Literal and Nonliteral Meaning in Placename Idioms

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Literal and Nonliteral Meaning in Placename Idioms

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Abstract

This paper discusses idioms of the form *be/come from X-place*, where *X-place* is a placename which contains an adjectival or verbal root. Using a corpus of examples from the Internet, the constructional properties of placename idioms and aspects of their distribution are considered. The examples are taken from German, Dutch and English. After a general introduction of placename idioms, we focus is on the subtype represented by German *aus Dummsdorf kommen* (`be from Stupid-village'). The following aspects of the expression will be discussed: The set of verbs involved, their syntactic flexibility, their interpretation, their status as individual level (rather than stage-level) predicates, and the fact that they appear in nonveridical contexts, primarily negative sentences, questions, and modal/subjunctive contexts, making them a special type of negative polarity item.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we discuss German and Dutch idioms as in (1), which have the form *be/come from X-place*, where *X-place* is a placename which contains an adjectival or verbal root. In the idiomatic meaning of such placename idioms (PNIs) the adjectival/verbal root of the placename functions as an individual-level predicate on the subject.

(1)   a. *Maria kommt nicht aus <u>Dumm</u>sdorf.*   [German]

          literally: Maria doesn't come from Stupid-village

          (= Maria is not stupid)

b. *Er stammt nicht aus <u>Schenken</u>dorf sondern aus <u>Greif</u>swald.*   [German]

   literally: He is not from Give-village but from Take-wood (= He is not generous but

   greedy)

c. *Hij komt van <u>Dom</u>burg.*   [Dutch, cf. Sanders 2003]

   literally: He comes from Stupid-borough (= He is stupid.)

d. *Ze zijn van <u>Zotte</u>gem.*   [Dutch]

   literally: They are from Foolish-place

(= They are stupid/foolish.)

PNIs show an intriguing interaction of literal and nonliteral meaning: The nonliteral meaning is not metaphorical but is derived by decomposing the placename into a literal A/V root and a placename formative. We will discuss the semantics of these expressions, compare them to other special kinds of names for actual or fictional objects, and study their syntactic properties. We will treat them as representatives of a special construction.

In some cases, such as the German example in (1b) and the Dutch example in (1c), the placename is an actual name, in other cases, the name is made up. The cases with real place names are probably funnier, being puns that rely on a double-entendre that may not be directly obvious to the hearer, but the interpretation in each case is based on taking part of the place name and treating it as the main predicate of the sentence.

Placename idioms have been studied at length in Sanders (2003), who traces them back to at least the 17th century (see also Földes 1996 for German). They occur not just in German and Dutch. We have also found a number of English examples. Here is one from a song called *Dog eat dog in Denmark* that we found on the Internet:

(2)   *Hamlet had a lady friend named Ophelia*

       She was a cool put together chick that made men thrill

       But Hamlet he thought she was from Uglyville

Much work on placename idioms is of a lexicographical nature, often with an additional recreational goal of amusing the reader. While there is nothing wrong with that perspective, we believe that a more linguistically-informed study, based on real usage data, from the perspective of constructions and construction grammar, will provide additional insights not easily gained otherwise. Consequently, in what follows, we focus rather narrowly on one particular German idiom, *aus Dummsdorf kommen*, and analyze its properties on the basis of corpus material.

2. Analysis

Proper names are often assumed to refer directly to objects, without the mediating effect of linguistic meaning (Kripke 1972). If the name *Saul Kripke* refers to a particular philosopher, this is not because of anything inherent in the name, but because of a historical and from a linguistic perspective entirely arbitrary connection between the name and its bearer. However, in the case of nicknames, it is more difficult to maintain this position. If Fred is nicknamed *Fatso*, it is presumably because he is fat, or possibly as a joke because he is exceptionally skinny. In either case, the name is linked to a physical property of Fred.

