Changes in communicative style in recent German: More interactional, less direct

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German communicative style in contrast to English style

(1a) Eng Orig: Suppose you are a doctor in an emergency room and a patient tells you…

(1b) Literal Ger Trans: Stellen Sie sich vor, Sie wären ein Arzt in der Notaufnahme, und eine Patientin sagt Ihnen…

(1c) Published Ger Trans: In der Notfallaufnahme eines Krankenhauses berichtet eine Patientin…

"In the emergency room of a hospital, a patient reports…"

➤ Literal German translation is stylistically awkward.

➤ Professional Engl.-German translators apply a 'cultural filter' (House 1997).

Structure

1. Short overview of German communicative preferences (in contrast to English ones)

2. Changes in written German: Diachronic corpus studies of popular scientific articles (1978-1982 vs. 1999-2002)

3. Changes in spoken interaction: Requests (1970s-80s vs. today)

4. Conclusions and outlook

Engl.-German contrasts in communicative style

English discourse has a tendency towards...	German discourse has a tendency towards...
indirectness	indirectness
other-orientation	self-orientation
person-orientation	person-orientation
implicitness	explicitness
verbal routines	ad-hoc formulation
-> interactional	interactional

Table 1: Dimensions of cross-cultural contrasts between English and German discourse (adapted from House 1997: 84)

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Data

* The Popular Science Corpus

(University of Hamburg, Research Center on Multilingualism):

1. English texts

2. Their German translations

3. Comparable (non-translated) German texts)

• *Scientific American* and *New Scientist* and from the German journal *Spektrum der Wissenschaft*

• Time-span: 1978-1982; 1999-2002

The Popular Science Corpus

	1978-1982	1999-2002
English source texts	26 texts	38 texts
Their German translations	26 texts	38 texts
Non-translated German texts	19 texts 82,480 words	32 texts 100,648 words

Table 2: Structure of the popular science corpus

Total word count: 500,000

Research on the Popular Science Corpus

* Studies have focused on use of linguistic items that are associated with expression of subjectivity and author-reader interaction in written discourse (cf. House 1996):

1. Speaker-deictic personal pronouns: *we–wir* (Baumgarten 2008)

2. Sentence-initial conjunctions: additive (*And–Und*) and concessive (*But–Aber–Doch*) (Baumgarten 2007, Becher, House & Kranich 2009)

3. Epistemic modal markers: modal verbs (e.g. *may*), modal adverbs (e.g. *perhaps*) (Kranich 2009, Kranich 2011) (cf. also Kranich, House & Becher 2012, Kranich forthc.)

Functions of sentence-initial conjunctions

* In sentence-initial position, they can be used to simulate direct interaction (cf. Becher et al. 2009)
* e.g. in question-response patterns

(1)   **But** what caused these calamities in the first place...?

* often in conjunction with other elements reminiscent of spoken discourse.

(2)   Das Landesdenkmalamt hofft, solchem Vandalismus durch Aufklärung vorbeugen zu können. **Und** durch ein bisschen Geheimniskrämerei.
      'The heritage department hopes to prevent such vandalism through education. And through a little bit of secretiveness.'

(Examples taken from Becher et al. (2009: 139) and Baumgarten (2007: 164) respectively)

Functions of epistemic modal markers

* Speakers/writers using epistemic modal markers a low commitment to the truth of the propositions expressed in their utterances. (cf. e.g. Coates 1995: 59)
* Motivations to use them:
1. Content-based caution: Speaker isn't sure whether the proposition p is true. e.g. *Paul **may** be at home right now.*
2. Addressee-based caution: the speaker is sure that p is true, but does not want to shock/insult hearer by stating blandly "p is true", assuming perhaps that hearer believed p not to be true. e.g. *You **may** have a problem with alcohol.*

(cf. Hyland 1996)

Addressee-oriented use of epistemic modal markers

* This interpersonal use of epistemic modality motivated by a wish to be more polite, state matters less directly and leave more room for non-face-threatening intervention (such as disagreement) on the part of the addressee. A more "dialogic" text (White & Sano 2006).

(3) "Alter Muskel rostet nicht" **mag** also der Slogan lauten.

"Old muscle does not rust" could be the punchline.

