

WHAT FOR INTERNALLY *

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Abstract. The present paper is concerned with the internal structure of Germanic *what for* phrases. A comparative look at *what for* across Dutch, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Swiss German leads to a drastic revision of the traditional view on *what for*. The proposal recognizes an (often silent) functional nominal *SORT* as a constitutive part of the *what for* construction. *For* is analyzed as a prepositional complementizer whose complement contains the (silent) nominal and the trace of *what*, to which *for* assigns accusative Case. The projection of *for*, *forP*, is argued to sit in a specifier position in the extended projection of the head noun, similar to adjectival modifiers on a Cinquean view. *What* moves out of *forP* into the left periphery of the noun phrase.

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1. Introduction

What for questions, as exemplified in (1), are usually glossed as ‘*What kind of NP...*’, though they can be compatible with an interpretation closer to ‘*Which NP...*’. One famous property of *what for* is that it allows splitting, i.e. that *what for NP* can surface in a discontinuous fashion, as in example (1b).

- (1) a. *what for*
- Was für einen Hund** hast du gesehen? German
what for a dog have you seen
‘What kind of dog did you see?’
- b. *what for split*
- Was** hast du **für einen Hund** gesehen?
what have you for a dog seen
‘What kind of dog did you see?’

The *what for* construction is found in many Germanic languages including Danish¹, Dutch², German³, Norwegian⁴, Swedish⁵, Swiss German⁶, and Yiddish⁷. Standard English and Icelandic seem to lack it (i.e. lack variants that would be uncontroversially analyzed as belonging to the “*what for* construction”).⁸

The *what for* construction has previously been viewed as an interesting idiosyncratic quirk of some Germanic languages. In the present paper I present a view on *what for* that makes it look less anomalous, and instead lets us look at it in a way that can ultimately inform syntactic theory beyond *what for* research, specifically bearing on the existence and nature of silent nouns in syntax, elements of the sort proposed in Kayne 2002, 2003, 2005a, Van Riemsdijk 2002, 2005, and Marušič 2005. Assuming a syntactic approach to word formation (Halle and

Marantz 1993, Koopman and Szabolcsi 2000, Julien 2002 among others), I will argue that *for* heads a modifier phrase which hosts a silent nominal and (the trace of) *what* as parts of the modifier, and which is hosted in a specifier of the extended projection of the head noun (i.e. of *Hund* in (1)).

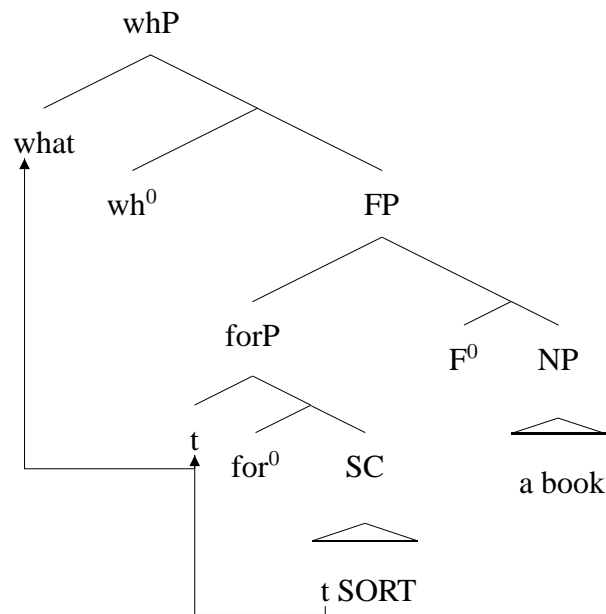
2. *for* and material to its right

As a heuristic I take *what for* to be strongly parallel across the relevant languages. The positions/elements which will be motivated in the present section are the following. (Capitals represent unpronounced elements.)

- (2) “... for [SORT] [a book] ...”
C/P [closed class N] [open class N]

The rightmost element *a book* in (2) is an indefinite NP. The leftmost element *for* is a prepositional complementizer which heads a constituent that occupies a specifier within the extended projection of the head noun *book*. In between these two elements there is a closed class nominal *SORT* which can be unpronounced (and often is). This nominal will be argued to be within the complement of *for*, and to stand in a predication relation with (the trace of) *what*. The structure I will argue for is given in (3).

- (3)



What moves out of the complement of *for* through Spec,*for*P into the specifier of a *wh*-projection, which I assume to be projected in all *wh*-noun phrases.⁹

I am now going to take up these elements one at a time and discuss their relevant properties.

2.1 The open class head nominal

The part of the *what for* phrase that in German overtly occurs to the right of *for* may contain a lexical/open class noun, an indefinite article, and adjectival modifiers. But it lacks a left-peripheral field (e.g. no definite determiners, no interrogative *wh* etc).¹⁰ Put another way, *for*P sits below or at the low edge of the left periphery of the DP.

The open class nominal is the head noun of the entire *what for* phrase. This is evidenced by the fact that the plural specification of *Schüler* in the *what for*

example in (4a) triggers plural agreement on the auxiliary. *Was* cannot trigger plural agreement, as shown in the non-*what for* example (4b).

- (4) a. Was für Schüler *hat/haben sich beklagt? German
 what for pupils has/have REFL complained
 b. Was ist/*sind zerbrochen?
 what is/are broken

This is parallel to English

- (5) What kind of books are lying on the table?

where *books* rather than *kind* is the head noun, while *what* is related to *kind* rather than to *books*.¹¹

Since there is nothing controversial about the NP constituent in *what for* I will leave it at this and immediately turn to the discussion of the silent nominal.

2.2 *Silent nominal*

2.2.1 *Overt manifestations*

The next element to be discussed is the silent functional nominal, *SORT* in (2).¹²

The idea that such silent elements play a role in syntax goes back at least to Katz and Postal 1964, and has regained prominence in recent work.¹³

Regarding *what for*, a first piece of evidence in favor of the existence of a functional nominal between *for* and *NP* comes from instances of *what for* in which there is an overt closed class nominal in this position. Such examples are common in Norwegian and Swedish and are also found in Dutch. This is exemplified here for Norwegian (with an example of *what for* split), and Swedish:

- (6) a. Hva har du lest for **slags** bok? Norwegian
 what have you read for *slags* book
 ‘What kind of book did you read?’
- b. Vad för **slags/sorts** bil köpte du? Swedish
 what for *slags/sorts* car bought you

Note that in the Norwegian and Swedish examples, the *sort-s/slag-s* bears genitive morphology, suggesting that it is in a local relation with another nominal. In my analysis this other nominal is *what*.¹⁴

I am generalizing from the overt manifestation of *slags/sorts* in the above examples to all instances of *what for*, and claim that cross-linguistically in all instances of *what for* there is always such a functional nominal present. I will argue that this nominal is in the complement of *for*.

