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## **ON THE LEXICOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MEANING OF A VERB IN ITS BOUND USE<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract.** The paper deals with the problem of the lexicographic interpretation of the verb meaning in collocations such as *бросить взгляд* ‘to cast a glance’, lit. *to throw a glance*. The verb *бросить* can be described here as meaning: (1) ‘to throw’; or (2) something like ‘to bring into existence’; or (3) ‘to look’. The paper demonstrates that solution (3), though sometimes erroneous from the lexicographic point of view, should not be entirely discarded, because of a special kind of *semantic shift* that can take place when the noun part of the collocation falls away and the meaning of the whole phrase is reassigned to the verb, cf. the semantic shift ‘to grasp’ → ‘to understand’ realized in French *comprendre* ‘to understand’, from Lat. *mente comprehendere* lit. *to grasp with the mind*.

**Key words:** semantics, lexicography, collocation, idiom, bound use, verb, metaphor, semantic shift, semantic derivation, semantic typology

Let us consider collocations consisting of a noun and a verb of motion or of physical action, which outside the collocation has its own proper meaning, e.g.: *бросить взгляд* ‘to cast a glance’, lit. ‘to throw a glance’, *столкнуться с проблемой* ‘to face a problem’, lit. ‘to run into a problem’, *добратся до истины* ‘to find out the truth,’ lit. ‘to get down to the truth’, *погрузиться в размышления* ‘to be plunged in thought’, *прийти к выводу* ‘to come to a conclusion’, *прийти в ярость* ‘to get furious’, lit. ‘to come into fury’; *сойти с конвейера*, *пойти на компромисс*, *смотреть сквозь пальцы*, *давить на психику*, *пудрить мозги* etc. While these collocations have different structure, what they have in common is the fact that the meaning of the whole is not compositional with respect to the meanings of its parts.

Obviously, before talking about the (non-)compositionality of such collocations, we should identify the meaning of its parts, and first of all, the meaning of the verb. Therefore the question is what the verb itself means. A verb such as *бросить* in *бросить взгляд* ‘to cast a glance’ can be described as meaning: (1) ‘to throw’; or (2) something like ‘to bring into existence’ (cf. the lexical function Oper1 in (Мельчук 1974/1999: 94)); or (3) ‘to look’. Yet another lexicographic solution (4) would be to give a semantic definition only to the collocation as a whole,

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by RFH, grant No 10-04-00156a.

not to the verb alone. All four possibilities can be found in linguistic descriptions, including different types of dictionaries. However, the choice is not always justified and not even always made consciously. It is necessary to show explicitly the choice of each of the four alternatives and to determine the advantages of each one of them for different kinds of collocations.

This problem is relevant not only for lexicography, but also for semantic typology, namely, for identifying *recurring semantic shifts* (cf. Зализняк 2001; 2009; Zalizniak 2008). On the other hand, it is important to note that the optimal lexicographic solution doesn't need to be adequate from the cognitive point of view, i.e. to correspond to a semantic network that gives the speaker access to the various meanings of a polysemic word. Actually, a dictionary is used in another way and for other tasks than a semantic network.

Solution (2) arises in the framework of the «Meaning — Text» model in its newest version (cf. (Mel'čuk, Wanner 1996; Апресян 2004а; 2004b) about semantic motivation of lexical functional verbs). In this case, the meaning of the verb is considered to be neither original, nor figurative (Dobrovol'skij, Piirainen 2005: 12). This solution, which implies that the verb acquires an additional meaning in collocations of a certain kind, seems to be the best whenever the verb comes close to the lexical functional verbs (most often Oper1), i.e. it has the same derivative meaning in a set of diverse collocations, a meaning that is permanently affected by its combinability with the nouns of a particular type, e.g., *прийти в ярость / восторг / отчаянье* etc. 'to fly into a rage' / 'be delighted' / 'give oneself up to despair', lit. 'to come into...'; *впасть в уныние / задумчивость / заблуждение*, etc., lit. 'to fall into despondency / reverie / error', cf. (Dobrovol'skij 1982; Baranov, Dobrovol'skij 1996). In this case it is treated in the same way as verbs that are not used outside the collocations (cf. the verbs *впасть* (в уныние), *оказать* (сопротивление)). A similar interpretation of collocations with nouns describing emotions and other inner states is made in (Булыгина, Шмелев 2000). In all these cases the verb is used in a shifted (semantically emptied, generalized) meaning.

In other cases, when the derivative meaning of the verb does not arise regularly and is based on the figurative meaning of the collocation as a whole, solution (1), in the spirit of (Lakoff, Johnson 1980) and their followers, is preferable. This approach has been discussed chiefly in the literature on semantics, but it is also widely used in lexicography. According to this principle, the collocation *бросить взгляд* 'to cast a glance' is to be placed in a dictionary in the same part of the word entry (corresponding to the meaning with same number) as *бросить мяч* 'to throw a ball', *забивать голову ерундой* lit. 'to choke up the head with rubbish' is to be filled in the same part as *забивать шкаф вещами* 'to choke up a cupboard with things', and so on.

