Dream a little dream of me: Cognate Predicates in English*

Ignazio Mauro Mirto[1]
Università di Palermo

Abstract

Three constructions of English are under scrutiny: in the first, the post-verbal noun (PVN) is a Cognate Object (CO, e.g. *They all sighed a little sigh of relief*); in the second, it is a Reaction Object (RO, e.g. *She rattled out a painful laugh*), whilst in the third it is a Measure Phrase (MP, e.g. *This case weighs 20 kilos*). COs, ROs, and MPs are analysed as noun predicates combining with a support (light) verb. COs and ROs may differ from MPs with regard to the (surface) grammatical relation they bear: in CO sentences, the PVN is a predicate surfacing as an argument, as in the RO construction; on the other hand, in *It weighs 20 kilos* the MP is a predicate throughout the structure. This paper offers a solution to the long-standing problem concerning the nature (argument vs. complement) of COs and MPs. In the proposed analysis, the verbs occurring with COs, ROs, and MPs have both plain and support uses rather than an alternating valence like that found with verbs such as *eat* (*He ate fruit – He ate*) or *break* (*He broke the window – The window broke*). Two types of support verbs are set apart: one, with or without descriptive content, works as an auxiliary, the other has descriptive content and is unergative.

Keywords : Cognate object, *complément interne*, measure phrase, light verb, reaction object

1. Introduction

In the case of unmarked word-order, sentences such as (1), an instance of the Cognate Object (CO) construction, contain a post-verbal noun (PVN), the analysis of which oscillates between two possible interpretations:

(1) *Bill sighed a weary sigh*. (Jones 1988: 89)

Some analysts argue that the CO has the properties of an obligatory complement, i.e. an argument, whilst others contend it has the properties of a free complement (an adjunct).[2]

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[1] Dipartimento di Analisi dell'Espressione (DANAE), Università di Palermo, ignaziomirto@unipa.it.

[2] Horrocks and Stavrou 2006 analyse COs invariably as adjuncts and provide a concise overview of the debate: "Jones (1988) […] argues that the CoC is heterogeneous and that only the DPs in examples like *He smiled an enigmatic smile* are genuine Cos, to be treated as adjunct NPs […], while cases like *They danced all sorts of dances at the party* involve ordinary objects (cf. Pereltsvaig (2002) [2001]). Moltman (1990) [1989] and Mittwoch (1998) assume that Cos are predicates over the event argument […] of the related verb. Massam (1990) and McFarland (1995) […] argue that all examples like those mentioned above involve structural (thematic) objects (i.e. are complements)". Pereltsvaig 1999 distinguishes two classes of COs: argument COs and adverbial COs. In her opinion, English and French have argument COs only.

Comparable contrasting views concern another construction, in which, unlike (1), the PVN is mandatory, as in (2):

(2) *It weighs nearly 27 kilos*. (Cobuild)

Some authors refer to the PVN in (1) as a 'complément interne' (Gougenheim 1964, Riegel 1999, Pina Serrano 2004), whereas others term it a "cognate complement" (Halliday 1967, Davidse and Rymen 2006), or, more frequently, a "cognate object".[3] As for the construction exemplified in (2), its PVN has been labelled as a "complément de mesure" (still Riegel 1999, and references therein), or as a "measure phrase", MP, (e.g. Flickinger and Bond 2003).[4]

Besides the controversial syntactic status of the PVN, CO and MP constructions are both characterized by the presence of two lexical items belonging to distinct parts of speech (verb and noun), but related, however, either morphologically or through a hyperonym/hyponym relationship, which explains the reasons why the PVN of the clause-type in (1) has been termed 'cognate complement/object' (e.g. *to dream* ↔ *dream*), or why analysts say that the PVN is a complement that "re-labels" the verb (Halliday 1967). In (2), the lexical/semantic relationship between the verb and the PVN (*to weigh* ↔ *kilo*, *to run* ↔ *mile*) is distinct but also evident.

Sentences such as *He roared his thanks*, from Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 305 (henceforth, H&P 2002) exemplify a third construction with an optional PVN, named Reaction Object (RO) by Felser and Wanner (2001), and with properties overlapping those of CO sentences.

In the present analysis, the label identifying CO sentences such as (1) needs to be re-worded, insofar as in this clause-type the noun and the verb can be regarded as cognate *predicates*. MP constructions involve cognate predicates as well.

