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# **Pre- and post-positioning of *wenn*-clauses in spoken and written German<sup>\*</sup>**

Peter Auer

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In recognition of the enthusiasm he has brought to all aspects of the study of spoken verbal interaction, we dedicate this series to Professor Dr. Aldo di Luzio, University of Konstanz.

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Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen  
PD Dr. Susanne Günthner  
Universität Konstanz  
FB Sprachwissenschaft  
PB D 180  
D-78457 Konstanz

Prof. Dr. Margret Selting  
Universität Potsdam  
Institut für Germanistik  
Postfach 60 15 53  
D-14415 Potsdam

Prof. Dr. Peter Auer  
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg  
Deutsches Seminar I  
Postfach  
D-79085 Freiburg i. Br.

**<http://ling.sprachwiss.uni-konstanz.de/pages/anglistik/>**

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the distinction between pre- and postpositioned (initial and final) *wenn*-clauses in German, and with the distinction between written and spoken language. A simple cross-tabulation of the two features [spoken/written] and [pre-/ postpositioned] (section 3) shows that initial *wenn*-clauses are preferred in spoken German, but final *wenn*-clauses are preferred in written German. These findings are in need of an explanation, which will be given in sections 4 and 5. Section 2 sketches the main characteristics of German *wenn*-clauses as compared to English conditional (*if*-) clauses.

The findings and discussions in this paper are corpus-based. They are partly quantitative, partly qualitative. With respect to both dimensions, the claim is that a full understanding of the syntax of (particularly) spoken language eludes the possibilities of a purely introspective methodology. Of course, no (quantitative or qualitative) corpus-based investigation can do without a strong reliance on the analyst's knowledge (,intuition') about the language being researched; in fact, finding valid generalizations always involves *Gedankenexperimente* playing with structural changes in and recontextualizations of the ,examples' found to be used by the informants. On the other hand, not even the empirical starting point of the present investigation (i.e., the (differing) preferences of spoken and written language for post- and prepositioning) is available to a purely introspective approach, since it is of a quantitative kind. In order to reach an explanation of these findings, this quantitative analysis has to be complemented by an in-depth analysis of individual cases of usage. Such an analysis will pay attention (a) to the in-time emergence of syntactic patterns, including the details of their delivery such as hesitations, reformulations, break-offs, etc., and (b) to the interactional aspects of this emergence, including hearer feedback (or lack of it) and sequential placement. In this respect, spoken language research can profit in important ways from conversation analysis.

## 2. German *wenn*-clauses and English *if*-clauses: a brief syntactic and semantic overview

This, of course, is not the place for a full contrastive analysis of the two constructions. In order to facilitate the reader's access to the examples to be discussed below, and in order to link up the present investigation with previous ones on *if*-clauses in spoken (and written) English, a short sketch of some important similarities and differences may however be in order here.

## 2.1. Syntax

The syntax of English suggests a (misleading) parallel between pre- and postpositioned adverbial clauses (including conditionals), since they can usually be exchanged without structural changes in either the main or the dependent clause. German syntax, on the other hand, treats the two positions quite differently. While post-positioned adverbial clauses always occupy the so-called post-field (*Nachfeld*), which is not obligatory, and are thus tagged on to an already complete syntactic pattern, pre-positioned subordinated clauses may be (and in written, normative language usually are) more tightly integrated into the syntactic structure of the following main clause: they occupy the so-called front field (*Vorfeld*) of the sentence, i.e., the uniquely available and obligatory position before the finite verb. Moving adverbial clauses from one to the other position therefore involves structural changes in the main clause:

Ex 1: (version b fabricated)<sup>1</sup>

- (a) wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.  
*if you want to have a job, you need to get down to the point*
- (b) sie müssen n bisschen auf=n PUNKT kommen wenn sie=n job haben wollen.  
*you need to get down to the point if you want to have a job.*

Positioning the *wenn*-clause in the post-field (=version b) instead of the front-field (=version a) implies that another constituent will fill this position (in the present case, it is the subject pronoun *Sie*). The dominant syntactic pattern in which pre-positioned adverbial clauses occur in written German may therefore be called „integrative“, while the English treatment is „non-integrative“ (cf. König & van der Auwera 1988:103-9 for this terminology and some further remarks). In spoken German, however, the fully integrated placement of the pre-positioned adverbial clause in the front-field is only one possibility. Alternatively, pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses may be followed by a resumptive particle (a local-temporal adverbial such as *dann* or one of its regional equivalents, e.g. *na*, *denn*, *no*, etc.; cf. version (b) below);<sup>2</sup> or they may even be used in a non-integrative way, rather like in English (version (c) below):

Ex 2: (versions b and c fabricated)

- (a) wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.  
*if you want to have a job, you need to get down to the point*

---

<sup>1</sup> Transcription of the spoken extracts follows GAT-conventions (cf. Selting *et al.* 1998); capital letters indicate stress positions. English translations are simplified, particularly with respect to prosody and hesitation phenomena. In case of conflict, less idiomatic versions have been chosen in order to give a better impression of German syntactic structure.

<sup>2</sup> The *wenn*-clause itself should be seen as adjoined to the resumptive particle, i.e., as a co-constituent of the front-field; cf. Eisenberg (<sup>3</sup>1994:364f).

(b) wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (.) dann müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.

(same meaning)

(c) wenn sie=n WIRKlich n JOB hätten haben wollen; (.) sie hätten dann SCHON n=bisschen aufn PUNKT kommen müssen.

*if you had really wanted a job, (then) you would have needed to get down to the point.*

For version (c), special conditions of use hold, and it may therefore be considered to be „marked“ (cf. König & van der Auwera 1988, Köpcke & Panther 1985, Günthner 1999, and below).

## 2.2. Reduction

As in English, pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses tend to be condensed into routine formulae; this reduction may eventually lead to a process of univertation and to the emergence of a new modal adverbial (?) *wenn dann*, which is integrated into the sentence frame. Note the following degrees of reduction:

Ex 3:(about the company's phone number; job interview)

I1: in der STEllenausschreibung war=ne teleFONnummer [drin. ]  
*in the job ad there was a telephone number*

B: [WAR se]  
*it was,*

drin; ne?

*wasn't*

I1: =mhm, [mhm,]

B: [gut.] (-) dann is=es oKAY.  
*fine. then it is o.k.*

I1: oder soll ich sie ihnen lieber noch mal AUFSchreiben.  
*or do you want me to write it down for you.*

B: nee: (-) und WENN, dann find ich sie auch im teleFONbuch.  
*no: and if ((necessary), then I'll find you/it in the phone directory*

I1: (-) ja. (-) h h geNAU  
*yes. exactly.*

Here, the *wenn*-clause is reduced, but the reduction is a result of a context-specific ellipsis, and its meaning needs to be inferred from the context (,if your phone number is not contained in the job ad'). It has retained its own intonation contour, separating it from the following resumptive *dann*. In the next example, however, the process of condensation has progressed further. This can happen if, semantically speaking, the conditional structure

singles out a referential object (here: the ‚Mercedes car‘ as the only one to which the predicate applies:

Ex 4: (about Mercedes cars)

- M: eh mit dem dreihundertACHda' erst mit ZWEIhundertachtzig bin ich gefahren  
*ehm the three hundred and ei' first I drove the two hundred and eighty*
- F: hm: ,
- M: (in dn) DREIhundertachzig,  
*(then) the three hundred and eighty*
- F: mHM, ,
- M: also=d=s der GRO:Sse da (.) gell,  
*you know that's the large one you see*
- F: ja:: ,
- M: s=is also n RIEsenunterschied; (.)  
*its a hell of a difference*
- F: ja::?
- M: jaJA: also f' eh eh [WENN dann] [dann kommt bloß der  
*oh yes you see if ((anything)) then then only the*
- F: [wo?i' [wen'  
*(where) (if)*
- M: dreihundertACHzig in frage,  
*three hundred and eighty interests me*
- F: nHM: ,

In this case, the reduced *wenn*-clause (i.e., ‚if anything only the three hundred and eighty ((model)) interests me‘ meaning ‚if anything interests me at all, it is the three hundred and eighty‘) needs no contextual inferencing; rather, it is directly tied to the syntactic structure it introduces. The routinization of the *wenn*-clause as *wenn dann* (or alternatively, *wenn überhaupt (dann)*) avoids a cumbersome process of ‚raising‘. At the same time, the former conjunction *wenn* loses its prosodic independence and is integrated into the following intonation contour, to which it adds a (head-onset) accent in contour-initial position.

Finally, under the same conditions, but differently from English, a German *wenn*-clause may be reduced to a mere *wenn* which can appear in the middle field of the (former main) clause:

- Ex 5: solche sachs (-) also (.) die (-) die wErden sich da WENN höchstens  
am ende eines jAhres dann erst ereignen  
*things like that (-) you see they (-) they will only occur IF (= if  
at all) at the end of the year at best then*

Here, *wenn* (optionally followed by *überhaupt* ‚at all‘) serves to modalize negatively the probability with which an event will occur. Its syntactic category as a conjunction is lost entirely.

### 2.3. Semantics

The semantics of German *wenn*-clauses<sup>3</sup> is not strictly equivalent to English conditional *if*-clauses either. The cognate of English *if*, German *ob* (> Germanic \**eba*), has lost its original (OHG/MHG) function of introducing conditional clauses, although remnants of this usage may still be found in (etymologically) composite concessive conjunctions such as Modern German *ob+wohl* and *ob+gleich* and in concessive conditionals of the type *ob X oder nicht...* (‚whether X or not‘). Filling the gap, the temporal conjunction *wenn* (or rather, its predecessors, MHG *swenne/swanne*), a cognate of English *when*, has taken over most of its functions. As a consequence, the semantics of *wenn*-introduced clauses oscillates between a temporal and conditional reading in the indicative mood. (For this reason, German *wenn*-clauses, other than English *if*-clauses, cannot be called CONDITIONAL clauses.) Only in combination with the subjunctive mood are *wenn*-clause unambiguously conditions. In the indicative mood, other conjunctions are available for a nonambiguous encoding of a conditional or a temporal relationship.

