On the semantics, headedness and classification of compound verbs

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Abstract

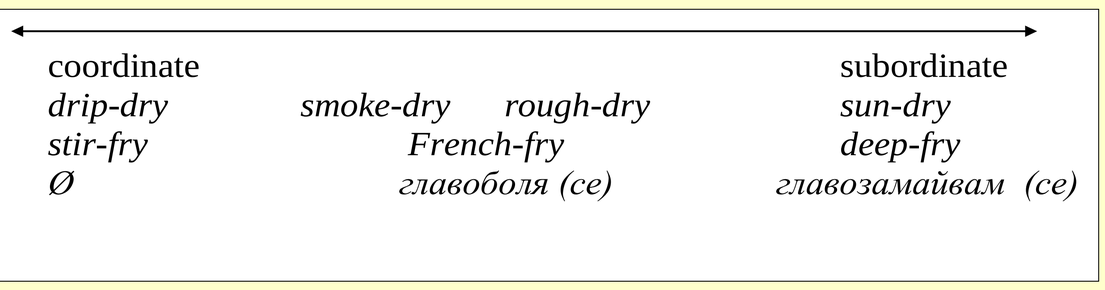
The snapshot of work in progress presents a hypothesis about a unified approach to the classification and semantics of compound verbs (CVs) in English and Bulgarian. To avoid inadvertent cross-classification of CVs belonging to the same family (Lieber 2009 vs. Bauer n.d., 2008), and to circumvent the heterogeneity in the meaning composition of CVs associated with their derivation (conversion, back-formation, and compounding), a unified framework combining constructionist accounts of morphological phenomena (Booij 2010a & b) and frame-based blending theory (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002; Barsalou 1992, 2008) is applied to the analysis of CVs. The proposed classificatory model of CVs is based on McGregor's distinctions between epistemological sub-classification and super-classification (2002). All strands in the analysis naturally dovetail in the treatment of CVs in both English and Bulgarian as lexically specified instantiations of a constructional idiom.

Data and basic problems

The analysis is based on a corpus of 350 English and 60 Bulgarian CVs. The data have been extracted from CoCA, OED, LDCE, OALD, BNC, works of fiction, the media and theoretical writings.

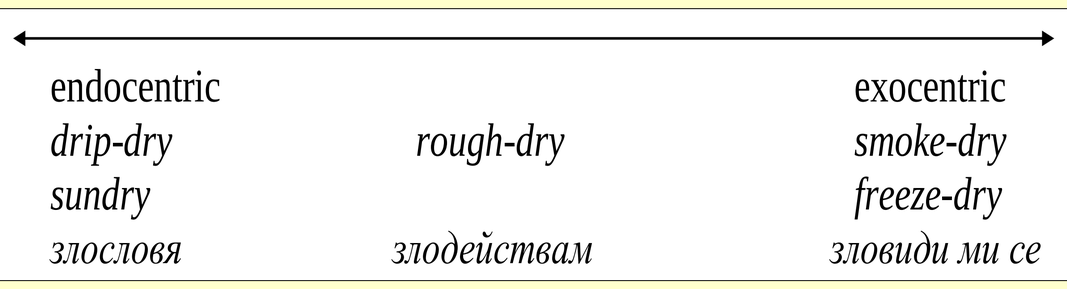
Three basic problems in the treatment of CVs:

- "English allows no verb-headed compounds" (Grimshaw 1990); "No typical verbal compounds in English" (Schmid 2011), yet
- CVs in English and Bulgarian meet all of Schmid's own 6 criteria – CVs are typical compounds, though not typical compounding objects;
- supposedly 3 different meaning composition patterns paired with 3 derivation processes (back-formation: argumental relation between the constituents (Guevara and Scalise 2004; Nagano 2007); conversion: "X must serve as an argument in the interpretation of Y" (Lieber 1981, 2004 Sándor 2007); and compounding: modification or predicator-argument relations (Fabb 2001)
- intrafamily cross-classification resulting from the standard subordinate, coordinate and attributive classification model (based on a presumption of lexical categorical specification of constituents).



Background and central assumptions

- Lexical meaning is a special type of data structure which is associated with an emergent ad hoc concept. A lexical item is an instructional sign-post which directs the listener in constructing the ad hoc concept relying on a perceptually presented stimulus with an emergent or prototypical lexical concept (a unit in the f-mind (Jackendoff 2002)) which might (not) undergo significant modification in particular instances of use (Evans 2007, 2009) as a tool to pilot attention (Marchetti 2006).
- CVs constitute a constructional idiom with unified semantics in a hierarchically structured lexicon interrelated by inheritance (Booij 2010 a & b).
- Compositionality is interpreted in a non-trivial and non-standard theory of semantico-pragmatic constraints where semantic parts of a compound *configure into a semantic whole* (Bundgaard et al. 2006, 2007).
- Sub-classification and super-classification are cognitive processes involved in "thinking for speaking" which yield two epistemological classes of [C]Vs (McGregor 2002): i) via sub-classification of an associated frame with ensuing hyponymic conceptual relations and ii) via establishment of a newly blended pragmatically-driven super-frame, configuring emergent cognitive content.
- ModE has undergone a "degrammaticalization shift from a 'specialized' noun-verb language (with a grammaticalized part-of-speech system) towards a 'flexible' type-token language (without [one])" Vogel (2000: 263). English - flexible, Bulgarian – rigid with overt marking, but many CV constituents appear in C-specific forms (blurring of lexical categoriality). "Compound is a lexical unit made up of two or more elements, each of which can function as a lexeme independent of the other(s) in other contexts, and which shows […] phonological and/or grammatical isolation from normal syntactic usage" (Bauer 2001).
- CV-internal constituents are not lexically categorized. The CV idiom coerces the verbal interpretation, aided by its use in predicative functions in context.
- "[T]he head in English complex words is determined neither positionally, nor morphologically. [I]t is identified with an onomasiological base […]. The criterion of headedness is thus shifted to the *conceptual level* of the WF process" (Štekauer 2005).
- Both headedness (Scalise and Fábergas 2010) and exocentricity (Scalise et al. 2009) are dimensionalized into categorical, morphological and semantic types.



