

A construction-based study of German ditransitive phraseologisms for language pedagogy

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Introduction

- Earlier studies (Chafe 1968; Fraser 1970; Weinreich 1969):
Phraseologisms (Phr) = idiosyncratic, idiomatic expressions with a meaning non-predictable from their constituent parts;
- Difficulties with Phr learning:
(Gibbs 1995; Matlock & Heredia 2002)
 - Attempt to establish connections between literal and non-literal meanings of Phr
 - learn Phr by heart.
- Our research: German ditransitive Phr, e.g.
 - (1) *Peter gibt Maria einen Korb*
Lit. 'Peter gives Maria a basket' = 'Peter turns Maria down'
 - (2) *Der Verkäufer zeigte mir die kalte Schulter*
Lit. 'The salesman showed me the cold shoulder'
= 'The salesman ignored me/could not be bothered'

Aim of our study:

- Show that German ditransitive Phr have the same pattern as non-phraseological/literal ditransitive constructions (Cx), but with some additional figurative aspects
- Show that L2-learners of German recognize the same patterns in ditransitive Phr as in non-phraseological Cx
- Exploit this connection for development of teaching methodology
- Show that Construction Grammar (CxG) is an ideal model for description of ditransitive Phr
- Need to also consider the verb valency for German



1. Prototypical ditransitive construction (ditr Cx)

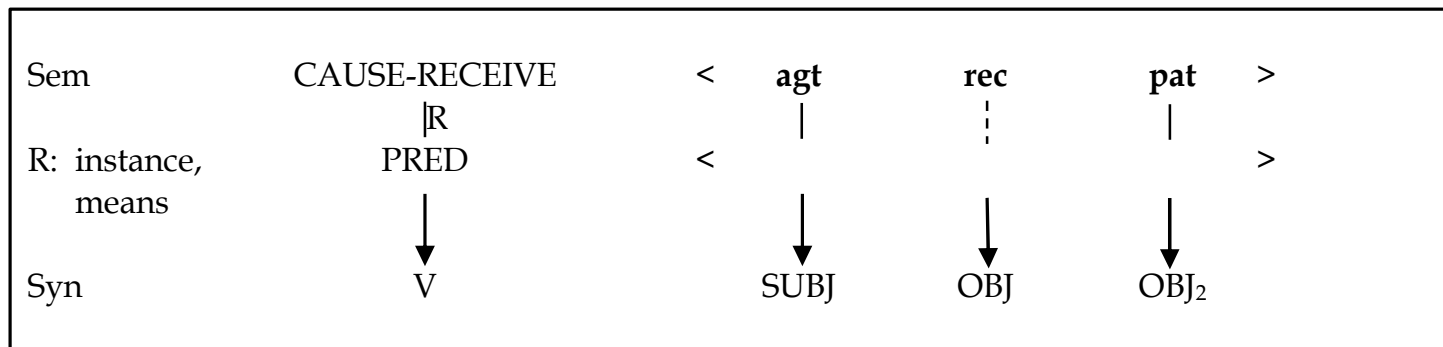
Definition

- Cx = Form-meaning pair (Goldberg 1995, 2006)
- Ditr Cx: the form [V Subj Obj1 Obj2]
- associated with abstract meaning:
'X CAUSES Y TO RECEIVE Z'
- CAUSE-RECEIVE <agt rec pat>
(Goldberg 1995: 49)

➤ **Central sense:** ‘TRANSFER’

Goldberg (1995: 141): “ [...] *the central sense is argued to involve transfer between a volitional agent and a willing recipient.*”

➤ **Representation** (Goldberg 1995: 143)



➤ **Instantiation:** Peter gives Maria a book
 [AGT] [REC] [PAT]

Prototypical instantiation:

- Meaning of Cx = Meaning of Verb (V),
e.g. *to give*
- Fusion between argument roles specified by Cx and participant roles required by V
(Goldberg 1995: 51)
- Illustration of correspondence principle
(Goldberg 1995: 50f)

2. Construction Grammar and Valency Theory (VT)

- German = strong flectional language, in which argument roles are marked with morphological cases (nominative, accusative, dative, genitive);
- Realization of ditr Cx is with a dative and an accusative object, e.g.