Disambiguation of *wenn* is possible on the basis of contextual information (i.e., the semantics of the remainder of the clause and/or its conversational context) in some, but certainly not all cases. Even in the following examples (which are among the clearest in my data) the paraphrases are not entirely beyond dispute. However, they do represent the prevalent semantic readings of *wenn*-clauses (in the indicative mood):

Ex 6: (temporal)

dann MELD ich mich morgen bei ihnen? (-) wenn ((=sobald, sowie)) ich bei AUror angerufen hab,

*so I'll be in touch with you tomorrow as soon as I have given „Auror“ a ring*

Ex 7: (temporal: simultaneous)

TRIFFST du den (.) wenn ((=während, solanGE)) du in PEking bist?

*will you see him while you are in Peking?*

Ex 8: (temporal: iterative)

ich sprEch UNdeutlich, (1) LISpel auch n=b' etwas, (-) und (-) ich sprEch dann öfter zu SCHNELL. (-) wenn ((=jedesmall wenn)) ich beGEIstert bin, oder (-) eh im element bin; (-) dann sprech ich zu SCHNELL,

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Metschkowa-Atanassowa 1983 and Zifonun *et al.* 1997:2280-2293.

*I speak inarticulately, I also lisp a little, and then I often talk too fast. whenever I am enthusiastic about something, or ehm get carried away; (-) then I talk too fast,*

Ex 9: (conditional: hypothetical)

er will sie jetzt wieder HEIraten, und die haben so ne FRIST ehm in den islamischen ländern dass innerhalb von nem halben JAHR oder so, muss die frau dann wieder zum MANN zurück wenn ((=für den Fall dass, falls)) er sie DOCH wieder will h.

*he now wants to marry her again and they have kind of a deadline ehm in the Islamic countries that within half a year or so the wife has to return to her husband in case he wants her back again*

Ex 10: (conditional: factual)

((radio phone-in, psychotherapeutic consulting; the caller has complained about having no-one to turn to with his marriage problems; the therapist recapitulates and formulates her advice))

denn LETZTlich .h wenn ((=da)) sie in ihrer verwAndtschaft niemand HABn mit dems REden können, .h äh is=danns BESTe, (-) sie würden zu am Eheberater gehn?

*for in the end, since you have nobody among your relatives who you could talk to, ehm it's best then to turn to a marriage counsellor*

Clearly, the temporal readings of *wenn* are not covered by English *if*, but by *when* instead.

Some verbal and prosodic features of indicative *wenn*-clauses may facilitate or even enforce one or the other reading: (a) the temporal, non-iterative reading is not available in sentences referring to past events; here, the temporal conjunction *als* takes over (while English allows *when*); (b) focussing adverbials such as stressed *nur* (‘only’) in the main clause strongly suggest a conditional reading of the (following) *wenn*-clause; (c) the particle *schon* (no English equivalent) in the *wenn*-clause suggests a factual-conditional reading; (d) *immer wenn* (‘always when’) instead of a simple *wenn* as a conjunction enforces a habitual-temporal/ contingent reading; (e) *selbst wenn* (‘even if’) and *wenn ... überhaupt* (‘if ... at all’) instead of a simple *wenn* enforce a conditional reading; (f) subjunctive (*Konjunktiv II*) in the *wenn*-clause enforces a hypothetical-conditional reading; (g) stressed *wenn*-conjunctions suggest a conditional instead of a temporal reading; for this last cue, consider:

Ex 11: (from a job interview)

Applicant: WENN=se mich WOLlen-

*IF you want me*

Interviewer:jo (.) dann wollen wir sie [auch] !GANZ!

*well then we want you completely*

Applicant: [dann]

*then*

Interviewer:und (.) [zwa:r soFORT-]

*which means immediately*

Applicant: [dann dann ] woll=n=se mich soFO:RT.  
then then you want me immediately.

Here a *wenn-dann* construction is co-constructed by the applicant and the interviewer in a job interview; the applicant starts out with a *wenn*-clause which could be read temporally (‘as soon as you want me’) or conditionally (‘in case you want me’), as long as prosody is not taken into account. However, the following main clause provided by the interviewer unambiguously selects the first reading. Arguably, the basis for this selection is the stressed conjunction (here constituting the head onset of the intonation contour).

Two special uses of *wenn*-clauses need to be mentioned here. The first is the expression of concessivity through the combination of *wenn* and *auch* (*wenn + auch* or *auch + wenn*), roughly similar to Engl. *even if/even though*:<sup>4</sup>

Ex 12: (fabricated examples)

- (a) auch wenn sie KEInen job haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.  
*even if you don't want a job, you need to get down to the point*
- (b) wenn sie auch keinen JOB haben wollen, (.) sie müssen n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.  
*even though you don't want a job, you need to get down to the point*
- (c) obWOHL sie KEInen job haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.  
*although you don't want to have a job, you need to get down to the point*

The *auch wenn*-construction (version (a)) differs from *obwohl*-concessives (Engl. *although*, version (c)) in that the truth of the proposition it expresses can but need not be taken for granted (‘neutral epistemic stance’; cf. Fillmore 1990, Couper-Kuhlen, 1999): whereas the proposition ‘you don’t want a job’ is not asserted in version (a)/*auch wenn*, it is in version (c)/*obwohl*. *Auch-wenn* -clauses therefore differ from *if*-conditionals and resemble true (*obwohl*-)concessives in that the presupposed generic statement is negative (for the above example: ‘someone who does not want a job does not have to get down to the point’). At the same time, they differ from true concessives and are similar to true conditionals in that the truth of the antecedent may but need not be asserted. Note that, differently from *auch wenn*, pre-positioned *wenn auch*-clauses (version (b)) often co-occur with non-integrative word order in the consequent.

Finally, it should be noted that German *wenn*-clauses are sometimes obligatory constituents of the verb.<sup>5</sup> (English often uses non-finite forms such as participle or infinitive clauses for this purpose, although *if*-clauses are also possible.)

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<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of these ‘concessive conditionals’, cf. König 1985.

Ex 13: das EINFachste, da ham sie RECHT, das wär für uns, wenn sie mal=n  
MONat (-) im teleFONmarketing ARbeiten würden.

*the simplest solution for us, and here you are right, would be if you  
could work in our direct marketing sector for a month*

Ex 14: des wär doch auch was .h vielleicht ist die mutter ga:nz FROH wenn  
sie hört dass ihr SOHN der ja inzwischen schon seit einiger Zeit erWACHsen  
ist hh eine FREUNDin hat

*this might be .h maybe the mother is really glad to hear that her son  
who in the meantime has grown-up has a girl-friend*

Syntactically speaking, *wenn*-clauses of this kind can be replaced by *dass*-(complement) clauses (*das Einfachste wäre, dass sie mal im Telefonmarketing arbeiten/ vielleicht ist die Mutter ganz froh, dass (sie hört, dass) ihr Sohn eine Freundin hat*). Semantically speaking, various differences result from the choice between *dass*- and *wenn*-complements; most of them pertain to the presumed status of the information in the complement clause (cf. Eisenberg <sup>3</sup>1994:365f. for some further discussion).

### 3. German *wenn*-clauses from a quantitative perspective

The observations in this section are based on a collection of 500 *wenn*-clauses taken from a corpus of spontaneous, direct conversations.<sup>6</sup> All instances of *wenn* were considered for analysis, apart from obvious syntactic break-offs in the *wenn*-clause, some non-reconstructable utterances, and the comparative uses of *als/wie wenn* (see note 5). In Fig. 1, the total of n=500 tokens is broken down according to the position of the adverbial clause relative to the main clause: pre-positioning, post-positioning, parenthetical positioning within the clause<sup>7</sup>, independent use of the *wenn*-clause as a turn-constructive unit of its own, and a residual category of ambiguous cases (e.g. apo-koinuconstructions, see below). There can be no doubt that the front position is preferred in spoken German.

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<sup>5</sup> Among these *wenn*-clauses in the role of obligatory constituents, we may also count comparisons using *wie wenn* and *als wenn*, as in: du kOmmst dir vielleicht vor wie wenn dir deine wERte verLORN gangn sin. (*,maybe it seems to you as if your values had been lost*). This usage of *wenn* will not be taken into account in the following discussion, nor has it been included in the quantitative analysis.

A note in passing: some grammarians believe that *wenn*-clauses in complement function are obligatorily marked by a resumptive *es* (e.g. Eisenberg <sup>3</sup>1994:365); this is not supported by my data, however.

<sup>6</sup> Some 40% of the corpus are job interviews, mainly collected among north and east German speakers, some 30% are therapeutic conversations, both in face-to-face and in radio phone-in contexts, and the remaining 30% represent private everyday conversations, partly on the telephone. In the latter two types of data, southern German speakers prevail.

<sup>7</sup> Embeddings of *wenn*-clauses into complex hypotactic constructions were not counted as parenthetical.

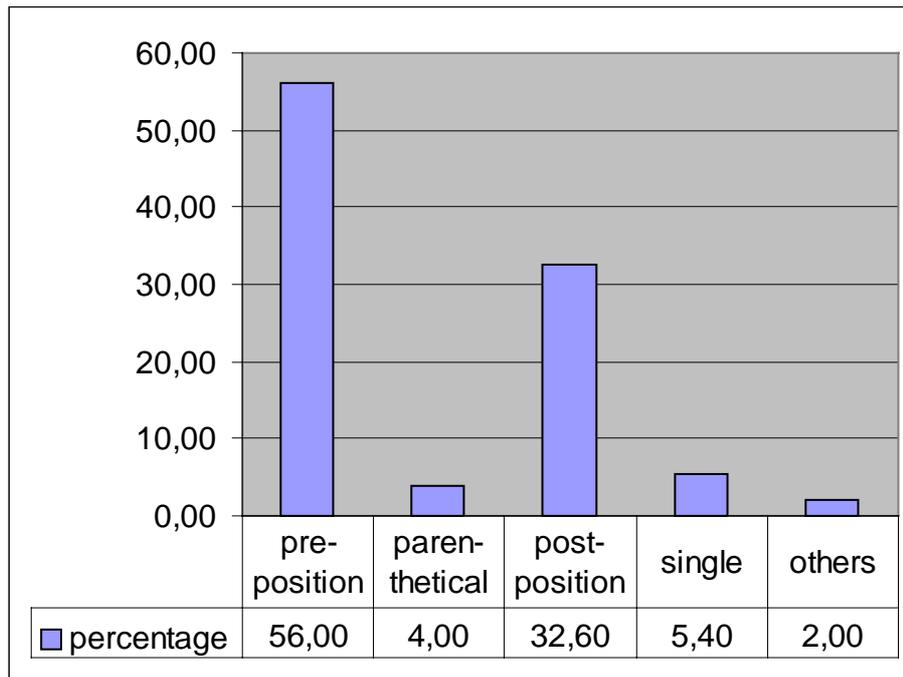


Fig. 1: Position of German *wenn*-clauses relative to the main clause; n=500.

