

LIGHT VERB CONSTRUCTIONS WHICH APPEAR IN THE DOUBLE OBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS AND IN THE PREPOSITIONAL DATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH. FOCUSING ON THE LIGHT VERB GIVE

Carmen-Elena Stănculescu

Doctoral School: Languages and Cultural Identities, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures,
University of Bucharest, 7-13 Pitar Moș, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the behaviour of the light verb give, in English, that appears in the double object constructions and the prepositional dative constructions. We write down the well known classification of deverbal nominals into complex event nominals, simple event nominals and result nominals. We will also bring into discussion the suffixes that appear with these deverbal nominals. We are only interested in the zero-derived nominals which are always result nominals. The scope of the zero-derived suffix is quite important to our research. We will show that there is a preference for the double object construction, at least, in case of the light verb give plus a zero-derived nominal.

Key words: light verb, deverbal nominal, zero-derived suffix, result nominals, double object constructions, prepositional dative constructions

1. INTRODUCTION

In this section, we will define light verbs, deverbal nominals, and also describe their properties. We will also make a review of the well known classification of deverbal nominals into complex event nominals, simple event nominals and result nominals. In this paper, we are only interested in result nominals. We will also bring into focus the suffixes that appear with these deverbal nominals, and try to classify them into suffixes that will only combine with result nominals and suffixes that have two readings: an eventive one and a result one.

1.1. Defining light verbs. Properties of light verbs.

Jespersen (1965, volume VI, p. 117, apud Butt 2010, p.1) is generally credited with first coining the term *light verb*, which he applies to English verb plus noun phrase constructions as in (1):

- (1) *have* a rest, a read, a cry, a think
 take a sneak, a drive, a walk, a plunge, a photograph
 give a sigh, a shout, a shiver, a pull, a ring, a smile
- (2) *a face o plimbare* (prin parc) ‘to take a walk (in the park)’, *un duș* ‘to take a shower’
 a avea ură ‘to have hate’, *răbdare* ‘to have patience’, *invidie* (față de el) ‘to have
 envy/jealousy of (him)’
 a da rod ‘to bear fruit’
 a lua masa ‘to have dinner’

These examples in (1) and (2) show that there are many light verbs in English, just as in Romanian, but we are only interested in *give*, from English.

In the study of light verb constructions has been noticed that the verb forms from these constructions are, on the one hand, semantically bleached, but, on the other hand, the verb may also function as the one that assigns thematic roles and/or cases to its DPs. This can be noticed by the fact that both, that is, the lexical verb *give* and the light verb *give*, have the same argument structure and so, they can assign the same thematic roles and/or cases. In other words, light verbs may license those categories (that is, NPs or DPs) and also theta mark them. From a syntactic perspective, the light verb syntax is identical to that of the lexical or full verb from which the light verb derives from, because the light verb determines which morphological cases are realized.

Cattell (1984, p.2) says that: “the words *make*, *give*, *have*, *take*, and *do* seem semantically very ‘light’ and they mean very little more than that a verbal action occurred. This action is spelt out in the nominal that follows. *Make*, *give*, *take* and *do* seem to do only a little more than provide the verb-function and carry the signification of tense and number”. This can be the case of the light verb *avea* ‘have’ which is a stative verb, so it selects only non-eventive nominals, for example there is a clear difference between the light *avea* ‘have’ from Romanian, and light verb *have* from English:

(a) *a avea o credință* ‘have a belief’, *o durere* ‘have a pain’, and

(b) *have/take a walk*, which in Romanian is translated using another light verb ‘*a face (make) o plimbare*’

1.2. Deverbal nominals. Classification of deverbal nominals.

A light verb is a verb that is obligatorily followed by a deverbal nominal. Generally, the thematic structure of the construction is the one of the deverbal nominal; it comes from the main verb from which the deverbal nominal is derived.

A deverbal nominal is a nominal that is derived from a verb; whether it is a zero-derived nominal, for example: *to sigh*, *to give a sigh*, or suffixed-derived nominal, for example: *to demonstrate*, *to give a demonstration*, in this case with the suffix *-ion*. We start from the classification of deverbal nominals into complex event nominals, simple event nominals and result nominals in Grimshaw (1990) and Alexiadou’s (2001) terminology.

