

On identifiability and definiteness in English and German:
An example of contrastive information structure analysis

Carsten Breul
(University of Wuppertal)

Abstract

Despite increasingly numerous works dealing with issues of information structure from a cross-linguistic perspective, contrastive information structure analysis is not an established field of research yet. The paper aims at showing that it is worthwhile staking out and exploring such a field. Starting off from a brief reminder of what information structure is, as conceived of by Lambrecht (1994), the paper proposes guiding questions that contrastive information structure analysis should strive to answer. It then turns to the discussion of an example of contrastive analysis which involves the information structural category of identifiability. It is argued that the variable x in the English formula *as for* x and the corresponding German formula *was* x $\{(an)betrifft / angeht\}$ in sentence initial position can only be instantiated by expressions that have identifiable discourse referents. Results of a corpus-based comparison of expressions which instantiate x in these English and German formulas are presented. These results show contrasts between English and German in the lexicogrammatical expression of identifiable referents that go beyond the better-known differences in the use of the definite article. A methodological point to be made is that Lambrechtian categories of information structure (identifiability and activation of discourse referents, focus structure) may serve as *tertia comparationis* for the analysis of contrasts on the lexicogrammatical level.

1 Lambrecht (1994) as a framework for contrastive information structure analysis

The first paragraph of the "Summary and conclusion" of Knud Lambrecht's *Information structure and sentence form* (1994) reads as follows:

In this book, I have tried to present an integrated account of the relationship between the formal structure of sentences and the communicative situations in which sentences are used to convey pieces of propositional information. The account is based on the assumption that this relationship is governed by principles and rules of grammar, in a component of information structure. In this information structure component, propositions, as conceptual representations of states of affairs, undergo pragmatic structuring according to the discourse situations in which these states of affairs are to be communicated. The pragmatic structuring of propositions is done in terms of a speaker's assumptions concerning the hearer's state of mind at the time of an utterance. Pragmatically structured propositions are then paired with appropriate lexicogrammatical structures. (Lambrecht 1994: 334)

A simple illustration that can be given to provide an idea of what Lambrecht means by 'pragmatic structuring of propositions' and by 'assumptions about the hearer's state of mind' is this: Consider a communicative situation in which a speaker has the option of felicitously using the expressions in (1):

- (1) a. John will be there.
- b. John will be.
- c. John will.
- d. John.

This will be the case in a situation in which the open propositional form ' x will be at place p at time t ' has just been evoked so that it can be assumed by the speaker to be active in the mind of the hearer. The hearer may, for instance, have asked a question like '*Who will be there?*', thereby evoking this open propositional form. That is, the association with this open propositional form is a part of the pragmatic structuring implied by the expressions in (1) given that they can be felicitously substituted for one another in a given communicative situation. Observations concerning the pairing of lexicogrammatical structures with this aspect of a pragmatically structured proposition would include the fact that the word *John* would have to carry the main sentence accent in (1a-d), albeit trivially so in (1d), and that (1b-d) can be analysed as elliptical versions of (1a). It would be a contrastive information structural observation to state that German does not allow elliptical expressions corresponding to (1b, c) to be used in analogous communicative situations; see (2).

- (2) a. Hans wird da sein.
- b. *Hans wird sein.
- c. *Hans wird.
- d. Hans.

From section 2 onwards I will concentrate on one of the categories that Lambrecht (1994) identifies as making up information structure. This is the category concerned with assumptions about the identifiability of discourse referents in the addressee's mind. Here I will briefly mention the other categories as well: There is also the category concerned with assumptions about the activation states of discourse referents in the addressee's mind. This dimension is very closely interrelated with the identifiability category, and they may be considered two sub-categories of an overarching category 'identifiability and activation'. They have to do with lexicogrammatical notions such as (in)definiteness, (non-)specificity, pronominal or zero versus full lexical coding, sentence versus embedded clause. The second

main category concerns the pairing of lexicogrammatical structures with assumptions about what kinds of informationally empty slots in an open propositional form the utterance is to fill in the addressee's mental representation of the discourse; this 'focus structure' dimension has to do with the lexicogrammatical notions sentence focus structure, predicate focus structure, and argument focus structure (orthetic, categorical, and identificational sentences).¹

The Lambrecht quotation that I began with provides a good starting point for saying what contrastive information structure analysis (henceforth CISA) is concerned with, or rather, as the label is not yet an established one in linguistics, what I propose studies that are covered by this label should be concerned with. They should be concerned with the following questions:

- 1) What are the lexicogrammatical structures in each of the languages to be compared that play a role in the pairing of pragmatically structured propositions with them? (Note that here and in what follows I regard prosodic and intonational features as being part of lexicogrammar.)
- 2) What are the rules or principles in each of the languages to be compared that underlie this pairing of pragmatically structured propositions and lexicogrammatical structures?
- 3) Are these rules or principles the same or different in the languages to be compared?
- 4) Given that some of these rules or principles are the same, are there lexicogrammatical structures that function in the same way in the languages to be compared?
- 5) What are the commonalities and differences in the behaviour of the lexicogrammatical structures that function partially in the same way in the languages to be compared?

Just as in other fields of contrastive linguistics, and necessarily so, CISA presupposes some work in the non-contrastive domain with which it is associated. Thus, dealing with questions 1) and 2) in each of the languages to be compared amounts to non-contrastive information structure analysis as a prerequisite for CISA in the narrow sense.

