

V2, Discourse Functions and Split-CP

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1. Introduction

The Verb Second (V2 for short) requirement means that the finite verb of a clause is preceded by exactly one XP as e.g. in (1), or more abstractly formulated, that V2 clauses have the structure $XP - V_{fin} - ZP \dots$

- (1)a. *Peter hat dieses Buch gestern gelesen.* (German)
Peter has this book yesterday read.
“Peter read this book yesterday.”
- b. *Gestern hat Peter dieses Buch gelesen.*
Yesterday has Peter this book read.
“Yesterday Peter read this book.”

However, most Germanic V2 languages are characterised by the so-called root-embedded asymmetry, i.e. main clauses are subject to the V2 requirement while in embedded clauses the finite verb usually stays lower down in the structure as is illustrated in (2) vs (1a).

- (2) *... daß Peter dieses Buch gestern gelesen hat.* (German)
... that Peter this book yesterday read has
“... that Peter read this book yesterday.”

There have been various suggestions as regards the syntactic structure of V2 clauses in German and the other Germanic languages (for some suggestions see section 2). To my knowledge, however, none of the structures proposed has really considered discourse functions. To be more precise, Frey (2000) for example, suggested that the V2 requirement could be satisfied in three ways, namely (a) merger of an expletive, (b) stylistic fronting and (c) semantically/pragmatically triggered fronting of an XP, so that discourse functions do come into play. These discourse functions, however, are simply encoded by different features, such as [fok] or [link], which appear on one and the same head (C°). The aim of this paper, on the other hand, is to incorporate discourse functions into the syntactic structure of V2 clauses.¹

2. Previous accounts

2.1 Asymmetric approaches

Asymmetric approaches (e.g. Travis 1984, Zwart 1997) posit that we have to distinguish between subject-initial and non-subject-initial V2 clauses. This distinction is based on the

¹ In this paper I only consider declarative main clauses.

assumption that subject-initial clauses are just IPs because the subject occupies the canonical subject position, SpecIP, while in all other clauses (object-initial, adverb-initial, etc.) the sentence-initial element is topicalised which means that the clause is a CP.

2.2 Symmetric approaches

The symmetric approaches (among them den Besten 1983, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Vikner 1995, Schwartz & Vikner 1996, Roberts & Roussou 1998/2002, Frey 2000, Roberts 2000), on the other hand, assume that all kinds of sentence-initial XPs of V2 clauses target the specifier of the same phrase, CP in most analyses.² Schwartz & Vikner 1996 argue that a uniform treatment of all V2 clauses is preferable over the asymmetric approach as subject-initial and non-subject-initial clauses pattern exactly alike with respect to a number of phenomena such as adverbial placement (see (3)) and extraction from embedded V2 clauses.

- (3)a. ... *daß bis gestern kein Mensch dieses Buch gelesen hatte.* (German)
 ... that till yesterday no human being this book read had
 “... that no-one had read this book till yesterday.”
- b. **Bis gestern kein Mensch hatte dieses Buch gelesen.*
 till yesterday no human being had this book read
 “Till yesterday, no-one had read this book.”
- c. **Bis gestern dieses Buch hatte kein Mensch gelesen.*
 till yesterday this book had no human being read
 “This book, no-one had read it till yesterday.”

In the case of adverbial placement, for example, Schwartz & Vikner (1996) argue as follows. (3a) shows that adverbials can adjoin to IP [please note that it does not matter if we assume that there is an adverb-related XP in the Split-IP, which is structurally higher than the subject position(s), instead of adjunction to IP] and if subject-initial main clauses were really just IPs adjunction of an adverbial should be possible. This prediction, however, turns out to be wrong (3b). Instead, subject-initial main clauses behave exactly like object-initial main clauses (3c) and do not allow for adjunction. This behaviour is predicted if both subject-initial and non-subject-initial main clauses are CPs.³

Schwartz & Vikner (1996), however, have to admit that the symmetric approach cannot provide a satisfactory explanation as regards, e.g., the distribution of weak pronouns in sentence-initial position where weak subject pronouns are fine but object pronouns are not, as can be seen in (4) and (5).