Hypothesis and analyses

Compounds and compounding are not causally related. Compounds as usage events (not necessarily derived via compounding) have higher ecological and cognitive validity than any WF process. CVs are special construal mechanisms, i.e. they combine relational and situational properties (Radden and Dirven 2007) and as type of conceptualizations occupy an intermediate position between simple relational symbolic units and conceptual core descriptions which motivates their rising usage. Categorical headedness is triggered by the constructional idiom, (uniform categorical endocentricity of CVs), but elaborate intrafamily and across sub-schemas semantic exocentricity.

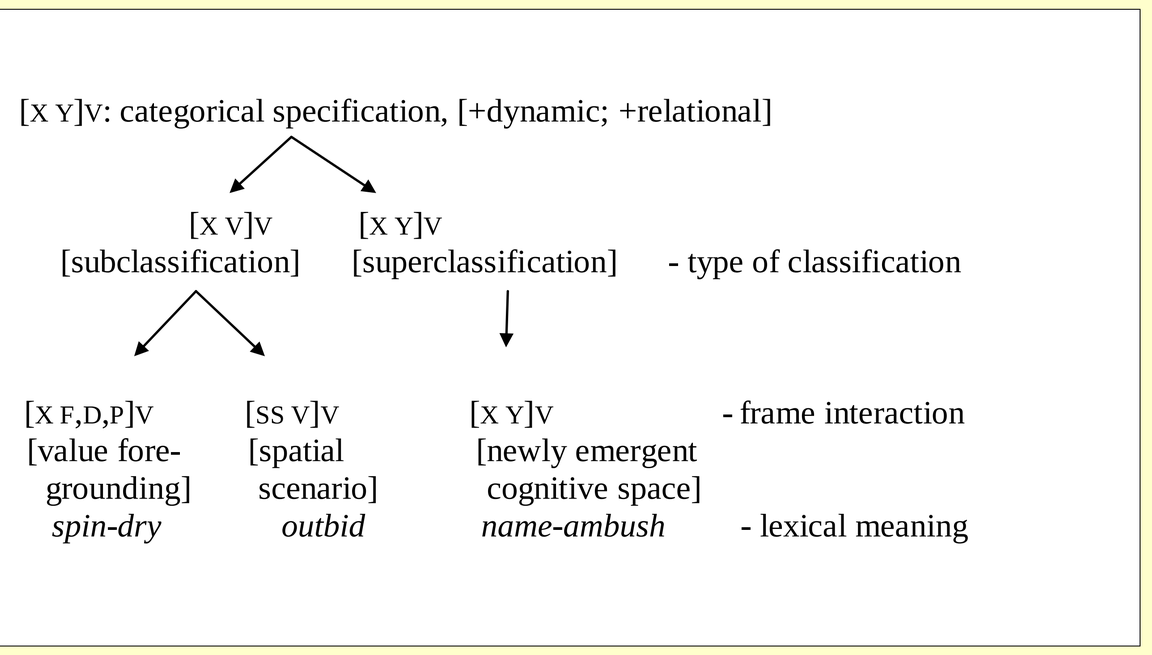
Morphotactic conflation is paralleled by frame-based conceptual integration, leading to 3 lower level schemas with 3 different patterns of semantic configuring:

I. [x f,d,p]v – blending of the two frames where the first frame fills an available slot in the second one and foregrounds it creating a new perspectivized profile of the second frame

II. [spatial specifier v]v – blending where the two frames merge and the spatial specifier frame augments the second frame by embedding it in a spatial scenario via the location and event branches of the event structure metaphoric system

III. [x y]v – blending where the generic space is newly emergent and in which the attributes to be projected from the two input frames are selected in keeping with the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997, 2002; Huang 2009) and following pragmatically driven coherence-establishing mapping principles.

Value - foregrounding One-sided network: Fb > F2 *oil-paint, tumble-dry, deep-fry*	Spatial scenario asymmetric Double -sided network: Fb = F1[2] + F2 *underrate, outbid, overpower*	Metaphtonymic blend Symmetric double-scope network: unique, newly emergent Fb *red-shirt, rail-road, boyfriend-drop*
Sub-classification proper	Spatially-embedded sub-classification	Super-classification



Final comments

CVs pose serious problems for both classification models for compounds and for their unified semantic interpretation in view of 3 different meaning generating mechanisms associated with 3 distinct morphosemantic (and morphotactic) derivation patterns. Studying compounds as usage events instantiating a constructional idiom helps better explain in a unified manner the plethora of CV divergent data. English CVs are far more analogically potent and there are more exemplars likely to rise in productivity via approximation (Rainer 2005). Even though the same constructional idiom streamlines the morphotactic and morphosemantic properties of CVs, English has a far richer compound verb lexicon in which three basic patterns of semantic configuring were identified. The spatial scenario CV schema elaboration is not attested in Bulgarian. This onomasiological need is satisfied by prefixed verbs. In Bulgarian the part of speech-system is far more rigid and the different categories have overt markings and this precludes the powerful constructional idiom coercion of categorically underspecified conceptualizations. In English only Goldberg's (2010) Conventional Frame Constraint (socio-cognitively and pragmatically grounded) restricts the creation and use of CVs.

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