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Word Order in German Sentences

Main Clauses and Subclauses II

Recall

Simple Statements, Questions, and Imperatives

- Sentences consist of building blocks which can be arranged in several ways to form a sentence.
- Every sentence has at least the subject and the verb. Everything but the verb may be put in an arbitrary order, but don't put the subject to far to the end.
- The verb usually goes to the second position. If it splits into parts, then the conjugated part goes to the second position and the non conjugated part goes to the end:

  Er nimmt am Deutschkurs teil.

  teilnehmen – participate

- Simple questions (questions without questioning word) have the conjugated part of the verb at the first position.

  Nimmt er am Deutschkurs teil?

- Imperatives are formed like questions:

  Nimm nächste Woche am Deutschkurs teil!

  nächste – next
  Woche, *f* – week

Composing clauses to sentences

- A simple clause (see above) may count as a sentence. Also, sentences can be made up of several clauses using connectives.
- A connective determines if it starts a main clause (Hauptsatz, *m*) or a subclause (Nebensatz, *m*).
- The main clause connectives are the following:

und	and	*oder*	or
aber	but	*denn*	since

Nicht (nur) ..., sondern (auch) ...	Not (only) ..., but (also) ...
Weder ..., noch ...	Neither ..., nor ...
Entweder ..., oder ...	

- *Weder*, *Entweder*, *Nicht (nur)* in the beginning may or may not count as building blocks of the first sentence.
- The subclause connectives are the following:

weil/da	because	*obwohl*	although
wenn	if (cond.)	*ob*	if, whether
während	while	*nachdem*	after
bevor	before	*dass/daß*	that
als	as (temp.)	*falls*	in case
sofern	as long as	*damit*	for that
so daß	such that	*indem*	by

- In subclauses, the verb goes to the end. Composed verbs don't split.
- Subclauses count as building block of the surrounding clause. They might be put at the first or last position, or after the verb.

Questions

- Simple questions are composed by putting the verb to the beginning of the sentence:

Spricht Frau Mayr englisch?

sprechen – speak

- If a question word is used, this word comes the the first position and the verb goes to the sencond.
- Here are some question words:

wer	who	*wo*	where
wann	when	*wieso/weshalb/warum*	why
wie	how	*was*	what
worüber	on what	*woher*	from where
...			

The corresponding default answers are

der/dieser	this (one)	*da*	there
dann	then	*deshalb/darum*	for this reason
so	so	*das/dieses*	this
darüber	on that	*daher*	from there
...			

- Examples:

Wo ist der Bahnhof?
Wann beginnt der Deutschkurs?
Wer hält die Vorlesung über Computer Algebra?
Wie geht das?
Was ist daran so schwer?
Wovor hast Du Angst?

Bahnhof, *m* – railway station
halten – (here) give
über – (here) on
daran – at this
schwer – difficult
Angst, *f* – angst

- Question marks can be more complicated. They may involve prepositions like in the following examples.

Wie viele Mails bekommst Du am Tag?
Von wem bekommst Du die meisten Mails?
Seit wann wohnst Du in Österreich?

viele – many
bekommen – get
am Tag – per day
Seit – since
wohnen – live/stay

Exercise

- Besides the question words above, there are further question words which are build by *wo* (+ *r*) + preposition, like *wovor* and *worüber* in the table (the *r* is put to avoid vocal clashes). Guess the question word for "for what" (that's too easy). Try to complete the question word from the prepositions that you know.
- The question word *wer* has to be declinated, depending on what you are asking for. The declination is analogous to the article *der* (Singular only). Write it down in a table and form a question sentence for each case.
- Translate to german:

How far is Linz (away)?
Do you have a laptop?
When does the seminar take place?
What is your talk about?

far – weit
away – here: entfernt
laptop – Laptop, *m*
take place – stattfinden
talk – Vortrag, *m*
about – über

- Translate to english:

Wo kann man in Hagenberg Brot kaufen?
Wann öffnet der Unimarkt?
Fährt jemand heute zum Billa?

können – can
man – 'one'
Brot, *n* – bread
kaufen – buy
öffnen – open
fahren – go (by car)
jemand – anybody
heute – today
zum = zu + dem

Indirect Questions Clauses

- The question word from the previous section may also serve as connectives which introduce subclauses.
- These subclauses are called indirect question clauses.
- They correspond to a special case of the english relative clauses, for instance "I don't know **who** will come."
- Here is a table with main clauses that are commonly used in connection with indirect question clauses:

Ich habe keine Ahnung, ...	I have no idea
Ich wüßte gerne, ...	I would (really) like to know
Können Sie mir sagen, ...	Do you know (formally)
Weißt Du, ...	Do you know (informally)
Es ist egal, ...	It doesn't matter
Es ist mir egal, ...	I don't care
Ich kann mir denken, ...	I can imagine
...	

