

The Vorfeld in Kiezdeutsch

Analyses of the Interplay between Syntax and Information Structure

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Even though at first glance German seems to adhere to the constraint ‘exactly one element before the finite verb’, there are also studies pointing to systematic deviations such as multiple frontings (Müller 2005), or the absence of a preverbal constituent (Önnerfors 1997).

In our study, we present analyses of similar phenomena in Kiezdeutsch, a way of speaking that has emerged among adolescents in multiethnic urban neighbourhoods in Germany. Previous studies (Wiese 2009) suggest a relaxation of grammatical constraints that allows a more liberal realisation of information-structural needs.

In Kiezdeutsch, one can observe in addition to the standard-like verb-second (V2) order ((cf. (1)) both declaratives without any constituent in the preverbal domain, as in (2), and sentences displaying more than one constituent in the Vorfeld, as in (3) (capitalisation marks main sentence stress, finite verbs are italicised):

- (1) ich *muss* kurz OHRring rausmachen (Kiezdeutsch Corpus)
I must briefly earring out.take
‘I just have to take out my earring.’
- (2) *schießt* auf dem TOR (Wiese 2009: 800)
shoot-you_{CL} on the goal
‘You shoot at the goal.’
- (3) danach isch *muss* zu mein Väter (Kiezdeutsch Corpus)
afterwards I must to my father
‘Afterwards, I’ve got to go to my father.’

We argue that what seems like random syntactic variation in the left periphery at first glance, turns out to be driven by information-structural factors. Given the importance of the Vorfeld for syntactically marking the topic status of constituents (cf., e.g., Jacobs 2001), the word order patterns in (2) and (3) can be regarded as novel alternatives to fill this position. In (2), the first position remains empty, with the clause still containing all arguments of the verb in the postverbal domain (hence, the constraints observed by Önnerfors 1997 for Standard German do not apply here). This can be interpreted as a lack of topic-comment structure (which seems to be related to subject cliticisation). In contrast, the pattern in (3) allows for an additional constituent in front of the preverbal subject (which, in turn, occupies the default topic position). This leftmost element seems to be restricted to adverbials, which are most appropriately interpreted as frame setters. Hence, V1 correlates with the absence of topic-comment structure, whereas in Adv SVO sequences, a frame setter is preposed.

Based on data from a corpus of approx. 25 hours of self-recordings by adolescents in multiethnic districts of Berlin, we will analyse declarative V1 and Adv SVO constructions in Kiezdeutsch and compare them with the options provided in other varieties of German. We discuss functional motivations for such patterns and their link with information-structural strategies. This will contribute to our understanding of Vorfeld and, from a broader perspective of linguistic architecture, of the interaction between syntax and information structure.

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Önnerfors, Olaf (1997): *Verb-erst-Deklarativsätze. Grammatik und Pragmatik*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell (Lunder germanistische Forschungen 60).

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