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THE DEATH OF ENGLISH *FOR* AND GERMAN *DENN*: LINGUISTIC CHANGE IN PROGRESS[1]

The system of conjunctions seems to be particularly sensitive to change. A diachronic view of the conjunctional system in any given language will show losses, additions and semantic change.[2] It is not surprising, then, to find that in both English and German a conjunction is disappearing from the language. What is surprising, however, is the similarity between these two conjunctions. Both *for* and *denn* are causal conjunctions and both are coordinating, or, if the classification given by Quirk et al. (1985: 13.18) of *for* is preferred, at least nearer the coordination pole of the coordination-subordination gradient than their rivals *because* and *weil*.[3]

Before entering into a discussion of the future of English *for* and German *denn* it seems appropriate to consider their past. The conjunction *for* is the oldest of the four causal conjunctions in English. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) dates its first appearance to the twelfth century and states that "the older language supplied the place of the conjunction by locutions in which *for* prep. governed a neuter demonstrative pronoun followed by a relative particle." With the extension of the function of the relative particle to conjunctional use and later loss of the particle we arrive at the conjunction *for*.

Denn, originally temporal, began to replace the causal conjunction *wan(de)* as a coordinating causal conjunction in the fifteenth century.[4] Its rival *weil* acquired its causal meaning in the sixteenth century and lost its original temporal meaning in the eighteenth. Other temporal conjunctions which could introduce a reason, such as *seit*, have since lost or, in the case of *nachdem*, are losing their causal meanings, with the exception of *da*, which is restricted to formal language.[5]

The semantic relationship between *denn* and *weil* is described by Engel (1988: P082) in his Deutsche Grammatik as follows:

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[1] This is a revised version of a paper given at the 28. Linguistisches Kolloquium (8-10 Sept. 1993) in Graz.

[2] A striking example of such changes can be observed in the conjunctional systems of the Romance languages from classical Latin to contemporary Romance languages. This is illustrated for concessive clauses in Harris 1988.

[3] Jespersen (1940:21.8.8) classes *for* as a coordinating conjunction on the basis of its positional restriction and intonation patterns, whereas Quirk et al (1985:13.18) class it as a subordinating conjunction, which possesses, however, three out of the six features that, according to the authors, characterize coordinating conjunctions, while *because* possesses one and a half.

[4] Different theories have been advanced to explain the origin of the causal conjunction *denn*. For a discussion of these see appendix 2 of Huldi's (1957:87-108) dissertation.

[5] For the development of *weil* see Arndt 1959 and Grimm 1955.

"Dieser Konjunktor [denn] leitet immer einen Satz ein, der Grund, Ursache, Voraussetzung des im Vorgängersatz beschriebenen Sachverhalts bezeichnet; (...) Der *denn*-Satz liefert also eine Erklärung dieses Sachverhalts. (...) Der Konjunktor *denn* kommutiert mit dem Subjunktor *weil* (der dann auch eine Änderung der Verbstellung erzwingt). Allerdings ist *weil* im strengeren Sinne kausal als *denn*, das mehr wie eine nachgeschobene Erklärung wirkt."

The main difference in meaning between *denn* and *weil* is, then, that *weil* introduces a cause in the strict sense of the word, whereas *denn* introduces an explanation for a preceding statement. Engel (1988: P060) mentions also a colloquial use of *weil* with verb-second word order.[6] The two different constructions will henceforth be referred to as verb-end *weil* and verb-second *weil*. Verb-second *weil* differs in meaning from verb-end *weil*. The difference is described by Engel (1988: P060) as follows: "Der Nebensatz hat dann den Charakter einer zusätzlichen Erklärung." This means that verb-second *weil* corresponds in meaning to *denn*.

The OED lists two meanings of the causal conjunction *for* as still being existent, one "introducing the ground or reason for something previously said", the other one a specific use in scientific texts "introducing a detailed proof". The third meaning, "introducing the cause of a fact", is marked as obsolete. This last meaning corresponds to the basic meaning of *because*, which is given in the OED as "for the reason that; in as much that; since".

