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A comparative study of the connectives *nämlich* and *infatti*: syntactic and semantic features

This article focuses on the lexemes *nämlich* and *infatti*. Both belong to the broad category of connectives (*Konnektoren*, Pasch et al. 2003; *connettivi testuali*, Colombo 1984; Berretta 1984), non-inflectional function words that encode semantic relations between two connected units. In terms of the type of semantic relation, *infatti* is frequently identified in Italian-German dictionaries and grammars of German as a foreign for italian speakers (e. g., Giacoma/Kolb (eds.) 2009) as the preferred equivalent of *nämlich* within the causal domain, both connectives being prototypical grammatical forms for the expression of causality in texts. In this semantic context, they can function as linguistic indicators of argumentation in argumentative discourse (Lo Cascio 1990; Kienpointner 2008).

These features form the basis of the systematic syntactic and semantic analysis of *nämlich* and *infatti* conducted in the present study. The aim is to describe and classify similarities and possible divergences between the two function words for each level of linguistic analysis. In accordance with the methodology of contrastive linguistics (e. g., Rein 1983), the present article adopts a synchronous orientation applied to a bilateral language comparison. This approach facilitates the identification of language-specific properties.

The research is divided into two main parts.

The first part presents an overview of the syntactic and semantic properties of each connective, outlined according to previous linguistic descriptions. The syntactic and semantic features are defined on the basis of the research criteria established in the field of *Konnektorenforschung* (e. g., Pasch et al. 2003; Blühdorn 2006, 2008 and Breindl et al. 2014 for German and Colombo 1984 and Ferrari 2010 for Italian).

With regard to the description of the syntactic features, the following categories were taken into consideration: the word class of the connective, its integrability, the syntactic structure of the sentence in which it occurs and its linear position in the sentence. These categories are first applied to *nämlich* and then to *infatti*. A comparison of the findings from studies on the syntax of the two forms reveals both structural similarities and differences. *Nämlich* and *infatti* belong to the category of adverbial connectives (vs. conjunctional connectives), functioning as adjuncts in the second relatum, where they can appear in integrated and non-integrated, sentence-internal and -external positions (Blühdorn 2006, 2008; Pasch et al. 2003). The most salient differences concern the possible types of positions within the linear structure of the sentence (types of pre-verbal and post-verbal positions), outlined in the article. The differences reflect the dissimilarities between German and Italian sentence structure as well as the specific properties of the connectives under consideration. For example, Italian sentences have no V2 restriction and no *Felderstruktur* and allow several positions before the finite verb; the German connective, unlike many other German *Adverbkonnektoren,* cannot occur in the *Vorfeld* position (Blühdorn 2014, p. 150; Pasch et al. 2003).

For the description of the semantic features, the following categories were considered: the semantic class of the connective, its categories of relata (based on the categorization of entities by Lyons 1977 and further developed by Blühdorn, cf. e. g. Ravetto/Blühdorn 2011), its modal potential and type of modal relation (epistemic vs. deontic, cf. e. g. Ravetto/Blühdorn 2011). Both connectives can express two different types of semantic relation: a causal relation and a non-causal relation. The similarities concern the finer features that both connectives display in causal contexts. *Nämlich* and *infatti* favour a modal (epistemic/deontic) causal relation between propositions/illocutionary acts (Blühdorn 2008; Breindl/Volodina/Waßner 2014; Previtera 1996) as in *Heute Morgen hat es vielleicht geregnet. Die Straße ist nämlich nass.* / *Deve aver piovuto. La strada infatti è bagnata*. Whether non-modal uses are possible is controversial in the literature. The main difference concerns the second meaning associated with each connector. While both connectors can be used to express a meta-communicative relation (Breindl/Volodina/Waßner 2014; Rossari 1994), each connective fulfils a different function in this context. *Nämlich* expresses a specification (*Sie erzählte ihm, wo sie studiert hatte, nämlich in Münster*), while *infatti* expresses a confirmation (*-Hai dovuto abbandonare l'idea, vero? -Infatti!*). In this second use of *nämlich*, *infatti* is not a suitable equivalent and vice versa.

The second part of the article presents a quantitative and qualitative corpus-based analysis of *nämlich* and *infatti* illustrated using examples derived from authentic written texts. The aim is to validate the description of the two connectives thanks to corpus data providing current usage preferences for each syntactic and semantic category. This empirical part of the research is based on 500 examples (250 occurrences of *nämlich* and 250 of *infatti*) from current German and Italian corpora of press language. The German examples were extracted from newspapers in the DeReKo corpus (Institut für Deutsche Sprache, Mannheim); half of the Italian examples came from the journalistic part of the PUNT-IT corpus (private corpus, University of Basel) and the other half from the *Repubblica* corpus (University of Bologna).

The corpus-based analysis of the syntactic properties illustrates usage trends relating in particular to the preferred syntactic form of the relatum that hosts the connective (sentence, clause, phrase), the integrability of the connective and its preferred position in the relatum. A comparison of the data derived from the analysis of each connective shows the salient role of the interplay between semantic and syntactic features. For example, *infatti* – unlike *nämlich*, which occurs in different types of sentences, clauses or phrases as outlined in the article – tends to occur in sentences, except for its holophrastic uses. When used in phrases *n*ämlich occurs in its specifying meaning while *infatti* used holophrastically occurs in its confirmative meaning. In terms of integrability and linear position, both connectives share a preference for integrated occurrences associated with their causal uses. *N*ämlich occurs in most cases in the prototypical integrated *Mittelfeld* position. *Infatti*, in contrast, favours the integrated post-verbal position between the finite verb and an object/an adverbial element; pre-verbal positions are also common and allow different variants, the comma being a signal for lower integration in this context. Non-integrated positions are also registered, for example the internal *Nacherstposition* for *nämlich* vs. sentence-external positions for *infatti*.

The corpus-based analysis of the semantic properties illustrates usage trends on the preferred semantic relation associated with each connective and, in the case of causal relations, on the preferred types of non-modal and modal meaning. One difference between

the two connectives in the written language analysed concerns the frequency of occurrence of the causal and non-causal types of relations: *nämlich* shows an almost equal distribution of causal and non-causal contexts with a slight preference for the former while *infatti* is mostly used to express causal meaning. In causal contexts, the modal epistemic relation is prototypical for both connectives. Non-modal uses (reported as motivations, cf. Ravetto/Blühdorn 2011) cannot be excluded in some contexts: in addition to monosemantic modal occurrences, both connectives show underdetermined polysemantic contexts (cf. Ballestracci/Ravetto 2015). The ambiguity can regard the type of modal relation (epistemic vs. deontic-illocutionary domain) as well as the modal potential (modal vs. non-modal use).

The data regarding syntax and semantics should be integrated in future corpus work on the information level of description, potentially offering further contributions to bilingual German-Italian lexicography and comparative grammatical descriptions. The findings of the comparison between the German connective *nämlich* and the Italian connective *infatti* may also prove useful at the application level as a resource when teaching German or Italian as a foreign language in the context of guided learning of causal strategies for the production of argumentative texts.

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