

On underspecified *wh*-elements in pseudo-interrogatives¹

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1. Introduction

In this article we analyze a particular *wh*-phrase, the analogue of English *what*, in three languages, two of which are Romance languages, namely French and the North-Eastern Italian dialect Bellunese, spoken in Northern Veneto. We provide a comparative analysis of the distributional and interpretive properties of French *que* and Bellunese *cozza* and focus on the fact that both of them seem to allow for a sort of semantic extension which results in interpretations different from the ordinary one, and coinciding in each case with sentential meanings that are not genuine requests for information. In order to analyze this particular aspect, we will restrict our attention to *Pagotto*, a sub-variety of Bellunese spoken in the Eastern Bellunese area of Northern Veneto.

The comparison between French and *Pagotto* is of interest because, contrary to *que*, *cozza* is “specialized” in expressing the “extended” uses of *what* while the standard interrogative meaning is expressed by *che*. Furthermore, the difference in form is correlated to a striking difference in syntactic behaviour. We will try to find out if this overt dissociation of two “faces” of *what* in Bellunese is more than an accident.

This inquiry takes place within a larger perspective determined by the following fact: crosslinguistically we find that among the different elements of the *wh*-paradigm, precisely the one corresponding to Engl. *what* is open to this variety of seemingly unconnected semantic values; on the contrary, the *wh*-phrases corresponding to *who*, *when*, *how*, *why*, etc. do not have a comparable range in their interpretive possibilities. This asymmetry between (the analogues of) *what* on the one hand and the whole remaining set of *wh*-phrases on the other forms the background of our analysis of *que* and *cozza*.

In view of our attempt to link the syntactic and interpretive properties of (the analogues of) *what* to the particular status of this element in the *wh*-paradigm it is especially interesting to note a case of large scale parallelism outside the Romance area. Including German *was* in our study allows us to significantly strengthen the justification of our approach in terms of deficiency.

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The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the particular position of (the analogues of) *what* in the *wh*-paradigm. Section 3 gives a survey of Pagotto interrogative syntax and presents the paradigm of *cosa*. Section 4 introduces the corresponding uses of French *que*, and section 5 the corresponding uses of German *was*. In Section 6 we discuss the respective positions of these elements in the higher functional structure of the sentence. Section 7 is devoted to the question of the number of lexical entries for *cosa/que/was* in Pagotto, French and German. Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. The crosslinguistic multi-usage ability of *what*

A number of languages exhibit a curious asymmetry within their paradigms of (interrogative/exclamative) *wh*-phrases. On the one hand, these paradigms comprise a set of *wh*-elements characterized by a clearly recognizable semantic restriction whose function is to determine the domain of individuals that are potential values of the variable bound by the *wh*-quantifier. Such a restriction can be expressed by the morphology alone or by means of a lexical noun (phrase), whence the (quasi) parallel series of bare and non-bare *wh*-quantifiers, arbitrarily represented here by French:

(1)

<i>bare Q</i>	<i>nonbare Q</i>	<i>restriction</i>
qui	quel homme/humain	[+human]
quand	à quel instant	[+time]
où	à quel endroit	[+place]
pourquoi	pour quelle raison	[+reason]
comment	de quelle façon	[+manner]
etc.		

On the other hand, these paradigms contain a *wh*-phrase whose restriction is less clearly recognizable - again in French, *quel/quoi* - and which is usually characterized, in the literature, as being [-human] or [-animate]. This *wh*-phrase, which from now on we will call WHAT when we refer to it in general, independently of its form(s) in a particular language, quite often has a number of possible additional meanings or uses that are intuitively quite different from the canonical meaning, roughly equivalent to ‘what thing’.² This multiplicity of meanings is not a uniform phenomenon across languages, in the sense that in a given language WHAT may or may not have one or the other of the set of meanings observed elsewhere.

²This characterization is obviously crude - even if “thing” is taken to include abstract entities - since WHAT can in particular refer to situations and events, that is, its potential values can have propositional content (like in *What does he want?* - *To be left alone*). It is interesting to note that there exist languages where this type of WHAT has a form that differs from the one corresponding to inanimate objects (see Dayal (1996, 82f) for examples from Walpiri). We will not be concerned here with such finer distinctions. Notice that the restriction “thing” / -human object” is the same in quantifiers that use *thing* as part of their morphological make-up: *He believed everything / nothing*. Notice also that under a suitable definition, persons can be things, for linguistic purposes.

A first illustration of the phenomenon, which we will examine below in a detailed way in the three linguistic systems under discussion, is given under (2), where we list the possible meanings of German *was* ‘what’.³

- (2) Was suchst du?
what look-for you
‘What are you looking for?’
- (3) Was weißt du schon davon!
what know you already of-it
‘What can you know of it!’
- (4) Was hast du dich verändert!
what have you refl changed
‘How you changed!’
- (5) Was rennst du so schnell?
what run you so fast
‘Why are you running so fast?’

(2) is a standard interrogative, (3) is an exclamative-rhetorical question (equivalent to French *Qu’est-ce que tu en sais!*, *Qu’en sais-tu!*), (4) an exclamation, and (5) a question with a ‘why’-like meaning. As the glosses show, English *what* lacks the noncanonical meanings in (4) and (5).

We will try to characterize the different meanings more carefully in the remainder of this article. Since there is no usual term available to refer to these noncanonical uses of *what*, we choose the term “pseudo-questions” and apply it at the same time to nonstandard questions (i.e. interrogatives which are not pure requests for information) and certain nonquestions, i.e., certain exclamatives.

For the time being, the important point is that while the concrete set of meanings may vary - to a limited extent - from one language to the other, there seems to be a remarkable stability: languages pick out from a perhaps universal set of possible meanings through the interplay of the lexical element and their syntactic resources / processes. This raises the question of the deep syntactic and semantic unity of WHAT behind the apparently unified superficial phenomenon. Two extreme possibilities suggest themselves a priori:

- there is indeed only one WHAT in each language;
- there are different WHATs, possibly as many as there are types of readings.

In order to propose an answer to this question we will examine in detail the properties of WHAT in Pagotto, French and German.

³Throughout this article, we are exclusively concerned with bare WHAT. Obviously, the relation between (the analogues of) *what* and *what N(P)* (like, for example, German *was für ein Buch*) will have to figure in a larger comparative study of WHAT that should also integrate data from many other languages, within and beyond the two language families exemplified here.

3. *Cossa in Pagotto*

3.1 Short survey of Bellunese *wh*-syntax

In Bellunese *wh*-phrases display in main *wh*-questions a very peculiar distributional pattern.

As proposed by Munaro (1997), the distribution of *wh*-phrases in main interrogatives in the Northern Veneto dialects can be accounted for by posing a requirement on the identification of the (nominal) head of the *wh*-phrase: a sufficient identification of the (possibly empty) category inside the head of the phrase determines the raising of the phrase in overt syntax to a functional specifier position, that is its occurrence in initial position; when the head of the *wh*-constituent is not sufficiently identified, the constituent fails to undergo syntactic movement and appears *in situ*, being connected at the interpretive level with an abstract *wh*-operator licensed in the specifier of the relevant functional projection of the CP layer; the corresponding head is occupied by the inflected verb, which is assumed to be endowed in interrogative contexts with specific inflectional features.

Simplifying somewhat it is possible, with respect to the position occupied in such contexts, to identify three different classes of *wh*-phrases: phrases which always move to a sentence initial position, phrases which optionally do so, phrases which never do so and always appear in sentence internal position⁴.

⁴The first class is represented by complex *wh*-phrases consisting of the *wh*-modifiers *che-quant* followed by a nominal element, that is, a phonetically realized nominal head; the *wh*-phrases belonging to this class always appear in initial position:

- (i)a. *Che libro avé-o ledést?*
 which book have-you read?
 'Which book have you read?'
 b. **avé-o ledést che libro?*
- (ii)a. *Quanti pon compre-lo?*
 how many apples buys-he?
 'How many apples does he buy?'
 b. **Compre-lo quanti pon?*

Munaro (1997) takes the ungrammaticality of (ib) and (iib) to follow from the structural properties of the *wh*-constituent, and more precisely from the fact that the presence of an overtly realized nominal head make them incompatible with the abstract *wh*-operator licensed in the CP field.

The second class of *wh*-phrases comprises the *wh*-elements *qual* and *quant* when used pronominally, that is not followed by a phonetically realized nominal head; they can appear either in initial position or *in situ*:

- (iii)a. *Quant ghen'à-tu magnà?*
 b. *Ghen'à-tu magnà quant?*
 'How much of it have-you eaten?'
- (iv)a. *Qual à-tu sièlt?*
 b. *À-tu sièlt qual?*
 'Which one have-you chosen?'

The optionality of the occurrence of these *wh*-phrases has been traced back in Munaro (1997) to the *d-linking* properties of these *wh*-elements and therefore to the ambiguous modality of identification of the empty category constituting their head; more precisely, when they appear *in situ* the identification is supposed to take place through reference to an antecedent in the discourse, while in case of movement the

As for the *wh*-element *what*, it can be expressed in these varieties with two different items, *che* and *cossa*, which display complementary distributional properties, in that the former appears *in situ* while the latter appears in sentence initial position:

- (6)a. *Che avé-o magnà?
 b. Avé-o magnà che?
 ‘What have you eaten?’
- (7)a. Cossa avé-o magnà?
 b. *Avé-o magnà cossa?
 ‘What have you eaten?’

The ungrammaticality of (7b) is explained by Munaro (1997) resorting to the idea that, despite appearance to the contrary, *cossa* has an internal structure which is more similar to that of complex *wh*-phrases than to that of bare *wh*-elements.

This hypothesis gains further empirical support from a diachronic perspective. As observed in Munaro (1998), *cossa* originated as a nominal element (meaning *thing*) and, starting from the 18th century, developed eventually into an interrogative operator, widening at the same time its semantic values (see section 2.2.1.5 for details); this is taken to be a consequence of its raising from the N° position up to the D° position, from where it transmits its *wh*-feature by *spec-head agreement* to [Spec,DP], thereby checking it.

From the interpretive point of view, in the majority of the varieties subsumed under the label Bellunese *che* and *cossa* are virtually interchangeable, that is, (6b) and (7a) are synonymous. There is, however, a dialect of the Bellunese area, the Pagotto dialect, in which the real *wh*-question, intended as genuine request for information, is (6b), while (7a) has particular uses which we present in the following section.

We will try to connect the complementary distribution of these two *wh*-elements to their semantic value and see how the interaction between them can be formally accounted for.

nominal head of the *wh*-phrase is identified with a *pro*, that is, with an empty pronominal category endowed with independent reference.

The third class of *wh*-phrases is represented by bare *wh*-elements, both (pro)nominal, like *chi* and *che*, and adverbial, like *comé* and *andé*; this class of *wh*-phrases occurs invariably in argumental position:

- (v)a. *Chi à-tu incontrà?
 b. À-tu incontrà chi?
 ‘Whom have you met?’
- (vi)a. *Andé sié-o stadi?
 b. Sié-o stadi andé?
 ‘Where have you been?’

Munaro (1997) proposes that these *wh*-elements, whose nominal head is presumably occupied by a not (sufficiently) identified empty category, head a QP internal to the extended nominal projection; they fulfill the requirement of categorial and structural parallelism with the abstract *wh*-operator licensed by the raising of the inflected verb to the relevant functional head position, and can therefore undergo a process of matching with it at the interpretive level.

3.2 *Cossa* and pseudo-questions in Pagotto

3.2.1 *Cossa* in main contexts

We analyze in this section the various main contexts in which the *wh*-word *coffa* can occur in Pagotto, where interrogative structures containing this element are not interpreted as real questions, but are amenable to a variety of interpretations which we are now going to examine.

3.2.1.1 Argumental use of *coffa* in rhetorical questions and exclamations

Cossa is used argumentally, that is, in its primary meaning of *what*, in rhetorical questions, whereby we mean sentences that correspond syntactically to interrogative structures (that is, displaying inversion between inflected verb and subject clitic pronoun) but through which the speaker does not intend to acquire new information about a specific subject:

- (8) *Cossa sé-tu drìo magnar (che)?*
 what are-cl behind eat (what)
 ‘What on earth are you eating?’

This sentence can only be used to express the speaker’s opinion that the person referred to (i.e. the subject of the sentence) is eating some strange and unexpected thing, that is the speaker’s dismay or disapproval concerning what is being eaten; note that the *wh*-element *che* can optionally appear in postverbal position.⁵

Roughly the same meaning can also be expressed through an ordinary exclamative sentence, in which the *wh*-word is (obligatorily) followed by the complementizer *che* and no inversion between verb and subject clitic obtains:

⁵ That factivity may be involved in determining the grammaticality of the structure exemplified in (8) is shown by the following contrasts:

- (i)a. *Cossa magni-tu che?*
 what eat-cl what?
 ‘What on earth are you eating?’
 b. ??*Cossa magni-tu che, stasera?*
 what eat-cl what, tonight?
 ‘What are you going to eat tonight?’
 c. ??*Cossa u-tu magnar che?*
 what want-cl eat what?
 ‘What do you want to eat?’
 d. *Cossa magnarà-lo che?*
 what eat-fut-cl what?
 ‘I wonder what on earth he may be eating’

While the grammatical example in (ia) has the same interpretation as (8), in (ib) and (ic) the implication (determined respectively by the temporal adverb and by the modal verb) that the event of eating is not taking place at the moment of speaking or has not taken place yet gives rise to ungrammaticality; the (unreal) future tense in (id) is interpreted as expressing the fact that the speaker has no idea concerning what the subject may be eating. Factivity may be relevant in so far as it is not possible to express annoyance or reproach about a future event, that is, to evaluate its degree of superfluousness or unconventionality.

- (9) Cossa che te sé drìo magnar!
 what that cl-are behind eat
 ‘What you are eating!’

