

Original paper

# Some Phraseological Units in Present-Day English and Their Variants

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## Abstract

The selection of the STRENGTH reading of the *legs* in *have legs* can be best captured by the meaning of the verb *have*. The LIE sense of the *bridge* in *have a bridge to sell* is selected by the meaning description of *sell* as “cause to believe.” The END-COME sense of *the fat lady sings* links with an implicature or an entailment which has the literal meaning of this expression. What seems to be an idiom whose form is *draw a line in the sand* is actually a combination of lexical items derived from the idiom *draw a line* and an idiom which only covers *in the sand*.\*\*

## 1. Introduction

This article concerns what Weinreich (1969:42) calls a phraseological unit and an idiom. The former’s definition is given in (1).

- (1) phraseological unit: “any expression in which at least one constituent is polysemous, and in which a selection of a subsense is determined by the verbal context”

By “constituent,” Weinreich seems to mean a lexical item, in light of his reference to a subsense. Thus the underscored parts in (2) can be phraseological units.<sup>1</sup>

- (2) Polls show that registered voters in both red states (those that voted Republican in 2000) or blue states (those that went Democratic) place the two major political parties on the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum. (“A Nation Divided? Who Says?” *NYT, WR*, 6/13/2004:IE 3)

Since both *red* and *blue* have their respective color subsenses in addition to their glosses in (2), if the selection of their glosses as in (2) are limited to a context, say, [    *state*], the underscored parts in (2) will fit the definition in (1).

An idiom, on the other hand, is defined as in (3).

- (3) idiom: “[a] phraseological unit that involves at least two polysemous constituents, and in which there is a reciprocal contextual selection of subsenses” (Weinreich (1969:42))

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One problem with (3) is that many of what he would have called idioms, for instance the underscored part in (4), do not fit the definition of phraseological unit.

(4) They *made their way* back up the crowded street to the Magical Menagerie. (*Prisoner*:68)

Although *make* and *way* have their respective subsenses which do not appear in the meaning description—i.e. GO—of the *make one's way* as an idiom, GO does not seem to be split into two pieces which can be allotted to *make* and *way* as their subsenses.

One solution to this problem is to go back to the ordinary sense of “constituent”—i.e. an ordered group of lexical items—and to revise the definition of phraseological unit in (1) into that in (5).

(5) phraseological unit: any expression in which a selection of a particular meaning  $\alpha$  of a constituent C is determined by the verbal context, and in which at least *one* lexical item in C has a sense which does not appear in  $\alpha$

Correspondingly, (3) needs revising into (6).

(6) idiom: any expression in which a selection of a particular meaning  $\alpha$  of a constituent C is determined by the verbal context, and in which at least *two* lexical items in C have a sense which does not appear in  $\alpha$

Now that the difference between a phraseological unit and an idiom only lies in the number of the relevant lexical items in them, and the cases in which that number is one or more properly include those in which it is two or more, an idiom is a phraseological unit, but not vice versa.

According to Weinreich (1969:57–58), a phraseological unit is registered in a grammar with its string of morphemes and its syntactic and semantic descriptions specified. Phraseological units are stored in the idiom list—a component which is separate from the lexicon. Each entry in the idiom list can substitute its semantic description for that of the part of a phrase marker whose terminal string and syntactic structure are identical with the morpheme string and the syntactic description of that entry. In the rest of the article, four phraseological units will be taken up in search of principles which are in charge of deriving their variants.

## 2. Semantically Selected Lexical Sense—Case One

### 2.1. *Legs*

In (7), *legs* seems to mean “ability to last” or “strength.”

(7) There have been cease-fires before. But many Angolans believe that this one has *legs* – because UNITA’s weary and emaciated soldiers do not.

(“Angolans Now Struggle To Live,” *WP*, 9/22/2002)

Following (5) will make us call the *have legs* as in (7) a phraseological unit. In (7), *leg* has at least two subsenses—i.e. “physical leg” and “strength,” and the “strength”-sense is only available when it occurs in the plural form as the object of *have*. Where does this sense come from? One possibility is to allow *leg* to have it in its lexical entry, as in (8).

(8) *leg*: STRENGTH/[<sub>VP</sub> have & [THING HAVE THING] [<sub>N+pl</sub> \_\_\_\_]]

Two problems come to mind. One is that the sense specified in (8) does not remotely resemble *leg*’s original sense—i.e. physical leg. Probably, the reading of *have legs* is based on an image that something having legs can walk some distance by itself. But why does *legs* stand for STRENGTH? The other problem is that it is impossible to identify a syntactic context in which its sense in question is to be selected. Contextual stipulations in (8) do not suffice, because examples like (9a–c) should be taken into consideration as well.

