

The “marks” of (secondary) syntax: punctuation and (Non-)integration

There are many constructions which syntactically and semantically are not fully integrated into the sentence and hence can be regarded as secondary syntax. While in spoken language, prosodic clues may indicate the secondary status of a construction, various means of punctuation serve that role in written text. Brackets, colons, commas, dashes, and quotation marks may all be employed to non-integratedness of an expression. Using authentic German corpus data of non-edited written texts, we develop functional profiles for those punctuation marks in this talk. We will show that there is no one-to-one correspondence between punctuation marks and the function they can fulfill in marking secondary syntax, but the kinds of punctuation we consider rather overlap in their function while differ with respect to the syntactic contexts in which they can be used.

We distinguish various factors that are relevant for which punctuation can be used. First, the position of the secondary syntax with respect to the rest of the sentence matters. It can precede (1) or follow the punctuation marks (2), or it can be centrally embedded in the sentence by the marks (3).

- (1) **Kurzum:** Man hat sich an das „überfüllte“ Leben gewöhnt.
- (2) Sitzen wir im Taxi unterhalten wir uns nicht mit dem Fahrer, sondern bedienen unser iPhone oder unseren Laptop – **natürlich mit MP3-Player oder iPod im Ohr.**
- (3) Der Drang nach Macht einzelner Menschen (**Lenin/Hitler**) brachte die einfache Bevölkerung so oft in große Probleme.

These examples also show variation regarding the relation between the secondary material and the expression it is commenting upon. The non-integrated material in (3) provides an exemplification for its anchor NP for which it could principally be substituted. This contrasts with (2), in which the PP in (2), which comes as an afterthought in the so-called “Nachfeld”, provides an adverbial modification of the VP. It is interpreted as an addition, not a substitution. (1) still is different, as the secondary syntax in the “Vor-Vorfeld” fulfills a discourse structuring function as it explicitly marks the discourse function of the following sentence.

Our study shows that not all functions and positions are licensed equally for all punctuation marks. These differences can mainly be traced back to two factors: the direction in which the punctuation is oriented and whether the punctuation marks (may) come in pairs. For instance, the colon is preferably forward-looking and does not come in pairs. That is, it cannot be used to center-embed secondary syntax and the disintegrated material tends to be on its left side. This contrasts with brackets, which must come in pairs and which are mostly backward-looking. That is, they can be used for embedded secondary material, as in (3), and must follow the material to which it is anchored.

- (4) *Der Drang nach Macht (**Lenin/Hitler**) einzelner Menschen brachte ...

However, bracketed material can precede the expression upon which it comments, if it is actually rather integrated into the sentence structure and the punctuation can be omitted in principle, as in the title of this abstract. This contrasts with the use of commas, which share a lot of the properties of brackets, but must always follow their target, if they are used pairwise.

- (5) *the marks of, secondary, syntax

Systematically applying considerations like those just sketched to the other kinds of punctuation marks will allow us to state the functional profiles of each of the discussed kind of punctuation mark and to highlight their interrelation and the principles that govern their usage to mark the secondary status of syntactic material.