Occasional Adnominal Idiom Modification – A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, this paper explores alternative types of adnoniinal modification in occasional variants of English verbal idioms. Being discussed against data extracted from the *British* National *Corpus (BNC)*, the model claims that in idioni-production idiomatic constructions are activated as complex linguistic schemas to code a context-specific target-conceptualisation. Adnominal pre- and postmodifications are one specific form of creative alteration to adapt the idiom for this purpose. Semantically, idiom-internal NP-extension is not a uniforni process. It is necessary to distinguish two systematic types of adnominal modification: external and internal modification (Ernst 1981). While external NP-modification has adverbial function, i.e. it modifies the idiom as a unit, internal modification directly applies to the head-noun and thus depends on the degree of motivation and analysability of a given idiom. Following the cognitive-linguistic framework, these dimensions of idiom-transparency result from the language user's ability to remotivate the bipartite semantic structure by conceptual metaphors and metonymies.

KEYWORDS: Adnoniinal idiom modification, cognitive linguistic model of idiom representation and variation, motivation and analysability, idiomatic creativity, wordplay vs. systeniatic idioni variation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Functioning as the referring elements in sentences, nominals (or NPs) are syntactically saturated when they contain a noun whose referential status has been specified by a determiner. Thus, the dog in (1) is a fully grammatical NP.

(1)   I love the dog.

Starting from this minimum degree of specification, the structural complexity of NPs can be further extended by adding adnominal premodifiers and postmodifiers. These constituents contribute additional information to the head (dog) to further delimit its referential scope or add descriptive detail as in (2):'

(2)   1 love the nice brown dog that my aunt brought me from Spain.

Following the recursive nature of grammatical patterning (see Van Valin, 2001: 153), adnominal modification is virtually unlimited. This, however, is not true for idiomatic constructions. Consider the ill-formed instance of the idiom *spill* the beans (reveal the truth about sth. secret or private)[2] in (3):

(3)   *I spilled the nice brown beans that my aunt brought me from Spain.

In phraseological research, the restricted lexicogrammatical malleability of idiomatic constructions has long been recognised as an empirical fact (cf. Moon, 1998: ch. 4). The restricted syntagmatic variability of idioms as illustrated in (3) is defined as **fixedness** (see, e.g., Barkema, 1996: 145; Langlotz, 2006: 4).[3] In contrast, **variability** captures the degree to which idioms remain open to occasional departures from their lexicalised base-forms (Langlotz, 2006: 176). Thus rather than being fully fixed, many idioms may be open to limited elaboration through adnominal modification as exemplified in the following uses of *spill* the beans attested by the British National Corpus (*BNC*):

(4)   One of their number has just written a book questioning this kind of
         control and spilling the beans of angst rather as American and British
         feminist writers did in the Seventies. (BNC, AJU: 1028)[4]

(5)   'Too late now for being discreet. All the Ardakkean beans have been
         spilled.' (BNC, G3G: 1532)

Given the non-idiomaticity of (3) and the attested grammaticality of (4) and (5), adnominal modification constitutes a considerable challenge for the analysis of idiom variation. To what

extent can adnominal modifiers be added to the NP-heads of verbal idioms? Are all idioms, e.g. *kick the bucket* vs. *spill the beans,* open to adnominal modification to the same degree?

Restrictions on the ability of NP-heads in verbal idioms to take adnominal modifiers seem to be a reflex of the semantic structure of the varied idioms. Since idioms constitute institutionalised and, to some extent, opaque **patterns of figuration** (Langlotz 2006: 4, ch. 4.6), their nominals do not function as literally-referring elements. Thus, in the collocational context of the idiomatic construction, the nominal constituent *beans* does not denote a type of vegetable. Therefore in (3), it cannot be elaborated by modifiers in the same way as the literally-referring lexical unit dog in (2).

In this article I would like to show that the modification-potential of idiomatic NP-heads, such as *beans,* is dependent on their semantic relationship to the overall idiomatic-meaning. Arguing from a cognitive-linguistic perspective, I will suggest that NPs in idioms can be elaborated by premodifers and postmodifiers if they can be attributed an idiom-internal figurative meaning. This, however, is only possible if the overall semantic structure of a given idiom can be (re)motivated and rendered analysable. The article thus takes position on the current theoretical and psycholinguistic debate centred around the syntactic behaviour of idioms. It opposes accounts – stemming from a generative background in particular – that regard idioms as semantic units by definition (cf., e.g., Čermák, 1988; Chomsky, 1980; Nicolas, 1995; Schenk, 1995; Weinreich, 1969). Proponents of this idioms-as-semantic-units view claim that adnominal modification can only be understood as a form of adverbial modification of the whole idiomatic meaning, or that it merely constitutes a form of wordplay. In contrast, the position advocated here is shared by those grammarians and psycholinguists who suggest that many idioms can be attributed an analysable or decomposable semantic structure (cf., e.g., Dobrovol'skij, 1995, 1997; Geeraerts, 1995; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Glucksberg, 1993; Nunberg et al., 1994). The cognitive-linguistic approach offered here sheds light on this controversy by proposing an explanatory model of idiom representation and variation that is principally based on Langacker's Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991). [5]

The article is structured as follows: First, Langacker's cognitive- linguistic account of adnominal modification is outlined. On the basis of this heuristics, I will introduce my own cognitive-linguistic model of idiom representation and adnominal modification in a second step. Third, the controversy is outlined relative to Ernst's (1981) seminal paper on "'extra' adjectives" in idioms. Discussing the distinction between external and internal modification as introduced by Ernst, it will be shown that occasional adnominal idiom modification is a semantically heterogeneous phenomenon. Moreover, a distinction will be made between systematic variation and wordplay depending on the degree of predictability of the modification. Relating my cognitive-linguistic model to the controversy, I will argue that the head-nouns of many idioms can be systematically modified if the idiom in question can be attributed an analysable semantic structure relative to a set of conceptual metaphors and

metonymies. The model is discussed on the basis of idiom-modification data extracted from the BNC.

II. A **COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC** ACCOUNT OF ADNOMINAL MODIFICATION

Following Langacker's usage-based model (Langacker, 1987: 46), the function of language is to code target conceptualisations in a symbolic format (see Langacker, 1987: 66). For instance, the lexical unit *dog* can be evoked to speak about the corresponding concept DOG or make reference to a specific dog that one wants to talk about. Coding is defined as a form of categorisation, i.e. the given linguistic unit *[U = dog]* is evoked as a schema *[S]*to categorise the conceptual target (T = the specific DOG) by working as a standard of categorisation (Langacker, 1987: 67-68).[6] The following categorisation formula is used to capture this relationship: *[S = U = dog]* → (T = specific DOG). Thus, the target conceptualisation is understood as a more elaborated instance of the schema.

