Expanding the German FrameNet: Pragmatic frames across lexicon and grammar

More than 40 years ago, Fillmore (1982) introduced the distinction between semantic and pragmatic frames (or cognitive and interactional frames). Since then, very few attempts have been made to explore motivations for this distinction, both theoretically and empirically (Czulo, Ziem & Torrent 2020). Whereas semantic frames cover lexical-semantic facets of linguistic units, pragmatic frames are said to cut across 'traditional' lexical frames by taking account of context-dependent usage parameters of the target units. The need for including pragmatic frames has become even more pressing with the development of so-called constructicons, i.e. structured digital repositories of constructions specific to a target language: Even though some constructicons, notably the Brazilian Portuguese and the German one, use semantic frames for analyzing and representing constructional meanings (Boas, Lyngfelt & Torrent 2019), lexical frames as documented in the FrameNet respositories often turn out to be descriptively inadaquate for linguistic units with pragmatic functions.

The talk addresses two batteries of issues: (1) How to identify linguistic units (lexical items, mulitword-expressions, grammatical constructions) evoking pragmatic frames? And which classes, or functional domains, of pragmatic frames may be established on the basis of the units identified? (2) To what extent do pragmatic frames differ from semantic frames? More specifically, what are the criteria that pragmatic frames have to meet in order to account for contextual constraints determining the usage of such linguistic units? With these questions in mind, the talk reports on results achieved in an explorative full-text annotation task. Directed at a small set of texts of various text types, the task aimed at identifying and outlining candidates for pragmatic frames as exhaustively as possible.

Analyses of the annotated data suggest that pragmatic constraints apply to a wide range of highly diverse lexical and grammatical constructions across the full range of the lexicon-grammar continuum (cf. also Cappelle 2017). In this range, a variety of domains needs to be distinguished. First, hybrid pragmatic frames contrast with non-hybrid ones, in that the former relate to existing lexical frames (evoked, for example, by interjections or modal adverbs) specific enough to also account for capturing linguistic units with pragmatic functions. Second, annotated data seem to fall in at least four domains of pragmatic frames: (a) interactional frames (evoked by greetings or addressing constructions), (b) frames for deictic information (time, place, textual reference, social deixis), (c) frames for stance-taking and positioning, and (d) text-related pragmatic frames (evoked for instance in simulated conversations or by textual formulas). Accordingly, canonical categories used in constructicography so far (Fillmore, Lee-Goldman & Rhomieux 2012; Lee-Goldman & Petruck 2018) need to be extended substantially. Finally, beyond coverage issues, a constructicographic challenge to be addressed is to account for contextual embeddings of constructions, yielding pragmatic interpretations at the level of individual instances which, however, need to be generalized in order to fully account for the construction's function (Finkbeiner 2019). The talk concludes by introducing a constructicographic apparatus to document and implement the pragmatic frames identified along with the linguistic units evoking them in the German FrameNet Constructicon (framenet-constructicon.hhu.de).

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