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## ***Überhaupt und sowieso and überhaupt en sowieso*<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

We compare the use of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* in Dutch and German. We use the world-wide web as the main resource and pursue a zigzag strategy, trying to find usages going back and forth between dictionaries, intuitions and real data obtained through web search. To our surprise, the results more or less confirm the decision of Dutch dictionaries to consider *überhaupt* and *sowieso* synonymous. In German, we find no synonymy, but only a great overlap of usage conditions in declarative sentences.

### **1. Motivation**

*Überhaupt* and *sowieso* are very common German words and have both been imported as loanwords into Dutch, where they are now very frequent (cf. table 1), *überhaupt* in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *sowieso* during the 1950s (cf. WNT, vDale-WB). Loanwords have their own lives, and when hearing Dutch speakers use *überhaupt* and *sowieso*, the author felt that ‘something was wrong’, i.e. different from his own use of these words, and the use he felt accustomed to, the use of at least some other Germans. Some Dutch dictionaries<sup>2</sup> even claimed a synonymy of *überhaupt* and *sowieso*, which seemed(!) quite unbelievable. Therefore, we started investigating the use of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* on the world-wide web. This appeared to be a good idea because both words are used quite often in semi- and informal texts, with which the web abounds. As discussed in section 3, a smaller or more formal corpus would probably not been of much help.

	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
<b>überhaupt (D)</b>	30900000	101000000
<b>sowieso (D)</b>	9810000	26900000
<b>überhaupt (NL)</b>	646000	3000000
<b>sowieso (NL)</b>	3030000	6010000

*Table 1: ‘Basic’ Frequencies*

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- 1 I thank Prof. Dr. Bernhard Schröder for helpful and controversial discussion throughout the preparation of this article. The participants of the ESSLLI workshop and two anonymous referees helped me to clarify the discussion, esp. extending the background discussion on *überhaupt*. Prof. Dr. Hans Eickmans pointed me to the role of Germanness in Dutch press texts. Derya Gür and Julia Wrede rightly doubted some of my initial intuitions. Dr. Michael Schmidtke-Nikella helped to find some final glitches.
- 2 See e.g. the renowned van Dale synonym dictionaries, 1988 and later editions.

## 2. Method

*Zig-Zag Strategy.* As we tried to find differences in the use between German and Dutch, our search zigzagged: Starting from the description of uses in German and our own intuition, we tried to establish the usage conditions of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* in German. Consequently, we tried to find these uses back in Dutch. When we found uses in Dutch of which we had not known of before, we tried to check whether we found them back in German.

*Search for prototypical constructions.* As the WWW has not been syntactically and semantically parsed, we had to take recourse to searching for prototypical phrases that should occur if the construction under investigation were common. As the results were quite clear in most cases, we take this as evidence that this method was successful, but of course it might still be the case that we fell into the trap of lexical peculiarities.<sup>3</sup>

*Quality of the found data.* Searches on the Web present a problem with respect to the quality of the retrieved data; Lemnitzer/Zinsmeister (2007: § 3) suggest that rare constructions may be found in discussions of ‘bad examples’.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the surrounding context for *rare* occasions of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* was checked by hand. If a query delivered hundreds or thousands of occurrences, these were not checked by hand, as it seems implausible to assume such an amount of linguistic discussion on the web, and it was only superficially verified that the results contained the intended data.<sup>5</sup> We assume that the resulting numbers – if not exactly accurate – still give a good picture of the orders of magnitude of certain usage conditions, and permits a classification in roughly three categories: (i) frequent, (ii) infrequent but generally possible, (iii) (nearly) unused. While these categories suffice for our argumentation, we give the numbers and queries so that the reader can check for herself whether she is convinced by our interpretation of the data.

*Search engines.* We used two search engines, *Google* and *Yahoo!* (for typographical reasons, we drop the final exclamation mark in *Yahoo!*’s name for the rest of this paper). Their numbers correlated well, differing only sometimes for very rare constructions; *Yahoo!*’s numbers were generally much higher than *Google!*’s, which may have to do with the fact that for Dutch, *Yahoo!* kept the occurrences of *überhaupt* and *uberhaupt* apart. Both search engines seem to try to compensate the use of the German ASCII version,

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- 3 Some of the data that might have hinted at lexical peculiarities turned out to be sensibly interpretable; see the discussion of *mogelijk* and *nodig/noodzakelijk* in section 3.2 below.
  - 4 In fact, the publication of the original abstract was the best hit in Google for „mit überhaupt niemand“ (‘with absolutely nobody’) at 2008-10-19, 17:45; which points to the fact that our intuitions about the use of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* were only partially confirmed.
  - 5 For the problem (also discussed by Lemnitzer/Zinsmeister, 2007: § 3) of checking whether the authors are native speakers of German and Dutch, we took care not to use obviously bad examples, but only in two cases it seemed evident that the text was written by non-native speakers (this is indicated in the discussion below). We still think that the results give a good picture of the general tendency and patterns of use.

*ueberhaupt*. Keeping apart  $n$  orthographical variants may have a very strong effect on the numbers, up to multiplying by  $n$ .

*No 'real' statistics.* Applying tests of significance to our results appears to be impossible, as we lack a good estimate of the number of indexed documents etc. Moreover, search engines report the number of matching documents, not of matching sentences. However, these raw numbers are well interpretable most of the time for our purpose. We agree with an anonymous referee that having a controlled corpus with semi- or informal speech of considerable size would still increase confidence in the numbers.

