

## German Discourse Particles are Weak Sentence Adverbs

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### 1 The Phenomenon: German Discourse Particles

- (1) *aber, auch, bloß, denn, doch, eben, eigentlich, etwa, halt, ja, mal, nur, ruhig, schon, vielleicht, wohl*

### 2 Discourse Particles in Cinque's Hierarchy

German discourse particles are subject to linearization rules:

- (2) a. *ja* > {*doch, wohl, nur, ruhig, mal*}  
 b. *denn* > {*doch, wohl, nur, ?mal*}  
 c. {*ja, denn*} > *doch* > {*wohl, nur, ruhig, mal*}  
 d. {*ja, denn, doch*} > *wohl* > {*?nur, mal*}  
 e. {*ja, denn, doch, ?wohl*} > *nur* > {*ruhig, mal*}  
 f. {*ja, doch, nur*} > *ruhig* > {*mal*}  
 g. {*ja, ?denn, doch, wohl, nur, ruhig*} > *mal*  
 (Thurmair 1989:278-279)

These restrictions are relatively strict:

- (3) a. *Ich bin ja doch deine Mami.*  
 I am JA DOCH your mum  
 'I'm [ja doch] your mum.'  
 (cf. Thurmair 1989:209,ex.7)
- b. \* *Das ist doch ja sowieso nicht wahr.*  
 this is DOCH JA anyway not true  
 'This isn't [doch ja] true anyway.'  
 (cf. Thurmair 1989:286,ex.19)

The following linear ordering can be proposed for the elements in (2):

- (4) *ja/denn* > *doch* > *wohl* > *nur* > *ruhig* > *mal*

A sub-class of discourse particles (containing *ja*) can occur high up in the clause:

- (5) a. *Du kannst ja glücklicherweise ruhig mal zu ihr rübergehen.*  
 b. *Du kannst glücklicherweise ja ruhig mal zu ihr rübergehen.*  
 you can JA luckily JA RUHIG MAL to her go.over  
 'Luckily, you may [ja ruhig mal] go over to her place.'

The higher position of *ja* appears to be its canonical position.

- (6) a. *Das ist es ja.*  
 b. *Das ist es ja leider.*  
 c. \*? *Das ist es leider ja.*  
 that is it JA sadly JA  
 'Sadly, this is [ja] the point.'

Another sub-class (containing *ruhig* and *mal*) must occur lower in the clause:

- (7) a. \*? *Du kannst ja ruhig mal glücklicherweise zu ihr rübergehen.*  
 b. \*? *Du kannst ja ruhig glücklicherweise mal zu ihr rübergehen.*  
 c. *Du kannst ja glücklicherweise ruhig mal zu ihr rübergehen.*  
 you can JA RUHIG MAL luckily RUHIG MAL to her go.over  
 'Luckily you may [ja ruhig mal] go over to her place.'

A first sketch of the overall distribution:

- (8) a. *ja* > ... > *glücklicherweise* 'luckily' > ... > *ruhig* > *mal*  
 b. [FPx ja [ ... [Mood-evaluative *glücklicherweise* [ ... [FPm *ruhig* [FPn *mal*

### 3 Discourse Particles as Deficient Elements

Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) typology of structural deficiency:

(*L* denotes any lexical category; *C<sub>L</sub>P* contains referential features; *Σ<sub>L</sub>P* contains prosodic features;

*I<sub>L</sub>P* contains the φ-features of *L*)

- (9) a. strong elements: [C<sub>L</sub>P ...[Σ<sub>L</sub>P ...[I<sub>L</sub>P ...[LP ...]]]]  
 b. weak elements: [Σ<sub>L</sub>P ...[I<sub>L</sub>P ...[LP ...]]]  
 c. clitic elements: [I<sub>L</sub>P ...[LP ...]]

(cf. Cardinaletti and Starke 1999:195)

Relevant syntactic properties of discourse particles (cf. Weydt 1969, von Stechow and Wunderlich 1991, Hartmann 1998, May 2000):

- they are restricted to the *middle field*<sup>1</sup> – cf. (11)
- they cannot be modified – cf. (12)
- they cannot be coordinated – cf. (13)

These are typical properties of weak elements (in contrast to strong elements) in the framework of Cardinaletti and Starke (1999). In these regards, discourse particles contrast with (strong) sentence adverbs, such as *offensichtlich* 'obviously'.

(10) *Diese Behauptung ist offensichtlich / ja falsch.*  
 this statement is obviously / JA wrong  
 'This statement is obviously / [ja] wrong.'