(6) *Peter gibt seiner Mutter ein Stück Kuchen*
[DATIVE OBJ] [ACCUSATIVE OBJ]
'Peter gives his mother a piece of cake'

3. Ditransitive phraseologisms (ditr Phr)

3.1. Definition

- Many definitions of Phr (Fleischer 1997, Donalies 2009, Burger 2007)
- Phrs "can range from free combinations to restricted collocations, figurative idioms, and pure idioms" (Wulff 2012: 292)
- Phrs = subset of phrases maximally conventionalized (Wulff 2012: 292)

3.2. Typology of ditransitive Phr

I. Prototypical ditransitive Cx

- Geben 'to give'

(9) *Isabella gab ihrem Verlobten einen Korb*

lit. 'Isabella gave her fiancé a basket'

= 'Isabella turned her fiancé down'

(10) *Der Arbeitgeber gab dem Mitarbeiter den Laufpass*

lit. 'The employer gave the colleague a run passport'

= 'The employer kicked his colleague out'

(11) *Die Stadt gab dem Bauunternehmen grünes Licht*

lit. 'The town gave the building company green light'

= 'The town gave the building company its OK (to do smt)'

- Zeigen 'to show'

(12) *Peter zeigt seiner Schwester die Krallen.*

Lit. 'Peter shows his sister the claws'

= 'Peter threatens his sister'

(13) *Er zeigte mir die kalte Schulter.*

Lit. 'He showed me the cold shoulder'

= 'He gave me the cold shoulder'

(14) *Der LKW-Fahrer zeigte den anderen Autofahrern den Stinkefinger.*

Lit. 'The lorry driver showed to the other car drivers the stinking finger'

= 'The lorry driver flipped the other car drivers off'

- Meaning: abstract transfer
- Argument roles of Cx = participant roles of V valency
- This type of ditr Phr is productive (same V, different objects), series are built.
- Phraseological meaning = Result of metaphorical or metonymical use of accusative object, e.g.

METAPHOR (9) *Isabella gab ihrem Verlobten einen Korb.*

lit. 'Isabella gave her fiancé a basket'

= 'Isabella turned her fiancé down'

METONYMY (13) *Er zeigte mir die kalte Schulter.*

lit. 'He showed me the cold shoulder'

= 'He gave me the cold shoulder'



II. Cx and V valency are different

➤ Dative object in the Phr, but not part of V valency:

(15) *Wir drücken Dir die Daumen*

Lit. 'We press you the thumbs'

= 'We keep our fingers crossed'

(16) *Ich huste dir was*

Lit. 'I cough you smtg'

= 'You can wait a long time, but I won't do it'

(17) *Jemandem den Marsch blasen*

Lit. 'to blow the march to s.o.'

= 'to give s.o. a piece of one's mind'

- Meaning: metaphorical/metonymical transfer
- Dative obj with *husten/drücken/blasen*
= the result of V use in ditr Cx
and fusion of V with ditr Cx
- Which difficulties with ditr Phr for learners?
=>TEST

4. Test

4.1. Aim of test:

- Inspired by Bencini/Goldberg (2000) and Valenzuela/Rojo (2008)
- Show that learners categorize ditr Phr like prototypical ditr Cx
- Develop avenues for teaching methodology

4.2. Participants

- 15 Belgian French-speaking master I-students in translation and interpretation studies
- 15 Italian master I-students in language studies
- Level: B2-C1 in the reference frame of Council of Europe
- Test students received the questionnaires in the class-room under supervision of lecturers but without any information



4.3. Test Part 1

4.3.1. Test design Part 1

- 25 mixed sentences (12 with Phr; 13 different)
- with same V, but different number of arguments, e.g.

