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LIGHT VERBS IN DIFFERENT GENRES OF MARITIME ENGLISH

Abstract: Verbs such as *make*, *take*, *give*, are called semantically empty verbs or light verbs in complex constructions consisting of a verb and a predicative noun, e.g. *take a walk*, *make a choice*, *give advice*, whose meaning corresponds to that of a full verb. The bond between the verb and its nominal complement is quite strong. Light verb constructions are often the result of the process of nominalization in different registers, especially in the legal register. These structures are considered difficult for non-native speakers of English.

The aim of the study is to investigate and analyze the distribution of the light verbs, *make*, *take* and *give* in a corpus of Maritime English consisting of three subcorpora: Maritime Legal English, English in Maritime VHF Communications, English in Marine Engineering. Since the subcorpora represent different genres of Maritime English, the hypothesis is that light verb constructions will show differences in frequency and distribution across genres and can thus be considered as one of the characteristics of a particular genre. The results of the study can be used both for the teaching and translation of such texts as well as for research when it comes to understanding whether there is a tendency towards a discipline-specific lexical repertoire in each subcorpus.

Keywords: Maritime English, light verbs, corpus analysis, nominalization

1. INTRODUCTION

Light verb constructions (LVCs) are specific Multi-Word Expressions (MWEs) which have been the subject of theoretical analysis in different languages and

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from different perspectives for decades (cf. Pompei, Mereu and Piunno 2023). The term itself was coined by Jespersen (1965) and refers to complex verbo-nominal constructions consisting of the so-called light verb, such as *make* or *do*, and a deverbal noun which carries the semantic content, e.g. 'make a decision'. Owing to their complex structure and extensive use, various scholars found them interesting in cross-linguistic studies, diachronic analysis, translation studies, second language acquisition, semantic analysis, as well as in terms of their discourse features and structural characteristics. However, there are only a few corpus-based studies that focus on LVCs (cf. Algeo 1995, Leech et al. 2009, Ronan and Schneider 2015) examining their construction and frequency. This study used corpus tools to investigate the frequency of LVCs containing the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* in a corpus of Maritime English, comparing the frequency and valency of the LVs within such constructions in three different subcorpora. The aim was to establish the similarities and differences in the use of LVCs across different genres: the legal genre, the specialized spoken genre and the technical genre, all within the field of Maritime English, and to see whether genre also plays a role in the use of LVCs.

The hypothesis is that these LVs will demonstrate different frequencies, different valence and different collocations across the genres. The second hypothesis is that genres with a greater tendency towards nominalization, such as legal genres, will show greater frequency and variability of LVCs than genres with a tendency towards verbal expressions, like spoken genres. In this paper, the term 'genre' is adopted to refer to a particular variety of language associated with a particular field, in this case, specialized spoken maritime communication, maritime law and marine engineering as subvarieties within a larger domain of Maritime English. Maritime English is specific as it encompasses various genres.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PREVIOUS WORK

Light verbs have been in the focus of various theoretical considerations and were also called thin verbs (Allerton 2002), function verbs (Nickel 1968), support verbs (Gross 1989), operator verbs (Rassi et al. 2014), vector verbs (Nespital 1989), while LVCs were also described as stretched verb constructions (Allerton 2002), complex predicates (Goldberg 1996), complex predicate constructions (Goldberg 1996), support verb constructions (Gross 1989) and verbo-nominal constructions (Cetnarowska 2012).

LVCs are composed of verbs such as *make*, *take*, *give*, *do*, and *have* which are used in their 'light' sense, meaning that their semantic contribution to the meaning of an LVC differs from their semantic contribution in other free word combinations, i.e. their 'heavy' use (Mehl 2017: 58), as for example the meaning of the verb *make* in 'make a decision' as opposed to its meaning in the phrase 'make a cake'. The verb itself is not completely semantically empty, as Jespersen first assumed, but it is semantically reduced (Fleischhauer 2021: 63) or bleached (Traugott and Dasher 2001: 59), contributing a little to the overall meaning of the LVC.

