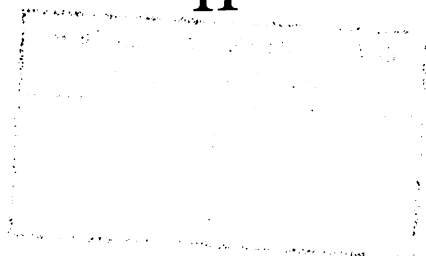


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Inhalt Band 2

Contents Volume 2

Section 5: Syntax und Semantik/Syntax and Semantics

O. Heinämäki: On Language Processing Cues in Finnish	939
W. Hirtle: Accounting for Usage in Ambiguous Sentences	942
Z. Hlavsa: Which Depth do we Need in Semantics?	946
A. Hoffmann: On the Role of Noun Phrases in Texts	948
L. Höbelbarth: Zum konfrontativen Vergleich deutscher und englischer Kausalzeichen	951
M. Hums: Zur Dialektik von Lexikalisierung und Syntaktifizierung	954
M. Immler: Was ist die Bedeutung?	957
E. Jacobs: Distribution of Modifiers on Quantifiers	959
M. Z. Kaddari: Componential Semantic Analysis of B(iblical) H(ebrew) Verbs (N-T-N and M-N-ʿ)	962
K. Kanno: Performative Analysis Revisited: A Solution of the Performadox	967
Y. Kato: Negation and the Bridge Effect in Japanese	969
R. T. King: The Cognitive Grammar of Causative Constructions in German and English	973
H. Kirsten: On the Communicative Relevance of Aspect in English	975
H. Koivisto: The Adjectivization of Participles in Finnish	978
J. Korhonen: Zur Syntax und Semantik von Satzidiomen im heutigen Deutsch	980
K. Kosaka: Konditionalsätze im Deutschen und im Japanischen	983
R. Kühnl: Zur Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik bei der Bestimmung der funktionalsemantischen Kategorie der Satzmodalität	986
K.-P. Lange: Zur Syntax und Semantik der Positionsverben im Deutschen und Niederländischen.	988
P. A. Machonis: The Lexicon-Grammar of English: Support and Operator Verbs	992
I. Max: Zur logischen Explikation von Präsupposition und Negation mittels Funktorenvariablen – Thesen –	995
E. Mioduszevska: On the Notion of Conventional Implicature	998
W. Mühlner: Valenzstruktur des Satzes und Kontext	1000
K. Narita: Some Characteristics in Tense-Aspect Markers in Japanese	1003
P. B. Naylor: Focus, Discourse Pragmatics, and Language Typology	1006
D. Nehls: Expressions of Future Time in English — A Special Case of Non-Factive Modality	1009
J. Nosek: Meaning and Function in Language	1011
G. Öhlschläger: Zur Semantik der Fragesätze	1014
R. Pasch: Towards a Uniform Pragmatic Description of Logical and Other Presuppositions	1017
Th. Pavlidou: On the Interplay Between Interrogativity and the Subjunctive: the Case of Modern Greek	1020
J. Peres: On the Syntax and Semantics of Restrictive Relative Clauses	1023
L. Pérez Botero: Semantic of the Conjugation of the Verb: The Spanish Case	1026
V. Perikliev: Are all Sentences With Constructional Homonymity Ambiguous?	1032
M. Pierrard: Marquage fonctionnel et expression référentielle: “celui” + relative en français moderne	1035
K. Polański: On the Notion “Underlying Structure” as Used in Various Theories	1038
I.-E. Rachmankulowa: Zur syntaktischen Grundlage der lexikographischen Beschreibung deutscher Verben	1040

