the frequencies of eight intensifying adverbials). The latter, however, has also inherited (probably from *one's socks off*) a high combinability index, which is perceived through its being combined with intransitive verbs that are not necessarily related to movement, e.g., *sue one's pants off*, *bore one's pants off*, *scare one's pants off*. As opposed to Types 2 and 3, Type 1 does not necessarily involve aggressive or violent verbs, for the meaning of [N], as suggested above, does not act as a direct object or a detached element (in the case of telic constructions). Despite this lack of semantic co-dependency, [N] follows a paradigmatic choice of words, which guarantees both a less ambiguous reading of the expression and its function of intensification. In other words, if [N] in *sue one's pants off* is substituted with *shoes* or *skirt*, the function will be retained; however, in **sue one's flowers off* or **sue one's watch off*, for instance, the result will not be the same. Also, some particular examples demonstrate that alternates of [N], with the same [V], might produce slightly different meanings, e.g. *talk one's head off* ('to talk very loudly'), *talk one's ears off* ("to talk to someone for a very long period of time", MWD11), and *talk one's arm off/talk one's ass off* ('to talk a lot').

Table 2. The eight most common intensifying adverbials and their type frequencies.

one's [N] *off*	(f)	one's [N] *off*	(f)
one's ass off	23	*one's arm off*	12
one's head off	22	*one's butt off*	11
one's face off	17	*one's pants off*	7
one's socks off	17	*one's tail off*	6

Last but not least, the process of schema-based analogy helps to explain how schematic structures are replicated once proficient speakers of English have gained awareness of the pragmatic and semantic values underlying a specific structure (see, e.g., Booij 2010a; Mattiello 2016). Following this cognitive automatization

of meaning, idiomatic expressions are variably open to new analogical formations, which leads to phraseological innovations that maintain the original function (intensification), but with a humorous and innovative effect, e.g. *work one's ass off → work one's balls off*. The likelihood of new analogical formation, however, depends on the semantic restriction of the idiomatic expression itself: *one's ass off*, being an adverbial intensifier, is more open to combine with all types of intransitive verbs whilst *one's head off*, as in *rip one's head off* (Subtype 3a), generally admits transitive verbs that cause dismembering for the sake of hyperbolic effect, so expressions such as *draw one's head off* or *read one's head off*, for instance, are interpreted as Type 1, where intensifying, rather than detachment, is the utterance interpretation, and thus, its salient property.

4.4. Final reflections on the degree of idiomaticity

What stands out from the data in Table 1 is the varying degree of idiomaticity and compositionality in schemas and subschemas originating from a telic/resultative etymology. The following reflections stem from the analysis carried out in the sections above, where idiomaticity is approached from a qualitative perspective:

a. Alternates in open slots. According to their type frequencies, Type 1 and Type 3 are more open to alternates as far as [V] and [N] are concerned, thus suggesting a lower degree of idiomaticity. In particular, Type 1 demonstrates a semantic disconnection between [V] and [N], according to which the latter, in the form of a body part or a clothes item, contributes to furnishing the morphological constituency of adverbial expressions that convey the pragmatic function of intensifying, as in *one's ass off* and *one's pants off*.

b. Output semantics restriction. Idiomaticity cannot be solely measured through type frequencies. Another property of considerable importance is that of semantic restriction, which indicates the extent to which the resulting meaning of an expression is dependent on [N] and/or [V]. This means that while *laugh one's ass off* depends on [V] to formulate the output semantics (i.e., the verbal action retains the meaning of *laughing*), *bite one's head off*, on the other hand, is interpreted through [V] and/ or [N] in that it can refer to a violent act where someone's *head* is *bitten* or *ripped* (i.e., the action verb retains the meaning of *biting*), or on a more narrowed-down sense, to the action of *yelling*, which is, without any doubt, closer to the status of idiom.

c. Semantic connection between open slots. The idiomatic expressions *one's ass off* and *one's head off* are not the sole cases of intensifying adverbials (see, for instance, *one's face off*, *one's socks off*, *one's pants off*, etc.), and the cases attested demonstrate that [N] and [V] are not necessarily semantically codependent. For instance, in *laugh one's ass off* and *argue one's ass off*, it is difficult to find the connection between the action and the buttocks, as opposed to hypothetical examples such as **to fart one's ass off*, where the body part is related to the action itself. This shows the non-compositionality of *one's ass off*, where [N], as a body part is not semantically relevant.[11] However, there are cases in which [V] seems to be semantically connected to [N]: *cry/scream one's head off* (*crying/screaming* occurs through the mouth, in the *head*) and *talk one's ear off* (*talking* is perceived through the *ears*). Interestingly, while *one's head off* is found in multiple expressions, *one's ears off* is only involved in one expression, which might be related to the fact that the *head*, as a more general body part, is involved in more types of actions, particularly those related to sound production and perceptions.

