Pre- and post-positioning of *wenn*-clauses in spoken and written German*

Peter Auer

Freiburg

March 2000

* The corpus research on which this paper is based was supported in many and substantial ways by Benjamin Stoltenburg. Thanks to Jessica Wallace for correcting the worst blunders in my English, and to Susanne Günthner as well as to Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Bernd Kortmann for their comments on a previous version.
In recognition of the enthusiasm he has brought to all aspects of the study of spoken verbal interaction, we dedicate this series to Professor Dr. Aldo di Luzio, University of Konstanz.
1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

Ex 1: (version b fabricated)\(^1\)
(a)  wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da auf’n PUNKT kommen.
    if you want to have a job, you need to get down to the point
(b)  sie müssen n bisschen auf=n PUNKT kommen wenn sie=n jOb haben wollen.
    you need to get down to the point if you want to have a job.

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

Ex 2: (versions b and c fabricated)
(a)  wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (.) müssen sie=n bisschen da auf’n PUNKT kommen.
    if you want to have a job, you need to get down to the point

---

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

\(^2\) The wenn-clause itself should be seen as adjoined to the resumptive particle, i.e., as a co-constituent of the front-field; cf. Eisenberg (1994:364f).
(b) wenn sie=n JOB haben wollen, (. ) dann müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.
(same meaning)

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

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

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

2.2. Reduction

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

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

I1: in der STELlenaußschreibung war=ne teleFONnummer [drin. ]
in the job ad there was a telephone number
B: [WAR se]
   it was,
   drin; ne?
   wasn’t
I1: =mhm, [mhm,]
B: [gut.] (-) dann is=es oKAY.
   fine. then it is o.k.
I1: oder sOll ich sie ihnen lieber noch mal AUFSchreiben.
   or do you want me to write it down for you.
B: nee: (-) und WENN, dann find ich sie auch im teleFONbuch.
   no: and if ((necessary), then I’ll find you/it in the phone directory
I1: (-) ja. (-) h h geNAU
   yes. exactly.

Here, the wenn-clause is reduced, but the reduction is a result of a context-specific ellipsis, and its meaning needs to be inferred from the context (‘if your phone number is not contained in the job ad’). It has retained its own intonation contour, separating it from the following resumptive dann. In the next example, however, the process of condensation has progressed further. This can happen if, semantically speaking, the conditional structure
singles out a referential object (here: the 'Mercedes car' as the only one to which the predicate applies:

Ex 4: (about Mercedes cars)

M: ehm the three hundred and eighty first I drove the two hundred and eighty
F: hm;
M: (in dn) DREIhundertachtzig, (then) the three hundred and eighty
F: mHM,
M: also=d=s der GROSSe da (. ) gell, you know that’s the large one you see
F: ja::,
M: s=is also n RIEsenunterschied; (. ) its a hell of a difference
F: ja::?
M: jaJA: also f’eh eh [WENN dann’] dann kommt bloß der oh yes you see if ((anything)) then then only the
F: [wo?i’] [wen’]
   (where) (if)
M: dreihundertachtzig in frage, three hundred and eighty interests me
F: nHM:,

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

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

Ex 5: solche sachen (-) also (. ) die (-) die wErden sich da WENN höchstens am ende eines jAhres dann erst ereignen
   things like that (-) you see they (-) they will only occur IF (= if at all) at the end of the year at best then
Here, wenn (optionally followed by überhaupt 'at all') serves to modalize negatively the probability with which an event will occur. Its syntactic category as a conjunction is lost entirely.

2.3. Semantics

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

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

Ex 6: (temporal)
dann MELD ich mich morgen bei ihnen? (-) wenn ((=sobald, sowie)) ich bei AÜror angerufen hab,
so I’ll be in touch with you tomorrow as soon as I have given „Auror“ a ring
Ex 7: (temporal: simultaneous)
TRIFFFST du den (.). wenn ((=während, solanGE)) du in PEking bist?
will you see him while you are in Peking?
Ex 8: (temporal: iterative)
ich sprEch UNdeutlich, (I) LISpel auch n=b’ etwas, (-) und (-) ich sprEch dann öfter zu SCHNELL. (-) wenn ((=jedesmall wenn)) ich beGEIStert bin, oder (-) eh im element bin; (-) dann sprech ich zu SCHNELL,

