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Christopher Gledhill. On the Discourse Functions and Contrastive Phraseology of Equivalent Light Verb Constructions Involving ‘make’ and ‘take’. C. Beedham; W. Danks; E. Soselia. Rules and Exceptions: Using Exceptions for Empirical Research in Theoretical Linguistics, Peter Lang, pp.175-227, 2014, 978-3-0343-0782-6. hal-01220023

HAL Id: hal-01220023

<https://u-paris.hal.science/hal-01220023>

Submitted on 28 Jun 2021

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Gledhill, Christopher. 2014. On the Discourse Functions and Contrastive Phraseology of Equivalent Light Verb Constructions Involving ‘make’ and ‘take’. In C. Beedham, W. Danks and E. Soselia (eds.) *Rules and Exceptions: Using Exceptions for Empirical Research in Theoretical Linguistics*. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 175-227.

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On the Discourse Functions and Contrastive Phraseology of Equivalent Light Verb Constructions Involving ‘make’ and ‘take’

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Abstract

The verbs *make* and *take* are used in a wide range of light verb constructions (LVC) such as *make / take + bath, call, joke*, etc. The alternation of *make / take* in these constructions can usually be explained by the meaning of the light verb (*make* as creation, *take* as reaction). However, a small set of expressions do not appear to follow this pattern: *make / take + decision, note, effort, time*. In this paper, I examine the phraseology of these expressions in the British National Corpus. Using the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), I show that this particular group of LVCs are (mostly) used in verbal group complexes of the form: *make / take + N + to V*. In SFG terms, this is a ‘grammatical metaphor’ in which the LVCs express an evaluation of the following predicator. I argue that it is only when we analyse the extended phraseology of these ‘exceptions’ that we can see how these expressions still broadly follow the regular patterns of English.

1. Introduction

Light verb constructions (LVCs) (such as *bring to mind, give a talk, make a decision*, etc.) differ from other verb phrases (such as *bring to market, give a gift, make a cake*, etc.), in that they are composed of a ‘predicative’ noun, which refers to a specific process (*mind, talk, decision*), and a ‘light’ verb, which re-frames this process in terms of a general metaphor (*bring, give, make*,

etc.).* In this paper, I focus on the particular phenomenon of ‘equivalent’ LVCs in English. Equivalent LVCs are constructions in which two or more alternative light verbs can be used, such as *give / have + talk*, *make / take + decision*, etc. Generally speaking, it is possible to explain the choice between light Vs such as *make* and *take* in equivalent LVCs by looking at the meaning of the noun (N) in the expression. For example, the Ns which are used exclusively with *make* (+ *amends*, *contact*, *deal*, *fun*, *gesture*, *love*, *sense*...) appear to refer to psychological or social behaviours: these processes are necessarily complex and involve various stages. On the other hand, the Ns which only occur with *take* (+ *action*, *bite*, *care*, *chance*, *charge*, *heart*, *issue*, *umbrage*...) tend to express psychological or physical reactions: these can be seen as actions or states of mind which are the result of a single, particular decision to act. This general difference may explain the distribution of *make* or *take* among a large number of LVCs. A similar distinction can be proposed to explain equivalent expressions which allow for both light Vs, but this time the onus is on the meaning of the light V. Generally, the subjects of many LVCs with *make* tend to have the underlying semantic role of ‘initiator, creator’ or in grammatical terms Agent (*make + bath*, *call*, *exception*, *joke*, *point*, etc.), in contrast to Subjects of many LVCs with *take* which tend to function as ‘possessor, receiver’ or Medium¹ (*take + bath*, *call*, *exception*, *joke*, *point*, etc.).

However, not all equivalent LVCs can be explained in these terms. In this paper I focus on a small set of constructions which appear to be exceptions to the general pattern, at least when observed out of context: *make / take + (a) decision*, *(a) note*, *(a, the) effort* and *(the or zero) time*. The hypothesis I wish to test here is that far from being interchangeable, each of these LVCs in fact has a consistent and contrastive pattern of use. This is in keeping with the structuralist principle, set out again recently by Beedham 2005, that apparent ‘exceptions’ point to an alternative regular system within a given language. However, in this paper, I attempt to show that this kind of observation can only be carried out by analysing the phraseology of a particular sign in a representative sample of texts (such as the British National Corpus, BNC²).

* This article is based on a paper read at the *Summer School and Conference on the Method of Lexical Exceptions*, St Andrews 2-8 Sept. 2007. I am very grateful to Tom Bloor for comments on a previous draft. I am solely responsible for any errors remaining.

¹ In Systemic Functional Grammar initial capitals are conventionally used to refer to terms which are particular to the model.

² The British National Corpus (BNC) is a representative corpus of 100 million words of spoken and (mostly) written texts in British English dating from the 1980s and 1990s (as reported in Aston & Burnard 1998).

By ‘phraseology’, I am not only referring here to idiomatic expressions, but to the more general tendency for signs (either lexical or grammatical items) to habitually co-occur with other signs in a particular communicative context (Firth 1957, Sinclair 1991). A related hypothesis I wish to explore here is that the phraseology of any given light V construction usually involves a much more regular extended lexico-grammatical environment than we would normally expect. Thus, my survey of the BNC (in section 4) suggests that the expressions *make / take + decision, note, effort* and *time* differ from many other LVCs in that they are typically used in ‘verbal group complexes’, structures which express an abstract form of evaluation in relation to the following non-finite clause. I would suggest that this is a significant feature of this particular group of expressions.

The linguistic literature on LVCs has been primarily concerned with issues of categorisation. This debate is clearly of interest to syntacticians and lexicologists, whose aim is to study the particular place of linguistic signs in relation to each other within the abstract language system. But it is less relevant to discourse-oriented linguists, who are interested in how the language system creates meaning in different communicative contexts, and how signs are used in naturally-occurring texts. For this reason, in section 2 of this paper I only give a very brief discussion of the defining features of LVCs. Although LVCs have attracted much attention in formal grammar and lexicology, there has been less research on them in functional or discourse-oriented linguistics. This is surprising, given that the difference between a V such as *to decide* and its equivalent LVCs, such as *to + come to / make / take / reach, etc. + decision* is just as likely to be found in the communicative functions of these phrases as in the semantics and structure of their constituent parts. In order to address this issue, in section 3, I set out the analysis of LVCs from the point of view of the discourse-oriented model of language, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG, Halliday 1985, Bloor & Bloor 2004, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). According to this approach, LVCs can be seen as part of a broader class of ‘extended predicates’, whose function is to express a particularly abstract (but also very productive) form of ‘grammatical metaphor’ (this point has been made previously in Gledhill 2008, 2009). In support of this analysis, in section 4, I present a corpus-based analysis of the LVCs *make / take + decision / note* (with their equivalent Vs *to decide* and *to note*) and the LVCs *make / take + effort, time* (which do not have equivalent Vs).

2. LVCs in mainstream grammar

LVCs can be seen as both partially grammaticalised and partially lexicalised phrases (Brinton & Akimoto 1999, Brinton & Traugott 2005). On the one hand, all LVCs share a relatively predictable, productive structure (light V + predicative N) and semantics (including lexical aspect). On the other hand, when we look at LVCs not as a class, but as individual expressions, their structure and semantics are relatively specialised (this is especially true of LVCs with a ‘non-referential’ N). In the following discussion, I discuss these issues in terms of compositional and lexical aspect (2.1), and the syntactic constraints on the predicative N (2.2).

2.1. LVCs and aspect

Jespersen (1942) observed that LVCs express a process as an ‘isolated instance’:

The most usual meaning of substantives derived from and identical in form with a verb is the action or an isolated instance of the action. This is particularly frequent in such everyday combinations [...] after *have* and similar ‘light’ verbs. They are in accordance with the general tendency of Mod E to place an insignificant verb, to which marks of person and tense are attached, before the really important idea [...] Such constructions also offer an easy means of adding some descriptive trait in the form of an adjunct: *we had a delightful bathe, a quiet smoke*, etc. They thus in some way form a parallel to those with a ‘cognate object’: *fight the good fight*, etc. (Jespersen 1942 VI:117).

Subsequent linguists agree that LVCs make an important contribution to the expression of ‘aspect’, whether in contrast to other equivalent LVCs or equivalent simple Vs (Vendler 1967, Smith 1991, Cotte 1998, Ballier 2003, inter alia). One of the problems commonly addressed in the literature is the extent to which the aspect of any given LVC is compositional, i.e. determined by modifiers of the LVC, or lexical, i.e. motivated by the underlying meaning of the predicative N. It has also been noted (for example in Celle 2004) that the modification of an LVC by an article such as *a/an* signals that a process is countable (and thus compatible with ‘accomplishments’ or bounded time-frames, as in *have a meal, take a break*), while the absence of an article signals that the process is uncountable (compatible with states and atelic processes, such as *make sense, take shelter*). In addition, as Hiroe (2007) has argued, the semantics of the N, at least for certain categories of LVC, appears to be decisive in determining the type of (lexical) aspect expressed by the LVC. Hiroe has thus suggested two broad types of LVC. The first group (invented examples 1a-c, from Hiroe 2007:6-7) can express either an ‘activity’ (compatible with phrases of duration: the ‘*for* test’) or an ‘accomplishment’ (with

phrases of bounded time-spans: the ‘*in* test’):

- 1α. John **did** a **dance** for/in ten minutes. = Activity or Accomplishment
- 1β. Prof. Smith **gave** a **lecture** on molecular biology for/in an hour. =
Activity or Accomplishment
- 1γ. John **took** a deep **breath** for/in three seconds. = Activity or
Accomplishment

By contrast, a second group of LVCs (invented examples 2a-c) is incompatible with phrases of duration, and thus only express an ‘activity’ (i.e. a process which is dynamic, durative, atelic):

- 2a. John **had** a **sleep** for/*in an hour = Activity not Accomplishment³
- 2b. Mary **took** a **rest** for/*in half an hour. = Activity not Accomplishment
- 2c. John **made** a **contribution** to the charity for/*in ten years. Activity not
Accomplishment

Hiroe suggests that the second group is ‘imperfective’ because it involves Ns which express no inherent endpoint. He claims that this semantic trait supersedes the usual interpretation of the indefinite article.

