

Light verb constructions from a cross-linguistic perspective

Anna Riccio (Foggia University) & Jens Fleischhauer (Cologne University)

Light verb constructions (LVCs) are (semantically) complex predicates consisting of a semantically light verb and an additional non-verbal element (e.g., Alsina et alii. 1997; Amberber et alii. 2010; Butt 2010). The non-verbal element contributes the main predicational to the complex predicate and is – in the most typical cases – either a nominal (phrase) – as in (1) – or a prepositional phrase (2).

(1) *xunrizi kardan* (Persian < Iranian < Indo-European)
bleeding do
'to bleed'

(2) *onder stress staan* (Dutch < Germanic < Indo-European)
under stress stand
'be stressed'

Light verb constructions are attested in typologically and areally divers languages like, for instance, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, Persian, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Turkish, Hindi/Urdu, Japanese and Korean. The literature on this topic is rather extensive, however, it is far from obvious whether the complex expressions dubbed 'light verb constructions' in the mentioned – as well as other – languages have the same properties. Irrespective of cross-linguistic issue, LVCs present a challenge for semantics, syntax and morphology.

The analysis of LVCs gives rise to a number of (interrelated) questions:

(i) What are the essential properties of light verb constructions in individual languages?

(ii) Are there any crosslinguistically recurrent properties of light verb constructions?

Proposed properties of light verb constructions – often mentioned in the relevant literature – include, for instance, the following:

(iii) Desemantization of the finite verb,

(iv) Non-referentiality of the nominal element.

Desemantization of the finite verb manifests in:

(v) different degrees of verb lightness, functions of codifying grammatical features (such as TAM features and person, e.g., Gross 2004).

Non-referentiality of the nominal element manifests in:

(vi) different degrees of predicativeness of LVCs' nouns (Simone 2007)

(vii) reduced modifiability of the nominal element,

(viii) severe restrictions on the use, variance and interpretation of articles.

Although such claims are frequently encountered in the relevant literature, they are very rarely tested on the basis of experimental or corpus linguistic data (exceptions are He & Wittenberg 2020, Wittenberg 2018, Wittenberg & Levy 2017, Wittenberg et al. 2014, Wittenberg & Piñango 2011).

The prospective volume is intended to be a collection of papers dealing with the above mentioned – but also further – properties of light verb constructions. The individual chapters should either discuss (properties of) light verb constructions from a crosslinguistic perspective or present a detailed study of one individual language. The overall topic addressed by the various chapters should be: What are language-specific and/or crosslinguistic properties of light verb constructions.

We encourage abstracts dealing with the above mentioned questions come various perspectives (e.g., diachronic, synchronic, pansynchronic), using different methodologies such as corpus linguistics, experimental linguistics or different theoretical frameworks.

In case of interest, prospective authors should send an email till March, 15, 2023 to LightVerbConstructions@gmail.com expressing their interest in contributing to the volume. The email should contain a provisional title as well as full name and affiliation of the author(s). An abstract (300 to 500 words + references) is needed till April, 1, 2023. The abstracts will be reviewed and the submission of the complete manuscript is due to December, 1, 2023.

The final book proposal will be compiled on the basis of the submitted abstracts. Further details concerning the publication process (including the intended publisher) will be communicated as soon as possible.

Selected references

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- Wittenberg, E. & R. Levy. 2017. If you want a quick kiss, make it count: How choice of syntactic construction affects event construal, *Journal of Memory and Language* 94, 254-271.
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