

EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION PRODUCED BY FRENCH LEARNERS OF GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

An Exploratory Corpus Analysis (L1 – L2)

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit stellt eine korpusgestützte Analyse von *Meinungsausdrücken* (MA) der deutschen Sprache dar, die auf mehr oder weniger festen Mehrwortverbindungen beruhen und pragmatisch als textmusterbezogene Handlungen der Meinungsäußerung definiert werden. Dabei steht die Frage im Mittelpunkt, welche formalen und funktionalen Besonderheiten bestimmte, exemplarisch ausgewählte MA im Rahmen schriftlicher Produktionen von französischen Studierenden im Vergleich zu Produktionen deutscher MuttersprachlerInnen aufweisen. Im Anschluss an eine Darstellung der an konstruktionsgrammatischen, framesemantischen, diskurs- und textlinguistischen Prämissen orientierten Methode wird eine Reihe von Ergebnissen diskutiert, welche aus der korpusbasierten Analyse hervorgehen. Das eigens hierfür kompilierte Lernerkorpus schriftlicher Produktionen französischer Deutschlernender sowie das muttersprachliche Vergleichskorpus wurden mittels *Sketch Engine* empirisch und qualitativ ausgewertet. Die Ergebnisse bestätigen die Hypothese, dass sich deutsche L2-Konstruktionen der Meinungsäußerung grundsätzlich von L1-Konstruktionen unterscheiden. Die exemplarisch durchgeführte Analyse und der damit verbundene Ansatz bedürfen breiter angelegter Studien, um die sprachtheoretischen und pädagogisch-didaktischen Erkenntnisse zu vertiefen.

Keywords: Sprachvergleich L1 – L2; Konstruktionen sprachlichen Bewertens; Korpusanalyse; Lernerkorpus; Metadiskurs; Textmuster; DaF

Abstract

The present study represents a corpus-based analysis of *expressions of opinion* (EoO) in German, which are based on multi-word combinations of varying degrees of fixity and are defined pragmatically as text-pattern-related acts of *expressing one's opinion*. The analysis is centred on the formal and functional characteristics of a number of selected EoO occurring in written productions of French students, in comparison to productions by German native speakers. Following a presentation of the method based on construction-grammatical, frame-semantic, discourse- and text-linguistic premises, a series of results emerging from the corpus-based analysis are discussed. The specially compiled learner corpus of written productions by French learners of German and the native-language comparison corpus were empirically and qualitatively analysed using *Sketch Engine*. The results confirm the hypothesis that German L2-constructions of *expressing one's opinion* are fundamentally different from L1-constructions. The exploratory analysis and the associated approach require broader studies in order to deepen the theoretical and pedagogical-didactic findings.

Keywords: language comparison L1 – L2; constructions of stance-taking; corpus analysis; learner corpus; metadiscourse; text patterns; German as a foreign language

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.*

(Charles Baudelaire: *Correspondances. Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857).

1. Introduction

The main objective of the present study consists in a critical analysis of a selected number of expressions of opinion (EoO) produced by French learners of German as a foreign language (GFL) in written

productions by comparing them to the way equivalent or similar expressions are used by German native speakers (GNS). The findings corroborate the initial hypothesis according to which similar formulaic phrases play out differently in different languages with respect to their lexico-grammatical structure as well as their pragmatic properties. This might come as a surprise, since the apparent transparency of word combinations such as *in + my + opinion* (English) / *meiner + Meinung + nach* (German) / *à mon avis* (French) may sustain the view that formulaic EoO are easy to understand and reproduce by non-native speakers. A number of studies carried out in second language reading comprehension have shown, however, that transparency of single and multiword units is frequently deceptive insofar as learners appear to often understand less than they think they do (cf. Laufer 1997: 24-26; Martinez / Murphy 2011: 268, 274-275, 286). A crucial question, then, is why such expressions are insufficiently understood. This question is primarily tackled from a linguistic and discourse analytical point of view: which are the properties of these expressions that the L2 learner will have to understand in order to improve their language proficiency? Recent works on (metadiscursive) discourse and discourse markers as well as studies in the fields of second language acquisition have pointed out the interrelatedness between the use of certain types of expressions and different text genres or rhetorical structures (see e.g. Upton / Connor 2001; Hyland 2005; Siepmann 2006: 240; Hyland / Wang / Jiang 2022: 2-3). Hence, a holistic approach to the analysis and description of the language phenomenon in question is necessary: by adopting Siepmann's wide definition of collocation as "any holistic lexical, lexico-grammatical or semantic unit normally composed of two or more words which exhibits minimal recurrence within a particular discourse community" (Siepmann 2005: 438), EoO can be considered as holistic signs that are "irreducible to the sum of [their] parts" (ibid.: 410). The implied theoretical and methodological shift from word-centred analysis to an analysis of more or less fixed multiword units allows us to consider sentence fragments like *I think that* as units of the lexicon despite their fragmentary status from the point of view of sentence grammar. In the following, I briefly present the frame-analytical and constructionist framework of my approach:

Expressions like *I think that* or *in my opinion* activate a global opinion-frame inside of which they can be attributed to the metadiscursive frame of expressing one's opinion. The concept of metadiscourse is defined with reference to the "interpersonal model" developed by Hyland (2005) and Hyland / Tse (2004), and presented in Hyland / Wang / Jiang (2022: 2) as follows:

[The interpersonal model] attempts to capture the interactive character of communication by seeing a writer or speaker's commentary on his or her unfolding text as representing a coherent set of interpersonal resources which help formulate a connected discourse or express the writer's attitude towards either what or who is addressed.

An example of such "interpersonal resources" are the above-mentioned expressions *I think that* and *in my opinion* which represent forms of self-mention¹. The specific communicative functions of self-mention are manifold and have been the object of a number of studies (for an overview, see Firdaus / Soemantri / Yuliawati 2021). According to Ivanič (1998)², three aspects of identity can be distinguished: the biographical, discursal and the authorial self or self as the author. The text analytical study of instances of self-mention combined with the word forms *Meinung* and *sagen* in my corpora has led me to the conclusion, however, that it is often difficult to make a clear distinction between these three aspects. The different functions of self-mention presented by Hyland (2005) with respect to academic writing appear to corroborate this conclusion insofar as it is difficult to trace clear lines between these three aspects. Thus, Hyland (2005: 181) asserts that "writers cannot avoid projecting an impression of themselves and how they stand in relation to their arguments, their discipline, their

¹ See Hyland (2005: 181): "*Self-mention* refers to the use of first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information (...)" [Italics in the original].

² Quoted by Firdaus / Soemantri / Yuliawati (2021: 37).

readers” by arguing simultaneously that the “presence or absence of explicit author reference is generally a conscious choice by writers to adopt a particular stance and disciplinary-situated authorial identity”. This aspect will be discussed further in section 2.

EoO are based on underlying patterns defined as linguistic and cultural conventions emerging from communicative processes (cf. Smith 2020: 218-219). They frequently form series of structurally, semantically and/ or pragmatically similar expressions: *I think / believe / am convinced /... that; in my opinion / view / eyes*. Taking up a usage-based approach to grammar, it is assumed that the gradual formation of this type of series is influenced by a multitude of factors (i.e. morphosyntactic, lexico-semantic, situational, pragmatic, interpersonal and discourse-related) which are inextricably interconnected. Analysing these expressions as ‘constructions’ allows us to view them as pairings of form and function according to the construction grammatical approach (see for instance Goldberg 2006), thus taking into account the interrelatedness of these factors.

The combined frame-and-construction-analytical approach appears to be highly compatible with current cognitive theories of second language acquisition³. According to a definition by Ziem (2008), frames represent conceptual units of knowledge which allow us to quickly grasp the linguistic meanings in terms of *Gestalt*-like units⁴. Ránics (2021) integrates the constructionist approach directly into his formulation of the overall objective from the point of view of phraseodidactics:

[Es geht darum], dass Form- und Funktionseinheiten als Schemata feste Bestandteile des Sprachunterrichts bilden, deren strukturesemantische... lexikalische... (morpho-)syntaktische... grammatische...und pragmatische...Eigenschaften (...) als Lernhilfe erkennbar, verstehbar, analysierbar und anwendbar gemacht werden. (Ránics 2021: 95-96)⁵

This didactic aim constitutes the background of the present corpus-based study. By carrying out a contrastive exploratory study of the way French learners use the German expression *in der Tat*, and the way they integrate the lexical units (LU) *Meinung* and *sagen* into their argumentative discourse, my objective is to support this didactic aim by contributing to the description of the properties of these units from the learner’s point of view. This implies a methodological bias that consists in focusing on the learners’ productions as a starting point of the analysis. It is assumed that inappropriate use of German EoO in French learner’s text productions is due to insufficient or incomplete understanding of opinion-based text- and formulation patterns (see 2.3 below). It is further assumed that foreign language learners’ difficulties in understanding and using this type of expression appropriately is partially linked to culture- and language specific patterns in their native language. This implies that the results of the present study apply specifically to French learners and may not apply to learners with different native language backgrounds such as Polish or Spanish.

