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MUCH OF A WOMAN AND SOMETHING OF A MAN: A COLLOSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH[1]

Abstract: This study explores the semantic and contextual nuances of the *much of a N* and *something of a N* constructions within the framework of Construction Grammar. Relying on corpus analysis and collostructional methods, specifically simple collexeme analysis, the paper aims to identify patterns of noun usage within these constructions. The analysis reveals that while both constructions demonstrate flexibility and inclusivity in accepting a wide range of nouns, they somewhat diverge with respect to meaning and pragmatic functions. The results show that *much of a N* primarily conveys an assessment of degree, while *something of a N* functions as a hedging device, relativizing the qualities expressed.

Keywords: simple collexeme analysis, collostructions, Construction Grammar, corpus analysis, *much of a N*, *something of a N*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The deliberately eye-catching and potentially misleading title introduces a study of two English constructions – *much of a N* and *something of a N* from the perspective of Construction Grammar. The core principle of constructionist approaches to language is that grammatical knowledge is represented through learned (and conventional) pairings of form and function, referred to as constructions (Goldberg 1995, 2006; Culicover, Jackendoff 2005). Constructions, which encompass all linguistic symbols, vary along the dimensions of complexity and abstractness, meaning they can range from individual words to multiword phrasal patterns and from concrete to abstract forms (e.g. *chair* and *noun*). Additionally, the notion of construction is flexible enough to include patterns whose meaning is not strictly predictable from its components or other known constructions. Even

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fully predictable, i.e. compositional, patterns are recognized as constructions if they occur frequently enough (Goldberg 2006: 5). One of the central tenets of constructionist theory is that meaning arises from diverse scenarios of human experience and is linked to specific forms. The syntax and lexicon form a continuum, both contributing to meaning, allowing speakers to apply familiar patterns to new contexts in systematic ways (Goldberg 1995: 43; Langacker 1990; Partee 2004).

A wonderful example of the constructions is the following quote:

> He is something of a musician, something of an author, something of an actor, something of a painter, very much of a carpenter, and an extraordinary gardener, having had all his life a wonderful aptitude for learning everything that was of no use to him (Charles Dickens, *Mister Humphry's Clock*).

The constructions *much of a N* and *something of a N* can be characterized as complex and semi-schematic, i.e. partially filled, due to the fact that quantifying expressions followed by the *of* prepositional phrase represent the unvarying part, while there is one slot open for a countable singular noun preceded by an indefinite article. These constructions are a perfect example of expressions defying the principle of compositionality that asserts that an expression's meaning is derived from its parts and their syntactic combination (Partee 2004: 153). The following example contains a degree quantifier for properties expressed in predicative noun phrases.

  a. Ed's not much of a husband.

The noun *husband* is not normally understood as gradable, yet in this construction it is interpreted as a bundle of features characterizing a *good* husband. In this sense, the subject *Ed* is being valued, or graded against those properties (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 415). The constructions have the status of idioms[2] implying that the degree of qualities expected from the noun is not particularly high.

On the other hand, *something of a N* is used to describe a person or a thing in a way that is partially true, but not completely or exactly[3]. It is often used to make a statement or description less forceful or definite, as can be seen in the following example.

  b. He is something of a local celebrity.

The interplay between lexical and grammatical constructions, including how they attract or repel each other, reveals the degree to which constructions are

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[2] Among others, Merriam-Webster Dictionary: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/much%20of

[3] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/be-something-of-a

entrenched in speakers' minds. This, in turn, allows for the investigation of constructional preferences or constraints concerning open slots, as well as potential interactions between two or more slots.

The aim is, therefore, to investigate the collocational preferences of the constructions *much of a Noun* and *something of a Noun* to determine the collexemes most strongly attracted to and repelled by the constructions. Relying on the quantitative statistical method named simple collexeme analysis, designed to measure the level of attraction between a lemma and a construction, the paper seeks to deepen the understanding of the meaning and usage of the specified constructions.

The detailed corpus description and methodology are given in a separate section, following the description of constructions.

