

Rising and Falling Repeat Questions in German

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When repeating questions in discourse, German uses syntax and prosody to distinguish repeat questions from other questions. Syntactically, repeat questions have the word order of embedded questions (that is, the finite verb appears at the end of the sentence) without an overt matrix clause (see Ex. 1).

- (1) a. *Wo ist die Katze?*
where is the cat
'Where is the cat?' Matrix Question
- b. *Wo die Katze ist ./?*
where the cat is
'Where is the cat?' + prosody ([\] or [/]) Repeat Question

These repeat questions are licensed only in specific contexts. There has to be an antecedent utterance containing a question with the same content. This may be a matrix question, a question embedded under a responsive predicate in a matrix interrogative, or a question embedded under a rogative predicate in a matrix declarative. Both the speaker and the addressee as well as any other participant of the conversation can repeat the question. If the speaker repeats the question (speaker repeat question, SRQ), it is addressed to the original addressee and pronounced with a final fall. This repeat is only licensed if the addressee asked for a repeat or did not react to the original question. If the addressee repeats the question (addressee repeat question, ARQ), it is addressed to the original speaker and pronounced with a final rise. Such a repeat is used either to confirm the content of the question or to question the appropriateness of the question (similar to echo questions and incredulity questions). In all of these contexts, a third person can utter the repeat as well.

These repeat questions have been syntactically analysed as results of eliding a matrix clause (Altmann 1987, Zimmermann 2013), based on a clause type standardly associated with the observed prosody. Thus SRQ are analysed as matrix declaratives of the form '*I asked SRQ*' and ARQ as matrix interrogatives of the form '*Did you ask ARQ*'. However, a number of observations challenge this view.

In this work I propose to analyse repeat questions as syntactic interrogatives and aim to incorporate the effect of prosody in a way similar to the work by Jeong (2017) and Rudin (2017) for rising and falling declaratives.

References

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