Since, as we have seen above, the form *che* can only appear *in situ*, and all *wh*-constituents undergo overt movement in main exclamatives, *cozza* is in fact the only one of the two forms that we find in these dialects in genuine exclamatives like (9). However, there is a difference between (8) and (9): while (8) can only express a negative attitude of the speaker towards the event, in (9), depending on the context, the speaker expresses either his enthusiastic admiration or his blame concerning the action performed.⁶

Consider now the following sentences:

- (10) Cossa u-tu che fae (*che*)?
 what want-cl that do (what)
 ‘What do you want me to do?’
- (11) Cossa fa-e?
 what do-cl
 ‘What shall I do?’
- (12) Cossa à-li (*che*), da vardàr?
 what have-cl (what), to look
 ‘What do they have to look?’

The sentences in (10) and (11) are not interpreted as questions inquiring about the addressee’s opinion concerning the identification of the speaker’s task, but can only be interpreted as the speaker’s statement/admission, respectively, of one’s impotence or of the impossibility of doing anything (in (10)) and of the fact that there is nothing interesting for him to do or no escape hatch from a difficult situation (in (11)). Similarly, the utterer of (12) does not really inquire about the reason for the people’s insistent looking at him, but simply expresses his own annoyance at that fact.

⁶For further details on this kind of constructions, see Munaro (forthcoming). Note that the use of complementizer *che* is incompatible with the presence of the *wh*-phrase *che in situ*:

- (i)*Cossa che te se drìo magnar che
 what that cl-are behind eat what

Note that in (8), adding a sentential negation like in (ii), we get the reading in which the speaker expresses the opinion that the subject is doing every kind of (unexpected) things:

- (ii) Cossa no sé-tu drìo magnar?!
 what not-are-cl behind eat
 ‘What things you are eating!’

On the particular “scalar implicature effect” involved in this reading see Portner and Zanuttini (1996).

3.2.1.2 ‘Why’-like *cossa*

Within the domain of rhetorical questions there seems to be another group of contexts in which *cossa* has a slightly different meaning, roughly corresponding to *why*, but where the sentence is again interpreted as expressing the speaker’s annoyance or disapproval with respect to the event referred to:

- (13)a. *Cossa zìghe-tu (che)?!*⁷
 what shout-cl (what)
 ‘Why are you shouting?!’
 b. *??Cossa magni-tu (che)?!*
 what eat-cl (what)
 ‘Why are you eating?!’

In (13a) we have an intransitive verb, which excludes the possibility for *cossa* to be interpreted as the direct object of the predicate; the utterer of (13a) points out that he doesn’t really see any valid reason why the person should shout and expresses his lively disapproval towards the fact that he does. With transitive verbs however, if there is no direct object expressed, as in (13b), the sentence is ungrammatical in the relevant reading (although it is perfectly acceptable in the reading analyzed in the previous section)⁸.

⁷ There are among unaccusatives some predicates which are not compatible with this particular reading of *cossa*, like for example copular verbs in predicative constructions:

- (i)a. **Cossa sé-tu cussì agitada?!*
 what are-cl so nervous
 b. **Cossa é-li diventàdi tant sparagnini?!*
 what are-they become so thrifty

However, even in this case the addition of a modal predicate improves the degree of grammaticality of the structure:

- (ii)a. *Cossa ocore-lo che te sìe cussì agitada?!*
 what needs-cl that cl-be so nervous
 ‘You needn’t/shouldn’t be so nervous?!’
 b. *Cossa ocoré-lo che i diventésse tant sparagnini?!*
 what needs-cl that cl-became so thrifty
 ‘They needn’t/shouldn’t have become so thrifty?!’

⁸ Paola Benincà (personal communication) points out that in Paduan, which allows the particular readings discussed in section 3.2.1, the *why-like* interpretation of *cossa* requires some form of licensing, such as a periphrastic rephrasing of the predicate with the verb ‘go’, like in (ib), or the addition of a constituent providing the predicate with a further specification, like in (ic):

- (i)a. *??Cossa magn-ito?*
 what eat-cl?
 ‘Why are you eating?’
 b. *Cossa ve-to a magnare?!*
 what go-cl to eat
 ‘You needn’t eat.’
 c. *Cossa magni-to a ‘ste ore?!*
 what eat-cl at these hours
 ‘Why are you eating at this time?!’

As shown by (14a), the structure is still slightly deviant if the direct object is overtly realized: this is probably due to a violation of the theta-criterion, as the (mono-) transitivity of the verb is not compatible with two potential arguments (that is *cosa* and the object DP); a psycholinguistic constraint might be at work here, such as the *minimal attachment* principle proposed by Frazier and Fodor (1978).

The acceptability improves considerably with the addition of the periphrastic expression (*par far*) *che*, which disambiguates the semantic value of *cosa*, (as in (14b)), or if a verb with a modal function is introduced (like ‘go’ in (14c) or ‘need’ in (14d)), thereby creating a structure with a modal periphrasis which again helps disambiguate and make it clear that the argument of the verb is the sentence internal DP and not *cosa*:

- (14)a. ?Cossa compre-tu n’altro giornal?!
 what buy-cl another newspaper
- b. Cossa compre-tu n’altro giornal (par al to amico) (*par far*) *che*?!
 what buy-cl another newspaper (for you friend) (for do) what
- c. Cossa va-tu a comprar n’altro giornal (*par far che*)?!
 what go-cl to buy another newspaper (for do what)
- d. Cossa ocore-lo comprar /che te-compre n’altro giornal (*par far che*)?!
 what needs-cl buy / that cl-buy another newspaper (for do what)
 ‘There is no need for you to buy another newspaper.’

The utterer of (14) expresses the opinion that there is absolutely no need for the addressee to buy another newspaper.

3.2.1.3 ‘How (much)’-*cosa*

Still another use of *cosa* is attested in sentences such as (15), where *cosa* expresses a quantificational value; note that in both cases the *wh*-element realizes the obligatorily selected argument of the verb and that such argument is a quantificational expression whose relation to the selecting predicate is very close to the one of a direct object, as it can be pronominalized with *li* or *ne* (see for a detailed analysis of these constructions in Italian the *Grande Grammatica di Consultazione*):

- (15)a. Cossa coste-lo (*che)?
 what cost-cl (*what)
 ‘How much does it cost?’
- b. Cossa péze-lo (*che)?
 what weigh-cl (*what)
 ‘How much does it weigh?’

The structure in (15a), with the cooccurrence of both *wh*-elements, is not in fact totally excluded; an example like (16a) is acceptable in the rhetorical reading according to which the person referred to is supposed to lend a helping hand and is indeed in the position to do it, although he doesn’t; similarly, an example like (16b) can only be used

Moreover, a flat intonation of the sentence is required.

For similar facts concerning German *was* and a possible formal account of these data see below.

by the speaker to express the fact that, despite his efforts, he doesn't manage to remember the name of the person referred to:

- (16)a. *Cossa ghe coste-lo (che) iutàrli*
 what him costs-cl (what) help-them
 'What does it cost him to help them'
 b. *Cossa se ciàme-lo (che)*
 what himself calls-cl (what)
 'What's his name'

Note that in (16) the *wh*-element *che* in sentence internal position can be omitted.⁹

The same interpretation that *cozza* has in the examples reported in (15) is also available in exclamative structures like (17):

- (17)a. *Cossa che'l costa/peza!*
 what that cl-costs-weighs
 'How much it costs/weights!'
 b. *Cossa che (no) 'l ghe piaze, al gelato!*
 what that (not) cl-him-likes, the ice-cream
 'How much he likes ice-cream!'

Here the *wh*-element is followed by the complementizer *che* and the verb is preceded by the subject clitic pronoun belonging to the assertive paradigm.

3.2.1.4 Parenthetical use of *cozza*

There is a further instance of *cozza* that is worth pointing out, that is the parenthetical use attested in sentences like the following:

⁹ It is noteworthy that in contexts such as the ones exemplified in (16) in Pagotto the sentence-initial *wh*-element *cozza* can be omitted, but the resulting structure is then interpreted as a real question:

- (i)a. *Coste-lo che?*
 costs-cl what
 'How much does it cost?'
 b. *Se ciàme-lo che?*
 himself calls-cl what
 'What's his name?'

In (ia), as we have seen above, the *wh*-item corresponds to a quantificational expression, while in (ib) it is likely to express a predicative complement of the (null) subject; in both cases *che* realizes an argument obligatorily selected by the predicate, which is also true of (ii), where it probably pronominalizes a whole CP selected by predicates such as *I have the impression/It seems to me [that...]*:

- (ii) *Te à-lo parést che?*
 you has-cl seemed what
 'What impression have you had?'

It seems then that even the *wh*-item *che* can, to a limited extent, widen its basic semantic contribution, but, differently from *cozza*, it is always associated with an interpretation of the sentence as a real interrogative through which the speaker intends to acquire information not previously available to him.

- (18) Me fradèl, cossa u-tu, no' l vede mai.
 my brother, what want-cl, not him see never
 'As for my brother, you know, I never see him.'

Here *cozza* introduces the by now frozen parenthetical expression *cozza utu*, used in contexts where the speaker wants to provide a plausible explanation or a justification for a certain, usually unpleasant or unfortunate, situation or attitude¹⁰.

3.2.1.5 Diachronically attested non-canonical uses of *cozza*

The semantic properties of *cozza* analyzed in the previous sections are particularly interesting in the light of its diachronic development; as discussed in Munaro (1998a), these particular usages are attested starting from the 18th century; in this period the nominal use of *cozza*, attested from the 16th century, starts to decline and correspondingly one finds an increasing number of cases in which *cozza* functions as *wh*-operator meaning *what*; the three following examples witness a non-canonical use of *cozza* as *wh*-item whose semantics is very close to the one discussed above:

- (19) Cossa avé-u nome?
 what have-cl name

¹⁰ All the particular interpretations analyzed in section 3.2.1 are also available for the corresponding *wh*-elements in other Northern Italian dialects, such as Paduan *cozza* (as anticipated in footnote (8) above), as exemplified respectively in (i) to (iv):

- (i) Cossa magni-to?!
 'What on earth are you eating?!'
 (ii) Cossa ridi-to?!
 'Why are you laughing?!'
 (iii) Cossa coste-lo?
 'How much does it cost?'
 (iv) Cossa vu-to...
 '...you know...'

Note that in the regional varieties of standard Italian that have both *che* and *cosa* only the latter allows for the relevant interpretation.

In Mendrisiotto, a dialect of the Italian speaking part of Switzerland, the *wh*-word corresponding to *cozza* (or its reduced form) can acquire the meaning *how much*, both with a nominal and with an adverbial function, as exemplified in (v) and (vi) respectively:

- (v)a. Cusè che ta n'e mangiada?
 what that cl-of it-have eaten
 'How much of it have you eaten?'
 b. Sa ta n mangiat (quanta)?
 what cl-of it eat (how much)
 'How much of it do you eat?'
 (vi)a. (Cusè) al peza quantu l to sacch?
 (what) cl-weighs how much the your sack
 'How much does your sack weigh?'
 b. Sa/se l'è che l dura?
 what cl-is that cl-lasts?
 'How long does it last?'

Note that in some cases the *wh*-element *how much* appears in argumental position.

‘What is your name?’ (Villabruna, “Fioretta”, act I - scene II)

(20) Cossa olé-u a tor quà entre la me toza?
 what want-cl to take here inside the my girl
 ‘How much do you want to accept my daughter inside here?’ (ibidem, act I – scene II)

(21) Cossa son-e stata quà a zanzar, mo, mi?
 what am-cl been here to chat, then, I
 ‘Why have I been chatting, then?’ (ibidem, act II – scene V)

As is clear from the glosses, in these examples the semantic value of *cossa* can be rendered respectively with *what*, *how much* and *why*; the hypothesis that between the 18th and the 19th century *cossa* had already undergone a semantic widening with respect to its original meaning is shown by the fact that in his “Vocabolario bellunese-italiano” (dating back to the first half of the 19th century) the bellunese abbot Carlo Vienna (1775-1855) quotes the following line from a sonnet by Pozzobon:

(22) Cossa che se vien vèci e sì nol par!
 what that one comes old and nonetheless not-cl-seems
 ‘How old one becomes without realizing it!’

Here *cossa* occurs in an exclamative sentence with a semantic value very close to *how* / *how much*. This particular use of the *wh*-phrase *cossa* in exclamative contexts is still attested in the Northern Veneto dialects, as shown by (17) above.

3.2.2 *Cossa* and embedded contexts

In this section we will consider some data concerning the interaction between *cossa* and embedded contexts and, in particular, we will try to determine if *cossa*, in the particular usages discussed above, can be interpreted as depending on the embedded predicate.

In indirect questions *cossa* is not amenable to the interpretations discussed up to now; the example in (23a) is acceptable as normal indirect question (such as 24(a)), but ungrammatical in the relevant reading (expressing the speaker’s dismay/annoyance about what has been done); similarly (23b), with *cossa* interpreted as causal element, is ungrammatical, and (23c), with quantificational reading, is marginal:

- (23)a. %Me domande cossa che i à fat.
 myself ask what that cl-have done
 ‘I wonder what they have done.’
 b. *Me domande cossa che ’l compra n’altro giornal
 myself ask what that cl-buys another newspaper
 ‘I wonder why he buys another newspaper.’
 c. ??Me domande cossa che ’l costa/peza
 myself ask what that cl-costs/weights
 ‘I wonder how much it costs/weights.’

The grammaticality status of (23) strongly suggests that the uses discussed in section 3.2.1 are crucially related to the availability of a particular structural

configuration which obtains in main questions; on the other hand, the possibility for *cossa* to function as real question word seems to be tied to its being embedded under an interrogative predicate; this possibility is also available in infinitival contexts, as shown by (24b):

- (24)a. No so *cossa* che i fa (*che).
 not know what that cl-do (*what)
 ‘I don’t know what they do.’
 b. No so *cossa* far (*che).
 not know what do (*what)
 ‘I don’t know what to do.’

Note that in these cases, differently from what happens in main questions, the *wh*-item *che* cannot appear in sentence internal position.

As we saw above, *cossa* can introduce a fake main *wh*-question in which the bare *wh*-word *che* can optionally appear *in situ*:

- (25) *Cossa* fa-lo (che)?

