



From *star* (N) to *star* (V):



A contrastive study of cognate noun/verb pairs in English and Norwegian

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Outline

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- Aim & research questions
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Idea for the study

“Conversion is a common feature of present-day English, leading to many ‘heterosemous’ words that express related meanings across multiple word classes. Especially common is verb/noun heterosemy, as in *flow* or *hand*, both of which can be used as verbs or as nouns.” (Shao et al. 2023: 321)

- Same feature exists in Norwegian, e.g. *tromme* (Eng. ‘drum’), which can be used both as a verb and as a noun.
- What if we combine the occurrences of heterosemous nouns and verbs in the two languages with the study of the translation of cognates?

“Cognates tend to trigger cognates in the mental lexicon of bilingual speakers [...]. When a cognate lexeme can be used in an equivalent grammatical construction in a target language, one might expect translators to choose to employ them both” (Egan 2021: 48).

Previous research

Previous studies of English-Norwegian cognates based on contrastive corpus data:

- *hold* vs. *holde* (Dalane-Hval, 2013)
- *bring* vs. *bringe* (Ebeling, 2017; Egan 2024)
- *give* vs. *gi* (Holmen 2021; Egan, 2023)
- *tell* vs. *fortelle* (Egan, 2021)
- *hope* vs. *håp(e)* (Ebeling, 2021)
- *help* vs. *hjelp* (Egan, 2024)
- *see* vs. *se* (Ebeling, 2024)
- *go* vs. *gå* (Ebeling & Hasselgård 2024)

Aim and RQs

Aim

Provide a more comprehensive account of how cognate nouns and verbs behave cross-linguistically between English and Norwegian.

RQs

1. To what extent do noun and verb uses of the cognates correspond to each other in translation?
2. What factors tend to trigger a higher or lower degree of Mutual Correspondence (MC)?

Material & method

Material: ENPC+: a balanced bidirectional translation corpus of **fiction** texts with 1.3 mill. words in either direction: EO, NO, ET, NT (Ebeling & Ebeling 2018: 351)

Starting point: Shao et al.'s list of 877 noun/verb pairs extracted from COHA; their aim was to study conversion in Am. English in a diachronic perspective

Current study: manually extracted and matched 118 etymologically related Norw. cognates from the ENPC+ based on Shao et al.'s list

Data (tokens) analysed: EnN: 4,676; NoN: 5,772; EnV: 7,539; NoV: 6,722 (and their translations)

NB! 118 occ. adjusted to 78 noun pairs and 73 verb pairs due to low freq. of some pairs.

Untranslated: not counted, i.e. not part of quantitative results

Material & method: Included in the study

Heterosemous nouns/verbs in Norwegian

- Eng. *smile* (N/V) vs. Norw. *smil* (N) and *smile* (V)

Also

- Eng. circle (N/V) vs. Norw. *sir**kel*** (N) and *sir**kle*** (V)
- Eng. *knot* (N/V) vs. Norw. *kn**ute*** (N) and *kn**yte*** (V)
- Eng. *drum* (N/V) vs. Norw. *tr**omme*** (N/V) (exception!)

Material & method: **Not** included in the study

Prefixed verbs in Norwegian

- *Eng. order (N/V) = ordre (N) but **beordre** (V)*

Compounds

- ***crossroads***
- *library **tour***
- ***turleder** (= tour leader)*

Norwegian verbs ending in **-ere**:

- *Eng. alarm (N/V) = alarm (N) / **alarmere** (V)*
- *Eng. control (N/V) = kontroll (N) / **kontrollere** (V)*

Material & method: Congruence

Regarded as **congruent, cognate** translation:

- N=N, V=V, N=V and V=N

Regarded as **non-congruent** translation:

- *kryss* (N) -> *crossroads* (compound)
- *dans* (N) -> *dancing* (ADJ)
- *fingers **crossed*** (V) -> ***kryssede*** (ADJ) *finger* (crossed fingers)
- *curls* (N) -> *krøllet* (ADJ)

