

is selected that will undergo subsequent structure-building operations (Chomsky 1995).¹¹

Linear order as a syntactic property constitutes a more integral part of the faculty of language—undeniably, it seems to me.

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¹¹ Once again, the two nominal paths A TO B and A FROM B have the same semantics, owing to the semantic identity of the respective ‘‘conceptual wholes’’ they are associated with (i.e., FROM A TO B and A FROM B TO); see section 2.

ABOUT OBJECT *ES* IN THE GERMAN

VORFELD

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1 The Standard View(s)

This squib is intended to show that the ban on object *es* in the first position of a German clause cannot be upheld. It will be shown that if certain criteria on the clausemates are met (the nature of the subject and potential adjunct material), an unstressed object *es* in the German *Vorfeld* (sometimes translated ‘prefield’) is, or at least may be, fully grammatical.¹

Since the influential work by Lisa Travis (1984), linguists working on German(ic) clause structure are divided into two groups. Travis distinguished between subject-initial clauses and non-subject-initial clauses and pointed out the difference. This difference seemed so important that these days researchers speak of the so-called symmetric

¹ It should be pointed out that *es*—independently of its grammatical status ((referential) subject, object, expletive) is an obligatorily weak pronoun; that is, it must never bear stress.

and asymmetric approaches. Advocates of the symmetric approach make no structural distinction between subject-initial sentences and clauses in which the prefield position is occupied by some other constituent. That is to say, for those grammarians (among them Den Besten (1983), Schwartz and Vikner (1996)), all German(ic) verb-second clauses are CPs. On the other hand, advocates of the asymmetric approach argue that subject-initial clauses are IPs, like regular English clauses, whereas all other clauses display an additional CP layer and are therefore CPs (mainly Travis (1984) and most antisymmetry proponents such as Zwart (1997)).

Travis's initial arguments making the symmetric/asymmetric distinction will not all be repeated here. Her main evidence, though, is the distributional restriction on the German neuter pronoun *es*. *Es* is inherently unstressed; that is, it leaves the lexicon with the specification of a phonologically weak element. Travis's observation—which will be refuted in this squib—is that Spec,CP can easily host a subject or quasi-subject *es*, but not an object one. Thus, the answer to *Wo ist das Geld?* 'Where is the money?' can have *es* in subject position, referring to the neuter *das Geld* (1). A quasi-subject or placeholder *es*, associated with a possibly 'extraposed' CP, is also fine (2). However, topicalization or any other movement option that raises the object *es* across a subject as in (3) is strongly ungrammatical.

- (1) *Es liegt auf dem Tisch.*
it lies on the table
'It is lying on the table.'
- (2) *Es ist noch nicht raus, wo es zur Zeit ist.*
it is yet not out where it at.the time is
'It is not clear yet where it is right now.'
- (3) **Es hat Bernd auf den Tisch gelegt.*
it has Bernd on the table put
'Bernd (has) put it on the table.'

This interesting observation has posed a real challenge, and even hardcore proponents of the symmetric approach have acknowledged the superiority of the Travis/Zwart analysis with respect to these data. Other linguists have tried to formulate a hybrid approach to circumvent the difficulties; for example, Haider (1988) has proposed a theory of matching projections. Researchers like Frey (2004) and Mohr (2005) make use of the split-CP idea, which no longer restricts one to a single available position (i.e., Spec,CP) immediately preceding the finite verb. This last approach, however, brings with it many new problems that the other proposals do not face.

The data in (1)–(3) have generally been viewed as solid facts. As far as I am aware, only three works have tried to weaken the firm recognition of a ban on object *es* in Spec,CP. Since Lenerz 1994, one famous sentence has repeatedly been cited in various works. The mini-discourse is an attested example from the German newspaper *Die Woche* (March 18, 1993, p. 15).

- (4) Ihr Geld ist nicht weg, meine Damen und Herren.
 your money is not away my ladies and gentlemen
 Es haben jetzt nur andere.
 it have now only others
 ‘Your money hasn’t disappeared, ladies and gentlemen. It
 belongs to others now.’

