

Towards a unified analysis of German 'denn'

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The German discourse particle 'denn' is pervasive in interrogative sentences, both in *wh*-interrogatives like 'Wo wohnst du denn?' (Where do you DENN live?) and in polar interrogatives like 'Kann Simon denn schwimmen?' (Does Simon DENN know how to swim?). This pervasiveness has sometimes led to the assumption that the semantics of 'denn' is so bleached out that the particle is licensed in any information-seeking question. In this talk, I will present new data showing that there are in fact information-seeking questions which don't license 'denn'. I propose that we can make sense of these data if we treat 'denn' as connecting the *highlighted content* of its containing clause (Roelofsen & Farkas 2015) to the preceding discourse by establishing a certain precondition-like relationship between them. I will discuss the predictions that this treatment makes for various types of interrogatives, and show how it may also be useful when trying to understand the contribution of 'denn' when this particle appears in conditional antecedents (Csipak & Zobel 2016).