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PRAGMA-SYNTACTIC APPROACHES TO LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

*Selected proceedings of the Annual International Conference*

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ANDRA-IRINA PORUMBEANU, On Existential Constructions in Romance and Germanic  
ANDREEA CODRINA TĂNASE, Limitations of Right Node Raising Syntactic Representations.

*Discussing the RNR Dilemma*

NATASHA STOJANOVSKA-ILJEVSKA, Wavering between Grammaticalization and Lexicalization  
CLAUDIA VLAD, COVID-19 and the Metaphor of War in the Online Press from Portugal and Romania  
DANIELA BORDEA, La vie en couleurs (II): figement et affranchissement dans le cas des syntagmes  
du type *verbe + adjf* concernant les adjectifs de couleur

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## WAVERING BETWEEN GRAMMATICALIZATION AND LEXICALIZATION

NATASHA STOJANOVSKA-ILIEVSKA\*

### *Abstract*

This paper aims to revisit the distinction between grammaticalization and lexicalization in English by addressing the case of English composite predicates, which are structures consisting of a verb and a deverbal noun (*give a cry, take a bite, have a chat*). There have been divided opinions in the linguistic literature as to whether composite predicates should be considered examples of lexicalization or grammaticalization. It will be demonstrated that it is more reasonable to talk about tendencies in the development of composite predicates, whereby they receive some features from one or the other process, than to decisively claim that composite predicates constitute a uniform class exemplifying only one of these two processes. Along these lines, this paper provides a rationale for such arrangement of composite predicates on a spectrum, including those that show features characteristic of lexicalization, such as: lack of compositionality, low productivity and/or fossilization and those that display features of grammaticalization, such as greater productivity and relative transparency in their meaning, as well as acquisition of grammatical functions. In addition, attention is also paid to viewing English composite predicates in the light of the recent theory of constructionalization, as expounded by Trousdale (2014) and Traugott and Trousdale (2013).

**Keywords:** grammaticalization, lexicalization, constructionalization, light verb constructions, composite predicates, continuum.

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## 1. Introduction

The term *grammaticalization* is generally applied to the gradual evolution of a lexical item into a grammatical marker, as well as the evolution of a grammatical marker into one that is even more grammatical. A typical example would be the development of the English indefinite article *a(n)* from the Old English word *an*, meaning 'one' (Hopper and Traugott 2003). As a matter of fact, the development of an indefinite article from the numeral *one* is common to multiple languages, as is the development of the definite article from demonstrative pronouns (Lehmann 1985). Grammaticalization is perceived as a process that proceeds over several stages, some of which can co-exist simultaneously. It is precisely this development from a lexical item to a grammatical element that has most frequently been encountered in hitherto analysed languages. Yet, while conceding that it may be the major trend, some authors claim that the processes involved in grammaticalization are not necessarily unidirectional (Clements 2006). Since minor developments also occur in the reversed order, from a grammatical marker to a lexical item, the existence of a lexicalization-grammaticalization continuum with major and minor pathways has been postulated (Clements 2006).

On the other hand, lexicalization is also conceptualized in a variety of ways, most notably though, as the conventionalization of new words or senses and their adoption into the lexicon and as a reverse process of grammaticalization, or degrammaticalization as some authors would call it (Traugott and Trousdale 2013, Trousdale and Norde 2013). For example, the idiomatic expression *kick the bucket*, meaning 'die' is viewed as an instance of lexicalization since its nominal component is decategorized and cannot be pluralized, while the entire construction cannot be passivized (Trousdale 2010). Brinton and Traugott (2005) underline that both processes are characterized by fusion and demotivation, which points to some similarities between them, and blurs the distinction between them to such an extent that different authors regard the same examples as instances of either lexicalization or grammaticalization. Such is the case with some phrasal discourse markers (*I mean, you know*), complex prepositions (*instead of, beside*) or the changes associated with the development of non-causative/causative pairs *lie/lay* or *sit/set*.

Wischer (2000: 364-365) distinguishes between lexicalization and grammaticalization by saying that in lexicalization “a specific semantic component is added,” as opposed to grammaticalization in which “specific semantic components get lost and an implied categorial or operational meaning is foregrounded”.

This paper seeks to explore both grammaticalization and lexicalization in the context of composite predicates, also known as light verb constructions. These are constructions consisting of a verb + deverbal noun that (usually) have a full verb counterpart, as is the case with the construction *have a look* corresponding to the verb *look*. The deverbal nouns within this structure are generally a product of conversion in English, but deverbal nouns formed in the process of derivation are also accepted in a broader understanding of composite predicates. The construction itself can be traced back to Middle English, or even Old English (Brinton 1996). The rationale for this investigation of composite predicates from the perspective of grammaticalization and lexicalization lies in the fact that this seemingly marginal structure can be exploited to illustrate both of these processes by employing a lexical-grammatical continuum.

