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Lexical bleaching of the verbal construction *fail to x*: A contrastive corpus-based study

The English verbal construction *fail to x* allows two interpretations: in the first, the verb has the full lexical meaning of not being successful in what you are trying to achieve, whereas in the second, it shows signs of semantic bleaching, and is thus interpreted as a grammaticalized marker of negation. Taking into account the syntactic and semantic properties of the construction *fail to x*, the present analysis examines its distribution in two types of corpora. General corpora (the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English) are used to examine the distribution of both – the non-bleached and bleached – meanings in English. To further elaborate the findings and contrast them on a cross-linguistic level, the parallel English-Slovenian corpus (European Commission's DGT Translation Memory) is used to observe the translations of the construction *fail to x* into Slovenian. The parallel corpus of legislative language demonstrates the impact of register on the use of *fail to x,* and addresses the claims that the bleached *fail* is characteristically found in more formal registers.

Key words: lexical bleaching; *fail to*; negative marker; legislative language.

1. Introduction

As evidenced in English-English dictionaries, the verb *fail* can be interpreted in several ways. Two of the definitions most relevant for this study are presented in this section.

The first meaning of *fail* is to "be unsuccessful in achieving one's goal" (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017). The corresponding entry in the Cambridge Dictionary (2017) is "to not succeed in what you are trying to achieve or are expected to do."

This meaning of the verb is exemplified in (1).

(1) *She failed to reach the Wimbledon Final this year*. (Cambridge Dictionary)

The second meaning of *fail* is to "neglect to do something" (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017) or "to not do something that you should do" (Cambridge Dictionary 2017), which is exemplified in (2).

(2) *Commuter chaos has again failed to materialize*. (Oxford Living Dictionaries)

In (1) the meaning is that of a failed attempt, whereas in (2) the construction *fail to x* functions merely as a marker of negation. Namely, the materialization of the chaos is negated, and no attempt by commuter chaos to materialize is implied. It can be concluded that the verb *fail* in (2) has lost some of its lexical meaning and that it has acquired a grammatical function.[1]

Translated into Slovenian, the above sentences are as follows:

(3) *Lansko leto ji ni uspelo priti v finale Wimbeldona*.
'Last year she did not succeed in reaching the Wimbledon Final.'

(4) a. *Zmešnjava med vožnjo na delo se tudi tokrat ni uresničila*.
'The chaos during the commute has again failed to materialize.'

b. **Zmešnjava med vožnjo na delo so tudi tokrat ni uspela uresničiti*.
'The chaos during the commute has again not succeeded to materialize.'

The translation in (3) relies on the construction *ni uspelo* 'did not succeed' and suggests an attempt made by the agent. The translation in (4a) involves the negation of *uresničila* 'materialize', which correctly presupposes no active attempt by the inanimate noun *zmešnjava* 'chaos'. In contrast, if an active attempt is expressed by using *uspela* 'succeed', the resulting translation in (4b) is not acceptable.

[1] As pointed out by a reviewer, the dictionary definitions for the second interpretation of *fail* are problematic. By including the verb *neglect* and the personal pronoun *you*, the definitions seem to assume that the subject of the sentence is an animate entity capable of making decisions. The example in (2), however, is not in line with such an assumption. It should still be noted that both dictionaries also provide example sentences that correspond to the second meaning and include an animate subject. For instance, in the Cambridge Dictionary, *He failed to arrive on time* is given as an equivalent of *He did not arrive on time*. This is contextually conditioned – the speaker knows that no attempt was made to arrive on time and uses *fail* as an equivalent of *not*. It is unfortunate that the dictionary uses an ambiguous sentence to illustrate this meaning.

This article focuses on the above differences by addressing some of the existing accounts of this phenomenon and by examining the distribution of the two meanings in two monolingual corpora, and in a multilingual, parallel corpus. The corpus-based, contrastive approach is adopted in order to examine the properties of the mentioned verbal construction in English, and to identify the lexico-grammatical structures that Slovenian uses to express the double function of the English construction *fail to x*.

The paper is organized as follows. The subsequent section (2) provides a brief theoretical overview of the issue. Section 3 describes the study, its methodology, the corpora used, and the results. In the last part (4), the results are discussed and the main conclusions are presented.

2. Literature overview

2.1. *Implicative verbs*

In his study, Karttunen (1971a: 352) studies a group of implicative verbs – such as *manage*, *remember*, *bother*, and *get* – that express some "necessary and sufficient condition, '…' which alone determines whether the event described in the complement took place." To demonstrate the behaviour of such verbs, let us consider the examples in (5).

(5) a. *Peter remembered/managed/bothered/got to visit John*.

b. *Peter visited John.*

The sentences with the implicative verbs in (5a) imply the interpretation in (5b). Of course, the sentences are not equivalent in meaning – the sentence in (5b) merely entails the truth of the complement clause in (5a).

