

Weil es is' ja so: weil clause word order by adolescents in Berlin-Kreuzberg

Word order in German *weil* clauses has been a topic of much debate, particularly in regard to whether the 'nonstandard' *weil*+V2 clause is actually increasing in usage. Proponents of this view, like Farrar (1999), claim that its use is in fact rising while others, like Freywald (2010), remain skeptical and believe it is merely a case of the 'recency illusion'. If *weil* is indeed undergoing syntactic change, we would expect to see both structural and social differentiation. Using data from semi-structured interviews with adolescents from the multiethnic neighborhood of Berlin-Kreuzberg, this study reveals a much higher frequency of *weil*+V2 clauses than found in previous studies, produced at the same rate by both youth with and without a 'migration background' (*Migrationshintergrund*). This suggests that this structure is establishing itself in this social context, possible evidence for syntactic change.

The data used in this study was collected in the course of the LLDM and MULTILIT projects from 2007-2010. My pilot study analyzed oral narrative and expository texts from 30 students in grades 7-13 from two participating schools. 24 students are from a migration background and 6 students are not from a migration background. For each text, I identified all instances of *weil*—as well as *dass* and *wenn* to serve as a basis for comparison—and categorized each token according to its verb placement and calculated frequencies of occurrence, e.g. "*weil man Angst hat*" (VF) and "*weil man sollte das tun*" (V2). Tokens that were not V2/VF or which were ambiguous in terms of verb placement were excluded from the subsequent analysis, e.g. "*weil ich meine, wenn man...*" (only 2.8% of the total tokens, 5/179). Following this, a semantic/pragmatic analysis of the token clauses was carried out by searching for recurring terms and word types. Based on results from previous studies, I hypothesized that *weil*+V2 clauses would be more frequent in conjunction with subjective verbs like *finden*, *denken*, etc. or evaluative adjectives like *gut*, *schlecht*, etc.

The most striking result to date is the observed high frequency of *weil*+V2. The number of V2 clauses is actually greater than VF clauses, with 54.05% of all *weil* tokens V2 and 45.95% VF, where there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups, i.e. with and without migration background, or the two schools. In a corpus study with spoken data from 1955-1974, Freywald (2010) found 91.7% of *weil* tokens to be VF and only 8.3% to be V2. In a corpus of interviews from 1989-1992, Farrar (1999) found 68.93% VF and 31.07% V2. We cannot directly compare my data and the other two corpora due to uncontrolled variables; however, this could suggest advancing change. This is only occurring with *weil*; for *wenn* and *dass*, the group with no migration background produced 100% of these tokens with VF, and the group with migration background produced 95.57% with VF, which is significantly different from the findings with *weil*. This follows Westergaard's (2009) approach to word order change, suggesting that it occurs gradually and only with one clause type at a time. A possible leading environment for this change is associated with the added illocutionary force of main clause word order, which has been suggested by Antomo & Steinbach (2010), Freywald (2010) and others. The semantic/pragmatic analysis supports this; all 11 *weil* clauses containing an evaluative adjective as well as 8/9 clauses containing the subjective verb *finden* were V2. This suggests that change is nearing completion in this 'leading' environment. Furthermore, in Heike Wiese's (2009) study on Kiezdeutsch, she suggests that word order deviations are common within this multiethnolect and that a multilingual setting supports a weakening of syntactic restrictions. Although my data is not representative of Kiezdeutsch, these social factors could be expediting change. The results of this study so far are promising and support the view that word order change is advancing in at least certain groups and structural contexts.

References

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