Syncretism in the Functioning of Verbs with Incorporated Actants

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Abstract: The article focuses on the study of syncretism in the functioning of verbs with incorporated actants in the contemporary English language. Incorporation is seen as the ability of a verb to incorporate actants. By syncretism in language we understand neutralization of oppositions in the paradigm of linguistic units of different levels; syncretism in speech is asymmetry of linguistic units lying in the ability to combine morphological, syntactic and semantic features of several linguistic units in one speech performance. We conducted the studies of functional properties of verbs with incorporated actants both in syntagmatics and paradigmatics. The findings of the paper support the prediction that the verbs possess syncretical meanings.

Key words: Syncretism • Incorporation • Verb with incorporated actant • Assymetry • Neutralization • Syncretical meaning

INTRODUCTION

Researchers treat the concept of incorporation in different ways. There are complex “noun + verb” words in various groups of Indo-European languages which are not holophrastic, including English [1, 2]. For example, the verb to houseclean-to clean the house-is equivalent to the combination of a verb and a direct object; to finger-paint- to paint with fingers-to a verb and an unalienable tool; to skydive-to dive into the sky-to a verb and a locative, etc.

Marianna Mithun notes, that the term “incorporation” is used to name the process of compounding when a verb is combined with a noun to form a new verb in which the noun stem and the verb stem preserve the same semantic relation as in the verb + object phrase [3: 848]. Verbs of this kind used to be studied in the system of word formation as examples of compounding. Being compound words, however, such verbs present a particular case of incorporation because in terms of semantics they are equivalent to the combination of a verb with some sentence part.

The important characteristic of verbs with incorporated actants is their asymmetry and consequently the presence of syncretical meanings/forms.

In modern linguistics syncretism is understood as a mismatch between syntax and morphology and is often reserved for the products of certain diachronic developments [4: 2, 4]. We see this notion as a wider concept: by syncretism in language (langue) we mean neutralization of oppositions in the paradigm of linguistic units of different levels; syncretism in speech (parole) is asymmetry of linguistic units lying in the ability to combine morphological, syntactic and semantic features of several linguistic units in one speech performance.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The data for study was taken from dictionaries by the means of overall sampling and from the corpora of the English language by the means of overall and selective sampling, in particular, the Corpus of Contemporary American English created by the team of Brigham Young University, the National British Corpus, the Corpora database of Leipzig University (Germany).

The choice of analysis methods was determined by the aim of the study as well as the specifics of the research target. To examine syncretism in the functioning of verbs with incorporated actants we used methods of seme analysis, context analysis, interpretation, complex functional analysis.

Main Body: We consider incorporation in an extended sense as a semantic-syntactic phenomenon, the verb ability to incorporate actants, participants of situations which can be expressed both inherently and adherently.

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According to Ch. Fillmore, role types which refer to semantic structure of predicates make up a universally valid system [5: 14].

In the contemporary English language two types of incorporation complexes can be distinguished: verbs formed after the “adjective + verb” pattern and “noun + verbs” pattern. We examined functional properties of incorporation complexes in the English language formed after the pattern “noun + verb” by compression or back-formation with an adherently expressed actant and denominative verbs formed by transmutation with an inherently expressed actant.

Morphological syncretism is the effect of transposition. Morphological transposition acts as a means of actualization of a syncretical meaning, these phenomena have a cause-and-effect relationship and since compression and back-formation, which are transposition phenomena, are the origin source of verbs with incorporated actants in the English language, all incorporation complexes are syncretical by their nature.

In the opinion of A. Ufimtseva, in any meaning of a verb lexeme there are the concepts of “action”, “state” and “process” which meet the mental category of “attribute” [6: 114]. Verbs with incorporated actants apart from these categories also possess the meaning of “thingness” which occupies the central place in semantic structures of nouns and in a verb is modified into the adverbial seme of tool / manner / object / place of action, which is reflected in dictionary definitions of denominative verbs.

For example the verb to nose has the following meanings:

- To look around or search in order to discover something [7]-manner of action; b) catch the scent of [8]: Our dog will nose out a rabbit anywhere it hides. object of action;
- Rub noses [8]-unalienable tool;
- Look around or pry into something [9]: I don’t want our neighbour nosing into our affairs, so keep quiet about our plans. assessment of action;
- Move cautiously forward (of a vehicle) [9]: The car nosed out into traffic. subject and manner of action;
- To move into a position where you are slightly in front of someone [10]: By half-time, our team had nosed ahead, with the score at 16-14.-subject and direction of action.

