

Cognitive Approaches to English

Cognitive Approaches to English:
Fundamental, Methodological,
Interdisciplinary and Applied Aspects

Edited by

Mario Brdar, Marija Omazić
and Višnja Pavičić Takač

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

MARIO BRDAR, Marija OMAZIĆ
AND VIŠNJA PAVIČIĆ TAKAČ

The present volume contains a selection of papers that were read at the conference entitled *Cognitive Approaches to English*, an international event organized to mark the 30th anniversary of English studies at the Faculty of Philosophy (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University, Osijek), which was held in Osijek on October 18-19, 2007. More than 30 scholars from Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia attended the conference.

The topic of the conference—*Cognitive Approaches to English*—simply suggested itself, due to the research interests currently dominant not only at the host institution, but also at a number of neighbouring institutions in the area of Central Europe. The participants were invited to discuss issues in cognitive accounts of English, ranging from fundamental to methodological to interdisciplinary and applied ones. The volume is accordingly divided into four parts.

Part 1, *Motivation in grammar*, deals with various phenomena in the grammar of English in the broadest sense of the term, all of which are shown to be motivated by metaphorical and/or metonymic operations.

Tanja Gradečak-Erdeljić investigates the role of structural and diagrammatic iconicity in construing event schemata by means of periphrastic constructions consisting of complex predicates containing the so-called ‘light’ verbs and nominalizations of activation verbs preceded by an indefinite article. It is argued that this construction reflects the conceptualised information of the event content, e.g. the short duration of the activity and its perfective character, as well as its Aktionsart force in the sense of the boundedness/unboundedness of the verb/noun space. The boundedness effect is explained in terms of the sequential scanning of the [PROCESS] event into the bounded region of [THING] as conceptualized with the help of the metonymy SUBEVENT FOR THE WHOLE and the conceptual metaphor EVENTS ARE THINGS.

The chapter by Ágota Ősz presents the development of the modal *will* within the framework of Langacker's cognitive grammar, taking into consideration the main verb stage, the OE *willan*, and ending with the gradual development of the epistemic meaning. She argues that the changes in the grammar of this modal verb are in fact motivated by changes in its image-schematic structure.

English is remarkably abundant in nominal compound words whose meaning is based upon some sort of metaphor and metonymy. Some of these have been lexicalised and therefore show up in dictionaries, such as *belly button*, denoting the navel. Others, however, are coined by speakers online to fit a specific communicative purpose, and may or may not become part of the shared lexicon of the linguistic community. The basic question Réka Benczes' chapter starts from is why speakers coin such metaphorical and metonymical compounds often competing with simple words denoting a concept. The existence of metaphorical compounds such as *belly button* defies the view that the reason why people produce novel compounds is to allow them to precisely communicate their intended meaning. It seems rather that speakers routinely employ creative, associative thought processes in order to come up with novel expressions with a rich mental imagery.

In her chapter on various readings of highly polysemous English nominalization in *-ion*, Adisa Imamović shows that this polysemy is far from being arbitrary. The majority of these meaning variations are highly motivated by metonymic and metaphorical processes. It turns out that in addition to their central meaning 'the action of V-ing', *-ion* nominalizations can sometimes have referential meaning and denote people, physical objects, countries, modality, time, place, manner, emotions and many other things. The author also identifies several factors at work in metonymic reading of a nominalization, e.g. whether the process is stative or dynamic, the degree of affectedness of the patient, whether the action is momentary or continuous (bounded vs. unbounded), whether there is energy transfer or not, and the cognitive salience of the participant.

The main point of the last contribution in the first part, *The meaning of English conversion: Quirky or not?* by Gabrijela Buljan, is to show how cognitive linguistics can contribute to the study of the meaning of conversions, a special word-formation process which happens to be very productive in English. It is suggested that construal operations (detopicalisation), coupled with the idea of linguistic constructions as symbolic pairings of meaning and form, as well as the basic cognitive tools like metonymy and metaphor, can help us in showing that there is much more system in the range of meanings that conversions may exhibit. What is more, the chapter

demonstrates that there are principled reasons why certain types of conversions are not likely to occur.

Part 2, *Constructing meaning (between grammar and lexicon)*, carries five chapters dealing with phenomena ranging from various peculiarities of form-meaning pairings (such as synonymy, polysemy, and figurative meanings) to concept formation.

Nina Tuđman and Ana Opačak study English near-synonymous verbs related to the concept of *refusal*. The fine-grained quantitative pattern analysis proposed in their chapter shows how the conceptual structure of the idealized cognitive model of *refusal* is reflected on various levels of linguistic structures, enabling comparisons in the usage of near-synonymous verbs and identification of those patterns that point to either similarities or differences in meaning.

Mario Brdar, Jadranka Zlomislić, Blaženka Šoštarić, and Alma Vančura Malbaša investigate the phenomenon of polysemy resolution. Specifically, they focus on the detection of signals of figurative meaning in texts. It is claimed that metaphorical and metonymic senses are signalled in different ways, which might be another important point of contrast between the two cognitive processes. In the concluding part, the authors point out that metaphor and metonymy produce two different types of polysemy.

