Metonymical object changes: a corpus-oriented study on Dutch and German
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1. Topic of the dissertation

A classical linguistic problem is answering the question how a verb can be combined with other words into a sentence. Often, a single verb occurs in comparable sentences with different syntactic-semantic patterns. The examples under (1)-(10) illustrate this. Every number shows how a single verb can be combined with two different types of direct objects by means of an a- and a b-sentence.

(1)  
a. The dockworker loaded goods (into the ship)  
b. The dockworker loaded the ship with goods  

(2)  
a. Mary planted roses (in a garden)  
b. Mary planted a garden (with roses)  

(3)  
a. The old lady cleared snow (off / from the pavement)  
b. The old lady cleared the pavement (of snow)  

(4)  
a. John emptied the stuff (from the drawer)  
b. John emptied the drawer (of the stuff)  

(5)  
a. John swept the sand (off the floor)  
b. John swept the floor  

(6)  
a. The farmer plucked feathers (off / from a duck)  
b. The farmer plucked a duck  

(7)  
a. The girl spun yarn (out of / from wool)  
b. The girl spun wool (into yarn)  

(8)  
a. The baker baked a loaf of bread (out of / from the dough)  
b. The baker baked dough (into a loaf of bread)  

(9)  
a. The author continued writing (the book)  
b. The author continued the book  

(10)  
a. Mary enjoyed reading (the book)  
b. Mary enjoyed the book  

Every number shows a minimal pair. Each time, the a-sentences and the b-sentences can refer to the same, or at least a very similar, situation in reality, even though the verb is used with a different type of direct object.  
These combinations of a single verb with different arguments have raised a lot of linguistic questions. For instance, what triggers the alternative patterns? Why and
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when are they allowed? Are there semantic differences between the a-sentences and the b-sentences? What do the syntactic structures tell us about the meaning of the verb? This dissertation aims to clarify such questions, with a focus on Dutch and German data.

2. Different theoretical approaches

According to many linguists, the alternative a-phrases and b-phrases under (1)-(10) are solely triggered by the verb. The idea is that the syntactic behaviour of a verb is determined by its meaning, and that alternative syntactic patterns are associated with different verb senses (Levin 1993: 1ff). In other words, the argument realisations are projected by the verb. The continental tradition of valency research has put forward comparable ideas (cf. Wb. zur Valenz; VALBU; Herbst & Götz-Votteler 2007). However, this dissertation will show that the claim that alternations are fully determined by a verb cannot be true in the strongest sense: In many cases a verb only allows an object change for some specific direct objects.

According to other linguists, underlying syntactic patterns could be regarded as meaningful in and of themselves. Some of the sentences above demonstrate comparable behaviour; compare the use of in(to) and with in (1) and (2), from and of in (3) and (4), off or no possible preposition in (5) and (6), out of / from or into in (7) and (8) and (9) and (10) with or without a VP. In construction grammar, patterns such as “DOlocatum + into/position” in (1)a or “DOlocatum + of/locatum” in (4)b are therefore considered to be meaningful linguistic constructions (Goldberg 1995). Using a different type of direct object with a verb is considered equal to combining a different meaningful construction to the verb. The constructions are held responsible for possible differences in meaning between the a-sentences and the b-sentences. An analysis of alternations boils down to the question of when and why a verb can be used with two different constructions (cf. Iwata 2008).

Although some modern valency analyses are compatible with constructional accounts (cf. Herbst 2010), the two types of linguistic theories, i.e. verb projections versus construction grammar, have opposite starting points. Whereas most valency theories and the projection theories of generative grammar reason from the verb to its argument realisations, construction grammar considers which constructions can be combined with a certain verb. The former theories could be classified as verb-based or lexeme-based (cf. Welke 2009: 82), the latter as construction-based (cf. Welke 2009: 83, 97).

The analysis in this dissertation has yet another slightly different perspective: The focus is not directly upon a verb and its valency patterns or upon possible constructions for a certain verb; instead the relation between both possible direct objects is the starting point of my analysis.

It is important to note that this approach is not directly in conflict with construction grammar. The analysis advocated in this dissertation, which focuses on the relation between the two direct objects, could be considered as an inquiry into under what conditions both types of construction are allowed in Dutch and German
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(cf. also Iwata 2005), and, more importantly, how these constructions are related to each other. But if the meaning of the verb, the meaning of the direct object and the contiguity relation with another possible direct object could explain the behaviour and meaning of examples (1)-(10), one might ask whether one still requires the stipulation of a meaningful construction (cf. also Foolen 2008: 6).