As will be shown, (4) comes structurally close to the construction that allows unstressed *es* in the prefield. Nevertheless, it does not sound completely fine and most German native speakers feel a small degree of reluctance about it, preferring a version in which the potentially stressable pronoun *das* is substituted for *es*. Data similar to those presented here can also be found in Haider 2005:12. Haider cites (4) and some close examples (he also gives a possible interpretation of the facts). The third attempt to attest object-*es*-initial clauses is Gärtner and Steinbach 2003. The authors’ examples, however, come mostly from dialectal sources and therefore cannot be regarded as a valid refutation of the facts presented in (1)–(3). Their data and interpretation are nonetheless interesting and have some impact on a final comprehensive analysis also of Standard German with respect to topic drop and the positioning of reduced pronouns in general.

2 The Subject Is Decisive

Despite the consensus that an accusative *es* in the German prefield is illicit and triggers ungrammaticality, one can find clear counterexamples. The observation presented here is this: an unstressed object *es* is grammatical if the coargumental subject occupies a relatively low (subject) position. (5), which is perfectly appropriate and grammatical, illustrates the crucial restriction.

- (5) (Gestern bin ich erstmals ohnmächtig
 yesterday am I for.the.first.time unconscious
 geworden.) Es hat zum Glück niemand
 become it has to.the luck nobody
 mitgekriegt.
 realized
 ‘(Yesterday I fainted for the first time.) (Though) luckily,
 nobody realized it.’

Such cases are the clearest examples. Their grammaticality is indisputable. A look at corpora reveals that most instances of prefield object *es* are of this type. In these examples, the *es* does not refer to a previously mentioned entity, but to the content of the whole proposition of the previous utterance. One might therefore doubt the referential status of the *es* and possibly argue that it is a base-generated placeholder expletive, much as in constructions like (6a–b). This is probably also the intent of Wurmbrand’s comment mentioned by Gärtner and Steinbach (2003:470, fn. 24). In these constructions, the *es* just fulfills a formal requirement of German clause structure, namely, the obligatory presence of an element in Spec,CP. In the corresponding subordinate

clauses, or if some other element can occupy the sentence-initial position, *es* disappears (7).

- (6) a. Es hat niemand gearbeitet.
 it has nobody worked
 ‘There was no one working.’
 b. Es kommt jemand.
 it comes somebody
 ‘There is somebody coming.’
- (7) a. . . . weil (*es) niemand gearbeitet hat.
 because (*it) nobody worked has
 b. Da kommt (*es) jemand.
 there comes (*it) somebody

Not so for (5). There, *es* is indispensable. The verb is obligatorily transitive, requiring the presence of an accusative object.² One cannot interpret the sentence-initial *es* as anything other than the object of *mitkriegen*. In sentences transformed along the patterns in (6) and (7), the pronoun has to appear obligatorily, as shown in (8) and (9).

- (8) Ich bin aber froh, dass *(es) niemand mitgekriegt
 I am PRT = ‘but’ happy that *(it) nobody realized
 hat.
 has
 ‘So I am pretty happy that nobody realized it.’
- (9) Zum Glück hat *(es) niemand mitgekriegt.
 to.the luck has *(it) nobody realized
 ‘Luckily, nobody realized it.’

Obviously referential uses are slightly harder to find or to construe, but they definitely exist. Even animate and human reference is possible.³

² A reviewer makes the interesting observation that examples like (5) could be considered cases of ‘illusion of grammaticality.’ Fanselow and Frisch (2006) list a number of structures in which a locally ambiguous string temporarily allows an analysis under which the sentence in question would be all right, but is then ruled out by later material in the clause. For examples akin to (5) or (21), something similar might apply since the initial *es* could be interpreted as an expletive associated with an extraposed object clause.

- (i) Es hat zum Glück niemand mitgekriegt, dass es regnet.
 it has to.the luck nobody realized that it rains
 ‘Luckily, nobody realized that it was raining.’

This idea seems reasonable. However, it does not explain the acceptability of (5) (i.e., (i) without the *dass*-clause) satisfactorily either. In future research, these options should be considered.

³ One of the reviewers remarks that the judgments are not as clear-cut as presented here. I agree that there is a slight degradation in grammaticality from (5) to (10)–(13). Maybe a device of comparison such as Featherston’s (2005) Decathlon Model could help to clarify things here. Indeed, a propositional object *es* is obviously easier to place in Spec,CP than a [+human] one. However, data like (10) are crucial and their grammaticality can hardly be challenged. This is in fact the reviewer’s intuition too, which is, furthermore, shared by all my informants.

