

Two specific indefinite articles in German

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1. Different notions of specificity

A: a semantic notion: referentiality

An indefinite noun phrase is specific if its referent is interpreted independent of the embedding context, i.e. it behaves like a rigid expression, takes scope over other operators (Karttunen 1969/1976, Fodor & Sag 1982).

B: a semantic notion: scope / dependencies

An indefinite is specific if it is interpreted independent of other operators (it values does not vary depending on other operators) (Farkas 1981, Ruys 1992, Abusch 1994, Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997, Kratzer 1998, Chierchia 2001, Schwarz 2001)

C: an epistemic notion

A specific indefinite signals that the speaker or some other salient participant “has a referent in mind” or can (uniquely) identify the referent (Karttunen 1969, Fodor & Sag 1982, Hintikka 1986, Kamp & Bende-Farkas 2003).

D: D-linking, partitivity and presuppositionality

An indefinite noun phrase is specific if it is D-linked, i.e. presupposed in the discourse. Partitive indefinites are prototypical instances (Pesetsky 1987, Enc 1991).

E: discourse pragmatic notion

An indefinite noun phrase is specific if it serves to introduce a referent that has a relevant / an important role to play in the subsequent discourse: (i) it is a “pretopic”, i.e. it has a high probability to become topic, (ii) it shows referential persistence, i.e. it has a large number of anaphoric expressions, (iii) it reflects a high activation level in terms of accessibility hierarchies, i.e. the first anaphoric expression is expected to have less descriptive material. (see Givón 1981).

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|------------------------|
| (0) | a | Every student recited a poem of Pindar. | unmarked |
| | b | Every student recited this _{ref} poem of Pindar. | referential |
| | c | Every student recited SOME poem of Pindar. | wide scope / partitive |
| | d | Every student recited a certain poem of Pindar. | epistemic |
| | e | Every student recited this _{ref} poem of Pindar. | discourse prominence |

The demonstrative *this* in English has an “indefinite” or “presentative” use, as in (1) and (2b). (Perlman 1969, Prince 1981, MacLaran 1982, Ionin 2006).

- (1) There is **this man** who lives upstairs from me who is driving me mad because he jumps rope at 2 a.m. every night. (Ionin 2006, 176, quoting MacLaran 1982)
- (2) a I put **a/*this** 1\$ stamp on the letter. I wanted to mail the letter to Europe.
b I put **a/this** 1\$ stamp on the letter and realized too late, that it was worth a fortune.

Besides these discourse properties, indefinite *this* also shows particular referential properties: It always takes wide scope with respect to extensional operators (3), intensional operators (4) and negation (5).

- (3) a He gave an A to every student who recited **this poem** by Pindar.
(→ Only one poem overall)
b He gave an A to every student who recited a poem by Pindar.
(→ Possibly many poems)
- (4) a Alice wanted to kiss **this sailor boy**. (→ There was a sailor boy)
b Alice wanted to kiss a sailor boy. (-/-> There was a sailor boy)
- (5) a Mary didn't buy **this pink truck**. (Prince 1981, 237)
(→ There was a pink truck)
b Mary didn't buy a pink truck. (-/-> There was a pink truck)

- (6) referential indefinite (Fodor & Sag 1982, Heim 1991)

$\llbracket a_{ref} \alpha \rrbracket^{c,i}$ is defined only if there is a unique individual that the speaker of *c* has in mind in *c*, and this individual is in $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{c,c}$; where defined, $\llbracket a_{ref} \alpha \rrbracket^{c,i} = \text{this individual}$.

- (7) *this_{ref}* (Ionin (2006, 187)

b. A sentence of the form $[sp \alpha] \phi$ expresses a proposition only in those utterance contexts *c* where the following felicity condition is fulfilled: the speaker of *c* intends to refer to exactly one individual x_c in *c*, and there exists a property *u* which the speaker considers noteworthy in *c*, and x_c is both *a* and *u* in *c*. When this condition is fulfilled, $[sp \alpha] \phi$ expresses that proposition which is true at an index *i* if x_c is ϕ at *i* and false otherwise.

Questions

1. Are these different concepts related and if so, how?
2. Can we establish a link between the referentiality and discourse prominence / noteworthiness?

