

A phrasal construction for an “ex quō libet falsum” inference

Manfred Sailer 

Goethe-University Frankfurt a.M.

Proceedings of the 32nd International Conference on
Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar

Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Stefan Müller, Shûichi Yatabe (Editors)

2025

Berlin: Berlin Universities Publishing

pages 159–179



Keywords: Construction, HPSG, German, Negation, Idiomaticity

Sailer, Manfred. 2025. A phrasal construction for an “ex quō libet falsum” inference. In Stefan Müller & Shûichi Yatabe (eds.), *Proceedings of the 32nd International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal*, 159–179. Berlin: Berlin Universities Publishing. DOI: 10.83067/hpsg.2025.8.  CC-BY 4.0

Abstract

The paper looks at the German constructional idiom *wenn S dann bin ich der Kaiser von China* ‘if S then am I the Emperor of China’, which is used to express ‘I strongly reject the idea that S.’ It is argued that this expression should be treated as an idiosyncratic construction. At the same time, almost all its properties seem to be fully regular. The idiosyncrasy lies in the pragmatic properties that are connected to a particular syntactic structure and its meaning. This makes the expression an interesting test case for (i) the interaction of different modules of grammar, and (ii) our understanding of the interplay of regularity and idiosyncrasy in language.

1 Introduction

In this paper, I discuss a German construction that expresses the rejection of the truth of the antecedent in a conditional, (1a), or the rejection of an immediately preceding proposition, (1b). In either case, the rejection is encoded as stating that the speaker is *der Kaiser von China* ‘the Emperor of China’.¹

- (1) a. Also, wenn das stimmt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.
 thus if this is correct am I the emperor of China
 ‘This cannot be correct.’
 (lit.: ‘If this is correct, I am the emperor of China.’)
 b. A: “Wir verwenden die besten [...] Materialien für unsere T-Shirts”
 ‘We use the best [...] materials for our t-shirts’
 B: Und ich bin der Kaiser von China!
 and I am the emperor of China
 ‘This is nonsense!’ (lit.: ‘And I am the emperor of China.’)

The relevant statement in (1) requires that the communication participants are aware that the speaker is not really the Emperor of China. Transparently, then, the utterance is to be understood in the following way: The preceding claim is so wrong that if you accept it, anything follows from it, even that the speaker is the Emperor of China. This means that the construction relies on an *ex falso quodlibet* reasoning, i.e., the fact that anything follows from a false assumption.

[†]This research was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) as part of the CRC 1629 “Negation in Language and Beyond” (project number 509468465), project B05 (*Negative Polarity Items in non-negative contexts*). I would like to thank my project colleagues for comments and discussion: Pascal Hohmann, Nicolas Lamoure, and Frank Richter. I would also like to thank the reviewers – both of the conference abstract and of this proceeding submission – for their comments and insightful suggestions, as well as the audiences of *HPSG 2025* and of the syntax-semantics colloquium at Goethe University, Frankfurt, and the proceedings editors, Stefan Müller and Shūichi Yatabe. All errors are mine.

¹Unless stated otherwise, all examples are from the deTenTen23 corpus, accessed via <https://www.sketchengine.co.uk/>. Constructed examples are followed by the marking “...^c”.

However, it is by making an “anything” (*quodlibet*) statement that the speaker indicates that they consider the previous statement false. In this paper, I will refer to the construction(s) in (1) as the *Emperor-of-China* construction (short: EoC construction). I will refer to the *if* part in (1a) and to the initial statement in (1b) as the *antecedent*. As the two realizations of the EoC construction in (1a) and (1b) have different properties, I will refer to them as *und*-EoC and *dann*-EoC respectively.

In Section 2 I will try to establish that it is justified to refer to the EoC-construction as a construction in the technical sense. I will, then, discuss the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of this construction and provide the respective parts of the overall analysis in Sections 3, 4, and 5. Since the EoC construction shows an interaction of regular and idiosyncratic properties in the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, sign-based architecture of grammar, such as HPSG, is required to capture it in a natural way.

2 Data

The empirical basis of the paper are examples from the German internet corpus deTenTen23, retrieved via sketchengine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). I also use examples from other corpora, and introspection.² The main questions addressed in this section are: (i) Do we have reason enough to classify it as a lexicalized unit (i.e., as an idiosyncratic construction or phrasal idiom) rather than as a free combination? (ii) If so, what are the properties of the EoC construction?

A first argument in favor of the idiomaticity of the expression is that it is listed in dictionaries. For example, the *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (<https://www.dwds.de>) has an entry for the *dann*-EoC (*wenn ... , dann bin ich der Kaiser von China*) as a multiword expression. This entry mentions the *und*-EoC (*und ich bin der Kaiser von China*) as a variant.³ Similarly, the idiom dictionary from the Duden series –*Duden 11: Redewendungen* – lists the *dann*-EoC variant as *wenn ... [dann] bin ich der Kaiser von China* (Dudenredaktion 2002: 391). These entries suggest a rather strict form with the following properties:

- It is a verb-second, unembedded clause.
- It is either the consequent of a conditional or a conjunct with *und* ‘and’.
- It is a copular clause in the present tense.
- The speaker is the subject.
- The predicative complement is the noun phrase *der Kaiser von China* ‘the Emperor of China’.

²The basic dataset used here is available at <https://osf.io/5ut2g>.

³<https://www.dwds.de/wb/wenn%20E2%80%A6%2C%20bin%20ich%20der%20Kaiser%20von%20China>, last checked 2025-11-01.

