

Wo Kopula? Copula-less wh-questions in German

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This study investigates *wh*-questions in German in which a *wh*-word and an XP are juxtaposed, see (1).

- (1) Wo Klapprad?
 where folding.bike
 ‘Where is the folding bike?’

Cross-linguistically, non-verbal predication can be expressed by i) copular clauses, ii) juxtaposition, iii) predicative inflection constructions, and iv) by a mixed type (a mix of type i and iii) (Creissels et al. 2026: 15). German belongs to the languages of type i), thus non-verbal predication is canonically formed by a copular clause, see (1):

- (1) Wo **ist** das Klapprad?
 where is the folding.bike
 ‘Where is the folding bike?’

A comparison of (1) and (1) shows that not only the copular verb but also the definite determiner is absent in (1). Crucially, neither omission is independently grammatical in standard German. The sentence **Wo ist Klapprad?* ‘where is folding bike’ without the determiner is ungrammatical. The same holds for the construction with determiner but absent copular verb **Wo das Klapprad?* ‘where the folding bike?’. Thus, in copula-less *wh*-questions as in (1) both functional categories the copula and the determiner are absent in the attested data.

The omission of copulae and determiners as in (1) has been attested of German newspaper headlines (Reich 2017). However, (1) does not occur as a headline. Furthermore, in early child language (around age of 2;0–3;0), copula-less non-verbal predication like in (1) is a well attested acquisition error in both declaratives and *wh*-interrogatives in German (Czinger et al. 2008: 81–90; Schmerse et al. 2013). Crucially, similar acquisition patterns as in German are also found in L1 English child language (Becker 2002, 2013; Rowland et al. 2005; Skinner 2005).¹ However, (1) is extracted of a comment section on a social media platform. Therefore, it is unlikely that (1) is an acquisition error.

Drawing on preliminary results from an ongoing corpus study of the German web corpus deTenTen (Suchomel 2020; Jakubíček et al. 2013; Suchomel & Pomikálek 2012), this talk provides a first empirical account of the distribution of these constructions in German-speaking online-communities akin to English-speaking virtual communities (Thompson & Anh 1992; Crystal 2001: 188). Since constructions like (1) fulfil the definition of fragments (Lemke 2021: 5–6), the aim of the study is twofold: 1. to provide a systematic empirical analysis of copula-less *wh*-questions in German internet-based language, and 2. to investigate whether and how non-verbal predication is established if no copular verb is present in a type i) language like German.

¹ In Rowland et al. (2005: 392), copula omission and auxiliary omission are counted as one omission error.

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