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Abstract

Gegenstand unserer Untersuchung ist die pragmatische Verwendung von expressiven Adjektivkomposita des Typs *blüt+árm* »überaus arm« mit zwei Hauptakzenten. Dabei intensiviert das einleitende, morphosemantisch meist opake Präfixoid. Die zugrundeliegenden Modelle sind das morphopragmatische der Natürlichen Linguistik und die Searlesche Sprechakttheorie. Die Aggressivität von beleidigenden Sprechakten wird innovativ skaliert. Wir zeigen, dass die Pragmatik im Deutschen und Dänischen im Wesentlichen identisch ist.

Schlagwörter: Morphopragmatics, speech acts of insults, scaling of aggressiveness, morphosemantic transparency/opacity

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1 Introduction

Aims of this contribution to honour Helmut Gruber are to describe and classify the pragmatic use of Austrian German and Danish expressive and intensifying adjective compounds of the type *blút+árm* ‘intensely poor, lit. blood+poor’, most often used with regrets and commiseration for the person(s) referred to. This compound type has in both languages two main stresses (henceforth not marked anymore) and thus differs in German (but not in Danish) from all other subordinating compounds which have just one main stress, as in the segmentally homographic but not prosodically homophonous *blút+arm* ‘anemic’, where the first constituent is morphosemantically transparent, in contrast to the homophonous expressive adjective compound. We focus on aggressive expressive adjective compounds in our analysis, because in his pragmatic writings Helmut Gruber specialised in studying conflictual discourse. Therefore, in his honour, we analyse and classify speech acts of insults which use expressive intensifying adjective compounds as a prominent element of the insult.

2 Very brief history of research

We can be short, because Korecky-Kröll & Dressler (2022) present an exhaustive history of research on German expressive adjective compounds formed with an intensifying prefixoid, which represent an intermediate stage in the grammaticalisation of a lexical word towards a prefix. For Danish see Stopyra (1998), Hansen (1973: 115–117) and Becker-Christensen & Basbøll (2023, with a focus on prosodic phonology). On aggressive speech in general, see the volume edited by Knoblock (2022).

3 Theoretical approach

We follow John Searle’s speech act theory, as expanded in Searle & Vanderveken (1985). The expressive intensifying adjective compounds are morphopragmatic elements. For morphopragmatics we follow the

model of Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994) and its further elaboration over Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (2017) to Merlini Barbaresi & Dressler (2020). This approach is characterised by the perspective of pragmatics first, semantics second, which is adequate also for our topic. Thus, the pragmatic meaning of the morphopragmatic rule forming expressive adjective compounds is pragmatically transparent, but morphosemantically opaque, as we have seen for the prefixoid of *blut+arm* (with two main stresses).

Expressive meaning is understood in this contribution as intensive emotionally and subjectively coloured meaning (cf. Gutzmann 2019, Gutzmann & Henderson 2019), intensification as in Rainer (2015). For aggressive intensification see Merlini Barbaresi (2009), cf. also Haryvliiv (2017).

As for morphopragmatics, we follow the approach of Natural Linguistics (cf. Dressler 2024).

4 Pragmatic properties of expressive intensifying adjective compounds

Pragmatic reasons explain the existence vs. absence of expressive adjective compounds. This becomes particularly clear in the case of antonyms. For example, the connotation of a stick does not fit to intelligence, but very well to stupidity, therefore, *stock+dumm* 'lit. stick+dumb' exists, but not its antonym **stock+gescheit* 'lit. stick+clever', or at least this may explain differences in token frequencies. For example, intelligent people are considered to think faster than stupid people and a lightning is seen as representing maximal rapidity. As a consequence, the token frequency of *blitz+gescheit* 'lit. lightning+clever' is much higher than of its antonym *blitz+dumm* (Austrian Media Corpus = AMC: 2,108 vs. 48 tokens).

