On wh-head-movement and the Doubly Filled Comp Filter

In this paper we will re-address the issues that arise in the context of the Doubly Filled Comp Filter (DFCF) of the type *[wh + complementizer] in embedded questions. Contrary to common belief, it is not the case that merely some dialects (especially Southern German dialects, but e.g. also Belfast English, cf. Henry 1995), have the option of inserting a complementizer more or less freely in this context. Rather, there are severe co-occurrence restrictions. Based on remarks in traditional dialect grammars where it is reported that the combination 'who' or 'what plus complementizer does not occur, we carried out a questionnaire study in Alemannic and Bavarian. It turned out that in fact word-size wh-expressions basically never occur together with a complementizer whereas phrase-level wh-expressions (of the type *which* X, [P+wh] but also complex "wh-words" like *wieviel* 'how many' etc) almost always require the insertion of a complementizer. This pattern calls for syntactic explanation that goes beyond the usual parameter-based 'pronunciation approach'. In this approach, it is assumed that the complementizer is always present (also in the standardized varieties which strictly obey the DFCF) but that it can be dropped. Whether dropping happens or not is basically a pure surface (i.e. PF) phenomenon. And indeed, since wh-phrases are assumed to always target a specifier position (Spec-CP), there must also be a head position, according to X'-theory. According to this view, phrase structure provides a position for the complementizer 'for free'. Note also that in "cartographic" approaches, where the complementizer and the wh-phrase are assumed to be positioned in different levels of a split CP, an account of the variation w.r.t the DFCF can only be given in terms of+/-pronunciation.

The above mentioned facts from Southern German dialects render pronunciation accounts implausible if not altogether impossible. We will propose instead that phrase structure (or the MERGE component) is indeed much more flexible than is commonly assumed. We will suggest that word-size wh-expressions have a 'latent' C-feature in their lexical entry and can thus fulfil the role of a complementizer by themselves - under certain definable structural conditions. This renders the insertion of a complementizer superfluous and in terms of economy even impossible. A wh-element has to be re-merged at the top-most position of an indirect question. We will assume for simplicity that this movement is triggered by the need of clausal typing, i.e. the embedded CP must bear a wh-feature when it is merged with the matrix V. This feature can be located either directly in the C-head (e.g. if-clauses) or in the specifier via a wh-phrase. The idea now is that word-size wh-expressions are re-merged as heads to TP. This is possible because they are ambiguous between head status and phrase status (like all pronouns). Having a latent C-feature and being in a selection relation to TP (where we assume with Suranyi (2003) that it is always the selecting element that projects, see also Chomsky (2005)), the wh-element will be able to activate its C-feature and project up to CP. Since this element is also marked for [+wh] the CP will end up as a [+wh] marked CP, in agreement with the requirements of the matrix verb. If in contrast a wh-word is merged within a larger phrase (e.g. with P) then it will never be in a sister (i.e. selection) relation to TP and thus the feature cannot be activated. The phrase moves to the specifier position and the head position of the CP is free to host a complementizer.

The analysis of word-size wh-elements as re-merged heads is supported by morpho-phonological process of consonant intrusion and sandhi. If a clitic pronoun beginning with a vowel adjoins to a wh-word (ending with a vowel), consonant intrusion is triggered in order to avoid hiatus, cf …*wo-**n**-er…* (where-N-he). If the wh-expression ends with a vowel but is complex, consonant intrusion is not possible, cf …*wieso-***n**-er*…(why-N-he).

Cross-linguistic evidence will be presented which strongly suggests that certain wh-words are re-merged as heads. As reported in Vangsnes & Westergaard (2005) and Vangsnes (2006), Northern Norwegian dialects can suppress V/2 movement of the finite verb in root questions – but only with word-size wh-expressions. Finally, the concept of 'latency' may give us a clue why e.g. in the Romance languages, a 'what'-like element (namely *che*, *que*) has developed into a declarative complementizer. Here, the latent C-feature has become permanent and in the course of the diachronic development, it has 'overwritten' the wh-feature and has thus created a new lexical item. The paper will end with a speculation why standardized languages tend to dismiss complementizers in this context in a rather rigid way.