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Some Observations on the Syntax and Semantics
of Denominal Verbs in English and Polish

The following remarks concern some problems connected with approaching lexical items from the point of view of derivational semantic theory. The question posed here is whether it is possible to trace any systematicity in the relationships between underlying semantic patterns and the types of surface structures of denominal verbs. It is hoped, too, that a comparison of the English data with some facts extrapolated from Polish will help to elucidate these problems.

We restrict our attention to denominal causative verbs, which seem to provide evidence for internal complexity more clearly than other verbs. Our discussion will start with the group of instrumental verbs. The following set of examples will introduce the argument:

- I.a/ The housekeeper killed her mistress by administering poison.
b/ The housekeeper killed her mistress with poison.
c/ The housekeeper poisoned her mistress with poison.
d/ The housekeeper poisoned her mistress.

In examples I/a-b/ the Instrumentⁱ/ "poison" is not contained in the semantic structure of the verb "kill". However, the verb in I/d/ of the semantic structure /CAUSE to die by using poison/ has already lexicalized the meaning of the Instrument. This also accounts for the ungrammaticality of I/c/.

McCawley /1971/ makes an important claim that Instrument can be incorporated into lexical causatives by what he calls "Means Incorporation" transformation^{2/}. However, he observes that denominal Instrumental verbs/ e.g. "hammer, polish, nail, screw" / display different patterns of syntactic behaviour, as illustrated by the following sentences /McCawley 1971/:

2.a/ John hammered the nail into the board with a rock.

b/ John nailed the proclamation to the door with rivets.

Some Instrumental verbs /"nail, glue, screw, rivet, tack, staple, pin, tape, stitch, mangle, chain, fester, gag, handcuff, manacle, strap, lock," etc./ specify a very narrow range of Instruments /2 b/, thus being treated as derived from structures containing cognate nouns, whereas others refer to generic Instruments and admit a variety of specific ones /2 a/, e.g. "hammer, saw, plane, iron, roll, brush, comb, rake, mop, sponge, polish", etc. Thus nailing must be done with nails, whereas hammering need not, and gluing must be done with glue, while pasting need not be done with paste. Accordingly, McCawley distinguished denominal causatives related to their cognate nouns from deverbal causatives which do not necessarily bear this relation.

The question raised by Instrumental verbs as well as by other denominal verbs is how far it is possible to treat them as syntactic-semantic derivations or historical lexical verbs. Why do some Instrumental verbs specify the range of Instruments to which they may refer much more narrowly than others? What is the nature of the relation between derived verbs and the associated nominals in the case of other, non-Instrumental denominal causatives?

McCawley's criteria seem to give inconsistent results. It can be noticed that some of the verbs he treats as denominal permit a wide range of Instruments, both in English and Polish /the English examples suggested by G.Green /1972//:

- 3.a/ Max pinned the money to his shirt with a beading needle.
- b/ They gagged the hostages with rolls of toilet paper.
- c/ He skewered the meat on fencing foils.
- d/ Przykleił obrazek do tablicy lakierem do paznokci.
- /He glued the picture to the board with nail polish/.
- e/ Zakneblował go chustką do nosa.
- /He muzzled him with a handkerchief/.

G.Green suggests a solution to the problem by positing much more abstract representations for Instrumental verbs and interpreting them in terms of "standard - non-standard" activities. The difference between generic and specific uses of Instrumental nouns would correspond to whether they are /G.Green 1972:87/:

a/ the standard object for an activity

/e.g. hammer = the standard object for striking repeatedly/

b/ a non-standard object for an activity

/e.g. "the rock" in 2a/.

Accordingly, historical evidence to the contrary, no Instrumental causatives are treated as denominal.

Neither of the proposals presented above seems very satisfactory. While in some cases there is no syntactic evidence that Instrumental verbs include reference to cognate nouns, in others the relation between the verb and the associated noun is explicit, for example:

- to asphalt - asfaltować
- to tile - wykładać kafelkami
- to zerox - kserokopować

Compare, however: ? to wallpaper the room with posters - wytapetować pokój plakatami.

In view of the contrasting data it seems that it would be very difficult to reach any systematicity in the treatment of the apparently idiosyncratic properties of Instrumental verbs.

