From the Grimms' fairy tales to *Star Wars*: How linguistics investigates the language of popular culture with corpora

It is a popular belief universally acknowledged that all fairy tales begin with the words "Once upon a time" and conclude with the formula "And they lived happily ever after." However, there is actually considerable variation – which becomes obvious once you consider these texts from a quantitative perspective. In linguistics, quantitative analyses of actual language use are commonly carried out with corpora. Corpora are digital collections of authentic texts that are representative of a language or variety, and which can be systematically searched for patterns.

This presentation will introduce you to the *TransGrimm* Corpus, a digital collection of the German fairy tales by the brothers Grimm and their English translations, which is currently being compiled at Chemnitz University of Technology. By developing software that allows us to analyse the fairy tales systematically and to place equivalent stretches of text next to each other, we will enable completely new perspectives on these cherished tales. The talk will also present some first results from a subcorpus consisting of the first and last sentences of Margret Hunt's (1884) English translation of the most widely read German edition of the Grimms' "*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*" (1857).

In the second part of the talk, we will consider how the language from one particular part of popular culture, namely *Star Wars*, has become part of the English language. Since George Lucas' film *A New Hope* was first screened in 1977, the *Star Wars* saga has become a pop-culture phenomenon incorporating e.g. films, videogames and merchandise. I will present a recent study (Sanchez-Stockhammer 2023) that uses corpus-linguistic methods to investigate to what extent characteristic words and constructions from the *Star Wars* universe have made a transition from the screen to the real world.

Five *Star Wars*-derived items included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), namely *Jedi*, *Padawan*, *lightsabre* (with spelling variants), *Yoda* and the construction *to the dark side* were analysed regarding their frequency in four corpora of present-day English (*COCA*, *COHA*, *BNC*, *BNC Spoken 2014*) and coded regarding their level of independence from the original films. The results show that over one third of the uses of the investigated *Star Wars*-derived items are innovative (e.g. "Other imbibers have gone over **to the dark side** of beer, rejecting the pasteurised lager produced by the breweries.") and thus well integrated into the English language.

Bibliography

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Sanchez-Stockhammer, Christina. 2023. The impact of *Star Wars* on the English language: *Star Wars*-derived words and constructions in present-day English corpora. *Linguistics Vanguard* 9(3). 233-245. https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2023-0029.

Biodata

Christina Sanchez-Stockhammer is professor of English and digital linguistics at Chemnitz University of Technology in Germany. Her research interests are very wide, and she has published on a large variety of topics, such as *English Compounds and their Spelling* (Cambridge University Press 2018), telecinematic discourse in comic-to-film adaptations, the feature-based clustering of English adverbs, sublexical cohesion in step-by-step cooking recipes with photographs, punctuation as an indication of register, fairy-tale style in translations, hybridization in language, the corpus-based English and German translation equivalents of the times of day and the question whether it is possible to predict linguistic change.

Furthermore, she has co-developed the software *WordValue*, which colour-codes words in context based on their qualities (www.wordvalue.gwi.uni-muenchen.de), the webtool *CompSpell*, which offers advice on English compound spelling based on large-scale empirical research (www.compounds.gwi.uni-muenchen.de), and the virtual-reality adventure quiz app *Bridge of Knowledge VR*, which can be employed for interdisciplinary self-study and revision (www.bridgevr.de).