Light Verb Constructions and Their Families – A Corpus Study on German *stehen unter*-LVCs

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Light verb constructions (LVCs)

Light verb constructions are complex predicates consisting of a semantically light verb and a phrasal element.

(1) a. *eine Frage stellen*  
a. *a question put*  
   ‘ask a question’

b. *unter Beobachtung stellen*  
   *under observation put*  
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The verb is semantically ‘light’ compared to its ‘heavy’ use:

(2) a.  *Der Verdächtige steht unter dem Dach.*
   the suspect stands under the roof
   ‘The suspect is standing under the roof.’

   b.  *Der Verdächtige steht unter Beobachtung.*
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    ‘put under surveillance’  [causative predication]

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    ‘The suspect is under observation.’  [state predication]

The light verb is semantically reduced but not semantically empty.
LVC-families

(3) Light verb constructions form a family if (i) they only show variance with respect to their NP element, and (ii) they exemplify the same interpretational pattern.

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(4) a. \textit{unter Beobachtung stehen}
   ‘be under observation’

b. \textit{unter Verdacht stehen}
   ‘be under suspicion’

(5) a. \textit{unter Stress stehen}
   ‘be stressed’

b. \textit{unter Schock stehen}
   ‘be shocked’
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(4) a. unter Beobachtung stehen
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b. unter Verdacht stehen
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→ event passive paraphrase: ‘Passive participle + werden ‘become”

(5) a. unter Stress stehen
   ‘be stressed’

b. unter Schock stehen
   ‘be shocked’

→ state passive paraphrase: ‘Passive participle + sein ‘be”
Corpus study on *stehen unter*-LVCs

**Background**

- German reference corpus (DeReKo)
- search criterion: ‘&stehen \s0 unter’
- 80255 hits; 8023 randomly collected sentences manually annotated (55 sentences excluded)
Annotation: 1. step

Is the *unter*-PP complement of *stehen* or not?

criterion: Is it possible to leave out the PP without affecting the grammaticality of the sentence?
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| PP complement | PP not complement |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 5822          | 2146              |

*Table:* Results of the first annotation step.
Annotation: 2. step

2. step: Is *stehen* used as a heavy or a light verb? (only checked for those sentences which realize *unter* as the complement of *stehen*)

criterion: Can *stehen* by substituted by some other posture verb (e.g. *sitzen* ‘to sit’, *liegen* ‘to lie’) or by a general location verb (e.g. *lokalisiert/positioniert sein* ‘to be located/positioned’)?

(6) a. *Der Mann steht/liegt/sitzt unter dem Dach.*  
    the man stands/lies/sits under the roof  
    ‘The man is standing/sitting/lying under the roof.’

b. *Der Mann steht/*liegt/*sitzt unter Schock.*  
    the man stands/sits/lies under shock  
    ‘The man is in a state of shock/is shocked.’
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    the man stands/sits/ies under shock
    ‘The man is in a state of shock/is shocked.’

|               | heavy use | non-heavy use |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 562           | 5260      |               |

*Table: Results of the second annotation step.*
Annotation: 3. step

Identification of LVCs-families.
criterion: paraphrase

| event-passive paraphrase | state-passive paraphrase |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1335                     | 1524                      |

**Table**: Results of the third annotation step.
The semantic type of the PP-internal nouns

**Question:** What type of object is denoted by the PP-internal noun?
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**Assumption:** PP-internal nouns denotes some type of eventuality, i.e. event or state (e.g. von Polenz, 1963, 1987; Engelen, 1968; Persson, 1994; Helbig, 1984, 2006; Langer, 2004, 2005; Ježek, 2016; Savary et al., 2018).
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**Criterion:** Eventuality-denoting nouns accept temporal (e.g. *gestern* ‘yesterday’) and aspectual modifiers (e.g. *andauernd* ‘continuous’) (Fábregas & Marín, 2012; Fleischhauer & Neisani, 2020).
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(7)  

a. *Alkohol* ‘alcohol’, *Beruhigungsmittel* ‘sedative’, *Drogen* ‘drugs’, *Medikamente* ‘medicine’, *Suchtmittel* ‘addictive substances’

b. *Der Fahrer stand unter Drogen.*

the driver stood under drugs

‘The driver was under the influence of drugs.’
Events vs. States

The PP-internal nouns of the event passive-family denote events, those of the state passive-family denote states.

Criterion: Event-denoting nouns can be realized as the object argument of been-den ‘finish/stop’, state-denoting ones cannot (Fábregas & Marín, 2012)

(8) a. *Die Polizei beendete die Beobachtung.*
    the police finished the observation
    ‘The police finished the observation.’

b. #*Der Arzt beendete den Schock.*
    the doctor finished the shock
Conclusion

- Identification of the members of two LVC-families
- Families show a unique interpretation pattern
- Correlation between semantic type of PP-internal noun and *stehen unter*-family
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▶ Families show a unique interpretation pattern
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| Phrase               | stellen | setzen |
|----------------------|---------|---------|
| *unter Beobachtung*  | 201     | 4       |
| ‘under observation’  |         |         |
| *unter Schutz*       | 2179    | 0       |
| ‘under protection’   |         |         |
| *unter Schock*       | 1       | 7       |
| ‘under shock’        |         |         |
| *unter Stress*       | 1       | 244     |
| ‘under stress’       |         |         |

Table: Preferences in the choice of causative light verbs.

search strings: ‘&stellen \s0 unter N’ and ‘&setzen \s0 unter N’
Thank you very much for your attention!

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