
**Closing the mental gaps.
German ‘Come to mind’ constructions as gateway and a dead end
for creativity.**

Fabian Fleißner
Universität de Neuchâtel
Fabian.Fleissner@unine.ch

This paper investigates multi-word expressions which are formed following the pattern *in* ‘in’ N *kommen* ‘come’. This structure is encountered in German in at least three different ways with respect to its semantics and its degree of idiomaticity. The diachronically primary concrete reading (1) denotes a change of location. ‘Come to mind’ constructions as in (2) lack a concrete local reading and denote abstract entities like mental content. Light verb constructions as in (3) are also characterized by a certain abstraction. They consist of an asemantically light verb and an eventive noun and form lexical units (see e.g. Fillmore 1987; Fleischhauer & Hartmann 2021):

- (1) *in das Hotel kommen* ‘enter the hotel’, lit. ‘come into the hotel’
- (2) *in den Sinn kommen* ‘come to mind’, lit. ‘come into the mind’
- (3) *in Bewegung kommen* ‘come into motion’

Both ‘Come to mind’ constructions (2) and Light verb constructions (3) result from ontological metaphors in that they create spatialized target domain entities: STATES / MINDS ARE CONTAINERS (see Lakoff & Johnson 2003). They differ with respect to the way that only in Light verb constructions the Experiencer can appear structure-internal as a subject argument. In ‘Come to mind’ constructions the Experiencer only appears structure-external. What is also noticeable are the differences between the two types in their diachronic development: Light verb constructions consisting of the light verb *kommen* are not attested until Early New High German and still continue to find high productivity (see Fleischhauer & Hartmann 2021). In contrast, ‘Come to mind’ constructions are already attested extensively in Old High German and are in decline in later language stages. The study attempts to answer what semantic, formal, and structural reasons can be found for the different behavior of the two constructions in their emergence and persistence. It will be argued that both linguistic creativity and productivity only come to unfoldment through certain syntactic, morphological and lexical preconditions in which both constructions differ significantly.

References: • Fillmore, C. (1987). How to Know Whether You’re Coming or Going. In G. Rauh (ed.), *Essays on Deixis*. Tübingen: Narr, 219–227. • Fleischhauer, J. & S. Hartmann (2021): The emergence of light verb constructions: A case study on German *kommen* ‘come’. *Yearbook of the German Cognitive Linguistics Association* 9(1), 135–156. • Lakoff, G. & M. Johnson (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.