Minimal Systems of Interrogative Words

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Wer, wie, was?
Der, die, das!
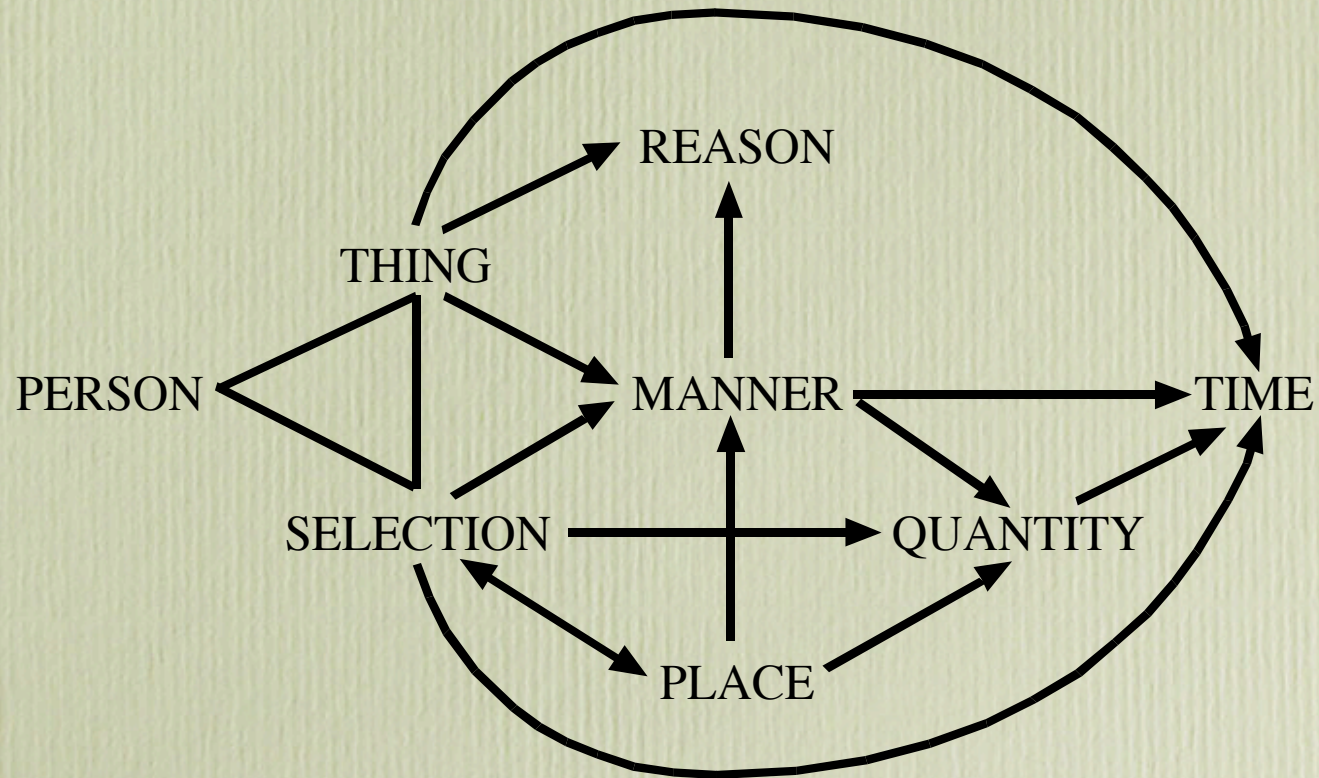*Wieso, weshalb, warum?*
Wer nicht fragt, bleibt dumm!

Typology of form

- unanalyzable morpheme (*how*, but also *who*)
- diachronically analyzable (*why, weshalb*)
- analyzable but nonsense semantically (*wofür*)
- partly analyzable ('raspberry'-type)
- transparantly derived from another questionword (*how much*)
- identical to another questionword (*how long?* vs. *how did you do it?*)

Major paths for derivation

Sranan (Creole, Surinam)

Asheninca (Arawak, Peru)

who = what

how = how many/much

Conclusions

- Synchronically, transparency is ubiquitous
- Diachronically, there is a high 'turn-over rate'
- Extreme transparency is rare
- Extreme ambiguity does not seem to exist
- Ambiguities among major categories are rare
- Ambiguity *who = what* is relatively common

The End