Phrasal verbs and semantic prosody in late Modern English (1750–1850) : a corpus-based study

Phrasal Verbs and Semantic Prosody in Late Modern English (1750–1850): A Corpus-based Study

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Abstract

The present study aims to describe processes of context-induced reinterpretation affecting the semantic prosody of phrasal verbs (henceforth PVs) during the Late Modern English period (1750–1850).

Diachronically, the semantic evolution of PVs has been associated with semantic reanalysis and idiomatization (Akimoto 1999; Rodríguez-Puente 2019; Leone 2023). When approached by adopting a phraseological perspective (Sinclair 1991; Stubbs 2002), the changes that occurred in the period 1750–1850 have been explained "as the effect of a reinterpretation driven by context-specific factors" (Leone 2019: 265). There are no studies examining the role of the lexical environment in the changes affecting the semantic prosody of PVs.

The present study is a corpus-based investigation undertaken on the Late Modern English–Old Bailey Corpus (1750–1850), which includes texts taken from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey. The analysis reveals that the selected PVs (*lock up*, *take away*, *throw away*) during the period 1750–1850 underwent changes affecting their semantic prosody, driven by context-induced processes, but also conventionalized their extant uses.

Key words

Phrasal verbs; reinterpretation; semantic prosody; Late Modern English; corpus-based

1. Background

The present study aims to describe processes of context-induced reinterpretation affecting phraseological verbs during the Late Modern English (LModE) period. Specifically, the objective is to examine the linguistic evolution of phrasal verbs (henceforth PVs) and the changes they underwent in terms of semantic prosody during the period 1750–1850.

PVs are phraseological verbs composed of a base verb followed by an adverbial particle, e.g. *come in*, *go on* and *take away*, which behave as a single lexical unit (Quirk et al. 1985) and are characterised by internal cohesion among their constituent parts. They are complex lexemes that exhibit meanings ranging from

the purely literal (*go away*) to idiomatic (*give up*), with instances characterised by internal non-compositionality (Biber et al. 1999; Thim 2012). At the same time, PVs exhibit semi-compositional meanings and aspectual properties, i.e. they are formed by a base verb and a particle marking the aspectual connotation of duration (*go on*), or portraying a resultative telic meaning (*end up*) (Brinton 1988; Thim 2012).

PVs' linguistic characteristics are the result of a process of change that started in Old English (OE) time, including phenomena of restructuring (Denison 1981; Rodríguez-Puente 2019) and increasing idiomatization, driven by image-schematic transfer that is proper to metaphor and metonymy (Claridge 2000; Rodríguez-Puente 2019; Leone 2023), or by processes of context-induced reinterpretation (Leone 2019). In this respect, Leone (2019) highlights that PVs were affected by the demotivation of extant meaning during the period 1750–1850. They emerged as the effect of a reinterpretation driven by context-specific factors: when a word that is usually used with concrete nouns starts to occur with more abstract collocates, it undergoes a process of innovation leading to increasing idiomaticity. She discusses the role played by the immediate context in processes of increasing non-compositionality of instances, without tying in with aspects concerning the extent to which the changing linguistic profile also promotes innovation in semantic prosody.

Semantic prosody is the "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates" (Louw 1993: 157), and it is conceptualized as the "pragmatic" dimension of a word's use (Sinclair 2003: 117). Semantic prosody turns out to be a "secondary meaning" (Philip 2011: 58) linked to the "positive, pleasant and good, or else negative, unpleasant and bad" specific profiles (Bublitz 1996: 9) that develop as the effect of interaction of the node with its surroundings: the immediate context may 'amplify' and 'colour' the core meaning by adding extra nuances revealing a pleasant or unpleasant attitude (Stewart 2010: 11; see Stubbs 2002). This assertion recalls the neo-Firthian approach to the study of language (Sinclair 1991, 2003; Stubbs 2002), which claims that the meanings of words are influenced by their immediate linguistic context, and that diachronically semantic prosody may be seen as "the product of a long period of refinement through historical change" (Louw 1993: 164).

