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Local Instability

Split Topicalization and Quantifier Float
in German

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Contents

Acknowledgments	V
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Empirical Scope	1
1.2 Types of Split Topics	1
1.2.1 Simple Splits	2
1.2.2 Gapless Splits	3
1.2.3 Split PPs	5
1.2.4 Multiple and Parallel Splits	6
1.2.5 Mixed Splits	8
1.3 Organization of the Study	9
2 Properties & Problems	11
2.1 Information Structure	11
2.1.1 Bridge-contour Splits	11
2.1.2 Focus Fronting	15
2.2 Syntax	19
2.2.1 A TOP-REM Asymmetry	19
2.2.2 Evidence for Displacement	22
2.2.3 Antecedent-gap Mismatches	28
2.2.4 Case Agreement	34
2.2.5 Summary	36
2.3 Previous Approaches	37
2.3.1 Subextraction	37
2.3.2 Distributed Deletion	43
2.3.3 Hybrid Analyses	47
2.4 Summary	55
3 A Novel Approach	57
3.1 Symmetry and Asymmetry in Syntax	57
3.1.1 Beyond Phrase-structure Grammar: Merge	57
3.1.2 Labeling by <i>Minimal Search</i>	59
3.1.3 Labeling Conflicts and Their Resolution	61
3.2 ST as Symmetry-breaking Movement	63
3.2.1 Bare predication: {DP,NP}	63
3.2.2 Simple Splits	70
3.2.3 Gapless Splits	74
3.2.4 Subject Splits and Parallel Splits	77
3.2.5 Fronting and Topic-Comment Structure	81
3.2.6 Mixed Splits	87

3.2.7	Split PPs	90
3.2.8	Multiple Splits	95
3.2.9	Ellipsis in TOP and REM	98
3.2.10	The Motivation for Movement	100
3.3	Predictions and Extensions	103
3.3.1	Antecedent-gap Mismatches	103
3.3.2	Movement and Locality	109
3.4	Further Issues	120
3.4.1	Gapping and Fragments	120
3.4.2	Remarks on ATB Application of ST	124
3.4.3	A Note on Pair-Merge (<DP, DP>)	128
3.4.4	Bare Predication or “Semantic Incorporation”?	131
3.4.5	Crosslinguistic Properties of ST	134
3.5	Summary	138
4	Quantifier Float	141
4.1	Floated Quantifiers: Basic Properties	141
4.2	QF as Symmetry-breaking Movement	143
4.2.1	Evidence for Movement	143
4.2.2	Evidence for a Hybrid Approach	144
4.2.3	Bare Predication and Symmetry-breaking Movement	148
4.2.4	An Agreement Asymmetry	152
4.2.5	Mixed QF Splits	153
4.3	Complex Splits	154
4.4	Summary	157
5	Conclusion	159
	References	163
	Index	173

1 Introduction: Aims and Scope

1.1 Empirical Scope

In this monograph, I propose a novel analysis of so-called *Split Topicalization* (henceforth, ST), a notorious and long-standing problem for syntactic theory.¹ The standard characterization of ST, illustrated in (1), is that it splits a single underlying constituent into discontinuous parts (examples are from German unless indicated otherwise):

- (1) Französische Bücher hat Amina bisher nur wenige gute gelesen.
French books has Amina so far only few good read
'As for French books, so far Amina read only few good ones.'

Throughout, I will use underlining to indicate the related parts; I follow van Hoof (2006) in referring to the fronted/topicalized part as TOP and to the stranded part as REM (for *remainder*). I hasten to add that both this terminology and the underlining are convenient notational shorthands without any theoretical import. In fact, it will become apparent in chapter 2 that TOP and REM are separate constituents, rather than discontinuous parts of a single constituent.

A distinctive feature of the analysis proposed in this work is that it provides a unified analysis of all split-topic constructions (STCs). While most analyses of ST limit their attention to the simple variety illustrated in (1), it turns out that the construction becomes highly problematic when the full range of possibilities is taken into account (Haider 1990, Pittner 1995, Kniffka 1996, Puig Waldmüller 2006, Fanselow and Čavar 2002, Nolda 2007). I will now outline the range of constructions I take to fall within the category of ST; the discussion in chapter 2 will provide further evidence for this grouping.