On the basis of the examples above it immediately becomes clear why this dissertation primarily takes the relation between the two possible objects into account: In all examples the two possible direct objects are conceptually closely related within the context evoked by the verb. They display a location and parts of that location or the things in that location, as in (1)-(6), some material and a product made of this material, as in (7) and (8), or an activity and an object involved in this activity, as in (9) and (10). These patterns are traditional contiguity patterns, usually used within research on metonymy.

The idea that metonymy could play a role in licensing the a-alternatives and b-alternatives is not entirely new: Dictionaries with a tradition dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth or even the end of the eighteenth century have described the above phenomena as involving metonymy. The German dictionary by Adelung, which dates from the end of the eighteenth century, structurally classifies shifts similar to the ones illustrated above as instances of metonymy (virtually always within a single verb meaning). The same label can be found in the traditional Dutch WNT or in the modern Van Dale’s dictionary.

Besides the qualification of metonymy, the latter two dictionaries also use the label “objectsverwisseling” (lit.: ‘object change’). Metonymy appears to play a role in object changes: Moerdijk (1994: 86, 139) discusses the relevance of the metonymical relation (i.e. contiguity) between the two objects in cases of “objectsverwisseling” and Van Dale defines “objectsverwisseling” as a specific type of metonymy in the direct object (cf. Van Dale 2005). In German, the same term, i.e. “Objektsvertauschung” or “Objektsverschiebung”, is used (cf. Carlberg 1948; Reichmann 1989: 110 or the Grimm brothers’ dictionary DWB), which has also explicitly been analysed as a specific type of metonymy (Goebel 1997: 185, 187).

Metonymy has not only been used to account for examples like (1)-(10) in traditional lexicography, it is also discussed in some linguistic studies of the last few decades. Since the nineties examples which display eventive contiguity shifts, such as (9) and (10), have been analysed as instances of “logical metonymy” (Pustejovský 1989; 1991; 1995; Verspoor 1997a; 1997b). The idea that metonymy could be a factor involved in sentences like (1)-(6) has been touched upon in Cappelle 2005 (p. 339) and Dowty 2000 (p. 126). In a detailed analysis, Waltereit (Waltereit 1998; 1999) has shown how different argument realisations, like those in (1)-(8), can be analysed as metonymy-driven. He considers them to be diachronically based on prototypically metonymical shifts. Although I will demonstrate that this part of his analysis is problematic, Waltereit’s explanation of such syntactic shifts as figure/ground effects within a frame will be adhered to within this dissertation.
3. The need for Dutch and German corpus data

Waltereit’s research is not only important because he takes into account the contiguity relation between the two possible objects in examples such as (1)-(8) but his work is also valuable because it focusses on French. It is an exception in this respect: Research on patterns as in (1)-(8) in languages other than English or German is rare. Studies on logical metonymy, as illustrated in (9) and (10), also focus mainly on English. There are a very limited number of studies comparing English and French (Godard & Jayez 1993; Pustejovsky & Bouillon 1996), while analyses of this phenomenon in other languages are hardly ever made (Horacek 1996 and a recent paper by Rüd and Zarcone (2011) being notable exceptions).

Given that English data for alternative syntactic patterns (as in (1)-(10)) has been discussed extensively in the literature, an analysis of this phenomenon in Dutch and German, two languages which are different but closely related to English, will be interesting. These two languages will therefore be the primary languages of interest in this study.

The present analysis tries to go beyond introspection. Introspection is problematic, because judgements on sentences such as the ones above differ greatly. Among the few studies on structures like (1)-(6) in Dutch and German, linguists have offered up their differing and even conflicting intuitions as simple facts. The German verb laden (‘to load’), for instance, is sometimes discussed as being different from English in that it does not occur with a location as a direct object, as in (1)b (cf. Frense & Bennet 1996: 313-314; Sauerland 1994: 54-55). Other linguists regard the German verb laden as very similar to the English verb ‘to load’, in that it allows the two types of direct objects (Brinkmann 1995: 50; Dewell 2004: 23). Similarly, opposing judgements can be found for Dutch: De Groot, for instance, explicitly denies that a simplex verb such as smeren (‘to spread’/ ‘to butter’) can be used with locations as a direct object (De Groot 1998), whereas Laffut discusses such examples, illustrated by real data (Laffut 1998: 158). Linguists sometimes also reject more complicated examples, which do in fact occur in corpora. The problem is that context is often necessary to make such sentences possible.