(9) a. “I wanted to keep this beast alive,” Goldberg declared in a recent interview. “I wanted to

*give the story legs*. I gave the New York Post, which I love and work for, a story a day for eight straight days.” (“The Presidential Scandal’s,” *WP*, 11/17/1998)

b. The president’s enemies are counting on this to be the scandal *with legs*. November elections are looming, and no other scandal has *grown legs*.

(“Democrats target,” *WT*, Web, 5/18/2002)

c. Now Mr. Bush must *put legs* to this proposal by setting up working groups in NATO to address the alliance’s new mission and global capabilities.

(“In Berlin, stunned applause,” *WT*, Web, 5/24/2002)

*Give* and *with* share the predicate HAVE, as far as they have meaning descriptions like those given in (10).<sup>2</sup>

(10) a. give: [THING CAUSE [THING HAVE THING]]

b. with:  $\lambda_i$  [THING<sub>i</sub> HAVE THING]

In (10b),  $\lambda$  stands for a relative operator “which” and the coindexing between  $\lambda$  and THING is intended to be the binding of THING by  $\lambda$ .

For *grow* and *put*, however, let us tentatively assume those in (11) as their meaning descriptions, and (12) as a schema for verbs’ meaning descriptions, where *X* is a variable for a string of symbols.

(11) a. grow: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> GO OUT OF THING<sub>1</sub>] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>2</sub> BE AT THING<sub>1</sub>]]]

b. put: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> GO TO THING<sub>3</sub>] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>2</sub> BE AT THING<sub>3</sub>]]]

(12) [Event X PURPOSE]

According to (11a, b), *grow* and *put* both describe an event which is aimed at something staying somewhere. The difference between the two is that in the case of *grow*, that thing comes from within the place where it is supposed to stay, whereas in *put*, that thing comes from outside. Furthermore, let us assume that if something stays somewhere, that place can be said to have that thing, as is stated in (13).<sup>3</sup>

(13) [THING<sub>1</sub> BE AT THING<sub>2</sub>] → [THING<sub>2</sub> HAVE THING<sub>1</sub>]

Through (13), *grow* and *put* can obtain inferences as in (14).

(14) a. grow: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> GO OUT OF THING<sub>1</sub>] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE THING<sub>2</sub>]]]

b. put: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> GO TO THING<sub>3</sub>] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>3</sub> HAVE THING<sub>2</sub>]]]

## 2.2. Syntactico-Semantic Overlapping

All the examples in (7) and (9) might suggest that the selection of the STRENGTH reading of *legs* can be best captured by the meaning of a verb or preposition which precedes it, as in (15), where again *X* is a variable for a string of symbols.

(15) leg: STRENGTH/[N+pl \_\_\_] & [X [THING HAVE \_\_\_] X]

(15) states that *leg* can mean STRENGTH if it occurs in the plural form and its sense STRENGTH fills the second term of HAVE in a meaning description. There is no mention of syntactic categories in (15) which select the *legs* as STRENGTH, so that whatever contains HAVE in its semantic description, whether V or P, qualifies for that job. As (14a, b) show, in a verb’s meaning description, one sense can fill more than one argument position at the same time through binding. The string variables in the semantic context in (15) make it impossible to specify any absolute position which STRENGTH is supposed to fill. Thus, although in (14a, b), STRENGTH is to fill the first argument of GO as well, it can fill at least one second argument position of HAVE, so that (14a, b) can satisfy the conditions in (15).

In (15), the stipulations on the item which selects the *legs* as STRENGTH in the formal context are reduced to [N+pl \_\_\_] and instead, the semantic context in which STRENGTH can occur is specified. True,

there are idiom-turned constructions whose sense is selected by a semantic context. *V one's way*, for instance, requires [THING DO] and *V one's hell out of* [THING DO AGAINST THING] (see (16a, b)).

- (16) a. Sheriff Frass *elbowed his way* through them as Mulder followed. (Bug:36)  
 b. [...] “Let’s just *tax the hell out of* them.” (“Ashes to ashes,” *WT*, Web, 4/9/1998)

But in both of them, the senses of those predicates or events select semantic elements—i.e. a superior predicate GO in the case of *V one's way*, and a degree phrase “to much degree” in the case of *V one's hell out of*. In (15), on the other hand, the sense of a predicate selects that of one of its arguments.

Let us explore a possible reason that (8) develops (15). The short answer would be that (8) and (15) resemble each other. This can be clearer when (8) is turned into (17) as a notational variant.

- (17)  $leg/[VP\ have\ [N_{+pl}\ \_\_]]$ : STRENGTH/[THING HAVE \\_\\_]

In (17), the formal and semantic contexts are stated separately, and the formal context in which the phraseological *leg* is supposed to occur looks exactly like the semantic context in which its sense is supposed to occur. Of course, it is just a coincidence, or even an artifact, that in English *have* and HAVE are “homonyms.” Still, it is highly conceivable that users confuse the two.<sup>4</sup> One consequence is the extension of internal distribution of *have legs*. The examples in (7) and (9) witness that the “*legs*-construction” which results from this extension is subject to the conditions on the semantic context as well as the residue of those on the formal context of the phraseological *have legs*—exactly the situation which (15) describes. Now, the original *leg* and the phraseological *have legs* are linked via image, and the phraseological *have legs* and the *legs*-construction via extension.

