From syntactic structure to discourse structure and back again: The role of referential form

Markus Bader
Goethe-Universität Frankfurt
bader@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Yvonne Portele
Goethe-Universität Frankfurt
portele@lingua.uni-frankfurt.de

We discuss how syntactic surface properties affect the interpretation and production of referential expressions in discourse, and how the choice of a particular referential form in turn affects the choice between syntactic alternatives. The data we present are taken from several studies investigating German p(ersonal)-pronouns and d(emonstrative)-pronouns. In a prototypical example, the p-pronoun preferentially refers to the first NP and the d-pronoun to the second NP:

(1) Max will   einen Freund treffen. Aber er/der   ist krank geworden.
     M. wants a   friend meet   But he/d-pro is sick   become
     'Peter wants to meet a friend. But he became sick.'

For d-pronouns, it is commonly held that they prefer an antecedent that is non-topical or least expected. Surface properties like syntactic function or linear position, in contrast, are assumed to have no effect (see summary in Ellert, 2013). We present experimental results as well as corpus data converging on the conclusion that information structure properties and surface properties are both necessary to capture the use of d-pronouns.We discuss our findings with regard to the model proposed in Kehler & Rohde (2013).

With regard to effects of referential form on syntactic structure, we discuss the choice between SO and OS order in German main clauses. It has long been known that the information structure status of a referent at least partly determines whether it is put into clause-initial position (the so-called prefield). We present recent experimental and corpus findings showing that the referential form of an object NP (e.g., d-pronoun versus definite NP) is an additional independent factor affecting the probability that the object is put into the prefield and the sentence therefore occurs with OS order.

References: ● Ellert, M. (2013): Information structure affects the resolution of the subject pronouns er and der in spoken German discourse. *Discours* 12(12), 3–24. ● Kehler, A.; Rohde, H.(2013): A probabilistic reconciliation of coherence-driven and centering-driven theories of pronoun interpretation. *Theoretical Linguistics* 39(1-2), 1–37.