

A phrasal construction for an *ex quolibet falsum* inference

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Introduction

The Emperor-of-China construction (EoC-Cx)

Implicational/*dann* 'then' variant (*then*-EoC-Cx):

- (1) Also, wenn das stimmt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.
thus if this is correct am I the emperor of China
'This cannot be correct.' (lit.: 'If this is correct, I am the emperor of China.')

(deTenTen23)

Conjunctive/*und* 'and' variant (*and*-EoC-Cx):

- (2) A: "Wir verwenden die besten und teuersten Materialien für unsere T-Shirts ..."

'We use the best and most expensive materials for our t-shirts '

B: Und ich bin der Kaiser von China!
and I am the emperor of China

'This is nonsense!' (lit.: 'And I am the emperor of China.')

(deTenTen23)

Plan for the talk

- Form:

- ▶ *then*-EoC-Cx:

- if <Antecedent> (then) <Subject> be the emperor of China.

- ▶ *and*-EoC-Cx: <Antecedent> and <Subject> be the emperor of China.

- ▶ Research question 1: Is the EoC-Cx an idiosyncratic phrasal construction?
⇒ Yes!

- Meaning:

- ▶ The EoC-Cx expresses a negation or strong rejection of the antecedent.

- ▶ Research question 2: Does the EoC-Cx express a negation? ⇒ No!

- Method:

- ▶ Exploratory corpus data (deTenTen23)

- ▶ Modeling within a constructional, constraint-based framework

- ▶ ...with an explicit semantics-pragmatics interface

Overview

1 Introduction

2 Syntax

3 Semantics

4 Pragmatics

5 Conclusion

Syntax

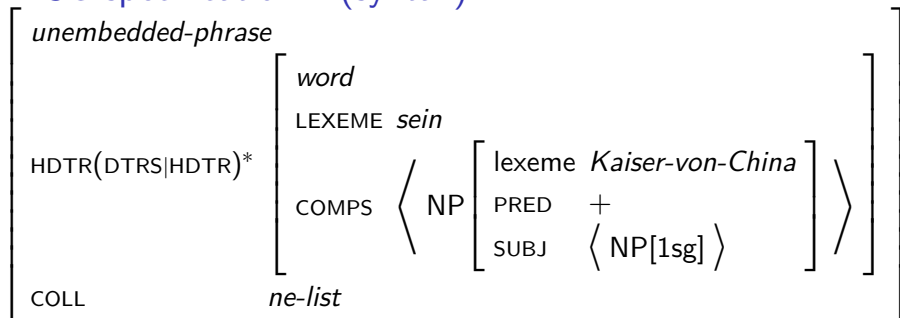
Corpus distribution: enTenTen23

- Query 1: sein der Kaiser von China 'be the emperor of China'
V2 – Subject-Verb: 50 hits; 20 relevant
- Query 2: sein * der Kaiser von China
V2 – Verb-Subject: 40 hits; 20 relevant
- Query 3: der Kaiser von China sein
V-Final: 40 hits; 0 relevant

Results:

- in all relevant examples: subject *ich* 'I'
- all relevant Subject-Verb examples with *und* 'and'
- all relevant Verb-Subject examples with *dann* 'then'
- Only in matrix clauses
- Antecedent typically a clause

HPSG specification 1 (syntax)



- idiosyncratic construction: Richter & Sailer (2009): *COLL* value *ne-list*
- Only in matrix clauses: *unembedded-sign* (Richter, 1997; Höhle, 2019)
- Lexically required material: via *LEXEME* values
- Subject *ich* 'I': specified in the *SUBJ* feature.
- To be dealt with through the semantics:
 - ▶ all relevant Subject-Verb examples with *und* 'and'
 - ▶ all relevant Verb-Subject examples with *dann* 'then'
 - ▶ Antecedent typically a clause

Semantics

Possible constructional meanings

- (3) a. Wenn Alex einen Preis gewonnen hat,
if Alex has a price won
bin ich der Kaiser von China!
am I the emperor of China (*then*-EoC-Cx)
- b. Alex hat einen Preis gewonnen
Alex has a price won
und ich bin der Kaiser von China!
and I am the emperor of China (*and*-EoC-Cx)
- At-issue negation of the antecedent:
I am convinced that Alex did not win a price.
 - Negated or inherently negative matrix predicate:
I strongly doubt that Alex has won a price.
 - Exclamative meaning (just use-conditional):
No way has Alex won a price!