Instrumental verbs are less frequent in Polish than in English. In English transition from one category to another without a formal change is a very active process. In Polish conversion is impossible, such changes require specific morphological processes, which, however, display less productivity. Hence much more severe restrictions are placed on the "Means Incorporation" Transformation in Polish than in English, whereby English causatives frequently correspond to complex expressions containing nominal Instruments:

- hammer /generic/ - przybić młotkiem
- nail /specific/ - przybić gwoździem^{3/}
- knife /specific/ - przebić nożem

A number of verbs in English, however, find equivalent lexicalized Instrumental causatives in Polish:

paste /generic/ - pastować
 brush /generic/ - szczotkować
 glue /specific/ - kleić
 wallpaper /specific/ - tapetować

It is not easy to observe any regularities between the type of Instrument /generic vs. specific/ and the occurrence of a lexicalized vs. complex causative expression, although it seems that lexicalized verbs tend to acquire the meanings of "standard activities".

Weaker capacity of Polish for deriving denominal verbs can also be observed in a number of non-instrumental formations, where homophonous verbs in English correspond to complex expressions in Polish:

to box gifts - włożyć podarunki do pudełka
 to bone a chicken - wyjąć kości z kurczaka
 to shelve books - położyć książki na półce

Also in English the process of grammatical homonymity with regard to non-instrumental verbs appears to be in some sense limited. Different nouns bear different relationships to the verbs derived from them, although it is possible to factor out some regular underlying patterns / 4 a-d/. As Rose /1973:510/ has pointed out, the majority of such verbs occur with restricted set of objects:

7. a/ Cause N to go to an object
 to water the lawn - podleć trawnik
 to air the room - przewietrzyć pokój
 b/ Cause N to become removed from the object
 to peel an orange - obrać pomarańczę
 to skin an animal - zedrzeć skórę ze zwierzęcia
 to pit a cherry - wyjąć pestkę z wiśni
 c/ Cause the object to become located in N
 to bag some sand - włożyć piasek do torby
 to pouch tobacco - włożyć tytoń do kapełucha
 to box gifts - włożyć podarunki do pudełka
 to shelve books - położyć książki na półce
 to tree cats - zapędzić koty na drzewo

to crate books - pakować książki
 to pocket a knife - włożyć nóż do kieszeni
 to picture the walls - pokryć ściany obrazkami
 to can tomatoes - i puszkować pomidory
 to garage a car - garażować samochód
 d/ Cause the object to become /like/ N
 to coke - koksować
 to powder - proszkować

Some of these classes show greater productivity than others, e.g. the "water" type /a/ and the "garage" type /c/. On the other hand group /b/ "Cause to become removed from the object" is limited to only a few dozen verbs and not represented in Polish at all. To a very large extent these are lexical items pertaining to making various kinds of food fit for human consumption /skinning, gutting, scaling, defeathering, boning of animals; peeling, pitting, etc. of fruits/. So the noun functioning as the verb-base is generally assumed to be a constituent part of the object noun. It should be observed that verbs of type /b/ constitute convincing evidence for postulating the derivational character of at least some lexical formations.

Derivation of denominal causatives by morphological processes in English is rare and does not correspond to any particular semantic pattern, e.g.

to atomize = Cause to become N
 to hospitalize = Cause to become located in N
 to encircle = Cause to become located in N
 to disarm = Cause to become removed from the object etc.

Polish denominal verbs employ a greater variety of prefixal-suffixal arrangements / Grzegorzewska 1969/. It can be noticed that the semantic patterns associated with them are basically the same:

8. a/ Cause N to go to the object
 mydlić - soap
 ukwiecić - decorate with flowers
 nawodnić - water
 lukrować - ice

stemplować	-	stamp
komputeryzować	-	computerize
metallizować	-	metallize
b/ Cause the object to become located in N		
butelkować	-	bottle
wekować	-	put into a jar
paczkować	-	put into packets
c/ Cause the object to become /like/ N		
proszkować	-	powder
cukrować	-	convert into sugar
galaretować	-	give the form of jelly
atomizować	-	atomize

In both Polish and English there is a group of technical words with the semantic pattern "Cause N to be removed from the object". These are verbs with limited production, not matched or related to unprefixated expressions, e.g.:

a/ defrost/an icebox/	-	odmrozić
dęgnąć /wheat/	-	oczyszczyć z zarazków
dęgnąć /wool/	-	odtłuścić
b/ odaszczurzyć /miasto/	-	remove rats
odsnieżyć /ulicę/	-	remove snow
odchwaszczyć /ogród/	-	weed
		etc.

