

Some (in)definiteness effects of expressive intensifiers

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Introduction

- ▶ Like many languages, German exhibits different means to intensify the meaning of a gradable adjective.

Positive

- (1) Piet ist schnell.
"Piet is fast"

Comparatives

- (2) Sophie ist schnell-er.
Sophie is fast-COMP
"Sophie is faster"

Degree words

- (3) Sophie ist {sehr/arg/überaus} schnell.
Sophie is DEG fast
"Sophie is very fast."

- ▶ In this talk, we examine a special class of degree items which we call **expressive intensifiers** (Els).
- ▶ The most frequent Els are *sau* “female pig” (lit.), *total* “totally” and *voll* “fully”.

Expressive intensifiers

(4) Sophie ist {*sau*/*total*/*voll*} schnell.

Sophie is El fast

“Sophie is El (≈ totally) fast.”

- ▶ Els like *sau* differ in two respects from common degree words like *sehr* “very.”
 - 1 Semantically, they convey an expressive speaker attitude.
 - 2 Syntactically, they can appear in a DP-“external” position.

DP-internal

- (5) Gestern hast du **eine** **sau** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you a El cool party missed
 "Yesterday, you missed a El cool party."

DP-external

- (6) Gestern hast du **sau** **die** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you El the cool party missed
 "Yesterday, you missed El a cool party."

The syntax of internal Els

- ▶ Els and common degree words have the same range of uses.

Predicative

- (7) Die Party ist **sau/sehr** cool.
the party is El/very cool
'The party is El/very cool.'

Adverbial

- (8) Piet läuft **sau/sehr** schnell.
Piet runs El/very fast
"Piet runs El/very fast."

Attributive

- (9) Gestern hast du eine **sau/sehr** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you a El/very cool party missed
"Yesterday, you missed a El/very cool party."

- ▶ Els and common degree words cannot cooccur with other overt degree morphology.

Not with comparatives

- (10) *Unsere Party ist **sau/sehr** cool-er als eure.
our party is El/very cool-COMP than your's.

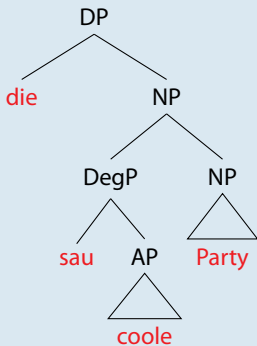
Not with superlatives

- (11) *Unsere Party ist die **sau/sehr** cool-ste von allen.
our party is the El/very cool-SUP of all

- ▢▶ Els are degree expressions.

Degree phrase headed by *sau*

(12)



The semantics of internal Els

- ▶ Semantically, Els increase the degree that is expressed by their adjective argument just like common intensifiers.
- ▶ One difference is that they express an even higher degree than *very*.

Degree of coolness

(13) sau cool > sehr cool > cool

- ▶ The semantic difference between *sau* and common intensifiers is that *sau* conveys an expressive speaker attitude.

(14) Gestern hast du eine **sau** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you a El cool party missed
'Yesterday, you missed a El cool party.'

Descriptive meaning of (14)

(15) "Yesterday, you missed a very very cool party."

Expressive meaning of (14)

(16) "The speaker is emotional about how cool the party was."

- ▶ This attitude is not part of the truth-conditional content of the sentence, as the “denial in discourse” test shows (cf. e.g. Jayez & Rossari 2004).

Denial of the descriptive component

- (17) A: Die Party war **sau** cool.
 “The party was El cool.”
- B: Nee, so cool war die Party nicht, auch wenn sie sehr cool war.
 “No, the party wasn’t that cool, even if it was very cool.”

Denial of the expressive component

- (18) A: Die Party war **sau** cool.
 “The party was El cool.”
- B: #Nee, das ist dir doch egal.
no that is you PART equal
 “No, you don’t care.”

- ▶ Whether the attitude is a positive or negative evaluation depends on the context.

Context 1

- (19) Man, es ist wieder **sau** kalt.
man it is again El cold
 "Man, it's El cold again!"

▣➡ negative attitude towards the degree of coldness

Context 2

- (20) Bei dieser Hitze kommt das **sau** kalte Bier genau richtig.
at this heat comes the El cold beer exactly right
 "In this heat, the El cold beer comes just right."

▣➡ positive attitude towards the degree of coldness

The syntax of external Els

- ▶ The biggest difference between Els and non-expressive intensifiers is that the DP-external position is only available for the former.

