Rising and Falling Repeat Questions in German

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Background

- in German, word order differs between matrix and embedded clauses: in matrix clauses the finite verb appears in the second position, while in embedded clauses are verb-final
- the embedded word order can surface without an overt matrix clause in questions in certain contexts
  \[ \rightarrow \text{Verb-Last Questions} \]
  
  (1) a. Wo ist die Katze?
  
  b. Wo die Katze ist?

  - two main contexts: self-addressed questions and repeat questions (Zimmermann 2013)

Rising and Falling Declaratives

The Table Model

Farkas & Bruce (2010) offer a framework of discourse representation tracking individual commitments as well as common ground updates.

Common Ground \(c_g\): background knowledge and public commitments

Discourse Commitments \(DC_{g}\): set of propositions that \(X\) is publicly committed to which are not in the \(c_g\)

Projected Discourse Commitments \(DC_{p}\): set of propositions that \(X\) is expected to commit to

- model for standard assertions and questions, with discourse moves for raising and resolving issues

Question Repeating

- questions can be repeated with a final rise or fall
- antecedents can be matrix or embedded questions
- the speaker or a third participant can repeat the question to the addressee with a final fall (speaker repeat question, SRQ)
- repeating is only licensed if the addressee asked for a repeat or did not acknowledge the original question
- the addressee or a third participant can repeat the question back to the speaker with a final rise (addressee repeat question, ARQ)
- used in discourse to confirm the content of the question or to question its relevance or appropriateness
- repeat questions are standardly analysed as questions forming from ellipsis (Altmann 1987) with a clause type corresponding to the prosody in unmarked contexts
- both kinds of repeats pattern with standard question in discourse continuations; allowing the speaker to be the source of content (yes) but not simple uptake (oh) in polar repeat questions vs rising polar interrogatives (RPI):
  \[ \text{utterance type} \quad \text{yes-response} \quad \text{oh-response} \]

- falling declarative (FD) with meaning \(p\): standard assertion
  \[ \rightarrow \text{add } p \text{ to the Table and to } DC_{Sp} \]
- two kinds of rising declaratives (Jeong 2017):
  
  a. assertive rising declaratives (ARD): allow yes-response
     intuition: biased question, expected to be confirmed
     \[ \rightarrow \text{the rise changes the meaning from an assertion to a polar question } \{ p, \neg p \} \]
     \[ \rightarrow \text{to the Table, add } p \text{ to } DC_{Sp} \]
     
     - rise is interpreted as assertive or inquisitive:
       steep rises are more likely to signal IRDs, while weak rises are more likely to signal ARDs
     - Rudin (2017) proposes that falling intonation signals speaker commitment, while rising intonation indicates lack of speaker commitment: an utterance with falling intonation adds the informative content of the utterance to the \(DC_{Sp}\)

- rising declarative (RD) with meaning \(p\): rise
  \[ \rightarrow \text{add } p \text{ to the Table and to } DC_{Sp}, \text{add } MLIP \text{ to the Table} \]

  - Jeong (2017) also finds that the steepness of the final rise can predict whether a rising declarative is interpreted as assertive or inquisitive: steep rises are more likely to signal IRDs, while weak rises are more likely to signal ARDs

  - Rudin (2017) proposes that falling intonation signals speaker commitment, while rising intonation indicates lack of speaker commitment: an utterance with falling intonation adds the informative content of the utterance to the \(DC_{Sp}\)

Rising and Falling RQs

Assumption 1: Despite differing word order, verb-last questions are semantically questions, that is, sets of possible answers (Hamblin 1973).

Assumption 2: There are two types of ARQ.

Adressee Repeat Questions: Type 1

- the addressee wants to confirm the content of the question:
  (2) a. A: Wo ist die Katze?
     \[ \text{where is the cat} \]
     b. B: Wo die Katze ist?
     \[ \text{where the cat is} \]
     \[ \text{‘You mean where the cat is?’} \]
  
  - a likely follow-up response from the addressee (speaker of the repeat question) is to provide an answer
  
  - intuition: biased question, expected to be confirmed
     \[ \rightarrow \text{similar to IRD} \]
     \[ \rightarrow \text{the rise changes the meaning from a (polar) question } \{ p, \neg p \} \text{ to a polar super-question } \{ \{ p, \neg p \}, \{ p, \neg p \} \}
     \[ \rightarrow \text{add the super-question to the Table, add } p \text{ and } \neg p \text{ to } DC_{Sp} \]
  
  - this requires a change of discourse commitments to being a set of both propositions and sets of propositions

Adressee Repeat Questions: Type 2

- the addressee wants to question the relevance or appropriateness of the original question:
  (3) a. A: Wo ist die Katze?
     \[ \text{where is the cat} \]
     b. B: Wo die Katze ist?
     \[ \text{where the cat is} \]
     \[ \text{‘Are you (seriously) asking where the cat is?’} \]
  
  - likely not followed by an answer to the question
  
  - intuition: neither question nor assertion, not only about the content
  
  - similar to ARD
  
  - the rise signals an MLIP about the question \(p, \neg p\)
  
  - add \(p, \neg p\) and MLIP\(p, \neg p\) to the Table

Speaker Repeat Questions

- the question posed last has not been reacted to by the addressee or a repeat has been requested
  
  - likely followed by an answer
  
  - intuition: unbiased question, but a request rather than an invite
  
  - prediction from Rudin (2017): Falling Interrogatives (FI) commit the speaker to a tautology unclear what this means

  - add \(p, \neg p\) to the Table, plus some effect that distinguishes rising and falling interrogatives in general

Open Questions

- Is there a difference in prosody between the two ARQ types?
  
  - Does the final fall of SRQ differ from FD?