N. Reiter: Die Leistung des Zeichens SUBSTANTIVUM	1043
W. Reuschel: Der Artikel im Arabischen	1045
Ch. Römer: Zusammenhang versus Differenz von Bedeutung und Subkategorisierung bei deverbalen -ung-Ableitungen.	1047
R. Růžička: Semantic-Pragmatic Interplay in Control	1050
D. Rytel-Kuc: Das reflexive Passiv transitiver Verben in den slavischen Sprachen (unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Tschechischen)	1053
D. Sakayan: On Factive/Non-Factive Connectors in Natural Languages	1056
J. Schröder: Präfixverben in einer mehrstufigen Analyse.	1059
K. Schwabe: Some Remarks on the Grammatical Representation of Situation Dependent Elliptical Expressions	1062
A. Soini: Double Scope in the Semantics of Topicalization	1065
O. Šoltys: Semantic Base and Twofold Expression: On Shakespeare and Sládek	1067
G. Spies: What <i>sogar</i> presupposes	1071
V. Stankov/M. Ivanova: Notes sur les rapports entre les différents types de catégories dans la langue	1076
G. Starke: Funktionale Beziehungen zwischen Wortschatz und Syntax im Satzgefüge	1078
L. Stefanowa: Essai d'une classification sémantico-lexicale des éléments grammaticaux du texte scienti- fique	1081
A. Steube: Grammatical Relations Between Preposition, Conjunction, and the Complementizer "daß" in an \bar{x} -Theory for German	1084
N. Stojanowa: Funktionen der denn-Sätze	1087
K. Stroyny: Eine Methode zur Untersuchung der Bedeutung von Zeit beinhaltenden sprachlichen Formen.	1091
M. Tenchea: La structure sémantique des compléments de temps prépositionnels en français.	1093
Y. Ujiié: Mental Integration and Linguistic Forms — Japanese Words vs. English Clauses	1096
O. Uličný: Über die Formalisierung der Kasusbeschreibung in flektierenden Sprachen	1099
A. Verhagen: Word Order and (No) Semantic Roles	1104
M. Vilela: Verbes de possession (en portugais): quelques aspects syntaxiques et sémantiques	1108
H. Walter: Zu einigen Fragen der Interpretation eingliedriger russischer Sätze.	1114
G. Walther: Passivsatz und agentivischer Nachtrag.	1116
Z. Wasik: In Search for Semiotic Paradigm in Linguistics	1119
W. Wildgen: Konfiguration und Perspektive im elementaren Satz: ein dynamischer Modellansatz	1122
E. Winkler: Satzeinbettung mit Hilfe von Korrelaten (am Beispiel der <i>verba dicendi</i> im Deutschen)	1125
B. Wotjak: Zu Inhalts- und Ausdrucksstruktur verbaler Phraseolexeme	1128
S. Yamada: Time, Modality, and Negation	1131
D. Zaefferer: Non-Standard Conditional Antecedents	1134
H. Ziebart/ Aktuelle/nichtaktuelle Bedeutung — Wertigkeit — Aspekt. Ein Beitrag zur konfrontativen Valenzbetrachtung	1139
Section 6: Lexikalische Semantik/Lexical Semantics	1143
S. Berežan: Die Semantik lexikalischer Einheiten und die semantischen Beziehungen zwischen ihnen in einem erklärenden Wörterbuch	1143
Ch. Bergmann: Aspekte der Wertung durch lexikalische Einheiten	1146
R. Blutner: Sentence Focus and Lexical Access	1148
U. Brauße: Die Bedeutung der Konjunktionen „daß“ und „ob“	1151
J.-C. Choul: Meaning as a Rule	1153
E.-M. Christoph: Zur Semantik der Eigennamen	1157
L. Dobberitz: Synonymie und Polysemie in russischen Bergbaufachtexten	1160
I. B. Dolina: Die grammatische und lexikalische Semantik der Äußerung	1163
J. Dücker: Entwicklung und bewußte Gestaltung in der neueren deutschen Sprachgeschichte	1166