\(^3\) For a detailed discussion, see Metschkowa-Atanassowa 1983 and Zifonun et al. 1997:2280-2293.
I speak inarticulately, I also lisp a little, and then I often talk too fast. whenever I am enthusiastic about something, or ehm get carried away; (-) then I talk too fast,

Ex 9: (conditional: hypothetical)

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

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

Ex 10: (conditional: factual)

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

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

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

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

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

Ex 11: (from a job interview)

Applicant: Wenn=se mich WOLlen-

IF you want me

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

well then we want you completely

Applicant: [dann]

then

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

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

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

Ex 12:  (fabricated examples)
(a) auch wenn sie KEInen job haben wollen, (. ) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.
   even if you don’t want a job, you need to get down to the point
(b) wenn sie auch keinen JOB haben wollen, (. ) sie müssen n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.
   even though you don’t want a job, you need to get down to the point
(c) obWOHL sie KEInen job haben wollen, (. ) müssen sie=n bisschen da aufn PUNKT kommen.
   although you don’t want to have a job, you need to get down to the point

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

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

4 For an analysis of these „concessive conditionals“, cf. König 1985.
The simplest solution for us, and here you are right, would be if you could work in our direct marketing sector for a month.

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

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

3. German wenn-clauses from a quantitative perspective

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

---

5 Among these wenn-clauses in the role of obligatory constituents, we may also count comparisons using wie wenn and als wenn, as in: du kommst dir vielleicht vor wie wenn dir deine Werte verloren gang sein. (maybe it seems to you as if your values had been lost). This usage of wenn will not be taken into account in the following discussion, nor has it been included in the quantitative analysis. A note in passing: some grammarians believe that wenn-clauses in complement function are obligatorily marked by a resumptive es (e.g. Eisenberg 1994:365); this is not supported by my data, however.

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

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

---

8 The count excludes, in addition to all polyvalent cases, all factual conditionals (i.e. those expressing a positive epistemic stance), which are always non-temporal, and all concessives, as well as wenn-clauses used as complements, but includes counterfactual conditionals and reduced wenn-dann routines.
Of the $n=203$ disambiguated wenn-clauses, 24% have temporal, the remainder conditional meaning. Exactly half of the wenn-clauses with temporal meaning are prepositioned and postpositioned respectively. There is, then, a clear difference between conditional and temporal uses: only for the former does the preference for pre-positioning hold. Since the majority of German wenn-clauses are semantically ambiguous between a temporal and a conditional reading, this finding also suggests that, taken as a whole, they behave syntactically like (English) conditional rather than temporal clauses.

Fig. 3 shows the percentage of integrative, resumptive and non-integrative constructions among the pre-positioned wenn-clauses in the sample ($n=280$).
The relatively large residual category ("others") covers wenn-clauses plus subsequent main clauses within larger hypotactical constructions (see below example (26)-(28)). Again, the results are very clear: resumptive constructions are preferred to fully integrated and totally non-integrated constructions. The canonical, integrative construction of standard written German only plays a secondary role in spoken German.

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

Ex 15: ich mein ich muss ihnen (-) ganz SCHNELL und GANZ: vehement sagen wenns IRgendwie gEht (-) fahrns HIN

I mean I have to tell you without hesitating and very vehemently: if you can make it at all, go there!

---

9 *Warum [wenn Du Kirschen magst] pfückst Du Dir keine vom Baum?* "Why [if you like cherries] don’t you pick any from the tree?" therefore has to be understood as parenthetical. Resumption by dann is also excluded here, i.e., non-integration is the only option.
However, there are also semantic reasons why certain *wenn*-clauses have to occur in the pre-front instead of the front field. This is the case for „speech-act related“ *wenn*-clauses which do not conjoin two propositions on the content level; often, they are used in order to mitigate subsequent face-threatening acts (such as, in the following example, an interruption). The apodosis is asserted independently of the protasis, and this semantic independence corresponds with obligatory syntactic non-integration:

**Ex 16:** ((job interview))

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

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

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

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

**Ex 17:** *wenn auch die theoRIE;* *(-) eh (-) so IRgendwo mal gehÖrt wurde im KOPF?* *(-) eh das UMsetzen das ist ja das entsCHEIdende,*

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

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

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

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

---

10 The term is used in a broader sense here than in Sweetser 1990. Details on this construction may be found in Günther, 1999. Note that Sweetser's „epistemic conditionals“, although not „content conditionals“, do not allow pre-front field placement in German (*Wenn er sich jeden Tag volllaufen lässt, sie hat ihn verlassen.* „If he gets drunk everyday, she has left him.“).
A similar topicalization (not of a single referent, but of a whole proposition) is involved in the following example:

Ex 19: un wenn ich mein Eltern anruft würde, würde auch nix bringen.

   and if I called my parents, that wouldn’t be any use either.

