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Light verb constructions with deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* in native English varieties: a corpus-based study

Angliškos konstrukcijos su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais
BITE ir SNACK gimtosiose anglų kalbos atmainose:
tekstyno duomenimis paremtas tyrimas

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Abstract

This study investigates light verb constructions (LVCs) involving synonymous deverbal nouns, specifically focusing on the nouns *bite* and *snack* in five native varieties of English: American, British, Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand. Previous research on LVCs with synonymous nouns is limited, and their usage across different English varieties has received little attention from linguists. The aim of the research is twofold: (1) to examine the usage of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* across the five English varieties, and (2) to identify distinguishing features of these synonymous nouns in LVCs. Data were sourced from the Corpus of Global Web-Based English, and the analysis explores the combinability of *bite* and *snack* with various light verbs, as well as the modification patterns associated with each noun. The study compares frequency, types, and semantic classes of modifiers, alongside the variety and frequency of light verbs used with each noun. Both light verbs and modifiers are analysed by their distribution across the five English varieties. The findings reveal significant syntactic and semantic differences between LVCs with *bite* and *snack*. *Snack* combines with a broader range of light verbs than *bite*, and modifier patterns show that *bite* often implies a focus on the duration of eating, whereas *snack* is associated with meal size or timing. The study also highlights cross-variety differences, including the frequency and modification of LVCs, as well as preferences for light verbs and modifiers across English varieties. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of LVCs and their variation in native English varieties.

KEYWORDS: light verb constructions, synonymous deverbal nouns, native English varieties, light verbs, modification, corpus-based study.

Introduction

Light verb constructions, henceforth LVCs, such as *have a bite*, *do a dance*, *take a rest*, *give a kiss*, are verb-noun combinations in which the verb is semantically diminished, and the meaning of the construction is derived from the nominal complement (Huddleston & Pullum, 2010; Tu & Roth, 2011). The verbal constituent in LVCs is known as a light verb, and the nominal complement is referred to as a deverbal noun. Despite its weakened meaning, the light verb has an impact on the construction as it adds some aspectuality (Bergs, 2005). It is responsible for case assignment and can change the semantic valency of the construction (Seiss, 2009; Butt, 2010). Light verbs may also contribute to the meaning of LVCs because certain light verbs can only pair with specific complements (Wierzbicka, 1982). There are numerous cases when the same deverbal noun is found with different light verbs: e.g. *have/take/get a rest*, *have/get/give a laugh*. The different light verbs add a particular shade of meaning to the construction. For instance, LVCs with the light verb *have* express brief, self-directed and usually aimless actions that are related to joy or relief. In contrast, LVCs with the verb *take* are associated with actions that are controllable, start at a definite moment of time and involve some effort. Meanwhile, LVCs with the verb *give* could be linked to punctual single actions affecting the object in some way (Dixon, 2005; Plante, 2014; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020).

Noun modification possibilities is one of the main motivations for using LVCs since a noun modification is easier and more natural than that of a verb (Bergs, 2005; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020). In addition, nominal complements of LVCs accommodate a wide range of modification patterns including single modifiers such as adjectives (e.g. *she gave me a coquettish look*) and post-modifying relative clauses (e.g. *she gave me a look that was coquettish in a naive sort of way*) as well as multiple modifiers (e.g. *John gave a short laugh of royal scorn*) (Leech et al., 2009).

Light verb constructions have been analysed in various languages that include English (Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020; Sundquist, 2020), German (Marzouk, 2021; Fleischhauer & Hartmann, 2021), Spanish (Arús-Hita & Martínez Caro, 2022; Rabadán, 2023), Czech (Kettnerová, 2021), Hungarian (Hrenek, 2021), Norwegian (Holmen, 2021) and Swedish (Sundquist, 2018) among others.

LVCs have also been successfully examined in different English varieties, especially with the focus on differences among varieties. Many of these investigations deal with the frequency of LVCs (Ronan & Schneider, 2015; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020), others look into semantics of LVCs (Ronan, 2019; Mehl, 2019; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020), their distribution across registers and/or stylistic differences (Bernaisch, 2015; Borlongan and Dita, 2015; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020) and modification (Höche & Shahrokny-Prehn, 2013; Ong & Rahim, 2021; Ong, 2023). Most of these studies compare one or two native varieties with one or two non-native varieties (Borlongan & Dita, 2015; Bernaisch, 2015; Mehl, 2019) and two or three native varieties (Leech et al., 2009; Smith, 2009; Höche & Shahrokny-Prehn, 2013; Ronan & Schneider, 2015); however, the number of such studies is relatively small.

The present research focuses on specific and previously unexamined LVCs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* in native varieties of English: American, British, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand. It allows to examine not only the peculiarities of different native English varieties but also the features of synonymous words. Synonyms are typically defined as words that have similar meanings and exhibit a semantic relationship with one another. Dictionaries do not clearly differentiate between the nouns *bite* and *snack* and provide an almost identical definition for both, for example, “a small amount of food or a small meal” (CD, 2024). Combining the two aspects will enable looking into typical uses of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*. Consequently, the study will focus on the following questions: What are the similarities and differences in the use of LVCs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* across native varieties of English? How can the synonymous deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* be differentiated?

The aim of the research is twofold: to perform the analysis of light verb constructions with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* across native English varieties and discern the ways to differentiate between the two synonymous nouns. For this purpose, the nouns *bite* and *snack* are studied in terms of their combinability with different light verbs and possible modifications.

Theoretical Background

Most research on LVCs in native English varieties focuses on the frequency and variety of light verbs and modification. The analyses of the frequency of LVCs usually deal with the general distribution of LVCs and/or the distribution of LVCs with particular light verbs across different varieties. The studies of LVCs with the light verbs *have*, *take*, *give*, *make* and *do* in British and American English varieties by Algeo (1995, 2006) demonstrate that there are no significant differences in the frequency of use of LVCs with the verbs *take*, *do*, *give* and *make*; however, LVCs with the verb *have* are found twice more often in British English than American English. The examination of LVCs based on the Brown and LOB corpora also shows that the constructions are more characteristic of British English than American English (Algeo, 1995, 2006). Leech et al. (2009) achieve similar results exploring LVCs with the verbs *have*, *take* and *give* in the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) Corpus, the Freiburg–LOB Corpus of British English, Brown and Frown corpora. The research reveals that LVCs are more frequently used in British than American English and that both English varieties have different preferences of light verbs in LVCs: British English tends to use more LVCs with the verb *have* and American English with the verb *take*.

