

The English light predicate with
an indefinite deverbal complement
in the BNC:
“I’d better *have a look* at it.”

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The LP construction contrasts with the simplex verb form (Stein 1991)

- (1) a. She *had a look* at the papers.
b. She *took a look* at the papers.
c. She *looked* at the papers.
- (2) a. The poor woman *gave a scream*.
b. The poor woman *screamed*.

What are the traits of the LP construction?

It involves primarily:

(1) a partially specified “tripartite” schema

[[V]_{light} a [N]_{deverbal}]

(2) a set of “highly frequent”, “light” verbs:

give, have, make, and take

(3) an indefinite article ‘*a*’, and

(4) an open class of deverbal nouns such

as *look, drink, go, and vote...*

Brief background

The LP construction has been a focus of

(1) diachronic studies

- The LPC developed fully since 1800

- It is a characteristic of the increasingly analytic character of English, the replacement of bound with free forms and of inflectional with periphrastic forms.

(Brinton 1996, Brinton & Akimoto 1999, Matsumoto 2008)

(2) sociolinguistic /dialectal studies

There are variations in the distribution and usage of the individual LPCs between the English dialects.

have a frame is preferred in British and
Australian English

take a frame is preferred in American English
(Stein 1991)

The LP construction has been a focus of

(3) synchronic studies

3.1 “equivalent to a simple verb”

give a cheer = cheer
make a turn = turn

(Nickel 1968, Brinton 1996,
Brinton & Traugott 2005).

3.2. “monotransitive type”

give a scream
give a shrug

(Stein 1991, Brinton 1996)

3.3. “The LPC may intransitivize a verb by permitting its use without its otherwise obligatory patient object 20 % of the time” (Brinton 1996 citing Rensky).

-*Allan made a mistake* vs.

-*Allan mistook X*. But not **Allan mistook*.

3.4. “The LPC may be used in the absence of an NP, PP, or infinitival phrase complement” (Live 1973).

3.5. “There are no corpus studies ...” (Stein 1991).

Objectives of the study



- (1) A collocational analysis of the light predicate constructions such as *have a look* in the whole BNC.
- (2) Description of the LPC components:
 - (a) light verb (b) indefinite article *a* , and (c) deverbial noun.
- (3) Collocational properties (subject, TAM, and complement preferences) of the LPCs as a “lexicalized or grammaticalized” unit.(Brinton & Traugott, 2005:130).

(2) Description of the LPC components:

[[V]_{light} a [N]_{deverbal}]

Light verbs in the LPC are of three categories.

- (1) a set of most frequent “native” verbs of English *give, have, make, and take,*
- (2) a class of auxiliaries *be, do, and come, get* or *put,* and
- (3) more recently verbs such as *perform, formulate, effect, pay, offer, or obtain* function as LPs.

(Biber, D. et al. 1999, Brinton 1996, Brinton & Akimoto 1999)

The indefinite article **a**

- To begin with its prototypical definition “it narrows down the reference of the following noun to a single member of a class as in *a look, a kick, a kiss, a drink, a blow, a talk* etc” (Biber et al 1999).
- This feature of isolating a single event makes the “light” predicate-deverbal action noun a punctual [-durative] and a one time event.
- It contributes to the punctual - perfective aspect meaning of the construction.

The deverbals

- The deverbals in general seem to be [-durative], [+replicable] kind of verbs.
- The BNC search for the deverbal noun in the schema [[V]_{LIGHT} - a - [N]_{DEVERBAL}] gave us 1,220 LPC types and about LPC16,000 tokens.
- About 90 deverbals with a token frequency of 20 + have been extracted and listed here.

GIVE a ~ talk (26), cry (25), sigh (25), toss (25)

HAVE a ~ look (2,014), drink (359), choice (192),
role (190), copy (166), chat (161), bath (141),
word (139), point (131), range (127), sense
(114), list (89), life (83), way (70), set (64),
row (60), record (59), say (56), claim (54),
part (52), game (49), laugh (48), dream (46),
(45), talk (45), go (44), hand (43), guess
(39), fit (28), fight (27), rest (27), spell (27),
change (26), piece (26), value (26), stake
(25), vote (25), view (24), contract (23), shot
(23), need (22), taste (21), voice (21), debate
(20), seat (20), share (20)

