The explicit marking of contingency relations in English and German texts: A contrastive analysis
– preview version –
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1 Introduction

Coherence: A discourse is coherent if and only if all of its segments directly or indirectly contribute to the discourse purpose (Grosz and Sidner 1986).

Cohesion: A discourse is cohesive if and only if it contains formal cues/markers – such as connectives – that signal its coherence (cf. Bublitz 1998). Cohesion is a form of explicitness (cf. House 2004).

Connective: A conjunction, sentence adverbial or particle that creates cohesion by assigning thematic roles to sentences (e.g. CAUSE–EFFECT) (Pasch et al. 2003, Blühdorn 2008a, 2008b).

1.1 English vs. German


1.2 The present study

Aim: corroborate or challenge previous results and provide explanations
Object of investigation: causal connectives

Data: corpus of ca. 100 short English and German business texts\(^1\) (letters to shareholders) from 1993–2001. Word count: ca. 50,000 per language.

2 Results\(^2\)

2.1 Conjunctions\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>denn</em> ‘for, because’ (28)</td>
<td><em>because</em> (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>weil</em> ‘because’ (14)</td>
<td><em>as</em> (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>da</em> ‘as, since’ (11)</td>
<td><em>since</em> (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong> 53</td>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong> 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Occurrence of causal conjunctions in the corpus

2.2 Adverbs\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>damit</em> ‘thus’ (107)</td>
<td><em>thus</em> (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>deshalb</em> (43)</td>
<td><em>therefore</em> (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>daher</em> ‘hence’ (21)</td>
<td><em>hence</em> (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td><em>as a result</em> (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>also</em> ‘so, thus’ (15)</td>
<td><em>so</em> (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>folglich</em> (0)</td>
<td><em>consequently</em> (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong> 186</td>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong> 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Occurrence of causal connective adverbs in the corpus

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\(^1\)Additionally, translations into the respective other language are available for most of the texts.

\(^2\)Work on the corpus is not complete, so the figures presented may change (minimally).

\(^3\)Non-connective uses (e.g. “as much as”), temporal uses (e.g. “since we entered the stock market”) etc. were not counted. Since

\(^4\)NB: Non-connective uses of *damit, deshalb* and *daher* were not sorted out. Since such uses are rare (ca. 10-20%) the figures are valid (though not exact).
3 Interpretation

Three Hypotheses...

... that might explain the observed frequency mismatch between English and German causal connectives:

1. Contexts in which causal connectives may appear (argumentation, evaluations, etc.) are rare in English economic texts. They make use of other “rhetorical structures” (Mann und Thompson 1988), or “discourse patterns” (Jordan 1984; Hoey 1994, 2001), than comparable German texts.

2. ‘Causal contexts’ do occur frequently, but they are signaled by other cohesive devices such as causal subjects, verbs with causal meaning, etc. (cf. This makes it difficult... vs. It is therefore difficult...).

3. ‘Causal contexts’ do occur frequently, but most of them aren’t signaled at all!

ad Hypothesis 1 (few ‘causal contexts’ in English)

Difficult to assess, since there are no hard and fast criteria for the identification of rhetorical relations.

ad Hypothesis 2 (‘causal contexts’ signaled differently in English)

Hypothesis supported by qualitative analysis of English-German and German-English translations. Causal connectives often translated by means of a subject switch in German-English translations:

(1) (a) Damit verstärken wir unsere Kapazität vor allem für den Chemie-, Biotechnologie- und Pharmamarkt.

‘Thus we [AGENT] increase our capacity...’

(b) *This [CAUSE]* will increase our capacity, especially for the chemical, biotechnology and pharmaceutical markets.

ad Hypothesis 3 (‘causal contexts’ often not signaled in English)

Hypothesis supported by qualitative analysis of English-German and German-English translations. Causal connectives often omitted in German-English translations:
We have grown more than twice as strongly as the market and have thus gained market shares worldwide.

Conversely, causal connectives are often added in English-German translations:

(3) (a) XY Business Support Services [was] launched in the first quarter [...].
(b) Deshalb wurde im ersten Quartal die XY Business Support Services gegründet [...].
‘Therefore, XY Business Support Services was founded in the first quarter.’

Quantitative results are under way!

4 Conclusion

Hypotheses 2 and 3 both seem to be correct. However, Hypothesis 3 is in need of an explanation: why are connectives added in English-German translations and removed in German-English translations? Two conflicting (?) explanations:

**Doherty’s (2002) explanation:** “German indicates and spells out discourse relations more often than English... The left-peripheral English verb phrase can rely on the verb as a natural, early clue to the semantic and pragmatic relationships in which the elements of a sentence participate... In German, the processor has to wait till the end of a sentence before it really knows all about the semantic and pragmatic functions of its constituents... Thus, additional clues which indicate discourse relations and the beginning of focus... are welcome in German.” (119f)

**House’s (2004) explanation:** Diverging frequencies of connectives in English and German are due to differences in “linguistic-textual conventions” (189), i.e. cultural differences between the Anglophone and German language communities. (Translators apply a “cultural filter” [House 1997], so that differences like this one get ‘filtered out’ in translation.)

\(^5\text{cf. also Fabricius-Hansen (2005)}\)
References