More generally, the derivation from (8) to (15) will be characterized as in (18).

- (18) Suppose  $[m_1 \dots m_n]$  is a phraseological unit, where  $m_i$  ( $1 \leq i \leq n$ ) is a lexical item, and the  $m_j$  ( $1 < j \leq n$ ) of  $[m_1 \dots m_n]$  corresponds to a sense  $\alpha$  only within  $[m_1 \dots m_n]$ . If  $\alpha$  is to fill the  $k$ -th argument position of a predicate  $\pi$  in the meaning description  $\Sigma$  of the  $m_h$  ( $1 \leq h \leq n$ ), then  $[m_1 \dots m_n]$  can develop a construction  $[m_j]$ , where (i) the internal structure of  $[m_j]$  is preserved to such an extent it is specified and (ii)  $[m_j]$ 's sense  $\alpha$  fills the  $k$ -th argument position of  $\pi$  in  $\Sigma$ .

In (8) and (15),  $m_h$  stands for *have*,  $[m_j]$  *legs*,  $\alpha$  STRENGTH,  $\pi$  HAVE, and  $\Sigma$  [THING HAVE THING]. The condition (i) in (18) aims to capture the fact that the plural form of the *leg* has been retained in the *legs*-construction. Clearly, plurality seems to be involved in the relevant notion of specificity.

### 3. Semantically Selected Lexical Sense—Case Two

#### 3.1. *Bridge*

In (19), *have a bridge to sell* seems to mean “cause to believe a lie.”

- (19) And if you believe all that, do they have a bridge to sell you.  
 (“The Democrats’ Brooklyn Bridge,” *WT*, Web, 12/29/1999)

Note that *sell* has the sense of “cause to believe,” independent of this phrase. Thus, (19) can contain a phraseological unit which gives *bridge* the sense LIE. Cole and Lass (2000:62) state that a term like the *bridge* in (19) is associated with gullibility. *OED* cites its earliest example relevant to this phraseological unit under the heading of *bughouse* from novelist Fannie Hurst’s 1919 work *Humoresque*. Internet folklore tells of it as follows:

- [...] the age-old adage, “If you believe that, I’ve got a bridge to sell you” – a saying developed in the 19th century as immigrants entered the new frontier that was America in search of a better, more prosperous life. Their optimism, and the myths about America that they had heard, made them easy targets for charlatans looking to take their money. (Fridman (1999))

This phraseological unit like “If you believe that, I’ve got a bridge to sell you” has seen its variants. In

one class of them, *if you believe that* is replaced with other *if*-clauses, as in (20), or missing.

- (20) Many said the analyst should be fired, while another broker said, “*If Jack Grubman is a top ‘research analyst’* then I have a bridge to sell.”

(“In a Wall St. Hierarchy,” *NYT*, Web, 4/29/2003)

In the second class of variants, *to sell* is replaced with expressions almost synonymous to it, as shown by the examples in (21).

- (21) a. “If anyone honestly expected the service chiefs to tell their civilian bosses anything different, I’ve got a bridge *I’d like to sell* them,” said Rep. Roscoe G. Bartlett, Maryland Republican and the House’s most vocal critic of mixing male and female recruits in the same units and dormitories. (‘Foes hit ‘PC’ decision,” *WT*, Web, 3/12/1998)
- b. If you think National Public Radio is prepared to give conservatives a fair shake, we might just have a couple of major bridges *for sale*. (“NPR’s anthrax smear,” *WT*, Web, 2/12/2002)
- c. If you believe the Senate candidate answered that one, there’s a bridge in Brooklyn just *for* you. (“Hillary’s listening tour,” *WT*, Web, 7/8/1999)

In the third class, *bridge* serves as the accusative object of the main verb not just semantically but also overtly, as in (22).

- (22) “And if you believe that, I’ll *sell* you *all the bridges* and tunnels into Manhattan,” scoffed Ronald F. Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a liberal advocacy group.

(“Prescription Bill Fuels,” *WP*, 6/13/2003)

In the fourth class, *sell* is replaced with other verbs, as in (23).

- (23) If Mr. Clinton believes there is no room to cut in a budget well over \$1 trillion, lawmakers have a few bridges he might like to *buy*. (*WT*, *SN*, 1/27/1993; 2/3/1993)

In (23), *have a few bridges he might like to buy* seems to mean “come to believe lies.” The verb *buy*, too, has the sense “come to believe,” independent of the *bridge* as LIE.

