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Oskar Gawlik

*The Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce
Institute of Foreign Languages
ul. Świętokrzyska 21D, 25-900 Kielce, Poland
E-mail: oskargawlik@vp.pl*

Research interests: spoken and written academic discourse, syntax (complementation of verbs), semantics, pragmatics, systemic-functional linguistics, corpus linguistics

ON THE TRANSITIVE OBJECT CONTROL INTO -ING COMPLEMENTATION PATTERN IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN AMERICAN ENGLISH: A CORPUS-DRIVEN STUDY

The aim of this paper is threefold: firstly, to establish whether the transitive into -ing complementation pattern is productive; secondly, to establish the semantic taxonomy of the matrix verbs taking the into -ing complementation pattern; thirdly, to investigate the existence of a correlation between the semantics and the predicate-argument structure of the matrix verbs selecting the transitive into -ing pattern in contemporary spoken American English in the COCA corpus. Goldbergian construction grammar constitutes a framework for this inquiry, whereby grammatical constructions do convey meaning, irrespective of the words used in them, with the transitive into -ing pattern instantiating a type of a caused motion construction (Goldberg 1995). The results of the pattern-based, synchronic corpus inquiry are believed to constitute a contribution to the area of shifting verbal complementation, thus providing further evidence to the validity of Gunter's notion of Great Complement Shift (Rohdenburg 2006). This paper is structured in accordance with traditional IMRD model.

KEY WORDS: the into -ing pattern, matrix verbs, complementation, spoken English.

Introduction

There exists a wealth of studies into various aspects of verbal complementation, with the pursuits gravitating towards investigations of different means and aspects of complementation: infinitival complement clauses (e.g. Mair 1990, Los 2005), diachronic and contemporary changes of English complementation patterns (Rudanko 1999, Leech *et al.* 2009), non-finite complementation (Egan 2008), changes in complementation in British and American English (Rudanko 2011). Of this panoply of linguistic pursuits, one type of prepositional complementation constitutes an object of this inquiry: the transitive *into -ing* pattern, which, although explored by such scholars as Rudanko (2011), appears to be productive (i.e. selecting innovative matrix verbs), and therefore deserving investigation.

Theoretical framework and methodology of the study

The *into -ing* pattern epitomises a subtype of a caused motion construction in Goldbergian sense, which refers to “form-meaning correspondences that exist independently of particular verbs [and they themselves] carry meaning, independently of the words in the sentence” (Goldberg 1995: 1), as exemplified below:

- (1) *And you might be able to talk a landlord into investing in some of these energy-efficient measures.*

Structurally-wise, the sentence consists of a matrix clause and a lower predicate: *talk* selects three arguments: a subject NP – *you*, a direct object – *a landlord*, and a prepositional phrase, controlled by the direct object – *into investing in some of these energy-efficient measures*. The implicit subject of the lower predicate is coreferential with the object of the matrix clause, thus rendering (1) an instantiation of an object control construction.

Semantically-wise, the interpretation of the sentence constitutes an amalgam of two types of meaning: the constructional meaning and the verbal meaning, i.e. causing or moving the patient to perform the action denoted by the prepositional complement, with the matrix verb conveying the means of achieving the goal. Consequently, the application of the two types of meaning renders (1) interpretable in the following way: The landlord might be pushed into investing in some of these energy-efficient measures by means of talking. Still, a note of caution appears to be in place here for not every string of the preposition *into* followed by a gerund form of the verb can be subsumed under the caused motion construction, as exemplified below:

- (2) (...) *finishes school and does well, then she should go into acting classes, maybe take some theater and (...).*

The formal proximity of *into* and the gerund form of the verb does not instantiate a type of a caused motion construction for two obvious reasons: firstly, the verb takes no object; secondly, the word ‘acting’ functions as a present participle premodifying the noun ‘classes’. Consequently, the string of words, i.e. *she should go into acting classes*, cannot be subsumed under a caused motion construction. This, in turn, implies that such irrelevant counts had to be eliminated manually.

