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Linguistic Creativity in Motion: How Speakers Extend Intransitive Verbs into Argument Structure Constructions

Abstract: This study examines how speakers extend prototypically intransitive “noise” verbs (coughed, laughed, sneezed) into Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions, as described by Goldberg (1995). Using corpus data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the analysis identifies the linguistic mechanisms and cognitive-semantic principles that support these non-prototypical uses. Results indicate that, despite their conventional intransitivity, these verbs are productively coerced into transitive frames when licensed by constructional meaning. Path and result phrases play a key role in signaling these interpretations. While both corpora provide evidence of such constructions, American English demonstrates greater frequency and flexibility, particularly in Resultative uses. These findings support a construction grammar framework, highlighting the role of usage patterns in shaping argument structure and extending verb meaning.

Keywords: noise verbs; intransitive verbs; the Caused Motion Construction; the Resultative Construction; BNC; COCA; concordance lines; usage-based; construal; semantic coercion

Introduction

Language is a remarkably flexible system (Zock, 1988), allowing speakers to extend the meanings of words and constructions in creative ways (Rambelli, 2025). In English, some verbs that are typically intransitive – such as the following ‘noise verbs’: *sneeze*, *cough*, or *laugh* (Urban and Ruppenhofer, 2001, p. 79) – occasionally appear in argument structure constructions that imply motion or result. For example: “He sneezed the napkin off the table” (Goldberg, 1995, p.9, Example (8)), or “She *laughed* herself *crooked*” (Goldberg, 1995, p. 182, citing Benson’s *Mr. Teddy*, 1910). Such patterns challenge traditional views of verb valency (Langacker, 1987) and argument structure (Goldberg, 1995, 2006), suggesting that speakers dynamically shape grammar based on cognitive and usage-based principles (Langacker, 1987; Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethuraman, 2004; Bybee, 2010).

For students of English as a foreign language – especially those with a solid grounding in English syntax – the creative extension of intransitive verbs into transitive constructions often lies outside the scope of formal instruction. These learners are typically trained to avoid “unlicensed” uses of verbs such as *coughed*, *sneezed*, or *laughed* in syntactic environments that resemble transitive complementation, such as the resultative (SVOC)¹ or the caused-motion construction (SVOA)², as defined by Goldberg (1995). Yet, native speakers frequently use these verbs in such constructions with expressive and communicative purpose. This discrepancy between prescriptive models and actual language use may restrict the learners’ expressive potential and inhibit their understanding of the dynamic, metaphor-driven, and constructional nature of English argument structure. A study of this phenomenon is thus not only theoretically significant but also pedagogically valuable, offering insights into how authentic language stretches

¹ SVOC stands for Subject-Verb-Object-Complement. (see Quirk et al. 2007 [1985], p. 721).

² SVOA stands for Subject-Verb-Object-Adverbial. (see Idem).

beyond canonical clause types – a perspective especially important when exploring concordance lines that document naturalistic, idiomatic usage.

Consider the sentence: “*He sneezed his tooth right across town.*” (Munsch, 2002, as Example (3) in Goldberg, 2006, p. 6)

At first glance, *sneeze* is an intransitive verb, meaning it does not typically take a direct object. Yet, in this sentence, it appears in a Caused Motion construction (Goldberg, 1995, p. 3) as if sneezing can transfer force onto an object. How is this possible? What allows speakers to use verbs in ways that extend beyond their conventional meanings?

The unexpected use of intransitive verbs (see Goldberg, 2006, p. 6) in these constructions raises fundamental questions about how argument structure is shaped by experience (Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethuraman, 2004), categorization (Goldberg, 1995; Bybee, 2010), and analogy (Blanchette and Dunbar, 2000). This study draws on Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006) and Usage-Based Linguistics (Bybee, 2010; Langacker 1987; Johnson 1987) to explore how speakers extend verbs into new argument structures.

Earlier Research on Argument Structure Flexibility

The question of how argument structure constructions shape meaning and accommodate non-prototypical verbs has been examined from various linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. Goldberg (1995) introduced the concept of constructional polysemy, demonstrating that argument structure constructions carry inherent meaning and allow verbs to be extended beyond their conventional valency through semantic ‘coercion’ (see point 2.3.1). Supporting this, Johnson and Goldberg (2013) provide psycholinguistic evidence that speakers automatically access constructional meaning, even in nonsensical sentences, suggesting that argument structure constructions function as pre-established cognitive templates for meaning.

Further expanding on the flexibility of argument realization, Goldberg (2001) discusses cases where patient arguments are omitted, shedding light on how transitive verbs can take on intransitive uses. Similarly, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) examine intransitivity, argument realization, and alternations, which are closely tied to Goldberg's framework. Their work on unaccusativity highlights a key distinction within intransitive verbs – some behave as if their subjects were direct objects. By contrasting unaccusativity with ergativity, they explore the implications of these phenomena across different languages and introduce the concept of split intransitivity, which distinguishes unaccusative from unergative verbs. This has significantly contributed to ongoing debates in syntactic and lexical semantics.

A related line of research focuses on resultative constructions, which often involve shifts in argument realization. Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004) explore how transitive verbs can be used in intransitive-like resultative constructions, further illustrating the flexibility of argument structure. Hans Boas (2003) builds on this perspective using Construction Grammar and Frame Semantics, categorizing English resultative constructions into conventionalized (fixed meanings) and non-conventionalized (allowing novel meanings). His usage-based model suggests that each verb sense functions as a mini-construction, crucial for licensing arguments. Furthermore, a comparison between English and German resultatives reveals differences in their lexical polysemy networks, emphasizing cross-linguistic variation in argument structure flexibility. While not Goldberg's own work, this study aligns with her framework by illustrating how argument structure constructions adapt dynamically to accommodate novel syntactic and semantic contexts.

Additionally, studies have shown that learners acquire argument structure constructions based on exposure to high-frequency exemplars (Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethuraman, 2004), reinforcing the idea that argument structure patterns are learned through categorization rather than being innate grammatical rules. From a cognitive perspective, research on analogy and structural mapping has contributed

to understanding how speakers generalize linguistic patterns to novel contexts. Blanchette and Dunbar (2000) found that people rely on deep structural similarity rather than surface resemblance when drawing analogies, supporting the idea that linguistic generalization occurs through abstract relational reasoning.

These findings align with usage-based models of language learning, which argue that linguistic patterns emerge from frequency effects and analogical extension rather than rigid syntactic rules (Bybee, 2010). In line with this, Zock (1988) emphasizes the flexibility of natural language, noting that this very flexibility makes it both powerful and difficult to formalize – a challenge also present in understanding how argument structure constructions dynamically adapt to non-prototypical verbs.

Research Question and Structure of the Study

This study investigates the following question:

How do speakers extend intransitive ‘noise’ verbs (such as *sneeze*, *cough*, and *laugh*) into Caused Motion and Resultative constructions (Goldberg, 1995), despite their conventional intransitivity?

Specifically, this study examines:

1. The linguistic mechanisms that allow non-prototypical verbs to appear in these constructions.
2. The cognitive and semantic principles that support this flexibility.
3. Corpus-based evidence for the frequency and productivity of these patterns in English.

To address this question, the article is structured as follows:

Section 2 provides the theoretical background, outlining Construction Grammar and the usage-based approach to meaning construction.

Section 3 presents a case study of the verbs *cough*, *laugh*, and *sneeze* in the Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions, illustrating how

argument structure shifts occur through conceptual extension. Drawing on the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), it examines the frequency and productivity of these constructions and discusses their linguistic and cognitive implications.

The Conclusion synthesizes the findings from Section 3, demonstrating that the extension of intransitive ‘noise’ verbs into Caused Motion and Resultative constructions reflects broader cognitive and linguistic mechanisms. It highlights the productivity and frequency of these constructions, reinforcing the argument that argument structure shifts are guided by both usage-based patterns and conceptual extensions in English.

