

Corpus-Based Empirical Research on Collocation beyond Existing Grammatical Rules: *Make Angry/Mad* as an Example

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Abstract. This corpus-based phraseological research focuses on the transition from the traditional, transitive usage of the existing collocation, *make somebody angry/mad*, to the intransitive utilisation of a collocation, *make angry/mad*. The present study elucidates three principal points. First, *make angry/mad* is established by the analogy of the semantically similar collocation *get angry/mad*. In terms of the syntactic factor, *make* takes the pattern ‘make + an adjective’ [SVC], and *get angry/mad* utilises the same syntactic construction. Second, the linguistic phenomenon is the subject of this study because it is more important to convey the intended meaning without causing a misunderstanding than it is to adhere to existing rules. In other words, the notion of the linguistic economy works in the case of *make mad/angry*. Finally, the research outcome reveals that existing linguistic theories and rules account for only a small part of English usage, most of which evidences numerous uses beyond normative theories and rules.

Keywords: Corpus-based empirical study, Resurgent collocation, Analogy

1 Introduction

This corpus-based empirical research focuses on the collocation *make angry/mad*, which is a seemingly minor error but is an independently used phraseological unit (hence PU) ¹.

It has been widely acknowledged that *make angry/mad* has been regarded as a mistake although it appears as is shown in (1) (italicised by the author as in the following).

- a. Mr-MAHDI: ..., so I did not want them to *make angry*, or I just did not want to make any risk about myself, so I had to postpone the project. (COCA, 2005, SP)

¹ The study uses phraseological units (PUs), a comprehensive term that includes idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, formulae, proverbs, discourse particles and fixed expressions.

- b. The two biggest bolts (from the 1860 Democrats and the 1912 Republicans) both cost the majority party the presidency. Perhaps it is true that whom the gods would destroy, they first *make mad*. (COCA, 2010, MAG) (1)

(1) creates a hypothesis that *make angry/mad* functioning intransitively is thought to be established by the analogy of *get angry/mad*. The study proves the hypothesis from quantitative and qualitative viewpoints using corpora.

2 Literature Review

This section offers an explanation of *make somebody (sb for short) angry/mad* in previous research.

Make angry/mad has not been fully discussed in previous research, but Swan (2016) [1] mentions that *make* working as an intransitive verb is used in the pattern ‘make C’ (C is an adjective), but that the pattern is old-fashioned and obsolete.

3 Corpora Used in the Study

This study uses the data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), British National Corpus (BNC), *WordBanksOnline* (WB) from a synchronic perspective, and from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) from a diachronic perspective. I accessed COCA on February 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th and March 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th and 7th in 2019. In Sections 5, data obtained from COCA show the register, where each example is used. The acronyms MAG for magazine, SP for spoken, and WR for written. I accessed COHA on March 6th in 2019.

4 Research Methods the Study Adopts

This descriptive research places more emphasis on linguistic realities rather than on existing linguistic rules or theories. It adopts the research methodology of attempting to examine actual linguistic phenomena without depending on any major linguistic theory. This investigation is grounded in the theory of semantic syntax which is a continuation of the tradition revised and developed under the influence of various linguistic theories developed in the United States and elsewhere. Its thesis is that the meaning of a word or a phrase is closely related to the syntactic feature of the word or the phrase.

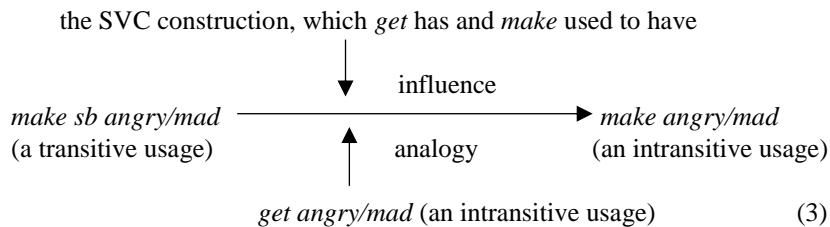
5 Quantitative and Qualitative Results of *Make Angry/Mad*

I investigate which tense and aspect *make angry/mad* is used based on the data obtained from the corpora. The results show that *make angry/mad* appears only in present tense and past tense although it is not necessarily used frequently compared to the frequency of *get angry/mad*. The examples below are quoted from the corpora.