The results agree with Ford & Thompson's findings on *if*-clauses in English conversations, according to which initials outnumber finals by a ratio of 4:1 (n=316, initial=81%, final=19%; Ford & Thompson 1986:362), with Ford's findings based on a smaller collection (n=52, 50% of which were preposed, 35% postpositioned, and 15% single; cf. Ford 1993:24), and with more general claims about a universal preference for pre-positioning of antecedents in conditional constructions (Greenberg 1963). Note, however, that the preference found in the English data for pre-positioning of conditional clauses does not extend to temporal (e.g., *when*-) clauses; rather, Ford (1993:24) found these to follow their main clauses by a ratio of 2:1. Given the ambiguity of German *wenn*-clauses (in the indicative mood) between a conditional and a temporal reading, it may be asked if the preference for initial placement of *wenn*-clauses holds for both. In the Fig. 2, those instances of *wenn*-clauses have been singled out (n=203) which have either a clear temporal or a clear conditional reading (based on the substitution tests and criteria discussed in section 2.3).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The count excludes, in addition to all polyvalent cases, all factual conditionals (i.e. those expressing a positive epistemic stance), which are always non-temporal, and all concessives, as well as *wenn*-clauses used as complements, but includes counterfactual conditionals and reduced *wenn-dann* routines.

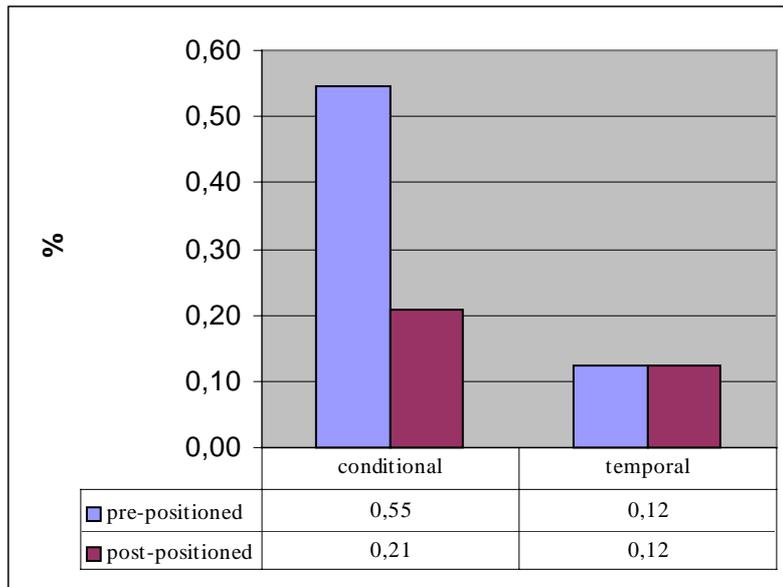


Fig. 2: Pre- and postpositioned *wenn*-clauses with temporal or conditional meaning (n=203)

Of the n=203 disambiguated *wenn*-clauses, 24% have temporal, the remainder conditional meaning. Exactly half of the *wenn*-clauses with temporal meaning are prepositioned and postpositioned respectively. There is, then, a clear difference between conditional and temporal uses: only for the former does the preference for pre-positioning hold. Since the majority of German *wenn*-clauses are semantically ambiguous between a temporal and a conditional reading, this finding also suggests that, taken as a whole, they behave syntactically like (English) conditional rather than temporal clauses.

Fig. 3 shows the percentage of integrative, resumptive and non-integrative constructions among the pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses in the sample (n=280).

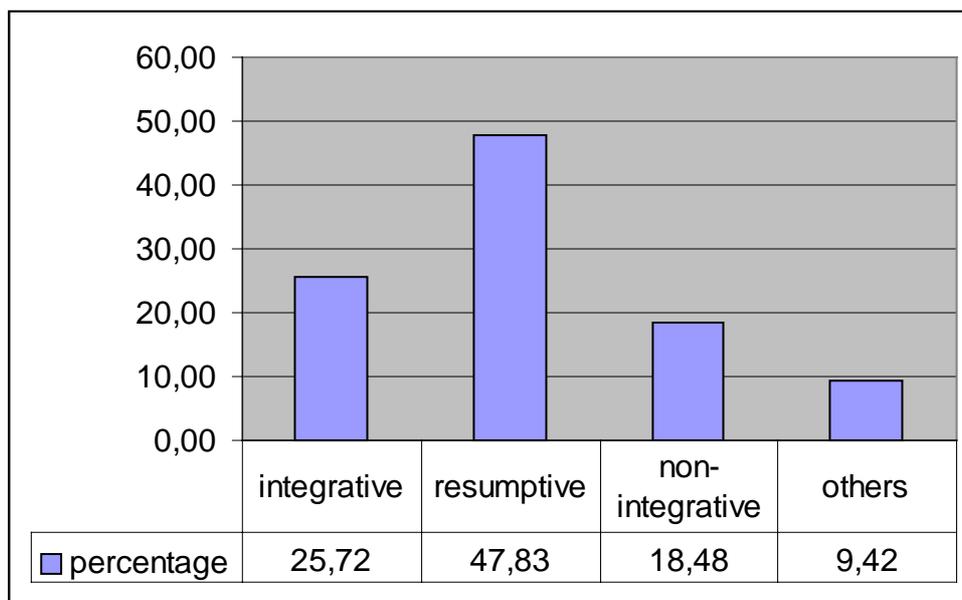


Fig. 3: integration (%) of pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses into the subsequent main clause (n=280)

The relatively large residual category („others“) covers *wenn*-clauses plus subsequent main clauses within larger hypotactical constructions (see below example (26)-(28)). Again, the results are very clear: resumptive constructions are preferred to fully integrated and totally non-integrated constructions. The canonical, integrative construction of standard written German only plays a secondary role in spoken German.

Some comments on non-integrative *wenn*-clauses in German are necessary at this point. Pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses occurring in the pre-front field of a sentence are basically of two types (cf. Auer 1996). We find instances which cannot be positioned in the front field (i.e., integrated into the main clause); in other words, the only available pattern for them is non-integrative syntax. This is sometimes for syntactic reasons; in particular, yes/no-questions and imperatives, which are verb-initial syntagms in German, do not have a front field, and in *w*-questions, the *w*-question word is usually said to occupy the front-field.<sup>9</sup> In these contexts, adverbial clauses either need to be post-positioned (despite the general preference for pre-positioning), or to be non-integrative. Of the 45 questions/imperatives in the sample, 16 have pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses, i.e., non-integrative word order (cf. Ex 15), while 29 have post-positioning; this means that the normal preference is reversed in this syntactic environment.

Ex 15: ich mein ich muss ihnen (-) ganz SCHNELL und GANZ: vehement sagen  
 wenns IRgendwie gEht (-) fahrns HIN  
*I mean I have to tell you without hesitating and very vehemently:  
 if you can make it at all, go there!*

<sup>9</sup> \**Warum [wenn Du Kirschen magst] pflückst Du Dir keine vom Baum?* ,Why [if you like cherries] don't you pick any from the tree?' therefore has to be understood as parenthetical. Resumption by *dann* is also excluded here, i.e., non-integration is the only option.

However, there are also semantic reasons why certain *wenn*-clauses have to occur in the pre-front instead of the front field. This is the case for „speech-act related“<sup>10</sup> *wenn*-clauses which do not conjoin two propositions on the content level; often, they are used in order to mitigate subsequent face-threatening acts (such as, in the following example, an interruption). The apodosis is asserted independently of the protasis, and this semantic independence corresponds with obligatory syntactic non-integration:

Ex 16: ((job interview))

wenn ich (-) grad WEIter ausführen darf; (0.5) Sie wissen ja in de: in der AUtoinduschdrie .h herrschen SEHR große k' konkurRENZ, markt

if I may continue elaborating on that; (0.5) you know that in the car industry there is a lot of competition ((etc.))

In such cases, the marked position of the *wenn*-clause in the pre-front field helps to contextualize a marked (non-referential) semantic interpretation.

But there are also contexts in which non-integrative syntax is frequent although not obligatory. For instance, there is a tendency for non-integrative clause-combining to occur in concessive *wenn nicht*-constructions:

Ex 17: wenn auch die theORIE; (-) eh (-) so IRgendwo mal gehört wurde im KOPF? (-) eh das UMsetzen das ist ja das entSCHEIdende,

even though the theory (-) ehm (-) may have been heard somewhere in one's head (-) the decisive thing is putting it into practice

Another frequent function of non-integrated *wenn*-clauses is topicalization; in this case, the *wenn*-clause is typically followed by an anaphoric pronoun back-referencing the proposition expressed in the *wenn*-clause as a whole, or an element contained in it. In the following example, the *wenn*-clause introduces a new discourse referent or topic; it is in many ways equivalent to other topicalization constructions (such as a cleft construction: *was Ihre Fragen angeht, die können Sie jetzt stellen*), with the additional implication that the speaker is not certain about the relevance of the new discourse referent for the co-participant.

Ex 18: also wenn sie FRAGEN ham zwischendurch, eh die können Sie ruhig STELlen?

well if you have any questions in between, ehm you can ask them of course.

<sup>10</sup> The term is used in a broader sense here than in Sweetser 1990. Details on this construction may be found in Günthner, 1999. Note that Sweetser's „epistemic conditionals“, although not „content conditionals“, do not allow pre-front field placement in German (\**Wenn er sich jeden Tag volllaufen lässt, sie hat ihn verlassen.* ‚If he gets drunk everyday, she has left him.‘).

A similar topicalization (not of a single referent, but of a whole proposition) is involved in the following example:

Ex 19: un wenn ich mein Eltern anrufen würde, =ds würde AUCH nix bringn.  
*and if I called my parents, that wouldn't be any use either.*

Here, the *wenn*-clause could even be entirely replaced by an infinitival construction (*meine Eltern anzurufen*), since potentiality is already expressed by the conditional verb form *würde...bringen* and redundantly coded by *wenn*.