It would be interesting to test this hypothesis with corpus data. As can be seen in the naturally occurring examples observed in section 4 (below), very few examples of LVCs in *make / take* are used in the same context as time expressions, which makes it difficult to use this kind of data to carry out formal tests for aspect. However, since it is not the aim of this paper to discuss grammatical aspect at any length, it is sufficient to observe, even in the invented examples cited above (1a-c, 2a-c), that individual LVCs express much finer gradations of meaning than suggested by categories such as ‘activity’, ‘accomplishment’ and so on. In addition, as many linguists have argued, the role of the light V is also a determining factor in the overall semantics of any given LVC. For example, Wierzbicka (1982) suggests that families of related LVCs such as *have a + bite, break, walk / take a + bite, break, walk* express very specific, but regular categories of aspect, which she claims can be formulated in terms of the primitive meanings of the light Vs. According to Wierzbicka, LVCs with *have* represent a process as a repeatable state that has no external goal, while LVCs with *take* represent a process as the final result of a goal-oriented, initial motion (1982:794-795). A similar point is made by Quirk et al. 1985:752, who distinguish between *give, have* and *do* in expressing different levels of conscious planning or volition, as in the following series:

- 3a. She shrieked.

³ The judgements about grammaticality made here are those of Hiroe, not mine.

- 3b. She **gave** a **shriek**. ('an involuntary shriek')
- 3c. She **had** a good **shriek**. ('a voluntary shriek for own enjoyment')
- 3d. She **did** a (good) **shriek**. ('a performance before an audience')

Many attempts have been made to provide a formal analysis of the contribution of different light Vs to the meanings of LVCs. But as Butt (2003) points out, in a discussion of LVCs expressing semelfactive 'punctual' aspect (4b), the relationship between the aspect expressed by lexical Vs and their equivalent LVC or the aspect expressed by LVCs as a family of expressions is not always symmetrical or predictable:

- 4a. Kim coughed for / *in five minutes. (Activity only)
- 4b. Kim **had** a **cough** *for / *in five minutes. (neither Activity nor Accomplishment)

The ambiguity of (4b) is instructive (is the process expressed by the N, in which case the aspect is akin to an instantaneous 'achievement', or the V, in which case the aspect is a stative relation?). Butt concludes that the semantics of light Vs cannot be explained in the same terms as grammatical aspect:

Light verbs serve to further structure or modulate the event described by the main verb in a manner that is quite distinct from auxiliaries, modals or other main verbs. (Butt 2003:3).

It is interesting that Butt uses the term 'modulate' in this respect, because in Systemic Functional Grammar, 'Modulation' refers to the modification of a lexical verb by a preceding 'verbal group complex'. As we see in section 3.2, some LVCs (although certainly not all) play an important role in these structures. In these contexts LVCs such as *make a decision to +V*, *take time to +V* express meanings which are comparable with, but not quite the same as aspect and modality.

2.2. The syntax of LVCs

There have been many attempts to identify the formal characteristics of LVCs. Most analysts propose sub-categories rather than a general class of expression. Thus, for example, generative grammar (Björkman 1978, Grimshaw & Mester 1988, Kearns 1989, Di-Sciullo & Rosen 1991 inter alia) makes a broad distinction between 'predicate nominal' and so-called 'pure light verb' constructions. Predicate nominals allow for passivisation of the LVC, pronominalisation of the N, pre- or post-modification of the N, and other grammatical paraphrases (these examples are mostly from Kearns 1989)⁴:

- 5a. The commission **made** an **inspection** of the building.

⁴ For the purposes of exposition, I have re-invented some of these invented examples.

- 5b. An **inspection** of the building was **made** last week.
 5c. The commission's **inspection** of the building was rather cursory,
 5d. Are you referring to the **inspection** which they **made** of the building?
 (etc.)

Since the N in a nominal predicate is said to be 'de-verbal' and 'referential', this kind of construction has a relatively productive, unconstrained syntax. In comparison, the predicative N in a (pure) light verb construction is considered to have all the properties of a 'bare' infinitive (on the basis of which the rest of the phrase is said to be derived), and is thus considered to be 'non-referential'. As we have seen, because the aspect of 'pure' LVCs is said to be lexical, and thus determined primarily by the process expressed in the predicative N, the articles and other modifiers in these constructions are highly constrained in contrast with predicate nominals:

- 6a. John **gave** the roses a **prune**
 6b. *The roses were **given** a **prune** by John
 6c. *John's **prune** of the roses was successful...
 6d. *John **gave** the roses the **prune** of their life (etc.)⁵

Wierzbicka (1982) makes the same distinction between equivalent 'cognate object' expressions such as *to have a think* and de-verbal LVCs such as *have a thought*. Since the N in *have a think* is predicative, it is not as grammatically productive as a de-verbal N (*to have the thought that, to have second thoughts* appear grammatical, but not *?to have the think that, ?to have second thinks*).

Although the term LVC has been adopted by many linguists, various related concepts have been proposed, notably the 'support verb construction' (Vivès 1984, Giry-Schneider 1987, Gross 1989, 2005 and others). An SVC is a verb phrase built around a (theoretically) meaningless 'support V' and a 'predicative N' whose semantic arguments are taken on as the syntactic arguments of the phrase as a whole. As with the generative light V, the SVC is seen to be a central mechanism in the construction of phrase structure. Unlike LVCs, however, SVCs are conceived in theory as a family of structures which all share the same predicative element, regardless of the semantic contribution of the support V (a similar concept is proposed by Allerton 2002). This means that 'non-light' (full or predicative) Vs can be categorized as (different related types of) SVCs. For example, the basic predicate *Max ordered Luke to +V* and the SVC *Max gave Luke an order to +V* are related to a 'converse' construction *Luke got an*

⁵ Kearns notes, however, that most of these will work when used with the gerund *pruning*. I should add that the acceptability judgements about these examples are those of Kearns, not mine.

order from Max to +V and various other constructions such as *Luke has an order to +V / Luke was given an order by Max to +V*, etc. (Gross 2005:167 [my translation]). Although ‘SVC’ is often taken to be a very inclusive category of expression, the notion excludes many examples which other analysts would consider to be legitimate LVCs (such as *bring + to book*, *make / take + effort*, *make / take + time*, *take seriously*, etc.).

Some analysts, notably Pottelberge (2000), have suggested that it is not possible to identify a general overall category of LVCs. Similarly, others (Poulsen 2005, Barrier 2006, Storrer 2006) have suggested that it is not possible to identify any reliable defining characteristics for sub-categories, such as ‘pure’ LVCs or SVCs. Following Brinton & Traugott (2005), I have argued (Gledhill 2008, Todiraşcu & Gledhill 2008, Gledhill 2009) that it is more realistic to analyse LVCs on a continuum of ‘extended predicates’ ranging from partially lexicalised constructions to highly lexicalised phrases. Of course, it is natural that functionalists and other discourse-oriented linguists have a tendency to see grammatical phenomena in terms of variation and ‘lexical diffusion’. They are therefore more comfortable with the gradual notion of a continuum and less preoccupied by the need to make a clear distinction between LVCs and other sequences (as they are with the distinction between grammar and lexis). On the other hand, formal linguists argue that it is absolutely necessary to establish watertight formal categories. For these analysts, a light verb construction (or support verb, stretched verb etc.) is by necessity a much more limited category of expression than the kinds of extended predicate that functional linguists are prepared to work with.

3. LVCs in Systemic Functional Grammar

In this section I set out the analysis of LVCs according to Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG, Halliday 1985, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). The following text is split into two sections, which correspond to the two ‘systems’ of meaning at which it is relevant to analyse LVCs in this model: ‘Transitivity’ and ‘Mood’. There is also a third major system in SFG, ‘Theme’, that is to say the organisation of language in the form of messages and texts. It can be shown that LVCs also have an important role to play in theme and information structure. In addition, the presence or absence of an article (*make a decision*, *make all the decisions that matter*) can often be

explained in terms of cohesive or textual reference.⁶ However, space precludes me from addressing these issues in this paper.

3.1. LVCs and Transitivity

In SFG, the Transitivity system is concerned with how language represents ideas and experience in the form of lexical processes. As in other models, SFG makes a broad distinction between semantic roles which are non-essential or extrinsic to a process (such as Circumstantials), and ‘participants’ which are intrinsic to a process (material processes have Actors and Goals, mental processes have Sensers and Phenomena, relational processes have Carriers and Attributes, and so on). However, Halliday suggests that there exists an intermediate category, which is treated syntactically as though it were a participant, but from the point of view of meaning is part and parcel of the process:

There may be in each type of clause one element which is not so much an entity participating in the process as a refinement of the process itself. (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:295)

Halliday uses the term ‘Range’ for the participant role of any element which determines the type or extent of the process expressed by the predicate as a whole (Halliday 1985:149, Banks 2000, Bloor & Bloor 2004:114-16). This distinction can be seen in (7a-d)⁷, in which the N *note* has a variety of meanings, depending on its participant role in the clause. The following tables set out the usual way these examples are visualised in SFG notation (the middle line corresponds to clause function, the bottom line corresponds to participant role):

7a. Ace	took	the note	and	read	it
Subject	Finite / Predicator	Complement	//	Finite/Predicator	Complement
Actor	Material Process	Goal		Mental Process	Phenomenon

7b. On 15 December,	Fhimah	made	a note	in his diary...
Adjunct	Subject	Finite / Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
Time	Actor	Material Process	Range	Location

⁶ Since determiner usage is not the focus of this paper, in the following sections I use a ‘+’ sign to avoid, in most cases, having to specify each time that an article (*a*, *the* or zero) may or may not be used with a particular LVC.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, all the numbered examples from this point on are taken from the BNC.

7c. The women	took	note	of where the body was laid to rest
Subject	Finite / Predicator	Complement	Complement [[Embedded clause]]
Senser	Mental Process	Range	Phenomenon

7d. I	made	a mental note	that	I mustn't say anything ...
Subject	Finite / Predicator	Complement	//	Projected clause
Senser	Mental Process	Range		Phenomenon

In example (7a), *note* is an ‘object’ (a letter or some other message) which is moved or transferred, and thus has the participant role of Goal (of a material process). However, in examples (7b-d), *note* refers to different kinds of process, and thus has the participant role of Range. Thus, in (7b) *note* refers to a more abstract kind of material object: it can be understood either an abstract ‘piece of writing’ (a message scratched on paper), or perhaps more realistically as a material process: the ‘act of writing’ or ‘making notes’. In (7c), we can observe that *note* refers much more clearly to a process, and there has been a change in process type; here *take note* expresses a psychological mental process equivalent to ‘to notice, to remark’. Finally, in (7d) *made a mental note* explicitly refers to a mental process, but this time with the meaning ‘to think, to remark to oneself’. This analysis can be verified by the presence of a ‘projected’ subordinate clause (this being a potential formal test for mental and verbal processes). In fact, *make a mental note to + V* is a prime example of a lexicalised phrase (which we encounter again in section 4.3).

