

Indeterminate Quotational Constructions and Their Readings

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Modalizing quotation, also referred to as scare quotes (SQs), commonly serve to signal non-literal meanings in written language. SQs represent an instance of indeterminate language as they not only allow for a single but at least two possible readings. Non-literal meanings can give rise to different readings, such as distancing, irony and sarcasm, while the boundary between non-literal and literal meanings can be blurred. This investigation combines theoretical perspectives with corpus-based evidence from German news texts to address the question which linguistic means are used to highlight intended meanings in indeterminate quotational constructions. The analysis reveals that lexical means like ‘sogenannt’ and ‘angeblich’ frequently co-occur with graphemic and discourse-based means in German news data. In a rating study, the perceived literal and non-literal continuum was empirically tested for. Sentences with (i) quotation marks, (ii) lexical modification, and (iii) a combination of quotes and lexical modification were all rated as more non-literal than their unmarked counterparts. The findings suggest that differences in readings are influenced by both lexical markers and graphemic marking.

Keywords: quotation, indeterminacy, readings, corpus data, rating study

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of Scare Quotes (SQs) is the use of quotation marks to highlight an ironic or non-literal meaning (Meibauer 2007). When writers use SQs, they distance themselves from the word enclosed in quotation marks. Consider the sentence in (1), which allows for two different readings of the quoted expression, here the word *theory*, which thus represents the indeterminate element in the sentence.

- (1) a. Tim vertritt die Theorie, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
‘Tim advocates the theory that the earth is flat.’
b. Tim vertritt die „Theorie“, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
‘Tim advocates the “theory” that the earth is flat.’

On the one hand, (1a) invokes a literal reading where the word *theory* is understood in the sense of a scientific assumption or hypothesis that the earth is flat. On the other hand, the SQs used in (1b) express an ironic or distanced attitude towards the quoted expression: SQs serve to question the literal meaning of a term or to signal the speaker’s distance regarding the use of the term in the appropriate context (see Härtl 2018). According to Wiślicki (2023), scare-quoted items like the word *theory* in (1b) would not simply be a negation of someone else’s words but a “downgrading” (420). In addition, Predelli (2003) defines scare quotation as applying “a standard technical term in a nonstandard way” (2).

While the distinction between literal and non-literal readings¹ can be made explicit through the use of quotation marks in the sentences presented above, quotes can also serve to

¹ I will use the terminology “readings” throughout the paper to highlight that readings are reader or listener-specific. I regard them to be influenced by various factors, including the familiarity of the word, familiarity with quotation and quotation marks in general, and inter-personal features such as perspective shifting. Importantly,

highlight that a word is used metalinguistically (see e.g. Saka 2003; Cappelen & Lepore 2007; Recanati 2001). Consider the quotational construction² in (2), in which the word *screen fatigue* is used metalinguistically to illustrate a naming convention. The metalinguistic status of the quoted nominal is reinforced through the lexical item *sogenannt*, which functions as a naming predicate (see Härtl 2016).

- (2) Viele Menschen leiden unter einer sogenannten Bildschirmmüdigkeit.
'Many people suffer from a so-called screen fatigue.'

In contrast to a literal reading in (3a), the scare-quotational reading in (3b) indicates the speaker's subjective stance.

- (3) a. The committee refers to this line of argumentation as a "theory".
b. The "theory" was criticised by researchers from various disciplines.

Although quotes in (3b) serve as a typographical marker to highlight the intended meaning, experimental evidence has proven that quotes are optional in written corpus data (Raue 2026, see also De Brabanter 2023). Additionally, quotes might be replaced for by other graphemic means³ (see also §2.2), which is also reflected in the controversy when it comes to define 'quotation' based on the presence of graphemic means (see e.g., Cappelen et al. 2023). Sentences as in (1) and (3) are in the following defined as an instance of indeterminacy as they allow for different readings.⁴ While research has addressed the function and theoretical aspects of SQs, the means involved in indeterminate structures have been neglected. For this reason, the following question arises: which means are used in written language to highlight the intended meaning in indeterminate quotational constructions?

To address this research question, I will combine theoretical perspectives with corpus evidence from German news. The aim is to illustrate the spectrum of readings that occur in corpus data and provide first insights into how different means – quotes, parentheses, lexical markers and discourse-based factors – interact within a given syntactical structure. Nominals, i.e., nouns or noun phrases, in quotational constructions that allow for different readings, i.e., literal or non-literal readings, will be analysed as indeterminate elements. Based on criteria used to classify and distinguish indeterminacy (see Ellsäßer & Raue 2026), I will specifically address the question which readings are possible in quotational constructions if quotes are present and absent. In this context, the means used to highlight the intended meaning – be it a literal or non-literal reading – will be analysed first from a theoretical angle followed by a qualitative analysis of written data from a German news corpus. A rating study with German

readings are understood as emerging from an interaction between individual factors and the reconstruction of interpersonal stance: readers integrate their own linguistic knowledge – familiarity with a linguistic item, familiarity with non-literalness and their graphemic markers as well as expectation concerning text types – with assumptions about the speaker's or writer's intentions, social positioning, common ground, and shared background knowledge.

² I use the terminology "quotational construction" throughout this paper to include also sentences containing a quotation which are not graphemically highlighted by quotation marks.

³ Graphemic markers in quotation are stereotypically quotation marks but can also include italics, bold letters and capitalization to highlight a linguistic item.

⁴ Please note that even sentences containing solely quotation marks as in (3) can be indeterminate due to the several purposes of quotes, such as highlighting a specific word without necessarily indicating non-literalness.

native speakers is then employed to get insights whether people rate the literalness and non-literalness differently when manipulating the presence of quotes and lexical markers.

The paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 locates quotational constructions within a framework for indeterminacy. Special focus is on the spectrum of possible readings in quotational constructions as well as on mechanisms used in written language to highlight the intended meaning. Chapter 3 first discusses the linguistic properties of the lexical markers *sogenannt* ('so-called') and *angeblich* ('allegedly') that frequently occur in quotational constructions. It proceeds in providing evidence from German based on word-sketch differences, which allows for comparing two lemmas by presenting similarities and differences in use, empirically test whether the disambiguation mechanisms identified in §2.3 occur in news data and how these means interact to highlight a specific reading. Chapter 4 presents the rating study; a summary and discussion are presented in Chapter 5.

2. Quotational constructions as instances of indeterminacy

In the following we will address how quotes create an indeterminate structure and why they can be classified as instances of indeterminacy. In communicative situations, context frequently resolves indeterminate language. Yet, especially in written texts, figuring out the intended meaning is not always straightforward. As argued beforehand, when placing quotes around a specific word, the respective word is the indeterminate element in this sentence. One core feature of indeterminacy is the existence of several readings for a given form (Ellsäßer & Raue 2026), here manifested as ranging from literal to non-literal readings. More specifically, coming back to the sample in (1), the quoted nominal *theory* is considered as a form that can have a literal and non-literal reading.

In line with the argumentation presented in Ellsäßer & Raue (2026), indeterminacy is understood as an overarching category that includes, among others, ambiguity and vagueness. For an analysis and classification of indeterminacy phenomena, four criteria have been identified: (i) degree of ambiguity, (ii) number of readings, (iii) hierarchical order of readings, and (iv) contextual specificity. These criteria can be applied to the phenomenon of quotation as follows:

C-1: Degree of ambiguity – The presence of quotes may lead to distinct ambiguous readings within one syntactic structure, where the intended reading is not clear without additional context.

C-2: Number of readings – Quotational constructions allow for different readings depending on the context and the speaker-related aspects, including e.g., irony, scepticism, or non-standard readings.

C-3: Hierarchical order of readings – The conventionalized meanings of word embedded in quotes may become less prominent compared to non-conventionalized interpretations that quotes highlight.

C-4: Contextual specificity – Markers signalling different readings can be strategically or not strategically used by writers/speakers, herewith impacting the degree of contextual specificity.

