

***Ich biege mich vor Lachen!* / ¡Me parto de la risa! Crosslinguistic Analysis of Verbal Fillers in Hyperbolic Expressions of Sensation: German [(*sich*) vor Lachen V] and Spanish [V de (*la*) risa]**

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ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of this study is to document and analyze prevalent verbal fillers within a bilingual construction, applying onomasiological principles to trace their semantic and pragmatic nuances. It focuses on the German construction [*sich vor Lachen* V] and [*vor Lachen* V] and its Spanish equivalents [V de *risa*] and [V de *la risa*], uncovering both shared and divergent cognitive-linguistic mechanisms across the two languages. The analysis reveals a strong crosslinguistic preference for reflexive verbs—particularly in Spanish—and highlights the role of morphological variation, such as verb prefixation, in shaping the range of constructions available in German. By exploring the figurative and often embodied nature of these microconstructions, the study sheds light on how speakers conceptualize and express affective experiences through language. The semantic domains from which these fillers emerge reflect deeply rooted cultural and cognitive models, offering insight into how language mediates emotion. These findings are particularly relevant for language learners and translators, as they reveal subtle crosslinguistic differences affecting both comprehension and production. Ultimately, the study underscores the essential role of crosslinguistic research in fostering intercultural communication within the fields of Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies.

Keywords: crosslinguistic phraseological studies; constructional idiom/phrase; language and emotions; German; Spanish.

1. Introduction

Laughter is a fundamental, innate emotional expression in humans, typically associated with joy—a sentiment considered to be cross-culturally universal. Its potential health benefits also make it a promising therapeutic tool. However, in extreme cases, laughter may manifest as a disorder known as

pathological laughter, which occurs independently of emotional state and can—even if only figuratively—lead to death: one can ‘die of laughter’.¹ As this expression illustrates, although it may originate in a literal context, it is more frequently used figuratively, serving a distinctly hyperbolic and intensifying function—as in the German *Ich biege mich vor Lachen!* or the Spanish *¡Me parto de la risa!* (literally, ‘I’m bending over with laughter’)—an aspect that will be explored further in this study.

Hyperbole functions not only as an expressive and intensifying device in emotional communication (González-García, 2020, 155) in both Spanish and German, but is also intrinsically tied to human cognition and the ways in which we perceive and process the world around us. This suggests that hyperbole is an innate and essential resource in both the expression and comprehension of human experience (González-García, 2012, 259). Accordingly, the presence of similar forms across different languages can often be attributed to the activation of shared cognitive processes—although cultural differences and language-specific conventions may also lead to divergent or unique idiomatic realizations.

Setting aside extreme cases such as pathological or therapeutic laughter, Moshöbel (2015, 81) defines laughter as “a double-structured bodily sign”.

On the one hand, laughter can be read as an unintentional indicator of the mood, the attitude and the feeling of the laughing person, while on the other hand it may also be assumed that laughter is deliberately used for a communicative purpose, for instance to cement a friendship, to distance oneself from someone, or to degrade someone. (Moshöbel, 2015, 81)

Laughter is an expression of a universally recognized emotion that serves various communicative functions. For this reason, it is unsurprising that the concept of ‘laughter’, particularly the action of ‘laughing’, is realized through multiple linguistic forms (cf. also Moshöbel, 2015, 95ff.), most of which are predominantly idiomatic, as noted above.

Starting from the German language, in the Digital Dictionary DWDS, the following five constructs are listed as idiomatic multiword expressions (‘Mehrwortausdruck’ = MWA)² under the nominalised infinitive *Lachen* (‘to laugh’) and as such they are lemmatised on the macrostructure: *sich ausschütten vor Lachen* (‘to spill out with laughter’), *sich vor Lachen kringeln*, *sich vor Lachen weg-schmeißen* (‘to curl up from laughter’), *sich vor Lachen wegwerfen* (‘to throw oneself

1 See, for example: <https://www.planet-wissen.de/gesellschaft/psychologie/lachen/pwiepathologischeslachen100.html> [Accessed: 02.05.2025].