*Numbers in brackets and Zeroes.* Sometimes, we give numbers in brackets; these give the original size of the list of results; the number outside the brackets gives the number corrected by hand. If only a number for Dutch or only a number for German are given, this generally indicates that the query gave an empty result for the German or Dutch counterpart. This is then discussed in the text.

### 3. **Überhaupt**

**Overview.** We start by considering the history and then dictionary descriptions of *überhaupt* (esp. Partikel-WB by Helbig), contrasting them with our intuitions. We simplify Helbig's picture somewhat, emphasising *überhaupt*'s function of generalisation ('pointing to a more general or more fundamental point of view' is given as the overall meaning by Partikel-WB, 223, but not elaborated upon) or 'domain widening', also regarding discourse structure. Anderssen (2006) gives a (semantic) formal account of domain-widening with respect to *überhaupt*; it may be interesting to extend it to cover more data. For the purpose at hand, the classification of syntactic and discourse functions defined by Helbig is more useful.<sup>6</sup>

**Note on footnotes.** *Überhaupt*, notably in German, is a very interesting word and definitely merits a much more detailed discussion than it can be afforded in this article. The main goal of this article, however, is a comparison between *überhaupt* and *sowieso* in Dutch and German using web search. To attain this goal, we have to set aside some very interesting questions. As noted by the referees and contrary to our intention, when we avoid some controversial points out of caution, this may suggest that we do not see the complexity of the issue of German *überhaupt*;<sup>7</sup> therefore, the questions that the

6 Anderssen (2006) also compares *any* and *at all* to *überhaupt*. Extending the discussion given by Anderssen is not the aim of this paper and would lead us too far astray, especially as the restrictions on the use of *überhaupt* in natural use are not overly clear. Yet Anderssen's restrictions are too strong, as he seems to exclude examples like those in fn. 16 and possibly also *überhaupt* embedded in prepositional phrases. Polarity may be an issue with indefinite noun phrases in which *überhaupt* clearly semantically acts on the noun (but see fn. 14 and 16). It is probably best to defer discussion of such details to a comprehensive study of the usage of *überhaupt*.

7 Luckily, *überhaupt* in Dutch and *sowieso* in either language may be less controversial, but we may just underestimate their *intricacies*.

referees or the author considered most urgent are taken up in footnotes. All main points relevant to the comparison are, of course, discussed in the main text.

### 3.1. *Überhaupt* in German

**History.** *Überhaupt* in German has developed from the Middle High German prepositional phrase *über houbet* ('over head') meaning *generally, overall* (cf. Lexer, BMZ etc.). Interestingly (cf. MNWB, *overhovel*), a similar collocation existed in Middle Dutch, but has fallen in disuse.

**Syntactic position.** In dictionaries, *überhaupt* is generally presented as an adverb or particle (cf. DUDEN-WB, Paul-WB) which can occur almost anywhere in a sentence, even between forefield and middle field (cf. Konn-HB); another way to view this latter use is to speak of NP post-modification.<sup>8</sup>

*Syntactic Liberty with regard to negation.* All dictionaries mention the intensification of negation (see also *Semantics* below); however, examples are only provided for cases in which the negation intensified is a sentence negation, or in which the negation is followed *überhaupt* in the middle field, so that *überhaupt* could be classified as a sentence adverb.<sup>9</sup> This is at odds with our own intuition that any negation might be intensified and that *überhaupt* may thus occur in positions indicating this semantic relation syntactically, e.g. 'before' *niemand* (*nobody*) where it is probably a subject noun phrase between the preposition and the negative noun phrase in prepositional phrases.

When conducting searches (cf. table 2), we find many occurrences of this usage pattern for German;<sup>10</sup> the fact that we find *überhaupt* mainly with the adjectival *keine/-r/-s* (adjectival *no*), which colloquially replaces *niemand* (*nobody*) may hint to a stylistic peculiarity.<sup>11</sup> This is all the more plausible as German has another negation intensifier *gar*. While *gar* is ambiguous between the usages as negation intensifier and modal particle in sentence-adverbial position, there is no ambiguity if *gar* is syntactically dominated by a prepositional phrase, so that it competes with *überhaupt* in this position. We also find that *überhaupt* can modify other nominal elements such as superlatives (see table 3) and indefinite pronouns, extending their domain. This use is not as frequent as negation intensification, and at least superlatives can be modified by local and temporal adverbs as well. Our results can be interpreted to mean that *überhaupt*'s function as an intensifier has been generalised and grammaticalised so that sentences like (3) are possible. We do

8 Already Götze et al. (1956) call this use 'obsolete'; we therefore concentrate on the other uses (but see fn. 16).

9 This is also true of Anderssen's (2006) examples.

10 Among the data retrieved by our searches, there are quite some occurrences of non-phrases, where the 'preposition' is a stranded particle. However, many occurrences of *überhaupt* within prepositional phrases remain, in fact too many to give a good estimate of the proportions.

11 Alternatively, one may assume that *niemand* is phonetically and semantically more marked than *keiner*, so that further intensification is often inadequate.

not know whether this syntactic liberty in the use of *überhaupt* as a general intensifier is recent or restricted to informal discourse.<sup>12</sup>

<b>Nobody has...</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
D: „überhaupt niemand hat“	383	111
NL: „überhaupt niemand heeft“	0	0
<b>with/‘to’ nobody...</b>		
D: „an überhaupt niemand“	9	18
D: „mit überhaupt niemand(em)“	404	335
NL: „aan/met überhaupt niemand“	0	0
<b>with/‘to’ nothing...</b>		
D: „an überhaupt nichts“	2980	6920
D: „mit überhaupt nichts“	708	919
NL: „aan/met überhaupt niets“	1	1
<b>with/‘to’ no</b>		
D: „mit überhaupt keinen/r/m“	1808	1990
NL: „met überhaupt geen“	4[5]	4
NL: „aan überhaupt geen“	0	0
<b>with/‘to’ anybody</b>		
D: „mit überhaupt jemand“	7[9]	5
D: „mit überhaupt jemandem“	19	36
D: „an überhaupt (irgend)jemand(en)“	8	8
NL: „met überhaupt iemand“	6	8
NL: „aan überhaupt iemand“	2	1
<b>outside a PP</b>		
D: „überhaupt mit jemandem“	2130	1290
NL: „überhaupt met iemand“	16[180]	36[23?]

