

What for movements are causing what for splits*

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Short version: Germanic *what for* features a *[for ... NP]* which, contrary to familiar assumptions, is not restricted to interrogative contexts. The *[for ... NP]* features an often silent (closed class) nominal (*SLAG, SORT*) in the complement of *for*. *What for* split involves leftward movement of *[for ... NP]* followed by leftward movement of the remnant *[what ...]*. *What for* split can happen not only in the *mit-telfeld*, but also within the left periphery, involving topicalization of the *[for ... NP]*. This is supported by *what the hell for* evidence. The subsequent remnant *what* movement may (in some variants) piedpipe the entire clause across *[for ... NP]* giving rise to *[for ... NP]* “extra-position”. This explains interpretive parallels between left-peripheral and right-peripheral *for NPs*.

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1 General Remarks

1.1 Meaning of life issues

- The discussion of Germanic *what for* presented here bears on (among other things):
 - the notion of Classifier with regard to IE languages (sections 2 and 4)
 - V2 (section 5)
 - the analysis of *what for* (obviously)

1.2 Germanic *what for*

- The *what for* construction is uncontroversially present in many Germanic languages (**German**: den Besten (1981, 1985); Pafel (1996); Ijbema (1997); Abels (2003), **Norwegian**: Lie (1982), **Dutch**: Bennis (1983, 1995); den Besten (1985); Corver (1990, 1991); Bennis et al. (1998), **Swedish**: Børjars (1992); Delsing (1993), **Danish**: Vikner (1995), **Yiddish**: Vikner (1995), **Swiss German**: Leu (2003, 2004)).
- Standard English and Icelandic seem to lack them (i.e. lack variants that would be uncontroversially analyzed as belonging to the “*what for*-construction”).^{1,2}
- *what for*- questions are usually glossed as *What kind of NP...*

- (1) a. *what for*:
Was für einen Hund hast du gesehen?
what for a dog have you seen?
“What kind of dog did you see?”
- b. *what for split*:
Was hast du **für einen Hund** gesehen?
what have you for a dog seen?
“What kind of dog did you see?”

¹The OED lists a few examples of *what for* in older varieties of English. These typically involve copular sentences and *what for*-split. Some speakers of present day American English quite readily accept *what for*-sentences.

²It is possible that English *What books shall we buy?* shares much of the structure of *what for*-questions. See footnote 14.

2 *for* and below

- I take *what for* to be strongly parallel across the relevant languages.
- I argue that there are unpronounced elements which do not have an antecedent. (cf. Leu (2004) akin to proposals in van Riemsdijk (2002); Kayne (2002, 2003, 2005))
- The positions/elements which will be motivated in the present section are:³

(2) “... for SORT [a book] ...”
P Classifier open class nominal

2.1 Open class head nominal

- Lacks higher functional structure (e.g. no definite determiners, no interrogative *wh*).

German:

- (3) a. **Welche** (Äpfel) soll ich kaufen?
which (apples) should I buy
- b. Was für **welche** soll ich kaufen?
what for some should I buy
“What kind should I buy?”
- c. Er hat **welche** gekauft.
he has some bought
“He bought some.”

Swiss German:

- (4) a. **Weli** (öpfl) sell ich nä?
which (apples) should I take
- b. * Was für **weli** sell ich nä?
what for which should I take
- c. * Er het **weli** gnu.
he has which taken

³Capitals represent unpronounced elements.

2.2 Classifier

2.2.1 Overt manifestations

- (5) a. NOR Hva har du lest for **slags** bok?
what have you read for *slags* book
“What kind of book did you read?”
b. SWE Vad för **slags/sorts** bil köpte du?
what for *slags/sorts* car bought you

- I am generalizing this to all instances of *what for*: there always is such a classifier nominal, which I take to be in the complement of *for*.⁴
- Evidence in favor of *SORT* in *what for*:
 - the Case-inertness of *for*
 - the spuriousness of *een*
 - the appearance of adjectival *-ig* to the immediate right of *for* in SG
 - the demonstrative variant *sertig* in SG
 - the diminutive morpheme *-tje* in DU

2.2.2 *for* and Case

- In non-*what for*-contexts *für* assigns ACC to its complement DP.

- (6) Ich habe das Lied [für dich] geschrieben.
I have the song for you_{ACC} written

⁴The idea of a silent *SORT* in *what for NP* was noted and rejected in Corver (1990) chapter 6 footnote (10). Corver considers (1a) to be favorable evidence for such a move, but he abandons the idea in view of (1b), which would suggest the presence of yet another *SORT*. But this latter does not seem to be able to be overt (1c).

