

Faroese *wh*-nominals

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Abstract:

This paper presents a survey of Faroese *wh*-nominals, in particular (i) the *hvør N* construction, (ii) the *hvát fyri (ein) N* construction, and (iii) the *hvát slag av N.DAT* construction. The first construction involves an *wh*-item which is used both pronominally, corresponding to English *who* and *what*, and adnominally, corresponding to English *which*, *what (N)*, and *what kind of*. The second construction is the Faroese version of the *was fír/what for* construction, including version with and without an indefinite article and with and without both the preposition (*fyri*) and the indefinite article (i.e. a “bare *what*” construction). The last construction involves an overt KIND noun which must be followed by the preposition *av* ‘of’ which in turn assigns dative case to the main/head noun. The survey is based on data collected during the NORMS fieldwork in the Faroe Islands in August 2008, focusing on a number of morphosyntactic issues as well as the semantic distinction between KIND and TOKEN interpretation. The various findings on Faroese are compared to data on other varieties of Germanic, in particular the North Germanic ones.

1. Introduction¹

Faroese is the only one of the standardized North Germanic languages which retains the following trait of Old Norse: the *wh*-word used to query for a human referent (i.e. ‘who’) can also be used adnominally, e.g. to query for a token (‘which’). The syncretism in question is described in Thráinsson et al. (2005:126f), and can be illustrated by the following example pairs from Faroese and Old Norse, respectively.

- (1) a. Hvør vann kappingina? *Faroese*
WH won contest-DEF
‘Who won the contest?’
- b. Hvør leikari skal skiftast út?
WH player should changed.PASS out
‘Which player should be replaced?’

¹ I thank the 43 informants from various locations in the Faroe Islands who answered my questions on Faroese *wh*-nominals (and other issues) during the NORMS fieldwork in August 2008. I am also indebted to my Faroese colleagues when preparing the questionnaire that I used, in particular Victoria Absalonsen and Jógvan í Lon Jacobsen.

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- (2) a. ... *huerr hævir hana hængat flutt ...* *Old Norse*
 WH has her hither moved
 ‘Who has moved her here?’ (DG 4–7, fol. 0013.21rA.10)
- b. *oc spurði hann þui nest or huerio lande hann var komenn.*
 and asked he that next out-of WH.DAT country.DAT he was come
 ‘And next he asked from which country he had come’

The Faroese examples are based on web examples whereas the Old Norse examples have been excerpted from the online corpus of the Medieval Nordic Text Archive (see <http://menota.org/>, henceforth ‘the Menota corpus’), in this case from the manuscript known as *Strengleikar* (DG 4-7).

For both Faroese and Old Norse it holds that the element in question in its adnominal use forms a paradigm which also includes the item(s) that by itself (themselves) can be used to query for non-human and inanimate entities (i.e. ‘what’): more specifically this involves the neuter singular forms of the paradigm. Consider the following Faroese example pair.²

- (3) a. *Hvat sigur tú?* *Faroese*
 WH say you
 ‘What are you saying?’
- b. *Hvat land var tað tú hugsaði um?*
 WH country was it you thought about
 ‘Which country were you thinking of?’

Modern Icelandic has developed a different system and no longer shows any syncretism between pronoun ‘who/what’ and determiner ‘which’: instead of the inflecting *hver(r)*, the non-inflecting *hvaða* is used to query for TOKEN, and we will return to this item below in section 4.4.

Importantly, as we will see below, Faroese *hvør* can be used adnominally not just to query for a TOKEN: it can also be used to query for a KIND.

Furthermore, as mentioned and discussed in Thráinsson et al. (2005: 124, 152f), Faroese possesses a *what for* construction which looks similar to corresponding constructions in German, Dutch and not the least Main-

² The following Old Norse examples illustrate the same situation for that language. Both examples are excerpted from *Óláfs saga ins helga* as rendered in the Menota corpus (manuscript DG 8 II).

- (i) a. *Hítt mik snemma i morgon oc man ec þa sægja þer hvat ec ætla.*
 meet me early in morning and may I then say you what I intend
 ‘Meet me early tomorrow and I will tell you what I will do.’
- b. *...þu raðer hvat namn er geva skal svæininum.*
 you decide what name REL give shall boy.DAT-DEF.DAT
 ‘You decide what name the boy shall be given.’

land North Germanic. According to Thráinsson et al. (op. cit) this construction is not part of the formal style of the language, hence, by inference, primarily a trait of colloquial Faroese. The following examples of the *what for* construction across a variety of Germanic languages have all been excerpted from the web.

- (4) a. Hvat fyri skúla gongur tú á? Faroese
what for school go you on
 ‘What school do you go to?’
- b. Kva for skule skulle eg velje? Norwegian (Nynorsk)
what for school should I choose
 ‘What school should choose?’
- c. Vad för skola arbetar du på då? Swedish
what for school work you on then
 ‘What school do you work at, then?’
- d. Hvad for en skole går du på i Silkeborg? Danish
what for a school go you on in Silkeborg
 ‘What school are you going to in Silkeborg?’
- e. Was für eine Schule besucht ihr? German
what for a school visit you.PL
 ‘What school are you going to?’
- f. Wat voor een school heeft u? Dutch
what for a school have you
 ‘What school do you have?’

Notice that the Danish, German, and Dutch examples, as opposed to the others, involve an indefinite article between ‘for’ and the noun. We will return to this issue below where we will see that such an item may occur also in Faroese. Another issue which we will return to concerns the “case inertness” of the preposition *fyri*: as discussed in Thráinsson et al. (2005: 152f) it is quite clear that *fyri* does not the assign case to the following main noun (and its modifiers), and this will be compared with what we find in other languages.