This symbolic construal of conceptual content involves the cognitive process of **profiling**: the activated linguistic structure designates some entity of content by highlighting certain substructures in the conceptualisation, while taking the others as its semantic base (Langacker, 1987: 118). For instance, when saying *Peter loves his dog,* the specific DOG-instance is profiled against the semantic background-domain PETER AND HIS PET.

Nouns constitute one grammatical subtype of linguistic unit. Prototypically, they profile a THING, i.e. an entity that is mentally construed as a coherent region or whole within a conceptualisation (Langacker, 1991: ch. 1). In doing so, a noun such as *dog* designates a conceptual type. In other words, it does not yet refer to a specific DOG-entity but merely captures 'dogness'. It is the semantic function of nominals, e.g. *the dog,* to denote a quantified and grounded instance of this highlighted type-coricept:

> The semantic conteiit of a simple noun like *site* amounts to nothing more than a type specification: it specifies the basis for identifying various eiitities as being representatives of the same class. This type specification is rendered progressively more specific in eomplex expressions such as **convention** *site,* **excellent convention** *site*, and **excellent convention** *site in the Midwest*. On the other hand, a full nominal like *the site, an* **excellent** *site,* or *two* **convention** *sites in the Midwest* presupposes **instantiation** of the type in question and designates one or more instances. Note that information is furnished concerning both the number of instances **and** their status vis-a-vis the speech act participants (the latter through thc definite/indefinite contrast).
> (Langacker, 1991: 53)

Thus, the distinction between the lexical category 'noun' and the phrasal category 'nominal' amounts to a distinction of semantic and communicative function: the noun categorises the given conceptual entity as belonging to a type of potential referents (various potential dogs); the nominal, however, grounds this type within a specific communicative context to make it

accessible to the "momentary focus of attention" (Langacker, 1991: 53), i.e. to communicative manipulation.

Functioning as the head in the nominal, the noun points to the potential referents of the type-concept that it codes. For the purposes of communicating rich conceptual content, language, however, does not provide sufficient lexical means: "This is no simple matter, for our mental world contains indefinitely many entities with the potential of being construed as things, any of which we might conceivably wish to talk about. How, then, is it possible to single out any one of these things for specific mention to the exclusion of others? A set of proper names providing each of these entities with its unique label is clearly out of question; [...] For the most part nominals employ a different strategy, based on type specifications, to accomplish their referential function" (Langacker, 1991: 53). This form of elaborated type-specification works through adnominal modification. By adding modifiers to the head, the conceptual type denoted by the noun can be elaborated for the purpose of coding a rich and specific target conceptualisation, e.g., *the nice little dog from Murcia*. Thus, our ability to code a conceptualisation in detail is linguistically reflected by our ability to create a composite structure through symbolic elaboration along the syntagmatic plane of a construction (Langacker, 1987: 75).

Type specification through adnominal modification illustrates the power of linguistic creativity. Following Langacker (1987: 71 and 439), linguistic creativity amounts to the computation of a novel, transitory linguistic standard, (S), on the basis of which the target (T) can be coded, i.e. categorised. Formally, this is rendered as follows: ([U] ====> (S) ---> (T)); with [U] being the set of conventional linguistic units activated to compute the novel standard (Langacker, 1987: 439). For head-modifier relationships, the computation process ([U] ====> (S)) results in a composite structure that establishes a more elaborate type-specification through syntagmatic integration. Langacker describes syntagmatic integration in terms of the valence relations between the conceptual units profiled by lexical items (see Langacker, 1987: ch. 8). Any autonomous conceptual unit can be elaborated to refine its characterisation. Thus, in terms of a head-modifier relationship any noun has the potential for being elaborated to denote a more specific subtype of the noun, e.g. *dog* → *little dog*. In the present case, the denoted 'thing' [DOG] instantiates the e-site of the atemporal relation (the adjective) [LITTLE] resulting in the composite conceptualisation [LITTLE DOG], which itself elaborates [DOG]: [DOG] → [LITTLE DOG] (cf. Langacker 1987: 304-306). On the linguistic level, this elaborate conceptualisation in reflected by the insertion of a premodifying adjective before the noun.

In this way, the lexical and grammatical resources of a language make it possible to code a target conceptualisation with a great degree of precision. Adnominal modification provides the basis for the nominal's function of singling out particular, context-specific instantiations of the type-concept profiled by the head-noun. This process, however, becomes very complex in the context of idiomatic constructions.

III. IDIOMS AND ADNOMINAL MODIFICATION – THE SPECIFICATION OF COMPLEX SCENES

Adnominal modification in idioms is complicated by the inherent figurativity of these constructions. By definition, idioms are semantically non-compositional, i.e. their idiomatic meaning cannot be derived by adding the senses of the lexical constituents (cf., e.g., Katz, 1973: 358). However, this limited, bottom-up conception of idiom semantics must be qualified in the light of cognitive semantics (for very detailed analyses see Langlotz, 2001, 2006).

111.1. A cognitive linguistic view of idiom semantics

In accordance with Langacker's (1991: 133) suggestion, I understand idioms as **complex scenes**[7] with a bipartite semantic structure, i.e. a literal reading and a figurative, idiomatic meaning (cf. Langlotz 2006: 4.4.1).[8] Literally, *throw a spanner into the works*, for instance, describes a rich scene belonging to the domain of OPERATING A MACHINE. The lexicalised idiomatic-meaning of this fixed expression involves a different, more abstract conceptuaiisation: CAUSE A PROBLEM TO PREVENT SOMETHING FROM HAPPENING. This can be illustrated as follows:
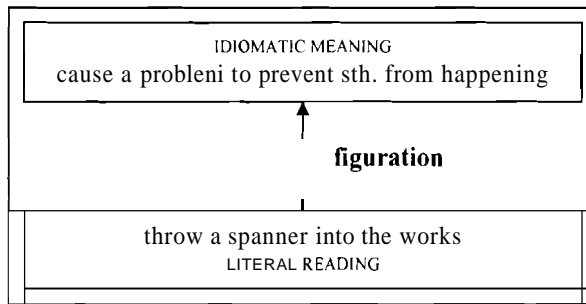

