Fragmentary Subordinate Clauses

While fragmentary expressions in root contexts have received considerable attention in the literature (cf. for example Merchant 2004, Stainton 2006, Reich, to appear) far less attention has been paid to fragmentary subordinate clauses (henceforth FSC) and their syntactic and semantic properties (but cf. Klein 1993, Winkler 2012, Konietzko 2014). Concentrating on German and English data, which also include naturally occurring examples extracted from corpora, we will propose that FSC should be analyzed as CPs embedding a bare predicative XP without an IP projection. Instances of FSCs, which also contain attributive uses, are given in (1)-(3):

(1)  a. Der Wagen darf, weil verkehrsuntauglich, im Straßenverkehr nicht weiter run be the car may because not-roadworthy in traffic not longer betrieben werden.
     b. Der Klemmer hat, obwohl ein Experte auf diesem Gebiet, die Heizungssteuerung not repaired the plumber has although an expert in this field the heating-control nicht repariert.
     c. Diese Aufgabe wird, bis gelöst, noch einige Leute beschäftigen.
        this task until solved still some people bother

(2)  a. Medicine, while still based on plants, became more and more sophisticated as knowledge accumulated […]
     b. The bill brings a host of new controls and regulations which, if fully implemented, would make polluting the environment an expensive option both for industry and individuals.
     c. Implicit in this argument, though not explored, was the idea that current models of design understanding, with all their weaknesses, were not accidental.

(3)  ein schmackhafter weil sorgfältig zubereiteter Braten
      a. tasty because thoroughly prepared roast

FSC are characterized by the following properties. First, they exhibit an overt subordinating conjunction (weil, obwohl, bis in (1) and (3), while, if, though in (2)) – lexical choice varying across languages. Second, they simultaneously lack an overt realization of the subject and of finiteness (cf. (4)). Third, FSC contain a phrase functioning as a predicate over the covert subject. Fourth, this subject is identified with a suitable antecedent within the matrix clause. With regard to the subject the embedding clause may serve as its antecedent as in (5):

(4)  *Der Wagen darf, weil er verkehrsuntauglich, / weil verkehrsuntauglich ist, im traffic not longer run be the car may because it not-roadworthy because not-roadworthy is in Straßenverkehr nicht weiter betrieben werden.
(5)  Der Wagen wurde, weil amtlich angeordnet, gestern aus dem Verkehr gezogen.
     the car was because officially disposed yesterday from the traffic withdrawn

We will propose an analysis for FSCs based on the following assumptions: Due to the obligatory occurrence of a lexical complementizer the embedded structure forms a CP. The complement of C cannot be categorized as an IP/FinP. Instead, the complement of C may be formed by an AP, PP, NP or VP – possibly restricted by language specific constraints. In the
case of VP the V is restricted to passive participles of transitive verbs and to past participles of unaccusatives. The subject is represented by PRO (in the non-attributive variant):

(6)  a. \([\text{CP} \left[ \text{C' weil [AP PRO [A verkehrsuntauglich]]]}}\]
    b. \([\text{CP} \left[ \text{C'' [XP PRO ... X]}} \right] X = \{A|P|N|Vpsrt\}\]

The temporal interpretation of the FSC varies to a certain extent – excluding future interpretations:

(7)  a. Anton wurde_{Prät} weil betrunken_{Prät} von der Streife angehalten.
    Anton was because drunk by the police held
    b. Anton kam_{Prät} weil notorisch unpünktlich_{PräS} auch heute wieder zu spät.
    Anton came because notoriously unpunctual also today again late
c. *Anton kommt_{Präs} weil geheilt_{Fut} zum Arzt-Termin.
    Anton comes because cured to doctor-appointment

The temporal reference of the FSC is linked to the temporal reference of the antecedent (lifetime effects). The considerable variation between German and English with respect to causal interpretation of FSCs (which is excluded in English: *Medicine, because based on science, became more and more sophisticated as knowledge accumulated.) will be traced back to the difference in clause structure: In German all clausal features are determined in C independent of clause type, while in English features are at least partially determined in I. Correspondingly, propositions are encoded by CP in German but by IP in English. The specific requirements on the interpretation of causal modification are sensitive to a complete specification of clausal features.

Our analysis offers an explanation for the syntactic and semantic properties of FSCs using a minimal set of assumptions. In essence, our hypothesis is that FSCs should not be treated as exceptional constructions. Rather, their syntactic and semantic properties follow systematically from independently motivated general principles of structure formation. Moreover, we will argue that language specific differences with respect to what types of conjunctions are licensed in FSCs are not idiosyncratic in any way. Rather, they follow directly from how clausal features are encoded in the clause structure in a specific language.

References