Given the impossibility of interpreting (25) as a real question, we predict the ungrammaticality of an example like (26a), through which the speaker asks the addressee to repeat his statement (and where the rhetorical interpretation is probably excluded by this particular pragmatic value of the sentence):

- (26)a. ??*Cossa* à-tu dit che l’*à* fat?
 b. ?*Cossa* à-tu dit che l’*à* fat che?
 c. À-tu dit che l’*à* fat che?
 (what) have-cl said that cl-has done (what)
 ‘What have you said that he has done?’

The only completely grammatical version is (26c), with no *wh*-item in initial position and *che* inside the embedded clause; (26b), with *cossa* in initial position and *che* in sentence internal position, is almost acceptable but still with the particular interpretive implication that the speaker is somehow unpleasantly surprised by the news. The data in (26) can be interpreted as indicating that argumental *cossa* (in its non-canonical reading) can be construed with the embedded predicate only when it is doubled by the *wh*-element *che in situ* but not otherwise; these data might also suggest that *cossa* does not raise from inside the embedded clause but is in fact inserted as expletive element in the position where it appears.

In order to determine to what precise extent sentence initial *cossa* is interpretable as related to the embedded verb, let us consider some cases where *cossa*, in the *why-like* reading, introduces a main clause whose verb selects an embedded declarative containing an intransitive predicate:

- (27)a. **Cossa* pensi-tu che i s*ia* dr*io* far bar*ù*fa (che)?
 what think-cl that cl-be behind do quarrel (what)
 b. *Cossa* va-tu a pensar che i s*ia* dr*io* far bar*ù*fa (che)?
 what go-cl to think that cl-be behind do quarrel (what)
 c. *Cossa* pensi-tu che i s*ia* ‘nd*à*di a far bar*ù*fa ??(che)?
 what think -cl that cl-be gone to do quarrel (what)

‘There is no reason for you to think that they are quarrelling’

As shown by (27a), *cozza* cannot usually be construed either with the matrix or with the embedded predicate, independently of the presence of *che*; only when the main predicate is replaced by a periphrastic expression with the verb ‘to go’ is the sentence completely grammatical, as shown by (27b); (27c) shows that rephrasing of the embedded verb is in itself not sufficient to save the structure and that grammaticality is achieved through the additional realization of *che in situ*; however, independently of the position occupied by the licensing elements, both in (27b) and in (27c) *cozza* can only be construed with the matrix verb. Again, as in (14c) above, the presence of a modality feature expressed by the verb *go* seems to favour the non-argumental reading.

Let us consider now cases in which the matrix predicate selects an infinitival clause, like the following:

- (28)a. *Cossa sta-lo là a far *(che)?*
 what stays-cl there to do (what)
 ‘What (on earth) does he stay there for?’
- b. *Cossa sta-lo là a parlar de che?*
 what stays-cl there to speak of what
 ‘What (on earth) does he stay there to speak about?’
- c. *Cossa sta-lo là a spetàr (che)?*
 what stays-cl there to wait (what)
 ‘Why does he keep waiting there / what is he waiting for?’

Again, in (28a) *cozza* can only be interpreted as object of the embedded infinitival verb and only if *che* is realized *in situ*; (28b) shows that *cozza* is also compatible with a prepositional phrase containing *che in situ*; finally in (28c), which contains an embedded verb that is ambiguous between a transitive and an intransitive reading, the realization of the *che in situ* is optional: if it is realized the transitive reading is selected, while if it is not realized *spetàr* can only have the intransitive meaning and *cozza* receives the *why-like* interpretation (probably favoured by the presence of the modal-like verb ‘stay’)¹¹.

¹¹ Note that there is an asymmetry between main and embedded contexts also with respect to the compatibility of *cozza* with the *wh*-item *chi in situ*; while the cooccurrence of the two elements gives rise to ungrammaticality in main questions, it is almost acceptable in embedded contexts, as shown by the contrast between (i) and (ii):

- (i)a. **Cossa vedi-tu chi stasera?*
 what see-cl whom tonight
 ‘Whom are you seeing tonight?’
- b. **Cossa a-tu parlà con chi ieri?*
 what have-cl spoken with whom yesterday
 ‘With whom have you spoken yesterday?’
- (ii)a. ?*Cossa sié-o stadi là a vardar chi?*
 what are-cl stayed there to look whom?
 ‘Whom have you stayed there to look at?’
- b. ?*Cossa sié-o ‘ndadi là a parlar con chi?*
 what are-cl gone there to speak with whom?
 ‘Whom have you gone there to speak with?’

Summarizing, what the examples from (26) to (28) show is that *cozza* can be interpreted with the embedded predicate only in its non-canonical argumental reading and if doubled by *che*; moreover, *why-like cozza* can only be interpreted with the matrix verb and if some licensing element (be it a modal-like predicate or *che*) is present.

3.3. Division of labor: the dichotomy *che* - *cozza*

The basic question we address in this subsection concerns the nature of the unity underlying the different noncanonical uses of *cozza* and a precise determination of what sets them apart from the “standard argumental” use of WHAT, that is, what precisely the semantic specialization of *cozza* consists in.

On the basis of the data presented above, we can identify two main features:

- *cozza* introduces genuine *wh*-questions only in embedded interrogative contexts;

- in main contexts *cozza can* have, beside its primary meaning of ‘what’, other semantic values; in such cases, it conveys different kinds of attitudes of the speaker towards the propositional content of the sentence.

The issue under discussion is strictly connected with the fact that the clear distributional asymmetry between *che* and *cozza* reveals an opposition between two major types of uses of WHAT. This dissociation, which we take to manifest overtly in Pagotto a distinction that is realized covertly in other languages, suggests that the “collection” of semantic values associated with *cozza* somehow forms a unity in the sense that these uses share a common (syntactic or semantic) core; this leads us to reject the second of the two extreme possibilities envisaged at the end of section 2 above.

Given that *che* and *cozza* each specialize for mutually exclusive subdomains of WHAT, a crucial question is how, and along what lines, this division is realized. The question, then, becomes the following: what are the respective sets of readings of *che* and *cozza*?

Two possible hypotheses suggest themselves at this point.

Starting from the observation that *cozza* does not (generally) allow for the real question interpretation, an apparently natural divide could be imagined: the one separating the argumental readings from the non-argumental ones. Intuitively speaking, one of the two *wh*-phrases would be largely parallel to WHO (the “true” WHAT), the other quite different (a “pseudo”-WHAT); as far as Pagotto is concerned, *che* would correspond to the former, and *cozza* to the latter. This first hypothesis is based on the assumption that *cozza*, being too impoverished in its feature content for the argumental use, is a kind of expletive with no basic meaning, and its actual meanings are entirely determined by structural and/or contextual factors; such inherent underspecification would make *cozza* compatible with such a broad spectrum of different “nonstandard” values as the one attested.

An alternative hypothesis relies on the assumption that *cozza* is basically synonymous with *che*, as it can also have the genuine interrogative reading in embedded questions (and more generally in other dialects), and that, again, its basic meaning may be affected (that is, somehow emptied or widened) by some contextual or structural properties.

As usual, in (ii) the presence of *cozza* entails that the speaker regards the event described with a reproachful attitude, judging it as somehow disturbing.

But the actual division of labor between the two WHATs is more complex, and instructive. A striking feature of this division is the fact that *cozza*, “specializing” by hypothesis vis-à-vis of *che*, is *not* specialized for nonargumental values, as might a priori be expected given that *che* seems to be limited to, i.e. specialized in, argumental values. It seems to be more adequate to speak of standard argumental values - expressed by *che* - vs. nonstandard values, argumental as well as nonargumental, expressed by *cozza*. This is precisely what seems to characterize the division of labor: the purely interrogative argumental value of *che* on the one hand, and the “noncanonical” values, including argumental ones, of *cozza*, on the other.

4. The types of uses of French *que*

After the detailed presentation of the Pagotto paradigm, let us turn to French. In presenting the different uses of *que*, we will concentrate here on the main types and return to particular subtleties in the context of the later theoretical discussion.

4.1. Interrogative (true question) readings of *que*

In the following presentation, we will make two simplifications which concern points that are irrelevant to our discussion. First, we will largely abstract away from the form *quoi*, which has a very particular distribution (in fact, complementary to that of interrogative *que*, except in infinitival sentences). Second, we will treat here the simple form *que* and the complex form *qu'est-ce que* ‘what is it that’ (a form only superficially similar to the focus construction) as if they were a unique form.¹²

With this proviso, (29) and (30) are *wh*-questions in which *que* and *qu'est-ce que* are interpreted as standard interrogative argumental WHAT. In (31) and (32) *que* and *qu'est-ce que* function as selected arguments of a quantity/amount type.

- (29)a. Que faites-vous?
 ‘What are you doing?’
 b. Qu’avez-vous fait?
 ‘What have you done?’
- (30)a. Qu’est-ce que vous faites?
 b. Qu’est-ce que vous avez fait?
 (same as (29))
- (31)a. Que gagne-t-il?
 b. Qu’est-ce qu’il gagne?
 ‘What does he earn?’
- (32)a. Que coûte ce voyage?
 b. Qu’est-ce que coûte ce voyage?
 ‘What does this travel cost?’

¹²See Obenauer (1981) for an analysis of the interrogative construction using *est-ce que*, and Obenauer (1977) for discussion of exclamative *que* and *qu'est-ce que*. See Milner (1978, chap. 7) for numerous aspects concerning exclamative *que*.

The examples (31) and (32), then, correspond to the use of *cosa* exemplified in (15), while (29) and (30) have no direct corresponding structure with *cosa* in Pagotto, although such use is attested in other varieties of the Bellunese area.

4.2. *Que* in pseudo-questions

4.2.1. Argumental *que* / *qu'est-ce que*

The sentences in (33) and (34) instantiate the interrogative-exclamation case, i.e. an interrogative structure with exclamative intonation and a surprise or disapproval reading (cf. also the comment concerning (3), above). (35) is the rhetorical question corresponding to the Pagotto *u-tu* construction exemplified in (10).

- (33)a. Que faites-vous?!
 what do-you
 'What are you doing?!'
 b. Qu'avez-vous fait?!
 'What have you done?!'
- (34)a. Qu'est-ce que vous faites?!
 'What are you doing?!'
 b. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait?!
 'What have you done?!'
- (35)a. Que veux-tu que je fasse?
 what want-you that I do
 a'. Que veux-tu que j'y fasse?
 what want-you that I-about-it do
 'How can I help it?'
 b. Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je fasse ?
 j'y fasse
 (same as (35a))

The examples in (36) contain the frozen expression *que veux-tu* without a sentential complement, meaning (approximately) 'It's like that' ('parenthetical' *que veux-tu*). This use of *que veux-tu* is reminiscent of that of Pagotto *u-tu* in (18).

- (36)a. Que veux-tu, il a toujours été paresseux.
 b. Qu'est-ce que tu veux, il a toujours été paresseux.
 'It's like that / there is nothing one can do, he has always been lazy.'

4.2.2. Nonargumental ‘why’-like *que*

4.2.2.1. *Que* in nonnegative and negative contexts

In contemporary French, *que* is rare in a ‘why’-like use in colloquial style and standard style.¹³ Nonetheless, many speakers have clear intuitions about this *que*. They agree on a second property of *que* that distinguishes it from Pagotto *cossa*, namely the fact that ‘why’-like *que* is almost entirely restricted to negative contexts. This intuition is implicitly confirmed by the examples given by grammarians or in dictionaries. The following sentence, characterized as “elegant turn” by Martinon (1927, 248n.) is one of the extremely rare nonnegative examples:

- (37) *Que tardez-vous?*
 what are-long-you
 ‘Why are you (so) long (doing it) ?’

Our informants qualify the sentence as “très recherchée” and only acceptable with an added *donc* at the end.¹⁴ Martinon gives a second example, which is negative, and notes that *pas* is not admitted in this case:

- (38) *Que ne partez-vous?*
 ‘Why don’t you leave?’

As in the case of Pagotto, ‘why’ is only an approximative translation, as shown by the substitution of *pourquoi* for *que* in (37) and (38):

- (39)a. *Pourquoi tardez-vous?*
 ‘Why are you (so) long (doing it) ?’

¹³In earlier stages of French, the situation was different. “[*Que*] sert [...] de complément circonstanciel sans préposition (1080) [...] jusqu’au XVII^e s. également pour à «quel propos?», «en quoi?», «pourquoi?», «à quoi?» (*Le Robert*, Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, 1992). [*Que* is used as nonprepositional adjunct (1080) [...] until the 17th century also for «in what connection?», «why?», «what for?».]

Littré gives, among other examples:

- (i) *Si vous n’êtes pas malade, que diable ne le dites-vous donc?*
 ‘If you are not sick, why on earth don’t you say it?’
 (Molière, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, II, 5)

and, without *diable*,

- (ii) *Que parlez-vous ici d’Albe et de sa victoire?*
 ‘Why do you speak here of Alba and her victory?’
 (Corneille, *Horace*, IV, 2)

and with *ne*:

- (iii) *Si le choix est si beau, que ne le prenez-vous?*
 ‘If the choice is so beautiful, why don’t you take it?’
 (Molière, *Femmes savantes*, III, 5)

¹⁴The role of this element in (almost) “licensing” *que* here is reminiscent of the role of the particle *denn* in German analogues with *was*, like in (i).

- (i) *Was lachst du ?(denn)*
 ‘Why are you laughing?’

See below, section 7.

- b. Pourquoi ne partez-vous *(pas)?
‘Why don’t you leave?’

(39a,b) can be interpreted as true questions, i.e. they can serve to inquire about the reasons of delaying or of not leaving. They can also express the opinion of the speaker in terms of what should be done: the addressee should not wait any longer, he should leave. These readings, additional possible readings in the case of *pourquoi*, are the “normal” readings when *que* is the question word.

Consider now (40), from Martinon (1927, 541):

- (40) Que n’écrit-il en prose?
‘Why doesn’t he write in prose?’

This sentence expresses the speaker’s surprise or perplexity: he is unable to see the reasons preventing the author from writing prose, an interpretation again different from that of the parallel structure with *pourquoi*.

We borrow a final example of this type again from Martinon (1927, 542):

- (41) Que n’est-il encore vivant!
‘‘Why’ isn’t he still alive!’

