1 Introduction. The *was für* ('what KIND of') construction (WFC) has garnered significant attention due to its split form (1b). The construction occurs in Germanic, Slavic, and Baltic languages, featuring the wh-element what and a DP with *für* ('for') (1). Notably, the wh-element may be extracted from the *für*-DP most WFC-languages. The WFC is associated with KIND- (Pafel 1996, Leu 2015) and TOKEN-readings (Vangsnes 2008).

2 Proposal and Findings. This talk models the diachronic development of the German WFC by taking into account certain empirical pecularities w.r.t case assignment and agreement, illustrated in table (1), and the structural development that can be modeled by taking these diachronic findings into account (see (3)). I gathered historical data using six corpora that cover three language periods and two topographic areas: GerManC corpus, the Bonner Frühneuhochdeutschkorpus (both Early New High German, ENHG, 1350-1650), Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch and Titus corpora (Middle High German, MHG, 1050-1350), Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch (Old High German, 750-1050), and Referenzkorpus Mittelniederdeutsch/ Niederrheinisch (1200-1650, Middle Low German). Until recently (Hobich 2018, Blümel & Coniglio 2019), it was assumed by traditional grammarians that the WFC evolved from its wh-split version and that *für* first assigned accusative case to the DP, with external case marking being possible only later. Contrary to these assumptions, there is no evidence for the split (1b) version to have preceded the adjacent version in (1a). Additional data from my study discussed here show that this also holds true for Low German. The element *für* never assigned accusative in WFC contexts in German, suggesting that *für* either never occupied a position that enabled it to assign case (as suggested by Leu 2015) or that it never functioned as preposition. Furthermore, the findings identify a predecessor structure consisting of the wh-element what and a genitival DP as in (2a). This predecessor construction and the early instances of WFC deviate from modern WFC in their agreement patterns: previously, the verb displayed 3SG agreement in WGC and early WFC contexts, even when the subject DP within the construction was plural, see (2a). Note the lack of agreement between the plural DP froiden ('pleasurers') and the verb. The findings from my corpus study are illustrated in table (1). From OHG onwards (stage 1), the adnominal what-DP$_{GEN}$ functioned as KINDs and TOKEN-query. At stage 2, genitive case started to give way for other cases assigned from outside. At that stage in the ENHG period, WFC-DP first agrees with the verb (as in 2b), which indicates that a structural change took place. Only at stage 3, in ENHG, did the element *für* emerge. These changes of case and agreement pattern and the subsequent emergence of *für* within the WFC coincide with the loss of genitive that takes place in German dialects around 1500 in general. It seems, then, that *für* emerged as a means to establish the relation between the wh-item and the DP when genitive could no longer provide argument marking. This leads to the analysis proposed below, that takes into account the contribution of the element *für*, which modern accounts of the WFC usually ignore.

3. Analysis. Following i.e. Kwon (2015), I argue that the structure of WFC developed as in (3). I propose that *für* established the relation between the interrogative item and its DP by assuming the position of a predicator. The WFC base structure is assumed to be a PredP (Pafel 1996, Bennis et al. 1998, Leu 2015), responsible for KIND or TOKEN interpretations (example 2). As is indicated by the agreement patterns of the predecessor WGC and early WFC, it is a silent noun - either KIND or TOKEN - that heads the construction and agrees with the verb. This noun is also responsible for the genitive marking on its argument DP. At stage II, when genitive case is no longer reliably marked in German, learners had no evidence for a silent noun being at play in the structure. In order to 'rescue' the structure of the construction, a predicator was introduced. *für* was a viable element for predication as it occured in other predicational contexts in German, see (4).

1

(1) a. ***Was für Bücher*** *hast du   gelesen?*
what for books   have you read

'What (KIND of) books did you read?'   [German[1], adjacent]

b. ***Was*** *hast du   [**t** für Bücher] gekauft?*
what have you   for books   bought

'What (KIND of) books have you bought?'   [wh-extraction]

c. [*Was für ein   / *ein**en** Roman*]$_{SUBJ}$ *liegt auf dem Tisch*?
what for a.NOM / a.ACC novel   lies on the table

'What KIND of novel is lying on the table?'
A: Mainly novels, but also some textbooks.   [KIND]
A': Winnie the Pooh and An Introduction to Syntax.   [TOKEN]

(2) a. ***was groser   froiden   *** *do   inne* ***were***.
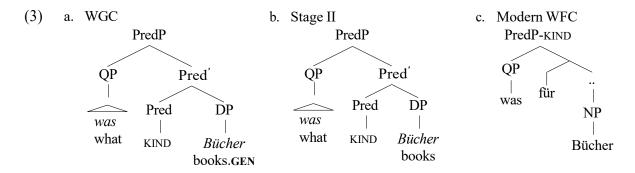what great.GEN.PL pleasures.GEN.PL there in   was.SG.PST.SUBJ

[..wonders how heaven is like and] 'what great pleasures therein might be'

[Mannen, Straßburg 1352, Early New High German (ENHG)]

b. ***Was für Romane   liegen*** *auf dem Tisch*?
what for novels.PL lie.PL on the table

'What KIND of novels are lying on the table?'

Stage 1 (before 1350)	Stage 2 (1350-1472)	Stage 3 (1472- ca. 1800)
was ... für DP$_{ACC}$	*was für* DP$_{NOM/ACC}$	*was für* DP$_{NOMINATIVE}$

Table 1: Grammaticalization pattern according to Behaghel 1923

(3) a. WGC   b. Stage II   c. Modern WFC

(4) *Sie   halten ihn für einen guten Menschen.*
they take   him for a   good human

'They take him to be a good person.'

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[1]unless noted differently, examples are from and in German.