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**GERMAN VERBAL UNITS WITH INDEFINITE CONTENT:
FEATURES OF SEMANTICS, FUNCTIONING AND
LEXICOGRAPHY**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of researching the semantics of eurysemic words in the German language. Eurysemia is interpreted by the author as a manifestation of the phenomenon of linguistic uncertainty, which is due to the vagueness of referential links between the facts of language and individual areas and essences of reality, as well as the abstract nature of any natural language. The report examines the German colloquial verbal units with adverbs and adverbial particles, which belong to the basic level of broad meaning according to the classification of E. Resch. Their semantic and functional features are analyzed, the essential characteristics that the studied verbal lexemes possess as units with indefinite content are considered. An observation is made about the change in the meaning of the producing basis towards a greater abstraction. There is a tendency towards a holistic metaphorical transformation of verb units with indefinite content in colloquial vocabulary. Using linguistic examples, the article demonstrates how by interpreting the conceptual content of verbal lexemes and their specific uses, as well as using the method of contextual analysis of the concordances of the representative electronic corpus DWDS-Corpus, contextually-conditioned elements of the semantics of verb units are revealed, on the basis of which ordinary semantic variants are formulated, not reflected in dictionary definitions. The article concludes that there is insufficient discretization of the common meanings of wide-valued verb units in their lexicographic description.

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1. Introduction

The article is devoted to the study of the semantics of wide-valued German verbal units with preverbal adverbs and adverbial particles.

Questions related to the status and functioning of verbs with broad semantics are of constant interest among domestic and foreign linguists. Interest in the problem of eurysemia (wide-ranging) is explained by the originality of this phenomenon, its paradox, when a unit, in fact devoid of specific semes, is capable of denoting a wide range of phenomena and objects. In addition, interest in this layer of German vocabulary is due to the fact that the corresponding word-formation models have significant activity, and the verb units themselves have a high frequency of use in modern German.

In Russian linguistics, eurysemia, as a rule, is considered as an independent lexical and semantic phenomenon. A heurycemic word is understood as a lexeme with a maximally generalized and highly indefinite meaning, "appearing in its pure form only in conditions of isolation of a word from speech and receiving a certain narrowing and concretization when this word is used in speech" (Amosova, 1959, p. 63). In European linguistics (including Germanic studies), the phenomena that fall under the definition of broad meaning are considered in the context of linguistic ambiguity ("Unbestimmtheit", "Vagheit"). Researchers working on semantic ambiguity recognize that it is based on an abstraction mechanism (Lakoff, 1970; Pinkal, 1991, 1996; Petermann, 2014). Turning to the research of Z. Freud and B. Russell, K. Peterman comes to the conclusion that since language models the surrounding reality, abstractness is its inherent property, like any model (as cited in Petermann, 2014, p. 47). As a result of the act of abstraction, in which the most relevant features associated with the designated segment of reality in the minds of all representatives of one linguistic community are selected, specific components of the content are lost. The lack of direct correspondence between the phenomena displayed in the language and the real phenomena becomes the cause of linguistic ambiguity, which affects all language levels, including the lexical one.

Another reason for linguistic uncertainty, which researchers point out, is that the entities of the real world, despite their uniqueness, have common features, which leads to the intersection of conceptual groups and the uncertainty of their boundaries ("referential fuzziness") (Blinova & Belov, 2020, p. 796). According to B. Russell, the impossibility to draw the line between specific entities is associated with the imperfection of human sensory organs, insufficient detail in the perception of the corresponding real objects (as cited in Petermann, 2014, p. 49).

Thus, the main reasons for eurysemia, as a private expression of uncertainty in a language, are fuzzy, unclear reference, due to insufficient detailing of the essence of the real world, and the abstract nature of the language (Petermann, 2014, p. 53).

Uncertainty is a common phenomenon (Blinova & Belov, 2020) and is characteristic of most linguistic units and expressions. Most of the words "do not fully reflect the complexity of the concepts corresponding to them, which means that they represent some averaging or generalization for which uncertainty is natural" (Brattseva, 2017, pp. 21-31). It is logical to assume that the degree of generalization that linguistic units can express is not the same. For example, Rosch's (1978) classification is known, which distinguishes categories of a higher, "superordinate" level, categories of a subordinate level and basic categories.

The term "eurysemic" is used, as a rule, in relation to lexemes belonging to the categories of the highest (superordinate) level. The speaker resorts to units of this level when the use of a lexeme of the basic or subordinate levels can lead to a misunderstanding, or because of "a high degree of predestination of its referent in a communication situation" (Kobozeva, 2000, p. 103).

