

Separating 'n from *denn* – Evidence from Special Questions

German possesses a modal particle *denn*, lit. 'then', that usually occurs in interrogative clauses (Bayer 2012; Thurmaier 1989; König 1977), illustrated in (1).

- (1) *Was machst du denn da?*
what make you DENN there
'What are you doing there?'

The sentence in (1) also has a corresponding version where 'n appears instead of *denn*, shown in (2).

- (2) *Was machst'n du da?*
what make-N you there
'What are you doing there?'

Despite the rich literature on *denn*, 'n is rarely discussed in the literature. The few articles mentioning 'n analyze it as a phonologically reduced version of *denn* (Bayer 2017; Wegener 2002: 379; Thurmaier 1991: 378). The only difference between 'n and *denn* is that 'n occurs in second position.

The aim of this talk is to show that synchronically 'n is not a reduced version of *denn* but a separate particle. The data I present come from the North East Berlin dialect of German, which has both *denn* and 'n. The arguments I develop center on the behavior of *denn* and 'n in Special Questions, that is, interrogative clauses that are not requests for information (Obenauer 2004; 2006). I argue that 'n is a genuine question particle: it marks the ignorance of the speaker towards the true answer. *denn*, on the other hand, marks the expectation of the speaker that the addressee knows the answer. Regarding the position of 'n, I argue that 'n is not a syntactic second position clitic, but a phonological second position clitic.

References

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