



Title	On the Extension of Copulative Perception Verb Constructions
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Citation	言語文化共同研究プロジェクト. 2021, 2020, p. 61-70
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/84984
rights	
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On the Extension of Copulative Perception Verb Constructions *

ITAGAKI Hiromasa †

1. Introduction

This paper discusses peripheral copula-like instances in present-day English, as exemplified in (1) below, aiming to investigate the motivations given rise to in these novel instances.¹

- (1) a. The reefs were healthy, I was told, the cigars cheap and the rum drinks delicious.
(NOW Corpus: *Huffington Post Canada*)
- b. They [i.e., = trousers] are most likely made of a fine Sea Island cotton, which is soft, lightweight and comfortable in the heat. The alternative would be silk, which wears warm and is avoided on hot summer nights. (iWeb)
- c. On the plus side, the bed sleeps cool and provides the just-right firmness to support you on your side or back. (NOW Corpus: *Nunatsiq News*)

The underlined phrases in (1) represent evaluations of the grammatical subject. The above sentences are idiosyncratic, in that they consider the logical object occurring in the grammatical subject and an adjectival complement. The sentence in (1a) includes *the rum*, which is normally construed as the theme of drinking, as the grammatical subject and includes *delicious* as an adjectival complement only after the verb *drink*, although this verb is usually used as a transitive verb. Therefore, these sentences seem to deviate from ordinal English grammar because they represent an evaluation, despite the use of an action verb, and can rarely be found in the web corpora. As such, this paper examines the motivations for sanctioning the sentences in (1).

While the examples mentioned above sound awkward to some extent, such creative uses are tolerated when associated with certain constructions. Especially, this paper argues that the motivations of novel sentences involve well-established perceptual constructions, which Taniguchi (1997) defines as copulative perception verb constructions (hereafter, **CPV constructions**), as in the sentence in (2).

- (2) John looks happy. (Taniguchi 1997: 270)

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I briefly review previous studies on CPV constructions and the creative uses associated with this construction. Section 3 identifies creative uses and classifies them into three types. Section 4 investigates the motivation for novel uses from a Cognitive Construction Grammar perspective. The final section concludes this study.

* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP19K23062.

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¹ All underling was done by the author.

2. Previous Studies

2.1. CPV constructions

This section reviews previous studies on CPV constructions and their extended use. The CPV construction is displayed by the sentences as in (3).

- (3) a. John looks happy. (Taniguchi 1997: 270)
 b. This cake tastes good. (ibid: 271)

The CPV constructions presented in (3) are generally composed of three elements; a subject noun phrase (NP), a perception verb, and an adjectival complement. They are of the copula type in nature: a copula sentence is a configuration that contains a functionally attenuated verb, followed by a complement denoting some property of the subject NP (Taniguchi 1997: 271). The characteristics of these constructions are commonly recognized in the literature. First, adjectival complements are obligatory with CPV constructions (Rogers 1974; Taniguchi 1997). It is no surprise that the sentences in (4) are ungrammatical, as they lack complements.

- (4) a. * He looks. (Taniguchi 1997: 272)
 b. * That sounds. (ibid.)

The second property of CPV constructions is that, although they are not used in the passive voice, the grammatical subject has the role of a perceptual object, similar to a seemingly logical object, not a perceptual experiencer (Rogers 1974; Taniguchi 1997; Nakamura 2012). *John* in (3a), for example, is not the visual experiencer but the person looked at.

Finally, CPV constructions connote an implicit experiencer who can be marked by a *to* prepositional phrase as in (5). As shown in (5), the implicit experiencer is interpreted as either the speaker (*to me*) or a generic individual (*to everyone*).

- (5) a. This cake tastes good to me. (Taniguchi 1997: 272)
 b. John looks happy to everyone. (ibid: 273)

The existence of a perceptual experiencer in a CPV construction is indeterminate as to how it should be realized. Further, the experiencer cannot appear as a grammatical subject because the construction may not undertake passivization, as illustrated in (6). Furthermore, unlike a passivized sentence, the perceiver cannot be coded as a *by* prepositional phrase, as in the sentence (7).

