

A *wh* discourse particle: Dutch *Hoezo*

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Introducing *hoezo*

- = **hoe + zo** (lit. ‘how so’)
- Usually translated as ‘why’
- Has a pragmatic meaning
- Often paraphrased as ‘What do you mean?’
- Contrasts with *waarom* (regular ‘why’)

Main claims

- *Hoezo* is both a **wh-word** and a **discourse particle**, hence a **wh discourse particle**

Pragmatics

- *Hoezo* expresses the **speaker’s attitude towards the discourse state**
- It signals **resistance to updating the CG** (or other discourse component such as the QUD or To-Do List)
- It asks the interlocutor to **provide a reason** for their preceding discourse move

Semantics

- *Hoezo* is **not a variable-binding operator** (unlike *waarom/why*)

Syntax

- *Hoezo* is **base-generated** in Spec-CP (no *wh*-movement)

Types of *hoezo* utterances

(1) Speaker A: *Ons plan is totaal mislukt.*
our plan is totally failed
‘Our plan totally failed.’

Speaker B can respond with:

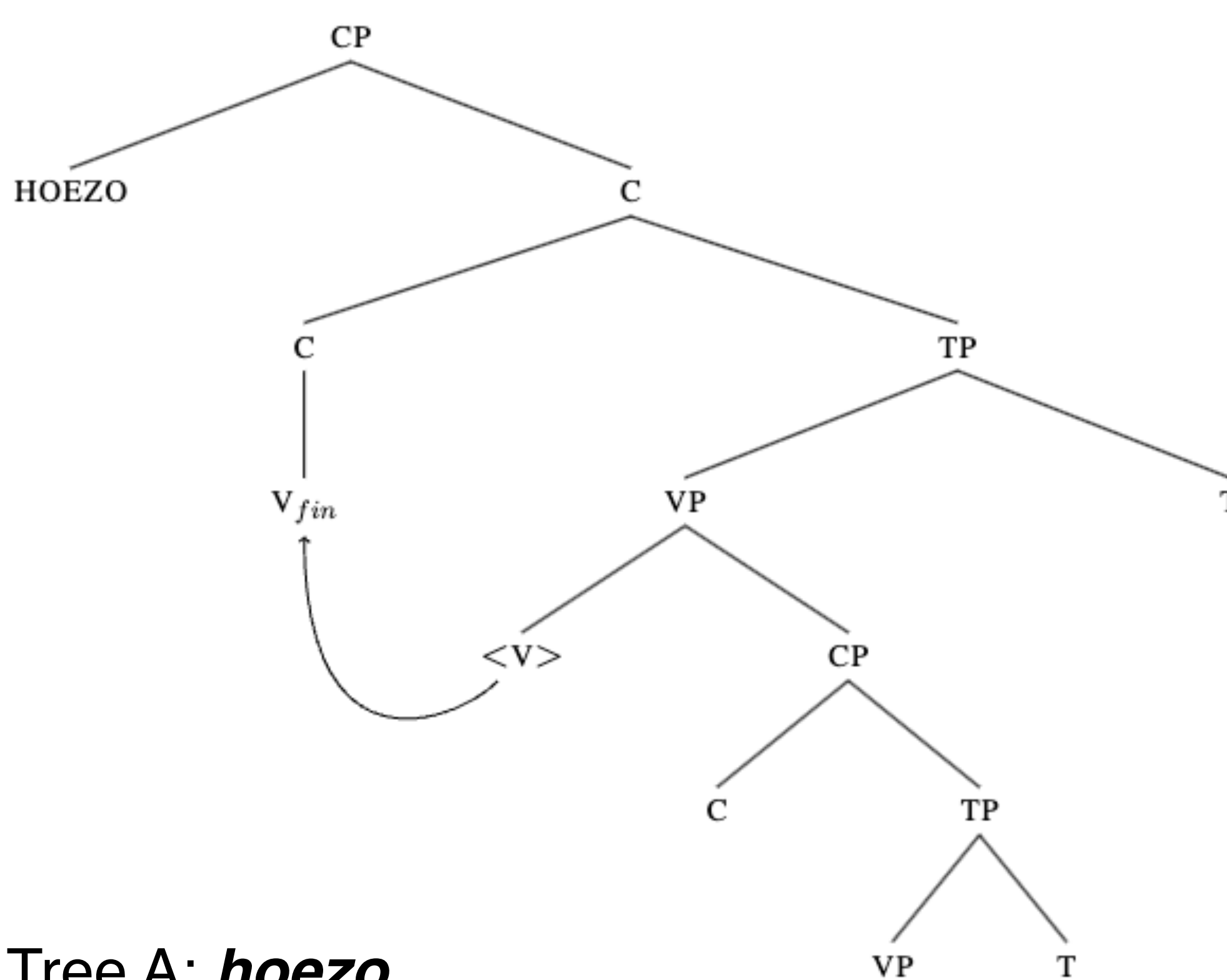
- Hoezo?* **isolated *hoezo***
‘What do you mean?’
- Hoezo, (totaal) mislukt?’* ***hoezo* + X**
‘What do you mean, (totally) failed?’
- Hoezo is ons plan mislukt?* **V2 *hoezo***
HOEZO is our plan failed
‘What do you mean, our plan failed?’

