

# Chapter 1

## Is a so-called “beach” a beach? An empirically based analysis of secondary content induced by ironic name use<sup>1</sup>

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This paper investigates the source and status of contents involved in ironic utterances which contain the name-mentioning modifier as in *The so-called “beach” was a thin strip of black volcanic grit*. Based on two experimental studies, we argue that the head nominal’s non-literalness implicated in constructions of this sort is at-issue “the most”, while the speaker’s attitude to evaluate the head’s denotatum negatively is treated as at-issue the least. It will further be reasoned that the meaning that the head nominal’s denotatum has been called by the quoted name tends to figure as a presupposition, which is compatible with an echo approach towards verbal irony. Our findings support the notion of at-issueness as a graded criterion and can be used to argue that verbal irony in general seems to be difficult to reject directly and, thus, be treated as at-issue.

**Keywords:** quotation, irony, non-literal, echoic mention

### 1.1 Introduction

Investigations of the boundary between primary and secondary content of an utterance typically consider meanings that are literal. The characterization of contents involving non-literal meanings, as is the case with idiomatic language or verbal irony, is complicated by the fact that the expressions’ non-literalness seems to critically supplement the main point of the utterance. Consider the following examples of verbal irony:

- (1) a. [After an awful performance]  
The lead singer did a really great job!
- b. [It is raining heavily]  
What wonderful weather for a picnic!

As their primary content, the utterances in (1) convey assertions which denote the opposite of the expressions' literal meaning. At the same time, by saying something positive, the speaker expresses a negative attitude towards the corresponding denotata, i.e., the lead singer's performance in (1a) and the weather conditions in (1b). An attitude of this sort, which materializes as negative criticism in our examples, has been argued to be a key component of verbal irony, see Dews and Winner (1999), Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Wilson (2006). But what exactly is the informational status of the speaker attitude conveyed by an ironic utterance? Is it perhaps also part of its primary content?

The current paper aims at analyzing how the different meaning components involved in ironic utterances blend into the spectrum between primary and secondary content, that is, the spectrum between at-issue and not-at-issue content. In our investigation, we will focus on quotational constructions that involve the German name-mentioning modifier *sogenannt* ('so-called') as in, e.g., *sogenannte Arthritis* ('so-called arthritis').<sup>2</sup> Depending on the context, a name-mentioning construction of this type adopts an ironic, modalizing interpretation as in, for example, *The so-called "beach" was a thin strip of black volcanic grit*. Specifically, we seek to determine the source, i.e., the presuppositionality of the contents involved in ironic utterances of the sort in question as well as the contents' status concerning their at-issueness. It will be reasoned on the basis of two experimental studies that the implication that the head nominal's denotatum, i.e., the thin strip of black volcanic grit in the above example, has been called *beach* before tends to figure as a presupposition. This finding is compatible with an echo approach towards verbal irony, which states that an ironic utterance is recognizable as such if it can be identified to be an echo of some other utterance. Furthermore, we will argue that the implicated meaning that the head nominal's meaning is not used literally represents the content which is at-issue "the most" in the construction. The speaker's attitude to (negatively) evaluate the head's denotatum will turn out to be treated as at-issue the least and, at the same time, to exhibit the highest tendency to figure as an implicature. Crucially, we assume (not-)at-issueness to be a graded notion. The results of our study indicate, for example, that the contents involved in an ironic use of the *so-called*-construction are less at-issue than contents involved in an appositive. We will attribute this finding to the attributive nature of the modifier embedded inside a DP.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2, the semantic and pragmatic properties of *so-called/sogenannt* in its two distinct readings are

<sup>2</sup>We use *so-called* in translations as a shorthand for *sogenannt*. Note that it is possible that English *so-called* and German *sogenannt* are not perfect functional equivalents, and that *so-called* may not share all three meaning components that we propose for *sogenannt*, at least not to equal extents. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. Our empirically based claims only apply to *sogenannt*.

explored. In section 3, we determine the contents involved in the construction’s ironic use and analyze their source and status based on two experimental studies. Section 4 concludes our investigation.

## 1.2 Semantics and pragmatics of *so-called*

Quotational constructions containing the modifier *sogenannt* can take on two distinct interpretations. With the first variety – which we assume to be the semantic default – the quoted material is a neologism or a low-frequency expression, where *so-called* indicates the expression’s status as a conventionalized name. Consider the example in (2):

- (2) Type 1: name-informing  
The so-called “thyroid inferno” [...] can be found in thyroiditis and in solid tumors.<sup>3</sup>

The second variety of *so-called* has a distancing function. In this modalizing use, *so-called* gives rise to an ironic or sarcastic reading of the nominal expression. Consider the quotational construction in (3) below. It conveys the information (i) that the name *beach* is in fact a misnomer for the denotatum in question, (ii) that the speaker evaluates the denotatum negatively to a certain extent, and (iii) that the name *beach* has been previously used by someone to refer to the corresponding denotatum.<sup>4</sup>

- (3) Type 2: modalizing  
The so-called “beach” was a thin strip of black volcanic grit around the rocky edge of the pool.<sup>5</sup>

Here, *so-called* is semantically related to the meaning of intensional, privative attributes like *pretend* or *fake*, which enforce a shift from the literal denotation of a noun they modify, see, e.g., Schumacher, Brandt, and Weiland-Breckle (2016).

