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Advanced topics in German syntax

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Frey (2006)

- main claims
 - 3 ways of filling the prefield:
 - * formal fronting
 - * base-generation
 - * A'-movement
 - contrast is an autonomous concept of information structure
 - the left periphery of German is complex

1 Introduction: the discourse function of phrases in the prefield

- (1)
- a. (Ich erzähle dir etwas über Hans): **Den Hans** wird eine polnische Gräfin
I tell you something about John: the.ACC John will a Polish countess
heiraten
marry.INF
 - b. **Dem Hans** hat Maria nicht geholfen, aber dem Otto
the.DAT John has Mary not helped but the.DAT Otto
 - c. Wem hat Maria geholfen? – **Hans** hat sie geholfen.
Who.DAT has Mary helped? John.DAT has she helped
 - d. Hans fühlt sich wohl an seinem neuen Arbeitsplatz. **Fast jeden Kollegen**
John feels self fine at his new working.place almost every.ACC colleague
schätzt der berühmte Linguist
values the famous linguist
 - e. **Fast jeder Kollege** schätzt den Hans.
almost every colleague values the.ACC John
 - f. **Leider** hat keiner dem alten Mann geholfen.
Unfortunately has no.one the.DAT old man helped
 - g. **Fast überall** spielen Jungen gerne Fußball.
almost everywhere play boys like.to soccer

- information structural functions in (1):
 - (1-a): topic
 - (1-b): contrastive topic (or contrastive focus, depending on context)
 - (1-c): focus
 - (1-d): ?
 - (1-e): unmarked
 - (1-f): unmarked
 - (1-g): unmarked

2 Ways of filling the prefield

2.1 Marked vs. unmarked

- claim: markedness in the prefield depends on markedness in the middle field:
 - phrases that are unmarked when they occur first in the middle field are also unmarked in the prefield
 - phrases that are marked when they occur first in the middle field are also marked in the prefield
- dative-nominative verbs: dat>nom order unmarked
 - (2) a. **Dem Karl** hat das Spiel gut gefallen.
the.DAT Karl has the match well pleased
 - b. dass **dem Karl** das Spiel gut gefallen hat.
that the.DAT Karl the match well pleased has
'that Karl liked the match very much'
- instrumental PP: marked in the prefield and when first in the middle field
 - (3) a. **Im Johannapark** hat Eva den Grill aufgebaut.
in.the Johanna.park has Eva the grill set.up
 - b. weil **im Johannapark** Eva den Grill aufgebaut hat
because in.the Johanna.park Eva the grill set.up has
'because Eva set up the barbecue in the Johannapark'
- the middle field-internal base position of the constituents that end up in the prefield is crucial:
 - highest position → unmarked
 - non-highest → marked (first have to be fronted to the first position in the middle field, which induces markedness)

2.2 Formal movement

- claim: there is a mechanism by which the prefield is filled with the highest constituent of the middle field; this preserves the information structural (un)markedness without endowing the constituent with additional pragmatic properties → a purely formal operation
- evidence for a purely formal operation: Fronting can involve elements like expletives or sentence adverbials that cannot be topical, focal, emphasized or bear any other pragmatic property
 - (4) a. **Es** wird bald regnen.
it will soon rain.INF
 - b. dass **es** bald regnen wird
that it soon rain.INF will
 - (5) a. **Leider** hat keiner dem alten Mann geholfen.
unfortunately has no.one the.DAT old man helped
 - b. dass **leider** keiner dem alten Mann geholfen hat
that unfortunatently no.one the.DAT old man helped has

- Formal movement can affect scrambled constituents and preserves their markedness (sic?)
 - Frey does not discuss the information structural status (arguably not a topic):
 - (6) a. **Im Johannapark** hat Eva den Grill aufgebaut.
in.the Johanna.park has Eva the grill set.up
 - b. weil **im Johannapark** Eva den Grill aufgebaut hat
because in.the Johanna.park Eva the grill set.up has
'because Eva set up the barbecue in the Johannapark'
- fronting of (aboutness) topics:
 - (7) a. (Ich erzähle dir etwas über Hans): **Den Hans** wird erfreulicherweise
I tell you something about John: the.ACC John will fortunately
nächstes Jahr eine polnische Gräfin heiraten
next year a Polish countess marry.INF
 - b. Ich habe gehört, dass **den Hans** erfreulicherweise nächstes Jahr eine
I have heard that the.ACC John fortunately next year a
polnische Gräfin heiraten wird
Polish countess marry.INF will
 - assumption: there is a designated functional position in the middle field for aboutness topics, above the base-position of sentential adverbials (different from the PP in (6)?)
- formal movement can skip clitics: *es* precedes the subject in the middle field, but the subject can be fronted without inducing markedness:
 - (8) a. weil es den Otto friert
because it the.ACC Otto cold.is
 - b. den Otto friert es
the.ACC Otto cold.is it
 - c. es friert den Otto
 - proposal: clitics are heads and thus invisible for features triggering XP-movement (not so innocuous as attracting features are not necessarily specified for the size of the goal)
 - note that the pronoun can be fronted and one wonders why (must be an XP in (8-c) but a head in (8-b), but unclear if there is any difference)

