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Phraseme Constructions: Productivity and Creativity (with Russian Examples)

This paper explores the productivity and creativity of phraseme constructions (PhraCons) within the framework of Construction Grammar, with a particular focus on Russian examples. Productivity, defined as the diversity of slot fillers, and creativity, the speaker's ability to generate novel constructs, are studied in tandem to understand their interrelation. By examining the interplay between productivity and creativity, the study expands the theoretical understanding of Construction Grammar, particularly with respect to idiomatic and schematic constructions. The study is part of the ongoing COST-project "PhraConRep", aimed at documenting phraseme constructions across Eastern and Central European languages. This research contributes to the development of multilingual repositories for phraseme constructions, enriching cross-linguistic studies. The primary goal is to classify PhraCons based on their productivity levels and to analyze how their flexibility impacts linguistic creativity. The research addresses key questions about the boundaries between theoretically productive and practically utilized constructions. The analysis uses corpus data from Russian and multilingual sources, categorizing constructions based on their productivity, type frequency, and semantic diversity. Slot fillers are evaluated to determine the degree of creativity and freedom speakers have when using these constructions. The study identifies a continuum of productivity levels, ranging from highly productive to non-productive PhraCons. It demonstrates that creativity often involves the use of rare slot fillers, with less frequent constructions sometimes requiring greater inventive effort. The research also highlights the role of idiomaticity and schema flexibility in fostering linguistic innovation. The paper argues that productivity and creativity are gradient properties, influencing not only the flexibility of constructions but also their lexicalization in discourse. These findings have implications for both theoretical linguistics and practical lexicography. Insights from this study support the creation of multilingual PhraCons repositories, providing tools for language teaching, translation, and lexicographical endeavors.

Keywords: phraseme construction, Construction Grammar, productivity, creativity

Phrasem-Konstruktionen: Produktivität und Kreativität (anhand von Beispielen auf Russisch)

Der Beitrag untersucht die Produktivität und Kreativität von phraseologischen Konstruktionen (PhraCons) im Rahmen der Konstruktionsgrammatik, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf russischen Beispielen liegt. Produktivität, verstanden als Vielfalt der Slot-Füller, und Kreativität, die Fähigkeit des Sprechers, neue Konstrukte zu schaffen, werden im Zusammenspiel analysiert, um ihre Beziehung zu erfassen. Die Analyse der Wechselwirkung zwischen Produktivität und Kreativität erweitert das theoretische Verständnis der Konstruktionsgrammatik, insbesondere in Bezug auf idiomatische und schematische Konstruktionen. Der Aufsatz entstand im Zuge des COST-Projektes „PhraConRep", dessen Ziel es ist, Phrasem-Konstruktionen in ost- und mitteleuropäischen Sprachen lexikographisch zu erfassen. Die Forschung leistet einen Beitrag zur Entwicklung multilingualer Repositorien für PhraCons und fördert die sprachübergreifende

Forschung. Das Hauptziel besteht darin, PhraCons nach ihren Produktivitätsstufen zu klassifizieren und zu analysieren, wie ihre Flexibilität die sprachliche Kreativität beeinflusst. Im Fokus stehen zentrale Fragen zu den Grenzen zwischen theoretisch produktiven und praktisch genutzten Konstruktionen. Die Analyse stützt sich auf Korpusdaten aus russischen und multilingualen Quellen und kategorisiert Konstruktionen basierend auf ihrer Produktivität, Typfrequenz und semantischen Vielfalt. Slot-Füller werden untersucht, um den Grad der Kreativität und Freiheit der Sprecher bei der Verwendung dieser Konstruktionen zu bewerten. Die Studie identifiziert ein Kontinuum von Produktivitätsstufen, das von hochproduktiven bis hin zu nicht produktiven PhraCons reicht. Es wird gezeigt, dass Kreativität häufig mit der Verwendung seltener Slot-Füller einhergeht und weniger häufige Konstruktionen oft größeren Erfindungsreichtum erfordern. Zudem wird die Rolle von Idiomatizität und Schemata-Flexibilität bei der Förderung sprachlicher Innovation hervorgehoben. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass Produktivität und Kreativität gradierte Eigenschaften sind, die nicht nur die Flexibilität von Konstruktionen, sondern auch ihre Lexikalisierung im Diskurs beeinflussen. Diese Erkenntnisse haben sowohl für die theoretische Linguistik als auch für die praktische Lexikographie Bedeutung. Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie unterstützen die Entwicklung multilingualer PhraCon-Repositorien und bieten Werkzeuge für den Sprachunterricht, die Übersetzung und lexikographische Arbeiten.

