

Non-Isomorphic Mapping between Form and Function in English: A Constraint-based Perspective*

Jong-Bok Kim (Kyung Hee University)

Jong-Bok Kim. 2012. Non-Isomorphic Mapping between Form and Function in English: A Constraint-based Perspective. *Studies in Modern Grammar* 68, 91-112. Mismatch or non-isomorphic mapping between form and function is prevalent in natural languages. English is no exception in this respect. It displays various instances of mismatch phenomena that can be classified into two main groups: complexity and content mismatch. This paper discusses several instances of these two types of mismatch in English and sketches how the lexicalist grammar with parallel architecture can license such non-isomorphic relations or no direct correspondences between form and meaning.

[Key words: extraposition, raising, binominal, complexity mismatch, content mismatch, incongruity, form and function]

1. Introduction

It is often observed that form-function mapping in natural languages can be ‘incongruent’ with respect to more general patterns of correspondence in the language. Mismatch or incongruity between form and function is sometimes unavoidable in language communication as in evolutionary biology where organisms encounter suboptimal and mismatching cases to the existent environment or to the existent generalizations (cf. Francis and

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Michaelis 2003).

There are at least two main types of mismatch (cf. Francis and Michaelis 2003): complexity and content mismatch. Complexity mismatch involves a discrepancy in the number of elements involved at different levels of representation. Consider the following two examples (cf. Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Kim 2005, Kim and Sag 2005):

- (1) a. Extraposition: It seems that he likes English.
- b. Idiom: The police kept tabs on the suspect.

In (1a), the matrix subject *it* has no semantic contribution but syntactically functions as the subject as attested from the subject-verb agreement or tag question in *It seems that he likes English, doesn't it?* In a similar manner, *tabs* in (1b) is in the object position, but does not behave as a semantic argument of the verb *kept*. That is, the idiomatic expression *keep tabs on* as a whole maps onto one semantic predicate like *monitor*. As such, we have more word-level elements in syntax than the number of semantic expressions.

Meanwhile, content mismatch involves an incongruous mapping in the content of items between two different levels of representation. Consider the following:

- (2) a. John is a good student.
- b. John is in.

Both of these examples include category mismatches. In (2a), the NP *a good student* functions as a predicate, even though the canonical function of an NP is denoting an individual. In a similar sense, the preposition *in* in (2b) corresponds not to a simple location indicator but to a semantic predicate, canonically represented by an AP or VP.

There have been two main, different perspectives in dealing with these types of linguistic mismatch or non-correspondence. The first one is