Smith (2009) examines LVCs with the light verbs *have*, *give*, *make* and *take* in British, Australian and New Zealand English based on the evidence from the International Corpus of English (ICE)-Great Britain, ICE-Australia and ICE-New Zealand. The comparison of LVCs with the four light verbs demonstrates that the verb *have* is most frequently used across all three English varieties. *Make* is the second most frequent light verb in British and Australian English, whereas the verb *give* outnumbers *make* in New Zealand English. *Take* is the least used light verb in all three varieties. The study of the regional choice between the verbs *have* and *take* in the three varieties confirms a greater spread of LVCs with *have* than those with *take*. The investigation also suggests that LVCs are more typical of spoken than written language (Smith, 2009). The latter idea is supported by Höche and Shahrokny-Prehn (2013) who study LVCs with the verbs *have*, *take* and *give* in British and Scottish English using the data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech (SCOTS). They discover that LVCs are used significantly more frequently in Scottish English compared to British English; however, the researchers admit that the results could be affected by a greater percentage of spoken texts in the SCOTS. In addition, the analysis shows the dominance of LVCs with the verb *have*, with *take* being the second most frequent verb in the two English varieties (Höche & Shahrokny-Prehn, 2013).

There is relatively little research on modification of LVCs in native English varieties. The modification of LVCs with the verbs *have*, *give*, *make* and *take* is discussed by Smith (2009) in the mentioned above study of British, Australian and New Zealand English. The analysis reveals that modified LVCs tend to be more often used in written texts than in spoken ones. If both spoken and written texts are taken into account, LVCs with *give* are most frequently modified in British English, whereas in Australian and New Zealand English, modification of LVCs with the verb *make* is given priority (Smith, 2009).

The modification of LVCs with the light verbs *have*, *take* and *give* is also studied by Höche and Shahrokny-Prehn (2013) based on the data from British and Scottish English. Their research demonstrates that LVCs in British English are slightly more often modified than in Scottish English; however, both English varieties show no differences in terms of modification of LVCs with different light verbs. In both varieties, the most frequently modified LVCs are those with the verb *give*, LVCs with the verb *take* come in second, while LVCs with *have* are the least modified ones. Höche and Shahrokny-Prehn (2013) also attempt to test the widespread statement that one of the advantages of the use of LVCs instead of simple verbs is an easier modification of the former. Based on data from the BNC, they compare the modification of LVCs with that of verb stems and singular nouns and confirm “a greater modifiability of LVCs” (Höche & Shahrokny-Prehn, 2013, p. 180). The claim is supported by Ronan (2019) who examines differences between LVCs and their heavy counterparts in Irish English. The analysis of LVCs with the verbs *have*, *give*, *make* and *take* reveals that the number of modified LVCs in Irish English greatly exceeds the number of modified simple verbs. In addition, the evidence shows that there are more modified LVCs than non-modified ones; however, the modification of LVCs greatly depends on the light verb. Modified LVCs with the light verbs *give* and *have* outnumber the non-modified ones, but there are more non-modified than modified LVCs with the verbs *make* and *take*. The modification of LVCs with *give* is slightly higher than of those with the verb *have*, and LVCs with *take* are the least modified ones.

The analysis of LVCs with synonymous nouns is very rare. One of such studies deals with semantic and syntactic features of prototypically different light verb constructions with the synonymous nouns *chat*, *talk*, and *conversation* in British English (Giparaitė & Balčiūtė, 2018). The data from the BNC reveal that the synonymous nouns differ in their combinability with different light verbs and in the range of complementation patterns. These distinctions stem from the semantic differences between the nouns.

Methodology and Data

The research is corpus-based and focused on the examination of concordance lines. To identify LVCs with the noun *bite* denoting a small amount of food, an expanded context was occasionally employed. The analysis was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative method was applied in the examination of the frequency of light verbs that combine with *bite* and *snack*, the frequency of modified LVCs, types of modifiers and semantic classes of modifiers. The qualitative analysis deals with the study of the similarities and differences of the LVCs under investigation in terms of the aforementioned aspects as well as the examination of the combinability of different light verbs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack*.

The data for the analysis were sourced from *the Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE)¹. The corpus contains about 1.9 billion words from twenty different varieties of English. It includes a diverse array of web-based materials, with informal blogs comprising about 60% of the corpus, newspapers and magazines, company websites and other sources.

In the data selection, the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* were tagged with all verbs (VERB a bite/snack). Only the verbs having a general meaning were selected. In the next stage, the lemmatised forms of all light verbs combined with the deverbal nouns within the span of three words to the left were retrieved (bite [have]/[take]/[get], snack [have]/[take]/[get]). The three-word span enabled the retrieval of modifiers used with the deverbal nouns. Subsequently, the examination of concordance lines was conducted, and light verb constructions were manually extracted since not all occurrences in the corpus were suitable for analysis.

The data were selected on the basis of several criteria. One of the main criteria was the meaning of LVCs. Only the LVCs conveying the meaning “have a small amount of food/a small meal”, which is characteristic of both synonymous nouns, were included in the analysis. For this reason, the study excluded idiomatic constructions such as *have/get a bite to eat* (e.g. *First date, it would be nice to have a bite to eat, or a drink, even a coffee.* (CaE), *They wanted to get a bite to eat first and be at the airport.* (BrE)) and *get a bite of the cherry* (e.g. *As such their own country; population gets a bite of the cherry so to speak.* (AuE)), as well as the examples describing the initial process of eating (e.g. <...> *he must have a bite of my peanut butter sandwich.* (AmE), *The old man took another bite out of his sandwich and chewed a few times.* (BrE)), those emphasising the amount of food (e.g. <...> *insisting they have at least one bite each time, and eventually they will eat it.* (AmE), <...> *or be ready to beg for food or worse, like sacrificing their bodies or other horrible acts or things to get a bite of food.* (AmE)), food qualities (e.g. *I used the fresh ginger though and it had a lovely bite to it.* (AuE)) or the instances referring to tasting food (e.g. <...> *and all the little kids around the camp came in. Can I have a bite?* (AuE); <...> *so as soon as I saw these paired with truffle and Gorgonzola, I had to have a bite.* (CaE)).

