

Zum Brüllen komisch. Intensifying with verbal constructions. A corpus-based study in German and Spanish.

Pedro Ivorra Ordines¹ & Nely Milagros Iglesias Iglesias²

¹University of Santiago de Compostela, University Pompeu Fabra (Spain) & Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, pedro.ivorra@usc.es; pedro.ivorra@upf.edu ²University of Salamanca (Spain), nely@usal.es

Keywords: Cross-linguistic Construction Grammar, constructional idioms, intensification function, tertium comparationis, continuum of idiomaticity

The analysis of partially filled phrasal patterns endowed with a global pragmatic meaning represents one of the most fruitful and innovative areas of research in the development of the Construction Grammar - phraseology intersection. It is precisely from constructionist approaches that these structures are in the spotlight since they have a high flexibility in the renewal of the slots in the discourse and are characterised by a productive structure. Interlingual descriptions of these phenomena are, however, rather scarce (see Mellado Blanco, Mollica & Schafroth 2022). Construction Grammar has mostly been the subject of study of a single language, particularly under the assumption that “constructions themselves are language-specific” (Croft 2001: 6).

Against this background, contrary to Croft’s belief, we argue that constructional idioms can be compared cross-linguistically departing from the semantic description (including discourse-pragmatic and functional factors) as a first step towards a tertium comparationis, while advocating for a holistic description of constructional idioms in the quest for a functional equivalent (Ivorra Ordines 2021). For the present study, two key aspects are essential when looking for a tertium comparationis: formally speaking, it must include an adjective, a preposition and an infinitive and, semantically-pragmatically speaking, the illocutionary function must be the intensification of the adjective.

(1) *Aber muss es dann ein enges Hemd sein, wo die 3 Knöpfe auf Höhe des Bauchnabels bis zum bersten gespannt sind?* (deTenTen20, 62243150)

(2) *Pendlerzüge, sind wieder zum Bersten gefüllt, in Bussen und Bahnen herrscht zur Hauptverkehrszeit wieder drangvolle Enge.* (deTenTen20, 204621972)

(3) *Finalmente, llegó a su oficina, una pequeña habitación con pocos adornos exceptuando un par de fotografías de sus años de estudiante, una biblioteca repleta a rebosar y su escritorio de madera, antiguo y funcional.* (esTenTen18, 1763382367)

(4) *Algo insensible, nunca se la dado bien intentar subirle el ánimo a los demás desde su punto de vista, Chrome es fiel a morir, traicionar no está en su vocabulario, en algunas misiones, sus compañeros pueden admitir que Chrome se vuelve algo violenta y quizás demasiado bruta cuando alguien la saca de sus casillas.* (esTenTen18, 4289285377)

As can be attested in the examples above, the German pattern [*zum* V ADJ] and the functionally equivalent Spanish pattern [ADJ *a* V], as interlinguistic related constructions, show different degrees of idiomatisation or pragmaticalisation conforming a continuum, which ranges from more or less literal meanings and moves over more or less figurative meanings (see Michaelis 2019).

According to the corpus analysis carried out with deTenTen20 and esTenTen18 corpus (Sketch Engine), the aim of the paper is twofold: i) to examine the adjective slot fillers in both languages, in order to determine which qualities tend to be intensified by this construction in each of the languages; ii) to examine the fillers which renew the infinitive slot in each of the languages, in order to observe which verbs are prototypically used to designate the supreme degree in each language. In this sense, verbs whose meaning can be interpreted literally in certain contexts and verbs whose interpretation is only metaphorical are detected (idiomaticity continuum).