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The homogeneity of root phenomena:
Modal particles in relative clauses

The article covers the question as to how homogeneous so-called *root phenomena*, or *root contexts*, are. A *root phenomenon* is a phenomenon which is typical for certain subordinate clauses (cf. e. g. Emonds 1969; Hooper/Thompson 1973; Haegeman 2006a/b). These sub-clauses (and main clauses) are then the *root contexts*. The classical root phenomenon in German is the verb-second word order. The finite verb is (canonically) positioned in second position in a main clause while it is in final position in a subordinate clause (cf. (1a) vs. (1b)).

(1a) [Er] **mag** die Nordsee.
      [*He*] *likes the North Sea*
      'He likes the North Sea.'
(1b) ... dass er die Nordsee   **mag**.
      ... that he the North Sea likes
      '... that he likes the North Sea.'

The domain of verb-second order is generally the main clause. Therefore, the main clause is a *root context*.

In an object clause such as (2), verb-second order is not possible. Therefore, this subordinate clause is a *non-root context*.

(2)   *Maria ignoriert, [er] **mag** die Nordsee.
       Mary   ignores, [he] likes the North Sea

In certain subordinate clauses, such as the object clause in (3), verb-second order is possible, however. That is why this subordinate clause is a *root context*.

(3)   Maria sagt, [er] **mag** die Nordsee.
       Mary says [he] likes the North Sea
       'Mary says he likes the North Sea.'

The literature on the topic usually includes lists of root phenomena and root contexts. For example, VP fronting, topicalisation, left dislocation and directional adverb fronting (so-called *structural* root phenomena) are identified as root phenomena, as are question tags, speech act adverbials and interjections (so-called *lexical* root phenomena).[1]

(4) gives an example of left dislocation, which is certainly possible in a main clause but which can also occur in an argument clause (cf. (5a) vs. (5b)). (5b) is thus a root context.

(4)   This book, it has all the recipes in it.

(5a)   *It's ***strange that*** [**this book**]$_1$, **it**$_1$ has all the recipes in it.
(5b)   Carl ***told me that*** [**this book**]$_1$, **it**$_1$ has the recipes in it.
       (Hooper/Thompson 1973, pp. 479, 474)

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[1]   For an overview of root phenomena and root contexts, see Müller (2019, section 7.1). Cf. also Heycock (2006, 2017).

The question regarding the homogeneity of root phenomena or root contexts arises from two perspectives. Firstly, when lists like the one above are complied, they usually do not specify whether **all** subtypes of the phenomena behave in the same way within a root context. Secondly, in a more global sense, it is unclear whether a context which is a root context for one phenomenon is also a root context for another phenomenon. It is also difficult to compare root contexts across languages. As (at least subliminally) functional aspects are made responsible, there should not be differences. It becomes even more problematic when differences of this kind are noticed within languages (cf. Green 1976; Shannon 1982).

The concrete case of root phenomena this article is concerned with is the occurrence of modal particles in relative clauses. *Ja*, *denn* and *doch*, for example, belong to the class of modal particles whose members are attributed a number of typical properties (such as unaccentedness, non-truth conditionality, restrictedness to the middle field). (For an overview see, e. g., Diewald 2007; Thurmair 2013, pp. 628–630; Müller 2014, chapter 2).

(6a) Der Wuppertaler Bahnhof ist **ja** für sechs Wochen gesperrt.[2]
The Wuppertal station is MP *for six weeks closed*
'As you know, Wuppertal station will be closed for six weeks.'

(6b) Wie lange braucht der Bus **denn** ab Düsseldorf?
How long takes the bus MP *from Düsseldorf*
'But how long does the bus take from Düsseldorf then?'

(6c) Fahr **doch** über Solingen! Das geht schneller.
Go MP *via Solingen This goes faster*
'Why don't you go via Solingen! That's faster.'
(Müller 2017, p. 383)

Various (recent) publications consider modal particles to be root phenomena (see, e.g., Coniglio 2011; Abraham 2012; Jacobs 2018; Rapp 2018). This assumption is based on data contrasts such as (7) to (9).

(7) Mutter war **ja** einkaufen.
Mum was MP *shopping*
'As you know, mum was shopping.'

