Ansonsten 'otherwise' as a complementizer. Its origin, development and use

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Introduction In this talk, I examine the origin, development and use of the adverbial complementizer *ansonsten* 'otherwise' in *Beamtendeutsch* ('officalese') in Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland. First, I compare subordinate *ansonsten*-clauses with their independent counterparts in which *ansonsten* is merged as a conjunctional adverb in the Spec-CP position. Second, I zoom in on the diachrony of the former pattern and provide novel insights into how adverbial clauses come into being.

Phenomenon In modern German, *ansonsten* is mainly used as a conjunctional adverb. According to the *Duden* grammar, it can be interpreted as: i) contra-conditional/conditional-consecutive, cf. [1], ii) additive, or iii) habitual. Additionally, Konopka & Waßner (2013: 28) point out that *ansonsten* can also be employed as a complementizer and that this use is spread in particular in Swiss German, cf. [2].

[1] Man muss ihm helfen, [$_{CP}$ [$_{Spec\text{-}CP}$ ansonsten] [C^0 wird$_i$] er [$_{VP}$ krank t_i].
one must.3SG him.DAT help.INFV otherwise will.3SG he sick
'One must help him otherwise he will get sick.' (*DUDEN. Die Grammatik* 2009: 585)

[2] Die Einsprache muss begründet sein,
the objection must.3SG well-founded be.INFV
[$_{CP}$ [$_{Spec\text{-}CP}$ Ø] [C^0 ansonsten] sie [$_{VP}$ unzulässig ist]].
otherwise she inadmissible be.3SG
'The objection has to be well-founded otherwise it is inadmissible.
(https://lex.vs.ch/frontend/versions/pdf_file_with_annex/2524; last accessed: 22/1/2025)

If *ansonsten*[1] is used as a C-head, it can only be interpreted as i). Since adverbial *ansonsten*-clauses have not been investigated in the literature yet, I examine their synchronic and diachronic syntax, providing, in addition, an explanation for why they can never be interpreted as ii) or iii).

Synchronic analysis Semantically, I assume *ansonsten*, following Phillips & Kotek (2019, 2022), to target a set of worlds in which some anaphoric proposition does not hold, see [3]. Concretely, by uttering [2] the speaker targets a set of alternative worlds in which the proposition 'the objection IS admissible' does not hold.

[3] $[\![\text{ansonsten}]\!] = \lambda p_{<\sigma,\tau>}\, \lambda q_{<\sigma,\tau>}\, \lambda u_{\sigma}\, .\, \neg p(u) \rightarrow q(u)$ (based on Phillips & Kotek 2019: 36, ex. 18)
Discourse object q holds of u only if we exclude p from consideration.

Syntactically, I argue that subordinate *ansonsten*-clauses are non-integrated adverbial clauses (= NACs) in the typology advocated by Haegeman (2006, 2010, 2012) and Frey (2011, 2012, 2016, 2023a,b). As NACs, adverbial *ansonsten*-clauses are taken to attach outside the clause structure of the matrix clause and to possess their own illocutionary force. Main evidence for this claim comes from: i) impossibility of information-structural movement to the Spec-CP position of the matrix clause, ii) the position of *ansonsten*-clauses on the right edge of the matrix clause, iii) licensing of both weak and strong root phenomena, and iv) non-sensitivity to sentential operators occurring in the matrix clause. Based on their NAC status, *ansonsten*-clauses are therefore expected to disallow variable binding. However, this prediction is not borne out, as [4] shows:[2]

[4] [Jeder Student]$_i$ muss in Deutschland versichert sein,
every student must.3SG in Germany covered be.INFV

[1] Other attested variants are *ansonst* and *sonsten*. I could not find any examples in which *sonst* is used as a C-head. For the sake of consistency, I stick to *ansonsten* in the examples I made up for illustration purposes.
[2] All examples from *Beamtendeutsch* made up for illustrative purposes were judged by over 100 civil servants working in Austrian, Luxembourgian, and Swiss institutions and using *Beamtendeutsch* in their work.

ansonsten [er]$_i$ nicht studieren darf.
otherwise he NEG study.INFV may.3SG
'Every student in Germany has to be covered, otherwise he is not allowed to study.'

As I argue, [4] is not a counterargument of the NAC status of *ansonsten*-clauses because they clearly instantiate a case of modal subordination in the sense of Roberts (1989, 1990), according to which the interpretation of a clause α is taken to involve a modal operator whose force is relativized to some set β of contextually given propositions. Evidence from this claim comes from the observation that we cannot drop the modal operator *muss* 'must' in the matrix clause, if we combine it with the subordinate *ansonsten*-clause. In other words, a modalized assertion is required for subordinate *ansonsten*-clauses to be licensed, cf. [2'].

[2'] *Die Einsprache ist begründet, ansonsten sie unzulässig ist.

Variable binding is therefore inappropriate for testing the syntactic status of *ansonsten*-clauses.

Diachronic analysis To my knowledge, studies on how subordinate *ansonsten*-clauses emerged do not exist. In filling this gap, I propose the following scenario. Step I: (*an*)*sonst*(*en*) is base-generated as an adverb in the middle field (see Frey & Pittner 1998 and Pittner 1998 for more details). First examples go back to texts from the 14th cent. Step II: (*an*)*sonst*(*en*) moves to Spec-CP from an informational-structural reason and is used as a conjunctional adverb from the 16th century onwards. Step III: The conjunctional adverb occurs in a subordinate clause, in a position between a subordinating conjunction (C-head) and a subject (Spec-TP), cf. [5]. In all these cases the proposition expressed in the *ansonsten*-clause provides an explanation for what would be the case if the proposition expressed in the matrix clause does not hold. This pattern is to be observed from the 17th cent. onwards. Step IV: Due to the adjacency of the C-head and *ansonsten*, the C-head is dropped, *ansonsten* takes over its syntactic function by merging into the C^0-position and introducing a subordinate clause with a verb-final position, but it still keeps its semantics by identifying the antecedent proposition in the relevant set of worlds that does not hold. The change from [$_{CP}$ [$_{C}{}^0$ COMP] [$_{AdvP}$ *ansonsten*] [$_{TP}$ [$_{Spec\text{-}TP}$ SUBJECT]]] to [$_{CP}$ [$_{C}{}^0$ *ansonsten*$_i$] [$_{AdvP}$ t_i] [$_{TP}$ [$_{Spec\text{-}TP}$ SUBJECT]]] is attested from the 18th cent. onwards, cf. (6). This process of upward grammaticalization did not happen to *ansonsten* used as an additive or as a habitual adverb because they never target a set of worlds in which some anaphoric proposition does not hold.

[5] [$_{CP}$ [$_{C}{}^0$ daß] ansonsten [$_{Spec\text{-}TP}$ dieselbe] ausgeschlossen werden können]
that otherwise the:same exclude.PTCP PASS.AUX.INFV can.3PL
'that otherwise the same can be excluded' (GerManC, NEWS P3 WMD 1784 mannheim)

[6] [$_{CP}$ [$_{C}{}^0$ ansonsten] sich der Vasall von ihm lossagen durfte]
otherwise REFL the vassal from him.DAT break:with.INFV may.3SG.PST
'otherwise the vassal was allowed to dissociate himself from him'
(DWDS, Joseph Schauberg, 1863, *Vergleichendes Handbuch der Symbolik der Freimaurererei*)

Similar language change patterns have been observed for other adverbial complementizers in the history of German, cf. e.g. Eberhardt (2017) on causal *zumal*-clauses, whereby the focus particle *zumal* 'the more so as' took over the syntactic function of a complementizer in the 17th cent., but kept its meaning. Why then *zumal*-clauses made it to the standard German whereas *ansonsten*-clauses did not remains a mystery.

Conclusion As it turns out, thorough examination of *ansonsten*-clauses not only provides new insights into how adjunct clauses behave with respect to their host clause, but also contributes to a deeper understanding of how adverbial clauses emerge and develop.

Selected references I. Eberhardt (2017): From a focus particle to a conjunction: Diachronic and synchronic analysis of German *zumal*. *Language* 93(2): e66–e96. M. Konopka & U.H. Waßner (2013): Standarddeutsch messen? Frequenz und Varianz negativ-konditionaler Konnektoren. *Korpus – gramatika – axiologie* 8: 12–35. J. Phillips & H. Kotek (2019): Updates and discourse anaphora: A dynamic approach to *otherwise*. In: M. Baird & J. Pesetsky (eds.), *Proceedings of NELS 49, Cornell University, October 5–October 7, 2018*, vol. 3, 29–38. Amherst, MA: GLSA Publications.