

# Elliptical appendices of relative clauses (EARs)

Tabea Reiner

*University of Bamberg, Germany*

# The story I'm going to tell

- Observation: remarkable relative clauses in German
- Question: output of mental grammar or systematic mistake?
- Hope: low acceptance
- Test: pseudo response time experiment
- Surprise: high acceptance!
- Question: see above...
- Answer: pro grammar, contra performance



The observation:

## Chance finds from German edited texts

Nachrichten [...], die man schaudernd liest  
news REL.ACC.PL one with a shudder reads

und (\*man) dabei dieses unendliche Grauen  
and (\*one) at the same time this infinite horror

doch nicht begreifen kann  
yet not comprehend can

(KulturSPIEGEL, no. 2/2011, p. 38)

‘news that one reads with a shudder and yet cannot comprehend this infinite horror’

obligatory  
subject gap

+

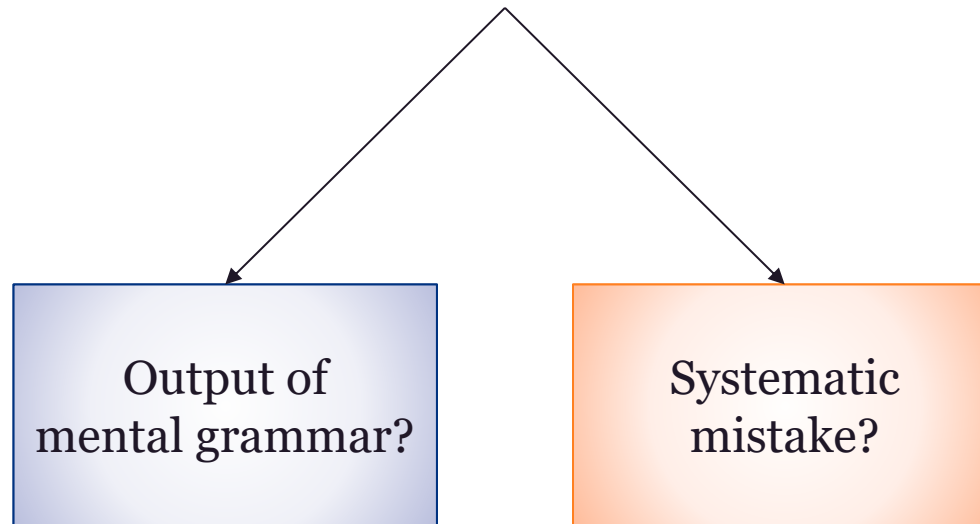
unlicensed  
VL

=

EAR

# The question

...die... und dieses Grauen nicht begreifen kann



# The problem and the hope

- Criterion for being an **output of mental grammar?**
  - **Acceptability not necessary:** garden path structures
  - **Acceptability not sufficient:** grammatical illusions (Haider 2011)
- But:
  - EARs presumably too peculiar to qualify as garden paths
  - EARs hopefully too poorly accepted to qualify as illusions

# The test

- Usual problem of acceptability judgement tasks: participants biased by education
- My attempt at a solution: pseudo response time experiment
  - Task: tell apart **real** from **mock** German sentences accuracy presupposed
  - Purported research question: How **quick** are you? speed emphasized
- Technically: matching task with (real) measurement of response times at <https://www.soscisurvey.de/>

# The test: Design



# The test: Design

## 4 structural types of stimuli

- EARs from sample
- AC: asymmetric coordination (Reich 2009)  
≈ V2 + V1 with obligatory subject gap
- DC1: deep coordination type 1  
surface structure that can be analysed as coordination low in the clause (type 1 = below subject)
- DC2: deep coordination type 2  
see above (type 2 = below non-subject, with potential subject gap)

