

DYNAMIC SHIFT IN THE VERB SEMANTICS: A CASE OF SOME FOUR-LETTER VERBS

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The traditional English verb classification based upon their grammatical meaning is a certain matrix according to which new units are grouped. The present investigation is aimed at integral describing the verbs of the 'give' type in the model "to give a smile". The analysis of its constituents does not give any new information, however, its analysis as an integral unit in the sentence and discourse can reveal it as a structural-semantic unity, wherein a redistribution of the lexical meaning takes place. Since Otto Jespersen defined them as "light verbs" they have been in the focus of research of grammarians, semanticists, discourse experts, and cognitologists. In the framework of our research the referred verbs in the given model are presented as the result of grammaticalization and lexicalization — major factors of the English language development.

Key words: dynamic shift, light verb construction, delexicalization, grammaticalization, syntactic composition, semantic composition.

Чотирикласна класифікація англійських дієслів представляє собою фундаментальну матрицю, за якою розподіляються також і нові одиниці. Незважаючи на її принципи, що працюють тільки для регулярних утворень, нерегулярні випадки, як правило, також підтверджують її валідність. Дане дослідження присвячене невеликій групі дієслів типу 'give', які функціонують у структурі "to give a smile". Аналіз її складових не дає нових результатів, проте, як тільки аналізується конструкція у реченні та дискурсі, ми маємо структурно-семантичну єдність, де відбувається перерозподіл значення складових. З часів Отто Єсперсена і його терміна «легкі дієслова» та до сучасної комп'ютерної лінгвістики зазначені дієслова і їхня валентність постійно знаходяться у центрі уваги синтаксистів, семантистів, дискурсологів, когнітологів та інших дослідників. У роботі дані дієслова у жорстко фіксованій моделі є прикладом взаємодії граматикизації та лексикалізації як факторів, що забезпечують подальший розвиток англійської мови.

Ключові слова: динамічний пересув, конструкція з десемантизованим дієсловом, делексикалізація, граматикикалізація, семантична єдність, синтаксична єдність.

Четырёхклассная классификация английских глаголов представляет собой фундаментальную матрицу, согласно которой распределяются также и новые единицы. Несмотря на её принципы, работающие только для регулярных образований, нерегулярные случаи, как правило, также подтверждают её валидность. Данное исследование посвящено небольшой группе глаголов типа 'give', которые функционируют в структуре "to give a smile". Анализ её составляющих не приводит к новым результатам, но, как только анализируется конструкция в составе предложения и дискурса, мы получаем структурно-семантическую общность с перераспределением значения составляющих. Со времён Отто Есперсена и его термина «легкие глаголы» и до современной компьютерной лингвистики данные глаголы и их валентность постоянно находятся в центре внимания синтаксистов, семантиков, дискурсологов, когнитологов и других исследователей. В работе указанные глаголы в жёстко фиксированной модели представляют собой пример взаимодействия граматикизации и лексикализации — основных движущих факторов развития английского языка.

Ключевые слова: динамический сдвиг, конструкции с глаголом облежённой семантики, делексикализация, граматикикализация, семантическое единство, синтаксическое единство.

INTRODUCTION

The paper aims at a usage-based description of the semantic and syntactic characteristics of the verb in the verb phrase like "to give a smile" as a grammatical nucleus of the sentence *She gave a smile.*, see also notions such as general verbs, support verbs, functional verbs, categorial verbs in different theoretical works. We have selected some verbs to illustrate their classification according to the grammatical meaning from the British National Corpus.

Here is an attempt to clarify so-called semantic lightness of such verbs, and the relationship between the notional and 'light' verbs, their semantic and syntactic properties in the text "Theatre" by W. Somerset Maugham.

Verbs, as a class of words [see 22] can be divided into three major categories, according to their function within the verb phrase: the open class of full verbs (or lexical verbs) which can act only as the main verbs; as verbs of the closed class of primary verbs

(*be, have, do*); modal auxiliary verbs acting only as auxiliary verbs [15, 96; 13, 31–40].

Note: the verb *do* as a constituent of full, auxiliary, and emphatic classes which is also considered 'light' will give its description in a special paper.

One can easily prove that the verbs under analysis may find their slot in the first class, e.g.:

1. *She took the revolver, the bullets and her coat to wrap them in, and began to walk towards the woods* (CDY2122).
2. *As the pasta drained, he gave the sauce a quick blast on the ring, and we ate in the middle of his room as enjoyably as in a trattoria* (H8M85).
3. *She says in her calm, posh voice that this is fine, and continues to stir the curry she is making for their evening meal* (ADG180).
4. *In Eddie Fenech-Adami's final rally in Malta in 1981 we had the old stadium in Valetta* (ADK1763).

