

German Demonstrative 'so'

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Starting point

German 'so' is a demonstrative expression

- (1) *So groß kann ein Dorsch werden.* deictic use
- (2) *Anna ist 1,80 groß. Marie ist auch so groß.* anaphoric use
- (3) *Anna ist so groß wie Marie.* cataphoric use



Comparison

Study project, start in SS 2008, in combination with

Comparative Constructions (seminar)

Semantic Similarity (seminar)

Comparison is a core feature of linguistic activity. Most prominent, and best explored, are comparative constructions based on gradable adjectives.

The key notion of comparison is similarity – comparing two items by checking their similarity with respect to certain features is one of the basic cognitive abilities of human agents.

Hypothesis: An appropriate semantic account of comparison must make use of the insights on similarity gained in Cognitive Psychology and AI, and combine classical semantics with similarity-based methods.

Puzzle 1

What does 'so' relate to in (4a) ??

(4a) *Anna ist groß. Marie ist auch so groß.*

? ←

Why is (4b) unacceptable ??

(4b) # *Anna ist groß. Marie ist auch so.*

Puzzle 2

Why does 'so' boost a wetness degree but downscale a filling degree ??

(5a) A: *Setzen wir uns auf den Rasen.*
B: *Der Rasen ist so nass.*
⇒ The lawn is very wet.

(5b) A: *Stell die Milch in den Kühlschrank.*
B: *Der Kühlschrank ist so voll.*
⇒ The fridge is not completely full.

Puzzle 3

Why can 'so' be used as a hedging device ??

(6a) (Customer in a stationery shop ...)
Ich möchte so Klammern haben.
⇒ customer wants something similar to *Klammern*

(6a) A: *Was für Kunst macht denn Ihr Sohn?*
B: *Na ja, so kubistische.*
⇒ B is unsure whether his son's art should be called *kubistisch*

Standard of Comparison

Relative gradable adjectives (e.g. *groß*):
Standard is given by comparison class



★ In anaphoric uses 'so' picks up the standard introduced by the antecedent

(4a) *Anna ist für eine Frau groß. Marie ist auch so groß.*

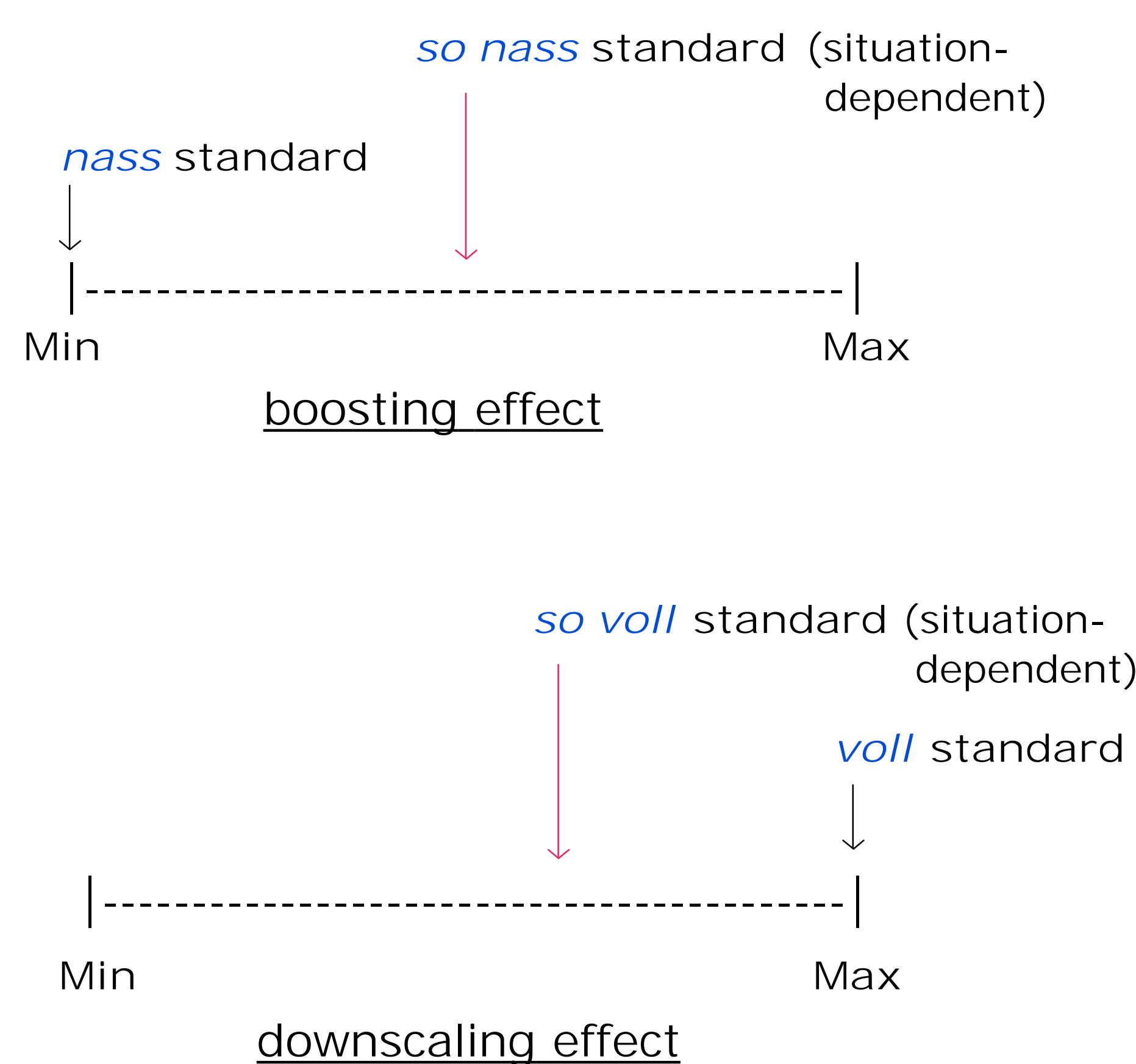
Anaphoric standard cannot be shifted:

Gregor ist für eine Maus groß. Luzie ist auch so groß

Boosting / Downscaling

Absolute gradable adjectives (e.g. *nass, voll*):
Standard coincides with the minimum or maximum (Kennedy & McNally 2002).

★ In out-of-the-blue uses, 'so' introduces a situation-dependent standard

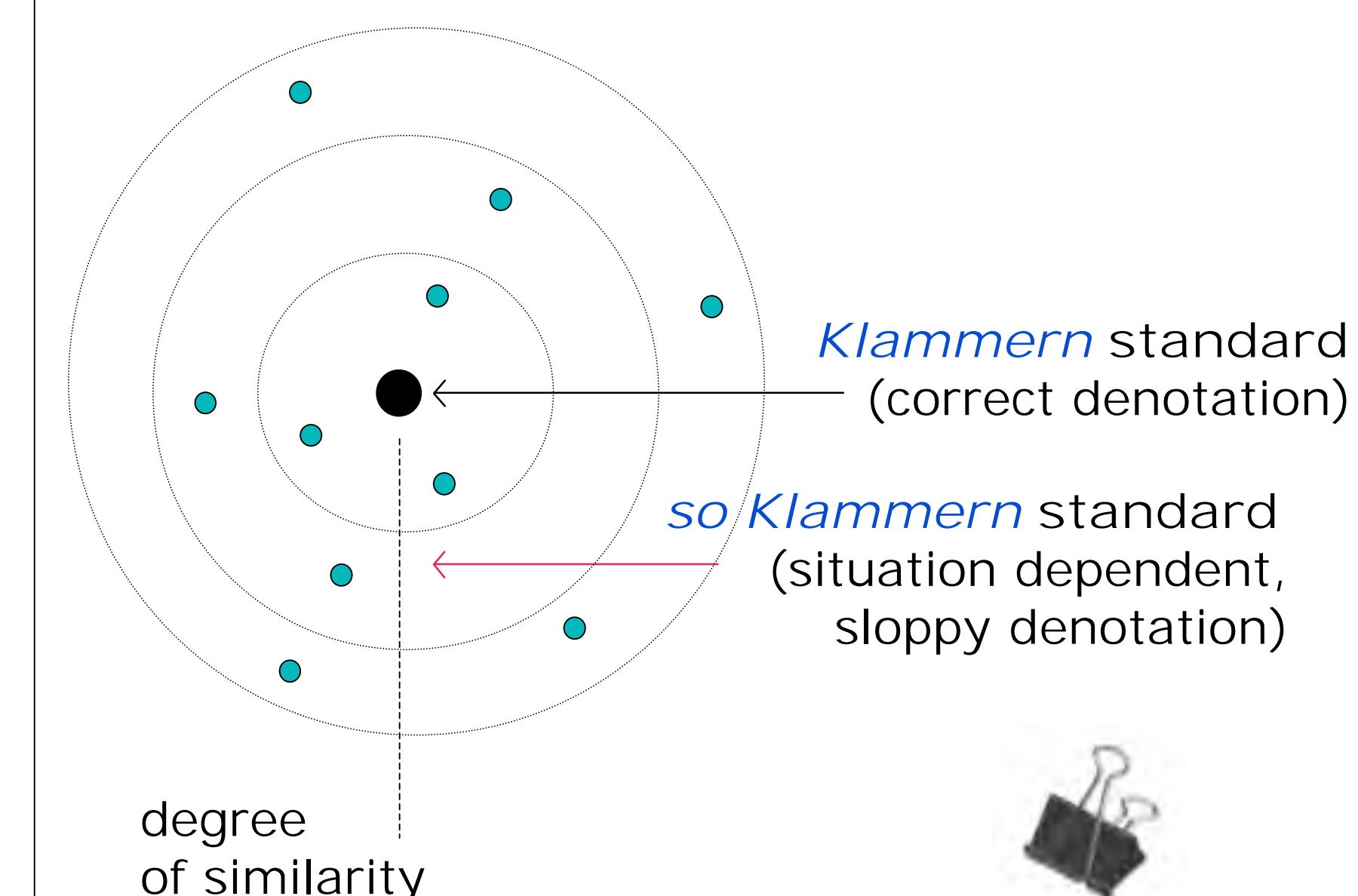


Hedging

Linguistic expressions may be used in a sloppy fashion – "near enough to truth"

Linguistic expression come with a halo – a set of denotations ordered according to similarity (Lasersohn 1999).

★ 'so' introduces a situation-dependent standard for being "close enough to truth"



Kennedy, Christopher & Louise McNally (2002) Scale structure and the semantic typology of gradable adjectives. *Language* 81.2.
Lasersohn, Peter (1999) Pragmatic Halos. *Language* 75.

