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Comparative Semantic Analysis of "Manner of Killing" Verbs in English and Polish

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COMPARATIVE SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF MANNER OF KILLING VERBS IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

1. Issue

The problem of possible and impossible verb meanings has been the subject of many recent semantic debates. In Generative Semantics, this has been a fundamental question in both lexicalist¹ and non-lexicalist² approaches (Beavers & Koontz-Garboden 2012). It is interesting to note that despite the major and minor differences in their study of verb encoding, both lexicalists and non-lexicalists recognize 'event structure' as a major, or at least crucial, component of verb meaning. What is more, both approaches take the event structure to decompose into two main design properties: (i) a small set of basic eventive predicates indicating either *change of state* (BECOME), *causation* (CAUSE), *action* (ACT), or *state* (STATE), among others, and (ii) a bigger set of idiosyncratic semantic roots or 'core' meanings. These properties are combined into one structure via 'a limited, well-defined event calculus' (Beavers&Koontz-Garboden 2012, p. 332). The fixed number of eventive predicates and the restrictive nature of core meanings indicate that the number of possible verb meanings should be limited.

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¹ See, among others, Dowty (1979), Pinker (1989), Jackendoff (1990), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), Van Valin and LaPolla (1997), Wunderlich (1997), Davis and Koenig (2000), Davis (2001).

² See, among others, Lakoff (1970), Hale and Keyser (1993, 1997, 2002), Pesetsky (1995), Baker (1997), Marantz (1997), Folli and Ramchand (2002), Harley (2003), Folli and Harley (2004), Ramchand (2008).

Some of the simple event predicates are shown in (1a), (1b), and (1c) below. Notice that they may also combine into complex event structures, as shown in (1d) below.

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(1) a. [x ACT<sub><MANNER-ROOT></sub>]
b. [x <STATE-ROOT>]
c. [BECOME [ x <STATE-ROOT>] ]
d. [ [ x ACT] CAUSE [y BECOME <RESULT-ROOT>] ]
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In a similar vein, Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2010) (henceforth RH&L), two leading proponents of the lexical approach to possible verb meaning, claim that the lexical content of a verb follows from the properties of its event structure. Accordingly, relying on the structure of different events, they assume that event verbs fall into two broad classes: (i) manner verbs³ encoding the means or manner in which the action is performed and (ii) result verbs4 encoding the coming about of some particular result state. More importantly, they make the strong claim that there is no single, monomorphemic lexeme that can encode both manner and result. For example, in actions described by result verbs, e.g., breaking, drying, or opening, the manner in which something is done is unspecified. It means that the action may be performed in many ways and by a variety of means. Correspondingly, manner verbs, such as jog, run or creak, identify the manner of action but do not specify the result of the action. Finally, RH&L point out that they are conscious of the fact that there are some exceptions to their statement, in particular complex predicates such as make clean or scrub bright. Given that monomorphemic verbs never encode manner and result, RH&L come up with a proposal that this complementarity results from the way the event templates are structured. Specifically, a single semantic root can either modify an underlying ACT predicate (1a), or become an argument of BECOME in (1c) and (1d), but cannot at the same time modify an event and become its argument. This clearly rules out the template in (2a) with two separate root meanings or (2b) with a copied root meaning (adopted from Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2010: 333)).

³ Means/manner verbs, e.g., jog, run, creak, whistle...

⁴ Result verbs, e.g., break, dry, melt, open, split...

Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2010) (henceforth B&K-G) make a contrastive proposal. Namely, they argue that there are verbs in English which encode both manner and result meaning in one root. These verbs belong to the *manner-of-killing* verbs, which are semantically included in a larger group of *poison* verbs⁵. The details of semantic classification are discussed in the following section. In order to prove their hunch that *manner-of-killing* verbs include manner and result in their encodings, B&K-G devised an independent diagnostics for manner and result components in verb meanings and then applied their tests to the selected *manner-of-killing* verbs. It is worth noticing that some of these tests had their origin in the probes used beforehand by RH&L or Rappaport Hovav (2008).

