

Distribution and structure of the *was für*-construction

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(1) *Was für Bücher hast du gelesen?*

what for books have you read

'What (kind of) books did you read?'

[German]

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Properties of *what for*-DP

'Core properties' of *what for* cross-linguistically

- A. *what for*-Split
- B. 'case-inertness' of *for*
- C. function: kind- and token-querying
- D. modification with cardinals changes meaning
- E. DP can only be indefinite
- F. agreement of verb and DP

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Core properties: A. Split

A. *what for*-Split

(2) *Was_i hast du [t_i für Bücher] gekauft?*

what have you for books bought

'What (kind of) books have you bought?'

[German]

Core properties: A. Split

A. *what for*-Split

(2) *Was_i hast du [t_i für Bücher] gekauft?*

what have you for books bought

'What (kind of) books have you bought?'

[German]

→ This operation is illicit with other interrogative DPs.

A. *what for*-Split

- (3) a. *Wessen hast du Bücher gelesen?
whose have you books read
'Whose books have you read?
- b. *Welk heb je boek gelezen?
which have you books read
'Which books have you read?' [Dutch, Corver 2017]

- Violation of the Left Branch Constraint (Ross 1967)

B. *for* does not assign case

- (4) *Čto (èto) za kniga* / **knigu*?
what it for book.NOM.SG / book.ACC.SG
'What kind of book is this?' [Russian, from Kwon 2011]

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C. Interpretation as either kind- or token-querying

- (5) a. Q: *Wat voor jongens zijn dat?*
what for boys are that
'What boys are those?'

A: Nice boys / Tom, Dick and Harry [✓kind/✓token]

- **kind interpretation:** Inquiring a kind of the entity specified by the DP
- **token:** instantiations of kinds (Carlson 1977), that are specific spatio-temporally localizable entities (cf. Vangsnes 2008, 2013, Mueller-Reichau 2011, Bennis et al. 1997)

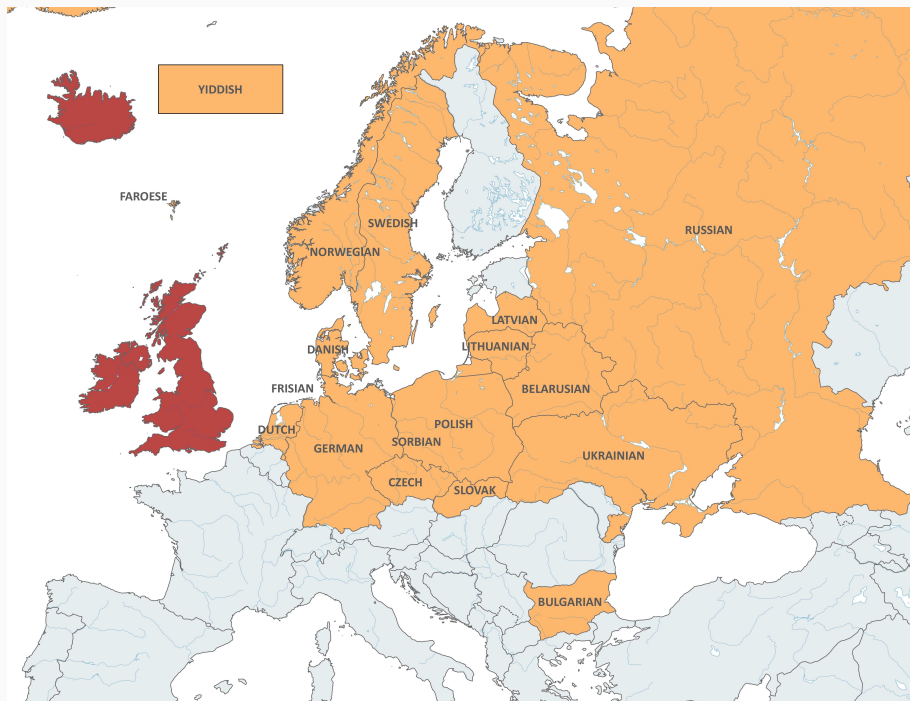
F. Agreement of verb and DP

- (6) *Wat voor honden hebben elkaar gebeten?*
what for dog.PL have.PL each.other bitten
'What dogs have bitten each other?'