In our study, the concept of "eurysemia" also applies to units of the middle (basic) level. They have a number of hyponyms that concretize the action they denote (hereinkriegen - hereziehen, hereführen, hereintragen), but at the same time, they are hyponyms in relation to the corresponding designations of a higher level of abstraction (kriegen - hereinkriegen). In total, 145 verb units were considered, formed from the stems of verbs with a wide meaning.

2. Problem Statement

As already noted, in the modern German language there is a layer of verbal lexicon, which has a pronounced property of wide meaning. Due to their high usage, these lexemes are usually always recorded by authoritative dictionaries, but their meaning, as a rule, is formulated as broadly as possible and is not discretized.

The problems of discretizing the meanings of wide-meaning words are caused by referential uncertainty, that is, by the fact that individual segments of reality do not have a clear delineation and structuring. On this occasion Nikitin (1996) writes the following: <...> in some points, the very structure of human practice, due to its insufficient, incomplete discretization in this area, does not give the semasiologist grounds to unequivocally answer the question of whether it is necessary to isolate the special meaning of a polysemantic word or combine two word uses with one meaning" (p. 210).

Observation of the practical material shows that among the set of actual (situational) contextual meanings of the studied verb units, there are regular, systematic uses, which can be reduced to a common lexico-semantic variant. Such variants of meanings need lexicographic fixation, but at the moment they are not marked by German dictionaries, including such authoritative lexicographic sources as the "Universal Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern German Language" of the Duden series (electronic version), and the "Electronic Dictionary of the Modern German Language" (Das Digitale Wörterbuch ..., 2020).

The number of allocated meanings in the semantic structure of a lexeme depends, first of all, on how "clearly and deeply the corresponding subject area is developed in human activity and experience, how important and sharp distinctions are made in human practice itself" (Nikitin, 1996, p. 207).

3. Research Questions

Within the framework of the research, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the features of the semantics of German verbal units with preverbal components formed from wide-valued stems?
2. What criteria should be applied in the lexicography of wide-valued verbal lexemes in order to solve the problem of semantic insufficiency in describing their meaning?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify cases of common use of German wide-valued verbal units with adverbial components (adverbs and adverbial particles) and to demonstrate the insufficiency of the lexicographic description of their semantics in modern German dictionaries.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods were the methods of component and contextual analysis, as well as the analysis of lexicographic definitions.

To conduct a contextual analysis, which made it possible to identify nuances in the meaning structures of specific realizations of wide-valued verb lexemes, we used the texts of modern publicistic publications included in the electronic text corpus of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (DWDS-Corpus) and the corpus of the University of Leipzig (Das Wortschatz-Portal), developed by the Leipzig University Institute for Informatics (Leipzig Corpora Collection (LCC)).

To identify gaps in the dictionary descriptions of the meanings of the studied verbal units and to discretize individual lexical and semantic variants, the method of interpretation of conceptual content, the method of component analysis, as well as a number of formal methods were used: distributive, valence, transformational, substitutional, translation methods.

Without denying the importance of formal operational techniques for establishing significant discretization differences in the meanings of wide-valued lexemes, we, following Nikitin (1996), believe that “the final criterion in solving semasiological problems are those structures of conceptual units that are formed in consciousness as a direct reflection of the structure of human activity” (p. 222). Thus, formal criteria were assigned a verification, auxiliary role in relation to meaningful interpretations of meaning, reflecting how reality is structured in human consciousness (Nikitin, 1996, pp. 222-224).

Of the proposed formal methods, the most significant for confirming the need to highlight the usual meaning in the semantics of the unit under study is the distributive or syntagmatic method. At the same time, we are not talking about the fact that it is necessary to take into account all the features of the distribution of the lexeme, since the possibility of a lexeme to be combined with units belonging to different semantic classes cannot serve as a basis for separating each such representation into a separate semantic variant. However, one should take into account the regular, repetitive combinations of tokens with units belonging to different conceptual areas. For example, regular combinations of the verbal unit *hineintun* as a collocant with units from the lexico-semantic group “Money” (*Geld, Zinsen, eine Milliarde Euro, etc.*) gives reason to single out in the homogeneous structure of this wide-valued lexeme the usual meaning “to invest (money)”, associated with a specific group of homogeneous uses.

The identification and analysis of regular collocations allows us to single out individual areas of use of the lexemes under study and differentiate their common meanings on the basis of *semes*, which are actualized only in these specific contextual uses.

6. Findings

6.1. Semantic characteristics of eurysemic verbal lexemes with preverbs, as units with indefinite content

The sphere of functioning of the studied verb units is limited to colloquial speech. This corresponds to the fact that uncertainty, blurred semantics are generally characteristic of colloquial lexemes, a significant part of which is saturated with hidden potential meanings. The vagueness of the content of such lexemes is compensated for by the linguistic and sociocultural context.