The information in Thráinsson et al. (op.cit.) suggests that both the *hvør N* and the *hvat fyri N* construction can be used to query for either KIND or TOKEN, i.e. corresponding to English *what kind of N* as well as *which N*. During the NORMS fieldwork in the Faroe Islands I set out to find out to what extent this holds or whether the semantic/pragmatic entailments of *hvat fyri (ein) N* and *hvør N* differ in this respect. I also queried about the presence/absence of the indefinite article in the *hvat fyri* construction and

several other issues related to *wh*-nominals (as well as a few other issues concerning *wh*-syntax).

In the following I will first present the questionnaire and the methodology that I employed in my investigations (section 2). I will then present the results concerning determiner *hvø*r and compare its status in Faroese to that of the situation in other North Germanic varieties where we find syncretism between query for TOKEN and for HUMAN referent (section 3). Subsequently, I do the same for the *hv*at *fyri* *N* construction (section 4) and for a construction where *hv*at *fyri* is augmented by the overt KIND noun *slag* (section 5). Section 6 presents some results concerning other kinds of *wh*-nominals such as exclamative DPs and binominals. Section 7 summarizes and concludes the paper.

2. The questionnaire: queries for kind and token in Faroese

My questionnaire was run on altogether 43 informants in sessions at the following locations (listed chronologically; number of informants in parentheses): Tórshavn (5), Fuglafjørður (8), Klaksvík (10), Tvøroyri (10), Sandur (6), and Miðvágur (6).³

The questionnaire was developed during the introductory seminar part and the first couple of fieldwork sessions. It was run in an interview fashion where various sentences, with alternatives, were read out loud to the informants. Practical adjustments to the situation were also sometimes made (time pressure, fatigue etc.). All informants were therefore not exposed to exactly the same set of sentences, but a core of examples was run on most of them. The informants were asked to say whether they found the test examples acceptable or not. Hence, no scale was used, but when informants responded ‘maybe’ or ‘dubious’ or gave other comments I made notes of this. The raw questionnaire data have been uploaded and are stored in the ScanDiaSyn Document Chest online repository.

The investigation of the *hvø*r *N* and the *hv*at *fyri* *N* constructions served two purposes. On the one hand I wanted to home in on their morphosyntactic properties, and on the other hand I wanted to see whether they were acceptable both with KIND and TOKEN interpretations. The test employed for the latter purpose involved the following two basic sentence formats:

- (5) a. WH car do you have? (KIND query)
 b. WH car is yours? (TOKEN query)

³ I am grateful to Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson for collecting the data from Sandur and Miðvágur for me.

The idea is that these two sentence forms will typically trigger a kind and a token query interpretation, respectively, i.e. that the answer to (5a) will refer to a particular type of car whereas the answer to (5b) will serve to identify a particular token out of a set of cars.

As discussed in Vangsnes (2008a:228f) this simple test may be too simple.⁴ Nevertheless, I believe that it serves to give a good estimation of the issue in question since it seems quite clear that the desired interpretational entailments indeed are the ones that in most cases first spring to mind among the informants.

In the next two subsections I will present the results for the two *wh*-nominal types one by one. The gross finding is that the determiner *hvør* can be used for both KIND and TOKEN queries, and that for most speakers that also holds for the *hvát fyri* construction. However, for a minority of speakers the *hvát fyri* construction can only be used in KIND queries and is not acceptable when querying for TOKEN.

Syntactically speaking I consider the KIND queries to involve a modifier use of the adnominal *wh*-expression whereas the TOKEN queries involve a determiner use, see Vangsnes (2008a) for explication. Although this syntactic distinction will not be of great importance for the exposition to follow, it will sometimes be reflected in the terminology.

3. The *hvør* *N* construction

3.1. The Faroese results

The relevant *hvør* *N* pair for the KIND~TOKEN test is given in (6).

- (6) a. Hvønn bil eigir tú? (41/0/1 = 42)
HVØR.M.ACC car own you
 ‘What car do you have?’
- b. Hvør bilur er tín? (42/1/0 = 43)
HVØR.M.NOM car is your.M.SG
 ‘Which car is yours?’

One of the informants rejected (6a) and for one other the question was not posed. The remaining 41 informants all accepted the sentence. This is indicated in the parentheses from left to right as positive vs. dubious vs. negative response (plus total number of informants asked).

⁴ One may argue that contextual factors may interfere and that the opposite reading be coerced. Furthermore, queries for a brand (e.g. ‘Volvo’) can be perceived as either a kind proper (akin to e.g. ‘station wagon’), or as token on a list of kinds (e.g. an implicit or explicit list of car brands/models).

As far as the example in (6b) is concerned, only one informant reacted to it and reported to ‘maybe’ accept it. This is not the same informant as the one who rejected (6a). All the other 42 informants accepted (6b).

As should be evident from the examples adnominal *hvør* agrees in case with the noun, and it also agrees in gender and number. The full paradigm, as far as the written norm is concerned, is the following (see Thráinsson et al. 2004:126).

		MASC	FEM	NEUTER
SG	NOM	<i>Hvør</i>	<i>Hvør</i>	<i>hvat</i>
	ACC	<i>Hvønn</i>	<i>Hvørja</i>	<i>hvat</i>
	DAT	<i>Hvørjum</i>	<i>hvørj(ar)i</i>	<i>hvørjum</i>
	GEN	<i>Hvørs</i>	<i>Hvørjar</i>	<i>hvørs</i>
PL	NOM	<i>Hvørjir</i>	<i>Hvørjar</i>	<i>hvørji</i>
	ACC	<i>Hvørjar</i>	<i>Hvørjar</i>	<i>hvørji</i>
	DAT	<i>Hvørjum</i>	<i>Hvørjum</i>	<i>hvørjum</i>
	GEN	<i>Hvørja</i>	<i>Hvørja</i>	<i>hvørja</i>

Table 1: The inflectional paradigm of Faroese *hvør*

The questionnaire included the following plural version of the TOKEN example: out of 42 informants asked, 40 accepted it whereas two found it dubious, but no informant rejected it.

