Creativity and Productivity in Composite Predicates in the History of American English.

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This study examines diachronic developments of verbo-nominal composite predicates with light verbs (e.g., *make an assumption)* in the history of American English between 1800 and the present day. This type of composite predicate (or CP) contains a polysemous transitive verb, or light verb (e.g., *make*), which often combines with an abstract nominal complement that carries the semantic weight of a verb. We set out to answer the question of why creativity of novel CPs that are similar to others might lead to an increase in productivity over time in some cases but not in others. A quantitative analysis of verbo-nominal CPs in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) (Davies 2010) provides support for the view that the semantic heaviness of the verb is responsible for the increase in productivity among some CPs over time (e.g., *take a look*) and for the lack of productivity among other CPs that contain a more lexically specific verb (e.g., *bear witness, lose sight of)*.

Following a diachronic construction grammar approach to CPs as laid out in Sundquist (2022), we describe the creation of and proliferation of novel verb-noun pairings in CPs in terms of successful exemplars (cf., Bybee 2006). We undertook a quantificational analysis of texts from COHA (1820-2010) to examine more closely four verb-noun pairings, namely, *take+look* and *make+sound* as well as *bear+witness* and *lose+sight*, analyzing type and token frequencies and tracking these collocations over time, along with families of semantically similar nouns that occur with the same verbs.

Results provide evidence that the lexical specificity of the verb dictates how productive CPs may become over the long term. We relate the differences in the relative productivity of each type of CP and the semantic properties of the verbs to the notion of coverage, as outlined in Goldberg (2019) and address the implications of this analysis for a diachronic approach and the effect that time may have on coverage and the ever-changing frequencies of novel and exemplary multi-word expressions.

References: • Bybee, Joan (2006). From usage to grammar. *Language* 82(4), 711-733. • Davies, Mark (2010). The corpus of historical American English. URL: http://corpus.byu.edu/coha. • Goldberg, Adele E. (2019). Explain me this. Princeton: Princeton University Press. • Sundquist, John D. (2022). An exemplar-based approach to composite predicates in the history of American English. *English Language and Linguistics* 26(2). 413-442.