This fixed form is said to have the meaning that the speaker does not believe the content of some antecedent proposition. This would be the proposition in the *if* clause in the *dann*-EoC, and the content of the (explicit or implicit) first conjunct in the *und*-EoC.

The noun phrase *der Kaiser von China* ‘the Emperor of China’ is clearly the dominant lexicalization for this expression. In the deTenTen23 corpus, there are 582 hits for the (simple, lemma) query *der Kaiser von China*, out of which 28 contain the sequence *und ich bin der Kaiser von China*. In comparison, there are 882 hits for *der König von Frankreich* ‘the King of France’, none of which being of the form *und ich bin der König von Frankreich* ‘and I am the King of France’. When looking for variants of the *und*-EoC with other titles or countries,⁴ *der Kaiser von China* is clearly dominating: It occurred in 28 out of 31 relevant hits. There was one instance of *König von China* ‘King of China’, and two instances of *Kaiser* ‘Emperor’ of a fantasy-land.

The female form *Kaiserin* ‘Empress’ is attested. Out of 68 hits for the (simple, lemma) query *die Kaiserin von China* ‘the Empress of China’, there were 3 hits for the *dann*-EoC, 1 for the *und*-EoC, and 1 with *ansonsten* ‘otherwise’ as introduction particle for the *falsum*, see (2).

- (2) Aber das niemand perfekt ist, stimmt wohl. Ansonsten bin ich
 but that nobody perfect is ist correct PARTICLE otherwise am I
 die Kaiserin von China.
 the Empress of China
 ‘Sure, it is correct that nobody is perfect. Otherwise, I am the Empress of China.’

In all of the relevant hits, the above-mentioned formal properties of the EoC construction hold, except for the gender variation. While it is only clear in one case that the speaker must be female, my native speaker intuition suggests that the occurrence of the *-in* suffix is a case of (optional) gender agreement.

In the following, I restrict my focus to the 582 hits for the (simple, lemma) query *der Kaiser von China*, mentioned above. In order to further test the formal properties of the EoC construction, I looked for cases in which the verb *sein* ‘be’ would follow the predicative complement. This was the case in 91 of the hits, none of which, however, expressed the meaning of the EoC construction. This confirms the observation that the EoC construction is restricted to main clause uses.

This sets it apart from another predicative use of the expression *der Kaiser von China*, illustrated in (3). Here, being the Emperor of China is meant to express that someone is (or considers themselves) important or rich.

⁴The query

[word="und|Und"] [word="ich"] [word="bin"] [word="der"]
 [word="König|Kaiser|Prinz|Herzog|Herrscher"] [word="von"]

has 35 hits, out of which are 3 irrelevant, and 1 is unclear unclear.

- (3) Wer die Hand an den Hof legt, kriegt die Kugel. Und wenn es der
 whoever the hand on the farm lays gets the bullet and if it the
 Kaiser von China wäre.
 Emperor of China were
 ‘Whoever lays a hand on the farm gets a bullet. Even if it were the
 Emperor of China.’

Out of the 582 hits, there were 26 relevant instances of the pattern *und NP sein_lemma der Kaiser von China*, i.e. of the *und*-EoC. In all of them, the subject was *ich* ‘I’ and the verb *sein* ‘be’ was used in present tense. In fact, there was no instance of another verb, nor was there an instance of the Subject-Verb order without the coordination particle *und* ‘and’.

The *dann*-EoC is attested in 24 hits, 9 with *dann* ‘then’, 15 without. Again, in all of these cases, the subject was *ich* ‘I’, the verb was *bin* ‘(I) am’.

Let us next look at the non-fixed material of the expressions. I will first consider the presence or absence of the antecedent and then additional material in the constructionally fixed part.

The DWDS description suggests that the antecedent proposition is part of the *wenn* ‘if’ clause in the *dann*-EoC and contextually provided in the *und*-EoC. This has also been the case in the initial examples in (1). My data contain one instance of a *dann*-EoC without a *wenn* ‘if’ clause, see (4). It is clear, however, that the preceding clause provides the antecedent.

- (4) PEGIDA: “Wir sind das Volk!!!”? Hmm, dann bin ich der Kaiser von
 PEGIDA we are the people hmm then am I the Emperor of
 China.
 China
 ‘I consider it nonsense that the political organization PEGIDA claims for
 itself to be the people.’

The *und*-EoC can be found with explicit complete or fragmentary antecedents, see (5).

- (5) [Context: Something about independent critical journalism]
 Ja, ja ... unabhängig, und ich bin der Kaiser von China.
 yes yes independent and I am the emperor of China
 ‘Right, independent – I don’t believe a word of it.’

One example reports a cartoon in which a police officer sees an ambulance parking in a spot reserved for disabled persons. Issuing a parking ticket the police officer utters the *und*-EoC-continuation *Und ich bin der Kaiser von China*. This suggests that non-linguistic antecedents are possible as well.

While both variants are quite restricted in their lexical material, they may contain additional words that are not mentioned in their dictionary descriptions above. This is illustrated in (6) with one example for each of the two variants.

- (6) a. ... dann bin ich wie gesagt der Kaiser von China
 then am I as said the Emperor of China
 ‘... then I am the Emperor of China, as I have said before’
 = ‘... is nonsense, as I have said before’
- b. Und ich bin übrigens der Kaiser von China!
 and I am by the way the Emperor of China
 ‘And, by the way, I am the Emperor of China’
 = ‘And this is utter nonsense, by the way.’