All of them are transitive and can combine with the subject in preposition and with the object in post-position: *take, give, make, and have* the quality of primary or full verbs.

The verb *have* may also belong to the class of auxiliaries, e.g.:

5. *But I **have** met many who objected to the kind of society it **has** created because of its injustice and inhumanity* (CDW24).

And *have* can be found among the modal auxiliaries, e.g.:

6. *Does this mean that she **has to** invent enemies too* (A2J343)?

The verbs under analysis are not registered among link verbs represented by the verb *be* and its functional equivalents in grammar books [19, 129–130].

Thus, it is hardly possible to name them functionally light or defective in the language system of Modern English [see their differences: 21, 501–519]. The study of the referred verbs in the function of complex ones go back to Otto Jespersen who initiated the term 'light' verb applied to English V+NP constructions *have a rest* ← *to rest*; *to have a read* ← *to read*; *to have a cry* ← *to cry*; *to take a sneak* ← *to sneak*; *to take a drive* ← *to drive*; *to take a walk* ← *to walk*; *to give drive* ← *to drive*; *to give a shout* ← *to shout*; *to give a shiver* ← *to shiver*; *to give a pull* ← *to pull* [12, 117].

Structurally these verbs take the position of the verb-predicate in the sentence structure NP1 + VP + NP2, but semantically in this distribution the verbs do not belong to any domain of full verbs [17, 111–178]. Besides, the NP2 is usually represented by deverbal nouns derived from *verbs* retaining their verbal semantic component which supplements the lexical meaning of the verb generalized in the course of time and together they form one semantic unity [3, 40–57]. This development, we believe, gives

a clue to understanding the VP semantic uniformity of the generalized verb which transformed into the *event* marker and the determiner of the event type retained in the lexical meaning of the deverbal nouns. *Take / give / have / make* verbs represent a type of complex predicate where two syntactic elements serve as a single predicate. Martina Ivanova [11, 47–61] defines several classes of predicative nouns (P-noun) in Slovak: event nominals ('investigation'), resultative nominals ('advice'), state nominals ('fear', 'hunger') and abstract nouns ('wisdom', 'brains'). In the process of their lexical meaning development she underlines their diachronic relationship with to verbs. Ivanova which can specify the meaning of the phrase (in Check cf.: Vaclava Kettnerova and Marketa Lopatkova, 2010). The deverbal nominals are specified by Wendy Jane Grimshaw as *assignment* and *continuation* remarkable for the variety of meanings that they exhibit. They are said to denote, results, manners, actions, processes, events, states, ordinary objects, and proposition. This type of nominalization, she adds, is highly sensitive to aspect, and restrictions on nominalization provide a key source of information concerning the representation of events in language [8, 1292–1313; see also: 15]. In this respect we believe that there must be an aspectual difference between the full (notional) verb, for instance, *take* as lexical imperfective and its semantically simplified form *take* as lexical perfective. Obviously, there are semantic differences between perfective and imperfective verb forms, though it is dubious to speak of differences in meaning as variations of aspect.

However, the verbs are not entirely devoid of semantic predicative content either: there is a clear difference between *take a bath* ← *I take a bath / ride / treat* [myself] and *give a bath / ride / treat* ← *I give / a bath ride / treat* [to someone].

Note: in the indicative *take a bath* with the subject as the 'doer of the action' the thesis is true (7) but in the imperative or request constructions the action refers to someone addressed to (8), [18], cf.:

7. *Cantona will be presented at Old Trafford this afternoon then probably **take a seat** on the bench at Arsenal tomorrow* (CEP10159).
8. *The boss knew I was worked to death, and not wanting to lose me said, "Mick, you **take** a few days".*

In case of (7) the beneficiary of the membership (*take a seat*) is the subject of the sentence — Cantona, while in (8) the addressee is the beneficiary (Mick).

Despite the use of the *take* type as a constituent of the verb phrase does not still bring us closer to its objective description. The fact is this verb serves as a link between the subject and its complement that makes it different from the complement of the lexically full verb. Evidently, these verbs undergo both grammaticalization [10]: fixed distribution,

monosemantic and lexicalization: forming a semantic unity with the deverbal noun [5: 68–97].