(21) Gestern hast du **sau** **die** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you El the cool party missed
"Yesterday, you missed El a cool party."

(22) *Gestern hast du **sehr** **die** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you very the cool party missed

- ▶ The DP-external position is however not freely available but depends on the determiner.

No external Els with indefinite articles

(23) *Gestern hast du **sau** **eine** coole Party verpasst.
yesterday has you El a cool party missed

No external Els with demonstrative or possessive pronouns

- (24) *Heute steigt **sau** diese/ihre coole Party.
today goes-on El that/her cool party

No external Els with quantified DPs

- (25) *Nächste Woche steigen **sau**
Next week, goes-on El
 alle/einige/die meisten/drei/mindestens drei/höchstens drei coole(n) Partys.
all/some/the most/three/at least three/at most three cool Parties

The semantics of external Els

- ▶ Beside the syntactic constraints that come with the external position, there is also a curious semantic effect.
- ▶ Even if external *sau* is restricted to occur only with a definite determiner, the DP is interpreted as indefinite.
- ▶ The DP-external construction in (26a) therefore corresponds to the internal variant in (26b) and not as expected to (26c).

Indefinite interpretation with external Els

(26a) = (26b) ≠ (26c)

- (26) a. Heute steigt **sau** die coole Party.
today goes-on El the cool party
 "Today El the cool party is going on."
- b. Heute steigt **eine sau** coole Party.
today goes-on a El cool party
 "Today a El cool party is going on."
- c. Heute steigt **die sau** coole Party.
today goes-on the El cool party
 "Today the El cool party is going on."

- ▶ External *sau* is therefore incompatible with phenomena that require a definite interpretation.

Restrictive relative clauses

- (27) *Da kommt **sau** der coole Typ, von dem ich dir erzählt habe.
there comes El the cool guy of whom I you told have
intended: "There comes El the cool guy about whom I have told you."

Contrast

- (28) *Ich habe **sau** den coolen Typen geküsst, nicht den langweiligen.
I have El the cool guy kissed not the boring
intended: "I kissed El the cool guy not the boring one."

- ▶ There is also no definiteness effect with external Els.

No definiteness effect with external Els

- (29) Da ist **sau** **die** coole Party.
there is El the cool party.
 "There is El a cool party."

Definiteness effect with internal Els

- (30) *Da ist **die** **sau** coole Party.
there is the El cool party

- ▶ However, in contrast to indefinite internal Els, there are no scope ambiguities with external Els. The indefinite always takes narrow scope.

No scope ambiguities

- (31) **Jeder** Jurastudent träumt von **sau dem** teuren Auto.
every law-student dreams of El the expensive car
 "Every law student dreams of El an expensive car"

✓ $\forall > \exists$
 * $\exists > \forall$

	syntax		semantics
internal	<i>indefinite</i>	\Rightarrow ✓ \Leftarrow	<i>indefinite</i>
	<i>definite</i>	\Rightarrow ✓ \Leftarrow	<i>definite</i>
external	<i>*indefinite</i>	$(\Rightarrow$ ✓ $\Leftarrow)$	<i>*indefinite</i>
	<i>definite</i>	\Rightarrow ⚡ \Leftarrow	<i>indefinite</i>

Table: Syntax-semantics (mis)matches with Els

A sketch of an analysis

Els raise many questions for an analysis of their syntax and semantics.

- ▶ **Position**

What is the position in which external Els reside?

- ▶ **Restriction to Els**

Why can only Els and not common intensifiers occur externally?

- ▶ **Restriction to definite articles**

Why is the external position only available with definite articles?

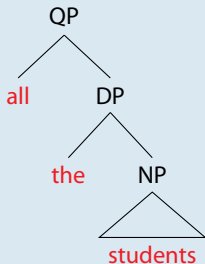
- ▶ **Interpretation**

Why is the definite article nevertheless interpreted indefinitely?

- ▶ **Position:** We need a head position above the DP.
- ▶ Giusti (1991) and Kallulli & Rothmayr (2008) argue that there is a QP above the DP to account for different phenomena.

