

The get-unit in Corpora of Spontaneous and Non-spontaneous Mediated Language: from Syntactic Versatility to Semantic and Pragmatic Similarity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Several interesting observations have been made about the multiple facets of the verb *get*. However, interest has mainly been focused on the degree of difference between structures such as the *get passive* and the *be passive* (cf. Hatcher 1949, Gee 1974, Standwell 1981, Haegeman 1985, Collins 1996, Rühlemann 2007, *inter alia*). Less frequently, comparative studies between *get* and other verbs like *have* (cf. Kimball 1973, Pizzini 1975, Johansson and Oksefjell 1996, Gilquin 2003), *give* (cf. Cattel 1984), *become* (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1991), *be* and *keep* (cf. Johansson and Oksefjell 1996) have been performed in order to investigate some specific features of *get*. Little attention seems to have been paid to what this study calls the *get-unit*, namely, the framework determined by *get* and the *environment* in which it occurs. The present paper explores the nature of this *get-unit* in American English, with particular regard to the functions it performs in spoken language, both spontaneous and non-spontaneous.

The primary aim is to demonstrate that, despite its syntactic versatility (cf. also Quirk *et al.* 1991 and Biber *et al.* 1999), *get* can be depicted semantically and pragmatically as a general *result marker* and as mainly displaying a *negative semantic prosody* (cf. Louw 1993, Stubbs 2001, Sinclair 2004), on the basis of the resultative quality of the sentences in which it locates, and the negative contexts in which it has a propensity to occur. Secondly, the paper intends to provide an explana-

tion for these semantic and pragmatic similarities. Accordingly, two interrelated and complementary meanings on which the semantics of the *get-sentence* may exclusively depend are here suggested: the *core* and the *peripheral meaning* of the *get-unit*. This underlying theory, which originates from Lindstromberg's (1991) claim that *get* should not be seen as "polysemic in the common sense of the term" but "as having different shades [...] of meaning which stand in a non-complex, semantically motivated relation to each other" (Lindstromberg 1991:285) and Johansson and Oksefjell's (1996:73) intuition that "despite the variety in syntax and semantic content, there appears to be a prototype to which all constructions conform more or less closely", reflects a tradition which does not perceive lexis and grammar separately, but rather interactively and complementarily (cf. Firth 1957a, 1957b; Sinclair 1991, 2003, 2004; Halliday 2003, 2004). *Get* plus the environment in which it occurs (or, in Hunston and Francis' 1999 terminology, plus its *complementation patterns*) are, indeed, perceived here as a *unit of meaning* (cf. Sinclair 1996, 1998, 2004).

Thirdly, the paper investigates the extent to which spontaneous and non-spontaneous conversation differ with particular regard to the features and functions of the *get-unit*. To do so, movie conversation is analyzed as an example of non-spontaneous conversation, both because it is written-to-be-spoken (cf. Gregory 1967, Nencioni 1976, Taylor 1999, Rossi 2003, Pavesi 2005) and because it is mediated, i.e. it derives from a script and it is broadcasted by a televised medium (cf. Ulrych & Anselmi 2008).

The analyses, which are based on authentic data retrieved from the US spoken sub-corpus of the *Bank of English* (henceforth USBoE; i.e. about 30 million words) and on an American movie corpus made up of 6 manually transcribed scripts (henceforth AMC6; i.e. about 60,000 words)¹, are conducted according to both corpus-based and corpus-driven methodologies (cf. Tognini-Bonelli 2001). Due to the large number of occurrences of *get* in the USBoE subcorpus (i.e. 35,860) and to the impossibility of manually checking all of them in context, the corpus-based approach is followed to verify the presence of the patterns of *get* which are usually described in reference grammars (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1991 and Biber *et al.* 1999) in American conversation, whereas the corpus-driven approach is employed to explore the functions that the *get-unit* performs in the data retrieved from the corpora. More specifically, the USBoE corpus is investigated according to sample selection criteria (cf. Sinclair 1999 and Hunston 2002), while the AMC6 corpus is investigated exhaustively. This choice depended on the exceedingly large size of the former compared to the manageable size of the latter; numbers are normalized to 100% so as to allow comparability.

Conceptually, the present account is divided into two parts: Section 2 offers a syntactic description of the types of the *get-sentences* present in spoken American English, whereas Section 3 is a tentative explanation of their semantics and pragmatics. The descriptive section gives an account of the syntax of all the possible clause patterns and classes of verb complementation² in which *get* locates as a full and as an auxiliary-like verb (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1991 and Biber *et al.* 1999); the explanatory section, instead, illustrates the resultative character of what I call the *result marker get* by hypothesizing two basic meanings responsible for the seman-

tics of the *get-sentence* (i.e. the *core* and the *peripheral meaning* of the *get-unit*). Section 3 also highlights the tendency of *get* to occur within negative contexts, and the causative mark it acquires when preceding a noun phrase (henceforth NP).

