YOU WILL BE (SO) LUCKY TO BREAK EVEN

LAURI KARTTUNEN

This talk is a case study of the idiomatic construction will be lucky to X. Aside of the semantics of this specific construction, the point is to demonstrate the need for linguistic exploration that falls between two established approaches: (i) learning semantics from an annotated corpus and (ii) unsupervised learning from the web with the help of an initial injection of seed knowledge.

FactBank [3] is a corpus where the verbs representing eventualities are marked for veridicality on a six-point scale: ct+ certainly true, pr+ probably true, ps+ possibly true, ps- possibly false, pr- probably false, ct- certainly false. A major motivation for constructing the FactBank was the hope that it would be a resource for the learning of semantics of complex constructions.

The study by Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. [1] is a very successful application of the second approach. It takes as its starting point the negative polarity items (NPIs) such as any chance, the known "triggers" that license them, and proceeds to discover hitherto unknown contexts where NPIS can appear such as be critical for X by harvesting examples from the internet.

We argue that neither (i) nor (ii) is sufficient to learn the semantics of will be lucky to X.

FactBank contains just a single example of this construction:

(1) Wong Kwan will be lucky to break even.

FactBank marks break in this sentence as pr- meaning that Wong Kwan probably will not break even. This is certainly correct for (1) but consider

(2) Wong Kwan will be so lucky to break even.

The switch from lucky to so lucky in this construction brings about a complete reversal of what is predicted about the future. (2) entails that Wong Kwan will be very lucky and he will break even.

Although will be lucky to X does not appear in [1] or in any other list of negative polarity licensors it does in fact allow them with or without so as in

(3) Wong Kwan will be (so) lucky to get any return at all on his investment.

In this talk we show that the future affirmative uses of be lucky to X are idiomatic. In the literal sense be lucky to X is a two-way implicative construction [2], similar to happen to X. Under positive polarity be lucky to X entails X, under negative polarity it entails not-X. It turns out that the idiomatic reading of will be lucky to X in (1) is very brittle in the sense that certain modifications of the sentence such as the addition of so in (2) enforce the literal interpretation.
REFERENCES