To further investigate the productivity of Caused Motion and Resultative constructions, this study analyzes concordance lines from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). While the BNC provides a representative sample of British English, COCA offers a much larger dataset for American English, allowing for a broader examination of usage patterns. For instance, the verb form *sneezed* appears only 39 times in the BNC but occurs over 600 times in COCA, highlighting the importance of cross-corpus comparison. By extracting instances of *sneezed*, *laughed*, and *coughed* in Caused Motion and Resultative constructions, this analysis aims to determine the extent to which these patterns appear in natural discourse, as well as their frequency, distribution, and possible constraints on productivity. This corpus-based approach complements the theoretical and psycholinguistic perspectives discussed earlier, providing quantitative evidence of how speakers generalize and extend argument structure constructions in everyday communication.

Theoretical Background

In Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995, 2006), grammatical constructions are symbolic units (Langacker, 1987, p. 58), meaning that

they pair form with meaning in a way that is at least partially arbitrary (Croft, 2001, p. 18).

The extension of intransitive verbs into argument structure constructions challenges traditional views on verb selectional restrictions and underscores the role of constructional meaning in shaping linguistic creativity (Goldberg, 2006, pp. 6–7). This section establishes a theoretical foundation by examining Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006), the issue of non-prototypical verbs, and the cognitive and semantic mechanisms that facilitate these extensions.

Goldberg's Construction Grammar Approach

Construction Grammar (CxG) posits that argument structure constructions are form-meaning pairings independent of specific verbs (Goldberg, 1995, p. 9). Constructions impose their own meaning onto verbs, allowing for creative extensions that might not align with the verb's prototypical usage.

More generally, in Construction Grammar, grammatical constructions are symbolic units, meaning that they pair form with meaning in a way that is at least partially arbitrary (Langacker, 1987, p. 58; Croft, 2001, p. 18). Even the most general syntactic constructions have corresponding general rules of semantic interpretation (Goldberg, 1995, p. 4), reinforcing the view that constructions themselves contribute to interpretation, independent of the lexical items they contain (Goldberg, 2006, pp. 6–7). This perspective departs from traditional syntactic theories, where meaning is assumed to emerge primarily from the properties of individual verbs or argument structures. Instead, Construction Grammar posits that meaning is inherently tied to constructions (Goldberg, 1995, p. 1), allowing for creative extensions beyond conventional verb usage (Goldberg, 2013).

Crucially, metaphorical extensions of constructions often emerge from a central sense based on actual transfer (Goldberg, 1995, p. 37). For example, in Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions, verbs

that do not inherently encode physical transfer (*laugh, cough, sneeze*) can still be extended metaphorically because the core constructional meaning provides a basis for interpreting them in terms of force or motion (Talmy, 2000). This ability to reinterpret verb meanings within constructions exemplifies the polysemy of argument structure constructions, where abstract extensions remain grounded in a central, literal meaning (Goldberg, 1995, pp. 31–39, 75–39).

Two particularly relevant constructions for this discussion are:

The Caused Motion Construction – typically represented as “X CAUSES Y to MOVE Z” (Subj–V–Obj–Obl³) (Goldberg, 1995, p. 3) and, in terms of thematic roles, as [Agent] [Verb] [Theme] [Goal/Path] (see Goldberg, 1995, pp. 52, 78, 90) – typically features verbs of caused movement (e.g., *throw, push, carry*). However, speakers often extend this construction metaphorically to verbs that do not inherently encode motion, such as *sneeze* in “Pat sneezed the napkin off the table” (Goldberg, 1995, Example 2, p. 3).

The Resultative Construction – typically represented as “X CAUSES Y to BECOME Z” (Subj–V–Obj–Xcomp⁴) (Goldberg, 1995, p. 3) or as “Subj V Obj RP”⁵ (Goldberg, 2006, p. 73) – expresses a change of state in the object. For example, in “She kissed him unconscious” (Goldberg, 1993, Example 3, p. 3), the object (*him*) undergoes a change

³ “Subj V Obj Obl” stands for Subject–Verb–Object–Oblique, a schematic representation of argument structure. The Oblique element typically refers to a prepositional or case-marked phrase that expresses direction, path, location, or other peripheral roles in the event – such as *to the park, with a stick, or for the children*. Unlike core grammatical relations like Subject and Object, Obliques are often marked by prepositions (in English) or case inflections (in other languages), and they encode a wide range of semantically related participant roles (Croft, 2012, p. 3).

⁴ “Xcomp” (open clausal complement) is a secondary predicate that expresses the result of the action on the object – e.g., “She kissed him unconscious”, where unconscious is the Xcomp.

⁵ RP” stands for Result Phrase, following the structure of the Resultative Construction as described in Goldberg (2006): [Subj V Obj RP].

of state (*becoming unconscious*), even though the verb *kiss* does not inherently encode such a result, as it is not a change-of-state verb.

In both cases, the construction itself contributes meaning, sometimes overriding the lexical constraints of the verb – a process known as coercion (Goldberg, 2006). Coercion is not merely a pragmatic inference; rather, it is systematically licensed by constructions that impose an interpretation not independently encoded by the verb itself (Goldberg, 1995, p. 159). When a verb does not inherently fit the construction's meaning but can be coerced into a related interpretation, the resulting expression is perceived as grammatical and interpretable within the constructional framework.

These constructions illustrate the flexibility of argument structure constructions, supporting the idea that grammar is not merely a syntactic system but a reflection of how speakers conceptualize and structure experience.

The Problem of Non-Prototypical Verbs

A key issue in argument structure alternations is how verbs that are inherently intransitive – for example, “noise verbs are usually intransitive, taking the sound Source as subject” (Urban and Ruppenhofer, 2001, p. 79) – can appear in transitive constructions. Classical lexicalist approaches struggle to explain why verbs like *sneeze*, *cough*, or *laugh* – which do not encode causation or motion – are nonetheless used in Caused Motion or Resultative Constructions (Goldberg, 2006, p. 6).

For instance:

- *She sneezed the tissue off the desk.* (see Goldberg, 1995, Example (8), p. 9)
- *He laughed the argument away.* (see “Return of the Phantom King,” 2017, Chapter 1, para. 1)
- *She coughed herself hoarse.* (see Goldberg, 1995, Example 56, p. 193)

These examples illustrate that the constructional meaning can override the verb's traditional selectional restrictions, allowing intransitive predicates to take direct objects. This flexibility suggests that speakers are guided not solely by verb semantics but also by broader cognitive and conceptual principles.

Cognitive and Semantic Mechanisms

The phenomenon of extending intransitive verbs into transitive constructions can be explained through several interrelated cognitive and semantic mechanisms.

Coercion

Coercion (Goldberg, 1995, p. 159; 2006, p. 22; Leclercq, 2019) occurs when a verb is integrated into a non-prototypical argument structure, prompting a reinterpretation of its meaning. In examples like *She sneezed the tissue off the desk*, the verb *sneeze* – which typically does not imply caused motion – acquires a motion-causing interpretation due to the constraints imposed by the Caused Motion Construction. This construction corresponds to the schematic pattern “X CAUSES Y to MOVE Z” (Goldberg, 1995, p. 3), in which an agent (X) causes a theme (Y) to move along a path (Z). The presence of this syntactic frame licenses an interpretation where *sneeze* is understood as bringing about motion, even though the verb itself encodes no such semantics. This process demonstrates how syntactic structures can override lexical meaning, reshaping the interpretation of a verb rather than the other way around.

