

Wh-less degree questions

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- The wh-less degree questions, or Null-Degree Questions (NDQs; Svenonius and Kennedy 2006, S&K), found in dialectal Norwegian are an instance of 0:1 form-meaning mismatch: while they are unambiguously interpreted as constituent questions asking for degrees (S&K 2006), they involve no (overt) morphosyntactic wh-component. This also renders them string-identical to polar questions (PQs). Several factors, however, set them apart from regular PQs, one of which being the phonological profile of the NDQ (marked by capital letters):

(1) ER du gammel? HAR du mange katte?
are you old have you many cats
“How old are you? How many cats do you have?”

- On the one side: S&K (2006) find that NDQs are not PQs, neither morphosyntactically nor semantically, and offer a formal analysis based on the analogy of the Icelandic *hvað*-construction, involving a covert wh-operator in SpecCP. This further explains the inversion word-order found in most NDQs.
- On the other: A covert-wh-analysis is challenged by other distributional facts, particularly from embedded NDQs (i.a. headed by polar complementisers). As it stands, the NDQ seems to pattern partly as a wh-question, and partly as a PQ. Other factors relating to in-situ/ex-situ readings and island constraints, raise further questions.

II. Motivation

- The NDQ, and its distribution, is not easily captured by central assumptions about wh-constructions and the relation between syntax and semantics. A further investigation into the NDQ and its related phenomena, could shed new light on the syntax and typology of wh- and interrogative clauses, degree expressions, island constraints and extraction.

III. Research questions

- What is the morphosyntactic status NDQ, and why does it overlap with PQ morphosyntax?
- How does the NDQ relate to other known null-degree constructions (e.g. V1-exclamatives in Swedish and German)?
- How do NDQs compare with overt wh-degree questions, both cross-linguistically, and specifically in the same dialectal varieties?
- Do NDQs have a specific pragmatic profile, and if so, how do they differ from other wh-questions?

IV. Hypotheses and method

Two main working hypotheses will be investigated:

- i. NDQs are morphosyntactically wh-questions
- ii. NDQs are morphosyntactically polar questions.

- More extensive empirical data will be gathered through one or more of the following methods:
 - i. Fieldwork
 - ii. In-depth work with informants (also via Skype)
 - iii. Questionnaires
 - iv. Mining of text corpora
 - v. Online gathering of judgements using Amazon Mechanical Turk
 - vi. Analysis of prosodic patterns using the PRAAT software (Boersma & Weenik 2007)
- How the PhD student proceeds:
 - i. Detailed analysis of empirical data on the NDQ and related phenomena (potentially cross-linguistic comparisons with Icelandic, Swedish, German etc.)
 - ii. Based on the generalizations found, a formal analysis of the data is to be developed, taking into account the preliminary hypotheses, and different levels of linguistic analyses.

V. Connections to other research projects

- Type of form-meaning mismatch: **7,8,9** (0:1 form-meaning mismatch)
- Empirical domain: **4,7,10** (Language variation across modalities)
- Content: **6,10**
- Methods: **4,9** (cross-linguistic comparison), **2** (fieldwork) **virtually all** (corpus study)

VI. Possible follow-up studies

1. Overt stranding wh-degree operators (Icelandic and (undocumented) Norwegian Helgeland dialects)
2. The polar complementiser *om* ('if'), and its varied distribution (a potential 1:many form-meaning mismatch)
3. Many:1 form-meaning mismatch in Norwegian (and Northern Germanic) wh-questions (stranding vs. pied-piping, ex-situ vs. in-situ, overt vs. covert)