Semantic Shifts and Stylistic Overtones as Conveyed by Function Verb Phrases. Comparative View: *English, German, Romanian*

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1. Function Verb Phrases[1] as Conveyors of 'Aktionsarten'

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1 'Function verb phrase' (FVP) – the term denoting a verb combination the overall meaning of which is a variant of its verbalized nominal core (e.g. *sink into despair* ≈ despair (of)) – originates with the German linguist Bernhard Engelen (s. "Zum System der Funktionsverbgefüge", 1968, WW5, pp 289-303). FVPs usually consist of a verb (function verb), which is the grammatical kernel, a noun (function noun), representing the semantic core – these are the major, i.e. indispensable constituents –, a preposition and/or an article – which are the minor, optional components.
Their main contributions to the language reside in:
1) ability to express a wide range of 'Aktionsarten' ('modes of action'), such as causative, transformative, progressive – the main ones – e.g. *plunge into terror* [caus., transf.], *keep in fear* [caus., progr.], *bring to the boil* [caus., transf.], *keep under control* [caus., progr.], *come to the realization* [transf.], *get into debt* [transf.], *be in debt* [progr.], *be in use* [progr.], etc;
2) ability to lower or to raise the syntactic valency of the one-word verbal substitute, e.g. *take courage* (↔ encourage sb to …);
3) FVPs can be resorted to as ways of expressing what I took the liberty to label 'implicit' or 'semantic' passive (a more vivid variant of the explicit, grammatical one), e.g. *come to a vote* [= be voted.], *get into circulation, come under consideration, undergo a change, fall into oblivion, come into production, come to harm, be in use, find expression.*
4) ability to attract rhematic focus, e.g. I *suggested* sth. → I made a *suggestion*;
5) FVPs can be had recourse to as means of shifting syles, e.g. *set fire to* (colloquial) ↔ ignite (formal, elevated), *give notice* (colloquial) ↔ notify, inform, apprise;
6) FVPs are sometimes resorted to when there is no one-word verbal substitute in the language, e.g. *catch a cold.*

Verbal aspect is definitely *the* bone of contention for researchers of both Romance and Germanic languages. Thus, for instance, when forced to come to grips with this particular problem, Florica Dimitrescu ventures the following opinion:

> In Romanian verbal aspect (unlike *tense* and *mood*), though quite important, has not been syste-matized as yet [...].Our language expresses aspectual change by resorting to various means [...] besides lexical ones, the use of several semiauxiliary verbs, of adverbs or prefixes, ellipsis of motion verbs, the use of tenses connoting aspect (the *imperfect* implies duration, the *present* can be taken to connote iterative actions, etc.) (1958: 116; translated by G.M.).

As for Romanian verb phrases and their availability for reflecting the category under discussion, the above-quoted linguist argues in much the same vein:

> Besides the previously specified devices, Romanian makes abundant use of verb phrases. As is only natural, since the verb can *speak* more forcefully in a more detailed, concrete manner, when accompanied by a noun than when left to his own devices (ib.; translated by G.M).

Oddly enough – as the excerpts quoted above intimate beyond the shadow of a doubt – Florica Dimitrescu seems to be rather oblivious to the clear-cut distinction between the grammatical category of 'subjective aspect' and the semantic one of 'objective aspect', also labelled 'Aktionsart' (cf *DIP*, subchapter II.4). Strongly corroborating my assumption is also the inclusion of 'aspect' in the second set of "grammatical characteristics of verb phrases" (translated by G.M.), which apply exclusively to those possessed of „certain IDIOSYNCRASIES"(1958:110; translated and capitalized by G.M). Nevertheless, the subtypes listed and exemplified by the above-cited Romanian author on the following pages of her remarkable book on which I base my analysis are an equally clear indication of the fact that reference is actually being made to Aktionsarten and not to 'aspect' proper. The "inchoative" subtype is the first in line, and with good reason too:

> As a matter of fact most verb phrases conveying aspect can be taken to specify the onset of an action – in this respect Romanian, too, tends to follow suit" (Dimitrescu,1958: 117; translated by G.M.).

