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Advanced Topics of German Syntax

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Reis (2005): On the Syntax of so-called Focus Particles in German. A reply to Büring and Hartmann 2001

1   Introduction

- Reis' paper responds to Büring & Hartmann's (2001) NLLT paper, in which they propose the 'adverb-only' theory (a-theory) for German focus particles (FPs), concentrating on the syntactic aspects
- main syntactic claim of B/H: FPs always adjoin to non-arguments (defined as: VPs, IPs, APs, root CPs), but never to arguments (DPs, PPs, CPs)
- a-theory is directed against the 'mixed' theory (m-theory) of German FPs
- a-theory analysis of preverbal FP-XP structures such as (1)-(2) as XP-XP sequences violates the V2-constraint (3) standardly assumed for German, but is nonetheless claimed correct by B/H

(1) Nur / auch / sogar PETer kooperierte.
     only / also / even Peter   cooperated

(2) Nur / auch / sogar mit   EIern ist das Brot   belegt.
     only / also / even   with eggs   is the bread topped

(3) *'V2-Constraint':* Within German minimal clauses involving a fronted finite verb V^0, there is just one preverbal XP-position to be overtly filled.

2   Two accounts of German FP-Syntax

Shared assumptions of m- and a-theory:
  i.   an FP is always in construction with a co-constituent K it c-commands
  ii.   K is a maximal projection
  iii.   K contains the focus, or, alternatively,
  iii'   the FP c-commands the focus

Questions that remain controversial:
1. How is 'in construction with' in (i) to be specified – as an adjunct or a head relation between FP and the XP?
2. Must 'XP' in (ii) be further restricted, and if so how?

- The most striking difference between a- and m-theory is the analysis of preverbal FP-XP structures such as (1)+(2) as XP-XP or [FP[XP]] sequences.

2.1   m-theory

Standard version of the m-theory:

(4) **m-theory**:
    a) FPs must be adjoined to a maximal projection.
    b) FPs can be adjoined to maximal projections of all kinds.
    c) FPs must c-command the focus.
    d) FPs must be adjoined to a clause-internal maximal projection.

- The V2-constraint (3) is a strong argument in favour for the m-theory. It entails that preverbal FP-XP sequences are [FP[XP]] structures.
- These usually are topicalized. Therefore, clause-internal FP-XP sequences must also be [FP[XP] structures.

- Since preverbal [FP[XP]]s contain XPs of all kinds, cf. (1), (2) and (5), it follows that FPs adjoin to XPs of all kinds (4b).

(5) a.   Nur   [HEUte$_{AdvP}$]   will   Peter   kooperieren.
               only   *today*   *wants*   *Peter*   *cooperated-INF*
            'Only toDAY does Peter want to cooperate.'

      b.   Sogar   [koopeRIEren$_{VP}$] will   Peter   heute.
               even   *cooperate-INF* *wants* *Peter*   *today*
            'Peter wants to even to cooperate today.'

      c.   Auch   [beTRUNken$_{AP}$] kooperierte er effizient.
               also   *drunk*   *cooperates* *he* *efficiently*
            'Even when DRUNK he cooperates efficiently.'

      d.   Nur [daß er koopeRIERT$_{CP}$] ist wichtig.
               only *that* *he* *cooperates*   *is important*
            'What's important is only that he cooperates.'

2.2   a-theory

Originally proposed by Jacobs (1983):

(6) **a-theory** (preliminary version; cf. B/H pp. 236-237):
    a) FPs must be adjoined to a maximal projection.
    b) FPs must be adjoined to an extended verbal projection (=EVP).
    c) FPs must c-command the focus.
    d) FPs are as close to the focus as possible.
       (= 'Closeness constraint')

(7) Adjunction sites licensed by the a-theory (6a+b):
    [$_{CP}$ XP [$_{C'}$ V [$_{IP}$…[$_{VP}$…[$_{VP}$…[$_{VP}$…]]]]]]

