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PROCESSES THAT UNDERLIE MODULATION OF ENGLISH VERB MEANING

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Abstract

The article deals with the present day problem of linguistic explanation of modulation of verb meaning in various lexico-semantic groups. Based on a number of English lexico-semantic verb groups the authors show in a well-argued manner that certain standard language processes underlie semantic modulations. Modulations of verb meaning are related to such processes as change of cognitive space types, actualization of various functional relations, social relations in particular. Moreover the modulation of meaning is defined by such standard semantic process as abstraction of the predicate from the time axis, shifting of the predicate from a concrete single action in prototypical meaning into an abstract heterogeneous type (the verb *depart*). Modulation of verb meaning is analyzed in terms of such standard process as focusing on various aspects of a denotative situation. As it is shown in the article this very process can be the source of meanings variation within one meaning of a verb, can be the introduction of additional meanings of one verb or the use of the other verb from the synonymic lexico-semantic verb group. It is the difference of interpretation of actual relations between participants of the situation that matters as the source of differential information in the verbs of "protection". The article also deals with semantics of non-causative verbs in causative constructions which is considered as a standard linguistic phenomenon of the influence of a causative construction on a non-causative verb meaning within the theory of Construction Grammar.

Keywords: Causative construction, cognitive semantic construction, semantic type of the predicate, standard language processes, syntactic construction, verbal lexis.

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1. Introduction

In linguistic studies over the last years a number of priority areas can be distinguished. One can mention standard intralinguistic processes that allow to explain many semantic shifts including the occurrence of polysemy and contextual variants of meaning of verbal lexis in contemporary English.

A number of statements of the semantic theory related to the Construction Grammar makes it possible to explain the occurrence of the so-called nontrivial word meanings (Fillmore, 1985; Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor, 1988; Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Jackendoff, 1990, 1993, 2013). Within this theory the introduction of a new meaning is caused by getting of the verb into another cognitive semantic and syntactic construction. Such mechanism of meaning modulation is often called a cognitive metaphor or a metonymy without revelation of internal language mechanisms which promote appearance of this new meaning. As early as in 2008 Rahilina (2008) noted that "the changeable nature of constructions allows the language to vary flexibly and continuously (without losing contact with its antecedent time sample)" (p. 338) and in the context of linguistics it is essential to know how the semantic type of the predicate is related to the phenomenon of cognitive metaphor and metonymy.

The effect of these internal language mechanisms closely connected with semantic roles modulation and some other standard language processes will be shown by analysis of semantic mutations in a number of lexico-semantic groups of English verbal lexis.

2. Problem Statement

Insufficient understanding of standard language processes that underlie the modulation of verbs lexical meaning is the cause of lexicographical practice drawbacks when the information about the denotative situations is presented as individual meanings, i.e. the linguistic information about the meaning is substituted by the information about the denotation.

3. Research Questions

One of the leading theses of the Construction Grammar is the thesis that the meaning of a language unit is influenced by the context, that the cognitive construction turns out to be the leading meaning-generating factor in the verbal meaning formation, it is the construction that determines the true meaning of the verb (Fillmore, 1985; Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Jackendoff, 1990, 1993, 2013), and the last but not the least idea is connected with not a verb centric position of the verb in opposition to a verb centric position (Tener, 1988).

The term "construction" in the frames of this approach is understood not only as a formal-syntactic construction, but also as a cognitive formation that can reveal the systemic relations between the actants of a situation, predict the semantic structure of the verb, its grammatical categories and compatibility. The meaning of the construction affects the semantic parameters of the verb directly. From this perspective of understanding semantic processes it is the construction that is the central figure of the sentence that affects the change of the verb meaning, generating non-trivial meanings with metaphorical meaning. The meaning of a verb inserted into a cognitive construction is determined by the semantic and syntactic parameters of this construction as a whole.

