

Ob-clauses in spoken and written interaction

It is assumed that subordinate clauses that are introduced with the conjunction *ob* are, in a broad sense, mostly used in the context of questions and/or cases of doubt, as well as to express uncertainty. A brief glance at authentic speech data initially confirms this assumption: The statement “sitze hier zuhause und überleg mir weiter *ob ich n neues Fahrrad brauch*” (from a short message exchange) entails an element of doubt, while “Wollte nur wissen, wie die Klausur war und *ob du morgen nach dem Training auch zum Spiel fährst*” (also from a short message exchange) establishes the context of a question. However, it remains unclear whether this is the full extent of functions covered by *ob*-clauses or whether additional functions exist in interactional language use. The methodological and theoretical principles underlying this examination are based in *interactional linguistics*, which focuses on the analysis of the discourse-functional aspects of language. This analysis is further enhanced by referring to *construction grammar* as it has been shown that the combination of both approaches (*interactional construction grammar*) is perfectly suited to identifying the procedural aspects of interactional language as well as linguistic solidification and routines. On the one hand, the combination of *interactional linguistics* and *construction grammar* was born from the need to account for the *temporal development of language*, the *sequential embedding of linguistic structures* (e.g., the role of specific syntactical patterns in the proclamation of narratives, marking the narrative’s climax, ending a conversation etc.), the *interactional embedding* of language (e.g., related to phenomena such as collaborative production of utterances, aspects of conversation management, hearer steering etc.) as well because it is *structurally open-ended*. On the other hand, this combination enables the identification of the *exemplariness* of language, i.e. a methodological and theoretical inventory with which to describe recurring links between form and function. Construction grammar is compatible with interactional linguistics as construction grammar also propagates a usage-based approach (which, however, is not always implemented in scientific papers on construction grammar) and is therefore open towards prosodic, sequential, interactionally functional or generic factors that must necessarily be integrated into the description of the construction.

The analysis indicated an unequal distribution of the *ob*-clauses in relation to their formal realisation: Of the 184 clauses found in the data, 149 were realised as object-*ob*-clauses. Within this group, the verbs *wissen* and *fragen* alone provide almost two thirds of all verbs in the matrix clause, the rest is divided into a small group of deliberative verbs (34 cases) and an even smaller group (12 cases) of communication verbs. In addition, we find that embedded *ob*-clauses constitute the overwhelming majority (169 of 184 cases). However, it must be noted that these embedded clauses are spread across as many types of forms (1. object clause; 2. subject clause; 3. subject-/object-dependent clause; 4. final *ob*-clause; 5. adverbial *als ob*- and *je nachdem-ob*-clauses) as the disproportionately less frequent (only 13 cases!) independent *ob*-clauses (1. irrelevant conditionals; 2. question/echo question; 3. *und-ob*-clause; 4. *als-ob*-clause).

This analysis, which was conducted on the basis of only a small data corpus but, as a result, combines both quantitative and qualitative aspects, could now be used to quantitatively verify the described patterns of *ob*-clauses with the help of larger corpora. This could lead to a more detailed image of their distribution and, with the help of larger data-sets, enable the analysis of hypotheses about the functions of the less frequent (predominantly independent) *ob*-clauses. Above all, it needs to be determined whether the cases presented here, which are not or only rarely discussed in academic literature and grammars (final *ob*-clauses; *als* *ob*-clauses), are factually less relevant or have been unfairly marginalised. And conversely, whether the well-researched types, or those that have been described in great detail (*und* *ob*-clauses; subject-dependent clauses; irrelevant conditionals) but appear very rarely here, are factually marginal constructions that are overrepresented in grammars.