### 1.2.1 Lexical-semantic format

In this section, we will inspect the lexical-semantic properties of the construction *so-called y* in its name-informing use. The expression *y* involved in constructions of this type is “mentioned”, i.e., reference is made to the linguistic name of *y*, see, among others, Quine (1981). Quotation marks,

<sup>3</sup>[www.kurzlink.de/zbwoTVKZf](http://www.kurzlink.de/zbwoTVKZf). Access: May 29, 2017

<sup>4</sup>Our intuitions regarding the meaning components involved in the construction under discussion are based on its occurrence in written language. The experiments that we report on in Section 3 were also carried out using written language only. It is possible, even likely, that the readings that are given in (2) and (3) are disambiguated in spoken language by prosodic means. This issue is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>5</sup>[www.kurzlink.de/AZGj1cXr7](http://www.kurzlink.de/AZGj1cXr7). Access: May 29, 2017

which are often found around mentioned expressions, are a metalinguistic tool that is used to draw the addressee's attention to the linguistic side of an expression. For instance, with an assertion like "*Paris*" has five letters, in contrast to *Paris has a subway system*, the graphemic makeup of the word *Paris* is described and the quotes around *Paris* indicate this use.

The verbal root *call-* of *so-called*, as used in constructions like *One calls this disease arthritis*, involves three thematic arguments: an agent  $x$  (*one*), a theme  $y$  (*this disease*) as well as the name  $z$  (*arthritis*) of the theme  $y$ . In (4), we represent the name as an argument of a relational function.<sup>6</sup>

- (4)  $x$  call-  $y$   $z$   
 $\exists e$  [CALL( $e$ ) & AGENT( $x, e$ ) & THEME( $y, e$ ) & NAME( $z, y, e$ )

With the participle form *so-called* as used in (5), the name argument  $z$  of *call-* is bound by *so* anaphorically, which points to the head noun of the object DP of the sentence in this case. Thus, here, *arthritis* is mentioned and used denotatively (as the direct object of *diagnose*) at one and the same time.

- (5) The doctor diagnosed a so-called arthritis.

According to Umbach and Gust (2014), *so*, as a demonstrative anaphor, introduces a similarity relation:<sup>7</sup>

- (6)  $[[so]] = \text{SIM}(n, n_{\text{target}}, f)$

In German, adnominal *so* as in *So ein Auto hat Anna auch* ('such a car has Anna too', *Anna owns a car like this, too*), based on features of comparison  $f$ , implies a similarity between an individual car, i.e., a token as the target of the demonstration, and a certain type of car, say, a vintage car. In the case of *so* in *sogenannt/so-called*, the similarity relation holds between two instances of a sign.<sup>8</sup> Here, the *so* points to an individual occurrence of a linguistic form in an utterance, i.e., the word token *arthritis* in (5), which has the same shape as the conventionalized linguistic representation for the concept ARTHRITIS as it is stored in our mental lexicon.

A demonstration-based analysis of quotational *so* has a natural fit with Davidson's Demonstrative Theory of quotation (Davidson 1979). Its central claim is that quotation is an operation through which a linguistic shape is referred to by pointing to something that has this shape.<sup>9</sup> Thus, an utterance

<sup>6</sup>See Härtl (2016) and Härtl (2017) for detailed analysis.

<sup>7</sup>We use a slightly modified version of the semantic representation Umbach and Gust suggest in their analysis for *so*.

<sup>8</sup>See Ginzburg and Cooper (2014) for a related approach for direct quotation.

<sup>9</sup>Against this background, we can assume quotation marks and the *so* in *sogenannt* to fulfil an identical function in (written) name-mentioning contexts as both are used to point to word tokens. If this is correct, co-occurrences of *sogenannt* and quotes need to be explained. We follow Predelli (2003, pp. 16–17) here, who states (for scare quotation) that *so-called* "is

like “Paris” has five letters semantically paraphrases as *Paris<sub>i</sub>*. The expression of which *this<sub>i</sub>* is a token has five letters, see Davidson (1979, pp. 38–39). Quotations of this type, by which we denote linguistic objects and put the shape of an expression on display, are commonly referred to as pure quotation in the literature, see, among others, Maier (2014).<sup>10</sup> Ginzburg and Cooper (2014) state that instances of pure quotation are rule-like statements about types of expressions. Accordingly, we propose to treat name-informing construction as *The doctor diagnosed a so-called arthritis* and *One calls this disease arthritis* as instances of pure quotation as well.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2.2 Pragmatic implementation

Observe that modalizing name-mentioning does not fulfill a name-informing function.<sup>12</sup> With an example as in (3) above, the addressee is not informed about the status of *beach* as a term commonly used for a landform along a body of water. Instead, the mentioned material takes on a non-literal, ironic interpretation. Härtl (2017) argues that the non-literal interpretation arises with commonly conventionalized nouns, like *beach* (or its German equivalent), involved in the construction as the result of a relevance-based implicature (Grice 1975; Horn 1984). With conventionalized nouns, name-informing *so-called* is irrelevant and, in avoidance of an R-principle violation, the non-literal interpretation emerges. In Härtl (2017), the lexical frequency of a noun is taken as a measure for its degree of conventionalization, which, in turn, can be used as a factor determining the different readings. This assumption is corroborated by results from a large-scale corpus study reported in Schrader (2017) for German. The data indicate that the interpretation of constructions involving *sogenannt* as either name-informing or modalizing indeed interacts systematically with the head’s lexical fre-

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less open to contextual variations” in contrast to quotes, as well as Finkbeiner (2015, p. 164), who views double markings as in *Peter’s so-called “theory”* to reflect the producer’s strategy to “play it safe”.