[Dutch, from Corver 1991]

Empirical data I: *what for* cross-linguistically

Distribution of *what for* cross-linguistically



WFC-language families: Baltic, Slavic, Germanic

- Notably, there are some languages within the WFC-language family that did not develop the WFC
 - English (exception: 16th to 19th century, Van Gelderen (2021))
 - Icelandic
 - Afrikaans (marginal use in expressions of indignation)
 - most South Slavic languages (recent findings indicate this might be falsely reported)

Observations and questions of interest

→ Two explanations have been proposed:

1. WFC spread through language contact
2. WFC developed in each language independently due to language internal factors

My hypotheses:

In order to develop the WFC, grammars need to

- A. have the option of forming adnominal wh-constructions.
- B. have lost a 'robust' case system.
- C. have a robust DP-internal predication system.

Method: Collection of data from descriptive grammars for 19 languages

- Notable findings include
 - North Germanic WFC-languages (often) feature the element *slags/sorts* 'kind/sort'
 - Swedish and Dutch allow the indefinite spurious article / predicational article *ena* / *een*
 - the core-properties introduced above hold for (almost) all WFC-languages

Empirical data II: German *what for*-DP diachronically

Method:

- GermanC Corpus (Early New High German journalistic texts)
- Bonner Frühneuhochdeutschkorpus (Early New High German)
- Referenzkorpus Mittelniederdeutsch/Niederrheinisch (Middle Low German)
- Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch (Middle High German)
- Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch (Old High German)
- Dating of example sentences in Paul (1919) and Behaghel (1923)

Search query: as broad as possible

Method:

- GermanC Corpus
- Bonner Frühneuhochdeutschkorpus
- Referenzkorpus Mittelniederdeutsch/Niederrheinisch:
`pos="DWA"`
- Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch: `pos="PW"`
- Referenzkorpus Altddeutsch: `translation=/was/`

Search query as broad as possible: ie.

- Middle Low German - part of speech: 'interrogative pronoun'
- Old High German - translation of 'was' in any form

Method:

- comprehensive collection and analysis of Old High German, Early New High German and Middle Low German, sample from Middle High German *was für* and *was*+DP according to
 - number and case of DP
 - adjacency: *wh*+DP or *wh*+...+DP
 - form: modifiers / determiners
 - syntactic position of *wh*+DP
 - agreement if WFC in subject position
 - sentence type (indirect / direct question, exclamative)
 - function (kind or token), if possible

Theories in the literature specific to German WFC:

- (A) WFC first emerged ca. 1700 in its Split version, only later occurred adjacent (cf. Behaghel 1923, Grimm 1854) ;
- (B) The WFC originally had a substitution semantics as 'in place of DP' (Paul 1919);
- (C) the preposition *für* originally assigned accusative case and lost this property over time (Behaghel 1923, Paul 1919);
- (D) WFC was incorporated into High German dialects from Low German (i.e. Blümel & Coniglio 2019, Danylenko 2001).

Oldest occurrence of *what for*-DP in German:

- (7) *was Christus mit seinen jungern für speyz*
what christ with his disciples for food.NOM/GEN
genossen hat.
enjoyed has
'What (kind of) food Christ enjoyed with his disciples.'

[Eyb 1474, Early New High German, from Behaghel 1923]

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[Eyb 1474, Early New High German, from Behaghel 1923]

Hypothesis:

- (A) WFC first emerged ca. 1700 (in its Split version), only later occurred adjacent (cf. Behaghel (1923), Grimm (1898)); → false

Oldest occurrence of *what for*-DP in German:

- (8) *Und meldet dise scena nun was vor geret ist.*
and reports this scene now what for talk.NOM is
'And this scene now shows what kind of talk that is.'