Why? theoretical interest in the concept of specificity
 grammaticalization path of articles
 understanding descriptive grammars (since they talk more about discourse prominence)

2. Two specific in definite articles in German

German happens to have two equivalent determiners that show very similar discourse properties: indefinite *dies* and the indefinite article *so'n* (primarily used in informal registers). Both are used to signal that more information about the referent will be given in the subsequent discourse:

1. *Da war **dieser andere Bursche** aus dem Kosovo, **der** seine Fluchtroute nicht mehr genau rekonstruieren konnte. Das nennt man dann fehlenden Mitwirkungswillen im Asylverfahren, dafür gibt es ebenfalls einen negativen Bescheid und in dem steht, daß der Asylantrag "offensichtlich unbegründet" war. Die zweitägige Berufungsfrist hat **der junge Kosovo-Albaner** versäumt. Warum? Weil **er** in diesen zwei Tagen durch drei Schubhaftanstalten gereicht wurde.* (Cosmas)

‘There was **this other guy** from the Kosovo region **who** could not exactly reconstruct the route of his flight. [...] **The young Kosovo-Albanian** missed the 2-day-respite for an appeal. Why? Because in these 2 days **he** was handed through 3 institutions, being arrested and awaiting repatriation.’

2. *Da war **dieser Typ** aus Deutschland, den ich in einem Hostel auf der neuseeländischen Insel Waiheke kennen lernte. Vielleicht hieß **er** Wolfgang, vielleicht Volker - nicht so wichtig. Ich erinnere mich nur, dass **er** nett, aber doch ein komischer Kauz war. Ich meine nicht **seine** schwäbischen Wurzeln, die **er** unüberhörbar kundtat. Ich meine Äußerlichkeiten. **Er** trug - für einen Backpacker äußerst verdächtig - gepflegte Halbschuhe, die **er** nach jedem Spaziergang gewissenhaft mit einem Speziallederfett behandelte.* (Cosmas)

‘There was **this guy** from Germany who I got to know in a hostel on the New Zealand island Waiheke. **He** was named was Wolfgang, maybe Volker – not that important. I just remember that **he** was nice, but quite a weird person. I do not refer to **his** Swabian roots, which he unmistakably presented. I refer to physical aspects. **He** had – very suspicious for a backpacker – neat loafers, which **he** carefully cleaned after every walk with a special dubbing.’

3. *Da war **dieser Dominikanerpater** aus Retz. Bei **ihm** habe ich zum letzten Mal gebeichtet. Ich war damals 16 oder 17 Jahre alt. **Der fremde Pater** hat sich im Sommer im alten Dominikanerkloster einquartiert. Während **er** dort seine Exerzitien abhielt [...].* (Cosmas)

‘There was **this Dominican Father** from Retz. With **him** I had my last confession. Back then I was 16 or 17. **The foreign Father** spent the summer in an old Dominican abbey. While **he** held his spiritual exercitation there [...].’

4. *Da ging mal **so'n Mann** voll Mut und Kampflust zum Militär und ward da Soldat, danach auch Hauptmann. Das macht' **ihn** dann so stolz, dass alt und jung früh und spät nur noch „Hauptmann“ zu **ihm** sug, als stünd's so im Taufbuch. Jahr und Tag ging's **ihm** damit gut; doch dann zog Ruh' ins Land, und in Hinkunft war nichts mit Kampf und Schlacht. Da schmiß man **ihn** vom Militär raus und gab **ihm** bloß paar Mark als Sold. O Undank! Da stand man nun samt Hauptmannsrang, sah nicht, was tun, und wornd knurrig ins Land hinaus.¹*

(‘There went **so-a man** full of courage and combativeness and became a soldier there, afterwards a captain. This made **him** so proud, because elder and younger people called **him** only ‘captain’, as if this was written in the birth certificate. Years and days passed by and **he** was well off, but then peaceful days came and the future did not foresee any fights and battles. **He** was dismissed from the military and was given only a few Marks pay. Such ingratitude! One had a military rank, but couldn't figure out what to do and [...].’)