As Devkin (2005), a colloquial word much more than any other depends on its use” (p. 169), therefore one of the important tasks of colloquial lexicography when describing a word with a wide meaning is the ability “<...> to convey a speech, uniquely instantaneous in the conditional operations of rejecting a word from the context and situation to reduce this dependence to a minimum sufficient to reveal the semantics. (p. 170)

The semantic nature of eurysemic verbal units with preverbs-particles and adverbs is rather complex and peculiar. The uncertainty of their content is due, first of all, to the wide-valued basis, while the adjective component performs the function of the concretizer and the semantic core of the lexeme. The presence of "semantic voids" in the meaning of the generating verb stem stimulates the concretization of the meaning of a wide-valued verb by adding an adverb component. However, despite the fact that the meaning of the motivating stem is narrowed due to the concretizing semes introduced by the adverb component, the zone of reference denoted by the verbal unit remains wide enough.

On the example of the second components of verbal units, one can observe the action of the desemantization process—a phenomenon in which a wide-meaning word partially or completely loses its lexical meaning. This is a gradual process that can end with the transition of a unit that has completely lost its lexical meaning to the category of service elements that perform a grammatical function. In verbal units, desemantization is expressed in the fact that the second component passes into the status of frequency components. From the point of view of word-formation potential, such bases can be characterized as "endogenous full-valued bases with a wide semantics, which determines their serial use in word formation" (Yushkova, 2020, p. 20). It is the serial use, word-formation activity and a high degree of abstraction that bring these units closer to service word-formation morphemes. The degree of abstraction of the semantics of frequency components in the composition of verbal units may be somewhat enhanced in comparison with the semantic abstraction that is initially characteristic of these units. This is due to the possibility of a holistic metaphorical rethinking of the entire verb unit. For example, verbal lexemes with the adverb *hin-* and the stems of the modal verbs *können*, *müssen* and *wollen*, referring to the conceptual area of “action modality”, in addition to the main meaning “to have the ability (desire) to go somewhere” regularly implement the metaphorical meaning “to address someone or something "(about feelings, emotions, intentions, etc.) (Yushkova, 2020).

The main reason for the uncertainty in the content of the units under study is that not only the generating verbs, but also the pre-verbal particles and adverbs themselves have a fairly wide meaning. If

we consider the semantic structure of preverb meanings as a network system, similar to the description of the semantic system of a preposition (Krongauz, 2001), then along with direct meanings of a spatial nature, metaphorized, abstract meanings are revealed in it. Altogether, the meanings of the adjective component are related in some maximally abstracted invariant part (Ibid.). The metaphorical identity between the category of space and other conceptual areas leads to the fact that all LSV derivatives of adverb units are more or less explicitly conditioned by the existence of this prototypical spatial invariant.

Another factor that leads to the uncertainty of the meaning of the units under study is due to the specificity of the word-formation model as a cognitive phenomenon, which is expressed in the combinatorics of the derived unit. The analyzed constructions can be considered as the result of semantic and linguistic compression or contraction, for example: *ummachen* is used instead of “*um den Arm (Hals, Kopf, Baum) machen*”. While analyzing the phenomenon of contraction, Nikitin (1996) writes that this gives rise to “hypersemantic constructions”, which are distinguished by referential uncertainty and need the support of a broader context (p. 574). Pinkal (2016) explains the ambiguity of the semantics of verbal units (such as *mitwollen*, *abtun* and others) by the unrealisation of obligatory arguments and characterizes them as facts of elliptic polysemy (*elliptische Mehrdeutigkeit*) (p. 77).

6.2. Problem of lexicography of eurysemic verb units

The problem of the dictionary description of the meaning of a word with an indefinite content lies mainly in the fact that most often it is interpreted as abstractly as possible. On the one hand, this makes it possible to avoid unnecessary detailing of the meaning, to correlate it with a wide semantic area, thus providing for the possibility of numerous variants of contextual implementations. As noted by Krongauz (2001), “a word in a language can only have a certain potential, allowing it to acquire one or another referential characteristic” (pp. 128-129). However, the lexical-semantic meaning of a word does not include referential features inherent in its actual meanings, which are not systemic lexical-semantic variants of the word and are not recorded by dictionaries. Thus, when describing the contextual meaning of a lexeme, referential signs are not taken into account. On the other hand, this approach may overlook some invariant conventional meanings that are regularly reproduced in a number of typical contexts and require lexicographic codification.