Recall from the introduction that in addition to the kind-reading *was für* phrases also allow a token interpretation. As a reviewer points out, it is not obvious how the semantics of *SORT* can accommodate this.¹⁵ Indeed, in Norwegian, (7a) strongly favors a type reading, in contrast to the variant without overt *slags* (7c), which readily allows a token answer. The judgment for (7b) seems somewhat intermediate, with some speaker variation.

- (7) a. Hva for slags bok har du lest? Norwegian
 what for sort book have you read
- b. Hva slags bok har du lest?
 what sort book have you read
- c. Hva for en bok har du lest?
 what for a book have you read

A possibility is that the set of functional nominals that can occupy the position of *SORT* has more than one member - note that there exist at least two overt items

slags/sorts within single grammars - and that these can be semantically distinct. For a concrete proposal along such lines see Van Riemsdijk 2005.

If the hypothesis that a nominal like *sort/SORT* is always present in *what for* is correct, we would expect to find reflexes of its presence even in languages in which it is non-overt. In the remainder of this section I discuss a number of such reflexes, some of which have been noted in the literature as odd idiosyncracies of *what for*.

2.2.2 *Spurious een*

In a limited range of contexts (including *what for*), Dutch¹⁶ sometimes has an “indefinite article” followed by plurals, proper names, and mass nouns, i.e. the kind of NPs that are not usually preceded by an indefinite article (8a). Bennis et al. (1998) call this a “spurious article” and analyze it as a small clause copula.

The indefinite article in (8a) is overtly followed by a plural noun, a state of affairs that is not generally possible in Dutch. It is clear that in (8a), *een* is not in an “article-noun” relation with *jongens*. What I would like to suggest instead is that *een* is in an “article-noun” relation with an unpronounced nominal *SORT* as in (8b).¹⁷

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|-------|
| (8) | a. | Wat voor (een) jongens zijn dat? | Dutch |
| | | what for (a) boys are that | |
| | b. | Wat voor (een) SORT jongens zijn dat? | |
| | | what for (a) KIND boys are that | |

Assuming the indefinite article to be well-behaved, we can understand it as indicating the presence of a singular nominal.

This is supported by the fact that Dutch allows *een* to precede overt *slag* (9a), but it does not allow *een* to precede the plural *jongens* when it is itself preceded by overt *slag*.

- (9) a. Wat voor een slag jongens zijn dat? Dutch
 what for a sort boys are that
 b. * Wat voor slag een jongens zijn dat?
 what for sort a boys are that

2.2.3 Adjectival -ig

Swiss German has a variant of *what for* where *für* is followed by the adjectival suffix *ig* (10a), which I analyze as in (10b).

- (10) a. Was für-**ig**-ä wi hesch kauft? Swiss
 what for-ADJ-MASC wine have-you bought
 ‘What kind of wine did you buy?’
 b. Was für-SORT-**ig**-ä wi hesch kauft?
 what for-KIND-ADJ-MASC wine have-you bought
 ‘What kind of wine did you buy?’

The suffix *ig* typically combines with nominal (11a) and verbal (11b) stems to form adjectives.

- (11) a. witz ; witz-ig Swiss
 joke ; funny
 b. zapplä ; zappl-ig
 to fidget ; fidgety

We can characterize the situation exemplified in (10a) in part by noting that *ig* in *was fürig* does not overtly follow the kind of stem it usually follows (but see

note 19). The presence of a silent nominal in a position following *für* (10b) opens the way to a treatment of *ig* in (10) parallel to the regular occurrences in (11).

The question arises whether *ig* in *was fürig* forms a constituent with *SORT* or not. In other words, does *ig* relate to *SORT* in a way parallel to (11) or does it relate to [...*for*...*SORT*...] in such a way?¹⁸ Reconsider (10) repeated as (12) below. Note that *ig* can be followed by an inflectional suffix which is sensitive to the phi-features of the head noun, while *was für* without *ig* cannot. Put another way, *ig* makes possible the appearance of an agreement morpheme, agreeing with the head noun. Hence *ig* and the inflection are in a close structural relation. If *ig* formed a constituent with *SORT*, it would be within the complement of *for*, as in (13a), and agreement with the head noun *wi* ‘wine’ would, on standard assumptions, not be expected. The fact that the inflection related to the occurrence of *ig* does reflect agreement with the head noun, leads me to conclude that *ig* does not form a constituent with *SORT*, but instead is outside of the scope of *for*, as represented in (13b).

- (12) Was für -ig -ä wi sell ich nä? Swiss
 what for ADJ AGR wine should I take
 ‘What kind of wine shall I get?’

- (13) a. was [_{forP} für [_{SC} t_{was} SORT-**ig-ä**]] wi (Wrong analysis)
 b. was [_{forP} für [_{SC} t_{was} SORT]]-**ig-ä** wi (Right analysis)

Hence the entire *forP* is functioning as a stem for *ig* (see also note 24).¹⁹

2.2.4 Demonstrative *sertig*

Swiss German has a demonstrative counterpart of *fürig*, which has no (overt) *für* but has what looks like a cognate of *sort*. (14) exemplifies a question-answer sequence in which *sertig* is used deictically (either discourse anaphoric or accompanied by a pointing gesture).

- (14) a. Was **fürt-ig-ä** wi? Swiss
 what for-ADJ-MASC wine
 ‘What kind of wine?’
 b. **Sert-ig-ä** wi.
 such-ADJ-MASC wine
 ‘Wine like this’

A treatment of *fürtig* and *sertig* as being parallel in an interesting sense is supported by the fact that they exhibit a similar range of morphophonological variants:

- (15) *fürig* *fürtig* *fürnig* *füttig* Swiss
 serig *sertig* *sernig* *settig*

Taking *fürtig* and *sertig* to be strongly parallel suggests

- (16) a. *für*-SORT-ig
 b. *FOR*-sert-ig

(ignoring the trace of *was* in (16a)) where overt *für* licenses non-pronunciation of *SORT*. Whether there is an unpronounced *FOR* in *sertig*, as in (16b), is less clear. Norwegian (17) supports the idea that an overt *slags* sometimes licenses the non-pronunciation of *for*.

- (17) Hva (**for**) **slags** bok har du lest? Norwegian
 what (for) *slags* book have you read

Alternatively to (16b) one could argue that *for* is contingent on the presence of (a counterpart of) *what* (see sections 3.1 and 3.3).