¹ http://verben.texttheater.de/Hauptmann_und_noch_f%C3%BCnf_Mann_auf_Landfahrt

5. *Letztens war so n Mann im TV, dessen einziger Sohn ist gestorben im Krieg, da hätt ich am liebsten geheult. Is doch sowas von scheiße! Grrrrrr!*²

‘Lately, there was **so-a man** on TV **whose** only son died in the war. I felt like crying in that moment. It is so bad! Grrrrrr!’

6. *In unsrer Stadt gibts so'n Mann er ist nicht irgendeiner, nein, er ist unser neuer Bürgermeister, er sieht wie ein Vogelstrauß.*³

‘In our city there is **so- a man**, **he** is not anyone, no, **he** is our new mayor, **he** looks like an ostrich.’

2.1 indefinite dieser

Anaphoric (tracking/co-referential) use

- (8) *Es war einmal ein König. **Dieser** König hatte eine Krone.*
 ‘Once upon a time there was a king. **This** king had a crown.’

Discourse Deictic use:

- (9) *Er sagte: „Ich liebe Dich“, und mit **diesen** Worten ging er.*
 ‘He said „I love you“, and with **these** words he left.’

Recognitional use

- (10) *Weißt du was mit **diesem** Telefon passiert ist, das immer in deinem Zimmer war?*
 ‘Do you know what happened to **that (dieses)** phone which used to be in your room?’
 (11) *Ich habe endlich **diese** Jacke gekauft. (Die, über die ich zuvor die ganze Zeit sprach.)*
 ‘I finally bought **that (diese)** jacket (The one I was talking about all the time before.)’

Demonstrative determiners (see above) are generally considered to be definite, since they pass all standard tests for definiteness and cannot occur in constructions which are typical for indefinites, like existential *there-is* constructions.

Indefinite use of dieser

- (12) *Es gibt da **diesen**_{ind}/**einen**/***den**/ Ort, an dem immer die Sonne scheint.*
 ‘There is **this**_{ind} /**a** /***the** place, where the sun is always shining.’
 (13) *Gestern kam ich in eine Bar und da war **dieser**_{ind}/ **ein**/ ***der** Fremde, der mich die ganze Zeit anstarrte.*
 ‘Yesterday I walked into a bar and there was **this**_{ind} /**a** /***the** stanger who stared at me all the time.’
- No situational deixis involved, the referent is not salient in the situation of utterance and neither present in the preceding discourse, no common ground between hearer and speaker exists.
 - Referents are not given, not perceptible, not salient but new to the hearer, i.e. discourse- and hearer-new information is marked.

² (<http://www.einahpets.de/blog/>)

³ (<http://www.mzee.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-100000620.html>)

2.3 Indefinite article *so'n*

The form *so'n* or *son* has grammaticalized from *so* 'such' and the reduced enclitic indefinite article '*n*'. Hole & Klumpp (2004) assume that they are one form, whereas Henn-Mennesheimer (1986) and Lenerz & Lohnstein (2004) assume that these are still two forms:

(14)	Sg.	Pl.
	Nom. <i>so'n</i> Pullover	Nom. <i>so'ne</i> Pullover
	Gen. <i>so'nes</i> Pullovers	Gen. <i>so'ner</i> Pullover
	Dat. <i>so'nem</i> Pullover	Dat. <i>so'nen</i> Pullovers
	Akk. <i>so'nen</i> Pullover	Akk. <i>so'ne</i> Pullover

Traditional analyses of so-indefinites: Ehlich (1986), Eisenberg (1994), Umbach & Ebert (t.a.)

	Use	Gradable expression	Example	Non-gradable expression	Example
Demonstrative Use	1. deictic (+pointing gesture)	Picks up a degree based on a similarity.	<i>Ana ist SO groß.</i> 'Ana is SO tall.'	Picks up a property, i.e. a type of X.	<i>Er hat SO ein Auto.</i> 'He has SO-a car.'
	2. anaphoric	Based on similarity, not identity.	<i>Ana ist 1.80m groß.</i> <i>Maria ist auch SO groß.</i> 'Ana is 1.80m tall. Mary is also SO tall.	Based on similarity to the antecedent.	<i>Maria hat ein Auto mit Heckklappe. SO ein Auto hat er auch.</i> 'Mary has a car with a hatchback. SO-a car does he also have.'
"Out of the blue"	3. intensifying	Shifts the standard value. Degree of a silent demonstration.	<i>Er ist so ein Pedant/ Kind.</i> 'He is SO-a pedant/ child.'	-	-
	4. hedging	-	-	Shifts the denotation of the expression.	<i>Peter hat so'n Hund gekauft.</i> 'Peter bought so-a dog.'
	5. pretopic	-	-		<i>Da gibt's so'nen Lehrer in meiner Schule in den ich verliebt bin.</i> 'There is so-a teacher in my school whom I'm in love with.'

