

## Rebuff, Redress, (Re)Wire: Illegal Reflexivization and Hidden Me

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Certain classes of productive (morpho-)syntactic constructions exhibit semantics that appears incongruent with their surface form, given standard assumptions about compositionality and the syntax-semantics interface. For example, no particular marker or established compositional mechanism seems to justify

- modal interpretations of excessive constructions (e.g. *(It is) too heavy* as conveying “(it is) heavier than it should be”),
- change of state (COS), modal or comparative interpretations of certain constructions often characterized by reflexive morphology (e.g. inchoatives or middles) or
- COS interpretations of constructions with directional prepositional complements (e.g. German *(Den Besen) in [den Schrank]<sub>ACC</sub>* ‘(Put the broom) into the locker’).

Merely stating the facts, mainstream analyses employ invisible and otherwise unmotivated operators to capture intransparent meaning aspects (generative grammar) or associate hidden meanings with morphosyntactic constructions holistically (construction grammar). We offer a compositional analysis instead that involves three general steps:

1. a lexical item’s logical form (LF) or the combined LF of lexical items amounts to a contradiction when interpreted *in situ*. A particularly weak but troubling part of the literally coded LF – non-instantiation of a property by an individual (not:P) – is not locally interpreted (rebuff).
2. The uninterpreted LF not:P is passed on and interpreted in terms of what is negotiated in the ensuing syntactic-semantic cycle, namely, times, worlds or thresholds (redress).
3. Providing an economic shortcut to a requisite COS, modal or comparative meaning, the process in 1. and 2. is hard-wired for

paradigmatic form constellations as representing, e.g., configurations of verbs and prepositions or adverbs ((re)wire).

Special attention will be paid to a grammatical element that takes the form *zu* 'to(o)' in German, with uses as a verbal or a degree particle, but also as a preposition or as an infinitival marker. We submit following Brandt (2019) that semantically, *zu* combines the existential positive (some  $x$   $P$ ) and existential negative (some  $x$  not  $P$ ) but features only one quantifier (some  $x$   $P$  and not  $P$ ). *zu* thus marks a condensed reflexivization operation the output of which is however always contradictory and hence illegal. In fact, *zu*'s troubling LF creates added value: It is the presence of the negative property to be redressed that makes *zu* flexible and popular because depending on properties of the linguistic environment, not: $P$  may be used to construct the pre-state of an event and thus a complete COS (substituting the VP meaning for  $P$ ), or it may be used to construct a threshold as marking the cutoff point between the negative and positive extensions of a property and thus get to a comparative meaning as in the case of excessives. Analogously, the circumstantial or deontic meaning of modal infinitives results from ascribing not: $P$  to a possible world (substituting an independently constructed propositional meaning for  $P$ ).

We argue illegal reflexivization is similarly behind some of the surprising meaning aspects of constructions with non-standardly used reflexive markers. In inchoatives or middles, the THEME syntactico-semantically binds the CAUSE, twisting the requirement that binders be more prominent semantically than bindees. The consequentially uninterpretable negative property implementing the required differential gives rise to COS (inchoative) or comparative (middle) interpretations. Arguably, the generic interpretation typical of middles and paraphrasable by means of the German subject only pronoun *man* likely reflects a further maneuver of redress aiming at a subject that is as inclusive as possible. Prepositional complement constructions finally instantiate illegal reflexivization at the level of semantics only, namely, they code spatiotemporal inclusion of the THEME by the GOAL. The semantic inclusion relation contradicts the construction's transitive (structural accusative case) syntax (cf. Gehrke 2008) that requires well-distinguished referents in the semantics and leads to redress in terms of COS meaning (by predicating not: $P$  of a time, with  $P$  substituted for by the VP (post state) meaning).

Pursuing results from experimental as well as corpus studies (Brandt and Schumacher 2021, Brandt (in press)), we discuss corollaries of the account that pertain to grammatical connections between reflexivization and totalization ( $\approx$  universal quantification). The central fact behind the striking productivity of *zu* in word formations

is that below the word level, *zu*'s problem appears to be healable by elements that effect universal quantification locally, such as the form *all* 'all' (cf. *allzu* 'all too') or superlative morphology (cf. *zutiefst* 'most deeply) or cliticized definite determiners (cf. *zum* 'to it', *zur* 'to her'). The connection between reflexivization and totalization is less surprising if, as we propose, binding is eventually defined in terms of indifference where *x* indifferently binds *y* iff all properties of *y* are also properties of *x*.

## References:

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