<sup>10</sup>Other types of quotation are direct quotation (*And then Kennedy said, “Ich bin ein Berliner”*), mixed quotation (*The coach said that his team will “kick arse” today*), and scare quotation (*We arrived at the “hotel”*), see Cappelen and Lepore (1997) for an overview.

<sup>11</sup>The fact that the head noun of a *so-called*-construction is mentioned and used denotatively (as the direct object of *diagnose* in (5)) at the same time brings the construction close to what is known as mixed quotation in the literature, see Davidson (1979). Observe, however, that, in mixed quotation, direct and indirect speech reports are usually combined in one utterance, see Maier (2007), cf. *The coach said that his team will “kick arse” today*. This is not the case in the construction under discussion. Further, the quoted expression in a *so-called*-construction adopts its mentioning function only inside the projection of the verbal root *call*-. Therefore, we assume that the name-informing *so-called*-construction is an instance of only pure quotation and that the hybrid use-mention function of the head noun results from the compositional merger with the matrix clause in which the *so-called*-construction is contained. We would like to thank Emar Maier for fruitful discussion on this issue.

<sup>12</sup>We leave open what specific type of quotation is involved in modalizing name-mentioning. One may speculate that it is in fact a combination of direct and scare quotation.

quency: The higher the lexical frequency of the head nominal, the higher is the probability for the construction to take on a modalizing function.

Pragmatic analyses of quotation marks hold that they are used as a means to create markedness of the expression and to indicate a deviation from the linguistic norm, see Klockow (1978) and Meibauer (2007). Correspondingly, Gutzmann and Stei (2011) as well as Finkbeiner (2015) implement quotes as pragmatic markers that give rise to a non-stereotypical interpretation of the expression in quotes. In the case of name-mentioning constructions, the deviation lies in the mentioning use of the expression as compared to its canonical, denotational use, and, thus, quotes are commonly used in environments of this sort. Crucially, a pragmatic account along these lines can be argued to apply to quotes in both interpretations of a *so-called*-construction, i.e., in name-informing and modalizing name-mentioning, see Härtl (2017). In a name-informing construction, quotes signal the use of the expression as a linguistic name as well as its status as a conventionalized name, and in a modalizing construction, quotes<sup>13</sup> indicate a departure from the standard meaning of the quoted material and express a specific speaker modality implying a reservation w.r.t. the semantic appropriateness of the expression.

An open question concerns the source as well as the status of the different contents involved in modalizing constructions of the sort under discussion in the current paper. Do we have reason to analyze, for example, the non-literality of the quoted expression's meaning as part of the conventional meaning in contrast to, say, the evaluative component, which one may hypothesize to be pragmatically implicated? This matter will be discussed in the next section, aiming at a careful classification of the contents involved in modalizing name-mentioning based on empirical data.

### 1.3 Source and status of contents in modalizing name-mentioning

For the purpose of our analysis, by *source*, we refer to the difference between presuppositional content, on the one hand, and implicated content, on the other. We speak of presuppositions as semantic presuppositions,<sup>14</sup> which are part of the semantic properties of sentences and their truth-conditional content, see, e.g., Potts (2015). In contrast, implicated content is content which is not said explicitly but communicated in compliance with Gricean principles of conversation (Grice 1975).<sup>15</sup> Further, by *status*, we refer to the difference between at-issue content and not-at-issue content, see, among others, Gutzmann (2015), Potts (2015), and Tonhauser (2012). The standard

<sup>13</sup>This type of quotes has commonly been characterized as scare quotes in the literature, see, among others, Predelli (2003).

<sup>14</sup>And not as pragmatic presuppositions, see, among others, Stalnaker (1974/1999).

<sup>15</sup>This applies to what is known as conversational implicatures. We assume the contents induced by modalizing name-mentioning to embody conversational implicatures.

definition holds at-issue content to represent the main assertion of an utterance and to answer the (underlying) question under discussion. Therefore, at-issue content is sensitive to a direct negation like *No, that is not true*. Not-at-issue content, in contrast, is linked to secondary aspects of an utterance and does not, or only indirectly, contribute to the question under discussion. A typical instance of not-at-issue content is an appositive relative clause as in *Kim, who lives in Berlin, fascinates Joan*, whose content can only be indirectly rejected by means of a discourse-interrupting protest like *Wait a minute – Kim lives in Rome!*, see von Fintel (2004).

### 1.3.1 Interplay between presuppositionality and at-issueness

Presuppositions and implicatures are commonly taken to represent content that is not-at-issue, see Potts (2005). This assumption, however, does not imply that these contents cannot be treated as salient by the interlocutors in a conversation. For instance, certain presupposed contents, although they are typically meant to be backgrounded and non-controversial, can be accommodated as new information, see Lewis (1979), and, thus, gain main point status.<sup>16</sup> This is illustrated in the following example from Simons (2005):

- (7) Ann: The new guy is very attractive.  
 Bud: Yes, and his wife is lovely too.

