

## On the use of the *way*-construction with the verb *make*: A diachronic perspective

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**ENG Abstract:** Although the English *way*-construction is reported to have expanded its semantic domain by recruiting an increasing number of new verbs over the last two centuries, the general verb *make* remains the most common predicate in all periods since the construction was first attested. Notwithstanding this central role, its use and behaviour has gone almost unnoticed in the abundant literature on the *way*-construction in favour of other semantically richer verbs. In order to fill this gap, this study is intended to offer a detailed characterization of the *way*-construction with *make* by focusing on two core semantic features: the implication of difficult movement or overcoming of barriers that the construction is argued to convey and its ability to express not only concrete movement but also abstract motion. The analysis of a corpus of more than 4,000 occurrences from the last two hundred years provides evidence that may cast doubts on the notion of difficult movement being an integral component of the construction and suggests that this meaning is not its prototypical sense anymore. Additionally, and despite the increase in its token productivity in the last decades, the construction does not seem to be more open to the expression of abstract movement.

**Keywords:** *Way*-construction; productivity; semantic change; corpus linguistics

## ESP Sobre la construcción *way* con el verbo *make*: Una perspectiva diacrónica

**ESP Resumen:** Aunque ya se ha documentado que durante los dos últimos siglos la construcción *way* en inglés ha expandido su dominio semántico atrayendo a un creciente número de verbos nuevos, el verbo general *make* sigue siendo el predicado más frecuente en todos los periodos desde que la construcción aparece por primera vez. A pesar de este papel central, su uso y comportamiento ha pasado casi inadvertido en los numerosos trabajos sobre esta construcción. Para cubrir este vacío, este estudio pretende ofrecer una detallada caracterización de la construcción basada en dos rasgos semánticos centrales: la implicación de dificultad en el movimiento o superación de barreras que se ha argumentado que la construcción conlleva y su habilidad para expresar tanto movimiento físico como abstracto. El análisis de un corpus de más de 4.000 ejemplos de los dos últimos siglos proporciona pruebas que pueden poner en duda la idea de que la noción de dificultad en el movimiento es un componente integral de la semántica de la construcción y apuntan a que este ya no es el significado prototípico de la construcción. Asimismo, y a pesar del aumento en la frecuencia de ocurrencia en las últimas décadas, la construcción no parece haberse vuelto más proclive a expresar movimiento abstracto.

**Palabras clave:** Construcción *way*; productividad; cambio semántico; lingüística de corpus

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Compilation and coding of the corpus. 3. The *way*-construction in English. 4. Results of the analysis. 4.1. Token frequency. 4.2. Difficulty meaning. 4.3. Semantic preference of the *way*-construction with *make*. 4.4. Abstract movement. 5. Concluding remarks.

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## 1. Introduction

The *way*-construction is a fairly productive pattern to express motion events in Present-Day English. This sentence type, as illustrated in (1), has been considered a prototypical example of the notion *construction* as it constitutes a schematic form-meaning pair where the syntactic pattern [SUB, [V [POSS, *way*] DIR]] is conventionally associated with the idea of the subject referent moving along the path designated by the directional phrase even though this meaning cannot be directly predicted from the semantic composition of the particular lexical items in the sentence:

- (1) Frank dug his way out of the prison. (Goldberg 1995, 199)

Two central semantic features of the construction are highlighted in most accounts since Goldberg's (1995) influential analysis: the implication of difficult movement or overcoming of barriers derived from the idea that the path of movement needs to be somehow created by the mover, as in (1) above, and its ability to express not only concrete movement, but also abstract or figurative motion, as in (2):

- (2) Her boyfriend cried his way to forgiveness. (Szczesniak 2013, 182)

One of the most remarkable and appealing changes undergone by the construction over the last two centuries is the expansion of its semantic domain, which has grown to include an increasing number of semantically diverse new verbs (Israel 1996; Perek 2018). Notwithstanding this increase in the type frequency of the *way*-construction, the general verb *make*, together with *find*, is reported to be the most common predicate in all periods since the construction was first attested (see Fanego 2018, Perek 2018 and McColm 2019 for a diachronic perspective, and Goldberg 1995, Gries and Stefanowitsch 2010, and Brunner and Hoffmann 2020, among others, for a PDE analysis). Despite this central role, the use and behaviour of *make* has gone almost unnoticed in the abundant literature on the topic in favour of other verbs with richer meanings.

In view of this situation, this work seeks to offer a detailed characterization of the *way*-construction with the verb *make* by focusing on the two semantic features mentioned above. To this aim, and extensive corpus of more than 4,000 occurrences of the construction with this verb from the period 1830–2019 retrieved from the Fiction section of the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), has been examined. From a quantitative perspective, the data has been first analysed so as to check whether its token frequency has remained constant in this period, has increased, as has been the case for the *way*-construction in general, or, on the contrary, has dropped as a result of the incorporation into the constructions of new verbs that may have replaced it. From a qualitative viewpoint, the study seeks to provide evidence that may support the view that the meaning of external difficulties or obstacles to overcome is an inherent semantic component of the construction, as originally proposed by Goldberg (1995), or, as already advanced in previous works (Kuno *et al.* 2004; Szczesniak 2013; Luzondo Oyón 2013), just a frequent but non-compulsory reading. Additionally, the study also focuses on the analysis of the expression of abstract motion events in order to ascertain if the behaviour of the *way*-construction with the verb *make* runs parallel to the *way*-construction in general, which is reported to have undergone an increase in the schematicity of the motion component in that, from the original expression of literal movement, has spread to convey abstract motion as well (Israel 1996; Mondorf 2010; Perek 2018).

The paper is organized as follows. After this introduction, Section 2 gives methodological details about the data analysed and the process followed for its compilation and coding. Section 3 provides a brief account of the *way*-construction according to some relevant previous works. In Sections 4, the main findings of the study are discussed: sub-section 4.1. deals with the analysis of the token frequency and the types of movement conveyed by the construction throughout the period analysed; 4.2 delves into the difficulty reading of the construction, commonly regarded as its most defining semantic feature; 4.3 explores the possible connection between the expression of difficult motion and the semantic preference of the construction for a particular semantic class; and 4.4. focuses on the tokens which express abstract motion. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are summarized in Section 5.