- (1) a. [Wat voor (een) soort honden] heb je gezien?
what for (a) sort dogs have you seen
b. [Wat voor een soorten honden] heb je gezien?
what for a sorts dogs have you seen
c. ?* [Wat voor een soort soorten honden] heb je gezien?

In the idea abandoned by Corver the silent nominal selects the N(P) *honden* as its complement. In the present proposal on the other hand, the silent nominal is embedded in a specifier headed by *for*.

- In *what for* contexts *for* and the open class head noun of the *what for*-phrase are not in a Case relation.
 - This observation has led to the description of *für* in *was für* as Case-inert.
- (7) a. **Mit** was für **einem**_{DAT} Hund hast du gespielt?
with what for a dog have you played
“What kind of dog did you play with?”
- b. **Mit** was [für SORT] **einem**_{DAT} Hund hast du gespielt?
with what for KIND a dog have you played
“What kind of dog did you play with?”

NP (*einem Hund*) is not the complement of *für*.

2.2.3 Spurious *een*

- In a limited range of contexts (including *what for*), Dutch⁵ sometimes has an “indefinite article” which precedes plurals, proper names, mass nouns.
 - Bennis et al. (1998) call it a “spurious article” and analyze it as a small clause copula.
 - Alternatively, we can think of the “spurious article” as article that goes with an unpronounced nominal SORT as in (8b).⁶
- (8) a. Wat voor (**een**) jongens ...
what for (a) boys ...
- b. Wat voor (**een**) SORT jongens ...
what for (a) KIND boys ...

In (8a), *een* is not in an “article-noun” relation with *jongens*.

⁵Swedish exhibits a similar phenomenon (Delsing, 1993)

⁶A full alternative account of the “spurious article” would of course have to extend beyond *what for*.

2.2.4 Adjectival *-ig*

- Swiss German has a variant of *was für* where *für* is followed by the adjectival suffix *-ig*, which usually combines with nominal and verbal stems to form adjectives.⁷

- (9) a. Was für-**igä** wi hesch kauft?
what for-ADJ wine have-you bought
What kind of wine did you buy?
- b. Was für-SORT-**igä** wi hesch kauft?
what for-KIND-ADJ wine have-you bought
What kind of wine did you buy?

In (9a), *ig* does not overtly follow the kind of root it usually follows.

2.2.5 Demonstrative *sertig*

- Swiss German has a demonstrative counterpart of *fürig*, which has no (overt) *für* but has what looks like a cognate of *sort*.

- (10) a. Was **fürtigä** wi?
what for-Adj wine
- b. **Sertigä** wi.
such wine

⁷Other instances in which *-ig* seemingly follows a preposition exist. They would be treated in a parallel fashion to the present treatment of *für-SORT-ig*.

- (1) a. Es isch nu öpis übrig
it is still something over-*ig*
“There’s something left over.”
- b. übrmässig
over-measure-*ig*
“over the top / exaggerated”

An analysis of (1a) as involving a silent nominal between *übr* and *ig* is supported by the existence of (1b).

- *fürig* and *serig* etc. seem to have a similar range of morphophonological variants:

(11) *fürig* *fürtig* *fürnig* *füttig*
 serig *sertig* *sernig* *settig*

- Taking *fürtig* and *sertig* to be strongly parallel suggests:

(12) *für*-SORT-ig
 FOR-*sert*-ig

- Norwegian allows the non-pronunciation of *for* in the presence of overt *slags* in:

(13) Hva (**for**) **slags** bok har du lest?
 what (for) *slags* book have you read

2.2.6 Diminutive *-tje*

- In Dutch it is possible to say (14a). The diminutive morpheme *-tje*, which in the example follows the indefinite article, normally appears only with nouns.⁸

(14) a. Wat voor **een-tje** heb jij gekocht?
 what for a/one-DIM have you bought
 “What kind of thing did you buy?”
 b. Wat voor een SORT-tje ...

2.2.7 Conclusion

- *what for NP* features a classifier nominal morpheme *SORT / SLAG*.
- This classifier can, in some variants, remain unpronounced.

⁸I'm grateful to an anonymous *Linguistik Aktuell* reviewer for pointing this out to me.