In the fifth class, *a bridge* is replaced with *the Brooklyn Bridge*, as in (24).<sup>5</sup>

- (24) Her protestations of pure innocence – or, rather, ignorance – don’t fool the kind of people who would never buy *the Brooklyn Bridge*.

(“The incredibly shrinking senator,” *WT*, Web, 2/27/2001)

What made all these variants derive? Before addressing this question, let us examine the senses of *sell* and *buy*—two key main verbs which occur in the phraseological unit involving *bridge*. These two verbs originally have meaning descriptions like those in (25).

- (25) a. sell: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> HAVE THING<sub>3</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE MONEY]]]  
 b. buy: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE THING<sub>2</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>3</sub> HAVE MONEY]]]

(25a, b) suggest that both *sell* and *buy* involve an act of obtaining something on the side of all parties concerned, the difference being which party gets money and which party something else.<sup>6</sup> *Sell* and *buy* also mean “cause to believe” and “come to believe,” respectively. A straightforward way to link (25a, b) to “cause to believe” and “come to believe” is to describe the relevant senses of *sell* and *buy* as in (26).

- (26) a. sell: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> HAVE [Thing IDEA]<sub>3</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE SUPPORT]]]  
 b. buy: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE [Thing IDEA]<sub>2</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>3</sub> HAVE SUPPORT]]]

(26a, b) describe the same situations as (25a, b), respectively, except that (26a, b), unlike (25a, b), involve idea and support as things to be exchanged between the participants.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2. Semantic Attraction

If it is the case that the selection of the *bridge* as LIE was at first limited to the expression like “If you believe that, I’ve got a bridge to sell you,” the entry for the relevant phraseological unit would look like

that in (27), where the iteration of the formal context is underscored for distinction's sake.

- (27) bridge: LIE/[<sub>S</sub> if you believe that, I [have got [<sub>NP</sub> a \_\_\_ to sell you]]] &  
 [<sub>S</sub> if you believe that, I [[THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE THING<sub>2</sub>] [<sub>NP</sub> a \_\_\_ to [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub>  
 HAVE [<sub>Thing</sub> IDEA]<sub>3</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE SUPPORT]]] you]]]

As (27) suggests, *bridge*'s sense LIE is to fill one of the argument positions of *have got*. One of the argument positions of *sell*, too, is to be filled by *bridge*'s sense, but only via binding in the relative structure. However, it might look as if *sell* were closer to *bridge* than is *have got*. Perhaps this is because *have got*'s sense is lighter and the gist of the whole expression is described by *sell*. This difference between *have got* and *sell* in contribution to the meaning of the whole expression reflects the fact that this expression is meant for a warning against the addressee, so that a bit of periphrasis is preferable. Suppose that in (27), the meaning description of *sell* "attracts" *bridge*'s sense LIE in the sense that an element in a main clause establishes an exclusive relationship with an element in a more deeply embedded structure.<sup>8</sup> Then (18) can help (27) develop the "bridge-construction," in which *bridge*'s sense is selected by the meaning description of *sell*, as in (28).

- (28) bridge: LIE/[X [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> HAVE [<sub>Thing</sub> [<sub>Idea</sub> \_\_\_]]<sub>3</sub>] [BY [THING<sub>1</sub> HAVE SUPPORT]]] X]

(28) states that *bridge* can mean LIE if its semantic counterpart fills the second argument of HAVE in a meaning description. The first three classes of variants of *bridge*-construction can be accounted for by (28). Since the bridge as LIE is now a lexical item free from the contextual restrictions in morphology and syntax, it does not need any specific *if*-clause (see (20)), or any specific relative clause (see (21a)). Moreover, since it only has to meet the semantic restrictions from the *sell* as "cause to believe," the *bridge* is blind to the syntactic categories of *to sell* and *for sale* (see (21b)). It is also blind to the distinction between explicit and implicated meaning—e.g. *to sell* and *for you (to buy)*—(see (21c)). Nor does it distinguish whether the argument in question is a variable or a referential expression—e.g. *a bridge to sell* or *sell a bridge*—(see (22)).

Since the meaning descriptions of *sell* and *buy* are the same except for their indexing, users might feel as if *bridge* could mean LIE when it serves as the accusative object of *buy* as well. Those users would strip (28) of the indexes and obtain (29) instead.

- (29) bridge: LIE/[THING CAUSE [THING HAVE [<sub>Thing</sub> [<sub>Idea</sub> \_\_\_]]] [BY [THING HAVE SUPPORT]]]

If the identity between semantic elements is checked to such an extent that a semantic context in a construction is specified, the semantic description of *buy* in (26b) will fit the semantic context in (29), so that, for instance, *a bridge to buy* can mean "a lie to come to believe." Hence (30).

- (30) An element  $\alpha$  in a semantic description is equivalent to an element  $\beta$  in a semantic context in a construction iff  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are identical or  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are identical except that  $\alpha$  has an index.

