

Conceptualising Transitivity

Update March 2023

Aims of the project

- To derive constructions from the Collins COBUILD Grammar Patterns: Verbs resource.
- To use those constructions to re-conceptualise the systemic-functional transitivity network.
- The constructions will be ‘mid-level’ i.e. more general than ‘the accident waiting to happen construction’ and less general than ‘the ditransitive construction’.
- For example ‘the **someone perceives something as something** construction’ (e.g. ‘They regarded the decision as a mistake.’)

Progress so far

- To date, 47 patterns have been processed, identifying about 25 end-point constructions per pattern.
- These constructions are being uploaded on to a web-based database.
- The project has also progressed in terms of:
 - Expressing the hierarchical relationship between constructions as a network;
 - Identifying what it is important to say about each construction.

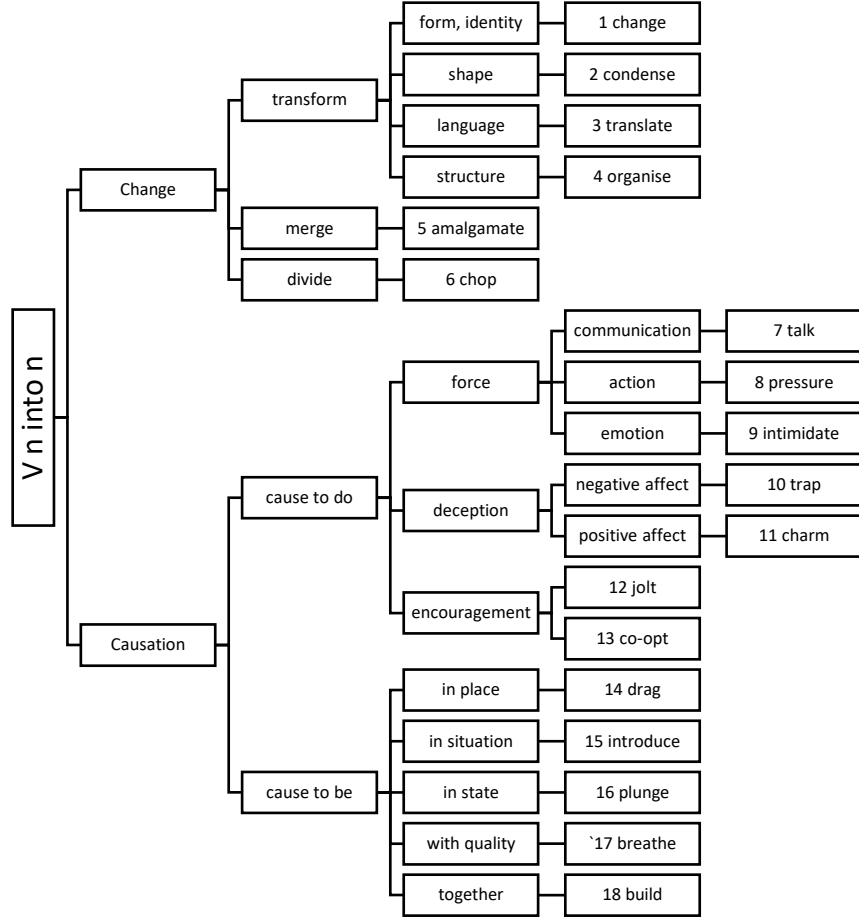
The method

- Working from the Collins Cobuild Grammar Patterns: Verbs resource...
 - ...identify the 'large-scale' meanings expressed by each pattern...
 - ...and the 'small-scale' meanings expressed by each meaning group or sub-section thereof...
 - ...and express these as constructions.
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- For example: **V n into n** (e.g. 'changed him into a frog' or 'jolted her into action') expresses two main meanings: CHANGE and CAUSATION
 - And is used in 18 'small-scale' or 'end-point' constructions.