The second constituent (head) of the expressive compound is always morphosemantically transparent, while the prefixoid as first constituent which renders the compound pragmatic, is usually to varying degrees

opaque. But German *fuchs+teufel+s+wild* has morphosemantically slightly opaque first and second constituents (*teufel* and *fuchs*), which may be due to the accumulation of two sociocultural changes from earlier rural to our urban society: high fear of the devil has massively decreased, and chicken as food providers endangered by foxes are not essential anymore.

In both German and Danish the morphopragmatic pattern of expressive adjective compounds is neither subject to mutual lexical blocking nor pattern blocking of synonyms. Thus, there is no pattern blocking between German expressive adjective compounds and the also pragmatically intensifying pattern in *ur+alt*, *ur+blöd* from the adjectives ‘old, silly’ (this prefix is as intensifying as our prefixoid). Lexical blocking holds both for the first and the second constituent: we found many series with non-blocking prefixoids, such as *sau/stroh/stock/blitz+dumm* etc.; examples for non-blocking synonymous heads are *sau+dumm/+blöd* ‘intensely silly’, *sau+gut/+wohl*, ‘lit. sow+well’, *stock+betrunken/+besoffen* ‘lit. stick+drunk’.

Dressler et al. (2019) have shown this already extensively for pragmatically used diminutives. For example, in German the pragmatically (emotionally) used diminutive *mein Computer+chen* does not block the semantic synonym *mein Computer+l* (with haplology from *Computer+erl*), and on the Italian internet we found hundreds of examples of pragmatically used diminutives from recent English loanwords, such as the abbreviation of ‘very important person’: *vipp+ino*, *vipp+etto*, *vipp+uccio*, *vipp+otto*, *vipp+er-ello*.

The pragmatic character of expressive adjective compounds shows also in another correspondence with pragmatically used evaluatives: whereas diminutives have a certain tendency to have positive connotations, their antonyms, the intensifying augmentatives, have a certain tendency to have negative connotations (see Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 92); the same holds for our intensifying expressive adjective compounds: this pejorative character renders them adequate for being used in hate speech (see Korecky-Kröll & Dressler 2022). This will be demonstrated for insults in this contribution (in Section 7).

Diachronically, prefixoids stem from morphologically transparent first lexical constituents of compounds in a process of grammaticalisation resulting in an intermediary stage between autonomous words and prefixes.

Grammaticalisation results in loss or reduction of lexical meaning. The great reduction of lexical meaning in our prefixoids may also be the reason why we have not found any expressive adjective compounds in poetic and theatrical occasionalisms (novel words created just for one place in a poem or theatre text, not to be repeated, see Dressler et al. 2024) in many literary texts of the German writers Joseph von Eichendorff and Arno Schmidt and of the Austrian writers Johann Nepomuk Nestroy and Peter Handke. The reason appears to be that creators of such occasionalisms want to refer by them to their favourite poetic and theatrical topics, and this needs morphosemantic transparency.

Differences between the examples of German and Danish are nearly exclusively about lexical profitability (in terms of token frequency, see Bauer's 2001 differentiation from morphological productivity) of either the first or the second compound constituent. This is probably due to the different cultural history of Austria and Denmark. Sometimes it can also be explained by the different pragmatic context of both countries, i.e., that sea fish occurs as first compound constituent in Danish but not in Austrian German, which explains why Danish *torsk+e+dum* 'lit. cod+stupid' has no parallel in the other language.

5 Data

The exact origin of our German data of the 20th and 21st century, which comes mainly from Vienna, is given in Korecky-Kröll & Dressler (2022); they have been found in the Austrian Media Corpus (AMC) of the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, a huge electronic corpus which exhaustively comprises all Austrian print media data of more than the last three decades (see Ransmayr 2018), from the corpus SFB DiÖ (Spezialfor-

schungsbereich “Deutsch in Österreich. Variation – Kontakt – Perzeption”, FWF F60, see Lenz 2018) and from the newspaper *Der Standard*. The Danish data comes partly from *infomedia*, a very large Danish corpus of public media from the 20th and the 21st century, partly from the extremely popular “Olsenbande”-films (the “Olsen-Gang”, 14 cinema films by Erik Balling and Henrik Bahs 1969-1998).

