

# ‘What for’ internally \*

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The present paper is concerned with the internal structure of Germanic *what for* phrases. A comparative look at *what for* across Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch, German, 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.

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## 1 Introduction

*What for* questions, as exemplified in (1), are usually glossed as ‘*What kind of NP...*’, but 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) German
- a. *what for*:  
**Was für einen Hund** hast du gesehen?  
 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 uncontroversially found in many Germanic languages including German<sup>1</sup>, Norwegian<sup>2</sup>, Dutch<sup>3</sup>, Swedish<sup>4</sup>, Danish<sup>5</sup>, Yiddish<sup>6</sup>, and Swiss German<sup>7</sup>. Standard English and Icelandic seem to lack it (i.e. lack variants that would be uncontroversially analyzed as belonging to the “*what for* construction”).<sup>8</sup>

The Germanic *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*

<sup>1</sup> den Besten (1981, 1985); Pafel (1996); Ijbema (1997); Abels (2003)

<sup>2</sup> Lie (1982)

<sup>3</sup> Bennis (1983, 1995); den Besten (1985); Corver (1990, 1991); Bennis et al. (1998)

<sup>4</sup> Børjars (1992); Delsing (1993)

<sup>5</sup> Vikner (1995)

<sup>6</sup> Vikner (1995)

<sup>7</sup> Leu (2003, 2004)

<sup>8</sup> 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.

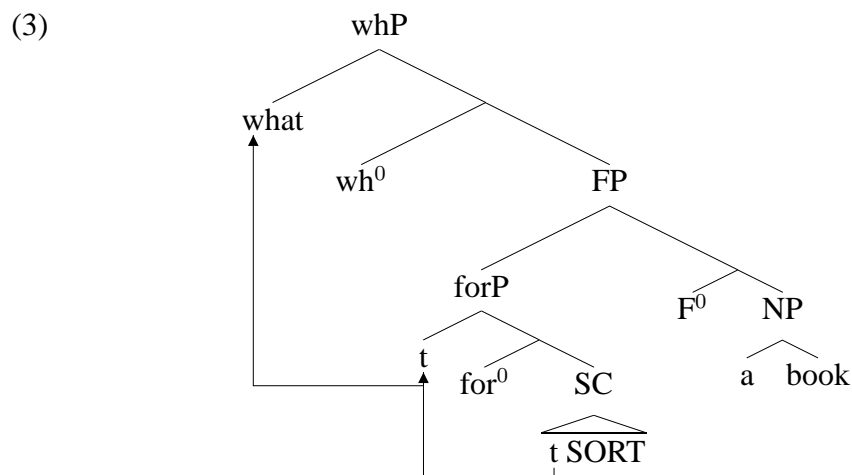
*for* research, specifically bearing on the existence and nature of silent nouns in syntax (Leu, 2004), elements of the sort proposed in Kayne (2002, 2003, 2005a); Riemsdijk (2002, 2005). I will argue that *for* heads a modifier phrase which hosts a silent nominal, and which is hosted in a specifier of the extended projection of the head noun (i.e. of *Hund* in (1a)).

## 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).



*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.<sup>9</sup>

I am next 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). 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 feature 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) German
- a. Was für Schüler \*hat / haben sich beklagt?  
     *what for pupils has / have themselves 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*.<sup>10</sup>

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.

<sup>9</sup> 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. Hendrick (1990); Szabolcsi (1994); Aboh (2004); Kayne (2005b).

<sup>10</sup> 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*] *wh*<sup>0</sup> [*FP* [*forP t<sub>what</sub>* FOR [*SC* kind of *t<sub>what</sub> t<sub>of</sub> t<sub>kind</sub>*]] F<sup>0</sup> 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).

## 2.2 Silent nominal

### 2.2.1 Overt manifestations

The next element to be discussed is the silent functional nominal, *SORT* in (3).<sup>11</sup> The first kind 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. Norwegian  
       Hva har du lest for **slags** bok?  
       what have you read for *slags* book  
       ‘‘What kind of book did you read?’’  
       b. Swedish  
       Vad f r **slags/sorts** bil k pte du?  
       what for *slags/sorts* car bought you

Note that in the Norwegian and Swedish examples, the *sorts/slags* is associated with genitive morphology, suggesting that it is in a local relation with another nominal. In my analysis this other nominal is *what*.

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*.<sup>12</sup>

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*.

<sup>11</sup> This element seems to share properties with East Asian classifiers (Huang and Ahrens, 2003; Cheng and Sybesma, 2005; 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.

