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IDIOMS AND "CONNIDITIES"

OR--How do we know what these crazy things mean,
and furthermore how do they fit into a grammar?

Danny Keith Alford

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

First let me limit my field of discussion by describing the different kinds of idioms and choosing the ones I want to discuss. Idioms are often broken down into roughly four categories (Chafe 1968; Fraser 1970): (a) nonlexical idioms, such as the semantic units progressive and perfect; (b) monomorphemic idioms, like sing, dance, book--for it has been said that indeed every word in language is an idiom, but that is very shaky ground on which to build the foundation of a definition of the word idiom (so I think we should let sleeping dogs lie and put that one on the shelf till kingdom come, and turn our attention to the task at hand!); (c) polymorphemic or lexical idioms, nominal compounds like knucklehead, bonehead, and funnybone--words for which the total meaning of the lexical item is not necessarily equal to the sum of the meanings of the two parts, and (d) phrasal idioms, the kind we're most familiar with and the kind with which I will be working in this paper--kick the bucket, on the wagon, trip the light fantastic, let the cat out of the bag, beat around the bush, pass the buck, and hundreds more.

Allow me the liberty of including a definition of idiom at this point: "Idioms are typically constructed on quite normal grammatical patterns of phrase structure, but the meaning of the whole idiom is not simply the sum of the meanings of the parts, nor can one segment the meaning (in the many cases where it is complex) and assign a definable portion of the meaning to each grammatical piece (e.g. morpheme). In other words, idioms are expressions in which the semantic and grammatical structures are radically different." (Nida and Taber 1969, 45)

So we've established that the total meaning of an idiom is in no way, or in no rigorously definable way, related to the sum of the meanings of

its parts. A simple illustration from English: if we take the words stings and alcohol and concatenate them, we have no more than the concatenation of two words--

(1:a) stings + alcohol --- "stings, alcohol"

whereas if we take the same two words and reverse their order, that sequential ordering can have underlying it the whole, beautiful arboreal structure of a transformational tree--

(1:b) alcohol + stings ---

```

      S
     / \
    NP  VP
    |   |
alcohol | stings

```

--- "Alcohol stings."

and furthermore, if instead of sticking with a bland adverb of manner like badly we choose the more colorful like hell, some strange things begin happening to our meaning--

(1:c)

```

      S
     / \
    NP  VP
    |   / \
    |  V  Man Adv
    |   |   / \
alcohol | stings like hell

```

--- "Alcohol really stings."

I could go over the whole thing again with the words bucket, John, kick, the, but I think you must have the point by now.

So that illustrates requirement number one for our grammar: it has to account for the fact that idioms have meanings which are not directly connected with their surface structure components.

There are three other requirements that Chafe (1968) demands of a grammar which hopes to adequately account for these phenomena: (a) it must account for the fact that idioms often do not undergo transformations; (b) it must account for the fact that some idioms are not well-formed, that is, can in no way be generated by any base component geared toward producing well-formed or grammatical sentences (e.g. trip the light fantastic)¹; and

(c) it must account for the fact that idiomatic and literal meanings are not equally statistically probable for any given occurrence of that phrase.²

The idiomatic meanings of phrasal idioms are destroyed when certain kinds of transformations are wreaked on them, I'll use some of Chafe's (1970, 68) examples to show what happens to one such idiom--

- (2) a. Henry saw the light.
 b. *The light was seen by Henry. (passive)
 c. *Henry saw the lights. (plural)
 d. *Henry saw a light. (indefinite)
 e. *Henry saw some lights. (indefinite + plural)
 f. *Henry saw it. (pronominalization)
 g. *Henry SAW the light. (contrastive emphasis)
 h. *Henry saw a bright light. (relative clause)
 i. Henry saw the proverbial light.