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1. Introduction

A paradigm shift can be observed in linguistics at the turn of the century: more and more linguists are showing a keen interest in so-called construction grammar (CxG): language is studied through constructions, understood as stable combinations of form and meaning. Constructions include both fixed phrases and syntactic structures that convey specific grammatical meanings. It is assumed that speakers possess a repertoire of diverse constructions stored in memory and used in communication: "Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency" (Goldberg 2006: 5). This perspective aligns closely with the description of familiar language provided in (Sidtis 2021).

The CxG regards constructions of different types: as non-schematic and as schematic, as non-productive and as productive. Degrees of schematicity are defined as: (1) fully filled and fixed; (2) fully filled and partially flexible; (3) partially filled (semi-schematic); (4) fully schematic (Fried 2015: 978). Highly schematic constructions of type (3) or (4) are general linguistic patterns which are flexible in structure and meaning,

allowing for a wide range of specific instances. These constructions have open slots that can be filled with different words or phrases, adapting to various contexts while maintaining a core grammatical or functional role. For example, the English construction *the X-er, the Y-er* (as in *the bigger, the better*) is highly schematic: the slots X and Y can be filled out with numerous adjectives to express different comparative meanings.

CxG distinguishes constructions based on their degree of productivity, with all constructions placed on a continuum from "fully (or high) productive" to "non-productive" (Delhem/Marty 2020: 39). Syntactic patterns tend to be more productive, while specific idiomatic constructions have limited productivity. The more schematicity, the more productivity (Van Lancker Sidtis et al. 2012, Ziem 2020). "Non-productive" constructions are "coined" (cf. Kay 2013: 33): they have a fixed structure and specific meaning, with little room for variation in usage. Examples include idiomatic expressions or set phrases, where individual elements cannot be freely replaced or modified without altering or losing the construction's established meaning. Highly schematic constructions are clearly productive, according to the most popular opinion represented by authors in the CxG area. But this is not the only point of view on productivity that would be common among proponents of CxG theory.

In this paper, the relationship between the **productivity** of a special kind of constructions (Phraseme Constructions, s. chapter 1) and the potential **creativity** of the speaker using them in his texts are considered.

2. Phraseme constructions

A broad range of constructions is highly phraseologized, where the syntactic pattern itself functions as phraseological. The patterns involve a fixed, partially lexically filled, partially open (semi-schematic) syntactic model with a meaning that speakers store as a whole in his mental lexicon, using it productively within certain limits (Finkbeiner 2022: 56). Cf.: (Engl.) *X or no X, Y* (*Rain or no rain, we're going outside*); (Germ.) *X ist nicht mein (dein, sein…) Ding* (*Sport ist nicht mein Ding*); (Fr.) *Ça a beau être X, Y* (*Ça a beau être cher, je vais l'acheter*); (Rus.) *N бы ещё V* (Ты бы ещё козу сюда привёл! *'Why not with a goat?'*[1]).

The term **phraseological construction**, or **phraseme construction** (Rus. фразеологизм-конструкция) was proposed in (Dobrovol'skij 2011: 114) and refers to a syntactic model included in a language system[2]. In the speech stream we deal with **constructs**, i. e. PhraCons filled with concrete linguistic material. The fixed elements of PhraCons are called **anchors**, and the positions to be filled in speech are called **slots**. The elements that fill the slots are denoted by the term **fillers**.

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[1] This is said to someone who has brought their dog to work, for example.

[2] There are other terms for the same phenomenon, but here, the term proposed by Dobrovol'skij is used. In the abbreviated form PhraCon (Singular) or PhraCons (Plural).

All PhraCons can be placed on the scale between the poles "high productive" and "non-productive", provided that productivity is understood to mean both the number of slot fillers and their morphological and semantic diversity. However, we should bear in mind that in addition to the freedom of slot filling, many constructions also have a certain number (sometimes a large number) of ready-made idioms and formulaic sentences based on the same syntactic pattern. In such cases, a combination of a certain degree of productivity (in the morphological sense) and a consolidation of some examples into finished sentences is observed. From the usage-based perspective, some utterances or structures are consolidated through their frequent use (process of chunking), without the underlying schema (syntactic pattern) disappearing as a result. This means that the schema remains as a template, but the speaker has the option of using ready-made formulaic sentences or parts of sentences without being forced to fill the slots themselves (cf. Bybee 2010: 33–56).

Creativity in language has often been associated with productivity (Hoffmann 2019: 1). In CxG, creativity is sometimes understood as an indicator of a pattern's productivity, as innovative, non-traditional applications of a construction offer insights into the language user's expansion strategies (Zeschel 2012: 228, Mellado Blanco 2023: 121).

