Relevant outputs of theoretical and descriptive contrastive linguistics for foreign language grammar writing

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Kontrastive Grammatikschreibung im europäischen Vergleich Theorie, Methoden und Anwendungen

2.10.2014
Overview

1. Goals of the talk

2. Presentation of the ICOCP-SNSF Project

3. Relevance of the project’s results for grammar writing
   • Focus on Cleft sentences

4. Concluding remarks
1. Goals of the talk
Goals

1. Show the relevance of descriptive and theoretical outputs produced by contrastive, corpus-based studies for grammar writing

2. Foster the dialogue between “contrastive-comparative” linguistics and language teaching

3. Discuss methodological issues
   • Availability of comparable corpora
   • Use of translation corpora
2. Presentation of the ICOCP-SNSF Project
General information

- **Title**: Italian Constituent Order in a Contrastive Perspective (ICOCP)

- **Funding**: Swiss National Science Foundation (PP00P1_133716 / 1)

- **Host institute**: Italianistica, Universität Basel

- **Duration**: 1.9.2011-31.8.2015

- **Staff**: 3 PhDs, 1 scientific collaborator
Goals of the ICOCP Project

• better understand the complexity and contradictions of constituent order in contemporary Italian
  – Semi-free word order + use of clefts
  – sa femme décide > c’est sa femme qui décide / *décide sa femme.
  – sua moglie decide > è sua moglie che decide / decide sua moglie

• highlight the distinctive properties of contemporary Italian through a contrastive perspective
  – Italian / French, Spanish, German, English
  – Frequency – form – function
The comparative nature of the ICOCP project

• ICOCP is not a typological project
  – Very small number of languages
  – Languages belonging to only two language families
  – Goal is not to find systematic correlations and implications between the contrasts identified in different parts of the grammar

• ICOCP is not a classic Contrastive Linguistics project
  – Focus on more than two languages
  – Description of contrasts, similarities and equivalences
  – Main aim is not didactic
Research Corpus

• ICOCP Corpus

  – representative sample of written texts in five languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Total words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_Italian</td>
<td>± 600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_French</td>
<td>± 400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_Spanish</td>
<td>± 350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_German</td>
<td>± 350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_English</td>
<td>± 425,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_Total</td>
<td>± 2 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main properties of ICOCP corpus

- Multilingual corpus of $\pm 2$ million words
- Written texts
- Electronic texts
- Comparable texts
- News items
Sources of news items of category I – newspaper articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICOCP_Italian</th>
<th>la Repubblica (repubblica.it), Corriere della Sera (corriere.it), il Sole 24 Ore (ilsole24ore.com), la Stampa (lastampa.it), Corriere del Ticino (cdt.ch), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch), Zenit (zenit.org)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_French</td>
<td>le Figaro (lefigaro.fr), le Monde (lemonde.fr), le Temps (letemps.ch), le Courrier (lecourrier.ch), La Libre (lalibre.be), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_Spanish</td>
<td>El País (elpais.com), El Mundo (elmundo.es)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_German</td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine (faz.net), Tagesspiegel (tagesspiegel.de), NZZ (nzz.ch), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICOCP_English</td>
<td>The Guardian (guardian.co.uk), The New York Times (nytimes.com), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Relevance of the project’s results for (foreign language) grammar writing

Cleft sentences
3.1. Brief description of cleft sentences
Cleft sentences – *Frasì scisse* (Roggia 2009)

ENEL advertisement, *Corriere della Sera* 29.3.2011
Cleft Sentences across Romance and Germanic languages

I: È stato Luigi a dirmelo.
S: Fue Juan quien me lo dijo.
F: C’est Jean qui me l’a dit.
P: O João é que me lo disse.
C: Sou vosaltres qui ho haveu dit.
R: El e acela care a spus adevărul.

– Metzeltin 2010, Erklärende Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen, p. 25

E: It’s John who told it to me.
G: Es ist Johann, der es mir gesagt hat.