- (7) Hvørjir bilar eru tínir? (40/2/0 = 42)
HVØR.M.PL.NOM cars are your.M.PL
 ‘Which cars are yours?’

3.2. Comparative issues

Syncretism across the pronoun~determiner dimension in the system of *wh*-items is by no means uncommon across languages. Modulo inflectional details, such syncretism is found in North Sámi, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek, Catalan, Hindi-Urdu, and presumably many more languages.⁵

Furthermore, although I stated initially that Faroese is the only one of the standardized North Germanic languages that shows this syncretism, we do find it in several non-standard varieties elsewhere in the language area. One case in point is southeastern dialects of Norwegian, roughly speaking dialects spoken in coastal or near-coastal areas from Oslo and southwards

⁵ This list of languages stems from an ongoing collection of comparative data on *wh*-items, and I am grateful to Lene Antonsen (North Sámi), Yulia Rodina (Russian), Marina Pantcheva (Bulgarian), Monica Basič (Serbian), Marika Lekakou (Greek), Xavier Villalba (Catalan), and Rajesh Bhatt (Hindi-Urdu) for information on the languages mentioned.

on both the southwestern and southeastern side of Skagerak. In the dialects in question one frequently encounters a determiner use of the item *hvem* (pronounced /vem/), which in standard Bokmål Norwegian exclusively corresponds to English ‘who’. Examples are abundant in informal writings on the web (see Vangsnes 2008c), and the following examples have been excerpted from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009): they are uttered by two different young male speakers from two different locations west (Darbu) and southeast (Fredrikstad) of Oslo, and rendered here in accordance with the “phonetic” transcription used in the corpus.

- (8) a. Vemm skoLe ær de du gå på a? *Darbu 01*
who school is it you go to then
 ‘Which school is it that you have gone to, then?’
- b. Vemm skoLe æ ru ha gått på a? *Fredrikstad 01*
who school is you have gone to then
 ‘Which school is it that you have gone to, then?’

Although the issue has not been extensively investigated, a difference between Faroese and East Norwegian seems to be that in East Norwegian dialects the adnominal use of *hvem* only allows for a token interpretation. In other words, *hvem* can only function as a determiner and not as a modifier in the dialects in question.

In that respect, the Övdalian variety of North Germanic, spoken in Älvdalen, Sweden, seems to pattern more like Faroese. As discussed in Vangsnes (forthcoming), which reports findings from the NORMS fieldwork in Älvdalen in 2007, the *wh*-item *ukin* is used to query for human referents, tokens, and kinds alike. Hence, the following examples are all readily accepted by speakers of the variety.⁶

- (9) a. Ukin al du råk i Ståkkåll? *Övdalian*
WHICH shall you meet in Stockholm
 ‘Which school is it that you have gone to, then?’
- b. Ukin bil ir denn?
WHICH car is your
 ‘Which car is yours?’

⁶ As discussed in Vangsnes (forthcoming) *ukin*, or rather its singular nominative/accusative neuter form *ukað*, can be used as a question particle in both matrix and embedded polarity questions, hence (partly) corresponding to English *whether* and Old Norse *hvárt*. Interestingly, as discussed in van Gelderen (2009), both *whether* and *hvárt* derive from neuter singular items essentially meaning ‘which of two’.

- c. Ukin bil ar du?
WHICH car have you
 ‘What kind of car do you have?’
- d. Ukin sir an aut?
WHICH sees he out
 ‘What does he look like?’

The d.-example here shows a fourth use of *ukin* whereby it corresponds to English *what ... like* in what we may call a PROPERTY query. Although not in English, in most varieties of Germanic the item used in such cases is the same as the one used in manner queries (*wie* (Ger.), *hoe* (Du.), *hur* (Sw.), *hvordan* (Da./No.), etc.), and that is also the case for Faroese, which uses *hvussu* ‘how’.

In the Övdalian examples *ukin* has been glossed here as ‘which’ to reflect the etymology of the item: it is cognate with the determiner (*h*)*vilken* found in the standard varieties of Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian, which in turn is cognate with English *which*, German *welcher*, Dutch *welk*, Old Norse *hvílíkr* and so forth. Since this item is known to have originated as a modifier in older stages of Germanic and subsequently developed into a determiner (see Vangsnes 2008a:234ff and references there for discussion), it seems reasonable to assume that the pronominal use of the item in turn has evolved from the determiner use. This is corroborated by the fact that the item *wer* given in Levander (1909:67), the cognate of Faroese *hvø*r and Old Norse *hverr*, is no longer recognized as a *wh*-pronoun to be used in queries for human referents: *ukin* has replaced it.

The opposite grammaticalization path has most likely taken place in the case of East Norwegian *hvem*. Unlike Faroese *hvø*r, East Norwegian *hvem* does not inflect in agreement with the main noun, and the pronoun *hva*, which otherwise refers to non-human referents, never replaces *hvem* the way *hvat* does in Faroese. Etymologically, *hvem* stems from the Old Norse dative singular masculine form *hveim* of *hverr*, but all in all it seems probable that the determiner use in East Norwegian is a neologism and extension from pronoun to determiner rather than a relic from Old Norse.

How and when the Old Norse pronoun~determiner~modifier syncretism, still observed in Faroese, arose is currently not known to me. Further diachronic investigations will, if possible, have to reveal whether it arose by extension from pronominal to adnominal use or vice versa.

The differences in lexicalization range between Faroese *hvø*r, East Norwegian (*h*)*vem*, and Övdalian *ukin*, can now be summarized as follows, and I have also included the Mainland North Germanic item (*h*)*vem* and the Icelandic item *hver*, which is cognate with *hvø*r.