The use of real examples is therefore of crucial importance: Corpus data can be used to avoid personal judgements and unnecessary rejections. Making use of corpus data can therefore be considered a “major improvement” and “a major step in the science of language” (Sinclair 2007: 202, 203). Because this study aims at analysing examples in depth, the corpus analyses are of a qualitative nature. The fact that corpus data are used to examine and “support reasonable claims about the language” makes the present analysis in Sinclair’s terms ‘corpus-assisted’ or ‘corpus-oriented’ (cf. Sinclair 2007: 202).

4. Dissertation outline

In order to analyse to what extent metonymy and object contiguity could be the underlying mechanism of the alternatives in, (1)-(10) several topics have to be...
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tackled. First of all, the way metonymy has been analysed by (mainly cognitive) linguists should be clarified (cf. e.g. Barcelona 2000; Benczes et al. 2011; Croft 1993; Koch 2001; Kövecses & Radden 1998). Also its definition should be considered. This will the subject of chapter II. It will turn out that metonymy in linguistics should be regarded as a highlighting effect within a frame, which has its effects upon semantic content and linguistic form.

Subsequently, chapter III will discuss how metonymy influences language. These influences range from prototypical examples to rather peripheral metonymies. The end of the chapter will examine to what extent metonymy can influence the argument structure within a sentence. Such effects will be called “predicative metonymies”. The term “Metonymical Object Changes” (MOCs) will be used for predicative metonymies that affect the direct object slot, which are the primary focus of this dissertation. Taken together, chapters II and III will reveal important characteristics of metonymy. They form the theoretical basis of this dissertation.

Chapter IV will adduce supporting evidence of the classification of metonymical influences made in chapter III, by taking dictionary data into account. Dutch and German dictionaries incorporate almost all types of metonymy effects as distinguished by linguistic research. Especially some Dutch and German dictionaries classify effects upon argument structure as metonymy-driven. Given that dictionaries describe meanings, it will also be discussed how dictionaries analyse the meaning of verbs as in (1)-(10). I will argue that the verb does not have to be considered polysemous. This is not only in line with the fact that dictionaries treat the majority of these verbs as non-polysemous, but this conclusion can be supported by a number of linguistic tests and is also reflected in some new linguistic studies. Chapter IV illustrates that dictionaries reflect linguistic insights before their time.

Therefore, practical lexicography and linguistics can benefit from each other. Chapter V illustrates this by searching for metonymical object changes (MOCs) in dictionaries. The examples that are found will be critically analysed and compared with existing sets of similar verb-object pairs (such as examples in Apresjan 1992 or Levin 1993). Given that the relationship between the possible direct objects will be analysed, the contiguity types involved will be classified (cf. Peirsman & Geeraerts 2006).

Chapters VI-VIII present the core analysis of MOCs. Chapters VI and VII will analyse some object-verb combinations in full detail on the basis of corpus samples. Chapter VI will discuss data of MOCs which shift between concrete entities, as in (1)-(8). This chapter will reveal how complex some of the examples are and why one object can be chosen over another. Furthermore, I will show that the contiguity relation between the possible direct objects must be taken into account for a full understanding of examples such as (1)-(10).

Chapter VII will examine Dutch and German corpus data of MOCs which shift between an event and a concrete object, as in (9) and (10). The fact that some concrete objects and preferred interpretations of the activity occur more frequently than others will again support the assumption that contiguity relations and their relevance with respect to the verb should be taken into account.
The definition of predicative metonymies in chapter III will be worked out in chapter VIII. This chapter will show that examples such as (1)-(10) can indeed be analysed as highlighting effects within a frame. With the help of the frames as developed by the English FrameNet (cf. framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu), all of the above argument shifts can be explained in a similar way. This analysis will also be able to account for some subtleties in language.

The advantages of the metonymy analysis advocated in this dissertation will be summarised in the concluding chapter. This study not only examines and clarifies MOCs by analysing a lot of data (which could be useful from a practical perspective in lexicography), but it also provides theoretical insights into the phenomenon of metonymy in general.