

Modality and aspectuality: Online composition in German V1 conditionals

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The presentation deals with the lexical encoding of a specific type of conditional probability in Modern German. In German, the productivity of the common Germanic non-counterfactual verb-first (henceforth: V1) conditional structure (1) is on the decline, with the exception of V1 conditionals being introduced by the modal verb *sollen* 'shall' – more precisely its preterit subjunctive *soll-t* 'should' (2, 3) (e.g. Auer/Lindström 2011, Van den Nest 2010). The obvious question is: Why *soll-t*?

- (1) Willst du viel, spül mit Pril.
'If you want a lot, rinse with Pril' (advertising slogan)
- (2) Sollte nach 14 Tagen keine Lieferung erfolgt sein, hat uns Ihre Bestellung eventuell nicht erreicht.
'If no delivery has been made after 14 days, your order may not have reached us.' (odin-versand.de)
- (3) Sollten Sie Inhaber dieser Domain sein, löschen Sie diese index.html Datei, damit Ihre hochgeladene Seite angezeigt werden kann.
'If you are the owner of this domain, delete this index.html file so that your uploaded page can be displayed.' (pypc.de)

A precondition for the current change of the German V1 conditional pattern has been proposed to lie in the ambiguity of V1 patterns (Auer/Lindström 2011: 254), while the motivation for the lexical selection of the parallel English pattern has been suggested to be the unambiguity of conditionals introduced by *should* (Dancygier 1998: 192). In this talk, the rise of the *sollen* V1 conditional is motivated with respect to the interdependencies of modality, word order, and aspectuality. Since the lexical selection of the modal verb *sollen* 'shall' goes hand in hand with a non-optional selection of its "fake tense" and mood, this co-occurrence will be discussed as a functionally motivated collective decision of German language users

The motivation for the selection of the modal verb *sollen* and its tense and mood is approached from a compositional perspective (cp. Klein 1999). The argument presented presupposes that events can be composed online (cf. Stockall/Husband/Beretta 2010). The analysis is carried out on the basis of a corpus linguistic analysis of German Web 2020 (17.5 billion words; www.sketchengine.eu). As will be demonstrated, finite *soll-t* combines with an infinite full verb with perfective lexical semantics in the majority of records. Remaining records like (3) are tested for aspectual coercion (cf., e.g., Piñango/Zurif/Jackendoff 1999). The data suggests that the V1 *sollen* conditional structure is used when a future perfective interpretation is intended, thus providing an example of interaction between modality and syntax.

References

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