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Betreff

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Motalová, Tereza (2022): *Menzerath-Altmann Law in Chinese*. Ostrava: PhD Thesis.

a) Introduction: assessment of the benefit of the dissertation for the relevant field of study; The overall benefit of the dissertation is to give an in-depth analysis of the Menzerath-Altmann law (MA-law). in Chinese on different linguistic levels (sentence, clause, phrase, word, character/syllable, component/sound and stroke). By considering all this level the PhD thesis is recently the most comprehensive and systematic analysis of Chinese through the prism of Menzerath-Altmann law. The MA-law is together with Zipf's law and Piotrovskij's law one of the cornerstones of contemporary quantitative and synergetic linguistics. Despite the outstanding number of single studies on MA-law in the last decades (many of them are discussed and presented by the author) the field lacks a systematic and well-organized study of the full range of possibilities of the analysis of various linguistic levels within one single language (Chinese). The dissertation under review is therefore an important contribution to our understanding how and where and on which levels MA-law comes into play and where not. Moreover, the dissertation is a systematic proof of various influence factors and challenges the question of overall boundary conditions. A further benefit is that the dissertation deals with an Non-Indo-European language, which are usually not primarily in the focus of quantitative linguistics.

b) Commentary on the problem-solving procedure, methods used and the meeting of the set objective;

The “problem solving procedure” reflects the state of the art in contemporary quantitative linguistics (*lege artis*), including the knowledge of preparing the required raw data (by relying on language corpora and available Universal Dependency Tree banks etc.). Moreover, also near-authentic oral speech and translated language was included. Although it is said that the choice of the language material is motivated “by the possibility of analysing all chosen language units” (p. 50) the chosen input indeed facilitates a check of various challenging obstacles coming into play by using such a heterogeneous linguistic input. As it appears the results apparently doesn’t seem to be affected by this in general, but the author focuses primarily, and this is quite reasonably, on the hierarchical distance between the analysed linguistic units. One further important focus of the dissertation is also to consider the impact of the frequency of units analysed, by distinguishing for instance the level of types and tokens, where possible and appropriate. In case of unsatisfactory modelling results (for instance in case of word length analyses), the author gives some not only some hypothetical explanations, but by changing the input also the empirical dimension is tackled. In particular interesting is that even excluding proper nouns, which hypothetically blur the Menzerathian scenario, at first site don’t change the overall picture. Changing the setting of the analysis (changing the corpus, the decomposition principles, the differentiation of types and tokens, the handling of proper names) and moving forward step-by-step brings some reliable results to the light. Regarding the used statistical methods (basically non-linear modelling, exploratory data analysis, pooling of the data) the dissertation meets the golden standards of contemporary quantitative linguistics.

C) Opinion on the results of the dissertation and the original specific contribution of the dissertation submitter;

The overall results of the dissertation are impressive. The dissertation gives fine-grained insights into the functioning of Menzerath’s law in case when different hierarchy distance between the units/constructs are considered; in this respect the dissertation comes up with rather reliable results, which are worth of being published on an international level. The findings in regard of strictly distinguishing the types/tokens levels in quantitative analysis deserves attention.

D) other commentaries, particularly in relation to the organisation, clarity, formal layout and language of the dissertation;

The dissertation is distinguished by a high degree of clarity and the language meets the standards of Academic English. The formal layout corresponds with the fine readability of the submitted dissertation (some minor shortcomings are the unusual writing of *menzerathian* instead of *Menzerathian*; some case of an overuse of *the*).

E) your unequivocal statement of either recommending or not recommending the submitted dissertation for defence.

Questions:

Below I list three brief questions to which the author could give an answer during the oral defence (as a suggestion):

1. Throughout the dissertation “triplets” is used when naming the linguistic units (constructs, components) for the MA-law analyses. Does this correspondent to the commonly used terminology in quantitative linguistics?
2. When analysing translated language would it be a necessary precondition that also the original text is “determined” by Menzerath’s Altmann law?
3. What are the principles of “random selection” of the sentenced from the used treebanks?

As pointed out above the dissertation is an important state-of-the art contribution to the field of Menzerath-Altmann law and it meets all requirement for an academic work of this kind and **therefore I unequivocally recommend the submitted dissertation for defence.**

Emmerich Kelih

