

The Third Scandinavian PhD Conference in Linguistics and Philology in Bergen.

How to match question, corpus, theory and method.
The case of argumentative markers in parliamentary discourse
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Depending on their disciplinary background, competence or personal interest, scholars find different subjects more or less interesting. Sometimes you even end up working on a specific topic because of accidental circumstances. In this talk I will argue that there is no such thing as more interesting or uninteresting questions, but only scientifically adequate or inadequate ways of handling it.

Linguistic research, as many other fields of investigation, stands on four pillars: question, corpus, theory and method. A question or hypothesis must be relevant for the investigated material, or vice versa. If I want to say something significant about a general linguistic phenomenon, the material must be general and representative. If I want to examine the particular features of a certain genre, the material must allow for comparison between genres. Once the question or hypothesis is formulated and the corpus is more or less established, it is not without complications to identify a theory that is both applicable and which generates a convincing explanation. For example, doing conversation analysis on a set of monologue texts is a hazardous venture. Finally, when the project design is on paper: how does one actually move a set of ideas and outlines into a workable Ph.D. project?

I will illustrate this dilemma with the case of argumentative markers in European parliamentary discourse. This project is divided into three subprojects of different epistemological status. First, a theoretical study which will result in an applicable model of linguistic argumentation analysis. Second, a corpus-based study of four argumentative semantic relations: *cause*, *consequence*, *concession* and *finality* and the linguistic expressions representing them. Finally, a discourse analysis of the expressions taking into account contextual factors. The corpus *C-ParlEur - Corpus de discours du Parlement Européen* consists of all speeches held by French and Swedish MPs from April 2006 until March 2008.

No matter where you are in your academic career, be it a Ph.D. candidate or an established researcher, certain dilemmas regarding project design and its implementation are re-occurring and must be dealt with. You may choose to place the focus on either the research question, on the corpus, on theory or on methods, but they always need to be connected in a convincing and academically feasible manner.