

AG 2
Quirky Vorfeld Phenomena:
Empirically-driven Approaches to Theoretical Challenges

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On exceptional Vorfeldbesetzung
24.02.2010, 14.30–15.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

Exception phrases (EP) are headed by exception words (EW) like *except (for)* and *but* in English or *bis auf* and *außer* in German, cf. (1-2).

- (1) [Every man]EC [but/except for John]EP came.
- (2) Die Lehrerinnen (...) arbeiten [bis auf ein kleines Spesen-Entgelt]_{EP} [gratis]_{EC}.
The teachers work except for a small expenses payment gratis.
'The teachers don't get paid besides receiving a small amount of expenses.'

EPs have received little analysis by semanticists (Moltman 1995, Hoeksema 1991, von Fintel 1995). Even less is found on their syntax. An analysis of certain syntactic properties can be found in Reinhart (1991), and even Pasch et al. (2003) only briefly mention one type of EP (with *außer*). I present empirical results regarding the syntax of two types of EPs (with *bis auf* and *außer*), without committing to any specific theory. In my corpus, EPs have a strong tendency to be Vorfeld fillers without their correlates (EC), the co-occurrence of the EP and its EC in the Vorfeld being almost banned. I show that the configuration with the EP in the Vorfeld and the EC in the Mittelfeld is just a special case of an even more preferred configuration where the EP precedes the EC.

For *bis auf* and *außer*, I sampled 100 random sentences each (from the COSMAS 2 corpus). First of all, it was found that 44% of the units have the EP is positioned sentence-initially, alone in the Vorfeld. To check whether this is indeed exceptional, an auxiliary study in recent archives (1999) of the DWDS-Corpus was conducted (using the DWDS, because its query language gave cleaner results than COSMAS) to get an estimate on the Vorfeld affinity of both rare and frequent sample prepositions to which to compare EWs (e.g., *angesichts*, *anstelle*, *in*, *statt*, *von*, *wegen*). The Vorfeld distribution of even the most likely Vorfeld-fillers among these (*angesichts*) is significantly lower than that of EPs. Thus, EPs (without their EC) must be recognized as highly, even disproportionally preferred Vorfeld fillers, while in only 4 of 200 cases the EP occupies the Vorfeld together with the EC.

Then, testing whether there are significant differences in the distribution of the two EWs, we found that *außer* has an even stronger Vorfeld affinity, and *bis auf* is more commonly located in the Mittelfeld. However, looking at the ordering of EC and EP regardless of which field they occupy, we find that 152 units have the EP preceding the EC vs. 36 where the EC precedes the EP. We show that the simple ordering preference is not modelled by the Vorfeld distribution, but that it is even (significantly) stronger. Thus, independently of how likely it is that an EP is located in the Vorfeld, the probability that it is positioned to the left of its EC is even higher. This preference

is not (at least not trivially) explained, for example, by the definiteness of the NP contained in the EP (statistically confirmed) or some information-structurally relevant feature like *given–new*. We therefore suggest that it is a preference associated with the specific lexical items, rather than one following from more general constraints.

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**Evidence from agrammatism
 for a non-uniform Left Periphery in German**
 24.02.2010, 15.00–15.30 Uhr, Raum 1.404

The paper discusses some new aspects of the well known subject/object asymmetry in the comprehension of wh-questions by Broca's aphasics. The main focus is on the additional difference between simple wh-words (*who*, *what* etc) and complex wh-expressions of the type *which-N*, as reported for German in Neuhaus & Penke (2008). The findings from a study show that there is hierarchy in comprehension that looks as follows:

wh-subjects > which-subjects > who-objects > which-objects

The main claim to be defended is that the movement process of simple wh-words differs essentially from that of complex XPs – a finding that has also been detected in unimpaired speech – and this may provide us with new insights about the properties of the Vorfeld. The accounts provided so far are unsatisfactory. Accounts in terms of Pesetsky's D-linking, requiring a more complex set-building operation are obsolete in a picture based comprehension task because the 'sets' are visually present in both cases. While it seems clear that the internal 'complexity' of *which*-phrases is in some sense responsible for this asymmetry, the exact reason why this should be so is not yet understood – especially in light of the common assumption that in both cases it is an XP that targets the specifier of the clausal projection, headed by the (re-merged) finite verb. Recently, it has been suggested by Bayer & Brandner (2008) on the basis of South German dialect data, that simple wh-pronouns behave differently from *which*-phrases in that only the latter allow a doubly filled Comp (i.e. insertion of the complementizer *dass* after the wh-phrase). B & B account for this difference by suggesting that simple wh-phrases are ambiguous in their phrase structural status, i.e. they are head and XP at the same time. Due to this ambiguous status wh-pronouns can move to the left periphery of the embedded clause via head-movement, i.e. they re-merge at the highest clausal projection and project the C-level. As a head they occupy the C-position in the embedded clause, preventing the insertion of the complementizer. Transferring this to root clauses, simple wh-pronouns move in a head-like way to the left periphery, executing the most simple

operation, i.e. (re-)merge. This structure allows the correct interpretation if the φ -features of the moved element match those of the finite verb, i.e. subjects. If they don't, comprehension is less successful or fails completely – as it is the case with object questions. This factor accounts for the subject-object asymmetries. Turning to *which*-phrases, movement of an XP requires a (local) look-ahead in order to provide a specifier position. Assuming that this operation is not available to aphasics, we predict that moved *which*-phrases are not integrated into the clausal structure, (presumably they are in an adjoined position) and thus cannot serve as the input for an interpretation that is based on the syntactic structure. This in turn prohibits the correct assignment/computation of the thematic relations. That subject *which*-phrases nevertheless can be interpreted to a certain extent by aphasics can be accounted for by the well-known strategy that aphasics tend to assign the subject (i.e. AGENT-role) to all left-peripheral NPs. In sum, since head-movement in the sense of re-merge is identical to the basic Merge operation, it poses less problems for aphasics than XP-movement. In sum, we suggest that the hierarchy in availability of the different types of wh-expressions is the consequence of a complex interaction of various factors: (i) the type of movement which has consequences for the projection of the clausal structure and (ii) the role of φ -features and their positioning within the clause for the correct interpretation. The discussion of the consequences of the suggested analysis for expletives and pronouns in the Vorfeld in declarative clauses will finish the paper.

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The Vorfeld in Kiezdeutsch.

Analyses of the interplay between syntax and information structure

24.02.2010, 15.30–16.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

Even though at first glance German seems to adhere to the constraint 'exactly one element before the finite verb', there also studies pointing to systematic deviations such as multiple frontings (Müller 2005), or the absence of a preverbal constituent (Önnerfors 1997).

In our study, we present analyses of similar phenomena in Kiezdeutsch, a way of speaking that has emerged among adolescents in multiethnic urban neighbourhoods in Germany. Previous studies (Wiese 2009) suggest a relaxation of grammatical constraints that allows a more liberal realisation of information-structural needs.

In Kiezdeutsch, one can observe in addition to the standard-like verb-second (V2) order ((cf. (1)) both declaratives without any constituent in the preverbal domain, as in (2), and sentences displaying more than one constituent in the Vorfeld, as in (3) (capitalisation marks main sentence stress, finite verbs are italicised):

- (1) ich *muss* kurz OHRring rausmachen (Kiezdeutsch Corpus)
 I must briefly earring out.take
 'I just have to take out my earring.'
- (2) *schießt* auf dem TOR (Wiese 2009: 800)
 shoot-you_{CL}on the goal
 'You shoot at the goal.'
- (3) danach isch *muss* zu mein VAter (Kiezdeutsch Corpus)
 afterwards I must to my father
 'Afterwards, I've got to go to my father.'

