

Wià effdà daß mà nochdenggd – Koàn bessàn weàds need findn!*

HUBERT HAIDER

Fully filled Comps, that is, lexicalized Spec-C plus C°, in Bavarian, clause-initial and clause-final complementizers in বাংলা ভাষা (Bangla), and the directional government-seeking behavior of focusing particles are my, but not only my own, favorites for the bronze, silver & gold podium in Sepp’s bibliography. My predilection is likely to be close to representativity, given the citation numbers in Harzing’s PoP, which lists them in the top range of the superb three digit categories.

In his persistently progress-seeking but casually Konstanz-bound academic peregrination, Josef occasionally touched Stuttgart, which was my academic home territory in these years. In 1993, I was extremely happy to welcome “an Bayer Sepp” on an SFB-project. Unfortunately, he too soon embarked on a C4-chair at the Friedrich-Schiller-University in a town where Goethe, Schiller and the Humboldt brothers used to meet, namely at Jena, before he finally returned to his primary ‘Tatort’ Konstanz.

Beforehand, I had the opportunity of admiring his cool temper when he applied for a C3 position in Germanic linguistics in Stuttgart, in front of a predominantly in-competent committee, as it is typical in the humanities. There, he delivered a brilliant talk on Negative Concord in Bavarian. The first guy to pop up his arm was a professor of German literature (Literatur-‘Wissenschaft’) whose main field of interest has been operettas. After lengthily wording his unhappy feelings of having irrelevantly been exposed to overly complicated thoughts about a dialect of a neighboring tribe while participating in an academic event designed to find a suitable professor for unraveling the grammatical enigmas of the language of Herder, Humboldt and Heidegger, not to mention the linguistic finesses in the librettos of “Fledermaus” or “Lustige Witwe”, he triumphantly announced his final and fundamental question “*Was ist ein ‘Knoten’*”? (*What is a knot?*).

The Privatdozent gently replied that there is knot theory in math and that there is graph theory, which would be what he had referred to by the syntactic tree diagrams with their nodes (‘Knoten’) that allow differentiating the scope domains of negation accurately, - but the most dangerous nodes would be those that clutter one’s brain.

* These evidently appropriate, adequately characterizing descriptions of Sepp are selected from Ludwig Merkle (1976) *Bairische Grammatik*. Dtv (p.190; 155). Note that the following glossing of the Bavarian statement cannot fully capture the essential formal ingredients, that is, a doubly-filled comp in the first clause, and negative concord in the second clause: The more one comes to think of it—You won’t find a better guy!

It did not help. When my opponents from the kingdoms of fiction realized that Sepp might be my favorite candidate, this was the end of his chance of getting shortlisted and my first profound lesson in the socio-pathology of academic decision-finding.

In my perception, Sepp's linguistic career is a true embodiment of empirical and theoretical linguistics in the final quarter of the twentieth century on its way to the following millennium. Starting with a dissertation on the interface between syntax and semantics, he first transformed into a clinical linguist & aphasiologist in Aachen, then molted into a psycholinguist at Nijmegen, in order to finish his academic metamorphosis as 'Privatdozent' in Konstanz again, returning to his main linguistic campground at the combat line between structural syntax and formal semantics.

There is no denying that Sepp's life-long research enterprises have elevated him to the rank of a prime candidate for the "*Bayerischer Maximiliansorden für Wissenschaft und Kunst*" because of his undeniable success of making *Bairisch* an internationally recognized idiom in the realm of grammar theory. He has not only continuously published pioneering work on the proper structural analyses of various constructions in the major idiom of Bavaria; he also distilled grammar theoretical in-sights out of these analyses that contributed to establishing *Bairisch* as one of the corner stones for any attempt of understanding Comp-related processes in a Germanic V2 language, next to Icelandic.

Everyone who knows Josef must know his predilection for opera. I wonder which composer would be the composer of his dreams if his biography was turned into an opera libretto. If he chose Richard Wagner "*Whatever my passions demand of me, I become for the time being – musician, poet, director, author, lecturer or anything else*" he understandably would be in a state of constant fear that Giacomo Rossini might be completely right "*Wagner has lovely moments but awful quarter hours*"¹, which by the way, satisfactorily describes our academic environments, too.

Anyway, he would be on the safe side with Callas "*An opera begins long before the curtain goes up and ends long after it has come down. It starts in my imagination, it becomes my life, and it stays part of my life long after I've left the opera house*". Same with linguistics if one is gifted with the same kind of passion as Sepp always has been.

Therefore, my best wishes—*Venerabilis Senex!*²—for your imminent and uninterrupted, and in principle everlasting sabbatical period as a professor of linguistics and aria aficionado: *Fin ch'han dal vino, Calda la testa, Una gran festa, Fa' preparar*. (Don Giovanni, act 1, scene v).

1 Rossini in a letter to Emile Naumann in 1867.

2 It is unattested but nevertheless widely claimed that Immanuel Kant has been addressed by these words at an occasion of the academic celebration of his 50th birthday.