

Lexical motivation and speaker judgements

Project Background and Objectives:

- Our main goal is to establish **motivational profiles** of French, Italian, and German based on data gathered by native speaker judgements.
- We interpret the speaker judgements according to a two-dimensional grid including not only formal relations (different types of word formation, formal identity, lexicalized syntagms, idioms) but also cognitive-semantic relations (e.g. metaphorical similarity, contiguity, taxonomic relations, etc.).

absence of motivation	semantic motivation	contiguity	metaphorical similarity	cotaxonomic similarity	taxonomic subordination	taxonomic subordination	cotaxonomic contrast
formal identity/polysemy		01	02	03	04	05	06
number alternation	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
gender alternation	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
voice alternation	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
word-class alternation	40	41	42	43	44	45	46
suffixation	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
prefixation	60	61	62	63	64	65	66
composition	70	71	72	73	74	75	76
lexical syntagm	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
idiom	90	91	92	93	94	95	96

Central theoretical questions:

- Has each of the three languages its own cognitive profile within motivation or have all three languages the same “cognitive preferences”?
- Which combinations of formal and semantic-cognitive relations are possible?

Our Aims in this Poster:

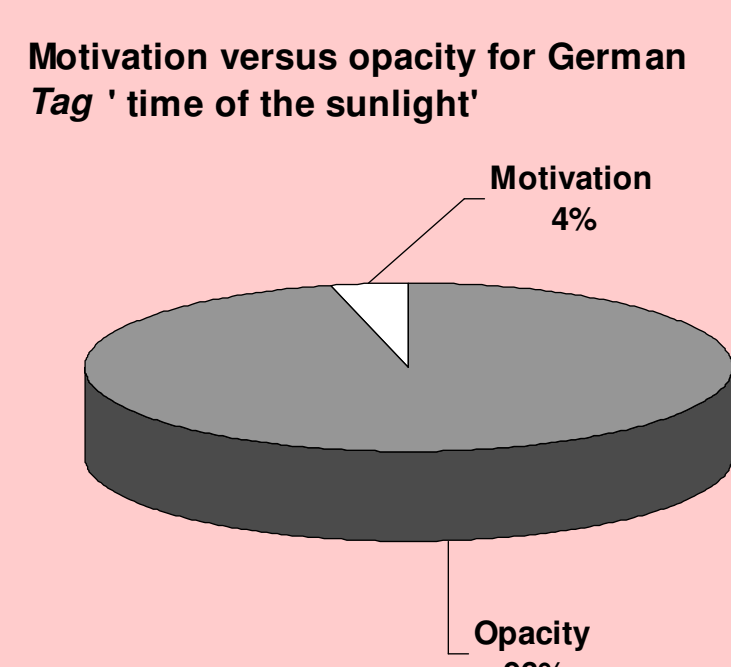
- To show that speaker judgements are better suited for the research of lexical motivation than linguist introspection.
- To discuss whether the results show significant differences depending on the task type. For this purpose we compare a more **open** and a more **closed** questionnaire task on the semantic dimension of motivation.

Some Results (OQ + CQ) Proving that Speaker Judgements are better than Linguist Introspection:

1. Is a certain word motivated or opaque?

German *Tag* ‘the time of sunlight’

We expected that most of the informants would see a relation to another meaning of the same word, i.e. *Tag* in the sense of ‘the space of 24 hours’. However, the results of both of our questionnaires clearly show that *Tag* in the sense of ‘the time of sunlight’ is not motivated, but opaque: 52 out of 53 informants opted for “this unit doesn’t come from any other word nor any other meaning”.