Table 1. Main uses of *so*

- (14) a *Jeder Schüler sagte gestern ein Gedicht auf* unmarked *ein*
 b *Jeder Schüler sagte gestern ein bestimmtes / ein gewisses Gedicht auf*
 a certain / a particular specific
 c *Jeder Schüler sagte gestern EIN Gedicht auf* topical
 d *Jeder Schüler sagte gestern dieses Gedicht auf* referential
 e *Jeder Schüler sagte gestern so'n Gedicht auf* pretopical
 'Every student recited DET poem.'

Pretopic

High probability to become a topic in the subsequent discourse.

Referential persistence

Number of anaphoric items linked to the discourse referent.

Discourse activation

Type of anaphoric expression used to refer back to the discourse referent.

explicit

- (15) a *Heute war ich in der Bücherei und hab mir **ein Buch** gekauft. Dann bin ich heimgerannt und hab gegessen und bin schlafen gegangen.* (Google)
'I went to the library today and bought a book. I went home afterwards, ate and went to bed.'
- b *?Heute war ich in der Bücherei und hab mir **dieses / so'n Buch** gekauft. Dann bin ich heimgerannt und hab gegessen und bin schlafen gegangen.*
'I went to the library today and bought so-a book. I went home afterwards, ate and went to bed.'
- c *Heute war ich in der Bücherei und hab mir **dieses / so'n Buch** gekauft. Dann bin ich heimgerannt, hab's gelesen und es war sehr interessant.*
'I went to the library today and bought so-a book. I went home afterwards, read it and it was very interesting.'

implicit

Da war **dieser Tunnel**, irgendwo mitten in Frankfurt. Sekundenlange Dunkelheit in der S-Bahn - rein gar nichts mehr zu erkennen. Und dann wieder Licht, Häuser, Straßen, Menschen.

‘There was **this tunnel**, somewhere in the middle of Frankfurt. Seconds of darkness in the Tube – absolutely nothing could be recognized. Then lights, houses, streets, persons again.’

Letztens war **so n Mann** im TV, **dessen einziger Sohn** ist gestorben im Krieg, da hätt ich am liebsten geheult. Is doch sowas von scheiße! Grrrrrr! (*google*)

‘Lately, there was **so-a man** on TV **whose** only son died in the war. I felt like crying in that moment. It is so bad! Grrrrrr!’

Noteworthiness

The speaker has a special / unexpected / noteworthy property in mind

- (16) Es gibt da **diesen/einen/?so’n/*den** Mann, der neben mir wohnt und ziemlich gut aussieht.

*There is **this/a/*the** man who lives right next to me, he is pretty good looking.*

- (17) a Ich klebte **eine/*diese_{ind.} / so’ne_{hedging} / ?so’ne_{ref}** 1\$ Briefmarke auf den Brief. Ich wollte den Brief nach Europa schicken.

*I put **a/*this** 1\$ stamp on the letter. I wanted to mail the letter to Europe.*

- b Ich klebte **eine/*diese_{ind.} / ?so’ne_{hedging} / so’ne_{ref}** 1\$ Briefmarke auf den Brief and merkte zu spät, dass sie ein Vermögen wert war

*I put **a/this** 1\$ stamp on the letter and realized too late, that it was worth a fortune.*

but not necessarily linked to discourse prominence:

- (18) a Da war plötzlich **ein/*dieser/*so’n/*ein bestimmter** Apfel an meinem Baum.

Außerdem flog ein Vogel umher. Der Vogel....

There was a / this / so-a / a certain apple on my tree. Furthermore a bird flew there.

The bird...

- b Da war plötzlich **ein/*dieser/*so’n/*ein bestimmter** blauer Apfel an meinem Baum.