## **2. Composite predicates viewed from two perspectives**

There are divided opinions in the linguistic literature as to whether composite predicates should be considered examples of lexicalization or grammaticalization. Many linguists who discuss this issue take flexible positions regarding the status of composite predicates in relation to these two processes. Indeed, it is unreasonable to decisively claim that composite predicates constitute a uniform class exemplifying only one of these two processes, while completely disregarding the other. One could rather suggest that there are tendencies in the development of composite predicates, whereby they acquire features of grammaticalization or lexicalization.

Traugott (1999: 259), for instance, argues that composite predicates are an example of lexicalization followed by idiomatization. In contrast, Brinton and Akimoto (Brinton and Akimoto 1999: 17) believe that some

of these constructions show signs characteristic of grammaticalization. However, Brinton (2011: 566) distinguishes between two groups of composite predicates with different developmental directions: one group moving in the direction of lexicalization, and the other – towards grammaticalization. The composite predicates of the first group are formed with various light verbs, and most often they are without an indefinite article before the noun (*lose sight of, inflict shame on, bear witness to, pay tribute to*). These composite predicates show some of the features characteristic of lexicalization, such as: meanings that do not represent the sum of the meanings of the constituent elements, low productivity and / or fossilization<sup>1</sup>. Thereby, lexicalization should be understood as a phenomenon that is characterized by gradation, i.e. it should be acknowledged that there are different degrees of lexicalization.

The composite predicates from the second group are formed with several distinctly specified light verbs: *make, take, give, have* and *do*, and are typically with an indefinite article before the noun (*have a look (at)*). These composite predicates are consistent in their development from the Old English period to the present day, including in their composition these few light verbs, only expanding the range of deverbal nouns with which they are combined. These formations are productive, relatively transparent in their meaning, but they acquire grammatical functions, i.e. they become very grammaticalized. Among the features that indicate grammaticalization, Brinton (2011) cites the expansion of syntactic context (e.g. when the position reserved for deverbal nouns in the composite predicate is filled with phrasal verbs converted into nouns rather than regular deverbal nouns, as in *do a make-over, make a comeback* or when it is filled with a gerund, as in *give someone a talking to*) and their high productivity, but most important in this regard is their semantic and pragmatic expansion, which is especially relevant for composite predicates with *give / take*. This means that owing to the presence of the indefinite

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<sup>1</sup>The term *fossilization* is understood as “the loss of the ability to undergo the range of manipulation found with comparable free combinations” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 284). Fossilized constructions resist syntactic variability, i.e. they resist syntactic separability, passivization etc.

article, the construction is enhanced with telic aspectual meaning<sup>2</sup>, which complements the eventive meaning. This meaning is not present in the corresponding full verb. The composite predicates such as these (and the others belonging to the second group) are at the lowest level (G1) of grammaticality understood as a continuum on which three degrees can be distinguished: G1 (periphrases) > G2 (semi-bound forms like function words and clitics) > G3 (inflectional morphology)<sup>3</sup> (Brinton and Traugott 2005). In the case of further grammaticalization of these constructions, light verbs can be expected to become transformed into prefixes, similar to the prefixes in the Slavic languages expressing aspectual meanings (Brinton 2011: 568). Another possible variant is for these constructions to develop meanings that do not derive from the meanings of the constituent elements and to be lexicalized (*to give it a shot = to try; to make a hit with = to be successful with*).

Thus, it can be said that composite predicates in English are not a homogeneous class, but they develop in two directions, lexicalization and grammaticalization, with Brinton (2011) understanding them as complementary, rather than oppositional processes. She believes that grammaticalized composite predicates can be expected to fossilize and acquire meanings that do not correspond to the sum of the meanings of the constituent elements, which would in turn result in lexicalized collocations. As for the lexicalized collocations, they may receive some signs of grammaticalization, similarly to the grammaticalized composite predicates.

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<sup>2</sup>According to Comrie (1976: 44-45), telicity implies situations that by their very nature have an end point, i.e. they progress towards their end point. At the same time, telic situations may, but do not necessarily, indicate the achievement of the end point of a given action. In contrast, atelicity is not limited in this way and presupposes actions that are not limited by any inner boundary (end point) and that can last indefinitely.