The chapter by Sanja Berberović addresses the issue of the construction of metonymic and metaphoric meaning of personal names in English. The construction of figurative meaning of expressions of the type of *the X of Y*, in which *X* is a personal name denoting humans, while *Y* designates various spheres of human activities (e.g. politics, sport, music, and a variety of different physical objects, concepts, places), is a complex and dynamic cognitive process. It is demonstrated that the figurative meaning of proper names in such constructions arises through successive tiers of metonymic and metaphoric mappings. The analysis shows that as a result of these processes a personal name can come to figuratively designate humans, physical object, concepts, and places.

The contribution by Nihada Delibegović Džanić and Mirza Džanić sheds light on the phenomenon of idiom modification. It is argued that Conceptual Integration Theory can significantly contribute towards accounting for the mechanisms of idiom modification. On a series of case studies, the authors discuss the role of vital relations and optimality principles at work in such idiomatic blends, analyze the relations between the idiomatic expressions and their modifications, and identify the constraints that define the relations within the blend.

In order to draw up a new theoretical framework making it possible to treat free expressions and fixed expressions in a unified way, László I. Komlósi adopts in his chapter a unified perspective on lexical behavior of variable-sized lexical units and illustrates the interaction of the appropriate types of knowledge bases and relevant cognitive schemes in the course of language processing enhanced by prompting and activating contextually and culturally relevant cognitive models. The tangible and predictable result of the analysis is the unfolding of a mechanism which lexically constrains meaning extension. The paper manages to show that the understanding of the interplay of force-dynamics and collocational force in the lexicon requires a reassessment of the literal-figurative distinction as well.

In the concluding chapter of Part 2, Luca Malatesti offers an account of phenomenal concepts for colour experiences that meets some anti-physicalist objections raised in the the physicalist vs. anti-physicalist controversy within the philosophy of mind. The author maintains that ascribing to a subject the possession of a phenomenal concept requires that s/he be sensitive to some reasons for endorsing and rejecting certain perceptual beliefs. This implies that possessing phenomenal concepts requires being aware of certain normative requirements. The aim of this chapter is to point out that the physicalist, who endorses the two ways of thinking strategy, should face the challenge of accounting for the normative dimension involved in the possession of phenomenal concepts.

The four chapters that make up Part III are concerned with the phenomenon of interlinguistic and intercultural variation in the use of metaphorical and metonymic processes. Zoltán Kövecses suggests in his chapter that the causes of metaphor variation can be grouped into two large classes: differential experience, on the one hand, and differential cognitive preferences, or styles, on the other. Many of our metaphors vary simply because our experiences as human beings also vary. The contexts that seem to have an influence on the metaphors we use include the physical environment, social context, the communicative situation, our history, and the concerns we have about the world. Another set of causes has to do with “cognitive preferences, or styles,” that is, the differential application of metaphor, metonymy, experiential focus, and conceptual integration as cognitive processes of the mind.

By providing case studies of two senses of *chickenhawk* (one being a (damaging) political epithet in the domain of AMERICAN POLITICS (‘a politician or other person who promotes war without having had any personal experience of it; especially those who have avoided the experience or the draft’) and the other limited to gay slang (‘an older gay man who seeks out boys or young men as his sexual partners’), Goran Milić attempts to track

the construction of meaning in creative compounds and the ensuing dysphemistic effects conveyed by the two senses. A cross-linguistic comparison with Croatian should help establish potential causes of variation and/or overlap.

Combining the constructional approach to idioms with an investigation of idiom motivation based on ICMs/cultural models, Mateusz-Milan Stanojević, Jelena Parizoska and Lea Banović take a closer look at the issues of structural variability and motivation of expressions with the components *in/u* and *eyes/očima* in English and Croatian. Their aim is to show that these combinations are in fact schematic idioms with a relatively stable structure, and that their structural characteristics and meaning are closely related and dependent on a limited number of ICM/cultural models motivating them.

In the final chapter in this Part, Marija Omazić, Goran Schmidt and Romana Čačija provide a number of selected case studies intended to determine the place and role of conceptual metaphor and metonymy in the process of translation, i.e. in particular translation strategies applied in performing different translation tasks. Further analysis focuses on whether the distribution of these cognitive mechanisms is the same for strategies targeting different language items and examines the reasons for possible unevenness, stipulating whether their established role in translation calls for and justifies their incorporation in translation theory, pedagogy, and practice.

The volume is rounded off by Part IV, with its three papers attempting to reconsider some TEFL issues from a cognitive linguistic point of view.

Renata Geld and Snježana Đurdek propose that categorization based on prototypes (with categories whose members are kept together by a unifying schema) is much better suited for pedagogical purposes than the categorization based on binary features. Further, they plead that strict categorical judgements and sharp dichotomies should be avoided, or at least negotiated, in the process of learning/teaching gradient grammatical categories such as tenses, as exemplified on the Present Perfect construction.