Negative Polarity Items (NPIs)

- NPIs: *jemals* 'ever', *einen finger krumm machen* 'lift a finger ', ...
- NPIs are not felicitous in simple, affirmative clauses, but require a licenser:
 - (4) a. *Alex has ever helped Kim. / Nobody has ever helped Kim.
b. *Alex has lifted a finger to help Kim.
/ Alex hasn't lifted a finger to help Kim.
- Clause-mate negation is a licenser for all NPIs (roughly)
- There is a variety of other licensers and NPIs differ with respect to their exact licensing requirements (Hoeksema, 2024)
 - (5) a. Few people have ever helped Kim.
/ *Few people have lifted a finger to help Kim.
b. *Alex might have ever helped Kim.
/ Alex might have lifted a finger to help Kim.

NPI licensing in phrasal constructions

Phrasal construction can in principle license NPIs. In those cases, there meaning representation can be assumed to be (constructionally)

- *I'll be damned if S* licensed virtually any NPI in the *if* part (von Bergen & von Bergen, 1993):
 - (6) I'll be damned if I ever help you/ lift a finger to help you!
- The Incredulity Response Construction (Akmajian, 1984; Lambrecht, 1990)
 - (7) Ich und jemals einen eigenen Garten haben?!
I and ever an own garden have (deTenTen23)

NPIs in the three potential meanings of the EoC-Cx

- At-issue negation of the antecedent: NPIs should be licensed.
- Negated or inherently negative matrix predicate: NPIs should be licensed:

(8) Ich bezweifle, dass Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat. /
I doubt that Alex ever a price won has /
für Kim einen Finger krumm machen würde.
for Kim a finger lift would
'I doubt that Alex has ever won a Price/ would ever lift a
finger for Kim.'

- Exclamative meaning: NPIs should be licensed

(9) Als ob Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat! / für Kim einen
as if Alex ever a price won has / for Kim a
Finger krumm mache würde!
finger lift would
'No way Alex has ever won a price/ would ever lift a finger for
Kim!'

NPI licensing in the *then*-EoC-Cx

NPIs can occur in the antecedent of the *then*-EoC-Cx.

- (10) Wenn Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat, .../
if Alex ever a price won has

Wenn Alex für Kim einen Finger krumm macht, ...
if Alex for Kim a finger lifts

... bin ich der Kaiser von China.
am I the emperor of China

NPI licensing in the *then*-EoC-Cx

NPIs can occur in the antecedent of the *then*-EoC-Cx.

But: NPIs also ok in ordinary *if* clauses:

- (11) Wenn Alex jemals einen Preis gewonnen hat, bin ich beeindruckt.
if Alex ever a price won has am I impressed
'I am impressed if Alex has ever won a price.'
- (12) Wenn du für Kim einen Finger krumm machst, kannst du mir
if you for Kim a finger lifts can she me
auch helfen.
also help
'If Alex lifts a finger for Kim, you can help me as well.'

NPI licensing in the *and*-EoC-Cx

No NPI licensing at all in the *and*-EoC-Cx:

- (13) *Alex hat jemals einen Preis gewonnen und ich bin der Kaiser
Alex has ever a price won and I am the emperor
von China!
of China

Intended: 'I doubt that Alex has ever won a price.'

- (14) *Alex hat für Kim einen Finger krumm gemacht – und ich bin der
Alex has for Kim a finger lifted and I am the
Kaiser von China!
emperor of China

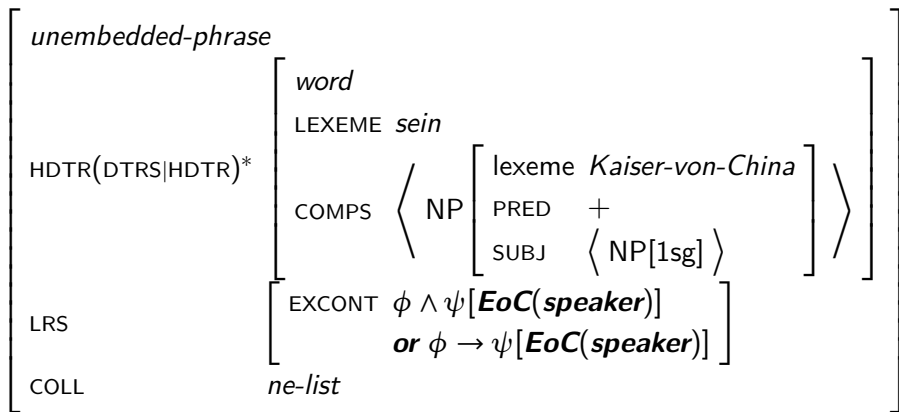
Intended: 'I doubt that Alex has lifted a finger for Kim.'

This is exactly what we find in ordinary conjunction!