There are also nicknames for fictional entities that we may interpret in a similar way. *Mr. Clean* is the nickname for anyone who is either physically neat and tidy, or free from the stain of corruption, as well as the name for a household detergent, known in Germany as *Meister Proper.* Similar examples are *Mr Know-it-all*, *Dr Killjoy, Miss Lonelyheart.*

Placenames are in most respects like any other proper name, arbitrarily referring to villages, towns, streets, neighborhoods, etc. Names like *Dummsdorf* or *Stupidville* can be seen as nicknames of fictional places, with an interpretation that is directly suggested by their name: a place where everybody is stupid. Hence a statement like (3) gets its intended interpretation as an entailment of the literal spatial interpretation. If Maria comes from a place where all inhabitants are stupid, then she is stupid as well.

(3)   *Maria kommt wohl   aus   Dummsdorf.*
         Maria comes presumably from Stupidville
         'Maria must be stupid'

We take this entailment from location to property to be at the heart of the placename idiom construction, and that it has turned into a conventional implicature when the idiom became conventionalized. The reason we assume it is a conventional implicature is that negation does not seem to matter: *Maria kommt nicht aus Dummsdorf* has the corresponding interpretation *Maria is not stupid*. The implicature is never cancelled, hence it is conventional, not conversational (Grice 1975, Potts 2005). Compare example (4):

(4)   *Maria kommt wohl   aus Dummsdorf. #Eigentlich ist sie ziemlich intelligent.*
         Maria comes presumably from Stupidville. Actually is she rather intelligent
         'Maria must be stupid. #Actually, she is rather smart.'

The implicature here seems to be (4a), i.e., the implicature that all and only the people from Dummsdorf are stupid. This implicature cannot be cancelled, neither in affirmative nor in negated sentences (4b,c).

(4) a. Dummsdorf: for all x: (x is from Dummsdorf ↔ x is stupid)

   b. Maria kommt wohl aus Dummsdorf. # Eigentlich ist sie ziemlich intelligent.

   c. Maria kommt nicht aus Dummsdorf. # Sonst wäre sie ja intelligent.

The implicature provides a one-to-one correspondence between stupid people and people coming from *Dummsdorf*. This is the basis for using the expression "be from Stupidville" as synonymous with "be stupid".

We note that other idiomatic interpretations for placename idioms are also possible and attested. A name like *Uglyville* could be a nickname for a town that is ugly to look at. In that case, the nickname would say something about the looks of the town, not of its inhabitants. However, in an example like (2), it is clear that Uglyville is used to say something about the outward appearance of Ophelia. When *Uglyville* is simply used as the nickname of an ugly place, there are no severe restrictions on the verbs that it appears with. So one might exclaim: *I don't want to go to Uglyville! I don't like Uglyville! Please avoid Uglyville! Our next stop is Uglyville.*

A similar case is provided by the street name the Hofstede de Grootkade in Groningen. This street, named after an art critic, Prof. Dr. C. Hofstede de Groot, is sometimes nicknamed *Hofstede de Graaikade* (literally: *Hofstede de Grab-quai*) by local businesspeople because of the tax office in the same street. The nickname is not intended to disqualify the people living in that street, just the tax collectors. Again, virtually any verb can be combined with this nickname, like *wonen*: *Aha, u woont dus aan de Hofstede de Graaikade* ("Aha, so you live at the Hofstede de Grab-quai").

In the construction we are considering here, however, the verbs are limited to a few options. They are typically either *be* or *come*, but more specialized ones such as German

stammen ('to stem (from)') as in (1b) are fine as well, since they all support the same entailment. In two cases we found *in Dummsdorf geboren* sein 'to be born in Dummsdorf'. In English, such a specialized verb is *hail from*: *She is hailing from Stupidville, Texas.* We did an Internet search for the special case of German *Dummsdorf*, using Google both for regular websites and newsgroups. We had to sift out the great many occurrences from online dictionaries and idiom lists, most of which seem to be copied from one another anyway. We also excluded cases either from, or referring to, a story involving Till Eulenspiegel, as well as many duplicates from texts showing up at several websites. We added two more examples from the Cosmas II database of the IDS (Institut für deutsche Sprache) in Mannheim.[1] This left us with a total of 158 occurrences. The Internet is the largest corpus imaginable. Therefore the meagre number of 158 examples indicates that the idiom is quite rare, and that we are well-advised to search in as large a data-set as we possibly can. The verbs we found in combination with the string *aus Dummsdorf* are tallied in Table 1:

PLACE TABLE 1 HERE

We should also note here that a statement such as *Sie kommt aus New York* may have two types of interpretation. Either it indicates the place where somebody is born and raised, and hence says something about the person in question, namely that she is a New Yorker, or it is the place somebody happens to be traveling from. For our purposes, only the earlier interpretation is relevant. Our placename idioms always indicate a more or less permanent property, such as being stupid or ugly, and not an accidental and very temporary property such as being tired or drunk. Since Carlson (1978), these two types of properties are often referred to as individual-level and stage-level predicates, respectively (cf. also Fernald 2000). We predict that anything associated with stage-level predicates, such as the progressive, is ruled

out with placename idioms. This prediction appears to be born out:

(5)   a.   *Mary is from Stupidville.*

        b.   **Mary is coming from Stupidville.*

There are also interactions with temporal adverbials:

(6)   **Wann kommt Maria aus Dummsdorf?*

        When   comes Maria from Stupidville

        'When is Maria coming from Stupidville?'

The German simple past is compatible with placename idioms, but the perfect is not:

(7)   a.   *Maria kam aus Dummsdorf.*

                Maria came from Stupidville

                'Maria was stupid'

        b.   **Maria ist aus Dummsdorf gekommen.*

                Maria is   from Stupidville come

The reason for this is the same as before: The perfect tense forces a stage-level interpretation, whereas the simple past may also permit an individual-level interpretation. Consequently, (7b) is ruled out for the kind of interpretation we may associate with (7a), and only has a literal (spatial) interpretation, indicating that Maria arrived from a place called Dummsdorf.

These general semantic properties also explain a final property of placename idioms:

They may be negated freely. Normally, it is rather odd to state that you are not from some town, unless the matter is somehow under discussion. It is normally much more relevant to say where you are from, than to mention some place you are not from. After all, there are thousands of places where you were not born and raised, and only one or two you may call your home town. However, for predicates such as *smart* or *stupid*, this is different. It is equally informative to state that someone is not stupid as it is to state that he or she is stupid. Hence *Sie kommt nicht aus Dummsdorf* is perfectly acceptable.

The placename construction we are looking at here therefore can be characterized by the following schematic structure:

(8)   Schematic structure of the placename idiom construction

[$_{vp}$ X from Adj/V-Y], where X is a verb such as *be/come*, and Y a placename morpheme, such as *–dorf, -ville,* etc., and the entire phrase indicates an individual-level property, associated with the adjectival or verbal stem in the placename.

The relation between the placename and the property expressed by the placename idiom is clearly most straightforward in cases like *aus Dummsdorf kommen*, since it is directly provided by the adjectival part of the complex placename. In the case of verbal stems, the relation is more indirect. We must infer that *give* is related to generosity, and *take* to greed, in order to understand (1b) properly. However, we take it that such associations are strong and rapid, and do not pose serious problems for the hearer, once he or she realizes that no actual placename is intended, but that the utterance makes use of a placename idiom.

There are many other ways in which placename idioms can be used, some in ways that rather resemble the structure in (8). For instance, Splitsville was a popular English expression in spring 2011. Example (9) is the heading of a piece on the separation of Arnold

Schwarzenegger and his wife Maria Shriver:

(9)   *It's Splitsville for California's 1st Couple*

Unlike the previous cases, Splitsville is not a fictional place that people are hailing from, but rather a place they are headed for. The idiom does not denote a state, like being stupid or generous, but a change of state, brought about by an event of splitting up. We do not know of any German or Dutch counterparts for *Splitsville.*

Another kind of idiom we may note in passing is the construction *X City* or *X Central.* Sometimes, these seem to indicate places, as in *My office is nerd city*, meaning an excellent place for nerds, or a place excelling in nerdiness, but sometimes the meaning is far more general than that, as examples like *this guy is nerd city* illustrate. Here the meaning is rather: This guy is a real nerd, a prime example of the species *nerd.* In (10) we have a similar example with Central:

(10)   *The R&D division of our place is nerd central, packed with PhD's, and general brains.*
        (http://ths.gardenweb.com/.../msg0612280730450.html)

Likewise such idioms likewise do not appear to have counterparts in either German or Dutch. The particular interpretation of fictitious placenames is therefore highly dependent on the constructions in which they are employed.