Leclercq (2019) investigates coercion as a contextual enrichment or adjustment (Lauwers and Willems, 2011, p. 1220) and explores the potential for a cross-theoretical account by integrating insights from Construction Grammar and Relevance Theory. While Construction Grammar conceptualizes coercion as an interaction between linguistic semantics and syntactic structures, Relevance Theory treats it as a broader phenomenon of lexical adjustment guided by pragmatic prin-

ciples. Leclercq ultimately argues that coercion is best understood as a linguistically required pragmatic process and may constitute a specific type of saturation.

Metaphorical Extensions

Metaphor plays a crucial role in argument structure creativity. Many extensions of intransitive verbs into transitive constructions involve conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) that map bodily actions onto forceful interactions with the world. For instance:

- *sneeze a tooth out* – conceptualized as an external force expelling an object
- *laugh the argument away* – laughter metaphorically removes the problem

These metaphorical mappings align with force-dynamic schemas (Talmy, 2000, pp. 409–470), where actions are conceptualized in terms of physical movement or resultative change.

1.1.1. Analogy and Productivity

The ability to extend intransitive verbs into argument structure constructions is not a one-off phenomenon but part of a broader pattern of analogical extension (Langacker, 1987, pp. 437–447). Speakers generalize usage patterns based on previous exemplars (Langacker, 2009, p. 115), making creative verb–construction pairings more productive over time.

Langacker (2009, p. 267) distinguishes between two types of generalizations conveyed by sentences. The first (“*A kitten is born with blue eyes*” Example (9d)) is a generic statement – it refers to a virtual event involving a virtual participant (a kitten), expressing a general truth about the inherent structure of the world. The second (“*Four times during the speech, a heckler shouted out an insult*” (Example 9e)) is also a generalization, but a local one: it abstracts over multiple actual events to highlight what they have in common. Although those events

truly occurred, the sentence profiles an abstract, fictive representation of their shared structure.

The extent to which such patterns are conventionalized or remain restricted to humorous or poetic contexts remains an open question. However, corpus data suggest that such extensions are frequent and not merely idiosyncratic (Goldberg, 2006, p. 167).

Linking to Event Construal and Conceptualization

Langacker (1987, p. 138) introduces the idea of “alternate construals,” arguing that grammatical structure is shaped by “conventional imagery” – our ability to construe the same conceived situation in different ways. The conceptualization of an event is not merely a matter of content, but also of how that content is structured in terms of “attention, selection, figure/ground organization, viewpoint, and level of schematicity.” As Cognitive Grammar (CG) posits, meaning is equated with “conceptualization,” understood as “cognitive processing” (Langacker, 1987, p. 5). This dynamic perspective challenges the notion of fixed verb meanings and instead emphasizes how linguistic structure interacts with conceptual organization.

Expanding on this foundation, Langacker later suggests “that a lot of predicates usually not considered factive are nonetheless susceptible to a factive construal under particular circumstances” (2009, p. 279). This notion of factive construal further illustrates how speakers creatively structure events linguistically. It helps explain the extension of intransitive verbs into transitive argument structure constructions – an instance of event construal – where verbs like *sneeze*, *laugh*, and *cough* appear in Caused Motion or Resultative Constructions (Goldberg, 1995, 2006), despite their inherent intransitivity.

A key aspect of Langacker’s argument is that conceptualization involves “anomalous processing” (1987, p. 138), whereby one conceptual representation can be transformed into another through shifts in construal. This is precisely what occurs in cases like:

- *She sneezed the tissue off the desk.* (see Goldberg, 1995, Example (8), p. 9)
- *He laughed the argument away.* (see “Return of the Phantom King,” 2017, Chapter 1, para. 1)
- *She coughed herself hoarse.* (see Goldberg, 1995, Example 56, p. 193)

In these examples, the speaker coerces an intransitive verb into a transitive frame by construing the action not merely as an isolated bodily function (as per the verb’s default meaning) but rather as an event with a force-dynamic structure (Talmy, 2000). The subject’s action is reinterpreted as exerting force on an object (*tissue*, *argument*, *oneself*), causing movement or a change of state – aligning with the meaning imposed by the Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions.

From a cognitive perspective, this “anomalous” reanalysis is not arbitrary but follows systematic principles of event construal and conceptual transformation. By shifting “figure/ground” relationships and adjusting levels of “schematicity” (Langacker, 1987, p. 138), speakers highlight different aspects of the event. For example, in *She sneezed the tissue off the desk*, the verb *sneeze* is reconstrued as an agentive force that propels an object (*tissue*) rather than simply denoting a bodily action. Similarly, in *She coughed herself hoarse*, the intransitive verb *cough* is reinterpreted as causing a resultant state (*hoarse*), consistent with the Resultative Construction.

These examples illustrate how grammatical constructions and cognitive construal mechanisms interact to extend verb usage beyond traditional selectional restrictions. Just as Divjak, Milin, and Medimorec (2019) found that linguistic construal affects visual event perception, the extension of intransitive verbs into transitive frames reflects a conceptual shift that reorganizes event structure in the speaker’s mind.

To further substantiate this theoretical account, the following section examines corpus-based evidence for the transitive use of intransitive

verbs such as *sneeze*, *cough*, and *laugh* – specifically in their preterit forms – within Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions. By analyzing concordance lines from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), this study explores how these verbs are extended through constructional coercion and alternate construals, and whether such uses reflect isolated creativity or systematic usage patterns across registers and contexts.

Summary

In sum, Construction Grammar provides a framework for understanding how speakers creatively extend intransitive verbs into argument structure constructions. The flexibility of Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions suggests that meaning is not solely determined by lexical semantics but is shaped by broader cognitive principles, including coercion, metaphor, and analogy. This perspective challenges traditional assumptions about verb selectional restrictions and highlights the dynamic, usage-based nature of language. Furthermore, insights from event construal research suggest that such linguistic creativity is not arbitrary but reflects deeper interactions between perception, cognition, and grammatical structure.

More specifically, integrating Langacker's (1987) notion of alternate construals with Goldberg's (1995, 2006) Construction Grammar allows us to explain the extension of intransitive verbs into transitive constructions as a cognitive phenomenon driven by conceptual restructuring. Rather than viewing these extensions as mere anomalies, they exemplify language's flexibility in shaping event construal through coercion, metaphor, and force-dynamic reasoning. This perspective underscores the broader claim that grammar is not merely a syntactic system but a reflection of how speakers conceptualize and structure experience. As Tyler and Evans (2003, p. 24) point out, a central tenet of cognitive linguistics is that meaning is fundamentally embodied, a view supported by a wide range of scholars "(e.g., Evans, 2000; Grady, 1997a; Heine, 1997; Jackendoff, 1983, 1990, 1992; Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lan-

gacker, 1987; Sweetser, 1990; Svorou, 1994; Talmy, 2000; Turner, 1991, 1996; Varela et al., 1991)”⁶.

Concordance-Based Analysis of Transitive Uses of Intransitive Verbs

Methodology and Data Sources

This section outlines the methodology and data sources used to investigate the transitive use of intransitive verbs in Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions. Specifically, it examines how verbs such as *sneezed*, *coughed*, and *laughed* occur in non-prototypical transitive constructions within these patterns. The analysis is based on concordance data predominantly drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), supplemented by examples from the British National Corpus (BNC), and considers patterns of usage across different registers and contexts.

Relevant examples were collected using *AntConc*, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit developed by Laurence Anthony (available at <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>). Concordance lines containing the past-tense forms of the target verbs were extracted from both corpora, and instances showing transitive usage were identified through manual judgment, with particular attention to their occurrence in the target constructions.

Case Study: Concordance Examples

This subsection presents selected concordance examples that illustrate how the intransitive verbs *sneezed*, *coughed*, and *laughed* are used in Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions.