1.2 Types of Split Topics

I should note at the outset that ST is a phenomenon predominantly found in spoken German but rare in written language (see Kniffka 1996: chapter 4). Therefore, readers with native intuitions should bear in mind when judging the examples that ST typically requires a proper contextual setting and specific information-structurally motivated intonation contours (on which see section 2.1) for full acceptability.

¹ Whence Gallmann and Lindauer's (1994) characterization of ST as a "thorny syntactic problem" (*dornenvolles syntaktisches Problem*). Nolda (2007: 12) notes that older works typically view it as a "marginal curiosity" (*Kuriosum am Rande*).

1.2.1 Simple Splits

The simple example of ST given in (1) is repeated below:²

- (2) Französische Bücher hat Amina bisher nur wenige gute gelesen.
 French books has Amina so far only few good read
 ‘As for French books, so far Amina read only few good ones.’

I refer to this type of split, which contains a gap corresponding to TOP, as “simple split.” The underlining reflects the intuitive perception of TOP and REM as discontinuous parts of an underlyingly continuous noun phrase (an idea which will however be rejected in chapter 2 below). Generally, the interpretation of STCs roughly corresponds to *as for* constructions in English (*As for TOP, ... REM ...*; cf. Pitner 1995: 33). Kniffka 1996: appendix contains a wealth of naturalistic examples of (mostly) simple splits.

Adopting for the moment the intuitive idea that TOP and REM represent a discontinuous constituent, we see that in STCs the head noun and optionally pied-piped modifiers precede the rest of the DP, i.e. ST inverts the order of elements internal to the split DP. The reverse of (2) is unacceptable:

- (3) *(Nur) Wenige gute hat Amina bisher (nur) französische Bücher gelesen.
 only few good has Amina so far French books read

In this respect ST differs from partitive split, which allows both inverted and non-interted post-movement orders (examples adapted from De Kuthy 2001: 53):

- (4) a. Niemand_i hat gestern t_i von uns das Fußballspiel gesehen.
 no-one has yesterday of us the soccer match watched
 b. Von uns_i hat gestern niemand t_i das Fußballspiel gesehen.
 of us has yesterday no-one the soccer match watched

In (2), TOP appears clause-initially; alternatively, it can appear in the middle field, more specifically in what Frey (2004a) terms the *medial topic position*, an \bar{A} -position immediately below C:³

² Here and throughout, focus-sensitive particles such as *nur* ‘only’ do not appear underlined, reflecting my assumption that they are not part of the relevant constituents but rather adjoined to higher functional projections: see Büring and Hartmann 2001 and Kleemann-Krämer 2010 for arguments in favor of this view, and Reis 2005 for some counterarguments.

I assume that the same is true for negative particles like clause-initial *nicht*:

(i) Nicht Männer wurden viele ausgezeichnet, sondern Frauen.
 not men were many decorated but women

³ Here and in what follows I will only consider \bar{A} -scrambling to the medial topic position immediately preceding the base position of sentence adverbials (see Frey 2004a). Frey (2000) points out that scrambling to a lower position (which is presumably A-movement, cf. Fanselow in press) yields unacceptable splits:

- (5) obwohl er französische Bücher bisher nur wenige gute gelesen hat.
 although he French books so far only few good read has

As suggested by (2) and (5), STCs can be derived by means of either topicalization or scrambling; I will demonstrate in section 2.2.2 that movement is involved. I will also refer to STCs derived by scrambling as instances of split scrambling (SS), but will explicitly distinguish ST and SS only where necessary and will otherwise use the labels “ST” and “STC” as cover terms subsuming SS.⁴

1.2.2 Gapless Splits

While in simple splits REM lacks an overt head noun, it is a complete noun phrase in gapless splits. In what Ott and Nicolae (2010) term “genus–species splits,”⁵ TOP denotes a superset (genus) of REM (species):⁶

- (6) a. Seltene Raubvögel hat Jürgen nur ein paar Bussarde gesehen.
 rare birds of prey has Jürgen only a few buzzards seen
 ‘As for rare birds of prey, Jürgen only saw a few buzzards.’
 b. *Bussarde hat Jürgen bisher nur ein paar Raubvögel gesehen.
 buzzards has Jürgen so far only a few birds of prey seen

At this point it should be obvious that the label “split” is inadequate and merely used for convenience, since examples like (6a) do not seem to involve a discontinuous constituent.