Method: Mutual correspondence & translation bias

MC: Measure (%) showing the intertranslatability of two lexical items in a bidirectional corpus

TB: Measure (%) showing how often two items correspond to each other in each direction of translation

Example:

- *light* (V): 137 occ. -> NT (*lyse*): 23 = TB 16.8%
- *lyse* (V): 110 occ. -> ET (*light*): 38 = TB 34.5%
- MC = 24.7%

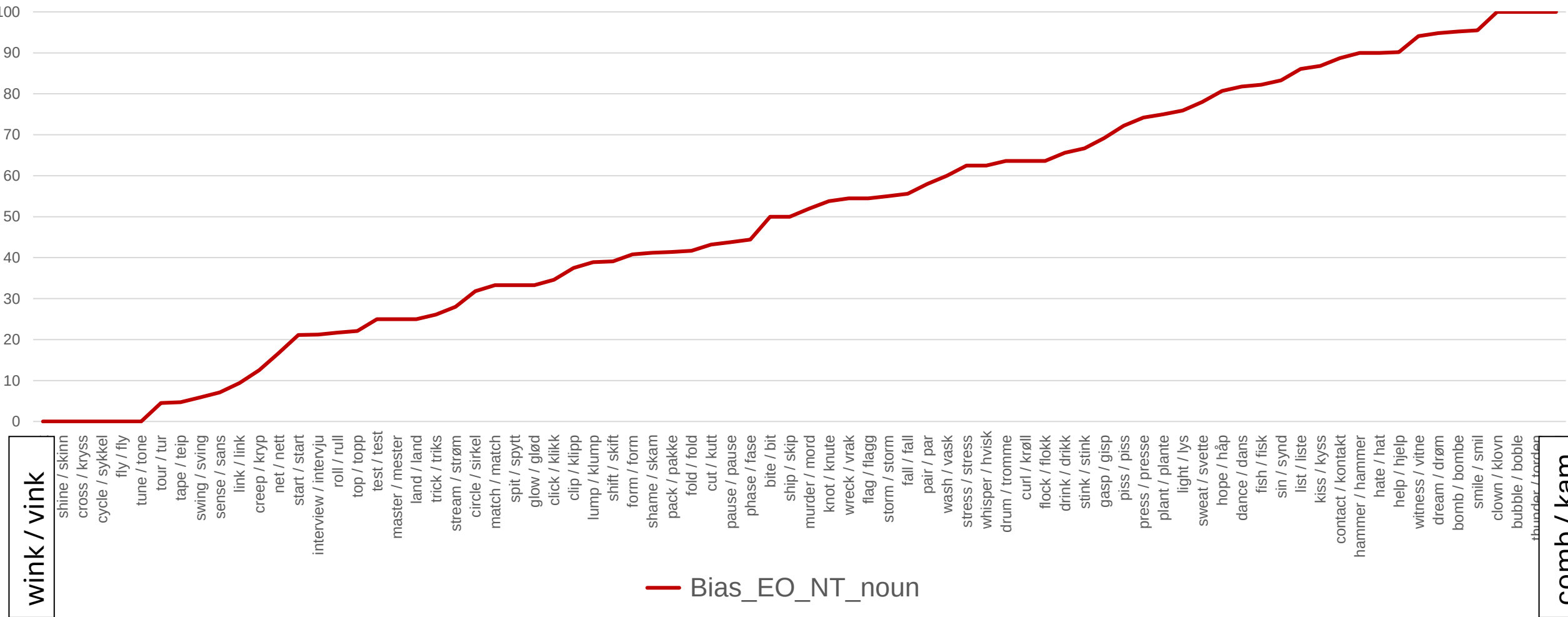
Analysis and results

MC of each individual cognate pair

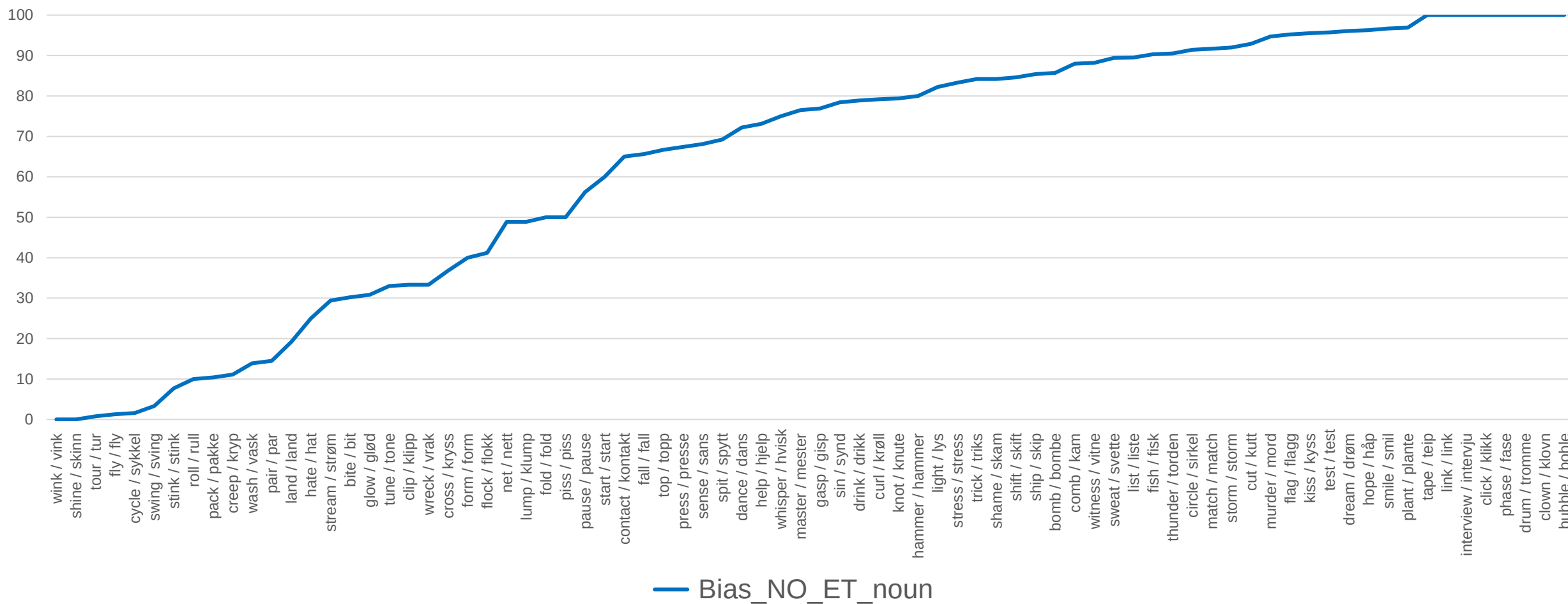
(78 noun pairs and 73 verb pairs)

- Calculated on the basis of the underlying TB of each individual cognate noun pair and each individual verb pair.