1.3. Types of suffixes.

In this paper, we are only interested in result nominals. We will also bring into discussion the suffixes that appear with these deverbal nominals, and try to classify them into suffixes that will only combine with result nominals and suffixes that have two readings: an eventive one and a result one.

The English suffixes we are interested in are:

(a) the zero-suffix. It is the one we will analyse in this article. It is the most productive, because it has the same form as the lexical verb from which it comes. From Grimshaw (1990) we know that all zero-derived nominals are result nominals. A list with some of the zero-derived nominals is the following:

Give: a bark, a cough, a cry, a gasp, a howl, a moan, a shiver, a sigh, a sneeze, a sniff, a snort, a sob, a cuddle, a hit, a hug, a kick, a kiss, a pat, a punch, a push and so on.

(b) *-ation*. This suffix is known in specialized literature as having two readings: an eventive one and a result one. A list with some of the *-ation* deverbal nominals is:

Give: an explanation, a presentation, an information, a consideration, a representation, an observation, a recommendation and so on.

(c) *-ion*. This suffix is known in the literature as having two readings: an eventive one and a result one. A list with some of the *-ion* deverbal nominals is:

Give: a demonstration, a description, an illustration, an imitation, an impersonation, an indication, a reputation, a generation, an evaluation, an orientation, an education, a medication, a definition, a donation, a permission, a suggestion, a translation, an animation, an expression and so on.

In the next lines, we will show that the deverbal nominal *demonstration* has two readings: an eventive one and a result one. This deverbal nominal is formed with the suffix *-ion*.

- (3)
- a. He demonstrated his technique to the postgraduates.
 - b. He demonstrated the postgraduates his technique.
 - c. His demonstration of his technique to the postgraduates was impressive.
 - d. He gave a demonstration of his technique to the postgraduates.
 - e. He gave the postgraduates a demonstration of his technique.
 - f. the demonstration which he gave of his technique to the postgraduates.
 - g. the demonstration of his technique to the postgraduates which he gave last week.
 - h. the demonstration of his technique which he gave to the postgraduates last week.

(examples taken from Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p.292).

According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 292) “the DP, *the postgraduates*, is the complement of the light verb *give*, in (3e), the DP, *the postgraduates*, in (3d), can also be interpreted as a complement of the light verb *give*. The DP, *a demonstration*, can admit these complements: *of his technique*, and *to the postgraduates*, as we can see in (3c). In (3f), we can notice that the propositional phrases, *of his technique* and *to the postgraduates*, are both of them complements of the light verb *give*. In (3g), we can conclude that the prepositional phrases, *of his technique* and *to the postgraduates*, are both of them complements of the DP *demonstration*. In (3h), we can point out that the first prepositional phrase (PP), that is, *of his techniques*, is a complement of the DP *demonstration*, while the second prepositional phrase, that is, *to the postgraduates*, is a complement of the light verb *give*”.

From the above examples we can conclude that the scope of the *-ion* suffix is higher, so this means that the deverbal nominal *his demonstration* can realize its arguments inside the deverbal nominal construction. In other words, as we can observe from (3c) and also from (3g) that the deverbal nominal *his demonstration* can take as its complements the PP, *of his technique*, and also the PP, *to the postgraduates*.

(d) *-ment*. This is a result suffix. This suffix is of Romance origin. A list with some of the *-ment* deverbal nominals is:

Give: a government, an argument, an assignment, an endorsement, an increment, an improvement, an acknowledgement, a reimbursement, an encouragement, a payment, a judgement, a statement, an investment and so on.

(e) *-ance*. This is a result suffix. This suffix is of Romance origin. A list with some of the *-ance* deverbal nominals is:

Give: a performance, an appearance, an admittance, an allowance, a resemblance and so on.

For this study, two kinds of empirical data have been investigated, namely existing zero-derived deverbal nominals in The Corpus of Contemporary American English and existing zero-derived deverbal nominals listed in dictionaries such as The Oxford English Dictionary (1989; OED) and The Great English Romanian Dictionary of Idioms (2007; GERDI).

