

# An analysis of the role of functives in the structure of English stereotyped word combinations with substantive bases

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**Abstract.** The present paper is devoted to some issues relating to English stereotyped word combinations with substantive onomasiological bases, particularly those that are used in socio-political texts. An attempt is made herein to describe cliched components in their structure (modifiers and bases) as functives, on the basis of implied subject-predicate-object (S-V-O) relations.

**Keywords:** word collocation; cliché; model; modifier; basis; S-V-O relation; transformational procedure; decoding; function; a functive; interdependence; determination; constellation; uniqueness; a narrative; event; a compactive.

## Анализ роли функтивов в структуре английских клишированных словосочетаний с субстантивными базами

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**Аннотация.** Настоящая статья посвящена некоторым вопросам, относящимся к английским клишированным словосочетаниям с субстантивными ономазиологическими базами, в частности к тем, которые используются в публицистических текстах. В работе предпринимается попытка описать стереотипные компоненты в их структуре (модификаторы и базы) в качестве функтивов, на основе имплицитных субъектно-предикатно-объектных отношений (S-V-O).

**Ключевые слова:** словосочетание; клише; модель; модификатор; базис; субъектно-предикатно-объектное отношение (S-V-O); трансформационная процедура; декодирование; функция; функтив; взаимозависимость; детерминация; констелляция; уникальность; нарратив; событие; компактив.

### Introduction

When studying various structural types of English word combinations (WCs) with substantive bases, we reveal some points of coincidence and typicality in the status of inter-componential links in their composition, as well as points of difference and non-typicality. In this regard, one may observe both uniqueness/unicity and non-uniqueness of semantic interrelations between modifiers and bases. For instance: (1) unique interrelationship: **book name - brand name - product name - case name - file name**, etc. (contingent objects **book**, **brand**, **product**, **case** and **file** do not form a single semantic class with one another and pertain to different thematic rows); (2) non-unique interrelationship: **book(s) section - foodstuffs section - bike(s) section - tractor section - art-car section**, etc. (contingent objects **books**, **foodstuffs**, **bikes**, **tractors** and **art-cars** are thematically connected with one another as a class of stock-keeping units/items and pertain to one generalised semantic row).

A specificity of the inter-componential relations illustrated in the above examples consists in that they show both generic and aspectual modification within a group of similar bases. In this connection, we may assert that there is apparently no generic unique interconnection, say, between the modifier **new books** and the basis **section** since the latter may freely match with other modifiers denoting stock-keeping units. Correspondingly, as regards the given WC, a mnemonical row seems to be

formed in an individual's consciousness: *new books section ↔ new bookstore section ↔ new additions section ↔ new designs section ↔ new publications section* and so on.

We believe that semantic properties of the modifier and the basis specify a dependence between them in the structure of a WC. Thus the latter may be of two types:

**DETERMINATION I:** as an illustration, an actantial dependence of two objects of the reality, designated by the modifier and the basis may be observed in the WC **tillage tool**. That is to say, the actant **tool** denotes a passive subject of an action, whereas the actant **tillage** indicates an object of this action (←a tool (S) IS USED FOR CARRYING OUT (V) tillage (O<sub>direct</sub>)). We suppose that the modification of this type has a *generic meaning*. This is why there exists, as it were, an *inherent bilateral dependence* between the structural components **tillage** and **tool**. The modifier **tillage** testifies to a *generic meaning* of the basis **tool**.

**DETERMINATION II:** as an example, an actantial dependence of two objects of the reality, designated by the modifier and the basis, may be observed in the WC **books section**. In other words, the actant **section** is a subject of an implied action, whereas the actant **books** is an object of this action (←a section (S) CONTAINS (V) books (O<sub>direct</sub>)). But in this case the modifier **books** bespeaks an *aspectual meaning* of the basis **section**. Seemingly, there is no *inherent generic interrelation* between the objects **books** and **section** in the objective reality. Why? The basis **section** denotes 'a depository' or 'a storage department',

and the modifier **books** designates a kind of stock-keeping unit. The object **section** is not semantically "tied up" to the objects **books** alone. It may also refer to quite a number of other units of issue (*tools* ←*section*; *foodstuffs* ←*section*, *bikes* ←*section* and so on), since its basic technical function remains, properly, constant and non-unique (*as a depository in general, a section may contain books, tools, foodstuffs, bikes, etc.*). Through the process of aspectual modification, the modifier **books** singles the object **section** out of the generalised class of similar stored entities on the basis of arbitrary distribution/arrangement/allocation/assignment/disposition, etc.

