



## Occasional Phraseological Synonymy

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### ABSTRACT

Just from one type of formal modification, i.e. lexical substitution, various semantic relationships between the the original phraseological unit (PhU) and the modified occurrence (MPhU) can be derived. We cannot rely on the semantic connection between the elements which take part in the substitution to describe and identify this semantic link. This is so because many times there is no semantic connection between the lexemes involved in the process. The key to interpret the kind of semantic relationship has to be extracted from the contextual clues. Following a cognitive approach, the purpose of this paper is doublefold. First, we focus on the analysis of one type of semantic relation, the synonymy, of creative variations of proverbs; and second, we check the validity of the cognitive approach to identify the procedures, transformations and changes which take part in the process of formal modification which ends in the generation of a synonymous paremiological unit.

**KEYWORDS:** Proverbs, figurative meaning, synonymy, phraseological variation, phraseological modification, cognitive tools, frames, scenarios.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Although the semantic relations between different multi-word units (MWU) have been studied in different languages<sup>1</sup>, little attention has been paid to the analysis of semantic ties between canonical phraseological units (PhUs) and their modified occurrences. There are, however, a few important studies of modified fixed expressions which also focus on the connection between these forms and their canonical version, mainly Sabban (1998) and Grésillon and Maingueneau (1984), who pay attention to German and French phraseological units, and Fleischer (1982), who concentrates on German MWU. Based on a corpus of modified English proverbs<sup>2</sup> extracted from Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina (1999), this paper aims to deepen the understanding of one type of semantic relationship, i.e. synonymy, generated between the modified utterance and the original PhU.

Any kind of semantic study of modified PhUs requires the analysis of language in context since isolated forms cannot provide enough information about the semantic content of the expressions, making, therefore, the observation of the semantic connections impossible. Accordingly, the instances of modified proverbs selected for this contribution appear in two main types of contexts: comic strips and advertisements. The selection of these two genres is not casual. As various phraseologists point (see, for instance, Glaser, 1986; Grassegger, 1989; Sypnicki, 1991; B. Wotjak, 1994; Corpas Pastor, 1995; Zamora Muñoz, 2000; Balsliemke, 2001), there are certain textual types and genres which favour the use of creative phraseological variations, being humour and advertising two of the most prolific genres for modified occurrences of PhUs.

Within the broad category of proverbs, our interest lies on figurative proverbs, which develop a higher degree of complexity than literal ones in the formation of synonymous occasional utterances. Literal paremiological units generate non-systematic synonymous forms by substituting synonymous lexemes. Consequently, the new proverb is semantically very close to the canonical version, which results in a minimum display of stylistic, semantic and pragmatic effects (Corpas Pastor, 2001). On the contrary, the production of occasional synonymous proverbs from figurative paremiological units creates an intricate web of conceptual operations and changes. Following Norrick's categorization (1985) we divide our corpus of figurative proverbs in two main groups: scenic proverbs with species-genus synecdoche and proverbs with object-attribute metaphors.

The proverbs have been creatively modified just by one modification method, which consists of the substitution of one or more lexical elements. Even though the semantic relationship between the components substituted with the occasional variation is not synonymy, the creative counterpart is synonymous of the canonical proverb from which the

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Martínez Marin (1990) and García-Page (1998) for Spanish units, Fleischer (1982) for German, Sabban (1998) for German and French and Glaser (1986) for English.

<sup>2</sup> Some authors, such as Makkai (1972) and Alexander (1984, 1987), provide a division of idiomatic multi-word units into two groups: phrase-length expressions and sentence-length expressions. Proverbs belong to the second category, which Makkai labels sememic idioms. Following these authors and within a wide conception of Phraseology as a discipline, we include proverbs within the phraseological scope.

modification originated. The question we aim to answer is, which conceptual changes, which procedures make this type of relation possible in spite of the lack of semantic ties between the components which take part in the substitution?

In order to answer this question we have followed a cognitive approach which has already been implemented by Baranov and Dobrovolskij (1996) to describe the actual meaning of idioms, which they understand as derived from specific cognitive structures: frames and scenarios. According to these authors (1996:409) "the cognitive model of meaning is based not on the literal meaning of words forming the idiom, but on the corresponding cognitive structure". The formation of the meaning of the idiom is the result of different cognitive transformations which take place in the initial scenario or frame and are reflected in the resulting cognitive structure. The PhUs are characterized, therefore, as conceptual structures, frames and scenarios with several slots, in which diverse transformations take place. Baranov and Dobrovolskij list the main types of simple transformations which make the derivation of idiomatic meaning possible:

1. The replacement of slot contents by uncharacteristic (or sometimes oppositional) content.
2. The introduction of an uncharacteristic slot with its own contents (when a slot of this type was not previously present).
3. The transposition of conceptual contents of a frame slot from one frame to another.
4. The integration of the conceptual contents of a slot in the initial frame or scenario (IF / IS) into the corresponding slot of the resulting frame or scenario (RF / RS)
5. The elimination of slots or subslots.
6. The reduction of a frame to a single slot or subslot.

Although this cognitive methodology has been implemented with one category of PhU, idioms, in their canonical forms, we examine the possibility of applying these cognitive tools to another category of multi-word units, i.e. proverbs. In addition, this method should allow us not only to describe the actual meaning of proverbs but also the meaning of their modified synonymous occurrences. The comparison and contrast of the conceptual structures (initial and resulting frames and scenarios) which define their meanings should highlight our understanding of the generation of occasional paremiological synonymy.

## II. OCCASIONAL PHRASEOLOGICAL SYNONYMY IN FIGURATIVE PROVERBS

Just one type of modification procedure, the substitution of one or more lexical components of the proverb can result in the creation of an occasional synonymous unit. This type of occasional productivity is not directly related with the lexemes that take part in the process of substitution. This means that the semantic relationship which exists between these two elements does not necessarily and directly condition the final phraseological product. In fact, O Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. *IJES*, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 131-158

in most cases, there is no semantic relationship at all between the constituents involved in the process. In spite of this, the result is a unit, which, in context is synonymous of the original one. This means, in turn, that the synonymy will appear in the figurative interpretation and not in the literal meanings of the proverbs involved.

Therefore, the success in the new synoiiymous creation lies, not on the semantic relation between the two lexemes involved, but on the correct contextualization of the original unit. The contextual information is so important that sometimes the interchange of synonymous lexemes in a specific context yields an utterance which is semantically very distant from the original form in a specific context.

The phraseological utterances with figurative meanings can be conceptually represented with two scenarios: the initial scenario (IS) and the resulting one (RS). For an occasional unit to be considered synonymous of the canonical one (CPhU), the resulting scenario of the modified proverb (MPhU) must also be valid for the canonical unit. This means that both proverbs, the original and the modified one, must share the same resulting scenario. The following diagram illustrates the type of relationship built between synonymous units, whenever these units are proverbs with a figurative meaning:

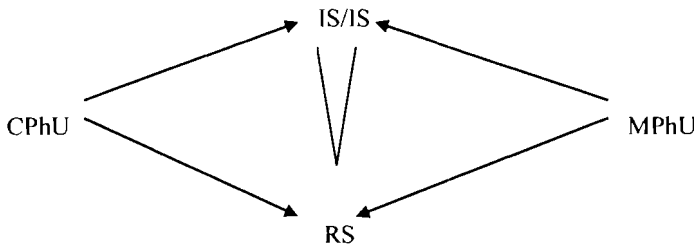


Fig. 1. Occasional synonymy of figurative proverbs

There are two operations which can guarantee the synonymy of the proverbs involved: Interchange of the units in context with no substantial change of meaning and share of the RS by the two proverbs.

Often the semantic effect of this type of process is the literal reading of the canonical PhU. This implies that the context leads to the literal interpretation of the utterance but does not forget the figurative meaning, which will be used to achieve other pragmatic and stylistic effects.