The vast majority of the examples listed are perfect illustrations of function verb phrases:

> a o lua la fugă (G die Flucht ergreifen, E take (to) flight), a-şi lua zborul (G abfliegen, auffliegen, E take one's departure), a da în fiert (G zum Kochen kommen, E come to a boil(ing point)), a da în copt / pârg / pârguială (G zur Reife gelangen, E come to maturity), a da în clocot (G zum Sieden

kommen, E come to a boil), a da ploaie, a da ninsoare, a lua în discuţie, (G zur Diskussion / Debatte stellen, E raise for discussion), a se face ziuă (G es wird Tag, E it is beginning to get light).

However, mention should be made of the fact that, taken out of their original contexts – which Dimitrescu kept on for appropriate exemplification – *a scoate grai* and *a se da pe rod* tend to be used rather infrequently in standard Romanian. Of the latter, in particular, native speakers tend to prefer a transitive variant, *a da rod* (G *zum Tragen kommen*, E *come into bearing*).

In the very same study the Romanian linguist deems it her duty to call our attention to the semantics of the verbs employed in inchoative verb phrases, "which, when on their own, convey a momentary action" (ib.; translated by G.M.). What is even more important, she also claims that this peculiar relationship obtaining between verb and corresponding verb phrase holds good for other languages too, in corroboration of which theory she cites, among other examples, the German *die Flucht ergreifen*. A further thought-provoking remark is the one relating to the so-called 'doubly inchoative' combinations which are at heart nothing more than inchoative verb phrases amalgamated with the semi-auxiliary verb *a începe* or various synonyms thereof. A second subtype listed and exemplified by Dimitrescu includes the verb phrases which she labels "momentary". As with the previous subtype, the bulk of the examples submitted for illustration are bona fide specimens of function verb phrases:

a lua fiinţă (G ins Leben GERUFEN WERDEN, E come into being), a slobozi strigăt (G einen Schrei ausstossen, E utter a cry / a shout / a scream / a shriek, raise a shout / scream), a scoate un oftat / suspin (G Seufzer ausstossen, E breathe / draw / fetch / heave / utter a sigh), a-i trece / plesni prin minte / gând (G in den Sinn kommen / einfallen, E cross one's mind / flash through one's mind), a da / se pune în genunchi (G auf die Knie fallen, auf / in die Knie sinken, E fall /go on one's knees).

The third and final subtype which Dimitrescu differentiates is represented by "iterative" verb phrases. From among the examples adduced *a face greşeli* (G *Fehler machen*, E *make mistakes*) stands out as a genuine function verb phrase. The Romanian scholar then appositely remarks that:

The iterative connotation is to be traced back to the plural noun. The category of number attached to a noun denoting an action can be viewed as a perfect match to the verbal category of aspect, the iterative one in particular (Dimitrescu 1958: 118).

A comparative survey of the Romanian function verb phrases listed under the three subtypes above and of their German and English equivalents is bound to

reveal the legitimate FVP-membership of most of the latter. The few ones defying admittance into this category are *a-şi lua zborul* – the German equivalent of which is a prefixed verb - *a da ploaie* and *a da ninsoare*, for which both Germanic languages have recourse either to a combination of impersonal construction + semi-auxiliary verb (G *es began zu regnen*, E *it was beginning / began to rain)* , or – if duration is also of the essence – to multi-word verbs, as in G *der Regen setzte ein*, E *it set in to rain*.

In order to better illuminate the problem under discussion, I am submitting to the reader's attention several additional samples of Romanian function verb phrases illustrating the 'egressive' subtype, semantically opposed to the 'inchoative' ('ingressive') one – both of which fall under the 'transformative' type (cf *DIP*, subchapter II. 4):

> a lăsa vorba (G aufhören zu sprechen, E stop talking), a ajunge la o concluzie / hotărâre (G zu einem Schluß/einer Entscheidung kommen, E reach a conclusion/decision), a duce la bun sfârşit (G zum Ende bringen, E bring to an end; amalgamated with the causative type of Aktionsart), a ieşi din uz (G ausser Gebrauch kommen, E go/fall out of use).

