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From biclausal constructions to ‘stand-alone’-conditionals – ‘syntactically disintegrated *wenn*-constructions’ in everyday spoken German¹

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This article on *wenn*-constructions in everyday spoken German will focus on real-time interaction and address questions of syntactic projectability (Auer 2007; Hopper/Thompson 2008; Auer/Pfänder 2011; Günthner 2011a; b; Pekarek-Doehler 2011), bi-clausality, sedimented grammatical constructions (Hopper/Thompson 2008) as well as forms of ‘insubordination’ (Evans 2007).

Conditional *wenn*-clauses in German are treated as subordinate clauses, either preceding or following their matrix clauses. The word-order-rule for subordinate clauses which function as the protasis, is that the finite verb is placed at the end of the clause. Speakers in everyday spoken German, however, frequently use syntactically ‘disintegrated *wenn*-clauses’ with the apodosis showing the syntactic features of an independent main clause with independent clause word-order (Günthner 1999).

My data – based on naturally occurring German talk-in-interaction from various settings (informal face-to-face interactions among friends and family members, office hours at university, genetic counselling sessions, radio phone-in programs, as well as data from reality-TV series) – has shown that participants in interactions use these ‘disintegrated *wenn*-clauses’ as projecting devices, alluding to anticipated activities. In addition to bi-clausal *wenn*-constructions, speakers also use *wenn*-constructions without an accompanying main clause. These ‘stand-alone’-conditionals are used in particular activities such as requests, orders and suggestions.

Based on empirical data, I will argue that these seemingly subordinate conditional clauses manifest varying degrees of integration into their accompanying apodoses and that there are a number of devices (prosodic, syntactic, lexical etc.) used to contextualize this integration.

“Let me preface these remarks with the (hopefully unprovocative) proposition that interactive language is the core phenomenon to be explained – all other forms of discourse are, however, interesting, derivative in every sense, ontogenetic and phylogenetic included.” (Levinson 2006: 85)

1. Introduction

Over the last 10 to 15 years, interactionally-oriented approaches such as ‘on-line syntax’ (Auer 2009a), ‘emergent grammar’ (Hopper 1987; 1988) and ‘dialogical grammar’ (Linell 2009, Günthner 2011a; Günthner/Imo/Bücker 2014; Du Bois 2014) have created new approaches to the analysis of grammatical structures as they unfold in real time and close attunement with co-participants’ reactions (cf. Auer 2000; 2005; 2009a; Goodwin 2002; Günthner/Hopper 2010; Hopper 2011; Auer/Pfänder 2011; Deppermann/Günthner 2015). These studies have

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led to a radical change in the conceptualization of language. Instead of treating grammar as a mental construct which speakers instantiate in their spoken and written sentences, they are recontextualizing grammar as it is used in the dialogical process of interaction to effect social actions.

In studying the use of *wenn*-clauses in everyday spoken German, this paper aims to contribute to the discussion on practices of clause-combining by showing how speakers use varying degrees of clausal integration as communicative resources to accomplish particular communicative projects. Further, I hope to stimulate the continued debate on “insubordination” (Evans 2007); in particular on stand-alone *wenn*-clauses.

Conditional *wenn*-constructions are generally treated as biclausal constructions, consisting of a subordinated *wenn*-clause and a main clause. However, through an empirical analysis, I will show that beyond this standardized biclausal pattern, participants in everyday interaction use a variety of *wenn*-constructions with different degrees of syntactic and prosodic integration. These range from tight subordination between the two clauses via syntactically disintegrated units to stand-alone *wenn*-clauses.

The analysis is based on 70 everyday interactions (30 to 180 minutes in length), collected from 1989 to 2013 in different parts of Germany. They include informal face-to-face and telephone interactions among friends and family members, radio phone-in calls, video-taped conversations of university office hours, data from television talk-shows as well as from a reality-TV series. From this material I have selected 80 *wenn*-constructions and examined them for interactional and grammatical features. For this article, I have chosen a set of illustrative examples for a detailed study of how participants handle different types of *wenn*-constructions in everyday interaction.

The analysis will address the following questions: • What are the formal characteristics and interactive functions of *wenn*-constructions in everyday German interactions? • What variations can we find in everyday uses of *wenn*-constructions? • Can we detect different kinds and/or degrees of integration/connectedness between the two units building a complex *wenn*-construction?

2. *wenn*-constructions in everyday German interactions

In spoken German interactions, the standardized biclausal sentence pattern with tight syntactic integration of the *wenn*-clause into its adjoining main clause (as in extract (1) below) represents one way of organizing *wenn*-constructions. Even though the *wenn*-clauses in this bi-

clausal construction can be placed before or after the main clause they are modifying,² studies of conditional clauses in German show that the *wenn*-unit (the *protasis*) more commonly occurs in initial position, projecting a subsequent main clause (the *apodosis*) (Günthner 1999; 2012; Auer 2000; Wegner 2010; Auer/Lindström 2015).³

Extract (1) illustrates the use of such a biclausal pattern, as it occurs in its ‘natural habitat’; i.e. in everyday interaction. Three friends (Janina, Birte and Markus) are talking about regionally different German words for „carrots“:

- (1) *DIFFERENT WORDS FOR CARROTS* (MÜNSTER)
- 006 Bi: also DU sagst das jedenfalls ne?
well in any case you use that word right?
- 007 manchmal [kaROtten.]
sometimes [kaROtten.]
{carrots}
- 008 Ja: [ich verwende] BEIdes [gern?]
[I like to use] both [actually?]
- 009 Bi: [ACH.]
[OH.]
- 010 aHA?
well?
- 011 (2.0)
- 012 **Ja: also wenn wenn man HÄSchenwitze erzählt-**
well if if you're telling rabbit jokes-
- 013 **spricht man doch immer von MÖHren.**
you tend to use the word Möhren.
{carrots}
- 014 (1.5)
- 015 Bi: [MÖHRchen.]
[little carrots.]
- 016 Ma: [MÖHRchen?]
[little carrots?]

In line 012 Janina uses a pre-positioned *wenn*-clause “also wenn wenn man HÄSchenwitze erzählt-“ (‘*well if if you're telling rabbit jokes-*’) to introduce the condition under which the proposition expressed in the following main clause “spricht man doch immer von MÖHren.” (‘*you tend to use the word Möhren.*’; line 013) is probable. In cognitive linguistics, *if*-clauses are seen as setting up a ‘mental space’ (Fauconnier 1985; Dancygier/Sweetser 2000) which provides the background for the construal of the main clause that follows. Here, the *wenn*-clause “also wenn wenn man HÄSchenwitze erzählt-“ (‘*well if if you're telling rabbit jokes-*’) sets up the mental space for the subsequent proposition.

² *Wenn*-clauses in spoken German may also be followed by a resumptive particle *dann* (“then”) which introduces the main clause (the *apodosis*) (Günthner 1999). In rare cases, the *wenn*-unit can even be inserted parenthetically (interrupting the production of the main clause); cf. Auer (2000).