### 11.1. Occasional synonymous units of scenic proverbs

The modification procedure of substituting elements alters one of the key features of the proverbs with scenic metaphors: the general meaning, their sense as general truths, that they bring about even when they are used in a specific situation (Norrick, 1985:70). This type of proverb has, through its constituents, specific referents which in spite of being specific have a general meaning. For this reason the proverbs are likely to be used in numerous times referring to different situations. Norrick (1985: 110) labels this procedure "species to genus synecdoque". For a phraseological utterance to belong to this category its literal reading must describe a specific scene from which its SPI (Standard Proverbial Interpretation) can be derived through the generalization of its semantic interpretation.

The lexical substitution which generates occasional phraseological synonymy blocks this feature, the generality. With the new elements or constituents, the substitution particularizes the referents which are originally used to generalize. That is, these modified proverbs make the process of referentialization explicit. The use of a determined phraseological utterance in a particular context gives the proverb specific referents. The substitution works later as an explicitation of the referents which were beforehand included in the utterance.

On the other hand, the relation between the canonical phraseological utterance and its contextualized synonym creates a supraunit, defined as a virtual unit which functions as a mould or pattern for future synonymous creations. In each occasion, this supraunit will get specific and particular referents, which will make it into a synonymous particularized utterance.

The following examples illustrate the occasional synonymy of scenic proverbs.

- (1) CPhU: A *watched pot never boils*  
 MPhU: A *watched back door never opens*<sup>3</sup>

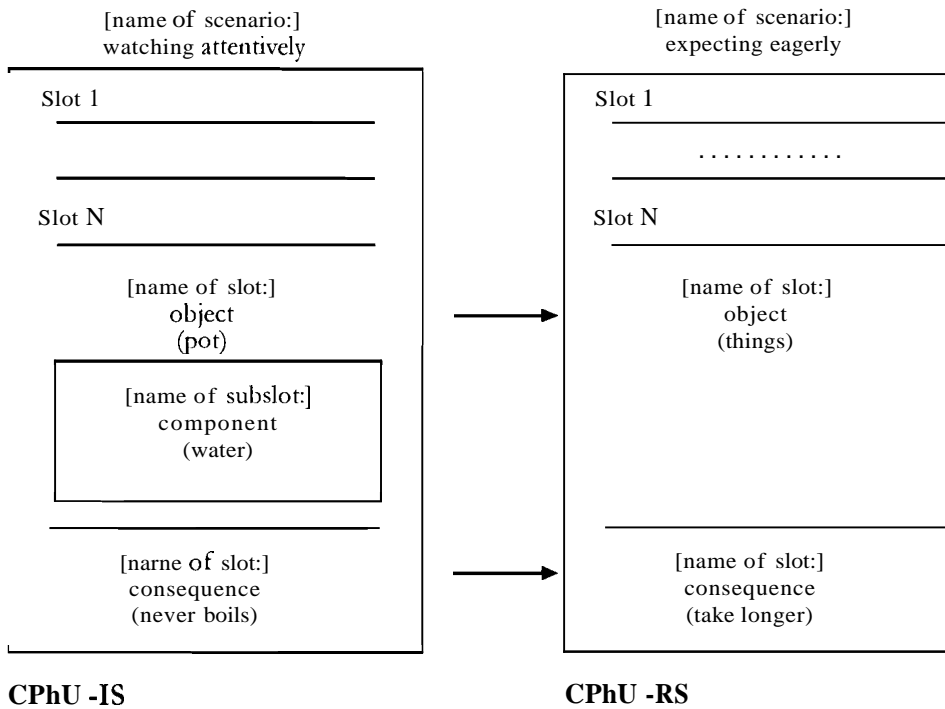
SPI: *Waiting attentively for something to happen, a stage to be reached, makes it seem to take longer* (ODEI)

The main elements involved in the modification mechanism in this proverb are two constituents: "*pot*" and "*boils*". These are substituted by two lexemes which belong to the same grammatical category –noun and verb--: "*back door*" and "*opens*". However, there is no semantic nor paronymic relationship between the elements which take part in the substitution. Analogically, the changes follow the mould established by the CPhU. Therefore, the new

<sup>3</sup> The strip consists of four vignettes. In the first one, Snoopy smiling on top of the roof of its house says: "It's almost that time"; in the second, still smiling, the dog exclaims: "Pretty soon the back door of the house will open and the roun-headed kid will come walking out with my supper". In the third picture, looking in the same

constituents imitate the cognitive connexion between “*pot*” and “*boil*” generating a similar union between “*back door*” and “*open*”. Following the same pattern, it is possible to build other pairs of elements, such as “*phone*” and “*rings*”, “*plant*” and “*grows*”, etc.

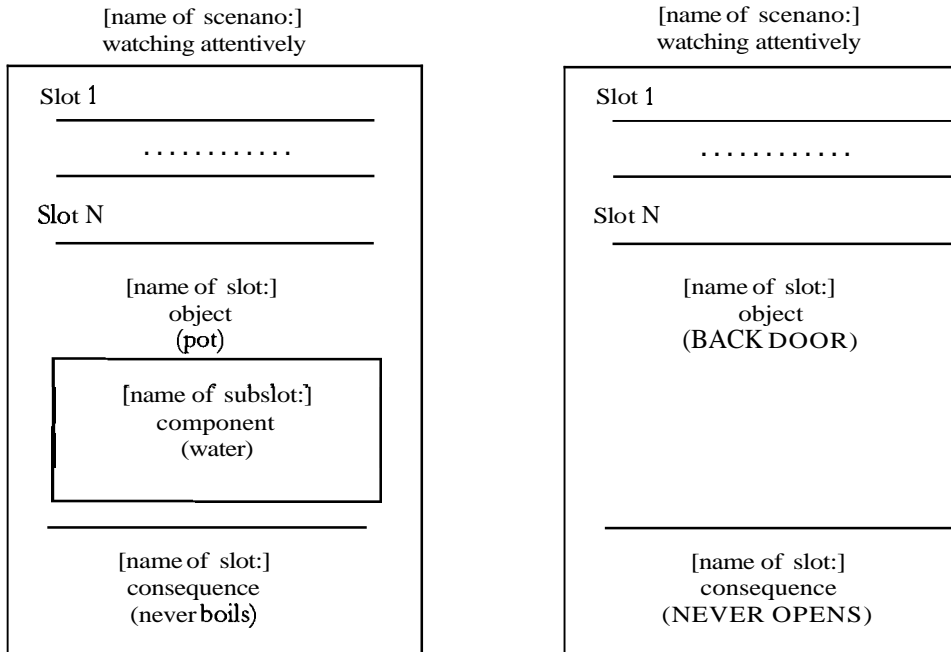
Once the formal changes which have generated the process of formal modification of this proverb have been described, we must describe how the derivation of the proverbial meaning is produced by representing the conceptual structure of the canonical proverb. The conceptual contents of the slots “object” and “consequence” in the initial scenario (IS) of the CPhU [*watching attentively*] are transposed into the corresponding slots of the final or resulting scenario (RS) [*expecting eagerly*] yielding the meaning *Waiting attentively for something to happen, a stage to be reached, makes it seem to take longer* (see fig. 2.).



**Fig. 2**

The modified proverb, on the other hand, builds its IS upon the initial scenario of the non-modified proverb, i.e. [*watching attentively*]. Within this scenario, the substitution of the lexemic material generates a particular cognitive operation: the change of the conceptual

content of two slots. The slot "object" and the slot "consequence" in the initial scenario of the modified proverb include new conceptual content: (back door) and (never opens) (see fig. 3).

