
ARBEITSGRUPPE 9 | WORKSHOP 9

Raum | Room: S 11, Seminargebäude

Creativity in meaning

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<https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/linguistik-literaturwissenschaft/forschung/arbeitsgruppen/experimentelle-pragmatik/ag-creativity-in-meaning/index.xml>



Speakers aim to produce utterances that optimally convey their intended meanings. For this purpose, they normally resort to the conventionally shared inventory of ex-pressions and productively compose them into more complex expressions. However, in many circumstances ordinary productivity is not sufficient, causing speakers and listeners cooperatively to move beyond the resources of their mental dictionaries and compositional constraints by creating new ad hoc meanings and interpretations well beyond literal meaning.

Linguistic creativity augments conventional interpretation and expands meaning be-yond conventionally interpretative limits imposed by the linguistic system at basically all linguistic levels, be it intentionally or unconsciously. The range of relevant phe-nomena can be anchored on different levels and elements of an expression to frame and sharpen the meaning in a certain context as in metonymic shifts (the *hepatitis called*), indirect speech acts (*Hasn't the mail arrived by now?* intended as a request for someone to get the mail) or contextually occurring sortal shifts (*Suzie finished the cigarette* for finishing the painting of a cigarette, as discussed by Asher 2011).

The workshop aims at combining insights from linguistics and cognitive psychology into the above-mentioned phenomena as well as to other related fields such as meta-phors, idioms, word plays, open texture, and irony.

We invite submissions for presentations (20 minutes talk + 10 minutes discussion) of theoretical and/or empirical contributions investigating creative meaning enrichments in a wide range of linguistic phenomena with a focus on the following ques-tions:

- In how far does creative meaning emerge from (i) contextual influences, (ii) mechanisms of compositionality, or (iii) alterations of established elements of compositional meaning, such as lexical semantics?
- To what extent is creativity anchored in the language system and to what extent does it operate extra-systemically?
- What are the limits of creativity in interpretation?
- And when do highly particularized and contextually determined meaning alterations result in the preservation within the language system?

Normative pragmatics and the social world

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Language is an integral part of our social worlds, but at the same time it has served, and continues to serve, as our main tool for shaping those worlds. We use language to create and allocate social roles (“mother”, “friend”, “content manager”) and to create and manage social institutions (“family”, “webshop”, “ethics committee”), all of which involve specific ways of using language, if only because roles and institutions tend to be named, so that they can be talked and written about.

Despite the fact that, arguably, institutions are fictional entities, we take them to be real, and not only that: we treat many of them as *agents*. It is generally accepted that business corporations, for example, have goals, rights, and duties that guide their actions, and that they interact with us and with other institutions: trade unions, courts of law, ministries, etc. And yet, the corporations we purportedly interact with have been made by us, and language plays a key role in their creation.

Thus language is instrumental in creating our social reality, seemingly *ex nihilo*. This is only possible, or so I argue, because both are inherently normative. We treat each other as having normative statuses (commitments, permissions, etc.), and the chief purpose of our linguistic exchanges is to manage our normative statuses. If I promise you to mow the lawn, I become committed to mowing the lawn; if I tell you I mowed the lawn, I become committed to the truth of proposition that I mowed the lawn; and so on. The main objective of my talk is to explain how such normative pragmatic practices could have bred such strange and diverse social creatures as families, football, and France.

References: • Geurts, B. (2019). Communication as commitment sharing: speech acts, implicatures, common ground. *Theoretical linguistics* 45: 1-30. • Geurts, B. (2022). Evolutionary pragmatics: from chimp-style communication to human discourse. *Journal of pragmatics* 200: 24-34.

**Stay safe! – A wish, advice, or an order?
Pragmatic creativity in times of a pandemic.**

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The present paper analyses the different meanings the expression *Stay Safe* has acquired on two types of public signs that have appeared across London businesses throughout the Covid-19 pandemic: closure signs and signs regulating behaviour, both of which abounded in creative language use. Rather than merely announcing the closure, closure signs redirected customers to online services, declared support with governmental measures and reinforced the businesses' relationship with customers (Ogiermann & Bella 2021). Signs regulating behaviour, on the other hand, rather than merely replicating governmental instructions, used creative formulations, constructing a certain image for the businesses, and developing personalised strategies of customer retention (Feyaerts & Heyvaert 2022).

Drawing on 350 closure signs and 500 directive signs, this paper documents the creative uses of the expression *Stay Safe* in the context of a pandemic and the pragmatic changes it has undergone over a relatively short period of time. On closure signs, the imperative *Stay Safe* took on the function of a farewell formula (Brown & Levinson 1987: 98) expressing a wish directed towards the addressee's safety and well-being, with its exact function depending on its position in the text, its context and exact form. When *Stay Safe* started appearing on signs implementing containment measures, the imperative regained its directive function, away from concern for the recipient to an expression directing customers towards certain forms of behaviour and thus concern for others.

