

# GERMAN CONSTRUCTIONAL PHRASEMES WITH DEICTIC ELEMENTS IN BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

This paper examines a group of semi-fixed German expressions that are irregular with regard to the relationship between form and meaning, namely constructional phrasemes<sup>2</sup> with the deictic element *her*. These constructions pose considerable difficulties not only for the description of their semantics, but also for translation into other languages. Languages such as Russian, English and French do not have exact equivalents of the German deictic elements *hin* and *her*. Consequently, expressions containing these elements also lack exact systematic equivalents. In cases where the German deictic elements *her* and *hin* are constituents of relatively fixed and irregular constructions, their meaning is even less consistent with their standard definition as “hither” and “thither”.

Such fixed word groups with non-additive semantics are being studied today not only in Construction Grammar (CxG), but also within the contemporary theory of phraseology, where besides the “classic” types of phrasemes such as idioms and collocations, attention is paid to grammatical constructions and constructional phrasemes, also called syntactic idioms.

In connection, among other things, with my work on a series of new German-Russian dictionaries, I have recently become interested in the phrasemes *vor sich hin* (literally ‘before/in front of oneself thither’, which means approximately <to/for oneself, quietly, not intensely>) and *vor sich*

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<sup>2</sup> On this notion see (Dobrovol'skij 2011; 2015). Russian constructional phrasemes are treated in (Baranov, Dobrovol'skij 2013: 86-90). This category should be considered a subclass of constructions in the sense of Fillmore et. al. (1988) and Goldberg (1995).

*her* (literally, ‘before oneself hither’, the basic meaning of which is ‘from before/in front of oneself in the same direction’). My observations indicate that the meaning of these word groups and therefore the means by which they are translated into Russian vary depending on the semantic class of the verb with which the relevant expression is combined. Thus for our purposes it is more convenient to speak about the constructional phrasemes [*vor sich hin* V] and [*vor sich her* V]. The present paper discusses semantic properties of the constructional phraseme [*vor sich her* V] and of similar expressions based on the same pattern.

## 2 Subject, Data and Theoretical Framework

The adverbial form *vor sich her*, which forms the nucleus of the construction [*vor sich her* V] has a basically spatial meaning. Here we have to do with the constructional scheme [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her*]. Referring to Marcq (1988), Krause and Baerentzen (2010: 21, 43, 46) observe that constructions such as [*hinter* N<sub>dat</sub> *her*], [*vor* N<sub>dat</sub> *her*], [*neben* N<sub>dat</sub> *her*], [*zwischen* N<sub>dat</sub> *her*] have a meaning of their own and express the idea of joint forward motion in one direction and at the same speed. It should be stressed that this is the meaning of the construction, not the meaning of the prefixed verb in combination with *vor/ hinter/ zwischen/ neben sich* ≈ ‘(before <in front of>/ behind/ between/ alongside <next to/ beside> oneself)’. Strictly speaking, the construction [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her*] is untranslatable into Russian, since the part of the meaning expressed by the deictic element *her* is lost. When the verb is included in the construction, however, non-equivalence is no longer an issue. Thus *etw. hinter sich her ziehen* ‘drag something behind oneself’ corresponds to the Russian expression *тащить что-л. за собой*.

Using corpus examples from German and Russian (including, above all, the data of German-Russian and Russian-German parallel corpora), I will propose a means of describing these constructions in a bilingual dictionary.

The German-Russian and Russian-German parallel corpora of the Russian National Corpus (RNC) are still quite small, consisting of some 10 million running words. Corpora of that size do not enable us to conduct a statistical analysis that would produce representative findings. Nevertheless, even relatively limited parallel corpora can yield useful and significant information about the meaning and functioning of linguistic units, especially if these units have not yet been subjected to thorough semantic and/or contrastive analysis. This is fully applicable to constructions with a varying degree of fixedness and idiomaticity,

especially constructional phrasemes – that is, phrasemes with empty slots that can be filled by various words. Depending on how a slot is filled, the meaning of the constructional phraseme changes, as do the means for translating the phraseme into another language.

