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ARTICLE TITLE

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Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA)

Victoria Fendel, 'Taking Stock of Support-Verb Constructions in Journalistic French', *Xanthos: A Journal of Foreign Literatures and Languages*, 2 (2020), 13-44 <<http://xanthosjournal.com/issues-issue-2-02-fendel>>

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Victoria Fendel, "Taking Stock of Support-Verb Constructions in Journalistic French", *Xanthos: A Journal of Foreign Literatures and Languages* 2 (2020): 13-44, <<http://xanthosjournal.com/issues-issue-2-02-fendel>>



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VICTORIA FENDEL

Taking Stock of Support-Verb Constructions in Journalistic French

This article takes a fresh look at support-verb constructions in journalistic French. It takes a novel approach by proposing a working definition that allows for an empirical data collection and thus captures the internal heterogeneity of this widely discussed group of constructions. The proposed working definition acknowledges that support-verb constructions, as many multi-word expressions, operate at the syntax-semantic interface by combining criteria relating to each domain. It also acknowledges that support verbs and predicative nouns can only be defined in relative terms, i.e. relative to the construction. The article assumes support-verb constructions to be a semi-productive pattern and an integral part of the French lexicon in line with Butt and Lahiri's findings on support verbs as well as Gross' influential Lexicon-Grammar framework. The article considers specifically the complementation patterns of support-verb constructions and their diachronic development through the lens of grammaticalisation. Grammaticalisation seems to affect the construction as a whole rather than only the support verb. The article shows that the support verb retains a crucial function and meaning in the construction, yet that the degree of its semantic and syntactic weight shifts relative to the combination of components in the construction.

I. Introduction

Support-verb constructions (SVCs henceforth) are pervasive in the lexicon, multi-faceted in their structure and finely nuanced in their meaning in many languages.¹ SVCs are a type of verbal multi-word expression (henceforth MWE) consisting of a verbal component, the support verb (henceforth SV), and a nominal component, the predicative noun (henceforth PN) or a prepositional phrase (henceforth PP), as in *prendre une décision* and *mettre en relief* (Dalrymple, Lowe & Mycock 2019: 346-52).

As in every MWE, there is a division of labour between the two components. While the SV has primarily syntactic functions (*prendre, mettre*), the PN or PP bears the main semantic weight (*décision, en relief*). The fact that the elements dominating at the syntactic and semantic levels differ results in problems when mapping these levels onto each other (Dalrymple, Lowe & Mycock 2019: 329-31).

Furthermore, the segmentation of components at each level can differ. This can com-

¹ Baños 2016 (on Latin), Butt 2010 (on Hindi), Cuervo 2010 (on Spanish), Jiménez López 2016 (on Greek), Gross 1984 (on French), Ronan 2019 (on Irish), Leech 2009: chap. 8 (on modern English), Storrer 2009 (on German).

pligate the mapping of one structure onto the other. Concretely, we usually have the PN filling the direct-object slot of the verb at the syntactic level, whereas the PN and the SV form the verbal element at the semantic level. Moreover, structures may be syntactically and / or semantically ambiguous, in that more than one analysis / interpretation is possible and only contextual implicature would (usually) resolve the issue in real life (Dalrymple, Lowe & Mycock 2019: 297).

In the context of the influential lexicon-grammar approach of the *Laboratoire d'Automatique Documentaire et Linguistique* (henceforth LADL), the lexicon-grammar of SVs (e.g. *to have*, *to make* in *n has an impact on n*, *n makes a certain impression on n*) was identified as one of the three main components of the French lexicon-grammar with the other two being the lexicon-grammar of free sentences (e.g. *to fall*, *to eat*, *to watch*) and the lexicon-grammar of idiomatic expressions (e.g. *n takes n into account*, *n raises a question*).² In his 1998 article, Gross turns specifically to the role of the SV in French, comparing SVs to operator verbs and ordinary verbs (Gross 1998). He concludes that, while SVs can be located on a continuum with operator verbs and ordinary verbs with regard to their semantics, SVs are syntactically distinct.³ Cross-linguistically and diachronically, this is confirmed by Butt and Lahiri (2013). Seiss (2009: 509) summarises the characteristics of SVs building on Butt's earlier work. Note that she uses the term *light verb* rather than *support verb*. This is a purely terminological difference.

1. Light verbs are always form identical to the corresponding main verb whereas auxiliaries are usually just form identical at the initial stage of reanalysis from verb to auxiliary.
2. Light verbs always span the entire verbal paradigm (are not restricted to appear with just one tense or aspect form).
3. Light verbs do not display a defective paradigm.
4. Light verbs exhibit subtle lexical semantic differences in terms of combinatorial possibilities with main verbs, are thus restricted in their combinations. Auxiliaries, on the other hand, are not restricted in their combinatorial possibilities, but do not have to combine with every main verb.

Point two may deserve further consideration on the basis of pairs such as *I am taking the decision* versus **I take the decision*. The issue is taken up briefly in Section IV, but an in-depth treatment lies beyond the scope of this article.

Syntactically speaking, three aspects of support-verb constructions have received significant attention, that is (1) the nature of the predicative element / the nominal element, (2) the degree of fusion of the SV and the nominal element and (3) the range of argument structures that many SVCs enter into (Langer 2005). The first issue ties in with the definitional uncertainty surrounding SVCs, whereas the other two issues are related to the synchronic and diachronic variability of support-verb constructions.

²The examples are taken from Gross 1984: 275-82.

³The Lexicon-Grammar approach has a strong semantic component, whereas the present article has a syntactic focus. However, since SVCs are MWEs that operate at the syntax-semantics interface and many semantic approaches to SVCs exist, we cannot completely ignore the semantic dimension.

The present article adopts a wide definition of SVCs in order to consider essential and marginal representatives of this internally heterogeneous group of constructions (Section II) and applies this to four case studies, that is SVCs with the PNs *raison*, *envie*, *peur* and *décision* (Section III). It discusses briefly the syntax of French SVCs (Section IV). Based on this discussion, the article considers their synchronic and diachronic variability and shows that we see in essence a syntactic change in progress (Section V). The article concludes with a brief summary of the results and some comments on the interplay between synchronic variability and diachronic change in French SVCs (Section VI).

II. Defining support-verb constructions

In the past, SVCs were defined by means of syntactic, semantic or lexical criteria (Laporte 2013: 23-27). This resulted in three fundamentally different definitions of SVCs (Gaatone 2004). These are discussed briefly below. The present article then takes a different approach in order to acknowledge two aspects: firstly, the relevant verbs and nouns cannot be defined in absolute but only in relative terms, that is relative to the construction (Butt & Lahiri 2013). Secondly, SVCs form an internally heterogeneous group of constructions (cf. Kamber 2008). Notably, Gross (1984) already included syntactically highly invariable and semantically idiomatic structures as well as syntactically variable and semantically transparent structures (e.g. *faire contre mauvaise fortune bon cœur* vs *faire attention*).

[II.1] Syntactic approaches (syntactic tests)

Syntactically speaking, SVCs are combinations of a verb, the SV, and a noun, the PN, which fills the direct-object slot of the verb. These two elements fuse tightly and form the verb phrase (VP henceforth) of a sentence. The syntactic environment of the SVC is largely determined by the SV (Alonso Ramos 1998: chap. 6).

The relative tightness of this fusion can be tested by means of syntactic transformations. Langer suggests assessing three general properties of SVCs by means of syntactic transformations, that is the referentiality of the PN phrase, the semantically reduced state of the SV, and the status of the complements (Langer 2004, 2005).

