

Imagine all the clauses: formal variability in complement-taking predicate constructions with *imagine*

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The present study investigates the different uses of the complement-taking predicate (CTP) *imagine*. Similar to other complement-taking mental predicates such as *think*, *suppose* and *believe*, *imagine* has both a 'lexical' variant, as in examples (1)–(2), and a 'grammatical' or 'parenthetical' variant, as in (3)–(4) (all examples are taken from the Spoken BNC2014 corpus).

- (1) ***Imagine*** if that had happened on a day I'd come up to see you?
- (2) I don't like don't like Tom Cruise (...) so and I ***couldn't imagine*** him being a six-foot odd marine
- (3) A: so like poison in n it yeah
B: yeah it was poisoned (.) ***I should imagine*** it was poisoned
- (4) A: paparazzo becomes paparazzi
B: paparazzo?
A: ***that's the singular I would imagine*** of a paparazzi

Despite the fact that it is frequently listed among English CTPs with grammatical uses, the verb *imagine* has a number of specific features that distinguish it from other members of this class. As noted by Van Bogaert (2010), for instance, grammatical CTP clauses with *imagine* display an unusually high proportion of variant forms, i.e. forms which deviate from the prototype *I imagine* – as can be witnessed in (3)–(4). Furthermore, *imagine* combines with a wide array of complement types, ranging from various finite complements (*that*, zero, *wh*- and *if*-clauses), to non-finite gerundive complements and nominal direct objects.

It is precisely this formal variability that makes CTP constructions with *imagine* ideally suited for an in-depth comparative analysis of formally and semantically distinct complements. In this paper, I examine all CTP constructions with *imagine*, including lexical uses, found in the Spoken BNC2014 corpus (Love *et al.* 2017). By applying a Hierarchical Configurational Frequency Analysis (Gries 2004, Hilpert 2009) to a set of over 2,000 instances of *imagine*-CTP constructions, I identify clusters of features associated with particular complement types, such as the CTP's TAM properties, polarity and clausal position. The different configurations that are found for each complement type are then discussed in light of their formal and semantic properties, with special attention to the opposition between zero/*that*-complementation and gerundive complementation (Maekelberghe *forthc.*).

Not surprisingly, zero complementation turns out to be most strongly associated with syntagmatic variability, as its CTP-clause can occur in various clausal positions. In addition, its CTP-clause displays the highest degree of internal variability, as it can combine with a wide range of modal auxiliaries, whereby especially *would* and *should* mark grammatical status (3)–(4). Interestingly, gerund complements, which are only found with lexical uses of *imagine*, are significantly associated with negative polarity, as in (2). Especially in cases where negation is to be read as non-raised (cf. Boye & Harder 2007: 579), gerundive complementation seems to be the preferred option.

The present results are interesting in several respects. Firstly, they confirm Van Bogaert's (2010) finding that grammatical variants of CTPs do not necessarily display less formal variation than lexical variants. Secondly, they reveal an apparent division of labour between those

complement types that allow for a modifying CTP-clause, and those that do not. A detailed examination of those different configurations, it is argued, can shed new light on the formal and functional properties of lexical vs. grammatical uses of CTP-clauses.

References

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