The study shows how creative meanings emerge in the context of a global health crisis, while also illustrating the complexity of the relationship between form and function, with the speech acts performed by *Stay Safe* and the strength of their illocutionary force depending on both context and co-text.

References: • Brown, P. & S.C. Levinson (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: CUP. • Feyaerts, K. & G. Heyvaert (2021). "Welcome Back, We've Missed You!" Humanized Business Communication in Shop Window Messages during Early 2020-Lockdown. *Languages* 6: 1-26. • Ogiermann, E. & S. Bella (2021). On the dual role of expressive speech acts: Relational work on signs announcing closures during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Pragmatics* 184: 1-17.

Indirect speech acts, verum focus and conventionality

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The judgement that a particular use of a linguistic unit is creative presupposes that one is able to determine what a non-creative, conventional use would be. This also holds of grammatical units. Here, sentence types and focus marking in German are studied. In Searle's (1975) original analysis of cases like *Can you pass me the salt, please?* two speech acts are carried out at once, a question and a request, whereby the indirectly communicated request to get the salt passed is the primary illocution, and the literally expressed question about the addressee's ability to perform the requested task is the secondary illocution.

It is rarely discussed in the literature on indirect speech acts that this view of the matter implies that the sentence type of polar question is not conventionally associated with the illocution of a request, and that the illocution of asking a question is its core literal meaning. Otherwise, there would not be any indirectness here. Given that such cases look like the standard way of formulating a polite request, this background assumption appears not very justified. After all, the issue of creativity vs. conventionality is an empirical one and a standard way of doing something with words is an implausible candidate for a creative use. Things are different with indirect requests (here, to close the window) like *It's getting cold*.

I claim that only the latter, not the former case is creative use. The empirical argument in favour of this claim lies in the specific use of verum focus in such utterances in order to insist, which is felicitous in the former, but not in the latter case ("Now, CAN you pass me the salt, please?" vs. "It IS getting cold").

In order to account for this contrast, my proposal uses alternative semantics for verum focus. It also implies a reconsideration of the theory of verum focus. I will propose that the alternative set in cases of insisting with verum focus contains alternative perlocutions rather than denotations. Such cases thus instantiate a third major type of using focus, besides expression and denotation focus (Krifka 2006).

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Implicit discourse structure and meaning in indirect replies to questions in political interviews

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There is a long tradition of conversational analyses of political interviews with the goal to characterize their nature and how they differ from other forms of dialogue. Politicians are frequently accused by the public of being disingenuous and evasive, and – indeed – not committing to a specific position can be a creative and tactical move in a fast-changing political environment, it can mask a lack of knowledge and serve as self-protection. Complex typologies of politicians' failures to answer questions have been suggested, ranging from complete disregard, via refusals, counter-attacks, attempts to undermine the question's validity, incomplete answers, and, finally, replies that take up some keyword of the question in order to give the conversation a different direction. In this talk, I will approach the issue from the perspective of formal pragmatics and the theory of *questions under discussion*. First, whether a reply constitutes a direct answer – i.e. whether there is congruence between the question and the reply – can easily be checked using matching alternative sets. Congruent answers can either be complete or partial. A question like *Who will be your party's candidate?* can be fully answered by naming one person, whereas the question *What are your plans for the coming year?* in most situations cannot be answered with a single assertion, but may require a list of answers and some amount of elaboration. If a reply is not strictly congruent, it might still represent a partial answer. E.g., a reply to the overt question *Q1* in (1) is partly answered by the *sub-congruent* reply *A1.1*, or the *non-congruent* *A1.2*, which at least seems to implicate part of the requested information, while *A1.3* is a coherent *non-answer*, used to steer the attention away from *Q1*.

- (1) Q1: How much will ordinary people save from the tax cuts?
> Q1.1: {How much will a middle class family save from the tax cuts?}
>> A1.1: A middle class family will save up to 1,000 Euros per year.
> Q1.2: {Who is our reform program aimed at?}
>> A1.2: Our reform program is aimed at all hard-working citizens.
> Q1.3: {What about tax cuts?}
>> A1.3: Tax cuts are important for the future of our economy.

I explore how QUD theory can help bring more transparency into real-life interviews, by highlighting the discrepancy between overt implicit questions and, in the case of multi-utterance replies, whether the actual answer is hidden under a complex discourse structure.

