Discourse particles in the German DP

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1. Introduction

Certain German discourse particles, e.g. *wohl* (lit. ‘well’) or *ja* (lit. ‘yes’), can occur within complex DPs. As far as we know, this is an idiosyncratic property of German. Other languages that have a rich inventory of discourse particles, for instance Bangla, do not license DP-internal discourse particles (Josef Bayer p.c.).

    ‘Yesterday I met my seriously sick neighbor.’

In (1), the particle *ja* does not take scope over the VP/vP of the clause. Rather, the particle only scopes over a propositional part expressed within the DP. That is, by adding *ja* to the utterance, the speaker indicates that he thinks that at the time of utterance he needs to make salient the uncontroversial fact that his neighbor is sick (the propositional content *p* expressed within the DP). Crucially, the speaker does not indicate that he thinks that it is uncontroversial that he has met his neighbor.

Given constructions such as (1), the following issues arise:

(i) In what kind of DPs do discourse particles occur? What sort of attributive constructions license which discourse particles?
(ii) How do DP-internal discourse particles connect to the illocutionary force of the clause?
(iii) What do discourse particles reveal about the internal fine-grained structure of DPs and about parallelisms between the functional make-up of DPs and CPs?

2. DP-internal discourse particles and attributive constructions

Discourse particles can only occur in DPs where the adjective, according to many approaches (e.g. Kayne 1994: ch. 8), originates in a reduced relative clause which is itself a complement of D (2). In other words, discourse particles are not licensed in constructions containing non-intersective prenominal adjectives (3).

* We thank Josef Bayer and especially Ellen Brandner for valuable discussion.
(2) \[[\text{DP } \text{dieser } [\text{CP } [\text{AP } \text{schwerkranke}]]] \subset [\text{IP } [\text{DP Mann} \ldots i \ldots]]\]
   this seriously.sick man

(3) *[\text{DP } \text{diese } ja \text{ angebliche Krankheit}]
   this JA alleged sickness

It is generally claimed that discourse particles can occur in certain types of relative clauses (Coniglio 2011; Hinterhölzl and Krifka 2013; Potts 2005), namely in appositive, i.e. non-restrictive, relative clauses, but not in restrictive ones.

(4) *\text{Eine Kollegin, die } (*ja) \text{ in Syracuse wohnt, wird kommen.} (\text{Kratzer 1999: 5})
   A colleague who JA in Syracuse lives will come
   ‘A colleague who lives in Syracuse will come.’

   (Zimmermann 2004: 32)

(5) *\text{Die Firma sucht } einen Angestellten, der ja immer pünktlich ist.
   The firm looks-for an employee who JA always punctual is
   ‘The firm is looking for an employee who is always punctual.’

In some cases, the occurrence of discourse particles in relative clauses even forces an appositive interpretation. Compare (6a) to its unambiguous counterpart in (6b) (cf. Coniglio 2008: 211):

(6) a. \text{Autos, die laut sind, sollten mit einer geschlossenen } (\text{Thurmair 1989: 80})
   cars which loud are should with a closed
   Motorkapsel versehen werden.
   motor capsule equipped become
   ‘Cars(,) which are loud(,) should be equipped with a closed motor capsule.’

   b. \text{Autos, die ja laut sind, sollten } […]
   ‘Cars, which are loud, should […]’ (= All cars are generally loud.)

However, some qualification is in order. Although discourse particles may be more frequent in appositive relative clauses, there is evidence suggesting that other factors play a role, such as the semantic content of \text{ja}, which serves to reactivate common ground information (Hinterhölzl and Krifka 2013: 3) and is therefore inappropriate in its environment in (4). Consider (7), where \text{wohl} simply expresses some uncertainty on the part of the speaker:

(7) *\text{Eine Kollegin, die wohl in Syracuse wohnt, wird kommen.}
Similarly, cases like (5) clearly improve when the DP has a unique referent in the discourse:

(8) *Mit Herrn K. bekommt die Firma einen Angestellten, der ja immer pünktlich ist.*

‘With Mr. K., the firm gets an employee who is always punctual.’

Wiltschko’s (2013) work suggests that there are different types of relative clauses that rely on unique or generic reference and, at the same time, cannot be analyzed as appositive relative clauses.

A recent corpus study strongly suggests that contextually given unique reference may be a major licensing criterion for a discourse particle in a DP. We searched the DWDS corpus (‘Digital Dictionary of the German Language’, cf. Klein and Geyken 2010) for the occurrence of DP-internal discourse particles and found that only 5.8% of all relevant findings were DPs without a definite article, most of which are preceded in the discourse by a unique entity, as demonstrated by the original corpus example in (9), contextually referring to ‘Jazz’.