We argue that what seems like random syntactic variation in the left periphery at first glance, turns out to be driven by information-structural factors. Given the importance of the Vorfeld for syntactically marking the topic status of constituents (cf., e.g., Jacobs 2001), the word order patterns in (2) and (3) can be regarded as novel alternatives to fill this position. In (2), the first position remains empty, with the clause still containing all arguments of the verb in the postverbal domain (hence, the constraints observed by Ötnerfors 1997 for Standard German do not apply here). This can be interpreted as a lack of topic-comment structure (which seems to be related to subject cliticisation). In contrast, the pattern in (3) allows for an additional constituent in front of the preverbal subject (which, in turn, occupies the default topic position). This leftmost element seems to be restricted to adverbials, which are most appropriately interpreted as frame setters. Hence, V1 correlates with the absence of topic-comment structure, whereas in Adv SVO sequences, a frame setter is preposed.

Based on data from a corpus of approx. 25 hours of self-recordings by adolescents in multiethnic districts of Berlin, we will analyse declarative V1 and Adv SVO constructions in Kiezdeutsch and compare them with the options provided in other varieties of German. We discuss functional motivations for such patterns and their link with information-structural strategies. This will contribute to our understanding of Vorfeld and, from a broader perspective of linguistic architecture, of the interaction between syntax and information structure.

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Müller, Stefan. 2005. Zur Analyse der scheinbar mehrfachen Vorfeldbesetzung. *Linguistische Berichte* 203, 297-330.

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Corpus-based investigations of the German Vorfeld
 24.02.2010, 16.30–17.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

The German Vorfeld is a position that is underspecified with regard to the grammatical function. We assume that the Vorfeld instead has two major (semantic-) pragmatic functions: (i) to relate the current sentence to the prior context, i.e., to

support the hearer in integrating the new information into his/her model of the current discourse; (ii) to provide the frame in which the current sentence is to be interpreted. We have annotated a small corpus of parliament debates with information about the function of the Vorfeld constituent. We distinguish between functions of type (i): coreference relations (including bridging) and discourse relations; and type (ii): “internal” functions, which are not related to the prior context (including frame-setting elements). In addition, there are expletives and situation-deictic functions. We achieved good inter-annotator agreement ($\kappa = 0.66$). This allows us to perform qualitative and quantitative investigations of the German Vorfeld.

The annotations show that in our corpus only 45.1% of the Vorfeld constituents are clearly related to the prior context (i.e., instances of type (i)). This seems to confirm the results by Speyer (2007): in his data, 50.8% of the Vorfelds are occupied by backward-looking centers, i.e., constituents that relate to the prior context (Grosz et al. 1995). However, his data also shows that the type of function of the Vorfeld constituent depends to a large extent on the data's genre. The genre in Speyer's investigations that probably comes closest to our parliament debates are scientific radio talks. Here, Speyer finds 71% of Vorfeld constituents that are context-related.

For the presentation, we will focus on the so-called internal functions (i.e., instances of type (ii)). These mainly occur with PPs and adverbials (most of them de-adjectival), which represent common categories for frame-setting elements. We also found a considerable number of subordinated clauses in the Vorfeld with a sentence-internal function. In the presentation, we will discuss a classification of this type of Vorfeld constituents that emerges from our corpus data.

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Norwegian is a V3 language
24.02.2010, 17.00–18.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

Norwegian is known as one of the really hardcore V2 languages. Any textbook on Norwegian will inform you that the second constituent of Norwegian main clause declaratives and main clause Wh-questions obligatorily is the finite verb. It has long been known (e.g. Iversen 1918, Åfarli 1986, Nilsen 1996) however that northern varieties of Norwegian have non-V2 main clause Wh-questions. Moreover, in Sollid and Eide (2007a, 2007b) we investigated a quite frequent type of non-V2 main clause declaratives in the same Norwegian varieties, the *så*-construction. This construction is characterized by the function word *så* following a topicalized element, and either the finite verb or the subject immediately following *så*, giving rise to a non-V2 declarative construction. Our main hypothesis was that the emergence of these non-V2 declaratives results from language contact between Norwegian and Finno-Ugric languages (mainly Kven and North Sami), the latter languages being non-V2 languages. During the investigation reported in these papers, we compared excerpted corpora from the relevant northern Norwegian varieties with corpora from

more standard-like dialects (e.g. the Oslo area). As we expected, the specific kind of non-V2 main clause declaratives, with the subject preceding the verb was not found in the standard-like varieties.