It is well known in contrastive linguistics that a successful contrastive analysis depends crucially on an appropriately defined *tertium comparationis* (TC). As stated recently by König and Gast (2007: 5): "The problem of establishing comparability and of finding the 'third of comparison' (*tertium comparationis*) is a major issue in any kind of comparative work." A TC is the scale, or parameter, on which two structures, units, rules, or principles of two languages may be compared. That is, it must make sense to apply this scale, or parameter, to linguistic structures, units, rules or principles of two languages. The problem in contrastive

¹ Discussion, often contrastive, of this last dimension forms the bulk of Lambrecht (1994). See also Breul (2004, 2007). Focus structure will play no role in the present paper.

linguistics is, in principle, the same as that of avoiding a comparison of apples with pears on the scale of say, intelligence.² Comparability is possible if the things to be compared may take more than one value on the scale or parameter on which they are compared. The problem in contrastive linguistics, which makes finding TCs much more difficult than in everyday-life, is that the TCs themselves are constructs of linguistic theory or theories and thus subject to effects of intra-theoretical inconsistency and/or inter-theoretical variation. Lambrecht's (1994) theory of information structure provides a solid framework within which the problem of finding appropriate TCs for doing CISA can be successfully tackled. There are, in fact, many examples of illuminating contrastive analyses in that book, and I consider these the seeds of a theoretically well founded kind of CISA.

For CISA, the most typical and direct procedure would be to start out from an information structural category and to ask how this information structural category is expressed by lexicogrammatical means in the languages to be contrasted. At the present stage of our knowledge of and familiarity with categories of information structure, it is not easy to come up with procedures for identifying instances of information structure categories. Thus, it may turn out that for the time being CISA will often have to take a more indirect, roundabout way, in which the nature of information structural categories crystallises more clearly only *after* lexicogrammatical features which are hypothesised to bear on information structure have been studied in greater detail. That is, it may often be the case that the preferred starting point is a lexicogrammatical feature that is assumed to be information structurally relevant, such as the cleft construction, left and right dislocation, fronting (preposing), definiteness, or certain intonation patterns in English. The information structural function of such a lexicogrammatical feature is then compared with that of its counterpart in other languages – to the extent that there is any counterpart. In that way more insights into information structure and its categories will certainly accumulate, with the result that in the future the more direct approach just mentioned can be taken. But notice that this preliminary approach faces the TC problem. For what *is* an information structural counterpart in language B of a lexicogrammatical feature in language A if we have to reckon with differences in their information structural functions? Or, to phrase this question in terms of more concrete examples: What *is* the information structural counterpart of English definiteness in a language that has no lexicogrammatical category definiteness? Or, what *is* the information structural counterpart of German definiteness in English, if we assume or know that the role of English

² Despite the old saying, apples and pears can be compared on many scales, such as vitamin C content, weight, sweetness etc.; but on many other scales a comparison is not possible.

definiteness for information structure is different in certain respects from that of German? The solution to these problems, of course, is to study the information structural properties of the respective lexicogrammatical features in one language first, and then to study how these information structural properties are matched by lexicogrammatical features in the other language. But this is then the indirect, roundabout approach that I mentioned above. As it happens, as far as differences between two languages in the lexicogrammatical expression of identifiable referents are concerned, some systematic insights can be gained by a procedure that amounts to the direct approach, where identifiability is the starting point. This is the procedure based on the identification and contrastive investigation of *as for* formulas (and their counterparts in other languages), an application of which with respect to German and English will be discussed in sections 3 to 5 of the present paper.

What has so far been said is by no means to imply that there is little importance or value in the cross-linguistic, comparative, or contrastive research on issues of information structure that is not based on Lambrecht (1994). For one thing, Lambrecht (1994) itself builds on a large and solid foundation of previous research, some of which includes cross-linguistic discussions (e.g. Comrie 1981, Dik 1978, Foley and Van Valin 1984, Fuchs 1980, Kuno 1972, Mathesius 1928/1964, Sasse 1987, Thompson 1978, several of the articles in Li (ed.) 1976). And many theoretically and empirically highly interesting observations with implications for CISA have been made in the more recent literature that has made little or no use of Lambrecht's (1994) framework of information structure theory.³ My point, however, is that this theoretical framework is a thorough and comprehensive one and that it can be put to advantageous use in conceptualising and integrating results of future contrastive information structure research and of results that have already been arrived at on more heterogeneous theoretical foundations.

³ It is impossible here to give a representative (not to speak of exhaustive) list of references for which this holds. A substantial recent list of references to research on information structure in general can be found in Erteschik-Shir (2007), containing many of the works that are cases in point; Erteschik-Shir (2007) itself contains several references to Lambrecht (1994). Among recent books that represent an explicitly cross-linguistic, comparative, or contrastive perspective on information structure with some references to Lambrecht (1994), Hasselgård et al. (eds.) (2002) and Schwabe and Winkler (eds.) (2007) can be mentioned. Extensive use of the Lambrechtian framework has been made in role and reference grammar (e.g. Van Valin (ed.) 2005).

2 Identifiability and definiteness

Imagine a communicator about to produce an utterance in which a certain entity is involved that cannot be referred to deictically. Identifiability has to do with the communicator's assumption about whether or not the addressee already has a representation of that entity in her mind. If the communicator assumes that such a mental representation does not yet exist, the entity is said to be unidentifiable, and the representation has to be created. Lambrecht (1994: 77, following Heim 1982) points out that the "creation of such a new discourse representation for the addressee can be compared to the establishment of a new referential 'file' in the discourse register, to which further elements of information may be added in the course of the conversation and which can be reopened in future discourses." If such a 'file' already exists in the discourse register, the entity is said to be identifiable. (Note that the term *identifiability* refers to the parameter that comprises the values 'unidentifiable' and 'identifiable'; its reference is not restricted to denotata that are identifiable.)