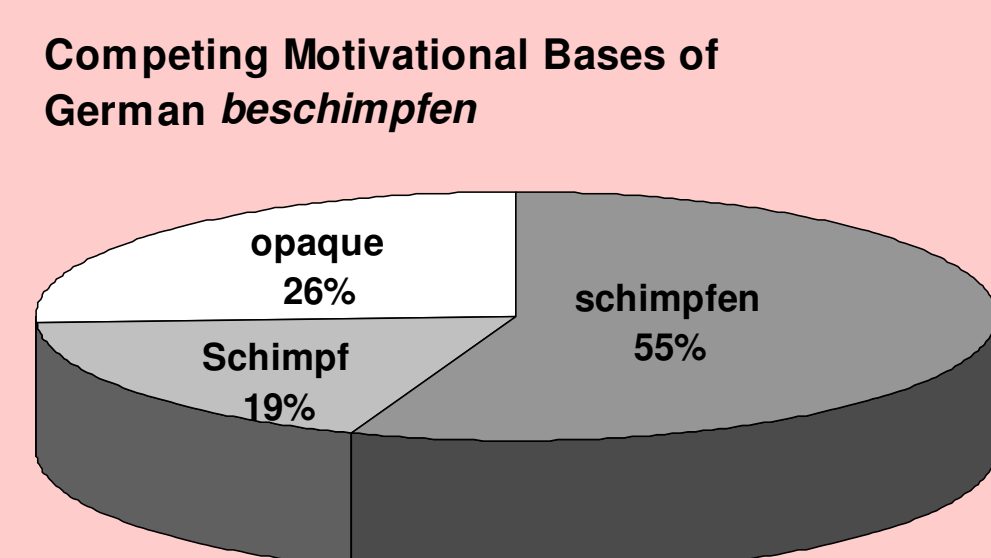


2. What are the motivational bases the native speakers would choose?

German *beschimpfen* ‘to attack sb. verbally in anger’

In this case we took it for granted that all informants would choose the word *schimpfen* as a motivational base. The majority (30 out of 53) actually did chose *schimpfen* as a motivational base (in the different senses of ‘to grumble’, ‘to scold somebody’ and ‘to talk about someone negatively’), but there are nevertheless some results we couldn’t foresee:

- 14 out of 53 informants considered it as opaque.
- 10 out of 53 informants named the motivational base *Schimpf* in the senses of ‘grumbling’ and ‘angry reproach’.