Much to our surprise however, declaratives from these standard-like dialects turned out to display a range of other exceptions to the alleged strict V2 requirement for standard Norwegian. In a more recent and broader investigation (reported on in Eide & Sollid to appear), we included a corpus from the Tromsø dialect, and our initial impression is corroborated even by these data: The amount of unambiguous V2 declaratives is not very impressive for an alleged V2-language, and we have to conclude that spoken colloquial Norwegian does not have an obligatory V2 rule for main clause declaratives, not even in standard-like varieties.

In our talk, we broaden the perspective, and in addition to the spoken corpus (containing declaratives from the northern dialects and dialects from the Oslo-area), we include a corpus of written Norwegian (containing declaratives from feature interviews in Norwegian tabloid news papers). The focus is on the non-subject-initial main clause declaratives. We have selected this specific clause type because subject-initial clauses are inadequate to separate V2-constructions from the more general SVO word order, and for our purpose we need to emphasize this distinction. Scrutinizing our selection of sentences, we investigate the variation between V2 and non-V2 on one hand, and the types of relevant non-V2 constructions on the other. Furthermore, we compare oral vs. written Norwegian. Our corpora will enable us to discuss the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors governing V2/non-V2 variation, most importantly, syntax, information structure and sociolinguistic context.

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Sollid, Hilde & Kristin M. Eide. 2007b. Om verbplassering og *så*-konstruksjonen i to språkmøter', *NOA*, 2/2007, 5-32.

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***Wh*-copying in German and its theoretical implications**

24.02.2010, 18.00–18.30 Uhr, Raum 1.404

We present novel data from *wh*-copying in German and will argue that they, in conjunction with already known facts, constitute a problem for extraction analyses in both trans-formational and non-transformational theories.

Wh-copying is a construction in which a long moved *wh*-phrase is repeated in intermediate position ("t" indicates the position of the gap):

(1) **Wen** glaubst du **wen** sie t liebt?

Who do you think she loves?

Apart from independent properties and constraints of extraction constructions it is subject to three construction specific constraints:

- (2) The repeated element must appear in an intermediate position, and only there
- (3) Some speakers license d-pronouns in intermediate position
- (4) Complex *wh*-phrases cannot be repeated

Despite intensive research over the past years, two central questions remained unanswered: (i) what set of elements is licensed in intermediate position; and (ii) is partial copying possible. As for (i), although it is known that not every *wh*-phrase can appear in intermediate position (cf. 4), it is so far unclear which ones exactly are licensed. Turning to (ii), partial copying refers to a situation in which a complex *wh*-phrase and a simple *wh*-phrase agreeing in morphosyntactic features form a chain (brackets indicate an extracted phrasal constituent):

- (5) a. [**Welchem Mann**] glaubst du **wem** sie t das Buch gegeben hat?
Which man do you think she has given the book to?
- b. **Wen** denkst du [**wen von den Studenten**] man t einladen sollte?
Which of the students do you think we should invite?

Given the sparseness of such examples it is unclear whether the phenomenon is real at all, and if yes, what restrictions it is subject to. Based on data we collected to fill those empirical gaps, we will formulate the following three results:

- (6) The intermediate element is form-identical to a free relative pronoun
- (7) Partial copying is real
- (8) Partial copying is restricted to a single pattern

We will provide empirical evidence for each result and show how the interaction of (6) and (7) leads to the result in (8). Since an extracted *wh*-phrase shares only a proper subset of features with a d-pronoun, (6) demands that any theory of extraction has to account for the following property:

(7) Extraction can involve partially identical elements As we mentioned, *wh*-copying behaves like a regular extraction; it is, e.g., not restricted to NPs, but is also licensed with PPs:

- (8) **Mit wem** glaubst du **mit wem** sie t tanzt?
Who do you think she is dancing with?