#### The notions of 'function' and 'functive' in the works by L. T. Hjelmslev

Initially, the notion of 'function' in the meaning of 'relationship', elaborated by representatives of the Copenhagen School (linguistics), had no definite content. For instance, the outstanding Danish linguist and representative of glossematics Louis Trolle Hjelmslev applied the term 'grammatical function' in his book "Principles de grammaire générale" [*Principles of general grammar*], published in 1928. But later on, he defines a function as "a dependence that fulfils the conditions for an analysis" in his work "Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse" [*Prolegomena to the theory of language*]. Just as there exists a function between a class and its components, so there is a sign and its components/segments. Thus, there is a sign function between terminals (members of a function). L. T. Hjelmslev terms terminals as functives. A function exists between a class and its segments (a chain and its parts or a paradigm and its constituents) or between segments (parts or segments) [4].

L. T. Hjelmslev singles out three types of function: 1) interdependence as a function between two constants; 2) determination as a function between a constant and a variable; 3) constellation as a function between two variables. In this regard, every function has two variables - in paradigmatics (*system*) and syntagmatics (*text*).

Generally, the notion of 'function' may imply both a role and a dependence, or correspondence, of units of one multitude to those of another one. The second meaning traditionally traces back to L. T. Hjelmslev's propositions and is characterised by what he meant by function: the correlation of classes of a different volume in paradigmatics and that of the part and the whole in syntagmatics.

In the present paper, modifiers and bases as constituents of the structure of English WCs are understood by us as functives in the light of L. T. Hjelmslev's theoretical expositions. We intend to give a description of some types of English stereotyped models of WCs, which are particularly widespread in social and political journalism. Also, our own hypothetical conception underlies our understanding of the structure of English WCs with substantive bases. It consists in that they may be "evolved" in the form of predicate constructions built on the subject-predicate-object type (S-V-O). We consider English WCs as *convoluted predicate syntagms*. This enables us, firstly, to determine a type of a syntagmatic interrelationship in a WC and, secondly, interpret the semantics of inter-componential links. For example, the WC **Obama letter** may be interpreted or "decoded" in two ways: 1) →a letter IS COMPILED BY Mr. B. Obama (the former President of the United States of America) →Mr.

B. Obama COMPILES a letter (Mr. B. Obama is an addressant); 2) →a letter IS ADDRESSED/SENT TO Mr. B. Obama →a letter IS ADDRESSED/SENT TO Mr. B. Obama (Mr. B. Obama is an addressee). Below are given two contextual instances of the above cliched (stereotyped) model:

#### Example 1.

"Early **Obama Letter** Confirms Inability to Write August 29, 2011 By Jack Cashill

On November 16, 1990, Barack Obama, then president of the Harvard Law Review, published a **letter** in the Harvard Law Record, an independent Harvard Law School newspaper, championing affirmative action".

([http://www.cashill.com/intellect\\_fraud/early\\_obama\\_letter.htm](http://www.cashill.com/intellect_fraud/early_obama_letter.htm)).

#### Example 2.

CBS NEWS May 30, 2013, 7:19 PM

"**Obama letter** possibly laced with ricin similar to contaminated Bloomberg letters ...". Secret Service says: "A letter addressed to President Obama that may have been contaminated with the deadly toxin ricin is similar to two ricin-laced letters recently sent to New York City" (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-letter-possibly-laced-with-ricin-similar-to-contaminated-bloomberg-letters-secret-service-says/>).

In Modern English, such onomasiological bases as **story**, **saga** and **case** form a large number of publicistic (social-political) cliched models of WCs: **bribery story**; **bribery case**; **adulteration saga** (a story about an adulteration of vegetable oil); **milk adulteration saga**; **oil adulteration saga** (a story of an adulteration of petroleum products); **fraud saga**; **success story**; **amalgamation saga**. Here are some contextual examples:

#### Example 3.

"**The Bush Family Saga**: George Jr.'s specialty was **insurance and security fraud**. Jeb's specialty was **oil and gas fraud**. Neil's specialty was **real estate fraud**. Prescott's specialty was **banking fraud**" (<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article3308.htm>).