(41) shows the delicate status in between an interrogative and an exclamative interpretation; according to Martinon, it expresses “un souhait irréalisable” (“a nonrealizable wish”).¹⁵

4.2.2.2. The periphrastic expression *que + avoir à V_{infinitive}*

The quasi-exclusive predominance of negative contexts for ‘why’-like *que* raises the question whether there is no means of “asking” this type of question in a positive context. Let us first note that, contrary to the case of argumental *que* - both in true questions (cf. (29), (30)) and in pseudo-questions like (33), (35) -, ‘why’-like *que* in (37)-(41) cannot alternate with *qu’est-ce que*, for reasons yet unclear:

- (42)a. *Qu’est-ce que vous tardez?

¹⁵Though the preceding examples of ‘why’-like *que* are due to a text of the 1920’s, it is easy to find sentences of this type in contemporary written texts. (i) and (ii) are taken from a recent article on the war against Yugoslavia, published in *Le Monde*; “il” refers to the Serb regime:

- (a) Que n’a-t-il choisi la discussion et l’échange au lieu de soutenir dans le plus grand cynisme le pilonnage de Sarajevo ou les exécutions collectives?
‘Why haven’t they chosen discussion and exchange instead of supporting in the utmost cynicism the shelling of Sarajevo or collective executions?’
- (b) Que n’a-t-il transformé le Kosovo, terre sacrée des ancêtres, en un pays de développement, de culture et de paix, au lieu d’en supprimer autoritairement le statut d’autonomie, ...?
‘Why haven’t they transformed Kosovo, the sacred land of the ancestors, into a country of development, of culture and peace, instead of abolishing, in an authoritarian way, its autonomous status?’

Notice that the apparent contrast between ‘why’-like *que* and *cosa*, namely the preferential appearance of *que* with *ne*, might be superficial: *ne* seems to have the function of “accommodating” *que* with a ‘why’-like reading; cf. note (14) on the analogous role of *donc*.

- b. *Qu'est-ce que vous ne partez (pas)?
- c. *Qu'est-ce qu'il n'écrit (pas) en prose?
- d. *Qu'est-ce qu'il n'est (pas) encore vivant!
(same as (37), (39b), (40), (41), respectively)

Perhaps the “recherché” style - to which *qu'est-ce que* does not belong - is part of the licensing factors of ‘why’-like *que*. There is, however, a means of using *qu'est-ce que*, though it is excluded as such in examples parallel to German *Was schreit der denn so?*; as shown by (43):

- (43)a. *Qu'est-ce qu'il crie (comme ça)?
‘Why does he shout (like that)?’
- b. *Qu'est-ce qu'il nous regarde?
‘Why does he look at us?’
- c. *Qu'est-ce que tu ris comme ça?
‘Why are you laughing like this?’

The intended meaning of these sentences can be expressed, in colloquial style, by using the verbal periphrase in (44):

- (44)a. Qu'est-ce qu'il a à crier (comme ça)?
what is it that he has to shout (like this)
‘Why does he shout (like this)?’
- b. Qu'est-ce qu'il a à nous regarder?
‘Why does he look at us?’
- c. Qu'est-ce que tu as à rire comme ça?
‘Why are you laughing like this?’

The meaning can include “annoyance or disapproval” as in the Pagotto case, but does not necessarily so.

Summarizing, we can say that in most cases the structures with ‘why’-like *que* are not true questions, and that they are licensed by different contextual strategies, that is, either by the presence of particles (negative - without *pas* - or nonnegative) or by the verbal periphrase which however turns *que* into an argument.

4.2.3. Nonargumental ‘how much’-like *que*

This instance of *que* appears to alternate with *comme*, as shown by (45)-(46):

- (45)a. Qu'il vous aime!
‘How much he loves you!’
- b. Que cet enfant est grand!
what this child is tall
‘How tall this child is!’
- c. Qu'il écrit bien!
what he writes well
‘How well he writes!’
- (46)a. Comme il vous aime!
- b. Comme cet enfant est grand!
- c. Comme il écrit bien!

(same as (45a,b,c) respectively)

(45) and (46) are borrowed from Martinon, (1927, 502),¹⁶ who also notes that in familiar style, *ce que* is acceptable in place of *que*. The same is true of *qu'est-ce que*:

(47) Qu'est-ce qu'il vous aime!

(same as (45a), (46a))

In summary, all the uses of Pagotto *cossa* described in section 3 are attested with French *que*, though only under very restrictive stylistic and licensing conditions as far as 'why'-like *que* is concerned. However, *que* differs from *cossa* in that it also has the standard interrogative uses which in Pagotto are apparently limited to *che*.

5. The types of use of German *was*

We noticed already at the outset of this article that German *was* combines the standard argumental use and some noncanonical uses. In this respect, then, German and French pattern together and contrast with Pagotto, where the canonical argumental use of *cossa* is not attested in main sentences.

5.1. Interrogative (true question) readings of *was*

Example (48) contains an instance of standard interrogative argumental WHAT. In (49a,b) *was* is a selected argument of a quantity/amount type.

(48) Was suchst du?
 what look-for you
 'What are you looking for?'

(49)a. Was verdient er?
 'What does he earn?'
 b. Was kostet das?
 'What does that cost?'

5.2. *Was* in pseudo-questions

5.2.1. Argumental *was*

(50a,b) instantiate the interrogative-exclamation case, i.e. an interrogative structure with exclamative intonation and a surprise or disapproval reading (cf. (3), above).

(50)a. Was machst du (denn)?!
 what do you 'denn'

¹⁶Martinon seems to accept all these examples alike. In contemporary French, *que* has, with verbs, a literary flavour and is subject to certain restrictions, contrary to its use with adjectives and adverbs. We leave this aspect aside.

- ‘What are you doing?!’
 b. Was bedeutet das?!
 ‘What does this mean?!’

(Concerning *denn*, see section 5.2.2, below, and the discussion in section 7). There is no direct equivalent of the French rhetorical *que veux-tu* construction in German, but *was* can have a rhetorical interpretation in (51):

- (51) Was macht das (schon)?
 what makes that (already)
 ‘What difference does it make?’ = ‘It makes no difference.’

5.2.2. Nonargumental ‘why’-like *was*

This instance of *was*, contrary to French ‘why’-like *que*, belongs to colloquial style; as can be seen from the ungrammaticality of (52a), it requires some form of “licensing”; if the particle *denn* is added, the sentence improves considerably, and with the further addition of the adverbial expression *so (blöd)* it attains full grammaticality (as shown respectively in (52b) and (52c)):

- (52)a. *Was lacht der?
 what laughs he
 b. Was lacht der denn?
 what laughs he ‘denn’
 c. Was schaut du mich so an?
 what look you at-me so
 ‘Why are you looking at me like that?’

Sentences of this type can be interpreted as true questions with an expression of surprise, but also as pseudo-questions with an expression of disapproval.

5.2.3. Nonargumental ‘how (much)’-like *was*

This particular quasi-quantificational reading where *was* expresses intensity or extent is exemplified in (53):

- (53)a. Was hast du dich verändert!
 what have you yourself changed
 ‘How you changed!’
 b. Was ist das doch schwierig!
 what is that ‘doch’ difficult
 ‘How difficult that is!’

In summary, German *was* can have the same types of uses as Pagotto *cossa* and *che*.

6. The derivation of “pseudo”-questions: a (landing) site for *cozza/que/was*

In this section we put forth a proposal concerning the position occupied by the *wh*-elements *cozza* and *que* in “pseudo”-questions and extend the analysis to German *was* without arguing directly for it.

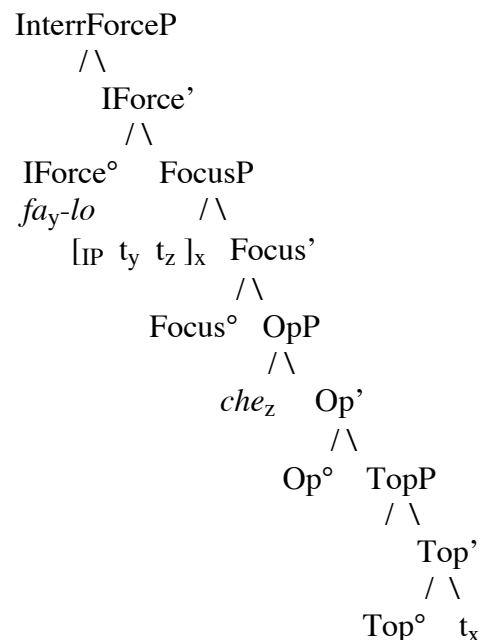
Our argumentation relies on Pollock et alii’s (1999) analysis of *wh-in-situ* phenomena, which views the puzzling distributional asymmetry between French *que* and Bellunese *che* as a deceptive epiphenomenon.

Pollock-Munaro-Poletto (1999) propose a new approach which exploits Rizzi’s (1995) split-CP and the notion of remnant-IP movement proposed by Kayne & Pollock (1998). They assume that Bellunese *che* and French *que* are (structurally and) phonologically defective elements in the sense that they cannot bear a focus feature. In main *wh*-questions they raise to the specifier position of OpP, the lowest of the various CP projections activated in the CP layer; *wh*-movement is followed by raising of remnant IP to the specifier position of FocusP (or, in French, by raising of its head I° (with V° adjoined) to Foc°) in order to check the focus feature of interrogative clauses.

The different position of the *wh*-element with respect to the inflected verb in the two languages is determined by the subsequent derivational step: in French the further raising of *que* to the specifier position of ForceP, the highest functional projection inside the CP layer, in Bellunese adjunction of the inflected verb to the (non assertive) subject clitic pronoun inside the head Force° of the same projection; this produces the deceptive appearance that in Bellunese, unlike French, we do not have movement of the *wh*-element to a sentence initial position¹⁷.

The resulting structure in the case of Bellunese *che* is illustrated in (54):

(54)



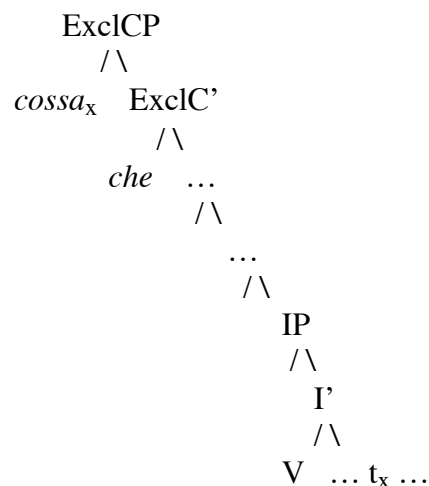
¹⁷ Moreover, Pollock et alii propose that French *wh-in-situ* is itself a deceptive phenomenon deriving from the raising of the *wh*-phrase to the specifier of FocusP and from the subsequent topicalization of the remnant-IP into the specifier of a higher TopP.

Under this new analysis there is no genuine *wh*-in-situ in French or in Bellunese. All *wh*-phrases move; the seeming non-movement of the *wh*-phrase appearing in sentence internal position (*che*, *quoi*) depends on the raising to a left-peripheral position lower than the one occupied by the sentence initial *wh*-phrase (*cosa*, *que*), with remnant IP raising to a position in between¹⁸.

Indeed, we are going to propose that, contrary to appearance, the fact that *cosa* and *que* share particular semantic properties (i.e. their specialization in non-argumental uses) as compared with other bare *wh*-words, is not due to the fact that they undergo overt syntactic movement to a left-peripheral position, but (beside their underspecification) to the fact that they move, in the relevant contexts, to one and the same structural position inside the CP-layer.

As noted, Pollock et alii propose that in Bellunese the inflected verb adjoins to the left of the subject clitic within the head Force°; as *cosa* precedes the inflected verb, it must be located either in [Spec,ForceP] or in the specifier of a higher functional projection. On the other hand, except in exclamatives (cf. (9) and (17), above, for different argumental and nonargumental uses), *cosa* can never be followed, in the particular contexts analyzed in section 3, by the complementizer *che* which, as argued by Munaro (forthcoming), occupies the head of a projection ExclP, whose specifier is the landing site of bare *wh*-phrases in main *wh*-exclamatives.¹⁹ In exclamatives, therefore, we take *cosa* to appear in the configuration (55):

(55)



¹⁸ In other words, adopting this approach there is no more contrast, with respect to overt (as opposed to covert) movement, between *che* and *cosa* in Bellunese and between *que* and *quoi* in French; any attempt to connect interpretation with syntactic structure will thus have to refer crucially to the specific landing site of the *wh*-element and not to the fact that the element moves *per se*.

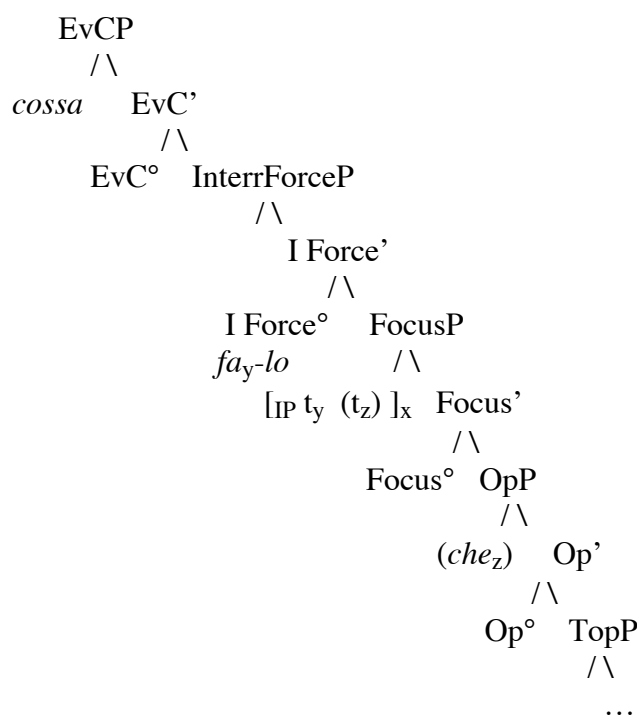
¹⁹ Concerning the hypothesis that *wh*-phrases occupy a higher structural position in main exclamatives than in main interrogatives see also Benincà (1995). We exclude the possibility that the *wh*-item occupies a specifier position even higher than the one occupied by *wh*-items in exclamatives on the basis of the fact that the contexts we consider here always present inversion between the inflected verb and the subject clitic pronoun, which is traditionally taken to be a morpho-syntactic mark of ‘interrogativity’; that such a feature must be somehow available in these cases is shown by the fact that pseudo-questions can, although they need not, be answered. This strongly argues for the *wh*-item being located in some projection belonging to the layer of CP connected to ‘interrogativity’, hence lower than ExclP.