(9) *eine ja nicht immer einfache Musik*

a. JA not always easy music

‘a music which is not always easy’

*(Die Zeit, 01/27/2006; http://www.zeit.de/online/2006/20/alpenjazz, 12/13/2013)*

Accordingly, when containing a discourse particle, indefinite DPs can only be interpreted as referring to a unique or generic entity. This concurs with observations by Hinterhölzl and Krifka (2013: 9), who claim that discourse particles are excluded from the *de dicto* reading given in (10c).

(10) a. *Hans sucht eine wohl erst 30-jährige Frau.*

‘Hans looks-for a WOHL only 30-year-old woman

b. Speaker asserts [wohl]: There is a 30 years old woman.

Speaker asserts: Hans is looking for this woman.

c. Speaker asserts: Hans wants it to be the case that there is a 30 years old woman.

Speaker asserts: Hans is looking for this woman.

The unavailable reading in (10c) parallels (5). An indefinite DP like *eine Frau* is not intrinsically unique. Still, in (10b) Hans is looking for a unique individual (*de re* reading), whereas in (10c) Hans is looking for any woman that fulfills the criterion to be of a specific age.
3. DP-internal discourse particles and Force

3.1 Discourse particles and Force

Discourse particles at the level of CP are geared to certain clause types (declarative, polar interrogative, wh-interrogative, exclamative, imperative etc.) and arise mainly in root clauses, where they are invariably stuck in a pre-VP/\(v\)P position. They make a semantic contribution by co-determining the illocutionary force of an utterance.

\[
\text{(11) } \begin{array}{c}
\text{[ForceP/FinP Force}^o/\text{Fin}^o \text{ [(TopP) ... [Prt}^o [(AdvP*) [VP/\text{vP} ... [[[\text{]]}]]\]
\end{array}
\]

Although particles are sensitive to sentence types and utterance contexts, they can appear at an arbitrary distance from Force\(^o\). In contrast to approaches assuming LF-movement of the particle (or feature movement), Bayer and Obenauer (2011) demonstrate how discourse particles obtain access to the force system of the clause by virtue of probe-goal agreement (cf. also Authier 2013).

3.2 Discourse particles and DP-internal Force

DP-internal particles must connect to an assertive context that is independent of the illocutionary force of the clause the DPs occur in. For instance, DP-internal \textit{ja} can also be used when the DP is part of an interrogative (12a), although it is a well-known observation that \textit{ja}, as a particle scoping over VP/\(v\)P, cannot occur in interrogative clauses (12b).

\[
\text{(12) a. Warum hat } \begin{array}{c}
\text{[VP dieser ja schwerkranke Mann] keine Jacke an?}
\end{array}
\]

\textit{Why has this JA seriously.sick man no jacket on}
\textit{‘Why does this very sick man not wear a jacke?’}

\[
\text{b. *Warum hat dieser schwerkranke Mann ja keine Jacke an?}
\]

We must conclude that the Force of the DP-internal propositional structure is declarative, perhaps by default. Note that occurrence in DP provides further evidence against LF-movement of the particle, since the particle takes scope where we see it and, given the Complex NP Constraint, should not be able to move out of the DP constituent anyway.

As mentioned above, the particle scopes over the propositional part expressed within the DP. This is different from predicative constructions with a truncated functional structure like small clauses.

\[
\text{(13) Hans findet [sc die Krankheit ja nicht erfreulich].}
\]

\textit{Hans finds the sickness JA not pleasant}
\textit{‘Hans does not consider the sickness pleasant.’}
In (13), the particle *ja* does not take scope over a propositional part expressed within the SC. That is, by adding *ja* to the utterance, the speaker indicates that he thinks that at the time of utterance he needs to make salient the uncontroversial fact that Hans thinks that the sickness is not pleasant (the propositional content \( p \) expressed by the whole CP). Crucially, the speaker does not indicate that he thinks that it is uncontroversial that the sickness was not pleasant.

Accordingly, we claim that the predicational structure expressed within the DP should be situated in a functional structure comparable to the one required by discourse particles at the level of CP. Pushing the analogy further, we assume that the particle is invariably stuck in a particle-specific position. Notice now that material can intervene between D and Prt, as shown in (14a).

(14) a. *dieser im letzten Jahr ja schwerkranke Mann*
   b. *dieser ja im letzten Jahr schwerkranke Mann*

We are not so sure about the exact information structural difference between (14a) and (14b), but there is one, cf. their usage in the context given in (15).

(15) Wie erging es eigentlich im letzten Jahr dem armen Herrn Meier?
   ‘What happened to poor Mr. Meier last year?’
   a. *Dieser im letzten Jahr ja schwerkranke Mann musste ins Krankenhaus gehen.*
      this in.the last year JA seriously.sick man had.to in.the hospital go
   b. *Dieser ja im letzten Jahr schwerkranke Mann musste ins Krankenhaus gehen.*

In analogy to CP-level analyses, we refer to the intervening landing site as TopP,\(^1\) and we claim that the particle is located within AP between TopP and TP (TP optionally preceded by DegP and/or NegP). Although TP does not encode Tense in a strict sense, we follow Struckmeier (2010) in postulating a TP-like category at the level of DP. This is motivated by the overt expression of Aspect in participle constructions where present or past participle suffixes fill a T-like head.