Lambrecht (1994) focuses on the identifiability of the referents of such phrases as the italicised ones in (3).

- (3) a. I am looking for *a book*.
- b. I met {*this / a*} *guy from Heidelberg* on the train.
- c. I met *the daughter of a king*.
- d. *A book* is a useful thing to have in *a doctor's waiting room*.
- e. She is now studying *the whale*.

These cases seem to be characterised by the fact that there is always a set of concrete individuals involved (books, guys from Heidelberg, daughters of kings, doctors' waiting rooms, whales). The identifiability issue seems to be about having or not having a mental representation of one individual in the set, or of some kind of abstraction over concrete individuals in the set, this kind of abstraction resulting in either genericity or type identifiability.⁴ It may be asked what information structural identifiability means with respect to abstract entities of which there are no concrete individuals as instantiations, such as the referents of expressions such as *difficulty*, *expectation*, *music*, *homework*, which are examples

⁴ 'Type identifiability' is explained in the following way by Gundel et al. (1993: 276):

The addressee is able to access a representation of the type of object described by the expression. This status is necessary for appropriate use of any nominal expression, and it is sufficient for use of the indefinite article *a* in English. Thus, *a dog* in [the discourse *I couldn't sleep last night. A dog (next door) kept me awake.*] is appropriate only if the addressee can be assumed to know the meaning of the word *dog* and can therefore understand what type of thing the phrase *a dog* describes.

of abstract nouns given by Quirk et al. (1985: 247).⁵ I will briefly return to this question in section 4.

It can be argued that identifiability is a universal pragmatic concept, that is, one that plays a role in the way utterances are expressed in all languages. In some languages, including English and German, identifiability has a reflex in the lexicogrammatical category of definiteness. Some authors present the relation between lexicogrammatical definiteness and information structural identifiability as a one-to-one form-function mapping, at least as far as the definite and indefinite articles in English and German are concerned. Allan (2001: 448), for instance, writes:

Although articles *the*, *a(n)* and *some* are quantifiers, quantification is incidental to their primary functions. The FUNCTION OF DEFINITE ARTICLE *THE* is to mark the identifiability of the referent. The FUNCTION OF INDEFINITE ARTICLES is to indicate that the definite is not applicable.⁶

Quirk et al. (1985) make a similar claim:

The definite article *the* is used to mark the phrase it introduces as definite, *ie* as referring to something which can be identified uniquely in the contextual or general knowledge shared by speaker and hearer. (Ibid.: 265)

The indefinite article is notionally the 'unmarked' article in the sense that it is used (for singular count nouns) where the conditions for the use of *the* do not obtain. That is, *a/an* *X* will be used where the reference of *X* is not uniquely identifiable in the shared knowledge of speaker and hearer. (Ibid.: 272)

Gallmann (2005) makes broadly the same claim for German:

Der definite Artikel *der/die/das* kennzeichnet ein Substantiv bzw. den damit gebildeten Ausdruck [...] als hinreichend identifiziert oder 'bestimmt'. (Ibid.: 299)

Im freien Gebrauch^[7] erhalten Substantive den indefiniten Artikel, wenn drei Bedingungen erfüllt sind:

- Sie stehen im Singular.
- Sie weisen das semantische Merkmal 'zählbar' auf [...].
- Es gibt keinen semantischen Grund für ein anderes Artikelwort. (Ibid.: 337)

More detailed analyses of definiteness and identifiability have revealed, however, that their relation is far from being one-to-one or straightforward. According to Lambrecht (1994:

⁵ That some people will feel there to be a difference in the degree of abstractness between, say, *expectation* and *music* and that it may appear plausible to think of music as an abstraction over individual concrete pieces of music are points that hint to the philosophical dynamite contained in the question.

⁶ For Allan (2001: 448), this function of an indefinite article is based on conversational implicature.

⁷ By *freier Gebrauch* ('free use') Gallmann means a use within a noun phrase that is not part of an invariable multi-word unit. Examples of invariable multi-word units are expressions such as *eine Entwicklung nehmen*, *aus einer Mücke einen Elefanten machen* or proverbs such as *Ein Unglück kommt selten allein* (see Gallmann 2005: 305ff., 338).

108), "definite vs. indefinite coding is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for either identifiability or activation state, at least in English, even though the tendency is strong for unidentifiable referents to be coded as indefinite noun phrases." Similar results have been gained by other authors, for example by Lyons (1999).⁸ Note that expressions with unidentifiable referents as understood by Lambrecht are type identifiable for those authors who employ this term (cf. fn. 4).

If there is no one-to-one relation between the grammatical category definiteness and the information structural category identifiability, then we may expect to find differences in the way identifiability is expressed or not expressed even in languages that have the grammatical category definiteness, such as English and German. That is, identifiability may serve as an information structural TC with respect to which we may analyse commonalities and differences in the manifestation of the grammatical category definiteness. In words harking back to the quotation from Lambrecht (1994) I began with: Identifiability is an information structural category manifested in a pragmatically structured proposition, and definiteness is a lexicogrammatical category that is in some, probably systematic but cross-linguistically variant, way paired with it.

3 *As for* formulas: Identifying identifiable referents

Insights into this pairing can be gained by a procedure that is based on the assumption that in some languages there are certain formulas, those in (4) for instance, in which a variable part can only be instantiated by an expression that denotes an identifiable referent.