Creative *chengyu*: How semantic compositionality and structural productivity facilitate idiom wordplay in Chinese

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When Chinese snowboarder Su Yiming won gold at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, Chinese news headlines used a homophone pun of a well-known *chengyu* 成语 (‘Chinese idiom’) to creatively express how the Olympian had ‘amazed the world with a single brilliant feat’. Yet wordplay in China is not always so playful. In the face of a sophisticated censorship apparatus, linguistic creativity is also essential for online expression.

Chinese online wordplay is characterised by its homophone substitutions, colloquialisms, loanwords and archaic Chinese characters (Wei & Lee, 2021). While homophone wordplay has been studied extensively, creativity with *chengyu* has received little attention. *Chengyu* are four-character expressions that behave as one phrasal construction. Chinese readers have implicit knowledge of common *chengyu* structures such as ‘—N₁—N₂’. Knowledge of *chengyu* structures not only helps people infer the meaning of unfamiliar expressions but also facilitates the creation of new *chengyu* (Lu et al., 2021). *Chengyu* therefore present a fascinating case for exploring how meaning can be creatively enriched within and by a language system.

In this presentation I explore how creative *chengyu* meanings emerge from contextual influences, mechanisms of compositionality, and alterations of established elements of compositional meaning. I analyse a selection of novel *chengyu* collected from online sources and show how each *chengyu*’s intended meaning can be inferred by integrating linguistic, cultural and contextual knowledge. Based on this analysis, I argue that *chengyu* creativity exploits the semantically compositional and structurally productive nature of the Chinese writing system to generate new expressions which are nevertheless recognisable as ‘*chengyu*’. My presentation concludes by drawing attention to the possibilities of meaning creativity beyond alphabetic limits.

References: • Lu, C., Tsai, I.-N., Su, I.-W., & Liu, T.-H. (2021). From repetition to continuation: Construction meaning of Mandarin AXAY four-character idioms. In J.-F. Hong, Y. Zhang, & P. Liu (Eds.), *Chinese lexical semantics. CLSW 2020* (pp. 201–210). Springer. • Wei, L., & Lee, T. K. (2021). Language play in and with Chinese: Traditional genres and contemporary developments. *Global Chinese*, 7(2), 125–142.

**The concessive reading of scalar particles: a
presupposition-weakening approach**

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Scalar particles (e.g., English *still*; Mandarin *hai*) are known as polysemous. Beck (2020) proposes a unified analysis for various readings of scalar particles, where all readings are boiled down to a core meaning. This paper argues that the concessive reading is not basic but derived, and is conditioned by the appearance of verum focus. The evidence includes (i) concessive scalar particles are not available crosslinguistically and (ii) concessive scalar particles need to co-occur with a verum focus marker *shi* in Mandarin as in (1).

- (1) *Mali-de yisheng rang ta xiuxi, dan ta hai-*(shi) qu pao le maraḥon*
Mary's doctor ask her rest, but she still-SHI go run ASP marathon
 'Mary's doctor asked her to rest, but she still ran the marathon.'

I propose the concessive reading is presuppositionally weaker than the reaffirmative reading as in (2). The reaffirmative *still/hai*, defined in (3) (adapted from Beck (2020)), presupposes the prejacent q is in the Common Ground (CG) at c^* . The concessive *still/hai*, defined in (4), is presuppositionally weaker than (3) as it presupposes the polar question concerning q at c^* (q is not in CG yet; denotations from Farkas and Bruce (2010)).

- (2) **Reaffirmative reading:** *Although you don't like me, I am still your mom.*
 (3) $[[still_R/haic]] = \lambda q_{\langle s,t \rangle} \lambda w : \exists c^*. c^* \in c_t \wedge q \in CG_{c^*}. q(w)$
 (4) $[[still_C/haic]] = \lambda q_{\langle s,t \rangle} \lambda w : \exists c^*. c^* \in c_t \wedge \langle S[I]; \{q, -q\} \rangle \in Table_{c^*}. q(w)$
 (5) $[[VERUM]]^{u,c}(q) = \checkmark$, if the speaker c_S wants to prevent that QUD(c) is downdated with $-q$.

The concessive reading is derived from the reaffirmative reading only when verum focus appears, which could be formally implemented by a **weakening operation** triggered only when presupposition failures happen. The felicity condition of the VERUM operator (5; Gutzmann et al. 2020) entails $?q$ is the QUD. When an VERUM operator appears with the reaffirmative *still*, a semantic conflict arises because q being in the CG at c^* and $?q$ being the QUD at c^* cannot be true simultaneously. A creative weakening operation as a salvage operation applies to the presupposition of reaffirmative *still/hai*, deriving (4). This weakening story naturally explains why concessive scalar particles are derived and co-occur with verum-focus markers.

