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verbless construction

construction which does not contain any verb.

verblose Konstruktion

eine Konstruktion, die kein Verb enthält.

An example of a verbless construction is the German “Incredulity Response Construction” (*Sailer* 2002), a construction of the form [X *und* Y], which is used to convey incredulity. In the most usual form of this construction, X and Y are both NPs (cf. *Sailer* 2002: 1):

(1) Du und ein Schwimmer?!

‘You and a swimmer?!’

“Do you really think you are a swimmer?”

(Example from *Sailer* 2002: 1)

However, X and Y can also be instantiated by items of different syntactic categories (cf. *Sailer* 2002: 2):

(2) Mein Bruder und großzügig?!

‘My brother and generous’

“Do you really think my brother is generous?”

(Example from *Sailer* 2002: 2)

Additionally, German has different types of verbless directives including those described and exemplified in (3)-(5) (cf. *Jacobs* 2008:15-19; examples are Jacobs’):

(3) Directive containing a directional adverb and a PP headed by *mit* (*with*)

[X_{Adv-dir} [PP*mit* Y_{NP-dat}]]

Her mit dem Geld!

‘Here with the money’

“Give me your money!”

(4) Directive consisting of directional PP and a PP headed by *mit* (*with*)

[X_{PP-dir} [PP*mit* Y_{NP-dat}]]

In den Müll mit diesen Klamotten!

‘Into the waste-basket with this gear’

“Throw away this gear!”

(5) Directive comprising a directional adverb and any kind of directional PP

[X_{Adv-dir} Y_{PP-dir}]

Raus aus meinem Haus!

‘Away out of my house’

“Get out of my house!”

Jacobs (2008: 15) points out that these verbless directives are *independent* constructions, because, like any normal main clause, they have their own potential to express an illocution. Specifically, they express a directive illocution, i.e., a command, a recommendation, and so on. Their potential to express a particular directive illocution does *not* depend on the context in which they are being used but is part of their conventional meaning. What *is* determined by their being used in a particular context is the *concrete* illocution expressed, which may be a command, a recommendation, a request, etc. The propositional content of these illocutions is a directional-resultative predication: an entity must be moved, either in a concrete sense or metaphorically along a path towards the endpoint of that path, and remain there.

According to *Goldberg* (2006: 8), verbless constructions are “prime examples of argument structure constructions”, because their meaning cannot naturally be attributed to a (non-existent) verb. Positing a null verb to account for them is likely to be motivated only by the desire to adhere to the idea that the main verb determines the overall form and meaning of a sentence. Construction Grammar provides an alternative to positing an invisible verb: the phrasal pattern itself may specify the main relational predicate of the clause (cf. *ibid.*: 9).

References

- Konstruktion zum Ausdruck ungläubiger Überraschung (Cognitive Grammar)
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Literature

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