Finally, non-integrated *wenn*-clauses often express emphasis and lend an emotional meaning to the utterance:<sup>11</sup>

Ex 20: wenn WIRKlich=n ganzen tag das telefon klingelt, und acht STUN' (-)  
 man IS hinterher' <<acc>man WEISS was man> getan hat. (.) geb ich  
 ehrlich ZU.  
*if the phone really rings all day, and eight hou' (-) afterwards  
 you are' you know what you have done. i have to admit that.*

In (20), the speaker describes her working-day in a call-centre and wants to emphasize that dealing with callers is a tiring job; one of the strategies used to convey this meaning is the non-integration of the protasis into the apodosis.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Cf. König & van der Auwera 1988: 128 („assertive emphasis on a consequent of a concessive allows non-integration“), Köpcke & Panther 1989: 700 („high degree of *ego involvement*“) and Günthner 1999 for details.

<sup>12</sup>In this context, König & van der Auwera's claim should be mentioned that sentential conjuncts with *und* ‚and‘, of which only the first has subordinated (verb-final) syntax but the second one is construed as a main clause, should occur with non-integrative word order in the superordinate (matrix) clause (1988). In my corpus, there is only one such example:

wenn ich <<acc,cresc>jetzt irgendwo NEU in=ner firma bin,>  
 = first part of protasis/dependent clause syntax (V-final)  
un:d e:h vis=a=vis sitzt jemand, der strEItet (sich) wegen=ner tasse  
 KAFfee, = second part of protasis/main clause syntax (V-2)  
 na GUT. = particle introducing apodosis  
 <<acc,f> da DENKT man sich> erstmal seinen teil. = apodosis (non-integrative)  
*If I start a new job in a company and ehm somebody is sitting opposite my  
 desk who gets into an argument over a cup of coffee, well, you see. you  
 draw your own conclusions.*

But the same type of anacoluthon is also regularly found in integrative *wenn*-constructions; e.g.:

wenn natürlich (.) mein chef Sagen würde oKEE, (.) .h <<acc>wir verLÄNgern  
 den vertrag> noch, = first part of protasis/dependent clause syntax (V-final)  
 .h und ich HAbE noch nichts, = second part of protasis/main clause syntax (V2)  
 bin ich AUCH dran intressiert. ne, = apodosis (integrative)  
*of course, if my boss said o.k., we'll give you a prolongation of your  
 contract, and I haven't found anything else, I'm also interested in that,  
 you see.*

## 4. Some reasons for pre- and post-positioning

What are the advantages of pre-positioning *wenn*-clauses? This question seems less difficult to answer than the opposite one of why a certain number of these clauses – roughly a third in our data – are post-positioned. We will deal with each question in turn.

### 4.1. The advantages of pre-positioning

To start with, it should be noted that the preference for pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses is not just a quantitative finding but is reflected in speakers' changes in the design of an emerging syntactic pattern 'in mid-stream'. Particularly striking are cases such as Ex. (8), repeated here for convenience as Ex. (21), in which a post-positioned *wenn*-clause is retrospectively turned into a pre-positioned one via what might be called an *apo-koinu* construction:

Ex 21: ich sprEch UNdeutlich, (1) LISpel auch n=b' etwas, (-) und (-) ich sprEch dann öfter zu SCHNELL. (-) wenn ich beGEIstert bin, oder (-) eh im element bin; (-) dann sprech ich zu SCHNELL,

*I speak inarticulately, I also lisp a little, and then I often talk too fast. whenever I am enthusiastic about something, or ehm get carried away; (-) then I talk too fast,*

The koinon here, of course, is *wenn ich beGEIstert bin, oder (-) eh im element bin*. It seems that the speaker, having completed the three-part list of his verbal handicaps, wants to qualify the last item retrospectively. He could have done this by simply adding the *wenn*-clause in the post-field but recycles this last component instead, with the *wenn*-clause inserted before it. The *wenn*-clause here is both final and initial. Instances in which a clause is broken off and a *wenn*-clause is inserted before it is re-started (as in (22)) are also evidence for the interactional relevance of pre- vs. Post-positioning.

Ex 22: ich fahr (-) wenn (-) wenns überHAUPT geht  
*I'll have if if it works out at all*  
denn fahr ich NA:CH(er) erscht in Urlaub,  
*then I'll only have my holidays afterwards*

So why this additional effort? There seems to be some kind of cognitive 'naturalness' in the way in which conditionals create the ground – or, in more recent but equally metaphorical parlance, set up a „mental space“ (Fauconnier 1985) – in which some hypothetical or factual proposition is located.<sup>13</sup> For cognitive reasons, it is the grounding which (iconically) precedes the focal proposition, and not the other way round. Ford, for instance, suggests that „the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf., among others, Ford & Thompson 1986: 370; Ford 1993; Dancygier & Sweetser 1996.

prevalence of initially placed *if*-clauses may reflect the general tendency to signal ((...)) that the interpretation of the coming clause will be, in some general way, limited by the contents of the *if*-clause“ (1993:15). Further evidence for the ‚naturalness‘ of this position can be derived from the affinity of conditional clauses and topic-introducing devices (topics precede comments), for which some evidence has been given in the preceding section (see Haiman 1978, Ford & Thompson 1986 for an in-depth treatment of this line of argumentation), and from the affinity of conditional and causal clauses (where causes iconically precede their effects). The advantages of this discourse function seem to outweigh the cognitive costs linked to the deployment of a syntactic pattern which projects considerably into time.

It may not have been sufficiently taken into account in previous research on clause positioning, however, that this projection in time has an interactional side as well:<sup>14</sup> speakers who open up far-reaching syntactic gestalts claim the turn for at least the time which is necessary to bring them to a well-formed conclusion. In other words, producing a *wenn*-clause gives the speaker the right and obligation to go on talking; it functions as a turn-holding device until the formulation of the consequent is completed. There are numerous cases in the data in which highly complex turns emerge in this way, since the speaker uses the space between a gestalt-opening *wenn*-clause and a terminating main clause for detailing the „mental space“ opened up by the first component. Two elaborate examples (as they seem to be typical for institutional talk) are (23) and (24):

Ex 23: (job interview; applicant B is talking about his previous employment in a West German consultant company which, however, withdrew from East Germany, despite the fact that it had highly experienced consultants)

B: zum beispiel einen herren, (.) KELLer?  
*for instance a Mr Keller*  
 (-) eh der (.) is: (.) FÜNFundzwanzig jahre unterNEHmensberater? (.)  
*ehm who has been a consultant for 25 years*  
 der hat=n STAMMKlientel in uh es ah KANada?  
*he has his regular clients in the U.S. and Canada*

I: mhm,

B: und DER war natürlich, (-) ein FACHmann. (-) aber er KOMMT, (.)  
*and he was a specialist of course. (-) but he is coming*  
 in die neuen BUNdesländer? (.) <<acc>er war ja nu> (-) eh hatte es ja  
*to the New States (.) he certainly had (-) ehm he had no need to do*  
 gar nicht mehr NÖtig gehabt;=da (.) so [VIEL] (-) zu REIsen,  
*that any more; to travel so much there*

I: [mhm,]

B: aber (-) er IS in die neuen BUNDDesländer gekommen, (-)

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<sup>14</sup> But see Ford 1993:56.

*but (-) he did come to the New States, (-)  
um auch etwas zu beWEGen. (-) aber wenn er dann nur auf der STRASse  
in order to get something moving. (-) but if he is on the road all  
the*

*(.) sitzt, (-) und DANN (-) den (.) kliENTen (.) mit nach schweRIN  
time (-) and then (-) he has to take his client with him to Schwerin*

*nehmen muss um=n FÖRderantrag zu stellen; (-) dann wieder zur BANK,  
in order to hand in the proposal for the subsidies; (-) and than back*

*(-)und die BANK sagt (.) wir brauchen erst=ne ZUStimmung von dem  
to the bank, (-) and the bank says (.)first we need the subsidizing*

*FÖRderinstitut,  
body's consent*

I: =<p>mhm,

B: vor[her (.) kö]nnen wir nicht die geSAMTfinanzierung,  
*before that we cannot (do) the total financing*

I: [(h) ]  
<p> wie mit Köpenick. ja  
*like with Köpenick<sup>15</sup>*

B: und (.) [und er da]nn NUR auf der STRASSE ist;  
*and (.) and he is just on the road*

I: [(h) ]

B: (-) dann SAGT er das LOHNT sich für mich nicht. (-)  
*then he says this isn't worth it for me.*

*dann bleib ich LIEBER (.) in nordrhein westFAlen.  
then I rather stay in North Rhine-Westphalia ((a West German state))*

This passage is embedded into a larger report the applicant gives of his participation in a West German consultant agency in the New States, which however closed down its East German office, making him redundant. The interviewer does not seem to know the company and questions its importance on the market. The applicant counters by stating that although small, the company had very professional consultants. At the same time, he has to deal with the interviewer's innuendo that the company withdrew from the East German market because it was not working successfully. In this context, the case of „Mr. Keller“ is mentioned, an experienced consultant who was disappointed by the kafkaesque way in

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<sup>15</sup> Speaker I is most likely alluding to Zuckmayer's play (and a famous German movie) *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick*, in which the Prussian state and army authorities are caricatured.

which state and bank authorities made it hard for new enterprises to get subsidies, and returned to the Old States.

After he has been portrayed as a successful consultant who came to East Germany mainly for idealistic reasons, „Mr. Keller’s“ dissatisfaction with the situation is described in a complex turn construction which starts out with a *wenn*-clause (*wenn er nun auf der Straße sitzt...*). In the given context, the interpretation is not hypothetical but refers to a (factual) state of affairs (‘since he was always on the road...’), which is established as the ground from which some conclusion can be drawn. Before this conclusion is reached, however, the speaker elaborates at considerable length on the unfortunate situation in which „Mr. Keller“ and his clients found themselves; in four clauses each introduced by (*und*) *dann*, the various fruitless journeys between the financing bank and the state authorities in Schwerin are described. Towards the end of this elaboration (securely produced by the speaker within the realm of his own turn, since a syntactic projection – that of the *when*-clause – still remains to be taken care of), the interviewer produces some reciprocity tokens which, although not claiming the turn (cf. their reduced loudness, indicating non-competitiveness), nevertheless acknowledge the speaker’s point: two laughter particles and one comment (*wie mit Köpenick*) display understanding. Only after this feedback does the speaker close the syntactic gestalt with two resumptive *dann*-clauses. Their content is highly predictable, given the fact that it has been mentioned before that the company closed down its East German branch. It seems, then, that what the speaker wanted to convey by this complex turn is not so much this consequent but rather the details of the situation which led to it. The relevant information of this complex construction is what is produced BETWEEN the initial *wenn*-clause and the final *dann*-clauses. The speaker employs the projecting force of the first in order to claim conversational space for himself, and makes use of this space as long as he needs it to ‚convince‘ the recipient of his point (as evidenced by the recipient’s responses). The ‚orderly‘ conclusion of the turn is produced as soon as this purpose is reached.

