

## Grading by *gewiss*

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## German specificity markers *bestimmt* and *gewiss*

(1) a. (About a novel)

*Der zehnjährige Bastian gerät zu Beginn der Geschichte ganz zufällig in ein Antiquariat und wird von einem bestimmten Buch magnetisch angezogen.*

'Ten year old Bastian walks into a second-hand bookshop and is magnetically attracted to a **bestimmt** book.'

**certain / particular  
determinado**

b. (About a prisoner in the former GDR)

*Er bekam die Erlaubnis, gewisse Bücher in der Bibliothek - unter Aufsicht und bei Kopierverbot! - einzusehen.*

'He was permitted to read **gewiss** books in the library – supervised and without permission to copy.'

**certain  
cierto**

→ How to describe the difference in meaning?

2

## German specificity markers *bestimmt* and *gewiss*

(2) a. *Ben sucht ein bestimmtes Buch.*

b. *Ben sucht ein gewisses Buch.*

'Ben is looking for a **bestimmt** / **gewiss** book.'

(2a, b) require wide scope interpretation

→ **bestimmt** and **gewiss** in indefinite NPs indicate specificity

Starting point: Ebert, Ebert and Hinterwimmer: German specificity markers: "**bestimmt**" vs. "**gewiss**". (EEH)

Focus: "grading effect" of **gewiss**

3

## The grading effect of *gewiss*

(3) a. (About medical treatment)

*Wenn ein glaubwürdiger Patient aussagt, dass er auf ein bestimmtes Risiko nicht hingewiesen wurde, hat der Arzt es vermutlich nicht erwähnt.*

'If a trustworthy patient claims that he has not been informed about a **bestimmt** risk, the doctor probably did not mention it.'

**certain  
determinado**

→ particular risks (e.g. allergic shock)

b. (About the movement for freedom in the former GDR)

*Selbst mit den Friedensgebeten, die wir durchgeführt haben, als die Mauer noch stand, war ein gewisses Risiko verbunden.*

'Even the prayers for peace we held when the wall still existed had a **gewiss** risk.'

**certain level  
cierto (?)**

→ degree of risk below maximum (down-grading)

4

## The grading effect of *gewiss* (2)

- (4) a. *Es waren nur diejenigen wahlberechtigt, die ein bestimmtes Alter (zwischen 21 und 30 Jahren) hatten.*  
'Only those were entitled to vote who had a **bestimmt** age (between 21 and 30).  
→ particular age certain  
determinado
- b. *Die Ausbildung in Erster Hilfe benötigt ein gewisses Alter und Reife.*  
'The first-aid training requires a **gewiss** age and maturity.'  
certain level  
cierto (?)  
→ above a contextually determined age  
(no down-grading)

5

## The grading effect of *gewiss* (3)

- (5) a. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein bestimmtes Risiko.*  
'Joining the polar expedition has a **bestimmt** risk.'  
certain  
determinado  
e.g., the risk to be attacked by polar bears
- b. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein gewisses Risiko.*  
'Joining the polar expedition has a **gewiss** risk.'  
certain level  
cierto (?)  
→ the expedition is not absolutely safe

6

## Questions

- (a) How do *gewiss* and *bestimmt* differ in distribution?
- (b) How do *gewiss* and *bestimmt* differ in meaning,  
  - when combined with non-gradable nouns?
  - when combined with gradable nouns?
- (c) How does the meaning of *gewiss* combined with non-gradable nouns relate to the meaning of *gewiss* combined with gradable nouns?
- (d) Grading or hedging?
- (e) Why do *gewiss* and *bestimmt* (appear to) induce specificity?