NPI licensing: Summary

- No support for a special constructional meaning that includes a negation.
 - The *then*-EoC-Cx behaves like an ordinary conditional.
 - The *and*-EoC-Cx behaves like an ordinary conjunction.
- ⇒ We can just assume a literal semantics of the construction

HPSG specification 2 (at-issue semantics)



- Semantics: Specifying the overall content (EXCONT in Lexical Resource Semantics) as:
 - ▶ either a conjunction: all relevant Subject-Verb examples with *und* 'and': Conjunction
 - ▶ or an implication: all relevant Verb-Subject examples with *dann* 'then'

Pragmatics

Preview of the analysis

Compositional Semantics:

(15) Wenn Alex das Rennen gewinnt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.

‘If Alex wins the race, I am the emperor of China.’

At issue: **win(alex) → EoC(speaker)**

(16) Alex gewinnt das Rennen und ich bin der Kaiser von China.

‘Alex wins the race and I am the emperor of China.’

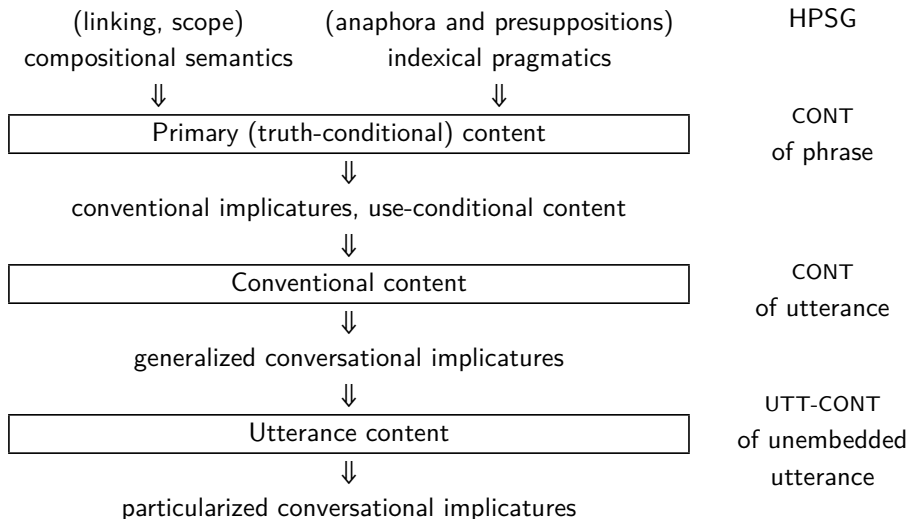
win(alex) ∧ EoC(speaker)

Pragmatics:

- Presupposition: The subject is not the emperor of China
- Use-conditional meaning: Speaker does not want antecedent clause to be integrated into the Common Ground
- Generalized conversational implicatures: Inference associated with coordination, i.e. turning a coordination into an implication.

Semantics-pragmatics interface

Levinson (2000), extended in Sailer (2021, 2024)



Presupposition: I am not the emperor of China

(17) Wenn Alex das Rennen gewinnt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.

'If Alex wins the race, I am the emperor of China.'

At issue: **win(alex) → EoC(speaker)**

Presupposition: ... $\wedge \neg$ **EoC(speaker)**

At the level where the presupposition is accommodated (at an S-node in the scope of quantifiers/negation/modal/...):

(18) Wenn Alex das Rennen gewinnt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.

'If Alex wins the race, I am the emperor of China.'

At issue: **win(alex) → EoC(speaker)**

Presupposition: \neg **EoC(speaker)**

Clausal content: (**win(alex) → EoC(speaker)**) $\wedge \neg$ **EoC(speaker)**

The clausal content is only true when **win(alex)** is false.

Presuppositions

- Sailer & Am-David (2016), Rizea & Sailer (2020)
- Introduced on a PRESUP(PPOSITION) list (and their subexpressions on the PARTS list

(19) Percolation and retrieval for PRESUP (Sailer & Am-David, 2016, 653):

In each phrase: All elements from the daughters' PRESUP lists are on the mother's PRESUP list unless the phrase is a clause and they appear in the clause's EXCONT value. In the latter case, they occur in the scope of some appropriate semantic operator.

(20) Alex gewinnt das Rennen – und ich bin der Kaiser von China.

‘Alex wins the race – and I am the emperor of China’

at issue: **win(alex)** und **EoC(speaker)**

presupposition: ... $\wedge \neg$ **EoC(speaker)**

After accommodation:

win(alex) \wedge (EoC(speaker) $\wedge \neg$ EoC(speaker))

This formula is always false, independently of the truth value of **win(alex)**

Generalized conversational implicatures (GCI)

- Optional, enriching a meaning globally!
- Evidence for their relevance for truth-conditional meaning (Levinson, 2000; Carston & Hall, 2012)

- (21)
- a. It is better to [drive and drink] than to [drink and drive].
 - b. She didn't write three books, she wrote four books (or maybe even more).

