

Structural similarity of constructional idioms in German and Slavic languages

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Constructional idioms (Booij, 2002; Taylor, 2002), also dubbed syntactic idioms (e.g., Mel'čuk 2022), phraseme constructions (German *Phrasemkonstruktionen*, e.g., Dobrovol'skij 2011: 11), phraseological schemes (Russian: *frazеологиčeskie konstrukcii*, *frazеosxemy*, e.g. Šmelev 1977: 327-330), or semi-preconstructed phrases (Wray 2002: 7), constitute a specific type of prefabricated language that is typically underrepresented in comparative phraseological research. Consequently, we know very little about typological differences and similarities in this subdomain of idiomatic language use.

The proposed talk investigates the structural, and – to a minor extent – lexical and functional similarity of German constructional idioms and in Slavic languages. Drawing on a database of more than 250 German constructional idioms, the proposed talk discusses a selection of 20 highly frequent constructional idioms of German and evaluates their equivalents in various Slavic languages in terms of their structural, lexical and pragmatic similarity.

For instance, the constructional idiom **N/pers.pron. und X** as in *ich und aggressiv?* 'me, aggressive?' has a full structural, lexical and semantic equivalent in southwest Slavic (Czech, Slovakian, Slovenian, e.g. Slovakian *Ja a agresívny?*). In Croatian and Bosnian, it is restricted to nouns as lexical fillers. Therefore, an instantiation of the German constructional idiom as *Wir und krank!* 'Sick, us?' can only be rendered as *mi i bolest!* (lit. 'we and sickness!') in Bosnian.

Constructional idioms may also be structurally and lexically very different across languages, but equivalent in pragmatic terms ("functional equivalence", Mellado Blanco, 2023: 283). With respect to the constructional idiom **N/pers.pron. und X** mentioned above, Russian has several functional, but no structural equivalents. One such equivalent is **kakoe tam X!?** which can be used when translating a realization of the constructional idiom like *ich und lustig machen?* 'me, make fun?' Russian: *kakoe tam smejus'?*

Structural similarity is a relative notion (Kolb & Mitrofanova & Westergaard 2023: 608), and there are no clearly applicable criteria for measuring structural similarity between languages. We therefore present our own criteria relating to similarity of constructional idioms with respect to different domains.

On the one hand, structural similarity refers to the similarity of the structure of the constructional idiom as a whole. Structural similarity can also be investigated with respect to the lexically unspecified fillers of a given constructional idiom. For instance, the selection of fillers may be restricted to certain parts of speech in one language, but not in another. There may also be cross-linguistic preferences for certain lexical fillers, resulting in lexical similarity. The combination of these and other criteria makes it possible to calculate an overall index of interlingual similarity of constructional idioms. As it turns out, this index is typically, but by no means always, higher for Slavic languages that are geographically closer to the German language area than for more distant Slavic language areas.

The method on which the lecture is based is consistently empirical. Equivalents are either retrieved from parallel corpora or have been established by well-versed translators, usually checked against corpus data.

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