That last example is an interesting one: any perceptive linguists around will have noticed by now that the tree for (2)i. does not look like this--

but in fact is something more closely akin to--

Fraser (1970) was concerned with the same grammar requirements we've already looked at. He attempted to show, as a further peculiarity which idioms possess, that there are varying degrees of frozenness by which these

creatures might be further taxonomically divided. He notes that of the idioms to blow off some steam, to put on some weight, to make up one's mind, and to lay down the law, "the first is completely frozen, the second less frozen, the third even less so, and the fourth fairly amenable to transformational operations." I reproduce his example in toto:

- (3) *He blew some steam off after he got home.
*Some steam was blown off at the party.
*Your blowing off of some steam surprised us.

John has put some weight on.
*Some weight has been put on by John.
*The putting on of some weight by Henry caused great alarm.

No one can make your mind up for you.
Your mind can be made up by no one but you.
*Your making up of your own mind on that issue surprised us.

Her father laid the law down when she came in at 4 a.m.
The law was laid down by her father before she was even twelve.
His laying down of the law didn't impress anyone.

Now it seems to me that one of the main points that Fraser made in that paper, when he wasn't talking about his categorizing techniques³, was that a well-formed phrase will have a single, specific deep structure representation whether it has an idiomatic meaning or a literal meaning, and the semantic component, by golly, will give the base component all the help it can in figuring out some interpretation for the output. I fear I may be doing Fraser an injustice in being so flippant, so I'll let him speak for himself--

I think there are two strong pieces of evidence which can be used to support the claim that an idiomatic expression has precisely the same syntactic deep structure representation as its literal counterpart. . . The first piece of evidence derives from the fact that many although not all idioms undergo some syntactic transformations. . . The second argument for this claim comes from the area of phonology. Whether or not any syntactic transformations have applied to a particular idiomatic expression, its ultimate phonological shape is exactly that of the corresponding literal expression. . . All other idioms--those I've called without literal counterpart--are analyzed as having a deep structure representation analogous to an expression which resembles the idioms in its surface representation. (p. 26, 31)

I will get back to Fraser's claim a couple of points from now--I feel Fraser missed the boat in not discussing a certain very hot potato mentioned in Chafe (1968). Fraser goes on to show some very clear transformational deficiencies which absolutely ALL idioms exhibit: (a) no idiomatic phrase can ever be subject to the Cleft Transformation (*It was the bucket that John kicked); (b) conjunction between parts of presumably similar idioms is not possible; (c) no NP in an idiom may be pronominalized; (d) no NP in an idiom may take a restrictive clause, and (e) gapping never occurs. You will remember at least three of those from our previous examples above. Let's leave Fraser for a while and welcome a new face into the crowd.

Ross (1970), in a squib entitled "Two types of idioms", seems to have gotten into some pretty deep water without his scuba equipment. The two types of idioms referred to in his title are of the sort crane one's neck and hold one's breath, which he differentiates by saying that the first can be modified with adjectives and the second can't--

- (4) a. he craned his spindly (long, disgusting, etc.) neck.
b. *he held his dank (fetid, foul, sweet, etc.) breath.

and then follows with the dismaying fact that only the former type is pronominalizable--

- c. He craned his neck while the doctor examined it.
d. *he held his breath while the gasologist tested it.

hey, haj! I'll bet you didn't notice that your new-found idiom has all kinds of other interesting properties, too: it can be clefted, gapped, conjunction reduced, contrastively emphasized, and all kinds of other neat things! Watch--

- e. It was his neck that he craned.
f. Bill craned his neck and Sue, hers.
g. Bill craned first his neck and then his. . .
(well, it would work if we could insert anything there!)
h. Bill craned HIS neck after that happened, too.

In fact, as that super-sleuth the "attentive reader" has surmised by now,

the crane one's neck idiom is no idiom at all, since it violates every transformational deficiency imputed to that breed of cat, I fear Mr. Ross has only "found" yet another word which occurs in an extremely restricted environment (a monomorphemic idiom, if you will), and confused it with that horse of a different color, the phrasal idiom.