<sup>3</sup>Brinton and Traugott (2005) maintain that the G1 level is characterized by the lowest degree of structural fusion, and consequently, the lowest degree of grammaticality, while the G3 level is characterized by the highest degree of morphophonological structural fusion, which indicates the highest degree of grammaticality. In contrast to the composite predicates with the light verbs *give, take, make, do, have* composite predicates of the type *raise an objection, lose sight of*, etc. are much less productive, more fossilized and non-transparent, i.e. they represent lexicalized phrasal constructions at the lowest level of the lexicality continuum - L1.



In contrast, Traugott (1999) claims that there are not enough arguments to say that the development of composite predicates takes place according to the principles of grammaticalization, because this process is not characterized by the creation of a new functional category (e.g. auxiliary verbs), i.e. the verb lexemes in composite predicates do not change their status. However, she concedes that certain elements characteristic of grammaticalization are also present. Traugott (1999: 257-258) argues that the development of composite predicates is accompanied by lexicalization, where lexicalization is understood as a process in which new lexical material is created, such that it has at least some components that are not completely predictable and must be learned (e.g. which verbs are combined with certain nouns). With the reduced predictability of meanings, lexicalized sequences (composite predicates) become increasingly routinized and idiomatic.

In the English composite predicates of the second type there are indeed some threads of grammaticalization, primarily the possibility of composite predicates to express telic situations, thus establishing an aspectual opposition with the corresponding full verbs. More precisely, these composite predicates convey the idea of telicity owing to the presence of the indefinite article before the noun and this meaning is not present in the corresponding full verb.

According to Comrie (1976: 44), telicity in English is tested as follows: if a sentence with a verb in the present progressive tense implies the sentence with the same verb in the present perfect, then the situation is atelic; whereas, the situation is telic when the sentence with the verb in the present progressive tense does not imply the sentence with the same verb in the present perfect. For example: *She is swimming* implies *She has swum*, but *She is having a swim* does not imply *She has had a swim*, which confirms the telicity (i.e. the existence of an end point, or inner boundary) of the composite predicate *have a swim* in relation to the full verb *swim*. Although composite predicates are suitable for expressing telic situations, a distinction should still be made between telicity that signifies reaching the end point of a given situation and telicity in which the end point is not reached (Comrie 1976: 47). When composite predicates are used in the past simple tense, it is usually a question of reaching the end point of the situation (*She had a bath*). On the other hand, when the same composite

predicates are used in the progressive tenses (*She is having a bath*) telic situations are expressed in which the end point has not been achieved.

According to other authors (Vendler 1974: 101; Levin and Rappaport 2005: 90-91) telicity is determined by the adverbials that are allowed in a given sentence. Thus, example (1) has a telic interpretation because the composite predicate in it allows for an adverbial of a (limited) timeframe (*in an hour*), but not an adverbial of duration (*\*for an hour*). In contrast, example (2) has an atelic interpretation because the full verb allows for an adverbial of duration (*for an hour*), but not a timeframe adverbial (*\*in an hour*). However, this telicity test seems to be valid only when telicity implies reaching the inner boundary (end point) of an action.

(1) *She had a swim in / \*for 20 minutes.*

(2) *She swam for / \*in 20 minutes.*

Composite predicates with *take* also exhibit characteristic features of grammaticalization. The aspectual opposition is evident in pairs such as *sip/take a sip*, *look/take a look*, *walk/take a walk* especially when the verb is used in the past tense. In some composite predicates with *take*, the light verb has been grammaticalized into a marker of inchoativity, as in *take a dislike*, *take a lead*, *take control*. These examples do not enter a relationship of absolute semantic synonymy with the corresponding full verbs *dislike*, *lead*, *control* since the latter lack the inchoative component. Paraphrases with *start to + V* would seem to be more accurate equivalents to these composite predicates: *start to dislike*, *start to lead*, *start to control*, respectively (Stojanovska-Ilievska 2018).

A novel approach to lexicalization and grammaticalization was offered by the model of constructionalization proposed by Traugott and Trousdale (2013) and Trousdale (2014). They distinguish between lexical/contentful and grammatical/procedural constructionalization that are viewed as two poles on a gradient. According to this model “signs which are created as the result of constructionalization will be located on a continuum from procedural to contentful meaning” (Trousdale 2014: 562). Thus, with the application of this model to composite predicates, they are to be viewed on a spectrum ranging from ‘procedural’ to ‘contentful’, corresponding to composite predicates undergoing grammaticalization

or lexicalization respectively. Obviously, between the plainly procedural (*take a walk, have a bath*) and the plainly contentful composite predicates (*curry favor with*), there is the 'grey' intermediate class of composite predicates (*give someone a roasting, give someone a kicking*) that demonstrate features of both grammaticalization and lexicalization (Trousdale 2008, Trousdale 2014, Traugott and Trousdale 2013).