	PROPERTY	KIND	TOKEN	HUMAN
Övdalian	<i>ukin</i>			
Faroese	-	<i>hvøðr</i>		
East Norw.	-	-	<i>(h)vem</i>	
Norw./Da./Swe.	-	-	-	<i>(h)vem</i>
Icelandic	-	-	-	<i>hver</i>

Table 2: Lexicalization range of some nominal *wh*-items across North Germanic

In Vangsnes (forthcoming) I argue that the query types as linearized in the table reflect a conceptual continuum and that extensions from one function/use to another can only take place to adjacent functions in the continuum. I will not discuss this issue further here, but just conclude that Faroese *hvøðr* fits nicely into the picture insofar as the lexicalization potential of *hvøðr* forms a contiguous stretch.⁷

At this point we will proceed to consider the *hvat fyri (ein) N* construction.

4. The *hvat fyri N* construction

4.1. Introduction

As we saw in the introduction, correlates for the *hvat fyri N* construction can be found in most other Germanic languages, and there is an extensive literature on the topic, especially for German and to some extent for Dutch (see Leu 2008:154ff for references). However, to the best of my knowledge there are few detailed studies, if any, of this construction for North Germanic.

In this section I will first present the results from the questionnaire investigation during the NORMS fieldwork, and I will then proceed to discuss various issues in a comparative perspective, also drawing on other sources of information for Faroese and the other languages. In doing so, I

⁷ Interestingly, Fritzner (1973 [1867]) in his dictionary of Old Norse notes one usage of *hverr* whereby it corresponds to the PROPERTY query type. One of his examples is the following.

- (i) Hann skýrði nú, hverr heimrinn er, ...
he explained now hverr world is
 ‘He explained now what the world is like.’

At present it is not clear to me whether *hverr* could also be used in a KIND query: the expectation is that it could, but further investigations will have to reveal whether Old Norse in this respect provides a counterexample to the conceptual continuum. In any event, the information in Fritzner suggests that Old Norse *hverr* and Faroese *hvøðr* do not have identical properties as far as lexicalization range is concerned.

will several places use web counts (by Google) as a source of information. One may object to this for a number of reasons, but I nevertheless strongly believe that such statistics in many cases has the property of at least being indicative of existing norms for the use of the language and of the weight between competing norms, if applicable.⁸

The first comparative issue concerns the absence/presence of an indefinite article after the preposition. Secondly, I will compare the KIND~TOKEN distinction across Germanic varieties, and thirdly I will discuss the case inertness of *fyri* in a comparative perspective. The last issue is illustrated by the following examples from Thráinsson et al. (2005:153).

- (10) a. Hvat fyri pakki/*pakka er hetta?
what for parcel.NOM/parcel.ACC is this
 ‘What parcel is this?’
- b. Hvat er hetta fyri pakki/*pakka?
what is this for parcel.NOM/parcel.ACC
 ‘What parcel is this?’

These examples furthermore illustrate a well-known fact from the literature on the German *was für* construction, namely that the ‘what’ part of the construction can move alone to the clausal left periphery as an alternative to pied-piping of the whole nominal. This issue was not investigated in any detail during the fieldwork, and I will not say much about it in the following.

4.2. The Faroese results

When investigating the *hvat fyri (ein) N* construction several issues were studied. In addition to testing the KIND~TOKEN distinction, presence vs. absence of the indefinite determiner and *fyri* was also tested. Let us start with the KIND~TOKEN test.

- (11) a. Hvat fyri bil eigir tú? (42/1/0 = 43)
what for car own you
 ‘What car do you have?’

⁸ The number of hits indicated in Google searches must not be taken at face value. As a minimum, one must go to the last available hit page: this appears to omit duplicates in the underlying database and will always reduce the number of hits significantly. Furthermore, if applicable, the remaining hits should be checked for (ir)relevance. As far as the counts reported here are concerned, in most cases the number of results has been so low that it has been feasible to look through them and remove irrelevant results.

- b. Hvat fyri bilur er tín? (29/3/11 = 43)
what for car is yours
 ‘Which car is yours?’

As the numbers in parentheses show, about 1/4 of the informants dismiss *hvat fyri N* in the TOKEN example.⁹ No geographic pattern is found: the negative responses are more or less evenly spread across all of the measure points visited.

Consider next the corresponding pair where *hvat fyri* has been augmented by an indefinite determiner.

- (12) a. Hvat fyri ein bil eigir tú? (40/3/0 = 43)
what for a car own you
 ‘What car do you have?’
- b. Hvat fyri ein bilur er tín? (35/1/7 = 43)
what for a car is yours
 ‘Which car is yours?’

The contrast is now slightly less pronounced, and interestingly three of the 11 informants who rejected (8b) and two of the ones who found it dubious accept (9b): there is only one informant who changes in the other direction and accepts (8b) but rejects (9b).

Although the numbers are small here, we can conclude that for most speakers of Faroese it seems that the *hvat fyri (ein) N* construction can be used both for KIND and TOKEN queries. However, for a minority of speakers *hvat fyri N* preferably entails a KIND reading. Furthermore, a larger subset of this minority prefers a KIND reading also when the preposition *fyri* is followed by the indefinite article. The subset of speakers who allow for a TOKEN reading if and only if the indefinite article appears, is very small in numbers, and further investigations should be made in order to verify whether or not there exists a consistent group of speakers for which $\pm ein$ in the construction corresponds to a \pm TOKEN reading.¹⁰

⁹ Strangely enough, the one informant (from Sandur) who finds (8a) dubious accepts (8b).

¹⁰ Unfortunately, examples with plural nouns in the *hvat fyri* construction were added to the questionnaire only towards the final part of the fieldwork, and moreover only for the TOKEN example type. 17 informants at Tvøroyri, Sandur, and Miðvágur were asked about the following two examples:

- (i) Hvat fyri bilar eru tínir? (14/1/2 = 17)
what for cars are yours
 ‘Which cars are yours?’