2. SYNTACTIC VERSATILITY

The spoken data from the USBoE and the AMC6 corpora qualitatively demonstrate that the *get-sentence* is extremely variable in syntax. In particular, syntactic flexibility is manifested in the multiplicity of the uses of *get* both as a full and as an auxiliary-like verb. As examples 1-7 illustrate, indeed, the full verb *get* can locate in all the seven clause types present in the English language posited by Quirk *et al.* (1991) (cf. also Biber *et al.* 1999³): SVC and SVA types (i.e. copular or linking complementation); SVO, SVOO, SVOC, and SVOA types (i.e. transitive complementation); and SV types (i.e. intransitive complementation).

1. (S)VC⁴:

(a) A lot of times in the early morning, like if I'm on a train or something, I **get** nauseous; I **get dizzy**. If I keep my hands up, it seems like I **get real dizzy**. [USBoE]

(b) I may not be tough, but, damn it, I can **get good** and mad! Come on! [AMC6]

2. (S)VA:

(a) There are only a few ways to **get to the bottom of the Los Angeles River**, either through a hole in the fence or by driving or walking down one of the official ramps or tunnels. Just give me all the details. [USBoE]

(b) And I'll **get to the bottom of it**. All right? [AMC6]

3. (S)VO:

(a) Just a few blocks away on West 44th Street, there's a place where the homeless can **get attention** not available anywhere else in this often harsh city. [USBoE]

(b) Well, I kind of fudged my resume a little bit to **get that job**. [AMC6]

4. (S)V_{OO}:

(a) I remember, you know, I helped get him a job. [USBoE]

(b) Listen, you gotta get a message to the colonel for me. [AMC6]

5. (S)V_{OC}:

(a) they're moving the 'Simpsons' up against 'Cosby,' but they're going to be running reruns until mid-October because that's how long it will take to get their shows ready, and there won't actually be any new 'Cosby Show' episodes until the end of September. [USBoE]

(b) Get your foot long and a bag of nuts. [AMC6]

6. (S)V_{OA}:

(a) Do you think it's possible to get him to the table at all? [USBoE]

(b) Yes. And you get us to safe place with them in Atlanta, thank God. [AMC6]

7. (S)V [?'s]:

(a) Why don't you get away. **Get away** from me. [USBoE]

(b) Everybody down! Get down! [AMC6]

Similarly, the auxiliary-like *get* can occur in six out of eight catenative structures (cf. Palmer 1988, Huddleston and Pullum 2002), both simple (as in examples 8, 10, and 12) and complex⁶ (as in examples 9, 11, and 13). The only structures with which it does not occur are the simple and complex bare infinitives. It is worth noting, however, that this lack does not seem to have repercussions on the versatile nature of *get* in that, as Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1244) maintain, "only a relatively small number of catenatives take bare infinitivals". Consequently, catenative *get* can still be considered versatile in its nature by covering the most common categories of catenative verbs.

8. **GET + PAST PARTICIPLE:**

(a) When we got on the Internet, on CNN, we saw the second tower get hit. [USBoE]

(b) You get robbed or something. [AMC6]

9. **GET + O + PAST PARTICIPLE:**

(a) She hopes to contact more authors in the future, and get them involved in the project as well. [USBoE]

(b) I'm gonna get my car washed. [AMC6]

10. **GET + PRESENT PARTICIPLE:**

(a) Well, if the Braves don't get moving, they're going to run out of second chances. [USBoE]

(b) Should we get going? [AMC6]

11. **GET + O + PRESENT PARTICIPLE:**

(a) That's pretty tough when they're bored, they're tired, they don't like the book they read to begin with, and you want to get a discussion going with 20 15-year-olds. [USBoE]

(b) Let's get this going. [AMC6]

12. **GET + INFINITIVE:**

(a) Most Americans never get to rest, and many of us have even lost the ability to relax. [USBoE]

(b) But in return they get to be a lot thinner. [AMC6]

13. **GET + O + INFINITIVE:**

(a) Foreign Minister Levy was unable to **get Secretary Baker** to approve the loan guarantees yesterday. [USBoE]

(b) I don't think I can **get her to do it**. [AMC6]

Another mark of *get* versatility is encountered in its passive forms: even though, by way of simplification, the *get passive* is included here in the more generic category of *catenatives* (i.e. in the *get + past participle unit*), it can be further categorized into five types of passive constructions. More precisely, as suggested by Collins (1996:45-49), *get passive* can be described as:

1) *Central*, when it may be related to an equivalent active clause⁷, with or without an agent, as in:

14. (a) A problem especially because federal workers often **get paid** less than their counterparts in the private sector. [USBoE]

(b) Why, I **get paid** to count 'em [AMC6]

2) *Psychological*, when it occurs with agent-phrases which refer to various entities or phenomena which initiate psychological processes, as in:

15. (a) This Chicago policeman, who asked not to be named, said that many policemen **get frustrated** because it's so hard to make a legal arrest. [USBoE]

(b) Come on, man, nobody's gonna **get hurt**. [AMC6]

3) *Reciprocal/Reflexive*, when it occurs with reciprocal past participles such as *married* or reflexive past participles such as *dressed*, as in:

16. (a) After a 10-day whirlwind courtship, they decide to **get married**. [USBoE]

(b) Hey mudwhistle, **get dressed** [AMC6]

4) *Adjectival*⁸, when its central members are adjectives (such as *ready*, *angry*, *lost*, *drunk*, *burned*, etc.), as in:

17. (a) They're very very hopeful, but they don't want to **get burned**.
[USBoE]

(b) Good. Let's all finish up and **get ready** to go. [AMC6]

5) *Formulaic*, when it is an idiomatic expression such as *get accustomed to*, *get used to*, etc., as in:

18. (a) Sure do, yeah. The more time--you **get accustomed to** the climate and to the environment around here, the better off you are.
[USBoE]

(b) Well, he wants me to rest while I'm **getting used to** the medication. [AMC6]

3. SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC SIMILARITY

Although from a syntactic point of view, *get* shows versatility with respect to the contexts in which it can locate, from a semantic and pragmatic perspective, it seems to express a significant degree of similarity. The data from the two corpora investigated, indeed, strongly suggest that *get-sentences* usually share a constant resultative quality, that *get* tends to occur within negative contexts, and that, when it is followed by an NP, it always acquires a causative meaning keeping, at the same time, the pragmatic functions of the corresponding sentences without NP. This may be due to the fact that the semantics and pragmatics of the *get-sentence* depend on two interrelating and complementary levels of functional meaning, namely, on what I call the *core* and the *peripheral meaning*, which are common to all *get-units*. More precisely, by *get-unit*, I mean the framework determined by *get* and the *environment* in which it appears; a unit whose parts "cannot retain independent meaning" (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001:101), even though each individual part carries a different function: *get* determines the *core meaning*, whereas the *environment* in which *get* occurs determines the *peripheral meaning* of the *get-unit*. The former meaning is constantly characterized by the feature *result*, which is typical of the *result marker get*, while the latter acquires variable semantics according to the specific *environment* in which *get* locates. In the binary notion I am suggesting, the "prototype to which all constructions conform more or less closely" posited by Johansson and Oksefjell (1996:73) may be envisaged.

Indeed, both the USBoE and AMC6 data demonstrate that the *resultative* feature, the tendency to occur in negative contexts, and the causative meaning acquired by the NP-sentences can be applied to any structure related to *get*. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 will qualitatively and quantitatively demonstrate this in detail.

3.1 GET AS A FULL VERB

Copular or *linking verbs* must be followed by a complement for the sentence to be complete. Specifically, there are two cases in which verbs may be said to have *copular* or *linking complementation*: when they are followed by a *subject/object complement* in types which belong to the SVC pattern, and when they are followed by a *predication adjunct* in types which are of the SVA pattern (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1991). In the former context, the *peripheral meaning* of the *get-unit* is claimed here to be determined by the *complement*, whereas in the latter, by the *predication adjunct*. In both cases the *core meaning* of the *get-unit* is contingent on the *result marker get*. When occurring in SVC types, both the USBoE and movie data show that the meaning of the *get-unit* is resultative in that it implies some change, or transformation. As illustrated in examples 19 and 20 from the USBoE and AMC6 respectively, *get* functions as a *result marker*, or a *resulting copula* (cf. Cattell 1984, Quirk *et al.* 1991, Johansson and Oksefjell 1996, Biber *et al.* 1999), which emphasizes a change of state (i.e. *getting nauseous, dizzy, and sloppy*); the *subject/object complement*, instead, specifies the kind of transformation brought about by *get*, which does not need to be an actual change (as in *get nauseous, get dizzy*), but can simply be, for instance, a metaphorical or hypothetical mutation (as in *get sloppy*), etc.

19. A lot of times in the early morning, like if I'm on a train or something, I **get** nauseous; I **get** dizzy. If I keep my hands up, it seems like I **get** real dizzy. [USBoE]

20. Guys like us don't change, Saul. We stay sharp or we **get** sloppy. We don't change. [AMC6]

The SVC *get-unit* not only shares the same resultative connotation in the two corpora under investigation, but also its semantic prosody: as Table 1 illustrates, the SVC *get-units* present in the USBoE tend to display a negative semantic prosody: the transformation/change of state they indicate is mostly negative (736 negative vs. 365 positive out of 1101, i.e. 66.84% vs. 33.15% respectively) in that it is expressed mostly by complements like *worse, hurt, sick, angry, mad*, etc.; similarly, those present in the AMC (cf. Table 2) show a preference of occurrences in negative contexts (13 negative vs. 3 positive out of 16, i.e. 81.25% vs. 18.75% respectively) collocating especially with complements like *hurt, lost, old, sick, tired*, etc..

RIGHT COLLOCATES	#
worse	171
better	152
ready	109
hurt	97
sick	92
tough	79
angry	46
mad	38
rich	31
older	30
nervous	28
serious	27
right	24
tougher	22
old	21
bigger	20
richer	16
tired	13
hot	11
emotional	9
(PRETTY¹)	(8)
wet	7
dirty	6
smaller	6
tense	6
negative	6
greedy	6
violent	5
weaker	5
dizzy	5
desperate	5
TOTAL	1101

Table 1. USBoE right collocates of *get* in the SVC-unit (negative changes of state in bold)

RIGHT COLLOCATES	#
hurt	4
lost	2
ready	2
old	1
sick	1
tired	1
sloppy	1
real	1
squeamish	1
chapped	1
good	1
TOTAL	16