- (10) (Wo kommt das Buch her?) Es muss doch jemand
 where comes the book from it must PRT someone
 dahin gelegt haben.
 there put have
 '(Where did this book come from?) Someone must have put
 it there.'
- (11) (Warum habt ihr das Huhn immer noch?) Es konnte
 why have you the chicken always still it could
 einfach niemand hier schlachten.
 simply nobody here slaughter
 '(How come you still have the chicken?) Well, nobody here
 was able to kill it.'
- (12) (Dass das Kind nicht mitkam, war gut so.) Es wollte
 that the child not with.came was good so it wanted
 sowieso keiner dabei haben.
 PRT no.one therewith have
 '(Good that the child did not come along!) Nobody wanted
 it there anyway.'

It is a fact that object-*es*-initial sentences sound more acceptable if the subject is indefinite unspecific. However, one can construct examples in which definite expressions seem possible.

- (13) Es könnte vielleicht noch der Papst verhindern, aber . . .
 it could perhaps still the pope prevent but
 'At most the pope could possibly prevent it, however . . .'

Thus, the crucial point seems to be that the subject is in a low position. It is commonly acknowledged that this position is easily available to weakly quantified, existential expressions. Some elements like indefinite *wer, was* (literally 'who' and 'what', but semantically unstressed 'some') and reduced *einer, eine* (also 'some') are even completely restricted to this position. Under the right conditions, however, this local spot can also host novel definites, narrowly focused strong quantifiers, and similar expressions. I will be as neutral as possible regarding the relevant positions. In a theory assuming some version of Diesing's Mapping Hypothesis (Diesing 1992, Meinunger 2000), the sentence-initial object-*es*-licensing subjects are assumed to occupy Spec,VP; that is, they are analyzed as being VP internal. Under an analysis like Frey's (2004), subjects that disallow sentence-initial object *es* would move into a special Topic position. Under analyses like those of Haider (1993) and Fanselow (2001), who argue for base generation of most "focus projective" middle-field orders and hence do not (generously) assume argument scrambling or the existence of two systematically related subject (and object) positions inside and outside the verbal phrase, different positions nevertheless have to be assumed for subjects: one closer and one less close to the verbal head of the clause. In any case, only the lower position licenses sentence-initial object *es*.

3 About the Rest of the Clause

The decisive point is the low position of the coargumental subject: only if the subject is VP internal can Spec,CP host an object *es*. Attested and constructed examples show that the presence of certain adverbials facilitates the construction of grammatical clauses. It helps to a great extent to insert adverbials to the left of the subject. Such a device disambiguates the given construction. Without the adverbial, the position of the subject is not sufficiently determined; with it, the position is fixed. To a certain degree, even temporal adverbials have an effect. This is the case in the frequently cited example (4). The best candidates, however, are speaker-oriented or sentence adverbials like *glücklicherweise*, *zum Glück* ‘luckily’, and *leider* ‘unfortunately’ and speech act or discourse particles like *halt*, *ja (doch)*, *jedoch*, and *eh*, which are hard to translate (see, e.g., Doherty 1985). It does not come as a surprise that these elements have quite an effect here. The former class are Frey’s candidates for illustrating the Topic position. They are his indicators that the subject has raised out of the verb phrase. (For the semantic and pragmatic effects, see Frey 2000.) The latter elements, the discourse particles, are implicitly Diesing’s (1992) diagnostic evidence for VP-internal or -external status. I say “implicitly” because Diesing gives a short informal characterization and then uses just the particle *ja doch* throughout her book. Intuitively, it is clear what she has in mind. These expressions are the ones found most often with sentence-initial object *es*. This fact is certainly connected to another observation. These elements are not “*vorfeldfähig*”—that is, they may never occur in Spec,CP ((14) vs. (15)). Thus, they can never be replaced with object *es* ((16) vs. (17)).

- (14) *Ja doch/*Eh/*/?Sowieso/*Aber findet man solche
well/anyway/yet/however finds one such
Beispiele kaum.
examples hardly
One attempt: ‘One hardly finds such examples—anyway.’
- (15) Solche Beispiele findet man ja doch/eh/sowieso/aber kaum.
- (16) Es hat ja doch/eh/sowieso/aber kaum einer bemerkt.
it has well/anyway/yet/however hardly one remarked
‘It was realized by almost no one anyway.’
- (17) *Ja doch/*Eh/*/?Sowieso/*Aber hat es kaum einer bemerkt.