H. Dupuy-Engelhardt: System-, Norm- und Redebedeutung: Lexematische Merkmalanalyse und Lexikographie am Beispiel des Wortfeldes ‚HÖRBAR‘	1168
P. Đurčo: Zur semantischen Interpretation und zweisprachigen Konfrontation phraseologischer Einheiten	1172
G. Györi: Some Remarks on the Phylogeny of Meaning	1175
J. C. Garrido Medina: Lexical and Text Meaning as Linguistic Knowledge Representations	1178
E. Günther: Zur Verbindbarkeit von Verben mit Verbalabstrakta (VA)	1182
G. Harras: Zum Geltungsbereich lexikalischer Regeln	1185
J. Horecký: Ein System von Konzeptualisatoren für künstliche Intelligenz	1187
T. Jämsä: The Basic Semantic Structures of Verbs	1189
J. Kačala: Die semantische Problematik der Wortartübergänge	1192
T. Kaneko: Tense-Aspect Calculus of Modern German	1194
J. Klare: Zur Problematik der Wortexplikation im einsprachigen Wörterbuch	1198
R. Landheer: Observations sur la distinction entre synonymie et hyponymie	1200
B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk: Conventions of Meaning in Language	1204
L. Lipka: Metaphor and Metonymy as Productive Processes on the Level of the Lexicon	1207
K.-D. Ludwig: Zum Status nicht-denotativer Informationen lexikalischer Einheiten	1210
M. Martin: Semantic Resolution of Lexical Ambiguity	1212
E. van der Meer: On Some Relationships between Event-Related Knowledge and Language Comprehension	1216
M. Meshkat al-Dini: Lexical Meanings Although Different from Cognitive Concepts Are Developed on Their Basis	1219
O. Nobuhara: Empathy and Particles — A Case Study from Japanese	1221
N. Okada: Semantic Analysis of Basis Adjectives by Concept Formation Process	1225
M. Opělová: Onomastics and Language Study	1228
M. Preuß: Experimente über Relationserkennungen im menschlichen Gedächtnis	1229
B. B. Rieger: Situations and Dispositions. Some Formal and Empirical Tools for Semantic Analysis	1233
H. B. Rosén: Richard Löwenherz, die rosenfingrige Eos und Augen, die wie Tauben sind. Ein „Universale“ gewisser „possessions“ implizierender Prädikatsformen?	1236
V. Sadler: From Dictionary to Knowledge Bank	1239
Ch. Schäffner: A New Way of Looking at Meanings of Political Words	1241
S. Schaljapina: Das Wörterbuch als einheitliche Organisationsform einer formalisierten linguistischen Beschreibung	1244
T. Schippan: Wortbedeutung als Wissensrepräsentation	1248
E. W. Schneider: Semantic Features and Feature Dimensions	1250
R. Schulze: The Meaning of English <i>by</i> : A Cognitive-Semantic Approach	1253
E. Sekaninová: Die Rolle der Präfigierung bei den semantischen Veränderungen des slawischen Verbums	1257
E. Service: Using a Word Guessing Game to Explore Organisation and Processes in Lexical Memory	1259
B. Stephan/W. Stephan: Semantische Derivation und Phraseologisierung als Gestaltungsmittel politischer Texte	1262
V. Straková: Morphematische Strukturierung der semantischen Angaben	1265
K. Sunaga: Konfrontative Betrachtungen zur Semantik deutscher und japanischer Phraseologismen	1268
Ly Toang Thang: On the Correlation Between the National Peculiarities of Language and Verbal Thinking	1270
M. Thelen: TCM: A Two-Cycle Model of Grammar, and the Structure of the Lexicon	1274
Ch. Todenhagen: Metaphors in Technical Writing	1278
V. Vapordžiev: Probleme der onomasiologischen Klassifikation von Phraseologismen	1279
M. Vliegen: Semantische Beschreibung von Verben im Lexikon: Auditive Wahrnehmungsverben	1282
E. Weigand: What Sort of Semantics is Lexical Semantics?.	1285
L. Wilske: Sprachkommunikative Verben und kommunikative Handlungstypen	1288
G. Wotjak: Bedeutungen als Handlungsanweisungen?	1291

B. Zamudio/F. J. Molina/J. M. Zamudio: Lexical Analysis of the Argentine Pain Questionnaire's Descriptors	1295
G. Zybatow: Zur Bedeutung des deutschen Verbs „verstehen“	1299
Section 7: Sprachwandel/Language Change	1303
H. R. Abd-El-Jawad: Lexical Conditioning of Phonological Variation: Evidence from Arabic	1303
E. Arndt: Sprachentwicklung zwischen Sammlung und Auswahl	1307
D. C. Bennett: On the Progress of Clitics: Evidence from Slovene and Serbo-Croat	1309
R. Bentzinger: Sprachwandel in der Wortbildung, dargestellt am Gebrauch von Adjektivsuffixen	1312
A. Betten: Lehnsyntax versus spracheigene syntaktische Strukturen	1314
V. Blanár: Der Bedeutungswandel unter diachronischem Aspekt und das Problem der Typologie der lexikalischen Bedeutung	1318
M.-G. de Boer: Les changements syntaxiques: développement interne ou influence externe. Le cas des degrés de comparaison en italien	1323
G. Brandt: Soziale Triebkräfte nationaler Normentfaltung in der deutschen Literatursprache	1329
J. J. Chew: The Geographical Context of Change in Linguistic Structure	1332
S. Clarke: Dialect Convergence in a Non-Overtly Stratified Society	1335
A. Dančev: Some Aspects of a Language Change Typology	1340
A. I. Domaschnew: Die Entwicklung der Theorie der nationalen Variante der Literatursprache in der sowjetischen Sprachwissenschaft	1342
H. Endermann: Beobachtungen zur Sprache Thomas Müntzers	1347
K. Ezawa: Zur wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung der Coseriuschen Sprachnormtheorie	1351
J. T. Faarlund: On the Genesis of Transformational Passives	1354
C. Feagin: Two Vowel Shifts in Southern States English: An Acoustic Study of Change in Progress	1357
N. Filičeva: Feldbegriff und Erklärung des syntaktischen Wandels	1361
N. Gadshijewa: Prinzipien der Erstellung von historischen Grammatiken der Turksprachen	1363
M. Gerritsen: Changing Conditions of VNP-Order in Middle Dutch Infinitive Constructions	1367
R. Große: Zur Problematik der Generationen im Prozeß des Sprachwandels	1372
V. Heeschen: Historical Changes in Papuan Languages	1374
E. Herique: A Case Study of the Emergence and Evolution of an Interjection in the French Language	1377
R. Hess: Positionen des portugiesischen Sprachbewußtseins	1380
P. Höhne: Einige Bemerkungen zum gesellschaftspolitischen Wortschatz der modernen persischen Sprache nach der Islamischen Revolution 1978/1979	1385
V. Jarzewa: Quantitative and Qualitative Changes in the Historical Development of the Language	1387
Y. Kawasaki: Zum Sprachkontakt und syntaktischen Wandel: Kritik der These des lateinischen Einflusses auf die deutsche Nebensatzwortstellung SOV	1390
G. Kettmann: Sprachwertstrukturen und ihr Einfluß auf Wandlungsprozesse im 16. Jahrhundert	1397
K. Kunze: A New Instrument for the Reconstruction of Historical Word Variation: The Index of Lexical Variation in the "Alsatian Legenda Aurea"	1400
H. Langner: Zur Tendenz der Internationalisierung in der deutschen Gegenwartssprache — Erscheinungen und Probleme	1403
E. Leiss: Grammatische Kategorien und sprachlicher Wandel — Erklärung des Genitivschwunds im Deutschen	1406
O. Leška: Teology and de Saussure's "Synchrony: Diachrony" Dichotomy. Notes on One Prague School Tenet	1410
P. Jen-Kuei Li: Sex Differentiation in Speech as a Mechanism of Linguistic Change	1412
O. Ludwig: Zur Genese der Abhandlung als einer genuin schriftlichen Textsorte	1414
H. Mettke: Zu einigen Fragen des Sprachwandels und Sprachausgleichs im Althochdeutschen	1417
W. Müller: Wie normgerecht sind unsere Normen, und wer macht sie? Eine Herausforderung zur Normenungläubigkeit	1420
T. N. Pachalina: Zur Rolle des Umlautes in der Geschichte der iranischen Sprachen	1423