It is important to state at this point that Halliday’s concept of Range is not the same as ‘predicative’ in traditional grammar. In SFG, Range is a participant role which is determined in relation to the clause as a whole, and cannot be seen as an intrinsic property of one particular element in the clause or a lexical class (such as the ‘predicative’ status of a verb, adjective or noun). In this respect, Halliday uses the term to refer to variety of functions in the clause, which are not necessarily predicative:

[...] the scope, type, extent, quality or quantity of the process or simply a restatement of the process itself in a nominal form (Halliday 1985:149)

Furthermore, Halliday makes a distinction between two types of Range. First, ‘Process Range’ defines or names the lexical process expressed in the clause. We have seen this in examples (7a-d) above, but Process Range can be expressed by elements other than complements, in particular ‘obligatory’ adverbials and prepositional phrases (*bear in mind, bring into play, take into*

account, take lightly). I have suggested previously (Gledhill 2005) that these elements have the clause function of ‘extended predictor’, as can be visualised in the following analysis (7e):

7e. I	take	seriously	any allegations of misbehaviour ...
Subject	Finite/Predictor	Extended Predictor	Complement
Senser	Mental Process	Process Range	Phenomenon

A second category, ‘Entity Range’, delimits the extent of the process expressed by a predictor. This type of Range expresses a variety of functions, such as the specification of a process type (*Dante wrote +his epic poem*), the specification of extent (*Matthew Webb first swam +the English Channel*, which is not the same as the Circumstantial: *+across the English Channel*), the product of resultative constructions (*Van Gogh had painted the canvas +one shade of blue*), and so on. Entity Range can also be seen in ‘caused movement’ constructions (7f-g), some of which (7g) resemble LVCs in that they have a relatively light V, an obligatory ‘extended predictor’ and an equivalent lexical V ‘to shelve’:

7f. He knelt on the car park gravel to **stow in his daypack** the grated cheese sandwiches.⁸

7g. Nathalie **put on the shelf** every piece of fiddle music she had collected in Nova Scotia.⁹

It can be seen in these and previous examples that expressions of Entity Range often serve to express the outcome or ‘endpoint’ of a process, and therefore contribute to the expression of compositional aspect, as mentioned in section 2.1.

I mentioned above that SFG does not consider LVCs to be a separate sub-category of expression, but rather as part of a gradual continuum which extends from simple transitive constructions to more metaphorical forms of speech. However, it is precisely this notion of metaphor which makes LVCs stand out from other predicates. From the point of view of SFG, all LVCs can essentially be considered to be examples of ‘grammatical metaphor’. According to Halliday & Matthiessen, grammatical metaphor refers to a transfer of meaning from a ‘congruent’ (non-metaphorical) mode of expression to a more metaphorical mode (2004:592-3). Halliday & Martin (1993) claim that this form of expression has had a particularly important role to play in technical and scientific English (as can be seen in such abstractions as *give effect to*,

⁸ From: McEwan, Ian. 1998. *Amsterdam*. London: Anchor Books, p76.

⁹ Cited in Ernst 2002:208-9.

have an impact on, have an important role to play, take possession of, etc.). It is perhaps no accident that many examples of LVCs examined in the corpus analysis in this paper (section 4) belong to the same type of discourse. In addition, I would suggest that LVCs present a rather complex form of metaphorical expression, in that they involve increasingly abstract cyclical layers of meaning:

Grammatical Metaphor (1) the re-expression (nominalisation) of a congruent event (*to note*) as a metaphorical entity (*a note*.)

Grammatical Metaphor (2) the reformulation of this process (GM1) as a participant in a more abstract process (*have* = ‘possess’, *give* = ‘transmit’, *make* = ‘create’, *take* = ‘appropriate’...)

Grammatical Metaphor (3) the re-interpretation of the whole expression (GM2) as a new composite process (which is not evident until equivalent LVCs are compared: *have a word* ‘talk’ vs. *have words* ‘dispute’, *make notes* ‘write notes’ vs. *take note* ‘to notice’, etc.).

In the next section, we see that this cycle is taken one step further, since some LVCs are used in verbal group complexes to express (an abstract) evaluation of the process expressed by the following verb.

3.2. LVCs and Mood

The Mood system in SFG is concerned with how language expresses interpersonal relationships in the form of speech functions. The primary speech functions of English include Mood type (indicative, imperative, etc.), Modality, Polarity, and so on. Just as LVCs have a significant role to play in Transitivity (the representation of the world in terms of lexical processes), LVCs are also involved in the expression of interpersonal meanings. Most LVCs probably express some form of evaluation of the lexical process expressed in the predicate as a whole, but in this section I focus on a small group of LVCs which fulfil this role in the particular context of ‘verbal group (VG) complexes’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:497-508, Bloor & Bloor 2004:149-51). A VG complex is a serial verb structure in which the first verb (V1) introduces a second, non-finite verb (V2). In SFG terms, the V1 does not express a process of its own, but rather serves to pick out a particular facet of the lexical process expressed by V2. As is evident in examples such as *have the opportunity to do it, make the effort to do it, make a mess of doing it*, the N signals an explicit evaluation of the following V2 by labelling it as an *opportunity, an effort, a mess*, etc. In structures such as these, the VG complex can be analysed as a form of grammatical metaphor (as

discussed in the previous section.)

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004:497-508) suggest that the V1 in a VG complex can express various types of meaning in relation to the V2: ‘Phase’ expresses the aspect or potential time-frame of a process (*to keep meowing*), ‘Conation’ evaluates the actual or attempted realisation of a process (*to try to measure the speed of light*) and ‘Modulation’ signals the circumstances or potential means by which a process is realised (*to help to lead the resistance*). A fourth term, ‘Projection’, is used for VG complexes in which the V1 is a Mental process (*to expect to win the ballot*). Since in cases of Projection, the V1 is an independent process in relation to the V2, this structure is not strictly speaking a VG complex but rather a (non-finite) clause complex. In Table 2 below, I have drawn up a summary of these different categories. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) provide several examples of Vs (listed below, under the examples 8a-8d) but they do not give examples of LVCs. For comparison, I have suggested some examples (9a-d) which reflect the patterns observed in the data analysis (section 4, below):

< INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE >

The clause relations Phase, Conation and Modulation have not been explored as thoroughly as other features of SFG. Perhaps this is because, when considering VG complexes, the categories are difficult to identify in naturally-occurring examples. However, in theory, it is not difficult to identify cases of Phase, since this often corresponds to a lexicalised expression of aspect that can be fairly straightforwardly compared with evaluative adjuncts of time such as *finally*, *initially*, *little by little*, etc. Typical examples of Phase include periphrastic constructions such as *to + be about to do*, *go on doing*, *stop doing*, etc. In these structures, the subject is a participant of the process expressed by V2, and the process expressed by V1 cannot be specified without reference to V2. As far as LVCs are concerned, in the corpus analysis in the following section, I found only one (possibly marginal) example of Phase: *take + ages, long, a moment, time, a while + V2*. Most of these are impersonal, postposed clauses (*It takes + time + to do this = To do this + takes + time* in contrast to *make time* which does not share the same pattern or meaning).

‘Conation’ is an evaluation of the extent to which a process is actualised or enabled, a meaning that is analogous to ‘polarity’ (as in the sequence: *X did it*, *X nearly did not do it*, *X nearly did it*, *X did not do it*). Among the examples given by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004:511),

Conation can be most clearly seen in causatives which express how participant X enables participant Y to do something (the examples given include: *X encouraged, instructed, taught, trained Y to V*). In these structures, it can be inferred that the process in V2 is actualised, or an attempt has been made to do so. In addition, and unlike Phase, the subject in a Conation structure has two different participant roles: one for V1 (often the ‘Behaver’ of a behavioural process, such as *help, learn, manage*, etc.) and V2 (some other participant role). In LVCs, the light V *take* often expresses this meaning (such as *take + action, care, effort, measures, pains, steps, time, trouble + V2*). These expressions all refer to the cognitive or physical ‘effort’ (and also ‘time’) that has been, or was nearly, expended in realising a process.

Finally, ‘Modulation’ expresses an evaluation of the means by which a process is actualised. Modulation can be thought of as a lexicalised form of ‘modality’, in that the V1 expresses meanings to do with deontic permission or potential (*X can / may do Y*) or epistemic inference and possibility (*X could have / might have done Y*). The light V *have* is often used in LVCs which express these kinds of meaning (*have + the capacity, the opportunity, the potential, the responsibility, the right + V2*). Examples such as these can be distinguished from Conation by considering whether the process in V2 is effectively realised or only potentially realised: in *X has a go at doing Y* the process is (nearly) realised, and the V1 expresses an evaluation of this attempt, while in *X has a chance to do Y* the process is only potentially realised, and the V1 focuses on this eventuality. This seems to be a criterial distinction between Conation and Modulation. In addition, as with Phase, Halliday & Matthiessen (2004:508) suggest that because the role of the V1 is simply to modify the process expressed in the following V2, in cases of Modulation, the V1 does not express a separate process, and thus resists probes such as the passive construction. In the data analysis below, I suggest the light V *make* (in contrast with *take*) tends to be used with VGs expressing Modulation. It might be objected that, since the V *decide* and its equivalent LVCs *make / take + decision* are mental processes, they should primarily express ‘Projection’ (as noted above in 8d, 9d). However, it seems to me that in the case of *decide* and *note* there may be a correlation between the meanings of the clauses projected by Vs and LVCs on the one hand and clause relations on the other. This can be summarised as: *decide / note + clause* = Phase, *take + decision / note + clause* = Conation, *make + decision / note + clause* = Modulation.

4. LVCs in the British National Corpus

The aim in this section is to explore the contrastive use of the light verbs *make* and *take*, principally in relation to the equivalent LVCs *make / take + decision* and equivalent full V (*to decide*). These observations are then compared briefly with a small set of similar LVCs, namely *make / take + note, effort time*. I would contend that this small group of expressions has a somewhat different set of lexical patterns to that of other equivalent LVCs in *make + take*. This initial observation is based on a survey of 50 LVCs involving *make* and / or *take*, summarised in Table 3:

< INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE >

As shown in Table 3, I propose a basic distinction between ‘Exclusive LVCs’ (10a), ‘Contrastive LVCs’ (10b-c), and ‘Interchangeable LVCs’ (10d). Space precludes me from examining the Exclusive LVCs (10a) in any detail. As mentioned in the Introduction, both groups of LVCs present some very general differences of meaning: *make* as a light V seems to have a preference for mental or verbal processes, *take* as a light V tends to be used with material or behavioural processes. This general trend can also be observed in the lexicogrammatical patterns of the Contrastive and Interchangeable LVCs.