The aim of the chapter by Višnja Pavičić Takač and Draženka Molnar is to explore how teachers' beliefs and perceptions, expressed in various metaphors, inevitably effect the underlying philosophy of teaching and learning. They also consider to what extent these metaphors serve as an important consciousness-raising tool, encouraging teachers to examine their constructions critically and to modify them. It is hoped that metaphor identification and understanding should help creating a more welcoming classroom environment, for both teachers and students.

Finally, Renata Geld and Maja Šimunić report the results of a case study involving a 16-year-old legally blind boy who has been learning English since the age of 7. The aim of the study was to determine whether the extraordinariness of his mental imagery is reflected in his language, more specifically in English as L2. The results of the study are consistent with the previously conducted research in L1, pointing to a variety of shifts in the conceptual content due to specific mental imagery based on various sensory modalities, as well as rather idiosyncratic shifts due to the subject's personal visual efficiency, that is the extent to which available vision is used effectively.

It is our hope that the present volume will have retained some of the liveliness of the discussion during the conference, and that the views expressed by the participants and assembled authors present an exciting record of a cross-section of of a broad and varied spectrum of possible cognitive linguistic approaches to the study of English.

We would again like to express our gratitude to all our co-members of the organising team of the conference and to all the volunteers (including the students) who helped out so well during the two-day event by managing matters behind the scenes. We are also enormously grateful to all participants for their contributions, their fruitful interaction and their enthusiasm, all of which made this conference not only a very interesting but also a very congenial event.

PART I:
MOTIVATION IN GRAMMAR

CHAPTER ONE

ICONICITY OF THE VERBAL EXPRESSION – THE CASE OF “LIGHT” VERBS IN ENGLISH¹

TANJA GRADEČAK-ERDELJIĆ

1. Introduction

The problem of opposition between creativity and the need for organisational clarity in all human communicational systems is greatly reflected in language as well. Linguists have been trying to establish links between the linguistically encoded experiences and their triggers from the human environment in different ways, mostly by describing the codes themselves and by imposing various taxonomic systems of organisation. The missing link between creativity and systematicity is the notion of motivation which has recently gained more attention by cognitive linguists as a consequence of ever stronger attachment to psycholinguistic research and more recent neurolinguistic research studies conducted by George Lakoff, who already in his *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987: 107, 148) urged for positing of a unified theory of motivation. The motivating factors were most exhaustively studied by a number of most distinguished cognitive linguists in Radden and Panther's (2004) *Studies in Linguistic Motivation* who noticed that among some of the motivating factors such as non-arbitrary relationships and explanation, in the past few decades iconicity has received much attention in the two main streams of linguistic research, functional and cognitive linguistics.

Within the cognitive linguistic framework iconic motivation is recognised as one of the major elements in the symbolic characterisation of language in the sense that it may contribute to the analyzability of polymor-

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in funding the research reported in this paper (Grant no. 122-130149-0606, *Cognitive Linguistic Approach to Polysemy in Croatian and Other Languages*).

phemic linguistic signs, diminishing to a certain degree the arbitrariness hypothesis of linguistic signs, as it was initially proposed by de Saussure and what is later to be developed as a structuralist linguistic framework. On the structuralist timeline, it may seem interesting to review the traditionally and formally established positions as they were ascribed to de Saussure, who, however, on a few occasions was forced to slightly transform his position on the indisputable force of linguistic arbitrariness. Thus, his words that:

There is no language in which nothing is motivated, and our definition makes it impossible to conceive of a language in which everything is motivated. Between the two extremes—a minimum of organization and a minimum of arbitrariness—we find all possible varieties. de Saussure (1916/1959:133)

call forth the thought that we indeed may find all possible varieties without any trace of meaningful connection between some superficially related linguistic structures and in the case of analytic verbo-nominal constructions with ‘light’ verbs in English we may be indeed prying in what Sapir (1925) calls a “perfect hornet’s nest of bizarre and arbitrary usages.” Some other distinguished linguists, and not only of functional or cognitive provenance, dealt with the role iconicity plays in the process of linguistic encoding, e.g. Bolinger (1977), Haiman (1980, 1983), Newmeyer (1992), and particularly Givón (1985: 189) restated the iconic-isomorphic interface by establishing the iconicity meta-principle: “All other things being equal, a coded experience is easier to store, retrieve, and communicate if the code is maximally isomorphic to the experience.”

