

# Reduced Subordinate Clauses in German

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## Abstract

This talk investigates the syntax and information structure of reduced subordinate clauses (RSC) in German from a corpus driven perspective. The main observation is that there are two distinct types of RSCs, provided in (1) and (2).

- (1) Sandy spielt FUSSball, /weil /wenngleich/obgleich /obwohl VOLKSsport.  
Sandy plays soccer because /if-prt /whether-prt /although popular sport
- (2) Sandy spielt FUSSball, /weil /wenngleich/obgleich /wenn /falls nicht TENnis.  
Sandy plays soccer because /if-prt /whether-prt /if /in case not tennis

Both constructions are introduced by a subordinating conjunction, host a second phrasal expression, here a noun phrase, optionally a focus sensitive particle or adverb, but not the finite verb. I will provide evidence that both RSCs are sentential in nature. However, they differ with respect to their syntax, their information structure, licensing, and interpretation.

The set of RSCs in (1) are control structures (CSC) (cf. Fortmann, et al. submitted). We argue that CSCs are CPs where the C head takes a projection of a predicate as its complement. The CP lacks finiteness features, the subject is PRO, which is generally interpreted as coreferential with the controller in the matrix clause. This analysis is supported by the occurrence of clause-level elements and the fact that in many cases CSC can be converted into finite adverbial clauses support this analysis. The set of RSCs in (2) are elliptical subordinate clauses (ESC) in German that are best analyzed as instances of embedded stripping (cf. Konietzko 2016). On the basis of evidence from the German DeReKo-corpus, I will argue against the *no embedding constraint* for stripping (cf. Johnson 2019, Lobeck 1995, Merchant 2003, Wurmbrand 2017) as did Bîlbîie & de la Fuente (2019) for embedded gapping in Spanish. I will show that the attested examples from German share a set of syntactic, semantic and information structural features with main clause stripping that support the analysis of ESCs as embedded stripping.

The focus of the talk targets the question of how the two RSCs differ with respect to their discourse functions. The main hypothesis is that the difference between reduced CSCs and ESCs is that ESCs are instances of contrastive ellipsis (cf. Konietzko & Winkler 2010) and CSCs are topic-continuity constructions. Instances of contrastive ellipsis are typically gapping and main clause stripping (cf. Depiante 2000, Johnson 2019, Merchant 2004, Rooth 1992) where the remnants are contrastively focused. Generally, contrastive ellipses adhere to the *parallelism requirement* (cf. Kehler 2000, Takahashi and Fox 2005). The task then is to show that reduced ESCs as in (2) are instances of contrastive ellipsis, despite the fact that they are syntactically subordinated, signalled by the V-final structure German, and do not seem to obey *the parallelism requirement*. One argument for this observation is that the presence of an affirmative or negative focus sensitive particle, such as *auch* (also, too), *sogar* (even), *überhaupt* (at all) or negation *nicht* (not), is mandatory in ESCs but not in CSCs. Syntactically, the focus sensitive particle is associated with the focused remnant and triggers focus movement of the remnant to a focus position. Contrastive focus can be realized on any type of remnant, as long as the remnants occur in a contrastive focus relation with their antecedent.

In most previous work on information structural requirements on main clause stripping (see e.g. Johnson 2019), parallelism is conceptualized as an obligatory requirement for contrastive ellipsis and serves as an argument for structural coordination and *the no embedding constraint*. However, parallelism as a mandatory requirement for reduced ESC cannot be obtained in its original form (see Abeillé et al. 2014, Konietzko & Winkler 2010, Winkler 2016, 2019 for observations of mismatches). The empirical evidence shows that ESCs are cases of contrastive ellipsis that allow for a parallel

interpretation between the remnant and its antecedent phrase despite syntactic subordination. The analysis is guided by the syntax-information structure mapping. I will propose that ESC involves movement of the focused phrase (*Tennis* in (2)) to a left peripheral focus position below the subordinator and below the sentential adverbs and negation with subsequent deletion of the lower verb phrase (VP) in German.

The CSCs, in contrast, are topic-continuity constructions. Given the lack of an overt subject and copula, the typical function of this construction is not to establish a contrast but to uphold the continuation of the topic. Therefore, CSCs do not introduce a new topic or pick up an already established discourse topic, but generally preserve the topic relation established in the main clause. The focus accent is typically realized on the predicate per default, in (1) on the nominal predicate (*Volkssport*). This focus accent is not a contrastive accent, but a nuclear accent that is realized on the most deeply embedded discourse new entity. This implies that the accent can be realized on another element in the clause, e.g. the sentential adverb, if the predicate should have a discourse-given status. In contrast to the ESCs, the CSC do not need to occur with a focus sensitive particle.

With this work, I turn to the largely underinvestigated area of reductions in subordinate clauses which include elliptical, but also other, forms of reductions. Most (but not all) of these reductions have been documented in language specific grammars, but have not been analyzed systematically in a specific theoretical framework, and therefore have remained largely unrecognized outside the language community. I thereby follow up on intuitions expressed in early papers on ellipsis (e.g. Klein 1993, Merchant 2003) and also on work done by Anne Abeillé and Gabriele Bîlbîie on gapping that there is language specific evidence that might not quite fit the categorization of ellipsis developed in the last 50 years.

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