Contrastive LVCs (10b) involve a change in meaning either of the lexical process, or if there is no change in process type, a change of participant role. For example, *make / take + bath* express two different types of material process (roughly glossed as ‘run a bath, prepare a bath’ vs. ‘bathe, enjoy a bath’). In some cases, as noted in (10c), both LVCs refer to the same process, but their participants play subtly different roles. In SFG, this difference can be captured by analysing the lexical process in terms of two simultaneous perspectives: ‘transitive’ and ‘ergative’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:280-302). From a transitive perspective, an external ‘source’ or ‘initiator’ is seen as the primary participant of the process. Thus the (invented) examples:

10e. *Pat makes nice photographs*

10f. *Pat takes nice photographs*

would both be analysed transitively as *Pat* = Actor (i.e. a photographer), the only difference of meaning being in the interpretation of *photograph*: in (10e) this appears to be unambiguously a physical object or a result in which case it is a ‘Goal’. In (10f) however, *photograph* can be taken

to represent either a Goal (the physical object, which can be ‘appropriated’ or otherwise created, transferred, etc.) or a process Range (the act of taking photographs with a camera). An ergative perspective on the other hand sees the primary participant as ‘inherent’ to the process, and in SFG this participant is labelled ‘Medium’. An ergative analysis of (10e-f) would not be very different to that of a transitive analysis, except for a change of labels (*Pat* = Agent, *photographs* = Medium or Range). However, an ergative analysis would allow us to represent a third potential reading for (10f) ‘Pat is photogenic / is nice to photograph’. All of these readings can thus be represented as follows (using transitive / ergative labels simultaneously):

- 10e. *Pat* (Actor / Agent) *makes* (Material process: ‘creates’) *nice photographs* (Goal / Medium)
- 10f. (ii) *Pat* (Actor / Agent) *takes* (Material process: ‘appropriates, receives’) *nice photographs* (Goal / Medium)
- 10f. (i) *Pat* (Actor / Agent) *takes* (Material process: ‘photographs’) *nice photographs* (Range / Range)
- 10f. (iii) *Pat* (Actor / Medium) *takes* (Material process: ‘is the photogenic subject of’) *nice photographs* (Range / Range)

Although it is possible to represent these differences from a purely transitive perspective (by seeing *Pat* as some kind of ‘Beneficiary’ in sense iii), an ergative or ‘middle’ analysis appears to present a much more systematic way of analysing such examples. It is for this reason that in table 3 I have proposed a dual analysis for various other LVCs (examples 10c) which appear to have little difference in meaning in terms of lexical process, but which have different participant roles. Thus for example, *make* + *bid*, *call*, *opportunity*, *picture* all appear to have the roles of Actor / Agent (depending on the specific process), as opposed to *take* + *bid*, *call*, *opportunity*, *picture* which can be analysed as Actor / Medium.

Of course, it is entirely unsurprising to find that the light Vs *make* and *take* are associated with different semantic roles. As I mentioned in the introduction, the alternation between *take* and *make* in LVCs can usually be explained by appealing to the general semantics of the light V: LVCs with *make* prototypically express ‘agency, creation’ (expressed as a complex, multi-stage process), while LVCs with *take* usually refer to some kind of ‘appropriation, reception’ (which takes place as a single, punctual event). However, it is surprising to see that a small number of examples (*make* / *take* + *decision*, *effort*, *note*, *time*) cannot be explained in this way. This small

group of ‘Interchangeable LVCs’ (10d) can be expressed with both *make* and *take* as light Vs, yet, out of context, these LVCs cannot be as easily distinguished in terms of participant or process type as the examples listed in (10a-c). It might be argued that *make* + *note* and *take* + *note* express different process types (‘write a note’ or ‘think’): but I would contend that, without the aid of corpus-based evidence, it would be difficult for us to say that one or the other is associated with these interpretations (in fact, as we see below, there is a clear distinction, but it is not realised in terms of process type). In addition, the four expressions I have identified here are probably not the only examples of this type (some possible variants are discussed below).

The final point in relation to interchangeable LVCs, is that when we come to look at the corpus data, these LVCs can in fact be distinguished in term of subtly different process and participant types. Thus in the data analysis below, we see that *make* / *take* are not in fact interchangeable; rather they have different but regular lexicogrammatical patterns. I discuss the implications of this in the conclusion (section 5).

4.1. The contrastive phraseology of *to decide*, *make* + *decision* and *take* + *decision*

The *V to decide* occurs over 25000 times in the BNC. The frequency of the equivalent LVC *make* + *decision* (counting active and passive forms) is approximately 1521 and *take* + *decision* approximately 922. The frequency of alternative expressions such as *reach* + *decision* is much lower (approximately 128).¹⁰ If we compare the typical lexicogrammar of each form, *decide* has a preference for finite, rankshifted and non-finite clauses, whereas its equivalent LVCs tend to prefer non-finite clauses or are used alone (as we see below, this preference is reversed for the *V to note* and its equivalent LVCs).

When *decide* introduces finite (projected) clauses, it expresses a cognitive or mental process equivalent to ‘to realise, to understand’. The projected clause is either a proposition or a state of affairs (11a-d) or in some examples (11e), a personal resolution about some future action (as we see below, the pattern in 11e is shared by *make* + *decision*, but not *take* + *decision*):

11a. the French people **decided that** France's honour was at stake.¹¹

11b. Hari **decided that** her mother must be told the truth.

¹⁰ A similar proportion has been observed (Gledhill 2008, Todiraşcu & Gledhill 2008) in English, French and Romanian. However, these examples were observed in ‘technocratic’ texts (legal documents of the European Union). There is some correlation between LVCs and text types, but I have no space to discuss this here.

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated, from this example onwards I use the convention of only citing five examples taken from the BNC for each pattern.

11c. Shortly after the film began, Liz Taylor **decided** enough was enough.

11d. I **decided** I would postpone hostilities for a while.

11e. if you **decide** you want to go sort of four, fourish or threeish ...

I can find only 7 examples of finite clauses projected by *make / take + decision* in the BNC. These do, however, present a regular pattern, in that the modal *should* is always used in the subordinate clause. Here the meaning of the LVC is something like ‘recommend’:

12a. Alternatively, we can **make** the **decision that** decent wages should be paid to all workers.

12b. it was not until September 18 that a **decision** was **made that** a section 105 investigation should be carried out.

12c. indeed, in 1945, a conscious **decision** was **made that** it should remain so.

12d. A **decision** was **made that** the delivery should be by Caesarean.

12e. and the **decision** was **taken that** SERPS should be replaced.

As mentioned above, *decide* also introduces various types of rankshifted clause (headed by the interrogatives *how, if, what, when, which*). In these contexts, the process expressed by the V1 is closer to ‘choose’, and is usually accompanied by some modal expression expressing duty. Rankshifted clauses headed by *whether* also belong to this pattern, and in many cases the V2 (here underlined) refers to a choice about whether to commence, continue or conclude a certain activity :

13a. But the IWC has yet to **decide whether** to continue or end the moratorium, ...

13b. then it's for the client to **decide whether** to proceed.

13c. the Disciplinary Committee then has to **decide whether** to go ahead with the inquiry in his absence.

13d. George Bush must **decide whether** to renew China's trading privileges.

13e. the latter have to **decide whether** to stop trying or to resort to more unconventional means.

The LVCs *make / take + decision* introduce very few rankshifted clauses. I only find 12 in the BNC, and these most often involve non-finite clauses introduced by prepositions (*make + decision as to whether / decision on which* etc.). These examples are similar to *make + decision that* (13a-e), and the LVC can similarly be paraphrased by ‘to recommend (that)’:

14a. When the parents are equally decent and competent, or the reverse, it is very difficult to **make a decision as to where** the children should reside on breakdown of the parents' marriage.

- 14b. It is the human being who will be faced with the opportunity and perhaps the temptation to be violent, and who will **make the decision as to which** path to follow.
- 14c. Those who have to **make the decision whether** to keep or discard are often people who have spent their lives among books.
- 14d. See if you can get a similar report significantly quicker elsewhere and then **make a decision as to whether** a less powerful but quicker report will do.
- 14e. the test which I need to adopt when I go to the site again, is to look at it and er simply **make a decision as to whether** or not in my opinion the land is more properly a part of this built-up area.

I now turn to patterns in which the V *decide* and LVCs *make / take + decision* introduce non-finite clauses. As with the rankshifted clauses mentioned above (13a-e), non-finites introduced by *decide* often involve idiomatic expressions of delay and postponement, such as: *call it a day, stall for time, wait and see*. This is such a regular phraseology that I have given a longer sample than usual to illustrate the variety of 'time-span' phrases used in the non-finite clause (here underlined):

- 15a. That evening I **decided** to begin my search around the shower area.
- 15b. There was nothing. They had **decided to** call it a day, that was all.
- 15c. He **decided to** carry on and returned to training four weeks ago.
- 15d. Upon getting airborne, Crocker **decided to** continue the trip which meant flying with two ...
- 15e. I **decided to** delay informing him of my visit to the Orne.
- 15f. he was trying to chat me up, I **decided to** end the conversation and get off the train.
- 15g. At the end of last season I had all but **decided to** finish my career playing junior rugby.
- 15h. At the same time it was **decided to** go ahead with a new 14,000 square foot facility.
- 15i. Nigel **decided to** leave things a few weeks then issue an invitation.
- 15j. the committee **decided to** postpone the proposed trip to Llangollen.
- 15k. we were a few days behind schedule by this time I **decided to** press on while the weather held .
- 15l. That's the usual procedure." Adam **decided to** stall for time.
- 15m. After my mother died he **decided to** stay on and **make** a living hunting.
- 15n. It was **decided to** take no further action with regard to the matter.
- 15o. He'd come across that before now. He **decided to** wait and see what

happened.

Negative contexts follow the same pattern:

- 15p. If you **decide not to go ahead**, just return the policy within 15 days.
- 15q. So, and the person who's speaking **decides not to go on**, so perhaps the conversation has stopped.
- 15r. Preston **decided not to pursue the subject**.
- 15s. The committee **decided not to take any further action** against four ...
- 15t. At half-past eleven the house was so quiet they **decided not to wait** until midnight.

I estimate that at least half of the non-finite clauses introduced by *decide* involve this kind of time expression in the BNC. Of the examples which do not follow the pattern, the projected non-finite clause still appears to involve some change in a course of action or a new psychological position (in aspectual terms this is 'inceptive'). This is not signalled explicitly, but can be gathered from elements in the immediate context (here underlined):

- 16a. So I've **decided to** ask Mrs Dean to come upstairs.
- 16b. He had obviously **decided to** be pleasant to her.
- 16c. Back on the ground again he **decided to** break the news.
- 16d. My just married son **decided to** build a wall in his back garden.
- 16e. if we hear for example that Saudi Arabia has **decided to** buy a series of British tanks ...