2 For more information, see the following explanatory video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c93rs30-z6g> [Accessed: 02.05.2025]. Regarding multiword expressions, cf. also Steyer (2013), and Steyer (2018). This researcher refers to them as *usuelle Wortverbindungen* (‘usual word combinations’), and, if applicable, *Muster* (‘patterns’).

away with laughter’), *zum Lachen in den Keller geben* (‘to go to the cellar to laugh’). The first four constructs could be interpreted as instantiations of the hyperbolic-intensifying phraseological construction [*vor Lachen* V] (‘[V (oneself) from laughing]’). In addition to the idioms already mentioned, the dictionary user is provided with a whole range of other synonymous or similar-meaning multi-word expressions in the DWDS, such as *sich kringelig lachen* (‘to laugh in a curly way’), *sich dumm und dämmlisch lachen* (‘to laugh oneself stupid and dimwitted’), *sich vor Lachen kaum noch halten können* (‘to hardly be able to hold oneself from laughter’), *sich kaputtlachen* (‘to laugh oneself to pieces/to laugh oneself broken’) und *aus vollem Halse lachen*³ (‘to laugh with full throat’), to name only a few.

As expected, the bilingual phraseological dictionary *Idiomatik Deutsch-Spanisch* (Schemann *et al.*, 2013) includes a higher number of entries: *sich ausschütten vor Lachen* (‘to spill out with laughter’), *sich biegen vor Lachen* (‘to bend oneself with laughter’), *sich gar nicht mehr einkriegen können vor Lachen* (‘to not be able to get oneself in anymore due to laughter’), *sich gar nicht mehr/nicht halten können vor Lachen* (‘to not be able to hold oneself (anymore) due to laughter’), *sich krümmen vor Lachen* (‘to bend oneself with laughter’), *sich kugeln/kringeln vor Lachen* (‘to curl up with laughter’), *(fast) platzen vor Lachen* (‘to (almost) burst with laughter’), *schreien vor Lachen* (‘to scream with laughter’), *sich schütteln/(schütten) vor Lachen* (‘to shake with laughter’), *sich wälzen vor Lachen* (‘to roll over with laughter’), *wiehern vor Lachen* (‘to neigh with laughter’), referring each of them onomasiologically to the lemma *sich den Bauch halten vor Lachen* (‘to hold one’s stomach from laughing’), as well as *weinen vor Lachen* (‘to cry with laughter’) —one of its senses also refers to it—, *prusten vor Lachen* (‘to chuckle with laughter’), and finally, *vor Lachen (fast/...) ersticken* (‘to (almost/...) choke with laughter’) (Schemann *et al.*, 2013, 532f.). Contrasting the data, indeed, these lemmas are all present in the analyzed corpus *deTenTen20* as instantiations (see Table 1).

Thanks to these internal cross-references within a formally semasiological dictionary, certain relationships are also established on an onomasiological level (cf. Mellado Blanco, 2009, 2010). This lexicographical practice has played a significant role in shaping the development of our research, first within the CONSTRIDIOMS project (cf. Mansilla, 2018, 217ff.) and now in our ongoing project, CREA-CONSTRIDIOMS. Indeed, as Schemann (2009) emphasizes, it is essential to establish a semantic network grounded in synonymy. These are not words sharing identical meanings, but rather ones whose meanings are very similar or nearly equivalent (Schemann, 2009, 109ff.). From the perspective of Construction Grammar —which posits the pairing of form and meaning in

3 For a detailed analysis of this construct in particular, cf. Iglesias Iglesias and Alonso Santos (2022).

each type of construction, that is, in every significant lexical unit⁴— such a semantic network constitutes the *constructicon*.

Returning our focus to the object of study, beyond laughter and its expressions in both German and Spanish, a physical and/or psychological sensation can be hyperbolically conveyed through the more abstract constructions [*vor* N_{Sing{Gefühlsempfindung}} V] and [*V de* (ART_{sing}) S_{sing{sensación}}], respectively. These are extremely productive macroconstructions in both languages, often of an idiomatic nature, such as in the following German multiword expressions: *vor Kälte sterben* (‘to die of cold’), *vor Langeweile umkommen* (‘to perish of boredom’), *sich vor Lachen biegen* (‘to bend oneself with laughter’), *sich den Bauch vor Lachen nicht halten können* (‘to be unable to hold one’s stomach from laughing’), *vor Angst in die Hosen scheißen* (‘to shit one’s pants out of fear’). In this sense, at a lower level of abstraction, [*vor Lachen* V], that is, the preposition *vor*, followed by the nominalized infinitive and a given verb, could be classified as a mesoconstruction, while each of the concrete verbal instantiations, presented in the following section, would be considered the corresponding microconstructions (cf. Ivorra Ordines and Alonso Santos, 2022). The terms macroconstruction, mesoconstruction, and microconstruction are used to establish a hierarchical order among the semantic-conceptual and linguistic-cognitive relationships —form-meaning pairs— of each construction within the *constructicon* (cf. Mollica and Stumpf, 2021).