<sup>12</sup> The idea of a silent *SORT* in *what for NP* was noted and rejected in Corver (1990) chapter 6 footnote (10).

### 2.2.2 *Spurious een*

In a limited range of contexts (including *what for*), Dutch<sup>13</sup> 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 (7a). Bennis et al. (1998) call this a “spurious article” and analyze it as a small clause copula.

The indefinite article in (7a) is overtly followed by a plural noun, a state of affairs that is not generally possible in Dutch. It is clear that in (7a), *een* is not in an “article-noun” relation with *jongens*. What I’d like to suggest instead is that *een* is in an “article-noun” relation with an unpronounced nominal *SORT* as in (7b).<sup>14,15</sup>

- (7) Dutch
- a. Wat voor (**een**) jongens zijn dat?  
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.

### 2.2.3 *Adjectival -ig*

Swiss German has a variant of *what for* where *für* is followed by the adjectival suffix *ig* (8a), which I analyze as in (8b).

- (8) Swiss German
- a. Was für **-ig-ä** wi hesch kauft?  
what for ADJ<sub>mas</sub> wine have-you bought  
“What kind of wine did you buy?”

<sup>13</sup> Swedish exhibits a similar phenomenon (Delsing, 1993, p.36ff.).

<sup>14</sup> For 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 Riemsdijk (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Dutch allows *een* to precede overt *slag*, but it does not allow *een* to precede the plural *jongens* when it is itself preceded by overt *slag*.

- i. Wat voor een slag jongens zijn dat?
- ii. \* Wat voor slag een jongens zijn dat?

This is of course in perfect harmony with the present proposal.

- b. Was für SORT **-ig-ä** wi hesch kauft?  
 what for KIND ADJ<sub>mas</sub> wine have-you bought  
 “What kind of wine did you buy?”

The suffix *ig* usually combines with nominal (9a) and verbal (9b) stems to form adjectives.<sup>16</sup>

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

We can characterize the situation exemplified in (8a) in part by noting that *ig* in *was fürig* does not overtly follow the kind of root it usually follows (but see footnote 16). The presence of a silent nominal in a position following *für* (8b) opens the way to a treatment of *ig* in (8) parallel to the regular occurrences in (9).

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 (9) or does it relate to [...*for* ... *SORT* ...] in such a way?<sup>17</sup> 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 inflectional suffix that is sensitive to phi-features of 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 (11a), and agreement with the head noun *wi* (‘wine’) would, on standard assumption, not be expected.

<sup>16</sup> Other instances in which *ig* seemingly follows a preposition exist. They can be thought of in a parallel fashion to the present treatment of *für-SORT-ig*.

- i. Es isch nu öpis übr-ig  
 it is still something over-*ig*  
 “There’s something left over.”
- ii. übr-mäss-ig  
 over-measure-*ig*  
 “over the top / exaggerated”

An analysis of (i) as involving a silent nominal between *übr* and *ig* is supported by the existence of (ii).

<sup>17</sup> Note that the two analyses both bear on the issue of affixation to zero-elements but in somewhat different ways.

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 (11b).

- (10) Was für -ig-ä wi sell ich nä?  
 what for ADJ<sub>mas</sub> wine should I take  
 “What kind of wine shall I buy?”
- (11) a. was [<sub>forP</sub> für [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>was</sub> SORT-ig-ä ] ] wi (WRONG ANALYSIS)  
 b. was [<sub>forP</sub> für [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>was</sub> SORT ] ]-ig-ä wi (RIGHT ANALYSIS)

Hence the entire *forP* is functioning as a stem for *ig* (see also ft. 21).

#### 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*. (12) exemplifies a question-answer sequence in which *sertig* is used deictically (either discourse anaphoric or accompanied by a pointing gesture).

- (12) Swiss German
- a. Was **fürt** -ig-ä wi?  
 what for ADJ<sub>mas</sub> wine  
 “What kind of wine?”
- b. **Sert** -ig-ä wi.  
 such ADJ<sub>mas</sub> 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:

- (13) fürig fürtig fürnig füttig  
 serig sertig sernig settig

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

- (14) a. für-SORT-ig  
 b. FOR-sert-ig

where overt *für* licenses obligatory non-pronunciation of *SORT*. Whether there is an unpronounced *FOR* in *sertig*, as in (14b), is less clear. Norwegian (15) supports the idea that an overt *slags* sometimes licenses the non-pronunciation of *for*.