Figure 1: The bipartite seniantic structure of an idiomatic construciion

The constituent structure of the idiom profiles the literal scene, whereas the idiomatic meaning denotes a seniantic extension from this conceptualisation. In other words, the lexical constituents are not activated to code the idiomatic meaning directly. Rather, they encode part of a literal **source-domain** that is evoked to provide a concrete conceptual background to model the abstract **target-domain** of the idiomatic meaning. In other words the scene of THROWING A SPANNER INTO THE WORKS provides us with a concrete conceptual scenario relative to which the more abstract action of CAUSING PROBLEMS TO HINDER DEVELOPMENT can be conceptualised (Langlotz, 2006: ch. 4.7).[9]

This cognitive-seniantic description of idionis is complicated by the fact that the association of the literal-scene with the idiomatic-meaning can adopt different degrees of

transparency for different idioms. While it seems relatively obvious why **throwing a spanner into the ivorks** has the idiomatic meaning it has, the figurative description of 'die' in terms of **kick the** *bucket* is far more opaque. Following Burger et al. (1982: 4), different idioms must therefore be placed on a semantic scale of motivation ("Motivierbarkeit"). Thereby motivation captures the language user's ability to re-establish a meaningful semantic link between the two conceptual domains that define the bipartite semantic structure of the idiom (also cf. Dobrovol'skij, 1995: 41-45; Geeraerts 1995: 61; Lakoff, 1987: 446-453). Following Geeraerts (1995), I regard motivation as an interpretative top-down process, rather than a form of semantic composition bottom-up. In other words, the idiomatic meaning is not predictable from the meaning of the constituents, but the idiom can be remotivated if the idiomatic meaning is known or when it can be predicted from the context. Thus, idioms are motivated if the association between the literal reading and the idiomatic meaning becomes transparent. In contrast, idioms are opaque if this relationship cannot be made sense of.[10]

Analysability is a further dimension potentially affecting the internal semantic structure of an idiomatic construction. **Throw a spanner into the ivorks** is semantically analysable because it is possible to devolve elements of the idiomatic meaning upon the lexical constituents (cf. Nunberg et al., 1994: 496). In other words, the idiom can be semantically decomposed. The act of **throwing the spanner** corresponds to CAUSING THE PROBLEM, while the PP **into the** *works* points to the PROCESS or ACTIVITY that is hindered.
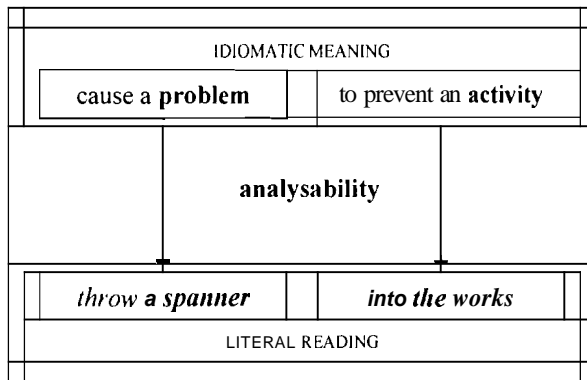

Figure 2: Analysability of *throw a spanner into* h e *works*

Not all idioms that are motivated are analysable. *Shoot oneself in the***foot** (do/ say something stupid which causes problems and harms your chances of success), for instance, is motivated but not analysable. It is the whole literal-scene of this idiom that can be meaningfully associated with the idiomatic meaning; but the idiomatic meaning cannot be decomposed over the constituents.

Proposing a cognitive linguistic account of idiom semantics, Langlotz (2001, 2006: ch. 4.4) claims that both motivation and analysability are the reflex of the language user's ability to establish conceptual correspondences between the source-domain coded by the idiom's constituents and the idiomatic target-domain. For *throw **the spanner into the** works* this can be illustrated as follows:
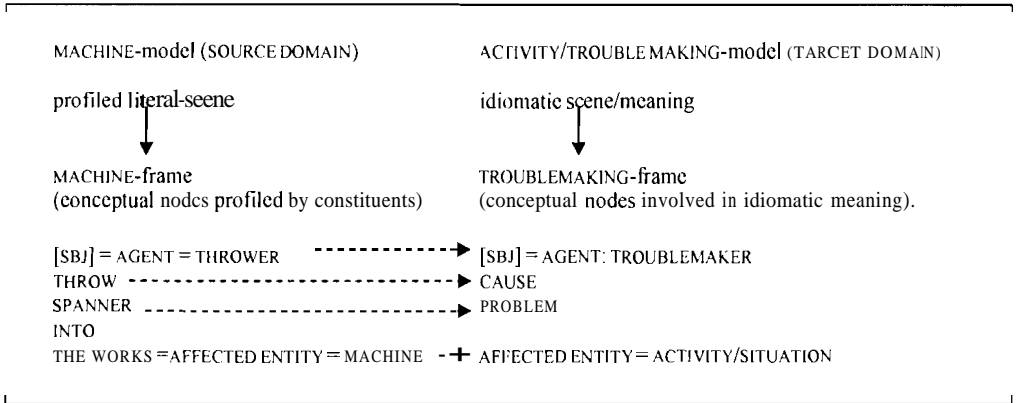
MACHINE-model (SOURCE DOMAIN)   ACTIVITY/TROUBLE MAKING-model (TARGET DOMAIN)

profiled literal-seene   idiomatic scene/meaning

↓   ↓

MACHINE-frame   TROUBLEMAKING-frame
(conceptual nodes profiled by constituents)   (conceptual nodes involved in idiomatic meaning).

[SBJ] = AGENT = THROWER ------------► [SBJ] = AGENT: TROUBLEMAKER
THROW -------------------------------► CAUSE
SPANNER -----------------------------► PROBLEM
INTO
THE WORKS = AFFECTED ENTITY = MACHINE -+- AFFECTED ENTITY = ACTIVITY/SITUATION

Figure 3: Conceptual correspondeiices patterning the motivated and analysable semantic structure of *throw a spanner into* the *ivorks*

In other words, motivation and analysability are claimed to be guided by a set of conceptual metaphors and metonymies that render the semantic structure of the idiom transparent (cf. Langlotz, 2006: 4.5). In the present example, the conceptual metaphors are: PROGRESS IS EFFICIENT PROCESSING OF A MACHINE (THE DEVELOPING/PROGRESSING CONFIGURATION IS THE MACHINE), IMPEDED DEVELOPMENT IS AN OBSTRUCTION OF THE MACHINE (THE OBSTRUCTION/PROBLEM IS THE SPANNER).[11] Moreover, the PART-FOR-WHOLE-metonymy WORKS FOR MACHINE provides the conceptual reference-point relative to which the MACHINE-frame can be triggered (see Langacker's account of metonymy: Langacker, 1993: 29-35).