Karttunen (1971a: 352) also discusses a subcategory of such verbs, which he terms negative implicatives. The group consists of verbs such as *forget*, *neglect* and *fail,* all of which exhibit the same properties as the previously mentioned implicatives, but with the difference that they also imply negation. The examples in (6) and (7) show that implications such as the one presented above persist in negative contexts,[2] i.e., (6a) implies (6b), and (7a) implies (7b).

[2] With regard to the negative implicative *fail*, Karttunen (1971a: 353) also observes that it is ambiguous, stating that it "would replace either *not do* or *not succeed*," which matches the dictionary definitions presented in the introductory paragraphs of the present paper.

(6) a. *Peter failed to visit John*.

b. *Peter didn't visit John.*

(7) a. *Peter didn't fail to visit John*.

b. *Peter visited John.*

If we compare (6a–b) and (7a–b), we can conclude that the construction *fail to x* produces an entailment in both affirmative and negative sentences, and that it also changes the polarity of the entailment in both types (see Karttunen 2012 for more).

2.2. *The subject of fail to x*

It has been observed that sentences with *fail to x* express not only the entailment of the truth of the complement clause but that they can also include an additional presupposition, i.e., the presupposition of an attempt made by the agent in the subject position of the matrix clause. Givón (1973: 898) illustrates this meaning with the sentence *He failed to solve the problem*, which expresses both negation (i.e., the problem was not solved) and the presupposition of an active attempt (i.e., he tried to solve the problem). As Mackenzie (2008: 58–59) explains, this means that "the subject of *fail* and thereby the syntactic controller of the complement clause must refer to an entity capable of deliberately trying to do something, i.e. an agent."

Based on the above, it can be assumed that any subject represented by an entity capable of making a deliberate attempt will be animate (see also Jackendoff 1978). Since studies on negative implicatives have yet to show the exact relationship between the lexical interpretation of such verbs and the type of animate subject they occur with, it remains unclear whether any type of an animate subject is a candidate for such structures. For instance, according to a basic classification by Quirk (1999: 314–315), animate nouns are personal nouns (this includes male, female, dual, common and collective nouns) and non-personal nouns (common and collective nouns and animals). Personal animate nouns are coreferential with the pronoun *who*, while non-personal pronouns are coreferential with *which*.[3] The issue of animacy in our context is salient since it is well documented that animacy effects play

[3] It is relevant to the subsequent discussion that in this classification institutions are treated as collective nouns – when followed by a singular verb, they should be treated as non-personal animate nouns. Countries, on the other hand, are inanimate as geographical units, animate personal as political units (*she*), and personal/non-personal collective when referring to a team (*France have/has won*). A similar analysis can be extended to Slovenian since Toporišič (2004) explains that the category of animacy refers to human and human-like entities.

a significant role in sentence processing (see, for instance, Szewczyk and Schriefers 2011 or Fauconnier 2011).

Furthermore, since it has been established that "the common progressive aspect verbs typically take a human subject as agent" (Biber et al. 2004: 473), the form *failing to x* is especially relevant for the analysis presented herein. Namely, if the progressive tense is sensitive to animacy (see also Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 167), it can be predicted that any sentence with the finite *failing to x* will include the lexical *fail*.

In contrast, according to Givón, the construction *fail to x* can be considered an equivalent of negation in instances where it does not express the presupposition of active attempt. Consequently, if the subject of *fail* is an inanimate entity that cannot make a deliberate attempt at something, the construction *fail to x* is an equivalent of the negative *not*.

(8) a. *The train failed to arrive.*

b. *The train did not arrive.*

c. **The train attempted to arrive but failed.*

As shown in (8), the sense of (8a) is that of negation, see (8b), and not that of an active attempt by the subject of *fail*, see (8c).

2.3. *Grammaticalization*

Hopper and Closs Traugott (2003: 18) describe grammaticalization as "the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions." In view of this, the construction *fail to x* can be treated as an example of such a process: the lexical verb *fail* has developed into a functional verb that signals the grammatical function of negation.

As further noted by Hopper and Closs Traugott (2003: 6–9), such shifts are not abrupt but rather transitional: on a cline of grammaticality, a content item first becomes a grammatical word, then a clitic, and finally an inflectional affix. The stages closer to content items are referred to as phrasal or periphrastic. They often include changes in meaning and structural properties. Since grammatical words are often seen as more abstract than content words (Eckardt 2011 and 2006), the terms generalization and bleaching are used to describe the change in meaning. The latter term is also used in the present paper.

According to Mackenzie (2008, 2009), in contexts where the construction does not presuppose a deliberate attempt, *fail to x* should be treated as a periphrastic negative,[4] which means that Mackenzie treats the construction as representative of early stages of grammaticalization. With regard to Slovenian, it can be predicted that the instances of the bleached *fail* will be translated with *ne* 'not', which has been established in the literature (Ilc 2008 and Ilc 2006) as a sentence negator in negative concord with negative pronouns (the two negatives are interpreted as a single negation).