(15) Norwegian

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

Alternatively to (14b) 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 Diminutive -tje

In Dutch it is possible to say (16a). The diminutive morpheme *tje*, which in the example follows the indefinite article, does not normally appear with articles but with nouns and a few other categories.<sup>18</sup>

(16) Dutch

- a. Wat voor **een** **-tje** heb jij gekocht?  
 what for a/one DIM have you bought  
 “What kind of thing did you buy?”
- b. Wat voor een SORT-tje heb jij gekocht?

The availability of (16a) suggests that there is a nominal structurally present between *een* and *tje*, as represented in (16b). This is a further piece of evidence in favor of the crucial claim here, that there is more (nominal) material (and structure) to the right of *for* and to the left of the open class head noun than meets the ear.<sup>19</sup>

### 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 (/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.

<sup>18</sup> I’m grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

<sup>19</sup> The availability of *tje* is restricted to the silent *SORT*. Overt *soort* does not allow *tje*: *Wat voor soort* / *\*soortje N*... Thanks to Hans Broekhuis for pointing this out to me.

(17) German

Ich habe das Lied [ für dich] geschrieben.  
 I have the song for you<sub>ACC</sub> 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 (18a) *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), 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*, thereby alienating it from other occurrences of *für*.

(18) German

- a. **Mit** was für **einem** Hund hast du gespielt?  
 with what for a<sub>DAT</sub> dog have you played  
 “What kind of dog did you play with?”
- b. **Mit** was [ für SORT] **einem** Hund hast du gespielt?  
 with what for KIND a<sub>DAT</sub> 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*. 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 (18) that the NP (*einem Hund*) is not (in) the complement of *für*. Put differently, *für* in (18) 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) *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* is inherently [+wh] (Bennis et al., 1998). However, this is not tenable in view of the examples in (21) and (23) below, which include instances of *for* NPs of the kind found in *what for*, occurring in declarative contexts.

A second claim that I will make in this section is that the specifier of *for*P 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 *for*P) to the higher left periphery of the extended projection of the open class N.

Third, I will present evidence suggesting that *was* in *was für* is accusative Case-marked by *für*.

#### 3.1 *for* is not interrogative

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

- (19) German  
       **Was** verkaufen die für Platten?  
       what sell        they for records

and the exclamative (which I will not discuss in any detail (see Bennis (1995))):

- (20) **Was** die für Platten verkaufen!  
       what they for records sell

However, *für* NPs can occur in non-interrogative (and non-exclamative) contexts as well. Consider (21).

- (21) German  
       Die verkaufen **sonst was** für Platten.  
       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 is stressed. 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 *sonst* the *für* NP is unacceptable.

(22) German

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

This suggests that the *für* NP in (21) (as in interrogatives) must be licensed by a quantificational element of a certain kind, and that the indefinite *was* is not a possible licenser, as shown by (22).

Another (perhaps more pervasive) instance of *für* NP in a declarative context is 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-*)<sup>20</sup>, and what looks like a genitive marker (*-er/-s*) can license a *für* NP.<sup>21</sup>

(23) Swiss German

- a. Di verchaufet **aller -lei** **für** plattä.  
Di verchaufet **allä -chäib**s **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 (23) 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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 fact that *all-* is followed by a genitive marker in combination with *-lei, -hand*, whereas in combination with *-chäib-s* it is the latter that ends in a genitive marker, and *all-ä* ends in what might be an accusative marker.

<sup>21</sup> Some speakers readily allow *allerlei fürti*g NPs where *für* is followed by the adjectival suffix *ig* discussed in section 2.2.3. If *lei* and *chäib*s are taken to be counterparts of *slags* / *SORT* (as suggested by the genitive ending, paralleling Norwegian), then this supports an analysis of *ig* as "combining" with the entire [*...for...*] phrase rather than with *SORT*.

*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 (23b), *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.<sup>22</sup>

I conclude this subsection by noting that *für* NPs of the type that occur in *what for* can also occur in declarative contexts. Hence the licensing factor for *für* NPs cannot be restricted to [+wh]. Put in terms of features: *für* is not [+wh].

### 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 *forP*. There are a number of reasons, however, why *what* in *what for* cannot be taken to be in the specifier of *forP* at spell-out (neither in split nor in non-split *what for*).

First of all, some uninflected modifiers such as *ungfähr*, as well as *alles* can occur between *what* and *for* (Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996; Ijbema, 1997; Leu, 2003).