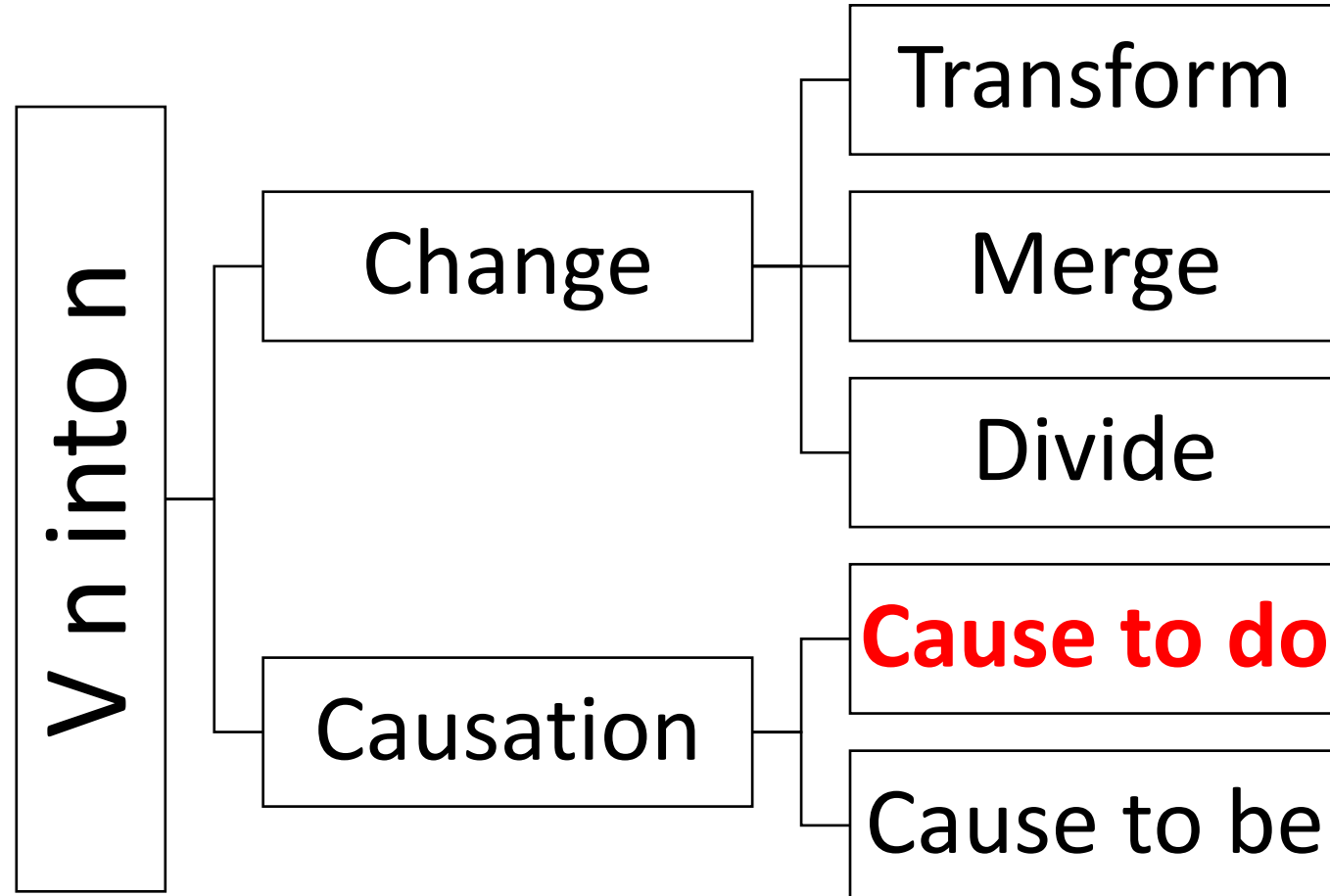
The outcome

- On the topmost level we can talk about:
 - The **change something into something** construction
 - The **cause someone into action** construction
- And at the mid level we can talk about:
 - The **transform something into something different** construction
 - The **merge two things into one thing** construction
 - The **divide on thing into two or more things** construction. Etc
- And at the most detailed level we can talk about:
 - The **condense something into a shape** construction
 - The **translate a text into a language** construction
 - The **organise people into groups** construction. Etc