[Neidhart 1486, Early New High German]

Hypothesis:

- (A) WFC first emerged ca. 1700 **in its Split version**, only later occurred adjacent (cf. Behaghel 1923, Grimm 1898); → **false**

WFC case in Early New High German:

- 47 data points for WFC in ENHG
- for 30 it was impossible to determine the case satisfactorily
- 11 featured genitive/nom/dative (earliest: 1556)
- 6 accusative, all of these in direct object position (earliest: 1599)

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Hypothesis:

(C) the preposition *für* originally assigned accusative case and lost this property over time (Behaghel 1923, Paul 1919);

→ cannot be corroborated

First occurrence of WFC in Middle Low German:

- (9) wat dat vor sunde mochten wesen
 what that for sin.DAT/ACC.PL.F may.3PL.PST be.INF
 'What this for sins were that they had hidden in his monastery'

[MLG, 1488, Lüb]

Hypothesis:

- (D) WFC was incorporated into High German dialects from Low German (i.e. Blümel & Coniglio 2019, Danylenko 2001).

Diachrony of German *what for-DP*

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What happend in kind-interrogatives before 1474?

Diachrony of German *what for-DP*

Original kind query in German:

- (10) *wundert in was steines ez müge sin.*
wonders him what stone.GEN.SG it might be
'He wonders what kind of stone it could be.'

[Flore ca. 1220, Middle High German, from Behaghel 1923]

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[Flore ca. 1220, Middle High German, from Behaghel 1923]

How did we get from a. to b.?

- (11) a. was steines
b. was für ein stein

The phenomenon: Diachrony

From *no-für* to *für*:

- (12) a. was steines
b. was **für** ein stein

	<i>was</i> +DP	<i>was für</i> +DP
1350-1500	57	1
1500-1700	19	46

Stage 1 (before 1350)	Stage 2 (1350-1472)	Stage 3 (1472- ca. 1800)
<i>was</i> + DP _{gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen} <i>was für</i> + DP _{structural/gen}

Table 1: Grammaticalization pattern from WGC to WFC.

Stage II agreement and case patterns

Stage 1 (before 1350)	Stage 2 (1350-1472)	Stage 3 (1472- ca. 1800)
<i>was</i> + DP _{gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen} <i>was für</i> + DP _{structural/gen}

- (13) *Chilo ward gefragt was unterschied zwischen den*
Chilo was asked what difference.NOM.SG between the
gelerten und ungelerten waer.
scholars and non-scholars was
'Chilo was asked what kind of difference there was between
scholars and non-scholars.'

[Gualtherus Bureaus 1490]

Stage II agreement and case patterns

Variation in agreement

- (14) *was groser froiden do inne were.*
what great.GEN.**PL** pleasures.GEN.**PL** there in was.**SG**
'what (kinds of) great pleasures therein might be'

[Mannen, Straßburg 1352]

- (15) *vnde wat slech=te van Cayn ghebaren synt*
and what lineages.NOM.**PL** of Cain born are.**PL**
'And which lineages came from Cain.' [MLG, 1494, LüBi]

Stage II agreement and case patterns

Insertion of *für* to disambiguate:

- DP-agreement first occurred in 1499, roughly at the same time *für* first emerged.
- When *für* is introduced, agreement of verb and DP stabilizes.

Stage II.1 (1350 - ca.1472)	Stage II.2 (around 1500)	Stage III (from ca. 1500)
<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{nom/acc/gen}	<i>was</i> + DP _{external} <i>was für</i> + DP _{external}
V- <i>was</i> agreement	first cases of V-DP agreement	V-DP agreement

Table 2: Stage II agreement and case

Analysis

The analysis: Quantifier constructions in German

Part of a broader change

Roehrs & Sapp (2018)'s observations w.r.t. quantifier constructions in German can be extended to the WFC.