Given the above, the derivation of the AP runs as follows:

(16) a. \([λ schwerkranke] Mann] \]
   \(\Rightarrow\) Merge PP
   b. \([\text{lexical layer im letzten Jahr}[λ schwerkranke] Mann]] \]
   \(\Rightarrow\) Merge T (overt as participle suffix)

\(^1\) As already mentioned, the determination of the exact information structural notion requires further investigation. Cf., for instance, the positional variation of higher adverbs such as *leider* (‘unfortunately’) in *ein leider ja schwerkranke Mann* vs. *ein ja leider schwerkranke Mann*. Given reasonable assumptions, *leider* should not be analyzed as some kind of topic.
As we saw in (8)-(10), the presence of discourse particles within AP, as is the case in the context of relative clauses (cf. Wiltschko 2013), crucially relies on different referential modi expressed in the D position. In particular, to account for the connection between D and Prt (i.e. the presence or absence of a discourse particle in AP), we propose agreement at a distance, so-called ‘probe-goal agreement’ (Chomsky 2000; 2001). A probe with an unvalued (uninterpretable) feature uF scans its locally accessible c-command domain for a category with a matching (interpretable) feature iF that values uF (and thus causes its deletion).

According to Chomsky (2001: 5), “[t]he natural principle is that the uninterpretable features, and only these, enter the derivation without values, and are distinguished from interpretable features by virtue of this property.”

Problem
We would have to postulate a particle-specific feature in D° that probes Prt. This feature, by virtue of its unvalued status, would have to be uninterpretable, according to Chomsky’s (2001) valuation/interpretation biconditional.

(17) \[ DP^D° \underline{uREFPrt} ... [AP ... Prt^Prt \underline{iREFPrt} ... ]] \]

However, note that the referential modus of D is independent of the discourse particle. The particle does not constitute the referential modus. In other words, D does not have a Prt-feature, but reference-sensitive Prts are likely to have a feature related to reference.

Consequently, we need a theory that, in addition to (18a), allows configurations where the licensing direction is turned around, as in (18b).

(18) a. X Y 
    b. X Y 
    \[ uF \ iF \ iF \ uF \]

We therefore adopt the feature-sharing version of Agree formulated by Pesetsky and Torrego (2007: 268) and already used by approaches to modeling Force-related agreement at a distance (cf. Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Bayer 2012; Authier 2013).
Agree: feature-sharing version

(19) a. An unvalued feature F (a probe) on a head H at syntactic location α (F_α) scans its c-command domain for another instance of F (a goal) at location β (F_β) with which to agree.

b. Replace F_α with F_β, so that the same feature is present in both locations.

The approach to probe-goal agreement as feature sharing by Pesetsky and Torrego (2007) dissociates agreement from interpretability. It allows an interpretable feature to probe an uninterpretable matching feature (adopting a notational convention, in (20c), agreement is expressed by an arbitrary value that fills the empty slot in [ ]).

(20) a. \([\text{DP} D_\text{REF}] \ldots [\text{AP} \ldots \text{Prt} \text{REF}] \ldots ]\] 
\[\Rightarrow\]

b. \([\text{DP} D_\text{REF}] \ldots [\text{AP} \ldots \text{Prt} \text{REF}] \ldots ]\]
\[\Rightarrow\]

3.3 Connecting DP-internal Force to CP Force

At the outset of this paper, we already noted that the DP-internal discourse particle depends on the epistemic reference point of the speaker of the whole utterance. This ‘epistemic judge’ is encoded in the Force projection at the level of CP. Concerning discourse particles at the level of CP, Bayer and Obenauer (2011) assume that particles, due to their sentence-type sensitivity, have a type-sensitive Force feature (for instance ‘QForce’).

(21) \([\text{FinP/ForceP} \text{Wh Force}^\text{Q} \text{Fin}^\text{Q} \ldots [\text{Prt} \text{QForce} \ldots ] \ldots ]\]

As we saw in (12a), DP-internal discourse particles do not depend on a particular sentence type at the level of CP, but their interpretive impact nevertheless connects to the speaker of the utterance. We therefore suggest that DP-internal discourse particles in German provide further evidence for splitting Force into a ‘clause-typing’ domain and a ‘speaker attitude’ projection that encodes the speaker’s relation to propositional contents of the utterance (Haegeman 2010).

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2 Of course, when the DP containing the discourse particle occurs in an embedded clause under *verba dicendi*, this interpretation is shifted to the matrix subject, as is the case with discourse particles at the level of CP:

(i) Mein Nachbar fragt, warum dieser ja sehr kranke Mann wohl keine Jacke anhat.
   My neighbor asks why this very sick man does not wear a jacket.'
4. References