A commonly shared idea is that PVs "can have meanings which are just as strongly positive or negative as any other item" (Stewart 2010: 33); for example, verbs such as *be bent on, set in* and *sit through* have been associated with negative prosody (Louw 1993; Partington 2004; Partington et al. 2013), whereas verbs including *bring about* signal neutrality (Stewart 2010). There are even ambivalent cases, as with *break out* and *come about*, that give rise to divergent conclusions, as unfavourable prosody may alternate with neutral prosody (Partington 2004; Stewart 2010; Partington et al. 2013). Similar to any other word, PVs can exhibit variable prosody, which is linked to the context of use and may, hypothetically, change over time via processes of context-induced reinterpretation, which is a topic yet to be explored.

Starting from these considerations, the present study aims to fill an existing gap in the literature and to investigate whether and the extent to which process-

es of context-induced reinterpretation affect the semantic prosody of PVs. The objectives are:

- to examine the lexical context of instances and investigate the extent to which changing lexical profiles drive the renewal of the semantic prosody of PVs over time;
- to evaluate whether there is a link between increasing idiomatization of instances and changes in semantic prosody.

The study focuses on the period 1750–1850 and is undertaken on the PVs *lock up, take away* and *throw away,* which are selected as case studies. These verbs are chosen as they are characterised by increasing idiomaticity during the period 1750–1850, but also derived from processes of context-induced reinterpretation (Leone 2019). The study is a corpus-based investigation undertaken on the Late Modern English–Old Bailey Corpus (LModE–OBC), a corpus composed of a selection of texts drawn from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London's Central Criminal Court (https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/). An examination of PVs undergoing idiomatization can help to identify a link between connotation, semantic prosody and linguistic context during the period 1750–1850. The linguistic context, which has been granted the status of a catalyst for increasing the idiomaticity of PVs (Leone 2019), if proved, may also be seen as a factor driving the renewal of semantic prosody of instances during the LModE period.

2. Materials and method

2.1. The corpus

The corpus used to undertake the present research is the Late Modern English-Old Bailey Corpus (LModE–OBC), a corpus comprising 1,008,234 words covering the years 1750–1850. It is a self-compiled corpus that has been created to study the diachronic evolution of multi-word verbs, i.e. phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs, and thus it can have several uses, including examining the semantic prosody of PVs.

I compiled the corpus by selecting texts, both trials and depositions, from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London's Central Criminal Court (https://www. oldbaileyonline.org/), which is an invaluable source of spoken data (Culpeper & Kytö 2010; see Kytö et al. 2007), giving access to the language used by people from all social classes.

Huber et al. (2016; see Huber 2007), have recognized the linguistic value of the Proceedings through the compilation of the Old Bailey Corpus (OBC), which is a data set including recordings of speech-related texts from 1720 to 1913. The LModE–OBC is related to the OBC because it includes a sample of the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, which is likewise the data source of the OBC. Nonetheless, it is a different corpus that only includes a selection of proceedings stored as plain texts, which can be queried using diverse tools such as WordSmithTools 6.0.

The selection of texts was made possible thanks to the Proceedings of the Old Bailey online website, which is a searchable online edition of the Proceedings of the Old Bailey. This website allows text-browsing according to specific criteria like crimes, judicial decisions and the criterion time that was used to compile the LModE–OBC. Both complete trials and depositions, and samples of thereof, were selected to obtain five sub-corpora, each containing approximately 200,000 words.

In terms of architecture and size, the LModE–OBC includes five sub-corpora balanced in terms of tokens; they cover two decades each, giving a total of 10 decades, as shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. The LModE–OBC (1750–1850)

	Years	No. of tokens	Total no. of tokens
Subc-1	1750–1769	201,533	
Subc-2	1770–1789	201,562	
Subc-3	1790–1809	201,770	1,008,234 tokens
Subc-4	1810–1829	201,614	
Subc-5	1830–1849	201,755	

For practical reasons, the sub-corpora are referred to as 1750s (span 1750–1769), 1770s (span 1770–1789), 1790s (span 1790–1809), 1810s (span 1810–1829) and 1830s (span 1830–1849).