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

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

Ex 20: wenn WIRKLICH=n ganzen tag das telefon klingelt, und acht STUN' (-) man IS hinterher <<acc>man WEISS was man> getan hat. (. ) geb ich ehrlich ZU.

   *if the phone really rings all day, and eight hours (-) afterwards you are' you know what you have done. i have to admit that.*

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


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

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

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

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

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

4.1. The advantages of pre-positioning

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

Ex 21: ich sprEch UNdeutlich, (1) LISPel auch n=b’ etwas, (-) und (-) ich sprEch dann öfTer zu SCHNELL. (-) wenn ich beGEISTert bin, oder (-) eh im element bin; (-) dann sprech Ich zu SCHNELL,

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

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

Ex 22: ich fahr (-) wenn (-) wenns überHAUPT geht denn fahr ich NA:CH(er) erscht in Urlaub,

*I’ll have if if it works out at all then I’ll only have my holidays afterwards*

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

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

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

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

B: zum beispiel einen herren, (.). KELLer?

for instance a Mr Keller

(-) eh der (.). is: (.). FÜNFundzwanzig jahre unterNEHmensberater? (.).

ehm who has been a consultant for 25 years

der hat=n STAMMklientel in uh es ah KAnada?

he has his regular clients in the U.S. and Canada

I: mhm,

B: und DER war natürlich, (-) ein FACHmann. (-) aber er KOMMT, (.).

and he was a specialist of course. (-) but he is coming

in die neuen BUNdesländer? (.). <<acc>er war ja nu> (-) eh hatte es ja
to the New States (.). he certainly had (-) ehm he had no need to do
gar nicht mehr NÖtig gehabt;=da (.). so [VIEL] (-) zu REIsen,

that any more; to travel so much there

I:                                        [mhm,]

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

---

14 But see Ford 1993:56.
but (-) he did come to the New States, (-)

um auch etwas zu beWEgen. (-) aber wenn er dann nur auf der STRASse
in order to get something moving. (-) but if he is on the road all
the

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

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

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

FÖrderinstitut,

body’s consent

I:   =<p>mhm,
B:  vor[her (.). kö]nnnen wir nicht die geSAMTfinanzierung,

before that we cannot (do) the total financing

I:     [(h)       ]
<p> wie mit Köopenick. ja

like with Köopenick15

B:  und (.). [und er da]nn NUR auf der STRAsse ist;

and (.). and he is just on the road

I:       [(h)       ]
B:  (-) dann SAGT er das LOHNT sich für mich nicht. (-)

then he says this isn’t worth it for me.

dann bleib ich LIEber (.). in nordrhein westFAlen.

then I rather stay in North Rhine-Westphalia ((a West German state))

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

15 Speaker I is most likely alluding to Zuckmayer’s play (and a famous German movie) Der Hauptmann
von Köpenick, in which the Prussian state and army authorities are caricatured.
which state and bank authorities made it hard for new enterprises to get subsidies, and returned to the Old States.

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

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

Ex 24: (bulimia therapy)

M: aso ich hab ma mit einer zuSAMMgewohnt,=
  you see I once lived with a girl
  und .h die hab ich EH nich so leidn könn un sie mich AUCH nich,
  and I couldn’t really stand her and neither could she me
  und dann hab ich IMmer so .h (0.5)
  and then I always
  und (-) DIE: is schon wesentlich DICker als ich;=
  and she really was a lot bigger than I was
  und dann hab ich ECHT immer gedacht (0.5)
and believe me I always thought
ich hab so alles des (–) AUF se projizierte
I projected everything on her
und wenn se viel geGESsn hat,
and when/if she ate a lot,
= die hat sich .h SAHne n ganzn becher SAHne mit Apfelschnittchen drin
gegessn.
= she put cream a whole cup of cream she ate with slices of apple in it
= und das war für mich ECHT der ABScheu.=
and to me that was really disgusting.
<<fast>> n hab ich gedacht .h des is ja wohl (1.0) des is FURCHTbar
then I thought .h isn’t that (1.0) that is really appalling
(1.0) wie KAMmer denn sowas ESsn un auch noch mit gUtM geWISsn.
how can you eat anything like that and without even feeling guilty