- (4) English: *as for* x
 German: *was* x {(an)betrifft / angeht}
 French: *quant à* x

According to Lambrecht (1994: 152), "the phrase *as for NP* (as well as similar phrases in other languages) can be appropriately used only if the NP referent is already a potential topic in the discourse at the time the phrase is used, i.e. if the referent is contextually accessible". 'Contextual accessibility', or 'textual accessibility', as Lambrecht calls it earlier on in the book

⁸ Lyons (1999: 278) writes:

let us say that definiteness is the grammaticalization of identifiability. It may be that identifiability is an element in interpretation in all languages, but in many languages it is not grammaticalized.

In languages where identifiability is represented grammatically, this representation is definiteness; and definiteness is likely to express identifiability prototypically. But it is to be expected that there will be other uses of definiteness which do not relate to identifiability – inclusive uses for example.

(e.g. p. 100), is given if the referent was active at some previous stage in the discourse but has subsequently been deactivated, or if it is accessible "via inference from some other active or accessible element in the universe of discourse" (i.e. the linguistic or extra-linguistic context) (Lambrecht 1994: 100). Note that there is a close logical connection between (con)textual accessibility and identifiability in Lambrecht's (1994) conception in that the accessibility of a referent entails its identifiability. In terms of the file card metaphor: The question of whether a given file card is on top of a stack of file cards or, if it is not, how far away it is from the top of the stack, poses itself only for existing file cards. Consequently, the referent of a noun phrase *x* in the formula *as for x* is necessarily identifiable. Having established this, the following contrastive procedure can be applied: Investigate what kinds of expressions can be inserted for *x* in such a formula of language A; then determine if there is a corresponding expression for *x* in such a formula of language B; and, if this is the case, take note of lexicogrammatical commonalities and differences between the expressions for *x*.

For the present paper, the procedure just mentioned was applied to English and German in the following way: All sentences that begin with the formula *as for x* were extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC).⁹ These data were scanned for interesting phenomena potentially connected to the identifiability / definiteness issue that result from a comparison between the English expression instantiating *x* in this formula and its German translation counterpart(s) instantiating *x* in the formula *was x {(an)betrifft / angeht}*.¹⁰ This preliminary comparison revealed an interesting difference between the German counterparts of some of the English expressions instantiating *x* that are 'bare' (i.e. articleless) singular noun phrases, as in (5) below, where the German version demands a definite article.

- (5) Portuguese and Danish funds may not invest in other countries. Italian funds cannot hold more than 20% of their money in private companies. No more than 5% of a German fund's assets can be in overseas bonds. Belgian funds must put 15% of their technical reserves into Belgian government bonds. *As for management*, Spain and

⁹ The BNC is a computerised corpus of contemporary written and spoken British English of roughly 100 million words (ca. 90 % written, 10 % spoken material). For more information on the BNC see the website at <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>.

¹⁰ I would like to stress that I am not (implicitly or explicitly) claiming that the 'best' German translation equivalent of an English sentence starting with the *as for* formula is generally a German sentence that starts with *was x {angeht / (an)betrifft}*. I am only interested in the lexicogrammatical definiteness issue as far as noun phrases instantiating *x* are concerned.

Portugal exclude foreign firms. (ABK 2482)¹¹

Cf. German: *Was *(das)¹² Management angeht, ...*

As this phenomenon was to be focused on, the corpus investigation was narrowed down to those instances where the English sentence contains an *as for* x formula with x being a bare noun phrase in the singular. German translation counterparts of these phrases embedded in the *was x {(an)betrifft / angeht}* formula were elicited from four native speakers of German and proficient speakers of English as a second language, including myself.¹³ All the German versions mentioned in the present paper and the acceptability judgements connected to them reflect the intuitions of these four speakers. It should be mentioned in addition that the corpus investigation was not intended to result in quantitative assessments. The BNC served only as a source of examples. No attempts at an exhaustive categorisation of data were made.

In what follows I concentrate on the phenomenon just mentioned, which does not seem to have been discussed in the English-German contrastive literature so far.¹⁴ In order to avoid further clumsy phrasing, I will call an expression that instantiates the variable x in the *as for* x formulas an '*as for* expression' from now on.

4 *As for* expressions in English and German

As already pointed out in the preceding section and exemplified by (5), English has *as for* expressions that are singular in number and occur without a marker of definiteness or indefiniteness whose German counterparts cannot occur without a marker of definiteness in the singular at all. Further examples from the BNC are given in (6).

- (6) a. Anyone is free to advertise with us at any time, *Gay Times* included. *As for content*, did you read our recent pieces on Derek Jarman's sainthood, the New

¹¹ Here and below, these labels identify the BNC document (here ABK) and the sentence number (here 2482) of the sentence in which the *as for* formula occurs.

¹² Recall that the notation ' $\dots*(x)\dots$ ' means that the whole expression is acceptable with x and unacceptable without x .

¹³ I am grateful to Yvonne Jesorek, Ina Schlafke and Alex Thiel (age range 24 - 27) for providing translations and discussing the examples with me (age 44). All four native speakers of German involved have grown up in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

¹⁴ Aspects of (in)definiteness in English and German from an explicitly contrastive perspective have been discussed in Chesterman (1993), Ebert (1982), Zelinsky-Wibbelt (1995), Zotter (1977). A rather comprehensive descriptive studies of (in)definiteness in English is Hawkins (1978). For German, the relevant sections in standard reference grammars may be mentioned, e.g. Gallmann (2005: 299-344), Zifonun et al. (1997: 1926-1968).