2.4. *Corpus findings*

Evidence in support of grammaticalization lies in the described changes in meaning, as well as in some structural properties of the construction *fail to x*. For instance, Mackenzie's corpus-based studies (2008 and 2009) show that the construction can occur with the meteorological *it* and the existential *there*, (9a–b); that the adverbials that it takes as modifiers exhibit scope over the whole construction *fail to x*, (9c); and that the grammaticalized *fail* licenses a negative polarity item, (9d). The examples in (9a-d) are from Mackenzie (2008: 62, 65).

(9) a. *It failed to rain the entire week*. 'meteorological *it*'

b. *There failed to be sufficient interest*. 'existential *there*'

c. *Drinking water frequently fails to meet EC standards*. '*frequently* with scope over *fail to meet*'

d. *I fail to understand Wagner at all*. '*at all* as a negative polarity item'

The periphrastic *fail* is also limited in its distribution – it does not occur with stative verbs, (10a); it shows a preference for telic verbs, (10b); and it does not occur in negative semantic prosody contexts, (10c).

(10) a. **The book failed to mean much*. '*mean* as a stative verb'

b. *The system failed to generate a user*. '*generate a user* – telic meaning'

c. *Both notices failed to comply with the standards*. '*comply with the standards* – positive semantic prosody'

In addition to the findings on the distribution of *fail to x*, Mackenzie (2008 and 2009) also provides information on the frequency of *fail to, fails to, failing to,*

[4] Mackenzie (2008 and 2009) also draws attention to other authors that have arrived to similar conclusions, for instance, Rudanko (1998), as well as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

failed to, and *failure to* in the British National Corpus. He shows that the forms appear mostly in newspaper, academic and non-fiction macroregisters. His examination of the same frequencies in the Time Corpus of American English yields similar conclusions.

The present study employs the above framework to provide further findings on the distribution of *fail to x* in various corpora. The parallel corpus of legislative language used in the present study should also demonstrate the impact of register on the use of *fail to x,* and explore the claim by Mackenzie (2008: 82) that the bleached *fail* is characteristically found in "more sophisticated registers."

3. The study

3.1. *Methodology and corpora*

The study focuses on sentences with the constructions *fail to x*, *fails to x*, *failing to x* and *failed to x*. The examples of these structures in (11) have been extracted from the British National Corpus (henceforth, BNC).

(11) a. *Even with the modest expenditure that is permitted, most candidates* fail to spend *the maximum allowed.* (BNC)

b. … *if a lessee* fails to give *notice, he shall be liable to forfeit to the person* … (BNC)

c. … *and I've even – in the past –* failed to pay *my road tax*. (BNC)

d. *Farming systems are* failing to provide *the increase in productivity*. (BNC)

For the purposes of this study, the empirical data has also been collected from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (henceforth, COCA) and the EU Translation Memory, a corpus made publicly available by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (henceforth, DGT-TM).

The British National Corpus contains 100 million words; the analysed sample was extracted from its written part. The corpus is "designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century" (Davies 2004–). A random sample of 150 sentences was extracted using the Brigham Young University online interface.

COCA contains more than 500 million words; the written part of the corpus was used for the present analysis. The corpus is described as "the only large and bal-

anced corpus of American English" (Davies 2008–). The size of the random sample was 150 sentences as well. The Brigham Young University online interface was used to acquire the sample.

DGT-TM is a multilingual corpus of 57 million words. The sample of 150 sentences was extracted from the English part of the database, and their corresponding Slovenian translations from the Slovenian part. This was achieved via the ELAN IJS online concordancer. DGT-TM differs significantly from BNC and COCA in that it represents not a referential corpus but a specialized, parallel corpus of European Union's legislative documents (Steinberger et al. 2012 and Steinberger et al. 2014).

In all, 450 English sentences containing the observed constructions were extracted from the BNC, COCA and DGT-TM corpora. In addition, 150 Slovenian translations of the English DGT-TM sample sentences were examined. The randomization of the samples was achieved by using the relevant function of the BYU and ELAN IJS online user interfaces. The sentences were analysed quantitatively (frequency of each form, number of different complements) and qualitatively (meaning, types of complements, types of subjects).

3.2. *Research questions*

The following research questions are addressed in the present study.

Research question 1. What is the distribution of bleached/lexical *fail* and its inflected forms in BNC, COCA and DGT-TM? Does the observed distribution in the random sample reflect the results of previous studies?

Research question 2. How varied are the verbs complementing the construction *fail to* in BNC, COCA and DGT-TM?