The above quoted definition proposes some rather strong assertions about the role of iconicity in language, especially if we look at the very label: the iconicity *meta-principle* (italics mine) suggests a very clear isomorphic background Givón establishes for the experiential basis of linguistic expression. The relationship of Behagel’s law on the symbolic nature of grammatical structure in what Langacker (1987: 361) terms *A maxim of grammar* (another quite strong and assertive label), is explained in a similar vein:

...that elements that “belong together semantically” tend to “occur together syntactically” (Behagel’s law). Vague though this principle is, both its significance and its essential correctness are beyond dispute. The iconicity it implies between semantic and formal relationships is naturally expressed in the present framework (Cognitive Grammar, T.G.-E.), where the bipolar character of grammatical structure is fundamental.

Following this linguistic timeline, it is easy to conceive why some of the most prominent advocates of Cognitive Grammar and cognitive semantics like Langacker and Lakoff found iconicity as one of the strongest motivating forces in the process of linguistic creation. Iconicity was in a way doomed to appear in all possible corners of the cognitive linguistic field of research and it stretches into the constructionist field of cognitive research, especially since Langacker's view that the above mentioned iconic principle pertains to grammatical constructions, especially if the element of proximity between the phonological and semantic pole of these constructions is taken into consideration. Langacker (1987: 181) also mentions a strong impact of the conventional metaphor CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit when analysing the linear ordering of elements, with cause: effect examples extending from the simple verb forms to periphrastic forms and finally to a complex sentence structure:

- (1) (a) Sam killed Harry.
- (b) Sam made Harry die.
- (c) Sam caused Harry to die.
- (d) Sam brought it about that Harry died.

The form-content iconicity, as Langacker notices, is a direct cause for the isomorphic influence on the links in conceptual distance between the domains of time and cause-effect.

2. Competing motivations?

There have recently been proposed some new ideas concerning the everlasting opposition between the proponents of the arbitrariness principle and the advocates of the iconicity as one of the most productive factors in the production and maintenance of linguistic organisation. The economy principle of linguistic encoding, as originally discovered by George Zipf (1949) in his mathematically justified organisational principle of the correspondence of the token frequency of a word and its shortness, i.e. when its length pushes to the background one of the basic iconic relationships, the form-meaning correspondence, presents its radical, isomorphic streamline, at the expense of the economy principle as the minimization of the coding effort. The expressive power of language, as Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2004: 326) notice, is, however, constrained by some communicative factors, and as much as the principle of economy, in the form of routinization and idiomatization of expressions contributes to the simplified organiza-

tion of linguistic structures, other elements are at play: the need for encoding new semantic elements, as will be suggested for the case of ‘light’ verb constructions, the content-form relationships which may import new linguistic material adjustable to the pragmatic circumstances of linguistic communication (also a valid factor in the case of ‘light’ verb constructions) but also the opposite relationship of form-content relation when some structural evidence, such as phonological, contributes to the enchainment process.

Another, quite lively discussion on the relationship between economy and iconicity has been prompted by some of the advocates of the frequency principle (c.f. Haspelmath 2003, 2008) and the linguists who pertain that frequency may be a decisive factor in terms of absolute frequency influencing the Zipfian frequency hypothesis, but that iconicity still makes the most correct predictions in terms of the initial cognitive impetus for the creation of new linguistic forms and the maintenance of the already existing ones (Croft, 1990, 2008; Haiman 1983, 1985, 2008). Even Radden and Panther (2004) contend that there is no unique approach to the problem of economy-iconicity opposition and suggest three different solutions: synonymy as the least cognitively based relationship of multiple forms and one meaning they resolutely discard, whereas polysemy, as a working process in both lexicon and grammar is contrasted to isomorphism as a driving force in structuring new forms which correspond to different concepts.

Without any further attempt to pursue this discussion further, we may only make a short notice concerning the conflicting evidence from our corpus of ‘light’ verb constructions.

2.1. The frequency element

In a 400 million corpus *The Bank of English* there is a strikingly high frequency of ‘light’ verb constructions and the example for *have + a + verb* search string the first two positions are held by spoken corpora, both British and American.²

² There is an obvious dialectal variability between the ‘light’ verb constructions with *have* and *take* with the same nominal part (*have a bath/take a bath*). *Have* is preferred in the British, Australian and New Zealand variety of English, whereas the Americans prefer *take*. Trudgill et al. (2002) claim that there happened a loss of *have* in the American variety due to its inability to retain its dynamic character (i.e. the NICE properties of primary auxiliaries, *do* insertion particularly).

Table 1-1. The frequency of 'light' verb constructions
in *The Bank of English*

| <i>Have a VB</i> | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| corpus | total number of occurrences | average number per million words |
| brspok | 1198 | 59.7/million |
| usspok | 119 | 58.8/million |