York drag scene, Kinky Gerlinky, [...]. (CGB 97)

*Was *(den) Inhalt angeht, ...*

- b. The jacket is rather short, so a jersey or fleece has to be put under the shoulder straps of the salopettes, not over, or it will stick out below the jacket and get wet. *As for general design*, cuffs storm flaps, pockets and parts of the hood all need looking at. (CL7 962)

Was {(?)allgemeines Design / das allgemeine Design} angeht, ...*

- c. *As for reality in character-drawing*, the ancestor of the English sea-story, Marryat, had his own way of dealing with the difficulty. (EC8 347)

*Was *(die) Wahrhaftigkeit bei der Charakterzeichnung angeht, ...*

- d. Only 1 man in 4 says he enjoyed the experience a lot. Another 36% liked it quite a lot, but almost as many men enjoyed it only a little, not very much or not at all (7% of our sample say they can't remember how they felt).

As for venue, only 58% made it to the bedroom. (ECT 948)

*Was *(den) Ort angeht, ...*

- e. This applies whether you're taking in an impromptu street performance at Toronto's Harbourfront or breakfasting on beaver-tails at Ottawa's Byward Market (relax, beaver-tails are Indian dumplings and delicious). Or strolling through one of Hamilton's many museums.

As for nightlife – well, we don't roll up the sidewalks at 11pm. (G26 68)

*Was *(das) Nachtleben angeht, ...*

- f. With partnerships and small businesses, the main avoidable tax loss is due to the failure to keep proper track of small cash expenditures, or losing records of minor expenses.

As for capital gains tax, the main waste is due to the failure of married couples to make full use of their allowances. (K59 369)

*Was *(die) Kapitalertragssteuer angeht, ...*

The following example is slightly different from the preceding ones in that an *as for* expression introduced by an indefinite article would have been acceptable in both English and German (*As for a burial in a churchyard ... / Was eine Beisetzung auf einem Kirchhof angeht ...*). But again the English bare *as for* expression corresponds most closely to a German *as for* expression introduced by a definite article.

- (7) As far as the church is concerned the position is a complicated one. Remember that suicide only stopped being a crime in 1956 and until then people were imprisoned if they were found to have attempted suicide. *As for burial in a churchyard* or a church service for the dead person, the position is again a very complicated one. (ADE 921)
*Was *(die) Beisetzung auf einem Kirchhof angeht, ...*

A special and very frequent case is exemplified by (8), where the English *as for* expression is headed by a verbal noun in *-ing* corresponding to a German nominalised infinitive preceded by the definite article *das*.

- (8) In Bangladesh children under the age of five or six are looked after by the whole family. All the children in the joint family are looked after together. They are taken to the pond for a bath perhaps by one daughter-in-law, and she bathes them all. [...] Another woman feeds them. *As for playing*, children play out of doors with natural objects. (A6V 583)
*Was *(das) Spielen angeht, ...*

There is a highly controversial debate on how exactly to represent the internal structure of what is traditionally called a noun phrase – i.e. DP or NP in the terminology of generative syntax (see e.g. Lyons 1999: ch. 8, Alexiadou et al. 2007 and the references given there). And this carries over to the syntactic representation of definiteness. I need not take a stand in this debate for present purposes and I can remain rather surface oriented with respect to syntactic structures. For what follows I need to make a distinction only between noun phrases in which the traditional head noun is preceded by a definite article and those in which the traditional head noun is not preceded by any article. The former, such as phrases like those in (9a), will be referred to as 'definite noun phrases'; the latter, such as phrases like those in (9b), will be referred to as 'non-definite noun phrases'.

- (9) a. the burial, the burials; die Beisetzung, die Beisetzungen ('definite noun phrases')
 b. reaction, reactions; Reaktion, Reaktionen ('non-definite noun phrases')

And conversely, whenever I refer to the notions 'definite / non-definite noun phrase' in the following, I have no other noun phrases in mind than those represented by (9), that is, where there either is or is not a definite article present, either with the singular or plural form of the noun. The reason for my avoiding the traditional term '*indefinite* noun phrase' here (as e.g. in Quirk et al. 1985: 253) is that noun phrases that lack a definiteness marker at the syntactic

surface can still be lexicogrammatically definite due to a covert definiteness marker or definiteness feature. For, according to Alexiadou et al. (2007: 162), several authors "maintain that the functional head D is as such responsible for the interpretation of a noun phrase as definite, generic, etc. This means that even in the absence of an overt article a nominal projection that is interpreted as, say, definite will have a D-projection". And according to Lyons (1999: 300),

there are languages which probably make it necessary to suppose that a definite article can be null, and DP therefore non-overt. These are languages like Mam, Sinhalese, and probably Turkish, in which definiteness is signalled not by a definite article, but by absence of a quasi-indefinite article.

Note also that if Lyons (1999: 49f.) is right in saying that the English indefinite article "*a*" is obligatory in singular indefinite noun phrases in the absence of any other determiner", then all of the *as for* expressions in (5)-(8) are actually definite. My strictly surface oriented use of *non-definite* is to avoid this potential source of confusion induced by terminology, which would ensue if considerations of surface structure (Quirk et al. 1985) were mingled with considerations of underlying structure (Lyons 1999).