7

## The plan

1. Distributional differences (in part from EEH)
  2. Interpretation of *bestimmt* / *gewiss* suggested by EEH
  3. Interpretation of *gewiss* as a hedging device
- Appendix: Spanish and Russian data

8

## Distributional differences between *bestimmt* and *gewiss*

	<i>bestimmt</i>	<i>gewiss</i>
scope	narrow/wide	widest
negation	narrow/wide	widest
nominal quantifiers	narrow/wide	widest
conditionals	narrow/wide	widest
intensional operators	not narrowest	widest
identifiable for	salient agent	speaker
combination with proper names	no	yes
license functional readings	yes	no
<i>namely</i> continuations	o.k.	marked
carry an accent	possible	impossible
grading effect	no	yes

9

## Scope relative to negation

- (6) *Die USA unterstützen ein Wirtschaftsprogramm, ....*  
 a. .... *nicht eine bestimmte Person.* narrow scope preferred  
 b. ... *nicht eine gewisse Person.* wide scope only  
 'The US support an economy program, not a *bestimmt* / *gewiss* person.'

- (7) *Tom hat keine bestimmte / \*gewisse Person für die Stelle im Kopf.*  
 'Tom doesn't have a *bestimmt* / *gewiss* person in mind for the position.'

*kein* = *nicht* + *ein* ('not' + 'a'), where *nicht* has scope over *ein*

→ scope relative to negation *bestimmt*: narrow or wide  
*gewiss*: wide scope only

10

## Identifiability

- (8) a. *Tom sucht schon seit Stunden nach einer bestimmten CD*  
 – *keine Ahnung, welche genau er sucht.*  
 b. *Tom sucht schon seit Stunden nach einer gewissen CD*  
 – *# keine Ahnung, welche genau er sucht.*  
 'Tom has been looking for a *bestimmt* / *gewiss* CD for hours now – I have no idea which one he is looking for'.

→ identifying agent: *bestimmt*: the speaker or some other salient agent  
*gewiss*: the speaker

11

## Conspiracy flavour

- (9) (About a search committee)  
 a. *Die Kommission forderte einen bestimmten Kollegen auf, ein Gutachten zu erstellen.*  
 b. *Die Kommission forderte einen gewissen Kollegen auf, ein Gutachten zu erstellen.*  
 'The committee asked a *bestimmt* / *gewiss* colleague to provide a review.'

→ *bestimmt*: the hearer need not be able to identify the referent  
*gewiss*: the speaker presupposes that the hearer can identify the referent  
 (although she did not provide a uniquely identifying description)

→ conspiracy flavour (cf. Hintikka 1986, Breheny 2003)

?? Does (8b) convey a conspiracy flavour? North: yes  
 South: no

Cornelia and I  
 are from the  
 North

12

## Proper names

- (10) a. *\*Ein bestimmter Herr Meier hat am Telefon nach dir gefragt.*  
b. *Ein gewisser Herr Meier hat am Telefon nach dir gefragt.*  
'A **bestimmt** / **gewiss** Mr. Meier called for you.'

→ combination with proper names: **bestimmt:** no  
**gewiss:** yes

- (11) (FAZ, Feuilleton, 25.03.2009)  
*Deshalb sind wir kollektiv zusammengezuckt, als uns Ihr Herr Müntefering mit den "Soldaten" und ein gewisser Herr Steinbrück mit der "Kavallerie" und der "Peitsche" gedroht hat. Das halten wir für schlechten Oberförsterstil. Mit Mundgeruch. Widerlich.*  
'It was embarrassing when [...] a **gewiss** Mr. Steinbrück threatened us [...].'

(10b) might be neutral, expressing ignorance, (11) is clearly pejorative

13

## Namely continuations

- (12) (About the jury of the Grimme Award)  
a. *Die Kommission forderte einen bestimmten Kollegen auf, ein Gutachten zu erstellen, nämlich den Vertreter des Fachbereichs / nämlich Hans Müller.*  
b. *?? Die Kommission forderte einen gewissen Kollegen auf, ein Gutachten zu erstellen, nämlich den Vertreter des Fachbereichs / nämlich Hans Müller.*  
'The committee asked a **bestimmt** / **gewiss** colleague to provide a review, namely the representative of the department / namely Hans Müller.'