(24) Swiss German

- a. [Was **ungfähr** für en betrag] hesch usggä?  
what approximately for an amount have-you spent  
“Approximately how much money did you spend?”
- b. [Was **alles** für lüt] hesch iggladä?  
what all for people have-you invited  
“Who all did you invite?”
- c. Was hesch [ **alles für lüt** ] iggladä?  
what have-you all for people invited  
“Who all did you invite?”
- d. ?\* Was **alles** hesch **für lüt** iggladä?  
what all have-you for people invited  
“Who all did you invite?”

<sup>22</sup> Questions arise as to the relation between *-lei/-chäib*s and Scandinavian *sorts*, *slags*, as well as to the impossibility of (23) in German. I have nothing to say about the latter. As for the former, unlike Scandinavian *sorts* and *slags*, Swiss German *all-er-lei für*... and *all-ä-chäib-s für*... must involve in part distinct derivations in view of the fact that the genitive markers, *-er-* in the former and *-s* in the latter, are distinct with respect to their form and their position. The difference in the position of the genitive marker is somewhat unexpected. Future investigations may be able to relate it to other differences between the two.

Secondly, *for* NPs can be coordinated to the exclusion of *what*, as argued by Corver (1991); Pafel (1996); Ijbema (1997):

(25) Dutch / German

Wat **voor mannen en voor vrouwen** heb jij gezien?  
 Was **für Männer und für Frauen** hast du gesehen?  
 what for men and for women have you seen

A third set of examples is especially telling. Note first that *alles* in (24b,c) is inflected in a way parallel to (26b,c), where *das* has moved through the specifier of *all*-(*es*) triggering agreement, by assumption (cf. Shlonsky (1991)).

(26) Swiss German

- a. ... all das ...
- b. ... das \*all / alles ...
- c. **Das** han ich **alles** scho ggläsä.  
 This have I all already read

This suggests that in (24b,c) *was* is in a Spec-head relation with *alles* at one point prior to splitting in (24c). A look at *what for* split shows that *was* cannot be in the specifier of *alles* when splitting occurs however. Consider the examples of split *what for* PPs (Abels, 2003) in (27a) and (27b) adapted from Abels's (290a) and (292a), and in Swiss German (27d).

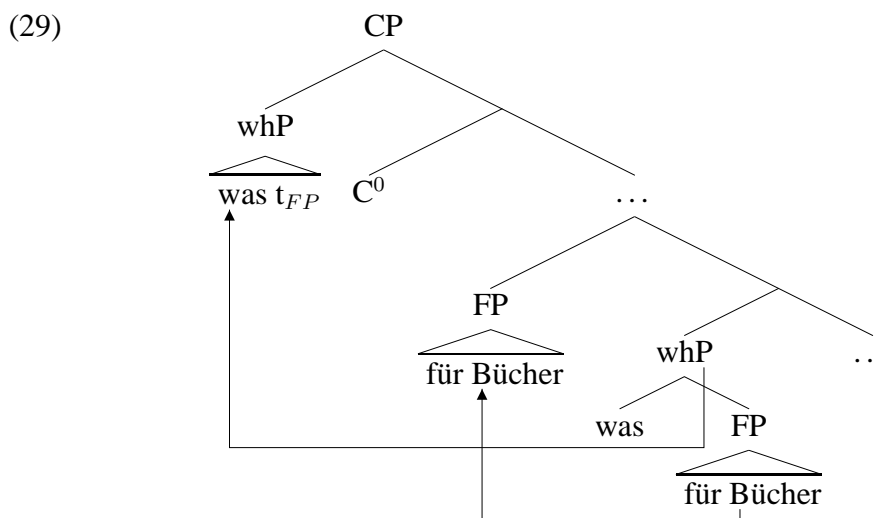
(27) German / Swiss German

- a. [Über **was** *t*] der alles **für Sachen** Bescheid weiss!  
 about what he all for things information knows  
 "(It's amazing) how much the guy knows!"
- b. [Mit **was** *t*] hast du denn **für Leuten** gerechnet?  
 with what have you PRT for people<sub>DAT</sub> reckoned  
 "What kind of people did you expect?"
- c. Mit **was** all-es **für Leuten** hast du geredet?  
 with what all-ACC for people<sub>DAT</sub> have you spoken  
 "What (kind of) people did you talk to?"
- d. (?) [Mit **was** *t*] hesch [all-es **für lüt**] gred?  
 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, and for some speakers in Dutch) is crucial, because (27a,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; Bennis, 1983; den Besten, 1985; Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996)<sup>23</sup>. The reason is that *mit* and *was* would not form a constituent at the point where *wh*-movement applies.

