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The role of negation in *zwar…aber* constructions in German and their Dutch equivalents

This article examines constructions containing the correlative connector *zwar…aber* (Pasch et al. 2003, p. 523) in German, as illustrated in (1) and (2), and their Dutch equivalents. These constructions consist of two conjuncts that stand in a concessive relation to one another.

(1)   (Kennst du *Neue Vahr Süd* von Sven Regener? 'Do you know *Neue Vahr Süd* by Sven Regener?')

(1a)   Ich habe **zwar** das Buch *nicht* gelesen, **aber** ich habe den Film gesehen.
'I haven't read the book but I have seen the movie.'

(1b)   Ich habe **zwar** den Film gesehen, **aber** ich habe das Buch *nicht* gelesen.
'I have seen the movie but I haven't read the book.'

(2)   (Will sich Martin politisch engagieren? 'Does Martin want to get involved in politics?')
Er ist **zwar** in die SPD eingetreten, **aber** ich *bezweifle*, dass er lange durchhält.
'He has joined the SPD but I doubt that he will last long.'

Previous studies have addressed various aspects of this construction in German, e. g., Primatarova-Miltscheva (1986), Leuschner/Van den Nest (2012a, b) and Günthner (2015). However, one notable feature has remained largely overlooked, namely the strong affinity of the construction with negation. In many cases, *zwar…aber* constructions contain a negation, which can occur in either the first or the second conjunct, cf. *nicht* 'not' in (1a, b), and which may be expressed explicitly, as in (1), or implicitly, as by the verb *bezweifeln* 'to doubt' in (2). The comparison with Dutch is particularly instructive here: while the two languages show strong similarities with respect to this construction, German *zwar* appears to have two Dutch counterparts, which, on closer inspection, differ in their properties, especially in their interaction with negation.

The first part of the article discusses general properties of the construction, its meaning, the function and semantic contribution of *zwar* and its development from a truth-asserting element, its interaction with negation and its potential Dutch equivalents. In concessive constructions, *zwar* and *aber* mark the two conjuncts, with *zwar* marking the less weighty argument and simultaneously signalling that the construction is incomplete and *aber* marking the subsequent, more weighty argument. The order of *zwar* and *aber* is fixed and, thus, so is the sequence of the two conjuncts. Following Umbach (2004, 2005), the two conjuncts can be interpreted as representing the positive and negative part of the answer to an explicit or implicit question that is under discussion in discourse. Which conjunct represents the positive or negative answer is not predetermined. Since the property of representing the negative part of the answer may be expressed either explicitly by a negation marker or in other, implicit ways, an empirically verifiable hypothesis can be formulated that *zwar…aber* constructions frequently, but not always, contain a negation marker in one conjunct.

The search for Dutch equivalents of *zwar* is informed by occasional remarks in the literature and, above all, by bilingual dictionaries. The sources consulted here (Abraham 1984; Westheide 1985; Schwan 1999; VDGW-DN) list two potential Dutch equivalents: *wel* and

weliswaar. From an etymological perspective, both are plausible candidates. However, it would be misleading to assume that *wel* and *weliswaar* are interchangeable forms with identical meaning and use in present-day Dutch. On the one hand, there is a stylistic difference: *wel* is characteristic of everyday, informal Dutch and occurs frequently while *weliswaar* belongs to a higher register and is, therefore, less common in colloquial language (Schwan 1999). On the other hand, *wel* and *weliswaar* also differ in their grammatical properties, in particular in their relation to negation. So far this difference has been overlooked in the literature and is not reflected in dictionary entries where *wel* (in the relevant function) and *weliswaar* are treated as synonyms.

A detailed investigation has not yet been undertaken of Dutch constructions containing *wel* and *weliswaar* with respect to their grammatical properties and their relation to German *zwar…aber* constructions. The corpus study described in the second part of the article represents a first step in this direction. It empirically examines both the affinity of the construction to negation in the two languages and the relationship between German *zwar* and Dutch *wel* and *weliswaar*. The corpus study makes use of the *European Parliament Proceedings Parallel Corpus* (*Europarl*, release v6, 02/2011), described in detail by Koehn (2005). This corpus contains transcripts of parliamentary sessions from April 1996 to December 2010 in up to 21 languages. One version is in the original language; the others are professional translations. From this dataset, the Institut für Deutsche und Niederländische Philologie at Freie Universität Berlin created a German-Dutch subcorpus, which is searchable online. This subcorpus contains around 50 million words per language and allows for both independent analysis of the data in each language and direct sentence-level comparisons between the German and Dutch versions.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the corpus study. Firstly, it confirms the affinity of *zwar…aber* constructions with negation in both German and Dutch. While the occurrence of negation is not a necessary condition, a large proportion of these constructions features a negation marker in one of the conjuncts. This is in line with Umbach's (2004, 2005) analysis assuming that one conjunct represents the positive part of the answer to a contextually given question and the other the negative part. In both German and Dutch, the negative part of the answer may be marked by a negation operator. For the positive part, in contrast, German lacks a systematic lexical marker whereas Dutch possesses the affirmative particle *wel*, which can function as the positive counterpart to negation within the construction (Sudhoff 2012).

Secondly, the results show that – contrary to claims in the literature (Abraham 1984; Westheide 1985; Schwan 1999) that are also reflected in dictionary entries – *zwar* and *wel* are not equivalent nor are *wel* and *weliswaar* synonymous. German *zwar* corresponds to Dutch *weliswaar*: both developed from truth-asserting elements into concessive connectors and both can occur in the conjunct representing the positive part of the answer as well as in the one representing the negative part. In contrast, *wel* has retained its truth-affirming meaning in present-day Dutch, which gives it a different function in the construction. It only occurs in the conjunct representing the positive part of the answer and should therefore not be analysed as a connector but rather as a polarity particle.

In sum, although *zwar…aber* constructions show similar properties in German and Dutch and negation plays an important role in their analysis, the study revealed that negation interacts differently with *zwar/weliswaar* on the one hand and *wel* on the other. As a consequence, only *weliswaar* can be considered an equivalent of *zwar* in the narrow sense. Building on these findings, a task for future research is to systematically investigate the extent to which the observed differences can be explained by the distinct scope properties of *zwar/weliswaar* and *wel* (in its various uses) with respect to negation.

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