2.2. Method

The present study is a corpus-based investigation undertaken by following three steps:

1. Identification of PVs

I selected verbs that are characterised by ongoing innovation at the semantic level, and treated them as case studies. Specifically, I chose the verbs *lock up, take away* and *throw away,* which were examined by Leone (2019) in her study on context-induced changes in PVs, and are associated with increasing idiomatization. Linguistically, these verbs occur as transitive verbs (*take away*), with the direct object placed between the base verb and the particle (*take something up*), and after the verb + particle combination (*take up something*) (Biber et al. 1999, 2021). All instances were individually examined to identify combinations occurring as PVs and those working as free combinations were set aside. All instances were retrieved with the concordancer WordSmithTools 6.0. Specifically, I used the Concord tool to display concordances within a window of +5 to the right and +0 to the left. This is a default setting sufficient to evaluate the semantic prosody of each instance, and larger than the window 3:3 that was used to examine processes of idiomatization of these verbs in the years 1750-1850 by Leone (2019).

2. Examination of linguistic profiles and semantic prosody

Once the PVs were selected, I examined their semantic features with the support of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). I examined their linguistic profiles and semantic prosody in each decade, which allowed an evaluation of ongoing changes. To study semantic prosody and identify positive, neutral and negative nuances of context of use, I focused on three aspects: (1) the occurrence of adverbs, and expressions that may be associated with pleasantness or unpleasantness (e.g. *unfortunately, immediately, possibly*); (2) the use of modals and their degree of certainty (e.g. *might, should*); (3) the extended context of use and meaning of the whole clause they occur in (e.g. *if possible, as expected*). All instances were treated individually, since single adverbs or expressions denoting uncertainty may acquire different prosody according to the extended context of use. For example, *immediately* may be linked to both a temporal representation of an action portraying neutral prosody and a representation implying a shortage of time experienced with negative feelings. The process of data analysis resulted in the creation of two groups, i.e. literal and idiomatic instances, and three categories of verbs, i.e. verbs with Positive prosody, Neutral prosody and Negative prosody.

3.Quantitative analysis to identify ongoing change

All PVs and their semantic prosody were examined quantitatively in terms of Raw Frequency (Rf) and Normalized frequency (Nf), normalized with a base of 10,000 words. I also calculated percentages (%) and Diff %, and on some occasions I used a test for statistical significance known as the log-likelihood test (LL), calculated with the support of the UCREL Log-Likelihood calculator (Rayson & Garside 2000; Rayson 2008).

3. Results and Discussion

An examination of the semantic prosody of selected PVs during the period 1750–1850 revealed that there were, indeed, processes of innovation and, as expected, also conventionalization of extant features. This corroborates the status of the LModE period as one that is characterised by both stability and change (Hundt 2014). Specifically, two tendencies were observed: (1) the verbs *take away* and *throw away* moved towards new semantic prosody as the effect of their reinterpretation being driven by context-specific factors and analogy; (2) *lock up* underwent increasing conventionalization of neutral prosody and only limited changes of extant prosody.

As for *take away*, it especially occurred with neutral prosody up to the 1790s, but over time it alternated with cases portraying negative prosody. When used as a PV conveying neutrality, it is mostly found in contexts devoted to the description of crimes and not signalled by any nuance, as in (1)–(2):

(1) My brother, who was on the other side, said, <u>take your pistol away</u>... (1790s)

(2)   He <u>took the bundles away</u>. (1810s)

An examination of the semantic set of *take away* revealed that this verb features with words denoting objects of various kinds mentioned as part of criminal histories, such as *the bundles* and *your pistol* in (1)–(2), but on other occasions also *stockings*, *a whole partition*, *nothing*, *the carpet* and *the oil*. In the absence of elements conveying a negative or positive perception of narration, the node preserves its neutral prosody.

