

The evolution of reported speech in German newspapers of the 18th and 19th century: Evidential strategies, epistemic modality and the expression of reliability

Dr. Lucia Assenzi, University of Innsbruck

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The century ‘around’ 1800 was a central moment in the history of German society. Between the late Enlightenment and the revolutions of 1848, German society underwent a series of changes fuelled by rapidly growing industrialization and urbanization, advances in mass education, widespread politicization of the masses and increasingly pressing requests for democratic policies (Steinmetz 2012: 91–95).

This period was pivotal for the evolution of newspapers. Because of booming alphabetization and the blossoming of the bourgeoisie, newspapers had garnered a growing readership, who, in time, became increasingly exigent. This led to the professionalization of journalism and journalists.

However, such an important period and the impact it had on the language of newspapers has not yet been fully investigated in the field of the history of the German language.

In the paper, I will delineate the design of a macro-sociolinguistic research project on the connections between the societal changes in the century ‘around’ 1800 and the changes in formulation patterns for reported speech in German newspapers. Since the project is still at an early stage, in the presentation I will outline the following points:

1. Research object:

Instances of reported speech (understood as any form of reporting linguistically encoded content such as words, thoughts, opinions, dreams, and so on) in the *Wiener Zeitung* and the *Berlinische Nachrichten von Staats- und gelehrten Sachen* (1740–1840).

2. Research hypothesis:

Due to societal change and the professionalisation of journalism, reported speech should become more explicit and transparent in expressing the information source and the journalist’s stance on the truthfulness of reported information, as well as on the reliability of the information source.

3. Methodology:

- a. Quantitative investigation of the lexical and grammatical realizations of:
 - i. Evidential strategies (strategies for indicating the information source; Aikhenvald 2018).
 - ii. Epistemic modality (evaluation of the likelihood that the reported information is true; Cornillie 2009: 46–47);
 - iii. Reliability (stance on the trustworthiness of the information source; Schenner 2010: 160–161).
- b. A theoretical reflection on how to bring together findings on linguistic typology and studies on the syntax-pragmatics interface with a macro-sociolinguistic perspective.
- c. In the multidisciplinary tradition of historical sociolinguistics (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2012), a qualitative discussion of the interconnections between changes in society, culture and media, and changes in language usage patterns for reported speech in newspapers.

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