Various research has shown different characteristics of LVCs. Firstly, the light verb (LV) does not have its literal sense when used in an LVC (Neo Tan et al 2022: 95), e.g. ‘make’ means create or bring about, but in ‘make a decision’ or ‘make an appearance’, it assumes the meaning of the deverbal noun, i.e. decide and appear, respectively. Secondly, research has shown that LVCs tend to be more frequent than their synthetic counterparts, despite language economy, as LVCs demonstrate greater possibilities of modification (Bonial and Pollard 2020: 580). One of the key features of LVCs is their semi-compositional structure, in which individual elements contribute to the lexical meaning, but it still has a degree of flexibility as to its components (Bonial 2021: 3), therefore LVCs can be positioned on a continuum between purely compositional language and fixed idioms, as shown in Figure 1.

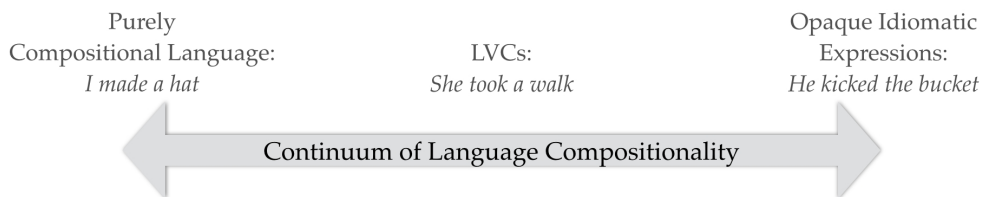


Figure 1. Continuum of Language Compositionality (Bonial 2021: 3).

It was also noted that LVCs are problematic for non-native speakers of English who underuse, overuse or misuse LVs in such contexts as it is frequently difficult to distinguish why we can ‘make a decision’ but not ‘do a decision’, or why we can ‘have a drink’ but we cannot ‘have an eat’. Guilquin (2019) proved that there is a link between English language proficiency and the use of LVCs, i.e. that there is a tendency towards more frequent and elaborate uses of LVCs in speakers at an advanced level. LVCs have also posed a problem in NLP applications (Tu and Roth 2011: 31) and corpus linguistic research (Ronan and Schneider 2015: 3–7), which gave rise to different methodologies applied to the identification of LVCs in these fields. It was also found that LVCs vary across regional varieties of English, e.g. LVCs with *have* were found to be more common in New Zealand, Australia and British English than LVCs with *take* (Smith 2009: 151–152).

3. FEATURES OF MARITIME ENGLISH

Trenkner (2000: 7) defined Maritime English as “the entirety of all those means of the English language which, being used as a device for communication within the international maritime community, contribute to the safety of navigation and the facilitation of the seaborne trade”. This description suggests that this specific variety cuts across a range of sectors, professional and business, encompassing onboard, onshore, ship-to-shore and inter-ship communication among seafarers and shore-based staff. However, the definition by Bocanegra-

Valle (2013), who defined it as a subdomain of occupational English with several subvarieties: English for navigation and maritime communications, English for maritime commerce, English for maritime law and English for marine engineering, suggests an even wider scope of Maritime English. There are several studies (e.g. Pritchard et al. 2024, Francheschi 2014, Bocanegra-Valle 2013, Pritchard 2007) that focused on distinctive features of different Maritime English subvarieties indicating how linguistic elements are employed in different ways. Maritime English is primarily distinguished by specialized vocabulary, as any language for specific purposes, covering maritime terminology for shipbuilding, navigation, marine engineering, shipping, maritime law, etc. (Pritchard, Borucinsky and Tominac Coslovich 2024). In addition, Maritime English lexis encompasses very productive multi-word units, general vocabulary words with specific meaning in the maritime context and a growing number of acronyms and abbreviations (Pritchard 2007, Pritchard, Borucinsky and Tominac Coslovich 2024). Maritime law, covering legal aspects of shipping, insurance, liability, ships' contracts, ownership and registration, maritime events, safety and marine pollution control, is further distinguished by its tendency towards long, complex, verbose sentences with embedded subordinate clauses, lexical redundancy, use of impersonal constructions thus achieving a higher level of formality and distance from the addressee (cf. Franceschi 2014). Similarly to legal English in general, it shows a tendency towards nominalization and predicate decomposition, resulting in informationally dense texts that are challenging to process. In this sense, it is expected that light verbs will be used to a greater extent as they frequently form a part of the decomposed predicate. Marine engineering English shows some similar features, like complex noun phrases and formality, but it is also distinguished by its structural conciseness, use of present tense, clarity of structure and use of impersonal "you". Owing to these features, it is expected that light verbs will not be the typical choice in the corpus. The subvariety of maritime routine communications involves mostly non-native speakers who communicate on a limited number of topics related to navigation to ensure safe and efficient shipping. It is quite specific as it shares some features of everyday spoken English and some features of specialized formal English (cf. Kegalj 2024). Its discourse structure, lexical choices, sentence structure and terminology are regulated by various documents issued by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). As the speakers communicate over radio, they rely more on intonation, contextualization and knowledge of the world than on paralinguistic features such as body language or facial expressions. Franceschi (2014) identified its specific features, which include restricted vocabulary, formality, standardized phrases, repetitions and confirmations, mostly resulting from the use of Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP). These phrases were designed to be clear, simple, efficient and easy to understand. When it comes to the use of verbs, international documents