acceptability baselines

## 4 conditions

	[+ conj.]	[- conj.]
[+] subject		double-check subject gap
[-] subject		

explore syndesis as a factor for coordination acceptability

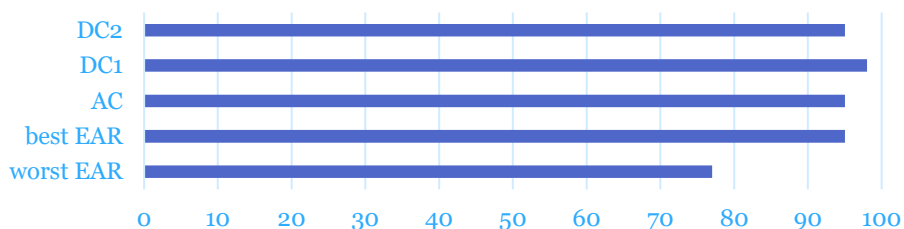
## Total numbers

5 EARs \* 4 conditions + 1 AC \* 4 conditions  
+ 1 DC1 \* 4 conditions + 1 DC2 \* 4 conditions  
= 32 target items, judged by 103 participants

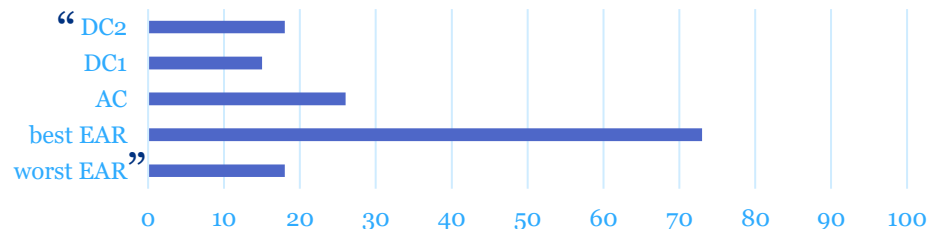


# The test and **the surprise**: Results (accumul.)

[- subject], [+ conj.] acceptance rate



[+ subject], [+ conj.] acceptance rate



**n.s.**

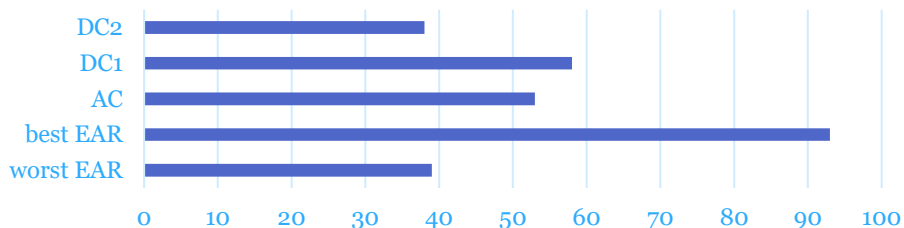
	AC	worst EAR
+ conj.	95	77
-conj.	53	39

