Constraints on Subsumption and Amalgamation Processes in the Lexical Constructional Model: the Case of *phone* and *email*

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This article deals with the study of the processes of lexical-constructional integration, or *subsumption*, of the verbs *phone* and *email* (as representatives of the subclass of verbs of instrument of communication) into the English dative and ditransitive argument-structure constructions. The exploration of the irregularities in such processes has led us to postulate the existence and explore the activity of two phrasal constructions, namely the *X About Y* and the *X With Y* constructions. These phrasal constructions may combine, on the basis of level-internal constructional *amalgamation* with the transitive construction as required by the semantic nature of the direct object, thus giving rise to a combined construction into which both verbs may subsume. The *Lexical Constructional Model* (LCM) provides the necessary analytical tools for the development of this study, especially the set of internal and external constraints that regulate subsumption and amalgamation.

Keywords: amalgam; dative; ditransitive; instrument of communication verbs; subsumption

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Restricciones en los procesos de subsunción y amalgamación en el Modelo Léxico Construccional: un estudio de caso de *phone* y *email*

Este artículo trata el estudio de los procesos de integración léxico-construccional o *subsunción* de los verbos ingleses *phone* y *email* (representativos de la subclase de verbos de instrumento de comunicación) en las construcciones dativa y ditransitiva. El análisis de las irregularidades halladas en dichos procesos nos lleva a postular la existencia y explorar la actividad de dos construcciones, a saber, las construcciones frasales *X About Y* y *X With Y*. Estas construcciones frasales pueden combinarse sobre la base de procesos de *amalgamación* construccional con la construcción transitiva en aquellos casos en que la naturaleza semántica del objeto directo lo requiera, dando lugar a una nueva construcción en la que ambos verbos pueden subsumirse. El *Modelo Léxico Construccional* (MLC) nos proporciona las herramientas analíticas que necesitamos para el desarrollo de este estudio, especialmente las restricciones internas y externas que regulan los procesos de subsunción y amalgama.

Palabras clave: amalgama; dativa; ditransitiva; subsunción; verbos de instrumento de comunicación

1. Introduction

The English dative and the ditransitive constructions have received a great deal of attention in Construction Grammar(s) (CxG henceforth) (e.g. Goldberg 1995, 2006; Iwata 2005, among many others),[1] and also in works by authors that invoke the notion of construction in their accounts (e.g. Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2008).[2] In this article, we explore in detail the integration of two verbs, namely *phone* and *email*, into these two constructional configurations.[3] According to Levin's taxonomy, these verbs belong to the subclass of verbs of *instrument of communication*, which are in turn part of the general class of verbs of communication (1993: 202-12). My research, which has been carried out on the basis of naturally-occurring data from such corpora as the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and the *British National Corpus* (the BNC World edition), sometimes complemented with Google searches, suggests that even though both lexical items are listed within the same subclass, there are discrepancies between the two verbs when we try to integrate them into the constructional configurations under scrutiny. Thus, while the verb *email* seems to equally fit into both the ditransitive and the dative constructions,[4] the uses of the verb *phone* in the ditransitive construction are marginal (no results obtained from COCA, BNC; 7 results obtained in Google searches). We have also identified certain irregularities in the process of integration of both verbs into the ditransitive construction, as evidenced by the contrast between the sentences *He emailed me the situation* vs. *He emailed me about the situation*; #*He phoned me good news* vs. *He phoned me with good news*.[5]

In order to solve these problems, we make use of the analytical tools provided by the *Lexical Constructional Model* (LCM). This model, as propounded by Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón (2008, 2011) and Mairal-Usón and Ruiz de Mendoza (2009), combines insights from cognitively-oriented constructionist and functional approaches to language. The LCM postulates that the integration of lexical items into argument-structure constructional configurations (called *subsumption*) is regulated by constraints based on conceptual compatibility and cognitive construal processes. The model also postulates *amalgamation* (Ruiz de Mendoza and Gonzálvez 2011) as a constrained process that can integrate several constructions into a constructional complex. The present research makes use of this explanatory apparatus in order to account for the constructional idiosyncrasy of the verbs mentioned above. The differences are so marked that, despite the obvious

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[1] For some authors, the ditransitive and the dative constructions constitute the so-called *dative alternation* (Levin 1993). In fact, in CxG(s), the ditransitive and the dative are different, though nonetheless, related constructions.

[2] Here we broadly understand the notion of construction as a form-meaning pairing. See section 2 for a more detailed definition of the term.

[3] Financial support for this research has been received from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, grant number FFI 2010-17610/FILO.