This fact seems to make it easier for the unstressed *es* to get to the initial position despite its not being an ideal candidate. As soon as other material is present, the relevant *es* is less likely to get to Spec,CP. (18) is still grammatical, but for some speakers it seems less preferred than (19) or (20). Thus, there is a slight contrast.

- (18) (?)Es könnte letzte Woche eventuell jemand vergessen
it could last week possibly somebody forgotten
haben.
have
‘Somebody could have forgotten it last week.’

(19) Letzte Woche könnte es eventuell jemand vergessen haben.

(20) Eventuell könnte es letzte Woche jemand vergessen haben.

This contrast is absent with indefinites or Frey's (2000) sentence adverbials.⁴

(21) Es hat (dann doch) jemand entdeckt.
it has (PRT) somebody discovered
'But then, somebody discovered it.'

(22) Jemand hat es (dann doch) entdeckt.

(23) Es hat zum Glück niemand gefunden.
it has to.the luck nobody found
'Luckily, nobody found it.'

(24) Zum Glück hat es niemand gefunden.

These elements that freely interchange with the object *es* share one crucial property with it. They are possible in the local Spec,CP only. Frey concludes from this that such elements are genuinely nontopical (and hence may have moved to Spec,CP only by a process called "formal movement" or "stylistic inversion"; Fanselow 2004, Holmberg 2000). Thus, these expressions cannot acquire topic status; hence, they cannot occupy a topic position in their original clause, nor can they be topicalized to the specifier of a matrix clause.

(25) *Es_i hat Bernd gesagt, dass wohl niemand _____i gesehen hat.
it has Bernd said that PRT nobody seen
has
Supposed to mean: 'Bernd said that probably no one saw it.'

(26) *Niemand(en)_i hat die Helga gesagt, dass der Bernd _____i getroffen hat.
nobody(ACC) has the Helga said that the Bernd
met has
'Nobody is such that Helga said that Bernd met him.'

(27) *Leider_i hat die Helga gesagt, dass der Bernd _____i den Erik getroffen hat.
unfortunately has the Helga said that the Bernd
the Erik met has
Supposed to mean: 'Helga said (that) it was unfortunate that Bernd met Erik.'

Thus, the object *es* shares an important characteristic with inherent indefinites and sentence adverbials—and to some degree with discourse particles. The clue must be contrastiveness. They are all inherently noncontrastive.

⁴ However, some speakers report a contrast between the *es*-initial sentences and the corresponding examples with the object pronoun following the finite verb; these speakers favor the latter, much like the contrast between (18) and (19)/(20). Still, (21) and (23) seem grammatical (see also footnote 2).

Another observation is that whereas the subject must not be topical and necessarily has to occupy a low position, these properties do not carry over to other arguments or to adjuncts.

- (28) A: Woher weißt du das?
 wherefrom know you that
 ‘How do you know?’
 B: Es hat *mir* halt jemand gesagt.
 it has me PRT somebody said
 ‘Well, somebody told me.’

This pattern is strongly reminiscent of a side discovery by Frey (2000), which he did not elaborate on in any way. Frey’s observation was this. German presentative topicless clauses (are assumed to) begin with an empty *es*, and the actual nominative subject (if any) appears at some deeper position in the clause, presumably below the sentence adverbial. See the expletive construction in (29), for example.

- (29) Es spielt (erfreulicherweise) E. L. (*erfreulicherweise)
 it plays (fortunately) E. L. (*fortunately)
 die ganze Nacht hindurch.
 the whole night through
 ‘Fortunately, E. L. will play all night long.’

In these constructions, then, subjects are not allowed in a Topic position. In other words, they can occupy the low (VP-internal) position only. Other elements of the clause are not restricted in such a way. Objects and certain adjuncts may appear in the slot between the finite verb and the sentence adverbial.

- (30) Es spielt für sie (erfreulicherweise) E. L. die ganze
 it plays for them (fortunately) E. L. the whole
 Nacht hindurch.
 night through
 ‘Fortunately, E. L. will be playing all night long for them.’

Thus, expletive-*es*-initial clauses need not necessarily bethetic; that is, they may possibly contain topical material. It is only the subject that is excluded from a higher middle-field position. In some sense, the expletive acts as a selective blocker for topical subjects only, being blind to any other material. In this respect, it behaves exactly parallel to the sentence-initial object *es* in (28). What the correct relation is—indeed, whether there is one at all—remains to be clarified.