The collocations *зайти в тупик* 'reach a deadlock', lit. 'to walk into a blind alley', *смотреть сквозь пальцы* 'turn a blind eye (to smth.)', lit. 'to look through

the fingers', *вешать лапшу на уши* 'give baloney to smb.', lit. 'to hang up noodles on somebody's ears' belong to the class described above, while for example *давить на психику* has another structure (see below). Note that (1) and (4) are actually one and the same solution: it is preferred in cases when the actual meaning of the collocation is based on an obvious «image component» (Dobrovolskij, Piirainen 2009) that stems from the meaning of the collocation as a whole (cf. *бросить камень в чей-то огород* 'make snide remarks about smb.', lit. 'to throw stones in somebody else's vegetable garden'). This solution corresponds to the usual practice of both explanatory and bilingual dictionaries.

Let us now consider solution (3). V. V. Vinogradov pointed out its fallacy, using the example of the verb *обвести* which in the Ushakov dictionary is explained as «to look over, to cast a glance», being illustrated by the example *Машенька обвела удивленными глазами свою комнату* (Виноградов 1977). Although Vinogradov's book has long become a classic, this confusion still often takes place. For example, in the ideographic dictionary (Бабенко и др. 1999) the class of «perception verbs» contains, among others, the verbs *бросать* (взгляд, взор), *ловить* (взглядом), *отводить* (взор / взгляд), *переводить* (взор / взгляд); the class of «emotion verbs» contains: *сжиматься* (она вся сжималась от рыданий; сердце ее сжалось), *преисполняться* (сердце ее преисполнилось жалостью); *входить* (в состояние задумчивости), *вызывать* (страх), *доставлять* (удовольствие), *наваливаться* (заботы навалились), *овладевать* (им овладело тревожное чувство), *переполнять* (воспоминания переполнили его душу), *заполнять* (его заполняла нежность к Насте), *портить* (настроение), и т. п. In a less drastic form this solution is present in some semantic investigations, for example in (Позина 2005: 96) *остановить* is classified as a verb of perception, the ground for this being the collocation *остановить взор*.

Although such a solution has been disproved from the lexicographic point of view, it should not, however, be entirely discarded: actually, there is a mechanism of semantic derivation based on the falling away of the noun from a collocation which is accompanied by the transition of the collocation's meaning to the verb itself. In that way, the verb obtains a new meaning; in fact, a **semantic shift** takes place. This was the case of diachronic semantic shift 'to grasp' → 'to understand' (cf. French *comprendre*, Italian *capire*, German *begreifen*, Russian *понять*, *постичь*, etc.), which is being reproduced also in the form of synchronic polysemy, cf. the following words having both meanings: Ancient Greek *καταλαμβάνω*, Russian *уловить*, *схватывать*, English *catch*, *grasp*, *seize*, *get*, French *saisir*, German *erfassen*, and others<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> In the «Database of semantic shifts in the languages of the world», see (Зализняк 2009; Zalizniak et al. 2012) there are 40 realizations of this semantic shift in the languages belonging to various families. Cf. also (Июмдин 2004: 564—566).

In the Latin-Russian dictionary by I. Kh. Dvoretckij among the examples of combinatory possibilities of the verb *comprehendere* we find: *comprehendere paucis verbis* ‘give a brief account’, lit. ‘to grasp with a few words’; *comprehendere visu* ‘to perceive, to see’, lit. ‘to grasp with sight’; *comprehendere memoria* ‘to remember’, lit. ‘to grasp with memory’; and *comprehendere animo / mente / cogitatione* ‘to understand’, lit. ‘to grasp with spirit / mind / intellect’. The question arises: can we state that the Latin verb *comprehendere* had the meaning ‘to understand’? Apparently we cannot, at least solely on the ground of the above-mentioned dictionary data. On the other hand, the fact that the French verb *comprendre* has nowadays the meaning ‘to understand’ but does not have the meaning ‘to grasp’ signifies that the Latin verb acquired this meaning at some point of its semantic evolution. The most adequate model for this process seems to be the statement that a verb acquires a new meaning when its expression becomes possible without the context that has generated this meaning (in this case it is the instrumental complement). We do not know at what moment exactly the compliments *animo / mente / cogitatione* have fallen off, but we can say with certainty that at this moment the Latin verb *comprehendere* acquired the meaning ‘to understand’.

Similarly, examples (2) and (3), but not example (1), testify that the Russian word *уловить* has acquired the meaning ‘to understand’. Actually, in (1) *Я не уловил смысла его слов* ‘I did not catch the meaning of what he said’ there is nothing more than a common metaphor.

- (1) Я не уловил смысла его слов.
- (2) Шли дни, и что-то очень странное начало происходить в музее. Я не сразу даже уловил, что же именно [Ю. О. Домбровский. Хранитель древностей (1964), ruscorpора].
- (3) Выступая на бесчисленных фестивалях и конференциях на Западе, он уловил, что наиболее значительную фигуру выпускают в самом конце [В. Аксенов. Тайственная страсть (2009), ruscorpора]<sup>3</sup>.

