V1 clauses aren't V2 clauses 'in disguise'

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Verb initial structures of the kind in (1) are widespread in German(ic). Putting imperatives aside (which are arguably of a different nature due to their special inflection), they can occur as Y/N questions (1a), Exclamatives (1b), Narratives (1c), and Conditionals (1d):

(1) a. Hat Hans sich aufgeregt?   Y/N question
         has H.   himself got-upset
      b. Hat Hans sich aufgeregt!   V-initial exclamative
         has H.   himself got-upset
      c. Kommt Fritzchen aus der Schule….   V-initial narrative
         Comes F.   from school
      d. Ist der Ruf erst ruiniert, lebt es sich ganz ungeniert   V-initial conditional
         Is he reputation ruined, lives one unabashed

A common view in generative syntax is that the seemingly empty 'Vorfeld'-position is actually not empty but occupied by an operator that is responsible for the relevant interpretation. Such a view has the advantage of being able to stick to a uniform analysis of all instances of V-C movement in German(ic). On the other hand, the postulation of an empty operator (which is only responsible for clause type and doesn't bind a variable) is a rather unusual type of element in syntactic theory.

In this talk, I will argue against the operator analysis and argue that

(i)   these structures are truly verb-initial, i.e. there is no empty material before the finite verb

(ii) they are syntactically underspecified for their clause type and the actual interpretation is dependent (partially) on non-syntactic means (like the addition of particles, lexical choice, intonation)

(iii) the common nominator for all these clause types can only be defined negatively, namely that they are not 'plain assertions' in which the speaker is committed to the truth value

The analysis entails a view on phrase structure which treats head movement as 'self-attachment' of the finite verb to its own projection and thus does not rely on criterial checking of clause type features. This means that clause type is not encoded via syntactic features in the syntax; instead, the syntactic structure of a clause merely delimits the possible range of interpretations. It will be shown, on the basis of non-canonical uses of certain clause types, that this flexible view is empirically more adequate than previous accounts.

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