Mun Jôngho: Sprachliche Normen und das sprachliche Leben (?)	1426
R. Peilicke: Historical Pragmatics — an Approach to Explaining Language Change	1430
I. Rauch: On the Nature of Firsts in Language Change	1432
K. Reichl: Indirect Objects as Subjects	1435
H. Rix: Morphologische Konsequenzen des Synkretismus	1437
S. Rovinetti Brazzi: Un cas de simplification morphologique dans le dialecte de Bologna. Quelle approche?	1441
A. Sanmugadas: Japanese-Tamil Relationship: Supporting Evidences for Susumu Ohno's Hypothesis	1445
W. W. Sauer: Wortschatzentwicklung in den Rechtschreib-Duden	1448
J. Schildt: Welche Rolle können Textsorten in einer Sprachwandeltheorie spielen?	1451
E. Schulz: Sprachwandel im Arabischen	1455
R. G. Sharma 'Dinesh': Change of Gender in Indian Languages	1458
U. N. Singh: On Language Development: The Indian Perspective	1460
P. Wiesinger: Lautwandel und Phonogenetik	1471
J. Wiktorowicz: Das Konzept der Natürlichkeit und der lexikalisch-semantische Wandel	1478
Section 8: Soziale und territoriale Variation der Sprache/Social and Regional Variation of Language	1481
B. Bajčev: Zur gegenwärtigen Differenzierung der Sprache in einer bulgarischen Stadt (eine soziolinguistische Studie)	1481
G. Bellmann: Nomination vs. Pronomination in soziopragmatischer Sicht	1483
J. Beneke: Soziokulturelles Sein-Alltagsbewußtsein-Sprachverhalten	1486
J. Chloupek: Zur Dichotomie Schriftsprachlichkeit — Nichtschriftsprachlichkeit	1489
J. DeChicchis: The Genesis of Kekchi Dialect Differences	1492
W.-P. Funk: Applying "Multidimensional Scaling" to Linguistic Variation: Accents of Standard English	1496
J. Herrgen: Koronalisierung. Zum sprachlichen Eigenbestand des Neuen Substandards	1499
R. Herrmann-Winter: Zu aktuellen Ansprüchen an die Lexikographie einer regionalen Sprachform	1503
J. Hlavsová: The Expressing of Abstract Concepts in Folk Language	1505
F. Inoue: Dialect Image and the Diffusion of New Dialect Forms	1508
R. King/R. Ryan: Dialect Contact vs Dialect Isolation: Nasal Vowels in Atlantic Canada Acadian French	1512
K. Legère: Kishwahili in Southern Tanzania Reconsidered	1516
S. Luchtenberg: Zur Bedeutung der Sprachvariation beim Sprachlernen	1518
H. Naumann: Soziolinguistische Aspekte der Eigennamen	1521
L. Nyholm: Conflicting Norms in Regional Speech — The Case of Finno-Swedish	1523
J. L. Ornstein-Galicia: Re-Evaluating the Sociolinguistic Role of Chicano Calo	1527
H.-D. Paufler: Soziale und regionale Variationen im spanischsprachigen Raum	1530
M. Perl: Some Aspects Regarding the Investigation of Caribbean Spanish	1534
P. Porsch: Soziolinguistische Aspekte des Verhältnisses von Land, Sprache und Kultur	1537
B. Prescott: A Dynamic Model of Language Variation Applied to Innovative Phonological Patterns in the Fijian Dialect Chain	1540
G. Richter: Die gesprochene Sprache als linguistischer Forschungsgegenstand	1547
I. Ripka: Das Abbild der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung im System der slowakischen Mundartlexik	1549
H. Schönfeld: Erwerb der städtischen Umgangssprache durch Zugezogene — Probleme und Indikatoren aus soziolinguistischer Sicht (am Beispiel von Berlin)	1552
J. Szabó: Theoretisch-methodologische Fragen der Untersuchung sprachlicher Prozesse in Sprachinseln	1555
H. Walter: Regionale Umgangssprachen in Ländern mit verspäteter kapitalistischer Entwicklung (am Beispiel des Bulgarischen im 19. Jahrhundert)	1558
G. D. de Wolf/E. Hasebe-Ludt: The Relationship of Speakers' Language Attitudes to Intervocalic Voicing in Formal and Informal Speech	1562

