Lexicalized manner and result are in complementary distribution

Nonstative verbs from various lexical fields are often classified as either manner or result verbs—a distinction implicated in language acquisition, as well as in argument realization. Intuitively, manner verbs specify a manner of carrying out an action (e.g., hit, run, sweep), while result verbs specify the coming about of a result state (e.g., arrive, break, clean). Verbs usually seem to be of one type or the other, and Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2008) argue that this complementarity of manner and result follows from a constraint on the way roots can be associated with event structures. This constraint allows only one of manner and result to be associated with an event structure. By thus enforcing manner/result complementarity, this “lexicalization” constraint limits the complexity of (non-derived) verb meaning.

What matters for manner/result complementarity, then, are “lexicalized” components of verb meaning: those meaning components which in the unmarked case remain constant across all uses of a verb. Rappaport Hovav & Levin characterize result verbs as verbs with a lexicalized scale, which thus denote events of scalar change, whereas manner verbs denote events of nonscalar change. They also isolate two major classes of result verbs: change of state verbs, which lexicalize a property scale, and directed motion verbs, which lexicalize a path scale; they show that members of both classes do not lexicalize manner. Nevertheless, at least a handful of verbs appear to challenge manner/result complementarity, as they seem to lexicalize both meaning components. In this paper, we investigate whether two much-discussed such verbs, climb and cut, provide grounds for rejecting the lexicalization constraint. We conclude that the properties of these verbs are insightfully understood in the context of the constraint, so that they actually provide further support for it.

There are manner verbs like sweep, with nonlexicalized, but conventional results (clean), and there are result verbs like melt with nonlexicalized, but conventionally associated manners (application of heat). Although such verbs do not constitute counterexamples to manner/result complementarity, cut and climb seem to be different. The verb cut clearly lexicalizes a result, as Dana cut the rope/paper/cake, but it stayed in one piece is a contradiction; nevertheless, it also apparently lexicalizes a manner component involving motion and contact (Guerssel et al. 1985). Furthermore, two facets of its behavior are characteristic of manner verbs: it is found in the conative construction (Sam cut at the rope) and does not show the causative alternation (Sam cut the bread/*The bread cut). Turning to the motion domain, as Fillmore (1982:32-33), Jackendoff (1985), and Kiparsky (1997:490) note, climb apparently expresses both manner and direction in uses such as Kelly climbed the tree (clambering manner, upwards direction), contra manner/result complementarity.

Closer scrutiny of the behavior of cut and climb reveals that in a particular use, each verb only lexicalizes either manner or result — and never both — as expected given manner/result complementarity. Thus, while the lexicalized components of meaning indeed normally remain constant in all uses of a verb, there are some verbs which can lexicalize a conventionally associated meaning component (either manner or result), but only if the complementary component (either result or manner) drops out. The verb cut represents those verbs whose basic sense involves result, but which have an additional, manner sense available, as a result of a strong conventionally associated manner. In contrast, climb instantiates verbs with a basic manner sense, which also have a second, result sense. It is the very strong conventional association of manner with result for climb and result with manner for cut that sets these verbs apart from monosemous manner and result verbs. Comparable instances of polysemy, in which each sense of a polysemous verb can lexicalize only one meaning component, are manifested by other verbs. Although sporadically attested, they nevertheless provide strong evidence for manner/result complementarity. For this reason, we give a detailed exposition of how cut and climb exemplify these two distinct, but related forms of polysemy.

We argue that those uses of climb said to express both manner and direction, such as Kelly climbed the tree actually only lexicalize a manner; the result is only conventionally associated with these uses, because of the nature of the manner itself. This verb involves a manner which allows motion while resisting the pull of gravity, and motion in this manner is typically necessary when an animate entity wants to move upward. Upwards motion alone need not, in fact, be entailed. For instance, with a barrier object, climbing is understood as ‘over’ (e.g., I saw him climb the fence...
and steal the bulbs). As this manner has a conventionally associated result, we propose that the result may get lexicalized in some uses of the verb, but only if the manner component drops out. In fact, in precisely those uses of *climb* in which the upward motion is lexicalized, the clambering manner, which is typical of animates, is absent, as shown by the wider range of permitted subjects, including inanimates (e.g., *The plane/train/cable car climbed to 9000 feet*). All uses of *climb*, then, conform to the lexicalization constraint, and other verbs which encode manners of motion which show conventional associations with particular directions of motion show a comparable form of polysemy, including *dive, scale, and soar*.

*Cut*, in contrast, is basically a result verb; it does not lexicalize a specific manner, as Bohnemeyer (2007:159) also recognizes, elaborating: “I can *cut* an orange using anything from a knife or axe to a metal string or laser beam, and I can do it by bringing the blade to bear on the fruit or by dropping the fruit onto the blade from sufficient height.” However, when a result verb has a conventionally associated activity, as *cut* does, the associated activity may be lexicalized in some uses of the verb, but only if the result drops out. Given this, conative uses of *cut*, which like all conatives require a lexicalized manner, but do not entail a result, are not surprising. In its manner uses, *cut* should also lack an anticausative, consistent with claims to this effect in the literature: *The bread cut*. Yet, despite these claims, *cut* is often found in anticausative intransitive uses (e.g., *The rope cut on the jagged rock*), but such uses involve a clear result and crucially lack an entailed manner. A near-synonym of *cut*, *slice*, also shows this form of polysemy.

The analysis of *cut* receives support from the verb *clean*, whose deadjectival origin shows that it is basically a result verb, yet it too shows manner uses. Like *cut, clean* entails the bringing about of a result state, though unlike many deadjectival result verbs, *clean* does not easily show anticausative uses, most likely for the same reason as *cut*. This verb shows a manner sense only in the context of housecleaning, where it refers to the general activities involved without being very specific about them (similar to *exercise*, as contrasted, say, with *jog or swim*). Furthermore, *cut* shows unspecified and nonsubcategorized objects precisely in the housecleaning context (e.g., *I cleaned before I left for work*), supporting its manner classification. In such uses, and consistent with this, it no longer entails a result of cleanness (e.g., *You wouldn’t know she cleaned today; there are still spots on the mirror and dust on the shelves*). Although a myriad of things can be cleaned, the availability of a manner reading only in a restricted context is not unexpected if it is properly a manner use. The reason is that the activity used to bring cleanness about depends on what is being cleaned; it differs according to whether it is a kitchen, a counter, a gun, fabric, teeth, etc.

Potential counterexamples to manner/result complementarity, then, are illuminated when reconsidered in light of a lexicalization constraint on verb meaning. The very fact that verbs such as *climb* and *cut* show the type of polysemy they do suggests that this complementarity of meaning components can be properly understood as a constraint which limits the complexity of verb meanings.

References