The use of parallel corpora allows us not only to identify appropriate means of translation, but also to refine our notions of the semantics and co-occurrence of the German constructional phrasemes under investigation. From this perspective, the fact that we cannot apply statistical methods does not prevent us from achieving our objectives, since quantitative analysis is not among the tasks addressed in the present study.

My investigation makes a certain contribution to Construction Grammar and the theory of phraseology, since the more concrete constructions in different languages that can be described through the use of authentic corpus data, the more successful will be the development of a typology of constructions. In other words, it will become clearer what types of constructions exist in different languages and how language-specific or general they are. The class of constructional phrasemes has long remained on the periphery in the description of phraseology. Yet corpus data show that this class is no less important to communication than idioms. Finally, the present study is of immediate value to bilingual lexicography.

Data were drawn especially from the corpora of parallel texts in the Russian National Corpus (RNC). Monolingual German corpora were also used: above all, the *Corpora des Digitalen Wörterbuchs der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts* (DWDS) of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.

### 3 The Constructional Scheme [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V] and its Realizations

The construction [*vor sich her* V] is a particular instance of the pattern [*vor* N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V], the meaning of which is not described in dictionaries and cannot be derived from the semantics of its constituents: *vor* N<sub>dat</sub> ‘before/in front of sb. or sth.’ + *her* ‘hither’ (in the direction of the subject of deixis).<sup>3</sup> Often the N<sub>dat</sub> slot is filled by the reflexive pronoun *sich*. See

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<sup>3</sup> In the canonical communicative situation this is the speaker; in hypotaxis it is the subject of the matrix clause; in a narrative, the narrator or a character from whose perspective events are viewed.

context (1). Because *vor* is followed by the dative, in the first- and second-persons the construction has the form *vor mir/ dir/ uns/ euch her*.

- (1) Frauen, Männer und Kinder *schieben* Rollwagen mit Grills, Herdplatten, Fritteusen oder ganze Garküchen *vor sich her*, reihen sich nebeneinander auf und beginnen zu kochen. (DWDS: Zeit-Corpus 2008)  
 ‘Women, men and children *push in front of them* carts with grills, cooktops, deep fryers or entire food stalls, line up next to each other and begin to cook.’

This constructional phraseme must be analyzed among similar realizations of the pattern [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V] that underlies it. Let us examine in more detail three of the possible such realizations: [*vor* N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V], [*hinter* N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V] and [*neben* N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V]. They were selected because there was a sufficient number of instances in the RNC. Since all three expressions are based on the pattern [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her*], meaning joint spatial movement, it is natural to expect that they will co-occur with verbs of motion indicating both independent forward movement (2) and the causation of motion (3).

- (2) Willy *geht neben mir her*. Was für ein Leben! (RNC: E.M. Remarque. Der schwarze Obelisk)  
 Вилли *шагает рядом со мной*. – Что за жизнь! (пер. на рус.: В. Станевич)  
 ‘Willy *is walking beside me*. What a life!’ (trans. Denver Lindley)  
 (3) Er *schleppte* einen Kranz *hinter sich her*. (RNC: F. Dürrenmatt. Justiz)  
*За собой* Эшисбургер *тащил венок*. (пер. на рус.: С. Фридлянд)  
 ‘He *was dragging a wreath behind him*.’

This is basically the case. But in the corpora we do find, albeit rather rarely, surprising instances of verbs of other semantic classes that co-occur with *vor/ hinter/ neben sich her*. See examples (4) and (5) from the German-Russian corpus.

- (4) “Ein Ausländer, ein Habenicht, ein Vagabund!” *kreischte* die Donna wütend *hinter mir her*. (RNC: K. May. Satan und Ischariot)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper I also use parts of the RNC that have not yet been made available online.

