

On the Linguistic Reality of Categorical Distinctions: the Transition of German *denn* from Adverb to Discourse Particle to Agreement Marker

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1. The phenomenon Germanic has a deictic element that is used to refer to time or to more abstract entities. In German, this element is *dann / denn* (“then”), derived from OHG *thanne*. It shows up in related forms in many Germanic languages. In this talk we will follow its development in German, as described in Abraham (1991) and Wegener (2002), and point out two changes that must have occurred in its history which had significant effects on the grammar of the language. It is known that *dann / denn* started out as an adverb which was neutral as to the clause type in which it occurs. German temporal *dann* preserves this tradition. Its sibling *denn* is different. It is used as a causative clause linker like engl. *because, since* (*Ich bin nicht zur Arbeit gegangen denn ich war krank*, “I didn’t go to work because I was ill”), and it is used as a discourse particle. As a discourse particle, *denn* is far more restricted. It is restricted to direct questions, and it is subject to special pragmatic conditions. In the Bavarian dialect, *denn* has undergone further developments. It has been reduced to a clitic, has acquired new syntactic properties, and has lost its semantic function.

2. Goal of the talk It will be argued that the development which *dann / denn* has undergone should be characterized as a syntactic change as seen in (1) of which the final stage as an agreement marker materialized only in Bavarian.

(1) adverb (XP) > discourse particle (X° / functional head) > agreement marker

While there isn’t much controversy about the distinction between agreement markers and full-blown phrases, there is controversy about the status of discourse particles. Are they adverbs (of some sort), and therefore phrases, or are they heads (of some sort), and if so, are they functional rather than lexical heads? (cf. Cardinaletti, 2007; Coniglio, 2005) One goal of the presentation will be to shed light on these questions. Evidence will be adduced which suggests that *denn* in its function as a discourse particle is a functional head. A second goal is to discuss the properties of the clitic version and to describe them as the result of grammaticalization.

3. Discourse particles It will be shown that German discourse particles have much in common with higher adverbs but differ in important respects from bona fide adverbs. Their position in the clause is fixed, and they can notably not be fronted to SpecCP. If there is word order variation, it is usually other elements that move to the left of the particle while the particle itself remains in a fixed position. There is one exception which we will see provides important insights: *Denn* (as well as some other particles) can move to SpecCP TOGETHER with a wh-phrase. Compare (2a) with (2b).

- (2) a. **Wer** hat dich **denn** neulich zum Essen eingeladen?
who has you DENN recently to-the dinner invited
“Who invited you recently to dinner?”
b. **Wer denn** hat dich neulich zum Essen eingeladen?

(2b) is semantically close to (2a) but requires emphatic stress on the wh-phrase: *WER denn ...* At closer inspection, (2b) has a different interpretation than (2a). Here we will focus on the fact that *denn* (as well as some other particles of that sort) can attract the wh-phrase to its left edge, and that as such *wer denn* in (2b) forms a constituent. Higher adverbs such as *leider* (unfortunately) notably disallow comparable constituency, cf. **Den Hans leider hat niemand zum Essen eingeladen* vs. *Den Hans hat leider niemand zum Essen eingeladen* (Unfortunately nobody invited Hans for dinner). Given that both wh and the particle are operators, a constituent [wh PRT] as in (2b) appears to be odd for semantic reasons. We will demonstrate a natural solution to this apparent obstacle which captures cases beyond this particular construction, most notably also cases of focus particles as in *Nur den Hans habe ich angerufen* (Only HANS I have called) which in the past have given rise to unconventional analyses according to which German should be “occasionally” a V3 language (cf. Jacobs, 1983; Buring & Hartmann, 2001). It will be suggested that the particle in (2a) is a pre-VP functional head with an uninter-

pretable feature for interrogativity that must enter a probe/goal dependency with the interrogative heads of the root clause. In (2b) the wh-phrase is first merged with *denn* and attracted to its specifier. [wh PRT ~~w~~h] will then move to SpecCP in two steps, first to the specifier of the particle phrase (PrtP) providing scope for *denn*, and then to SpecCP for wh-checking. *Denn* can be in arbitrary linear distance from the left periphery of the root clause as long as it can be construed with a wh-operator. This is the case whenever wh-movement crosses the particle as seen in (3).

- (3) **Wohin** glaubst du, ~~w~~ohin dass der Hans **denn** ~~w~~ohin gefahren ist?
where believe you that the Hans Prt driven is
 "Where do you believe that Hans went?"

4. Reduction to a clitic The Bavarian dialect shows a reduction of *denn* to the clitic *-n* which goes far beyond phonology. (a) While the use of *denn* in the standard language is optional, in Bavarian wh-questions *-n* is obligatory as shown in (4).

- (4) Wo wohnst *(-n) du?
where live -N you
 „Where do you live?“

(b) While *denn* makes a clear contribution to the semantic interpretation of the question, the Bavarian *-n* does not do so. The semantic impact of Standard German *denn* is solidly absent. (c) Although a phonological host would be provided for *-n* to cliticize, *-n* does not allow attraction of a wh-phrase. (5) shows that there is no correspondence to the type of phrase seen in initial position of (2b).

- (5) *Wo -n wohnst du?
where-N live you

(d) Placement of *-n* at a distance as in (3) is impossible although by phonological criteria *-n* could readily cliticize in Wackernagel style to C. See the contrast between (6a) and (6b).

- (6) a. Wo moanst-n du [~~w~~ dass der ~~w~~ wohnt]?
where think -N you that he lives
 „Where do you think that he lives?“
 b. *Wo moanst du [~~w~~ dass-n der ~~w~~ wohnt]?
where think you that-N he lives

Our conclusion will be that Bavarian *-n* has been reanalyzed as an agreement marker for the wh-phrase that terminates in the specifier of a V2 clause. Returning at this point to the debate about the X-bar status of words like *denn*, the grammaticalization observed in the reduction to *-n* speaks in favor of the transition in (1). The Bavarian agreement marker cannot have developed directly from an XP. The grammaticalization scenario supports analyses which ascribe to discourse particles the status of functional heads. These are plausible candidates for further reduction.

References

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