In the following, I will firstly present the overall theoretical framework before discussing issues linked to the complex meaning construction of EoO, followed by some methodological observations concerning the comparison between L1 and L2 (part 2). The third part deals with corpus analysis, starting with a brief description of data and methodology, followed by a more detailed presentation of the expressions under scrutiny as well as a few results (part 3). Finally, I will conclude by discussing some theoretical and methodological issues as well as perspectives for further research (part 4)

³ For a detailed presentation see Holme (2012). More recently, see for instance Ellis / Wulff (2019), who focus, however, on morphosyntactic aspects of constructions. Concrete applications of construction grammar for L2 teaching and learning are presented in Boas (2022).

⁴ See Ziem (2008: 441): “[...] konzeptuelle (...) Wissensseinheiten, [die es uns ermöglichen,] sprachliche Bedeutungen als gestalthafte Einheiten gleichsam auf einen Schlag zu erfassen.” English translation: “[...] conceptual units of knowledge [that enable us] to grasp in an instant linguistic meaning as gestalt-like units”.

⁵ English translation: “[The aim is] that form-function pairings, considered as schemata, become an integral part of (foreign) language teaching. Their structural-semantic, lexical, (morpho-)syntactic, grammatical and pragmatic properties (...) are made recognisable, understandable, analysable and applicable as learning aids”.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Theoretical reflections and methodological assumptions

Regarding the model of metadiscourse developed by Hyland / Tse (2004), Hyland (2005) and Hyland / Wang / Jiang (2022), the distinction between ‘interactive’ resources on the one hand and ‘interactional’ on the other⁶ implies an analysis on two levels: the level of discourse organisation (1), i.e. the formulation of “a connected discourse” (Hyland / Wang / Jiang 2022: 2), and the level of interaction (2), i.e. the expression of the writer’s (or speaker’s) “attitude towards either what or who is addressed” (ibid.). Examples for (1) are *in other words; Furthermore, ...; First ..., then ...; the second point is; in conclusion; to sum up*. Examples for (2) are *It is unfortunate that; I argue / think / believe ... that; possible; might; perhaps; obviously; highly*. The forms and specific discursive functions of these devices vary greatly with respect to the situation, genre-specific conventions, and overall discursive strategies. Metadiscursive resources can be linked to modality, e.g. in combination with modal verbs (e.g. *should, could* etc.), to topicalization (e.g. *Whether this is true [is not certain]*) or the use of questions to attract the reader’s/ hearer’s attention (e.g. *Why is this a remarkable feature?*). On the level of formulation strategies, the use of expressions of perception and cognition, such as *hear, notice, see; feel; think; understand* can be analysed in terms of metadiscursive strategy, in particular in evaluative contexts such as *It is a comfort to hear ...* or *It is important to understand ...*. They represent ‘constructions’ on the basis of their relative fixity due to lexico-grammatical constraints exerted by the underlying respective patterns, thus providing immediate access to their meaning regarding their (meta-)discursive frame:

- (1) *It is a comfort / pleasure / wonderful thing to hear.*
- (2) *It is important to understand / note / point out / not forget / become aware ...*

Construction (1) refers to a discursive frame in which the speaker reacts to a piece of information by expressing their satisfaction. The contrast between the formal, impersonal formulation *It is ... to hear* of the Verb Phrase (VP) and a Noun Phrase (NP) expressing a strong positive emotion implies a certain degree of cognitive distance of the speaker with respect to the information. The interactional meaning will have to be negotiated with the interaction partner in order to determine the authenticity of the sentiment thus expressed. Regardless of the degree of irony, the stylistic effect plays out on a metadiscursive level in the sense that it “express[es] the writer’s attitude towards either what or who is addressed” (Hyland / Wang / Jiang 2022: 2, see above). The combination of the impersonal formulation *It is ...* with the perception verb *to hear* functions as an additional device which invites the addressee to share their point of view. The interaction partner’s understanding of this meaning is based on a complex process of explicature and implicature (see e.g. Sperber / Wilson 1993: 12-14, 21-23), which enables them to react coherently by either confirming or rejecting the attitude thus formulated (*Yes, indeed! / No, really?*).

Construction (2) differs from the first example insofar as it contains both interactive and interactional resources: By pointing the addressee’s attention to a new aspect of the discourse, it acts as a connector providing textual coherence. Simultaneously, the evaluative expression *important* represents an ‘attitude marker’, following the definition by Hyland (2005: 180): “*Attitude markers* indicate the writer’s affective, rather than epistemic, attitude to propositions, conveying surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, and so on, rather than commitment” [Italics in the original].

⁶ See Hyland / Wang / Jiang (2022: 2): “Drawing on Thompson’s (2001) distinction between interactive and interactional resources, Hyland refers to *interactive* as the writer’s management of the information flow to steer readers through a text and *interactional* as authorial interventions which personally engage with the content and readers” [Italics in the original].

The variety of descriptive and analytic categories employed in metadiscursive studies is considerable⁷. The categories regarding stance-taking, for instance, are frequently linked to specific grammatical categories and modalities, such as hedges, based on adverbs, adverbial or modal constructions (e.g. *possible, might, perhaps*). In addition, the difficulty in describing the complexity of text production and interactional strategies leads to an almost infinite number of potential linguistic candidates to be classified within the category of EoO. Hence, other theoretical aspects will have to be included in the definition of this notion with a view to giving a more precise account of the linguistic phenomena which I would like to take into consideration for the purposes of teaching and learning German as a Foreign or Second Language⁸.

The intimate link between genre and metadiscursive strategies have been repeatedly pointed out by various researchers (e.g. Firdaus / Soemantri / Yuliawati 2021; Hyland / Wang / Jiang 2022). This link plays an important role within a text analytical approach based on a definition of ‘style’ as “acting in a socially meaningful way” (“sozial relevante (bedeutsame) Art der Handlungsdurchführung”, Sandig 1986: 23). I thus propose to adopt a pragmatic approach to text and discourse in terms of ‘speech act patterns’, thereby following the German text analytical tradition of “Textmuster” (i.e. ‘textual patterns’). According to this tradition, genre can be specified with reference to different *Textmuster* as a structured unit based on a network of patterns regarding intonation, sentence and text structure, knowledge, style and *Handlung*, i.e. the different ways we (inter-)act linguistically (cf. Sandig 1989: 133). It is further assumed that expressing one’s opinion represents a speech act pattern which is connected to other speech act patterns within argumentative discourse, such as describing, illustrating, justifying, encouraging, expressing regret⁹. In this analytical framework, genre is intimately linked to the notion of ‘text type’, which means that it can be specified with respect to different textual patterns, such as reader’s comment, editorial, academic conference, press review.

As regards the speech act pattern ‘expressing one’s opinion’, it is prototypically connected to a series of text types. A list of useful expressions for learners of GFL provided by the Goethe Institute may serve as an example. The document can be downloaded directly from the internet and is conceived as a ‘learning aid’ (“Lerntipp”) enabling the learner “to write discussion essays, comments, or for an oral comment on a subject”¹⁰. The expressions listed in this document are referred to as “Redemittel”, i.e. ‘discursive devices’¹¹, and can serve as a perfect illustration of the metadiscursive distinction between organisational and interactional devices discussed above. However, the document

⁷ See for instance the categories employed in Hyland (2005): *hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives, questions*.

⁸ See the minimal distinction by Crystal (1991: 194): “[...], **first language** (sc. mother tongue) is distinguishable from **second language** (a language other than one’s mother tongue used for a special purpose, e.g. for education, government) distinguishable in turn from **foreign language** (where no such special status is implied)” [Bold characters in the original]. Considering the difficulties involved in learning expressions of opinion to be the same for second and foreign language learners, I will apply these terms indistinctly in this article

⁹ An example of how speech acts are interconnected within argumentative discourse with respect to *stereotypical speech acts* can be found in Smith (2020).

