

# FACTORS RESTRICTING THE INTERCHANGEABILITY OF LEXICAL CONVERSES IN THE SENTENCE

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## Introduction

The paper continues the study of the functioning of lexical converses on the communicative level, including the factors determining the selection of one or the other member in a converse opposition and their interchangeability. In the article published in the previous issue of *Kalbotyra* 53 (3) (Maskaliūnienė 2003) it was shown that sentences containing lexical converses differ in the distribution of the communicative prominence, or focus, which is understood as a category of the communicative level closely related to empathy (cf. Kuno & Kaburaki 1977). Furthermore, it was argued that lexical converses are a means of focusing a participant of the situation by turning the noun which names it into the subject of the sentence. This change in the prominence, or focus (emphasis), determines the role of lexical converses on the communicative level and their choice, accordingly.

In the article referred to above, I concentrated on the restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses determined by the linguistic environment of converses in a stretch of text. In certain instances this context restricts the interchangeability of converses very rigidly either because it results in an interruption of the cohesion of the text and/or in an abrupt change in the focus. However, there was no possibility to discuss other factors that influence the interchangeability of lexical converses and also those instances when both members of a pair of converses are used together in the same sentence. These issues are the object of investigation in this article.

## A Few Theoretical Remarks

First of all, it seems relevant to mention that I agree with Dieter Kastovsky (1981,126) that the choice between the active and the passive and converse lexemes is governed by the thematic organization imposed upon a particular sentence. Furthermore, I consider such pairs of units both lexical, i.e. converses, and grammatical, i.e. active-passive, as denotative synonyms as they have the same referential structure or, in simple terms, describe the same extra-linguistic situation (cf. Apresjan 1995, 260; Kastovsky 1981,125). It seems logical that, being denotative synonyms, such units would allow building synonymous sentences, at least in the broad sense of the term. And

although, as Kastovsky rightly pointed out, 'their overall communicative value is not the same' (1981, 124), such sentences may be used interchangeably to describe the same situation, especially if taken out of the context in which they are used. For instance, compare examples (1) and (2) borrowed from Kastovsky (1981, 125):

- (1) a. *My brother owns the largest betting shop in London.*  
b. *The largest betting shop in London belongs to my brother.*
- (2) a. *John bought the car from Peter.*  
b. *Peter sold the car to John.*

In both pairs of the sentences, (1a–b) and (2a–b), the interchangeability of the predicates, i.e. lexical converses, seems possible, at least semantically, as they retain the same semantic roles for the referents of the situation (cf. the semantic roles of the referents in (2): *John* is the Recipient, *the car* is the affected Patient and *Peter* is the Source in both sentences), but the choice between them in a particular context will depend on the communicative intention of the speaker, i.e. on his/her decision which of the two participants of the situation is more important to him/her in this particular situation and thus should be placed in the position of the subject in the sentence. Basically, the underlying principle of the current analysis is that the choice between lexical converses is determined by rules of the pragmatic level, but the possibility or impossibility of their replacement by each other in a sentence may depend on other factors as well.

These factors can be of a contextual, semantic, syntactic and stylistic nature. Furthermore, these factors may be combined. I intend to present these restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses in the form of general rules that I have worked out on the basis of the examples gathered from different English sources and support them with additional comments.

## Restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses

1. The interchangeability of lexical converses in a sentence is impossible when the replacement of one of the members of a converse opposition with its counterpart results in a significant change in the prominence of the utterance, i.e. in the selection of the subject of the sentence which serves as the focus<sup>1</sup> of the situation, and/or in the disruption of the cohesive structure of the text. This often occurs when the referential meaning of lexical converses involves two human referents: the syntactic function of the subject is usually ascribed to the one who has been referred to in previous sentences or to the one who is more important to the speaker. For instance, sentences (3a) and (4a) below presuppose that the noun/pronoun in the subject position has an antecedent, i.e. it refers to the participant of the situation that was mentioned by the speaker/writer in the previous sentence and, naturally, is selected as the focus of the following one. In (4a) the use of the converse is unacceptable due to the wrong distribution of the prominence as well – for the speaker Deck and the fact that he has borrowed a camera is more important than its source, otherwise sentence (4b) would be acceptable in this context, cf.:

- (3) a. *He is a good listener [... ] He knows he's not gonna hire me, so he's just passing time, waiting for my ten minutes to pass. (Grisham, 84).*  
b. *\*He knows I am not gonna work for him, so he's just passing time, waiting for my ten minutes to pass.*

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<sup>1</sup> The notion *focus* is discussed in Maskaliūnienė 2003.