#### Example 4.

On The Otedola/Lawan **Bribery Saga** And Their Recorded Conversations By Festus Keyamo: "From the various reports, Press releases and statements made **by all the actors involved in this saga**, certain undisputable facts have emerged: (1) *There was definite communication between Farouk Lawan and Femi Otedola (both by telephone and face-to-face) in respect of the offer and acceptance of bribe money concerning the investigation by the House Committee probing the fuel subsidy scam...* (9) *The bribe money that is the all-important evidence to "nail" Otedola cannot be produced by Farouk Lawan now despite repeated demands by the Police...*" (<http://saharareporters.com/2012/07/04/otedolalawan-bribery-saga-and-their-recorded-conversations-festus-keyamo>).

#### Example 5.

"The East Asian **success story** cannot be a model for other developing countries. On the one hand there are too many differences between East Asia and other developing regions to copy one to one the East Asian miracle. For example, Latin America tries to foster development with import substitution programs (Quelle). By contrast East Asian economies try to foster economic growth by export

oriented programs. The implemented policies in East Asia could have helped to improve development. ". (<http://www.ukessays.com/essays/economics/the-success-story-in-east-asia-economics-essay.php#ixzz3qxqCXUX>).

#### Example 6.

The commercial narrates the **success story** of Narda Capuyan. A family planning nurse who became a successful exporter & entrepreneur: "In my recent trip to Baguio, I took some time to visit her shop in La Trinidad, Benguet. This was where it all began almost 40 years ago, in the 70's. Back then, weaving blankets and recycling acrylic yarns were just a pastime for her. Little did she know that her hobby will soon become the backbone of her business... The strategy worked well and soon enough, her side-line became a full-time business and her women started weaving more than just blankets but also bedspreads, draperies and upholstery fabrics... Narda's business slowly flourished". (<http://fitzvillafuerte.com/the-success-story-of-narda-capuyan.html>).

#### Some typical models of cliched (stereotyped) English WCs with substantive bases

The term **cliche** itself (a stereotyped expression) (French cliché; German Klischee, feste Wendung) is ambiguously interpreted in Russian and foreign linguistics. For example, according to W. L. Chafe, clichés may be semantically referred to situations in which their intrinsic meanings are actualised. He pointed out to such a role of a cliché as an indicator or marker of a situation. O. S. Akhmanova defines a cliché as "a stamp". Some scientists, for instance I. R. Galperin, refer clichés (as linguistic units) to stereotyped fixed phrases, hackneyed and trite. The researchers D. Crystal and E. A. Partridge interpret the notion of 'cliche' as "a frequently used stereotyped phrase" [1, 2, 3]

As a result of our study of English cliched WCs which are especially widely used in social and political essays, we single out several tentative models of them as follows:

**Model 1:** the modifier denotes an individual/individuals/an organisation/a country, whereas the basis signifies a product or an event of their activity: **Merkel message; France move; Iran move; UNO decision; UNESCO project; China proposals; England plea, police conference; Teachers Forum**, etc.

**Model 2:** the modifier designates an assembly of persons with identical professional affiliation, whereas the basis signifies a form of their grouping into associations, unions, etc.: **Welders Association; Teachers Union; Builders Association**, etc.

**Model 3:** the basis denotes an assembly of affiliated persons, whereas the modifier signifies objects of their activity: **technical recommendation group; advice group; strategic decisions group; district operations team; land operations group**, etc.

**Model 4:** the modifier designates an assembly of objects as inventory items or stock-keeping units, whereas the basis denotes their depository: **bargain books section; book(s) section; new book(s) section; foodsuffs section; tractor section; ploughs station; tractors line; car line; strategic weapons system; standards system; acts summary; achievement record; publication list**, etc.

**Model 5:** the modifier designates a geographical or administrative object, while the basis signifies an assembly of persons associated with it: **France team; London group; Belgium government**, etc.

**Model 6:** the modifier denotes a company/an organisation, whereas the basis signifies products of its activity: **Mercedes-Benz items; Google product; Google books**; etc.