Putting the dialectal particularities aside, we may notice that it is the spoken corpus which is highly populated with the 'light' constructions, which is only slightly opposed by the corpus finding by Biber et al. (1999:1028) who maintain that constructions with *have*, *make* and *take* are much more frequent in written discourse and some are to be found only in academic or journalistic texts (e.g. *have implications*, *make his/her appearance*, *take account of* etc.). Here we may make a remark that there is an opposition recognised by Wierzbicka (1982) and Stein (1991) that in fact the prototypical type of construction with 'light' verbs would include the verb stem as a nominal part of the construction.³ The frequency element is in this case slightly puzzling because we maintain that it is the spoken corpus which is the main driving force for the creation and preservation of the 'light' verb constructions. The puzzling part is in the way the frequency level is maintained in a not indirectly transmitted linguistic material, i.e., how can a non-written form be maintained on a sufficiently appealing level to be transferred with such a high frequency? We maintain that it is the schematic level of organisation of the construction which relies on the both schematic meaning of 'light' verbs and the schematic structure of the canonical event model (see below) which is the main motivating factor in the preservation of the high frequency level of these constructions, i.e. we have a clear case of content-form relationship which is basically iconic and which subsequently influ-

³ Wierzbicka (1982) insists that, in fact, the process of nominalisation has not taken place in these constructions but that the verb stems which are arguments to 'light' verbs retain their verbal character, i.e. are verbs and gives a pair of contrasting examples where (a) is a prototypical 'light' verb construction with a verb (since it is pronounced as a verb) and in (b) we have a corresponding noun:

(a) Can I have **a** use [ju:z] of your pen?

(b) Can I have **the** use [ju:s] of your pen?

Only (a) would belong to the 'light' verb constructions considering other obligatory elements in the constructions (see below).

ences the development of the form-content link (to be discussed in section 4.1 on phonological evidence). The story of frequency-iconicity relationship has thus come full circle in the case of the ‘light’ verb constructions and it makes sense to propose the idea of such interplay of various factors and to see motivation as a matter of degree. As Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2004: 325) notice: “Cf. Langacker (1987: 48) and Lakoff (1987: 346), who speak of levels of predictability and relative motivation leading to restricted predictions, respectively.”

2.2. Polysemy

The clash between the principle of economy and the isomorphic extension of the analytical constructions with ‘light’ verbs may be explained if we take into consideration the additional feature of Aktionsart as a contrastive element in the pairing of the simple verb form and its periphrastic counterpart where it has a role of the nominal argument to the ‘light’ verb (more about this feature in Gradečak-Erdeljić 2004). Other languages resort to some other mechanisms when this feature of lexical aspect is to be encoded (see below for contrastive analysis with Croatian, German etc.) and English had to rely on the analytical strategy of attributing certain morphemes an independent status of grammatical function markers, in the case of the ‘light’ verb constructions these are the ‘light’ verbs themselves (attested examples with OE *habban* and *gifan* and the gradual expansion in Middle English period).

What has been recognised in our research, however, is that it is not only the traditionally ascribed function (originating in Jespersen’s (1931) term ‘light’ for lacking their full semantic features), but they are schematically encoded polysemous constructional elements which retain their basic force-dynamic features (in Talmy’s (1995) terms) and imputing those features from the physical force domain into the more abstract sphere of physical/psychological interaction, intra-psychological intention, perception or sensation, or of socio-psychological interaction (Brugman 2001).

Since the field of aspect research is notorious for its inconsistencies (particularly concerning the accompanying terminology), we would only like to point at the features which are highlighted by the use of the ‘light’ verb constructions. The following examples show that the grammatical aspect retains its formal markers in both lexical and constructional use of main verbs, but the distinction of boundedness is what sets apart the periphrastic examples:

- (2) (a) have a drink vs. drink; cf.:
 He had a drink.
 He was having a drink.
 He was drinking
 (b) take a walk vs. walk
 (c) give sb. a kick vs. kick sb.
 (d) make a suggestion vs. suggest

The boundedness effect (as proposed by Langacker 1991: 21) is conventionally recognised as one of the main features of the lexical aspect or Aktionsart and in Cognitive Grammar it is a universal category which we shall explain in terms of the sequential scanning of the [PROCESS] event into the bounded region of [THING] as conceptualized with the help of the metonymy SUBEVENT FOR THE WHOLE EVENT. In view of abstractedness of the notion of [THING] the conceptual metaphor EVENTS ARE THINGS serves as a link to the nominalisation process and the boundedness effect mentioned above (see below for a more detailed analysis).

Taking a look at the above mentioned characteristics of the ‘light’ verb constructions, we may ask ourselves whether those really are competing motivations (Haiman 1985), because, if one attempts to study the necessity of the existence of the periphrastic forms, one must inevitably conclude that the economy principle (minimising the coding effort) has to be neglected in the case of periphrastic verb phrases with light verbs, especially when the context of the parallel usage of the full verb is compared. We suggest that the notions of economy and iconicity are not competing, but rather complementary or self-contained as suggested by Haspelmath (2003), because Du Bois (1985) reminds us of the inherently structuralist clash between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ linguistics, i.e. perceptually and experientially motivated form meaning correspondences, vs. arbitrarily construed linguistic signs respectively. He mentions de Saussure’s marginal note that eventually those two competing theories of language may clash and merge, the approach which is, actually adopted by the cognitive linguists and the cognitive interface which embraces neurocognitive sciences, psycholinguistic research and theoretical and empirical linguistics.