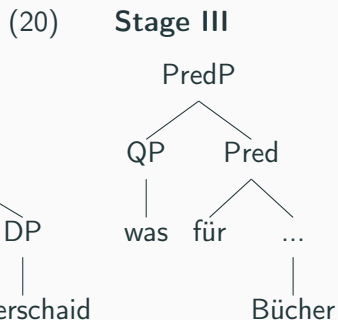
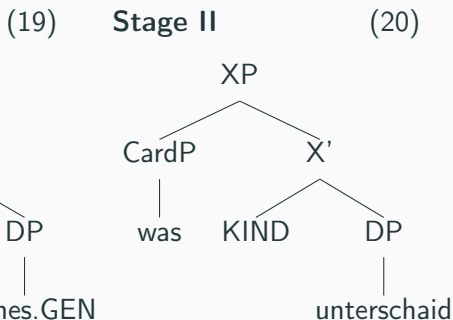
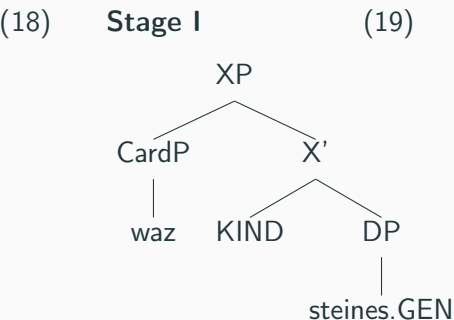
- Changes in quantifiers from Old High German to Modern German w.r.t. case:

(16) quantifier + NP_{Genitive} $\Rightarrow$ quantifier + NP/DP_{matrix case}

- Case facts of the WFC:

(17) interrogative pronoun + DP_{Genitive} $\Rightarrow$ interrogative pronoun + *für* + DP_{matrix case}

How, when, and why *für*?



für as Pred°

- Functional elements often develop into nominal predicators.

- (21)
- a. *Er wird **als** ein Außenseiter betrachtet.*
he will as a outsider seen
'He will be seen as an outsider.' [German, Pafel 1996]
- b. *Ich halte ihn **für** ein Genie.*
I hold him for a genius
'I take him to be a genius' [German]
- c. *Ik hield het **voor** waar.*
I held it for true
'I took it to be true.' [Dutch, cf. Corver 1991]

conclusion and open questions

Conclusion

My hypotheses:

In order to develop the WFC, grammars need to

- A. have the option of forming adnominal wh-constructions.
- B. have lost a 'robust' case system.
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- In German, *was für*-DP emerged when the argument DP was no longer robustly marked through case. → points to B.
- The emergence of *für* may be explained by adopting a PredP-approach.
 - *für* is a viable item for DP-internal predication. → points to C.

Conclusion and open questions

1. WFC spread through language contact
2. WFC developed in each language independently due to language internal factors

- The development of WFC is different than previously assumed in the literature:
 - Earlier and thus simultaneous with the Slavic development.
 - It can be shown that in German, it is more likely that WFC developed due to language-internal factors.
 - More data on the historic stages of WFC cross-linguistically is needed to comprehensively answer these questions.

Thank you

thank you

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Properties

The phenomenon: Shared cross-linguistic properties

- The wh-element may be fronted: 'was für-Split'

- (22) a. #Was liegen [t für Bücher]_{subj} auf dem Tisch?
what lie for books on the table
'What (kind of) books are lying on the table?' [Ger,
extr. from subject]
- b. */#Auf was hast du [t für ein Reh] geschossen?
on what have you for a deer shot
'What kind of deer did you try to shoot at?' [Ger, cf.
Corver [1991]]

- There is a lot of variability w.r.t. which extractions within the WFC are judged acceptable and which are not (Winkler et al. [2016])

- (23) *Wat zijn voor mensen gekomen?
what are for people come
'What kind of people came?' [Dutch]
- (24) Wat zijn er voor mensen gekomen?
what are there for people come
'What kind of people came?'
- (25) *Was₁ haben [t₁ für Bücher]_{DP3} [den Fritz]_{DP2}
what have for books the Fritz.acc
beeindruckt?
impressed
'What kind of books impressed Fritz?' [German, Müller 2010]