Corpus examples may also shed further light on the question of absence/presence of the indefinite article in the *hvat fyri* construction. A superficial Google count gives back about 200 hits with *hvat fyri N* and slightly less than a 100 hits with *hvat fyri ein* (including inflected forms such as *eina, einum, eitt*). This at least corroborates the findings from the questionnaire survey: both absence and presence of the indefinite article is found in Faroese.

In the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) three examples of the *hvat fyri* construction can currently be found, all of which stem from the recordings made during the NORMS fieldwork (see Johannessen, this volume). All of the examples come without the indefinite article, and they are produced by three different informants from three different locations. The examples are given here in (13) – one is an embedded *wh*-clause, the two other are elliptic/predicateless questions. (Location and informant number is given in parenthesis.)

- (13) a. Tað handlar kanska eisini nógv um (Klaksvík K3)
it deals maybe also a-lot about
 hvat fyri fólk mann kennur.
what for people man knows
 ‘It is maybe also a question of what people one knows.’
- b. Hvat fyri grýturætt? (Sandur S8)
what for stew
 ‘What kind of stew?’
- c. Hvat fyri diætir altso sukursjúku? (Tórshavn T16)
what for diets that-is diabetes
 ‘What diets, that is diabetes?’

Examples with just *hvat* in combination with the masculine noun *bilur* ‘car’ were also tested, i.e. uninflected *what* as it were. A minority of the informants accepted these examples.

- (14) a. Hvat bil eigir tú? (10/2/31 = 43)
what car own you
 ‘What car do you have?’

-
- (ii) Hvat fyri nakrir bilar eru tínir? (8/0/9 = 17)
what for some car is yours
 ‘Which car is yours?’

Although the number of informants is low, at least these figures indicate that plural nouns are more readily accepted without an indefinite determiner than with one. This seems to be corroborated by web counts: I have found very few web examples with a plural indefinite determiner in the construction.

- b. Hvát bilur er tín? (7/1/35 = 43)
what car is yours
 ‘Which car is yours?’

Although few, the number of informants who accept these examples is nevertheless comparable to the number of informants who dismiss a TOKEN reading for *hvat fyrí (ein)*, and that arguably warrants some further discussion and analysis. It should be noted that the consistency across the two examples is only partial: only four informants accept both of them, meaning that there are nine informants who accepts one of them and rejects the other.

Still, when performing a web search for variants of the string *hvat (for (ein)) bil/bilur*, i.e. ‘what for a car.ACC/NOM’, I find 19 examples of the full string, 11 examples with just the indefinite article missing, and as many as 17 examples of both *fyrí* and the indefinite article missing, i.e. ‘bare *hvat*’. This suggests that bare *what* does exist in Faroese and that the reports obtained during the fieldwork do have some basis in existing norms for the language.

4.2. Presence/absence of the indefinite article across North Germanic

Among the other standard varieties of North Germanic, Icelandic does not have a *what for* construction, whereas Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish do. Among the latter three there seem to be significant differences as to whether an indefinite article follows *for* and also whether bare *what* is allowed. Consider the following web count (Google) done in November 2009. (Numbers in italics have not been fully checked for accuracy.)

	‘what for a car/way’	+article	–article	bare <i>what</i>
Danish (site:dk)	<i>hvad (for (en)) bil</i>	47	3	167
	<i>hvad (for (en)) vej</i>	26	2	885
Swedish (site:se/fi)	<i>vad (för (en)) bil</i>	1	137	4
	<i>vad (för (en)) väg</i>	0	11	5
Nynorsk Norw. (site:no)	<i>kva (for (ein)) bil</i>	7	6	148
	<i>kva (for (ein)) veg</i>	23	24	416
Bokmål Norw. (site:no)	<i>hva (for (en)) bil</i>	4	7	140
	<i>hva (for (en)) vei</i>	6	2	94

Table 3: Web counts on *what for a N* across Mainland North Germanic

In this count the *what for* construction in combination with the nouns ‘car’ and ‘way’ has been checked across the varieties for presence/absence of the indefinite article and for absence of both *for* and the indefinite article, i.e. for “bare *what*”. The search strings involve unique items for the various

languages, but the searches have nevertheless been restricted to the national web domains.

The figures show that in Danish presence of the indefinite article is much more frequent than its absence whereas in Swedish the situation is completely reversed. For Norwegian the figures are small but nevertheless very balanced as regards \pm indefinite article. What is striking though, is that bare *what* is by far the most common of the three variants both in Norwegian and in Danish. Although these hits have not all been checked for accuracy, eyeballing through a fair amount of them, suggest that there are very few irrelevant hits.¹¹

It should be noted that splitting of the *wh*-nominal seems to be preferred over pied-piping in Swedish: the search string *Vad har du för bil?* ‘What have you for car?’ gives back as many as 205 hits (and only 1 with the indefinite article present), and we should thus expect a fuller survey of splitting vs. non-splitting of *what for* nominals in Swedish to show that splitting is the preferred strategy. Searches for the equivalent string(s) in the other varieties yield very few hits.

On this background, Faroese looks most similar to Norwegian in that there is a fairly good balance between absence/presence of the indefinite article. This is an interesting finding as one might *a priori* assume that Faroese would have obtained the *hvat fyri* construction through influence from Danish. On the other hand, it is quite clear that Faroese squares with Norwegian rather than Danish also with respect to other syntactic traits, double definiteness being a very salient one (see Thráinsson et al. 2005: 96).

As far as bare *what* is concerned further investigations will have to reveal to what extent this is as widespread in Faroese as in Norwegian and Danish.

