Variation in the grammaticalisation of polar operators in West Germanic

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Introduction

embedded interrogatives in (Standard) German: [wh] feature of a C head marked either by the *wh*-element moving to [Spec,CP] in constituent questions, or by the insertion of *ob* 'if' into C in polar questions (Zimmermann 2013: 86)

(1)   a. Ich frage   mich,   **mit wem**   er kommt.
        I   ask.1SG myself.ACC with who.DAT he comes
        'I wonder who he is coming with.'

      b. Ich frage   mich,   **ob**   er kommt.
        I   ask.1SG myself.ACC if   he comes
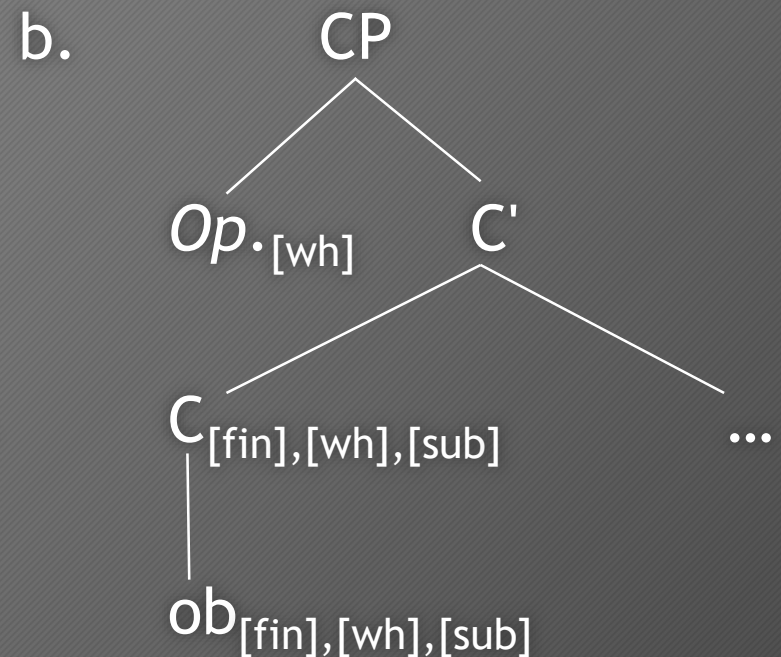   'I wonder if he is coming.'
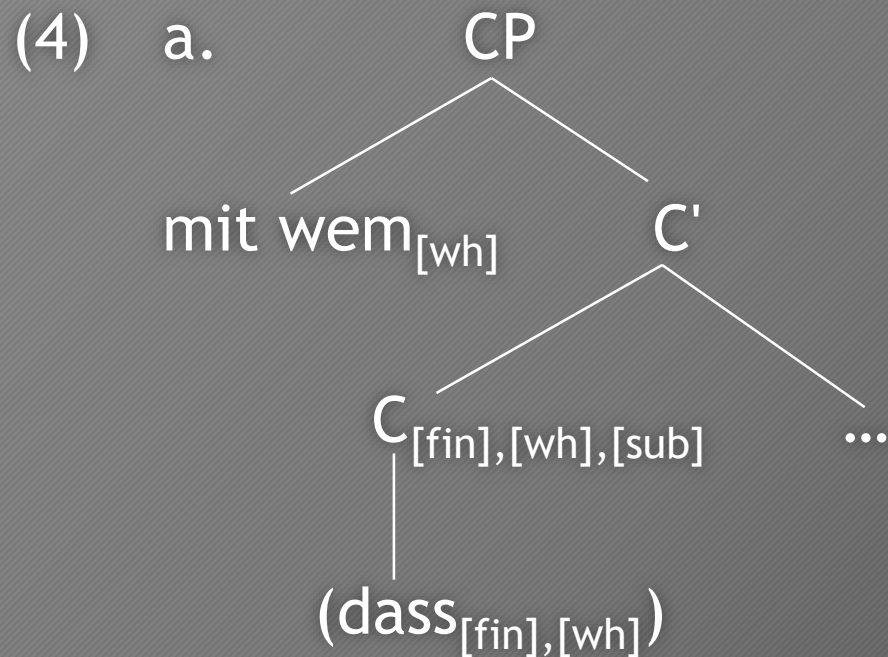
Alemannic

(2) I   ha   koa Ahnung, **mid wa   für-e Farb   dass**-er zfriede wär.
     I   have no   idea   with what for-a colour that-he content would.be

‘I have no idea what colour he would be content with.’
 (Bayer & Brandner 2008: 88, ex. 4b)

Polar questions

no *dass* (not even in Alemannic — Ellen Brandner p.c.):

(3) *Ich frage   mich, **ob dass** er mit einem Dackel   kommt.
     I   ask.1SG myself if   that he with a.M.DAT dachshund comes
     'I wonder whether he is coming with a dachshund.'