I. Wotschke: Socio-Regional Accent Versus RP	1567
P. Zima: Is There an Empirically-Based Theory of Creolization?	1570
Section 9: Sprachplanung und Sprachpolitik/Language Planning and Language Policies	1574
M. Basaj: Einige Probleme der Sprachkultur in den slawischen Sprachen	1574
M. Benson: Language Planning in Yugoslavia	1577
Y. C. Bhatnagar: Indian Bilingualism — a Few Emerging Trends	1580
A. Blinkena: Kulturgeschichtliche Faktoren bei der Herausbildung und Entwicklung der lettischen Literatursprache	1596
K. Bochmann: Zur Gegenstandsbestimmung von Sprachpolitik	1599
S. Brauner: Der wissenschaftlich-technische Fortschritt (WTF) und die wissenschaftlich-technische Revolution (WTR) und ihre Auswirkungen auf die sprachliche Situation und die Sprachen Afrikas	1602
J. Brumme: Sprachpolitik und lexikalisches Modell	1605
Chun-an Chen: Spreading Putonghua in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone	1607
M. Gatzlaff: Das Hindi als Staats- und Unionssprache in Indien	1611
Ch. J. Georg Gellinek: Färtige Sprachpolitik Filips von Zesen	1614
A. Gladrow: Zu typologischen Fragen der Sprachenpolitik im slawischen Sprachraum	1618
F. Häusler: Orthoepische Normen und ihre Repräsentation im Wörterbuchtext	1621
B. Henisz-Thompson: Thou Shalt Speak English: English in California Elections	1624
M. Hu: Putonghua, the Chinese Standard National Common Speech, and the Beijing Vernacular	1627
E. H. Jahr: Limits of Language Planning? Norwegian Language Planning Revisited	1630
P. A. Kotey: Mother Tongue Education in Language Planning: The African Dilemma	1633
M. Mauderer: Zu einigen aktuellen sprachpolitischen Aspekten bei der Beschäftigung mit der franzö- sischen Sprache der Gegenwart	1636
K. Opitz: The Growth of an International Technical Register: The Language of Maritime Safety and Vessel Control	1639
K.-E. Pabst: Die Tätigkeit der arabischen Sprachakademien bei der Schaffung eines wissenschaftlich- technischen Spezialwortschatzes im Arabischen	1642
R. Richter: Aktuelle Prozesse der Sprachentwicklung in Äthiopien	1646
G. Rowe-Minaya: An Overview of Nations, State, and Local Legislation on Language Policies in Peru, Nepal, and the United States: What Impact on School Principals?	1648
A. Sakaguchi: Zum Gegenstand der Interlinguistik	1651
B. Schmidt: Politique linguistique et changements linguistiques et communicatifs en République Démocratique de Madagascar	1657
J. Schmied: Developing East African Varieties of English?	1659
H. Schuster-Šewc: Die Sprachsituation der Lausitzer Sorben — Ein Beitrag zur Planung und Ent- wicklung von Minderheitensprachen im Sozialismus	1664
Z. Starý: The Theory of Standard Language — (a) Failure of Functionalism	1667
Tschöh Tschönghu: Sprachpolitik und die Entwicklung der Nationalsprachen	1669
V. Ülkü: Die neue Sprachpolitik in der Türkei	1672
M. Underdown: Evenki Orthography. Language Policy in the PR China	1675
I. Wiese: Fachsprachliche Normungsprozesse	1678
F. J. Zamora Salamanca: The Standardization of the 'National Variants' of Spanish: Problems and Goals of a Language Policy in the Spanish-Speaking Countries	1681
H. Zikmund: Sprachplanungsbemühungen um eine adäquate Wiedergabe von Eigennamen aus der UdSSR in der DDR	1686
Section 10: Sprachkontakte/Language Contacts	1689
I. M. Alves: Les emprunts lexicaux employés dans la presse politique brésilienne	1689
A. Desnickaja: Die erworbene Sprachverwandtschaft und die Bedeutung dieses Begriffes für die Balkanstudien	1691