Firstly, the PN cannot have a point of reference that differs from the point of reference of the SV, that is the grammatical subject. The PN must be either co-referential with the grammatical subject or non-referential. The reason is that the noun in the direct-object slot is part of the VP in SVCs. Therefore, like any other VP, the noun has to refer to the actions of the grammatical subject. This can be achieved either by co-referentiality or by non-referentiality of the noun. In the latter case, the noun is then taken as referring to the actions of the grammatical subject by contextual inference. Relevant syntactic tests include the addition of determiner phrases (henceforth DPs) (Danlos 2009) and attribute phrases (henceforth ATTs).⁴ Secondly, the PN carries the semantic weight, with the SV

⁴ On syntactic and semantic differences entailed by the addition of DPs and ATTs, see Chaurand 1991, Heid 2004, and

fulfilling grammatical functions and contributing rather marginally to the semantics of the VP. Relevant syntactic tests include deletion and substitution of the SV and their effect on the construction. Thirdly, the SV and the PN form a VP and this VP can be complemented like any other VP. The difference is that, in a non-grammaticalised state, the PN still fills the direct-object slot of the SV, and thus complementation patterns differ from those of non-SVC VPs (see further Section V.3). Relevant syntactic transformations include the patterns of negation, that is the difference between *ne ... aucune* (e.g. *prendre DP décision*) and *ne ... pas* (e.g. *avoir peur*), and the addition of adverbial information, that is the difference between the addition of an adverbial phrase (henceforth ADV) and an adjective (henceforth ADJ). Both transformations show that some SVCs behave more like synthetic VPs (i.e. in calling for an ADV) and others more like analytic MWEs (i.e. in calling for an ADJ).

Syntactic tests are language-specific. For example, Langer (2005) presents a list of tests applicable to English, German and French. When testing for co-referentiality between the PN and the grammatical subject, DPs and ATTs added to the PN are considered pivotal. All three languages have a set of definite and indefinite articles as well as possessive articles and all allow for zero determination under certain circumstances. However, for languages that express referentiality of a noun in a different way, the tests proposed by Langer would have to be modified.

Crucially, the application of syntactic tests shows that constructions that are commonly identified as SVCs display different degrees of fixedness. We find largely invariable combinations of an SV and a PN such as *faire grâce* (e.g. **faire la grâce*, **faire grande grâce*, **faire des grâces*).⁵ These often allow for complementation by means of a complement clause.⁶ We also find more flexible combinations of an SV and a PN such as *faire peur* (**faire la peur*, **faire des peurs*), which is subject to syntactic constraints, and *prendre la / une décision*, which allows for a wide range of syntactic modifications and transformations; in these, the underlying structure of an SV with the PN in the direct-object slot is often still transparent, so that complements have to be added in the form of objective genitives and what are, strictly speaking, adverbial or attributive clauses.

[II.2] Semantic approaches (starting from the PN or the SV)

Semantically speaking, SVCs are combinations of a semantically light element, the SV, and a semantically heavy element, the PN. These two elements fuse tightly and form the predicate of a sentence. The semantic environment of the SVC is largely determined by the PN (Danlos 1992: 2). Therefore, Gross and Daladier even advocated a nominal conjugation in French, that is one in which the PN is conjugated by means of an SV (Gross 1993, Daladier 1996).

Giry-Schneider 2004. On DPs with PNs in French, see further Giry-Schneider 1987: 33-36.

⁵ Brunot 1927 (on *juxtaposés immuables*), Marchello-Nizia 1996 (on older stages of French); see also Dubois 1965, Wagner 1962, Guilbert 1975, Marchello-Nizia 1979.

⁶ Idiomatic SVCs are usually syntactically inflexible. This coincides with a high degree of semantic non-compositionality. However, A. Firenze and C. Fellbaum (2008) show for German *jmdm. Sand in die Augen streuen* ('to pull the wool over so.'s eyes') that modification of this idiomatic expression is permissible.

Semantic definitions of SVCs are based on the assumption that we can define a group of SVs and / or PNs in absolute terms. Several seminal works in the field took this approach. Giry-Schneider (1978), Labelle (1974), and Vives (1983) focused on select SVs. The choice of the candidates seems to depend on cross-linguistic comparison along with semantic scope and specificity. The SVs which they investigate are candidates that are common across languages, have a wide semantic scope and are thus semantically rather unspecific (i.e. *faire, avoir, prendre, perdre*). The nature of the PN is discussed insightfully by Radimsky (2011) and Mel'čuk (1996), who both seem to acknowledge a range of PNs that is wider than the often-assumed group of deverbal formations. Notably, even defining a group of deverbal formations is difficult. For example, do we define it etymologically (e.g. *espoir*), morphologically or semantically (Balvet, Barque & Marin 2010)? If semantically, do nouns have to refer to an action only or can they refer to a state too (cf. the polysemy of *espoir* and *décision*)?

Crucially, most verbs and nouns that function as SVs or PNs respectively in SVCs also appear in free sentences, to use Gross' terminology, or idiomatic expressions (Butt 2010, Butt & Lahiri 2013). This aligns with the general model of verb profiles. Most verbs can appear in more than one syntactic and semantic environment (see further Section V.2). Consequently, an absolute definition of SVs and PNs is impossible. Cross-linguistic comparison can only help to a certain extent since SVCs are collocations and collocations are language-specific. There are candidates for SVs and PNs that are common across languages but there is an even larger number of candidates that are language-specific.

[II.3] Lexical approaches

Lexically speaking, SVCs are combinations of a verbal and a nominal element. They are collocations rather than free combinations of a verb and a noun. However, opinions are divided on where to situate SVCs on the continuum ranging from collocations to idioms (Schutzeichel 2013: 15).

The lexical category of collocations is essentially based on the frequency of co-occurrence of two or more lexical items. Collocations are considered to be tighter when the frequency of co-occurrence is higher. This is often the case when a given lexical item appears only with a small range of other lexical items. Collocations are considered looser when the frequency of co-occurrence is lower. This is often the case when a given lexical item appears with a wide range of other lexical items. However, the frequency of co-occurrence is not sufficient as a criterion by itself (Langer 2004: section II.2.v).

We further consider the syntactic flexibility and the semantic compositionality of a collocation (Hollós 2010: 95). These are usually low and absent respectively in idiomatic expressions but high and present respectively in collocations. For example, de Pontonx with regard to semantically metaphorical SVCs, hence comparatively idiomatic SVCs, notes that deletion of the SV is not permissible (de Pontonx 2004: 270). If we delete the SV in (a) *La haine que Luc nourrit contre Jeanne* and (b) *La haine que Luc éprouve*

contre / envers Jeanne, we get *La haine de Luc contre Jeanne*. De Pontonx comments on the deletion of the SV *nourrir* in (a) that ‘la métaphore a été perdue ainsi que la nuance sémantique qu’elle apportait’ (de Pontonx 2004: 270). Conversely, deletion of *éprouver* in (b) does not impact semantically.

The continuum ranging from collocations to idioms is discussed in detail by Hollós (2010: 95). Some argue that SVCs are a lexical category situated at one point on this continuum (Bouveret 2008: 53, Danlos 1992: 7). Others argue that SVCs can be more or less idiomatic with regard to their semantics and syntax and consequently can rather be located on a part along this continuum (Langer 2005, Ronan 2012: 20-21).