Table 2: Embedded *überhaupt*

<sup>12</sup> Searches in the written IDS and DWDS corpora yielded too few examples for a conclusion with regard to the syntactic liberty of *überhaupt*; it seems that we need a corpus of the stylistic level and the site of the web to find clear cases of *überhaupt* where it does not act as a sentence adverb. We find that the prepositional phrases are often prepositional objects, not adjuncts; i.e. most (of the relatively few) occurrences are with verbs like *erinnern* (*remember*) or *glauben* (*believe*).

<b>The überhaupt best/greatest</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
D: „Der überhaupt beste“	41	66[51]
D: „Der überhaupt größte“	22	61[21?]
NL: „De überhaupt beste“	0	0
NL: „De überhaupt grootste“	0	0
<b>The sowieso best</b>		
D: „der sowieso beste“ etc.	77	56
NL: „de/het sowieso beste“	3	2

Table 3: Superlatives

In the following examples, coindexation by superscripts links *überhaupt* to the constituents it could modify syntactically; the indexes are also used in the glosses to indicate which reading corresponds to which syntactic relation. It is uncontroversial that these readings exist (and thus semantic ambiguity arises) and that (1) is syntactically ambiguous; taking into account the embedded phrases presented in table 2, we assume that there is also syntactic ambiguity in (2).

- (1) Das geht<sup>1</sup> überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> nicht<sup>2</sup>.  
 This works *überhaupt* not.  
 [2] *This does not work at all. / (unusual<sup>[1]</sup>): It is in general the case that this does not work.)*
- (2) Ich habe<sup>1</sup> überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> keine<sup>2</sup> Zeit.  
 I have *überhaupt* no time.  
 [2] *I really don't have time. / (unusual<sup>[1]</sup>): I generally don't have time.)*
- (3) Ich erinnerte mich an überhaupt<sup>1</sup> nichts<sup>1</sup>.  
 I remembered *refl-1st-sg to überhaupt* nothing.  
*I did remember überhaupt nothing. (from <http://www.provoweb.de/> )*

**Semantics.** In line with Helbig's *Partikel-WB*, we assume that the general and abstract semantics of *überhaupt* is generalisation, either of the semantics of a constituent or of the point of view taken by the speaker; we discern the following applications of this rather vague core meaning, collapsing some of Helbig's differentiations for the sake of brevity and to adapt them to the granularity of our web research.

'Positive' Generalisation: *sentence adverb / noun phrase post-modifier*. When used as a generaliser, (*überhaupt*  $\varphi$ ) means that  $\varphi$  holds, independently of restrictions, mentioned or anticipated, on (part of) the semantics  $\varphi$  of the sentence. What exactly is generalised, seems to depend on the context; in the examples (4–6), we mark the rejected restriction in a hypothetical context<sup>13</sup> using bold-face. As it concerns a contextually present restric-

13 We use hypothetical contexts, as we can vary them more easily and do not want to discuss possible interpretations for real examples at this stage of the discussion.

tion, this generalisation or domain-widening often appears to be contrastive.<sup>14</sup> Syntactic structure seems to constrain the meaning of *überhaupt* somewhat, as it is generally adjacent to (a phrase dominating<sup>15</sup>) the generalised constituent. This also applies to uses of *überhaupt* as a NP post-modifier. If *überhaupt* occurs in the middlefield, its role is ambiguous between that of a sentence adverb and others, e.g. modification of an adverb as in (4); the resulting semantic ambiguity may be spurious, as we assume for (4). If the modified noun phrase is in the forefield and is not embedded inside a non-verbal phrase, *überhaupt*'s syntactic role is generally unambiguous; yet in the middle field, it can be analysed as an NP-postmodifier or a sentence adverb (6).<sup>16</sup>

- (4) [CONTX1: *She likes to drive on Sundays.*]  
 Sie fährt<sup>1</sup> überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> gern<sup>2</sup> Auto  
 She drives *überhaupt* gladly car.  
*She likes überhaupt to drive.*

14 It is difficult, however, to clearly define what constitutes such a restriction. (i) illustrates a very loose contrast between decorating the terrace (i.e. [ruining?] part of the garden) and ruining the whole garden; it is even difficult to say whether the generalisation concerns only the object of ruining or the overall verb phrase. It would be necessary to investigate this further, probably using experimental methods.

- (i) [...] dann rennt er in nem 3m<sup>2</sup> garten im kreis, kackt auf die terasse und hat überhaupt den ganzen garten ruiniert.  
 [...] then it [= the neglected dog] runs in a circle in a 3m<sup>2</sup> garden, shits on the terrace and ruined überhaupt the whole garden.