¹⁰ Translated from German: “Tipps zum Schreiben von Erörterungen, Stellungnahmen oder zur mündlichen Stellungnahme zu einem Thema”. <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf291/lerntipps1-v1.pdf> (22.05.2024).

¹¹ In a study centred on “Redemittel” associated with written descriptions of graphics, Kispál (2023: 280-281) rightly points out that the recurrence of some lexical errors in texts produced by learners of German L2 can be imputed to insufficient competencies (“Nichtbeachtung”, see below) regarding the idiomaticity of routine formulae as well as their selectional and combinatorial preferences: “Neben den Rechtschreibfehlern und grammatischen Fehlern bei diesen Redemitteln gibt es allerdings auch einige typische, wiederkehrende Wortschatzfehler, die sich auf die fehlerhafte Verwendung der Wörter, die Nichtbeachtung der idiomatischen Prägung dieser Routineformeln, der Selektions- und Kombinationspräferenz zurückführen lassen”. (Translation: ‘Beside the spelling mistakes and grammatical errors occurring in these phrases, there are also some typical, recurring vocabulary errors that can be attributed to the incorrect use of the words, the non-observance of the idiomatic character of these routine phrases as well as their selectional and combinatorial preferences’.)

does not merely present a list of linguistic constructions of varying complexity (e.g. *Diese kurze Beschreibung führt zu der Frage ...; Für ... spricht ...; Auch wenn ..., meine ich doch, dass ...*). The learner is also given advice concerning the sequential organisation of their text/speech as well as the norms and conventions regarding argumentative discourse in general, for example: “Eine Stellungnahme muss/sollte eine klare Gliederung und Strukturierung in eine Einleitung, einen Hauptteil und einen Schluss haben”¹². The explicit references as to how argumentative discourse is expected to be organised, combined with equally explicit references to specific genres/text types (i.e. discussion essays, comments, oral comments) show a relatively high degree of awareness regarding both text types and text production strategies. Despite the awareness-raising qualities of this document, it is unsure whether the above-mentioned indications of text types enable the learner to differentiate sufficiently between these types and to use the different devices appropriately.

2.2 ‘Expressing one’s opinion’ in the light of ‘meaning’

The question as to which EoO may be appropriate regarding specific discursive genres/ text types requires a granular analysis of a series of different text types and text production strategies, which is beyond the scope of the present exploratory study. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the notion of *appropriateness* plays an essential role if we seek an answer to why French students of GFL frequently use expressions like **in meine Meinung* or **meiner Meinung nach ist, dass ...* in their written productions. In both cases, we tend to qualify these errors as ‘mistakes’ by imputing them either to lexicogrammatical interferences with other foreign languages learned simultaneously – in this case, **in meine Meinung* could be imputed to a false analogy with *in my opinion* in English – or else to insufficient morphosyntactic knowledge leading to ‘agrammatical’ constructions. From a construction analytical point of view, however, it can be argued that the distinction between ‘mistake’ and ‘inappropriateness’ is fallacious in the sense that they represent two sides of the same coin. By placing these errors on a scale within the grammar-lexicon-continuum, the analysis of errors in terms of either purely grammatical or lexical ‘mistakes’ is of secondary concern.

Within a constructionist framework, the meaning-aspect of language and language learning becomes a major pedagogical and didactic issue. A particularly salient example for the application of a meaning-orientated model of description is the usage-based, holistic *Phraseoframe* (Schafroth / Imperiale 2019), a canvas for lexicographic description of familiar idiomatic expressions in Italian, integrated into an online learner platform associated to the GEPHRI-project¹³. In combining frame semantic theory (cf. e.g. Fillmore 1982; Croft 2001; Ziem 2008; Busse 2012) with basic theoretical and analytical principles in Construction Grammar, this approach aims at enabling non-experts to understand phrasemes in terms of constructions, i.e. complex symbolic units or linguistic signs whose meaning emerges from the ways in which they are used in various contexts¹⁴. The *Phraseoframe* does not merely gloss the meaning(s) of a particular phraseme in combination with corpus-based examples, it also provides information and guidelines concerning their functions and use in specific contexts, including pragmatic and situational aspects¹⁵. Even though this dictionary does not contain any metalinguistic discursive devices comparable to the ones discussed in the present study, quite a few phrasemes

¹² Translation: ‘A comment must/ should provide a clear organisation and structure based on an introduction, a body and a conclusion’.

¹³ GEPHRI = *Gebrauchsbasierte Phraseologie des Italienischen*. <https://gephri.phil.hhu.de/projektbeschreibung> (22.05.2024).

¹⁴ See Schafroth’s claim that linguistic knowledge can be regarded as “an emergent product of linguistic use” (footnote 6 in Schafroth 2015: 319).

¹⁵ This lexicographical principle is based on Fillmore’s ‘semantics of understanding’: “a sentence can only be fully interpreted if we know something about the situation in which it has been used; in many cases, then, understanding a sentence

are directly or indirectly linked to a semantic frame which could be referred to in terms of an ‘opinion frame’. For example, the meaning of the phraseme *non stare né in cielo né in terra*, (word-for-word-translation: *‘be neither in heaven nor on earth’) is glossed as follows: “(oft über Äußerungen, Gerüchte, Ideen o.Ä.) [überaus] absurd, unsinnig oder unzutreffend sein [und somit haltlos oder untragbar werden]”¹⁶. The suggested attribution to the ‘opinion frame’ appears justified on at least two accounts:

1. The specific situational contexts listed in the dictionary can be interpreted as triggers of stance-taking¹⁷;
2. the specific illocutive functions described in the dictionary refer to speech acts that can be attributed to the global speech act pattern ‘expressing one’s opinion’¹⁸.

The GEPHRI dictionary attributes *non stare né in cielo né in terra* to a ‘semantic field’ (“semantisches Feld”¹⁹) called “incoerenza” (‘incoherence / incoherency’), which in turn is attributed to a more global frame called “Menschliches Handeln und Verhalten” (‘human action and behaviour’), thus focusing on the ‘referential’ aspect of meaning (cf. 3.2 below). From the learners’ point of view, however, this choice may not be more useful than focusing on the pragmatic and discursive (i.e. communicative, cf. 2.3) aspects of the opinion frame. Either way, their understanding of this linguistic unit remains partial, unless they study the *Phraseoframe* of this construction in its entirety and thus acquire a holistic view²⁰.

The interconnectedness of semantic frames can be illustrated by the German *FrameNet-Constructicon*-project²¹, which aims at elaborating a *constructicon* of the German language comparable to the Berkeley *FrameNet*²²:

The ultimate goal of the German Constructicon [...] is to identify and describe all constructions constituting the grammar of German in such a way that everything language users have to know in order to appropriately use and understand a construction is captured. Besides semantic, pragmatic, discourse-functional, and syntactic specifications, a full-fledged description of a construction also comprises information about relations to other constructions. Capturing the entire network of constructions in German constituting the constructicon is, to say the least, an ambitious long-term project [...]. (Boas / Ziem 2018: 215)

involves knowing the class of situations in which it could be appropriately uttered and knowing what effect it could be expected to have in that situation” (Fillmore 1975: 16, quoted in Schafroth 2015: 32).

¹⁶ See: <https://gephri.phil.hhu.de/phraseologisches-woerterbuch/detail/non-stare-ne-in-cielo-ne-in-terra> (22.05.2024). Translation: ‘(frequently referring to statements, rumours, ideas, etc.) be [extremely] absurd, nonsensical, or inaccurate [and thus without any foundation]’.

¹⁷ See for example: “(in den Augen des Sprechers) unsinnige Äußerungen“ / “(in den Augen des Sprechers) absurde Anschuldigungen oder Anklagen [vor Gericht]”, <https://gephri.phil.hhu.de/phraseologisches-woerterbuch/detail/non-stare-ne-in-cielo-ne-in-terra> (22.05.2024). The pragmatic function(s) of the phraseme in question relate to (negative) evaluative speech acts performed by the speaker (cf. the specification “in den Augen des Sprechers”). The negative stance-taking constitute reactions to statements (“Äußerungen”), accusations (“Anschuldigungen”) or charges in court (“Anklagen [vor Gericht]”).

¹⁸ See for example “die Meinung äußern, dass etwas absurd oder unzutreffend ist“ / “Gerüchte oder Anschuldigungen zurückweisen, indem man behauptet, dass diese absurd seien”, <https://gephri.phil.hhu.de/phraseologisches-woerterbuch/detail/non-stare-ne-in-cielo-ne-in-terra> > tab “Pragmatik” > section “Illokutive Funktion“ (22.05.2024). These glosses can be interpreted as ‘explicatures’ of the meanings of various types of speech acts performed in specific contexts (cf. Sperber / Wilson 1993: 14).

