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ARE PHONESTHEMES EVIDENCE OF A SUBLEXICAL ORGANISING LAYER IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE LEXICON?

Testing the OED analysis of two phonesthemes with a corpus study of collocational behaviour of *sw-* and *fl-* words in the OEC

Abstract   Phonesthemes (Firth 1930) are sublexical constructions that have an effect on the lexico-grammatical continuum: they are recurring form-meaning associations that occur more often than by chance but not systematically (Abramova et al. 2013). Phonesthemes have been shown (Bergen 2004) to affect psycholinguistic language processing; they organise the mental lexicon. Phonesthemes appear over time to emerge as driven by language use as indexical rather than purely iconic constructions in the lexicon (Smith 2016; Bergen 2004; Flaksman 2020). Phonesthemes are acknowledged in construction morphology (Audring/Booij/Jackendoff 2017) as motivational schemas. Some phonesthemes also tend to have lexicographic acknowledgment, as shown by etymologist Liberman (2010a, b), although this relevance and cohesion appears to be highly variable as we will show in this paper.

This paper seeks to compare two phonesthemes in a combined lexicographic and corpus study with a view to testing the results obtained. **Firstly**, following Smith (2016) which identified 11 semantic categories of *fl-* words in the OED, we analyse the OED entries for 245 *sw-* monomorphemes with a view to carrying out a key word analysis and a semantic trait analysis. The 245 monomorphemes have a total of 469 senses out of which 330 can be classified into 18 recurring semantic traits in Table 1.

semantic traits based on OED key words	number of senses carrying the trait
sway sweep swish	78
strike blow swipe	56
pressure swell swathe	57
sway swagger boast	11
compact cluster agitated	7
big fellow	4
flame burn waste	10
deceive sway swindle	11
faint swoon agitated	18
cool dark	7
drink	19
surface	9
hollow	10
exchange swap	6
labour toil sweat	12
deviate deflect	6

Are phonesthemes evidence of a sublexical organising layer in the structure of the lexicon?

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semantic traits based on OED key words	number of senses carrying the trait
sound	9
Total	330

Table 1: Lexicographic behaviour of sw- senses in the OED.

Then, in a **second step**, the comparison between the OED analysis of *fl-* and *sw-* monomorphemes shows that *sw-* words appear less likely to undergo any semantic change and therefore appear to be less indexical. In the light of these differing lexicographic behaviours, we aim, in a third step, to analyse the collocational behaviour of some common phonesthemic verbs carrying *fl-* and *sw-*. Collocational behaviour via a collexeme analysis will enable us to identify combinatorial patterns of use. For the study, we use the very large contemporary (2 billion words) OEC corpus (2000–2005) using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al 2004). The results of the compared analysis allow us to discuss whether phonesthemes are actual (sub)lexical "chunks" deserving of a lexical status, or whether they belong to larger phraseological "chunks" or units. This question raises the issue of the architecture of the lexico-grammatical continuum, the "constructicon": does the constructicon accommodate or require a sublexical layer?

What are the repercussions for lexicography and phraseology?

Keywords Phonesthemes; analogy; collocational behaviour; OED; OEC; phraseological chunks

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