MAKE a ~ point (235), note (136), list (108), change (104), face (99), move (94), start (88), profit (73), choice (54), claim (50), success (49), go (34), noise (34), comeback (29), gesture (28), phone (28), loss (27), case (26), comment (25), hole (23), complaint (22), run (21), dash (20), grab (20)

TAKE a ~ look (486), step (205), seat (95), break (94), sip (83), chance (50), walk (47), bit (36), stand (27), swig (25), risk (24), trip (24), course (23), decision (22), turn (22), view (22), drink (21), lead (21), bath (20)

Deverbals that collocate with more than one light verb

{**HAVE, MAKE** + a + *change, choice, claim, go, list, point*

{**GIVE, HAVE** + a + *talk*

{**HAVE, TAKE** + a + *bath, break, drink, look, seat, view*

Unique collocational preferences

- (1) **GIVE** has a preference expressive verbs such as for *cry, sigh, talk*, and *toss*.
- (2) **HAVE** has a preference for actions such as *choice, role, copy, word, point, range*, and *sense*.
- (3) **MAKE** has a preference for action initiating deverbals such as *point, note, list, change, move, start*, and *profit*.
- (4) **TAKE** has a preference for everyday activity denoting deverbals such as *step, break, walk*, and *stand*.

(3) Collocational properties of the LPCs

The LPCs exhibit subject, TAM, and complement preferences as a “lexicalized or grammaticalized” unit (Brinton & Traugott 2005:130).

(1) Subject preference of the LPC

(Table 1)

	GIVE a	TAKE a	MAKE a	HAVE a	Rank
I	1	3	3	3	2
you	5	1	1	2	1
he	3	6	2	5	6
she	7	7	7	6	7
it	6	4	6	7	5
we	4	2	4	1	3
they	2	5	5	4	4

(2) TAM preferences of the LPCs

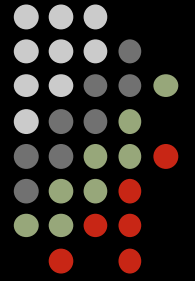
USING SPREAD SHEET

(TABLE 2)

	INFIN	PRES	PRES -s	PAST	ING	PPART	TOTAL
LPC	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP
GIVE a N _{DVB}	16	6	7	43	10	27	109
HAVE a N _{DVB}	155	121	56	103	25	32	492
MAKE a N _{DVB}	86	54	55	168	155	37	364
TAKE a N _{DVB}	82	37	47	160	85	13	255
TOTAL	339	218	107	298	149	109	1,220

(2) TAM preferences of the V NPs in the BNC USING PIE (TABLE 3)

	INFIN	PRES	PRES -s	PAST	ING	PPART	TOTAL
LPC	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP	TYP
GIVE a NOUN	95	24	34	78	31	135	397
HAVE a NOUN	672	531	452	718	175	169	2,717
MAKE a NOUN	282	99	55	168	155	113	872
TAKE a NOUN	178	86	47	160	85	52	608
TOTAL	1,227	740	588	1,124	446	469	4,594



Comparison of Tables 1 - 3

The LPC prefer **2SG, 1SG, 1PL, 3PL** subjects in that order.

Both the V NPs and the LPCs prefer *infinitive, past, and bare present* **INFL** forms respectively.

3. Complement preferences of the LPCs

Let us consider the most frequent LPCs in the BNC

- *HAVE a look* (2,014),
- *TAKE a look* (486),
- *HAVE a drink* (359),
- *MAKE a point* (235), and
- *TAKE a step* (205)

