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Review

Marx, K. (1844): Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung. In: *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Dezember 1843/Januar 1844. http://www.staff.uni-giessen.de/~g31130/PDF/marx/Rechtsphilosophie.pdf (05.05.2018)

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Anschrift
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Zinn, J. O./ McDonald, D. (2017): Risk in the New York Times (1987–2014). A corpus based exploration of sociological theories. Cham: Springer International Publishing – Palgrave Macmillan.

To what extent do the assumptions of different sociological theories contribute to explain the social »*shift towards risk*«? (3) This is the central question of the corpus study that is the basis of the book reviewed here: »Risk in the New York Times (1987–2014). A corpus based exploration of sociological theories« by the sociologist Jens O. Zinn and the corpus linguist Daniel McDonald. The goal is to empirically examine this research topic, however, not with traditional social science methods, but with corpus linguistic analyses – using the New York Times news coverage between 1987 and 2014 as sample.

So, the starting points of the study are the hypotheses derived (by the authors) from different sociological approaches concerning risk in diverse contexts – from technical or environmental catastrophes, pandemics, terrorism, financial crises, to everyday-life-risk-management of problems like which career to pursue, how to deal with the risk of chronic illness, how to prepare for retirement, what to eat and to drink and so on. The authors reflect the state of the art of this research subject in sociology by describing a wide range of theoretical perspectives – techno-scientific paradigms, understanding risk as an objectively calculable and measurable reality (in contrast to the common sense lay-perspective) (8), the ›governmentality‹ perspective interested in examining how something can be understood as risk in the framework of »a calculative effort to manage the future« (10), social science approaches distinguishing between real risk and risk as socially and culturally determined and constructed subjects of discussion (9), systems theory focusing how risk becomes real through communication and the so-called risk-society-perspective – epistemologically to classify between realist and constructionist approaches – from which the reality of risk is seen as influence factor on social debates without the possibility to separate them from the social framework. Informed by these backgrounds the

meaning of risk is differentiated into the following notions: »risk as danger or threat, risk as part of (an often) scientific calculation of likelihood that something undesired happens, and risk-taking as an activity which could have negative and positive outcomes« (12).

The assumptions, hypotheses and questions with regard to the »shift towards risk« derived from these diverse theoretical backgrounds are varied. Some research perspectives suggest the growing normalisation of the experience of risk and the social practices to deal with risk. As a consequence, the authors expect the establishment and institutionalisation of the notion of risk in all social domains. Another supposed development is the increasing dominance of the negative meaning of risk (danger, harm). Different hypotheses are due to the views described above, for example the suggestion of a ›culture of fear‹ given by the risk-society-perspective or the interpretation of risk communication as rationality and an »expression of the successful application of risk technologies rendering the future manageable« (35f.) by the governmentality-perspective. The attribution of risk to specific groups is an aspect that is examined. The transfer of a »risk epidemic« (37) from academic articles to news coverage and an epidemiological worldview as a commonplace in public discourses about health and illness are suggested, too. These are just a few examples. The authors show that the sociological assumptions are related to very different levels.

This leads to the question, how a linguistic analysis can capture this multifaceted research field. Social theories as a starting point for linguistic studies are nothing new. But mostly such works are written by linguists who use sociological approaches. The fact that a sociologist uses linguistic methods and collaborates with a corpus linguist is unusual and innovative. It is all the more interesting to find out how this interdisciplinary approach works exactly especially if we consider the diverse research questions. The authors systematically link linguistic findings to sociological phenomena. They justify this with the observation of a shift in linguistic practices concerning risk – for example the more common usage of the word ›risk‹ after World War Two or shifts in meanings of words in the risk-context – what they consider as an indication of systematic social change. Therefore, a functional (not a for-

mal) linguistic theory with a socio-semantical orientation seems to be obvious. As a consequence of this consideration two approaches are discussed in the second chapter of the book (following the presentation of the fundamentals of social science): frame semantics and systemic functional linguistics (38–52).

The perspective of frame semantics (according to Charles Fillmore) is shown rather briefly. The authors reflect that there are even successful applications of the approach in risk research. Nevertheless, they reject him with regard to the current issue. To support this decision, the following reasons are alleged: Frame semantics focuses on the cognitive representation of risk, but the study aims primarily at the »interpersonal« (40) pragmatics and the negotiation and the exchange of risk in interaction as a »commodity« (40). Moreover, the goal is to capture risk not only as the central subject of sentences, but also, for example, as quality of objects (e.g., at-risk youth). It is considered a problem that these instances of risk are difficult to interpret with frame semantics. These concerns are understandable. However, in my opinion, this approach offers more possibilities than shown in the short section of the book and should not be reduced to the one already identified cognitive frame of the verb ›risk‹. It should be considered that in the state of the art of frame semantics, frames are not only regarded as individual cognitive structures (as the authors show, cf. 40f.), but also socially-negotiated, interpersonal conventionalized frames are taken into consideration – the social cognition (cf. van Dijk 2008).