The following extract similarly shows how pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses can be used to claim conversational space:

Ex 24: (bulimia therapy)

M:     aso ich hab ma mit einer zuSAMMgewohnt,=  
       *you see I once lived with a girl*  
       und .h die hab ich EH nich so leidn könn un sie mich AUCH nich,  
       *and I couldn't really stand her and neither could she me*  
       und dann hab ich IMmer so .h (0.5)  
       *and then I always*  
       und (-) DIE: is schon wesentlich DICker als ich;=  
       *and she really was a lot bigger than I was*  
       und dann hab ich ECHT immer gedacht (0.5)

*and believe me I always thought*  
 ich hab so alles des (-) AUF se projeziert  
*I projected everything on her*  
 und wenn se viel geGESSn hat,  
*and when/if she ate a lot,*  
 =die hat sich .h SAHne n ganzn becher SAHne mit Apfelschnittchen drin  
 gegessn.  
*she put cream a whole cup of cream she ate with slices of apple in it*  
 =und das war für mich ECHT der ABScheu.=  
*and to me that was really disgusting.*  
 <<fast>n hab ich gedacht> .h des is ja wohl (1.0) des is FURCHTbar  
*then I thought .h isn't that (1.0) that is really appalling*  
 (1.0) wie KAMmer denn sowas ESSn un auch noch mit gUtm geWISSn.  
*how can you eat anything like that and without even feeling guilty*

Once more, a speaker is involved in telling a story which in this case is supposed to show how she projected her own feelings of guilt for eating too much onto her flatmate. And once more, a *wenn*-clause is the first component of a syntactically cohesive turn construction which spans six intonation units. The speaker does not go into gestalt closure (apodosis) after the *wenn*-clause, but rather parenthetically includes information detailing the claim that the roommate ‚ate a lot‘, and how she herself reacted to that emotionally. Only then does a (*dan*)-clause follow which ties back to the initial part of the turn, where a story concerning a ‚projection‘ (*ich hab so alles des auf se projeziert*) was announced.

There is only one legitimate way for a recipient to share (or rather, intrude into) the conversational space which a *wenn*-projection creates for the current speaker: by becoming a co-speaker herself, i.e. by collaboratively producing the gestalt-closing apodosis matching the already produced protasis (cf. Lerner 1991 and Ex. 11 above). First speakers may invite such co-construction by the recipient after the *wenn*-clause, as in the following example, in which delicate matters of re-negotiating an appointment are at stake:

Ex 25: (telephone conversation: A has called to cancel this evening's appointment because her husband (Klaus) is ill; B seems to be quite relieved since she had other plans anyway):

- B: wir ham doch n SCHIFFSnachbar. (-)  
*I told you about our ship neighbour*  
 und der hat uns jetzt bestImmt schon das ZEHNTemal zum ESSen  
 eingeladen;  
*and he has invited us at least ten times for dinner*  
 [und IMmer hatten wir was ANDres vor;  
*and we always had other plans*
- A: [mhm
- B: jetzt ham mir gsA mir gehn heut Abend mit DEM äh: (-) nach cuxHAVen.  
*so we said we'd go with him to Cuxhaven this evening*

un dersch isch hier schon DREI<sup>ma</sup> am SCHIFF vorbeigelaufen  
*and he's walked by the ship three times*  
i glaub der sucht n(JÜRgen) un FRAGT wenn das jetzt alles losgeht.  
*I think he is looking for (Jürgen=B's husband) and asks when we are leaving.*

A: aa: (-)

B: un (-) mir wärn also (-) ersch so (-) morgen  
*so we would only be tomorrow ((break-off))*  
aber wenn der klaus sowieSO krank isch, na,  
*but if/since Klaus is ill anyway, then,*

A: mhm (-) also so wie ICH des ver äh standen hab, hat der ä THOMas zu  
mir gesagt (-) äh dass wir das verSCHIEben.

*mhm (-) well as I understood it Thomas told me that we would postpone it.*

B starts out by underlining her social obligation to accept the ,ship-neighbour's' invitation to Cuxhaven this evening; she then produces two unfinished fragments which both point to the consequences of this fact for the meeting with A: *und wir wären also erst so morgen...* (,we would only be tomorrow...') – to be complemented by ,available', and a *wenn*-clause (,but since Klaus is ill anyway then...') which is broken off after the resumptive ,then' (*na*). Clearly, the consequent is highly predictable in this context: since ,Klaus' is ill, the appointment for ,today' cannot be upheld. A suggests that B should draw this conclusion for herself, however, which would make it unnecessary for her to make the face-threatening act explicit. B indeed does so, but only indirectly: she does not pick up the syntactic frame suggested by A, i.e., she does not bring A's sentence to a conclusion, nor does she cancel the appointment herself but rather takes a third person's (Thomas') perspective.

What is responsible for most cases of the isolated *wenn*-clauses in the data are invitations for recipients to draw the inferences themselves which are suggested by speakers who have built up a ,mental space' in a pre-positioned *wenn*-clause: in these cases, the invitation is not picked up (cf. Tab. (1)).

Both inserted material between protasis and apodosis and collaborative constructions pivoting around this transition suggest that there is some interactional work going on, and that, at least in a substantial subgroup of examples, the construction is not planned and executed as one whole, but rather develops in (at least) two steps.

#### 4.2. Why post-positioning at all?

If pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses are both cognitively more ,natural' and interactionally more advantageous than post-positioned ones, why do the latter occur at all? Two reasons have

already been mentioned in section 3: *wenn*-clauses may be used for expressing the temporal circumstances of an event, and since temporal adverbial clauses do not follow the preference for pre-positioning, *wenn*-clauses of this semantic type need not do so either.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, it was shown that the absence of a front-field in questions and other verb-initial syntagms makes their post-positioning more likely.<sup>17</sup> There are, however, other important reasons.

First of all, it may be asked if there are any further syntactic environments in which post-positioning is preferred or even necessary. There is indeed another construction in which the front-field is not available: that in which the *wenn*-clause plus subsequent clause are themselves embedded into a larger construction. The various types of embedding show different patterns with respect to the possibility of pre-positioning. As in Ford & Thompson's English data (1986:359), final positioning is preferred „when a conditional clause occurs within a nominalization, an infinitive, or a relative clause“. Take, for instance, the following case of a relative clause:

Ex 26: (therapy session)  
 TM: s=ESSn isch wie? ein TEddybär.  
*eating is like a teddy bear.*  
 TW: =ja,  
*yeah*  
 TM: den' den sie: (-) .h mit sich RUMtragn. (2.0)  
*who who you carry around with you.*  
 damit SIE <<p>nich alleIn sein müssn.>  
*so that you don't have to be alone.*  
 un dem=mer (-) sich RANzieht, ja? (-) (-) wenn s HART wird; (3.0)  
*and whom one holds close, right? (-) (-) when life becomes hard;*  
 an dem=mer sich FESCHThält, (2.0) wem=mer EINSam isch, (1.0)  
*whom one clings to, (2.0) when one is lonely,*  
 nd der ü:berall MIT muss.  
*and who has to come along all the time.*

Both *wenn*-clauses in this extract are part of a relative clause introduced by an oblique relative pronoun, i.e., their matrix clause is itself subordinated, and therefore has verb-final syntax (cf. the placement of the finite verbs *ranzieht* and *festhält*). Here, the *wenn*-clause cannot be placed in front of the relative clause (\**und wenn's hart wird den man sich ranzieht*); pre-positioning would require a superordinated main clause instead of the relative

<sup>16</sup> This of course, leaves the question open why temporal adverbial clauses should behave differently from conditional ones – a question which requires an investigation of its own.

<sup>17</sup> For a similar remark on English, cf. Ford & Thompson 1986:369.

clause (*und wenn's hart wird, zieht man sich den ran*).<sup>18</sup> The same applies to dependent clauses introduced by *wie* ,as', *obwohl* ,although', *weil* ,because', etc. which likewise do not allow initial *wenn*-clauses.

However, subordination by the most frequent complementizer *dass* (,that') shows a different pattern. Here, we frequently encounter initial placement of the pre-positioned *wenn*-clause BEFORE the complementizer *dass*:

Ex 27: MEIN interesse is natürlich  
*my interest of course is*  
WENN ich da: .h schon als POSTdoc auf=m ZEITvertrag bin;  
*if I am there as a post-doc on a temporary contract*  
dass ich während de dieser ZEIT dann; (-) auch=n paar  
 ergebnisse MITnehme  
*that I can take at least some results with me during this time*

Ex 28: und DESwegen wär es natürlich; (-) für uns WÜNsenswert; (.)  
*and therefore of course it would be desirable for us*  
 <<scanning>WENN wir uns einigen KÖNNten,>  
*IF we could come to an agreement*  
dass sie so früh wie MÖGlich <dim>natürlich anfangen.  
*that you start as soon as possible*

The additional stress on *wenn* in these examples may give us a clue to the origin of this construction; arguably, it underlines the semantic link between antecedent and consequent. Fronting the *wenn*-clause to a position before the *dass*-complementizer may be another way of focussing on the semantic link established by *wenn*.<sup>19</sup> Note in passing that the fronting of the *wenn*-clause renders its scope ambiguous both in (27) and (28): it may or may not include the initial phrases *mein Interesse ist natürlich/ ...wäre es natürlich für uns wünschenswert* (i.e.: ,of course, if I am only there as a post-doc on a temporary contract, then my interest is to take at least some results with me' and ,if we could come to an

<sup>18</sup> In some cases, however – though not in (26) with its oblique relative pronoun - , the *wenn*-clause can follow the relative pronoun (*das Essen ist wie ein Teddybär, der, wenn es hart ist, immer bei Ihnen ist, und der, wenn man einsam ist, zum Festhalten da ist*). But here we are dealing with parenthetical placement in the middle field of the sentence; this is exceedingly rare in spoken German.