I promised I'd come back to Fraser, so here we go. Fraser's main point, as I read it at any rate, was that idioms should have the same deep structure representations as their literal counterparts. Now the interesting thing here is that Chafe (1966) had already demolished that position nearly two years before, in an article which is footnoted in Fraser's article. (I did notice though that the particular idiom Chafe used for demolishing the "s.d.s." position, pull one's leg, was excruciatingly conspicuous by its absence---it does not appear even a single time (that I could find) amidst the over one hundred other idioms that found their way into his taxonomic inventory which includes virtually every other idiom Chafe used in his article.)

In his article, Chafe addressed himself to the main people on the transformational scene who had concerned themselves with idioms to that time: Katz and Postal (1963) and Weinreich (1966), both (?) of which had tried, in varying manners, the same thing Fraser tried in an attempt to show that transformational grammar could indeed handle idioms: the s.d.s. position (alternately, but less provocatively, the i.d.s. for identical deep structure).

Chafe cited the idiom in the sentence---

(5) a. We pulled Tom's leg.

as having the following interpretations---

b. (idiomatic) We teased Tom.

(I prefer the word tricked for teased, and will continue with the former.)

c. (literal) We tugged on a lower appendage. The lower appendage belongs to Tom.

I think the reader will be able to follow me this time, even if I do not play the botanist, in seeing that Tom stands in some sort of surface direct object relationship to the verb in (5)b., and stands in a different relationship entirely to the verb of (5)c., being merely--as it were--the owner of a tugged appendage, in case terms, Tom would be in perhaps a patient case in the former (to pick one from the many competing names that are available at the moment), and for the latter case? We don't seem to have a leg to stand on for the present, since Fillmore withdrew the dative.

As well as showing that idioms could not be stored with exactly the same deep structures, Chafe also showed that idioms could not be stored independently of their literal counterparts in any way, since idioms contain parts which are subject to the same inflectional processes as normal words--including irregular inflections, in other words, the past tense form of kick the bucket will always be kicked the bucket, and the past tense form of fly off the handle will be flew off the handle whether the meaning is literal or figurative.⁴ And of course a grammar that would have to include a rule to account for the fly/flew irregularity twice would be expensive.

Chafe is a historian, as both his articles and book show, and he tries wherever possible to let his theory of language mirror actual historical developments in language. Knowing this, you can better appreciate his discussion of the historical developments that lead to idioms.

If we wish to discuss the color red, for instance, we can conceivably define it informally as something like the color of fresh arterial blood; more formally, a slice of visible light of a frequency between yea-many angstroms and thus-many. (I know, I know!) Anyway, THAT color shall henceforth be dubbed RED₁, or the primary meaning of red. Now I don't think

the following scintillating bit of dialogue has ever occurred in either the real world or the theatrical, but if any playwrights of the absurd wish to incorporate this into their next hit play, I hereby bequeath my permission--

- (6) The Scene. a typical middle-class rumpus room
 The Cast: Murgatroyd, a typical middle-class 5-year-old.
 Selma Sue, his typical middle-class 4-year-old sister.
 The Action: They are coloring in their t.m.c. coloring books.
- M: Selma Sue, hand me the red crayon.
 SS: (hands it to him)
 M: No, not the RED red--the one for coloring red HAIR!
 (Curtain closes as children fight.)

All this, in a quite unprofessionally dramatic way (pardon the ambiguity!) is to show that there is a secondary meaning of red, RED₂, which developed historically later than RED₁--was dependent, in fact, on RED₁ for its meaning. We seem to become color-blind when we talk about hair in that way! The concept of RED₁ never enters our consciousness at all, despite the fact that "John has red hair" is ambiguous and can equally well refer to a situation in which paint has spilled on his head and made his hair that "unnatural" color. Quick: what would be your first reaction if someone said to you, "X (where X = someone you know quite well) just came back from the beauty shop and has orange hair." Of course the next question is, just what color WOULD someone's hair have to be to qualify to be called orange?

