

New corpus-linguistic approaches to the investigation of poetic occasionalisms: the case of Johann Nepomuk Nestroy

Wolfgang U. Dressler & Barbara Tumfart, Austrian Academy of Sciences

The expansion of electronic corpora allows to pose and answer new questions in the study of occasionalisms created by poets for a single use at a specific point in one of their texts. Such research can surpass the limits of, e.g., studies on James Joyce, such as Boase-Beier (1987), Kotliński (2003), Wu (2011).

Our contribution exemplifies novel paths by investigating the work of the Viennese comedy writer Johann Nepomuk Nestroy (1801-1862) still cherished for his witty word formations, which represent poetic creativity. By means of searching through electronic corpora we first identified whether Nestroy has used (a candidate of being) an occasionalism really only once in his many comedies, second whether it did not occur elsewhere in 19th century writings. Third we classified the audacity of his occasionalisms (according to the methodology in Dressler 2007) and found that, contrary to previous studies, he nearly only used current productive word-formation rules for creating neologisms (99 of 102 occurring in his 3 plays studied).

4) we characterised his occasionalistic compounds as being formed either from elements with small family size in their word positions (e.g. the second member of *Mathilden+schnipfer* occurs as a second compound member only in 1 other compound in all electronic corpora available) or with other semantically surprising relations between them (e.g. neither the first nor the second member of *Liebes+mathematiker* occurs with semantically similar other members in the other position). 5) we studied systematically the cotextual and contextual motivation of his novel words. 6) we found out that the French models of his three comedies lacked any occasionalism. 7) we compared his novel words with the few to be found in the works of his contemporary rival O. Berg and detected that these differed in points 4 and 5. 8) we compared the percentages of occasionalisms assigned to the different characters of his plays and found that the highest percentages were to be uttered by the two characters represented by Nestroy himself and by his most esteemed actor-friend, which proves his strategic creation of occasionalisms on a metalinguistic level.

Above all, Nestroy appears to have formed occasionalisms for increasing the theatrical effect of word play and for stimulating metalinguistic reflection, partially similar to the effects already present in the occasionalisms created by Aristophanes (cf. Peppler 1902). In this way corpus-linguistic analysis of belles-lettres can provide new impulses for literary studies.