<http://davidinbrighton.wordpress.com/2006/09/29/firsties-week/> (overall tone of the text is very colloquial, evidently)

- 15 See e. g. the examples in fn. 14 and 16, in which *überhaupt* seems to associate with the adjective within the noun phrases.
- 16 An anonymous referee suggests that *überhaupt* may only be used with stative verbs; we agree that this may be true for many out-of-the-blue sentences, but we find that the example (i-a) presented by the referee as a test is only infelicitous for a reading in which *überhaupt* clearly modifies the noun of an indefinite NP, but good in a context where *überhaupt* rejects a contextual restriction, as in (i-b), which fits a context in which the beauty of car may have been under discussion already, but in restricted way, e. g. to the bumpers; in this case, (i-c) is also possible, trivially, as *überhaupt* is an adverb. Note that the syntactic role of *überhaupt* is not different in (i-a) and (i-b). The infelicity of (i-a) may be due to the fact that it is not possible to achieve a logically stronger sentence by modifying the simplex noun, but this seems quite ad hoc. See also the preceding footnote for an example with a definite NP and an episodic verb. Even examples with post-modifying *überhaupt* like (ii) can be found; however, the query succeeds more easily in older texts ((ii) was found by accident using Google book search), as in modern texts, *überhaupt* is overly often correlated with negation and *überhaupt* as a post-modifier is less common today than it used to be (cf. fn. 8). Interestingly, cases as (ii) are quite close to the original meaning of *über houbet*.

In cases like (i-b) and (ii), *überhaupt* is intuitively semantically linked to the adjective of the noun phrase, even though syntactically, it can only either be a sentence adverb or modify the

- (5) [CONTX2: *She likes **big busses.***]  
 [Autos<sup>1</sup> überhaupt<sup>1</sup>]<sub>NP</sub> mag<sup>2</sup> sie gern<sup>2</sup>.  
 Cars überhaupt likes she well.  
*She likes cars in general.*
- (6) [CONTX2 (ü<sup>1</sup>) or CONTX3 (ü<sup>2</sup>): *She likes cars as a decoration of the pavement.*]  
 Sie mag<sup>2</sup> Autos<sup>1</sup> überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> gern<sup>2</sup>.  
 She likes cars überhaupt well.  
*She likes cars in general (cars per se or also for other purposes than decoration).*

*Negation Intensifier:* When used as a negation intensifier (cf. (1–3) above), *überhaupt* normally means that the negation holds independently of restrictions, mentioned or anticipated, on the negation;<sup>17</sup> we have already shown, that the negation need not be the sentence negation in at least some registers. For sentence negation (with the adverbial *nicht* ~ *not*) we can assume two syntactic and semantic applications: (ü (¬ φ)) and ((ü ¬)φ); we can treat embedded *überhaupt* analogously. To speculate a little: It may be this possibility to associate *überhaupt* not only semantically but also syntactically with (adverbial) sentence negation that may have caused the generalisation of this function to other negations (see ‘Syntax’ above).<sup>18</sup>

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noun phrase (or the intermediate projection). These cases should be investigated further.

- (i) Sie kaufte gestern [(a) # überhaupt ein Auto] / [(b) überhaupt ein schönes Auto] / [(c) ein überhaupt schönes Auto].  
*She yesterday bought [ (a) # überhaupt a car ] / [(b) überhaupt a beautiful car] / [(c) an überhaupt beautiful car].*
- (ii) Sie kann theils den ganzen Körper überhaupt, theils insbesondere den Kopf oder die Schultern betreffen.  
*It can sometimes affect the body überhaupt, sometimes especially the head or the shoulders*  
 Hecker, A. F. & Erhard, H. A. (1827): *Lexicon medicum theoretico-reale oder allgemeines Wörterbuch der gesammten theoretischen und praktischen Heilkunde, vol 4.2. Erfurt, Gotha: Henning, p. 1007.*
- 17 In principle, nothing rules out the ‘positive’ intensification (i.e. modification of the sentence [predicate] rather than the negation); however, we find it difficult to arrive at such a meaning (even if the negation is not adjacent to überhaupt) and describe it; other native speakers have reported similar difficulties. We (therefore?) have not encountered examples where this reading was clearly intended; it may be worthwhile to investigate this question of positive intensification in negative contexts experimentally. (As always, positive *überhaupt* should be easily possible in ‘echo’ contexts.)
- 18 It would be interesting to investigate this historically; yet probably, there will never be sufficient data to resolve this issue. German project Gutenberg gives some very few clear occurrences of embedded *überhaupt*, even in translations of Plato from the 19th century; in the IDS or *korpora.org* historical corpora, we did not even find a sufficient number of occurrences of *überhaupt*.

*Question generalisation and topic shifting:* In questions, two special functions of *überhaupt* are conventionally distinguished: (a) ( $\ddot{u}(?\varphi)$ ), can reject restrictions, mentioned or anticipated, on ‘the question’, i.e. the question is emphasised or intensified. (b)  $\ddot{u}(?\varphi)$  can also indicate that the subject has been changed to a new (related) subject, independently of restrictions, mentioned or anticipated, on discourse structure.<sup>19</sup> This again can be seen as an application of ‘domain-widening’ to discourse structure, in the sense that generally accepted discourse restrictions are rejected.<sup>20</sup>

- (7) a. [CONTEXT: *I tried to reach you yesterday. You weren't at home, you weren't at the university, you weren't at the ESSLLI.*]  
 Wo waren Sie überhaupt gestern?  
*Where were you yesterday at all? (generalises Where / intensifies question)*
- b. [CONTEXT: *I was at a nice party yesterday, talk too much about it, but finally turn to you:*] Wo waren Sie überhaupt gestern?  
*By the way, where were you yesterday?*  
 (casually changing the subject to a general point, see Partikel-WB).
- (8) Fahren Sie überhaupt Auto?  
 Drive you überhaupt car?  
*Do you überhaupt drive (a car)?*  
 (intensification / generalisation / topic-shift)
- (9) Führt<sup>1</sup> er überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> nicht<sup>2</sup> viel Auto?  
 Drives<sup>1</sup> he überhaupt<sup>1/2</sup> not<sup>2</sup> much car?  
<sup>2</sup>*Is it the case that he doesn't drive a lot at all?*  
<sup>1</sup>*Is it really the case that he doesn't drive a lot?*  
 (context: In my preceding discourse contributions,  
 I just assumed that he does not; difficult to get!)