111.2. A cognitive linguistic model of occasional adnorninal modification in idiom variants

Proceeding from this cognitive-linguistic account of idiom semantics, one can claim that adnominal modification should only be possible for analysable idioms. Only with these idioms can the constituents be attributed autonomous but idiom-specific figurative senses that are open to type-specification through adnominal modification. Following Fellbaurn (1993), semantic analysability makes some constituents become **figuratively-denoting** elements. The constituent **spanner,** for example, can be regarded as pointing to some specific problem that is

referred to in the context of use. This hypothesis seems to be verified by the following usage-token of the idiom that features occasional adnominal modification:

(6)   Compaq has shown great interest in VUE, a preference that put just **one of the many** spanners in the works **of the ACE initiative.** (BNC, CT8: 21O).

The insertion of the premodifying numerative one of the many suggests that spanner is a countable entity. (This, of course, is also indicated by the pluralisation of this constituent.) This occasional occurrence of the numerative in the context of the idiom can be explained straightforwardly in terms of our cognitive linguistic account. On the basis of its motivation by the conceptual metaphors, spanner has the figurative sense 'problem'. In the context of (6) 'Compaq's great interest in VUE' is one specific problem being referred to. The idiom-variant makes anaphoric reference to this problem by specifying that it is just one of the many spanners, i.e. just one of the many problems. In other words, the numerative fulfils the function of adapting the complex idiomatic-scene to the referential context.

The same is true for the postmodifying partitive of-complement of the *ACE* initiative." Clearly, the 'ACE initiative' is the activity that is impeded by Compaq's plans. Again, this can be directly explained with regard to the analysable semantic structure of the idiom. The postmodifier exploits the PART-FOR-WHOLE-metonymy WORKS FOR MACHINE. On the basis of this idiomatically-coded metonymic reference-point shift, the prevented activity can be contextually specified by inserting the of-complement: the works are conceived as part of the 'ACE initiative', which is thus metaphorically equated with the MACHINE-node in the idiom's literal-scene – the machine being the figurative element in the source-domain evoked to concretise the more abstract target-activity.

Following Fauconnier (1997: ch. 6.4.), the complex NP the works of the *ACE initiative* can be seen as reflecting the process of **conceptual blending.** Combining elements from two input-spaces, the source-domain (works) and the contextual target-domain (the *ACE* initiative), the NP conveys a hybrid, blended conceptualisation (see also Langlotz, 2004; Langlotz 2006: 261-265; Mena Martínez, 2002). The blend emerges in accordance with the analysable semantic structure of the idiom.

The appropriateness of this cognitive-linguistic interpretation is further supported by (7):

(7)   The Labour Party Conference: Policy review throws a spanner in the **Whitehall machinery** (BNC, A1J: 494).

Here, the lexical substitution, tnachinety for works, again makes use of the WORKS-FOR-MACHINE-metonymy. But instead of the metonymic association, the MACHINE-node is directly coded in the variant. The noun-premodifier *Whitehall* specifies the contextual reading of the

autonomous figurative meaning of the head-noun *(machinery* = activity, developing configuration). It is the activities of Whitehall, i.e. the British government, that are impeded by the policy review. Again, this head-modifier pattern can be interpreted as a blend: the element *Whitehall* belongs to the contextual target-domain, whereas *the machinery* is part of the idiom's literal source-domain.

III.2.1. Modelling the modifications

These processes of occasional NP-modification can be directly accounted for by analogy with Langacker's computation-formula: ([U] ====> (S) ---> (T)). For (6) the computation of the occasional variant can be illustrated as follows:
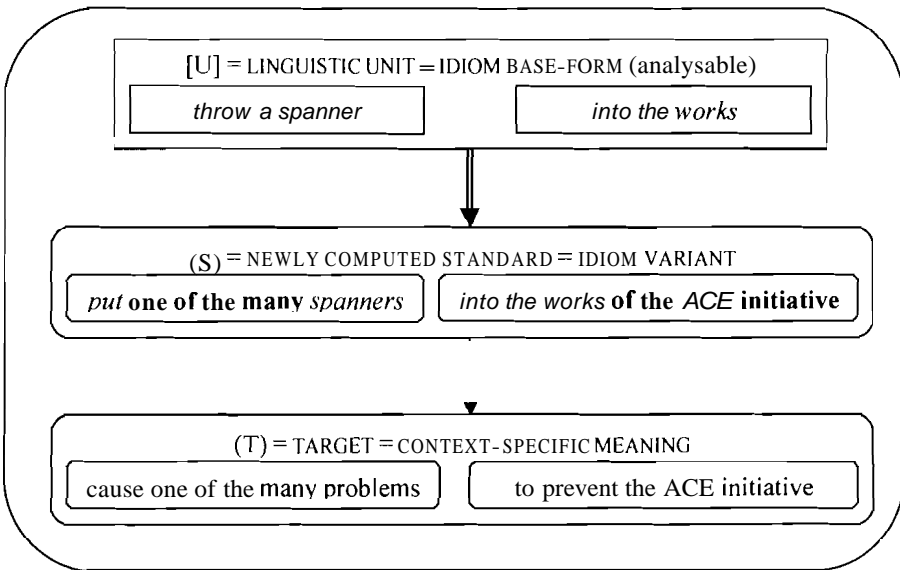

Figure 4: Coniputation of an idiom variant

The newly computed, occasional idiom-variant (S) functions as a standard by means of which the context-specific meaning (T) can be coded figuratively ((S) ---> (T)). This new standard is an elaboration of the base-form [U], that is activated as an entrenched and conventional linguistic schema to compute the novel standard ([U] ===> (S)). Thereby, the idiom's literal-scene works as a conceptual model to concretise the abstract constellation to be expressed. In other words, the scene of 'throwing a spanner into the works' is evoked as a **figurative type** to categorise the conceptual relationships in the contextual target-meaning. The adnominal modifiers indicate how this figurative model has to be mapped onto the contextual meaning.

