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

Sabine De Knop
(Université Saint-Louis, Brussels; deknop@fusl.ac.be)

Fabio Mollica
(Università degli Studi di Milano; fabio.mollica@unimi.it)
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sem</th>
<th>CAUSE-RECEIVE</th>
<th>&lt;</th>
<th>agt</th>
<th>rec</th>
<th>pat</th>
<th>&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>PRED</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>SUBJ</td>
<td>OBJ</td>
<td>OBJ2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

\[(6) \text{Peter gibt } \text{seiner Mutter ein Stück Kuchen} \]

\[\text{[DATIVE OBJ] [ACCUSATIVE OBJ]} \]

‘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:

- 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 Denkzettel.
    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. Phraseology
  - 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency Results Italian learners</th>
<th>Frequency Results French-speaking learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ditr Cx/Phraseol</td>
<td>73 %</td>
<td>69 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb-oriented</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>38 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Italian learners</th>
<th>French-speaking learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct answer</td>
<td>37 %</td>
<td>70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the phraseol</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 sentences with 4 possible answers
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Italian learners</th>
<th>French-speaking learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct answers Part 2</td>
<td>37 %</td>
<td>70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct answers Part 3</td>
<td>37,4 %</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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!
Bibliography