3. Project "A Multilingual Repository
of Phraseme Constructions in Central and Eastern
European Languages (PhraConRep)"

Currently, an international project (with over 100 participants from various countries) is developing two online Repositories for phraseme constructions[3], focusing on both the detailed description of PhraCons with the most relevant parameters (like semantics and pragmatics, morphology, syntax, restrictions for slot filling, etc.) and their translation. One Repository is a German-multilingual (targeting 15 Eastern and Central European languages such as Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, Hungarian, etc.), while the other is a Russian-German Repository. These are active, didactic reference works designed not only to support the users in recognizing and understanding PhraCons in texts but also to enable them to independently create constructs in speech. The first version is scheduled for publication in 2027/2028. Currently, there are approximately 280 German and 500 Russian entries in these bilingual PhraCons Repositories.

Based on the collected material and a well-developed macro- and micro-structure, the authors are able to carry out linguistic research. Among other things, we are interested in classifying all PhraCons into the classes depending on their productivity level.

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[3] S. https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA22115/.

4. Productivity of phraseme constructions

The question of the productivity of syntactic constructions is attracting a great deal of attention in CxG. There are at least four different approaches to productivity for constructions. One is limited to the structural characteristics of a construction: maximally schematic, maximally productivity. With respect to PhraCons, productivity in terms of type frequency is thus synonymous with variety in filling slots (Barðdal 2008: 27, 45; Kay 2013; Urban 2019: 34). The other focusses on the popularity (frequency of usage) of the construction: the more usage, the more productivity (Clausner/Croft 1997, Plag et al. 1999, Finkbeiner 2008: 221). The third states that productivity can be determined individually depending on the specific construction and regarding all levels of slot fillers, and not only the morphological one (Boas 2003: 80, Perek 2020, Delhem/Marty 2020). According to the fourth point of view, not every act of slot filling can be considered as a testimony to the productivity of a construction, because it may conceal a completely different cognitive operation than the free choice of a filler (Cappelle 2014: 277).

In this paper, productivity is understood as the number of different lexemes used to fill the same slot within a PhraCon. In other words, productivity refers to the degree of freedom the speaker has in selecting the slot filling. The term **frequency** refers to the usage intensity of a PhraCon in the modern language, or the PhraCon popularity.

But there is a fairly large number of PhraCons that combine high productivity with a complete absence of freedom in selecting the fillers, as they represent phrases akin to echoic responses. For example, the Russian PhraCon ***X′ как X′*** ('X is a normal X' or 'X as usual'), when considered in terms of its use in speech, often turns out to be practically devoid of creative potential. This is because it expresses a reaction to someone's criticism, and its filler word is taken from a preceding utterance of the interlocutor, for example: *Что за каникулы! – Каникулы как каникулы!* 'What kind of vacation is this! – A vacation as usual, no worse than others.' Similarly, the model ***X′-то X′, но*** … ('Well, you are right, but …') functions as a rejoinder, where the filler X can be any word from the interlocutor's preceding utterance, repeated twice, for example: *Хорошо, что дочь о ней заботится.* 'It's good that her daughter takes care of her'. – *Хорошо-то хорошо, но ей одной не справиться.* 'Yes, it's good, but she cannot manage everything on her own.' The fillers can be of any kind, but freedom of their selection is not an issue here: the speaker is completely bound to the preceding utterance, even if a given instantiation of this PhraCon may be attested only once.

Thus, there are **two fundamentally different types of productivity**: abstract-morphological productivity on the pattern level (=theoretical, or potential productivity), and concrete, usage-based productivity during the text creation (=practical productivity). I therefore advocate keeping a theoretically possible level (the potential) separate from the practically used level (the realisation).

When all relevant characteristics are combined in one classification, the following groups of productivity levels are obtained:

– Theoretically productive + practically productive + high frequent. For example: ***С какой стати X?*** ‚Why on the earth X?' The slot can be filled with a word of any type, a group of words or a complete sentence (subject / predicate structure). In the text, too, the corresponding construct is a reaction to a situation, but the slot filling is not imposed by the preceding replica, it can be done relatively freely. E. g. *С какой стати я должен тебя слушать?* 'Why on earth should I listen to you?' This PhraCon ist highly frequent and actively used in different types of discourse.

– Theoretically productive + practically non-productive + high frequent. The most PhraCons that functions as an 'echo', i. e. quotes the previous replica, belongs to this type.

