

A Socio-Linguistic Analysis of the German Alternation between *bis an-* and *bis zu-* Constructions

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1. Alternative constructions and conceptual variation

Syntactic, semantic, conceptual variation in German constructions with the preposition *bis* ('until', 'up to', 'as long as') followed by a second preposition [*bis* + PREP2], e.g.

- (1) *Der Weg bis an die Grenze ist gleich gefunden*
'The way to the border will soon be found';
- (2) *Er arbeitete spät bis in die Nacht*
'He worked late into the night';
- (3) *Ich werde dich lieben bis in den Tod*
*'I will love you into death/until I die';
- (4) *Die Wut steht ihm bis über den Kopf*
*'Anger stands till over his head' = 'Anger was overwhelming him'.
- (5) *Rot wurde sie bis hinter die Ohren*
*'Red she became up to behind the ears';
(DWDS corpus: Rehbein, Franz, Das Leben eines Landarbeiters, Jena: Diederichs, 1911., S. 54932)
- (6) *Unser Auto ist schon bis unter Dach voll mit Wein*
*'Our car is already full with wine up to the roof';
(Cosmas II: I00/DEZ.71933 Tiroler Tageszeitung, 11.12.2000, Ressort: Sport; Maier zelebrierte seinen Hunderter).

Bis can be used in the same construction with different prepositions,
e.g.,

- (7) *Deet ging zur Tür. Marc begleitete ihn bis zum Gartentor.*

‘Deet went to the door. Marc accompanied him to the garden gate’;

(Cosmas II: DIV/DSP.00001 Scholz, Dietmar: Poldi. - Föritz, 2004 [S. 138]).

- (8) *Auch der Steuermann, der den gebrechlichen alten noch bis ans Gartentor gebracht hatte, war fortgegangen.*

‘Also the helmsman who had brought the old fragile man up to the garden gate had gone away’;

(Cosmas II: DIV/URH.00001 Rakoún, Ulrich: Das Haus der toten Stimmen. - Föritz, 2005 [S. 233]).

- (9) *Sie begleitete die Mädchen bis an die Tür und blieb dort, bis der Zug wieder abfuhr,...*

‘She accompanied the girls up to the door and stayed there until the train drove off,...’;

(Cosmas II: RHZ03/FEB.03426 Rhein-Zeitung, 05.02.2003; Zwei Mädchen aus dem Zug gesetzt).

- (10) *Yü-peï, geleite den Herrn bis an das Tor;*

‘Yu-peï, accompany Sir up to the gate’;

(DWDS: Klabund, Der Kreidekreis, Berlin: Späth 1925, S. 111622).

Is the alternation arbitrary or does it correspond to a conceptual and semantic distinction ?

- English translations of the examples (7)-(10) suggest that the examples convey a different meaning.
- Claim in CL: where there is alternation of constructions one has to postulate different constructions and meanings (Goldberg 1995 and 2002; Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004; Langacker 1991);
- Selection of the second preposition (*an* or *zu*) reflects diversity in construal:
 - Expression of concrete, fictive or metaphorical **motion events** (Talmy 2002; De Knop and Dirven 2008).
 - PREP2 ***zu*** ('to') highlights the endpoint (of an implied path or trajectory), expression of telicity;
 - PREP2 ***an*** ('up to'): focus on path towards the gate or the door, i.e. the motion itself.

Aim of my presentation

- (i) Description of the semantic and conceptual differences between the alternating constructions in (7)-(10);
- (ii) Collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003; Gries 2003a, 2003b and 2003c; Stefanowitsch 2003) → alternation reflects diversity at conceptual level;
- (iii) Sociolinguistic issues:
 - Are alternative constructions perceived as alternation by German speakers ?
 - Is the perception of the alternation dependent on the education level of speakers (+ empirical tests)?

Corpora used: DWDS + Cosmas II (IDS Mannheim)

2. Collostructional analysis of the variation

Question: “Which lexemes are strongly attracted or repelled by a particular slot in the construction (i.e., occur more frequently or less frequently than expected)”
(Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003: 214).