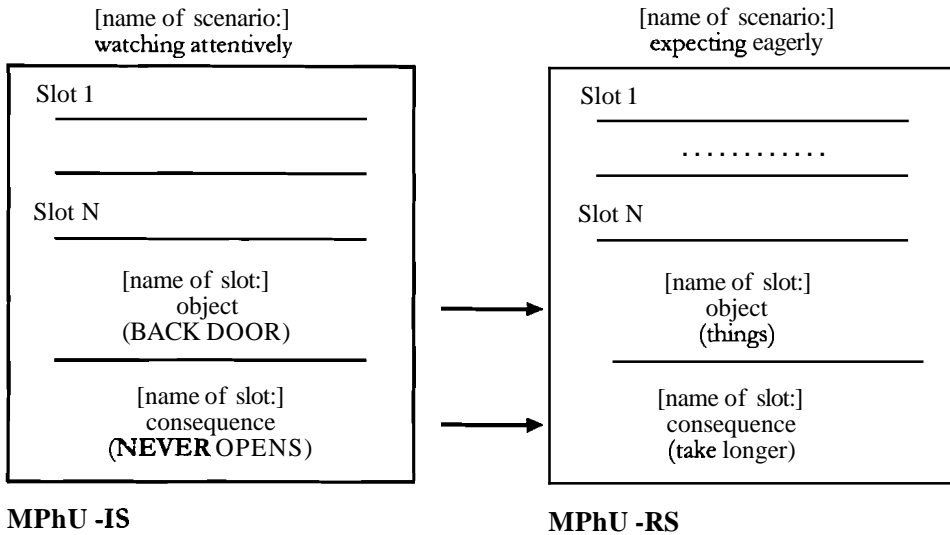


**CPhU -IS**

**MPhU -IS**

**Fig. 3**

If our analysis ended with the analysis of these two initial scenarios, there would be no possibility of considering the occasional synonymy since the changes produced inside the scenario establish too much **distance** between the new proverb and its canonical unit. However, it is important to stress that the changes just happen in this initial scenario as the final scenario of the modified proverb **proves**. This **resulting** scenario coincides with the RS of the CPhU. That is, "back door" represents the object or thing and "never opens" represents the negative consequences that the canonical proverb describes. The message of the institutionalized form warns that wishing something desperately seems to **delay** its **fulfilment**. In the canonical proverb the wished object is symbolized by means of a pot which **does** not **start** boiling **because** it is being continuously watched. In our example, the main character's **desire** is the back door of a house to open, which **does** not happen **because** the dog wishes desperately the door to be opened (see fig. 4).

**Fig. 4**

Locating the canonical proverb in the place of the modified one would mean **losing** not only the humorous effects, but **also** the contextualization and particularization of the utterance. The context gives the proverb specific referents, **illustrates** it with one specific **situation** in which the proverb applies, and achieves an occasional synonymous proverb. There is no doubt that the new modified phraseological unit works in this context **literally** since the dog Snoopy is staring at the back door which is not being opened, but it is **also** true that this occasional proverb points **also** to the figurative meaning of the original utterance – when something is wished deeply, time seems to stretch and its passing gets **slowlier**. In other situations, we **could also build** other particularized synonymous proverbs if we count with contextual support, for instance: *A watched phone never rings*, *A watched plant never grows*, etc. **All** these utterances would describe facts that we wish would happen, but whose **fulfilment** delays **because** we are paying too much attention to them.

A similar example is **illustrated** in the following proverb whose modification is built on the literal reading of its meaning.

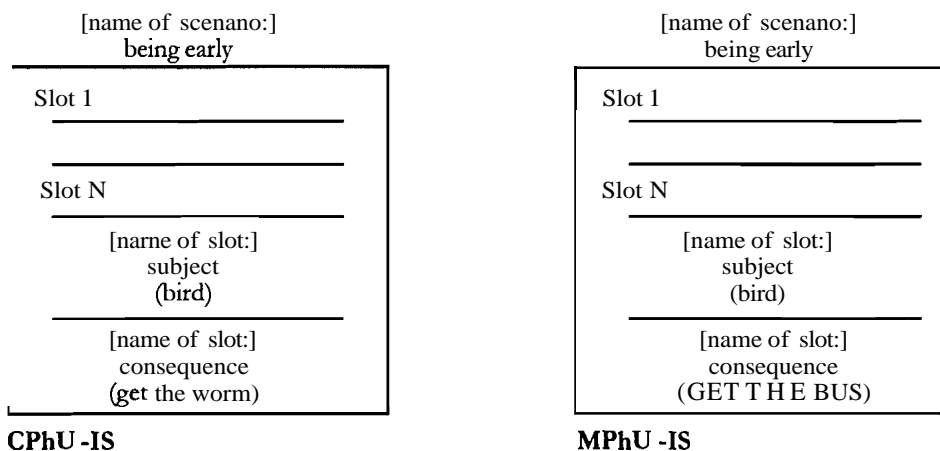
- (2) CPhU: *The early bird catches the worm*  
 MPhU: *The early bird catches the bus*<sup>4</sup>

SPI: *The first in line gets the pick of the opportunities. To delay in taking action may end in disappointment* (DP)

<sup>4</sup> This comic strip pictures Snoopy in a rainy day following several birds. The dog exclaims to the last bird in the queue: "I told you... The early bird catches the bus".  
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In this illustration, it is **also** the context the one responsible for the mechanism of substitution since it supports and motivates the change. The noun '*worm*' leaves its place for another noun, '*bus*'. Obviously, between these two nouns there is no semantic nor paronymic relationship. The modified utterance makes use of the **initial** scenario of the original proverb to make changes in its structure. This time, these changes are **minimal**: the content of the slot "*consequence*" includes now another aim (*get the bus*) (see fig. 5)



**Fig. 5**

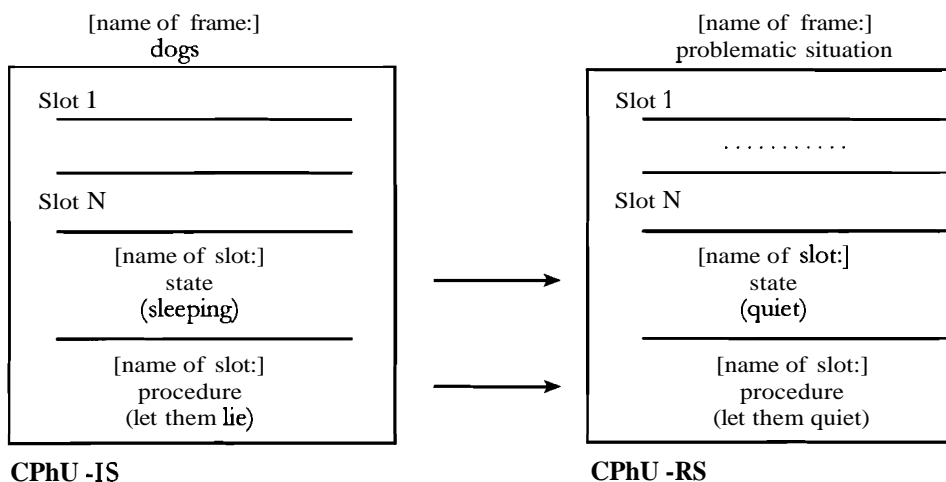
The resulting scenario of the modified proverb **is** the same as the resulting scenario of the original utterance: [*doing things first*]. The slot '*subject*' still keeps the content (*bird*) which appears in the canonical proverb, whereas the slot named '*needed object*' is filled with a new content: the bus (see fig. 6).



SPI: *Do not provoke, disturb or interfere with somebody/ something that is giving no trouble though he/it might, or could do so* (ODEI)

The modification of this proverb is achieved through the substitution of the noun "*dogs*" by the noun "*dads*". There is no semantic relationship between these two elements, but the paronymic relationship established between both constituents is the **support** of a substitution **specifically** based on the iconic context.

The canonical proverb is represented with an initial frame [*dogs*] and a resulting frame [*problematic situation*]. Both frames have two slots: the slot '*state*' and '*procedure*', which include in the initial frame the conceptual content (*sleeping*) and (*let them lie*) respectively. The transposition of contents from one frame into the other one makes it possible for the resulting frame to include (*quiet*) and (*let them quiet*) in these two slots (see fig. 7).



CPHU -IS  
Fig. 7

CPHU -RS

If the initial frames of the original proverb and the modified one are represented using these cognitive tools, it becomes clear that the initial frame of the modified proverb has the same structure in this context as the original proverb. This means that [*Dads*] has also a slot '*state*' and a slot '*procedure*', including both the same conceptual information which appeared in the canonical proverb (see fig. 8).