2. *SOMETHING OF A N*, *MUCH OF A N* AND OTHER RELATED FORMS

The specified constructions have not yet, to the best of our knowledge, been the focus of extensive research. Quantifiers followed by *of* phrases – such as *much*, *more*, *less*, *a bit* – are only sporadically addressed in English grammar books (e.g. Huddleston, Pullum 2002; Swan 2002: 145), possibly because of their relatively narrow and fixed scope. The quantifier *much* is often examined alongside *any* in studies on negative polarity items (see Giannakidou 2019), because of its predominant tendency to be used in negative contexts. As Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 415) observe, *much* is strongly non-affirmative. They refer to the structure as *fused determiner-heads* with special interpretation. The following examples show the construction's inclination towards non-affirmative context.

    c. I don't have much money.
    d. *I have much money.
    e. I don't enjoy sailing much.
    f. *I enjoy sailing much.

Nevertheless, *much* has been noted to appear in affirmative contexts as well, especially in formal writing (Swan, Walters 2015: 169; Cerce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1990: 330), as in the following example:

    g. I have much experience in the skills you have listed as required for the position.

Despite this 'anomaly', Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 827) argue that the negative polarity item *much* affects the entire string *much of a N*. Additionally, the construction is restricted to predicative complements.

    h. Kim isn't much of a dancer.

    i. ∗Kim is much of a dancer.

The positive counterpart of the example (h) could be *Kim is quite a dancer*. Somewhere along the axis of competent and lousy dancers stands the construction *something of a N*.

Interestingly, the same grammar book lists two peculiar examples illustrating that both affirmative and negative contexts are available.

    j. It wasn't [(very) much of a success].

    k. He's in [too much of a hurry]. (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 533)

The last example may seem to argue against the NPI claim. However, a closer examination of the preceding syntactic structures reveals one major difference. Namely, example (j), with the negative auxiliary verb taking a *much of a N* complement, would be a prototypical construction conveying the sense that the noun in question lacks certain qualities expected from a 'successful' representative of the kind. On the other hand, example (k) is a declarative sentence with a prepositional phrase as the auxiliary complement *in a hurry*. The fixed expression (also considered a construction in CG) is merely expanded to include the degree modifier *too much*.

There is one construction of the same form that has been idiomatized through recurrent use. The following example of the expression *too much of a good thing* diverges from the meaning encoded by the primary construction, now indicating that something generally desirable or beneficial can be detrimental or unpleasant if experienced excessively[4]. Moreover, it serves as a complement to a wider range of verbs. A search of the British National Corpus (BNC)[5] reveals its use with verbs such as *desire*, *have*, *be*, *seem*, *become* and *appear*.

    l. Can person desire too much of a good thing?

    m. But anyone could have too much of a good thing, and now she was hot and tired and angry.

Given the apparent infrequency of such meaning shifts, our study will encompass all structures of this form and dispute the negative polarity item (NPI) claim.

It is important to note that *much* can be intensified in numerous ways and used in affirmative contexts. The following examples taken from the BNC illustrate that the threat and distraction are significant.

    n. He is *very* much of a distraction.

    o. If libel is *too* much of a threat to press freedom already, the answer is to reform the law.

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[4] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/too-much-of-a-good-thing
[5] https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/

These examples suggest that the polarity of the phrase is largely contingent upon the presence of prior negation.

Another method for grading a non-gradable singular countable noun (example (q)) involves using *something* in combination with the *of* phrase complement. The structure indicates a certain degree or extent, akin to the *much of a N* construction. This shared characteristic provides a basis for comparing the two structures.

> p. It was something of a surprise that he wasn't sacked on the spot.
> q. He's something of an actor.

Unlike the *much* construction, the default reading is positive, yet vague. For example, in (q) the person in question may be a mediocre actor. The same fact can be expressed by *He's not much of an actor*, the only difference being the attitude of the speaker.

The two constructions differ in the sense that *something of a N* is not restricted to predicative complements (as in (r)), nor is it restricted to obliques determined by an indefinite article (example (s)) (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 44).

> r. Something of a problem has arisen.
> s. She has something of her mother's charm and tenacity.

In example (r), *something of a problem* is a noun phrase occupying the subject position, while in (q), instead of *a*, the noun is preceded by another determiner, *her*.

Despite the distributional differences, this study will focus on the form shared by the constructions *much of a N* and *something of a N*.

