INTRODUCTION

Comparing crosslinguistic complexity

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Denken heißt Vergleichen / Thinking means comparing Walther Rathenau

When contrasting two or more languages, we often notice language-specific preferences that would otherwise go under the radar. In this sense, the German author and politician Walther Rathenau had a point: Comparison is central to our thinking but also, from our perspective, to the understanding of languages. In this vein, we invited contributions to a contrastive pre-conference workshop at the 43rd ICAME[1] conference, *Corpus Linguistics: A New Normal?*, hosted by Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, UK, July 27–30, 2022. The theme of the contrastive workshop, *Comparing Crosslinguistic Complexity*, opened up for contributions exploring structural differences and degrees of complexity on both micro- and macro-levels of texts, comparing English with at least one other language based on parallel (translation) or comparable corpora. This special issue of *Languages in Contrast* comprising a collection of six papers is the result of our endeavours in investigating differences in complexity across languages. Altogether, it discusses English in comparison with four different languages: German, Norwegian, Spanish and Swedish, both in different broader genres such as fiction and non-fiction texts, but also sub-registers such as fiction narrative and fiction dialogue, and newspaper editorials and magazine articles. All in all, the six contributions shed new light on crosslinguistic complexity with English as one of the nodes. We hope that this special issue can inspire further forays into this area.

The contributions in this volume are presented below. These range from comparative corpus studies on lexical (word-formation) complexity, morphosyntactic complexity, and phrasal and clausal complexity.

The paper by **Magnus Levin** and **Jenny Ström Herold** addresses the case of morphologically complex English premodifiers adjoined by hyphens, so-called 'hyphenated premodifiers' (e.g., *self-propelled* (*guns*)), and their correspondences in German and Swedish. This trilingual study draws on data from the Linnaeus

1. International Computer Archive of Modern and Medieval English (http://clu.uni.no/icame/).

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University English-German-Swedish Corpus (LEGS), a bidirectional corpus of non-fiction texts. Comparisons are also made with fiction texts from the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus (ESPC) from a previous study. The findings show that these complex premodifiers are more frequent in English originals than in English translations, and also more pervasive in non-fiction than in fiction. The comparisons with German and Swedish correspondences suggest that these two languages have partly different noun-phrase preferences: half of all correspondences are rendered as postmodifiers, which leads to a considerable reduction in the complexity of the *pre*-head position in translations.

Noelia Ramón and **Rosa Rabadán**, also considering morphological complexity, explore new territory by focusing on subjunctives in translation data from an English-Spanish perspective. Complexity is here calculated using the word-alignment measure (C_A). Based on P-ACTRES 2.0, a broadly sampled English-Spanish parallel corpus with both fiction and non-fiction texts, the authors investigate whether the Spanish subjunctive mood displays a higher level of complexity than English correspondences. The study covers both originals and translations. The results confirm that Spanish morphological complexity is higher than that of English, both as source language and target language. The results show there to be a correlation between lexical and morphological complexity. The findings will have a bearing on future crosslinguistic studies of mood.

Signe Oksefjell Ebeling contrasts the use of adjectives in English and Norwegian fiction, comparing narrative with dialogue. The study draws on data from the bidirectional English–Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC), but is restricted to comparisons of English and Norwegian originals. The adjectives are classified into semantic classes and also compared as to whether they are in attributive or predicative position. A major finding is that English dialogue and Norwegian dialogue are more similar to each other in the positioning of adjectives than there are similarities across narrative and dialogue within each language. In both languages, there is a larger proportion of attributive adjectives in narrative than in dialogue. As for noun-phrase complexity, both narrative and dialogue favour simple phrases. Here, too, the type of fiction text seems to be a stronger factor than language. The findings cast new light on the hybrid nature of fiction, indicating that differences between narrative and dialogue to some extent may be language independent.

Thomas Egan investigates complexity features concerning complementation patterns for HELP constructions in English and Norwegian. As in Oksefjell Ebeling's contribution, the data was collected from the ENPC. In terms of complementation types, the English verb *help* and its Norwegian cognate *hjelpe* share the same repertoire, HELP constructions having intransitive, monotransitive as well as complex-transitive uses. One hypothesis put forward is that the grammatically

simpler the source-text construction is, the more likely it is that an equally simple parallel construction would be used in the target text, e.g., an intransitive Norwegian *hjelpe* being rendered as an intransitive English *help* in the target text. The findings, however, do not support this and the overall picture is much more multifaceted. For example, translators may resort to a more complex complementation type by specifying a direct object HELPEE, going from an intransitive original to a monotransitive translation. Notably, an additional sub-study comparing English originals with Norwegian originals shows that Norwegian authors – compared to English authors – more strongly favour the syntactically more complex complementation type where they explicitly encode the HELPEE.

Hilde Hasselgård's contribution is also based on material from the ENPC. The paper explores concessive subordination in English and Norwegian, including both originals and translations. Different concessive markers are found to be used with different frequencies, reflecting author-specific preferences. Most concessive clauses are placed in sentence-final position, but with highly variable frequencies. As Oksefjell Ebeling, Hasselgård compares usage in narrative and dialogue, finding indications of formality differences in the concessive markers. The translations of concessive markers are often congruent, but the mutual correspondence between individual lexical items is rather low. Non-congruent translations into Norwegian often involve coordination, while translations into English have a predilection for phrases expressing concessive meanings. Interestingly, translations into Norwegian would tend towards lower complexity level, and translations into English towards higher complexity level.

Marie-Pauline Krielke's paper is a diachronic English-German study investigating syntactic complexity reduction in scientific writing in The Late Modern Period (ca. 1650–1900), using Dependency Length as a measure of complexity. The data for the study were extracted from four comparable corpora – one general language corpus each for English (the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET)) and German (das Deutsche Textarchiv (DTAW)), and one scientific language corpus each for English (the Royal Society Corpus (RSC)) and German (das Deutsche Textarchiv (DTAG)). The findings corroborate previous studies, showing that scientific writing in both English and German moves towards lower syntactic complexity in terms of Average Dependency Length compared to the general diachronic development in the two languages. Thus, both scientific English and German increasingly make use of short, intra-phrasal dependency relations (e.g., phrasal instead of clausal modifiers), while long dependency relations such as clausal sub- and co-ordination become rather disfavoured over time.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who have contributed to this volume. Both the authors and the peer reviewers have ascertained a brisk and academically rewarding handling of proceedings. In particular, we would like to extend

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