Examining competition in sentential complementation, with evidence from large electronic corpora

Juhani Rudanko, Department of English, University of Tampere, Finland

Consider sentence (1):

(1)   … perhaps it were better not to force her into accepting me, … (1813, CLMETEV, Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)

In sentence (1) the preposition *into,* followed by an *-ing* clause, is syntactically selected by the matrix verb *force,* and the verb also syntactically selects a direct object, realized by the NP *her,* and the pattern in question may be termed the transitive *into -ing* pattern. The pattern of (1) is one of object control, and it is argued on the basis of a set of data from the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, Extended Version, that the pattern represents a construction in the sense of Adele Goldberg's work.

In order to shed further light on the position of the construction within the system of English predicate complementation, it is compared with a competing pattern of object control, the transitive *to* infinitive pattern. Sometimes entailment properties may be invoked to separate the two, as for instance with the verb *coax*, as in *... they coaxed Dona Carmen into leaving the Moncloe palace ...* (BNC, A5M), as contrasted with *They coaxed Dona Carmen to leave the Moncloe palace.* However, comparing sentence (1) above with *It were better not to force her to accept me,* it is suggested that, for instance in the case of the verb *force*, there is also a need to look for a more subtle distinction to separate the two competing patterns. Additional authentic data involving matrix verbs that select both types of sentential complement in the BNC and in the more recent Corpus of Corpus of Contemporary American English COCA are considered, in order to identify the conceptualizations expressed by each construction in present-day English. Overall, the paper illustrates an application of the corpus-based method in the study of subcategorization in current English.