On closer inspection, some of these function verb phrases turn out to be bona fide 'contradictions in terms'. So, for instance, the structural similarity to the last example cited above, *a ieşi din uz,* in conjugation with the semantics of the verb employed , *a ieşi din uz,* in conjugation with the semantics of the verb employed, *a ieşi*, might as well induce one to assume that the function verb phrase *a-şi ieşi din răbdări* (G *aus der Fassung kommen,* E *get into a rage*) is also an egressive one. However, its one-word – two-word in fact, to be more accurate, if we count the reflexive in – semantic substitute *(a se enerva)* seems to point in the opposite direction. Considering the matter more carefully, though, we would be well advised not to dismiss the egressive interpretation altogether, since, in order for the Experiencer to get into a rage or into a tantrum, or fly into a passion, (s)he has first to lose her/his temper, hair or shirt, or, even more metaphorically put, to fly off the handle or to jump out of her/ his skin (s. also G *ausser Rand und Band /aus dem Häuschen geraten*). Both the function verb phrases and the idioms listed above adduce strong evidence in support of my theory which views the Romanian function verb phrase *a-şi ieşi din răbdări* (as well as its English and German semantic equivalents E *lose one's patience*, G *aus der Fassung kommen*) as expressing the transition from one state to another, and, accordingly, the choice of one or the other of the two Aktionsart–subtypes as an utterly arbitrary one. In view of the above, I suggest the use of a more appropriate term for defining and describing the idiosyncratic semantic pat-

tern under discussion, namely 'transitive' Aktionsart or Aktionsart-subtype – which, to be sure, has absolutely nothing to do with the transitive or intransitive syntactic availability of the function verb phrase in question.

This ability to highlight various stages or phases of the activity as process expressed by verbs Polenz views as a major criterion for assessing the stylistic force of a FVP. That, in all probability, should account for the indispensability of certain FVPs – even where a semantic one-word analogue is by no means hard to come by – , the aspectual auxiliary of which, nevertheless, falling short of the translator's expectations when in need of appropriate emphasis on the most relevant activity or process phase. Such is the case with the English ingressive *fall in love*, which long since demoted the sequence *begin to love* to the trivial position of a dictionary paraphrase (as did for that matter, German and Romanian too, where *von Liebe ergriffen werdenm* and *a fi cuprins de dragoste* came to supersede *zu lieben anfangen* and *a începe să iubească*, respectively – even if only resorted to in literary or elevated style, the colloquial one favouring the two-word reflexives *sich verlieben* and *a se îndrăgosti*).

It is English again – one must give credit where it is due – that came up with yet another highly original FVP accommodating the egressive meaning opposed to the one discussed above: *fall out of love*. Admittedly, this fairly recent coinage has not come into its own as yet – as the failure of most English dictionaries to include it among their entries seem to indicate – , but it is definitely a choice to be reckoned with in less formal styles, where aspectual combinations such as *cease to love* and *stop loving* or trite paraphrases like *love no more* and *not love any more* sound dismayingly run-of-the-mill. Unfortunately, for German and Romanian there is only Hobson's choice to take, i.e. they have to make do with lacklustre sequences such as *nicht mehr lieben, zu lieben aufhören* and *a nu mai iubi, a înceta să mai iubească*, respectively.

To my mind, the vividness and immediacy of both *fall in love* and *fall out of love* are ultimately to be traced back to the aggressive dynamics of *fall*, which must thus be taken to induce general anaesthesia of the subject's will.

The German examples listed below also go to prove that function verbs can every so often transcend their strictly grammatical province with amazing effects for the overall semantics of the FVP:

- *in Bewegung geraten/kommen* (the stress is on the onset of the action – inchoative aspect);
- *etwas in Bewegung halten, in Bewegung sein* (duration is of the essence – durative aspect);
- *etwas in Bewegung bringen, geraten lassen, kommen lassen* (the initiator of the action comes into play – transformative-causative combination).