Section 2 provides some arguments to analyse COs as noun predicates, whilst section 3 suggests a parallel between COs and ROs with regard to their predicative nature and the verbs with which they occur, in both cases analysed as supports. Section 4 succinctly targets MP constructions. The three clause-types all share double predication, regardless of the label with which this notion has been referred to: e.g. secondary predication, serial predication, e.g. serial verb constructions, or serialization as opposed to auxiliation (Rosen 1997).[5]

2. Cognate Objects as noun predicates

In a sentence such as (3) the verb assigns *the two boxers* a syntactic role (SUBJECT OF) and a related thematic role (FIGHTER):

(3) *The two boxers fought.*

[3] In the literature the label comprises pairs of words sharing the same lexical morpheme, as in the title and in (1), but also verb/noun pairs with lexical roots interpretable as hyperonym and hyponym respectively, e.g. *dance a jig* / *a piece from Swan Lake*. Jones 1988 claims the two types have distinct empirical properties. In these examples, the hyponym CO can be interpreted as the "produit de l'action intransitive" (Safa 2004: 221).

[4] To a certain extent, the different labels reflect a language divide: Francophone researchers who use the label *objet interne* take into little or no account the work done by those who use *cognate object*/*complement*, mostly writing in English, and vice versa (compare e.g. the references in Riegel 1999 and Pina Serrano 2004 on the one hand, to those in Felser and Wanner 2001 and Davidse and Rymen 2006 on the other).

[5] The predicative function of the PVN of COs is recognized in a number of works (e.g. Moltman 1989, Zhang 2005), but in none of these is the verb analysed as a support. To the best of my knowledge, the only exceptions are a few hints in Mittwoch (1998: 311), Riegel 1999, a paper that draws a parallel between COs and MPs, Safa 2004, and Ibrahim 2005.

English has a different construction, exemplified in (4), in which the predicative PVN assigns *the two boxers* both a syntactic role and a related thematic role that appear fully comparable to those in (3). The verb of such a clause-type is a support (a light verb, see Cattel 1984).

(4) *The two boxers had a fight.*

Sentences such as (3) and (4) show a number of mutual relationships. First, (3) is a paraphrase of (4), and vice versa; second, each sentence entails the other.[6] Besides, the insertion of an adverb in the clause-type with a plain verb, i.e. (3), corresponds to the insertion of an adjective in its support counterpart:

(5a) *The two boxers fought ferociously.* (5b) *The two boxers had a ferocious fight.*

Such insertions keep the paraphrase and entailment relationships unaltered, a semantic effect attributed to the fact that in both structures modification applies to the predicate assigning the syntactic and thematic roles (see Alba Salas 2002, Gross 1981, La Fauci 1980, 1997). Such effects can also be observed in the CO construction. H&P (2002: 305) note that "Modification of the noun […] is semantically comparable to modification of the verb", as in their examples:

(6) *He grinned wickedly.* (7) *He grinned a wicked grin.*

The relationship between (6) and (7) suggests that in the latter sentence the PVN is predicative and *grin* is a support verb. This hypothesis is borne out by the syntactic relation existing between the PVN and the clausal subject, since in a support verb construction the former is a predicate and the latter its argument. This is the reason why a sentence such as *She gave him a kiss* can only be interpreted with *she* as the one who kisses. Again, the same holds true for the CO construction, e.g. for *life* and *breath* in *She lived a good life* and *He breathed his last breath* respectively (from Quirk et al. 1985, 10.29), which corroborates the view of COs as noun predicates of a support verb construction (see Mittwoch 1998: 312).

Types and distribution of determiners also indicate the predicative nature of COs. The constraints on predicative nouns concerning the type of determination are well-known. Brinton (1996: 187) writes that the PVN "is normally preceded by an indefinite article", and provides several references expressing the same point of view. H&P (2002: 291) point out that "The most usual determiner with light verbs is the indefinite article", and an investigation of the *Cobuild* corpus in search of sentences with a CO (Rymen 1999, Davidse and Rymen 2006[7]) shows that the zero article and the indefinite article are used in almost three-quarters of the occurrences (7,7% + 65,4% respectively).[8] The constrained nature of determination in COs is also noticed by Zhang (2005: 67).[9] Such constraints on the PVN shed light on the rare occurrences of passives originating from sentences with a CO (discussed in Jones 1988, Moltmann 1989, Massam 1990, Felser and Wanner 2001, Nakajima 2006).