³ Whereas 58% of the *wenn*-clauses in my data are prepositioned, 31% are postpositioned. 11% are either stand-alone *wenn*-constructions, *wenn*-fragments or unclear cases (false starts, reformulations, etc.). Greenberg (1963: 84-85) even treats this ordering of an initial *if*-clause and a following consequence clause as “universal word order”, stating: “In conditional statements, the conditional clause precedes the conclusion as the normal order in all languages.” Cf. Ford (1993) for similar observations in English and Laury (2012) in Finnish data.

From an on-line perspective, Janina’s syntactic project in line 012 begins with the discourse marker “also” (*well*) and a *wenn*-clause (“also wenn wenn man HÄSchenwitze erzählt-“; ‘*well if if you’re telling rabbit jokes*’; l. 012) which does not represent a self-contained unit, but projects, on various levels, a unit to come. The information in the *wenn*-part provides the background (the “protasis”) for the construal of the main clause (i.e. the apodosis): “spricht man doch immer von MÖHren.” (*you tend to use the word Möhren.*’ line 013). Only with the production of this second unit is the biclausal conditional construction complete. The ‘continuing’ intonation at the end of the *wenn*-clause indicates a strong syntactic integration between the two clausal units: the *wenn*-clause shows subordinate word order (i.e. final positioning of the finite verb “erzählt” (*tells*)) and forms the first constituent (positioned in the so-called “Vorfeld”; ‘front-field’) within the topology of the sentence pattern. The foreshadowed main clause starts with the finite verb “spricht” (*speaks*) and thus shows “inversion” (cf. verb-first positioning), indicating a tight connection to the preceding subordinate clause.

The topological field schema displays/exhibits this tight connection:⁴

Vorfeld <i>front field</i>	linke Satz- klammer <i>left brace</i>	Mittelfeld <i>middle field</i>	rechte Satz- klammer <i>right brace</i>	Nach- feld <i>end field</i>
also wenn wenn man HÄSchenwitze erzählt-	spricht	man doch immer von MÖHren.		
<i>well if if one rabbit jokes tells-</i>	<i>speaks</i>	<i>one actually always of carrots.</i>		

As our data reveal, this standardized biclausal pattern is but one type of *wenn*-construction, whereas in everyday interactions speakers frequently make use of several types of *wenn*-constructions with varying degrees of integration between the pre-positioned *wenn*-part and the succeeding unit:

1. Syntactic integration of the pre-positioned *wenn*-clause and the ensuing main clause:
 - a. tight syntactic and prosodic linkage between the two units
 - b. tight syntactic linkage with independent prosodic contours
2. Syntactic (and prosodic) non-integration of the pre-positioned *wenn*-clause and the following main clause:
 - a. convertible into integrative word order

⁴ In German, the topology of the declarative sentence is canonically defined by the position of the finite and non-finite verbal parts. They form the so-called ‘sentence brace’ (Satzklammer), defining the ‘front-field’ (“Vorfeld”) (the field before the finite verb), the ‘middle field’ (“Mittelfeld”) (the field between the finite and non-finite parts of the verb) and the ‘end field’ (“Nachfeld”) (the field after the non-finite part of the verb; this field often remains empty).

- b. not convertible into integrative word order
- 3. *wenn*-constructions exceeding biclausal sentence patterns
 - a. incrementally expanded *wenn*-units, spreading over several TCUs
 - b. the second unit is comprised of a longer sequence of talk
- 4. Stand-alone *wenn*-constructions

I will argue that we are dealing with a continuum, ranging from syntactically integrated to stand-alone *wenn*-constructions.

2.1. Syntactic integration of the pre-positioned *wenn*-clause and the following main clause

Extract (1) displayed a common use of a *wenn*-construction in spoken German, with the two clauses tightly linked syntactically. Even though initial *wenn*-clauses in our data tend to be phrased as a separate prosodic unit with the *wenn*-clause ending with ‘continuing’ intonation (such as level or rising boundary tones),⁵ speakers sometimes produce *wenn*-constructions with the two clauses being tightly prosodically linked:

- (2) *FOOD POISONING* (SCHWARZWALD)
- 229 Dora: =nja und no liegts natürlich AU an DIR,
 =*well and then of course it also depends on you,*
 230 und deiner kon? kons-
 =*and your con? cons-*
 231 konstituTION;
 =*constitution;*
 232 Wolf: was du verTRÄGST ja?=
 =*whatever your body can take right?=
 233 Dora: =<<all> wie GSUND du grad drauf bisch;
 =*<<all> how healthy you are right then;*
 234 und so.>
 =*and things like that.>*
 235 Gisa: <<p> mhm.>
 236 Udo: ja sicher natÜRLICH.
 =*yeah sure of course.*
 237 (2.5)*
- 238 Dora: <<all> wenn du ANGSCHT hasch kriegsch=s
 sowieso eher.>
 <<all> if you are afraid you are more likely to get it
 anyway.>**
- 239 Udo: aber sag mer mol SO?
 =*but let's put it this way?*
 240 wenn SAG mer mal so,
 =*if let's say,*
 241 i möcht ähm was i zum beispiel NET mache würd,
 =*I want um what I for example would never do,*

Dora in line 238 uses a pre-positioned *wenn*-clause "wenn du ANGSCHT hasch" ('if you are afraid'; l. 238) to introduce the condition under which the proposition expressed in the

⁵ Cf. also Auer/Lindström (2015: 7).

following main clause "kriegsch=s sowieso eher.>" ('*you are more likely to get it anyway.>*') is likely. Both clauses show a strong syntactic integration, which is fortified by the prosodic integration of the two clauses forming a single intonation unit. Again, the conditional *wenn*-clause projects a continuation.

2.2. Syntactic (and prosodic) non-integration of the pre-positioned *wenn*-clause and the following main clause

Tight syntactic integration of the *wenn*-clause into its adjoining main clause represents one of a number of ways of organizing *wenn*-constructions. In addition, speakers in everyday interactions (less frequent in written texts; Günthner 1999; 2012) make use of *wenn*-constructions which deviate from this standard word order. The prepositioned *wenn*-clause is followed by a full-fledged main clause which shows no inversion, and thus, does not account for its preceding subordinate *wenn*-clause.⁶ Prosody supports this feature of syntactic independence in so far as syntactically non-integrated constructions are delivered as two separate intonation contours, each having its own nucleus accent. In the data, speakers make use of two types of syntactic non-integration:

- (a) non-integrated *constructions which are convertible into integrative word order*
- (b) non-integrated *constructions which are not convertible into integrative word order.*

(a) Non-integrated *constructions which are convertible into integrative word order:*

Simon (Si), Lisa (iL), Bianca (Bi) and Robert (Ro) are having dinner together, when Simon tells the others about a sushi dinner he had recently had with two other friends (Michael and Timo). Both friends had fallen sick right after eating the sushi. In the following extract, Lisa, Bianca, Robert and Simon are puzzling over possible reasons for their distress:

(3) *EATING SUSHI (MÜNSTER)*
 044 Si: der hat halt AUCH-
 well he has also-
 045 (1.0)
 046 der hat halt schnell geGESSen?
 he just ate too fast?
 047 und VIEL zu viel sojasoße.
 and used far too much soya sauce.
 048 (1.5)
 049 Bi: HAaha-
 050 Si: der HAT-
 he has-
 051 Bi: Overkill an sojasoße.
 overkill with soya sauce.
 052 ((B und L lachen))

⁶ Various grammars mention these syntactic „exceptions“ (Weinrich 1993/2007: 740; Helbig/Buscha 2005: 576f.; cf. Wegner 2010). Cf. also Zifonun et al. (1997: 2290) on "moduskommentierende" Konditionalsätze.

