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## Responsive *sowieso*

Minor Sentence Types – Universidade de Lisboa

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# Introduction

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# *Sowieso* as a stand-alone answer

## ➤ German adverb/particle *sowieso*

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all Germans that not in Berlin live find namely that Berlin  
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'All Germans who don't live in Berlin think that Berlin is terrible. Hamburg? Is good. Cologne? Of course.'
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- Responsives as stand-alone utterances arguably have assertive force.

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- Standard response particles 'merely assert' their antecedents or the negation thereof.
- Non-standard responsives possibly signal something above and beyond agreement/rejection.
- Adverbs/modal particles are prime candidates to develop into responsives (German *eben* (MP), *allerdings* (MP/adverb, Koch and Pusch (1976))), *sowieso* being another candidate.

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- We propose a specific semantics for adverbial *sowieso* that captures intuitions about its meaning and parts of its distribution.

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- We argue that a common core semantics carries over to more specialized adverbial cases.
- Furthermore, the core meaning carries over to *sowieso* as a standalone responsive.
- But responsive *sowieso* is also different, possibly indicating that *sowieso*'s meaning is bleaching.

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- Two (alleged) synonyms: *ohnehin*, *eh* (Weydt 1983) (not Austrian German *eh*, see Zobel (2017))

- (3) A: Ich muss ein Buch zurückgeben. B: Ich kann dein Buch zurückgeben. Ich muss  
A I must a book return B I can your book return I must  
sowieso in die Bibliothek.  
SOWIESO in the library  
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➤  $\approx$  B has to go to the library, independently of them returning a book for A.

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- $\approx$  B has to go to the library, independently of them returning a book for A.
- *sowieso* has been placed in a class of irrelevance markers together with *so* oder *so*.

$$(4) \quad \llbracket \text{sowieso/so oder so}(q) \rrbracket = (p \rightarrow q) \wedge (\neg p \rightarrow q) \quad (\text{König 2015})$$

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- We follow Helbig (1988) and Weydt (1983) in assuming a causal component for *sowieso*.
- Its meaning contribution is split into use condition and at-issue meaning.

- (5) Ich kann **dein Buch zurückgeben**. Ich **muss sowieso in die Bibliothek**.  
I can your book return I must SOWIESO in the library  
'I can return your book. I have to go to the library anyway.'

- (5) Ich kann dein Buch zurückgeben. Ich muss **sowieso** in die Bibliothek.

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- (6) use condition for *sowieso*( $q$ ):  $\exists p[p \rightsquigarrow_c q]$

$\llbracket \text{sowieso}(q) \rrbracket = \exists \mathbf{r}[\mathbf{r} \neq p \wedge \mathbf{r} \rightarrow_c q]$

- There has to be a **potential cause**  $p$  for the host proposition mentioned in (or directly inferrable from) the preceding context.

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- $p$  is not the **actual cause**, which instead is  $r$ .
- Claus et al. (2025): *sowieso* states the causal indecisiveness of some contextually available propositional referent  $p$ .
- Better: the causal decisiveness of some proposition different from  $p$ .

➤ That ' $r \rightarrow_c q$ ' is the at-issue reading can be witnessed in questions.

- (7) A: Möchtest du einen Kaffee? B: Kommst du *sowieso* am Kaffeeautomaten  
A want you a coffee B come you *sowieso* at.the coffee-machine  
vorbei?  
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'A: Would you like a coffee? B: Are you passing by the coffee machine anyway?'

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- ✓ Use conditions fulfilled.
- B asks whether there is a reason  $r$ , different from bringing B a coffee  $p$ , why A would go to the coffee machine =  $\exists r[r \neq p \wedge r \rightarrow_c q]$ ?

# “Parallel structure” *sowieso*

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# Parallel structure with scalar interpretation

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- (8) Ich danke dir für die Kritik, und für das Lob danke ich dir *sowieso*.  
I thank you for the criticism and for the praise thank I you *SOWIESO*  
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- The host clause containing *sowieso* has a parallel structure/the same verb phrase as the antecedent, often leading to ellipsis (9).
- (9) Erwachsene mögen Süßigkeiten. Und Kinder *sowieso*.  
Adults like sweets and children *SOWIESO*  
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- The interpretation is scalar in the sense reflected in the translations.
- There is a hint of 'obviously'.

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- It is not that the expressed property holds to a higher degree in the second clause.
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- Standard and parallel case: one or two meanings?
- We opt for one, leaving a bit more work to pragmatics. [also, the synonyms *ohnehin* and *eh* are used in the same way]

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- According to (6), we need a potential reason  $p$  for the host proposition  $q$ .
- Different from the standard case,  $p$  is not given in the immediately preceding utterance context.