Some further examples of gapless splits are given below (see also Fanselow 1993: 63, Pittner 1995: 33 Fanselow and Cavar 2002: 99, Puig Waldmüller 2006: 8 and Fanselow and Féry 2006: 66, among others):

-
- (i) a. Otto wird Bücher wahrscheinlich keine verschenken.
 Otto will books probably none give away
 b. *Otto wird wahrscheinlich Bücher keine verschenken.
 Otto will probably books none give away
 ‘As for books, Otto probably won’t give any away.’ (Frey 2000: 144)

I will therefore only consider TP-level scrambling in what follows.

⁴ The existence of SS is sometimes denied in the literature, for instance by Frey (1993: 198) (who, however, accepts it in Frey 2000: 144); Puig Waldmüller (2006: 26) takes it to be “only acceptable in colloquial German.” In many cases, the judgments are confounded by extraneous factors, such as illicit scrambling across a pronominal subject. Here I take SS to be fully productive while contextually conditioned, as are almost all scrambling movements (see Struckmeier 2011).

⁵ The name is due to Cable 2004, where similar constructions in Yiddish are discussed.

⁶ It should be noted that some speakers prefer TOP to be a PP, headed by the preposition *an*:

- (i) An seltenen Raubvögeln hat Mitsch nur ein paar Bussarde gesehen.
 of rare birds of prey has Mitsch only a few buzzards seen

Semantico-pragmatically, (i) and (6a) appear to be equivalent; *an* seems to act as an explicit topic marker. I set aside this alternative here.

- (7) a. Rotwein haben wir heute kalifornischen Merlot.
 red wine have we today Californian Merlot
 b. Japanische Autos hat Volker bisher meistens Toyotas gekauft.
 Japanese cars has Volker so far mostly Toyotas bought
 c. Zeitungen aus Berlin kenne ich nur die junge Welt.
 newspapers from Berlin know I only the *junge Welt*

The superset–subset requirement is pragmatically grounded and not tied to inherent lexical-semantic properties of TOP and REM. Consider the following (due to Gisbert Fanselow, p.c.; see also Nolda 2007: 87):

- (8) a. Geschenke hat er mal wieder nur rote Socken bekommen.
 presents has he PRT again only red socks got
 b. Syntaktiker kenne ich nur den Chomsky.
 syntacticians know I only the Chomsky

In both cases, it is only world knowledge that licenses the superset–subset relation between TOP and REM; *rote Socken* ‘red socks’ and *Chomsky* are not hypernymically related to *Geschenke* ‘presents’ and *Syntaktiker* ‘syntacticians,’ respectively.⁷

In a further class of gapless splits, REM surfaces as an indefinite pronoun. This is shown below for plural *welche* ‘some/any’ (in its quantificational, non-interrogative use) and singular *eins* ‘one’ and *keins* ‘none:’

- (9) a. Französische Bücher habe ich noch nie welche gelesen.
 French books have I so far never any read
 ‘As for French books, I haven’t read any so far.’
 b. ’n französisches Buch habe ich schon mal eins gelesen.
 a French book have I already PRT one read
 ‘As for French books, I’ve read one.’
 c. Französische Bücher habe ich noch keins gelesen.
 French books have I yet none read

In my dialect, indefinite *was* is also possible when TOP is a mass noun, indicating a vague amount;⁸ strong personal pronouns seem to be acceptable as well (capitals indicate stress):

- (10) a. Den Wodka mochte ich nicht, aber Bier hab ich schon was getrunken.
 the vodka liked I not but beer have I PRT some drunk
 ‘I didn’t like the vodka, but I did drink some beer.’
 b. Männer liebt sie ja sowieso nur IHN.
 men loves she PRT anyway only him
 ‘As for men, it is only him that she loves anyway.’