- ((B and L are laughing))
- 053 Si: ich verSTEH das aber auch immer nich-
I still don't ever really get it-
- 054 michael und timo BEIde.
michael and timo both of them.
- 055 **wenn man mit denen SUsHi essen geht-**
if/when you go and eat sushi with them-
- 056 **die BAden immer-**
they always bathe-
- 057 **das SUsHi komplett in dieser sojasoße-**
their sushi completely in this soya sauce-
- 058 **bis sich der ganze REIS vollgesogen hat-**
till the rice is completely drenched-
- 059 Bi: bis der ganz SCHWARZ is.
till it is all black.
- 060 Si: ja.
yeah.
- 061 Li: ja aber dann schmeckt man doch gar nichts
mehr von dem REST?
yeah but then you can't taste the rest at all anymore?

Simon's utterance in line 055 starts with an initial *wenn*-unit ('wenn man mit denen SUsHi essen geht-'; '*if/when you go and eat sushi with them-*') which does not represent a syntactically or semantically complete unit nor a complete communicative action, but makes a further component – the consequence – expectable. The two units of this syntactic gestalt are realized as separate intonation units each with its own independent intonation contours and nucleus accent. The *wenn*-part ends on a level tone, indicating 'continuation'. As in extract (1) (*DIFFERENT WORDS FOR CARROTS*), the event mentioned in the main-clause (the 'apodosis') ('die BAden immer- das SUsHi komplett in dieser sojasoße- bis sich der ganze REIS vollgesogen hat-'; '*they always bathe- their sushi completely in this soya sauce- till the rice is completely drenched-*' l. 056ff.) is presented as probable, should the condition mentioned in the *wenn*-clause (the 'protasis') apply. However, despite the dependent clause features of the *wenn*-unit, its adjoined main clause fails to display inversion (verb-first-positioning) as required in standard written German. Instead, the apodosis "die BAden immer- das SUsHi komplett in dieser sojasoße- bis sich der ganze REIS vollgesogen hat-" ('*they always bathe- their sushi completely in this soya sauce- till the rice is completely drenched-*' l. 056-058) is attached asyndetically without showing the grammatical coding expected as a result of the preceding subordinate *wenn*-clause.

The grammatical cohesion between the two clauses is reduced, and the subordinate *wenn*-clause no longer occupies the position of the front field but is shifted to the peripheral position of the "Vor-Vorfeld" ('the pre-front field'; Auer 1996):

Vor-Vorfeld	Vorfeld	linke Satzklammer	Mittelfeld	rechte Satzklammer	Nachfeld
-------------	---------	-------------------	------------	--------------------	----------

<i>pre-front field</i>	<i>front field</i>	<i>left brace</i>	<i>middle field</i>	<i>right brace</i>	<i>end field</i>
wenn man mit denen SUshi essen geht-	die	BAden	immer- das SUshi komplett in dieser sojasoße-		bis sich der ganze REIS vollgesogen hat-
<i>if/when you go and eat sushi with them-</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>bathe</i>	<i>their sushi completely in this soya sauce-</i>		<i>till the rice is completely drenched-</i>

Even though the main clause depicts a syntactically asyndetic unit, this construction can easily be converted into a biclausal pattern showing integrative word order: “wenn man mit denen SUshi essen geht- BAden die immer- das SUshi komplett in dieser sojasoße- bis sich der ganze REIS vollgesogen hat-“.

From the perspective of on-line syntax, it is clear that until the end of the *wenn*-unit, speakers have the opportunity to present the *wenn*-construction as syntactically integrated (with the main clause showing inversion) or as two more loosely connected units which are conjoined asyndetically.

(b) Non-integrated constructions which are not convertible into integrative word order:

In contrast to the *wenn*-construction in excerpt (3) SUSHI ESSEN – *EATING SUSHI*, participants also use syntactically non-integrated *wenn*-constructions which cannot be reformulated as integrated ones without changing their meaning.

In the following extract, Ute is helping herself to an apple lying on Michi’s kitchen table: The subordinate *wenn*-clause “wenn er dir net SCHMECKT,” (*if you don’t like it,* l. 291) in the following extract (*APPLES*) adjoins an asyndetically organized main clause “mir hän no ANdere.” (*we have other kinds [too.]*; l. 292):

(4) *APPLES* (BODENSEE)
288 Ute: <<:-)> ich NEHM mir einen?>
<<:-)> I’ll have one?>
289 Michi: KLAR (gern.)
SURE (you are welcome to.)
290 (2.0)
291 wenn er dir net SCHMECKT,
if you don’t like it,
292 mir hän no ANde[re.]
we have other kinds [too.]
293 Ute: [öhm] ne=ne.
[um] no=no.
294 <<:-)> i- ich mag so sAUre ganz GERN.>
<<:-)> I- I do actually the sour ones quite a lot.>

The initial *wenn*-unit in line 291 has all the indications of a subordinate clause. However, in spite of these dependent clause features of the *wenn*-unit, its adjoined main clause fails to

display inversion and verb-first-positioning, as required in standard written German. The *wenn*-unit is realized as a self-contained prosodic contour although its rising boundary tone implies ‘continuation’. The construction carries a “non-conditional meaning”; i.e. what follows in the second unit (“mir hän no ANdere.”; ‘we have other kinds [too.]; l. 291) is not a direct consequence of the statement in the ‘protasis’ (“wenn er dir net SCHMECKT,” ‘if you don’t like it,’ l. 291). The statement is valid, whether or not Ute likes her apple. The *wenn*-clause forms the background against which the subsequent statement has to be interpreted.

This type of *wenn*-construction is generally treated as a “relevance conditional” (Sweetser 1990; Günthner 1999; 2009; 2012), with the pre-positioned *wenn*-part providing the grounds for which the subsequent information may be relevant. The grammatical cohesion between the two clauses is reduced, and the subordinate *wenn*-clause no longer occupies the position of the front field but the peripheral position of the “Vor-Vorfeld” (‘the pre-front field’; Auer 1996)⁷:

Vor-Vorfeld <i>pre-front field</i>	Vorfeld <i>front field</i>	linke Satz- klammer <i>left brace</i>	Mittelfeld <i>middle field</i>	rechte Satz- klammer <i>right brace</i>	Nach- feld <i>end field</i>
wenn er dir net SCHMECKT, <i>if you don’t like it,</i>	mir <i>we</i>	hän <i>have</i>	no ANdere. <i>other kinds too.</i>		

Here, the two units of this *wenn*-construction cannot be converted into a standardized construction showing syntactic integration (“wenn er dir nicht schmeckt, haben wir noch andere”; ‘if you don’t like it, [then] we have other kinds too’). The loose semantic connection is reflected by its syntactic and prosodic non-integration.