Research question 3. What types of subjects can be found in sentences with the lexical *fail*? And, what types of subjects can be identified in sentences with the bleached *fail*?

Research question 4. Do the results reflect the difference in the type of corpora used in the study?

3.3. *Results*

3.3.1. *Frequencies*

Figure 1 shows the frequencies for *fail to x*, *fails to x*, *failed to x* and *failing to x* in BNC, COCA and DGT-TM random samples.

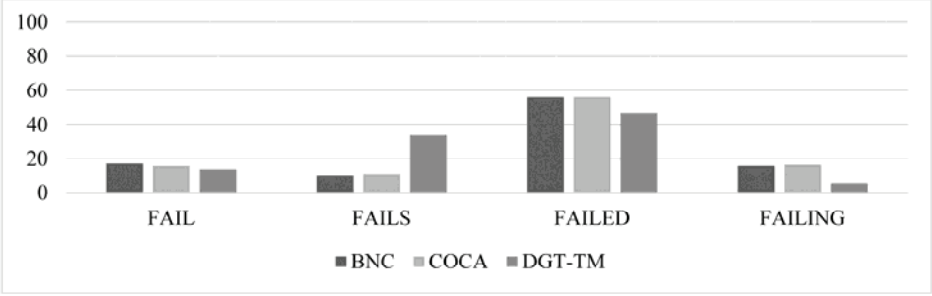

Figure 1: Frequencies for the observed forms across corpora.

Figure 1 shows that the form *failed to x* is the most frequent in the three corpora. In addition, it can be observed that the data sets in the balanced corpora (BNC and COCA) exhibit similar properties, whereas the DGT-TM corpus contains a noticeably higher number of sentences with the form *fails to x*.

In addition, it has been established that the distribution of the forms in the BNC and COCA random samples is in agreement with the findings presented by Mackenzie (2008 and 2009). The correlation is very high: 0.99.

3.3.2. *Bleached* fail to x *and lexical* fail to x

Figure 2 shows the frequency (in percentage) of the bleached *fail* and the frequency of the lexical *fail* in BNC, COCA and DGT-TM.

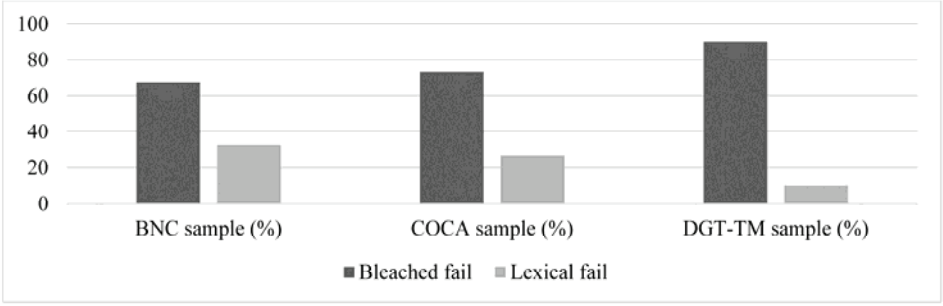

Figure 2: The bleached *fail* and the lexical *fail* across corpora.

The chart above shows that the prevailing sense of *fail* is the bleached one. In BNC and COCA the frequency for this meaning is at 67 and 73 percent, respectively. The DGT-TM sample, however, shows a substantial preference for the bleached meaning: 90 percent of the sentences in this sample have been categorized as such.

The bleached *fail* occurs in sentences such as the following, (12).

(12) a. *Ondomethacin '...' failed to inhibit chemiluminescence production by the inflamed colonic mucosa* (Fig 7). (BNC)

b. *He said the film failed to capture the "love and justice of the world that Gabeira and his friends belonged to"* … (COCA)

c. *... if the conditions set forth in paragraph 8.1 are not complied with or if the audible warning device fails to pass the checks referred to in paragraph 8.2 above.* (DGT-TM)

The lexical *fail* can be found in sentences such as the ones illustrated in (13).

(13) a. *Hardy, who has twice failed to win the European title, can feel somewhat fortunate to be matched with the International Boxing Federation champion* … (BNC)

b. *Hitler's early struggles as an artist are well known: the young, mediocre artist from Braunau had tried and failed to enter the Viennese artistic establishment* … (COCA)

c. *One interested party also claimed that the Commission had failed to show that the sample remained representative after the withdrawal of the Polish producer* … (DGT-TM)

It is noteworthy that the matrix subjects in (12) are inanimate, whereas the ones in (13) are animate. These types of subjects are further addressed in the following section.

3.3.3. *Verbs complementing the construction* fail to x

The random samples of 150 sentences per corpus were also analysed with regard to the variety of the complements following the discussed construction. Figure 3 shows the number of different verbs following *fail to x*, *fails to x*, *failed to x* and *failing to x*. The last group of bars in the chart (marked with the asterisk) represents the combined data for all forms.