## 2. Compilation and coding of the corpus

The data analysed in this study comes from the *The Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) (Davies 2008–) which contains more than 475 million words from the 1820s to 2019. The corpus is made up from texts from five different genres, TV/Movies, Fiction, Magazine, Newspaper, and Non-fiction books. In order to delimit the scope of this preliminary investigation, the Fiction component, which accounts for almost half of the total number of words in the whole corpus, was chosen. By using the search query *MAKE POSS way \_i.*, all the occurrences with any inflectional form of the verb *make* followed by a possessive determiner coreferential with the subject, the noun *way* and a preposition were retrieved, obtaining a total number of 4,468 tokens. The data from the 1820s was not considered in the analysis because its size is remarkably smaller, only 23 instances of the construction, and thus much less representative than that of the later periods. The remaining 4,435 occurrences were then manually analysed to exclude, first, duplicated tokens, as long as they could be detected, together with sentences with unclear interpretations, and second, all the instances where the prepositional phrase is not a directional element. This material comprises instances of two patterns different from the *way*-construction. In the first one, illustrated in (3), the combination of the verb *make*, the locative preposition *in* and the noun *way* with a metaphorical sense results in a phraseological unit which describes the process of advancing in life or becoming successful in a profession or activity. In the second one, which means 'to establish a good relationship or to gain the favour of someone' (OED, n.a. *Way*, N. (1) & *Int.* (1), Sense P1.h.iv), the prepositional phrase contains the head *with* and a noun phrase with a personal reference, as in (4):

- (3) Mind you, it's difficult for a girl to make her way in the city. (1963)
- (4) Usually he made his way with people easily, but this girl held him at a distance (...) (1877)

The final corpus included 4,285 occurrences of the *way*-construction from the 1830s to 2019.<sup>1</sup> The number of tokens for each decade is shown in Table 1. The material was then analysed and classified decade by decade according to the type of motion --literal or abstract, and the kind of subject --human (or animate) or inanimate. The data was also coded for the expression of difficult or indirect movement or overcoming of barriers that the *way*-construction is argued to convey.

Decade	Tokens	Decade	Tokens
1830-1839	140	1930-1939	175
1840-1849	119	1940-1949	150
1850-1859	172	1950-1959	153
1860-1869	155	1960-1969	196
1870-1879	151	1970-1979	256
1880-1889	160	1980-1989	213
1890-1899	226	1990-1999	295
1900-1909	236	2000-2009	445
1910-1919	250	2010-2019	554
1920-1929	239		
TOTAL			4,285

Table 1. Number of tokens in each decade of the corpus

### 3. The *way*-construction in English

Although there are several hypotheses about the date of emergence and historical evolution of the *way*-construction, Perek (2018, 70) argues that this pattern was already established as we know it today by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and its grammatical properties have remained stable since then.<sup>2</sup> Among the different constructions available in English, which vary according to their complexity and abstraction, Goldberg (1995, 199) analyses the modern *way*-construction as an instance of the so-called *argument structure constructions*, and defines its syntactic form as shown in (5), where the verb cannot be stative, the oblique is a directional phrase and the noun *way* together with the bound possessive determiner is a fixed constituent:

- (5) [Subj<sub>i</sub> [V [POSS<sub>i</sub> *way*] [OBL]]]

As regards its meaning, all instances of this construction share the entailment of “[the] motion of the subject referent along the path described by the adverbial” (Perek 2018, 67).

Several reasons have been adduced to describe the *way*-construction as a *construction* in this Construction Grammar's sense. From a syntactic viewpoint, it exhibits unusual structural properties because in many cases the argument structure of the verb is violated. Jackendoff (1990, 211) highlights in this regard the “bizarre behaviour” of verbs which are incompatible with direct objects or PP complements, such as *belch* or *joke*, but nonetheless appear in the *way*-construction with these two elements, as in (6). On the contrary, as Jackendoff (1990, 212) also notes, basically transitive verbs such as *eat* cannot take their prototypical direct objects in this pattern, as (7) shows:

- (6) Sam joked his way into the meeting. (Jackendoff 1990, 211)
- (7) \*We ate hot dogs our way across the U.S. (Jackendoff 1990, 212)

Semantically, the *way*-construction also qualifies as a construction in that its meaning is not compositional: the sense of motion conveyed does not appear to be derived from the semantic combination of the lexical pieces that conform the sentence nor from pragmatic implicatures, but seems to arise from the whole syntactic pattern (Goldberg 1995; Culicover and Jackendoff 2004; Pedersen 2013; Perek 2018).

Israel (1996, 218) distinguishes three usages for the modern *way*-construction: means, manner and incidental activity. The three of them refer to the motion of the subject referent along the path specified by the

<sup>1</sup> Although in many accounts of the *way*-construction, the directional prepositional phrase is regarded as compulsory for a sentence to be classified as such (Marantz 1992; Takao 2000; Mondorf 2010; Fanego 2018), some authors point out that the idea of movement can be conveyed even when this element is not present in the sentence (Israel 1996, Kuno *et al.* 2004, Nakajima 2006). This observation is borne out by some tokens in the corpus such as *She made her way with bent, reluctant steps* (1978), which have not been therefore excluded from the analysis. Their presence is nonetheless extremely marginal: only 31 tokens (0.7% of the total number) occur without an overt directional element.

<sup>2</sup> According to Israel (1996, 221) and Fanego (2018, 685), early usages of the *way*-construction are attested from around the middle of the fourteenth century, although the examples provided by the former do not include the directional component that the latter argues to be compulsory in the construction as we understand it today. In contrast, for Traugott and Trousdale (2013, 84), the emergence of the *way*-construction did not take place until the end of seventeenth century. This date coincides with the one proposed in McColm (2019, 26), where the first instance of the modern construction attested in the corpus analysed dates to 1658.

directional constituent, but, while in the first one the verb denotes the means of achieving the motion, (i.e., the creation of a path) (8), in the second, the verb describes the manner how the motion develops (9), and in the third, the verb refers to an action not directly related to the motion itself but simply simultaneous with it, as in (10):

- (8) Rasselas dug his way out of the Happy Valley.
- (9) The wounded soldiers limped their way across the field.
- (10) Convulsed with laughter, she giggled her way up the stairs. (Israel 1996, 218)

In Goldberg's (1995) classification of *way*-constructions, Israel's means and manner interpretations constitute one single category, labelled 'means', while the term 'manner' corresponds to Israel's incidental activity sense. Goldberg (1995, 204) argues that the means interpretation is the most basic and frequent one and, following Jespersen's (1949) observation that the *POSS way* phrase is a type of *object of result*, contends that this reading implies that "the subject moves despite some external difficulty, or in some indirect way: the path is not already established, but must in some sense be created by the mover". In the manner interpretation, much less common and not accepted by all speakers, the verb simply expresses co-extensive action but there is no implication that a path must be created and, hence, that the motion involves obstacles or difficulty.