¹⁹ The word form “field” (*Feld*) is visibly used as a synonym of “frame” (*Frame*), the latter being used in the project description. <https://gephri.phil.hhu.de/projektbeschreibung> (22.05.2024).

²⁰ Cf. the same principle formulated by Boas / Ziem (2018: 203): “For the sake of usability, it is important to bear in mind that only a complete constructional entry meets the requirement for capturing what a language user needs to know in order to use and understand a grammatical construction appropriately.”

²¹ Cf. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/> (22.05.2024).

²² Cf. <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/> (22.05.2024).

Unlike the GEPHRI dictionary, the German *FrameNet Constructicon* does not specifically target foreign or L2 language learners and is conceived as a “non contrastive” constructicon (cf. Boas / Ziem 2018: 219)²³. Whilst partially subscribing to Croft’s point of view according to which constructions are language-specific and thus cross-language generalisations difficult to establish (cf. Croft 2001: 6; 283; Boas 2010: 5-7; Boas / Ziem 2018: 256), the methodology of the project is nevertheless partially contrastive insofar as the frame semantic part is built on the English model of the Berkeley FrameNet. Thus, the German opinion-frame (labelled “Meinung”) is more or less identical with the corresponding English frame, based on a theoretical framework developed by Fillmore (1982, 1985)²⁴. The definition of ‘frame’ implies a both intuitive and cognitive approach to meaning:

Frame Semantics offers an intuitive method of elaborating the analysis of form-meaning relationships by focusing on lexical semantic issues that are relevant to grammatical structure, among other things. It differs from other theories of lexical meaning in that it builds on common backgrounds of knowledge (semantic “frames”) against which the meanings of words are interpreted. (Boas 2010: 8)

The opinion frame of the Berkeley and the German FrameNet is structured around three core elements (CE) defining the meaning of the lexical unit (LU)²⁵ ‘opinion’, i.e. the CE ‘cognizer’, ‘opinion’ and ‘topic’: “A *Cognizer* holds a particular *Opinion*, which may be portrayed as being about a particular *Topic*” [terms in italics marked by colour code in the original]²⁶.

This knowledge-based definition of the opinion frame is of limited use for the language learner, since it does not take into account the (meta)discursive and pragmatic dimensions of the opinion frame in question. However, the establishment of systematic links to related semantic frames can give valuable insights into the interconnectedness between frames in terms of ‘families’ (“Framefamilien”²⁷), such as the connection with the frame ‘epistemic stance of the speaker’ (“epistemische Sprechereinstellung”²⁸). This frame refers to the LU *in der Tat* in terms of one of its ‘frame-evoking elements’ (FEE). They are categorised as frame elements signaling the epistemic status (“epistemischer Status”) of the propositional content of a phrase with respect to a ‘scale of certainty’²⁹. From the learner’s point of view, this definition provides insight into the meaning of the lexical multiword unit *in der Tat* merely to the extent that it operates on the level of stance-taking in a comparable way to other FEE listed in this context (i.e. *gewiss, möglicherweise, scheinen, sicher, tatsächlich, vermutlich, wahrscheinlich, zweifelsohne*). This, however, represents just one of the multiple aspects of meaning, namely what Lewis (1993: 84-85) calls the “modal meaning”. Other meaning aspects linked

²³ This methodological choice appears to be motivated by a holistic approach to the description of the grammar-lexicon continuum, combined with the conviction that only a complete description of a construction may be useful to the language learner: “For the sake of usability, it is important to bear in mind that only a complete constructional entry meets the requirement for capturing what a language user needs to know in order to use and understand a grammatical construction appropriately” (Boas / Ziem 2018: 203).

²⁴ Cf. the parallel treatment of this frame in <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/framenet/frame?id=187> and in <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Opinion> (22.05.2024), explicit reference on the German webpage to the corresponding page within the Berkeley FrameNet.

²⁵ Cf. the definition provided by the German FrameNet glossary: “Paarung aus einem Lemma (Wort oder Mehrwortheit) und einer Bedeutung (Frame). Eine LE ist der Zielausdruck (Target), der innerhalb eines Satzes einen Frame evoziert. Wird auch als Frameevozierendes Element (FEE) bezeichnet. Im Fall eines polysemen Wortes handelt es sich um so viele LE, wie dieses Wort Bedeutungen hat”. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/documentation/glossary#glossary-4> (22.05.2024).

²⁶ Cf. <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Opinion> (22.05.2024).

²⁷ Cf. glossary of the German FrameNet: <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/documentation/glossary#glossary-23> (22.05.2024).

²⁸ Cf. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/framenet/frame?id=2268> (22.05.2024). This frame is only partially developed for the moment.

²⁹ German: “Gewissheitsskala”, cf. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/framenet/frame?id=2268> (22.05.2024).

to the opinion frame can be found in different parts of the German FrameNet³⁰, but the complexity of the access structure makes it difficult for the learner to gather and process all the information needed to use expressions like *in der Tat* appropriately.

The difficulty of applying construction grammatical resources such as FrameNet to foreign language learning and teaching (FLL/FLT) has been recognized and discussed by a number of researchers within the recent field of Pedagogical Construction Grammar (PCxG – for an overview see Boas 2022). The German Frame-based Online Lexicon (G-FOL)³¹, a beginner learner’s dictionary of German for speakers of English (cf. e.g. Boas / Dux 2013; Boas et al. 2016; Boas 2022), represents an attempt to apply the “Seven Principles for Pedagogical Construction Grammar” by Herbst (2016) (cf. Boas 2022). For reasons of space, the following observations are restricted to the meaning-aspect regarding the frame-semantic dictionary entry “thinking: opinion”³².

The contrastive German – English presentation of the semantic frame, followed by a graphic representation of the abstract ideas of ‘thinking’ combined with ‘judging’ (= having an opinion) facilitates the learner’s access to the concept by applying the principles of a simultaneous bottom-up and top-down approach such as that recommended by Lewis (1993: 88):

In summary, meaning is made in three ways, by an implicit system of **contrasts**; **bottom-up**, a synthetic process of adding bits to each other, and by **top-down interpretation**, incorporating detail into an overall view based on previous, real-world (including language) knowledge. [Bold characters in the original]

According to Lewis (1993: 88), “meaning is a complex concept” which, since “the purpose of language is communication”, implies that “language teaching [and learning] activities should invariably be meaning-centred” (ibid.). Amongst the meaning aspects presented by Lewis (1993: 77-88) in his chapter “The Nature of Meaning”, the pragmatic and the negotiated dimensions are particularly relevant for FLL and FLT for at least two reasons:

(1) Expressing one’s opinion implies a methodology that interprets the meaning of specific linguistic (multiword) units in terms of evaluative speech acts produced with the intention of not merely sharing one’s point of view but also influencing the communication partner in some way. Hence, for the learner to be able to understand the meaning, they must become aware of the complex communication strategies underlying expressions of opinion by asking questions such as: ‘How is opinion expressed in this context and to what end?’ However, since the ways we communicate are culturally codified and the meaning of a vast number of linguistic units conventionalised, the learner will not be able to answer these questions without substantial help³³.

(2) Apparently banal and routinised expressions like *meiner Meinung nach* have specific meanings in different contexts. In the G-FOL, this expression is mentioned with respect to the particularity of its syntactic structure, but its meaning is not described separately from to the “noun *opinion*” that is generally “used like English *opinion*”³⁴. If the concept of ‘opinion’ is the same in German and English,

³⁰ For example, elements of pragmatic meaning related to the opinion frame can be found when searching *Meinung* in the index of lexical forms of the German FrameNet, cf. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/constructicon/formindex> (22.05.2024): This index connects *Meinung* to the frame “Beurteilung” (“judgement”) which, in turn, is connected to the communication frame “Beurteilung kommunizieren” (“to communicate a judgement”), cf. <https://framenet-constructicon.hhu.de/framenet/frame?id=578#sectionframefamilies> (22.05.2024).

³¹ Cf. www.coerll.utexas.edu/frames/ (22.05.2024).

³² Cf. <https://frames.coerll.utexas.edu/frames/thinking:%20opinion> (22.05.2024).

³³ Cf. Lewis (1993: 83): “Teachers need consciously to incorporate the question *What was he doing when he said ...?* rather than *What did he mean when he said ...?* Recognising the speaker’s intention, and to be able to express your own intentions, are central to effective language use” [Italics in the original].

