

Abstract (Humboldt Fellowship for experienced researchers)
Information structure, anaphoric reference and discourse organization
Hélène Vinckel-Roisin

Dealing with the three following aspects: information structure, anaphoric reference, and discourse organization, this project focuses on the interface between syntax, information structure and text structure.

This study takes as its point of departure a syntactically linear phenomenon which is still poorly understood and scarcely commented on: the discourse-structuring role (the textual competence) of the syntactically non-obligatory filling of the postfield (*Nachfeld*) in German utterances. Verbless constituents (primarily NP and PP) which ‘ought to have been placed’ earlier in the German utterance appear in fact after a first locatable syntactic closure / beyond the Right Frontier / beyond a closure-marking final element / after the close of the verbal frame (cf. for example: *Zum Glück ist es in den Medien inzwischen ruhiger geworden **um den demografischen Wandel.***). Reasons of information structure on the one hand and communicative / pragmatic reasons (like the speaker’s intention) on the other should be taken into consideration to explain this frequent manifestation of the German non-canonical constituent order.

The main point of this corpus-based project – which is undertaken from the point of view of discourse and pragmatics – is to demonstrate that such syntactically and prosodically integrated verbless postfield constituents have two functions regarding discourse reference:

- i) They can serve as a means of continuity
- ii) They can also effect the progression of the information flow in text.

Thus, this syntactical phenomenon will be studied in relation to the following questions:

- To what extent is one justified in regarding verbless postfield constituents as discourse-structuring markers in written German?
- Can verbless postfield constituents establish a new discourse referent in the text and also pick up a pre-mentioned discourse referent? Are there any constraints for these two functions? And what are their semantic and cognitive effects?
- To what extent do verbless postfield constituents contribute to establish coherence in texts?

The analysis is based upon a corpus of German Newspaper texts (*FAZ, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Der Tagesspiegel, Die Zeit*).

Keywords:

Syntax – non-canonical constituent order – postfield (*Nachfeld*) in German utterances

Information structure

Anaphoric reference

Continuity and progression – discourse coherence

Focus strategy

Salienz