As far as marginal function verbs[2] are concerned, stylistic synonyms are the perfect device to put them on their mettle, as illustrated by *eine Frage stellen, eine Frage aufwerfen, eine Frage aufnehmen,* or *jdm. eine Frage stellen, jdm. eine Frage unterbreiten, jdm. eine Frage vorlegen.*

An even more exquisite array in terms of discriminating connotations flaunt FVPs the nominal constituents of which have been known to assume psychologi-cally-based semantic role. German *sich fürchten* (E *be in fear of,* R *a-i fi frică*) with its stylistic synonyms is a relevant case in point: *in Furcht fallen / geraten / kommen / sein,* or *Furcht empfinden / fühlen / haben / hegen / (ver)spüren.*

To sum up, when it comes to making aspect conspicuous, what really speaks vo-lumes for the preeminence of FVPs above their archrivals, one-word semantic analogues, is the fact that the former fittingly feature the noun, which is not subject to conjugation, hence notoriously defying such oppressive categories as tense, per-son, as well as mood. Thus the highlight switches from the process or action as expressed by the verb over to the concept or notion, as represented by the noun.

Stylistically viewed, compliance with the principle of end-weight acts as an ad-ded incentive, keeping the listener/reader on tenterhooks up to the end, when the main information is finally processed (cf. G *vorgestern erschreckte er die ganze Stadt, vorgestern **versetzte** er die ganze Stadt **in Schrecken**,* E *the day before yesterday he frightened the whole town...,the day before yesterday he **threw** the whole town **into a fright**,* R *alaltăieri el **a speriat** tot oraşul..., alaltăieri el **a băgat** tot oraşul **în sperieţi**).*

By way of conclusion, I deem it safe to infer that its vast number of inchoative FVPs reveals Romanian as being closer to German, since most English FVPs have been found to convey momentary actions.

Clearly setting Romanian apart from the two Germanic languages - which in such cases rely heavily on good old analytical means, is its recourse to synthetic devices (such as prefixation of the function verb) for turning certain momentary FVPs into interative ones, as illustrated by:

R a REveni în memorie, with its causative counterpart a REaduce în memorie, G jdm. IMMER WIEDER in den Sinn kommen, jdm. etwas WIEDERHOLT in Erinnerung (zurück)bringen / rufen,

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2 I am perfectly willing to take both the blame and the credit – if any – for this term which I employ-ed with reference to a subcategory including verbs that only occasionally take on the function verb role in such combinations and, consequently, tend to resent being deprived of their major semantic availabilities, as is usually the case with bona fide function verbs (s. sink into despair).

E KEEP ON coming to one's mind, KEEP ON bringing / calling to someone's mind, come to one's mind OVER AND OVER (AGAIN), bring / call to someone's mind TIME AND AGAIN.

2. Function Verb Phrases as Conveyors of Voice

A minute survey of the body of examples utilized in *DIP* (sch II.7), as well as the additional ones extracted from various sources, laid the groundwork for my subsequent research into voice as conveyed by FVPs , which has in turn yielded the following facts:

a) Like German and English, Romanian has frequent – if not that ample – recourse to certain function verbs for expressing what I took the liberty to label the 'semantic' or 'implicit' passive – a combination which conveys a passive meaning couched in an active-like form, i.e. containing no passive auxiliary, eg *a cădea victimă* [= a FI ucis] (G *zum Opfer fallen*, E *fall a victim*), *a cădea în uitare, a cădea pradă* (*atacului* etc.), *a cădea în dizgrație, a ajunge de ocară* [= a FI disprețuit, ridiculizat], (G *in Schande geraten* [= *verhöhnt / verspottet WERDEN*], E *bring shame upon oneself* [= BE disgraced]), *a suferi o modificare, a căpăta expresie* [= a FI exprimat], *a fi în uz, a da un examen* [= a FI examinat], (G *eine Prüfung ablegen* [= *geprüft WERDEN*], E t*ake an exam* [= BE examined]).

b) Nevertheless, certain German and English FVPs - the ones employing dynamic verbs in particular (s. *kommen, geraten, gelangen, come, get, fall*, etc.) – will settle for nothing less than a Romanian explicit passive as their semantic equivalents. Cf. for instance : G *zur Abstimmung kommen*, E *come to a vote*, (R-*a FI supus la vot*), G *in Umlauf kommen*, E *get into circulation* (R *a FI pus în circulație*), G *zur Aufführung kommen*, E *come into production* (R *a FI pus în scenă*), G *in Betracht kommen*, E *come under consideration* (R *a FI luat în considerare*).