By definition, the at-issue content in Bud’s utterance is associated with the information that the new guy’s wife is as good-looking as he himself. At the same time, however, the information that the new guy is married is expressed, and we can reason this to be the utterance’s actual main point communicated to Ann. The example illustrates that content which is presented as presupposed can be perceived as more on the at-issue side despite the fact that it formally figures as not-at-issue content. Concerning Bud’s reply in (7), the latter is reflected by the fact that the information that the new guy is married cannot be easily rejected by means of a direct negation, cf. *??No, that’s not true – he is not married*. Under certain circumstances, however, contents that are typically perceived as not-at-issue can also be rejected with a direct negation and, it follows, be treated as at-issue by the respondent. An example are sentence-final appositives as in *Joan admires Kim, who lives in Berlin*, whose content can be easily targeted with a direct denial like *No, that is not true – Kim lives in Rome*, see AnderBois, Brasoveanu, and Henderson (2015), Syrett and Koev (2015). Furthermore, a direct negation targeting not-at-issue content improves to a significant extent with the presence of a lexical tag in the denial,<sup>17</sup> i.e., an anchor that can be used to determine the

<sup>16</sup>We stay agnostic w.r.t. the question, asked by a reviewer, whether main point status is an empirically primitive notion like salience or psychological prominence, which are also often characterized as (conceptual) primitives, see, for example, Schmidt (1996).

<sup>17</sup>We wish to thank Craige Roberts for pointing this out to us.

scope of the negative operator. The contrast between (8b) and (8c), both with the intended meaning that Kim does not live in Berlin, illustrates this:

- (8) a. Kim, who lives in Berlin, fascinates Joan.  
 b. ??No, that is not true.  
 c. No, Kim lives in Rome.

In addition, the acceptability of the denial depends on whether a sentential anaphor is present in the negating construction, i.e., *that* in (8b). It has the matrix clause as its antecedent, which is, thus, what the negative operator can scope over. Consequently, if the anaphor is absent, as in (8c), a denial of appositive content is more acceptable. As we can see, the relation between presuppositionality and at-issueness is not homomorphic. In certain configurations, presupposed content can gain main point status and, thus, be adapted to be more at-issue. As a reflector of this, experimental results reported in the literature indicate dependencies on configurational variables, and show a considerable amount of variation in general. Syrett and Koev (2015), for example, report the sentential position (sentence-medial vs. sentence-final) of an appositive relative clause to have an effect on the proportion of *No*-rejections, i.e., rejections that target at-issue content. What is striking in this respect is that a substantial amount (21.1 per cent) of the *No*-rejections are still judged to target appositives even when they occur in sentence-medial position.

To conclude, content that is formally presupposed and figures as not-at-issue can, in fact, be taken to contribute at-issue content. Presuppositionality of contents, on the one hand, and at-issueness, on the other, we assume, ought to be investigated separately. Furthermore, we suppose at-issueness to be a gradual feature and to be present to certain degrees. Based on this notion, we hypothesize graded at-issueness for contents involved, for example, in complex assertions like *Kim, who lives in Berlin, a great city, has finally arrived* to be reflected in supposedly graded acceptabilities of the different denial options such that *No, she hasn't* > *No, she doesn't* > *No, it isn't*.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3.2 Hypothesized types of contents in ironic *so-called*-constructions

We assume the contents involved in *so-called*-constructions to be all not-at-issue, though to different degrees, due to the attributive nature of *so-called* embedded within a DP. This is indicated by the observation that a direct re-

<sup>18</sup>As expressed by a reviewer, a gradual notion of at-issueness may raise suspicion because of the fact that contents are either at-issue or not, just as contents are either presuppositional or not. Observe, however, that what is really at stake here are not-at-issue contents that are *made* at-issue in a conversational exchange, and we assume contents to have different potentials to become at-issue. Furthermore, our assumption that at-issueness is a gradual feature is also motivated by experimental results as they are reported in Smith and Hall (2011), who found substantial heterogeneity among projective meanings w.r.t. their projective strengths.



jection of content associated with *so-called* is clearly marked when compared with a rejection of entailed content. Observe the contrast between (9b) and (9c):

- (9) a. The doctor diagnosed a so-called "sepsis".  
 b. #No, that is not true, blood poisoning is called septicemia, in fact.  
 c. No, that is not true, the doctor diagnosed a lymphangitis, in fact.

The corresponding direct rejection is unmarked only when *call-* is the main predicate:

- (10) a. "Sepsis" – blood poisoning is called so.  
 b. No, that is not true, blood poisoning is called septicemia, in fact.

We conclude that the contents associated with attributive *so-called* do not address the question under discussion to the same extent as root clause content addresses it. Recall, however, the notion discussed in the previous section that certain contents can gain salience under specific circumstances and, thus, be treated as more at-issue to a significant extent. Consider, for instance, the example in (11), which can easily be understood as intended to inform the addressee that the named individuals are not real friends and that the name is in fact a misnomer.

- (11) None of these so-called friends ever offered to help.

The non-literalness of the meaning of the expression is the central feature of ironic and sarcastic language, see, e.g., Wilson and Sperber (1992). From a semantic viewpoint, irony has been described to involve a form of (indirect) negation, see Giora (1995), in contrast to pragmatic approaches, which view the notion of contextual inappropriateness of the mentioned expression as central in modelling ironic speech acts, see Attardo (2000). Whichever approach is preferable, the expression's non-literalness is constitutive for verbal irony; which is why we hypothesize that content related to the head's non-literalness in a *so-called*-construction is prone to be treated as more at-issue to a significant extent.