CURRENT STATE OF ART

Miriam Butt (2009) states that tests to distinguish light verbs from main verbs or auxiliaries differ from language to language. Naomi Butt points out some more properties to distinguish 'light' verbs from auxiliaries. Light verb forms are always identical to the corresponding main verb whereas auxiliaries are usually just identical at the initial stage of reanalysis from verb to auxiliary; they do not display a defective paradigm; they exhibit subtle lexical semantic differences in terms of combinatorial possibilities with main verbs, are thus restricted in their combinations [7, 1–49]. Auxiliaries, on the other hand, are not restricted in their combinatorial possibilities, but do not have to combine with every main verb. Thus, they seem to neither retain their full semantic predicational content, nor are they semantically completely empty [see lexical functions: 2, 1–13].

Naomi Sager's classification presents a small classification consisting of 13 classes, which groups verbs (mostly) on the basis of their syntactic alternations. While semantic properties are largely ignored, many of the classes appear distinctive also in terms of semantics [20, 59].

Due to their semantic and syntactic characteristics light verbs and light verbs constructions (verb + nominal collocations) pose a challenge to analysis of their semantic-syntactic interface. There are different approaches to the understanding of the function of a light verb within a light verbs construction. According to some authors, in this construction, the meaning of a noun strongly contributes to the meaning of the whole construction, and the meaning of a verb is construed just schematically (see Czech light verbs: Jan Radimský, 2010). Contrary to the claim that LVs are semantically empty verbs, some researchers defend the viewpoint that the lexical selection of LVs is based on their meaning (the hypothesis of the semantic compatibility (c.f. light verb constructions in Spanish: Sanromán Vilas, 2011)). Some authors claim that LVs have a semi-lexical status and the amount of content they contribute and the nature of that content usually depends on the particular LV itself. Within this approach LVs are characterised as semantically "bleached" verbs or as verbs with weakened meaning (M. Butt, 2003, 2010).

On the contrary, A. Korhonen stresses that lexical-semantic classes are aimed to capture the close relationship between the syntax and semantics of verbs; namely, this feature has attracted considerable interest in both linguistics and computational linguistics (see also: S. Pinker, 1989; R. Jackendoff, 1990; B. Levin, 1993; B. Dorr, 1997; H.T. Dang et al., 1998; P. Merlo and S. Stevenson, 2001).

Beth Levin's taxonomy provides a classification of 3,024 verbs (4,186 senses) into 48 broad and 192 fine-grained classes according to their participation in 79 alternations involving NP and PP complements [cf.: 23]. In her rich reference work, Beth Levin classifies over 3,000 English verbs according to shared meaning and behavior. Beth Levin starts with the hypothesis that a verb's meaning influences its syntactic behavior and develops it into a powerful tool for studying the English verb lexicon.

In the other approach, the light verb interpretation arises from the composition of a semantically underspecified verb and its (deverbal) noun complement. Lexical retrieval of the noun complement triggers the specification of either the light or non-light version of the verb [27, 393–413].

The lexical items entering these expressions are either stored with the construction, as in idioms, or connect to the construction through "variable slots". Accordingly, in this approach, light verb constructions are stored in the mental lexicon as separate entries with each verb and noun fully specified (e.g., *take a walk / guess / shower...*). Support for such an approach is found, for example, in the observation that light verb constructions can be idiosyncratic, and can exhibit a high co-occurrence frequency [see: A. Goldberg, 2003].

INVESTIGATION

We will take an attempt to prove that they do retain the component 'action' in their lexical meaning usually actualized in the fixed distribution. No doubt, they appear to be semantically light in some manner that is difficult to identify the transformation in the semantic structure of the verb meaning [see their historical development: 4, 161–185]. Let us express one more idea: the light verbs in the construction are able to express a perfective even / act / process, [see: 9, 59–89].

We shall consider the transformation of the verb *take*:

(1) lay hold of (sth.) with one's hands; reach for and hold; (2) win (*a trick*); (3) capture (*in chess*); dismiss (*in cricket*); (4) dispossess, remove, steal; (5) occupy; (6) rent; (7) agree to buy; (8) use; (9) subscribe; (10) ascertain; (11) have sexual intercourse; (12) write down; (13) make a picture; (14) afflict; (15) subtract; (16) accompany; (17) invade; (18) use some transport; (19) accept; (20) accept; acquire; (21) receive; (22) achieve; (23) act; (23) experience, (24) react, regard; (25) be attracted; (26) submit, tolerate, endure; (27) assume; (28) consume; (29) make, undertake, perform; (30) conduct; (31) be taught; (32) obtain; (33) require; (34) need, call for; (34) wear; (35) become established (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The semantic structure of the full verb *give* differentiate the following components:

(1) transfer the possession; (2) hand over, pay; (3) do sth.; (4) commit, entrust; (5) set aside or devote; (6) sanction; (7) consent to; (8) cause or allow; (9) allow; (10) pass on; (11) make a connection; (12) carry out, perform; (13) produce; (14) allot; (15) present; (16) provide; (17) yield; (18) emit, vapour; (19) concede; (20) place (a special value); (21) sentence; (22) s declare; (23) adjudicate; (24) state, put forward; (25) pledge, offer; (26) say; (27) deliver; (28) predict; (29) tell; (30) resist, break; (31) yield; (32) concede, defeat, surrender (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The semantic structure of the full verb *make* is constituted by the following components:

(1) create; (2) compose, draw up; (3) prepare; (4) arrange; (5) complete, close; (6) cause to bring about; (7) carry out, perform, produce; (8) communicate; (9) contract; (10) appoint, designate; (11) represent; (12) compel; (13) constitute; (14) developed; (15) estimate; (16) agree, decide; (17) gain, earn; (18) score; (19) manage; (20) succeed; (21) achieve; (22) prepare; (23) act; (24) induce; (25) win; (26) shuffle (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

The lexical meaning of the verb *have* includes the following components:

(1) possess, own, hold; (2) provide, indulge; (3) comprise; (4) make use of; (5) know (a subject); (6) experience; undergo; (7) suffer from; (8) come into one's mind; hold in the mind; (9) cause; (10) tell, arrange; (11) cheat, deceive; (12) indulge in; (13) perform; (14) organize; (15) eat, drink; (16) give birth; (17) show; (18) exercise; (19) accept, tolerate; (20) hold, grasp; (21) take, invite (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

All these constituents may share one common component in their lexical meaning 'action' and may be grouped under the heading 'Lexical-semantic field of action verbs [see: 6, 1–49]. Evidently, there is a case of semantic simplification which the verb *take* undergoes in the referred construction:

TAKE (37 components) → TAKE (generalized component 'ACTION')

GIVE (30 components) → TAKE (generalized component 'ACTION')

MAKE (32 components) → TAKE (generalized component 'ACTION')

HAVE (29 components) → HAVE (generalized component 'ACTION'),

where it has the nucleus component 'possession' which can be reinterpreted as 'obtain' or 'cause' someone to do something (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The rest of the components in the lexical meaning become covert in this distribution.

Further the same structures and related issues may be found under various headings, for example, verb-nominal phrases (Akimoto, 1989) or verb-nominal predication (L. Dušková, 2003). And some linguists even do not employ any term for this group of verbs,

e.g. A. Wierzbicka writes about *have* in the Verb frame or in its full title: periphrastic *have* constructions [26, 753–799]. As regards grammar books, delexical verbs are customarily referred to multi-word verbs or discussed under the category of transitivity or complement. But in textbooks, delexical structures are usually presented as collocations, e.g. 'have + noun' phrase. This will be described in greater detail in due course.

We call *take*, *give*, *make*, *have* semantically simplified: all the components of the lexical meaning but one turn covert in this distribution and the meaning of the noun specifies the meaning of the construction.

I. NP +VP

[V 'TAKE' (ACT QUANTIFIER) + N (DEVERBAL)]

Take is used in the sense of "to accept or choose something that is offered, suggested, or given to you". It is also *take* with nouns denoting **washing**: *a bath, a shower, a wash*; **resting**: *a break, a holiday, a rest* [see 24, 579]; and nouns denoting: *care, a photograph, a turn, trouble, a chance, a risk, a decision*; e.g.:

9. *After all, with the exercise I take I can eat anything I like.*

10. *He took no notice of the flippant rejoinder.*

II. NP +VP

[V 'GIVE' (ACT QUANTIFIER) + N (DEVERBAL)]

Give is used in the senses of "tell somebody something: tell someone information or details about something", or "tell someone what they should do with" and they can be used with nouns denoting: *food, drink*, etc, e.g.:

11. *I thought we might take him back with us and give him a spot of lunch.*

With nouns denoting **noises**: *a cry, a laugh, a scream, a shout, a whistle.*

12. *She gave a loud laugh.*

It can be also used with nouns denoting:

— **facial expressions**: *a smile, a grin, a look, a glance*, e.g.:

13. *John gave a happy smile.*

— **hitting**: *a kick, a punch, a slap, a push, a knock, a blow*;

— **affectionate actions or processes**: *a hug, a kiss, a stroke*, e.g.:

14. *She was surprised to receive a letter one morning from Mrs. & Mr. Gosselyn, Michael's mother, saying that it would give the Colonel and herself so much pleasure if she would come with Michael to spend the week at Cheltenham.*

— **talking**: *some advice, an answer, some information, an interview, a lecture, some news, a report, a speech, a talk, a warning*, e.g.:

15. *Julia gave them a wistful look before she shook her head in refusal.*
16. *She gave the butler a significant glance; he was at that moment helping.*
17. *She gave him the quick, delightful smile, with a slight lift of her fine eyebrows, which he must often have seen her give on the stage.*
18. *It gave them a sort of horrible satisfaction to comply with his outrageous demands.*

III. NP +VP

[V 'MAKE' (ACT QUANTIFIER) + N (DEVERBAL)]

Make can be used in the sense of do "with some nouns to say that someone does something" [1, 173–195]; it can combine with nouns:

— **of talking and sounds:** *a comment, an enquiry, a noise, a point, a promise, a sound, a speech, a suggestion, e.g.:*

19. *The young man forced himself to make a remark. What a stunning room this is.*

— **denoting planning:** *arrangements, a choice, a decision, a plan, plans, an appointment, a date, e.g.:*

20. *I don't believe one could hope to make a success in London unless one were pretty well-known already.*

IV. NP +VP

[V 'HAVE' (ACT QUANTIFIER) + N (DEVERBAL)]

Have is used in the sense "offering something to someone". It can be used:

— with nouns denoting **food and drink:** *a meal, breakfast, lunch, dinner, a snack, a cup of tea, e.g.:*

21. *It was really rather wonderful, when you came to think of it, that just to have lunch with her and talk to her for three quarters of an hour, perhaps, could make a man quite important in his own scrubby little circle.*

— in expressing **talking:** *a chat, a conversation, a discussion, a talk;*

— in expressing **washing:** *a bath, a shower, a wash, a scrub, e.g.:*

22. *You can have a wash and brush up when we get home.*

— in expressing **resting:** *a break, a holiday, a rest;*
 — in expressing **disagreeing:** *an argument, a dispute, a fight, a quarrel, e.g.:*

23. *Notwithstanding her cropped peroxide hair and her heavily-painted lips she had the neutral look that marks the perfect secretary.*

24. *He had affection and admiration for her, he felt at ease with her, and he had confidence in her, but she was well aware that he was not in love with her.*

In this approach, light verb constructions are stored in the mental lexicon as separate entries with each verb and noun fully specified (e.g.: *take a walk*

/ guess / shower). A support for such an approach can be found, for example, in the observation that these verb constructions can be idiosyncratic, and can exhibit a high co-occurrence frequency [see: 25, 31–39; A. Goldberg, 2003].

Despite the fact that the semantically simplified (light, delexicalized, auxiliary) verbs are actually very common verbs, there are not many of them. The most common and productive delexical verbs are: *give, make, have, take*.

Although the semantic weight of these verbs used in this way is reduced, they cannot be used interchangeably, e.g. *give a bath* is not the same as *have a bath*. Further, Minoji Akimoto (1989) pointed out they often do not allow a substitution by synonymous verbs, such as for *make* — *produce, create*, or for *take* — *grab* or *catch*. While it might seem that delexical verbs are redundant, they contribute otherwise to a message, at least they function as the bearer of grammatical information indicated by inflectional endings.

Apart from the four examples mentioned above, which frequently recur in various sources, there are other verbs which adopt the same structure (e.g.: *to pay a visit, to throw a glance*) [3], namely, *hold, keep, throw, cast, pay, raise, set, put, bear*.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

This paper has surveyed a number of light verbs and their correlation with full and auxiliary verbs in English and revealed the semantic simplification transformation which they undergo due to their distribution in the construction: "Verb *take* + Deverbal Noun". Indeed, in many instances this construction is used to refer simultaneously to the piece of content and the physical object that holds that content.

The function of light verbs is to modulate the event predication of a main predicator in the clause. Different light verbs will do so in different ways and some of the semantic contributions are quite subtle. This is in part because of the flexible interpretation of the underlying lexical semantics. The verbs which allow light verb readings have lexical semantic specifications that are of a very general nature. This allows them to appear in a wide variety of syntactic contexts.

The idea that light verbs and their corresponding main verbs are derived from one and the same underlying representation accounts for the fact that light verbs are always form identical to a main verb counterpart in the language and that they are stable with respect to historical change.

They represent a crosslinguistic phenomenon: they are common, for instance, in Japanese, Turkish, Romance languages, Slavic languages or Urdu. Hence, the other related trend in the delexical verbs research is translation.

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