

Another adverbial expletive in German?

In German, the lexical item *so* can perform an impressive number of different functions depending of the syntactic context in which it occurs. For instance, it can be a modal (1a) or a consecutive adverb (1b), a resumptive (1c), a discourse particle (1d), a focus particle (1e), or a DP-internal particle/determiner (1f).

- (1) a. Ich habe schon vermutet, dass es **so** ausgehen würde.
'I knew that it would end up this way.'
(*sueddeutsche.de*, Sept. 25th, 2017)
- b. Meine vereinbarte Ansprechpartnerin war nicht da und **so** musste ich das Gespräch mit einem anderen Mitarbeiter führen.
'My appointed reference person wasn't there, so I had to talk to one of her colleagues.'
(*kununu.com/de/sempart1*, Jul. 1st, 2015)
- c. Ist $x = 0$, **so** muss $y = 0$ oder $y = \pm 1$ sein.
'If $x = 0$, then $y = 0$ or $y = \pm 1$.'
(*www2.math.ethz.ch*, Apr. 11th, 2016)
- d. **So**, jetzt kann ich endlich mal loslegen.
'Good – now I can finally get started.'
(*pff.de*, 04.12.2005)
- e. Ich stehe **so** eher auf KUNST.
(int.): 'I prefer ART.'
(adapted from: Wiese 2011: 1004)
- f. Kaufst du mir **sonen** Pullover?
'Would you buy me that sweater/a sweater like that?'
(Hole & Klumpp 2000: 236)

In each of these cases, *so* can be argued to have a different formal status and realize a different entry in the mental lexicon, which in turn amounts to the assumption that a different syntactic derivation needs to be postulated for each of the (sentences containing each of the) polysemous occurrences of *so* in (1).

The focus of this paper will be a further function that has so far never been considered independently, namely the one illustrated in (2) (henceforth: *so_{expl}*):

(2) **pre-context:**

Aus der amtlichen Statistik lässt sich bei Personen im Alter von 65 und mehr Jahren für den Zeitraum von 2000 bis 2019 ein stetig steigender Beschäftigungstrend im Ruhestandsalter erkennen.
'Official statistics reveal a steady increase in employment among retired people in the age group 65+ between 2000 and 2019.'

clause:

So zeigen die Daten von Eurostat, dass der Anteil der Erwerbstätigen im Ruhestandsalter in Deutschland von 7 % im Jahr 2009 auf 12 % im Jahr 2019 angestiegen ist.

'Eurostat data show that the proportion of employed people in retirement age in Germany grew from 7% in 2009 to 12% in 2019.'

(*bpb.de*, Mar. 10th, 2021)

In this paper, I will show that *so_{expl}*, although being formally identical to the elements shown in (1) and superficially looking like a run-of-the-mill adverb in clause-initial position, exhibits none of the features related to the other items.

On the basis of distributional and semantic-pragmatic criteria discussed in the literature (cf. e.g. Haider 1993; Bayer & Suchsland 1997, 1998; Svenonius 2001; Hartmann 2008; Fuß 2008), I will also argue that this element qualifies as a good candidate to be categorized as a particular adverbial expletive with the functions of satisfying an EPP-like feature of Comp and at the same time “compressing”

the content of a new-information utterance into the middle field. *So_{expl}*, however, also has its own peculiarities. For instance, differently from other expletive elements of German – e.g. Standard-German *es* or *da* (*Es hat jemand gesprochen* ‘Someone has spoken’/ *Da ist jemand* ‘Someone is there’), or Bavarian *do* (*Do hot jemand g’reedt* ‘Someone has spoken’) –, *so_{expl}* cannot introduce a sentence that is uttered out of the blue (e.g. without the pre-context given in (2), the *so*-clause could not be interpreted in the same way).

With respect to its origin and development in the system, it will be proposed that *so_{expl}* represents a fully grammaticalized (de-semanticized and arguably also de-referentialized) item having its source in one of the elements illustrated above. This is confirmed by the results of a diachronic study showing that this element seems to have emerged later than its counterparts in (1).

Selected references

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