

Nouns with governed preposition *on*. A comparative analysis of N+P constructions in German, English, Polish, and Ukrainian

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Traditionally, it has often been argued that governed prepositions tend to lose their semantic value when they are governed by verbs, nouns or adjectives (e.g. Duden-Grammatik, 2005). For instance, in such expressions as *warten auf* ‘wait for’, *Hoffnung auf* ‘hope for’, *stolz auf* ‘proud of’ the preposition *auf* ‘on’ is claimed not to express its intrinsic meaning, i.e. to be meaningless or meaning-neutral.

However, since the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics in 1970s, this view has been challenged, and governed prepositions might no longer seem as meaningless as once thought. By way of illustration, Zeschel’s (2019) analysis of the range of meanings of verbal ASCs in German that involve PP *vor* ‘in front of’ demonstrates that the governed preposition *vor* is meaningful in identified schematic pattern meanings. The primary meaning of the preposition *vor* is a spatial one, while other meanings are related to the spatial sense metaphorically and/or metonymically. The results of Zeschel’s (2019) research correspond to those of Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 17): while analyzing orientational metaphors, they concluded that "most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors."

The focus of the present study is to examine nouns that govern the spatial preposition *on* in German and their translations into English, Polish, and Ukrainian. The main concern of the paper is to discover whether any cross-linguistic parallelism or any similar semantic networks can be identified, and if the various meanings of the constructions, similarly to Zeschel’s (2019) study, are connected to the spatial meaning of the preposition through the same or similar metaphorical and metonymic extensions. For this research, one dictionary for each language will be used to identify nouns that require the preposition *on*. Corpus data will be used to supplement the dictionary information.

Below is an example of the N+P ‘*Gedanken auf / thoughts on*’ construction in English and German, as well as their equivalent translations into Polish and Ukrainian:

ENG: *I don't waste my thoughts on this*

DE: *Ich verschwende meine Gedanken nicht darauf*

PL: *Szkoda o tym myśleć*

UA: *Шкода про це думати*

While English and German employ the noun *thoughts/ Gedanken* and preposition *on/ auf*, Polish and Ukrainian use the preposition ‘about’ and the nonfinite verb ‘to think’. Additionally, an interjection *szkoda/ ukoda* ‘it’s a pity’ are placed at the beginning of each utterance. The literal translation into English would be ‘It’s a pity to think about it’. In other words, the strategies used in Ukrainian and Polish are different from those in English and German. Strategies are certain ways of expressing a particular combination of semantic content and information packaging (Croft 2022: 19). As languages vary greatly and people use them in creative ways, identifying similar strategies might be challenging. The present analysis, however, aims to discover whether there is any cross-linguistic similarity in the structuring of a particular function, whether they differ, and if so, how, as well as what strategies are there to express equivalent functions.

References:

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