[4] "Dative and ditransitive constructions" are short for "English dative and ditransitive constructions" throughout this paper.

[5] '#' stands for uses that are only acceptable in very specific contexts. See Boas (2010) for a principled account of the participation of verbs of communication into the ditransitive construction.

similarities in denotative meaning, the two verbs will be argued to belong to different subclasses within the general class of verbs of communication.

An overview of the LCM, especially those aspects that will be helpful in the development of this article, is provided in section 2. In section 3, we discuss the reasons why the verbs *phone* and *email* should not be regarded as members of the same subclass. We offer a detailed account of the subsumption processes of these two verbs into the ditransitive and the dative constructions; problematic cases are addressed and plausible solutions are proposed. This analysis points to the necessity of postulating the existence of the *X About Y* and the *X With Y* phrasal constructions, which will be accordingly described, and whose role as constructions will be defended. Section 4 summarizes the main findings of this study.

2. The Lexical Constructional Model (LCM): An overview

As noted in the introduction to this article, the LCM is a cognitively-oriented constructionist approach to language that encompasses relevant features from apparently diverging paradigms such as Van Valin's (2005) *Role and Reference Grammar* (RGG), Dik's (1997) Functional Grammar (FG) and Goldberg's (1995, 2006) (Cognitive) Construction Grammar (CXG). The LCM incorporates insights from these three accounts together with relevant developments of Lakoff's (1987) Cognitive Semantics carried out by Ruiz de Mendoza and his collaborators (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez 2011).

The LCM provides a unified account of meaning construction and a set of constraints that regulate the integration of lexical and constructional elements at all levels of meaning description. Let us briefly describe each of these levels, focusing on level 1, with which our study is concerned:

(1)   Level 1, which deals with argument structure characterizations, contains the building blocks of the model, namely *lexical* and *constructional templates*. At this level, the LCM explores the ways in which lexical predicates, which are lower-level configurations, are built into (higher-level) argument-structure constructions, such as the caused-motion, resultative, ditransitive, and dative constructions (Goldberg 1995: 2006). For example, the sentences *Mary gave me the book* and *Mary gave a book to me* are instantiations of the ditransitive and the dative constructions, respectively. They differ in the way in which the transfer process is put into perspective: while the dative focuses on the transfer process, the ditransitive highlights the result of such process, which is the possession of the object by the receiver. The verb *give* is compatible with both perspectives, which is why the dative and ditransitive constructions can alternate (Levin 1993) with this verb. However, this alternation is not possible with the verb *contribute*, despite its semantic similarity with *give*: *Each partner contributed capital to the partnership/ *Each partner contributed the partnership capital. This is so because the notion of contributing highlights*

the idea of giving to a common fund, which relegates the actual receiver to a secondary role (Rosca 2012).

(II)   Level 2 is concerned with the study of implicational constructions. Together with level 3, it constitutes the pragmatic module of the model. An example of level-2 construction is the well-known configuration *What's X Doing Y?*, originally identified and discussed by Kay and Fillmore (1999). Consider the sentence *What are you doing in my house?* The idea that the speaker is bothered by the hearer's presence in his house is in origin a pragmatic implication that has become conventionally associated to the construction through frequency of use.

(III)   Level 3 includes illocutionary constructions. The *Can You X?* construction is an instance of illocutionary construction. The expression *Can you pass me the salt?* invokes the illocutionary scenario of requests by mentioning the ability component (Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza 2002; Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi 2007).

(IV)   Level 4 addresses discourse phenomena, including discourse constructions intended to endow discourse with connectivity. For example, a CAUSE-CONSEQUENCE relation underlies the interpretation of the sentence *The bomb exploded; many people died*.

In terms of the LCM, the integration of conceptual structure across levels of description is handled under the notion of *subsumption*, while level-internal integration is a matter of representational *amalgamation* (Ruiz de Mendoza and Gonzálvez 2011). Furthermore, subsumption is also the process by virtue of which lexical templates fuse into constructional configurations at level 1. The integration of the verb *push* into the caused-motion construction in the sentence *Mary pushed Peter out of the room* is an example of subsumption.[6] For an example of constructional amalgam, consider the sentence *I will call you this evening*. In this expression, the *X Will Y* construction amalgamates with the transitive construction (i.e. *I call you*) in such a way that the variables of the former (a more abstract construction) are parametrized by the argument and the predicate of the latter, which is an argument-structure construction.

