

# Licensing German Multiple Fronting in Context

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German is classed as a verb second (V2) language, that is, normally exactly one constituent occupies the position before the finite verb in declarative main clauses. There has, however, been ongoing debate in the theoretical literature concerning the status of examples seemingly violating this V2 constraint, such as the data in (1) (taken from G. Müller, 2004) in which both objects of a ditransitive verb precede the finite verb. As can be seen from G. Müller's grammaticality judgement, such constructed examples, in the absence of context, tend to be deemed at best marginal, or even ungrammatical.

Nevertheless, corpus data indicate that such introspection alone is unreliable as a basis for linguistic description since examples such as (2) instantiate the same syntactic structure as (1a), yet they are perfectly appropriate within their context:

Although S. Müller (2003, 2005), also working with attested data, has shown that a large variety of syntactic categories, grammatical functions and semantic classes can occur preverbally in such Multiple Frontings (MFs), the well-formedness conditions on the occurrence of such MF constructions have thus far not been established. The purpose of the present paper is to do precisely this.

Relying on findings from a corpus of naturally occurring data, we have identified specific environments in which MFs are licensed. In particular, we will show that MFs do not correspond to a single information structural configuration but, in fact, are motivated by different pragmatic considerations. We analyze these different configurations (two of which we briefly sketch below) as a set of related but distinct constructions, each of them instantiating a specific pairing of form, meaning and contextual appropriateness.

Of particular interest among the contexts in which MFs are licensed are the following two which we refer to as the *Presentational MF Construction*, viz. (3b) and the *Propositional Assessment MF Construction*, viz. (5b). The (a) and (c) lines provide the context before and

after the target sentence in (b), respectively.

We take the function of the *Presentational MF Construction* to be a topic shift strategy. A new entity (in italics in 3b) is introduced into the discourse (i.e. presented) and serves as an aboutness Topic in the continuation (= 3c). Our data strongly indicate that this entity is generally the referent of the grammatical subject, but may sometimes be another dependent (as in (4b)). We will argue that the entity in question is the most topic-worthy argument of the verb. Since focus and newness are not prototypical Topic features cross-linguistically (see e.g., Lambrecht, 1994, 165), new/focal entities often have to be first 'presented' before they can function as aboutness Topics. Interestingly, if this is correct, then rather than spelling out a discourse function of the fronted material, the motivating factor for presentational MF is the need to shift material away from the post-verbal domain (or middlefield), presumably to maximize the presentational effect.

We analyze the *Propositional Assessment MF Construction* on the other hand as involving an inverted Topic-Comment structure. The fronted material constitutes (part of) the Comment, while the Topic is instantiated by a discourse-given subject constituent in the middlefield. A stressed evaluative particle (*nicht* 'not') in the middlefield expresses/highlights the degree to which the Comment holds for the Topic. Other such evaluative particles frequently encountered in our data include *nie* 'never', *selten* 'rarely', *oft* 'often' etc.

We discuss these and other types of MF construction, highlighting common and divergent properties across the set, and sketch an analysis within construction-based HPSG – which lends itself particularly well to the formalization of our findings since it represents different levels of linguistic structure (syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, phonological) in parallel, thus allowing for constraints to be straightforwardly stated among these layers.

In sum, then, instead of writing off multiple fronting as too controversial or marginal, we are taking the opposite route of explicitly examining attested examples in context. By considering such data, we are thus able to state licensing conditions on its occurrence. In this way, we hope to shed light on the circumstances under which an otherwise robustly V2-language seemingly deviates from the verb second requirement.

- (1) a. ?? Kindern Bonbons **sollte** man nicht geben. 'G. K. did not go to Brussels for the demo'  
 b. \* Dieses billige Geschenk der Frau **sollte** man nicht geben. c. aber gut verstehen kann der Vorsitzende des Lampertheimer Bauernverbands die Proteste der Kollegen.  
 (2) [Dem Saft] [eine kräftigere Farbe] **geben** 'but the president of the Lampertheim Farmers' Association can well understand his colleagues' protest.'  
 to.the juice a more.vivid colour give  
 Blutorangen.  
 blood.oranges  
 'What gives the juice a more vivid colour is blood oranges.'<sup>1</sup>
- (3) a. Spannung pur herrschte auch bei den Trapez-Künstlern. [...] Musikalisch begleitet wurden die einzelnen Nummern vom Orchester des Zirkus Busch [...].  
 'It was tension pure with the trapeze artists. [...] Each act was musically accompanied by Circus Busch's own orchestra.'  
 b. [Stets] [einen Lacher] [auf ihrer Seite] **hatte** always a laugh on their side had  
*die Bubi Ernesto Family*.<sup>2</sup>  
 the Bubi Ernesto Family  
 'Always good for a laugh was the Bubi Ernesto Family.'  
 c. *Die Instrumental-Clowns*<sub>i</sub> zeigten ausgefeilte Gags und Sketche [...]  
 'These instrumental clowns presented sophisticated jokes and sketches.'
- (4) a. Polizei sucht nach Zeugen  
 'The police are looking for witnesses'  
 b. Weiterhin jede Spur **fehlt** von *jenem* further every trace lacks of this  
*Unbekannten, der [...] den 'Videopalast'*  
 unknown who the Videopalast  
 [...] *überfallen hat*.<sub>i</sub>  
 robbed has  
 'There is still no trace of the unidentified man who robbed the 'Videopalast'.'  
 c. *Der Mann*<sub>i</sub> war mit einer Pistole bewaffnet [...]  
 'The man was armed with a gun'
- (5) a. Bauern befürchten Einbußen  
 'Farmers fear losses'  
 b. [Nach Brüssel] [zum Demonstrieren] **ist** to Brussels to demonstrate is  
 Gerd Knecht *nicht* gefahren<sup>3</sup>  
 G. K. not gone

<sup>1</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 08/01/1999. Alles Orange: Pomeranzen, Salusianas, Kumquats.

<sup>2</sup> *Mannheimer Morgen*, 03/12/2005. Beim Salto Mortale herrscht Spannung pur.

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<sup>3</sup> *Mannheimer Morgen*, 26/02/1999. Umlandseite(n).