– Theoretically non-productive + practically non-productive + high frequent. For example: ***N по кому-л. плачет*** 'N is crying for somebody' (lterally) or 'N is waiting for somebody': the pattern is used for disapproving evaluation of a person's moral qualities or mental (intellectual) state. In the speaker's opinion, this person deserves the strictest punishment or should be isolated from society. The filler N is typically represented by some form of punishment (stick, prison, jail cell, gallows, and some others). E. g.: *Колония для малолеток по нему плачет.* ‚The juvenile detention centre is waiting for him'; *По этой даме давно верёвка плачет.* 'A rope has long been waiting for that lady'. These frequently used terms for various punishments or correctional institutions can, however, sometimes be replaced by more original slot fillers, resulting in hapax-expressions such as *116-я УКРФ по вам плачет.* 'Article 116 of the Russian Criminal Code is crying for you' (which is still an idea of punishment but expressed very specifically, as a precise article of criminal law is cited). But more often, variants of the slot-fillers that are familiar and well-known to all native Russian speakers are used.

– Theoretically productive + practically productive + low frequent. Such a combination is observed, among other things, in constructions that are outdated and find little use in modern language. For example: ***даром что X*** ‚although X'. This PhraCon can be filled with a broad variety of fillers, they can belong to any word type. But this PhraCon is used either in the texts of the 19ᵗʰ century (or for stylisation of this epoch) or by modern people who enjoy a thorough education in the humanities. The situation is similar with constructions that are reminiscent of folklore. For example: ***(и тут / а тут) глядь – X*** ‚and look – there is X'. E. g.: *И тут глядь – она уже передо мной.* ‚And look, there she is in front of me.' As with any folkloric PhraCon, this one isn't frequent in modern conversational language and is primarily used to give speech a folkloric style.

– Theoretically productive + practically non-productive + low frequent. This category includes PhraCons that fall under the 'echo' type mentioned above (i. e.,

quoting the interlocutor) and have an outdated or folksy tone. For example: **то-то и оно, что X** ‚That's exactly it – X'. E. g.: *"Ты что, забыл?"* – *„То-то и оно, что не забыл"*. ‚Did you forgot it?' 'That's exactly it – I didn't forgot it'. The Russian PhraCon is used to formulate a response to the previous replica; at least one word from the previous replica is quoted in the construct. Therefore, although this PhraCon can theoretically be filled with various fillers, in practice it leans completely on the left context. It is stylistically vernacular and not very popular: its frequency is rather low.

– Theoretically non-productive + practically non-productive + low frequent. This category includes only a few constructions for which a high level of creativity on the part of the speaker is required. For example, the PhraCon V^{inf} **вам не пере** V^{inf} requires the speakers to create their own words according to a certain word formation pattern. This PhraCon expresses the desire for someone to carry out an activity for as long as possible because this activity is enjoyable or useful. The second Verb does not exist in the Russian language, it has to be created by the speaker, e. g.: *Отдыхать вам – не переотдыхать* ‚Have a great holiday / have a good rest'; *Плавать вам – не переплавать* 'Take a nice long swim', etc. The verbs *переотдыхать*, *переплавать* are not lexicalised, they are specially invented for this construction, created according to the productive word formation model. These new creations are not to everyone's taste, and the corresponding design is not popular.

– There are several PhraCons, which are productive, theoretically as well as practically, and very popular, but at the same time they serve as the basis for many existing formulaic expressions (idioms and clichés). The speaker can either use a ready-made idiom or create their own construct, depending on what they are more inclined to do. Here, we observe a combination between two ways of using the same PhraCons: a productive and creative one or a "coined" one. For example, the PhraCon **хоть** V^{imp} offers many idioms build up on this pattern and they all mean a high degree of despair: *хоть плачь, хоть в петлю лезь, хоть вешайся, хоть помирай* ('It's enough to drive you crazy, to make you cry, to make you despair') and many others. The speaker can use one of these idioms to express his desperation. But also different, non-idiomatic constructs are created individually on the basis of the same PhraCon with the same meaning.

– A separate group consists of phrasal constructions in which the first slot is filled relatively freely, while the second slot-filler depends on the first, so that the speaker's freedom in filling the second slot is significantly more restricted than when choosing a lexeme for the first slot-filling. For example: **V′? Как бы V″ не пришлось!** (*Смеётесь? Как бы плакать не пришлось!* ‚Are you laughing? You might end up crying!') The productivity of the second slot is heavily constrained by the first. This type of PhraCons needs to be examined separately with regard to productivity and frequency level for each slot.

5. Creativity of the speakers using PhraCons

While the term **productivity** refers to a property of constructions, the term **creativity** characterises the person who uses constructions in their spoken or written language. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, creativity means "the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas".[4] The very choice of a construction for his utterance can be seen as a creative act, because the use of the idiomatic style in text production testifies to a certain freshness in the way of thinking and formulating. Using idioms of any kind can add relatability, a personal touch, stylistic colour, and authenticity to communication. It can be casual or expressive and often relies on established phrases to convey emotion, or shared experience in a compact, recognizable way. The use of idiomatic constructions enlivens language.