## 4. Meaning-Linked Idiomatic Meaning

### 4.1. *The Fat Lady*

In (31), *the fat lady sings* seems to mean "the end comes."

- (31) Hey, Luther./Admiral, how's the big case going?/Ah, nose to the grindstone./No flies on you./A rolling stone gathers no moss./Well, it ain't over till *the fat lady sings*./You can say that again./It ain't over till/both: the fat lady sings. (*A Few Good Men*)

The fat lady's singing symbolizes a climax in opera. According to Rees (1993), *The New York Times* quoted sports writer Dan Cook in 1978 as coming up with the expression *the opera ain't over till the fat lady sings* after that year's professional basketball play-off game. Kamp (2003) dates this expression back

to the 1936–1945 Texas Legislature, in which the closing of each legislative session used to be followed by an opera singer’s performance. Cook’s expression clarified the reference to opera and perhaps led to lifting this expression up to the nation-wide level of use.

This idiom has several classes of variants. In one class of them, *it ain’t over* is replaced with other phrases, as in (32).

- (32) On Wednesday, a Boston radio station sent a “fat lady” to sing outside Mr. Gore’s residence./ “Gore’s campaign said *he wouldn’t give up* till the fat lady sings,” Juanita Dickinson said outside the Naval Observatory’s gate./ “I’m a fat lady, and I’m singing.”

(“For Gore, the end is near,” *WT*, Web, 12/8/2000)

Note that in (32), the negative is still retained in the main clause and that the tense of the *till*-clause remains intact.

In the second class, *the fat lady sings* behaves as an independent clause, as in (33).

- (33) “The courts have spoken and *the fat lady has sung* all on the same day. It’s over for Gore,” said independent pollster John Zogby. (“End of line near for Gore,” *WT*, Web, 12/5/2000)

Notice that in (33), the relevant clause is in the present perfect.

Perhaps because neither *fat lady* nor *sing* normally stands for any part of “the end comes,” the linkage of the two looks stable. One exception to this observation is a case where *fat lady* occupies the subject position of different predicates, whose examples are given in (34).

- (34) a. “It ain’t over till the fat lady sings, and *the fat lady is just warming up*,” Mitchell said.  
(“For African Americans, Race Is,” *WP*, 1/17/1998)

- b. “We’re down, we’re in trouble, but *the fat lady hasn’t called for a limo* yet,” said Newcombe, who is now dependent on his top-ranked doubles tandem, Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge, to prevent the semifinal from being clinched by the home team on Saturday.

(“SAMPRAS AND CHANG,” *NYT*, *Asahi*, 9/20/1997)

Another exception is a case in which *fat lady* occupies the accusative object position of *hear*, as in (35).

- (35) We’re loose./Can you get us out of here in 30 seconds?/I ain’t *heard no fat lady!*/Forget the fat lady. You’re obsessed with the fat lady./Drive us outta here. (*Independence Day*)

Even the whole clause *the fat lady sings* arguably fills the complement position of *listen to* or *hear*, as shown by (36).

- (36) Confronted by a reporter at the Capitol last night, Rep. Dan Burton, Indiana Republican, said, “I’ve been *listening to the singing*. Have you heard it? *That fat lady, singing*. The party’s over.”  
(“End of line near for Gore,” *WT*, Web, 12/5/2000)

The examples in (34)–(36) seem to come from metaphorical inferences.

The idiom entries for these “*fat-lady* constructions” would look like (37a–c).

- (37) a. [§ the fat lady sings]: [THING<sub>1</sub> GO TO END]/[[it]<sub>1</sub> ain’t over [till \_\_\_\_]]  
b. [§ the fat lady sings]: [THING<sub>1</sub> GO TO END]/[till \_\_\_\_]  
c. [§ the fat lady sing]: [THING<sub>1</sub> GO TO END]

These entries each suggest that *the fat lady sing* stands for “something finishes.” Only (37a) says that this something must have the same referent as the main clause subject *it*. (37b) does not have such condition—a consequence of loss of the main clause in the contextual restriction—but still has restrictions on tense—a consequence of retention of *till*. (37c) has neither the condition of coindexing nor the restrictions on tense and context. (37b) covers (32); (37c) covers (32) and (33).<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.2. Sentence-Discourse Conflict

Let us consider how metaphorical inferences work for the examples in (34)–(36). In the cases of (34a, b),

the literal reading of *the fat lady's* acts is compared with the literal reading of an expression *the fat lady sing*, to see, based on common sense, if the fat lady's act in question precedes or follows her singing. If the literal reading of a given expression describes the fat lady's act which common-sensically precedes what is described by the literal reading of *the fat lady sing*, then it is guessed that that expression describes the time which precedes the time when what is described by the idiomatic reading of *the fat lady sing* takes place. If the literal reading of a given expression describes the fat lady's act which common-sensically follows what is described by the literal reading of *the fat lady sing*, then it is guessed that that expression describes the time which follows the time when what is described by the idiomatic reading of *the fat lady sing* takes place. In (34a), for instance, *the fat lady is warming up* describes a preparatory act by the fat lady before her performance, so that it roughly means, say, "this is before it is over." In (34b), on the other hand, *the fat lady's calling for a limo* describes an act which the fat lady makes after she literally sings, so that *the fat lady has not called for a limo* means "this is not after it is over."