References: • Beck, S. (2020). Readings of scalar particles: noch/still. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 43(1), 1–67. • Gutzmann, D., Hartmann, K., & Matthewson, L. (2020). Verum focus is verum, not focus: Cross-linguistic evidence. *Glossa* 5(1), 51.

Creative meaning in interaction

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In naturally occurring interaction, interlocutors conceptualise various kinds of meanings that are not simply ‘retrieved from the lexicon’. Speakers can signal such non-conventionalised meanings in different ways: (i) by attributing them to an appropriately contextualised established expression, (ii) by vaguely approximating them with an established expression, (iii) by indexing them with a novel expression specifically designed for this purpose, and (iv) by providing the addressee with mere cues to the relevant meaning without directly labelling it at all.

In (i), creative meanings are deployed as local meanings of an established linguistic unit. Local meanings are tailored to current interactive needs by integrating properties of the present context and cancelling out other, currently irrelevant facets of the item’s conventional meaning potential (Norén & Linell 2007). In (ii), an established expression with its conventional semantics is presented as a mere approximation of intended meaning, as signalled by various kinds of mitigation devices (Schneider 2010). In (iii), speakers coin a creative ad hoc-expression that is specifically designed to signal an ephemeral, creatively constructed meaning (Helmer 2022). Finally, in (iv) speakers neither use a more or less fitting conventional expression nor a dedicated ad hoc-formation to categorise a given target, but resort to more indirect strategies of indicating intended meaning (as in e.g. exemplification as a cue to higher-level ad hoc categories, Mauri 2017).

Speakers standardly assume that their intended meanings are recoverable on the basis of shared linguistic knowledge and different kinds of non-linguistic common ground. In case they are mistaken, the relevant meaning must be negotiated with their addressee(s). For this, speakers can resort to a range of communicative practices that profile, explicate, illustrate or enact the intended local meaning of an expression and build it up incrementally (Deppermann 2020).

Using authentic conversation data from the reference corpus of spoken German, FOLK, the talk gives an overview of these different manifestations of creative meaning and how they are constituted in situated interaction.

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Figurative verb polysemy is driven differentially by grammar and conceptual content: Evidence from cross-linguistic data

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Figurative polysemy, in which a word’s original meaning is extended into domains for which it did not originally apply, is a pervasive property of the creativity of human language. We argue, using cross-linguistic (English/Spanish) data, that we can explain similarities and differences in patterns of figurative verb polysemy in the two languages by distinguishing whether the polysemy is anchored in grammar (e.g. the event-structure of the verb) or in conceptual (or “root”) content. We begin with the case study of English *sweep* and Spanish *barrer*. Though listed as equivalents in the IDS database (Key & Comrie 2015), *sweep* is an activity verb (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1991), while *barrer* describes a complex telic event (Auza & Maldonado 2005). As conceptual counterparts, they share various patterns of figurative extension (e.g., describing overwhelming victory or severe weather); we show that the differences in event structure also correlate with subtle differences in figurative senses.

A contrasting case study is provided by *tear* and *rasgar*, which share event structure but differ in fine details of conceptual content. Both verbs denote comparable changes of state resulting in some loss of integrity via separation; however, they diverge significantly in their semantic restrictions on the affected object. *Rasgar* is restricted to destruction of unsubstantial materials, excluding, e.g. thick substances (??*rasgar pan* ‘tear bread’). *Tear* is not so restricted, and (perhaps relatedly) further implies that the separation involves force in opposing directions. These differences are clearly traceable in figurative meanings: While both verbs can describe figurative separation or destruction, only *tear* allows figurative uses exploiting force in opposing directions, e.g. to describe contrary feelings.

A full understanding of cross-linguistic variation in creative language use, such as figurative verbal polysemy, entails understanding how grammatically-encoded content interacts with content not specifically linked to grammar. The success of our account in shedding new light on figurative polysemy thus highlights the importance of treating the two types of semantic content as distinct, if related.

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Creativity in Nominal Mass-Count Coercions

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The categories of count and mass nouns are often defined morphosyntactically and in binary opposition to one another. Yet, many nouns in English can occur as both count and mass, sometimes termed ‘dual-life.’ These nouns display a variety of meaning shifts, or ‘coercions’ between their countable and uncountable forms. We present an empirical study of coercion, including several types of coercions that have not been previously observed. The study also recognizes that there are clearly two classes of coercion: one more conventionalized, such packaging uses, and one more creative in which novel interpretations arise in due to novel combinations of lexical semantics, syntactic construction and discourse context. Some of these creative uses include individuation of degrees or percentages, (1), or counting of instances or events, (2).