2.2.5 Kind as a head noun

It is important to distinguish the functional nominal *SORT* from counterparts of English *kind* that can function as the head noun of a *what for* phrase. Swiss German and German do have overt noun counterparts of English *kind*, as e.g. in German (18). Here the nominal *Art* is preceded by an indefinite article, *Art* triggers agreement on the indefinite article (18a), and the noun phrase *einer Art* ‘*a_{DAT} kind*’ (18b) receives outside Case (see section 2.3), hence it is not in the complement of *für*.

- (18) a. Was für ein-e Art Bücher liest du? German
 what for a-FEM kind books read you
 b. Von was für ein-er Art Film hat er gesprochen?
 of what for a-DAT kind movie has he spoken
 c. diese Art Bücher/diese Art von Büchern
 this kind books/this kind of books.DAT

The fact that there is an additional noun *Bücher* ‘books’ present has to do with properties of *Art* ‘kind’, and is independent of *what for*, as illustrated in (18c). On the present analysis there is still a silent *SORT* present in (18a,b), which is in the complement of *für* and stands in a predication relation with *was*.

Further, if (*eine*) *Art* in (18a) were an overt counterpart of the proposed silent nominal *SORT*, we would for the case in which it is silent expect (19a) with silent

ART and a spurious *eine* (cf. section 2.2.2), or (19b) with silent *EINER ART* to be possible in German, contrary to fact.

- (19) a. * Was für eine ART Bücher... German
 what for a KIND books...
 b. * Von was für EINER ART Film...
 of what for A.DAT KIND film...

A similar potential confusion arises in Dutch.

- (20) a. Wat voor een SORT [soorten wijn] zijn er? Dutch
 what for a SORT sorts wine are there
 b. Wat voor een SORT [jongens] zijn dat?
 what for a SORT boys are that

In the present analysis, the silent nominal *SORT* is crucially within the *for* NP and not the head noun of the *what for* phrase. In (20a), on the other hand, *soorten* clearly is the head noun of the *what for* phrase, triggering plural agreement on the copula. Hence, as far as the structure of *what for* is concerned, (20a) is parallel to (20b), with *soorten* ‘sorts’ as the head noun instead of *jongens* ‘boys’. The difference between the two examples is that in (20a) the indefinite NP following [...*for SORT*...] is in itself more complex than the one in (20b). But this is not directly relevant to the structure of *what for*.²⁰

2.2.6 Intermediate conclusion

What for NP features a functional nominal morpheme *SORT/SLAG*, which occurs between *for* and the open class head noun, and which in some varieties of Germanic can and in some varieties must remain unpronounced.

2.3 for and Case

Let us next consider the element *for*. In non-*what for* contexts *für* assigns accusative Case to the noun phrase that follows it, which is its complement DP.

- (21) Ich habe das Lied [für dich] geschrieben. German
I have the song for you.ACC written

One of the striking facts about *what for* is that the (open class) noun phrase that overtly follows *for* is marked for Case relative to the syntactic context in which the entire *what for* phrase occurs, i.e. it can be nominative, accusative, dative or genitive. In other words, in *what for* contexts *for* and the open class nominal of the *what for* phrase are not in a Case relation. Concretely, in (22a) *für* and *einem Hund* are not in a Case relation. Instead *einem Hund* is in a Case relation with the dative preposition *mit*. Note further that *für* is not an intervener for the Case relation between *mit* and *einem Hund*.

These observations have led to the description of *für* in *was für* as Case-inert (Den Besten 1981, Corver 1991, Pafel 1996), i.e. the fact that *für* in *was für* does neither assign Case to the head nominal nor intervene for Case assignment has been ascribed to lexical properties of *für* in *was für*, thereby alienating it from other occurrences of *für*.

- (22) a. **Mit** was für **ein-em** Hund hast du gespielt? German
with what for a-DAT dog have you played
'What kind of dog did you play with?'
b. **Mit** was [für SORT] **ein-em** Hund hast du gespielt?
with what for KIND a-DAT dog have you played
'What kind of dog did you play with?'

On my analysis, it is possible to more closely assimilate *für* in *was für* to other occurrences of *für* and ascribe its irrelevance regarding the Case of *einem Hund* to the structural configuration holding between *für* and *einem Hund*. Concretely, I propose that *für* does not c-command *einem Hund* (see (3)). Put another way, *einem Hund* is not in the complement of *für*. This is why *für* does not intervene between *mit* and *einem Hund*. In this respect *für* in (22) is like *auf* in (23), relative to the Case relation between *mit* and the head noun (*Hund* and *Mutter* respectively).

- (23) Mit ein-er [[auf ihr-en Sohn] stolz]-en Mutter German
 with a-DAT of her-ACC son proud-DAT mother
 ‘with a mother proud of her son’

Further, we do not need to stipulate that *für* in *was für* does not assign Case. In fact, in section 3.3 I will argue that it does assign accusative Case, namely to *was*. For now, I conclude from (22) that the NP (*einem Hund*) is not (in) the complement of *für*. Put differently, *für* in (22) heads a constituent that does not contain *einem Hund*. Generalizing across Germanic, I propose that the constituent headed by *for* in *what for* is (in) a specifier within the extended projection of the open class head noun.

3. *for* and material to its left

A first issue in this section concerns the nature/distribution of *for* found in *what for*. The literature on *what for* assumes this *for* to be limited to co-occurring with (interrogative/exclamative) *what*. In other words, as far as I know, there is no mention in the generative literature on *what for* of instances of *for* NPs in

non-interrogative (and non-exclamative) contexts. Indeed such contexts are less pervasive than the interrogative ones and may not exist as possible contexts for *for NP* in some languages that have *what for*. This has led researchers to propose that *for* in *what for* is inherently [+wh], as in Bennis et al. 1998, where [wh] is intended as a morphological feature, not encoding interrogativeness (see also Den Dikken 2003). In section 3.1 I will argue that the *for* of *what for* is not specified for [+wh], whether understood as an interrogative feature or as a purely morphological feature.²¹

In 3.2 I will argue that the specifier of *forP* is neither the base position nor the surface position of *what*, but instead *what* originates in the complement of *for* and moves (through the specifier of *forP*) to the higher left periphery of the extended projection of the open class N.

In section 3.3, finally, I will present evidence suggesting that *was* in *was für* is accusative Case-marked by *für*.

3.1 *for* is not [+wh]

The possible environments which *für NPs* can occur in include the familiar interrogative

- | | | |
|------|--|--------|
| (24) | Was verkaufen die für Platten?
what sell they for records | German |
|------|--|--------|

and the exclamative (which I will not discuss in any detail (see Bennis 1995, 1998).²²

- | | | |
|------|---|--------|
| (25) | Was die für Platten verkaufen!
what they for records sell | German |
|------|---|--------|

However, *für* NPs can occur in non-interrogative (and non-exclamative) contexts as well. Consider (26).