Another important criterion was the number of occurrences. Only the LVCs that occurred at least five times were selected for analysis. Despite a total of 2403 occurrences with *bite* and 557 with *snack*, applying the selection criteria resulted only in 45 cases with *bite* and 410 with *snack* being included in the study.

The analysis of the light verb constructions with the synonymous deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* was carried out in the following way. First, the light verbs that combine with the two nouns were identified, and their frequency and distribution across the varieties under investigation were described. Normalised frequencies were used in the statistical data due to unequal representation of English varieties in the corpus: American English sub-corpus contains 386 809 355 words, British English has 387 615 074 words, Australian English includes 148 208 169 words, Canadian English has 134 765 381 and New Zealand English consists of 81 390 476 words. The normalised frequencies were calculated by dividing the raw frequency of each combination by the number of words in each sub-corpus and multiplying by 1 000 000. The calculated frequencies were rounded to hundredths.

¹ <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>

Subsequently, the modification of LVCs with the nouns *bite* and *snack* was studied starting with the description of frequency of modified and non-modified LVCs with the two nouns, the frequency of modified LVCs combined with different light verbs and their distribution across English varieties. Following this, the types and semantic classes of modifiers used with the constructions in question were examined, focusing on the frequency and distribution in different Englishes. The semantic classes of modifiers were also evaluated with respect to the light verbs used with *bite* and *snack* as well as the ways of expression and preferences in different English varieties.

Results and Discussion

This section analyses LVCs with *bite* and *snack* across five English varieties focusing on the range of light verbs used and their frequency and distribution across different native varieties. The constructions are also studied in relation to the use of modifiers with different light verbs across English varieties with a focus on the frequency, types and semantic classes of modifiers.

Variety, frequency and distribution of light verbs

LVCs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* exhibit both similarities and differences in the variety of light verbs they combine with as well as in the frequency and distribution of these light verbs across native English varieties. Table 1 demonstrates that both deverbal nouns combine with the light verbs *have* and *get*; however, their combinability across the five native English varieties differs.

Table 1 Normalised frequencies of light verbs with *bite* and *snack* in native English varieties

Light verbs	Deverbal nouns									
	BITE					SNACK				
	AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NzE	AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NzE
have	0.02 (7) ²	0.02 (6)	0.05 (7)	0.10 (14)	0.06 (5)	0.26 (99)	0.23 (90)	0.32 (48)	0.56 (76)	0.34 (28)
take	-	-	-	-	-	0.01 (5)	-	-	0.04 (5)	-
get	0.02 (6)	-	-	-	-	0.09 (36)	0.03 (11)	0.03 (5)	0.05 (7)	-
Total	0.04 (13)	0.02 (6)	0.05 (7)	0.10 (14)	0.06 (5)	0.36 (140)	0.26 (101)	0.35 (53)	0.65 (88)	0.34 (28)

As seen from Table 1, *have* is the most commonly used light verb that combines with the deverbal nouns *bite* (1a) and *snack* (1b) in all English varieties.

Ex 1a *The girls and I had a quick bite before we headed home. (AmE)*

<...> *You just need to take a bus from behind Central Station have a bite there, admire the lighthouse <...>. (BrE)*

<...> *We then had a quick bite at the vegie bar in Fitzroy and looked at some more shops before finally heading back <...>. (AuE)*

<...> *We had a quick bite at De Joffers Brasserie and were off <...>. (CaE)*

<...> *to get home after work, have a bite, get the kids squared away and then they're keen to get to a yoga class. (NzE)*

² The number in brackets refers to raw frequency.

- b He got hungry and had a snack. (AmE)
- <...> There'll be a chance to have a snack at the cafe in the park <...>. (BrE)
- I'm just having a snack at my girlfriend's. (AuE)
- <...> It was also a great place to sit, have a snack, drink and watch the kite-surfing and windsurfing on the beach. (CaE)
- <...> you may have a snack when we get home <...>. (NzE)

The distribution of the light verb *get* combined with *bite* and *snack* shows a significant difference across the varieties under investigation. The construction *get a bite* (Ex 2a) is used only in American English, whereas *get a snack* (Ex 2b) is characteristic of four out of five varieties: American, British, Australian and Canadian English.

- Ex 2a <...> Love this place for when I need a coffee and want to catch up on the NYT <...>. Also love the hours; early or late, you can get a bite. (AmE)
- b <...> Then we'll do something special for lunch and get a quick snack before we order room service <...>. (AmE)
- <...> Mom, would you please take Katie and Joey to get a snack? (BrE)
- <...> Then we walked together upstairs where he could get a snack. (AuE)
- Getting a snack, walking around, even checking Facebook and/or Twitter are good ways to keep the midterm madness at bay. (CaE)

The light verb *take* used with only the deverbal noun *snack* is found in only American and Canadian English varieties.

- Ex 3a <...> At home, take an after-school snack to keep your belly full until dinner time <...>. (AmE)
- b After his sunbath he usually bathed in cold water, then he took a snack and a brief nap. (CaE)

The constructions where *take* combines with *bite* usually refer to tasting of food (Ex 4a), the start of eating (Ex 4b) or the act of biting (Ex 4c).

- Ex 4a They don't look perfect, but they almost invite you to take a bite. (AmE)
- <...> she brought the cupcake to her nose so she could smell it. It smelled sweeter than anything she had ever smelled before. Without hesitating she took a bite. (CaE)
- b Moments later they called my number and I unwrapped the piping hot, meat-stuffed pastry and took a bite. (AmE)
- I took it home and put it on the barbecue. It smelled pretty good and then I took a bite. (NzE)
- c She stared at it for several minutes before finally picking it up and taking a bite. (AmE)
- I was feeling a bit hungry. I saw an apple in a bowl. I picked it up and took a bite. (AuE)

The frequency data in Table 1 show that LVCs with the noun *snack* are significantly more often used in all five native varieties compared to those with the noun *bite*. LVCs with the two deverbal nouns are most frequently used in Canadian English, whereas other English varieties do not show a significant difference in the use of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*, except for British English where the number of occurrences of the LVCs is smaller in comparison with other varieties.

