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METAPHORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN INDIAN ENGLISH AND AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ENGLISH

From compositionality to grammaticalization

Keywords Verbal MWCs; variability; World Englishes; idiomaticity

The study of verbal multi-word constructions (MWCs) presents intriguing theoretical and methodological challenges which touch on both the relation between morphology and syntax, more generally on the architecture of grammar (Los et al. 2012). Verbal MWCs occur in most Germanic languages and are generally referred to in the literature as verb-particle constructions, phrasal verbs, separable (complex) verbs or particle verbs occurring in transitive, intransitive or more complex variants (Dehé 2002). They represent a highly innovative area in any variety of English (Baugh/Cable 2002) and the divergence of these constructions in World Englishes is highly significant. The present research focuses on verbal MWCs possessing semantic opacity, with a specific focus on the possible development of figurative and non-compositional meaning (Brinton/Closs Traugott 2005; Rodriguez-Puente 2012, 2021) in two varieties of English, namely Indian English and Aboriginal English. Such constructions develop through gradual stages of semantic reinterpretation from semantically transparent according to the ‘Principle of Compositionality’ (Szabó 2012) to idiomatic constructions via metaphors (Kovács 2007). This process is also reflected in both the syntactic structure of particle verbs and in the semantic contribution of the accompanying particles to the meaning of the whole combination. For example, the aspectual or telic function implied in these verb+particle combinations have led some authors to analyse them as lexicalisation of the functional category ‘telicity’ (Dehé 2002).

The study aims to address the major issue concerning whether phrasal verbs with figurative and non-compositional meaning follow a common underlying phenomenon across the two varieties under investigation. Corpus-based methodology and linguistic diagnostics have been matched to 1) uncover potential differences and shared features between Indian and Aboriginal English in multi-word verb constructions 2) establish the extent to which the frequency of such features across time may contribute to measuring distance and similarity between the two lects.

In order to test the aforementioned theoretical and methodological issues, the research draws on data from two annotated corpora, the Diachronic Corpus of Indian English (1,000,000 tokens) and the Diachronic Corpus of Aboriginal English (948,000 tokens), specifically compiled to represent different dimensions of linguistic variability over a period of about 150 years (1833–2013). The two corpora have been designed on the model of available multi-genre corpora like ICE-IND and ICE-AUS to provide a comparable, balanced configuration to the two corpora. As major changes in a language are assumed to come from the spoken language, speech-related written genres such as witness depositions (containing direct speech) were included for the analysis (Culpeper/Kyto 2010) and then compared to

selected proceedings from the *Old Bailey Corpus* dating back to the same time span. Other sections of the corpora were selected and compared to similar samples from the *BNC* and *ARCHER* corpora. To test whether any of attested combinations in the 1830s had followed a gradual path toward nativisation in Indian English and Aboriginal English, the comparative approach of using each sub-corpus compiled for each decade side-by-side was employed to describe the development and use of those combinations.

Early results have shown that similar lexico-grammar patterns are attested in both DiCIE and DiCABE. The data confirms previous findings (Nihalani/Ray/Tongue 2005; Malcolm 2013) showing similar patterns of variation in the two varieties. The occurrences of verbal MWC variation identified in DiCIE and DiCABE were also analysed from a semantic perspective to investigate whether they developed a figurative meaning (Rodríguez-Puente 2021) over time. While similar converging co-occurrences were relatively scarce due to different contact ecologies, from a diachronic perspective it is remarkable that the overlap in Indian-specific and Aboriginal-specific occurrences emerges with greater frequency up until the year 1938. A possible explanation may be that commonalities were due to the fact that in their first phases of evolution they followed a similar path still linked to the common lexifier but after that date the two varieties underwent a further phase of nativisation (Schneider 2007). In other words, the comparison of data from different time periods suggests that the creation of new combinatory lexico-grammar patterns is an overall phenomenon occurring regularly and steadily over time, but that in both varieties it was at first influenced by their supposed similar lexifiers and later gave rise to divergence.

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