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The prosody, syntax and discourse function of V>2 in spoken German

German is a V2 language, apart from a small number of exceptions that lead to a superficial later positioning of the finite verb (V>2), which are, nevertheless, considered compatible with its underlying V2 property. In more recent literature, however, a number of V>2 orders have been identified that are not easily reconcilable with a V2 syntax, such as inversionless V2 clauses preceded by a 'central' adverbial, that is an adverbial that modifies the proposition of the associate clause and that would normally cause inversion. Such Adv–S–V_{fin} orders were first described for multi-ethnolectal urban varieties known as Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2012, 2013; Wiese/Rehbein 2016; Wiese/Öncü/Bracker 2017; Wiese/Müller 2018; Wiese et al. 2020) but have since been observed in the spoken interaction of monolingual speakers of German as well (Schalowski 2015; Wiese/Müller 2018; Wiese et al. 2020). In the Kiezdeutsch data, there seems to be a tendency for the initial adverbial to be a temporal modifier and for the subject to be an unstressed pronoun.

The present article presents a first, explorative study of the prosody and syntax of these patterns in speech data drawn from public radio interviews where Standard German was being used. In the twenty-five tokens collected for the present study, sixteen have a non-clausal adverbial in initial position (mostly locative PPs, cf. (1)) and nine have an adverbial clause (mostly conditional clauses, cf. (2)).

(1)   [Auch in Afrika], [die meisten Menschen] sprechen Englisch.
       'In Africa, too, most people speak English.'
       (Deutschlandfunk, Thekla Jahn interviewing Prof. Plikat in "Campus und Karriere", 04/04/2019)

(2)   [Wenn er Dinge macht, mit denen sie nicht übereinstimmen], [sie] <u>werden</u> ihn nie wieder los.
       'If he does things they do not agree with, they will never get rid of him again.'
       (Gregor Gysi (Die Linke), 03/11/2018)

Perceptually, the left-peripheral adverbial constituents are prosodically separated from the rest of the clause, unlike the equivalent adverbials in the corresponding V2 orders, which are prosodically fully integrated in the associate clause. The prosodic boundary can be marked in different ways, such as by a pause (which can be very short), a high boundary tone, a reset of the intonation curve after the initial constituent, an upstep, or by pre-boundary lengthening as in (1), cf. Figure 1. The initial constituent also bears at least one pitch accent.
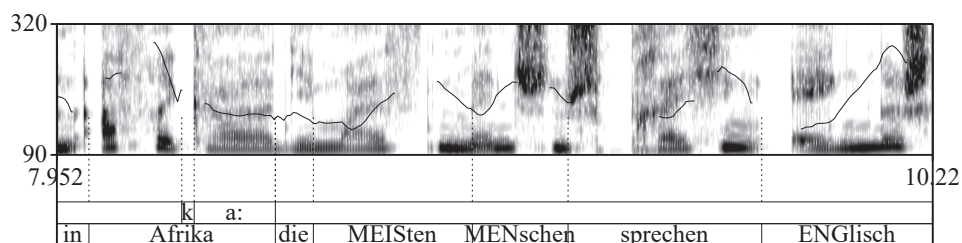

Fig. 1:   Pre-boundary lengthening and fast progression at intonational boundary in (1)

Furthermore, the prosody indicates a clear intention to continue speaking, ruling out an analysis in terms of disfluency or a lack of utterance planning.

As far as the syntactic analysis is concerned, the data collected for the present study suggest that the initial central adverbial functions as a framesetter that is situated outside the V2 clause proper (cf. also Wiese/Öncü/Bracker 2017; Haegeman/Greco 2018; Wiese et al. 2020). Recently, a number of cartographic analyses have been proposed for the clausal left periphery in (historical) German (e. g. Frascarelli/Hinterhölzl 2007 (3); Speyer 2008; Petrova 2012; Walkden 2017) with the aim of distinguishing different types of information-structural interpretations as well as of providing an analysis of multiple XP fronting in Early New High German (Speyer 2008 (4)), Middle Low German (Petrova 2012) and Kiezdeutsch (Walkden 2017). Walkden only assumes two separate CP projections, one conflating the higher functional projections in (3) and (4), i. e. ForceP, (SceneP,) ShiftP, ContrP, and FocP, and one conflating the lower ones, i. e. FamP and FinP (5).

(3)   ForceP > ShiftP > ContrP > FocP > FamP* > FinP > IP
       (Frascarelli/Hinterhölzl 2007)

(4)   ForceP > SceneP > FocP > TopP > FinP > IP
       (Speyer 2008)

(5) CP_2 > CP_1 > IP
       (Walkden 2017)

Walkden further stipulates that one XP at most may reach the left periphery by movement from within the clause and that a second one, then, may only be merged directly. Under this analysis, framesetting adverbs are merged directly in $SpecCP_2$, allowing subjects to reach $SpecCP_1$ by movement. Problematically, for the data analysed in the current paper, this requires the subject to be either a familiar topic (typically a pronoun) or an expletive or impersonal pronoun (which, under a more fine-grained analysis, would occupy SpecFinP). The availability of full DP subjects, often contrastive or shifting topics, some of them internally complex (e. g. *sechzig Prozent der Meldungen* 'sixty percent of the reports' or *die ersten Impftermine in den Impfzentren* 'the first vaccination appointments in the vaccination centres') rules out such an analysis. Furthermore, despite their 'central' interpretation, the initial adverbials can also be shown not to serve as focus (6), which would make them typical FocP or CP_2 elements, and do not allow reconstruction into the associate clause.

(6)   Q: Wo sprechen die meisten Menschen Englisch?
              where speak the most people English
       V2:   In Afrika sprechen die meisten Menschen Englisch.
              in Africa speak the most people English
       V3:   #In Afrika die meisten Menschen sprechen Englisch.
              in Africa the most people speak English
              'Where do most people speak English? In Africa, most people speak English.'

Given these observations, as well as the prosodic independence of the initial constituent, a split-CP analysis is therefore rejected. Instead, the current paper proposes that the initial adverbial phrase is merged outside the left periphery of the associate clause, following Haegeman/Greco's (2018) analysis of similar constructions in West Flemish.

Finally, the paper argues that the lack of inversion after the initial adverbial constituent, together with a continuative prosody, is used to support the realisation of a specific discourse function of the initial adjunct. The left-peripheral adverbial serves to anchor the following proposition, either contrasting it with another proposition available in the discourse or adding to it. The context of (1), for instance, shows that *in Afrika* resumes the framesetter introduced by the interlocutor and anchors the following proposition, which expresses a contrast to the previous proposition.

(7) Jochen Plikat: Aber, denken Sie beispielsweise an Afrika, da ist Französisch eine sehr wichtige Verkehrssprache …
'But, think for instance about Africa: French is a very important lingua franca there…'

Thekla Jahn: Hm, okay, aber dennoch: auch in Afrika, die meisten Menschen sprechen Englisch – welchen Mehrwert bringt es denn da, eine andere Fremdsprache außer Englisch zu sprechen?
'Hm, OK, but still: in Africa, too, most people speak English – what would be the added value of speaking another foreign language apart from English?'

In other cases, the adverbial itself expresses the contrast, in addition to its anchoring function. In all cases, the prosodic encoding seems to serve as a floor-holding device signalling the intention of the speaker to keep their turn.

The present explorative study raises a number of questions for further research, particularly whether Adv–S–V_{fin} orders with central adverbials in spoken Standard German are an older pattern that – being restricted to spoken language – has stayed under the radar so far or whether this is a new development.

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