- (1) Barley was germinated in soils of two *moistures* (40 and 50 per cent).
- (2) Thirty-two *abolitions* against the death penalty took place in Europe

To better understand the distribution and kinds of shifts found in English, we created a dataset containing around 950 noun-sense pairs, taken from work by Kiss et al. 2016 and Grimm et al. 2021, and examples for each attested type of mass-to-count coercion. We first classify the syntactic triggers into four different contexts where a mass or dual-life noun was countable: a noun’s being possessed by multiple entities, a noun’s being in some sort of relational construction with multiple other events or objects, a noun in degree or percent measures, or simply being pluralized. Second, the meaning (or ontological) shifts fall into four general categories: type (often discussed as UNIVERSAL SORTER), ad hoc portioning (including UNIVERSAL PACKAGER), degree, and a ‘natural’ shift which occurs when speaking about individual atoms or particles of a natural kind.

Previous proposals for mass-count meaning shifts have discussed a number of these phenomena (Bunt 1985, Zamparelli 2020) but analyze them as a result of functions such as the UNIVERSAL SORTER and UNIVERSAL PACKAGER, which are presented as total functions, mapping denotations from one category to the other. In contrast, our study indicates that mass-to-count coercions are often more flexible and creative endeavors, involving a wider range of semantic domains; the speaker-hearer calculus for successfully uttering a creative mass-to-count coercion relies on both syntactic elements (and the compositional semantics thereof) and broader discourse context, while being heavily conditioned on lexical semantics.

References: Bunt, H. C. (1985). *Mass terms and model-theoretic semantics*. • Grimm, S., Moon, E., & Richman, A. (2021). Strongly non-countable nouns. In M. Dočekal & M. Wągiel (Eds.), *Formal approaches to number in Slavic and beyond* (pp. 57–81). • Kiss, T., Pelletier, F. J., Husic, H., Simunic, R. N., & Poppek, J. M. (2016). A sense-based lexicon of count and mass expressions. *Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation*, 2810–2814. • Zamparelli, R. (2020). Countability shifts and abstract nouns. In F. Moltmann (Ed.), *Mass and count in linguistics, philosophy, and cognitive science* (pp. 191–224).

Entrenchment and productivity predicting potential for creativity: a corpus-based approach on creative adjective intensifiers

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Linguistic creativity is defined by deviations from norms (Sampson 2016; Goldberg 2019), which I assume to be determined by entrenchment (Hilpert & Diessel 2017) and conventionalisation (Schmid 2020). My corpus-based approach to linguistic creativity assumes no binary distinction between norm-deviating and norm-abiding expressions but proposes a scale ranging from the least creative uses that show a high degrees of entrenchment and productivity, to highly creative uses, which are not entrenched and rely less on productivity. The majority of creative expressions fall somewhere along this scale.

I approximate degree of creativity with entrenchment and productivity (Barðdal 2008; Baayen 2009), relying on frequency and co-occurrences above chance level. The assumption is that creative expressions are characterised by lower frequencies, less attracted co-occurrences and rely less on productive patterns.

The focus of this study lies on ADJ intensification in the enTenTen15 corpus. Creative ADJ intensifiers often make use of taboo expressions coerced into the ADV-slot, such as ‘damn crazy’, ‘bad-ass crazy’ or ‘bat-shit crazy’. These patterns can be used more or less productively: the bat(-)shit-ADJ-construction is entrenched with ‘crazy’, but it can be extended to other adjectives as in ‘batshit original’. Examples such as ‘the crazy-ass idea’ suggest that with increasing productivity, constructions like the bad(-)ass-construction give rise to new constructions. This study eventually aims for a systematic and more comprehensive rather than just exemplar-based overview of the creative potential of different adjective intensifiers.

References: • Baayen, H. (2009) Corpus linguistics in morphology: Morphological productivity. In A. Lüdeling & M. Kytö (eds.), *Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science*, 899–919. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter. • Barðdal, J. (2008) Productivity: Evidence from Case and Argument Structure in Icelandic. John Benjamins. • Goldberg, A. (2019) *Explain Me This: Creativity, Competition, and the Partial Productivity of Constructions*. Princeton UP. • Hilpert, M. & H. Diessel (2017) Entrenchment in construction grammar. In H.-J. Schmid (ed.), *Entrenchment and the psychology of language learning: How we reorganize and adapt linguistic knowledge.*, 57–74. Washington: American Psychological Association. • Sampson, G. (2016) Two Ideas of Creativity. In M. Hinton (ed.), *Evidence, Experiment and Argument in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*. Peter Lang. • Schmid, H.-J. (2020) *The Dynamics of the Linguistic System: Usage, Conventionalization, and Entrenchment*. Oxford UP.

