

What ‘*n* is not *denn* – evidence from Special Questions

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1 Introduction

- The North East Berlin variety of the Berlin Brandenburg dialect (henceforth NEB) features the obligatory presence of ‘*n* in wh-interrogatives

- (1) a. *Wat is 'n mit eurer Katze los?*
what is.N with your cat PRT
b. **? Wat is mit eurer Katze los?*
what is with your cat PRT
‘What’s your cat doing?’

- At first sight, this ‘*n* looks like a reduced version of the modal particle *denn* (apparently present in substandard German, cf. Bayer 2017; Wegener 2002: 379; Thurmair 1991: 378)

- (2) *Was ist denn mit eurer Katze los?*
what is DENN with your cat PRT
‘What’s your cat doing?’

- Aims of this talk
 - ‘*n* is a genuine question particle
 - ‘*n* is not a reduced form of *denn*
 - the distribution of ‘*n* allows new insights into the meaning of interrogatives

2 The status of ‘*n*

- ‘*n* has the following is characterization

- (3) ‘*n* is a question particle: it marks ignorance of the speaker towards the true answer

- If ‘*n* is a question particle, then it should be absent from interrogatives where the speaker knows the true answer
- In other words, ‘*n* is predicted to be absent from interrogatives that are not requests for information
- Crucially, not every interrogative clause is a request for information (pace Plunze & Zimmermann 2006; Siemund 2001; Åqvist 1975; Hintikka 1974)
- Such interrogative clauses are called *special* or *non-standard questions* (Bayer & Obenauer 2011; Obenauer 2006, 2004; Munaro & Obenauer 1999, 2002; Sadock 1974, 1971, 1970)
- Special questions that do not allow ‘*n*
 - expository (monologic) questions

- (4) Context: A professor has successfully introduced island effects in his introduction to syntax and now wants to move on to subjacency. He says:

Warum sind ('n) Subjekte Inseln.*
why are.N subjects islands

‘Let me tell you why subjects are islands.’ [√ ‘Why are subjects islands?]

- exam questions
- (5) *Wann hat (* 'n) Cäsar den Rubikon überquert.*
 when has.N Cesar the Rubicon crossed
 'Let me check whether you know this: When did Cesar cross the rubicon?' [√ 'When did ... ?']
- riddle questions
- (6) *Wat hat (* 'n) vier Beene un kann flieng?*
 what has.N four legs and can fly
 'Guess: what has four legs and can fly?' [√ 'I wonder what has four legs and can fly.']
- exclamatives
- (7) *Wat hat (* 'n) die für lange Beene!*
 what has.N she for long legs
 'What long legs she has!' [√ 'What long legs does she have?']
- whimperatives (Sadock 1970)
- (8) *Wieso hältste (* 'n) ne einfach ma die Klappe.*
 why hold.you.N not simply once the clapper.board
 'Why don't you be quiet.' [√ 'Why aren't you quiet?']
- self-addressed can't-find-the-value-of-x questions (Obenauer 2004: 369-370)
- (9) Context: Guido wants to tell Stefan about an old friend of theirs he recently met. Stefan asks the name of that friend. Guido can't recall. He describes the friend to Stefan, but neither does Stefan know who Guido is talking about, nor can Guido recall. Guido is getting angry and says:
Mann, wie hieß('n) der...*
 man how was.called.N he
 'Damn, what on earth was his name!' [√ 'Damn, what was his name?']
- obvious-x questions (Obenauer 2004: 363-365)
- (10) Context: Stefan and Guido discuss politics. They talk about the recent elections in Germany and the disastrous result of the SPD. Guido is optimistic that the SPD will return to its social democratic roots. Stefan is surprised by the naivety of Guido and says:
Wer will('n) die Hartz IV-Jesetze beibehalten?!*
 who wants.N the Hartz IV laws keep
 'Let me remind you who wants to preserve the Hartz IV regulations.' [√ 'Who wants to ...']
- rhetorical questions with negative force (aka queclaratives, Sadock 1971)
- (11) Context: Anna and Maria talk about their husbands. Anna says that she recently watched a TV show with Heidi Klum about healthy life. Anna also says that according to Heidi Klum her husband appears to be too fat. Maria remarks:
Wer is('n) ne zu dick für Heidi Klum.*
 who is.N not too fat for Heidi Klum
 'Everyone is too fat according to Heidi Klum.' [√ 'Who isn't too fat according to Heidi Klum?']
- What all the special questions in (4)-(11) have in common is that the speaker already knows the answer, so they are not requests for information
 - And as correctly predicted by (3), 'n is barred from these special questions

