

# Discourse Novelty, Givenness, and EV2 in German

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This study presents experimental data on Embedded Verb-Second (EV2) in German in relation to discourse status of the embedded proposition *p*. Djärv (2019) proposes that if *p* has an antecedent in the context (*p* has been *given* in the discourse), EV2 is ruled out. If *p* is discourse-new (i.e. not given), EV2 is allowed. The results of the experiment I report only partially bear out this claim. In light of these results, I suggest that the notion of discourse-novelty must be refined.

**Background:** Some verbs presuppose givenness of their complement (e.g. doubt, accept, resent), while others lack that presupposition (e.g. say, believe, discover). This correlates with their complements allow EV2 or only take Embedded Verb-Final (EVF) configurations. See the contrast between EV2 (1a) and EVF (1b).

- (1) a. Hans \*bezweifelt/glaubt, [Peter geht nach Hause]  
Hans \*doubts/believes Peter goes to home  
'Hans doubts/believes that Peter is going home.' *Embedded Verb-Second (EV2)*
- b. Hans bezweifelt/glaubt, [dass Peter nach Hause geht]  
Hans doubts/believes that Peter to home goes  
'Hans doubts/believes that Peter is going home.' *Embedded Verb-Final (EVF)*

Djärv et al. (2018), Djärv (2019), and Caplan & Djärv (2019) argue that EV2 (1a) is *licensed* iff the embedded proposition is discourse-novel, i.e. has no propositional antecedent in the discourse context. For Djärv (2019), to be a propositional antecedent in the context, *p* can be part of the discourse context without specific restrictions, or can be accommodated through contextual entailment. An experiment was carried out to test EV2 felicity when *p* was given in the context.

**Experiment & Findings:** A judgment experiment on a 7-point Likert scale, in a 2x2 factorial design, was deployed (in German) through PCIbex (Zehr & Schwartz, 2018). It was set up s.t. *p* was given in the context, and the target item contained either *p* or a novel proposition *q* under a reportive verb, with an EV2 or EVF configuration. See the design in (2) (in English, for ease of interpretation), with manipulations Verb Position (VP; EV2 vs. EVF) and Discourse Status (DS), with *p* in both context and target (GIVEN), or *p* in context and *q* in target (NEW).

- (2) a. **Context:** You overhear a conversation between *x* and *y*. *x* says: "p, isn't it?"  
b. **Target:** *y* answers: Yes, *z* said/mentioned/told me, *p/q* (EV2/EVF)

The results show that the predictions in Djärv (2019) are only partially borne out. The scores were analyzed in R (2012), using a mixed-effects model (Bates et al., 2012; Kuznetsova et al., 2014 for *p*-values). The experiment ( $n = 108$ ,  $x = 36 + 54$  fillers) showed a main effect for VP, s.t. EV2 scored lower than EVF ( $\beta = -.04$ , s.e. = .01,  $p = .003$ ), and an interaction between VPxDS ( $\beta = -.025$ , s.e. = .01,  $p = .02$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed that EV2-GIVEN scored lower than EVF-GIVEN ( $\beta = -.14$ , s.e. = .03,  $p < .001$ ); other conditions did not differ. Those results show that there is indeed an effect of givenness penalizing EV2. Despite the significant penalty for EV2 when *p* is given, it is felicitous, given the high mean ratings across conditions (EV2-GIVEN = 5.6; EVF-GIVEN = 5.9; EV2-NEW = 5.7; EVF-NEW = 5.8).

**Implications:** The results show that there is indeed an effect of givenness and dispreference for EV2. However, the high average ratings across condition suggests that Djärv’s licensing hypothesis is too strong. A weaker *predictor hypothesis* can be considered: if a matrix predicate does not presuppose that p is given, EV2 is optional. However, this hypothesis cannot explain the penalty for EV2-GIVEN relative to EVF-GIVEN. The results raise questions about the definition of *givenness*; the experiment used tag interrogatives to make p *given*, which may be an insufficient manipulation to make p an EV2-blocking antecedent, considering the different composition of tag interrogatives and declaratives/embedded clauses (Farkas & Roelofsen, 2017). Ultimately, this study shows the need for reanalysis of *givenness* and *discourse novelty* for a better understanding of licensing EV2.

## References

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