3. Light verb constructions and the constructionalist approach

The motivating factors for the ‘light’ verb constructions is inextricably connected to the constructionalist view of language, namely, to the approach that combinations of lexemes with their morphological and syntac-

tic organisation may form symbolic units per se with the unique property of partial compositionality and, following from this, a lack of full predictability. The standard view of the lexicon as a fund of existing words that can be extended by certain morphological operations is challenged when ‘constructional idioms’ (Booij 2002) come into play, which are, again traditionally viewed, syntactic units with a non-compositional semantic interpretation. This sharp boundary between lexicon and syntax has recently been challenged by linguists working in the framework of Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001, and Cognitive Grammar as promoted by Langacker 1987, 1991; and Taylor 2002) can be considered a prime example of the constructionalist approach.

Light verb constructions are easily recognizable and present an excellent example of the analytical nature of English language where the analytical force of dissecting the form has reached its prime in abstracting the meaning of the most schematic English verbs such as *have*, *take*, *give*, *make*, *do*, *put* etc. enacting their polysemous character and in the process of ascribing to the verbal root certain morphosyntactic features of the noun (premodification by an AdjP or indefinite article). Their (proto)typical structure is presented in Figure 1-1:

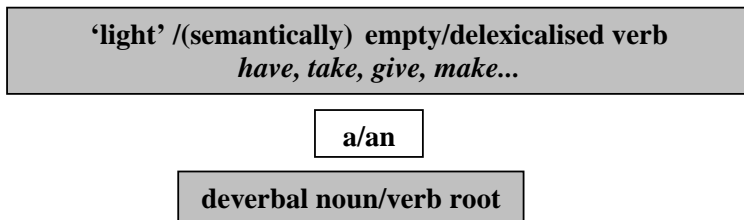


Fig. 1-1. The structure of the ‘light’ verb constructions

When considered as a composite structure the traditional ‘building block metaphor’ approach to these constructions must be avoided, which, however, reflects the traditional approach to these structures (Jespersen 1942; Nickel 1968) where they were studied as lexical collocations where each of the collocates contributes the full content of their semantic framework with the final result of the composite structure or the collocation having a set meaning intended for specific purposes in a defined and controlled environment. The ‘building block metaphor’ may be, to a certain degree, blamed for the lack of full understanding of the nature of the

'light' verb constructions. The principle of full compositionality⁴ neglects the effect of constructional meaning, i.e. the basic idea of constructional grammars that constructions are independent, conceptually highly motivated units or as Goldberg (1995: 4) states:

That is, a construction is posited in the grammar if it can be shown that its meaning and/or its form is not compositionally derived from other constructions existing in the language.

What sets apart Goldberg's view on constructions from that of Langacker (1987) or Taylor (2002) and which we actually endorse is that, although the structural independence must be recognized, even with the 'light' verb constructions (otherwise they wouldn't be recognized as identifiable units at all), there is a link to the properties possessed by other construction-types that may be more or less schematic and which include both highly idiomatic (in the non-compositional sense of the term) or idiosyncratic, but also superficially 'regular' linguistic structures. Non-compositional approach to semantics would suggest that the meaning of such complex predicates, as 'light' verb constructions have also been called, is not predictable from its component parts, which is the main reason why they have for years been shrugged off as non-transparent idiomatic phrases. Taylor (2002: 567), however, stresses that it does not preclude their analyzability since he sees constructions or 'constructional idioms' structures that can be analyzed into component parts. Unlike idioms where the whole does not mean the sum of its component parts, as is an approximation of a common definition (although in the area of idiomaticity one must also be quite cautious and see it as a matter of degrees and not of clearly set boundaries), 'light' verb constructions do reflect the meaning of their component parts, but only reflect, since the meaning is highly schematized ('light' verbs) or metonymically mapped subevents representing the event denoted by the verb which is a part of the construction's nominal phrase (e.g. *a kick* where the final, resultative phase stands for the whole process of kicking).

Each of these separate idioms or collocations was considered to make up a part of the content of the initial lexical items, either verbs or nouns, instead of taking the opposite direction and considering the schematic structure of the specific world class where only certain facets of component parts would be highlighted. This kind of partial compositionality

⁴ Cf. Booij's (2003) discussion of Dutch *een belofte doen* 'to make a promise.' The meaning of this phrase is transparent and compositional, yet one has to know that this is a conventional expression for the concept of promising.

would also defy the already existing labelling of verbs which appear in these structures as 'semantically emptied' or 'light' since they indeed do contribute a degree of content to the construction, to the degree their schematicity allows it.