Another content involved in verbal irony is associated with the speaker's intention to produce a comment which can be recognized as an echo of another utterance, see Wilson (2006). For example, with an utterance like *The so-called "hotel" turned out to be a run-down dump*, the speaker communicates that somebody, perhaps a travel agent, has used the label *hotel* for the corresponding denotatum, which would better be described as *run-down dump*. At the same time, the speaker expresses a negative evaluation of the respective denotatum. The evaluative tone, which can be negative or positive, see Dews and Winner (1999), is the third feature of verbal irony that we postulate for the construction under discussion. We assume the non-literalness of

the head nominal's meaning as well as the evaluative component to result from the echoic use of the mentioned name as it was employed in some previous utterance: By explicitly marking the utterance as an echo through the use of *so-called*, the speaker produces a comment implicating that she says something contrary to what she means, and that she evaluates the denotatum in a certain way. Importantly, we hypothesize the speaker's evaluation as well as the previous name use to be less prone to figure as at-issue content in comparison to the non-literality of the meaning of the head nominal in an ironic *so-called*-construction (Hypothesis H<sub>A</sub>).

As for the source of the contents involved in ironic *so-called*-constructions, we hypothesize the previous name use of the mentioned expression to figure more as a presupposition as compared to the speaker's evaluation and the non-literality of the name's meaning, which we both assume to be treated more as implicatures (Hypothesis H<sub>B</sub>). Our assumption is motivated through the fact that the verbal root involves the predicate CALL as part of its truth-conditional content, see (4), and we assume the predicate's event variable to provide the semantic anchor for the echoic meaning component, see Härtl (2017) for details. Our tentative categorization is supported by the examples below. They show that the negative evaluation and non-literality components, see (12a) and (12b), are easily cancellable by the speaker, which supports the implicature status of these components, while an attempt to cancel the previous name use component results in infelicity (12c), which suggests that this component is a presupposition of *so-called*.

- (12) a. We have been staying for a week in the so-called hotel – I don't want to say I do not like it there, it's just that it is a B&B rather than a hotel.  
 b. We have been staying for a week in the so-called hotel – I don't want to say it's not a real hotel, I just find it terrible.  
 c. We have been staying for a week in the so-called hotel – #I don't want to say someone has called it that, I just find it terrible.

To test the two hypotheses, we devised two rating studies. The first study investigates Hypothesis H<sub>B</sub>; the second study investigates H<sub>A</sub>. We now present these in turn.

### Study 1

**Method.** *Participants.* 66 first-year students of the English Language department of Kassel University participated in the experiment. All of them were native speakers of German. Participants were not paid.

*Materials and design.* The entire experiment was conducted in German. The experimental items took the form of dialogs between two speakers. Speaker A used *sogenannt* in her first contribution, modifying a noun that was preceded by an unmodified noun that referred to the same denotatum.

The unmodified noun was less specific than the modified noun. Speaker B then asked a question initiated by (the German equivalent of) *Wait a minute* that asked for a clarification of the speaker's intention in using *sogenannt*. Speaker A finished the dialog by denying that she had asserted the pre-jacent of Speaker B's question. This denial is predicted to be incoherent if the pre-jacent of the question represents a presupposition of Speaker A's first utterance, and coherent if it represents an implicature – since implicatures can generally be denied or canceled.

(13)–(16) illustrate one experimental item. The first and third sentences of the dialog were the same in all three conditions. Only the question used by Speaker B to target the contribution of *sogenannt* differed between conditions. (14) illustrates negative evaluation, (15) illustrates non-literal meaning, and (16) illustrates previous name use. Since we propose that previous name use is part of the lexical meaning of *sogenannt*, we predict a difference in acceptability between (16) and the other two conditions.

- (13) A: Wir hatten letzte Woche im Gewächshaus eine teure  
we had last week in.the greenhouse an expensive  
Pflanze bestellt. Gestern nun wurde der sogenannte Busch  
plant ordered yesterday now was the so-called bush  
schließlich angeliefert.  
finally delivered  
'A: Last week, we ordered an expensive plant from the green-  
house. Yesterday, the so-called bush was finally delivered.'
- (14) B: Sekunde, willst du sagen, dass dir der Busch nicht gefällt?  
second want you say that you the bush not pleases  
'B: Wait a second, do you mean that you don't like the bush?'  
A: Das habe ich doch gar nicht gesagt!  
that have I MP at.all not said  
'A: I didn't say that at all.'
- (15) B: Sekunde, willst du sagen, dass das kein richtiger Busch ist?  
second want you say that that no real bush is  
'B: Wait a second, do you mean that it's not a real bush?'  
A: Das habe ich doch gar nicht gesagt!
- (16) B: Sekunde, willst du sagen, dass die Pflanze als Busch  
second want you say that the plant as bush  
bezeichnet wurde?  
named was  
'B: Wait a second, do you mean that the plant has been called a  
bush?'  
A: Das habe ich doch gar nicht gesagt!

