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CONSTRUCTION AND A DICTIONARY ENTRY

When confronted with sentences such as the following:¹

- (1) *Lord King craftily joked and blustered his way out of trouble at the meeting.*
- (2) *He talked his way out of trouble.*
- (3) *Their customers snorted and injected their way to oblivion and sometimes died on the stairs.*

a user of a dictionary will be left baffled, since dictionary entries for the verbs *joke*, *bluster*, *snort* or *inject* come nowhere near explaining either the semantics or the syntax of the above verb phrases. No dictionary entry offers a possibility of a motion sense for, say, *joke* or *talk*, just like no dictionary entry predicts ditransitivity of *snort* in the example above.

The present paper is premised upon the view that every dictionary that is only lexically based will fail short of explicating a full range of data, such as those exemplified in (1–3). Thus, it will be argued, what is called for instead is an approach recognising constructions as basic theoretical entities, crucial to the description of language, and accommodating for them in a dictionary entry. More specifically, the present paper attempts to focus on just one construction, namely [SUBJ_i [V[*Poss_i*, *way*]OBL]] as in (4) *They found their way to New York* demonstrating that the contribution made by lexical items – its particular component parts – proves infelicitous in accounting fully for the semantic and syntactic make-up of the construction. Thus, the semantic and syntactic composition of the construction will be outlined, and the type of information that should be included in a revised dictionary entry suggested.

That constructions are taken to be the basic units of language is the most fundamental tenet of Construction Grammar. This and some other

¹ All the examples cited in this section come from the selection made by A. Goldberg in *Construction Grammar* (1995) from the following corpora: Oxford University Press, Wall Street Journal 1989, Lund, United States Department of Agriculture.

issues raised by the constructional view will be briefly outlined in the first section of the present paper. The second section will seek to present the analysis proper of the construction. In conclusion, the consequences of the theory of grammar favoured in the present paper on lexicography will be reflected on, displaying the many advantages it has over other, alternative approaches.

To begin with, the fact that a large amount of information is contributed by individual items is not, and has never been, put to question by any frameworks, encouraging the traditional arrangement of information in dictionary entries. However, it is claimed in the construction-based standpoint that entirely lexically-based, or bottom-up approach systematically fails to account for a full area of language data. To illustrate the point let us consider Goldberg's (1995) analysis of the following

- (5) *Frank dug his way out of the prison.*
 (6) *Frank dug his escape route out of the prison.*

The meaning of (5) necessarily entails **motion** on the part of the subject referent, while this attribute is absent from (6), the contrast displayed in the following:

- (7) **Frank dug his way out of the prison but he hasn't gone yet.*
 (8) *Frank dug his escape route out of prison but he hasn't gone yet.*

Needless to say, a dictionary entry for *dig* does not include a motion sense.

Furthermore, the core difference between (5) and (6) seems to lie in the selection of the noun phrase – either [*his way*] or [*his escape route*]. The pattern appears to be repeated in the sentences below,

- (9) *He found his way to New York.*
 (10) *He found a way to New York.*

where (10), in contrast to (9), does not suggest that he actually went to New York.

Given some more examples:

- (11) a. *Joe bought his way into the exclusive country club.*
 b. *'I knitted my way across the Atlantic' he reveals*
 c. *He bludgeoned his way through.*

one is bound to draw the conclusion that the newly acquired motion sense of each verb is attributable to the *way* construction.

"A construction is defined to exist if one or more of its properties are not strictly predictable from the properties of their component parts" Goldberg (1995: 4). In other words, constructions themselves carry meaning, independently of the words in the sentence. Once the notion of a contentful construction is recognised, the meaning of an expression is understood to be the result of integrating the meanings of the lexical items into the meanings of constructions. Using the taxonomy adopted by Goldberg (1995), the meaning is derived from both top down and bottom up interaction between lexical and constructional meaning.

Finally, emerging as a consequence of such an approach to language other issues raised by Construction Grammar will only be mentioned briefly as they fall beyond the scope of the present paper. Especially, constructions are taken to display prototype effects and form networks of associations, they are claimed to constitute a highly structured lattice of interrelated senses, they are capable of contributing arguments so that direct objects are licensed not directly as arguments of the verbs but by particular constructions – the point to be taken up later in the course of the analysis. All these qualities of the construction pose a challenge to lexicographers as they need to ... find their way into dictionary entries.

Having considered some basic theoretical assumptions of Construction Grammar let us turn to Goldberg's (1995) analysis of [SUBJ_i[V[Poss_iway]OBL]] construction.

As briefly noted before, the construction entails motion, either literal or metaphorical. See (12) and (13) below:

- (12) *I made my way unto Rome.*
 (13) *He punched his way through.*

Second, it is stipulated that the motion must be through a literal or metaphorical **self-created path**. The idea of a path that is not pre-established but created by the subject referent, first conceived of by Jespersen (1945), conveys the message that the movement takes place despite some **external difficulty**, literal or metaphorical, like moving through a crowd, mass, or a social obstacle – the third component of the semantic make-up of the construction in the light of Goldberg's analysis. The examples to illustrate the point include:

- (14) *He pushed his way past the others.*
 (15) *He bribed his way into the meeting.*

Thus, even if the effort is not so obviously coded by the verb itself the construction forces the air of a barrier into the interpretation. Compare (16):

- (16) *He talked his way into the meeting.*

Such verbs, referred to by Goldberg as vanilla motion verbs – as they do not typically imply any difficulty or indirect motion – are, thus, normally unacceptable in the construction. Hence the ungrammaticality of the following:

- (17) **She went /walked/ ran her way to New York.*

Unless a context is provided that gives a clue of the difficulty, as in Goldberg's fine selection of examples:

- (18)a. *The old man walked his way across the country to earn money for charity.*
 b. *The novice skier walked her way down the ski slope.*

To summarise, the semantic make-up of the construction requires a motion sense of the verb, with the movement despite some external difficulty along the path that is not pre-established but rather created by the subject referent.

