

Germanic complementizer semantics

Minimal pairs

Minimal pairs are found with complement-taking elements of class 3 (e.g. semifactive predicates and predicates of saying).

Type 2 complementizers are used
if the speaker is – or presents* – herself as uncertain about the complement proposition.

Otherwise, Type 1 complementizers are used.

* There are cases where the speaker is certain about the complement proposition, but wishes not to reveal this to the listener.

(1) *I know [whether it is ready] (but I won't tell you).*



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Danish examples (cf. Boye 2008: 22-23; COPR = complement proposition)

- (1) a. *Bo siger [**at** Ib græder].* (conveys certainty about COPR
'Bo says that Ib is crying'. to the extent that Bo is reliable)
- b. *Bo siger [**om** Ib græder].* (conveys uncertainty about COPR
'Bo will say whether Ib is crying'. whether or not Bo is reliable)
- (2) a. *Bo går uanset [**at** Ib græder].* (conveys certainty about COPR)
'Bo will leave in spite of the fact that Ib is crying'.
- b. *Bo går uanset [**om** Ib græder].* (conveys uncertainty about COPR)
'Bo will leave even if Ib is crying'
- (3) a. *Bo tænker over [**at** Ib græder].* (conveys certainty about COPR)
'Bo is thinking about the fact that Ib is crying'
- b. *Bo tænker over [**om** Ib græder].* (conveys uncertainty about COPR)
'Bo is wondering whether Ib is crying'



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Relating **minimal pairs** to the proposed description

Minimal pairs support the description of Type 1 complementizers as being epistemically neutral, and of Type 2 complementizers as expressing uncertainty about the complement proposition.



Germanic complementizer semantics

Consider also the categories that trigger the use of Type 2 after semifactive predicates and predicates of saying (Sitta 1971, Nordström 2010: 182ff):

negation

(1) *I don't know whether it is ready.*

modal verbs

(2) *I should know whether it is ready.*

futures

(3) *Tomorrow I will know whether it is ready.*

interrogatives

(4) *Do we know whether it is ready?*

According to Sitta, the common denominator of these categories is

"das Moment der Nicht-Festgelegtheit, Unsicherheit"

(Sitta 1971: 198).



Germanic complementizer semantics

Complementizer deletion

Type 1 complementizers

can in some, but not all, Germanic languages be deleted in certain contexts.

Languages that readily allow deletion:

Danish, English, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish

Languages that allow deletion less readily:

Icelandic: *að* can be omitted when it occurs directly after the finite verb and is immediately followed by a subject pronoun (Thráinsson 1994: 186).

- (1) *Ég held (að) þú megir fullyrða það.*
 I think.PRS COMP you may claim that
 'I think that you can claim that'

Languages that do not (with possible dialect exceptions) allow deletion:

Dutch (de Schutter 1994: 467), German*

- * In German, verb-final *dass*-complements contrast with verb-second \emptyset -complements



Germanic complementizer semantics

Type 2 complementizers
cannot be deleted.

Relating restrictions on **complementizer deletion** to the
proposed description

The proposed analysis captures this difference between
Type 1 and
Type 2 complementizers in a straightforward way:

- Since Type 1 complementizers are epistemically neutral,
deleting them has no semantic consequences.
- Since Type 2 complementizers express uncertainty, deleting
them has semantic consequences.



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Non-complementizing uses of complementizer forms

Both Type 1 and 2 complementizer forms have non-complementizer uses.

Type 1

Desubordinated uses (probably found in all Germanic languages)

(1) *That it should have come to this!* (exclamative (mirative/frustrative))

Relativizer uses (English restrictive relative clauses)

(2) *the dog [that I bought yesterday].*

Adverbial uses

Danish

(3) *Jeg gjorde det [(for/så) **at** hun ikke skulle gøre det].*

(purposive)

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I did it so that she didn't have to do it'.



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The proposed description is compatible with these uses of Type 1 forms:

Restrictive relative clauses are either presupposed or epistemically neutral. Similarly, adverbial subordinators are either presupposed (can be constructed with 'the fact that', e.g. *except for the fact that*) or epistemically neutral ('in that'; although some resemble conditional protasis markers, e.g. *provided that*).



Germanic complementizer semantics

Type 2

Desubordination uses: suggestive, apprehensive, suppositive and counterfactual desiderative constructions

(1) *If only you had been there!*

Adverbial subordinator uses

Protasis markers in conditionals

English *if, whether*, Faroese *um*, Swedish *om*, (Norwegian *om*), (Danish *om*)

(2) *I will do it [**if** you don't].*



Germanic complementizer semantics

The proposed description of Type 2 complementizers makes possible a straightforward account of the use of such complementizers as conditional protasis markers.

