Tying the knot of language: unveiling the linguistic and conceptual tapestry of wedding idioms in English and Spanish[1]

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Abstract

This paper delves into the integration of phraseology and cognitive linguistics, using a comparative corpus-based analysis of idiomatic locutions concerning weddings and marriage in English and Spanish. Within a cognitive phraseology framework, the research focuses on their formal and semantic fixation and complexity, and examines their metaphorical motivation. By doing so, it addresses a significant gap in literature, facilitating deeper insights into linguistic and cultural representations of love and wedding traditions. Ultimately, this study advocates for further exploration of marriage idiomatic locutions from a cognitive phraseology perspective offering avenues for broader investigations into cultural traditions associated with love and other emotions.

Keywords: phraseology; cognitive linguistics; corpus-based analysis; idiomatic locutions; metaphor; weddings.

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1. Introduction

The integration of phraseology and cognitive linguistic theories has sparked a shift in the understanding of language construction and the cognitive processes that underlie it. This paper adopts an observational approach, focusing on a corpus-based analysis of idiomatic locutions within the conceptualization of weddings and marriage in both English and Spanish. Idiomatic locutions, which transcend literal interpretation through metaphorical associations, adhere to linguistic rules akin to literal language while presenting challenges in translation[2]. Within a cognitive phraseology framework, this study places particular emphasis on the formal and semantic fixation and complexity, as well as the frequency of occurrence of these idiomatic locutions, while also examining their underlying conceptual metaphors.

To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first investigation into wedding and marriage idiomatic locutions in English and Spanish from a phraseological and cognitive perspective. Building upon prior research in the fields of phraseology and metaphor (e.g. Iñesta and Pamies, 2002; Olza Moreno, 2011; Ureña Tormo, 2024) and phraseology within construction grammar (Croft and Cruse, 2004; Corpas Pastor, 2021; Ureña Tormo, 2024), this research aims to explore ten idiomatic locutions and their associated metaphors in both languages, contributing to a deeper conceptualization of weddings and marriage.

This paper is structured as follows: section 2 introduces the synergies between phraseology and cognitive linguistics approaches, setting the groundwork for this exploration. Section 3 outlines the cognitive phraseology framework that guides the analysis. Section 4 delves into previous research on conceptual metaphor and cognitive accounts in the formation of idiomatic locutions related to love, weddings, and marriage. Methodological considerations, including a description of the selected idiomatic locutions and corpora, are discussed in section 5. Section 6 presents and discusses the key findings, followed by section 7 that summarizes the conclusions drawn.

2. Integrating perspectives: exploring the synergies between phraseology and cognitive linguistics

Phraseology can be examined through various methodological lenses, contingent upon the theoretical foundations shaping its perception of language, such as the Soviet perspective, the European structural approach, the generative paradigm, the corpus-based perspective,

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2   This article refers to idioms as "idiomatic locutions", a term directly translated from the more commonly used Spanish term *locución idiomática*, although it may not be as prevalent in English.

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and the cognitive linguistics paradigm. The present investigation is concerned with the cognitive linguistics approach. While phraseology and cognitive linguistics initially emerged and developed independently, stemming from geographically distant regions (the former in Europe and the latter in the United States), they share notable similarities in their focal points. Within cognitive linguistics, discussions revolve around formulaic and figurative language (Gibbs, 2008; Semino and Demjén, 2017; Suárez-Campos and Hijazo-Gascón, 2019), exemplified by concepts like metaphorical expressions. These terms often encapsulate units falling within the purview of phraseology, referred to as "idiomatic verbal expressions" (Penadés Martínez, 2019) or of cognitive phraseology ("constructional idiom" as in Taylor, 2015; Corpas Pastor, 2021, or "idiomatic locution" as in Ureña Tormo, 2024).

The discipline of phraseology increasingly integrates cognitive linguistic concepts to explore phenomena such as semantic transposition, metaphorical processes, along with semantic motivation in phraseological units (PU). Spanish phraseology, exemplified in monographs by Iñesta and Pamies (2002) and Olza Moreno (2011), systematically explains the idiomatic meanings of phraseologisms through metaphorical and metonymic formation processes. This perspective is further supported by research from scholars like Recio Ariza (2013), Muñoz Medrano (2019), and Ureña Tormo (2021), who examine cognitive grammar applications and conceptual metaphors in various emotional phraseologisms. Ureña Tormo's recent monograph (2024) emphasizes the cognitive theoretical foundation of phraseology, offering insights into PU and their teaching-learning process in Spanish.

Similarly, recent research by Ye (2022), Ramírez Rodríguez (2022), Bran (2022), Ureña Tormo (2023), Martín-Gascón (2022, 2023) delves into metaphorical bases of phraseological units in gastronomy and emotions, animal-related expressions, meteorology, metalinguistic expressions, and color and emotions, respectively. Some phraseologists have also found a valuable ally in construction grammar to elucidate the nature of phrasemic constructions, phraseological constructions, or constructional idioms, situated between free constructions and those with greater fixity (Omazić, 2005; Boers, 2014; Mellado Blanco and Gutiérrez Rubio, 2020; Mellado Blanco, 2021; Corpas Pastor, 2021).