³⁴ “[*opinion*] In most instances, this noun can be used like English ‘opinion’, with the exception of the set phrase ‘*meiner Meinung nach*’ (‘in my opinion’). The possessive pronoun (in [the] dative [case]) in this phrase can be modified to reflect

this does not imply that the meaning of constructions containing the linguistic unit (LU) *opinion* can be fully understood by simply referring them to the cognitive opinion-frame. The following statement, found in the *Gegenwartskorpora* of the *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (DWDS³⁵), refers to *meiner Meinung nach* as a means to signal one's readiness for negotiation:

Alles gilt als verhandelbar, wer nicht bereit ist zur Metareflexion, gilt als unempathisch, gar als gewaltvoll, wer ein Urteil fällt, wer nicht permanent darauf hinweist, er oder sie spreche jetzt aus rein subjektiver Perspektive, wer nicht jeden zweiten Satz mit 'Meiner Meinung nach' oder 'Ich habe das Gefühl, dass' einleitet, dem wird Nachhilfe in GFK [= Gewaltfreie Kommunikation] verordnet.³⁶

For the learner, the communicative function of *meiner Meinung nach* is highly relevant if they seek to understand and use this expression appropriately. The lexical form of *Meinung* (*opinion*) determines the function of the construction to a lesser degree, since it is suggested that *Ich habe das Gefühl, dass* ('I have the feeling that') (see above) represents an equivalent and could thus be attributed to the same "family" of constructions.

In other contexts, however, *meiner Meinung nach* appears to function differently, as in the following (constructed) exchange:

A: *Ich bin ja so müde!*

B: ***Meiner Meinung nach*** solltest du dich ausruhen.

A: *Du hast gut reden! Erstmal muss ich mit der Arbeit fertig werden.*³⁷

The sequential position and discursive context of the utterance suggest that B reacts to A's complaint (i.e. "I'm so tired!") by formulating a piece of advice ("If you ask me, you should have a rest"). Hence, the meaning of *meiner Meinung nach* is different in this configuration since it implies that the point of view of B contrasts with A's point of view: B's advice can be interpreted as suggesting that having a rest represents an advisable alternative to complaining about being tired. In this context, the English translation of *meiner Meinung nach* by *if you ask me* appears more appropriate than a translation containing the LU *opinion*³⁸. By associating *meiner Meinung nach* to a piece of advice, B emphasizes that his/her point of view is not simply different but also better adjusted to the situation, thus provoking A's rejection (*Easy for you to say!*). It can therefore be argued that the opinion frame is connected to a 'conflict' frame which can be activated in various contexts and degrees, and be either moderated or emphasized (see above). This view is compatible with Lewis' assumption of an 'implicit system of contrasts' as one of the three ways 'meaning is made': "Subconsciously we make meaning not only by recognising what the speaker has said, but by **contrasting** it with what has **not** been said" (Lewis 1993: 88; bold characters in the original).

anyone's opinion, but the 'nach' must always appear after 'Meinung.' The whole phrase fills the first position in the sentence (if it comes first), so a conjugated verb often follows it". (<https://frames.coerll.utexas.edu/frames/thinking:%20opinion> (22.05.2024))

³⁵ Cf. *Gegenwartskorpora mit freiem Zugang*. Text corpus provided by the *Digital Dictionary of the German Language*, <https://www.dwds.de/d/korpora/dwdsxl> (22.05.2024).

³⁶ Cf. https://www.dwds.de/r/?q=%22meiner+Meinung+nach%22&corpus=dwdsxl&date-start=1897&date-end=2024&sc=adg&sc=bz&sc=blogs&sc=bundestag&sc=ddr&sc=tsp&sc=kern&sc=kern21&sc=gesetze&sc=spk&sc=politische_reden&sc=untertitel&sc=wikibooks&sc=wikipedia&sc=wikivoyage&format=full&sort=date_desc&limit=50 (22.05.2024). English translation: 'Everything is considered negotiable, anyone who is not prepared for meta-reflection is considered unsympathetic, even violent, anyone who makes a judgement, who does not constantly point out that he or she is now speaking from a purely subjective perspective, who does not introduce every second sentence with 'In my opinion' or 'I have the feeling that', is prescribed coaching in NVC [= non-violent communication]'.³⁷

³⁷ A: 'I'm so tired! – B: If you ask me, you should have a rest. – A: Easy for you to say! First, I have to finish my work'.

³⁸ This affirmation has been confirmed by an English native speaker.

Within a usage-based approach, it appears thus necessary to extend the ‘construction’ based on the Berkeley FrameNet in a way which takes into account the multiple aspects of meaning construction, namely by transposing the network of cognitive semantic frames into a multilevel model of meaning construction capable of representing expressions of opinion within a network of constructions connected to the opinion frame on at least two levels: (1) the level of (meta)discursive organisation associated to opinion-related speech act patterns (e.g. signaling openness to negotiation/ signaling a degree of certainty); (2) the level of interpersonal communication on which meaning emerges from constant negotiation (e.g. communicative strategies such as moderating or emphasizing conflictual elements linked to the opinion frame).

2.3 Comparing L1 and L2: some methodological issues

As discussed previously, errors regarding the German constructions *meiner Meinung nach* and *meine Meinung ist, dass ...* have to be referred to processes of understanding (see 1., 2.1). The argument of insufficient understanding might be rejected by the learner on the grounds that they simply had not memorized the exact ‘form’ of each ‘word’ composing the expression. However, the number of errors linked to the functional-pragmatic aspect of these constructions in the written productions of my French learners’ GFL-corpus appears to be at least equal if not superior to the number of purely formal ‘mistakes’. If *meine Meinung ist, dass* had been understood and learned as a construction, the risk of morphosyntactic error might have been reduced. This leads us back to the question of ‘meaning’: What does a writer/speaker ‘mean’ when they say *In my opinion*?

In a phraseological perspective, EoO represent pre-constructed phrases whose predominant communicative function(s) must be described with respect to the contexts in which they occur. Taking Sinclair’s slogan “The phrase, the whole phrase, and nothing but the phrase” (Sinclair 2008: 407-410) a step further, I would like to argue that this type of expression can only be fully understood with respect to genre/text type as well as the particular situation in which it is employed. This top-down approach increases the importance of the pragmatic and interactional dimensions of the notion of meaning. According to Firth’s *contextual meaning theory*, meaning must be analysed “at all levels of linguistic analysis” (Firth 1957: 192). Describing context in the Firthian sense can provide valuable insight into a large variety of elements which are likely to influence the process of meaning construction and re-construction by L2 learners. One important aspect is the different situational and motivational background of L2 learners compared to native speakers: whereas students’ text productions are initiated by the teacher in an institutional (academic) setting and thus primarily extrinsically motivated, the native speaker’s productions are generally intrinsically motivated, namely in situations other than learning. This is to say that learners’ texts are focused at least partially on the language itself, being both a means of communication and an object of learning.

Within a contrastive approach, one question is whether part of the linguistic differences between L1 and L2 texts can be attributed to the double quality of L2 texts as both learners’ and learning texts (i.e. texts produced for learning). It could be argued that L1 and L2 texts are not comparable, since a number of accounted differences are directly imputable to the learning situation. The following table illustrates major differences between L1 and L2 text production situations with respect to the specific conditions on which the corpora of the present study are based:

L1 text production situation	L2 text production situation
general setting: private	general setting: academic (institutional)
interactional setting: internet-communication (forums, comment sections)	interactional setting: classroom-communication (mediated by the teacher)
self-imposed task	task imposed by the teacher

addressee of the text: the people consulting the forums and comment sections writing objective: to express an opinion communication-oriented text production aim: written contribution to a discussion/ debate	addressee of the text: the teacher (?) writing objective: to develop L2 writing skills learning-oriented text production aim: feedback/ assessment by the teacher
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Table 1
Situational aspects of opinion-related text production in German L1 and L2

A few criteria listed in this table represent simplifications in the sense that they emphasize the learning aspect of the L2 text production situation. The intention is to highlight differences which are likely to affect the writing style: since the writing task is generally imposed by the teacher in a learning situation, it is possible that a certain number of EoO are produced for the sole purpose of responding to the task by trying to meet the teacher's expectations. Thus, the learner may express an opinion even though they might not actually have any to communicate on the given subject. This may lead to incoherencies and errors affecting all levels of text production, including constructions and formulations related to opinion. The question mark behind the teacher as addressee of the learner's text suggests, however, that this might *de facto* be the case, but that this would not involve any substantial alterations in terms of 'recipient design'. Most linguistic forms of 'engagement' of the reader rely on a series of highly conventionalised procedures and devices, such as direct address (reader pronouns, personal asides), appeals to shared knowledge, directives, and questions (cf. e.g. Hyland 2005: 182-186). It can be assumed that the concrete identity of the reader affects these procedures and devices only marginally. Another way of looking at this consists in considering language learning as a form of 'game' which enables the learner to acquire new skills and knowledge by way of playing. In this perspective, the learner 'playfully' constructs a reader whose attention is primordially directed to style and content³⁹ rather than lexical and grammatical correctness. Hence, the learner's text can be considered globally comparable to the native speaker's.