The Caused Motion Construction, as defined by Goldberg (1995, p. 159), encodes a meaning in which an agent causes an entity to move

⁶ This list of scholars is cited in full from Tyler and Evans (2003, p. 24).

to a location, independently of verb meaning. This interpretation arises from the construction itself, which conventionally pairs a verb with a directional prepositional phrase (PP), yielding a [Subj V Obj Obl] pattern that carries a caused-motion interpretation. In cases where the PP appears locative rather than directional, a process of coercion allows the construction to impose a motion reading on otherwise non-directional expressions.

The Resultative Construction expresses a change of state caused by an agent's action, following the schematic pattern [Subj V Obj Xcomp], where the result phrase (*Xcomp*) denotes the outcome of the event. This interpretation is not derived from the verb alone but is licensed by the construction itself (Goldberg, 1995, p. 3).

The Use of *Coughed* in the Caused Motion Construction: Evidence from BNC and COCA

While the examples featuring the verb form *coughed* in the Caused Motion Construction in (1) and (2) are drawn from the British National Corpus (BNC), the concordance lines cited in (3) through (21) originate from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). This distribution reflects the relative availability of such constructions in each corpus, highlighting potential differences in usage patterns between British and American English.

1. “53 CEH W_fict_prose the launch from the jetty, a wheel spun in capable hands, **[the engine coughed them on their way]**⁷. Then a half-turn astern, and they were heading confidently” (BNC)

The concordance line in (1) contains the verb form *coughed*, which occurs in the clause “the engine coughed them on their way,” a structure that follows the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent:

⁷ Bolded fragments within square brackets in the concordance lines excerpted from BNC and COCA (with the verbs sneezed, coughed, and laughed) are not highlighted in the original sources; they have been emphasized here to indicate a modification to the original text.

the engine] [Verb: coughed] [Theme⁸ (Object moved): them] [Goal/Path: on their way]. Semantically, the engine is the entity causing the motion of *them* (presumably people in a boat). The verb *coughed* is used metaphorically here – while it typically describes a sound or action associated with an engine starting up, in this construction, it is extended to express caused motion. The phrase “on their way” indicates a direction or path – not a change of state, but a change in location or trajectory.

Goldberg’s theory accounts for such creative verb uses, where a typically intransitive verb like *cough* is extended by the construction to take on a transitive, motion-related meaning.

2. “125 HA2 W_fict_prose. But he wasn’t one for being matey, or even civil. Rather [**coughed his orders out**]. I mean, as I told Dick Treadwell, we’re” (BNC)

The clause “coughed his orders out” in (2) follows the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed] [Theme (Object moved): his orders] [Goal/Path: out]. The verb *coughed* is used metaphorically to describe the expelling of words – that is, the subject (“he”) causes the object (“his orders”) to move from an internal source (e.g., his mind or throat) to an external destination (spoken aloud). The particle *out* functions as a path marker (see Talmy, 2000b), indicating motion in an outward direction.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction as described in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, in which the construction licenses a typically intransitive verb to take on a transitive, motion-related meaning.

While concordance lines (1) and (2) are the only examples of the Caused Motion Construction among the first 100 search results for the

⁸ The semantic role of THEME is typically associated with newer information (Goldberg, 2019, p. 42).

token *coughed* in the BNC, the COCA corpus contains nineteen concordance lines illustrating this construction among its first 100 results with the same verb form, presented in (3) through (21) below.

3. “13 2019 MAG Gizmodo predictably, ended in tears. Boxer Floyd Mayweather and kind-of-a-rapper, **32;2281; [TOOLONG DJ Khaled coughed up tens of thousands of dollars to the SEC] in connection with their decision to” (COCA)

In line (3), the clause “TOOLONG DJ Khaled coughed up tens of thousands of dollars to the SEC” follows the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: DJ Khaled] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): tens of thousands of dollars] [Goal/Path: to the SEC]. The subject (“DJ Khaled”) causes the object (“tens of thousands of dollars”) to move toward a recipient (“the SEC”), with the prepositional phrase “to the SEC” marking the goal of motion. The verb phrase “coughed up” is idiomatic and metaphorical, but it retains the sense of forcible release or transfer.

This use of *coughed* illustrates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, where the construction licenses even idiomatic expressions to convey caused motion through the integration of agent, theme, and goal roles.

4. “18 2018 FIC Ploughshares contracted tuberculosis while accompanying him on his monthly charitable rounds and within six months had [coughed away her lungs] and wasted away to nothing but skin. “The rich die” (COCA)

In line (4), the predicate “coughed away her lungs” [Subj] [Verb] [Obj] [Goal/Path]. The subject causes the object to move (physically or metaphorically) along a path or to a destination. The subject causes the object to move “away”. Even though metaphorical, the motion is conceptualized via the path particle *away*. The verb *cough* is metaphorically extended to take a direct object (“her lungs”) and a path particle

(“away”), meaning the subject caused the object to move. The use of *coughed* in “coughed away her lungs” represents the Caused-Motion Construction, according to Goldberg (1995).

In line (4), the clause “coughed away her lungs” instantiates the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: she] [Verb: coughed] [Theme (Object moved): her lungs] [Goal/Path: away]. The subject (“she”) causes the object (“her lungs”) to move away, with the path particle *away* marking the direction of motion. Although metaphorical, the construction expresses a conceptualized transfer or loss through motion. The verb *coughed* is metaphorically extended to take a direct object and a directional particle, indicating that the subject caused the object to undergo motion.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction as described in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, where a typically intransitive verb is licensed by the construction to encode caused, directed motion.

5. “23 2018 FIC Fan Fic of her head. A slew of gagging noises emanated from her beak and [**she coughed up an ovoid pellet**]. # “ Ah, that’s what it was.” (COCA)

In line (5), the clause “she coughed up an ovoid pellet” instantiates the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: she] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): an ovoid pellet] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject (“she”) causes the object (“an ovoid pellet”) to move upward, with the particle *up* marking the path of motion. The verb *coughed* is extended metaphorically and syntactically to take a direct object and a directional particle, encoding caused physical motion.

This use of *coughed* demonstrates the Caused Motion Construction as defined by Goldberg (1995), in which a typically intransitive verb is licensed by the construction to express the caused movement of an object along a path.

6. “24 2018 NEWS New York Post to Chytil near the right post. He turned to see oncoming checkers and quickly [**coughed it up along the wall**]. # It didn’t result in a goal,” (COCA)

In line (6), the clause “coughed it up along the wall” follows the pattern of the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): it] [Goal/Path: along the wall]. The subject (“he”) causes the object (“it”) to move along a trajectory, with the prepositional phrase “along the wall” marking the path of motion. The verb phrase “coughed up” is used metaphorically to express a sudden or involuntary release, and the constructional meaning licenses this atypical use to convey caused physical motion.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction as defined in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, where the construction enables a typically intransitive verb to express caused, directed motion.

7. “25 2018 NEWS Minneapolis Star Tribune Bortles, who was benched in the third quarter after his second fumble. [**Bortles coughed up the ball on Jacksonville’s third play of each half**], leading to 10” (COCA)

In line (7), the clause “Bortles coughed up the ball on Jacksonville’s third play of each half” instantiates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Bortles] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): the ball] [Goal/Path: *up* (implicit endpoint)]. The subject (“Bortles”) causes the object (“the ball”) to move away from his control, with the particle *up* marking a metaphorical path of release. While the final location is not explicitly stated (e.g., to the ground or the opposing team), the construction still licenses this implicit goal.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction as defined in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, which allows for metaphorical and implicit paths in expressions of caused motion.