In all the other cases, *cosso* must occupy the specifier position of a functional projection lower than ExclP.

Conceptually, we would like to follow a by now well-established tendency to associate each interpretively relevant feature to a specific head (projection) in the functional structure of the sentence; hence we propose that, given the peculiar interpretive implications that are associated to the structures we have examined, the position occupied by *cosso* and *que* in this kind of sentences cannot be the same as the one of *wh*-phrases in ordinary *wh*-questions. Therefore, given what we said above, it must be the specifier of a projection located between ExclP and ForceP.

More precisely, we want to suggest that in pseudo-questions *cosso* and *que* occupy the specifier of a functional projection that we will call *Ev(aluative)-CP*. The relevant structure of (25) *Cosso fa-lo (che)?*, then, is (56).

(56)



From the interpretive point of view, this proposal captures under a single label the particular implication which is common to the various non-canonical readings of *cosso / que / was* discussed above, namely the fact that the speaker, in the lively expression of a feeling of surprise/annoyance/disapproval, conveys his personal evaluation of the event referred to. In this sense, in the spirit of Cinque (1999), we hypothesize that the head of this syntactic projection is associated with what can be informally defined as the ‘evaluative attitude’ of the speaker towards the event, and that such a head can be activated by filling the corresponding specifier position with *cosso / que / was* (in the same way as such information can be encoded in some languages in specific verbal affixes filling the head of the EvaluativeP that Cinque (1999) identifies within the inflectional layer of the sentence).²⁰

²⁰ A viable alternative proposal would be that *cosso/que/was* occupy the specifier of a functional projection specifically devoted to host *wh*-constituents in rhetorical questions; empirical evidence from Italian and French for the existence of such a projection is provided in Obenauer & Poletto (1999).

It is interesting to note that, as shown by examples (14c-d) or (27b), this particular reading is sometimes made possible by the insertion of modal-like predicates such as ‘want’, ‘need’ or ‘go’, which, under this approach, are likely to occupy the head Ev-C° (or possibly the lower head Ev°); indeed, the presence of these verbal forms seems to be able to determine the same kind of reading even with *wh*-words that usually do not admit it:

- (57)a. U-tu che 'l sia 'ndàt andé?!
 want-cl that cl-be gone where
 ‘Where on earth may he have gone?!’
 b. Va-lo a invidàr chi?!
 go-cl to invite whom
 ‘Whom on earth does he (intend to) invite?!’

With a sentence like (57a) the speaker intends to point out the silliness of the addressee’s question, meaning that there can be no doubt about the place referred to; similarly, (57b) expresses the speaker’s disapproval towards the subject’s decision/intention to invite a specific person.

We speculate that a similar role might be played by negation and by the auxiliary ‘have’ in the French examples analyzed in section 4.2.2.

Anticipating on the discussion in section 7, we may assume that the German modal particle *denn* is located in the lower EvP inside the inflectional layer.

As for the unavailability of the non-argumental readings in embedded questions we speculate that this might be seen as the effect of two joint factors: the intrinsic underspecification of these *wh*-elements on the one hand and the selectional properties of the matrix predicate on the other; the latter, given the intrinsic feature deficiency of the *wh*-items, would suffice to determine the really interrogative interpretation.²¹

²¹ Once we have identified a possible position for *cossa/que/was*, one natural question arises: are these elements merged there or do they raise from some clause-internal argumental position?

Empirically, there are some data supporting the first alternative; one relevant piece of evidence is the fact that the particular reproachful interpretation usually associated with *cossa* is not available when it is inside a prepositional phrase:

- (i)a. ??De *cossa* parle-li?!
 of what speak-cl?!
 b. *Cossa* parle-li de che?!
 what speak-cl of what
 ‘What on earth are they speaking about?!’
 c. Parle-li de che?
 speak-cl of what
 ‘What are they speaking about?’

So, a sentence like (ia) is sharply deviant in the relevant reading, which can be expressed through (ib), that is, with non-prepositional *cossa* in initial position and prepositional *che in situ*; (ic) conveys the real *wh*-question interpretation.

Another piece of evidence for the base generation of *cossa* in sentence initial position comes from the data reported in section 3.2.2 above concerning its (un)interpretability with an embedded predicate; as we have seen, *cossa* can never be construed with the predicate of the embedded sentence, unless some licensing element (usually *che*) is inserted; this state of things would be completely unexpected if *cossa* were generated in an argumental position inside the embedded clause moving then to the specifier of some CP-projection of the matrix clause. On the contrary, the hypothesis of its merging in the position in which it surfaces correctly predicts the data.

7. Underspecification and contextual dependency

In this section, we will be concerned with the relation between the different readings of WHAT that we have isolated in the three linguistic systems. The central question will be: How many WHATs are there in each of the three languages we are examining? More precisely, how many lexical entries are there for *cozza*, *was*, *que*, respectively? This question also bears in a crucial way on the status of the lexical relation between *che* and *cozza*.

7.1. How many lexical items? The unity hypothesis

Let us consider the case in more general terms. Assume that in a language L_i a lexical item LI is associated with two or more quite different readings (and possibly different syntactic behaviours). This could perfectly well be an accident, and - as in numerous existing cases in all languages - it would appear reasonable to consider that there are two or more homophonous LIs which are independent of each other and represent different lexical entries. In order to avoid more intricate cases, let us illustrate such a situation with the case of French *cousin*, which has two entirely different meanings, namely, ‘cousin’ and ‘midge’.

Turning to *wh*-phrases, let us imagine that language L_i has a *wh*-phrase with two or more quite different readings. The same reasoning as before could apply; one might assume that there are two (or more) homophonous *wh*-phrases present in L_i , unless some relation between the different meanings pointed to the conclusion that only one LI should be hypothesized. Accordingly, the *wh*-phrases in (58a-d) could be homophones; in other words, they could correspond to different lexical items. Even counting the

Furthermore, from the conceptual point of view, one can appeal to the by now well-founded theory-internal assumption that, everything else being equal, the operation Merge is less costly than Move.

However, under this analysis an obvious problem is posed by sentences with a transitive predicate containing argumental *cozza* without *che in situ*, as it is not immediately clear how the verb can discharge its internal thematic role; considering these cases, we propose that the strategy of merging the *wh*-item directly in [Spec,Ev-CP] is employed in sentences with *why-like* reading (as well as in the cases of pseudo-argumental *cozza* as long as it is doubled by *che*, which is the element that satisfies the argumental requirements of the verb); as for pseudo-questions and parentheticals containing only argumental *cozza-que-was* we assume base generation of the *wh*-item in an argumental position and successive raising to [Spec,Ev-CP], thereby activating the feature associated with the corresponding head and inducing the particular implication discussed above. Another case of ordinary *wh*-movement from an argumental position is probably represented by the *how-much-like* reading of *cozza-que-was*, which is the only case where the sentence receives a purely interrogative interpretation (and where, in Pagotto, *che* cannot appear *in situ* in cooccurrence with *cozza*); this case is also exceptional in the sense that this is the only use of *cozza* that seems to be restricted to a very limited class of verbs (*cost*, *weigh*, *measure*) characterized by the same argumental requirements; these two facts strongly suggest that in this case *cozza-que-was* are generated in an argumental position and undergo ordinary *wh*-movement to [Spec,ForceP] (or to [Spec, ExclP] in (17a)). As for the exclamative usage exemplified in (17b), given that there is no restriction as to the kind of predicate involved in this structure, this example may well fall under the case of merging of *cozza-que-was* in [Spec,Ev-CP] - cf. Corver (1990, ch. 5.4) on “base generation” in [Spec,CP] for split exclamative *wat* in Dutch -, with subsequent raising to [Spec,ExclP] where (owing to some interpretive constraint such as the scalar implicature effect discussed by Portner & Zanuttini (1998)), the quantificational value of *cozza* is automatically selected.

argumental *was* in (58a,b) as one and the same item, the difference of the readings might be taken to point to the existence of three homophones.

- (58)a. Was suchst du?
 ‘What are you looking for?’
 b. Was du sagst!
 ‘What you are telling (me)!’
 c. Was lacht der denn so?
 ‘Why does he laugh like that?’
 d. Was hast du dich verändert!
 ‘How you changed!’

The hypothesis that (58) exemplifies three different lexical *wh*-phrases which are accidentally homophonous could appear quite reasonable as a first step limited to German. Consideration of the other cases seen above - Pagotto and French - however, radically changes the problem. It is very unlikely that the equivalents of *was* in these languages also have different readings by chance. The hypothesis, therefore, is plausibly reversed: the phenomenon we are considering is not a case of homophones, but a case of *polysemy*. There is one *was* in German, a *wh*-phrase which has four readings (at least). Let us call this the unity hypothesis. Why the four readings are so different from each other is a problem that remains to be solved. The same considerations apply to *que* and *cosa* (for its two adverbial readings, in the latter case).

The unity hypothesis is strongly reinforced by a second basic fact: the noncanonical readings of the lexical items *was*, *que* and *cosa* are the same, and not just randomly different readings in each of these languages. It is again very unlikely that WHAT should have the same spectrum of meanings across languages by chance. This, however, would be expected if we had to do with independent, accidentally homophonous *wh*-phrases. The fact that the readings associated with WHAT are the same - more precisely, that they seem to belong to a shared set of few elements - points to general principles which determine the relations between them.²² We will see below that closer examination of ‘why’-like *was* / *que* / *cosa* yields a strong argument in favor of the unity hypothesis.

7.2. The unique status of WHAT and the underspecification hypothesis

Once we adopt the hypothesis that there is a unique *wh*-phrase WHAT in French, German, and Pagotto, respectively, and not a set of homophones, a third crucial fact determines our approach. The “polysemy” of WHAT crucially contrasts with the fact that other bare *wh*-phrases do not similarly exhibit different readings.

In German, for example, the bare *wh*-phrases associated with the other basic restrictions like [+human], [+time], [+place] are limited to the corresponding readings:

²²The unity hypothesis presupposes, of course, that these readings are present more generally in other languages than the ones we consider here, an empirical hypothesis we explicitly make and hope to establish more strongly in the future.

neither *wer* ‘who’ nor *wann* ‘when’ or *wo* ‘where’, to take just some examples, have other readings.²³

Let us put forward the empirical hypothesis that this is generally the case (as it is in Pagotto, French, and German). There must then be a general reason excluding the kind of polysemy found with WHAT in the case of the other *wh*-phrases. The reason seems to be that the “lexical” restrictions [+human], [+time], [+place], [+manner], ... are incompatible with other readings, being too specific. For example, it seems intuitively obvious that the lexical item *chi/qui/wer*, bearing the feature [+human], cannot express a meaning close to ‘why’, or to ‘where’ or ‘what’, to mention just these.

The unity hypothesis for WHAT intervenes strongly at this point. Since the crosslinguistic fact leads us to reject the hypothesis of unrelated homophones, one possibility is a type of feature specification of WHAT that IS compatible with the additional readings observed. In other words, the basic lexical restriction incorporated in WHAT is not in contradiction with the meanings ‘why’, ‘how much’, contrary to “intuition” - though we still maintain that these meanings are quite different from each other. Under an alternative hypothesis, which we will adopt below, the *wh*-phrase WHAT is optionally compatible with a “weakened” specification. Since weakening does not occur with the other *wh*-phrases, we are again led to assume a significant difference in the type of relevant feature(s) initially characterizing WHAT, and somehow allowing the optional weakening.

We are led to the conclusion, then, that the polysemy of WHAT is crucially linked to the type of semantic specification it bears (i.e., the lexical restriction determining the set of entities which can function as values of the variable), as well as the syntactic features that figure in its lexical entry. Its initial inherent specification must be poorer than in the case of the other bare *wh*-phrases; we assume therefore that *cosa / que / was* are underspecified in semantic (and possibly syntactic) features.

7.3. Deficient vs. nondeficient WHAT

So far the discussion in this section has been rather programmatic. We believe that the unity hypothesis for WHAT is essentially correct as such; on the other hand, the underspecification hypothesis, which represents one particular approach to implementing the unity hypothesis, remains to be made precise and firmly established. At present, we are not in a position to make the assumed poorer semantic status of WHAT explicit, the main reason being that our understanding of the semantic restriction(s) associated with interrogative WHAT in the three linguistic systems considered here is insufficient.

In particular, the conditions under which human and animate individuals are possible values of the variable bound by interrogative WHAT turn out to be extremely complex once a certain amount of relevant data is taken into account. The precise characterization of the restriction associated with WHAT - usually termed [-animate] or [-human] - is not clear.

²³There do exist cases where a *wh*-phrase is not strictly limited to the meaning following from its inherent restriction. French *où* ‘where’, when used as a (nonfree) relative phrase (that is, in the presence of an appropriate antecedent), can have a temporal meaning in, for example, *au moment où* ‘at the moment when’. Such cases seem to be strictly limited (here to the spatio-temporal domain) and to rely on contextually given indicators (without an appropriate antecedent, only the ‘place’ interpretation is available); hence they do not seem to contradict the hypothesis that only WHAT is standardly open to several interpretations.

In the absence of an account of these semantic aspects, we will concentrate on certain syntactic properties related to the different uses of WHAT. Earlier we considered the fundamental distributional asymmetry that is at the origin of this article, namely that between *che* and *cosa* in terms of their respective positions in the sentence, and formulated it in terms of functional sentence structure in section 6. Here we will be concerned with aspects of the internal structure of WHAT. While these aspects are directly relevant to the syntax of *que*, *cosa* and *was*, it is likely that they will also turn out to be crucial for the understanding of their semantic values.