The investigation of the *into -ing* pattern, multifaceted as it is, necessitated a careful selection of its aspects to be investigated, and the analysis did not depart from the traditional dichotomous division into a quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Accordingly, the initial pattern-based, bottom-up, quantitative analysis aimed at gleaning all the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern in the spoken segment of the COCA corpus. The rationale behind the employment of a pattern-based approach, rather than a head-based one, was at least twofold. Firstly, the former approach enabled the retrieval of all the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern, a corpus investigation which might have been flawed had only the head-based inquiry been adopted. Secondly, a number of tokens might have been tagged incorrectly by the corpus compilers, which necessitated the employment of the pattern-based approach. By comparison, the head-based approach

would have consisted in entering particular matrix verbs in the search string, which, if adopted, might not have retrieved all the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern, principally because “speakers sometimes use an unusual word with a pattern by analogy with a word that more typically occurs with that pattern, and that because of this the full complement of words that occur with a given pattern is constantly open to change” (Hunston, Francis 2000: 107).

This initial inquiry constituted a point of departure for a more fine-grained qualitative analysis gravitating towards a semantic taxonomy of the matrix verbs investigated. The findings, in turn, aimed at answering the question which semantic category of the matrix verbs is most reliant on employing the transitive *into -ing* pattern, with a view to tracing any correlations between the semantics of the matrix verbs and their potential for selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern. Finally, it seemed interesting to find out whether the *into -ing* pattern is spreading to new matrix verbs.

The employment of the corpus-driven methodology for the extraction of all the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern was inextricably entwined with the fact that no a priori assumptions were made concerning the occurrences of the pattern in the corpus in general or with particular matrix verbs, which were taxonomised after their extraction. Alternatively speaking, “[i]n a corpus-driven analysis the guiding principle is to extract these criteria from the language data. They should not be postulated before the analysis takes place” (Mindt 2011: 18). This translates into the fact that the adoption of the inductive approach to gleaning language data constituted the basis for a theoretically unbiased account of the linguistic behaviour of the *into -ing* pattern in the spoken segment of the COCA corpus. The choice of the corpus, in turn, was motivated by the fact that it is one of the largest corpora overall, and, simultaneously, it is the largest corpus of contemporary American English, currently totalling approximately 450 million tokens. Secondly, the corpus is updated biannually, which enabled the retrieval of the innovative uses of the *into -ing* pattern. The rationale behind the investigation of spoken English, currently totalling 95,385,672 tokens, was couched in the tenet whereby spoken English, as a particularly agile genre, is more often than not an instigator of linguistic innovation (cf. e.g. *Discourse Patterns* 2004). Consequently, given the fact that the degree of productivity of the transitive *into -ing* pattern was one of the research questions, the spoken component of the COCA corpus appeared to be an ideal candidate for the investigation of innovativeness. Accordingly, the following search string was entered in the spoken segment of the COCA corpus: *into [v?g*]*.

Results and discussion

The *into [v?g*]* query yielded 2,336 occurrences of the pattern investigated, with as many as 1,403 irrelevant tokens, whose elimination resulted in 933 relevant occurrences of the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* complementation pattern. This, in turn, translated into 9,8 occurrences of the relevant tokens per million words, with as many as 89 matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern in American spoken English in the COCA corpus. The frequency of the occurrences of the matrix verbs ranged from

133 occurrences (as was the case of the most frequent verb *talk*) to 1 single occurrence, as epitomized by such verbs as *hound*, *humble* or *humour*. Consequently, it seemed imperative to divide the results into a number of categories, the first of which contains the most frequent matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern, with 10 occurrences of a verb matrix constituting a cut-off point, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. **The most frequent matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern in the spoken section of the COCA corpus**

Matrix verb	Total number of occurrences	Normalised occurrences per million words
<i>Talk</i>	133	1.39
<i>Trick</i>	80	0.84
<i>Pressure</i>	59	0.62
<i>Force</i>	54	0.57
<i>Scare</i>	43	0.45
<i>Fool</i>	43	0.45
<i>Coerce</i>	42	0.44
<i>Push</i>	38	0.40
<i>Manipulate</i>	35	0.37
<i>Intimidate</i>	25	0.26
<i>Lure</i>	23	0.24
<i>Mislead</i>	21	0.22
<i>Bully</i>	21	0.22
<i>Coax</i>	20	0.21
<i>Dupe</i>	19	0.20
<i>Frighten</i>	16	0.17
<i>Seduce</i>	16	0.17
<i>Provoke</i>	14	0.15
<i>Blackmail</i>	12	0.13
<i>Lead</i>	12	0.13
<i>Legislate</i>	11	0.11
<i>Shock</i>	11	0.11
<i>Shame</i>	10	0.10

