

# Asymmetric Causation Types in the Competing Complements of Negative Causative Verbs:

## NP (from) V-ing

Katsuko Tomotsugu (tomotugu@ns.sist.ac.jp)

Shizuoka Institute of Science and Technology

### 1 Introduction

Competing complements: *from* variant vs. *from-less* variant

In 1978 fog at Heathrow airport prevented me from flying to referee the first ever game between France and Russia, and in 1981 a leg injury picked up in the First Test prevented me refereeing the Second Test between France and New Zealand. (BNC CB2 799)

#### Background

Mair (2002), using the Brown family of corpora, shows that the *from-less* variant increases in the complements of *prevent* and *stop* in British English, and suggests the spread of *from-less* in other V + NP *from* V-ing patterns.

#### Aims of the study

- Investigate the distribution of the two variants of *prevent*, *stop*, and semantically similar verbs in the British National Corpus and compare them with COCA
- Identify semantic factors underlying the shifting process

#### General scope

Explore cognitively plausible explanations for the syntactic pattern distribution in corpora

#### Methods

- British National Corpus (XML Edition)
- Search engine: Suganuma (2008), Sketch Engine
- Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

### 2 BNC: Complement verbs of *prevent* and *stop*

Verb(ing)s in the complement of *prevent* (frequencies)

Prevent NP V-ing	Prevent NP from V-ing
be	336
(be passive)	281
become	77
get	64
go	46
take	44
fall	37
reach	36
enter	31
happen	29
occur	27
arise	25
have	22
come	21
leave	20
491 verbs	Total 1880

be, be passive, happen, arise p<.001  
occur p<.01 (log likelihood test)

- A significantly higher frequency of complements using the passive form “*being* \_\_\_” was found in the *from-less* variant of *prevent* and *stop*, as well as with verbs of occurrence (*happen*, *arise*, *occur*) in the *from-less* variant of *prevent*.
- Other concurrent verbs give little distinction between the two variants of *prevent* and *stop*.

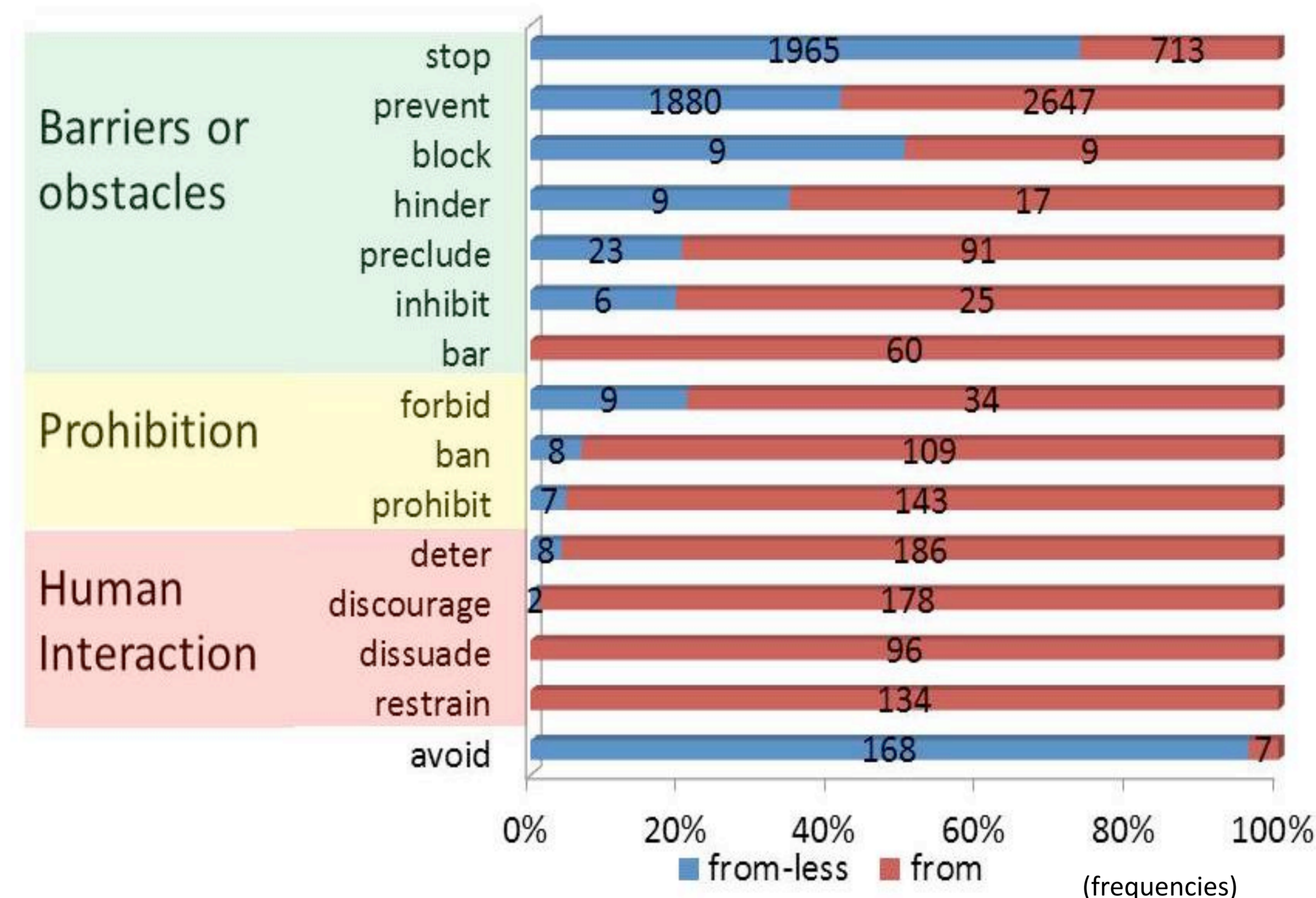
Verb(ing)s in the complement of *stop* (frequencies)

