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EVALUATION IN A CROSS- LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE: INVESTIGATING SEMANTIC PROSODY ACROSS ENGLISH AND GERMAN NEAR-SYNONYMS

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ABSTRACT

The present study follows in the path of previous research on semantic prosody, shifting its focus to the domain of near-synonymy analysed from a cross-linguistic perspective. The targeted items are English and German near-synonymous schemata expressing a sense of persuasion. The aim is to assess whether there are notable differences and/or overlaps in their evaluative behaviour and pragmatic function. Results highlight an “evaluative gap” existing between the English and German patterns, reflected in subtle differences in meaning nuances not always picked up by dictionary definitions. These results are discussed in the light of their relevance for translation and contrastive studies, as well as their practical implications for corpus-assisted lexicography.

KEYWORDS

contrastive studies, corpus-assisted
lexicography, evaluation, near-synonyms,
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Evaluation in a cross-linguistic perspective: Investigating semantic prosody across English and German near-synonyms

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1. Introduction

Semantic prosody¹ is a key component of the holistic approach to language production and understanding favoured by scholars following in the wake of the neo-Firthian school of corpus linguistics. Originally encapsulated by Sinclair (1991, 1999) in his discussion of the semantic environment, or preference, of English verbs like *SET IN* and *HAPPEN*, it has grown out of two seemingly unrelated concepts: evaluative meanings and discourse functions. The terminological ambiguity stemming from such apparent dichotomy has led to considerable inconsistency: from ‘semantic’ or ‘discourse prosody’ (Louw, 1993; Stubbs, 1995) to ‘evaluative prosody’ (Partington, 2004) and ‘semantic association’² (Hoey, 2005).

In this contribution, we use the term ‘semantic prosody’ to refer to the non-obvious evaluative force (either positive or negative) which linguistic items may acquire by virtue of the habitual patterns they participate in (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, pp. 135–41). This essentially binary system could be further expressed in terms of a more complex taxonomy. In other words, ‘the goodness and the badness can [...] come in many forms’ (Morley & Partington, 2009, p. 141) and reflect something that is either beneficial or detrimental, pleasurable or dangerous, in our control or not (Partington, 2018, p. 1). At the discourse level of pragmatic function, semantic prosody (more or less) implicitly reveals ‘the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint or feeling about the entities and propositions’ that they are talking about (Hunston & Thompson, 2000, p. 5). The two perspectives (encompassing the lexical priming of evaluative meanings and their manifested illocutionary force; see Hoey 2005) are inherently intertwined, since ‘the potential of an item for engaging in the expression of favourable or unfavourable evaluation is part of its basic communicative function’ (Partington, 2004, p. 152).

Prosodic expectations regularly escape introspection and are ‘mainly engaged at the subconscious level’ (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001, p. 141). Hence, they are typically not easy to recollect and become more apparent when they are violated due to a collocational or

1 In this contribution we adopt the better-established term ‘semantic prosody’, though Partington’s term ‘evaluative prosody’ would arguably better encapsulate the idea of semantic prosody that we adopt in this contribution, referring to ‘the evaluative intent of the speaker, that is, the attitude s/he has to his/her topic’ (Morley & Partington, 2009, p. 147).

2 Hoey’s use of the term is somewhat broader than the others, as it covers so-called ‘secondary meanings’ – including association, connotation and evaluation – that contribute to ‘how [something] means what it does’ (Philip, 2009, p. 4).

‘evaluative clash’³ (cf. Partington 2017) occurring between the established meaning and the one that seems to be conveyed: irony, insincerity, or humour can be explained as cases where semantic prosody is (un)voluntarily switched off (Louw, 1993, p. 173).

One area of lexicogrammar where semantic prosody proves particularly interesting is that of semantic similarity, that is, near-synonymy. Near-synonyms are partially overlapping items displaying ‘very similar cognitive meanings, but widely differing prosodic behaviours’ (Partington, 1998, p. 77). An awareness of the existence of these subtle nuances, uncovering the basic reason why sequential strings are co-selected in native-like discourse (Sinclair, 2004, p. 34), is invaluable both for translators and learners. Non-native speakers are indeed less likely to have benefited from ‘exposure to the priming processes of language’ (Frank *et al.*, 2020, p. B4), hence resulting in potential ‘misunderstandings with respect to tone or content of the original message’ (Berber Sardinha, 2000, p. 96). Corpus-assisted techniques are invaluable in this respect, allowing for abstractions ‘across multiple, different contexts of usage’ (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, pp. 136, 141) to be identified via data-driven inductive reasoning.

Following in the wake of previous contrastive corpus-assisted research (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Partington, 2004; Xiao & McEnery, 2006; Kenny, 2006; Shao, 2017; Frank *et al.*, 2020), this study attempts to highlight intra- and interlinguistic differences between near-synonyms and their equivalents, analysed through the lens of semantic prosody. If, as Xiao and McEnery (2006, pp. 124–125) suggest, there exists sufficient evidence for a certain degree of cross-linguistic comparability between prosodic behaviours, the comparability remains unpredictable, and is often undermined by restrictions related to a specific language variety, style (Greenbaum, 1974, p. 81), or register (Berber Sardinha, 2017). A case in point is represented by Italian CONTAMINAZIONE and French CONTAMINATION (‘contamination’), discussed by Frank *et al.* (2020). Both seem to share the same unfavourable evaluative prosody when they are used in their literal sense and are associated with the semantic fields of ‘environmental hazard’ and ‘microbiology’ (Frank *et al.*, 2020, pp. B15–B20). However, CONTAMINAZIONE features a further context of use: namely that of culture, including literature, arts and music. Here, the item is used metaphorically with a positive intent to denote enhancing cultural influence and interpenetration.