As follows from the above, the difficulties of discretizing the meanings of wide-valued words in dictionaries are due to the fact that individual segments of reality do not have a clear delimitation and structuring, since “<...> in some points the very structure of human practice due to its insufficient, incomplete discretization on a given area does not give the semasiologist reason to unequivocally answer the question of whether it is necessary to isolate the special meaning of a polysemantic word or to combine two word usage with one meaning” (Nikitin, 1996, p. 210).

To make the final decision on the allocation of an independent lexical-semantic variant in the homogeneous structure of a wide-meaning word, you can use some rules. Certain rules for identifying conventional meanings and their delimitation from actual meanings are set forth by Kobozeva (2000).

The rule formulated within the framework of prototype theory is quite effective (Lakoff, 1987). According to the concept of a “prototypical denotation”, meanings actualized in a certain context that differ from the prototypical meaning by one or another feature or the absence of any semantic feature are not

ordinary meanings (Lakoff, 1987). However, if A and B are two different conventional meanings of a word, then their simultaneous use in the same context is impossible (Kobozeva, 2000), since this violates the conceptual basis of the statement due to the syntactic combination of words denoting objects from different conceptual areas.

Wide-valued verbal units allow many variants of use that differ from the main meaning in one or another actualized sign, but in most cases their variants can be placed in one context without violating the conceptual integrity of the utterance. A sense of punning usually occurs when the direct and metaphorical meanings of a word collide (for example, “Er geht ins Geschäft und zum Himmel hin“). Consequently, the metaphorical meanings of wide-valued verb units, subject to their repetition, should be considered as separate conventional meanings.

Kobozeva (2000) cites a number of factors that should be taken into account in order to resolve the controversial issue of the presence or absence of different meanings of a word (Kobozeva, 2000). Among them, we consider the factor of difference between virtual denotations and significations of word usage, as well as the factor of semantic compatibility, to be the most significant for identifying individual meanings in wide-meaning words.

The carried out contextual analysis made it possible to identify the context-related conventional meanings in a number of German verbal units with adverbs and adverbs. These meanings are not noted either in the Duden Universal Explanatory Dictionary of Modern German or in the Electronic Dictionary of Modern German (DWDS).

For example, the meaning of the verbal unit *herunterwollen* is formulated in these dictionaries in the most general form as “herunterkommen, -gehen, -fahren o. A. wollen“ (Duden, 2021). The conventional meaning of “jump off”, “stop taking drugs, alcohol, etc.” it is not noted in dictionaries, but the formation of such a variant of meaning is objectively confirmed both by the denotative-significative correlation of this use with a certain conceptual sphere, and by syntagmatic features—the verb unit *herunterwollen* in this use is used as a collocant in combinations with lexemes from the lexical-semantic group “substances, forming dependence”, as a rule, in the role of a prepositional object (*von Drogen, auf 20% Alkoholinhalt, auf ein vernünftiges Mass an Alkohol*).

The verb unit *heraustun* has the dictionary definition “(aus dem Inneren) nach außen legen, setzen, stellen” (Duden, 2021). The use of referential and syntagmatic criteria made it possible to single out the usual meaning of “take someone out of the composition, expel from the team”. In addition, in combination with the reflexive pronoun as an object in the accusative case, the nuclear seme of the verbal unit *heraustun* “going out” is rethought, implying the idea of separation from the general row. Thus, the new reflexive verb *sich heraustun* (which is not given in the dictionaries of the German language) develops the meaning “to stand out, to attract attention”.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of dictionary definitions showed that the usual meanings of eurysemic colloquial verb units often turn out to be unaccounted for in dictionaries, which is explained, firstly, by the desire for an economical and capacious description of the semantics of a broad-valued word, and secondly, by the blurred

boundaries between the essences of the reality surrounding a person and impossibility of their clear delineation.

To make the final decision on the allocation of an independent lexical-semantic variant in the homogeneous structure of a wide-meaning word, the study used formal rules for identifying common meanings. The most significant for identifying discrete conventional meanings in the structure of a wide-valued lexeme are recognized as referential and syntagmatic (distributive) criteria.

The number of allocated meanings in the semantic structure of a wide-valued lexeme depends, first of all, on how clearly the corresponding subject area is indicated in human experience and consciousness.

In direct connection with the conventional meaning of the word is its compatibility. As the analysis has shown, regular combinations of the unit under study with lexemes belonging to a certain semantic group most often serve as confirmation of the presence in the structure of a heurysemic lexeme of a specific conventional meaning.

The performed analysis allows concluding about the need for a more thorough study and dictionary description of the meanings of wide-valued verbal units. The observations made can contribute to the development of an algorithm for the lexicographic description of eurysemic words in order to accurately record the stock of German colloquial verb vocabulary.

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