In addition, Table 1 demonstrates that LVCs in Canadian English also outnumber those in other varieties when different light verbs used with *bite* and *snack* are taken into account, except for the construction *get a snack* which is more frequent in American English. British English is the variety where LVCs with *bite* and *snack* are least frequent, even when different light verbs are considered.

The distribution of light verbs across five native varieties reveals that *have* is the most frequently used light verb when combined with *bite* and *snack* in all native varieties, while *get* ranks second.

To sum up, the findings on the variety, frequency and distribution of light verbs used with the nouns *bite* and *snack* are in line with previous research that demonstrates that the verb *have* is not only the most frequently used light verb but also the most widely distributed one across English varieties (Algeo, 2006; Leech et al., 2009; Smith, 2009; Höche & Shahrokny-Prehn, 2013). The frequent use of the verb *have* with the two deverbal nouns can be predicted since the light verb *have* is usually associated with brief and self-directed actions, and eating a small amount of food is not a time-consuming activity and is performed for one's own benefit (Wierzbicka, 1982). The verb *take* can also be expected to be found with the nouns *bite* and *snack* since, similarly to *have*, it may refer to brief actions (Wierzbicka, 1982) and combines with the nouns denoting "things being taken into the body, particularly if this is likely to be performed incrementally" (Dixon, 2005, p. 480). However, the analysis shows that *take* is found only with the light verb *snack*, but even in such cases the number of occurrences is low. The combinations of *take* with the noun *snack* are limited to American and Canadian English. American speakers usually prefer the light verb *take* over the verb *have* in the formation of LVCs, but the deverbal noun denoting a small amount of food seems to be an exception. This can be attributed to the fact that, unlike *have*, the verb *take* can also refer to actions that require physical effort and are planned in advance (Dixon, 2005), which is not typically associated with the consumption of food. The verb *get* mainly combines with the noun *snack* and is used in all varieties under investigation, except for New Zealand English. The use of *get a bite* is limited to American English. The limited use of *get a bite* might be related to the prevalence of the synonymous idiom *get a bite to eat* which is found in all varieties under investigation and significantly outnumbers the use of the LVC. Interestingly, there is a similar idiom *have a bite to eat* which is far from being as frequent as LVCs with *have*. As a versatile verb, *get* is similar to *have*, including its light uses. Both verbs are sometimes interchangeable, sharing similar morphological forms and combinability patterns (Giparaitė, 2015). Additionally, the light verb *get* is typical of informal English (Allerton, 2001), and since the GloWbE corpus consists primarily of blog entries, which tend to be informal, this explains why *get* in combination with *snack* ranks second in frequency after the verb *have*.

LVCs with *bite* and *snack* are unevenly distributed across five English varieties with respect to frequency. In Canadian English, LVCs with both nouns are most frequent, whereas in British English, they are least used compared to other varieties. American, Australian and New Zealand English show no significant difference in the frequency of LVCs with the two deverbal nouns.

Modification of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*

The analysis of modification of LVCs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* focuses on the frequency of use of modified LVCs, types of modifiers which include attributive noun, adjectival and multiple modifiers as well as semantic classes of the most frequent attributive nouns and adjectival modifiers used with the constructions under investigation.

Frequency of modified LVCs

The study of the modification of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* shows more differences than similarities between the two nouns. *Bite* and *snack* are similar in that, in general, the number of non-modified LVCs with both is greater than the number of modified ones. However, when considering the number of modified LVCs with each of the nouns, slight differences are observed. Modification frequency for the noun *snack* is slightly higher than that for the noun *bite*, at 36.6% compared with 31.1%, respectively.

The comparison of the frequency of modified LVCs with *bite* and *snack* with different light verbs in Figure 1 shows that LVCs with the verb *take* have a significantly higher modification rate in comparison with other light verbs; however, the verb *take* is found only in combination with the deverbal noun *snack*. There is only a slight difference in modification of *bite* and *snack* in combination with the verb *have*, with 33% for *bite* and 39% for *snack*. However, no modification differences can be traced when both deverbal nouns combine with the verb *get*: the frequency of modified cases is 17% for both nouns.

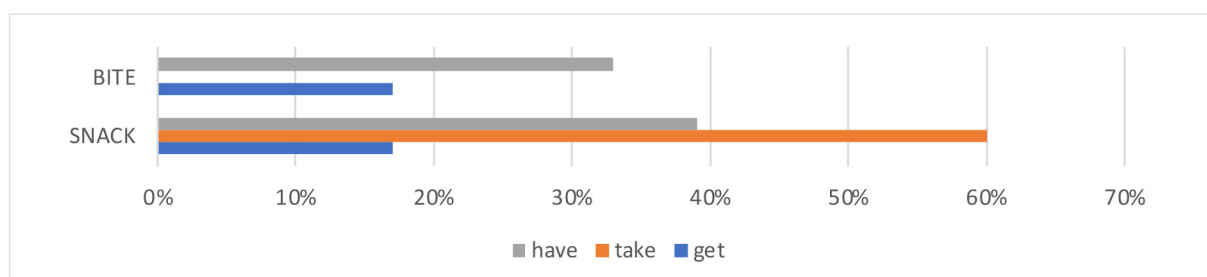


Fig. 1 Frequency of modified LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in combination with three light verbs in percentage

Some differences can be observed in the modification of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* across English varieties. Table 2 demonstrates that the highest number of modified LVCs with *bite* can be found in Australian and American English varieties, while for *snack*, the largest number is in New Zealand English with Australian English in the second position. Interestingly enough, the number of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in Australian and New Zealand English is rather low when compared with other varieties under investigation.

Table 2 Frequency and distribution of modified LVCs with *bite* and *snack* across different light verbs and English varieties in percentage

Light verbs	Deverbal nouns									
	BITE					SNACK				
	AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NZE	AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NZE
have	57 (4) ³	33 (2)	43 (3)	29 (4)	0	42 (42)	36 (32)	42 (20)	33 (25)	54 (15)
take	-	-	-	-	-	60 (3)	-	-	60 (3)	-
get	17 (1)	-	-	-	-	17 (6)	9 (1)	40 (2)	14 (1)	-
Total	38 (5)	33 (2)	43 (3)	29 (4)	0	36 (51)	33 (33)	42 (22)	33 (29)	54 (15)

³ The number in brackets refers to raw frequency.