That is the niodifiers work as type-specifiers 'translating' the complex idiomatic-scene into the context of use.

This idiomatic forni of type-specification results in the extended composite structure of the variant. The head-modifier relationships *one of the many spanners* and **the works of the ACE initiative** both establish the more elaborate type-specification through syntagmatic integration. Due to the analysable semantic structure of the idiom, the niodifiers can exploit the open valence relations of the head-nouns. Since these nouns can be attributed an autonomous figurative-sense within the collocational context of the idiom, these units can be elaborated to specify their contextual characterisation. In (6) [SPANNER = PROBLEM] and [WORKS = (PART OF) ACTIVITY] instantiate the **e-sites** of the numerative [ONE OF THE MANY] and the *of*-complement [OF THE ACE INITIATIVE] resulting in the blended composite conceptualisation [PUT ONE OF THE MANY SPANNERS INTO THE WORKS OF THE ACE INITIATIVE], which provides the contextually-appropriate elaboration of the literal-scene [PUT A SPANNER INTO THE WORKS]. On the linguistic level this elaborate blended conceptualisation is reflected by the insertion of the adnominal modifiers. In this way, the occasional variant can work as a new, but transitory standard to code the context-specific target-conceptualisation. It categorises this conceptualisation by the help of the metaphorical source-domain encoded by the idiom's literal-scene. Occasional adnominal idiom modification thus fulfils the function of singling out one particular, context-specific instantiation of the figurative concepts specified by the head-nouns. In short, this process of modification represents an idiom-specific form of linguistic creativity that Langlotz (2006: 8, ch. 6.2) calls **idiomatic creativity.**

IV. THE CONTROVERSY

My cognitive linguistic niodel of occasional adnominal modification in idioms is challenged by the fact that both 'motivation' and 'analysability' are not generally accepted concepts in phraseological research. For instance, Čermák (quoted according to Dobrovol'skij, 1995: 42) claims that one should abandon "the view that idioms are motivated through their constituents". In a similar vein, Weinreich (1969: 45) postulates that "the seniantic difference between idioms and their literal counterparts is, by definition, *arbitrary in principle*, [...]". Similarly, the concept of analysability has often been rejected. Among many others, Schenk (1995: 253)- who argues from the machine-translation perspective of the Rosetta-grammar - claims that all idioms must be described as non-decomposable semantic units: "I argue that the reluctance of some idiom parts to undergo certain syntactic operations follows from the fact that idioms are not built up in a conipositional manner, because a compound idiomatic expression corresponds to one primitive meaning expression. The latter entails that proper parts of idioms do not carry meaning."

To exclude idiom variants that do not support this assumption – such as our tokens of adnominal modification above – it is frequently assumed that these variants just represent instances of wordplay: "Methodologically, the ability of people to play with words is outside

the scope of a theory of idioms proper; therefore, data involving word games cannot play a role in a theory of idioms" (Schenk, 1995: 258). tlowever, occasional variants such as (6) and (7) above do not reflect intentional wordplay because do they not create a striking semantic effect.[13] In contrast, these variants must be regarded as occasional but nevertheless systematic adaptations of the idiom *throw a spanner into the works* to the respective contexts of use (see Langlotz 2006: chs. 2; 6.3).[14]

In what follows, I would like to further substantiate my cognitive-linguistic model by relating it to Ernst's (1981) account of adjectival premodification. Ernst's model raised considerable controversy as reflected by Schenk's firm stances against analysability. But Ernst's account can be fruitfully re-interpreted in the light of the present cognitive linguistic framework.

IV.l. Ernst's 'grist for the linguistic mill'

Ernst (1981: 51-53) discusses three types of idiomatic extension through adjectival premodification: "external modification", "internal modification", and "conjunction modification". In the following discussion, I will merely concentrate on the two former modification types.[15] Moreover, I will relate the second modification type to adnominal modification in general rather than restricting it to adjectival premodification only.

External and internal modification constitute two alternative, systematic types of head-modifier relationships in adnominally-extended idiom-variants. In other words, rather than constituting forms of wordplay, external and internal modifications define two distinct ways of how the idiomatic base-form can be systematically adapted to the context of use. Using Langacker's computation formula, one can generally characterise modification in idioms as follows:

$$([u] \implies (S = [U] + [\text{MODIFIER}]) \dashrightarrow (T)$$

Depending on the modification-type, the structure ([U] + [MODIFIER]) can have different qualities, which depend both on the quality of the modifying element and the semantic structure of [U].

IV.1.1. External modification

To illustrate external modification, Ernst (1981: 51) employs the following examples:[16]

(8)   Carter does not have an economic leg to stand on. (emphasis is mine)

(9)   He came apart at the political seams. (emphasis is mine)

With external modification, the premodifying ndjective functions as an adverbial which modifies the idiomatic meaning as an entire semantic unit rather than modifying the idiom's head-noun directly (cf. Ernst, 1981: 51 and 55). Thus, (8) can be paraphrased as (8a) and (9) as (9a), respectively:

(8a)   *Economically,* Carter does not have a leg to stand on [is in an unstable
       situation].

(9a)   *With regard to political matters,* he came apart at the seams [started to
       fail].

For externally modified idiom variants one must therefore postulate a rule, which triggers the adverbial interpretation of the noninherent adverbial adjective relative to the full idiomatic meaning.[17] This rule can be formalised as follows (also cf. Ernst, 1981: 62):

$$((([U] ===> (S = [U] + [\text{PREMODIFIER}]) ---> (T = \text{Adverbial}, [U])$$

However, external modification is not a phenomenon only to be found with idiomatic expressions. Rather, external adjectives seem to correspond to the more general class of adverbial adjectives.