Außerdem flog ein Vogel umher. Der Vogel....

There was a / this / so-a / a certain blue apple on my tree. Furthermore a bird flew there.

The bird...

4. Referentiality

- (19) *Intensional operators*

- a *Eva will diesen / so’n Film über Eliade sehen.*

‘Eva wants to watch this / so-a movie about Eliade.’

(→ There is a movie about Eliade)

- b *Eva will einen Film über Eliade sehen.*

‘Eva wants to watch a movie about Eliade.’

(→ It is not necessarily true that ‘There is a film about Eliade’)

- (20) *Negation*

- a *Es ist nicht der Fall, dass Eva dies / so’n Buch von Eliade gekauft hat.*

‘It’s not the case that Eva bought this / so-a book by Eliade.’

(→ There is a book written by Eliade)

- b *Es ist nicht der Fall, dass Eva ein Buch von Eliade gekauft hat.*
 ‘It’s not the case that Eva bought a book by Eliade.’
 (→ It is not necessarily true that there is a book by Eliade)

(21) *Universal quantifiers*

- a *Jeder meiner Kollegen hat dies / so’n Buch von Eliade gelesen.*
 ‘Each of my colleagues read this / so-a book by Eliade.’
 (→ There is such a book of this type my colleagues read)
- b *Jeder meiner Kollegen hat ein Buch von Eliade gelesen.*
 ‘Each of my colleagues read a book by Eliade.’
 (→ It could be the case that Eliade wrote more than one book)

- (22) *Maria will ?diesen / so’nen / einen Prinz auf einen weißen Ross heiraten. Aber sie hat noch keinen kennengelernt.*
 ‘Mary wants to marry this / so-a / a prince on a white horse. But she has not met one yet.’

- (23) John dreamt that he was in this Eskimo restaurant. (Prince 1981, 241)

5. Webexperiment⁴

5.1 *So’n indefinites (experiment I)*

This experiment was designed to test whether the existential entailment generated by the *so*-indefinite is maintained under negation and with modals, as we found contradictory examples. We tested the behavior of simple indefinites and of definite descriptions under the same conditions as well, to have a direct basis of comparison.

5.2 *Experimental setup: Participants, Procedure and Method*

49 students participated in the experiment. All of them were native speakers of German. The participants were presented stimulus items consisting of one sentence. In the second sentence the subjects were asked whether this sentence was an appropriate description of the preceding sentence. Their task was then to answer this question with “yes”, “no” or “I don’t know”. The questionnaire comprised two subexperiments with twelve experimental items each. Each participant answered to $((4 \times 3) \times 2) = 24$ questions. Another 24 sentences represented the filler items. Subexperiment IA looked at the availability of existential entailments for indefinite NPs, *so*-indefinites and definite NPs under negation and subexperiment IB looked at their behavior under intensional operators:

- (24) Example: Subexperiment IA: Negation

The 12 stimulus items of subexperiment IA were of the following form:

⁴ This experiment was undertaken by Sofiana Chiricescu.

Es ist nicht der Fall, dass Maria ein/ das/ so'n reiches afrikanisches Land besucht hat.

(‘It is not the case that Mary visited a/ the/ so-a rich African country.’)

Folgt daraus, dass es ein reiches afrikanisches Land gibt?

(‘Is it true that there is a rich African country?’)

Answer options: Ja / Nein/ Ich weiß nicht („yes“/ „no“/ „I don’t know“)

(25) Example: Subexperiment IB: Intensional operators

The twelve stimulus items of subexperiment IB were of the following form:

Maria will ein/ das/ so'n reiches afrikanisches Land besuchen.

(‘Mary wants to visit a/ the/ so-a rich African country.’)

Folgt daraus, dass es ein reiches afrikanisches Land gibt?

(‘Is it true that there is a rich African country?’)

Answer options: Ja / Nein/ Ich weiß nicht („yes“/ „no“/ „I don’t know“)

Expected results for both subexperiments:

- for indefinite NPs: the existential entailment does not hold: → more “no” answers.
- for *so*-indefinites: the existential entailment holds under negation: → more “yes” answers.
- for definite NPs: the existential entailment is generally not affected by operators:
→ more “yes” answers expected.