→ namely continuations **bestimmt:** o.k.  
**gewiss:** dispreferred

14

## Functional readings

- (13) (About meetings of the parliamentary group of the Green Party)  
a. *Ein bestimmter Abgeordneter übernahm jeweils den Vorsitz (nämlich der Fraktionsälteste).*  
b. *\*Ein gewisser Abgeordneter übernahm jeweils den Vorsitz.*  
'A **bestimmt** / **gewiss** deputy had the chair in each meeting (namely the eldest).'

→ functional readings: **bestimmt:** yes  
**gewiss:** no

15

## Accents

- (14) a. *Anna hat eine [bestimmte FRAU] / [gewisse FRAU] für die Stelle im Kopf.*  
b. *Anna hat eine BESTIMMTE Frau für die Stelle im Kopf.*  
c. *\*Anna hat eine GEWISSE Frau für die Stelle im Kopf.*  
'Anna has a **bestimmt** / **gewiss** women in mind for the position.'

→ carry an accent **bestimmt:** possible  
**gewiss:** impossible

Question:

What are the alternatives triggered by [*bestimmte FRAU*], *BESTIMMTE Frau* ?

16

## The grading effect

- (5) a. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein bestimmtes Risiko.*  
 'Joining the polar expedition has a **bestimmt** risk.'  
 → a certain risk, e.g., be attacked by polar bears
- b. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein gewisses Risiko.*  
 'Joining the polar expedition has a **gewiss** risk.'  
 → a certain level of risk
- c. *An der Polarexpedition ist auch ein gewisser Kollege beteiligt.*  
 'A **gewiss** colleague will join the expedition'  
 → a certain colleague, e.g., Mr. Meier.

→ grading effect	<b>bestimmt:</b>	<b>no</b>
	<b>gewiss + gradable nouns</b>	<b>yes</b>
	<b>gewiss + non-gradable nouns</b>	<b>no</b>

17

## The grading interpretation of *gewiss* (1)

Which nouns license a grading interpretation of *gewiss* ?

- (i) abstract nouns  
*Risiko / Erfolg / Gefahr / Vorteil / Einfluss / Stolz / Demokratie...*  
 'risk, success, danger, advantage, influence, pride, democracy ...'
- (ii) nouns denoting dimensions  
*Alter, Temperatur, Höhe, ...*  
 'age, temperature, height, ...'
- (iii) nouns denoting measurement units  
*Grad, Maß, Prozentsatz*  
 'grade, amount, percentage, ...' only indirectly grading

18

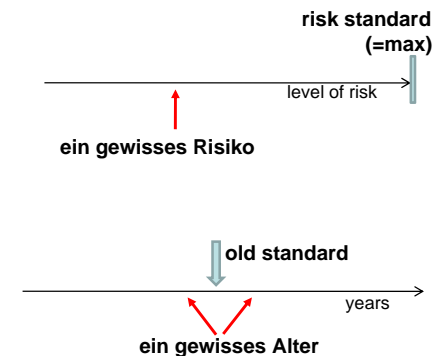
## Eine gewisse Demokratie

- (15) *In meiner Familie herrscht eine gewisse Demokratie, was den Sonntagsausflug angeht.*  
 'In my family, there is a **gewiss** democracy concerning the Sunday excursion.'

