
The syntax of '*wat fir*'-phrases in Luxembourgish: Splittability and Germanic comparisons

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This contribution investigates the internal structure and syntactic behavior of *wat fir*-phrases in Luxembourgish, such as:

- (1) *Wat fir (eng) Decisiounen sinn dat? / Wat sinn dat fir Decisiounen?*
'What kind of decisions are these?'

These constructions parallel German *was für* and Dutch *wat voor*-phrases (Den Besten 1985). Following proposals in the Dutch literature (Corver 1990), *wat fir (eng)* forms a complex specifier within the noun phrase, with the noun (*Decisiounen*) as the head. A central phenomenon under investigation is the possibility of splitting this construction. While Dutch exhibits a subject-object asymmetry (Corver 1990), Luxembourgish allows certain subject splits, prompting a reevaluation of the internal structure and semantics of the specifier. I argue that subject splitting in Luxembourgish is permissible when the verbal construction supports a *Vorfeld*-dummy (a neuter singular pronoun, *et* or *dat*), as manifested in passive constructions or specific verbal structures (2). Corpus data further reveal that the local adverbs *hei* and *do* ('here'/'there') can split the *wat fir* phrase.

- (2) *Wat hei fir Elementer feelen*
what here for elements miss
'the kind of elements missing here'

Luxembourgish also permits interrogative noun phrases with *wéi eng* ('which one'), which cannot be split. This contrast suggests that the splittability of *wat fir*-phrases is not a general property of interrogative specifiers but is closely tied to the preposition *fir*. Due to its multifunctionality *fir* contributes to the syntactic flexibility and mobility of these constructions. De Kuthy (2002) further demonstrates that discontinuous noun phrases in German are constrained not only by syntactic factors but also by discourse and information structure, which may account for the acceptability of certain splits. The Luxembourgish data thus enrich the understanding of discontinuous noun phrase structures in West Germanic languages (see also Leu 2008), emphasizing the role of multifunctional elements like *fir* and syntactic 'dummy' elements in enabling syntactic flexibility.

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