In certain types of syntactic environments distributional asymmetries appear between the different instances of WHAT. We begin with the case of German and consider Pagotto and French in turn. A certain number of contrasts between noncanonical uses of *was* and standard interrogative *was* are pointed out in d'Avis (1996). In the light of Cardinaletti and Starke's (1994) work, the examples which follow, in part inspired from d'Avis's, can be taken to reveal differences relating to the completeness or incompleteness of the internal structure of their *wh*-phrases.

Let us begin by examining the behavior of standard interrogative *was* in different constructions, namely, (a) under coordination, (b) as contrastive focus, (c) in isolation.²⁴ We consider the different constructions in turn.

Standard interrogative *was* can appear as a member of a coordinated structure, as shown in (59); it is similar in this respect to other interrogative *wh*-phrases, including nonargumental ones like *warum* 'why' (cf. (60)).

- (59) Wer oder was hat diese Ereignisse ausgelöst?
'Who or what caused these events?'
(60) Wann und warum hast du mit Max gesprochen?
'When and why did you talk to Max?'

Standard interrogative *was* can be contrastive focus, as in (61), like other interrogative *wh*-phrases, including *warum* (cf. (62)).

- (61) Ich habe nicht gesagt: WER macht diesen Krach, sondern: WAS macht diesen Krach.
'I did not say, WHO makes this noise, but: WHAT makes this noise.'
(62) Ich habe nicht gesagt: WANN hast du mit ihm gesprochen, sondern: WARUM hast du mit ihm gesprochen.
'I did not say, WHEN did you talk to him, but: WHY did you talk to him.'

Finally, standard interrogative *was*, like other interrogative *wh*-phrases including *warum*, can appear in isolation, forming a truncated question:

- (63) Sie schreiben also? Was?
you write, then what
'You are a writer, then? What do you write?'
(64) Sie haben das gefunden? Wo?
'You found it? Where?'

²⁴The environments (a) and (b) are used in d'Avis (1996) for distinguishing standard interrogative *was* from the two nonargumental *was*; see also note 26. We add environment (c) to this list.

In the three constructions, standard interrogative *was* behaves like other interrogative *wh*-phrases. The picture is quite different in the case of the nonargumental uses of *was*, which we now turn to. ‘Why’-like *was* and exclamative ‘how much’-like *was* contrast with standard interrogative *was* (and other *wh*-phrases) under coordination, as shown in (65)-(66).²⁵

- (65) *Was und seit wann schreit der denn so?
 ‘Why and since when does he shout like this?’
 (66) *Was und wie lange der schon wieder schreit!
 ‘How much and for how long he has been shouting again!’

‘Why’-like *was* and exclamative ‘how much’-like *was* are also unable to function as contrastive focus (see (67)-(68)), contrary to standard interrogative *was* and other *wh*-phrases.

- (67) *Ich habe nicht gesagt: Seit WANN schreit der denn so, sondern: WAS schreit der denn so.
 ‘I did not say, since WHEN has he been shouting like this, but: WHY has he been shouting like this.’
 (68) *Es ist unglaublich, WAS der schreit, nicht WIELANGE der schon schreit.
 ‘It is unbelievable HOW he is shouting, not FOR HOW LONG he has been shouting.’

Finally, ‘why’-like *was* cannot appear in isolation, as a truncated question (see (69a)); notice that its quasi-synonym *warum*, in contrast, can function this way, with or without the modal “licenser” *denn* (see (69b)). As for ‘how much’-like *was*, there are no analogous truncated exclamatives; we replace this type by the “afterthought construction” shown in (70).

- (69)a. Jetzt lachst du wieder so blöd. Warum (denn) ?
 b. *Was (denn)?
 ‘Now you are again laughing so stupidly. Why?’
 (70)a. Er schreit schon wieder, und wie !
 b. *was !
 ‘He is shouting again, and how!’

These contrasts²⁶ between standard interrogative *was*, on the one hand, and ‘why’-like *was* and exclamative ‘how much’-like *was*, on the other, are strikingly

²⁵Argumental exclamative *wh*-phrases share the properties of argumental interrogatives:

- (i) Wen und was sie alles gesehen hat!
 who and what she all seen has
 ‘The number of people and things she saw!’
 (ii) Ich habe nicht gesagt: WEN sie alles gesehen hat, sondern: WAS sie alles gesehen hat!
 I have not said WHO she all seen has, but: WHAT she all seen has

²⁶D’Avis also points out contrasts involving multiple *wh*-questions with ‘why’-like *was*. However, with the appropriate surprise interpretation (and intonation), in the presence of *denn*, this type of structure seems to Obenauer to be independently excluded even with standard question words; cf. (i)-(ii):

parallel to the contrasts between the so-called strong and defective elements (among which, most prominently, personal pronouns) investigated by Cardinaletti and Starke (1994), and strongly suggest parallel deficiencies (in terms of the absence of certain maximal projections in the structure of the deficient *wh*-phrases).²⁷

As announced above, let us now turn to the Pagotto counterparts of these data. As shown by (71), the argumental *wh*-phrases *chi* and *che* cannot be coordinated; there is, therefore, no counterpart of the German sentence (59). However, the exclusion of (71) is due to independent factors: coordination of sentence internal *wh*-phrases is generally excluded - as shown by (72a) - for reasons yet unknown. In sentence initial position, however, coordination is possible for the *wh*-elements that can appear there; cf. (72b).

- (71) *?À-tu vist chi o che?
have you seen who or what
- (72)a. *À-tu parlà con Piero quando e parché?
b. ?Quando e parché à-tu parlà con Piero?
'When and why did you talk with Piero?'

It is probably safe to assume, in fact, that argumental *che* is *in principle* capable of appearing in coordinated structures. Such an interpretation of (71)-(72) is motivated by the fact that the second diagnostic attests the "strong" status of interrogative *che*: it can be contrastive focus, as in (73), like other interrogative *wh*-phrases (cf. (74)).

- (73) No o dita: é-lo CHI che fa sto rumor, ma: é-lo CHE che fa sto rumor.
not I-have said: is-cl who that makes this noise, but: is-cl what that makes...
'I did not say, WHO makes this noise, but: WHAT makes this noise.'
- (74) No o dita: QUANDO à-tu parlà con lu, ma: PARCHE à-tu parlà con lu.
'I did not say, WHEN did you talk with him, but: WHY did you talk with him.'

Finally, interrogative *che*, like other interrogative *wh*-phrases, can appear in isolation, forming a truncated question, though in the case of *che* the result is perfect only with

-
- (i) *Was schreist du denn wen an?
'Why are you shouting at whom?'
- (ii) *Wer macht denn was hier?
'Who is doing what here?'

(ii) contrasts with the acceptable *Wer macht was hier?*, without the surprise interpretation discussed in more detail below, in this section (irrelevantly, even in (ii), *denn* can also have another interpretation not implying surprise, but simply expressing some more general relation with the context of the utterance; in such cases (ii) is acceptable, but 'why'-like *was* is excluded independently because the latter type of *denn* is not an adequate "licenser"). We therefore consider data like (i), with 'why'-like *was*, as inconclusive with respect to the opposition between the two types of *was*.

²⁷Deficient elements, according to Cardinaletti and Starke, must appear in certain types of positions in order to "make up" for their missing structure/features. It suffices here to note that these positional requirements cannot be met in the diagnostic environments utilized above, which accounts for the observed contrasts.

the discourse particle *po* ‘then’ added, a type of device we will also find in French, and which is not required with *andé* ‘where’:

(75) *Alora te scrive? Che ??(po)?*
 then you write what then
 ‘You write, then? What?’

(76) *L’à- tu catà? Andé?*
 it have-you found where
 ‘You found it? Where?’

The situation is quite different in the case of the nonargumental uses of *cossa*. ‘Why’-like *cossa* and exclamative ‘degree’-*cossa* cannot be coordinated with another *wh*-phrase, as shown in (77) and (78).

(77) **Cossa e da quando zighe-lo cussí?*
 ‘Why and since when does he shout like this?’

(78) **Cossa e da quando che’l zigha da novo!*
 ‘How much and for how long he has been shouting again!’

‘Why’-like *cossa* and exclamative ‘degree’-*cossa* are unable to function as contrastive focus

(79) *No o dita: da QUANDO zighe-lo cussí, ma: COSSA zighe-lo cussí.*
 ‘I did not say, since WHEN has he been shouting like this, but: WHY has he been shouting like this.’

(80) **Te savelle COSSA che’l zigha, no da QUANDO che’l zigha.*
 ‘It is unbelievable HOW he is shouting, not FOR HOW LONG he has been shouting.’

Finally, the two nonargumental *cossa* are unable to appear in isolation (even using the discourse particle *po*, in the case of ‘why’-like *cossa*), while their respective close counterparts, *parché* and *come*, are perfect in such contexts:

(81) *Adèss te ride da novo come an stupido. Parché (po) ?*
 **Cossa (po) ?*
 ‘Now you are again laughing so stupidly. Why?’

(82) *Adèss al zighe da novo, e come !*
 **cossa*
 ‘Now he is shouting again, and how!’

The German and Pagotto paradigms just established show a clear parallelism in opposing argumental and nonargumental WHAT in terms of their respective structural strength. At first sight, the well-known fact that in French, standard interrogative *que* has a particularly deficient behaviour might be taken to indicate that the French paradigm is different in fundamental ways from the two preceding ones. However, it is not this particular difference which will turn out to be important (quite aside from the

fact that there are also certain instances of strong argumental WHAT). In fact, in the comparison between the three languages, the crucial fact will be the uniform deficiency of the nonargumental instances of WHAT.

Before turning to the data, let us note once more that we will not attempt an account of the intricate syntax of argumental *que* and *quoi* in French. Though there exist a number of (mostly pre-generative) studies²⁸ the relations between these two elements are still insufficiently understood. While a comprehensive and coherent analysis would shed light on important points, it is not vital for our limited objective here.

The data are the following. Standard interrogative *que* is excluded from coordinated structures; *quoi* is not, and behaves here like other *wh*-phrases, including *pourquoi* ‘why’:

- (83)a. Qui ou quoi vous a donné cette idée?
 a.’ *Qui ou que
 ‘Who or what gave you this idea?’
 b. Qui ou quoi voudra-t-il consulter?
 *Qui ou que
 ‘Whom or what will he want to consult?’
 (84) Quand et pourquoi as-tu parlé avec Jean?
 ‘When and why did you talk to Jean?’

Quoi, but not *que*, can be contrastive focus, like other interrogative *wh*-phrases, including *pourquoi*:

- (85) Je n’ai pas dit: QUI a fait ce bruit, mais: QUOI a fait ce bruit.
 *QUE
 ‘I did not say, WHO made this noise, but: WHAT made this noise.’
 (86) Je n’ai pas dit: QUAND as-tu parlé avec lui, mais: POURQUOI as-tu parlé avec lui?
 ‘I did not say, WHEN did you talk to him, but: WHY did you talk to him?’

Quoi, but not *que*, can appear in isolation, like other interrogative *wh*-phrases including *pourquoi*, forming a truncated question (notice the use of the discourse particles *et* and *donc*, reminiscent of Pagotto *po*):

- (87) Vous écrivez (donc) ? (Et) Quoi?
 Vous écrivez (donc) ? (Et) *Que?
 ‘You write, then? What?’
 (88) Vous l’avez trouvé? Où ?(donc) ?
 ‘You found it? Where?’

As for the nonargumental instances of WHAT, *quoi* is never found, but only *que*; *que* is excluded in coordinated structures. (89), with ‘why’-like *que*, is independently excluded since *que* requires *ne* (alone), but other adverbial elements need the complete negation; given the obligatory violation of one of the two requirements, the status of (89) is inconclusive. (90), however, attests the weak status of exclamative *que*.

²⁸For studies of the relation between *que* and *quoi*, realized in earlier generative frameworks, see Obenauer (1976), Bouchard and Hirschbühler (1987).

- (89) *Que et depuis combien de temps n'écrit-il en prose?
 'Why and for how long has he not written prose?'
 (90) *Que et depuis combien de temps Jean est déjà malade!
 'To what an extent and for how long he has been sick!'

'Why'-like *que* and exclamative degree *que* are also unable to function as contrastive focus (see (91)-(92)), contrary to interrogative *quoi* and other *wh*-phrases.

- (91) *Je n'ai pas dit: DEPUIS QUAND n'écrit il pas en prose, mais: QUE n'écrit-il en prose.
 'I didn't say, SINCE WHEN hasn't he been writing prose, but: WHY doesn't he write prose.'
 (92) *Je n'ai pas dit: DEPUIS COMBIEN DE TEMPS Jean est malade!, mais: QUE Jean est malade!
 'I didn't say, FOR HOW LONG Jean has been sick!, but: HOW SICK Jean is!'

Finally, 'why'-like *que* cannot appear in isolation, as a truncated question, while its quasi-synonym *pourquoi* can function this way (see (93)). Exclamative *que* is excluded in isolation in the "afterthought" construction; for once, the "specialized" exclamative word *comme* is also excluded, and only *comment* is acceptable, as shown in (94).

- (93) Vous n'écrivez pas en prose. *Que?
 Pourquoi?
 'You don't write prose. Why?'
 (94) Il rit de nouveau, et *que !
 *comme !
 comment !
 'He is laughing again, and how!'

The diagnostics used, then, lead to slightly different results in French than in German and Pagotto. Let us summarize these results and try to interpret them.

On the descriptive level, there are two findings. The first is that the argumental instances of WHAT behave in part as strong elements (*was, cossa, quoi*)²⁹ and in part as deficient elements (*que*). This is, in fact, not unexpected given that in general, other argumental elements - pronouns - can also have either status. The second finding is that the nonargumental instances of WHAT (*was, cossa, que*), in contrast to the variable status of the argumental ones, are uniformly weak. This uniformity could be accidental, in which case it would have no particular significance. However, though the result concerns only three languages, we will tentatively assume that it is not due to chance. If we are correct, the uniformity is surprising, for at least two reasons.

