"One-to-one" or "one-to-many" correspondences in verb classes and argument realization patterns?

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Drawing on data from English verbs (verb classes) of Change, Theft, and Giving, this talk demonstrates a novel approach to verb classes which reconciles the assumption of a "one-to-one" correspondence between verb meaning and argument realization (Levin 1993: 1) with recent findings that argument realization is not predictable from verb meaning but exhibits a "one-to-many" correspondence (e.g. Faulhaber 2011). After briefly reviewing previous literature, I discuss the distribution of sets of near-synonymous verbs across various argument realization patterns ("constructions"). When comparing verbs of the same class, the data show that no two verbs exhibit identical constructional behavior (especially when frequency of occurrence is accounted for). However, when comparing distinct classes against each other, the data show that each class is associated with a unique range of constructions.

While it is obvious that verbs of a given class exhibit similar but not identical behavior, linguists have yet to formalize this observation. I thus show how verb classes and verbal lexical entries can be formulated at multiple levels of granularity. At a coarse-grained level, these classes specify the general, shared meaning of all verbs in the class and the class's "constructional range", which delimits the set of constructions the verbs may *potentially* occur in. The fine-grained "frame-based verb entry", in turn, specifies how each verb profiles certain aspects of the class's more general semantics, as well as the relative frequency with which the verb appears in each construction of the constructional range. Where possible, sub-classes are formulated to capture medium-grained similarities in both meaning and syntax among more closely related verbs of a given class. To conclude, I discuss the implications of these data and theoretical concepts and point to avenues for future research

References: • Faulhaber, S. (2011): Verb Valency Patterns. Mouton de Gruyter. • Levin, B. (1993): English Verb Classes and Alternations. U. of Chicago Press.