

Danish and other Indo-European languages. Structural differences between texts in ‘endocentric’ Danish and ‘exocentric’ Romance languages

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The article shows how presentation and structuring of text information can be traced back to lexicalisation, morphology and syntax. Within the framework of the CBS-based TypoLex project, Danish and the other Germanic languages are characterised as “endocentric”, i.e. with semantic weight concentrated in the verb, as opposed to the “exocentric” Romance languages, which encode relatively more semantic information in the nouns. This difference in basic sentence semantic structure is linked to differences in the lexicalisation of verbs and nouns. For instance verbs of motion in endocentric languages typically encode the semantic features MANNER and FIGURE, whereas verbs of motion in exocentric languages generally only encode the more abstract feature DIRECTION. On the other hand, nouns in exocentric languages encode more precise features such as e.g. CONFIGURATION, whereas nouns in endocentric languages encode the more abstract feature FUNCTION. Systematic differences in verbal morphology result in different possibilities of foregrounding and backgrounding information. Whereas endocentric languages use predominantly finite verbs in coordinate sentences, non-finite verb forms and nominalisations are much more common in exocentric languages. Typological differences are also seen in anaphors; endocentric languages tend to use ‘light’ anaphors as compared to the semantically ‘heavy’ nominal anaphors typically found in exocentric languages.