To conclude this theoretical section, I propose a summary of my basic postulates and assumptions:

1. 'expressing one's opinion' represents a discursive frame within the 'opinion frame';
2. the frame of 'expressing one's opinion' is deployed linguistically through a network of speech-act patterns;
3. these patterns refer to specific procedures on the semantic, morphosyntactic, pragmatic, interactional as well as the lexical and 'formulation' level. *EoO* are forms of formulaic language which are analysable as 'constructions';
4. semantic frames, patterns and grammatical constructions are interwoven, and constitutive elements of specific text patterns related to the opinion frame;
5. the structural, linguistic, and pragmatic properties of a text based on the opinion frame can be described as a complex argumentative text pattern;
6. text patterns are constitutive elements of genre and text type.

Examples of text types related to the opinion-frame are blog comments⁴⁰, radio/television comments, essay discussions, editorial, letter to the editor.

³⁹ The notion of 'content' refers roughly to the propositional and communicative aspects of textual meaning.

⁴⁰ A detailed account of this text type based on text analytical methods for the purpose of text mining can be found in Trevisan (2013).

3. Corpus analysis

3.1 Data and method

The following exploratory study deals with one construction and two word forms: *in der Tat*, *Meinung*, and *sagen*. It is based on corpora compiled specifically for the purpose of examining the use of EoO by French learners of GFL and comparing them to the way they are used by German native speakers (GNS). The choice of *in der Tat* is motivated by the relatively high frequency in which it occurs in French learner's text productions and my difficulties as their teacher in explaining why this expression is inappropriate or 'unusual' in most cases. The word forms *Meinung* and *sagen* were chosen as lexical elements frequently associated with the opinion-frame and thus likely to occur within speech-act-patterns related to 'expressing one's opinion'.

The general background of the study is as follows: the data of the GFL-corpus were collected over the past three years during my classes in front of French second, third and fourth year non specialist students at the University of Lorraine (France). All the data are written texts handed in electronically and responding to writing tasks explicitly involving the pattern 'expressing one's opinion', typically elicited by formulations such as *Kommentieren Sie ... / Schreiben Sie einen Kommentar/Leserbrief. / Geben Sie Ihre Meinung ab!*; *Was ist Ihre Meinung dazu?* The level of the students is relatively advanced and can be situated in a range between B1 and B2/ B2⁺ of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*⁴¹. The GNS-corpus is compiled according to the criterion of comparability in terms of text type, but also in terms of length. Thus, since learners' texts are generally short compared to GNS-texts, I restricted my choice of GNS-texts to the text type *Leserbrief* ('letter to the editor') in a wide sense: As these texts were published in online versions of German regional and national newspapers (e.g. *Tagesspiegel*, *FAZ*), it must be assumed that elements of the traditional text pattern have evolved or even disappeared, such as traditional introductory formula addressing the editors (*Liebe Redaktion, ...*). The degree of comparability⁴² of the GFL- and the GNS-corpus is relatively high with respect to the speech-act-pattern 'expressing one's opinion', but it remains ultimately insufficient regarding specific text types such as 'letter to the editor'. Nevertheless, my French learner's corpus contains 23 documents explicitly referring to this text type, thus increasing the chances of finding comparable text- and speech-act-patterns in both corpora. I have chosen not to include a French native speaker's (FNS) corpus, considering the present study as simply a first step to improving French learners' writing skills. Its focus lies on the revelation of culture and language specific patterns and constructions of 'expressing one's opinion'. Only in a second step can we attempt to describe these patterns and constructions in more detail.

The table below provides a general overview of the data. The GFL-corpus is divided into two sub-corpora, whereas the GNS-corpus, solely based on the text type 'letter to the editor', does not require any subdivision.

⁴¹ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions> (22.05.2024).

⁴² During the *Europhras 2019* conference in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Schafroth tackled the question of interlingual comparability of phraseological constructions ("Phraseoschablonen") in terms of a *desideratum*, asking, for instance, whether and to which extent constructions can be compared with respect to their specific functions. This question is bound to stay open until the lexicon-syntax interface has been described in more detail (cf. Schafroth 2019).

Corpus GFL: <i>Written commentaries</i>		Corpus GFL: <i>Letters to the editor</i>		Corpus GNS: <i>Letters to the editor</i>	
Tokens	42,359	Tokens	6,210	Tokens	20,019
Words	35,772	Words	5,308	Words	16,660
Sentences	2,137	Sentences	368	Sentences	912
Documents	106	Documents	23	Documents	19

Table 2
Empirical corpus data (GFL- and GNS-corpora)

Method: The corpora were compiled in *Sketch Engine* (cf. Kilgariff et al. 2014) in order to enable basic queries concerning frequencies and concordances. The latter were extracted for a qualitative analysis in order to determine the underlying constructions and patterns of a complex argumentative structure. Larger parts of texts were extracted and annotated manually according to the type of speech acts performed within argumentative discourse. The descriptive categories were adapted, and partially altered, from typologies developed by Tutin (2019) with respect to ‘prefabricated sentences’ used in interaction⁴³ as well as from Granger / Paquot (2008) regarding phraseological categories for textual and communicative phrasemes.

3.2 First results

In the following, I will start by presenting general findings concerning the use of the word *Meinung*, before presenting the construction *in der Tat* by combining empirical results with a more detailed qualitative analysis. Finally, I will present a few interesting findings with respect to *sagen*-constructions.

The choice of *Meinung* was motivated by my expectation of finding a relatively high number of occurrences in both the GFL and the GNS productions. Surprisingly, only two occurrences could be found in the GNS productions, whereas the GFL-corpus contains 47 occurrences⁴⁴. The GFL-sub-corpus based on the text type ‘letter to the editor’ contains 7 occurrences and thus distinctly more than the GNS corpus, even though the latter is more than three times bigger (16,600 words compared to 6,210 words). The qualitative analysis revealed, moreover, that both occurrences in the GNS-corpus are used in descriptive contexts unrelated to the specific metadiscursive and pragmatic functions of ‘expressing one’s opinion’. In the French learners’ productions, on the other hand, 33 occurrences out of 47 can be attributed to this type of speech act. Their specific functions can be described in terms of ‘(meta-)attitudinal’⁴⁵ constructions such as *meiner Meinung nach*. It can be noted that they are frequently connected to metadiscursive acts of discourse organisation, as in the following examples:

- (3) *Endlich sind wir der Meinung, dass Gleichberechtigung [eine] Priorität ist.*
- (4) *Ich schließe mich dieser Argumentation größtenteils an, dennoch sehe ich ein weiteres, meiner Meinung nach genau so wichtiges Argument.*

⁴³ French: “Phrases préfabriquées de l’interaction”, see Tutin (2019).

⁴⁴ The low frequencies in the GNS corpus are of course not generalisable for the overall occurrence of these units in large corpora; nor are they pertinent with respect to the quantitative distribution of their usage and discursive functions. The GNS examples are therefore used in this article primarily for qualitative comparison.

⁴⁵ ‘meta-attitudinal’ = metadiscursive category signalling the speaker’s attitude “towards their utterance and interlocutors” (Granger / Paquot 2008: 43).

The combination of metadiscursive devices of text organisation, such as *endlich* (1) and *sehe ich ein weiteres (...) Argument* (2) with *Meinung*-constructions creates an effect of over-emphasis on interactive steering and coherence-marking. This appears relatively unusual to a German native speaker, an impression requiring verification on bigger GNS-corpora. Finally, the relatively frequent cases of unusual constructions are less often due to incorrect syntax than to an incoherent combination of constructions. The following examples illustrate the sometimes comical effect:

- (5) **Meiner Meinung nach ist gemischt.*
(6) **Unsere Meinung dazu wird vom Text geteilt, [...].*

The pragmatic-semantic incongruence created by these sentences is based on a confusion of collocational relations: the adjective *gemischt* is usually part of the collocation *ein gemischtes Gefühl/ einen gemischten Eindruck haben* (E: ‘having mixed feelings / impressions’), its use being restricted to the psychological aspect of perception. In the second example, the comical effect relies partially on the restriction of the expression *seine Meinung teilen* (E: *to share one’s opinion*) to humans, thus bringing the “Text” literally to life. These types of error indicate a certain degree of awareness with regard to constructions, despite the learners’ insufficient linguistic competencies concerning the lexico-grammatical properties of this construction.