<sup>19</sup>Of course, *wenn* is not always stressed in fronted *wenn*-clauses. Cf. the following example:  
 ich (.) hab (-) FÜNF jahre lang an der schule franzÖsisch geHABTh, mir  
 fEhlts eigentlich an (.) PRAxis, .h aber: (-) ich bin überZEUGT davon,  
 =wenn ich: eh eh ÖFTers mal die geLEgenheit hätte zum beispiel in  
 FRANKkreich, eh mich aufzuhaltn, .hh dass des: (-) eh SICherlich  
 Ausbaufähig is.

*I had French at school for five years, actually I'm lacking practice, but I'm convinced if I on occasion had the chance to spend some time for instance in France, that I could work on it.*

agreement it would of course be desirable for us that you start as soon as possible' respectively).<sup>20</sup>

In addition to these syntactic constraints, there are semantic-syntactic reasons for post-positioning *wenn*-clauses. In particular, *wenn*-clauses in complement function are usually postpositioned (cf. (13) and (14) above). As a rule, the main clause contains an evaluative two-place predicate, with the *wenn*-clause expressing the proposition which is evaluated (as in Ex. 14: *vielleicht ist die mutter ga:nz FROH wenn sie hört dass ihr SOHN ... eine FREUNdin hat*).<sup>21</sup> The opposite serialization is not unacceptable, particularly if an anaphoric pronoun is used to indicate the syntactic position in the main clause in which an argument is lacking (*wenn sie hört, dass ihr Sohn eine Freundin hat, ist die Mutter vielleicht ganz froh DARÜBER*); nevertheless, it is very rare. The dominant pattern obviously parallels that of *dass*-introduced complement clauses which can, but rarely do, precede the main clause as well. Complements make up ca. 25% of all the post-positioned *wenn*-clauses in the spoken materials investigated.

Finally, and most importantly, post-positioning of *wenn*-clauses is linked to the pragmatic status of the proposition they express, and to the interactional possibilities this position opens up both for the speaker and the hearer. As outlined in section 1, final subordinated clauses in German are added onto an already complete syntactic structure. They are therefore a straightforward means for expanding a syntactic gestalt, and thereby the turn-at-talk. This is particularly obvious in cases where syntactically complete syntagms preceding the *wenn*-clause are marked as terminal by intonation, e.g. by a pitch fall to the speaker's base line (full stop in the transcription); the *wenn*-clause then appears as an afterthought, or epexegetis (cf. Auer 1991):

Ex 29:(hypothetical talk about a situation in which two people are in conflict over where to put the cup for the coffee; B is asked to mediate)

B: ich würd [einfach] die (.) die tasse kaffee NEHmen,  
I would simply take the (.) the cup of coffee  
Il: [ <p>h:m, ]  
B: und eh (-) WEGstellen. (-) .h ja? (.)

<sup>20</sup> The tendency to place the *wenn*-clause early in dependent constructions is also evidenced by the fact that parenthetical placement immediately after *dass* is frequent (cf. Note 18). Often, a second, resumptive *dass* is added at the beginning of the consequent:

kAnnst du ihm vielleicht (-) AUSrichten dass ich ANgerufn habe?  
*could you perhaps tell him that I called?*  
und dass wenn er mit dem trelitz geSPROChen hat über meine prüfungk,  
*and that if he has talked to Trelitz about my exams,*  
dass er sich dann irgendwie=mal=GANZ kurz bei mir mElden soll?  
*that he should give me a quick ring some time?*

<sup>21</sup> The same was found in English conversations by Ford & Thompson 1986:368.

*and ehm (-) put it away. (-) you see?*  
*eh=s da stundenlang streitereREIen gibt,*  
*before they start quarrelling for hours,*  
*würd ich sagen, al[so: ] jetzt is:-*  
*I would say right now it is*  
 I1: [ hm, ]  
 (0.5)  
 I1: da hätt=ich ärger [mit IHnen.  
*then I would have trouble with you.*  
 B: [schluss aus ENde?  
*over and out*  
 I1: [wenn SIE mir dann auch noch den KAFfee (wegschließen.)]  
*if you (shut away) my coffee*  
 B: [(.) ja, he he he he he he  
  
 I1: [he he he he he he

At a point where B has already suggested simply 'taking away' the disputed coffee cup, but is in the middle of a syntactic construction elaborating on this proposal (*eh's da stundenlang Streiterei gibt würde ich also sagen: Schluss, aus, Ende*) I1 intervenes during an intra-turn hesitation pause to refute this solution: 'if you do that, there would be trouble between the two of us' (i.e. between the mediator, B, and one of the two people quarrelling, i.e. himself). The utterance is linked to B's proposal by the initial anaphoric *da*; it is semantically and syntactically complete, and being marked by a final fall, it certainly is a candidate for a complete turn. However, B does not pick up this refutation, but continues with the production of the unfinished syntagm in another piece of simultaneous talk. Sequential structure and temporal development are now out of phase: a response has been produced to an utterance which is still in need of being completed, and is only completed after the response. In this context, I1's following *wenn*-clause, syntactically expanding an already complete turn/syntagm, can be seen as a skillful way of re-aligning sequentiality and timing: it re-instantiates I1's refutation of B's proposal without repeating it, by retrospectively transforming a simple construction into a hypotactical one with a post-positioned adverbial clause. Semantically, this expansion adds nothing new: it just restates what B herself has said before.

The possibility of such an expansion is not only available to the speaker but also to the recipient, of course, who may become a co-speaker and co-producer of the emerging syntactic pattern by adding a *wenn*-clause himself/herself:

Ex 30

L: .h dann: eh (.) wir' der Hund wird auch jetzt zunehmend ruhiger;  
*then ehm beco the dog is becoming more and more calm now;*

S: mHM (-) des GUT so; (-)  
*this is how it should be;*

L: JAja des=also wird langsam (a)=richtiger HUND;  
*yeah slowly he's turning into a real dog.*

S: aHA  
*I see*

L: hm, (-)

S: wenn=er (nicht mehr) abhaut, (-)  
*if he doesn't escape (any more),*  
 hat (name) des ANgebot jetzt für den zaun?=  
*did NN get the offer for the fence in the meantime?*

So it is not only the transition between a *wenn*-clause and its subsequent main clause which is sensitive to turn-taking, but also the inverse transition between a (main) clause and its subsequent *wenn*-clause. But obviously, there is an important difference: while in the first case an open syntactic projection is in play, in the second case the first speaker has already come to an orderly completion of the sentence/turn.

Post-positioned *wenn*-clauses thus offer the possibility not only of expanding a turn, but also of expanding a sentence by adding a post-field constituent. At least example (29)<sup>22</sup> also points to an important pragmatic feature of such expansions: its low information value. Indeed, this applies to a very large number of post-positioned *wenn*-clauses. Often it is the whole previous text which functions to build up the ‚mental space‘ that is necessary to come to the conclusion expressed in the main clause, while the post-positioned *wenn*-clause only summarizes this preceding text, sometimes slightly changing the focus. In (31), the introductory adverbial *insofern* explicitly establishes this resultative link between pre-text and conclusion, while the post-positioned *wenn*-clause just repeats what is known from the previous conversation anyway (the *wenn*-clause is factual here):

Ex 31: ((after a long discussion of the applicant's career aspirations in the bank, and an equally long description of the branch bank in Stralsund and its sophisticated private client service, which seems to match these wishes))

((...)) das HAM wir alles in stralsUnd, also inSofern, (-) eh wäre das=ne  
*we've got all that in Stralsund, so in that regard, this would be an ideal*  
*ideAle (-) STELle, (-) wenn sie (-) praktiZIEren wollen im*  
*position if you want to be a trainee in the sales department. in client-*  
*verTRIEBSbereich. im KUNDDennahen bereich.*  
*oriented business.*

<sup>22</sup> In other-speaker produced post-positioned *wenn*-clauses this does not always hold, since second speakers may choose this way of intimately linking their speech to a preceding syntactic pattern but nonetheless produce unexpected and even contradictory information under this ‚disguise‘.

As in other, similar cases of low-relevance *wenn*-clauses in final position, the front-field is used here for a connecting (anaphorical) adverbial, which is preferentially placed in sentence-initial position, where its indexical meaning is most easily processed. Since only one constituent may be placed in the front-field, this position is not available for the *wenn*-clause any longer.

Since post-positioned *wenn*-clauses are often of low pragmatic relevance, upgrading their informational value requires special means; a standard technique for doing so is the use of focussing particles such as (stressed) *auch*, *nur* or *dann*, or a combination of these. In this case, it is the focussing particle which projects syntactically: it requires a constituent to follow which is in its scope. Therefore, *wenn*-clauses such as the following cannot be treated in the same way as post-field *wenn*-clauses in general: they do not expand an already complete syntactic pattern but rather close a gestalt projected by the particle.

Ex 32: ((about wearing glasses))

ich zieh=se nur DENN ouf wEnn=i=se wIrklich (-) Effektiv brOuch

*I only put them on then when I really and positively need them*

Ex 33: denn (.) es is ja SO dass: (-) giTARrenunterricht auch nur DANN  
 spaß macht wenn man auch sIeht: dass der schüler <dim>FORTschritte  
 macht.=das heißt .h er NICH irgendwie sich an nem stück FESTbeißt,

*for it is like this: giving guitar lessons is only then fun when you see  
 that the student is making progress. this means that he doesn't get stuck  
 with a piece of music.*

*Ex negativo*, the necessity of using such focussing particles in order to upgrade the following *wenn*-clause to rhematic status is evidence for the (sub)thematic status which *wenn*-clauses usually have in the post-field.

## 5. Pre- and post-positioning of *wenn*-clauses in written German

In the last sections, it has been shown that *wenn*-clauses are preferentially pre-positioned with respect to their main clauses in spoken German, and that this serialisation has a number of cognitive and interactional advantages. It has also been shown that the more marked structure, i.e. post-positioned *wenn*-clauses, which does occur in about a third of all instances, has its own specific contexts of usage. These are partly due to (a) syntactic constraints on pre-positioning in superordinate clauses without a pre-field or in which two complementizers occur in adjacent position; partly to (b) turn-taking (afterthought position); partly to (c) semantic-syntactic reasons (*wenn*-clauses in complement function are postpositioned); and partly to (d) pragmatic reasons (post-positioned dependent clauses are thematic or subthematic, unless focussing particles indicate the contrary).

