

# Explaining locative alternations in terms of frequency of use: A corpus-based diachronic approach to English *spray/load*-alternations

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In accounting for cross-linguistic trends in the coding of causal-noncausal verb pairs, such as *break* (tr.)/*break* (intr.), Haspelmath et al. (2014) proposed, and provided corpus-based support for, an explanation in terms of usage frequency: In a causative verb pair, the causal member will be rarer than the noncausal member, while in an anticausative verb pair, the causal member will be more frequent than the noncausal member, Prediction 1, (hereafter P1). However, this explanation cannot be applied to English causal-noncausal verb pairs. Since English mostly uses the same verb form for the causal and noncausal verb use, the explanation does not follow the *form–frequency correspondence principle* (i.e., Languages tend to use less coding material for more frequent expressions, hereafter FFCP) that P1 is based upon. In Inoue (2022) I argue, by using causative-affixed verbs, that for a linguistic pair there is a strong correlation in terms of frequency between *form* and *earlier occurrence* and therefore, in place of the FFCP and P1, I propose the *earlier occurrence – frequency correspondence principle* (hereafter EOFCP) and the *prediction-for-causal-noncausal alternations* (hereafter PFCNA) based on EOFCP.

This study aims to test the above-mentioned proposal about a class of causal-noncausal verb alternations by applying it with necessary changes to another class of verb alternations. In this presentation the test is directed to the explanation of English locative alternating verb pairs, of the *spray/load* type.

Among verbs listed in Levin (1993) under the class of ‘*spray/load* alternations,’ 49-alternating verb pairs are found. What characterizes this class of verbs is that either ‘locatum’ or ‘location’ is permitted as its direct object, as shown below:

- (1) a. X sprayed/loaded A on(to)/over/under/... B. (locative variant)  
b. X sprayed/loaded B with A. (*with* variant)

Among the 49 pairs, after excluding the verbs whose initial attestation is uncertain and whose total number of occurrences is less than 15, approximately 40 remain. For decisions concerning the initial attestation of each use and its frequency, I mainly appeal to the *OED online* and the *BNC*, respectively, with historical corpora as tools to supplement the weaknesses of both tools.

Preliminary results suggest that since the verb form is the same in both variants the EOFCP is applicable as in the case of causal-noncausal verb pairs. However, for the prediction applied to these verb pairs, the PFCNA should be changed to the prediction-for-locative alternations (PFLA), as follows: In a locative alternating verb pair, if the initial occurrence of a locative variant member is attested earlier than the *with* variant counterpart, the *with* variant member will be rarer than the other counterpart, while if the initial occurrence of the *with* variant member is attested earlier than the locative variant counterpart, the *with* variant will be more frequent than the other counterpart.

Based on the results of a pilot survey, it is expected that the matching rate of PFLA for the approximately 40 verb pairs will amount to around 65%.

## References

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