3 'n is not denn

- Argument 1: 'n and denn can co-occur
 - (surprise) disapproval questions
- (12) Context: Paul's girlfriend combs her hair as every morning. All of the sudden, she starts screaming and running around. After she calmed down, Paul asks:
Wat is'n denn mit dir los!?
what is.N DENN with you PRT
'What the hell is going on with you?!'
- Argument 2: 'n can be used out-of-the-blue in NEB, but denn in Standard German cannot (König 1977: 119-120)¹
- (13) Context: Guido wakes up in the morning and realizes that he has overslept. He can't find his watch, so he wakes up his wife Anna and asks:
- a. **Anna, wie spät ist es denn?*
Anna how late is it DENN
 - b. ✓*Anna, wie spät is'n dit?*
Anna how late is.N it
'Anna, what's the time?'
- Argument 3: there are special questions that license 'n but not denn
 - deliberative (reflective) questions (cf. Thurmair 1991: 383 that denn is barred from deliberative questions)
- (14) Context: Guido and Stefan talk about their time ever since they left school.
- Guido: *Hast du nomma wat von Matze jehört?*
have you again something of Matze heard
'Have you ever heard of Matze again?'
- Stefan: *Nee du.*
no you
'No!'
- Guido: ✓*Mhm, wie's'n dem jetz wohl geht? / *Mhm, wie's denn dem jetz wohl geht?*
well how.it.N him now PRT goes well how.it DENN him now PRT goes
'I wonder how he's doing now.'
- self-addressed questions
- (15) Context: Jan, a student from Kiel, and Guido, a student from Berlin, talk about female students. Jan asks Guido: *Wie heißt denn die mit den roten Haaren in deinem Syntaxkurs?*
how is.called denn the with the red hairs in your syntax.class
'What's the name of that red-haired student in your syntax class?'
- Guido: ✓*Ja, wie heißt'n die? / *Ja, wie heißt denn die?*
yes how is.called.N she yes how is.called DENN she
'Well, what's her name?'
- Argument 4: there are special question that license denn, but not 'n
 - exam questions
 - exclamatives
 - whimperatives
 - obvious-x questions
 - rhetorical questions with negative force (cf. Meibauer 1994: 223)

¹ The first two arguments also hold for North Thuringian (Pankau 2018)

- (16) a. *Wann hat denn Cäsar den Rubikon überquert?*
When has DENN Cesar the Rubicon crossed
'When did Cesar cross the rubicon?'
- b. *Wat hat denn die für lange Beene!*
what has DENN she for long legs
'What long legs she has!'
- c. *Wieso hältste denn ne einfach ma die Klappe!*
why hold.you DENN not simply once the clapper.board
'Why don't you be quiet!'
- d. *Wer will denn die Hartz IV-Jesetze beibehalten?!*
who wants DENN the Hartz IV laws keep
'Let me remind you who wants to preserve the Hartz IV regulations.'
- e. *Wer is denn ne zu dick für Heidi Klum.*
who is DENN not too fat for Heidi Klum
'Everyone is too fat according to Heidi Klum.'

- Argument 5: *denn* can form a constituent with a wh-phrase (Bayer & Obenauer 2011: 471, pace Ott & Struckmeier 2018), '*n* cannot

- (17) a. $\sqrt{[Wer\ denn] soll\ befehlen?}$
who DENN shall command
- b. $*[Wer'n] soll\ befehlen?$
who.N shall command
'Who shall command?'

