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Author(s): Stephan Schuetze-Coburn

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On the Borders of Subordination:
 Signaling Relative Clauses in Spoken German
 Stephan Schuetze-Coburn, UCLA

The German language may be viewed as a classic case where subordination, on the whole, can be taken to be a grammatical category. "Subordination" or "dependency" is practically equated with a particular word order by linguists as well as grammarians working in the German tradition. "Independent" clauses clearly appear to have one basic word order, "dependent" clauses another.

While this may be most true for formal styles of the homogenized standard language, it is less accurate for both more colloquial styles and dialect. And in terms of 'basicness,' there is good reason not to consider the informal styles as somehow "deviating" from the norm of the standard, but instead that the standard represents one extreme of some highly-valued tendency. Highly-valued originally by prescriptive grammarians.

Restricted to a finite space, I would like to discuss here one group of dependent clauses, relative clauses, and how they might be signaled in more informal styles of German.

One recent work by the East German linguist Helbig (1980) has clearly demonstrated the complexities involved in even delimiting the subclass relative clause: indirect questions as well as other types of clauses usually taken to be subordinate are shown to have domains which overlap with that of relatives. The details do not need to concern us now; what is important, though, to the present discussion is the conclusion that no one criterion or set of criteria at one level is alone sufficient to establish a taxonomy free from contradiction and redundancy.

Attempts made to rectify previous shortcomings have also met with limited success, for proposed solutions have amounted to little more than an addition using highly-visible, grammatical criteria. As I shall try to demonstrate in this paper, the failures have been caused, in part, by limiting what can be viewed as grammatical. In the data I wish to present, there is much more at hand than obviously meets the eye: suprasegmental cues also prove relevant and so must be taken into consideration.

In order to exemplify the crucial role intonational factors play in signaling relative clauses, I shall focus on a certain subset of clauses, namely on those for which there is generally no disagreement over their

classification as relative. These clauses take the form depicted in (1), that is, they are characterized by the clause-initial relative pronoun der or any of its declined forms:

- (1) ... # der # ... (# = clause boundary)

What makes this particular subset interesting is its resemblance to a separate class of independent clauses. Notice that (1) also represents the basic form of a clause introduced by a demonstrative pronoun used substantively (henceforth 'demonstrative clauses').

Differentiating between relative and demonstrative clauses 'normally' requires no special effort. The clauses are distinguishable on the basis of word order. Relative clauses take verb-final¹ or "dependent" word order, as in (2):

- (2) /zwei↓ geschwister hatte ich die
 two siblings had I these ones
 köchinnen waren (Caroli:546)
 cooks were
 'I had two siblings who were cooks'

Demonstrative clauses show verb-second position or "independent" word order, as in (3):

- (3) /und ihre älteste tochter↑ lebt die auch
 and your oldest daughter lives this one also
 mit ihnen /ja↓ die lebt ↓auch mit mir/
 with you yes this one lives also with me
 (Caroli:555)
 'and your oldest daughter does she also live with
 you -- yes she lives with me too'

Yet clauses occur in informal speech and in certain styles of writing² which have quite a relative 'feel' to them but nevertheless display verb-second word order. Take, for example, (4), a sentence from one of Grimm's Märchen, and (5), a sentence from Brecht's Herr Puntila:

- (4) Es war einmal ein Mann, der verstand
 it was once a man this one understood
 allerlei Künste. (Grimm:211)
 all kinds of tricks
 'There once was a man who knew all kinds of tricks'
- (5) Ich war im Dienst bei einer Bierbrauerin,
 I was in the service by a beer-breweress

die hat eine Tochter gehabt. (Kolb:49)
 this one had a daughter had
 'I was working for a brewer who had a daughter'

In (4) the der-clause is in every sense a clause attributive to ein Mann. In a less stylized text, the verb verstand would be placed at the end of the clause. The same can be said for (5). This sentence suggests the author was trying to capture a sense of the spontaneous. The verb hat, again, would normally come clause-final. How should such clauses be analyzed?

Discussions in the literature treat this and related problems in an unenlightening manner. A few discussants (Lambert 1976, Kann 1972) have ventured the idea that the second clauses in examples like (4) and (5) are dependent clauses with independent word order, that is, relative clauses with verb second. Others have criticized this approach or have simply interpreted the clauses as demonstrative (Wichter 1980, Engel 1977, Saltveit 1975, Van de Velde 1974). All, however, apparently felt compelled to commit themselves one way or the other. But in doing so, they have relied either on criteria of an impressionistic nature to the exclusion of syntactic form or on the position of the finite verb without the consideration of contextual function. In either case, the evidence against one analysis is as great as that for it. Without additional support, classifications based on this kind of reasoning are inconsequential, and the matter thus reduces to a question of personal aim and inclination of the discussant. Objectively, sentences like (4) and (5), in isolation, must remain indeterminate. A clear judgment cannot be made solely on the criteria so far presented.