2. Quantitative analysis of the microconstructions in German and in Spanish: [*sich vor Lachen* V] and [*vor Lachen* V] as well as [*V de risa*] and [*V de la risa*]

This section focuses on the detailed analysis of the verbal slot in each of the two languages, with the objective, from a semantic-pragmatic standpoint, of identifying the linguistic-cognitive strategies utilized to achieve hyperbolic intensification within the construction.

While the previous studies (cf. Iglesias Iglesias and López Meirama, 2024; López Meirama and Iglesias Iglesias, 2022) focused on nominal slots, the present work will focus on verbal slots, particularly on monolexemic verbs without complements. In both languages, the use of the nominalized infinitive *Lachen* in German and the noun *risa* in Spanish, as well as the verb *sterben* in German and its Spanish equivalent *morir* —very often used as reflexive verb *morirse*—, is highly frequent: German *vor Lachen sterben* (literally, ‘of laugh/laughter die’) and Spanish *morirse de (la) risa* (literally, ‘to die of (the) laughter’). Besides their high frequency of use, it is also notable that:

4 Cf., among many other authors, Goldberg (2006), and Mellado Blanco and Iglesias Iglesias (2022, 376).

i. The verbs *sterben*, as well as *morirse*, can be used in conjunction with many nouns—in German: *vor Lachen* (‘laughter’)/*Hunger* (‘hunger’)/*Angst* (‘fear’)/*Langeweile* (‘boredom’)/*Durst* (‘thirst’)/*Kälte* (‘cold’)/... *sterben*; in Spanish: *morir(se) de la risa* (‘laughter’)/*del susto* (‘fright’; ‘scare’)/*de vergüenza* (‘shame’)/...’ and also the construction without article *morir(se) de hambre* (‘hunger’)/*miedo* (‘fear’)/*risa* (‘laughter’)/*frío* (‘cold’)/*envidia* (‘envy’)/...’, while other verbs exhibit a much more restrictive usage (cf. López Meirama and Iglesias Iglesias, 2022, and Iglesias Iglesias and López Meirama, 2024).

ii. The nominalized infinitive *Lachen* in German and the noun *risa* in Spanish is indeed used in conjunction with a wide range of often reflexive verbs belonging to different stylistic levels in both languages: (*sich*) *vor Lachen biegen*, *ausschütten*, *krümmen*, *schütteln*, *kringeln*, *wegschmeißen*, *bersten* etc.; *halten* is mostly used in combination with a negation and a modal verb: *sich vor Lachen nicht halten können* (or, depending on the modal verb, without negation and possibly with the accusative complement *den Bauch* (‘the stomach’): *sich den Bauch vor Lachen halten müssen* (‘having to hold one’s stomach from laughing’), *sich den Bauch nicht vor Lachen halten können* (‘not being able to hold one’s stomach from laughing’), etc.

iii. Due to their typically non-compositional meaning and their fixedness, the construction can be considered a constructional idiom or a constructional phraseme (cf. Goldberg, 2006, 4f., and Mollica and Stumpf, 2021), even though syntactically it generally exhibits no particularities.

iv. Given their high intensity and/or expressiveness, it’s crucial to consider the diverse registers that correspond to each microconstruction, precisely marking the differences in usage. While some instances may maintain a neutral tone, the majority lean towards informality, occasionally reaching vulgarity or coarseness, and including certain dysphemisms.