Apart from the obvious perfective/imperfective and Aktionsart distinction between the full verb form and the corresponding periphrastic construction, the added, newly formed quality of the construction is in the fact that the nominal designatum, in many examples accompanied by an adjectival attribution (the force of which is especially obvious with the cognate pairings of nouns and verbs, e.g. *breathe a deep sigh*, *sigh a sigh of relief*) has to be strengthened in its singling out of a particular relational sequence by the processual force of the cognate verb which thus redirects the attention of the recipient towards the processual character of the construction, i.e. we are forced to rearrange the active zone of the profiled [THING] which consequently interacts more directly with the profiled character of the verbal part of the construction. In other words, it delimits the quality of the noun's semantic content to the specific instance of breathing out a gush of air ('a sigh'), enabling the entering of more specific descriptive elements which would in the adverbial position in certain situations sound quite clumsy and inappropriate.

In line with the usage-based model of language (Langacker 1991b), the constructions' actual usage and the sociolinguistic and pragmatic effects they create point at their emergent quality which we may describe as stylistic markedness. Dixon (1992) mentions their preference in colloquial style, and some corpus research in the COBUILD databases proved them to be prevalent in the spoken corpus of, particularly British and Australian variety of English, American variety sticking to the combination with *take*. They pronounce a strong overt tone of friendliness and seem to be especially productive in the Late Modern period of English, although there is diachronic evidence of its existence in OE and ME stages of the development of English, especially of the combinations with *have* (*habban*) and *give* (*giefan*). Their high productivity gives rise to the assumptions that the structure and its schematic nature provide a very convenient mechanism for eliciting novel combinations and offers a new discourse perspective, enabling the speaker to provide a more detailed description of the event encoded by the base form of the activity verb, e.g.:

- (3) I'll just take a **quick** glance. vs. I'll just glance **quickly**.

Adjectival premodification instead of an adverbial fits the preferred transitive model of sentences, its force is in not imposing the role of a speaker

but redirects the attention towards the bulkier conglomerate of the nominal phrase, the activity described is usually of short duration, performed for the sake of fun or pleasure on the part of the speaker, and the typical constructional meaning, also reflected in the above example, is doing certain activity ‘for a bit,’ for a very short period of time, the quality of which reflects the structural phonological iconic elements to be discussed below.

3. Iconicity, metaphor and metonymy as motivational factors

3.1. Iconicity

In the case of the periphrastic verbo-nominal constructions with ‘light’ verbs, we may justly use Langacker’s (1991: 37) view that “[W]hat distinguishes the periphrastic variants is their application to a particular cognitive domain, namely the conception of a process.” The relationship between the frequency of specific periphrastic forms and the superficial redundant quality they may create reflects their sometimes misconceived parasitic nature, although, once again, we claim that there is always a strong stimulus in the sense described above, namely that of particularizing specific cognitive domains in the process of coding of things or events and even more, that the ever growing body of evidence from typologically more or less similar languages supports the idea that the shared quality of linguistic expression provides a highly motivated index of the conceptually iconic type of linguistic expression. The presupposed redundant nature of the ‘light’ verb constructions follows the entrenched view of the clash between the principle of economy of a linguistic expression with the iconic correspondence of form and meaning, as shown above and displays its somewhat quirky nature of encoding referentially incongruent linguistic signs, namely verbal roots functioning as nouns.

Periphrastic constructions with ‘light’ verbs and deverbal nouns are also an excellent specimen for a careful dissection of how prototypes may influence the network of structural and semantic relationship in a particular language. We claim that, once again, the motivation is decidedly conceptual because it is based on the constructionally encoded conceptualization of processual aspects of human interaction which, on the other hand, strives towards referentially shaped reality, but, at the same time, or precisely because of this switching routine, may become highly subjective and not very likely to be clearly delineated and thus conceivable.

We shall attempt to show that iconicity in ‘light’ verb constructions as symbolic units works at several levels, from phonological to syntactic and

that it provides a deeply, experientially and perceptually rooted channels for motivating their creation and use.

In the quite dispersed terminology regarding iconicity (see Haiman 1980, 1983, 1985; Panther and Radden 2004; and Haspelmath 2008 for an overview), while researching the 'light' verb constructions we found that what is usually termed diagrammatic iconicity or in a narrower sense structural iconicity, since it excludes isomorphism as a separate phenomenon (see Taylor 2002: 45ff) for a detailed justification of this distinction) may be a basic motivational factor in the process of periphrastic transformation of the event structure: intransitive predication is encoded through the syntactically simpler form of a one word verb, whereas conceptually more complex, transitive event demands a periphrastic verb + noun construction. In this transitive model we have retained the role of Agent from the intransitive model, but the role of Patient is introduced to reflect the novel, more elaborate profiling of the event structure, and this newly created elements have to be bound by the so called morphosyntactic slot-filler, in our case a 'light' verb. The complexity of the more elaborate event structure is thus reflected through the process of a structural iconicity processing when the structural complexity of form corresponds to the cognitive complexity of a concept. Sweetser (1997: 125) stresses one of the most important functions of any periphrastic transformation and that would be a better systematization of semantic roles than it is the case in monolexemic units of meaning. In this sense even the systematic adjectival modifications makes sense because they much more precisely pre-modify the NP when it is isolated in the role of Patient within the canonical transitive event schema, i.e. when the predication is profiled referentially, as a noun to which adjectives are attracted by their very nature and are able to describe it in a more detailed and precise manner. Haiman (1983: 790) notices that:

Intuitively speaking, the conceptual distance between a transitive verb and its complement is lesser than that between an intransitive verb and its complement: the transitive verb affects the object, while the intransitive verb does not.

