

Concerning the notion of constructional polysemy

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1. ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Argument structure is a grammatical pattern which is supposed to provide the basic means of clausal expressions in a language and specify the arguments a verb can be combined with.

According to Goldberg (1995, 2006), the meaning of a sentence is determined by the interaction of the meaning of the verb and the argument structure.

2. CONSTRUCTIONAL POLYSEMY

In Construction Grammar, **grammatical patterns** are seen as:

- **inherently meaningful**, independent of the lexical items they feature;
- **polysemous**: each pattern is typically associated with several related senses, organized in a radial network, with a central sense and a few semantic extensions.

7. AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

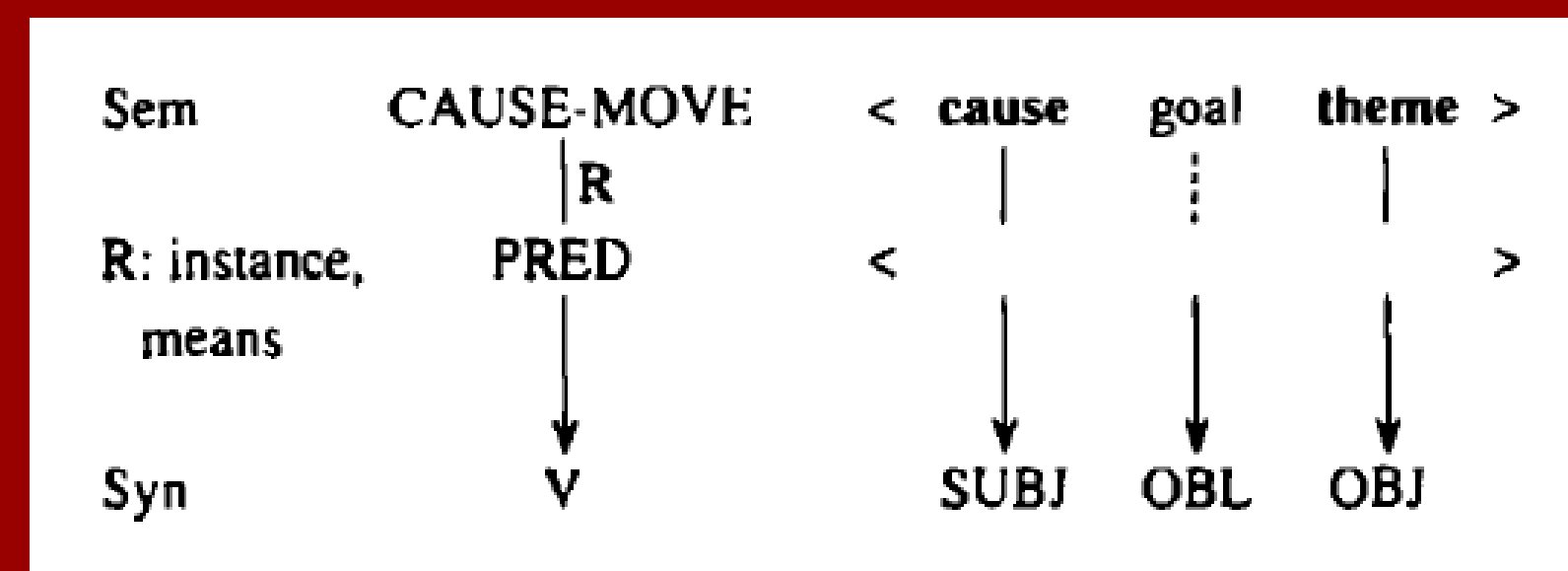
A radial network view does not do justice to the range of similarities and differences between the instantiations of the pattern:

- The instantiations of a caused-motion pattern may be better characterized as forming a continuum and standing in a relationship of family resemblance with each other.
- Against this general background lower-level generalizations over similar verb meanings may be drawn (e.g. Boas 2003, 2008).

8. SOME EXAMPLES (from the *enTenTen13* corpus)

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. I can <i>throw</i> it in my craft bag.
Instant motion through the air; whole event profiled; verb semantics implies caused motion. | d. They would (...) blow it into an opponent's face...
Instant exertion of force; 'causing' subevent profiled; verb not even necessarily transitive. |
| b. ...we <i>pushed</i> the stick into the polystyrene cup...
Continuous force exertion; 'causing' subevent profiled; verb semantics implies cause-motion attempt. | e. He <i>spun</i> the pedestal seat toward the bow...
Motion along a surface; 'moving' subevent profiled; verb semantics does not specify energy source. |
| c. ...he stood to <i>kick</i> the snake into the bush.
Instant exertion of force; 'causing' subevent profiled; verb semantics only implies force application. | f. ...the master (...) <i>ordered</i> the crew into the boat...
Strong deontic force; definite time frame; 'causing' subevent profiled; affirmative clause. |