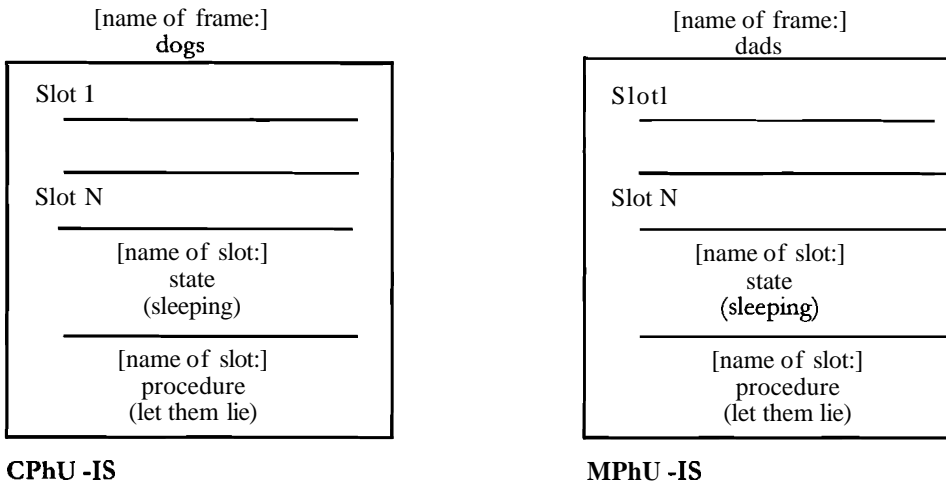


Fig. 8

Forgetting the literal meaning of the constituents, we could also include [Dads] within the frame [*Dogs*]. In fact, 'dads', in this type of situation, are also a type of 'dogs', a particularization of something or 'somebody who could blow out if they are annoyed or disturbed. It is precisely for this reason that the resulting frame of the modified phraseological unit coincides with that of the original one (see fig. 9)

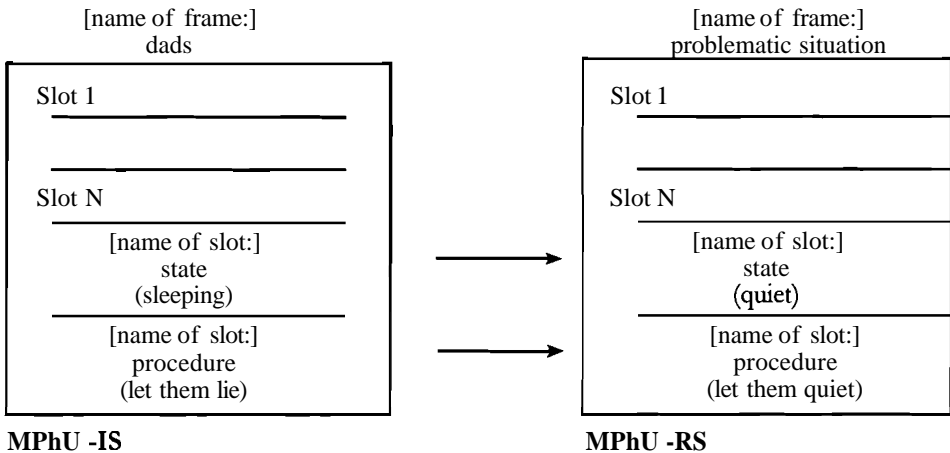


Fig. 9

Therefore, the modification has worked in the literal level of the unit assuming, at the same time, the new proverb the figurative meaning of the utterance that it illustrates. Since the comic strip represents graphically the situation described in the initial frame, the two levels

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of meaning work almost in a **parallel** way. Although the iconic context benefits the literal reading, the relationship that the modified utterance establishes *in absentia* with its source, that is, its original utterance with its two frames, brings the metaphorical meaning of the proverb to the surface. **All** this makes the humorous effects possible.

The explicitation of the referents is again present in this occasional proverb. **If**, the original phraseological unit had **been** used instead of the modified one in this same context, the only consequence would **have been** losing the humorous effects, the contextualization and particularization of referents, whereas the sense of the unit would not **have** experienced any loss.

As it happened with the previous example, **analogically** we could **build** other contextualized occasional phraseological synonyms: *Let sleeping brothers lie*, *Let sleeping neighbours lie*, *let sleeping cats lie*, etc. It would **also** be possible, forgetting the literal reading of the lexeme 'sleeping', to **create** numerous synonymous occasional proverbs such as, *Let sleeping politicians lie*, *let sleeping bosses lie*, *let sleeping soldiers lie*, etc. As a **result**, the original phraseological utterance **builds** a supraunit which could be contextualized and **illustrated** in many circumstances and situations.

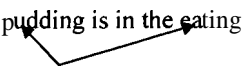
(4) CPhU: *The proof of the pudding is in the eating*

MPhU: *The proof is in the puffing*<sup>6</sup>

SPI: *The wisdom of a course of action will be tested when it is put into practice* (DP)

Two are the modification procedures that **have** caused the occasional variation of this phraseological utterance. On the one hand, the reduction of part of the proverb by omitting "the pudding", and on the other hand, the substitution, which has interchanged two **-ing** verbal forms: "*puffing*" for "*eating*". In this example there is no semantic relationship between the two constituents involved in the substitution, but there are paronymic relations: "*Puffing*" not only shares the same ending with the substituted lexeme "*eating*", but **also** shows a close paronymic relationship with another element in the original proverb, that is "*Pudding*". **Besides**, it is **also important** to point out that, due to the reduction of the phraseological unit, the new constituent almost takes the place of the lexeme with which it shares the highest degree of phonological similarity. **Thus**, the new element establishes a double connexion with its canonical proverb. On the one hand, the new lexeme rhymes with the substituted constituent, and on the other, thanks to the reduction and through the paronymy, it relates with the constituent that was previously placed in its position:

CPhU: The proof of the pudding is in the eating

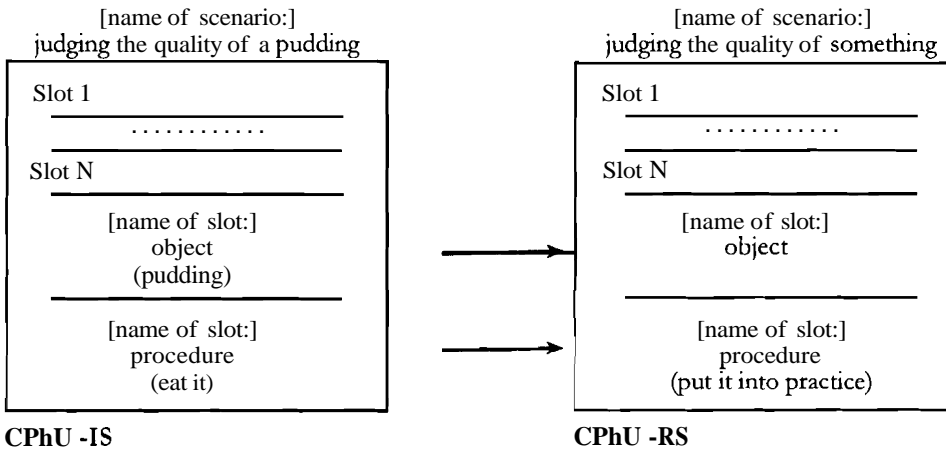


<sup>6</sup> This is the slogan of an advertisement of Merit Filter cigarettes placed above the picture of the packet of cigarettes.

**MPhU: The proof is in the puffing**

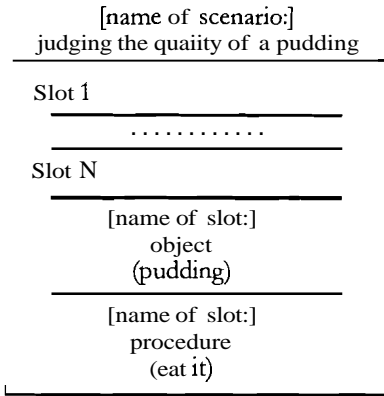
There can be no doubt that this double **conexion** acts as a necessary support for the retrieval of the canonical proverb. Furthermore, **the** visual and textual context, and even the word “*puffing*” help the readers to complete the omitted part in the new utterance. Taking all the visual and textual **clues** into account it **is not difficult** to build the complete version of this new utterance: *The proof of the cigarette is in the puffing*. It would **have been** possible to use this **full** version in the context, but doing so would **have** meant less phonological **conexions** between the reduced utterance. A further consequence would **have been** the elimination of **some** of the semantic and stylistic effects that the comic strip wants to achieve.