As seen from Table 2, the frequency of modified LVCs with different light verbs across English varieties shows that the verb *have* in combination with *bite* is most frequently used in American English and when combined with *snack* in New Zealand English. LVCs with *snack* in combination with the verb *take* are equally distributed in American and Australian English, which are the only varieties where these constructions are used. It should be noted that the modified LVCs with the verbs *have* and *take* in these three varieties outnumber non-modified ones. Modified LVCs with *snack* in combination the verb *get* are most often used in Australian English, accounting for 40% of such cases.

Types and semantic classes of modifiers

The analysis of types of modifiers used with LVCs with the deverbal nouns *bite* and *snack* shows that these constructions can be modified by adjectives, attributive nouns and multiple modifiers. Adjectival modifiers are the most numerous type of the three and are found with LVCs with both deverbal nouns. As seen from Figure 2, they account for 86% (12) of modified LVCs with *bite* and 78% (117) with *snack*. Attributive nouns⁴ modifying only LVCs with *snack* account for 15% (23) of all cases, and the least frequent multiple modifiers are twice more often used with LVCs with the noun *bite* in comparison to those with *snack*, with 14% (2) versus 7% (10) respectively.

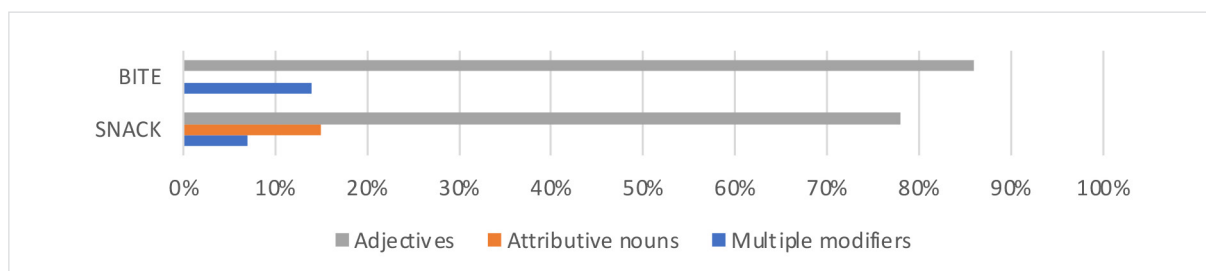


Fig. 2 Frequency of types of modifiers of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in percentage

Multiple modifiers can be combinations of two adjectives (Ex 5a) or an adjective and an attributive noun (Ex 5b). Both types are characteristic of LVCs with the deverbal noun *snack*, whereas LVCs with *bite* are used only with multiple modifiers consisting of two adjectives. One more feature of the multiple modifiers is that they are found with LVCs with the light verb *have*.

Ex 5a *I've only had a quick pre-theatre bite there a few weeks ago <...>. (BrE)*

I just had a small tasty bite <...>. (CaE)

While other supermassive black holes devour gas and stars around them, releasing large amounts of energy in the process, ours only seems to have the occasional light snack. (AmE)

<...> together they sifted through the apples and had a cozy little snack <...>. (CaE)

Have your normal mid-morning snack (if you have one) and go to the laboratory for the first blood glucose test before your lunch. (NZE)

b *Between shower time and bedtime he can have a small bedtime snack usually consisting of milk and a few goldfish crackers or something similar. (AmE)*

<...> I missed having a late afternoon snack and bought a coffee loaded with honey instead of fruit <...>. (BrE)

Examples in (5) demonstrate that multiple modifiers are limited to four out of five English varieties as they are not found in Australian English. However, even these four varieties, except for American English, have single cases

⁴ Prefixed nouns such as *mid-morning/afternoon*, *after-dinner/school*, *pre-dinner/lunch/exercise* and alike are described as adjectives.

of such modifiers. Thus, it could be stated that multiple modifiers are not typical of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*.

The adjective and attributive noun modifiers can be grouped into three major semantic classes: size, duration and time period. Fig. 3 demonstrates that two out of three semantic classes of modifiers present in LVCs with both deverbal nouns are size and duration. LVCs with *snack* can, in addition, be used with modifiers denoting time period⁵. The most frequent modifiers of LVCs with *bite* are those of duration comprising 75% of all modifiers. In contrast, modifiers of size are most often used with LVCs with *snack* accounting for 35% of all modifiers, with time period modifiers being in second place at 28%.

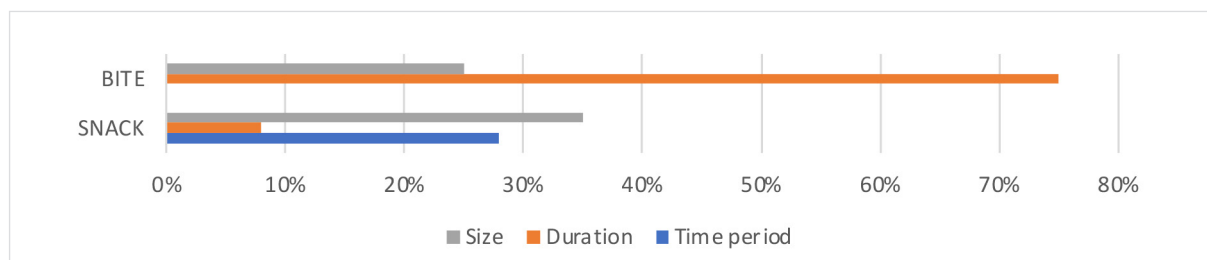


Fig. 3 Frequency of semantic classes of modifiers of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*

It should be pointed out that there is some difference in the semantic variety of modifiers used in LVCs with *bite* and *snack*. The modifiers of LVCs with *bite* limited to the semantic classes of size and duration account for 100% of all modifiers found with these LVCs. In contrast, LVCs with *snack* can be modified by the three major semantic classes of modifiers (size, duration, and time period), which constitute 71% of all modifiers, and also by minor classes of adjective and attributive noun modifiers⁶.