- (6) * I was tasted delicious to (by the pea soup). (Levin 1993: 188)
 (7) * Mary looks beautiful by John. (Nakamura 2012: 113)

2.2. Creative uses of CPV constructions

Several previous studies have pointed out the creative sentences in question. For example, Horton (1996) observes that sentences such as a “quasi-copula” have a more complicated semantic structure, as presented in (8).

- (8) a. The meat cuts tough. (Horton 1996: 329)
 b. The cake eats short and crisp. (ibid.)

According to Horton (1996), in these sentences, the verbs imply a causative agent who performs the verbal action. The subject participants in (8) are semantically the objects/patients of the events. Therefore, the sentence in (8a), for instance, can be paraphrased with using a transitive pattern such as *the meat is tough when someone cuts it*. However, Horton (1996) only indicates that the sentences are contained in a copulative structure as a prototype category (cf. Lakoff 1987), but does not mention the motivation for this occurrence.

Taniguchi (1997) further proposes that these sentences are brought about by means of extensions of CPV constructions, as they present an evaluation of a subject referent through his/her action, regardless of the perceptual experience. The sentences in (8) share grammatical characters of a CPV construction, in that their subject is semantically the theme of the denoted events and they commonly connote an implicit experiencer or agent. Although these expressions have not been fully established because they are distinctly odd, her observation gives an insight into the motivation of these novel sentences from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

Suzuki (2019) names the sentences “R(ead)-type” and demonstrates their grammatical behavior. Let me consider the following sentences:

- (9) a. That article reads naïve these days. (Suzuki 2019: 188)
 b. It drinks smooth and elegant despite its serious power. (ibid: 191)

Being parallel to the sentences in (1) and (8), the sentences in (9) are composed of a logical object, *that article* or *it*, as the grammatical subject and an action verb accompanied by an adjectival complement. They also represent the evaluation of patients of the events. Suzuki (2019) indicates that R-type sentences cannot appear in a progressive form, as in (10), since they mainly focus on attributive evaluations independent of the temporal aspect.

- (10) * It was eating salty. (Suzuki 2019: 192)

These expressions appear to be similar to the middle construction, such as *this book reads easily*. However, according to Suzuki (2019), prototypical middles convey the possibility or ability to carry out the action denoted by the verb phrase, whereas R-type expressions focus on subjective evaluation. Therefore, a sentence like (11b) is best paraphrased with a sentence referring to the content of this book, not a sentence depicting the action relevant to *this book*.

- (11) a. This book reads easily. ⇒ Reading this book is easy. (Suzuki 2019: 193)
 b. This book reads arrogant. ⇒ This book is arrogant.
 ≠ Reading this book is arrogant. (ibid.)

3. Observations

This section analyzes the expressions in question, using evidence from corpus data. The corpora used in this study are mainly the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Additionally, this study also uses data sourced from web corpora. Specifically, I use the News on the Web Corpus (NOW corpus), which contains 8.1 billion words from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010 to the present, and the iWeb corpus, which contains 14 billion words in 22 million web pages.

It is observed in this section that the expressions can be classified into the following three types: coordination, verbal extension, and constructional extension types.

3.1. Coordination patterns

The first type is represented by the sentences in (12), which are exploited in actual usage events.

- (12) a. The comfortable new canvas fabric looks good and wears tough. (iWeb)
 b. Horizon looks, sounds and plays wonderful. The presentation I saw at Gamescom was nothing new but it looks so good and polished. (iWeb)
 c. The bike looks and handles great. (iWeb)
 d. I really love this hoodie and think it feels and fits great! (iWeb)
 e. I really love that little green guitar. It sounds and plays great. (iWeb)

The sentences in (12) have patient in the subject position and an adjectival complement, despite including an action verb. The point is that the perception verb instantiating the CPV construction occurs in this sentence before the action verb. These perception verbs enable the action verb to be used

to depict the somesthetic evaluation that the CPV construction typically describes.² That is, the action verb that cannot be acceptable in nature can appear with the adjectival complement with reference to the syntactic configuration of the CPV construction. Bybee (2013: 59) reports that the features of the forms in existing constructions or lexical items may influence the novel use of the items in a lexical slot. Similarly, the sentences in (12) should be tolerated with the support of the linguistic knowledge invoked by the CPV construction.