## A meaning for the parallel structure case

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- The use conditions fulfilled, the speaker asserts that there is a reason  $r$  different from  $p$  which leads to  $q$ .
- $r$  is left unspecified, as in the standard case.
- The parallel structure invites us to compare reasons for both clauses, and we get a scalar interpretation, because there are more or more compelling reasons for  $q$  than for the antecedent.

# Elliptical responsive *sowieso*

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- A simple corpus search for one word *sowieso* utterances mostly delivers cases like the following: [all natural examples from DeReKo (IDS 2020)]

- (10) Dosenpilze? Auch. Nudeln? Sowieso.  
'Canned mushrooms? Also. Pasta? SOWIESO.'
- (11) Italien? Klar. Deutschland? Sowieso. Frankreich? Immer ein Kandidat.  
'Italy? Clearly. Germany? SOWIESO. France? Always a candidate.'

- Often monological.

➤ They same will appear with negation.

- (12) Rauchmelder? Fehlanzeige. WLAN? Sowieso nicht.  
'Smoke detector? No such thing. Wi-Fi? SOWIESO not.'
- (13) Die letzte Heimpartie verliert man nicht [...] Und das letzte Auswärtsspiel?  
"Sowieso nicht!"  
'You don't lose the last home game, and the last away game? SOWIESO not.'

→ these are "just" cases of ellipsis.

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- The elliptical form and the fullform are equivalent. We can call this use elliptical responsive *sowieso*.

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- (1) Alle Deutschen, die nicht in Berlin wohnen, finden nämlich, dass Berlin schrecklich ist. Hamburg? Ist gut. Köln? Sowieso.
- (14) (1) = Köln ist sowieso gut.

- The elliptical form and the fullform are equivalent. We can call this use elliptical responsive *sowieso*.

(1) Alle Deutschen, die nicht in Berlin wohnen, finden nämlich, dass Berlin schrecklich ist. Hamburg? Ist gut. Köln? *Sowieso*.

(14) (1) = Köln ist *sowieso* gut.

- Whatever applies to the parallel structure cases, applies here.
- *Sowieso* is technically used as an answer, but this is not a real responsive use.

# Plain responsive *sowieso*

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- The more interesting case is the following.

(2) A: Freust du dich auf den Urlaub? B: Sowieso.

A: are happy you yourself on the holiday B SOWIESO

'A: Are you looking forward to the holiday? B: Of course.'

- These are genuine questions and genuine answers, without a parallel structure, not monologically.

- (15) A: »Einen angenehmen Tag, Tom. Wir telefonieren?« B: »Sowieso.«  
'A: Have a nice day, Tom. We call each other? B: SOWIESO!'
- (16) A: Das klingt nach einem strengen Elternhaus. Haben Sie Ihrem Vater inzwischen verziehen?  
B: Sowieso. Eltern machen doch immer das, was sie [...] für das Beste halten.  
'A: That sounds like a strict parental home. Have you forgiven your father in the meantime?  
B: SOWIESO. Parents always do what they think is the best.'

- Can also be used as an affirming response to assertions.

(17) A: Ich denke, das Thema ist [...] kompetent [...] genug dargestellt, um hier als lesenswerter Artikel prämiert zu werden.

B: Sowieso .

'A: I think the topic is presented competently enough to be awarded as an article worth reading here.

B: SOWIESO.'

- Those cases do not seem to be elliptical in the same way that the parallel cases are.

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(18) A: Freust du dich auf den Urlaub?

B: #Ich freue mich *sowieso* auf den Urlaub.

'A: Are you looking forward to the holiday?

B: I am looking forward to the holiday for a reason different from what has been mentioned.'

(19) A: Das klingt nach einem strengen Elternhaus. Haben Sie Ihrem Vater inzwischen verziehen?

B: #Ich habe meinem Vater *sowieso* verziehen.

'A: That sounds like a strict parental home. Have you forgiven your father in the meantime?

B: I have forgiven my father for some reason not mentioned in the context before'

- Those cases do not seem to be elliptical in the same way that the parallel cases are.

(18) A: Freust du dich auf den Urlaub?

B: #Ich freue mich *sowieso* auf den Urlaub.

'A: Are you looking forward to the holiday?

B: I am looking forward to the holiday for a reason different from what has been mentioned.'

(19) A: Das klingt nach einem strengen Elternhaus. Haben Sie Ihrem Vater inzwischen verziehen?