2.1. The noun after [*bis* + PREP2]

- More examples of constructions in Cosmas II with *zu* (840 529) than with *an* (10 598);
- Distribution of both prepositions => semantics of the nominal ‘collocates’ (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004: 100)

<i>Date: 30.11.2009</i>	<i>bis zu</i>		<i>bis an</i>	
Total number of Occurrences in Cosmas II	840 529		10 598	
Expressions of quantification	10 596	1,2 %	21	0,2 %
Expressions of time	720 430	85,7 %	-	-
Life stage/ period of time	62 213	7,4 %	785	7,4 %
Abstract noun	19 866	2,3 %	5	0,05 %
Motion expression	22 662	2,7 %	9 197	86,8 %
Body-part noun	4 762	0,5 %	590	5,5 %

bis zu

(a) Main use: expression of time (85,7 %)

- (11) *Bis zum Sommer soll der Spielplatz auf der Schulanlage [...] realisiert werden.*

‘Up to the summer the playground on the school grounds should be ready.’

(Cosmas II: A00/JAN.00288 St. Galler Tagblatt, 04.01.2000, Ressort: RT-URT (Abk.); Erlebniswelt auf dem Pausenplatz).

(b) Particular expression of time: step or event in one’s life, e.g. death, retiring, going to school for the first time, end of school,... (7,4 %):

- (12) *Die Jahre bis zu seinem Tod am 8. Januar 1642 verbrachte er unter Hausarrest.*

‘He spent the years up to his death under house arrest’;

(Cosmas II: N00/JAN.00493 Salzburger Nachrichten, 07.01.2000, Ressort: Kopf Story; Und sie bewegt sich doch).

(c) Expressions of quantification (1,2 %)

→ + numeral before N

(13) *Der Texaner überlebte bis zu 30 Grad Kälte.*

‘The Texan guy survived up to 30 degrees cold’;

(Cosmas II: E00/JAN.00287 Zürcher Tagesanzeiger, 03.01.2000, S. 10, Ressort: Kehrseite; Auf 3000 Metern "Lothar" überlebt).

(14) *Viele Arzneien würden dort bis zu 60 Prozent billiger angeboten.*

‘Many drugs were offered there up to 60 percent cheaper.’

(Cosmas II: NUN00/DEZ.01254 Nürnberger Nachrichten, 14.12.2000, S. 10; Kurznachrichten aus der Wirtschaft).

(d) Abstract noun (2,3 %)

(15) *... trinken diese ‚Gäste‘ oft bis zum Exzess Alkohol;*

‘...these guests often drink alcohol to excess’;

(Cosmas II: RHZ05/JUL.25288 Rhein-Zeitung, 22.07.2005; Schläger ziehen von Fete zu Fete)

bis an

(a) Main use: expression of motion (86,8 %)

(16) *Ein Schimmer von Natur geriet [...] bis an die Fenster der Schulen.*

'A shimmer of nature came up to the windows of the school';

(Cosmas II: N92/SEP.33963 Salzburger Nachrichten, 15.09.1992; Zweckbauten zur Umerziehung).

(b) Life stage/period of time (7,4 %)

(17) *Wenn man nicht Dilettant sein will, sondern Künstler bis an sein Lebensende, ...*

'If one does not want to be a dilettante/amateur, but an artist up to one's life end, ...';

(Cosmas II: N91/NOV.19929 Salzburger Nachrichten, 14.11.1991; Ein bunter Vogel mit Unternehmergeist am Metropol).

(c) Body-part noun (5,5 %)

(18) *Bis an die Zähne bewaffnete Soldaten suchen nach Waffen für die GAM, die Guerillaorganisation.*

'Soldiers weaponed up to the teeth look for weapons for the GAM, the Guerilla organisation';

(Cosmas II: E00/FEB.03564 Zürcher Tagesanzeiger, 08.02.2000, S. 5, Ressort: Ausland; Der Präsident will Dialog, die Armee Gewalt).

2.2. Other collocates

- (19) *Die...Detektivin...verfolgte beide bis zu einem Hause in der Neanderstraße. – Sie benachrichtigte nun die Polizei,...;*
'The...detective...tracked both up to a house in the Neanderstreet. - Then she informed the police,...';

(DWDS corpus: o.A., o.T. [Die belgischen Flüchtlinge ...], in: Berliner Tageblatt (Morgen Ausgabe) 05.03.1915, S. 6).

- (20) *Mit der Bahn reisen Kinder bis zum vollendeten 6. Lebensjahr in der Schweiz und in Österreich gratis;*
'Children upon completion of their 6th year travel free by train in Switzerland and Austria';

(Cosmas II: E99/APR.10628 Zürcher Tagesanzeiger, 22.04.1999, S. 80, Ressort: Reisen; Im Katalog ist vieles familienfreundlich).

→ The collocates *nun* in (19) and *vollendet* in (20) stress the goal attainment/telicity/completion => *bis zu*.

