

The syntactic and communicative functions of extraposition in German writing *from below* in Latin America

A linguistic means of emphasising syntactic functions by moving them from the middle field (MF) to the narrow postfield (NF) (e. g. *wenn wir nicht ein Pferd können schücken für mein Bruder Johann*, Hamburgerberg/1870), extraposition is a syntactic process that emerged as bracketing structures underwent complete grammaticalisation at the beginning of Modern High German (17th/18th century) (cf. Elspaß 2010; von Polenz 1994). Although 19th century (school) grammars prescribed the use of sentence brackets and, at the same time, stigmatised extraposition, the latter was commonly used in everyday language (cf. Elspaß 2005). It can therefore be assumed that extraposition was present in the linguistic repertoire of German-speaking emigrants to Argentina and Brazil in the 19th century. Prediger (2023) found an extraposition rate of 7.3% in the conceptually oral written testimonies of these minorities. With a share of 9.1%, extraposition is 40% more frequent in Brazil than in Argentina (5.5%).

Since the immigrant minorities, especially the Volga Germans and Hunsrückers, rarely came into contact with Standard written German in the 19th century, it is conceivable that extraposition was not limited to the usual syntactic functions (prepositional objects and adverbials) in the NF. Extraposed functions that are marked in Standard German (e. g. case complements) or those which are only extraposed under special conditions (e. g. (prepositional) attributes) could also be affected. In order to investigate the precise distribution of extraposed components, the *Tat-Pot* analysis (based on Engel 1970) was applied in which the syntactic functions in actual extrapositions were analysed in relation to the same functions in potential extrapositions in the MF. In addition, a multiple linear regression (MLR) test was used to help clarify which linguistic and sociolinguistic variables predicted extraposition. Finally, potential syntactic-communicative correlations were analysed.

The components and functions of the right sentence bracket and the NF are particularly relevant in an analysis of extraposition. The following elements are treated as right bracket elements: the verbal complex (possibly non-finite verb and finite verb / possibly finite verb, non-finite verb and modal verb), all conceivable combinations of non-finite auxiliary, modal or full verbs, separable verb particles, parts of an object incorporation or a functional verb structure, the predicative (in the form of adjectives, noun phrases, prepositional phrases and adverbs) and the *zu*-infinitive (cf. Altmann/Hofmann 2008; Thurmair 1991; Wöllstein 2010). A distinction is therefore made between different brackets: the verb-last (or subordinate clause) bracket, the verbal bracket, the particle verb bracket, the verbal idiom (or lexical) bracket, the predicative (or copula) bracket and the open bracket. With regard to extraposition elements, a continuum of NF options is assumed for syntactic functions (cf. Altmann/Hofmann 2008; Zifonun 2015): prepositional objects, optional adverbials, obligatory modal and locative adverbials (usually or mostly well possibly in the NF), sentential adverbials, attributes (possibly in the NF under certain conditions), idioms (mostly not in the NF), obligatory directional adverbials, genitive, dative and accusative objects and subjects (only in the NF under special conditions).

The corpus on which the analysis is based consists of 47 letters and 2,297 data points, which were annotated according to syntactic and sociolinguistic variables. When the *Tat-Pot* analysis (cf. Engel 1970) was applied to the syntactic functions, it revealed that less frequent syntactic functions in the MF, such as instrumental, causal, local and final adverbials as well as prepositional objects (prep.-ob.) and prepositional attributes (prep.-att.), are frequently excluded. In contrast, accusative objects (acc.-ob.) and predicatives as well as temporal and modal adverbials seem to be conventionalised in the MF. It is particularly striking that the prep.-att. and prep.-ob. have a similar distribution. A diachronic analysis of excluded prep.-att. indicates phases of increase and decrease, which is consistent with the developmental process of extraposition.

The MLR test of the predictability of the dependent variable *extraposition yes* shows that certain syntactic functions can predict the probability of extraposition occurring best. In the NF, the prep.-att. shows a highly significant positive difference compared to the reference variable of a causal adverbial ($p = 0.0004$). Increasing the prep.-att. variable by 1 unit increases extraposition by approx. 5 units compared to a causal adverbial in the NF. The prep.-ob. is not far behind and also shows a significant difference compared to the reference variable ($p = 0.0007$). Each additional unit of a prep.-att. increases the probability of extraposition by approx. 4 units compared to the reference variable of a causal adverbial. Similarly, the acc.-ob., which is at the lower end of the acceptability continuum for NF placement and is described as a poor candidate for NF placement in standard German, is apparently legitimate and also appears as a factor that increases the probability of extraposition by 3.8 units. The length of the prep.-att. and acc.-ob. – usually up to three words – is not decisive for extraposition compared to the causal adverbial. In addition, the variables region and bracket type cannot predict extraposition.

A closer look at the evidence reveals that the postposed prep.-att. predominantly contain the preposition *von*. In the extraposed examples of *von* in the corpus, the prep.-att. mostly refers to derived nouns, namely to transitive verbs (cf. 1. *Edgar wier haben die Escriuren noch nicht gemacht von dein Tereno* [Neue Kolonien/1930], and 2. *und abrasos (#für Ihn#) sollst du Ihn geben von der ganze Famillie* [Neue Kolonien/1920]), or to derived adjectives (cf. 3. *Die [Mercedes] hatt die verlobung auseinander gemacht mit dem Arno Berg* [Neue Kolonien/1920]). However, the semantic role played is heterogeneous. It is also noticeable that the reference words are mostly nominal nuclei of an acc.-ob.: *Escriuren*, *abrasos* and *Verlobung* or *Schank ohfen*, (cf. 4. *der soll uns zwej Schank ohfen mit bringen von den von den kleinen* [Alte Kolonien I/1850]). Only a few extraposed prep.-att. refer to subjects or dative objects in the MF (cf. 5. *als das schon 2 ais unserem Korpo gestorben von Mude nowo* [name of a city] [Alte Kolonien/1860]).

From an information-structural perspective, the prep.-att. *mit dem Arno Berg* and *von den kleinen* could have a stylistically emphasising or announcing function, according to which the nominal information in the MF is specified in the narrow NF (cf. Petkova-Kessanlis 2015). According to the writer, *Arno Berg* is probably a promising prospective bridegroom for *Mercedes*, which can be interpreted on the basis of the next two lines: *denk mahl / fie so ein mädel wie die ist!* The person *Arno Berg* is probably already known to the recipient but his name appears as a contextually relevant focus of information (cf. Coniglio/Schlachter 2015) as he himself is considered too important for a separation. In the extraposition cf. 4 *von den kleinen*, this is likely to be a contrast focus (cf. Coniglio/Schlachter 2015) as a certain variable is named from a limited choice of alternatives.

Due to the information focus, the extraposition can, therefore, take on a stylistically emphasising function by specifying or announcing information from the MF in the NF or by having an appealing effect (cf. 6. *Ich Hoffe die Wainachtn ein Größers vergnüen zu haben mit Dir; als ich schon gehabt haben mit Dir* [Porto Alegre/1868]). However, as the data are very heterogeneous and extend over a long period of time, the results cannot be generalised. Further research at the micro level is therefore absolutely necessary.

References

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