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How light can a light verb be?

In earlier studies, we have investigated the complex constructional patterns of body-part idioms of the type V + NP in five different languages (see Niemi et al. 2010, 2013a). In these corpora and dictionary based analyses, we have looked at the overall lexical composition of these idiomatic constructions and the NP complement in them.

In this presentation, we take the ideas of Niemi et al. (2013b) further and concentrate on the semantics of the verbal element in complex verb constructions at the same time extending our study beyond idioms. It has been claimed that in so-called light verb constructions the verbs carry most of the constructional meaning, while the verb is more or less empty (see e.g. Pottelberge 2000, Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 290–296). Whether this is true – especially in languages that vary greatly in their structural properties – will be tested in our presentation with the help of a case study on the semantic division of labor between the verb and its complement in V + NP constructions in four languages (English, German, Finnish and Russian). The discussion is based on corpus data, and the verb with the main emphasis is *take* and its semantic equivalents in the studied languages. ‘Take’, after all, typically carries various meanings, many of which are by no means empty, thus having the potential to enrich the semantic complexity of the so-called light verb constructions.

References:

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