Ch. Fleckenstein: Zur Rolle der Lehnbildung für die Bereicherung der russischen Sprache	1695
O. Gökçe: Soziolekt der türkischen Gastarbeiter in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland	1698
R. Gusmani: Grundsätzliches zur Lehnwortintegration.	1701
K. Gutschmidt: Zur Typologie von Sprachbünden.	1704
G. Hentschel: Zu einigen Grundfragen der kontrastiven Phonologie.	1706
K. Hyldgaard-Jensen: Zweisprachigkeit — Förderung oder Beeinträchtigung des Kreativitätspotentials	1709
J. H. Junttila: From Multilingualism to Monolingualism in North Norway?	1713
M. Kondratiuk: Slavonic-Baltic Linguistic Contacts in the 16th Century on the Basis of Anthroponymy of Bialystok Region	1716
A. Kostallari: La base populaire de la langue littéraire albanaise et la diaspora albanaise contemporaine	1719
E.-D. Krause: Europäische Einflüsse auf die Lexik der Bahasa Indonesia.	1723
F. Krier: Typologie der Sprachkontaktphänomene.	1726
B. Mæhlum: Linguistic Variation in Longyearbyen, Svalbard (Spitsbergen)	1729
M. L. Oñederra/B. Hurch: Borrowing in Basque	1732
S. Rót: On Language Contacts in the Northern Part of the Amero-Euro-Asian Linguistic Area and Problems of Language Union (Sprachbund)	1735
M. Sala: Disparition des langues et contact des langues	1738
St. Semčinský: Sprachkontakte und Interferenzisosemie	1741
G. Senft: „Bakabilisi Biga“ — “We Can ‘Turn’ the Language” — Or: What Happens to English Words in Kilivila Language?	1743
K. Steinke: Sprachinselforschung unter dem Aspekt des Sprachkontakts (am Beispiel russischer Sprachinseln in Bulgarien)	1746
A. Vašek: On Language Maintenance in Immigrants	1748
F. F. Weingartner: Some Lexical Problems in Late Ming Doctrines	1751
I. T. Zograph: Mongolian-Chinese Interference as a Special Case of Language Interaction	1754
Section 11: Spracherwerb/Language Acquisition.	1758
L. A. Abulhajja: The Development of Affixes: Evidence from Urdu	1758
G. Antos: Saarbrücker DFG-Projekt zum fortgeschrittenen natürlichen L ₂ -Erwerb von Kindern ausländischer Arbeiter	1762
J. Bahns: Der L ₂ -Erwerb der <i>Do</i> -Periphrase	1764
H. Barthel: Types d'actes de parole dans les discours en langue étrangère.	1768
B. Brandt: Desiderata der Theorie des Fremdsprachenunterrichts an die Linguistik	1771
M. Correa-Beningfield: Prototype and Language Transfer: The Acquisition by Native Speakers of Spanish of Some English Prepositions of Location	1773
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J. Munoz-Liceras: Missing Subjects in Native and Non-Native Spanish	1823
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F. Manthey: Semantisieren unbekannter Lexik beim stillen Lesen fremdsprachiger Texte als elementarer Erkenntnisprozeß — dargestellt am kontextualen Erschließen	1833

Non-Standard Conditional Antecedents

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0. Introduction

Most natural languages have, alongside with a standard way of formulating conditional antecedents (protases), like the English *if*-clause, one or more alternatives to this formulation, like the English *in case*-clause or the German conjunctionless protases (*Bleibst du, so bleibe*

ich auch). A closer look at these non-standard alternatives would not be interesting, were they but synonymous constructions with only stylistic differences. But although they belong to the same family, they do have slightly different meanings.

For instance the scope ambiguity for adverbs of quantification like *always*, that is present in a standard conditional construction, seems to be absent in the *in case*-variant of its formulation, as can be seen from contrasting *I will always be at home on Sunday, if you want me to* with *I will always be at home on Sunday, in case you want me to*. Another type of non-standard conditional antecedents, that looks very much like alternative and constituent interrogatives (*Whether you stay or go I Wherever you go, I'll be with you*), and that seems to be fairly widespread across typologically diverse languages, shows a more conspicuous difference in meaning, one that leads me to call it “unconditionals” (cf. Zaefferer (in preparation)).