Protasis markers as epistemic modal markers of uncertainty

Arguments in support of the analysis (Boye 2008; van Lier & Boye 2010)

1. Polyfunctional expressions are found which can be used either as protasis markers or as uncertainty markers.
2. Epistemically ambiguous adverbializers are disambiguated as protasis markers in contexts of speaker uncertainty.
3. The analysis allows us to give an account of negative polarity items in protases.



Germanic complementizer semantics

Argument 1: Polyfunctional expressions

In Lango, the protasis marker *kónó* 'if' is used outside protasis clauses in what seems to be harmonic combination with the epistemic adverb *òhò* 'maybe, it is possible'.

Lango (Noonan 1992: 184)

| | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| (1) | <i>Kóno</i> | <i>òhò</i> | <i>àwòt</i> |
| | If | it.is.possible | 3SG.go.PFV |
| | 'Maybe he's walking'. | | |

In other languages, the opposite situation is found:

General markers of uncertainty (possibility) are used in protasis clauses in harmonic combination with canonical protasis markers (Bybee & al. 1994: 208-210).



Germanic complementizer semantics

Argument 1: Polyfunctional expressions (continued)

In Lega, the particle *andé* occurs both in protasis clauses (1) and, as a marker of uncertainty, in main clauses (2) and complement clauses (3):

Lega (Botne 1997: 527)

- (1) ***andé*** *mbúla zálɔka, ntábwε.*
 EPIST 9.rain 9.?.fall.FIN.V. NEG.3SG.come.FIN.V.
 'Assuming (if) it rains, he won't come'.
- (2) ***andé*** *nʒɔka!*
 EPIST 9.snake.
 'Assume (it's) a snake', 'Presumably (it's) a snake'.
- (3) *nsízi andé éndile kw isɔkɔ.*
 1SG.not.know EPIST 3SG.go.REC:PST to 5.market.
 'I don't know whether/if she went to the marketplace'.



Germanic complementizer semantics

Argument 2: Epistemically ambiguous adverbializers are disambiguated as protasis markers in contexts of speaker uncertainty

Japanese

(1) [*Konya syuzin ga kaette ki -tara*], tazune-masyoo.
 tonight husband SUBJ returner come -SUBORD ask -will.
 'When/if my husband comes home tonight, I'll ask'.

"If the speaker takes for granted that her husband will come home, it is temporal; but if she is not absolutely sure, it is conditional"
 (Akatsuka 1985: 626).

Cf. German *wenn*.



Germanic complementizer semantics

Argument 3: an account of negative polarity items in protasis clauses

In Danish, *noget som helst* 'anything at all' normally requires a negation (Boye 2008: 20).

In combination with *hvis* 'if', however, it does not
(cf. Nordström 2010: 154ff on Swedish; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 835ff on English).

- (1) [**Hvis** *han har lavet noget som helst*]
if he have.PRS done anything at all
 bliver jeg glad.
 become I happy
 'If he has done anything at all, I will be happy.'

Account:

Hvis 'if' with its meaning of UN-certainty semantically provides this negation.



Germanic complementizer semantics

Main points

- Most, if not all, Germanic languages have a binary complementizer contrast similar to the English contrast between *that* (Type 1) and *if* (Type 2).
- The contrast can be straightforwardly be described as reflecting a semantic contrast between being *epistemically neutral* (Type 1) and indicating *uncertainty about the complement proposition* (Type 2): an epistemic contrast.*

* Though only Type 2 can perhaps be said to have epistemic modal meaning.



Germanic complementizer semantics

- The proposed description is supported by – or compatible with:
 1. the diachrony of the complementizers
 2. the distribution of the complementizers with complement-taking elements
 3. contrasts in identical environments (minimal pairs)
 4. facts pertaining to complementizer deletion
 5. facts pertaining to non-complementizing uses of complementizer forms



Overview

1. The standard view
2. Complementizer semantics
3. Germanic complementizer semantics
- 4. Complementizer deletion**
5. Problems and questions



Complementizer deletion

The Danish complementizer *at* ('that')

Danish is like English in that one of its complementizers, *at* ('that'), is in most contexts optional.

(1) a. *I think that she is there.*

b. *I think \emptyset she is there*

(2) a. *Jeg tror at hun er der.*
I think COMP she is there
'I think that she is there'

b. *Jeg tror \emptyset hun er der.*
I think she is there
'I think she is there'.