Quantifiers + determiners

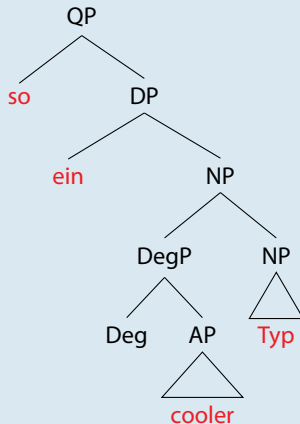
(32)



so + DP

"such a cool guy"

(33)



- ▶ Except for the fact that they need definite articles, external Els show some resemblance with the *so DP* construction.
 - ▶ *so* also has an intensifying semantics.
 - ▶ There is also an internal variant of *so*.

Internal *so*

- (34) Peter ist ein **so** cooler Typ.
Peter is a such cool guy.

- ▶ We therefore assume that external *sau* takes up the Q-position like external *so*.

External Els in Q

- (35) [QP **sau** [DP die [NP [DegP coole] Party]]]

- **Restriction to Els:** We need more evidence to treat Els differently from common degree words.

No ellipsis in short answers with Els /so

- | | | | | |
|------|----|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (36) | a. | War die Party cool?
<i>Was the party cool?</i> | a. Ja, sehr.
<i>yes very</i> | b. *Ja, sau/so.
<i>yes El/so</i> |
| | b. | Wie cool war die Party?
<i>How cool was the party?</i> | a. Sehr.
<i>very</i> | b. *Sau/so.
<i>El/so</i> |

No left dislocation out of Els /so

- | | | | | |
|------|----|--|----|--|
| (37) | a. | Cool, das ₁ ist Sophie sehr t ₁ .
<i>cool that is Sophie very</i>
"Sophie is very cool." | b. | *Cool, das ₁ ist Sophie sau/so t ₁ .
<i>cool that is Sophie El/such</i> |
|------|----|--|----|--|

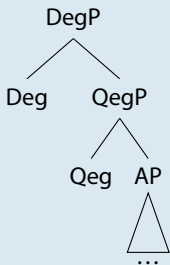
No *wh*-movement out of Els /so

- | | | | | |
|------|----|---|----|--|
| (38) | a. | Was ₁ ist Sophie sehr t ₁ ?
<i>what is Sophie very</i> | b. | * Was ₁ ist Sophie sau/so t ₁ ?
<i>what is Sophie El/so</i> |
|------|----|---|----|--|

- ▶ **Split degree system hypothesis:** Corver (1997a,b), following Bresnan (1973), assumes that there are two kinds of degree elements, for which differences like in (37) and (38) can be observed.
- ▶ There are determiner like functional elements (Deg) and elements that are more like quantifier (Q; we use Qeg).

Split degree system hypothesis

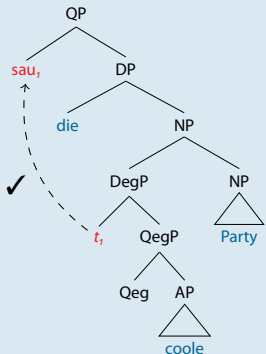
(39)



- ▶ Based on the asymmetries in (38) and (39), we assume that internal Els and *so* are Deg-elements, while *sehr* is the head of QegP.
- ▶ Only elements from the higher DegP are allowed to be raised to the external QP.

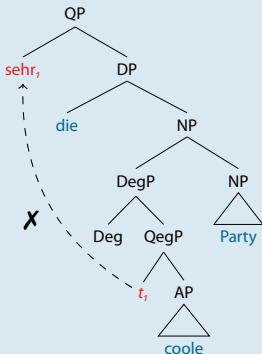
Raising from Deg

(40)



No raising from Qeg

(41) *



- ▶ This also directly accounts for the observation that external Els are impossible with quantified DPs, since the Q-position is already occupied.

Open questions

- ▶ **Restriction to definite articles:** So far, we can only implement this restriction by imposing a lexical restriction on *sau*, especially given the fact that *so* is used with indefinite articles.
- ▶ **Indefinite interpretation:** We yet have to find a solution to the puzzle of the required indefinite interpretation.
 - ▶ A possible explanation may be based on the assumption of a functional projection for definite interpretation (cf. e.g. the strong DP in Zamparelli 2000).
 - ▶ If it can then be shown that *sau* in Q prohibits that the determiner ends up in SD (either by blocking movement or by disallowing that entire projection), the article has to be interpreted indefinitely.
 - ▶ However, this still makes the mismatch between the indefinite interpretation and the requirement of a definite determiner pretty mysterious.

Thank you for your attention!