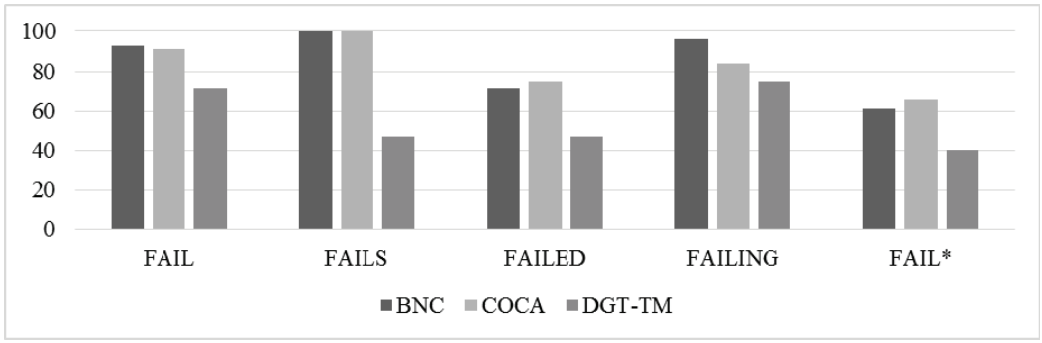

Figure 3: The variety of complements (in percentages *per* form)

A more detailed examination of the complements across all the forms (see the last set of bars in the chart) shows the following.

In the BNC sample of 150 sentences, 92 different complementing verbs occur (61 percent). Twenty-six appear more than once. Among the most frequent are *make* (7 occurrences), *win* (5), *do* (5), and *respond* (4). The verbs used are dynamic and express activities with an end-point: *to make a mark*, *to win the title*, *to do so* (substituting for other verbs), and *to respond to vaccine*.

The COCA sample is similar: 99 different verbs occur in the 150-sentence sample (66 percent). Twenty-eight appear more than once. The most frequent are *do* (6 occurrences), *make* (6), *meet* (6), and *recognize* (5). The verbs are dynamic and telic: *to do good, to make secure, to meet the quotas, to recognize the value*.

The variety of verbal complements is smaller in the DGT-TM sample. 60 different verbs are used in 150 sentences (40 percent), 20 of which appear more than once. Among the most frequent are *comply* (18 occurrences), *meet* (13), *provide* (13), and *fulfil* (12). The following are some common collocations: *comply with the undertakings*, *meet the standards*, *provide documentation*, and *fulfil conditions*.

The observed verbal complements are dynamic and telic. All sentences in the samples express neutral or positive semantic prosody.

3.3.4. *Subjects in sentences with* fail to x

Figure 4 presents the analysis of matrix subjects in the corpora samples. The basic division is into the groups of animate and inanimate subjects. The third bar in each of the three samples pertains to the subgroup of collective animate subjects – this set has been included in the chart since it highlights a relevant characteristic of the

DGT-TM sample: the high frequency of collective animate subjects.

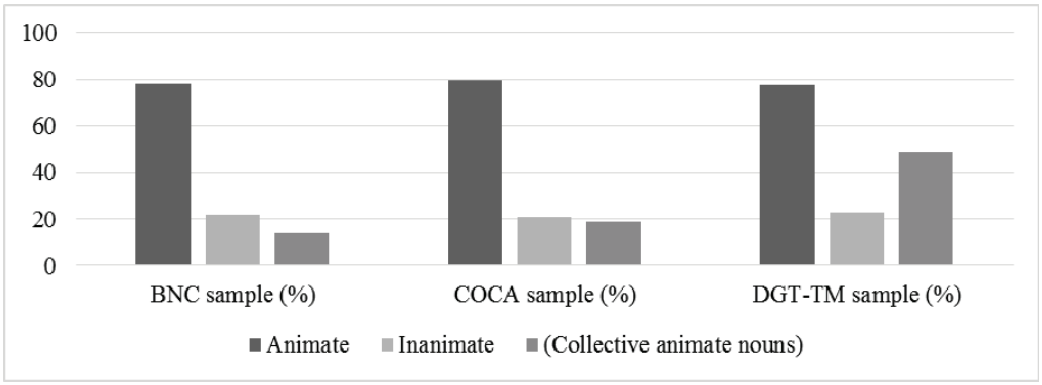

Figure 4: (Collective) animate and inanimate subjects in matrix clauses.

The distribution of animate and inanimate subjects in the three corpora is very similar. The subjects are predominantly animate: 78 percent in BNC, 79 in COCA, and 77 in DGT-TM.