c) A further type of implicit passive convey superficially (i.e. in surface structure only) reflexive FVPs such as *a se bucura de* (*mare*) *căutare* [= a FI căutat], *a se bucura de o primire favorabilă* [= a FI primit favorabil] (E *enjoy a favourable reception*), *a se bucura de stimă* [= a FI stimat] (G *Achtung geniessen*), *a-și pierde onoarea* [= a FI dezonorat]. The verb *a se bucura* is a marginal function verb (cf *DIP*, sch II.7, FVPs employing *finden, erfahren and leiden*), which seems to be equally at its ease when translated both by means of an active FVP (s. examples above) and of a passive one (eg. E *BE given an enthusiastic reception, BE held in respect*).

d) On the other hand, some superficially active FVPs must be construed as reflexives in disguise, eg. *a cădea în desuetudine* [= a SE învechi / perima] (G *ausser*

Gebrauch kommen, E *come / fall / go / pass into disuse*), *a cădea în* ruină [= a SE ruina] (G *in Verfall geraten*, E *fall / sink into decay*), a avea încredere [= a SE încrede].The shift seems to go both ways, for we are also bound to encounter specimens like *a-şi pierde minţile* [= a înnebuni], *a-şi da cu părerea* [= a opina] (s. also sch. II. 7 of *DIP*).

Since implicit passives are "notorious" to provide one with ample food for thought, the concluding pages of this section will be devoted to discussing this particular topic.

For openers, mention should be made of the fact that one of the main reasons for which speakers/writers seem to fall back quite frequently on implicit passives realized by FVPs is their time/space-saving function. Indeed, most German *kommen-*, *gelangen-* and *geraten-*, as well as English *come-*, *get-*, and *fall-* FVPs are monovalent, as contrasted to the usually bivalent explicit passives bound – at least in deep structure – to reveal the identity of the perject (= agent).

There are, however, further benefits which prevail upon speakers/writers to resort to such FVPs.Let us consider the following examples: *solche Geräte kamen ausser Gebrauch vor sechs Jahren* şi *solche Geräte werden seit sechs Jahren nicht mehr gebraucht.* Given the two different aspects conveyed – egressive, by *ausser Gebrauch kommen*, and durative, by *gebrauchen –*, recourse must accordingly be had to different tenses – past, in the former, and present, in the latter example - in order for the semantics to survive the transposition intact.Yet the key-element in the last two examples above is the noun phrase *solche Geräte*, which assumes the grammatical function of subject in both of them, whereas the semantic roles attached to it seem to differ considerably. Thus, in contradistinction to the latter, where *solche Geräte* is most obviously a 'patient', the active voice employed in the former example effects the conversion of the 'patient' (= the entity directly affected by the action or by the consequences thereof) into a special type of 'agent', a kind of 'minor performer' (i.e. the equivalent of a 'sleeping- ' or 'silent partner'), which is actually rather passively involved in the action denoted by the FVP, but definitely claims a certain responsibility in performing it. Again, the strategy helps render the style more dramatic. The relationship obtaining between *be thrown into ecstasies* and *go into ecstasies* is a perfect illustration of the opposite effect to the one previously described. To begin with, the action as such can be traced back to a particular cause, more precisely an external stimulus. It follows that the active FVP clearly indicates that the subject deliberately experiences the state induced by the stimulus in question. By contrast, the explicit passive of *be thrown into ecstasies – compounded by the aggressive semantics of throw – views the subject as disclaiming all*

responsibility, or better still, as a mere puppet of fate. In an attempt to chop logic, we could take the reasoning a step further and claim that facing us in this example is a bona fide double-dealer: *ecstasy.* At first blush the passive semantics inherent in this noun seems to reinforce the explicit passive of the function verb. Deep down, however, it is the merger thus achieved of the two conflicting connotations – the negative, distressing one, conveyed by *throw,* and the positive, exhilarating one, carried by *ecstasy* – that effectively sets the stage for the puppet show.