As illustrated in Table 1, *talk* is the most frequent matrix selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern in spoken American discourse, as exemplified in (3) below:

(3) *In the morning, had – these guys came by and talked me into going back to New Orleans (...).*

As already mentioned, the verb *talk* expresses the means of reaching the goal, while the *into -ing* construction, as a subtype of a caused motion construction, provides information on causing or moving the patient to perform the action denoted by the

prepositional complement. Consequently, the interpretation of the sentence constitutes an amalgam of the meaning of the matrix verb *talk* and the meaning of the construction (cf. e.g. Goldberg, 1995, thus yielding the following interpretation: These guys caused/moved me to go back to New Orleans by means of talking. The popularity of *talk* tallies with Rudanko's (2011) findings. *Talk* is also the most frequent matrix verb selecting the transitive *out of -ing* pattern (cf. e.g. Gawlik 2013: 172).

Trick is the second most frequent matrix verb employing the transitive *into -ing* pattern, scoring 80 occurrences in the spoken section of the COCA corpus, as exemplified below:

(4) *He's tricking you into taking care of everything and taking care of him.*

The third most frequent matrix verb is *pressure*, which selected the transitive *into -ing* pattern 59 times, followed by *force* and *scare*, scoring respective 54 and 43 occurrences, as epitomized below:

(5) *She has her students practice rejecting the lines they'll hear to pressure them into having sex.*

(6) *She has said that she's not going to force you into having healthcare, and there's not going to be a penalty.*

(7) *Our critics are playing with the people's fears, trying to scare them into believing that things will get worse so their own political fortunes will get (...).*

The cut-off point of the remaining high-frequency verbs was set at 10 occurrences (as the cut-off point had to be set somewhere), and the verbs subsumed under the most frequent ones are: *fool* (43 occurrences), *coerce* (42 occurrences), *push* (38 occurrences), *manipulate* (35 occurrences), *intimidate* (25 occurrences), *lure* (23 occurrences), *mislead* (21 occurrences), *bully* (21 occurrences), *coax* (20 occurrences), *dupe* (19 occurrences), *frighten* (16 occurrences), *seduce* (16 occurrences), *provoke* (14 occurrences), *blackmail* (12 occurrences), *lead* (12 occurrences), *legislate* (11 occurrences), *shock* (11 occurrences), and *shame* (10 occurrences).

The results obtained give grounds to claim that a significant majority of the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern do convey negative semantic prosody, as exemplified in (5)–(7). Still, what seems interesting, and revealing at the same time, is the fact that the *into -ing* pattern does not invariably convey negative flavour in the spoken segment of the COCA corpus: in a number of cases there was neutral or positive semantic prosody of both the matrix verbs and the lower predicates, as exemplified in (8) below:

(8) *(...) it was hard to make a living, and she talked me into giving this a try, and we've not had any problem.*

This finding tallies with what Rudanko (2011: 5) claims: “[T]he transitive *into -ing* pattern is currently in the process of spreading beyond verbs expressing specified causation to verbs that express causation that is neutral or unflavoured with respect to means or to manner”. This finding, whose more insightful pursuit does not come within the purview of this article, appears to be a fertile ground for further study, primarily

aimed at discerning correlations between matrix verbs and lower predicates in respect of both their semantics as well as their semantic prosody.

Having established which matrix verbs most frequently select the transitive *into -ing* pattern, the next step of the investigation consisted in classifying the matrix verbs into semantic categories, an endeavour one of whose goals was to bring out the common denominators of the matrix verbs. The taxonomy of the semantics of the matrix verbs, proposed by Rudanko (2011: 25), was adopted for the purposes of the present investigation. Table 2 below contains the means of achieving the goal, the matrix verbs employed to convey the means of achieving the goal, as well as the number of the matrix verbs.