The experiment consisted of nine such critical items and a total of 12 fillers that did not contain *sogenannt*. Participants only saw one condition of each item, but every filler. The fillers were further subdivided into true fillers (in which Speaker A gives an affirmative answer to Speaker B's clarification question), and two groups of controls: in one group, Speaker B's question targeted an entailment of Speaker A's first utterance; in the other group, Speaker B's question targeted an implicature of Speaker A's first utterance. In both cases, Speaker A denied having made the questioned contribution.<sup>19</sup> Since entailments are not cancelable, these controls should receive relatively low ratings, while the denial of implicatures should receive relatively high ratings, implicatures being cancelable. There were four true fillers and four each of the control items, for a total of 21 ratings per participant.

The nouns in the critical items were controlled for frequency – using the Wortschatz corpus of Leipzig University,<sup>20</sup> we balanced both the noun modified by *sogenannt* and the alternative name (i.e., *plant* and *bush* in the example in (13)) around a median frequency class of 11.<sup>21</sup> Frequency classes ranged from 8 to 16. We also conducted a pre-test in which a non-participant in the actual study judged all items and fillers for plausibility and coherence.

*Procedure.* Participants were asked to rate the coherence of Speaker B's second utterance (i.e., usually a denial, except in the fillers) on a 5-point scale (1: completely incoherent; 5: completely coherent). All items were presented visually, using SoSci Survey.<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of the experiment, there was a short training period of two test items, which were accompanied by more elaborate instructions on how to decide on a rating. A high rating was explicitly suggested for the first training item and a low rating for the second. We excluded four participants who gave a low rating for the first and a high rating for the second training item from the statistical analysis.

**Results.** Figure 1.1 gives an overview of the mean ratings within each critical condition, as well as within each category of filler/control. As can

<sup>19</sup>Example of an entailment control item:

- (i) A: Just imagine, our cat got a bad infection and died of heart failure last week.  
B: Wait a second, are you saying that your cat is no longer alive?  
A: I didn't say that at all!

Example of an implicature control item:

- (ii) A: Max dropped by yesterday. He gave flowers to my flat mate for the third time already.  
B: Wait a second, are you saying that Max is in love with her?  
A: I didn't say that at all!

<sup>20</sup>[www.corpora.uni-leipzig.de](http://www.corpora.uni-leipzig.de)

<sup>21</sup>Frequency classes express how much more frequent the most frequent word in the corpus is relative to a given word.

<sup>22</sup>[www.sosicisurvey.de](http://www.sosicisurvey.de)

Condition	Mean rating
Entailment (control)	1.53
Previous mention	2.25
Non-literal meaning	2.45
Negative evaluation	2.73
Implicature (control)	3.59
Filler	4.43

Table 1.1: Mean ratings in Study 1

be seen, the controls patterned as expected: denying an entailment of an utterance one has made is judged as pragmatically infelicitous, while denying an implicature is judged as pragmatically acceptable. The fillers, in which nothing was denied, were judged as perfectly acceptable. The critical conditions fell in between the controls – in all three conditions, the denial of one of the contents of *sogenannt* was judged as more acceptable than denying an entailment, but less acceptable than denying an implicature. Table 1.1 summarizes the mean ratings in each condition.

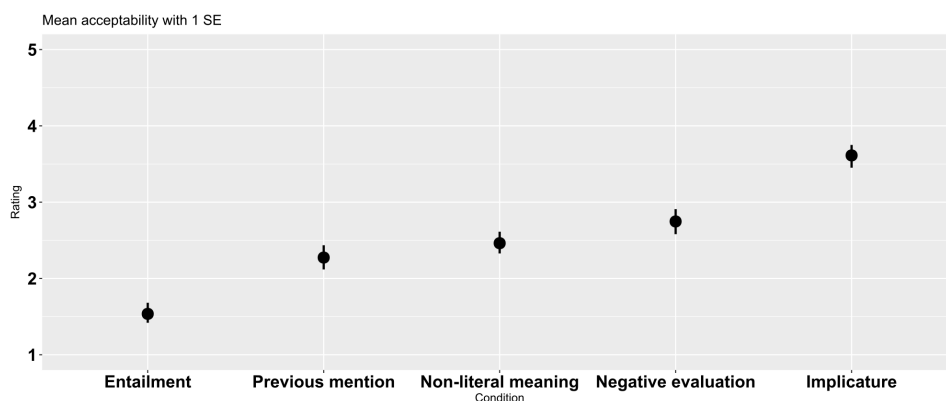


Figure 1.1: Mean ratings across conditions in Study 1

The statistical analysis was conducted using cumulative link mixed models (R package `ordinal`, Christensen 2015). The model treated the non-literal meaning condition as the baseline of comparison, and included random intercepts for participants and items. The differences in ratings between the conditions turned out to be significant. Previous mention was rated significantly worse than non-literal meaning;  $z = -2.2$ ,  $p = .03$ . Similarly, negative evaluation was rated significantly better than non-literal meaning;  $z = 2.3$ ,  $p = .02$ . Comparing the critical conditions to the two control conditions, we find that the means of every comparison differ significantly.

**Discussion.** The results lead us to accept Hypothesis H<sub>B</sub>: Previous men-

tion is the meaning component in the construction that is most difficult to dissent with, followed by non-literal meaning and then negative evaluation. All three meaning components are more difficult to deny than implicatures. We take this to be evidence that, in the spectrum between entailed and implicated content, previous name mention shows the strongest tendency to cluster with entailed content, as compared to non-literal meaning and negative evaluation, which are each closer to clustering with implicated content.