The necessary presence of this idea of external difficulty in the dominant means interpretation of the *way*-construction accounts, according to Goldberg (1995: 205), for the unacceptability of monomorphemic motion verbs, or *vanilla motion* verbs as the author calls them, such as *go*, *run*, *move* or *walk* in (11), which do not usually imply any kind of obstacle, difficult or indirect movement. For this reason, only a suitable context where the motion is portrayed as involving some difficulty, as in (12), would make the construction possible:

- (11) \*She walked her way to New York.
- (12) The novice skier walked her way down the ski slope. (Goldberg 1995, 205)

Although this reading of difficulty and effort is widely accepted in later works (Israel 1996; Góralczyk 2001; Michaelis 2005; Hilpert 2014), where it is regarded as an integral semantic component of the construction and, hence, a constraint on its use, several authors have pointed out that it is not a key prerequisite for the *way*-construction to be successful. Kuno *et al.* (2004, 84-6) argues in this regard that the implication of difficulty is secondarily derived from the fact that the distance that the directional phrase describes is perceived to be of a nontrivial nature and that the subject referent moves gradually and in an unusual manner. For instance, in (13), very similar to Goldberg's example in (11), the distance specified by the PP *across the country* is not the ordinary, common distance that someone walks across and, in addition, the movement happens in a gradual and unusual manner since walking is not the way in which people usually cross a country:

- (13) Gandhi walked his way across the country to win democracy for his people. (Kuno *et al.* 2004: 86)

While Kuno *et al.* (2004) do not deny the implication of difficulty but do not see it as intrinsic to the semantics of the construction as Goldberg (1995) does, other corpus-based studies provide examples where this interpretation does not obtain and simply depict situations where motion, both literal and abstract, proceeds without difficulty or effort:

- (14) The bran merrily floated its way to the Mississippi. (Luzondo Oyón 2013, 358)
- (15) [...] and she was transferred from the country theatres to London, where she laughed and danced her way into popularity. (Szczesniak 2013, 165)

In light of this evidence, Szczesniak's (2013, 163) holds the view that "the difficulty arises frequently enough to be taken for a prototypical meaning component of the construction, but is certainly not found in all uses and is not a necessary condition for a use to sound natural and grammatical".<sup>3</sup>

Together with the original expression of literal movement in physical space, where the path or goal of motion is always concrete, the modern *way*-construction has acquired new uses where the situation is metaphorically construed as a motion event that implies an abstract path or goal, (16) (Goldberg 1995; Israel 1996; Martínez Vázquez 1998; Mondorf 2010; Hilpert 2014; Perek 2018; Brunner and Hofmann 2020), or even a temporal distance, (17) (Jackendoff 2002, Kuno *et al.* 2004):

- (16) They talked about uncle Paul having bought his way into the Senate. (Perek 2018, 20)
- (17) Sue sang her way through dinner. (Jackendoff 2002, 174)

According to Israel (1996, 224), in the nineteenth century new verbs depicting social and psychological activities entered the means thread of the construction, which was then also used to express abstract or metaphorical movement. For Perek (2018, 92), these abstract meanings were possibly derived during most of the nineteenth century as metaphorical extensions of concrete uses of frequent verbs, such as *find*, *fight* or *make*. From the late nineteenth century on, new verbs related to abstract ways of reaching a goal, for instance, those in the social interaction group (*chat*, *joke*, *talk*) or in the finance and commerce group (*buy*, *pay*)

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg (1995, 212-14) proposes two additional semantic restrictions on the *way*-construction in its mean interpretation: the movement must be self-propelled --except for *find* and *work*-- (\*The butter melted its way off the turkey), and it cannot be aimless but directed (\*John shoved his way among the crowd). Later corpus-based works have shown nonetheless that both types of motion are possible in the *way*-construction (Kuno *et al.* 2004; Luzondo Oyón 2013; Hilpert 2014).



have been recruited by the *way*-construction to express abstract motion. The semantic expansion of the *way*-construction into the abstract domain has been extensively discussed by Mondorf (2010) who, nonetheless, concludes that the construction is still mainly used to express literal motion.

## 4. Results of the analysis

### 4.1. Token frequency

Goldberg (1995, 206) grants the verb *make* a major status in the *way*-construction as it was the first one to appear in it and remains the most commonly used since then.<sup>4</sup> According to McColm's (2019, 183), who analyses data from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it is, together with *find* and *force*, a central member of the construction in that it is the most commonly attested and has had, therefore, a leading role in its development. Semantically, the verb *make* is also strongly linked to the original meaning of the construction: movement by means of the actual creation of a path (Israel 1996; Traugott and Trousdale 2003).

Figure 1 shows the token frequency of the *way*-construction with *make* in each decade of the section FICTION of COCA from 1830 to 2019, normalized per million words:

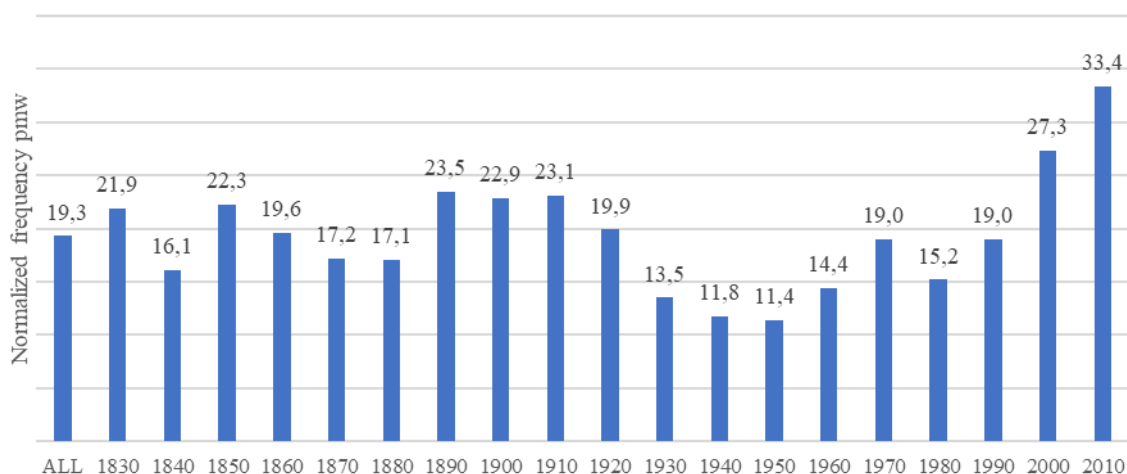


Figure 1. Variation in the token frequency of the *way*-construction with *make* in the corpus

As the chart shows, the *way*-construction with *make* remained fairly constant, with small rises and falls, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1930s to the 1960s it underwent a moderate fall which began to go up again by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the token productivity of the construction shows a clear increasing tendency.

