On English Light Verb Extensions: analysis, types, and classification
Roberta Mastrofini (University of Perugia)

The syntax-semantics interface in Light Verb Constructions (henceforth, LVCs) has been a highly discussed topic in linguistic research since Jespersen’s definition (1954: 117-118). Over the past thirty years the interest in a similar syntagmatic construction called “Light Verb Extension” (henceforth, LVE) has also emerged, even though scarcely investigated (cf. Vives 1983, Cicalese 1999). A LVE (i.e. to cultivate a hobby, to launch a project, to deliver a speech) is represented by the combination of a full lexical predicate and an eventive noun. While the verb, under certain syntagmatic conditions, loses most of its semantic configuration, and serves as an aspectual device, the eventive noun, that is a nominal item that implies a process having duration and phases (cf. Kiefer and Gross 1995, Kiefer 1998), carries the semantics of the pattern, as in prototypical LVCs (i.e. to give an explanation, to make a call). This is made possible since any verb involved in a LVE construction undergoes a process of bleaching through the interaction with the semantic configuration underlying the nominal element it combines with. In other words, the lightness of the pattern is contextually licensed by the *qualia* interaction (cf. Pustejovsky 1998) between the verb and the noun.

The present contribution aims at accounting for this interesting phenomenon in English, both from a syntactic and an aspectual semantic viewpoint, by using Pustejovsky’s Lexical Model known as The Generative lexicon (henceforth, GL) as an analytic tool.

According to Pustejovsky’s GL, the semantics of a lexical item can be defined as a structure consisting of four levels of analysis and representation, and takes into account: its argument realization, the aspectual configuration of the event, the *qualia* (a set of properties associated with the event described that express what that word actually means), and the way the meaning of a lexeme contributes to the global organization of a language’s lexicon. A number of English LVEs, retrieved from the CoCa Corpus of Contemporary English (http://corpus2.byu.edu/coca/), was classified according to the different aspectual semantic configuration licensed by the verb, and the number and type of arguments represented in its syntactic realization. The results showed that a large variety of LVEs exists in English, exhibiting different aspectual configurations: inchoative (i.e. to fall in love), continuative (i.e. to grow a hobby), iterative (i.e. to reap success), resultative (i.e. to deliver a speech), and transformative (i.e. to conclude an agreement). By analyzing the aspectual implications carried by the verb, and the way they interact with (and are affected by) the noun at a syntagmatic level it was also possible to establish a lexical continuum that goes from prototypical LVCs to verb-noun collocations, and posit the syntactic-semantic status of LVEs in between.

References


