

## Optionality and the recovery of temporal information in German verb clusters

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### Abstract

While the clause-final placement of finite elements is usually quite rigid in German embedded clauses, verbal clusters mark an exception in that they allow finite temporal auxiliaries to be placed linearly before the verbal elements they embed. The prescriptive rules of Standard German suggest that there is optionality with respect to the two ordering possibilities at least in future clauses. However, previous studies have shown that this also holds for perfect clauses with *lassen* ('let'). Based on two experimental studies focussing on verbal clusters with continuative *lassen* ('let') and perception verbs, which supposedly have similar properties, the present paper aims at investigating a) whether there really is proper optionality with respect to placing the finite auxiliary in a cluster-initial or clause-final position, and b) whether preposing the temporal auxiliary induces advantages for the processing of temporal information.

### 1 Introduction

Even though German shows an exceptionally stable word order in the verbal domain (in contrast to its large degree of flexibility in other areas like the middle field), there are two syntactic configurations for which this does not hold: verbal clusters introduced by the temporal auxiliaries *werden* ('will') and *haben* ('have'). In embedded clauses, which characteristically lack the main clause V2-effect and thus leave their finite verbs or auxiliaries in the clause-final position rather than moving them to the second position, verbal clusters differ from their simplex counterparts by virtue of triggering restructuring. While the finite main verb taking a DP-complement in (1a) remains in the canonical clause-final position (cf. Zifonun, Hoffmann & Strecker 1997: 1500), the temporal auxiliaries introducing 3-verb clusters in (1b) and (1c) occur in a cluster-initial position, occasionally referred to as the 'upper field' (*Oberfeld*; cf. Bech 1955/1983: 63).

- (1) a. Peter denkt, dass Ida ihn hört.  
*Peter thinks that Ida him hears*  
'Peter thinks that Ida hears him.'
- b. Peter denkt, dass Ida ihn **wird** hören können.  
*Peter thinks that Ida him will hear can*  
'Peter thinks that Ida will be able to hear him.'