Structures

(4)   a.   CP

         mit wem$_{[wh]}$ C'

                    C$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$ …

                    (dass$_{[fin],[wh]}$)

b.   CP

         $Op.$$_{[wh]}$ C'

                    C$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$ …

                    ob$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$

Dutch

Standard Dutch *of* 'if': no doubling, similar to the case of English *if* (see Bayer 2004, following Hoekstra 1993)

combination *of dat* in substandard dialects possible:

(5) Ik vraag me af **of dat** Ajax de volgende ronde haalt.
I ask me prt if that Ajax the next round reaches

'I wonder whether Ajax will make it to the next round.'
(Bayer 2004: 65, ex. 14, quoting Hoekstra 1993)

note: substandard dialects also allow Doubly Filled COMP with ordinary *wh-*elements in Dutch (see Bayer 2004, following Hoekstra 1993)

Constituent questions

(6) Ze weet **wie of dat** hij had willen opbellen.
she knows who if that he had want call

'She knows who he wanted to call.'
(Bayer 2004: 66, ex. 17, citing Hoekstra 1993)

separation of [Q] and [wh] by Bayer (2004): languages with distinct elements carrying yes/no property and the *wh*-element itself

English

English: no Doubly Filled COMP with *if* in interrogatives: always in C

note: *if that* attested in Middle English but in conditionals (Van Gelderen 2005):

(7) Blameth nat me **if that** ye chese amys.
      'And blame not me if you do choose amiss.'
        (Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales: Miller's Prologue)

Doubling

patterns with doubling similar to Doubly Filled COMP in constituent questions, see (2); pattern available with the operator *whether*: doubling attested in Old and Middle English and in modern substandard varieties (see Van Gelderen 2009):

(8) I wot not **whether that** I may come with him or not.

   'I do not know whether I may come with him or not.' (Paston Letters XXXI)

Question

whether *ob* was always a complementiser in complementary distribution with *dass*, or whether grammaticalisation can be detected

if grammaticalisation is probable, how it is related to the difference between [wh] and [Q]

Proposal

- attested patterns suggest that any doubling is related to the need of filling the [wh] C by an overt element

- operators/complementisers may differ in their feature specification — *whether* is inherently [wh], whereas *if* has both a [wh]+[Q] and a [Q] version

- *ob* originally available in conditionals as well, but its disappearance from conditionals makes a mere [Q] version paradigmatically unavailable

Old Saxon

both the operator *(h)wedar* 'whether' and the complementiser *ef* 'if' attested

corpus analysis: DDD Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch (Old German Reference Corpus)

Results

	ef	*(h)wedar*	*(h)wedar* + V
Genesis	1	1	
Heliand	5	2	1

Example for *ef*

(9) endi frâgodun, **ef** he uuâri that barn godes
    and asked   if he was the son God's
    'and they asked whether he was the son of God'
    (*Heliand* 11)

Examples for *(h)wedar*

(10) a. ne   rôkead, **huueðar** gi   is   ênigan thanc antfâhan
           not   worry   whether   you it   some   thank receive
           'do not worry whether you get some reward' (*Heliand* 18)

b. endi he frâgoda sân,   huilic sie   ârundi   ûta   gibrâhti,
     and   he askedq instantly which   they business out   brought

   uueros an   thana uuracsîð   **huueðer lêdiad** gi   uundan
   man   in   this   foreign.land whether   bring   you   wrought