When we look at the various types of placename idiom constructions in the three languages discussed here, it becomes clear that the type in (8) is a more comon than the others: It exists in all three languages, and it shows a relatively high degree of systematic productivity. For

this reason, we have focused on this type in the present paper.

3. Modification

Placename idioms are not entirely frozen, but allow for some types of modification. This is what we would expect based on our analysis, which treats the construction in a semicompositional way (Nunberg et al. 1994).

Topicalisation of the placename PP is possible:

(11)   *Aus Dummsdorf kommt sie nicht.*

From Stupidville comes she not

'She is not stupid'

Some but not all idioms allow for this. The examples in (12) and (13) reflect judgments given in Fleischer (1997:50).

(12)   a.   *Alex hat Fraktur   geredet.*

Alex has Gothic type talked

`Alex talked straight.´

b.   *Fraktur hat Alex geredet.

(13)   a.   *Alex hat den Vogel abgeschossen.*

Alex has the bird   shot

`Alex surpassed everyone.´

b.   *Den Vogel hat Alex abgeschossen.*

We may split the idiom in question-answer pairs:

(14)   Woher stammt die blöde Kuh? Aus Dummsdorf!

Whence hails that stupid cow? From Stupidville.

Such splitting of idioms is normally very restricted. It may occur with partially idiomatic expressions as in (15) but not fully idiomatic expressions such as the one in (13), even if this expression is otherwise very flexible.

(15)   a.   *schimpfen wie ein Rohrspatz*

curse like a reed sparrow

`curse harsh and loudly´

b.   *Wie hat Alex geschimpt? Wie ein Rohrspatz.*

How did Alex curse? Like a reed sparrow.

(16)   *Was hat Alex abgeschossen? *Den Vogel.*

(`*´under the idiomatic meaning)

What did Alex shoot? The bird.

The next example shows that the answer *aus Dummsdorf* as in (14) cannot generally be interpreted as meaning *stupid*.

(17)   *Wie ist Chris eigentlich so?*

How is Chris in fact?

*Ziemlich dumm./ *Aus Dummsdorf./ So wie jemand, der aus Dummsdorf kommt.*

Quite stupid./   From Stupidville./ Just like someone who is from Stupidville.

The data in (14) and (17) show that the idiomatic reading is available in a short answer if the rest of the expression can be reconstructed from the direct context. We can assume that what needs to be reconstructed is either a full syntactic representation of the idiom or a semantic representation of the literal meaning of the expression.[2]

Whether adjectival modification is possible here is less clear to us (cf. Ernst 1981, Cserép 2010) for a discussion of nonidiomatic modifiers inside idioms). We have found some cases of modification on the Internet, but these seem to involve some sort of creative embroidering of the placename idiom, as in the following example, where the expletive adjective *fucking* is added:

(18)   The problem is, that Gaga's Career Train has left Artistic City and arrived in Fucking
        Stupidville. (http://thatgrapejuice.net/2011/02/video-lady-gaga-born-way/)

Forming comparatives or superlatives is generally out of question for placename idioms. Compare the examples in (19) and (20) below:

(19)   a.   *Sie stammt mehr aus Dummsdorf als er.*
                [German]
                She hails   more from Stupidville than he
                Intended meaning: She is more stupid than he

b. *Hij is meer van Zottegem   dan zij. [Dutch]

   He is more from Stupidville than she

   Intended meaning: He is more stupid than she

(20) a.   *Sie stammt am meisten aus Dummsdorf.   [German]

   She hails   the-most   from Stupidville

   Intended meaning: She is the most stupid

   b.   *Hij is het meest van Zottegem   [Dutch]

   he   is the most   of Stupidville

   Intended meaning: He is the most stupid

This may seem surprising, given that the idioms have a meaning (=be stupid) which should be eminently gradable. The reason that the comparatives and superlatives are impossible cannot be due to the construction with prepositional phrases either. In (21) and (22) we give examples with comparative and superlative constructions in which prepositional phrases are modified:

(21) a.   Er war noch mehr außer   sich   als ich.   [German]

   He was even more beside himself than I

   `He was even more berserk than I.'

   b.   Then they were even more over the moon.   [English]

   c.   Zij was meer bij de pinken dan hij.   [Dutch]

   she was more at the pinkies than he

   'She was smarter than he.'

