

## Binomial pairs with opposing nominal components in German and Serbian

The present work is part of a series of contrastive phraseological studies and focuses on the phrase class of binomial pairs, which has barely been researched and is thus largely unrecognized in Serbo-Croatian phraseological studies. We understand binomial pairs (binomials) to be complex word combinations composed of two auto-semantic units ( $X$ ,  $Y$ ) which belong to the same word and concept class and which are linked by a conjunction (mostly coordinating) or a preposition. Taking the definition in its broadest sense, there is a structural and semantic-functional diversity to binomial pairs which complicates their classification and restricts their investigation and description. In this paper we limit ourselves to nominal binomial pairs in German and Serbian, the auto-semantic components of which are in opposition to one another and are connected by the conjunction *und* or *i* [and] respectively. The selection of opposing relations is justified by the fact that the construction  $X$  *und*  $Y$ , in which  $X$  and  $Y$  represent two opposing words (here nouns), is a common word combination, which can develop specific semantic potential, in contrast to synonymous word pairs, which mostly serve to intensify (cf. Burger 2011). Furthermore, viewed syntactically, they occur as free noun phrases and not as parts of other idioms, which ensures their semantic independence; thus their full potential for meaning in the context of use can be exploited. We distinguish between the following four classes of opposition relations:

- a) gradable antonymy
- b) complementarity
- c) conversivity and
- d) reversibility

In order to compile a corpus of binomials with opposing meaning, the list of binomial pairs<sup>1</sup> compiled by Hofmeister was used for German while the Serbian binomial pairs were taken from monolingual Serbian and bilingual German-Serbian dictionaries due to the lack of theoretical and, therefore, empirical foundations. The list of lexicalized binomial pairs in Serbian was then supplemented with non-lexicalized evidence from everyday oral and written communication found on the web. A total of 64 German and 35 Serbian items (types) could be found. They were classified according to the opposition relations mentioned above in terms of the idiom-external meaning of the components. This resulted in the following picture:

	Gradable antonymy	Complementarity	Conversivity	Reversibility	TOTAL
German	14	27	10	13	64
Serbian	8	17	6	4	35
Total	22	44	16	17	<b>99</b>

Table 1: Number of items in the investigation corpus

<sup>1</sup> [https://static.uni-graz.at/fileadmin/\\_Persoenliche\\_Webseite/hofmeister\\_wernfried/ZWILLINGSFORMELN\\_Hofmeister\\_25-06-2010.pdf](https://static.uni-graz.at/fileadmin/_Persoenliche_Webseite/hofmeister_wernfried/ZWILLINGSFORMELN_Hofmeister_25-06-2010.pdf) (Stand: 21.2.2021).

In the empirical part, we turned to the various linguistic levels that we found worth investigating, namely the morphological, syntactic, phonological and semantic levels. The contrastive analysis carried out revealed regularities within each opposition class in both languages as well as significant differences between the two.

On a morphological level, possible variations were investigated in the binomial constituents in the categories of *number* and *case* as well as the congruence of a preposed attribute with the constituents *X* and *Y* and number congruence between the binomial pair (as a subject) and the predicate. The corpus analysis showed the following: number stability, which is shown by a relatively large number of the binomials examined in both languages, cannot be explained by the lexeme status of these phraseological units but rather for linguistic reasons (*singularia* or *pluralia tantum*). If there are no morphological restrictions, the category *number* can be changed, which only rarely leads to a phraseological difference in meaning. Case inflection, which in German (in contrast to Serbian) should prototypically only affect the second constituent of a binomial pair (cf. Müller 1997, p. 20), only applies to a few of the binomials examined, mostly to those with an optional determinative which (can) stand in the singular and whose constituents have a uniform meaning. In other cases, however, both constituents are inflected, which illustrates the relatively loose structure of most of the binomials examined. The congruence of the preposed attribute with constituents of different gender has proven to be particularly interesting since in such cases the preposed attribute, which stands for both constituents of a binomial, is congruent with the first constituent and not with the second, as assumed in the research literature for prototypical binomials (*ibid.*). Three possibilities emerged for verb congruence: 1) Despite the copulative connection of the constituents, the verb is only in the singular because the binomial is to be understood as a unit, an entity. Such singularization is a feature of prototypical binomials, which could only be proven in Serbian for binomials using *svi* [all] and meaning “different persons (types of person)”; 2) In addition to the singular, the plural form of the verb is also possible, which in German is often related to the (non-)realization of the optional (usually singular) determinative; 3) The total meaning of the binomial is understood to be the sum of the individual meanings of the constituents, which is why the verb is in the plural.

