Using dictionary definitions to identify the semantic profile of an open slot in a construction

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The study addresses the question of how to identify and characterise the semantic profile of the class of words that can appear in an open slot of a construction. The description of the semantic profile of a constructional slot contributes to the identification of the meaning(s) and productivity of the construction, including for constructicographic purposes.

In previous studies different semantic inventories have been used to categorise the words, mainly verbs and event nouns, that appear in a construction, for example, an inventory of event types that are basic to human experience, e.g. someone causing something, someone experiencing something, etc. (Goldberg 1995:39); more narrowly circumscribed verb classes (including subclasses) subsumed under these basic human event types, e.g. verbs of appearing, verbs of attaching and detaching, etc. (Barðdal 2008:63-68); more broadly defined event types, like mental, physical and social events (Levshina 2016:251); FrameNet (Fillmore et al. 2002) frames, e.g. Statement, Sound, etc. (Sundquist 2020:361-362, Bonial 2014).

The aim of the present study is to test an additional method for describing the semantic profile of a constructional slot. In a dataset consisting of the lemmas appearing in the open slot of a construction in corpus data, we annotate each lemma with descriptors extracted from their dictionary definitions. Based on the classification and clustering of the (sets of) descriptors, we will construct the semantic profile of the class of lemmas that are compatible with this constructional slot. The added value of the method is that it allows to capture semantic dimensions that crosscut categories like event types, verb classes, or frames, for example, intensity, collectivity, or impulsivity. Such aspects of meaning can be gleaned from dictionary definitions, which go beyond recording the broad semantic type of a lemma. A second advantage of the method is that it can be applied to any set of words defined by a construction, not only to words denoting events or some other particular semantic type.

We will apply the method to an expressive and colloquial complex predicate construction in Estonian. Our data consists of the instances of the construction extracted from the Estonian National Corpus (ENL21). The dictionary definitions come from the Combined Dictionary of Estonian (CombiDic22).

The construction consists of the finite verb *minema* 'go' combined with an NP headed by an event noun in the translative case form, see (1). The verb does not take a subject and is always in the third person singular form. The construction denotes the inception of the nominalised event.

(1) *Wisla   ja   Levadia   fännide   vahel   **läks   lööma-ks**.*
    Wisla.GEN and   Levadia.GEN fans.GEN.PL between   **go.PST.3SG fight-TRA**
    'A fight broke out between the fans of Wisla and Levadia.'

In terms of productivity indicators (Baayen 2009), the construction is highly productive. In terms of collostructional strength (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003, Gries 2022), the vast majority of the 1386 lemmas represented in the dataset show an equally weak association with the construction. Nevertheless, the meaning of the construction restricts the class of words that are compatible with it. We hypothesise that the aspects of the meaning of the construction that restrict the class of compatible words are not limited to event types or frames but include additional features that can emerge from the analysis of the dictionary definitions of the lemmas.

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