– Иностранишка, оборванец, бродяга! – *заскрипела* донья, рассвирепев. (пер. на рус.: А.Г. Москвин, Л. Костюкова)

“‘Outlander, beggar, tramp!’ *screamed* the Donna in a rage *behind me.*’

(5) “‘Tue es, tue es!’ *lachte er hinter mir her.* (RNC: K. May. Satan und Ischariot)

– Сделай это, сделай! – *рассмеялся он мне вслед.* (пер. на рус.: А.Г. Москвин, Л. Костюкова)

“‘Do it, do it!’ *laughed he behind me.*’

The reasons for this phenomenon demand a separate analysis. In cases such as (4) and (5) we deal with a kind of coercion. Being used in the construction [*hinter N<sub>dat</sub> her V*], the verbs with a communicative potential (*kreischen* and *lachen*) are interpreted as verbs of motion. Russian translations either ignore the idea of motion (4) or point to it by the adverb *вслед* that focuses the sense of ‘behind’, however, does not express the idea of joint movement.

## 4 The Deictic Element *her* in German–Russian Dictionaries

It is obvious from an analysis of these examples that there is no single way of translating *vor sich her*, *hinter sich her* and *neben sich her*. This fact alone confronts the lexicographer with the need to search for non-trivial means for registering these units in a bilingual dictionary. The first question to arise is which meaning of the word *her* we should attach to the given expressions. A glance at the appropriate entry in *The New Comprehensive German–Russian Dictionary* (NDRG) reveals that it does not include any of the above realizations of the deictic element *her*. See fragments of the entry *her* in NDRG:

**her** *adv dem* **1.** сюда (по направлению к говорящему или лицу, точку зрения которого принимает говорящий); komm ~! иди сюда! **2.** фам. побуждение предоставить что-л. в распоряжение говорящего: ~ damit! фам. а ну-ка, давай сюда!, выкладывай! **3.** в конструкциях «von + наречие/сущ.» – указывает на отправную точку: von außen ~ извне, снаружи **4.** в конструкциях «von + наречие» – при обозначении времени: von früher ~, von alters ~ с давних пор **5.** в конструкциях «von + сущ.» относительно чего-л.; von den Voraussetzungen ~ что касается предпосылки □ **...hin, ...** ~ разг. конструкция с уступительным значением, соответствует русск. конструкции «сущ. в именительном сущ. в творительном»: Regen hin, Regen her, die Arbeit

muss (trotzdem) getan werden дождь дождём, но работа (всё равно) должна быть сделана; **hin oder** ~ разг. больше или меньше; более или менее; drei Stunden **hin** oder her... разг. тремя часами больше, тремя часами меньше... ◇ **hinter** jmdm. ~ **sein** разг. преследовать кого-л., гоняться за кем-л.; домогаться кого-л.; **hinter** etw. (D) ~ **sein** разг. гоняться за чем-л. (напр. за каким-л. товаром); **mit** jmdm., etw. (D) **ist es nicht weit** ~ разг. кто-л. не на высоте; что-л. оставляет желать лучшего; **das langt [reicht] nicht hin und (nicht)** ~ разг. этого всё равно ни на что не хватает; **das ist hin wie** ~ разг. это всё равно; это всё одно, это всё едино

The forms *hinter jmdm. her sein* and *hinter etw. her sein* that are included in the entry in its phraseological part are idioms with the meaning ‘to be after sb. or sth.’. The constructions with spatial semantics that provide the motivational basis for these idiomatic expressions are not described in the entry.

The problem is that independently of the verbs that govern them, adverbial constructions of the type *vor sich her*, *hinter sich her* and *neben sich her* are scarcely translatable into Russian. The only reasonable solution here lies in describing their semantics and translating the instances of the V-construction.

## 5 Constructional Phrasemes Based on the Pattern [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> *sich her* V] in Parallel Corpora

Let us turn to the German–Russian parallel corpus of the RNC. Certain contexts with the forms *vor sich her* and *hinter sich her* do not realize the meaning under consideration here, but contain homonyms. See ... *stießen ihre Spazierstöcke vor sich her* (‘... they pushed their walking sticks in front of them’), where *vor sich her* does not express the idea of joint forward motion in one direction and at the same speed, and *er ist immerfort hinter mir her* (‘he is constantly after me’), where the form *hinter mir her* realizes its idiomatic meaning (compare the part of the above-cited dictionary entry behind ◇) and point to the idea of persecution.

Of the other contexts in the RNC, the most frequent realization of the construction [*hinter sich her* V] was *hinter sich her ziehen* ‘pull behind oneself’. Russian translations of the German forms can be tentatively divided into two groups: those which do not indicate any direction of movement (6-7) and those which do (8-9). Russian has many different ways to convey this meaning.