3.2. Analogical extension of a perception verb

There are a few instances in which action verbs of this sort function as quasi-copulas even without cooccurrence with a CPV construction, as shown in (13).

- (13) a. The reefs were healthy, I was told, the cigars cheap and the rum drinks delicious.
(NOW Corpus: *Huffington Post Canada*)
- b. They [i.e., = trousers] are most likely made of a fine Sea Island cotton, which is soft, lightweight and comfortable in the heat. The alternative would be silk, which wears warm and is avoided on hot summer nights. (iWeb)
- c. The dress is great. The quality is excellent. The fabric chiffon touches soft. (iWeb)

In these cases, the subject referent in (13a), *the rum*, semantically corresponds to the object of the drinking activity, *silk* in (13b) corresponds to the object of wearing, and *the fabric* in (13c) is the object of touching. These sentences can be used mainly because an analogical extension from the perception verbs instantiating the CPV construction applies to the verbs that evoke a sensory modality, such as gustatory sense or tactual sense. This analysis has also been carried out by Suzuki (2019), who argues that sentences like (14) result from the verbal extension of making direct use of the perception verb occurring in the CPV construction. Namely, these expressions come into existence by virtue of the analogical extension of the sensory modality from the perception verb of the CPV construction, such as *taste* or *feel*, into verbs such as *eat* or *drink*.

- (14) a. The cake eats short and crisp. (Horton 1996: 329)
- b. It drinks smooth and elegant despite its serious power. (Suzuki 2019: 191)

² As for the sentence (12e), the alternative phrase *play(s) and sound(s) great* is used almost as frequently as the phrase *sound(s) and play(s) great*, as exemplified in (i) below. The iWeb Corpus scored 24 hits for the collocation *play(s) and sound(s) great* and 21 hits for *sound(s) and play(s) great*.

(i) Just a fantastic instrument, Chris. I don't own one red guitar. But I'd hit that in a second. And I'm sure it plays and sounds great. (iWeb)

This is ascribed to events following order of time when we can identify a better tone quality of the instrument only after we try to play it.

Notice that the sentences in (13) or (14) are not entirely well-formed, being judged as “slightly well-formed” by my informants. Taniguchi (1997: 295) also states that native speakers reported that creative uses, including (14a), are distinctly odd. Moreover, Taniguchi (1997) reports that the sentence in (15) is almost unacceptable in current English. These expressions are hardly seen in the corpora.

- (15) *? This table touches hard. (Taniguchi 1997: 295)

The unacceptability of these novel expressions may be related to a process of statistical preemption. Statistical preemption, as proposed by Goldberg (2016), is a particular type of indirect negative evidence that plays an important role in avoiding unacceptable sentences. According to Goldberg (2016: 377), when speakers recognize that a repeatedly encountering formulation B is the appropriate form in a context, they implicitly learn that a semantically and pragmatically related alternative formulation A is not appropriate in this context. The situations observed in sentences like (13) to (15) can be accounted for by statistical preemption. That is, the well-established CPV construction may be preempted over the copulative use of *eat* or *drink* as an alternative formulation and, as a result, these sentences are blocked by the CPV construction.

3.3. The patterns of *sleep*

Finally, in the following expressions, the verb *sleep* occurs with the adjective, mainly referring to temperature, such as *cool* or *warm*:

- (16) a. On the plus side, the bed sleeps cool and provides the just-right firmness to support you on your side or back. (NOW Corpus: *Nunatsiaq News*)
 b. The North Face’s Beeline 900, which packs small and sleeps warm thanks to plenty of 900-fill-power down. (COCA, MAG)

Sentences of this sort are somewhat different from the expressions including verbs such as *eat* or *drink*: the verb *sleep* does not display sensory modality. Interestingly, [NP_{SUBJ} *sleep* ADJ_{COMP}] patterns can be relatively easily found in web corpora. For instance, the iWeb search for string [NP_{SUBJ} *sleep* ADJ_{COMP}] returned 27 hits. Therefore, the sentences should be motivated in a different way from the appearance in the sentences in (13) to (15). The next section will analyze the *sleep* patterns from a cognitive construction grammar point of view.