Methods

* Corpus searches using paraconc (for *and-und*, *but-aber*, personal pronouns)
* Manual analyses of 'mini-corpus' consisting of the text beginnings and text endings of texts in the corpus, all in all 3840 sentences (for the search of all epistemic modal markers)

Changes in German original popular science texts

	1978-1982	1999-2002	Increase
First person pronoun *Wir*	17.7	36.3	**+105%**
Sentence-initial *Aber/Doch*	9.0	19.8	**+120%**
Sentence-initial *Und*	0.9	4.5	**+400%**
Epistemic modal markers	181.3	271.9	**+50%**

Frequencies normalized per 10,000 words for *Und* and *wir*; per 1,000 sentences for *Aber/Doch* and epistemic modal expressions.

Summary of findings on popular science writing

* Increase of all the linguistic markers creating more personal, more interactional and – in the case of epistemic markers – more indirect texts.

* As a result, the clear-cut contrasts existing between the English and German texts in 1978-1982 no longer hold true in the 1999-2002 texts.

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Previous findings on requests in German

* **Methods used**: DCT, role-plays, notebook/ diary entries, audio taped interviews and authentic conversations (cf. e.g. overview in House 2010)

* **Main findings**: German speakers interact in more direct ways, explicit and verbose, self-directed, are more content-oriented → consistent pattern of cross-cultural differences

* "Germans prefer more direct expressions when making requests" (House 2010: 570)

* Germans use less conventional indirectness but more imperatives (House and Kasper 1981)

Methods and data

* Discourse completion test (DCT) consisting of scripted dialogues representing socially differentiated situations, eliciting requests

* Participants: German and English university students (30 each) n=60

* Theoretical framework adapted from the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989)

DCTs

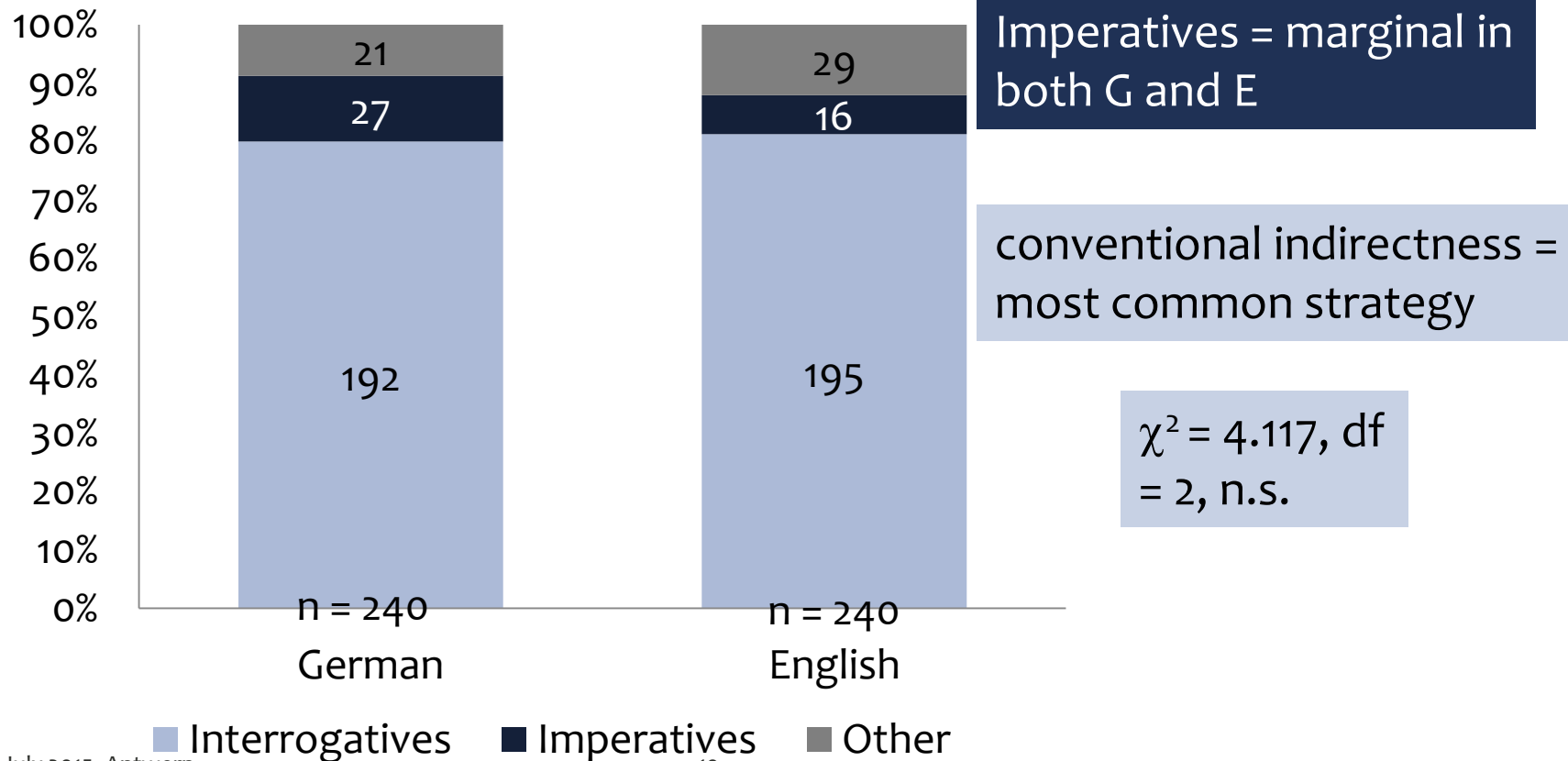|	Power	Weight
Shift off; Financing the internship	+	+
Noisy office; Extra plate	+	-
Baby sitting; Friend wants to move in	-	+
Chip shop; Tire pressure	-	-