- (26) *Was₁ haben [t₁ für Bücher]_{DP3} [den Fritz]_{DP2}
what have for books the Fritz.acc
beeindruckt?
impressed
'What kind of books impressed Fritz?' [German, Müller 2010]
- (27) Was₁ haben [den Fritz]_{DP2} [t₁ für Bücher]_{DP3} t₂
what have the Fritz.acc for books.nom
beeindruckt?
impressed
'What kind of books impressed Fritz?'
- (28) extraction from
moved subjects < moved objects < in-situ subjects < in-situ
objects

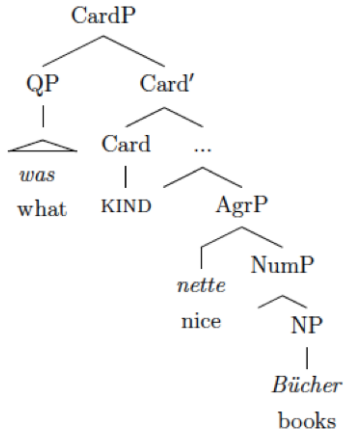
kind and cardinality

- The WFC is associated with a kind reading; but also queries for specific spatio-temporally localizable entities (token, cf. Vangsnes 2008,2013, Bennis et al. 1997)
- **Numerals cannot co-occur with the kind-interpretation of the WFC**

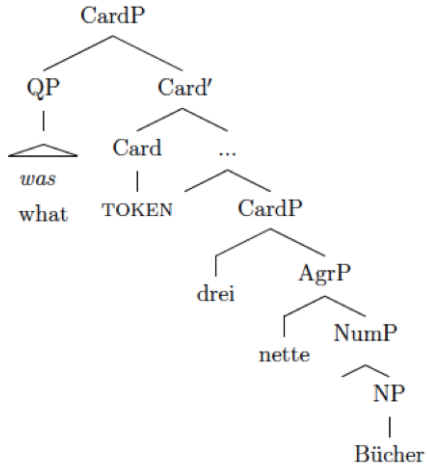
- (29) a. *What kind of three cars do you own? [cf. Vangsnes 2008]
- b. Q: *Was für drei Autos stehen im Hof?*
what for three cars stand in.the yard
'What three cars are standing in the yard?'
- A: ✓ Mom's car, a Toyota and a Mercedes.
- A': *Alte ("old ones"). [✓token/*kind]

Analysis for token and kind WFC

a. KIND query



b. TOKEN query



a. Was für eine Person ist Karl?

what for a person is Karl

'What kind of person is Karl?'

[German]

b. WHICH x [KIND (x) $\wedge$ PERSON (x)]

[cf. Blümel (2012)]

(30) which x [person (x)]

Rullmann & Beck (1998):

a. [_{CP} [which woman]_{*i*} [_{C'} [_{C+wh} did] [_{IP} Mary kiss t_i]]]

b. [_{CP} [_{C+wh} did] [_{IP} Mary kiss [the woman x_j]]]

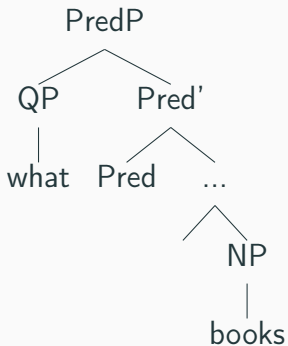
c. $\lambda p \exists x_j$ [$p = \wedge$ Mary kissed the $(\lambda y. \text{woman}(y) \wedge y = x_j)$]]

C. Dutch: Presence of *een* forces kind-interpretation

- (31) a. Q: *Wat voor jongens zijn dat?*
what for boys are that
'What boys are those?'
A: Nice boys / Tom, Dick and Harry [✓kind/✓token]
- b. Q': *Wat voor **een** jongens zijn dat?*
what for EEN boys.PL are that
'What boys are those?' [Dutch, Bennis et al. 1997]
A': Nice boys / *Tom, Dick and Harry. [✓kind/*token]

Analysis for Modern WFC: PredP

(32)



was an DP

- (33) Was an Kleidern hängen/hängt in deinem
what on dresses.dat.pl hang.3pl/hang.3sg in your
Schrank?
closet

'What do you have in terms of dresses hanging in your closet?