- (4)a. *Das Kind hat das Buch gelesen.* (German)
 the child has the book read
 “The child has read the book.”
- b. *Es hat das Buch gelesen.*
 it has the book read
 “It has read the book.”

² Den Besten (1983) was the first to suggest that V2 clauses are (what is now called) CPs. He argued that the root-embedded asymmetry found in most V2 languages is due to the fact that in declarative main clauses the verb moves to C (COMP) while in embedded clauses this position is occupied by the complementiser so that the verb has to stay further down in the clause.

³ Please note that Schwartz & Vikner (1996) do not consider the possibility that (3b) could simply be ruled out because the V2 requirement (which would then be located in I°) is violated.

- (5)a. *Dieses Buch hat das Kind gelesen.*
 this book has the child read
 “This book, the child has read.”
- b. **Es hat das Kind gelesen.*
 it has the child read

[Note: Haider (1993) goes even one step further than the other proponents of the symmetric approach and claims that there is no (independent) IP in German as, according to him, there is no compelling evidence to assume this category in German. Therefore V2 is a phenomenon of the combined CP/IP in German.]

In the discussion below, I will follow the symmetric approach and assume that all V2 clauses are CPs but I will argue that we need a finer-grained structure, namely a Split-CP à la Rizzi (1997) to account for all the data. Thus we reach a kind of synthesis of the symmetric and the asymmetric approach.

3. A closer look at German data

Contrary to the distinction drawn in the asymmetric approaches (i.e. subject-initial vs. non-subject-initial clauses), the data in (6) show that many more types of XP pattern with subjects.

- (6)a. *Alle Studenten lieben Syntax.*
 All students love syntax.
- b. *Einer alten Frau wurde die Handtasche gestohlen.*
 [an old woman]-Dat was the handbag stolen
 “Someone stole the handbag of an old lady.”
- c. *Mir war gestern fürchterlich heiß.*
 me-Dat was yesterday terribly hot
 “I felt terribly hot yesterday.”
- d. *Morgen kommt der Weihnachtsmann.*
 tomorrow comes the Santa Claus
 “Santa Claus is coming tomorrow.”

In addition to subjects (6a), Dative object DPs in passives (6b), Experiencer DPs of impersonal psych-verbs (6c) and certain temporal and locative adverbs that create a setting⁴ (6d) can occur in sentence-initial position with ‘neutral stress and interpretation’. This means that all of the sentences in (6) can be used as out-of-the-blue utterances or as answers to the question ‘What happened?’⁵ Of course, all of these sentence-initial XPs *can* be stressed, focussed or topicalised as well.

Other object DPs, PPs, adverbials and VPs, on the other hand, can only appear in sentence-initial position if they are topicalised, establish a link with the preceding sentence or receive (contrastive) focus.

- (7)a. *Diesen Minister hat die Presse schon lange kritisiert.*

⁴ These adverbs seem to be all the adverbs that fall into Frey & Pittner’s (1998) categories of *Bereichsadverbiale* and *Frameadverbiale*.

⁵ Note that (6d) sounds much more natural than the subject-initial version.

this minister has the press already long criticised
“The press has criticised this minister for a long time.”

- b. **Einen Minister hat die Presse schon lange kritisiert.*
a minister has the press already long criticised
“The press has criticised a minister for a long time.”
- c. *EINEN Minister hat die Presse schon lange kritisiert (aber nicht alle).*
a minister has the press already long criticised (but not all)
“The press has criticised one minister for a long time (but not all).”
- d. *Einen MINISTER hat die Presse schon lange kritisiert (aber nicht den
Kanzler).*
a minister has the press already long criticised (but not the
chancellor)
“The press has criticised a MINISTER for a long time (but not the
chancellor).”

In (7a) the demonstrative *diesen* (“this-Acc”) indicates that the minister we are talking about must have been mentioned in the preceding sentence. Hence the sentence-initial object DP establishes a link between the two sentences. (7b) illustrates that an object that is newly introduced in the discourse (indicated by the indefinite article) cannot occur sentence-initially. An indefinite object DP can only show up in sentence-initial position if it receives contrastive focus, as can be seen in (7c) and (7d).