The LCM provides a set of constraints that regulate this process. *Internal constraints* arise from the degree of conceptual compatibility between lexical and constructional characterizations, while *external constraints* have to do with the sensitiveness of a lexical predicate to be construed from different perspectives. An example of the former is the *Lexical Class Constraint*, according to which all members of the same class or subclass are in principle compatible with a given constructional configuration. For example, *break* verbs, which involve a change of state (e.g. *shatter, burst*, etc), can participate in the inchoative construction (*The bottle broke/shattered, The tire burst*). By contrast, certain verbs belonging to a different class, even if they are semantically related, cannot take part in the inchoative construction, as is the case of *destroy* and *demolish*, which belong to the

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6   The caused-motion construction may be schematized as X CAUSES Y TO MOVE Z (Goldberg 1995; 2006).

class of cessation of existence (*The house destroyed/demolished). These two verbs contrast with other similar verbs as regards intentionality (e.g. The house collapsed).

Examples of external constraint are high-level metaphor and metonymy. Let us see how each of these processes works. Take the sentence The audience laughed the actor off the stage. The verb laugh denotes an activity that is usually directed to a target. This is indicated by the use of at to introduce the target (They laughed at the actor). The absence of this grammatical mark in the sentence above is an indication that laugh has experienced a re-construal process whereby its object is no longer seen as a targeted activity but rather as what LCM theorists call an effectual object, i.e. one that receives the direct physical impact of an action (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón 2007; 2008).[7] Such a re-construal process is, in fact, the result of a metaphor according to which activities having a target can be seen as if they were effectual actions (AN EXPERIENTIAL ACTION IS AN EFFECTUAL ACTION). This metaphor allows us to treat verbs like laugh, stare, smile, talk, and others as if they were verbs like strike, hit, or kick, which are effectual action verbs. Once re-construed in this way, the verb laugh can be built into the caused-motion construction.

High-level metonymy can have a similar licensing role. Think of the possibility of using an action verb like open as if it designated a process, as in The door opened. What this sentence literally designates is incongruent with what we know to be the case in the real world: agents or forces open doors but doors do not open themselves. Envisaging the action as if it were a process, which it is not, facilitates the use of such purported process to make it stand for the action. Thus, the metonymy PROCESS FOR ACTION is an obvious cognitive strategy aimed to lend conceptual prominence to the action that is taking place over the agent of the action (see Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez 2001; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón 2007, for a more detailed discussion).

In addition to high-level metaphor and metonymy, the interaction of two or more metaphors or two or more metonymies may also play a regulating role in subsumption and amalgamation processes (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón 2011). For example, He beat silence into me combines the metaphors AN EFFECTUAL ACTION IS CAUSED MOTION and ACQUIRING A PROPERTY IS RECEIVING A MOVING OBJECT. As a result of this combination, the two metaphors have a common target domain, i.e. an effectual action that results in the object of the action (or 'effectee') acquiring a new property, where the 'effectee' is seen both as the destination of a moving object and as the new possessor of the object. The combination of these two metaphors licenses the use of beat silence in the caused-motion construction ('silence' is the new property that is figuratively transferred to the person that acquires it). Two metonymies may also combine into a metonymic chain (Ruiz de Mendoza 2007). In He has too much lip the metonymy INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION FOR ABILITY TO PERFORM THE ACTION licenses the use of "lip" as an uncountable noun standing for the ability to perform the action of speaking easily.

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[7] In line with Langacker (1987), here we understand construal as the different ways in which the same event may be perspectivized.

Before we get to the core of this article, we should clarify what the LCM understands by the term *construction*. According to Goldberg, "any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts of other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency" (2006: 5). The LCM takes the notions of frequency and entrenchment to be central, which gives rise to a usage-based understanding of the notion. Furthermore, the LCM rounds up its own definition of construction by adding replicability as one more criterion for a linguistic pattern to actually qualify as a construction. Thus, according to the LCM, a construction is a pairing of form and meaning (or function), such that form affords access to meaning and meaning is realized by form. In a true construction, these two processes are entrenched in the speaker's mind and are generally recognized by the speech community to be stably associated.[8] Furthermore, in the LCM, a pattern qualifies as a construction with the proviso that it can be replicated by other speakers with irrelevant variation in its form and meaning (Ruiz de Mendoza 2013).[9]

The theoretical background provided by the LCM will aid us in the exploration of the distinctive features of verbs of instrument of communication, in this case *phone* and *email*.