3 *for* and above

- The literature on *what for* assumes this *for NP* to be limited to co-occurring with (interrogative) *what*.
- Leading to the proposal that *for* is inherently [+wh] (Bennis et al., 1998).
- I will argue that *for* is not [+wh].
- Further: *what* is not the specifier of *for*.

3.1 Acceptable environments for *for*

- Possible environments for *für NPs*:

Interrogative (familiar):

- (15) GE **Was** verkaufen die für Platten?
 what sell they for records

Non-interrogative:

- (16) GE Die verkaufen **sonst was** für Platten.
 they sell else what for records
 “They’re selling all kinds of records (even pretty weird/rare ones).”
- (17) GE Ich hab mir **was (*für Platten)** gekauft.
 I have myself something for records bought
- (18) SG Di verchaufet **allerlei** für plattä.
 Di verchaufet **allächäibs** für plattä.
 they sell *all kinds* for records
 “They’re selling all kinds of records.”

- the *für*-phrase can occur in non-interrogative contexts.
- *für* is not [+wh].

3.2 Between *what* and *for*

- Some uninflected modifiers as well as *alles* can occur between *what* and *for* (Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996; Ijbema, 1997; Leu, 2003).

- (19) a. SG Was **ungfähr** für en betrag hesch usggä?
 what approximately for an amount have-you spent
 b. SG Was **alles** für lüt hesch iggladä?
 what all for people have-you invited
 c. SG Was hesch **alles für lüt** iggladä?

- *alles* is inflected: suggesting movement was alles t

- (20) a. ...all das ...
 b. *...das all ...
 c. ...das alles ...

- *was alles* is insensitive to outside Case.

- (21) a. SG ? Mit dem allem han ich nüd z tuä.
 with this_{DAT} all_{DAT} have I nothing to do
 b. SG Mit was ?alles / *allem für Lüt hesch grächnet?
 with what all / all_{DAT} for people have-you calculated
 “Who did you expect?”

- Coordination of *for NPs* is possible (Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996; Ijbema, 1997):

- (22) DU: Wat **voor mannen** en **voor vrouwen** heb jij gezien?
 GE: Was **für Männer** und **für Frauen** hast du gesehen?
 what for men and for women have you seen

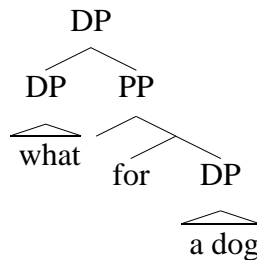
- *was* is not in the specifier of *für*.
- *was* has moved through the Specifier of *alles*.
- *was alles* is Case-licensed internally to the *what for* phrase.

4 The *what for* phrase

4.1 What a DP for a PP

- (Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996): [_{PP} for NP] right-adjunction to *what*.

(23)

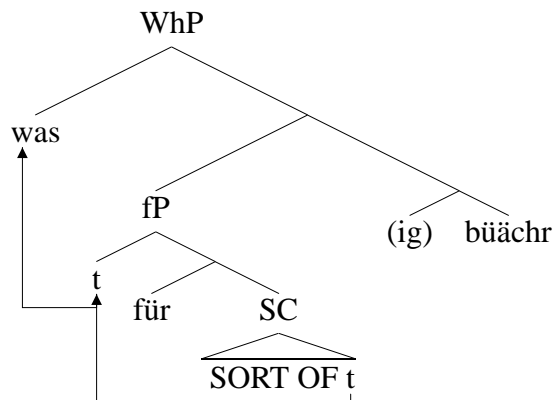


4.2 What for a modifier: the present proposal

- *for SORT* is parallel to adjectival modifiers.
- *what* is in a predication relation with *SORT* -> genitive in *slags, chäib's*.

(24) a. was für SORT büächr
what for SORT books

b.



