

***na dann* as a multifunctional multi-word expression in spoken language**

A corpus linguistic investigation

This article focuses on a particular combination in German, that is, the combination of the particle *na* ('well') with the adverb *dann* ('then') as a turn-constructive unit (TCU) (subsequently referred to as 'stand-alone'). In the literature to date, stand-alone *na dann* has been described almost exclusively as a termination signal (Imo 2015, p. 18; Massaia 2021, p. 8; Rensch 2018, pp. 117–120). Rensch (2018, pp. 118 f.) also describes how *na dann* indicates uncooperativeness and is used in particular when a speaker is dissatisfied with the course of a conversation and therefore tries to change the subject: "It does not simply close a topic or an argument, it downright shuts it down in a way that discourages any further contributions to the previous topic or argument" (ibid., p. 118). Rensch indirectly refers to *na dann* as a possible stance marker here but neither mentions the term stance in this context nor elaborates on this aspect.

This article demonstrates that, in spoken German, stand-alone *na dann* is used not only to conclude a topic, as described in previous literature, but also for other purposes.

To answer the research question "*What uses does stand-alone na dann have (apart from ending a topic) and what characteristics do these uses have?*", I first conducted a corpus search in the *Research and Teaching Corpus of Spoken German* (FOLK; see Reineke/Deppermann/Schmidt 2023; version 2.22), which is accessible via the *Database for Spoken German* (DGD). Version 2.22 comprises 436 interactions lasting approximately 365 hours. About one-third of the recordings are video recordings; the remainder are audio recordings. Using the DGD search function, I searched for the lemma *dann* together with transcribed *na* one token to its left as context, receiving 154 results. I manually reviewed these results and eliminated all incomprehensible *na dann* cases (e. g., due to overlaps), noisy cases (due to data protection regulations), and incorrectly transcribed cases. I also removed all false positives (e. g., dialectal *na* for *no*) and prosodically integrated *na dann*. Finally, I ended up with a collection of 50 stand-alone *na dann* TCUs.

First, I transcribed all cases according to GAT 2 (see Selting et al. 2009), then I examined them using conversation analysis and phonetic-phonological analyses (with *Praat* software). As 20 of the 50 cases were from video recordings, I also transcribed and analysed these multimodally (according to Mondada 2018).

The analysis shows that *na dann* has two interdependent dimensions. In other words, both dimensions can be fulfilled with *na dann* but one dimension always dominates. This is evident from the fact that the participants in a conversation primarily refer to one of the dimensions interactionally. On the one hand, *na dann* can fulfil conversational organisational functions: opening or closing an action or topic. On the other hand, speakers can use *na dann* to express either a resigned-sceptical attitude (which also includes the ironic use of *na dann*) or an encouraging-approving attitude.

In summary, *na dann* can be used both projectively and to display a stance. Although one function always predominates, stand-alone *na dann* can simultaneously serve to organise the conversation and mark a stance. *Na dann* thus combines the functions attributed individually to the particle *na* – and the particle combination *naja* (which partly has the same possible uses) – as well as the adverb *dann*: According to previous literature, *na(ja)* can express a conciliatory, hesitant and/or resigned stance (Ehlich 1986; Golato 2018; Imo 2015) whilst *dann* is attributed a conclusive meaning (Siebold 2021, see also Deppermann/Helmer 2013; Harren/Raitaniemi 2008; Helmer 2011; Meier 1997). The first part of the stand-alone expression, the particle *na*, seems to be particularly responsible for displaying stance while the second part, the adverb *dann*, shapes the conversational organisational function. This can be explained by the semantics of *dann*, which refers to a sequence or a point in time in the near future (DWDS 2025). In terms of conversation organisation, *dann* can therefore be used to refer to or prepare for the next topic or action.

No correlation could be established between the function concerned and which of the two words is emphasised. However, the intonation pattern plays a pivotal role in assigning the chosen meaning of *na dann*: When used as a conclusion, *na dann* has a slightly to strongly falling intonation curve whereas projective *na dann* is characterised by a constant to rising intonation. In the context of conveying a resigned-sceptical stance, the intonation of *na dann* is characterised by its constant or falling nature.

When primarily serving to organise a conversation, *na dann* is used in cooperative contexts while stance-marking *na dann* is more frequently employed in negotiation contexts or instances of disagreement. (Sometimes, however, it also occurs in narratives or other contexts.) By not explicitly stating the actual stance but rather communicating it implicitly through *na dann*, *na dann* can be used in delicate situations to save one's face (for face-saving, see Goffman 1955). If, for example, it becomes apparent during a dispute that none of the people involved will change their opinion, a person can use *na dann* to withdraw without, however, relinquishing their own point of view. Instead, the person indicates a state of resignation. This attitude can also be explained with the semantics of *dann* in that the speaker refers to “the conditions and circumstances under which the event of the ‘dann’ clause takes place” (DWDS 2025; translated by the author). These conditions seem to differ according to the assumptions of the people involved such that the person who says ‘*na dann*’ clarifies that the subject under discussion may be contingent upon the conditions and circumstances assumed by the other person. Through this resigned attitude, the speaker simultaneously initiates the end of the dispute and, thus, preserves his/her own face as well as that of the others. In this way, *na dann* can fulfil a fundamental function in social interaction (Goffman 1955, p. 224). Thus, the study presented here not only contributes to expanding our knowledge of stand-alone *na dann* but may also be helpful for future research on stancetaking.

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