6 Methods

The collection of data in electronic corpora was conducted via a manual search for the relevant search terms (e.g., the German prefixoids *sau+*, *scheiß+*, *stroh+*, *strunz+*, corresponding to Danish *svine+*, *skide+*, *stok+*, *pisse+*), for Austrian German in the online AMC database via the No-Sketch engine search tool (Ransmayr 2018).

If the interpretation of a token or example appears problematic, we follow the method of group interpretation elaborated by Soeffner & Hitzler (1994), who apply a Popperian falsification method: each of the coauthors or invited specialists is asked to propose an interpretation, the others are asked to try to falsify the interpretations of the others. Which interpretation survives falsification attempts best, is accepted as the best one for the projected publication.

7 Analysis of German and Danish speech acts of insults

The speech act of insulting is an offensive expressive speech act (see the overview by Milić 2018) uttered with a contemptuous attitude stressed via an evaluative term, in our case, by the head of an expressive adjective compound sharpened by the intensifying prefixoid. The propositional content is invective and often denigrating based on a negative evaluation. Subtypes of insults reflect different relationships between the inveigher and the addressee or object of the invective in the given situation of performing the speech act.

7.1 Insults of addressees in praesentia

This subtype is the most aggressive with the strongest illocutionary force or invectivity and the strongest perlocutionary sequels the speaker may expect from the addressee:

- (1) *Ihr seid so blöd, dass ihr gar nicht merkt, wie sau+dumm ihr seid.*
- (2) *Du bist sexy, aber stroh+dumm.*
- (3) *Du bist zwar stroh+dumm, siehst aber gut aus.*

In the two latter machist invectives, we think, the contrast with looking well and sexual appeal enforces the insult of attributing very great stupidity to the addressee, which we think is an instance of intensification of aggressivity.

- (4) *Talentløse skide+rik, ingenting kan du klare, ikke engang et skide hul kan du lave* (Talentless piece of shit, nothing can you manage, you cannot even make a bloody hole).

This is a typical example of the leader of the Olsen-Gang, Egon, shouting insults into the face of his gang-member(s). Egon Olsen has a rich, and very original, vocabulary of insulting (very expressive) compound nouns, e.g. *skide+spræller* 'shit+jumper', *luse+ryg* 'lice+back', *skvat+pisser* 'wimp/splash+pisser', often preceded by expressive, and very insulting, adjectives. The Olsen-Gang is now an established part of Danish popular culture, and new types of merchandise (playing cards, etc.) are still produced.

7.2 Insults of addressees in praesentia with mitigation

- (5) *Ich muss sagen, nichts Persönliches gegen Ihnen[sic!], aber das war eine sau+dumme Frage.*

This insult refers to an action of the addressee, which is less aggressive than a reference to the addressee him/herself, i.e. to his/her physical or mental state (cf. Havryliv 2009: 55–56, Baron 1988). This is also the case in:

- (6) *na, wie ma amoi in da cocktailbar worn, do bist du sau+spät kumma.*¹
- (7) *Du har storartede ideer, Egon, men ... Det begynder så godt, og så ender det hele i skudder+mudder, fordi der aldrig er nogen plan i det du foretager dig* (Egon, you have great ideas, but ... It begins so well, and then everything goes to pot (to-day nonsense word, +mudder means '+mud') because there is never any plan in what you are doing.)²

7.3 Insults of addressees in absentia

These insults are less aggressive than insults of addressees in praesentia: this establishes a second scaled parameter of aggressiveness.

