

Support verb constructions

Comments on Angelika Storrer's presentation

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Salsa-Workshop 2006



Outline of the comment

- Support-verb constructions (SVCs) and textual organisation
- SVCs and semantic construction
- two kinds of SVC (with PPs and direct objects)



SVCs and textual organisation 1

- the anaphoric potential of many (non-idiomatic) SVCs and the corresponding base verb constructions (BVCs) is different

(1) *Den Kindern soll nur Hilfe geleistet werden, wenn sie sie benötigen. Sie erfolgt durch Fragen ...*

‘The children should only be helped if necessary. This will take the form of questions ...’

(2) **Den Kindern soll nur geholfen werden wenn nötig. Es erfolgt durch Fragen ...*



SVCs and textual organisation 2

- general observation: eventuality arguments of simple verbs cannot be referred to by an (non-demonstrative) anaphoric pronoun

(3) *The referee sent the keeper off. *It/This/He made Mary very angry.*

- nominalisations are accessible to subsequent anaphoric pronouns

(4) *Mary was baffled when she watched the referee sending off the keeper. It made her very angry.*

- this follows from the different status of their **eventuality arguments** (Dahl and Hellman, 1995; Schwarz, 2000)
 - only nominalisations introduce a discourse referent
 - this also distinguishes SVCs and their BVCs



SVCs and textual organisation 3

- this suggests treating eventuality arguments of plain verbs not on a par with those from nominalisations
- e.g., in DRT (Kamp and Reyle, 1993), the former should not immediately appear as discourse referents
- this would not fit in with Asher's (1993) (Davidsonian) event semantics

(5)

| |
|-------------------|
| e x y |
| referee'(x) |
| keeper'(y) |
| e: send-off'(x,y) |



SVCs and textual organisation 4

- in her talk, Angelika Storrer argues that this anaphoric potential is one of the reasons for the use of SVCs
- but why should one create this anaphoric potential in the first place?
 - it might be **inefficient**, if there is no subsequent anaphoric reference to the eventuality
 - if necessary, the reference could also be established and highlighted with a nominalisation **in the anaphor**

(6) *Den Kindern soll nur geholfen werden, wenn es nötig ist. Diese Hilfe erfolgt durch Fragen ...*

‘The children should only be helped if necessary. This help will take the form of questions ...’

SVCs and textual organisation 5

- consider e.g. Roßdeutscher's (1994) account of *der Umtausch* 'the exchange'

(7)

| |
|---|
| $\text{ecc}, \mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y}_1, \mathbf{y}_2, \mathbf{s}$ |
| $\text{exchange}'(\text{ecc})$ |
| $\text{ec}_1: \text{give}'(\mathbf{s}, \mathbf{y}_1, \mathbf{x})$ |
| $\text{ec}_2: \text{give}'(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y}_2, \mathbf{s})$ |
| $\text{ecc} = \text{ec}_1 + \text{ec}_2$ |
| $\mathbf{y}_1 \cap \mathbf{y}_2 = \emptyset$ |

- this competing hypothesis calls for further research on SVCs along the lines sketched in Angelika Storrer's talk
 - identify the relevant cases (semi-)automatically from suitable corpora
 - evaluate the alternatives by hand

SVCs and semantic construction

- central problem: **restriction of readings** of the PredN
 - are the readings of the nominalised polysemous verbs always restricted to one (cp. Storrer's *Absage erteilen*: only 'refuse')?
 - (8) *einem Bewerber eine Absage erteilen*
'to reject an applicant'
 - (9) *dem Rassismus eine Absage erteilen*
'to say no to racism'
 - which readings disappear in SVCs? hypothesis: **stative** readings of polysemous verbs
 - * *helfen*: 'aid', but not 'support'
 - * *zusagen*: 'accept' but not 'please'
 - * *aussagen*: 'claim' but not 'mean'



Two kinds of SVCs 1

- why are PP-SVCs less flexible than DO-SVCs?

(10) *zur Anwendung bringen* ‘apply’

(11) *in Kontakt treten* ‘initiate contact’

- many of them incorporate an **unstressed** definite determiner (integrated with the preposition)
- but modification of PredNs by an AP or PP works with other determiners (indefinite, null, **stressed** definite determiner)

(12) *eine deutliche Absage erteilen*
‘to refuse clearly’

(13) *guten Unterricht erteilen*
‘to provide excellent teaching’



Two kinds of SVCs 2

- for stressed definite determiners, modifying PPs seem obligatory
- they provide the **contrasting** property for the focus interpretation

(14) *DIE Anerkennung finden, von der man immer geträumt hat*
'to get the recognition that one has always been dreaming of'

(15) **DIE Anerkennung finden*

(16) *DEN Unterricht erteilen, den sich die Schüler wünschen*
'to provide that sort of teaching that pupils want'

- but are PP-SVCs without incorporated determiner thus easier to modify?

(17) *in einen schnellen Gang bringen* 'to get (something) going fast'

(18) **in DEN Gang bringen, der alle zufriedenstellt*

'to get (something) running in such way that everyone is satisfied'



References

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Roßdeutscher, A. (1994). Fat child meets DRT. *Theoretical Linguistics* 20, 237–305.

Schwarz, M. (2000). *Indirekte Anaphern in Texten. Studien zur domänen-gebundenen Referenz und Kohärenz im Deutschen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.



SVCs and semantic construction 2

- generally, functional SVCs are semantically **more transparent** than non-functional ones

(19) *in Gang bringen/halten* 'to start/keep going'

(20) *eine Entscheidung fällen* 'to make a decision'

- but there is no simple line between semantically transparent functional SVCs and semantically opaque non-functional SVCs
 - how do SVs like *bringen* and *finden* develop a 'light' reading?
 - when is the semantic contribution of the SV part of the interpretation?

(21) *zum Abschluß bringen* (2 × causative) = *abschließen* (1 ×)

(22) *zur Aufführung bringen* (1 × causative) = *aufführen* (0 ×)

(23) *in Gang bringen* (1 × causative) ≠ *gehen* (0 ×)



SVCs and semantic construction 3

- central problem: **restriction of readings** of the PredN (ctd)
 - how relevant is this disambiguation of PredNs within larger texts?
 - * e.g., for stative/nonstative readings of polysemous verbs, the context might already disambiguate
 - * then the disambiguating function of SVCs would be less crucial
- (24) *Schulmusiker aller Schularten haben seit den 1920er Jahren als Teilzeitbeschäftigte in Musikschulen unterrichtet ...*
- ‘Music teachers from all kinds of schools have given lessons in music schools as part-time employees since the 1920’s ...’
- * here, *unterrichten* cannot mean ‘inform’ (missing accusative complement)
 - * once more, we need further investigations along the lines of Storrer’s approach

Miscellaneous points 1

- many SVCs where the adjective modifies the PredN cannot be replaced with BVCs where the adjective is changed into an adverb

(25) *dumm Vorschläge machen*

‘make suggestions in a stupid way’

(26) *dumme Vorschläge machen*

‘make stupid suggestions’

- however, there are other ways of reformulating SVCs with adjective modifiers without changing meaning, z.B.:

(27) *tschechischen Unterricht erteilen*

‘teach Czech’

(28) *Tschechisch unterrichten*

