

Presence vs. absence of the Danish complementizer *at* in spoken and written language

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Like its English cognate *that*, the Danish complementizer *at* is optional in most contexts. Several factors have been hypothesized to govern the variation between presence and absence of *at*. This paper tests the hypothesis that speakers use optional *at* as a filler in case of production difficulties. The hypothesis entails two specific predictions: 1) *at* is relatively more frequent in complement clauses with disfluency symptoms such as pauses and lengthenings (assumption: disfluency is symptomatic of production difficulties); 2) *at* is relatively more frequent in complement clauses which have a non-pronominal subject (assumption: pronouns, being easily accessible, are easier to produce than e.g. nouns and complex noun phrases). Prediction 1 is tested on spoken language data (from the LANCHART corpus). Prediction 2 is tested on both spoken language data and written language data (from KorpusDK). Both predictions are confirmed. Interestingly, prediction 2 is confirmed not only in the spoken language test, but also in the written language test. Thus, an instance of grammatical variation which is best understood as governed by phenomena characteristic for spoken language (production difficulties), is found also in the written language.