REVIEW

Siever, Torsten, 2011. *Texte i. d. Enge. Sprachökonomische Reduktion in stark raumbegrenzten Textsorten*. (Dissertation U Hannover 2008.) Frankfurt: Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften. ISSN: 2190-6386, ISBN: 978-3-631-60529-5. 442 pages.

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Whimsical title orthographies which flirt with text jargon under discussion have become rather popular (cf. Jørgensen 2010), and this volume on – freely translated – 'Texts in constrained space' is no exception. The abbreviation "i. d." for *in der* flags the topic of reduction and other simplification and abbreviation phenomena in modern media with heavy space constraints. We will first summarise the content of the volume and see how it matches the stated goals and our own expectations, take issue with several aspects, and briefly note possible future research in the field.

The study, a doctoral dissertation, provides five unevenly dimensioned chapters, the first four of which grow exponentially in length and shrink again in the fifth: a very short introduction informally outlining the corpus-based approach, a history of related literature, an overview mainly of word formation in reduction strategies, an interpretation of the corpus materials, and a conclusion, with an extensive bibliography and two very short appendices containing web links in lieu of actual corpus samples. There are no person, subject, or data indexes.

In the introduction, a quick informal tour of rather random samples is given, with largely uncommented pictures (Fig. 1-3 is wrongly referenced as 1-4; Fig. 1-4 is not mentioned at all). Distinctions used later ("effective", "efficient") are used, but without explanation, and the methodology (collation of a corpus of texts of comparable length from different registers, plus a newspaper article control text) is outlined. An experienced reader will expect an introduction to contain first approximations to defining terms such as "economy", "Textsorte"

(here: 'register'), "Enge" ('narrow space'), "efficient", or "effective" within a broader context of restricted registers, on which there is a rather large but here uncited literature dating back to Crystal and Davy (1969), Fluck (e.g. 1978) and beyond; such definitions are detailed in contributions to Jørgensen (2010), but not referenced by Siever. Sadly, these expectations will be disappointed. References to standard text type and register taxonomies, including Jakobson's (1960) very relevant but also uncited channel-oriented functional communication model, and many later approaches, would have been helpful. This atheoretical stance is coupled with much intuitive speculation, and indeed pervades the entire volume. The introduction also gives a taste of the book's 19th and 20th century philological style, *passim in libro*, of including a plethora of vocabulary examples in narrative text, rather than clearly separating examples into (for instance) structured lists or tables to make life easier for the reader rather than just for the writer himself.

The overview of previous approaches is an eclectic tour de force from the 13th century to the present day, being particularly detailed and instructive when dealing with economy of text and speech as understood by 19th century philologists and 20th century grammarians, with an interesting but very brief excursus on the role of standardisation in the definition of industrial abbreviations. The guiding light in the second chapter is the "Minimax Principle", which here remains undefined, and which we take to mean "minimal effort with maximal effect". The discussion is detailed, though there are some oddities, such as the idiosyncratic literal interpretation of Grice's descriptive semantic "maxims" as recommendations – Grice did not write an essay on communication etiquette. The presentation strategy is essentially that of a very detailed person based rather than concept based associative narrative, with little effort to categorise, generalise and compare, and often without section summaries – maximal effort with minimal effect, perhaps?

There is a considerable literature on the history of text and speech economy which includes analysis of codes and ciphers of many kinds, from secret codes and jargon to channel-determined economies of semaphoring, morse code and street signs. These are not mentioned. Clearly a line must be drawn, but how? The obvious answer is to refer to explanatory pragmatic and sociolinguistic criteria for the functional taxonomies of restricted registers, styles and genres used by adolescent, or religious, or masonic, or criminal "in-groups" for the purpose of defining private, elite or secretive communication. One wonders, for example, why the famed cryptic punning exchange between Voltaire and Frederick

the Great of Prussia is not adduced as an early example of text messaging humour:[1]

	Frederick's invitation			Voltaire's acceptance	
Code:	p	à	ci	G	a
	venez		100		
Read as:	'venez' sous 'p'		'cent' sous 'ci'	'g grand'	'a petit'
Gloss 1:	'come' under 'p'		'hundred' under 'ci'	'capital g'	'small a'
Decoding:	Venez souper	à	Sans-Souci	J'ai grand	appetit
Gloss 2:	Come for dinner	to	Sans-Souci Palace	I have a big	appetite

There is also a long history of psycholinguistic and phonetic work into the related "hypo-articulation" and "hyper-articulation" distinction (Lindblom 1990) which would have enhanced the explanatory value of the literature review. So the "state of the art" does not come out as clearly as one would have wished.

