

Reference repair in German and French

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Abstract

This conversation analytic study examines the use and function of repair initiators in German and French, in particular those beginning with specific *wh*-words and targeting prior references to objects or phenomena (i.e., non-person entities). In both languages, the specific repair initiators vary depending upon the type of reference problem encountered. For underspecified prior referents, repairs are initiated with *was/was denn* (*what*.) in German and *le quoi* (*what*) in French. Failures to recognize prior referents prompt the repair initiators *was ist* (*what is*) in German, and *c'est quoi* (*what is*) in French. With lexical access issues, these latter repair initiators are followed by *noch mal* (*again*) and *déjà* (*already*) in German and French, respectively. The repair initiators *welch-* (*which*) in German and *lequel* (*which*) follow failures to identify one referent from among a given set. If no set is identifiable, the repair initiator *was für* (*what x*) is used in German; there is no corresponding repair initiator in the French corpus. Non-comprehension of turns or actions prompt repair initiations with *wie* (*what*) + repeat in German, and with *hein* (*huh*) + repeat in French. Where relevant, the study also discusses translation-related issues that concern both crosslinguistic similarity and interactional accomplishment.

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1. Introduction

As explained in the introduction to this special issue, much of the work on reference has been on person reference. In line with the other articles in this issue, we are interested in practices that target a referential problem that does not involve person reference. Specifically, the present paper analyzes the use and function of repair initiators that target prior “thing” references in German and French, i.e., references to objects and (abstract) concepts. The analysis concentrates on those repairs that include specific *wh*-words to initiate repair. German has different *wh*-questions that target a problem with the reference to an object or phenomenon¹:

Excerpt 1: Was (denn) (Egbert et al., 2009: 113)

1 L: Bärbel du hast se zuletzt gehabt.
 Bärbel you had it last have.
 Bärbel you had it last.

=> 2 B: Was denn,
 what PRT,
 what.

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¹ All data segments were (re)transcribed using the transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson as described in Atkinson and Heritage (1984). For each line of talk, there are three lines in the transcript. The first line represents the original talk, the second a word-for-word gloss, and the third line consists of an idiomatic English translation. When the gloss and the idiomatic translation are identical, the line with the gloss is omitted.

Excerpt 2: Was ist [E_H_Filme_neu]¹

=> 1 E: =oh ich glaub wir kriegen heute unsern midterm wieder.
 =oh i believe we get today our midterm((English)) back.
 =oh I believe we'll get our midterm back today.

2 (0.5)

3 H: was is das?
what is that?

Excerpt 3: Welch- [Sandra&Lena_2.45_Himbeer]

1 S: ich möchte wo das weiss drauf ist.
 i want where that white on top is.
 i want where it's white on top.

2 A: das weisse? dies weisse oder das weisse da?
 the white? this white or that white there?
the white one? this white one or that white one?

3 (.)

=> 4 R: welches weisse?
which+neuter white?
which white one?

Excerpt 4: Was für- [Oregon_1A_0.30_lampe]

3 O: eben war dein vater da der hat mir die lampe festgestellt
 just now was your father here he has me the lamp adjusted
you father was just here he adjusted the lamp for me

4 (.)

5 O: die is' immer runtergerutscht
 she is always slipped down
it always slipped down

=> 6 M: .hh was für 'ne lampe?
 .hh what kind of a lamp?
 .hh what lamp?

Excerpt 5: Wie + repeat [AIK]

1 I: un wat die alle mit ha:ben so jetzt diese-
 and what they all with ha:ve like now these-
and all the things they ca:rry along these days

2 I: diese::- [stöckskes
 these::- [little sticks

[
 3 K: [stöcke,
 [sticks,

4 (0.2)

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