These studies exemplify the potential for a cohesive treatment of phraseology and cognitive linguistics, highlighting the essential notion that PU should be considered integral elements of the linguistic system. This perspective, emphasized by Corpas Pastor (2021), is crucial in the unified treatment of phraseology and cognitive linguistics. Ureña Tormo (2024) extends this integrative approach by proposing a novel framework that concurrently investigates phraseology, cognitive linguistics, and their implications for teaching and learning Spanish as a first and second language (L1/L2). This theoretical foundation serves as the guiding framework for the present article. Yet, due to space constraints, the exploration of teaching and learning the target idiomatic locutions in L2 Spanish will be deferred to a subsequent study.

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3. Ureña Tormo's cognitive phraseology (2024)

In her theoretical proposal for cognitive phraseology, Ureña Tormo (2024) integrates two main strands. Firstly, she delves into the examination of PU within the cognitive linguistic framework. Secondly, she incorporates research originating from the discipline of phraseology that embraces principles of cognitive linguistics to elucidate specific phraseological phenomena. This integrative approach converges by assimilating insights from studies conducted under structural and descriptive perspectives. Furthermore, her approach assimilates contributions from studies aligning with cognitive linguistics, such as conceptual metaphor theory and construction grammar, essential for exploring PU from this innovative perspective.

3.1. Conceptual metaphor theory

Embedded within the cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Kövecses, 2000) is the prevalent notion that humans use metaphors as a fundamental cognitive mechanism to structure their understanding of the world. As Lakoff (2006) later argues, there exists a conceptual system, both conventional and intertwined with everyday metaphors, shaping our conceptual and daily systems, including the most abstract concepts underlying our everyday language. These metaphors intricately involve complex concepts structured and comprehended based on more immediate and accessible ones (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This perspective posits metaphor as a mental process wherein abstract facets of experience find understanding through association with more concrete aspects. The mechanisms guiding these metaphorical processes are deeply rooted in our conceptual system and intricately connected to culture. Consequently, our minds shape the world through metaphors intelligible within the confines of a shared linguistic community.

At the linguistic level, metaphorical expressions, or linguistic metaphors, seamlessly integrated into everyday communication, primarily take the form of polysemic words and idiomatic expressions. Each meaning is shaped by a semantic shift influenced by one or more metaphors. Accordingly, PU, particularly metaphorical locutions, unveil an analogical relationship. For instance, let us consider the construction *estar obnubilado* (from Latin "obnubilāre" literally referring to a person's blurred or cloudy vision), a resemblance emerges between the metaphorical meaning of the term *obnubilado* (to be captivated or enchanted by another individual, normally when being deeply in love) and the physical transformation experienced by an individual, involving a decrease in clarity in perceiving and understanding the environment, coupled with a diminished ability to maintain focused attention on external stimuli or one's own thought processes.

From a phraseological perspective, word sequences within the lexicon-syntax continuum, present degrees of idiomaticity, fixity and productivity (Finkbeiner and Schlücker, 2019: 3, as cited in Ureña Tormo, 2024: 163). A significant portion of these sequences integrates a set

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of PU, within which some are classified as idiomatic locutions. Their meaning is not entirely determined by the meaning of their constituents but, it is rather the result of a semantic transpositional process motivated by metaphors. These structures, unconscious and automatic, adhere to the same rules as literal language through consistent use. This entails systematicity and productivity in their creation and comprehension. Authors like Molina Plaza (2008: 208) note translational challenges, confirming that translating these units involves translating a metaphor. From this perspective, these locutions are, thus, metaphorical expressions that, over time, have lexicalized with a specific form and assigned meaning. This also demonstrates that idiomatic locutions based on metaphors are a connecting bridge between cognitive linguistics and phraseology.

3.2. Construction grammar

The conjunction of phraseology and the cognitive linguistics perspective is further solidified by construction grammar. Constructions are pairings of form and meaning based on usage, forming symbolic units that are interconnected, contributing to complex networks. These symbolic units develop through repeated experience with specific instances (*constructs* or *exemplars*) and their generalizations (constructions) (Corpas Pastor, 2021).

Both phraseology and construction grammar share the goal of representing idiomatic structures within a system, akin to regular syntactic patterns (Croft and Cruse, 2004). While phraseology concentrates exclusively on PU, Ureña Tormo's (2024) cognitive phraseology proposal seeks to establish a study framework aligned with cognitive linguistics principles. This framework facilitates the exploration of phraseology by emphasizing regularity and systematicity, with a specific focus on idiomatic locutions as the starting point. According to the author, every idiomatic locution constitutes a specific occurrence of a particular and more schematic construction.