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

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

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

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

20
un dersch isch hier schon DREIma am SCHIFF vorbeigelaufen
and he’s walked by the ship three times
i glaub der sucht n(JÜRgen) un FRAGT wenn das jetz alles lOsgeht.
I think he is looking for (Jürgen=B’s husband) and asks when we are leaving.
A: aa: (-)
B: un (-) mir wärn also (-) ersch so (-) morgen
so we would only be tomorrow ((break-off))
aber wenn der klaus sowiesO krank isch, na.
but if/since Klaus is ill anyway, then,
A: mhm (-) also so wie ICH des ver äh standen hab, hat der ä THOmas zu
mir gesagt (-) äh dass wir das verSCHIEben.
mhm (-) well as I understood it Thomas told me that we would postpone it.

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

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

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

4.2. Why post-positioning at all?

If pre-positioned wenn-clauses are both cognitively more ‘natural’ and interactionally more advantageous than post-positioned ones, why do the latter occur at all? Two reasons have
already been mentioned in section 3: wenn-clauses may be used for expressing the temporal circumstances of an event, and since temporal adverbial clauses do not follow the preference for pre-positioning, wenn-clauses of this semantic type need not do so either.\(^\text{16}\) Secondly, it was shown that the absence of a front-field in questions and other verb-initial syntagms makes their post-positioning more likely.\(^\text{17}\) There are, however, other important reasons.

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

Ex 26: (therapy session)

    eating is like a teddy bear.

TW: =ja,
    yeah

TM: [den’] den sie: (-) .h mit sich RUMtragn. (2.0)
    who who you carry around with you.
    damit SIE <<p>nich allEin sein müssen.>
    so that you don’t have to be alone.
    un dem=mer (-) sich RANzieht, ja? (-) (-) wenn s HART wird; (3.0)
    and whom one holds close, right? (-) (-) when life becomes hard;
    an dem=mer sich FESCHThält, (2.0) wenn=mer EINsam isch, (1.0)
    whom one clings to, (2.0) when one is lonely,
    nd der ü:berall MIT muss.
    and who has to come along all the time.

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

\(^{16}\) This of course, leaves the question open why temporal adverbial clauses should behave differently from conditional ones – a question which requires an investigation of its own.

\(^{17}\) For a similar remark on English, cf. Ford & Thompson 1986:369.
clause (und wenn’s hart wird, zieht man sich den ran).\textsuperscript{18} The same applies to dependent clauses introduced by wie ‘as’, obwohl ‘although’, weil ‘because’, etc. which likewise do not allow initial wenn-clauses.

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

Ex 27: MEIN interesse is natürlich

my interest of course is

WENN ich da: .h schon als POSTdoc auf=m ZEITvertrag bin;

if I am there as a post-doc on a temporary contract

dass ich während de dieser ZEIT dann; (-) auch=n paar ergebnisse MITnehme

that I can take at least some results with me during this time

Ex 28: und DESwegen wär es natürlich; (-) für uns WÜNschenswert; (.)

and therefore of course it would be desirable for us

<<scanning>WENN wir uns einigen KÖNNten,>

IF we could come to an agreement

dass sie so früh wie MöGlich <dim>natürlich anfangen.

that you start as soon as possible

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

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

\textsuperscript{19} Of course, wenn is not always stressed in fronted wenn-clauses. Cf. the following example:
ich (.) hab (-) FÜNF jahre lang an der schule franzÖsisch gehABT, mir fehlt’s eigentlich an (. ) PRAxis, .h aber: (-) ich bin überZEUGT davon, =wenn ich: eh eh Öfter mal die geLEgenheit hätte zum beispiel in FRANKreich, eh mich aufzuhaltn, .hh dass des: (-) eh SICherlich Ausbaufähig is.
I had French at school for five years, actually I’m lacking practice, but I’m convinced if I on occasion had the chance to spend some time for instance in France, that I could work on it.
agreement it would of course be desirable for us that you start as soon as possible' respectively).  