- (26) Die verkaufen **sonst was** für Platten. German
 they sell else what for records
 ‘They’re selling all kinds of records (even pretty weird/rare ones).’

Sonst seems to play a crucial role here. Phonetically, it receives focus stress. Semantically, it somehow stretches the domain of quantification. It is not important for present purposes what exactly *sonst* does, what is important to note is that without modification of *was* by *sonst* the *für* NP is unacceptable.

- (27) Ich hab mir **was** (*für Platten) gekauft. German
 I have myself something (for records) bought

This suggests that the *für* NP in (26) (as in interrogatives) must be licensed by a quantificational element of a certain kind, and that the indefinite *was* is not a possible licenser. Hence while *was* in (27) has a morphological [wh] feature, this is not sufficient to license the *für* NP.

Morphological [wh] is not only not sufficient to license the *für* NP, it is also not necessary. This is evidenced in the (perhaps more pervasive) instances of *für* NP in a declarative context under a kind of universal expression, as found in Swiss German (Weber 1964). A handful of expressions (e.g. *allerlei/allerhand/allchäib*s ‘all kinds’) that transparently contain a universal quantifier (*all-*), a closed class nominal (*-lei/-hand/-chäib-*)²³, and what looks like a genitive marker (*-er/-s*) can license a *für* NP.²⁴

- (28) a. Di verchauft **allerlei** **für** plattä. Swiss
 Di verchauft **allächäibs** **für** plattä.
 they sell *all kinds* for records
 ‘They’re selling all kinds of records.’
- b. (?) Ich ha mit [allerlei für komisch-ä lüt] gred.
 I have with *all kinds* for funny-DAT people talked
 ‘I talked to all kinds of weird people.’

The assumption that the *für NP* in (28) is indeed the same as in *what for* is corroborated for one thing by the fact that the *für NP* must be licensed (i.e. *allerlei* etc. cannot be omitted), and secondly by the fact that *für* is not in a Case relation with the overtly following NP. As shown in (28b), *komischä*, the adjectival modifier of the head noun, has dative Case morphology, assigned by *mit*, even though it follows *für*. This is exactly parallel to the situation in the more familiar *what for* discussed above.

Questions arise as to the relation between *-lei/-chäibs* and Scandinavian *sorts/slags*, as well as to the impossibility of (28) in German. I have nothing to say about the latter. As for the former, in Swiss German the distinct form and position of the morphemes *-er* in *all-er-lei für...*, and *-s* in *all-ä-chäib-s für...* reflect the regular pattern of German genitival morphology in feminine (*-lei, -hand*) and masculine (*-chäib*) noun phrases respectively. This clearly identifies them as remnants of genitival morphology and thereby strengthens the parallelism between Swiss German (28) and Scandinavian *sorts/slags*.

I conclude this subsection by noting that *für NPs* of the type that occur in *what for* can also occur in certain declarative contexts. They must be licensed by a certain kind of expression, whereby morphological [wh] is neither sufficient nor

necessary as a licenser. Put in terms of features: *für* is not [+wh]. Among the possible licensors of *für NP* are interrogative [+wh], exclamative [+wh], focused *sonst*, and a number of [∀] expressions.

3.2 Between what and for

The question to be addressed in this section is where *what* is, relative to *for*. At first glance it may seem possible that *what* is in the specifier of *for*P. There are a number of reasons, however, why *what* in *what for* cannot be taken to be in the specifier of *for*P at spell-out (neither in split nor in non-split instances of *what for*).

First of all, *for* NPs can be coordinated to the exclusion of *what*, as argued by Corver (1991), Pafel (1996), Ijibema (1997):

- (29) a. Wat **voor mannen** en **voor vrouwen** heb jij gezien? Dutch
 what for men and for women have you seen
 b. Was **für Männer** und **für Frauen** hast du gesehen? German
 what for men and for women have you seen

If it is right that the head noun (e.g. *mannen*) is not in the complement of *for*, as I argued in section 2, then *wat* and *was* respectively in (29) cannot be in the specifier of *for*P.

Secondly, some modifiers, including *alles* ‘all’, can occur between *what* and *for* (Corver 1991, Pafel 1996, Iibema 1997, Leu 2003).

- (30) a. [Was **alles** für lüt] hesch iggladä? Swiss
 what all for people have-you invited
 ‘Who all did you invite?’

- b. Was hesch [alles für lüt] iggladä?
what have-you all for people invited
'Who all did you invite?'
- c. ?* Was alles hesch für lüt iggladä?
what all have-you for people invited
'Who all did you invite?'

Note that *alles* in (30) is inflected in a way parallel to (31b,c), where *das* has moved through the specifier of *all-(es)* triggering agreement, by assumption (cf. Shlonsky 1991).

- (31) a. ...all das ... Swiss
- b. ...das *all/all-es ...
- c. **Das** han ich **all-es** scho ggläsä.
this have I all-AGR already read

This suggests that in (30a,b) *was* is in a Spec-head relation with *alles* at one point, prior to splitting in (30b). A look at *what for* split shows that *was* cannot be in the specifier of *alles* when splitting occurs however. To show this, let me reproduce an argument from Abels 2003. Consider the examples of split *what for* PPs in (32a) and (32b) adapted from Abels's (290a) and (292a), and in Swiss German (32d).

- (32) a. [Über **was** *t*] der alles **für Sachen** Bescheid weiss! German
about what he all for things information knows
'(It's amazing) how much the guy knows!'
- b. [Mit **was** *t*] hast du denn **für Leut-en** gerechnet?
with what have you PRT for people-DAT reckoned
'What kind of people did you expect?'

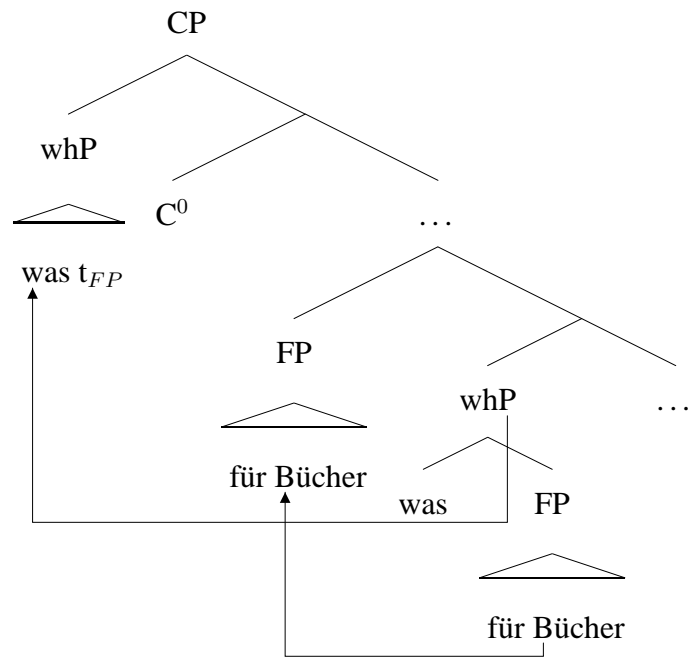
- c. Mit **was** all-es **für Leut-en** hast du geredet?
 with what all-ACC for people-DAT have you spoken
 ‘What (kind of) people did you talk to?’
- d. (?) [Mit **was** *t*] hesch [all-es **für lüt**] gred? Swiss
 with what have-you all-ACC for people spoken
 ‘What (kind of) people did you talk to?’