(6) Er wartete nicht ab, was Momo dazu sagen würde, sondern *zog* sie an der Hand *hinter sich her* zum Auto. (RNC: M. Ende. Momo)

He дожидаясь ответа, он *втащил* Момо в машину. (пер. на рус.: Ю.И. Коринец)

Without even waiting for an answer, he *seized* Momo's hand *and towed her to* the car. (trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn)

(7) [...] und *locken* den Rasenden heimtückisch *hinter sich her* in dunkle Gänge. (RNC: G. Meyrink. Der Golem)

[...] коварно *заманивают* безумного в темные коридоры. (пер. на рус.: Д. Выгодский)

[...] when he is beside himself with fury, slyly *lure him into* dark corridors. (trans. Mike Mitchell)

All of the translations in (6-7) are adequate in the sense that they convey the basic meaning of the original texts, but they cannot be used in a bilingual dictionary as Russian equivalents of the given German expression. Thus, *он втащил Момо в машину* 'he towed her to the car' in (6) does not describe the movement of the Agent, who was himself getting into the car at the moment this action was performed, whereas on the basis of the Russian translation one might think that he was already in the car. In (7) *коварно заманивают безумного в темные коридоры* 'slyly lure him into dark corridors' can be construed as meaning that the enticers are located somewhere outside, but *hinter sich her locken* clearly indicates that they are themselves in the dark corridors and are luring someone to follow them.

(8) Durch die halboffene Tür schlüpfte eine Frauengestalt und *zog* ein Kind *hinter sich her*. (RNC: E. Kästner. Pünktchen und Anton)

В приотворенную дверь протиснулась какая-то женщина. *За собой она вела* ребенка. (пер. на рус.: Е. Вильмонт)

'A woman slipped through the half-open door, *leading* a child *behind her*.'

(9) Johann Buddenbrook kam zornig herbei, den Kerzenlöscher *hinter sich her schleifend*. (RNC: Th. Mann. Buddenbrooks)

Иоганн Будденброк направился к сыну, сердито *волоча за собой* гасильник. (пер. на рус.: Н. Ман)

Johann Buddenbrook walked over angrily, *dragging* the candel-snuffer *behind him*. (trans. John E. Woods)

In contrast to examples (6-7), the Russian translations of *hinter sich her* in contexts (8) and (9) can be regarded as candidates for inclusion in a

dictionary. The forms *вести за собой* ‘lead after oneself’ and *волочить за собой* ‘drag after oneself’ fairly accurately convey the notion of parallel movement contained in the German expressions *hinter sich her ziehen* and *hinter sich her schleifen*.

Deserving special attention are contexts in which the construction [*hinter sich her V*] is used not to denote motion in the strict sense, but in the derived meaning of occurring after some event;

(10) Der Golem *zieht* eine unheimliche Gefolgschaft *hinter sich her*.  
(RNC: G. Meyrink. *Der Golem*)

*За Големом всегда такая страшная свита событий.* (пер. на рус.:  
Д. Выгодский)

The Golem brings some macabre things in its wake. (trans. Mike Mitchell)

It is entirely possible to regard this sort of use as an idiomatization of the original expression. When *hinter sich her ziehen* is employed not to denote the causation of motion,<sup>5</sup> but in a metaphorical sense based on a transfer from the spatial to the temporal sphere, the expression can be viewed as a potential idiom. This example demonstrates one possible way in which weakly idiomatic expressions (here, constructional phrasemes) can become idioms. The way they are translated differs from the means used by Russian to convey the original meaning of the expression. In the German–Russian bilingual dictionary the co-occurrence *hinter sich her ziehen* can additionally be marked as a phraseme with the lexicographic equivalents *вести за собой* ‘lead to, entail’ and *иметь своим следствием* ‘have as a consequence’.

## 6 The Constructional Phraseme [*vor sich her V*] and its Semantic Specification

Let us turn to the central object of my investigation: the constructional phraseme [*vor sich her V*]. See the following examples from the Russian–German parallel corpus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The standard Russian translation in that case is *тащить за собой* ‘drag after oneself’.