When children are more pragmatic than adults: Norwegian children's comprehension of precise and imprecise absolute adjectives

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Studies in developmental pragmatics have shown that children prefer to derive semantic (or ‘literal’) interpretations of phenomena such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole or scalar implicatures (Demorest et al, 1983; Noveck, 2001, i.a.). With age, they learn to interpret the intended non-literal meaning of such expressions. However, does this developmental tendency mean that children always go from first grasping the semantic meaning to later learning the intended (pragmatic) meaning of an utterance? The current work addresses this question by investigating the development of comprehending absolute gradable adjectives such as *straight*. These adjectives can have both a precise (“literal”) (perfectly straight) and an imprecise (“non-literal”) (straight enough) interpretation. Their precise interpretation is generally believed to be part of the adjective’s semantic meaning, whereas the imprecise interpretation is seen as a pragmatic adjustment (see Kennedy, 2007, i.a.). We tested 100 native speakers of Norwegian ages 3-8, and 33 adults. Participants saw 12 critical items and 12 fillers on a tablet screen. In each trial, participants heard an instruction to select a picture. They saw three pictures including a distractor referent, a target referent (precise, imprecise or incorrect control picture) and a red X, signifying that neither of the two pictures was the correct referent (See Figure 1). The Experiment had CONDITION (three levels: precise, imprecise, control), AGE (continuous predictor measured in days) and their interaction as fixed effects. We fitted a mixed-effects, ‘maximal’ logistic regression model to the data. We found an interaction between CONDITION (precise vs. imprecise levels) and AGE (z -value= 2.4, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that, with age, children were less likely to tolerate imprecise interpretations. Adults were significantly less likely to tolerate imprecision relative to the youngest age group (3-to 4-year-olds). Overall, our findings suggest that children behave more pragmatically than adults when understanding imprecision, and that only with age do they become less tolerant of imprecise interpretations of absolute adjectives.

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Linguistic and extralinguistic determinants in attitudes towards grammatical creativity/productivity

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According to Leech (1969: 24), speakers are creative when they make “original use of the established possibilities of the language”. This definition relates closely to the concept of productivity – i.e., a construction’s ability to be extended to license novel instantiations (Hoffmann 2018, see also Goldberg 2019). Current research into productivity is often corpus-based and focuses on construction-internal measures. However, little is known about which characteristics of the *language user* influence their verbal creativity, though recent studies in usage-based grammar show the significance of individual differences in linguistic knowledge. Consequently, we can expect variation in the extent to which language users will (i) extend constructions creatively, and (ii) accept creative extensions produced by other speakers. The present study applies a cognitive sociolinguistic approach in a first attempt to investigate which user-related variables affect language users’ attitudes towards syntactic creativity/productivity and how these intertwine with linguistic determinants such as the ones mentioned above.

More than 700 native speakers of Dutch participated in an online acceptability rating experiment in which they evaluated both conventional and unconventional/productive/creative instantiations of two selected Dutch argument structure patterns, namely the *weg*-pattern in (1) and the *krijgen*-passive in (2), on a 7-point Likert scale.

- (1) Hij baande/zocht/toeterde/elleboogde zich een weg door de menigte.
'He made/searched/honked/elbowed his way through the crowd.'
- (2) Els kreeg een kaartje aangeboden/opgeplakt/geleverd/toevertrouwd.
'Els was presented/stuck on/delivered/entrusted a card' (lit. 'E. got the card presented/...')

Our first results indicate that there is considerable individual variation in speakers’ evaluation of the less conventional instantiations of these constructions. In our presentation, we will analyse this variation using mixed ordinal regression models, exploring the interplay of linguistic determinants on the one hand – such as token frequency, lemma frequency and semantic compatibility – and extralinguistic/user-related determinants on the other hand – such as age, level of education, gender, personality (measured by the BFI-2) and general intelligence.

