German Multiple Fronting in Context

German is classed as a V2 language, that is, normally exactly one constituent occupies the position before the finite verb in declarative main clauses. In what has been assumed to constitute rare, exceptional cases, however, more than one constituent appears to precede the finite verb, as illustrated in (1):

(1) [Dem Saft] [eine kräftigere Farbe] **geben**
     to.the juice a more.vivid colour give
     Blutorangen.
     blood.oranges
     'What gives the juice a more vivid colour is blood oranges.'[1]

Müller (2003, 2005) showed that a large variety of syntactic categories, grammatical functions and semantic classes can occur preverbally in such Multiple Frontings (MFs).

Relying on findings from a corpus of naturally occurring data, we have identified specific environments in which MFs are licensed. In particular, we will show that MFs do not correspond to a single information structural configuration but, in fact, are motivated by different pragmatic considerations. We analyze these different configurations (two of which we briefly sketch below) as a set of related but distinct constructions..

Of particular interest among the contexts in which MFs are licensed are the following two which we refer to as *Presentational MF*, viz. (2b) and *Propositional Assessment MF*, viz. (3b). The (a) and (c) lines provide the context before and after the target sentence, respectively.

(2) a. Spannung pur herrschte auch bei den Trapez-Künstlern. [...] Musikalisch begleitet wurden die einzelnen Nummern vom Orchester des Zirkus Busch [...].
     'It was tension pure with the trapeze artists. [...] Each act was musically accompanied by Circus Busch's own orchestra.'

     b. [Stets] [einen Lacher] [auf ihrer Seite] **hatte** *die*
        always a laugh on their side had the
        Bubi Ernesto Family[i].[2]
        Bubi Ernesto Family
        'Always good for a laugh was the Bubi Ernesto Family.'

     c. *Die Instrumental-Clowns*[i] zeigten ausgefeilte Gags und Sketche [...]
        'These instrumental clowns presented sophisticated jokes and sketches.'

(3) a. Bauern befürchten Einbußen
        'Farmers fear losses'

     b. [Nach Brüssel] [zum Demonstrieren] **ist** Gerd
        to Brussels to demonstrate is G.
        Knecht *nicht* gefahren[3]
        K. not gone
        'G. K. did not go to Brussels for the demo'

     c. aber gut verstehen kann der Vorsitzende des Lampertheimer Bauernverbands die Proteste der Kollegen.
        'but the president of the Lampertheim Farmers' Association can well understand his colleagues' protest.'

We take the function of *Presentational MF* to be a topic shift strategy. A new entity (in italics) is introduced into the discourse and serves as an aboutness Topic in the continuation (= 2c). This entity is the most topic-worthy argument of the verb and is, thus, typically, the grammatical subject. Non-subjects may take on this role in MFs in the case of e. g. unaccusatives/psych verbs which favour spatio-temporal or experiencer Topics (see e. g., Lambrecht, 1994). Since focus and newness are not prototypical Topic features cross-linguistically, new/focal entities often have to be first 'presented' before they can function as aboutness Topics. Interestingly, rather than spelling out a discourse function of the fronted material, the motivating factor here is the need to shift material away from the post-verbal domain (or middlefield) to maximize the presentational effect.

We analyze *Propositional Assessment MF* on the other hand as involving an inverted Topic-Comment structure. The fronted material constitutes (part of) the Comment, while the Topic is instantiated by a discourse-given subject constituent in the middlefield. A stressed evaluative particle (*nicht* 'not') in the middlefield expresses/highlights the degree to which the Comment holds for the Topic. Other such evaluative particles include *nie* 'never', *selten* 'rarely', *oft* 'often' etc.

We discuss these and other types of multiple fronting, highlighting common and divergent properties across the set, and sketch an analysis within Head Driven Phrase Structure Grammar – which lends itself particularly well to the formalization of our findings since it represents different levels of linguistic structure (syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, phonological) in parallel, thus allowing for constraints to be straightforwardly stated among these layers.

Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form. Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Müller, Stefan. 2003. Mehrfache Vorfeldbesetzung. *Deutsche Sprache* 31(1), 29–62, http://www.hpsg.fu-berlin.de/~stefan/Pub/mehr-vf-ds.html, April 28, 2010.

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[1] *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 08/01/1999. Alles Orange: Pomeranzen, Salusianas, Kumquats.

[2] *Mannheimer Morgen*, 03/12/2005. Beim Salto Mortale herrscht Spannung pur.

[3] *Mannheimer Morgen*, 26/02/1999. Umlandseite(n).