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[6] It is well-known that semantic differences (e.g. aspectual) are found in sentence pairs formed with a plain verb and its counterpart with a support (see H&P 2002: 290-296). For instance, Zhou 1998 maintains that in the clause-type with a support verb the PVN has a delimitative function. This notion roughly corresponds to the 'bounding effect' described in Davidse and Rymen 2006 (see also Nakajima 2006). Delimitative function and bounding effect are absent in sentences with a plain verb. In this work, paraphrase and entailment are intended only with reference to the basic meaning, i.e. the meaning deriving from the syntactic and thematic roles the predicate (either verbal or nominal) assigns. In (3) and (4), for example, this meaning can be summed up as follows: a) a fighting event exists, and b) the two boxers are fighters.

[7] Their search involves seven verbs only, *breathe*, *cough*, *dance*, *die*, *dream*, *smile*, *waltz*.

[8] As Davidse and Rymen (2006) write, the preponderance of indefinite determination in COs had already been pointed out in Halliday 1967, Moltmann 1989, and Massam 1990.

[9] Partially different views are those expressed by Alba Salas (2002: 285) and by Pereltsvaig (1999), who maintains that argument COs can occur with strong determiners, whilst adverbial COs show constraints.

Syntactic and semantic evidence for analysing COs as noun predicates can then be shown in at least three ways: a) the equivalence found between adverbial modification of the clause and adjectival modification of the PVN (*He smiled enigmatically* ↔ *He smiled an enigmatic smile*); b) the predicate-argument relationship between the PVN and the clausal subject (in *He smiled an almost beatific smile* (Cobuild), the beatific smile can only be that of the subject); c) the distribution found for the determiner of COs. In examining the predicative nature of COs, it is also worth recalling the often noticed fact that these are event nouns, as is often the case in support verb constructions.[10] Moreover, the noun predicate of a support verb construction never surfaces as a subject. A treatment of CO's as noun predicates thus accounts for the existence of cognate *objects* only, i.e. for the lack of cognate subjects.

3. Three types of support verb constructions

As (8) shows, English has a pleonastic form clearly related to (5a, b):

(8) *The two boxers fought a ferocious fight*. (adapted from Quirk et al. 1985: 10.29)

The PVN of (8) is a CO. Under the analysis put forward in this study, (8) is a variant of (5b) (with a higher register), i.e. a construction in which the NP *a ferocious fight* contains a noun predicate and *fought* is a cognate support verb. (8) conveys the same basic propositional content of (5a) and (5b). This is shown by the formal and semantic relationships linking the three sentences, given that (8) is a good paraphrase of both (5a, b), and also mutually entails both sentences.

The differences between the three clause-types are interpreted as follows: in (5a), the NP *the two boxers* receives a syntactic role (SUBJECT OF) and a related thematic role (FIGHTER) from the verbal predicate; in (5b), the same NP receives identical syntactic and thematic roles from the noun *fight*. Thus (5b) has two clausemate predicates: a one-place noun predicate, and a zero-valent verbal predicate (a non-lexical support verb). As for (8), the subject receives its syntactic and thematic roles from the PVN predicate, as in (5b). The predicative role of *fought* in (8) will be discussed shortly.

Two types of support verbs should be distinguished: the first, e.g. *to make an assault on the enemy*, is devoid of descriptive content, i.e. [–Lexical], whilst the other is [+Lexical], e.g. *He launched an all-out assault on his critics* (Cobuild). The [–Lexical] type contributes the grammatical meaning that all support verbs convey, e.g. they manifest agreement in person and number with the subject of the clause. On the other hand, a [+Lexical] support verb contributes additional meaning, which can be of at least three types: aspectual (*They launched/started an assault*, Cobuild), stylistic (*Marines conducted the largest armor assault since World War II*, Cobuild), or intensity related (*to give* vs. *to strike a blow at someone's face*). Such contribution can be interpreted as a sort of semantic "debris" stemming from the literal uses of the verb, i.e. those with the presence of a non-empty argument structure.[11] In other words, the aspectual, stylistic, or intensity meaning of support verbs (or a combination of the three) derives from the presence of descriptive content ascribable to lexical uses of the

[10] A sentence such as *Max ha fatto il tuo sogno* 'Max had/dreamt your (same) dream' shows a double subject phenomenon: the same dream is said to be dreamt (in a given order) by two individuals, i.e. the referent of the possessive adjective and that of Max. This effect can be observed in support verb constructions, but not in *Max fabbricò la tua fabbrica* 'Max built your factory', and is evidence of a structural difference between the two clause-types. What follows is that the presence of cognate lexical items gives no guarantee that the sentence is a CO construction (see Mittwoch 1998: 312).

