

Abstract

The present thesis deals with noun valency, its relation to reference, and factors underlying the realization of the valency potential of nouns. The theoretical part examines valency in general, delineating the basic terminology and concepts usually employed in the descriptions of valency couched within various linguistic frameworks. The theoretical part subsequently focuses more specifically on the valency of nouns, pointing out in what ways it differs from the valency of verbs. The support verb construction is introduced, and it is explained why the construction is not examined in the present thesis. Two interfaces are introduced, viz. that of valency and word-formation, and that of valency and reference, or contextual boundness.

The empirical part of the thesis is divided into several parts, all relying on data from the British National Corpus. The quantitative part of the analysis shows that the nouns *attempt* and *ability* obligatorily take an explicit complement when they are immediately preceded by an indefinite article marking their newness in discourse. This could possibly challenge both the widespread claim that the expression of the valency potential of a noun is never obligatory and the claim that (these) nouns are aivalent. The qualitative part of the analysis examines the expression of the first argument of the nouns *attempt*, *ability*, and *failure*, but also the cases in which the first argument is not expressed explicitly. Subsequently, the analysis attempts to identify factors affecting the choice of an *at*-prepositional phrase or an infinitival clause as the complement expressing the second argument of these nouns; various possibilities are considered, including morphosyntactic and semantic as well as contextual factors.

key words: noun valency; noun phrase; definiteness; reference; syntax and semantics