(14) … *his successors failed to diminish the fueros of the Basque Provinces* … (BNC)

(15) *What Kyle failed to grasp was what he supposedly understood*. (COCA)

(16) … *exporting producer and its trading company failed to demonstrate*… (DGT-TM, English)

Nevertheless, a closer scrutiny of the samples reveals a significant difference between animate subjects across corpora: in BNC and COCA, respectively, only 14 and 19 percent of the subjects are collective, whereas in DGT-TM this percentage is noticeably higher – 49 percent of the matrix subjects are collective nouns. Such subjects include *Member State*, *company*, *DaimlerChrysler*, *Germany*, and the like.

In the example in (17a), a company is placed in the position of the agentive subject. The parallel translation in (17b) supports this interpretation with the translation *ni uspelo izvesti* 'not succeed to complete' – we can observe that the subject has been interpreted by the translator as an entity capable of deliberate attempts.

(17) a. *Since KH failed to achieve the required turnaround* … (DGT-TM, English)

b. *Ker družbi KH ni uspelo izvesti '...' zahtevanega preobrata* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)

'Since the company KH did not succeed to complete the required turnaround'

Inanimate subjects are less frequent: they represent 22, 21 and 23 percent of the subjects in BNC, COCA and DGT-TM, respectively. Three such examples are given in (18–20); all contain the bleached *fail*.

(18) *However, the 'top title' promotion failed to excite booksellers*. (BNC)

(19) *The meeting would often fail to take place*. (COCA)

(20) a. … *any project failing to achieve the threshold marks will be rejected* (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *bodo zavrnjeni vsi predlogi, ki ne bodo dosegli praga*. (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'all proposals will be rejected that do not achieve the threshold'

3.3.5. *(In)animate subjects with bleached/lexical* fail

Figure 5 presents the relationship between inanimate and animate subjects and the two meanings of the verb *fail* in BNC, COCA, and DGT-TM.

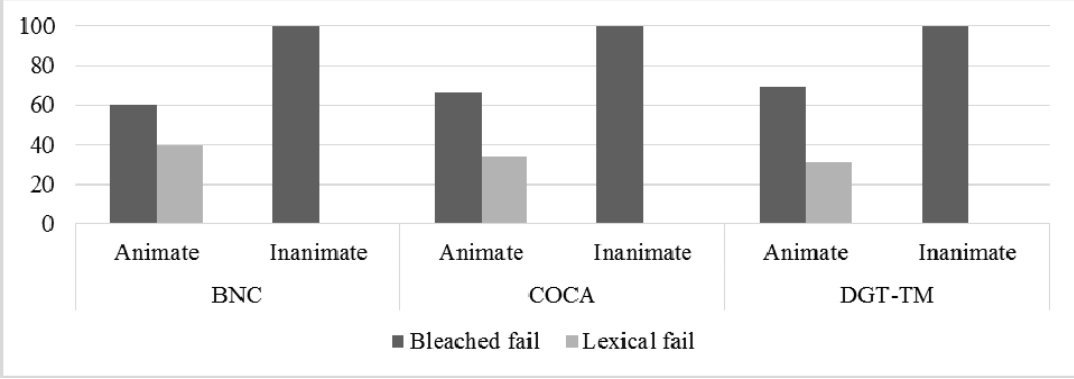

Figure 5: (In)animate subjects and the bleached/lexical *fail* in BNC, COCA, and DGT-TM.

The above figure shows that the sentences with animate subjects contain either the bleached fail or the lexical fail. As already noted above, in most sentences the bleached interpretation is more common. In contrast, in sentences with an inanimate subject, the verb *fail* is understood in its bleached sense exclusively.

3.3.6. *The form* failing to x *in progressive tenses*

The analysis of corpus data shows that the form *failing to x* used in the progressive tense is relatively rare. Only 17 percent of the sentences with *failing* from BNC use the verb in its finite form. The analogous percentages in COCA and DGT-TM are 12 and 13, respectively. Other sentences with *failing* contain non-finite structures, mostly gerunds.

Additional scrutiny of the sentences demonstrates that *failing* in progressive tenses collocates with animate (including collective) subjects. They may contain the bleached or the lexical *fail*.

In sentence (21) the past progressive tense is used after a collective subject that refers to animate, human agent(s). The interpretation of *fail* is lexical since the context suggests failed attempts.

(21) … *schools were failing to hone their pupil's political critical faculties* … (BNC)

Sentence (22) is taken from COCA and it contains an animate, human subject followed by *fail* in the past progressive. The interpretation of *fail* here is lexical as it can be assumed that the person represented by the pronoun *he* made several attempts at trying to grasp something.

(22) *What was he failing to grasp that his student obviously perceived?* (COCA)

Finally, the single example from DGT-TM in (23a) contains a human (collective) subject; its translation in (23b) shows that the verb *fail* is interpreted as bleached. The meaning of the progressive form is conveyed in Slovenian using the imperfective verb *izpolnjuje* 'comply'.