Adverbial adjectives are a subclass of "noninherent adjectives" (Quirk et al., 1985: 97.43). Adverbial adjectives occur in attributive use syntactically, but correspond to adverbials semantically (cf. Quirk et al., 1985: $7.36). This semantic relationship becomes obvious when the given nominal is paraphrased as a clause:

- my *former* friend $\rightarrow$ *Formerly,* he was my friend.
- an *old* friend $\rightarrow$ He has been a friend, *since the old days.*
- a *heavy* smoker $\rightarrow$ sb. who smokes *heavily.*

Adverbial adjectives typically premodify deverbal nouns or nouns that have an inherent but covert temporal quality, i.e. they imply a process or a continuing temporal relationship (cf. Quirk et. al, 1985: § 7.73). For instance, our knowledge about friends includes that we have them over a certain period of time: friendships start, are maintained, and may come to an end. Thus, when used as a noninherent, adverbial adjective *old* in *an old friend,* highlights the long lasting continuous friendship between the speaker and the referent, rather than ascribing a property to the referent of *friend.*

The same adverbial contribution is made by the external adjectives in (8) and (9). Many non-analysable idioms have an idiomatic meaning that can be paraphrased by an intransitive verb. Thus. *come apart at the seams* in (9) can be rendered as '(start to) fail'. Since *seams* is

not a figuratively-denoting head-noun, i.e. it has no semantic correspondent on the level of the idiomatic meaning, the premodifying adjective can only be interpreted adverbially relative to the process described by the intransitive verbal paraphrase.

Ernst (1981: 51) calls external adjectives "domain delimiters" because "these adjectives function to specify what domain the idiom is to apply to." The notion of 'domain delimiter' is in full accord with the cognitive-linguistic model of adnominal modification outlined above: the external adjectives function to specify the context of the target-conceptualisation onto which the idiom is mapped. Analysing the syntax of metaphorical language more generally, Goatly (1997: 201) hightlights the same function: "ln Topic Indication, e.g. verbal **diarrhoea,** the T-term [topic term = *verbal]* does not refer precisely to what is referred to unconventionally by the V-term [vehicle-term = *diarrhoea],* but indicates the general area, the conceptual-semantic field in which the Topic is related." Moreover, he states: "What I have in mind is lexis that points in the direction of the semantic field where the topic is located, generally by means of an adjective/noun premodifying the V-term" (Goatly, 1997: 171). In this sense, domain delimiters point to the semantic domain into which the idiomatic meaning must be integrated. Following Goatly, I have used the term **topic indication** to denote this phenomenon (Langlotz, 2006: ch. 6.4.3).

As should have become obvious from this sketch, external modification does not directly depend on the internal semantic structure of the idiom. Fulfilling an adverbial function, the premodifying adjective does not directly elaborate the head-noun, but modifies the idiom as a whole. Therefore, external modification can also apply to non-analysable idioms, i.e. idioms that have the status of semantic units. This, however, is not true for internal modification.

IV.1.2. Internal modification

With internal modification, an idiom's nominal head is directly modified. Thus, for (10) – (12) it is impossible to re-interpret the premodifiers as adverbials that qualify the whole idiomatic meaning as a unit. Rather, the adjectives apply to the autonomous figurative senses of the respective heads to elaborate them.

(10)   When will you get it through your **small** head that this isn't the way to
         do it! (Ernst, 1981: 51, emphasis is mine)

(11)   That's beside the **immediate** point. (Ernst, 1981: 52, emphasis is mine)

(12)   To come up with a decent presentation we were reduced to scraping the
         bottom of **every single** barrel. (Ernst, 1981: 52, emphasis is mine)

As hypothesised by our cognitive linguistic model, all of these head-modifier relationships must be explained as a reflex of the semantic analysability of the idioms. Moreover, the idiom-specific semantic autonomy of the internally-modified heads should be explained relative to conceptual metaphors and metonymies that render the idioms' semantic structures transparent.

Thus, following the conceptual metonymy HEAD FOR MENTAL FACIJLTY, head in (10) can be given the figurative meaning 'intelligence, mental ability'. Accordingly, the premodifier *small* must be attributed a figurative reading, possibly 'restricted', which modifies the figurative reading of head.

In the same way, point in (11) can be rendered as 'matter of consideration'. This figurative interpretation is guided by the conceptual metaphors UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING and MENTAL PRESENCG IS PHYSICAL PRESENCE. In accord with this metaphorical background, point can be internally modified by the quality adjective *immediate*.

Finally, *barrel* in (8) can be attributed the figurative value 'resource' following the metaphtonymic mappings CONTAINER FOR CONTENT, A RESOURCE IS FOOD/DRINKS).[18] Along these lines, (8) can be paraphrased as 'exploit eveiy single resource'.

In all of these occasional variants, the preinodifying adjectives specify the referential scope of the figurative-types denoted by the head-nouns. For the given contexts of use, they add a more specific quality to them (*small head*), restrict the range of denotation (*immediate* point), or ground the nominal quantitatively (*every* single *barrel*). In this way, they fulfil the function of elaborating the idiomatic construction through adnominal modification to render it semantically more appropriate for the given context of use.

Ernst (1981: 56) takes the phenomenon of internal modification as clear evidence against the overly limited view of idioms as semantic units – a view which is predominantly advocated in the generative paradigm: "I think it is clear, then, that not just any paraphrase will adequately represent the internal structure of an idiom. Yet in the literature one often sees paraphrases supplied under the implicit assumption that idioms do not even have internal structure, that they have fixed, inonolithic meanings. While they may be fixed, they are not (always) monolithic: I think that the data presented here show that at least at some level we must represent a more complex and articulated meaning for idioms." Clearly, this stance is in full accord with the cognitive-linguistic model of idiom semantics proposed here (see figure 4). Those idioms that are open to internal modification correspond to the notion of 'analysable idioms' advocated in this article (also cf. Ernst, 1981: 57-58). Thus, to accommodate the cases of adjectival premodification in (10) – (12), we have to postulate the presence of a complex, i.e. non-monolithic, idiomatic meaning that can be partly devolved on the constituents as guided by the conceptual metaphors or metonymies.

IV.2. Arguments against internal modification and analysability

Several proponents of the idioms-as-semantic-units view have proposed arguments against the existence of internal modification and idiom analysability (cf. Langlotz, 2006: ch. 2.2.3). Discussing data from a corpus-based analysis of 75 V-NP idioms, Nicolas (1995), for instance, rejects the view that idiom-internal head-nouns such as *spanner* or *works* have identifiable, autonomous figurative senses as suggested here. Accordingly, he claims that internal modification must generally be interpreted as external, adverbial modification: "A principal claim in this chapter is that adjectives inserted into NPs in V-NP idioms can, where they are well-formed, systematically be interpreted as adverbial modifiers of the whole idiom" (Nicolas, 1995: 236).

Indeed, it is possible to interpret many adjectival premodifiers both in terms of external and internal modification. (13), for instance, can be interpreted both internally (13a) and externally (13b):

(13)   That sum may seem like a lot of lei (the Romanian currency that
           purchases next to nothing abroad) but it still left the Romanians
           treading a **financial** tightrope. (BNC, A9R:7).