This lexical definition of SVCs has been implemented in data collections in the sense that SVCs were seen as periphrastic, that is semantically equivalent to a base verb (BV henceforth). For instance, the SVC *prendre une décision* to a certain extent corresponds to the BV *décider*. This extension of the notion of periphrasis from the syntactic to the semantic plane is problematic by itself and complete semantic equivalence is unlikely to exist (Crystal 2008). Moreover, Storrer (2009) and Ronan (2019) have convincingly shown that there are distributional differences between SVCs and BVs. Finally, the correlation between an SVC and a BV is difficult to define. Should we rely on diachronic etymological links (e.g. *espoir* and *espérer*), synchronic derivation (e.g. *confier* and *confiance*), or on semantic relations (e.g. *avoir peur* and *craindre*)?

[II.4] Working definition

Section II.1 outlined how to apply syntactic tests to structures and showed that constructions with different syntactic properties form part of the group of SVCs (see e.g. *to take heart* vs **to take the/a heart*; *to hold one’s breath* vs **to hold the/a/∅ breath*; *to make a/the a good/the good suggestion*; *to give rise* vs **to give a/the rise*, **to give good rise*; *to keep an open mind* vs **to keep the open mind*, **to keep a narrow mind*). Section II.2 described the difficulty of defining PNs and SVs in absolute terms and thus questioned the viability of a semantic approach. Section II.3 drew attention to the fact that SVCs are an integral rather than a redundant part of the lexicon and that comparison with BVCs is not only difficult but also not feasible (cf. *to hold one’s breath*, *to take time* which could not be rephrased in the form of single-word-expression verbs).

Therefore, the present article proposes a different approach in order to assess the properties of the SV while acknowledging the internal heterogeneity of the group of constructions. We apply a working definition consisting of a syntactic and a semantic criterion to the corpus data:

1. The PN fills the direct-object slot of the SV.
2. The PN is co-referential with the grammatical subject (regarding both explicit morphological encoding and implicit contextual inference) or non-referential. Criterion 1 defines a basic range of constructions, that is verb-object construc-

tions.⁷ Criterion 2 helps us distinguish between generic verb-object constructions and SVCs (see Section II.1 for the syntactic issues and Section I for the issue of segmentation).

Given the scope of the working definition, we encountered a range of borderline cases. These pointed towards the most interesting aspects to be investigated. Two aspects need to be mentioned here already as they are crucial to the data collection presented in Section III. Firstly, sequences of PNs with the same SV are accepted provided that each PN in question can form an SVC with the SV so that we can assume deletion of the SV. The assumption is that the SV has been deleted in order to avoid repetition. However, strictly speaking, an in-depth analysis of the relevant PNs would be necessary in order to confirm that the PN is not only attested with the relevant SV but also that the relevant SV does not trigger a specific semantic nuance or register-related connotation. An example corroborating this view is:

- [1] *Et après une étreinte de passage qui ne lui a procuré qu'un plaisir minuscule, elle a le sentiment du devoir accompli et l'espoir d'avoir gagné quelques points concernant son accomplissement personnel.*

A covert SV seems especially likely here as asymmetrical coordination would usually be avoided in French (Grevisse 2011: paras. 265-66).⁸ Secondly, possessives and attributes with the PN that indicate co-referentiality with the grammatical subject are accepted (e.g. *Le groupe était encadré par des professionnels que je connais personnellement et auxquels je garde toute ma confiance*). The assumption is that possessives of this type do not impact on the feature of co-referentiality between the grammatical subject and the PN. Conversely, instances with a possessive or attribute that disrupts co-referentiality such as *il attire l'attention publique* are excluded.

This novel empirical approach takes seriously the fact that SVCs lie at the interface of syntax and semantics by combining criteria reflecting both layers. Throughout this article, we call the syntactic structure the argument structure and the semantic structure the participant structure. Arguments and adjuncts are syntactic elements, participants are semantic roles, as in *he suddenly took heart* where *he* is syntactically speaking an argument in the subject slot and semantically speaking the agent and *suddenly* is syntactically speaking an adjunct.⁹

⁷ Unlike in the function-verb construction tradition, which considers verb + PP expressions primary, the SVC line of research considers verb + object expressions primary (cf. Storrer 2009).

⁸ For the omission of functionally equivalent items in cases of symmetrical coordination and for the repetition of functionally equivalent items in cases of asymmetrical coordination, Grevisse lists exceptions and distinguishes between the rule established by grammarians and the situation in natural language.

⁹ Note that the exact definition of participant roles is a matter of debate (cf. Kroeger 2005, Næss 2007: 72). For our purposes, the segmentation at the two levels is more important than the exact definition of roles.

III. Case studies

The case studies presented here are an extract from the PN environments that my MPhil thesis looked at. They are chosen because they illustrate best the aspects of syntactic variability of the SV. One case omitted here, as it deserves a separate treatment, is PNs referring to concrete objects. In these, the SV not only verbalises but also reconceptualises the PN (Radimský 2011: 214-19, Mel'čuk 1996: 59-60). For example, in an SVC such as *prendre une photo* and *faire des photos*, the concrete noun *photo* is used to refer to the process that results in the concrete object rather than to the concrete object, a picture, itself.

[III.1] Corpus of texts

The select corpus of texts consists of 1,110,392 words from *Le Monde* 1998. Thus, the language of the corpus is journalism as regards the genre and varies in register depending on the exact topic treated.¹⁰ The corpus can be accessed on lextutor.ca.

[III.2] Data collection

For practical reasons, the data collection proceeded from the PN in the form of drawing concordances from a corpus of texts by means of concordance software. The working definition was then applied to this raw data sample.¹¹ Given that we are primarily interested in the role that the SV plays, we need a controlled environment in which we can observe what effect minimal changes to the component of interest have. By setting the PN as an absolute term, we create such an environment. Admittedly, this is only a case-study approach.¹² Concordances for select nouns were drawn from the corpus. The results for *envie*, *peur*, *raison* and *décision* are presented below. The PNs were searched for in their singular and plural forms. Note that the numbers of plural tokens for *envie* and *peur* are very small.

The nature of the corpus imposes limitations on the range of PNs that can be studied, because sample sizes for several nouns are too small and would skew the statistics. For instance, nouns commonly mentioned in the research literature on SVCs, such as *faim* and *soif*, are naturally rare due to the topics discussed. Therefore, *peur* and *envie* serve as our starting points as they are accepted as PNs even by those who apply a narrow syntactic definition of SVCs to their data. In addition, we look at one noun referring to

¹⁰ Describing the language of journalism in detail goes beyond the scope of the present article. A rich research literature exists, see e.g. Friedl 2009 (on linguistic innovation), Lüger 1977, Engel 1990: 8-13 (as an introductory overview), Wedler 2006: chaps. 5.2, 6.3.4 and p. 92, all with further references. The issue of nominalisation is widely discussed for titles (e.g. by Cecilia 2007), but less so for the text body. For several aspects of VPs in journalistic French, see Seppänen 2011 (on voice), Engel 1987 (on past tenses), Lefeuve 2005 (on nominal predicates). It is common opinion that the language of French journalism heavily relies on nominal constructions. However, to my knowledge no statistical comparisons between corpora of journalistic and, for instance, literary French have been undertaken.

¹¹ For the working definition applied to a corpus of texts (10,000 words of Classical Greek), see Fendel 2019.

¹² If our interest was primarily in the PN, the opposite approach would have been chosen.

an abstract concept (*raison*) and one noun referring to an action (*décision*). Naturally, the classification of nouns into semantic classes is not absolute.¹³ In essence, the semantic classification of nouns depends on which meaning of a noun one considers primary (e.g. the result or the process for *décision*). Most of the nouns selected here are polysemous and could consequently be subsumed under several semantic classes. Thus, our initial classification of nouns serves simply as a starting point.