2.1 Most frequent monolexematic verbal fillers of the German constructions [*sich vor Lachen* V] and [*vor Lachen* V]

The quantitative analysis of the German Web 2020 corpus (*deTenTen20*), consisting of a total of 20,999,598,683 tokens, yields 2,743 results in terms of verbal slots; the verbs are detailed in Table 1. The use of lowercase letters was also considered, as there is often uncertainty regarding the normative spelling of nominalized infinitives. The Corpus Query Language used was as follows: CQL [word=”vor” | word=”Vor”] [word=”Lachen” | word=”lachen”] [tag=”V.*”]. As can be observed, reflexive verbs (left side of Table 1) are more common in use than non-reflexive ones (right side of Table 1).

Table 1. Verbal fillers of the microconstructions [*sich vor Lachen V*] and [*vor Lachen V*]

[<i>sich vor Lachen V</i>]		[<i>vor Lachen V</i>]	
<i>biegen</i> ('to bend')	208	<i>sterben</i> ('to die')	93
<i>krümmen</i> ('to curl')	176	<i>weinen</i> ('to cry')	69
<i>halten</i> ('to hold') (of which 76: + <i>den Bauch</i> ('the stomach'))	174	<i>zusammenbrechen</i> ('to collapse')	47
<i>ausschütten</i> ('to spill out')	137	<i>brüllen</i> ('to yell')	33
<i>schütteln</i> ('to shake')	137	<i>platzen</i> ('to burst')	31
<i>kringeln</i> ('to coil')	128	<i>heulen</i> ('to howl')	27
<i>kugeln</i> ('to roll into a ball')	102	<i>umfallen</i> ('to faint')	27
<i>wegschmeißen</i> (/ <i>wegschmeissen</i> ⁵) ('to throw away')	89	<i>bersten</i> ('to burst')	22
<i>wälzen</i> ('to roll over')	17	<i>ersticken</i> ('to choke')	16
<i>verschlucken</i> ('to choke')	15	<i>umkippen</i> ('to kip over')	11
<i>wegwerfen</i> ('to throw away')	14	<i>beben</i> ('to tremble')	11
<i>bepissen</i> ('to piss on')	12	<i>einkriegen</i> ('to pull oneself together')	10
<i>ausschütteln</i> ('to shake out')	10	<i>losprusten</i> ('to chuckle'), <i>losbrüllen</i> ('to roar'), <i>toben</i> ('to rage'), <i>umbauen</i> ('to knock over'), <i>wiehern</i> ('to neigh'), <i>schreien</i> ('to scream'), <i>zerplatzen</i> ('to burst'), <i>explodieren</i> ('to explode'), <i>piszen</i> ('to pee'), <i>quieken</i> ('to squeak'), <i>krähen</i> ('to crow'), <i>quietschen</i> ('to squeal'), <i>rollen</i> ('to roll'), <i>kreischen</i> ('to screech'), <i>zerbrechen</i> ('to break'), <i>prusten</i> ('to chuckle'), <i>grölen</i> ('to bellow'), ...	below 10
<i>einnässen</i> ('to wet'), <i>zerreißen</i> ('to tear'), <i>verbiegen</i> ('to bend'), <i>festhalten</i> ('to hold'), <i>zerkugeln</i> ('to double up'), <i>kuellern</i> ('to tumble'), <i>winden</i> ('to twist'), <i>wegpacken</i> ('to pack away'), <i>durchschütteln</i> ('to shake thoroughly'), <i>bepinkeln</i> ('to pee on'), <i>abrollen</i> ('to unroll'), <i>wegschreien</i> ('to scream away'), <i>wegbrüllen</i> ('to yell away'), <i>wegrollen</i> ('to roll away'), <i>überschlagen</i> ('to somersault'), <i>weghauen</i> ('to hit away'), <i>in die Hosen machen</i> ('to make in the pants'), <i>ver-/ein/-anschiffen</i> ('to pee'), ...	below 10		

2.2 Most frequent monolexematic verbal fillers of the Spanish microconstructions [*V de risa*] and [*V de la risa*]

The search with a comparable corpus of Spanish, namely the Spanish Web 2018 corpus (*esTenTen18*), with a total of 19,593,089,777 tokens, yields the following results. The construction [*V de risa*], whose CQL corresponds to [tag="V.*"] [word="de"] [word="risa"], yields a total of 30,775 results, while the construction with the article, [*V de la risa*] (CQL: [tag="V.*"] [word="de"] [word="la"] [word="risa"]), only yields 13,721 results. Compared to German, in the case of the equivalent constructions in Spanish, first, it is striking that the vast majority of verbs updated in usage are reflexive (left side of Table 2),

5 This is the standard orthographic variant in Swiss German.

at an approximate ratio of 1 to 5.5 (cf. López Meirama and Iglesias Iglesias, 2022); the ending *-se* actually corresponds to the form of the reflexive pronoun. Second, it should be noted that although both microconstructions are very common, the one without article clearly predominates in usage. In any case, significant differences are not observed with regard to the verbal fillers; perhaps it is only worth noting the differences in the frequency of usage of the verbs *mondarse* and *abogarse*.