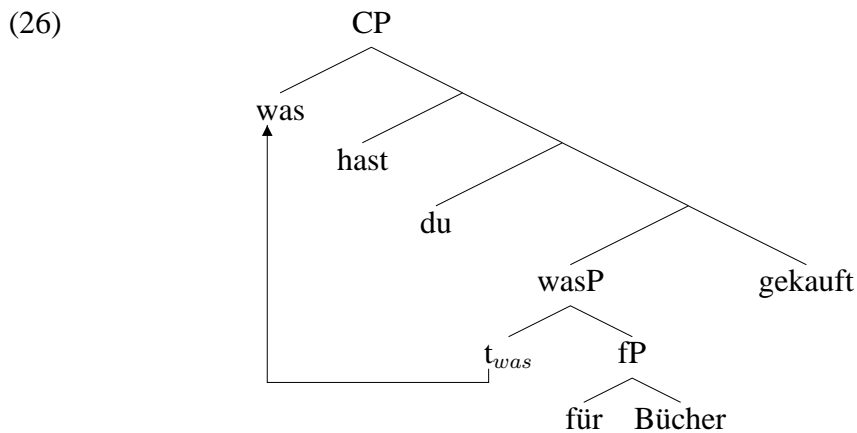
- Possibly fP is underlyingly a relative clause in the spirit of Kayne (1994); Alexiadou and Wilder (1998).

5 *what for-split*

5.1 Traditional view

- (25) **Was** hast du **für Bücher** gekauft?
 what have you for books bought

- *what* subextracts out of the specifier of the *what for*-phrase (den Besten, 1981; Bennis, 1983; den Besten, 1985; Corver, 1991; Pafel, 1996).



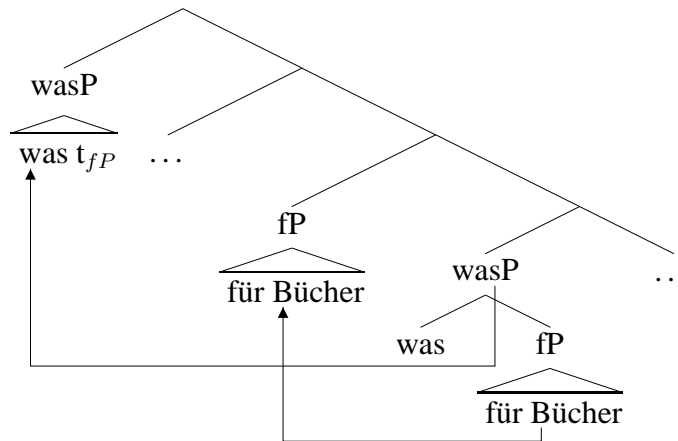
5.2 A remnant movement analysis of splitting

- Splitting must (at least sometimes) be analyzed as involving subextraction of the [*für NP*] followed by movement of the remnant [*was t_{fP}*].

- (27) a. [Was genau *t*] hesch **für nä wi** wellä?
 what exactly have-you for a wine wanted
- b. [Mit was *t*] hast du denn **für Leuten** geredet?
 with what have you PRT for people spoken
- c. Mit was alles für Leuten hast du geredet?

what for-split is to be analyzed as extraction of a phrase containing the *für*-phrase and the head-NP, followed by remnant movement of the *was*-phrase (piedpiping *mit* in (27b)) (Abels, 2003; Leu, 2003).

(28)



Such an analysis unifies diverse instances of split constructions, e.g.:

- *combien de*-split (Starke, 2001):

(29) [À combien t] tu as parlé [de photographes]... [à combien [de photographes]]?

- *something strange* split in French and (Swiss) German (Leu, 2005):

(30) [Was t] hast du [schönes]... [was [schönes]] gekauft?

5.3 Split and interpretation

- There are interpretive difference distinguishing left-peripheral and mittelfeld *für* NPs.

(31) a. “**What for NP** V_{fin} ?”

versus:

b. “**What** V_{fin} **for NP** ?”

- How do “right-extraposited”⁹ *für* NPs pattern in this respect?¹⁰

⁹“Right-extrapolation” is used as a purely descriptive term.

¹⁰In German, Swiss German and Dutch (32b) and (32c) are easy to tell apart in periphrastic tenses.

- (32b) has the order [*for NP*] (...) $V_{non-finite}$.

- (32c) has the order $V_{non-finite}$ [*for NP*].

Acceptability of *for NP*-“extrapolation” is subject to speaker variation, within both Dutch and Swiss German.

- (32) a. “**What for NP** V_{fin} ?”
 versus:
 b. “**What** V_{fin} **for NP**?”
 versus:
 c. “**What** V_{fin} **for NP?**”

To be shown in this section: left-peripheral and right-peripheral *for NPs* pattern together and against mittelfeld *for NPs* in interesting respects.

- Three (interpretive) properties with respect to which (32a) and (32b) pattern together and against (32c), which involve topicalization of the *for NP*:

A) idiom/literal reading of N (exclamative/interrogative) in subsection 5.3.1.

B) weak island sensitivity in subsection 5.3.2.