Application of the working definition to the concordances drawn from the corpus was done manually, that is without relying on a pre-tagged corpus. The definition advanced here is significantly wider than definitions of SVCs in most research on French SVCs, so that marginal candidates of the group of SVCs, as here defined, would not be tagged as such in most corpora. All the instances were entered into a database built with the free software *Symphytum*. The database form contains fields for the SV and the PN as well as the sentence containing the SVC, apart from eight fields based on the syntactic tests suggested by Langer (2005). The complete database can be accessed on Apollo.¹⁴

[III.3] Application of the working definition

Initially, all the instances in which the noun fills the direct-object slot of a verb or appears within a PP in prepositional verbs (e.g. *participer à*) formed the pool of raw data. To this pool of data, the working definition was applied:

1. All the instances in which the noun appears within a PP were excluded. (cf. criterion 1)
2. All the remaining instances were analysed with regard to the referentiality of the noun. (cf. criterion 2)
 - a. Instances in which the noun is explicitly encoded as referring to an entity other than the grammatical subject (e.g. by a *de* XP phrase or by an adjective, as in *il attire l'attention publique*) were excluded.
 - b. Instances in which contextual implicature results in the noun having a point of reference other than the grammatical subject were excluded.

A difference was made between the grammatical subject witnessing an action and the grammatical subject taking part in the action (cf. *décision*, esp. in combination with *annuler*, *confirmer*, *critiquer*, *expliquer*, etc.). All those instances in which the grammatical subject was in essence a witness of an action and in which the noun consequently had an external point of reference were discarded.

¹³ Nouns could be classified based on criteria relating to their etymology. (Rubenbauer, Heine & Hofmann 1995: § 18 on classes of nouns in Latin), their morphology / word formation (Balvet, Barque & Marin 2010 on deverbal formations in French), or their semantics (cf. <http://atilf.atilf.fr/> for French).

¹⁴ See <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.39599> for all the instances extracted from the corpus with complete analysis.

[III.4] Presentation of the data

In Section III.5, the entry for each noun is split into two parts. Part one investigates component compatibility in the form of a diagram and a table, [2].

[2] **Analytic table**

PN	Voice	Aspect	No. of arguments	Total	% of total
...

In the column ‘voice’, a binary distinction between active and passive is made for the SVC as a whole, based on its distribution of participant roles. That is to say, when the grammatical subject takes the participant role of a patient, the SVC is classified as ‘passive’, whereas, when the grammatical subject takes the participant role of an agent, the SVC is classified as ‘active’ (Danlos 2009). In the column ‘aspect’, a binary distinction is made between durative (state) and punctual (action). Aspect is further discussed in Section 4. In the column ‘number of arguments’, arguments of the SV are counted: subject = argument 1, PN = argument 2, further arguments = arguments 2+n.¹⁵

Part two considers the use of the relevant noun in the corpus, an aspect that influences the statistics for the noun functioning as a PN as compared to a non-PN noun.

[3] **Five-point questionnaire: Aspects that influence the quantitative data**

1. Which constructions are frequent but are not SVCs (e.g. *en raison de*)?
2. Which constructions may be SVCs but are excluded from the analysis (primarily because they consist of an SV and a PP)?
3. Which constructions are unclear?
4. Which phrases, etc. skew the statistics (e.g. the noun appearing in personal names)?
5. What is the semantic scope of the PN?

[III.5] Case studies

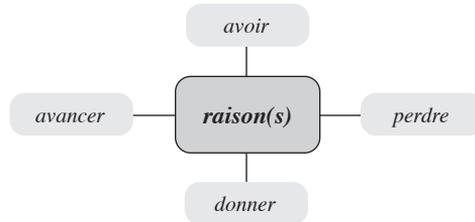
The following four subsections present four select PN environments.

¹⁵ Adjuncts are disregarded.

[III.5.i] *Raison*

The aspect of component compatibility for the PN *raison* in the singular and plural forms is illustrated graphically in [4], and quantitative details are tabulated in [5].

[4] Component compatibility: *raison(s)*



[5] Constructions with the PN *raison(s)*

	Voice	Aspect	No. of arguments	Total	% of total
<i>avoir</i>	passive	(see section V)	(see section V)	31	73
<i>donner</i>	active	punctual	3	10	23
<i>perdre</i>	passive	punctual	2	1	2
<i>avancer</i> ¹⁶	active	punctual	2	1	2
			(total)	43	

Idioms containing the PN *raison(s)* with SVs

1. *faire entendre raison à qqn.* ‘to make sb. listen to reason’

Raison(s) in the corpus

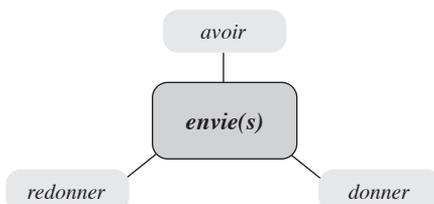
1. Which constructions are frequent but are not SVCs? *en raison de, à raison*
2. Which constructions may be SVCs but are excluded from the analysis? *ramener à la raison, amener à la raison, mener à la raison*
3. Which constructions are unclear? *céder à la raison*
4. Which phrases, etc. skew the statistics? [∅]
5. What is the semantic scope of the PN? *Raison* can refer to a concrete cause or a reason but also to the mental capacities of reasoning and / or judging things to be reasonable. In addition, *raison* has taken on a more abstract meaning with the sense of ‘right’ or ‘concession’ in *avoir raison* and *donner raison*.

¹⁶ Context: *M. Weygand a avancé une raison à son initiative.* The contextual inference is that M. Weygand put forward a reason which he himself had thought of. The construction is inchoative as regards aspect. Furthermore, the construction is not a variant of *donner raison*, since *donner raison* has lexicalised and has consequently taken on a very specific meaning. By contrast, *avancer DP raison* is syntactically flexible and semantically compositional. Note also that the meaning of *raison* here clearly differs from the meaning of *raison* in *avoir raison*, etc.

[III.5.ii] *Envie*

The aspect of component compatibility for the PN *envie* in the singular and plural forms is illustrated graphically in [6], and quantitative details are tabulated in [7].

[6] Component compatibility: *envie(s)*



[7] Constructions with the PN *raison(s)*

	Voice	Aspect	No. of arguments	Total	% of total
<i>avoir</i>	passive	durative	2	29	83
<i>donner</i>	active	punctual	3	5	14
<i>redonner</i>	active	punctual	3	1	3
			(total)	35	

Idioms containing the PN *envie(s)* with SVs

1. [∅]

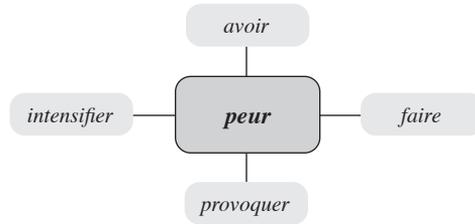
Envie(s) in the corpus

1. Which constructions are frequent but are not SVCs? [∅]
2. Which constructions may be SVCs but are excluded from the analysis? [∅]
3. Which constructions are unclear? [∅]
4. Which phrases, etc. skew the statistics? [∅]
5. What is the semantic scope of the PN? [∅]

[III.5.iii] *Peur*

The aspect of component compatibility for the PN *peur* in the singular and plural forms is illustrated graphically in [8], and quantitative details are tabulated in [9].