X-squared = 0.057856, df = 1, p-value = 0.8099

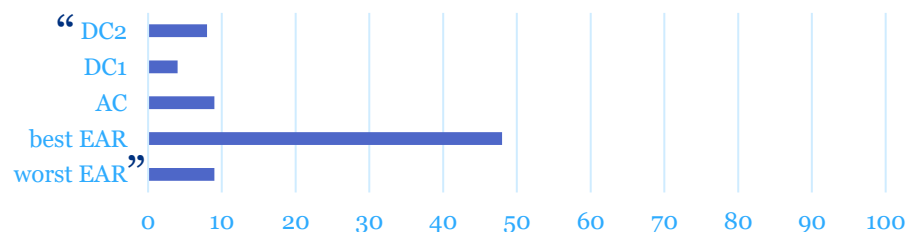
**syndesis >  
structural  
type**

**subject gap  
indeed obligatory**

[- subject], [- conj.] acceptance rate



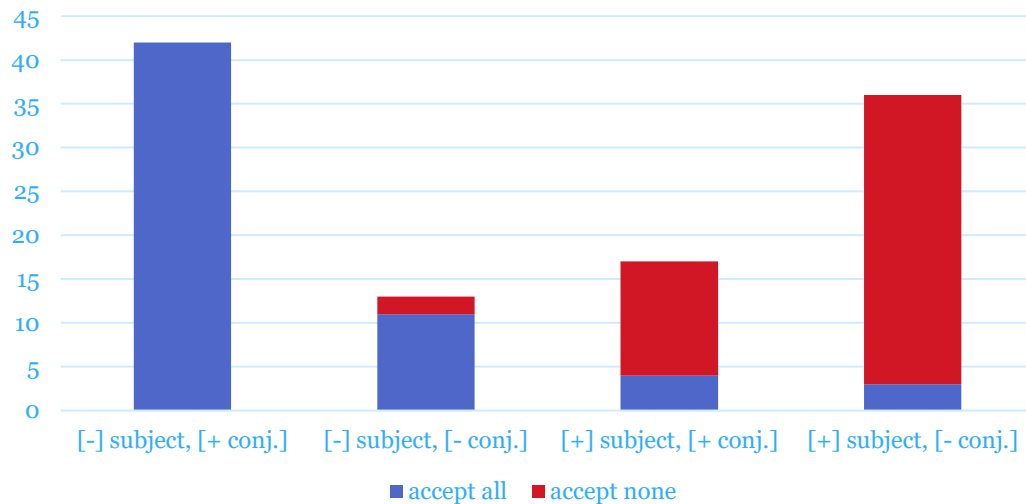
[+ subject], [- conj.] acceptance rate



**EARs are not bad 😊**

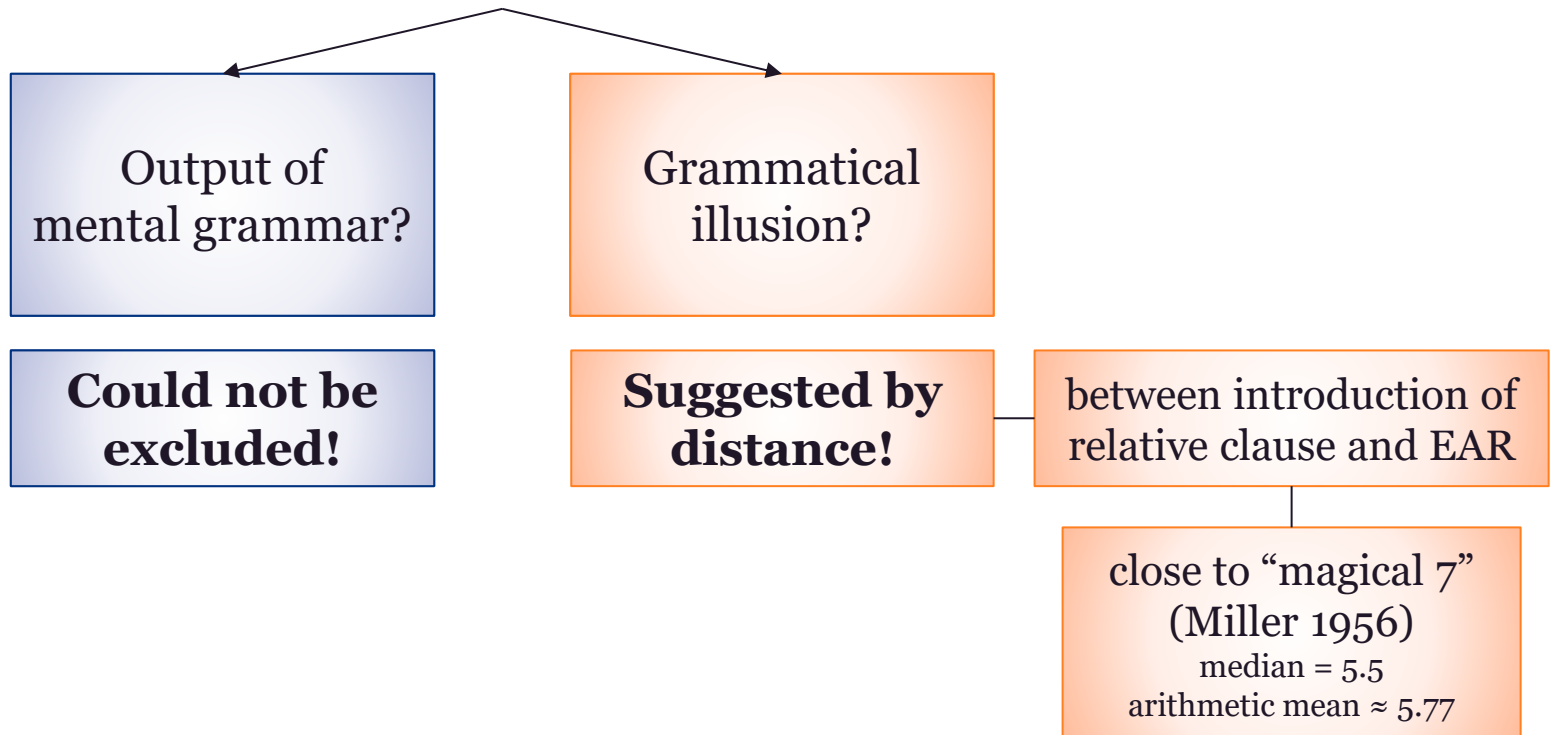
# The test and **the surprise**: Results (individ.)