In (35) and (36), *heard* seems to mean "sensed" or "perceived," and in (36), *listening to* "made myself sense." But "sense" is not a sense of *hear*. Nor is "make oneself sense" a sense of *listen to*. Then where do these senses come from? Let us assume that *hear* and *listen to* have meaning descriptions as in (38a, b), respectively.

- (38) a. hear: [THING SENSE THING [BY EAR]]  
 b. listen to: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>1</sub> SENSE THING [BY EAR]]]

(38a) entails that if someone hears something, he senses it, and (38b) that if someone listens to something, he causes himself to sense it. So, the literal reading of *hear the fat lady sing* entails sensing the fat lady's performance and that of *listen to the fat lady singing* causing oneself to sense the fat lady's performance. Replacing what amount to the fat lady's performance in these entailments with the idiomatic reading of *the fat lady sing* will provide sensing something is over and causing oneself to sense something is over.

The arguments thus far seem to point to what is stated in (39).

- (39) If an expression E has an implicature or an entailment  $\Sigma$ , and  $\Sigma$  contains  $\alpha$  which amounts to a literal reading of an idiomatic expression I, then the result of replacing the  $\alpha$  in  $\Sigma$  with  $\beta$  which amounts to the idiomatic reading of I is also an implicature or an entailment of E.

Note that *the fat lady sing*, which stands for I in (39), is almost overt in cases like (35) and (36), but is missing in cases like (34a, b). What is surprising about (39) is that it allows for an invisible idiom to take part in construing expressions.

What makes such a liberal strategy for linking as (39) available to the *the fat lady sing* as an idiom? One can point to a possible conflict between a sentence and a discourse in which it occurs. The fat lady warming up or calling for a limo, which is described in (34a, b), rarely fits into a normal every-day discourse. Likewise, in (35) and (36), *hear* and *listen* require the literal readings of their complements—i.e. sound-related events. The whole sentence whose constituent has such a reading, however, will have difficulty getting along well with the rest of (35) or (36). (39) serves to adapt these examples to their discourses by linking their implicatures or entailments with the idiomatic reading of *the fat lady sing*.

## 5. Meaning Augmentation

### 5.1. *Line in the Sand*

In (40a), *draw a line in the sand* seems to mean "set a limit," while in (40b), *drawing a line in the sand* seems to mean "making an objection."

- (40) a. As appropriators pressed their case for more emergency spending, Mr. Bush *drew a line in the sand*: He threatened to veto any spending above the \$40 billion this year.



(“Come new year,” *WT*, Web, 12/16/2001)

- b. Still, Mr. Levin has avoided *drawing a line in the sand*. He and other Democrats have been careful not to say they will oppose the Jordan deal if the Bush administration makes any changes to it. (Free-trade debate preludes,” *WT*, Web, 4/2/2001)

The two senses can be united, if the meaning of *draw a line in the sand* can be posited as “set a limit and not allow any possibility beyond that limit.” Legend dates this expression back to the Texan war for independence from Mexico.

During the siege of the Alamo in San Antonio in 1836, legend has it that William Barret Travis drew a line in the ground (some say sand) with his sword and said, “Those prepared to die for freedom’s cause, come across to me” [...] (Safire (1994:309))

The presence of *in the sand* in *draw a line in the sand* seems to serve as an enhancer, not as an enabler, of the idiomatic reading of this expression; even without *in the sand*, the expression can be interpreted in the sense of “NOT ALLOWING ANY POSSIBILITY BEYOND,” as shown in (41).

- (41) Asked by a panelist if they would name two Latino candidates for consideration to the Supreme Court, both men finally *drew a line*./“I think I’m going to avoid listing names of people to appoint,” Mr. Gore said. “I think I’d be getting ahead of myself.”/Mr. Bradley said Latinos “should be appointed at the highest levels of government,” including the Supreme Court. He offered “a commitment that there are many who could” serve on the high court.

(“Gore, Bradley press each other,” *WT*, Web, 1/18/2000)

The phrase *in the sand* enables *draw* to be replaced with another verb, as in (42a), or dispensed with, as in (42b).

- (42) a. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the District’s congressional representative, has *marked a line in the sand*. [...] Mrs. Norton is ready to do battle with Jeff Flake, who this week introduced legislation that would give scholarships to poor children. Of course, Mrs. Norton doesn’t call them scholarships. She and her kind call them vouchers.