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The real meaning of the verb in a particular statement is dependent on the semantics of the structure. At the same time, the verb can both realize its prototypical meaning or modify it in order to function adequately in a given utterance. Consequently, not the verb, but the construction itself will determine which semantic roles will fill the slots of the frame and how the semantic type of the predicate will be changed as a standard language mechanism of a new meaning (Shabanova, Sulejmanova, Shvajko, & Volkova, 2015).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal standard language processes that underlie the modulation of verb lexical meaning of a number of verb groups of contemporary English.

5. Research Methods

The leading method used in conducting the research is hypothetical-deductive. It provides a scientifically based research, meets the objectives of the study, allows to formulate hypotheses, to carry out experimental verification, analyze the results and summarize them. In the framework of this method, the analysis of language material was carried out. The language material was obtained by sampling from original texts of English and American classical and modern literature, English advertising texts, as well as on-line National Corpora. Semantic interpretation and component analysis were also used as research methods.

6. Findings

Let us consider the mechanisms of standard language processes in a number of examples. In the lexico-semantic group of English verbs of leaving the verb *depart* is one of the most frequent. Its prototypical meaning presupposes the presence of the three actants of a situation: X is the subject of the action, Y is the object left by the subject and Y1 is the object of the action whose space X is directed to achieve. For example, 1. *He departed Antwerp for London on the steamship*. In this example, *depart* refers to the homogeneous predicate localized on the time axis as a "point". The Subject *He* is endowed with the semantic role of Actor in which the components "application of force" and "controllability" are present (Shabanova et al., 2015). Consequently, in this sentence the semantic type of the predicate is the action and its subtype in relation to the time axis is one-time action. The semantic-syntactic construction of the verb in this lexico-semantic meaning is as follows:

depart + [*Act, Loc*$_{initial,}$ *Loc*$_{final}$], where Act is Actor, Loc$_{\text{initial}}$ — locative case indicating the position of the Subject before performing the action, Loc$_{\text{final}}$ — locative case indicating the direction of the Subject.

As it was established in the study, the change in the meaning of *depart* is associated with the information about leaving not a physical three-dimensional space, but a different type of space, a space of functional relations, called the space of sets (Seliverstova, 2004). The change of meaning is also associated with the emergence of a different type of the predicate in relation to the axis time - a heterogeneous type (Shabanova, 1998).

The following sentence can be a vivid example of the influence of these standard language processes on the change of the verb meaning: 2. *George Washington, as we all know, advised strongly, as he departed*

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his presidency, that we should avoid all entangling alliances with foreign nations. - Ron Paul. The first standard semantic process is change of the type of the space (X (*he*) breaks off the functional relationship with Y (*his presidency*)), the second standard semantic process is the change of the predicate type in relation to the time axis – the verb *depart* becomes a heterogeneous type of the predicate.

The denotate of the predicate expressed by the verb *depart* is abstracted from the time axis and conveys information on leaving the space of functional relationships between X (*he*) and Y (*his presidency*). Being a heterogeneous predicate, the verb *depart* includes a number of different actions of breaking functional relationships within a social position (presidency). The result of breaking functional relationships is that the Subject *he* ceases to be part of personal and social relationships (presidency), losing its social status as the president. Thus, this sentence illustrates an example of semantic change in the personal spatial relations of the subject X and its shifting to a special type of space of sets. X loses the status of a member of a certain social functional space of sets, while the social space of sets itself remains the same. This semantic information appears to be a definite basis for distinguishing the separate meaning of the verb and its shifting from the semantic group of leaving to the semantic group of verbs of retiring, resigning.

The semantic-syntactic scheme of the verb *depart* in this meaning will be as follows:

depart + *[Act,* $O_{Func.Rel.Part\ of\ the\ Whole}$], where Act is the Actor of the action, $O_{Func.Rel.Part\ of\ the\ Whole}$– Locative case presenting a space of sets where the functional relations between X and Y arise (part of a whole).

Being localized on the time axis the predicate denotate expresses a specific homogeneous action as the prototypical meaning of the verb. In this case, the verb *depart* communicates information about the physical three-dimensional space left by the Subject.

Modulation in the meaning of the verb *depart* is associated with shifting of the predicate from the homogeneous type to the heterogeneous types of the predicate. At the same time this shifting is accompanied by communicating the meaning of functional relationships leading to complication of the semantic structure and emergence of non-trivial meanings of the verb.