- (34) Was hängt/#en an Kleidern in deinem Schrank?
what hang.3sg/3pl on dresses.dat.pl in your closet
'What do you have in terms of dresses hanging in your closet?

- (35) a. *An Büchern* liegt was auf dem Tisch?
on books.DAT.PL lies what on the table
'What in terms of books is lying on the table?'
- b. *Für Bücher hast du was gelesen?
for books have you what read?
'In terms of books, what did you read?'

Was an DP

- (36) a. Was haben wir an Wein / *an Buch / *an
what have we on wine.mass / on book.sg / on
einem Buch zu Hause?
a.dat.sg book at home
'What do we have in terms of bread at home?' [German]
- b. *Was an *drei/den* Büchern...?
what on three/the books..
'What in terms of three books / of the books is lying on
the table?'
- c. Was *(hast) *(du) an *gelben Kleidern* (#hast)
what have you of yellow dresses *have
(#du) im Schrank?
*you in.the closet
'What in terms of yellow dresses do you have in your
closet?'

Extension to Slavic and Baltic

Why WFC in Slavic?

B. have lost a 'robust' case system. → didn't happen?

C. have a robust DP-internal predication system.

- (37) i čto jestb znamenije tvojego prišestvija
and what is sign.NOM/ACC.SG your arrival.GEN
'and what shall be the sign of your arrival?'

[East Slavic, Danylenko 2001]

- Danylenko (2001:149): *čto za* developed from 'secondary accusative/nominative':
- '[...] prepositions of the type [...] *za* [...] were introduced in Slavic, Baltic and Germanic, replacing thereby both the predicative nominative and accusative.'

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(5) a. *byti* *odinъ* *moužъ*
be (INF) one (NOM-ACC.SG) man (NOM-ACC.SG)

b. *byti* *za* *odinъ* *moužъ*
be (INF) for/as one (NOM-ACC.SG) man (NOM-ACC.SG),

and, finally,

c. *byti* *za* *odinogo* *mouža*
be (INF) for/as one (GEN-ACC.SG) man (GEN-ACC.SG)
“to be one and all”

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MBe

zaproda/n/ *estʹ iosifʹ za nevolnikʹ*
sell (PAST.PASS.PART) is Joseph as slave (NOM-ACC.SG)
“Joseph has been sold as a slave”

Why WFC in Slavic?

- Danylenko (2001): *čto za* replaces predicative case, a development mirrored in many Indo-European languages (citing Indic, Latin, Greek).
- Unclear what triggered the replacement; however: accusative and nominative marking falls together.
- Claim: the semantics of the prepositions made them viable for replacement.

The Origin of WFC

→ Two explanations for the development of the WFC have been proposed:

1. WFC spread through language contact (Moser (1998))
 - From Low German via the Hanse to the North Germanic varieties and via Polish to other Slavic varieties X
 - The other way around: From Slavic to Germanic (Danylenko (2001)) X
2. WFC developed in each language independently due to language internal factors (i.e. Danylenko (2001))
 - In Slavic: WFC originates from an Indo-European predecessor involving *what* and a DP akin to secondary predicate constructions

⇒ These question can only be addressed with knowledge of

- the diachrony of potential WFC-languages
- a clear picture of differences and similarities of WFCs cross-linguistically

English

- (38) *Was für Bücher hast du gelesen?*
what for books have you read
'What (kind of) books did you read?' [German]
- (39) *What is he for a Ladde you so lament?*
what is he for a boy you so lament
'What kind of boy is he that you so lament?' [OED, 1579]

Van Gelderen 2021 explores the history of *what for* in English

- some observations:
 - the paths of English and German KIND queries are not alike
 - verbal agreement in the contexts of KIND queries differs in the history of English and German,
 - BUT the analyses don't necessarily differ significantly

Overview: observations concerning the WPC

- broader meaning variation: *kind*, *partitive* and *amount*
- WFC is not a successor of WPC (in English)

Properties of the WPC

- the WPC: *hwæt* + partive genitive noun phrase

(41) Ic þæt secgan mæg, **hwæt** ic **yrma** gebad.