Similar to the constructions analyzed in the present paper are *more of a N* and *less of a N*, which semantically stand as antonyms, and deserve a study of their own.

The subsequent sections outline the corpus description and methodology, followed by the presentation of results and a discussion of the findings.

3. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The method used to analyze the previously described constructions is *simple collexeme analysis*, one of several approaches suited for different construction types under the umbrella term *collostructional analysis* (Stefanowitsch, Gries 2003). It is a quantitative, statistically sophisticated method in corpus linguistics created to examine the relationship between words (lemmas) and the grammatical structures they appear in (Stefanowitsch 2013: 290), i.e. to measure which lexical items occur more or less frequently than expected by chance in a given slot (or slots) of

a particular construction (Hilpert 2014: 392). This is suggested by the term *collostruction* itself, as it represents a blend of the terms *construction* and *collocation*.

The lexemes attracted to a certain construction are called *collexemes* of that construction (Stefanowitsch, Gries 2003: 215). Often, but not exclusively, associated with Construction Grammar, this approach identifies which words are most strongly attracted to or repelled by a particular construction (Stefanowitsch, Gries 2004: 210; Hilpert 2014: 391). Ultimately, the findings obtained through collostructional analysis should be used to build a more precise and complete picture of the constructions' meaning and use, which should align with the meanings of the lexical items it attracts (Hilpert 2014: 392).

The nouns extracted from the BNC corpus were processed using *R Studio* software, with the aid of an additional script (Flach 2017) tailored for collostructional analysis. The input for a simple collexeme analysis, designed for semischematized constructions with one open slot, is represented in the following 2x2 contingency table.

Table 1. Contingency table for simple collexeme analysis

	Construction Y	Not construction Y
Collexeme X	a	b
Not Collexeme X	c	d

To prepare the datasets for *something of a N* and *much of a N*, we used the National British Corpus, as a balanced corpus of approximately 100 million words of the British English dialect encompassing diverse genres such as spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. It covers the period between the 1980s and 1993, which could potentially affect the results, as the corpus does not include 'fresh' language samples.

The first step was to retrieve all the occurrences of the constructions in the corpus, as well as the types and tokens of nouns involved in the constructions. BNC was suitable because the number of retrieved hits allowed us to manually inspect all the concordance lines, and exclude the false positives from the Excel sheet. For example, many instances of nouns were, in fact, modifiers in nominal compounds, such as *standing joke* or *folk hero*, where *standing* and *folk* were incorrectly categorized as head nouns. The following step was to provide the number of occurrences in the corpus for every noun in the list cleaned of errors. It should be noted that quite a number of nouns are polysemous, and the numerical values assigned to nouns included all possible meanings (e.g. *wedge*).

The corpus search revealed a total number of 690 nouns occurring with the *much of a N* construction, 365 of which are unique. Only 15 examples containing the intensifier *very* were observed (e.g. *It was very much of a village*) and 25 containing *so* (as in *so much of a hardship*). The intensifier *too* in combination with *much* seems to be the most productive, with 188 tokens.

In contrast, the *something of a N* construction exhibited a slightly higher total, with 883 tokens, including 437 types. Apparently, the British speakers seem to prefer *something of a N* construction. It is interesting to note that only 89 unique nouns are shared between the two constructions, possibly indicating a significant semantic difference.

The resulting output includes the observed and expected (i.e. chance) frequencies of the lexemes in the noun slot, as well as the association measure (p-value), indicating the degree to which the collexeme is attracted to the construction. It is worth mentioning that the p-values are calculated using the Fisher exact test, log transformed, due to numerous instances of nouns appearing only once in the corpus. One advantage of the Fisher exact test is that, unlike other statistical tests, it can be applied to data that are highly unevenly distributed and/or infrequent in the corpus (Stefanowitsch, Gries 2003: 9). Nevertheless, the association measures derived from collostructional analysis should not be regarded as definitive, since different statistical tests, influenced by corpus size, can yield divergent results (for elaboration see Schmid, Küchenhoff 2013)[6].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *MUCH OF A N*

Observing only the raw frequencies of nouns occupying the open slot of *much of a N* construction, it is interesting to note that only 51 noun types occur with a frequency greater than 2. The most frequently occurring nouns in this construction show a sharp decline beyond the following: *problem* (46), *hurry* (23), *threat* (15), *chance* (13), *coincidence* (12), *strain* (12), *life* (11), *difference* (9), *choice* (8), *man* (8) and *surprise* (8). Unsurprisingly, some of the nouns occurred in the examples in the previous section. When the observed or raw frequencies are compared with the total representation of specific nouns in the corpus, this picture changes.