(23) a. … *an issuer, or a holder of shares or other financial instruments, or a person or entity '...' is failing to comply with its obligations* (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *izdajatelj, imetnik delnic ali drugih finančnih instrumentov ali fizična ali pravno oseba '...' ne izpolnjuje svojih obveznosti* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'an issuer, a holder of shares of other financial instruments or a person or entity '…' does not comply with its obligations'

3.3.7. *DGT-TM: Slovenian equivalents*

The analysis of the Slovenian translations in the DGT-TM corpus reveals that in 90 percent of the cases, the construction *fail to x* is used in its bleached sense. The Slovenian translations in these sentences contain the structure with the negative word followed by the translation of the complement verb: *ne/ni x* 'not x', see (24).

(24) a. … *if Member States fail to comply with the conditions*… (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *če države članice ne spoštujejo pogojev* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'… if Member states do not comply with the conditions …'

An interesting example of an extended translation of the bleached meaning is presented in (25).

(25) a. … *if the Commission's consultations of the exporting countries concerned fail to yield a satisfactory solution* … (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *če na podlagi posvetovanj Komisije z organi oblasti zadevnih držav izvoznic ni mogoče najti primerne rešitve* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'if on the basis of consultations of the Commission with the authorities of the relevant exporting countries it is not possible to find a satisfactory solution'

The added modal meaning in (25b) may be a result of the translator having difficulties with the translation of *yield* in this context.

Fifteen sentences (10 percent of the DGT-TM sample) have been interpreted as containing the lexical *fail*, which is evidenced in the Slovenian translations: the structure *ni uspelo x* 'did not succeed to x' appears when the full lexical sense of the verb is present. Examples of sentences with animate subjects and the lexical *fail* are given in (26a) and (27a). (26b) and (27b) are the parallel translations in Slovenian.

(26) a. *Those pairs that fail to mate should be evaluated* … (DGT-TM, English)

b. *Tiste pare, ki se ne uspejo spariti, je treba preučiti* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'Those pairs that do not succeed to mate should be examined …'

(27) a. … *operators using the GNA network via BBned will fail to attract enough customers*. (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *operaterjem, ki uporabljajo omrežje podjetja GNA prek družbe BBned, ne bo uspelo pritegniti dovolj strank.* (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'operators that use the network of the GNA enterprise via the company BBned will not succeed to attract enough customers'

Other examples translated in this fashion contain animate subjects such as *company, Commission, producers, Member State, economic operator,* and *authorities*.

Only one of the sentences that were translated with the Slovenian structure *ni uspelo x* 'did not succeed to x' contains a subject that could have been classified as an inanimate noun, (28).

(28) a. … *shortcomings in financial supervision which has failed to anticipate adverse macro-prudential developments* … (DGT-TM, English)

b. … *pomanjkljivosti na področju finančnega nadzora, ki ni uspel predvideti negativnega makrobonitetnega razvoja* … (DGT-TM, Slovenian)
'shortcomings in the area of financial supervision, which has failed to anticipate the negative macro-prudential development …'

It can be argued that *financial supervision* in (28) represents an institution or a group of people performing this activity. In such a case, the sentence should be classified as one containing an animate subject, thus licensing the interpretation with the lexical *fail*. This seems to be the case here since the Slovenian translation *ni uspel* 'did not succeed' suggests an attempt made be the agent. Nevertheless, the translation adds to the confusion by extending the source text with the noun *področje* 'the field/area', which would typically signal an inanimate subject.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of corpus data confirms the existence of the two presented meanings of the construction *fail to x*. The verb can function as a full lexical verb expressing the idea of deliberate but unsuccessful attempt, or as a grammaticalized verb expressing periphrastic negation. The full lexical interpretation of the construction *fail to x* is possible with animate subjects capable of deliberate actions/attempts, whereas the bleached *fail* occurs with inanimate subjects. The lexical *fail* is translated into Slovenian as *ne uspeti* 'to not succeed', whereas the bleached *fail* is translated with the negative word *ne* 'not'. Overall, the results for both English and Slovenian demonstrate a strong preference of language users towards the bleached interpretation, which also correlates with the prevalent number of inanimate subjects in sentences with *fail*.

The distribution of the forms *fail to x*, *fails to x*, *failed to x* and *failing to x* is highly uniform in BNC and COCA with *failed to x* being the most frequent form (56 percent of sentences in both corpora). The distribution of these forms in the BNC and COCA random samples is in agreement with the results presented in Mackenzie (2008 and 2009); the correlation is very high at 0.99. The high agreement in distribution also suggests that random sampling provided through the BYU and ELAN IJS online interfaces was successful.