Complementizer deletion

Goal

Test of three hypotheses about what governs absence vs. presence of *at*:

I. Disambiguation

II. Production difficulties

III. Grammaticalization



Complementizer deletion

Data

LANCHART corpus

- 6 million-word corpus of spoken Danish

Explorative subcorpus

- 312,396 non-empty intervals
- 20 conversations
- 12 speakers



Complementizer deletion

Procedure

Manual tagging in Praat of all complement clauses for 16 parameters, including:

- complementizer (type, number)
- disfluency symptoms at the clause boundary
- matrix subject (type, length)

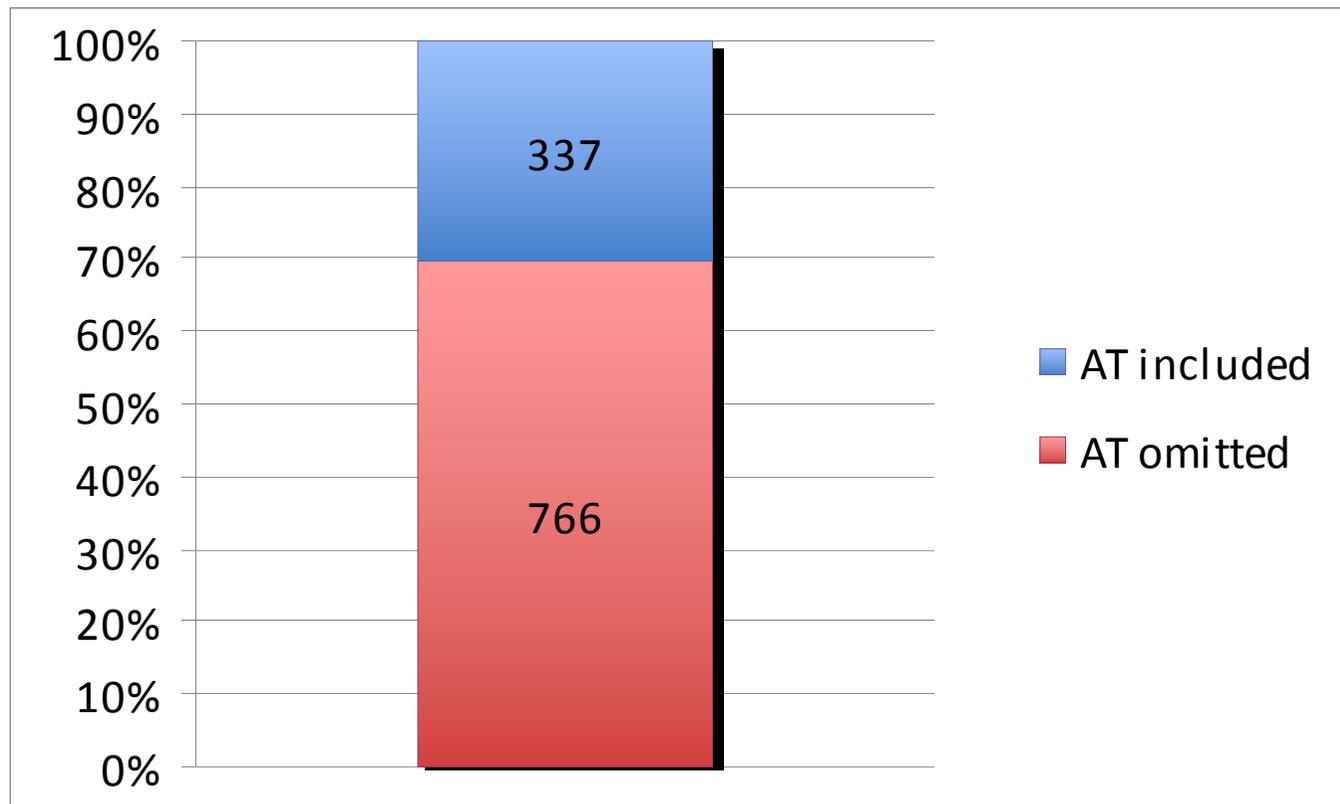
Subsequent extraction of data to Excel.



Complementizer deletion

General picture

1103 relevant constructions.



Complementizer deletion

Hypothesis I (disambiguation)

The complementizer *at* introduces clauses, and may thus potentially serve as a disambiguating device.

1. Garden-path ambiguity in complement

(1) *Jeg kan ikke huske [(at) **de** var der].*
 I can NEG remember COMP they were there
 'I don't remember (that) they were there'.

(2) *Jeg kan ikke huske **de** tre tenorer.*
 I can NEG remember the three tenors
 'I don't remember the three tenors'.