The following table representing the top 25 nouns attracted by the construction contains the corpus frequency of a noun, the observed frequency with the construction, expected frequency, association measure (p-value), as well as the level of statistical significance. According to Gries (2012: 93), the association measure, referred to as collostructional strength, indicates the mutual attraction of collexemes in the construction – the higher it is, the stronger the attraction.

The collostruction script (Flach 2017) uses asterisks to indicate a statistically significant result, i.e. a result not attributed to chance. Namely, five asterisks

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[6] In their study, the authors challenged the reliability of the p-value as a measure of statistical significance, a critique to which Gries (2015) responded with counter-arguments.

represent the greatest level of statistical significance with $p < .00001$ (30 nouns), four asterisks indicate the result is significant at $p < .0001$ (11 nouns), three asterisks mean significant at $p < .001$ (31), while two should be interpreted as $p < .01$ (54), and, finally, one asterisk signifies p-value $<.05$ (84). Conventionally, if a probability is higher than .05, the results are not statistically significant (marked *ns*, 155 nouns). It should be noted that there were merely 7 instances of nouns repelled by the construction, but without statistical significance. This can be interpreted as evidence of the construction's stable and uniform semantics, allowing it to accommodate a wide range of noun types.

Table 2. Top 25 collexemes attracted by *much of a N* construction

	COLLEX	CORP. FREQ	OBS	EXP	ASSOC	COLL.STR. FYE. LN	SIGNIF
1	MISNOMER	93	19	0	attr	146.3732	*****
2	MYSTERY	2171	29	0.1	attr	140.6867	*****
3	SURPRISE	4962	31	0.2	attr	126.7204	*****
4	SHOCK	4163	29	0.2	attr	121.7966	*****
5	RARITY	287	13	0	attr	80.02505	*****
6	DISAPPOINTMENT	1451	16	0.1	attr	75.29415	*****
7	PARADOX	651	11	0	attr	56.97876	*****
8	CELEBRITY	401	10	0	attr	55.86022	*****
9	CULT	878	10	0	attr	47.98017	*****
10	PROBLEM	28251	22	1.2	attr	45.53746	*****
11	HERO	2178	11	0.1	attr	43.69451	*****
12	DILEMMA	1062	9	0	attr	40.67039	*****
13	PUZZLE	568	8	0	attr	40.38303	*****
14	MIRACLE	1019	8	0	attr	35.70254	*****
15	JOKE	2075	9	0.1	attr	34.66439	*****
16	MYTH	1438	8	0.1	attr	32.95495	*****
17	CHALLENGE	6656	11	0.3	attr	31.56387	*****
18	SPECIALITY	137	5	0	attr	30.53547	*****
19	NOVELTY	501	6	0	attr	29.65447	*****
20	LEGEND	1197	7	0.1	attr	29.35931	*****
21	QUANDARY	51	4	0	attr	27.78602	*****
22	VACUUM	919	6	0	attr	26.01603	*****
23	COMEDOWN	10	3	0	attr	25.37095	*****
24	RELIEF	6322	9	0.3	attr	24.78894	*****
25	REVIVAL	1170	6	0.1	attr	24.57289	*****

The top seven nouns in the list with the highest corpus frequencies are also the ones with the greatest collostructional strength, which, surely, stems from their respective overall corpus frequencies. The strong relation of collexemes such as *problem*, *hurry*, and *threat* mentioned previously is again confirmed.

Inspecting the corpus for the second time provided a better insight into the construction usage, especially in terms of its polarity.