(22) a.   Most to the point was the final example. [English]

b. *Da   war ich am meisten zu Hause.*   [German]

there was I   the-most   at home

'There I was most at home.'

c. *Zij was het meest bij de pinken.*   [Dutch]

She was the-most at the pinkies

'She was the smartest.'

So if it is not the intended meaning, nor the syntactic configuration as such which resists comparatives and superlatives, it must be the literal interpretation shining through. Predicates like *be from Dijon* are in a completely analogous manner thus impossible to turn into comparatives or superlatives:

(23)   a.   *Marie is more from Dijon than Pierre is.*

b.   *Marie is the most from Dijon.*

The only type of comparative or superlative-like construction we have been able to find is a rather special one that plays upon the literal meaning of the placename idioms in a sort of metaphorical play. Here is an example from the website Angry White Dude:

(24)   *And they terrorized Dan Quayle for putting an "e" on the end of potato! And Sarah Palin for talking about Russia being close to Alaska. Here's a fact – Joe Biden can see Stupidville from his house. He's the Mayor!*

(http://angrywhitedude.com/2009/07/joe-biden-welcome-to-stupidville-population-you/)

To be the Mayor of Stupidville is to be maximally stupid. While this example is not fully

compliant with the schematic structure in (8), it may be viewed as a creative play on this schema with the pragmatic effect of a superlative.

4. Anaphoric reference

Our analysis makes the assumption that placename idioms such as *aus Dummsdorf kommen* are first interpreted as statements about places, and only then further processed to yield the final interpretation *be stupid*. This is supported by the fact that anaphoric reference to the placename, rather than to the idiom as a whole, is possible. In (21), we have an example from the Internet, and we point out that the anaphoric link is compatible with a fully idiomatic interpretation of the antecedent.

(25) *Aus Dummsdorf ist hier nämlich keiner und es muss sich auch keiner so behandeln lassen,*
      als käme er von dort. (http://www.paforum.de/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=72424&start=30)
      'Nobody here is from Stupidville, actually, and nobody should be treated as if he came
      from there.'

5. Veridicality

The final, and for us most surprising property of the German expression *aus Dummsdorf sein/ kommen*, concerns the type of context it may appear in. Most commonly, the sentences in which it shows up are negated. In other cases, we find occurrences in questions, subjunctive

clauses (or Konjunktivsätze, to use the German term), sometimes assertions with the epistemic modal adverb *wohl*. We almost never find the expression in plain, undiluted assertions. These various contexts are illustrated in (26) below with examples from our Internet corpus:

(26)   a.   *Terroristen kommen ja nun auch nicht zwingend aus Dummsdorf.*

Terrorists come   PRT   not   necessarily from Stupidville

'Terrorists aren't necessarily stupid'

b.   *Oder seid ihr alle aus Dummsdorf?*

Or   are you all from Stupidville

'Or are you all stupid?'

c.   *Ich hatte einen Chef der mich behandelte als käme   ich aus "Dummsdorf"*

I   had a   boss who me treated   as come-KONJ II I from Stupidville

'I had a boss who treated me as if I came from Stupidville.'

d.   *Also die Heimaufsicht hätte ich gerne erlebt, waren wohl aus Dummsdorf.*

So   the inspection   had I   gladly experienced, were PRT from Stupidville

'I would have loved to have seen the retirement-home inspection, [they] must have been stupid.'

e.   *Du kommst aus   Dummsdorf, nicht wahr?*

You are   from Stupidville, not   true

'You are stupid, aren't you?'

Note that example (e) is one of the few examples of a regular assertion in our corpus, and even this one is given a question-like flavor by the tag *nicht wahr.*

PLACE TABLE 2 HERE

Looking at this distribution, we can only conclude that we must be dealing with some sort of polarity item. The high percentage of negative sentences is a tell-tale sign, as is the fact that the remainder is taken up to a large extent by interrogative and subjunctive clauses. Subjunctive clauses have been identified by Giannakidou (1998) as one of the prime contexts in which items that require nonveridicality may appear.[3] Nonveridicality is defined as in (27):

(27)   A context X__Z for a proposition Y is nonveridical just in case the truth of XYZ does not entail the truth of Y.