Similar to PU in general, idiomatic locutions can be delineated as constructions characterized by two fundamental features, as initially conceptualized by Goldberg (2013): fixation (as opposed to schematization or abstraction) and complexity (as opposed to simplicity). These characteristics gradually manifest and can be elucidated in relation to the formal and semantic aspects that any construction represents as a symbolic unit. In terms of fixation, idiomatic locutions exhibit both formal and semantic fixation, as their configuration is not entirely unrestricted but instead, at least partially, lexicalized. Furthermore, their meaning does not align with the individual meaning of their components, being non-compositional. This non-compositionality, akin to idiomaticity in phraseological studies, is regarded as semantic fixation in cognitive phraseology. It poses a challenge to conducting a compositional analysis of the meaning of phraseologies. In terms of complexity, idiomatic locutions are formally intricate, comprising at least two elements and embodying meanings that have undergone semantic changes propelled by metaphors and other phenomena.

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In light of the degrees of fixation and complexity, PU, particularly idiomatic locutions, find their place on a specific point along the two-dimensional continuum of formal-semantic fixation and formal-semantic complexity. It is important to note that these dimensions are not directly proportional. Therefore, indicating the position of PU on the continuum necessitates distinguishing whether their form or meaning is under examination. Ureña Tormo (2024: 166-167) aptly illustrates this distinction in examples 1-3 (adapted for this study), which have rich expressive nuances.

(1) "Tras sus éxitos, la actriz reconoce que *ha nacido de pie*" (After her successes, the actress acknowledges that she was born lucky).

(2) "¡Pero si tienes el mar *a dos pasitos*!" (You're just two steps away from the sea!).

(3) "La habitación estaba *hecha un asco*" (The room was a pigsty).

From a formal and semantic standpoint, the idiomatic locution *nacer de pie* (lit. 'to be born standing', Eng. *to be very fortunate*) manifests a proximity to the positive extremes of both fixations, denoting stable lexicalization where the meaning resists easy deduction from constituent elements, and complexity, characterized by its compositionality. This compositional nature entails that the meaning arises from a process of semantic extension, effecting a transposition from the literal signification of the word combination to the idiomatic interpretation inherent in the construction. A similar degree of formal fixation and complexity can be observed in example 2 *a dos pasos* (lit. 'two steps away', Eng. *very close*) and 3 *hecho un asco* (lit. 'made a pigsty', Eng. *very dirty*). It is noteworthy to acknowledge, however, the potential for partial modification in the formal structure of these idiomatic locutions when assimilated into discourse, i.e., morphological variation, as evidenced in *ha nacido* (*she has been born*), *hecha un asco* (*hecha*: feminine and singular referring) or for communicative purposes, i.e., suffixation, as in *pasitos* (lit. 'little steps'). As for the level of semantic fixation in examples 2 and 3 it is lower to that in 1, as the literal meaning of the word combination facilitates access to the overall meaning of the expression (being partially transparent). Nevertheless, it maintains its semantic complexity for the same reason as specified in relation to example 1 (Ureña Tormo, 2024: 167).

From a constructional perspective, they could be specific instances of more abstract constructions: *nacer de pie* [INF. + Prep/ADV/ADJ Phrase] as in *nacer con un pan bajo el brazo* (lit. 'to be born with a bread under the arm', Eng. *to be born with a silver spoon in your mouth*), *nacer ayer* (lit. 'to be born yesterday', Eng. *to be naive or inexperienced*) or *nacer cansado* (lit. 'to be born tired', Eng. *to be tired constantly*); *a dos pasos* [a (prep) + Noun/Verb phrase] as in *a un tiro de piedra* (lit. 'a stone's throw', Eng. *very close*); *hecho un asco* [participle of hacer + Noun Phrase] as in *hecho un mar de lágrimas* (lit. 'made a sea of tears', Eng. *to be in floods of tears*). According to Ureña Tormo (2024: 168), this reasoning challenges the conventional understanding of idioms in phraseology by questioning their structural fixation, where elements within PU lack syntactic relationships. Examples 1, 2 and 3 are idiomatic locutions, yet

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there is potential to analyze PU from a constructional perspective, categorizing them based on fixation and complexity (see also studies by Mellado Blanco, 2019, where she explores comparative phraseological constructions in German and Spanish, and Corpas Pastor, 2021, where she examines comparative and resultative PU expressing madness in Spanish and English).