So we now have red-that-we-call-red and orange-that-we-call-red-in-the-context-of-hair, or diagrammatically,⁵

- (7) RED₁ ----- "red"
 RED₁ ----- RED₂ -----
 (in the context of hair)

Chafe then in his grammar calls RED₁ a full-fledged semantic unit, but calls RED₂ a special kind of semantic unit, one which needs to have what he calls "literalization rules" apply before it can emerge into the

light of surface structure.

Idioms, then, constitute a subset of semantic units characterized by the fact that they are subject to literalization rules. Each idiom has its own special literalization rule latent within it, and that rule is then activated at an early stage in the transition from meaning to sound. Literalization may or may not produce a post-semantic arrangement which could also be a semantic arrangement. If it does, we can say that the idiom has a literal counterpart. In Chomskyan terms such an idiom would be called well-formed, but it would be more correct to say that the literalization. . .is well-formed--not the idiom itself.

Or diagrammatically--where LR stands for literalization rules--

Now there are a number of reasons why Chafe wants to begin with a different semantic structure for idioms and turn that into recognizable sentations. First, of course, he feels it mirrors historical development. Second, there is an imbalance concerning usage between RED₁ and RED₂ in that the former carries more weight, is used in an unrestricted manner in many more environments.⁶ And thirdly, the point mentioned before about irregular inflections of verbs--this framework still captures the fact that we will only have to state such rules once in the grammar.

Still in a historical vein, Chafe comments on the sources of various types of idioms. Most phrasal idioms like kick the bucket, Chafe says, have shrunk into single units of the type he characterizes thru the device of hyphenation: kick-the-bucket or die. ("Some linguists would say that it is identical with the meaning of die, but that seems an exaggeration."⁷ Chafe 1968, 111)

But not all idioms are shrinkages of well-formed phrases in the language. Some are truncated versions of well-known quotations: "The tornado blew old man Smith's barn to kingdon come";⁸ trip the light fan-

tastic.⁹ Sometimes idioms are coined and then the original words become obsolete, as in spic and span, by and large, come a cropper. And finally, a variation of the previous method, a word like numbles 'the inferior part of a deer' is changed into umbles, and that in turn gets inserted into the demeaning phrase eat umble pie; that phrase, having gotten itself transported to this side of the Atlantic, gets reinterpreted¹⁰ into the more transparent ("I knew that's what it meant all the time!") rendering of eat humble pie. As Chafe (1970) remarks, "Undoubtedly this replacement had something to do with the fortuitous closeness of meaning between humble and the idiom."

One final and very important topic that Chafe talks about in his article and book is that of semantic leakage--

. . .the boundary between what is semantic and what is post-semantic (read deep structure) is a rather loose one. Speakers do not construct semantic arrangements within a hermetically sealed 'semantic level' and then lose all control over and awareness of the subsequent post-semantic arrangements which lead to. . .an eventual phonetic output. On the contrary, speakers are quite aware, among other things, of literalizations and the relation between idioms and their literal counterparts. If this were not so, many puns would be impossible to create or appreciate, and literature would be a very different and much duller thing.¹¹

And with that thought in mind, I would like to shift gears and move into the second part of my paper--

EXAMPLES OF IDIOMS--PUNNING AND "CONNIDITIES"

Before I get into my soon-to-be world-famous connidities, which I propose as a parlour game to replace the now defunct and tasteless fad perpetrated a few years ago under the name of "Tom Swifties" (you remember those: "What an electrifying experience," said Tom as he was led to the gas chamber; or something like that. . .) (I never could understand why they weren't called "Tom Swiftlies"!), I will present some equally taste-

less puns which may at least serve as a contrast by which you may judge later the dazzling technical excellence, spawned by brilliant cogitation, which is displayed in connidities.