Ignoring construction specific restrictions, any theory of extraction therefore needs to equally account for the second property:

(9) Extraction targets XPs In the rest of the talk, we will show that neither transformational nor non-transformational theories of extraction make correct predictions for cases in which (7) and (9) apply at the same time, e.g. for extracted PPs in *wh*-copying in German.

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**Doppelte Vorfelddbesetzung bei zweiteiligen VP-Idiomen des Deutschen:
 Eine korpusbasierte Analyse**
 25.02.2010, 9.30–10.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

In diesem Beitrag wird die doppelte Vorfelddbesetzung bei zweiteiligen VP-Idiomen des Deutschen anhand von Daten aus einer umfangreichen Korpusstudie untersucht. Zweiteilige VP-Idiome sind Idiome, die aus einem Verb (V) und zwei weiteren festen, d.h. lexikalisch spezifizierten, Bestandteilen bestehen (NP NP, NP PP etc.); vgl. (1). Weitere Argumente können realisiert sein, sind aber nicht lexikalisch spezifiziert (z.B. das indirekte Objekt in (1b)).

- (1) a. [Öl] [ins Feuer] gießen
 b. jmdm. [einen Floh] [ins Ohr] setzen
 c. [den Karren] [aus dem Dreck] ziehen

Es ist schon beobachtet worden (vgl. u.a. Müller 2003: 19-20), dass die Idiomkomponenten zweiteiliger Idiome gemeinsam im Vorfeld auftreten können:

- (2) [Öl] [ins Feuer] **gossen** auch zwei Wissenschaftler [...], die darlegten, daß der belgische Föderalismus ein Schwindel sei [...].
 Frankfurter Allgemeine 25.01.1993, S. 12

Anhand eines großen Korpus des Deutschen (Fellbaum 2006, 2007) soll gezeigt werden, dass die doppelte Vorfelddbesetzung bei Idiomen die häufigste Strategie der (kontrastiven) Topikalisierung darstellt. Es lässt sich auch zeigen, dass doppelte Vorfelddbesetzung mit der holistischen Struktur besonders transparenter metaphorischer Idiome korreliert.

Darüber hinaus soll gefragt werden, ob es eine feste Reihenfolge bei der Verwendung der beiden Komponenten gibt, wie Müller (2003: 23) voraussagt. Nach dieser Auffassung entspricht die präferierte Wortstellung der des Mittelfeldes; vgl. (3) und (4) im Gegensatz zu (5):

- (3) [Den Floh] hat euch Max [ins Ohr] gesetzt.
 Ditfurth, Jutta, "Blavatzkys Kinder" - Teil 23 (Krimi), in: die tageszeitung 11.08.1995, S. 16
- (4) Den Floh ins Ohr ließ er sich nicht setzen.
- (5) *Ins Ohr den Floh ließ er sich nicht setzen.

Es soll erklärt werden, warum (4) aber nicht (5) grammatisch ist bzw. warum die präferierte Wortstellung nicht verletzt wird.

Fellbaum, Christiane (ed.). 2006. Corpus-based Studies of German Idioms and Light Verbs. *International Journal of Lexicography (special issue)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Idiomatcity and multiple fronting in German
25.02.2010, 10.00–11.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

Although German counts as a V-2 language, it has long been noted that sometimes more than one constituent precedes the finite verb in a declarative main clause (e.g. Engel 1970; Jacobs 1986; Eisenberg 1989):

- (1) [Dem Saft] [eine kräftigere Farbe] geben Blutorangen...
the juice a richer colour give blood-oranges
'It is blood oranges that give the juice a richer colour'
[IDS PUBLIC R99/JAN.01605]

Müller (2005) lists VP-idioms like (2) as particularly common in the pattern:

- (2) [Öl] [ins Feuer] goss wieder einmal Erzbischof Johannes Dyba.
oil into-the fire poured again once archbishop Johannes Dyba
'Once again, archbishop Johannes Dyba added fuel to the flames'
[IDS PUBLIC M00/JUN.26272]