The analysis of the subject referent, human or inanimate, and the nature of the motion expressed has revealed that, most commonly –almost 92% of the tokens, *way*-constructions with the verb *make* describe the physical movement of a human subject. The expression of abstract motion is also possible throughout the whole period analysed, but in a much lesser proportion, only 4%. Human subjects also outnumber inanimate entities when motion is portrayed as abstract or metaphorical. Figure 2 summarizes the distribution of human and inanimate subjects according to whether they undergo literal or abstract movement:

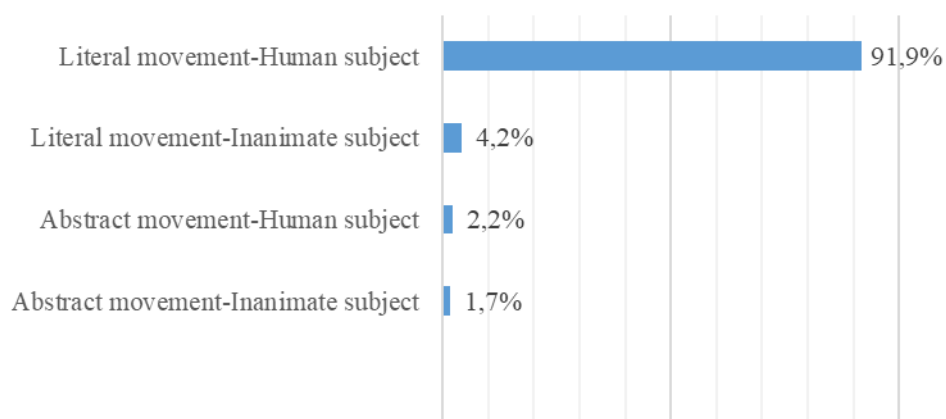


Figure 2. Distribution of motion and subject referent's types in the corpus

<sup>4</sup> Fanego (2018: 683) traces the earliest uses of *make*, also reported in this work to be the most common predicate in the construction, to an OE precursor of the *way*-construction, whereas Traugott and Trousdale (2013: 84) find in EModE times some occurrences of *make* which “appear to be pre-constructionalization CCs that enabled the development of the *way*-construction”. As regards PDE usage, Goldberg (1995: 206) reports that 20% of the tokens in her corpus contains the verb *make*; in Brunner and Hoffmann's (2020) corpus analysis of the *way*-construction in twenty national varieties of English this verb amounts to almost 35% of the total number of instances.

## 4.2. Difficulty reading

Close examination of the corpus has confirmed that the idea of difficult, laborious movement, or obstacles to overcome is a recurring reading conveyed by the *way*-construction, which, in a considerable number of occurrences, “evokes a scenario in which an agent moves along a path which is difficult to navigate” (Hilpert 2014, 37). Notwithstanding the salience of this core meaning, and as already put forward in previous work (González Romero 2023), the analysis has also revealed that it cannot be regarded as a rigid or fixed phenomenon but as a flexible net of different senses that depict the idea of motion conveyed by the construction in a variety of ways, either explicitly or in an implicit manner. In addition, these meanings have remained constant and do not show any significant change throughout the period under study.

The most primary sense of difficult movement due to the need to create a path for motion is amply attested in the corpus with both human and inanimate subjects:

- (18) In some places there seemed be no path at all; and it was necessary for him to make his way by clinging to the roughnesses of the rocks on the steep, sloping side of the mountain, with an immense abyss yawning below. (1854)
- (19) [...] and, what is more, the points of two teeth had made their way through the red and swollen gums. (1885)

The prototypical meaning of difficulty linked to the existence of obstacles to be overcome or barriers that impede the movement is also particularly noticeable in the corpus:

- (20) He had to make his way through the women who already filled the steps of the building, walking carefully so that he didn't step on the children who were playing below. (1993)
- (21) Thor did his best to conceal his limp as he made his way through no-man's land. It was a foreboding world of desolate buildings, barbed wire, cement barriers, armed guards, and spindly olive trees struggling to grow through rubbish-laden piles of rock. (2002)

The construction shows here a remarkable semantic preference for nouns denoting large groups of people, such as *crowd*, *throng* or *mob*, which add a clear sense of laborious movement or even chaotic situations, as in (22). References to wild or dense vegetation that hinders motion as the one depicted in (23) are also frequent:

- (22) As they made their way through the confusing, shifting, gabbling crowd, Sam took hold of Henry's arms. (1947)
- (23) [...] but in the midst of the pine-trees, there so entangled with under-growth, that not even a man, much less a horse, could make his way through them. (1862)

The trouble hampering motion can be additionally found in external natural circumstances such as darkness, wind, fog, rain, storms, snow or ice:

- (24) [...] they made their way to the little door, guided by their sense of feeling, for the night was black as the pitch in the old saying. (1999)
- (25) None could even tell how she had made her way to the deck in the midst of the tempest [...]. (1843)

In another common sense of the *way*-construction, the reading of difficulty and obstacles arises from the nature of the path itself, its shape or its poor conditions:

- (26) Ned began the task of making his way down the almost perpendicular face of the cliff. (1912)
- (27) He made his way up the winding staircase, so narrow that the attendants carrying the emergency cases had to bend the stretcher and patient around the curves. (1971)
- (28) Over almost impassable roads and mosses she made her way on the little ponies of the country, which had to perform a constant steeple-chase over the bogs and chasms. (1883)

In other contexts, the sentence describes a temporal or permanent physical condition of the subject referent which has a direct impact on how motion develops:

- (29) He had been shot through the throat -- somehow he had made his way to this porch, and here he was. (1930)
- (30) She moved with the jerky speed of blind people making their way through a dark universe filled with land mines and booby traps [...]. (1990)

The implication of difficulty is also found when the situation is depicted as dangerous, or when there are references to hampering circumstances involving secrecy or escape:

- (31) To my surprise, unmolested and unafraid, she made her way through streets where no one officer went alone. (1915)
- (32) It was better for him to make his way through the house undetected. Step by step, he crept through the hallway, peering into the rooms flanking the corridor. (2010)

- (33) [...] she had fled into the night without horse or guide and had made her way to freedom. (1980)

Finally, in some occurrences motion can be viewed as difficult because the distance travelled is perceived, as pointed out by Kuno *et al.* (2004), as nontrivial:

- (34) He did not quite see how they had made their way from a children's tea party at Oxford to the South Pacific islands [...]. (1899)

Although the sense of difficult movement or the existence of barriers and obstacles to motion is usually, as in the examples above, openly stated in the construction either in the directional element or in some other constituent in the neighbouring text, sometimes it is only implied and must be inferred from the extralinguistic situation described or from our knowledge of the world. In (35), for instance, the subject referent most likely found obstacles in his way since onlookers crowded the murder site; the token in (36), from the script of the movie *The Birds*, locates the reader in one of the most nail-biting scenes of Hitchcock's classic movie:

- (35) The murder site had acquired more onlookers than a movie premiere. [...] He made his way to the circle of men around the body. (2011)
- (36) The camera moves ahead of the three of them as they silently make their way past the crows once more, Melanie holding Cathy close to her. (1963)