Cf. Smits 1989, Eurogrammar: The Relative and Cleft Constructions of the Germanic and Romance Languages
De Cesare (ed.), in press, Frequency, Forms and Functions of Cleft Constructions in Romance and Germanic. Contrastive, Corpus-based Studies
The building blocks of clefts

I  [ è Luigi ]c₁ [che me lo ha detto]c₂
G  [ es ist Johann,]c₁ [der es mir gesagt hat]c₂

• [ ]c₁ = copular clause
• [ ]c₂ = cleft clause
• Copula
• Cleft constituent (CC)
Clefts = monoclausal sentences

I [è Luigi]₁ [che me lo ha detto]₂
G [es ist Johann,]₁ [der es mir gesagt hat]₂

I [Luigi me lo ha detto]₁
G [Johann hat es mir gesagt]₁
Why focus on clefts?

1. Discuss the Compensation Mechanism Principle

2. Italian: one of the diagnostic syntactic features of “neo-standard” language variety (Sabatini 1985)

3. still associated to some misguided beliefs
   • typical of oral speech (Italian)
   • calques from English (German journalistic prose)

4. interesting contrast and similarities Italian-German (work in progress)

5. particularly challenging to describe in grammars for non-native speakers
3.2. Cleft sentences in Italian grammars for German speakers


*Italian grammars for Italian native speakers*

General remarks

• Significant differences between the grammars
  – Depth in the description of clefts
    • Nothing in H
    • Succinct description in G (1 ex.) and K (2 occ. of same ex.)
    • Quite extensive description in R&W, SW
  – Examples (number, type: first / prototypical)
  – German equivalents (translations)
General remarks

• Basic shortcomings of all Italian grammars for German speakers:

1. Do not always provide the whole range of clefts sentences
2. Main differences, similarities and equivalences between Italian and German cleft sentences are unclear
   • frequency, form, function
3. German equivalents to Italian clefts are unclear
4. Tend to focus on formal issues (agreement between CC and copula)
5. Functional aspects poorly described
   • informational properties + discourse functions
K 1996 + G 2013 – one example

• È stato lui a mandarmi i fiori. *Er war es, der mir die Blumen geschickt hat.* [K 1996: 298 + 517]

• Sono loro (non noi) che vogliono viaggiare sempre in autunno. *Sie (nicht wir) wollen immer im Herbst reisen.* [G 2013: 236]
### R&W (72012: 479): selection of examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>È lei che porta i pantaloni / calzoni.</td>
<td>Sie hat die Hosen an.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>È stato Angelo che ci ha tradito.</td>
<td>Angelo hat uns verraten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>Sono le chiavi che non riesco a trovare.</td>
<td>Die Schlüssel kann ich nicht finden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>È te che stanno cercando.</td>
<td>Dich suchen sie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO</td>
<td>È a tua sorella che ho dato il pacco.</td>
<td>Deiner Schwester habe ich das Paket gegeben.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Fu proprio a lei che ricorsero.</td>
<td>Gerade an sie wandten sie sich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>È a Firenze che ci siamo conosciuti.</td>
<td>In Florenz haben wir uns kennen gelernt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**33 examples: not a single Spaltsatz**
# Schwarze 1995 – Selection of examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Sei <strong>tu</strong> che <strong>hai</strong> sbagliato</td>
<td>‘Du bist es, der sich geirrt hat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>È stata <strong>lei</strong> che me l’<strong>ha</strong> detto</td>
<td>‘Sie war es, die es mir gesagt hat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>È questa regola che non riesco a capire.</td>
<td>‘Es ist diese <strong>Regel</strong>, die ich nicht begreifen kann’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>Sono questi versi che volevo citare.</td>
<td>‘Diese <strong>Verse</strong> sind es, die ich zitieren wollte’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>È a Carlo che ho chiesto di venire</td>
<td>‘Carlo ist es, den ich gebeten habe zu kommen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>È così che ho imparato a sciare</td>
<td>‘So habe ich Ski fahren gelernt’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fazit: examples + translations