However, if we analyse to what extent this state of affairs corresponds to the situation with composite predicates in the Macedonian language, we shall see that the strongest arguments for grammaticalization of English composite predicates are not completely relevant for the Macedonian language. Namely, some of the Macedonian imperfective verbs: *pliva* and *piska* (*swim, scream*) are atelic because they do not contain information about the end point (inner boundary) and can last indefinitely. In contrast, Macedonian perfective verbs are very suitable for expressing telicity, understood as reaching the end point of a given situation, as is the case with: *ispliva, pisne* (*swim, scream, marked for perfective aspect*)<sup>4</sup>. As a result of the fact that aspectual information is immanently present in Macedonian verbs, there had been no need to express aspectual opposition through composite predicates of the type *have a swim* or *give a scream* in English. The aspectual opposition *imperfective - perfective* is not marked morphologically in the verb itself in English, as is the case with the Slavic languages, such as Macedonian. This may be one of the reasons why in Macedonian there are fewer composite predicates compared to English.

Topolińska (1982: 39) argues that the Macedonian composite predicates are mainly associated with lexicalization, and not with grammaticalization. Composite predicates are regarded as set phrases which should be studied individually. In accordance with that, the formations of the type *dava* (*give*) + nominalization, such as: *dava sovet, dava podrška* (*give advice, give support*), as well as all constructions of the type *ima* + nominalization, such as: *ima obvrška, ima potreba* (*have an obligation, have a need*) are considered by Topolińska (2003: 84) as isolated

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<sup>4</sup>Timberlake (2007: 292-293) also points out the close relationship between telicity and perfectivity (the perfective aspect). According to him, predicates that are telic usually appear in the perfective form.

lexicalizations. On the other hand, Topolińska includes the marginal construction *Što* + deverbial noun + *dade*, as in (3), in the regular periphrastic series, noting the limitations placed on the verb, which must be of the perfective aspect and in the past definite complete tense:

- (3) *Što trčanje daje!*  
 What running-N-SG give-PST-DEF-PFV-3SG  
 'He/She/It has been running to excess.'

Although in Slavic studies *dava* (and its perfective counterpart *dade*) is not treated as an auxiliary verb, in Topolińska view such a perspective would be well-grounded due to the fact that in these constructions the verb *dade* is a carrier of tense, aspect, person and number information in these constructions, while its semantic load is minimized. The status of *dade* in these constructions facilitates its presence in composite predicates as well, as a sort of transition from a full verb to an auxiliary verb. Practically, one can trace the first steps on the path to grammaticalization, from a full lexical verb > a light finite component of composite predicates > auxiliary verb > a particle of verbal origin, and a carrier of modal meaning (Topolińska 2003: 87).

To summarize, languages abound with examples that testify to the fact that composite predicates are related to both grammaticalization and lexicalization. There have even been attempts at classifying composite predicates according to certain formal criteria into groups that are typically related to either grammaticalization or lexicalization. Admittedly, there is a gradience in the degree of lexicalization / grammaticalization exhibited by various composite predicates, i.e. in some composite predicates there are more, and in some composite predicates there are fewer elements characteristic of one of these two processes.

### 3. Conclusions

Composite predicates in English are a heterogeneous class, and should be treated as such. Specific instances of English composite

predicates were singled out to demonstrate that features of grammaticalization and/or lexicalization are pronounced to a greater or a lesser degree in them, thus indicating that there truly is a continuum of varying degrees of lexicalization / grammaticalization in composite predicates.

Apart from the aspectual opposition established between the composite predicates and the full verbs, of the features characteristic of grammaticalization composite predicates demonstrate semantic transparency, productivity of the model (because composite predicates include numerous nouns from different semantic fields), as well as expansion of syntactic context (because gerunds and nouns converted from phrasal verbs can also appear in the position of a direct object within the construction). However, it must be emphasized that grammaticalization is a scalar category, the features of which are not present to an equal degree in composite predicates with different light verbs, or even in different subgroups of composite predicates with the same light verb.

With grammaticalized composite predicates, one can expect development in the direction of their further grammaticalization, for instance, by reducing the light verb to a prefix with aspectual meaning. However, another possibility is that some of these constructions will lose their semantic transparency, which is foreshadowed by the fact that certain composite predicates have already served as bases for the creation of idiomatic constructions where the lexicalization facet is more pronounced (*give someone the slip*, *give someone the push*).

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