Before we examine an additional criterion which would provide evidence for a more objective judgment, we might well ask about the status of verb-second relatives in general. That relative clauses with verb-second exist is undeniable. In sentences such as (6) and (7), the presence of unspecified antecedents in the main clauses forces interpreting the following clauses as relative:

- (6) Ich hab welche gesehn, die graben Wurzeln aus
 I have some seen who dig roots out
 vor Hunger. (Kolb:49)
 because of hunger
 'I have seen some who dig up roots because of
 hunger'

- (7) Ich sehe aus wie eine, die wartet auf den Bus.
 I look like one who waits for the bus
 (Kolb:45)
 'I look like one who is waiting for the bus'

In (6) welche requires the following die to be a relative pronoun; in (7) eine has the same force. Again, in both sentences, the "normal" position for the verb would be at the end of the clause.

That evidence for a subgroup of relative clauses with verb second surfaces should not surprise us. The notion of dependent clause with independent-clause word order is only strange within the rigid framework of a normative grammar. Diachronically there is support for such a subgroup also. The historical continuity between earlier forms of German, which did not always make a clear syntactic distinction "dependent" versus "independent," and the spoken language today has been observed (Schieb 1978, Sandig 1973).

Finally, existence of the subgroup finds support when we examine the syntax of informal styles of German. The tendency toward shorter clauses and parataxis in the spoken language and the widespread unbracketing of the characteristically German sentence frame in the written is thoroughly discussed in the literature (Lambert 1976, Weiss 1975, Helmig 1972, Dal 1966, Moser 1969, Leska 1965). It has been documented that typically "subordinating" conjunctions, which should always trigger verb-final word order, occur with a mixture of verb positions (Eisenmann 1973). Elimination of dass ('that') is a well-known phenomenon. Furthermore, Lambert has shown that syntactically light elements, as well as heavy clauses, are commonly unbracketed (i.e., extraposed) in the written and spoken language. These devices and others are regularly employed by speakers to control embedding. The type relative clause with verb second is an additional manifestation of the syntactically independent constructions preferred in informal styles.

Now that we have presumed erased preconceived notions of relative clauses and the form they should exhibit, we can return to the problem of disambiguating the indeterminate clauses discussed earlier. Since we are dealing chiefly with the spoken language, we should have at our disposal the extragrammatical dimension of utterances, intonation, with which we can systematically adjudicate the indeterminate clauses. That is, we should be able to use intonation to distinguish between relative and demonstrative clauses.

Although matters of intonation are, as a whole,

exceedingly complex, certain components seem to stand out in an examination of interclausal relationships. Thus, while there is considerable debate over the individual parameters of intonation, there is also a fair amount of agreement that final phrasal intonation in German is pragmatically dependent and determines the character of the entire clause (Löttscher 1983, Scuffil 1982).

The data I have used in my examination of relative clauses was taken from the appendix of Caroli (1977). The texts comprise parts of nine interviews from a collection known as the "Bottrop Records." They are marked for pause (/), and for pitch contour in relation to tonic accent, following Isačenko/Schädlich (1966). It should be noted that this system ignores the finer details of German intonation, but as an approximation it is adequate for present purposes.

Crudely speaking, then, a pretonic falling change in pitch (↓') concomitant with a pause often signals a clause or clause-group boundary; a posttonic rising pattern (↑) is present in many interrogative clauses; and a pretonic rising strategy (↑') signifies a linking to the following clause. Since it is precisely the relationship between clauses which interests us, effort may be concentrated on the few patterns which are relevant to the conjoining process.

Let us first take a look at the intonation patterns of unambiguous relative and demonstrative clauses. When we inspect the intonational nature of conjunction involving verb-clause-final relative clauses, we notice the tendency is to use a linking pattern in the clause containing the antecedent and a falling pattern in the relative clause (if the entire clause is then completed). Examples are (8) and (9):

(8) wir ham so verschiedene ↑schreiben/die wir an
we have so different writings which we to
die ↓éltern schicken müssen (599)
the parents send must
'we have different papers which we have to send
to the parents'

(9) /und da sind doch ↑sèhr viele mütter die/zu
and there are indeed very many mothers who at
hause bleiben ↓wóllen (545)
home stay want
'and there are very many mothers who want to stay
home'

In (8) the change in pitch is pretonic rising on schrei-
ben, a linking pattern, which signifies incompleteness

on the part of the main clause. The relative clause which follows completes the main clause and closes with a pretonic falling change in pitch. Exactly the same is true for (9). Given this pattern, relative clauses can be said to be intonationally dependent on the preceding clauses containing their antecedents.