To begin with, it might be the case that the obligatory deficiency has a general relation with nonargumenthood. This idea appears to be untenable: the deficient nonargumental instances of WHAT have close semantic counterparts which do not share their deficient status. Thus, the "specialized" interrogative *wh*-phrases *warum / perché / pourquoi* as well as exclamative *wie / come* are strong; only *comme* shows the

²⁹Note that some (or all) of these might, in addition to being strong, also be deficient, i.e. they might have homophonous deficient forms (see Cardinaletti and Starke (1994) for numerous examples in the domain of pronouns). The diagnostics used above do not check for such a possibility, which is in fact irrelevant to our purpose here.

behaviour of a deficient element. We conclude that there is no independent semantic reason imposing the deficient status of these elements. The fact that all six instances of nonargumental WHAT in the three languages are deficient is surprising and calls for explanation.

That the deficient status of nonargumental *was / cossa / que* should be considered surprising is also suggested by data from certain Northern Italian dialects. In investigating interrogative *wh*-phrases in these dialects, Poletto (in press) establishes a frequency scale for the appearance of deficient forms of *wh*-phrases, with *what* and *who* ranging highest. As for the *wh*-phrases we are concerned with, exclamative degree *how* is outside the scope of Poletto's study, but *why*, which figures in the lowest position, is attested, and is exclusively strong in the dialects examined.³⁰ From this viewpoint, too, the uniformly weak status of *was / cossa / que* is unexpected and must be accounted for.

We assume, then, that the obligatorily deficient status of 'why'-like WHAT and exclamative degree-like WHAT is crucially linked to the fact that these elements are instances of WHAT. More precisely, the particular relation between these elements and argumental WHAT must be such that nonargumental WHAT is necessarily deficient. Let us therefore, in the spirit of Cardinaletti and Starke (1994), adopt the hypothesis that the deficient forms of WHAT are impoverished structurally with respect to the strong forms, in that one or more projections are missing in them.

We are not in a position here to identify the missing piece of structure, but only to specify its relevant properties. It must be linked to the expression of argumenthood, and contain the semantic restriction ([+thing], as suggested above). Nonargumental WHAT, then, can only be deficient, in contrast to *how* and *why* (and their counterparts).³¹ Contrary to Cardinaletti and Starke, we do not take a stand concerning the functional character of the missing projection(s). Recall that this particular instance of structural deficiency is unique in the *wh*-paradigm, in that we do not find other cases of different meanings associated with one and the same *wh*-phrase, an exception related to the fact that [+thing] is the unmarked restriction.

To summarize, the uniformly deficient status of nonargumental WHAT in the three languages is an argument in favour of the unity hypothesis for WHAT. We assume that the deficient elements remain *wh*-words, that is, they keep their *wh*-feature. A crucial question that remains to be answered is how, in the absence of the semantic restriction [+thing], the deficient forms can get their interpretation. We will turn to this question in subsection 7.5.

³⁰Poletto notes that the coexistence of strong and deficient forms of the same *wh*-phrase is not rare (for example, the Friulian dialect of S. Michele al Tagliamento has a strong form *dulà*, a homophonous weakly deficient form *dulà*, and a clitic form *do*, all meaning 'where'). She also notes that for a given dialect, the frequency scale seems to be interpretable as an implicational scale: if a weak form exists for a lower-ranking *wh*-phrase, so does one for a higher-ranking one.

³¹Of course there also exist deficient instances of WHAT which are argumental, like French *que* (that is, deficiency is not intrinsically linked to nonargumenthood). This type of deficiency is of another type and exists independently, as also shown by certain of the cases mentioned by Poletto.

7.4. Underspecification beyond that of interrogative WHAT

We have assumed that WHAT is normally underspecified in its lexical restriction, given that [+thing] is the unmarked restriction, and that this is the reason why WHAT in principle tolerates the stronger semantic deficiency we related to the supposed structural deficiency discussed above.

As is well-known, it has sometimes been argued that an analysis in terms of a radical semantic deficiency (“expletive *wh*”, “scope marker”) is adequate for the *was* of the German construction illustrated in (95) (though not necessarily for all the “scope markers” of the languages in which a similar strategy is available). Recently, the issue has been much debated again; see Dayal (1996), Horvath (1997), and the articles in Lutz and Müller (1996) for recent conflicting analyses as well as further references.

- (95)a. Was glaubst du, wo er wohnt?
 what believe you where he lives
 ‘Where do you believe (that) he lives?’
 b. Was glaubst du, wie stark er ist?
 ‘How strong do you believe (that) he is?’
 etc.

To the extent then, that an analysis of this construction in terms of a semantically impoverished (possibly restrictionless) WHAT can be shown to be on the right track, the construction provides an independent argument in favor of the hypothesis that WHAT is accessible to the type of semantic deficiency we argued for.

7.5. Deficiency and contextual dependency: the case of ‘why’-like *was*

We showed earlier in this section that among the four main types of use of WHAT in French, German and Pagotto, two are structurally deficient, namely, the two nonargumental ones. At the same time, we were led to assume that these *wh*-phrases are also semantically deficient, with a weakened or possibly “lost” restriction. Consequently, questions arise as to the precise kind of semantic deficiency involved and to the way interpretations are obtained, given that the nonargumental *wh*-phrases do have “meanings”.

We will be able to give only a partial answer, while uncovering an intriguing interplay of relevant factors. In order to develop our answer, we will focus on one of the two *wh*-phrases, ‘why’-like WHAT, and examine its properties more closely. As we already noted, ‘why’-like *was* (section 5.2.2), *que* (section 4.2.2), and *cossa* (section 3.2.1.2) are subject, even apart from the “diagnostic contexts” used in section 7.3, to quite strong distributional restrictions which can be overcome through the addition of elements of a “modal” type. These restrictions are particularly visible when we contrast ‘why’-like WHAT, in given environments, with “specialized” *wh*-phrases like *warum*, *pourquoi*, *parché*, that is, with *wh*-phrases carrying the inherent semantic restriction [+reason].³²

³²As the following paragraph shows, “reason” is not more than a convenient label for a restriction whose precise definition can be left aside here. The question of the precise characterization of the meaning

Let us consider German as an exemplary case. German has different interrogative elements corresponding to Engl. *why*, *how come*, *what for*, that is, *wh*-phrases inquiring about the reason (cause, purpose, ...) for some action or situation, among which those in (96):

- (96)a. *warum*
 b. *weshalb, weswegen*
 c. *wozu*
 d. *wieso*

While these elements partially overlap in meaning, they also differ from each other in sometimes subtle ways (see Milner (1973) for remarks on some of these differences) which do not concern us here.

The meaning of *was* can be close to that of the elements in (96), but it is obligatorily closely linked to the expression of an attitude of the speaker ranging from mild surprise to strong disapproval.³³ Such a meaning can be present in (97) as well as (98), which do not display any obvious semantic difference:

- (97) Warum rennst du so schnell?
 why run you so fast
 ‘Why are you running so fast?’
 (98) Was rennst du so schnell?
 (same as (97))

Because of its necessary association with the expression of surprise, *was* cannot occur in a number of environments where *warum*, the semantically and stylistically most neutral of these elements, appears without difficulty. One such case is illustrated by the contrast (99) vs. (100):

- (99) Warum lacht (d)er?
 ‘Why is he laughing?’
 (100) *?Was lacht der?
 (101)a. Was lacht der denn ?
 b. denn so (blöd)
 ‘Why is he laughing ‘denn’ / ... ‘denn’ so (stupidly) ?’

The unacceptability of (100) contrasts with the acceptability of (101a,b).

In the context of (101), *denn* expresses that there is something unexpected or even inadequate about the event at hand, to the eyes of the speaker. It is one of the contextual elements which can make a sentence containing ‘why’-like *was* acceptable. *Denn* is a word with many uses;³⁴ in addition to its “modal” use, we will mention here

associated with ‘why’-like WHAT seems even more difficult. Here too, we limit ourselves to the intuitive characterization.

³³We assume that one of the factors expressing positions on this scale is intonation.

³⁴*Denn* is one of the elements called “Modalpartikeln” or “Abtönungspartikeln”, a set of free functional morphemes comprising *ja, etwa, schon, nur, auch, aber, vielleicht* and others. One of their common characteristics is that they are the homophones of “logico-contentive” (“logisch-inhaltlich”, König (1977, 115)) elements which are (in the same order) the German counterparts of English *yes, approximately,*

only one other use which seems to be basically present in all its modal uses. This basic value consists in connecting the sentence in which it appears either with a preceding utterance or more generally with the discourse situation. With this use, *denn* might roughly be translated by *and*:

- (102) Wo wohnt er denn?
‘And where does he live?’

The same value of *denn* seems to be present in follow-up questions like (103), where it functions as a discourse particle in the sense already observed with Pagotto *po* and French *donc* (cf. (75), (81), (88) above).

- (103) Er kommt? Wann denn?
‘He is coming? When?’

On the other hand, (102)/(103) can also be interpreted - with a different intonation - as questions expressing surprise.

Keeping in mind the two uses - “pure” discourse particle vs. expression of the speaker’s surprise - let us note that *denn* qua modal particle is excluded in non-questions:

- (104) *Der Oskar lacht denn!

Given (101), (104) might be expected to express the speaker’s surprise at Oskar’s laughing; the sentence, however, cannot have this meaning and is in fact ungrammatical.³⁵

In Yes-No questions, on the other hand, *denn* can have a meaning very close to that observed with *was*:

- (105) Ist es denn schon Mitternacht?
‘But is it already midnight?’

already, only, also, but, perhaps etc. (*denn* here corresponds to *because*, or more precisely to French *car*). We are not concerned here with the latter functions (conjunctions, adverbs, etc.), but with the use of *denn* etc. as modal particles. As such, these elements have no word-for-word counterparts in English (and in many other languages); they are standardly described as expressing the attitude of the speaker with respect to the propositional content of the sentence or towards the discourse situation.

See, within the rich literature about modal particles, Bayer (1991) and the articles collected in Weydt (1977).

³⁵In syntactic declaratives, surprise is expressed by the particle *ja*:

- (i)a. Es ist ja schon Mitternacht!
(I’m amazed) It is already midnight!
b. Das schwimmt ja!
But it floats!

Denn is also incompatible with exclamatives:

- (ii) Wie der Ø lügt!
*denn
‘How (blatantly) he lies!’

Denn here expresses surprise; in the appropriate context the meaning can include disapproval:

- (106) Ist der denn verrückt?
‘But is he crazy?’

The *denn* we are concerned with in (101) (and (105)), then, is specialized in giving questions a surprise flavor, in a way comparable to certain instances of English *the hell/ on earth* etc. (which, however, form a constituent with a *wh*-phrase and do not appear in Yes-No questions). Contrary to *was*, *denn* is not by itself colloquial, but compatible with colloquial style.³⁶

The attitude of the speaker can also be expressed, via *denn*, with *warum* or the other *wh*-words in (96) - cf. (107); in contrast with the case of *was*, the expression of surprise does not condition their use, but is optional:

- (107)a. Warum lacht der denn?
b. Warum lacht der denn so blöd?
‘But why does he laugh (so stupidly)?’

Denn is not the only contextual element facilitating the occurrence of ‘why’-like *was*. The same type of obligatory “licensing” through another such element appeared already in our earlier example (98) *Was rennst du so schnell?*, as shown by the contrast with (108); *warum* is perfect without *so* (*schnell*):

- (108) *Was rennst du?
(109)a. Warum rennst du Ø ?
b. so schnell

Another example of this type of strategy is shown in (110), to be compared with (111) (with a ‘why’-like interpretation of *was*).

- (110)a. Was schreit der schon wieder?
b. why shouts he already again

- (111)a. Was schreit der *Ø

³⁶It is a common property of *wh*-questions and Yes-No-questions containing *denn* that they bring into play the situation in which speaker and hearer find themselves: in (101) they are in the presence of the person laughing, (105) is natural only in the context of a preceding utterance or another element of the situation pointing to the late hour.

The fact that *denn* makes reference to a preceding element of the discourse or the situation has been repeatedly stressed in the literature. Kühner und Stegmann (1914, vol. II, 116), a Grammar of Latin, mentions “die Fragesätze mit *nam*, welche lebhaft, leidenschaftliche Fragen enthalten, wie im Griechischen die Fragen mit $\gamma\alpha\rho$ und im Deutschen die mit *denn*. Solche Fragen beziehen sich auf vorher Ausgesagtes” (“... [Latin] interrogatives with *nam*, which contain vivid, passionate questions, like in Greek questions with $\gamma\alpha\rho$ and in German those with *denn*. Such questions refer to things said earlier ...”). König (1977, note 4) cites earlier work by Weydt where it is said that “... *denn* ... weist darauf hin, daß die Frage auf etwas vorher Angesprochenes Bezug nimmt” (“*denn* ... indicates that the question refers to something mentioned earlier”). König (ibid., 121ff.) develops this observation by noting that interrogatives containing *denn* can go back to aspects of the situation more generally (and not necessarily to linguistic aspects of it, i.e. not necessarily to preceding utterances).

- b. OKdenn so

Schon wieder expresses that the shouting occurs with short intervals and may be conceived as expression of the speaker's attitude concerning the event. This is again the case with *so*, indicating a degree (considered surprising and possibly excessive). Notice that the facts are parallel for *lachen*, which is intransitive only, and *schreien*, ambiguously transitive or intransitive.

(112) is another relevant example.

(112)a.??Was machst du die Vorhänge zu?

- b. Was machst du am helllichten Tag die Vorhänge zu?

'Why are you closing the curtain (in the middle of the day)?'

The PP *am helllichten Tag* (lit. 'in broad daylight'), pointed out by Josef Bayer (personal communication), again facilitates the presence of 'why'-like *was*.

Let us consider again the different elements which can play a kind of licensing role for *was*, and which we repeat under (113), in an obviously open list.

(113)a. *denn*

b. *so*

c. (*schon*) *wieder*

d. *am helllichten Tag*

Certain distinctions can be drawn between these elements. *Denn* is the modal particle with no precise lexical meaning and the grammatical function of attributing a modal value to the sentence. This property opposes *denn* to the three other elements collectively, which do not have such a function, but which have a lexical content that increases from (b) to (d). They do not grammaticalize an attitude of the speaker, like *denn*, but rather represent "noteworthy" or "extraordinary" aspects of the content of the sentence, in fact "reasons" for the surprise felt. Each of them realizes this function in a different way, according to their lexical status and semantic precision: *so* as degree or manner adverb, (*schon*) *wieder* as an expression of repetition and *am helllichten Tag* as a full adverbial PP.