[8] Component compatibility: *peur(s)*



[9] Constructions with the PN *peur(s)*

	Voice	Aspect	No. of arguments	Total	% of total
<i>avoir</i>	passive	durative	2	22	68.75
<i>faire</i> ¹⁷	active	punctual	3	8	25
<i>provoquer</i>	active	punctual	3	1	3.125
<i>intensifier</i>	active	punctual	2	1	3.125
			(total)	32	

Idioms containing the PN *peur(s)* with SVs

1. [∅]

Peur(s) in the corpus

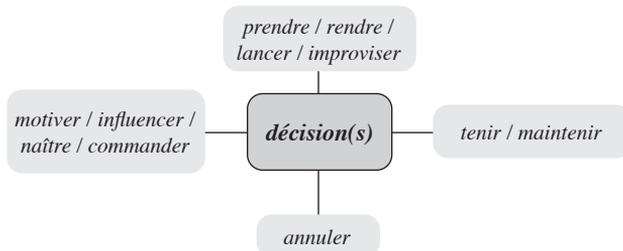
1. Which constructions are frequent but are not SVCs? *de peur de / de peur que, par peur*
2. Which constructions may be SVCs but are excluded from the analysis? *ramener à la peur*
3. Which constructions are unclear? [∅]
4. Which phrases, etc. skew the statistics? [∅]
5. What is the semantic scope of the PN? [∅]

¹⁷ The SV is twice reflexive, that is *se faire* rather than simple *faire*.

[III.5.iv] *Décision*

The aspect of component compatibility for the PN *décision* in the singular and plural forms is illustrated graphically in [10], and quantitative details are tabulated in [11].

[10] Component compatibility: *décision(s)*



[11] Constructions with the PN *décision(s)*

	Voice	Aspect	No. of arguments	Total	% of total
<i>prendre / rendre / lancer / improviser</i>	active	punctual	2	59	88
<i>tenir / maintenir</i>	passive	durative	2	2	3
<i>annuler</i>	active	punctual	2	1	2
<i>motiver / influencer / naître / commander</i>	active	punctual	2	5	7
			(total)	67	

Idioms containing the PN *décision(s)* with SVs

1. [∅]

Décision(s) in the corpus

1. Which constructions are frequent but are not SVCs? (cf. 5 below)
2. Which constructions may be SVCs but are excluded from the analysis? [∅]
3. Which constructions are unclear? [∅]
4. Which phrases, etc. skew the statistics? [∅]
5. What is the semantic scope of the PN? *Décision* refers on the one hand to the action of decision-making but on the other hand also to the result of this action. The latter meaning is commonly used in political contexts when commenting on documents which state decisions that have been taken (Radimský 2011: 223). Only when *décision* is referring to an action or the result of an action can it be a PN. When *décision* refers to an official document, it would have to be actualised by means of the SV, like the concrete nouns discussed below.

[III.6] Taking stock regarding the working definition

As the case studies show, the advantages of our working definition include the fact that it grasps the syntactic variability (e.g. pluralisation of the PN, the addition of DPs and ATTs to the PN), the fact that it grasps the collocational variability (e.g. high- and low-frequency combinations), and the fact that it grasps the semantic breadth (e.g. nuances with regard to aspect and voice conveyed by the substitution or deletion of the SV).¹⁸ In essence, the working definition assumes SVCs to be a semi-productive pattern in the French language, that is patterns that are subject to certain syntactic, semantic and lexical constraints but that are otherwise variable. By approaching the data in this empirical way, we acknowledge that SVCs are a group of constructions that is internally heterogeneous because we explore marginal and prototypical representatives of it and can consider critically where to draw the line between SVCs and verb-object constructions (cf. Kamber 2008).

IV. The syntax of support-verb constructions

The verb is the kernel of any clause. As such, the verb cannot be modified without effects on its structural and semantic environments. In the case of SVCs, as in other verbal MWEs, we have a VP consisting of multiple items, i.e. what is termed a complex predicate (Darlymple, Lowe & Mycock 2019: 346-52). Thus, we have to consider how each component can be modified and how this affects the whole construction and how the construction as a whole interacts with the syntactic environment.

Although we are primarily interested in the SV, we cannot ignore the PN as it forms part of the construction and modifications on it affect the construction as a whole. Giry-Schneider (1987: 2-3) in response to Brunot (1927) points out the optional extensions to the allegedly invariable *avoir tort*. These include the addition of an adjective as well as the addition of an indefinite article when the PN is pluralised. Noticeably, such modifications often go hand in hand with subtle semantic changes as Chaurand (1991), Heid (2004) and Giry-Schneider (2004) in particular show with regard to the use of definite and indefinite articles in SVCs. Moreover, the addition of a DP is sometimes warranted for syntactic reasons (Heid 2004). At other times, it is for reasons of discourse cohesion (Storror 2009).

By way of example, we can think of an SVC that is highly frequent and constitutes a strong collocation, *prendre DP décision* (ATT), and allows for a range of syntactic operations to be carried out on it including passivisation, negation (*ne ... aucune*), relativization with the PN in the superordinate and the SV in the relative clause, and pluralisation of the PN, as well as for a range of complementation patterns to be attached to it including a range of prepositions as well as *de* INF.¹⁹ By contrast, *donner/redonner* (DP)

¹⁸ On collocational variability in Latin, see Baños 2014, 2015, 2016. On collocational variability in Old French, see Marchello-Nizia 1996.

¹⁹ E.g. '*Le "groupe restreint" mettra ensuite au point le budget qui sera présenté début février, et il préparera les grandes décisions qui devront être prises en avril ou mai*'.

envie is an SVC that is comparatively less frequent and constitutes a weak collocation. It allows for several syntactic operations to be carried out on it including pluralisation of the PN and addition of DPs as well as for a range of complementation patterns to be attached to it (*de* NP, *de* INF). Thus, syntactic flexibility is not *per se* paired with strong or weak collocations. Rather, as mentioned, syntactic inflexibility is often but not always, as we will see, paired with semantic non-transparency.

[IV.1] Encoding voice, mood, tense, and aspect

There are in essence three options for how the notions of voice, mood, tense and aspect can be indicated, that is morphologically, lexically and syntactically. Voice, mood, tense and aspect can be encoded on the verb by means of inflectional endings, or in the case of the passive an established verbal periphrasis. They can be encoded by means of substituting the SV by another SV as, for example, in the dyad of active *donner* and passive *recevoir*. They can be encoded outside the SV by means of adding modal verbs and adjuncts, such as adverbs or adverbial phrases. Due to our focus on the SV, we are interested in option one and tangentially in option two. Option three lies beyond the scope of the article.

Regarding voice, we have morphological encoding for the active and passive voices in French. Theoretically, we could posit a middle in that there are reflexive and reciprocal uses of many verbs, yet these are not encoded on the verb by means of an inflectional ending or by means of an auxiliary verb but by means of the addition of dedicated pronouns. The lexical encoding of voice in SVCs has been studied by Gross (1989) in what he called *constructions converses*, that is constructions which resemble passive constructions with regard to their distribution of participant roles. He focused on the interchange of *donner* and *recevoir*. Vivès (1993: 13) later studied the pair *faire* and *subir*.

In the case of mood, we distinguish between the indicative, subjunctive, and conditional moods. While all three have a variety of semantic nuances, these semantic subtleties are not morpho-syntactically encoded but rather pragmatically inferred. Therefore, we will not take these into account, but only consider the three morphologically encodable moods.