Thus at paradigmatic level the verb to nose can incorporate almost all kinds of actants, however at syntagmatic level the meaning of action and only one incorporated actant-unalienable tool-might occur most frequently: Sniffer dogs nosed parcels and purses [11].

According to R. van Trijp, “syncretic forms require more resources than forms with a transparent form-meaning mapping because syncretic forms are more ambiguous” [12]. There are some verbs which incorporate not one but several actants in one meaning both at paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels, e.g.: to garden-to cultivate (what?) a garden, to work (where?) in a garden-object + location of action; to glass-to use (what?) glass to fill the open spaces, to cover (with what?) with glass-object + material; to baby-treat (someone) (how?) as a baby; pamper (who?)-manner + object; to handshake-to shake a hand-tool + object. Yu. Apresyan when describing such cases, calls this phenomenon “fusion of two semantic actants”. As an example the verb to scold is examined, in its semantic structure there’s fusion of the actant “object of blaming” and the actant “speech act recipient” [13].

Just so in the verb to house-clean the component house is simultaneously a locative (to clean where?-in the house) and an object (to clean what?-the house): “I don’t like to cook or sew. And I really don’t like to houseclean,” Yancey said [14].

In such verbs there is not only morphological syncretism which is a characteristic feature of all denominative verbs, but also semantic syncretism.

Syntactic syncretism in the functioning of verbs with incorporated actants is presented both at paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels.

In paradigmatics, in our view, syntactic syncretism is illustrated by the ability of incorporation complexes to function as different sentence parts: What McBush will try to do is brainwash democrats into thinking he is liberal like democrats as well [14]-predicative; We do not brainwash anyone [11]-predicate: Then some bright spark realised he/she could brainwash people with it and make a few quid in to the bargain [11]-part of compound verbal predicate; Linda, I think you are under a misapprehension if you think every religion preaches hell and damnation and aims to brainwash children [11]-complement; “I don’t listen to the crazy ramblings of celebrities who try to use their status to brainwash people,” one participant commented [11]-complement + adverbial.
These verbs are also used with different particles which can indicate their high valence potential: The recent death of a Phoenix police officer after a charity boxing event with a Chandler firefighter has prompted Chandler officials to brainstorm on ideas for preventing future tragedies [11]. We brainstorm for solutions for 15 minutes [11]. Some 700 folks, including Jeff Jarvis, are going to brainstorm about making post-crisis world a much better place [11]. Sometimes this verb is used without any preposition: Members of the ecumenical group meet every week to brainstorm shelter ideas [11]; The top kill plan, unprecedented at 5,000 feet of water, was cobbled together in what Interior Secretary Ken Salazar called a kind of Apollo 13 operation in which government scientists and oil industry engineers brainstormed solutions at a Houston operations center [11].

Performance of syntactic syncretism at syntagmatic level seems to be a more complicated process.

Ray Jackendoff gives the following example from the English language: it is impossible to say *to butter the bread with butter, but possible-We buttered the bread with cheap margarine. The participant “substance” is lexically presented within the denominative verb that is why there is no necessity in its syntactic explication (manifestation). However, according to R. Jackendoff, verbs of the to butter type inherit the actant structure of the verb to cover with the actant Theme. When a word group with the preposition with is linked to the verb, the concept ‘butter’ is transformed from an implied participant into a selective restriction of the Theme. In order to make the utterance to butter with... successful / accurate, it is essential to add a new, non-redundant piece of information, i.e. to specify the concept ‘butter’: ‘Cheap margarine’ is a good example of this concept specification. Along with the verb to butter, there are a lot of other verbs which also have an incorporated actant, e.g. to powder, to ice, to frost, to line [15: 165]: She powdered her nose and went downstairs, trying not to show the despair she felt; After she shut the oven door she began heating the sweet syrup into the eggwhites and we iced the cake [14].

As I. Muravyova notes, syntactic consequences (results) of incorporation can be roughly into two groups:

- Simple valence alteration and the corresponding change of an incorporation complex general execution;
- Complex valence alteration which is caused by development of an exocentric construction.