Table 2. AMC6 right collocates of *get* in the SVC-unit (negative changes of state in bold)

When occurring with place adjuncts in SVA types, both the USBoE and movie data show that the meaning of the *get*-unit expresses *movement* and *result*. As for the former type of *peripheral meaning*, i.e. *movement*, this is not surprising in that in such a complementation pattern *get* occurs only with *place adjuncts*, and not with *time*, as *be*, for instance, may do. The latter type, instead, i.e. *result*, raises interest: it seems that *get*, unlike *go* (the prototypical verb of motion), for instance, does not only imply a change of location, but it also adds some information about the movement it implies. This may be ascribed to the fact that the non-neutral *get* acts like a *result marker* by focusing on the difficulty or the unfavourable situation in reaching B and, consequently, on the result of the action. It may be speculated that this focus on the result of the action expressed by *get* may be brought about by at least two main strategies: either by the speaker wanting to create some expectation about the result of the action (i.e. meaning *will the subject be able to reach X?*) or by his/her underlining that despite (or because of) the difficult situation, the subject has (not) been/will (not) be able to reach X; indeed, the most frequent occurrences in both corpora of the SVA *get*-unit in negative contexts (i.e. 73% in the USBoE and 54% in the AMC6) show that *get* is employed, under both the circumstances mentioned, to highlight the doubt, effort, fatigue, or danger of the situation.

This difficulty in reaching the point is illustrated by the few chances (i.e. *a few ways* and *the only way*) to manage to do so (i.e. to reach *the bottom of the Los Angeles River* and *the future*) in examples 21 and 22:

21. There are only *a few ways* to **get** to the bottom of the Los Angeles River, either through a hole in the fence or by driving or walking down one of the official ramps or tunnels. [USBoE]

22. We're all here to do what we're all here to do. I'm interested in one thing, Neo, the future. And believe me, I know - *the only way to get there* is together. [AMC6]

Essentially, there are three kinds of verb complementation that correlate with *get* transitivity: monotransitive, ditransitive, and complex transitive verb complementation. The first kind is encountered when *get* appears in SVO clauses; the second when it locates in SVOO clauses; and the third when it is used either in SVOC or SVOA clauses. It is assumed here that in transitive verb complementation, the *core meaning* of the *get* unit is determined by *get*; whereas the *peripheral meaning* is determined by the object(s), by the object plus the complement, or by the object plus the adjunct respectively.

Interestingly, when *get* occurs in SVO clauses, the *get-unit* can express, in both the USBoE and movie corpus, a binary notion of *possession* for, this time, *get* can express two (and not one like in the SVC and SVA types) *core meanings*, namely, *stative* and *dynamic possession* (cf. LeSourd 1976, Quirk *et al.* 1991, Tobin 1993, Biber *et al.* 1999). In particular, when the *get-unit* expresses *possession* in the most general sense, *get* is *stative* without being marked by the *resultative* feature it would normally display; indeed, in examples 23 and 24, *get/got* means *possess*, as *have* does in examples 25 and 26:

23. They got a chance to use it now [USBoE]
24. I'm sorry you lost him. Hey, listen, I know you got a great heart. You're just fixated on the outside appearances of people so. Hal Larson, I'm gonna do a great favour. [AMC6]
25. Then u have a chance to win everything. [USBoE]
26. Well, you have a better idea? Come on. [AMC6]

On the other hand, when the *get-unit* expresses *dynamic possession*, *get* can be paraphrased by *come to possess/acquire*; indeed, it is marked by the *resultative* feature that already emerged in the SVC and SVA types, as examples 27 and 28 demonstrate:

27. Just a few blocks away on West 44th Street, there's a place where the homeless can get attention not available anywhere else in this often harsh city. [USBoE]

28. You mean you **get** the hyena, and I choose between the hippo and the giraffe? [AMC6]

As Table 3 shows, this binary notion of possession does not emerge by looking at the collocates of dynamic and stative *get*; indeed, in both cases it occurs with similar objects like *job*, *chance*, *place* and *gun*; conversely, it does emerge by investigating the context in which *get* locates. More specifically, when dynamic *get* is employed, there is some acquisition involved: dynamic *get* is often found in sentences containing *if*, *when*, and modal verbs, for instance, which suggest that there is no actual possession, but only some hypothesis or future referent about it. On the contrary, when stative *got* is employed, there is no acquisition involved: *got* does not collocate with the linguistics features just listed, unless it is the past participle of dynamic *get*.

RANK	GET		(HAVE) GOT	
1	150	job	59	job
2	140	chance	41	chance
3	36	place	27	problem
4	23	lite	25	people
5	22	score	23	choice
6	22	copy	16	plan
7	21	vote	15	situation
8	20	bili	15	proposal
9	19	break	14	gun
10	18	lawyer	13	group
11	17	picture	12	playground
12	17	peace	12	petition
13	17	gun	12	guy
14	16	letter	11	report
15	16	list	11	place
16	15	loan	10	program
17	14	message	9	mother
18	13	response	9	house
19	13	resolution	9	boat
20	13	license	8	question

Table 3. USBoE right collocates of *get* and *got* in the SVO-unit

Another particularly relevant aspect linked to this binary notion that distinguishes current possession from *succeeding in attaining* or *coming to possess* is also mirrored in the opposition that distinguishes stative *have got* from the perfective/resultative *have gotten* shown in example 29 (cf. also LeSour 1976, Trudgill and Hannah 1985, Leech 1989, Quirk *et al.* 1991, Gramley and Pätzold 1992, Wilson 1993, Biber *et al.* 1999, Tottie 2002). This aspect is rather compelling for it strongly suggests that stative *have got* may not be so closely related to the result marker *get*, as *have gotten* may, instead, be.