While these criteria oftentimes co-exist and interact with one another, I will specifically address the criterion “degree of ambiguity”.⁵ This allows for an analysis of literal and non-literal readings, as well as of mixed instances, i.e., sentences where both readings are possible.

2.1 *The spectrum of readings in quotational sentences*

To investigate readings in quotational construction, the focus is on the lexical item *sogenannt*, which can adopt two different semantic interpretations. First, consider the sentence in (4) taken from the DeTenTen20 corpus, which involves reference to the name of a lexical concept (cf. Härtl 2018; Härtl & Seeliger 2019).

- (4) Ein Nachteil der Haarseife ist, dass sich bei sehr hartem Wasser die sogenannte „Kalkseife“ bildet.
‘One disadvantage of hair soap is that it can form so-called “lime soap” in very hard water.’

Here, the word *Kalkseife* is introduced as a specialized term to inform the reader about the name of this concept. The sentence therefore allows for a literal reading. In addition, *sogenannt* allows for a modalizing use to signal a non-standard use of a specific expression (5).

- (5) Der sogenannte „Präsident“ hat heute wieder eine beeindruckende Ansprache gehalten, die alle Erwartungen an überzeugende Rhetorik bei weitem übertroffen hat.
‘The so-called “president” gave another impressive speech today, far exceeding all expectations for convincing rhetoric.’

In the non-literal reading in (5), the writer distances themselves from the wording *president* and devalues the status of being called an expert. As illustrated above, both (4-5) contain quotation marks around the nominal. The type of quotation that give rise to a distancing interpretation as in (5) has been commonly considered as SQs.

SQs have initially been discussed by Klockow (1980) as modalizing quotation and the definition holds that a speaker implies a deviation from the literal or conventional meaning (see also Recanati 2003) in using quotes as graphemic markers or air quotes in spoken communication. In traditional views, quotes are considered as a defining feature, which simplifies their identification in written texts. According to Potts (2007), SQs allow the speaker or writer to refer to language while retaining distance from its literal meaning. Predelli (2003) characterizes SQ as signaling a reservation of the speaker with regards to the appropriateness of the quoted word, which oftentimes involve a “kind of negative evaluation” (Wiślicki 2023). In addition, McArthur (1992) claims that SQs can warn the reader that there is “something unusual or dubious (in the opinion of the writer) about the quoted word or phrase” (839).

Nádraská (2022) argues that SQs “can imply a range of attitudes, including criticism, sarcasm, irony, distance and disapproval, and invite the reader to evaluate from their own point of view” (103). In line with this argumentation, SQs are in the following understood as

⁵ As an anonymous reviewer notes, the criterion “number of readings” could have also been addressed in this research as it also relates to literal and non-literal readings. This also strengthens the argumentation that the different criteria sometimes overlap. For an analysis of the exact number of readings, another experimental design would be desirable to analyse what actually allows for a quantification of how many readings can be distinguished.

comprising any form of distancing, including also instances of irony⁶ and sarcasm (see also Raue 2023). Consider, for example, the sentences in (3) which illustrate subtle differences in the interpretation of SQs.

- (6) a. She was so “generous” with her advice that nobody asked for it.
b. Oh, great, another “brilliant” idea from the committee.

In (6a), the quoted expression indicates irony. Non-literal expressions in ironic utterances have been argued to involve both a non-literal, descriptive content and an attitudinal content that is expressive (see e.g., Sperber & Wilson 1981; Dews & Winner 1999). While the non-literal descriptive content in (6a) can indicate that the advice was unwanted, intrusive, and therefore not genuinely helpful, the attitudinal content means that the speaker/writer disapproves of the woman’s behaviour. The reading of the sentence in (6b) involves a sarcastic nuance, which is made explicit by the quotes and signals an expression of negative attitude towards the committee’s idea. This aligns with Colston’s assertion that sarcasm is a “negative form of verbal irony” (2017: 236) used to enhance negativity.

Gutzmann & Stei (2011) have analysed SQ as conversational implicatures, proposing that their primary function is to signal to readers that a non-standard interpretation of the quoted expression is necessary. Within this framework, they argue that the presence of SQs increases the markedness of the expression, which prompts readers to block the stereotypical interpretation, or general implicature associated with the unmarked term and to instead infer an additional meaning beyond the literal sense of the expression. Gutzmann & Stei (2011) highlight that this implicature-triggering role of SQs is consistent with the idea that, in conversation, speakers often rely on context to convey meanings that are not explicitly stated.

In a pilot investigation based on *sogenannt* (Raue 2025), corpus data revealed that even if enough context is provided in newspaper text, a third category is needed as some sentences seemingly allow for a co-existence of both literal and non-literal readings. This dual use is illustrated in sample sentences taken from the deTenTen20 corpus, where both a distancing and non-distancing reading are possible.

- (7) a. Unter den sogenannten „Traditionalisten“ ist niemand nicht einverstanden.
(DeTenTen20; xobor.de)
‘Among the so-called “traditionalists,” no one disagrees.’
b. So erhofft sich die Kultusministerkonferenz durch die Einführung einer systematischen Evaluation auf der Grundlage von sogenannten „Bildungsstandards“ eine starke Verbesserung unserer Schulen: [...]
‘The Conference of Ministers of Education therefore hopes that the introduction of systematic evaluation based on so-called “educational standards” will greatly improve our schools: [...].’
(DeTenTen20; uni-konstanz.de)
c. Dort bachaufwärts, vorbei an anspruchsvollen Kletterfelsen bis zur sogenannten „Savanne“.
‘Upstream, past challenging climbing rocks to the so-called “savannah”.’

⁶ Please note the different concepts behind scare-quotation and irony: SQs mark a deviation from the stereotypical denotation from a lexical item, without necessarily reversing its meaning (Predelli 2003; Nádraská 2022). Irony, by contrast, is commonly defined as negating the stereotypical meaning (see e.g., Giora 1995). While SQs may facilitate an ironic interpretation, they encompass irony as one possible nuance.

(DeTenTen20; erzgebirgsfritz.de)

The sentences in (7) are underspecified concerning the intended meaning and oscillate between literal and non-literal readings. This provides first evidence in favour of the argumentation that indeterminate quotational constructions exist on a spectrum that allows for more than a binary literal and non-literal classification. Traditional analyses in linguistics following Grice (1975) and Searle (1979) have initially discussed the boundary between literal and non-literal linguistic content as a sharp distinction. Literal meanings have been considered as context-independent and compositional, while non-literal meanings are commonly understood as being context-independent and inferred (cf. Allott & Textor 2022). The latter typically involves an extension beyond the access of the lexical item and requires the addressee to infer the intended meaning. The traditional distinction between literal and non-literal meaning has, however, been challenged. Giora (2002) proposed a gradient view for figurative language⁷ like metaphors, arguing that salient meanings are processed first. In addition, the binary distinction between literal and non-literal meaning has been addressed by researchers who question the divide as a strict categorical boundary (cf. Jackendoff 2002). Continuum models have emerged, proposing for example that metonymies are perceived “more literal” than metaphors (Michl 2019). Linguistic phenomena that have been addressed within this debate include most prominently irony (Dews & Winner 1999; Yus 2000; Bromberek-Dyzman 2012), humor (Raskin & Attardo 1994), sarcasm (Kovaz, Kreuz & Riordan 2013; Uchiyama et al. 2012), idioms (van der Linden 1992; Gibbs 1986), metaphors (Uchiyama et al. 2012; Carston 2012), and indirect speech acts (Vanderveken 1997; Crespo et al. 2007). A considerable amount of research provides empirical evidence on the processing of these phenomena (see Hauptman et al. 2023 for an overview). Despite this, the phenomenon of quotation has mostly been addressed from a philosophical perspective (cf. Davidson 1979), neglecting the advantages of using quotation as a test case for perspectives on the literal-non-literal debate. More specifically, the complex mechanisms involved in quotational constructions that facilitate the process of identifying the intended meaning have been neglected. In the following, I will present how quotational sentences permit for multiple readings, and support the argumentation that quotation should also be treated as a linguistic phenomenon that does not allow for a straightforward distinction between a literal and non-literal meaning. The next section discusses linguistic and non-linguistic means that can be used to disambiguate or highlight the intended meaning.