- (4) a. *Deck arrives with a load of equipment. He's borrowed an obsolete video camera from a friend. (Grisham, 320).*  
 b. *\*Deck arrives with a load of equipment. A friend's lent an obsolete video camera to him.*

These restrictions can be called contextual.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, they are the most common restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses, which is a natural conclusion to arrive at after an experimental study if we remember that lexical converses serve particular communicative purposes.

2. Contextual restrictions are related to those which are semantic in nature. For instance, in the case of bivalent lexical converses that contain one human and one inanimate referent in their referential meaning their interchangeability is seldom possible because it is more natural to have a human referent as the topic/focus of the situation<sup>3</sup>; and vice versa, if a noun marking an inanimate referent is the subject of the sentence, its predicate is likely to be a verb whose semantics presupposes this particular syntactic structure. Most frequently it happens with verbs which semantically are very close to lexical synonyms (cf. Chomiakova 1988, 36) while their converseness is realised only on the syntactic level, e.g. *own – belong to, attract – admire, appeal – like, admire – fascinate* and the like. As sentences with these converses are very close in their meaning, their interchangeability seems to be dependant totally on the context and is predetermined by it. For instance:

- (5) a. *Among in-flight magazines, a Towns & Gowns Traveler will appeal to college students in search of adventurous backpacking. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *Among in-flight magazines, college students in search of adventurous backpacking will like a Towns & Gowns Traveler.*  
 (6) a. *He admired the way she had coped with life... (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *The way she had coped with life fascinated him...*

It is of interest to note that a replacement of the verbs *appeal to* and *belong to* (see (1b)) by their converses *like* and *own* is also possible if the latter are used in the Passive Voice. The passive form allows retaining the positions of the subject and the object for the nominal phrases marking the same referents and the same semantic roles ascribed to them. Thus, where interchangeability of lexical converses may be restricted because of some factors, the same communicative goals can be achieved by using grammatical converses, i.e. by a passive transformation.

As mentioned, rules (1) and (2) just discussed are contextual and therefore the most common ones. Rules (3) to (6) below refer to syntactic restrictions. Syntactic restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses are of various types, because it is on the syntactic level that the linguistic environment of a unit is set up. This linguistic environment creates specific conditions which impose additional constraints on the possibility of a converse interchange. Here are a few of such instances.

3. The possibility of the interchange of lexical converses decreases where the converse verb is modified by the gerund, provided that the relationship of the nominal components of the gerundial construction with their antecedents of the main clause is retained. For example:

<sup>2</sup> For more examples of contextual restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses see in: Maskaliūnienė 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The *topicworthiness* has been discussed in many works, including the latest articles by Bernard Comrie (2003) and Axel Holvoet (2003).

- (7) a. *She passed me the book, without looking at me. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *\*I took the book from her, without looking at me.*
- (8) a. *Before leaving, he donated large sums to charity. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *\*Before leaving, charity received large sums from him...*

4. Where a converse verb itself is in a syntactically dependent position as a part of a participial or infinitival construction or a clause, its replacement by the other member of the opposition is absolutely impossible, because it either entails a complete change of the message of the sentence as in (9) or the object of the main predicate cannot be moved as in (10) and, thus, there is no possibility of a converse transformation, cf.:

- (9) a. *Conventional political wisdom called for a media campaign to appeal to all of Louisiana's middle-class voters. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *\*Conventional political wisdom called for Louisiana's middle-class voters to like the media campaign.*
- (10) a. *Pictures of starving children have sent many people scurrying to donate money. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *\*Pictures of starving children have sent many people scurrying to receive money.*

5. In sentences with homogenous predicates the replacement of the converse with its counterpart may result in a greater or lesser change in both the pragmatic and the syntactic structure of the sentence, as the sequence of homogenous predicates is broken and a simple sentence turns into a compound one, as in example (11) below. In other cases a converse transformation seems acceptable, as in (12), where semantic changes are not that conspicuous:

- (11) a. *I buy an ice cream from a street vendor and sit on a street bench in Court Square. (Grisham, 94)*  
 b. *A street vendor sells an ice cream to me and I sit on a street bench in Court Square.*
- (12) a. *But I've always managed by having friends I can rely on, borrow from, or otherwise sponge off, and Tachnadray only had this gaggle of clan innocents. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *But I've always managed by having friends I can rely on, who can lend to me, or otherwise I can sponge off, and Tachnadray only had this gaggle of clan innocents.*

6. Where the Source or the Recipient of the action is generalized or if this referent is not expressed in a sentence, the replacement of one converse by its counterpart may be impossible for two reasons, (a) contextual – the cohesion of the text and/or the order of prominence is broken, and (b) syntactical – one of the human referents is not expressed. Such a use of these verbs, especially in the case of tri-valent and four-valent lexical converses expressing property relations, is quite frequent. For example, in (13) and (14) the name of the Source is not mentioned, which makes a converse transformation impossible.

- (13) a. *People buy cards of paper with the most banal words on them... (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*  
 b. *\*[ ] sell cards of paper with the most banal words on them to the people...*
- (14) a. *In a statement, the club says: "We would not take these buildings in any case."*  
 b. *\*In a statement, the club says: "[ ? ] would not give these buildings to us in any case."*

The type of restriction on interchangeability of converses exemplified by (13) and (14) can be called combined.

7. Stylistic restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses are imposed in those instances when one of the members of the converse opposition is used metaphorically. This is particularly frequent in the case of polysemous converses where the converse meanings are realized in

two different grammatical patterns of the same verb. Take, for instance, the examples from Salkoff (1983, 288–346):

- (15) a. *Bees are swarming in the garden.*  
b. *The garden is swarming with bees. (288)*
- (16) a. *Flies buzzed in the bottle.*  
b. *The bottle buzzed with flies. (292)*
- (17) a. *Enthusiasm danced in his eyes.*  
b. *His eyes danced with enthusiasm. (318)*

As a metaphorical use of the verbs in opposition is based on the concrete meaning of the same verb, e.g. the meaning of swarming, buzzing, dancing or the like (see examples (15), (16) and (17), the word order of all (b) sentences, compared to that of (a) sentences, appears to be stylistically marked. It is evident that no matter what context we take, the interchangeability of these converses is impossible because the meaning of these sentences is completely different in all the pairs opposed. Furthermore, stylistic connotations are the more stronger in those instances where an inanimate referent is assigned features of an animate one, as in all the examples above, except (15a). Naturally, such sentences will be used only in particular contexts.

It must be noted that converse sentences with a stylistically marked word order are much less frequent in texts than those with an unmarked one, i.e. they are marked statistically as well in comparison with a more neutral and therefore more frequent occurrence of an unmarked word order (Zwicky 1978, 136–137). Despite a somewhat limited use of such instances in the texts, polysemous verbs allowing converse patterns make up a special group of lexical converses which cannot be mutually interchanged, because such a change would result in the loss of the stylistic colouring of the sentence, which, in its turn, would contradict the communicative intention of the speaker/writer. Moreover, the communicative intention of the speaker or writer justifies the use of both members of the converse opposition in the same sentence. Such instances will be discussed in the following section of the article.

### The use of both lexical converses in the same sentence

As is known, the use of both lexical converses of the pair in the same sentence is quite rare (cf. Dobričev 1978, 137; Zueva 1980, 67). Still, this does happen if the writer/speaker has a specific purpose. Although it is hard to provide statistics on this issue because no exact corpus was taken for the analysis, but no matter what sources I took (Lithuanian or English, of one author or several) the ratio was pretty much the same – the number of such instances constituted about 5 percent of all the cases compared.