29. So well, when they beat the Oilers, he presented a game ball to SMU. So I--I think it's the first time that I can recall where a college team has **gotten** a game ball for a pro team's victory [USBoE]

In terms of comparison between the two conversational domains investigated here, it emerges that the SVO *get-units* mostly occur within neutral contexts in both corpora (i.e. 58% in the USBoE and 83% in the AMC6), although the SVO *get-units* of the USBoE are much more negative than those present in the AMC6 (i.e. 42% and 17% respectively). It is, in fact, the high occurrence with *job* (cf. Table 3 above) which makes the semantic prosody of the SVO *get-units* of the USBoE more negative than those present in the AMC6: *get* mostly collocates with *job* in the USBoE, which is the most frequent collocate which occurs within a negative semantic prosody (70% of the time).

When *get* collocates with two object noun phrases in SVOO types, the *get-unit* still expresses *result* and *acquisition*, as in SVO types. However, unlike SVO types, it is not the subject which acquires something, but it is the subject that makes the indirect object (e.g. *your son*, *him*, and *myself* in examples 30 and 31) acquire a direct object (e.g. *an interview*, *a job*, and *another B plus* in examples 30 and 31). *Get* is thus not only resultative, but also causative by causing somebody to acquire something. More precisely, it is the presence of the object that makes *get* become causative; the *get-unit* semantics and pragmatics can, then, be said to be determined by three items: the *result marker get* which conveys *result*; the *indirect object* of the clause which makes *get* function as a *causative verb*; and the *direct object* of the clause which is the object of *acquisition*. Another constant item (54% in the USBoE and 82% in the AMC6) present in both corpora is the idea of effort, fatigue, and/or danger (cf. *very difficult* in example 30 and *If I don't buckle down* in example 31) of the situation linked to this type of *get-unit*.

30. So, to **get** your son an interview or **get** him a job is very difficult.
[USBoE]
31. If I don't buckle down, I'm gonna **get** myself another B plus.
[AMC6]

In *complex transitive verb complementation*, the *get-unit* is made up of *get* plus an object and a complement clause in SVOC types, or *get* plus an object and an adverbial in SVOA types. As concerns semantics, the *core meaning* of the unit is ascribed here to *get*, which functions as a *result marker* either by causing someone to enter a new state or by causing someone to be in a certain place; the *peripheral meaning*, instead, is linked to the object plus the complement clause or the adverbial and expresses either *causation* and *transformation* (both in SVOC and SVOA types) or *causation* and *movement* (in SVOA types). In other words, the semantics of the SVOC and SVOA *get-unit* is determined, like in SVOO types, by three units: the *result marker get* which conveys *result*; the *object* of the clause which makes *get* function as a *causative verb*; and the *complement* or the *adjunct* of the clause which determine *transformation* or *movement*.

As the numbers in Table 4 indicate, there are very few occurrences of the SVOC *get-unit* in the USBoE sample investigated. This, together with their absence in the movie corpus, suggests that the SVOC *get-unit* might be rare; however, further research on other samples is undoubtedly required. As regards semantics, the few occurrences found show that, when this structure occurs, it usually does in a negative situation (69%), like the inconvenient length of time (i.e. *60 to 90 days*) mentioned in example 32:

32. ...it would take us probably 60 to 90 days to **get** them ready. [USBoE]

Prosody	Get R2 Collocates	Occurrences
POSITIVE	ready	5
NEGATIVE	ready	6
POSITIVE	interested	2
NEGATIVE	interested	7
POSITIVE	free	2
NEGATIVE	free	1
POSITIVE	organized	1
POSITIVE	accurate	1
NEGATIVE	drunk	2
NEGATIVE	lost	1
NEGATIVE	angry	1
NEGATIVE	mad	1
NEGATIVE	pregnant	1
NEGATIVE	confused	1
TOT POSITIVE		10
TOT NEGATIVE		22
TOT		32

Table 4. USBoE right 2 collocates⁹ of *get* in the SVOC-unit

As for the SVOA *get-unit*, the 2 occurrences found in the AMC6 demonstrate it is very rare in movies; on the other hand, it is not rare in the spontaneous conversation sample analyzed (i.e. 137 occurrences). In both corpora, it is resultative and causative in that the subject causes somebody/something to change place; and, like the SVOC *get-unit*, it generally occurs in situations which are negative, namely, where the effort, fatigue, and/or danger to make somebody/something reach a certain place is highlighted (59.12% vs. 100%, i.e. 81/137 vs. 2/2 in the USBoE sample and AMC6 respectively). This occurrence within a negative context is illustrated by the speaker's doubt in example 33 and the lack of time in example 34:

33. Do you think it's possible to get him to the table at all? [USBoE]
34. We've got nineteen hours and fifty eight minutes. I'll get Belairiform into your system before them. Just stay alive. I'm not going to lose you. [AMC6]

Finally, with regard to intransitive complementation, i.e. SV types, Quirk *et al.* (1991:722) exclude the use of *get* from this structure, whereas Biber *et al.* (1999:391) attest it in sentences like: *Don't ask, you don't get*. Neither the USBoE nor the movie data seem to offer such examples: the only constructions found in the sample data are SV clause types in which *get* is usually employed as a phrasal or a prepositional verb of movement. Although the present paper is not concerned with *get* either as a phrasal or a prepositional verb, it is worth noting that following the view introduced here, in such constructions the *core meaning* of the *get-unit* would be considered to be determined by the phrasal or prepositional verb *get*, whereas the *peripheral meaning* by its preposition.

3.2 GET AS AN AUXILIARY-LIKE VERB

As the examples in Section 2 have illustrated, *get* shares all the characteristics of catenative verbs except the occurrence with the *bare infinitive*; and this lack does not influence its versatile syntactic nature. Despite this flexibility in syntax and the fact that catenative *get-units* display a variation also in semantics since their *peripheral meaning* depends both on the kind of the verb that follows *get* and on the presence or absence of an intervening NP (i.e. when an NP intervenes, catenative *get* expresses causation similarly to SVOC and SVOA clause types), there is still similarity in semantics and pragmatics. Indeed, the traits that constantly mark its uses as a full verb (i.e. the resultative nature, the negative semantic prosody, the correspondence of meaning between the structures with and without an intervening NP, and the causative mark the former acquire) are also present in almost all its auxiliary-like uses.

More specifically, the *get + past participle* (together with its corresponding *get + o + past participle unit*) and the *get + infinitive* (together with its corresponding

get + o + past infinitive unit) are the only constructions which do imply a change of state and can occur in negative contexts, but preferably occur in neutral ones. As both the USBoE and movie data indicate, the *get + past participle unit* introduces a type of transformation which is generally not negative (66% and 62% of times respectively, cf. also Table 5), as in *get dressed* in example 36; even though it can also be negative (34% and 38% of times respectively), as in *get hit* in example 35:

35. When we got on the Internet, on CNN, we saw the second tower get hit. [USBoE]
36. Pam: Go take a shower, get dressed and come back down. [AMC6]

USBoE Corpus		
PAST PARTICIPLE	NEGATIVE	NON-NEGATIVE
Ending in -ed	639	1341
Ending in -en	59	30
TOTAL	698	1371
AMC6 Corpus		
PAST PARTICIPLE	NEGATIVE	NON-NEGATIVE
All types	5	8

Table 5. Types of past participles belonging to the *get + past participle unit* and their semantic prosody checked in the USBoE and in the AMC6

In much the same way, its corresponding causative *get + O + past participle unit*, which causes somebody or something to enter a new state, preferably occurs in neutral situations, either in the USBoE (78% of cases) or in the AMC6 (57% of cases), as illustrated in example 37; but it can also occur in negative ones (22% and 43% respectively), as shown in example 38:

37. She hopes to contact more authors in the future, and get them involved in the project as well. [USBoE]
38. You keep fucking around, you gonna get that scholarship to Yale taken away from you [AMC6]

With respect to the *get + present participle unit*, it is worth underlining that despite its low frequency in movies (only 3 occurrences), it still resembles the structures

found in the USBoE, for two reasons. First, in terms of semantic function, this unit usually implies, in both corpora, entering a new state, especially concerning movement and locating within difficult situations (i.e. 78% in the USBoE and 67% in the AMC6), as *going to run out of second chances* in example 39 and *trying to catch her on the way home* in example 40:

39. Well, if the Braves don't **get** moving, they're going to run out of second chances. [USBoE]
40. She's hostessing until 11. Actually oh I better **get** going I'm gonna try to catch her on the way home see if she wants to get a drink or something. [AMC6]

Second, the occurrences present in the AMC6 are all *get + going*, which, as Table 6 illustrates, is the most frequent *get + present participle* unit in the USBoE.

GET + PRESENT PARTICIPLE	
going	38
moving	16
cracking	7
training	5
working	3
rolling	3
parking	3
talking	1
spending	1
shaking	1
running	1
overflowing	1
happening	1
flying	1
flooding	1
TOTAL	83

Table 6. Most common present participles belonging to the *get-unit* in the USBoE corpus

A similar case concerns the causative *get + O + present participle* unit: first, it still implies entering a new state, especially concerning movement and locating within difficult situations (i.e. 94% in the USBoE and 100% in the AMC6); example 41, for instance, is explicitly negative, i.e. *it's pretty tough*, whereas example 42 is negative, if perceived in the movie context, i.e. the situation is tough because there is no time.

41. That's pretty tough when they're bored, they're tired, they don't like the book they read to begin with, and you want to get a discussion going with 20 15-year-olds. [USBoE]
42. Let's get this going¹⁰. [AMC6]

Second, there is only one occurrence of the *get + O + present participle* in the movie corpus and the verb which is used is still *going*, like in the *get + present participle* unit. As illustrated in Table 7, this is still the most frequent present participle of *get + O* in the USBoE sample.