*Restricting strength.* In all examples of generalisation (but evidently not topic-shift) we considered, *überhaupt* generally is only used to make sentences logically stronger (or have an analogous function in non-topic-shifting questions), but this hypothesis may be to *ad hoc* and should be investigated further.

*Resume.* We can thus see *überhaupt* as (a) rejecting restrictions, fulfilling the following functions: ‘semantically’ acting as an intensifier / generalisation of sentence meaning (‘verum’, generalisation) and negation (more or less any negation), superlatives,...

19 It seems that this function is related to the generalisation in the car examples, where one takes a ‘broader view’ of her liking of cars or driving. However, as the topic-shifting function is most prominent, easy to find in questions and lends itself to the comparison with Dutch (see 3.2), we keep these two apart in this paper.

20 An anonymous referee suggests that *überhaupt* may also function as a topic-shifter in declarative sentences. As we cannot come up with an example, either, this question must be deferred for the moment.

and (b) casually changing discourse direction in questions (which is also a rejection of restrictions, but on the discourse level). Which of these do we find back in Dutch?

### 3.2 *Überhaupt* in Dutch Compared to German

In Dutch, we find many examples of *überhaupt* as a sentence generaliser and as an intensifier applied to the sentence negation; however, we do not find any examples of *überhaupt* as a general negation intensifier or a question intensifier.

**Negation intensification.** If we say that we do not find *überhaupt* as a general negation intensifier, we mean that nearly all occurrences of *überhaupt* next to a negation can be explained as sentence-adverbial position; it seems plausible to assume that *überhaupt* semantically or pragmatically is (perceived to be) associated with the negation, but there is no (or only a very weak) syntactic reflex of this (cf. table 4 for co-occurrences and table 2 for frequencies of paradigmatic embedding constructions); those few examples of embedded *überhaupt* that we find may be due to language interference (at least they are too few to speak of general use of the pattern). Dutch seems to be content with its very own *helemaal* and *absoluut*, which occur as NP etc. modifiers.

	Google	Yahoo
NL: „ <i>überhaupt</i> niet”	59100	191700
NL: „ <i>helemaal</i> niet”	4480000	15600000
D: „ <i>überhaupt</i> nicht”	7000000	21100000
D: „ <i>gar</i> nicht”	31100000	101000000
NL: “ <i>sowieso</i> niet”	230000	740000
D: „ <i>sowieso</i> nicht”	1780000	3900000

Table 4: *Negation Modifiers(?)*

**Question intensification: possibility and necessity.** Furthermore, in the cases of question intensification we find, there is an asymmetry between questions like *Is it possible...* (*is het mogelijk...*) on the one hand and *Is it necessary...* (*Is het nodig/noodzakelijk...*) or *Is it right* (*Klopt het/dat...*) on the other hand. While the first form is quite common, the second form is very rare. One might argue, however, that the first kind of question is one where *überhaupt* plays its normal role of domain-widener: We want to know whether something is possible at all, we remove all restrictions like plausibility or improbability from the pragmatic meaning of *mogelijk* (*possible*), e.g. in (10a), where the writer is willing to accept any way of connecting his/her PDA to a GPS device, and has evidently already explored the obvious possibilities. Yet domain-widening is implausible for necessity or being right or true: generally, either something is necessary (right, true) or it is not, and widening the concept of necessity does not amount to much,<sup>21</sup> so that

21 One might even argue that what happens here in German examples, is a kind of topic-shift: *Is it überhaupt necessary?* may occur in cases where necessity has not been discussed yet (e.g.

the only interpretation for the use of *überhaupt* in such a question is that it intensifies the question (see e.g. 10b). In this sense, we conclude that in Dutch, the function of a question intensifier is not well established for *überhaupt* (esp. if we keep in mind that with the amount of contact and expositions to German, these few uses may well indicate language interference).

- (10) a. Is het überhaupt mogelijk en zo ja, wat heb ik daarvoor nodig.  
*Is it überhaupt possible, and if so, what do I need [for it / to do it]?*  
<http://forum.geocaching.nl/lofiversion/index.php/t8793.html>
- b. Is dat uberhaupt nodig?  
*Is that überhaupt necessary?*  
<http://forum.bouweenpc.nl/topic/3654/1>

**Topic-Shift.** While in German, we find many uses of *überhaupt* in topic-shifting questions like *Who are you überhaupt?* and *Where is ... überhaupt?* (the latter is very common on websites of German cities<sup>22</sup>), this use is exceedingly rare in Dutch (see table 5); it also does not seem to be just as casual as in German. The Dutch examples of *Who are you überhaupt?* generally present the addressee as presumptuous, thus indeed intensifying the meaning of the question or the interrogative pronoun (a use possible in German, too, and thus also possibly a language interference as in the case of a question intensifier). It is not the case, though, that Dutch does not indicate topic-shifts through the use of particles: if we turn to native Dutch particles again, we find many occurrences of *eigenlijk* (*Wie ben je/jij eigenlijk?* about 25,080/28,100 times), whose German counterpart *eigentlich* can be used for this purpose, too.

