Exploring the Integration of Valency Patterns and Meaning

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Firth's (1957: 190) argued that the study of meaning is a permanent interest of scholarship. He (Firth 1957: 192) further suggested the procedure for dealing with meaning, that is, to disperse it into different modes, among which colligation is one salient type. Firth's notion of colligation is rather complex which means the co-occurrence of multi grammatical choices such as the classes of word and sentence or other similar grammatical categories. The statement of meaning at the syntactic level is in terms of these grammatical categories and of the interrelation of them in colligations. Corpus linguists borrow Firth's term of colligation but do not apply full colligation in their description of grammatical patterns. Colligation is narrowed down to the co-occurrence of word class with a collocating pair (Sinclair 1991, 2004; Hunston & Francis 2000), mainly because of the limitation of the present descriptive techniques on the syntagmatic axis (Sinclair 2004: 142). However, this simplified colligation is an extremely useful concept in describing the grammatical structure and stating the meaning at the grammatical level. Sinclair (2004) used it in his model of extended unit of meaning, Hunston & Francis (2000) employed it in their Pattern Grammar, and consequently it has been widely accepted by corpus researchers. However, Teubert (2007: 227) argued that "grammatical categories have to be posited on more than just the one level (namely word class)" and proposed "a set of categories and classifications taken from valency theory" (ibid) and this model would supplement Pattern Grammar and "have solutions for the problems of ambiguity and similarity" (ibid: 232). Sinclair (2004: 18) predicted that "valency grammar … is likely to see an upsurge of interest in the next few years". However, this is not a revival of interest in the traditional valency grammar, but in capitalizing some categories and classifications in valency grammar to augment pattern grammar.

The privilege of valency is to link local, lexical grammar to general grammar (Teubert 2007: 225). And according to Sinclair (2008), in describing meaning, grammar and lexis cannot be separated. Inspired by these views, Reichardt（2014）proposed the notion of valency sentence patterns and explores the meaning interpretation of the valency patterns, taking the verb CONSIDER as a case study. However, Reichardt's study has a limitation, namely the narrow scope of empirical data. If our research interest is in the integration of lexis' valency patterns and meaning, more data are desirable. Hornby (1954, cited in Hunston & Francis 2000: 5) once suggested to deal with together a group of verbs with similar patterns to identify common meaning.

The present research aims to investigate the integration of lexis' valency

patterns and meaning. To achieve this aim, we apply Reichardt's system of valency pattern to the description of a group of verbs, namely, *consider, believe, feel, find, guess, judge, know, prove, suppose and think*, as suggested by Hornby. The corpus used is the BNC. Firstly, 200 randomly-chosen concordance lines are retrieved from the BNC for each verb. Secondly, the verbs are described in terms of valency patterns, and the valency patterns for each verb are listed in descending order of frequency. Thirdly, common valency patterns among all the verbs are identified, and as well as the idiosyncratic patterns. Finally, the association among lexis, valency patterns, and meaning is observed. The major findings are presented as follows.

（1） There are some common valency patterns for all the verbs, such as "Sub V Obj-*that*", "Sub V Obj-nom", "Sub V Obj vb-*to*-inf", "*it* BE adj *to* V Obj-that", "Sub V Obj-*wh*", etc., and some for most of the verbs, such as "Sub V Obj adj", "Sub V", "*it be* V-*ed* that", "Sub be V-*ed* vb-*to*-inf", etc. The common valency pattern identified indicates a common sense among all the verbs involved.

（2） Each verb has its preference for some typical valency patterns. For example, the verb *prove* is highly associated with "Sub V adj", and the verb *guess* tends to occur very often in "Sub V". This preference can be used as an indicator of difference among the verbs.

（3） Some verbs are repulsed by certain valency patterns which are associated with other verbs. For example, "Sub V Obj adj" is frequently linked with the verbs *find*, *believe, feel, judge, prove, think,* but the verbs *guess, know, suppose* are repulsed by it. In order to validate this finding, we examine the association between the verb and the valency pattern in the whole BNC. The repulsion between a verb and valency pattern is of great value in analyzing the absence of meaning in the verb.

（4） Valency patterns can be interpreted in terms of meaning. In other words, sense and structure are interwoven. For example, the verbs in the valency pattern "it BE V-*ed* that" share a common sense, namely to objectify, albeit in varying degrees, the statement expressed in the "that-clause" following the verb.

（5） Some valency patterns are observed to have obvious pragmatic functions which have little to do with the semantic meaning of the verbs involved. For example, the valency pattern "Sub V Obj adj" implies evaluation, and most of the verbs under survey can be used in this valency pattern, no matter what semantic meaning they have. Moreover, the same pragmatic function can be realized by different forms of valency patterns. For example, evaluation can be realized by "Sub V Obj adj", "Sub V Obj nom", "It BE adj V Obj-that", and so on.

The above findings, albeit tentative, indicate the complex association between sense and structure. And these findings also have pedagogic implications, since

students, especially EFL students, hope to learn words with semantic and syntactic restrictions.

References

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