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Exploring language use in reference games with concepts from computational creativity

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Research on computational creativity often operationalizes creativity as a search problem where an agent performs concept combination, exploration, or transformation in and upon a search space (Boden, 2004). Although computational creativity is an active research area, its concepts have mostly been applied to highly intentional, aesthetic forms of creativity in language and meaning. In contrast to this, we present thoughts on the computational modeling of creativity in spontaneous language use and dialogue. More specifically, we assume that the need for creativity arises when agents need to refer to objects in a shared visual environment, especially when they are difficult to describe and resorting to conventionalized strategies for verbalizing the referential meaning is not possible. Work on reference shows that interaction partners often only need a few words or utterances to unambiguously refer to objects while using a rich vocabulary and a variety of referring strategies. Throughout an interaction they readily develop novel referring strategies and expressions, adopt them from each other, further refine them (Brennan and Clark, 1996), and flexibly respond to changing local contexts (Ibarra and Tanenhaus, 2016). Our hypothesis is that the ability to come up with new but effective referential strategies in reference games can be seen as a creative process and expect that it is triggered, facilitated and intensified through interaction between dialogue agents. We present qualitative analyses of a dataset of dialogical reference games in a color grid domain (McDowell and Goodman, 2019), focusing on participants' reference strategies and how they change and evolve over the course of an interaction. We investigate the influence of referent features and reference context, interactive solutions to miscommunication, as well as jointly established reference strategies. We also explore – from a computational language generation perspective – how reference strategies found in the color grid domain can be categorized according to Boden's (2004) notions of search space exploration and transformation in computational creativity.

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Creativity in neologizing and the survival of the fittest

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By definition producing new linguistic units constitutes a creative act in a wider sense. However, not every neologism shows creativity in the narrower sense of originality and surprisingness. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of creativity in this sense in the fate of neologies. As is well known, the vast majority of neologies are but a flash in the pan, leaving in general at most one of them as survivor. This selection of a winner from a pool of competitors is of course reminiscent of natural selection in biology, as has been noted already by Max Müller (1870) and Charles Darwin (1871) in their exchange about the evolution of language. Both see an ongoing struggle for life at work less between languages than amongst the words and grammatical forms of each language.

Neologisms are a challenge for explanatory linguistic theories because trying to predict neologies seems to lead to a paradox: either creativity with its unpredictability plays no role in neologizing or efforts to explain it amount to predicting the unpredictable and must thus fail. Recently, Ralph Keyes has devoted a whole book to proving the unpredictability of word coinage (2021). Nevertheless, there are attempts at showing that the creation and dispersion of new words is not completely random (Metcalf 2002, Link 2021, Zaefferer 2021). Interestingly, Keyes himself proposes six factors that improve the odds of survival of a new word.

The seeming paradox disappears if predictability is understood as estimating the probability of different outcomes at three stages of a neologie's life. Predicting (a) the emergence of a new entity worth of compact coding is mostly up, e.g., to epidemiology and beyond the scope of linguistics. But predicting (b) the pool of possible labels for the new entity is a genuinely linguistic task, and so is predicting (c) the survivor of a competition based on the factors that contribute to its fitness.

The core of this study consists in comparing the four approaches by Keyes, Metcalf, Link, and Zaefferer regarding the quality of their predictions on a sample of pool - winner pairs from experimental and corpus data. It will be shown that alongside with other factors that contribute to the degree of fitness for survival of a neology a well-balanced degree of creativity seems to be vitally important.

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Vehicle-based inferences in metaphor interpretation: a CODA approach

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Psycholinguistic research demonstrates that words with concrete referents tend to be processed more quickly and with clearer mental representations than those with abstract referents (Solovyev 2020; Mkrtychian et al. 2019; Fliessbach et al. 2006; de Groot 1989). This phenomenon known as ‘concreteness effects’ has many interesting implications for metaphor comprehension research. However, it has been a subject of increasing nuance and scepticism in recent years (Reijnierse et al. 2019; Pollock 2018; Dunn 2015), despite abstraction being foundational to Analogical Structure Mapping Theory (Gentner 1983; Gentner and Toupin 1986; Falkenhainer et al. 1989) and its implementations into investigating metaphor processing. Taking a Cognitive Discourse Analysis approach (Tenbrink 2020) in dissecting metaphor interpretations, my aim is to explore the relationship between abstractness of Topics and Vehicles and the type and diversity of information which people construe from them out of context based on patterns observed by Goatly (1997). I present two studies, the first in which I asked 47 English-speaking participants to openly interpret contextless nominal copula metaphors while controlling for different degrees of Topic abstractness (low-order (ex. *school*), mid-order (ex. *town*), high-order (ex. *mind*)). Participants also rated how difficult the metaphors were to interpret using a Likert scale (1 easy – 5 difficult). Employing consistently concrete Vehicles (ex. *prison*, *beast*, *maze*, *rollercoaster*), I was able to analyse how many distinct data-emergent attributes of the Vehicle were incorporated into participants’ characterizations of the Topics. Results showed a weak correlation ($r(45) = .1304$, $p = .382$) between higher topic abstractness and greater multiplicity of Vehicle-originated attributes (threshold at 40% of participants having mentioned), however a moderately strong negative relationship ($r(45) = (-).4894$, $p = .000$) existed between lower interpretive difficulty ratings and higher multiplicity of Vehicle-originated attributes. Two possible interfering variables were lexicalization of certain metaphors (e.g. *rollercoaster*) as well as non-standardized criteria for abstractness in linguistic stimuli. Study 2 instead uses WordNorm concreteness ratings (Brysbaert et al. 2014) for selecting Topics and Vehicles. Like the first study, 75 participants were presented contextless nominal copular metaphors, this time controlling abstractness for Vehicles as well as measuring interpretive difficulty ratings. We carried out a predicate analysis of the linguistic data dividing predicates into either relational (2 or more arguments) or attributional (1 argument). Full results are in preparation. The discussion further explores whether abstractness is an informative measure in characterizing the structure and cognition of metaphor and how factors outside of analogy, like context simulation, metonymy, and surface similarity shapes interpretation in creative ways.