4. Metaphors in the formation of idiomatic locutions about romantic LOVE: the language of WEDDINGS and MARRIAGE

Within the domain of idiomatic locutions associated with love, a captivating focus emerges on the language intertwined with weddings and marriage. In both English and Spanish, there exist numerous preferred ways to convey formal commitments of love. Idiomatic locutions like *tie the knot* (Spa. *dar el sí quiero*, lit. 'to give the yes I want'), *take the plunge* (Spa. *dar el paso*, 'to take the step'), and *happily ever after* (Spa. *fueron felices y comieron perdices*, lit. 'they were happy and ate partridges') encapsulate the very essence of matrimonial unions. These expressions not only embody the commitment inherent in marriage but also offer a comparative perspective, shedding light on the nuanced ways love is articulated within the different cultural and linguistic frameworks of English and Spanish.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, particularly within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, the investigation into the abstract target domain of LOVE involves the examination of its representation through more tangible source domains. Notable contributions to the study of romantic love in English have been undertaken by Barcelona (1992, 1995, 2001) and Kövecses (1986, 1988, 1991). However, significantly less attention has been devoted to this topic in the Spanish language (Barcelona, 1992; García, 2003). Several conceptual metaphors have proven highly effective in articulating the multifaceted nature of love (Tissari, 2001; Climent and Coll-Florit, 2021). For instance, love has been metaphorically described as a unity of two complementary parts, akin to fire, embodying madness, and as a state of ecstasy[3]. Additionally, it has been framed in terms of natural and physical forces, illustrating a social hierarchy, and even as an adversary or as the object of affection likened to either a deity or a possession. This intricate network of metaphors further distinguishes the hierarchical aspects of love, where rationality and consciousness are positioned above, and emotions and the unconscious reside below.

Furthermore, recent research has delved into the analysis of love language from a cognitive and comparative perspective, shedding light on various linguistic dimensions. Karczewska's

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3 Regarding LOVE AS UNITY, see, for instance, "We were *made for each other*", "We *are one*", "We function as a *unit*" (Kövecses, 1986: 62), and with respect to LOVE AS MADNESS, "*I'm crazy* about her", "*I'm* just *wild* about Harry" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 49).

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(2021) investigation focuses on the examination of conceptual metaphors concerning the end of relationships across English, Polish, and Italian. The study aims to elucidate how such occurrences are portrayed and whether there exist commonalities. In the same vein, Numonjonovna and Abdujalil's (2023) work centers on the analysis of love PU in English and Uzbek, with particular attention to the structural-semantic elements of somatic expressions. Their study underscores the significance of verbalizing love within the respective cultures and highlights its close associations with emotions such as jealousy, passion, and excitement across languages. Savchenko and Tsareva's (2023) research, on the other hand, explores the cognitive aspects of PU within love in English and Chinese by looking at idiomatic locutions from both languages found in printed and online dictionaries.

As for studies exploring language related to weddings and marriage, there is a notable gap in research that adopts a phraseological and conceptual metaphor-based perspective to analyze the representation of marital unions, particularly from a comparative English-Spanish standpoint. Scant attention has been given to PU concerning weddings, with Mamatova's (2020) work standing out as one of the few recent studies. Her research focuses on linguistic features within English and Uzbek wedding traditions, such as proverbs and idioms, showing that proverbs and idioms express elements of national and cultural specificity, revealing that weddings are culturally marked traditions.

In this line and broadening the scope, research on the analysis of wedding traditions as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon has considered this ritual as a culturally marked concept. Jan (2009) conducts a comparative analysis of the wedding concept, uncovering common and specific features in Russian and Chinese languages. His study examines the historical evolution of wedding customs, ritualized communication, the balance of verbal and non-verbal elements in Chinese and Russian wedding communication, and the core values associated with these traditions. Guziyekova (2011) investigates universal and specific peculiarities of weddings in Russian and Adyghe languages, identifying propositional functions within ritual texts of wedding customs. Gabbasova (2013) directs her attention to the Russian and Bashkir linguistic perspectives, exploring speech genres forming wedding communication and scrutinizing similarities and dissimilarities in the conceptualization of weddings in Russian and Bashkir texts. Additionally, Sawalmeh (2014) explores speech peculiarities in wedding invitations from two different religions.

Grounded in the theoretical framework of cognitive phraseology and building upon the current state of research, this study seeks to compare ten idiomatic locutions and their underlying metaphors in Spanish and English that contribute to the conceptualization of weddings and marriage. The main objective is to address a significant gap in the existing literature by conducting an in-depth analysis of linguistic and conceptual features associated with weddings and marriage, specifically examining and contrasting patterns within the Spanish and English languages.

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5. Methodology

In light of the foregoing, the study undertook an examination of the formal and semantic characteristics surrounding the fixation and complexity of idiomatic locutions in English and Spanish pertaining to weddings and marriage, while also considering their frequency of occurrence. Furthermore, the study sought to elucidate the conceptual metaphors underpinning these expressions. To achieve this, the methodology was founded upon linguistic, cognitive, and corpus analyses.

5.1. Idiomatic locutions under study

Out of an initial inventory of nineteen English idiomatic expressions, five were chosen, specifically those structured with the INF. + Prep/Noun Phrase construction, due to space constraints. This initial pool of data was retrieved from different sources, including *The Free Dictionary* or the SMART tool, which provides with a cloud of vocabulary related to the words and phrases found in the *Cambridge Dictionary*[4]. To enhance precision, noun phrase locutions were discarded (e.g. *the big day*, *ball and chain*, *my better half*, *a shotgun wedding*, etc.). This final selection included idiomatic locutions that encapsulate various stages of the matrimonial journey, ranging from the proposal phase to the big day scenarios (see table 1). To establish the Spanish equivalents for the selected English idiomatic locutions, a triangulation approach was adopted. This involved consulting easy-access dictionaries such as Collins, Webster, and Oxford. Additionally, insights were gathered from three bilingual informants and two linguistic experts, thus ensuring a deep understanding of linguistic nuances.