[11] See Alba Salas 2002 for a survey on the types of argument structure for light verbs.

verb, as opposed to what happens with verbs "of general meaning such as *do*, *give*, *have*, *make*, *take*" (Quirk et al. 1985, 10.30).

The [+Lexical] nature of the support verb is not seen as necessarily related to the assignment of syntactic (and related thematic) relations. In the examples provided above with *launch*, *start*, *conduct*, and *strike* the support verbs assign neither syntactic nor thematic roles. Expressed differently, they do not legitimise (see La Fauci 2000, La Fauci and Mirto 2003) any argument(s). In certain languages, a [+Lexical] support verb can either inherit the argument(s) authorized by the noun predicate, and in this case the verb has an empty argument structure (see Gross 1981, Grimshaw and Mester 1988), or legitimise an argument. That is, a support verb can carry both values of the feature [Legitimiser].

I argue that English has both types of [+Lexical] support verbs. A sentence such as *She nodded her approval* (Felser and Wanner 2001: 106) illustrates a construction in which the verbal predicate (re-)legitimises its subject. Felser and Wanner 2001 call such sentences "the way construction". In their parlance, the PVN is a "reaction object". H&P (2002: 305) define the PVN as an "object of conveyed reaction" and provide several examples of verbs compatible with this construction. The verbs listed involve bodily expression, which can be either visual (H&P call it "non-verbal communication"), e.g. *grin*, *nod*, *smile*, or oral (emission of a sound, see H&P 2002: 293), e.g. *sigh*, *mumble*, *roar*. From our point of view, the syntactic relation between the PVN and the clausal subject cannot pass unnoticed. The sentence, which can be paraphrased as 'she approved (of something) by nodding', entails that 'she approved'. As in support verb constructions, the PVN thus appears to be predicative, with *she* as its subject. Besides, the sentence also entails that 'she nodded'. Thus the third person feminine pronoun is an argument of two clausemate predicates sharing the same subject: the noun *approval* and the verb *nod*.

The CO construction may differ from sentences such as *She nodded her approval* with regard to the determiner of the PVN.[12] As Felser and Wanner 2001 point out, in "the way construction" the determiner usually agrees with the matrix subject. In e.g. *She smiled her assent* (H&P 2002: 305), the possessive adjective necessarily copies the features of the subject. The search by Davidse and Rymen 2006 shows that the CO clause-type has distinct formal properties with regard to the determiner of the PVN, given that a possessive is found only in 6.9% of cases.

To sum up, let us consider the three sentences in (9) (all from Cobuild), in which the head of the PVN is regularly *laugh*:

(9) a. *Myrtle gave a brittle laugh*. [–Lexical] [–Legitimiser]

b. *Dog… coughed a painful laugh*. [+Lexical] [+Legitimiser]

c. *Alice laughed a scornful laugh*. [+Lexical] [?Legitimiser]

These sentences all entail that someone (Myrtle, Dog, and Alice) laughed. By analysing *give*, *cough* and *laugh* as support verbs, this meaning springs from the predicative role the noun *laugh* has in the structure, i.e. from the syntactic and thematic roles (SUBJECT OF and LAUGHER respectively) the noun assigns to its pre-verbal noun. The verb *give* in (9a) only contributes the necessary inflectional morphology.[13] In (9b, c), the verbs *cough* and *laugh* can be analysed

[12] For the same reason, also sentences such as *He moaned an apology* or *Prue heaved a weary sigh* (Cobuild) might instantiate a support verb construction distinct from *She nodded her approval*.

[13] The use of *give* as a support is signalled semantically by the fact that in (9a) *Myrtle* is necessarily a LAUGHER but not a GIVER, and syntactically by the ungrammaticality caused by the preposition *to* (**Myrtle gave a brittle laugh to John*), the one regularly found in the literal uses, i.e. as a three-place predicate, of the verb.

as unergative one-place predicates, insofar as they appear to assign to *Dog* and *Alice* the grammatical relation SUBJECT OF and the thematic role COUGHER and LAUGHER respectively. In the suggested analysis, however, it is impossible to ascertain the [±Legitimiser] role of the verb that combines with a CO. A positive value of the feature in (9c) would have no semantic effect at all in that the verb *to laugh* would assign *Alice* the same syntactic and thematic roles also assigned by the noun predicate *laugh*.