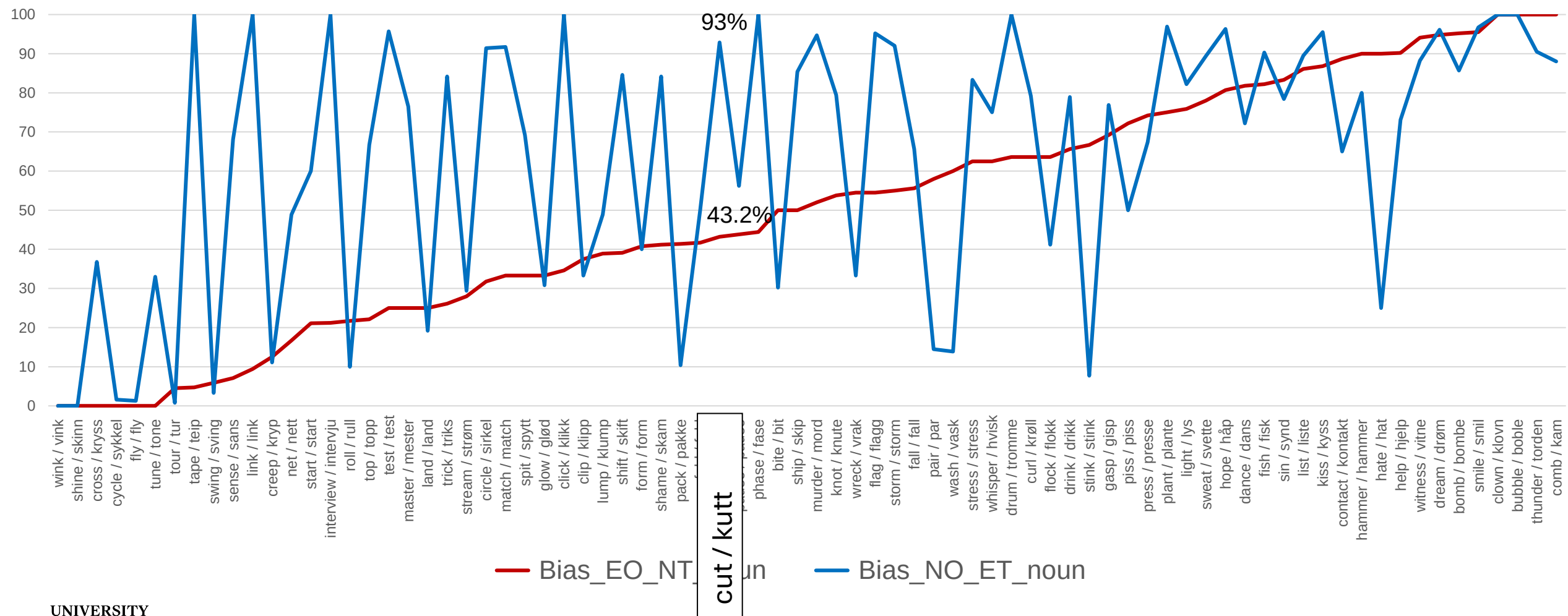
Translation bias of the noun pairs (EO>NT)



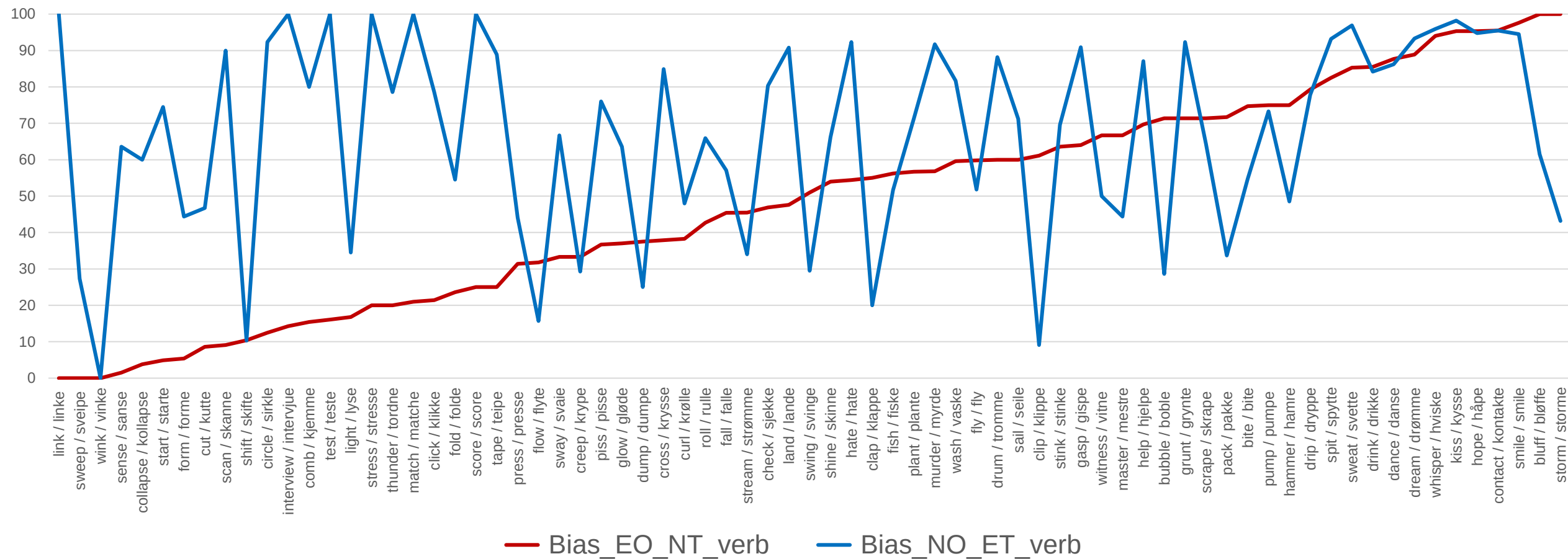
Translation bias of the noun pairs (NO>ET)