(11) a. *Offensichtlich ist diese Behauptung falsch.*  
 obviously is this statement wrong  
 b.\* *Ja ist diese Behauptung falsch.*

(12) a. *Diese Behauptung ist ganz offensichtlich falsch.*  
 this statement is quite obviously wrong.  
 b.\* *Diese Behauptung ist ganz ja falsch.*

(13) a. *Diese Behauptung ist offensichtlich und eindeutig falsch.*  
 this statement is obviously and unambiguously wrong  
 b.\* *Diese Behauptung ist ja und offensichtlich / ja und wohl falsch.*  
 this statement is JA and obviously / JA and WOHL wrong

Conclusion: German discourse particles can be treated as weak sentence adverbs in terms of Cardinaletti and Starke (1999). The lack of an adverbial CP (referred to as  $C_{Adv}P$ ) implies a "non-referential" reading which manifests in their abstract, discourse-linked semantics, illustrated in (14).

<sup>1</sup> The term *middle field* refers to the area between verb-second and verb-final position.

(14)  $[[ja(\alpha)]]$ :

*ja*  $\alpha$  is appropriate in a context  $c$  if the proposition expressed by  $\alpha$  in  $c$  is a fact of  $w_c$  which – for all the speaker knows – might already be known to the addressee.<sup>2</sup>

(Kratzer 1999:1)

Further evidence for such an analysis: In Colloquial Non-Standard Viennese German (Ger. *Wiener gehobene Umgangssprache*), two forms of the discourse particle *denn* appear, a full form and the reduced form *dn* (cf. Grosz 2005).

- Reduced *dn* must follow clitic pronouns:

(15) a. *Seit wann regnet-s-n schon?*  
 since when rains-it.CL-DN already  
 'Since when has it [dn] been raining?'  
 b.\* *Seit wann regnet-n-s schon?*  
 c.\* *Seit wann regnet-n es schon?*

- Full *denn* must follow clitic and unstressed pronouns; in contrast, reduced *dn* precedes unstressed pronouns:

(16) a. *Was schenkst(-dn) du ihr(%-dn)<sup>3</sup> zum GEBURTSTAG?*  
 what give.as.present-DN you her-DN to.the birthday  
 'What do you [dn/denn] give her for her birthday?'  
 b. *Was schenkst (\*denn) du ihr (denn) zum GEBURTSTAG?*

- Reduced *dn* precedes non-pronominal DPs; full *denn* may follow them:

(17) a. *Wieso hat (denn) der Otto (denn) die Anna (denn) geküsst?*  
 b. *Wieso hat(-dn) der Otto(\*-dn) die Anna(\*-dn) geküsst?*  
 why has-DN/DENN the Otto-DN/DENN the Anna-DN/DENN kissed  
 'Why has Otto [dn/denn] kissed Anna?'

<sup>2</sup>  $\alpha$  being an expression,  $w_c$  referring to the possible world selected by the context  $c$ .

<sup>3</sup> Note that in all cases where *dn* follows unstressed *du ihr* 'you her', the latter seem to be realized as clitics. In other words, *dn* cannot follow unstressed non-clitic pronouns. In contrast, when *dn* precedes unstressed pronouns, they cannot be analyzed as clitics, as *dn* obligatorily follows all pronominal clitics (including the unpersonal pronoun *man* 'one'). This is illustrated in (15).

#### 4 Analysis:

(18) discourse particle (i.e. weak sentence adverb):

[<sub>CP</sub> Wieso [<sub>C</sub> [C hat] [<sub>IP-Layer</sub> ... [<sub>FP</sub> [<sub>SpecFP</sub> [<sub>ΣAdvP</sub> *denn*]]]<sub>F</sub> F<sup>0</sup> [... ?  
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(19) clitic discourse particle (i.e. clitic sentence adverb):

[<sub>CP</sub> Wieso [<sub>C</sub> [C hat-*dn*<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>IP-Layer</sub> ... [<sub>FP</sub> [<sub>SpecFP</sub> [<sub>IAdvP</sub> [<sub>IAdv</sub> *t<sub>i</sub>*]]]<sub>F</sub> F<sup>0</sup> [... ?  
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The typology of deficiency applied to German sentence adverbs:

- |         |                             |  |
|---------|-----------------------------|--|
| (20) a. | sentence adverbs:           | [ <sub>CAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>ΣAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>IAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>AdvP</sub> ...]]]] |
| b.      | discourse particles:        | [ <sub>ΣAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>IAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>AdvP</sub> ...]]]                         |
| c.      | clitic discourse particles: | [ <sub>IAdvP</sub> ... [ <sub>AdvP</sub> ...]]   |

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