## Study 2

**Method.** *Participants.* 55 first-year students of the English Language department of Kassel University participated in the experiment. There was no overlap in participants between the two studies. Again, all participants were native speakers of German.

*Materials and design.* The experimental items again took the form of a dialog between two speakers, with one turn per speaker. Speaker A begins the dialog with a coordinated pair of claims about a third person. The second conjunct contains a noun modified by *sogenannt*, while the first conjunct contains the more general alternative name. Speaker B's contribution was always a rejection, specifically of one of the contents of *sogenannt*. There were two forms of this rejection to choose from in each critical condition: one where the rejection is initiated by a sentence like *That's not true* and one in which the rejection is initiated by an interjection like *Wait a minute*. (17) illustrates the experimental design for one item.

- (17) A: Meine Nachbarn haben letzte Woche eine Pflanze für  
my neighbors have last week a plant for  
ihren Garten gekauft und jetzt ist der sogenannte Busch  
their garden bought and now is the so-called bush  
auch schon gepflanzt.  
MP already planted.  
'A: My neighbors ordered a plant for their garden last  
week, and now the so-called bush has already been plant-  
ed.'
- a. B: Das stimmt nicht, niemand hatte die Pflanze als Busch  
that is right not nobody had the plant as bush  
bezeichnet.  
named  
'That's not true, nobody had called the plant a bush.'
- B': Moment, niemand hatte die Pflanze als Busch bezeichnet.  
'B: Wait a moment, nobody had called the plant a bush.'
- b. B: Das ist nicht wahr, der Busch ist doch eigentlich ganz  
that is not true the bush is MP actually quite

- hübsch.  
pretty  
'B: That's not true, the bush is actually quite pretty.'
- B': Wart mal, der Busch ist doch eigentlich ganz schön.  
'B': Wait, the bush is actually quite pretty.'
- c. B: Das ist falsch, das ist schon ein richtiger Busch.  
that is false that is MP a real bush  
'B: That's false, that's a real bush.'
- B': Sekunde, das ist schon ein richtiger Busch.  
'B': Wait a second, that's a real bush.'

There were 12 critical items – nine of the paired nouns were re-used from the first study, although the frame stories were changed, as indicated by the contrast between (13) and (17). Three new pairs of nouns were chosen in such a way that the frequency classes of the nouns followed the pattern established in the first study. In addition to the critical items, there were two sets of eight control items and one set of six fillers. The control items involved rejections of plainly at-issue content, on the one hand, and rejections of the content of appositives – which we take to be not-at-issue – on the other hand. The at-issue rejections were reactions to contributions by Speaker A that were initiated by hedge markers like *I think that p*, which were supposed to indicate that Speaker A considers the proposition *p* to be at-issue. The fillers involved rejections of the first conjunct of Speaker A's turn, with no indication of what is at-issue and what is not.<sup>23</sup> Thus, every participant rated a total of 34 rejections.

We varied the initiating phrases of both types of rejection, i.e., *Moment*, *Wart mal*, and *Sekunde* (*Wait a moment*, *Wait*, and *Wait a second*, respectively) in the B' sentences in (17). This was done in order to conceal the true purpose of the experiment. Finally, the number of training sentences was increased to three.

*Procedure.* Participants were asked to choose between the two rejections, again using a 5-point scale. Numerically low ratings indicate a preference for rejections initiated by phrases like *That's not true*, while numerically high

<sup>23</sup>Example of an at-issue control item:

- (i) A: Yesterday, someone new moved into the apartment below us and I think that the new tenant is a musician.  
B: Wait a minute/that's not true, he's an actor.

Example of a not-at-issue control item:

- (ii) A: Yesterday, someone new moved into the apartment below us and I think that the new tenant, a musician, is from Hamburg.  
B: Wait a minute/that's not true, he's an actor.

Condition	Mean rating
At-issue rejection	2.29
Filler	2.98
Not-at-issue rejection	3.09
Non-literal meaning	3.40
Previous mention	3.63
Negative evaluation	3.83

Table 1.2: Mean ratings in Study 2

ratings indicate a preference for *Wait a minute* rejections. A rating of 3 indicated no preference either way, while ratings of 2 and 4 could be used to indicate weak preferences for one of the two rejections. No participants were excluded on the basis of the training ratings in this study, because *Wait a minute* rejections can be used to reject both at-issue and not-at-issue content, i.e., high ratings were principally always possible.

**Results.** Figure 1.2 gives a graphical representation of the experimental results. Rejections of at-issue content showed a preference for *That's not true*, as predicted. The rejections of not-at-issue content gravitated more towards *Wait a minute*. Turning to the critical conditions, we find that all three showed a preference for *Wait a minute*. If we take the *Wait a minute* test to diagnose (not-)at-issueness, then all three meaning components of *sogenannt* are less at-issue than the contents of an appositive. Table 1.2 summarizes the mean ratings in each condition.