3. Degree of entrenchment of the variation

- Are German speakers aware of the difference between alternative constructions?
- Is the variation perceived by a group of experts or does it correspond to folk perception as well?

First intuition:

- The **perception of a meaning and conceptual difference** between constructions with *bis an* and with *bis zu* is dependent on the education level of the speakers.
- The difference is hardly perceived by German non-highly educated natives.

3.1. Empirical research

3.1.1. Test groups

Preliminary remark

Delimitation of the different groups according to their education level is not standardized;

=>Arbitrary decision;

=>Selected criterion: German tripartite education system,

- “Hauptschul-Abschluss” (= lower secondary school degree)
- “Realschul-Abschluss” (= middle secondary modern school degree)
- “Abitur” (A-levels) (= entrance qualification required to study at German universities)
can be obtained at “Gymnasium” (grammar school).

4 groups:

- (i) less educated adults with “Hauptschul-Abschluss” or “Realschulabschluss”
- (ii) higher educated adults with “Abitur” and university degree
- (iii) young adults (between 18 and 23) with “Abitur” degree
- (iv) teenies between 15 and 17 from a “Hauptschule”.

Each group consisted of 12 participants.

3.1.2. Test design

- 32 sentences from the two corpora
- organized in 16 pairs
- one and the same sentence presented with the preposition *an* or *zu* as found in the corpus; the same sentence was replicated but the preposition was switched, e.g.,

(49) a. *Die Nachricht war bis an seinen Arbeitsplatz gedrungen.*

*‘The news had reached up to his work place’;

(Cosmas II: E00/FEB.04878 Zürcher Tagesanzeiger, 22.02.2000, S. 43, Ressort: Sport; Sforzas Variante).

b. *Die Nachricht war bis zu seinem Arbeitsplatz gedrungen.*

- Test with two tasks:

(A) acceptability judgment task

Choice between 4 possibilities:

- 'fully acceptable'
- 'acceptable but unusual'
- 'fully unacceptable'
- 'not sure if acceptable';

(B) decision-making task

decide whether meaning differs between

(a)- and (b)-sentences of the same pair;

not explain the difference between (a) and (b)

→ too hard for non-experts

3.2. Results and discussion

3.2.1. Meaning difference

Perception of a meaning difference among the different test groups

	16 pairs of examples X 12 test persons/ group = 192
Less educated adults	46 = 24 %
Higher educated adults	57 = 30 %
Young + Abitur	37 = 19 %
Teenies + Hauptschule	56 = 29 %

- General observation: weak perception of a meaning difference between the different examples;
- Highest score regarding a perceived meaning difference is reached by higher educated people
- Teenies of the “Hauptschule” attain almost the same score as higher educated people
(=> age criterion)
- New light on assumption that education level is decisive for the perception of a meaning difference.

3.2.2. Acceptability

	Less educated		Higher educated		Young + Abitur		Teenies + Hauptschule	
	<i>an</i>	<i>zu</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>zu</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>zu</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>zu</i>
Concrete motion expression	41 acc. 3 not	56 acc. 3 not	43 acc. 10 not	74 acc. 5 not	46 acc. 9 not	72 acc. 3 not	44 acc. 9 not	56 acc. 3 not
Body-part expression	22 acc. 7 not	23 acc. 5 not	27 acc. 13 not	40 acc. 9 not	27 acc. 11 not	36 acc. 7 not	24 acc. 8 not	36 acc. 2 not
Abstract noun	16 acc. 1 not	19 acc. 0 not	27 acc. 4 not	14 acc. 13 not	26 acc. 2 not	20 acc. 3 not	17 acc. 5 not	18 acc. 2 not

- Most test sentences accepted with both prepositions by all four groups;
- Slightly higher score of non-acceptable sentences with higher educated persons;
- Difference between the categories “abstract” and “concrete” seems to be neutralized;
- Gap between (reception of) what speakers accept as being correct or not and the actual production of sentences with *bis* + PREP2 (as reflected in the corpora).

4. Concluding remarks

- Many studies in Sociolinguistics deal with phonological or syntactic variation;
- This study deals with semantic and conceptual variation (See Gries 2003c or Stefanowitsch 2003) ;
- Shows
 - (i) how fundamental corpus study is in Sociolinguistics (See Geeraerts 2005: 167);
 - (ii) how strong the lexical bias of construction alternatives is;
 - (iii) that the correlation between education level and assumptions about metalinguistic competence has to be revised.

- Results of the study about the collocates and the meaning difference are relevant for FLT and FLA
=> help develop better teaching methodology

Thank you !

References: See Preprint