d. Idiomaticity as a product of argument structure and syntactic blocking. NetCons_*off* demonstrates that from a proto-argument structure, which is telicity in our case, various subschemas can be abstracted to determine the syntactic properties that are inherited and blocked. For instance, as mentioned in Section 4.1, Type 1, as in *work one's ass off,* shows how intensification is inherited while detachment is blocked. It is then expected that subschemas are, at some point, connected to one (or more) of the three major properties expressed in the semantic structure [action SEM_i performed (on SEM_k) so intensely that SEM_k detaches from SEM_j]: an action that is intensified, a recipient of the action (someone, body part, garment), and something that is detached/removed from the person. If subschemas are not directly, or overtly, connected to any of these properties, then we can say that the subschema is characterized by high idiomaticity. Type 2, for instance, is connected to the semantic structure [action SEM_i causes SEM_j to be astounded], which, rather than inheriting the properties of intensification and detachment like Type 1 and Type 3, denotes a readjustment of these inherited properties in the form of a new meaning, i.e., astoundment.

e. Role of the adverbial *off* in NetCons_*off*. Being lexicographically described as polysemous,[12] *off* represents the anchor point (invariable constituent) that modulates the semantic compositionality of constructions. Through the expression of either intensification, detachment, or accomplishment, this adverbial guarantees, along with specific permutations of [V] and [N], the process of semantic restriction or specificity. A hands-on way of testing the structural and semantic function of *off* is

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[11] One exception of this non-compositionality is how *ass* is replaced with less offensive, or euphemistic, terms referring to the buttocks, e.g. *one's arse off*, *one's butt off*, *one's hiney off*, *one's tail off*. There are also other linguistic means to soften the offensiveness of *ass*: spelling adaptation (*work one's azz off*), dingbats (*work one's #ss off*) and lexical alternatives (*work one's assets off*).

[12] According to MWD11, *off* is used in phrasal expressions to convey one the following meanings: "from a place or position" (*march off*), "at a distance in space or time" (*to ease off*), "into an unconscious state" (*doze off*), "so as to be separated from support" (*blow the lid off*), "so as to be divided" (*mark off*), "to a state of discontinuance or suspension" (*shut off*), "used as an intensifier" (*drink off*), "in absence from or suspension of regular work or service" (*take time off*), and "offstage" (*go off*).

through its omission in phrases of similar construction. See, for instance, the idiom *bite one's head off* and the transitive compositional phrase *bite one's head*, where the latter does not specify the accomplishment of the action, and let alone the fact that its endpoint (i.e., the *head* is detached from the body) is impossible here.

5. Conclusions

This study was designed to explore the degree of idiomaticity through a qualitative and a descriptive analysis of NetCons_*off,* which is a network that represents a strict association between the form $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$ and the (originally) telic semantics [action SEM_i performed (on SEM_k) so intensely that SEM_k detaches from SEM_j]. Through a corpus-based data compilation, three general Types (and ten Subtypes) are specified, which are distinguished through their utterance interpretation or pragmatic functions: Type 1 (Intensification), Type 2 (Astoundment), and Type 3 (Detachment). The aspectual property of telicity and the syntactic property of resultativeness are inherited from the unified schema, and readjusted in accordance with at least one of the following components: (i) the verb is intensified; (ii) someone or something, which is originally part of someone, receives the intensified, sometimes violent, action; and (iii) something detaches from an individual as a result of such an action. An unexpected finding was that there is a (scalar) semantic restriction in [N], which is conventionally limited to two semantic fields: 'body parts' and 'clothes'. This finding suggests that, regardless of the statistical variability of each of the (Sub)Types and the exceptions (e.g., part of an inanimate noun), they concur in generally inheriting either of these two [N] values in order to maintain the same pragmatic functions such as that of intensifying the verbal action or of indicating that something detaches from the recipient of the action.

While Type 1 and Type 3 are quantitatively more frequent, they inherit different semantic and syntactic values: Type 1 solely retains the property of intensification, and Type 3 inherits the properties of intensification and detachment. The expression of intensification of Type 1 is reflected through the idiomatization of adverbials such as *one's ass off* and *one's socks off*, which are not felt as the result of detachment, and thus, the endpoint/accomplishment of an action is not specified. This suggests that telicity is readjusted in the form of intensification in Type 1. Type 3, on the other hand, does retain the expression of an endpoint, but this is generally conveyed through figurativeness, as with *chop one's head off*. Type 2, unlike Types 1 and 3, shows a mismatch between the input semantics of [V] and the output semantics of $[[V]_i[pd]_j[N]_k off]$, which is, without doubt, an expression of higher degree of idiomaticity.

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