2.3 Base-generation

- Certain elements that can occur in the prefield cannot occur in the middle field (unless they function as parentheticals):
 - (9) a. Am Rande bemerkt bin ich etwas enttäuscht von dir.
by the way am I somewhat disappointed by you
 - b. Kein Wunder spricht Peter so gut Französisch.
no wonder speaks Peter so well French
 - c. Ein Glück habe ich den Regenschirm dabei.
a luck have I the umbrella with.me
 - (10) a. *Ich bin am Rande bemerkt etwas enttäuscht von dir.
I am by the way somewhat disappointed by you
 - b. *Peter spricht kein Wunder so gut Französisch.
Peter speaks no wonder so well French
 - c. *Ich habe ein Glück den Regenschirm dabei.
I have a luck the umbrella with.me

- the prefield constituents do not seem to be integrated into the proposition expressed by the clause; rather, they make an extra-linguistic statement or have an exclamative function
- these elements are licensed by C (since C is the functional head that relates the proposition to discourse)

2.4 True A'-movement

- an asymmetry between local and long-distance moved topics:

(11) Ich erzähle dir was über Max.
I tell you something about Max

a. **Den Max**₁ sollte der Chef __₁ mitnehmen.
the.ACC Max should the.NOM boss take.along

b. **Den Max**₁ meint Eva, dass der Chef __₁ mitnehmen sollte
the.ACC Max thinks Eva that the.NOM boss take.along should

- only (11-b) requires a pitch accent
- only (11-b) is obligatorily contrastive (implicature that the sentence is not true if Max is replaced by any of the salient alternatives in a given context)

- elements which cannot be stressed and contrasted cannot undergo long A'-movement:

(12) a. *Es₁ sagt Karl dass __₁ bald regnen wird
it says Karl that soon rain will

b. *Leider₁ sagte Karl, dass __₁ keiner dem alten Mann geholfen hat
Unfortunately said Karl that no.one the.DAT old man helped has

- elements which cannot be scrambled also reach the prefield by means of true A'-movement:

(13) a. *dass Maria **grün**₁ die Tür __₁ streichen wird
that Mary green the door paint.INF will

b. **Grün**₁ wird Maria die Tür __₁ streichen.
Green will Mary the door paint.INF

- independent evidence: they are stressed and receive a contrastive interpretation

- foci also reach the prefield by means of A'-movement

(14) Was hat Otto heute auf dem Markt gekauft?
what has Otto today on the market bought?

a. **Zwei Kilo Äpfel** hat Otto heute auf dem Markt gekauft.
two kilos apples has Otto today on the market bought

b. ??Otto hat **zwei Kilo Äpfel** heute auf dem Markt gekauft

- the focus cannot scramble in the middle-field → cannot have reached the prefield by means of formal movement

- the focus can, of course, also be realized in situ:

(15) Otto hat heute auf dem Markt **2 Kilo Äpfel** gekauft

- evidence that fronting induces contrast: preferred when the context presents a set of alternatives from which one needs to choose:

(16) Wen hat Maria getroffen, den Karl oder den Otto?
whom has Mary met the.ACC Karl or the.ACC Otto

a. #Maria hat **den Karl** getroffen.
Mary has the.ACC Karl met

b. **Den Karl** hat Maria getroffen
the.ACC Karl has Mary met

3 The left periphery in German

- How the account correctly predicts what is acceptable in athetic context:

(17) Hans und Maria haben geheiratet.
Johan and Mary have married

- a. Bald wird ein Baby schreien.
soon will a baby cry.INF
- b. #Ein Baby wird bald schreien.
a baby will soon cry.INF

- *Bald* is the highest element in the MF → formal fronting
- since indefinites like *ein Baby* cannot scramble, it can reach the prefield only by means of A'-movement, but that induces contrastiveness, which is not appropriate in the context above

3.1 A'-scrambling

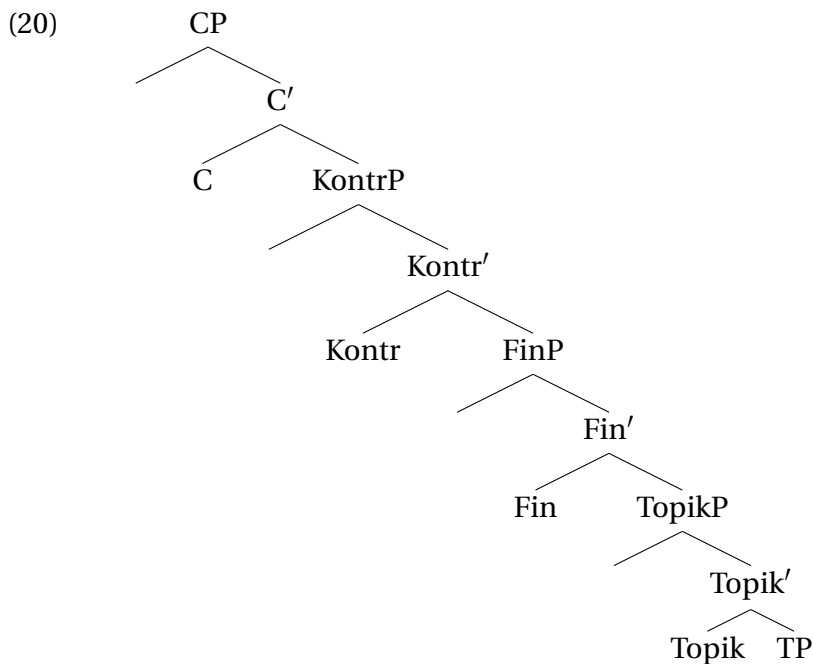
- regular scrambling is clause-bound:

(18) *da Eva den Max₁ meint, dass der Chef __₁ mitnehmen sollte
because Eva the.ACC Max thinks that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should

- however, there is A'-scrambling, which is unbounded and targets the highest position in the middle field
- A'-scrambling requires stress and induces a contrastive interpretation:

(19) da den MAX₁ Eva meint, dass der Chef __₁ mitnehmen sollte
because the.ACC Max Eva thinks that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should

3.2 The left periphery in German



- Long A'-movement targets KontrP

- (21)
- Den** **Max** meint Eva, dass der Chef mitnehmen sollte
the.ACC Max thinks Eva that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should
 - da den MAX₁ Eva meint, dass der Chef 1 mitnehmen sollte
because the.ACC Max Eva thinks that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should

- (21-b) long scrambling thus does not target a position in the middle field but in the left periphery! (the complementizer [in C] and the finite verb [in Kontr] thus occupy different positions)

- formal fronting targets FinP (information structurally neutral position)
 - base-generated adverbials are externally merged in SpecCP
 - complementizers are in C
 - There can be only one EPP-feature in the C-domain, it holds:
 - the EPP feature in Fin is a pure EPP-feature
 - the EPP-feature in Kontr is associated with the feature [contrast]
 - the EPP-feature in C is associated with a feature licensing C-related adverbials
 - Verb movement to the C-domain is possible only to a head which carries an EPP-feature and, at the same time, is the highest head of the structure (structure is generated only if necessary)
- the last assumption is necessary to accommodate long scrambling because in that case there is no verb movement even though a head in the left periphery (Kontr) carries an EPP-feature:

- (22) [_{CP} da [_{KontrP} [_{den} Max]₁] [_{TP} Eva meint [_{CP} 1 dass [_{TopikP} 1] [_{TP} der Chef 1 mitnehmen sollte]]]]]]

- it is only this type of example that requires a complex left periphery; otherwise, a system with just one head and one specifier would suffice!

- exercise: why are the following ungrammatical?

- (23) a. *Da Eva den Max₁ meint, dass der Chef ₁ mitnehmen sollte
because Eva the.ACC Max thinks that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should
- b. Eva hat den MAX₁ gemeint, dass der Chef ₁ mitnehmen sollte
Eva has the.ACC Max thought that the.NOM boss take.along.INF should

- the following is also (claimed to be) ungrammatical:

- (24) *Offen gesagt hat den MAX₁ Eva gemeint, dass der Chef ₁
frankly speaking has the.ACC Max Eva thought that the.NOM boss
mitnehmen sollte
take.along.INF should

- This would require 2 EPP-features in the left-periphery: on C and Kontr ...
- but really ungrammatical?

4 Possible issues/questions

4.1 Asymmetries w.r.t. markedness middle-field – prefield

- Are topicalized objects in the prefield as unmarked as in the middle-field?

- (25) a. Den Peter hat die Maria geküsst.
the.ACC Peter has the Mary kissed
- b. dass den Peter die Maria geküsst hat
that the.ACC Peter the Mary kissed has

- what about instrumentals (scrambling seems very marked)?

- (26) a. Mit der Axt hat Otto den Baum gefällt.
with the axe has Otto the tree cut.down
- b. dass mit der Axt Otto den Baum gefällt hat
that with the axe Otto the tree cut.down has

- the position of sentence adverbials vs. definite subjects (in the V-final order, *leider* may be less marked if occurring after the SU ...)

- (27) a. Leider hat der Hans dem Peter nicht geholfen
unfortunately has the.NOM John the.DAT Peter not helped
- b. dass leider der Hans dem Peter nicht geholfen hat
that unfortunately the.NOM John the.DAT Peter not helped has

- what is the difference between scrambling and movement to the middle-field-internal topic position?

4.2 Mismatches between constituency and information structural function

- In the case of foci (and also topics) what is fronted may (i) coincide with the focus, (ii) be part of the focus or (iii) be larger than the focus, cf. Fanselow (2009: 112, fn. 25) and Fanselow and Lenertová (2011):

- (28) What have you bought in town?
- (i) [Ein paar Bücher] hab ich mir gekauft
a few books have I me.DAT bought
- (ii) [Bücher] hab ich mir ein paar gekauft
book have I me.DAT a few bought
- (iii) Ein Buch gekauft hab ich mir
a book bought have I me.DAT
'I've bought myself a book.'

References

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