It will also be of interest to compare the German findings presented here with the facts in the neighboring languages Dutch and West Flemish. Dutch is claimed to be strictly subject-before-object in the middle field (for an overview, see any traditional grammar book or Zwart 1997). Thus, the Dutch counterparts to the grammatical German sentences with the pattern in (5) are expected to be ungrammatical.

- (31) *Het heeft echter gelukkig niemand gemerkt.
 it has however luckily nobody realized
 (Compare with (5): ‘(Though) luckily, nobody realized it.’)

- (32) *Maar het heeft gelukkig niemand gemerkt.
 but it has luckily nobody realized

As (31) and (32) show, this seems to be true. Further investigation into native speakers' intuitions should be conducted, especially for West Flemish, which is much closer to Dutch with respect to pronoun placement, but which behaves more like German when it comes to possible pronominal object fronting before the subject. In West Flemish, then, a direct unstressed (i.e., weak) object pronoun may precede a full-fledged subject DP. This prerequisite, however, is not sufficient to make the pronoun a good prefield filler. The crucial property has been argued here to be the subject position.

The claim about object *es* can of course be carried over to unstressed pronouns in the prefield more generally. Accusative *sie* 'her, them' and *ihn* 'him' can be found in Spec,CP; this has never been disputed. The present contribution implies that both types—the stressed (strong) variants and the unstressed (weak) ones—are possible in sentence-initial position, *es* being inherently unstressed. The anaphoric pronoun *sich*, which, at least in combination with reflexive verbs, can be argued to be obligatorily weak as well, remains challenging. Although the prefield has been shown here to host unstressed object pronouns, *sich* seems to remain prefield-phobic. However, some speakers find examples like (33) marginally possible.

- (33) ?Also: sich darf nur eintragen, wer beim letzten Mal
 well himself may only list who by.the last time
 noch nicht dabei war.
 yet not there was
 'So: only those may register who were not there last time.'

The correct derivation of unstressed object *es* in sentence-initial position has yet to be given. First steps are taken in Frey 2006. However, the general grammaticality of the phenomenon can no longer be neglected, and it therefore cannot be declared marginal and hence ignorable, let alone ungrammatical.

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ON FEATURE INHERITANCE: AN
ARGUMENT FROM THE PHASE
IMPENETRABILITY CONDITION

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This squib is organized as follows: the first part (section 1) identifies a potential conceptual flaw in the feature inheritance model of phase theory proposed in Chomsky 2005; the second part (sections 2–4) suggests a revision that removes this flaw.

1 Feature Inheritance, (Non)phase Heads, and the Strong Minimalist Thesis

Chomsky (2005; henceforth OP)¹ proposes a reinterpretation of the relation between the functional heads C and T: the Agree (ϕ -) and Tense features associated with the inflectional system are not an inherent property of T; instead, they belong to the phase head C. Traditional subject agreement and EPP (Extended Projection Principle) effects associated with T (A-movement of the formal subject to Spec,T, expletives, etc.) then arise via a mechanism of *feature inheritance*, whereby uninterpretable features are passed down from the phase head to its complement. It follows that T lacks uninterpretable features unless it is selected by C. That is, T is no longer a probe in its own right; it cannot initiate operations directly or independently of C.

Clearly, in this way, feature inheritance captures the long-standing observation that raising/ECM (exceptional Case marking)-infinitival T, which lacks C, also lacks ϕ -features (failing to value Case on DP) and independent tense (see MI:102, 105, BEA:13, OP:9). However, where the previous system had to stipulate this connection by means of a selectional restriction (C selects ϕ -complete T; V selects ϕ -defective T), the feature inheritance model offers an arguably more explanatory account of T's featural dependence on C: the features are simply C's, not T's. This, in turn, allows a uniform characterization of phase heads (C, v^*) as the locus of uninterpretable features, as is desirable on computational grounds (see section 2).

Nevertheless, there is a major hurdle to be overcome before feature inheritance can be accepted as a principled property of the language system. Whereas T now clearly needs C in order to function at

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¹ For convenience, the following abbreviations are used throughout: MI = Chomsky 2000, DbP = Chomsky 2001, BEA = Chomsky 2004 (pages cited from the ms. version, 2001), OP = Chomsky 2005.