The present study focuses on such idiomatic instances of the construction and proposes a semantic explanation of the observed fronting preferences. Specifically, it is suggested that idioms like *Öl ins Feuer gießen* – 'to add fuel to the flames', i.e. 'to aggravate a problem' – are peculiar in that the NP and PP constituents form a semantic unit: both *X ins Feuer gießen* and *Öl ins Y gießen* will only give the idiomatic reading if *X = Öl* and *Y = Feuer* (or a near-synonym such as *Flammen*, 'flames'). I suggest that fronting either element in isolation is dispreferred because neither of them is semantically autonomous. By contrast, syntactically isomorphic idioms like *X ins Rollen bringen* 'to get X rolling' with semantically more autonomous object NPs are predicted to come with a higher proportion of single frontings:

- (3) [Die skandalöse Affäre] brachte der Lehrer des Kindes [ins Rollen].
the scandalous affair brought the teacher of.the child into-the rolling
'It was the child's teacher who kicked off the scandalous affair'
[IDS PUBLIC O94/FEB.10728]

Using the type frequency of the head of the object NP in 'caused motion' VP-idioms (NP_{SUBJ} V NP_{OBJ} PP_{OBL}) in a giga corpus of written German as an indicator of its semantic autonomy, it is shown that degree of autonomy is a significant predictor of fronting behaviour. The deeper reason for this is identified in a strong tendency to interpret the fronted material contrastively, and non-autonomous idiom components fail to evoke a relevant contrast set within the idiomatic reading if fronted in isolation. Finally, the proposed explanation is contrasted with an alternative approach based on collocational strength, and the existence of (few but unambiguous) counterexamples to the semantic account in the idiom data is acknowledged as evidence for the ultimately more complex multifactorial nature of the phenomenon at large.

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Engel, U. 1970. *Regeln zur Wortstellung*. Forschungsberichte des Instituts für deutsche Sprache 5. Mannheim: Institut für deutsche Sprache.

- Jacobs, J. 1986. The Syntax of Focus and Adverbials in German. In W. Abraham and S. de Meij (eds.), *Topic, Focus and Configurationality*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 103-127.
- Müller, S. 2005. Zur Analyse der scheinbar mehrfachen Vorfeldbesetzung. *Linguistische Berichte* 203, 297-330.

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The two ‘Vorfelder’ of SGF coordination in German

25.02.2010, 11.30–12.00 Uhr, Raum 1.404

German exhibits the so-called SGF coordination (1) (*subject gap in finite/frontal clauses*, Höhle 1983), a coordinate construction with inversion in the first and an invisible subject (a subject gap) in the second verb-second clause:

- (1) [Vorfeld 1 **Dann**] holten der Vater und Niklaus Sack für Sack vom Handwagen und [Vorfeld 2 ?] leerten ihn gemeinsam durchs Fenster hinab.

It is controversial whether the first Vorfeld element (the temporal adverbial *dann* ‘then’) has wide scope over both conjuncts (Höhle 1990, Heycock & Kroch 1993) or narrow scope only over the first conjunct (Hartmann 1994), and to what extent its function, for example the opposition adjunct vs. argument, influences the grammaticality of SGF coordination (Van de Velde 1986: 503-508, Heycock & Kroch 1993: 75). Moreover, it is doubtful whether the second Vorfeld is either occupied by an empty subject, by an operator that binds the empty subject (Hartmann 1994: 12) or by an adjunct ellipsis (vgl. Duden 2006: 913), or a priori ‘filled’ with a shared subject outside the coordination (Kathol 1999). SGF coordination competes with other coordinate constructions without inversion and/or with a resumed subject. However, the common feature of these analyses seems to be that they avoid a systematic confrontation with the actual use of the construction alternatives. In this talk, I therefore present a case study of the distribution of the alternatives on the basis of a literary corpus, consisting of four German novels. The starting point of the investigation is the construction grammar Principle of No Synonymy (Goldberg 1995, 2006). In particular, the correlation between the respective form of the coordination variant and three semantic properties is tested. Results show that the prototypical SGF coordination diverges from its alternatives as a construction with a wide or ambiguous interpretation of the first Vorfeld element and identical semantic subject roles, but also converges with them in that they all possess an old or mediated first subject.

