

# Two misbehaving German dative experiencer-object verbs

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## 1 EO Verbs

### Dative EO

- Dative EO verbs are psych verbs that regularly map their experiencer argument to a dative object and their stimulus argument to the subject.

(1) [...] Nötig ist das nicht, aber es gefällt den Leuten [...]  
necessary is this not but it pleases the.DAT people.DAT  
'It isn't necessary, but people like it.' (NZZ\_1993\_07\_10\_a17\_seg3\_s8)

- Dative EO verbs are usually assumed to be stative and to disallow agentive readings (see e.g. Landau, 2010)
- It is widely assumed that dative EO verbs do not passivise (cf. Fanselow, 1992; Hirsch, 2018; Landau, 2010; Primus, 2004; Temme, 2018, among others)
- There is a long tradition treating them as unaccusatives (Belletti & Rizzi, 1988; Fanselow, 1992; Hirsch, 2018; Landau, 2010, among many others) ⇒ would explain inability to passivise

### Outline

- While the literature usually treats dative EO verbs as a rather homogeneous class, there is little large-scale corpus evidence
- We will present data from a corpus study we conducted and show that in German...
  - there are dative EO verbs that can have an agentive reading.
  - there are dative EO verbs that seem to passivise.although most verbs behave as expected.

## 2 Corpus Study

### Corpus Study

We conducted a corpus study on German EO verbs, annotating several syntactic and semantic features (Masloch et al., 2021; Poppek et al., in prep.)

- Up to 200 occurrences for 64 verbs (16 dative EO), a total of 10,290 examples from *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ)

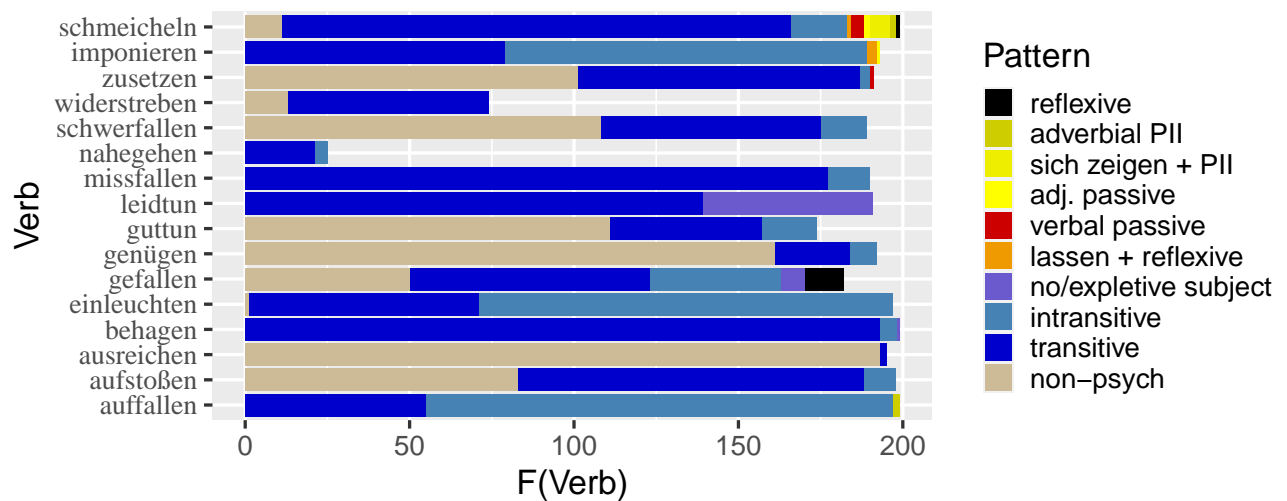
- Annotated for syntactic pattern, stimulus type, stimulus prepositions and a number of other features

### Analysed Dative EO-Verbs

Since the number of dative EO verbs in German is rather small, we annotated data for 16 verbs:

- |                                 |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| • auffallen, ‘to strike’        | • gefallen, ‘to like’           | • nahegehen, ‘to afflict, upset’              |
| • aufstoßen, ‘to strike (neg.)’ | • genügen, ‘to suffice’         | • schmeicheln, ‘to flatter’                   |
| • ausreichen, ‘to suffice’      | • guttun, ‘to benefit, comfort’ | • schwerfallen, ‘to find difficult’           |
| • behagen, ‘to please’          | • imponieren, ‘to impress’      | • widerstreben, ‘to oppose, have an aversion’ |
| • einleuchten, ‘to be evident’  | • leidtun, ‘to feel sorry’      | • zusetzen, ‘to badger, harass’               |
| • missfallen, ‘to displease’    |                                 |   |

### Distribution



### Typical verbs

- Most dative EO verbs occur in the same limited number of patterns, differing mainly in frequency.
- Two typical verbs are *behagen* ‘to please’ and *aufstoßen* ‘to strike (neg.)’:
  - *behagen*: Mainly canonical pattern, some object-drop, few examples with dropped subject
  - *aufstoßen*: Frequent non-psych readings (‘to open by pushing’, ‘to belch’). On psych-reading only canonical pattern and pattern with dropped object.
- No (verbal or adjectival) passive examples (as expected), no other patterns

## 3 Schmeicheln

- *Schmeicheln* occurs in more patterns than any other dative EO verb.
- At the same time, *schmeicheln* is highly polysemous. A ‘regular’ psych example:

- (2) Aber gerade diese Wahrnehmung im Ausland schmeichelt uns doch so sehr.  
 but precisely this perception in.the foreign.countries flatters us MP so much  
 ‘But what flatters us so much is precisely that we are seen this way abroad.’  
 (NZZ\_1994\_10\_15\_a182\_seg3\_s21)

## The Passive

- *Schmeicheln* occurs in the passive, but only as a verb of utterance.
- (3) Seit ihrem Rücktritt [...] werde sie mit jedem Monat jünger [...], wurde ihr  
 Since her resignation becomes she with every month younger was she.DAT  
 geschmeichelt.  
 flattered  
 ‘People/Someone flattered her by saying that since her resignation she is getting younger with every month.’ (NZZ\_1996\_05\_21\_a135\_seg3\_s7)

## Unusual Patterns with Psych Reading

- Even on its canonical psych reading, *schmeicheln* occurs in some patterns the other verbs avoid.
  - These patterns feature *schmeicheln*’s past participle, arguably as an adjective.
  - (4) is an example sentence with *schmeicheln* in the adjectival passive
- (4) Hoffman erzählt zum Schluss, wie sehr er geschmeichelt war [...].  
 Hoffmann tells in.the end how much he flattered was  
 ‘In the end, Hoffman tells how flattered he was.’ (NZZ\_1995\_02\_20\_a78\_seg10\_s29)
- Embedding under reflexive *fühlen*:
- (5) [...] Deasy [*sic!*] fühlt sich zwar von Gatsbys Treue [...] geschmeichelt, weigert sich  
 Deasy feels REFL although by Gatsby’s faithfulness flattered refuses REFL  
 jedoch, ihren Mann zu verlassen.  
 but her husband to leave  
 ‘Daisy, though flattered by Gatsby’s loyalty, refuses to leave her husband.’  
 (NZZ\_1999\_02\_09\_a164\_seg25\_s4)
- Adverbial use:
- (6) El grande Gross nimmt die Ovation mit zuckenden Mundwinkeln entgegen, halb  
 El grande Gross accepts the ovation with twitching corners.of.the.mouth VP half  
 belustigt, halb geschmeichelt.  
 amused half flattered  
 ‘With twitching corners of his mouth, El grande Gross accepts the ovation, half amused, half flattered.’ (NZZ\_1994\_10\_01\_a212\_seg17\_s32)

## 4 Imponieren

- *Imponieren* appears less syntactically flexible than *schmeicheln*, although its general distribution displays occurrences on deviant patterns.
- In addition, *imponieren* does not seem to display the same amount of polysemy that we observe with *schmeicheln*.

