

PA6.1 – Wh-less degree questions

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I. The form-meaning mismatch: 0:1

- The (dialectal) Norwegian *Null Degree Question* (NDQ) is a V1 *wh*-less question asking for degree. On the surface, NDQs look form-identical to a polar question (PQ), but are unambiguously understood as DQs by speakers. [3]

(1) ER du gammel(/*tørst/*ung) (nøyaktig)?
are you old thirsty young exactly
'How old are you (exactly)?'

- Background:** Non-PQ behavior: felicity in "anti"-PQ contexts; prosody; semantic restrictions on ADJ (SMR) [3]; co-occurrence with *sånn cirka* 'approximately'. [1][2][3] Svenonius and Kennedy: a (phonologically) null degree operator; a null Deg⁰ *meas* (encoding measurement; in complementary distribution with *pos*).

(2) [_{CP} Op₁ er₂ [_{IP} du t₂ [_{DegP} t₁ gammel]]] [3]

However: NDQs may embed under *om* 'if'. [4]

- Case study: the morpheme *pass*** – occurs with:
(i) *wh*-word[4]: *how pass old*
(ii) deictic/causal *så* 'that/so': *so pass old (that)*
(iii) NDQs[4] (for certain dialects)
Assumption: *pass* contributes a 'roughly'-meaning [1]

• Research questions

- What is the morphosyntax of the NDQ? (Covertly *wh*-question or underlying PQ after all?)
- What is the morphosyntax and function of *pass*? What is its exact meaning contribution?
- Do we find cases of overt split *wh*-degree in Norwegian (like Icelandic [3])?

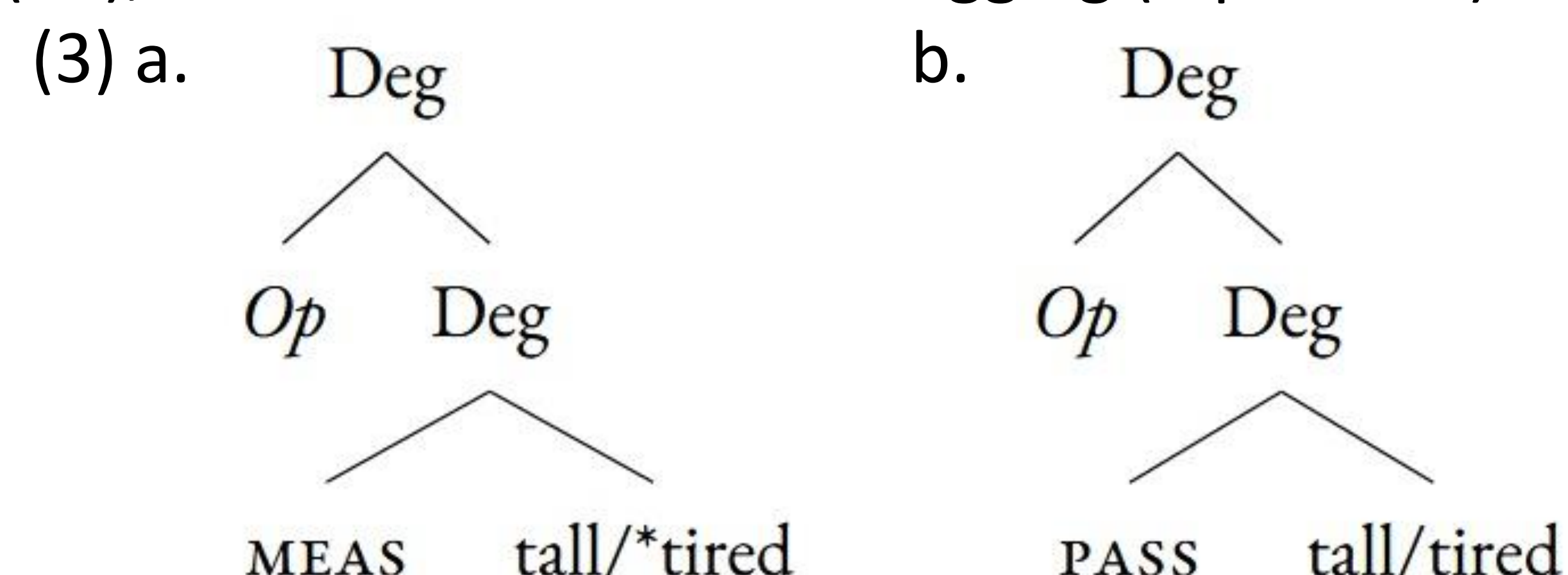
II. Methodology and hypotheses

- Method:
 - Questionnaire with 32 participants from the Helgeland region.
- Hypotheses:
 - If *pass* has a meaning like 'roughly' (approximation), it should (i) ensure a degree (*wh*-) question reading and (ii) not be compatible with 'exactly'.
 - NDQs, if *wh*-questions, should be sensitive to strong islands.

III. Results and discussion

- NDQs with *pass* read only as *wh*-questions
 - Pass* lifts SMR; allows *exactly* (and precision reading)
- Other findings:
- Embedded NDQs and structural ambiguity (matrix Spec,CP and embedded Spec,CP *wh*-readings)
 - NDQs seem not sensitive to Subject and Complex NP islands
 - NDQs embed under polar *om* 'if', but also *at* 'that'.
 - "In-situ" readings of NDQs (with SVO).
 - Overt split in Helgelandic with *ke* 'what'.

- Pass*: a functional degree morpheme? *Pass* vs. *meas* [3]: not fully equivalent. *Pass* lifts the semantic restriction (3b); *meas* needs contextual rigging (if possible).



- While still inconclusive, the results indicate a *wh*-status of NDQs: e.g. no PQs with *pass*, structural ambiguity (4), and "in-situ" readings. **Problem:** NDQs did not show e.g. a Subject island effect (5).

(4) Spørt du om ho va gammel?
asked you if she was old
'How old did you ask if she was?',
'Did you ask how old she was?'

(5) Trur du mange har sedd videoen no?
think you many have seen video.DEF now
'How many do you think have seen the video now?'

IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- This project sheds light on and raise further questions about the form-meaning relation in question formation, the inventory of linguistic means involved, the syntax and semantics of degree, and language variation.
- The interaction of syntactic, phonological and interpretive factors in question-form variation (Project 6.2)**
 - Polar complementizers: Syntax, semantics and variation?