Note that none of the examples in (5) and (6) corresponds to the cases of better-known differences between English and German in the use of the definite article. I am referring to observations such as the following one by Zotter (1977), where German obligatorily definite noun phrases are contrasted with their English obligatorily non-definite counterparts:

Der Gebrauch des bestimmten Artikels bei Abstrakten im Deutschen (z.B. 'die Natur', 'der Protestantismus', 'die Industrie') verleitet zu Fehlern wie *'in the nature', *'the Protestantism', *'the industry'. [...] Gegenüberzustellen ist die Verwendung des Artikels bei Postmodifikationen des Abstraktums, z.B. 'the agriculture of Austria', 'the Protestantism introduced under Edward VI', 'the staple industry of this area'. (Ibid.: 40)

An example from the BNC which corresponds to this observation is (10).

- (10) The same applies to the general deterrent argument: its effectiveness depends on whether the penalty for murder affects the calculations of potential killers at all, and, if it does, whether life imprisonment is seen as significantly more or less severe than the alternative of a long, fixed-term sentence. *As for public protection*, this depends on executive decisions with regard to release; it fails to take into account whether it is necessary for public protection to keep 'lifers' in for so long. (ACJ 47)

Was *(den) Schutz der Öffentlichkeit angeht, ...

Consider also the following quotation from Chesterman (1993).

In German, for example, noun phrases seem to be typically more heavily specified than in English – at least insofar as degree of specification is reflected in the presence or absence of the definite article. Consider pairs such as the following, where German has (or can have) a surface article but English does not": *Das Wasser vergiftet die Menschheit.* vs. *Water poisons humanity.*; *Der Sozialismus ist tot.* vs. *Socialism is dead.* etc. (Ibid.: 21)

The second pair of sentences given by Chesterman corresponds to the examples given by Zotter. The first pair of sentences involves concrete mass nouns (*water* / *Wasser*) as heads of noun phrases that are probably intended to be interpreted as generic. Such a generic mass noun phrase may not be definite in English whereas a corresponding definite noun phrase is possible in German, as is also shown by Heidolph et al.'s (1981: 592) example (11a) and Zelinsky-Wibbelt's (1995: 331) example (11b) with its English equivalent (11b').

- (11) a. (Das) Salz ist ein Ablagerungsprodukt.
- b. (Das) Wasser ist unverzichtbar für die Menschheit.
- b'. Water is indispensable for humanity.

Zelinsky-Wibbelt (1995: 331) describes this difference between English and German as follows: "Whereas in German individuated as well as non-individuated entities may be designated by definite NPs, in English only individuated entities may be so designated; non-individuated entities are designated by the bare construction." In contrast to the examples mentioned by Zotter, Chesterman and Zelinsky-Wibbelt as well as that in (10), none of the English examples in (5)-(7) above involves a concrete mass noun as head of the *as for* expression, nor would unacceptability arise if the *as for* expression were preceded by a definite article (cf. *as for the management*, *as for the general design*, *as for the reality in character-drawing*, *as for the venue*, *as for the nightlife*, *as for the capital gains tax*, *as for the burial in a churchyard*). The special morphological nature of the English and German *as for* expressions in (8) (English verbal noun in *-ing* corresponding to German *das* + nominalised infinitive), where an article is obligatorily absent in English and the definite article obligatorily present in German, makes this paradigm of cases also different from those mentioned by Zotter, Chesterman and Zelinsky-Wibbelt referred to above. But I will ignore such cases in the following since they seem to call for a purely syntactic contrastive analysis.

In some other cases the issue does not seem to be about the presence or absence of the definite article in German and English. Instead, a non-definite plural noun phrase is the most appropriate choice in German for a non-definite singular English *as for* expression, as shown in (12).

- (12) a. Mr Kinnock said: '[...] We are going to build up the commitment to science because if we carry on like the Tories are, our country is going to be shoved down to the second or third division of modern industrial nations'. *As for investment in public and private research and development*, Mr Kinnock said: [...]. (A2F 86)
Was Investitionen in öffentliche und private Forschung und Entwicklung angeht, ... (singular (*die*) *Investition* is acceptable, but triggers uneasiness in some speakers)
- b. I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend that peace in Northern Ireland will be hastened by a healthy economy and by a well-trained work force. *As for work experience*, I am grateful for the reminder. Action for Community Employment – ACE – is providing an extra £50 million in 1991-92 and 9,850 places of work experience. (HHV 2432)
*Was {*Praktikum / Praktika} angeht*, ... (*Was das Praktikum angeht*, ..., although not ungrammatical as such, is not a translation equivalent of the English *as for* formula)

In still other cases the most appropriate way of translating the English *as for* expression is to use a singular definite noun phrase that is either morphologically or syntactically expanded in comparison with the English one, this expansion being based on the use of an additional noun form. This is exemplified in (13).

- (13) a. If you mention the possibility of a conspiracy charge, it would be wise to add that the addition of conspiracy counts when the crime is consummated must be specially justified. *As for incitement*, if the crime is actually committed the inciter becomes an accessory to it. (FRA 652)
Was {das Thema / den Tatbestand der} Anstiftung angeht, ...
- b. We have the benefit of a Conservative Government who will put the battle against inflation at the head of their priorities for dealing with the recession. I am confident that we shall see the end of the recession in the next few months. *As for housing in Wales*, which was the basis of the hon. Gentleman's question, in the last full financial year for which we have figures, 10,000 properties were built in Wales. (HHV 12635)
Was den {Wohnungsbau / Wohnungs- / Immobilienmarkt} in Wales angeht, ...