(28) ... [<sub>PP</sub> mit [ <sub>was</sub> [<sub>FP</sub> für Leuten<sub>DAT</sub> ]]] ...

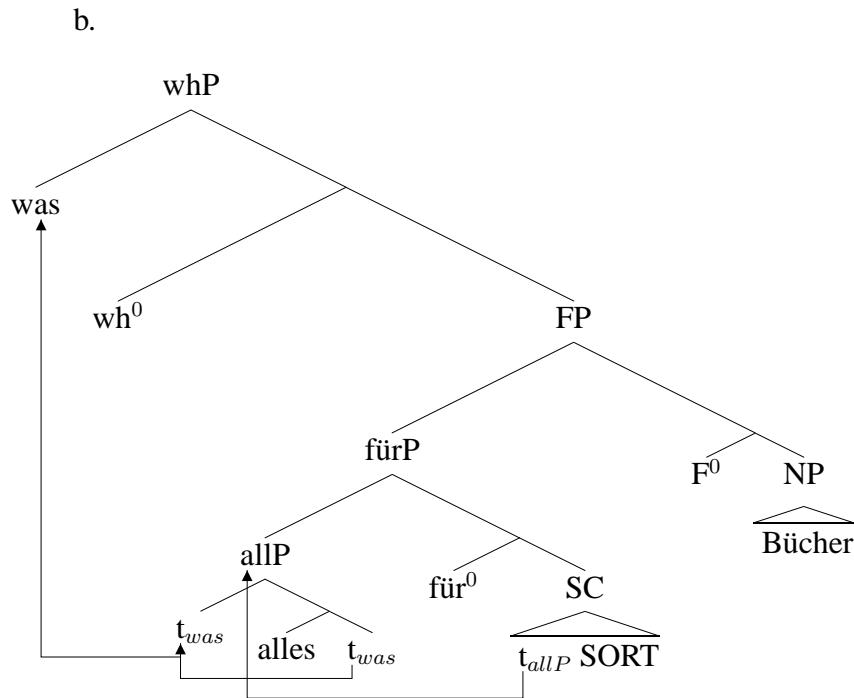
On the basis of examples like (27b,d) Abels (2003) and Leu (2005b) argue that *what for* split involves remnant movement and provide an analysis akin to proposals for split DPs in Greek by Androutsopoulou (1997), French *combien de* split by Starke (2001); Kayne (2002), and *quelque chose de Adj* split in French and *öpis Adj-s* split in Swiss German by Leu (2005a). The proposed derivation of *what for* split is sketched in (29), cf. (3).



If these considerations on *what for* split are correct, then *was* and *alles* in (24c) cannot form a constituent at the point of splitting. I propose the following derivation.

(30) a. was alles für Bücher  
what all for books

<sup>23</sup> 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.



After triggering Spec-head agreement on *alles*, *was* must move on, out of the specifier of *allP* and thereby out of the specifier of *fürP*, 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 as well, 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 below.

- (31)
- a. ... das all-**es** ...  
this<sub>ACC/NOM</sub> 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 identify the Case of *was* in *was für* and show that *was alles* is insensitive to outside Case. Consider (32a) where *allem* modifies the complement of *mit, dem*. In this example, the Case assigned by *mit* is visible on *allem*.

(32) Swiss German

- a. Mit dem all-**em** / denä all-**nä** bin ich zfridä.  
 with this<sub>DAT</sub> all<sub>DAT</sub> / these<sub>DAT,PL</sub> all<sub>DAT,PL</sub> am I content  
 “I’m happy with all of this / of these.”
- b. Mit was (?)all-**es** / ?\*all-**em** für Lüt hesch grächnet?  
 with what all<sub>ACC</sub> / all<sub>DAT</sub> for people have-you reckoned  
 “Who did you expect?”

In the *what for* example (32b), *alles* modifies *was*, which can be deduced in part from the fact that *alles* is singular. No dative Case is visible on *alles*.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that *was* in *was für* 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 (32b) is accusative or nominative. I will assume that *was (alles)* gets its (accusative) Case assigned by the prepositional complementizer *for*, akin to Kayne’s (1981) proposal for:<sup>25</sup>

(33) 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:

(34) Swedish

- a. **Vad** såg du **för nånting**?  
 what saw you for something  
 “What did you see?”