**Model 7:** the modifier expresses some phenomenon or happening, while the basis specifies a certain narrative: **success story** (story-as-narrative); **adulteration saga; fraud story; amalgamation story; amalgamation saga; adulteration story; bribery case** (case-as-narrative), etc.

**Model 8:** the modifier designates a certain phenomenon or happening, whereas the basis denotes its manifestation (the constituents of this model are the same as in Model 7): **success story** (story-as-event); **fraud saga; amalgamation story; amalgamation saga; bribery case; fraud case** (case-as-event), etc.

**Model 9:** the basis denotes a certain arrangement or public event, whereas the modifier designates its subject-matter: **connected car conference; tractor(s) forum; Google product forum**, etc.

In connection with the afore-said, a question arises whether there exists a general and unified semantic meaning at the bottom of the given stereotyped models. Based on our investigation, it may be preliminarily assumed that the existence of such a unified and generalised semantic foundation is of low probability, but it is possible to define three basic models: 1. an organisation/a country (basis) and a product of its activity (modifier): **court decision, Microsoft product, France team**; 2) an object as a depository/an assembly (basis) and its inventory units or constituents (modifier): **book(s) section, Agricultural Engineers Association; Welders Union**; 3. an object as a narrative (basis) and an associated event (modifier): **success story, adulteration saga, bribery case**.

The WCs analysed by us are compacted nominative language units, i. e. compactives, which makes it possible to express analogous extended predicate constructions in the "convoluted" form. They actually contain implicit actantial chains of the S-V-O type. Due to this, in some instances the property of their compactness and convolution brings about factors of uncertainty and requires the application of some transformation procedures in the process of their "decoding". In this case, it is necessary to consider their contextual manifestations. On the one hand, models of stereotyped WCs are effective compact units of nomination, widely functioning in the social-political sphere of the English language, on the other hand, their syntagmatic convolution contributes to their dependence on a context, as in the case of the two homonymous WCs **Obama<sup>1</sup> letter<sup>1</sup>** (a letter compiled by Mr. Obama) and **Obama<sup>1</sup> letter<sup>2</sup>** (a letter addressed to Mr. Obama).

We refer English WCs built on the basis of Determination II to quasi-composites, because they represent term-like analogues of rather bulky syntagms containing prepositional or participial links: **books section versus section of books, adulteration saga versus saga of adulteration/saga devoted to adulteration; strategic decisions group versus group for strategic decisions** etc.

Sometimes, it is necessary to apply a procedure of deconvoluting a convoluted WC structure into an extended predicate syntagm while "decoding" homonymous WCs with substantive bases in various contexts. For instance, it is theoretically possible to use the following transforms with respect to the WC **France team**:

1. →a France-based team FUNCTIONING IN France; 2. →a team ORIGINATES FROM France and FUNCTIONS elsewhere; 3. →a France-based or foreign team STUDIES France; 4. →a France-based or foreign team IS BOUND TO France as its destination.

The present article is aimed at determining the specificity of some types of English compactive word combinations, or compactives. We endeavour to base our analysis on several propositions of glossematics, particularly those concerning functions between abstract entities called functives. Considering a function, L. T. Elmslev and his associates and followers meant an interrelation alone, void of any semantic filling. The theory of glossematics was criticised for too general a character of its basic notions. Nevertheless, we believe that some of its explications may be useful and instrumental for

carrying out a semantic analysis of modifier-to-basis interrelations in the structure of English stereotyped WCs with substantive bases.

#### Conclusions

1. A number of models of stereotyped WCs are widely used in Modern English. They are characterised both by their recurrence and compactness. In particular, they enable authors of social-political essays to avoid using bulky WCs containing prepositional or participial groups.

2. The application of transformational procedures in the interpretation of English WCs makes it possible to determine the semantic status of inter-component relationships within their structure, as well as to "decode" homonymous WCs.

3. The use of certain propositions of glossematics while studying inter-component relations in the structure of English stereotyped WCs seems to be promising (for example, L. T. Elmslev's three types of 'function' as an interdependence between two constants; a constant and a variable; two variables, as well as his theory of functives). This promotes establishing a theoretical basis for the empirical study of such WCs.

4. The tentative classification of models of stereotyped WCs, presented in this paper, is subject to further verification and validation.

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