

Against *wohl* in ForceP

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1 Introduction

This short article takes issue with the syntactico-semantic solution that Zimmermann (2004) has developed for the evidential or epistemic German discourse particle *wohl* ‘supposedly’ as in (1).

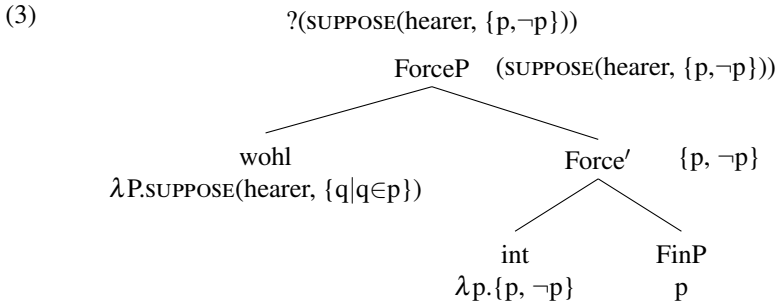
- (1) Katharina wird doch wohl 50 und nicht 60, richtig?
‘Katharina is turning 50 and not 60, right?’

Zimmermann (2004) proposes an LF movement account where *wohl* moves to ForceP. I present evidence to the effect that this cannot be the case. What I propose instead is that Force/C informs T so as to provide the right semantic object further down such that *wohl* can perform its duty in its surface position.

2 Zimmermann (2004)

Zimmermann (2004) follows a trend prominent in the formal semantics literature to have evidential, epistemic or mirative markers interact with the speech-act encoding ForceP (Rett and Murray 2013 and work based on this). While Rett and Murray (2013) remain silent about the exact syntactic implementation, Zimmermann (2004) bites the bullet and proposes that the German evidential or epistemic particle *wohl* is not interpreted in its surface position following the inflected verb in main clauses, but LF-moves to SpecForceP to do its Force-interaction work there. In this position all the right categories would seem to be available. (3) renders Zimmermann’s (2004: 22) compositional derivation of relevant portions of a question with *wohl* as in (2) (I removed a faulty question mark in the second highest denotation of (3)).

- (2) Hat Katharina wohl auch ihren Ex-Chef eingeladen?
‘Did Katharina WOHL invite her ex-boss, too?’/‘Do you suppose Katharina invited her ex-boss, too?’



The Force head *int* in (3) converts the *p* denotation of *FinP* into a question radical, the set of *p* and $\neg p$. Then the commitment downtoner in *SpecForceP*, the denotation of *wohl*, results in a denotation stating that the hearer supposes *p* or $\neg p$. The speech-act question operator in the highest line converts this into a full-blown question denotation, a question which asks whether the hearer supposes *p* or not *p*.

Let us note two things for what is coming. First, the introduction of the set containing *p* and $\neg p$ and the introduction of the question operator are not in complete adjacency. The *SUPPOSE* operator intervenes. Second, there is no constituent corresponding to the question operator *?*. In Zimmermann's (2004) work, the latter peculiarity is not so visible, as the denotation of *ForceP*, unwarrantedly, already has this operator.

3 Problems with the LF movement account and a solution

In this section I will present a problem that Zimmermann's (2004) account for *wohl* faces, and I will reconstitute the view that *wohl* indeed takes scope in its surface position. We will note a dilemma that results from this surface-orientedness, and I will sketch a solution for it.

Zimmermann's (2004) account works beautifully, and it has become popular in the literature on German (cf., recently, Tan and Mursell 2022). Nonetheless there are some very basic facts that are incompatible with it. Consider (4).

- (4) Zum Glück feiert Katharina wohl am 13. Februar.
 'Fortunately, Katharina will supposedly party on February 13.'

It is clear beyond doubt that the adverbial *zum Glück* 'fortunately' takes scope over *wohl*. (4) means that it is fortunate that Katharina will supposedly party on that date. It does not mean that the speaker supposes that it is fortunate that Katharina will do that. Cinque's (1999) order of his highest I-level categories (better dubbed low C domain categories; Bross and Hole 2017) makes

us expect this scope order. Now, if *wohl* LF-moved to ForceP, then *zum Glück* would have to move along to a position above *wohl*'s landing site to yield the correct reading. The problem doesn't get better with (5).

- (5) Ehrlich gesagt feiert Katharina zum Glück wohl am 13. Februar.
'Frankly speaking, Katharina will fortunately supposedly party on February 13.'

On Zimmermann's account, both *zum Glück* and the speech-act adverbial *ehrlich gesagt* 'frankly speaking' would have to move after *wohl* now to render the correct reading. I deem this to be highly unlikely and draw the conclusion that *wohl* takes scope in precisely that position in which we find it at the surface; a low C-level position (Struckmeier 2014).

This conclusion comes with a big problem. Recall that Zimmermann's (2004) account elegantly derives the behavior of *wohl* in 'yes/no'-questions. To this end, he has *wohl*'s denotation interact with the correct semantic object for questions: the set of p and its negation $\neg p$. It would appear that this is what the Force head (Rizzi 1997) yields after computation with its sister, and this is precisely how Zimmermann designs his analysis. This leaves us with a huge dilemma. On the one hand *wohl* cannot be in ForceP, because it takes scope below this category. On the other hand *wohl* would seem to have to be in ForceP, because that is where the right semantic object for questions – $\{p, \neg p\}$ – becomes available.

Here's a way out of this dilemma. If Force/C informed T about it being a 'yes/no'-question, then T could generate the desired semantic object in TP and hand it on upwards. Force would then, and this is what Zimmermann achieves without a constituent performing this job, be a function from contexts to contexts (Truckenbrodt 2006). Note that it is quite common to assume that C and T communicate (indirectly in Kratzer 2009, directly in van Koppen 2017, and many before him who have investigated complementizer agreement). In the end, this is what phases are good for (with VoiceP and CP/ForceP being clear phases, and protracted shipping to the interfaces in-between). As said a moment ago and with these adjustments in place, the head of ForceP is now free to host the constituent that converts (SUPPOSE(hearer, $\{p, \neg p\}$)) into $?(SUPPOSE(hearer, \{p, \neg p\}))$.

4 Conclusions

It was really funny how Katharina and I became befriended. We are both friends with DB, and that's why we traveled to his wedding in L.A. in the noughts. We only understood this afterwards, it was a fake wedding. They had gotten married beforehand, then medical beauty benefits had applied to

D's wife, and then they invited people to their fake wedding. Katharina and I were furious when we found out. However, the two of us went hiking in some nameless mountains near L.A. after the "wedding", and we had the greatest time there.

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