C) discourse-linking interpretation, in subsection 5.3.3.

5.3.1 Idiomatic versus literal N

- Compare the idiom/exclamative versus literal/interrogative pair:¹¹

- (33) a. **Was** bisch du **für en esel**?! (idiom)
 what are you for a donkey
 b. # **Was für en esel** bisch du? (literal)
 what for a donkey are you

- Compare left-peripheral, mittelfeld, and “right-extraposed” *für en esel*:

- (34) a. **Was** bin ich nur **für en esel** gsi?! (idiom)
 what have you only for a donkey been
 b. # **Was für en esel** bin ich nur gsi? (literal)
 c. # **Was** bin ich nur gsi **für en esel**? (literal)

¹¹This contrast can be reproduced for Dutch.
 Some speakers of Swiss German are less sensitive to the contrast than others. Intonation also plays its role.

5.3.2 Weak Island sensitivity

- *What for* split is sensitive to Weak Islands (de Swart (1992); Beck (1996); Honcoop (1998) among others).

- (35) a. Was **für es büäch** hesch nu nid gläsä?
what for a book have-you still not read
“What book haven’t you read yet?”
b. ?* Was hesch nu nid **für es büäch** gläsä?
c. Was hesch nu nid gläsä **für es büäch**?

- Negation doesn’t seem to intervene between *what* and a “right-extraposed” *for NP*.¹²

- A parallel pattern emerges with Wh-Islands:

- (36) a. (?) Was **für es büäch** fragsch dich **öb** sellsch läsä?
what for a book ask-you yourself whether should-you read
b. * Was fragsch dich **öb** sellsch **für es büäch** läsä?
what ask-you yourself whether should-you for a book read
c. (?) Was fragsch dich **öb** sellsch läsä **für es büäch**?
what ask-you yourself whether should-you read for a book

- *öb* doesn’t seem to be intervening between *was* and the “right-extraposed” *for NP*.

5.3.3 Discourse-linked interpretation

- Mittelfeld and left-peripheral *for NPs* have been argued to differ with regard to D-linking (de Swart, 1992; Diesing, 1992; Beck, 1996; Ijbema, 1997).

¹²Possibly Yiddish (1, from Vikner (1995)), where the expected WI-violation is circumvented, should receive an analysis parallel to the one proposed here:

- (1) Vos hot Avrom nisht gekoyft far a bikher?
what has Avrom not bought for a books

- Context A: Hans and I have a common friend, Pumuckl, who likes receiving postcards. Hans always sends him an original one when he travels. Hans goes on vacation to the Swiss Alps. When he's back I ask him (37a) rather than (b):

- (37) a. So, **was** hesch am Pumuckl **für nä chartä** gschickt?
so, what have-you to-the Pumuckl for a postcard sent
- b. # So, **was für nä chartä** hesch am Pumuckl gschickt?
so, what for a postcard have-you to-the Pumuckl sent
- c. # So, **was** hesch am Pumuckl gschickt **für nä chartä**?
so, what have-you to-the Pumuckl sent for a postcard

- Context B: Same as above, plus: Hans calls me from his vacation and describes three postcards to me, undecided which one he should send to Pumuckl. We hang up before reaching a conclusion. When he's back I ask him (38b) or (c) rather than (a):

- (38) a. # So, **was** hesch am Pumuckl **für nä chartä** gschickt?
so, what have-you to-the Pumuckl for a postcard sent
- b. So, **was für nä chartä** hesch am Pumuckl gschickt?
so, what for a postcard have-you to-the Pumuckl sent
- c. So, **was** hesch am Pumuckl gschickt **für nä chartä**?
so, what have-you to-the Pumuckl sent for a postcard

- The “right-extraposd” *for NP* patterns with the left-peripheral one.

5.3.4 Conclusion

- The patterning observed above suggests that left-peripheral *for NPs* and “right-extraposd” *for NPs* have a derivation similar in respects not shared by mittelfeld-stranded *for NPs*. A natural proposal is that the former both involve topicalization of *for NP*. The interpretation involves a discourse given set of (kinds of) donkeys/books/postcards etc.
- Assuming this to be on the right track, I take “right-extrapolation” to be the result of piedpiping of the entire clause by the (leftward) movement of the remnant *was t* to a position to the left of the topicalized *for NP* (akin to Kayne and Pollock (2001)).¹³

¹³There are restrictions on *für NP* extraposition, which I don't understand:

5.4 *what the hell for-split*

- Further support for left-peripheral splitting comes from *what the hell for* sentences.
- *the hell* and *for NP* are, descriptively speaking, in complementary distribution with regard to sharing constituency with *what*.