8. “37 2017 FIC Bk:NotDeadEnough the longhouse. The Corps finally admitted they’d screwed up the original relocation and [**coughed up millions of bucks**] to rebuild everything. “ # I whistled. “ I” (COCA)

In line (8), the clause “The Corps ... coughed up millions of bucks” expresses the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: The Corps] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): millions of bucks] [Goal/Path: *up* (implicit endpoint)]. The subject causes the object to move out of its possession, with the particle *up* marking the metaphorical path of release. Although the final goal is not explicitly stated (e.g., “to the victims”), the construction conveys a transfer of money.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, which allows for implicit endpoints when motion and transfer are contextually entailed.

9. “41 2017 FIC Analog When she slept, perspiration stood on her forehead. When she woke, [**she coughed up fluid**] and couldn’t keep anything down. Soon she wouldn’t eat at” (COCA)

In line (9), the clause “she coughed up fluid” represents the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: she] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): fluid] [Goal/Path: *up*]. The subject causes the object to move upward and outward, with the particle *up* marking the physical path of expulsion from inside the body. This is a literal instance of caused motion.

This use of *coughed* illustrates the Caused Motion Construction as defined by Goldberg (1995), where the construction expresses a direct, physical transfer caused by the agent.

10. “47 2017 FIC New England Review As we sped off, the scene receded in the rearview mirrors, and [**Havoc coughed up a hunk of flesh**]. He would not stop licking it. # Although” (COCA)

In line (10), the clause “Havoc coughed up a hunk of flesh” instantiates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Havoc] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): a hunk of flesh] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to move outward from the body, with the particle *up* marking the path of expulsion. This is a literal instance of caused physical motion.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, where the construction expresses an agent-caused transfer along a marked path.

11. “50 2017 NEWS Detroit Free Press (7-1) had a two-touchdown lead, 14-0. [Cass Tech (7-1) coughed up the ball on its second offensive play] and Tyrece Woods returned the ball to” (COCA)

In line (11), the clause “Cass Tech (7-1) coughed up the ball on its second offensive play” presents the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Cass Tech] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): the ball] [Goal/Path: up (implicit endpoint)]. The subject causes the object to move out of possession, with the particle *up* marking the path of release. In context, the motion is implicit (e.g., a fumble or turnover), but constructional meaning licenses the interpretation.

This use of *coughed* expresses the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, which allows for idiomatic verbs and implicit goals when motion is entailed.

12. “51 2016 FIC Bk:BorrowedMan The librarian merely pulled out another card and waved it at Bill, who [promptly coughed up a couple more]. The librarian took them and passed one to me,” (COCA)

In line (12), the clause “promptly coughed up a couple more” instantiates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Bill] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): a couple more (cards)] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to move outward, with the particle *up* marking the path – metaphorically from an internal source (e.g., pocket or wallet).

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg's (1995) framework, where idiomatic expressions can encode caused motion with overt path marking.

13. "60 2016 NEWS Virginian-Pilot territory. # With a first and 10 at the Ocean Lakes 20, [**Browning coughed it up**] at the 25 and White recovered at the 30 before returning it to" (COCA)

In line (13), the clause "Browning coughed it up" expresses the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Browning] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): it (the ball)] [Goal/Path: up (implicit endpoint)]. The subject causes the object to move out of possession, with the particle *up* marking the path of release. Although the goal is not explicitly stated, the context (e.g., a turnover) and verb semantics imply motion.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg's (1995) framework, even in idiomatic sports contexts.

14. "65 2015 FIC FantasySciFi still as he could, trying to will the sensation to stop. Finally [**he coughed something up**]. He pulled his mask aside to spit it out. It was" (COCA)

In line (14), the clause "he coughed something up" expresses the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): something] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes a physical object to move outward, with the particle *up* marking the literal path of expulsion from the body.

This use of *coughed* illustrates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg's (1995) framework, expressing agent-driven physical motion along a marked path.

15. "76 2015 MAG SatEvenPost Mrs. Westbrook arrived, her face as pale as the white patio – [**the child coughed up water**] and took in a huge, hitching breath. # Billy moaned his" (COCA)

In line (15), the clause “the child coughed up water” instantiates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: the child] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): water] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to move outward, with the particle *up* marking the path of physical expulsion from the body.

This use of *coughed* exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, expressing literal, agent-caused motion along a marked path.

16. “78 2015 NEWS STLouis the Stars discussed worked. Paul Stastny won the ensuing face-off, but [**Jay Bouwmeester coughed up the puck to Tyler Seguin**], who fed Stars captain Jamie Benn. Just” (COCA)

In line (16), the clause “Jay Bouwmeester coughed up the puck to Tyler Seguin” follows the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: Jay Bouwmeester] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): the puck] [Goal/Path: to Tyler Seguin]. The subject causes the object to move out of possession, with the prepositional phrase “to Tyler Seguin” marking the explicit goal.

This use of *coughed* reflects the Caused Motion Construction as defined in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, combining idiomatic expression with clearly expressed caused motion.

17. “82 2014 FIC Bk:GreatAbrahamLincoln on it. As he shared the cone with his brothers, [**one of them coughed up the vice president**], and another hacked on William Jennings Bryan’s long name” (COCA)

In line (17), the clause “one of them coughed up the vice president” follows the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: one of them] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): the vice president] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to move outward, with the particle *up* marking the path. Though surreal or humorous in tone, the verb

“coughed up” implies expulsion, and the constructional pattern remains intact.

This use of *coughed* illustrates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, even in figurative or fantastical contexts.

18. “84 2014 FIC KenyonRev , my dog. He, too, was cocooned in kelp, and [**he coughed up whiskered fish**] when we pressed on his belly. He remained lying on his” (COCA)

In line (18), the clause “he coughed up whiskered fish” illustrates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): whiskered fish] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to be expelled, with the particle *up* marking the literal path of motion from inside the body to outside.

This use of *coughed* demonstrates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, expressing agent-caused physical movement along a marked path.

19. “86 2014 FIC Confrontation pain had softened and he could breathe again, he breathed in loose dirt and [**coughed it out**], again and again. But the dirt was cool on his cheek” (COCA)

In line (19), the clause “coughed it out” follows the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed out] [Theme (Object moved): it (dirt)] [Goal/Path: out]. The subject causes the object to move outward, with the particle *out* marking the physical path from inside the body to the outside.

This use of *coughed* instantiates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, expressing literal, agent-caused motion along an overt path.

20. “91 2014 NEWS Denver pushed so hard to make up a deficit over the last 200 meters that [**he coughed up blood**] after the race, winning by 0.01 of a second. He tries” (COCA)

In line (20), the clause “he coughed up blood” follows the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): blood] [Goal/Path: up]. The subject causes the object to be expelled, with the particle *up* marking the physical path from inside the body to the outside.

This use of *coughed* reflects the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, expressing literal, agent-caused motion along a marked path.

21. “92 2014 NEWS STLouis What can you say about a 25-year-old girl who died? “[**A blubbing public coughed up \$100 million**] to learn the answer. Adjusted for inflation, the 1970 film” (COCA)

In line (21), the clause “A blubbing public coughed up \$100 million to learn the answer” follows the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: a blubbing public] [Verb: coughed up] [Theme (Object moved): \$100 million] [Goal/Path: up (implicit endpoint)]. The subject causes the object to move out of their possession, with the particle *up* marking the metaphorical path of reluctant release. The phrase “to learn the answer” expresses purpose, not a spatial goal.

This use of *coughed* illustrates the Caused Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework, despite its idiomatic and figurative nature.

Summary of Findings

Across all 21 concordance lines, the verb form *coughed* (including idiomatic phrasal forms like *coughed up* and *coughed out*) was used in a range of literal, metaphorical, and idiomatic contexts. Despite these

differences in meaning, each instance fits the Caused Motion Construction, which follows the generalized semantic pattern:

[Agent] [Verb] [Theme (Object moved)] [Goal/Path]

In each case, the subject (Agent) causes an object (Theme) to move, either literally (e.g., expelling fluid) or metaphorically (e.g., transferring money or possessions), and the path or goal of motion is either explicitly marked (e.g., with a particle like *up* or a prepositional phrase) or implicitly understood from context.