Thus, this part of the study shows that modulations in the meaning of the verb meaning are associated with changing of the type of space which expresses functional relations, social relations in particular. Moreover, change in meaning is determined by such standard semantic processes as abstraction of the predicate from the time axis, shifting from a specific one-time action of the prototypical meaning to the heterogeneous type of the predicate as a result of abstraction from the time axis.

Let us consider what standard language processes can be the cause of modulation in the meaning of English verbs of the so called “protection” semantic group. Some of the most frequent verbs of this group include: *protect, defend, secure, preserve, guard, safeguard* and *shield*. These verbs contain the common semantic component that is expressed by a general semantic dominant which unites them into one synonymic group: *Subject X is the Source of Force Application for creation (preservation) of a Barrier from the negative effect of* Y_2 *(Threat) on* Y_1 *(Object)*. The integral meaning of these verbs is the presence of this actant frame in the semantic structure of all the verbs of this “protection” lexico-semantic group. At the same time each of these verbs contains differential information which distinguishes a certain verb from the other verbs of this group by the existence of certain differential semantic components which make restrictions on the use of these verbs.

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The dictionary entries for the verb *shield* in English and English-Russian dictionaries have been analyzed to find out that the verb *shield* with the meaning of protection is interpreted with the use of its synonyms: in English dictionaries the verb *shield* is interpreted first of all with the verb *protect*. The dictionary entries analysis reveals uncertainty of the provided in the dictionaries information about the characteristics of denotative situation which requires the use of the given verb as the meaning of this verb is interpreted with its synonyms and differential information about the characteristics of the denotative situation which defines the use of this verb isn't expressed.

The analysis of sentences with this verb indicated that the frame structure of the verb *shield* meaning protection involves an additional participant of the situation that is a means of protection.

3. *He shielded his eyes from sight with a raised arm.* Harry Harrison

The semantic structure of the verb *shield* can be described as follows: *the Subject X (he) creating a Barrier with the help of the Instrument Z (a raised arm) is the source of the Application of Force protecting the Object Y_1 (his eyes) from the Threat Y_2 (sight).* The semantic model of the verb *shield* can be presented as follows:

shield + *[Act, O_{aff}, $O_{source\ (threat)}$), Instr]*, where Act is the semantic role of Actor characterized by Controlled Force Application that comes from the Subject (*he*) as the Subject is a living being with high psych activity (Shabanova et al., 2015); O_{aff} is the semantic role of Object affect characterized by the lack of changes in the Object as the changes in the Object that come from the Subject don't take place; $O_{source\ (threat)}$ is the semantic role of the Object which represents a Threat or a potential Threat; Instr is the semantic role of Instrument.

4. *Mom knocks in and too late, I shield the page, cause up I glance at my sister's wary eyes, hear the pause that won't prod me when there's nothing I want to confess.* - Rajbanshi Reema

In this sentence the Subject (*I*) is a Barrier protecting the Object Y_1 (*the page*) from the Threat Y_2 (*Mom knocks in and too late*) with the help of the intended Instrument Z (*with my hand*).

The semantic model of the verb *shield* can be presented as follows:

Shield + [Act, O_{aff}, $O_{source\ (threat)}$]

5. *The body of the asteroid will shield us from the radiation! - Ben Bova*

This sentence has the information about the fact that the Subject X (*The body of the asteroid*) represents the Instrument which creates a Barrier between the Object Y_1 (*us*) and the Threat Y_2 (*the radiation*). In this sentence the change in the actant frame of the verb *shield* can be observed. The Subject as a living being with high psych activity is absent but the attention is given to the fact that the Subject itself is the Instrument protecting the Object from the Threat. The semantic model of the verb *shield* in this sentence can be presented as follows:

Shield + [Instr, O_{aff}, $O_{source\ (threat)}$)]

6. The divine ones will shield your children. - Richard Bowes

In this sentence the Subject X (*The divine ones*) is the Instrument, a Barrier for protection of the Object Y_1 (*your children*) from the intended Threat Y_2.