3. The verbs *phone* and *email* as members of the same subclass

3.1. Preliminary issues

Verbs of *instrument of communication* are a subclass of verbs of communication. Like the rest of verbs in the larger class, the members of this subclass can generally occur in the ditransitive and dative constructions. This is possible because these two constructions typically take in verbs denoting transfer of possession (*He gave me the book/He gave the book to me*) and communication can be seen as a metaphorical transfer of information (Levin 1993: 207). In fact, several authors list this subclass in their accounts of groups of verbs that may participate both in the ditransitive and the dative constructions (Levin 1993; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Radden and Dirven 2007; Rappaport and Levin 2008). However, some preliminary considerations are necessary before we can fully account for the peculiarities of the integration of the members of this subclass into these constructional patterns. Let us first examine the internal makeup of two of the verbs from the subclass of verbs of instrument of communication, namely *phone* and *email*.

Unlike other communication verbs (e.g. *tell, say, narrate*), *phone* and *email* (and the rest of the verbs included within this subclass such as *fax, cable*, etc.) originate in nouns that have undergone categorial conversion into verbal predicates. This process is regulated

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[8] For further reference on usage-based models in general and their implications for the definition of a construction, the interested reader is referred to Bybee (2010, 2012).

[9] Note that replicability does not necessarily correlate with frequency, although high-frequency constructions are more likely to be replicated by other speakers.

by a high-level metonymy. In the case of *email*, the source of this metonymy is the means that we use to get the information across from one person to another, that is, the way in which the information is transferred (via email, fax, etc.). The target is the communicative action (MEANS FOR ACTION). A different metonymy licenses the conversion of *phone* into a verb, namely INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION. In the acts of communication made by phone, the instrument is perceived as more relevant than any other element involved in the transmission of information, so by naming the instrument, it is made to stand for the whole act of communication. Making a difference between the MEANS FOR ACTION and the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymies is not a moot point. Note that it is not possible to use INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION in the case of email message transmission, which is why a sentence like **Mary computered me* is unacceptable. This difference of focus has syntactic implications that will be discussed in section 3.2, where we provide an account of the subsumption processes that the verbs *email* and *phone* may undergo in relation to the ditransitive and the dative constructions.

3.2. The ditransitive and the dative constructions: the subsumption processes of *phone* and *email*

As we pointed out in the introduction to this article, the verb *phone* may be subsumed into the dative construction, as we can see in the sentence *The President immediately phoned congratulations to House speaker Foley* (COCA, 1993). By contrast, the integration of this same verb into the ditransitive construction is a marginal phenomenon (7 occurrences in Google, none in the BNC, none in the COCA), and therefore cannot be taken as a regular pattern of integration.[10] This fact clashes with the Lexical Class Constraint, according to which lexical items belonging to the same class tend to have the same constructional behaviour. Thus, we may assume that there are significant differences between the verbs *phone* and *email* that may explain some of the inconsistencies found and that may support the possibility of listing these two verbs within different categories (or sub-categories).

We have traced some of the differences between *phone* and *email* to the different metonymies that underlie their processes of categorial conversion from noun to verb. Let us now explore the implications of this discrepancy in relation to the subsumption of these verbs into the constructions under scrutiny. In order to do so, we shall start by providing a general overview of the features that differentiate the ditransitive from the dative construction.

The ditransitive and the dative constructions can be schematized as SUBJ V OBJ1 OBJ2 and SUBJ V OBJ2 'to' OBJ1, respectively. According to Goldberg (1995), the ditransitive differs from the dative construction in that the ditransitive highlights the new possessor of the transferred object (the result of the process) while the dative focuses on

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[10] Kay (2012) refers to low-frequency configurations as patterns of coining, and denies them the status of construction. A case in point is the English caused-motion construction and oft-quoted instances such as *She sneezed the napkin off the table* in particular.

the object and the process of transference itself (the action).[11] For example, the ditransitive use of the verb in *Sally baked her sister a cake* can only mean that the intention of Sally was for her sister to have the cake (Goldberg 1995: 141). Advocates of the LCM, in line with other cognitively-oriented constructionists (e.g. Panther 1997; Goldberg and Bencini 2005; Colleman and De Clerck 2009), further argue that the dative construction is but a case of the caused-motion construction.