The authors opted for Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an explanatory framework and as a link between the lexicogrammatic level, meaning and social context. The reason given for this is that SFL provides a functional explanatory framework that covers language in use and an interpretation of »meaning as a stratum of language that lies between words and social context, rather than between words and the (individual) mind […], the systemic functional approach allows us to separately consider how risk figures into *depictions of the world*, and how risk figures into *writer's relationship with readers*, as a thing is or is not argued about, […] it provides a conceptualisation of the relationship between text and context« (40f.). In particular, it is highlighted as a unique advantage that SFL provides the ability to account

for discourse semantics because the approach allows a description of the context solely on the basis of the lexicogrammatical content of the text. These are good reasons and SFL is an obvious approach with the described potential, which is discussed in the field of discourse analysis at the intersections between sociology and linguistics. Norman Fairclough (1995) for example explicitly advocates SFL as a powerful basis for discourse analysis because of its focus on the functional and the connection between the texture of texts and their social contexts. He also emphasizes that the systemic view offers not only the possibility »for analyses of what is in the texts, but also for analyses of what is absent or omitted from texts« (Fairclough 1995, S. 210), it comprises the options of selection in a system constituting meaning potentials. But this long-striding step – from the lexicogrammatical content to the system of meaning and social context and its transformation – is a difficult challenge in the present case with regard of the partially very complex sociological assumptions.

However, in the book discussed here, the application of SFL-theory remains very close to what is in the text – the lexicogrammatical surface of the language. The linguistic analysis examines risk words – their frequency, their grammatical forms and syntactic roles (risk as noun, as verb (and process), as pre-head nominal modifier, as participant and so on) – and their co-text (52) – the written text environment – in a corpus that contains New York Times newspaper texts (1987–2014) in the amount of 14.487.500 tokens (72). The corpus has been linguistically annotated and the authors offer a new toolkit for corpus analyses that they also apply (71f.). So, the study is of interest for corpus linguists in general – also from a practical perspective. It is to emphasize in a positive sense, that not only lexical properties are focused (as in many discourse studies), but also more complex grammatical shapings of concepts and the co-text of risk words. This leads to the benefit, that the results of the corpus linguistic study not only show for example the increase in the frequency of risk words, or that risk nouns and adjectives are used more frequently than verbal / procedural risk expressions, but rather correlations like this: »Both *pose risk* and *put at risk* have overtaken *run risk* in frequency. Use of the prototypical risk process, *to risk* is declining. Fi-

nally, there is some evidence for reduced agency in the risk process.« (105), or: »The most frequent riskers are pronominal and show significant gender differences. ›He‹ risks almost five times more than ›she‹« (ibid.).

In the course of the research design, attempts were made to operationalize at least important aspects of the initial sociological questions, which can also be seen in such results. However, further interpretive steps are undertaken almost exclusively from the sociological perspective without a more detailed transfer of findings from the linguistic approach. Further linguistic considerations and interpretations, preferably a methodological explanatory framework that incorporates linguistic theories of discourse (not only sociological discourse approaches) would have been helpful and could have acted as a mediator and additional point of reference for the sociological theories. Thus, the sociological explanatory framework uses the results of the corpus linguistic study quite abruptly without more detailed linguistic mediation and attempts to bridge the gap. This creates a tension that opens up interesting perspectives on the one hand, but is also problematic on the other hand.

Nevertheless, the results are insightful and provide promising starting points for further research. The authors convincingly found evidence »for the increasing and fundamental institutionalisation of social understanding and managing of risk« (159), the calculative and rational (according to the ›governmentality‹-perspective) and routinely dealing with risk and the codification of risk procedures (indicated by increasingly nominalised instantiations of risk words). »The Risk has become a part of the known cultural repertoire, which no longer requires further explanation« (ibid.). This is considered as shown not only by the frequency of the use of risk words, but also by the increasing use of risk words as pre-head modifiers and the movement of risk words »from the central components of a clause (subject, finite and predicator) towards the less arguable positions of complement and adjunct« (ibid.). This does not mean that risk is considered calculable and controllable, but there is also no validation of a generalised »culture of fear«-perspective, the presentation of risk in the news is ambivalent. Risk as a process is decreasing in general, everyday people are less found in the active risk-taking

position, in this position, powerful people and organisations dominate. In the news coverage, reports are more frequently found to be concerned with »the ›scandal‹ of individuals being exposed by others or by social circumstances to risk« (162).

Another finding is a tendency towards an increasingly negative understanding of risk words. Simultaneously the number of unique risk words has diversified (161). Beyond that, there is a more metaphorically use of risk words observed. This result underpins the assumption, that risk has become part of a generalised worldview. A particularly high density of risk words is found in health-related articles. A separate chapter of the book is dedicated to this context –chapter 5 »Risk, Health and Medicine in the New York times«, which follows a chapter about the findings of risk words in the New York Times in general. The previous chapters that are described and discussed above, are »Introduction« (chapter 1), »Conceptual Foundations« (chapter 2) and »Research Design and Methods« (chapter 3). The results are summarized in chapter 6 and the conclusions are supplemented by further research perspectives. In this part of the book the limitations of the study are well reflected – for example the missing examination of »what has not been reported and why« (165), of broader risk semantics and representations of risk that do not involve risk lexis (166), the limitations that result from the selection of the corpus (just one newspaper, a short time-span of 27 years) and the non-consideration of different media cultures in different countries. In addition, to explain a general social »shift towards risk« different forms of communication, text-types, genres and varieties would have to be considered. In this respect it seems obvious to conduct further studies with other corpora – which include not just other newspapers as announced in the ›perspectives‹-chapter 6, but also other text-types, for example texts from the fields of technical and special language, everyday language or advertising language – and additional approaches, that also take context into account.

Despite all limitations – acknowledged by the authors themselves – the book is a highly instructive and enlightening contribution to this field of research. The book reflects the state of the art from the corpus linguistic and the sociological point of view in an exciting, highly topical and currently relevant domain. The innovative approach addresses a vivid and increasing field of cultural and social research with digital methods within the frameworks of the Digital Humanities and Digital Social Science, attractive to corpus linguistics, corpus assisted discourse studies and sociological studies as well.

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