Table 2. **Semantic classification of the matrix verbs selecting the *into -ing* pattern in spoken American English in the COCA corpus**

Means	Verbs and their occurrences	Number of matrix verbs
By means of deception or trickery	<i>trick</i> (80), <i>fool</i> (43), <i>manipulate</i> (35), <i>dupe</i> (19)	4
By means of exerting force or pressure, sometimes understood metaphorically	<i>pressure</i> (59), <i>force</i> (54), <i>coerce</i> (42), <i>push</i> (38)	4
By means of arousing fear, irritation, anger, annoyance, confusion, surprise	<i>scare</i> (43), <i>intimidate</i> (25), <i>mislead</i> (21), <i>bully</i> (21), <i>frighten</i> (16), <i>provoke</i> (14), <i>blackmail</i> (12), <i>shock</i> (11), <i>shame</i> (11)	9
By means of enticing, flattering or verbal persuasion	<i>talk</i> (133), <i>lure</i> (23), <i>coax</i> (20), <i>seduce</i> (16)	4
By other specific means	<i>legislate</i> (11)	1
By non-specific means	<i>lead</i> (12)	1

Of course, such a classification of matrix verbs does not imply that verbs belonging to the same semantic class are semantically interchangeable. Still, they do evince shared or related semantics.

Statistically speaking, the results may be interpreted in various ways. One of them is to regard the overall number of different matrix verbs as a benchmark of the popularity of the pattern investigated. Consequently, as illustrated in Table 2, the most numerous group of matrix verbs consists of verbs which arouse fear, irritation, anger, annoyance, confusion or surprise, thus constituting the means of achieving the goal designated by the prepositional complement, with 9 such verbs subsumed under this category: *scare*, *intimidate*, *mislead*, *bully*, *frighten*, *provoke*, *blackmail*, *shock*, *shame*. Consequently, in terms of the number of the matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern, this group may be regarded as a statistical prototype, which, in turn, appears to buttress the claim whereby the *into -ing* construction typically conveys negative semantic prosody, as exemplified below:

- (9) They are again ***scaring their own Alawi cohorts into thinking*** that these will be slaughtered by the Sunnis.
- (10) Kelley Martin was 30 years old when a so-called friend began ***bullying her into paying*** for his expenses with her credit card.

As illustrated in Table 2, the three remaining categories consist of four matrix verbs and the umbrella names of the means of achieving the goal are: by means of deception or trickery; by means of exerting force or pressure, sometimes understood metaphorically; by means of enticing, flattering or verbal persuasion. The fact that the same number of matrix verbs is selected by each semantic category appears to testify to the relatively even representation of each semantic category by the matrix verbs. Disregarding the last two categories (i.e. by other specific means and by no specific means) as too insignificant to be investigated more insightfully, due to the too low number of tokens of the matrix verbs, what appeared worth investigating was the number of the total tokens of all the matrix verbs in each category. Surprisingly, the picture which emerged was one of a relatively even distribution of the tokens of the matrix verbs in all the categories, despite differing numbers of the matrix verbs: the tokens ranged from 177 occurrences of the matrix verbs in the first category, i.e. by means of deception or trickery, to 193 tokens instantiated by the second category, i.e. one consisting of verbs expressing the means of exerting force or pressure, sometimes understood metaphorically. Consequently, it might be said that the categories are relatively evenly represented by different matrix verbs.

Finally, there are a number of very infrequent occurrences of matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern, which might be indicative of the productivity of the pattern. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the innovative uses will gain popularity. Given the fact that it is usually spoken English which is the instigator of innovation, it should not be surprising that there is such a large number of innovative verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern. The remaining matrix verbs, selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern, were divided into six groups, as determined by their frequency of occurrence:

- a) matrix verbs occurring eight and seven times: *browbeat, draw, press*;
- b) matrix verbs occurring six and five times: *rope, hoodwink, nudge, prod*;
- c) matrix verbs occurring four times: *maneuver, tempt, trap*;
- d) matrix verbs occurring three times: *propel, terrorize, torture*;
- e) matrix verbs occurring twice: *galvanize, get drafted, get pressured, get roped, get stuck, guilt, humiliate, jawbone, kill, make, mobilize, mold, panic, pigeonhole, pull, rush, snooker, spoil, spook, stampede, sucker, tease, threaten, tie, will*;
- f) matrix verbs occurring only once: *hound, humble, humour, hurt, hypnotize, incense, incite, indoctrinate, ingrain, lead astray, lever, lobby, marginalize, move, nag, negotiate, paint, pander, persuade, pester, pistol whip, polarize, power, pray, pressure, program, put, quicken, railroad, reinforce, scam, shape, shoehorn, sing, spark, spearhead, speculate, spur, squeeze, stick, stigmatize, stimulate, streamroll, strong-arm, sway, sweet-talk, taint, take, tip, train, turn, whip up, woo, work*.