The following segment is taken from an informal interaction between two friends (Ute and Anja). Again, the pre-positioned subordinate *wenn*-clause in line 68 is not syntactically integrated into the subsequent matrix clause:

- (5) SOUTH AFRICA (BODENSEE 1981)⁸
 67 Ute: (unglaublich)[PEINlich;]
 (incredibly) [embarassing;]
 68 Anja: [w- wenn] ich dich mal KURZ hi
 [unterbrechen] darf;
 [just a] second hee i- if I may
 [interrupt] you;

⁷ In spoken German, the general function of the pre-front field is to frame subsequent utterances (Auer 1996: 310); framing functions of *wenn*-clauses include pragmatic specifications, modalizations, discourse-organizational aspects etc.

⁸ Cf. Günthner (2012).

- 69 Ute: [dieser MENSCH.]
 [*this guy.*]
 70 Anja: **ich [stell] en nAchtisch nochmal KALT, (.)**
 I'll [put] the desert back in the fridge for a while, (.)
 71 ??: [tja]
 [*well*]
 72 Anja: oder WOLLT ihr gleich noch was?
 or do you want a second helping right now?

Anja's *wenn*-clause in line 68, explicitly announced as an interruption, is clearly marked as a subordinate clause by the initial subjunction *wenn* and the final placement of the finite verb ("darf"; 'may'). It forms an independent prosodic unit with falling intonation. However, what follows in line 70 is not a direct consequence of the condition outlined in the antecedent *wenn*-part. Instead, it represents an independent activity; i.e. a full-fledged main clause informing Ute that she is going to put the dessert back in the fridge. Instead of outlining the mental space in which the statement in the apodosis will be proven, the *wenn*-unit creates a "metapragmatic space" by referring to the ongoing communicative activity which provides the frame for what is to follow.⁹

Syntactically non-integrated, asyndetic *wenn*-patterns are not only used to join various diverging activities, but also to connect different sentence types. In the following extract from a reality-TV-show, the *wenn*-unit is followed by a question format. Ina and Gert are talking about smoking:

- (6) *MONEY & SMOKING* (REALITY-TV-SHOW: bb2-06#41)
 309 Ina: **wenn wir_s heut SCHAffen,**
 if we can make it today,
 310 **wer weiß was wir DA kriegen;**
 who knows how much we'll get then;
 311 Gert: h=hm,
 312 h° NEE dann haben wir einfach nur vierzig
 prozent mehr GELD;
 h° no then we will just have forty percent more money;

Ina's initial *wenn*-clause in line 309 ("wenn wir_s heut SCHAffen,"; '*if we can make it today,*'), which ends with 'continuing' intonation (with a rising boundary tone), creates the background for her following question: "wer weiß was wir DA kriegen;" ('*who knows how much we'll get then;*'; l. 310) and thus functions as a framing device for the subsequent question format/interrogative form (Günthner 1999). The initial *wenn*-clause frames the following activity and "prepares the scene" (Schegloff 1984) for what is to come.

⁹ This *wenn*-construction can be treated as a "politeness conditional" (cf. Metschkowa-Atanassowa 1983; Günthner 1999; Evans 2007; Laury 2012 for "politeness conditionals"). Furthermore, such uses of disconnected *wenn*-clauses, framing the following action, represent intermediate forms between disintegrated *wenn*-patterns and stand-alone *wenn*-constructions (cf. 2.4).

Even though a prepositioned *wenn*-clause projects more to come, the formal structure of the anticipated unit is underdetermined, so that no precise predictions can be made about its syntactic structure (Auer 1996: 320).

As extract (7) will show, a *wenn*-clause can also be followed by an imperative sentence. Birte and Anne are talking about Birte's vacation plans:

- (7) *HOLIDAYS ON LANGEBOG* (20.6.2002)¹⁰
 816 Anne: also (.) aber ich würd sagen- (.)
 well (.) but I would say- (.)
 817 **wenn du LUST hast auf son schönen Urlaub-** (.)
 if you want to have a really nice holiday- (.)
 818 **fahr LIEber auf ne INsel.** (.)
 best go to an island. (.)
 819 Birte: hmhm,
 820 (1.7)

Similar to the *wenn*-constructions in extract (5) and (6), this *wenn*-clause “wenn du LUST hast auf son schönen Urlaub- (.)” (“*if you want to have a really nice holiday-* (.)”; l. 817) no longer functions as a protasis which would indicate the condition under which the statement in the following apodosis might be valid. Instead it serves as a framing device¹¹ which provides the relevant background for the following activity. Anne's proposal „fahr LIEber auf ne INsel.” (“*best go to an island.* (.)”; l. 818) exhibits features of an autonomous syntactic, prosodic and pragmatic activity.

In studying *wenn*-constructions as they emerge in the process of interaction, we can detect striking parallels between the *wenn*-clauses and “projecting constructions” (Günthner 2006; 2008a; b; 2011a; b; Hopper/Thompson 2008; Günthner/Hopper 2010; Pekarek Doehler 2011) such as N-be-*that*-constructions, pseudoclefts, etc., organizing the on-line management of interactional contingencies and framing the particular social activities that follow. Positioned in the pre-front field, the *wenn*-unit is only loosely connected to the following clause so it functions as a framing device. (As chapter 2.4. will show, this loose linkage may lead to a complete separation of the *wenn*-unit resulting in a stand-alone *wenn*-construction.)

2.3. Beyond biclausal sentence patterns: *wenn*-constructions comprised of larger discourse units

(a) *Incrementally expanded wenn-units, spreading over several TCUs:*

¹⁰ Cf. also Günthner (2012).

¹¹ Cf. also Hopper/Thompson (2008: 114) who argue: “What we propose for the grammatical formats we're considering here is that the initial “pieces”, the *wh*-clause, the *it*-clause, and the *wenn*-clause, must be factored out and recognized as playing a key role in the strategic management of the current talk, rather than simply as parts of syntactic constructions. This role has been discussed by a number of researchers in terms of projection. [...] Projection involves what speakers have come to expect about what might happen next, about the courses of social action a given stretch of talk is heading towards performing.”

As the data show, *wenn*-constructions in everyday interaction cannot be reduced to biclausal sentence patterns. Instead, speakers frequently use *wenn*-units which exceed the single clause in length (Wegner 2010). These multi-unit *wenn*-parts incorporate a string of different clauses which stretch over several turn construction units and so constitute an emerging sequence of talk produced in the ongoing process of interaction.