• Two different descriptions:

1. Italian cleft // non-cleft clause in which Italian CC occurs in the Vorfeld (R&W 2012)

2. Italian cleft // German cleft (S 1995)
   • Asymmetry between Arguments and Adverbials
   • Different positions of the CC

➢ Adequacy of the description?
➢ Parameters at play?
3.3. Cleft sentences in contrastive, corpus-based studies

**Italian-German**

Grewendorf / Poletto 1989, 1991
De Cesare 2011, De Cesare et al. in press
Frequency in ICOCP corpus

• Research methods
  – semi-manual extraction of all the occurrences of clefts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>German es</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>essere ‘to be’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a ‘to’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>che, cui, quale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘who, what, which’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of keywords 1 (Cleft sentences proper)
## Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
<th>Normalized frequency (100’000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Italian-German: ± 3:1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

De Cesare et al. in press
## Form
### Syntactic function of the cleft constituent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*S: Subject / C: Complement / A: Adverbial*

NF: Normalized frequency (100‘000)
%
percentage out of total of clefts
1. Italo Calvino 1993 [1952, Einaudi], *Il visconte dimezzato*, Milano, Mondadori (10 occ.)
   Italo Calvino 82004 [1985, München, Carl Hanser Verlag], *Der geteilte Visconte*, trad. ted. Oswald von Nostitz, München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (2 occ.)

   Susanna Tamaro 1995, *Geh, wohin dein Herz dich trägt*, trad. ted. Maja Pflug, Zürich, Diogenes (7 occ.)

   Vincenzo Todisco 2001, *Das Krallenauge*, trad. ted. Maja Pflug, Zürich, Rotpunktverlag (6 occ.)
Syntactic form and position of cleft constituent functioning as Subject

- Lexical vs pronominal Subject // Informational properties of the CC

1. Mia madre è morta insoddisfatta e rancorosa, senza mai essere sfiorata dal dubbio che almeno qualche colpa fosse sua. Era il mondo a essere crudele perché non le aveva offerto delle scelte migliori. (Tamaro, pp. 33-34)

   Es war die Welt, die grausam war, weil sie ihr keine bessere Wahl gelassen hatte. (p. 36)

2. - Tienti qua, - disse mio zio, perché era lui che s’era avvicinato alle mie spalle. E voleva m’afferassi alla sua spalla, dalla parte della lama. (Calvino, p. 43)

   “Halte dich hieran fest”, sagte mein Onkel, denn er war es, der sich mir von hinten genähert hatte. Und er wollte, daß ich mich an die scharfe Schneide seines Degens klammern sollte. (p. 46)
5. Concluding remarks
General remarks

• Integration of the ICOCP findings into grammar writing ought to be discussed case by case
  – Depends on the nature of the grammar (based on differences, similarities etc.; levels of the learner; descriptive or practical aim etc.)

• Suggestions for improvements:
  – Parameters to be described (explicitly?): frequency, form and function
  – Clefts in German should be provided only in some of the translations (clefts on Subject vs Adverbial; but not in all clefts on subject)
  – Form-Function interface: clefts should be provided in context (given-new CC)
  – Use real translations: also starting for other known languages (French)
Translations (Clefts on adverbial)

• French > Italian and German

• Adverbial + cohesive function

– « C’est pour cela que j’en appelle à la mobilisation »
– “E’ per questo che invito tutti alla mobilitazione”
– „Deshalb rufe ich zur Mobilisierung auf“

[Monde diplomatique]
Grazie / Gracias / Grazas

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References


De Cesare, Anna-Maria 2011, L’ordine dei costituenti in italiano contemporaneo e in prospettiva contrastiva con il tedesco. Tra sintassi, pragmatica e tipologia linguistica, Habilitationsschrift, Italianistica, University of Basel, Ms., pp. 442.


References