In discussing economy as one of the principles which guides natural languages, Siever identifies, in the spirit of the chapter defining some of the key concepts, the same principle with regard to formal languages (Section 2.4). The scope of the formal languages considered there is – oddly, from the perspective of a computational linguist – limited exclusively to two arbitrarily selected programming languages (Visual Basic, C#), disregarding the primary formal languages of logic and mathematics, and even the programming style paradigms underlying programming languages (linear, structured, functional, logical, object-oriented, ...), which determine the terseness of these languages. It is quite wrong to suggest that more compact programs lead to faster processing: in general they require more processing in order to expand compact code, and indeed compiler optimisations may compile out compact formulations into much longer linear structures, for speed.

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[1] In case explanation is needed: the joke lies in the spatially reduced pun: Frederick's invitation "Venez souper" ('Come for dinner') is represented by the homophonous "venez sous p" ('come under p'), "à" means, quite normally, 'at', and "Sans Souci", the name of Frederick's palace, is represented by the homonymous "cent sous ci" ('hundred under ci'). Voltaire replies "J'ai grand appetit" ('I have a big appetite') is represented homophonously by "G" ('G grand' i.e. 'big or upper case G') followed by "a" ('a petit', i.e. 'little or lower case a').

The role of Chapter 3 is to report and illustrate the manifold ways in which economy and transparency interact in the morphology, lexicon and graphostylistics of German (with occasional recourse to other languages). Consequently, a list of reduction categories (termed "processes") emerges, which then serves to quantify and compare the degree of reduction across various types of written communication. These categories are largely conventional classifications of word formation and inflection such as those clearly expounded for English in Marchand (1960), which could profitably have been used. On occasion the author indulges in rather wild speculation, for example that very many simple items are harder to learn than fewer complex items, demonstrating that the author has not really thought carefully, despite one or two hints, about issues of simplicity and complexity, and about the effects on learning of compositionality in morphology and syntax as opposed to idiomatisation, lexicalisation and grammaticalisation. Some claims are patently false, such as that concerning the apparent unambiguity of the genitive in German – this only applies to the masculine and neuter genitive, not the feminine, which is indeterminately genitive or dative. Siever seems to be unfamiliar with issues of morphological syncretism (inflectional ambiguity). The section on graphostylistic devices serving reduction (3.3) is not particularly systematic (especially in comparison with the morphology and lexis sections) and, as a result, letter homonyms, blending techniques involving alphanumeric characters, or the ABC language (Kul 2007a) are lumped together in the visual category, doing injustice to further analysis of genre-specific differences. For an account of formal devices in SMS texts, and their history, cf. Gibbon and Kul (2010).

The empirical aims of the dissertation are the subject of Chapter 4. Some of the specific aims are: (1) to verify the working assumption that SMS text messages exhibit the highest degree of reduction as compared to other genres; (2) to investigate the role performed by anglicisms in achieving reduction. To such ends, a quantitative, corpus-based study of reduction in German was conducted on a range of text types. Siever selects the following six types: (1) Alpenpanorama (TV information for tourists); (2) X-City Media (TV channel blending information and advertisements); (3) live text commentaries (ARD digital); (4) newspaper advertisements (a popular genre in the language variation literature); (5) SMS texts; (6) shopping receipts. The analysis of the 4759 examples and 74058 word forms furnished by the six corpora constitutes the empirical foundation of the book. Interesting as these text types may seem, the selection criteria are not convincingly presented by the author. Argumentation is lacking: the reader is simply required to believe that all these text types breed reduction somehow. The motivation is, of course, that some media are involved in new

technologies. Siever also uses a control corpus, compiled entirely on the basis of newspaper articles; one wonders what the *tertium comparationis* is. The corpora are described and briefly illustrated in section 4.1. Missing from this exhaustive presentation is any reference to state-of-the-art corpus linguistic procedures, somewhat undermining the overall positive impression of the study's methodology.