   gold te geƀu huilicun gumuno?
   gold to gift   some   men

   'and he instantly asked, what business had brought them out from
   their land into this foreign land and whether you are bringing
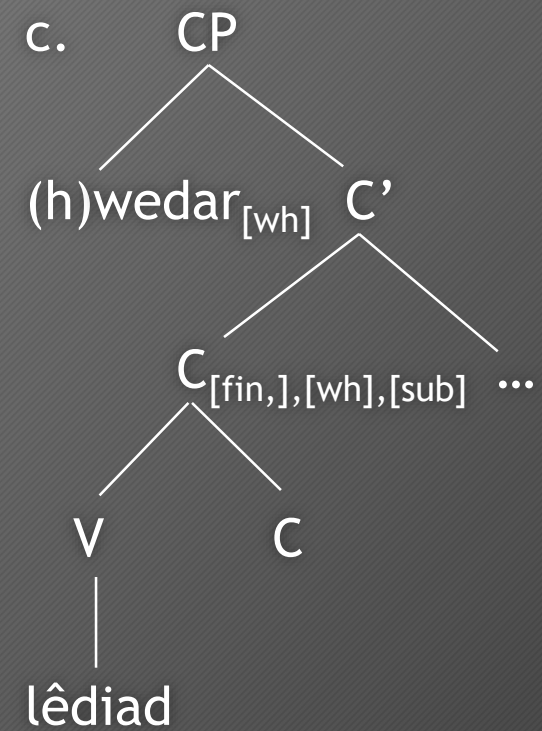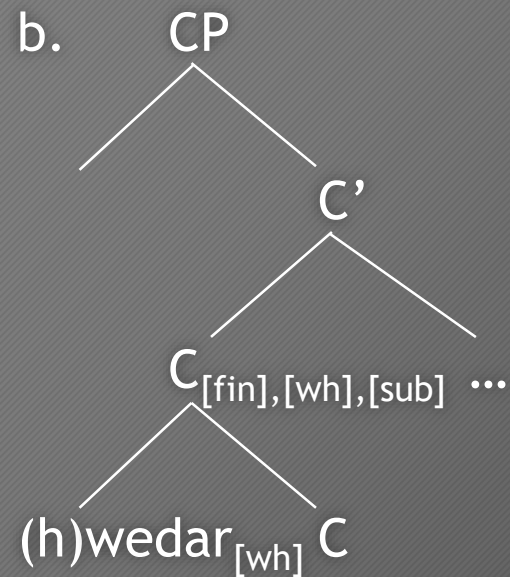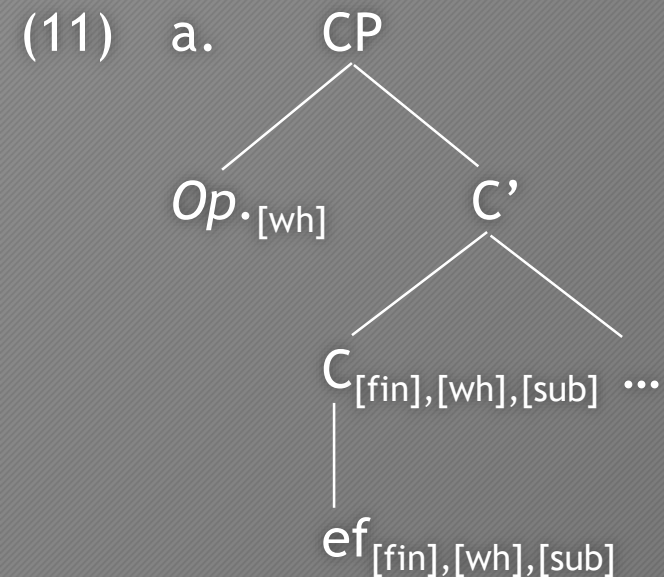   wrought gold as a gift to someone?' (*Heliand* 7)

So...

Old Saxon pattern similar to the English one
  separation of *whether* and *if* in their distribution
  (note: analysis here differs from Axel 2007, who
  categorises all of the Old German elements
  mentioned here as complementisers)

but: verb movement instead of a complementiser
  equivalent to *that*

analysis (Bacskai-Atkari 2016): potentially all patterns
  in (9)—(10) involve lexicalising the C head

Structures

(11) a.

CP
- *Op.*$_{[wh]}$
- C'
  - C$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$ ...
    - ef$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$

b.

CP
- C'
  - C$_{[fin],[wh],[sub]}$ ...
    - (h)wedar$_{[wh]}$ C

c.