⁷ Similarly, the judgment in (6b) presupposes that the speaker knows about the superset–subset relation between birds of prey and buzzards. If this relation is falsely believed to be the reverse, or in a hypothetical situation where birds of prey are a type (species) of buzzards, (6b) is acceptable.

⁸ Conceivably, this *was* is a reduced form of *etwas* ‘some(thing),’ in which case the split may not be gapless.

Pronominal REMs allow postnominal modifiers but not pronominal ones; determiners or quantifiers likewise cannot be contained in pronominal REMs. This, of course, simply mirrors the general syntactic co-occurrence restrictions of these pronouns, as shown in (12):

- (11) Gute Bücher hat er schon (*{französische / drei}) welche von Chomsky
 good books has he already French three some by Chomsky
 gelesen.
 read
- (12) A: What kinds of books did you read?
 B: (i) *{Französische / drei} welche.
 French three some
 (ii) Welche von Chomsky.
 some by Chomsky

Like ST generally, gapless splits are not restricted to arguments; adjuncts, such as free datives, can be split as well (this issue will be discussed further in section 3.3.2):

- (13) Verwandten hat er nur welchen mit viel Geld einen Kuchen
 relatives.DAT has he only some.DAT with much money a cake
 gebacken.
 baked

Like simple splits, gapless splits can be derived by SS, TOP surfacing in the left middle field's medial topic position:

- (14) a. obwohl ich seltene Raubvögel leider nur ein paar Bussarde
 although I rare birds of prey unfortunately only a few buzzards
 gesehen habe.
 seen have
 b. weil ich französische Bücher ja auch mal gerne welche lesen
 because I French books PRT also sometime gladly some read
 würde.
 would

1.2.3 Split PPs

The cases discussed so far all involved split noun phrases, however these are not the only constituents that can undergo ST. In PP-splits, an argument or adjunct PP is split:

- (15) In Schlössern habe ich noch in keinen gewohnt.
 in castles have I so far in no lived
 'As for castles, I haven't lived in any so far.' (Fanselow and Ćavar 2002: 69)

The preposition obligatorily appears in both TOP and REM (see also section 2.2.3).⁹

Some further examples of PP-splits are given in (16):

- (16) a. In fremden Betten ist er schon in vielen aufgewacht.
 in stranger's beds is he already in many woken up
 b. Selbst für Freunde würde ich so etwas nur für ganz enge tun.
 even for friends would I such something only for very close do
 c. Mit anderen Syntaktikern hat er bisher nur mit Lasnik
 with other syntacticians has he so far only with Lasnik
 zusammengearbeitet.
 worked together

The split PP in (16a) is an adjunct (its preposition is not 'governed' by V), showing that ST is not restricted to argument categories. Notice that REM in (16c) is a PP containing an overt head noun, illustrating a gapless PP-split (*Lasnik* being a subset of *other syntacticians*).

As with the other types, TOP in PP-splits can alternatively surface in the left middle field:

- (17) a. obwohl ich in Schlössern bisher noch in keinen gewohnt habe.
 although I in castles so far yet in no lived have
 b. weil er mit anderen Syntaktikern bisher nur mit Lasnik
 because he with other syntacticians so far only with Lasnik
 zusammengearbeitet hat.
 worked together has

1.2.4 Multiple and Parallel Splits

Multiple splits combine ST and SS. That is, an additional medial element MED appears in the middle field:

⁹ In colloquial speech, the preposition can be dropped, in which case TOP bears nominative case (see also Fanselow and Féry 2006: 67):

(i) %Schlösser hab' ich noch in keinen gewohnt.
 castles.NOM have I yet in no.DAT lived

Citation form of TOP and its restriction to the prefield suggest that (i) is a base-generated topic construction. Preposition drop of this kind is not specific to ST; it occurs (in colloquial speech) with non-split topics as well:

(ii) %MIT studieren nur die besten.
 MIT study only the best

- (18) Fehler hat er so richtig dumme bisher nur wenige gemacht.
 mistakes has he PRT really dumb so far only few made
 ‘As for mistakes, so far he made only few really stupid ones.’ (Pafel 1996: 167)

It appears that in such cases the original noun phrase *wenige so richtig dumme Fehler* is “scattered” across three clausal positions. As in simple splits, however, an overt head noun can be present in MED or REM in multiple splits as well, yielding a gapless split. As shown by (19c), the familiar superset–subset requirement is active here as well.¹⁰

- (19) a. Raubvögel habe ich so richtig große bisher nur mal ein paar
 birds of prey have I PRT really big so far only once a few
Bussarde gesehen.
 buzzards seen
 b. Raubvögel habe ich so richtig große Adler bisher nur zwei gesehen.
 birds of prey have I PRT really big eagles so far only two seen
 c. *Adler habe ich so richtig große Raubvögel bisher nur zwei gesehen.
 eagles have I PRT really big birds of prey so far only two seen

Parallel splits are STCs that involve splitting of more than one constituent. In (20), both direct object (underlined) and subject (overlined) are split:

- (20) Sonaten haben Frauen bislang nur wenige welche geschrieben.
 sonatas have women so far only few any written
 ‘As for sonatas, so far only few women have composed any.’
 (Fanselow and Čavar 2002: 67)

Evidently, neither multiple nor parallel splits are qualitatively different from the types discussed above but merely combine the configurational options that are independently available.

¹⁰ I leave open whether or not both MED and REM can simultaneously contain an overt head noun, since judgments are somewhat murky. With proper intonation (as indicated), cases such as the following seem quite acceptable:

- (i) /AUtos hab’ ich so richtig schäbige /ROSTlauben bisher nur ToYO\tas gehabt.
 cars have I PRT really scabby clunkers so far only Toyotas owned
 ‘As for cars, and as for really scabby clunkers, so far I’ve only had Toyotas.’

I tentatively assume that such cases to be grammatical but marginal due to their complexity, both structurally and informationally. The issue is left to future research.

1.2.5 Mixed Splits

So far, it was shown that TOP in STCs can occur either in the prefield or in the middle field. A further means of splitting noun phrases and PPs is by including TOP in a fronted VP:

- (21) Französische Bücher gelesen hat Amina bisher nur drei langweilige.
 French books read has Amina so far only three boring
 ‘As for reading French books, Amina only read three boring ones so far.’

Following van Hoof (2006), I will refer to this type of STC as “mixed split” (since, intuitively speaking, both DP and VP surface discontinuously).

All previously mentioned types of splits have mixed counterparts. That is, mixed splits can be PP-splits (22a), gapless splits (22b)/(22c), and multiple splits (22d):

- (22) a. In Schlössern gewohnt hat er noch in keinen.
 in castles lived has he yet in no
 b. Mit Angestellten gesprochen hat er immer nur mit den hübschen
 with employees talked has he always only with the pretty
Frauen.
 women
 c. Bücher gelesen habe ich damals nur selten welche über solche
 books read have I back then only rarely any about such
Themen.
 topics
 d. Fehler gemacht habe ich so richtig dumme bisher zum Glück keine.
 mistakes made have I PRT really stupid so far fortunately no

The following illustrates a mixed-split version of the parallel split in (20):

- (23) Sonaten geschrieben haben Frauen bislang nur wenige welche.
 sonatas written have women so far only few some

Scrambling of VPs is generally a marked option, but with contrastive emphasis and a proper contextual setting, mixed SS is acceptable if marginal:

- (24) a. ?weil er Bücher gelesen wohl erst wenige hat.
 because he books read PRT only few has
 b. ?weil er in Schlössern gewohnt noch in keinen hatte.
 because he in castles lives so far in no had

The facts reviewed above constitute the empirical core of this work, to be expanded in later sections. It is noteworthy that previous analyses of ST have typically only taken the simple type into account; I know of no single analysis that attempts to unify all types (which, as we will see in the next chapter, form a natural class).