Synoptically viewed, the 'implicit' passive tends to be more readily conveyed by German and English active FVPs, with the Romanian ones getting the upper hand when reflexive function verbs are involved. Moreover, the two Germanic languages under discussion differ in their treatment of the 'implicit' reflexive, with German acting more like the Romance one in resorting to active FVPs, and not like its English cognate, which is usually less partial to reflexives.

3. Function Verb Phrases as Generators of Involuntary or Premeditated Linguicomedy

Not infrequently there obtain various more or less planned-for linguistic conditions which in turn call for a dramatic dispersal of the constituents making up certain function verb phrases along all three axes: lexical, semantic and grammatical. In other words, facing us is the reverse of what is usually considered to induce the building up of function verb phrases, a process I will take the liberty to call 'decomposition of idiomatic meaning'[3].

3.1. Involuntary decomposition of idiomatic meaning

The function verb phrases most available for involuntary decomposition are the ones pairing up a dynamic function verb with a noun which features [+ loca-

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3 The 'idiomatic ↔ non-idiomatic' terminological opposition must be taken to refer to 'set phrases' as contrasted to 'free combinations'. (Romanian provided me with a more felicitous choice of terms – 'sintagmatic' versus 'componenţial' – which manages to escape ambiguous interpretation). It is not even remotely related to the opposition 'opaque ↔ transparent' which the two terms usually imply, since the major criterion differentiating FVPs from canonical 'idioms' (cf. Romanian rendition: 'locuţiuni idiomatice') is none other than transparency of meaning. More precisely, the overall meaning of an idiom cannot be inferred through mere semantic addition (as with 'free combinations'), nor can it be traced back to the meaning of a sole constituent – as is the case with FVPs, where their meaning originates in that of the nominal component.

tion/direction in space] at the top of its semantic diagram. It is this particular feature that induces the semantics of the function noun to switch over from [+ abstract] to [-abstract], subsequently waiving all claim to the status of function-verb-phrase-constituent. A relevant case in point here is the following one provided by Wustmann:

«"Bilder werden *zur Ausstellung gebracht*" kann doch nur bedeuten, dass sie im eigentlichen Sinn in das Gebäude gebracht werden; meistenteils aber ist nichts weiter gemeint, als dass sie ausgestellt werden» (1966: 333-4) (cf. also R *tablourile sunt aduse la expoziţie* [= sunt aduse în clădirea în care se organizează expoziţia], E *the paintings are (being) brought to the exhibition*, versus R *tablourile sunt aşezate la expoziţie* [=sunt expuse], E *the paintings are (now) on Ø exhibition* [=are (being) exhibited]).

Since the use of the noun *Ausstelung* gives rise to ambiguous interpretations, a timely cancellation of the misleading idiomatic meaning can be most adequately effected through superimposition of the non-idiomatic one.

However, given the fact that dynamic verbs such as the one employed above are usually accompanied by nouns whose regular semantic description includes the features [-abstract] and [+destination in space], a spontaneous association of these verbs with abstract nouns is most likely to induce, by analogy, an additional semantic shift in the noun to [+destination in time] or [+goal]. Consequently, examples like the one below, smacking of ridicule, are a risk to be reckoned with: "[...] ja sogar eine Ratsvorlage *zur Ablehnung* [gelangt] (als ob es Ziel und Bestimmung der Vorlagen wäre, abgelehnt zu werden)" (ib.).

Bills are normally proposed with the obvious intention of being pushed through the Parliament, that is why a sequence made up of *gelangen* – conveying a positive connotation (cf. E *reach, gain, accomplish*, R *a ajunge la*) – and the inherently negative *Ablehnung* (cf. E *rejection*, R *respingere*) is bound to flout the norms of congruity, and, as a result, defy and shock logic. Hence the abrupt superimposition of the non-idiomatic meaning on the idiomatic one.