Goldberg's framework allows for:

- Overt or implicit paths
- Metaphorical extensions of motion
- Idiomatic phrasal verbs, as long as the constructional meaning of caused motion is preserved.

Line	Clause	Literal / Metaphorical / Other	Path Marker	Goal Explicit?	Corpus BNC / COCA per 100 search results
(1)	"the engine coughed them on their way"	Metaphorical	"on their way"	Yes	BNC
(2)	"coughed his orders out"	Metaphorical	"out"	Yes	BNC
(3)	"coughed up tens of thousands of dollars to the SEC"	Metaphorical	"up" + "to the SEC"	Yes	COCA
(4)	"coughed away her lungs"	Metaphorical	"away"	Yes	COCA
(5)	"coughed up an ovoid pellet"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(6)	"coughed it up along the wall"	Literal	"up" + "along the wall"	Yes	COCA
(7)	"coughed up the ball"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(8)	"coughed up millions of bucks"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA

(9)	"coughed up fluid"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(10)	"coughed up a hunk of flesh"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(11)	"coughed up the ball"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(12)	"coughed up a couple more"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(13)	"coughed it up"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(14)	"coughed something up"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(15)	"coughed up water"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(16)	"coughed up the puck to Tyler Seguin"	Metaphorical	"up" + "to phrase"	Yes	COCA
(17)	"coughed up the vice president"	Surreal / Figurative	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(18)	"coughed up whiskered fish"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(19)	"coughed it out"	Literal	"out"	Implicit	COCA
(20)	"coughed up blood"	Literal	"up"	Implicit	COCA
(21)	"coughed up \$100 million"	Metaphorical	"up"	Implicit	COCA

Table 1: Comparative Overview Examples (1) through (21)

Key Observations

- Path markers such as *up*, *out*, *away*, and prepositional phrases (e.g., *to the SEC*, *along the wall*) are central to identifying the constructional role of the Goal/Path element.
- Both the BNC and COCA contain instances of *coughed* used in the Caused Motion Construction, based on a sample of the first 100 concordance lines from each corpus. However, they differ in both the frequency and variety of path markers. In the BNC, *up* appears only twice in this construction, whereas in COCA it is significantly more frequent, occurring in 19 lines where *coughed* is used within the Caused Motion frame ([Agent] [Verb] [Theme (Object moved)] [Goal/Path]).

- Even in idiomatic or figurative contexts (e.g., sports commentary or satire), the underlying constructional schema remains intact.
- Although the verb *cough* is typically intransitive, it is licensed by the Caused Motion Construction to take on a transitive, caused-motion interpretation.
- Implicit motion is permissible within this construction, provided it is contextually recoverable.

A Patterned Use in Caused Motion, an Absence in Resultatives

An analysis of the first 100 concordance lines containing *coughed* from both the BNC and COCA reveals that the verb does not appear in the Resultative Construction, as described by Goldberg (1995), in either corpus. That is, there are no attested instances where *coughed* occurs in a frame such as [Subj V Obj Result Phrase] (e.g., *He coughed his throat raw*⁹), within the initial sample. This contrasts with the Caused Motion Construction, in which *coughed* is attested a total of 21 times across both corpora – 2 instances in the BNC and 19 in COCA – demonstrating a patterned albeit limited extension of the verb into this argument structure. The absence of *coughed* in the Resultative Construction within the corresponding sample suggests either a lower productivity of this verb in resultative contexts or its marginal status in such usage compared to its more prominent role in caused-motion expressions.

The Use of *Laughed* in the Caused Motion Construction: Evidence from COCA and BNC

While examples (22) and (23) from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and examples (24) through (26) from the British National Corpus (BNC) all feature *laughed* used in the Caused Motion Construction, the former two are drawn from COCA, and the latter three from the BNC.

⁹ Kilgallon, P.T., 2022. Careful Now: A Short Story. Vocal. <https://vocal.media/fiction/careful-now>. Similar uses of *coughed* in caused-motion contexts can also be found in various internet blogs and online texts.

22. “102 2013 TV Suits interview with Harvey? No... But I’m assuming it went well. [**He laughed me out of the room**]. - Are you kidding? - No, I” (COCA)

In line (22), the clause “He laughed me out of the room” illustrates the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: laughed] [Theme (Object moved): me] [Goal/Path: out of the room]. This creative, semi-idiomatic use of *laugh* – attested in dictionary entries (e.g., Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary 2010, definition 4) – depicts a situation in which the subject (“he”) causes the object (“me”) to move along a path (“out of the room”), driven by the act of laughter. The construction implies that the speaker is metaphorically forced to leave due to being mocked, dismissed, or humiliated. Although *laugh* is typically intransitive, this usage exemplifies its extension into a transitive, caused-motion frame, in line with Goldberg’s (1995) analysis.

23. “365 1999 FIC Bk:WhenIFallInLove but Mark looked at her with a raised eyebrow she knew was disapproving. “[**Laughed his tubes out?**]” “It was okay. The nurses hurried in and” (COCA)

In (23), “Laughed his tubes out?” [Subj] [Verb] [Obj] [Path/Goal] appears as a fragment (likely dialogue), but it references a situation in which laughter causes the physical displacement of medical tubes. Consultation of the extended context clarifies that Bryan, a hospital patient, laughed so hard at Charlie Roth’s comedic antics that his tubes came loose, prompting the nurses to rush in and reattach them. This strongly supports a literal interpretation of *laughed*, as it describes an actual physical consequence of laughter rather than a figurative or metaphorical effect.

From a constructional standpoint, the example shows how the typically intransitive verb *laugh* is coerced into a transitive frame, taking a direct object (“his tubes”) and a directional particle (“out”) to encode physical motion. Unlike metaphorical expressions such as “laughed

me out of the room” – which implies social dismissal through laughter – this case represents a real-world causal event.

This usage fits within Goldberg’s (1995) Caused-Motion Construction, illustrating how an action (laughing) can be construed as exerting force that leads to the displacement of an object.

24. “364 J13 W_fict_prose ‘ They burst out laughing. But then the second girl wails that [**she has laughed away her whizz powder**]. All four swarm like seagulls round the tiny sink.” (BNC)

In (24), the clause “she has laughed away her whizz powder” [Subj] [Verb] [Obj] [Goal/Path] suggests the powder is gone as a result of laughter. The Subject (“she”) causes an object (“her whizz powder”) to be lost as a result of laughing. “The particle *away* marks the path of motion (loss/displacement). The verb *laugh* is normally intransitive, but here it is extended to take a direct object and a path phrase – a key feature of the Caused-Motion Construction. The predicate “laughed away her whizz powder” indicates that laughter causes the powder to metaphorically or physically disappear.

Consequently, the use of *laughed* in “laughed away her whizz powder” represents the Caused-Motion Construction in Goldberg’s (1995) framework.

25. “463 FES W_non_ac_humanities_arts union would disappear in the same way as the others “, and good humouredly [**laughed Wilson’s overtures out of court**]. Powell in his history of the Shipping Federation” (BNC)

In line (25), the clause “laughed Wilson’s overtures out of court” reflects the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: implied] [Verb: laughed] [Theme (Object moved): Wilson’s overtures] [Goal/Path: out of court]. The subject causes the metaphorical removal of the object through laughter, with “out of court” marking the path of dis-

placement. The verb *laugh* is coerced into a transitive, caused-motion frame, consistent with Goldberg's (1995) analysis.