There is an extensive literature on **linguistic creativity**. The topic was taken up by Noam Chomsky. His concept of linguistic creativity refers to the human ability to generate an unlimited number of novel sentences, using a finite set of grammatical rules. He argued that native speakers can produce and understand sentences they've never heard before, reflecting an innate knowledge of syntax and structure rather than just repetition. This creativity is central to his theory of Generative Grammar, which posits that an internal set of generative rules enables speakers to form complex, meaningful expressions beyond memorized phrases (Chomsky 1964: 50–51, Chomsky 1972: 101–103).

Sampson critiques Chomsky's Generative Grammar by asserting that linguistic freedom surpasses generative rules: "Let me describe activities which characteristically produce examples drawn from a fixed and known (even if infinitely large) range as 'F-creative', and activities which characteristically produce examples that enlarge our understanding of the range of possible products of the activity as 'E-creative'. (F chosen as standing for 'fixed', E for 'enlarging' or 'extending')" (Sampson 2016: 19). The same idea can be found in Lyons (1977: 549): Lyons suggested to differentiate between productivity, which should be explained by generative grammar rules, and creativity, which is the native speaker's ability to expand the language system in a way that is motivated yet unpredictable and not strictly governed by rules.

Many PhraCons already violate various grammatical rules. In this paper, creativity is not understood as an ability to create new sentences by using certain schemes and filling slots. Linguistically creative is someone who produces expressions that are rare or entirely absent in texts produced by others.[5] According to (Haspelmann 1999: 1059),

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[4] S. dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/creativity.

[5] Being linguistically creative does not necessarily mean breaking language rules or norms. Even the boldest and most ingenious language plays often remain within the framework of linguistic grammaticality and norms, in the sense of being acceptable and understandable. Being creative, one expands the familiar and goes beyond the limits of the ordinary and common but does not exceed the boundaries of correctness. In this strict sense, there cannot be real E-creativity in language (cf. Bergs/Kompa 2020).

the "maxim of extravagance" is one of the key drivers behind any language change; it is counterbalanced by the "maxim of conformity".

In the context of PhraCons, the speaker is creative if he has **the ability to generate unusual, non-trivial, original constructs**. But not only the originality is important: "Originality is a necessary part of creativity, but creative things are more than just original. They also solve a problem, or more generally are somehow fitting or appropriate" (Runco et al. 2005: 137).[6] The key is that the recipient is surprised, laughs, or smiles, or takes a bit more time than usual to decipher the meaning of what was said. A certain degree of deviation from what one is used to hearing or reading, from the everyday, from the usual – that is the basis to judge an utterance as the result of a creative mental act.

Productivity in this sense can provide information about creative uses of a construction. PhraCons by their very definition contain open slots that are filled during text production, which is why there can be no PhraCons that would be inherently unproductive, and, therefore, unavailable for unusual (potentially creative) slot fillers.

In particular, less frequently occurring fillers, especially **hapaxes** (single occurrences of fillers), have been associated with creativity (Mellado Blanco 2022: 9). In other words, low token frequency can be an indicator of creativity. "In general, the more creative and less frequent the slot filler is, the more semantic enrichment and pragmatic implications it adds to the constructional meaning" (Mellado Blanco 2023: 116, Csikszentmihalyi/Wolfe: 2000).

The constructions that encourage the speaker to be creative can be categorised into the follow groups.
– Type (7), s. chapter 4: theoretically and practically productive and high-frequent PhraCons which offer a high number of (also frequented) prefabricated structures as idioms or formulaic phrases. The ability of some fixed structures to open their slots and, conversely, the tendency of some constructions to "close up" and solidify, reaffirms Kay's observation that there "exist families of lexically restricted expressions, originally identified by Fillmore as patterns of coining, which although sporadically productive diachronically are not systematically productive synchronically" (Kay 2013: 40). For example: *X до Y* 'X to the point of Y'. The construction reflects an extreme degree of quality or state: the speaker evaluates, using the construction, the extent to which an object's state has reached, is reaching, or could reach a certain point: for example, someone *устал до дрожи в коленях* 'is tired to the point of trembling knees', *пугается до истерики* 'is frightened to the point of hysteria', or *устанет до обморока* 'will be exhausted to the point of fainting'. The second slot-filler – a noun in the genitive case or a nominal phrase – expresses, as it were, the outcome of the state described by the first slot-filler. The construction typically serves as a hyperbole,

