

Hearsay in Historical German Newspapers (1740–1840)

The century ‘around’ 1800 was a central period in the history of European society. Between the late Enlightenment and the revolutions of 1848, a series of changes fueled by rapidly growing industrialization and urbanization took place, as well as advances in mass education, widespread politicization of the masses, and increasingly pressing requests for democratic policies.

This period was pivotal for the evolution of newspapers. Because of booming alphabetization and the blossoming of the bourgeoisie, newspapers garnered a growing readership who, in time, became increasingly exigent. This led to the professionalization of journalism and journalists. However, this important period and its impact on the language of newspapers have not been fully investigated in the field of the history of the German language.

In the paper, I will delineate the first results of a research project on the connections among changes in society, changes in the text genre ‘report,’ and changes in the formulation of reported speech in German newspapers in the century ‘around’ 1800.

The focus of the paper is the lexical and grammatical marking of information source of hearsay in reported speech. Following Wiemer (2010: 59), hearsay is understood as synonymous with reportive evidentiality, that is, “reported information with no reference to who it was reported by” (Aikhenvald 2018: 12). Hearsay markers in German comprise — but are not limited to — the reportive modal verb *sollen* (a) (Wiemer 2010: 81; Smirnova & Diewald 2013) and indirect speech with the generic 3SG subject pronoun *man* (b) (Jäger 2010: 179), as well as constructions with the verb *hören* (*hear*; Whitt 2009: 1088–1889) and with the reportive particle *angeblich* (*allegedly*; Wiemer 2010: 92).

- a. Sonst **sollen** Se. Königl. Majestät in Ruppin am See, 3 der größten Häuser erkaufte haben (BN 4.10.1740: 2)
[Furthermore, His Royal Majesty **is said to** have purchased 3 of the largest houses in Ruppin on the lake]
- b. **Man sagt**, daß der General Brocon [...] das Commando über die Truppen [...] führen werde; (BN 2.7.1740: 1)
[**It is said** that General Brocon will command the troops]

1. Research hypothesis:

Due to the changes delineated above, newspaper reports became more transparent in handling information and information source (Schroder 2017: 169–172); it is expected that this led to a decrease in the frequency of hearsay and an increase in quotative strategies, that is, “reported information with an overt reference to the authorship of the quoted source” (Aikhenvald 2018: 12).

2. Research object:

Reported speech, understood as any form of direct or indirect reporting of or reference to linguistically encoded content produced in another communicative situation in the *Wiener Zeitung* (WZ) and the *Berlinische Nachrichten von Staats- und gelehrten Sachen* (BN) (1740–1840), with a focus on hearsay.

3. Corpus:

Factual reports (*Kurzbericht*, *faktizierende Meldung*, *Erlebnisbericht*, Wille 2020: 150–155) in the WZ and BN from the years 1740, 1745 – 1770, 1775 – 1800, 1805 – 1830, 1835 (two issues per year).

4. Methodology:

Production of a taxonomy of hearsay markers present in the WZ and BN (1740–1840);

Quantitative investigation of the diachronic changes in frequency of different hearsay markers in comparison to quotative strategies in reported speech.

5. Results:

As expected, in the analyzed time span, hearsay markers became progressively rare. In the WZ issues from 1740 to 1775, between 38% and 47% of all instances of reported speech are hearsay; that is, they do not contain any indication of the information source. In the 19th century, a steady decrease in the frequency of hearsay is observable: In the 1835 issues of the WZ, only 7.5% of all reported speech is hearsay. This diachronic development can be explained fully in light of the changes in media and society in the century ‘around’ 1800.

However, it remains to be discussed why not all markers of hearsay decline at the same rate. Whereas constructions with the generic 3SG subject pronoun *man* decline from being one of the most frequent formulations of reported speech in 1740–1775 (16–20%) to disappearing almost entirely (from 3.2% in 1830 to 0% in 1835), the frequency of the reportive *sollen* remains constant, at ca. 6%.

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