(3) *Jeg kan ikke huske [(at) **hun** var der].*
 I can NEG remember COMP she was there
 'I don't remember (that) she was there'.



Complementizer deletion

2. Garden-path ambiguity on clause boundary

(1) *Det er muligt [(at) hun er der].*
 it is possible COMP she is there
 'It is possible (that) she is there'.

(2) *Det er muligt.*
 it is possible
 'It is possible'.

(3) *Jeg ved [(at) hun er der].*
 I know COMP she is there
 'I know (that) she is there'.

(4) **Jeg ved.*
 I know
 'I know'.



Complementizer deletion

Hypothesis I

There is a higher proportion of *at* in constructions with a garden-path ambiguity

(cf. e.g. Elsness 1984 on the English complementizer *that*).

Hypothesis I.a

There is a higher proportion of *at* in constructions with a garden-path ambiguity in the complement.

Hypothesis I.b

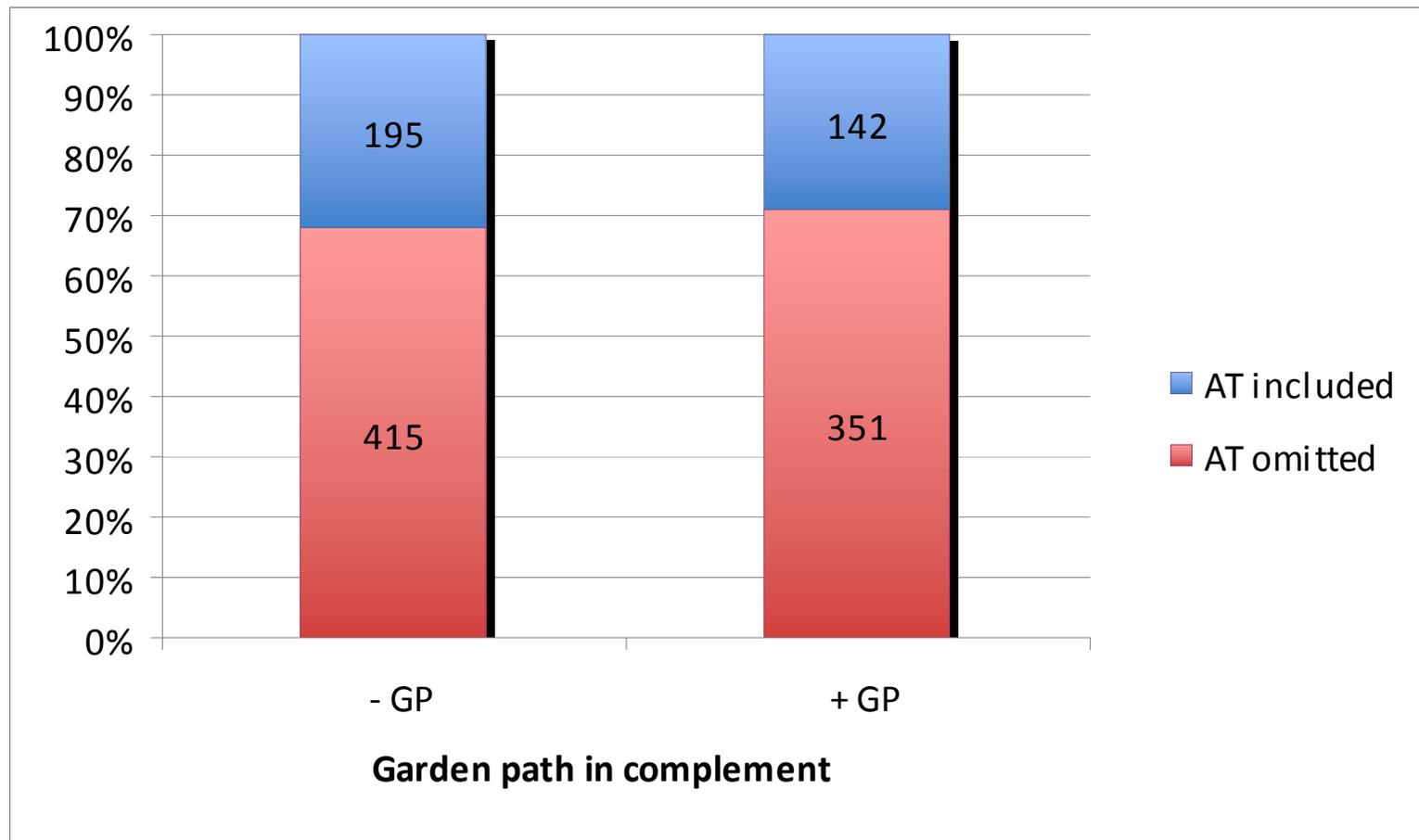
There is a higher proportion of *at* in constructions with a garden-path ambiguity on the clause boundary.