- (8)a. *Peter liebt Maria.*
Peter loves Maria.
- b. *PETER loves Maria.*
- c. *Den Peter liebt Maria.*
the-Acc Peter loves Maria.
“Maria loves Peter.”

As the examples in (8) show, sometimes not even focalisation alone makes an object a licit sentence-initial element. (8a) and (8b) will always be interpreted as “Peter” being the subject and “Maria” the object. To turn “Peter” into the object we have to use the definite article with the name (a construction that is usually only found in dialects of German) to mark the DP morphologically as Accusative. The same holds for Dative object DPs in active clauses, see (9).

- (9) *Dem Peter hat Maria ihre Liebe gestanden.*
the-Dat Peter has Maria her love confessed
“To Peter, Maria confessed her love.”

The fact that PPs, just like adverbials that do not create a setting, have to be focussed or topicalised is illustrated by the following example from the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, April 4th, 2005 which comments on Pope who had just died.

- (10) *Er hat geholfen, die Regime im Osten zu beseitigen, aber vom Westen*
He has helped the regimes in-the East to get-rid-of but by-the West

ließ er sich nie vereinnahmen.

let he himself never take-in

“He helped to get rid of the regimes in the East but he would never let himself be considered to be part of the West.”

Here, the clause-initial PP *vom Westen* (“by the West”) contrasts with the PP *im Osten* (“in the East”) of the first conjunct.⁶

Last but not least, (remnant) VPs in sentence-initial position have to have a special function in the discourse, namely make reference to some aforementioned event, element etc. or be contrastively focussed, as can be seen in (11).

- (11) *Zurücktreten wird der Minister deswegen wohl nicht.*
 Resign will the minister because-of-that probably not
 “The minister probably won’t resign because of that.”

Here we might think of a discussion of possible consequences of a political scandal, the resignation of the minister (i.e. the option given by the fronted remnant VP) (not) being one of them.

Table 1 summarises which XPs can show up in sentence-initial position with neutral stress and interpretation (but can also have a special discourse function) and which XPs have to always be associated with a special discourse function to be able to occur sentence-initially.

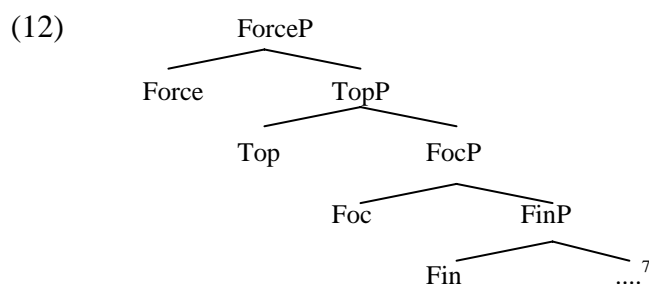
	neutral	special discourse function
subject DPs	✓	✓
Dative objects in passives	✓	✓
Experiencer DPs of impersonal psych-verbs	✓	✓
temporal and locative adverb(ial)s that create a setting	✓	✓
other object DPs	X	✓
other adverb(ial)s	X	✓
PPs	X	✓
(remnant) VPs	X	✓

Table 1: sentence-initial XPs and discourse function

4. Discourse functions and Split-CP

In his seminal paper on the fine structure of the left periphery Rizzi (1997) suggested that the CP be split into (at least) the following categories: ForceP – **where the clause-type is determined**, TopP – targeted by topicalisations, FocP – targeted by focussed elements, and FinP – **where finiteness is encoded**. This Split-CP has the following structure then.

⁶ Note: *aber* (“but”) is always followed by a V2 clause



Assuming that German, too, does not simply have a CP but such a finer grained structure and that the sentence-initial XPs of V2 clauses target different specifiers within this Split-CP, the above observations can easily be accounted for. I suggest that all kinds of XPs that can occur in sentence-initial position with neutral stress and interpretation are merged in or move to SpecFinP. All the other kinds of XP, however, have to be associated with a topic or focus feature to be able to occur sentence-initially in a V2 clause. This means that these XPs move to SpecTopP or SpecFocP, respectively and check their semantic feature against the respective head. The same applies to XPs of the “neutral group” if they are contrastively focussed or topicalised.