The distribution of the forms *fail to x*, *fails to x*, *failed to x* and *failing to x* exhibited in the DGT-TM corpus is different from the one in BNC and COCA. While the prevailing form in this corpus is still the past tense one (46.7 percent), the form *fails to x* also stands out since it is present in 34 percent of the DGT-TM sample sentences: the frequencies in BNC and COCA are 10.7 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively. Further scrutiny of these sentences shows that the variation in the distribution of the forms in the three corpora can be accounted for if we consider the type of language represented in DGT-TM. Since it is a corpus of legislative language, many of the sentences that contain the verb in the third person singular present tense form are conditionals specifying various requirements of the EU legislation (for instance, *If the Member State fails to respond to the Commission request* …).

Furthermore, the analysis of the full lexical *fail* and the bleached *fail*, indicates that the periphrastic negative is the prevailing meaning. Once again, the data from the BNC and COCA corpora is similar (67 and 73 percent, respectively), while the random sample from DGT-TM exhibits distinct properties: 90 percent of the sentences contain the bleached *fail*, which is reflected in the parallel Slovenian translations that use negation to express the same meaning. The finding suggests that the use of the bleached *fail* is significantly dependent on the register. In legal language the construction *fail to x* is used almost exclusively in its bleached meaning, as a marker of negation.

The particularities of the DGT-TM sample are also evident in our examination of the complements to verb *fail*. While the variety of the verbal complements is similarly high in the BNC and COCA samples (61 and 66 percent, respectively), the DGT-TM sample exhibits much less variety (40 percent). The four most frequent verbs in DGT-TM (*comply*, *meet*, *provide*, and *fulfil*) occur in 56 of the sampled sentences. Given the nature of these verbs, it can be concluded that this, too, is related to the legal language of the corpus. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the verbs complementing *fail* are dynamic and telic, which confirms the previous findings by Mackenzie (2008 and 2009). An interesting exception to this observa-

tion is the sentence with the finite form of *failing to comply* in DGT-TM (see 3.3.6.), which was parsed as the bleached *fail* in the Slovenian translation but it was also translated with an imperfective form of *comply* to reflect the use of the progressive in English.

It has been previously established that the full lexical meaning of *fail* requires a human subject because only such subjects can act as agents capable of deliberate actions. This study refines this claim by providing a more detailed examination of the types of subjects appearing with *fail*. It shows that collective animate nouns are frequently in this position, especially in legal language. Even though the number of animate subjects BNC, COCA and DGT-TM is very similar (78, 79 and 77 percent, respectively), it can be concluded that they are not of the same type. In BNC and COCA 14 and 19 percent of subjects are collective nouns, whereas in DGT-TM this percentage is noticeably higher – 49 percent of animate subjects are collective nouns. The finding is predictable since legal language generally includes a number of sentences with institutions and companies as subjects.

The corpus data also supports the claim that progressive tenses are sensitive to the agentive subjects (Huddleston and Pulum 2002 and Biber et al. 2004). The findings illustrate that the finite form *failing to x* indeed patterns with such subjects, and that it can appear with both the lexical and the bleached *fail*. In addition, the data demonstrates that the aspectual value of the progressive in English can be rendered in Slovenian by using an imperfective verb.

The described similarities between the data from BNC and COCA, as well as the distinctive properties of the DGT-TM sample, confirm Mackenzie's suggestion (2008: 82) that "the conclusion seems warranted that the periphrastic negative *fail to* is predominantly encountered in more sophisticated registers and that is differs from regular negation not only in its semantic scope '…' but also in its stylistic value."

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DESEMANTIZACIJA GLAGOLSKE KONSTRUKCIJE *FAIL TO X*: KONTRASTIVNO KORPUSNO ISTRAŽIVANJE

Engleska glagolska konstrukcija *fail to x* može biti protumačena na dva načina: prema prvom glagol nosi puno leksičko značenje ne uspijevanja u onome što se pokušava učiniti, dok prema drugom pokazuje znakove desemantizacije te se smatra gramatikaliziranim niječnim obilježivačem. Uzimajući u obzir sintaktička i semantička svojstva konstrukcije *fail to x*, ovo istraživanje ispituje njezinu distribuciju u dvjema vrstama korpusa. Za analizu distribucije obaju tipova u engleskome – s punim leksičkim značenjem i desemantiziranog – korišteni su opći korpusi (Britanski nacionalni korpus 'BNC' i Korpus suvremenog američkog engleskog 'CoCA'). Za daljnju razradu dobivenih rezultata i njihovu usporedbu na međujezičnoj razini korišten je usporedni englesko-slovenski korpus (DGT Prijevodna memorija Europske komisije) kako bi se istražili prijevodi konstrukcije *fail to x* na slovenski. Usporedni korpus jezika pravne struke pokazuje utjecaj registra na uporabu konstrukcije *fail to x* te podupire tvrdnje da je desemantizirani glagol fail uobičajeno prisutan u formalnijim registrima.

Ključne riječi: desemantizacija; *fail to*; niječni obilježivač; jezik pravne struke.