Individual consistency in judging EARs  
& EARs with forced subjects




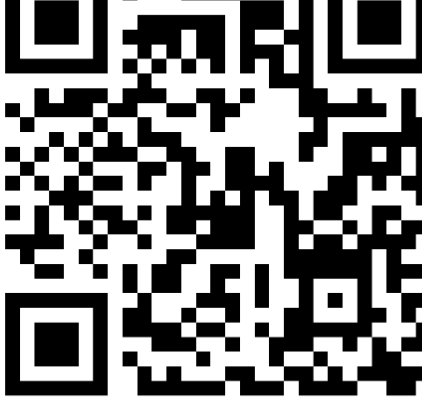
# The question again

...die... und dieses Grauen nicht begreifen kann



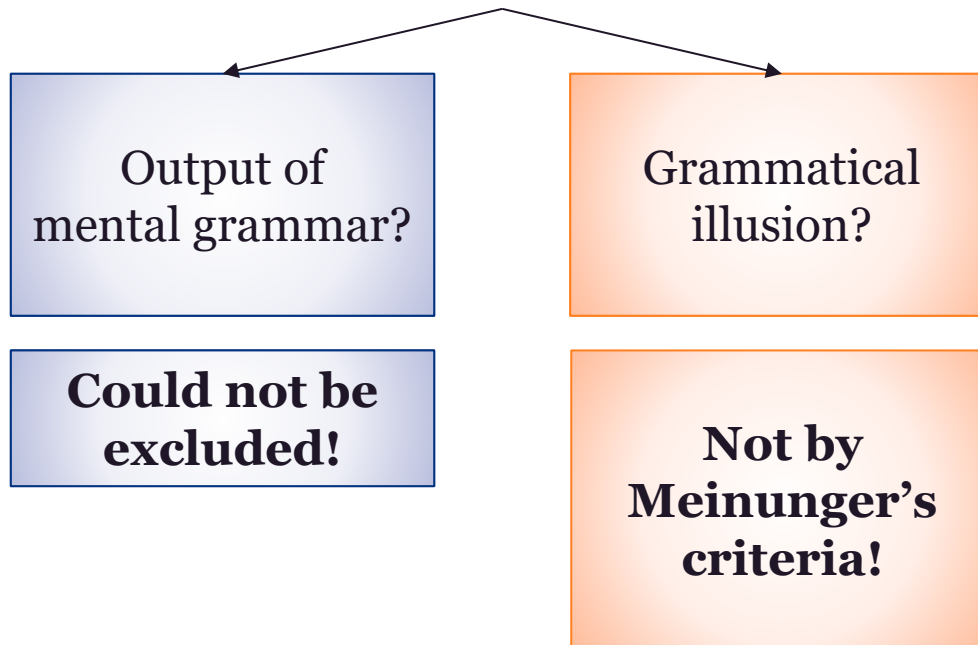
# An answer: Meinunger's (2023) criteria

Should we assume that phenomenon X is a grammatical illusion?