Table 2. Verbal fillers of the microconstructions [V *de risa*] and [V *de la risa*]⁶

[V <i>de risa</i>]		[V <i>de la risa</i>]	
<i>morirse</i> ('to die')	6096	<i>morirse</i> ('to die')	3236
<i>partirse</i> ('to split')	5091	<i>cagarse</i> ('to shit')	1404
<i>cagarse</i> ('to shit')	4550	<i>partirse</i> ('to split')	1381
<i>matarse</i> ('to kill oneself')	1918	<i>matarse</i> ('to kill oneself')	1169
<i>llorar</i> ('to cry')	937	<i>llorar</i> ('to cry')	908
<i>desternillarse</i> ('to crack up')	641	<i>abogarse</i> ('to choke')	570
<i>troncharse</i> ('to burst out')	472	<i>mearse</i> ('to pee oneself')	378
<i>mearse</i> ('to pee oneself')	438	<i>desternillarse</i> ('to crack up')	257
<i>estallar</i> ('to burst')	355	<i>doblarse</i> ('to bend over')	162
<i>mondarse</i> ('to peel oneself')	179	<i>troncharse</i> ('to burst out')	149
<i>retorcerse</i> ('to twist')	162	<i>estallar</i> ('to burst')	113
<i>descostillarse</i> ('to unrib oneself')	95	<i>retorcerse</i> ('to twist')	106
<i>doblarse</i> ('to bend over')	93	<i>descostillarse</i> ('to un-rib oneself')	105
<i>reventar</i> ('to burst')	93	<i>revolcarse</i> ('to roll around')	86
<i>revolcarse</i> ('to roll around')	85	<i>orinarse</i> ('to pee oneself')	75
<i>explotar</i> ('to explode')	64	<i>explotar</i> ('to explode')	64
<i>abogarse</i> ('to choke')	47	<i>atragantarse</i> ('to choke oneself')	59
<i>orinarse</i> ('to pee oneself')	32	<i>mondarse</i> ('to peel oneself')	55
<i>rodar</i> ('to roll')	26	<i>reventar</i> ('to burst')	52
<i>atragantarse</i> ('to choke')	15	<i>descojonarse</i> ('to crack up')	18
<i>descojonarse</i> ('to crack up')	13	<i>rodar</i> ('to roll')	14
<i>hacer caer</i> ('to make fall')	3	<i>hacer caer</i> ('to make fall')	8

2.3 Main properties of the verbal fillers in German and in Spanish

Many of the verbs, in their literal use, correspond in both languages either to a more or less objective description or to a metaphorical—and in most cases metonymic—interpretation of psychophysiological (re)actions provoked

⁶ Cf. López Meirama and Iglesias Iglesias (2022).

by laughter, i.e. caused by forceful contractions of the diaphragm. In fact, up to fifty facial muscles are involved in the facial expression of laughter (mainly around the mouth, that may be accompanied by lacrimal secretions), but laughter can set in motion up to three hundred different muscles throughout the body, including the abdominal wall, head, neck, back, shoulders, arms, hands and/or legs. It is precisely this physiological knowledge that speakers make use of to express their emotions and/or subjective sensations related to laughter. Together with the metaphorical and/or metonymic-hyperbolic reinterpretation by a given community of speakers, they constitute one of the starting points, serving as motivation in the formation of the semantic domains, which will be further explored in the following section.

3. Crosslinguistic Qualitative Analysis

Any translational process grounded in the constructionist principle of the pairing of form and meaning should begin with a crosslinguistic semantic analysis, based on the onomasiological systematization of linguistic material. In this way, the speaker, drawing from a concept within their semantic domain, can select the most suitable equivalent based on its meaning, while also considering its form, and vice versa (cf. Mellado Blanco and Iglesias Iglesias, 2022). Consequently, beyond denotative meaning, in translation to another language, each connotative nuance can be taken into account.