Selected atypical examples of matrix verbs complemented by the *into -ing* pattern are exemplified below:

(11) *No, but Mandrake could enter people's minds and **nudge them into doing** something they secretly wanted to do already.*

(12) *That was one right there that could **propel me into doing** very well in this tournament.*

As illustrated above, a large number of the occurrences of the verbs, as well as the fact that they occurred once only in such a large corpus, might speak volumes for the fact that the *into -ing* pattern, as a subtype of a caused motion construction, is relatively productive as it appears to admit a wide array of verbs. This finding appears to tally with what Hunston and Francis (2000: 103) claim by attempting to answer the apparently rhetorical question whether “there are any limits to the creativity of speakers” in the employment of the transitive *into -ing* pattern. Of course, the incidental occurrences of the verbs might be attributable to certain idiosyncratic preferences of the speakers, which, by implication, translates into the fact that it remains to be seen which of these verbs will be heavily drawn on in communication and which ones will be marginalised, a corpus-linguistic inquiry which provides fertile ground for future research.

Conclusion

This investigation of actual language usage, as opposed to armchair linguistics, appears to have shed new light on the deployment of the transitive *into -ing* pattern in contemporary spoken American English, thanks to which it was possible to meet the research goals, outlined in the introduction of the article. Firstly, it was hopefully demonstrated that the transitive *into -ing* pattern is employed relatively frequently in spoken academic discourse, with some verbs drawing on it considerably more frequently than others, with *talk* constituting the most frequent matrix verb selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern. The quantitative analysis also revealed an insignificant number of matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern, ranging from 8 occurrences to 1 occurrence, which, in turn, might be indicative of the fact that the pattern is relatively productive, and, as the results appear to testify, it does not only convey negative semantic prosody, but also neutral and positive one. Moreover, this quantitative analysis enabled a more fine-grained qualitative research, one of whose goals was an attempt at a semantic taxonomy of the most frequent matrix verbs. This inquiry revealed that there exist four major groups of matrix verbs, and although the number of the matrix verbs constituting each group ranges from 9 to 4 verbs, the overall number of tokens of the matrix verbs in each category is relatively similar, oscillating around 200 occurrences, a finding which appears to corroborate the notion that matrix verbs are distributed relatively evenly. Finally, the vast number of infrequent occurrences of matrix verbs might testify to the notion that the pattern is productive in the spoken register of the COCA corpus analysed.

However, it needs to be stressed in no uncertain terms that this inquiry into the matrix verbs selecting the transitive *into -ing* pattern is by no means exhaustive, primarily due to the multi-aspectual nature of the transitive *into -ing* pattern. Consequently, the multi-facetedness of the *into -ing* pattern renders it an ideal candidate for more insightful research, and this article only constitutes a point of departure for related linguistic

pursuits. Accordingly, what might be explored more insightfully is, *inter alia*, the correlation between matrix verbs and lower predicates, with a view to taxonomising the lower predicates, which, in turn, might shed new light on what is admitted by the construction and what is not. A further line of inquiry might revolve around probing into which of the nonce occurrences of the matrix verbs will be redeployed in spoken English and which ones will not be drawn on, thus possibly falling into oblivion. Moreover, an analysis of how the *into -ing* pattern is used in other genres would allow us to discern points of convergence and divergence between the genres investigated, particularly in terms of the employment of the innovative matrix verbs. Finally, linguistic pursuits might gravitate towards an investigation into the potential correlation between the employment of the *into -ing* patterns and their alternatives in cases of verbs taking the *to*-infinitive complement. A number of these issues are taken up in my subsequent research.

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