- Argument 6: *denn* allows distant usage, '*n* does not (pace Bayer 2017)

- (18) a. $\sqrt{Wen\ glaubst\ du\ denn\ wen\ er\ gesehen\ hat?}$
who believe you DENN who he seen has
- a'. $\sqrt{Wen\ glaubst\ du\ wen\ er\ denn\ gesehen\ hat?}$
who believe you who he DENN seen has
- b. $\sqrt{Wen\ gloobst'n\ wen'r\ jesehen\ hat?}$
who believe.you.N who.he seen has
- b'. $*Wen\ gloobste\ wen'r'n\ jesehen\ hat?$
who believe.you who.he.N seen has
'Who do you think he saw?'

- Argument 7: '*n* does allow wh-drop, *denn* does not (Bayer 2010: 35)

- (19) a. $\sqrt{~~Wat~~\ jibt's'n\ heut\ zum\ Mittag?}$
what give.it.N today to.the lunch
- b. $*~~Wat~~\ jibt's\ denn\ heut\ zum\ Mittag?$
what give.it DENN today to.the lunch
'What's for lunch today?'

- Argument 8: *denn* can appear in conditionals (Meibauer 1994: 222), '*n* cannot

- (20) Context: Guido tells Stefan that the EU has decided on a new embargo for Russian products because Russia poisoned Skripal. Stefan says:
- a. $\sqrt{Wenn's\ denn\ so\ war.}$
if.it DENN so was
- b. $*Wenn's'n\ so\ war.$
if.it.N so was
'If it is true.'

4 Analysis

- There are special questions that accept neither ‘*n* nor *denn*’
 - expository questions
 - riddle question
 - self-addressed can’t-find-the-value-of-*x* questions
- (21) a. *Warum jibt’s (*denn) genau diese Inseleffekte.*
 why gives.it DENN exactly these island.effects
 ‘Let me tell you why these specific island effects exist.’
- b. *Wat hat (*denn) vier Beene un kann flieng?*
 what has DENN four legs and can fly
 ‘Guess: what has four legs and can fly?’
- c. *Mann, wie hieß (*denn) der...*
 man how was.called DENN he
 ‘Damn, what on earth was his name!’
- What the three interrogatives have in common is that the speaker cannot expect the hearer to know the answer

	<i>S</i> knows answer	‘ <i>n</i> licensed	<i>A</i> might know answer	<i>denn</i> licensed
<i>expository Q</i>	yes	no	no	no
<i>exam Q</i>	yes	no	yes	yes
<i>riddle Q</i>	yes	no	no	no
<i>exclamatives</i>	yes	no	yes	yes
<i>whimperatives</i>	yes	no	yes	yes
<i>self-addressed cfvx Q</i>	yes	no	no	no
<i>obvious-x Q</i>	yes	no	yes	yes
<i>rhetorical Q</i>	yes	no	yes	yes
<i>disapproval Q</i>	no	yes	yes	yes
<i>deliberative Q</i>	no	yes	no	no
<i>self-addressed Q</i>	no	yes	no	no

- Analysis for ‘*n* and *denn*’
- (22) a. interrogative + ‘*n* = [pragmatic meaning of interrogative] + ¬KNOW (S, p_[w])
 b. interrogative + *denn* = [pragmatic meaning of interrogative] + EXPECT (S, KNOW (A, p_[w]))

5 Implications for the pragmatic meaning of interrogatives

5.1 Interrogatives are not necessarily requests for information

- The classical, narrow analysis: interrogatives = questions (Plunze & Zimmermann 2006; Siemund 2001; Åqvist 1975; Hintikka 1974; Searle 1969)
- (23) WANT (S, A (KNOW S, p_[w]))
 ‘Bring it about that I know whether p.’
- Under such an approach, special questions are instances of *non-literal use* (Plunze & Zimmermann 2006: 323, 326-8)
 - For example, in exam questions the speaker plays the role of an *ignoramus* (a not-knower)

- The alternative, broad analysis: interrogatives \neq questions (Truckenbrodt 2004)

(24) WANT (S, A (KNOW S \wedge A, p_[w]))

‘Bring it about that we know together whether p.’

