

On the distributional constraints and discourse function of German discourse particles in postinitial position

The class of German discourse particles is divided into two almost equally large subsets with respect to their syntactic distribution in the clause that hosts them. Thus, particles like *aber* ('but'), *nämlich* ('namely'), *immerhin* ('at least') and *infolgedessen* ('hence') can occupy what has been called the *postinitial position* (PI; cf. Pasch et al. 2003) – the position immediately after the constituent in the initial field (IF) and before the finite verb that canonically occupies the second position in the German matrix sentence, as in (1).

- (1) [Das Wichtigste]_{IF} [**aber/nämlich/immerhin**]_{PI} hat_{v.fin.} sich nicht geändert.
'But the most important things have not changed.'

Discourse particles in this position pose several as yet unresolved questions concerning their syntactic behaviour, their meaning and their discourse function. In the talk, we address these questions from a corpus-linguistic perspective, presenting first results of our work on an ongoing large-scale project on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of discourse particles in the postinitial position.

Concerning the syntactic distribution of particles, semantic constraints seem to play an important but not decisive role. Our investigation of the semantic categorization of particles made in Pasch et al. (2003) shows that particles able to occupy the postinitial position belong to the following semantic classes: adversative, scalar, conclusive, reformulative, negative-conditional, temporal, restrictive, causal, consecutive, and additive. However, particles that are not capable of occupying this position may also belong to these semantic classes. The intersection of the two groups contains classes like adversative, scalar, conclusive, temporal, causal, consecutive and additive. On the other hand, certain semantic classes correlate with only the one or the other group of particles. Thus, all particles belonging to the semantic classes concessive, comparative, instrumental, conditional, comitative and consecutive, are not PI-capable, whereas all reformulative and restrictive particles are PI-capable. We also observe that the majority of the adversative and scalar particles are PI-capable, whereas the majority of the additive ones are not PI-capable. Additionally, some PI-capable particles are ambiguous between two (or more) semantic classes, depending on their particular position in the host, such as e.g. *wiederum* which has an adversative reading when in PI-position (2) and a temporal-iterative reading when occupying the initial field (3):

- (2) [An anderen Stellen]_{IF} [**wiederum**]_{PI} konnte der Bundeskanzler herzlich lachen.
'At other places, the chancellor could cordially laugh.'
- (3) [**Wiederum**]_{IF} hieß der Torschütze Dadic.
'Again, the goal scorer's name was Dadic.'

In the talk, we compare the two groups and present some initial observations on the possible

correlation between semantic type and distribution of a particle.

Concerning the discourse function of PI-capable particles, it has been argued that the occurrence of discourse particles in this position correlates with topic change (cf. Breindl 2008), as in (4).

- (4) Die Besprechung_{Topic₁} wird wegen des Direktors vertagt. Der Direktor_{Topic₂} **nämlich** kann nicht kommen.

Our corpus investigations show however that this is not necessarily the case and that cases with no topic change are equally natural and frequent. Thus in (5), the topic of the second sentence containing the particle in PI remains the same.

- (5) Peter_{Topic₁} ist der einzige Überlebende. Er_{Topic₁} **nämlich** hatte sich versteckt.
'Peter is the only survivor. It was him who had hidden himself.'

We also found out that such cases of topic continuity often involve topics that are best characterized as contrastive, rather than aboutness (sentence) topics. A similar observation is that in a large number of cases the topic of the particle host is a frame setting topic (cf. Jacobs 2001). In other words, we observe that PI-capable particles may not only follow after aboutness topics, but also other types of topics identified in the literature, such as contrastive and frame setting topics. Intuitively, out of these three types of topic, only aboutness topic can be seen to be involved in topic change. On the other hand, contrastive topics in the initial position seem to strongly correlate with topic continuity. What the data clearly indicates is that particles in PI-position identify the initial-field constituent as topic. This has been noticed before for *aber* (Sæbø 2003), however without differentiating between the three types of topic we consider. The distinction has not been made in Breindl (2008) either, where an analysis of PI-capable particles in terms of association with topic is proposed, in analogy to focus particles that associate with a focused constituent. However, the lack of a distinction between different types of topic that the PI-particle may associate with, renders a rather simplified picture when it comes to the difference between focus particles and "topic particles". In fact, some focus particles can also occupy the PI position, like (6), where the first constituent is a contrastive topic carrying a focal accent. On the other hand, alleged "topic particles" like *nämlich* may also associate with a contrastively accented constituent, thus being associated with a prosodically focal element.

- (6) Der Plan war gut. EINE FRAGE **nur** blieb offen: Wer sollte das alles machen?
'The plan was good. One question only remained open: Who was supposed to do all this?'

In the talk we will present more initial results concerning the distribution of particles with respect to these different types of topic and the possible correlations between topic type, semantic class and discourse function of the PI-capable particle.

References: Breindl, E. 2008. Die Brigitte nun kann der Hans nicht ausstehen. Gebundene Topiks im Deutschen. *Deutsche Sprache* 36, 27–49. • Jacobs, J. 2001. The dimensions of Topic-Comment. *Linguistics* 39, 641–681. • Pasch, R., U. Braue, E. Breindl and U. H. Waßner 2003. *Handbuch der deutschen Konnektoren*. Berlin: de Gruyter • Sæbø, K. J. 2003. Presupposition and contrast: German *aber* as a topic particle. In: Weisgerber (Hg.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 7, 257–271.