(“Get ready to rumble,” *WT*, Web, 2/14/2003)

- b. “The president had the upper hand, with Cheney’s denouncing people,” the Republican strategist said. “Well, guess what? After a couple of weeks, *the line in the sand got washed over*.”

(“White House Strategy,” *NYT*, Web, 6/6/2002)

The meaning of *the line in the sand* in (42b) seems to be “a limit for not allowing any possibility beyond it.”

## 5.2. Idiom Split

Assuming the *draw a line* sans *in the sand* as the prototype of the one with it, the entry for the “*line-idiom*” would look like (43).

- (43) [VP draw [NP a line]]: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[THING LIMIT]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE]]

One way for building the meaning description of *in the sand* into that of the *line-idiom* is to split this idiom into two lexical items, as shown in (44), to posit an idiom entry like (45), and to employ (12) as a connector of the meaning descriptions of *draw* and *in the sand*.

- (44) a. draw: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[THING LIMIT]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE]]

b. line: LIMIT

- (45) [PP in the sand]: [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> NOT CAUSE [ANYTHING BE BEYOND [THING LIMIT]<sub>2</sub>]]]/[VP draw [NP a line] \_\_\_\_]

Let us illustrate how these entries are involved in assigning meaning to a phrase-marker given in (46).

- (46) [S John [VP draws [NP a line] [PP in the sand]]]

Omitting the details on the indefinite article, (44b) links the NP in (46) with a conceptual structure like [Thing LIMIT], and (45) links the PP in (46) with one which has the same form as the meaning description in (45). (12) makes available to the *draw* in (44a) a meaning description given in (47).

(47) draw: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE] PURPOSE]

The general principle of linking associates the S in (46) with a conceptual structure like (48).

(48) [JOHN<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> NOT CAUSE [ANYTHING BE BEYOND [Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub>]]]]

On the other hand, if (46) is interpreted with *draw* and *line* glossed as in (49a, b), respectively, it will result in a meaning conflict between LINE and LIMIT, as shown in (50).

(49) a. draw: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [THING<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE]]

b. line: LINE

(50) [JOHN<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[Thing LINE]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> NOT CAUSE [ANYTHING BE BEYOND [Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub>]]]]

Note that (43) and (45) share the stipulation of *draw a line*. This redundancy, however, makes it possible to state that in English, there are an idiom whose form is *draw a line* and one, *in the sand*, which has the former as its contextual restriction. In other words, what seems to be an idiom whose form is *draw a line in the sand* is actually a combination of lexical items derived from the idiom *draw a line* and an idiom which only covers *in the sand*. Since each chunk of the idiom, instead of the idiom as a whole, is independently assigned its meaning, the meaning of the add-on part is easily composed with that of the idiom chunks, without the need of combining the meaning of the VP—*draw a line*—and that of a daughter of its—*in the sand*.<sup>10</sup> If English had, besides (43), a similar idiom as in (51), it would be difficult to state which is the prototype of which.

(51) [VP draw [NP a line] [PP in the sand]]: [THING<sub>1</sub> CAUSE [[Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub> BE PLACE] [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> NOT CAUSE [ANYTHING BE BEYOND [Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub>]]]]

The claim that the *line* in *line*-idiom has also become a lexical item receives support from some facts. It can accept a prenominal modifier, as in (52a);<sup>11</sup> and serve as the subject of a passive sentence, as in (52b), and the antecedent of a pronoun, as in (52c).

(52) a. So Friday, Yeltsin sought to *draw a new line in the sand*, saying that Russia would rethink its decision not to intervene in the Yugoslav conflict if the alliance launched a ground operation in Kosovo. (‘‘U.S. WARNS RUSSIA,’’ *NYT*, Asahi, 4/10/1999)

b. ... *the line’s drawn in the sand*. I mean, the state who licensed them says, You know, this is your last shot. You – we’re going to stand behind you and support you getting well, but if you want to practice dentistry, this is what you got to do.

(*LKL*, 12/19/2003; ellipsis the speaker’s)

c. George W. *drew the line in the sand*. Saddam crossed it.

(‘‘Not enough splendor,’’ *WT*, Web, 1/28/2003)

The PLACE in (43) is not linked to a syntactic constituent, since any daughter of the VP which is assigned meaning by (43) cannot independently correspond to an element of a conceptual structure. Thus, the PLACE in (43) receives an interpretation of an unrealized place—i.e. SOMEWHERE. The case of (44a) is free from such a problem, since it links a V and its meaning. Thus, when the VP does not dominate *in the sand*, a constituent of the VP can be linked to the PLACE in (44a), as witnessed by (53).

(53) ‘‘Just *where* do we want to *draw the line* on NATO membership? With Indonesia?’’ asked former secretary of state Henry Kissinger at a recent Berlin conference on NATO’s geopolitical destiny.

