[SBJ CAUSED_CONTACT_VERB OBJ with OBL]

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18. [SBJ CAUSED_CONTACT_VERB OBJ *with* OBL]

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Verbs of caused contact – Levin's (1993) classes 18 (Contact by Impact, except subclass 18.4, Non-Agentive Verbs of Contact by Impact), 19 (*Poke*) and 20 (Contact) – prototypically occur in the [SBJ VERB OBJ *with* OBL] argument structure construction (ASC): 'Paula swatted the fly with a dishcloth.' In this note, I argue that this represents a force-dynamic image schema of a person causing the application of force to a physical object via another physical object, or Apply Force for short. The Apply Force construction has three participants. It should be distinguished from the [SBJ VERB *with* OBL] ASC in 'The car collided with the truck/the wall', which also involves forceful contact. The latter ASC instantiates a 'semi-symmetrical' force dynamics: it is sometimes but not always paraphrasable with a conjoined argument ('The car and the truck collided' but *'The car and the wall collided').

Talmy's (1988) model of force dynamics enumerates possible relationships between an Agonist, often realized as Direct Object, and an Antagonist, often realized as Subject. Talmy contrasts a force-dynamic interaction in which the Agonist unsuccessfully resists the Antagonist (e.g. going from stasis to change) and one in which the Agonist successfully resist (e.g. remaining in stasis). The Apply Force force dynamics appears to be an example of the latter, contrast with physical caused change of state (COS) verbs in which the Antagonist brings about a change of state in the Agonist. In fact, however, it appears that the best description of the Apply Force ASC meaning is that it does not entail either stasis or change in the Agonist: Paula can swat the fly with the dishcloth, and either the fly dies or flies off if the impact is not

forceful enough; the ASC does not specify the outcome for the Agonist. I am not aware of any language in which a change of state outcome is entailed by one ASC and absence of a change of state is entailed by another ASC.

For this reason, I would suggest that in a sentence such as 'She broke the block of ice with a hammer', the semantics contributed by the Apply Force ASC does not entail a change of state for the block of ice. Instead, the change of state is contributed by the fact that *break* is a result verb (Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2010). Of course, a COS ASC, with a result phrase, does entail a change of state: 'She broke the block of ice into three pieces.' Interestingly, the Apply Force and COS ASCs may be combined (blended, unified, depending on one's theory): 'She broke the block of ice into three pieces with a hammer.' If so, then we must allow for ASCs to be combined if their semantic construals of the event are consistent with each other.

Notes

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References

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