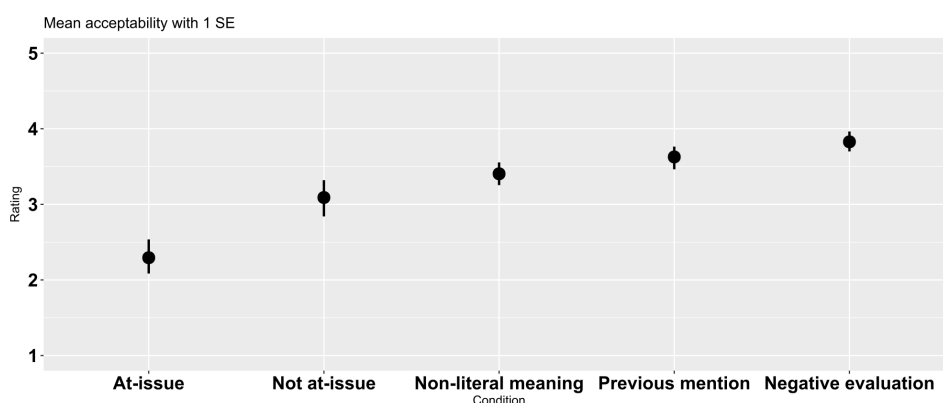


Figure 1.2: Mean ratings across conditions in Study 2. High ratings indicate preference for “*Wait a minute*”

The statistical analysis was again conducted using cumulative link mixed models, in which the previous mention condition was treated as the baseline of comparison, and random intercepts were included for participants



and items. The differences in ratings between the critical conditions turned out to be significant; non-literal meaning vs. previous mention:  $z = -2.4$ ,  $p = .02$ , and negative evaluation vs. previous mention:  $z = 2.3$ ,  $p = .02$ . Comparing the critical conditions to the two control conditions, we find that the means of every comparison again differ significantly.

**Discussion.** The results lead us to partially accept Hypothesis H<sub>A</sub>: As predicted, the non-literalness component shows the strongest tendency to figure as at-issue content in comparison to previous mention and negative evaluation. We take this to reflect the fact that the expression’s non-literalness is a key property of verbal irony. All three *sogenannt*-contents taken together, however, turned out to be even less at-issue than our not-at-issue content, i.e., the appositive. We believe this result to be rooted in two factors. On the one hand, due to the attributive nature of *sogenannt* and its embedding inside a DP, the contents linked to the modifier are even more difficult to access directly than the contents of appositives, which (presumably) are adjoined at the sentential level. On the other hand, appositives provide explicit antecedents for lexical tags that improve direct rejections of the sort we used in the experiment (cf. example (8) in section 1.3.1), while *sogenannt* does not provide any such antecedents.

To conclude, the second experiment has two main findings. First, at-issueness is a graded notion – the three meaning components of *sogenannt* are less at-issue than the content of an appositive. The second main finding is that the three meaning components of *sogenannt* differ in terms of their at-issueness. The non-literal meaning component is perceived as the most at-issue out of the three, followed by previous mention. The speaker’s negative evaluation is the least at-issue of the three meaning components.

## 1.4 Conclusion

The current paper focused on the questions if contents conveyed by an ironic *sogenannt*-construction differ in their (not-)at-issueness, and what empirical evidence we can use to determine their position on the spectrum between primary and secondary content. Furthermore, our analysis aimed at finding the source of the corresponding contents. The results of Study 1 indicate that the three contents we have proposed to be involved in an ironic *sogenannt*-construction are more difficult to dissent with than standard implicatures; but the content relating to the previous mention of the quoted name turned out to be the most difficult to deny, followed by the non-literalness of the name’s meaning and then the denotatum’s negative evaluation by the speaker. We conclude that the previous mention of the name, as compared to the other two contents, has the strongest inclination towards figuring as presupposed content. We interpret this result to reflect the fact that the verbal root of *sogenannt* contains, as part of its truth-conditional content,

the predicate CALL. Its event variable provides the semantic anchor for the construction's interpretation as an echo, which we have assumed to be a central characteristic of verbal irony.

In Study 2, we examined the (not-)at-issueness of said contents. The results suggest that the non-literalness of the quoted name's meaning is treated as at-issue the most, followed by the previous mention content and negative evaluation. We take this to reflect the fact that the non-literalness of the expression is central for ironic utterances and, thus, critically supplements the main point of the assertion. Interestingly, in the studies we conducted, the negative evaluation component figured as the content with the weakest tendency to be presupposed and, respectively, the weakest tendency to be at-issue. In light of the assumption that an evaluation bias is also key in ironic utterances, see Dews and Winner (1999), Wilson (2006), this content can be concluded to be situated outside the narrow interpretational core of ironic *sogenannt*-constructions.

As concerns the lexical-semantic format of *sogenannt*, we proposed a unitary analysis, which uses a single underspecified semantic representation, with pragmatic factors determining the construction's interpretation as either name-informing or ironic. Furthermore, our findings support the notion of at-issueness as a graded criterion. Crucially, all three contents conveyed in the ironic use of the construction proved to be less at-issue than the contents of appositives. As the main reason, we assume that this effect is rooted in the attributive nature of *sogenannt*, impeding access for direct denial to a stronger extent as compared to appositive content. At the same time, however, our findings tell us that verbal irony in general seems to be difficult to reject directly from the addressee's side and, thus, be made at-issue. How far this insight can be generalized by extending it to similar constructions involving *call*- (such as *Und sowas nennt sich Urlaub!* – lit. 'and that calls itself a vacation', *And that's what you call a vacation?*) and to other instances of verbal irony in general remains a subject for future investigation.

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