In sum, the series of examples (11, 13, 15) suggest that *decide* typically introduces non-finite projected clauses which express the commencement, continuation or conclusion of a process. This is a similar meaning to that of Phase, discussed in section 3.2 (although structurally it is not the same: here lexical aspect is expressed in the V2, or gathered from the surrounding context). If the V *decide* is associated with the projection of clauses expressing some form of Phase, I would suggest that the non-finite clauses introduced by the LVCs *make / take + decision* tend to express meanings related to Conation or Modulation. Thus, the LVC *make + decision + non-finite clause* tends to project non-finites in which the emphasis is less on the time-frame or on-going process than on engaging in a potentially new process:

- 17a. So some farmers **make the decision to change** the crops in each field from one year to the next.
- 17b. **Making the decision to come in** is difficult for an investor.
- 17c. the subsequent investigation of Ventura led Tony Gamble to **make the decision to give it a try**.
- 17d. You can really only **make your decision to go netting** in a particular area that same day.
- 17e. I had to **make a decision to put my heart into it** or not to bother at all; ...

The passive construction *decision* + (*is / was*) + *made* + *to* (which, with 410 examples, makes up over one third of all uses of *make* + *decision*) involves a similar pattern. Its projected non-finite clauses often refer to a physical or metaphorical movement *ahead, forward, on*, etc.:

- 18a. The concept of effectiveness means that a **decision is made to do something** and to do it effectively.
- 18b. If the **decision is made to go ahead** ...
- 18c. It is for that reason that, if and when the **decision is made to move forward...**
- 18d. The police have heard nothing. Finally, the **decision is made to move in**.
- 18e. ...so the **decision was made to venture abroad** to play matches in Belgium.

It is interesting to note that in these series (12a-e, 13a-e, 14a-e, 17a-e) and (18a-e), the *make* + *decision* is typically followed by modals (in 12, *should*) or preceded by modals (in 13, 14, 17 *has, have to, must*), or conditional clauses with *if* (14, 17, 18) : this leads me to suggest below that the *decision* in question may have been *made*, but the contents of the *decision*, the process in V2 has not yet been enacted or actualised.

Whereas *make* + *decision* + non-finite clause tends to express 'personal' *decisions* which open up the possibilities of new processes, *take* + *decision* + non-finite clause generally expresses 'public' *decisions* which close off or narrow down the possibilities of further action. In examples (19a-e), it is clear from the process expressed by the V2 that the *decision taken* is momentous (here underlined). This correlates with the tendency for the *decision-taker* to be in some position of authority (here in italics):

- 19a. They hoped to arrange a meeting with Mr Mugabe, who in his capacity as *Chancellor of the university* was believed to have **taken the decision to close the campus**.
- 19b. The Prime Minister: There have been twin forms of law since *this House* **took the decision to enter the Community** 20 years ago.
- 19c. Responsibility for **taking the decision to imprison a person** before trial is shared between *the police, Crown Prosecution Service and the courts*.
- 19d. Moreover, as *Eisenhower* later publicly admitted, on 17 March Washington **took the decision to prepare an invasion** of Cuba.
- 19e. *Tommy Gilmour, Clinton's manager*, said last night: "Pat had tried to go through the pain barrier and keep his injury from me but *I* have

taken the **decision** to withdraw him after consultation with an orthopaedic surgeon.”;

As we can see from these examples *take* + *decision* + non-finite clause tends to be used when the *decision* has dramatic or irrevocable consequences. Since these consequences usually affect participants other than the *decision-taker*, it is not surprising to find many passives, a structure in which the agentive role is optional, as in the following examples:

20a. Then, with dramatic abruptness, a **decision is taken** to close the institution or move on.

20b. At a recent SAG board meeting a **decision was taken** to cut all development projects.

20c. the armed response vehicle arrived and the **decision was taken** to shoot the dogs.

20d. in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, the **decision was taken** to start the shut-down in 1995.

20e. the **decision was taken** to terminate the programme.

I can now summarise the data regarding non-finite projected clauses: LVCs with *take* introduce processes that are actualised (or ‘de-actualised’, since they often refer to the cessation of a process). Since the passive can be used to express the resultant state of an action (Beedham 2005), it is not surprising to find so many examples of LVCs with *take* in the passive. The LVC *take* + *decision* + V2 therefore generally involves Projection + Conation. On the other hand, *make* + *decision* + V2 appears to express a more diffuse set of meanings. In most cases, it is clear that although the *decision made* in V1 is an actualised event, the process expressed in V2 is not, since (as is the case of *to decide* + V2), *make* + *decision* is typically used to introduce a new process or course of action. I would therefore suggest that *make* + *decision* + non-finite clause correlates with Projection + Modulation (an expression which focusses on how the process in the V2 is realised, or has come about.) This meaning is not always easy to detect, especially in examples where it is almost certain that the process will be realised (e.g. 18d.). Nevertheless I would suggest that even in these examples, we can only be certain that a *decision* has been *made* to engage in a new process, and the emphasis is therefore less on the details or the effects of the *decision*, but rather on the means employed (whether the *decision* is *quick*, whether the *decision* enacts a communicative act, and so on.)

Let us now turn our attention to the differences between *decide* and its equivalent LVCs in terms of modification of the predicator or the complement. The V *decide* is typically modified by

manner adjuncts which have a variety of meanings: source (*by experts*), means (*by democratic vote*), content (*differently*), and evaluation (*immediately, impulsively*):

- 21a. The treatment was to be **decided** by experts, and the people had simply to accept it.
- 21b. Supposing Yorkshire or Cornwall **decided** by a majority vote to secede from Britain ...
- 21c. The irony for England was that had he **decided** differently he would have been
- 21d. playing for them.
- 21e. Each of them has the power to **decide** immediately to stop purchasing.
- 21f. Folly had **decided** impulsively that they weren't friends at all.

In contrast, the LVC *make + decision* is typically modified by circumstantial adjuncts of time (the most frequent being *quickly*):

- 22a. a place on the United board that he would **make** his **decision** at the end of this season.
- 22b. I think the **decision** was **made** long ago. I cannot go back now.
- 22c. Thus, for example, in a police operational matter it may well be that one individual must make a decision and **make** that **decision** quickly.
- 22d. the bloke says we're going to sit down and **make** a **decision** tonight.
- 22e. FIDE was scheduled to **make** a **decision** yesterday.

The LVC *take + decision* tends to be modified by prepositional phrases in passive constructions. These are manner adjuncts which express the cognitive effort involved, or the reasons which motivated the *decision-taker*:

- 23a. the **decision** was **taken** after careful consideration.
- 23b. The spokesman stressed: "This **decision** was **taken** after a great deal of thought and heartache".
- 23c. The parliamentary candidate, yesterday revealed the **decision** was **taken** for financial reasons.
- 23d. Could it be that the **decision** was **taken** in a temporary depression from drugs?
- 23e. The **decision** was **taken** reluctantly by the company ...

The modification of Vs by adjuncts can be compared to the pre-modification of Ns in LVCs. The typical adjectives used in LVCs tend to correlate with the patterns observed above for adjuncts, namely: (22a-e) *make + decision + time expression*, (23a-e) *take + decision + manner*. There are four main patterns of pre-modification for *make + decision*. The first typically expresses an

evaluation of the speed of the *decision*, and is preceded by various modals of necessity:

- 24a. GORDON Hamilton remains hopeful of a return to competitive rugby - but he won't **make** any hasty **decisions**.
- 24b. I had to **make** an instant **decision**, so I steered Foinavon to the right - the outside - to get away from the main part of the melee.
- 24c. The stewards inquiry had to **make** a quick **decision**; any defect in natural justice at that stage would be cured by the hearing before the full committee of the Jockey Club.
- 24d. This can happen at a time when you are under pressure and need to **make** a rapid **decision**.
- 24e. The most common cause of serious accidents on wire launches is **making** a snap **decision** to turn off for a 360° turn without ensuring that there is enough speed.

The second pattern is essentially a variation of (24a-e) involving classifying adjectives: *make* + *final*, *initial*, *preliminary* + *decision*. These items set out different stages in the *decision-making* process. In a third pattern (25a-e, below) the modifier evaluates the result or quality of a *decision*:

- 25a. By inhibiting our initial instinctive action we have the choice to **make** entirely different **decisions**.
- 25b. The weathermen are your best ally in **making** a good **decision** and probably the best coastal forecasts are those provided by 'Marineline'.
- 25c. It is designed to help each applicant to **make** an informed **decision** before applying for a particular programme of study.
- 25d. But if they are to **make** the right **decisions**, they must realise that the promise will turn to ashes.
- 25e. As adults, however, many of us cripple ourselves with fears of making mistakes, of **making** a wrong **decision**, of failing, of feeling embarrassed, of repeating the past.

The fourth and final pattern *make* + *all* + *decisions* is used to define the overall responsibilities of someone or some organisation:

- 26a. The council **makes all the decisions** which concern the society's policy, but on major issues, the members' opinions are sought through ballots and general meetings.
- 26b. The leader **makes all the decisions** and issues instructions, expecting them to be obeyed without question.

- 26c. The manager still **makes all the decisions**, but believes that subordinates need to be motivated to accept them before they will do what he wants them to.
- 26d. They depict a stereotyped norm where father **makes all the decisions**, goes out to work and waits for his meals to be prepared by the wife with occasional assistance of the daughter.
- 26e. [as the head of the family] you no longer have to **make all your decisions** in terms of money.

The LVC *take + decision* has essentially one pre-modification and one post-modification pattern. The pre-modifiers evaluate the effort (*bold, difficult, hard, risky*) involved in the *decision* rather than evaluating timing or result:

- 27a. Countless numbers of people are looking to their leaders and representatives to **take bold decisions** now - and not to put off these critical decisions that will ultimately cause our grandchildren to curse us.
- 27b. And he made clear that despite the government's small majority, they would be prepared to **take difficult decisions** about how to reduce the enormous government deficit.
- 27c. From time to time national committees will have to **take hard decisions** about the strategy for that particular sector, that's what they're there for.
- 27d. Investors were reluctant anyway to **take major decisions** until the Budget details are known and the Chancellor has shown whether growth or control of the borrowing requirement is his top priority.
- 27e. To develop ideas at this stage means **taking risky decisions**, so the BTG must have the cash to throw after promising ideas.

The second pattern involves post-modification of the N by prepositional phrases headed by *against, on* or *upon*. In these examples, the post-modifier specifies the topic or 'matter' of the *decision*. It is notable that this degree of qualification is usually absent in *make + decision*:

- 28a. We would want to find out more about the circumstances of what happened before we **take a decision on future screenings**," said company spokesman Richard Frost.
- 28b. He gave warning that the longer the Council of Ministers waited before **taking a decision on the former**, the more time trading partners had to change their minds on the latter.
- 28c. The fundamental considerations in **taking a decision on loans** are laid out in another Midland Bank booklet called "How to Borrow Money" by

Margaret Dibben.