TABLE 1

English and Spanish target idiomatic locutions

SITUATION	ENGLISH IDIOMATIC LOCUTION	SPANISH COUNTERPART
Proposing marriage	*Get down on one knee*	*Hincar (la) rodilla*
	Pop the question	*Declararse a alguien*
	Ask for one's hand	*Pedir la mano a alguien*
(Not) getting married	*Leave at the altar*	*Dejar plantado a alguien en el altar*
	Walk down the aisle	*Caminar hacia el altar*

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4   https://dictionary.cambridge.org.

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5.2. Corpora used

As Corpas Pastor (2021) states, idiomatic locutions are normally low-frequency items even in very large-size corpora, yet they are cognitively entrenched due to their semantic opacity and figurativeness. Authentic examples were extracted from two corpora using Sketch Engine, the Spanish Web Corpus or esTeTen18 and the English enTenTen21, containing 19,593,089,777 and 61,585,997,113 tokens, respectively. These serve as an all-purpose Spanish and English corpora and are curated to encompass the broadest possible variety of genres, topics, text types, and web sources, ensuring a comprehensive representation of linguistic usage in both English and Spanish languages.

The concordance feature offered by Sketch Engine served as a pivotal tool in this study. This option facilitates the exploration of lemmas, phrases, and intricate grammatical or lexical structures within their contextual environments. Leveraging authentic data within its contextual framework enabled a nuanced examination of the potential for modification in the formal and semantic structure of idiomatic locutions. Such analysis was crucial for understanding how these locutions may be assimilated into discourse or used for communicative purposes, providing valuable insights into language dynamics and usage patterns.

6. Results and discussion

The analysis started by scrutinizing the English and Spanish idiomatic locutions categorizing them along the continuum of formal and semantic fixation and complexity (refer to figure 1 at the end of section 7.1 for a concise summary). This systematic approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the metaphorical processes involved in the formation of the target locutions (elucidated in section 6.2).

6.1. Degree of fixation and complexity: a continuum

In the analysis of the idiomatic locution *get down on one knee* and its corresponding Spanish counterpart *hincar (la) rodilla*, several notable observations emerge. Firstly, when used in the context of proposing, the locution with *get* is more prevalent, with 3,592 tokens identified (example 4) although go is also used, albeit less frequently, with 1,384 tokens (example 5). Beyond its proposal-related meaning, an altered way of the locution (POSSESSIVE Adj. + plural noun, e.g. *my/your/their knees* 3,851 tokens) also encompasses other idiomatic usages, such as begging desperately for something or procuring something (example 6). Transitioning to its Spanish equivalent, *hincar (la) rodilla*, the corpus reveals its usage in 120 cases (example 7). It is noteworthy to mention that the verb *hincar*, which typically means to insert or nail, is also found in other idiomatic locutions such as *hincar el diente* (lit. 'to nail the tooth', Eng. *to eat*) or *hincar (los) codos* (lit. 'to nail the elbows', Eng. *to study diligently*).

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(4) "I got the ring out, *got down on one knee*, and the rest is history".

(5) "The man *went down on one knee*, brought out the engagement ring and popped the question".

(6) "I'm begging. I'll even *get down on my knees*".

(7) "Paula no se esperaba nada que en su viaje a Cadaqués él *hincara rodilla* (...) yo pensé que él se estaba atando los zapatos" (Paula didn't expect that on her trip to Cadaqués he would get down on one knee (...) I thought he was tying his shoes).

In examining the idiomatic locution *pop the question*, a low frequency of its usage in the context of proposing marriage was noted (example 8) in contrast to the meaning provided by Cambridge and Collins dictionaries, as well as informant accounts. Eleven cases explicitly alluding to marriage were also found (example 9). However, beyond its conventional usage, a predominant tendency to employ the locution for inquiring about significant matters was observed (8,678 tokens), illustrating its versatile semantic range. Conversely, the Spanish equivalent, *declararse a alguien* (example 10), exhibited a similarly lower frequency in its usage specifically to propose to someone, with 167 instances identified[5]. A broader exploration, only including *declararse a*, unveiled 1,256 tokens, thus indicating a broader usage encompassing the occurrence of a fact or event.

(8) "Within 6 months Dil *popped the question* on Anne Marie's 30th birthday on a crisp winter's afternoon on Dun Laoghaire pier".

(9) "The lover took his lady, Adriana Blagniceanu, to the famous glacier bay in Alaska and went down on one knee as he *popped the marriage question*".