- The classic motivation for (6b) is Jacobs' '*no nominal adjunction*' argument, which is based on the following observations:
  (i)   FPs do not adjoin to DPs inside PPs nor inside complex DPs (8)+(9)
  (ii) FPs do not adjoin to extraposed constituents (10)+(11)

(8) *Luise wurde von nur/auch/sogar ihrem ARZT vor dem Rauchen gewarnt.
   Luise was by only/also/even her doctor about the smoking warned
   (√ L. wurde nur/auch/sogar von ihrem ARZT vor dem Rauchen gewarnt)
   'L. was warned only/also/even by her DOCTOR that smoking was dangerous.'

(9) *Luise hat das Haus nur/auch/sogar des NACHbarn gekauft.
   Luise has the house only/also/even the neighbour's bought
   (√ Luise hat nur / auch / sogar das Haus des NACHbarn gekauft)
   'Luise only /also /even bought the NEIGHbour's house.'

(10) *weil er bedauerte nur/auch/sogar daß GERda nicht da war
   since he regretted only/also/even that Gerda not therewas
   (√ Nur/auch/sogar daß GERda nicht da war, bedauerte er)
   'Since he regretted only/also/even that GERda wasn't there'

(11) ?Er ist zu Hause geblieben nur wegen des WETTers.
   he is at home stayed   only because of.the weather
   (√ Er ist zu Hause geblieben wegen des Wetters.)
   'He stayed at home only because of the WEAther.'

- A-theory correctly predicts that (8)-(10) are not good and that the XP, which the FP is adjoined to, is not automatically identical to the focussed constituent.
- But assumption (6b) of the a-theory also violates the V2-constraint (12a).

(12)   Analysis of clause-initial FP-XP-structures:
        nur PETer kooperierte heute
        only Peter cooperated today

   a.   [$_{CP}$ nur [$_{CP}$ PETer [$_{C'}$ kooperierte [...[heute...]]]...]] [a-theory/(6b)]
   b.   [$_{CP}$ [nur Peter] [$_{C'}$ kooperierte [...[heute...]]]...]   [m-theory/(4b)]

- Also, (6b) wrongly predicts that non-adjacent constellations of FP and the focus as in (13) are okay, since the focus condition is fulfilled (6c = 4c).

(13)   *Nur Peter kooperierte mit der PoliZEI.
         only Peter cooperated with the police

   a)   structure assigned by a-theory / (6b):
        [nur [Peter [kooperierte$_i$ [mit der PoliZEI]]].

   b)   structure assigned by m-theory / (4b):
        *[[nur [Peter]] [kooperierte mit der PoliZEI]].

- B/H produce a powerful new argument in favour for the a-theory, showing that structures like (13a) resulting from clause-external FP adjunction are really needed:

(14)   *B/H's 'no reconstruction' argument (2001: 259-263):*
        'DPs can undergo reconstruction in German [14a], but FPs even in cases when associated with and adjacent to a DP that undergoes reconstruction, cannot [14b]. Thus it follows that the FP and the DP do not form a constituent.' (p. 259)

   a.   [Einen Fehler]$_i$ hat vermutlich jeder t$_i$ gemacht.   [ambiguous]
        a$_{ACC}$ mistake has presumably everyone$_{NOM}$ made
        Presumably, everyone made a mistake.
            R 1: einen > jeder
            R 2: jeder > einen ('reconstruction reading')

   b.   Nur MARIA$_i$ liebt jeder t$_i$.   [unambiguous]
        only Mary$_{ACC}$ loves everyone$_{NOM}$
            R 1: nur > jeder (= 'only Mary is loved by everyone')
            *R 2: jeder > nur (= 'everyone loves only Mary')

- The absence of the reconstruction reading in (14b) is compatible with the a-theory, and given the standard assumption that only constituents move, not constituent strings, it even forces it: (14b) must be analysed as containing a topicalized focussed simple DP, with the FP adjoining to the closest EVP, which is the entire clause.