When the semantic clash between verb and noun renders hopeless any attempt at reconciliation, the combination turns downright nonsensical, with the ridicule verging on bona fide linguicomedy. Let us consider the following sample of "gallows humour":

So herrscht ein ewiges Kommen und Gelangen. Selbst die Toten lässt man nicht in Ruhe! Wie kann eine Zeitung schreiben: Die am Feiertage Gestorbenen *kommen* nach dem Fest *zur Beerdigung* – nein, sie werden beerdigt. Zur Beerdigung kommen die Leidtragenden (Wustmann, 1966: 334).

The advertisement lends itsels to two interpretations, depending on whether the sequence *zur Beerdigung kommen* is viewed as a function verb phrase, i.e. assuming an idiomatic meaning (b), or as a free combination (a):

(a) "People who pass away on a public holiday come to the burial after the feast" (cf. also R "Persoanele decedate în ziua respectivei sărbători vin după ceremonie la înmormântare");

(b) "People who pass away on a public holiday *come to be buried* [=will be buried] after the feast" (cf. also R "Persoanele decedate vor fi îmormântate după ceremonie").

The patent preposterousness of the ad expedites decomposition of the idiomatic meaning, for, as Wustmann appositely remarked, it is the mourning relatives, not the deceased, that one would normally expect to come to the funeral *per pedes apostolorum.*

The non-idiomatic meaning is greatly aided in ousting the idiomatic one by the insertion of the time adjunct *nach dem Fest* ("after the feast") which infelicitously disrupts the function verb phrase.

All three cases of unintentional decomposition examined above feature a particular type of function verb phrases, namely those construed as implicit passives. The high availability for decomposition of the above mentioned type can be accounted for, in my opinion, by the fact that they are exposed to a double strain. First and foremost, there is the clash obtaining between the verb and the noun – as illustrated by the three samples previously discussed. As for the other type of strain, it has everything to do with the conflicting connotations of the inert, passive idiomatic meaning on the one hand, and of the dynamic, active one expressed by the verb, on the other one.

3.2 Premeditated decomposition of idiomatic meaning

The technique at work here is the same as with involuntary decomposition cases, i.e. superimposition of non-idiomatic meaning on the idiomatic one, which in turn triggers off this time the reaction phase of the listener/reader confronted when least expected with the real intentions of the speaker/writer. By way of illustration I submit to the reader's – hopefully, undivided – attention the following sample:

"Un lup *dădea târcoale* unei turme. La un moment dat s-a oprit. De ce? Pentru că nu mai *avea târcoale*" (verbatim translation: "A wolf was giving circles [*scil.* was circling] to a herd. All of a sudden it stopped. Why? Because it had no more circles to give"). The root of all evil here is the double semantic opposition in force

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between the verbs *a da* (E *give*, G *geben*) and *a avea* (E *have*, G *haben*) both in their functional and non-functional, i.e. lexical meaning.

The key-word, undoubtedly, is the verb *a avea*, employed in its primary relational meaning "a poseda" (E *own*, G *besitzen*) which automatically rules out the [+abstract] reading of the noun *târcoale* resorted to in the function verb phase *a da târcoale*. To be more specific, it is the semantics of *a avea* that overrides the idiomatic meaning, subsequently steering the reader/listener away from it towards one which is more likely to chime in with the relational use of the aforementioned verb.

However, for all the semantic clout of the verb, there also seems to be more to the nominal constituent than meets the eye. Thus, considering the fact that it is a loan-word from Bulgarian, *târcol* is pre-eminently a semantically arbitrary noun, which accounts for its real meaning ("circle", "wheel") being practically unknown to most native speakers of Romanian. That in turn disallows any claim of this noun to semantic self-reliance: hence its uncommonly limited employment which is actually confined to one function verb only, *a da târcoale* (or less frequently, *un târcol*).

It is as late as this particular juncture that the most difficult problem facing us comes into evidence. Obviously, a reconciliation between the verbal and nominal senses analysed above could only be attempted by using the word *târcol* in one of its non-idiomatic readings. Unfortunately, there is no non-idiomatic meaning of *târcol* in Romanian, none at all, therefore nothing to combine with the denotation of the lexical verb *a da* which the listener/reader infers by opposing it to that of *a avea*, as provided by the context.