As for the representation of the cognitive structure of the CPhU, there is one initial scenario [*Judging the quality of a pudding*] and a **resulting** one [*Judging the quality of something*]. Both scenarios include a slot “*procedure*” which in the case of the initial scenario is filled with the content (*eat it*), which is transposed into the “*procedure*” slot in the final scenario with the content (*put it into practice*)(see fig. 10).

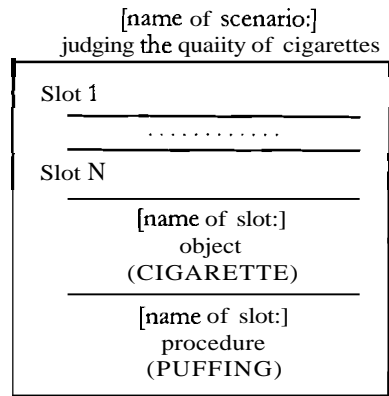


**Fig. 10**

The modified **paremiological** utterance **builds its** initial scenario [*Judging the quality of cigarettes*] in a **parallel** form with the original one. This means that both units share the same structure, and **also** that the slot “*procedure*” is filled with (*puffing*) in an **analogical** way imitating the relationship which exists between this slot and the evaluated element (see fig. 11).



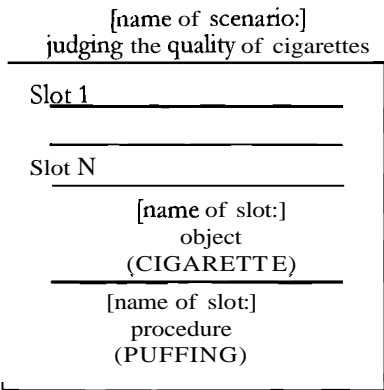
CPhU -IS



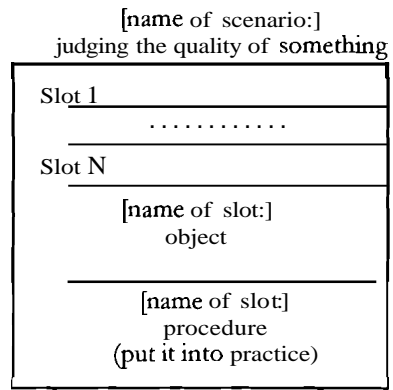
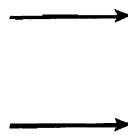
MPhU-IS

**Fig. 11**

The final scenario that corresponds to the new utterance coincides with the resulting scenario of the canonical proverb. The purpose is to test the quality of an object, and the object in this specific situation are cigarettes. To test them, the best method is to use them, that is, to smoke them (see fig. 12).



CPhU -IS



MPhU-RS

**Fig. 12**

By means of these procedures and conexions the modified proverb is converted into an occasional synonym. The referents extracted from the context are made explicit in the new utterance achieving the contextualization and particularization. The use of this phraseological modification as a slogan guarantees some of the effects looked for by the advertising O Servicio de Publicaciones. Universidad de Murcia. All rights reserved. *IJES*, vol. 6 (1), 2006, pp. 131-158

companies. The substitution **calls** the reader attention, whereas the reduction encourages the reader to find the missing information which is necessary to complete the new utterance in the next text. **All** these consequences **have** already **been** mentioned by Tanaka (1992) when dealing with the use of the word play in advertisements. In this study, based on the **Relevance Theory** by Sperber and Wilson (1986), it is pointed out that the advertising experts try to **call** the consumers' attention with these word plays being aware that these changes **generate** an extra effort to be processed by the readers. This extra effort is the price that has to be paid so that the message can be perceived and properly understood. **In** case we omitted this extra effort, the audience could ignore the message. Therefore, the extra effort to process the new utterance is worth it **because** the message has a stronger power of communication, and probably it **will** be easier to remember since its processing cost was higher. **Besides**, following Tanaka (1992:102) there are contextual effects based on the **pleasure** that the audience enjoys when the word play is solved and understood. **In** this example, the audience has to go back to the original proverb and guess why it has **been** modified. The intellectual satisfaction achieved **after** the effort could **have** a positive effect on the consumers' attitude towards the advertised product. Furthermore, in **all** the examples showed so far, the **values** which the proverbs own as general truths are assumed by the slogan in a natural way. This means that if people think that proverbs are general truths and a proverb is used in a slogan, probably the slogan is **also** true; consequently the product advertised with that slogan is a good one.

Once more the relation between the original proverb and the modified PhU creates a supraunit which works as a phraseological **mould**. For this reason, in appropriate contexts, we could **build** other occasional phraseological synonyms of this same proverb, such as, *The proof (of the car) is in the driving, the proof (of the perfume) is in the smelling*, etc. This type of phraseological creation has **also** been identified and studied in other languages. Sabban (1998), in her study offers other examples of German and French proverbs which by means of the lexical substitution are modified generating contextualized occasional synonyms.

## 11.2. Occasional synonymous units of proverbs with object-attribute metaphors

Unlike scenic proverbs with species –**genus** synecdoche, in which the whole utterance pictured a metaphorical situation, the proverbs with object –**attribute** metaphors acquire their metaphorical meaning through a nominal element in the sentence. This kind of proverb includes a nominal constituent which functions as one of the **features** it depicts. In *Fairplay is a jewel*, for instance, the noun *jewel* represents in fact one of its characteristics, in particular, the attribute "*valuable*".

The following examples illustrate the generation of synonymous PhUs which include object-attribute metaphors.

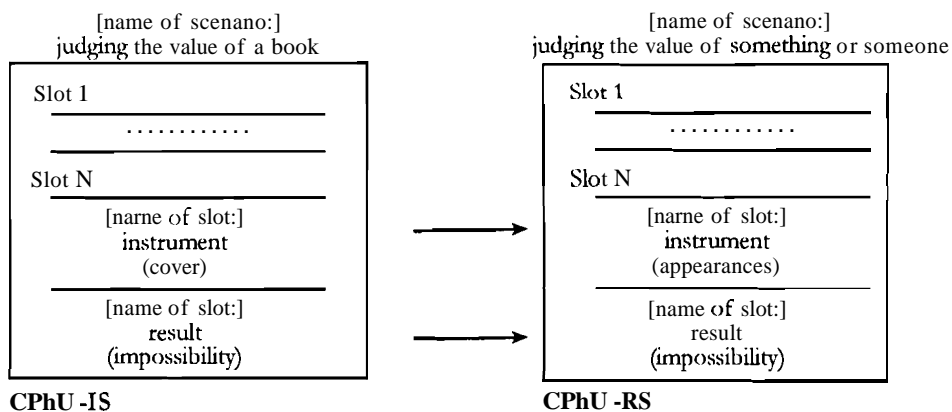


- (5) CPhU: *You can't judge [tell] a book by its covers*  
 MPhU: *You can't judge an egg by its covers*<sup>7</sup>

SPI: *If someone says 'You can't judge a book by its covers' they mean that you should wait until you know someone or something better before deciding whether you like them, because your first impressions may be wrong* (CCDI)

The modification of this phraseological utterance is achieved through the substitution of the noun '**book**' by another noun, '**egg**'. This time it is not possible to find any semantic nor paronymic relationship between the two elements involved in the modification procedure. The only aspect in common is the one revealed by the own phraseological unit consisting of a minimal conceptual connexion: both 'books' and 'eggs' have 'covers', that is, both have an external part which does not allow to see the inner part of the objects. On the other hand, the substitution is motivated by the context. It is an advertisement about the quality of food products of a chain of supermarkets. The picture that goes with the text shows the object designed by the new lexeme: an egg.