How can we explain the fact that *because* and not *for* has become the general causal conjunction in English? The answer to this question must lie in their respective semantic and syntactic scopes. A possible reason might be the strong collocational link between *because* and *why*. The OED entry for *because* lists under section A (adv.) *because*, "followed by *that* and *why*: For the reason *that*", and states that *because why* was used interrogatively, meaning *why*. One of the central functions of causal conjunctions in discourse is that of introducing the answer to a *why*-question. This usage is not restricted to the typical dialogue situation, where two speakers are involved, but also occurs with the same speaker asking and answering the *why*-question, as shown in the following extract from *The Dead of Jericho*, a contemporary detective story:

(1) I tell you I find you attractive. You know why? Because it does me good to look at you and to sit next to you like this.   (Dexter 1981: 11)

The OED does not include examples like this, but lists under its entry *because* (section C) examples where *because* is used "in answer to a question, implying that a fuller reply is being withheld for some reason". This use of the conjunction presupposes, however, that an answer can also consist of a *because*-clause alone. German *weil* can likewise introduce answers. The Duden lists as the third meaning of this conjunction "[*weil*] leitet die Antwort

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6   The characteristic pause after verb-second *weil* is described by Eisenmann (1973:263): "Leitet WEIL einen beigeordneten Kausalsatz ein, dann folgt ihm eine - kurze oder längere - Pause, die in der Schrift etwa durch einen Doppelpunkt ausgedrückt werden könnte."

auf eine direkte Frage nach dem Grund von etwas ein", a use of *weil* also mentioned in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (section D 2) under the heading *Syntaktische Besonderheiten* [sic]. The use of the one-word answer *weil* is not mentioned in either work although it does exist, as anyone who works with children will be able to confirm.

Neither English *for* nor German *denn* can introduce an answer to a *why*-question. *For* could, however, be used in that context in earlier stages of the English language, as a citation from Dryden, cited in the OED entry *for* (section B 1), shows:

(2) Why comes not he? ... For he's a puling sprite.

Moreover, both *for* and *denn* are positionally restricted in that they can only refer to a preceding statement. This restriction occurs rather late in the English language. In the OED the latest entry of a *for*-clause introducing the cause of the situation of the following clause dates from 1872. Since then *for* has become increasingly restricted to formal language. In a 100,000-word sample from the London Lund corpus, a corpus of spoken English, not one instance of *for* as a conjunction can be found (cf. Quirk et al. 1985:15.47), and it seems predictable that it will soon be replaced by *because* in the written language as well.

The semantic scope of *because* has gradually widened from a conjunction introducing only direct reason to one introducing also indirect reason. This will be illustrated by the following examples taken from three grammars, written at different times in this century:

(3)   It must have rained, because the ground is wet   (Jespersen 1940: 21.8.8)

(4)   They've lit a fire, because I can see the smoke rising   (Quirk et al. 1972: 11.37)

(5)   Vanessa is your favourite aunt, because your parents told me so.

(Quirk et al. 1985: 15.45)

The first example is classed as ungrammatical in 1940, the second one is marked as colloquial in 1972, whereas the third is listed as an example for clauses of indirect reason without such a descriptor in 1985.

Does there remain, then, any syntactic context where *for* is still preferred to *because*? This seems to be the case in the following example:

(6)   ... he felt he'd done a good job. And so did Bell, for the picture was now pretty clear.

(Dexter 1981: 45)

The logical relation between the clauses can be described as follows: The picture has become pretty clear, from which fact the speaker concludes that he and Bell must have done a good job. As native speakers of English assure me, *because* would likewise be possible in this case:

(7)   ... he felt he'd done a good job. And so did Bell, because the picture was now pretty clear.

How does this compare to the ousting of German *denn* by German *weil*? If example (6) is translated into German both *denn* and verb-second *weil* are acceptable, whereas verb-end *weil* is only acceptable if the *weil*-clause is fronted.

(8)   Er hatte das Gefühl, gute Arbeit geleistet zu haben, und Bell auch, denn die Sache war jetzt ziemlich klar.

(9)   Er hatte das Gefühl, gute Arbeit geleistet zu haben, und Bell auch, weil: die Sache war jetzt ziemlich klar.

(10) Weil die Sache jetzt ziemlich klar war, hatte er das Gefühl, gute Arbeit geleistet zu haben, und Bell auch.

(11) *Er hatte das Gefühl, gute Arbeit geleistet zu haben, und Bell auch, weil die Sache jetzt ziemlich klar war.

The last two examples show that verb-end *weil*-clauses require a close positional relationship with the clause they modify. They also require a close causal relationship,[7] as the following example (Gaumann 1983: E 37) illustrates:

(12) Das Band ist so lang. Weil: wir reden jetzt schon seit zwei Stunden.

(13) *Das Band ist so lang, weil wir jetzt schon seit zwei Stunden reden.

The *weil*-clause in Gaumann's example introduces an explanation for making the preceding statement, but does not introduce a reason for its content, as the length of the tape can in no way be influenced by the length of the conversation. The meaning can be paraphrased as "Das Band ist so lang. Es kommt mir so lang vor, weil wir jetzt schon seit zwei Stunden reden."

We have thus two different *weil*-clauses: the verb-end *weil*-clause, which introduces direct reason and can immediately precede or follow the clause it refers to, and the verb-second *weil*-clause, which introduces indirect reason and can never precede the clause it refers to. This means that the loss of *denn* from the language results in a reduction in the number of causal conjunctions, but that the two different functions of *denn* and the original *weil* are still structurally distinguished. This does, however, not explain why it is *weil* rather than *denn* that has taken over both functions.