- (11) En wie ben jij ueberhaupt dat je dergelijke uitlatingen naar iemands hoofd slingert??  
*And who are you überhaupt that you throw such utterances to/at somebody's head?*  
<http://www.affiliate-forum.nl/index.php?topic=736'5;wap2>

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*I know it is usually done, but is it really necessary?*), while *Is it überhaupt possible?* in our opinion suggests just the opposite (*I know it is 'not really' possible that the sun will not rise tomorrow, but is it possible at all?*). Thus it is indeed important to keep apart the functions of *überhaupt* in questions.

22 In these cases, it also seems plausible to us that this plays with both topic shift and question intensification.

<b>Is it possible?</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
NL: „Is dat/het überhaupt mogelijk“	5080	4580
D: „Ist das/es überhaupt möglich“	111300	184400
<b>Is it necessary?</b>		
NL: „Is dat/het überhaupt nodig/noodzakelijk“	67	132
D: „Ist das/es überhaupt nötig/notwendig“	10390	8900
<b>Is it right?</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
NL: „Klopt dat/het überhaupt“	4[6]	21[33]
D: „Stimmt das/es überhaupt“	25110	33330
<b>How are you doing?</b>		
D: „Wie geht es * überhaupt“	1148	1672
D: „Wie geht es überhaupt“	781	642
NL: „Hoe gaat het überhaupt met“	3	5
<b>Where?</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
NL: „Waar is [*] überhaupt“	19[60]	79[193]
NL: „Waar ben * überhaupt“	25	28
D: „Wo ist [*] überhaupt“	49100	49800
<b>How?</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
NL: „Hoe werkt * überhaupt“	24[31]	26[41]
D: „Wie funktioniert * überhaupt“	38300	23200
<b>Who?</b>	<b>Google</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
NL: „wie ben je/jij überhaupt“	16	43
D: „wer bist du überhaupt“	6900	34900
NL: „Wie was [*] überhaupt“	2[12]	21[23]
D: „Wer war [*] überhaupt“	1715	14040

Table 5: überhaupt and questions

## 4. Sowieso

The paragraph on *sowieso* is quite a bit shorter, as everything seems to be easier with this word; however, section 5 will discuss *sowieso* again.

### 4.1. Sowieso in German

**History.** *Sowieso* appears as an adverbial construction in the eighteenth century (cf. Kluge-WB) and means ‘under all circumstances’ (Paul-WB). Since the nineteenth century, it has also been used as a ‘particle’ meaning that ‘the speaker marks the facts as holding independently of the concrete conditions (talked about in the context)’ and ‘as an affirmative answer’ (Paul-WB).

**Syntax.** While *sowieso* occurs very often with sentence negation, we cannot find it in prepositional phrases. All 8 Google occurrences of „mit sowieso keiner“ are typos (*mit* instead of the dative pronoun *mir*). Yahoo has one real example. However, *sowieso* sometimes occurs with superlatives (cf. table 3), like other adverbs (especially temporal or local ones). It is generally sufficient to analyse *sowieso* as an adverb, most often as a sentence adverb.

- (12) Der sowieso beste und überhauptteste Film aller Zeiten: Once upon a time in the west oder zu deutsch: spiel mir das lied vom tod  
*The sowieso best and most überhaupt movie of all times: Spiel mir das Lied vom Tod, or in English: once upon a time in the west*  
<http://www.dsfo.de/fo/viewtopic.php?p=128880><sup>23</sup>

**Functions and Semantics.** Semantically, *sowieso* means ‘in any case’, i.e. (*sowieso*  $\varphi$ ) means that  $\varphi$  holds independently of what was said or assumed.<sup>24</sup>

*Question and Negation modification.* According to our intuition and the examples we read, *sowieso* does not have a special function in questions and negative sentences; it generally takes wide scope over negation and stands ‘below’ the question operator. (*sowieso*  $\neg\varphi$ ) thus means: ‘( $\neg\varphi$ ) holds anyway’; (? (*sowieso* [ $\neg$ ] $\varphi$ )) means: ‘Is it anyway the case that [ $\neg$ ] $\varphi$  holds?’. Using *sowieso* in a negative question leads to spurious ambiguity as in (13).

- (13) A: I need your abstract.  
 B: Es ist sowieso schon fertig.  
 It is *sowieso* already ready.  
 B: *It is ready, anyway. (There’s really no need to bother me!)*
- (14) Hab ich da nun was falsch eingestellt, funktioniert<sup>1</sup> diese Kombination sowieso<sup>1/2</sup> nicht<sup>2</sup> oder brauch ich ein opt?  
 [<sup>1/2</sup>] *Did I configure it badly, does this combination sowieso not work or do I need an opt?*  
<https://lists.spline.inf.fu-berlin.de/lurker/message/20041229.153736.6b7e95b2.ja.html>

## 4.2. *Sowieso* in Dutch Compared to German

In Dutch, *sowieso* seems to be used quite often without rejecting the previous utterance or any other explicit restriction as irrelevant, see e.g. (15a), which at first surprised us.

<sup>23</sup> Already the use of *überhaupt* as an adjective shows that this is a playful sentence; however this one fits this paper so well that we had to cite it.

<sup>24</sup> Fobbe (2004) suggests that *sowieso* is thus used to reject the previous utterances as irrelevant or less relevant; this comes very close to our initial intuitions. We have to conclude that while this is a frequent function, it is by no means necessary (cf. the use as ‘affirmative answer’) can be easily derived as a typical usage case from the general meaning of ‘anyway’, cf. §. 5.