1.3 Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 presents the theoretically relevant properties of ST. A brief sketch of ST's pragmatic properties will lead to the conclusion that ST is not in any way "information-structurally driven." Contrary to what is typically claimed in the literature, neither TOP nor REM obligatorily bears a specific informational role. I go on to show that while ST exhibits all properties of an \bar{A} -dependency, there is no single noun-phrase constituent that relates TOP and REM in the base (Fanselow 1988); one clear sign of this are the gapless splits illustrated in section 1.2.2 above. This, in a nutshell, is the empirical problem that so far no analysis of ST has been able to solve (and most have failed to even properly address).

Chapter 3 develops a novel analysis of ST, based on the idea that TOP and REM are underlyingly related in a "bare-predication structure," i.e. they directly merge as DP subject and NP predicate ($\{\text{DP}, \text{NP}\}$). I argue, following Moro (2000, 2007) and Chomsky (2008, 2012), that this structure is *locally unstable*: it must be asymmetricized by movement in order to be assigned a label. This analysis explains why TOP and REM, while not subconstituents of a single underlying noun phrase, nevertheless agree in case (the result of Multiple Agree with both DP and NP) and are obligatorily separated, without any resort to syntacticized pragmatic features. I argue that symmetry-breaking movement applies freely, displacing NP to an \bar{A} -position made available by an unselective edge feature of C, which can optionally be inherited by T. It is shown that these minimal assumptions suffice to derive the entire range of STCs. In the remainder of the chapter I show that the analysis correctly accounts for the locality conditions on ST, including its circumvention of the CED (e.g., in adjunct splits), and discuss various implications and extensions of the analysis.

In chapter 4 I propose to extend the analysis developed in chapter 3 to Quantifier Float (QF). I show that QF has in common with ST the property that TOP and REM are not subparts of a single noun phrase in the base. Following a suggestion in Pittner 1995, I analyze floated quantifiers as predicates that merge with their DP associates, again creating a locally unstable structure ($\{\text{DP}, \text{QP}\}$) that requires movement.

Chapter 5 summarizes the main claims of the thesis, and spells out some broader theoretical context.

I will use trees, bracketing, and set notation interchangeably throughout.

2 Split Topics: Empirical Properties and Theoretical Problems

In this chapter, I discuss two dimensions of the STCs introduced in section 1.2. First, I will give a brief overview of the information-structural properties of ST, concluding that there is no fixed correspondence between form and function. Second, I turn to syntactic properties of ST and review a number of analyses that have been proposed, all of which fail to provide an adequate solution to the empirical puzzle presented by STCs.

2.1 Information Structure

A widely-held view is that STCs provide the grammatical basis for endowing individual subparts of a single constituent with different information-structural roles. This view is clearly articulated by Féry (2007) (see also Pittner 1995: 32f.):

The discontinuity of [REM] and [TOP] finds a double motivation. First, [...] the need to provide both elements with equal prominence triggers the formation of two phrases, topicalization being the most obvious solution. [...] Second, the sentence-initial position is preferably associated with a rising bitonal tone for topic, and the preverbal one with a falling accent for focus (see Büring 1997). (Féry 2007: 81f.)

As indicated by the term “preference,” TOP and REM often, but not necessarily, express some particular information, such as focus. In what follows, I will briefly summarize the various information-structural realizations of STCs. I emphasize that since the main focus of this work is the syntax of STCs, what follows is *not* meant to be an exhaustive explication of their information structure, but rather a broad sketch; consequently, I will gloss over some of the fine-grained (and controversial) distinctions found in the relevant literature.¹ See Nolda 2007: chapter 4 for further discussion and examples.

2.1.1 Bridge-contour Splits

TOP and REM as Topic and Focus

Broadly speaking, German realizes contrastive topics with a rising accent and foci with a falling tone (marked below by ‘/’ and ‘\,’ respectively). In combination, rising

¹ All observations below equally apply to PP-splits, although I will not specifically provide examples of this type.