Admittedly, one could, if wisely prompted, construe a fairly accurate non-idiomatic reading for *târcol*. Our problem, nevertheless, still looms as large as life, for the straightforward reason that the listener/reader, who is unfamiliar with the original Bulgarian meaning of the word, will willy-nilly be induced to assign to it the feature [+abstract], in keeping with its idiomatic reading, i.e. the one employed in the function verb phrase cited above.

Which brings us back to square one, for we are still left without a referential entity matching the [-abstract] non-idiomatic meaning of the noun *târcoale* as a companion of the verb *a da*. And, since it is a well-established fact that the ideal and most dignified escape for a mind at the end of its tether is to plunge into humour, stunning one's interlocutor into laughter is one of the canonical ploys resorted to by humourists. This very stratagem allows the idiomatic meaning to prevail up to the end, when the abrupt lumping together of *avea* and *târcoale*, aided by a most felicitous insertion of the adverb *mai* ("no more", "not any more"), jogs one's memory into reviving the non-idiomatic one. Which meaning, or, to be more precise, the

required component of which is conspicuous by its absence. That, in turn, is no fortuitous side effect, much rather part and parcel of the humourist's ploy described above.

Alas, ours is a less gleeful note to end on, for the constituency pattern of Romanian *a da târcoale* is blatantly dissimilar from its English and German semantic equivalents – cf E *move in a circle*, G *seine Runde ziehen* -, thus nipping in the bud any attempt at translating the linguicomedy sample under discussion into any of the other two languages cited.

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Semantic Shifts and Stylistic Overtones as Conveyed by Function Verb Phrases. Comparative View: English, German, Romanian

After painstakingly anatomizing in a previous book (s. *DIP*) the function verb phrase (FVP) in German and tracking down English combinations which display the morpho-

syntactical pattern, comply with the lexicosemantic criteria and assume the stylistic features, characteristic of "Funktionsverbgefüge" (FVGs), I resume in the present contribution my relentless quest for lexicomorphological conveyors of FVGs, this time in Romanian – a Romance language – and then, in a second stage, try to go with a fine tooth-comb through the semantic and stylistic shifts following in the wake of FVPs as employed by the three languages at issue (German, English and Romanian).

The opening section of the paper at hand searches in a first phase through the samples of Romanian FVPs extracted from various sources and assigns them to the aspect subcategories which they most fittingly illustrate: ingressive, punctual, iterative and egressive. In a second phase the analysis focuses on type *a-şi ieşi din răbdări* FVPs which convey a transition from one state to another and, consequently, admit of a double-barrelled interpretation, i.e. both egressive and ingressive – hence the labels 'contradiction in terms' and 'transitive aspect' I put forward as indicative of their idiosyncratic behaviour. The third and final phase of my survey is devoted to investigating stylistic synonymy as well as defending such intriguing FVPs as *fall in love* and *fall out of love*.

The approach in the middle section is roughly the same, i.e. descriptive in the beginning, with copious illustration of various semantic shifts (active / reflexive › passive, active › reflexive) as well as of the contrasts and similarities observed when comparing the three languages at issue, and interpretive in the second stage, with the focus on two most challenging cases: the 'implicit' passive with a subject acting semantically as a 'minor performer'; the surprisingly divergent semantics of two at first blush similar FVPs (*be thrown into ecstasies* and *go into ecstasies*).

The third section investigates the involuntary as well as premeditated decomposition of idiomatic meaning in FVPs, which more often than not is to be held accountable for comic effects. The technique at work here is the superimposition of nonidiomatic meaning on the idiomatic one, which in turn triggers off the reaction phase of the listener/reader confronted when least expected with the real intentions of the speaker/writer. The effects of the interference at issue range from ambiguity through a smack of ridicule – when decomposition is unintentional – to the most sophisticated linguistic humour – when decomposition is premeditated. Since the approach is also a contrastive one, the final conclusions would only naturally relate to the rendering into another language of linguicomedy samples. Unfortunately the translatability of interference-effects-generated linguistic humour has been found to be minimum at best in most cases.