- c. Riding schools have an estimated annual turnover of £9 million and horsefeed £60 million, which does not include specialist supplements. There are an estimated 1,800 farriers in the UK with a market turnover of about £36 million. *As for insurance*, the market for horses is dominated by nine main companies with an estimated bloodstock trade of £400 million. (K97 11381)
- Was die Versicherungsbranche angeht, ...*

In section 2 above I raised the question of what information structural identifiability means with respect to abstract entities. Note now that the referents of all the *as for* expressions and of their German counterparts mentioned so far are abstract, where the abstractness is not the result of some kind of abstraction over a set of concrete individuals, that is, where the abstractness is not the result of genericity or type identifiability. Let us call this kind of abstractness 'inherent abstractness'. The present paper is not the place for a discussion of such a philosophically venerable notion as 'abstractness', nor of the 'abstract vs. concrete' dichotomy. However, I would like to quote a pertinent passage written by the philosopher Dummett (1973/1981) and to make some observations related to it. The passage is taken from a book that elaborates on philosophical ideas developed by Frege, including Frege's distinction between sense (G. *Sinn*) and reference (G. *Bedeutung*) (see especially Frege 1892/1962/1994), which has become central in linguistic semantics.

Names of the concrete objects we encounter in everyday life stand at one end of the scale, terms for pure abstract objects at the other. While the use of any name requires the mastery of some linguistic technique, so that a grasp of the sense of a name never consists in the bare association of the name with an object presented to us as a separable constituent of reality in advance of all use of language, we may regard the position on the scale as indicating the relative contribution of linguistic and non-linguistic capacities to our having the conception of objects of the kind for which the name stands. In the case of abstract terms of any kind, the fragment of language which has to be mastered to learn their use is relatively large, and so the contribution made by the acquisition of linguistic capacities to forming the conception of the objects which they stand for is correspondingly great. But when the terms are not terms for pure abstract objects, but for, say, shapes of physical bodies or sequences of concrete objects, the use of these terms is still clearly related to processes of observation of the external world and identification of constituents of it. For that reason, therefore, it is still possible to apply to such terms the notion of reference, construed realistically as a relation to something external; although, indeed, the further we travel along the scale, the more stretched becomes the analogy with the prototypical case. It is only when we reach terms for pure abstract objects, however, that the thread snaps completely, and we are concerned with the use of terms which have no external reference at all. (Dummett 1973/1981: 509f.)

Whether having no 'external reference' means or should mean having a different kind of reference or no reference at all, is another point whose discussion would need a philosophical

forum. I simply assume here that it means having a different kind of reference. Just to commit myself to a slightly more explicit characterisation of this kind of reference, I assume that the referents of what Dummett calls "terms for pure abstract objects" are mental representations of the senses of these terms.¹⁵ Apart from this aspect, the Dummett quotation is interesting in that it presents the idea of the concreteness vs. abstractness dichotomy as a scale: The role of external reference decreases the more one approaches the pole of the scale that is inhabited by pure abstract objects, where it does not play any role at all. Let us now say that what I called inherent abstractness above, i.e. the kind of abstractness displayed by the English singular non-definite *as for* expressions in (5)-(7), (12) and (13) above, is a kind of abstractness that is closer to the pure abstractness pole of Dummett's concreteness-abstractness scale than is the abstractness represented by genericity or type identifiability (abstraction over concrete individuals); pure abstractness itself is a kind of inherent abstractness. Inherently abstract expressions are characterised by the fact that their referent is to a large extent – larger, at least, than in the case of genericity or type identifiability – constituted by the mental representation of their sense, so that inherently abstract denotata are generally identifiable to the extent that they can be assigned sense. That is, any language user who can associate a sense with an inherently abstract noun phrase has available a mental representation of its referent. Consequently, any communicator who uses an inherently abstract noun phrase and assumes that her addressee can associate a sense with it assumes the referent of this noun phrase to be identifiable by the addressee by virtue of its inherent abstractness.

It is not the case that a German non-definite singular noun phrase can never be the counterpart of an English non-definite singular *as for* expression with an inherently abstract referent. The examples in (14) are cases where a German non-definite singular noun phrase is the most (or only) acceptable *as for* expression in the given context.¹⁶

¹⁵ I interpret the references to "linguistic technique", "linguistic capacities", "fragment of language which has to be mastered to learn their use" in the quotation from Dummett as references to the defining characteristics of the Fregean notion of sense.

¹⁶ There are some examples in the BNC where the *as for* expression is a conjunctive noun phrase having non-definite singular, abstract noun phrases as its conjuncts. These can generally be rendered by a German conjunct of non-definite singular noun phrases too:

- i. a. Zuwaya were scattered over a vast territory, and although they owned land they were not permanently resident on it. Most shrines were the property of people who could visit them easily, and who might find it expedient to assemble there to show their strength if they had land disputes with their neighbours. *As for justice and peace*, the Zuwaya had no judges. (ADW 757)
Was Gerechtigkeit und Frieden angeht, ...
- b. Meditation was something that only happened east of Suez and although imaging was something I did every time I wrote a book, play or did a drawing, I had not associated it with my cancer. *As for healing and counselling*, both sounded dark, ominous and alien, an intrusion into my existence and

- (14) a. If I'm going to spend several hundred pounds on an outfit, I make sure I get real value out of it and will wear it a lot. I'm a hoarder when it comes to clothes – I still wear some of the clothes designed for Alexis in *Dynasty*.
As for perfume, I wouldn't *dream* of wearing anything other than Spectacular by Joan Collins! (A7N 393)
Was Parfüm angeht, ...
- b. For the marine hobby the 1960's were anything but good. Little was known about the requirements of certain species. Although U/V, ozone and protein skimmers were known, reference books often claimed they were unnecessary. *As for nitrate*, one author stated that fish could live for years in levels up to 500ppm! (C95 2274)
Was Nitrat angeht, ...
- c. He couldn't know what an effort it was to push him away. *As for regret*, she was feeling that already, but how much sharper it would be when he decided he didn't want her any more, as he certainly would do sooner or later. (H8J 2150)
Was Reue anging, ...
- d. For soccer skills, we've always looked to the Brazilians; in cricket, the West Indies have been the power. *As for table tennis*, it's the Chinese who've dominated. (K1B 2826)
Was Tischtennis angeht, ...