recommend the use of action verbs in the phrases as they are clear, concise and unambiguous. Therefore, it is expected that light verbs will not be used to a great extent.

Owing to the specific features described, it is expected that the use of light verbs will also show specific tendencies in each subvariety.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study is a corpus-based quantitative analysis of LVCs containing the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* in three corpora. The study was conducted in the web-based corpus analysis tool Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2004). The results obtained using corpus query language (CQL) showed that the identification of LVCs was challenging due to several features of LVCs. Firstly, the components of LVCs are often discontinued by other elements, e.g. ‘he *made* several successful *appearances* on TV’. Secondly, LVCs may have different forms, e.g. the passive form (‘the *lecture* was *given*’). Thirdly, LVs may be found in ambiguous contexts in which corpus tools may not be able to identify them correctly, e.g. ‘they will *make* the *decision* known to the public’, where the verb *make* is not part of an LVC (Neo Tan et al. 2022: 96). To avoid the possibility of contamination of results with ‘heavy’ uses of the LVs, CQL had to be adjusted. Furthermore, the analysis was complemented through the use of another feature of Sketch Engine, the Word Sketch. This tool provides an overview of a word’s collocates organized into categories. In this case, the analysis focused on *verb* + *noun* structures. All identified structures were subjected to a qualitative analysis, following Bonial’s flow chart (Bonial 2021: 7) shown in Figure 2.

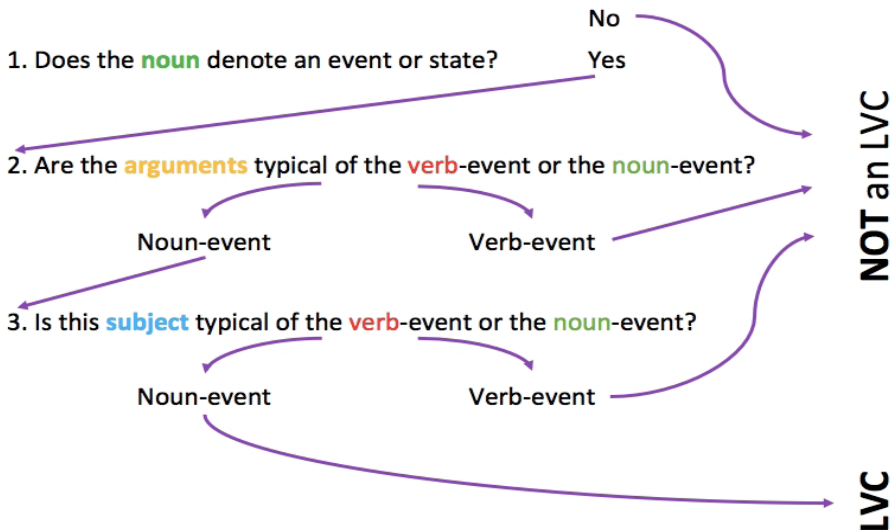


Figure 2. Flow chart for identifying LVCs (Bonial 2021).