4.3. KIND vs. TOKEN interpretations of the ‘what for’ construction

It has sometimes been argued for Nynorsk Norwegian that the presence/absence of the indefinite article corresponds to the KIND~TOKEN distinction, see e.g. *Språkrådet* (1999:164), but I am skeptical as to the validity of this statement. For Faroese we have seen that my questionnaire survey provided

¹¹ My own intuitions regarding Bokmål Norwegian suggest that this variety of Norwegian should not have a *what for* construction and particularly not the bare *what* construction. It was therefore somewhat unexpected to find so many examples of this use on the web. Follow-up studies of this seem quite appropriate, as I believe there exists a latent presumption that the *what for* construction is a trait of Nynorsk Norwegian but not of Bokmål Norwegian.

scarce evidence for a semantic distinction in the *hvat fyri (ein)* construction.

Leu (2008:154) reports that the German *was für* construction allows for both KIND and TOKEN reading, i.e. along with what we found for the majority of Faroese speakers. Leu's examples all include an indefinite article, but it seems that also German, at least to some extent, allows both the presence and absence of *ein* after *für*.¹²

However, for Dutch the situation seems to be different. First of all, in Dutch the optional indefinite article is generally referred to as a 'spurious indefinite article' (see Bennis et al. 1998), mainly because it occurs with a singular form in plural *wat voor* DPs. Van Riemsdijk (2005) points out that there is also a semantic difference related to the presence/absence of the article. Interestingly, given our inconclusive findings about Faroese, the semantic effect for Dutch goes in the other direction than in Faroese: van Riemsdijk shows that the presence of *voor* bars a TOKEN interpretation for the *wat voor* DP. Consider the following example (see Van Riemsdijk op. cit.:166) where answer A entails a KIND reading and answer B a TOKEN reading: as indicated the presence of *een* bars the TOKEN reading, whereas the KIND reading is compatible with both presence and absence of *een*.

- (15) Wat voor (een)_A/*een_B musea heb je bezocht?
 what for (a) museums have you visited
 'What museums have you visited?'
- A. Musea voor moderne kunst ('museums of modern art')
- B. Het Rijksmuseum en het Van Gogh museum ('the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh museum')

Now, if on closer inspection the claims about the presence of the indefinite article in Norwegian turn out to be accurate, it would mean that the presence of the indefinite article has opposite effects in Dutch and Norwegian. Again, this is an issue to be pursued in future research, also for Faroese.

4.4. Case inertness: Faroese *hvat fyri* vs. Old Norse *hvat at*

Above we saw that *fyri* in the *hvat fyri* construction does not assign case to the main noun in the nominal. This is in line with what can be observed for *für* in German, see Leu (2008:184) and references cited there.

¹² A Google search for the strings {*was für (ein/einem) Auto*} (i.e. 'what for (a) car') restricted to the domain .de gives back about 1000 examples with *ein/einem* and about a 100 examples without. (Eyeballing the results it seems that both result groups involve examples of exclamative use.) I am not aware of any reports suggesting that there should be a semantic difference related to the presence/absence of the article in German.

In this respect it is of some interest to take a look at the Icelandic *wh*-determiner *hvaða* ‘which’, which was briefly mentioned in the introduction. In interrogative contexts *hvaða* is used only to query for TOKEN, not for KIND. (See Vangsnes 2008b:238 for discussion. There are also exclamative uses of *hvaða*, see Jónsson, forthcoming.)

One interesting aspect of *hvaða* is that unlike most other Icelandic adnominal constituents it does not inflect for case, gender, and number. This is partially illustrated by the following example pairs, contrasting *hvaða* with *þessi* ‘this’ – a full illustration of all potential contexts for agreement would fill up several pages.

- (16) a. Hvaða sending/sendingar hlustar hún á?
which broadcast.F.ACC/broadcasts.F.ACC listens she to
 ‘Which program/programs does she listen to?’
- b. Þess-a sending/ þess-ar sendingar
this.F.ACC broadcast.F.ACC/these.F.ACC broadcasts.F.ACC
 hlustar hún á.
listens she to
 ‘This program/these programs is/are what she listens to?’
- (17) a. Hvaða maður á þennan bíl?
which man.M.NOM owns this car
 ‘Which man owns this car?’
- b. Þess-i maður á þennan bíl.
this.M.NOM man.M.NOM owns this car
 ‘This man owns this car.’

In some sense this means that *hvaða* is like *hvat fyri* in that the Faroese expression does not inflect either: *hvat* occurs in the same form regardless of the gender, number, and case of the following main noun.

Interestingly enough, although not transparent in contemporary Icelandic, *hvaða* derives from an Old Norse expression which is quite parallel to the *what for* structure, namely *hvat at*, literally ‘what at’, i.e. *what* plus a directional preposition.¹³ One significant difference, however, is that in Old

¹³ An even closer parallel to the Old Norse structure, modulo case assignment, can be found in the contemporary Norwegian dialects of Hallingdalen and Gudbrandsdalen where the preposition *til* (/te/) ‘to’ immediately follows the *wh*-item. The following example from the Lom dialect (Gudbrandsdalen) is taken from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009):

- (i) Ko te bakkst ska åss ha i jurn da? *Lom 02*
what to bakery shall us have in Christmas.DAT then
 ‘What kind of bakery are we going to have for Christmas, then?’

Norse the preposition did assign (dative) case to its complement, whereas *fyrí* does not. In the example in (18)¹⁴ the main noun occurs in the dative although the noun phrase is the subject of a copula (and occupies a clausal position for nominative case). A contemporary Icelandic example (found on the web) is given in (19) for comparison.¹⁵

- (18) Ottarr kvað sva vera, ok segir
Óttar said so be and said
 hvat at sættum varð með þeim.
hvat at agreements.DAT became with them
 ‘Óttar confirmed and told what agreements had been reached between them.’
- (19) En þá myndi kannski einhver spyrja
but then may perhaps someone ask
 hvaða sættir séu boðnar?
which agreements.NOM are offered
 ‘But then someone may ask what agreements can be offered.’

This suggests that the structure of the Old Norse construction is not entirely parallel to that of the modern varieties.