The effect of culture is also investigated by Wang (2022), who locates prosodies within the wider context of cultural psychology, arguing that cross-linguistic differences and similarities are shaped by the harmonizing effect of culture on the lexical primings that one develops within a given speech community. Examples include the differing meaning nuances exhibited by English WORLD and Mandarin 世界 (shìjiè ‘world, uni-

3 A widely-cited example is Louw’s discussion of a passage from a novel by David Lodge where people are described as ‘bent on self-improvement’. A reversal of evaluation occurs due to the clash between ‘bent on’, typically followed by negative items, and the favourable evaluation associated with self-improvement (Louw, 1993, p. 164).

verse') as well as their most common clusters, which the author ties to the opposition between (Western) individualism and analytic thinking and (East-Asian) collectivism and holistic thinking.

Broadening the scope of our research to encompass long-distance collocations (Siepmann, 2006, pp. 2–3)⁴, in this contribution we describe a working and learning method that all translators should adopt to improve their ability to recognise and convey subtle shades of meaning across languages. The observation that 'you cannot simply put any old bunch of words together' (Morley & Partington, 2009:144) is especially relevant to the situation in which one needs to convey someone else's evaluative intent in another language, as is the rule for translators. For this reason, Alan Partington's theoretical reflections and methodological breakthroughs provide invaluable input in the education of future translators. Indeed, this study grew out of his teaching and is greatly influenced by it. We continue to teach his ideas to our students, and to expose them to his writings, as epitomes of rigour, scholarship, and originality. Our specific aims, and the overall rationale for the study, are presented in the following section.

2. Evaluative prosody and near synonymy: an English/German comparison

2.1. Aims and research questions

The aim of this case study is twofold. On the one hand, it draws on corpus evidence to establish whether English near-synonymous expressions conveying a sense of persuasion display subtly but distinctly separable evaluative meanings. More specifically, the focus is placed on a notional group comprising 'ways of reporting utterances which perform the speech act of "directive" (Searle, 1979; Leech, 1983), and of describing non-verbal ways of influencing what someone does' (Hunston & Francis, 2000, p. 114).

Among the items listed in the relevant literature, we selected verbs participating in the pattern *verb + noun + to-infinitive* (Hunston & Francis, 2000, p. 116), which share the general sense 'causing someone to do something'. These verbs include ENCOURAGE, INDUCE, and URGE along with several other more infrequent ones (for a full list, see Hunston & Francis, 2000, p. 114). The inherent deontic modality of these verbs may be revelatory of the speaker's attitude towards both the activity being described and the subjects involved; yet lexicographic evidence provides only marginal indication that each pattern is allocated a specific pragmatic function.

As for ENCOURAGE + *noun + to-infinitive*, both monolingual and learners' dictionaries highlight the idea of making someone more likely to do something (Cambridge University Press, 2024; Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 2024). Occasionally, this meaning is integ-

4 That is, cases where collocations extend to encompass longer syntagms and phrasemes together with their peculiar semantic-pragmatic features (Siepmann, 2006, p. 2–3, 12)

rated with a more explicit sense of ‘stimulate by approval or help in the sense of urge’ (HarperCollins, 2024a).

The construction URGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* is associated with severity (‘to try to persuade (someone) in a serious way to do something’, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 2024), pleading (‘if you urge someone to do something, you try hard to persuade them to do it; to plead with or press someone to do something’, HarperCollins, 2024a) or unspecified persuasion (‘to try to persuade someone to do something’, Cambridge University Press, 2024). Notice that the least specific definition is provided where it would be needed the most, namely in a learners’ dictionary.

Finally, no clear evidence of favourable or unfavourable prosody seems to be gained at first glance from the dictionary profile of INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*. In this case definitions include ‘to persuade’ (Cambridge University Press, 2024) or ‘influence someone to do something’ (HarperCollins, 2024a) and ‘cause someone (or something) to do something’ (Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, 2024).

Besides shedding light on evaluative differences across English near-synonyms, a further objective of this study is to determine whether the corresponding German near-synonyms, referred to in relevant entries of bilingual dictionaries, feature any potential evaluative discrepancies with respect to their English counterparts. This choice is motivated by the fact that research into semantic/evaluative prosodies of words in German is limited (cf. Dodd, 2006; Kenny, 2001, 2006), and that such cross-linguistic information can be of great relevance for contrastive and translation studies, as well as bilingual lexicography.

The present analysis focuses on the verbs ANSPORNEN (‘encourage’), BRINGEN (‘induce’) and DRÄNGEN (‘urge’) in the syntactic pattern *jemanden (dazu) VERB etwas zu tun* (HarperCollins, 2024b; K Dictionaries, 2014; Oxford University Press, 2012). These equivalents were identified on a one-to-one basis following two selection criteria. First, each German verb had to be listed as a possible candidate for the translation of the corresponding English predicate in more than one dictionary. Second, each German verb had to enter a pattern analogous to the English one, explicitly referenced as its adequate equivalent (cf. Section 2.2. for further discussion on patterns’ operationalisation). For instance, both BRINGEN and BEWEGEN were listed as translation candidates for INDUCE, but the pattern INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* was explicitly associated with *jemanden (dazu) BRINGEN etwas zu tun*. Similarly, while both ANSPORNEN and ERMUTIGEN appeared as equivalents for ENCOURAGE, only the former was associated with the relevant pattern.

With reference to these sets of synonyms in English and German, the study aims to answer, through a thorough collocation-via-concordance analysis of comparable corpora, the following research questions:

1. Do the English near-synonymous patterns expressing a sense of persuasion (ENCOURAGE|INDUCE|URGE) + *noun* + *to-infinitive* display discernibly different semantic prosodies?
2. Are the same subtle meaning differences found to characterise the German expressions offered as equivalents by bilingual German/English dictionaries?

The method followed in the analysis is outlined in the following section.

2.2. Data and methodology

Two roughly comparable web corpora are employed for the analysis, one for English and one for German: the Araneum Anglicum Maius corpus and the Araneum Germanicum Maius corpus, both part of the Aranea family of comparable corpora compiled by web crawling to be used ‘for teaching purposes, but also in linguistic research (contrastive studies) and in lexicography (both mono- and bilingual)’ (Benko, 2014, p. 248). They are a valuable source of data for contrastive analysis since they feature text types, genres and registers collected in the same time period and following a similar method. Furthermore, they are fairly similar in terms of size, as illustrated in Table 1.