5.3 Results

Table 2 shows the number of responses (“yes”, “no”, “I don’t know”) in each condition of subexperiment IA (indefinite article_N; *so’n*_N; definite article_N under negation).

Indef.art + N			So’n + N			Def.art + N		
Yes	No	Don’t know	Yes	No	Don’t know	Yes	No	Don’t know
44 /196	143 /196	5 / 196	117/ 196	72/ 196	7/ 196	176/ 196	21/ 196	1/ 196
23%	74%	3%	60%	37%	3%	89%	10,5%	0,5%

Table 2. Indefinites, *so*-indefinites, definites NPs under negation

Table 3 shows the number of responses (“yes”, “no”, “I don’t know”) in each condition of subexperiment IB (indefinite article_N; *so’n*_N; definite article_N under intensional operators). The difference between the three referential types in this experiment as well.

Indef.art + N			So’n + N			Def.art + N		
Yes	No	Don’t know	Yes	No	Don’t know	Yes	No	Don’t know
62/ 196	130/ 196	4 /196	159/196	35 /196	2 /196	193/ 196	3/ 196	-
31,6%	66,3%	2,04%	81,1%	17,85%	1,02%	98,4%	1,6%	-

Table 3. Indefinites, *so*-indefinites, definite NPs under intensional operators

The findings of both subexperiments confirmed our predictions with respect to the referential types which license an existential entailment. As expected, the existential entailment of the indefinite NP does not hold in contexts with intensional operators or under negation. On the contrary, in the case of definite NPs, the entailment is maintained. For the *so*-indefinites, the existential presupposition reading was the preferred one. We notice a stronger tendency which favors a [+Existential] reading of the referents of the *so*-indefinites under intensional operators than under negation.

5. Further tests

5.1 Intermediate scope

- (26) Jeder Professor hat jedem Studenten gelobt, der einen / diesen / so'n / Aufsatz kritisch zusammengefasst hat.

Every professor has praised every student who has critically summarized a / this / so-an article.

readings

ein: wide, intermediate, narrow

dies: wide

so'n: wide, ?intermediate (hedging: narrow)

5.2 functional reading

- (27) Every man forgot a certain / this date: his wife's birthday

Jeder Mann vergaß ein bestimmtes / dieses / so'n datum: den Geburtstag seiner Frau

reading

ein bestimmtes

dies: only in a "cataphoric" sense

so'n: good (?)

5.3 Intermediate scope of intensional contexts

- (28) Hoover charged that the Berrigans plotted to kidnap a / this high American official

a.but he said they couldn't decide which one (to kidnap)

b.but he didn't know which one (they plotted to kidnap)

c.guess which one (he charged they plotted to kidnap)

- (29) Hoover klagt die Berrigans an, geplant zu haben, einen / diesen / so'n amerikanischen Beamten zu kidnappen.

a: aber er sagte, dass sie sich nicht entscheiden konnten, welchen

b: aber er wusste nicht, welche

c: rat mal, welchen

readings

ein: wide, intermediate, narrow

dies: wide, ?intermediate

so'n: wide, ?intermediate (hedging: narrow)

5.4 epistemic readings

(30) Anna trifft sich mit einem / diesem / so'n Spanier. (but I do not know him)
Ann dates a / this / so-a Spaniard

(30) Jeder spricht über einen / diesen / so'n neuen Film
Everybody talks about a/ this / so'n new movie. (but I do not know it)

Summary

1. German has two specific indefinite articles, indefinite *dies* and (informal) *so'n* corresponding to English indefinite *this*.
2. Both specific indefinite articles are used to signal discourse prominence
3. Both specific indefinite articles have a strong tendency to have a referential meaning (wide scope with respect to other operators, rigid reference etc.)
4. Both articles have grammaticalized from deictic expression
5. They are different: indefinite *this* derives from the demonstrative for objects, while *so'n* derives from the demonstratives for properties. The different readings of *so'n* are not easy to distinguish
6. Indefinite *this* cannot take a functional reading, while for *so'n* it seems possible.
7. While we clearly see strong analogous pattern between referentiality and discourse prominence, we have not found a clear dependency between these aspects
8. This seems to indicate that we have certain alignment relations between the different aspects or notion of specificity.
9. More is to do...

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