A Question Particle in Thuringian and its Implications for the Analysis of Wh-Drop

Introduction

A number of German dialects have an obligatory question particle in direct wh-questions (Bavarian, cf. Bayer 2012; South Hessian, cf. Mottausch 2009). I first argue in this talk that Thuringian also possesses an obligatory question particle. In contrast to Bavarian and South-Hessian, this particle obligatorily appears even in direct yes/no-questions. I then show that this finding casts doubt on the analysis of wh-drop as an agreement phenomenon.

An Obligatory Particle in Questions in Thuringian

It has been known from a long time that speakers of Thuringian (spoken in Thuringia with the exception of the south west and in the south of Saxony-Anhalt) often use the particle *enn* (phonologically realized as [(ə)n], [də], or [dn̩]) in questions (Trebs 1899, Weise 1900). Closer inspection of written sources reveals that this particle is obligatory. The grammar and dictionary of the dialect of Sondershausen (Döring 1903/1904/1912) contains 21 direct wh-questions, 19 of which feature *enn*. The only two exceptions come from fixed expressions and are hence not representative. All 18 direct yes/no-questions from that description contain *enn*. Similar findings can be reported for the dialect of Gotha (Cramer 1998). All 72 direct wh-questions in that description contain *enn*, and 20 out the 24 direct yes/no-questions. An inspection of the entries for wh-words in the *Thüringer Wörterbuch* shows that the majority of examples contain *enn*. The few examples lacking *enn* come from parts of Thuringia where Thuringian is not spoken, namely from the south west, where East Franconian is spoken, and from the cities of Halle and Merseburg, where a mix of Low German and Thuringian is used. Finally, the question particle is found in all direct wh- and yes/no-questions in a dialect text (Kühn 1985).

Why the Particle is a Question Particle I

That the particle *enn* is a true question particle is evidenced by the fact that it is restricted to true questions, that is, in requests for an information the speaker does not know (Krifka 2011). On the one hand, *enn* is absent from exclamatives.

(1)   Bì dan wèrd àlə Dâχə wàs Gûts jəprępłt, wû sə`s mànt hãr nãmn.
        'They always manage to prepare good food, where they only take it from!'

(Döring 1903: 11)

Even though exclamatives feature wh-movement, they are not requests for information and hence lack *enn*. On the other hand, *enn* is absent from embedded contexts, that is, it never appears in indirect questions. Since embedded questions are not requests for information (Krifka 2001), *enn* is again barred to occur there. There is one principled exception to the ban on *enn* appearing in embedded contexts. A few verbs, most notably *fragen* 'to ask', do embed true questions (Munsat 1986). One therefore expects that *enn* is licit in indirect questions embedded under *fragen*. This prediction is borne out.

(2)   Ar fragt 'ne, was 'enn lus ös.
        'He asks him what is happening.'   (Kühn 1985: 17)

Why the Particle is a Question Particle II

The evidence adduced in the previous paragraph is equally compatible with an analysis of *enn* as a phonologically reduced variant of the modal particle *denn*, because exclamatives and indirect questions unless embedded under *fragen* don't allow *denn* either (Coniglio 2011). However, there are contexts that allow *enn* but bar *denn*, and there are contexts that allow *denn* but bar *enn*. As for the former, note first that *enn* licenses wh-drop, which *denn* does not (Bayer 2013).

(3)　　Issän jetz schonn widder?
　　　　'What's going now on again?'　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Cramer 1998: 38)

Second, *enn* is found in disjunctive questions, from which *denn* is banned.

(4)　　a.　　Wùman a Lăĕγ otər a Kàm kêjəlĕ?
　　　　　　　'Do we want to play a Lage or a Kamm?'　　　　　(Döring 1903: 44)
　　　　b.　　Wollen wir (*denn) Poker oder Skat spielen?
　　　　　　　'Do we want to play poker or skat?'

denn in yes/no-questions conveys the meaning that the speaker actually knows the answer and only asks the addressee for reassurance of his belief (Zimmermann 2004). Using *denn* in disjunctive questions is consequently odd because the speaker precisely fails to convey what he thinks the addressee in (4b) wants to play. As for the latter category, *enn* is banned from what Sadock (1971) calls *queclaratives*, that is, questions that have declarative force.

(5)　　a.　　Was sull 'e mache?
　　　　　　　'What can he do?'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Kühn 1985: 13)
　　　　b.　　Plâχət dìγ dan dr Gùgùk?
　　　　　　　'Are you crazy?' [literally: Does the cuckoo plague you?]　　(Döring 1903: 43)

In (5a), the declarative meaning conveyed is: 'He can't do anything', in (5b), it is: 'You are crazy.' In contrast to *enn*, *denn* is fine in queclaratives.

(6)　　a.　　Was soll er denn machen?
　　　　b.　　Bist du denn verrückt?

Implications for Wh-Drop
Given the evidence presented up to now, it has become clear that *enn* is a question particle.

(7)　　*enn*: [+Q]

This characterization turns out to be problematic for Bayer's (2013) analysis of wh-drop. As Bayer (2013) notes, wh-drop in Bavarian is licit only in the presence of *n*. To capture this, Bayer analyzes *n* as an agreement marker for wh-phrases in C°. The presence of *n* then allows recoverability of the elided wh-phrase. Since this analysis crucially relies on *n* being a wh-agreement marker, it predicts that languages lacking such an agreement marker also lack wh-drop. However, as the behavior of *enn* shows, this prediction is not borne out. *enn* is a question particle, and not a wh-agreement marker. But *enn* licenses wh-drop as much as *n* does. In order to account for this, I analyze wh-drop as an ellipsis operation that requires the host clause to be unambiguously clause-typed. Both *enn* and *n* achieve this: *enn* does so directly (cf. 7), *n* achieves this indirectly because movement of interrogative phrases is restricted to interrogative clauses. Consequently, wh-drop is licensed with both *enn* and *n*.

References
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