

Experimental insights into denominals and creativity in adult Romanian

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Abstract: The current paper investigates denominal verbs through an experiment testing how native Romanian adult speakers prefer to use and understand semi-artificial denominal (non-existent) verbs (SAD verbs) created from existing nouns, such as *a cireși* ‘to cherry’ or *a vulpi* ‘to fox’. Regarding sentence production, speakers generally prefer to use SAD verbs in intransitive frames and with animate subjects. Regarding interpretation, speakers prefer to associate the nouns/nominal roots SAD verbs derive from with typical activities/states/behavior, in line with Kiparsky’s (1997) Canonical Use Constraint. Moreover, speakers mostly paraphrase animal and human role SAD verb classes through ‘behave/become like N’ paraphrases, while paraphrasing fruits/vegetables and object SAD verb classes by directly combining typical activities/changes-of-state with N. We provide a mixed cognitive-structural account, arguing that the literal interpretation obtains when the light verb merges with the noun, and the figurative interpretation obtains when the light verb merges with the noun-like root, and that the frequency of the interactions between humans and (in)animate entities and the naturalness of a comparison between them determine the type of interpretation.

Key words: denominal verbs, animacy, sentence production, paraphrases, lexical syntax, cognition.