(13a)   ...left the Romanians going through a difficult financial situation.

(13b)   ....but, financially, it still left the Romanians going through a difficult
           situation.

Ernst (1981: 63) also points to the fact that domain delimiters can often be interpreted internally or externally: "I think there are a great many cases of external and internal reading both being possible. However, we rarely notice them because they are cognitively synonymous." Even Nunberg et al. (1994: 500, footnote 14), the most prominent advocates of the analysability view, concede that adjectival premodification is not an unequivocal measure for analysability: "The distinction between internal and external modification seems clear in principle [...]. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to make in practice. In particular, adjectives that delimit the domain in which the metaphor is to be understood may at first glance appear to be internal, but should in fact be regarded as external."

Given this state of affairs, adjectival premodification does not seem to offer a reliable indicator for semantic analysability. This leads Nicolas (1995: 249) to conclude: "Idiom-internal modification of the type examined semantically modifies the idiom as a whole; no cases of modification that forced a genuinely internal (NP-modifying) interpretation were found." Note, however, that the internal interpretation is fully unproblematic for (13) because this idiom can be attributed an analysable semantic structure on the basis of the conceptual metaphors PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOVEMENT, THE PATH IS THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT,

SECURED PROGRESS IS STABLE MOVEMENT, FAILURE IS INSTABILITY, FAILURE IS FALLING DOWN. Relative to these metaphorical concepts, the constituent tightrope can be identified with the figurative reading 'difficult situation' in the context of the idiom. This renders the constituent open to internal modification (cf. Langlotz, 2006: 206-207).

So how does one proceed from this point? Is it really the case that all instancec of internal modification can just be interpreted as external adverbial modifiers? Does Nicolas's data therefore falsify the cognitive-linguistic model of occasional adnominal idiom modification proposed here? In the following section, 1 will present clearcut evidence that this is not the case. I claim that the semantic analysabilty of idioms becomes obvious when considering instancec of both premodification and postmodification.

V. VARIATIONAL EVIDENCE FOR THE COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC ACCOUNT OF ANALYSABILITY

The idioms-as-semantic-units view is severely challenged by the following data of adjectival premodification proposed by Ernst (1981: 57):

(14)   Too many **political** cooks spoil the **economic** broth. (bold-type by al)

Here, the premodified nouns (cooks and broth) clearly have different referents. These referents are metaphorically modelled by the proverb's literal-scene: the idea of 'spoiling a project due to the shared influence of too many decision-makers' is concretised by the COOKING-scenario. Following the mapping of the concrete COOKING-domain onto the abstract domain of PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY/PROJECT, the nominal constituents can be isolated. They denote the concepts AGENT (cook) and PROJECT (broth), respectively. In the context of (14), these figurative types are further specified as 'political agents spoiling the economic project'. This internal reading of the premodifiers is straightforward. In contrast, the external interpretation in (14a) sounds awkward:

(14a)   **In the domain of politics,** too many agents spoil the project, **with**
         regard to economy.

One can therefore claim that the semantic quality of the pattern of premodification is not dependent on the semantic type of adjective (adverbial or property ascribing), but on the semantic structure of the idiom. In short, the likelihood of activating an internal or external interpretation of the premodifier is influenced by the idiom's degree of semantic analysibility. This argument can be further elaborated with a view to occasional postmodification.

(15)   All this has upset the applecart **of the relation of fertility to**
         prosperity. (BNC, EDK: 1433)

In (15) the of-construction must be attributed an appositive reading.[19] Thus, the idiomatic constituent applecart and the of-complement (rhe relation *of fertility* to *prosperity*) must have the same referent (cf. Langlotz, 2006: ch. 7.5.3-7.5.4). We can thus substitute the of-complement for the constituent without changing the message of (15):

(15a)   All this has upset the relation of fertility to prosperity.

This substitution, however, is only possible if *applecart* can be attributed an autonomous figurative sense in the context of the idiom. Indeed, *applecart* seems to approximate the sense 'stable, satisfactory situation' within the idioniatic construction. (Again, this figurative interpretation is motivated by the conceptual metaphors PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOVEMENT, SECURED PROGRESS IS STABLE MOVEMENT, FAILURE IS INSTABILITY, FAILURE IS FALLING DOWN.) Thus, the of-complement in (15) points to the specific situation being referred to by means of the statement. Thereby, the literal-scene coded by *upset* the applecart provides a concrete metaphorical model for the more abstract conceptualisation of SPOILING A STABLE SITUATION. Note that the adverbial interpretation in (15b) is not synonymous to (15a). Therefore, an external reading of this postmodifier is not possible.

(15b)   ?With regard tolin the domain of the relation of fertility to prosperity, all
        this has spoilt the satisfactory situation.

In short, the appositive postmodifier in (15) provides clearcut evidence for the analysability of the idioni. This is in full accord with the cognitive-linguistic model: the of-complement works as a specifier that indicates how the figurative type-concept applecart has to be interpreted within the context of use.

        The partitive of-complement in (16) can be interpreted by analogy to the of-construction in (6).

(16)   Finniston admits that being plunged into the deep end **of commercial**
        decisions he inevitably made mistakes in the early stages, although he
        is not prepared to take the blame entirely. (BNC, A6L: 832)

This occasional variant conveys a hybrid conceptualisation in which the blend THE DEEP END OF COMMERCIAL DECISIONS inherits structure from the source-domain SWIMMING (POOL) and the target-domain COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES. The literal-scene of the idiomatic construction models the abstract target-domain PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY with reference to a SWIMMING-scenario. This association is further motivated by the conceptual metaphors PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOVEMENT, FAILURE IS GOING DOWN/SINKING. In accordance with these metaphors, STARTING AN ACTIVITY is conceived as GETTING INTO THE WATER. Following this logic, PLUNGING INTO THE DEEP END means STARTING AT THE MOST DIFFICULT PART. Relative to this

metaphorical conceptualisation, the nominal deep end can be identified with the figurative reading 'the most difficult part'. Consequently, it is the partitive *of*-complement that specifies the contextual interpretation of this figurative type-concept. Again, this internal interpretation of the *of*-complement provides evidence for the semantic analysability of the idiom.