   This prosody also emerges from the use of *take away* with such phrases as *thought right*, as in (3), or surrounded by elements denoting objectivity, as with *alive or dead*, as in (4). Overall, it thus seems neither to prejudice the neutrality of the node word nor to create the conditions for a diverse perception of it:

(3)   ...and among the rest, folded up in his box, was this bag, with some marks and numbers, which I <u>thought right to take away</u>. (1790s)

(4)   Did you <u>take them away alive or dead</u>? (1750s)

The context of the node *take away* in these cases implies a justification for action in (3) and uncertainty in (4), which further contributes to its interpretation as being linked to neutral prosody. On other occasions, it occurs with modals like *could* and *would* expressing future actions, as in (5), or with phrases expressing possibility, as in (6):

(5)   ...then he said he <u>would take him away</u>, but I believe he had not money to pay for his standing. (1750s)

(6)   I asked him how he <u>could take it away</u> so in a morning... (1750s)

At the same time, there is increasing use of the idiomatic form of *take away,* occurring with the meaning 'to deprive a person of' (OED) in contexts dominated by a sense of unpleasantness, especially from the 1770s onwards, as in (7)–(8):

(7)   It stunned me it <u>confused</u> my senses and <u>took my sight away</u>. (1830s)

(8)   He said this is all the money me got, me swear a robbery <u>against</u> you if you <u>take my money away</u>. (1770s)

Words and phrases such as *deliberate purposes*, *charge* and *entirely*, or also *confused* and *against,* which are reported in (7)–(8), do, indeed, permeate the node with a sense of unpleasantness and portray a negative perception of the event. There are cases where this interpretation is supported by elements such as *unfortunately* and *immediately,* inspiring a perception of unpleasantness and danger, as in (9)–(10):

(9) There found a quantity of playing-cards, some loose, and some in packages <u>unfortunately</u>, after <u>taking the prisoner away</u>. (1830s)

(10) Mrs. Joyce <u>immediately took me away</u>, and put me in an arm chair. (1790s)

In example (9), in particular, the use of *take away* with the meaning of 'to commit to or confine in an institution' (OED) seems to acquire negative prosody due to its interaction with contextual elements such as *unfortunately*. This adverb refers to the previous statement and does not directly correlate with the act of limiting the prisoner's freedom. Nonetheless, it endorses the negative perceptions of speakers about events, which also includes the fact that the prisoner was arrested. The larger context determines, in this case, unpleasantness that characterizes *take away*. In contrast, the use of *immediately,* in example (10), which modifies the PV itself, reveals a negative evaluation derived from the necessity to act very quickly to avoid dangerous consequences.

Further support for the role of context in the changing status of *take away* derives from the grammatical choices that may likewise corroborate the semantic prosody of a word (Sinclair 1991). In particular, this PV was increasingly used in environments characterised by deictic elements, as in (11), or anchored to modals denoting an unfulfilled possibility, as in (12), and to verbs denoting desires, as in (13):

(11) I said he was the man that <u>took the money away from me</u>. (1810s)

(12) I then told him he <u>might take away</u> his clock. (1830s)

(13) After that I <u>desired</u> him <u>to take away</u> his bacon or take it off the table. (1770s)

The emphasis on specific aspects given by *me* in (11), and regret over actions that are impossible at the time of speaking expressed by *desired him* in (13), inspires an interpretation linked to a negative attitude. At the same time, modals such as *might* in (12) – on other occasions substituted with *would* and *could* – seem likewise to reverse the unpleasantness also seen on the node. The node, indeed, absorbs a negative character from the context, which is increasingly characterised by terms or grammatical patterns denoting a negative perception of events. Overall, this means that *take away*, which at first signalled neutrality, developed a new 'aura' of meaning as a consequence of reinterpretation driven by the context.

A similar path explains the use of this PV with positive prosody, as in (14), which is, however, only found three times from the 1790s onwards:

(14) The glass is broke, is it not? – A. Yes, it was <u>perfect </u>when it <u>was taken away</u>. (1790s)

The word *perfect* in (14), referring to the status of the glass, inspires a positive interpretation of the contextual event from the speaker.