(18) *Die Kuh gibt Milch,*

lit. 'The cow gives milk' = 'The cow produces milk'

(19) *Isabella gab ihrem Verlobten einen Korb.*

lit. 'Isabella gave her fiancé a basket'

= 'Isabella turned her fiancé down'

(20) *Die Müllers geben eine Party in ihrer neuen Villa.*

Lit. 'The Müllers give a party in their villa'.

- with different V, but same constructions, e.g.

(21) *Peter zeigt seiner Schwester die Krallen.*

Lit. 'Peter shows his sister the claws'

= 'Peter threatens his sister'

(22) *Die Mutter verpasste ihrer Tochter einen Denkkarte.*

Lit. 'The mother gave her daughter a think-card'

= 'The mother gives her daughter a warning/smt to think about'

(23) *Der Bauer versprach seiner Freundin goldene Berge.*

Lit. 'The farmer promised his girl-friend golden mountains'

= 'The farmer promised his girl-friend the moon'.

➤ Task: rewrite and classify these sentences according to their meaning and/or form

➤ « No wrong answer »

4.3.2. Test results Part 1

➤ 5 different classes:

d = ditr. Construction

v = according to Verb

p = ditr. Phraseologism

o = no answer or not to be recognized

x = other Construction

➤ Learners recognized different structures and did not mix them (ex. (18) *Die Kuh gibt Milch*, 'The cow gives milk'; (24) *Ich esse gerne Pasta*, 'I like to eat pasta')

➤ Many ditr Phr classified with prototypical, literal ditr Cx

➤ Classification of ditr Phr

	Frequency Results Italian learners	Frequency Results French-speaking learners
Ditr Cx/Phraseol	73 %	69 %
Verb-oriented	19 %	38 %

4.4. Test Part 2

4.4.1. Test design Part 2

- 10 instantiations of ditr Phr
- Ask for their meaning (multiple choice task, 4 possible answers)
- + select "I know the meaning" or "I don't know the meaning, but guessed it".

Isabella gab ihrem Verlobten einen Korb.

- Bedeutet:
- (1) Isabella schenkte ihrem Verlobten einen Korb Obst.
 - (2) Isabella erzählte ihrem Verlobten eine Lüge.
 - (3) Isabella sagte ihrem Freund, dass sie ihn nicht heiraten würde.
 - (4) Isabella erzählte ihrem Verlobten die Wahrheit.

- ☐ Ich kenne die Bedeutung.
- ☐ Ich kenne die Bedeutung nicht, habe sie erraten.

4.4.2. Test results Part 2

- Even if learners claimed not to know the ditr Phr, they guessed the meaning quite well!
- Better results with French-speaking learners

	Italian learners		French-speaking learners	
	Correct answer	Know the phraseol	Correct answer	Know the phraseol
10 sentences with 4 possible answers	37 %	8 %	70 %	31 %

4.5. Test Part 3

4.5.1. Test design Part 3

- Same 10 exs in a clear context
- Please paraphrase only the meaning of Phr.

*Als Mario sie fragte, ob sie ihn heiraten wollte,
gab Isabella ihm einen Korb, weil sie ihn nicht
mehr liebte.*

Bedeutung:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.5.2 Test results Part 3

- This test part allowed us to see whether learners know the meaning at all.

	Italian learners	French-speaking learners
Correct answers Part 2	37 %	70 %
Correct answers Part 3	37,4 %	75 %

5. Teaching methodology

- Refer to **prototypical, non-phraseolog. ditr. Cx** with idea of transfer (concrete or abstract)
- **Productivity + build series:** esp. with V with ditr valency, e.g. *geben/zeigen/versprechen/...*
- Talk about **figurative use** of the accusative object (metaph or meton → advanced students)

Example:

(25) *Der Bauer versprach seiner Freundin goldene Berge.*

Lit. 'The farmer promised his girl-friend golden mountains'

= 'The farmer promised his girl-friend the moon'.

6. Conclusion

- CxG ideal for unified description of ditr Cx (literal vs phr)
- Future perspective: Test efficiency of this methodology with our learners

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!



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