GET + O + PRESENT PARTICIPLE	
gong	35
moving	22
working	13
thinking	4
talking	5
rolling	3
flying	1
swimming	1
yelling	1
walking	1
TOT	86

Table 7. Most common present participles belonging to the *get + O* unit in the USBoE corpus

The *get + infinitive unit* shows slightly different patterns: in the first place, it usually implies a change, either of state or of place, which tends to occur in neutral situations both in the USBoE (80%) and in the AMC6 (67%), meaning *manage to*; even though it can also occur in negative ones such as those illustrated by examples 43 and 44 (i.e. *It'll take a while* and the *never did* respectively):

- 43. It'll take a while for people to get to know it. [USBoE]
- 44. Hey you know, we never did get to finish that little “convo” back at the den. [AMC6]

Secondly, although it is rather rare in movies (only 6 occurrences), similarly to the preceding construction, the most frequent verb is *know* (2 occurrences), which is also the most frequent following *get* found in the USBoE sample (cf. Table 8).

GET TO RIGHT COLLOCATES	
know	99
see	79
work	68
play	65
be	49
go	27
do	18
decide	8
TOT	413

Table 8. Get to right collocates (i.e. most common infinitives) belonging to the *get*-unit in the USBoE corpus

Finally, its corresponding causative *get + O + infinitive unit* still conveys a kind of change of state or of place, but this time it underlines the effort/difficulty of the situation in both corpora (i.e. 68% in the USBoE and 67% in the AMC6), like in:

- 45. Foreign Minister Levy was unable to get Secretary Baker to approve the loan guarantees yesterday. [USBoE]
- 46. I don't think I can get her to do it. [AMC6]

4. CONCLUSIONS

Both the USBoE and movie data have shown that the *get-sentence* is extremely variable in syntax, but not in semantics and pragmatics. In particular, syntactic flexibility has been demonstrated by the multiplicity of uses of *get* both as a full and as an auxiliary-like verb. Indeed, as a full verb, *get* locates in all the clause types present in the English language; and, as an auxiliary-like verb, it appears in three out of four of both simple and complex catenative constructions, and in five kinds of passive sentences. Semantic and pragmatic similarity, instead, has been demonstrated, first of all, by the resultative feature the *get-sentences* constantly display. Specifically, *get* as a full verb may exhibit a resultative change of state in SVC, SVOC, and SVOA clauses; a resultative change of location in SVA, SVOA, and SV clauses; resultative achievement in SVO, SVOO, and SVOA clauses; and resultative causation in SVOO, SVOC, and SVOA clauses. Whereas *get* as an auxiliary-like verb may be classified into various semantic domains, all resultative in nature, depending on the meaning of the lexical verb which follows *get*. Second, semantic and pragmatic similarity has emerged from the constant negative/difficult situation often highlighted by the effort to reach the result brought about by *get*; in particular 7 *get-units* out of 11 have shown a negative semantic prosody). Finally, such similarity has been demonstrated by both the causative mark *get* acquires every time it is followed by an NP, and by the semantic and pragmatic features it displays under this circumstance which are almost always identical to those expressed by its corresponding sentence without the NP (the only exceptions to this are the SVO and *get + infinitive units* and their corresponding NP-clauses).

The constant resultative quality of the *get-sentence*, together with the variable syntactic context in which *get* can locate, have led me to hypothesize an explanation for this semantic and pragmatic similarity by considering two interrelating and complementary levels of meaning that may play a fundamental role in the semantics and pragmatics of the *get-sentence*. These levels of meaning are the *core* and the *peripheral meaning* of the *get-unit*. In particular, the idea of the *core meaning* has suggested that, due to the presence of the *result marker get*, any potential meaning of the *get-sentence* must necessarily be characterized by the feature *result* it constantly conveys. On the other hand, the idea of the *peripheral meaning* has justified the different shades of meaning determined by the variable environment in which *get* occurs (e.g. movement in SV, SVS, and SVOA types; transformation in SVC and SVOC types; and achievement in SCV and SVOO types).

Regarding the comparison between spontaneous and movie conversation, the present data have empirically demonstrated that the two conversational domains do not differ much (cf. Table 9). Indeed, despite the discrepancy of the uses of *get* in the *SVOC-unit*, despite the difference in semantic prosody percentages, and despite the fact that movie language is a type of conversation which is not spontaneous (cf. Gregory 1967, Nencioni 1976, Taylor 1999, Rossi 2003, Pavese 2005) in that it is both written-to-be-spoken and mediated, as far as the general syntactic, semantic and pragmatic uses of *get* are concerned, movie language has turned out to exhibit similar characteristics to spontaneous conversation.