	Araneum Anglicum Maius	Araneum Germanicum Maius
Language	English	German
Words	888 466 066	875 465 845
Texts	1 159 878	2 321 308
Reference date	2015	2013

Table 1: Data about the comparable corpora of English and German used in the study

Patterns in the respective languages were identified by exploiting Part-of-Speech (POS) and lemma annotation through the Corpus Query Language (CQL) on the SketchEngine platform². The queries that were generated are listed in Table 2.

Queries were carefully designed considering the behaviour of the verb found at the core of each pattern. The queries for ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to* and INDUCE + *noun* + *to* match any instance in which a noun or pronoun follow encourage or INDUCE and are followed by *to*, including an optional slot for a determiner between the verb and the noun/pronoun. For URGE + *noun* + *to*, it was further specified that only instances in which it is used as verb and not as a noun should be extracted. As for DRÄNGEN and ANSPORNEN, optional elements, ranging from one to five, were placed between the verb and the preposition to allow for complex noun phrases, prepositional phrases or modifiers to be found (hence reflecting the vagueness of *jemanden* (‘someone’) and *etwas* (‘something’) expressed

in the pattern). Since a potentially high number of optional slots may result in sentence-crossing, queries were delimited by sentence boundaries.

Pattern	CQL query
ENCOURAGE + noun + to-infinitive	[lemma="encourage"] []? [tag="N.* PP.?"] [word="to"]
URGE + noun + to-infinitive	[lemma="urge" & tag="V.* "] []? [tag="N.* PP.?"] [word="to"]
INDUCE + noun + to-infinitive	[lemma="induce"] []? [tag="N.* PP.?"] [word="to"]
jemanden (dazu) ANSPORNEN, etwas zu tun	[lemma="anspornen"] []{1,5} [word="zu"] within <s/>
jemanden (dazu) DRÄNGEN, etwas zu tun	[word!="Rand"] [lemma="drängen"] []{1,5} [word="zu"] [tag="V.*"] within <s/>
jemanden dazu BRINGEN, etwas zu tun	[word="dazu"] [lemma="bringen"]

Table 2: Patterns under analysis and corresponding queries in CQL

Still, the query for DRÄNGEN required further adjustments. First, it was necessary to explicitly omit 'Rand', as part of the idiom 'an den Rand drängen' ('to isolate, marginalise'). At the same time, the corresponding tag for a verb was placed immediately after the preposition 'zu' to discard instances where DRÄNGEN functions as a motion verb. The peculiar behaviour of the fixed sequence *dazu bringen* needed no such precautions. While any attempt at retrieving all and only the relevant patterns through CQL queries is bound to fail, by providing the exact queries we aim to favour replicability and allow readers to evaluate the soundness of our data retrieval procedures for themselves.

In order to better grasp the semantic prosody associated with each pattern, a thorough concordance analysis was carried out by the first author (a non-native speaker of both languages in focus), taking into account both the meaning of the items participating in the predefined pattern, and the meaning conveyed by the wider co-text. Simply generating a collocate list and highlighting good or bad companies would indeed have been counter-productive, since their relationship with the node could be one of opposition or detraction (Partington, 2004, pp. 154–5), embedding or contagion (Partington, 2017, p. 196)⁵.

5 Opposition and detraction are exemplified by phrasings such as 'the relief of pain' or 'easing the pain' (Partington, 2004, p. 155). An example of embedding can be found in 'global poverty is falling rapidly', whereas contagion concerns the evaluative colouring of textual blocks based on prosodic clues (Partington, 2017, p. 196)

Due the overwhelming amount of data returned by the queries (see Section 3.3. below), a decision was made to generate samples of 100 lines randomly selected from all parts of the corpus. While analysing a larger sample would no doubt have added to the reliability of our conclusions, a compromise had to be struck between the number of examples and the depth of the analysis. In a contrastive analysis of evaluative semantic prosody, we would suggest that the balance between the quantitative and the qualitative should be tipped in favour of the latter. Concordance lines that escaped the targeted pattern and did not conform to the meaning of persuasion were discarded, together with any duplicates.

Following this filtering phase, prosodies in the remaining extracts were evaluated as either favourable, unfavourable or neutral, and their corresponding discourse functions listed in a table. Any evidence of register variation was thus arrived at via a careful corpus-driven process of bottom-up inference. The findings of the six analyses are reported in the next section.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. English near-synonyms: ENCOURAGE, URGE, INDUCE

The pattern ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* is mostly associated with a prosody of persuasion for the good (72 out of 98 sampled lines),⁶ either prompting the addressee to pursue something they have already committed to doing (the focus being on the state of mind of the recipient and their eventual benefit, as in Excerpt 1), or evoking a sense of commonality between those who encourage and the encouraged that is opposed to a third party (as in Excerpt 2):

- (1) We encourage you to not procrastinate when you are on the path to change the outcome of some of your choices.
- (2) Ghandi encouraged everyone to sit down and spin when they had a free moment and did so himself.
This spinning would be done in public and hopefully in the presence of the British.

The overall favourable prosody associated with ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* may be exploited for the sake of creativity and cohesion, depicting a contrastive perspective in negative contexts. This can be achieved through contagion, a process whereby items are ‘subsumed into the prevailing evaluative “mood”, the evaluative polarity of the segment of text they find themselves in’ (Partington, 2017, p. 196). A case in point is the following passage containing a citation from another speaker:

6 Two lines were discarded because they reflected a meaning closer to that of INCREASE, for example, ‘he other sites are more remote and more difficult to access, but we want to encourage woodcutting there to reduce encroaching juniper’

- (3) On September 11, 2001, Fischer praised the terrorist attacks in New York as “wonderful”, and hoped it would encourage America to imprison the Jews.