Note that the Russian verb *схватывать* cannot be used in such contexts. The meaning ‘to understand’ appears only in the idiom *схватывать все на лету* as a whole. The use of quotation marks indicating a not yet conventionalized semantic shift, is also significant, as in the following example:

- (4) Оказалось, что ни одно животное не может разрешить правильно задачу и сразу бежать к следующей баночке, т. е. оно не может «схватывать» принцип, что приманка перемещается в каждую следующую

<sup>3</sup> The examples from the National Corpus of Russian ([www.ruscorpора.ru](http://www.ruscorpора.ru)) are referred to as «ruscorpора».

баночку ряда. [...] В отличие от этого маленький ребенок легко «схватывает» [данный] принцип [А. Р. Лурия. Язык и сознание].

Another example of a semantic shift which took place due to the elimination of the substantive member of a collocation is ‘to carry’ → ‘(to be/to become) pregnant’<sup>4</sup>. The conventionalizing process of this semantic shift can be illustrated by the following three sentences:

- (5) Старуха *понесла* впереди *свечу*; я и Трифена за ней последовали [В. Т. Нарезный. Бурсак (1822), ruscorpora].
- (6) Эхо, бессонная нимфа, скиталась по берегу Пеня. / Феб, увидев ее, страстию к ней воспылал. / Нимфа *плод понесла* восторгов влюбленного бога (Пушкин).
- (7) А царица молодая / Дела вдаль не отлагая / С той же ночи *понесла* (Пушкин).

Yet another example<sup>5</sup>: the contemporary Hebrew expression meaning ‘don’t pay attention’ comes from the more traditional one for ‘paying attention’: *lasim lev*, lit. ‘to place one’s heart [in the matter]’ — but in a truncated negative imperative form: *al tasim(i)*, lit. ‘do not place’.

Let us take some more examples from Russian: *пробежать* ‘to look over’, from *пробежать глазами* (cf. *Ему захотелось побыстрее пробежать это письмо*); *дойти* ‘get utterly exhausted’ (cf. *Лев Николаевич не спал нормально уже 12 ночей, три дня не вылезал с передовой, совсем дошел* (ruscorpora)), from *дойти до ручки / до крайности*; *доводить* ⟨учительницу⟩ ‘to drive to tears’, from *доводить кого-то до слез, до нервного срыва, до истерики*. Similarly, falling away of a direct object has generated such new verb meanings as *рассекать* ‘to drive in an expensive and fashionable car’, apparently from an idiom *рассекать воды* ‘cleave the water’ or *предъявлять* ⟨кому-то⟩ ‘to reproach ⟨smb⟩’, from *предъявлять претензии* ‘to lay claims’, etc.

If the verb cannot be used in the derived meaning outside of a particular collocation, no semantic shift takes place and the lexicographic solution (3) is erroneous. In (Падучева 2004: 198—200) a semantic shift ‘to look’ → ‘to evaluate’ is considered. Indeed, it can be observed in a number of Russian constructions, such as *Как ты на это смотришь?*, *Я смотрю на это просто*, or *Это как посмот-*

<sup>4</sup> Consider some other realizations of this semantic shift from the «Database of semantic shifts...»: German *tragen* ‘carry’ and *trächtig* ‘pregnant’, Arabic *hamala* and *hamalat*, Breton *dougen* and *dougaréz*, Lithuanian *nėšti* and *nėščia* (the same two meanings); др.-греч. *fortion* ‘foetus’, lit. ‘burden’, English *borne* and *born*, Russian *бремя* (etymologically ‘borne’ (Фасмер 1996, I: 155)) and *беременная* ‘pregnant’ etc.

<sup>5</sup> Olga Meerson, in conversation.

*петь* etc., where the meaning ‘to evaluate’ is conveyed by the verb *смотреть*. (The mental meaning is supported here by the word *как* ‘how’ which is typical for verbs of opinion, cf. *как ты считаешь / думаешь / полагаешь*, but is excluded for *смотреть* in its original visual meaning.) Meanwhile, the idioms *смотреть сквозь пальцы* ‘look through one’s fingers’ or *смотреть на что-то косо* ‘look askew’ do not demonstrate the semantic shift in question, because they cannot be decomposed into its parts (cf. \**Как ты на это смотришь? — Я смотрю на это сквозь пальцы / косо*). Thus, the phrases *это как посмотреть* and *смотреть на что-то сквозь пальцы* should be treated differently. The same applies, e.g., to *давить на психику* on the one hand, and *пудрить мозги* or *вешать лапшу на уши* — on the other. In *давить на психику* the verb *давить* has a derived meaning ‘to apply psychological pressure, trying to convince smb.’, which can also be observed in *давить* ⟨на кого-то⟩, *психологическое давление* и т. п. In the two other items (*пудрить мозги* and *вешать лапшу на уши*) no derived meaning is assigned to the verb, the figurative one being attributed to the idiom as a whole.

So, from the lexicographic point of view, a borderline has to be traced between idiom having a figurative meaning as a whole and a semantic shift which affects the verb as such. This borderline depends on whether the verb can or cannot be used in the derived meaning in question outside the collocation as well. Indeed, the same principle should be applied while establishing semantic shifts.

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