The fact that there are acceptable examples of this sort (in German and Swiss German)²⁵ is crucial, because (32a,b,d) cannot, under common assumptions, be derived by subextraction of *was*, as earlier analyses of *what for* split would have it (Den Besten 1981, 1985, Bennis 1983, Corver 1991, and Pafel 1996).^{26,27} The reason is that *mit* and *was* would not form a constituent at the point where wh-movement applies (independently of whether or not *was* is in the specifier of forP or in a higher Spec).

(33) ... [_{PP} mit [was [_{FP} für Leuten_{DAT}]]] ...

On the basis of examples like (32a,b,d) Abels (2003) and Leu (2003) argue that *what for* split involves remnant movement and provide an analysis akin to proposals for split DPs in Greek by Androutsopoulou (1997), French *combien de* split by Starke (2001) and Kayne (2002), and *quelque chose de Adj* split in French and *öpis Adj-s* split in Swiss German by Leu (2005). The proposed derivation of *what for* split is sketched in (34), cf. (3).

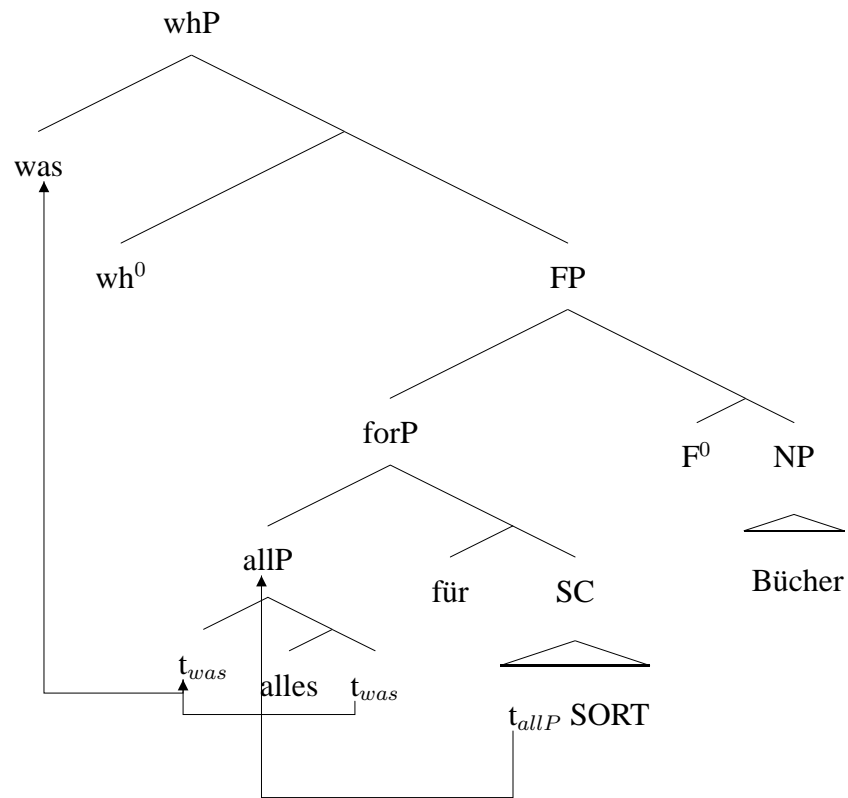
(34)



The *for NP* (FP in (34)) extracts across *was* (and out of the PP in the split *what for* PP examples), prior to wh-movement of the remnant whP (which piedpipes P).

If these considerations on *what for* split are correct, then *was* and *alles* in (30b) and (32a,b,d) cannot form a constituent at the point of splitting. I propose the following derivation for the *what for* phrase.

- (35) a. was alles für Bücher
 what all for books
 b.



After triggering Spec-head agreement on *alles*, *was* must move on, out of the specifier of allP and thereby out of the specifier of forP, into a higher Spec in the extended projection of the head noun, which I label whP.

3.3 The Case of *was*

The agreement morphology on *all-* is a key to another important question, which is the question of what the Case of *what* is. (Swiss) German *was* does not overtly show any Case alternations. However, accusative/nominative *was* on the one hand and dative *was* on the other can be morphologically distinguished looking at the agreement which *was* triggers on *all-*, due to the fact that the inflection on *all-*

overtly distinguishes Case, as illustrated in the non-*what for* examples (36).

- (36)
- a. ... das all-**es** ...
 this.ACC/NOM all-ACC/NOM
 - b. ... d-**em** all-**em** ...
 this-DAT all-DAT
 - c. mit was all-**em** ...
 with what all-DAT

With this trick we can turn to *what for* and identify the Case of *was* in *was für*, showing that *was alles* is insensitive to outside Case. Consider (37a) where *allem* modifies the complement of *mit*, *d-em/de-nä*. In this example, the Case assigned by *mit* is visible on *all-em/all-nä*.

- (37)
- a. Mit dem all-**em**/denä all-**nä** bin ich zfridä. Swiss
 with this all-DAT/THESE all-DAT.PL am I content
 ‘I’m happy with all of this / all of these.’
 - b. Mit was (?)all-**es**/?*all-**em** für lüt hesch grächnet?
 with what all/ all-DAT for people have-you reckoned
 ‘Who did you expect?’

In the *what for* example (37b), *alles* modifies *was*, which can be deduced in part from the fact that *alles* is singular. The dative form *allem* is degraded.²⁸ This suggests that *was* in *what for* does not receive Case from outside. Instead, I propose, that *was* in *what for* receives Case from within the *what for* phrase. The morphology on *alles* in (37b) is compatible with accusative and nominative. I will assume that *was (alles)* gets its (accusative) Case assigned by the prepositional complementizer *für*, akin to Kayne’s 1981 proposal for:²⁹

- (38) I want for her to be happy.

In other words, *for* is an (accusative) Case assigner after all. This is possibly supported by the fact that Swedish has:

- (39) a. **Vad** såg du **för nånting**? Swedish
 what saw you for something
 ‘What did you see?’
- b. **Var** har du varit **nånstans**?
 where have you been someplace
 ‘Where have you been?’
- c. **Var** bor Christer **nånstans**?
 where lives Christer someplace
 ‘Where does Christer live?’