As concerns tense, we encode a range of present, past, and future tenses in French including most prominently *le présent*, *le futur simple*, *le futur antérieur*, *l'imparfait*, *le passé composé*, *le passé simple*, *le plus-que-parfait*, *le passé antérieur*.²⁰ These morpho-syntactic encodings are interwoven with the encoding of aspect, that is the reason there are no separate morphological aspect and tense markers in French, but morphological marking is multifunctional in indicating both aspect and tense.

Aspect has been described in different ways and several models are presented in Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers (2001). While the exact definition of aspect in French is debated, researchers by and large agree that aspect refers to the internal temporal struc-

²⁰ See Ayres-Bennett & Carruthers 2001: chap. 6 (on past tenses), Bres & Labeau 2015 (on periphrastic formations).

turing of an event. By contrast, tense determines the external temporal profile of an event. Wilmet (1997) provides a comprehensive theory of aspect in French from the semantic and morpho-syntactic perspectives. In the data collection, we focused on coarse-grained categories such as imperfective and perfective not only because unlike finer-grained categories these can be morphologically encoded but also because finer-grained categories are even more debated (Carruthers 2012, Marnette 1998).

Regarding the lexical encoding of aspect, Vivès (1993: 13) notes that applying aspectual modifications to SVCs is usually not done by adding a verb such as *commencer* (à) ‘to begin’ (inchoative aspect) to the SVC, but by substituting the SV in the SVC by an SV that already implies the aspect to be expressed. Furthermore, Vivès (1984) considered the aspectually distinguished pair *avoir* (durative aspect) and *perdre* (terminative aspect). These two constructions, while complementary in aspectual terms, differ in the morphosyntactic constraints that apply to them. We can add the distinction between *faire* and *avoir*, which is aspectual in that *faire* + PN usually encodes an action, whereas *avoir* + PN usually encodes a state (e.g. *avoir* DP *cœur* ADJ and *faire* *cœur* ADJ). We can also distinguish clearly between *perdre* + PN (terminative aspect, with the grammatical subject being a patient) and *ruiner* + PN (terminative aspect, with the grammatical subject being an agent), for instance in the case of the PN *espoir*.²¹

Ideally, we would test the difference between something like *I am taking the decision* and **I take the decision* in French in a study with human participants as constraints on the choice of tense, mood, voice and aspect seem to affect certain SVCs. However, the select corpus of texts is not only too small but also pragmatically too limited for this kind of test in that we have a range of reports and descriptions of past events. Thus, this aspect will have to await further research.

[IV.2] Encoding arguments and adjuncts

There are in essence two options to complement an SVC, that is we can have semantic objects and syntactic objects. Semantic objects are syntactically adjuncts, whereas syntactic objects are syntactically arguments.

[12] Les élus avaient peur de la drogue.
ART.DEF S.ELECTED SV.HAVE PN.FEAR PRP.OF ART.DEF SUBSTANCE.SG

For example, the phrase *de la drogue* in [12] is semantically but not syntactically speaking the object of the verbal expression *avoir peur*.

In essence, given that the direct-object slot in SVCs is filled by the PN, the appearance of syntactic objects points towards the components of the SVC having fused to the extent that the SV and the PN can occupy the verb slot together as it were so that the

²¹ Aspectual variants of SVCs are discussed by Danlos 1992: 7-8, Alonso Ramos 1998, and Giry-Schneider (2004): inchoative (*prendre espoir*), durative (*garder l'espoir*), terminative (*perdre l'espoir*), iterative (*multiplier les agressions*), and neuter (*avoir espoir*).

direct-object slot is vacant and can be filled (see further Section V). In our data sample, the following four complementation patterns appear:

- Prepositional phrase (semantic object, adjunct)
- Objective genitive (semantic object, adjunct)
- Complement clause (syntactic object, argument)
- Direct object (syntactic object, argument)

Amongst our case studies, there is none that allows for a nominal direct object.²² However, object clauses appear in our data sample. These clausal syntactic objects could theoretically still be interpreted as adverbial or attributive clauses. In [13], the complement clause could be taken as an attribute clause attached to the antecedent *peur*.

[13] On avait peur qu' il s' essoufle.
 S.ONE SV.HAVE PN.FEAR CPL.THAT S.IT RFL.HIM V.LEAVE.OUT.OF.BREATH

Furthermore, in some instances with what seems to be a clausal complement, the issue arises of whether we have a syndetic or an asyndetic structure, that is whether the sentence-initial particle is subordinating or not. For example, is *que* in [13] a subordinator or a sentence-initial particle in an independent clause (Deulofeu 2008)? Lehmann maps the kinds of complements that can appear in the complement slot on a continuum ranging from nominality to sentiality (Lenham 1988: section III.1.iv). The sentiality end of the continuum raises the issue of subordination vs. coordination and insubordination (Cristofaro 2016, Mithun 2008). There are semantic / pragmatic, register-related and diachronic aspects to be considered in order to decide.²³ Thus, what looks like a straightforward complement clause may not be one and may hence not be as indicative towards the nature of the fusion between the PN and the SV as it may seem at first.

The indirect-object slot, for those SVs that subcategorise for an indirect object, is not affected in any way by the considerations above.

[14] Il fait peur aux enfants.
 S.HE SV.DO PN.FEAR PRP.TO ART.DEF CHILD.PL

In [14], the SV *faire* is used in its three-argument pattern, ‘to cause something to somebody’.

²² Direct objects are permissible with certain SVCs e.g. in Estonian, a Finnic language, which is agglutinative (Ronan 2012: 13); and in Coptic, a Semitic language, which is agglutinative (Fendel 2018: chap. 3).

²³ Günther 2000 (semantic / pragmatic issues around German *obwohl*); Debaisieux 2007, 2016 (on register-related issues around French *parce que*); Bentein 2015 (on diachronic issues around Greek *ὅτι*).

V. Explaining syntactic variability

This section discusses the synchronic and diachronic flexibility and variability of SVCs by looking at the interactions between the SVC as a VP with its environment (Section V.1) from a synchronic perspective as well as through the lens of grammaticalisation from a diachronic perspective (Section V.2). In essence, we see that French SVCs are a prime example of synchronic variation (Hopper's layering) reflecting a change in progress.

[V.1] *Varying environments*

Like other VPs, many SVCs combine with more than one syntactic and semantic pattern. A simple example of an SWE allowing for several patterns is the verb *to try* in English. We find *try to do*, *try and do*, and *try doing* with certain syntactic and semantic constraints applying (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2003, Hopper & Traugott 2003: 50-51). This combinatory flexibility of many VPs has been captured in the concept of verb profiles.²⁴

In Section II.1, we mentioned that SVCs can behave more like synthetic VPs (i.e. in calling for an ADV) and others more like analytic MWEs (i.e. in calling for an ADJ). A prime example is *avoir peur*. The options *avoir très peur* and *avoir grande peur* coexist. In the former case, the SVC is treated like a single-word expression VP in that an adverb is added to modify the entire SVC. By contrast, in *avoir grande peur*, the SVC is treated as an MWE in that an adjective is added to modify the PN.

Thus, unlike in other VPs, complementation patterns with SVCs vary on two axes. The SVC as a whole can appear with different complementation patterns in the sense of verb profiles and the SVC can be treated more like an analytic MWE or more like a synthetic VP and thus allow for one type of modification or another.

Two examples of varying syntactic environments are discussed in more detail. Both relate to SVCs that do not allow for variation within the construction, but enter into a range of syntactic environments, the first without a semantic change entailed, the second with a semantic change entailed.