Jan and his niece Mia are talking about the early onset of winter, when Jan urgently advises Mia against using her bike to ride to school. His *wenn*-unit (l. 76ff.) stretches over several TCUs occupying an extended sequential space which includes various *dass*-clauses, parentheses, lists, main clauses, etc.:

- (8) *ONSET OF WINTER* (MÜNSTER 2009_02_1)
- 74 Jan: als jemand der STÄNDig damit zu tUn hat,
as someone who constantly has to deal with such issues,
- 75 SACH ich dir jetzt mal wAs; (0.3)
let me tell you something now; (0.3)
- 76 **h° wenn DU meinst-**
h° if you think-
- 77 **du hättest d- dein rAd unter kontROLLe;**
you are in control of y- your bike;
- 78 **dass du BREMSen kannst,**
that you can apply the brakes,
- 79 **dass du [auch] vor- LANGsam fÄhrst,**
that you [also] ride care- slowly,
- 80 Mia: [ja;]
[yeah;]
- 81 Jan: **dass du AUf[passt] wo=s GLATT is;**
that you are [careful] where it's icy;
- 82 Mia: [**<<p> ja;>**]
[<<p> yeah;>]
- 83 Jan: **un- ähn dass du (.) MEINST,**
an- um that you think,
- 84 **du hast alles im GRIFF;**
that you have everything under control;
- 85 **sowas passIERT dir nich;**
things like that can't happen to you;
- 86 **das pAssiert nur solchen DÖ:deln da,**
they only happen to fools,
- 87 **DIR aba [nIch;]**
but not to [you;]
- 88 Mia: [**(nein;)**]
[(no;)]
- 89 Jan: **da tÄUscht du dich g- ganz geWALTich;**
then you are seriously mistaken;
- 90 **du kÄnnst bei der glätte nich BREMSen;**
you just cannot brake when it's icy;
- 91 dein RAD kommt ins SCHLEUdern; (.)
your bike is going to skid; (.)
- 92 **h° äh und dann hAste den SCHEISS.**
h° um and then you're in deep trouble.

A closer look at the temporal unfolding of Jan's *wenn*-construction shows that Jan's *wenn*-clause ("h° wenn DU meinst- [...] du hättest d- dein rAd unter kontROLLe;" 'h° if you think-

you are in control over y- your bike;’ l. 76ff.) does not represent a syntactically or semantically complete unit, nor a complete communicative action, but it does call for a further component – the consequence. This communicative project is not completed right away: the subsequent complement clauses (l. 78ff.) “dass du BREMSen kannst, dass du [auch] vor- LANGsam fÄhrst, dass du AUf[passt] wo=s GLATT is; (...)“ (*‘that you can apply the brakes, that you [also] ride care- slowly, that you are [atten]tive to slippery ground; (...)*’) do not satisfy the *wenn*-clause projection impetus, but they incrementally expand the *wenn*-part and extend the projection span, keeping the projecting force in play. In line 83, Jan stages Mia’s possible thoughts and opinions on the matter over an extended turn by using a conjoined construction: “un- ähn dass du (.) MEINST, du hast alles im GRIFF; sowas pasSIERT dir nich; (...)“ (*‘an- um that you assume, that you have everything under control; such things can’t happen to you; (...)*’). Once more, the speaker does not fulfill the projection, so the projecting force of the *wenn*-clause in line 76 remains in effect. His subsequent utterance: “das pAssiert nur solchen DÖ:deln da, DIR aba [nIch;] “ (*‘they only happen to fools’*), which continues the inner monologue and confronts Mia with her possible thoughts, further delays the completion of the *wenn*-construction. Finally, the utterance in line 89, introduced with the adverb “da” (*‘there/then’*), links back to the *wenn*-clause in line 76 (“da tÄUscht du dich g- ganz geWALTich; du kAnnst bei der glätte nich BREMSen;” *‘then you are seriously mistaken; you just cannot brake when it’s icy;*’ l. 89-90) and skip-connects across eight intervening intonation phrases back to the syntactically projecting *wenn*-component.

This incrementally assembled *wenn*-part functions as a framing device, anticipating Jan’s main argument and ultimately drawing Mia’s attention to his warning. Due to its projecting force, the *wenn*-part ensures the speaker the opportunity to build a multi-unit turn and to keep the floor pending the completion of the gestalt and the formulation of the foreshadowed consequence.¹² Furthermore, as this interaction shows, although initial *wenn*-clauses may project the formulation of the consequence, it need not be presented immediately; a projection may be deferred and still retain its validity across inserted materials.¹³ Not only may the *wenn*-parts be comprised of various clauses and intonation units, taking up extensive time and sequential

¹² Cf. Auer (2000: 184).

¹³ As Auer (2009b: 184; footnote 4) points out, empirical studies have yet to be conducted on how long a projection can be ‘in play’ before it is forgotten by the speaker or the recipient: “It seems likely that there is a certain time span which must not be exceeded though.”

space, but the second unit (the ‘apodosis’) may also embrace a longer stretch of talk whose end is sometimes difficult to determine (Günthner 1999; 2012; Wegner 2010).¹⁴

(b) wenn-clauses followed by a longer sequence of talk:

The following extract is taken from a talk-show with Heidi Klum, the producer of the TV-show ‘Germany’s next top model’. The moderator (Mod) talks to Klum about the problem of many young women starving themselves in an attempt to meet current ideals of the so-called SCHLANKWAHN (‘slimness frenzy’), and criticizes Klum for treating underweight girls as if they were “too fat”:

- (9) *THE OBSESSION WITH BEING THIN* (HEIDI KLUM: 2006_02_06klum)¹⁵
- 431 Mod: ich verSTEH das alles,
I understand all of this,
- 432 so wie du das beschrEibst,
the way you are describing it,
- 433 aba (--) äh:
but (--) um:
- 434 **wenn man da mal jetzt REINGucken,**
if we look at it more closely,
- 435 **es gibt ja in diesem mOdelBUSiness,**
in this modelling business there are,
- 436 **VIEle mädchen die einfach WAH::Nsinnig dünn sind,**
many girls who are just awfully thin,
- 437 **[es] gibt hier ein BILD,**
[here] is a photo,
- 438 Klum: [mhm]
- 439 Mod: **SCHLANKwahn; (-)**
slimness craze; (-)
- 440 **willst du das? (.)**
is that what you want? (.)
- 441 **heidi klum, (-)**
heidi klum, n(-)
- 442 ja es is KEIN [model aus] deine SENDung,
true this is not a [model from] your program,

The adversative conjunction “aba” (‘but’) in line 433 foreshadows an opposing argument. The moderator goes on to use a subordinated *wenn*-clause “wenn man da mal jetzt REINGucken,” (‘if we look at it more closely,’ l. 434), presented as a separate intonation unit. Its rising boundary tone projects a ‘continuation’ and implies the presentation of a consequence. However, what follows in line 435ff. (“es gibt ja in diesem mOdelBUSiness, VIEle mädchen die einfach WAH::Nsinnig dünn sind, (...)”; ‘in this modelling business there are, many girls who are just awfully thin, (...)’) is neither a direct consequence nor is it limited to a single clause. Instead, it is comprised of a string of clauses, which extend over several TCUs (l. 435 to 440).