From a syntactic perspective, we researched the irreversibility of the substantive constituents of a binomial and the factors that motivate their (fixed or preferred) order (sequence preferences) as well as the possibility of inserting further elements between the constituents *X* and *Y* without losing the phraseological character of the binomial (structural variations). The analysis of irreversibility showed that relatively few binomials diverge from the prototype, with 18 in German (mostly with reversible constituents) and only 4 in Serbian (all from the subclass of complementarity). Thus, with a combined total of 77 binomials for the two languages, a fixed order is preferred for the constituents, which is mainly motivated by extralinguistic factors (*Salienzbeschränkungen*). Structural variations are mostly formal in nature and concern the extensions of binomials by elements or constructions which serve to emphasize, qualify, specify or negate one of the constituents. In addition, coordinated extensions with an additional noun are confirmed, which results in common or occasional triple forms based on a binomial pair.

The phonetic (rhetorical) aspect relates to the presence of sound devices, which are considered to be characteristic of binomial pairs. The end rhyme proved to be the most dominant sound device, which is not surprising considering that it facilitates the mental stor-

age of binomials. This is followed by alliteration and assonance, while ellipsis was only detected in a few cases. It is noteworthy, however, that a considerable number of the investigated binomials (43 in total), predominantly from the class of complementary and converse oppositions, show no rhetorical features.

From a semantic point of view, the following can be stated: With regard to idiomaticity, three groups can be identified: 1) idiomatic binomials; 2) binomials with a context-dependent constitution of meaning; 3) non-idiomatic binomials. The group of binomial pairs with context-dependent meaning included examples that can be either idiomatic or non-idiomatic depending on the context of use. Only in the case of the gradable antonyms could all three groups be identified in significant numbers. In the case of the complementary binomials, only two Serbian examples were identified as being constantly idiomatic; all others were either non-idiomatic or context-related idiomatic binomials. In reversive and converse binomials, non-idiomatic manifestations occurred almost exclusively with two reversive exceptions, the meanings of which are formed in the context. In both cases, it is a question of deverbal conversion products, which have generally been shown to have a relatively high potential for idiomatization.

The idiomatic nature of the binomial pairs under examination is expressed in the fact that the examples concerned have a new, overall meaning that clearly differs from the individual meanings of the components. In many cases, the overall meaning is in the sense of 'all', 'everything', 'concerning the whole entity'. It was also noticeable here that idiomaticity is not, as is often assumed, gradual. Therefore, in the case of the binomials, we speak of idiomatic or non-idiomatic. Non-idiomatic examples are then classified as those whose components additively constitute the meaning of the whole phraseme. In specific terms, this implies that each auto-semantic constituent of the binomial contributes its own meaning – be it literal or figurative – to the overall meaning. In this case, a semantic spectrum is constituted, which is marked by an element of diversity and/or complexity. Therefore, it can be assumed that the function of the opposing binomial pairs is usually not that of reinforcement and emphasis, as seems to be the case for most binomials with synonymous constituents (cf. Burger 2011), but of evaluation and reference for the idiomatic and non-idiomatic binomials respectively. For reasons of space it was not possible to carry out a detailed analysis of the functional potential of opposing binomials, which could be a worthwhile focus of a future project. Therefore, any statements about it must remain cursory.

## **References**

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