28d. The House itself will **take** a **decision** on the matter later this evening when the Question will be put whether the Bill should or should not be considered in Committee of the whole House.

28e. they've **taken** a **decision** on the preferred route.

It is now possible to summarise some of the general differences between the the simple V *decide* and its equivalent LVCs *make / take + decision*. It is a general principle of phraseology (following Firth 1957, Sinclair 1991) that the meanings of expressions change in subtle ways according to their lexicogrammatical contexts. Thus I would propose the following simple glosses for the different patterns observed in this section: *decide* + finite clause = 'realise, understand', *decide* + rankshifted clause = 'choose which', *decide* + non-finite clause 'to choose to, to be determined to', *make + decision* + finite clause = 'recommend', *make + decision* + non-finite clause = 'deliberate', *take + decision* + non-finite clause = 'decree', *take + decision* + N modifier 'decide a specific case'. Generally speaking, the meanings of the LVCs move the process of *deciding* away from the private domain of the mind to the more public domains of social interaction (*decision-making*) or social regulation (*decision-taking*).

It is also possible to make some generalisations about the contrastive role of the light verbs in these expressions, especially in relation to their use in VG complexes. Generally, the simple V *decide* regularly introduces finite, rankshifted and non-finite clauses which express a similar meaning to Phase (an evaluation about the timing of an on-going or new process). By contrast, *make + decision* is generally used to introduce non-finite clauses which express a meaning akin to Modulation (an evaluation about the means or the manner by which a new process is to be realised). The LVC *make + decision* is also used on its own (an evaluation about the quality of an on-going process). By contrast, *take + decision* typically introduces non-finites which express a similar meaning to Conation (a statement about whether an on-going process is to be successfully actualised). This LVC is also used on its own with some form of pre- or post-modification (a specification of the process in terms of effort or matter/manner). It is important to reiterate here that the meanings of Phase, Conation and Modulation are not introduced by the V or the LVCs themselves, but by the (non-)finite clauses. In other words, the clause relations of Phase, Modulation and Conation must be seen as part of the phraseology (the extended lexicogrammatical context) of these constructions.

4.2. The contrastive phraseology of *to note*, *make + note* and *take + note*

In this section, I compare the simple V *to note* and its equivalent LVCs with *decide* and *make / take + decision*. In terms of semantics, *decide* and *note* both refer to cognitive processes (equivalent to *to think*), although *note* as an N or V can also be used for perceptions (*to note something*) as well as material processes (*to note something down*). Structurally speaking, the V *to note* cannot introduce non-finite clauses, and many finite examples of *to note* occur in impersonal passive or postposed ('extraposed') clauses. However, I would suggest that *to note* is analogous to *to decide* in terms of its basic process type. Thus, when *note* introduces finite clauses its meaning is typically 'to consider, notice, realise', which as we have seen is similar to the meaning of *decide* in the same contexts:

- 29a. **It is important to note that** a void charge still remains valid against the company.
- 29b. **It is interesting to note** a similar problem with attempts to put some of his ideas into practice.
- 29c. In Chapter Two **it was noted that** although presidents face many difficulties in imposing their will on the American political system ...
- 29d. Labov **notes that** questions formulated without preparation can often be lengthy and unclear.
- 29e. observers **noted that** the ideas which it promoted were gathering increasing support in Russia.

The LVCs *make* and *take + note* appear in two contrastively distinct lexicogrammatical patterns. As we saw in section 3.1, the LVC *make + note* can either express a material process 'writing, take notes', or a mental process 'to remind oneself, to attempt to remember'. This ambiguity is not always resolved in context (for example, 30c-d), although the LVC is typically accompanied by prepositional phrases which suggest which type of process may be involved:

- 30a. On 15 December, Fhimah **made** a **note** in his diary, reminding himself to take some Air Malta luggage tags from the airport.
- 30b. Haunted by penury for the rest of her life, she habitually **made notes** over other people's letters and wrote her own on the back of old laundry bills.
- 30c. Right. Must **make** a **note** of that. Yes I wanted to erm outline ...
- 30d. But thanks for the point, and I mean, I'll **make** a **note** of that and take it up to the health authority.
- 30e. Firstly, **make** a **note** of all of the bully words and phrases that James Bolham uses

Make + note does not introduce non-finite clauses. But as mentioned above, the expression *make + mental note* clearly refers to a cognitive process, and thus can project a variety of finite and non-finite clauses. While the V *note* means ‘to consider, notice’, *make a mental note + non-finite clause* is closer to ‘to decide, determine’ (and once again, this is similar to *decide + non-finite clause*, which we saw earlier):

- 31a. I **made** a **mental note** that I mustn't say anything to annoy my prim secretary, ...
- 31b. I **made** a **mental note** to ask for an application form on the way out.
- 31c. He **made** a **mental note** to find out who was the snorer and who the complainant.
- 31d. Sarah **made** a **mental note** to go and see Janine.
- 31e. He looked at his brother's open face, and **made** a **mental note** to tell his mother what was going down with him.

In contrast, *take + note* is typically used to express mental processes, and more specifically reactions to messages. As can be seen in the examples below (32-33) *take + note* is essentially a lexicalised phrase (the N *note* can be seen as ‘non-referential’, and therefore largely fixed in place, although there is one example of *Note was taken...* in the BNC). Typically, the Subjects of *take note* (as we have seen with *take + decision*) are persons of authority or administrative bodies, and there is usually some reference to a communicative act or message in the context (here underlined):

- 32a. The meeting also **took note** of a memo from D G Mann to C Will.
- 32b. The administration also **took note** of the fears of American oil companies that their interests might suffer elsewhere in the Middle East.
- 32c. Julia **took note** of Ian's tone as well as his words.
- 32d. now the erm the question you did pose me, sir, which er I did **take** a **note** of, but I wonder if you'd be kind enough to repeat ...
- 32e. HEREFORD player-coach Greg Downs was delighted his players **took note** of his pre-match warnings.

A similar meaning can be seen in a small number of finite clauses (I find 7 in the BNC):

- 33a. "British Rail, the EC, car manufacturers - these and others should **take note** that we will not be letting up in our battle for consumer rights."
- 33b. And further **take note** that over 100 PFF aircrew managed the ton (100 sorties).

33c. At about then I **took note** that there weren't in fact any other boats moving on the river and I remembered that often the locks closed for maintenance in winter ...

33d. EFTA [...] signed a declaration on co-operation with Albania; and **took note** that both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic had declared ...

33e. [the House] **took note** that the Home Secretary would define the Government's attitude towards this question...

Is it possible to explain the general differences between *to note* and *make / take + note*? In contrast to the V *decide*, which has a wide-ranging and complex lexicogrammar, the V *note* and its LVCs are evidently more restricted and specialised. In addition, *make / take + note* are not typically used in the context of VG complexes (except for the expression *make a mental note* +V2). However, I believe that the contrasts between *note* and *make / take + note* directly parallel the differences between *decide* and *make / take + decision*. In terms of lexical process type, both patterns share the same lexico-grammatical patterns and their corresponding meanings, as suggested by the following glosses: *to note* + finite clause = 'to consider, notice', *make + note* = 'write' or 'attempt to remember', *make + mental note* + non-finite clause = 'determine, decide', *take + note* = 'realise, react', and so on. More generally, I would suggest that *take + decision* and *take + note* are both used in contexts where the process of *decision* or *noting* is assumed to be actualised, and the focus of the clause is on the resultant state or consequences (expressed either in V2 or elsewhere in the context). In other words, these two LVCs tend to correlate with the clause relations Projection + Conation. In comparison, *make + note* and *make + decision* concentrate on the circumstances of *noting* or *deciding*, which are seen as leading up to the actualisation of a further process (expressed either in V2 or elsewhere in the context). This correlates with the clause relations Projection + Modulation.

4.3. The contrastive phraseology of *make + effort / take + effort*

In sections (4.1) and (4.2) we have seen that *make / take + decision*, *note* are (usually) mental processes which can be used alone as VG complexes to introduce projections. In contrast, the LVCs *make / take + effort* are (abstract) behavioural processes which can be used in VG complexes to express the clausal relation of Modulation (in the case of *make*) or Conation (the case of *take*). It is not surprising that abstract Ns such as *effort*, *time*, *trouble* are used very productively in these structures, since they have polyvalent meanings, and can be qualified in

various ways. In the case of *make / take + effort*, the corpus evidence suggests that *make + effort* is used exclusively in VG complexes with a personal subject, whereas *take + effort* is used exclusively in impersonal postposed clauses. This difference in form reflects a subtle contrast in meaning. The sequence *make + effort* has two basic sub-patterns. The LVC *make + effort + V2* expresses an attempt to achieve success in some social role or 'behaviour':

- 34a. Please **make every effort to** attend and encourage your class members to come as well.
- 34b. No matter how tired or worried you may feel, it's important to **make the effort to** be pleasant and friendly to customers.
- 34c. the indications are that he **made an effort to** behave in a way appropriate to his new position.
- 34d. During my term, I want to **make every effort to** ensure that they will be used.
- 34e. Chatichai had nevertheless **made every effort to** maintain traditional close relations with China.

The second pattern, *make an effort and*, is similarly used with personal subjects, but the process expressed in V2 is a reaction to some communicative event or challenge:

- 35a. When he had answered my questions he **made an effort and** blurted out one of his own.
- 35b. If, on the other hand, you are not, then you need to **make the effort and** change the priority you give to the organisation of time.
- 35c. And I would be standing there with my runny nose. So he'd **make an effort and** play a game. And then he'd suggest hide-and-seek....
- 35d. He did not want to speak to anyone, let alone Ford, but he **made an effort and** confirmed that the Colonel had indeed heard a cannon's report...
- 35e. She suddenly realised how tired she was, but she **made an effort and** told him that she was travelling to Rome to join her aunt and uncle.

We saw above that the subjects of *take + decision*, *note* often tend to be persons in authority or organisations. A similarly regular pattern can be seen with *take + effort*, which is almost exclusively used with impersonal subjects and post-posed clauses. In contrast to clauses introduced by *make + effort* (35, 36) which tend to express communication or social behaviour, *take + effort* tends to introduce non-finite (postposed) clauses which express material processes or metaphorical movement:

- 36a. **It takes** little **effort** of the imagination **to** put oneself in Theo's

shoes, and feel the grey, correct, judicious side of his character.