2.2 Means of highlighting the intended meaning

The intended meaning in quotational constructions can be underspecified, which leaves the reader or listener to entangle the intended meaning.⁸ This is not a rare occurrence in everyday communication as listeners or readers are constantly opposed to indeterminate language, including e.g., different types of ambiguity like lexical and syntactical ambiguity (cf. Sennet 2023). In scare-quotational sentences, some utterances may involve several markers to indicate non-literal readings, such as graphemic markers, lexical modification, prosodic cues, as well as contextual embedding. These means will exemplarily be illustrated based on corpus data (see §3.1).

⁷ Non-literal language is here understood as an instance of language where the literal meaning is not the intended meaning.

⁸ I am not using the terminology “disambiguation” here as the sentences might not be “ambiguous” in a strict sense but rather vague.

First, one way of indicating a non-literal meaning, which oftentimes also involves some key features of irony⁹, is the use of quotation marks. In written language, the distinction between a literal and non-literal reading can be made explicit through the use of quotes around the indeterminate element. However, it is crucial to note that writing practices are liberated for quotes in general, e.g., for types of pure and mixed quotation, meaning that instances of SQ might not consistently be highlighted with quotes. If other punctuation devices are used, these might include, for example, bold letters, underlining or capital letters (see e.g., Brendel et al. 2011).

Second, a non-literal reading can be made explicit when combining SQs with lexical markers such as *sogenannt* ('so-called') and *angeblich* ('allegedly'), which will be addressed in detail in Chapter 3. SQs have been analysed as non-literal uses of language, in which they have been argued to share some basic characteristics with irony, such as denying a defining characteristic of the quoted word (cf. Raue 2026), see for example (8a).

- (8) a. Nee warnurn Witz....ach nein die sogenannten „Experten“ nehmen sowas ja gleich wiederernst..... (DeTenTen20; allmystery.de)
'No, that was just a joke.... oh no, the so-called "experts" take that kind of thing seriously again.....'
- b. Wie man sieht, überblicken ja nicht einmal die Reformer, angeblich „Experten“, oder höchst interessierte Leute wie Michael Jansen das Thema. (DeTenTen20; nachrichtenbrett.de)
'As can be seen, even the reformers, supposedly "experts," or highly interested people like Michael Jansen, do not even have a comprehensive understanding of the topic.'

The first example (8a) suggests a sense of scepticism or doubt about the credentials and authority of those referred to as experts. It implies that these individuals might be labeled as experts but may not have the legitimate expertise one would expect. This usage is often indicative of a critical stance towards the so-called experts, highlighting the uncertainty in their predictions or assessments. In (8b), *angebliche "Experten"* ('supposedly "experts"') carries a similar insinuation, where it is used to express disbelief or critique regarding the authenticity. The wording *angebliche* ('alleged') intensifies this scepticism, depicting these individuals as unqualified or purveyors of misinformation. Both modifiers seem to have a preference for combining with words that lack standardized criteria, are subjective, and require specialized knowledge, like *Experte* ('expert'), *Fachleute* ('specialists'), *Freund* ('friend'). In some cases, several different lexical modifiers are employed in one sentence, which highlights the intended meaning.

- (9) Populisten erfinden und betonen einen Gegensatz zwischen einer vermeintlichen „Elite“ und dem sogenannten „Volk“. (DeTenTen23; br.de)
'Populists invented and emphasize a contrast between a supposed "elite" and the so-called "people".'

In addition, modalizing quotes have been observed to occur in combination with derogatory or slurring language, which clearly frames the speaker's attitude.

⁹ For this reason, Issel-Dombrecht (2018) uses the terminology "distance ironique".

- (10) Nein, es ist nicht dieses verdammte sogenannte „Volumen“, was in jeder Zeile des Internets nur allzugern als Vorwand hergenommen wird [...] (DeTenTen23; einrichtungsbeispiele.de)
‘No, it’s not this damned so-called “volume” that is all too often used as an excuse in every line on the internet [...].’

Sometimes, the non-literal reading is explicitly accompanied by additional information provided in brackets, which has been discussed as a “disambiguation strategy” (Sennet 2023), which is also present in corpus data for *sogenannt* (‘so-called’).

- (11) a. Das sogenannte „Teledienststedatenschutzgesetz“ (gruseliges Wort) schreibt vor, dass KundInnen ausdrücklich zustimmen müssen, wenn ihre Daten zu Werbe-, Markt- oder Meinungsforschungszwecken genutzt werden sollen. (DeTenTen23; lizzynet.de)
‘The so-called “Telecommunications Data Protection Act” (creepy word) stipulates that customers must expressly agree if their data is to be used for advertising, market research, or opinion polling purposes.’
b. Weitere Artikel: Im Schwerpunkt mockiert sich Christoph Bartmann über das im großen Stil geplante, naiv-protzige Hans-Christian-Andersen-Jahr, das den Märchenerzähler zu Dänemarks Botschafter und zahllose Prominente zu Andersens sogenannten „Ehrenbotschaftern“ ernennt (ein Wort, das in Dänemark mittlerweile schon für Gelächter sorgt). (DeTenTen23; perlentaucher.de)
‘Additional articles: In the focus, Christoph Bartmann mocks the grandiose and naïve Hans Christian Andersen Year, which appoints the fairy tale narrator as Denmark’s ambassador and countless celebrities as Andersen’s so-called “honorary ambassadors” (a word that has already caused laughter in Denmark).’

Additional means that occur in oral communication are prosodic cues like pitch, volume, and pauses that can be used to highlight a non-literal reading (see e.g., Schlechtweg & Härtl 2023 for empirical evidence). Further devices accompanying spoken language to highlight non-literal readings include gestures, facial expressions as well as air quotes, i.e., a speaker indicating quotes with the fingers in the air.

This first overview of the markers involved in highlighting the intended meaning has descriptively illustrated which means might be involved, supporting the argumentation in exemplarily presenting authentic written-language corpus data. The next section will explore which further devices are used in newspaper data.

3. Word-sketch differences in corpus data

The aim of the analysis of word-sketch difference is to investigate which means are present in quotational sentences employing *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) and *angeblich* (‘allegedly’).¹⁰ The

¹⁰ Other lexical markers include *supposedly* (see Celle 2009 for an analysis), *apparently*, *presumably*, *putatively* etc. They are also referred to as “attitudinal disjuncts” (Celle 2009: 274).

distancing use of *sogenannt*, which frequently occurs when combined with a nominal with a low lexical frequency, has been argued to be semantically related to the meaning of *angeblich* (see Härtl 2018). The following research questions will be addressed: How frequently do graphemic disambiguation mechanisms (quotation marks and brackets) occur in corpus data? What additional disambiguation patterns (parentheses) can be observed? Do these patterns differ across lexical markers (*sogenannt* and *angeblich*)?

For an investigation of the strategies and means used by the author to create and/or resolve indeterminacy, the corpus-based analysis focusses on an analysis of the occurrence and interplay of the observed means:

- (i) Quotes
- (ii) Brackets
- (iii) Evaluative adjectives
- (iv) Additional means

It further addresses the question which differences arise between the lexical modifier *sogenannt* and the “attitudinal disjunct” (Celle 2009: 247) *angeblich* (‘allegedly’). A comparison between these two lexical items can reveal patterns used to highlight the intended meaning.

Empirical evidence has revealed that SQs commonly occur in newspaper headlines and articles (see Nádraská 2022; Meibauer 2015), revealing that the genre news can serve as a testing ground for this investigation. The present study is based on a newspaper corpus as it offers the opportunity for investigating quotational sentences and the use of disambiguating strategies due to the frequent use of quotational constructions. Newspaper journalists are expected to be familiar with the use of quotation marks and further graphemic means: newspapers represent a genre in which graphemic means are conventionalised and systematically used.