- (9) a. Agnew talks in circles, which causes strange rug-wear patterns.
b. "If you want to safely demolish something, you sure can't hold a candle to dynamite."
c. Things weren't going too well with the play, so the dramatist split the scene.
d. "Who was the funniest person in history?" "Samson, of course, because when he appeared, he brought down the house."
e. Archie: "EDITE! Did youse call this exterminator that's at the door?" Edith: "Well, like said you had bats in your belfry, so I thought I'd better have him take a look upstairs."

I warned you. Anyway, the idea of connidities first began while I was reading in Chafe (1970) the following sentence: "Bill was on the wagon." I thought about it a while and then asked myself if that could be extended into a single sentence with two ambiguous idioms, and I came up with--

(10) a. Bill was on the wagon and George wrecked it. . .
which may be interpreted for most people as either fully idiomatic or fully literal, as embodied in the two endings--

- b. . . by offering him a drink.
c. . . by driving it into the ditch.

Of course, having two I could not be content until I tried for three; but I have only this to show for my efforts, and I can't get many people to accept even it--

- d. Bill was on the wagon and George wrecked it by driving him to drink.

Nevertheless, thus was born, from sentence (10)a., the CONNIDITIES: CONNected IDIomatic ambigUITIES. I will close with a few choice goodies.

- (11) After shooting the bull a while, Max gave Slim a bum steer.
(12) Snoopy flew the coop when he was down in the dumps.¹²
(13) John went thru a hair-raising operation, which was followed by a few close shaves. ¹³

IDIOMS AS PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATION

Nida and Taber (1969) have a few suggestions concerning idiom problems in translating the Bible. First off, as you must know, there ARE plenty of idioms in the Bible--but many of them are so common to you now that you never think about some of them. Secondly, you will have to decide for yourself, when you actually get to the field, what exactly to do with them: sometimes you will want to literalize idioms (and defigurize some figures of speech), sometimes you will want to change the English idioms into target-language idioms where possible, and other times you will want to make your translation more alive by changing common Biblical non-idioms into the more forceful idioms of that language.

When you read in I Peter 1:13 that you are to 'gird up the loins of your mind', it may be wise in some instances to make that more literal and say 'get ready in your thinking' or something similar. And you must always be on your guard in translation, because some Biblical idioms carry lethal suggestions. It's reported in the SIL book Two Thousand Tongues to Go that one linguist living with tribesmen who had a penchant for burning their enemies bethought himself just in time to avoid recommending in their Bible that they 'heap coals of fire' on their enemies' heads. He translated instead that they 'make them ashamed by your friendliness'. Be sure also to make figures of speech as clear as possible, as the following hints are meant to illustrate.

- (15) a. possess the gate--the city
- b. my flesh--my race
- c. taste death--die (please, not kick the bucket!)

In translating from idiom to idiom, you can take a lesson from a Shipibo translator who translated 'he has a hard heart' into the English equivalent of 'his ears have no holes.' Or, in one African language, 'flesh and blood', meaning the epitome of human wisdom (as in 'flesh and

blood has not revealed it to you') was rendered as 'an old man with a single hair.' Now a very flexible concept for languages around the world has to do with what part of the anatomy is actually the so-called 'seat of emotions'. In English we call it the 'heart' (HEART₂ in Chafian terms), and I believe even in the dim remote past history of English it was once called the 'bowels' (at least, there's an old Semitic idiom 'to close one's bowels' which means to be lacking in compassion'), and in many other languages of the world it's the 'liver'. So check your language for that one. . .and while you're checking, see if the people praise God with their 'tongues' or their 'lips'.

Sometimes, as I mentioned, you can make the translation come alive to people by inserting new idioms, as when a Tzeltal translator rendered 'faith' as 'to hang on to God with the heart', or where the word 'peace' in a number of African languages can be spoken of as 'to sit down in the heart'.