After identifying the LVCs with the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* in all three corpora, CQL was used to find their frequencies in each of the corpora for the purpose of comparison. Also, the association measures logDice and log likelihood values were extracted for each LVC to gain a deeper insight into the valency and strength of the link between the components. While logDice identifies typical collocations and works well across corpora of different sizes providing comparable data, log likelihood provides a check of statistical significance. Also, logDice value gives typical combinations of words, not just those that often co-occur, but also fails to identify rare associations between words, which is why it was used in this case.

The study was conducted on three subcorpora: Maritime Legal English (MARLAW), English in Maritime VHF communications (MARCOM) and English in Marine Engineering (MARENG). The size of the subcorpora is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on the subcorpora used in the study.

Subcorpus	Tokens	Other
MARCOM	93,920	Ca 12 hours of spoken conversation
MARLAW	564,267	14 conventions and 5 regulations
MARENG	2,687,102	Technical specifications, manuals, guidelines

MARCOM is a corpus of spoken interactions between ships and shore stations. It involves speakers in real, everyday situations producing unconstrained exchanges, using a specialized subvariety of Maritime English which has been standardized and prescribed by relevant international organizations. About 12 hours of recordings for corpus compilation were granted by the Croatian Maritime Safety Directorate of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure provided that General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹ requirements are met. The compilation underwent specific stages, from collection, and transcription to anonymization due to GDPR requirements. In the anonymization stage, all personal data, such as ship names, shore station names, geographical locations, were replaced with generic names to avoid any possibility of identification. This specific subvariety is realized exclusively through speech. As the speakers do not interact face-to-face, they cannot rely on paralinguistic features, such as body language and facial expressions. Another notable feature is the standardization of language used in such communication, which poses restrictions regarding the length of utterances, specific terms used, recommended language structures, and other standardized features. This kind of communication also relies heavily on

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng>

contextual clues as it follows typical scenarios, with the principle of cooperation between speakers being prominent.

The subcorpus MARLAW includes written legal texts, conventions and regulations, dealing with maritime law that regulate legal aspects of shipping, marine insurance, safety at sea, etc. The subcorpus contains 14 international conventions and five international regulations, but EU maritime regulations were not included here so as to avoid contamination of the results as several studies have shown that EU English differs from British legal English (cf. Trosborg 1997, Koskinen 2000, Tosi 2005, Biel 2014) and that it should be considered as a different variety.

The subcorpus MARENG contains written technical texts about the design, operation and maintenance of ship engines and machinery, guidelines for repairs intended for and used by marine engineers, shipbuilders, ship surveyors and other technical staff dealing with operation and maintenance of ship engines, ship systems, equipment or construction.

The subcorpora all belong to the field of Maritime English, but different genres, following different linguistic norms, utilizing different linguistic strategies to express ideas. It is important to note here that one of the subcorpora is a spoken corpus, while the other two are corpora of written texts, although they all belong to the same domain. As research has shown, spoken corpora show different characteristics than written corpora, which is expected to be reflected in the results in this study.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the frequencies of LVCs containing the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* were analyzed in each of the subcorpora. Owing to the differences in the size of the subcorpora, the frequencies had to be normalized to allow comparison. The results of the frequency of LVC structures normalized per million (Figure 3) show that the verb *take* is the most frequent in all three subcorpora, followed by *make*, with *give* being the least frequent of the three. The corpus of Maritime Legal English shows the greatest frequency of LVC structures. This might indicate a tendency towards nominalization in this genre as LVCs are used instead of full verbs. Despite previous studies in which spoken corpora contained more LVCs than written corpora (cf. Smith 2009, Shahrokny-Prehn and Höche 2011: 255), in the case of spoken maritime communications, this has not proved to be true. However, this is a specific spoken corpus, with a majority of non-native English speakers which has an impact on the use of LVCs (cf. Gilquin 2019). There is a restricted number of topics related to maritime affairs and the communication follows a specific prescribed structure. Therefore, it does not contain the features of a typical spoken corpus.