The results of this investigation showed that the roots of the analyzed *manner-of-killing* verbs are made up of both manner and result meanings. Now, since RH&L always stress the relevancy and necessity of cross-linguistics studies in making claims about the nature of verb meaning and syntactic alternations, I decided to conduct a cross-linguistic analysis of the nature of *manner-of-killing* verbs. In this paper, my primary concern will be to analyze the semantic meaning of Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs. Using the diagnostics developed by B&K-G, I will examine verbs from this group to establish their semantic encoding.

Since in this analysis I rely heavily on the B&K-G study and methods of testing of verb meaning, in a large portion of this paper I introduce their theory on verifying manner and result meaning in the roots of verbs. As a next step, I apply it to my Polish data.

2. Typology of manner-of-killing verbs

Levin (1993) developed a large-scale classification of English verbs into groups according to their semantic encoding. Among these groups she distinguished a class of *killing verbs*, which she further divided into *murder verbs*⁶ (p.

⁵ See Levin's (1993) semantic classification of verbs in English.

⁶ Levin's murder verbs: assassinate, butcher, dispatch, eliminate, execte, immolate, kill, liquidate, massacre, murder, slaughter, slay.

231) and *poison verbs*⁷ (p. 232). During their semantic analysis, Levin indicated that none of the verbs in the *murder* group lexicalizes means component, in contrast, among *poison* verbs all lexicalize means. Quite the contrary, B&K-G, after a primary diagnostics of *poison* verbs, conclude that some of them entail not only manner but also result; in other words, some *poison* verbs indicate not only result but also means that lead to this result, i.e. death. Bearing this observation in mind, B&K-G decided to form a new semantic group that consists strictly of these verbs, i.e., *crucify*, *drawn*, *electrocute*, *guillotine*, *hang* (p.335). They called the new class *manner-of-killing* verbs. Following B&K-G, *manner-of-killing* verbs exemplify verbs that encode both manner and result in their roots. As indicated in the previous section, this observation is a serious challenge for the RH&L and Rappaport Hovav (2008) approach to the composition of event structures. Therefore, I believe it needs further analysis.

In the following sections, I will present B&K-G's diagnostics that led to the conclusion introduced above and apply their semantic tests to the Polish equivalents of English *manner-of-killing* verbs, in order to check if the roots of Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs also incorporate both of these components.

3. Result meaning diagnostics

Before we proceed with the diagnostics, we must have a solid understanding of the result meaning. In the process of tests compilation, B&K-G relied heavily on the RH&L interpretation of result meaning. RH&L characterized result as an event in which some change is bound to occur at the end of the process, hence they take resultative events to involve scalar change (adapted from B&K-G, p. 336).

[denote] events of scalar change ...where a scale is a set of degrees – points or intervals indicating measurement values – on a particular dimension (e.g. height, temperature, cost), with an associated ordering relation. (RH&L, p.28)

Simply put, at the end of the resultative event, of for example *breaking*, a broken item will be in a different physical condition than at the beginning of the ac-

⁷ Levin's poison verbs: asphyxiate, crucify, drown, electrocute, garrote, hang, knife, poison, shoot, smother, stab, strangle, suffocate.

tion. As a result of this observation, B&K-G created a series of truth-conditional tests that measure out a scalar change in a resultative event. All of their tests are presented below and applied to Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs. The acceptability verdicts are based on the judgements of the speakers of Polish⁸.

3.1. Denial of result

The first test draws from the common expectation that a result is rooted in the event structure of resultatives. Consequently, every construction in which a resultative verb is followed by a phrase that denies the result should be unacceptable, as in #Shane just broke the vase but it is not broken. where the past participle form of a verb is used to deny the result. With manner-of-killing verbs, B&K-G decided to oppose the expected result with a phrase but nothing is different about it which has a meaning similar to the test with the past participle. Such constructions are unacceptable in English, as shown by B&K-G (13).

- (3) a. #Jane just drowned Joe, but nothing is different about him.
 - b. #Jane just hanged Joe, but nothing is different about him.
 - c. #Jane just crucified Joe, but nothing is different about him.

