An investigation of diachronic change in hypotaxis and parataxis in German through language contact with English in translation

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Diachronic Corpora, Genre and Language Change

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Source

Although strategy had considerable breadth then, it didn't have much rigor.

Tr (para)

*Das Thema Strategie hatte damals **zwar** eine gewisse Bandbreite, **doch** es mangelte an Disziplin.* (translator's draft)
['The topic of strategy did have a certain breadth then, but it lacked discipline.']

Example

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*Das Thema Strategie hatte damals **zwar** eine gewisse Bandbreite, **doch** es mangelte an Disziplin.* (translator's draft)
['The topic of strategy did have a certain breadth then, but it lacked discipline.']

Tr (hypo)

***Obwohl** das Thema Strategie damals umfangreich behandelt wurde, mangelte es ihm an Stringenz.* (published version)
['Although the topic of strategy was treated in depth then, it lacked rigour.']

Aim | to investigate a trend towards an increasing use of paratactic constructions in German concessive constructions

Degree of standardisation of the languages involved determines the outcome of contact in translation (Kranich 2014)

Ancient languages

degree of standardisation: low
$\hookrightarrow$ syntactic innovations, borrowings

Modern languages

degree of standardisation: high
$\hookrightarrow$ influence limited to frequency shifts

Mechanism: Structures/patterns that are conventionally infrequent in the TL
↪ used more frequently (assimilation to SL norms)
(Koller 1998)

Language contact in translation

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Example

- Bisiada (2013): decrease of hypotactic structures from 80% to 60% in causal constructions in translated and non-translated business articles
- similar results for Italian (Musacchio 2005), German (Becher 2011) and Portuguese (Bennett 2013)

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Issue: does variation arise from contact with texts

- **translated** from language X?
- **written** in that language?

1. Compare translations and source texts from two time periods
   ↪ determine diachronic variation/change in a specific feature

Diachronic translation corpora

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2. Investigate comparable corpus for similar patterns
   ↪ are these patterns exclusive to translated language or are they also found in non-translated language?

Diachronic translation corpora

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→ translation of concessive conjunctions *although*, *(even) though*, *while* to German

2 Investigate comparable corpus for similar patterns
↪ are these patterns exclusive to translated language or are they also found in non-translated language?

→ do the German concessive conjunctions found in step 1 (and thus the structure they demand) occur more frequently?

Corpus structure

Corpora: 1982/83 & 2008

Parallel   English originals and their published German translations

Comparable   German non-translations

Texts:
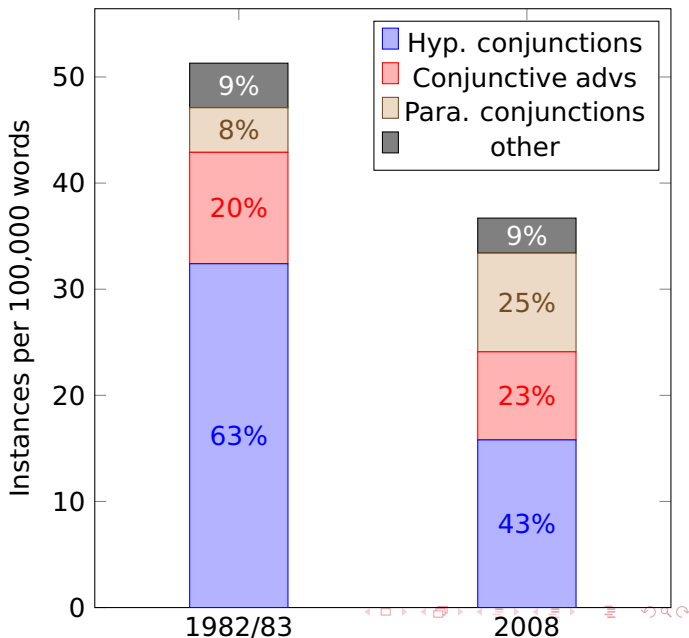
English   *Harvard Business Review*

German   *Harvard Business Manager*

Corpus size

	1982/83	**2008**
English source texts	251,148	258,589
German translations	246,341	260,261
German non-translations	145,715	88,312
Total size	643,204	607,162

Analysis of the parallel corpus

Translators' use of concessive conjunctions where the source text does not have them:

Example

However, the councilmen desired to continue the new budget system **despite** a lack of significant cost savings or cost reallocations. (HBR 6/77,76)

*Die Stadträte wünschten aber, am neuen Budgetierungssystem festzuhalten, **obwohl** es zu keiner signifikanten Einsparung oder Neuverteilung von Mitteln gekommen war.* (HBM 1/83,13)

Do translators introduce conjunctions?