Leu (2008:162ff) argues for an analysis of the Germanic *what for* structure whereby the preposition does not c-command the main noun and where *what for* constitutes a case domain of its own: in fact, the idea is that the preposition is not case inert, but that its case is assigned to a silent functional noun (SORT). Faroese would square just as well with this analysis as German and other contemporary varieties, but a different analysis would be called for to account for the Old Norse structure.

I will not detail alternative analyses for the structures here, but we may on this background appropriately turn to another Faroese adnominal *wh*-expression which does govern the case of the main noun, namely one with an overtly expressed KIND nominal.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson for providing this example for me. It stems from *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, chapter 3.

¹⁵ As discussed in Fritzner’s (1973 [1867]) entry for *hvat*, there exists a bare *what* use of the item where the main noun can appear in nominative, genitive, or dative. The following example excerpted from the Menota corpus (*Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*) in fact illustrates the latter two options at the same time.

(i) [H]uat manne er sa er guð ma kaupa eða huat guða er þat er kaupazt letr[?]
what man-DAT is that REL god may buy or what god-s.GEN is it REL buy-REFL lets
 ‘What man is it that God may buy or what gods is it that lets themselves be bought?’

5. Overt kind noun: the *hvat slag av N.DAT* construction

In Faroese, *wh*-nominals can be equipped with an overt noun meaning ‘type’ in order to make the KIND reading explicit. The noun in question is *slag*, familiar from other varieties of Scandinavian, and the main noun (and adjectives if present) will appear in dative case. The following example is taken from the web.

- (20) Hvát slag av sokkabuksum/sokkum hava tit brúkt?
what type of tights.DAT /socks.DAT have you used
 ‘What kind of tights/socks have you used?’

As shown in Vangsnes (2008:242ff), there is a difference between Norwegian on the one hand and Swedish and Danish on the other hand when it comes to whether the preposition *for/för* can appear between ‘what’ and the KIND noun: in Norwegian, in particular Nynorsk, absence is much more frequent than in Danish and Swedish. The ratios for *+for/för* vs. *-for/för* are 1:15.3 for Nynorsk Norwegian, 1:6.5 for Bokmål Norwegian, 1:3.6 for Danish and 1.8:1 for Swedish.

Judging from Google searches, again Faroese seems to pattern with Norwegian in that absence of *fyri* is more frequent than its presence in the *hvat (fyri) slag av N* construction: a search in November 2009 gives 63 (unfiltered) examples with and 337 (unfiltered) examples without *fyri*, hence a ratio of 1:5.3.

An attempt to investigate this issue was done during the fieldwork, but the set of test examples was somewhat flawed, and the results are therefore difficult to use: what is clear is that 42 of the 43 informants accepted the example in (18) – the remaining one found it dubious – and it is thus safe to conclude that *fyri* is not needed in the explicit KIND *wh*-nominal.¹⁶

¹⁶ The problematic questionnaire examples related to this topic were the following.

- (i) a. Hvát fyri slag bil hevur tú? (9/2/26 = 37)
what for type car have you
 ‘What kind of car do you have?’
 b. Hvát slag bil hevur tú? (7/1/20 = 28)
what type car hevur you
 ‘What kind of car do you have?’

In both examples the preposition *av* is (intentionally) missing and the main noun appears in the case assigned by the main verb, here accusative, and the fact that a few speakers actually accepted these examples, was unexpected. One methodological problem here is that no example with just adding *fyri* to (12) was included in the test: in (i-a) *fyri* is introduced, but in addition *av* is absent and the main noun appears in accusative rather than dative. In (i-b) on the other hand neither *fyri* nor *av* is present, and again the main noun occurs in the accusative. During a rather hectic interview session it is difficult to know if all these detailed differences are properly conveyed to the informants,

- (21) Hvát slag av bili hevir tú? (42/1/0 = 43)
what type of car-DAT have you
 ‘What kind of car do you have?’

When we compare this noun phrase type to its Icelandic equivalent, we see that the case of the main noun is not affected by the *wh*-expression.

- (22) Hvers konar barn/*barni/*barns áttu? *Icelandic*
what.GEN type.GEN child.ACC/.DAT/.GEN have you
 ‘What kind of child do you have?’

This means that we are faced with a similar challenge in this case as we are in the case of Faroese *hvat fyri* versus Old Norse *hvat at*: in one instance the complex *wh*-expression does govern the case of the main noun, whereas in the other it does not. The challenge here lies in capturing functional equivalence but structural difference. I will leave it to future investigations to work out a proper solution to this challenge.

6. Other nominals

Some other cases of *wh*-nominals, modelled on types found in other varieties of Scandinavian, were also tested out during the Faroese fieldwork, mostly with a negative result.

First of all, it seems quite clear that Faroese does not allow an adnominal use of the same *wh*-item as is used for manner *how*, i.e. *hvussu*. This was tested since such a use is widespread in colloquial Icelandic and across Norwegian dialects and also found in Jutlandic Danish (see Vangsnæs 2008a:240, 2008b). 27 informants were presented with the example in (23), and all of them rejected it.

- (23) *Hvussu bil hevir tú?
how car have you
 ‘What kind of car do you have?’

One interesting fact in this respect is that in the ongoing systematic dialect syntax investigation in Norway (within the ScanDiaSyn project), there seems to be a geographically contiguous area in coastal Western Norway where this construction is dismissed or at least infrequently used. Given

and it is therefore a fair chance that some of the positive responses is simply due to noise. The fact that I only obtained one of the positive answers in sessions that I conducted myself, may further indicate that these figures should be handled with great caution. Alternatively, Sandur and Miðvágur may be significantly different in these respects, but when looking at results from Google searches, there are in fact no examples with *hvat fyri slag N*, and only a handful of cases with *hvat slag N*. (For the string *hvat slag av* there are almost 400 hits.)

that Western Norway may (historically speaking) be a primary contact point between Faroese and Mainland North Germanic, this observation may be one puzzle to add to that greater picture.