The distribution of semantic classes of modifiers related to different light verbs is interesting from a few perspectives. As seen from Table 3, LVCs with both deverbal nouns combined with the light verb *have* can be modified by two major classes of modifiers size and duration and with the verb *get* only by modifiers of duration. However, if the modification of only the deverbal noun *snack* is taken into account, LVCs with the verbs *have* and *get* are used with all three classes of modifiers, whereas those with the verb *take* are limited to size and time period modifiers. Interestingly, the light verbs *take* and *get* in combination with both deverbal nouns have fewer modifiers in comparison with the verb *have*, but their modification accounts for 50% to 100% of all modified cases with a particular light verb, except for the time period modifiers with *get a snack*.

The distribution of modifiers of distinct semantic classes across English varieties shows significant differences between *bite* and *snack* combined with the three light verbs. LVCs with *bite* in combination with *have* are found with two semantic classes size and duration in three out of five varieties: in American, Australian and Canadian English. Modifiers of duration can also be used in American English when *bite* combines with *get*. When frequency is considered, duration modifiers in LVCs with the noun *bite* are most frequent in American English, whereas size modifiers are most often used in Australian English. New Zealand English differs from other English varieties in that LVCs with the noun *bite* are not modified by any of the three semantic classes of modifiers. The modification of LVCs with the noun *snack* demonstrates that, similarly to the noun *bite*, the distribution of the semantic classes of modifiers across English varieties depends on the light verbs. Size and duration modifiers with *have a snack* are most frequent in Australian English and time period modifiers in American English variety. American English is the only variety where time period modifiers are also used with LVCs with the verbs *take* and *get* and where LVCs with *get* are found with duration modifiers. The use of size modifiers with

⁵ One of the two multiple modifiers used with LVCs with *bite* can be attributed to time period (refer to Examples in (5)), indicating that this semantic type of modifiers might be used with these constructions.

⁶ In addition, a class of modifiers of well-being can be identified. It is mostly represented by the adjective *healthy* and single-case modifiers *high-protein* and *low-GI*. Other modifiers used once or twice include the adjectives *free*, *cheap*, *shared*, *favourite*, *special*, *substantial*, *unexpected*, *nice*, *normal* and *proper*, among a few others, and the attributive nouns *food*, *fruit* and *bar*.

the construction *take a snack* is limited to Canadian English and with *get a snack* to Canadian and Australian English. However, Canadian English exhibits the highest usage of the latter construction with size modifiers.

Table 3 Semantic classes of attributive noun and adjectival modifiers used with LVCs with *bite* and *snack* and their distribution across English varieties in percentage

Light verb	Semantic class	Deverbal nouns									
		BITE					SNACK				
		AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NzE	AmE	BrE	AuE	CaE	NzE
have	size	25 (1)	0	33 (1)	25 (1)	0	33 (12)	35 (11)	55 (11)	33 (8)	23 (3)
	duration	75 (3)	50 (1)	67 (2)	50 (2)	0	3 (1)	6 (2)	10 (2)	4 (1)	15 (2)
	time period	0	0	0	0	0	36 (13)	23 (7)	25 (5)	33 (8)	23 (3)
take	size	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	67 (2)	-
	duration	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-
	time period	-	-	-	-	-	100 (3)	-	-	0	-
get	size	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	50 (1)	100 (1)	-
	duration	100 (1)	-	-	-	-	50 (3)	0	0	0	-
	time period	0	-	-	-	-	17 (1)	0	0	0	-

The three major semantic classes of modifiers differ in terms of expression. Size modifiers are manifested only by adjectives the variety of which depends on the deverbal noun. *Small* is the main adjective used with LVCs with *bite* (Ex 6a), though there is one case with an informal *wee*, whereas adjectives found with LVCs with *snack* (Ex 6b) show a greater variety since *small*, *light*, and *little* can be used in different Englishes under investigation. Both nouns *bite* and *snack* contain the connotation of 'small', thus the adjectives seem to be redundant and have some informal overtones.

Ex 6a Can you *have a wee bite* of something right before you swim? (AmE)

I have a stash at work so that I can *have a small bite* rather than hanging out to get to the supermarket and end up eating too much. (AuE)

We packed up our stuff and our tent, and *had a small bite*, but planned to eat a real breakfast right in town before we really got moving. (CaE)

b *Have a small snack* before you head out of the door <...>. (AmE)

Strangely, later that night, I got hungry again and *had a light snack*. (AmE)

Grab a glass of champagne, *have a little snack*, and talk wedding! (AmE)

<...> normally I *have a small snack* at work at around 4.30, banana or yogurt or similar. (BrE)

If you are hungry, have a light snack no later than two or three hours before you nod off <...>. (BrE)

<...> Mind if you have a little snack? (BrE)

<...> I would recommend drinking something afterwards and maybe getting a small snack before heading in to work. (AuE)

Eat regularly through the day and have a light snack before dinner or lunch if you're hungry. (AuE)

Josh retreated to the bathroom with him and his spare bathers, while Mia and I had a little snack. (AuE)

I finished in just under 2 hours and 30 minutes, without eating anything during the race, and wish I would have had a small snack at the 90-minute mark. (CaE)

Have a light snack (such as a glass of milk) before bed. (CaE)

<...> give me a clear picture of things like if I can take a little snack, or if I had to go out, and take a walk to burn more calories. (CaE)

After we got our little snack, we were ready for some bubble tea to quench our thirst. (CaE)

Then we got a small snack with sandwiches from the Subway at 10:30. (NZE)

It is also a good idea to have a light snack before going to a party <...>. (NZE)

Have a little snack prior to you go out to eat. (NZE)

It should be emphasized that different English varieties tend to have their preferences in the use of size modifiers with the noun *snack*. In American and British English varieties *small* and *light* prevail with *snack*, though *little* is found as well. In addition to *small*, *little* is extensively used in Australian English, whereas Canadian and New Zealand English prefer the use of *light* and *little* as size modifiers of *snack*.

In American (Ex 7a), British (Ex 7b) and Australian English (Ex 7c) varieties, the deverbal noun *snack* can be used with antonyms of the adjective *small*. These cases are rare and seem to refer to a meal rather than a small amount of food.