In written German, *wenn*-clauses are generally less frequent than in spoken discourse, a finding which contradicts the frequent claim that spoken language avoids syntactically complex constructions. Fig. (4) shows the frequencies of *wenn*-clauses per 100 words in the corpus of spoken language used above, and in a corpus of written language, taken from the newspapers *DIE ZEIT* (politics section) and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (culture section).<sup>23</sup> Transcriptions of conversational speech were regularized in order to make a comparative computer-based word-count possible.<sup>24</sup>

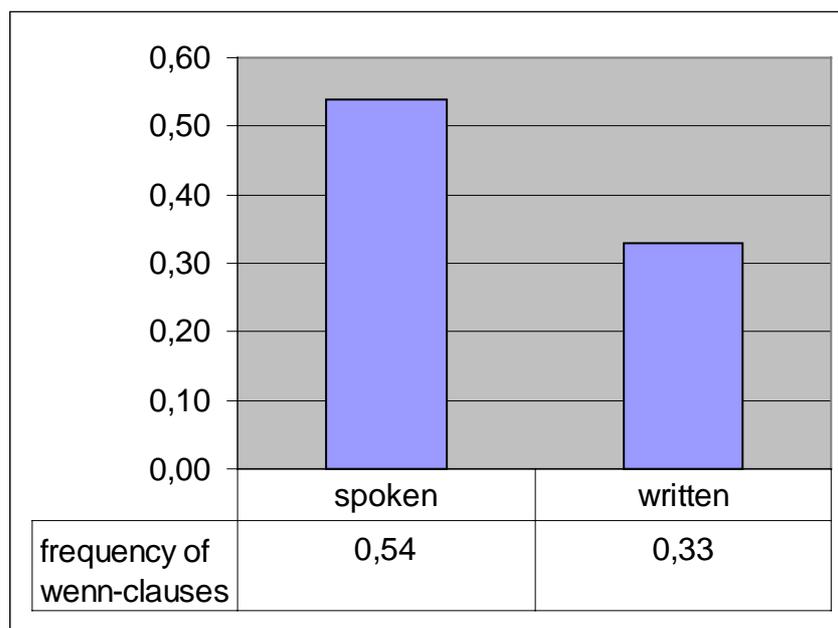


Fig. 4: Frequency of *wenn*-clauses in spoken and written German per 100 words

As Fig. 4 shows, every 186<sup>th</sup> word is *wenn* in our spoken corpus on an average, but only every 300<sup>th</sup> word in our written texts. Once more, this finding is in line with comparative work on written and spoken English (Ford & Thompson 1986, 354: 0.72 vs. 0.46; similarly: Beaman 1984 and Biber 1986), but also with previous work on German (Leska 1965, 450).

There are of course also qualitative differences between the *wenn*-clauses used in the two corpora; in particular, certain rather idiomatic patterns (constructions) seem to be more or less exclusively used either in spoken or written language. For instance, the reduced *wenn*-(*dann*)-constructions of spoken German (cf. section 2.2. above) do not occur in the newspaper corpus, while, on the other hand, the topicalizing causative construction *wenn p dann (deswegen), weil q* (if p, then that is because of q'), as in (34), seems to be used exclusively in writing

<sup>23</sup> More exactly, the corpus included the F.A.Z. *Feuilleton-Glossen* from Jan 8, 1993 (Ausgabe Nr. 6) to Dec 31, 1993 (Nr. 304) and *DIE ZEIT* politics section of Dec 30, 1994 (No. 1) to Feb 17, 1995 (Nr. 8).

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix for an example.

Ex 34: (DIE ZEIT Nr. 8 17.02.1995)

Wenn wir das Leugnen von Auschwitz, anders als das Leugnen der kopernikanischen Wende, unter Strafe stellen, dann deswegen, weil es uns nicht nur hypothetisch angst macht.

*If we punish the denial of Auschwitz, and not the denial of the Copernican revolution, then that is because it does not make us feel afraid only hypothetically.*

Also, and contradicting received wisdom according to which written language is more logical and more explicit, we find instances of *wenn* as a conjunction in the newspaper texts, with semantics which are exceedingly vague, as for instance in (35):

Ex 35: (F.A.Z 19.06.1993, S. 27 / Nr. 139)

Aber wenn zum stets und inständig angestrebten "Weltniveau" der DDR die Stellvertreterenschaft des überragenden, fortschrittlichen, darin sogar selbst "bürgerlichen" Kulturerbes gehörte, dann äußert sich nun das Aufschließen zur Weltoffenheit seltsam kleinmütig.

*But if the representation of the outstanding and progressive cultural heritage, one which includes even the „bourgeois“, belonged to the ever and urgently sought after „international standard“ of the GDR, then growing into cosmopolitan open-mindedness expresses itself rather timidly nowadays.*

Here, the *wenn-dann* construction seems to vaguely express something between adversativity and concessivity.

However, these differences only affect a relatively small number of examples and are not directly linked to the positioning of the *wenn*-clause. The important question for the present discussion is rather whether the preference for pre-positioning of *wenn*-clauses is also to be found in written German (as it is in written English, cf. Ford & Thompson 1986<sup>25</sup>). Fig. (5) shows that this is not the case:

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<sup>25</sup> The written corpus used by Ford & Thompson consisted of philosophical essays, a professional text for automobile mechanics, and a personal narrative account (1986:355). The preference for pre-positioning held for all these sources.

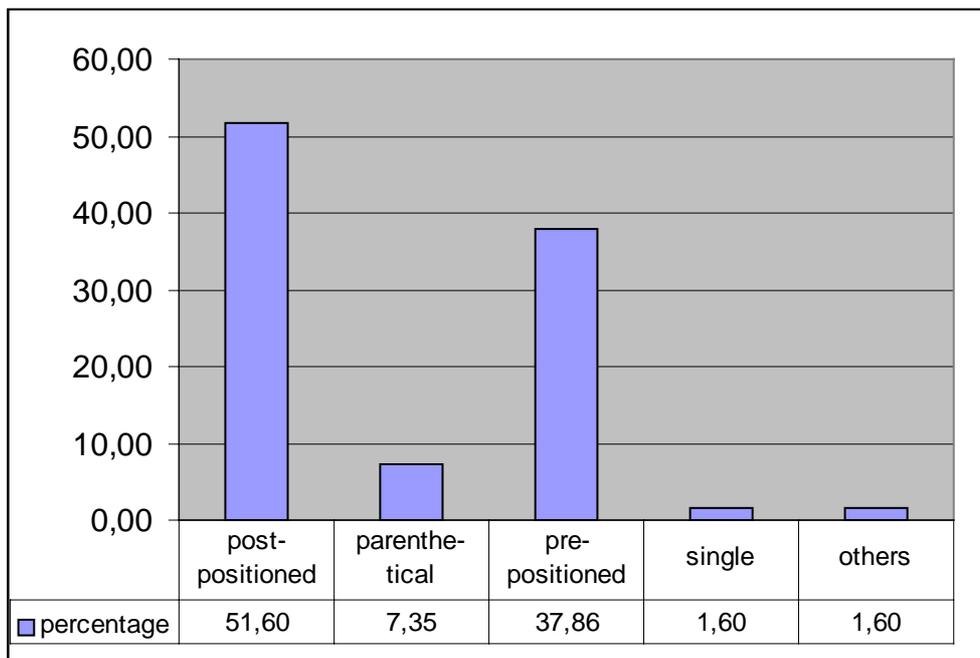


Fig. 5: Percentage of post- and prepositioned *wenn*-clauses in written German (n=626)

In the written materials, post-positioned *wenn*-clauses are almost one and a half times more frequent than pre-positioned, ones while the opposite ratio is found in the spoken material.<sup>26</sup> As would be expected, the number of integrative pre-positioned *wenn*-clauses is higher than in conversational language, and both the number of non-integrative and resumptive<sup>27</sup> structures is markedly reduced (cf. Fig. (6)).

<sup>26</sup> A separate count for the two newspapers shows that the quantitative results are identical.

<sup>27</sup> The resumptive particle is *dann* in 46 cases and *so* in 16 cases. *Dann* and *so* are not freely interchangeable; in particular, *so* can be used with concessives (introduced by *auch/selbst wenn*), while *dann* cannot. Cf.: *Auch wenn das Abgeordnetenhaus erst im Herbst, voraussichtlich am 22. Oktober, gewählt wird, so hat mit der Urabstimmung schon der Wahlkampf begonnen.* (‘Even though parliament will not be elected until autumn, probably on October 22, SO the electoral campaign has already begun with the strike ballot.’)

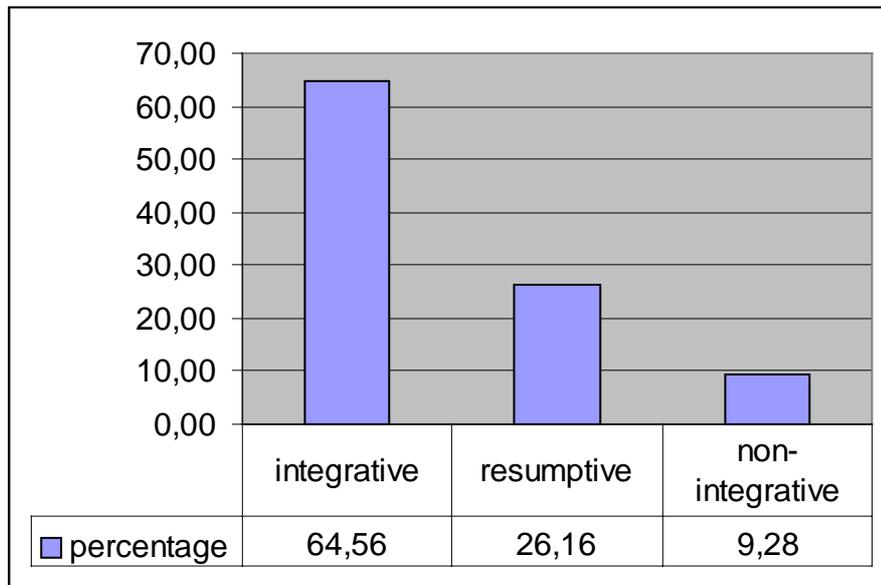


Fig. 6: Percentage of integrative, resumptive and non-integrative *wenn*-clauses in written German (n=237)

Fig. 7 shows that the preference for post-positioning is only slightly less pronounced in unambiguously conditional *wenn*-clauses than in unambiguously temporal ones.