Let us now contrast the uses of the verbs *email* and *phone*. We have already mentioned that the verbal use of *email* arises from the licensing ability of the high-level metonymy MEANS FOR ACTION. *Phone*, on the other hand, is based on INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION. Despite this superficial similarity, however, the two verbs behave differently: *email* can be subsumed into the dative and the ditransitive constructions (*He emailed the report to me/ He emailed me the report*), while *phone* works much better with the dative construction (*He phoned the good news to me/#He phoned me the good news*; but *He phoned me with the news*). The reason for this is to be found in the fact that the noun *email*, which is the means of conveying the message, is itself metonymic for 'a message sent by email' and the action of sending can have either a dative or a ditransitive construction (*He sent me the message/He sent the message to me*). The combination of MEANS FOR ACTION and MEANS (OF SENDING A MESSAGE) FOR MESSAGE calls for the following paraphrases of the verb *email*: 'send a message to someone by email' or 'send someone a message by email'. The former paraphrase focuses on the motion aspect of the transfer of information, while the latter highlights its resultative aspect, i.e. the idea that the receiver figuratively 'possesses' the information. The noun *phone*, by contrast, is not metonymic for the message that is communicated by telephone. Such a message is called a *phone message*. So, the verb *phone* simply means 'use a phone to communicate a message' through the application of INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION. This metonymy focuses on the communicative activity but not on the transfer of information, which means that the message cannot be seen as a possession; it is just the object of communication. Since the ditransitive construction focuses on the message as a possession, it follows that using the verb *phone* in such a construction would result in a focal prominence clash.

In the light of the LCM, we may claim that the possibility of subsuming the verb *phone* into the ditransitive construction is ruled out by the *Focal Prominence Compatibility* constraint (Del Campo Martínez 2011). According to this constraint, the conceptual prominence given to lexical and constructional elements that we integrate into a conceptual construct must be compatible. Thus, since the new possessor of the transferred object (the result) is given conceptual prominence in the ditransitive construction, this constructional configuration is not compatible with the verb *phone*, which gives conceptual prominence to the action by mentioning the instrument used to perform action. It logically follows that the verb *phone* is compatible with the dative construction, which, as a subtype of

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[11] See Langacker (1991) for a similar treatment of the difference between these two uses within the context of Cognitive Grammar.

the caused-motion construction, places emphasis on the process of transfer rather than on the possession of the transferred object. By contrast, the verb *email*, for the reasons discussed above, can be licensed into either the dative or the ditransitive constructions in terms of the *Focal Prominence Compatibility* constraint. Obviously, in the case of *email*, the choice of the ditransitive construction to the detriment of the dative involves a shift of emphasis from the transferred information to the receptor as the metaphorical possessor of information.

These considerations provide an explanation for the asymmetric constructional behaviour of *phone* and *email* on the basis of their semantic properties. However, this discussion is not enough to account for problematic cases such as (i) the impossibility of **He emailed me the situation* versus the acceptability of *He emailed me* about *the situation*, and (ii) the impossibility of **He phoned me good news* versus the acceptability of *He phoned me with good news*. These two configurations are dealt with in sections 3.3 and 3.4, respectively.

3.3. The *About* construction
We initially assumed that verbs of instrument of communication constitute a special subclass whose syntactic behaviour not only patterns with sister subclasses that belong to the verbs of communication class (*tell, talk, say*, etc.), but also assimilates to verbs of change of possession (*give, send,* etc.). In this respect, consider the examples in (1)-(3):

> (1) *Louie emailed her letter to Joachim.* (COCA, 2003)
> (2) *Zoe emailed me Dr Marmur's contact information.* (COCA, 2010)
> (3) *Angie immediately emailed Frank about her concerns for their daughter's safety.* (COCA, 2007)

Sentences (1) and (2) are clear examples of the use of the verb *email* with central instances of the dative and ditransitive constructions respectively. Example (3), on the other hand, features an additional element, a prepositional phrase introduced by *about* indicating the topic of the object of communication. In this respect, we should note that the dative and the ditransitive constructions are usually found to incorporate verbs of change of possession; we could easily replace the verb *email* with the verb *send* in sentences (1) and (2). On the other hand, the constructional pattern in (3), and its variant where the receiver is introduced by *to*, typically integrates some of the subclasses belonging to the general class of verbs of communication such as *tell* and *advise* verbs (without *to*) or *talk* and *complain* (with *to*), as in *Ellen told/advised/talked to/complained to Helen about the situation* (Levin 1993: 202-12).

Our searches reveal that the selection of the syntactic pattern in (3) is associated to objects that may be discussed about (*her concerns for their daughter's safety*), while the central instances of the ditransitive and the dative constructions typically feature syntactic objects that denote items that may be transferred (*her letter, Mr. Marmur's contact information*). Therefore, we may postulate that in those cases in which the OBJ2 slot of

the ditransitive construction is filled in by a topic that lends itself to discussion rather than to (literal or metaphorical) transmission, the transitive construction amalgamates with what we have termed the *X About Y* construction.