B: #Ich habe meinem Vater *sowieso* verziehen.

'A: That sounds like a strict parental home. Have you forgiven your father in the meantime?

B: I have forgiven my father for some reason not mentioned in the context before'

- Hunch: The full replies in (18, 19) answer the question:  
 $q$  for reason  $p$ ? [Answer:  $q$ , but because of  $r$ ]

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Standard adverbial  
*sowieso*

“Parallel structure”  
*sowieso*

Elliptical responsive  
*sowieso*

Plain responsive  
*sowieso*

Outlook

References

- *Sowieso* as a responsive tends to go along with a heightened emotional state.
- Compare Wiltschko (2017) on the emotive response paradigm (*yes – yeah – yep – yessss – oh yes*).

- *Sowieso* as a responsive tends to go along with a heightened emotional state.
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- Our intuition (to be tested):

(20) A: Your favorite band is in town, do you want to join?  
B: Yes!/SOWIESO!

(21) A: I am looking for my keys, have you seen it in the kitchen?  
B: Yes./#SOWIESO.

(22) A: Is Lisbon the capital of Portugal?  
B: Yes./?SOWIESO.

# Trying our meaning proposal for responsive *sowieso*

- How can our meaning proposal for *sowieso* be reconciled with its use as a responsive?

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(23) (16)

= Have you forgiven your father?

[[I have done all kinds of things, and] I have forgiven my father] *SOWIESO*

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- How can our meaning proposal for *sowieso* be reconciled with its use as a responsive?
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(23) (16)

= Have you forgiven your father?

[[I have done all kinds of things, and] I have forgiven my father] SOWIESO

(24)  $q?$  [ $p$ , and] SOWIESO [ $q$ ].

- One has more or better reasons for forgiving one's father or looking forward to the holiday than for generic alternative things.

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- General idea: one has to have a reason for using an affirmative answer other than unmarked *ja/yes*.

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References

- General idea: one has to have a reason for using an affirmative answer other than unmarked *ja/yes*.
- Pragmatic effect of *sowieso*: rendering the initial question superfluous to ask, because it is conveyed that an affirmative response is obvious  $\approx$  if there are reasons for anything at all, there are more obviously reasons for *q*.

# Outlook

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Standard adverbial *sowieso*
- 3 “Parallel structure” *sowieso*
- 4 Elliptical responsive *sowieso*
- 5 Plain responsive *sowieso*
- 6 Outlook

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- We came up with a sensible meaning for adverbial *sowieso* and tried to extend it to its different uses.

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- Our proposal can be seen as an origin story for *sowieso* as a responsive.

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- Our proposal can be seen as an origin story for *sowieso* as a responsive.
- The “additional reason” at the core of the adverbial *sowieso* meaning makes it suitable for expressing strengthening more generally.

## Introduction

Standard adverbial  
*sowieso*“Parallel structure”  
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## Outlook

## References

- We came up with a sensible meaning for adverbial *sowieso* and tried to extend it to its different uses.
- Our proposal can be seen as an origin story for *sowieso* as a responsive.
- The “additional reason” at the core of the adverbial *sowieso* meaning makes it suitable for expressing strengthening more generally.
- But maybe the standard adverbial use and the responsive should be treated separately.

- Dutch *sowieso* differs from German *sowieso* in distribution (Boonen and Fisseni 2019; Claus et al. 2025).

- (25) Lees *sowieso* onze handleiding! (Dutch)  
“Read our manual *SOWIESO*  $\approx$  in any case!”
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- We conclude that the uses of German *sowieso* are a subset of uses of Dutch *sowieso* and that Dutch *sowieso* has developed into a more general strengthening device like *definitively*.
- Crucially, Dutch *sowieso* is also used as a responsive.

(27) A: Ben je erbij vanavond?  
B: *Sowieso*!  
“A: Will you be there tonight?  
B: *Sowieso*!”

- Maybe, German *sowieso* goes down the same path.

- Of its two supposed synonyms, *ohnehin* is not used as a responsive, *eh* seems to be used in Southern varieties.

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- *Ohnehin* belongs to a higher register, which maybe makes it less probable to be used in the same way.
- Other responsives with a “strengthening” effect: *definitiv* “definitely”/*auf jeden Fall* “in any case”.
- They convey a high degree of certainty, but they don’t convey that the questions seems superfluous to ask like *sowieso*.

# Which words are suited to be responsives

## › Interesting research questions:

- ›› Particularly for *sowieso*: look into diachrony. We expect: standard → parallel construction → responsive
- ›› Generally: Which expressions are suited to develop into responsives and why?



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