**Imponieren has an agentive reading***Lassen-middles*

- Recall that dative EO verbs are not assumed to have agentive readings.
- But we find examples like (7):
 

(7) [...] Mit ihnen lässt sich trefflich imponieren.  
       with them lets REFL splendidly impress  
       ‘With them, it’s easy to impress.’ (NZZ\_1996\_02\_23\_a187\_seg4\_s4)
- This is an impersonal *lassen*-middle.
- Since agentivity of the implicit argument is a core feature of middles (see Pitteroff, 2014, p. 43 f. and the literature cited there), *imponieren* must have an agentive reading (and it is clearly interpreted this way).

**The Passive***Imponieren licenses the lassen-passive*

- Does *imponieren* license the verbal passive?
- We find instances of the *lassen*-passive in our data: It is usually assumed that the set of verbs entering the *lassen*-passive is a subset of the set of verbs entering the verbal passive (see Pitteroff, 2014, chapter 3.6).
 

(8) Da lässt sich einer [...] wohl vom Alter imponieren, das im Gemäuer  
       there lets REFL one.NOM MP by.the age impress that in.the masonry  
       der Kirche nistet.  
       the.GEN church.GEN nests  
       ‘It seems that that person/someone is impressed by the age that nests within the walls of the church.’ (NZZ\_1994\_12\_15\_a158\_seg5\_s15)
- In (8), the experiencer bears nominative case (as usual even for datives on the *lassen*-passive (Pitteroff, 2014)) and the stimulus is given in a PP headed by *von* ‘by’. Because the stimulus is inanimate, *we cannot assume an agentive reading*.

**The Passive***Comparison of imponieren to other verbs*

In constructed examples, *imponieren* appears far more acceptable in passive constructions than other verbs, even in its non-agentive reading.

- (9) a. ? Dem Besucher wird wohl vom Alter der Kirche imponiert.  
       the.DAT visitor is MP by.the age the.GEN church.GEN impressed  
       ‘The visitor is probably impressed by the age of the church.’  
       b. \* Dem Besucher wird wohl vom Alter der Kirche gefallen/missfallen/gutgetan/behagt...

**The Passive***Searching for the Passive*

Search in DeReKo (Kupietz et al., 2010) for all sentences containing a form of *werden* and *imponiert*: 589 hits, 8 of which actually passive (all agentive)

- (10) Wem soll wohl damit imponiert werden?  
       who.DAT should MP with.this impressed be  
       ‘Who is supposed to be impressed by this?’ (U07/JUN.04350 Süddeutsche Zeitung, 26.06.2007, S. 31; Besondere Verantwortung für die Sprache)

## Adjectival Passive

Pace Hirsch (2018), *imponieren* occurs in the adjectival passive in its canonical, non-agentive reading:

- (11) [...] dass Vertreter der Europäischen Union [...] von der Wahlfreiheit  
 that representatives the.GEN European.GEN Union.GEN by the freedom.of.choice  
 imponiert gewesen seien.  
 impressed been were.SBJV  
 ‘that representatives of the European Union were impressed by the freedom of choice.’  
 (NZZ\_1996\_02\_23\_a187\_seg4\_s4)

## 5 Implications

- Pace Landau (2010), there are dative EO verbs that can have an agentive reading.
- Pace Fanselow (1992), Hirsch (2018), Landau (2010), Primus (2004) and Temme (2018), there are dative EO verbs that seem to passivise.
- That passivisation of *imponieren* is possible might relate to the existence of an agentive reading: Already Fanselow (1992) noted that the ability to passivise of an *accusative* EO verb seems to correlate with the existence of an agentive reading.
- The possibility to use *schmeicheln* on many untypical patterns may also relate to the existence of other readings that make them available or it is a lexical feature of its (adjectival) past participle.
- The divergent behaviour of *schmeicheln* and *imponieren* casts doubts on the characterisation of the class in general. As it stands, the specific patterns found for them may emerge from other readings, but are these lexeme-specific or indications of a deep bifurcations within the allegedly homogeneous class?
- Because the interesting constructions occur in corpora only seldom, it will be necessary to employ experimental methods for further investigations.

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