The reason might be that the authors who describe one and the same denotative situation present it either from the perspective of one or the other participant of the situation, not from both, therefore, usually only one member of the converse opposition is realized in the sentence. In those instances when both members of the opposition are used in the same sentence an overall picture of the situation is created, the situation is kind of extended as it is shown from both sides, cf.:

- (18) *Every caller who qualifies will receive a free ultra slim calculator, and when you take out a policy we'll give you a 15 discount off your premium, absolutely free. (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*
- (19) *In considering pre-qualification programs, first-time buyers should ask lenders these questions: Does your program merely estimate my ability to borrow or is it a firm commitment to lend money? (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)*

The given sentences have a much heavier information load than in the case when only one converse of the pair is used, i.e. the information provided is by far richer than any of them could provide if taken separately (cf. Lomtev 1972,37). It seems that in such cases we can also speak about redundancy or surplus of information (Dobričev 1978,138), but the surplus realised by converses depends on the specific goals of the author. In sentences with a modal colouring, it is hard to speak about 'redundant information'. For example:

(20) *Even if she wanted to give her secret to me I could not take it.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

(21) *It was not that she expected to lose, it was just the fear that he might win.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

The same can be said about negative sentences, cf.:

(22) *Please do not give them anything, they get very good benefits already.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

(23) *It is true that colonialism did not bequeath much to this African country; it inherited an impossible situation of poverty, ruined economy and crime ...* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

In certain cases both members of the pair are used in the same stretch of the text for stylistic purposes, i.e. for the purpose of expressiveness, avoidance of monotony or both at the same time. Sometimes both members of the pair are used to escape a repetitive use of one and the same verb. In similar cases it is not only the perspective that changes but the style becomes richer as well. For example:

(24) *There was a time loud music fascinated us – we loved to listen to it...* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

Finally, I found quite a few examples, in which both members of the pair were used in the same sentence with the same referent as the subject. In such instances converses describe not one and the same denotative situation but two different ones, separated in space and time. For example:

(25) *By five in the morning, the plan looked like this: if he, and I, and our other close friends live to be 65, we shall all sell our houses, buy a huge castle in glorious grounds with the collective proceeds and live out our days with a couple of Jeeves in attendance.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

(26) *They buy the stock cheap when it is not wanted and sell it back through flotation when the fashion cycle turns.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

(27) *However, in order to do justice to such a reputation, a city must be able not only to import great art but also to export it.* (HarperCollins Publishers 2003)

## Conclusions

The analysis of the collected material revealed that contextual factors which determine the selection of one or the other lexical converse on the pragmatic level are also the most common restricting factors of their interchangeability in the sentence. The contextual factors, however, may go together with those of a semantic, syntactic, or stylistic nature. Among these, syntactic restrictions on the interchangeability of lexical converses are of the most varied types because it is on the syntactic level that the linguistic environment of a unit is set up.

The instances when both converses of the pair are used in the same sentence are infrequent, but if they occur, again, they serve the specific pragmatic aims of the speaker/writer. On the one hand, the denotative situation is as if extended and an overall picture (the 'macro-situation') is created; on the other hand, the parallel use of lexical converses may serve the stylistic purposes of expressiveness or avoidance of monotony.

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## VEIKSNIAI, APRIBOJANTYS VIENO LEKSINIO KONVERSYVO PAKEITIMĄ KITU SAKINYJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariami leksinių konversyvų vartojimo ypatumai. Tėigiama, kad be anksčiau nagrinėtų kontekstinių apribojimų, neleidžiančių vieno konversinės poros nario pakeisti kitu tame pačiame kalbiniame kontekste (žr. Maskaliūnienė 2003), yra ir kitų veiksmių, apsunkinančių tokias transformacijas. Surinktų pavyzdžių analizė parodė, kad tokie apribojimai gali būti ne tik kontekstiniai, bet ir semantiniai, sintaksiniai, stilistiniai arba mišrūs. Straipsnyje jie pateikiami kaip bendrosios taisyklės, parodančios, kokiais atvejais vieno konversyvo pakeitimas kitu yra neįmanomas. Taip pat aptariami tie atvejai, kai abu konversinės opozicijos nariai vartojami toje pačioje teksto atkarpoje kartu. Taip pasiekiami konkretūs komunikaciniai tikslai: viena vertus, tarsi praplečiama kalbančiojo (rašančiojo) pateikiama situacija, kita vertus, kartu pavartoti leksiniai konversyvai atlieka stilistines funkcijas – sustiprina ekspresiją arba leidžia išvengti monotonijos.

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