The collexeme *problem* tends to be used in negative contexts, almost invariably preceded by the intensifier *too*. Its frequent use in the speech community is evidenced by its occurrence in interrogative forms (*How much of a problem is it?*), or even in its own right (e.g. *Too much of a problem?*), suggesting its status of a fixed expression. Similarly, *coincidence*, *strain*, *difference*, *burden*, *deterrent*, *fuss*, *shock*, *compromise* and *surprise* are consistently preceded by *too*, *how* and *as*. This pattern suggests that in affirmative contexts, *much* is nearly always accompanied by a modifier, and in such cases it expresses a degree of (mostly negative) states or situational emotions encoded by the associated nouns. The following examples are taken from the BNC.

1. I don't want to make <u>too much</u> of a *fuss*.
2. I had not realised quite <u>how much</u> of a *burden* they really are.
3. Then it wouldn't be <u>so much</u> of a *shock* to you, either!
4. […] and let me say that it was <u>as much</u> of a *surprise* to find they had sausages and black pudding <u>as</u> it was to […]
5. But there is still controversy over whether this is <u>too much</u> of a *compromise*.

In the same vein, next to the nouns *hurry* and *chance*, *much* is embedded in the stable collocation *to be/pose/present a threat* and *to have/stand a chance* and acts like any other degree adverb expanding the fixed phrase.

Another striking group of nouns includes *fool*, *drinker*, *coward*, *gentleman* and *talker*, all of which encode qualities of human personality. It would be natural to assume these nouns are found in non-affirmative contexts described in Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 533), expressing the person's inadequacy to a certain degree and against pragmatically inferred standards.

The results, however, show that nouns of this type can be used across positive and negative contexts, though some of them exhibit a stronger preference for one or the other. For example, out of four instances of the noun *drinker*, 3 are preceded by negation, while 1 was used with *too*:

6. Burton, too, contributed: a wayward genius, too much of a drinker for his own good.

The same is true of *fool*:

7. "I see how much of a fool you've made of me!"

On the other hand, both instances of the noun *talker* and five instances of *joke* prefer the negative environment.

8. Now he thought about it, Ted Mosse hadn't been much of a talker.

Interestingly, the nouns *gentleman* and *coward* are without exception preceded by *too much.*

9. I'm too much of a coward.
10. He was far too much of a gentleman to degrade any woman.

The findings seem to challenge, or rather correct, the explanation offered by Huddleston and Pullum (2002). While it is accurate that **He is much of a dancer* is not acceptable, the positive counterpart of the *much of a N* construction is not necessarily *He is quite a dancer*, but rather *too much of a N*. The addition of *too* allows the construction to be more readily used in affirmative contexts by changing the degree of qualities ascribed to the noun from negative to positive. The choice depends largely on the speaker's stance as well as on pragmatic information related to the noun meaning.

Some collexemes with very low corpus frequencies are strongly related to the construction. For instance, *muchness* appears only 4 times in the corpus with 3 instances in the analyzed construction. Further investigation of the corpus showed that collexemes *muchness*, *dent*, *look-in* and *splash* stand out from the other nouns due to their being part of idiomatic expressions, with discreet entries in dictionaries. This should explain the high collostructional strength. For instance, *much of a muchness* is an idiom used to express similarity, typically implying low quality. The online Cambridge dictionary lists it as informal, typical of the United Kingdom[7]. The noun *dent* forms part of the idiom *to put/make a dent in something*, meaning to reduce an amount of something[8]. Similarly, *to make a splash*[9] refers to a person suddenly becoming famous, and *not get a look-in*[10], also marked as an informal expression characteristic of the UK, is used to describe a lack of opportunity for success. The listed idioms instantiate fully filled and partially flexible constructions; the verbs can be inflected, but the structures also allow for a degree modifier, such as *much of.*

11. Don't think he'd get much of a look-in with free-kicks now with Dorigo and Macca fighting over it.

4.2. *SOMETHING OF A N*

Nouns with the highest raw frequency in the construction *something of a N* include *surprise* (31 tokens), *shock* (29), *mystery* (29), *problem* (22), *misnomer* (19), *disappointment* (16), *rarity* (13), *paradox* (11), *challenge* (11), *celebrity* (10),

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cult (10), *hero* (11), *dilemma* (9), followed by a longer list of nouns occurring fewer than 9 times. As much as 324 nouns have frequency 1, indicating that the pattern can be used creatively to incorporate a wide range of lexical items.

