



The Uni- or Polyfunctionality of so in German

... from the Perspective of its Prenominal Use

Hagen Hirschmann
DGfS-Jahrestagung
05.03.2020

Identity or Non-Identity?

- I a) *Peter ist **nur** VOR das Haus gegangen*
*Peter went **just** in FRONT of the house*
- I b) ***Nur** PEter ist vor das Haus gegangen*
***Just** PEter went in front of the house*
- II a) *Die **Kraft** deiner Arme (ist überwältigend)*
*The **strength** of your arms is overwhelming*
- II b) ***Kraft** deines Amtes (kannst du mich feuern)*
***In virtue of** your office you can fire me*
- III a) *Sie war **so** nett*
*She was **so** nice*
- III b) *Er hat das **so** gemacht*
*He has done it **like this***
- III c) ***So** Typen mag ich nicht*
*I don't like **such** people*

Plan

- Introduction: *so* across German syntax
- A closer look at *so* in the nominal domain
- Comparing the nominal, verbal, and adjectival domain: different readings of *so*
- Bringing it together: ideas for a homogenous description of *so*
- Warning: Presentation of analysis based on authentic examples and conceptual conclusions, no implementation yet

Motivation – Syntactic Variants

- *so* in German a highly polyfunctional form, occurring at all (?) syntactic levels:
- Sentence domain (subjunction):
 1. *So es der radikalen Linken gelingt*, []
If the radical left succeeds in it, []
- Sentence domain (sentence adverb):
 2. [*Danach*] *lockt das Meer und so zieht die* [] *Gruppe* [] *an den Strand*
[*Afterwards*] *the sea is luring, thus, the whole group moves to the beach*

Motivation – Syntactic Variants

- VP adverb:
 3. *So* klang er wirklich nicht
*He really did not sound **like this***
- AP particle:
 4. *Warum fällt man barfuß immer gleich **so** negativ auf?*
*Why is one noticed **that** negatively when being barefoot?*
- NP determiner:
 5. *So'n Zufall kann es kaum geben*
***Such a** coincidence is barely possible*

Aside: See [Hennig 2006](#) for classification problems with idiosyncratic uses, multi-word expressions etc.

Motivation – Syntactic Variants

- Summary of all (?) systematic syntactic surroundings and different readings:

	Condition	Consequence	Cause	Manner+Sim	Degree+Sim	Quality+Sim	Intensification	Vagueness
Subjunction	X							
Sentence Adverb			X					
Sentence Adverb (resumptive)		X						
V Adverb				X	X	X	X	X
N Predeterminer				X	X	X	only <i>so'n</i> & <i>so ein</i> ?	X
A Particle				X	X	X	X	X

Motivation – Prenominal *so*

- *so'n* as an article in German:
 - Zifonun et al. 1997, p. 1938: *so* and *solch* as "Determinativmodifikatoren (Prädeterminative)" for *ein*
 - Hole/Klumpp 2000: *so'n* as the third standard article in spoken German
 - von Heusinger 2012:
 - *so'n* as an indefinite demonstrative
 - graded specificity: $ein < so'n < dies$
 - *so'n* and *dies* allow for referential persistence (information structural functions)

Motivation – Prenominal *so*

- *so* only with a merged indefinite head? → Prenominal occurrences of *so* without any further (overt) determiner component:
- 6. **So** *Dinge müssen natürlich schriftlich festgehalten werden*
*Clearly, **such** things have to be written down*
- 7. **So** *Kamaraden habe ich auch in der Klasse*
***Such** mates I also have in class*
- 8. **So** *Deathmetalzeug gefällt mir nun mal gar nicht*
***Such** death metal stuff does not please me at all*
- **Hirschmann (to appear)**: *so*+N is a neglected variant of *so'n*, *so ein*, *solch*, and other prenominal variants
 - Used in the same (spoken and written) register contexts as *so'n*
 - Individual grammatical restrictions (differing from variants above)
 - Specific preferred constructions (*so* N *wie* ...)

so in N, A, and V Contexts

- How do the adnominal occurrences of *so* correspond to *so* in other syntactic surroundings?
 - N: 9. ***So** Räder sind noch nicht erfunden*
***Such** wheels are not invented yet*
 - A: 10. *Diese Verwandlung ist **so** harmlos nicht*
*This transformation is not **that** harmless*
 - V: 11. *Kann aber auch sein dass die wirklich **so** klingt*
*It is also possible that it really sound **like this***
- Problem: Different readings in each syntactic position possible