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

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

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

B:  ich würd [einfach] die (. ) die tasse kaffee NEHmen,
I would simply take the (. ) the cup of coffee
I1:  [<p>h:m,]
B:  und eh (-) WEGstellen. (-) .h ja? (.)

---

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

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

21 The same was found in English conversations by Ford & Thompson 1986:368.
and ehm (-) put it away. (-) you see?
ehm=s da stundenlang streiteREIen gibt,
before they start quarrelling for hours,
würd ich sagen, al[so:] jetzt is:—
I would say right now it is

I1: [hm,]
(0.5)
I1: da hät=h ich ärger [mit IhNen.
then I would have trouble with you.
B: [schluss aus ENde?
over and out
I1: [wenn SiE mir dann auch noch den KAFfee (wegschließen.)]
if you (shut away) my coffee
B: [(.) ja, he he he he he he

I1: [he he he he he he

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

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

Ex 30
L: .h dann: eh (.) wir' der Hund wird auch jetzt zunehmend ruhiger;
then ehm beco the dog is becoming more and more calm now;

25
S: mHM (-) des GUT so; (-) 
this is how it should be;
L: JAja des=also wird langsам (a)=richtiger HUND;
yeah slowly he's turning into a real dog.
S: aHA
I see
L: hm, (-)
S: wenn(er (nicht mehr) abhaut, (-)
if he doesn’t escape (any more),
hat (name) des ANgebot jetzt für den zaun?=
did NN get the offer for the fence in the meantime?

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

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

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

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

22 In other-speaker produced post-positioned wenn-clauses this does not always hold, since second speakers may choose this way of intimately linking their speech to a preceding syntactic pattern but nonetheless produce unexpected and even contradictory information under this ‘disguise’.
As in other, similar cases of low-relevance wenn-clauses in final position, the front-field is used here for a connecting (anaphorical) adverbial, which is preferentially placed in sentence-initial position, where its indexical meaning is most easily processed. Since only one constituent may be placed in the front-field, this position is not available for the wenn-clause any longer.

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

Ex 32: ((about wearing glasses)
ich zieh=se nur **DENN** auf wenn=i=se wirkl+ch (-) Effektiv brOuch
I only put them on then when I really and positively need them

Ex 33: denn (.) es is ja SO dass: (-) giTARrenunterricht auch nur **DANN**
spaß macht wenn man auch sieht: dass der schüler <dim>FORSchritte
macht.=das heißt .h er NIChN igenwie sich an nem stück FESTbeißt,
for it is like this: giving guitar lessons is only then fun when you see
that the student is making progress. this means that he doesn’t get stuck
with a piece of music.

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

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

In the last sections, it has been shown that wenn-clauses are preferentially pre-positioned with respect to their main clauses in spoken German, and that this serialisation has a number of cognitive and interactional advantages. It has also been shown that the more marked structure, i.e. post-positioned wenn-clauses, which does occur in about a third of all instances, has its own specific contexts of usage. These are partly due to (a) syntactic constraints on pre-positioning in superordinate clauses without a pre-field or in which two complementizers occur in adjacent position; partly to (b) turn-taking (afterthought position); partly to (c) semantic-syntactic reasons (wenn-clauses in complement function are postpositioned); and partly to (d) pragmatic reasons (post-positioned dependent clauses are thematic or subthematic, unless focussing particles indicate the contrary).
In written German, wenn-clauses are generally less frequent than in spoken discourse, a finding which contradicts the frequent claim that spoken language avoids syntactically complex constructions. Fig. (4) shows the frequencies of wenn-clauses per 100 words in the corpus of spoken language used above, and in a corpus of written language, taken from the newspapers DIE ZEIT (politics section) and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (culture section). Transcriptions of conversational speech were regularized in order to make a comparative computer-based word-count possible.

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

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

---

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

24 See Appendix for an example.
If we punish the denial of Auschwitz, and not the denial of the Copernican revolution, then that is because it does not make us feel afraid only hypothetically.

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{25} The written corpus used by Ford & Thompson consisted of philosophical essays, a professional text for automobile mechanics, and a personal narrative account (1986:355). The preference for pre-positioning held for all these sources.
Fig. 5: Percentage of post- and prepositioned wenn-clauses in written German (n=626)

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

\textsuperscript{26} A separate count for the two newspapers shows that the quantitative results are identical.

