

## Some (in)definiteness effects of expressive intensifiers

Beside standard instances of degree words like *sehr* ‘very’, *überaus* ‘acutely’ and other intensity particles (Breindl 2009), German exhibits several expressive intensifiers (EIs henceforth) that mainly belong to informal varieties of German and whose syntax and semantics are not well understood. These include at least *total* ‘totally’ and *voll* ‘completely’. A more recent instance is *sau*, which is derived from the homophonous expression meaning ‘female pig, sow’.

- (1) Gestern hast du eine {sau/total/voll} coole Party verpasst.  
*yesterday has you a EI cool party missed*  
“Yesterday, you missed a EI cool party.”

Semantically, EIs are multidimensional expressions that intensify the adjective they scope over on the descriptive level (i.e. their main semantic function is that of a degree word), while they expressively convey that the speaker is emotional about the degree to which the property expressed by the adjective holds (McCready & Schwager 2009). Therefore, an EI contributes to both dimensions of meaning (cf. McCready 2010 for a formal approach to such mixed content).

- (2) a. Descriptive meaning of (2): “Yesterday, you missed a very cool party.”  
b. Expressive meaning of (2): “The speaker is emotional about how cool the party was.”

As far as we know, the properties of such EIs are not documented in any grammar of German, if they are mentioned at all. Therefore, even if we cannot give a satisfying analysis, our main aim is to describe the syntactic and semantic behavior of EIs which raises some challenging puzzles for the syntactic and semantic analysis of (in)definiteness. Since there are no references for EIs, we backed up our intuitions with a questionnaire study with over 300 informants and small corpus and google researches.

EIs show interesting syntactic behavior and semantic effects that distinguishes them from regular booster words like *very*. The most notable feature is that beside the ordinary “ad-adjectival” position as in (2), they can occur on the left edge of a DP like in (3). In contrast, ordinary degree words as in (4) are excluded from this position.

- (3) Gestern hast du {sau/total/voll} die coole Party verpasst.  
*yesterday has you EI the cool party missed*  
“Yesterday, you missed EI a cool party.”
- (4) \*Gestern hast du sehr die coole Party verpasst.  
*yesterday has you very the cool party missed*

Even in the DP-external position, the EI intensifies the adjective inside the DP. Therefore, one could suspect that the external position is derived from DP-internal position by movement. However, the behavior of EIs in this position is more complex. First, it seems to be the case that the DP-external position is connected with some special kind of “indefiniteness effect” (Wang & McCready 2007), since it is only available if the DP contains a definite determiner. That is, while (3) is fine, a DP-external variant of (1) is not.

- (5) \*Gestern hast du {sau/total/voll} eine coole Party verpasst.  
*yesterday has you EI a cool party missed*

This for itself is astonishing enough and shows that a simple movement account cannot be the whole story. However, the indefiniteness effect that *sau* etc. have when in external position is even more surprising, because despite the requirement of a definite determiner, the DP is

nevertheless interpreted as indefinite. Therefore, the DP-external position is disallowed if a definite interpretation of the DP is intended.

- (6) a. \*Da kommt sau der coole Typ, von dem ich dir erzählt habe.  
*there comes EI the cool guy of whom I you told have*  
 intended: “There comes the EI guy about whom I have told you.”  
 b. \*Ich habe sau den coolen Typen geküsst, nicht den langweiligen.  
*I have EI the cool guy kissed not the boring*  
 intended: “I kissed the EI cool guy not the boring one.”

There are also some similarities to the definiteness effect insofar as that due to the requirement of indefinite interpretation, the DP with an external EI cannot scope over an universal quantifier. A sentence like (7) therefore has only one reading.

- (7) a. Jeder Jurastudent träumt von sau dem teuren Auto.  
*every law-student dreams of EI the expensive car*  
 “Every law student dreams of EI an expensive car”  $\checkmark \forall > \exists, * \exists > \forall$

That even definite DPs receive an indefinite interpretation with DP-external EIs is the reason for the observation (cf. McCready & Schwager 2009, who discuss the Viennese German EI *ur*) that there is no definiteness effect in existential construction if a DP-external EI is used (8a). With an internal position (8b), a definiteness effect arises as usual.

- (8) a. Da ist sau die coole Party.  
*there is EI the cool party.*  
 “There is EI a cool party.”  
 b. \*Da ist die sau coole Party.  
*there is the EI cool party*

It seems that an EI in the DP-external position somehow reserves the definiteness of the definite determiner. It cannot however, change the interpretation of indefinite articles. This pattern is puzzling. Why should the DP-external position require a definite DP and exclude an indefinite DP, while at the same time enforcing an indefinite interpretation of the DP? DP-external EIs therefore add another serious puzzle to the well known but not yet well understood definiteness and indefiniteness effects.

The problem becomes even more problematic when we recall that even in the external position, an EI intensifies the adjective inside the DP. This makes an approach that relies on the assumption that external EIs take the determiner or the entire DP as their argument highly problematic. Of course, it would be possible to assume that an external EI takes the definite determiner and an adjective as argument to become a new indefinite and grading determiner that applies to the noun. Even if this worked, it would be merely a description and certainly no explanation. Moreover, this would make it very difficult to relate the external and the internal position of EIs, something any adequate analysis of EIs should be able to.

Breindl, Eva (2009): “Intensitätspartikeln”. In: Hoffmann, Ludger (ed.): *Handbuch der Wortarten*. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 397–422.

McCready, Eric (2010): “Varieties of conventional implicature”. In: *Semantics & Pragmatics* 3(8), 1–57.

McCready, Eric & Schwager, Magdalena (2009): “Intensifiers”. Talk given at DGfS 2009. University of Osnabrück.

Wang, Linton & McCready, Eric (2007): “Aspects of the indefiniteness effect”. In: Washio, T. et al. (eds.): *New Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 162–176.