Overall, this demonstrates that changes in the environment induced the semantic innovation of *take away*, whose semantic prosody was modified over the period 1750–1850: its increasing use in combination with words conveying pleasantness or unpleasantness favoured the acquisition of new nuances. When combining these results with those reported by Leone (2019), who claims that renewal of the context of use determined the semantic transfer and increased abstractness of this verb, it is possible to question whether there is a correlation between change in the degree of idiomaticity and variation in semantic prosody. Moreover, these considerations beg the question of the extent to which positive, neutral or negative prosody is mainly associated with idiomatic and/or literal verbs.

To examine these aspects, the various occurrences of *take away* were separated into two groups according to their degree of idiomaticity, and the prosody of each instance was identified. The frequency of Positive, Neutral and Negative prosody of literal and idiomatic occurrences of *take away* over the period 1750–1850 is reported in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Semantic prosody of *take away (Rf and Nf per 10,000 words)*

Take away	Literal combinations						Idiomatic combinations					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf
1750s	–	–	43	2.13	1	0.04	–	–	4	0.19	–	–
1770s	–	–	42	2.08	–	–	–	–	–	–	9	0.44
1790s	2	0.09	17	0.84	6	0.29	–	–	2	0.09	3	0.14
1810s	–	–	31	1.53	9	0.44	–	–	4	0.19	1	0.04
1830s	1	0.04	24	1.23	10	0.49	–	–	–	–	6	0.29
Total	3	0.02	157	1.55	26	0.25	–	–	10	0.09	19	0.18

Observation of Table 2, and an analysis of single instances, reveals that literal and idiomatic occurrences of *take away* exhibit diverse features when their semantic prosody is examined. Two major aspects emerge: (1) there are preferences in terms of semantic prosody, since literal combinations mostly occur with neutral prosody, whereas negative prosody is prominent in idiomatic combinations; (2) there are signs of innovation affecting the semantic prosody of instances.

First, literal PV seems for the most part to remain anchored to neutral prosody, which has a Rf of 157 (Nf 1.56), contrasting with the rate of those occurrences with negative prosody, i.e. Rf of 26 hits (Nf 0.25). This means that, overall, there are 186 hits with a literal meaning and 84.4% of these combinations occur with neutral prosody. Negative prosody is, instead, the predominant form in idiomatic combinations, with 29 hits, and 65.5% of these portray negative prosody.

The fact that, in the case of idiomatic combinations, negative prosody is attested in the 1770s acquires value if considering that negative prosody was already used for literal combinations (1 hit). Specifically, it is possible to suppose that

negative prosody emerged because of the renewal of contexts of use, since the affected forms occur with words and phrases entailing a sense of unpleasantness. When questioning the factors promoting changes in lexical profiles increasingly characterised by negativity, it can be hypothesised that there is a phenomenon of interference between literal and idiomatic forms and analogical processes: analogy is a process that favours linguistic interference within the linguistic system, and it may have created a link between these two groups and favoured the establishment of a new form of prosody. In other words, idiomatic combinations may have started to modify their linguistic features and exhibit negative prosody, being influenced by literal instances taken as models to follow (Hopper & Traugott 2003), since the 1770s.

The fact that literal combinations worked as models for idiomatic forms did not preclude further innovation in terms of prosody. Specifically, there is an increasing use of instances with negative prosody: there is a shift from one hit in the 1750s to six hits in the 1790s, and a rate of nine hits in the 1810s and ten in the 1830s. This means that there is an increase of +499.3% in the 1790s if compared to the 1750s, and of +898.9% in the 1830s if compared to the 1750s (LL 8.54, significant at p>0.01).

These results suggest that the context of use should be considered as the place where new traits associated with semantic prosody may emerge and vary over time, and that eventually semantic prosody may also be affected by analogical processes driving a cyclical change from literal to idiomatic forms, or vice versa. However, this is not always the case.