Nonveridicality is a property that negation shares with intentional contexts, subjunctives, questions, disjunctions, and various other contexts. Zwarts (1995) and Giannakidou (1998, 1999) have argued that a class of weak polarity items is licensed in such contexts, such as modern Greek indefinite pronouns of the *kanenas* series. Since then, more items with similar distributions have been discovered (Oosterhof 2004, Hoeksema 2010).

Supposing then, that nonveridicality is at play here, let us for a moment look at the affirmative cases in our little corpus. One, we have already seen (26e), and we noted that it may be viewed as less than straightforwardly affirmative, due to the tag question. Another one is:

(28)   *Lol. Und wir sind alle aus Dummsdorf…*
        Lol. And we are all   from Stupidville
        'Laugh out loud. And we are all stupid!'

This sentence is clearly used ironically, rather than a plain assertion. While irony is not usually considered to provide a context for polarity items, we think that there are nonetheless connections here to be explored. It would seem to us that so-called rhetorical *as if* may well be a case of grammaticalized irony, and it is a well-known context for polarity items:

(29) a. *As if he would give a damn!*

   b. *As if Fred would ever do the dishes!*

   c. *As if Sue would do anything in the kitchen!*

A third example is provided by

(30) *Da kann ich ja alles schreiben, und der es glaubt - der kommt aus "Dummsdorf"!*

   So can I PRT all write,   and who it believes – he comes from Stupidville

   'So I can write anything, and whoever believes it – is stupid!'

Clearly, the context is nonveridical, given that the truth of the proposition *der kommt aus Dummsdorf* is dependent on the existence of hypothetical readers who believe anything the writer is claiming.

   Our fourth Internet example is:

(31) *Wer so einen Blödsinn echt nötig hat, ist entweder sehr naiv oder kommt aus Dummsdorf.*

   Who such a nonsense really necessary has, is either very naive or comes from Stupidville

   'Whoever needs this nonsense, is either very naive or stupid'

Again, the context is nonveridical, because of the nonreferring *whoever*-subject, and the disjunctive context. Other cases involve the modal adverb *wahrscheinlich* 'probably' and a complement of the propositional attitude verb *denken* 'think'. Only 3 of the 9 affirmative cases involve a veridical statement (but still metaphorical in nature), such as the following:

(32)   *ich weis ja   das   ich von Dummsdorf bin, aber wie kommt man an die adresse über*

     I   know OK that I   from Stupidville am, but how comes one to the address

     zivilrechtlichen Auskunftsanspruch?   [Misspellings in the original]

     about civil-law   information-right

     'OK, I know I am stupid, but where/how do you find the url about the right to

     information in civil law?'

The property of being a negative polarity item or nonveridical item does not appear to be completely predictable. We have seen several examples (e.g. (1) and (2) above) in this paper of placename idioms that are somewhat similar to our Dummsdorf-examples, yet do not exhibit any polarity sensitivity. Hoeksema (1994) has argued that polarity sensitivity is a form of grammaticalization, resulting in a limited distribution. Just like other cases of grammaticalization, the general domains from which polarity items are taken are not haphazard, but within such a domain, one cannot predict exactly which elements will develop into polarity items. For instance, many languages have so-called minimizers, negative polarity items that indicate a minimal point on a scale, such as *a jot, a whit, a word, a red cent, a plugged nickle,* or *a thing* (cf. Bolinger 1972). Dutch has a very similar list of minimizers, but in that list the counterpart of *a thing*, namely *een ding*, is missing:

(33)   I did not hear a thing.

(34)   *Ik heb geen ding gehoord.

         I have no   thing heard

        'I have not heard a thing'

The reason seems to be that denoting the endpoint on some scale is a necessary, but not a sufficient requirement for becoming a minimizer. Languages have many options at their disposal for creating polarity items, but only some are picked. Just like some languages develop future auxiliaries out of volitional verbs (e.g. English *will*), and others from verbs of motion (French *aller*), but there is no way of predicting, that we know of, which language will pick which verb for this task.

