Building a system network for the semantic field of 'possession transfer'

Possession transfer means taking or giving. It entails three participants or roles (or frame elements):

1. The 'transferer' – person or entity causing the transfer
2. The 'possessor' – old or new possessor of the possession
3. The 'possession' – the thing, physical or abstract, that is transferred

There are 18 constructions that express possession transfer. Table 1 illustrates these. In each case, the transferer is not shown, but is the subject of the clause. The possessor is indicated by 'someone' and the possession by 'something'. These are informal representations of the constructions.

Table 1: 18 constructions expressing possession transfer.

feed someone	bring someone something	provide something
bring something for someone	borrow from someone	acquire something from someone
take something from someone	deprive someone of something	rid someone of something
give something to someone	mail something to someone	allocate something to someone
bequeath something to someone	grant something to someone	demand something from someone
coax something from someone	cheat someone out of something	charm something out of someone

The task is then to model the options that a speaker has when finding a construction to express this meaning. These aspects appear to be relevant:

- There are choices of meaning made. These relate to the process type used and to the direction of transfer.
    - The process type can be 'action' or 'communication'
    - The direction can be towards the possessor ('give') or away from the possessor ('take')
- There are choices of form made. These relate to the type of entity occupying the clause object slot and to the pattern.
    - The type of entity as object can be the possession or the possessor. In both cases there is an object. A third alternative – no object – exists.
    - A total of 8 patterns contribute to the constructions. They can be divided into those with prepositions and those without.

Figure 1 represents this information as a system network. The curly brackets indicate simultaneous choice. The square brackets indicate exclusive alternatives. For example, a construction is the outcome of choices within both process type and direction. Within 'process type' a construction expresses either 'action' or 'communication'.

Each of the constructions shown in Table 1 can be shown to have a specific combination of elements from the choices shown in Figure 2. Table 2 shows these combinations. It is noticeable that several constructions share a full set of elements. In those cases, the distinction between the constructions lies in the choice of preposition, the physical or abstract nature of the possession, or the meaning of the verbs used in the construction.

Table 2: The combinations of features in the constructions. (‘so’ = ‘someone’; ‘sth’ = ‘something’)

POSSESSION TRANSFER								
MEANING				FORM				
PROCESS		DIRECTION		OBJECT TYPE		PATTERN TYPE		Cx
ACTION	COMM	GIVE	TAKE	POSS’OR	POSS’ION	+ PREP	-PREP	
√		√		√			√	feed so
√		√		√			√	bring so sth
√		√			√		√	provide sth
√		√			√	√		bring sth for so
√			√	-	-	√		borrow from so
√			√		√	√		acquire sth from so
√			√		√	√		take sth from so
√			√	√		√		deprive so of sth
√			√	√		√		rid so of sth
√		√			√	√		give sth to so
√		√			√	√		mail sth to so
√		√			√	√		allocate sth to so
√		√			√	√		bequeath sth to so
√		√			√	√		grant sth to so
	√		√		√	√		demand sth from so
	√		√		√	√		coax sth from so
	√		√	√		√		cheat so out of sth
	√		√		√	√		charm sth out of so

Because, as Table 2 shows, multiple combinations of elements are available, it is not possible to move directly from the network shown in Figure 1 to the construction. In other words, there is not a straightforward progression through choices of increasing delicacy from the features shown to the constructions. This is, at least in part, because each construction is the consequence of choices within each of the simultaneous decisions. To construct a single network, therefore, some of the binary distinctions must be prioritized over others.

Figure 2 shows the proposed network for ‘possession transfer’. This network prioritises process type and pattern. Other choice options are shown only when they distinguish constructions within a pattern. The constructions are represented in Figure 2 by a number and a verb. The number refers to the number assigned to the construction in the pattern-construction analysis, while the verb is a brief indication of the construction meaning. For example, ’10 feed’ is to be interpreted as: ‘construction number 10 in the list of constructions included in the pattern designated as ‘V n (material); this construction is the ‘feed someone’ construction’.

Figure 1: A system network for the primary choices for the possession transfer semantic field.

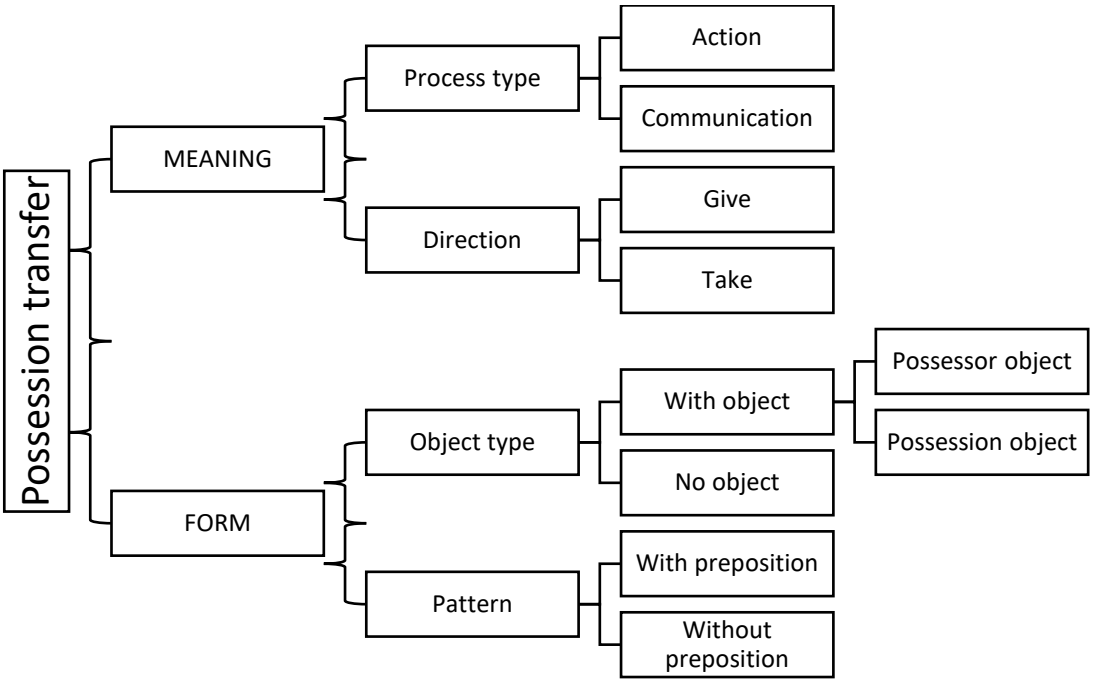

Figure 2: A system network leading to the constructions expressing possession transfer.