If instead an "independent" demonstrative clause follows, the first clause will contain a completed-clause change in pitch, as in (10) and (11):

- (10) die mutter wiegt im höchstfall fünfund-
 the mother weighs in the highest case five and
 siebzig ↓pfund /bekommt sehr dicke kräftige
 seventy pounds receives very thick strong
 ↓kinder /also die würde niemals in ein
 children thus this one would never in a
 ↓kränkenhaus gehn (546)
 hospital go
 'the mother weighs at most 75 pounds, bears big
 strong children, now then she would never enter
 a hospital'
- (11) wir machen jeden monat einmal unsren/↓häusfrauen-
 we make every month once our housewife
 tag nicht/↑das is so alle sieben monate is man
 day not that is so all seven months is one
 denn mal ↓drán/ (448)
 then once on it
 'we have once a month our housewife-day, it's
 like this every seven months it's your turn'

Example (10) is an instance of a series of independent clauses, the last containing a demonstrative pronoun. Notice that the completion of each clause is signaled by a pretonic falling contour, thus the three clauses are intonationally independent from each other.

Example (11) is an instance of another way of signaling clause completion. The first clause shows a pretonic falling contour, which is then reinforced by a posttonic rising pattern, much the same as with English 'right?/ isn't it so?' In both cases, clauses with these types of intonation patterns can be said to be intonationally independent.

We are now prepared to turn to the indeterminate clauses in the text. Upon inspecting the group of relative clauses with verb-second word order in conjunction with their antecedent clauses and checking the intonation against the above orders, it becomes evident that the group exhibits more of the 'connected-to' intonation that we expect from relative clauses, as examples (12) through (15) show:

- (12) /der Älteste is fünfzig ↓jahre...ein bergmann↓/
 the oldest is fifty years a miner
 ...ein↑ bergmann/der kommt aus dem ↓baugewerbe/
 a miner who comes from the building-
 trade (480)
 'the oldest is 50 years, a miner, a miner who
 comes from the construction trade'
- (13) /jetzt hab ich eine ↑erwischt/die hat zuviel
 now have I one caught who has too much
 ↓ahnung/ (579)
 idea
 'now I've nabbed one who has too much of an idea'
- (14) /also s' laufen ↑leute rum /die ham überhaupt
 thus it run people around who have at all
 keine ↓arbeit/ (529)
 no work
 'so there are people running around who have no
 work at all'
- (15) /s' wird ne ↑delegation zusammengestellt/die
 it becomes a delegation together-put which
 fährt ↑rüber/zur ↓zone (533)
 drives over to the zone
 'there's a delegation being formed which is going
 over to the (East) zone'

In (12), although the main clause is completed, the referent to der Älteste, i.e. ein bergmann, is picked up, emphasized, and finally uttered with a linking intonation signifying something is to follow. That is, the der-clause is intonationally dependent. Likewise, in (13) the main clause shows pretonic rising intonation signifying dependency. Examples (14) and (15) are similar cases. The main clauses show a linking pattern which then requires the following clauses introduced by die to contribute to the completeness of the main clause. The second clauses of (12) through (15), then, show dependency intonationally the same way the relative clauses in (8) and (9) do.

Examples (16) and (17) display an even tighter kind of intonational dependency:

- (16) /né↑ da sind eben leute die wollen sich
 not there are just people who want themselves
 n'paar pfennige ↓verdienen/ (560)
 a few pennies earn
 'right, there are people who want to earn a few
 cents'
- (17) /und da sind amerikanische firmen sind ↑da
 and there are American firms are there

die kaufen schächte auf↓/ (528)
 who buy wells up
 'and there are American companies are there who
 are buying up the wells'

In both instances no pause turns up between the antecedents and the following *die*-pronouns. From a traditional grammatical point of view, verb-final word order is expected in the dependent clauses, thus the above examples would have to be labeled "anomalous," as would (12) through (15). We have seen, however, that syntactically independent clauses which function as relative clauses with respect to their antecedents systematically signal their dependency by means of a linking intonational pattern. To call these clauses "deviant" ignores the importance the construction may possess for users of the language. We must conclude, then, that word order becomes just as unreliable as any other single criterion in predicting dependency in German. Consequently, reference must be made to factors situated outside the domain of the strictly grammatical. The claim accordingly is not that intonation replaces word order or anything else as a means of determining dependency, but instead that intonational patterns on the one hand have a vital contribution to make in disambiguating otherwise ambiguous clauses.

On the other hand, the patterns alone do not disambiguate unequivocally: I would not wish to state that the indeterminate clauses we have examined are fully equivalent to relative clauses. Pragmatically they may carry separate connotations. Moreover, comparatively their use in discourse has not yet been explored. However, these indeterminate clauses certainly behave much more like relatives than has been their allotted credit. Syntactically coordinate, arguably subordinate in function and intonation, verb-second relative clauses fall on the borders of subordination, alerting us that the theme of this parsession is indeed multidimensional, and that an all-or-nothing approach, coordinate or subordinate, cannot be advocated.

Footnotes

¹ More accurate is 'verb not-second.' Even the written language permits a number of elements to fall outside the verbal frame (and thus ousting the finite verb from its clause-final position). I shall, however, continue to use 'verb-final' as the terminology is, in English, clumsy enough already.

²This generally includes any style which strives to resemble or is especially close to the spoken language.

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