Here follows a list of some idioms in the Bible to perhaps watch out for--

- (16) a. they lifted up their voices (Luke 17:13)
- b. his countenance fell (Mark 10:22)
- c. the heaven was shut up (Luke 4:25)
- d. he set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)
- e. men's love will grow cold (Matt. 24:12)
- f. fill up. . .the measure of your fathers (Matt 23:32)
- g. bear fruit that benefits repentance (Matt. 3:8)
- h. the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24)
- i. the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23)
- j. who devour widows' houses (Mark 12:40)
- k. pour out my Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17)
- l. justified by his blood (Rom. 5:9)
- m. glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14)
- n. children of the bridechamber (Mark 2:19)
- o. children of wrath (Eph. 2:3)
- p. fruit of his loins (Acts 2:30)
- q. sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2)

And a few more final comments here. Make your translation as clear as possible for the people who will be reading it. There are still some

people today who think that 'the grace of God' refers to the gracious way in which He handles Himself, rather than what he does for men (i.e. technically, they interpret 'grace' as an abstract quality rather than as an event); some think that the 'kingdom of God' is a specific location referred to, rather than the rule or rulership of God, again an event; and some do not realize that when Matthew talked about the 'kingdom of heaven', he also was not talking about a location, but used the word heaven euphemistically out of deference to the Jew's reluctance to use the name of God.

And finally, if you have to STRAIN too much in order to find the truest translation--you're going about it the wrong way. You've begun counting too much on Your ingenuity and not enough on His.

APPENDIX

- A1. Christopher didn't have a leg to stand on, but he hobbled thru the conference admirably. (MOB)
- A2. Christopher didn't have a leg to stand on, but he compensated for it by running circles around his opponents. (MOB)
- A3. By their deft manipulations, the sailors took the wind out of the admiral's sails. (MOB)
- A4. She blew her stack, which taught the captain not to get her so steamed up. (Especially if she can be interpreted as being a steamship.) (MOB)
- A5. Mortimer lost his shirt after Peregrine took him to the cleaners. (MOB)
- A6. Altho Jonas isn't in the same league with Andrew, he went to bat for him. (MOB)
- A7. Rose saw the light, after being in the dark for so long. (MOB)
- A8. Lambert set his sights on Priscilla, and then shot her down. (MOB)
- A9. Mitchell led Abbie up the primrose path, and then he cut her dead. (MOB)
- A10. After they passed the peace pipe, they danced up a storm.
- A11. "This is really hot stuff," he said as he blew his cool.
- A12. They finally let the cat out of the bag after they had put him thru the wringer.
- A13. After the sculptor had put her on a pedestal, he broke her heart.
- A14. He instructed me to bite my tongue when I shot my mouth off.
- A15. My dentist used to gnash his teeth when he was down in the mouth.
- A16. Bill gave Suzie the eye, so she beat it.
- A17. Something tickled Oglethorpe's funnybone, so he beat it. (6 meanings)
- A18. Everything went to pot after Steve planted the evidence.
- A19. After Bill and Bob felt they had dished up enough dirt, they buried the hatchet.
- A20. "I could care less about your meaningless threats: I have it made," he cried as he gave the boot to the mayor.
- A21. "You've bitten off more than you can chew this time," he muttered after they had been chewing the fat a while.
- A22. "I'll bet you were banking on that," said the pool player who was on the ball.
- A23. Marilyn was on her toes when she broke the ice like that.
- A24. They were given a wide berth after the sailors began taking liberties.
- A25. "You'll have to learn how to pull some strings if you want to get ahead," said his boss when he was called on the carpet.
- A26. "And now let us turn back the clock," he intoned, striking a familiar chord.
- A27. They were sitting on pins and needles wondering whether Cecil's boss would put his foot down or not.