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[6] Motivation for linguistic creativity is not the focus of this essay: a lot of the right things have already been said about this (s. Gerrig/Gibbs 2009, Ward et al. 1997).

portraying the state of a person, animal, or inanimate object in an exaggerated form. Many fillers indicating a high or extreme degree of quality or state are idioms. The speaker usually uses one of these idioms from an extensive list. Naturally, the choice partly depends on the state the speaker is describing. People are usually *обижаются до слёз* 'offended to the point of tears', *устают до посинения* 'tired to the point of turning blue', *работают до (полного) изнеможения* 'work to the point of complete exhaustion', or *спорят до хрипоты* 'arguing until they are hoarse'. But the same PhraCon offers a wide field for creativity: speakers often invent descriptions of states that leave one marveling at their ingenuity. For reasons of space, only one example from the poem "Leningrad" by Osip Mandel'štam will be cited here: *Я вернулся в мой город, знакомый до слёз, / До прожилок, до детских припухлых желёз*, I've returned to my city, it's familiar in truth / To the tears, to the veins, swollen glands of my youth'[7]. It is a wonderful example of creativity in using the PhraCon.

– Type (6), s. chapter 4: theoretically and practically non-productive, not frequent. Since the corresponding constructs are generally not used often, every new formation in the sense of unusual slot fillings stands out as a creative idea on the part of the speaker. For example, the Russian PhraCon **N′ в N′** is hardly productive in terms of type frequency, and almost all examples attested in different sources are near-idioms, collocations or even idioms proper: *дверь в дверь* 'door to door', *окна в окна* 'windows to windows', *лоб в лоб* 'forehead to forehead', *глаза в глаза* 'eye to eye', *день в день* 'day to day; to the day'. Such expressions are not generated during text production, they are "coined". Nevertheless, some rather exotic individual examples such as *колени в колени* 'knees to knees', *берег в берег* 'shore to shore', *ножи в ножи* 'knives to knives', and a few others could be found. The authors of these expressions create something new, non-trivial against the background of the more frequent fillers attested in this PhraCon; they break with the familiar in favor of the unexplored, the uncharted. Such hapaxes can be regarded as instances of creativity.

– Some PhraCons used for comparisons require the speaker to be creative from the outset: the speaker must come up with something original; otherwise, he cannot successfully produce the intended utterance. For example: **X (это) всё равно что Y** , it's just as if …' This PhraCon is extremely popular and productive in both spoken and written discourse. The second filler (Y) is the comparison itself. It is represented by a relatively long, content-rich, original, and vivid infinitive phrase. Cf.: *Говорить с матерью – это всё равно что с кошкой советоваться* 'Talking to my mother is like consulting a cat'; *Использовать вас в роли секретарши – это всё равно что колоть орехи с помощью парового молота* 'Using you as a secretary is like cracking nuts with a steam hammer'. As is often the case with comparative constructions, this PhraCon prompts the speaker to activate their creative potential: they must come up with a situation to which they compare the actual, original one.

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[7] Translated by Andrey Kneller.

The previously mentioned PhraCon *N бы ещё V* (e. g., *Ты бы ещё козу сюда привела!* ‚Why not with a goat!’) is based on a comparison between the observed, negatively judged situation and an imagined, even worse scenario. This construct encourages the speaker to invent an imaginary situation, doing so with complete freedom and a high degree of creativity. This keeps the tone and context of a construct that invites creative exaggeration for effect. This type of construction invites the speaker to exaggerate a situation in a creative way so that the addressee can be reprimanded effectively and indirectly.

For some PhraCons with the comparative function, the speaker has the choice between using a prefabricated structure or a creative act of filling slots in the syntactic scheme himself. For instance, the comparative PhraCon Russian *(из) N′ такой (же) X, как (из) N″ Y* is an example of a highly productive PhraCon in terms of type frequency, and also with respect to creativity and hapax legomena. The fillers for this PhraCon often include the same words and phrases, like *ballerina*, *Queen of England*, *Queen of Sheba* or *the Pope*. The examples like: *Вы такой же профессор, как я английская королева.* ‘If you are a professor, then I’m the Queen of England’ are very popular and do not require much creativity. However, creative speakers can freely choose entirely original, ‘extravagant’ fillers, such as: *Ты такой же шахтёр, как я канатоходец.* ‘If you are a miner, I am a tightrope walker‘; *Из тебя такой финансовый директор, как из моего пальца корабельная мачта.* ‘If you’re a financial director, then my finger is a ship mast’; *Из него поэт, как из козы апельсин.* ‚If he’s a poet, then a goat is an orange.’ Such expressions add an unexpected twist to conversation, entertain the listeners, and bring freshness and vivid imagery to discourse (cf. Pavlova et al. 2021: 18–22).
– PhraCons that involve language play; Snowclones