36b. no matter how talented or hardworking you are, if you're a woman **it always takes extra effort** and drive **to** succeed in business.

36c. **It need not take** much **effort to** write to the local paper, or phone a councillor, with a complaint.

36d. **It took an effort to** bring her thoughts under control.

36e. **It took some effort to** stay upright with such variations in terrain.

4.4. The contrastive phraseology of *make + time* and *take + time*

We have seen that the LVCs *make / take + effort* are both express (abstract) behavioural processes which are used in VG complexes to express the clause relation of Modulation (in the case of *make*) or Conation (in the case of *take*). A similar pattern can be seen for *make / take + time*, except that these LVCs are relational processes (analogous to the V *have* and the LVC *to have time to*). The typical context of *make + time + non-finite clause* involves a person who interrupts an on-going activity to gain some benefit or fulfil a social duty or role:

37a. Friends will be in touch this afternoon and you'll need to **make time to** accommodate them this evening.

37b. In Acts 6 we find the apostles cutting out other responsibilities to **make time to** "devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

37c. The most important thing in socialising is that you **make the time** and spend the effort **to** keep those friends that you do have.

37d. We are thinking about those children who, whatever their socio-economic background, have parents who have the time, or somehow **make the time, to** talk with them, to read to them, to read for themselves, and so to offer an example.

37e. Despite his busy schedule, he **made time to** visit the conference.

The pattern *take + time + non-finite clause* appears to be related to a more general construction of the form: *take + time expression (ages, a moment, a while) + V2*. The LVC *take time + non-finite clause* has three distinct sub-patterns. In the first pattern (38a-e), the subject is a person who reacts to a previous event or message (in terms of participant roles, this is Sayer or Sensor / Middle, a role that we have seen elsewhere for LVCs with *take*). The V2 typically involves a cognitive or communicative process:

38a. The question disturbed her and she **took time to** answer.

38b. Greater weight is given to propositions contained in judgments where

the judges **took time** to consider their judgments.

38c. Curtis **took time** to consider his reply.

38d. Titch **took time** to consider the question.

38e. Martin **took time** to reply.

This meaning, however, is quite different from the other patterns of *take + time*. As can be seen in (39a-e) below, *take + time* is also used to refer to the relative success or completion of an event, in other words Conation. In these expressions, which all involve impersonal subjects and post-posed clauses, the LVC evaluates the time taken to achieve a material process of change or development:

39a. Besides, it took time to get the formula right; one dose began to work on the notes after only 24 hours.

39b. On each occasion it took time to warm a new ball.

39c. Thus NEP as a monetary phenomenon took time to seep slowly through the various levels of society.

39d. When they quit the market and ICI became our main supplier, the relationship took time to bed down but ICI's performance now is excellent.

39e. The solution - Polaris - took time to be developed.

Although this meaning may be interpreted in aspectual terms as Phase, it can also be seen as Conation: an evaluation of the effort and time spent in realising (or attempting to realise) the process in the V2. As can be seen in (37c) and in other examples, the VG appears to express two separate processes, which suggests a Conation structure (the variable use of articles in 37a-e also suggests that the expression is less lexicalised than *take + time* analysed below). This is particularly evident in expressions such as *take the time and effort / take the time and trouble*:

40a. Says Marcus Lyon: "You are always going to get the lazy buyer who wants a barn they don't want to **take the time and trouble to do** it themselves."

40b. I find it amazing that reader Mrs J. **took the time and effort to castigate** another community Norris Green for fighting to keep an asset in an area that is one of the most socially and economically deprived in this city.

40c. ...it might have been thought that there was a place in society for young persons who had **taken the time and the trouble** needed to give themselves some understanding of the problems we have set ourselves, so that they could help to reduce the damage done, and the worse damage yet to come.

40d. Before making such statements, the hon. Gentleman should **take the time and trouble to read** the Further and Higher Education Bill that is going through another place.

40e. Treat these words with care; **take the time and effort to understand** and explain them.

Once again, the sense of ‘effort’ in these examples assumes that the process in the V2 has been actualised. This point may also explain why *take the time* (with a determiner, and not *take (0) time*) is also used in the expression of ‘thanks’, since the process referred to is assumed to have been enacted successfully and with some care and effort:

41a. Joan asked Sunday Life to thank the unknown person who had **taken the time to care** for her son's grave.

41b. Freya thanked me at the end of her letter for “**taking the time to care** about a subject so little understood”.

41c. Thank you for **taking the time** to complete the questionnaire and we wish you luck in the prize draw.

41d. I would like to thank you and your colleagues for **taking the time to meet me** and some of my branch officials on Tuesday.

41e. To all my brothers and sisters who **took the time to visit** and send cards when I was ill, thank you for the encouraging words and scripture.

5. Conclusion

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. A cursory glance at the data in section 4 might suggest that the phraseology of English is nothing but a diffracted mass of idiosyncratic phrases. However, I have made every effort in this paper to show that this is not the case. On the contrary, the patterns observed in this paper confirm the structuralist idea that irregularities are not ‘exceptions to the rule’, but rather conceal deeper regular patterns of use and meanings, if they can be found (as argued, among others, by Beedham 2005). Having said this, it is also important to stress the fact that the regularities observed here are not absolute: in the data analysis above I have taken the decision to omit many sub-patterns which seemed contradictory, including examples which would have required individual treatment. The complexity of the data suggests to me that the alternation of *make* / *take* in light verb constructions constitutes a currently unstable part of the English language (at least as regards the LVCs I have examined here, and the kinds of English represented in the British National Corpus).

How is the empirical linguist to make any sense of this kind of data? The position taken in this paper is that of J.R. Firth and the ‘contextualist’ school of language (Firth 1957, Sinclair 1991). Firth insists that the meaning of a sign depends not on its place in an abstract system, but on its habitual context of use in discourse. In other words, every sign is used in the regular and recurrent lexicogrammatical environment of other signs (its ‘collocations’), and at the same time, each lexicogrammatical pattern has a habitual and distinctive meaning (its ‘phraseology’). The terms collocation and phraseology are often used to refer to fixed idiomatic expressions, but as I have shown in this paper, although the expressions *make / take + decision, note, effort and time* all have regular and recurrent patterns of use, they are also used very productively, in a variety of particular contexts which stretch beyond the immediate environment of the two or more signs of the light verb expression itself.

I have stated above that the alternation of *make / take* in LVCs is a particularly unstable area of phraseology in Modern English. However, some general remarks can be made. The alternation between *make* and *take* in most equivalent light verb constructions can usually be explained in terms of Transitivity or more specifically Ergativity (Halliday 1985): the subject of LVCs with *make* is typically an Agent of some kind (*make + call, point*) while the subject of LVCs with *take* has a more passive or ‘receptive’ role of Medium (*take + call, point*). But as we have seen, this distinction does not seem to work for *make / take + decision, note, effort and time*. It would appear that this small set of apparent exceptions have a particular role to play in the expression of Mood, that is to say the abstract evaluation of a lexical process. Formally speaking, and unlike other LVCs which can be used with both *make* and *take*, each of these LVCs is used in verbal group complexes of the form *make / take* (V1) + *decision / note / effort / time* + non-finite clause (V2). In this context, LVCs with *make* focus on the manner of *decision-making* or *note-making*, rather than on the results of the *decision* or act of *noting* (or other process expressed with *effect / time*). This clause relation is termed ‘Modulation’ (Halliday 1985). More generally, LVCs with *make* also tend to express an ‘opening out’ to a new or virtual process (expressed by the following clause or V2). This general phraseology may explain why we often find pre-modifiers of N which evaluate the different stages or cognitive effort involved in a *decision-making* process: as in *making + final, good, hasty, informed, preliminary + decision*.

In contrast, LVCs with *take* + non-finite clause imply that the event expressed in the projected clause is already actualised. Here the focus is not on the lexical process but on the

effects or the details of the process expressed in V2, a clause relation that is called ‘Conation’ (Halliday 1985). A more general function of this pattern is to express a ‘closing off’ or a ‘reaction’ to an on-going or already actualised process (expressed in V2). This meaning is also compatible with a stative, ‘ascriptive’ reading of grammatical structures such as the passive (*a decision was taken* +V2) or extraposition (*it takes time to* +V2, *it took little effort* + V2). This may explain why we often find pre-modifiers such as *bold, courageous, difficult, hard, tough*, which do not evaluate the quality of the *decision* as such, but are rather the qualities of a *decision-taker*. Since the results of these *decisions* are typically negative ‘closures’, it is not surprising that the subject is often left diplomatically unmentioned. I need make no comment here about the cultural values implied by this phraseology.

I would like to end this paper by pointing out one or two issues which are not problems as such, but rather opportunities for subsequent research. In the first place, the BNC (Aston & Burnard 1998) is an archive of (primarily written) British English of the 1980s-1990s. This degree of synchronicity and representativeness is in itself an advantage. But it leaves out the possibility (in fact the likelihood) that *make / take* in North American and other major varieties of English have their own phraseological patterns, in LVCs and elsewhere. This is related to a second point, which is that while I have looked at LVCs from the Systemic Functional perspective of Transitivity and Mood, I have not had space to analyse them in terms of Theme. There is clearly a textual function involved in the expression of nominalised processes, and this point requires more detailed analysis. Finally, I have discussed the general properties of LVCs and the rather unique subset of LVCs *make / take + decision, note, effort* and *time*. But it is important to bear in mind that these phraseological patterns still make up a large family of related phrases. This fact is often forgotten by prescriptive grammarians and other commentators, who generally assume that two different signs can only be contrastively defined in terms of each other. This can be seen in many on-line discussions of language, which often pick out *make / take + decision*, without relating them to structurally similar expressions. Thus for example, ‘language conservatives’ put the difference down to dialect (with no consensus on whether *take + decision* is a British import into American English, or the other way round), such as:

It has always been my understanding that you should use the following; you take a decision, not, you make a decision. Can you help me here? Which is correct? Thank you.... According to Bryan Garner, "take a decision" is a Britishism that began to "invade" the United States in the late 20th century. "Make a decision"

prevails, still, in the U.S.¹²

Other ‘language mavens’ suggest a basic semantic difference relating to lexical aspect:

I don't want to be a nitpicker but I can see a shade of difference between the two. Accepting that they both mean decide. Make a decision suggests make your mind up rather than as it were sit on the fence. Take a decision [sic] is make your mind up and follow through. The reason why I pick on this is that I hear the expression used as follows: A country takes the decision to go to war. And then the war starts.¹³

Finally, some comments appear to have been based on thorough analysis. The following (almost undoubtedly written by a lexicographer, with training perhaps in corpus linguistics) emphasizes both aspect and register (referring to formality), as well as hinting at lexical patterns:

The phrase "making a decision" is the more common phrase. It can refer to the actual moment where a course of action is chosen (and just that moment), but also sometimes to the whole process leading up to it (where one might undertake research, have discussions, think and so on, in order to prepare oneself for the decision itself): "The committee took several months to make a decision." The phrase "taking a decision", by contrast, only refers to the decisive moment itself, and not to the process leading up to it. It has more formal connotation, and an implication that the decision will have serious consequences, and that the person deciding will be responsible for them; it has a sense of finality about it. (psmears, 21 Jan 2011)¹⁴

As I have shown in this paper, this comment is highly accurate: the corpus data suggest that *take* + *decision* has a clear preference for subjects which have a role of ‘authority’, and the LVC is often used with ‘momentous’, already-actualised decisions. However, it is still necessary for the empirical linguist to corroborate these remarks, and of course to explain any tendencies observed in terms of a theory of language. In this paper, I have argued that lexical preferences of this type can be explained in terms of the general meaning of the light verb, and that this is not just a tendency for the equivalent LVCs *make* / *take* + *decision* but for all LVCs formed by *take* / *make*. In addition, I have attempted to show here that LVCs such as *make* / *take* + *decision* / *note* are not just contrastive pairs, but are also contrastive in relation to other related signs (the Vs *decide*, *note*, *notice* etc.). Finally, I have shown here that the small sub-group of LVCs (*make* / *take* + *decision*, *note*, *effort* and *time*) are all related in that they share a particular structural function: such an observation could not have been made with much confidence without the benefit of corpus-based analysis and the more general expectation that these signs might all have their own particular ‘phraseology’.