CP
- (h)wedar$_{[wh]}$
- C'
  - C$_{[fin,],[wh],[sub]}$ ...
    - V
      - lêdiad
    - C

Operators

structure in (11b): alternatively, *(h)wedar* could be an operator in [Spec,CP] and the C head null, but the availability of verb movement suggests that the [fin] C was required to be lexicalised (see Bayer & Brandner 2008, Bacskai-Atkari 2015; 2016 on *wh*-elements inserted/moved into C)

Conditionals

also: *(h)wedar* not available in Old Saxon conditionals, *ef* is

corpus results: *ef* in conditionals only in *Heliand*, all the 33 instances contain a single *ef* as a grammaticalised complementiser

→ parallelism between embedded interrogatives and conditionals suggests there may be some analogy between the two clause types

Old High German

cognates of *if* attested: *ibu* and *ob*

corpus analysis: DDD Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch (Old German Reference Corpus)

Results

	ibu + V	*ob*	*ob* + V
Benediktiner Regel	1		
Otfrid		11	
Tatian		8	1
Ludwigslied		2	
Psalm 138		1	
St. Galler Schularbeit		1	
Benediktiner Glaube und Beichte III		1	

Examples

(29) a. fona himile   simblum sihit ubar parn   manno, daz   sehe,
        from heaven always   sees onto children men's   that   see

       ibu ist farstantanti edo   suahhanti cotan
       if   is   understood   or   sought   God

'from Heaven, he always sees onto men's children, to see if God is understood or sought' (*Benediktiner Regel* 7)

b. láz nu,   gisehemes oba come   Helias losenti inan
   let now see   if   comes Elias save   him
   'let us see if Elias will come to save him' (*Tatian* 208)

c. Pilatus uuntrota, oba her iu   entoti
   Pilate   wondered if   he already died
   'Pilate wondered if he was already dead.' (*Tatian* 12)

Variation

verb movement to C with *ibu*/*ob*: in the earliest texts, rare; yet: *ibu*/*ob* is an operator in these instances, but *ob* grammaticalised as a complementiser quite early

both *Benediktiner Regel* and *Tatian* from the Upper German dialect area, as most texts in table above (only *Ludwigslied* Central German); *Benediktiner Regel* is Alemannic, *Tatian* is East Franconian, *Otfrid* is South Rhine Franconian

→ the unavailability of *ob* in Modern German as an operator truly stems from grammaticalisation

Conditionals

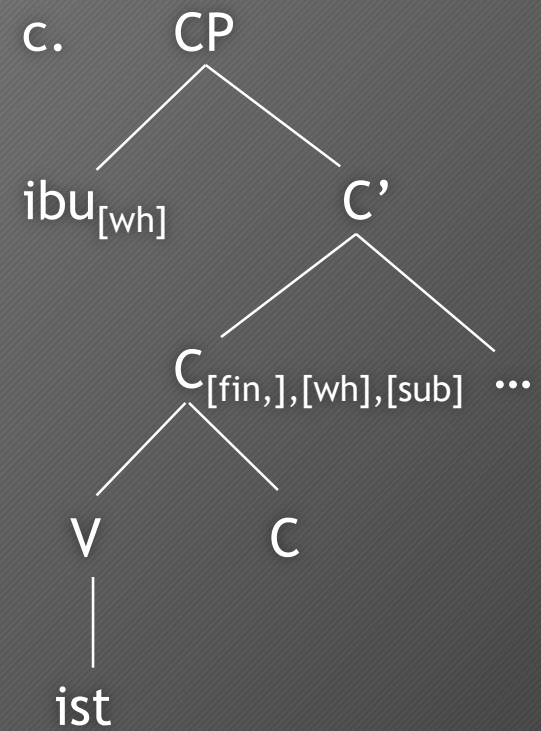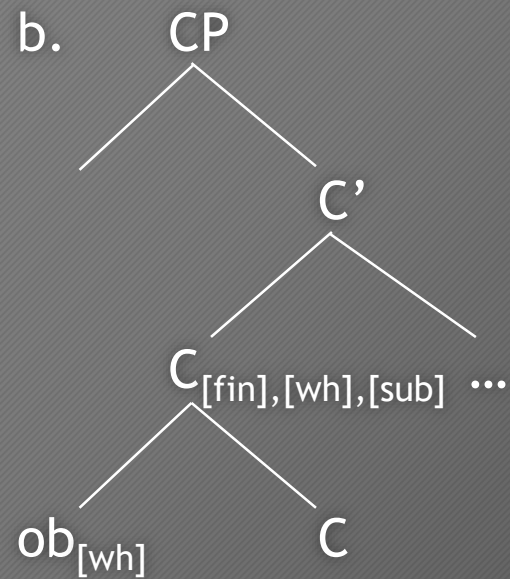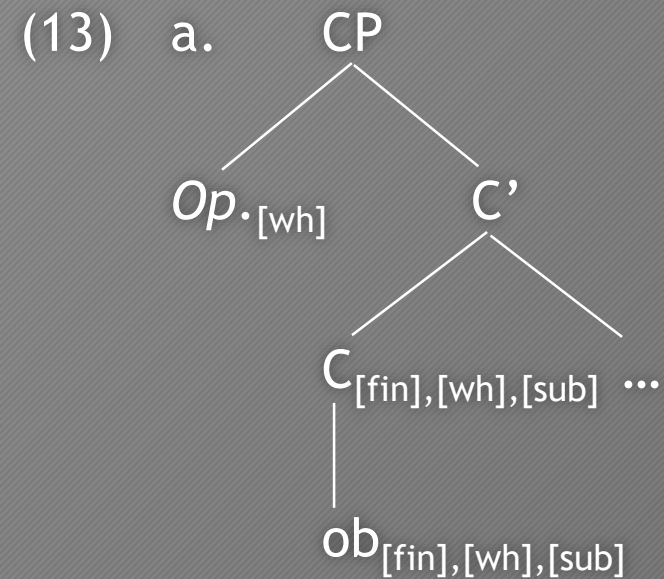|	*ibu* + V	*ibu*	*ob*
Isidor		7	
Benediktiner Regel	2*	2	
Otfrid			10
Monseer Fragmente		2	
Murbacher Hymnen			3
Wessobrunner Glauben und Beichte		1	