26. "471 CL2 W_biography real thing'. He seems to have been a great romancer.' [**He laughed them into bed**],' Warren Mitchell said.' There was the poetry," (BNC)

In line (26), the clause "He laughed them into bed" exemplifies the Caused Motion Construction: [Agent: he] [Verb: laughed] [Theme (Object moved): them] [Goal/Path: into bed]. The subject brings about a metaphorical change of location through laughter, with "into bed" serving as the path element. This is a clear case of constructional coercion, where the intransitive verb *laugh* adopts a transitive, caused-motion frame in line with Goldberg's (1995) analysis.

Summary

Examples (22) through (26) illustrate various instances of the Caused-Motion Construction (Goldberg, 1995), where the typically intransitive verb *laugh* is extended into a transitive frame, taking a direct object and a path phrase to express causal motion. These cases demonstrate both literal and metaphorical uses of the construction.

In (22) "He laughed me out of the room", laughter metaphorically forces the object (*me*) to leave, conveying dismissal or humiliation. Similarly, (25) "Laughed Wilson's overtures out of court" follows the same pattern, where laughter metaphorically rejects an idea (*Wilson's overtures*), mapping laughter onto an external force that causes displacement.

Example (26) "He laughed them into bed" extends this pattern but encodes a change of state or location, where laughter is construed as an influence leading to a metaphorical outcome (*them ending up in bed*). Like the previous examples, this use reinforces the idea that laughter can be conceptualized as a social or persuasive force.

In contrast, (24) “She has laughed away her whizz powder” introduces a different kind of metaphor, where laughter causes the disappearance or loss of an object (*whizz powder*). The particle *away* signals a path of loss or dissipation, aligning with other expressions like *cried away the pain*¹⁰.

Crucially, (23) “Laughed his tubes out?”, unlike the others, does not operate metaphorically. Consulting the extended context reveals that this example describes a literal physical consequence, where laughter led to the unintended dislodging of medical tubes in a hospital setting. Unlike the metaphorical examples, here laughter has a direct physical impact, making it a literal instantiation of the Caused-Motion Construction.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate how the Caused-Motion Construction can accommodate both metaphorical extensions (where laughter functions as a force for dismissal, rejection, or persuasion) and literal causal effects (where laughter physically impacts objects). The variability across these cases supports Goldberg’s (1995) analysis of argument structure constructions, showing how meaning can be coerced onto verbs that would not typically appear in transitive, caused-motion frames.

Contrastive Observations: Laughed in the Caused Motion Construction Across COCA and BNC

Examples (22) and (23), drawn from the first 500 concordance lines in COCA, and examples (24) to (26), from the first 500 in the BNC, indicate that the verb *laughed* appears less frequently in the Caused Motion Construction in COCA than in the BNC. Nonetheless, both corpora contain clear instances where *laughed*, typically intransitive, is coerced into a transitive, caused-motion frame that includes a displaced object and a path or goal phrase (e.g., *laughed away her whizz powder*,

¹⁰ Taylor, P., 2025. Love Letters. “The nights we cried away the pain.” Boomplay. Available at: <https://www.boomplay.com/lyrics/54568976> [Accessed 20 March 2025].

laughed them into bed). These metaphorical extensions demonstrate that, despite the quantitative imbalance, *laughed* exhibits a shared constructional potential in both American and British English.

Line	Clause	Literal / Metaphorical	Path Marker	Goal	Corpus BNC / COCA per 500 search results
(22)	"He laughed me out of the room"	Metaphorical	"out of the room"	Room (Metaphorical dismissal)	COCA
(23)	"Laughed his tubes out?"	Literal	"out"	Tubes physically displaced	COCA
(24)	"She has laughed away her whizz powder"	Metaphorical (Loss/displacement)	"away"	Powder disappears	BNC
(25)	"Laughed Wilson's overtures out of court"	Metaphorical	"out of court"	Overtures metaphorically rejected	BNC
(26)	"He laughed them into bed"	Metaphorical	"into bed"	Metaphorically leading to be	BNC

Table 2: Comparative Overview Examples (2) through (26)

The Use of Laughed in the Resultative Construction: Evidence from COCA and BNC

Examples (27) through (32) all feature *laughed* used in the Resultative Construction. While the example in (27) is drawn from the British National Corpus (BNC), four concordance lines are taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), as shown in (28) through (31); an additional example from COCA, which would appear as (32), is not cited here due to offensive content.

27. "419 JYE W_fict_prose wanted to know why. He looked very doubtful when I asked certain questions and [**laughed me to scorn**]

when I gave my verdict. He said I was just covering” (BNC)

In line (27), the clause “laughed me to scorn” exemplifies the Resultative Construction: [Subject: implied] [Verb: laughed] [Object: me] [Result-XP: to scorn]. The object undergoes a figurative change of state, with “to scorn” expressing the resulting condition. The laughter brings about a shift in how the object is perceived – namely, as scorned – aligning with Goldberg’s (1995) resultative frame.

28. “74 2015 MAG NatlReview of the Democratic National Committee would not answer, or could not answer. [**She laughed off the question**] and instead said she wanted to talk about the difference between a” (COCA)

In line (28), the clause “She laughed off the question” represents the Resultative Construction: [Subject: she] [Verb: laughed off] [Object: the question] [Result-XP: off]. The object undergoes a conceptual change of state, with *off* marking its dismissal or removal from relevance. The result is encoded in the particle, signaling that the question is no longer engaged with – consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) framework.

29. “76 2015 NEWS Atlanta dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals. “During Thursday’s debate, [**Trump laughed it off**]. In the Lemon interview, the GOP frontrunner called the question “” (COCA)

In line (29), the clause “Trump laughed it off” exemplifies the Resultative Construction: [Subject: Trump] [Verb: laughed off] [Object: it] [Result-XP: off]. The object undergoes a conceptual change of state – from a potential concern to something dismissed – with *off* encoding the result. The construction signals that the issue is no longer taken seriously, aligning with Goldberg’s (1995) resultative pattern.

30. “133 2012 WEB patheos.com came buzzing by those of us standing near the pile of un-ignited fireworks. [**We laughed it off**] as an

abberation and kept going, bringing out the “big guns” (COCA)

In line (30), the clause “We laughed it off as an aberration” exemplifies the Resultative Construction: [Subject: we] [Verb: laughed off] [Object: it] [Result-XP: off]. The action reclassifies the object as insignificant, with *off* encoding its dismissal. The construction reflects a change in the object’s conceptual status and licenses a transitive use of the otherwise intransitive verb *laugh*, consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) framework.

Lines (29) and (30) – “Trump laughed it off” and “We laughed it off as an aberration” – represent near-identical idiomatic realizations of the Resultative Construction, both following the pattern [Subject] [Verb] [Object] [Result-XP]. In each case, the verb *laughed* is extended into a transitive frame, with *it* as the object undergoing a conceptual change of state. The particle *off* encodes the result: dismissal or minimization of the object. These constructions demonstrate a stable idiomatic usage in which laughter serves to invalidate or downplay a potential issue, aligning closely with Goldberg’s (1995) model of resultative meaning derived from the verb–object–result configuration.

31. “134 2012 WEB blogs.indiewire.com 627196 # And [**they laughed him to scorn**],.... The servants, neighbours, and relations, the pipers” (COCA)

In line (31), the clause “they laughed him to scorn” represents the Resultative Construction: [Subject: they] [Verb: laughed] [Object: him] [Result-XP: to scorn]. The object undergoes a figurative change of state, with “to scorn” expressing the resulting condition. This mirrors line (27) from the BNC and shows the intransitive verb “laugh” extended into a transitive, resultative frame – consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) analysis.

