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Investigative adverbial clauses

Rieke Scheffner & Sune Gregersen

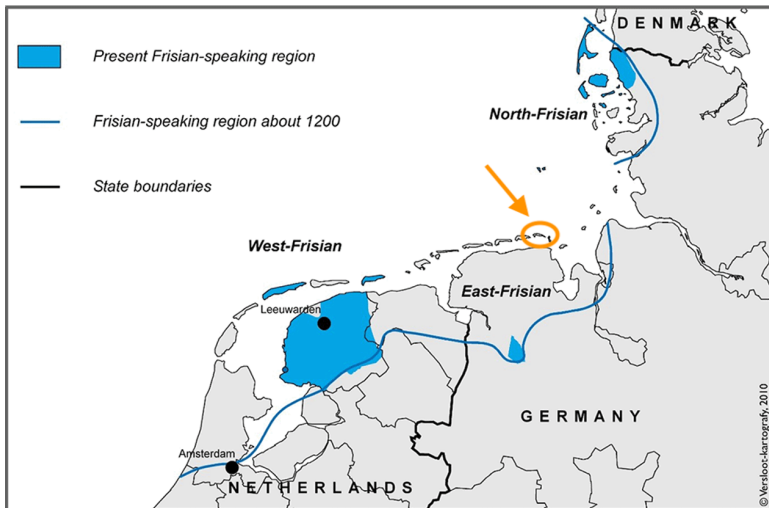Kiel University & Uppsala University

SLE 58
Bordeaux, 26 Aug 2025

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Rieke Scheffner (Kiel University)

Introduction: *wut* in Wangerooge Frisian

The Frisian languages

Wangerooge (© Martina Nolte, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE)

Wangerooge Frisian

- Variety of East (Ems-Weser) Frisian, extinct c. 1950
- Documentation from c. 1800–1935 (cf. Versloot 1996)
- Material collected by H. G. Ehrentraut (1798–1866) particularly reliable and true to the spoken word
- Our examples are all from the *Corpus of Wangerooge Frisian* (Gregersen 2025)

H. G. Ehrentraut (1798–1866)

Functions of *wut*

1. Pronoun 'what'
    - as interrogative pronoun
    - as relativizer
    - as content complementizer
2. Interrogative particle (cf. German *ob*)
3. Subordinator 'whether, (to see) if'
    - as polar complementizer
    - as marker of investigative clauses

wut as interrogative particle (insubordination)

(1)   *e,*   *qua*   *diu*   *moget,* ***wut***   *ya*   *dait* *nich* *wittert*
      yes say.3SG DEF.F maid   whether they that not   know.PL
      'Yes, the maid says, don't they know that?'

Complementizer *wut* 'whether, if'

(2) *iik wul   him fraig,   **wut**   hii mit gung wul*
    I   will.1sg him ask.inf whether he with go.inf will.3sg
    'I will ask him whether/if he wants to come along'

Investigative clause with *wut* 'to see if'

(3) *yaa wult weg un wult naa hírii kantóor too,* **wut**
   they will.PL away and will.PL after her office to whether
   yaa daa breíver nich fiin kant
   they DEF.PL letter.PL not find.INF can.PL

   'They will leave and go to her office **to see if** they might be
   able to find the letters'

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Characteristics of investigative clauses

wut 'to see if'

- Investigative clauses do not fill an argument slot → not complement clauses
- They do not reproduce a speech act → not insubordinate questions
- Adverbial (adjunct) clauses expressing a proposition whose truth value is to be determined
    - Often contain markers of epistemic uncertainty

Investigative clause after 'open'

(4) *doot   dait   fínster ínsen ípiin,* **wut**   *djuu duuv hiir*
   do.IMP.PL DEF.N window ATTEN open whether DEF.F dove here
   wail   herdíin kumt
   possibly in.here come.3SG
   'Please open the window **to see if** the dove might come in here'

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Typologies of adverbial clauses

- Kortmann (1997): "32 [adverbial] interclausal relations" in the languages of Europe
- Hengeveld (1998): 14 types of adverbial clauses
- Thompson et al. (2007): "twelve basic types" in the world's languages