3.1 Preliminaries: linguistic properties of lexical markers

The term *angeblich* (‘allegedly’) originates from the German verb *geben*, meaning *to give*, which has roots in various Germanic languages: first recorded in the first half of the 18th century, *angeblich* literally translates to *allegedly* or *supposedly*, conveying a meaning of something that is claimed but not necessarily proven (Pfeifer et al. 2015).¹¹ Its English equivalents *allegedly* and *reportedly* have been discussed as reportative adverbs, which play a significant role in attributing information to external sources (e.g. Celle 2009; Rozumko 2019; Wiemer & Marín-Arrese 2022). This attribution implies a level of detachment or non-commitment to the truth of the statement being conveyed (Diewald & Smirnova 2010; Wiemer & Socka 2017). Reportative adverbs would often imply a degree of uncertainty or doubt; they allow speakers to distance themselves from the truth of the proposition, thereby exempting them from responsibility for it. In addition, Rozumko (2019) highlights the interpersonal functions, i.e., a pragmatic function of the speaker’s authority or responsibility regarding the credibility of the presented information. Notably, *allegedly* can also perform a countering function, challenging the interlocutor’s knowledge claims and undermining the reliability of their assertions (see e.g. Wiemer & Socka 2017). According to Celle (2009), news reports

¹¹ Celle (2009) notes a difference between these two adverbs as follows: Whereas *reportedly* would distance the speaker from the source of information, i.e., there is no speaker commitment involved, *allegedly* creates a greater distance by detaching the speaker from the entire content of the proposition, as they cannot ascertain its truth. Please note that, following from this argumentation, it is generally more difficult to deny a sentence that includes *allegedly* compared to one that uses *reportedly*.

frequently make use of reportative adverbs as it allows the writer to take “the precaution of presenting information as second-hand to disclaim any responsibility. S/he thereby acts as a mere locutor, leaving it to the reader to form opinions and judgments of his/her own” (282).

In contrast, *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) is not restricted to a modalizing reading but has been argued to have a literal reading as its default reading (see Härtl 2018). This default reading is impacted by the lexical frequency of the quoted nominal, where high-frequent name uses commonly indicate a non-literal meaning (see also Raue 2026). For a detailed analysis of German *sogenannt* (‘so-called’), I refer the reader to argumentation presented in Härtl (2018) and Schlechtweg & Härtl (2020).

3.2 Methodology

The focus of this analysis is on syntactic structures containing the lexical modifiers *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) and *angeblich* (‘allegedly’). In order to test for the frequency of graphemic markers as a tool to highlight the intended meaning, corpus data from SketchEngine (Kilgariff et al. 2014) using German Web 2020 (DeTenTen20) was extracted. First, a corpus-based comparison between *sogenannt* and *angeblich* in the deTenTen20 corpus was conducted: nouns most frequently modified by *sogenannt* are *Cookie* (‘cookie’) (2,145 hits), *Welt* (‘world’) (2,389 hits), *Staat* (‘state’) (1,951 hits), *Experte* (‘expert’) (1,558 hits), and *Medium* (‘medium’) (1,251 hits). The most frequent nouns modified by *angeblich* are *Million* (‘million’) (2,684 hits), *Geld* (‘money’) (1,585 hits), and *Verstoß* (‘violation/breach’) (1,450 hits).

In order to examine possible differences between *angeblich* (‘allegedly’) and *sogenannt* (‘so-called’), nominals that occurred in collocation with both modifiers were selected for the analysis. Therefore, the nominals *Experte* (‘expert’) and *Elite* (‘elite’) were chosen, which is also beneficial as both lexical items have a high lexical frequency. This allows for a better comparison as the lexical frequency cannot confound the results concerning the classification of the readings. In a next step, the data was filtered for the genre news¹². The number of valid instances is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Valid hits in the deTenTen23 corpus

CQL	Valid hits
<i>sogenannt</i> + <i>Experte</i>	60
<i>angeblich</i> + <i>Experte</i>	17
<i>sogenannt</i> + <i>Elite</i>	70
<i>angebliche</i> + <i>Elite</i>	14

The qualitative analysis is discussed in the next section and follows the order as presented in Table 1 and proceeds along the analytical dimensions stated out in §3.1.

3.3 Results

A recurring pattern in the corpus data is the use of *sogenannter Experte* (‘so-called expert’) in explicitly evaluative contexts through the use of adjectives or subjective evaluations. While the wording *Experte* (‘expert’) normally signals authority and professional expertise, its

¹² The other genres are blog, discussion, fiction, legal, reference/encyclopedia and unspecified.

modification through *sogenannt* ('so-called') frequently reverses this positive connotation and transforms it into an evaluative marker as in *Sogenannte Experten haben ein kurzes Erinnerungsvermögen* ('So-called experts have a short attention span') (focus.de). It often combines with subjective comments and judgements from the writer that explicitly highlights the attitude concerning a specific person: (...) *finde ich gelinde gesagt eine Unverschämtheit dieses sogenannten Experten* ('(...) I believe, to put it mildly, this to be an impertinence of this so-called expert') (focus.de). Syntactically, the phrase also appears as an apposition¹³ to add an evaluative component to the preceding NP: *Richtig sei auch, dass andere Leute, sogenannte Experten, in der Hauptverhandlung keinen guten Eindruck gemacht hätten* ('It is also true that other people, so-called experts, did not make a good impression during the main trial') (bz- Duisburg.de).

Concerning the target group of reference, the phrase oftentimes appears in broader attacks against an unspecified group: *Überall sogenannte Experten* ('So-called experts everywhere') (insideparadeplatz.ch). The referent is frequently not an identifiable individual but a group of people, as in *ihr sogenannten Experten in eurer Berichterstattung* ('you so-called experts in your reporting') (focus.de) and *die sogenannten Experten der Medien* ('the so-called media experts') (freiewelt.net). In rare instances, *sogenannter Experte* ('so-called expert') also occurs with direct reference to prominent figures, citing also their name.

One example for a contrast between literal and non-literal readings made explicit by the presence of the lexical modifier arises in this enumeration, where the writers distinguished between two types of experts: *forderten Fans, Experten und sogenannte Experten* ('fans, experts and so-called experts requested') (spox.com). The *sogenannt* use is an echo of the first mention of the name, revealing a non-literal, ironic use that can be classified as echoic mention (Härtl 2018; see also Sperber & Wilson 1981).

Interestingly, six instances of the corpus data were graphemically marked with quotation marks around both lexical modifier and nominal. Five of these sentences refer back to a situation where an attribution to a primary source, i.e., another text, of the quoted words is possible: *Flick hatte Lauterbach im Februar als „sogenannten Experten“ bezeichnet* ('Flick had referred to Lauterbach as a "so-called expert" in February') (spox.com). The corpus data cannot be clearly validated as a mixed quote as the words have been uttered verbally: *einmal wurde ich von einer Grünen-Abgeordneten ohne abgeschlossene Berufsausbildung als „sogenannter Experte“ beschimpft* ('I was once insulted as a "so-called expert" by a Green Party member of parliament who had no completed vocational training') (freiewelt.net). The verb *beschimpfen* ('insult') illustrates how the speaker contrasts between his own qualification and the person who originally uttered the words, more specifically as someone lacking a completed professional education. This reinforced support in favour of a non-literal, distancing interpretation.