\textsuperscript{27} The resumptive particle is \textit{dann} in 46 cases and \textit{so} in 16 cases. \textit{Dann} and \textit{so} are not freely interchangeable; in particular, \textit{so} can be used with concessives (introduced by \textit{auch/selbst wenn}), while \textit{dann} cannot. Cf.: \textit{Auch wenn das Abgeordnetenhaus erst im Herbst, voraussichtlich am 22. Oktober, gewählt wird, so hat mit der Urabstimmung schon der Wahlkampf begonnen.} (‘Even though parliament will not be elected until autumn, probably on October 22, SO the electoral campaign has already begun with the strike ballot.’)
Fig. 6: Percentage of integrative, resumptive and non-integrative wenn-clauses in written German (n=237)

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

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

What could be the reason for this reversal of preferences for post- and pre-positioning in written German compared to spoken language? Three factors seem to be primarily responsible for it. First, the number of (almost exclusively final) wenn-clauses with a preceding focus particle in the main clause is about eight times as high in the written as in the spoken material (40 vs. 5 occurrences). An example is:
Accordingly, women may only terminate an unwanted pregnancy during the first three months if they have undergone counselling: in an advice centre and also by the physician who does the abortion.

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

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

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

Neither of these reasons for post-positioning in written German can explain the difference between the English and the German results, of course. Why should these same reasons not lead to a preference for post-positioning in written English as well? If one was looking for a structural explanation, one would probably try to find an answer based on the most prominent difference between English if- and German wenn-clauses, i.e. the semantic ambiguity of the latter. For instance, it might be argued that since wenn can often be interpreted either conditionally or temporally, German newspaper journalists try to disambiguate their sentences by using other, strictly conditional conjunctions instead, such as falls, im Falle dass, für den Fall dass, sofern or soweit. However, this hypothesis receives little empirical support in my data: not only are these conjunctions very rare in the newspaper texts (a total of 31 tokens!), they also fail to show a positional distribution different from that
Another possibility to express conditionality in German which is not available in present-day English (apart from peripheral cases) is inversion (as in: \textit{kommst du zu spät, bestraft dich das Leben = wenn du zu spät kommst, dann bestraft dich das Leben} ‘if you are late, you will be punished by life’). This possibility is almost never used in spoken German because of its bookish and high-register connotations but ist occurrence cannot be excluded in rather conservative newspapers such as DIE ZEIT and F.A.Z.; and since the distribution of pre- and post-positioned conditional clauses with inversion is unknown we cannot exclude a balancing effect, for instance due to a preference for pre-positioning in this case. Since this syntactic pattern can only be quantified in syntactically labelled corpora, there is no possibility to test this hypothesis in a straightforward way in our materials. However, preliminary analysis of some texts suggests that inversion hardly occurs in newspapers. Alternatively, one might look for a non-structural explanation which would locate the reason for diverging English and German patterns on the textual level, possibly in the stylistic preferences of English and German text composition. The matter clearly awaits further investigation.

6. Conclusion

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

The general conclusion of this study is that the supposed parallel between ‘left’ and ‘right’ in syntax (suggested by parlances such as ‘left extraposition’ vs. ‘right extraposition’, or ‘left-adjoined’ vs. ‘right-adjoined’) is fundamentally mistaken when applied to spoken syntax; in speaking, there is no ‘left’ and ‘right’, but only ‘earlier’ and ‘later’. At least for an approach to syntax which takes the in-time (‘on-line’) emergence of (particularly) oral language units seriously, what is dealt with first and what is taken care of later cannot be seen as a decision between two logical equivalents (as between ‘right’ and ‘left’). Rather, it involves one of the most basic and far-reaching decisions a speaker can make, with all kinds of cognitive, interactional and structural repercussions.\footnote{For a similar argument, cf. Thompson 1985.}

\footnote{Of the 15 tokens in the spoken material, the three positions were about equally distributed.}
Bibliography


Biber, Douglas, 1986, Spoken and written textual dimensions in English: Resolving the contradictory findings. Language 62, 384-416.


Fauconnier, Gilles, 1985, Mental Spaces. Cambridge: UP.


Haiman, John, 1978, Conditionals are topics. Language 54, 564-89.


Köpcke, Klaus-Michael & Panther, Klaus-Uwe, 1989, On correlations between word order and pragmatic function of conditional sentences in German, J. Pragm. 13, 685-711.