<sup>24</sup> There are speakers of German who prefer dative morphology on *all-* in the German counterpart of (32b). 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), modifying not *was* but the head noun.

i Mit was all-en für Leuten hast du gerechnet?  
 with what all<sub>DAT,PL</sub> for people 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)).

<sup>25</sup> An interesting difference between the English sentence in (33) 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.

- 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 (34a) *vad* receives Case from *för*. If *var* and *nånstans* in (34b,c) can be taken to be the counterparts of *vad* and *nånting* respectively, we note that *where* being locative (inherently Case-marked) does not need an additional *for* to assign it Case.<sup>26</sup> This is borne out, by the fact that (34b,c) do not have a *för*.<sup>27</sup>

*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).

First, in (35) *was* and *alles* are separated by *genau*.

- (35) Swiss German
  - a. ? Was **genau alles** für büächr mömmer läsä?  
what exactly all for books must-we read
  - b. ?\* Was **alles genau** für büächr mömmer läsä?

Secondly, in the split *what for* example in (36) *alles* strands together with the *for* NP rather than fronting with *was*.

- (36) a. **Was** hesch **alles für büächr** kauft?  
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*. *What* thus originates somewhere in the complement of *for* and moves out of the phrase headed by *for*, into

<sup>26</sup> Thanks to Anders Holmberg for pointing this out to me.

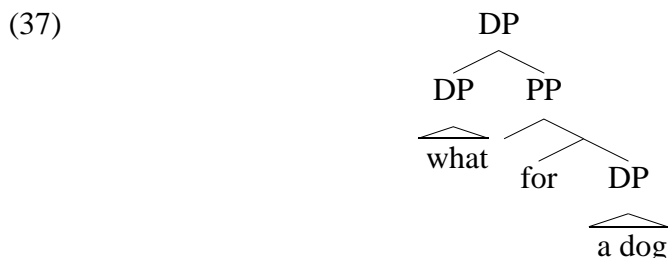
<sup>27</sup> Some speakers of Swedish allow *för* in front of *nånstans*. This suggests two things, first of all it supports the claim that the example is parallel to *what for*, and secondly that Case assignment is not the only function that *for* has.

Spec,whP in the left periphery of the extended projection of the open class nominal.

## 4 The *what for* phrase

### 4.1 What a DP for a PP

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



In addition to being incompatible with antisymmetry (Kayne, 1994), 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 Swiss German *ig* (section 2.2.3) and Dutch *tje* (section 2.2.5) and the spurious article (section 2.2.2).

Yet another observation which the structure in (37) 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).

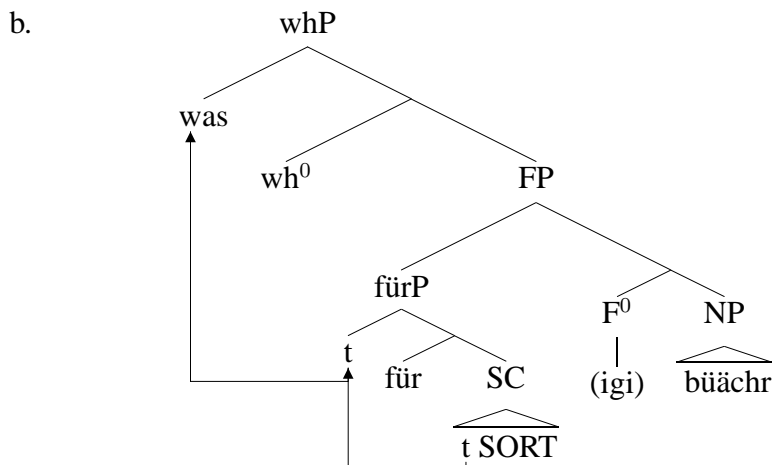
In the next subsection a proposal is made that integrates these findings.

### 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 modi-

fiers, as analyzed in Cinque (1993, 1999). The structure I propose is represented below.<sup>28</sup>

- (38) a. was für SORT (-igi) büächr  
       what for SORT (Adj) books



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*, 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 grammaticalized nominal 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 *forP* is in a specifier of the extended projection of the head noun, similar to Cinquean adjectives.

<sup>28</sup> I represent *ig* as spelling out the functional head  $F^0$ . This may well be a simplification. What is important in (38) is the relative constituent structure of *was*, *fürP*, and the noun *büächr*.

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