Composing Not-at-issue Meaning: German Discourse Particles in Questions

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German discourse particles (DiPs) like ja, denn and schon have been argued to contribute to the not-at-issue meaning, be it in terms of expressive content (Kratzer 1999), presuppositional import (Kaufmann 2010), speech act felicity conditions (Jacobs 1991, Karagjošova 2004) or discourse structure requirements (Viesel 2015). This is illustrated in (1)-(3). Roughly, ja in (1) marks its sister proposition as not debatable, denn in (2) signals that the question it combines with has been pondered about, and schon in (3) indicates that the question is being used rhetorically:

(1) Er wohnt ja in Allmannsdorf.  
He lives JA in Allmannsdorf. 'As you may know, he lives in Allmannsdorf.'
(2) Wo wohn er denn?  
Where lives he DENN  'Where does he live? I've been wondering.'
(3) Wo wohnt er schon?  
Where lives he SCHON?  'Where does he live? Nowhere interesting/significant.'

Crucially, in questions with embedded complement clauses, DiPs interact with the syntactic structure of the sentence in two interesting ways (Bayer, Häussler & Bader 2016). First, for the sentence to be acceptable, the DiP has to be located on the "path" of the wh-chain. When the wh-phrase is extracted from the embedded clause (to the extent that long extraction is allowed), the DiP may appear in the matrix or in the embedded clause, as in (4); but when the wh-phrase is extracted from the matrix clause, the DiP can only appear in the matrix clause and not in the embedded clause, as shown in (5). Second, the surface position of the DiP determines it semantic scope. While either placement of schon in (6) is acceptable, the resulting interpretation differs. With schon in the embedded clause, the speaker expresses disbelief about there being any place here where one can get gasoline at 3am. With schon in the matrix clause, the speaker conveys skepticism about there being any place of which Hans would think that one can get gasoline at 3am there (maybe such gas stations abound, but Hans is new in the area and the speaker believes he does not have a clue).

(4) Wen₁ vermutete er (denn), dass die Polizei (denn) t₁ festgennomen hat?  
Who assumed he DENN that the police DENN arrested has  'Who did he assume that the police arrested?'
(5) Wer₁ t₁ berichtete ihr (denn), dass die Einbrecher (*denn) gefasst wurden?  
who told her DENN that the burglars DENN caught were  'Who told her that the burglars were caught?'
(6) Wo glaubt Hans (schan), dass man hier nachts um 3 Uhr (schan) Benzin t₁ bekommt?  
where believes Hans SCHON that one here at-night at three SCHON gasoline gets  'Where does Hans believe that one can get gasoline here at 3 o’clock at the night?'

The goal of this talk is to develop a compositional account that exploits the interaction of syntactic structure, propositional content and not-at-issue meaning to derive (i) the wh-path condition on the acceptability of DiPs and (ii) the interpretive effects stemming from the location of the DiP.
References