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How (not) to analyse multiword expressions

Multiword expressions (MWEs) are those linguistic expressions that seem partly phrase-like and partly word-like: things like idioms ('Alex finally kicked the bucket last week'), phrasal verbs ('We can't rely entirely on Peter for this'), and other (apparently) fixed expressions ('My feet went every which way', 'By and large, this has been a success'). They're phrase-like because they seem to be made up of multiple words, which can be separated; but they're word-like in that the parts have to appear together, and the expressions have idiosyncratic, unpredictable meanings.

Because of this tension between word-like and phrase-like properties, MWEs can be a challenge to analyse. In this talk, I'll consider the space of logically possible theories open to us in handling such expressions, assess what type of theory provides the best coverage, and ask whether we want a 'one size fits all' theory, or whether different approaches are suited to different phenomena in the extremely broad MWE church.