Examples from the BNC concordance lines – HAVE a look

<u>1 A06 48</u>	revived by present day repertory companies.	Have a look	at these.
<u>2 A08 3061</u>	heavy overcoat, asked again casually if he could	have a look	at the glass. I shook my head.
<u>3 A0C 822</u>	sources of good, reasonably priced wine,	have a look	at Sicily.
<u>4 A0F 802</u>	check your trolley, just in case.We'll	have a look	round in here."
<u>5 A0F 1095</u>	see from the outside when I went down to	have a look	at it. I went in, explained the position
<u>6 A0F 1718</u>	.Curious, I went up the path to	have a look	at it and I discovered to my no great surprise
<u>7 A0F 3198</u>	off for some lunch and we then went to	have a look	at the castle.
<u>8 A0H 1205</u>	, select good-looking fields, and then go and	have a look	at them after the flight to see what they are
<u>9 A0L 78</u>	I Do Like , gay and lesbian stuff.	Have a look	."
<u>10 A61 97</u>	better than this homely fare.I must	have a look	round later, maybe look in at the big house,
<u>11 A61 1152</u>	, and I moved it to one side to	have a look	.There was a ragged hole just above the knee
<u>12 A6J 1755</u>	the dinosaur people, at least, might like to	have a look	at it and see what they think.
<u>13 A6R 375</u>	"We promised Coventry we'll	have a look	at the stretch again before the zander spawn in
<u>14 A6T 2259</u>	advantage of the slack trace and goes over to	have a look	at a tree. I let off the snow hook
<u>15 A6V 506</u>	n't take much part.They may come and	have a look	at the baby, but the singing, the gathering
<u>16 A74 140</u>	I get up and	have a look	round the room, but things are blurry ...
<u>17 A74 484</u>	's done, she hands me the mirror and I	have a look	.I must admit I'm a bit shocked at first.
<u>18 A74 517</u>	cos I lost mine, and she says we'll	have a look	and see if there's any good cheap ones.
<u>19 A74 534</u>	"It's perfect!	Have a look	in the mirror."
<u>20 A74 535</u>	I go over to the long mirror and	have a look	.I reckon it looks really great.

Examples from the BNC concordance lines – TAKE a look

1 A0F 2197	bit does refer to you, open your eyes,	<u>take a look</u>	around you, see what's going on and do
2 A0G 1483	and Pauline Lloyd to discuss their garden and	<u>take a look</u>	at its one-in-three slope, I was filled with a
3 A0R 2426	She decided to	<u>take a look</u>	at the harbour. She pushed the bike along the
4 A0X 1794	how to rejuvenate antique furniture. We also	<u>take a look</u>	at William and Mary furniture,
5 A14 753	If you're in London,	<u>take a look</u>	for yourself. But take a tie and plenty of
6 A6T 2341	lakes western edge. Perhaps we go and	<u>take a look</u>	? Sure, anything is better than manhandling the
7 A6W 412	routes to high specific outputs should at least	<u>take a look</u>	at this alternative means of forced induction.
8 A6Y 158	in sport. For the moment let us	<u>take a look</u>	at the fortunes of the professionals,
9 A7D 374	carpets; for bright colours at reasonable prices,	<u>take a look</u>	at Tapetes .
10 A7G 891	-- a huge wastage of resources --	<u>take a look</u>	at these figures:
11 ABK 607	and their bags are empty." Let's	<u>take a look</u>	over this one last hill," she pleads,
12 ABX 2638	"Let's	<u>take a look</u>	for this collar," said the man and took Lee
13 AC4 1018	queer going on up there. I'd best	<u>take a look</u>	, just to be on the safe side."
14 AC5 834	again after I just cleaned you up!	<u>Take a look</u>	at it!"
15 AC6 475	had filled several note books. I agreed to	<u>take a look</u>	at these efforts, and we arranged to meet next
16 ACM 218	. Recently, I visited the centre to	<u>take a look</u>	at the charity's operation and talk to Pat about
17 ACR 1030	high, and British dealers would do well to	<u>take a look</u>	at the opportunities, he adds. "Previously
18 ACW 663	"Go upstairs and	<u>take a look</u>	at yourself in the mirror," he said.
19 ACY 1209	get a better idea of all the options you	<u>take a look</u>	at a few good catalogues, ...
20 AD9 310	Kid left. ""Shame.	<u>Take a look</u>	at me, will you? I just jumped out of a