An examination of the verb *lock up* makes a case in this respect. Indeed, it was involved in meaning transfer during the period 1750–1850, when its degree of compositionality was modified. This verb may occur with various meanings, ranging from literal to idiomatic, that were established over time as the effect of processes of idiomatization, which is one of the major processes affecting multi-word verbs, including PVs, in the course of time (Akimoto 1999; Claridge 2000; Rodríguez-Puente; Leone 2023). Specifically, it is used with the meaning of 'to enclose or confine in a locked room, box etc.' or 'to shut up and secure (a room, building, enclosure etc.) by locking the door or doors'; and when used figuratively, it has the meaning 'to imprison' (OED). Over time, it underwent processes of change and, as suggested by Leone (2019), *lock up* shifted from almost exclusive use with its literal meaning to the idiomatic connotation of 'to imprison', via reinterpretation driven by its changing context of use. This verb moved from uses in contexts dominated by collocates denoting concrete things, such as *his tools, the sheep* and *a dessert spoon,* to those characterised by collocates referring to humans, such as *the boy* and *the prisoner*, thus modifying its degree of compositionality (Leone 2019). A changing linguistic profile and idiomatization are aspects that this verb shares with *take away*, but differently from it, the semantic prosody of *lock up* was not modified significantly in the course of time.

From a lexico-semantic perspective, *lock up* never occurs with negative prosody and seems to take on a neutral meaning from relations within the immediate context reporting information on the crime and representing it as unbiased narration. It is very common for this verb to be used with objects belonging to the

material sphere, such as *his tools*, *things*, *my notes* or *the spoons and the mugs*, as in (15), and in contexts enriched with details about place and time, such as *in a box*, *in a desk* or *in the drawers*, as in (16):

(15) ...as she always used <u>to lock up the spoons and the mugs</u> before she went to bed. (1790s)

(16) A bundle was in the shop, containing two shawls, two tablecloths, and other things, which I had left <u>locked up in the drawers</u>. (1810s)

On other occasions, the neutral prosody of *lock up* derives from its co-occurrence in contexts dominated by uncertainty, and with patterns like *what makes you think*, as in (17), which may encourage the perception of something that is rather indefinite. Similar considerations apply to instances occurring with phrases including *ever since*, *usual hour*, as in (18), which likewise corroborate a 'resonance' of objectivity to the narration:

(17) <u>What makes you think</u> the door <u>was locked up</u> about five minutes before nine? (1790s)

(18) Is nine o'clock the <u>usual hour</u> for <u>locking up</u> the office? (1790s)

Overall, the linguistic profile of this verb may be highly institutionalized and linked to neutral prosody, except for a few cases denoting positive meanings in the 1770s and 1790s. In these decades, *lock up* occurs with words like *safe* and *safely*, as in (19), which favours a shift of *lock up* towards positive prosody as the effect of 'contagion' from the linguistic context. However, *lock up* with positive prosody is limited to five occurrences.

(19) In June last I <u>locked up</u> the linen <u>safely</u>. (1790s)

To determine the extent to which there is a link between the changing context and renewal of semantic prosody, and to operationalise innovation in mathematical terms, I calculated the rates for literal and idiomatic combinations and their prosody, as shown in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Semantic prosody of *lock up* (*Rf and Nf per 10,000 words*)

Lock up	Literal combinations						Idiomatic combinations					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf
1750s	–	–	3	0.14	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1770s	1	0.04	6	0.29	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Lock up	Literal combinations						Idiomatic combinations					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf
1790s	4	0.19	12	0.59	–	–	–	–	1	0.04	–	–
1810s	–	–	10	0.49	.	–		–	3	0.14	–	–
1830s	–	–	3	0.09	–	–	–	–	6	0.29	–	–
Total	5	0.04	34	0.33	–	–			10	0.09	–	–

An examination of Table 3 reveals that, once again, there are divergences between literal and idiomatic combinations, but also limited change.

First, as for literal combinations, it is possible to note that they almost exclusively occur with neutral prosody: overall, there are 34 hits, which represents 87.1 % of the total number attested at 39 matches, with the remaining ones portraying positive prosody. The preference for neutral prosody is a feature that literal combinations share with *take away*. Similarly, there are ten hits portraying neutral prosody out of ten matches in the case of idiomatic combinations, which is 100% of the total number. Instances with negative prosody are, instead, absent in both literal and idiomatic combinations. This means that the use of *lock up* with a pleasant meaning remains an exclusive feature of its literal forms.