- (39) a. **Was zum tüfl** bisch du **für en esel!**?
what to-the devil are you for a donkey
b. # **Was zum tüfl für en esel** bisch du?

- Sluicing forces linking to an antecedent (den Dikken and Giannakidou, 2002).

- (40) Someone bought that book. John knows who / *who the hell.

- Interestingly, in Swiss German, the judgment in (40) can be reproduced, with a pronominal wh-phrase (41a), but with a *was für* sluice, adding a *the hell* phrase becomes marginally acceptable (41b).

– Some bad cases of extraposition:

- Plural subjects

- (1) a. Was **für gleser** sind abäghit?
what for glasses are down-fallen
b. Was sind **für gleser** abäghit?
c. (?*) Was sind abäghit **für gleser**? (unstable judgment)

- Dative noun phrases (selected/assigned by V)

- (2) a. Was **für emenä hus** hesch dich agneheret?
what for _{a_{DAT}} house have-you yourself approached
b. Was hesch dich **für emenä hus** agneheret?
c. ?* Was hesch dich agneheret **für emenä hus**?

– Dative preposition *a* makes (2c) improve:

- (3) a. *(A) was hesch dich agneheret?
(to) what have-you yourself approached
b. ? A was hesch dich agneheret **für emenä hus**?

- (41) a. Si het geschter öpis gse.
 she has yesterday something see
 Und du wäisch genau **was (*zum tüfl)**.
 and you know exactly what (to-the devil)
- b. Si het geschter en film gse.
 she has yesterday a film seen
 Und du wäisch genau **was (?zum tüfl) für äinä**.
 and you know exactly what the hell for one

- The only interpretive contribution that the *the hell* phrase has in *was für* questions is the expression of the negative attitude of the speaker.

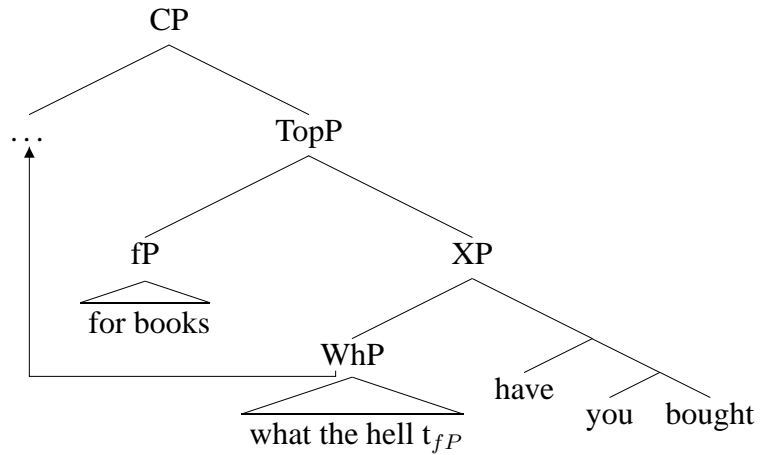
5.5 The derivation proposed

- I am proposing the following possible (partial) derivation:
 1. *what (the hell) for SORT NP* moves to the left periphery.
 2. *for SORT NP* moves (to a Topic position).
 3. The remnant *what (the hell) t* moves across the position hosting the *for SORT NP*. This last step may (in some variants) piedpipe the entire clause, giving rise to “extra-position”.¹⁴

¹⁴Some speakers of English allow (1b), (Pesetsky, 1987). den Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) claim that *what the hell book* is semantically equivalent to *what kind of book* rather than to *which book*. In view of the above discussion the availability of (1b) and its interpretation suggest an analysis as in (1c).

- (1) a. What book did you buy?
 b. What the hell book did you buy?
 c. [[What the hell] [FOR SORT book] [did you buy?]

(42)



- There are however some puzzles that either remain or are brought to light, see footnote 13.

6 Conclusion

- *for* in *what for* is not interrogative.
- *for* in *what for* has in its complement a (sometimes silent) classifier nominal.
- *what* is related to this classifier nominal, rather than to the open class NP.
- *what for*-split involves remnant movement.
- *what + for NP* are sometimes split even in the left periphery.
- “right-extrapolation” of the *for NP* is an offspring of left peripheral splitting.

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