19

## The grading interpretation of *gewiss* (2)

- (i) *ein gewisses Risiko*  
 → not a full risk  
 (down-grading)
- (ii) *ein gewisses Alter*  
 → contextually determined age  
 (no down-grading)



absolute adjectives: standard of comparison given by the min./max. of the scale  
relative adjectives: standard of comparison given by the comparison class  
 (cf. Kennedy & McNally 2005)

20

## No grading interpretation

- (i) count nouns do not license a grading interpretation:  
*Person, Schriftsteller, Kollege, Kneipe, Film, ....*  
 'person', 'author, colleague, bar, film, ...  
*eine gewisse Person* → a certain level of person  
 'a *gewiss* person'
- (ii) plurals do not license a grading interpretation:  
*gewisse Risiken* → particular risks  
 'gewiss risks'
- (iii) abstract nouns combined with *bestimmt* have a count noun interpretation  
*ein bestimmtes / bestimmte Risiken*  
 '(a) *bestimmt* person(s)'

21

## EEH: The meaning of *bestimmt* / *gewiss*

- bestimmt** some **salient agent  $\alpha$**  knows the answer to the question  
 "who is *ein bestimmter N*"? under some contextually determined  
 conceptual cover  $n$  (cf. Aloni 2008)  
 $[[\textit{ein bestimmt}]] = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists x [P(x) \wedge Q(x) \wedge K_{\alpha}(\uparrow_n x)]$   
 where  $K_{\alpha}(\uparrow_n d) := (\exists x_n. x_n = d)$
- gewiss** **the speaker** knows the answer to the question  
 "who is *ein gewisser N*"? under some contextually determined  
 conceptual cover  $n$   
 $[[\textit{ein gewiss}]] = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists x [P(x) \wedge Q(x)] \bullet K_{\text{speaker}}(\uparrow_n y)$   
 where  $y$  is bound to  $x$  and  $K_{\text{speaker}}(\dots)$  is a conventional implicature  
 (cf. Potts 2005)

22

## Predictions and problems

Core difference in meaning

- bestimmt:** some agent knows who the referent is – part of the assertion  
**gewiss:** speaker knows who the referent is – conventional implicature

accounts for

- scopal differences,
- identification by some agent / speaker,
- no functional readings with *gewiss*

no explanation for

- combination with proper names, licensed for *gewiss*, but not *bestimmt*,
- the grading interpretation of *gewiss*
- markedness of *namely* continuations with *gewiss*
- accenting behavior

23

## Hypothesis

General idea

- bestimmt** indicates "knowledge by **description**"  
 → the speaker or some other agent can identify  
 the referent by a description
- gewiss** indicates "knowledge by **acquaintance**"  
 → the speaker can identify the referent by ostension

Proposal

- bestimmt** adopt the interpretation in EEH
- gewiss** (I) rigid cover (not fully satisfying)  
 (II) hedging device (not fully developed)

24

## Proposal I (not fully satisfying)

*bestimmt* agent determines the referent under a descriptive / naming cover n

$$[[\textit{ein bestimmt}]] = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists x [P(x) \wedge Q(x) \wedge K_{\alpha} (\uparrow_n x)]$$

*gewiss* speaker determines the referent under a rigid (ostension) cover

$$[[\textit{ein gewisser}]]_{\text{non-grad}} = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists x [P(x) \wedge Q(x) \bullet K_{\text{speaker}} (\uparrow_n y)]$$

$$[[\textit{ein gewisser}]]_{\text{grad}} = \lambda R \lambda Q. \exists x \exists d [R(x, d) \wedge Q(x) \bullet K_{\text{speaker}} (\uparrow_n d')]$$

Explain the grading effect by

- given degree instead of given individual referent
- "for abstract nouns there are no instances unless you consider degrees" ???

25

## Proposal II (not fully developed)

What is *gewiss* about *ein gewisses Risiko* ?

→ Analysis based on the adjectival modifier *gewiss*

Sentence adverbial *gewiss*

(17) *Müller ist gewiss ein Politiker.*  
'Müller is certainly a politician.'

→ make use of Tarantos (2008) interpretation of the sentence adverbial *clearly* as a device **lowering the standard of evidence**

26

## *Clearly* (Barker & Taranto 2003, Taranto 2008):

The paradox of clarity:

- (18) a. *Briscoe is a detective.*  
b. *Briscoe is clearly a detective. / It is clear that Briscoe is a detective.*

Why assert (b) instead of (a)?