USBoE	AMC6	VS.	USBoE	AMC6
GET as a FUL VERB			Negative Prosody %	
(S)VC	(S)VC	similar	67%	81%
(S)VOC	—	<i>different</i>	69%	—
(S)VA	(S)VA	similar	73%	54%
(S)VOA	(S)VOA	similar	59%	100%
(5)VO	(5)VO	similar	42%	17%
(S)VVOO	(S)VVOO	similar	54%	82%
GET as an AUXILIARY-LIKE VERB			Negative Prosody %	
GET + V-ED	GET + V-ED	similar	34%	38%
GET + O + V-ED	GET + O + V-ED	similar	22%	43%
GET + V-ING	GET + V-ING	similar	77%	67%
GET + O + V-ING	GET + O + V-ING	similar	94%	100%
GET + TO V	GET + TO V	similar	20%	33%
GET + O + TO V	GET + O + TO V	similar	68%	67%

Table 9. Summing up table of the *get*-units found in the USBoE and AMC6 corpora (*get*-units within a negative context in bold) and the percentage of their negative semantic prosody

More specifically, this similarity has emerged, first and foremost, from the fact that in both the domains under investigation, *get* is extremely versatile by occurring in various syntactic structures both as a full and as an auxiliary-like verb; as already mentioned, the only *get*-unit which has not been attested in movie conversation is the SVOC one. Moreover, in both spontaneous and movie language, *get* has been shown to function as a *result marker* by implying some change or transformation. This change or transformation has been found to take place mostly in negative contexts in almost all the *get*-units analyzed; besides, the units which have not turned out to occur in negative contexts (i.e. the SVO-unit, the *get* + *past participle unit* with its corresponding *get* + *O* + *past participle unit*, and the *get* + *infinitive unit* with its corresponding *get* + *O* + *infinitive unit*) have appeared to be positive both in spontaneous and movie conversation. Finally, the occurrence of the SVOO and *get* + *infinitive units* within negative contexts (which was not expected since all the other O-structures reflect the prosody of the corresponding structure without an O, or NP) has proved to be the same in both spontaneous and movie conversation.

Since the characteristics concerning the *get*-unit have turned out to be similar in both the conversational domains explored, it can be concluded not only that the two registers are similar with regard to this unit, but also that the features emerged may be typical of the *get*-unit, regardless of the register in which it may appear. In other words, the present research confirms both Lindstromberg's

(1991:285) claim that *get* should not be seen as polysemic, but as having different shades of meaning semantically related to each other, and also lends strength to Johansson and Oksefjell's (1996:73) intuition regarding the existence of "a prototype to which all constructions conform more or less closely". Furthermore, it has been proved that *get* must enjoy a very special status, which derives not only from its syntactic versatility or from the semantic and pragmatic similarity shared by the sentences in which it appears, but also from the fact that such peculiarities of *get* coexist.

1 The AMC6 corpus (where 6 stands for the number of the movies taken into account) is part of the American Movie Corpus, namely, a *sample parallel bilingual* database under development for the study of movies (cf. Forchini *forthcoming*) as a form of mediated language both because movie language is constructed to appear spontaneous (Pavesi 2005) and because it is dubbed (i.e. translated) and by extension mediated (Ulrych and Anselmi 2008). For the present research the following 6 movies have been taken into account: *Mission:I-2* (John Woo 2000); *Me, Myself & Irene* (Bobby & Peter Farrelly 2000); *Meet the Parents* (Jay Roach 2000); *Shallow Hal* (Bobby & Peter Farrelly 2001); *Ocean's Eleven* (Steven Soderbergh 2001); and *The Matrix Reloaded* (Andy & Larry Wachowsky 2003).

2 Quirk *et al.* (1991) reserve this term for the function of a part of a phrase or a clause which follows a word and completes the specification of a meaning relationship which that word implies.

3 Quirk *et al.* (1991:722) consider seven major clause types (i.e. SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, SVOO, SVOC, SVOA) according to the “permissible combinations” of clause elements. They exclude the use of *get* from type SV, whereas Biber *et al.* (1999) include it (cf. *Don't ask, you don't get* in Biber *et al.* 1999:391).

4 S stands for *subject*, V for *verb*, O for *object*, C for *complement*, and A for *adverbial*.

5 As explained in note 3, there are doubts about *get* belonging to this structure. Both the USBoE sample and the movie data seem to offer only constructions in which *get* is usually employed as a phrasal or a prepositional verb of movement (cf. Section 3 for details).

6 What is traditionally called a *catenative* verb is classified according to the construction it occurs with, namely, the kind of non-finite

complement the *catenative* is followed by (i.e. the *bare infinitive*, the *to-infinitive*, the *-ing form*, or the *-en form*, cf. Palmer 1988 and Huddleston and Pullum 2002) and the possibility of having an intervening NP which functions as complement in the clause. Specifically, with intervening NP, the *catenative* construction is said to be *complex*; otherwise, it is said to be *simple* (cf. Huddleston and Pullum 2002).

7 Quirk *et al.* (1991) call it *central* or *pure passive*.

8 Palmer (1988) and Quirk *et al.* (1991) call them *pseudo passives*, since it is only their superficial form that recommends them for consideration as passives. Similarly, Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1443) point out that “it is only the embedded complement that is passive, with the matrix *get* clause being active”.

9 Since *pretty* is a right collocate of *get*, it has been included in the table. However, it has not been counted because it is used as a pre-modifying adverb in the sample corpus.

10 I.e. those which occur in second position, namely, after the object.

11 This example is the same as example 11 (b) for it is the only occurrence of the *get* + O + *present participle* found in the AMC6 corpus.

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