FOOTNOTES

*This paper was first given as a guest lecture for an Advanced Linguistics class at Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota, on 22 July 1971. I am indebted to Don Frantz and the SIL staff for the use of their time and libraries during my brief stay.

The tree notations given in the paper were simplified for presentation, and are in no way meant to be crucial to the arguments presented.

Forgive me ~~my~~ puns, dear readers, and above all: send me any connidities you may dream up, to--

Danny K. Alford
Connidity Clearinghouse
General Delivery
Ashland, MT 59003

¹Now Bruce Fraser may know something I don't about the history of trip the light fantastic; for his analysis of that as a verb-determiner-adjective-noun construction, see Fraser 1970, 31.

²Chafe (1968) talked about this at length in discounting Katz and Postal's, as well as Weinreich's, analyses of idioms.

³See also the end of Fraser's paper where he divides a multitude of idioms into six (really five) categories of degrees of frozenness.

⁴About those irregulars: are the words oxes, flied, weeped and bleeded good standard-dialect words for any sentences you can think of? Think again--

- (i) (said on a dance floor) "Just look at those clumsy oxes over there!"
- (ii) "Yes, folks, Mickey Mantle just flied out to third base."
- (iii) My basement walls weeped again last night. -OR-
- (iv) My sore really weeped a lot of plasma.
- (v) The line was bleeded off during the printing process.
- (vi) "...information can be typed out onto the screen and inputted into the computer."

⁵For those who prefer a more formal statement of the rule--

RED₁ --- RED₂ / ___ hair
RED₁

⁶Of course, that argument does not hold in treating the idiom off base, since the literal usage is narrowly restricted to a ball park.

⁷I totally agree with Chafe's comment. How would it sound if, years ago, someone had come up to you and said, "Did you hear that President Kennedy kicked the bucket yesterday?" Or a newscaster solemnly intoned, Winston Churchill kicked the bucket last week, as you remember." How about Ho Chi Minh? Clark Gable? Walt Disney?

As you all know, the verb assassinate must have as its object some important personage. I think something quite similar, only reverse, is going on here: only people for whom large numbers of strangers will feel no loss in the passing may be talked about as kicking the bucket; but even that must be revised since old cronies of even an important personage may, especially if the death was a "natural" one, speak with that particular brand of irreverence.

⁸From the Lord's Prayer.

⁹Courtesy of, variously, Milton's "L'Allegro" or the once popular song "The Sidewalks of New York", whichever was first.

¹⁰And we all know how those Limeys drop their haitches!

¹¹See Chafe (1968, 124) for discussion. It has such examples as a very hot potato with very modifying hot even tho hot is not a semantic unit available for modification. Elsewhere he mentions such examples as-- can you think of kick-the-bucket without the image of a wooden container cropping¹⁵ into your mind? How about red herring without images of color

and a fish? This is the contamination of the idiomatic with the literal that Chafe calls semantic leakage.

¹²Hold on, this one's loaded with strangeness and buried treasure.

(a) There are four different meanings that can be associated with this connidity, which results from being able to interpret one-half as idiom and the other half as literal. A great many of these connidities have this potential.

(b) A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
Let us flee, said the fly.
Let us fly, said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

Now, the question is (and second in importance only to whether the princess chose the lady or the tiger): Those two insects, did they fly or flee? If you think you have the right answer, go right on to the next part (DO NOT PASS "GO". DO NOT COLLECT \$200); if you're not sure, study your navel until enlightenment comes.

(c) Now when Snoopy was down in the dumps, did he (a) fly or (b) flee that coop? You win the prize if you answered (c) it depends on whether I interpret the phrase flew the coop literally or idiomatically.

¹³Courtesy of Michael O'Brien, friend and fellow UCLA-linguist, now on an all-expense-paid vacation with an uncle in the far East--without whose stimulating correspondence through the past few months my interest in idioms would not have been awakened. (MOB in appendix)

¹⁴Does this have anything to do with come a cropper?

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