German and Spanish share five out of the seven semantic domains with an intensifying function: (1) TO DIE, (2) DESTRUCTION, (3) ROTATION IN ARC FORM, (4) LAMENT, and (6) EXCRETION, the latter standing out for its scatological and vulgar register.

The semantic domains (5) UNPLEASANT SOUNDS, consisting exclusively of constructs with verbal fillers of onomatopoeic origin, and (7) TO FALL / TO BE OUT, are exclusive to German. In these cases, the degree of interlinguistic equivalence is lower or even nonexistent, meaning that the form is likely to be given less consideration.

Table 3 presents the results of the verbal fillers, components of the German construction [*sich vor Lachen V*] and/or [*vor Lachen V*], alongside their equivalent verbal fillers in Spanish, components of the constructions [*V de risa*] and/or [*V de la risa*].

Table 3. Onomasiological distribution of verbal fillers in laughter constructions in German and Spanish⁷

SEMANTIC DOMAINS	GERMAN	SPANISH
(1) TO DIE	<i>sterben</i> ('to die'); <i>ersticken</i> ('to suffocate')	<i>morirse</i> ('to die'), <i>matarse</i> ('to kill oneself'); <i>ahogarse</i> ('to choke')
(2) DESTRUCTION (potentially accompanied by a bang)	<i>platzen</i> ('to burst'), <i>zerplatzen</i> ('to burst apart'), <i>bersten</i> ('to shatter'), <i>explodieren</i> ('to explode'); <i>zerbrechen</i> ('to break apart'); <i>zusammenbrechen</i> ('to collapse')	<i>estallar</i> ('to burst'), <i>reventar</i> ('to burst/to explode'), <i>explotar</i> ('to explode'); <i>partirse</i> , <i>desternillarse</i> , <i>troncharse</i> , <i>mondarse</i> , <i>descojonarse</i> ('to split one's sides/to crack up')
(3) ROTATION IN ARC FORM	<i>sich krümmen</i> ('to bend'), <i>sich nicht halten können</i> ('to not be able to hold oneself'), <i>sich kringeln</i> ('to curl up/to twist'), <i>sich kugeln</i> ('to roll into a ball'); <i>sich wälzen</i> ('to roll over')	<i>retorcerse</i> , <i>doblarse</i> ('to twist/to bend'); <i>revoirse</i> ('to roll over'); <i>rodar</i> ('to roll')
(4) LAMENT	<i>weinen</i> ('to cry'), <i>heulen</i> ('to howl')	<i>llorar</i> ('to cry')
(5) UNPLEASANT SOUNDS (human/animal/object nature)	<i>brüllen</i> ('to roar'), <i>losbrüllen</i> ('to bellow'), <i>schreien</i> ('to scream'), <i>greischen</i> ('to shriek'), <i>grölen</i> ('to bawl'); <i>wiehern</i> ('to neigh'), <i>quieken</i> ('to squeal'), <i>krähen</i> ('to crow'); <i>quietschen</i> ('to squeak')	—
(6) EXCRETION (scatological: very informal or vulgar register)	<i>sich bepissen</i> , <i>sich pissen</i> ('to piss oneself')	<i>cagarse</i> ('to shit oneself'), <i>mearse</i> , <i>orinarse</i> ('to piss/pee oneself')
(7) TO FALL / TO BE OUT	<i>umfallen</i> , <i>umkippen</i> ('to topple over/to tip over'); <i>sich wegschmeißen</i> ('to throw oneself away'); <i>sich ausschütten</i> ('to spill oneself')	—

The following taxonomy offers a metonymic classification of the most frequent verbal fillers occurring in the constructions [*(sich) vor Lachen V*] in German and [*V de (la) risa*] in Spanish. It is based on the semantic domains to which these verbs belong and on the underlying conceptual mechanisms by which speakers link bodily or emotional responses to the experience of laughter. In line with previous research (cf. González-García, 2020, and Mollica and Stumpf, 2021), the taxonomy captures metaphorical and metonymic mappings grounded in embodied experience and cultural convention.

