

Scalar Implicature in Syntax

In spoken variants of German, adverbial clauses expressing causation are frequently used with verb-second order, whereas in written German, adverbial clauses introduced by *weil* show verb-final order. Interestingly, *weil*-clauses with verb second order are not simply a colloquial variant of standard verb-final clauses, but they can express a wider range of semantic relations. I will refer to the standard verb-final clauses as central adverbial clauses and to the verb-second clauses as peripheral adverbial clauses.

Central adverbial clauses introduced by *weil* express a reason for the propositional content of the matrix clause (1a) (*propositional reading*). The same relation can be expressed by a peripheral adverbial clause (1b). In contrast, the peripheral adverbial clause in (1c) justifies the speaker's attitude (*epistemic reading*) (cf. Sweetser 1990, Uhmann 1998). Such an interpretation is not available for a central adverbial clause (1d).

- (1) a. Die Straße ist ganz weiß, weil es geschneit **hat**.
the road is totally white because it snowed has
'The road is totally white because it snowed.'
- b. Die Straße ist ganz weiß, weil es **hat** geschneit.
the road is totally white because it has snowed.
'The road is totally white because it snowed.'
- c. Es hat geschneit, weil die Straße **ist** ganz weiß.
it has snowed because the road is totally white.
'It snowed, because the road is totally white.'
(≈ It must have snowed. I think so because the road is totally white.)
- d. #Es hat geschneit, weil die Straße ganz weiß **ist**.
it has snowed because the road totally white is
'It snowed because the road is totally white.'

Peripheral adverbial clauses are able to express a wider range of causal relations than central adverbial clauses. This is due to the fact that peripheral adverbial clauses are paratactic structures whereas central adverbials are part of the matrix CP. Thus, central adverbials are merged inside the IP of the matrix clause and modify the event-structure. In contrast, peripheral adverbials are merged late in the derivation of the associated CP, hence, they can modify either the event-structure of the matrix clause or the illocutionary structure of the discourse (cf. Blakemore & Carston 2005, Haegeman 2003).

Whereas central adverbial clauses express always a reason for the propositional content of the matrix clause, peripheral adverbial clauses are ambiguous since they can express either a propositional or an epistemic reading (cf. Blühdorn 2008). In ambiguous contexts, the use of a peripheral adverbial clause triggers a scalar implicature. Due to the competition of the ambiguous structure with a non-ambiguous alternative the hearer concludes that the speaker would have used a non-ambiguous central adverbial clause if he had intended to express a propositional reading. Thus, in contexts which allow for both readings, the preferred reading of a peripheral adverbial clause is the epistemic reading.

The results of a questionnaire study and other empirical investigations provide independent empirical evidence for this analysis, which is relevant for the broader understanding of the interaction of syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

References:

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