The preference for neutral prosody of literal and idiomatic combinations observed in the analysis of *lock up* suggests that neutral prosody is a prominent feature of this verb, and that the establishment of occurrences with positive prosody may be the result of ongoing change. Considering that neutrality also characterises literal instances of the verb *take away*, it may be supposed that neutral prosody is an inner quality of these verbs and that its variation depends on contextual factors that may evolve over time.

There is a link between *lock up* and *take away,* since they both underwent semantic change and were characterised by increasing idiomaticity, as also noted by Leone (2019) in her discussion on PVs in the period 1750–1850. Differently, *lock up* is tied to increasing conventionalization of its semantic prosody, with only limited change in terms of semantic prosody. Another point of divergence is that positive prosody only being attested in the 1770s in literal forms excludes processes of interference and analogy between instances with diverse degrees of idiomaticity, which may or may not work in context-induced changes.

As for the link between idiomatization and changing semantic prosody, it is possible to suppose that there is no direct correlation between the two, which may work independently depending on additional factors including analogical processes. If semantic prosody "is the result of infection" from the environment (Stewart 2010: 43), and the environment shows variation, then it may be expected that *lock up* should be dominated by ongoing innovation affecting both connotation and semantic prosody. This does not, however, seem to be the case. Neither are there signs of analogical processes stimulating interference between literal and idiomatic forms, as observed in *take away*. Thus, it is necessary to explain why

innovation in the linguistic context gave rise to the idiomatization of *lock up* at the connotative level, as observed by Leone (2019), but did not reverse its effects on semantic prosody. The data available, nonetheless, do not provide sufficient evidence for factors explaining this divergence, but it is possible to suppose that there may be a link between idiomatization and renewal of semantic prosody, but this is not always the case.

A verb that proves the existence of a link between changing context, idiomatization and renewal of semantic prosody is *throw away*. To evaluate the changing semantics of *throw away* and its prosody, I calculated the rate for each of its attested uses and prepared Table 4, below.

Table 4. Semantic prosody of *throw away (Rf and Nf per 10,000 words)*

Throw away	Literal combinations						Idiomatic combinations					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf	Rf	Nf
1750s	–	–	4	0.19	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1770s	–	–	9	0.44	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1790s	–	–	1	0.04	3	0.14	–	–	–	–	–	–
1810s	–	–	5	0.24	1	0.04	–	–	–	–	–	–
1830s	–	–	3	0.14	2	0.09	–	–	2	0.09	–	–
Total	–	–	19	0.18	5	0.04	–	–	2	0.01	–	–

Observation of the rates reported in Table 4 reveals two major tendencies: (1) there is prominence for neutral prosody in both literal and idiomatic forms; (2) there are signs of innovation, since negative prosody is only attested from the 1790s onwards for literal combinations, whereas there are no hits in the case of idiomatic combinations.

First, the fact that *throw away* is almost exclusively used with neutral prosody acquires value in light of the considerations provided for *take away* and *lock up*. This could corroborate a hypothesis indicating that neutral prosody is an inner quality of verbs which may, over time, adopt other semantic prosodies, both positive and negative: single forms are, at first, marked by neutral prosody when they are established but, over time, they can develop new nuances, both positive and negative, as an effect of the phenomenon of context-induced reinterpretation.

An examination of the rates reported in Table 4 reveals that there are two interrelated processes prompting first the reinterpretation of literal forms whose semantic prosody is modified, and second analogical processes establishing similar uses for idiomatic combinations.

As for the first point, 19 hits for literal forms occur with neutral prosody, while another five hits exhibit negative prosody, which means that the former score is 79.1% and the latter is 20.9%. The low rate of instances with negative prosody does not impede consideration of processes of change favouring new prosody.

Indeed, the absence of occurrences portraying negative prosody in the 1750s and 1770s is evidence of ongoing innovation, which may be linked to a changing context of use characterised by an increasing number of words with unpleasant connotations.

Specifically, literal forms have been rather stable in terms of neutral prosody since the 1750s, as in (20), but over time they also became established as being characterised by negative prosody, as in (21).