Der Duden in zwölf Bänden; 4. Die Grammatik. P. Eisenberg, J. Peters and P. Gallmann. Edited by K. Kunkel-Razum et al. Mannheim, Duden, 2006.

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German “VP”-fronting: A matter of syntax?
25.02.2010, 12.00–12.30 Uhr, Raum 1.404

This talk explores the connections among word order, subjecthood, information structure, and processing constraints with respect to fronted verbal constituents. As seen in (1)-(3), this kind of fronting appears to be sensitive to the differences between those verbal projections which host a ‘subject’ and those which do not.

- (1) *[Ein Idiot Mamas Auto zu Schrott gefahren] hat damals.
(2) [Ein Außenseiter gewonnen] hat {?*im zweiten Rennen / √ hier noch nie}.
(3) [Das Auto zu Schrott gefahren] wurde der Frau.

Fronting of verbal constituents hosting a transitive subject (1) is degraded in almost any context, and inclusion of an unergative (proto-agent) subject (2) is more severely constrained than inclusion of a passive or unaccusative (derived, proto-patient) subject (3). Subjects of verbs that are typically used unergatively, like *gewinnen*, are only acceptable as part of a fronted verbal constituent if this constituent is focused as a single unit (Webelhuth 1990, De Kuthy & Meurers 2003). Using different terminology, the fronted constituent needs to be embedded in a context which allows for a ‘thetic’, as opposed to ‘categorical’, interpretation (Kuroda 1972, Ladusaw 1994). Under a thetic interpretation, the subject is not understood as separate from the predicate but is integrated into the interpretation of the predicate, resulting in a single, non-compositional unit. Theticity then makes predictions about specificity and conventionality. In order to require only a single interpretation act, the subject must be non-specific, and a thetic interpretation is more likely, the more conventional the described situation is. The post-fronting context needed for a thetic interpretation is provided by *hier noch nie* in (2).

Assuming that proto-patient subjects originate as part of the lexical VP and are thus integrated into the predicate, while proto-agent subjects are introduced by little *v*, outside the VP and are thus separate from the predicate, it could be argued that VPs (see (3)) may front, but agentive little *v*Ps (see (1)) may not. The verb phrase in (2) then needs to be coerced into a passive/unaccusative VP-structure (Hankamer & Lee-Schoenfeld 2005).

Although this purely syntactic analysis, which encodes the thetic/categorical distinction structurally, covers a lot of ground, it rules out examples like (4), which are acceptable. The transitive Accusativus cum Infinitivo (Acl) complement, consisting of an agentive *v*P, in this example is hardly coerceable into a passive/unaccusative VP.

- (4) [Katzen Mäuse jagen] sieht man hier oft.

The new hypothesis to be tested is that constituents describing conventional situations with generic (non-specific) participants, like the Acl in (4), trigger athetic interpretation. If this is indeed the case, it is the thetic/categorical distinction rather than syntactic complexity that determines the possibility of fronting. Examples like (4) will be contrasted with minimally different examples, where the subject is changed to *Hühner* (4') and *unsere Katzen* (4''), respectively. To investigate the independent contributions of conventionality and specificity on the one hand and plausibility on the other hand, the results of separate surveys will be presented. The first asks native speakers to judge non-fronted verbal constituents with respect to (i) plausibility of the described situation, (ii) conventionality of the described situation, and (iii) specificity of the subject. The second asks for acceptability of the some of the same verbal constituents in fronted position. If my predictions are borne out, speakers will judge (4) to be better than both (4'), which is less conventional but still plausible, and (4''), which has a specific fronted subject.

This suggests that German “VP”-fronting is a matter of not only syntax but also processing constraints: It is acceptable to front structurally complex constituents, including transitive vPs, if they can be interpreted thetically, as a single unit, and are therefore light semantically. This is in line with recent work in psycholinguistics. The heavier the fronted constituent, that is, the more processing memory is required to interpret it, the harder it gets to properly integrate the displaced constituent back into the site from which it was extracted (Grodner & Gibson 2005).

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