



Force Dynamics in English Infinitive Constructions

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Abstract

Talmy (2000) describes force dynamics as a conceptual category that captures how entities interact with respect to applying force, resisting or overcoming force, blocking force, or removing blockage. In language, force dynamics manifests itself in both lexical elements and grammatical structures. Widely discussed examples of the latter include causative constructions and modal auxiliaries. This paper argues that force-dynamic meanings are present in several syntactic constructions in English that have, to this point, received little or no attention regarding this conceptual category. Based on corpus data from the COCA (Davies 2008) and collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003), it is shown that force dynamics characterize the constructional meaning of English object-to-subject raising (Mair 1987, Langacker 1995), subject complement clauses with *ing*-forms (Hilpert 2010), and the split infinitive construction (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Perales-Escudero 2010). Collostructional analyses indicate that the three construction types are systematically associated with networks of force-dynamic scenarios that are organized in a semantic map. In addition, the three constructions exhibit coercion effects, imposing their meanings on lexical elements that are not inherently force-dynamic. These findings are discussed in terms of their implications for current usage-based network models of language (Diessel 2019, 2023, Schmid 2020).

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