(20) He told me he had thrown it away under the gateway. (1750s)

(21) I ran and threw it away, to prevent his doing me any harm. I never pointed it at him. (1810s)

This shift was due to the contagion in an environment dominated by a sense of unpleasantness. Examples of *throw away* conveying negative meaning can, indeed, be identified from contextual features and the occurrence of words like *desire* and *had better*, as in (22)–(23):

(22) I desired him to throw it away, and have no concern in it... (1770s)

(23) He said, I had better throw it away, and have nothing to do with it. (1770s)

An interpretation linked to negative prosody is also evident from the uses of this verb in contexts devoted to descriptions of events that are dominated by a sense of unpleasantness. The use of vague expressions as *something*, as in (24), or the combination of *throw away* with *did not know*, as in (25), create uncertainty and reveal imprecision in the narration:

(24) I accompanied the policeman to where he had thrown something away... (1830s)

(25) ...nor I did not know that he had thrown the pistol away. (1770s)

Moving to the second point, there is a link between literal and idiomatic forms. Signs of analogical processes are evident from an examination of idiomatic instances that are exclusively used with neutral prosody. The fact that they score only two hits, as in (26)–(27), is rather limiting, but sufficient to demonstrate the existence of a link between these verbs and literal combinations.

(26) I heard of the robbery, and went home, and threw the raisins away. (1830s)
(27) "We will take 40l." I said, "That is a great deal too much to throw away at present." (1830s)

In this respect, it is possible to hypothesise that idiomatic forms established with neutral prosody as the effect of analogical processes since they took literal

combinations, which were already used especially with neutral prosody, as the example to follow. This entails that, at first, a new form conveys neutrality and that only after its constant use in contexts permeated by positive or negative connotations can it acquire, 'by contagion', the same properties as the linguistic environment. Acceptance of this assertion could imply that neutral prosody is an inner quality of verbs that, over time, can adopt other semantic prosodies, both positive and negative. Analogical processes may, on the other hand, work as factors favouring the establishment or the renewal of the lexical profile.

4. Conclusions

The analysis reveals that the PVs *lock up*, *take away* and *throw away* underwent changes affecting their semantic prosody during the period 1750–1850, but that there are also signs of conventionalization. The major findings are:

1. Reinterpretation of the semantic prosody of selected PVs.
A changing context, in addition to favouring processes of idiomatization, can also work as a leading factor in the establishment of new prosody.

2. There is no apparent link between the degree of idiomaticity and semantic prosody.
The case studies demonstrate that there is no direct link between changes in the degree of idiomaticity and semantic prosody, as demonstrated by the examination of *lock up,* which underwent increasing non-compositionality but was especially characterised by conventionalization of its prosody.

3. Changing semantic prosody may be the effect of analogical processes between literal and idiomatic combinations.
Take away showed that analogical processes from literal to idiomatic forms may stimulate renewal of the context of use, and consequently of the semantic prosody of instances. Similarly, idiomatic forms of *throw away* established with neutral prosody as the outcome of analogical processes between literal and idiomatic instances. At the same time, this result cannot be generalised as *lock up*, which was not affected by analogy, indicating that this process may or may not work diachronically.

4. Neutral prosody may be conceptualized as the incipit of a new word's sense over time, and words may evolve towards acquiring positive or negative prosody.
A common feature among the case studies is that, except for idiomatic forms of *take away*, they exhibit a preference for neutral prosody. In the course of time, it is possible to observe changes in their semantic prosody favouring the establishment of other nuances, both negative and positive. This suggests that neutral prosody is an inner quality of the examined verbs and that contextual factors may promote innovation and stimulate uses in contexts dominated by pleasantness and unpleasantness.

The results obtained highlight the need for further investigation. It is possible to argue that the domain of the analyzed texts (accounts of investigated crimes) might be biased towards less happy vocabulary, and the use of a diachronic corpus with records of other domains might paint a very different picture of semantic prosody for the same verbs. This opens up future paths of research aiming to examine the same PVs in different domains over time in order to evaluate whether, and the extent to which, the changes in semantic preference seen across the decades in one single domain may be generalized to other contexts.

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