4. Discussion

4.1. Cognitive Construction Grammar

This paper draws on one of the cognitive linguistics approaches; **COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTION**

GRAMMAR APPROACH. The main idea is that the speaker’s language knowledge can be modeled as knowledge of constructions (Hilpert 2014: 22). Constructions are defined as pairings of form and meaning that do not only include idiosyncratic functions but also morphological or phonological properties and the pragmatic or contextual dimensions in which a particular utterance is found (Croft and Cruse 2004; Goldberg 2006; Hilpert 2014). Constructionists, thus, argue that constructions are crucial to a description of language.³

The cognitive construction grammar approach, which is used by linguists to analyze expressions in terms of human cognitive apparatuses such as perception, memory, abstraction, or attention, focuses on the categorical networks between constructions, such as family resemblances or categorization among constructions (Goldberg 2006). A categorical network can account for the motivation of innovative expressions as extensions. This theory posits that language creativity and extensions are realized to the extent that we are able to recognize a novel expression as pertaining to an existing construction. Our recognition of the extension relies on some similarity between the unfamiliar expression and the conventionalized construction (Langacker 2008). Therefore, this approach allows us to motivate the patterns of *sleep* discussed in the previous section with reference to knowledge on well-established constructions.

4.2. The patterns of *sleep* revisited

This section offers a cognitive construction grammar analysis for the innovative instances of the patterns of *sleep*. Before that, I investigate the semantic structure of these patterns.

Typical examples represent a comfortable temperature, like *warm* or *cool*, as in (17).

- (17) a. In other words, some sleepers could find that this mattress sleeps warm if they find themselves sinking in deeply. (iWeb)
 b. The bed sleeps cool for a memory foam mattress. (iWeb)
 c. During my sleep test the Endy mattress slept cool, on par with the average cooling I’ve experienced on most other foam mattresses I’ve tested. (iWeb)
 d. This bed works well at alleviating pressure points and reducing motion isolation. Also, since it uses gel memory foam, it sleeps cooler than the traditional version. (Google⁴)

The sentences in (17) commonly designate a sleeper’s feeling regarding temperature during his/her sleep. That is, the adjectives *warm* or *cool*, modify the condition of the implied experiencer, as

³ This explanation implies that all description levels are understood to involve constructions, including morphemes, words, idioms, partially lexically filled phrasal patterns, and fully general ones (Goldberg 2006). In this sense, our total knowledge of a language can be captured by a network of constructions, that is, a CONSTRUCT-I-CON (Goldberg 2006; Hilpert 2014), which is the product of generalization across usage events.

⁴ <https://www.mybestmattress.com/novaform-mattress-reviews>

well as the subject referent. The sentence (17a), for example, can be paraphrased as: *if we sleep on this mattress, it will be warm and we will become warm*, and the sentence (17b) means *if I sleep on the bed, it will be cool and make me cool*. This pattern need not be accompanied with the adjectives. In effect, there are a few instances for this pattern which directly indicate the comfortable condition, as exemplified in the sentences in (18) and (19).

- (18) I waited three months to review the mattress and I could not be happier. The mattress sleeps very cool and comfortable. After the first 30 days of sleeping on the mattress, I went on vacation and spent the next two weeks sleeping on a series of different mattress. What a difference when I returned back to my Purple mattress! (NOW Corpus: *Buzzfeed*)
- (19) a. We stayed for one night and it was great. The room was clean and beds slept great. They have a continental breakfast and it was busy!! (iWeb)
 b. The mattress sleeps comfortable especially for side sleepers, however stomach or back sleepers may want to choose the Firm model. (Google⁵)
 c. Just like other memory foam mattresses, this mattress sleeps comfortable with limited motion delivery. (Google⁶)

Although this pattern fundamentally stands for the comfortable state of a sleeper on a bed or mattress, it can refer to the bedding's property, which makes him/her uncomfortable, as shown in (20).