3   Dissecting the Büring & Hartmann Account

3.1   FP adjunction sites

- important point made by B/H: FP adjunction to root clauses is possible (14b)
- Left-Dislocation structures strengthen this (15):

(15)   Nur die MARIA$_i$, die   liebt jeder t$_i$.
        only the Mary,   this-one loves everyone
        'Only Mary is loved by everyone.'

   a)   structure assigned by m-theory:
        [$_{CP}$ [$_{DP}$ nur [$_{DP}$ die Maria]]$_i$,[$_{CP}$ die$_i$ ...

   b)   structure assigned by a-theory:
        [$_{CP}$ nur [$_{CP}$ [$_{DP}$ die Maria]$_i$,[$_{CP}$ die$_i$ ...

- According to the m-theory, (15) should be ruled out, if *nur die Marie* were one dislocated constituent. But (15) is okay and interpreted analogously to (14b). This implies that *die* in the pre-field refers to the preceding DP without the FP.
- According to prediction (6b), FPs combine with EVPs of all kinds, the corresponding FP + EVP-topicalizations should all have two possible readings: the surface reading and the reconstruction reading. But B/H themselves point out that CP-constituents do not confirm this prediction:

(16)   Nur [daß er$_j$ MarijuAna raucht]$_i$, versucht jeder$_j$ t$_i$ zu verheimlichen.
         only that he marijuana smokes tries   everyb. to hide

        √R1: nur > jeder (the only thing everybody tries to hide is that he smokes marijuana)

        *R2: jeder > nur (everybody tries to hide only one thing: that he smokes marijuana)

- Therefore, B/H change their theory, restricting FP adjunction to non-arguments:

(17)   *B/H's Particle Theory, final version (2001: 266)*
    a) FPs must be adjoined to a maximal projection.
    b) FPs must be adjoined to a non-argument.
    c) FPs must c-command the focus.
    d) FPs are as close to the focus as possible.

- To further support the change in (17b), B/H give ambiguous AP cases like (18). Here, the AP is not an EVP and clearly a non-argument and therefore seems to support (17b):

(18)   Nur [$_{AP}$ mit EIern belegt]$_i$ schmeckt es nicht t$_i$ so gut.
         only   with eggs topped tastes   it not   so good

         √ R1 ([$_{CP}$ nur [$_{CP}$ AP C^0...]])   nur > nicht
         'the only way it doesn't taste as good is with eggs on it'

         √ R2 ([$_{CP}$ [$_{AP}$ nur AP] C^0...])   nicht > nur
         'if there are only eggs on it it doesn't taste as good'

Reis points out that this revision (17b) causes more problems than it solves:
- e.g.: B/H focus on selected cases of non-arguments (VPs, IPs, APs, root CPs), ignoring CPs, DPs and PPs, which can also figure as non-arguments (as DP/PP/AP internal modifiers).
- In the examples in (19), the DP- and AP-internal host of FPs are of like category (PP or DP) but differ in argument (19a-c) vs. non-argument (19a'-c') status. According to (17b), (21a-c) should be ungrammatical and (19a'-c') should be good. But this prediction is not borne out:

(19)   a.   ??das Warten nur auf Godot
                 the waiting only for Godot

         a'.   ??das Warten nur auf dem Bahnhof
                 the waiting only at   the   station

         b.   ?*der Autor sogar   des Erfolgsbuchs
                 the author even (of) the bestseller$_{gen}$

         b'.   ?*der Autor sogar   des Springerverlags
                 the author even (of) the Springer.Publishing.house$_{gen}$

         c.   stolz nur auf sich   selber (wollte er sein)
                 proud only of himself self   (wanted he be)
                 'He wanted to be proud of himself only.'

         c'.   stolz nur im Unglück   (will   niemand sein)
                 proud only in unhappiness (wants nobody be)
                 'Nobody wants to be proud only in unhappiness.'