stop NP V-ing	stop NP from V-ing
be	141
(be passive)	115
get	128
go	115
do	74
take	49
fall	44
come	43
have	30
move	27
happen	26
552 verbs	Total 1965

be passive p<.001 (log likelihood test)

### 3 BNC: Proportional distributions of V NP V-ing vs. V NP *from* V-ing

#### British National Corpus



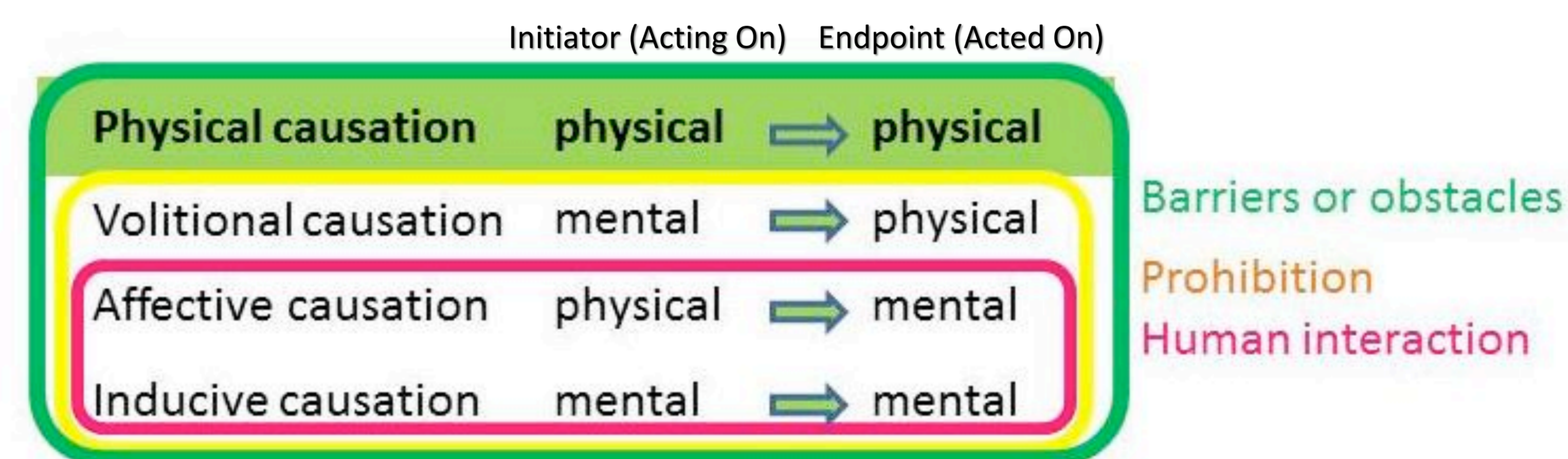
#### Three subclasses of verbs of negative causation

- Verbs of barriers or obstacles take the *from-less* variant in various degrees
- Verbs of prohibition are intermediate in the *from* to *from-less* shift
- Verbs of human interaction retain the *from* variant

Note *avoid* is an outlier

### 4 Causation types

Asymmetries in causation types (Talmy, 1976; Croft, 1991) and three subclasses of verbs



- Verbs of barriers or obstacles express all causation types
- Verbs of prohibition (many in legal contexts) and Verbs of human interaction (endpoints are animate or human-related) do not express physical causation