In Polish the phrase but nothing is different about it translates as ale nic się (w nim/niej) nie zmieniło and can be used to deny the result component in the verb meaning, e.g., Janka mrugnęła, ale nic się w niej/jej oku nie zmieniło. 'Jane blinked, but nothing is different about her/her eye'. Let us examine the properties of Polish verbs.

(4) a. #Egzekutor właśnie utopił skazanego, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniło.

'The executor has just drowned the convict, but nothing is different about him.'

⁸ I carried out a survey among 14 respondents who were native speakers of Polish.

- b. #Egzekutor właśnie powiesił skazanego na stryczku, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniło.
 - 'The executor has just hanged the convict on a noose, but nothing is different about him.'
- c. #Egzekutor właśnie ukrzyżował skazanego, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniło

'The executor has just crucified the convict, but nothing is different about him.'

My respondents, who were native speakers of Polish agreed that none of these verbs can have their result meaning denied, as all of the illustrated verbs in (4) involve a result encoding according to which the patient is either dead or significantly crippled as a result of the action expressed by the verb.

At this point, I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for pointing out the issue to which I would like to refer now. Namely, in my analysis all the selected verbs are presented in perfective aspect that is with perfectivizing prefixes, such as *u-topil*, *po-wiesil*, *u-krzyzowal*, which was challenged by the reviewer. Consequently, let us analyze the imperfective *topić*, *wieszać* or *krzyżować* with the denial of result diagnostics with imperfective reading, to better fit the context: .?Egzekutor właśnie topił skazanego, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniało. 'The executor was just drowning the convict, but nothing is different about him.' or ?Egzekutor właśnie wieszał skazanego na stryczku, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniało. 'The executor was just hanging the convict on a noose, but nothing is different about him.' ?Egzekutor właśnie krzyżował skazanego, ale nic się w nim nie zmieniało. 'The executor was just crucifying the convict, but nothing is different about him.'

It seems that the change of aspect does not affect the result encoding, because it is almost impossible that a drowned, hanged or crucified convict comes unscathed from the action expressed by these verbs. Bearing in mind that resultative events involve scalar change, one may expect that the convict suffers at least some sort of consequence, e.g., he may have choked and now suffers from some side effect of suffocation. In all, the change from perfective to imperfective verb influences the scale of the result but it does not entirely negate the result. Since,

manner/result complementarity is much more easily verified in context of perfective clauses, in the further diagnostics, whenever it is desired, I use the verbs in perfective aspect.

3.2. Object deletion test

The second test takes transitive manner verbs⁹ but not transitive result verbs to have their object deleted in certain contexts. Following Rappaport Hovav (2008, p.24, cited from B&K-G, p.338), '...scales require that the participant whose property is measured out by them is overtly realized'. This condition holds for English, see (5) below (adopted from B&K-G (20)).

- (5) a. #All last night, Shane crucified.
 - b. #All last night, the executioner electrocuted.
 - c. #All last night, Shane drowned.

Similarly in Polish, the examples of resultative phrases without patients are judged as unacceptable, see (6) below.

- (6) a. #Całą zeszłą noc egzekutor krzyżował.
 - 'All last night, the executor crucified.'
 - b. #Całą zeszłą noc egzekutor tracił na krześle elektrycznym.
 - 'All last night, the executioner electrocuted.'
 - c. #Całą zeszłą noc egzekutor topił.
 - 'All last night, Shane drowned.'

The sentences in (6) were unanimously evaluated as ungrammatical. In Polish, with result verbs the patient must be specified, otherwise the meaning of the construction is vague and unacceptable. To conclude, Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs pattern like English verbs with respect to object deletion, suggesting that in both these languages these verbs encode result.

⁹ B&K-G (p. 339) for manner verbs: Kim scrubbed the floor. All last night Kim scrubbed.

3.3. Restricted resultatives

The next test offers even better results. Namely, this diagnostics assumes that verbs encoding result are generally more constrained to appear in result constructions than manner verbs. To better clarify, I will use Rappaport Hovav's (2008, p. 22) commentary '...[a] verb with no lexically specified scale can appear with a variety of results. In contrast, verbs which have lexically specified scales... are very restricted in the kinds of resultatives they can appear in' (commentary adopted from B&K-G (p. 340)). B&K-G come up with a variety of result phrases¹0 that they apply to manner-of-killing verbs. Neither of the newly formed sentences is acceptable in English, see (7) below (adopted from B&K-G (27)).