4

- Another failure of (17b) is the behaviour of certain DP-/PP- and CP-adverbials. (20) should have the reconstruction reading and the surface reading, but it does not:

(20)   Nur in POLen/nur während des SOMmers war jeder   glücklich.
       only in Poland/only during   the summer   was everybody happy

       √R1: nur > jeder ('it was only in Poland that everybody was happy')

       *R2: jeder > nur ('everybody was happy only in Poland')

3.2   Closeness condition

It is questionable that the closeness condition holds:
- There are semantic exceptions to Closeness caused by intervening scope-taking items. If the FP in (21) were as close to its focus as syntactically possible, it would alter the intended scope relations and lead to a different meaning (22). Hence, it is semantically impossible.

(21)   a. Gerd wollte   nur [mit jemandem [SPRECHen]].
          Gerd wanted only with someone   speak
          'Gerd only wanted to SPEAK to somebody.'

        b. Gerd hat *auch* [freiwillig [das GeSCHIRR gewaschen]].
          Gerd has also voluntarily the dishes   washed
          'Gerd also volunteered to wash the DIshes.'

(22)   a. Gerd wollte [mit jemandem *nur* [SPRECHen]].   [21a≠22a]
          Gerd wanted with someone   only speak
          'Gerd wanted to only speak with somebody.'

        b. Gerd hat [freiwillig   auch [das GeSCHIRR gewaschen]].
          Gerd has voluntarily also the dishes   washed   [21b≠22b]
          'Gerd volunteered to also wash the DIshes.'

- There are also syntactic exceptions: If the focussed XPs is in the middle field, then non-adjacent FPs (23a,b) are often possible although perhaps dispreferred to directly adjacent placement (23a',b'). But sometimes non-adjacent placement is the only option (23c,c'), although a scope-taker intervenes.

(23)   a. Ich hab nur darin/in dem Buch [geLESen] (nicht RUMgemalt).

        a'. Ich hab   darin /in dem Buch   nur [geLESen]
           I   have (only) therein/in the book (only) read
           (nicht RUMgemalt).
           (not   scribbled)
           'I've only READ it/the book, not scribbled in it.'

        b. Er hat auch dem Paul [ein BUCH] gekauft (nicht nur eine CD).

        b'. Er hat   dem Paul   auch [ein BUCH] gekauft
           he has (also) the Paul$_{dat}$ (also) a   book   bought
           (nicht nur eine CD).
           (not   only a   CD)
           'He also bought a BOOK for Paul, not only a CD.'

        c. Er wollte nur ein bischen [in den GARTen] gehen (nicht auch ins DORF).

        c'. *Er wollte   ein bischen nur [in   den GARTen] gehen
           he wanted (only) a   bit   (only) into the garden   go
           (nicht auch ins   DORF).
           (not   also into.the village)
           'He only wanted to go into the GARden for a while (but not into the village as well).'

5

- Even more remarkable: non-adjacency between FP and the related XP is only allowed in the middle-field:

(24) a. *Nur Peter kooperierte [mit der PoliZEI].

    a'. Peter   kooperierte *nur* [mit der PoliZEI].
     (only) P. cooperated (only) with the police

    b. *Nur mit jemandem sollte [geSPROCHen] werden.

    b'. Mit   jemandem sollte nur [geSPROCHen] werden.
     (only) with someone   should (only) spoken.to be
     'The idea was to (just) speak (just) with someone.'

- Non-adjacent FP-adjunction to CP, which would satisfy the focus condition, for sentences like (24), is ruled out by assumption (25):

(25) Non-adjacent adjunction sites for FPs must be VPs.