An examination of the simple collexeme analysis results reveals a significant overlap with the *much of a N* list. Namely, 53 collexemes show the strongest attraction to the construction, of which 25 are given in the table below. This is followed by 23 nouns with 4 asterisks, 37 with 3, 104 with 2, and 95 collexemes with 1 asterisk. Similar to the previous construction, 120 nouns are found to be statistically insignificant, of which only 15 are repelled. In other words, neither of the examined constructions exhibits repulsion with a statistical significance. This is a reliable indicator that the meaning they encode, that of a degree and intensification, is flexible yet uniform.

Table 3. Top 25 collexemes attracted to *something of a N* construction

	COLLEX	CORP. FREQ	OBS	EXP	ASSOC	COLL.STR. FYE. LN	SIGNIF
1	MISNOMER	93	19	0	attr	146.3732	*****
2	MYSTERY	2171	29	0.1	attr	140.6867	*****
3	SURPRISE	4962	31	0.2	attr	126.7204	*****
4	SHOCK	4163	29	0.2	attr	121.7966	*****
5	RARITY	287	13	0	attr	80.02505	*****
6	DISAPPOINTMENT	1451	16	0.1	attr	75.29415	*****
7	PARADOX	651	11	0	attr	56.97876	*****
8	CELEBRITY	401	10	0	attr	55.86022	*****
9	CULT	878	10	0	attr	47.98017	*****
10	PROBLEM	28251	22	1.2	attr	45.53746	*****
11	HERO	2178	11	0.1	attr	43.69451	*****
12	DILEMMA	1062	9	0	attr	40.67039	*****
13	PUZZLE	568	8	0	attr	40.38303	*****
14	MIRACLE	1019	8	0	attr	35.70254	*****
15	JOKE	2075	9	0.1	attr	34.66439	*****
16	MYTH	1438	8	0.1	attr	32.95495	*****
17	CHALLENGE	6656	11	0.3	attr	31.56387	*****
18	SPECIALITY	137	5	0	attr	30.53547	*****
19	NOVELTY	501	6	0	attr	29.65447	*****
20	LEGEND	1197	7	0.1	attr	29.35931	*****
21	QUANDARY	51	4	0	attr	27.78602	*****
22	VACUUM	919	6	0	attr	26.01603	*****
23	COMEDOWN	10	3	0	attr	25.37095	*****
24	RELIEF	6322	9	0.3	attr	24.78894	*****
25	REVIVAL	1170	6	0.1	attr	24.57289	*****

The results presented in the table provide a clear picture of the construction *something of a N*. The collexemes with the highest level of collostructional strength can be classified into two major categories, depending on their referents. Specifically, the majority of nouns pertain to descriptions of situations, or more

precisely a speaker's emotional and intellectual reaction to an event, development, incident etc. Examples of such nouns include, among others, *mystery*, *surprise*, *shock*, *disappointment*, *paradox*, *problem*, *dilemma*, *puzzle*, *miracle*, etc. The following example shows that *rarity* in fact describes not women but a situation, a world where women are unable to attain positions of power in business.

12. Women are still something of a rarity in senior positions within business and industry, despite efforts.

A simple syntactic transformation proves this point: *It is rare for women to be in senior positions.* The semantic function of *something* remains consistent across all examples, serving to relativize the claim and act as a hedging device.

Numerous nouns exhibit the same behavior. The noun *paradox*, for example, follows the raising verb *seem* and the dummy pronoun *it*, which indicates that *paradox* is actually a description of the proposition, of the situation that comics take themselves seriously.

13. It may seem something of a paradox that comics should take themselves seriously, but there you have it.
14. It's something of a comedown for the band who've just had their first taste of the big time.

Plenty of examples demonstrate a more direct syntactic relation between the referent and the noun, without the use of introductory *it* and similar devices, as in (15):

15. […] under departmental sponsorship often makes ministerial responsibility something of a myth […]
16. […] losses sustained by the Scottish nobility left something of a vacuum at the centre of Scottish politics, […]

In example (16), the noun to which *vacuum* refers is a situation of Scottish politics lacking certain qualities.

