

Project B04: Grammatical and conversation analysis of creative variations of multi-word expressions

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Project Summary

The project deals with the expressive creativity of interlocutors that arises in natural conversation: the creation of complex linguistic expressions by individual speakers in order to communicate content that is difficult to express, as well as their collaborative processing by the participants in conversation (interactive creativity).

Our objects of investigation are newly invented or creatively altered multi-word expressions in natural dialogues, e.g., idioms and pre-patterned structures (including compounds), the characteristic grammatical and conversational properties of these MWEs, their interactive processing as well as the limits and conditions for success of their use in the context of local and global conversational tasks.

Our research agenda consists of three tasks:

- a) describe and analyse the range of expressive options from which speakers choose the MWEs that they use
- b) reconstruct the dynamics of the interaction in which interlocutors establish a common understanding of a newly introduced MWE
- c) understand the contextual and interactional conditions, as well as the conversational features that indicate the interaction's success

This research programme requires the collaboration of researchers with expertise in conversation analysis (CA) and formal linguistics (FL). In pursuing each of these three tasks in our agenda, we will integrate the two perspectives.

We understand deviations from conventional MWEs as well as the emergence of new figurative expressions as creative language use in the sense of our theoretical framework: They are a consequence of the normal variability of spontaneous language use, but at the same time they are constrained by conditions of communicative success, i.e. they must be designed in such a way that the interaction partner comprehends and accepts them.

The project takes a dynamic view of linguistic meaning by examining how interlocutors use their resources to build an inter-subjective world of meaning as the interaction progresses.

We understand the outcome of this sequentially co-constructed meaning as the interactively established common ground in the ongoing conversation. The CA group and the FL group both work on a reconstruction of the dynamic process whereby interlocutors interactively yield a common understanding and use of newly created or altered MWEs. The CA group will build a collection of dialogue

excerpts in which new MWEs emerge or where creative deviations from MWEs are found (sequences). The data corpus from which the collection is taken consists of authentic conversations in a setting where the participants are under high pressure to be linguistically creative in order to express themselves, doctor-patient-interactions. In these conversations, patients usually have no linguistic routines at their disposal for describing their personal experiences.

Drawing from this corpus, we will develop precise descriptions of how interaction partners co-constructively process creative uses of MWEs. The descriptions are based on recordings and time-aligned transcripts of the conversational data, carried out with computer-aided multilevel annotation software (EXMaRALDA).

The FL group will analyse the same MWEs from this corpus. We will focus on the lexical and grammatical details of MWEs and their parts, on their stable and variable properties, and in particular on the kinds of changes and modifications that can be observed: e.g., the idiom *Wie das Kaninchen vor der Schlange* ('like a deer caught in the headlights', lit. 'like the rabbit in front of the snake') appears in modified form in our data: *wie nen kaninchen vorm abschluss* (lit. 'like a rabbit that's about to be shot') and still has a figurative, though modified, interpretation.

We expect that speakers and hearers use key words, syntactic configurations, or schematic templates (like *wie ein Kaninchen vor* in our example) as indicators for the base recognition of the modified MWE. The meaning associated with its modified variants is subject to negotiation between the interlocutors.

Open Positions

PhD position 1 (65%)

Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field. He/she has completed an excellent master's thesis in the field of linguistic conversation analysis, interactional linguistics or Gesprächsanalyse. He/she has experience in recording, transcribing (according to the conventions of GAT 2) and especially in analysing natural conversations. He/she has a solid education in all relevant fields of linguistics and an interest in collaborating within and beyond the field.

Main research focus within the project: The dissertation topic will be the analysis of the interactive negotiation of newly created and creatively altered Multi Word Expressions with methods of linguistic conversation analysis, i.e. in contributing to the research tasks of the Conversation Analysis part of the project.

PhD position 2 (65%)

Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field. He/she has completed an excellent master's thesis in the field of semantics, pragmatics and/or morpho-syntax of German. He/she has experience in the formal analysis of the structure and meaning of complex linguistic expressions. He/she has a solid education in all relevant fields of linguistics and an interest in collaborating within and beyond the field.

Main research focus within the project: The dissertation topic will be the formal and semantic analysis of multi-word expressions, the reconstruction of the dynamics of the negotiation of multi-word expressions, and the development of formal context models.

For further information please contact the project leaders:

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