
Du Trottet du! Intensifying insults with expressive use of pronouns

Jakob Mache¹, Vesela Simeonova²

¹*University of Lisbon*, ²*University of Graz*

jakob.mache@letras.ulisboa.pt, vesela.simeonova@uni-graz.at

In some Indo-European languages, pronouns are used in expressive ways via grammatical patterns that involve: (1) nominative pronouns, as in German and English; (2) possessives (Romance, Swedish); (3) demonstratives (Bulgarian); (4) indefinites (Serbian).

- (1) Du Trottet (du)! (Germ.) you.NOM fool you.nom
- (2) Seu burro (E.Portuguese) POSS.3S donkey
- (3) Zadnik takuv! (Bulg.) asshole such

The construction is emotionally charged and predominantly used pejoratively, in that it does not take a positive pronoun easily (d'Avis & Meibauer 2013: 210 on German; Jain 2021 on English, Van Olmen et al. 2023 on Dutch, Polish a.o.). Here we confirm this for Bulgarian with a corpus study from OpenSubtitles: in a random sample of 200 masculine and 200 feminine hits for NP+*such* (cf. (3)), 170 and 168, respectively, were used pejoratively, and only 5 and 8 (resp.) reflected an endearing attitude notably still used a pejorative NP (e.g. *I love you, you fool*). We propose that the pejorative force arises from the interaction of degree semantics and pragmatic principles like the M-Principle proposed by d'Avis & Meibauer (2013). We provide two arguments that the NPs used in this patterns come with some salient scale. (i) determiner doubling in German has only been observed with NPs that denote degree properties, signalling intensification (e.g. *ein ganz ein blöder Fehler*, cf. Kallulli & Rothmayr 2008: 97–100, 104–106, 131). (ii) most NP insults and endearments can be graded, modified by intensifying adjectives (*big idiot*), they occur in exclamatives that express an unexpected grade of a property (*What an idiot!*). Our data from Bulgarian provides new evidence against the predominant view that the pattern under consideration is a type of vocative (with Giomi et al. 2022; *pace* Jain 2021, Gutzmann 2019): (i) Bulgarian NP+*such* is compatible with the vocative but rarely used (only 15 out of 200 feminine hits; masc. does not have a productive vocative form); (ii) it cannot be used as calls.

References: • d'Avis, F. & J. Meibauer (2013). *Du Idiot! Din idiot! Pseudo-vocative constructions and insults in German (and Swedish)*. In B. Sonnenhauser et al. (eds.), *Vocative!* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter • Gutzmann, D. (2019). *The grammar of expressivity*. Oxford: OUP • Jain, K. H. (2022). *You Hoboken! Semantics of an expressive label maker*. *Linguist & Philosophy* 45, 365–391. • Kallulli, D. & A. Rothmayr (2008). The syntax and semantics of indefinite determiner doubling constructions in varieties of German. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 11.2, 95–136. • Van Olmen et al. (2023). Inherent linguistic impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 215, 22–40.