

Topicalization patterns and expressive particle verbs:  
Comparative evidence from German and Italian

Andreas Trotzke & Stefano Quaglia  
*University of Konstanz*

In this talk, we discuss topicalization patterns of verbal particles and propose a new distinction between expressive and non-expressive particle verbs by looking at both German and Italian. The basis for our proposal is that these two classes behave differently both in the domain of ‘extreme’ degree modification and in the context of topicalization.

**Topicalization in non-transparent particle verbs in German.** One major condition on particle topicalization consists in the possibility of attributing a contrastive interpretation to the particle (e.g. McIntyre 2001; Müller 2002; Zeller 2001). This explains the contrast between (1) and (2):

- (1) Zu hat er die Tür gemacht (und nicht auf). (Zeller 2001: 89)  
close.PART has he the door made and not open  
‘He closed the door.’
- (2) \*Auf hat Peter mit dem Trinken gehört. (Zeller 2001: 90)  
open.PART has Peter with the drinking heard  
‘Peter stopped drinking.’

While the particle topicalized in (1) may enter a relation of paradigmatic semantic opposition with the particle *auf* in *auf-machen* (lit. ‘open-make’, to open), the particle *auf* in *auf-hören* enters no such paradigmatic opposition (cf. #*zu-hören*, #*ab-hören* etc.). We refer to cases such as (1) as ‘transparent’ particle verbs (i.e. the particle can be contrasted and can occur in a predicative construction, cf. *Die Tür ist zu/auf* ‘The door is shut/open’). Cases like (2) are referred to as ‘non-transparent’ cases (i.e. the particle cannot be contrasted and cannot occur in a predicative construction). However, we will present experimental evidence from an acceptability study (judgment task) that demonstrates exceptions to this rule. In particular, cases such as *runter-machen* (‘to bash sb.’) receive a significantly better rating compared to examples such as (2):

- (3) Runter hat sein Chef ihn vor allen Kollegen gemacht!  
down.PART has his boss him in.front.of all colleagues made  
‘His boss bashed him in front of all his colleagues!’

This effect is not predicted by the information-structural constraints mentioned above, according to which all non-transparent particle verbs should behave alike. An obvious account in the case of *runter-machen* would be to follow Stiebels & Wunderlich (1994), who argue that topicalization improves with resultative or directional particles (like *runter*), cf. also Webelhuth & Ackerman (1999). We demonstrate, however, that this is not the whole story. Observe the following minimal pair demonstrating differences between non-contrastable particles with a clear directional semantics:

- (4) a. Raus hat der Chef den faulen Kerl geschmissen!  
out.PART has the boss the lazy guy thrown  
‘The boss kicked out the lazy guy.’
- b. #Raus hat die Band ihr neues Album gebracht.  
out.PART has the band their new album brought  
‘The band published their new album.’

In both cases, there is no semantic alternative to *raus* without referring to a different meaning of the verb (cf. #*rein-schmeißen*, #*rein-bringen*). In order to account for this pattern, we propose a

distinction between ‘expressive’ (*raus-schmeißen*) and ‘non-expressive’ (*raus-bringen*) particle verbs. Given this distinction, we argue that only expressive particle verbs (like *runter-machen*, *raus-schmeißen*) allow topicalization of non-contrastable particles in German. The observation that we are dealing with a distinct class of particle verbs here is corroborated by diagnostics from adjectival semantics. For instance, certain ‘extreme’ degree modifiers do only occur with adjectives that can be analyzed as conveying expressive (in the sense of Potts 2007) or ‘extreme’ content. This is shown by the contrast given in (5):

- (5) a. Your shoes are {downright, positively} {gigantic, gorgeous} (Morzycki 2012: 568)  
 b.?? Your shoes are {downright, positively} {big, pretty}

Turning to the non-transparent particle verb constructions, we can apply these diagnostics to the cases discussed above:

- (6) a. Der Chef hat den faulen Kerl regelrecht rausgeschmissen.  
 the boss has the lazy guy downright out.PART.thrown  
 b. #Die Band hat ihr neues Album regelrecht rausgebracht.  
 the band has their new album downright out.PART.brought

In (6), we see that non-transparent particle verbs differ in their compatibility with such extreme degree modifiers. Given what is known concerning the expressive contribution of these modifiers, we thus see that certain particle verbs are expressive, while others are not.

**Topicalization patterns and particle verbs in Italian.** In the rest of the talk, we turn to Italian, a language where the phenomenon of particle verbs is not as pervasive as in German (cf. Schwarze 1985). In contrast to what is claimed in the literature (e.g. Iacobini 2015), we argue that particles can appear in the clausal left periphery both in focus fronting (7a) and in Clitic Left Dislocation (7b), cf. Quaglia (2015):

- (7) a. FUORI stava spingendo le persone (, non dentro).  
 outside.PART was pushing the people not inside.PART  
 ‘(S)He was pushing the people out (, not in).’  
 b. Fuori(,) stava spingendo le persone senza biglietto.  
 outside.PART was pushing the people without ticket  
 ‘(S)He was pushing out the people without a ticket.’

We show that particle topicalization in Italian is also sensitive to the transparency divide mentioned in the context of the German data, cf. topicalization patterns involving the non-transparent particle verb *fare fuori* (‘to kill’):

- (8) a. \* FUORI hanno fatto gli ostaggi.  
 outside.PART have done the hostages  
 b. \* Fuori(,) hanno fatto gli ostaggi.  
 outside.PART have done the hostages

Crucially, like for German, we identify expressive particle verbs by testing their compatibility with ‘extreme’ modifiers like *di brutto* ‘full-on’, cf. *tagliare fuori* (‘to cut out’) vs. *tirare fuori* (‘to take out’):

- (9) a. La concorrenza ci ha tagliato fuori di brutto.  
 the competition CL.LOC has cut outside.PART of ugly-M.SG  
 ‘The competitors full-on cut us out.’  
 b. # La ragazza ha tirato fuori gli occhiali di brutto.  
 the girl has taken outside.PART the glasses of ugly-M.SG

At the end of the talk, we explore to what extent this non-information-structural meaning component of particle verbs does constrain displacement patterns also in Italian.