The EoO *in der Tat* is used very frequently by French learners of German. Their considerable difficulties in using this expression appropriately is linked to its syntactic, semantic and pragmatic fixity and the existence of a French translation which is, however, only partially equivalent (F: *en effet*; E: *indeed*). The corpus-based study of this expression leads to similar results compared to *Meinung* in terms of frequency: With only two occurrences in the GNS-corpus its number is significantly lower compared to the 36 occurrences in the GFL-corpora. The specific discursive function of the two occurrences in the GNS-corpus can be glossed as *marking the evidence of an assertion within argumentative discourse*:

- (7) *Wie können Kindeswohl und Elternwohl [...] durch die Familien- und Sozialpolitik des Staates gestärkt werden? Die klassische Familie ist in der Tat keine Erfindung einer ideologischen Denkschule, sondern eine historisch gewachsene Institution. Es gab zum Beispiel die Zeit der Großfamilie (das „Haus“ oder „Vaterhaus“ zur Zeit des Alten Testaments), eine patriarchalisch strukturierte Wohn-, Wirtschafts-, Sozial- und Kampfgemeinschaft, die sich gleichzeitig als religiöse Kultgemeinschaft verstand.⁴⁶*

This example of argumentative discourse deploys a series of interlinked speech acts as part of a textual pattern which can be analysed according to the global speech act pattern of ‘evaluating linguistically’ (G: “sprachliches Bewerten”) developed in a text linguistic perspective (see e.g. Sandig 1986; Trevisan 2013). The specific function of the expression *in der Tat* within this example can be referred to a global argumentative pattern inside of which it carries out the function of an operator by marking the evidence of the assertion to which it is associated. The meaning of the assertion in question can be glossed as follows: *The traditional family (“klassische Familie”) is an undeniable fact, i.e. “not an invention of an ideological school of thought”*. In addition to what Hyland / Wang / Jiang (2022) call the ‘interactional’ function (see section 2.1), *in der Tat* can be seen as an ‘interactive’ device preparing the thematic development of the following sentence. On the one hand, *in der Tat* represents

⁴⁶ E: ‘How can the welfare of children and parents be reinforced by public family and social policy? The traditional family is in fact not an invention of an ideological school of thought, but an institution that has evolved historically. For example, there was the time of the extended family (the *house* or *father’s house* at the time of the Old Testament), a patriarchally structured living, economic, social and fighting community that also saw itself as a religious cult community’.

a ‘warrant’ to the ‘claim’⁴⁷ by presenting the existence of extended families in the past as a proof for the claim’s veracity. On the other hand, the salience of the sequential position of *in der Tat* provides emphasis and can be interpreted as an interactive signal regarding the relevance of the claim. Since the relevance is not (yet) explicit, *in der Tat* informs the reader implicitly that a proof of the claim will follow: *Es gab zum Beispiel ...* (‘For instance, there was ...’). Since a granular analysis of this cannot be fully provided in the present article, this brief account can only provide first insights into the complexity of EoO.

The fact that only 20% of the EoO produced by French learners are used appropriately can serve as an illustration. A closer analysis of the contexts in which inappropriate use occurs shows a tendency of French learners to employ them as textual coherence markers. For reasons linked to the length of the present article, I will restrict my observations to one example:

- (8) *Mich hat besonders interessiert, was Herr Karl gesagt hat. In der Tat bedauert er die Tatsache, dass wir uns bei der Bewältigung der Krise in Europa vom Rest der Welt isoliert fühlen. Allerdings bin ich mir nicht sicher, ob dieses Gefühl *am meisten geteilt wird.*⁴⁸ *[correct: von der Mehrheit]

In this context, the expression is used by the French learner to signal the thematic link between the assertion produced in the previous sentence and the illustration in the second. Since the thematic development provided by this second sentence is incompatible with the evidence-marking function discussed above, the use of *in der Tat* must be rendered inappropriate. From the point of view of a GNS, there does not seem to be any better way of indicating the intended meaning than by simply eliminating the expression. Hence, it is imperative for French learners to study the complex discursive functions of *in der Tat* in the contexts in which they are employed by GNS.

The significance of the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data will have to be confirmed by a contrastive analysis by integrating a comparable FNS corpus into the study.

The findings with respect to constructions occurring in combination with the word form *sagen* will be restricted to a few essential observations. The choice of *sagen* was based on the hypothesis that *verba dicendi* are frequently associated with the EoO-pattern, since their metadiscursive dimension makes them a valuable resource for stance-taking purposes. An example of a stance-taking construction containing the word form *sagen* is the idiomatic speech act *Na sag mal!* (E: ‘You don’t say! / I can’t believe it! / Wow, that’s impressive / ...’)⁴⁹. Whereas this construction typically occurs in discourse-in-interaction, formulations in written productions based on the text type ‘letter to the editor’ tend to be more descriptive regarding the author’s sentiments. This assumption is corroborated by my findings with respect to EoO in the GNS-corpus. The morphosyntactic analysis of the GNS-constructions reflects a preference for impersonal formulations compared to the EoO found in the GFL-corpus.

The following table gives an empirical account of *sagen*-constructions in the GNS-corpus and the French learner subcorpus based on the text type ‘letter to the editor’, using *Sketch Engine*.

⁴⁷ See Toulmin’s model of argumentation (1964).

⁴⁸ E: ‘I was particularly interested in what Mr. Karl said. He regrets the fact that we feel isolated from the rest of the world in dealing with the crisis in Europe. However, I am not sure whether this feeling is shared by a majority of people’.

⁴⁹ For a detailed lexicographic description in a contrastive German-French perspective see Smith (2016); for further discussion see Smith (2022: 119-122).

GNS-corpus		GFL-corpus (French learners)	
Number of hits	7	Number of hits	5
Number of hits per million	349.67	Number of hits per million	805.15
Percent of whole corpus	0.03497%	Percent of whole corpus	0.08052%
Percent of total number of occurrences (word-form <i>sagen</i>)	31.82%	Percent of total number of occurrences (word-form <i>sagen</i>)	33.33%
Corpus size (tokens)	20,019	Corpus size (tokens)	6,210

Table 3
Communicative *sagen*-constructions in German L1 and German L2 (text type ‘letter to the editor’)

Even though the limited number of our data does not enable us to draw any general conclusions, our analyses have shown that there may be a stronger tendency for French native speakers to use *sagen*-constructions compared to German native speakers. This might be ultimately an indicator of cultural and linguistic differences with respect to speech and text act patterns in the two languages in question, an observation requiring further study.

The proportion of constructions linked to the EoO-pattern with respect to the total number of ‘more or less fixed multiword units’⁵⁰ analysed is roughly the same in both corpora. The qualitative analysis was carried out in three steps: (1) filtering of communicative constructions; (2) general morpho-syntactic description of each construction; (3) in-depth analysis of the specific discursive and pragmatic functions of each construction regarding the specific contexts.

Step (1) consisted in a simple division of all occurrences into two phraseological categories based on a rough distinction between ‘referential’ (i.e. descriptive) function on the one hand and the ‘textual’ / ‘communicative’ function on the other, thereby following the extended version of Burger’s typology (1998) presented by Granger / Paquot (2008). In this extended version, Burger’s distinction between the ‘referential’, ‘communicative’ and ‘structural’ function is modified insofar as the ‘structural’ function is renamed ‘textual’ function, thus extending the number of phrasemes which could be potentially attributed to this category. The extension of the analytical scope corresponds to a text analytical approach going beyond the level of the phrase and the sentence (see above, 2.2). For the purpose of the present study, however, I did not consider it useful to establish a clear categorial distinction between the communicative and the textual function, since EoO are primarily seen as meta-discursive resources whose interactive (i.e. textual) and interactional (i.e. communicative) functions cannot always be clearly separated (see above).

