

Concessive conjunctions and prepositions: Frequencies and degrees of subjectivity in varieties of English

Ole Schützler

University of Bamberg

ole.schuetzler@uni-bamberg.de

This paper investigates differences between the subordinating concessive conjunctions *although*, *though* and *even though* and the prepositions *in spite of* and *despite* in British, Canadian, Jamaican and Nigerian English (BrE, CanE, JamE, NigE). Focusing on the frequencies and semantic functions of connectives, the study highlights properties of those items beyond the obvious fact that prepositions take nominal complements, while conjunctions take clausal complements, and the observation that they may have different stylistic or emphatic values (cf. Quirk et al. 1985). The analyses are based on data from the *International Corpus of English* (ICE; cf. Greenbaum 1996).

The main research questions asked in this paper are the following: (i) Does the choice of a certain connective correlate with a certain semantic structure of the concessive? (ii) What, if any, is the relationship between the frequency of connectives and the degree of subjectivity of the associated constructions? (iii) How can we account for differences between connectives and varieties?

Three semantic types of concessives are assumed (cf. Sweetser 1990): *Content concessives* like example (1) are based on presuppositions (here: complicated itineraries → problems on a journey); *epistemic concessives* like example (2) are content concessives with inverted semantic polarity; and *speech-act concessives* like example (3) are not based on presuppositions but present two contrasting pragmatic views of a situation. In principle, all three semantic types can be expressed by all five markers, but the prepositions are much less likely than the conjunctions to express epistemic and speech-act relations. It is possible to rank the three types according to their degree of subjectivity (cf. Crevels 2000), i.e. the extent to which they reflect speaker/writer reasoning and argumentation, rather than (presupposed) causal or conditional relations between propositions. In such a ranking, speech-act concessives are most subjective and content concessives least subjective.

(1) [...] I managed to find my way to work with no problems, **even though** it involved a change in buses [...]. <ICE-GB:W1B-002> [content]

(2) **Though** they both believe they're older than me, I'm the eldest [...]. <ICE-JAM:S1A-041> [epistemic]

(3) Mister Speaker, **although** there will be problems along the way, there is also the promise of a better future. <ICE-CAN:S2B-024> [speech-act]

It is shown that *although* and *though* are attached to concessives that are clearly more subjective, compared to *even though*. This semantic specialisation, however, is considerably weaker in JamE and NigE. As expected, the two prepositions clearly prefer the less subjective content concessive type. In BrE and CanE, *despite* is attached to more subjective concessives than *in spite of*, while in the L2-varieties the difference is once again less clear. In general, variants will stand out as being higher in subjectivity if they are also more frequent than their alternatives. This, it is argued, can account for many of the differences observed between varieties since it can be interpreted as evidence of what Traugott (1995) calls 'subjectification in grammaticalisation': As variant forms in a functional domain (e.g. concessive conjunctions or prepositions) become more clearly ranked in frequency and thus undergo specialisation (*sensu* Hopper 1991), they also become semantically more distinct. [445 words]

References

- Crevels, Mily. 2000. Concessives on different semantic levels: A typological perspective. In: Couper-Kuhlen, Elisabeth & Bernd Kortmann (eds.) *Cause – Condition – Condition – Contrast. Cognitive and Discourse Perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 313–339.
- Greenbaum, Sidney. 1996. Introducing ICE. In: Sidney Greenbaum (ed.) *Comparing English Worldwide. The International Corpus of English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 3–12.
- Hopper, Paul J. 1991. On some principles of grammaticization. In: Elisabeth Closs Traugott & Bernd Heine (eds.) *Approaches to Grammaticalization. Vol. I: Focus on Theoretical and Methodological Issues*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 17–35.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Arnold.
- Sweetser, Eve E. 1990. *From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Traugott, Elisabeth Closs. 1995. Subjectification in grammaticalisation. In: Dieter Stein & Susan Wright (eds.) *Subjectivity and Subjectivisation. Linguistic Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 31–54.