In the *what for* example (39a) *vad* receives Case from *för*. If *var* and *nånstans* in (39b,c) can be taken to be the counterparts of *vad* and *nånting* respectively, we note that *var* ‘*where*’ being locative (inherently Case-marked) does not need an additional *för* to assign it Case.³⁰ This is borne out, by the fact that (39b,c) do not have a *för*.³¹

What moves from its Case position out of the phrase headed by *for*. This movement proceeds through the specifier of *for*, where *alles* is stranded. The claim that *alles* is stranded, i.e. that *was* and *alles* do not form a constituent at the point of spell-out is supported by the same kind of argument made above with regard to *was* and *für* (section 3.2).

In the split *what for* example in (40) *alles* strands together with the *for NP* rather than fronting with *was*.

- (40) a. **Was** hesch **alles für büächr** kauft? Swiss
 what have-you all for books bought

- b. ?* **Was** **alles** hesch **für** **büächr** kauft?
 what all have-you for books bought

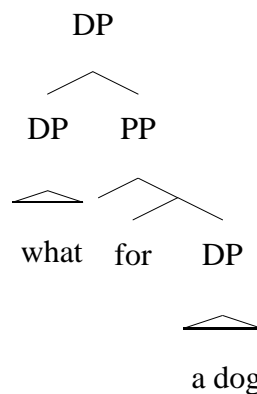
In summary, *for* in *what for* is not specified for interrogativeness and it is not Case-inert but assigns accusative Case to *what*.³² *What* thus originates somewhere in the complement of *for* and moves out of the phrase headed by *for*, into Spec,whP in the left periphery of the extended projection of the open class nominal.

4. The *what for* phrase

4.1 What for an adjunction structure: the traditional view

The standard view on the structure of *what for* phrases in the 1990s was the one proposed in Corver 1991 and Pafel 1996 (minor differences between the two are omitted here) in which a [_{PP} *for NP*] is right-adjoined to (a maximal projection containing) *what*.

(41)



In addition to being incompatible with antisymmetry (Kayne1994), this proposal has a number of short-comings with regard to the properties of *what for*

phrases discussed above. The treatment of the *for NP* as a PP headed by a P *for* creates the two Case problems discussed: one regarding the clash between the Case assigned by *for* and the one expressed on *a dog* (section 2.3), and another regarding the clash between the Case assigned to the entire *what for* phrase and the one expressed on *was alles* (section 3.3).

Such an analysis further fails to provide space for *slags* (section 2.2.1). Related to this, it does not lend itself to a natural account of the facts mentioned regarding the spurious article (section 2.2.2) and Swiss German *ig* (section 2.2.3).

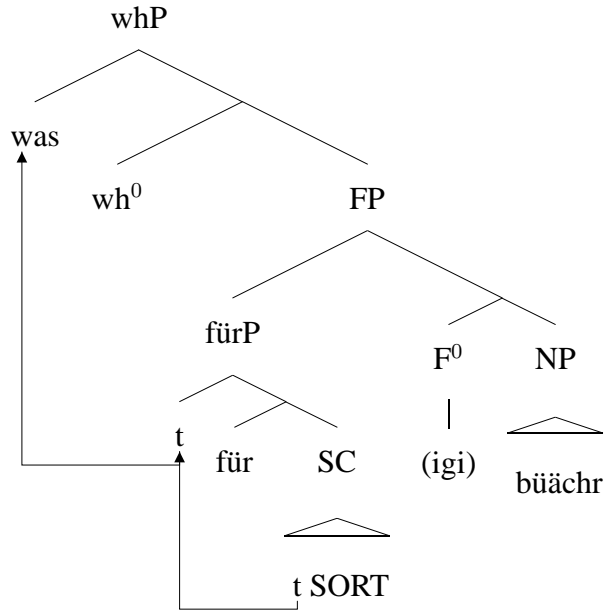
Yet another observation which the structure in (41) fails to capture in any straightforward way is the fact (noted in section 2.1) that it is the number specification of the head noun that triggers agreement on the verb/auxiliary in (4).

Below a proposal is made that integrates these findings.

4.2 What for a modifier: the present proposal

In an attempt to account for the properties of *what for* discussed in the previous sections I propose to analyze *for SORT* in a fashion parallel to adjectival modifiers, as analyzed in Cinque 1993, 1999. The structure I propose is represented below.³³

- (42) a. was für SORT (-igi) büächr
 what for SORT (ADJ) books
 b.



Recall that the structural parallel with adjectival modifiers is strongly supported by the fact that in Swiss German the [*for SORT*] phrase can be followed by the derivational adjectival suffix *ig* and adjectival inflection, as discussed in section 2.2.3.

5. Conclusion

A comparative view on Germanic *what for*, including examples from Mainland Scandinavian, Dutch, German, and Swiss German, was shown to provide compelling evidence for the presence of a functional nominal *SORT* in the complement of *for*. It has been shown that this nominal can/must remain unpronounced in some varieties. It has further been argued that *what* in *what for* also originates in the complement of *for*, where it is assigned accusative Case by *for*, and subsequently moves through the specifier of *forP* into a higher specifier of the extended

projection of the head noun. The head noun has been argued not to be in the complement of *for*, instead *for*P is in a specifier of the extended projection of the head noun, similar to Cinquean adjectives.

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Notes

¹ Vikner 1995.

² Bennis 1983, 1995, Den Besten 1985, Corver 1990, 1991, and Bennis et al. 1998.

³ Den Besten 1981, 1985, Pafel 1996, Ijbema 1997, and Abels 2003.

⁴ Lie 1982.

⁵ Börjars 1992 and Delsing 1993.

⁶ Leu 2003, 2005b.

⁷ Vikner 1995.

⁸ The OED lists a few examples of *what for* in older varieties of English. Some speakers of present day American English quite readily accept *what for* sentences like

- i. % What did you buy for books?
- ii. % What is that for a building?

with a strong preference for splitting.

⁹ On a view on the left periphery of noun phrases as involving dedicated A-bar positions, similar to the proposal in Rizzi 1997 for the clause, see e.g. Hendricks

1990, Szabolcsi 1994, Aboh 2004, and Kayne 2005b.