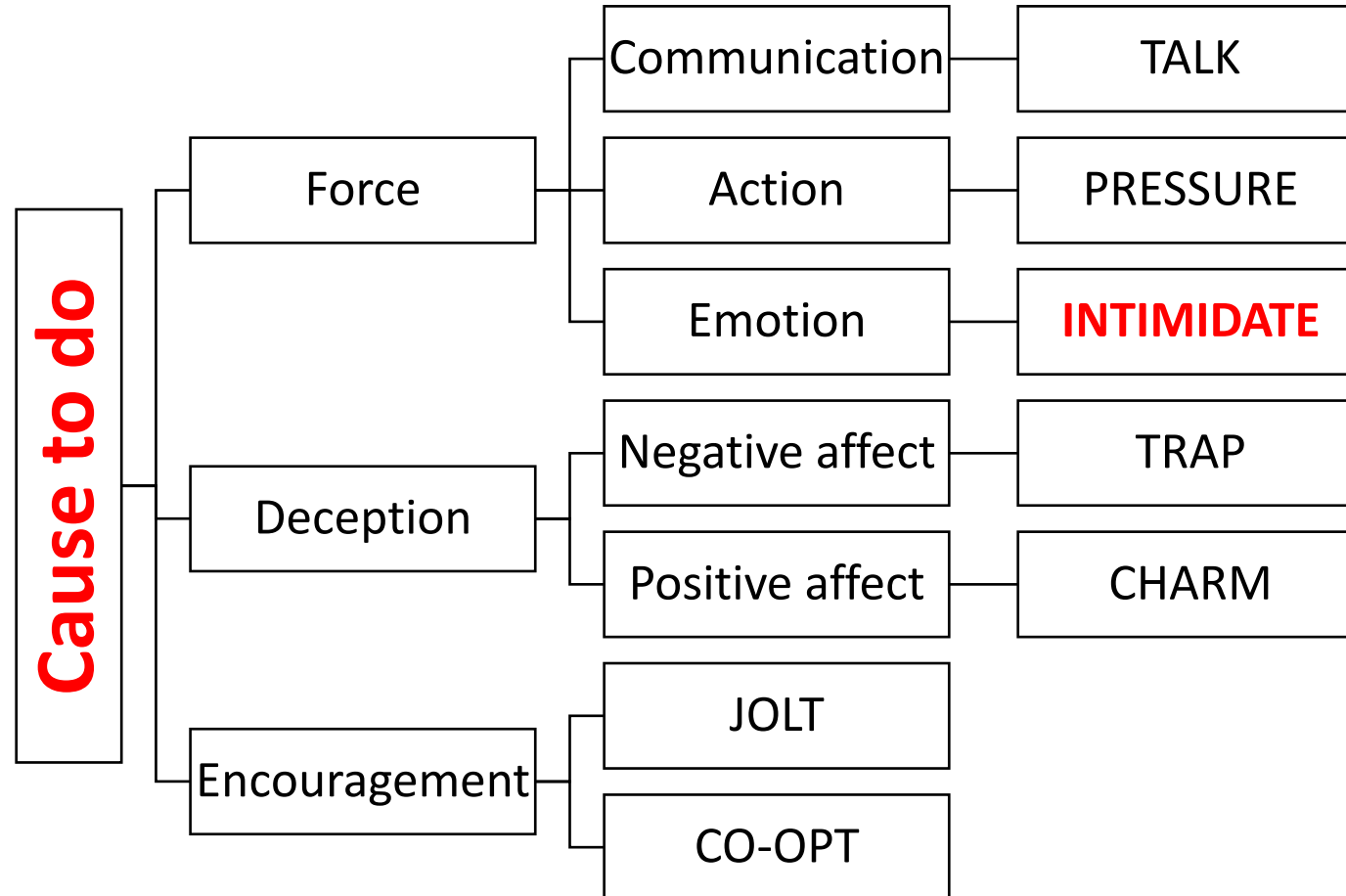
The construction network: *V n into n*



In more detail:



And more detail (capitals = end-point constructions):



Adding explanatory notes to the network

Cause to do [The constructions are divided according to whether the verb indicates force, deception, or encouragement]

Force [...divided according to the type of process indicated by the verbs...]

Deception [...divided according to whether the affect is positive or negative]

Encouragement [...divided according to the meaning of the verbs]

communication

action

emotion

Negative

positive

Describing the construction - example

Pattern	V n into n
Construction name	the intimidate someone into action construction
Description	A person causes another person to follow a course of action by making them feel fear or shame. The NP following 'into' indicates the action.
Verbs	chasten, frighten, intimidate, panic, scare, shame, terrify
Example	<i>...with the aim of intimidating Europe into submission...</i> (BNC)
Membership	cause; cause someone to do; force; emotion
Roles	?? NP1: xxx NP2: xxx NP3: xxx
Semantic fields	?? causation; aggression

Describing the construction

Pattern	V n into n	These are the patterns used in the COBUILD dictionaries.
Construction name	the intimidate someone into action construction	The name is taken from one of the verbs used with this construction.
Description	A person causes another person to follow a course of action by making them feel fear or shame. The NP following 'into' indicates the action.	A short description, as explicit as necessary / possible.
Verbs	chasten, frighten, intimidate, panic, scare, shame, terrify	The verbs taken from the COBUILD Grammar Patterns: Verbs lists.
Example	<i>...with the aim of intimidating Europe into submission...</i> (BNC)	An illustrative example from the BNC.
Membership	cause; cause someone to do; force; emotion	This shows the route through the network, showing more and more delicate distinctions.
Roles	?? NP1: xxx NP2: xxx NP3: xxx	Ongoing.
Semantic fields	?? causation; aggression	Ongoing.

What it shows: the story so far

- The notion of ‘delicacy’, taken from Systemic-Functional Linguistics, can usefully be applied to the description of constructions.
- The grammar patterns, taken from Corpus Linguistics, can usefully be applied to organise constructions and to identify testified verbs in each construction.
- The networks and the end-point constructions provide an increasingly comprehensive account of verb-based constructions in English at this level of generality.