(10) "Es una canción sobre una tímida chica que intenta *declararse* al chico que le gusta" (It's a song about a shy girl trying to *propose to the* boy she likes).

In examining the idiomatic locution *ask for one's hand*, a nuanced picture emerged from the corpus analysis. When considering the act of asking for the hand of a woman in marriage, the locution *ask for her hand* was notably prevalent, appearing 1,665 times in the dataset. Moreover, a significant proportion of these instances were accompanied by the phrase *in marriage*, indicating the conventional context of proposing marriage, as evidenced by 1,001 tokens (example 11). When the object of the request is a man, the usage of the locution shifts. Instances of *ask for his hand* were observed, albeit less frequently, with some occurrences in the context of appeals to God or religion, often denoted in capital letters (His). A romantic connotation was discerned in 45 instances, underscoring the versatility of the

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5   Unlike English, the Spanish equivalent does not align with a phraseological unit; instead, it pertains to a polysemous verb, indicative of a free discourse unit.

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locution beyond its traditional context (example 12). Turning to the Spanish *pedir la mano a alguien*, the analysis uncovered 454 tokens (example 13). However, the prepositional variant *pedir la mano de alguien* captured attention due to its significantly higher frequency, with 1,621 instances identified (example 14). This distinction in preposition usage shows subtle nuances in meaning; while the former suggests a direct approach to the future bride or groom, the latter conveys a more indirect route, harkening back to the old tradition of seeking the father's approval for the bride's hand in marriage. The analysis revealed not only linguistic variations but also cultural implications, reflecting the multifaceted nature of idiomatic expressions in shaping social norms and practices.

(11) "While one man was on one knees *asking for her hand in marriage* (...)".

(12) "You could *ask for his hand in marriage* anywhere (your favorite restaurant, the Eiffel Tower, or the privacy of your own bedroom)".

(13) "Se acerca San Valentín, un momento ideal para *pedirle la mano a* tu pareja" (Valentine's Day is approaching, an ideal time to *propose* to your partner).

(14) "Don Juan *le pide la mano de* su hija al comendador, y este se la niega" (Don Juan asks the commander for his daughter' s *hand*, and the commander refuses).

Turning now to idiomatic locutions for the day of the wedding and referring to the confines of the church itself, the locution *leave at the altar* denoting the act of abandoning one's partner at the wedding altar, emerged with a frequency of 961 tokens in the corpus. A notable observation arose from the consistent usage of *left at the altar*, which dominated the dataset with 954 tokens (example 15). This standardized form underscores a prevalent linguistic convention in expressing the abandonment of a partner in the matrimonial context. Additionally, 66 instances featured the manner adverb *standing*, indicating instances where individuals are left *standing at the altar*, further emphasizing the abrupt and poignant nature of the abandonment. The Spanish locution *dejar plantado a alguien en el altar* was found in 109 cases when the abandoned individual is male (example 16) and 125 when it is a woman (*plantada*). This variation, albeit marginal, hints at potential gender-specific nuances in the cultural perception and articulation of abandonment within matrimonial contexts. With regard to *walk down the aisle,* the locution presents a significant presence in the corpus, with a noteworthy frequency of 17,474 tokens (example 17). It is commonly associated with the ceremonial procession of a bride during a wedding, encapsulates the symbolic journey towards marriage and commitment. However, it is worth noting that the verb *go* also appeared in conjunction with the concept of walking down the aisle, although with a more general meaning extending beyond weddings. This usage, observed in 662 tokens (example 18), again underscores the meaning versatility of idiomatic locutions, in this case conveying the act of movement towards a particular destination or goal. The Spanish equivalent *caminar hacia el altar* emerges with 421 tokens, reflecting a direct and straightforward expression of walking towards the altar (example 19). Interestingly, variations in

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prepositional usage were also observed, with *al altar* appearing 242 times (example 20). These variations might suggest subtle nuances in conveying the directionality (*al*) or the limit (*hacia*) of the directionality of the movement towards the altar.

(15) "A type-A woman who's *left at the altar* by her would-be husband".

(16) "Después de seis años de noviazgo *le dejaron plantado* en el altar" (After six years of courtship *he was jilted* at the altar).

(17) "There's no rush, either, because her father has declared that she cannot marry until her younger sister Bianca *walks down the aisle*, flowers in hand".

(18) "You've helped over twenty brides *go down the aisle* this season".

(19) "En caso de que se celebre la boda, para Eva Longoria esta sería la tercera vez en *caminar hacia el altar*" (Should the wedding take place, this would be Eva Longoria's third time *walking down the aisle*).

(20) "Preparados para el gran día, de *caminar al altar* y dar el sí" (Ready for the big day, to *walk down the aisle* and say "yes").