Ex 7a Jaclyn, I just had a huge snack and a big dinner earlier and now all I want is one of these sandwiches. (AmE)

Try to avoid having a big snack before bed. (AmE)

b Have a large snack at about ten o'clock, then don't have a meal until middle of the afternoon. (BrE)

c <...> often in the hot mornings I just do fruit [...] and have a bigger snack later. (AuE)

Duration modifiers, similarly to size modifiers, are expressed only by adjectives. There is no great variation of duration adjectives that modify both deverbal nouns. LVCs with *bite* (Ex 8a) and *snack* (Ex 8b) are mainly modified by the adjective *quick*; however, LVCs with *snack* again show some variation. In British English, in addition, the adjective *brief* can be found with *snack*, whereas in New Zealand English the adjective *short* might be used instead of *quick* as a modifier of *snack*. Similar to size modifiers, the duration modifier *quick* may have its antonym *slow* (Ex 8c) used with LVCs with *snack*, but there is a single case of this type used in American English.

- Ex 8a** *The girls and I had a quick bite before we headed home. (AmE)*
I'm gonna get a quick bite and then get on the Coleman account. (AmE)
So now I'm going to have a quick bite of lunch before I get ready for my interview at 2pm. (BrE)
We then had a quick bite at the vegie bar in Fitzroy <...>. (AuE)
We had a quick bite at De Joffers Brasserie and were off <...>. (CaE)
- b** *If it's on pretty soon, have a quick snack, set your recorder to record the show <...>. (AmE)*
You probably could get a quick snack, but mostly you went to get a drink. (AmE)
The boys came home, they had a quick snack, grabbed swimming stuff and off we went. (BrE)
At some point they have a brief snack and then return home for another snack. (BrE)
So, without even dropping packs we had a quick snack and kept walking with Banksia Hill <...>. (AuE)
When they needed a break they hopped into the wagon, had a quick snack, then hopped out again. (CaE)
A few groups passed us while we had a short snack <...>. (NZE)
- c** *Between breakfast and lunch you should have a slow carb snack <...>. (AmE)*

Time period modifiers differ from size and duration ones in that they can be manifested by both adjectives and attributive nouns. This class of modifiers is typical of only LVCs with the noun *snack*. There is a single occurrence of this modifier with LVCs with *bite*; however, it is found as a part of a multiple modifier (Ex 9a). There is no significant difference in the frequency of adjectives (Ex 9b) and attributive nouns (Ex 9c) used as time period modifiers with LVCs involving *snack*: they amount to 47.5% (19) and 52.5% (21), respectively.

- Ex 9a** *I've only had a quick pre-theatre bite there a few weeks ago so want to go back again <...>. (BrE)*
- b** *I had been sitting at the table having a late snack of hummus <...>. (AmE)*
I had a pre-dinner snack of a pink lady apple. (BrE)
After we had got in the air we had a pre-lunch snack and another glass of champagne. (AuE)
 <...> *there is a lunch room for kids to have their after school snack <...>. (CaE)*
 <...> *you probably won't be able to exercise as long or as hard as if you'd had a pre-exercise snack. (NZE)*
- c** *He eats horrible, junk, too much salt, not enough water, then he always has a midnight snack. (AmE)*
Have a bedtime snack containing starch to help a relaxed state. (BrE)
He stayed there for an hour and then went and had his morning snack with the group. (AuE)

Since breakfast was a little later I did not have a morning snack. (CaE)

Then around 3-4pm have an afternoon tea snack such as a medium sized muffin and a trim latte or trim milkshake. (NZE)

As seen in Example 9, time period modifiers are found in all five English varieties when the noun *snack* combines with the light verb *have*. American English is the only variety where time period modifiers are used with LVCs with all three light verbs. The way of expression of time period modifiers seems to depend on the light verb. When the noun *snack* combines with the verb *have*, these modifiers can be expressed by both adjectives and attributive nouns (Ex 10a), and when *snack* is used with *take*, only adjectives are found (Ex 10b). There is only one case when *snack* in combination with *get* is modified by a time period modifier, and it is expressed by an attributive noun (Ex 10c).

Ex 10a *If you don't normally have an after-dinner snack on days you don't workout, stick with no dessert.* (AmE)

<...> never let myself get too hungry because then I make bad choices so I always have an afternoon snack at my desk <...>. (AmE)

b *My amazing son, realized that he couldn't take naps every day, and he could not take a mid morning snack at work.* (AmE)

c *At places like Fultondale Elementary and Chalkville Elementary, children get an afternoon snack that is also an adventure.* (AmE)

Interestingly, all varieties, except for New Zealand English, show certain snacking preferences. Americans prefer midnight snacks, the British favour afternoon snacks, whereas Australians and Canadians have preference for morning snacks. In New Zealand English, there are three cases of time period modifiers, and all of them are different.

All in all, the analysis of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* demonstrates that, in general, the modification of these constructions is rather limited. Though in written texts the modification of LVCs tends to be higher than in spoken language (Smith, 2009; Martínez Caro & Arús-Hita, 2020), this does not apply to LVCs with the two deverbal nouns under investigation as there are more non-modified than modified cases. The situation changes when considering the modification of LVCs with different light verbs in different English varieties. LVCs with the verb *take* in combination with *snack* are infrequent, but their modification is high, whereas the most frequently used constructions with the verb *have* combining with both deverbal nouns have moderate modification, which seems to support the previous research by Höche and Shahroky-Prehn (2013). In some varieties, modified LVCs with both *take* and *have* outnumber non-modified ones. These include *have a bite* and *take a snack* in American English, *take a snack* in Canadian English and *have a snack* in New Zealand English. LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in combination with *get* are the least modified constructions, and they are mostly spread in American English.

The study of modification also shows that LVCs with *bite* and *snack* differ in the type of modifiers they take. The former can be modified by adjectives and multiple modifiers and the latter is in addition found with attributive nouns. The two types of modifiers characteristic of LVCs with both deverbal nouns are more frequent with *bite* in comparison with *snack*. All three types of modifiers are used with LVCs with the verb *have*, while LVCs with *take* and *get* are modified by only adjectives and attributive nouns. Modified LVCs with *have* are also the most widespread in English varieties, with *get* being the second most common. The prevalence of modified LVCs with *have* over other light verbs may be due to their frequent use.