In contrast to sentences involving *sogenannter Experte*, the corpus data for *angebliche/r Experte* ('alleged expert') did not contain any quotes. However, exclamations as morpho-syntactic markers can be observed: *Da schwappt einer über, nämlich der angebliche Experte!* (nrhz.de). The analysis further reveals a consistent evaluative context characterized by scepticism towards the competence and motivations of those labelled as expert: *Erstaunlich ist*

¹³ An apposition is here defined as a grammatical construction where the second appositive NP defines or specifies the first NP.

immer, wie schlecht doch angebliche Experten informiert sind ('It's always astonishing how poorly informed supposed experts are') (freiewelt.net). The phrase generally exhibits a greater specificity concerning the referents, meaning that specific individuals are explicitly mentioned and criticised. The targeted individuals are associated with belonging to a specific group or job, e.g., virologists, politicians, and academics. The inclusion of providing the qualification aims at emphasizing the perceived inadequacy of these credentials, reinforcing the impression that even formal qualifications cannot guarantee genuine expertise. These ideologically-centred narratives across newspapers range from assertions to accusations of conspiratorial intentions attributed to influential figures. The narrative framing underscores a distrust not simply of lacking expertise, but of expertise itself, particularly when it supports viewpoints contrary to the writer's. The capitalization of terms like *AHNUNGSLOSIGKEIT* ('cluelessness') in conjunction with *angeblicher Experte* ('alleged expert') further intensifies the rhetorical attack, signalling a vehement rejection of the individual's claims: *Wow—schon mit dem ersten Satz sieht man die AHNUNGSLOSIGKEIT des angeblichen Experten / Kenners* ('Wow—even from the first sentence, you can see the CLUELESSNESS of the supposed expert/connoisseur') (wrestling-infos.de). This is further reinforced through the interjection *wow*, which can be regarded as a pragmatic marker (Norrick 2009) to signal a shift in the speaker's cognitive state and highlighting a strong emotive emphasis and disbelief.

Furthermore, the interplay between *angeblich* ('alleged') and *sog.* ('so-called') indicates a fluid boundary between the two terms. The shift from *unsere sog. Rechtschreibexperten finden* ('our so-called spelling experts believe') (freiewelt.net) to *angebliche Experten* suggests a process of escalating disqualification, where initial scepticism solidifies into rejection.

Moving on to constructions involving *sogenannte Elite*, the wording correlates strongly with narratives within the context of politics. The phrase functions as a marker for identifying groups or individuals within a specific group. The observed data indicates that *sogenannte Elite* is applied to a diverse range of individuals, encompassing economic and political leaders as in *Zwischen den sogenannten Eliten der Wirtschaft und der Politik* ('Between the so-called elites of the economy and politics') (nrhz.de) as well as professionals like doctors, lawyers, educators, and journalists. Frequently, negative-evaluative framings like *keine Glanzleistung der sogenannten Elite* ('no outstanding performance of the so-called elite') (freiewelt.net) and *die wahre Dummheit dieser sogenannten Elite* ('the true stupidity of this so-called elite') (freiewelt.net) occur in news data. Further means evident in the data involve parentheses, i.e., a graphemically delimited insertion into a syntactically closed unit (see e.g., Pittner & Frey 1997; Prokopczuk 2011), employing either comma (12a) or brackets (12b).

- (12) a. Die größten Verbrechen an der Menschheit wurden unter Führung von Akademikern, den vermeintlich gebildeten Menschen, der sogenannten Elite, begangen.
'The greatest crimes against humanity were committed under the leadership of academics, the supposedly educated people, the so-called elite.' (netzpolitik.org)
- b. Die Menschen werden gezeißelt von einigen wenigen (der sogenannten Elite) Geheimbündlern, Politikern, Verbrecherorganisationen.

‘People are scourged by a few (the so-called elite) secret societies, politicians, criminal organizations.’ (freiewelt.net)

While these parentheses are, in contrast to the other occurrences of the search query not a grammatically integral part of the syntactical structure, they clearly serve the function of revealing the writer’s stance. The communicative function of parentheticals embedded into an NP as in (12a) have been argued to have a “metacommunicative character” (Pittner 1995: 4). Concerning the occurrence of graphemic markers, only one occurrence makes use of quotation marks, here functioning as a direct quotation.

For sentences involving *angebliche Eliten* (‘alleged elites’), the observed evaluative embedding of the phrase seems to be more pronounced when compared to *sogenannte Eliten* (‘so-called elites’). Support for this claim comes from the use of modifying adjectives with a strongly negative connotation, such as *satanisch* (‘satanic’) and *böse* (‘evil’). It is used to portray a group of people, oftentimes those perceived as holding power (e.g., *angeblich mächtige Elite* (‘alleged powerful elite’)), as harmful. One striking sample states the observation that the elite would rather be self-proclaimed, lacking a legitimation based on performance: *unsere angebliche Elite eher selbsternannt als aufgrund eines Leistungsausweises legitim wäre* (‘our supposed elite is more self-appointed than legitimate based on a track record of achievement’) (insideparadeplatz.ch). This again emphasizes the perceived lack of demonstrable achievement as justification for their position. Morphosyntactic markers observed in the data include the interjection *tja* (‘well’), and exclamations as in *angeblich gewählten Elite(?)politiker ordnen sich den Amis nicht erst seit gestern bedingungslos unter!* (‘Allegedly elected elite(?) politicians have been unconditionally subservient to the Americans for more than just yesterday!’) (freiewelt.net). Further markers include rhetorical questions as in *Für wen klingt das nicht nach der alten antisemitischen Erzählung von einer angeblichen Elite, die sich gegen die Menschheit verschwört?* (‘For whom doesn’t this sound like the old anti-Semitic narrative of an alleged elite conspiring against humanity?’) (nd-aktuell.de).

Apart from ellipsis (...) as a typographic marker preceding *angebliche Elite* (‘alleged elite’), no graphemic means or parentheses occur in the data which might also be due to the small size of hits in the corpus.

3.4 Discussion

Overall, the corpus analysis proves that a variety of markers are found in German news corpora: graphemic means including quotes, brackets, capital letters, evaluative adjectives, and morphosyntactic markers as well as contextual cues like the overarching topic of the newspaper article.

Before the background of treating quotational constructions as instances of indeterminacy, the observations confirm that an identification of just one reading for a specific word or phrase is not always possible. In my analysis, we have started with a distinction between two readings, a literal and non-literal reading, which resulted in the observation that a clear distinction between these two categories is not always possible. Concerning the indeterminacy criteria stated out in §2.1, the number of readings is clearly influenced by the

presence or absence of typographic and morpho-syntactic markers in *sogenannt* ('so-called') and *angeblich* ('alleged') constructions. Concerning the indeterminacy criterion "number of readings", the data suggests that the exact number of readings for a syntactic structure depends on the definition of what constitutes a "reading" and on how fine-grained distinctions are drawn between irony, sarcasm, evaluative distancing, and literalness.

The corpus analysis proves that the high frequent nominals *expert* and *elite* almost exclusively can be considered as a distancing interpretation as the primary reading. While the lexical marker *sogenannt* ('so-called') has been argued to also occur in non-evaluative contexts, its evaluative function is especially pronounced in combination with graphemic marking and negatively connotated adjectives in the data. The primary function of the lexical item *angeblich* ('alleged') is, in contrast, inherently distancing. It increases scepticism and often implicit criticism, especially towards specific individuals. Since these doubts are already semantically included in *angeblich* ('alleged'), graphemic emphasis is rare and seems redundant, as reflected in the corpus data. As a consequence, *sogenannt* ('so-called') generally allows for more variation in readings as compared to *angeblich* ('alleged'), which suggests that the degree of ambiguity varies between more distinct readings and less distinct readings.

The news data reflects that non-literal readings include typographic markers like capitalization, quotation marks, and brackets but also morpho-syntactic markers such as exclamation and interjections. Repetitions of the target nominals as well as ironic echoes can also be observed. In addition, evaluative adjectives reinforce a distancing reading and clarify whether the utterance is ironic, sarcastic or simply negative. While adding for example additional information in brackets can resolve indeterminacy, more specifically hint the reader toward a specific reading, these markers can disambiguate readings only to a certain degree. If different readings are possible, it is expected that this indeterminacy in the genre news is used strategically by writers.