In the *X About Y* construction, X is any communicative action in which the receiver may or may not be explicitly mentioned.[12] Y may be realized by any topic of discussion. It only follows that X and Y must not coincide (#*Mary told a story about a story*). Note that the constructional status of this configuration follows from the definition outlined in section 2 above.[13] First, it pairs a specific formal structure (*X about Y*, where *X* and *Y* are noun phrases of various degrees of complexity) with a given function (introducing a topic):

(4) a. *He told me the true story about John's death.*
    b. *He told me everything he knew about John's death.*
    c. *He told me everything he'd been told about John's death.*
    d. *He told me everything he'd been told during the week about John's death.*
    e. *He told me everything he'd been told during the week by his mother about John's death.*

Of course, following general iconicity constraints, the smaller the distance between the head of the X noun phrase and the *about* phrase, the greater the felicity of the constructional realization.[14]

Second, the *X About Y* configuration is highly replicable provided that the formal and functional constraints mentioned above are not violated; e.g. *I like stories about true love, I will not tell you anything about that issue, I don't know anything about what she said*; however, **I like stories about stories, I will not tell you anything about anything;* etc.

In addition, there are specific syntactic restrictions on the distribution of this construction, which strengthen its role as such. The *X About Y* construction cannot amalgamate, for instance, with the following syntactic patterns: the dative construction (*He emailed the letter to me* vs. **He emailed about the letter to me*), the complex-transitive construction (*He considers Mary a good person* vs. **He considers Mary about a good person*).[15] By contrast, the *X About Y* construction may amalgamate, for instance, with the intransitive (*Mary phoned/ about the problem*) and the transitive constructions (*Mary phoned me/ about the problem*).

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[12]   The *X About Y* construction may also be superimposed with clauses containing verbs of cognition (e.g. *I've been thinking about you, I know a lot about animals*, etc.). However, given the restricted scope of this article, we will focus on verbs that involve a communicative action.

[13]   The *X About Y* construction needs to be considered as a phrasal construction (as opposed to clausal constructions), given its syntactic dependency and lack of clausal structure. The distinction between phrasal and clausal constructions is fully at home with the continuum posited between morphemes and complex constructions as endpoints (the grammar-lexicon continuum).

[14]   We regard iconicity as the principle underlying linguistic expressions that emulate a given state of affairs (Croft 2008 and Haiman 1980, 1985, 2008, among many others).

[15]   Here we use Quirk et al.'s terminology (1985).

If we examine examples from our data, there are apparently two ways in which the *X About Y* construction may amalgamate with the transitive construction. Let us see examples (5) and (6) below:

(5) *But a fellow* NBA *reporter recently emailed me about how rude Garnett continues to be to the media.* (COCA, 2004)

(6) *Supervisor Mike Antonovich emailed me the news about the promotion of Assistant Sheriff Paul Tanaka.*[16]

In these examples, even if syntactically optional, the *X About Y* construction is obligatory for discourse purposes. In both cases, the *X About Y* construction provides additional information that complements the semantic object of the sentence, which is the email itself in (5) and the news in (6). One may argue that in the sentence *Mary told me about the problem*, the *X About Y* construction constitutes the direct object. However, this is not possible in view of the possibility of making a transitive use of *tell*: *Mary told me everything/what she knew about the problem.* The sequence *Mary told me* is the result of applying what Goldberg (2006) has termed the *Deprofiled Object Construction.* This construction has the function of omitting non-focal arguments that are irrelevant in discourse. As a result of this, in *Mary told me* the emphasis is on the relationship between the communicative action and the receiver of the communication.

On the basis of the observations made above we can contend that the transitive and the *X About Y* constructions can only amalgamate in one way. In the amalgam, the *About Y* part of the construction complements (by introducing a topic) the semantic object within the X part thus designating the information transmitted, which may, in turn, be either implicit or explicit.

One word of caution is nonetheless in order here. The *X About Y* construction is what we can call *a topic construction.*[17] It has the function of introducing a topic that provides information about an object of communication or cognition. It is different from other uses of *about*, as in the following sentence: *About your financial situation, let me just tell you that you made a mistake.* This sentence instantiates a *topicalization construction*, which in the LCM is a discourse or level-4 construction whose function is to bring a discourse topic (*your financial situation*) to the front.[18] This construction may be represented as follows:

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[16] <http://rafu.com/news/2011/06/horse-10/> (Accessed 17 May, 2012).