¹⁰ It allows morphological *wh* in e.g. German (iiia). Notice that this is an indefinite pronoun *welche*. Consider the following pairs, (a) examples are German, (b) examples Swiss German:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---------------------------------|--------|
| i | a. | Welche hast du gekauft? | German |
| | | which have you bought | |
| | b. | Weli hesch kauft? | Swiss |
| ii | a. | Er hat welche gekauft. | German |
| | | he has some bought | |
| | b. | * Er het weli kauft. | Swiss |
| iii | a. | Was für welche hast du gekauft? | German |
| | | what for some have you bought | |
| | b. | * Was für weli hesch kauft? | Swiss |

Swiss German *weli* ‘which’ (ib) does not allow the indefinite pronoun use of German *welche* (ii). The contrasts in (ii) and (iii) seem parallel, showing that *welche* after *für* in *what for* is the indefinite pronoun.

¹¹ Possibly the English example is an instance of *what for* with unpronounced *for*, looking, according to the present analysis of *what for*, like:

[_{whP} [what] wh⁰ [_{FP} [_{forP} *t_{what}* FOR [_{SC} kind of *t_{what}* *t_{of}* *t_{kind}*]]] F⁰ books]]

where *books* is not in the complement of *of*. *Of* is presumably the English counterpart of the genitive marker found in the Scandinavian variants of *what for*, see examples (6).

¹²This element seems to share properties with East Asian classifiers (Huang and Ahrens 2003, Cheng and Sybesma 2005, and Simpson 2005). I will not pursue this comparison here, but content myself with noting that both are cases of “grammaticalization” of nominals to functional items within the noun phrase.

¹³The idea of a silent SORT in *what for* was noted and rejected in Corver 1990, see note 20.

¹⁴The a more detailed analysis of this genitive -s should also take into account examples like Norwegian (ia) (due to Øystein Vangsnes p.c.), Dutch (ii) (from Corver 2006), and Swiss German (iii).

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| i. | en helvete-s idiot | Norwegian |
| | a hell-s idiot | |
| ii. | een bliksem-s-(e) mooi-e meid | Dutch |
| | a lightning-s-(AGR) pretty-AGR girl | |
| iii. | a. ä hund-s gemäinä chäib | Swiss |
| | a dog-s mean guy | |
| | b. ä wahnsinn-s typ | |
| | an insanity-s guy | |
| | ‘an incredible man’ | |

Dutch (ii) and Swiss German (iiia) suggest that in (iiib) as well -s may be followed by an (in this case silent) adjective, e.g. *GREAT*, and similarly in (i). I.e. in all the examples, the modifier plausibly consists of two parts related by -s.

¹⁵Note though that the compatibility of *Was für SORT Bücher?* ‘What for SORT

books’ with a token answer, e.g. *Voltaire’s Candide und Reuters Schelmuffsky*, is parallel to the proposal by Heim (1987), that English *what* has the semantics of *something of what kind*, in the light of the fact that English *What (two) books did you read?* also allows such an answer. If Heim is right, this suggests the possibility that all *what* questions are really *what for* questions, with a silent *for NP*. In light of the contrast in (7), this line of reasoning suggests that non-pronunciation correlates with a sort of semantic weakening/bleaching (a notion that ultimately needs to be made more precise).

¹⁶Swedish exhibits a similar phenomenon (Delsing 1993:36ff.).

¹⁷For an extension of the present proposal to other kinds of noun phrases in which a “spurious article” surfaces, notably the *N of an N* and the *wat een* constructions, see Van Riemsdijk 2005.

¹⁸Note that the two analyses both bear on the issue of affixation to zero-elements but in somewhat different ways.

¹⁹The morpheme *-ig* can compose with complex phrases in other cases too. An example is the very colloquial Swiss German (ia), where the stem contains an R-pronoun and hence an entire PP structure containing an empty category in the complement of P (Van Riemsdijk 1978). (I refrain from discussing the identity of the morpheme glossed *n* at this point.) Cf. also Swiss German (ib), akin to *übr-mäss-ig* lit. ‘over-measure-ADJ’ meaning ‘exaggerated’, and English *-ish* in (ic), due to Richard Kayne p.c.

- i. a. En völliɡ dr-uf-n-ig-ä typ Swiss
a totally there-on-n-ADJ-AGR guy
‘A total weirdo’
- b. Es isch nu öpis übr-ig
it is still something over-ADJ
‘There’s something left over.’
- c. It must be a quarter after five-ish.

Another example of an adjectival modifier headed by a P element is the colloquial German (iia), pointed out to me by a reviewer, and the corresponding Swiss German (iib), where the verbal particle *zu* takes adjectival inflection (and optionally combines with *-ig*). A possible analysis would be that there is an unpronounced participle *MADE* (or German *GEMACHT*).

- ii. a. eine zu-e Tür German
a PRT-AGR door
‘a closed door’
- b. ä zuä-n-i/zuä-n-ig-i türä Swiss
a PRT-n-AGR/PRT-n-ADJ-AGR door

²⁰ Assuming a different internal structure of *what for*, Corver (1990:chap 6, note 10) considers (ia) to be favorable evidence for the existence of a silent SORT, but abandons the idea in view of (ib), which would suggest the presence of yet another SORT. But this latter does not seem to be able to be overt (ic).

- i. a. [Wat voor (een) soort honden] heb je gezien? Dutch
what for (a) sort dogs have you seen

- b. [Wat voor een soorten honden] heb je gezien?
what for a sorts dogs have you seen
- c. ?* [Wat voor een soort soorten honden] heb je gezien?

But the very marginal status of (ic) should be related to German (iib) which is unacceptable.

- ii. a. Diese Art Bücher lese ich nicht. German
this kind books read I not
- b. * Diese Art Art(en) Bücher lese ich nicht.
this kind kind(s) books read I not

Hence independently of *what for*, the complex noun phrase of the *Art Bücher* kind does not allow recursion (in the absence of a mediating preposition).

²¹ Marcel Den Dikken (p.c.) points out that non-wh-elements like Dutch *zulk* in (i), which pattern like *wat* in allowing overt *soort*, do not normally seem to be separated from it by *for*:

- i. zulk (*voor) soort N
such (for) sort N

This suggests that there is some sort of relation between the presence of a kind of operator, including [wh] and possibly [∀], see below, and the presence of (overt) *for*.

²² A reviewer points out the possibility of German (ia), which is close to Swiss German (ib). Notice that instead of German *was* we have Swiss German *äis*, reminiscent perhaps of the spurious article in Dutch.

- | | | | |
|----|----|---|--------|
| i. | a. | Die hat sich was Platten gekauft! | German |
| | | she.DEM has REFL what records bought | |
| | | ‘She has bought loads of records!’ | |
| | b. | Aso, diä het sich äis plattä kauft he! | Swiss |
| | | well, she.DEM has REFL one records bought hey | |
| | c. | Was diä sich äis plattä kauft het! | |
| | | what she.DEM REFL one records bought has | |
| | | ‘She has bought so many records!’ | |
| | d. | Was miär üs äis chrum gglachet hend! | |
| | | what we.EMPH us one curved laughed have | |
| | | ‘We laughed so much!’ | |

Swiss German also has the variants (ic,d), with an initial *was* and a verb final clause. (id) shows that *äis* can also be an emphasizing modifier in resultative structures. Possibly *äis* is construed with a silent *GREAT AMOUNT/NUMBER/DEGREE*, (Kayne 2005b).