- (7) a. #Shane electrocuted the prisoner to a crisp.
 - b. #Shane drowned Sandy blue.
 - c. #Shane hanged the prisoner thin.
 - d. #The Romans crucified Jesus to the tomb.

Next, I am going to build the syntactic structures with Polish *manner-of-kill-ing* verbs and the following resultative phrases *tylko trochę* 'barely', *na* śmierć 'to death', *do końca* 'to the end', *na wpół* 'half-'.

- (8) a. #Egzekutor stracił skazanego na krześle elektrycznym tylko trochę/ na śmierć/do końca/na wpół.
 - 'The executor (barely) (half-)electrocuted the prisoner to death, to the end.'
 - b. ?Egzekutor utopił skazanego tylko trochę/na śmierć/do końca/?na wpół.
 The executor (barely) (half-)drowned the convict to death, to the end.'
 - c. #Egzekutor powiesił skazanego trochę/na śmierć/do końca/na wpół.'The executor (barely) (half-)hanged the convict to death, to the end.'
 - d. ?Rzymianie ukrzyżowali Jezusa trochę/na śmierć/do końca/?na wpół.

¹⁰ B&K-G (p. 340) for manner verbs (i) *Cinerella scrubbed the table clean/shiny/bare*. (ii) *Cinderella scrubbed her knees sore*. (iii) *Cinderella scrubbed the dirt off the table*.

'The Romans (barely) (half-)crucified Jesus to death, to the end.'

Polish manner-of-killling verbs, similarly to English verbs, pattern like result verbs in this diagnostics. The only subject of hesitation were the sentences Egze-kutor utopil skazanego na wpół. 'The executor half-drawned the condemned.' or Rzymianie ukrzyżowali Jezusa na wpół. 'The Romans half-crucified Jesus.'. I assume that the Polish respondent imagined the context in which these people were almost dead as a result of the action, yet they stayed alive. Given that resultatives are scalar change verbs denoting the action that leads an alive man, at the beginning of the event, to death at the end of the event, bearing in mind that an almost dead person is not fully alive, let me make a claim that in these structures drown and crucify pattern like the other result manner-of-killing verbs.

The discussion so far has shown that Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs encode result and pattern almost exactly like their English equivalents. Let us move on to the next section in which we will apply manner diagnostics to the verbs we have just defined as resultatives.

4. Manner diagnostics

In order to create a well-balanced manner diagnostics B&K-G initially had to define manner. They decided to adopt RH&L's interpretation of manner, as a nonscalar change.

A nonscalar change is any change that cannot be characterized in terms of an ordered set of values of a single attribute... The vast majority of nonscalar changes deviate from scalar changes in another, more significant respect: they involve complex changes – that is, a combination of multiple changes – and this complexity means that there is no single, privileged scale of change. (RH&L, p. 32)

In the definition above manner is taken as a non-scalar, complex change that is built up of smaller events that eventually lead to a final event or result. However, achieving a final result is not a condition with manner, in contrast to the constructions with resultatives. According to this criterion, the main difference between manners and resultatives seems to be the dichotomy between the scalar and non-scalar character of the events they represent. B&K-G make explicit that their diagnostics focuses on the verification of the presumed scalarity of events in the analysed verbs. As with the resultative diagnostics, the manner diagnostics includes tests previously used in RH&L.

4.1. Selectional restrictions

Manner verbs are said to impose strict selectional restrictions on their subjects. Namely, they exclude natural forces or inanimates as subjects. These requirements make them more restricted in the choice of subjects than resultatives, which can take inanimates, natural forces as well as animates. English manner verbs, however, select only animates, see (9) below (adopted from B&K-G (33)).

- (9) a .#John changed/crucified Jesus with sailing rope.
 - b. #Sailing rope hanged/crucified Jesus.
 - c. #The wind hanged/crucified Jesus (by opening the trap door).

Next let us see how Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs behave with inanimate subjects.

(10) a. Egzekutor powiesił/ukrzyżował skazanego na krzyżu.