The examination of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in terms of major semantic types of modifiers reveals a clear distinction between the two nouns. LVCs with *bite* tend to be modified by modifiers of duration as this class of modifiers is not only the most frequent one but is also found with all three light verbs, though not in all varieties. Differently from LVCs with *bite*, those with *snack* show the tendency to be modified by two semantic classes of modifiers: size and time period. These two classes of modifiers are the most often used ones and are characteristic of LVCs with the three light verbs.

The present research has some limitations that should be taken into account. There are relatively few analyses on the use of light verb constructions in native English varieties and still fewer on their modification, and

linguists have largely overlooked the examination of LVCs with synonymous deverbal nouns. Many existing studies are also outdated. The size of the collected data and the small number of modified constructions, especially of LVCs with the deverbal noun *bite*, might also be regarded as shortcomings of the study.

The analysis of LVCs with nouns *bite* and *snack* across five native English varieties highlights a few differences among the varieties: the frequency of use and modification of the constructions, the combinability of deverbal

Conclusions

nouns with light verbs and modifier preferences. Canadian and American English stand out from other varieties in that Canadian English has the greatest number of LVCs with both deverbal nouns, whereas American English leads in the number of light verbs combining with the noun *bite*. Both Canadian and American English also differ from other varieties in that they are the only ones where the noun *snack* combines with all three light verbs. In contrast, New Zealand English is the variety where both *bite* and *snack* combine with only one light verb. The modification of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* shows that Australian and New Zealand English varieties are the most dominant. Australian English has the greatest number of modified LVCs with *bite* and New Zealand English with *snack*. However, considering the number of modified LVCs with different light verbs, none of the varieties stand out distinctly, as four out of five varieties have the highest number of modified LVCs with various verbs. Since Canadian and American English as well as Australian and New Zealand English belong to the same regions, the use of LVCs with *bite* and *snack* in different varieties shows some regional tendencies. In addition, the five English varieties show some differences in the choice of modifiers related to semantic classes.

Based on the typical uses of LVCs with *bite* and *snack*, the study reveals that the two synonymous deverbal nouns can be differentiated both syntactically and semantically, and this aligns with previous research by Giparaitė and Balčiūtė (2018). Syntactically, *bite* and *snack* differ in the combinability with light verbs and modification. The limited use of *bite* with the verb *get* and that of *snack* with the verb *take* shows the tendency of the deverbal noun *bite* to combine with the light verb *have* and *snack* with the verbs *have* and *get*. It should be also emphasized that LVCs with *snack* are far more often used than those with *bite*. This could be largely due the fact that language users may feel more comfortable using LVCs with a mono-semantic noun *snack* with the meaning having a small amount of food rather than a polysemous noun *bite*. When considering the modification of the LVCs under investigation, the two nouns exhibit differences in that the noun *snack* can combine with more types and a greater variety of modifiers than *bite*, and *bite* is more frequently modified by adjectives and multiple modifiers than its synonym. Modification may also reflect the semantic differences between *bite* and *snack*. Both deverbal nouns denote the consumption of a small amount of food, but *bite* is more related to the duration of eating, while *snack* is more related to the size of meal and time of taking a meal. Though *bite* and *snack* can take modifiers of size and duration, such factors as frequency, the variety of light verbs and distribution across English varieties clearly show the dominance of a particular semantic type of modifiers used by each of the nouns. Time period modifiers are characteristic of only LVCs with *snack*.

The findings of the present research provide sufficient evidence on the differences between the nouns *bite* and *snack*. For this reason, the analysis of LVCs with synonymous deverbal nouns by their combinability with light verbs and modification patterns offers an effective strategy for distinguishing synonymous words and could be applied in similar studies. This investigation is based on a relatively small set of data, especially regarding LVCs and modifiers with *bite*, and therefore requires additional verification. Thus, further research could expand the analysis to include non-native varieties as well as other registers and corpora.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Santrauka

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Angliškos konstrukcijos su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais BITE ir SNACK gimtosiose anglų kalbos atmainose: tekstyno duomenimis paremtas tyrimas

Iki šiol konstrukcijos, sudarytos iš desemantizuotų veiksmažodžių ir sinoniminių deverbatyvinių daiktavardžių, ir jų skirtumai gimtosiose anglų kalbos atmainose nesulaukė pakankamo lingvistų dėmesio. Šiuo straipsniu, kuriame tyrinėjamos konstrukcijos su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais *bite* ir *snack* penkiose gimtosiose anglų kalbos atmainose (amerikiečių, australų, britų, kanadiečių ir Naujosios Zelandijos), tikimasi iširti du aspektus: šių konstrukcijų paplitimą ir jų ypatumus ir deverbatyvinių daiktavardžių vartosenos skirtumus minėtose gimtosiose anglų kalbos atmainose. Tyrimo medžiaga surinkta iš Global Web-Based English tekstyno. Tyrimo tikslas – sugretinti sinoniminius deverbatyvinius daiktavardžius skirtingose anglų kalbos atmainose ir nustatyti jų skirtumus. Konstrukcijos su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais analizuojamos atsižvelgiant į jų junglumą su veiksmažodžiais ir modifikavimo galimybes. Veiksmažodžių junglumo su daiktavardžiais *bite* ir *snack* tyrimas apima jų įvairovę ir vartojimo dažnumą, o modifikavimo galimybės nustatomos atsižvelgiant į modifikatorių vartojimo dažnumą, tipą ir semantinę klasifikaciją. Taip pat siekiama išsiaiškinti, kaip konstrukcijų veiksmažodžiai ir galimi modifikatoriai yra pasiskirstę analizuojamose anglų kalbos atmainose. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad konstrukcijos su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais *bite* ir *snack* turi sintaksinių ir semantinių skirtumų. Daiktavardis *snack* jungiasi su įvairesniais veiksmažodžiais nei daiktavardis *bite*. Modifikatorių, vartojamų su tyrinėjamais deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais, dažnumas, tipai ir semantinė klasifikacija rodo, kad daiktavardis *bite* gali būti siejamas su valgymo trukme, o daiktavardis *snack* su valgio dydžiu ir valgymo laiku. Tyrimas taip pat atskleidžia, kad gimtosios anglų kalbos atmainos skiriasi tyrinėjamų konstrukcijų vartojimo ir modifikavimo dažniu, veiksmažodžių vartojamų su deverbatyviniais daiktavardžiais junglumu ir modifikatorių pasirinkimu.

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