While all the senses mentioned above can be argued to represent different nuances of the general difficulty reading advocated by Goldberg (1995), there are other occurrences in the corpus which do not neatly fit into this meaning as they do not imply difficulty, effort or obstacles but focus instead on the distinct nature of the movement described. Israel (1996, 220) notes in this regard that the construction may refer to winding paths, a feature already advanced by Goldberg (1995, 205), as in (37), while Kuno *et al.* (2004, 85) highlights the gradual nature of the movement and the unusual manner in which it proceeds, as in (38) and (39):

- (37) Don, her assistant, was making his way among the tables, gathering up books and periodicals that needed to be put away. (2001)
- (38) Pointed silver hands made their way around the clock, and the bars of light lengthened across the carpet. (1993)
- (39) On the left the first elements of the 3d Platoon [...] were making their way toward Stein running bent over at the waist. (1960)

From the analysis so far it might be concluded that the idea of difficult movement, with all the shades of meaning described, is an inherent component of the semantics of the *way*-construction with the verb *make*. However, it must be pointed out that there is an appreciable number of occurrences in the corpus that seems to fall outside the widely accepted semantic characterization of the *way*-construction based on this notion. On the one hand, the directional phrase occasionally describes obstacles which do not make motion difficult or laborious, as in (40). Some tokens even lack any sense of difficulty or effort in the movement depicted but, on the contrary, convey a meaning of enjoyment and delight, as (41) shows:

- (40) She kissed her son, and under a huge umbrella made her way through the poppies that starred the grass. (1920)
- (41) Giggling and laughing, they made their way up the short walk to the steps. (1978)

On the other hand, and contrary to Goldberg's (1995, 203) original proposal that "the path (the way) through which motion takes place is not preestablished but rather is *created* by some action of the subject referent", it has not been difficult to find occurrences where the path is already created and also known by the mover so that there is no implication of difficult movement or obstacles:

- (42) As he made his way down the meticulously kept paths, he allowed his mind to wander off down Memory Lane, when he and his family lived in happier times. (2010)
- (43) She turned towards the Champs Elysees and made her way along familiar streets. (1938)

Finally, the corpus contains a significant number of tokens which apparently only convey references to the direction, path, goal or source of the movement by means of the information expressed in the directional phrase, as in (44)-(47). These occurrences lack either explicit or implicit references to obstacles, barriers, difficulty or any other aspect which may depict motion as unusual:

- (44) He stood some minutes watching the ship, and then made his way towards his cottage. (1847)
- (45) Richard watched her making her way along the lakeshore, disappearing and reappearing with the path. (1995)
- (46) He got up and made his way to the bathroom, where he showered, shaved, and got dressed. (2009)
- (47) Chaikin had recently moved into one of these houses, and it was to call on him that I had made my way from down-town. (1917)

As mentioned in Section 3, several studies have already drawn attention to the fact that the implication of difficult movement derived from the existence of obstacles and the need to create a path for motion is not a compulsory requirement in the canonical *way*-construction. On the basis of sentences similar to (42) and (43), where the path is not newly created by the subject referent's motion, Kuno *et al.* (2004, 84-5) conclude that Goldberg's semantic characterization of the path as non-preestablished is not an inherent meaning of the construction. The authors likewise argue that the central notion of external difficulty is not an intrinsic semantic component of the construction either, but contend instead that this frequent reading stems from the fact that the movement is depicted, as in the examples (34), (38) and (39) above, as involving a nontrivial distance or happening in a gradual or unusual way.

In her analysis of the constraints on the *way*-construction, Luzondo Oyón (2013, 358) provides a more refined interpretation of Goldberg's original idea of path creation and proposes that the movement of one entity from one point to another always implies the creation of a figurative self-developed path resulting from the mover's own motion. With the implication of path creation, either real or figurative, always present in the construction, she further argues that the meaning of the instances where the difficulty reading is absent is closely related to the core sense of the construction, that of creating a path. Thus, according to the author, the existence of occurrences which do not convey the implication of difficult movement hindered by obstacles follows from the fact that the semantics of the *way*-construction can encode both the idea of motion by creating a path due to the existence of obstacles, i.e., the prototypical meaning of the construction put forward by Goldberg (1995), or simply the idea of motion of the subject referent, which is conceived of as creating a figurative path as the movement itself proceeds.

The findings of the present corpus analysis suggest that the *way*-construction with the verb *make* mirrors the behaviour of the canonical *way*-construction as defined above: together with the recurring idea of difficulty and effort due to the need to create a path for motion, the presence of obstacles to overcome or the indirect or gradual nature of the movement itself, there are also frequent instances which only convey information about the subject referent's movement and simply focus on the direction, source, goal or path of motion. According to the data and in line with the previous studies mentioned, the reading of difficult movement, although amply attested, cannot be regarded as a compulsory component of the semantics of the *way*-construction with the verb *make*.

The rich variety of semantic notions associated with the construction seems to be reinforced by an additional factor which may explain the broad range of meanings observed in the corpus: the high polysemy and semantic abstractness of the verb *make*. As already noted by Perek (2018, 81), general verbs such as *find* and *make* do not add much content to the sentence apart from the basic idea of motion conveyed by the construction itself. Having such a neutral meaning, the verb *make* is able to express, as the examples above show, a wide diversity of meanings, but, at the same time, its semantic indefiniteness makes it extremely context-dependent. In this respect, the analysis has revealed that the motion component intrinsic to the construction is most frequently enriched by the information contributed by the context. Contextual clues, be them linguistic or extralinguistic, are crucial in this regard since they provide the sentence with its actual meaning and, given the appropriate environment, allow the implications of difficult or laborious movement and overcoming of obstacles become apparent. On the contrary, when nothing in the context hints at these notions, the sentence focuses on expressing plain motion.

Notwithstanding the central role of the recurring idea of difficult movement and all the related notions examined so far in the *way*-construction with the verb *make*, the examination of the corpus also indicates that this reading has gradually become less salient over the years. Figure 3 shows the evolution in the expression of difficult motion in the corpus, which has been split into three time periods of fifty years and one final span of forty years. It clearly reveals a progressive fall throughout the period analysed. This reading is dominant in the middle decades of the 19th century, but becomes less frequent, although still highly prevalent, in the last decades of the 1800s and throughout the 20th century until it reaches its lowest level towards the end of this century and the beginning of the 21st one, when the most common reading is that of plain motion.