The semantic model of the verb *shield* in this sentence can be presented as follows:

Shield + [Instr, O_{aff}]

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Thus, the semantic structure of the verb *shield* with the meaning "protect" presented in English dictionaries by the verb *protect* has the following prototypical model:

Shield + [Act (Instr), O_{aff}, $O_{source\ (threat)}$, Instr], where Act is the semantic role of Actor characterized by Controlled Force Application that comes from the Subject or the Instrument; O_{aff} is the semantic role of the Object affect characterized by the lack of changes in the Object; $O_{source\ (threat)}$ is the semantic role of the Object which represents a Threat or a potential Threat; Instr is the semantic role of Instrument.

The dictionary entries data showed that the semantic structure of the verb *shield* doesn't contain the protection information in all its meanings, for example: in Cambridge Dictionary (2019) entry (2. in football, to keep your body between an opponent and the ball, with your back to the other player, to prevent them from getting the ball), in Oxford Dictionary (2019) entry (1.1 prevent from being seen), in Macmillan Dictionary (2019) entry (3. in sport, to keep your body close to the ball and prevent an opponent from touching it) and in ABBYY lingvo dictionary (2019) entry (3. тех. экранировать) other actant relations different from protection relations are presented.

Let us consider the situation of separating out individual meanings of the verb *shield* in the dictionary entries. However, in our view they are not the individual meanings. In this case there are variations of denotative situations, but not different meanings of the verb. The dictionary entries illustrating this statement have been analyzed to find out the following:

The verb *shield* has the following individual meanings in the dictionaries:

- *to protect someone or something* (Cambridge Dictionary 2019);
- *protect from a danger, risk, or unpleasant experience* (Oxford Dictionary, 2019);
- *to protect something, usually from being hit, touched, or seen;*
- *to protect someone from something unpleasant* (Macmillan Dictionary, 2019)

The semantic modelling of these meanings of the verb *shield* represents the actualization of a basic semantic model:

- to protect someone or something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019) – in this meaning the information about the Object Y_1 to be protected is emphasized;
- to protect from a danger, risk, or unpleasant experience (Oxford Dictionary, 2019) - in this meaning the semantics of the Threat from Y_2 is emphasized;
- to protect something, usually from being hit, touched, or seen (Macmillan Dictionary, 2019) - in this meaning the semantics of the Object Y_1 to be protected and the Threat Y_2 is emphasized;
- to protect someone from something unpleasant (Macmillan Dictionary, 2019) - in this meaning the information about of the Object Y_1 to be protected and the Threat Y_2 is emphasized.

Thus, it is impossible to say that these are the individual meanings. They are one and the same meaning presented in different variants. The individual meanings of the verb *shield* presented in the dictionaries are the denotative situation variants, world knowledge description but not individual meanings. In this case the standard language process of denotative situation understanding from a certain perspective focusing on a certain denotation characteristic and the elimination of other aspects of the situation are observed. However, this process occurs based on the same meaning of the verb as the information about a means of protection is focused. In this case the prototypic model of the verb *shield* is changed due to the actant frame modulation.

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The reverse process is observed when while naming the situation certain denotative situation characteristics that require the use of the other verb with protection meaning are focused. Whereas the verb *shield* is used when a means of protection is emphasized, different denotative situation characteristics are emphasized in other verbs. Thus, the verb *secure* is used in case when information about preserving a status quo (non exchangeable state) of the Object (Y_1) to be protected is stressed:

7. Happy days," he laughed, pushing open the door to his quarters and rubbing his hands together with glee. The guard shoved Mikah in after him and locked the door. Jason ***secured*** *it with his own interior bolt, then waved the two others over to the corner furthest from the door and the tiny window opening. Harry Harrison.*

In this sentence the Subject X (*Jason*) applies Force to take certain actions to preserve the status quo of The Object Y_1 (*locked the door*) at the intended (potential) Threat from Y_2 (*opening of the door*).