This analysis allowed for a classification of the locutions within the bidimensional continuum, confirming findings from previous research (e.g. Boers, 2014; Mellado Blanco, 2021; Corpas Pastor, 2021) that position them between free constructions and those exhibiting greater fixity (figure 1). As an illustrative example, an analysis of the idiomatic locutions *get down on one knee* and *hincar (la) rodilla* is provided. Regarding the formal aspect, example (1) is located not far from the positive extreme in terms of fixation, due to being partially lexicalized (i.e., when inserted into discourse both "get" and "go" are frequent forms), and close in terms of formal complexity as it is composed of a set of elements. On the other hand, the Spanish counterpart (2) is much closer to the positive extreme of fixation as it can present subtle morphological variation in context: i.e., subjunctive *hincara*), but as opposed to the English locution, it does not present a high degree of formal complexity. As for semantics, both idiomatic locutions are not as tightly bound to the positive extreme of fixation, as their meaning can be inferred from their constituent elements. Nonetheless, they do lean towards the positive extreme of semantic complexity, as they convey a meaning derived from a process of semantic extension. In fact, using these locutions instils a spectrum of connotations that would be lost if a literal expression equivalent to the idiomatic locution was employed instead (Ureña Tormo, 2024).

In line with research examining the nature of phraseology from a construction grammar perspective (Omazić, 2005; Boers, 2014; Mellado Blanco, 2019; Mellado Blanco and Gutiérrez Rubio, 2020; Mellado Blanco, 2021; Corpas Pastor, 2021; Ureña Tormo, 2024), this investigation delved into idiomatic locutions as specific instantiations of broader schematic constructions. Through the analysis, it became evident that idiomatic locutions 2 and 3 adhered to

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FIGURE 1

Taxonomy of idiomatic locutions according to their degree of formal and semantic fixation and complexity
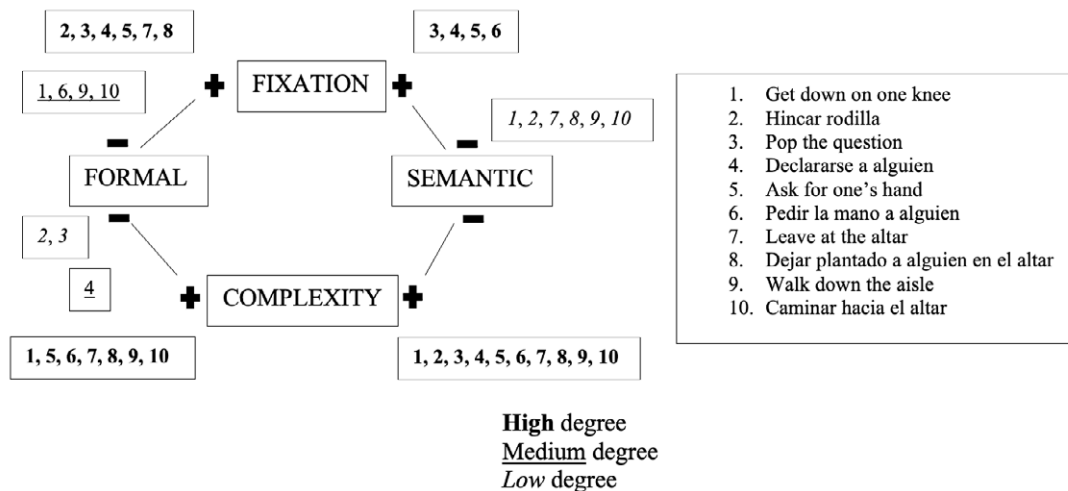
a consistent pattern within the construction [Verb + Direct Object (Noun Phrase)], while locutions 4, 5, and 7 conformed to the [Verb + Adverbial (Prepositional Phrase)] construction. Similarly, locutions 1 and 9 exhibited a recurring pattern of [(Verb + DOWN) + Adverbial (Prepositional Phrase/Noun Phrase)], while locution 6 aligned with the construction [Verb + Direct Object + Indirect Object]. Lastly, locution 8 displayed [Verb + Adjective Participle + Direct Object + Adverbial (Prepositional Phrase)].

6.2. Conceptual metaphors underlying

As observed, the idiomatic locutions in both languages share a characteristic: a high degree of semantic complexity. This suggests that they have undergone semantic evolution over time, propelled by cognitive processes like metaphors (Iñesta and Pamies, 2022; Olza Moreno, 2011). Table 2 provides a summary of the metaphors elucidating this phenomenon. Firstly, the metaphorical concept of kneeling as a gesture of respect or submission is evident in *get down on one knee - hincar (la) rodilla* (literally, *to kneel*). The metaphor KNEELING AS PROPOSING underscores the solemnity and significance of the proposal moment. Secondly, the ASKING AS PROPOSING is apparent in the idiomatic locution *pop the question* in English, however the Spanish counterpart *declararse a alguien* (lit. 'to declare oneself to someone') equates the act of PROPOSING marriage with MAKING SOMETHING KNOWN. This metaphor in the Spanish language highlights the formal and decisive nature of proposing. The cultural specificity in the underlying metaphors aligns with Molina Plaza's (2008) observation regarding translational challenges, highlighting that translating locutions also involves *translating*—in this case *reconsidering*—a metaphor. Both languages use the metaphorical idea of the HAND AS A SYMBOL OF AGREEMENT OR CONSENT in the idiomatic locutions *ask for one's hand - pedir la mano a alguien*, reflecting the traditional notion of seeking approval for marriage through asking the