The fact that this construction type is known under a variety of names (e.g. conditional-concessive clauses (Quirk/Greenbaum 1973), irrelevance conditionals (König/Eisenberg 1984), concessive relative clauses (Autorenkollektiv 1981)) is part of the reason that I have allowed myself to christen it my own way. The other part is that I think that it is a fitting designation, but that of course I will have to argue for. I will also argue that looking at them will shed some light on the behaviour of regular conditionals and show how they are embedded into a network of related construction types.

1. What are unconditionals?

Here are some examples, (1) and (2) for a(lternative)-unconditionals, (3) and (4) for c(onstituent)-unconditionals:

- (1) Whether they pay him well or not, Max does his job.
- (2) Whether she's working or playing, Eve is always intense.
- (3) Whatever they pay him, Max does his job.
- (4) Whatever she's doing, Eve is always intense.

If we call $\{she's\ working, she's\ playing\}$ the antecedent set for (2), and $\{she's\ doing\ x/x\ any\ proper\ instantiation\}$ the antecedent set for (4), we can say that what these constructions express is that the truth of the consequent is unconditional on the choice of an antecedent from the antecedent set. That's why I call them unconditionals.

Given their form and their meaning, unconditionals are at the crossroads of four related construction types: regular conditionals, concessives, interrogatives, and free relatives. This has inspired several ways of analysing them.

2. Ways of dealing with unconditionals

2.1 Unconditionals as free relatives

Unconditionals with their characteristic properties located somewhere between conditionals, concessives, interrogatives, and free relatives are found in many languages, so it comes as no surprise that they appear with almost identical properties also in German. One of the most interesting and ambitious grammars of German, the one by the East Berlin “Akademie” (Autorenkollektiv 1981) treats c-unconditionals such as (5) as “concessive relative clauses”:

- (5) Was du auch einwenden magst, unser Programm steht fest.
'Whatever you may object, our program is all set.'

Since the German particle *auch* like the English *-ever* goes with relative, but not with interrogative *wh*-words, this decision is easy to understand, but is it correct? I think, it is

not, and this can easily be shown. First of all, free relatives are of the same category as the extraction site of their *wh*-phrase. Therefore, e. g. *wherever*-free relatives are location adverbials. If so, sentences like (6) should have but one reading, namely one with such an adverbial modifying the rest of the sentence.

(6) Wherever you live(,) you have to pay your taxes.

But, as Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) note, there are two readings of (6), the expected adverbial one and a clearly different one, where the locationally unspecified main clause is asserted as not depending on where the addressee lives, which of course is the unconditional reading. (These readings tend to be distinguished by inserting *vs.* omitting a comma or pause.)

The second argument comes from the presence of the possibility of multiple *wh*-ing with unconditionals, which is absent from free relatives. Cf. (7) vs. (8):

(7) Whoever bribed whomever with however big an amount, one cannot trust this government anymore.

(8) *Eve enjoys whatever she does whenever.

So it seems that the free relative analysis of unconditionals can be clearly ruled out.

2.2 Unconditionals as regular conditionals

Another possibility hinted at in König and Eisenberg (1984) would be to take the unconditionals as just a stylistic variant of regular conditionals, postulating thus that (9) is a paraphrase of (1) and (10) a paraphrase of (3):

(9) If they pay him well or not, Max does his job.

(10) If they pay him something, Max does his job.

This seems to be a fairly good approximation, but it fails to explain why (11) and (12) don't seem to be good paraphrases of each other, nor do (13) and (14):

(11) Whether he is in Stanford or in Cambridge, Max is happy.

(12) If he is in Stanford or in Cambridge, Max is happy.

(13) Whatever she wears, Amanda looks pretty.

(14) If she wears something, Amanda looks pretty.

Obviously, unconditionals lack the tendency to what sometimes is called 'conditional perfection', i.e. the transformation of a conditional into a biconditional. So something is missing in a pure "unconditionals are conditionals"-analysis.

2.3 Unconditionals as interrogatives

Given all this, the best option seems to consider unconditionals as special interrogatives, interrogatives that neither ask questions nor serve as arguments, but function as topic setters, just like some of their unembedded counterparts such as head-line interrogatives. Furthermore these special interrogatives serve as generalizing devices, just like their free relative counterparts.

There is one problem left open by this analysis: How come there are no polarity-unconditionals, i.e. no unconditional counterparts of sentences like (15):

(15) Whether Max is well paid is a well-kept secret.

(16) ?Whether Max is well paid, he does his job.

We will have to come back to this question below.