Simple valence alteration of verbs, according to I. Muravyova, is that incorporation of a syntactic actant reduces verb valence. As a result of this the verb used as part of the incorporation complex changes its syntactic class (compared to the construction without incorporation) and it influences the general execution of the construction. On this evidence, in particular, there is transformation of a transitive verb into an intransitive one and also transformation of an intransitive personal verb into an impersonal one with incorporation of a subject [16: 67]. For instance, the verb to see in the meaning “perceive with the eyes; discern visually” [9] is transitive: Last year was a good opportunity to see Mars (though not as good as 2003); People wanted to see the Triple Crown [11]. When the actant-object sight is incorporated the verb to sightsee-visit famous or interesting sights [8] changes its class and becomes an intransitive verb: And because our guesthouse was centrally located in relation to the sights of Savannah, we could walk to shop, sightsee and go out to dinner; This way, you can shop and sightsee; do whatever you want all day, Morris said [11]. The transitive verb to read-look at and comprehend the meaning of (written or printed matter) by interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed [9]: I never learned to read music-becomes intransitive when the object lips is incorporated: She lip-reads and speaks his words aloud; Adams wears hearing aids and lip-reads but doesn’t consider himself disabled [11]. This valence alteration of verbs leads to simplification of a sentence syntactic structure.

Complex valence alteration takes place twice: first, there is valence reduction and then, when a new syntactic actant appears, valence grows [16: 67]. Valence growth occurs as a result of semantic development of verbs with incorporated actants. Examples of this nature are committed in dictionaries, e.g.: to salt clouds with silver iodide.

Sometimes complex valence alteration is the result of meaning metaphorization of a verb with an incorporated actant, e.g., Albertans whose bread is buttered with tourism dollars are noticing a drop in American visitors this summer [11]. In this example we can see the syntactic transformation of the idiom “bread and butter”-a person’s livelihood or main source of income [9]. The construction made of the two nouns connected with the co-ordinating conjunction and is transformed into the construction “verb with incorporated noun-instrument denoting substance + direct object” to butter bread. Due to the idiomatic character of this expression it
is necessary to use an indirect object denoting instrument with the denominative verb to butter for the expression to make sense and it is demonstrated in the example given. But there are also some examples of complex valence growth of verbs which are not part of an idiom: These new methods make easy work of managing password-derived key creation, ensuring password strength and even salting passwords with randomization modifications to help protect against dictionary-style attacks [11]. The verb to salt means “to sprinkle with salt” [9], i.e. it is a verb with incorporated actant-instrument denoting substance. The phrase to salt with randomization modifications is, apparently, based on the metaphor: in the same way that salt improves taste of food, randomization modifications improve the quality of the passwords created. Another example of this kind is: But Newport News hardly prepared us for the ship's sailors, hardened young men not much older than we, whose vocabulary was salted with the f-word, used several times in every sentence and often creatively inserted mid-word, in participial form [14]. The people use coarse language, i.e. “salt” their speech with “f-words”, to produce a certain impression on their interlocutors. This metaphorical re-thinking of the verb to salt leads to its use with the direct object denoting instrument which also simplifies the syntactic structure of the sentence because it does not require a special use of a metaphor to add extra expressiveness to the utterance.

As we have observed, valence alteration of incorporation complexes can result in both valence reduction and growth which leads to simplification of a sentence syntactic structure.

Semantic syncretism of verbs with incorporated actants manifests itself primarily in their polysemy. V. Vinogradov believes that the inner unity of a word is achieved not only by the unity of its phonetical and grammatical composition but also by the semantic unity of its meaning system which, in its turn, is determined by common laws of semantic system of language as a whole [17: 17]. Therefore, a polysemantic word is kept in human memory as an integral unit, i.e. is syncretical.

Almost all the examples of incorporation complexes in the English language that we studied are polysemantic.

In the system of verbs there are certain types of polysemy which were described by Yu. Apresyan, e.g. “action-causation of action in one’s favour”-to hand-feed-1) to feed (a person or an animal) by hand [18]: Hungry sharks typically veer abruptly when researchers try to hand-feed them a lionfish [11]; 3) eat from hands: Some Koi will actually hand-feed from people they know well [11]. The third meaning-causation of action in one’s favour-is not committed in dictionaries but occurs in examples of the verb’s use; “action-causation of action”: to brain-drain-1) to emigrate to get a better job 2) to entice away professionals for working abroad [19: 137].