- a. Mr-MAHDI: ..., so I did not want them to *make angry*, or I just did not want to make any risk about myself, so I had to postpone the project. (COCA, 2005, SP)
- b. The two biggest bolts (from the 1860 Democrats and the 1912 Republicans) both cost the majority party the presidency. Perhaps it is true that whom the gods would destroy, they first *make mad*. (COCA, 2010, MAG)
- c. It is said that those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first *make mad*, and it is clear that Tory Ministers are mad. (BNC, 1992, WR) (2)

(2) suggests the following points: (i) *make angry/mad* is used intransitively to express anger the same as *get angry/mad*; (ii) a careful examination of (2) shows that *make mad* in (2b,c) is described in a proverb dictionary, so *make mad* originates from an old proverb and remains fossilised; (iii) there is little semantic difference between *make angry* and *make mad*; (iv) *make angry/mad* is perhaps not a minor error, due to the fact that it is observed in written registers of the corpora and (v) *make angry/mad* appears both in American English and British English.

I maintain that *make angry/mad* comes to intransitively function as follows: *make angry/mad* is established by the analogy of *get angry/mad*; in other words, the original construction [make sb angry/mad] changes into *make angry/mad*, which is influenced by *get angry/mad* without causing a semantic change. In other words, *make angry/mad* is formed due to a syntactic-based contributing factor. Also, *make* has the old-fashioned and obsolete construction [make C]. The construction has a syntactic influence on forming *make angry/mad*. In other words, it is safe to assert that *make angry/mad* is established by these two contributing factors, i.e. semantic and syntactic contributing factors. The diagram of *make angry/mad* is illustrated in (3).



Consequently, (3) proposes that the intransitive meaning of ‘anger’ is reflected in the syntactic pattern *make angry/mad*, and that least effort of linguistic economy underlies to form *make angry/mad* because the original syntactic pattern *make sb angry/mad* is simplified into *make angry/mad*.

6 Informants’ Elicitation

I asked native speakers of English (a Canadian, an Australian, two English people, two Americans) to cooperate in the following two investigations to examine whether the results shown in the previous section are supported: ① to investigate whether the

sentences where *get(got) angry/mad* in (2) changes into *make(made) angry/mad* are acceptable; and ② to investigate whether *make angry/mad* in (2) is acceptable.

As for ①, all informants replied that the sentences in (2), where *get(got) angry/mad* changes to *make(made) angry/mad*, are acceptable. This means that *make angry/mad* is regarded same as *get angry/mad*. As for ②, all informants said that *make angry/mad* in (2) is acceptable and is used to mean ‘anger’.

Hence, the informants’ elicitation shows that the results provided in the study (i.e. *make angry/mad* is used intransitively and is same as *get angry/mad*) are supported.

7 Use of *Make Angry/Mad* from a Diachronic Standpoint

This section examines the diachronic use of *make angry/mad* based on the data obtained from COHA. *Make angry/mad* is observed only in present tense and past tense, as the above example shows. Thus, I retrieved *make(made) angry/mad* used in the same tenses in COHA.

Historically, *make(made) angry/mad* began being observed in the 1810s, although it did not appear frequently.

8 Conclusion

The corpus-based collocational study suggests that *make angry/mad* derived from *make sb angry/mad* is established as a resurgent collocation (i.e. a part of PUs) due to the influence of *get angry/mad*. The phenomenon may have arisen from the concept that it prioritises to express meanings over to adhere to grammatical rules. In other words, linguistic economy works and supports our smooth communication as a background. The study reminds us that only part of our language can be accounted for by rules or theories, and in fact most parts of our languages are diversely used beyond the rules or theories. This especially holds true for PUs, and it is not surprising to find PUs that are not explained by the rules or theories.

Acknowledgement

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Reference

1. Swan, M.: Practical English usage. 4th edn. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2016).