The initial scenario of the original proverb is [*judging the value of a book*], while the resulting scenario is [*judging the value of something or somebody*]. Although the name of this last scenario coincides with the final scenario of the previous example, the inner structure differs. The context offers the scenario another cognitive organization which highlights different slots (see fig. 13).

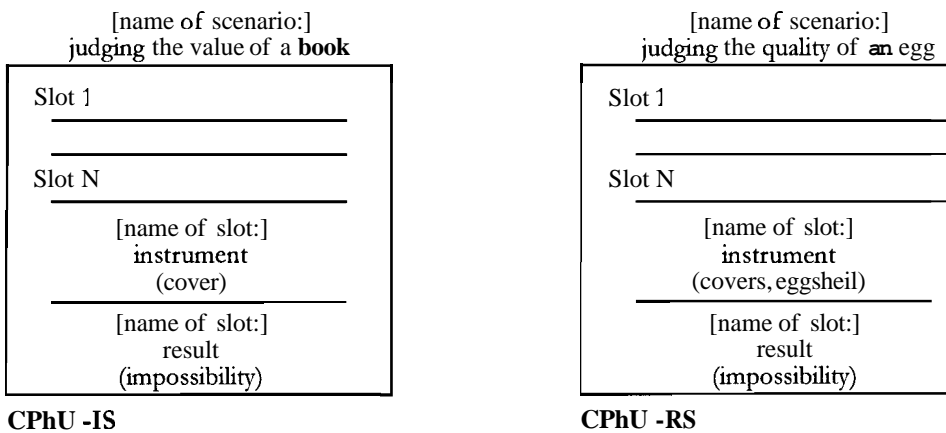


**Fig. 13**

<sup>7</sup> The Safeway America's favorite food store uses this slogan below the picture of an egg. The text that follows starts: "You have to look inside. So we do. It's called Candling. And simply put, it involves passing the egg over a very bright light to determine that the yolk, and the white are clear and intact."

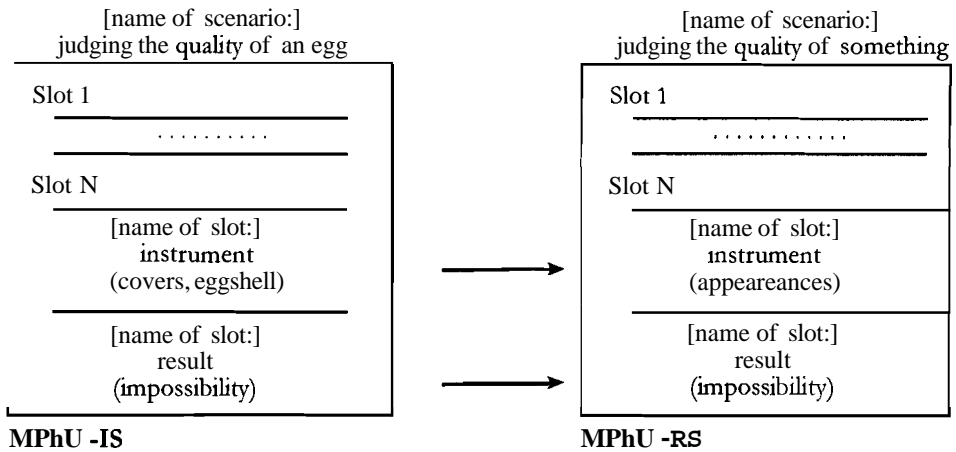
As this last figure shows, the transposition of conceptual contents is again the main conceptual transformation and the one responsible for the figurative meaning of the proverb. The slots 'instrument' and 'result' transpose their conceptual content (covers, impossibility) into their equivalent slots in the resulting scenario, which are filled with the content (external appearances) and (impossibility) respectively.

By means of the comparison of the initial scenarios of both the canonical proverb and the modified one, it is possible to find a change in the IS of the new proverb. Now, the name of the new scenario changes from [*judging* the value of a book] to [*judging* the quality of *an* egg]. The inner structure of the scenario is still the same and the conceptual content that fills the slots **also** remains; nevertheless, it is important to point out that the conceptual content of the slot 'instrument' (covers) makes **reference** to another type of cover, particularly "the egg *shell*". The result, however, is **still** the same: the impossibility (see fig. 14).



**Fig. 14**

The new unit has **been** created using as a starting point the IS of another unit and feeds from the RS of this other unit. The final scenarios of both proverbs are the same. Thus, again we can speak of occasional synonymy: it is not possible to **judge** the quality of something – nora book, nor an egg-- taking **just** its appearance into account (see fig. 15).



**Fig. 15**

The constituent 'book' is used with generic reference in the canonical proverb to refer to all types of persons and objects, including 'eggs', but the modified proverb has made explicit this reference. Therefore, the phraseological unit is contextualized and particularized through the modification, and overall this new proverb calls the potential consumers' attention who recognize in the slogan a phraseological unit. The advertisement begins with the literal sense of the proverb since, in fact, the picture shows an egg, and it is impossible to diagnose its freshness just by looking at its cover. But the context also requires the figurative sense of the original proverb. The impossibility applies not only to eggs but to all the products which the supermarket chain sells, trying to convince the consumers that they own the best methods to check the quality and freshness of all the food.

As it happened before with the previous examples, in this case we also find a supraunit which embraces all the possible occasional synonymous utterances, which, through the specification of the referents of the substituted constituents, achieve the contextualization and the illustration of the canonical proverb. The modified and desautomatized proverb '*You can't judge a kiwifruit by its cover*' is an example taken from Mieder and Tothné (1999), but it is possible to create other utterances following this supraunit, such as, *You can't judge a car by its covers*, *You can't judge a present by its covers*, etc. In all these cases, and because the new utterance is an occasional synonym, the paronymological meaning is proved.

- (6) CPhU: *Give him an inclr and he'll rake an ell [a yard]*  
 MPhU: *Give them an inclr and they'll rake the whole yard<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> The modified proverb is the slogan of a fire ant insecticide. In this advertisement we can also read "Win the war against fire ants at your house with Amdro. Amdro kills the queen".

SPI: *Said of someone who takes advantage of another's kindness or generosity* (DP)

In this utterance the process of modification occurs through different formal procedures, being one of them the substitution of the pronouns *'he'* and *'him'* by *'they'* and *'them'*. There is no doubt that in any other context this substitution could even be considered as an institutionalized variant of the canonical proverb. However, the advertisement in which the proverb is used as a slogan shows that these changes are a part of the modification procedures.

In this context, the new pronouns **have** the ants as referents. This type of referentialization involves the violation of **some** of the semantic conditions of selection of the PhU. The original proverb refers always to people and these are the only ones that could take advantage of any situation. Ants or any other animal act instinctively; therefore, to use this proverb to make **reference** to them would **mean** to give them human **qualities**, that is, it **implies** personification.

On the other hand, the extension of the nominal phrase *"a yard"*, which is now *"the whole yard"* and the particular context, an advertisement of a product against ants, has the semantic effect of the literalization of the word *'yard'*. In the canonical proverb, *'yard'* refers to a specific measurement of a surface, while in the new proverb, the same lexeme has as a referent any garden or yard of a **private** house.