Although the data herewith presents a wide range of markers to highlight the intended meaning, a clear effect of the genre news becomes evident as the text lacks other typographic markers like emoticons, hashtags or elongations to highlight ironic readings (see Burgers & van Mulken 2017). Most notably, we do not observe any direct markers of ironic or sarcastic readings, which typically occur in reported speech in phrases like *she said ironically* or *they noted with a sarcastic undertone*. My data suggest that rather than a fixed set of discrete markers, a non-exhaustive list of markers could potentially be developed that is influenced by text genre and that might be further extended in future by additional typographic markers, as revealed in recent trends by using hashtags or emoticons.

4. Rating study

4.1 Research question and hypotheses

Building upon the observed means involved in the continuum between literal and non-literal, the sentence rating aims at investigating whether lexical modification and the presence of quotes impact the interpretation of the sentence. In order to investigate the spectrum of different readings, scalar ratings will be used to answer the following research questions: how do lexical modification and the occurrence of quotes impact the reading of *sogenannt*-constructions? The

aim is to empirically test which markers are perceived by native speakers of German as impacting a literal, a non-literal or neutral reading. The experimental items consist of a sentence which is presented in four different versions.

- | | | | |
|------|----|---|------------------------------------|
| (13) | a. | Tim vertritt die Theorie, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
'Tim supports the theory that the earth is flat.' | without marking |
| | b. | Tim vertritt die „Theorie“, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
'Tim supports the “theory” that the earth is flat.' | with quotes |
| | c. | Tim vertritt die sogenannte Theorie, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
'Tim supports the so-called theory that the earth is flat.' | with lexical modification |
| | d. | Tim vertritt die sogenannte „Theorie“, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
'Tim supports the so-called “theory” that the earth is flat.' | with lexical modification & quotes |

A five-point Likert-scale will be used, for which participants can choose between the following options for the interpretation: clearly literal, rather literal, neutral, rather non-literal, and clearly non-literal. Sentence (13a) is expected to be rated as 'clearly literal' as it does not contain any non-literal cues (H₁). The use of the lexical modification *sogenannt* (13c & d) is expected to lead to a clearer disambiguation between a literal and non-literal reading than the mere use of quotation marks (13b). Therefore, (13b) is expected to receive a rating of 'rather non-literal' (H₂) while (13c) should be rated between 'rather non-literal' with a tendency for the rating 'clearly non-literal' (H₃). Instances with double markings, i.e., *sogenannt* in combination with quotes (13d), are used for a 'clearly non-literal' interpretation (H₄).

4.2 Methodology

To test for these hypotheses, a rating study was created in SoSci Survey (Leiner 2024). The experimental items consist of a total of $N=80$ sentences, of which 20 were presented to each participant group. A total of 10 filler items of comparable sentence length were included. In this between-subjects design participants were randomly assigned to one of the four questionnaires. The material consisted of the sentences presented above in (13) and can be found in Appendix A. Crucially, the target nominal was controlled for its lexical frequency, with a mean lexical frequency of 11.4 (SD=1.43) (see Appendix B).

Participants consented to the collection and storage of their data, and participated in this online experiment in a non-fixed setting. They were instructed to read the sentences at their own reading pace and told that the experiment aimed at investigating sentence comprehension (see Appendix C).¹⁴ The instructions further provided a brief explanation that the interpretation of each sentence should be rated by selecting one of the given answers. Prior to the start of the

¹⁴ Participants were not provided with a definition of what 'literalness' and 'non-literalness' means as this would have impacted the selection of their answer. Rather, the design was chosen to encourage participants to select their answers intuitively.

experiment, demographic data was selected and two test sentences were provided for training purposes.

A total of 124 native speakers of German participated in the study out of which 41 were male, 81 female and 3 diverse. The mean age was 29.4 years ($sd = 12.7$). Concerning their educational background, 72 people were enrolled at university (with and without a university degree), 30 did not have a university degree, 13 reported to have a completed non-academic training, and four did not match to any of these criteria.

4.3 Analysis & results

The statistical analyses were conducted in RStudio (version 2015.12.1) using the packages *ordinal* (Christensen 2025), *emmeans* (Lenth & Piaskowski 2025) and *ggplot* (Wickham 2016). Because the dependent variable was based on Likert-type ordinal ratings, we used a cumulative link mixed model (CLMM) with random intercepts for participants to account for repeated measurements (Bates et al. 2015). The descriptive statistics with the median and IQR for the 620 ratings are reported in Table 2 and visualized in Figure 1.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the ratings (N = 620 per condition, 95% CI)

Variable	median	IQR	mean	SD	SE	CI low	CI high
L	2	2	2.07	1.204	0.05	1.98	2.17
LM	2	1	2.48	1.172	0.05	2.38	2.57
LM_Q	2	2	2.57	1.268	0.05	2.47	2.66
Q	2	1	2.41	1.166	0.05	2.32	2.51

Participants rated the literal condition (L) as most literal, whereas all non-literal manipulations (LM, LM_Q, Q) received higher ratings towards non-literal interpretations.

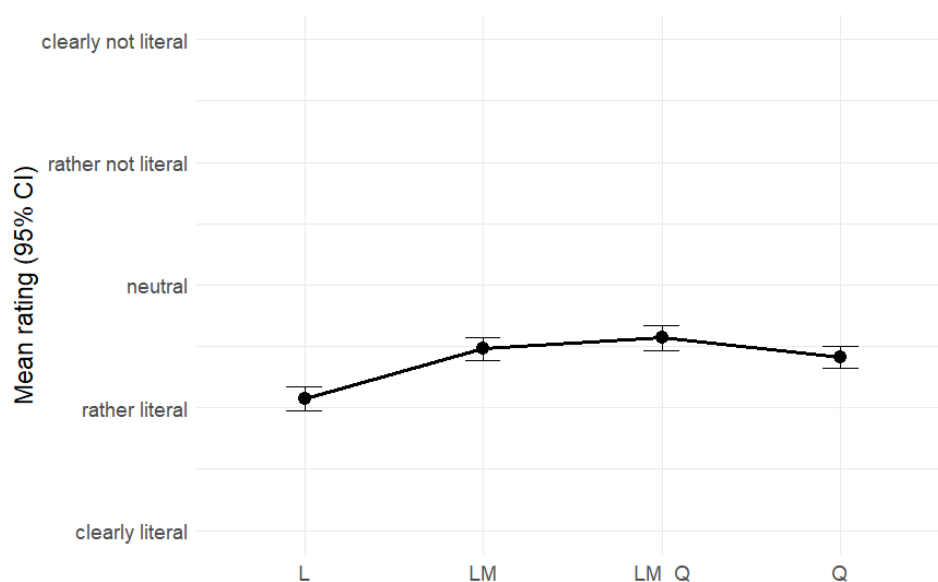


Figure 1: Mean rating with 95% CI

A cumulative link mixed model (CLMM) was fitted with random intercepts for participants to account for repeated measurements. The estimated variance of the participant intercepts was 1.37 (SD = 1.17), indicating substantial between-subject variability. The CLMM revealed a significant effect of condition on ratings, with all non-literal conditions (LM, LM_Q, Q) being rated significantly higher than the literal baseline ($p < .001$).

Table 3: Fixed effects from the CLMM

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
TypeLM	0.8677	0.1094	7.934	2.12e-15 ***
TypeLM_Q	1.0124	0.1105	9.163	< 2e-16 ***
TypeQ	0.7443	0.1094	6.801	1.04e-11 ***

Note: Threshold coefficients for the five-point scale ranged from -0.577 to 3.953

To follow up on the overall effect of condition, we conducted pairwise comparisons between levels of the factor *Type* using estimated marginal means (EMMs) from the CLMM. The contrasts were tested on the log-odds scale and p-values¹⁵ were adjusted for multiple testing using the Holm method.