However, and utterly against our initial intuition, this also happens in German, cf. (15b). This is very similar to the ‘affirmative answer’ of Paul-WB.

- (15) a. Het is sowieso mooi dat Frisk zondag weer in Zweden zit.  
 It is sowieso nice that Frisk is back in Sweden on Sunday.  
<http://piet.zijtveld.com/index.php/category/diamond-ek-2004>
- b. [Discussing forenames.] Dennis gefällt mir sowieso!  
 I like ‘Dennis’ sowieso.  
<http://www.parents.at/forum/archive/index.php/t-385209.html>

We find back all functions of *sowieso* in the Dutch web texts; we have just seen *sowieso* in declaratives. We do (nearly) not find *sowieso* in Dutch modifying superlatives (for examples, cf. table 3).

## 5. Are überhaupt and sowieso synonymous?

As already noted, it was the claim of synonymy that got us started, as it surprised us so much. However, when we tried to formulate conditions of use for *überhaupt* and *sowieso*, we found a great overlap.

**The same usage conditions?** If one says that  $\varphi$  holds independently of restrictions (mentioned or anticipated),  $\varphi$  will hold in more cases or for more reasons (than mentioned or assumed in anticipating), i.e. *if überhaupt  $\varphi$ , then often sowieso  $\varphi$* . If one says that  $\varphi$  holds in any case (not just in the cases mentioned or anticipated),  $\varphi$  will hold ‘to a greater extent’ than stated before (or anticipated), i.e. *if sowieso  $\varphi$ , then often überhaupt  $\varphi$* . Evidently, this argumentation only holds for declaratives, but not for the intensification of questions or topic-shift. For questions, *sowieso* can thus be very different from *überhaupt* – but only really in German, as in Dutch the differentiating uses are very uncommon. Similarly, generalised negation or superlative intensification is uncommon in German with *sowieso* and uncommon with either word in Dutch.

We thus see that *überhaupt* and *sowieso* are considerably more similar in Dutch than in German.

**Greater Similarity in Dutch: Sowieso.** It would be plausible if this similarity in Dutch led to ‘confusion’ of *überhaupt* and *sowieso*. We can confirm this suspicion, when considering the uses differentiating *überhaupt* and *sowieso* in German; these are – as already said – uncommon for *überall* in Dutch, but they also occur with *sowieso*, thus blurring the distinction even more. In Dutch, we find (few) examples that *sowieso* can intensify (esp. indirect) questions (see table 6). *Überhaupt* is still more frequent (though it is relatively less frequent in general). While this use is rare in Dutch,<sup>25</sup> it does not

25 It may also be the case that this use is not sanctioned by the grammar of all Dutch speakers (yet), as Marieke Schouwstra told us at the ESSLLI she would not use *sowieso* like this. Still, Dutch linguists who also speak German need not be optimal informants in such cases of doubt.

occur at all in German, so that we take it to be a case of semantic assimilation, which has not completed yet.

- (16) Anderen stellen zich zelfs de vraag of een canon sowieso noodzakelijk is.  
*Others even wonder whether a canon is sowieso necessary.*  
[http://www.foliacivitatitatis.nl/pfd/foia24\\_60.pdf](http://www.foliacivitatitatis.nl/pfd/foia24_60.pdf)
- (17) Ik wil vandaag weten wie er sowieso komen BBQ-en zodat ik alles met de slagerij & strandpaviljoen kan regelen.  
*I want to know today who is sowieso going to come BBQ-ing so that I can arrange everything with the butcher and the beach pavilion.*  
<http://partyflock.nl/party/94753:Beachmachine.html>

Similarly, find some very few topic-shifting uses of *sowieso* in Dutch (see table 6); the relative frequency is quite on par for this use with the relative frequency of *überhaupt*, although in these cases, it cannot be a spill-over from German – as this use does not occur in German data (except for one case by a non-native speaker). Thus in Dutch, even the uncommon functions are more balanced between *überhaupt* and *sowieso*.

Is it possible?	Google	Yahoo	
[NL: „Is dat überhaupt mogelijk“]	3290	2420	
NL: „of het/dat sowieso mogelijk“	46[51]	41[68]	
NL: „is dat/het sowieso mogelijk“	31[48]	60[78]	
D: „ob das/es sowieso möglich“	0[1]	0	(none native!)
D: „ist das/es sowieso möglich“	1[20]	0[37]	one German <i>sowieso</i> , other hits are not questions
<b>Is it necessary?</b>			
NL: „is dat/het sowieso nodig/noodzakelijk“	8[36]	9[47]	
NL: „of * sowieso nodig“ (noodzaakelijk)	14[21]	12[16]	
D: „ob * sowieso nötig“ (notwendig):	1	0	[not a question intensifier!]
<b>How is/are * doing?</b>			
NL: „Hoe gaat het sowieso met“	7	3	
<b>Where are you?</b>			
NL: „Waar ben * sowieso“	0	3	
<b>How does * work?</b>			
NL: „hoe werkt * sowieso“	0	1	

Table 6: *Sowieso* and questions

**Synonymy only in Dutch.** We conclude that if not semantically (i.e. from what is commonly accepted as their paraphrastic or intensional meaning), *überhaupt* and *sowieso* are ‘pragmatically synonymous’, because they can be substituted ‘*salva felicitate*’<sup>26</sup>; by this, we mean that it is generally possible to use *überhaupt* and *sowieso* felicitously in declarative sentences under nearly the same circumstances, even if the sentence semantics intuitively may be different, at least from a normative point of view.