The findings of the study outlined in section 4.2 lack the clarity present in the overview of the procedure. The visualization of the results is rather reader-unfriendly: the arrangement of the outcomes is in largely unexplained and not always informative tables. Graphs with quantitative comparisons would show consideration for the reader as well as greatly facilitating the progression from numbers to conclusions. Another drawback of the results section is the overabundance of sparsely commented data: suffice it to say that the tables and their descriptions run from page 176 to 370 (the book has 460 pages) with a dearth of general categorisations. The extensive empirical component is certainly the book's greatest virtue, and shows great attention to detail.

As for the results, it emerges that less reduction is observed in SMSes than in other text types, with receipts at the top of the hierarchy. But why? This issue is not addressed systematically. One may wonder how comparable the text types really are in terms of the claimed spatial channel constraints and genre functionality, which are not discussed, despite the title of the book. SMS texts, owing to primary functions such as making arrangements, use shorter words and less morphologically complex structures in comparison with the journalistic style of X-City Media and live text commentaries, abounding in names of institutions etc. Siever does note certain text-specific differences, but takes this no further. The other finding is that anglicisms are a fully-fledged reduction technique, because of systematic substitution of longer German equivalents (section 4.3) by English expressions. This observation is in line with the results of a study of Polish, the morphology of which is typologically similar to that of German (Gibbon and Kul 2010).

Chapter 5 combines summary and conclusions. The author introduces a distinction between reduction-worthy morphological, lexical and graphostylistic features ("Ersparnis") and plain frequency of use ("Anteil"). Comparing the two scales, a different order emerges: SMSes, ranked relatively low given the general use of reduction, has the highest use of the most efficient reduction categories. This generalization indicates a promising avenue of research into the cross-linguistic comparison of reduction (cf. also López Rúa 2005). This final chapter contains no substantive implications for future studies, but it does clarify many of the basic concepts (in ways which would, however, have been best clarified

at the beginning). It has to be said, though, that while large quantities of interesting data are treated, the results in terms of generalisations, categorisations, and comparisons are meagre. The economy scales which are presented in two cases are the kind of result which one is looking for, but unfortunately these scales are not presented in a comparison schema for all text types, and therefore no basis for a comparatively based taxonomy of text types emerges. The economy features discussed in Chapter 3 provide no more than a basis for such comparisons. The essence of science is comparison – how else would generalisations be made? – for example with a control group, which the author recognises by choosing a control text type. Unfortunately, the comparison is somewhat vacuous since the control contains none of the interesting reduction features which the spatially restricted channel types show. An implicit null hypothesis is thereby disproved, fine, but the real interest lies in a possible taxonomy of the other text types in terms of economy scales and functional and formal feature matrices.

The book provides copious and potentially very useful quantities of interesting data, mainly in the area of vocabulary. A serious criticism of the book lies in the lack of explicit and explanatory references to theories of speech and text speech production and perception in context, evidenced already in Chapter 2. Little attention is paid to scientific explanation of constraints on written communication, over and above documentation and description, for instance as given by Kul (2007b) in terms of visual analogues to lenition and hypoarticulation in text messages and other restricted registers. Indeed, even general sociolinguistic concepts such as Bernstein's (1971) distinction between functionally motivated elaborated and restricted codes is highly relevant for the functional explanation of such registers. The study would have benefited from explicit theory-grounded generalizations with explanatory value in terms of channel constraints and their social contexts.

On the editorial side, *Texte i.d. Enge* frequently refers the reader to examples from the "Netlinks", a collection of websites listed in Appendix B. For the convenience of the reader we suggest that the book should appear in a searchable and linked electronic version, with embedded links wherever corpora are referred to.

To conclude: the study is based on copious background reading and summarisation, shown by the extensive (though still incomplete) bibliography and references, and the information contained in each chapter is very detailed. Sometimes it seems that the detail embedded in the narrative has grown unmanageable, as the lack of section and chapter summaries in some cases indicates. Consequently, an imbalance of data and interpretation, and the embedding of data in

narrative text that leaves the reader doing too much text mining and thereby feeling a little impatient at having to do the work of the author in digging out relevant information and deriving general conclusions. Still, quantities of information are there, and the topic of the book, which could be paraphrased more explicitly (though pedantically) as "channel-determined spatial constraints on communication", is hot.

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