As indicated in the non-idiomatic paraphrases below the examples, the additional material in (6) is parenthetical. However, there is one example in my dataset in which only a literal interpretation of the extra material is possible:

- (7) Wenn der Potential für die Bundesliga hat bzw. hatte, bin ich
 if he potential for the Bundesliga has respectively had am I
 ab sofort der Kaiser von China
 from now on the Emperor of China
 ‘If he has the potential for playing in the Bundesliga, then I am the
 Emperor of China from now on.’

This brings me to another interesting property of the expression. Some examples contain the expression together with other phrases that refer to unrealistic or unreal properties, see (8). Clearly, the second clause is meant as an emphasis to the absurdity, but it is not conventionalized.

- (8) und ich bin der Kaiser von China. Und der Schwiegersohn des Tankwarts
 meines Kollegen ist der Zauberer von Oz.
 ‘and I am the Emperor of China. An the son-in-law of my colleague’s gas
 station attendant is the Wizzard of Oz.’

Getting back to the initial question in this section, the data presented here confirm that the EoC construction is an idiosyncratic, conventionalized form-meaning pairing. Under the particular meaning of disbelief, doubt, or rejection, it is very restricted in its syntactic variation. However, the literal meaning cannot be fully ignored, and the expression can be combined with ad-hoc formations that have the same effect. In this paper, I will try to maneuver between these properties by claiming that on the one hand, there is a construction, but, on the other, its effect is pragmatic and the same pragmatic effect can be achieved by ad-hoc formations.

In the next sections, I will argue that the construction is a regular combination, though restricted (Section 3 for syntax and Section 4 for semantics). At the level of pragmatics, however, its effect is hard-wired into the construction.

3 The syntax of the EoC construction

In this section, I will present the syntactic aspects of my analysis. I will argue that the construction is syntactically fully regular, but it is restricted to the occurrence of particular lexical expressions and to begin a copula structure.

For the sake of concreteness, I pick a particular HPSG approach to each of the aspects that need to be expressed. Other choices are certainly possible, but my purpose here is merely to show that everything that needs to be expressed can be expressed within HPSG. The resulting phrasal lexical entry is given in (9).

(9) The syntax of the EoC construction:

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{unembedded-phrase} \\ \\ \text{HDTR(DTRS | HDTR)}^* \\ \\ \text{COLL} \end{array} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{word} \\ \text{LEXEME } \textit{sein-lex} \\ \text{COMPS} \left\langle \text{NP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{LEXEME } \textit{Kaiser-v-China-lex} \\ \text{PRED } + \\ \text{SUBJ } \left\langle \text{NP[1SG]} \right\rangle \\ \text{SPR } \left\langle \text{DP[DEF +]} \right\rangle \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \right] \\ \text{irregular} \end{array} \right] \right]$$

To mark the expression as an idiosyncratic construction, I follow Richter & Sailer (2009). In their theory a feature *COLL* specifies whether a sign is regular or irregular, i.e., exempt from some principles of grammar. All irregular signs have a *COLL* value of type *irregular*. This type has subtypes expressing the type of irregularity (syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, ...). These reflect the idiosyncrasy classification of Fillmore et al. (1988). In (9), I simply put *irregular*. We will see in the next sections how this value can be more finetuned, once we identified the exact subsort required for this construction.

It is an idiosyncratic property of the construction that it must occur as an independent utterance. Richter (1997) and Höhle (2019) use a special subtype of signs for this, which they call *unembedded-sign*. Building on this, I specify the EoC as being of this type. As an *unembedded-phrase* the possibility of a verb-final realization is excluded.

The description in (9) specifies a path along the head line until its lexical pivot. This allows for an underspecified description of the syntactic structure that it is compatible with both the *und*-EoC and the *dann*-EoC variant. It is worth noting that this is a non-local construction and, as such, not directly compatible with a framework like Sign-Based Construction Grammar (Sag 2012). However, it satisfies the locality conditions specified in Sailer (2012), i.e., there is a single, idiosyncratic node in the tree, but it may restrict which elements must occur in the structure as well.

The lexical head selects a predicative noun phrase that requires a first person subject. This is specified in the SUBJ value of the predicative complement.

The construction requires some specific words: the copula *sein* ‘be’, and the expression *Kaiser von China* ‘Emperor of China.’ Such occurrence requirements can be dealt with by a mechanism of lexeme-based selection. I use the feature LEXEME for this purpose. The construction specifies that it must be headed by an instance of the lexeme *sein* ‘be’, for which I stipulate the lexeme type *sein-lex(eme)*.

The expression *Kaiser von China* ‘Emperor of China’ must be lexically selected as well. For simplicity, I treat this nominal projection as a lexicalized unit, but it could also be directly composed from its component parts. To capture the occurrences of the female form *Kaiserin* ‘Empress’, one can make either of the following assumptions about the suffix *-in*: (i) It is used here as a mere marker of gender agreement. As such it does not change the LEXEME value. (ii) It is a derivational suffix and can change the LEXEME value of its base. Nonetheless, the value of the base should still be accessible from the outside. For simplicity, I tentatively opt in favor of the first assumption.

A reviewer suggests to require a particular phonological realization, i.e., a particular PHON specification. I do not adopt this solution because I think that there is some phonological variation: First, the female form *Kaiserin* ‘Empress’ would not be included automatically. Second, parts of the expression may be camouflaged by a placeholder expression such as *Dingsbums* ‘thingamajig’ or *du-weißt-schon-wer/was/...* ‘you know who/what/...’.

- (10) Die helfen uns ... ‘They are going to help us ...’
 und ich bin der Dingsbums von China/ der Kaiser von
 and I am the thingamajig of China the Emperor of
 du-weißt-schon-wo.^c
 you-know-where

Since placeholder expressions may occur inside idioms, Sailer & Dörner (2020) argue that they change the PHON value, but not the LEXEME value.

In (9), I specify that the predicative complement must be marked as $\left[\text{DEF} + \right]$. This is intended to capture the obligatoriness of the definite article. As a reviewer point out, this specification might not be sufficient to guarantee the presence of a definite article as there are other determiners as well that give rise to a definite noun phrase. These include demonstratives and possessives. To avoid this, a lexeme-selection approach could be preferable here, i.e., the DP in the SPR value can be required to have the LEXEME value of the definite determiner.

The EoC is a copula construction. While the EoC construction always requires a definite determiner, this is not in the case in general with occurrences of the phrase *Kaiser von China* ‘Emperor of China,’ as shown in (11).

- (11) Ich war Kaiser von China. (booktitle)
 I was Emperor of China

It seems that in the variant with or without determiner, we have a predicational copula clause, as both NPs can be coordinated with adjectives:

- (12) Ich bin (der) Kaiser von China und richtig reich!^c
 I am the Emperor of China and really rich
 ‘I am the Emperor of China and really rich.’

All other properties of the construction will follow from its semantic and pragmatic properties, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

4 The semantics of the EoC construction

The main question of this section is whether the core semantics of the EoC construction is the negation of the antecedent proposition. The answer to this question will be “no.” After settling this question, I will look at what the semantics is instead, and I will introduce the framework of the syntax-semantics interface assumed in this paper.

A construction is an idiosyncratic form-meaning pairing. Since we treat the EoC construction as a phrasal construction, it could be assigned some holistic idiosyncratic meaning, such as the negation of the antecedent proposition. Let’s use the example in (13) for illustration.

- (13) a. Wenn Alex einen Preis gewonnen hat,
 if Alex has a price won
 bin ich der Kaiser von China!^c
 am I the emperor of China (*dann*-EoC)
 b. Alex hat einen Preis gewonnen
 Alex has a price won
 und ich bin der Kaiser von China!^c
 and I am the emperor of China (*und*-EoC)

There are two straightforward ways in which the construction could express negativity: First, by directly negating the antecedent, i.e., expressing something like (14a). Second, it could encode some adversative attitude towards the antecedent, as indicated in the paraphrase in (14b).

- (14) a. I am convinced that it is not the case that Alex won a price.
 b. I strongly doubt that Alex won a price.

The most reliable test for the presence of some (even weak) type of semantic negativity in a structure is to check if a weak negative polarity item (NPI) such as *je(mals)* ‘ever’ is licensed in it. Just like its English counterpart, German *je(mals)* can occur with all explicit NPI licensors, in contrast to an NPI such as *einen Finger krumm machen* ‘lift a finger’, (15). However, *je(mals)* is excluded from contexts of purely pragmatic licensing, such as (16) (Sedivy 1990, Sailer 2022).

- (15) a. Niemand hat/ Nur wenige haben das jemals gesehen.^c
 nobody has only few has that ever seen
 ‘Nobody has/ Only few have ever seen that.’
 b. Niemand hat/ *Nur wenige haben einen Finger
 nobody has only few have a finger
 krumm gemacht.^c
 lifted
 ‘Nobdy has/ *Only few have lifted a finger.’

- (16) a. *Aber Alex HAT das doch jemals gesehen.^c
 but Alex HAS that PARTICLE ever seen
 ‘But Alex has seen that at some point/*ever’
 b. Aber Alex HAT doch einen Finger krumm gemacht.^c
 but Alex has PARTICLE a finger lifted
 ‘But Alex HAS lifted a finger.’

The NPI *je(mals)* is licensed by a clause-mate negation, as in (15a), but also in the complement clause of an adversative predicate, see (17).

- (17) Ich bezweifle stark, dass Alex jemals einen Preis gewinnt.^c
 I doubt strongly that Alex ever a price win
 ‘I strongly doubt that Alex will ever win a price.’

We can use this observation to test if NPIs can occur in the antecedent of the EoC construction. Under either of the two negative readings suggested in (14) would we expect licensing of *ever*. However, as shown in (18a), the NPI is grammatical in the *dann*-EoC – though not in the *und*-EoC, (18b).

- (18) a. Wenn Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat, bin ich der Kaiser
 if Alex ever a price won has am I the emperor
 von China.^c
 of China
 ‘If Alex has ever won a price, I am the emperor of China.’
 b. *Alex hat jemals einen Preis gewonnen und ich bin der Kaiser
 Alex has ever a price won and I am the Emperor
 von China.^c
 of China

The data in (18) show that the EoC construction does not behave uniformly with respect to NPI licensing. Note, however, that this behavior is also found in clausal coordination structures and conditionals without any special pragmatics, see (19).

- (19) a. Wenn Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat, bin ich beeindruckt.^c
 if Alex ever a price won has am I impressed
 ‘I am impressed if Alex has ever won a price.’
 b. * Alex hat jemals einen Preis gewonnen und ich bin beeindruckt.^c
 Alex has ever a price won and I am impressed
 Intended: ‘Alex has won a price (at least once) and I am impressed.’

This means that we have no evidence for a special constructional semantics of the EoC construction. Instead, its semantics must be just its literal meaning. Let us, therefore, briefly look at the literal meaning. As argued for above, we have a predication copula clause with a definite noun phrase. I will assume the framework of *Lexical Resource Semantics* (LRS) for modelling the semantic combinatorics (Richter & Sailer 2004) and for the semantics-pragmatics interface (Sailer 2024).

LRS is a system of underspecified semantics, just like *Minimal Recursion Semantics* (MRS, Copestake et al. 2005). LRS differs from MRS in many respects. For example, LRS uses a standard semantic representation language. Underspecification is not done at the level of elementary predications (as in MRS), but at the level of each expression in the semantic representation language. Another major difference is that the resolution of the underspecification happens within the linguistic sign in LRS.

We can illustrate all this with a simple example, see (20). To integrate an LRS combinatorics with the rest of the grammar, we introduce a new feature LRS at the level of the sign. The value of the LRS feature is an object of type *lrs*. This sort has other features defined on it. From these, we will use EX(TERNAL-)CONT and PARTS here.

(20) Sketch of the LRS analysis of *Alex is tall* .:

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{sign} \\ \text{LRS} \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{lrs} \\ \text{EXCONT } \mathbf{tall}(\mathbf{alex}) \\ \text{PARTS } \langle \mathbf{alex}, \mathbf{tall}, \alpha(\beta) \rangle \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

Let’s assume that sentence *Alex is tall* has the simple reading **tall(alex)**. This would be the overall semantic representation, which is the value of the feature EXCONT. There is also a list-valued feature PARTS, whose value contains all the subexpressions contributed by the sign itself or by the signs that it dominates. These expressions would be: **alex**, **tall**, and the means to combine the two. I will write $\alpha(\beta)$ for this, where α and β are meta-variables over expressions of the semantic representation language. A principle guarantees that the EXCONT value is an expression that consists only of elements of the PARTS list and that every element of the PARTS list is a subexpression of the EXCONT value. This requirement is clearly met in (20).

In (21) I add the semantic specification to the AVM from (9). Note that there is no need to specify the PARTS list of the construction, as its value will be determined by the signs it dominates. However, the elements from the PARTS list must be such that they can be combined into one of the given EXCONT values. Just as the EoC construction has no idiosyncratic syntax, but a very specific syntax, so is its semantics. All words and phrases have their ordinary meaning, but the construction imposes strong restrictions on what may occur in it.

(21) The Syntax and semantics of the EoC construction:

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{unembedded-phrase} \\ \\ \text{HDTR(DTRS | HDTR)*} \\ \\ \text{LRS} \\ \text{COLL} \end{array} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{word} \\ \text{LEXEME } \textit{sein-lex} \\ \text{COMPS } \left\langle \text{NP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{LEXEME } \textit{Kaiser-v-China-lex} \\ \text{PRED } + \\ \text{SUBJ } \left\langle \text{NP[1SG]} \right\rangle \\ \text{SPR } \left\langle \text{DP[DEF +]} \right\rangle \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \\ \text{EXCONT } (\phi \wedge \psi[\text{EoC}(\text{speaker})]) \\ \text{or } (\phi \rightarrow \psi[\text{EoC}(\text{speaker})]) \\ \text{irregular} \end{array} \right] \right]$$

In particular, we only speak of an EoC construction if its overall semantics, i.e. its EXCONT value, is that of either an implication ($(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$, for the *dann*-EoC), or of a conjunction ($(\phi \wedge \psi)$ for the *und*-EoC). In either case, the subexpression ψ must, itself, have a subexpression that encodes the meaning ‘I am the Emperor of China’. For simplicity, I write **EoC(speaker)** for this semantic expression. In LRS, a constraint of the form $\alpha[\beta]$ means that the expression β must be a subexpression of α .⁵ I use this notation in the specification of the construction, writing $\psi[\text{EoC}(\text{speaker})]$ inside the EXCONT value.

5 The pragmatics of the EoC construction

Since the semantics of the EoC construction does not encode a negation of the antecedent, the question is where does this effect come from and how does it arise. When we look at the indicated overall semantic representations (i.e. the EXCONT value) in Fig. 21, ϕ is the antecedent proposition and ψ the proposition containing the EoC continuation. In this section, I will argue that the apparent negation effect is the result of an interaction of conventional implicatures (or use-conditional meaning more general) and a generalized conversational implicature.

⁵See Sailer & Richter (2021) for a more detailed presentation of the notation.

prevent that the Common Ground be updated with the antecedent proposition. This parallelism is illustrated in (23), where the same antecedent proposition (expressed in *A*'s utterance) can be rejected either by a VERUM (preventing downdate to $\neg\neg p$, i.e. to p) in (23a), or by a EoC construction in (23b). The difference between the two constructions lies in the fact that the VERUM construction compositionally states the negation of the contextual claim, whereas the EoC construction does not alter the polarity of the antecedent at the surface.

- (23) A: Alex might have won a price.
- a. B: Alex HAT keinen Preis gewonnen.^c
 Alex has+VERUM no price won
 ‘Alex DIDN’t win a price.’
 - b. Alex hat einen Preis gewonnen – und ich bin der Kaiser von
 Alex has a price won and I am the Emperor of
 China.^c
 China
 ‘Alex has won a price – and I’m the Emperor of China.’

To support the idea that the EoC construction rejects a contextually salient claim, (24) shows that it is infelicitous when it is explicitly said that such a claim has not been made.

- (24) Wenn Alex einen Preis gewinnt, bin ich der Kaiser von China
 – #aber es hat ja auch niemand behauptet, dass Alex was gewinnt.^c
 ‘If Alex wins a price, I am the Emperor of China.
 – #But noobody has actually claimed that Alex would win anything.’

In my analysis, I assume an LRS-compatible HPSG treatment of use-conditional meaning as proposed in Sailer & Am-David (2016) and Rizea & Sailer (2020). Since use-conditional meaning is conventional, it is not predictable on general grounds, but an idiosyncratic property of a sign – a morpheme, a word, or a phrasal construction. The relevant meaning components are, therefore, introduced as members of a list C(ONVENTIONAL)I(MPLICATURE).

Use-conditional meaning is also projective. This means that the members of the CI list percolate up along the syntactic projection and can only be retrieved in the immediate scope of a speech act operator. This last property guarantees that use-conditional meaning is integrated into the Conventional content of an utterance at the utterance level.

I adopt this approach to the EoC construction. In my final analysis in (25), I add the above-mentioned use-condition to the CI list of the construction. With the overall construction being an unembedded sign and the use-conditional constraint being added only at that level, it will be integrated into the Conventional content of the utterance. Consequently, the two varieties of the EoC construction share their use-conditions.

(25) The syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of the EoC construction:

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{unembedded-phrase} \\ \\ \text{HDTR(DTRS} \mid \text{HDTR)}^* \\ \\ \text{LRS} \\ \\ \text{COLL} \end{array} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{word} \\ \text{LEXEME } \textit{sein-lex} \\ \text{COMPS} \left\langle \begin{array}{l} \text{NP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{LEXEME } \textit{Kaiser-v-China-lex} \\ \text{PRED} \quad + \\ \text{SUBJ} \quad \left\langle \text{NP[1SG]} \right\rangle \\ \text{SPR} \quad \left\langle \text{DP[DEF +]} \right\rangle \end{array} \right\rangle \right\rangle \\ \text{EXCONT } (\phi \wedge \psi[\text{EoC}(\text{speaker})]) \\ \quad \text{or } (\phi \rightarrow \psi[\text{EoC}(\text{speaker})]) \\ \text{CI} \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{l} \text{prevent-downdate}(\wedge \phi), \\ \neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}) \end{array} \right\rangle \end{array} \right] \right]$$

Let me address the second use-conditional meaning. The construction is only felicitous if the speaker is actually not the Emperor of China. Consequently, I assume a second member in the CI list: $\neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker})$. This clearly must be a conventional, i.e. arbitrary meaning contribution, as we cannot enforce in general that, conversationally, the opposite holds of what the speaker says. This felicity condition cannot be canceled either. It can be evaluated independently of the Primary content, but it interacts with the Primary content in an interesting way.

I will now show how this, second, use-conditional content suffices to derive the negation-effect of the *dann*-EoC. With a global retrieval of use-conditional meaning, a sentence of the *dann*-EoC variant has a semantic representation of the form $(\phi \rightarrow \text{EoC}(\text{speaker})) \mid \neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker})$, where the symbol “ $\mid$ ” separates the truth-conditional and the use-conditional meaning. This formula can only be used felicitously and express a true statement, if the antecedent, ϕ , is false. This shows that, even though, the semantic representation does not contain a negation of the antecedent, the sentence can only be true if the antecedent is false.

Matters are a bit more challenging for the *und*-EoC variant. The Conventional content has a semantic representation of the form in (26).

$$(26) \quad (\phi \wedge \text{EoC}(\text{speaker})) \mid \neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}).$$

The formula is either false, or cannot be used felicitously. In what follows, I will argue that we can appeal to a *generalized conversational implicature* (GCI) to achieve the same effect for the *und*-EoC that we derived for the *dann*-EoC just by virtue of the use-conditional meaning.

Coordination structures can trigger various types of pragmatic enrichment which are usually treated as a GCI. Most prominent are GCIs of temporal order or causal connection. Horn (2004) provides a convincing argument in favor of deriving such enriched readings of coordination by GCIs. He illustrates this with the temporal reading of *and* (*They got a baby and married.* vs. *They married and got a baby.*). The same argument applies to the causal or inferential uses of *and* – as in *The earth rotates and we experience day and night.*), which is interpreted with an implicit “*and, therefore.*”

GCIs are very different from use-conditional meaning. They do have an influence on the truth-conditional content of an utterance. However, they do not project, but rather have the surprising property of having an effect on embedded elements in a semantic representation if this leads to a stronger reading.

To model this, it is proposed in Sailer (2021) that a CGI are optional rewriting rules mapping the Conventional content to the Utterance content. These rule apply late, but can access any parts within a semantic representation. They have the form $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$, which means that an occurrence of the subformula α should be replace with the expression β . For the inferences that Horn (2004) describes, I assume the following GCI: $(\phi \wedge \psi) \mapsto_{GCI} (\phi \rightarrow (\phi \wedge \psi))$.⁷

To guarantee the independence of the truth-conditional and the use-conditional layers, a GCI needs to apply at a single layer. For our case, the mentioned GCI only applies to the truth conditions. This leads to the following derivation for our running example.

- (27) Alex gewinnt einen Preis – und ich bin der Kaiser von China.^c
 Alex wins a price and I am the Emperor of China
 Primary content: $(\text{win}(\text{alex}) \wedge \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}))$
 Conventional content: $(\text{win}(\text{alex}) \wedge \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}) \mid \neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}))$
 GCI: $(\phi \wedge \psi) \mapsto_{GCI} \phi \rightarrow (\phi \wedge \psi)$
 $\text{win}(\text{alex}) \rightarrow (\text{win}(\text{alex}) \wedge \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}) \mid \neg \text{EoC}(\text{speaker}))$

With this GCI, the original semantics of the *und*-EoC, $(\phi \wedge \psi) \wedge \neg \psi$, can be rewritten as $(\phi \rightarrow (\phi \wedge \psi))$. This formula is logically equivalent to the semantic representation of the *dann*-EoC variant, $(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$. Under the felicity condition that the speaker is not the Emperor of China, this formula can only be true, if the antecedent is false.

⁷I need to modify the formalization of GCIs from Sailer (2021) slightly. There, GCIs are rewriting rules at the mapping between the conventional content and the utterance content. They take the form $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$ and are interpreted as follows: When the formula α occurs in the conventional content, it can (optionally) be replaced with the formula $(\alpha \wedge \beta)$ in the utterance content. This way, GCIs always enrich the semantic representations and do not remove material. However, Sailer’s formulation is too restrictive. I will, therefore, adopt the following, weaker definition of GCIs: For any formulae α and β , such that α is a subformula of β : $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$ is interpreted as follows: When the formula α occurs in the conventional content, it can be replaced with β in the utterance content. To reflect the intuition of a “monotonic enrichment”, α must be a subexpression of β . This new definition maintains the idea of enrichment but is more flexible.

It should be noted that GCI are *conversational*, not *conventional*. This means that they do not have to be considered as idiosyncratic contributions of a sign. Instead, they are general, optional, mappings that apply to the Conventional content when it is mapped to the Utterance content. Consequently, there is no feature GCI in the specification of the construction in (25).

Taken together the two non-at-issue semantic contributions of the EoC construction guarantee: (i) that the speaker signals that the antecedent should not be integrated into the common ground, and (ii) that the speaker signals independently that the sentence is only true if the antecedent is false. This takes care of the semantics and pragmatics of the construction.

Let us briefly come back to NPI licensing. NPIs such as *je(mals)* ‘ever’ can occur in the antecedent of a conditional. This explains why it can occur in (18a). But why would the NPI not be felicitous in the final representation in (18b)? The contrast between the licensing of *ever* and *lift a finger* has been discussed in Sailer (2021, 2022). An NPI like *je(mals)* ‘ever’ must be licensed in the Primary content. Consequently, this NPI cannot be licensed through an *und*-EoC. An NPI such as *einen Finger krumm machen* ‘lift a finger’ can be licensed in the Utterance content. However, NPIs of that type require a stronger licenser than the antecedent of a conditional, they must be in the scope of a negation. This excludes them even from the enriched semantic representation.

6 Conclusion

I have discussed empirical properties of the EoC construction in German. These established that this is a specialized, idiosyncratic construction, which, nonetheless, has a regular syntactic structure, and is interpreted in a standard way with its literal meaning. I proposed a fairly underspecified phrasal lexical entry to capture the syntactic regularity and flexibility. As its construction-specific meaning, I propose that it introduces the use-conditions that the speaker is not the Emperor of China and that the antecedent of the construction should not be integrated into the common ground. These assumptions are sufficient to get the correct reading for the conditional variant of the construction. For the coordination variant, we arrive at a meaning that is identical to that of the conditional variant via a generalized conversational implicature.

HPSG makes it possible to formulate the complex syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the EoC construction: A *constructional framework* is required to express the idiosyncrasy. However, it must also allow for the appropriate degree of underspecification to capture that (i) the construction is overall built according to the general rules of the language, and (ii) it comes in two syntactically different variants. A concrete proposal of the *semantics-pragmatics interface* is necessary to allocate the different meaning components of the construction and to indicate which aspects are idiosyncratic and, thus, need to be expressed in the lexical description of the construction, and which ones follow

from general semantic combinatorics or from general mechanisms of meaning enrichment.

References

- Bach, Kent. 1994. Conversational implicature. *Language and Mind* 9(2). 124–162.
- Copestake, Ann, Dan Flickinger, Carl Pollard & Ivan A. Sag. 2005. Minimal Recursion Semantics: An introduction. *Research on Language and Computation* 3(2–3). 281–332. DOI: 10.1007/s11168-006-6327-9.
- Dudenredaktion (ed.). 2002. *Redewendungen. Wörterbuch der deutschen Idiomatik*. 2nd edn., vol. 11 (Duden). Mannheim, Leipzig, Wien, Zürich: Dudenverlag.
- Fillmore, Charles J., Paul Kay & Mary Catherine O'Connor. 1988. Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of *let alone*. *Language* 64(3). 501–538.
- Grice, Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole & Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and semantics*, vol. 3, 41–58. New York: Academic Press.
- Gutzmann, Daniel. 2013. Expressives and beyond: An introduction to varieties of use-conditional meaning. In Daniel Gutzmann & Hans-Martin Gärtner (eds.), *Beyond expressives: Explorations in use-conditional meaning* (Current Research in the Semantics Pragmatics-Interface (CRiSPI) 28), 1–58. Leiden: Brill. DOI: 10.1163/9789004183988_002.
- Gutzmann, Daniel, Katharina Hartmann & Lisa Matthewson. 2020. Verum focus is verum, not focus: Cross-linguistic evidence. *Glossa* 5(1). 51. 1–48. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.347>.
- Höhle, Tilman N. 1999. An architecture for phonology. In Robert D. Borsley & Adam Przepiórkowski (eds.), *Slavic in Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar* (Studies in Constraint-Based Lexicalism 2), 61–90. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications. An architecture for phonology. In Stefan Müller, Marga Reis & Frank Richter (eds.), *Beiträge zur deutschen Grammatik: Gesammelte Schriften von Tilman N. Höhle*, 2nd edn. (Classics in Linguistics 5), 571–607. Berlin: Language Science Press, 2019. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.2588383.
- Höhle, Tilman N. 2019. An architecture for phonology. In Stefan Müller, Marga Reis & Frank Richter (eds.), *Beiträge zur deutschen Grammatik. Gesammelte Schriften von Tilman N. Höhle*, 2nd edn., 571–607. Originally published 1998. Berlin: Language Science Press. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.2588381.
- Horn, Laurence R. 2004. Implicature. In Laurence R. Horn & Gregory Ward (eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics*, 3–28. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Kilgariff, Adam, Vít Baisa, Jan Bušta, Miloš Jakubíček, Vojtěch Kovář, Jan Michelfeit, Pavel Rychlý & Vít Suchomel. 2014. The Sketch Engine: Ten years on. *Lexicography* 1. 7–36. DOI: 10.1007/s40607-014-0009-9.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. *Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature*. London: MIT Press.

- Richter, Frank. 1997. Die Satzstruktur des Deutschen und die Behandlung langer Abhängigkeiten in einer Linearisierungsgrammatik. Formale Grundlagen und Implementierung in einem HPSG-Fragment. In Erhard Hinrichs, Walt Detmar Meurers, Frank Richter, Manfred Sailer & Heike Winhart (eds.), *Ein hpsg-fragment des deutschen. teil 1: Theorie* (Arbeitspapiere des SFB 340, Nr. 95), 13–187. Universität Stuttgart & Universität Tübingen.
- Richter, Frank & Manfred Sailer. 2004. Basic concepts of Lexical Resource Semantics. In Arnold Beckmann & Norbert Preining (eds.), *ESSLLI 2003 – Course material I* (Collegium Logicum 5), 87–143. Wien: Kurt Gödel Society.
- Richter, Frank & Manfred Sailer. 2009. Phraseological clauses as constructions in HPSG. In Stefan Müller (ed.), *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, University of Göttingen, Germany*, 297–317. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications. DOI: 10.21248/hpsg.2009.15.
- Rizea, Monica-Mihaela & Manfred Sailer. 2020. A constraint-based modeling of negative polarity items in result clause constructions in Romanian. *Linguisticae Investigationes* 43(1). 129–168. DOI: 10.1075/li.00042.riz.
- Sag, Ivan A. 2012. Sign-Based Construction Grammar: An informal synopsis. In Hans C. Boas & Ivan A. Sag (eds.), *Sign-Based Construction Grammar* (CSLI Lecture Notes 193), 69–202. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Sailer, Manfred. 2010. Phonological idiomaticity. Talk delivered at the 6th International Conference on Construction Grammar. Prague.
- Sailer, Manfred. 2012. Phraseologie und Syntax (Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar). In Michael Prinz & Ulrike Richter-Vapaatalo (eds.), *Idiome, Konstruktionen, "verblühte rede": Beiträge zur Geschichte der germanistischen Phraseologieforschung* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Germanistik 3), 241–263. Stuttgart: S. Hirzel Verlag.
- Sailer, Manfred. 2021. Minimizer negative polarity items in non-negative contexts. In Stefan Müller & Nurit Melnik (eds.), *Proceedings of the 28th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*, 348–368. Frankfurt/Main: University Library. DOI: 10.21248/hpsg.2021.19.
- Sailer, Manfred. 2022. Use-conditional licensing of strong Negative Polarity Items. In Daniel Gutzmann & Sophie Repp (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 26, 734–752. University of Cologne. <https://ojs.ub.uni-konstanz.de/sub/index.php/sub/issue/view/30>.
- Sailer, Manfred. 2024. Horn clauses and strict NPIs under negated matrix clauses. In Stefan Müller & Rui Chaves (eds.), 152–172. Frankfurt/Main: University Library. DOI: 10.21248/hpsg.2024.10.
- Sailer, Manfred & Assif Am-David. 2016. Definite meaning and definite marking. In Doug Arnold, Miriam Butt, Berthold Crysmann, Tracy Holloway King & Stefan Müller (eds.), *Proceedings of the Joint 2016 Conference on Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar and Lexical Functional Grammar, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland*, 641–661. Frankfurt/Main: University Library. DOI: 10.21248/hpsg.2016.33.

- Sailer, Manfred & Annika Dörner. 2020. A smurf-based approach to placeholder expressions. In Stefan Müller & Anke Holler (eds.), *Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*, 136–156. Stanford: CSLI Publications. DOI: [10.21248/hpsg.2020.8](https://doi.org/10.21248/hpsg.2020.8).
- Sailer, Manfred & Frank Richter. 2021. Negative conjuncts and negative concord across the board. In Berthold Crysmann & Manfred Sailer (eds.), *One-to-many relations in morphology, syntax, and semantics*, 175–244. Berlin: Language Science Press. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.4729806](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4729806).
- Sedivy, Julie. 1990. Against a unified analysis of negative polarity licensing. *Cahiers Linguistiques D'Ottawa* 18. 95–105.