Turning to a different type of nominal, the questionnaire survey also established that Faroese DP-exclamatives, i.e. corresponding to English *what a N*, generally do not involve *wh*-items. Consider the following three test examples: the a.-example is the one spontaneously given by Faroese linguist while preparing the questionnaire, the b.-example corresponds to a structure known from for instance Swedish, and the c.-example is widely found across Mainland Scandinavian.

- (24) a. Sum hann hevur fínan bil! (41/0/2 = 43)
 as he has nice car
 ‘What a nice car he has!’
- b. Hvat fínan bil hann hevur! (3/1/22 = 26)
 what nice car he has
 ‘What a nice car he has!’
- c. So fínan bil hann hevur! (18/2/19 = 39)
 so nice car he has
 ‘What a nice car he has!’

The figures show that the preferred way of forming a DP-exclamative is to use the preposition/complementizer *sum* rather than a *wh*-item or the degree item *so*. Unfortunately, the regular *wh*-degree element *hvussu* was not tested for this exclamative type, but results from testing degree exclamatives suggest that also in such cases is a structure introduced by *sum* preferred over one with *hvussu*.

- (25) a. Sum hann er vorðin stórur! (43/0/0 = 43)
 as he is become big
 ‘How tall he has become!’
- b. Hvussu stórur hann er vorðin! (6/2/29 = 37)
 how big he is become
 ‘How tall he has become!’

Further details concerning Faroese exclamatives will be treated in future work. What is worth pointing out in this context is that the unmarked way of forming exclamative DPs in Faroese seems to be different from the way most other varieties of Scandinavian do it (see Delsing, forthcoming) and that it does not involve the use of a *wh*-expression.

Like in the other North Germanic languages, the Faroese quantifier corresponding to English *each* is morphologically speaking a *wh*-item, in fact homophonous with *hvør* except for one place in the paradigm: the

nominative/accusative singular of neuter has *hvørt* for the quantifier, but *hvat* for the *wh*-item proper. The same morphological distinction is made in Icelandic as well as in Old Norse.

The quantifier version of *hvør* is (naturally) involved in binominal constructions of which Faroese has, just like other varieties of North Germanic, two basic varieties, one with a postnominal quantifier/distributor like English <number> *N each* and the other involving a possessor, with the basic format *each POSSESSIVE N*. Although interesting data on these constructions were obtained during the fieldwork, it is peripheral to the topic of this paper, and I will leave also this issue to future work.¹⁷

7. Summary and conclusions

We can now summarize the findings regarding Faroese *wh*-nominals as follows:

- I *Hvør N nominals*: The same *wh*-item as is used to query for human referents (i.e. ‘who’) can be used adnominally to form a *wh*-nominal. The *wh*-item, *hvør*, is inflected and agrees in gender, number, and case with the main noun of the nominal. *Hvør*-nominals can be used to query for both KIND and TOKEN.
- II *Hvat (fyri (ein)) N nominals*: A construction similar to the German *was für (ein)* construction is also found in Faroese. The *wh*-part of this construction involves the general *wh*-pronoun *what*, which is not inflected but always appears in the nominative/accusative singular neuter form, *hvat*. The presence of an indefinite determiner after the

¹⁷ The following examples illustrate the structure of Faroese binominal constructions.

- (i) a. Vit hava fingið eina bók hvør.
we have received one book each
 ‘We got one book each.’
- b. Vit hava fingið eina bók í part.
we have received one book in part
 ‘We got one book each.’
- c. Vit hava fingið hvør sína bók.
we have received each REFL book
 ‘We got one book each.’

Interesting questions pertain to the internal structure of the binominal constructions, in particular the possessive type where other varieties of Scandinavian differ as to whether the quantifier agrees with the main noun of the quantified phrase or with the binder, and also as to whether the possessive is always third person or sensitive to the person of the binder. Furthermore, a version of the first binominal construction mentioned has the PP *í part* ‘in part’ instead of *hvør* in a postnominal construction.

preposition *fyri* ‘for’ appears to be entirely optional with singular nouns. For some speakers (about ¼) the *hvat fyri (ein)* construction is dispreferred in TOKEN queries. We also saw that a small number of informants allowed just *hvat* to precede the main noun, and judging from the number of examples found on the web of such bare *what*, this constructions seems to be in use in contemporary Faroese.

- III *Hvat (fyri) slag av N.DAT*: The overt way of forming a KIND querying nominal in Faroese is to combine *hvat (fyri)* with the KIND noun *slag* which in turn must be followed by the preposition *av* ‘of’. The preposition *av* assigns dative case to the main noun.

One interesting observation that can be made concerning the *hvat fyri (ein) N* construction and the *hvat (fyri) slag av N* construction is that in terms of presence/absence of the elements just put in parentheses Faroese seems pattern more with Norwegian than with the other Mainland North Germanic standard languages: as in Norwegian \pm indefinite article is fairly balanced and for \pm *fyri* absence of *fyri* seems far more frequent than its presence. Taken together with the observation in section 6 that “adnominal manner *how*” was dismissed in Faroese similar to what is the case for West Norwegian dialects in the ongoing ScanDiaSyn investigations, may suggest that Norwegian has constituted the major point of contact between Faroese and Mainland North Germanic.

A number of issues for further investigation and theorizing have been touched upon in this survey of Faroese *wh*-nominals. One the one hand there are several issues that warrant further empirical investigations such as \pm indefinite article in the *hvat fyri N* construction and the possible correlations with KIND vs. TOKEN readings and the use of bare *what* in the language. Furthermore, more specific syntactic analyses remains to be worked out for the various constructions, and as I hope to have highlighted, the task is not, in a comparative perspective, entirely trivial. In other words, exiting work still lies ahead as far as the morphosyntax and semantics of Faroese *wh*-nominals are concerned.

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