All three non-literal conditions (LM, LM_Q, Q) differed significantly from the literal baseline ($p < .001$). The contrast between LM_Q and Q was also significant ($p = .031$), indicating that combined marking increased non-literal ratings compared to quotation marks alone. In contrast, LM and LM_Q did not significantly differ ($p = .33$), nor did LM and Q ($p = .33$).

4.4 Discussion

The statistical analysis provides evidence for a clear influence of linguistic modification type on perceived literalness: all types of modification – graphemic marking and lexical modification – shift the probability distribution towards higher, less literal categories.

Concerning the hypotheses, the results largely support our predictions. Hypothesis H1, positing that the literal condition (L) would be rated as ‘clearly literal’, was supported by the significantly lower non-literalness ratings assigned to this condition compared to all others. Hypothesis H2 predicted that the use of quotation marks alone would lead to a ‘rather non-literal’ rating. This was partially supported: the quoted condition (Q) received significantly higher ratings than the literal baseline (L), although its ratings did not reach the level of the lexical modification conditions. Hypothesis H3 proposed that the lexical modification *sogenannt* (LM) would elicit ratings between ‘rather non-literal’ and ‘clearly non-literal’. Indeed, LM was rated significantly higher than L, indicating a shift towards non-literalness. However, LM did not differ significantly from Q, suggesting that *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) alone was not sufficient to produce a clear ‘clearly non-literal’ interpretation, but was more in line with ‘rather non-literal’, as predicted. Finally, H4 predicted that combining *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) with quotation marks (LM_Q) would result in a ‘clearly non-literal’ interpretation. While LM_Q received higher ratings than Q, consistent with this prediction, it did not differ

¹⁵ The significant levels used throughout this paper are: 0 ‘****’ 0.001 ‘***’ 0.01 ‘**’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’.

significantly from LM. Thus, the expected strong shift towards a fully non-literal (‘clearly non-literal’) interpretation was not statistically confirmed.

This suggests that while the LM_Q condition increases perceived non-literality in the mean ratings, it does not reach the level predicted for a ‘clearly non-literal’ interpretation. The lack of significant differences between LM_Q and LM suggests that adding quotes to lexical modifications does not further alter the perceived literalness compared to lexical modification alone. In addition, the lack of a significant difference between Q and LM suggests that both markers yield similar levels of perceived non-literality. As expected, the combination of lexical modification and quotes received the highest mean rating with a tendency towards a non-literal reading. This provides evidence for the assumption that a double marking of quotes and lexical modification in combination with quoted nominals of a high lexical frequency is perceived more non-literal as compared to the other conditions.

5. Concluding remarks

The paper has argued that quotational constructions can involve indeterminate elements, more specifically where a given form can give rise to two or more readings. One factor that contributes to indeterminacy within a syntactic structure is the presence and absence of quotation marks. This investigation has demonstrated that several means exist to highlight the intended meaning. Concerning the criteria for indeterminacy as outlined in Chapter 2, it has been shown that quotational constructions allow for different readings, including e.g., literalness, irony, scepticism, or non-standard readings. These readings are considered to exist on a continuum between literal and non-literal; however, the exact number of ‘readings’ depends on what exactly constitutes a reading. Notably, some might argue that irony and sarcasm can be modelled as one reading while the present analysis has adopted an approach based on recent empirical evidence that considers a more fine-grained analysis with a spectrum between literalness and non-literality.

A qualitative analysis of German news data for *sogenannt*- and *angeblich*-constructions revealed that graphemic cues, morpho-syntactic markers, and evaluative adjectives are used to signal distancing attitudes. While we can assume that the lexical items are strategically used to highlight a non-literal meaning as the intended meaning within the genre news, the data has also revealed that a variety of markers exist in the corpus. These markers frequently include typographic and morphosyntactic markers. Direct markers like quotation marks and explicit reference to e.g., ironic statements are lacking. Instead, additional typographic means like capitalization and brackets have been observed to interact with lexical markers in the data. This suggests that a distancing reading is not primarily triggered by quotation marks. The findings further suggest that instead of a closed inventory of markers, a broader perspective is needed for written natural language. It is expected that an analysis of different text genres like blogs or social media posts would reveal further markers of non-literal readings, such as hashtags, visual material using air quotes, or further typographic markers like “/s” to indicate sarcastic readings in *sogenannt* or *angeblich*-constructions.

The analysis of the corpus data was supplemented by experimental findings from a pilot study on the interpretation of sentences in which quotation and lexical modification were used to investigate whether the continuum between literal and non-literal meaning is also reflected in the ratings by native German speakers. The results suggest that both lexical modification and quotation marks shift interpretation towards non-literal readings, with their combination

producing the strongest effect. However, the results suggest only trends in the hierarchy of markers and further experimental evidence is needed to investigate whether the different readings emerge from a flexible interaction of linguistic and typographic means and how additional means identified in the corpus data might impact the perceived readings.

Finally, returning to the notion of SQs, the corpus analysis and rating study presented here suggest that while quotation marks contribute to non-literal interpretations, they neither constitute a necessary nor a sufficient device for such readings. Instead, scare-quotational readings may be triggered by lexical markers as well as contextual and evaluative cues. From this perspective, SQs can be understood as serving a pragmatic function used to modulate readers’ inferences towards a non-literal reading.

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Appendix A

Table 4: Experimental items

Condition	Label	Sentence
L	L1	Tim vertritt die Theorie, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
Q	Q1	Tim vertritt die „Theorie“, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
LM	LM1	Tim vertritt die sogenannte Theorie, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q1	Tim vertritt die sogenannte „Theorie“, dass die Erde eine Scheibe ist.
L	L2	David ist überzeugt, dass die Kreativität in der Bildung gefördert werden sollte.
Q	Q2	David ist überzeugt, dass die „Kreativität“ in der Bildung gefördert werden sollte.
LM	LM2	David ist überzeugt, dass die sogenannte Kreativität in der Bildung gefördert werden sollte.
LM_Q	LM_ Q2	David ist überzeugt, dass die sogenannte „Kreativität“ in der Bildung gefördert werden sollte.
L	L3	Anna glaubt, dass Kommunikation der Schlüssel zum Erfolg ist.
Q	Q3	Anna glaubt, dass „Kommunikation“ der Schlüssel zum Erfolg ist.
LM	LM3	Anna glaubt, dass die sogenannte Kommunikation der Schlüssel zum Erfolg ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q3	Anna glaubt, dass die sogenannte „Kommunikation“ der Schlüssel zum Erfolg ist.
L	L4	Max unterstützt die Idee, dass Diversität am Arbeitsplatz wichtig ist.