- (8) *dass nahezu sämtliche Top-Berater ihn mindestens einmal als 'Idiot, Volltrottel, strunz+dumm', oder mental auf dem Stand 'eines Kindes' bezeichnet haben.*³
- (9) *Der sau+dumme Klachel findet das auch noch witzig.*⁴
- (10) *dass die Kärntner Bevölkerung nicht 'so blöd ist', auf die 'blitz+dumme, böartige Verhetzung' hereinzufallen*
- (11) *Kardinal Joseph Ratzinger ist stock+konservativ und blitz+gescheit.*
- (12) *Min kone er skide+sur* (My wife is shit+sour)⁵

1 This dialectal insult is part of an informal conversation between two young men from Lower Austria in the SFB DiÖ corpus. This is the Standard German translation: '*Nun, wie wir einmal in der Cocktailbar waren, da bist du sauspät gekommen*'.

2 Said by the wife Yvonne of gang-member Kjeld.

3 Note the climax from *idiot* to *intensely dumb*.

4 The noun *Klachel* 'ruffian, boor' increases aggressiveness.

5 This is the title of a television program about frustrated men (*infomedia*), and now used in innumerable contexts.

7.4 Self-insults

Self-insults have other Illocutionary intentions, i.e. they are not offensive but self-reproaches; and they have other perlocutionary consequences, namely frustration or the resolution to behave next time in a similar situation more adequately:

- (13) *Ich hab' ein sau+dummes Interview im Fernsehen gegeben.*
 (14) *Das war ein sau+dummer Fehler von mir, das musste nicht sein.*
 (15) *Det var pisse+dumt af mig!* (It was piss+stupid of me!).⁶
 (16) *Jeg tænkte ikke på andet end ... pilsnere, spiritus og kællinger ... og et svin var jeg, en sut, et skvat, lidderligt mæg+dyr, en fordrukken svamp* (I only thought of beer, booze, and bitches, and I was a swine, a soak, a twerp, a voluptuous mud+animal, a drunken sot).⁷

7.5 Negative comments about states of affairs and events

Negative comments about states of affairs and events are still less aggressive than comments about addressees in absentia:

- (17) *Das war schlecht, sau+schlecht sogar.*⁸
 (18) *Es war hart, anstrengend, naß, sau+kalt und sau+dreckig.*⁹
 (19) *naa aber moor* (,morgen') *wird's scheiße+streng.*
 (20) *weil die Miete is so scheiße+teier.*
 (21) *Jeg er simpelthen skide+sur over de indbrud. Det er pisse+irriterende at man ikke kan have sine ting i fred* (I am purely and simply shit+sour for those burglaries. It is piss+irritating that one cannot have one's things in peace).¹⁰

6 This was said by a goalkeeper who made a game-decisive error in an important football-match (*infomedia*).

7 This was said by an associate (Dynamite Harry) of the Olsen-Gang who has become a teetotaller.

8 This was said about a soccer game.

9 This was said about tomorrow's weather.

10 Said by the owner of a car breaker's firm (*infomedia*).

8 Conclusions

The main innovations of our contribution are the embedding of the speech act of insulting into the morphopragmatic model of Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994), the subclassification of this speech act and the embedding of the use of German and Danish intensifying expressive adjective compounds into speech act theory. The parallels between German and Danish increase the prospects that our findings can be generalised.

9 Outlook for future research

A still more fine-grained subclassification of the speech act of insulting would be welcome.

Compounds generally derive diachronically from syntactic phrases and are at least originally morphosemantically transparent, just as the synonymous phrases. This leads to the expectation that also expressive adjective compounds should have been originally transparent, as in G. *blitz+gescheit*, *sau+dumm*, whereas the less transparent synonym of the second example, namely *stroh+dumm*, might not yet have existed. Note that the anti-iconic (more precisely: anti-metaphorical) antonym of the first example, namely *blitz+dumm*, is still today very rare or even not used by some speakers. It can also be expected that when expressive adjective compounds arise, they are used much less than their syntactic paraphrases. With increasing use and lexicalisation this asymmetry in token frequency is expected to be successively reversed, and morphosemantic opacification is expected to increase.

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