In support of the idea that the unmarked form for the objective case, the accusative case, foregrounds the idea of accomplishment or success in performing some activity, he gives an example of the Spanish construction *contestar la pregunta* 'answer the question' as completely fulfilling the purpose of the activity, whereas the prepositional complementation *contestar a la pregunta* means only to contribute a response to the question without any clear indication of its being a correct one.

Heine (2004: 105) equals iconicity and isomorphism to what he describes as structural motivation, and even to genetic motivation, which is the central point of interest of his work and describes certain structural correspondences between linguistic and cognitive or some other extra-linguistic phenomena in the process of grammaticalization or diachronic analysis of evolution of certain lexical or grammatical forms. Both genetic and structural motivation is at play in the case of the 'light' verb constructions creating a closely interconnected network of motivational factors.

The corpus has shown that the concept of causative events follows the natural laws of imaging which represents the two most salient participants, Agent and Patient taking part in the process of interaction whereby the Patient role is encoded by the metaphorically transferred sequence of [PROCESS] into the bounded region of [THING] (according to Langacker 1991). In this sense, as Panther and Radden (2004: 16) notice, the semi-otic content-form relation actually involves the metonymic stand-for-relationship governing the iconic motivation between the concept and its linguistic form as an image (or its representation), where the form transfers the image with the gestalt forms of two figures manipulating the scene and being manipulated. In the case of ditransitive construction with *give* the same participants pertain to the imagery, and the role of a Recipient is added when the interaction involves two affected members of the scenario. Our corpus, however, has shown high frequency of 'light' *give* constructions where the Recipient role is missing and this feature only adds elements to the thesis that what is generally encoded in these 'episodic nominalisations,' as Langacker terms them, are actually prototypical transitive processes with the schematically extracted components of verbal behaviour which are directed towards manipulating (possessing: *have*, receiving: *take*; delivering: *give* and producing: *make*) the object in the form of the nominalized verbal roots.

Structural iconicity of the 'light' verb constructions may be well hidden behind the highly schematic meaning of 'light' *have*, *make*, *take* or *give*, but the sheer number of highly entrenched and diachronically attested examples. More closely the iconic elements present in the process of attributing motivating factors to 'light' verb constructions may boil down to what Taylor (2002: 46) also terms *sequential iconicity*, when he points that in a typical transitive clause the linguistic encoding follows the notion that "...the Subject is the conceptual 'starting point' for the conceptualization of a transitive process, and its position before the Object iconically reflects this fact." Additional point to be discussed in this sense might be that the element of the Subject in these constructions would be

the resultative force of the transitive construction being exerted upon the Subject, either for her own pleasure (*have a walk*) or any kind of general benefit (*take a look, make an offer*). Even in the ditransitive constructions with *give* we may claim that the purpose of introducing the transferring process with an Indirect Object has as its motivation the self-centred image of the Subject being described, i.e. his or her behaviour, rather than an intentional directing of an activity towards the recipient encoded by the Indirect Object, which, it is worth noting, may or may not be introduced. Thus, we may have:

(4) He **gave** Roz **a broad wink**.

where the process metaphorically encoded as ACTIONS ARE OBJECTS may be viewed as having for its purpose the potential effects that the nominalized process may have on the recipient, the number of examples with the monotransitive complementation structure of *give*, such as:

(5) She **gave** **a dismissive wave**.

(6) Hal **gave** his baritone **chuckle**.

may point at the conclusion that the focus of attention is on the source of action, the Subject, i.e. the Agent in the role-assigning terminology. In terms of role assignment, Givón's (1995: 46) observation that the topicality scale conventionally distributed as semantic roles of AGT>DAT/BEN>PAT>LOC>INSTR>OTHER, or their respective grammatical roles: SUBJ>DO>IO, reflects the probability of their more topical position in a sentence or some discourse type. This is at odds with the superior position which is in this sense occupied by the Subject, but opposes the more prototypical and referentially encoded concept of the Object position which is taken by a noun, typically introduced by an indefinite article. The nominal Object forces in that manner its individuality and nominal, i.e. referential character into foreground, which is reinforced by the adjectival premodification, another point to be discussed later in the paper.

This clash in the topicality assignment may be the product of the conceptual integration of two competing motivations, the need to put into the foreground the centrality of the source of activity in the role of the Subject, i.e. the Agent, and the necessity to more closely relate the particularities of the process instigated by the Agent. We propose that precisely this integration of intents is the main purpose of these constructions and shall proceed