

## Questions in Focus – Focus in Questions

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**Aim:** This talk focuses on information-eliciting *Wh*-questions at the Syntax-Discourse Interface comparing two closely related Germanic languages, German and Swedish. These languages show considerable differences in the syntactic realization of *Wh*-questions and in their mapping to discourse strategies. Especially the discourse semantic properties of clefts in *Wh*-questions deserve attention; the restrictions on their use and other possible strategies for rendering equivalent contextual meanings (e.g. by the use of modal particles) are of great relevance for the contrastive and comparative analysis of *Wh*-questions.

However, the syntactic and discourse pragmatic properties of clefts in information-eliciting *Wh*-questions have been only discussed by a few researchers from the contrastive and /or comparative perspective (see Mathieu, Engdahl 2006, Myers 2007, Boucher 2010, Brandtler 2012). It was observed that the discourse-semantic effects of clefts in *Wh*-questions differ significantly from the effects of the non-clefted versions within the same language, and special attention was paid to the different question types in French (allowing non-clefted *Wh*-questions with or without fronting of the *Wh*-element). Interestingly, the distribution of clefts and non-clefts is completely different in other languages (e.g. English, German).

In a contrastive analysis concentrating on *Wh*-questions in German and Swedish it is also relevant to take into account the differences between the syntactic, prosodic and pragmatic properties of clefts in declarative sentences in these two languages (Huber 2002). The discourse-semantic potential of declarative clefts in German is more restricted than in Swedish – a fact which can provide a partial explanation for dispreferring clefts in German *Wh*-questions.

**ANALYSIS:** The different effects of the clefted and non-clefted *Wh*-questions in German and Swedish will be investigated in a discourse-oriented syntactic framework with the aim to clarify and compare the language specific patterns in this field.

We argue that the main difference between German and Swedish w.r.t. the use of clefts in *Wh*-questions can be traced back to the rules that these languages must observe for the specific additional marking of certain expectations on the answer. The requirements on the marking of an expected empty set in the answer and /or the need for a referential specification of the *Wh*-element seem to be language-specific. Swedish requires special syntactic marking for the expectation of referential specification by clefts, whereas additional marking of an expected empty set is essential in German and can be achieved by the use of modal particles (e.g. *schon*). The use of other modal particles in German (e.g. *denn*, *nun*) is, however, also possible (but not obligatory) in *Wh*-questions. Modal particles in German questions can mark the expectation of a referential specification in the answer making possible close equivalents to the clefted *Wh*-questions in Swedish.

The theoretical analysis of the language-specific requirements and constraints is based on relevant morphological and syntactic properties of the interrogative clause discussed in detail in Brandtler's (2012) analysis of Swedish *Wh*-questions. The distinction of different types of *Wh*-questions (*argument questions*, *framing questions* and *propositional questions*) seems to be decisive for the appropriateness and discourse-semantic potential of clefted *Wh*-questions. However, the choice of certain morphological forms ((in)definiteness, tense forms) and the use of certain lexical elements can also have influence on the distribution of clefted and non-clefted *Wh*-questions.

Our analysis is not only based on theoretical considerations but is also supported by empirical evidence provided by the comparison of Swedish *Wh*-questions in Sjövall-Wahlöö's Martin Beck detective series and their translations into German by Eckehard Schulz. The quantitative and qualitative aspects of the empirical investigation demonstrate convincingly the cross-linguistic differences between German and Swedish w.r.t. the distribution and discourse-semantic effects of *Wh*-questions in these two languages.