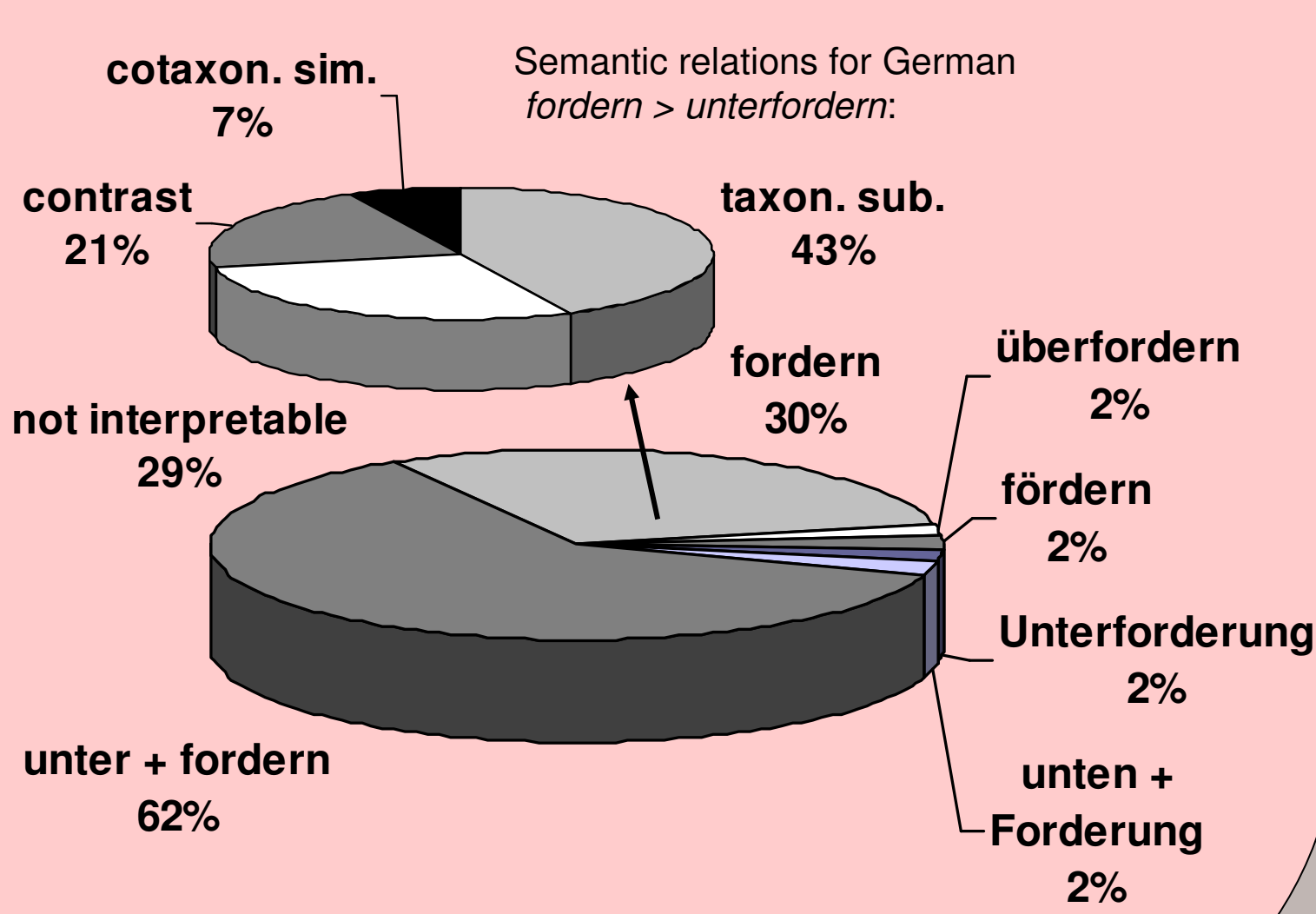


3. Which is the semantic-cognitive relation underlying most of the informants’ explanations with respect to one motivational base?

German *unterfordern* ‘ask too little from somebody’

One of the informants’ favourite motivational bases was *fordern* ‘to demand something from somebody’. We expected that the most important semantic-cognitive relations would be either the relation of taxonomic subordination or the relation of contiguity. The informants’ answers clearly show that

- the relation of contiguity plays no role in this case and that
- the relation of taxonomic subordination is the most important relation for both of the stimulus-base-pairs, but not the only one.



Two Types of Questionnaires about Motivation:

Both questionnaires have the same first and second part.

1. For each word, the informants are presented with a stimulus which consists of a word form, a meaning definition and an example. The question they have to answer is: “Where does the given word come from?” One of the following four answer types has to be chosen:

- from another word of the same word family
- from two other words
- from another meaning of the same word
- from no other word or meaning

If the last option is selected, the informants are directly led to the next stimulus, otherwise, they pass on to the second part of the question.

2. In the example on the right the participant chose the option “from another word” and he was asked to give the word form as well as its meaning. He derived the German stimulus *beschimpfen* ‘to attack sb. verbally in anger’ from the word form *schimpfen* and defined its meaning as ‘to utter negative words’.

From here on, the questionnaires proceed differently.

3. As a third step, participants are supposed to specify the semantic relation between the meaning of the stimulus and the meaning they gave themselves:

“Open” Questionnaire (OQ):

Wort: Bedeutung:

schimpfen negative Worte äußern

beschimpfen "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen"

Begründen Sie bitte, inwiefern die Bedeutungen des Ausgangsworts und des von Ihnen genannten Worts zusammenhängen.

die Erweiterung des Wortes um die Vorsilbe be- zeigt, dass die negativen Worte gegen jemanden gerichtet sind

3.a) In the OQ, they have to explain this relation entirely in their own words. The informant’s solution for ‘to attack sb. verbally in anger’ and ‘to utter negative words’ says for example: “The extension of the word by the prefix be- shows that the negative words are directed against somebody”.