The conceptual representation of the original utterance describes an IS [*giving people something*] and a RS [*being generous, helpful*]. The initial scenario includes a slot *'characteristics'* with the content (*small*) and a slot *'consequence'* which in turn includes a subslot called *'characteristics'* with the conceptual content (*more quantity of land*). These slots transpose their contents into the **resulting** scenario, which has similar slots (see fig. 16)

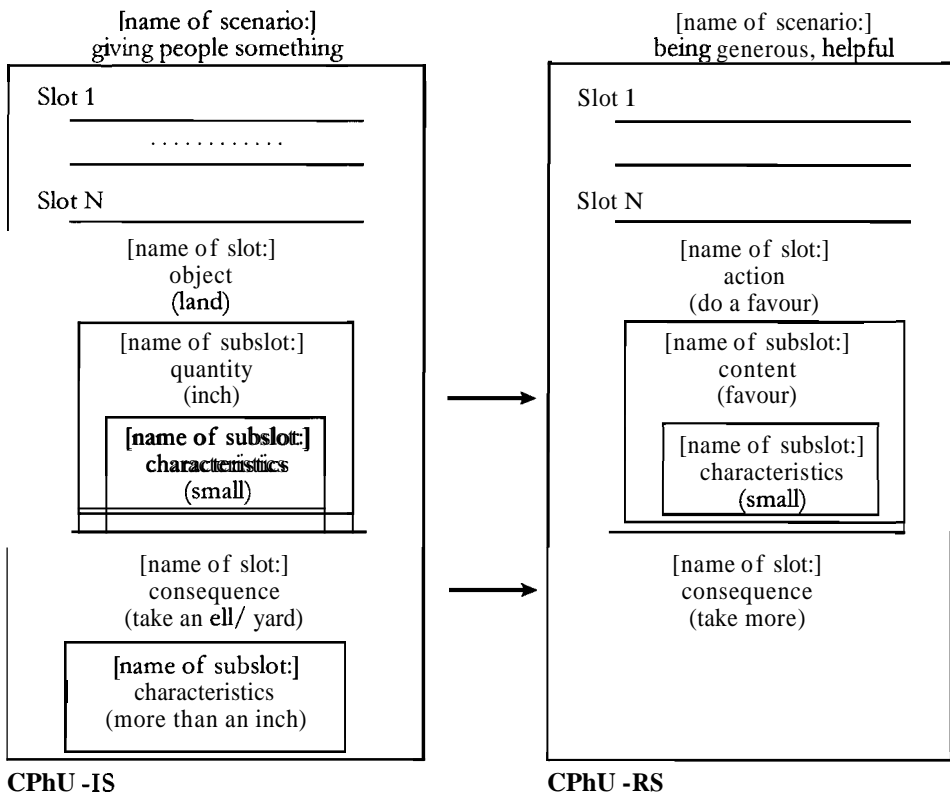


Fig. 16

On the other hand the **modified unit builds** its initial scenario [*giving ants something*] in a **parallel** way to the initial scenario above described. This is the reason why it has the same slots, but with slightly different variations as far as the conceptual content is concerned. The subslot '*characteristics*' found in the slot '*consequence*' includes, **besides** the quantity of land, another information: the type of plot (see fig. 17).

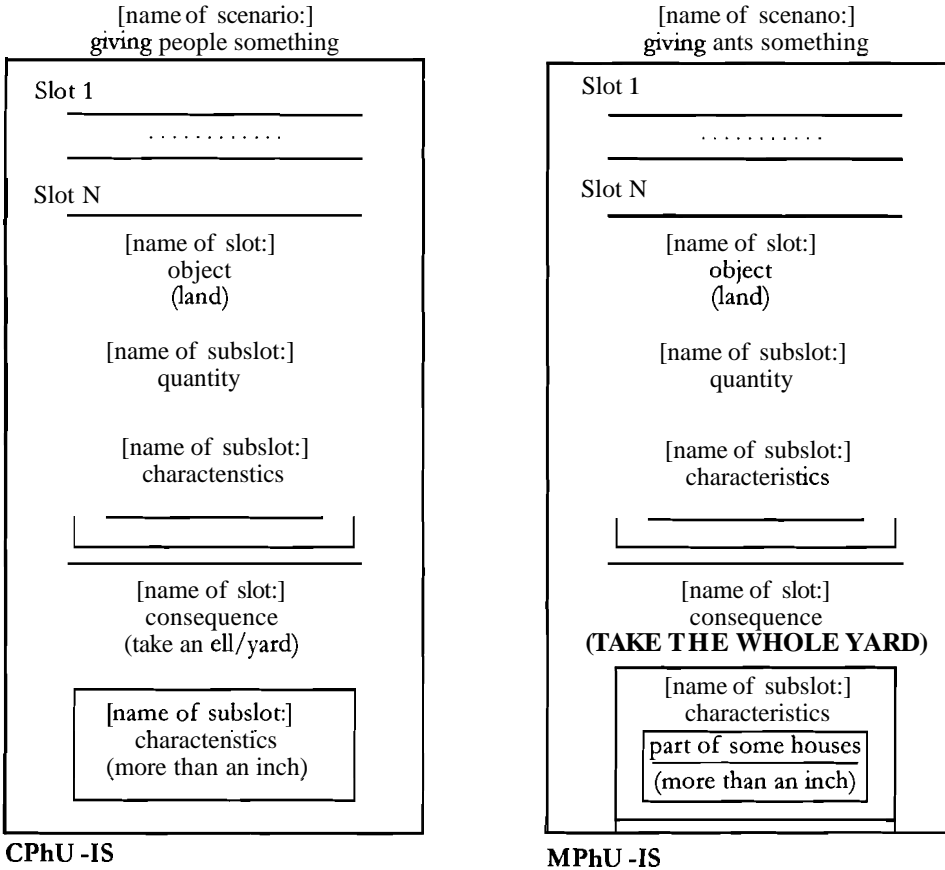
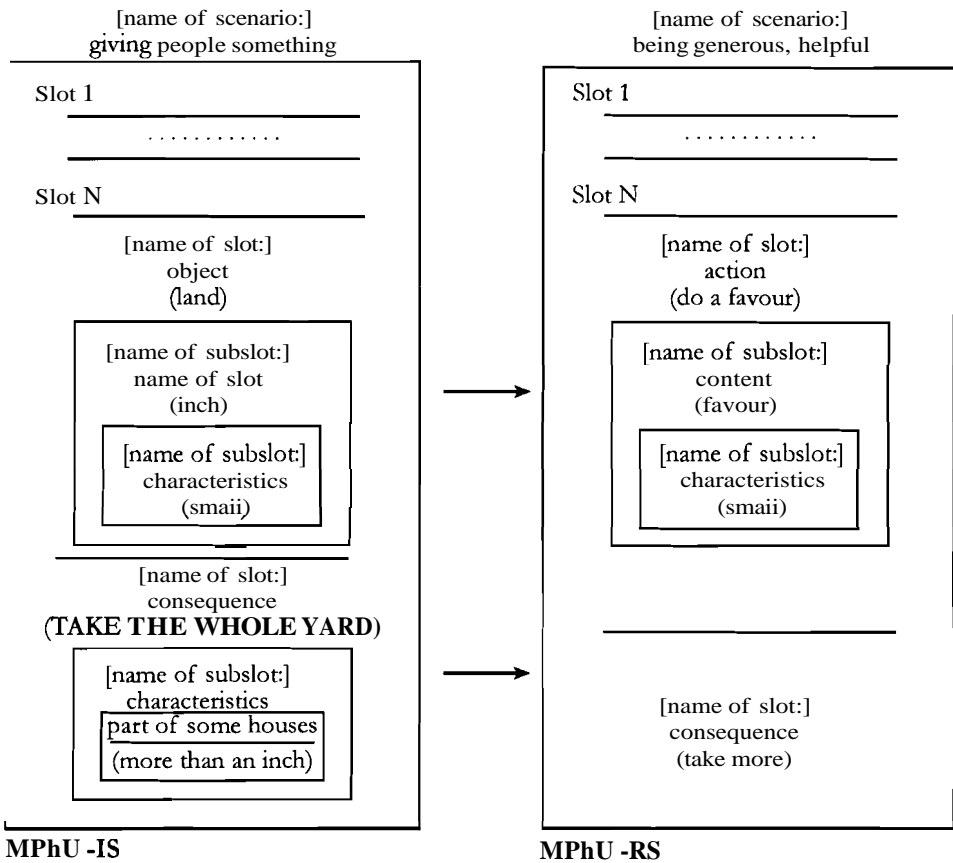


Fig. 17

Although in the new proverb the literal meaning has priority over the figurative sense through the context (if ants are given a piece of garden, they will **finally** invade the whole land), the figurative sense of the **modified** phraseological unit is **still** evoked. In fact, through a process of abstraction we could get to the same meaning of the canonical proverb: if you give them a bit (in this specific case, if you give ants a piece of land), they will **try** to get more profit and will take more (the whole garden). Therefore it is possible to say that the RS of this new proverb coincides with the RS of the original proverb (see fig. 18).



