The name-informing and the distancing use of sogenannt (‘so-called’). A pragmatic account

Holden Härtl
Universität Kassel
holden.haertl@uni-kassel.de

Name-mentioning constructions involving sogenannt are instances of pure quotation (Davidson 1979; Quine 1981). They adopt two distinct interpretations, a name-informing interpretation, see (1a), and a distanced interpretation (1b):

(1) a. Der Doktor diagnostizierte eine sogenannte “Sepsis”.
   b. Das sogenannte “Hotel” erwies sich als üble Abstiege.

In the paper, we will propose a unitary semantic analysis for sogenannt, in which the expression is treated as polysemous. The so in sogenannt, in its function as a demonstrative anaphor, will be argued to operate as a pointer to the lexical shape of a name, thus binding the Name argument of the underlying verbal root of sogenannt. The varying interpretations arise as the result of an interplay between sogenannt’s primary semantic content and pragmatic factors. In particular, we will claim a relevance-based implicature to be effective in a sogenannt-construction with highly conventionalized nouns like Hotel, giving rise to the distanced interpretation we observe in cases like (1b). Distancing sogenannt-constructions will be analyzed as an instance of verbal irony. As such, they echo a preceding utterance of the mentioned name (Wilson 2013). Crucially, sogenannt-constructions will be claimed to convey not-at-issue content (Tonhauser 2012): (i) the speaker asserts himself/herself to oppose the semantic appropriateness of the mentioned name and (ii) evaluates the denotatum negatively. A careful investigation of the empirical facts will shed light on the tenability of this claim.