I that say can what I misery.GEN.P gebad

'I can speak what kind of miseries I have endured.'

(Karlberg 1954, 174, Wife's Lament 2-3, Old English)

Old English WPC: agreement

Properties of the WPC

- singular verbal agreement in (42) while partitive noun phrase *ðinga* is plural
- **claim 1:** verb agrees with a silent noun

(42) **Hwæt** is **ðinga** þe bitterre sie on ðæs
 what is things.GEN.PL REL bitterer be.SUBJ.SG on that
 lareowes mode ... ðonne se anda ðe for
 teacher's mind ... than that anger REL for
 rhytwisnesse bið upahafen?
 righteousness is aroused
 'What kinds of things exist that are more bitter in the
 teacher's mind than the anger which is roused for
 righteousness?'

Properties of the WPC

- WPC queries NUMBER/AMOUNT/SIZE as well as KIND

(43) Saga me **hwæt suna** hæfde Adam? Ic ðe secge,
tell me what sons.GEN.PL had Adam I you tell,
xxx sunena and xxx dohtra.
30 sons and 30 daughters
'Tell me how many sons Adam had. I tell you 30 sons and 30 daughters.'

Old English WPC: properties of the number query

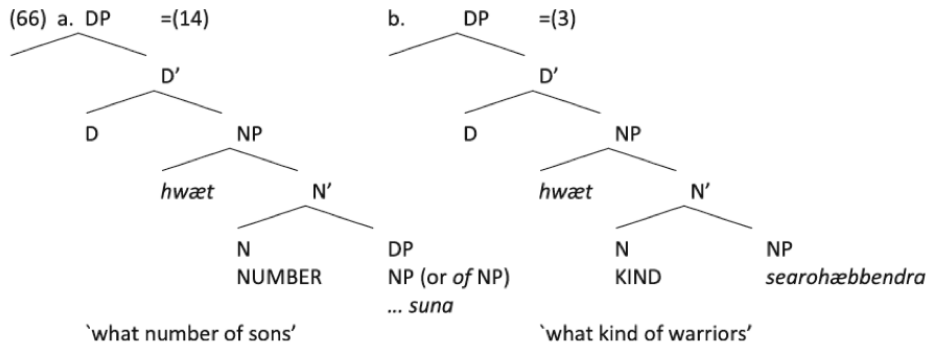
- WPC queries NUMBER as well as KIND
- verb agrees in singular
- (only) when querying NUMBER/SIZE, the noun can be modified by possessives and determiners

English WFC: not a descendant of the WPC

English WFC is not a descendant of the WPC

- genitive case marking is lost in the **12th century**
- around that time, the preposition *of* occurs within the former WPC, as well as occurrences with an overt KIND noun
- **the WFC first occurs in the 16th century** (Early Modern English), a long time after the WPC is lost in English
- the WFC exists only for a short period of time: in Early Modern English up to the late 19th century
- the WFC is not a common occurrence
- the WFC only ever questions KINDs, never NUMBER/SIZE

Van Gelderen 2021: WPC analysis



- the silent nouns agree with the verb (which explains the singular agreement)
- the silent nouns assign genitive case to their complement
- the complement of the silent NUMBER noun is DP while the KIND complement is an NP as only the NUMBER query allows modifiers within the complement (example 12)

Previous proposals can be grouped as follows:

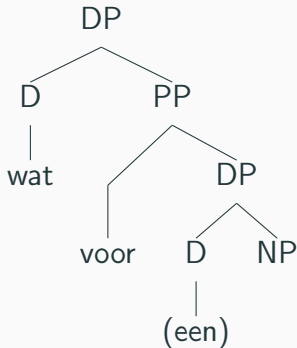
- Traditional view
- Small clause view
- Remnant movement view

