
German High relative clauses and the Split-DP

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In this talk, I put forth a preliminary analysis of German left-peripheral relative clauses. I outline their restrictions and their effect on the information structure of the DP and discuss their role in the ongoing research on its split character.

In German, the canonical position of full relative clauses, those marked by a relative pronoun, is postnominal. Some speakers, however, allow high relative clauses to the left of determiners (see also Haider 1992; Roehrs 2019).

- (1) Der diesen Schwachsinn behauptet hat (*leider) der Mann hat
the this nonsense claimed has unfortunately the man. has
einen Vortrag gehalten.
a presentation held

‘The man who claimed this nonsense has given a presentation.’

Although the relative clause seems to be split from its noun, it is in fact still part of the DP. The two units form a constituent, as evidenced by the impossibility of inserting an adverb in between, thus contrasting with other splitting phenomena such as the *what-for*-construction.

The data I draw from a preliminary study using mainly qualitative interviews show that relative clauses in this high domain, which is generally argued to be the locus where information-structural effects are mapped onto syntax (Rizzi 1997 a. o.), have a focalizing or topicalizing function, same as other modifiers in this domain in German, such as prepositional phrases (*von PÉTER das Auto* ‘Peter’s car; Roehrs 2019).

Further evidence for this comes from the fact that they are only licit if followed by a definite determiner and the obligatorily restrictive interpretation they invoke. In fact, forcing a non-restrictive interpretation leads to unnaturalness.

From a theoretical perspective, I conclude that such relative clauses have A’-moved to the left periphery of the noun, giving evidence for this area and respective projections, FocP and TopP.

References: • Haider, H. (1992). Die Struktur der Nominalphrase. Lexikalische und funktionale Strukturen. In L. Hofmann (ed.), *Deutsche Syntax. Ansichten und Aussichten. Institut für deutsche Sprache Jahrbuch 1991*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 304–333.
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