¹⁴ Cf. Wegner (2010: 13) found that 20% of the *wenn*-constructions in his data showed a complex second component. In 15% of the constructions, the *wenn*-part was comprised of various TCUs and in 7% both parts represented complex units.

¹⁵ Cf. Günthner (2012).

The syntactic disintegration reflects the loose semantic connection between the units. The *wenn*-clause no longer presents the condition under which the following statement is valid, but creates a foundation for the subsequent argument. In light of the complexity of the following unit, it is unlikely that the construction was planned in its entirety when the initial *wenn*-clause was produced.¹⁶ Here, we are dealing with online emergence reasoning.

In studying *wenn*-constructions as structural processes unfolding over time, one can argue that the initial *wenn*-unit, a syntactically and semantically incomplete utterance, opens a syntactic project with particular expectations of what might follow. As Auer (2009b) outlines, projection never equals determination. This also holds for *wenn*-constructions: the initial *wenn*-unit gives the speaker a certain amount of leeway in shaping the following part.

As extracts (8) and (9) illustrate, *wenn*-constructions in everyday spoken German are not confined to biclausal sentence patterns, but both units, the *wenn*-part and the following consequence, may be realized as segments of varying lengths and complexity which extend over several TCUs with no discernible boundary and involving various activities.¹⁷ This observation underlines the emergent nature of grammar in talk-in-interaction: A grammatical construction can be reconfigured in response to locally-managed interactional needs and emerges in the moment-to-moment, temporally-organized process (Günthner 2006; 2008b; 2011a; Pekarek-Doehler 2011).

Again, the data call into question the binary division between subordination and coordination (Haiman/Thompson 1984, Matthiessen/Thompson 1988; Auer 1998; Günthner 1999; 2000; Laury 2012; Laury et al. 2013). Our data show that *wenn*-constructions in everyday interaction can range from instances in which the initial *wenn*-unit can be a subordinated adverbial clause followed by its main clause, to ones in which the following component exhibits the syntax of an autonomous clause. Speakers also build *wenn*-constructions with both units showing considerable complexity, comprised of various clauses which occupy more sequential time and space.

2.4. Stand-alone *wenn*-constructions

So far, I have maintained that initial *wenn*-clauses represent prosodically, syntactically, and semantically incomplete units. They open a syntactic gestalt which creates the expectation of a second unit whose grammatical make-up may vary in several ways – these may range from

¹⁶ Cf. Laury/Lindholm/Lindström (2013: 236) for similar cases in Swedish and Finnish conditional constructions.

¹⁷ This observation supports Laury's (2012) argument that clause combinations in everyday interactions are not ready-made elements; they are responsive to local contingencies and various interactional factors (cf. Günthner 2008a; b; 2011a; b).

an integrated or autonomous main clause up to a considerably longer stretch of discourse. As Auer (2000: 184), I hold that “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 consequence is completed.”

However, in everyday interactions, speakers not only produce *wenn*-units which are only loosely connected to their following syntactical units. They also employ *wenn*-units which are neither followed nor preceded by a superordinated clause. These constitute independent communicative projects which are non-projecting (Laury et al. 2013). “Independent *wenn*-clauses” have been discussed by various grammarians for quite some time: In general, these “independent verb-final clauses” or “isolated subordinate clauses” (Brugmann 1918; Weuster 1983; Altmann 1987; Oppenrieder 1989) are associated with particular sentence types or activities, such as “optative sentences”, expressing wishes and desires (“wenn ich doch bloß Millionär wäre!”; ‘*if only I were a millionaire*’) and requests (“wenn ich um eine Antwort bitten dürfte”; ‘*if I could ask for an answer, please*’) designed to ask a recipient to perform some action.

In the following, I will show that speakers in everyday interactions employ stand-alone *wenn*-constructions in a number of different functions: They are more or less routinized constructions, representing various accountable social actions. Again, this finding calls into question the binary division between subordinated and main clauses (Matthiessen/Thompson 1988; Günthner 1999; 2000; Laury 2012; Laury et al. 2013).

(a) Optatives:

The following extract, taken from a radio-phone-in program, illustrates an optative *wenn*-clause which is not integrated in any superordinate main clause but constitutes a turn in and of itself. The moderator (Mod) asks his caller, in the form of a *wenn*-optative, to name some celebrities whom he considers embarrassing:

- (10) *EMBARRASSING CELEBRITIES (RADIO-PHONE-IN #48)*
 168 Mod: ehm (.) VIERte frAge,
 um (.) fourth question,
 169 =wElchen dEUtschen prominenten findest !DU!
 am pEInlichsten?
 which german celebrity do you think is the most
 embarrassing?
 170 (---)
 171 Jan: och=das würd(e) ich NIE sagen jetzt.(.)
 oh= *I would never say that now. (.)*
 172 also=d=d da kOmmen EINige;
 well=t=t there are several who might qualify;
 173 da hab ich(-)da habich ne GÜte top tEn liste.
 I have (-) actually I have a good top ten list.
 174 Mod: !HACH!
 !wow!

- 175 Jan: ((lacht))
 ((laughs))
- 176 Mod: <<:-)> wenn ich doch jetzt EIn_n NAmen
 erfahrn könnte.>
 <<:-)> if I could just get one name now.>
- 177 Jan: Öh: NEIN.
 uh: no.
- 178 das das is is doch nich,
 this this=is=is not,
- 179 !NEIN!.
 !no!.
- 180 ich will doch nich dAUernd über BOHlen sprechen.
 I really don't want to talk about Bohlen all the time.

The moderator's turn in line 176 begins with a *wenn*-clause (“<<:-)> wenn ich doch jetzt EIn_n NAmen erfahrn könnte.>”; ‘<<:-)> if I could just get one name now.>’ l. 176), which manifests typical subordinate characteristics such as an initial subjunctive and verb-late placement. Still, this seemingly subordinate syntactic unit forms a self-contained turn and represents a full-fledged activity which expresses a wish designed to persuade the caller to name at least one embarrassing celebrity. Prosody fortifies this ‘independence’: the *wenn*-clause is produced as a prosodic unit of its own with utterance final prosody. The co-participant's reaction supports this interpretation. Jan treats this *wenn*-unit as an accountable action. He responds to the moderator's indirect request¹⁸ (l. 177f.) with a moaning “öh: NEIN.” (‘uh: no.’), showing no indication that he is expecting a pending main clause. Subsequent to his playful fuss, Jan, in line 180, complies with the moderator's wish and provides the name of a German celebrity.