<sup>6</sup> Šmelev (2015) points out that the parallel corpora in which the language of the expression under analysis is the target rather than the source language possess the best diagnostic potential for determining the language-specificity of a lexical unit. The appearance of such words is evidently the unconscious solution of the



(11) – Мама, пойдем быстро! – прокричала женщина, *подтолкнув* старуху. (RNC: В. Сорокин. 23000)

“Komm, Mama, beeil dich!” rief die Frau und *schob* die Alte *vor sich her*. (trans. Andreas Tretner)

“Mama, go, quick!” the woman shouted, *nudging* the old lady. (trans. Jamey Gambrell)

(12) Бьорн пятился, пятился, *тихая* Ольгу, раскачивая трубу: – Быстро, быстрее!! (RNC: В. Сорокин. 23000)

Mit Macht strebte Björn rückwärts, *trieb* Olga *vor sich her*, brachte das Rohr heftig zum Schwanken. »Schnell! Schneller!« (trans. Andreas Tretner)

Bjorn kept on moving away from the grate, *pushing* Olga. His movement made the duct sway. “Faster, faster!” (trans. Jamey Gambrell)

(13) Погрузившись до рта, я поплыл, крепко сжимая Лед в руках. (RNC: В. Сорокин. Путь Бро)

Als das Wasser mir bis zum Mund reichte, schwamm ich wieder, mein Stück Ljod mit beiden Händen festhaltend und *vor mir herschiebend*. (trans. Andreas Tretner)

When the water reached my mouth, I swam, clutching the chunk of Ice firmly. (trans. Jamey Gambrell)

Examples (11-13) show that the semantics of *vor sich her* is implanted in the meaning of Russian verbs corresponding to the German construction [*vor sich her* V]. This also holds true for English. Example (13) is even more convincing. The idea of *vor sich her schieben* is not at all expressed in the Russian original. However, the idea of motion is clearly indicated by the verb form *поплыл* ‘swam’, and the causation of joint forward movement is a part of the situation; See *я поплыл, крепко сжимая Лед в руках* ‘I swam, clutching the chunk of Ice firmly’.

Even more interesting is the fact that the constructional phraseme [*vor sich her* V] serves as the basis of the full-fledged idiom *etw. vor sich her schieben* – literally, ‘push smth. ahead of oneself’ – meaning <<to postpone or defer indefinitely some action or decision because one is unable to mobilize one’s inner resources>>. The Duden phraseological dictionary (Duden 11) does not contain this idiom, in spite of the fact that

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translator as a native speaker. For that reason I turned to the Russian–German parallel corpus of the RNC.

it is fairly common in both oral and written speech and is established in the language system as an independent lexical unit with a metaphorical meaning. See (14):

(14) Der Bund *schiebt* einen seit Jahrzehnten angehäuften Schuldenberg von mehr als 900 Milliarden Euro *vor sich her*. (DWDS: Zeit-Corpus 2008)

‘The federal government is deferring action on a debt accumulated over decades of more than 900 billion Euros.’

The idiom *etw. vor sich her schieben* arose from a semantic reinterpretation of the construction [*vor sich her* V<sub>CausMotion</sub>], that is, a realization of the constructional phraseme [*vor sich her* V] in which the verbal slot is filled by a verb denoting causation of motion. On the whole, the group of constructions described here can be represented in the form of a chain of successive stages of lexico-semantic specification: [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V] → [*vor sich her* V] → [*vor sich her* V<sub>CausMotion</sub>] → [*vor sich her schieben*] → [IDIOM [*vor sich her schieben*]].

Analysis of examples drawn from the parallel corpus shows that the constructions of this group exhibit a language-specific configuration of semantic features. Consequently, they do not have simple Russian equivalents. As the corpus data indicate, in translation this meaning is often not conveyed at all, or it is distributed among other elements of the context or is clear from the situation. In a number of cases the expression (*прямо*) *перед собой* ‘(directly) in front of oneself’ corresponds to the adverbial *vor sich her*. Thus Russian translations – if at all – convey the purely spatial component of the semantics of this construction (the locus of the object vis-a-vis the subject), while the notion of ‘parallel motion’ remains unexpressed.

