
Quirky Subjects in German – A Relational Analysis

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There is a debate in the literature on German syntax about the status of the dative marked DP in sentences such as (1).

- (1) **Mir** gefällt dieses Buch.
I.DAT likes this book
'I like this book.'

One line of research takes such DPs to be quirky subjects, that is, non-nominative marked subjects (Barðdal 2006). One argument for this approach comes from the observation that such DPs can bind reflexive pronouns, hence pass a typical subject test. The other line of research denies that they are quirky subjects and analyzes them as objects (Haider 2010). What speaks in favor of this approach is that such DPs do not pass all subjects tests: for instance, they cannot be controlled.

The aim of this talk is to show that the debate is misguided. It rests on the false premise that a DP can only be a subject or only an object. Instead, I argue that such DPs are in fact quirky subjects and that quirky subjects are uniformly both subjects and objects: they are deep subjects and surface objects (Perlmutter 1984). That the DP in (1) passes some subject tests follows because it was a subject at some point of the derivation. That it doesn't pass all subject tests follows because some subject tests in German reference surface subjects only. This analysis also captures the difference between German and Icelandic. In Icelandic, subject tests are never (except for V-agreement) sensitive to surface subjects exclusively. In sum, the syntax of quirky subjects is uniform. The differences follow from language particular rules. They can take into account the subject demoted to object (as in German), but they need not (as in Icelandic).

References: • Barðdal, J. (2006): Construction-specific properties of syntactic subjects in Icelandic and German. *Cognitive Linguistics* 17(1), 39–106. • Haider, H. (2010): *The Syntax of German*. Cambridge University Press. • Perlmutter, D. (1984): Working 1s and Inversion in Italian, Japanese, and Quechua. In: *Studies in Relational Grammar 2*, Perlmutter, D. & Rosen, C. (eds.), 292–330.