

## **“Homo Austriacus” on the mountains. The discursive construction of mountaineering in an alpine heritage corpus**

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The Alps and mountains in general may not just be perceived as a geological entity but also as cultural constructs (Bubenhofers/Schröter 2012: 264). In accordance with Rak (2007: 111) we suggest viewing discourses about mountains and mountaineering as a rhetoric of their own, because they narrate very particular “conceptualizations, beliefs, evaluations and behaviors” (Bubenhofers/Schröter 2012, 265) members of a social group share. This social group of climbers and mountaineers as well as the activity mountaineering have become quite significant since the 18th century, especially in Central Europe. The discourses around this topic may have been “one of the key ways that modern, Western ideas about human activity, the idea of the body and the linking of gender to ideas about nationalism, colonialism, and race have been formulated” (Rak 2007, 112). This is because writing about mountaineering is equally important as the activity itself. Alpinist discourses offer climbers the possibility to prove their worth within their very elitist community, because they document the climb itself and provide climbing advice for anyone trying to repeat a route. Frequently they also have to provide some sort of justification for the activity itself – which without these discourses would be considered a very unnecessary risk. Expedition narratives, for example, are a way that mountaineers “talk” to or about each other, and so they provide much more than factual information. They are about social and ideological issues as well as about climbing, because they tell other climbers not only how to climb a certain mountain but how to be a climber too: very often they are about the ability and potential of the modern individual, about progress, conquest and aspiration. At the same time, those discourses entail utterances about people and cultures living in the mountains, who often are depicted as tradition-bound, even sometimes weak-willed. Mountaineering rhetoric hence produces a specific kind of climbing subjectivity which relates climbing to Western notions of identity. Therefore, mountaineering, a sport without spectators, relies heavily on discourses and for this reason was called “the most literary of all sports” (Barcott 1996, 65). Those discourses in the form of texts, speeches, movies etc. usually follow certain structures and patterns, because to be part of this community a certain style has to be followed and specific topoi need to be activated. Lutz (2002) for example describes mountaineering as a condensed form of “masculine encounters with the body and nature”, which is not just “hypermasculine” but also soldierly and nationally coded. Topoi like ‘critique of civilization’, ‘individualism’, or the hero, who experiences and epiphany in the mountains are also quite generally known.

However, mountaineering and related discourses are very rarely treated in DA and there is little substantial research on the rhetoric and language of alpinism (especially in the German language), even though there is a significant number of texts on the topic. The proposed talk uses the corpus *Alpenwort – Korpus der Zeitschrift des österreichischen und deutschen Alpenvereins* (Corpus of the Austrian Alpine Club Journal) to investigate how the concepts and topoi mentioned above are linguistically constructed and linked with each other. Methodically we use a

'quantitatively informed qualitative' discourse approach, as suggested by Bubenhofer & Schröter (2012), Mautner (2012). Research questions are oriented along the lines of a thesis stated by Lutz: Heroism as something masculine that becomes visible in mountaineering as extreme sport, embodies virtues and values, which are often used to confirm identities of nations or even of a nationalism that reflects feelings of superiority towards other nations.

We investigate the following questions from a discourse-historical perspective:

- How are nations and people in the corpus discursively constructed?
- How is especially Austria constructed as the mountaineering nation par excellence?
- Which linguistic patterns and topoi are used to construct Austria as an "alpine super power" and the heroes as its soldiers?

We will especially focus on references/nominations (Wodak 2012), as well as argumentation patterns. The research uses a combined corpus-linguistic and discourse-historical approach to look for recurrent patterns of language use relating to these topics (e.g. n-grams, use of personal pronouns and nomination, predications, intensifiers).

To investigate these questions a large, linguistically annotated heritage corpus of alpinism will be used. This corpus contains 126 yearbooks of the Austrian Alpine Club Magazine (= *Zeitschrift des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpenvereins, ZAV*) from the years 1869 to 1998. It consists of 42.000 book pages which result in approximately 18,6 million word forms and is available in a corrected and fully POSTagged form. In its first decades the corpus reflects the ongoing touristic and cartographic exploration of the Alps. During the 20th century perspectives expanded to the mountains of the world. Topics such as environment and nature protection are discussed as well as questions of regional identity and cultural heritage. Thus, this corpus provides an excellent opportunity to investigate how concepts like heroism, femininity/masculinity, Western notions of identity, and ideas about nationalism, colonialism and race (e.g. "world mountains"), are discursively constructed.

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