Note

ibu + V: one example elliptical (contains only *ibu* and the verb), the other contains an object following the verb as well (but OV/VO shows some variation in Old High German, see Hinterhölzl 2015), hence not necessarily instances of V-movement to C

So...

grammaticalisation in conditionals most probably even earlier

Old Saxon more similar to English than to Old High German (*if* already fully grammaticalised in polar questions, availability of *whether*) — Ingvaeonic dialects of West Germanic (Old English, Old Frisian, Old Saxon), while (Old) High German is Erminonic and (Old) Dutch is Istvaeonic

Structures

(13) a. CP

Op.[wh]   C'

C[fin],[wh],[sub] ...

ob[fin],[wh],[sub]

b. CP

C'

C[fin],[wh],[sub] ...

ob[wh]   C

c. CP

ibu[wh]   C'

C[fin,],[wh],[sub] ...

V   C

ist

Grammaticalisation

reanalysis of polar operator into complementiser:

element inserted into [Spec,CP] → element inserted into C via head adjunction → element base-generated in C (complementiser)

change is gradual

transparency: structures like (13b) and (11b) transparent for the language learner as long as there is input in the form of (13c) and (11c) showing the lack of grammaticalisation — stable input in the case of *whether/(h)wedar* but not in the case of *if/ob*; if no operator input, generation of (13a) or (11a) more transparent and more economical

Feature changes

- [wh] has to be marked overtly (no distinctive intonation in embedded clauses) — either in [Spec,CP] or in C, feature checked off either way

- feature difference between [wh] operator and [wh] complementiser: complementiser is also [fin] an [sub]

- regular *wh*-operators occupy [Spec,CP] in the syntactic paradigm, and even if head-sized operators may merge to C, visibly phrase-sized ones cannot → a regular *wh*-operator such as *whether* is not reanalysed as a C head, hence no feature change occurs

- operators of the form *if/ob* are not members of the regular *wh*-paradigm but instead come in two versions: a [wh]+[Q] one and a mere [Q] one (as in conditionals), and the latter is especially prone to grammaticalisation (transparency, economy) → these operators do acquire the [fin] and [sub] features when merged to C, and are reanalysed as C

Conclusion

differences in the status of [wh]-marking elements in embedded polar interrogatives in West Germanic

- Modern German *ob* a grammaticalised complementiser — evidence from Old High German for its origin as an operator
- grammaticalisation of operators depends on availability of further overt operators
- grammaticalisation of operators depends on features associated with the operator in interrogatives and in conditionals
- variation in West Germanic follows from these factors

the grammaticalisation of German *ob* follows general mechanisms of reanalysis

Thank you!
Danke!

Acknowledgements

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