Whether an XP can end up in SpecFinP or whether it has to have a special discourse function is determined by economy and locality. If the numeration still contains an expletive *es*⁸ or an adverb that creates a setting once the derivation has reached FinP, this element will be merged in SpecFinP because merger is less costly than movement of an XP. That’s why (6d) is much more natural than the subject-initial version *Der Weihnachtsmann kommt morgen*. However, if all material has been used up once the derivation reaches FinP, the default case is to move the XP closest to Fin^o to SpecFinP. This XP is usually the subject or, in the absence of a subject DP, the Experiencer XP of an impersonal psych-verb.^{9, 10}

⁷ Fin selects the topmost category of the Split-IP as its complement. Whether it is always the same category that is selected by Fin or not depends on whether categories that are not used in a particular language or construction are completely absent from the structure or just inert. If the category selected by Fin varies, it can be either some adverb-related category, a TopP or FocP as in constructions involving Scrambling (cf. Mohr 2004, in print) or a subject position.

⁸ Expletive *es* can be found in presentational sentences (i) and impersonal passives (ii).

(i) *Es hat soeben der Kanzler die Bühne betreten.* (German)
 Expl has just the chancellor the platform entered
 “The chancellor has just mounted the platform.”

(ii) *Es wird gesungen, getanzt und gelacht.*
 Expl is sung, danced and laughed
 “People are singing, dancing and laughing.”

⁹ Of course, the topmost XP of the Split-IP (e.g. TP) would be closer to SpecFinP than these XPs but the topmost XP does not qualify as a candidate for movement to SpecFinP. If SpecFinP is associated with a subject-of-predication feature this restriction becomes plausible because the topmost XP is the predication rather than the subject of the predication.

¹⁰ Sentences like (6b) (repeated as (i) here) suggest that even the neutral position SpecFinP is associated with checking of a feature, which I assume to be a subject-of-predication feature.

(i) *Einer alten Frau wurde die Handtasche gestohlen.*
 [an old woman]-Dat was the handbag stolen
 “Someone stole the handbag of an old lady.”

The Dative XP is probably highest in the vP/VP but it is definitely not the highest element in the Split-IP as definite subjects occupy a fairly high position in the I-system (cf. Mohr 2004, in print). Therefore the Dative XP must be associated with a feature that allows for the XP to move across the definite subject to SpecFinP without violating any locality constraints.

This argumentation predicts that if we have an object that has scrambled over an indefinite subject, this subject can only show up in sentence-initial position if it is topicalised or focussed because it is not the element closest to SpecFinP in this case. The example in (13) seems to confirm this prediction because the subject *ein Kind* “a child” has to be focussed.¹¹

- (13) [Context: Irgendjemand hat giftige Köder ausgelegt und schon mehrere Hunde und Katzen sind daran eingegangen.
Someone has laid out poisoned baits and several dogs and cats have died.]

Ein KIND hat einen solchen Köder glücklicherweise noch nicht gegessen.
a child has a such bait fortunately not yet eaten
 “Fortunately, no child has eaten such a bait yet.”

This association with a topic or focus feature is the default case when it comes to objects, more complex adverbials, PPs and VPs. As these XP are usually not closest to the C-system, they have to carry a feature that has to be checked against the head of one of the discourse related projections of the Split-CP to be able to move across the subject DP which would be the default candidate for the sentence-initial position.