“Closed” Questionnaire (CQ):

Wort: Bedeutung:

schimpfen sich wütend verbal äußern

beschimpfen "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen"

Bitte erklären Sie, welche Beziehungen sie zwischen den Bedeutungen der beiden Wörter sehen:

- ☒ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" ist mehr oder weniger dasselbe wie sich wütend verbal äußern, weil
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" und sich wütend verbal äußern sind eigentlich ganz verschieden, aber sie sind sich in gewisser Weise auch ähnlich, nämlich
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" und sich wütend verbal äußern hängen in Raum und Zeit eng miteinander zusammen, insofern als
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" und sich wütend verbal äußern sind beides Arten von
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" ist eine Art von sich wütend verbal äußern
- ☐ sich wütend verbal äußern ist eine Art von "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen"
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" ist das Gegenteil von sich wütend verbal äußern
- ☐ "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" und sich wütend verbal äußern stehen in keiner der oben genannten Beziehungen, sondern
- ☐ Ich sehe keine Beziehung zwischen "jemanden wütend verbal angreifen" und sich wütend verbal äußern

3.b) Informants here, too, are asked to specify the semantic connection between the related meanings, but in contrast to the OQ, nine pre-formulated relation options are presented. Depending on the selected relation the informant may be additionally asked to justify his choice in his own words. Each of the first seven options stands for one of the cognitive-semantic devices as shown in the two-dimensional grid on the left: in the example, the participant chose ‘taxonomic subordination’ which is paraphrased as “(to attack sb. verbally in anger) is a kind of (to express oneself in anger)”.

Concluding Remarks: Comparison of the Questionnaires

1. The results:

- There are **no significant differences** between the two questionnaires: the most important semantic relation between a given stimulus and its base is always the same in both questionnaires. This proves that both questionnaires are suited for the investigation of lexical motivation.
- There is a **greater variety of relations in the CQ than in the OQ**.

2. Reasons for this difference between OQ and CQ:

- The **more open responses to the OQ leave more room for the linguists’ interpretation**: They risk reading the expected results into the answers.
- In the **CQ**, the informants may vote for **options they never would have thought of by themselves**, just because they are a legitimate option in the multiple choice list.

3. The analysis of the informants’ answers:

- It is **easier to interpret** the results of the **CQ**, because the pre-formulated explanations correspond to given semantic relations.
- However, the **analysis of the CQ is not automatic**: especially when the informants contradicted their **former choice** while justifying it, we considered the “free” text more important than the relation chosen in the multiple

choice part.

One informant, e.g., related *unmöglich* ‘impossible’ to *möglich* ‘possible’ and chose the explanation: ‘impossible’ and ‘possible’ are totally different, but they are also similar to a certain extent, “because the prefix un- expresses the opposite”. Our pre-formulated relation (underlined) was meant as a non-technical formulation of metaphorical similarity, but in the “free” text the informant clearly described a contrast. Therefore we treated it as a relation of contrast.

- Cases like this one also show that we **can’t be sure that our paraphrases used in the CQ really fit the semantic relations in question** in the eyes of the informants.

In the **OQ**, there was **no such problem**.

- As the justification was not obligatory for every relation in the **CQ**, sometimes we were confronted with **completely illogical choices**, which we might have better understood with the help of additional explanation.

4. Future research plans:

As these data don’t allow us to decide which questionnaire is better suited for our purposes, we would like to execute another pilot study with a **β-version of the CQ**.

We plan to

- make the additional „free“ text for the semantic relations obligatory in order to avoid uninterpretable data.
- reformulate some of the pre-formulated semantic relations.
- improve the design in order to make the questionnaire more user-friendly.