(8) *Er las vormittags, ***während*** Mutter **ja** einkaufen war.
He read in the mornings while mum MP *shopping was*

(9) Er faulenzte, ***während*** SIE **ja**/**wohl** arbeitete.
He idled whereas she MP/MP *worked*
'He was doing nothing while she was (probably) working (as you know).'
(Abraham 2012, p. 78) (translated by S.T.)

In spite of the fact that there are certain restrictions concerning sentence types, modal particles can occur in main clauses, as (7) shows. However, they are excluded from temporal clauses (cf. (8)) whereas their occurrence in adversative clauses (as in (9)) is totally acceptable. Relative clauses as a root phenomenon are also discussed in Hooper/Thompson (1973) and Green (1976) and have also been examined in the discussion of verb-second order in German (cf. Gärtner 2001; Antomo 2015).

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[2] Note that this is only a very rough translation as precisely expressing the contribution of modal particles in another language is very hard, if not impossible.

In the small number of works dealing with relative clauses as root phenomena, different classifications have been proposed. One approach states, for example, that restrictive relative clauses are a non-root context (and, therefore, do not allow root phenomena) whereas appositive relative clauses are a root context (and, therefore, do allow root phenomena). This is the traditional assumption made in many descriptive pieces of work on either modal particles or subordinate clauses (e. g. Becker 1978, p. 3; Zifonun/Hoffman/Strecker 1997, p. 2007; Holler 2005, p. 30). In (10), for example, the proper noun *Peter* precedes an appositive relative clause, which can host the modal particle. The indefinite expression *the ones* precedes a restrictive relative clause in (11), however. Here, the occurrence of either of the two particles is considered unacceptable by Holler (2005).

(10) ***Peter***, <u>der **ja** sonst immer zu spät kommt</u>, kam dieses Mal überraschenderweise
Peter who MP *else always too late comes came this time surprisingly*
pünktlich.
punctually
'Peter, who, as you know, is normally too late, was surprisingly puctual this time.'
(Dahl 1988, p. 135)

(11) ***Diejenigen***, <u>die **(*ja/*doch)** politisch interessiert sind</u>, gehen auch zur Wahl.
the ones who MP *politically interested are go also to the election*
(Holler 2005, p. 30) (translated by S.T.)

This article aims at contributing to answering the following two questions:

1) Which definition of relative clauses as a root context is appropriate?

2) To what extent does the class of modal particles behave homogeneously?

It discusses three theses from the literature:

1) The restrictive relative clause is a non-root context and the appositive relative clause is a root context. (See Becker 1978; Zifonun/Hoffman/Strecker 1997; Holler 2005 and theoretical works by Coniglio 2011; Abraham 2012).

2) The definite restrictive relative clause is a non-root context and the appositive relative clause & indefinite restrictive relative clause are a root context (Hooper/Thompson 1973).

3) The appositive relative clause, definite restrictive relative clause & indefinite unspecific restrictive relative clause are a non-root context and the indefinite specific restrictive relative clause is a root context (Gärtner 2001; Antomo 2015).

The theses as well as the illustrative examples used in the pieces of works mentioned in 1) to 3) are presented and verified on the basis of corpus data from *DECOW2016-NANO* (cf. Schäfer/Bildhauer 2012). The corpus study is evaluated using an inferential statistical analysis.

In all three cases, the main point is that there are counterexamples. This assumption has been made in other works, too, and in many cases it is not difficult to come up with such examples. One of the main aims of my research, however, is to draw conclusions based on corpus data. My corpus study revealed that neither the differentiation between restrictive vs. appositive relative clauses nor the more fine-grained distinction between restrictive indefinite vs. restrictive definite relative clauses nor the dichotomy of specific vs. unspecific within the indefinite restrictive relative clauses applies comprehensively to all eight

modal particles examined in this article (*wohl*, *ja*, *eh*, *halt*, *eben*, *einfach*, *schlicht*, *sowieso*). In fact, it becomes obvious that a finer differentiation is necessary as there are clear differences within the class of modal particles. Consequently, the class of modal particles does not behave very homogeneously: some particles follow the given patterns while others show a balanced distribution or even an inverse relationship regarding the frequency of their occurrence.

The task which arises from this study is to determine why the different modal particles have different preferences for specific contexts. To answer this question, a more fine-grained analysis of the data is necessary for each modal particle, building on the very important preliminary work carried out so far.

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