The following examples taken from the GNS-corpus illustrate the basic distinction between referential and communicative functions of phrases containing *sagen*:

- (9) *Wenn ich abends meine 8 Stunden gearbeitet habe, dann sage ich* „Feierabend“ und gehe nach Hause. (Argumentative discourse: [...] Warum man jetzt ausgerechnet bei Kindern, denen man ja eigentlich am meisten ein unbeschwertes Leben wünscht, dieses Feierabendgefühl nicht für wichtig hält, ist mir gänzlich unverständlich.) - REFERENTIAL
- (10) PS: Danke an das Gesundheits- und Pflegepersonal, das sich jeden Tag aufs Neue den Hintern aufreißt, um Menschenleben zu retten – ihr seid der Wahnsinn! **Das musste einfach mal gesagt werden.** - COMMUNICATIVE

Despite the argumentative context in example (9), the sentence based on the temporal/ iterative structure *Wenn (ich) ..., dann (sage ich)...*, is purely descriptive: in referring to the writer’s habit of *calling*

⁵⁰ See the notion of “usuelle Wortverbindungen” coined by Steyer (2013).

it a day after eight hours of work, the VP *ich sage "Feierabend"* fulfills a referential function. Unlike in example (10), *sagen* is not part of a construction in the sense defined above (see introduction)⁵¹.

The construction *Das musste einfach mal gesagt werden* in (10), on the other hand, carries out a communicative function since the meaning of *sagen* in this context is inextricably linked to the meaning of the other components and thus represents a 'holistic sign' (see introduction). Its function in the present context is both to mark the end of a sequence and to emphasize the relevance of what is said, thus combining interactive and interactional aspects of metadiscourse.

The lists below provide an account of all EoO-constructions found in the GFL and GNS corpora, followed by a schematic overview regarding their morpho-syntactic and functional-pragmatic properties.

a) GNS-CONSTRUCTIONS

- *Das musste einfach mal gesagt werden.* (E: "That just had to be said.")
- *ehrlich gesagt* (E: „to be honest“)
- *kurz gesagt: ...* (E: „in short“)
- *milde gesagt* (E: "to put it mildly")
- *oder sollte man besser sagen, ...* (E: "or shouldn't I rather say")
- *zu X ist (lediglich) zu sagen, dass ...* (E: "as far as X is concerned, we can (simply) say that ...")
- *Wie sagt (unser/e) X immer: ...* [aphorism or maxim] (E: ? [ironic introduction of an aphorism or a maxim])

b) GFL-CONSTRUCTIONS

- **Deshalb ist es notwendig, sehr deutlich zu sagen: ...* (E: "This is why it is important to say very clearly: ...")
- *Lassen Sie mich zum Schluss noch sagen, dass* (E: „To finish, I would like to say that“)
- **Um unseren Standpunkt zusammenzufassen, können wir sagen, dass* (E: "To sum up our point of view, we would like to say that ...")
- *Wir können nicht sagen, dass* (E: "We can't (really) say that ...")
- *Zusammenfassend kann man sagen, dass* (E: "All in all, you might say that...")

The two constructions marked with an asterisk can appear unusual to a GNS both from a syntactic and a pragmatic point of view. The accumulation of metadiscursive elements of similar forms and functions creates an impression of redundancy and stylistic weakness, leading to the question whether the constructions in question can be viewed as yet *genuinely* German. I will address this point in my conclusion. As regards the morpho-syntactic and functional-pragmatic properties, the differences between the GNS- and the GFL-constructions are striking.

⁵¹ Interestingly, there appears to exist a non-negligible number of constructions containing *Feierabend* that fulfill communicative functions - see for example the list of constructions provided by the Collins online dictionary: "*jetzt ist aber Feierabend!* (fig inf) - enough is enough; *damit ist jetzt Feierabend* (fig inf) - that's all over now; *dann ist Feierabend* (fig inf) - then it's all over, then it's the end of the road; *für mich ist Feierabend* (fig inf) - I've had enough", <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/deutsch-englisch/feierabend> (22.05.2024).

1. Morpho-syntactic properties:

- a. GNS: predominance of finite verb forms (*sagt, gesagt*); adverbial structures (*milde/ kurz/ ehrlich gesagt*)
- b. GFL: predominance of infinite verb forms (*sagen*); infinitive structures embedded in modal structures (*kann man sagen/ können wir (nicht) sagen/ es ist notwendig, zu sagen/ jdn. sagen lassen [Lassen Sie mich sagen, dass ...]*)

2. Pragmatic and discursive functions:

- a. GNS:
 - Metadiscursive organisation:
 - Selecting one aspect of the subject for a brief comment
 - Announcing a brief conclusion
 - Attitudinal marker:
 - Marking the writer's critical attitude towards an object or an idea *in an ironic manner*
 - Introducing a quotation *in a humoristic manner*
 - Marking the writer's critical attitude towards an object or an idea *in a manner emphasizing his frankness*
 - (Meta-)comment:
 - Commenting one's own commentary, presenting it as both a need and a necessity (*Das musste einfach mal gesagt werden.*)
- b. GFL:
 - Metadiscursive organisation:
 - Introducing a final comment or judgement
 - Introducing an appeal as a necessary act
 - Introducing a final summary
 - Introducing a summary of one's point of view
 - Modalization:
 - Expressing the impossibility of asserting sth

The qualitative analysis of EoO show a clear tendency of French learners of German to use different speech- and text-act patterns with respect to the text type 'letter to the editor'. Their preference for expressions operating on the level of metadiscursive organisation can be assumed to derive from patterns in their native language, but it is insufficient to raise their awareness simply on this point. It is equally important to promote awareness of the existence of specific speech- and text-act patterns regarding different text types in order to facilitate the acquisition of constructions specialised in stance-taking ('attitudinal markers', see above).

4. Conclusion

The results obtained through this exploratory study will need to be confirmed by further research. Nevertheless, they enable me to confirm my initial hypothesis concerning the importance of genre and text types regarding the development of the writing skills of French learners of German. Taking up the learner's point of view, it appears necessary to overcome the traditional word-based view of

language, and to discover that despite often similar vocabulary in German and French, the constructions related to ‘Expressions of opinion’ are not necessarily equivalent. The (culture-)specific text patterns linked to the opinion-frame require further analysis in order to determine more precisely the constitutive elements of specific text types such as the ‘letter to an editor’.

On a methodological level, the combination of frame semantic and construction grammatical elements with a text analytical approach enables us to explore the complex network of semantic, lexico-grammatical, pragmatic, (meta-)discursive and interactional aspects of language beyond the limits of the sentence. The analysis of corpora of German L1 and L2 is largely facilitated when coupled with concordances provided by a corpus tool like *Sketch Engine*, even if the creation of descriptive and analytical categories in accordance with a particular theoretical framework still requires personal investment and time.

Finally, I would like to offer a personal reflection on the ultimate objective of foreign language learning and teaching: given the above-mentioned difficulties of French learners in acquiring near-native language proficiency in German (see above, 3.2), I have chosen not to use the notion of ‘interlanguage’. This notion refers to a concept of language learning based on the idea that the language produced by learners does not *yet* correspond to the target language, since it is *still* tainted by aspects of their native language. But does this idea reflect the reality of foreign language learning? We are accustomed to measure the lexico-grammatical “correctness” of learners’ productions with respect to the target language. My experience as teacher of GFL in France has taught me, however, that it cannot be realistically expected of the learner to produce native-like texts within a foreseeable future. The manifold institutional constraints as well as pedagogical and didactic issues are regularly discussed by teachers and learners alike, but the question of what can be attained within a limited number of months or years is mostly understood in terms of quality and quantity: how much and which vocabulary to choose, as well as how much (more rarely: which) grammar may lead to satisfactory progress. Questions concerning teaching and learning methods as well as tools are also discussed. It might be interesting to approach the issue from another angle: what kind of language can be learned and taught? To state the obvious, one could say that learning German as a foreign language implies that the language that is learned is “foreign”. Might it be possible to conceive GFL less in terms of a method and more in terms of a language in its own right? Instead of an ‘interlanguage’ bridging the gap between source and target language, there would be a type of German both foreign to the learners and to the native speakers: emerging from a process of meaning-construction through continuous interaction between the native and the second and/or foreign language, this ‘Foreign German’ would simultaneously create a sense of what is different and of what is familiar in both languages. It would facilitate a contrastive view on language and language learning, enabling the speaker to construct meaning by interpreting the “forests of symbols/ Which observe him with familiar eyes”⁵².

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⁵² Extract from the English translation of Baudelaire’s “Fleurs du Mal” by Wallace Fowlie, *Flowers of Evil* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).

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