¹² From <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/grammarlogs4/grammarlogs570.htm> (accessed 11 aug 2011).

¹³ From <http://www.english-test.net/forum/ftopic12105.html> (accessed 11 Aug 2011).

¹⁴ From <http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/6431/what-is-the-difference-between-make-decision-and-take-decision> (accessed 6 aug 2011).

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DISCUSSION (EXTRACT)

Beedham

You have combined Corpus Linguistics and Systemic Grammar to arrive at a new account of the meaning/use differences between *make* and *take* in Light Verb Constructions (LVCs) such as *to make/take a decision*. In doing so you used unusual or exceptional uses/meanings of *make* and *take* in LVCs as your starting point, on the basis of which you arrived at deeper generalizations.

I have two related questions. Firstly, corpus linguistics is obviously *parole*, but the new aspectual analysis of the passive which I have proposed was and still is conceived within *langue*. How do you square those two things in terms of the role of exceptions?

Secondly, Halliday has said that for him grammar is always lexico-grammar, and I agree with that entirely. How do you square the lexis-oriented nature of your work on LVCs with that statement by Halliday? Is lexis for you always grammatical lexis?

Gledhill

Can I account for the exceptional behaviour of LVCs in terms of *langue*? Maybe, but only if we refine what we mean by *langue*. The language system is usually defined in terms of purely abstract, grammatical oppositions. Oppositions such as *active* / *passive* and *regular* / *irregular* involve contrastive, closed grammatical choices, whereas LVCs (as I have shown in this paper) represent a class of phrases in which each particular expression has an asymmetrical, unpredictable relation with the others (a full V may have one or more equivalent LVCs, while many LVCs do not have a full V equivalent, etc.). Since LVCs are essentially 'lexical', should we see LVCs as a (large) set of unexplained lexical exceptions? Maybe we should. But perhaps the answer lies in the way in which we conceive of *langue* and *parole*.

In Beedham 2005 you argue that *langue* / *parole* should be seen in terms of a dialectic rather than a simple dichotomy. I have a great deal of sympathy with this interpretation of Saussure. But my reply to the first question requires a slightly different approach. I would argue, following J.R. Firth (1957), that *langue* is not a system of closed-class, contrastive choices, but rather a *polysystem*: according to this view, language is a human system of behaviour designed for comprehending the world and interacting with other humans, and as such it is made up of asymmetrical, complementary but also sometimes competing subsystems, all of which have evolved to fulfil particular communicative functions. As you know, Firth also argued that there is a general principle at work which he termed 'collocation' and J. Sinclair (1991) and others later reformulated as the 'idiom principle'. Put simply, all signs (and in this case, LVCs are complex multi-word signs) have a tendency to be co-selected with other signs, and consequently to be interpreted in terms of their habitual patterns of use. In this study I have observed the typical collocations of a small subgroup of LVCs (namely *make* / *take* + *decision*, *effort*, *note*, *time*) and found that each expression has very a consistent and contrastive phraseology. It is possible to make some generalisations about form and function in terms of the whole subset (these LVCs are related in that they use *make* and *take* interchangeably without much difference in meaning, and they are all used to introduce non-finite clauses). However, each individual expression also has its own consistent patterns of use, and this usage is consistently different to related constructions: thus *make a mental note* does not have the same range of use or distribution as *take note*, and in a similar way *make an effort to* does not share the same contexts of use as *take the effort to*, and so on. If we see language as essentially a 'system', then these are exceptions. But if language is a 'polysystem', then we are looking here at a particular subsystem of expression, which has evolved apart from its predecessors (extended predicates are descended from complex predicates) and has taken on a particular form and function in this particular language.

Is lexis for me always grammatical lexis? Yes. In this chapter, I have been conducting a study of ‘phraseology’ rather than of pure grammar or syntax. The term phraseology is sometimes used to refer to the study of idiomatic expressions. However, for many Systemic Functional linguists (for example Tucker 2007), phraseology refers more generally to the co-selection of lexical patterns and grammatical structures within the same stretch of text. This approach differs from the traditional study of syntax in that it assumes that grammar and lexis are not two different levels of language, but are rather two ends of the same continuum (this is known as the ‘lexicogrammar’: Halliday 1985). Furthermore, the phraseological approach assumes that utterances are not the products of a combination of grammatical slots and lexical fillers. Rather, both grammar and lexis are organised in the mind (or if you prefer in the *langue*) as ‘lexico-grammatical patterns’ (for a discussion of lexico-grammatical patterns in a Systemic Functional perspective see Gledhill 1999, 2011a/b). Lexico-grammatical patterns are not fixed sequences of signs; they involve information about the preferences of co-selection which go beyond the items themselves (*make / take + decision + non-finite clause*, *make + effort + non-finite clause*, but not *take + effort + non-finite clause*, etc.) and about the particular senses that speakers convey and contexts in which they are likely to use these patterns (*make note* = ‘remember’, *take note* ‘notice’ etc.) The notion of lexico-grammatical pattern allows us to explain how expressions such as ‘*have a sit down*’, ‘*make a face*’ can be invented on the spot on the basis of more regular constructions of the type *have a + (base V)* or *make a (behavioural N)*. I have not fully explored the notion of ‘lexico-grammatical pattern’ yet. But I think it could be a useful alternative to terms such as ‘construction’ or ‘(verb, noun) phrase’, because it refers explicitly to a particular kind of linguistic unit which stands halfway on the continuum between *system* (the abstract, system-oriented oppositions and structures referred to by terms such as *active / passive*, *causative / resulative* etc.) and *instance* (the particular sequences of lexical items which clearly have no other name than their citation form).

References to Discussion

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Type of VG relation	Meaning of V1	Single V examples	LVC examples
Phase	V1 = aspect (when V2 is realised)	8a. He just kept meow ing the whole time	9a. Titch took time to consider the question
		Other Vs: <i>begin to, get + ing, seem to, start +ing</i>	Other LVCs: <i>take ages to, take long to, take a moment to, take a while to,</i>
Conation	V1 = polarity (whether V2 is realised)	8b. Galileo tried to measure the speed of light	9b. Please make every effort to attend
		Other Vs: <i>avoid +ing, fail to, learn to, manage to</i>	Other LVCs: <i>be able to, have a go at +ing, make a bid to, take care to, make a point of +ing</i>
Modulation	V1 = modality (by what means V2 is realised)	8c. Barbara Castle helped to lead the resistance	9c. Everyone has the right to say no.
		Other Vs: <i>happen to, hasten to, insist on +ing, remember to, tend to</i>	Other LVCs: <i>get the chance to, have the authority to, have a duty to, have the potential to</i>
Projection	V1 = mental process	8d. She expected to win the ballot	9d. I had to make a decision to stay in this line of work
		Other Vs: <i>decide to, enjoy +ing, intend to, promise to, remember +ing</i>	Other LVCs: <i>have the option to, make a choice to, make a promise to, take a decision to</i>

Table 2. Light Verb Constructions and Verbal Group Complexes

Exclusive LVCs (not interchangeable, when the Complement expresses Process Range)	10a. Different light verb: make + (an) appointment, (an) arrangement, (an) attempt, (a) change, (a) complaint, (a) concession, (0) contact, (0) conversation, (a) deal, (a) demand, (a) discovery, (an) enquiry, (an) excuse, (a) fortune, (some / 0) friends, (0) fun, (an) investment, (a) list (of), (0) love, (0) mention, (a) mistake, (0) sense, (a) wish... take + action, (a) bite, (0) care, (a) chance, (0) charge, (a) class, (0) exercise, (0) heart, (a, the) lead, (a) look, (a) nap, (a) test, (a) walk...
Contrastive LVCs (interchangeable, but with a clear contrast in meaning)	10b. Different process, different participant: make (a) bath 'prepare bath' / take (a) bath 'bathe' make (a) bow 'bend down' / take (a) bow 'react to audience' make (a) break 'escape' / take (a) break 'pause' make (an) exception 'recognise unique case' / take (0) exception 'react badly' make (a) hint 'suggest' / take (a) hint 'understand' make (a) meal 'prepare' / take (a) meal 'eat' make (a) point 'communicate idea' / take (a) point 'understand' make (0) trouble 'cause problems' / take (the) trouble 'care'
	10c. Similar process, different participant [Transitive / Ergative]: make (a) bid [Actor / Agent] / take (a) bid [Actor / Beneficiary] make (a) call [Actor / Agent] / take (a) call [Actor / Medium] make (an) opportunity [Actor / Agent] / take (the) opportunity [Actor / Beneficiary] make (a) picture [Actor / Agent] / take (a) picture [Actor / Medium]
Interchangeable LVCs (interchangeable, with a slight contrast in meaning)	10d. Similar process type, similar participant: make (a) decision / take (a) decision make (an) effort / take (an) effort make (a, zero) note / take (a, zero) note make (the, zero) time / take (the, zero) time

Table 3. The distribution of *make* and *take* in 50 different Light Verb Constructions.¹⁵

¹⁵ The articles (*a*, *the*, zero) mentioned here are only indicative. As mentioned earlier, I do not focus on determiner usage here, and thus use a '+' sign for the citation forms of LVCs.