Examples from the BNC concordance lines – HAVE a drink

<u>104</u> KP7 201	no I had a drink of juice you	<u>had a drink</u>	of juice, he's not well you know
<u>105</u> KR0 187	you like being on tape? <pause> Have you	<u>had a drink</u>	yet?Not very good cafe this is it?
<u>106</u> KR0 504	, do know what it was though, he never	<u>had a drink</u>	he just sat there talking to himself, having a
<u>1</u> CE1 1653	is a popular view that if an older person	<u>has a drink</u>	, "it will do them no harm".
<u>2</u> CE1 1709	The task of discovering whether an ageing individual	<u>has a drink</u>	problem requires considerable tact and...
<u>3</u> CKC 3769	After that, Jimmy, I suggest that Theodore	<u>has a drink</u>	, snack and snooze in that order."
<u>4</u> EGO 1100	years. A couple of times a month she	<u>has a drink</u>	with the women at work, which is the only time
<u>5</u> F9V 808	b. goes to his goes to a club +	<u>has a drink</u>	talks to the barman + then he starts dancing
<u>6</u> F9V 810	a club. So he	<u>has a drink</u>	, talks to the barman, starts dancing and
<u>7</u> F9V 1032	out + goes to his goes to a club +	<u>has a drink</u>	talks to the barman
<u>8</u> F9V 1039	spatio-temporal setting will suggest that the man	<u>has a drink</u>	and talks to the barman within that same
<u>9</u> K5M 526	defence solicitor, Jack Gowans, said Ballantine	<u>has a drink</u>	problem but is a kind, intelligent and caring man
<u>10</u> KD6 159	, I mean she said, any body that	<u>has a drink</u>	and gets into a car is a potential murderer
<u>1</u> AOL 109	She and Lucy would	<u>have a drink</u>	after work on Fridays, sometimes an early supper,
<u>2</u> AOL 1053	.No gin for a month already.	<u>Have a drink</u>	at six-thirty.Not before.Brandy.
<u>3</u> AOL 1505	"	<u>Have a drink</u>	," she said.
<u>4</u> AOL 2134	"Let's go	<u>have a drink</u>	," said Jay."It's five to
<u>5</u> AOL 3527	"Perhaps we could	<u>have a drink</u>	outside," said the woman as the French family
<u>6</u> AOL 3831	Whimper like a whipped puppy, Jay,	<u>have a drink</u>	and pick up the pieces.Alcohol and phonecalls
<u>7</u> AOR 2575	wearing shot into line."Come and	<u>have a drink</u>	," he added.

Examples from the BNC concordance lines –MAKE look

<u>1A0H 1214</u>		<u>Make a point</u>	of looking for the lay of the surrounding countryside
<u>2A0H 1566</u>	trying to stay up! You need to	<u>make a point</u>	of setting yourself tasks to do in order to keep on
<u>3A0H 1682</u>	your hand near the release, ready.	<u>Make a point</u>	of trying to keep absolutely straight rather than just
<u>4A18 392</u>	thing of all would be to do nothing.	<u>Make a point</u>	of doing nothing.No, making a point would
<u>5A6A 584</u>	band actually meet their fans. The straits	<u>make a point</u>	of having autograph-hunters back stage in the ...
<u>6A6T 1013</u>	Viking ships at least and Arctic travellers should	<u>make a point</u>	of going to the Fram museum, which pays
<u>7AB6 995</u>	Those who live close enough to walk to work	<u>make a point</u>	of mentioning it, rather as if they were keeping alive
<u>8ABH 204</u>	of the violence in person. He can also	<u>make a point</u>	of talking to Mr Yeltsin and other republican leaders
<u>9AC2 891</u>	any other way? Throwing up slides to	<u>make a point</u>	here, and stepping aside from the podium to develop
<u>10AHC 1055</u>	Guidebooks and holiday brochures	<u>make a point</u>	of explaining ploys which can be adopted to bring a
<u>24HHV 25100</u>	My hon. Friend	<u>makes a point</u>	which my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will
<u>25HMH 141</u>	to thank the Midland bank.Now he	<u>makes a point</u>	of keeping in touch with his local branch.
<u>26J13 3020</u>	Vinnie walks ahead of us. He	<u>makes a point</u>	of it.So if there is going to be
<u>27JJA 197</u>	the <unclear> affecting the <unclear> environmental <unclear> and	<u>makes a point</u>	that will be we as officers have been <unclear> with
<u>28KRP 1262</u>	C network, local, B B C local radio	<u>makes a point</u>	of actually sending a certain amount of material on a
<u>1AOL 1479</u>	sober evenings honing every flip phrase so that it	<u>made a point</u>	.Jay was given to grandiloquent rambling, and
<u>2A40 65</u>	nagging away these last 16 years, and Moore	<u>made a point</u>	last week of reminding Bobby Robson of the hostile
<u>3A4S 15</u>	Curiously, Palin	<u>made a point</u>	in the commentary about how he wasn't ...
<u>4ASF 14</u>	history at different levels. Elsewhere I	<u>made a point</u>	of discussing historians, such as Taylor and Elton, ...
<u>5A67 906</u>	on a tour of Normandy earlier this year, I	<u>made a point</u>	of visiting and photographing the grave of Battle of

