What does "break" mean when we say that someone *broke our heart*? Do English speakers use this expression by convention, or is there something in the semantics of the verb *break* that is motivated by experience? We generally propose that meaning is both *motivated* and *sedimented*, and explore this meaning-making process with a corpus-based analysis of cutting and breaking metaphors of the Self.

Cutting & breaking events – henceforth C&B – have received a fair amount of attention (e.g. Bowerman, 2005; Majid et al. 2007; Majid, Boster & Bowerman, 2008; Kroeger, 2011; Naess, 2012; Fuji, Radjeksty, & Sweetser 2013; Devylder 2016, 2017), and yet, as Taylor (2007:335) concludes in a special issue devoted to the study of C&B events: “[t]here are, to be sure, many other open questions [...] one concerns the availability of C&B verbs for metaphorical extension beyond the domain of material separation”. To this day, only one conference proceeding paper has been published on this subject (Bouveret & Sweetser 2009). This seminar presentation is thus a contribution to a subject that is greatly underrepresented.

C&B events are sub-types of *separation*, which is a motion event defined as a “change-of-state event leading to an observable spatial disruption in its continuity”. Metaphors of separation can thus said to be referring to “change-of-state events leading to a loss of the integrity of a figure while lacking observable physical separation”. We suggest that C&B metaphors of the Self all refer to a loss of its integrity in three distinct dimensions that we identify as *cognitive integrity*, *emotional integrity*, and *social integrity*. (1), (2), and (3) respectively refer to these three dimensions of the Self, as if they were affected by actual C&B events.

(1) *My mind has split in two*, and I have not control over it.

(2) *I was heartsick and broken like a dry twig.*

(3) *Honestly I am happy I cut myself off from my family.*

The C&B expressions found in the CNSTTD corpora\(^1\) were annotated with regards to their actual or metaphorical meaning, to the type of separation they linguistically encode, and to the type of the Self dimension that is referred to as affected by separation.

First, the results of this analysis shows that surprisingly, a vast majority of C&B constructions are metaphorical – as opposed to actual – C&B events (79% vs. 21%). Secondly, a chi-square analysis shows that there is a strong correlation between the two categorical factors “affected dimension of the Self type”, and “separation type”.

---

\(^1\) a compilation of 2022 Psychotherapy transcripts, 3121 Psychotherapy clients’ narratives, and 229 trauma diaries extracted from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Internet forum.
We discuss these results under the light of the Sedimentation and Motivation of meaning model (Zlatev & Blomberg 2016), and hope to start a more general discussion on metaphoricity, conventionalization processes and experiential motivations of meaning-making.