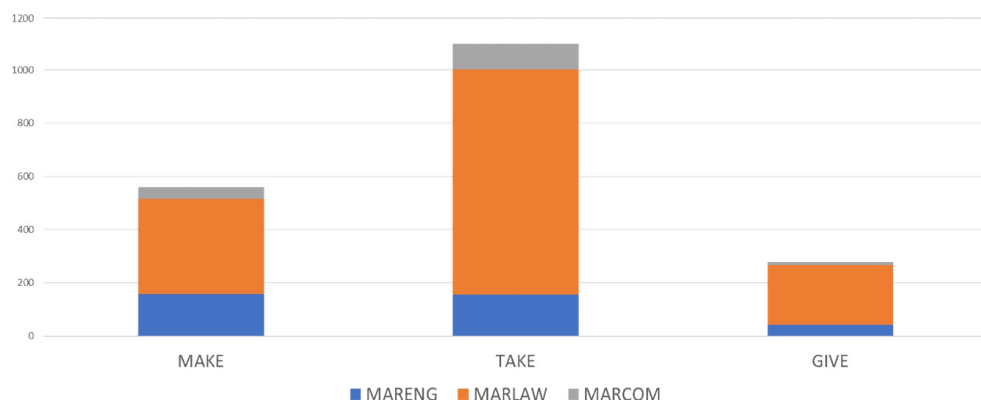


Figure 3. Results of the normalized frequencies of LVCs in the studied subcorpora.

The results referring to the number of nouns/collocates each verb takes (Figure 4) differ from previous results. Although *take* is the most frequent LV overall, the verb *make* collocates with the greatest number of different nouns within LVCs in all three corpora. The verbs *take* and *give* collocate with approximately the same number of nouns, while *give* is used less and is less productive in the spoken maritime communications subcorpus. Therefore, the verb *make* is the most valent of the three, producing more versatile LVCs than the other verbs.

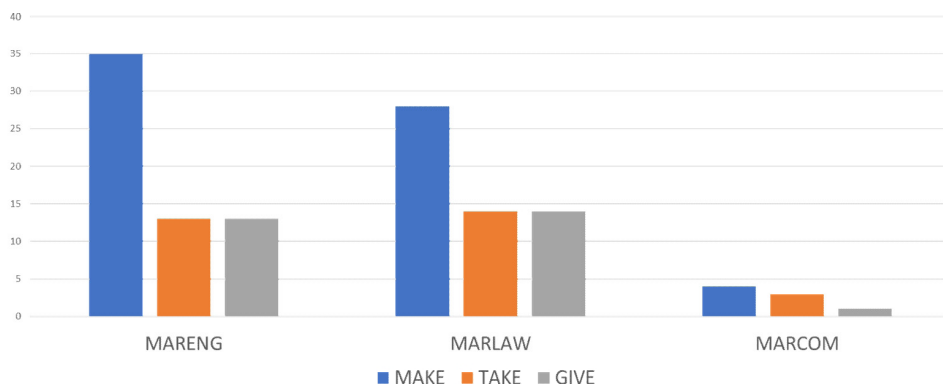
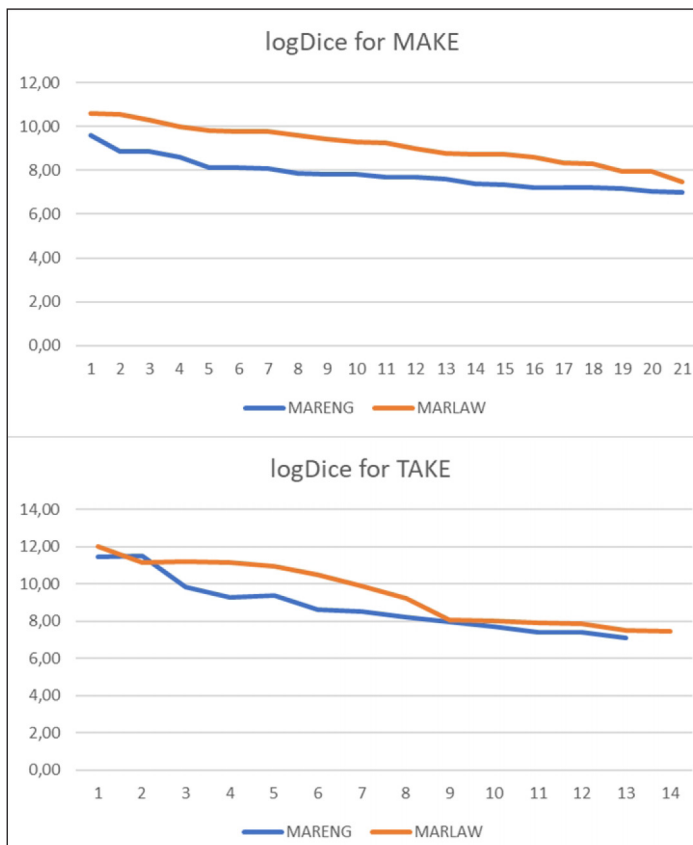


Figure 4. Collocates of the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* within the three subcorpora.