Q	Q4	Max unterstützt die Idee, dass „Diversität“ am Arbeitsplatz wichtig ist.
LM	LM4	Max unterstützt die Idee, dass die sogenannte Diversität am Arbeitsplatz wichtig ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q4	Max unterstützt die Idee, dass die sogenannte „Diversität“ am Arbeitsplatz wichtig ist.
L	L5	Peter vertritt die Ansicht, dass Nachhaltigkeit in der Modebranche notwendig ist.
Q	Q5	Peter vertritt die Ansicht, dass „Nachhaltigkeit“ in der Modebranche notwendig ist.
LM	LM5	Peter vertritt die Ansicht, dass die sogenannte Nachhaltigkeit in der Modebranche notwendig ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q5	Peter vertritt die Ansicht, dass die sogenannte „Nachhaltigkeit“ in der Modebranche notwendig ist.
L	L6	Sarah ist überzeugt, dass Steuerhinterziehung kein Verbrechen ist.
Q	Q6	Sarah ist überzeugt, dass Steuerhinterziehung kein Verbrechen ist.
LM	LM6	Sarah ist überzeugt, dass sogenannte Steuerhinterziehung kein Verbrechen ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q6	Sarah ist überzeugt, dass sogenannte „Steuerhinterziehung“ kein Verbrechen ist.
L	L7	Tom fordert, dass die Bildung reformiert werden muss.
Q	Q7	Tom fordert, dass die „Bildung“ reformiert werden muss.
LM	LM6	Tom fordert, dass die sogenannte Bildung reformiert werden muss.
LM_Q	LM_ Q7	Tom fordert, dass die sogenannte „Bildung“ reformiert werden muss.
L	L8	Julia argumentiert, dass Teamarbeit die Effizienz steigert.
Q	Q8	Julia argumentiert, dass „Teamarbeit“ die Effizienz steigert.
LM	LM8	Julia argumentiert, dass sogenannte Teamarbeit die Effizienz steigert.
LM_Q	LM_ Q8	Julia argumentiert, dass sogenannte „Teamarbeit“ die Effizienz steigert.
L	L9	Sophie betont, dass sportliche Aktivität die Lebensqualität erhöht.
Q	Q9	Sophie betont, dass sportliche Aktivität die "Lebensqualität" erhöht.
LM	LM9	Sophie betont, dass sportliche Aktivität die sogenannte Lebensqualität erhöht.
LM_Q	LM_ Q9	Sophie betont, dass sportliche Aktivität die sogenannte „Lebensqualität“ erhöht.
L	L10	Martin glaubt, dass Kreativität in der Wissenschaft wichtig ist.
Q	Q10	Martin glaubt, dass „Kreativität“ in der Wissenschaft wichtig ist.
LM	LM1 0	Martin glaubt, dass sogenannte Kreativität in der Wissenschaft wichtig ist.
LM_Q	LM_ Q10	Martin glaubt, dass sogenannte „Kreativität“ in der Wissenschaft wichtig ist.
L	L11	Lukas denkt, dass Meditation die Stressbewältigung verbessert.
Q	Q11	Lukas denkt, dass „Meditation“ die Stressbewältigung verbessert.
LM	LM1 1	Lukas denkt, dass sogenannte Meditation die Stressbewältigung verbessert.
LM_Q	LM_ Q11	Lukas denkt, dass sogenannte „Meditation“ die Stressbewältigung verbessert.
L	L12	Felix ist überzeugt, dass Reisen den Horizont erweitert.
Q	Q12	Felix ist überzeugt, dass Reisen den „Horizont“ erweitert.
LM	LM1 2	Felix ist überzeugt, dass Reisen den sogenannten Horizont erweitert.

LM_Q	LM_Q12	Felix ist überzeugt, dass Reisen den sogenannten „Horizont“ erweitert.
L	L13	Daniel glaubt, dass persönliche Ziele die Motivation steigern.
Q	Q13	Daniel glaubt, dass persönliche Ziele die „Motivation“ steigern.
LM	LM13	Daniel glaubt, dass persönliche Ziele die sogenannte Motivation steigern.
LM_Q	LM_Q13	Daniel glaubt, dass persönliche Ziele die sogenannte „Motivation“ steigern.
L	L14	Alexander betont, dass Respekt das Fundament jeder Beziehung ist.
Q	Q14	Alexander betont, dass Respekt das „Fundament“ jeder Beziehung ist.
LM	LM14	Alexander betont, dass Respekt das sogenannte Fundament jeder Beziehung ist.
LM_Q	LM_Q14	Alexander betont, dass Respekt das sogenannte „Fundament“ jeder Beziehung ist.
L	L15	Lena weiß, dass positive Einstellungen den „Erfolg“ fördern.
Q	Q15	Lena weiß, dass positive Einstellungen den Erfolg fördern.
LM	LM15	Lena weiß, dass positive Einstellungen den sogenannten Erfolg fördern.
LM_Q	LM_Q15	Lena weiß, dass positive Einstellungen den sogenannten „Erfolg“ fördern.
L	L16	Tim ist der Überzeugung, dass digitale Medien das Lernen verbessern.
Q	Q16	Tim ist der Überzeugung, dass digitale Medien das „Lernen“ verbessern.
LM	LM16	Tim ist der Überzeugung, dass digitale Medien das sogenannte Lernen verbessern.
LM_Q	LM_Q16	Tim ist der Überzeugung, dass digitale Medien das sogenannte „Lernen“ verbessern.
L	L17	Julia behauptet, dass Achtsamkeitstechniken Stress reduzieren.
Q	Q17	Julia behauptet, dass Achtsamkeitstechniken „Stress“ reduzieren.
LM	LM17	Julia behauptet, dass Achtsamkeitstechniken sogenannten Stress reduzieren.
LM_Q	LM_Q17	Julia behauptet, dass Achtsamkeitstechniken sogenannten „Stress“ reduzieren.
L	L18	Jonas argumentiert, dass regelmäßige Pausen die Produktivität steigern.
Q	Q18	Jonas argumentiert, dass regelmäßige Pausen die „Produktivität“ steigern.
LM	LM18	Jonas argumentiert, dass regelmäßige Pausen die sogenannte Produktivität steigern.
LM_Q	LM_Q18	Jonas argumentiert, dass regelmäßige Pausen die sogenannte „Produktivität“ steigern.
L	L19	Carla ist der Meinung, dass die Digitalisierung die Arbeitswelt verändert.
Q	Q19	Carla ist der Meinung, dass die „Digitalisierung“ die Arbeitswelt verändert.
LM	LM19	Carla ist der Meinung, dass die sogenannte Digitalisierung die Arbeitswelt verändert.
LM_Q	LM_Q19	Carla ist der Meinung, dass die sogenannte „Digitalisierung“ die Arbeitswelt verändert.
L	L20	Laura ist überzeugt, dass der Umweltschutz unnötig ist.
Q	Q20	Laura ist überzeugt, dass der „Umweltschutz“ unnötig ist.
LM	LM20	Laura ist überzeugt, dass der sogenannte Umweltschutz unnötig ist.

LM_Q LM_Q20 Laura ist überzeugt, dass der sogenannte „Umweltschutz“ unnötig ist.

Appendix B

Table 5: Target nominals with frequency classes

Target nominal	Frequency class
Erfolg ('success')	8
Kommunikation ('communication')	10
Nachhaltigkeit ('sustainability')	10
Bildung ('education')	10
Digitalisierung ('digitalization')	10
Theorie ('theory')	11
Kreativität ('creativity')	11
Motivation ('motivation')	11
Lernen ('learning')	11
Stress ('stress')	11
Diversität ('diversity')	12
Lebensqualität ('quality of life')	12
Horizont ('horizon')	12
Fundament ('fundament')	12
Umweltschutz ('protection of the environment')	12
Steuerhinterziehung ('tax evasion')	13
Produktivität ('productivity')	13
Teamarbeit ('team work')	14
Meditation ('meditation')	14

Note: Calculated based on the Wortschatz Uni Leipzig (2024).

Appendix C

Instructions:

Willkommen zu unserem Experiment! In unserem linguistischen Experiment untersuchen wir das Satzverstehen. Die Ergebnisse sind anonym und werden ausschließlich für wissenschaftliche Zwecke verwendet. Die Studie dauert ca. 5-10 Minuten.

'Welcome to our experiment! In our linguistic experiment, we are investigating sentence comprehension. The results are anonymous and will be used exclusively for scientific purposes. The study takes approximately 5-10 minutes.'

Gleich werden Sie einen Satz auf dem Bildschirm sehen. Bitte lesen Sie die Sätze zügig, aber in Ihrem eigenen, normalen Lesetempo, sodass Sie den Inhalt verstehen. Zu jedem der Sätze beantworten Sie bitte mithilfe der Auswahlmöglichkeiten, wie Sie diesen interpretieren. Eine einmal gegebene Antwort können Sie nicht mehr revidieren. Machen Sie

einfach mit dem nächsten Satz weiter. Bevor das Experiment startet, gibt es einen Probedurchgang mit zwei Beispielsätzen.

‘You will see a sentence on the screen right away. Read the sentences quickly, but at your own normal reading pace, so you can understand the content. For each of the sentences, please select one answer on how you interpret the sentence. You cannot revise an answer once given. Simply continue with the next sentence. Before the experiment starts, there is a test run with two example sentences.’

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