

A frame-semantic treatment of verbs of separation in metaphoric usage

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Recent work in frame semantics (Bouveret & Sweetser 2009; Fujii, Radetsky & Sweetser 2011) and construction grammar (Sullivan 2007) has provided cross-linguistic evidence that a frame-implicational account of the lexical meanings of predicates can account for certain exceptions to lexical generalizations pertaining to classes of verbs. In that vein, by focusing on verbs of separation, namely verbs of *cutting* and *breaking*, I show that observed frame-based groupings of separation predicates account for inferential structure in cross-domain mappings in the metaphoric uses of those predicates. Semantic frames are posited to be cognitively real experience-based construals that structure all encyclopedic and linguistic knowledge (Fillmore 1982). It is frames that provide semantic structure, while lexical and grammatical units simply evoke the frame, and all the inferential structure that comes with it. For example, the verb *split* is a break-family verb that is classified as non-agentive and as lexically encoding the result in the event, and can engage in a causative/inchoative alternation (Levin 1993):

- (1a) I split the log in half / in two.
- (1b) The log split down the middle / in two / along the grain.

However, in metaphoric instances of *split*, the usual anticausative construction is never allowed, and the causative construction is used:

- (1c) We split the profits in half / in two.
- (1d) # The profits split in half / in two.

Here, the inferences associated with causation are preserved due to the interrelated frames evoked by *split*, namely, *Division_for_allocation*. With *cut*, on the other hand, when used metaphorically, the *Reduction* frame is mostly found: e.g., *cut taxes to an acceptable level*. Metaphoric uses can help reveal the elaborate lattice of interrelated frames evoked by predicates. However, physical and metaphoric uses are not mutually exclusive in terms of what frames are evoked. Metaphoric uses, though, help bring to light frames that are otherwise unaccessible when analyzing physical uses alone.

The purpose of this work is two-fold: 1) to extend insights about lexical traits of verbs, including argument structure and syntactic alternations in which they can appear, to their metaphoric uses; 2) to do so using a semantic framework that reflects what is known about the cognitive structure of experience-based conceptual frames.

Bouveret, Myriam and Eve Sweetser. 2009. Multi-frame semantics, metaphoric extensions and grammar. BLS 35.

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