The difference between *denn* and the other three items seems essential: the modal particle *denn*, in fact an affective element, contrasts with the elements expressing what the speaker perceives as the factual basis of the surprise he feels.³⁷ There is also another type of evidence for this distinction, namely the fact that *denn* can cooccur, without redundancy, with the elements (b)-(d):

(114)a. Was rennst du denn so schnell?

- b. Was schreit der denn schon wieder?

c. Was machst du denn am helllichten Tag die Vorhänge zu?

We conclude that *denn* is the fundamental element among the apparent "licensors" of 'why'-like *was*. More precisely, as anticipated in section 6, we take it to be located in the functional projection EvP hypothesized by Cinque (1999) in the highest portion of

³⁷In being affective, *denn* also contrasts with adverbs like *erstaunlicherweise* 'surprisingly', located by Cinque (1999) in Spec,EvP.

IP.³⁸ Given our assumption that ‘why’-like *que / cosa / was* come to occupy [Spec,EvCP], this amounts to having two different projections related to the expression of the speaker’s attitude in the sentence, a case of “matching” perhaps comparable to the one pointed out in Rizzi (1997) between the finiteness specification in the C system and that in the I system.³⁹

We already noted that intonation plays an important role in sentences with surprise modality, and assumed that the range and intensity of the relevant attitudes - from light surprise to strong disapproval - is in part expressed through it. Intonation is also, we now assume, what makes the optional absence of *denn* in sentences like (114a-c) possible: in the presence of *so*, (*schon*) *wieder*, *am helllichten Tag*, etc., “surprise” intonation suffices to license EvP with a covert head, in our terms, covert *denn*.

In the light of our present understanding of “licensing” by modal elements, let us now come back to the central point of this subsection, namely, the nature of the semantic deficiency of ‘why’-like *was*. A relevant observation is the following.

The almost intermediate (instead of unacceptable) status of (112a) ??*Was machst du die Vorhänge zu?* suggests that elements of the predicate itself also can contribute to “accommodating” *was* in the absence of overt *denn*, and that this effect should not be limited to elements which in a sense are adjuncts of the predicate. This idea leads to the hypothesis that “remarkable” - in the sense of “specific, nonneutral” - informational content is essential for the “licensing” of ‘why’-like *was*. In other words, the presence of *was* in the sentence should be more difficult if the lexical information is minimal, in the intuitive sense of “neutral”, “weak”. Examples like (115a,b) seem to confirm this hypothesis.⁴⁰

- (115)a. **Was machst du das denn?*
 ‘Why are you doing this?’

³⁸We leave open the question whether the other types of use of the particle *denn* also bring into play the projection EvP.

³⁹One possible way of obtaining the “Matching effect” in our case is the following. Let us assume that *denn*, qua particle, is a head, and that it can head the EvP in IP. Modal particles are generally tied to particular syntactic environments (i.e., sentence types; cf. König (1977), Bayer (1991, 260ff), a.o.), a point we stressed above in relation with *denn* and *ja*. *Denn* qua particle is strictly limited to interrogatives (*wh*- and Yes-No), which might be expressed by its having a feature that must be checked. In a case like (i):

- (i) *Wo steckt er denn?*
 ‘Where the hell is he?’

wo could be attracted to [Spec,EvP] if *denn* had an (uninterpretable) feature [+*wh*]; *denn*’s *wh*-feature would be checked there. A second process could take place at the same time: the *wh*-word might be assigned the feature [+Ev] by *denn*, insuring its movement up to [Spec,EvCP].

For this device to derive the “matching effect” on a general basis, several conditions may have to be met. In Yes-No questions, the checking of *denn*’s *wh*-feature must be performed by a Yes-No operator which would have to be merged below EvP. The same requirement applies to ‘why’-like *was*. Furthermore, the verb must be able to skip the filled head position of EvP on its way to the C-domain. Whether these assumptions turn out to be correct will be left open here. Alternatively, a dependency of a different type might require the direct matching of some feature shared by *denn* and C°EvP.

The “checking stopover” suggested for cases like (i), though different in its motivation, shares essential properties with a similar device proposed by Hasegawa (1999) for his ParticleP in exclamatives.

⁴⁰I am indebted for example (115b) to Josef Bayer.

- b. *Was tust du denn etwas?
 ‘Why are you doing something?’

It is visibly the difference in informational content between *die Vorhänge zumachen* ‘close the curtains’ and the “neutral” predicate *das tun* ‘do it/that’ that accounts for the contrast between (112a,b) and (115a). Notice in particular that *denn* is present in (115a,b), but in no way sufficient to ensure acceptability.

On the other hand, substitution of *warum* for *was* leads to entirely acceptable sentences, even without *denn*:

- (116)a. Warum macht er das (denn) ?
 b. Warum tust du (denn) etwas?

As for (115a,b), native speakers, beyond simply rejecting these sentences, qualify them as (quasi) incomprehensible, and point out that it is *was* in particular which appears to be uninterpretable; *was* does not seem to have any content here.⁴¹ This contrasts with cases like (108) **Was rennst du?* ‘Why are you running?’, where, in spite of its unacceptable status, the ‘why’-like interpretation of *was* seems to be possible. More directly, (115) contrasts with (117), which has an entirely parallel structure, but a verb with more “content”.

- (117) (?)Was versteckst du es denn?
 ‘Why are you hiding it?’

We take these judgments to provide the answer to our earlier question concerning the type of semantic “weakening” correlated with structural deficiency in the case of ‘why’-like *was*. Rather than a true “weakening”, difficult to conceive in concrete ways, as noted, it seems to be the total absence of any semantic restriction that we are dealing with.⁴² Consequently, no range is associated to ‘why’-like *was*.

If this assumption is correct, how does “empty” *was* get an interpretation, overcoming the violation, and why is the actual interpretation a ‘why’-like one? We have shown in what precedes, in particular through the comparison of *was* and *warum*, that a number of factors intervene in the acceptability, hence the interpretation, of sentences containing this *was*. Leaving aside intonation, these factors include (at least) those in (118).

- (118)a. sentence type (*wh*-interrogative),
 b. the projection EvP, contributing evaluative - more precisely surprise - modality,
 c. “contentful” elements in the sentence.

It is thus not possible to assume that in a *wh*-interrogative, in the absence of a restriction in the *wh*-phrase, the grammar provides a ‘why’-like reading, in the sense of a “default”

⁴¹Josef Bayer points out to me that (115a) can become acceptable under particular circumstances, for example in a situation where *das* is used deictically and where the predicate *das machen* “points” to some sufficiently remarkable action being performed. Clearly, this improvement of the status of the sentence is due to its content being richer than in the neutral use of (115a) considered in the text.

⁴²Our conclusion confirms for the case of ‘why’-like *was* an intuition formulated by d’Avis (1996) for this *wh*-phrase as well as for exclamative degree *was* and the *was* ... *w* construction.

reading always available. On the contrary, the presence of evaluative modality is crucial, and more precisely, the presence of a particular type of this modality, namely the type “surprise” (to give an example, we assume that, if there existed a (non-surprise) analogue of *denn* expressing a “satisfaction” evaluation by the speaker - i.e. an analogue related to the meaning ‘fortunately’ - no ‘why’-like reading could be assigned).

Factor (118c) is plausibly pragmatically determined, since what counts as contentful may vary according to the situation; however, the way (118c) intervenes - which is not clear to us - may involve a syntactic/semantic device yet to be formulated.

Let us come back to the role of modality. The crucial role of “surprise” in the licensing of ‘why’-like *was* is also shown by the fact that the *wh*-word is incompatible with -realis Tense; *warum* is compatible with it:

- (119)a. *Was wirst / würdest du es denn verstecken?
 b. Warum wirst / würdest du es verstecken?
 ‘Why are you going to / why would you hide it?’⁴³

To be acceptable, a sentence with ‘why’-like *was* must imply the truth of the propositional content.⁴⁴ In other words, the contrast in (119) suggests that among the different instances of *denn*, there is a “factive surprise *denn*”, different from the “nonfactive surprise *denn*” in (120):

- (120) Warum würdest du es denn verstecken?
 (But) Why would you hide it?

and that only “factive surprise *denn*” can contribute to “licensing” ‘why’-like *was*. While we do not understand the process yet, we are led to assume that the ‘why’-like interpretation results from the interplay of the semantically empty [+*wh was*], on the one hand, and the factors in (118) on the other, including factivity. Given the extensive parallelism between ‘why’-like *was* and its French and Pagotto counterparts, we obviously extend this assumption to the latter two.⁴⁵

⁴³Analogous contrasts obtain for irrealis in the past:

- (i) *Was hättest du es denn versteckt?
 Warum hättest du es denn versteckt?
 ‘Why would you have hidden it?’

⁴⁴For a similar case with argumental *cossa*, cf. note 5.

⁴⁵In Latin, the “neutral accusative” form *quid* ‘what’ could be used with the meaning ‘why’, and the analogous form of the pronoun *id* ‘that’ with a meaning corresponding to ‘for that reason’ (Kühner and Stegmann, vol. I, 279):

- (i) Loquere: quid venisti?
 ‘Tell me: why did you come?’
 (ii) Id venimus.
 ‘We have come for that reason.’

The absence of literal analogues of (ii) - cf. the German (iii) - suggests that the “reason interpretation” in Latin and the ‘why’-like reading of WHAT in French, German and Pagotto involve different processes.

Let us add here a brief digression on the other nonargumental WHAT, that is, the one expressing exclamative degree. Since it is structurally and, we assume, semantically deficient in ways parallel to ‘why’-like WHAT, the interpretation it eventually gets should again be construed from elements of the sentential context. Given the little we know about modality in exclamatives, the question why nonargumental WHAT has a ‘why’-like interpretation in interrogatives, but a degree reading in exclamatives may a priori involve quite different alternative reasons.⁴⁶ It appears, however, that the restriction “degree” is in a sense a “minimal” solution, as one would expect it to be.

Indeed, basic data from a certain number of languages, among which English, French and German, show that only “degree” is, in the unmarked case, a possible restriction for exclamative quantification (cf. Elliott (1974) and Grimshaw (1977) for English, and Obenauer (1994, ch. III) for French). This is illustrated, in English, by (121)/(122).

- (121)a. How tall Jim is!
 b. What a car he bought!
 (122)a. *?Who Jim met!
 c. *?Where he found it!

Let us assume that in languages (and constructions - cf. *It's amazing who Jim met*) where “nondegree” *wh*-words can appear with an exclamative reading, they are in fact “accommodated” by additional devices. Turning back to the question of construal of a restriction for exclamative *was / que / cossa*, we note that economy considerations will exclude resorting to such devices and limit construal of a restriction to the type of restrictions that do not depend on them; this is what one finds.

Needless to say, the question of the precise construal of the exclamative degree reading of WHAT remains open.

To summarize, we examined in this section two types of distributional restrictions affecting nonargument WHAT, namely, the restrictions revealed by the “diagnostic environments” of subsection 7.3, whose nature is syntactic in the first place, and the restrictions related to the need for “modal licensing” of ‘why’-like WHAT, which are of a semantic nature. Both were argued to reduce, in the end, to the same cause, namely, structural deficiency in Cardinaletti and Starke’s (1994) sense.

The extensive crosslinguistic parallelism shown by the different types of use of WHAT motivates the hypothesis of the “unity” of WHAT in the lexicon. The semantic vacuity of the nonargumental WHATs and their need for “licensing” are unexpected under an a priori possible alternative hypothesis,⁴⁷ namely, the hypothesis that these WHATs are independent *wh*-phrases like *warum / wozu / weshalb* and *wie*. Deficiency and the resulting loss of features make sense *within* one and the same lexical element; independent elements should have their inherent meaning (as they indeed do - cf. *warum* etc.).

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- (iii) *Ich bin das gekommen.
 (iv) Ich bin darum gekommen.
 ‘I came for that reason.’

⁴⁶The restriction “reason” is not a priori incompatible with exclamation:

- (i) (You won’t believe) for what an astonishing reason he decided to disappear!

⁴⁷Not a very plausible one, for the reason just given.

This reasoning has the following implication for the relation between *cozza* and *che*. If *cozza* were an item independent of *che*, the ‘why’-like reading would be extremely surprising, since there would be no reason why *cozza* should have exactly (the needs for licensing and) the (derived) meaning of “impoverished” WHAT. We conclude that *che* and *cozza* are just one lexical item, differing in feature content and spelled out differently.

8. Conclusion

In this paper we have argued for the existence, within the CP-layer of the sentence structure, of a functional projection Ev(aluative)CP whose specifier can be filled across languages by the *wh*-element WHAT and other *wh*-phrases, thereby expressing the speaker’s attitude towards the event referred to.

The variety of possible interpretations of WHAT finds a natural framework of explanation within the hypothesis, strongly suggested by the crosslinguistic parallelisms on the syntactic and semantic level, that they all derive from the initially weaker - in the sense of “unmarked” - specification of WHAT, in comparison with the other *wh*-phrases.

The North-Eastern Italian dialect Pagotto exhibits overtly a distinction which is covertly present in French and German, namely that reflecting the division of labor between *wh*-elements that appear in different positions in the left periphery. The distinction, contrary to what might be expected a priori, is not made along the lines of the [\pm argumental] divide. Rather, it opposes standard interrogative interpretation in the sense of “genuine request for information” to several other types, gathered together under the label “pseudo-interrogatives”, among which exclamation and non genuine questions.

The syntactic reflex of this distinction is the appearance of standard interrogative *wh*-phrases in the lower CP-domain, as compared to the higher sites determined by the functional projections relevant for the “noncanonical” uses of WHAT. Given this distinction, *cozza* is the “second face” of *che* in that it can move to the sites which are inaccessible to *che*.

The striking overt differences between *was* and *que*, always sentence initial, on the one hand, and *che/cozza*, on the other, reduce to the simple interaction between the landing site requirements and the possibility for *che* to stay in a low CP-position.

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