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family for their daughter's hand (SEEKING APPROVAL FOR MARRIAGE IS ASKING FOR ONE'S HAND). Furthermore, locutions such as *leave (standing) at the altar* in English and *dejar plantado a alguien en el altar* (lit. 'to leave someone planted at the altar') in Spanish share the metaphorical concept of abandonment with the altar symbolizing the location of commitment and union in the metaphor DECIDING NOT TO MARRY AT THE LAST MOMENT IS LEAVING ONE BY ITSELF (IN A STANDING POSITION) AT THE ALTAR. Finally, both languages employ the metaphorical notion of THE AISLE / THE ALTAR AS POINTS IN THE PATH TOWARDS MARRIAGE in locutions *go/walk down the aisle* in English and *caminar a/hacia el altar* in Spanish. Yet, while in English attention is given to the passageway or alley, emphasizing the path through commitment and union, in Spanish, the focus shifts to the altar, directly underscoring the culmination or endpoint of the (getting married) journey. Both locutions convey the underlying metaphor GETTING MARRIED IS WALKING ALONG A PATH IN A CHURCH. Though distinctions exist (primarily) in linguistic representation and scarcely in conceptualization, both English and Spanish reflect shared cultural conceptualizations of marriage and commitment through linguistic and conceptual metaphors.

TABLE 2

Conceptual metaphors for the English and Spanish idiomatic locutions

FUNCTION	ENG. METAPHOR	ENG. IDIOMATIC LOCUTION	SPA. METAPHOR	SPA. IDIOMATIC LOCUTION
Proposing	PROPOSING IS KNEELING	*Get down on one knee*	=	*Hincar (la) rodilla*
	PROPOSING IS ASKING	*Pop the (marriage) question*	PROPOSING IS MAKING SOMETHING KNOWN	*Declararse a alguien*
Seeking approval	SEEKING APPROVAL FOR MARRIAGE IS ASKING FOR ONE'S HAND	*Ask for one's hand*	=	*Pedir la mano a alguien*
Getting cold feet	DECIDING NOT TO MARRY AT THE LAST MOMENT IS LEAVING ONE BY ITSELF (IN A STANDING POSITION) AT THE ALTAR	*Leave (standing) at the altar*	=	*Dejar plantado a alguien en el altar*
Getting married	GETTING MARRIED IS WALKING ALONG A PATH IN A CHURCH	*Walk/go down the aisle*	=	*Caminar a/ hacia el altar*

7. Conclusions

This paper represents a preliminary corpus-based approach to the comparative study of marriage expressions in English and Spanish, presenting a novel perspective that advances the notion of idiomatic locution as a significant tool for analyzing the formal-semantic and

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conceptual dimensions of language. The study addresses a notable gap in existing research, offering valuable insights into the language of weddings in English and Spanish, which have hitherto been underexplored in previous research (Jan, 2009; Mamatova, 2020; Guziyekova, 2011; Gabbasova, 2013; Sawalmeh, 2014; Pintin, 2018). The contribution not only enriches the field of cognitive phraseology, but also enhances our understanding of the linguistic intricacies associated with cultural practices such as marriage ceremonies.

The findings show two significant aspects of idiomatic locutions conceptualizing weddings and marriage in English and Spanish. Firstly, the shared semantic complexity suggests a deep-rooted evolution over time, driven by common metaphors prevalent in both languages. Despite cultural nuances, the conceptual metaphors shaping these expressions seem to be universal, at least within the scope of the examined idiomatic expressions in these closely related languages.

Secondly, while a considerable portion of these idiomatic expressions exhibit formal fixation, indicating stable lexicalization, they demonstrate a lower degree of semantic fixation. This implies that, although the word combination maintains a consistent form, their meanings remain somewhat transparent and accessible to speakers. Interestingly, this semantic pattern holds true within each English-Spanish pair.

These conclusions not only contribute to the understanding of the linguistic and conceptual aspects of marriage expression but also have practical implications. The insights gained from this study can inform the design and implementation of pedagogical materials for second language learners of English or Spanish, enriching their understanding of cultural nuances and facilitating cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, adopting a comparative and cognitive phraseology-based approach opens avenues for investigating other cultural traditions, thereby enhancing the framework for linguistic and cultural analysis design.

In essence, this study underscores the importance of exploring marriage expressions through a phraseological and cognitive-linguistic lens, offering valuable insights into both linguistic structures and cultural representations. By establishing a foundation for linguistic and cultural analysis design, it is contended that it not only facilitates deeper understanding of marriage traditions but also empowers broader investigations into other traditions associated with love and other emotional facets.

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