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What American English *into* constructions reveal about abstract meaning

Abstract:
Numerous studies have shown that abstract domains of experience (e.g. CHANGE) are understood by means of other, typically more concrete, or more delineated domains of experience (e.g. MOTION, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, not only primary-level topological knowledge constructs (e.g. those related to image schemas, primary metaphors, and conceptual metaphors) (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza, 2013, pp. 13-17) structure speakers’ understandings of the abstract. Low level non-topological knowledge constructs (e.g. those related to people’s experiences of real world objects, cf. Ruiz de Mendoza, 2013) are also important (Johansson Falck, 2017).
This paper deals with an analysis of concrete and abstract constructions (i.e. grammatical form and meaning pairings, Goldberg, 2005) including the preposition *into* and its most frequent collocations from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, Davies, 2008). My main aim is to show how spatial relations that involve something that goes into something else are used to construe abstract meaning. The 100 most frequent of *into* collocations were analyzed as well as the 100 most frequent collocations including either a noun, a verb, or adverb to the left of *into*, or a noun to the right of *into*. Physical as well as abstract concepts were then identified as well as the actions involved, and what can be learned about the actions. The most frequent *into* collocations include a verb (79%), a noun (14%), or an adverb (7%). The VERB + into collocations show that the actions involved typically refer to motion into something else (e.g. *go*, *get*, and *disappear*), to putting some entity into something else (e.g. *put*, *fit*, and *incorporate*), to breaking something (e.g. *cut*, *divide*, and *burst*), to looking into something, to translating into something, or to growing into. The *into* + NOUN collocations show that the concepts involved mark the beginning of an action (e.g. *action* or *motion*), a decrease in, or removal of something (e.g. recession, bankruptcy, and extinction), pieces (e.g. *pieces*, *chunks*, *strips*, and *halves*), submission (e.g. *slavery*, and *compliance*), absence or presence of light (e.g. *darkness*, and *daylight*), or a phase in someone’s life (e.g. *adulthood*, and *adolescence*). The adverbs provide information on the ways in which something goes into something else (e.g. *deep*, *straight* and *directly*), or on the direction of motion. More generally, my analysis provides information on the relation between physical and abstract *into* constructions, and on that between low-level non-topological knowledge constructs and primary-level topological ones.
References:


