

# The non-standard German response item *sowieso*

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## Abstract

In this paper, we examine the German non-standard response item *sowieso*, which, we argue, is used to indicate that a positive response to a question or agreement with an assertion is obvious. In its primary usage, *sowieso* occurs as an adverb indicating that the host clause is true for a reason not inferable from the immediate discourse context. We explore how the meaning of *sowieso* as a response item is connected to its adverbial use. We propose that the different uses of *sowieso* are connected via the notion of comparative causal efficacy. In the standard adverbial case, *sowieso* compares possible reasons for its host clause. As a response item, however, it compares possible reasons for its host clause with possible reasons for relevant alternatives, yielding the result that the host clause proposition emerges as the most compelling among its competitors.

## 1 Introduction

Research on response items has mainly focused on the standard particles *yes* and *no* and their counterparts across languages. Non-standard response items like *probably* or *absolutely* have received less attention.<sup>1</sup> It is a common theme that sentence adverbs are used as response items (Cambridge University Press 2016).<sup>2</sup> Often, they will signal a heightened (1b) or lessened degree of certainty (1c) concerning the picked up proposition, compared to the standard particle response.

- (1) Are you coming to the party?  
a. Yes.  
b. Absolutely/Definitely.  
c. Probably/Maybe.

In this paper, we focus on a particular German non-standard response item, *sowieso*, as used in (2). *Sowieso* is standardly used as an adverb expressing that the embedded proposition holds independently of some otherwise mentioned proposition (roughly  $\approx$  *anyway* in (3)).

- (2) A: Freust du dich auf den Urlaub? B: Sowieso.  
A: are.happy you yourself on the holiday B: SOWIESO  
'A: Are you looking forward to the holiday? B: Of course.'

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<sup>†</sup>We thank the audience at the Minor Sentence Types workshop and the 32nd HPSG conference in Lisbon as well as the reviewers for the workshop and the proceedings for valuable comments.

<sup>1</sup>Some exceptions being Krifka (2013) on *okay* and *right*, Greenberg & Wolf (2019) on Hebrew *legamrey* 'absolutely'.

<sup>2</sup><https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/adverbs-as-short-responses-definitely-certainly>

- (3) Ich kann dein Buch zurückgeben. Ich muss sowieso in die  
 I can your book return I must SOWIESO in the  
 Bibliothek.  
 library  
 ‘I can return your book. I have to go to the library anyway.’

The aim of this paper is to reconcile the standard adverbial *sowieso* with its use as a response item. To do this, we first sketch analyses for the adverbial uses of *sowieso* in section 2, before we extend one of the analyses to the responsive use in section 3. We argue that what connects all uses of *sowieso* is a comparison over reasons for the host proposition. Section 4 concludes the paper.

## 2 An account of adverbial *sowieso*

The German word *sowieso* originally derives from a compound form consisting of three elements: *so wie so*, literally ‘so as so’, i.e., this way the same as that way.<sup>3</sup> There are two cases to consider here: what we call the standard case (3), which has been the main focus of the literature so far, and the parallel structure case (4). We assume that, in the standard case, *sowieso* conveys that there is a reason for the host clause proposition that was not inferable from the discourse context. The parallel case typically involves the same predicate both in the antecedent clause and in the *sowieso* host clause. The interpretation is scalar in that the speaker expresses greater confidence in asserting the host clause of *sowieso* than the antecedent. Section 2.1 presents the analysis for the standard case and section 2.2 extends it to the parallel case.

- (3) Ich kann dein Buch zurückgeben. Ich muss sowieso in die  
 I can your book return I must SOWIESO in the  
 Bibliothek.  
 library  
 ‘I can return your book. I have to go to the library anyway.’
- (4) Ich danke dir für die Kritik, und für das Lob danke ich dir  
 I thank you for the criticism and for the praise thank I you  
 sowieso.  
 SOWIESO

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<sup>3</sup>*Sowieso* has at least two reported synonyms: *ohnehin* and *eh* (Weydt 1983). Federal German *eh* is not to be confused with Austrian German *eh*, see Zobel (2017). Breindl (2014) reports that *ohnehin* and Federal German *eh* are not attested in a response item fashion, but this has not been studied further and we don’t comment on these reported synonyms in the rest of the paper. The meaning and distribution of *sowieso* are slightly different in Dutch, where it exists as a loanword (Claus et al. 2025).

‘I thank you for the criticism and all the more so for the praise/and it is even clearer that I thank you for the praise.’

## 2.1 The standard case

We follow Weydt (1983), Helbig (1988) and Claus et al. (2025) in assuming that *sowieso* has a causal component. Its meaning contribution is split into a use-conditional part and its at-issue meaning. (5) gives a representation of the meaning of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>*(*q*), i.e., the standard case. The use of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>* requires that there be a proposition (*p<sub>a</sub>*, subscript *a* for antecedent) mentioned in, or directly inferable from, the preceding discourse context that counts as a potential cause or reason ( $\rightsquigarrow_c$ ) for the host proposition of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>*(*q*). If this use condition is fulfilled, the speaker of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>*(*q*) asserts that there is a proposition (*r*) different from every potentially causing proposition *p<sub>a</sub>* inferable from the context, which counts as a better cause or reason for *q*, where ‘better’ is to be understood as a higher causation potential.<sup>4</sup> Given that *r* counts as a reason for *q* on its own, the use of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>*(*q*) states the causal decisiveness of a proposition different from any contextually given one, effectively rendering every other potential reason ineffective or irrelevant in the given situation.

$$(5) \quad \llbracket \textit{sowieso}_{st}(q) \rrbracket = \exists p_a [p_a \rightsquigarrow_c q] \text{ (use condition)} \\ q \wedge \exists r \forall p_a [(p_a \rightsquigarrow_c q) \rightarrow (r \neq p_a \wedge (r, q) >_c (p_a, q))]$$

Looking at the example in (3), we get the following interpretation: returning the book for the addressee counts as a potential reason for the speaker to go to the library ( $\exists p_a [p_a \rightsquigarrow_c q]$ ), but there exists another proposition ( $\exists r [r \neq p_a]$ ), which has a higher causal potential for the speaker’s going to the library ( $(r, q) >_c (p_a, q)$ ). This actual reason does not have to be mentioned. In the case at hand, the speaker might have plans to meet a friend in the library. Usually, there is one potential reason mentioned or inferable from the context, as in (3), but we can imagine a speaker listing several different reasons why the addressee should be doing something, to which the addressee can respond by using *sowieso<sub>st</sub>*(*q*): none of the listed reasons is as good as the one they already have for doing *q*. Therefore, universal quantification over possible reasons is included in (5).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>We use *cause* and *reason* interchangeably here. Sometimes it is more natural to speak of a cause (a house being destroyed by either a flood or a fire), and sometimes of a reason (why some agent acts). What is important is that *p<sub>a</sub>* and *r* are (potentially) causally efficacious in some way.

<sup>5</sup>There is a second case that can be considered standard but which differs from what we have presented here. In this case, the antecedent still conveys a possible cause for a consequence, but the host clause of *sowieso<sub>st</sub>* does not denote that consequence, but it denotes the competing cause itself: not being offered anything to eat and not being hungry are both reasons why one would not eat anything. The general semantics for *sowieso<sub>st</sub>* is the same, but now the host clause is a better reason than the antecedent.

That ‘ $(r, q) >_c (p_a, q)$ ’ is part of the at-issue meaning can, for example, be observed in questions ((6), example from Bruijnen & Sudhoff (2013)). A potential reason for going to the coffee machine ( $p_a$ ) is to be determined from the context: A’s question implicates the proposition that A is bringing B a coffee. This could be such a reason ( $p_a \rightsquigarrow_c q$ ). B asks whether there is a reason  $r$ , different from bringing B a coffee ( $p_a$ ), such that A would go to the coffee machine because of  $r$  rather than because of  $p_a$  ( $\exists r \forall p_a [(p_a \rightsquigarrow_c q) \rightarrow (r \neq p_a \wedge (r, q) >_c (p_a, q))]$ ?).<sup>6</sup>

- (6) A: Möchtest du einen Kaffee? B: Kommst du sowieso am  
 A want you a coffee B come you sowieso at.the  
 Kaffeeautomaten vorbei?  
 coffee-machine by  
 ‘A: Would you like a coffee? B: Are you passing by the coffee machine anyway?’

## 2.2 The parallel structure case

A special use of *sowieso* is what we refer to as the “parallel structure” case (4). The antecedent and the host clause of *sowieso* in (4) have the same predicate but differ only in the prepositional phrase. Often, the predicate is elided, as can be seen in (7).

- (7) Erwachsene mögen Süßigkeiten. Und Kinder sowieso.  
 Adults like sweets and children SOWIESO  
 ‘Adults like sweets and children all the more so/for children it’s even clearer.’

The case is different from the standard case discussed above since one does not get the interpretation that some (implied) antecedent proposition is irrelevant to the realization of the host clause proposition. Instead, the interpretation appears to be scalar in the sense reflected in the two possible translations, see (7). We propose that *sowieso* in parallel structure cases such as (7) has slightly different truth conditions from the standard case, but that both uses are connected via the comparison of causal efficacy. Rather than comparing a potential reason from the context with an unmentioned one, both with respect to the host proposition, potential reasons for the antecedent proposition(s) are compared with reasons for the host clause proposition.

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- (1) A: Ich kann dir nichts zu essen anbieten. B: Ich hab sowieso keinen Hunger.  
 A I can you nothing to eat offer B I have SOWIESO no hunger  
 ‘A: I can’t offer you anything to eat. B: I am not hungry anyway.’

<sup>6</sup>For the at-issue status, see also the discussion around the examples in (13).

To obtain the scalar interpretation of (7) or (4), a specific configuration is needed: the antecedent proposition has to be part of the focus alternatives of the host proposition. Consider the full clause variant in (8). In general, we can obtain both the scalar and the standard interpretation. The actual interpretation will depend on the preceding discourse context and the focus structure.

- (8) Und Kinder mögen Süßigkeiten sowieso.  
 and children like sweets SOWIESO  
 ‘And for children it’s even clearer that they like sweets.’ or ‘And there is a different reason why children like sweets.’

Given the most natural focus placement on *Kinder*, the scalar interpretation is accessible, but only if the preceding context contains a focus alternative of the host clause, i.e., a clause where the host clause’s focused constituent is replaced by a contextually relevant alternative (e.g., *adults like sweets* or *middle-aged men like sweets*). Without such an antecedent proposition, only the standard interpretation is available. (9) illustrates such a case. As a context for (9), assume that it is uttered by a product marketing manager talking about a new sweets packaging design. The host clause prosody is the same as in the parallel structure case, but since no relevant focus alternative antecedent is present, the usual scalar interpretation of (7) is missing.<sup>7</sup>

- (9) Wir müssen die Packung nicht cooler machen. Es geht nicht  
 we must the packaging not cooler make it goes not  
 um Erwachsene, sondern um Kinder. Und [Kinder]<sub>F</sub> mögen  
 about adults but about children and children like  
 Süßigkeiten sowieso.  
 sweets SOWIESO  
 ‘We don’t have to make a cooler packaging. We are dealing with children, not adults. And children like sweets anyway [for reasons independent of the packaging].’

Taking seriously the focus sensitivity of *sowieso*<sub>ps</sub>, we propose the lexical entry in (10) (preliminary).

- (10)  $\llbracket \text{sowieso}_{ps}(q) \rrbracket = \exists p_a [p_a \in \text{FOC-ALT}(q) \wedge p_a = 1]$  (use condition)  
 $q \wedge \exists r \forall p_a \forall p_r [(p_a \in \text{FOC-ALT}(q) \wedge p_r \rightsquigarrow_c p_a) \rightarrow ((r, q) >_c (p_r, p_a))]$

Applying (10) to the *sweets*-example (7) results in the following interpretation: First, the utterance of *sowieso*<sub>ps</sub>(*q*) is felicitous because there is a true antecedent proposition (*p<sub>a</sub>*) that is part of the focus alternatives

<sup>7</sup>Note that *Es geht nicht um Erwachsene* is not a focus alternative of *[Kinder]<sub>F</sub> mögen Süßigkeiten* as the former is not a structurally identical variation of the latter clause (with the focused expression replaced).

of the host proposition ( $q$ ): adults like sweets. Against this backdrop, it is asserted that  $q$  is the case (children like sweets) and that there exists a proposition  $r$  whose causal efficacy for  $q$  exceeds that of any reason  $p_r$  for the antecedent proposition  $p_a$  ( $(r, q) >_c (p_r, p_a)$ ), using the same notion of comparative causal efficacy from the standard case. Whatever counts as a reason why adults like sweets, there is a better or stronger reason why children like sweets. Note again that there could well be multiple antecedent propositions with possible causes against which  $r$  is compared (*Old men like sweets, young women like sweets, and children like sweets* SOWIESO), which motivates the universal quantification over antecedent focus alternatives.

This account arguably lacks an element. In the standard case example and in (4), we were concerned with examples in which the speaker invokes reasons for acting that have not been considered in the context. However, consider (11) (from the DeReKo corpus (IDS 2020)). One possible interpretation of (11) is that the speaker does not claim that there is a more compelling reason why these chemical elements are found outside Earth. In fact, the speaker might not be aware of why these elements occur where they occur. Instead, what seems to be the case is that the speaker has more compelling reasons to *believe* or to *assert* that they are found outside Earth, e.g., because the occurrence is more frequently observed or better documented. That is to say that the causal component of *sowieso*<sub>ps</sub> in this case appears to operate on some level above the propositional level.

- (11) Promethium und Technetium kommen auf der Erde vor [...].  
 Promethium and Technetium come on the Earth PRTCL  
 Und außerhalb der Erde sowieso.  
 and outside the Earth SOWIESO  
 ‘Promethium and Technetium are found on Earth. And certainly outside Earth.’

A possible route to go would be to assume that *sowieso* in this construction acts on the assertion level rather than the propositional level. Under this assumption, *sowieso*<sub>ps</sub> acts similarly to the degree modifier *absolutely* that has an at-issue contribution on the propositional level when modifying adjectival degrees (12a) and that has been argued to modify the degree of credence on the speech act level in examples like (12b) (Greenberg & Wolf 2018). As a consequence, the meaning contribution in (12a) is at issue, while the contribution in (12b) is not. This can be witnessed by the felicitous continuation *No, it is almost full* for (12a) and the infelicitous continuation *No, #you’re not that certain* for (12b).

- (12) a. A: The glass is absolutely full.  
 b. A: John is absolutely coming to the party.

If *sowieso* in parallel constructions acts on the speech act rather than the propositional level, we would expect the whole meaning contribution of *sowieso<sub>ps</sub>* to be non-at-issue in these cases. This should be reflected in rejection behaviour. Consider first the rejections in (13), exhibiting two standard *sowieso* examples. Both answers of B can be interpreted as rejecting the existence of an independent reason for the host proposition of *sowieso*, even if the host proposition itself is not doubted.<sup>8</sup>

- (13) a. A: Das war bestimmt kein Stress für Hans. Er war sowieso  
           A that was certainly no stress for Hans he was SOWIESO  
           in Berlin. B: Das stimmt nicht!  
           in Berlin B that is.right not  
           ‘A: Certainly, that wasn’t stressful for Hans. He was in Berlin  
           anyway. B: That’s not true.’  
       b. A: Warum bist du denn hier? B: Ich war sowieso gerade in  
           A why are you PART here B I was SOWIESO just in  
           der Gegend. B: Das glaube ich dir nicht.  
           the area B that believe I you not  
           ‘A: Why are you here? B: I was just in the area anyway. B: I  
           don’t believe that.’

By contrast, consider the parallel construction case in (14). To us, the rejection by A is harder to understand as challenging the meaning contribution of *sowieso*, i.e., the rejection is less compatible with A believing the host proposition of *sowieso*. The relevant interpretation would be one under which A in (14) accepts both the fact that adults like sweets and that children like sweets, but rejects the contribution of *sowieso*. The case is not clear-cut though and judgments are mixed.

- (14) A: Erwachsene mögen Süßigkeiten. B: Und Kinder sowieso. A:  
           A adults like sweets B and children SOWIESO A  
           Das stimmt nicht!  
           that is.right not  
           ‘A: Adults like sweets. B: And children even more obviously. A:  
           That’s not right!’

However, even if we manage to get a successful interpretation for *sowieso* denial in (14), it is always possible to challenge the meaning contribution of illocutionary modifiers as well: in response to (12b), one could say *No, I also believe that he’s coming, but I wouldn’t say he’s “absolutely” coming*. In the

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<sup>8</sup>Note that the rejection can also target the host proposition of *sowieso* or the conjunction of the two sentences uttered by A in (13a). We only claim that the contribution of *sowieso* can be rejected, while its host proposition is accepted. We make no claim about which antecedent is more salient for rejection.

same way, A could respond in (14) by saying *No, they might like them but I wouldn't say "sowieso"*. Additionally, that the contribution of *sowieso<sub>ps</sub>* is not as easily targetable by denial and negation in general might be due to the fact that to occur it requires a specific focus structure, which also acts to background *sowieso*'s meaning contribution. At this point, more research is needed to settle the question of what the (non-)at-issue status of the *sowieso* contribution in parallel structure cases is. For now, we are considering two possibilities to capture the meaning impact on the epistemic or speech act level that *sowieso<sub>ps</sub>* seems to have, but we leave the decision between them for future research. One way would be to claim that *sowieso<sub>ps</sub>* does not operate on a proposition, but on a speech act. This is what Greenberg & Wolf (2018) propose for *absolutely* in cases like (12b). The entry for the parallel structure case in (10) would then need a little update and instead of taking propositions, it would operate on assertions. Alternatively, *sowieso<sub>ps</sub>* still combines with propositions, but compares reasons to assert one proposition over the other, an alternative that is sketched in (15).

$$(15) \quad \llbracket \text{sowieso}_{ps}(q) \rrbracket = \exists p_a [p_a \in \text{FOC-ALT}(q) \wedge p_a = 1] \text{ (use condition)} \\ q \wedge \exists r \forall p_a \forall p_r [(p_a \in \text{FOC-ALT}(q) \wedge p_r \rightsquigarrow_c \text{ASSERT}(p_a)) \rightarrow \\ ((r, \text{ASSERT}(q)) >_c (p_r, \text{ASSERT}(p_a)))]$$

Finally, two more notes on the current formalization. First, compared to the standard case, we have dropped the requirement that  $r \neq p/p_r$ . The rationale behind this move is that the value of any given cause or reason is not fixed but variable. For instance, the same upcoming deadline may be a stronger reason for person A to feel stressed than for person B, even though both are affected by it. This difference in affectedness can be attributed to different background assumptions about A and B that factor into the causal network. Second, the way we have formalized the meaning in (10)/(15), there is one reason/cause that trumps the other reasons/causes. This captures one intuitive reading of the cases at hand, but there is also a reading according to which there is an additional reason for the host clause proposition compared to the antecedent clause proposition, but it is not a strong reason on its own. This is not yet captured by the formulas given (without further information about the causal calculation). A possible improvement would be to compare the union of reasons for  $p_a$  with the union of reasons for  $q$ , but we leave this for future work. Overall, the notion of comparative causal efficacy deserves more fleshing-out in the future, but the exact implementation of this notion is orthogonal to the goal of this paper, which is to prove the connection between different uses of *sowieso* and which we believe can be achieved by appealing to a rather intuitive notion of causal comparison.

### 3 Response item *sowieso*

After having established a possible way of capturing the meaning of standard adverbial *sowieso* and its extension to the parallel case, we now turn to *sowieso* used as a response item. Section 3.1 serves to establish the environments in which *sowieso* is used as a response item. In section 3.2, we extend our analysis of adverbial *sowieso* to the responsive use.

#### 3.1 Data

In this section, we will cover what could be called two subtypes of responsive *sowieso*. The first subtype is often found in monologues, answering questions introduced for expository reasons. (16) attempts to answer the larger question of who the likely candidates to win a sports championship are. However, we can imagine the same example where the questioner and the answerer are two different people. (Examples (16)-(20) all from the DeReKo corpus.)

- (16) Italien? Klar. Deutschland? Sowieso. Frankreich? Immer ein  
Italy clearly Germany SOWIESO France always a  
Kandidat.  
candidate  
'Italy? Clearly. Germany? Obviously. France? Always a candidate.'

This type of example resembles the parallel structure case discussed above; it is characterized by parallel antecedents. The example in (16) would read out as: *Italy is clearly a candidate, and Germany SOWIESO*. We also find examples with negation as in (17). If the antecedent contains negation, *sowieso* cannot occur bare. This first 'subtype' of response item *sowieso* is just an elliptical version of the parallel construction discussed in section 2.2, and as such it does not offer any new challenges, as whatever holds for the parallel structure case laid out in section 2.2 also holds here.

- (17) Die letzte Heimpartie verliert man nicht [...] Und das letzte  
the last home.game loses one not and the last  
Auswärtsspiel? Sowieso nicht!  
away.game SOWIESO not  
'You don't lose the last home game, and the last away game? Certainly not.'

The second subtype does not have a parallel antecedent and behaves more like a genuine response item. It occurs with positive polar questions (18), rising declaratives (19) and assertions (20).

- (18) A: Das klingt nach einem strengen Elternhaus. Haben Sie  
A that sounds after a strict parental.home have you

Ihrem Vater inzwischen verziehen? B: Sowieso. Eltern machen  
 your father in.between forgiven B SOWIESO parents make  
 doch immer das, was sie [...] für das Beste halten.  
 DOCH always that what they for the best hold  
 ‘A: That sounds like a strict parental home. Have you forgiven your  
 father in the meantime?  
 B: Obviously. Parents always do what they think is the best.’

- (19) A: Einen angenehmen Tag, Tom. Wir telefonieren? B: Sowieso.  
 A a pleasant day Tom we telephone B SOWIESO  
 ‘A: Have a nice day, Tom. Shall we talk on the phone? B: Certainly!’
- (20) A: Ich denke, das Thema ist [...] kompetent [...] genug  
 A I think the topic is competently enough  
 dargestellt, um hier als lesenswerter Artikel prämiert zu  
 presented in.order here as read.worthy article awarded to  
 werden. B: Sowieso.  
 be B SOWIESO  
 ‘A: I think the topic is presented competently enough to be awarded  
 as an article worth reading here. B: Certainly.’

*Sowieso* can only be used to express agreement, i.e., it can only pick up the proposition that was asserted or made salient by the polar question, and it cannot switch polarity. As before, if the antecedent proposition contains negation, *sowieso* has to co-occur with negation as well (21). If the question contains ‘high negation’, i.e., if it is biased towards the positive polarity answer, *sowieso* behaves like the standard polar response particles in that it does not require negation and asserts the positive proposition (22).

- (21) A: Bist du noch nicht eingeschrieben? B: Sowieso #(nicht).  
 A are you yet not enrolled B SOWIESO not  
 ‘A: Are you not yet registered? B: Obviously (not).’
- (22) A: Bist du nicht schon eingeschrieben? B: Sowieso (#nicht).  
 A Are you not already enrolled B SOWIESO not  
 ‘A: Aren’t you already enrolled? B: Obviously (not).’

This second subtype of responsive *sowieso* behaves differently from the first type because it does not appear to be elliptical in the same way. Unlike in the first type, a non-elliptical answer cannot be used instead while maintaining the same meaning, as illustrated in (23) as a variant of (18) and (24) as a variant of (2).

- (23) A: Das klingt nach einem strengen Elternhaus. Haben Sie  
 A that sounds after a strict parental.home have you

Ihrem Vater inzwischen verziehen? B: Ich habe meinem Vater  
 your father in.between forgiven B I have my father  
 sowieso verziehen.  
 SOWIESO forgiven

‘A: That sounds like a strict parental home. Have you forgiven your  
 father in the meantime?’

B: I have forgiven my father for some reason not mentioned in the  
 context before’

- (24) A: Freust du dich auf den Urlaub? B: Ich freue  
 A are.happy you yourself on the holiday B I am.happy  
 mich sowieso auf den Urlaub.  
 myself SOWIESO on the holiday

‘A: Are you looking forward to the holiday? B: I am looking forward  
 to the holiday for a reason different from what has been mentioned.’

The full replies in (23) and (24) are not equivalent to the bare *sowieso* answer. While acceptable on their own, they are infelicitous to use in the given context, because they answer a different question: Is  $q$  true because of  $p$ ? Answer:  $q$  is true, but because of  $r$  (we have indicated that answer in the translations). That is, as the use conditions for  $\text{textit{sowieso}}_{ps}$  are not fulfilled, the interpretation of the answers in (23) and (24) is that of the standard case, and hence a different interpretation than response item *sowieso*.

The closest translational equivalents of the second subtype of responsive *sowieso* in English seem to be *of course* or *obviously*. The speaker expresses a strong affirmation towards the positive answer and conveys that a positive answer was to be expected and that the question need not have been asked in the first place.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 Analysis

Responsive *sowieso* is one of a series of expressions that originate as an adverb and develop into response items. These response items are mainly used to intensify or weaken the assertion. Other examples in German and English include *absolut/absolutely*, *definitiv/definitely*, and *wahrscheinlich/probably* (25).

- (25) Is the vase expensive? Absolutely! Definitely! Probably!

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<sup>9</sup>A reviewer suggested that  $\text{sowieso}_{resp}$  could pick up the motive of the question in the sense of Ginzburg et al. (2022). While the pragmatic effect might be explained in terms of questioning the motive of the question (*why do you even ask?*), our semantic analysis goes a different route, see section 3.2.

Greenberg & Wolf (2019) have proposed an analysis of the Hebrew intensifying response item *legamrey* ‘absolutely’ (26) in terms of degree modification of the ASSERT operator (27). It picks up a contextually given antecedent proposition and asserts it with a maximal degree of credence. The analysis is thus an extension of the sentence-adverb-as-speech-act-modifier analysis discussed in section 2.2.

- (26) A: ha-argartal yakar.      B: legamrey!  
       A the-vase      expensive B legamrey  
       ‘A: The vase is expensive. B: Absolutely!’
- (27) A: ASSERT(the vase is expensive)  
       B: legamrey ASSERT(the vase is expensive<sub>c</sub>)

While *sowieso* cannot be analyzed as a degree modifier, we nevertheless get the effect of a strengthened assertion: the answer is obviously true. Let us now consider how our meaning proposal for *sowieso* can be reconciled with its use as a response item. In this section, we propose a tentative solution: responsive *sowieso* has developed into a generalized parallel structure case without an overt parallel antecedent. The taken-for-grantedness that is conveyed by using *sowieso* as a standalone response is similar to what is conveyed in the parallel structure case. The parallel structure case brings about a comparison of reasons for asserting the *sowieso* host clause with reasons for asserting the antecedent proposition with the result that there are more or better reasons to assert the *sowieso* host clause. In the responsive case, an appropriate antecedent clause is lacking. However, the general feeling of obviousness remains: the speaker of responsive *sowieso* has stronger reasons to assert the positive answer than they have for any alternative proposition. (28) represents the general schema we have in mind.

- (28)  $q?$   $[[p, \text{and}]]$  SOWIESO  $[q]$ .

Applying the general schema to (18) gives us (29). *Sowieso<sub>resp</sub>* picks up the salient proposition from the polar question and asserts it. Furthermore, it compares reasons for forgiving the father with reasons for alternative propositions and asserts that there are better reasons for forgiving the father than for relevant alternatives.

- (29) (18) = Have you forgiven your father?  
        $[[\text{I have done all kinds of things, and}]]$  I have forgiven my father]  
       SOWIESO

Focus marking also seems to play a role, comparable to the parallel structure case. If instead of a broad focus, there is narrow focus on *forgiven* in the question, the use of *sowieso* expresses that the forgiven-relation holds, more clearly than any relevant alternative relation (30).

- (30) Have you [forgiven]<sub>F</sub> your father?  
 [[I stand in some alternative relation to my father, and] I have  
 [forgiven]<sub>F</sub> my father] SOWIESO

We can assign *sowieso*<sub>resp</sub> virtually the same meaning as the parallel structure case, except that it does not require a previously mentioned focus alternative antecedent, as shown in (31). The same reasoning regarding the impact on the assertion level applies as in section 2.2 for the parallel structure entry (15). (31) might need to be updated with reference to the assertion level. Whatever turns out to be the viable approach for the parallel structure case should also apply here.<sup>10</sup>

- (31)  $\llbracket \text{sowieso}_{resp}(q) \rrbracket =$   
 $q \wedge \exists r \forall p \forall p_r [(p \in \text{FOC-ALT}(q) \wedge p_r \rightsquigarrow_c p) \rightarrow ((r, q) >_c (p_r, p))]$

## 4 Conclusion

This paper has examined the non-standard response item *sowieso*, which marks an obvious positive response to questions and assertions. We argued that the meaning contribution of *sowieso* as a response item can be traced back to its adverbial core. We proposed that while different uses of *sowieso* have different concrete semantics, they are connected via a common core of comparative causal efficacy. Responsive *sowieso* makes the initial question or statement appear superfluous, as it conveys that an affirmative response is obvious; if there are reasons for anything at all, there are even stronger reasons for the contextually given antecedent proposition. Further research is needed to spell out the exact semantic formalization of causal comparison, proposed in an informal manner here. A further topic for future studies is the diachronic development of the different uses of *sowieso*. According to our analysis, we should expect that the response-item use emerged only after the proper parallel structure use. Beyond the specific topic of *sowieso*, it would be valuable to further explore the realm of non-standard response items in German and other languages more generally, particularly with respect to which adverbs or particles can develop into response items, and why.

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<sup>10</sup>Eggs (2003) also notices a relationship between the parallel structure case and the response item. She remarks that both cases indicate that the overt question (in the responsive case) or a covert question (in the parallel case) need not be answered, as the answer is obvious. Bruijnen & Sudhoff (2013) mention the responsive use of *sowieso* in passing and they mention in a footnote that the responsive use can be explained in the same way as the standard adverbial one. They do not propose a concrete analysis and they do not consider the parallel structure case in their paper.

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