From Fischer’s perspective, the imprisonment of ‘the Jews’ is something to be hoped for, hence the choice of encourage that maintains a favourable evaluative harmony with the ‘wonderful’ attack previously cited. The overall picture depicted through the report of this external viewpoint, however, is one to be condemned. Notice that while the word ‘wonderful’ is in inverted commas, signalling that it is a direct citation and explicitly distancing it from the reporter’s position, ‘encourage’ is not. This is possible because the positive evaluation of ENCOURAGE is conveyed through evaluative prosody and harmony, rather than being part of the meaning of the word.

A fairly neutral semantic prosody can be observed instead when the pattern is used in formal or semi-formal environments as an alternative to ‘ask’, ‘suggest’ or ‘lead to’:

- (4) We also encourage users to upload their photos to Boris’ Board and videos to Little Fireface Project YouTube Channel

Perhaps more interestingly, ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* clearly displays an unfavourable prosody when the encouragement itself is not volitional, that is to say, when it stems from external circumstances or state of affairs mostly imposed by inanimate entities:

- (5) ‘Me too’ or ‘more of the same’ will not work in branding. Saying... or even implying... that you are ‘just like the leading brand’ does nothing but encourage people to go with the top brand. The more you try to be like others, the farther you’ll blend into the crowd.
- (6) it would be unfortunate if government regulations encouraged community banks to abandon what they are good at in favor of riskier lines of business. [...] It is difficult to understand with precision the degree to which Dodd-Frank affects community banks and their potential to survive and thrive, but it is clear that the regulatory burden is weighing heavily on.

In Excerpt 5, although the (involuntary) encouragement here may lead to thinking highly of the proposed solution, the effect conjured up by today’s market conditions will inevitably be that of a negative jump-on-the-bandwagon effect. Likewise, the regulatory burden imposed by the government to limit weak administration practices (the Dodd-Frank act) is perceived as potentially affecting the development of community banks.

It is this non-obvious meaning nuance of coercion that may bring ENCOURAGE closer to URGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*, especially in unfavourable contexts (21 occurrences out of 98; two lines were discarded because they did not represent the pattern under analysis), although the latter frequently involves animate beings and explicit acts of persuasion. Perhaps more crucially, URGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* presupposes that the person being urged had no prior intention of performing the action in question, while the person urging the other feels justified in so doing. The clash between the reaction those urged and

the agent's (or urger's) intention conjures up an displeasing feeling, reinforced by the semantic preference for immediacy (Excerpt 7). Furthermore, there would seem to be no indication that the urger will participate in the activity they urge on others (Excerpt 8):

- (7) Most people I know considered me nuts for cooking throughout both trips taken within that vacation. Like my mom, who constantly urges me to relax. Get out of the kitchen. I tell her cooking for me “does it.”
- (8) You don't see Bush giving speeches in which he urges Americans to fight in his war. </s><s> The wealthy aren't asked to give up their tax breaks in order to help fund Bush's war.

Most notably, however, *URGE + noun + to-infinitive* refers to protest and criticism with the purpose of stressing topicality. It is associated with a pragmatic function for resolute calls, raising awareness on critical issues or metaphorically pushing the urged towards a desired outcome. As opposed to non-field-specific *ENCOURAGE + noun + to-infinitive*, *URGE* is associated with the political register:

- (9) America's competitive position in the world now faces greater challenges and that research investments are even more critical. The report urges Congress to reauthorize COMPETES which expired on September 30th.
- (10) In fact, the Canadian Government (Consular Services, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada) urges all Canadians to purchase supplemental health insurance when leaving the country.

Overall, co-textual clues do not seem to suggest any clear tendency towards either end of the good–bad spectrum (39 occurrences with a neutral prosody out of 98 total concordance lines). Like *ENCOURAGE + noun + to-infinitive*, *URGE + noun + to-infinitive* exhibits a neutral semantic prosody when used to paraphrase a formal request, for example in a public speech, the difference being that it also conveys a sense of urgency. That is, immediate necessity advocated by a pressing force directly translates into greater intensity, a quasi-deontic modality which becomes evident when compared to the milder effect conjured up by *ENCOURAGE*:

- (11) Growing marine revenues have allowed us to increase the fund by five per cent and I urge projects to get their bids ready for round three when it opens next year.

Additionally, people may also be motivated to improve or change something for the better. In similar instances, *URGE* could be replaced by *ENCOURAGE* or *PROMPT* and the overall meaning conveyed would be approximately the same:

- (12) Mr. Abdalla Hamdok, urged African countries to transform the structure of their economies to effectively address development challenges.
- (13) Stress-management strategies urge you to reframe negatives into positives by creating a kinder story out of the facts in order to release all that anger and disappointment.

As for *INDUCE + noun + to-infinitive*, it is overwhelmingly found in unfavourable contexts (52 times out of 99 sampled occurrences), to depict subtle coercion by either animate or inanimate agents that, differently from the prototypical use of *URGE*, does not necessarily result in physical damage (see Excerpt 8). However, similar to *URGE + noun + to-infinitive*, the underlying assumption is that the person being induced to do something had no prior intention to perform that action:

(14) God admitted that Satan was right; he recognised that the devil did not deceive Adam and Eve in promising them knowledge and liberty as a reward for the act of disobedience which he had induced them to commit.

(15) Prosecutors said Albanses convinced several firms to submit invoices for phantom services and induced others to inflate their bills to the company.

The behaviour of *INDUCE + noun + to-infinitive* partially overlaps with that of *INCITE + noun + to-infinitive* ('to deliberately encourage people to fight, argue', Pearson English Language Teaching, 2014), although it is more subtle in that the effect triggered is an indirect consequence of the agent's act of persuasion for the bad, and the resulting damage, again, is not necessarily physical nor is it normally caused by human actants. The focus is usually placed on both the devious action and its underlying cause, rather than on the recipient's state of mind:

(16) Former Texas Fish and Wildlife Administrator Sam Hamilton, lamenting the fact that the threat of ESA listing induces property owners to destroy endangered bird habitat, added that "we've got to turn it around to make the landowner want the bird on his property."