- (20) a. About 8% of owners report that their bed sleeps hot enough to be uncomfortable. (iWeb)
 b. My mattress sleeps uncomfortable, my back completely misaligned each night. (Google⁷)

Note that the adjectival complements appearing in (18) to (20) also designate the sleeper's feeling, as well as the subject referent. Thus, these sentences can be categorized as an instantiation from a new form-meaning pairing, that is, a construction as in (21). The conceptualizer in this pattern is also involved in the situation.

- (21) *Sleep* patterns as a construction:
 SYNTAX: NP_{SUBJ} – *sleep* – ADJ_{COMP}
 SEMANTICS: NP_{SUBJ} feels ADJ_{COMP} and makes someone (mainly, the conceptualizer) ADJ_{COMP} as s/he sleeps on it.

The semantic structure involving the existence of the implicit conceptualizer advances a

⁵ <https://www.memoryfoamtalk.com/reviews/cocoon-mattress-review/>

⁶ <https://besthomeshoppingreviews.com/high-rated-memory-foam-mattress/>

⁷ <https://okaydonkeymag.com/2019/09/09/serpentarium-by-clara-bush-valada/>

suggestion that these sentences are subjectively construed. On the cognitive linguistic theory, in which one of the fundamental claims is that it is very important to adopt a conceptualizer to construe a situation in linguistic semantics, subjectivity is the degree to which the role or existence of the conceptualizer occupies a designated situation (Langacker 1987). It can be said that the *sleep* patterns are also depicted in a highly subjective status of construal.

Why does subjective construal play a key role in the semantics of the *sleep* pattern? This question can be answered by arguing that this pattern extends from the CPV construction. As mentioned above, subjectivity is the degree to which the role or existence of the conceptualizer conforms to a designated situation. Employing Langacker's (1987) cognitive theory of subjectivity, many cognitive linguists observe that the CPV construction is highly subjective in the cognitive apparatus discussions on "subjectification" (Gisborne and Holmes 2007; Taniguchi 1997; Whitt 2011). They thus conclude that the CPV construction is subjectively construed in that the implied experiencer, namely the conceptualizer is strongly involved in the denoted situation although he/she is not literally encoded.

What is important here is that the *sleep* patterns represented in (21) share functional characteristics with the CPV constructions, such as the subjective status of construal, as well as the syntactic configuration of [NP – V – ADJ]. Therefore, this constructional pattern sanctioning the novel expressions in (17) to (20), can be once again analyzed as extended from a CPV construction.

My argument is supported by the evidence in (22) to (23) that the patterns of *sleep* can occur with the experiencer in a *to* prepositional phrase just like in the CPV construction in (5); moreover, the sentences in (23) portray the actual experience of the speaker in the past.

(22) This mattress sleeps cool to us, never [I] woke up hot and ... (comment on Amazon.com⁸)

(23) a. Everyone says it sleeps cool but it slept warm to me. (Google⁹)

b. These actually slept cool to us but both were way too firm and [got] the smell, weeks later wouldn't go away. (Google¹⁰)

5. Conclusions

This paper has examined the motivations of peripheral copula-like instances in which the grammatical subject requires a logical object accompanied by an adjectival complement. These examples sound awkward to native speakers to some extent. However, it has been observed that such creative uses are tolerated when associated with CPV constructions. Moreover, I have demonstrated that they are produced not just by the analogical extension of verb meaning, but also with reference to the semantics of schematic CPV constructions, in which the conceptualizer is strongly involved in the denoted situation.

⁸ <https://www.amazon.com/Inch-Pillow-Memory-Foam-Mattress/product-reviews/B00I4HJ9QC>

⁹ https://www.reddit.com/r/Mattress/comments/j6br84/idle_latex_mattress_3_weeks_later/

¹⁰ https://www.reddit.com/r/Mattress/comments/h8bfov/please_help_me_out_of_revolving_bib/

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