There are PhraCons that are perfect for thinking up different language games. They encourage creative use on the part of the speaker. Some PhraCons are based on antonymy of the fillers and are made for creative ideas regarding the semantic inconsistency of the words with which the speaker fills their slots. Some fillers even rhyme with each other, but this would not be an absolute requirement for the speaker based on the syntactic model. For instance: *кому X, (а) кому Y*. This PhraCon means that some (people) get, enjoy, own or are allowed to do something good and interesting, while the others are ignored in the distribution of goods or interesting things. In other words, it is about unfair distribution. This PhraCon is very popular and is used for various creative ideas on the part of the speaker. One of the most widespread Russian stereotypes about the Russian soul is that Russians place nothing higher than justice. This is why this PhraCon is often interpreted in a folkloristic way and filled with folklore-like metaphorical fillers. The fillers rhyme in some examples, which can also be associated with the folk language. Cf.: *Кому горевать, а кому зоревать и во сне потягиваться* ‚One is mourning while the other is stretching in bed in the early morning’; *Кому тушить, кому глазеть, а кому руки греть* ‚One extinguishes, the other stares, the third warms his hands‘.

Many other PhraCons that require antonymy for their fillers are also made for creativity on the part of the speakers. Word creation based on existing word formation models can also be required by a PhraCon. An example has already been given above that presupposes the creation of a not-existing word (*Копить вам – не перекопить* 'I wish you lots of savings'; *Смеяться тебе – не пересмеяться* 'I wish you lots of laughter').

Some quotations that are modified by the speaker (so-called **snowclones**) also lend many speakers to language games. According to Carmen Mellado Blanco (referencing her lecture in Nancy[8]), a quote becomes a syntactic model (snowclones) when at least half of all tokens represent various modifications of the quote (s. also Stumpf 2016; Hartmann, Ungerer 2023). Applying this criterion, the line from Shakespeare's "Hamlet", "To be or not to be…," has become a snowclones in Russian (cf.: *Купить или не купить, вот в чём вопрос* ‚To bye, or not to bye – that is the question'; *Идти или не идти? Вот в чём вопрос* ‚To go, or not to go – that is the question', etc.) while Caesar's famous quote, "Veni, vidi, vici," although frequently adapted, has not yet reached the level of a snowclones in Russian, unlike in German (s. Stutz/Finkbeiner 2022).

The PhraCon originated from the well-known phrase *Казнить нельзя помиловать* ('Execute not, pardon' or 'Execute, not pardon'), attributed to Peter I or Alexander III, illustrating the importance of punctuation placement. This phrase has been popular in Russian grammar lessons. This wordplay exists in other cultures. For example, in Spanish: *Perdón imposible, que cumpla su condena / Perdón, imposible que cumpla su condena* 'Pardon impossible, carry out the sentence / Pardon, impossible to carry out the sentence'. German has similar examples: *Hinrichten nicht begnadigen* ‚Execute, not pardon / Do not execute, pardon' or *Wartet, nicht hängen* ‚Wait, don't hang / Don't wait, hang'. In Russian discourse, phrases based on this model have become so popular that the model has turned into a PhraCon. Like any wordplay that is brief, impactful, and catchy, this syntactic model V'^{inf} **нельзя** V''^{inf} is mainly used in advertising, e. g.: *Уйти нельзя купить* ‚Go not bye'; *Купить нельзя отложить* ‚Buy not delay'. Russian journalists take a liking to this pattern to create article titles and headlines. Even some authors use this model for book titles. Cf. the book titles: *Наказать нельзя наградить* 'Punish not reward'; *Любить нельзя отпустить* 'Love not let go'; *Бежать нельзя остаться* 'Run not stay'. Such constructs deliberately play with ambiguity by leaving open how a statement is to be understood. They encourage reflection by letting the reader decide where the imaginary comma could be placed.

The topic of creativity in the use of PhraCons would be incomplete without considering the opposite extreme: PhraCons that inherently **exclude any creativity** due to their structure. These are the PhraCons perfectly suited for "tired" speakers who have

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[8] The lecture with the title "What the hell are constructional idioms? An approach from the research project CONSTRIDIOMS" was held by Carmen Mellado Blanco and Pedro Ivorra Ordines at the conference "Approches constructionnelles et phraséologie, ATILF & LIDILEM" on 18 October 2024.

no desire for creativity. Alternatively, these PhraCons can be characterized differently in terms of creativity: no matter how creative the speaker may be, there is nothing in these syntactic patterns that would allow him or her to demonstrate creativity.