[V.1.i] *avoir peur*

In combination with the SV *avoir*, the PN *peur* is never accompanied by either a DP or an ATT. The SVC appears in three syntactic configurations, as illustrated in [15] (cf. similarly *avoir raison*).

²⁴ Gross 1984 (for French); Hanks 1996, 2013 (on English); Hartmann, Haspelmath & Taylor 2013 (for German); Lazard 2002 (from a typological perspective).

[15] **Constructions with the PN *peur(s)***

Complement	Prospective complement		Factive complement		No complement
	<i>de</i> INF	<i>que</i> SVO ²⁵	<i>de</i> NP	(<i>ne ...</i>) rien	∅
<i>avoir peur</i>	5	3	6	2	6

Hence, despite not allowing for variation within the construction, *avoir peur* allows for a range of complementation patterns.

[V.1.ii] *avoir raison*

Chaurand (1991: 12) calls *avoir raison*, in the sense of *avoir une bonne raison* or *être dans le bon sens, dans le vrai*, a fixed construction. Yet, both the addition of ADJs to the PN (twice) and the addition of ADVs to the SVC (four times) are attested in the corpus and suggest that *avoir raison* is not completely inflexible syntactically speaking. In the corpus, *avoir raison* appears in three syntactic contexts, as illustrated in [16] to [18] (Labelle 1983).

[16] ***avoir raison*, ‘to be right’ (intransitive)**

Depuis sept ans qu’il en assume la direction, Marco Müller, globe-trotter polyglotte et cinéphile au cœur d’artichaut, entretient le doute, et il a raison.

[17] ***avoir raison de qqn.*, ‘to defeat’ (transitive, factive)**

Le règlement de comptes politique a eu raison de la “Madame Propre du RPR”.

[18] ***avoir raison de faire*, ‘to be right to do sth.’ (transitive, prospective²⁶)**

Certes, Michel Jeanneret a raison de mettre en garde contre les projections du présent sur le passé, les anachronismes, les analogies indues (...).

If we apply Hopper and Thomson’s (1980) criteria for transitivity to these three structures, the following differences emerge.²⁷ Hopper and Thompson’s list combines syntactic and semantic aspects.

²⁵ The verb is always in the subjunctive.

²⁶ The distinction between factive and prospective is a purely syntactic, rather than a semantic-pragmatic, one. Anaphoric complements are categorised as factive and non-anaphoric ones as prospective (cf. Schulz 2003).

²⁷ A discussion of the issue of transitivity goes beyond the scope of this article. See e.g. Bickel 2010, Comrie 1981, Haspelmath 2011, Lazard 2002, Witzlack-Makarevich 2011. Lazard in particular draws a clear line between morphosyntactic and semantic characteristics of a construction. Overall, the above-mentioned authors do not conceptualise transitivity as formally gradient but focus on valency patterns and their characteristics (cf. the notion of verb profiles mentioned above).

[19] **Hopper and Thompson’s (1980: 252) Table 1, as applied to *avoir raison***

SVC	<i>avoir raison</i>	<i>avoir raison de qqn</i>	<i>avoir raison de faire qqch</i>
Participants	2	3	3
Kinesis	non-action	action	action
Aspect	atelic	telic	atelic ²⁸
Punctuality	non-punctual	punctual	punctual
Volitionality	volitional	volitional	volitional
Affirmation	affirmative	affirmative	affirmative
Mode	realis	realis	realis
Agency	A high in potency	A high in potency	A high in potency
Affectedness of O	n/a	O totally affected	O not affected
Individuation of O	n/a	O highly individuated	O non-individuated
Transitivity score	4 / 9	9 / 9	7 / 9

[19] illustrates that the three structures differ in their argument structure, their assignment of participant roles, their semantic value, and their lexical properties.

We know that ordinary verbs can subcategorise for several argument structures (Naess 2007). The same seems to apply to SVCs, as shown for the Spanish SVCs with the SV *dar* by Cuervo (2010). Cuervo distinguishes by means of syntactic tests between ditransitive and unaccusative structures. [20] and [21] are her introductory examples:

[20] **Ditransitive structure (Cuervo 2010: 139, no. 1)**

El plantel siempre le da apoyo al técnico.
 THE TEAM.NOM ALWAYS CL.DAT GIVES SUPPORT THE COACH.DAT
 ‘The team always supports the coach.’

[21] **Unaccusative structure (Cuervo 2010: 140, no. 2)**

Al técnico le dan rabia las protestas.
 THE COACH.DAT CL.DAT GIVE.PL FURY THE COMPLAINTS.NOM
 ‘The complaints make the coach furious.’

Cuervo shows that the SV *dar* in [20] functions as a ditransitive verb, syntactically speaking, and is bleached, semantically speaking. The dative ‘to the coach’ fills an argument slot of the SV. By contrast, the dative is not an argument of the VP in [21] (Cuervo 2010: 141-51). Rather, the SVC *dar rabia* resembles constructions with psychological predicates, such as *piacere* and *gustar*, as illustrated in [22] (Cuervo 2010: 147-48).

²⁸ While its constituent parts are atelic (*avoir raison*) and telic (*faire qqch*), the expression *avoir raison de faire qqch* as a whole is atelic.

[22] **Unaccusative structure (Cuervo 2010: 147, no. 24)**

Al técnico no le gustan las protestas.

THE COACH.DAT NEG CL.DAT LIKE.PL THE COMPLAINTS.NOM

‘The coach doesn’t like complaints.’

By and large, the combination of the SV and the PN seems to be tight enough in SVCs that the SVC as a whole, as a VP, can assume different meanings when entering into different syntactic contexts (Gries 2003, Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004).

[V.2] *The ravages of time*

Like other VPs, SVCs can undergo changes affecting their internal structure and consequently the way they integrate into the surrounding syntax and semantics. The two processes considered here are grammaticalisation and lexicalisation (Breban 2019, for a new approach; Marchello-Nizia 2006, specifically on French).

Grammaticalisation is the process by which an originally lexical item or MWE assumes a grammatical function.²⁹ This is one way of language change (Traugott & Trousdale 2010: 21, on change in different frameworks). This change is brought about through the mechanisms of reanalysis, a rule change on the syntagmatic level, and analogy, a generalisation of a rule at the paradigmatic level (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 52-55, 64).³⁰ Reanalysis may be preceded by ambiguity of a structure (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 52). The concrete changes that can take place include phonetic reduction, morphological and syntactic reanalysis, and semantic bleaching, but not all these changes have to occur.

When the mechanisms of reanalysis and analogy do not primarily affect the grammar but the lexicon, we speak of lexicalisation (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 58). Here, Hopper and Traugott (2003: 53) use very effectively the example of compounding as in *house+wife*. The grammatical status of *wife* does not change, that is the word is not reanalysed as a morpheme, but there is a change at the lexical level. In affecting its semantics, lexicalisation affects the register-related and genre-related applicability of the item or MWE, for example, contrast the contexts of usage for *prendre DP décision* and *rendre DP décision*.

Grammaticalisation and lexicalisation seem to be continuously ongoing processes of change in French SVCs. However, technically, these are processes that involve a very large number of successive discrete micro-step changes, this is what Traugott and Trousdale (2010: 31, 39) label gradualness.

We can imagine a line ranging from the free combination of a VP and a direct object to the completely fixed combination of an SV and a PN (forming a VP together) in the sense of Brunot’s (1927) *juxtaposés immuables*. Concretely, we initially have an NP filling the direct-object slot of a VP. If these two items co-occur frequently, the connection between them may become tighter (cf. collocations) so that they may fuse both seman-

²⁹ The opposite process is called conversion (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 58).