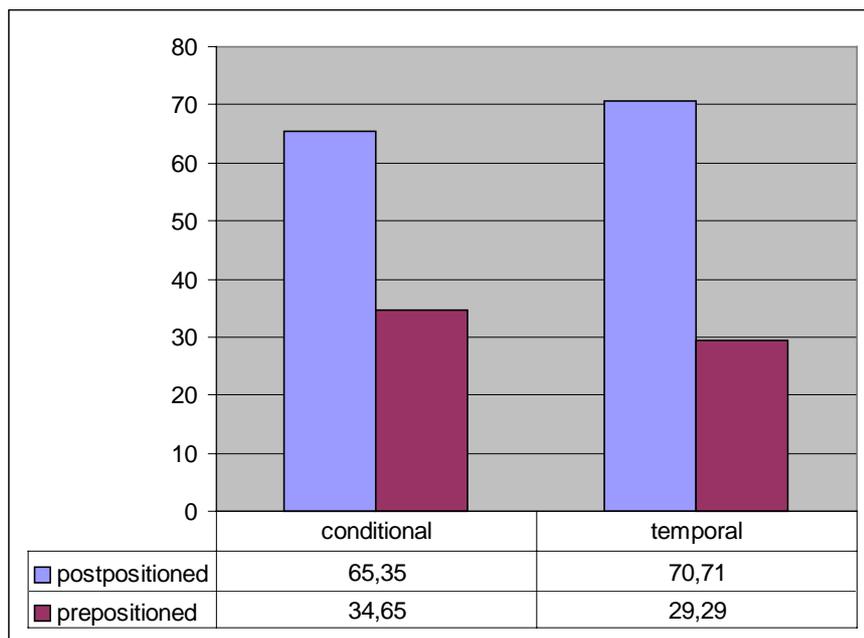


Fig. 7: Pre- and postpositioning of temporal vs. conditional *wenn*-clauses in written German (n=301)

What could be the reason for this reversal of preferences for post- and pre-positioning in written German compared to spoken language? Three factors seem to be primarily responsible for it. First, the number of (almost exclusively final) *wenn*-clauses with a preceding focus particle in the main clause is about eight times as high in the written as in the spoken material (40 vs. 5 occurrences). An example is:

Ex 36: (DIE ZEIT Nr. 7 10.02.1995)

Danach dürfen Frauen ungewollte Schwangerschaften in den ersten drei Monaten nur beenden, wenn sie sich vorher haben beraten lassen: in einer Beratungsstelle und vom abtreibenden Arzt.

*Accordingly, women may only terminate an unwanted pregnancy during the first three months if they have undergone counselling: in an advice centre and also by the physician who does the abortion.*

Secondly, although embedded *wenn*-clause plus main clause constructions are not more frequent in the written than in the spoken material, all 52 *wenn*-clauses of this type are post-positioned, while a majority of them (34 of 54, all of which are embedded into *dass*-constructions) are pre-positioned in the spoken materials. In other words, fronting of *wenn*-clauses before the embedded matrix clause such as in (27) or (28) does not occur in the newspaper texts.

Finally, one of the important reasons outlined above for frequent pre-positioning in interactional language use is simply not applicable to writing: this is the need for the speaker to claim conversational space for the production of a larger turn, through projecting syntactically beyond the current clause. Instead, another factor becomes relevant: in writing, the *wenn*-clause may become so complex that processing it would become difficult even in reading if it was pre-positioned with respect to its main clause; cf. for instance:

Ex 37: (DIE ZEIT Nr. 03 13.01.1995)

Und man denkt an Talleyrands Feststellung: "Hochverrat ist eine Frage des Datums", wenn man sich daran erinnert, daß Hans Modrow in einer Phase als Reformier und Hoffnungsträger galt, aber in der nächsten für schuldig erachtet wurde, weil er mitverantwortlich war für das DDR-System.

*And one thinks of Talleyrand's statement: „High treason is a question of the date“ when one recalls that Hans Modrow was regarded as a reformer and as a source of hope in one phase, but that he was found guilty in another, because he shared responsibility in the GDR political system.*

Neither of these reasons for post-positioning in written German can explain the difference between the English and the German results, of course. Why should these same reasons not lead to a preference for post-positioning in written English as well? If one was looking for a structural explanation, one would probably try to find an answer based on the most prominent difference between English *if*- and German *wenn*-clauses, i.e. the semantic ambiguity of the latter. For instance, it might be argued that since *wenn* can often be interpreted either conditionally or temporally, German newspaper journalists try to disambiguate their sentences by using other, strictly conditional conjunctions instead, such as *falls*, *im Falle dass*, *für den Fall dass*, *sofern* or *soweit*. However, this hypothesis receives little empirical support in my data: not only are these conjunctions very rare in the newspaper texts (a total of 31 tokens!), they also fail to show a positional distribution different from that

of *wenn* (6 initial vs. 17 final tokens, with 8 parentheticals).<sup>28</sup> Another possibility to express conditionality in German which is not available in present-day English (apart from peripheral cases) is inversion (as in: *kommst du zu spät, bestraft dich das Leben = wenn du zu spät kommst, dann bestraft dich das Leben* ‚if you are late, you will be punished by life‘). This possibility is almost never used in spoken German because of its bookish and high-register connotations but its occurrence cannot be excluded in rather conservative newspapers such as DIE ZEIT and F.A.Z.; and since the distribution of pre- and post-positioned conditional clauses with inversion is unknown we cannot exclude a balancing effect, for instance due to a preference for pre-positioning in this case. Since this syntactic pattern can only be quantified in syntactically labelled corpora, there is no possibility to test this hypothesis in a straightforward way in our materials. However, preliminary analysis of some texts suggests that inversion hardly occurs in newspapers. Alternatively, one might look for a non-structural explanation which would locate the reason for diverging English and German patterns on the textual level, possibly in the stylistic preferences of English and German text composition. The matter clearly awaits further investigation.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at the placement of German *wenn*-clauses in spoken and written texts. Various explanations for the general quantitative results – i.e., that spoken German prefers pre-positioning, written German post-positioning – have been presented and discussed on the basis of individual conversational contexts in which *wenn*-clauses occur.

The general conclusion of this study is that the supposed parallel between ‚left‘ and ‚right‘ in syntax (suggested by parlances such as ‚left extraposition‘ vs. ‚right extraposition‘, or ‚left-adjoined‘ vs. ‚right-adjoined‘) is fundamentally mistaken when applied to spoken syntax; in speaking, there is no ‚left‘ and ‚right‘, but only ‚earlier‘ and ‚later‘. At least for an approach to syntax which takes the in-time (‚on-line‘) emergence of (particularly) oral language units seriously, what is dealt with first and what is taken care of later cannot be seen as a decision between two logical equivalents (as between ‚right‘ and ‚left‘). Rather, it involves one of the most basic and far-reaching decisions a speaker can make, with all kinds of cognitive, interactional and structural repercussions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Of the 15 tokens in the spoken material, the three positions were about equally distributed.

<sup>29</sup> For a similar argument, cf. Thompson 1985.

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## Appendix: Regularisation of Transcriptions of Word-Count (example)

| original transcription:<br>„words (automatic count)“: 198<br>characters (including blanks): 1151  | regularised transcription:<br>words: 118<br>characters (incl. blanks): 767  |
|---|---|
| <p>01 M .hh ich will UMgehend den (-) nächsten<br/>(-) ANrufer wieder einen Hörer<br/>02 begrüßen guten Abend?<br/>03 A guten Abend,<br/>04 B guten Abend?<br/>05 (0.5)<br/>06 A .hhh ja; ALso hh das proBLEM äh ALler<br/>steht äh auch äh so äh vor MIR<br/>07 jetzt irgendwo- wie wie und wo ANfangen<br/>am besten?<br/>08 B mhm,<br/>09 A = ähm: (--) es is eine etwas<br/>AUSsergewöhnliche Proble ProbleMATik,<br/>die<br/>10 vielleicht nicht nicht so ganz äh:: HÄUfig<br/>in ihrer sendung erscheint,<br/>11 .hh obgleich des eigentlich äh::: ne total<br/>MENSCHliche angelegenheit<br/>12 is- ich lebe: seit =um gleich mal auf<br/>FAKten mal zu KOMM ich lebe seit<br/>13 hh äh circa FÜNFzehn JAHRN mit einem<br/>MANM zusAmmen?[.hh ]<br/>14 B [ ja ]<br/>15 A und äh auch äh recht GU:T eigentlich<br/>=natürlich<br/>16 mit den üblichen ALLtagsschwierigkeiten<br/>17 die überall existieren auch in<br/>HEterobeziehungen,<br/>18 B ja,<br/>19 A u:nd äh das =(dies) ist nicht unsere<br/>probleMATik eigentlich, wir<br/>20 kommen mit diesem mit unserer<br/>verANlagung sehr gut zuRECHT?<br/>21 also = [das] = ist alles o.k. soweit,<br/>22 B [ja:]</p> | <p>Ich will umgehend den nächsten Anrufer, wieder einen Hörer,<br/>begrüßen: Guten Abend.<br/>Guten Abend.<br/>Guten Abend.</p> <p>Ja, also das Problem aller steht auch so vor mir jetzt irgendwo.</p> <p>Wie und wo anfangen am besten?</p> <p>Es ist eine etwas außergewöhnliche Problematik, die vielleicht nicht so ganz häufig in ihrer Sendung erscheint,</p> <p>obgleich das eigentlich eine total menschliche Angelegenheit ist. Ich lebe seit, um gleich mal auf Fakten zu kommen, ich lebe seit circa fünfzehn Jahren mit einem Mann zusammen.</p> <p>Ja?<br/>Und auch recht gut, eigentlich.<br/>Natürlich mit den üblichen Alltagsschwierigkeiten, die überall existieren, auch in Heterobeziehungen.</p> <p>Ja.<br/>Und das ist nicht unsere Problematik, eigentlich. Wir kommen mit unserer Veranlagung sehr gut zurecht,</p> <p>also das ist alles o.k. soweit.<br/>Ja.</p> |

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