In the following extract from a university office-hours session, the professor (Prof) uses a stand-alone *wenn*-clause to formulate a request for action:

- (11) OFFICE HOUR: INTERNSHIP REPORT (VIDEOAUFZEICHNUNG - MÜNSTER)
- 046 Prof: da fehlt nur noch das SIEgel.
 only the stamp is missing here.
- 047 Stu: achSO.
 I see.
- 048 Prof: das MUSS ich eben-
 hold on I just have to-
 ((the professor moves his chair back to get at his stamp))
- 049 Stu: hüps?
 oopps?
 ((der Professor lässt dabei den Bericht los, die aufgeschlagene Seite fällt zu))
 ((in doing so, the professor lets go of the report on his desk, the page he had opened closes))
- 050 Prof: OH.
 oh.
- 051 RUTSCHT uns hier alles-
 everything is falling apart here-

¹⁸ Here, the optative construction functions as an indirect request, which is implemented by a turn designed to encourage the co-participant to do something which will benefit the initiating speaker (Couper-Kuhlen/Fox/Thompson 2014: 122). The modal particle “*doch*” adds pressure to this wish.

052	wenn sie`s FESThalten [würden-]	
	if you could hold [it-]	
053	Stu:	[joa?] ((lacht kurz))
		[yeah?] ((laughs for a moment))
054	das GEHT-	
	<i>no problem-</i>	

After realizing that the pages of his manuscript are fluttering around, the speaker asks his student to hold his papers. His utterance in line 052 starts with the subjunction *wenn* and carries late placement of the finite verb (“würden”; ‘*would/could*’), it thus exhibits characteristics of a canonical dependent clause. The professor’s request, realized in the subjunctive mood (“FESThalten [würden-]” (‘*could hold*’), is designed to get his student to perform some action (Couper-Kuhlen/Fox/Thompson 2014: 122). In response to this request, the student agrees “[joa?] das GEHT-“ (‘[*yeah?*] *no problem*’; l. 053) and holds on to the paper. The immediacy of her reaction suggests that she is not waiting for a continuation, (for the ‘apodosis’), but interprets the *wenn*-clause as self-contained.

Stand-alone *wenn*-clauses which manifest typical features of grammatical subordination, but constitute prosodically and pragmatically autonomous activities, can be treated as cases of “insubordination” (Evans 2007), as “the conventionalized main clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally in subordinate clauses” (Evans 2007: 367).

Actually, stand-alone *if*-clauses expressing requests, proposals or suggestions are routinized in various languages. As ‘politeness conditionals’¹⁹ (Metschkowa-Atanassowa 1983, Günthner 1999, Pittner 1999, Laury 2012) they form indirect requests, giving the addressee room for negotiation (Laury 2012: 222) and thus, soften the directive.²⁰ (In German, the use of the subjunctive, and thus its hypothetical semantic value, further contributes to making the request less direct.²¹) As Evans (2007: 370), I believe that in the case of optative stand-alone *wenn*-constructions the conventionalization of the construction is so advanced that co-participants do not have to supplement any ellipsed material in order to interpret it. Their imme-

¹⁹ Studies of spoken Finnish (Laury 2012), Swedish (Laury/Lindholm/Lindström 2013), Italian (Vallauri 2004), English (Stirling 1999) and Dutch (Boogaart/Verheij 2013) point to the fact that stand-alone conditionals represent conventionalized means associated with directive actions in all these languages. Brown/Levinson (1978/87: 153f.) argue that in Tzeltal, the possibility marker “*me*” (‘*if*’) is used to soften commands. By “including a notion of possibility or ‘if’ in the command”, it comes close to a “polite suggestion”.

²⁰ As Laury (2012: 234) points out in describing *if*-conditionals used as directives in Finnish: „In fact, it appears that indirectness of form may be connected with the contingencies involved in requests in complex ways, and that there may be quite a bit of cross-linguistic variation as to which types of forms index requests viewed as problematic in some ways.”

²¹ Even though the conditional architecture of “requests for action” (Couper-Kuhlen/Fox/Thompson 2014: 122) displays the requester’s awareness that there may be contingencies which could make it difficult to grant the request, these constructional formats are so conventionalized that the argument that “insubordinated requests are favoured in requests for reasons of politeness by virtue of playing down the explicit interpersonal control made evident in imperatives and other indirect commands” is oversimplifying (Evans 2007: 393).

diate verbal and/or non-verbal responses indicate that these stand-alone *wenn*-constructions tend to be interpreted as full-fledged requests.

(b) Warnings/threats:

In addition to optative *wenn*-clauses, speakers in our data apply these seemingly subordinated clauses as resources with which to express prohibitives; i.e. warnings and threats.

In the following excerpt, taken from a reality-TV-show, Sabrina reconstructs an episode in which she, as a child, nearly cut off her finger and tried to hide it from her strict mother. The next day, however, as Sabrina's injury worsened and the bandage was soaked through, her mother noticed the wound and got angry with Sabrina:

- (12) **STRICT MOTHER (REALITY-TV-SHOW: bb # 17)**
 228 Sa: <all> un_am nächsten TACH hat_sie irgendwie,>
 <all> and the next day she somehow,>
 229 die (.) EInkaufstÜte (so),
 the (.) grocery bag (so),
 230 die hat das nIch geMERKT,
 she hadn't noticed it,
 231 <<all> und dann hat- (-)
 <<all> and then- (-)
 232 sie dann das ge[SEHN,] ne>
 she- saw it [then,] eh
 233 Jür: [ja.]
 [yeah.]
 234 Sa: und dann HAT_se dann-
 and then she then-
 235 (weiß halt) (.) da war der ganze verband alles
 voll[BLU:T.]
 (you know) the whole bandage was full
 of [blood.]
 236 Jür: [<<p>hm]
 237 (0.5)
 238 Sa: und dann HATse,
 and then she,
239 <<flüsternd> wenn du DAS noch mal mAchst.> (--)
<<whispering> if you ever do that again.> (--)
 240 <<p> meine mutter war STRENG.>
 <<p> my mother was strict.>
 241 Jrg: ja aber das ist doch n=!UN!fall.>
 yeah but that was just an accident.

The reconstructed threat “<<flüsternd> wenn du DAS noch mal mAchst.>” (“<<whispering> if you ever do that again.> (--); l. 239) leaves open the question of what action the mother might take, if her daughter were to do something like that again. Prosodically, the reconstructed *wenn*-clause is produced as a prosodic unit of its own with a nucleus accent and utterance final intonation. One could argue that the mention of the mother's threat, in combination with contextualization cues such as marked prosody, reference to a future action of the addressee, the use of particular modal adverbs and particles, etc., is sufficient for the daughter to understand the seriousness of her mother's warning, so that the articulation of any

possible consequence may be omitted.²² Such stand-alone *wenn*-clauses uttered by a speaker (here the quoted mother), who has no intent of continuing but deliberately leaves the possible consequence ‘in the air’, come close to the rhetoric figure of the ‘aposiopesis’ (Imo 2014: 163f.; Auer 2007: 105). With relevant parts being left out, aposiopeses “rely on recipients’ ability to guess what the speaker intended to say, i.e. they serve as fully functional utterances in a given context and are intended for the recipients to react to” (Imo 2014: 163).