The three types of support verb constructions can be regarded as the combination of two features:

SUPPORT VERBS		
[+Lexical]		[–Lexical]
[+Legitimiser]	[–Legitimiser]	[–Legitimiser]

Table 1: Three types of support verbs

4. Measure phrase constructions

MPs are the subject of a vast number of studies. Some of these contain analyses of measure items that occur inside an adjectival phrase, e.g. *I need a ten foot long cord* (see Flickinger and Bond 2003). This study disregards such uses to concentrate mainly on phrases such as *27 kilos* in (2) above. No reference will be made to the numerous tests apt to illustrate the non-argumental nature of MPs (see those contained in Riegel 1999 and Safa 2004, e.g. tests with paraphrases). Uncertainties regarding their (non-)argumental nature all spring from the fact that in the *weigh-kilo* type the PVN is obligatory.

Sentences such as (2) are interpreted as multi-predicative structures with a type of hyperonym-hyponym pair of lexical items. A central aspect of the head of a MP is the relationship between these items. As Riegel 1999 points out, in *Jean weighs 60 kilos* the '60 kilos' are necessarily Jean's rather than someone else's (Jean_i weighs 60 kilos_i). Within an analysis that treats *60 kilos* as a complement, the relationship between *Jean* and *kilos*, shown above by means of index sharing, turns out to be *ad hoc* and arbitrary. On the other hand, a view in which *60 kilos* is predicative yields a necessary relationship between such a predicate and its argument. The noun *60 kilos* and the verb *weigh* are analysed as cognate predicates sharing the same argument (*Jean*). The predicative relationship between the MP and the subject guarantees that the *60 kilos* are *Jean*'s, whereas the verbal predicate guarantees that it is *Jean* who has a certain weight.

In a distinct MP construction, e.g. *He ran a race*, the verb and the PVN are also cognate lexical items interpretable as hyperonym and hyponym respectively. This clause-type differs from the *weigh*-type in several ways. For example, the MP is optional and has certain of the properties of direct objects. Predicative nouns of support verb constructions that do not involve MPs can be optional and bear a (surface) direct object grammatical relation, as in the CO construction, or be mandatory with no direct object properties (regardless of word order), as with *catch sight of*, *heave/cast/weigh/drop anchor* (which appear to be collocations). Thus *run a race* would align with the former support verb construction, whilst *She weighs 60 kilos*, in which the MP remains a predicate throughout the structure, would align with the latter.

5. Concluding remarks

Analyses of pairs of sentences such as *Mark Twain died gruesomely* ↔ *Mark Twain died a gruesome death* (from Nakajima 2006: 679) that ignore possible support uses of verbs give

the impression of alternating valences for *die* (unaccusative vs. transitive). This work takes a different stance towards such pairs, which are analysed as structures with a plain and a support verb respectively (unaccusative vs. support), an opposition comparable to e.g. *She delivered a pizza – She delivered a lecture* (transitive vs. support). Within this hypothesis, the PVN and the verb can be serializing clausemate predicates. A body of evidence suggests that in the CO construction the verb works as a support, as does the possibility of replacing the [+Lexical] verb with a [–Lexical] counterpart (with register effects only), e.g. *He danced an original dance* (Givón 1984: 105) vs. *He did an original dance*. Syntactically, ROs appear to behave as do COs, insofar as they function as event nouns with the pre-verbal noun as their subject. The two constructions might be alike with regard to argument structure and could both have a [+Legitimiser] support verb. In terms of the present analysis, however, in the CO construction the verb assigns to the pre-verbal noun syntactic and thematic roles that are identical to those assigned by the noun. The semantic outcome of the verb predication would therefore be neutralized. The PVN of MP constructions also establishes a subject-predicate relationship with the pre-verbal noun, a fact that leads to regarding these clause-types as support verb constructions. An analysis is suggested in which a mandatory MP is a predicate throughout the structure, as happens in some support verb constructions, whilst a structure with an optional MP can be assimilated to a support verb constructions in which the PVN is a predicate that also bears the direct object grammatical relation.

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