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	1982/3	**2008**
obwohl	1.8	4.0
auch wenn	1.8	3.1
doch	0.8	4.0

- strong decline in hypotactic structures, but also introduced frequently
- no notable increase in frequency in paratactic structures
  - proportional share of paratactic translation choices increased due to decline in the use of conjunctions in the source texts?

Analysis of the comparable corpus

	f	
1982/3	35.0	14%
2008	52.1	15%
Change	+17.1	+1pp

Hyp. conjunctions

1982/3	195.6	76%
2008	221.9	63%
Change	+26.3	−13pp

Conjunctive advs

1982/3	28.8	10%
2008	77.0	22%
Change	+48.2	+12pp

Para. conjunctions

- hypotactic structures remain stable/increase somewhat
  - decrease noted in translated texts not corroborated
- general increase in concessive conjunctions (viz. decrease in translated text)
  - difference in the expression of concessive meaning relations between English and German?

Sentence-initial concessive conjunctions

Source

But it's not just the physical attributes of a space that influence informal interactions; [. . .]. (HBR 7/11,102)

Tr (adv)

*Beim Aspekt der Nähe und dessen Einfluss auf informelle Kontakte geht es **jedoch** nicht nur um den physischen Abstand, [. . .].* (translator's draft) ['The aspect of proximity and its influence on informal contacts, however, is not just about physical distance.']

Sentence-initial concessive conjunctions

Source	**But** it's not just the physical attributes of a space that influence informal interactions; [...]. (HBR 7/11,102)
Tr (adv)	*Beim Aspekt der Nähe und dessen Einfluss auf informelle Kontakte geht es **jedoch** nicht nur um den physischen Abstand, [...].* (translator's draft) ['The aspect of proximity and its influence on informal contacts, however, is not just about physical distance.']
Tr (SICC)	***Aber** nicht nur die physischen Eigenschaften eines Raums beeinflussen die Häufigkeit zufälliger Begegnungen.* (published version) ['But not only the physical attributes of a room influence the frequency of random encounters.']

Translations of sentence-initial *But*

	1982/3		2008	
	f		*f*	
Aber	30.0	48%	21.8	38%
Doch	5.2	8%	18.7	33%
Conj. adv.	20.9	34%	11.6	20%
omitted	4.8	8%	3.7	6%
other	1.0	2%	1.7	3%
total	61.9	100%	57.4	100%

Translations of sentence-initial *But*

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- strongest frequency increase: sentence-initial *Doch*
- sentence-initial conjunctions more popular than internal adverbs

Findings in the comparable corpus

	1982/3		**2008**	
	n	*f*	n	*f*
Aber	24	16.5	45	60.0
Doch	5	3.4	63	71.3
total	29	19.9	108	122.3

Findings in the comparable corpus

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- ■ *Aber* and especially *Doch* increase significantly
- ■ 1982/3: both sentence-initial conjunctions used more frequently in translations than in non-translations
- → spread from translated to non-translated language?

- diachronic decrease in hypotactic structures in concessive clauses

similar observations made by

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similar observations made by
- Becher (2011) for popular science

Discussion: Translated texts

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⤳ hypotactic conjunctions frequently introduced – no evidence of decreasing use

- no decrease: more hypotactic structures in 2008 than in 1982/3

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- paratactic conjunctions used more often

Discussion: Non-translated texts

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- paratactic conjunctions used more often
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  - contrary to popular science observations (cf. Becher 2011)
  - due to sentence splitting? (encourages use of *aber*; see Bisiada 2014)

Discussion: Conclusions

→ decrease in hypotaxis: hypotaxis not unpopular, but readability concerns more important (sentence splitting: *Zwar. . . . Aber. . .*)

■ difference in genres: overall decrease in conjunctions in source texts?

■ Sentence-initial concessive conjunctions increase in translated and non-translated texts (also noted in popular science by Becher, House & Kranich 2009)

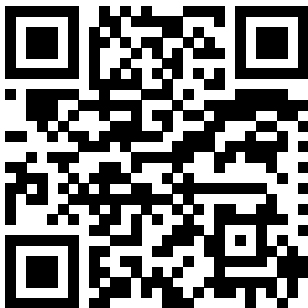⇒ diachronic change through translation?

Thank you!

Paper

Bisiada, Mario. 2016. Structural effects of English-German language contact in translation on concessive constructions in business articles. *Text & Talk*. 36(2). 133–154.

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