[17] The functionalist *topic-comment* distinction has often been related to the *theme/rheme* dichotomy put forward by the Prague School and the *given/new* distinction in Discourse Analysis. According to Halliday (1976: 180), the rheme is the point of departure for the message, and the distinction theme/rheme concerns the organization of information of the clause. The given/new distinction is context dependent in that it bears in mind previous discourse and information. As far as this article is concerned, we will embrace the general notions of topic/theme as what is being talked about as opposed to comment/rheme, which refer to what is said about the topic/theme.

[18] "Topicalization" here conflates what Gregory and Michaelis (2001) refer to as "topicalization" and "left-dislocation" in English. We recommend this article for the specifics of the distinction between topicalization and left-dislocation as two pragmatically specialized constructions in English.

About X, Y, where X is a noun phrase introducing the discourse topic and Y a clause or a clause complex commenting on the topic.

Let us now turn our attention to the verb *phone*, which may, in fact, be subsumed into the construction resulting from the amalgam between the *X About Y* and the transitive construction, as shown in examples (7) and (8) below:

(7)   *April Jolley phoned me about the Spring Fling Dance.*[19]
(8)   *He phoned her about a surprise fortieth birthday party for a mutual friend.* (COCA, 2001)

The *X About Y* construction ensures that the semantic direct object of the sentence will include a topic that can be discussed about. Therefore, the interpretation of the amalgam between the *X About Y* and the transitive constructions is semantically closer to verbs of communication than to verbs of change of possession, which, in fact, cannot be subsumed into this amalgam (**April Jolley sent me about the Spring Fling Dance*). We may contend that the construction that results from the amalgam is somehow semantically close to the ditransitive construction in that we may identify a recipient and an affected object (which is usually implicit within the semantic configuration of the verb). Examples (7) and (8) show that, even if the verb *phone* cannot be integrated into the ditransitive construction, it may become part of what we may call the *transitive-about* amalgam. The verb *phone* can thus be said to constitute an exception within the subclass of verbs of instrument of communication in that it inherits syntactic and semantic properties from sister subclasses, but not from verbs of change of possession. The verb *phone* patterns with other verbs of communication in that the semantic object is implicit within the verbal configuration: in *He told me about the situation*, the semantic object is implicit within the verb, as is revealed by the following paraphrase: *He gave me information about the situation*. This is not the case, for instance, of other subclasses such as *say* verbs. We must observe that the syntactic behaviour of *say* and *tell* verbs is different, despite their evident semantic relatedness: *He said something to me* vs. **He said me something*; **He told something to me* vs. *He told me something*. In our view, the verb *say* (defined as "to express with words")[20] is the verb of communication that genuinely conveys the implications of Reddy's *Conduit Metaphor* (1979). In general lines, this metaphor allows us to reason and talk about acts of communication in terms of acts of physical transfer (ideas as moving objects that go from speaker to hearer, the speaker is the point of departure, the hearer is the final destination, etc.; Grady 1988). Therefore, the use of this metaphor points to the dative construction as the prototypical construction in acts of communication, as is the case with acts of transfer of possession. This explains why the verb *say* cannot be subsumed into the ditransitive construction, which intrinsically focalises the final state rather than the act of transfer itself.

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[19]   <http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-05-15/explore/ph-re-browning-0511-20120511_1_anna-jarvis-honor-mothers-artists-reception> (Accessed 17 May, 2012).

[20]   <http:// www.thefreedictionary.com> (Accessed 10 May, 2012).

However, not every subclass within the general class of verb of communication is sensitive to the use of the conduit metaphor within its semantic structure. Verbs like *tell* convey a more specific meaning related to narration. Therefore, acts of communication coded by this verb are not seen as transfers of information, but rather as giving an account of an event in sequenced and ordered ways. The conduit metaphor also provides an explanation for the fact that *tell* can be subsumed into the transitive-about amalgam (*He told me about the situation*), while *say* cannot (*He said me about the situation): as we pointed out, the transitive-about amalgam is semantically related to the ditransitive construction, so the subsumption of the verb *say* is blocked.

3.4. The *X With Y* construction
Consider sentences (9) and (10) below:

(9)   *I emailed the company with this information.* (COCA, 2010)
(10) *Josephson phoned him with big news.* (COCA, 1996)

In the light of these examples, we postulate the existence of another phrasal construction that may amalgamate with argument-structure constructions, namely the *X With Y* construction. This construction may amalgamate, for instance, with the intransitive and the transitive constructions.