(17) Update of February 9, 2009: American Eagle Outfitters sued Citigroup and accused it of fraudulently inducing it to buy \$258 million worth of auction rate securities that it now can sell only at a significant loss, if at all.

This aura emerges with such consistency as to call for a negative reading of the text even when its immediate co-textual environment does not at first seem to provide clear indications to this effect:

(18) There's also funny woman Kristin Wiig from Saturday Night Live, the last person to induce me to see a movie twice in the same week.

(19) Being desirous his sons should pursue that innocent, entertaining course of agriculture in which he himself had been engaged all his life, made use of this expedient to induce them to it.

In Excerpt 18, the implicit (perhaps ironic) suggestion conjured up by *INDUCE* is that seeing a movie twice in a week is a deplorable action, or at least one that the speaker strongly resists to. In Excerpt 19, *INDUCE* arguably concurs in implicitly highlighting one of the possible meaning nuances of 'expedient', namely that of describing something as

morally questionable. The resulting evaluative harmony between the two conveys a sense of manipulation, of the father intending to get his children to do something they may not be fully aware of or happy about.

The function of persuasion for the good in non-specialized contexts is marginal and tied to appeals directed towards entities or people in authority roles. In Excerpt 20, for instance, INDUCE could be replaced by ENCOURAGE or PROMPT while still achieving a similar effect, given the general tentativeness of the attempt:

- (20) The law in New York was an effort to induce states to provide for the disposal of low-level radioactive waste, which no state wanted to do on its own.

Unlike its near-synonyms, INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* shows a greater degree of interdependence between semantic prosody and register variation. The pattern appears in religious prose to denote both a positive form of spiritual guidance and perilous tendencies towards unethical conduct:

- (21) will become agents of the great adversary of souls and will leave no means untried to draw them away from their allegiance to God and induce them to leave the narrow path of holiness.
- (22) However, Christian charity induces me to believe and hope the best; I will therefore, in the language of those who afterwards encouraged Bartimeus, say unto you, Arise, take comfort for, I trust, Jesus is calling you;

The unfavourable prosody of implicit coercion is reproduced in court settings and semantic frames of legal proceedings, where it occasionally alternates with a more neutral sense of contractual obligation:

- (23) To achieve this objective, while protecting the conservation organization's interest in having promises that it can rely upon, the donation document should recite facts that explain why donor's voluntary promise will induce conservation organization to take action in reliance upon it and that it is this reliance that makes the promise legally binding.

Finally, while ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* and URGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* point to requests or suggestions (in formal contexts like business-to-consumer communications and user's manuals, or in emphatic political exchanges, respectively), INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* features in scientific and literary prose as either a technical term for 'lead to, determine' or as a neutral/positive synonym for 'convince'. Interestingly, in Excerpt 27 the meaning nuances pointing to an unintentional course of events still persists:

- (24) At the time of their establishment, 3T3 cells were different than most other cell lines in regard to the fact they did not induce tumors to develop when injected into murine species.
- (25) I was glad he had not gone. I hoped Jane would like him a great deal, perhaps induce him to remain a fortnight.

3.2. German near-synonyms

Evidence from the Araneum Germanicum Maius corpus shows that *jemanden (dazu) ANSPORNEN, etwas zu tun* occurs in overwhelmingly positive textual environments (81 occurrences out of 98 concordance lines; two lines were deleted as they were duplicates), where it contributes to depicting people being animated, inspired and led toward personal development or amelioration. The verb usually conveys a similar meaning to that of ‘ermutigen’, that is, ‘in Positiver Weise in seinen Absichten bestärken’ (‘to reinforce in a positive way one’s intentions’, Dudenredaktion, 2020). ANSPORNEN indeed overlaps with ENCOURAGE in pointing to an overall persuasion for the good.

In what follows, glosses for German extracts were also provided to capture the gist of their meaning in context, based on evidence from both monolingual (Dudenredaktion, 2020; Goldhahn *et al.*, 2012) and multilingual (LEO Dictionary Team, 2006–2024) resources. In order to avoid any potential bias, in the excerpts below the targeted verbs are substituted by a low line ‘___’, leaving their interpretation to the reader’s intuition:

(26) Was mich anspricht, in jedem Mandat mein Bestes zu geben, sind die Interessen meiner Mandantinnen und Mandanten.

‘what ___ me to give my best in every mandate are the interests of my clients’

(27) Während der Film also gedreht wird, kann man mit Emmy Rossums Charakter sprechen. Man wird dazu angespornt, ihr zu helfen und sich mögliche Fluchtwege für sie zu überlegen.

‘So while the film is being shot, you can talk to Emmy Rossum’s character. You are ___ to help her and think of possible escape routes for her.’

There seems to be no indication in Excerpts 26–27 as to whether the addressees had already committed themselves to that activity, and ANSPORNEN does not systematically appear in unfavourable scenarios conjured up by external forces, as is the case with ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*. On the contrary, the encouragement may precisely arise from an unpleasant state of affairs:

(28) Unterschiede können die Kinder auch ansprechen, sich Anforderungen zu stellen und sie zu meistern, die kindliche Entwicklung also voranbringen.

‘Differences can also ___ kids to face and overcome challenges, thus advancing their development’

(29) Mahfouz wurde von der anhaltenden Verfolgung von Journalisten durch das Regime von Hosni Mubarak und der tunesischen Freiheitsbewegung angespornt, ihre eigenen Proteste zu organisieren.

‘Mahfouz was ___ by the ongoing persecution of journalists under Hosni Mubarak’s regime and by the Tunisian freedom movement to organise their own protests.’

In similar cases, concordance lines prove especially helpful in bringing to light the evaluative behaviour of the item: if ANFORDERUNG (‘claim, demand, challenge’, LEO Dictionary Team, 2006–2024) and Protest (‘protest, reclamation’, LEO Dictionary Team, 2006–

2024) were to be found among the collocates of ANSPORNEN, we could indeed mistakenly conclude that the verb is associated with an unfavourable prosody as we discussed in Section 2.2.