In the following stage, the analysis focused on the strength of the association made between the verb and the noun in LVC structures, which also showed some differences among the subcorpora. For this purpose, the logDice value was used as this identifies typical collocations. The logDice value of 7 was used as the

threshold, showing rather strong association between the verb and the noun. As the logDice values for LVCs in maritime communications were too small to be considered (i.e. < 7), and the log likelihood values were less than 6.63, showing that there is a large possibility the results are due to chance, the MARCOM corpus was omitted from this comparison. The reasons for this probably lie in the size of the corpus, but also the nature of the corpus. As discussed earlier, the language of maritime communications is highly standardized. One of the norms that it follows is the preference for the use of action verbs and avoidance of wordy expressions. This explains the reduced frequency of LVCs compared to other spoken corpora and other subcorpora in this study, and the low strength of the associations within LVC structures.

The results in Figure 5 show that in the case of all three verbs, *make*, *take* and *give*, the logDice values are greater in the subcorpus of Maritime Legal English, which means that the LVC structures are more typical for that subcorpus than for the subcorpus of marine engineering. Both subcorpora show rather strong associations (i.e. > 7) between these verbs and the nouns they are associated with. The log likelihood values for each LVC were > 20 , which shows that the probability of the LVCs appearing by chance is less than 1 %.



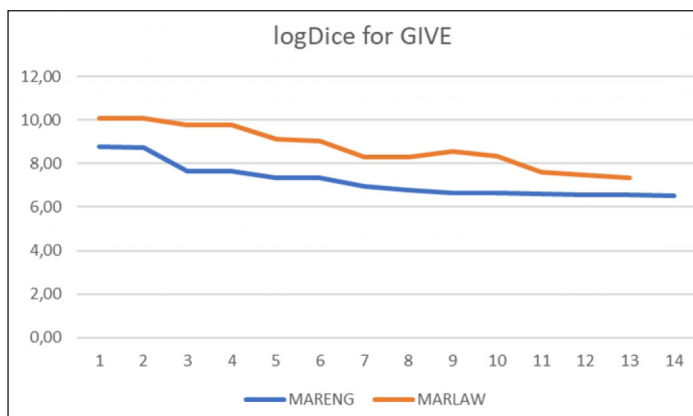


Figure 5. logDice values for the verbs *make*, *take* and *give* in two subcorpora.

The subcorpora MARENG and MARLAW also share some common LVCs, shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Common LVCs in the subcorpora MARENG and MARLAW.

LV	LVCs
MAKE	decision, payment, note, use, provision, recommendation
TAKE	place, measure, action, advantage, account, form, precaution, step, responsibility
GIVE	rise, access, instruction, information, consideration, warning, protection

This might indicate that, while there are some LVCs which can be found in general English such as ‘make a decision’, some LVCs may be typical for a particular genre of Maritime English, i.e. genre specific. This in particular can be found in the third subcorpus MARCOM, as it contains LVCs such as ‘make a turn’, ‘take bunkers’ or ‘give notice’, which are not found in the other subcorpora. The results also show that there is some overlap in the use of LVCs between the written subcorpora of marine engineering and maritime law, although the associations between the components of the LVCs differ in the subcorpora.

6. CONCLUSION

The study focused on the analysis of LVCs in three subcorpora belonging to the domain of Maritime English. Each subcorpus is representative of a specific genre: legal, technical and specialized spoken genre. The analysis was performed

using functionalities available via the corpus tool Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al. 2004). First, it was necessary to appropriately identify the LVCs in the subcorpora, which proved as a challenging task owing to the nature of LVCs which demonstrate ambiguity, discontinuity and variability of form. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of the results was necessary. The analysis was done using CQL and Word Sketch functions to filter out possible mismatches. This was followed by an analysis of frequencies normalized per million and statistical measures related to the strength of the bonds within LVCs.