2. LIGHT VERB CONSTRUCTIONS WITH GIVE

In this section we will present some of the most important properties of the zero-derived nominals. We will also present the zero-derived nominals that can appear only in the double object constructions, but also the ones that can appear in the alternation between the double object constructions and the prepositional dative constructions. We will discuss the scope of the zero-derived suffix which is low, and what this means with respect to inside arguments of the deverbal nominal or outside ones.

2.1. Light verb constructions with give which only appear in double object constructions and the ones that allow the alternation of the double object constructions with the prepositional dative constructions

A list with some of the zero-derived nominals is the following:

Give: a cuddle, a hit, a hug, a kick, a kiss, a pat, a punch, a push and so on. According to Cattell (1984, p. 7) “none of the above items can be associated with *to*-phrases”, an idea that will we prove not to be always true for some of them. All these deverbal nominals come from transitive verbs and can be use in our analysis of double object constructions and prepositional dative constructions.

There are also situations when the indirect object is only optional, for example:

- (4)
- a. She described him (to me).
 - b. Mary’s description.
 - c. Mary’s description of him.
 - d. She gave (me) a description of him.
 - e. She gave a description of him to me.

(examples taken from Huddleston and Pullum 2002, pp. 293-294).

Generally, in English, we encounter a preference for double object constructions instead of the prepositional dative constructions, which involves the preposition *TO*, at least in some cases that involve zero-derived nominals. The list of zero-derived nominals that do not allow the *to*-alternation checked in The Corpus of Contemporary American English includes the following deverbal nominals:

Give: a cuddle, a pat, a punch, a push.

- (5)
- a. The whole family pushed Mary to go to college.
 - b. The whole family gave Mary a push to go to college.

c. *The whole family gave a push (to go to college) to Mary.

(example (b) is taken from The Great English-Romanian Dictionary of Idioms (GERDI) 2007, p. 221).

From these examples, we can show that the prepositional dative construction is not a valid alternative in this case, so no *to*-phrase is allowed. However, the zero-derived suffix shows the following property: the subject of the lexical verb from which the deverbal nominal (a zero-derived nominal) comes is shared with the subject of the light verb construction with *give*.

Moreover, there are zero-derived nominals that permit the alternation between the double object constructions and the prepositional dative constructions. These deverbal nominals checked in The Corpus of Contemporary American English are the following:

Give: a hit, a hug, a kick, a kiss.

- (6)
- a. Ken kissed Cathy.
 - b. Ken's kiss.
 - c. *Ken's kiss of Cathy.
 - d. Ken gave Cathy a kiss.
 - e. *Ken gave a kiss to Cathy.
 - f. Ken gave a kiss to anyone who deserved it.

(example taken from Cattell 1984, p. 67; p.74).

From these examples, we can say that according to Cattell the *to*-phrase construction is not allowed, but below we will exemplify that this is not true. According to Bruening (2010) the example in (5f) is actually a double object construction disguised as a prepositional dative construction.

However, we discovered that in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), there are examples that use the construction *give a kiss to* plus a noun:

- (7)
- a. [...] Before dying, he said, 'Please give a kiss to my wife'. "The horrific experience nearly destroyed Molinari". (COCA:2009:MAG HarpersBazaar).
 - b. [...] MACKINTOSH (CONT'D) ... will you do me a favour? Give a kiss to your Katrina for me. Alain reaches into his pocket, tossing his SINGLE [...]. (COCA:1998:FIC MOV:Legionnaire).

Moreover, the zero-derived nominal *kiss* has another important property. It has low scope which means that the deverbal nominal *kiss* cannot realize its argument inside the deverbal nominal construction, but it has to externalize it in the form of the dative phrase, that is, *to my wife*, which is found outside the deverbal nominal construction. In other words, as we can observe from (7a) and also from (7b) that the deverbal nominal *kiss* cannot take as its complement the dative phrase *to my wife* (7a) (or *to your Katrina* (7b)).

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

So, we can conclude that nowadays speakers use both alternatives that involve the double object, whether they are double object constructions or prepositional dative constructions.

It is a well known fact that the light verb constructions with *give* are idiomatic constructions, and so, the light verb constructions with *give* show a preference for the double object constructions instead of the prepositional dative constructions. Idiomatic constructions are constructions that involve the double object constructions and not the prepositional dative constructions.

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