The overarching favourable evaluation of ANSPORNEN may come into play to trigger irony or comical effects, depicting as positive something that the reader may not consider so:

- (30) Die Grabpreise steigen, damit wir gesund leben. Um uns anzuspornen und glücklich zu machen, tut die chinesische Regierung wirklich alles!“
Grave prices are going up so that we live healthy lives. The Chinese government is really doing everything to __ us and make us happy!”

The pattern *jemanden (dazu) DRÄNGEN, etwas zu tun*, on the other hand, normally interacts with items carrying a negative evaluative force (44 occurrences out in a sample of 92 lines; eight lines were deleted as duplicates or representing an irrelevant sense). These include animate beings and inanimate entities forcing someone against their will to counterproductive and detrimental results (Excerpt 31), or pressing conditions that occasionally incite people to commit despicable acts, with a semantic preference for violence and illegal actions (Excerpt 32). Unlike the case of URGE + *noun + to-infinitive*, there is no necessary implication of urgency:

- (31) Häufig scheitert das Unterfangen dann, wenn zwar der Wille da ist, aber der Körper aufgrund der Entzugserscheinungen den Raucher dazu drängt weiter zu rauchen.
‘Often the effort fails when the will is there, but the body __ the smoker to continue smoking due to withdrawal symptoms.’
- (32) Nein, denn „von allen Leidenschaften ist Angst diejenige, die die Menschen am wenigsten dazu drängt, das Gesetz zu übertreten“
‘No, because “of all the passions, fear is the one that least __ men to transgress the law”’

Both DRÄNGEN and ANSPORNEN are instantiated in religious prose in a way comparable to that of INDUCE + *noun + to-infinitive*, although only in a positive light to exemplify a sudden urge to help or express guidance from above, respectively:

- (33) Auch wir sind berufen, uns auf den Weg zu machen, auf den Weg des Glaubens, der uns drängt, anderen zu helfen.
‘We too are called to set out on the journey, the journey of faith that __ us to help others.’
- (34) Der Hintergrund unseres Einsatzes als Frauen in all diesen Handlungsfeldern ist der Auftrag des Evangeliums, ein Glaube, der mehr ist als „Wellness für die Seele“, ein Glaube, der uns anspricht, unsere von Gott geschenkten Kräfte wirksam werden zu lassen.
‘The foundation of our commitment as women in all these fields of action is the mission of the Gospel, a faith that is more than “wellness for the soul”, a faith that __ us to make our God-given strengths effective.’

While both patterns can be found in political discourse to formulate requests (signalled through passive constructions in the case of ANSPORNEN; see Excerpt 27 above), DRÄNGEN further shows a tendency to do so also in a metaphorical sense and to paraphrase resolute calls in theatres of war:

- (35) Individualist könne man den Glauben nicht verstehen. Er sei kein privater Akt, sondern komme aus dem Hören und dränge dazu, verkündet zu werden.
‘One cannot conceive of faith as individualistic. It is not a private act, but comes from hearing and ___ to be proclaimed.’
- (36) Wenn Simon sie jetzt zufällig töten würde, wäre das eine ideale Ausgangsposition für mich. Gerade deshalb habe ich ihn heute Morgen den gesamten Tag dazu gedrängt einen Gegenschlag zu organisieren.
‘If Simon happened to kill them now, it would be an ideal starting position for me. That is precisely why I have been ___ him all day this morning to organise a counter-attack.’

The pattern does not seem to carry suggestions as to any favourable appraisal of the topic being discussed, and it is rarely used to motivate the addressee. Interestingly, when this is the case, the encouragement stems from unfavourable sources as DRUCK (‘pressure, urgency’, LEO Dictionary Team, 2006–2024) and LEERE (‘emptiness’, LEO Dictionary Team, 2006–2024) in the following examples, similar to *jemanden (dazu) ANSPORNEN*, *etwas zu tun* but differently from the more explicit URGE + noun + to-infinitive:

- (37) Ich will einen Druck aufbauen, der uns dazu drängt zu versuchen tatsächlich zu gewinnen, und nicht nur Stärke zu demonstrieren.
‘I want to build the kind of pressure that ___ us to actually try to win, not just demonstrate strength.’
- (38) Die gähnende Leere in Brieftasche und Kühlschrank drängt mich dazu erfinderisch zu werden
‘The yawning emptiness in my wallet and fridge ___ me to become inventive’

Alternatively, the expression is used with a fairly neutral prosody to exemplify a general stimulus to do something:

- (39) In Israel ist Arabisch eine offizielle Amtssprache, weil ein Fünftel der Bevölkerung Araber ist, doch das ist nicht der wichtigste Antrieb, warum dort gedrängt wird, Arabisch zu lernen.
‘In Israel, Arabic is an official language because one-fifth of the population is Arab, but that is not the main reason for ___ people to learn Arabic there.’

The behaviour of *jemanden dazu BRINGEN*, *etwas zu tun* varies greatly and usually occurs in neutral environments, with a total of 52 occurrences from a sample featuring 99 concordance lines (one line was discarded for representing an irrelevant meaning). No implication suggests a priori that a person will be induced or led to either objectionable or commendable courses of action. Although people who BRINGEN others to a certain outcome may in principle exert their influence indirectly, the pattern also functions in the proact-

ive sense of get someone to do something. Unlike INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*, then, agents are here active participants with a clear objective in mind:

- (40) Außerdem wurden Konzepte erstellt, wie mehr Lehrkräfte dazu gebracht werden können die bestehenden Materialien im Unterricht auch einzusetzen.
‘Plans were also devised on how to __ more teachers to use the existing materials in their lessons.’

- (41) Seiner Aktion Y+2m sollte die Menschen dazu bringen, sich auf der Y-Achse zu bewegen, den Blickwinkel zu ändern und die Stadt aus einer anderen Perspektive zu sehen – eine wichtige Voraussetzung für das urbane Gärtnern.
‘His campaign Y+2m was meant to __ people to move on the Y-axis, to change their point of view and to see the city from a different perspective – an important prerequisite for urban gardening.’