It turns out that it is rather difficult to find translation equivalents suitable for inclusion in a dictionary. Translations of the idiom *vor sich her schieben* in the parallel corpus are especially problematic. See (15):

(15) [...] und dachte an Marie, an die Christen, an die Katholiken und *schob* die Zukunft *vor mir her*. (RNC: H. Böll. Ansichten eines Clowns)

[...] начал думать о Марии, о протестантах, о католиках и о будущем. (пер. на рус.: П. Райт-Ковалева)

[...] and thought of Marie, of Christians, of Catholics, and *contemplated* the future. (trans. Leila Vennewitz)

The problem is that a translator – particularly a first-class translator, as in the case of (15) – can have individual priorities when translating certain text fragments. It is for that reason that some lexical units – here the idiom under consideration – sometimes remain untranslated. The German original says that the hero thought about Marie and other things but tried not to think about the future, whereas the translation does not convey this contrast.

As a possible dictionary equivalent of the German idiom I can propose the expressions *откладывать что-л.* ‘postpone, defer smth.’ or *отгонять от себя мысли о чем-л.* ‘banish/drive away thoughts about smth.’).

## 7 Conclusion

The study has revealed both theoretical and empirical findings.

First, both phraseological theory and practical lexicography need to expand their subject domain. All languages have not entirely compositional constructions which, although they fall under the definition of phrasemes, remained practically unstudied within traditional phraseology. The more fixed co-occurrences with non-compositional semantics that we can investigate and describe lexicographically, the more valid will be our theoretical conceptions of the objectives and boundaries of phraseology. Such studies will also enable us to create an empirically based classification of constructions. In this respect collaboration between phraseology and Construction Grammar may prove to be very fruitful. The methods of corpus linguistics enable us to register the combinatorial potential of each lexeme and consider frequent co-occurrences to be units of linguistic description regardless of whether there is a semantic shift in the meaning of the constituents of such co-occurrences.

Second, the contrastive analysis of all units of language must consistently distinguish between translation equivalence, i.e. cross-linguistic correlates encountered in text, and systematic equivalence, i.e. cross-linguistic equivalents postulated at the level of the language system. Not all correlates of an expression in the source language that can be found in texts in the target language meet the criteria of systematic equivalence. Studies based on data from parallel corpora provide information about translation equivalence. To identify functional equivalence, i.e., get data for lexicography, additional information is needed, primarily about the conditions of use in each individual context and the combinability of a particular unit. This is especially true of

phrasemes with open slots in their structure; that is, the kind of expressions analyzed in the present article.

Third, the use of parallel corpora is an effective tool in the study of constructional phrasemes. It must be taken into account, however, that currently the available corpora of parallel texts (including the German-Russian and Russian-German ones) are still quite modest in size. The contexts from the RNC containing the phrasemes [*vor sich her* V], [*neben sich her* V] and [*hinter sich her* V] do not reflect all relevant types of constructions, not to mention all possible translations of these phrasemes.

As for presenting constructional phrasemes of the type [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> *sich her* V] in the dictionary, the most economical and user-friendly way of describing it is to indicate the meaning of the pattern underlying it [Prep<sub>spatial</sub> N<sub>dat</sub> *her* V] and enumerate all the prepositions that can appear in the position Prep<sub>spatial</sub>. For example, *the expressions hinter jmdm./etw. her* ‘behind sb. or sth.’, *vor jmdm./etw. her* ‘before/ in front of sb. or sth.’, *neben jmdm./etw. her* ‘next to sb. or sth.’ and *zwischen jmdm./etw. her* ‘between sb. or sth.’ denote movement by the participants of the situation in the same direction and at the same speed. It is important to include in the same zone of the entry examples illustrating the basic ways to use these constructions and translate them into Russian.

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## Corpora

DWDS – Corpora des Digitalen Wörterbuchs der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts: <http://www.dwds.de>

RNC – Russian National Corpus = Корпус немецко-русских параллельных текстов Национального корпуса русского языка: <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/search-para.html>