Similarity Readings of *so* in N, A, and V Contexts



- Most prominent description of *so*: similarity reading (Umbach&Gust 2014, König 2018, Lenerz&Lohnstein 2005):
 - *so* combines with an explicitly or implicitly (contextually) given comparative phrase
 - N: 12. *So Spieler wie dich haben wir hier sehr gerne gesehen*
(*Such*) *players like you we were pleased to see here*
 - A: 13. *Unsere Gesellschaft war noch nie so reich wie jetzt*
Our society has never been as rich as now
 - V: 14. *Leider ist es nicht so gelaufen, wie ich es mir vorgestellt hatte .*
Unfortunately, it did not work the way (as) I had imagined

Similarity Readings of *so* in N, A, and V Contexts



- Similarity relations are expressed in most *so* occurrences in N, A, and V contexts
 - Umbach&Gust 2014: Three-part similarity (comparans – comparandum – relevant features of comparison)
- Comparative phrase, however, remains implicit in many cases
 - N: 15. *So Tipps [wie die Erwähnten] bekomme ich auch von den anderen Kranken (Such) Tips [like the above mentioned] I also get from the other patients*
 - A: 16. *Ich war auch mal so dumm [wie du] Once I was also that/so stupid [like you]*
 - V: 17. *Ist es jemandem von euch auch so gegangen [wie mir]? Has anyone experienced the same [as I have]?*
- Lenerz&Lohnstein 2005's syntactic conclusion: *so* always merges with a (comparative) degree phrase
- *so* must be coreferent with the comparative phrase in all these cases

Intensifying Readings of *so* in N, A, and V Contexts



- *so* in N, A, and V contexts without explicit or implicit coreferent expression :
 - A: 18. *Kafka ist **so** schizo[phren] gewesen!* 19. *Ruthie, Du bist **soooo** doof!*
*Kafka was **so** schizophrenic!* *Ruthie, you are **soooo** dumb!*
 - V: 20. *Ich hab **so** gelacht!*
*I have laughed **so hard!***
 - N: 21. *Du bist **so'ne** Blindschleiche!* (Not attested for *so* without 'n or ein)
*You are **such a** blindworm!*
- Intensification seems to be a result of a missing comparative phrase (equivalent mechanism: *Der ist einfach **zu** [≙ **sehr**] doof!* – *He simply is **too** [≙ **very**] dumb!*)
- Also compare [Umbach&Ebert 2009](#); [König 2018, p.12](#) for intensifying *so*

Vagueness Readings and Other Non-Phoric Uses of *so* in N, A, and V Contexts



- N: 22. *Ich bin etwas unsicher in der Nagelpflege bei meiner 10 Wochen alten Tochter. Geschnitten habe ich die Nägel bisher erste zwei Mal, so ca. ab der 6. Woche und es ist auch gutgegangen, sie hat aber auch immer so Flusenzeug unter den Nägeln (...)*
My 10 weeks old daughter (...) has **such** lint stuff under her nails
- V: 23. *Das Bild [ist] natürlich aus der Ego-Perspektive. Also [es ist] so daruntergehängt*
The picture (...) [is] **like** hanging beneath
- A: 24. *Ich mag die Drums gar nicht vom Klang her. Klingen so plastikmäßig irgendwie*
The drums (...) sound **like** plastic-ish somehow
- Vagueness readings → hedging effects (Umbach&Ebert 2009)

Factors for Interpretation of *so*

- Reasons for treating *so* homogeneously:
 - Same basic readings in each domain
 - Represent similarities between *so* variants
 - Many variants – reduction of lexicon entries
- Assumption: The lexical meaning of *so* is constant: reference to similarity construction
- Semantics of the whole construction is dependent on
 - modification type: internal vs. external modification
(see [Maienborn 2001](#) and [2003](#) for internal vs. external verbal modification, see [Bücking 2012](#) for similarities in nominal domain)
 - the availability and type of a comparative element (comparandum)
- We will once again look at the examples in the verbal, nominal, and adjectival domain separately

Internal vs. External Modification Type: Verbal Domain



- Three readings of *so* in V domain:
 - a) ... *nicht **so** gelaufen, **wie** ich es mir vorgestellt hatte*
*did not work **the way (as)** I had imagined*
 - event-internal reading – manner modification of verb
 - similarity target: CP (*ich es mir vorstellt habe*)
 - b) *Ich hab **so** gelacht!*
*I have laughed **so hard!***
 - event-internal reading – intensification of verb (*lachen*)
 - similarity target: missing
 - c) *Das Bild [~~ist~~] **so** daruntergehängt*
*The picture [~~is~~] **like** hanging beneath*
 - event-external reading – vagueness marking of event expression, potentially with hedging effect
 - similarity target: designation of verb (event)

