

Additions in Internet-based communication

An analysis of selected syntactic-semantic and functional aspects of additions in online comments, online columns and associated comment forums.

Introduction

Regarding current syntactical trends in written contemporary German, we observe that sentence structure, which is relatively fixed in German due to various syntax rules, is being relaxed as a result of various factors such as e. g., spoken language in the media (see Marschall 2015, p. 202). Numerous major changes have been identified, in particular in the post-field, that until recently would have been considered rule violations (see Vinckel-Roisin 2015, p. 3). Nowadays, they represent a typical syntactical characteristic of spoken German and are simultaneously characteristic of certain text types of written contemporary language, such as media language (see Marschall 2015, p. 202).

This article focuses on additions that prove to be highly productive and stylistically interesting elements in the right sentence periphery (see Tavčar-Pirkovič 2017). We analysed their syntactic and semantic aspects as well as their stylistic functions in a number of commenting textual methods or text types in various German online newspapers and magazines. Based on the analysis of literary press and advertising texts, Marschall (2015, p. 202f.) shows that occupying the post-field is motivated by style and text type, i. e. that clause placement in the post-field is characteristic of certain styles of language and speaking (e. g. media language) and is associated with certain causes and objectives. Post-field occupation fundamentally contributes to improved comprehensibility and information structure “due to a more convenient structure of the information and more precise steering of focus” (ibid., translated from German original).

Structural and functional aspects of additions

In general, it can be said that grammarians accept two possible conceptions of the right sentence periphery: On the one hand, the post-field represents everything after the right sentence bracket. On the other hand, the field after the right sentence bracket is divided into the post-field and the right outer field. Following the most recent findings of Zifonun (2015, p. 49), we do not apply the distinction between post-field and right outer field in our article, as established by the IDS grammar. In accordance with Zifonun, we instead assume zones of condensed and reduced syntacticity after the right sentence bracket.

As a result, we consider additions as those types of structures that appear after the right sentence bracket in our empirical analysis. These are syntactically, prosodically/graphically and/or pragmatically disintegrated elements, i. e. they are normally differentiated from the preceding sentence by a break and/or graphic means. They often occur with connective, modifiable or graduating expressions such as *jedenfalls*, *also*, *und zwar*, *noch* etc. From a semantic perspective, additions expand, complement or specify the preceding sentence and can have the following stylistic-communicative functions: they highlight and emphasise important information, disentangle information (simplified understanding), add and specify information, increase rhematic elements, enable a later addition of forgotten information and correct information in the preceding sentence.

All aforementioned syntactical, morphological, phonological and stylistic-communicative criteria to define additions were considered and, in particular in problematic cases (differentiation between additions and addendums), discussed in the empirical analysis.

Corpus and methodological approach

In the analysis, additions that exhibit an evaluative function and, to varying degrees even an argumentative function are thoroughly investigated in a number of commenting communicative methods in various online newspapers and magazines. In contrast to journal articles, fiction etc., (online) newspapers and magazines very rapidly pick up on linguistic innovations and thus very clearly reveal linguistic and societal trends in contemporary language and language change (see Mair 2008, p. 1121). Aside from online comments and columns discussing the controversial topic “cultivation of cannabis for critically ill patients”, we also analyse posts in related comment forums in ZEIT ONLINE, TAZ.DE, SPIEGEL ONLINE and FAZ.NET. In contrast to systematically written, text-oriented and edited online articles, posts constitute an interaction-oriented, communicative practice that is also characterised by conceptual orality. In addition to evaluative and argumentative functions, posts can also exhibit a phatic function (see Fandrych/Thurmair 2011, p. 141). Our aim is to highlight differences in linguistic forms (here additions) or medium-dependent variation by comparing text- and interaction-oriented communicative online methods (see Gredel/Herzberg/Storrer 2018, p. 483, Kupietz et al. 2014, Storrer 2017, 2019).

We chose the online platforms of media outlets that are of supra-regional importance and are among the most recognised opinion-forming German-language print media both in Germany and across Europe. Nonetheless, the fact that the users speak German is characteristic of the comment sections. Selecting newspaper articles from a thematically-restricted discourse enables us to compare occurrences of additions and their functions in various online portals with regard to potentially differing approaches within a single consistent topic. The corpus contains one online article and its associated comment section per online newspaper. In the case of ZEIT ONLINE, only a comparable number of words was used due to the extensive length of the comment sections associated with the article.