Hoezo in action

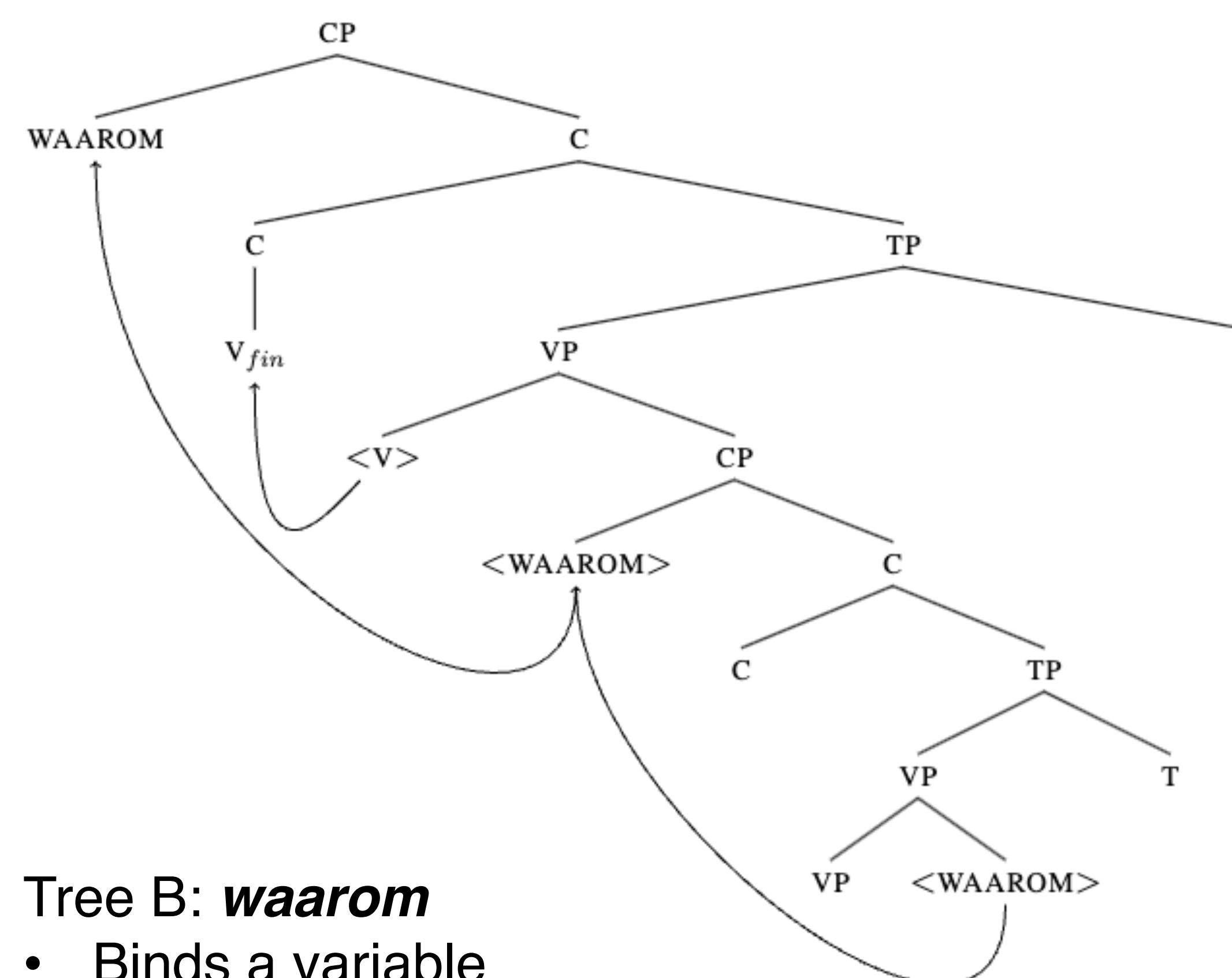
- Prototypical use: response to an **assertion** of a proposition *p*, as in (1)
- Challenging a **presupposition** or conversational **implicature**:
(2) A: Bob Dylan is geen goede zanger meer.
Bob Dylan is no good singer anymore
‘Bob Dylan is not a good singer anymore.’
B: *Hoezo geen goede zanger meer?* (Ik heb hem altijd vreselijk gevonden!)
HOEZO no good singer anymore I have him always terrible found
What do you mean, not a good singer anymore? (He’s always been terrible!)’
- (3) A: Het water is warm. B: *Hoezo warm?* (Het is gloedheet!)
‘The water is warm.’ ‘What do you mean, warm? (It’s scalding!)’
- In response to other speech acts such as **questions** or **commands**:
(4) A: Ben je ziek? B: *Hoezo?*
‘Are you sick?’ ‘Why?’; ‘Why do you ask?’
(5) A: Doe je jas aan! B: *Hoezo?* (Ben jij de baas soms?)
‘Put on your coat!’ ‘Why? (Are you my boss?)’