Examples from the BNC concordance lines – TAKE a step

<u>176</u> <u>K8R 2362</u>	She	<u>took a step</u>	into the room and noticed a dark red dress on
<u>177</u> <u>K95 2232</u>	the fellow so hard Athelstan became alarmed and	<u>took a step</u>	forward, but the coroner waved him back.
<u>178</u> <u>KBD 8863</u>	he was right on the edge and he	<u>took a step</u>	back Why the fuck did
<u>1</u> <u>ACE 216</u>	lets Hitler dictate to him, his ignominious peace	<u>takes a step</u>	nearer a war." "Here we go again
<u>2</u> <u>AJ8 270</u>	and writing their memoirs. Byron Rogers	<u>takes a step</u>	back in time❓
<u>3</u> <u>B03 394</u>	night. Roads campaign	<u>takes a step</u>	forward❓
<u>4</u> <u>CH2 913</u>	TV beauty Catherine Zeta Jones	<u>takes a step</u>	up in the world -- to get equal with her 6ft
<u>5</u> <u>FP6 2034</u>	"Shut it, laddie. "The man	<u>takes a step</u>	forward, looking over my head at Andy.
<u>6</u> <u>FP6 2047</u>	He	<u>takes a step</u>	away. I'm trembling, rooted to the spot
<u>7</u> <u>H7R 72</u>	is now transferred to phase B the rotor	<u>takes a step</u>	in the anticlockwise direction and the opposite
<u>8</u> <u>H8M 1459</u>	But when she	<u>takes a step</u>	towards me I find I've crossed the kitchen to
<u>9</u> <u>KAV 142</u>	on the reinAnd another child	<u>Takes a step</u>	and falls As 10,000 more are born to this
<u>1</u> <u>A0M 1052</u>	, so that you have to spin around and perhaps	<u>take a step</u>	to reach him. By that time, of course,
<u>2</u> <u>A12 583</u>	happen in older ballets when the hero would	<u>take a step</u>	forward with a slight stamp before he "swore to
<u>3</u> <u>A3G 354</u>	It is time for the party as a whole to	<u>take a step</u>	back and look at the way in which its democracy
<u>4</u> <u>A5M 128</u>	Hungary appeared to	<u>take a step</u>	in the right direction when its rulers voted to
<u>5</u> <u>AE4 1113</u>	Yet some did	<u>take a step</u>	of great courage. The widespread practice of
<u>6</u> <u>AT6 605</u>	.The turn can be speeded up if you	<u>take a step</u>	back on the board and depress the windward
<u>7</u> <u>AYK 1182</u>	on your achievements. Every time you	<u>take a step</u>	in the right direction, realise what you have
<u>8</u> <u>B08 536</u>	well, in the circumstances, be willing to	<u>take a step</u>	backwards rather than lose your job.❓

Observations

- (1) The LP constructions co-occur with PPs 58% ,
adverbials 17%, and conjunction constructions
9% of the time.
- (2) The absence of NP complement is a typical
collocational property of the LPCs.
- (3) As a result the LPCs exhibit a tendency to
become intransitive when nested in larger
constructions.

In conclusion

The literature states

“no corpus studies ...”

“equivalent to a simple verb”

“monotransitive type”

“The LP may intransitivize a verb 20 % of the time and the LPC is used in the absence of an NP, PP, or infinitival phrase complement”

In conclusion

“no corpus studies ...”

This is a pilot corpus study of the collocational aspect of the LPCs.

“equivalent to a simple verb”

The LPCs behave like any simple verb in its subject, TAM and complement preferences.

“monotransitive type”

The LPC is generally an intransitive.

“The LP may intransitivize a verb 20 % of the time and the LPC is used in the absence of an NP, PP, or infinitival phrase complement”

However, the BNC exhibits the LPCs as intransitive unit 84% (=58+17+9) of the time.



Thank you !

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