(‘‘NATO Ponders Future, Effectiveness,’’ *WP*, 5/30/1998)

Where the VP dominates *in the sand*, on the other hand, such linking is blocked by the contextual restriction

in (45), and this seems to be borne out by facts. In (54), for instance, the underscored part is not linked to PLACE in (44a).

- (54) President Bush yesterday unveiled a list of “Most Wanted Terrorists” that includes Osama bin Laden and 21 other suspects linked to acts of terror over the past 16 years, declaring “it is time to draw the line in the sand *against the evil ones*.” (“FBI Draws ‘the Line’,” *WP*, 11/11/2001)

Since the *line* in (44b) is a lexical item, it can combine with *in the sand* to form a structure like (55).

- (55) [NP a line [PP in the sand]]

Assuming that the idiomatic interpretation of *in the sand* is available to (55) as well will necessitate setting up an idiom entry like (56) and a schema, like (57), for a purpose phrase which modifies an N.

- (56) [PP in the sand]: [PURPOSE FOR [THING<sub>1</sub> NOT CAUSE [ANYTHING BE BEYOND [Thing LIMIT]<sub>2</sub>]]]/[N' line \_\_\_\_]

- (57) [Thing X PURPOSE]

(56) and (57) will help account for (42b). Notice that (45)—the speculated prototype of (56)—has two lexical items in its contextual stipulation—i.e. *draw* and *line*. Of these two, only *line* is mentioned in (56). Clearly *in the sand* chose its closer neighbor as the new contextual restriction for its idiomatic reading. This closeness can be accounted for by the fact that a syntactic structure like [N' N PP] is available to English.

## 6. Conclusion

Out of the four phraseological units examined in this article, *have legs* and *have a bridge to sell* have derived their variants which semantically select specific lexical senses. Possible motives for such derivations are the parallelism between form and meaning in the selectional context, in the case of former, and the attraction between semantically related elements, in the case of the latter.

The other two phraseological units *the fat lady sing* and *draw a line* are idioms. The former has derived its variants which link an implicature or an entailment with its meaning. A possible motive for such a derivation is the conflict between a sentence which requires the literal reading of this expression and a discourse in which that sentence occurs. The idiom *draw a line* has derived its variants *draw a line in the sand* and *the line in the sand* by splitting itself into two lexical items and combining the meaning description of the *in the sand* as an idiom with those of *draw* and *line*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, emphases and ellipses in examples and quotations are Tl's, unless otherwise mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> The facts concerning (7) and (9a) might be captured by Sato (2003:421). He proposes that the presence of a causative idiom in a language entails that of its unaccusative version in that language. The question is how it is so.

<sup>3</sup> (13) is the reverse of what is proposed by Pinker (1989:190). True, it is more probable that someone's having something implies that something's staying at that someone than the opposite. The difference is just the matter of degree.

<sup>4</sup> The title of section 2.2 is adopted from Kajita (1977:66). By “syntactico-semantic overlapping,” he tries to capture the phenomena which derives a new rule by replacing a syntactic category in a rule with a semantic element.

<sup>5</sup> Specifying the referent of *a bridge* might facilitate users' understanding of this construction. A similar phenomenon can be observed when the other construction that had once been regional became national. See

section 4. Reference to Brooklyn is seen in other variants, too, as in (21c).

<sup>6</sup> A different formulation of the meaning descriptions of *sell* and *buy* is proposed by Jackendoff (1992:191). Their details aside, the relations among the semantic roles are essentially the same between his formulation and mine.

<sup>7</sup> What made (26a, b) from (25a, b)? Specifically, how can idea and support be the counterparts of material goods and money, respectively? Economist Robert Frank teaches that much of economic interest is a demand for status recognition (Fukuyama (2002:44)).

<sup>8</sup> For the attraction in the traditional-grammarians sense, see Jespersen (1914:179) and Jespersen and Haislund (1949:226).

<sup>9</sup> The reason for assuming idiom entry (37b) is that of all the 16 examples of the *fat-lady* construction I have collected, the number of ones which have different main clauses but still retain *till/until* is two, 12.5 percent.

<sup>10</sup> One possibility to avoid this difficulty is to make a structure like (i) and to assign the idiomatic meaning to the V' in (i).

(i) [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> draw a line] in the sand]

This move, though it does not employ the splitting of the idiom, makes the same claim as the one which does—i.e. there is no such idiom as *draw a line in the sand* in English.

<sup>11</sup> This might not be a crucial property of lexical items. Even *sand* can accept a prenominal modifier, as in (i).

(i) “It was a line that was drawn *in the moral sand* way back when, and it appears in virtually all international and national ethics statements and guidances about genetics, but in the last year or so I have felt it beginning to soften,” said John Fletcher, a bioethicist at the University of Virginia.

(“SCIENCE ON THE ETHICAL,” *WP*, Web, 3/28/1998)

Just because the *in the moral sand* in (i) means “in the moral respect” does not make it likely that *sand* means “respect.”

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