

On two polarity-sensitive equative constructions

Eri Tanaka¹, Kenta Mizutani¹, and Stephanie Solt²

¹ Osaka University, ² Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft (ZAS) Berlin

eri-tana@let.osaka-u.ac.jp, l.g.fuad0809@gmail.com, solt@leibniz-zas.de

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Cross-linguistic variation in the semantics of equative constructions has been the subject of considerable recent interest (see e.g. Crnić & Fox 2019, Rett in press). We contribute to this body of research with an investigation of two equative markers – Japanese *hodo* and German *dermaßen* – which exhibit the interesting property of being polarity sensitive on some but not all of their uses.

The following examples illustrate a use of these items that can be paraphrased roughly with English *as ... as*. In this construction, they pattern as negative polarity items:

- (1) a. Taro-wa Jiro-**hodo** se-ga *takai/takaku-nai.
Taro-TOP Jiro-hodo height-NOM tall/tall-NEG
b. Taro *ist / ist nicht **dermaßen** groß wie Jiro.
'Taro *is / isn't as tall as Jiro.'

But both items also have a second use that would be paraphrased with English *so ... that*; on this use they are not polarity sensitive:

- (2) a. Taro-wa basukettobooru senshu-ni nar-eru-**hodo** se-ga takai/takaku-nai.
Taro-TOP basketball player-to become-can-hodo height-NOM tall/tall-NEG
b. Taro ist (nicht) **dermaßen** groß, dass er Basketballspieler werden könnte.
'Taro is (not) so tall that he could become a basketball player.'

Standard analyses of equatives take them to express relations between two maximal degrees. Building on a recent proposal by Crnić & Fox (2019), we argue that *hodo* and *dermaßen* sentences do not have maximality as part of their semantics, but instead simply introduce existential quantification over degrees. Polarity-based distributional restrictions then arise as the result of triviality of meaning in certain configurations.

We extend the analysis by considering the norm-related presuppositions of these items: the negative sentences in (1) presuppose that both Jiro and Taro are tall, and the sentences in (2) likewise presuppose a high standard (they would be odd if 'basketball player' were replaced with 'jockey'). We propose that these effects can be accounted for by construing the degrees over which existential quantification operates as possible thresholds θ for the positive form of the gradable expression. That is, *hodo* / *dermaßen* sentences are varieties of positive constructions. Presuppositional effects can then be derived pragmatically via competition with the unmodified positive form.

In the talk we consider differences between the Japanese and German cases, as well as connections to other equative constructions in these and other languages, and discuss the implications for the cross-linguistic semantics of degree constructions more generally.

References: Crnić, L. & Fox, D. (2019). Equatives and maximality. In Altshuler, D. & Rett, J. (eds.), *The Semantics of Plurals, Focus, Degrees, and Times*. Cham: Springer, 163–184. Rett, J. (in press). Separate but equal: a typology of equative constructions. In Hallman, P. (ed.), *Degree and quantification*. Leiden: Brill.