'The Executor hanged/crucified the convict on the rood.'

b. #Krzyż powiesił/ukrzyżował skazanego.

'The rood hanged/crucified the convict'.

c. #Wiatr powiesił/ukrzyżował skazanego.

'Wind hanged/crucified the convict'.

d. #Wiatr stracił skazanego na gilotynie.

'Wind guillotined the convict'.

The above analysis shows that Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs also impose a strong restriction on their subjects by allowing only animates to be selected for this syntactic position. Following B&K-G in their claim that such a condition is imposed only by manner verbs, I assume that Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs encode manner in meanings. Let us next use another diagnostics.

4.2. Denial of actions

Following B&K-G, in order to identify the encoding of verbs it is useful to look for inferences that follow from their meanings. In section 3.1 above, we have already seen how the denial of result diagnostics elicited the inference of an endpoint of action rooted in resultative verbs. The contradictory phrase *nothing is different about it* was used in this diagnostics to deny the scalar event encoded in resultatives. The conclusion was unacceptable structures. In contrast, for manner verbs it is not so easy to isolate means of action that must be denied in each case. For example, assuming that it would be quite easy to deny manner in words such as *run*¹¹ or *blink*, it is much more difficult to create a denial phrase for verbs such as *break* or *destroy*, since they may be performed with a use of variety means. Finally, B&K-G decide to use a denial phrase *but didn't move a muscle*, which they consider unified in meaning hence suitable to be applied to a wider range of manner verbs. The results of using this phrase with English *manner-of-killing* verbs are presented in (11) below (adopted from B&K-G (39).

- (11) a. #The governor crucified/electrocuted the prisoner, but didn't move a muscle rather, after taking office she failed to issue a pardon!
 - b. #The governor drowned/hanged the prisoner, but didn't move
 a muscle rather during the execution she just set there, tacitly
 refusing to order a halt.

Now, let us see how Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs pattern with a manner denial phrase, which is a translation of English *didn't move a muscle*.

(12) a. #Egzekutor ukrzyżował/powiesił/stracił skazanego na krześle elektrycznym, ale nie ruszył przy tym jednym mięśniem, raczej tylko siedział i nie wstrzymywał egzekucji.

'The executor crucified/hanged/electrocuted the convict, but didn't move a muscle – rather, after taking office she failed to issue a pardon!

It is impossible to assume that the *egzekutor* 'executor' physically participated in the execution of the prisoner. He was neither an agent nor a performer of the action, as could be expected from the context. In fact, he was only a silent

¹¹ B&K-G suggest that the phrase *but did not move his arms or legs* clearly denies the manner encoded in the meaning of these verbs.

observer. Consequently, this ambiguous interpretation makes this sentence unacceptable. To conclude, given that the manner meaning cannot be denied in these verbs, we may assume that it is a result of the fact that they clearly have it rooted in their 'core' meanings. Hence, this test provides additional evidence in support of the claim that *manner-of-killing* verbs encode manner.

Let us verify this working hypothesis against the data from the final of diagnostics.

4.3. Complexity of action

As pointed out in section 3 above, manner verbs are complex and the events they encode consist of separate changes. This in turn implies that they must be durative. B&K-G treat this assumption as a core of their third diagnostics that tests standard durativity in *manner-of-killing* verbs. Following B&K-G (p.347-348), the standard durativity test takes the phrases *take/spend an hour*, where *take an hour* has an 'after an hour reading' and embeds a punctual, telic predicate, or it is interpreted as 'during an hour' when it embeds a durative telic predicate. It is interesting to note that although *manner-of-killing* verbs are independently perceived as punctual verbs that encode a two-point scale, i.e., from alive to dead. In the diagnostics presented in B&K-G, they behave as durative verbs¹², see (13) below (adapted from B&K-G (43)).

(13) It took me five minutes to drown/hang/crucify Jim...('after/during five minutes')

AFTER: because I lacked the courage.

DURING: because this is how long it takes to kill someone by holding them under water/cutting off their air/nailing them down, hoisting them up, and waiting.

They conclude that in this diagnostics at least some *manner-of-killing* verbs showed a manner component in their meaning.