GCI in Sailer (2021)

- GCI: $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$
- Integration only at the utterance content

(22) Sailer (2021, 355)

Given two formulæ α, β , a rewriting rule for a generalized conversational implicature has the form $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$.

Such a rule means: If α occurs in the conventional content, it can optionally be replaced with $(\alpha \wedge \beta)$ in the utterance content.

- Status of GCIs: Analoguous to post-lexical rules in phonology (Höhle, 2019)

GCI for conjunction

- Horn (2004)

(23) a. They got a baby and married.

\mapsto_{GCI} They got a baby and **then/therefore** married.

b. The earth rotates and we experience night and day.

\mapsto_{GCI} The earth rotates and **therefore** we experience night and day.

- Suggested GCI: $(\phi \wedge \psi) \mapsto_{GCI} (\phi \rightarrow (\phi \wedge \psi))$

- Required change in the theory:

- ▶ GCI: $\alpha \mapsto_{GCI} \beta$ where α is a subexpression of β .
- ▶ Such a rule means: If α occurs in the conventional content, it can optionally be replaced with β in the utterance content.

Back to the *and*-EoC-Cx

(24) Alex gewinnt das Rennen - und ich bin der Kaiser von China.

'Alex wins the race – and I am the emperor of China'

at issue: **win(alex)** *und* **EoC(speaker)**

presupposition: ... $\wedge \neg \text{EoC(speaker)}$

After accommodation:

win(alex) \wedge (**EoC(speaker)** $\wedge \neg \text{EoC(speaker)}$)

GCI: $(\phi \wedge \psi) \mapsto_{GCI} (\phi \rightarrow (\phi \wedge \psi))$

win(alex) \rightarrow (**win(alex)** \wedge (**EoC(speaker)** $\wedge \neg \text{EoC(speaker)}$))

This formula is only true if **win(alex)** is false.

Use-conditional content

- VERUM effect of the EoC-Cx
- Gutzmann et al. (2020), Sailer (2022):

(25) Alex HAT das Rennen gewonnen.

Alex HAS the race won

at issue: Alex won the race

Contextually salient: Alex did not win the race.

VERUM: use-conditional meaning: Do not integrate “Alex did not win the race” into the common ground.

Use conditional content of the EoC-Cx

- Antecedent proposition is contextually salient.
- EoC-Cx's use conditions say that the antecedent should not be integrated into the common ground.

(26) Alex gewinnt das Rennen – und ich bin der Kaiser von China.
Alex wins the race – and I am the emperor of China

Contextually salient: **win(alex)**

Use-conditional content:

prevent-from-CG-integration([^]win(alex))

Truth conditions and use conditions of the EoC-Cx

- (27) Wenn Alex das Rennen gewinnt, bin ich der Kaiser von China.
'If Alex wins the race wins, I am the emperor of China'
- Alex gewinnt das Rennen – und ich bin der Kaiser von China.
'Alex wins the race – and I am the emperor of China.'
- a. Truth conditions: $[[\mathbf{win}(\mathbf{alex})]] = 0$
 - b. Use conditions: **prevent-CG-integration**($^{\wedge}\mathbf{win}(\mathbf{alex})$)

HPSG specification 3 (pragmatics)

<i>unembedded-phrase</i>	
HDTR(DTRS HDTR)*	$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{word} \\ \text{LEXEME } \textit{sein} \\ \text{COMPS } \left\langle \text{NP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{lexeme } \textit{Kaiser-von-China} \\ \text{PRED } + \\ \text{SUBJ } \left\langle \text{NP[1sg]} \right\rangle \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \end{array} \right]$
LRS	EXCONT $\phi \wedge \psi[\textbf{EoC}(\textit{speaker})]$
	<i>or</i> $\phi \rightarrow \psi[\textbf{EoC}(\textit{speaker})]$
	PRES $\left\langle \neg \textbf{EoC}(\textit{speaker}) \right\rangle$
COLL	CI $\left\langle \textbf{prevent-CG-integration}(\wedge \phi) \right\rangle$
	<i>ne-list</i>

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Neither syntax nor semantics irregular!
- But still: construction with idiosyncratic properties:
 - ▶ unembedded sign, V2
 - ▶ presupposition and use-conditional meaning
- The interaction of the various meaning components trigger conversational inferences that lead to the negation-like effect of the construction.
- Since this effect is conversational, we expect it to arise also spontaneously, with other lexicalizations:

(28) ... und ich bin der Kaiser von China. Und der Schwiegersohn des Tankwarts meines Kollegen ist der Zauberer von Oz.
'...and I am the emperor of China. And the son-in-law of the gas station attendant of my colleague is the Wizard of Oz.'

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