

Different Meanings of Causal Clauses in Historical German

In contemporary German, causal clauses can be marked in different ways: by prepositions (e.g. *wegen* 'because of', *aufgrund* 'based on'), by adverbs (e.g. *deshalb* 'therefore', *deswegen* 'hence') and by conjunctions (*weil* 'because', *denn* 'for', *da* 'since'). While prepositions and adverbs are attributed to just one kind of reasoning – propositional or factual reasoning – *weil*, above all others, allows more than one type of reasoning.

Inspired by Sweetser's model, in which causal relationships can be interpreted on three cognitive levels – content domain, epistemic domain, and speech act domain (Sweetser 1990, Volodina 2011) – German research literature of the 1990s dealt intensively with the interpretation of causal sentences.

First of all, the verb position of the subordinate clause was used as an indication of which type of reasoning exists. Consequently, the prevalent opinion was that *weil*-sentences with the verb in clause-final position are factual sentences and attributable to the propositional reasoning type, as in (1), and that *weil*-sentences with the verb in clause-second position, as in (2), are statements of utterance or rather belong to the epistemic reasoning type (e.g. Uhmann 1998, Keller 1993).

- (1) Ich gehe ins Bett, weil ich müde bin.
I'm going to bed because I'm tired.
- (2) Es hat Frost gegeben, weil die Wasserrohre sind heute Nacht geplatzt.
There has been frost because the water pipes burst last night.

Only since the 2000s was this strict division relinquished and focus put on so-called modality markers (Blühdorn 2008), which can also trigger the epistemic reasoning type, as in (3) the modal verb *müssen* 'must':

- (3) Fritz muss krank sein, weil er so bleich ist.
Fritz must be ill because he is so pale.

In addition, it is only since that period that attention has been paid to the third type of reasoning according to the speech act domain, as in (4) and (5) (i. a. Frey 2015, Speyer 2015).

- (4) Maria ist krank, weil du dich doch immer für sie interessierst.
Because you are always interested in Maria, she is ill.
- (5) Peter ist zu Hause. Weil, du regst dich da immer so auf.
Peter is at home. This is because you're always so upset about this.

As these examples show, on one hand, the verb position in the *weil*-sentence seems to be no criterion for the interpretation of the sentence. On the other, it is not clear whether each type of speech act is suitable for this type of reasoning or not.

Looking at this subject historically, it is striking that only a few studies deal with this topic. Eroms 1980, after all, mentions the epistemic type of reasoning for Middle High German, but makes it dependent on the verb position of the sentence.

Speyer, on the other hand, in his pilot study for Early New High German in 2011, found that the position of the verb is not a good criterion for interpreting the meaning of causal sentences, even though he found a preference for verb-final position in propositional and verb-second position in epistemic causal sentences. Only Gagel 2017 – also in Early New High German – considered all three reasoning types and, using the *diweil* 'in the meanwhile' as an example that regardless of the level of meaning domain primarily verb-final position occurs.

My pilot study 2015 for Middle High German and Early New High German has also shown that it is not the verb position in the differentiation of propositional and epistemic causal sentences which is helpful, but instead modality markers, as summarized by Blühdorn 2008.

My poster will give an overview of the development of the German language and present the results of a pilot study together with first results from the reference corpus Old German in ANNIS. The guiding questions are: Which of the causal conjunctions existing in historical German have developed in which direction? Which types of reasoning could they initiate? Which verb position was favored? Which modality markers contributed to the disambiguation?

References:

- Blühdorn, Hardarik (2008): Epistemische Lesarten von Satzkonnectoren – Wie sie zustande kommen und wie man sie erkennt. In: Pohl, Inge (eds.): *Semantik und Pragmatik – Schnittstellen*. Frankfurt/Main. S. 217-251.
- Eroms, Hans-Werner (1980): Funktionskonstanz und Systemstabilisierung bei den begründenden Konjunktionen im Deutschen. In: *Sprachwissenschaft* 5, 1. S 73-115.
- Fleczonek, Constanze (2015): Kausale Beziehungen im mittelhochdeutschen und frühneuhochdeutschen „Wilhelm von Österreich“. Masterthesis.
- Frey, Werner (2016): On some correlations between formal and interpretative properties of causal clauses. In: Reich, Ingo / Speyer, Augustin (eds.): *Co- and subordination in German and other languages. Special issue of Linguistische Berichte* 21, 153-179.
- Gagel, Sebastian (2017): Frühneuhochdeutsche Konnectoren. Entwicklungslinien kausaler Verknüpfungen auf dem Gebiet der Modalität. Berlin / Boston.
- Keller, Rudi (1993): Das epistemische *weil*. Bedeutungswandel einer Konjunktion. In: Heringer, Hans Jürgen / Stötzel, Georg (eds.): *Sprachgeschichte und Sprachkritik. Festschrift für Peter von Polenz zum 65. Geburtstag*. Berlin / New York. S. 219-247.
- Speyer, Augustin (2011): Zur Integriertheit kausaler (Neben-)Sätze im Frühneuhochdeutschen. In: *Sprachwissenschaft* 36, 1. S. 53-84.
- Sweetser, Eve (1990): From etymology to pragmatics. Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure. In: *Cambridge Studies in Linguistics* 54. Cambridge.
- Uhmann, Susanne (1998): Verbstellungsvariation in *weil*-Sätzen: lexikalische Differenzierung mit grammatischen Folgen. In: *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 17, S. 92-139.
- Volodina, Anna (2011): Sweetser's Drei-Ebenen-Theorie: Theoretische Überlegungen vor dem Hintergrund einer korpuslinguistischen Studie über konditionale und kausale Relationen. In: Ferraresi, Gisella (eds.): *Konnectoren im Deutschen und im Sprachvergleich. Beschreibung und grammatische Analyse*. Tübingen. S. 127-155.
- <https://korpling.org/annis3/ddd>