Polysemy, based on metaphorical re-thinking of the verb meaning, is of frequent occurrence, in this case a figurative meaning is not sometimes committed in dictionaries, probably because of its recent appearance: to handpick-1) to pick by hand [20]: However, winter is the busiest season for the couple and up to three full-time employees will help handpick gourds for the Wuertz Farm’s Sixth Annual Gourd Festival Feb. 6-8 at the Pinal County Fairgrounds in Casa Grande But in this corner of New Mexico, people have flocked to Joe Lujan's "you-pick" farm in Las Cruces for the past 45 years to hand-pick chili peppers [11]; 2) select carefully with a particular purpose in mind [9]: He handpicks his assistants;

To hand-tailor-1) to produce (a garment or the like) by individual workmanship [20]; 2) to make according to individual requirements: And what if you could hand-tailor these purchases in the store with high-tech sewing machines? [11]; 3) a new meaning-to develop, to suggest: They will not hand-tailor a solution but will provide useful guidance nonetheless [11];

To spoon-feed-1) to feed with a spoon [9]: Responding to a call for his mum from a pale-skinned, paralysed boy, the nurse wipes food from his grubby face and continues to spoon-feed him [11]; 2) provide (someone) with so much help or information that they do not need to think for themselves: If listeners don't make the distinction, hey, he's not going to spoon-feed them [11]; 3) to overindulge or spoil [18]: Duncan Haile explains that you may need to spoon-feed the buyer if you want to help the sale go forward [14];

To pinprick-1) to puncture with or as if with a pin [18]: She badly pinpricked her finger; 2) to hurt, to annoy [21]; 3) an extra meaning-to break, to interrupt: He decided to "pinprick the silence" by taking advantage of his tony address on a high-traffic road traveled by commuters as well as the curious [11];

To vacuum-clean-1) to hoover: Don’t forget to vacuum-clean upholstered furniture [11]; 2) an extra meaning-to absorb: Now these factories vacuum-clean so much of its power that even Shillong has power cuts [11];
To headhunt-1) the practice among some peoples of collecting the heads of dead enemies as trophies [9]: The Igbo fight with other villages, kill each other and ritualize brutality in a way that is most definitely unchristian and illiberal, for example, they headhunt [14]; 2) to offer a job to a person who already has a job with another company [18]: Thinknicity headhunts everyone from top IT project managers and biostatisticians to lab assistants and help-desk employees [14].

At syntagmatic level semantic syncretism is manifested via additional characteristics which are given to action by some verbs with incorporated actants. For example, to babysit-permanent, usual action; to handshake, to spoon-feed: In the article, Horowitz claimed popular professors like Angela Davis and Paul Ortiz spoon-feed students a liberal agenda, preventing students from seeing the bigger picture; Really, in a world gone mad, why spoon-feed us such easy metaphors? [11], to brain-wash-hint of disapproval; attribute characteristic of an action-to hand-pick (carefully): The accomplished organist used his years of experience to handpick works that play to the organ's strengths; Our reporters and editors handpick the stories you shouldn't miss [11]; to hand-tailor (exclusively, individually): And what if you could hand-tailor these purchases in the store with high-tech sewing machines? [11]; to pinpoint (precisely): Federal investigators have found the cockpit voice recorder, the flight management computer and the Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning System, but said it could take a while before they pinpoint what exactly caused a plane to crash in Owatonna Thursday [11].

There are also examples of use of verbs with incorporated actants simultaneously in their direct and figurative meaning. For example: Olympic bronze medallist Bryony Stokes wore her Blue Peter badge as she windsurfed to victory at the Beijing Olympics 2008 [11]. The verb windsurf is used in this sentence in its direct meaning: “to take part in the sport of windsurfing” [18], because Stokes is a famous windsurfer; as well as in its figurative meaning “to move fast towards something” which is not committed in dictionaries, as the point of issue is winning a medal, i.e. striving for victory.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, verbs with incorporated actants are of significant linguistic interest and require further study and the analysis of syncretism in their functioning can give rise to new research in this field (sphere).

Study Findings: In the functioning of verbs with incorporated actants there are syncretcal phenomena which are manifested in paradigmatics at the morphological level by the ability of one and the same verb to incorporate various actants; at the semantic level-by their polysemy; at the syntactical level-by the ability of the verb to act as different sentence parts.

In syntagmatics syncretism is presented by incorporation of different actants in one speech performance at the morphological level; at the semantic level-by some connotations that verbs with incorporated actants possess; at the syntactical level-by the verbs’ valence alteration caused by incorporation of actants.

REFERENCES

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