
Creativity in the dynamics of German constructional idioms. A diachronic, corpus-based approach

Sören Stumpf

LMU München

s4jjkram@uni-trier.de, stumpf@daf.lmu.de

Our talk deals with the creation of new constructional idioms (CIs) in German through modification. By CIs we mean partially lexicalized patterns (e.g., *X will gelernt sein* [*Argumentieren/richtiges Heizen* etc. *will gelernt sein*]). By modification (in terms of phraseology research) we mean the occasional variation of multi-word expressions (e.g., *Liebe auf den ersten Knick*, Ritter Sport commercial). Various studies show that CIs can emerge via an increase in modification of fully lexicalized multi-word expressions, “especially through the process of lexical substitution” (Mellado Blanco 2022: 9) (e.g., *X oder Nicht-X / Y, das ist hier die Frage*, Stumpf 2016: 317–318). This process can be described as delexicalization/constructionalization (Traugott/Trousdale 2013). In our talk, we ask how the developmental processes from lexically fixed idioms via modification to CIs, a development which happens over a shorter period of time, can be empirically determined and theoretically explained. The main goal of our talk is to conduct a corpus-based and diachronic analysis of German CIs, providing an adequate account of the interplay of routine, variation and creativity. Methodologically, virtual corpora composed of temporally separated sub-corpora of the German Reference Corpus (1990–2000; 2001–2010; 2011–2020) as well as the tool Lexical Pattern Analyzer (*lexpan*) are used. On the basis of the slot analyses provided by *lexpan*, the scale of productivity, and, consequently, of the degree of fixedness of a (partially lexicalized) pattern will be examined. Using case studies, we will show how the form and meaning of lexicalized multi-word expressions change over a 30-year period. In doing so, our approach yields insights into the formal and semantic changes in the filling of slots and into the emergence and dynamics of CIs. Based on the empirical results, we will discuss the extent to which “[f]requent modifications of substantive idioms can function as a real engine of change, as a trigger for the emergence of new semi-schematic constructions” (Mellado Blanco 2022: 12). Thus, we investigate the tension between creativity and routine, the role of creativity in the emergence, usage and distribution of CIs in German, and the question how modifications may develop into productive patterns.

References: • Mellado Blanco, C. (2022). Phraseology, patterns and Construction Grammar. An introduction. In C. Mellado Blanco (ed.), *Productive Patterns in Phraseology and Construction Grammar*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1–25. • Stumpf, S. (2016). Modifikation oder Modellbildung? Das ist hier die Frage. Abgrenzungsschwierigkeiten zwischen modifizierten und modellartigen Phrasemen am Beispiel formelhafter (Ir-)Regularitäten. *Linguistische Berichte* 247, 317–342. • Traugott, E. C. & G. Trousdale (2013). *Constructionalization and Constructional Changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.