The ousting of *denn* by *weil* in standaard German is connected with a change of verb position in the *weil*-clause that takes *denn's* place. Why did the strict rule which linked this conjunction with verb-end word order begin to give way within the last twenty-five years? Transference from English has been discussed in this context (Clyne 1975: 23ff.; Gaumann 1983: 19f., 69ff.), but although this linguistic development coincided with an increase in the

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[7]   It is, however, possible for *weil* to be separated from the rest of its clause by another clause, most frequently a conditional *wenn*-clause.

number of pupils who were taught English at school, there is no socio-linguistic evidence to corroborate this hypothesis.

Verb-second word order with subordinating conjunctions has also been described as the result of a general simplification in the syntax of German (cf. Gaumann 1983: 20ff.), but without accounting for the fact that, in the case of *weil* , the change of word order never occurred with *weil*-clauses in initial position and that it was restricted to clauses of indirect reason. This fact is, however, recognized by Wessely (1981: 51f) in her study of the dialect of Ottenthal in Niederösterreich. She claims that the conjunction *denn* and the adverb *nämlich* are absent from that dialect and that verb-second *weil* has the same function as the *denn*-clause. She insists that verb-second and verb-end word order are never free variants, but occur in complementary distribution. Those cases where both verb-end *weil* and verb-second *weil* are possible do not contradict her statement, but reflect the fact that a speaker can present the same content as a direct reason leading to a certain situation or as an explanation for a preceding statement. This can be illustrated by the following two examples:

(14) Ich muß jetzt gehen, weil ich meinen Unterricht noch vorbereiten muß.

(15) Ich muß jetzt gehen, weil: (denn) ich muß meinen Unterricht noch vorbereiten.

Apart from Austria, verb-second *weil*-clauses have been noted as a dialect feature of Baden-Württemberg and Bayrisch-Schwaben (Eisenmann 1973), the Saarland (Labouvie 1938) and the Franconian dialect areas on the Mosel and the Rhine (Gaumann 1983). *Denn* is absent from all these dialects.

If we accept that verb-second *weil* was originally a dialect feature, how can we explain that this dialect feature has suddenly entered the standard language and has spread so fast within the last twenty-five years? I would like to suggest that this was only possible as the result of a shift of the linguistic centre of Germany from the east to the west, due to the political situation of post-World War II Germany.[8] Southern and south-western Germany, where in the dialect verb-second *weil* functionally and structurally corresponded to *denn* in the standard language, were no longer peripheral, neither politically nor linguistically, since the linguistic centre, which had been in the east of Germany since Luther's times, was effectively cut off by the Iron Curtain.[9]

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[8] The importance of the post-war political situation in Germany for linguistic developments is recognized by Albrecht (1990:57f.), who states that it led to the levelling of regional accents, but that the resulting widespread pronunciation was distinct from the "Deutsche Bühnensprache", the pre-war German equivalent of BBC English.

[9] In the discussion following the presentation of this paper this hypothesis was corroborated by Dr. Kerstin Stroyny (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), who was brought up in Leipzig and lives and works in East-Berlin. She confirmed that causal *denn* is still widely used in the east, while verb-second *weil* is unknown.

It is tempting to speculate about future developments in the field of causal conjunctions. If we consider the linguistic changes that have occurred in Germany since 1989, it seems likely that East Germans will take over West German speech patterns (cf. Viehweger 1992). If this were the case, causal *denn* might be expected to disappear in East Germany fairly soon. Grammatical changes tend, however, to take more time than lexical changes. Moreover, the development of a new East German identity, that can be observed in everyday life in the return to buying local goods and in voting for the PDS, might stop such a process if the verb-second *weil*-construction should be recognized as a typical feature of West German speech.

Thus, despite the semantic and syntactic correspondences between *for* and *denn*, there seems to be little similarity in the disappearance of the two conjunctions from their respective languages. Positional restriction marked the beginning of the decline of *for*, but, unlike *for*, *denn* has always been positionally restricted and has never had the same range of meaning. *Because* replacing *for* is in no way structurally distinguished from basic *because*, whereas *weil* replacing *denn* is so, taking over the verb position of the *denn*-clause. Moreover, the process of replacing *denn* seems to be much faster than that of replacing *for*. In the case of *for* the ousting of the conjunction is a matter of centuries, while with *weil* it is a matter of decades.[10] This suggests that the processes are independent despite a certain superficial similarity.

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[10] This is not contradicted by the fact that verb-second *weil* is only beginning to enter the written language. It shows, however, that the present stages of the linguistic changes differ.

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