In the case of predicates meaning 'smart/stupid', we may find several polarity items, alongside nonpolarity sensitive expressions. In English, there are idioms such as *born yesterday*, *the brightest crayon in the box*, or *the sharpest knife in the drawer* that are conventionally used in negative sentences:

(35)   I wasn't born yesterday, mind you.   [= I am not stupid]

(36) Fred is not exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer [= Fred is a bit dense]

Dutch also has quite a few idioms meaning stupid or smart that are restricted to negative contexts: *op zijn achterhoofd gevallen zijn* 'to have fallen on the back of one's head = to be stupid', *ze alle vijf op een rijtje hebben* 'to have all five (senses) on a row = to be smart.' Compare also German *du hast sie wohl nicht alle* 'you must not have them [the five senses] all = you must be stupid.'

The above observations suggest that languages may well develop, among a host of

expressions indicating cleverness or stupidity, some that are restricted to negative contexts. Just like our idiom *aus Dummsdorf kommen*, these cases seem to be restricted to individual-level predicates (see the discussion in section 1 above). Stage-level predicates, which express temporary properties, as in *That was stupid of you*, or *Fred was being clever just now*, typically do not develop into polarity items, compare:

(36) *That was born yesterday of you!

6. Conclusions

We discussed idioms of the form ``be/come from X-place''. Such idioms were shown to be based on an implicature triggered by the (very often fictitious) placename. Statements of the form *Y is from X-place* carry the implicature *Y has the property of being X*. The idiom, we claim, uses this implicature to derive its idiomatic meaning. We discussed a number of semantic properties of such idioms based on data for their most prominent representative in German, *aus Dummsdorf sein/kommen/stammen*. Properties noted were the semantic status of the placename idioms as individual-level predicates in the sense of Carlson (1978), limited possibilities for modification, and the impossibility of forming comparatives. We analyzed a set of occurrences from the Internet, and found that this expression shows a nearly absolute tendency to appear in nonveridical contexts, and therefore has to be viewed as weak polarity items (cf. Giannakidou 1998). Unlike the majority of cases discussed in the literature under the heading of nonveridicality, however, the idioms we have studied here are not indefinite pronouns or determiners, but predicates. This raises the question of how general the phenomenon of nonveridicality (as distinct from the better-known phenomenon of sensitivity to negation) is in languages like German. We believe that there might be a lot more to be

found, once we look more closely into a great number of idioms, using modern corpus tools (see Lichte & Soehn 2007, Richter, Sailer & Trawiński 2010). We hope this paper will encourage researchers in the field of phraseology to look more closely at the distribution of the idioms they study.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] COSMAS stands for Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System, and is available to researchers who have applied for an account. See http://www.ids-mannheim.de/cosmas2/.

[2] If we assume a semantic reconstruction in question-answer pairs only, we need to modify the definition of the placename idiom construction from the morphosyntactic definition in (8) to a more semantic one.

[3] Giannakidou (1998) defines nonveridicality in terms of operators. An operator P is nonveridical just in case P(p) -/-> p. We prefer to define nonveridicality as a property of contexts, because it may be affected by the presence of elements such as adjectives and verbs, which are not usually viewed as operators. E.g. verbs like *want, try, desire, wish, hope, fear* etc. create nonveridical contexts. Thus, from *I fear Fred is dead* we may not conclude *Fred is dead*. Nonveridicality is not to be confused with the stronger notion of averidicality: a context of a proposition p is averidical just in case it entails the falsity of p. Negation is averidical, as well as nonveridical, whereas *perhaps* creates a nonveridical context, but not an averidical one. From *Fred is not dead* we may not conclude that Fred is dead, but we may conclude that the proposition 'Fred is dead' is false. From *Fred is perhaps dead* we may likewise not conclude that Fred is dead, nor may be conclude that 'Fred is dead' is false. For nonveridicality of binary connectives, cf. Zwarts (1995).

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Table 1: *aus Dummsdorf*+verb

Verb	N
Sein 'be'	103
Kommen 'come'	47
Stammen 'stem (from)'	6
Geboren sein 'be born'	2
Total	158

Table 2: Contexts for *aus Dummsdorf*

Context	N	%
Negation	125	79
Question	12	8
Subjunctive	5	3
Wohl	7	4
Affirmative	9	6
Total	158	100