The prototypical meaning of the verb *secure* under the influence of the Benefactive construction can modulate its meaning:

8. She really felt quite triumphant at the ease with which she ***had secured*** *several valuable pieces of mahogany which she knew had always been favorites with Julia. Grace Livingston Hill.*

In this sentence the change of actant relations is observed. In case the protection semantics isn't eliminated it becomes a part of presupposition. Benefactive relationship come to the fore: the Subject X (*she*), having Benefactive relations with the Instrument Z (*several valuable pieces of mahogany*), creates obstacles for Y_2 (*had always been favorites with Julia*) that has Benefactive relations with the Instrument Z, so that Y_1 (*Julia*) owned Z at the real or potential Threat Y_2.

Thus, the prototypical meaning of the verb *secure* as its derivative with Benefactive semantics focuses on the creation of an obstacle to the effect of the Threat Y_2.

In the semantics of the verb *defend* the emphasis is made on the activity of the Subject towards the Threat Y_2. It can include physical or verbal actions of the Subject with the help of some Instrument Z to preserve the Object Y_1. Although the Threat is not always expressed, X is active and gets in contending touch with the Threat Y_2 with possible aim of damage. For example:

9. *We* ***defend*** *our homeland against those who would destroy our freedoms and our way of life. Alex Irvine.*

In this sentence the Subject X (*we*) interacts with the Threat Y_2 (*those who would destroy our freedoms and our way of life*) with the purpose of preserving the Object Y_1 (*homeland*).

Thus, such a standard process as focusing on various aspects of a denotative situation can become a source of meaning variability within one meaning of the verb, the introduction of connotations of one verb or "require" the use of the other verb from the "protection" lexico-seamantic group. The differential information of the verbs *secure*, *shield* and *defend* depends on the type of actant relationships.

The most obvious example of meaning modulation of the verb is the ingress of a verb into the causative construction. The syntactic structure of this construction is closely correlated with a causative situation. Sentences with causative verbs are a common way of representing a causative situation in the language. Causative verbs differ from non-causative transitive verbs at a deep semantic level, their actants are not the subject and an object, but the subject of causation (S1) - the antagonist and the subject of the causable state or action (S2) - the agonist (Apresyan, 1974). Schematically it can be shown as:

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V + (S1,S2), where S1 is the subject of causation, S2 is the subject or an object of the causable state or action, and V is the predicate with the semantics of causation, expressed by the transitional so-called "auxiliary" verb, and aimed at changing the state or action of S2. For example: *She caused the horse to walk*, where S1 - *she* (the subject of causation), V - *caused* (the so-called "auxiliary causative verb"), S2 - *the horse* (the object of causable action).

Let us consider the standard language processes in different types of causative constructions. Modern researchers distinguish several types of the causative construction in English:

1. Analytical type.

Analytical causative constructions contain two separate lexical elements corresponding to two events of the causal situation. The first lexical element is a linking (auxiliary) verb (let, make, have, get) that expresses the reason why the subject performs a certain action or process, for example: *He made her cry.* In this example, the linking verbs is *made*. It is important to note that the verb *make* is used with causative semantics, which is not typical of the prototypical meaning of the verb *make*. The causation meaning is acquired by the verb *make* while getting into the causative construction. The same can be said about other the so-called causative “auxiliary” verbs *let, get, have, make, cause, force, permit, allow*. Consequently, the standard linguistic process that influences the modulation of the meaning of these verbs is the usage in the analytical causative construction.

Causative constructions are the most frequent in advertising texts. Let us consider the analytical causative constructions in the advertising text of the products of *Sony's PlayStation 4*: 10. *Sony's dominant console has been around for years, so give new life with some additions that* ***makes it even easier*** *to get lost in a new experience.* The causative construction in this example is the construction with the verb *make*: make + [S1, S2 (CO)], where S1 is *Sony's dominant console has been around for years, so give new life with some additions* (the subject of causation), S2(CO) is *it even easier to get lost in a new experience* (the object of causable action, expressed by complex object (CO))

In the formation of such analytical constructions, the prototypical meaning of the full lexical verb is transformed under the following process: the focus is on the subject's intention and expression of the will is manifested. Lexically meaningful prototypical meaning of these verbs is eliminated or becomes presupposed. The expression of the will is presented in the form of permissiveness *(allow, let, permit*), impulse to action (*get, make, have, force*), causation (cause).