Ahnung, *f* – anticipation
gerne – willingly
egal – equal
denken – think

- Examples:

Können Sie mir sagen, wo der Bahnhof ist?
Ich wüßte gerne, warum Deutsch so schwierig ist.
Es ist fast egal, wo im Satz das Subjekt steht.
Es ist nicht egal, wo im Satz das Verb steht.
Ich sage Dir nicht, wen ich anrufe.

Bahnhof, *m* – station
schwierig – difficult
fast – almost
stehen – stand
anrufen – call

- Question words that are made up of *wo* and a preposition split into parts if they have to be in a case different from nominative.

Weißt Du, für wen er die Blumen pflückt?

Blume, *f* – flower
pflücken – pick

- Indirect question sentences may also serve as subjects/objects, or other adverbial parts of the surrounding sentence.

Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben.[1]
Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.[2]
Wer anderen eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein.[3]

zu spät – late
bestrafen – punish
Leben, *n* – life
betten – to lie down
liegen – to lie
andern – others
Grube – hole
graben – dig
fallen – fall
hinein – into (it)

Exercise

- Convert the following questions to indirect ones using a phrase from the table as main clause.

Was machst Du morgen?
Wo wohnst Du?
Wer geht gleich zum Unimarkt?
Ist morgen Seminar?[4]

was – what
machen – do
wohnen – live/stay
gehen – go
gleich – soon
zum – to the
Seminar, *n* – seminar

- The German philosopher Georg Schimmel once said

Gebildet ist, wer weiss, wo er findet, was er nicht weiss.

gebildet – educated
wissen – know
finden – find

Do you understand?

Relative Clauses

- Relative clauses are similar to indirect question clauses. Here the articles and the question word *welcher* (which) serve as subjunctions.
- They are declinated to the case which they have to have wrt. the sub clause verb. The declination differs to the declination of articles only in genitive singular *dessen/deren/dessen* instead of *des/der/des* and dative plural: *denen* instead of *den*.
- Their genter and number is according to the word which they refer to.

[1] Gorbatschow
[2] German saying
[3] German saying
[4] Hint: use *ob*

- Relative clauses are subclauses; the verb is put at the end.
- Relative clauses are put directly behind the word to which they refer.
- If there is no ambiguity, they may also be put at the end of the clause, if this makes the clause more readable.
- Examples:

Hunde, die bellen, beißen nicht.[5]
Das Problem, das Du seit Wochen studierst, ist völlig trivial.
Die Aufgaben, die wir im Deutschkurs, den Manuel gibt, machen müssen, sind zu einfach.

Hund, m – dog
bellen – bark
beißen – bite
Problem, n – problem
seit – since/for
Woche, f – week
studieren – study
völlig – completly
trivial – trivial
Aufgabe, f – exercise
geben – give
machen – make/do
müssen – must
zu – too
einfach – easy

Exercise

- For each case build an example sentence with the relative pronoun in that case.
- Fill in the correct relative pronouns in the slots.

Folgen, ... beschränkt und monoton sind, konvergieren.
Der Witz, ... Du erzählst, ist langweilig.
Das Kind, ... Du spielst, heißt Anna. (Caution!)
Den Satz, ... auf Seite 1 steht, verstehe ich nicht.

Folge, f – sequence
beschränkt – bounded
monoton – monotonous
konvergieren – converge
Witz, m – joke
erzählen – tell
langweilig – boring
Kind, n – child
spielen – play
heißen – being called
Satz, m – sentence
auf – on
Seite – page
stehen – stand
verstehen – understand

- In English there is no distinction between implicit question clauses and relative clauses, both start with who, which, whose, etc. What is the difference in German? Give examples for both kind of clauses.

Special Constructions

- There are some special constructions that don't fit to any of the constructions above. They are listed here.
- A table with approximate translations

um ... zu X-en	for X-ing ...
je ... desto ...	the... the ...
ohne ... zu X-en	without X-ing ...
...	

- Examples:

Er kommt nach Österreich, um Deutsch zu lernen.
Viele kommen zum RISC, um dort zu promovieren.
Je mehr Du lernst, desto mehr kannst Du.
Er kann lügen, ohne mit der Wimper zu zucken.

lernen – learn
dort – there
promovieren – doing PhD
lernen – learn
lügen – ly
Wimper, f – eyelash

[5] German saying.