Syntactic consequences: *hoezo* vs. *waarom*

- **No long-distance construal**
(6) *Waarom/Hoezo zei de politie dat de verdachte gearresteerd is?*
‘Why did the police say the suspect was arrested?’ (*waarom*: ambiguous; *hoezo*: not ambiguous)
- **Can’t introduce an embedded clause**
(7) *Ik vraag me af waarom/*hoezo het regent.* ‘I wonder why it’s raining.’
- **Can’t appear in multiple-*wh* or echo questions**
(8) *Wie is waarom/*hoezo afgetreden?* ‘Who resigned why?’



Tree A: ***hoezo***
• Does not bind a variable
• Local interpretation



Tree B: ***waarom***
• Binds a variable
• Local and non-local interpretation

Hoezo as a discourse particle

Similarities

Non-wh discourse particle	<i>Hoezo</i>
Not truth-conditional contribution	✓
Not at issue	✓
Situates <i>p</i> in the Common Ground	✓
Manages CG-content dispute	✓
Marks <i>p</i> as controversial	✓
Does not bind a variable	✓

Differences

Discourse particle	<i>Hoezo</i>
Cannot be independent	✗
Deficient adverb (cf. Grosz 2021)	✗
Cannot introduce a question	✗
Cannot directly challenge <i>p</i>	✗

Conclusion

- Our analysis extends the **typology of *wh*-questions**
- Our analysis extends the **typology of discourse particles**
- We introduce a new category of *wh* discourse particles
- Other potential *wh* discourse particles:
Wat dan nog? ‘what then still’, *So what?*, *What of it?*

Selected references

Cox. 2021. How *why*-interrogatives work. Farkas & Bruce. 2010. On reacting to assertions and polar questions. Grosz. 2021. Discourse particles. Krifka. 2008. Basic notions of information structure. Portner. 2004. The semantics of imperatives within a theory of clause types. Roberts. 2012. Information structure in discourse. Schwarz & Simonenko. 2018. On the logical make-up of *how*- and *why*-questions. Zwicky & Zwicky. 1973. How come and what for

Acknowledgments

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