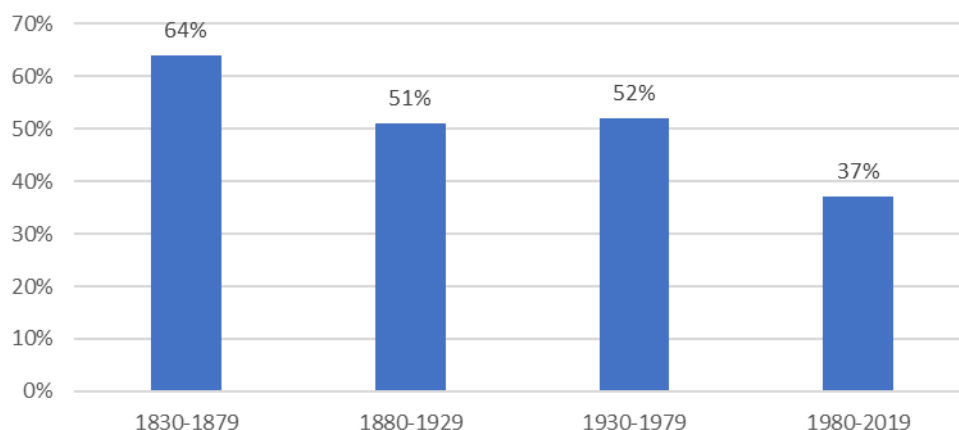


Figure 3. Variation in the expression of difficult motion in the corpus



These results, however, cannot be taken as definite because coding the data according to the notion of difficulty in its broadest sense was not a straightforward task because, although the meanings discussed above are openly stated in a significant number of tokens, in some others it is only implied. Only when the reading of difficult movement was explicit in the sentence or the contextual implications were clear enough, tokens were coded as difficult. Otherwise, they were coded as non-difficult. However, since the expanded context provided by the COHA may have not been big enough to find this sort of implications, tokens coded as non-difficult might have been classified as difficult if a wider context had been available.

### 4.3. Semantic preference of the way-construction with *make*

In spite of the complexity that coding the data according to the idea of difficulty and barriers to movement posed, there is additional quantitative evidence that may support the hypothesis that the way-construction has gradually undergone a semantic change from the common expression of meanings linked to the dominant idea of difficult movement to the more neutral reading of plain motion. As explained in 4.2., the analysis of the corpus has revealed that nouns which refer to large amounts of people gathered close together usually in a disordered way, such as *crowd*, *throng* or *mob*, are particularly frequent when the sentence conveys the core meaning of the way-construction --the existence of physical obstacles that hinders movement. A noticeable number of instances include a noun from this semantic class in the directional phrase, (48), or in the immediate context, (49):

(48) If I hadn't had the Doctor with me I am sure I would never have been able to make my way through the mob packed around the Court-house door. (1922)

(49) As he attempted to make his way towards the Tuileries, he found the streets thronged with crowds of the worst description. (1840)

Less frequent but equally worth remarking is the presence in the directional element of a morphologically related adjective or verb, such as *massed* or *crowding* in (50) and (51):

(50) It was with difficulty that we presently made our way among the massed guests to the point where Zara de Echeveria was receiving her friends. (1909)

(51) I was able to make my way through the excited public crowding the corridors to the stage passageway. (1936)

The observed tendency of the way-construction with *make* to appear with items from this particular semantic field may be regarded as an instance of semantic preference. The concept of semantic preference has attracted a great deal of attention in the field of corpus linguistics since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bednarek 2008; Begagić 2013). Stubbs (2001, 65) defines it as "the relation, not between individual words, but between a lemma or word form and a set of semantically related words". Partington (2004, 150) argues that the phenomena of semantic preference and collocation are closely related in that, according to its semantic preference, "a particular lexical item *x* collocates frequently, not with another item *y*, but with a series of items which belong to a semantic set {*S*}." In this respect, Stubbs (2001) shows that that adjective *large* frequently collocates with words from the semantic group "quantities and sizes" such as *number* or *scale*.

Although Stubbs' (2001) widely accepted definition of semantic preference applies to lemmas, i.e., the lexeme from which the different inflectional forms of a word are derived, and the phenomenon of collocation as defined in Partington (2004) refers to the relationship between lexical items, these two phenomena have been also examined, as Lehecka (2015: 13) notes, in relation to larger units, for instance, patterns, i.e., the syntactic structure frequently associated with a word and which shapes its meaning, in Pattern Grammar (Hunston and Francis 2000), or constructions in collocation analysis (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003, 2009), where the focus is on the attraction or association between certain words or semantic classes and meaningful grammatical structures. For the purpose of the present work, the changes in the degree of semantic preference for items from the semantic set 'large and disordered amounts of people', which clearly point to the obstacles that make motion difficult or laborious, observed in the corpus may be taken as a further indicator of the fact that this reading is not, as far as the verb *make* is concerned, the prototypical meaning of the way-construction anymore, and that it has possibly undergone a semantic change which has made the construction more likely to simply convey plain motion, particularly from the last decades of the 20th century onwards.

In order to analyse the semantic preference of the way-construction for items from this semantic class, I focused on the directional phrase and manually extracted all the instances in the corpus which had been previously classified as conveying some notion of difficult motion and contained a word, usually a noun but sometimes also a morphologically related *-ed* or *-ing* participle, which fitted the definition 'large amounts of people gathered disorderly close together'. The results obtained showed that *crowd* is by far the most common of these items in the directional phrase of the construction, followed by *throng*.<sup>5</sup> Other members of the same semantic set, which will be referred to as the *crowd*-class henceforth, marginally attested are *mob*, *group*, *press*, *jam*, *crush*, *cluster*, *mass*, *horde*, *knot* and *multitude*. Figure 4 quantifies the presence of these words in the whole set of tokens which express literal movement in the four periods examined:

<sup>5</sup> The analysis of the data indicates that 6.4 % of the tokens which refer to difficult physical movement contains a word from the semantic class examined. The noun *crowd* and the corresponding *-ed* and *-ing* forms account for 72% of these occurrences while *throng*, together with its morphologically related form *thronged*, appears in 11% of the sentences.

