Elliptical appendices of relative clauses (EARs)

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My talk addresses the structure illustrated in (1).

(1) Am 11. März begann er mit seinen grausamen, rätselhaften Taten,
on 11 March began he with his cruel mysterious crimes

die er mit einer kleinen Kamera filmte
which.ACC he with a small camera filmed

und (*er) sich dabei wie in einem Actionfilm inszenierte.
and (*he) himself at.it like in a action.movie staged

(Der Spiegel, Nr. 13/2012, S. 96)

'On 11 March, he began his cruel, mysterious deeds, which he filmed with a small camera, staging himself as if in an action movie.'

The elliptical appendix of a relative clause (EAR) is found in line 3: *und sich … inszenierte*. This structure shows two remarkable properties:

1. It involves a subject gap that seems to be obligatory (**er*).
2. Verb last order (*…inszenierte.*) in German usually implies the presence of a complementizer or relative pronoun. However, neither is there any complementizer to be seen nor can the relative pronoun from line 2 (*die*) be easily conceived of as ATB-moved from/copied into/elided from line 3: the latter has its own object (*sich*) and cannot possibly accommodate another one.

EARs in this sense are regularly found in edited text types and I compiled an opportunistic mini-corpus containing 34 usage examples. From this pool, I draw some items to be tested experimentally (slightly adapted if necessary). The aim was to assess whether EARs are not just a usage phenomenon but robust in mental grammar.

In more detail, I tested the following structures:

- EARs – see above
- AC – asymmetric coordination
  (typically V2+VL incl. an obligatory subject gap, cf. Reich 2009)
- DC1 – deep coordination, version 1
  (surface structure that can be analyzed as coordination low in the clause,
  1 = below subject)
- DC2 – deep coordination, version 2
  (surface structure that can be analyzed as coordination low in the clause,
  2 = below non-subject)

The reason for testing three structures in addition to EARs is that these additional structures potentially guide the analysis of EARs, depending on the overall acceptance rates. For example, the grammaticality and acceptability of AC seems to be beyond dispute in the literature so that the acceptability of AC

provides a baseline for the acceptability of EARs. DC1 seems to be the clearest case of an apparent ellipsis that is probably better analyzed as mere coordination (cf. Reich's 2011 rightward deletion). This might be an option for EARs as well. DC2 is interesting because, similarly to EARs, it seems to involve an obligatory subject gap and I wanted to check this assumption for both structures.

This last point is also the reason why I used a factorial design, varying the presence of the subject. The other factor varied was the presence of an overt conjunction since I suspected that asyndetic linkage reduces acceptability. The four conditions are shown in Table 1.

	syndetic	asyndetic
[+] subject		
[-] subject		

Table 1: Factorial design

In sum, this gives 4 structures * 4 conditions. Since EARs were represented by 5 items while the other structures were represented by 1 item each, the total number of items amounts to (5 + 1 + 1 + 1) * 4 = 32 (plus filler and control items). These were judged by 103 participants.

The actual task involved telling apart so-called mock sentences from real sentences as quickly as possible (forced choice). So the overall design can be described as a pseudo response time experiment.

The results show that

- the acceptance rates for EARs are rather high
  (depending on the item, 77–95/103)
- the acceptance rates for EARs approach the acceptance rates for AC (95/103)
- of all structures, DC1 reaches the highest acceptance rate (98/103)
- the subject gap in DC2 as well as in EARs is strongly preferred over overt subjects
- across all structures, asyndetic linkage is devaluated

These results are also reflected in the individual data. In sum, EARs (without subjects, with overt conjunctions) appear to be quite robust in mental grammars.

Therefore, the talk will discuss how to generate this structure by using devices of the "mainstream generative analysis of German" (Sternefeld 2006:507). Additionally, I will draw on Hartmann's (2000:45) analysis of Asymmetric Coordination. Eventually, it will be argued in favour of an analysis in terms of pure coordination, similarly to DC1.

References

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