Similar to requests for actions, the formulating of a warning or threat represents a form of interpersonal coercion (Evans 2007: 392), and thus, an activity susceptible to insubordination. So stand-alone *wenn*-units seem to have become sedimented patterns used to elicit certain actions, or the refraining thereof, from co-participants.

(c) Exclamations and expressions of stances and assessments:

Speakers in our data also use stand-alone *wenn*-constructions as resources for things other than making requests, wishes, threats, warnings and other forms of interpersonal coercion. They use them as a constructional resource with which to express exclamations and to convey positions and assessments.

In the following extract from a reality-TV series, the inhabitants are backbiting about Marion, a co-inhabitant, who needed pain killers after she had shaved her legs:

(13) SHAVING HER LEGS (REALITY-TV-SHOW: bb # 45)

324 Dan: =ich GLAUB,
 = *I think*,
325 d_MARion interessiert des net besonders;
 that marion isn't really interested in it;
326 Ste: **nja außerDEM- (.)**
 well besides- (.)
327 wenn man sich SO die BEine raSIERT.
 if you shave your legs the way she does,
328 (--)
329 Hka: hh° AH°°
330 Ste: oh wir sin Echt FIES ne?
 we are being really mean aren't we?
331 [fast (.) geMEIN] schon;
 [nearly(.)bitchy] already;
332 Hka: [nö wieSO denn.]
 [no why would you think that.]

The speaker (Steffi) uses a stand-alone *wenn*-clause “*nja außerDEM- (.) wenn man sich so die BEine raSIERT,*“ (‘*well besides- (.) if you shave your legs the way she does,*’ l. 326f.) to express her indignation about the way Marion shaves her legs, characterizing Marion’s behavior (i.e. to shave her legs the way she does) as deviant. Even though, from the point of view of normative grammar, this *wenn*-clause is “incomplete” and invites the recipients to re-

²² As Evans (2007: 390) argues, the more subordinated *if*-clauses become conventionalized, the more difficult it is to reconstruct a seemingly ellipsed main clause.

construct whatever has been left unsaid, it is treated as an accountable activity by co-participants and becomes a turn of its own. Prosody fortifies its ‘independence’: the *wenn*-clause is produced as a prosodic unit of its own with utterance final intonation. Hanka’s heavy breathing “hh° AH°” (l. 329) underlines her own indignation.

Weuster (1983: 21) has argued against the fallacy of taking the final positioning of the finite verb as a per se criterion for classifying these “unabhängige Sätze” (‘independent sentences’) as subordinate.²³ Laury et al. (2013: 261) present a similar argument in their analysis of independent conditionals in Swedish and Finnish: “In such uses, these conditional clauses are readily interpretable as requests, proposals and suggestions. We have suggested that these clauses are not inherently subordinate and projecting, but rather they are functionally independent clauses marked with a conditional particle.”²⁴

This leads to the following questions:

- (i) How can a *wenn*-clause, which is marked as subordinate and according to our shared grammatical understanding incomplete, be interpreted as an independent unit?

In particular contexts and in combination with specific prosodic, grammatical and semantic features and associated with social action types and local contingencies, the projective force of the initial *wenn*-clause may be suspended. In these cases, co-participants treat the single *wenn*-clause as an autonomous unit. This supports the idea that syntactical indications do not provide sufficient or stable cues with which to indicate whether a clause is to be continued. Participants seem to rely on various other cues, such as prosody, modality markers (modal particles, subjunctive mood), the type of action indicated as well as interactional experience with routinized constructions. This question also touches on the issue of “action ascription” (Levinson 2013) and thus the issue of how participants assign a particular action (such as a request, a threat, an assessment, etc.) to a stand-alone *wenn*-unit. In our data we can detect a variety of stand-alone constructions, ranging from framing devices via elliptical to highly routinized stand-alone *wenn*-constructions used to express wishes, requests, etc. As Evans (2007: 386) explains:

“...there are many cases where it is not analytically clear how far insubordination has become conventionalized. As we have seen there exists a continuum from subordinate clauses only used as such, to free-standing subordinate clauses for which an ellipsed main clause can be readily supplied, to insubordinated clauses which can be supplied with main clauses though it sounds somewhat unnatural or pedantic, to insubordinated

²³ Cf. also Oppenrieder (1989: 223) on the status of independent *wenn*-clauses.

²⁴ Cf. also Evans (2007: 370) who argues that even though – due to the presence of subordinate verb order, subjunctors etc. – these insubordinated clauses look like subordinate ones, “over time they get reanalysed as standard constructions, those features will no longer be restricted to subordinate clauses, so that the term ‘subordinate’ means, at best, having diachronic origins as a subordinate clause.”

clauses which have become so conventionalized that they are felt to be quite complete in themselves.”

- (ii) How can we account for these uses of *wenn*-clauses as independent units, and thus for the reanalysis of an erstwhile subordinate clause as an independent one?

Stand-alone *wenn*-clauses challenge the postulated unidirectionality in grammaticalization (Lehmann 1982/95), which leads from a “less grammatical to a more grammatical unit”. Grammaticalization theory assumes that “parts of a constructional schema come to have stronger internal dependencies” (Haspelmath 2004: 26). Stand-alone *wenn*-clauses represent counterexamples to this unidirectional tendency going from “less to more grammatical” and thus from “main clause to subordinate clause”. We are confronted with an increase in syntactic autonomy and a decrease in bondedness; and thus “a reanalysis from subordinate to main clause status” (Evans 2007: 376).

3. Conclusion

Speakers of everyday German make use of a broad range of *wenn*-constructions, which reveal different degrees of syntactic integration between the subordinate *wenn*-unit and the following part: Even though the initial *wenn*-clauses project upcoming talk (the formulation of a consequence) by the same speaker, this upcoming talk can vary from a syntactically integrated main clause showing syntactic inversion, to a prosodically and syntactically autonomous clause (where the information stated in the second unit is no longer dependent on the fulfillment of the condition in the *wenn*-unit), to a complex discourse segment stretching over several turn construction units. In addition, participants employ stand-alone *wenn*-constructions, i.e. clauses which show clear indications of subordination, but perform autonomous social actions. Beyond the expression of wishes and directives, these constructions are used to express threats and warnings as well as to indicate positions and moral assessments. These constructions further blur the boundaries between subordinated and main clauses. In everyday interaction, participants employ a wide range of in-between *wenn*-constructions (as illustrated in the following chart) ranging from tightly integrated to loosely integrated, from non-integrated to free-standing.

Survey of the wenn-constructions: scale of syntactic (and prosodic) integration:

*tight syntactic
and prosodic
integration*

*syntactic
and prosodic
disintegration*

*independent
wenn-clauses*

←-----→

tight syntactic linkage between the two units a. one prosodic unit b. independent prosodic contours	syntactic (and prosodic) non-integration a. convertible b. non-convertible into integrative word-order	beyond biclausal constructions a. incrementally expanded <i>wenn</i> -units, spreading over several TCUs b. the second unit comprises a longer sequence of talk	stand-alone <i>wenn</i>-constructions
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