- Under this approach, true questions are a but one way to use an interrogative and special questions are as much instances of literal meaning as true questions

(25) pragmatic meaning of interrogative

- non-literal use 1 → exam question
- non-literal use 2 → riddle question
- non-literal use 3 → rhetorical question

(26) pragmatic meaning of interrogative

- exam question
- riddle question
- rhetorical question

- Recall that ‘n is obligatory in wh-interrogatives in NEB

(27) a. *Wat is 'n mit eurer Katze los?*

what is.N with your cat PRT

b. **? Wat is mit eurer Katze los?*

what is with your cat PRT

‘What’s your cat doing?’

- Whatever ‘n marks under the classical approach, it has to be part of the meaning of interrogatives
- If special questions derive from the non-literal use of interrogatives, then the classical approach predicts that ‘n should always be used in special questions
→ FALSE
- Under the alternative analysis, the pragmatic meaning of interrogatives is underspecified
- Particles can be used as indicators for an additional meaning component
- The alternative approach then predicts that particles indicate an additional pragmatic meaning and hence are not predicted to occur in all interrogatives
→ TRUE

5.2 Interrogatives are not necessarily formulated by the speaker

- There are two types of interrogatives where the speaker does not know the answer, but from which ‘n is generally barred, contrary to expectation
 - vain questions (Driver 1988)/problem questions (Conrad 1978)

(28) a. *Folgende Frage bleibt: warum hat (* 'n) der Mörder dit Opfer so entstellt?*

following question remains why has.N the murderer the victim so defaced

‘The following question remains: why did the murderer deface the victim?’

b. *Wir müssen bloß no folngdet klären: warum jibt's (* 'n) überhaupt Inseleffekte?*

we must only still following clear why gives.it.N at.all island.effects

‘We only need to find out this: why are there island effects at all?’

- proxy questions
- (29) Context: Stefan has broken his leg. Since he and his wife Anna live deep in the woods, Stefan can't visit his doctor as often as he should. Still the doctor wants to know how the cure of Stefan's leg is progressing. So the doctor sends a questionnaire every week Stefan has to fill out. Unfortunately, Stefan is also an analphabet. Therefore his wife Anna has to read the questions for him and fill in his answers. She starts with the first question:
Wie groß is('n) die Schwellung jetzt?*
 how big is.N the swelling now
 'How big is the swelling now?'
- In both interrogatives, the speaker doesn't ask from personal motivation
 - In vain/problem questions, the speaker doesn't exclusively ask from personal motivation, but only acts as a representative of a group interested in the answer
 - In proxy question, the speaker doesn't ask at all from personal motivation but only acts as a mouthpiece
 - Suggestion: just as the addressee need not be specific in interrogatives (cf. Truckenbrodt 2004: §4), the speaker needn't be either

(30) want (S, ...) ⇒ want (x, ...)

- The condition for 'n must then be reformulated as follows

(31) 'n = ¬KNOW (x_S, p_[w]) [x_S = x is the speaker]

5.3 Do interrogatives involve a common ground?

- According to Truckenbrodt's analysis, the speaker uses an interrogative to accommodate the common ground between himself and the addressee (cf. (24); Truckenbrodt 2004: 321)
- But this seems to be too strong a requirement (cf. also Plunze & Zimmermann 2006: 325-6 for another problem)

(32) Context: Stefan has trouble with his internet connection. He calls the hotline for support. A lady at the other end of the phone receives his call. As usual, the lady first asks him for his 3-digit customer ID before being able to help him. She eventually manages to help him and they hang up. 5 minutes later, Stefan again experiences problems with his internet connection and he calls the hotline again. By coincidence, the lady receiving his call is the same lady as before. In order to help him, she asks another time for his customer ID. Stefan says:

Why do you ask again, I just told you.

- The lady certainly asks for an information she doesn't have
- What the lady doesn't ask for is information that she wants to accommodate to the common ground between herself and the hearer
- Yet interrogatives can be used in such situations without any flavor of awkwardness
- Suggestion: interrogatives don't include the speaker as an argument of the know-predicate, but only the addressee
- In other words, interrogatives only formulate a wish of the speaker that the addressee knows something

(33) WANT (x, y (KNOW y, p_[w]))
 'x wants of y that y knows whether p'

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