Now, let us apply their test to the Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs, see (14) below.

¹² For more details see B&K-G (p. 347–348).

(14) Utopienie/powieszenie/ukrzyżowanie/stracenie na gilotynie skazanego zabrało egzekutorowi pięć minut.

'Drawning/hanging/crucifyinh/guillotining the convict took the executor five minutes.'

These sentences receive exactly the same interpretation as the English ones. Namely, they could be interpreted as *the executor* managed to execute *the prisoner* after an hour because he lacked courage, or a contrasting second interpretation would be he was doing it for five minutes 'because this is how long it takes to kill someone by holding them under water/cutting off their air/nailing them down, hoisting them up, and waiting' B&K-G (43).

Thus, this last diagnostics has shown again that Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs similarly to their English equivalents, encode manner in their meanings.

5. Concluding remarks

The main aim of this article was to adduce evidence to Beavers and Koontz-Garboden's (2012) claim that some manner-of-killing verbs encode result and manner in their core meanings. This observation was seriously challenged by Rappaport Hovay & Levin's (2010) as well as by Rappaport Hovay's (2008) approach to the composition of event structures, in which they argue that a verb may encode either result or manner in its root, but never both. In order to challenge this proposal, Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2012) designed a number of truth-conditional tests that they next applied to manner-of-killing verbs in English. The results showed that English manner-of-killing verbs encode both result and manner in their roots. The analysis in this paper aimed to provide more evidence to the hypothesis that not all monomorphemic verbs were created equal, but some of them may have manner and result encoded in their inherent meaning. The data tested in this analysis came from the Polish manner-of-killing verbs. In sections 3 and 4, I applied Beavers and Koontz-Garboden's diagnostics to the analyzed verbs and arrived at the conclusion that the Polish manner-of-killing verbs encode both result and manner. As a consequence, this crosslinguistic observation strengthens Beavers and Koontz-Garboden claim that eventive predicates may encode two meanings in their roots simultaneously.

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Abstract

Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2010) have argued that verb meanings are composed in a way that enables them to encode only one meaning in their roots. In the case of eventive verbs, it is either the meaning of manner or result. In other words, no verb can encode two of these meanings simultaneously. Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2012) challenge this proposal with the observation of *manner-of-killing* verbs in English, which, under a specially designed diagnostics, show both manner and result meaning. This paper searches for cross-linguistic data that could provide supportive evidence for one of these hypotheses. Using Beavers and Koontz-Garboden's diagnostics, I test Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs. The results show that Polish *manner-of-killing* verbs pattern exactly the same way as their English equivalents.

Keywords: event structure, root meaning of verbs, lexical semantics, manner meaning, result meaning

PORÓWNAWCZA ANALIZA SEMANTYCZNA CZASOWNIKÓW O INHERENTNYM ZNACZENIU ZABIJANIA W JĘZYKU POLSKIM ORAZ ANGIELSKIM

Streszczenie

Rappaport Hovav i Levin (2010) twierdzą, że w znaczeniu inherentnym czasownika zawiera się tylko jedna kategoria znaczeniowa. W przypadku czasowników wydarzeniowych jest to kategoria sposobu lub katerogia rezultatu. Innymi słowy, żaden czasownik nie może zawierać obydwu tych kategorii jednocześnie. Celem tego artykułu jest przytoczyć dane z innego języka niż język angielski, które potwierdziłyby lub obaliły tę hipotezę. Używając testów semantycznych przygotowanych przez Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2012), w niniejszej analizie sprawdzam czasowniki mające inherentne znaczenie zabijania w języku polskim (manner-of-killing). Są to polskie odpowiedniki czasowników, które zostały przebadane przez Beavers and Koontz-Garboden w języku

angielskim. Rezultaty tego badania pokazują, że w wybranych strukturach badane czasowniki zachowują się dokładnie tak samo jak czasowniki w języku angielskim, czyli pokazują zarówno kategorię sposobu, jak i rezultatu w swoim inherentnym znaczeniu semantycznym.

Slowa kluczowe: struktura wydarzeniowa, znaczenie inherentne, semantyka leksykalna, kategoria sposobu, kategoria rezultatu