MPPhU -IS

MPPhU -RS

Fig. 18

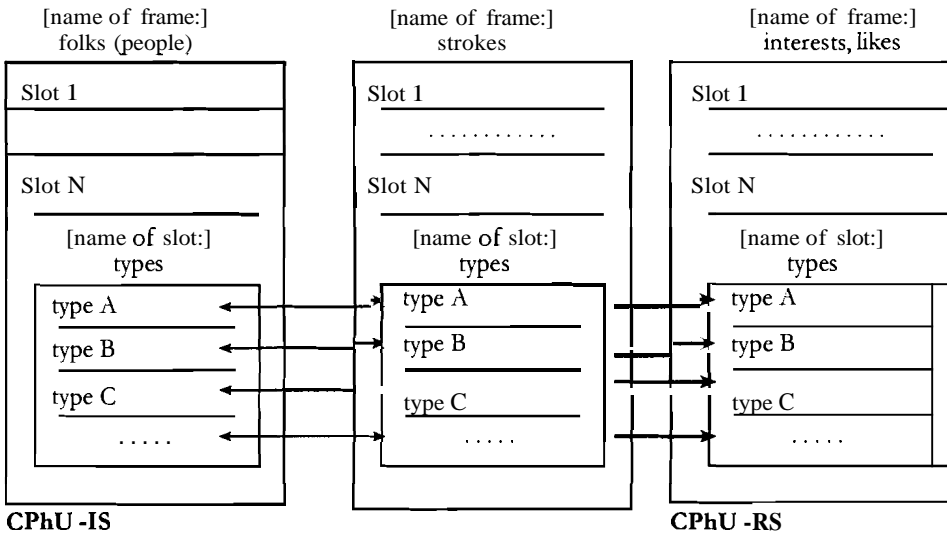
The use of the original utterance in the place of its occasional synonym would have sent the same message, but the especial effects activated by the modification of the proverb would have been lost. Among these effects, we can find, for example, the humour caused by the violation of the semantic conditions of selection. The ants, suddenly, **have** acquired own will. Furthermore, the use of the plural form of the pronouns calls the readers' attention and raises their curiosity to find out who these proverbs are referring to. These same pronouns together with their referents and, especially, the **literalization** of the component "yard" are responsible for the contextualization of the base utterance. This utterance has been used in a specific situation, has acquired specific referents and finally assumes the status of an illustration of the original proverb, a particularization.

(7) CPhU: *Different strokes for different folks*

MPhU: *Different smokesfor differentfolks*<sup>9</sup>.

SPI: *People say 'different strokes for different folks' to point out that people are different, and some individuals or groups have different needs and wants from others* (CCDI).

The original utterance has a bipartite and parallel structure, which excepting one constituent, is completely literal. The component '*stroke*' is a metaphor for any interest, need or like. This structure, in its initial scenario, relates two frames: [*folks*] and [*strokes*]. Each of them owns a slot named '*types*', whose conceptual contents establish a relationship based on the inter-frame correspondence. These two frames build a scenario which end in another resulting scenario with a similar structure. As expected, the part that changes is the one which carries the figurative meaning, that is, '*different strokes*'. The result is two other frames [*folks*] and [*needs, interests*]. The correspondence relationship established in the IS is repeated in this RS (see fig. 19).



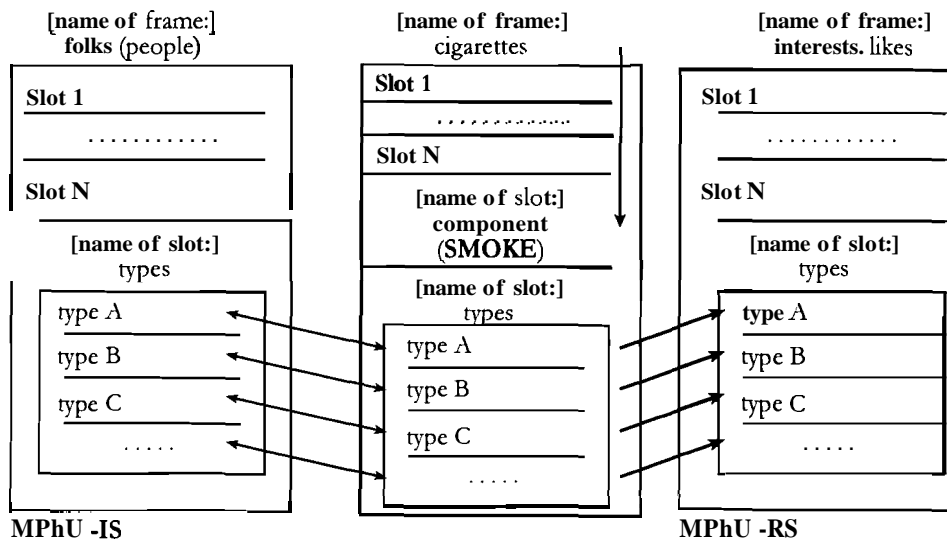
The occasional variation of this utterance comes from the element that carries the metaphorical load; the constituent '*strokes*' has been substituted by another noun, '*smokes*'. These two nouns share no semantic similarities although they are strongly connected through the paronymy. As a result, the new constituent succeeds in keeping the parallel structure of

<sup>9</sup> This comic strip pictures two men, one dressed with a suit and a hat who is carrying a suitcase and smoking a cigar; the other man, who dresses jeans and a T-shirt, smokes a cigarette.



the original utterance as far as the phonology is concerned. Besides, 'strokes' is probably a lexeme which has reached that position, not thanks to its semantic content, but to its phonological qualities from which the rhyme with the constituent 'folks' in the second member of the proverb derives.

The modification that has been carried out by means of the lexical substitution creates a new scenario in which the frames [cigarettes] and [folks] are related. The frame [cigarettes] has displaced the frame [strokes], but borrows a great part of the conceptual structure that this last frame had defined. Therefore, it includes a slot 'types', whose content corresponds also with the content of the same slot in the frame [folks]. In spite of the great similarity, there exists a small difference between the two interchanged frames. The frame [cigarettes] shows also a reduction to one of its slots, the slot 'component' with the content (smokes). This reduction did not happen in the frame [strokes]. In this way, the lexeme 'smokes' acts as a metonymy of 'cigarettes'. The reduction was completely necessary if the aim is to maintain the rhyme and the parallel structure of the base unit (see fig. 20).



MPHU -IS  
Fig. 20

MPHU -RS

The RS which corresponds to this new unit is the same as the resulting scenario of the original unit. The different types of cigarettes are an example of different likes and preferences which are associated to different kinds of people. The modified utterance can be considered, therefore, a contextualized example of the unit from which it has departed. The comic strip represents the specific referents graphically. If in this context we had used the canonical proverb, the sense would have been the same, but the humorous effects added by the particularization and illustration of the utterance would have been lost. Again we find an

occasional synonym built through the explicitation of the referents of a particular phraseological utterance.

### III. CONCLUSION

We have followed a cognitive approach to describe and analyze the occasional phraseological synonymy in humour and advertising texts. Our study has shown that although the semantic effect produced by the modification of figurative proverbs through the substitution of one or several lexical elements is the literal reading of the unit, the synonymy is built upon the metaphorical meanings of the proverbs. Thus, in spite of the literal reading of the unit, the figurative sense of the PhU is also present in the interpretation of the proverb in context.

The synonymy achieved does not derive from the semantic relationship which connects the elements which are involved in the substitution, but on the contextual clues that direct the particularization and referentialization of the lexeme or lexemes which have been substituted. The context plays, therefore, a highly significant role. Hence, it is not only advisable, but also necessary, to use an approach which favours the analysis of language in context. In this respect, the cognitive notions of frames and scenarios appear to be excellent tools for the description of paremiological figurative meanings for both canonical and modified occurrences. The implementation of this cognitive method has also proved to be useful for the study of the semantic connections which appear between canonical forms of phraseological units and their creative variations.

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