To sum up our observations on the denominal verbs in English and Polish we can state:

- In both languages the process of denominal formation is limited. The vast majority of denominal causatives occur with a restricted set of objects.
- Both languages display the same range of variation of the underlying semantic patterns, however a given semantic relationship is not uniformly matched by a single morphological process or means of lexicalization.
- Despite the seemingly diverse relationships between the verbs and their noun-bases it is possible to factor out some regular correspondences:

The problems of denominal verbs and of their references to associated nouns is a programme of research of which so far only fragments have been carried out. It seems, however, that an explicit account of such relationships falls beyond the means of current syntactic - semantic formalism.

Footnotes:

- 1/For various concepts of Instrument in modern linguistic theory c.f. Fillmore/1969, Langendoen/1970/, Huddleston /1970/, etc.
- 2/It must be admitted that the transformational mechanism the theory has at its disposal to account for the combinations of semantic units into lexical items is far from being well understood.
- 3/"Przygodził", curiously enough, has only metaphorical meanings, as in: "Przygodził mi spojrzaniem", where the Instrument is of abstract character and not related semantically to the denominal verb.

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Streszczenie

Ważniejsze rozważania dotyczą pewnych problemów związanych z derywacyjną teorią jednostek leksykalnych. Głównym celem analizy jest próba znalezienia systematycznych zależności między odmiennymi czasownikami a głębszymi strukturami semantycznymi, z których są derywowane. Jednocześnie podjęto próbę porównania tego fragmentu gramatyki języka angielskiego i polskiego.

Analiza nasunęła następujące wnioski:

- w obu językach proces derywacji jest ograniczony: wiele czasowników przyjmuje ograniczony zespół dopełnień;
- w obu językach pojawiają się te same głębsze struktury semantyczne. Wśród różnorodnych relacji między czasownikami a rzeczownikami, z których są derywowane, daje się zauważyć pewne regularności. Brak jest jednak dowodów na istnienie ściślejszej korelacji między semantyką a procesami morfologicznymi lub syntaktycznymi.

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Einige Bemerkungen zum Valenzbegriff

Die Valenztheorie und der Valenzbegriff haben in den letzten Jahren eine zunehmende Bedeutung in der Linguistik gewonnen. Die Valenz liegt im Schnittpunkt von Grammatik und Lexikologie, von Syntax und Semantik und deshalb ist von der Valenz her ein neues Licht auf viele Fragen des einfachen Satzes gefallen. Im Laufe dieses Prozesses haben sich in der Sprachwissenschaft verschiedene Auffassungen von der Valenz herausgebildet.

Der moderne Valenzbegriff wurde in der Linguistik heimisch mit Tesnière, der bei seiner strukturellen Satzanalyse vom Verb ausgeht, dabei die ‚actants‘ und die ‚circumstants‘ unterscheidend. Die ‚Valence‘ des Verbs wird bei ihm durch die Zahl der actants bestimmt. Die Umstandsbestimmungen spielen dabei keine Rolle. Tesnière unterscheidet im Französischen drei Arten von actants, die in gleicher Weise direkt vom Verb abhängig sind und in seinem Stammbauschema auf der gleichen Ebene stehen: die Subjekte, die Akkusativobjekte und die Dativobjekte. Er lehnt die traditionelle Subjekt-Prädikat-Opposition im Satz ab, weil diese die Valenzbeziehungen verdunkelt. Aus der traditionellen semantischen Coposition zwischen Subjekt und Objekt wird die strukturelle Differenz zwischen dem ersten und zweiten Actant. Nach der Zahl der Actants unterscheidet Tesnière vier Gruppen von Verben: ohne Actant, mit einem Actant, mit zwei und drei Actants. Die Actants sind immer sinnotwendig und werden durch Substantive bzw. Äquivalente dafür ausgedrückt. Tesnière vergleicht die Fähigkeit der Verben, eine bestimmte Anzahl von Actants zu sich zu nehmen, mit der Vertikalität des Atoms und nennt sie Valenz.

Für die deutsche Grammatik ist der Tesnièresche Valenzbegriff