The first hypothesis about LVCs demonstrating varying frequencies, valencies and collocations in the subcorpora proved correct. Although *take* is the most frequent in all subcorpora, the verbs show different frequencies in each subcorpus. Furthermore, the verb *make* has proved as the most valent of the three verbs, taking the greatest number of different collocations. Regarding the variability of associations of nouns with the three verbs, some of the LVCs were common in two subcorpora, MARLAW and MARENG, but the subcorpus MARCOM contained some unique LVCs.

The second hypothesis about genres with a greater tendency towards nominalization showing greater frequency and variability of LVCs than genres with a tendency towards verbal expressions was also proven. The LVCs showed as being more typical in the subcorpus of maritime legal texts, with greater frequencies and stronger associations between the elements than in the two other subcorpora. Contrary to some previous studies, the results here show that LVCs are not typical for the spoken corpus of maritime communications MARCOM. However, this can be accounted for by the fact that MARCOM is not a prototypical spoken corpus, as it contains standardized language, which is not commonly associated with a spoken corpus.

The main contribution of this paper lies in the fact the LVCs have not been studied across different genres. Further study could take into consideration the impact of genres and registers on the use of LVCs which might have implications for teaching those specific genres and registers. The use of full verbs as opposed to LVCs in these registers could be analyzed, as well as the modifications related with LVCs compared to those of full verbs.

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PERIFRAZNI GLAGOLI U POMORSKOM ENGLSKOM JEZIKU

Rezime

Glagolsko-imeničke konstrukcije specifični su višerječni izrazi koji su desetljećima bili predmet teorijske analize u različitim jezicima i iz različitih perspektiva (usp. Pompei, Mereu i Piuanno 2023). Te se strukture sastoje od perifraznih, tzv. laganih glagola (engl. *light verbs*) i odglagolnih imenica, pri čemu je glagol značenjski nepotpun, a leksičko značenje strukture proizlazi iz njegove imenske dopune, stoga on u rečenici ne može stajati samostalno. U ovome se radu analizirala frekvencija

i valencija laganih glagola *make*, *take* i *give* u korpusu pomorskog engleskog jezika. Korpus se sastojao od potkorpusa govornog specijaliziranog jezika pomorskih komunikacija (MARCOM), potkorpusa pisanih tekstova iz područja pomorskog prava (MARLAW) i potkorpusa pisanih tekstova iz područja brodograđarstva (MARENG). Hipoteza je da će promatrane glagolsko-imeničke konstrukcije pokazati različite frekvencije, različitu valenciju i različite kolokacije u različitim žanrovima, odnosno potkorpusima. Druga je hipoteza da će žanrovi s većom tendencijom nominalizacije, poput pravnog, pokazati veću učestalost i varijabilnost glagolsko-imeničkih konstrukcija od žanrova s tendencijom prema verbalnom izražavanju, poput govornog jezika.

Rezultati su pokazali da je perifrazni glagol *take* najfrekventniji u promatranim potkorpusima, dok se perifrazni glagol *make* pokazao se najvalentnijim, s najvećim brojem različitih kolokacija. Potkorpus MARCOM pokazao netipičnim i po konstrukcijama koje nisu pronađene u drugim potkorpusima i po snazi asocijacije među komponentama. Ovaj je potkorpus specifičan jer obuhvaća specijalizirani jezik koji je standardiziran i strukturiran, a u komunikaciji sudjeluju osobe koje nisu izvorni govornici engleskoga jezika. Rezultati su pokazali da su glagolsko-imeničke konstrukcije najprisutnije u potkorpusu MARLAW, što govori u prilog nominalizaciji kao karakteristici tog žanra.

Glavni je doprinos rada analiza glagolsko-imeničkih konstrukcija u različitim žanrovima. Daljnja istraživanja trebala bi uzeti u obzir utjecaj žanra i registra na uporabu glagolsko-imeničkih konstrukcija. Osim toga, analiza može obuhvatiti i usporedbu uporabe punih glagola za razliku od perifraznih, te različite modifikacija glagolsko-imeničkih konstrukcija.

Ključne riječi: pomorski engleski, perifrazni glagoli, korpusna analiza, nominalizacija