Therefore the entries in table 1 can directly be translated into structural positions in which the respective XPs can occur.

	neutral	special discourse function	SpecFinP	SpecFocP/ SpecTopP
subject DPs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dative objects in passives	✓	✓	✓	✓
Experiencer DPs of impersonal psych-verbs	✓	✓	✓	✓
temporal and locative adverb(ial)s that create a setting	✓	✓	✓	✓
other object DPs	X	✓	X	✓
other adverb(ial)s	X	✓	X	✓
PPs	X	✓	X	✓
(remnant) VPs	X	✓	X	✓

Table 2: structural position of sentence-initial XPs

As always only one specifier of the Split-CP is used, it could be argued that an unsplit CP where topic and focus come in as features of C° would suffice for German (Müller p.c.) and this is exactly what Frey (2000) proposes. Apart from the fact that he assumes an unsplit-CP, Frey’s system is very similar to mine. He suggests that SpecCP could simply be filled by merger of an epletive or by ‘stylistic fronting’. In the latter case, which just serves to satisfy the V2 requirement, the phrase that is highest in the *Mittelfeld* is fronted to the sentence-initial position and this operation is completely unmarked and ‘contextually neutral’. It usually applies to subjects, Dative DPs of passive constructions and temporal and frame adverbials (Frey & Pittner 1998) and it cannot apply whenever there is a sentence topic, which marks the left edge of the I-system. On the other hand, C can also be associated with a semantic or pragmatic feature, such as [fok] or [link], according to Frey. Fronting of an XP to check these

¹¹ This argumentation relies on Frey’s (2000) assumption that the sentence adverb *glücklicherweise* ‘fortunately’ marks the right edge of the (upper) topic area of the I-system.

features results in the sentence not being contextually neutral any more but having a certain semantic or pragmatic effect.

As a reply to this claim I suggest that we cannot have a „neutral“ XP together with e.g. a topic XP because the topic always passes through SpecFinP on its way to SpecTopP. This analysis is supported by doubling structures like the one in (14) where, on its way to SpecTopP, the complex DP [_{DP2} *den* [_{DP1} *diesen Satz*]] (cf. Belletti 2003) leaves the resumptive pronoun behind in SpecFinP.

- (14) *Diesen Satz, den mag ich einfach nicht.* (German)
this-Acc sentence, that-Acc like I simply not
“This sentence, I simply don’t like (it).”

Therefore I assume that any topicalised or focussed XP moves through SpecFinP first before it moves on to its final destination. In addition, (14) illustrates that the verb does not move to a higher head position in the Split-CP but stays in Fin^o.

Last but not least the structure proposed here (i.e. the assumption of a Split-CP also in German) has the advantage that it can account for the data that proved problematic for Schwartz & Vikner (1996) and which I repeat here as (15) and (16).

- (15) a. *Das Kind hat das Buch gelesen.* (German)
the child has the book read
“The child has read the book.”

- b. *Es hat das Buch gelesen.*
it has the book read
“It has read the book.”

- (16) a. *Dieses Buch hat das Kind gelesen.*
this book has the child read
“This book, the child has read.”

- b. **Es hat das Kind gelesen.*
it has the child read

Es being a weak, unstressed pronoun, it cannot show up in SpecTopP or SpecFocP or in other words, it cannot occur in sentence-initial position if it stands for an object DP as an object DP always has to target a discourse-related projection of the Split-CP. This analysis is supported by the fact that if we chose the strong pronoun *das* (“this”) instead of *es* (“it”) the sentence becomes grammatical (cf. (17)). If *es* stands for a subject DP in SpecFinP, however, no problem arises.

- (17) *Das hat das Kind gelesen.*
this has the child read
“The child has read it.”

Thus my analysis comes close to Travis’ (1984) explanation which relied on the assumption that subject-initial and non-subject-initial V2 clauses have a different structure.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I argue that declarative V2 clauses uniformly target the C-system as advocated by the symmetric approaches to V2. On the other hand I suggest, as the use of the term C-system indicates, that German has a Split-CP and that the sentence-initial XPs of V2 clauses target different specifier positions within this Split-CP, depending on their discourse function. Subjects, expletives, adverb(ial)s that create a setting, Dative object DPs of passives and Experiencer DPs of impersonal psych-verbs, i.e. all the XPs that can show up in sentence-initial position with neutral stress and interpretation end up in SpecFinP, while all the other XPs can only appear sentence-initially if they fulfil a special discourse function and therefore move to SpecTopP or specFocP.

This analysis combines the advantages of the symmetric and the asymmetric approaches because it confines the V2 phenomenon to the C-domain and nevertheless can account for the fact that there are some differences in behaviour with respect to the different kinds of XPs.

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