- Criterion no. 1: “Too much effort”  
Fundamental changes in theory needed just to capture X  
→ X = illusion
- EARs captured by very general, early generative analysis  
- Criterion no. 2: “Too restricted”  
X only found in very restricted semantic or syntactic contexts  
→ X = illusion
- EARs in mini-sample: restrictive & non-restrictive, head adjacent & dislocated, simple introductions & pied-piping, diverse conjunctions, more than two conjuncts, symmetric & asymmetric readings (Altshuler & Truswell 2022:ch.3); in addition: free relative clauses

# The question and the answer for now

...die... und dieses Grauen nicht begreifen kann



# Conclusion and open questions

- EARs apparently output of mental grammar!
- Open questions:
  - How can we account for the devaluation of asyndetic examples?
  - Does DC2 allow subjects in Dutch?  
Als theatraal tegendraads politicus  
viel Fortuyn op door zijn uiterlijke vertoon  
[...] en formuleerde hij zijn politieke denkbeelden provocatief [...].  
(<https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dandy>, 11 May 2022)

# References

- Altshuler, Daniel & Robert Truswell. 2022. Coordination and the syntax-discourse interface (Oxford Scholarship Online). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haider, Hubert. 2011. Grammaticale Illusionen. Lokal wohlgeformt – global deviant. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 30(2). 223–257.
- Meinunger, André. Unexpected finite verb forms in German: Cases of grammatical illusion? *Linguistische Berichte* (Special issue 34). 205–230.
- Miller, George A. 1956. The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information. *The psychological review* 63(2). 81–97.
- Reich, Ingo. 2009. „Asymmetrische Koordination“ im Deutschen (Studien zur Deutschen Grammatik 75). Tübingen: Stauffenburg.



## **Additional slides**

17: examples

18: improvements

19: best/worst EAR





# The observation: Additional examples

- Rosemarie sagte: »Für Mara ist so ein Text einfach das **Material, das man auseinanderschraubt, anguckt und überlegt, wie man es sinnvoll wieder zusammenmontiert**. Ist das nicht verrückt?« (Christian Schünemann: Die Studentin. Der dritte Fall für den Frisör. Zurich: Diogenes 2009. p. 77) <4>
- Manche der alten Offiziere verschwanden von einem Tag auf den anderen, sie entsorgten Uniformen und Wintermäntel in **Container, aus denen Gunnar und andere Rekruten sie wieder herausfischten, die Schulterstücke ablösten und auf die eigenen Uniformen knöpften**. (Der Spiegel, no. 42/2009, p. 62) <8>
- Übrigens ging ihr es vollkommen nach Wunsche, sie hatte ihr besonderes Zimmer, war immer um die **Gräfin, die sie mit ihren Affenposen unterhielt und dafür täglich etwas geschenkt bekam**: [...]. (<https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/goethe/meisterl/mstl307.html>) <24>

# The test: Improvements

- More targeted filler and control items
  - Obvious grammatical illusions, e.g. missing-VP effect
  - Standardized control items if available for German
- Manipulated target items w.r.t. informational balance
- Represent baseline structures by more than one item

# The test: Results

- Best EAR
  - All conditions except [- subj.], [- conj.]:  
Es ist eine dieser **Nachrichten**, die in allen Zeitungen stehen, **die (man) schaudernd liest (und) dabei dieses unendliche Grauen doch nicht begreifen kann.** (from <25>)
  - [- subj.], [- conj.]: Eine junge Chinesin verliebt sich in einen feschen **Geschäftsmann, dem sie bis nach Berlin nachreist, ihn dort aber höchstens mal ans Telefon bekommt.** (original <26>)
- Worst EAR (all conditions):  
Ich holte einen dicken **Pullover** aus Brillenschangs Stube, **den ich Luo um die mageren Schultern legte (und) (ich) ihm die Ärmel um den Hals band.**  
(from <6>)