The representation of this construction is *X With Y*, in which X is an act of communication and Y constitutes the object of communication. Therefore, *X With Y* is not a topic construction, since it introduces the semantic object rather than a topic that complements it.

In the light of our database, we have identified a semantic restriction on the object introduced by *with*. This object must be informatively relevant, that is, it must add information that is not already implicit in other constituents of the sentence. Consider, in this respect, example (9) above. This sentence is acceptable within a context in which speaker and hearer are aware of the existence of some information related to a topic that they have been previously discussing. By saying *with* this *information*, the speaker is making reference to information that is known to the hearer. By contrast, the sentence *I emailed the company* with *information* would be less relevant in principle, since we take it for granted that an email message contains some kind of information. The same can be said about the other members of the subclass of verbs of instrument of communication. Let us see another example: *The morning a friend emailed her with news of Loren's arrest* (COCA, 1999). The prepositional object *news of Loren's arrest* is informatively more relevant than *news*, since it is far more specific about the nature of what is communicated.

The *X With Y* construction also differs from the *X About Y* construction since it needs metonymic licensing in order to amalgamate with the transitive and the intransitive constructions when used with verbs of instrument of communication like *phone* and

email. Let us go back to example (10) above. Here we postulate a double metonymic shift based on domain expansion and reduction within the action frame (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal-Usón 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza 2011). The complement *with big news* constitutes the point of departure for the first metonymic shift. Although the "big news" is what gets communicated, this notion is metaphorically presented as if it were an instrument (*He hit me with a hammer; Eat your soup with a spoon*). This figurative instrument is first made to stand, through metonymic expansion, for the whole communicative action. Then, through metonymic reduction, the subdomain of the communicated object is highlighted within the broader domain of communicative action. This metonymic chain may be schematized as shown in figure 1 below:
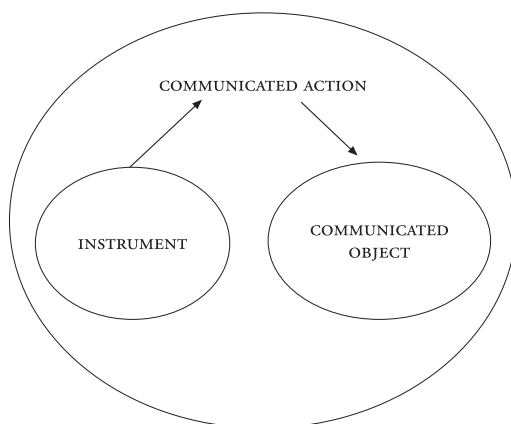

Fig. 1. Metonymic chain in the X With Y construction

The overall meaning implication of treating the "big news" as an instrument in this metonymic chain is that their importance is what actually makes the whole communicative act worth the while. This explains the tendency to use this constructional amalgam when the object to be communicated is thought to deserve special attention: *Hayes phoned him with an idea; They phoned him with congratulations; She phoned him with the offer*, etc. (vs. *#Hayes phoned an idea to him; #They phoned congratulations to him; #She phoned the offer to him*, which are at best rather odd).

4. Conclusions

The present article has explored in some detail the integration of the verbs *email* and *phone* into the ditransitive and the dative constructions. Making use of the analytical and explanatory tools provided by the LCM, we have found that some of the asymmetries between the subsumption processes of these two verbs may be explained in terms of the high-level metonymies that regulate the categorial conversion of the nouns *phone* and *email* into verbs: the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymy, in the case of *phone*,

and the combination of MEANS FOR ACTION and MEANS (OF SENDING A MESSAGE) FOR MESSAGE, in the case of *email*. Moreover, we have postulated the existence of two phrasal constructions that may amalgamate with the transitive construction in order to accommodate these two verbal predicates with certain objects: the *X About Y* and the *X With Y* constructions. These two constructions are different in that the former is a case of topic construction while the latter is not. In other words, the *X About Y* construction introduces a topic that complements the direct object while the *X With Y* construction introduces the object of communication itself, although the object is treated as if it were an instrument of communication.

Our study points to the possibility of listing the verb *phone* within a separate subclass, given its idiosyncratic constructional behaviour. This verb may not be subsumed within the ditransitive construction, but may be integrated within the transitive-about amalgam. We have suggested that the verb *phone* patterns with *say* verbs in that it is conceptually grounded in the conduit metaphor, which explains why it cannot be subsumed into the ditransitive construction.

Finally, metonymic chains have been shown to be a licensing factor for certain amalgamation processes, as in the case of the amalgam of the transitive and the *X With Y* constructions in English.

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