When found in unfavourable environments involving people, the causative nature of *jemandem dazu BRINGEN, etwas zu tun* often translates into deception. That is to say, the agent tricks the addressee into doing something detrimental for them:

- (42) Zur erfolgreichen Ausnutzung dieser Schwachstelle muss der Angreifer den Anwender dazu bringen eine manipulierte E-Mail oder Webseite zu öffnen.
‘To successfully exploit this vulnerability, the attacker must __ the user to open a manipulated email or website.’
- (43) Die Kinder werden vom Täter dazu gebracht, dass sie ein dunkles Geheimnis mit ihm teilen.
‘The children are __ by the abuser to share a dark secret with him.’

Subtle coercion or negative influence from external forces are not reported systematically, which constitutes a key difference with respect to DRÄNGEN. Rather, *jemanden dazu BRINGEN, etwas zu tun* also expresses a positive evaluative force, especially when paired with items denoting a moment of realisation:

- (44) Eine Geschichte, die, wenn sie nicht so traurig wäre, hier zu Ihrer Belustigung beitragen könnte, passierte mir heute, was mich dazu bringt, mich mal wieder an Sie, liebe Leser von *The Intelligence*, zu wenden.
‘A story that, if it were not so sad, could contribute to your amusement here, happened to me today, __ me to turn once again to you, dear readers of *The Intelligence*.’

Contrary to INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*, there is only one instance where the German equivalent is found in religious discourse as indicating a moving force:

- (45) Nur ein allmächtiger Erlöser kann uns dazu bringen, uns wie Hiob „selbst zu verabscheuen“ (Hi 42,6) und Böses zu verachten.
‘Only an almighty Saviour can __ us to “abhor ourselves” (Job 42:6) and despise evil like Job.’

As a final remark, it must be noted that *jemanden dazu BRINGEN, etwas zu tun* and INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* do actually share similar meaning nuances in academic prose, where

the German pattern denotes neutral causation chains of events between inanimate objects:

(46) Mit der neuen Technologie werden die Pflanzen dazu gebracht, selber Pilzgifte zu entwickeln, die natürlich für den Menschen unschädlich sind.

‘With the new technology, plants are ___ to develop their own fungal toxins, which are naturally harmless to humans.’

3.3. Summary of results

The results of all six analyses are listed in Figure 1, Table 3 and Table 4. The prevailing prosody of each pattern, whether favourable, unfavourable or neutral, is shown in bold.

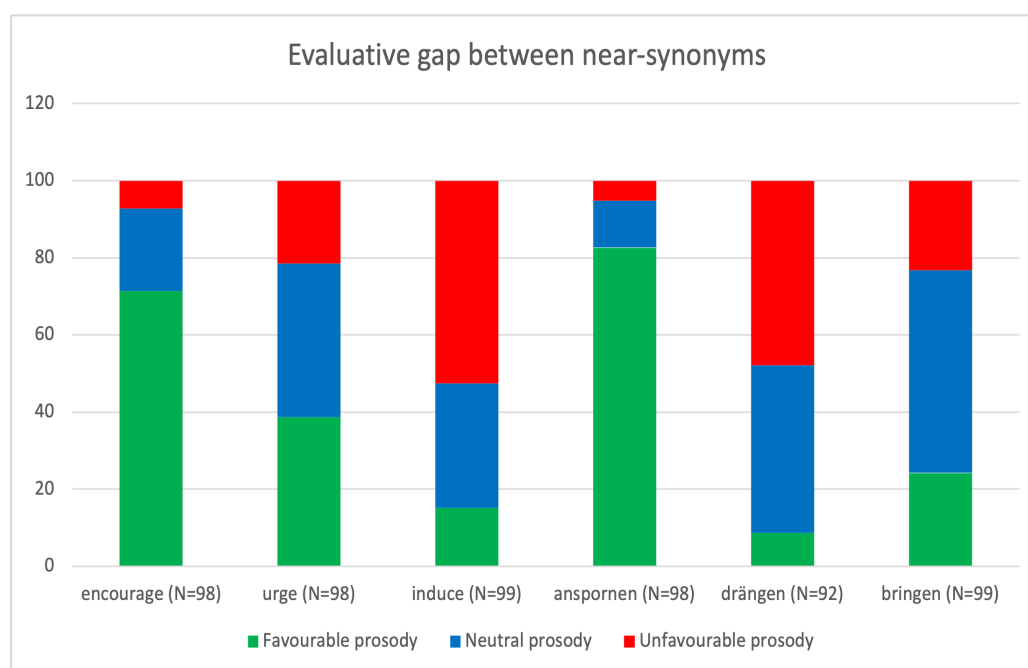


Figure 1: Evaluative gap between near synonyms.

Going back to our research questions, our study highlighted differences at both the intra- and interlinguistic levels among the near-synonymous patterns under analysis. Despite claims of synonymy found in dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, the corpus evidence did not lend sufficient support to a strong claim in this sense. For example, differently from the ‘milder’ ENCOURAGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*, whose evaluative prosody often resembles ‘proactive support given by animate subjects to the accomplishment of a previously-set goal’, URGE + *noun* + *to-infinitive* clearly displays a greater degree of intensity stemming from the immediate necessity of addressing overlooked issues or from considerable pressure being explicitly exerted on the individual, the latter associated with a shift towards deplorable actions that is even more evident with INDUCE + *noun* + *to-infinitive*.