Then there are cases where inter- and intra-individual judgements vary as to whether a non-definite singular German *as for* expression is acceptable or to what degree it is acceptable in comparison to the corresponding definite singular expression. Some cases in point are given in (15) below. With respect to these examples, acceptability judgements among the four speakers involved in the present study (cf. section 3) were not unanimous, and / or one or more speakers expressed difficulty in deciding on straightforward acceptance or rejection. But note that a definite article introducing the English *as for* expression would not be possible in these cases. That is, the English *as for* expressions correspond to those mentioned in (10) and in the quotations from Zotter (1977) and Chesterman (1993) above, but are not concrete mass

most certainly not me. (B19 702)
Was Heilung und Therapie anging, ...

These, however, are plural *as for* expressions and thus not the focus of the present paper. That the conjuncts in German conjunctive noun phrases can be, and most often are, articleless is well known. See e.g. Gallmann (2005: 305).

noun phrases as in the *water* / *Wasser* example; their German counterparts, however, are not subject to a definiteness requirement for some speakers.

- (15) a. Epicurus' influence on Gassendi relates to his taking pleasure and pain as the measure of what is good, and sense-experience as the criterion, or measure, of truth. As for the first, it should be remembered that for an Epicurean the worst pain is the groundless fear of what may happen after death, and that excessive unnatural desires are painful too. *As for truth*, Epicurus, rather like Hobbes centuries later, took sense-perception to be simply the effect of objects on our material souls. (ABM 532)
Was (die) Wahrheit angeht, ...
- b. Since last year, homosexuals – so long seen as the weak link – can join the secret services. Others remain resolutely closed. In the armed services homosexuality is still punishable by imprisonment. *As for politics*, forget it: only one MP, Chris Smith, Labour candidate for Islington South, has dared to 'come out'. (AHG 35)
Was (die) Politik angeht, ...
- c. My encounters with girls were destined always to end in rejection until I'd left my teens behind me. I caught up a bit during the '60s when I became the oldest teenager in town – in fact I was in my early thirties. *As for love*, I fell easily and often. (CH8 1762)
Was (die) Liebe anging, ...
- d. A reading of the Egyptian press indicates that neither the government nor any official is immune from criticism or above the law. *As for terrorism*, this is an international phenomenon. (CR8 344)
Was (den) Terrorismus angeht, ...

The reason for a lack of clear intra- and interindividual judgements in such cases may be that there is change going on in the German language to the effect that the use of non-definite singular noun phrases to refer to inherently abstract entities is expanding, i.e. that non-definite singulars are encroaching on the territory of definite singulars or non-definite plurals. This would mean that German is becoming more similar to English in this respect. Actually, the increased use of an ever greater range of abstract nouns without a definite article in English seems to be a quite recent phenomenon itself, a 20th century development, in fact. According to Siepmann (2001: 107):

A handful of examples similar to [*reaction in Northern Ireland was immediate*] were spotted as far back as 1939 by Christophersen, who stresses the recency and apparent inadequacy of the use: "In recent times a tendency has sprung up to use (one might almost say 'misuse') the zero-form even where the *the*-form would seem to be required" (Christophersen: 1939, 108).

[...]

there is overwhelming evidence to indicate that what may have been an ephemeral usage in the 1930s has now become commonplace.

5 Conclusion

English allows for a greater range of non-definite singular noun phrases to refer to inherently abstract and thus inherently identifiable entities than German. The range of German non-definite singular noun phrases with inherently abstract referents is smaller, and the acceptability status of some of these is unclear. This lack of clarity in acceptability may be an indication of ongoing language change in this area, similar to what seems to have been going on in English, especially since the beginning of the 20th century. Apart from the more restricted range of non-definite singulars, the class of German equivalents of English non-definite singular noun phrases is subdivided into a class of definite singular noun phrases and a class of non-definite plural noun phrases. Sometimes a definite singular noun phrase is morphologically or syntactically expanded, and this expansion involves (morphologically or syntactically) a noun form that is not present in the English counterpart. An interesting question that arises at this point is whether there is any systematic pattern behind the membership of noun phrases to these classes in German. This has to be left to future research.

In sum, my discussion of English and German *as for* expressions has shown that the grammars of these languages treat noun phrases with inherently identifiable referents in different ways, English being more permissive than German in the use of non-definite singular noun phrases. In words based on a Lambrechtian (1994) framework of contrastive information structure analysis: The pairing of the information structural category identifiability on the one hand and lexicogrammatical structure on the other hand is manifestly different in these languages. This raises interesting questions for explanations of the difference in terms of syntax, semantics, and/or historical development. Finally, the paper has provided an illustration of the kind of investigation that can be referred to as contrastive information structure analysis (CISA) in a Lambrechtian framework.

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