Lines (27) from the BNC (“laughed me to scorn”) and (31) from COCA (“they laughed him to scorn”) exemplify parallel uses of the

Resultative Construction across the two corpora. Both follow the pattern [Subject] [Verb] [Object] [Result-XP], with the phrase “to scorn” expressing the resulting emotional or social state imposed on the object. In each case, the typically intransitive verb *laugh* is extended into a transitive resultative frame, showing that this idiomatic expression – though possibly archaic or literary in tone – remains constructionally viable in both British and American English. These examples highlight a shared metaphorical mapping between laughter and scorn within the resultative schema, consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) framework.

Line (32) contains an additional informal instance of the Resultative Construction in COCA. Due to the offensive nature of the expression, the full example is not cited here; however, it follows the familiar [Subject] [Verb] [Object] [Result-XP] pattern and contributes to the corpus evidence for resultative extensions of *laughed* in colloquial American English.

Summary of Findings

Examples (22) to (26) illustrate clear instances of the Caused Motion Construction, in which *laughed* is coerced into a transitive frame involving a displaced object and a goal or path (e.g., *laughed away her whizz powder*, *laughed them into bed*). These examples, though not equally distributed, appear in both COCA and the BNC, highlighting the cross-linguistic applicability of this construction in British and American English.

Examples (27) to (31) shift to the Resultative Construction, where *laughed* similarly adopts a transitive frame, this time leading to a change of state in the object (e.g., *laughed me to scorn*, *laughed it off*). These instances include both idiomatic and metaphorical uses, with consistent structural patterns across the two corpora.

Finally, example (32), from COCA, provides an additional informal instance of the Resultative Construction. Although not cited due to offensive language, it follows the same [Subj] [Verb] [Obj] [Result-XP] pattern, reinforcing the productivity of this construction in colloquial American English.

Constructional Extensions of *Sneezed*: Caused Motion and Resultative Uses

Although *sneeze* is canonically an intransitive verb, corpus data reveal instances where it appears in extended argument structure constructions. This section examines uses of *sneezed* in both the **Caused Motion** and **Resultative Constructions**, based on an analysis of the first 500 concordance lines from COCA. While the BNC contains 39 concordance lines of *sneezed*, all are strictly intransitive. In contrast, COCA includes cases where *sneezed* is coerced into transitive frames, either to encode the displacement of a physical entity or to express a figurative change of state, demonstrating its constructional flexibility in American English.

Examples (33) and (34) demonstrate the use of *sneezed* in the Caused Motion Construction, based on two concordance lines from COCA, while (35) illustrates a Resultative Construction with *sneezed* in another line from COCA, and (36) presents a similar Resultative Construction in a concordance line from the BNC.

33. “49 2016 FIC FantasySciFi couldn’t help it. I sucked up a great gust of air and [**I sneezed it back out**] again, all over her. # Something - the droplets my” (COCA)

In line (33), the clause “I sneezed it back out again, all over her” represents the Caused Motion Construction: [Subject: I] [Verb: sneezed] [Theme (Object moved): it] [Goal/Path: back out again, all over her]. The subject causes the movement of an entity (air or droplets) along a spatial path through the act of sneezing. This construction reflects a transitive extension of the typically intransitive verb *sneeze*, consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) analysis of caused-motion patterns.

34. 130 2012 WEB sarahbessey.com has been horribly sick, when he bent over to kiss my head, [**he sneezed boogers all over my hair**]. I wondered if that is the sort of thing” (COCA)

In line (34), the clause “he sneezed boogers all over my hair” illustrates the Caused Motion Construction: [Subject: he] [Verb: sneezed] [Theme (Object moved): boogers] [Goal/Path: all over my hair]. The subject causes a physical substance to move along a spatial trajectory via the act of sneezing. This transitive extension of the typically intransitive verb *sneeze* aligns with Goldberg’s (1995) analysis of caused-motion patterns.

35. “109 2012 MAG ParentingEarly So I did and I had a massive allergy attack. I had hives, [**sneezed my head off**], and my eyes were tearing. And this detergent was geared” (COCA)

In line (35), the clause “sneezed my head off” exemplifies the Resultative Construction: [Subject: I] [Verb: sneezed] [Object: my head] [Result-XP: off]. The object undergoes a figurative change of state, with off encoding the exaggerated result of the action. Though idiomatic, the expression fits the resultative pattern in which an otherwise intransitive verb is extended into a transitive frame, consistent with Goldberg’s (1995) framework.

36. “3 ACB W_fict_prose it was only moments, until a pollen-laden grass flower tickled his nose and [**he sneezed himself back to life again**]. He rolled over and saw Simon’s face,” (BNC)

In line (36), the clause “he sneezed himself back to life again” demonstrates the Resultative Construction: [Subject: he] [Verb: sneezed] [Object: himself] [Result-XP: back to life again]. The action brings about a figurative change of state in the object – from a diminished or unconscious state to vitality. Although *sneeze* is typically intransitive, the construction licenses a transitive use with a result phrase, exemplifying the core features of the Resultative Construction as described by Goldberg (1995).

Constructional Extensions of Sneezed Across COCA and the BNC

The verb *sneeze*, typically intransitive, appears in both the Caused Motion and Resultative Constructions in the COCA and, more rarely, in the BNC. Among the analyzed examples, three instances come from COCA and one from the BNC, illustrating the verb's constructional flexibility in American and, to a lesser extent, British English.

Lines (33) and (34) from COCA exemplify the Caused Motion Construction. In both cases – “*I sneezed it back out again, all over her*” and “*he sneezed boogers all over my hair*” – the subject initiates an action that causes a physical substance to move along a spatial path. These examples clearly follow the pattern [Subject] [Verb] [Theme] [Goal/Path], showing how *sneeze* is coerced into a transitive, caused-motion frame.

In contrast, lines (35) and (36) reflect the Resultative Construction, extending the verb *sneeze* to encode a figurative change of state in the object. In COCA line (35), “*sneezed my head off*” follows the idiomatic [Subject] [Verb] [Object] [Result-XP] structure, where *off* marks the exaggerated result of the action. Line (36), from the BNC, offers a more vivid resultative use: “*he sneezed himself back to life again*”. Here, the object *himself* undergoes a figurative transformation, brought about by the act of sneezing.

Together, these examples demonstrate that while the BNC contains only one instance of *sneeze* in an extended construction (line 36), COCA reveals multiple cases in both caused-motion and resultative frames. This distribution highlights a greater degree of constructional productivity for *sneeze* in American English, especially in informal or expressive contexts.

Final Conclusions

This study set out to explore how speakers extend prototypically intransitive “noise” verbs (*coughed*, *laughed*, and *sneezed*) into Caused

Motion and Resultative Constructions, despite their conventional intransitivity.

In response to the first research question, the corpus data from COCA and the BNC revealed that these verbs can be integrated into both constructions through constructional coercion, whereby the syntax of the construction licenses a transitive, caused-motion or resultative interpretation. Specifically, the presence of path elements (e.g., *up*, *out*, *along the wall*) and result phrases (e.g., *off*, *to scorn*) enables these verbs to function within argument structures that go beyond their prototypical valency.

Addressing the second question, the findings support the role of cognitive and semantic principles – such as metaphorical extension, event schema compatibility, and ‘conceptual blending’ (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) – in facilitating this flexibility. Speakers interpret these constructions as coherent events of caused change or displacement, even when the verb’s core meaning does not entail transitivity.

Finally, with respect to the third question, corpus-based evidence from both American (COCA) and British (BNC) English indicates that while both varieties support these extended uses, American English exhibits greater frequency, variety, and productivity – particularly in Resultative contexts. Overall, the findings provide strong support for construction grammar approaches, illustrating how abstract argument structure constructions enable semantic innovation and flexibility in everyday language use.

These conclusions reinforce Goldberg’s (1995) argument that constructions carry meaning independently of the verbs they contain, and that verb-construction pairings can yield new, contextually grounded meanings. They also highlight the role of corpus-based analysis in uncovering the nuances of such usage patterns across varieties of English.

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