Relevant types

- Purpose (final) clause: *p* in order to *q*
- Conditional clause: *p* if *q*
- 'Potential circumstance' (Hengeveld 1998): *p* in case *q*

Relevant types

- Purpose (final) clause: *p* in order to *q*
- Conditional clause: *p* if *q*
- 'Potential circumstance' (Hengeveld 1998): *p* in case *q*
- Investigative clause: *p* to see (find out) if *q*

Investigative clause after 'go'

(5) *de schipper is   nu erst weg gingen,* **wut**   *dait*
     DEF sailor   be.3SG now first away go.PTCP whether that
     uk   wer is,   dat ya far 'n docter lidzt
     really true be.3SG COMP they before INDF doctor lie.PL
     'The sailor has now first gone **to see if** it is really true that
     they are sick'

Between purpose and conditional clause?

- Investigative clauses express a motivation (like purpose clauses)
- ... but contain a proposition which may be either true or false (like conditional and potential circumstance clauses)
- In descriptions of individual languages often treated as a subtype of purpose or conditional clause
    - z. B. Lee (1975), Wakker (1986), Wakker (1994), Bodelot (1998), Imo (2017)

Investigative clauses in eight languages

Convenience sample

Language	Marker	Term	Main source
Ancient Greek	*ei/eán*	'in the hope that' clause	Wakker 1994
German	*ob*	'final *ob* clause'	Imo 2017
Japanese	*ka*	'unselected embedded question'	Kim 2018
Korean	*ci*	'unselected embedded question'	Kim 2018
Kosraean	*lah*	'to see if' clause	Lee 1975
Latin	*si*	'pro-causal conditional'	Cabrillana 2009
Upper Tanana	*de' kah*	'to find out if' clause	Lovick 2020
Turkish	*diye*	'unselected embedded question'	Özyıldız 2018

Three formal types

- Marked by complementizer/question particle ('whether')
    - German *ob*, Japanese *ka*, Korean *ci*, Kosraean *lah*, Turkish *diye* (plus Wangerooge Frisian *wut*)
- Marked by conditional subordinator ('if')
    - Ancient Greek *ei/eán*, Latin *si*
- Marked by goal adposition ('looking for')
    - Upper Tanana *de' kah*

German *ob*

- Investigative clauses with *ob* rare in modern written German
- Imo (2017: 18) on *ob* in text messages: may introduce "a kind of elliptical adverbial (final) clause"
- Also found in older texts, but already obsolete around 1800 according to Adelung (1801: *ob* 2)

German *ob*

(6) *ich wil   hin   gehen / **ob**   vileicht mir*
    I   want.1sg away go.inf   whether perhaps me.dat
    der   HERR begegne
    def.m.nom Lord   meet.3sg.sbjv
    'I want to go **to see if** perhaps the Lord will meet me' (Luther
    Bible (1534), Numbers 23:3)

German *ob*

(7) *ruf   vorher   besser kurz durch* **ob**   *ich zu*
     call.IMP.SG beforehand better briefly through **whether** I   at
     hause bin
     home be.1SG
     'Give me a quick call beforehand **to check if** I am home'
     (SMS, 30.09.2011; Imo 2017: 18)

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XAROTHS SÖLDNER STÜRMEN DEN AUßENPOSTEN! ✪ Minecraft FREEDOM #312 DEUTSCH | Paluten

https://youtu.be/KpBVno6sE5c?si=zr9815XOw1mdbhfv&t=468

Latin *si*

- Investigative clauses with *si* relatively common in classical Latin
- Long discussion about their status in Latin philology, e.g.
    - "pro-causal conditionals" (Núñez 1998, Cabrillana 2009)
    - "propositions hypothétiques à sens 'final'" (Bodelot 1998)
    - "Pseudokondizionalsätze" (Burkard & Schauer 2012)
    - "Purpose *si* clauses" (Pinkster 2021)

Latin *si*

(8) *i-b-o*   *hinc*   *intro, perscruta-b-or*
    go-FUT1.IND-1SG.ACT from.here into search-FUT1.IND-1SG
    fanum, **si** *inueni-a-m*   *uspiam*   *aurum*
    temple if find-PRS.SBJV-1SG.ACT anywhere gold
    'I will go from here and search the temple, **to see if** I might be
    able to find gold anywhere.' (Plautus, *Aulularia* 620) (Núñez
    1998: 598)

Upper Tanana *de' kah*

- Subordinator *de' kah* in Upper Tanana meaning 'to see if, to find out if, to check if' (Lovick 2023: 472)
- According to Lovick this is a special use of the postposition *de' kah* 'to check for, looking for [NP]'
- As a subordinator, the form only occurs in investigative clauses

Upper Tanana *de' kah* with investigative clause

(9) *Ntthi'   elok **de'_kah** dąą' dįįdį'.*
2SG:head hot to.see.if thus 2SG:do:IPV
'Do like this [gesturing: put hand on forehead] **to check if**
your head is hot.' (Lovick 2020: 205)

Upper Tanana *de' kah* as postposition

(10) … *Martha nah'ogn   dlegn   hut'oh **de'_kah***
     Martha MED:outside:AREAL squirrel 3PL:nest looking.for
    natidaak.
    3SG:SING:walk.around:IPV:CUST

    '[…] Martha walked around out there **looking for** squirrel
    nests.' (Lovick 2023: 489)

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Conclusions

- Investigative clauses found in several – also well-described – languages
  - Introduced by polar complementizers (5), conditional subordinators (2), and a goal postposition (1)
- Often classified as a kind of purpose or conditional clause, but the function is distinct from these received types
- In German well-attested in older and colloquial language, but almost entirely overlooked in the linguistic literature

Questions

- Are investigative clauses found in other languages of the world?
- How do they develop out of e.g. complement or conditional clauses?
- Might they correlate with other features, e.g. the presence of interrogative particles (cf. Park 2021)?

Thank you for your attention!

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Ellipsis?

(11) *ruf vorher besser kurz durch ~~um~~ ~~zu~~*
call.IMP.SG beforehand better briefly through in.order to
~~klären~~ ob ich zu hause bin
check.INF whether I at home be.1SG
'Give me a quick call beforehand ~~to check~~ whether I am home' (Imo 2017: 18, modified)

- Ellipsis analysis might work for German – but to what advantage?
- Rejected for Japanese and Korean by Kim (2018: 83–89)
- Seems untenable for Upper Tanana *de' kah*

Constituent investigative clauses

(12) *nu   biisocht dan   oel groev dait   kronkenhus uk   ään*
     now visit.3sg def.m old count dem.n hospital   also one.m
     *dii, **huu** 't da   kronken deer oon gunget*
     day how it def.pl sick.pl there in go.pl
     'Now the old count also visits the hospital one day **to see
     how** the sick people are doing there' (Wangerooge Frisian)

- Also in Kosraean, Japanese, Korean, Upper Tanana (and
  German?)
- However, only sporadically reported and never discussed as a
  separate type

Wangerooge Frisian *wut* as interrogative particle

(13)   **Wutt**   *ik Di mit ditt   sgriewen in us   memmsprok*
      whether I   you with this.ɴ letter   in our mother.tongue
      weil   'n   littk-en   gefallen do?
      possibly ɪɴᴅꜰ small-ᴍ.ɪɴᴅꜰ favour   do.1sɢ
      '(I wonder,) Am I doing you a small favour with this letter in our mother tongue?'

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Kosraean *lah*

(14) *El oruh ma   sac   **lah**   nga ac folo-yak.*
3sg do   thing DEF.INDIV to.see.if 1sg FUT anger-VBLZ
'He is doing that **to see if** I will get mad.'

(15) *El pauni ik ah **lah**   ac toasr.*
3sg weigh fish DEF to.see.if FUT heavy
'He is weighing the fish **to see if** it is heavy.' (Lee 1975: 362)