

***Whoever's dogs are running around in the garden is in big trouble. Properties and historical development of 'asymmetric' free relatives in German***

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'Asymmetric' free relative clauses, in which a DP undergoes pied-piping along with a fronted genitival/possessive wh-word, exhibit a set of peculiar properties that set them apart from run-of-the-mill free relatives (cf. e.g. Müller 1999, Vogel 2001 on German; Pollard & Sag 1994: 69, McCawley 1998: 457 on English). As illustrated in (1), the verb internal to the free relative agrees in number with the whole DP consisting of (i) *wessen* 'whose' and (ii) a plural NP. In contrast, the matrix verb agrees with the possessive/genitival wh-word and not with the nominal head. That is, only *wessen* (and not *wessen*+NP) acts as the argument and subject referent of the matrix verb. This is also shown by the binding and resumption facts in the 'real-life' examples (2a-b).

- (1) [*Wessen Spielfiguren geschlagen werden*] *muss von vorne anfangen.*  
 whose pieces captured become.PL must.SG from beginning start  
 '[Whoever's pieces are captured] has to start over.'
- (2) a. [*Wessen<sub>j</sub> Neigungen<sub>i</sub>*] *sich<sub>i</sub> im Verlauf eines Erwachsenenlebens verändern,*  
 whose inclinations REFL in-the course of-a adult-life change-PL  
*muss die Chance haben, sich<sub>j</sub> auf ein anderes Berufsfeld zu begeben:[...]*  
 must.SG the chance have REFL to another professional-field to move  
 '[Whoever's inclinations change in the course of their adult life] must have the opportunity to change careers.'  
 (DeReKo, St. Galler Tagblatt, 30.06.2012, p. 41)
- b. [*Wessen<sub>i</sub> Briefe*] *als besonders schlecht auffielen, der<sub>i</sub> wurde abgeholt*  
 Whoever's letters as particularly bad stood-out the-one was picked-up  
*zum Diktat.*  
 for dictation  
 '[Whoever's letters stood out as particularly bad] was picked up for dictation.'  
 (DeReKo; Berliner Zeitung, 11.01.2007, p. 29)

In this talk, I take a closer look at the properties, theoretical analysis, and historical development of asymmetric free relatives in German. I show that the construction poses a challenge to theoretical approaches to free relatives in which the fronted DP is represented in the matrix clause (including e.g. the Head analysis of Bresnan & Grimshaw 1978, and more recent reprojection-based analyses such as Donati 2006). I then propose an alternative account in which the free relative is embedded under an empty D head (Groos & van Riemsdijk 1981) that is licensed/identified under Agree with a wh-operator (an instance of relativized probing, Béjar 2003; Nevins 2007). In addition, I will discuss the diachronic origins of asymmetric free relatives, arguing that they developed from parenthetical conditional/concessive wh-clauses that gradually came to be integrated into the matrix clause through a series of reanalyses (possibly on the model of other wh-FRs, cf. Coniglio & Paul 2019, Fuß 2021).