The classification also reflects the varied expressive strategies —ranging from physiological effects to animalistic or scatological expressions— used to hyperbolically intensify laughter-related constructions. This taxonomy organizes the verbal fillers according to conventional metonymic mappings between physiological, behavioral, or expressive responses and the intensity of laughter. It highlights

⁷ Cf. López Meirama and Iglesias Iglesias (2022).

how speakers exploit embodied knowledge and social norms to construct hyperbolic meaning (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, and Kövecses, 2000).

Table 4. Metonymic taxonomy of verbal fillers in laughter constructions in German and Spanish

No.	Metonymy	Description	German Verbs	Spanish Verbs
i	EFFECT-FOR-CAUSE	A physiological or emotional consequence stands metonymically for its cause —intense laughter.	<i>sterben, ersticken</i>	<i>morirse, matarse, abogarse</i>
ii	DESTRUCTION-FOR-INTENSITY	Physical rupture or explosive action represents the overwhelming force of laughter.	<i>platzen, bersten, zerplatzen, explodieren, zerbrechen, zusammenbrechen</i>	<i>estallar, reventar, explotar, partirse, desternillarse, troncharse, mondarse, descojonarse</i>
iii	MOTION-FOR-REACTION	Bodily movements or contortions serve as a metonymic expression of laughing fits.	<i>sich kringeln, sich kugeln, sich krümmen, sich wälzen, sich nicht halten können</i>	<i>retorcerse, revolcarse, doblarse, rodar</i>
iv	EMOTION-FOR-PHYSICAL REACTION	Expressions of crying or lament represent the physical extremes provoked by laughter.	<i>weinen, heulen</i>	<i>llorar</i>
v	SOUND-FOR-RESPONSE	Animalistic or uncontrolled human sounds evoke the audible and unrestrained nature of laughter.	<i>brüllen, losbrüllen, schreien, greischen, grölen, wiehern, quieken, krähen, quietschen</i>	—
vi	EXCRETION-FOR-EXCESS	Scatological verbs reflect the loss of bodily control as a hyperbolic consequence of laughter.	<i>sich bepissen, sich pissen</i>	<i>mearse, orinarse, cagarse</i>

4. Concluding Remarks

Particularly when it comes to conveying sensations and/or emotions — which are inherently abstract, or at least seemingly difficult to articulate in words— speakers display a remarkable capacity to express them, often through figurative means. The constructional idioms examined in this study are a clear manifestation of this phenomenon, with verbal fillers standing out for their origins in highly diverse source domains. Notably, these domains only partially overlap in the two languages under investigation. The semantic groupings and verbal slot fillers are considerably more varied in German, partly due to the flexibility introduced by verbal prefixation.

The overarching objective of this study was to catalogue the most frequent verbal fillers within a bilingual construction, employing onomasiological principles to shed light on the semantic composition of various microconstructions. Through a crosslinguistic onomasiological approach, as outlined in Section 3, speakers can access a spectrum of microconstructions that are closely aligned in both form and function. These linguistic choices are shaped not only by the communicative situation but also by stylistic and rhetorical preferences, as observed by Iglesias Iglesias and Alonso Santos (2022). For learners of a second language and in translation contexts, this onomasiological mapping offers crucial support for both comprehension and productive use of L2 constructions.

In addition to these semantic insights, the metonymic taxonomy presented in Table 4 highlights how figurative extensions —particularly those grounded in physiological, behavioral, and expressive correlates of laughter— function as conceptual mechanisms to hyperbolically express emotional intensity. These metonymies serve as cognitive bridges, linking involuntary bodily responses (e.g., shaking, choking) with communicative aims such as the exaggerated expression of amusement. In this sense, hyperbole operates as a central rhetorical strategy: it not only amplifies the affective charge of the construction but also reinforces its pragmatic effectiveness. The observed patterns suggest a convergence of figurative strategies across languages, even where the concrete lexical realizations differ.

Ultimately, the figurative meanings embedded in these constructions, rooted in diverse source and metonymic domains, provide a window into alternative ways of understanding and conceptualizing human experience across languages and cultures. In our exploration of linguistic complexity, studies such as this one guide us toward a deeper understanding of intercultural communication and the cognitive underpinnings of language use —both essential for advancing linguistic theory and improving practical language skills.

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