



# 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

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# 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

	Total words
ICOCP_Italian	± 600,000
ICOCP_French	± 400,000
ICOCP_Spanish	± 350,000
ICOCP_German	± 350,000
ICOCP_English	± 425,000
ICOCP_Total	± 2 million

# 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

ICOCP_Italian	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)
ICOCP_French	le Figaro (lefigaro.fr), le Monde (lemonde.fr), le Temps (letemps.ch), le Courrier (lecourrier.ch), La Libre (lalibre.be), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)
ICOCP_Spanish	El País (elpais.com), El Mundo (elmundo.es)
ICOCP_German	Frankfurter Allgemeine (faz.net), Tagesspiegel (tagesspiegel.de), NZZ (nzz.ch), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)
ICOCP_English	The Guardian (guardian.co.uk), The New York Times (nytimes.com), Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch)

### 3. Relevance of the project's results for (foreign language) grammar writing

Cleft sentences

## 3.1. Brief description of cleft sentences

# Cleft sentences – *Frasi scisse* (Roggia 2009)



SONO I VOSTRI SOGNI A DARCI ENERGIA.

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** ]<sub>c<sub>1</sub></sub> [che me lo ha detto]<sub>c<sub>2</sub></sub>  
G [ es **ist Johann**, ]<sub>c<sub>1</sub></sub> [der es mir gesagt hat]<sub>c<sub>2</sub></sub>

- [ ]<sub>c<sub>1</sub></sub> = copular clause
- [ ]<sub>c<sub>2</sub></sub> = cleft clause
- Copula
- **Cleft constituent (CC)**



# Clefts = monoclausal sentences

I [ è **Luigi** ]<sub>1</sub> [che me lo ha detto]<sub>2</sub>

G [ es **ist Johann**, ]<sub>1</sub> [der es mir gesagt hat]<sub>2</sub>

I [ **Luigi** me lo ha detto ]<sub>1</sub>

G [ **Johann** hat es mir gesagt ]<sub>1</sub>

# 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

# Corpus of grammars

## *Italian grammars for German native speakers*

1. Gorini, Umberto. 2013. *Langenscheidt Standardgrammatik. Italienisch*. München-Wien: Langenscheidt. [G]
2. Hofmann Di Marzio, Anna Maria. 2008. *Italienische Grammatik*. München: Compact Verlag. [H]
3. Krenn, Herwig 1996, *Italienische Grammatik*. Ismaning: Max Hueber Verlag. [K]
4. Reumuth, Wolfgang & Winkelmann, Otto. <sup>6</sup>2001/2009, <sup>7</sup>2012. *Praktische Grammatik der italienischen Sprache*. Wilhelmsfeld: Gottfried Egert. [R&W]
5. Schwarze, Christoph. <sup>1</sup>1988, <sup>2</sup>1995. *Grammatik der italienischen Sprache*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. [SW]

## *Italian grammars for Italian native speakers*

6. Schwarze, Christoph. 2009. *Grammatica della lingua italiana. Edizione interamente riveduta dall'autore* (ed. Adriano Colombo, with the collab. of Emilio Manzotti). Roma: Carocci. [SW]

# 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 (<sup>7</sup>2012: 479): selection of examples

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

**33 examples: not a single *Spaltsatz***



# Schwarze <sup>2</sup>1995 – Selection of examples

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

# Fazit: examples + translations

- Two different descriptions:
  1. Italian cleft // non-cleft clause in which Italian CC occurs in the Vorfeld (R&W <sup>7</sup>2012)
  2. Italian cleft // German cleft (S <sup>2</sup>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

Italian	German
	es
<i>essere 'to be'</i>	
<i>a 'to'</i> <i>che, cui, quale</i> <i>'who, what,</i> <i>which'</i>	

List of keywords 1 (Cleft sentences proper)

# Frequency

	Absolute frequency	Normalized frequency (100'000)
I	216	42
G	46	13
	Italian-German: <b>± 3:1</b>	

De Cesare et al. in press

# Form

## Syntactic function of the cleft constituent

	S		C		A	
	NF	%	NF	%	NF	%
I	29	72	2	6	9	22
G	8	97	0.3	3	0	0

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

NF: Normalized frequency (100'000)

?: percentage out of total of clefts

# Italian > German translations

1. Italo Calvino 1993 [1952, Einaudi], *Il visconte dimezzato*, Milano, Mondadori (10 occ.)  
Italo Calvino 2004 [1985, München, Carl Hanser Verlag], *Der geteilte Visconte*, trad. ted. Oswald von Nostitz, München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (2 occ.)
2. Susanna Tamaro 1994, *Va' dove ti porta il cuore*, Milano, Baldini&Castoldi (32 occ.)  
Susanna Tamaro 1995, *Geh, wohin dein Herz dich trägt*, trad. ted. Maja Pflug, Zürich, Diogenes (7 occ.)
3. Vincenzo Todisco 1999, *Il culto di Gutenberg e altri racconti*, Locarno, Dadò (29 occ.)  
Vincenzo Todisco 2001, *Das Krallenaue*, 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'afferarsi 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 (explicitely?): 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*]

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