Translation bias of the noun pairs



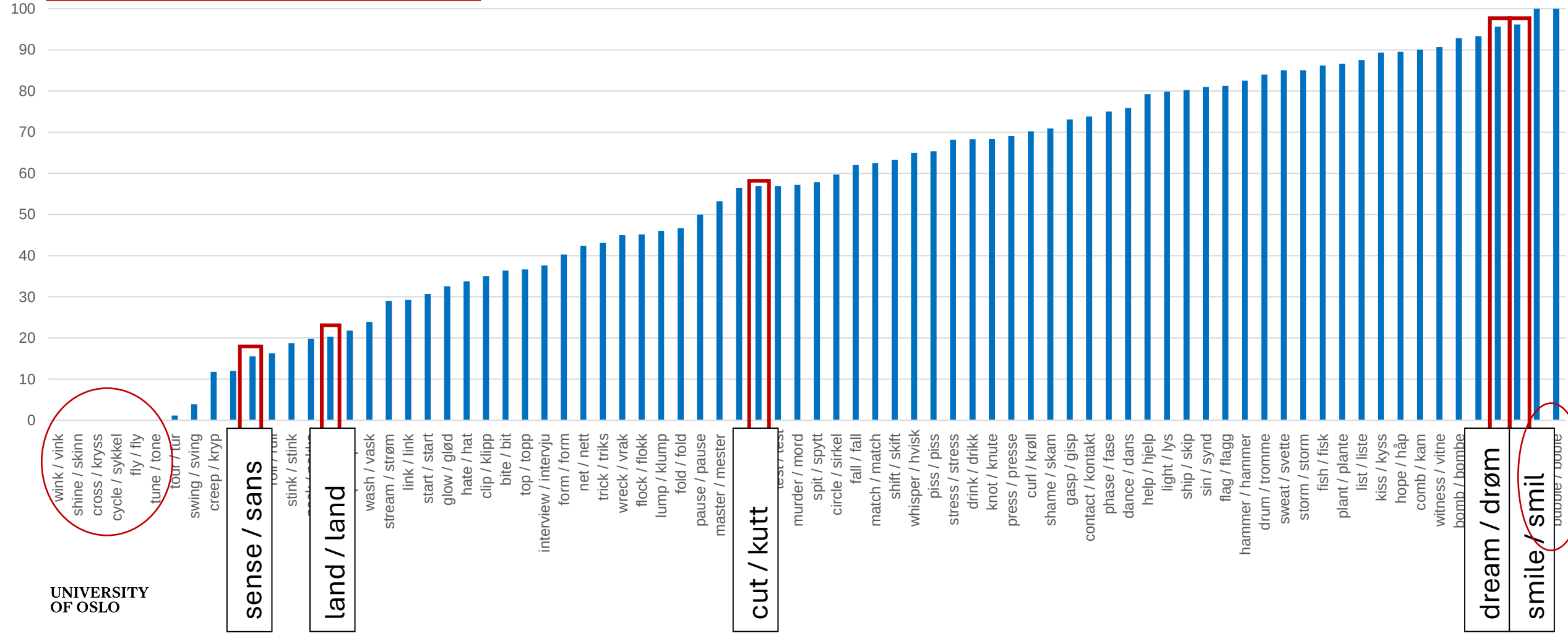
Translation bias of the verb pairs



MC of 78 noun pairs

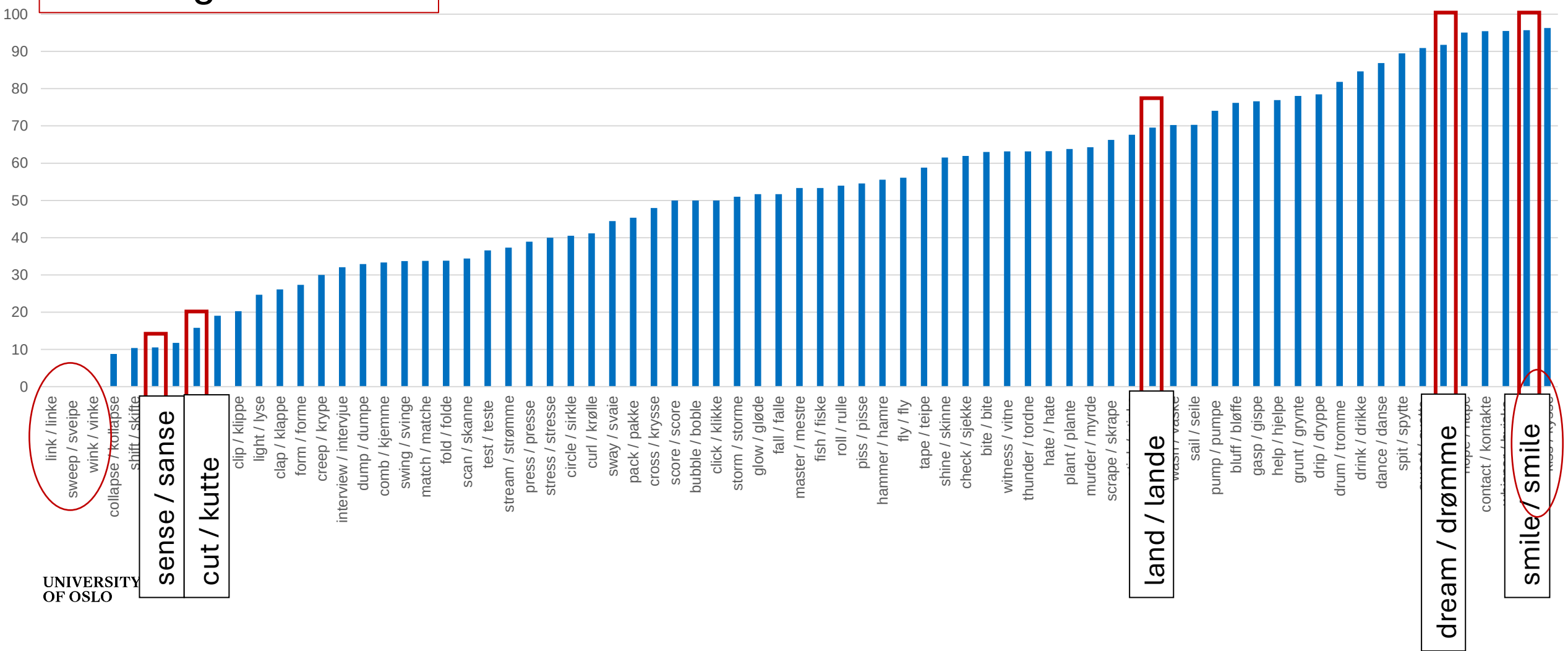
MC = 60.9%

MC range: 0%-100%



MC of 73 verb pairs

MC = 58.6%
MC range: 0%-96%



Case studies: SMILE/SMIL(E) AND SENSE/SANS(E)

SMILE/SMIL(E)

- Relatively high frequency of both noun (>260) and verb (>460) in both languages
- High MC (ca. 96% for nouns and verbs) and an even TB
- Stable meanings, no specific lexico-grammatical extensions, overlapping uses, e.g. (1)
- Nouns and verbs may correspond to each other across the word classes (cross-linguistic conversion), e.g. (2).