Pattern	Prosody	Text type	Pragmatic function	
ENCOURAGE + noun + to-infinitive	+	Unspecified	Persuade the addressee to do something positive they have already committed themselves to doing Evoke a sense of commonality between those who encourage and the encouraged that is opposed to a third party	
		Unspecified	Non-volitional “persuasion for the bad” stemming from external circumstances	
	0	B2C, manuals	Formulate a request or suggestion	
URGE + noun + to-infinitive	+	Political discourse	Raise awareness on a beneficial outcome	
		Unspecified	Explicitly motivate someone	
	-	Unspecified	Explicit coercion normally resulting in physical damage, mostly by animate agents that feel justified in so doing and may not participate in the action	
		0	Political discourse	Formulate urgent requests
INDUCE + noun + to-infinitive	+	Unspecified	Indirectly stimulating or inspiring someone Persuade people or entities with great(er) authority	
		Religious prose	Positive form of spiritual guidance	
		-	Unspecified	Subtle constriction by animate or inanimate that does not result in physical damage
	-	Legal proceedings	Implicit coercion	
		Religious prose	Perilous tendencies towards unethical conduct	
		0	Scientific prose	Leading to, determine something
			Literary prose	Convince

Table 3: Overall pragmatic functions and preferred text types of the English near-synonyms

Clear tendencies also discriminate between German near synonyms. While *jemanden zu etwas* ANSPORNEN consistently occupies the positive end of the evaluative spectrum, the behaviour of its two near-synonyms oscillates more evidently.

Pattern	Prosody	Text type	Pragmatic function
jemandem zu etwas ANSPORNEN	+	Unspecified	A person or an unpleasant state of affairs lead someone towards personal development or amelioration without implying prior commitment on their part
		Religious prose	Guide towards a positive outcome
	-	Unspecified	Negative encouragement due to pressing forces
	0	Political discourse	Ask or lead to do something
jemandem zu etwas DRÄNGEN	+	Unspecified	Motivate someone towards a desired result
		Religious prose	Sudden urge to help
	-	Unspecified	Either animate or inanimate beings force someone against their will to detrimental results without implying urgency External forces press someone to commit despicable acts
	0	Political discourse	Resolute call for action
jemandem zu etwas BRINGEN	+	Unspecified	Indirectly leading to a moment of realisation Actively encourage someone
		-	Unspecified
	0	Unspecified	Influence someone, either directly or indirectly Get someone to do something
		Academic prose	Denote causation chains between inanimate objects

Table 4: Overall pragmatic functions and preferred text types of the German near-synonyms

In particular, *jemanden zu etwas DRÄNGEN* refers to detrimental results in approximately 50% of sampled instances, whereas *jemanden zu etwas BRINGEN* does so almost exclusively in the sense of deception. More frequently it occurs in neutrally-connotated co-textual environments to indicate (in)direct influence (approximately 52% in the sample).

Furthermore, considered from a cross-linguistic perspective, these items do not exhibit the same meaning nuances as their alleged equivalents. Cases in point are those of *jemanden zu etwas ANSPORNEN* lacking the unfavourable prosody of ‘non-volitional persuasion for the bad stemming from external circumstances’ associated with ENCOURAGE +

noun + to-infinitive, or the evaluative mismatch between URGE + *noun + to-infinitive* and *je-manden zu etwas* DRÄNGEN on the one hand, and INDUCE + *noun + to-infinitive* and *je-manden zu etwas* BRINGEN on the other, which differ cross-linguistically in terms of degree of explicitness (of the act portrayed) and involvement (of those who prompt the act).

Mismatches between corpus and dictionary evidence can be explained with reference to the semasiological nature of most dictionaries, guiding the reader ‘from the word to its meaning’ (Siepmann, 2006, p. 8). Traditionally, lexicographers gather information on discrete word-forms based on frequency patterns with the objective of classifying them in alphabetical fashion, a practice that ‘give[s] patchy or inadequate coverage to semantic-pragmatic collocations, [that] cannot provide adequate cross-referencing between synonymous items and [is] prone to translation errors’ (Siepmann, 2006, p. 1). The opposite view is represented by Sinclair’s approach to the empty lexicon (2004, p. 160), an onomasiological practice proceeding from particular concepts to appropriate linguistic items so that “meanings have words”, and not vice versa (Philip, 2011, p. 9).

Sequences such as the ones targeted here, in particular, make the limitations of most monolingual and, especially, bilingual dictionaries’ evident. When it gets to accounting for extended units of meaning entering the same structural pattern and having, to paraphrase Frege (1892), a similar *Bedeutung* (here ‘persuasion’) but a different *Sinn* (understood as a mode of ‘presentation’), these resources are clearly less than ideal.

4. Conclusion

The present study has attempted to provide insights into the relevance of semantic prosody from both an intra- and an inter-linguistic perspective, focusing on two English and German near-synonymous sets whose salient patterns are associated with a general meaning of persuasion. Evidence from monolingual comparable corpora has contributed to highlighting considerable discrepancies in their evaluative behaviour and related discourse functions.

These results corroborate previous findings as to the powerful predictive and explanatory power of semantic prosodies against the background of the idiom principle (see for example Partington 1998, Philip 2009). At the same time, they expand the scope of both monolingual and comparative research into subtle, arguably non-obvious meaning nuances differentiating near-synonymous alternatives available on the paradigmatic axis, within and across languages. Clearly, a number of limitations remain: they concern, among others, the composition of the corpora (crawled from the web, with no attempt at sampling from different registers), the method of analysis (bottom-up, focusing on a limited number of examples), and the reliance on a single individual’s interpretation of the data.

One area where the observations presented here naturally find their application is lexicography. Following in the path indicated by Siepmann (2006), one could conceive of

dictionaries as onomasiological resources that assign meaning and concepts to (structurally complex) linguistic units, rather than the opposite. Within this model, each entry is allocated a topic area with varying situation-types, thus providing a clear and explicit understanding of interrelated semantic-pragmatic features and repeated syntagmatic contexts, ultimately achieving an effective ‘economy of treatment’ (Siepmann, 2006, p. 17–18, 20–24). By adopting this model, monolingual and bilingual dictionary definitions could then be enriched with fine details that may escape conscious knowledge, allowing foreign language learners and translators to better capture the complexities of language in use: a quest that Alan has always excelled in, and has consistently encouraged them, and us, to embark upon.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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