Speaker lacks sufficient evidence to assert (a) (Gricean reasoning)

"... clarity is asserted only in contexts in which there is some lingering uncertainty about whether the complement is in fact true."

(Taranto 2008)

- Why does *clear* facilitate the assertion of something which is in fact not clear?
- What is the contribution of *clear* in (18b)?

27

## Metalinguistic interpretation of degree assertions (1)

(19) *Robin is tall.*

(i) descriptive interpretation: inform the hearer about Robin's height.  
"What is Robin's height?"

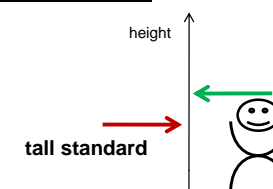
→ Robin's height exceeds the tall-standard

(ii) metalinguistic interpretation: inform the hearer about the standard of tallness in the context.

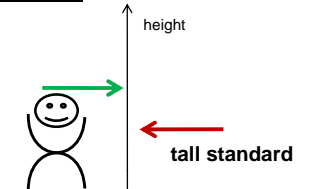
"Who counts as tall in this context?"

→ the tall-standard is below Robin's height

descriptive interpretation



metalinguistic interpretation



28

## Metalinguistic interpretation of *clearly*

20) *It is clear that p.*

metalinguistic interpretation: informs the hearer about the standard of clearness in this context.

→ the standard of clearness in this context is below the degree of evidence available for proposition p.

(Barker & Taranto 2003, Taranto 2008)

assuming:

- evidence is gradable
- some evidence that p is given (for speaker and hearer)



29

## Metalinguistic interpretation of adverbial *gewiss*

Assume:

- certainty is gradable
- certainty is absolute maximum
- some certainty about p is given (for speaker and hearer)

(21) *Es ist gewiss, dass p.*

'It is certain that p'.

→ the standard of certainty in this context for asserting propositions is below the degree of certainty for p (in this context)

→ the standard of certainty w.r.t. p is lower than maximal certainty

meets the intuition of downgrading / hedging:

(22) *Briscoe ist gewiss ein findiger Detektiv.*

'Briscoe is certainly a clever detective.'

30

## Metalinguistic interpretation of prenominal *gewiss* (1)

Assume:

- prenominal *gewiss* has the same meaning as the sentence adverbial, i.e. lower the standard of certainty of the nominal ascription

(23) *Ein gewisser N*

'A certain N'

→ the standard of certainty in this context is below the degree of certainty of picking out the intended referent via the description N

→ the speaker deliberately withholds descriptive information required to identify the intended referent ("information hiding")

→ the speaker presupposes that the hearer knows whom she is talking about ("conspiracy effect")

31

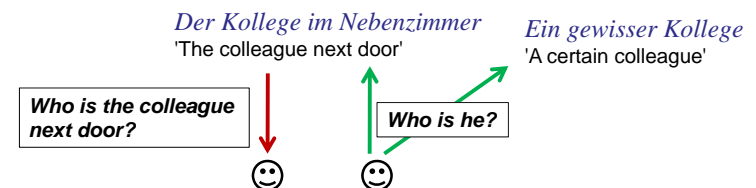
## Metalinguistic interpretation of prenominal *gewiss* (2)

Hedging ?

Prenominal *gewiss* differs from *a kind of*:

- the referent of *a kind of colleague* need not be a colleague
- the referent of *ein gewisser Kollege* (a certain colleague) is a colleague

(Un)certainly does not affect the correctness of the nominal description, but instead its uniqueness:



32

## Hedging device *gewiss* (1)

Prenominal *gewiss* is a particular hedging operator, lowering the standard of certainty required for the nominal ascription to uniquely characterize the given referent

The description is correct but insufficient, → there is an additional uniquely characterizing property (cf. Farkas 2002)

Absolute certainty would require a definite description, less than absolute certainty requires an indefinite description

→ \**Der gewisse Kollege* (The certain colleague)