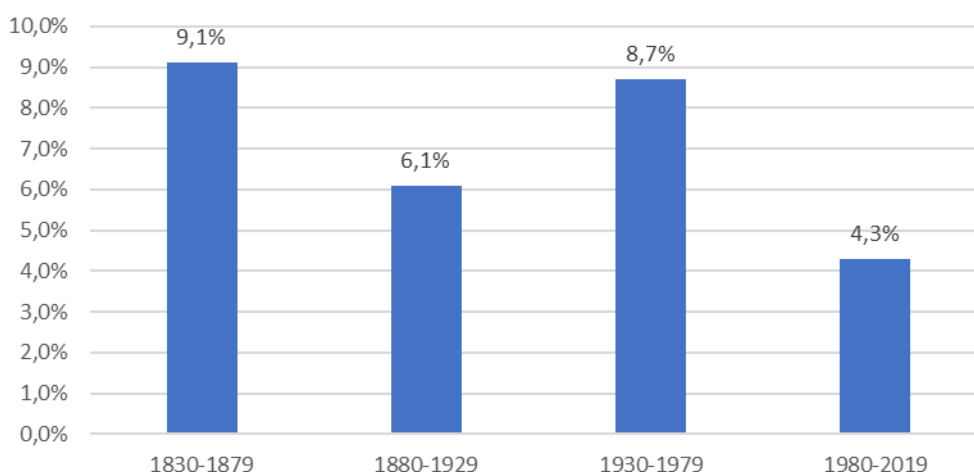


Figure 4. Distribution of tokens including an item from the *crowd*-class in the directional phrase

The comparison between Figures 3 and 4 hints at a possible correlation between the higher or lower tendency of the construction to convey notions related with difficult movement and a stronger or weaker semantic preference for items from this semantic set: the more prevalent this meaning is, the more frequently the construction co-occurs with words from this group. The contrast between the first and the last period is particularly noteworthy in this regard. The years between the 1830s and the 1880s is the time span when the construction exhibits the strongest tendency towards the meaning of difficulty (see Figure 3) and it is also the period when its degree of semantic preference for words such *crowd* or *throng* is higher. On the contrary, in the period covering the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, when the meaning of difficult movement has significantly dropped and that of plain motion has undergone a considerable increase (see Figure 3), the number of tokens which denote large and disordered amounts of people falls to less than half.

The evidence provided by the data from the second and the third periods, which comprise the spans 1880-1929 and 1930-1979 respectively, does not seem to be as conclusive as the one obtained for the first and last periods. Even though in both periods these readings appear in approximately half of the tokens (see Figure 3), in the second one the semantic preference of the construction for the *crowd*-class is as strong as in the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with almost 9 occurrences per 100 tokens, while in the first interval it is less evident, being the number of words from this group slightly lower, only 6%. Although some other factor not directly related to the construction could be responsible for this contrast, these results might be accounted for by examining the behaviour of the construction in specific decades in each period. In this respect, the 1910s and the 1920s show the lowest level in the expression of difficult motion in the corresponding period (44% and 46%, respectively) and, in a parallel way, the frequency of occurrence of items from the semantic class examined is among the lowest in the whole corpus (2.9% in the former and 4.2% in the latter). The opposite phenomenon is found in the data from the 1940s and the 1950s: the reading of difficult motion is present in more than half of the tokens in this decades (57% and 51%, respectively) and the frequency of occurrence of the *crowd*-class reaches the highest level in the entire corpus (12.2% in the 1940s, and 9.2% in the 1950s). The behaviour of the *way*-construction in these decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may be responsible for the uneven results found but, at the same time, seem to support the hypothesis of the connection between the expression of difficult movement and the semantic preference of the construction. According to the data analysed, there is an overall tendency for the construction to co-occur more frequently with an item of this semantic class when the expression of difficult motion is more recurrent. On the contrary, when this meaning becomes less salient, the level of semantic preference of the construction decreases.

#### 4.4. Abstract movement

The abstract sense of the *way*-construction with the verb *make* has been documented from the beginning of the period analysed, but the tokens which convey this meaning represent a tiny amount of the corpus: only 4% of the occurrences describes situations where the subject referent is engaged in an abstract or metaphorical movement. It may be argued that, because of the many new abstract verbs entering the construction since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the verb's strong association with its original path-creation sense, the verb *make* is likely to have developed a strong preference for the expression of physical movement. The construction with *make* follows thus the same trend displayed by the canonical *way*-construction in the dominant means interpretation, which, despite the expansion into the abstract domain observed by Israel (1996) or Perek (2018), is still specialised in conveying concrete motion, as Mordorf (2010) amply attests.

While the general token frequency of the *way*-construction with *make* has remained fairly constant throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the exception of a moderate fall between the 1930s and the 1960s, and it is only in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that a remarkable growing tendency can be observed (see Figure 1), the token frequency of the abstract construction with *make* reaches, as Figure 5 shows, its highest points in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; from then on it remains extremely low with no apparent sign of increase.

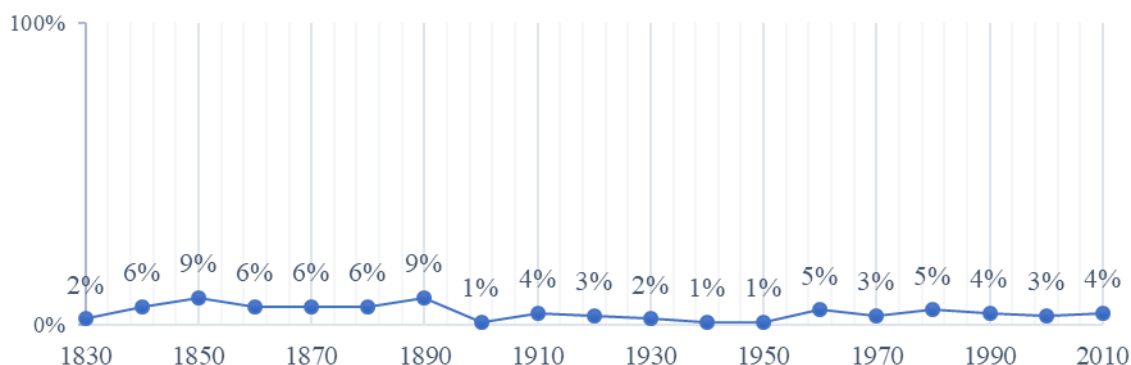


Figure 5. Distribution of way-constructions with abstract meaning in the corpus

The meaning of abstract movement conveyed by the construction can be linked to the nature of the subject referent or to that of the path or goal denoted by the prepositional phrase. This sense is particularly evident when the subject denotes abstract concepts such as ideas, feelings, news, rumours, gossip, etc., and the directional element refers to some aspect of human experience:

- (52) But the truth of a vitally important fact soon makes its way into the understanding of even the most stolid. (1855)

Sometimes, however, the subject referent is a human being, (53), or, less frequently, a concrete entity travelling through or towards an abstract location, (54). In some occurrences, the figurative path traversed is a temporal distance, as in (55):

- (53) [...] and even now, when I have made my way through some of the densest and darkest fogs of experience, I know I should be happy. (1885)
- (54) "Come off!" said Bellingham, in a slang phrase then making its way into merited favor. (1891)
- (55) [...] together they made their way to the beginning of the previous day's disaster. (1912)

Occasionally, the directional phrase refers to a concrete, physical space which, as Szczesniak (2013, 182) points out, stands in a metonymic relationship to an abstraction, with the construction acquiring thus a metaphorical meaning. For instance, reaching people's hearts is conventionally understood as becoming admired by them, as in (56), whereas the subject referent's movement into the high level offices mentioned in (57) means that they found a job there:

- (56) His book must make its way to the hearts of all who think; of all who look at the stars (...). (1860)
- (57) During this time, the most brilliant made their way into the offices of ministers, kings and presidents (...). (1967)

The data analysed has also revealed that way-constructions describing abstract motion tend to display meanings tightly connected with the notion of difficult motion or obstacles found in the canonical way-construction. The corpus contains abundant references to difficult or laborious figurative movement, as in (58), and, as already noted by Goldberg (1995, 205), to the need to overcome social obstacles, as in (59):

- (58) (...) they had stayed quiet, knowing that their puppet had the tools to make his way through the maze of illegalities and do the job they could not do themselves. (1984)
- (59) She had been trying to make her way into the black elite social circles, but had found herself unable to fight her social obstacles. (1880)

The implications of winding or indirect motion and that of gradual movement are also found in the abstract domain. As similarly attested when motion is literal, these meanings may not be conveyed by the directional phrase but by some other constituent in the construction itself, such as the manner adverbial *by contrary trial and error* in (60), or in the neighbouring context, such as the final *-ing* clause in (61):

- (60) Longfaeroe made his way by contrary trial and error to university, where he took a degree in divinity. (1983)
- (61) But a silent sorrow had made its way into her bosom, gnawing there with the noiselessness and certainty of the imperceptible worm. (1830)

In some tokens, the reading of difficulty is, as Kuno *et al.* (2004) defend, secondarily derived from the fact that the distance described by the directional phrases is perceived to be of a nontrivial nature. In (62), the process of reading *Don Quixote* is metaphorically portrayed as a long journey through its seven volumes which took the reader several months to complete:

- (62) I remember distinctly, the spring and summer that I made my way through all of Don Quixote, all seven volumes of it in the set which I had found, a great bargain, in Cork City (...) (1988)

Although still strongly linked to the idea of difficult or indirect movement and obstacles, the abstract *way*-construction may also describe motion events that seem to proceed, as in (63), without impeding circumstances. In (64), the effortless nature of the movement is even emphasized by the manner adverbial *leisurely*:

- (63) (...) the summer advanced, and with it there appeared a new character, making her way into our pages. (1872)
- (64) Students leisurely make their way between classes. (2004)

The process of metaphorical extension reported by earlier works whereby the *way*-construction acquires new abstract meanings derived from the more basic reading of literal motion is also amply attested in the corpus. There are at least four metaphorical senses of the construction with *make* that occur throughout the whole period analysed: that which refers to an idea, opinion or doctrine gaining popularity and becoming thus widespread (65), the one related to the ability to understand or unravel a complex issue (66), the reading where life is seen as a journey (67), and the meaning of becoming successful in the social or professional fields (68), which is by far the most recurring in the whole corpus:

- (65) The movement spread throughout Eastern Massachusetts and made its way to other States. (1918)
- (66) Can you make your way through these contradictions? (1894)
- (67) Vogel -- he had made his way through the tremulous packed streets of this life by fastening his gaze firmly before him. (1971)
- (68) (...) he had industry, determination, intelligence, character, and he made his way to distinction and prosperity (...) (1890)

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two new metaphorical uses of the *way*-construction are attested. In one of them the sentence refers to the material process of eating, as in (69). The second meaning is similar to the one which describes the ability to understand or work out a complex issue mentioned above in that it focuses on a related cognitive skill, that of reading (70):

- (69) Lady Montgomery was making her way through a bunch of grapes and Lady Mary had only peeled her peach (...). (1911)
- (70) Her passion for James Joyce was undergoing a severe test as she made her way through Ithaca. (1969)

The analysis of the data from the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggests that in just twenty years, the *way*-construction with the verb *make* has developed four novel metaphorical uses not attested in the corpus before: being unfaithful in a love relationship (71), praying (72), drinking (73), and being born (74):

- (71) As she learned two months ago, he'd made his way through plenty of other beds during their time together. (2005)
- (72) (...) while she knelt at home, making her way around the rosary in preparation for more praying at church that afternoon. (2003)
- (73) We were making our way through the bottle of Irish Creme she'd set out. (2019)
- (74) Lewis Heart (...) was rushing to the hospital to see his brand-new baby girl make her way into the world. (2013)

The presence of these many and various abstract uses attested throughout the whole period analysed suggests again a possible connection between the verb *make* being, as discussed in 4.2., semantically very general and highly context-dependent and its ability to express a great variety of figurative and metaphorical meanings despite the marginal expression of abstract motion in the corpus. The semantic versatility of the verb *make* becomes evident when two metaphorical meanings occur, although very occasionally, in one single token:

- (75) (...) the sun warming Beck's broad back as he made his way through the front section of the New York Times and his second cup of coffee. (2015)

## 5. Concluding remarks

The results of the corpus analysis carried out in this study has shown that, despite a slight decline around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the token frequency of the *way*-construction with *make* has gradually increased, with a substantial expansion from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It seems, therefore, that the major role of this verb in the construction emphasized in earlier works (Goldberg 1995; Israel 1996; Fanego 2018; Perek 2018; McColm 2019) has not been diminished by the reported arrival of new verbs over the last two centuries.



As regards the notion of difficult movement and overcoming of barriers, the analysis suggests that, contrary to Goldberg's proposal and in line with authors such as Kuno *et al.* (2004), Luzondo Oyón (2013) or Szczesniak (2013), this sense is recurring enough to be considered the prototypical or preferred meaning of the construction, but not an integral and compulsory component of its semantic frame. The results likewise confirm previous observations about the diversity of nuances conveyed by the construction and the need to analyse the meaning of difficulty and obstacles as a flexible and multifaceted phenomenon (González Romero 2023). Additionally, it must be highlighted that, in light of the corpus analysed and as far as the verb *make* is concerned, this reading seems to have become progressively less salient to the point that nowadays the construction is mainly used to simply describe the direction, path, source or goal of motion. In this regard, the changes observed in the semantic preference of the construction for items of the *crowd*-class have been argued to be the result of the gradual loss of this meaning. Future research is undoubtedly needed here since the present analysis has been restricted to American English in fictional writing; other varieties and genres should be examined to achieve a complete view of the behaviour of the construction.

Finally, the expression of abstract motion is only marginally attested in the corpus and the analysis of the data does not provide any evidence of it becoming higher. From this finding and in line with previous studies of the canonical *way*-construction (Mondorf 2010), it can be concluded that the increase in the overall token frequency of *make* in the corpus does not seem to correlate with the construction becoming more inclined to the expression of abstract motion. It must be remarked, however, that in the abstract domain the verb *make* also exhibits a noteworthy ability to express a broad variety of meanings.

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