

## Pseudo-Vocative constructions and insults in German (and Swedish)

In our talk, we will focus on a construction in German we call pseudo-vocatives, namely *Du/Sie Idiot!* (You idiot!). We will compare them with *bona fide* cases of vocatives, analyse their syntactic and semantic properties and contrast them to analogue cases in Swedish.

1. At first glance pseudo-vocatives look like vocatives: In front of a sentence they may be replaced by the second person or proper nouns:

- (1) a. Du, komm mal. (You, come MP.)  
b. Peter, komm mal. (Peter, come MP.)  
c. Du Idiot, komm mal. (You idiot, come MP.)

But this is not the case for other positions inside a clause.

- (2) a. Du, der Hund (\*du) hat (\*du) aufs Sofa gepinkelt (??du).  
*you, the dog (\*you) has (\*you) on-the couch peed (??you)*  
'You, the dog has peed on the couch.'  
b. Heinz, der Hund (\*Heinz) hat (??Heinz) das Sofa (\*Heinz) zerkaut (?Heinz).  
*Heinz, the dog (\*Heinz) has (\*Heinz) on-the couch peed (?Heinz)*  
'Heinz, the dog has peed on the couch.'  
c. Du Idiot, der Hund (du Idiot) hat (du Idiot) aufs Sofa gepinkelt (du Idiot).  
*you idiot, the dog (you idiot) has (you idiot) on-the couch peed (you idiot)*  
'You idiot, the dog has peed on the couch.'

Pseudo-vocatives can appear in parenthetical niches, whereas second person pronouns and proper names cannot. In addition, pseudo-vocatives appear in argument positions, see (4) below.

2. Pseudo-vocatives are *expressive* in that they contribute only partially to the truth conditions of the utterance. As expressive devices, they possibly contribute to the use-conditions of the utterance (or contribute to the *contextual bias*, see Predelli 2008). They appear to constitute *constructions*, i.e. their special form is not easily analysed in a projectionist manner (cf. Jacobs 2008) and they display a special meaning, possibly an insult (see Neu 2008).

According to Vater (2000: 194), neutral expressions like *Mensch*, *Arbeiter*, *Soldat*, etc. are acceptable to a lesser degree. It has been made more precise, however, that N must have an emotional overtone, for example *Ich Glückspilz* (I lucky devil!). Now Rauh (2004) argues that the construction *per se* cannot be connected with an expressive meaning, since *Ich N* or *Ihr N* shows up in sentences where it has no expressive meaning at all, cf. (3a):

- (3) a. [Ihr Literaturwissenschaftler] mögt den jetzigen Zustand für angemessen halten, aber [ich Linguist] halte die Linguistik für weit unterrepräsentiert.  
*You literary scholars might the actual state for adequate hold, but I linguist hold the linguistics for widely underrepresented.*  
'You, as literary scholars, might consider the actual state as adequate, but I, as a linguist, consider linguistics as widely underrepresented.'  
b. [Ihr als Literaturwissenschaftler] mögt den jetzigen Zustand für angemessen halten, aber [ich als Linguist] halte die Linguistik für weit unterrepräsentiert.  
,You, as literary scholars ....'

Roughly, *du X* codes holistic properties of being X, while *du als N* denotes X with respect to the property of being an X. However, the *ich/ihr N*-construction seems to inherit an emotional aspect even if N is not pejorative or ameliorative, and even if it does not occur in isolation.

Note that the appositive variant does not allow for expressives like *Idiot*. These are only allowed in the *ich/du N*-construction.

- (4) a. Du Idiot hältst den Zustand sicher für angemessen.  
You idiot considers the state surely as adequate.  
'You idiot considers the state as surely adequate.'  
b. \*Du als Idiot hältst den Zustand sicher für angemessen.

Cases like (5), containing no N that is pejorative *per se*, are associated with an insulting attitude:

- (5) a. Du Student, (du)! Sie Hochschulangehöriger, (Sie)!  
'You student, (you)! You<sub>POL</sub> university member, you<sub>POL</sub>!'

This association rises from the isolated utterances that mostly have an insulting touch, and from the competing *du als*-construction that excludes pejorative nouns. Thus we conclude that the *du X*-construction is systematically connected with expressiveness, even if it occurs in the prefield of a complete sentence.

3. In Swedish, there is a difference between the form of embedded and unembedded expressive N-constructions, which are analogue to our pseudo-vocatives.

- (6) a. Vad gör du idiot? ('What do you idiot')  
b. \*Vad gör din idiot? ('What do you idiot')  
(7) a. Vad gör du, din idiot? ('What do you, you idiot')  
b. Din idiot! ('You idiot')

In the embedded cases the form is *du idiot*, whereas in the unembedded case it is *din idiot*. We will contrast this with the German cases and show how our analysis can cope with this data.

## References

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