

The semantics of Light Verb Constructions in Modern Irish

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The term Light Verb Construction (henceforth LVC) is used with reference to a combination of a ‘a common verb of general meaning’ (Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 174)) with a complement, whose semantic load is greater, e.g. *take a walk, give a groan, make a search, have a drink and do a stunt* in English. The paper focuses on the semantics of their opposite numbers in Modern Irish. The structures in question are made up of the verbal noun and one of the following light verbs: *déan* ‘do’, *tabhair* ‘give’, *faigh* ‘get’, *bain* ‘take, extract’, *cuir* ‘put’, for example:

Dhein sé gearán.

do-past he complain-VN

‘He made a complaint.’

Wierzbicka (1982) brought to light the necessity of semantic considerations in the analysis of LVCs. This presentation aims at demonstrating that the productivity of the construction is affected not only by aspectual considerations but also by semantic factors. It is a well known fact that VNs are used in this construction when the corresponding verb has a limited set of inflected forms, and/or to achieve a partitive or singulative effect (Ó Siadhail (1989: 304-308), Wigger (in press)). In addition to this, as will be shown light verbs display systematic behaviour in their ability to combine with verbal nouns derived from certain semantic verb classes.

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