For instance, the PhraCon *X, а туда же* is used when the conversation partner or a third party is subjected to criticism or condemnation, often accompanied by disdain or contempt: the qualities or initial characteristics of the person being criticized (abilities, talents, professionalism, character traits, experience, living conditions, etc.), mentioned in the first part of the construct by the filler X, do not correspond to the actual specific actions, plans, or aspirations of the target of criticism. The initial characteristics, serving as a sort of background or basis for criticism, are always mentioned in the construct, while the claims, plans, or actions provoking the criticism may not be verbally indicated. They may be implicit in the text, and the recipient may infer them from situational knowledge or previous context. This construct corresponds to a non-creative approach to linguistic models: to say something like *Старый, а туда же* ‚Old, yet acting that way‘ or *Учёный, а туда же* ‚A scientist – yet acting that way‘ without verbally justifying one's criticism or dissatisfaction is a convenient way to save articulatory and cognitive effort, allowing for the expression of emotions and illocution without the need to exert any effort to formulate one's thought.

The PhraCon *V только так* is also ideally suited for non-creative use. The addition of the phrase *только так* ‚ just like that ‘ to a verb provides a description of an action V as intensive, performed with force, on a large scale, without deliberation or reflection, without conditions or reservations, with full dedication, sometimes quickly and decisively, often repeatedly or in relation to a large number of objects. For example: *Нынче кот хозяйничает в доме только так.* ‘These days, the cat rules the house just like that’; *Мой кот соседских метелит только так!* ‘My cat beats up the neighbor cats just like that!‘ Sometimes, the construct also implies the semantics ‘with ease, without any issues’. For example: *Мой ребёнок выпивает в день литр молока только так* ‚My child drinks a liter of milk a day just like that‘. This construct often combines these semantic components. For example, meanings like ‚a large quantity,‘ ‚with ease,‘ and ‚without reflection‘ are simultaneously inferred from the construct: *Вчера поезда отменяли только так.* ‚Yesterday, they canceled trains just like that‘. The PhraCon is used in place of specific detail: it allows one to ‘withhold’ exactly how action V is performed. Instead of particular adverbs or phrases, a quasi-evaluation in the anchor *только так* is used. For example, instead of saying *Он играет на аккордеоне мастерски и с удовольствием* ‚He played the accordion beautifully and with pleasure‘, one says: *На аккордеоне наяривал только так* ‚He played the accordion just like that‘. And instead of saying *Он часто поднимает руку на жену* ‚He often raised his hand against his wife‘ or *Он регулярно и жестоко избивает жену* ‚He regularly and severely beat his wife‘, one says: *Жену лупит только так* ‚He beat his wife just like that‘. In this way, the PhraCon seems almost intended for a non-creative approach to

speech models and for a speaker not inclined to creativity: they don't need to search for words to describe an event specifically.

These PhraCons assume a non-creative approach, as they replace a specific detail or description with a semantically broad anchor, relieving the speaker of any need to come up with something original. All PhraCons that function according to the 'echo' type are also extremely uncreative, freeing the speaker from the need to be creative. He only reacts to the previous replica and leans on the left context to the fullest extent.

6. Conclusion

Creative uses of PhraCons necessarily imply the use of unexpected, and, therefore, rare fillers. But creativity cannot be equated with or reduced to great variation in slot fillers observable in corpus data. Creativity is not directly derivable from the high productivity of a PhraCon (Pavlova et al. 2021: 5–7), although it may of course be associated with it. Sometimes, even the reverse seems to be the case: the less productive a PhraCon, the greater creativity and ingenuity are required to break with the tradition and not rely on the existing arsenal of idioms, collocations, or prefabricated cliché phrases, but to create something unique and original (cf. Ivorra Ordines 2022: 48–49). Of course, there are also PhraCons with high type frequencies allowing for or even requiring a high degree of creativity. Many PhraCons designed for comparison, offer ample space for inventiveness, resourcefulness, and humour, in other words – for creative acts. There are PhraCons that serve various kinds of wordplay and whose main function is to encourage the speaker's creativity.

But many PhraCons are perfect for a non-creative speaker. In these, the anchors take on the function of expressing a characteristic or an evaluation without the speaker having to formulate it. The need to quote the conversation partner (like an "echo") and respond to his words also frees the speaker from the need to demonstrate creativity.

Both creativity and productivity are gradient properties, and their interplay can give rise to more schematic structures out of lexicalized ones and vice versa.

Productivity in the morphological sense, frequency of slot fillers and construction, but also the degree of creativity that the speaker has to apply when using a PhraCon – all these characteristics serve as important features in lexicographical descriptions of PhraCons. They are an integral part of the microstructure for the lemmas in our repository.

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