Thompson, Sandra, 1985, Grammar and written discourse: initial vs. final purpose clauses in English. Text 5, 55-84

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>original transcription:</th>
<th>regularised transcription:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>words (automatic count)</strong>: 198</td>
<td><strong>words</strong>: 118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>characters (including blanks)</strong>: 1151</td>
<td><strong>characters (incl. blanks)</strong>: 767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>line</th>
<th>translation</th>
<th>line</th>
<th>translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>M .hh ich will UMgehend den (-) nächsten (-) ANruf...</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ich will umgehend den nächsten Anrufer, wieder einen Hörer, begrüßen: Guten Abend. Guten Abend. Guten Abend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>grünen guten Abend?</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Ja, also das Problem aller steht auch so vor mir jetzt irgendwo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>A guten Abend,</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Wie und wo anfangen am besten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>B guten Abend?</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>Es ist eine etwas außergewöhnliche Problematik, die vielleicht nicht so ganz häufig in ihrer Sendung erscheint, obgleich das eigentlich eine total menschliche Angelegenheit ist. Ich lebe seit, um gleich mal auf Fakten zu kommen, ich lebe seit circa fünfzehn Jahren mit einem Mann zusammen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ja?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>A .hhh ja; ALSo hh das proBLEM ah ALler steht ah auch ah so ah vor MIR</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>Und auch recht gut, eigentlich. Natürlich mit den üblichen Alltagsschwierigkeiten, die überall existieren, auch in Heterobeziehungen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>jetzt irgendwo- wie wie und wo ANfangen am besten?</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>Ja. Und das ist nicht unsere Problematik, eigentlich. Wir kommen mit unserer Veranlagung sehr gut zurecht, also das ist alles o.k. soweit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>B mhm,</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>Ja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>A = ähm: (-) es is eine etwas AUSSergewöhnliche ProbleMAzik,</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>Und auch das nicht unsere Problematik, eigentlich. Wir kommen mit unserer Veranlagung sehr gut zurecht, also das ist alles o.k. soweit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>die vielleicht nicht so ganz äh:: HÄufig in ihrer sendung erscheint,</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>.hh obgleich des eigentlich äh:: ne total MENSCHliche angelegenheit</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>is- ich lebe: seit =um gleich mal auf FAKten mal zu KOMM ich lebe seit hh ah circa FUNFzehn JAHRN mit einem MANM zusAMM ...</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>[hh ]</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>B [ ja ]</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>A und ah auch ah recht GU:T eigentlich =natürlich</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>mit den üblichen ALLtagsschwierigkeiten die überall existieren auch in Heterobeziehungen,</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>B ja,</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A und ah das = (dies) ist nicht unsere probleMAzik eigentlich, wir kommen mit diesem mit unserer verANlagung sehr gut zuRECHT?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>also = [das] = ist alles o.k. soweit,</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>[ja:]</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previously published in this series:

No.3 Susanne Günthner, Polyphony and the “Layering of Voices” in Reported Dialogues. An Analysis of the Use of Prosodic Devices in Everyday Reported Speech (1998)
No.4 Margret Selting, TCUs and TRPs: The Construction of Units in Conversational Talk (1998)
No.5 Helga Kotthoff, Irony, Quotation, and Other Forms of Staged Intertextuality: Double or Contrastive Perspectivation in Conversation (1998)
No.6 Peter Auer, From Code-Switching via Language Mixing to Fused Lects: Toward a Dynamic Typology of Bilingual Speech (1998)
No.7 Martin Sturm, Mündliche Syntax im schriftlichen Text - ein Vorbild? (1998)
No.8 Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, On High Onsets and their Absence in Conversational Interaction
No.9 Margret Selting, Fragments of TCUs as deviant cases of TCU-production in conversational talk
No.10 Barbara Rönfeldt, Paragrammatism reconsidered
No.11 Susanne Günthner, Wenn-Sätze im Vor-Vorfeld: Ihre Formen und Funktionen in der gesprochenen Sprache
No.12 Gabriele Klewitz / Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, Quote - Unquote? The role of prosody in the contextualization of reported speech sequences
No.13 Margret Selting: Berlinische Intonationskonturen: ‘Der Springton’
No.14 Ines Lange: Die sequentielle Struktur von Anrufbeantworter-Kommunikation. (Nur online unter http://inlines.uni-konstanz.de abrufbar)