Finally, the cognitive-linguistic model is also supported by tokens such as (17):

(17)   As it once showed the way toward democratic success, today it blazes
          the trail **toward democratic failure.'** (BNC, J57: 614)

Being patterned by the metaphors PROCRESS IS FORWARD MOVEMENT, THE PATH IS THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPMENT, THE END POINT OF DEVELOPMENT IS THE DESTINATION, *trail* adopts the figurative value 'basis for activity'. The PP extends this conceptualisation by specifying the end point of the development in question: democratic *failure*. Again, the resulting blend - THE TRAIL TOWARD DEMOCRATIC FAILURE - combines information from the context-specific target conceptualisation with the idiom's literal-scene. The variant can thus be interpreted as:

(17a)   As it once showed the way toward democratic success, today it creates
          the basis for democratic failure.

Again, an interpretation in terms of external moditication seems inappropriate:

(17b)   [?]... today it creates the basis for development with regard to democratic
          failure.

Since he does not want to accept the existence of semantically analysable idioms, Nicolas considers similar instances of internal modification as wordplay (see Nicolas, 1995: 248). In my view, however, the occasional variants described above do not convey an intentionally-created, striking semantic effect. (At least, it is far from obvious to what extent they should differ from the instances of external modification discussed above.) Their only discursive function is to adapt the given idioms for the purpose of coding the respective target conceptualisations efficiently. In this sense, these variants must be claimed to be fully systematic. Therefore, one can reject Nicolas' claim that all adnominal modifiers must be interpreted externally. Rather, the data indicate that both modification types occur although one can find some variants which are open to both an internal and an external interpretation (also cf. Sabban 1998: ch. 1.3). Internal modification must be accepted as a fully grammatical form of idiom-variation that can be systematically related to the analysable semantic structure of the modified idioms.

VI. CONCLUSION

With the cognitive-linguistic model of occasional adnominal idiom modification in hand, we are now in a position to refer back to the introduction of this article and explain why the instances of adnominal modification in (4) and (5) are grammatical, whereas (3) does not trigger an idiomatic reading of *spill the beans.* In (3) the adnominal modifiers *nice brown* and *that my aunt brought me from Spain* do not apply to the idiom-internal figurative sense of *beans.* Therefore, these modifiers cannot fulfil the function of figurative-type specification; they do not adapt the idiomatic meaning to the usage-context in any meaningful way and, as a consequence, must be understood literally. In contrast, *Ardakkean* in (5) and *ofangst* in (4) specify how the figurative meaning of *beans* is to be interpreted in the statements. In accordance with the CONDUIT-metaphors: IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, COMMUNICATION IS OBJECT TRANSFER, *beans* adopts the idiom-internal autonomous sense 'secret' or 'information'(see Lakoff, 1987: 450). This reading is contextually-specified by the modifiers: in *(5)* we learn that 'Ardakkean secrets' are revealed, whereas the appositive *of*-complement *of angst* in (5) tells us that the book in question 'reveals the angst'. Both readings are guided by the analysable structure of the idiom as supported by the conceptual metaphors.

NOTES

A very detailed descriptive overview of alternative types of premodification and postmodification is offered by Quirk et al. (1985: ch. 17).

[2] The meanings of the idionis analysed are taken fiom the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms.*

[3] I regard fixedness as one subtype of idioiiiatic FROZENNESS (cf Fraser, 1970). FIXEDNESS is fiozenness along the syntagiiiatic dinieiision coveriiig both restrictioiis in syntactic and morpho-syntactic flexibility, i.e. the inflection, addition, permutation or deletion of constituents. The other subtype, RESTRICTED COLLOCABILITY, is fiozenness along the paradigmatic dimension, i.e. it captures constraints on lexical substitution (cf Langlotz, 2006: 3-4).

[4] In the quoted corpus-data, I will highlight by bold-type the adnominal modifiers to be analysed.

[5] This paper is based on insights and analyses from Langlotz (2006). In this book the cognitive-linguistic model of idiom representation and variation is described and explained in full detail. While this paper does not provide a refinement of this theoretical account, it elaborates on the corresponding insights concerning adnominal modification.

[6] In accordance with the notational conventions established by Langacker (1987: 59), I use square brackets to capture entreiiched units while round brackets denote transitory non-units.

[7] A scene is a cogiiitive representation that is experienced as a consistent configuration (see Langacker, 1987: ch. 3.4.2.).

[8] Obviously, a number of idioms such as *trip the light fantastic* or *the whole kit and caboodle* do not possess a directly meaningful literal reading. Such instances are beiiig ignored here.

The notions of 'source domain' and 'target doniain' are understood in terms of the Lakoffian cognitive theory of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987, 1993).

[10] Obviously, idioms without a coherent literal meaning, such as *bloiv the gaff, trip /he light fantastic,* etc. are difficult to motivate because it is almost impossible to imagine a meaningful conceptual scenario for the literal readings.

[11] **A** very extensive account of the system of conceptual mctaphors that motivate idioms from the word field of 'success, progress, and failure' is offered by Langlotz (2006: ch 5).

[12] In a partitive of-consttuction, the of-complement constitiites the whole and the postmodified noun is its part: e.g., *ihe surface of the earih → ihe earih has a surface*. For a comprehensive overview of alternative *of*-constructions, see Quirk et al. (1985: §17.38ff.).

[13] McArthur (1992: 787) defines wordplay as: "Any adaptaiion or use of words to achieve a humorous, satirical, dramatic, critical, or other effect."

[14] This view is shared by Burger (1998: 151) who states: "Die Erweiterung hat in diesen Fallen nicht den Effekt eines Sprachspiels, sondem sie gibt eine Art Anweisung, wie nian die phraseologische Ausdtucksweise in den wortlichen Gedankengang zu 'übersetzen' habe [...]."

[15] I agree with Schenk (1995) or Nicolas (1995), who argue that 'conjunction variation' niust be described as a form ofwordplay. For a tiiore extetisive analysis of this variation principle, see Langlotz (2006: 212-213).

[16] Note that the numbering of all examples taken from Ernst was adapted to ihe present study.

[17] In the context of stretched verb constructions, this systematic correspondence is extensively analysed by Allerton (2002).

[18] The notion of 'metaphtonyniy' is introduced and discussed by Goossens (1990).

[19] The head-noun in an appositive *of*-construction has the same referent as the noun that it niodifíes: e.g., *ihe cify of Basel → Basel is ihe cify; Basel* and *city* have the same referent.

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