Another major group has its focus on qualifying people, approximating their social status or reputation. This group encompasses *celebrity*, *cult* (*figure/status*), *hero* and *legend.* The collexemes *joke* and *myth* also refer to people in some of their instances. It should be noted that the noun *cult* was not removed from the initial list despite the fact that it served as a modifier of *status* and *figure*, because the head noun could be excluded without altering the overall meaning. The following sentence illustrates the semantic prominence of *cult*, while the head noun *performance* is implied.

17. The Theatre's annual panto has become something of a cult, […]
18. You are something of a legend here still and would be assured of a fine welcome, […]

Two nouns occupying the open position in the *something of a N* construction – *misnomer* and *specialty* – slightly diverge from the previous two groups in the sense of a referent.

Misnomer ranks highest in terms of collostructional strength; it appears in the construction 19 times, with the overall corpus frequency of 93. As a rule, it refers to expressions and words, with *something* once again serving as a relativizing device.

> 19. Of course the word NEW was now something of a misnomer.
> 20. The expression 'plea bargain' is actually something of a misnomer.

The collexeme *joke*, on the other hand, is rather elusive due to its polysemy. Depending on the noun it semantically relates to, it may mean a funny situation (e.g. how to end a phone call), low standard (e.g. army food), a person not worthy of respect, etc. Nevertheless, its core meaning aligns with the two previously established categories.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study clearly demonstrate the domains of constructions *much of a N* and *something of a N*. With no evident cases of repelled nouns, both constructions prove to be inclusive and flexible with regard to the nouns filling the open slots. The meticulous examination of the corpus, especially the contexts in which constructions occur, highlights that despite several lexemes which appear in both lists (*challenge*, *problem*, *joke*, and *surprise*), the two constructions have somewhat dissimilar usage. Although in certain cases they can be used interchangeably, *much of a N* generally conveys a degree, or more precisely estimating a degree of *coincidence*, *strain*, *difference*, *burden* etc. In contrast, *something of a N* serves to relativize qualities of situations, ultimately functioning as a hedging mechanism that distances the speaker from a definite judgement.

The research has also shown that *much* is not necessarily a NPI, as its polarity, presumed to be negative by default, alters when preceded by intensifiers like *too*, *how* or *as.* Conversely, the construction *somewhat of a N* is exclusively associated with affirmative contexts. Furthermore, *much* is a frequent companion of fixed phrases and idiomatic expressions. *Somewhat of a N*, on the other hand, does not exhibit such preferences in the statistically significant part of the results.

Reference to personality traits is another overlapping point. Whereas *much of a N* indicates a degree of a personal quality (*She's too much of a coward*), *something of a N* focuses on the social status, on how the person is perceived by the public (*He's something of a celebrity*).

While the present study offers valuable insight into the semantic nuances of the two constructions, it would be useful to expand the study as to include other

related constructions, such as *more/less of a N* in order to provide a broader understanding of expressions modifying singular countable nouns.

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MUCH OF A WOMAN ИЛИ SOMETHING OF A MAN: АНАЛИЗА КОЛОСТРУКЦИЈА

Резиме: У раду се у оквирима конструкционе граматике испитују семантичке и прагматичке нијансе образаца *much of a N* и *something of a N*. Циљ рада је да, на основу Британског националног корпуса и сложеног статистичког метода анализе простих колексема (*simple collexeme analysis*), утврди типове бројивих именица у једнини које могу фигурирати на једној од отворених позиција у оквиру датих конструкција. Мерењем колострукцијске снаге показује се да ниједна конструкција не „одбија” именице према критеријуму статистичке значајности, што говори о њиховој прилагодљивости и комбинаторној инклузивности. Упркос бројним сличностима, конструкције се у извесној мери разликују, првенствено у прагматичком погледу. Наиме, док се *much of a N* превасходно користи да искаже процену говорника у погледу ситуације, особе или неког другог појма, тачније степена неке особине, примарна функција конструкције *something of a N* јесте релативизација појма/квалитета означеног именицом, те дистанцирање говорника од одлучне процене.

Кључне речи: анализа колострукција, конструкциона граматика, анализа простих колексема, корпусна анализа, *much of a N*, *something of a N*.