In the individual text analyses, which are based on the model for text-linguistic analysis by Brinker/Cölfen/Pappert (2018), the additions were initially defined, analysed and described in terms of the syntactical-semantic characteristics per communicative method. Then, the stylistic-communicative functions were determined and finally comparatively discussed.

Results of the analysis and conclusion

Additions occur predominantly in interaction-oriented posts in comment forums but are also relatively frequent in text-oriented, systematically written and edited online newspaper articles. From a quantitative perspective, additions are less frequent in text-oriented online newspaper articles and exhibit modest structural diversity. From a functional perspective, additions in online newspaper articles are necessary to highlight certain central pieces of information or to clarify and add to information from the preceding sentence while contributing to language dynamics and emphasis through language economy (addi-

tions are short, elliptical, rhythmic etc.). Furthermore, additions simplify comprehensibility and processing of complex content and structures in online newspaper articles. Following Marschall (2015, p. 202 f.), we can therefore summarise that additions as well as other post-field structures in online newspaper articles turn into a kind of complementary area in the right sentence region where rhematic elements are used to specify or highlight information, or are organised according to the principle of comparison. The following examples demonstrate the use of additions in newspaper articles:

- (1) *Drogen werden konsumiert – **ob legal oder nicht***. (TAZ.DE: online commentary “Zeit zu legalisieren”)
- (2) *Sie schreiben echtem Dope einige hundert zusätzlicher Wirkungen gegen alle möglichen Krankheiten zu – **von Diabetes über Depressionen bis Farbenblindheit***. (SPIEGEL ONLINE: online column “Kiffer in der Krise”)

Aside from the more frequent occurrence and greater structural variety as well as complexity (additions in additions, longer additions) of the additions in interaction-oriented posts in comment forums, however, their functional aspect in particular must also be highlighted. In many cases, additions in posts fulfil different functions than in online newspaper articles. Similar to spoken language, they are used to add information in the right sentence margin, namely forgotten information or modifications, graduation and less frequently corrections to the preceding sentence. With regard to production conditions, we can assume that, despite their medial, graphic realisation, additions in posts develop spontaneously in the writing process as a consequence of interaction-oriented writing experiences and the frequent linguistic proximity orientation or conceptual orality. Additions can therefore be considered an expression of emotional linguistic textuality. The following post is an example of an accumulation of additions and their associated complexity (additions in additions, longer additions):

- (3) *Nach Expertenmeinungen besteht dabei die Gefahr von Langzeitnachwirkungen (¹**anders als beim Alkohol**, ²**allerdings wird auch davon bei uns zu viel konsumiert**): ³**im Gehirn bleiben Reste kristalliner Verbindungen** (⁴**mit kumulativem Effekt, der sich proportional zur Häufigkeit des Konsums erhöht**), die noch längere Zeit nach Aufnahme der Droge ins Blut gelangen und dort ihre bewusstseinsstrübende Wirkung entfalten können – ⁵**fatal für Leute, die Maschinen bedienen oder am Straßenverkehr teilnehmen***. (FAZ.DE: to the online commentary “Oans, zwoa, g'kiff!”)

In the next example, the two additions must also be considered a kind of accumulation of additional, spontaneous elements (here exceptions). This interpretation is further supported by the placement of the brackets.

- (4) *Stoiber hat natürlich Recht, die Gesellschaft muss Jugendliche davor schützen, sich das ganze Leben durch Cannabis zu versauen. Schon allein deshalb muss es beim Verbot bleiben (**außer vielleicht für Schwerstkranke, da kann man vielleicht eine Ausnahme machen**)*. (TAZ.DE: to the online commentary “Zeit zu legalisieren”)

However, similar to Große (2015, p. 57), we identified a relatively major heterogeneity in the selected posts used in this analysis: the posts that were made to essentially comment on the newspaper article and that often appear in “isolation” or have no follow-up posts mostly look like news stories. By contrast, other posts, frequently shorter and related to one another, are more reminiscent of dialogue sequences. Whether additions in longer,

more strongly text-oriented posts have similar functions to additions in newspaper articles, and occur less frequently, is an interesting future research questions that could not be answered in this limited analysis.

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