3. Unconditionals and recent accounts of conditionals

3.2 Barwise's three-place analysis: protasis, epidosis, background

In his paper on "Conditionals and Conditional Information" (Barwise 1987), Jon Barwise argues that for a unified account of mathematical and ordinary language conditionals a three-place analysis is required, where the visible two arguments, i.e. protasis and epidosis, are complemented by a third argument, the invisible background. So (17) formalizes (18), to be read 'S involves S' given B', where B captures something like normal circumstances:

(17) If Claire rubs her eyes, then she is sleepy.

(18) $S \rightarrow S'|B$

If normal circumstances include that there is no pollen X present, then this account blocks the intuitively unwanted inference from (17) to (19), which a two-place standard account would have granted.

(19) If Claire is rubbing her eyes and there is pollen X present, then she is sleepy.

Now compare (20). In contrast to the just mentioned inference from (17) to (19), the inference from (20) to (19) seems to be correct. How come, given that both *if*- and *then*-clause are the same in (17) and (20)?

(20) Whatever the circumstances are, if Claire is rubbing her eyes, then she is sleepy. Obviously, the unconditional preface of (20) changes the background, makes it larger so that even non-standard circumstances like the presence of pollen X are included. (If this is correct, the very existence of unconditionals can be turned into an argument for positing the hidden B parameter, since without it they would be pointless.)

But now note that the hidden background parameter B is not a specific property of conditionals but is required by simple clauses as well. So if one formalizes (21) as (22), parallel to (17) and (18), the intuitively unwanted inference to (23) (if one considers the presence of pollen X to be an exceptional cause of nervousness) can be blocked from being formally forced upon us.

(21) Jim never gets nervous.

(22) $S|B \blacktriangleright$

(23) Jim never gets nervous, if pollen X is present. .

3.2 Kratzer's three-part analysis: modal operator, protasis, epidosis

Angelika Kratzer (in Kratzer 1986 and earlier papers cited there) argues for a different three-part analysis of conditionals that goes back in spirit to Lewis' "Adverbs of Quantification" (Lewis 1975). She proposes to analyse sentences like (24) as consisting of a typed modal operator, a restriction, and an epidosis.

(24) If it snows, then it is freezing.

[Nomic must: it snows] it is freezing

The second line of (24) gives an idea of what this amounts to. *Nomic must* is to be read as physical necessity. This brings up the interesting question whether all of the adverbs of quantification, not only those translated by Kratzer as necessity operators, in their wide scope reading, go as well with unconditionals as they do with conditions.

Although my informants disagree to some extent, this does not seem to be the case, but a contrast arises that is shown in (25) vs. (26):

(25) Always/never/sometimes/seldom/mostly, if Max is paid well, does he do his job.

(26) Always/never/?sometimes/?seldom/?mostly, whether Max is paid well or not, does he do his job.

Non-universal adverbs of quantification seem to be harder to get with unconditionals than with conditionals.

I will conclude with an outline of what I think is the lesson to be learned from these considerations.

3.3 A four-place analysis and a unified account of conditionals and unconditionals

I propose to treat both conditionals and unconditionals as local background-adjusting devices. Their common denominator is a four-place structure consisting of (a) a background, (b) a quantification operator like *always*, *mostly*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, *never*, indexed for a modality type (epistemic, nomic, mathematical, common-sensical, . . .), (c) a protasis, and (d) an epidosis.

Their specific difference is the following: If the assumed background is larger than the domain for which the epidosis assertion, be it specific or general, is intended to be valid, then a conditional is used as protasis, serving as a local background-restriction. If on the other hand the assumed background is narrower than the domain for which the epidosis assertion, be it specific or general, is intended to be valid, then an unconditional is used as protasis, serving as a local background-amplification which adds at least one alternative. Compare (27), (28), and (29):

(27) The sum of the angles of this triangle is 180 degrees.

(28) If this is an even-sided triangle, the sum of its angles is 180 degrees.

(29) Whether this is an even-sided triangle or not, the sum of its angles is 180 degrees.

Suppose a background of normal Euclidean planar geometry. Then what one would say is (27). (28), in comparison, sounds as if there were a possibility of things described by the epidosis being different with a different protasis, as if there were a non-void restriction. (29), on the other hand, can be used to cancel the assumption that there could be such a restriction. If this is correct, all three of the above-mentioned properties of unconditionals can be explained:

(a) Polarity interrogatives cannot serve as unconditionals, since part of the meaning of the latter is that they generalize over at least two alternatives.

(b) Unconditionals do not go well together with non-universal quantification, since generality is built into their meaning.

(c) Conditionals tend to invite the inference that the sufficient condition might be necessary too by implicating that everywhere outside the restricted domain, the epidosis is not valid; unconditionals lack this effect, since they do not restrict the background, but on the contrary they amplify it, so no attention is directed towards the area outside the background domain.

For lack of space, the question of how interrogatives can be treated in a way that allows as well for their argument and questioning function, as for their topic setting one, will have to be left for another occasion, whichever that may be.

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