

Advances in the lexicography of Modern Irish verbs

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Irish verbs are somewhat peculiar at least in two different ways: they are syntactically highly prominent in that they initiate the linear structure of a sentence, and may also serve as anaphorical sentence representations. But from the point of view of comparative lexicography they are strangely deficient, as more or less cumbersome circumlocutions correspond to plain verbs in most other European languages ('have' being perhaps the most obvious example).

The paper is a report on work in progress and will deal with the syntactic and semantic differentiation of Modern Irish verbs. While the existing dictionaries of Modern Irish such as Ó Dónaill give substantial information on this topic, it is felt (and will be shown) that more detailed analysis and more systematic presentation is called for. A few selected verbs will be presented to demonstrate how the varying syntactic patterns interact with the semantic range of verbs, and what a unified description of all relevant properties might look like. The analysis focusses on:

- (1) Discovery procedures for the distinction between complements and adjuncts in empirically realistic verb contexts, which is a persistent problem in valency theory (see e.g. Ágel); the delimitation of semantic restrictions for verb complements is an issue related to this problem.
- (2) Definition of semantic roles fulfilled by the complements in relation to the verb, with a focus on the applicability of such a system to rich and realistic data – as opposed to mere theoretical modelling, as in most versions of case grammar, functional grammar and some more recent approaches.
- (3) Occurrence of directional adverbs as verb-derivational elements, in contrast with free constructions of similar make-up; this topic is connected to the concept of 'phrasal verbs' in English, aptly analyzed by Bolinger, or prefix/particle verbs in German and other Indo-European languages, such as van Valin.
- (4) Problems relating to the hierarchical arrangement of the semantic range of individual verbs; polysemy vs. homonymy; metonymical and metaphorical bridges, and a reasoned ordering of sublemmata based on such considerations, clearly an issue as old as the making of dictionaries.
- (5) Grammaticalization paths in some common verbs, giving rise to the rich variety of verbal locutions mentioned above, as well as to a fairly refined system of aspectual periphrasis.

The work to be reported on is strictly empirical, corpus-based, and largely computer-aided. Most of the information on Irish verb patterns is derived from the spoken corpus *Caint Chonamara*, as well as from the literary source *Corpas Náisiúnta na Gaeilge* – together comprising ca. 3 mio. words. For the purpose of identifying Irish verbs in running written texts a special programme was developed, the features and functions of which will be outlined in the paper.

References

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