³⁰ An example at the morphological level is the French inflectional future.

tically and syntactically. When this happens, the SV undergoes grammaticalisation in that it turns from an independent lexical item into a dependent semantically reduced item. The resulting state is that the former VP and the former NP form a VP in the form of an SVC. The semantic and syntactic functions, that is the assignment of participant roles and of the argument structure, is then split between the two items forming the VP (the SV and the PN). Eventually, the fusion will be tight enough that the PN is no longer considered to occupy the direct-object slot and thus complementation by means of a direct object will be possible. Basically, what formerly had to be attached as an adjunct (semantic object) can then be attached as an argument (syntactic object). However, this is rare.

With regard to changes, we have to distinguish between the event of innovation and the gradual spread of this innovation throughout the linguistic system and the speaker community (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 46). Often, older and newer forms coexist for extended periods of time. This is what Hopper calls layering (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 49). Synchronically, a combination of an SV and a PN may appear in a more or less grammaticalised, or syntactically and semantically flexible, form as long as it is not completely fixed. Compare *avoir peur* with *avoir (DP) espoir*; while the former no longer allows for syntactic modification of the PN, syntactic modification is an available option in the latter. Yet, even *avoir peur* still allows for the addition of an ADJ to the PN (cf. *avoir grand peur*, literary) although it allows for the addition of the ADVs *si* and *très* as well. If the combination with an ADJ passes completely out of use, the SVC *avoir peur* will reach the extreme end of the above-mentioned line. In cases like *avoir peur*, syntactic tests, can then help us locate structures on the aforementioned line (cf. Section II.1), that is assess the fusion between the components.

Based on the above observations, it seems that grammaticalisation in French SVCs is an example of a syntactic change in progress with a period of variation preceding the actual change. Furthermore, it seems plausible to conceptualise grammaticalisation in French SVCs as a line or continuum on which SVCs can move up and down, diachronically speaking. Synchronically speaking, any SVC usually moves up and down on a part of this line or continuum.

[V.2.i] *avoir envie*

There appears to be a strong link between *envie* and the SV *avoir*. In two thirds of all attestations of *envie* in the corpus, we find the singular form *envie* in combination with *avoir*. This strong link between *envie* and *avoir* may indicate that the SVC has gone down the path of grammaticalisation to the degree that analyticity has been lost at least partially and / or syntactic flexibility is constrained.

In fact, the SVC *avoir envie* appears in two syntactic configurations, as illustrated in [23], and the PN *envie* is never accompanied by a DP or an ATT in the corpus.

[23] The syntax of *avoir envie*

	<i>de</i> INF	<i>de</i> NP
<i>avoir envie</i>	27	2

The *de* in these complementation patterns encodes an objective genitive (cf. similarly *espoir*). Thus, the fusion of components is not yet tight enough for the direct-object slot to be vacant.

[V.2.ii] *faire peur*

The SVC *faire peur* is syntactically highly inflexible, whereas the structure consisting of *provoquer* and the plural form *peurs*, which seems semantically equivalent to the *faire-peur* construction, shows extension by both a DP and an ATT on the PN.

- [24] *Autant dire que l'impuissance passagère et les "pannes" en tout genre **provoquent des peurs intenses, obsessionnelles.***

The structure in [24] is causative like the *faire-peur* construction, with a phrase à XP 'to XP' omitted in [24]. There may be a semantic difference between the singular PN *peur* in *faire peur* and the plural PN *peurs* in *provoquer* DP *peurs*, in that the singular seems to be non-referential, whereas the plural is referential. Furthermore, in order to add the nuance of intensity that is highlighted by the ADJs *intenses* and *obsessionnelles* in [24], these would have to be converted into adverbs if the *faire-peur* construction was to be used. The resulting sentence would be syntactically correct but semantically nonsensical as well as unidiomatic. Thus, an alternative to the grammaticalised *faire-peur* construction may have to be selected whenever specific extensions are to be added.

Another alternative to the *faire-peur* construction is [25]. Yet, here the nuance of intensification is expressed by means of substituting the SV.

- [25] *La crise asiatique, en menaçant certaines des économies les plus fortes au monde, **intensifie ces peurs.***

The PN is again in the plural form and is accompanied by a DP, unlike in the grammaticalized *faire-peur* construction. However, unlike in [24], the substitution of *intensifier* as the SV has a clear semantic impact and thus syntactic reasons alone cannot account for the choice of the construction in [25] over the grammaticalised *faire-peur* construction.

VI. Summary and conclusion

Section I provided an introduction to various issues around SVCs including the issues of segmentation at the syntactic and semantic levels and mapping of these two levels onto each other. Section II dove into the crucial question of how to define SVCs and proposed a novel approach in the form of a working definition that brings together semantic and syntactic criteria and thus acknowledges that SVCs operate at the interface of syntax and semantics and that their components can only be defined in relative terms, that is relative to the construction. Section III presented the results of applying the working definition to a select number of noun environments and thus showed its value as an empirical approach that allows us to explore the margins of this internally heterogeneous group of constructions. Section IV shone some light on the syntax of SVCs by considering the modifications encoded on the SV as well as the interactions of an SVC with its syntactic and semantic environments. Section V showed how the concept of verb profiles applies to SVCs and how SVCs go beyond single-word expression VPs in their variability, in that they can behave more like analytic MWEs or more like synthetic VPs with regard to their environment. Furthermore, Section V showed how this synchronic variability correlates with diachronic changes through the lens of grammaticalisation.

In conclusion, French SVCs show a high level of synchronic variation (layering) and diachronically a tendency towards the tighter fusion of the two components involved. This suggests that what we see is a syntactic change in progress in the sense of Hopper's layering and socio-linguistic approaches.

The jury is still out on the precise status of SVCs in French, and on several questions that have been raised in — but go beyond the scope of — this article, such as the use of SVCs to encode subtle semantic, pragmatic and register-related nuances. For example, Christophe Léon's novel *Désobéis!* uses *prendre la relève*, *avoir la trouille* (for *avoir très peur*), *emboîter le pas à qqn* and *faire gaffe (à)* (for *faire attention (à)*) in quick succession over just nine pages. Thus, there is ample scope for further research into SVCs in French.

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VII. List of abbreviations

A	Agent
ADJ	Adjective
ADV	Adverbial Phrase
ATT	Attribute Phrase (incl. adjectives, prepositional phrases with de)
BNC	British National Corpus
BV	Base Verb
BVC	Base-Verb Construction
CVS	Construction à Verbe Support
DEC	Dictionnaire Explicatif et Combinatoire
DP	Determiner Phrase
FV	Function Verb
FVC	Function-Verb Construction
IE	Indo-European
IND	Indicative
INF	Infinitive
LV	Light Verb
LVC	Light-Verb Construction
MWE	Multi-Word Expression
NPL	Natural Language Processing
NP	Noun Phrase
NV	Nominal Verb
NVC	Nominal-Verb Construction
O	Object
pl	Plural
PN	Predicative Noun (in an SVC)
POSS	Possessive Phrases (i.e. possessive pronouns, possessive de phrases)
PP	Prepositional Phrase
SBJ	Subjunctive
sg	Singular
SLA	Second-Language Acquisition
SV	Support Verb
SVC	Support-Verb Construction
SVO	Subject Verb Object (word order pattern)
VP	Verb Phrase
XP	Verb Phrase or Noun Phrase