Internal vs. External Modification Type: Nominal Domain



- Two readings of *so* in N domain:
 - a) **So** *Spieler wie dich*
Such *players like you*
 - internal modification of *Spieler*
 - similarity target: NP/DP (*dich*)
 - b) ... *hat so Flusenzeugs unter den Nägeln*
... *has got such lint stuff under the nails*
 - external modification of noun (*Flusenzeugs*)
 - similarity target: designation of noun (referent)
- (Intensification reading only for *so'n* and *so ein*)

Internal vs. External Modification Type: Adjectival Domain



- Three readings of *so* in A domain:
 - a) *so reich wie zuvor*
as rich as before
 - internal modification of *reich*
 - similarity target: AdvP (*before*)
 - b) *sooo doof*
sooo dumb
 - event-internal reading – intensification of adjective (*doof*)
 - similarity target: missing
 - c) ... *klingen so plastikmässig*
... *sound plastic-like*
 - external modification of adjective
 - similarity target: designation of adjective (feature)

Summary

- All assumed meanings can be expressed in N, A, and V domain (exception: intensification of *so* + N)
 - Option for assuming one uniform operator *so*
 - *so* obligatorily merges with a comparative phrase with three possible interpretations
 - Similarity reading: both comparans (attributed head) and comparandum (comparative phrase) are given, modification level of *so* is internal (*so gut | gemacht | Typen wie du*)
 - Intensification reading: comparandum is missing, attributed head is again comparans, modification level of *so* is internal (*so doof | gefreut*)
 - Vagueness reading: attributed head is comparandum, modification level of *so* is external (*so Flusenzeugs | plastikmässig | weggerobbt [irgendwie]*)

Outlook

- A lot of obstacles still to overcome:
 - Find a fitting framework for describing the similarities and also the variation (construction networks? SBCG?)
 - Bare $so+N$ is always limited to indefinite noun contexts – bare (mass) nouns or plurals; this has to be taken into account
 - ... and everything that bothered you

Thank You!



- Comments, hints, questions?

hirschhx@hu-berlin.de

Research Literature and Research Resources



Research Literature on so in German:

- Bücking, Sebastian (2012) Kompositional flexibel. Partizipanten und Modifikatoren in der Nominaldomäne. Tübingen; Stauffenburg.
- Heusinger, Klaus von (2012) Referentialität, Spezifität und Diskursprominenz im Sprachvergleich am Beispiel von indefiniten Demonstrativpronomen. In Gunkel, Lutz; Zifonun, Gisela (ed.) Deutsch im Sprachvergleich – Grammatische Kontraste und Konvergenzen. Berlin: de Gruyter, 417-455.
- Hole, Daniel; Klumpp, Gerson (2000) Definite type and indefinite token: the article *son* in colloquial German. *Linguistische Berichte* (182), 231-244.
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- Lenerz, Jürgen; Lohnstein, Horst (2005) ‚Nur so‘ – Strukturaspekte der Vergleichskonstruktion. In: D’Avis, Franz Josef (ed.) Deutsche Syntax: Empirie und Theorie. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 81-103.
- Maienborn, Claudia (2003) Event-internal modifiers. Semantic underspecification and conceptual interpretation. In: Lang, Ewald; Fabricius-Hansen, Cathrine (ed.) Modifying adjuncts. Berlin; de Gruyter, 475-509.
- Maienborn, Claudia (2001) On the Position and Interpretation of Locative Modifiers. In: *Natural Language Semantics* 9, 191-240.
- Umbach, Carla; Ebert, Cornelia (2009) German demonstrative *so* – intensifying and hedging effects. In: *Sprache und Datenverarbeitung. International Journal for Language Data Processing* 33 (1-2), 153-168.
- Umbach, Carla; Gust, Helmar (2014) Similarity Demonstratives. *Lingua* 149, 74-93.
- Zifonun, Gisela; Hoffmann, Ludger; Strecker, Bruno (1997) Grammatik der deutschen Sprache. Band 2. Berlin/New York; de Gruyter.

Research Resources (corpus data used):

- DECOW14: Schäfer, Roland; Bildhauer, Felix (2012) Building Large Corpora from the Web Using a New Efficient Tool Chain. In Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC’12), 486-493
<https://corporafromtheweb.org/decow14/>
- DeWaC: Baroni, Marco; Bernardini, Silvia; Ferraresi, Adriano; Zanchetta, Eros (2009) The WaCky Wide Web: A Collection of Very Large Linguistically Processed Web-Crawled Corpora. *Language Resources and Evaluation* 43(3), 209-226.
<http://wacky.sslmit.unibo.it/doku.php?id=corpora>