(1) De **smiler** fromt og favner vidt. [AnHo2N]
They **smile** piously and open their arms wide.

(2) Molly, the waitress says, giving him a **smile**. [PaAu1E]
Molly, sier servitrisen og **smiler**.
'Molly, says the waitress and smiles'

SENSE/SANS(E)

- Markedly higher frequency of both the noun and verb in English
- Low MC and lopsided TB
 - MC: nouns = 15.5%; verbs = 10.5%
 - TB nouns: EO>NT = 7%; NO>ET = 68%
 - TB verbs: EO>NT = 1.5%; NO>ET = 63.6%
- The English nouns and verbs have a wider area of use
 - Attested by varied and extensive translation paradigms (incl. various ways of sensing: FØLE 'feel', MERKE 'notice', ANE 'assume') and the number of lexico-grammatical patterns observed.
 - Only two noun patterns have congruent counterparts with SANS: *sense of humour* = *sans for humor* and plural *senses* = *sansene/sanser*. The MC of these two patterns alone is around 82% (compared to around 15% overall for the nouns).
 - Main pattern of non-congruence for the nouns: English MAKE (*no/any*) *sense* → Norwegian copular verb + ADJ, as in (3).

- (3) What he said *made sense* to Mattie ... [GN1]
Det han sa *lød fornuftig* nok for Mattie ...
'What he said sounded reasonable enough for Mattie'

Conclusion

RQ 1: To what extent do the cognates correspond to each other in translation, i.e. what is their Mutual Correspondence?

Great variation, ranging from 0%-100%, suggesting no shared MC tendency for cognates

- The nouns tend to have a higher MC than the verbs, suggesting that nouns are cross-linguistically less versatile;
- The NO>ET direction of translation has higher Translation Bias scores, suggesting that there is a more varied use of both the nouns and verbs in English.

RQ 2: What factors tend to trigger a higher or lower degree of Mutual Correspondence?

Word class, frequency of use and lexico-grammatical potential

- **Word class**

- Nouns seem to be less prone to language-specific lexico-grammatical extensions, resulting in a **higher** MC.
- Possibility of cross-linguistic conversion (from V to N or N to V), resulting in a **higher** MC, e.g. SMILE/SMIL(E) and DREAM/DRØM(ME).

- **Frequency of use**

- The higher the frequency of an item in one language compared to the other, the more semantically and syntactically versatile it may be, resulting in lopsided TBs (e.g. SENSE/SANS(E)) and a **lower** MC.

- **Lexico-grammatical potential**
- Translation paradigms as well as translation bias point to the cognates' versatility (their lexico-grammatical potential):
 - A uniform and small set of translation correspondences may yield an insignificant translation bias and points to lexico-grammatical similarity across the languages, resulting in a **higher** MC (overlapping lexico-grammar).
 - A varied and large set of translation correspondences may yield a strong translation bias and points to lexico-grammatical extensions only present in one of the languages, resulting in a **lower** MC (diverging lexico-grammar).
- ➔ These lexico-grammatical features vary extensively from cognate pair to cognate pair
- ➔ English seems to have developed more lexico-grammatical extensions than Norwegian for most of these heterosemous cognates, resulting in lower TBs in the EO>NT direction of translation.

A note on the future

Each new case study of cognates has the potential to add new insight into the cross-linguistic intricacies of cognate (non-)correspondence across languages, thus encouraging more studies of individual items also in the future.

Thank you!

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