

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, Karagjosova 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 its 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) **Wen**₁ vermutete er (**denn**), dass die Polizei (**denn**) **t**₁ festgenommen hat?
Who assumed he *DENN* that the police *DENN* arrested has
'Who did he assume that the police arrested?'
- (5) **Wer**₁ **t**₁ 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 (**schon**), dass man hier nachts um 3 Uhr (**schon**) Benzin **t**₁ 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

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