Complementizer deletion

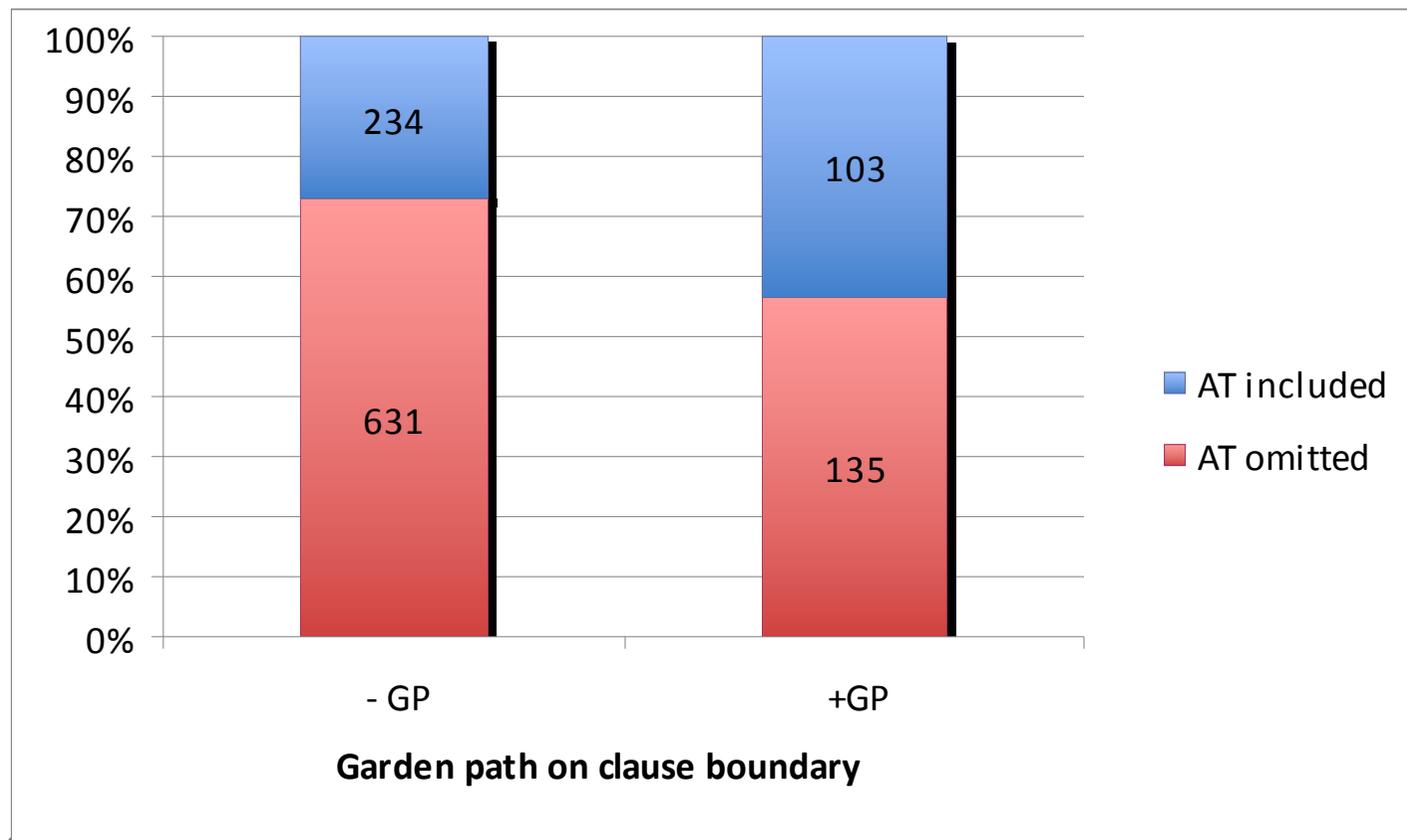
Results

Hypothesis I.a (garden path in complement): not supported.



Complementizer deletion

Hypothesis I.b (garden path on clause boundary): there is support for the hypothesis in our simple logistic regression analyses, but the issue is less clear-cut when we do more complicated analyses.



Complementizer deletion

Discussion of hypothesis I

Prosodical disambiguation may to some extent resolve garden-path ambiguities.