3.3 The '(no) reconstruction' argument

- The 'no reconstruction' argument does support a distinctive trait of the a-theory – the 'reconstruction reading'. But it also supports the m-theory, which it was designed to eliminate.
- For the AP cases (18) and (26a) B/H acknowledge both readings - reconstruction reading and surface reading:

(26) a.   Nur [$_{AP}$ mit EIern belegt]$_i$ ist es nicht t$_i$.
     only   with eggs topped is it not

    √R1 ([$_{CP}$ nur [$_{CP}$ AP C^0 ...]]) nur > nicht
    'the only thing missing are eggs on it'

    √R2 ([$_{CP}$ [$_{AP}$ nur AP] C^0 ...]) nicht > nur
    'it doesn't have only eggs on it'

    b.   Nur [$_{VP}$ mit EIern belegt]$_i$ wird es nicht t$_i$.
     only with eggs topped becomes it not

    c.   Nur [$_{VP}$ mit EIern belegen]$_i$ will ich es nicht t$_i$.
     only with eggs topped want I it not

- Single stress on *Eiern* promotes the [$_{CP}$ FP CP] reading, while main stress on *nicht* and secondary stress on *Eier* favours the [$_{AP}$ FP AP] reading and which produces an I-contour.
- Intonational help (I-contour) is required by the reconstruction reading.
- What about argumental (DP/PP) FP-XP structures?
- Under the same intonation variation there is no real difference between the readings:

(27) a. Nur [$_{VP}$ mit EIern belegt]$_i$ wird es nicht t$_i$.

    b. Nur [$_{PP}$ mit EIern]$_i$ wird es nicht t$_i$ belegt. (PP = argum. of *belegen*)

- Reconstruction readings involving FPs and a quantifier like *jeder* are hard to get:

(28) a. Nur [mit EIern belegt]$_i$ ist jedes Brot t$_i$. ?reconstruction reading?
    only with eggs topped is every bread

    b. Nur [mit EIern]$_i$ ist jedes Brot t$_i$ belegt.
    only with eggs   is every bread topped

- The argument also does not hold, if negative quantifiers are involved:

(29)   a. Nur MaRIA\liebt keiner. a'. /NUR MaRIA liebt KEIner\.
       only Maria loves no.one$_{nom}$
       'Only Mary was loved by nobody.'

       b. Nur FLEISCH\ as niemand. b'. /NUR FLEISCH as NIEmand\.
       only meat$_{acc}$ ate no.one$_{nom}$
       'Nobody ate only meat.'

       Readings for a/b: for a'/ b':
       √R1 nur > neg   *R1 nur > neg
       *R2 neg > nur   √R2 neg > nur

3.4   Postposed FPs

- FPs following their co-constituent are not covered by B/H. They argue that postposed FPs are incompatible with the a-theory, but say that these are marginal and do not belong to the standard register of German usage.

(30)   (*)Seine SCHWESTer nur   überlebte den Unfall.
       his   sister   only survived the accident
       'Only his SISter survived the accident.'

- Not all FPs or related XPs allow the stylistically marked post-position, but this does not automatically make it 'nonstandard' (Reis refers to 'the many authentic' examples from newspapers (Müller 2004) 'that seem neither marked nor degraded').
- Particularly frequent is FP postposition with adverbials as in (31a,b):

(31)   a. Ein einziges Mal nur haben /sie/ ihr   Haus /.../ unbewacht
       a   one.time   only have /they/ their home /.../ unguarded
       zurückgelassen.
       behind-left
       'Only once did they leave their house behind unguarded.'

       b. Ungenügend   nur hat sich die Bundeswehrführung   der
       unsatisfactorily only has   the Bundeswehr.leadership the
       Tatsache gestellt,   daß /.../
       fact   confronted that /.../
       'The Bundeswehr command confronted the fact that /.../ in a rather unsatisfactory way.'

- Therefore, a theory of German FPs should include postposed FPs.

4   Summary

- Neither version of the a-theory is sustainable. There are counterexamples to the areas where they diverge as well as with respect to their common core.
- The Closeness condition does not hold. The m-theory is more convincing when it comes to account for the facts of German FP placement.
- The 'no reconstruction' argument does support the a-theory over the m-theory by showing that FPs adjoin to root clauses. But when properly reconstructed it also shows that FPs adjoin to all kinds of XPs, thus supporting the m-theory as well.
- The a-theory does not cover postposed FPs.