The above characteristics hold true for just one of the senses of the construction. Goldberg demonstrates the construction is a case of polisemy, as illustrated in the paraphrases *a* and *b* of (19) below:

- (19) *Sam joked his way into the meeting.*
a. Sam got into the meeting by joking.
 (sense₁ – means interpretation)
b. Sam got into the meeting while joking.
 (sense₂ – manner interpretation)

To give the reader a better grip of the distinction between the means and manner interpretations, here are some more examples of the former (20) and the latter (21) cases:

- (20) *a. Sally drank her way through a case of vodka.*
b. I cannot inhabit his mind nor even imagine my way through the dark labyrinth of its distortion.
- (21) *a. ...the commuters clacking their way back in the twilight.*
b. He seemed to be whistling his way along.
c. They were clanging their way up and down the narrow streets.

While sense₁ of the construction involves motion in the face of some external difficulty, this does not seem to be a constraint on sense₂. Likewise, there is no necessary implication that a path must be created. Thus, sense₂ only entails movement along a path. According to Goldberg, there is considerable evidence to support the hypothesis that the *means* interpretation is more basic and the *manner* interpretation is to be treated as its extension. The issue of their mutual relation will come up again in the analysis, when the question of the syntactic form of the construction will be addressed.

Furthermore, there are three semantic constraints on a class of verbs admitted into both senses of the construction posited. They are formulated by Goldberg as follow:

A: The verb necessarily designates a repeated action or unbound activity

Compare:

- (22) *a. Firing widely, Jones shot his way through the crowd.*
*b. *With a single bullet, Jones shot his way through the crowd.*

Hence, the sentence:

- (23) *He hiccupped his way out of the room.*

necessarily entails a series of hiccups over time and not a single hiccup.

B: The motion must be self-propelled

This condition rules out non-agentive verbs, like in (24)

- (24) **The butter melted its way off the turkey.*

C: The motion must be directed-it cannot be aimless

This condition explains the unacceptability of the following:

- (25) *a. *She wandered her way over the field.*
*b. *She meandered her way through the crowd.*
*c. *Joe shoved his way among the crowd.*

Next, it is persuasively argued by Goldberg (1995) that the syntax of the construction is motivated by its semantics. Every verb entering the construction obligatorily expresses one argument, namely the creator of the movement. The construction contributes another argument – the createe *way* – recall the semantic constraint for sense₁ that a path must be self-created rather than pre-established, making the createe *way* a very meaningful element of the construction. The semantics of the construction requires that the third argument be present – the one coding a path. Syntactically, the creator-theme is linked to the subject, the createe *way* to the direct object and the path to an adverbial directional. The construction stipulates that the direct object must always be realised in a fixed way – as *way* preceded by the most grounded pronoun – in Langacker's (1991) sense. The pronoun is coindexed with the creator-theme, perhaps to syntactically reflect the semantic condition that the way is not pre-established but individually created by the creator.

Sense₂ – the *manner* interpretation – posits a problem insofar as it does not stipulate that the path is self-created by the creator, which makes the **Poss way** element less meaningful and less justified in the syntactic realisation of the construction. Goldberg's (1995) argument goes that the form of the *manner* case is inherited from the *means* case, both senses being in this way related by a polisemy inheritance link.

To summarize, the analysis of the [SUBJ_i[V[Poss_i;way]OBL]] construction points out that its full semantic make-up cannot be attributed to the semantics of the lexical items that constitute the construction. In particular, the motion sense of the verb remains unexplained unless we posit it is directly conveyed by the construction. The semantics of the construction entails motion against difficulties along a path self-created by the subject (for the basic *means* interpretation) and it straightforwardly motivates the syntax of the construction.

There have been many attempts to deal with the semantics of the construction outside the constructional approach.

The solution suggested by Levin and Rapoport (1988) favours the idea of a special lexical rule generating a motion sense to each verb prior to its entering the construction.

Similar in its standpoint, one of Jackendoff's (1990) proposals stipulates that a verb which appears in the construction undergoes a lexical rule, turning it into a complex predicate [**Poss way**].

For lexicography, such frameworks would result in positing additional verb senses in dictionary entries for each verb potentially admitted into the construction, yielding senses intuitively implausible outside the construction.

See (26):

(26) *But he consumately add-libbed his way through a largely secret press meeting.*

Conversely, constructional approach displays many advantages over the ones postulating rules. For once, implausible verb senses are avoided. It is the construction that contributes the required sense. Next, this framework is claimed far more parsimonious, since whenever a verb occurs in a construction it requires specific semantic make up and specific semantic constraints. Instead of reflecting it in the verb's dictionary entry, it can be more parsimoniously attributed to the construction.

One way or another if the constructional view is to be adopted it challenges lexicography to respond to the need for a new conception of a dictionary entry.

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