

## You can't always dislocate it, the pronoun: Restrictions in German right-dislocation

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Right-dislocations (RD, see 1a) are non-canonical structures that include an anaphoric relation: They consist of a matrix clause with a corresponding element – such as a pronoun ('*sie*' in 1a) – that is related to a dislocated element at the right of the matrix clause ('*die Anna*' in 1a).

- (1) Ich habe sie in Berlin getroffen, die Anna.  
'I met her in Berlin, the Anna.'

However, RDs also refer back and forth to elements in the surrounding discourse context, as their function is to mark the (discourse) topic which must have been established in the preceding context, and which is critical for the following discourse (see Averintseva-Klishch 2008). From an experimental point of view, RDs are understudied on all linguistic levels. In three acceptability judgment experiments, we focus on phonological and syntactic conditions for acceptability in German right dislocation structures.

**Experiment 1: Phonological factors.** It has been proposed that the length of a phrase motivates the dislocation, similar to the cognitive mechanism that leads speakers to shift heavy constituents to the right periphery of a sentence in English (Heavy NP Shift, see e.g., Wasow 1997, Arnold et al. 2000). In Experiment 1 (N=48), we tested whether long and short phrases can be dislocated to the right, and whether they can be shifted inside the middle field, that is, whether we find Heavy NP shifts in German. Long phrases were always three times longer than short phrases. Besides sentences with a RD (RD, 2a/b) and a Heavy NP Shift (HNPS, 2c/d), we included canonical control sentences (CONTROL, 2e/f). If RD is influenced by the length of a constituent, we expect a main effect of length in this condition (long constituents judged better than short constituents). If German has HNPS (a question that has not been explored experimentally), we also expect a main effect of length in this condition. If RD constraints arise from similar phonological constraints as HNPS, we expect longer NPs to be rated better.

**Results.** Compared to the CONTROL condition, there was a significant difference between long and short phrases for HNPS ( $\beta = 10.26$ ,  $SE = 5.35$ ,  $t = 1.92$ ,  $p = .056$ ), and for RD ( $\beta = 11.66$ ,  $SE = 3.37$ ,  $t = 3.46$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Against expectations, though, the difference went into the opposite direction, in that sentences with shifted and dislocated short NPs received higher ratings than those with long NPs. Crucially, both RD and HNPS behaved similarly.

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| (2) | a. Ich habe sie in Berlin getroffen, die Anna.                      | RD-SHORT      | 69% |
|     | 'I met her in Berlin, the Anna.'                                    |               |     |
|     | b. Ich habe sie in Berlin getroffen, meine alte Schulfreundin Anna. | RD-LONG       | 57% |
|     | 'I met her in Berlin, my old school mate Anna.'                     |               |     |
|     | c. Ich habe in Berlin die Anna getroffen.                           | HNPS-SHORT    | 77% |
|     | 'I met in Berlin the Anna.'   |               |     |
|     | d. Ich habe in Berlin meine alte Schulfreundin Anna getroffen.      | HNPS-LONG     | 67% |
|     | 'Ich met in Berlin my old school mate Anna.'                        |               |     |
|     | e. Ich habe den Paul im Zoo gesehen.                                | CONTROL-SHORT | 72% |
|     | 'I saw the Paul in the zoo.'  |               |     |
|     | f. Ich habe meinen alten Freund Paul im Zoo gesehen.                | CONTROL-LONG  | 76% |
|     | 'I saw my old friend Paul in the zoo.'                              |               |     |

**Experiment 2: Syntactic category constraints.** The right-dislocated element can be of every syntactic category. An exception are pronouns. According to some accounts, they cannot be dislocated since they do not add meaningful content that can function as a specification for the corresponding element in the matrix clause. However, as pointed out by de Vries (2007), it

could be meaningful to use a pronoun, and this possibility is allowed by the grammar in general (see also data on Norwegian by Fretheim 1995 and Borthen & Karagjosova 2021).

In Experiment 2 (N=51), we investigated the effect of syntactic category (DP/NP/PRO, see 3) of the corresponding element in the matrix clause and the dislocated element.

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| (3) | a. Ich mag <u>Anna</u> , <b>meine Schwiegermutter</b> . | `I like Anna, my mother-in-law.' | 75% |
|     | b. Ich mag <u>sie</u> , <b>meine Schwiegermutter</b> .  | `I like her, my mother-in-law.'  | 60% |
|     | c. Ich mag <u>meine Schwiegermutter</u> , <b>Anna</b> . | `I like my mother-in-law, Anna.' | 72% |
|     | d. Ich mag <u>sie</u> , <b>Anna</b> .                   | `I like her, Anna.'              | 54% |
|     | e. Ich mag <u>meine Schwiegermutter</u> , <b>sie</b> .  | `I like my mother-in-law, her.'  | 16% |
|     | f. Ich mag <u>Anna</u> , <b>sie</b> .                   | `I like Anna, her.'              | 14% |

**Results.** Dislocated DPs are more acceptable than dislocated NPs, and both are more acceptable than dislocated pronouns. Dislocated pronouns are not judged to be grammatical (worse than bad filler sentences), independent of the element in the matrix clause (see 3).

**Experiment 3: Syntactic phrase constraints.** It has been claimed that if proper names are dislocated, they cannot occur as bare names, only together with a definite article: RDs with bare proper names (e.g., *Ich habe sie gesehen, Anna*, 'I've seen her, Anna') could be ambiguous between a vocative reading (addressing the interlocutor by the name Anna), and the RD reading (talking about the person Anna). Meinunger (2015) claims that bare proper names in RDs are properly ungrammatical in German (see Averintseva-Klisch & Bücking 2008 for similar conclusions). However, there is a lack of empirical studies and it is an open question whether bare proper names are indeed ungrammatical in RDs.

We manipulated the presence of a determiner (NON-BARE, see 4a; BARE, see 4b). To exclude a possible vocative reading, we created context sentences that ensured that the participants (N=25 from a region with bare NP preference, Werth 2015) knew who was talking to whom. If right-dislocated proper names need the presence of a determiner, we expect that acceptability ratings differ between non-bare and bare proper names. Crucially, if right-dislocated bare proper names are excluded by the grammar, we expect them to behave like 'bad' filler sentences (just like dislocated pronouns in Experiment 2).

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| (4) | Leonie says to Benjamin:                               |                                  |     |
|     | a. Ich habe sie in Berlin getroffen, <b>die Anna</b> . | `I met her in Berlin, the Anna.' | 62% |
|     | b. Ich habe sie in Berlin getroffen, <b>Anna</b> .     | `I met her in Berlin, Anna.'     | 40% |

**Results.** There is a difference between the conditions NON-BARE and BARE ( $\beta = -22.08$ ,  $SE = 3.51$ ,  $t = -6.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, if a structure is forbidden, one would expect worse ratings (as it was the case for 'bad' filler sentences and dislocated pronouns in Experiment 2). Thus, we can conclude that the acceptability of bare proper names in dislocated structures is decreased compared to non-bare proper names, but they are not perceived as ungrammatical.

**Discussion.** Right-dislocations – elements that include an anaphoric relation – are quite acceptable, even in written form. The dislocated elements cannot be too small (dislocated pronouns are ungrammatical, Exp. 2), but also not too long (decreased acceptability for long dislocated phrases, Exp. 1). Furthermore, the claim that dislocated bare proper names are ungrammatical is not supported by our experimental work (Exp. 3). These results indicate the complex interplay of phonological and syntactic constraints in right-dislocation, and set the stage for a broader experimental investigation into other linguistic and conceptual contributors to constraints on right-dislocations.