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## Linguistic Variation in the Realization of Rhetorical Questions – Providing Semantics and Pragmatics for German RQs

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In this talk we provide a semantic and pragmatic analysis of rhetorical questions (RQs) in German. RQs differ from information-seeking question (ISQ) in that there is usually only one possible answer intended by the speaker. We explore the role of several semantic building blocks whose composition obligatorily or possibly leads to the interpretation of a question as rhetorical. We mainly focus on rhetorical questions marked with the discourse particle *schon* and those marked with a combination of a subjunctive auxiliary and negation.

- (1) Wer mag **schon** Spinat?  
*Who like.3sg particle spinach*  
‘Who likes spinach?’
- (2) Wer **hätte** nicht gerne einen Ferrari?  
*Who have.3sg.subj neg gladly a Ferrari*  
‘Who wouldn’t gladly own a Ferrari?’

These two types of constructions robustly carry rhetorical readings, where (1) expresses that nobody likes spinach and (2) expresses that everybody wants to own a Ferrari. Following the literature, we assume that the semantic input of the two question types leads to their pragmatic interpretation as RQs. For this reason, we propose a lexical entry for the discourse particle *schon*. Thereby, we show that *schon* contains a temporal component that affects the felicity of *schon* RQs in specific temporal contexts. We apply this analysis to *subj+neg* RQs and show the temporal semantics of *schon* are actually part of the pragmatic interpretation of RQs, while tense is not.

**References:** • Abraham, W. (1991): *Discourse Particles: Descriptive and Theoretical Investigations on the Logical, Syntactic and Pragmatic Properties of Discourse Particles in German*, volume 12. John Benjamins Publishing. • Biezma, M. and K. Rawlins (to appear): Rhetorical Questions: Severing Questioning from Asking. • Caponigro, I. and J. Sprouse (2007): Rhetorical Questions as Questions. In: *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 11, 121–133. • Meibauer, Jörg. 1986. *Rhetorische Fragen*, volume 167. Walter de Gruyter.