

Languages in general have various possibilities to express one and the same propositional content. One of these possibilities is grammatical variation. This thesis is concerned with the variation of the linear word order in a clause and the effects triggered by word order alternations. Although sharing the same propositional content, different word order variants can carry different functions; word order variation can be used to achieve certain stylistic effects. The dissertation looks at functional and stylistic preferences of English regarding variation from the canonical word order in (1).

(1) [Ernie]_s [sits]_v [on the table]_o. (SVO)

The variation under consideration is locative inversion (LOCI), exemplified in (2).

(2) On the table sits Ernie.

As any variation from the canonical word order is said to strongly depend on the grammatical system of the language a sentence is realized in, the perspective is extended to the word order equivalent of the sentence above in German (3). The goal is to highlight possible differences/similarities between English and German with respect to one specific word order variant in a declarative main clause.

(3) Auf dem Tisch liegt ein Brief.
On the table lies a letter
'On the table lies a letter'.

As the variation from the canonical word order is not expected to be coincidental in both languages, the features that favor the pattern under consideration are examined. This is done through a statistical analysis by employing two comparable corpora, the BNC for English and the TÜPP D/Z for German. The central questions for the thesis therefore are: What are the functions of the inverted constructions in English and German, what features favor their use in the respective languages, and how are they realized syntactically?

One finding is that German uses the syntactic pattern PP-V-NP for very similar reasons this pattern is used for in English. There seems to be a general tendency to order shorter before longer constituents. The syntactic pattern under consideration fulfills similar discourse functions in both languages. Both languages show similar preferences, they are driven by similar factors when having to decide on whether to stay with the canonical order or to prepose (respectively invert) the canonically postverbal PP.