How to spell out the meaning of the hedging operator *gewiss* ???

inadequate:  $[[_{A} \textit{gewiss}]] = \lambda P. \text{certainty-of}(x = \varepsilon y. P(y))$  is below max

a convincing formal representation requires an inbuilt notion of certainty, as in, e.g. fuzzy logic

33

## Hedging device *gewiss* (2)

How does the hedging device interpretation of *gewiss* account for

1. *gewiss* + count nouns    "*ein gewisser Kollege*"    conspiracy effect
2. *gewiss* + abstract nouns    "*ein gewisses Risiko*"    down-grading
3. *gewiss* + proper names    "*ein gewisser Meier*"    ignorance or depreciation

34

## *gewiss* + abstract nouns

*ein gewisser Kollege*    - speaker knows the referent  
'a *gewiss* colleague'    - the referent is a colleague  
- it is not certain that the referent is uniquely characterized by *Kollege*

*ein gewisses Risiko*    - speaker knows the "thing" at stake  
'a *gewiss* risk'    - it is a risk  
- it is not certain that it is properly characterized by *Risiko*  
"less certainty → less risk"

→ two scales involved: certainty + risk  
the grading effect is not due to directly grading the noun, and instead is brought about by downgrading the certainty that the thing at stake is a risk.

35

## *gewiss* + proper names

Why can *gewiss* be combined with proper names?

- (9b) *Ein gewisser Herr Meier hat am Telefon nach dir gefragt.*    may be neutral  
'A *gewiss* Mr. Meier called for you'.
- (10') *Ein gewisser Herr Steinbrück hat uns gedroht.*    clearly pejorativ  
'A *gewiss* Mr. Steinbrück threatened us.'

- In the case of (9b) the speaker doesn't know more about the referent than the fact that he is called Meier  
Using *gewiss* the speaker indicates that the name Meier might be insufficient for identification – *He is called Meier, but who is Meier?*
- In the case of (10') the speaker pretends not to know more about the referent than the fact that he is called Steinbrück – *Who, on earth, is Steinbrück?* – thereby expressing depreciation

36

## Conclusion (1)

EEH Proposal

Hedging interpretation of *gewiss*

accounts for

- scopal differences
- identification by some agent / speaker,
- no functional readings with *gewiss*

referentiality

no explanation for

- combination with proper names licensed for *gewiss*, but not *bestimmt*,
- the grading interpretation of *gewiss*

*gewiss*: referent presupposed  
[ *bestimmt*: ?]

graded certainty

- markedness of *namely* continuations with *gewiss*
- accenting behavior

37

## Conclusion (2)

The hedging interpretation of *gewiss* accounts for the wide scope behavior as well as the grading effect and the combination with proper names.

The grading effect is only directly due to grading, and instead brought about by downgrading certainty. Still, it requires nouns with inherent scales (all abstract nouns ??)

Why does *gewiss* indicate specificity?

meta-linguistic interpretation requires the referent to be given (i.e. the speaker presupposes that the referent is given)

- specificity (referentiality) is a prerequisite for the use of *gewiss*  
the semantic contribution of *gewiss* consists in indicating the lowered standard of certainty.

38

## Further questions

What about the English specificity marker *certain*? Does it facilitate a hedging interpretation?

What about Spanish *cierto* / *determinado*? And about Russian *opredelennyi* / *isvestnyi*? Are their pair similar to *gewiss* / *bestimmt* in other languages?

What about German *eher*? How does it relate to *gewiss*?

(24) a. *Zur Zeit sind Deutsche Bank Aktien eher ein Risiko als eine sichere Anlage.*

⇒ *Deutsche Bank Aktien sind zur Zeit ein gewisses Risiko.*

b. *Er ist eher ein Kollege als ein Doktorand.*

✗ *\*Er ist ein gewisser Kollege.*

⇒ *Er ist gewissermaßen ein Kollege.*

39

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40