Shift off

Female worker (F) asks her boss (M) if she could have the Saturday night shift off because she can't find a baby sitter.

* *F:*

* *M: Well, we will have to find a substitute then. I will take care of it later and let you know.*

Quantitative findings on English-German request behavior

Imperatives = marginal in both G and E

conventional indirectness = most common strategy

$\chi^2 = 4.117$, df = 2, n.s.

Chart values:
- German (n = 240): Interrogatives 192, Imperatives 27, Other 21
- English (n = 240): Interrogatives 195, Imperatives 16, Other 29

Legend: Interrogatives | Imperatives | Other

Requests on a scale of indirectness

Strategy type	Example	Ger.	Engl.
1 mood derivable (imperative)	*Keep the noise down.*	**27**	**18**
2 performatives	*Ich bitte Sie darum, die Gespräche einzustellen. ('I ask you to…')*	7	0
3 hedged performances	*Dad, I wanted to ask you if…*	4	1
4 obligation statements	*You need to check the tyre pressure.*	0	1
5 want statements	*I really wish I could take the shift off.*	0	3
6 suggestory formulae	*Guys, let's keep it down please and get back to work.*	0	2
7 query preparatory (willingness, ability)	*Papa, könntest du mir finanziell helfen? ('Dad, could you help me…')*	**195**	**208**
8 strong hints	*Honey, the tyre pressures need to be checked.*	6	4
9 mild hints	*We have an extra person staying for dinner.*	1	1
Mean value		**6.1**	**6.5**

more direct

more indirect

20

Implications

* The pattern suggests a change in preferred German conversational style

* More indirect than in previous decades

* Conventional indirectness now preferred by both English and German speakers > no significant differences between the two groups.

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Conclusion

* In written texts, linguistic markers associated with greater indirectness and interactionality are more common in present-day German than in the late 1970s / early 1980s.

* Spoken data (simulated, DCTs) shows that requests are performed more indirectly by present-day young speakers than in the 1970s / 80s, and that the most direct form, imperatives, is now rather avoided.

Conclusion and Outlook

Changes in society between 1970s and today:

* Decline of overt attention to hierarchy
* Democratization and globalization of knowledge
* Globalization of communication (Internet)
* Declining relevance of formal education as predictor of success
* Increasing validation of youth and youth culture
* (cf. Mair 2006: 1-11)

* Further plans: Investigation of other potential candidates for linguistic change driven by these social changes (e.g. boosters, hedges, personal pronouns) in both German and English.

Thank you for your attention!

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