2. Lexical type.

The main expressions of the lexical type of causative constructions are words and derivational affix morphemes. Words that express the causation structurally can be:

- derivatives:

a) the causative words which are formed with the help of suffixes *-en, -ize, -(i)fy –ate*. For example: 11. *The gusto of her favour* ***frightened*** *him even a little* (Dreiser); 12. *The operation will* ***equalize*** *cerebral fluid to ease the strain on the vertebrae*; 13. *The music* ***animates*** *us to feel*; *Every day they* ***clarify*** *some things that happens in this country.* But not all the verbs with the suffix - fy (-ify) are causative. To produce the action is not to cause a change, and many verbs with this suffix are not causatives (*classify*). It means that the – fy (-ify) suffix can form a causation only from certain nominal bases (Filimonova, 2014).

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b) causative words which are formed with the help of using the prefixes *dis-, un-, em-, en,* for example: embelish, unbutton, discolour, discourage, enslave, enliven, encourage: 14. *And although she knew he talked to* ***encourage*** *her to do what he had not the courage or skill to do himself, she was not angry (Dreiser)*, where the subject of causation is *he,* and the subject of the second causable action is *her to do*... . The semantics of causation is explicated in the word *encourage*, with the help of the prefix en-;

- **compound**: overcome. For example: 15. *It was a prelude to the blankness that often overcame him*, where S1- *that (a prelude)* (subject of causation), V- *overcame*, S2- *him to be in blankness* (object of causable action);

- **non-derivative**: set, lay, raise. For example, ... *the news set me thinking*..., where S1 is *the news* (subject of causation), S2 is me *thinking* (object of causable action).

The difference between the lexical way of expressing causation and analytical type is that the prototypical meaning of the verbs in the lexical type remains, only the addition seme of causation is added, thus focusing the attention on the causational aspect of the denotative situation.

In a real use of language, the position of S1 and S2 may change. For example, in sentence 16. *Mary stared at the corpse in disgust*, the position of the subject of causation changes, as *the corpse* will be the subject that causes the subject *Mary* to *stare*. This can be proved by tests (Shabanova et al., 2015). For example, at the initial stage of the predicate it is impossible to say **Stare at the corpse in disgust!*, but we can say *Don't stare at the corpse in disgust!* Since the imperative construction is a test for the controllability of the action on the part of the subject, it proves that the causative subject of the action is the object *the corpse*, but not the subject *Mary*, i.e. the quality of the object *the corpse* causes the process *stare*.

The following sentence is a vivid example of acquisition of causative semantics of a non-causative verb: 17. *He started him into action.* Non-causative verb *stare* gets into the causative construction in this sentence and confers a causative meaning due to the quality of view (power of sight, tension, intensity) which are understood in the aspect of causation due to the vivid result (action). The semantic core of the whole causative construction is the second proposition (*him into action*). In this case, the verb *stare* can be considered as a contextual synonym of causative verbs *make, get, have*.

Thus the appearance of causative meaning in non-causative verbs is considered a standard linguistic process of transforming of non-causative verbs into contextually causative ones under the influence of focusing on a causational aspect of the situation while getting into the causative construction.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the study of modulation in the meaning of verbs of different lexico-semantic groups shows that the semantic modulations are based on system standard language processes:

- changing of the type of space, the elimination of the semantics of physical space and emergence of the functional relations;
- abstraction of the denotate of the predicate from the time axis, shifting from a specific one-phase action in the prototypical meaning to different types of heterogeneous predicates as a result of abstraction from the time axis;
-focusing on various aspects of a denotative situation can become a source of meaning variability within one meaning of the verb;

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- modulation in the relations between actants;

- acquisition of new meaning due to getting into a different lexical and semantic structure (semantic type of the predicate, various types of semantic and syntactic structures).

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