The similarity of usage conditions is stronger in Dutch (cf. table 7), where most of the usage conditions differentiating *überhaupt* from *sowieso* in German are virtually missing: the question intensifying and topic-shifting functions of *überhaupt*, and the use of *überhaupt* as a negation phrase modifier; association with sentence negation and generalisation/emphasis in declarative sentences are possible for both *überhaupt* and *sowieso*. In German, the functions and usage conditions of *überhaupt* are quite different from those of *sowieso*.

*Foreigners are all alike?* We might also want to conjecture that the semantic meaning of *überhaupt* and *sowieso* is more transparent and present in German; but that would need to be confirmed by another investigation. It is quite plausible, however, that ‘Germanness’ increases synonymy in Dutch, at least that is what we make of some quotes on the web (such as (18)), and by the fact that there is strong consciousness and playfulness involved in the use of German words in the Dutch press, esp. for German things (see Eickmans 2006). Similarly, in German, *sowieso und überhaupt* and *überhaupt und sowieso* (both more than 20,000 and 10,000 times, respectively<sup>27</sup>) can be used to emphasise that some issue is solved and discussion is finished – while this does not occur in Dutch.<sup>28</sup> In Dutch, *sowieso en überhaupt* and *überhaupt en sowieso* occur very infrequently (around 50 times), mostly in metalinguistic discussion or referring to German culture (19).

- (18) Iemand iets niet gunnen zit sowieso/ überhaupt niet in mijn persoonlijkheid  
*It's sowieso/überhaupt not part of my personality to begrudge anybody anything.* <http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=12096688&blogID=331753588>

26 Arbiter anonymus certiorum me fecit me *felicitous felicityve* Latino in syntagmate ludentem dictum creavisse Romano Aetatis Classicae incomprehensibile. Sowieso! But a bad pun is better than überhaupt no pun, isn't it?

27 The numbers for the first phrase are skewed by Nöstlinger's (1991) book and the corresponding TV show.

28 An anonymous referee points to the interpretability of combined *sowieso überhaupt / überhaupt sowieso*. We agree with all our intuition. Still, these combinations are difficult to investigate in the current setting. They occur relatively frequently in German (about 11800/15000 and 13700/1350 times, respectively) yet the first one is often before a negation (*sowieso überhaupt nicht[s]/niemand* etc.) and the second one often in the non-phrase ..., *wenn überhaupt, sowieso...* (... , *if at all, sowieso...*) so that real doublings cannot easily be counted. The Dutch counterparts are less frequent (62/57+33 and 85/35+27 times) and often marked as alternatives, see ex. (18), or in metalinguistic discussion and word lists, so that earnest doublings are quite few.

- (19) De video ‘Sowieso en überhaupt’ (Duits kiezen in het vo, duur: 16 minuten; 2001) kunt u lenen bij het Informatiecentrum, GI Amsterdam.  
*You can rent the video ‘Sowieso en überhaupt’ (choosing German in higher education, duration: 16 minutes, 2001) from the Information Center, GI Amsterdam.*  
[http://www.austausch.nl/Infoportaal-Duits/index.php?var\\_content=content.php&contentid=78](http://www.austausch.nl/Infoportaal-Duits/index.php?var_content=content.php&contentid=78)

**Diverging history?** As we do not know when *überhaupt* became more flexible syntactically in German, we do not know whether Dutch only borrowed a part of its usage potential to fill gaps in its own vocabulary, or whether *überhaupt* acquired the functions differentiating it from *sowieso* after the borrowing. We do not know, either, whether the borrowed *überhaupt* was more frequent in Dutch as a topic-shifter in earlier times; however, it seems quite implausible to assume this. We thus assume that from the beginning, Dutch *überhaupt* was functionally less versatile than German *überhaupt*, probably because Dutch had at least one established topic-shifter, *eigenlijk*, and two good negation intensifiers, *heelemaal* and *absoluut*.

## 6. Conclusion

We have compared the use of two German loanwords in Dutch, *überhaupt* and *sowieso*, with their use in the language of origin. Even though Dutch and German are very close both linguistically and regionally and although language-contact is quite strong, the loanwords are functionally different from their ‘originals’.

The results of our little research fit well with general assumptions that borrowing is driven by functional ‘need’ or ‘gaps’ and that loanwords may therefore be specialised in different ways than in the languages of origin.

Thus *überhaupt* and *sowieso* seem to develop into perfect synonyms in Dutch, as the functions distinguishing them from each other in German are taken by ‘native’ words and are thus not available. If synonymisation continues, we may expect the extinction of one of them, probably *überhaupt*, as it is already less frequent, and its only special function, (sentence) negation intensification is already well taken care of in the Dutch lexicon. To finish with a Dutch(!) quote from the web:

- (20) *Überhaupt* betekent “sowieso” en schrijf je *überhaupt* niet met een “b” maar met een “p”.  
*‘Überhaupt’ means ‘sowieso’ and you write it überhaupt not with a ‘b’ but with a ‘p’.*  
[http://jeronimo.blogspot.com/2002\\_09\\_22\\_archive.html](http://jeronimo.blogspot.com/2002_09_22_archive.html)

Context	überhaupt/D	sowieso/D	überhaupt/NL	sowieso/NL
<b>declarative intens./ generalisation</b>	x	x	x	x
<b>sentence neg</b>	x	x	x	x
<b>NP(-neg)</b>	x	?	(-)	(-)
<b>in questions</b>	x	–	(x)	(x)
<b>question intensification</b>	x	–	(x)	(x)
<b>topic-shifting</b>	x	–	(x)	?

Table 7: Function overview

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