Previous proposals

Previous proposals can be grouped as follows:

- Traditional view
- Small Clause view
- Remnant Movement view

(44) Corver [1991]



(45) Pafel [1996]



data in detail

OldHG	MidHighG	ENHG	MidLowG
89/ 11	691/sample of 60	125	170/ 32

Table 3: Instances of kind or token *was (für)*-DP

Diachrony of German *what for*-DP

Oldest occurrence of *what for*-DP in German:

- 47 data points for WFC in ENHG
- for 17 it was impossible to determine the case satisfactorily
- 11 featured genitive/nominative/dative
- 6 accusative, all of these in the direct object position

	Reg.	Beleg	Satzglied	Kas.
1599	Hess	Dieser erzehlete vns/ was die Hispanier für einen Wahn hetten von dem Reichthumb Guiana vnd El Dorado, der Hauptstatt deß Keyzers Inga	DO	Akk
1599	Hess	[...] vñ was für einen Eyngang Berrheo // vnd ich haben bekommen/ wirdt E. M. weitem Bericht schöpfen	DO	Akk
1684	Ober-säch	Wer weis/ was ich vor einen Vogel in das Gebauer darzu bekommen hätte.	DO	Akk
1698	Ost-hochal	Wer erfahren // wil/ was das Meer–Wasser vor einen // Geschmack hege/ muß nicht eben // das ganze außdrinken/ [...]	DO	Akk
1684	Ober-sächsi sch	NUn ihr Leute/ was habt ihr vor einen Gefangenen?	DO	Akk

WGC and WFC compared

Properties of the modern WFC and the predecessor WGC in comparison:

was für ein Mann (WFC)	was Mannes (WGC)
extraction of <i>was</i>	extraction of <i>was</i>
agreement between NP and matrix verb	agreement between interrogative and
NP in matrix case	NP with genitive morphology
indefinite determiner with singular NPs	(probably) no determiners
<i>für</i>	∅

Table 4: properties of WFC and WGC

Roehrs and Sapp

The analysis: Quantifier constructions in German

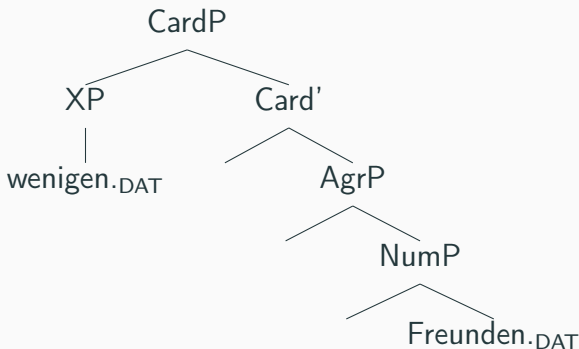
Part of a broader change!

- Roehrs and Sapp [2018] assume that quantifiers in German developed from head-type to phrase-type.
- The predecessor kind-construction *what* + NP.gen (WGC) resembles the case facts of head-type quantifiers.
- Modern WFC parallels the case facts of phrase-type quantifiers, much like regular quantifiers in Modern German (*wenig-e Freunde*; 'few friends'; Roehrs and Sapp 2018).

The analysis: Quantifier constructions in German

- (47) *Ich habe das wenige.n Freunde.n erzählt*
I have that few.DAT friends.DAT told
'I told a few of my friends (/few friends know about this).'

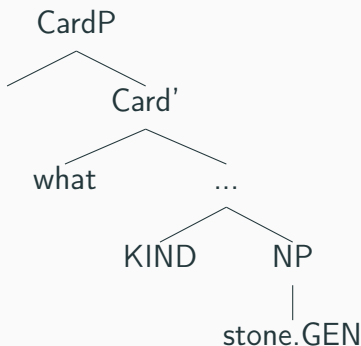
- (48) phrase-type Q (case concord)



The analysis: Roehrs Sapp

Along with other head-genitive constructions in German, the WGC was reanalyzed as a phrase-type construction during the Early New High German period.

(49) Stage I



(50) Stage II