²³ According to Paul (1935), *lei* is historically derived from the Mid-High-German loan from Old-French *ley* ‘kind, manner’. The origin of *hand* is transparently *Hand* ‘hand’, and *chäib* is an emphatic expression, often used for ‘male person’. They are all semantically bleached and are distinguished only by A) their phonological shape, B) somewhat differing distributional preferences, and C) by the morpho-syntax of the genitival morphology, which distinguishes a feminine pattern (-*lei*, -*hand*, with -*er* as a modifier suffix) and a non-feminine one (-*chäib*, with -*s* as a noun suffix, descriptively speaking).

²⁴ Some speakers readily allow *allerlei fürtigi NPs* where *für* is followed by the adjectival suffix *ig* discussed in section 2.2.3. If *lei* and *chäibs* are taken to be counterparts of *slags*/*SORT* (as suggested by the genitival morphology, paralleling Scandinavian), then this supports an analysis of *ig* as “combining” with the entire [...*for* ...] phrase rather than with *SORT*.

²⁵ In Dutch these seem clearly less acceptable. Among my informants, a clear majority (though not all of them) reject examples like (i).

- i. a. *Op wat heb jij dan voor mensen gerekend? Dutch
 On what have you PRT for people reckoned
- b. *In wat speel jij voor elftal?
 In what play you for team
 ‘In which (what kind of) team do you play?’

See also note 27.

²⁶ The proposals by Den Besten and by Bennis involve reanalysis of the category of the stranded *for NP*. In this these proposals share in common with the present proposal that splitting changes the category via which the *for NP* is connected to the clausal projection line.

²⁷ It is interesting that with regard to such examples, judgments seem to vary strongly among speakers within languages/dialects, and that this variation exists across languages. Concretely, *what for*-PP splitting finds acceptance and rejection both in Swiss German and in Dutch. The same fact seems to be the case with regard to a number of “constructions,” such as e.g. the availability of right

peripheral *for NPs* (i) in Swiss German and Dutch (cf. Corver 1990 and Leu 2005b), PP-splitting with *combien* in French (ib) (cf. Starke 2001, Lena Baunaz p.c.), and Greek polydefiniteness (ic) with so-called non-predicative adjectives (cf. Androutsopoulou 1996, Alexiadou and Wilder 1998, and Leu 2006, Artemis Alexiadou, Antonia Androutsopoulou, Alexandra Ioannidou p.c.).

- | | | | |
|----|----|--|--------|
| i. | a. | % Was hesch kauft für es buäch? | Swiss |
| | | what have-you bought for a book | |
| | b. | % A combien tu as parlé de photographes? | French |
| | | to how-many you have spoken of photographers | |
| | c. | % Ohi, o proighoumenos o prothipourghos pethane. | Greek |
| | | no, the former the prime minister died. | |

In all of these, judgments reported in the literature and elicited from speakers vary from unacceptable to fully acceptable, sometimes among speakers from the same town and a same social demographic. Notice that at least (ib) may involve the same parameter that is involved in the variation observed in note 25 and that also holds for (32d) in the main text. While I do not know what this variation is correlated with, it is clear that any mechanism that is necessary to derive the examples must be made available by UG, and the negative judgments must subsequently be attributed to something else/additional.

²⁸ There are speakers of German who prefer dative morphology on *all-* in the German counterpart of (37b). Consistent with the present proposal would be that for these speakers, *all-* does not originate in the complement of *für*, but is merged in the higher projection line (i.e. the extended projection of the head noun), mod-

ifying not *was* but the head noun *Leuten*.

- i. Mit was all-en für Leuten hast du gerechnet? German
with what all-DAT.PL for people.DAT.PL have you reckoned

This is supported by the fact that in (i), *allen* not only is dative but also plural, hence not related to *was*, which cannot be plural (see (4b)).

A reviewer makes the interesting observation that the dative form *allen* is incompatible with splitting.

- ii. a. * [Mit was] hast du [all-en für Leuten] gerechnet?
with what have you all-DAT.PL for people.DAT.PL reckoned
b. * [Mit was all-en] hast du [für Leuten] gerechnet?
with what all-DAT.PL have you for people.DAT.PL reckoned

(Similarly, *allem* in (37b) deserves a full star when split.) It seems that *for* NP fronting cannot piedpipe *allen* ruling out (iia). Since stranding of *allen* is not impossible per se (cf. *Diesen Leuten habe ich allen vertraut* ‘These people have I all_{dat.pl} trusted’), the impossibility of (iib) should presumably be taken to show that *allen* blocks fronting of [*für Leuten*].

²⁹ An interesting difference between the English sentence in (38) and *what for* is that in the latter the DP that is Case-marked by *for* can wh-extract, while in the former such extraction is not possible, possibly an instance of the *that*-trace phenomenon.

³⁰ Thanks to Anders Holmberg for pointing this out to me.

³¹Some speakers of Swedish allow and even prefer *för* in front of *nånstans*, and interestingly, some speakers also accept *vad för nånstans* ‘*what for someplace*’ (Anders Holmberg p.c. See also the discussion at <http://forum.scandiasyn.uit.no/viewtopic.php?t=18>). This supports the claim that the example is parallel to *what for*. The variant with *var* and *för* suggests that Case assignment is not the only function that *for* has.

³²A reviewer points out the existence of German (ia), with an exclamative *was* phrase but without (overt) *für*, and (ib), which shows that the noun phrase construed with *was* may have dative Case.

- | | | | |
|----|----|--|--------|
| i. | a. | Was ein Jammer! | German |
| | | what a misery | |
| | b. | Was ein-em hervorragenden Künstler er ähnlich sieht! | |
| | | what a-DAT outstanding artist he alike looks | |

The availability of (i) seems restricted. It is not productive for my German informants. And it is not available in Swiss German, as far as I am aware. Dutch, on the other hand, allows counterparts of such exclamatives (Bennis 1995, and Bennis et al. 1998)). This suggests a dialectal (i.e. geographically traceable) pattern (unlike the variation mentioned in note 27).

The fact that Swiss German and some varieties of German require an overt *für* in their counterparts of (i) suggests that (i) features a silent *FOR*, that assigns Case to *was*.

³³I represent *ig* as spelling out the functional head F^0 . This may well be a

simplification. What is important in (42) is the relative constituent structure of *was*, *fürP*, and the noun *büächr*.