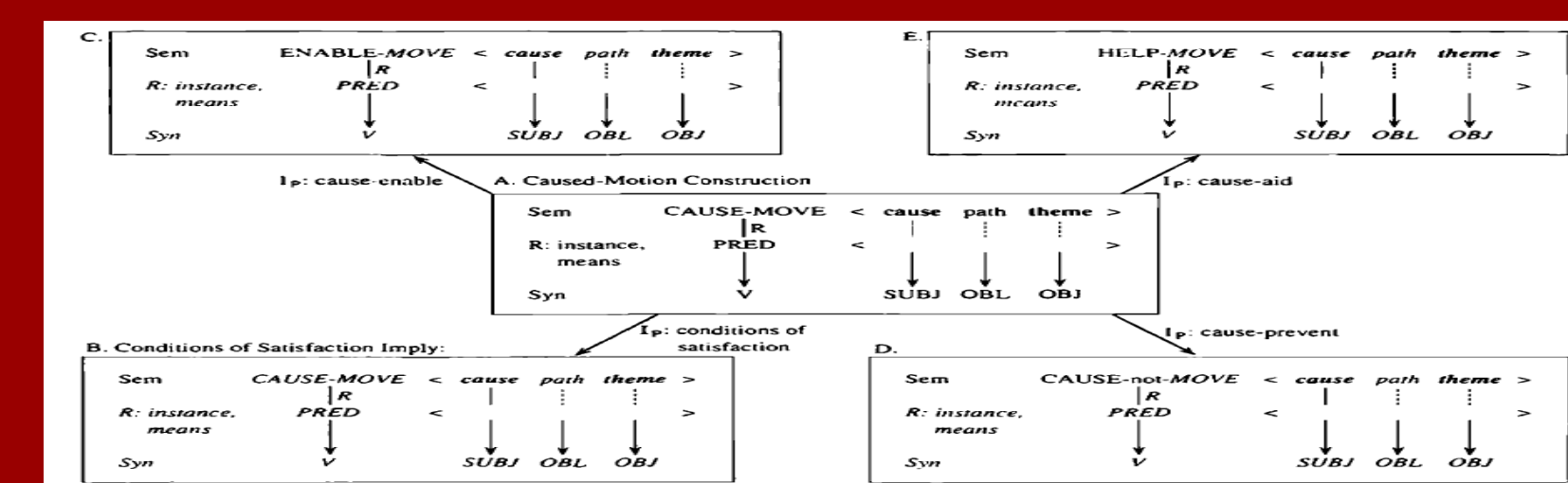
3. A CASE-STUDY: THE CAUSED-MOTION PATTERN



(From Goldberg 1995)

5. THE NETWORK OF RADIAL EXTENSIONS

- **sense 2: conditions of satisfactions imply 'X causes Y to move Z'**
instantiated by verbs of saying with associated satisfaction conditions
Pat ordered him into the room.
- **sense 3: 'X enables Y to move Z'**
instantiated by verbs of enabling
Pat allowed Chris into the room.
- **sense 4: 'X causes Y not to move from Z'**
instantiated by verbs of blocking
Pat locked him into the room.
- **sense 5: 'X helps Y to move Z'**
instantiated by verbs of helping
Pat assisted him into the room.



(From Goldberg 1995)

4. THE CENTRAL SENSE

Central sense: 'X causes Y to move Z'

- Form: SUBJ V OBJ OBL_{path/loc}
- Meaning: X causes Y to move Z_{path}
- Argument structure: CAUSE-MOVE (causer theme goal)
- e.g. *Pat pushed the piano into the room.*

10. BEYOND CAUSED-MOTION: TOWARD A 'CHANGE PATTERN' (cf. Broccias 2003, 2007)

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. Marcie <i>kissed</i> the sadness out of Charlie Brown.
Actual causation, metaphorical motion. | D. The crowd <i>booed</i> Arsenal off the pitch at the interval.
Motion, but no causation: mere temporal co-extension. |
| B. Sally <i>talked</i> Chris into dropping the course.
Causation, but no motion. | E. Nancy <i>read</i> the book well into the night.
No causation, no motion: only a change of circumstances. |
| C. The butler <i>bowed</i> the guests into the room.
Motion, but only mild causation, whose direction is unclear. | F. East Timor <i>could beat</i> Britain into the Eurozone.
No causation, no motion: a synthesis of two scenarios. |

6. PROBLEMS WITH THIS ACCOUNT

An analysis of 1,000 attested occurrences of the pattern in the *enTenTen13* corpus suggest that a radial network view does not do justice to the range of similarities and differences between the instantiations of the pattern:

- The wide variety of instantiations can differ along several dimensions: force-dynamics, temporality, deontic nuances, profiling, degrees of verb transitivity, and so on.
- Only a very general meaning common to all these instantiations seems to be detectable, and it does not seem to be necessarily related to a motion event, but rather to a change of circumstances.

11. CONCLUSION: A CONTINUUM VIEW BASED ON FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

- The 'change' pattern as a continuum of instantiations related via **family resemblance**. All the realizations of the pattern share a common syntactic structure and a very general meaning, denoting a change of circumstances in a situation which involves two different participants in a variety of possible scenarios.
- More generally, a perspective centered on heterogeneity can represent a general background to investigate the relationship between the general meaning of the pattern and that of the lexical items which occur in each specific instantiations, allowing for lower-level generalizations to avoid the proliferation of constraints to rule out implausible senses.
- This view allows capturing the range of variation in the interaction between lexical items and syntactic patterns at different levels of specificity, also bringing of (verbal and non-verbal) lexical items back to the fore.