In this paper we focus on the semantics of the verbs GET, GIVE, PUT and TAKE in the present-day European languages. We present two series of quantitative analyses, where we employ innovative corpus-driven approaches to estimate the overlap and differences between the meanings of the language-specific equivalents of the verbs. The data that we use are parallel corpora of different genres: religious texts (the Bible and Jehova's Witnesses pamphlets), film subtitles and European parliament transcripts.

In the first series, we demonstrate an exemplar- (or token-)based probabilistic conceptual space of GIVE, which is constructed from a matrix that contains exemplars of GIVE and their translation equivalents in the parallel corpora. The underlying assumption of the approach is that the cross-linguistic similarity between the form of a pair of exemplars can be interpreted as an indication of similarity of the exemplars' meanings (cf. Cysouw 2010). These pairwise exemplar similarities are represented in a matrix of distances, which then serve as input for Multidimensional Scaling and other multivariate techniques. The resulting semantic maps allow us to explore the semantic functions of the GIVE cognates (English give, German geben, Dutch geven, etc.), pinpoint the common and idiosyncratic polysemy patterns of GIVE found across the European languages, and model the cognates' common core and divergent periphery.

In the second series of our analyses, we quantify the semantic similarity of all four verb's equivalents, using larger data samples. We use the methodology described in Mayer & Cysouw (2012) to cluster word forms across languages on the basis of their co-occurrence in parallel contexts (e.g., verses in the Bible texts). All word forms from all languages in our sample are listed in an occurrence matrix, where each cell in the matrix indicates whether the word form occurs in the respective context or not. For each context (e.g., for each Bible verse), we then cluster all word forms occurring in that particular context in all languages in the sample. For the purpose of this investigation, we take only those contexts where the English version contains at least one word form of the lemmas GIVE, TAKE, PUT or GET.

To give an example, consider the Bible verse Matthew 6:11, which in the New International Version of English is rendered as “Give us today our daily bread”. If we run the clustering procedure on the occurrence matrix for all word forms that occur in the respective verse in the 12 European languages Bulgarian [bul], Dutch [nld], English [eng], French [fra], German [deu], Icelandic [isl], Italian [ita], Polish [pol], Portuguese [por], Russian [rus], Spanish [spa], Swedish [swe], we get the following clusters:

1) donne_fra dá_por geef_nld gef_isl give_eng
2) ежедневная_bul cotidiano_ita насущный_rus dzisiaj_pol quotidiem_fra daily_eng tägliches_deu dagelijks_nld cada_por dagliga_swe powszedniego_pol daglegt_isl cotidiano_spa
3) nuestro_spa nostro_ita сей_rus unser_deu notre_fra наш_rus vort_isl our_eng naszego_pol vårt_swe nosso_por
4) o_por il_ita
As can be seen from the clustering results, the method grouped the GIVE verbs in the various languages into two clusters (1 and 10). Taking the groupings in all contexts into account enables us to explore how languages translate the English equivalents of GIVE, TAKE, PUT and GET and where they differ. Finally, the results of our data-driven analyses are compared with the previous cross-linguistic studies of the verbs (e.g. Newman 1998; Lenz & Rawoens 2012; Bowerman et al. 2012).

References