No champagne for sham friends:
Semantic creativity through form–meaning re-pairing

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This paper examines a type of wordplay that involves splitting the form of a linguistic expression into provisory segments which are associated with meanings independent from the semantic content paired with the initial integral form (as in the popular quote *Champagne for my real friends, real pain for my sham friends*, reflected in the title). With the aim of describing and explaining the observed paronomastic phenomenon (which is related to the notions of metanalysis, false splitting or rebracketing, but more complex in terms of the dynamics of meaning construction), the paper provides a qualitative analysis of data from two languages, English and Serbian. The data comprise authentic usage examples manually collected from various spoken and written sources in the two languages (e.g. /E/ *Syntax?! Is it some kind of tax you have to pay for eating too much chocolate or drinking too much wine?*; /S/ *projekat velikog ujedinjenja u globalnu zajednicu ravnodušnih naroda – Ujedinjenu Stag-naciju* 'the project of great unification into the global community of indifferent peoples – United Stag-nation'). The analysis is situated in the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics – specifically, the theories of conceptual blending (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) and construction grammar (Goldberg 2006). In parallel, it takes into account the current multidisciplinary research on the dynamics of wordplay (Giora et al. 2004; Zirker and Winter-Froemel, eds. 2015; Knospe, Onysko and Goth, eds. 2016) and highlights points of convergence between this area of study and cognitive linguistics.

The findings include a classification of patterns of paronomastic form–meaning re-pairing identified in the English and Serbian data, discussed with regard to the triggering form–meaning relatedness factors along the constructional continuum, in a cross-linguistic perspective. The theoretical considerations further include an interpretation of the phenomenon under analysis as a special case of conceptual blending (featuring both form and meaning as elements in blending networks), discussed with regard to the cognitive significance of the principle of compositionality and the principle of linguistic-conceptual innovation.

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Implicit Causality guides Coherence and Reference Production – Even more so in Creative Language

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In two production and perception experiments, we investigated how the discourse-semantic and pragmatic-biases observed for Implicit Causality (IC) biases might be influenced in a production task explicitly manipulating linguistic creativity:

(1) a. Mary fascinated/adored John ... / b. Mary fascinated/adored John because ...

IC is associated with several remarkably strong biases: After full stops (1a), participants tend to produce Explanations (Kehler et al. 2008, Solstad/Bott 2022). After *because* (1b), those explanations almost exclusively make reference to one of the arguments over the other (depending on verb class; Hartshorne/Snedeker 2013, Solstad/Bott 2022) and coreference is almost exclusively established with a personal pronoun (Bott/Solstad, t.a.). However, these biases may be overridden, the question being whether they are influenced by creative aspects of language use. In our production task, we had participants produce continuations to prompts as in (1) in two blocks. After first writing the "first continuation that comes to mind", we subsequently asked participants to provide creative continuations, that is, in a maximally original and effective/felicitous, way (Runco/Jaeger 2012). Furthermore, we asked a different group of participants to rate the elicited productions with respect to the perception of both originality and effectiveness. These ratings served as a check of the creativity manipulations in the production task and are also used for analyses of particularly creative vs. uncreative language. Crucially, the results of the rating study revealed that creativity as manipulated via instruction is perceivable to comprehenders: In inferential statistical analyses, we found a highly significant difference in perceived originality between the creative and non-creative blocks in the production study.

The production experiment painted a mixed picture: While the coreference patterns usually observed in (1b) were completely unaltered by the creativity manipulation, we observed an increase in the proportion of explanations in (1a) and an increase in other forms than personal pronouns in creative as compared to "uncreative" continuations. In our presentation we will highlight further linguistic dimensions affected by linguistic creativity.

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