#### physical causation: interaction of two nonvolitional, nonsentient entities

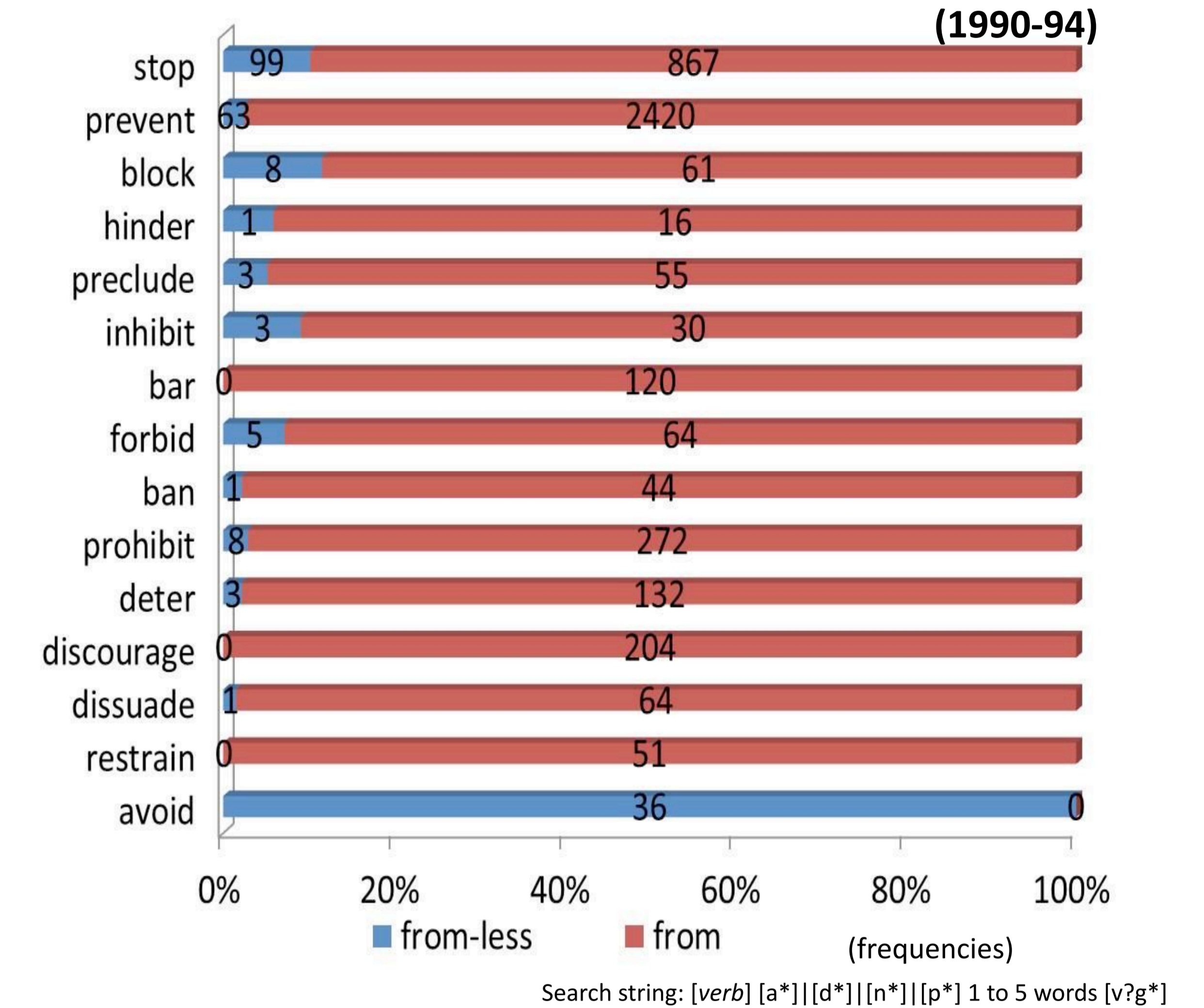
The ozone layer still prevents any lethal UVC radiation reaching the earth. (FBL 3222)

Closed doors stopped the fire taking over the whole building in Borough Road. (K4W 266)

This somehow inhibits copies of viral DNA being made, and is the basis of acyclovir's anti-viral activity. (B72 593)

### To compare with American English

#### Corpus of Contemporary American English (1990-94)



Search string: [verb] [a\*][d\*][n\*][p\*] 1 to 5 words [v?g\*]

### 5 Conclusion

- The statistical distribution of the two complement variants in British English reveals three subclasses of verbs of negative causation
- The *from-less* variant is expanding in verbs of barriers or obstacles which **do** express physical causation; verbs of occurrence and *being* passives produce a physical causation type. On the other hand, verb subclasses which necessitate mental endpoints or intentional initiators retain the *from* variant.
- Causation types are applied to the verb subclasses, rather than a direct semantic divergence between the two variants, such as hypothetical or realized (Sellgren, 2010), indirect or direct means (Dixon, 1991)
- American English is resisting the change to the *from-less* variant

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