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Sommario/riassunto

The filling of the vorfeld (= clause-initial position in German declarative clauses) depends on information structural rather than strictly syntactic constraints. Referential phrases of one of the following three types are eligible for the vorfeld: scene-setting elements, contrastive elements and topics. The main point of this paper is to show that these types seem to be ranked: scene-setting elements are the most likely ones to appear in the vorfeld, followed by contrastive elements and finally by topics. Note that topics are thus not the preferred vorfeld-fillers even in German (see Speyer 2007; Frey 2004a). The difference in likelihood to be in the vorfeld can be modelled by an Optimality Theoretic account that is sketched out in this paper.
