

The Syntax and Semantics of German Emotion Verbs

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BACKGROUND

- ▶ Since (Postal 1971), linguists have amassed a plethora of aspects in which emotion verbs are special (Landau's (2010) 'psych properties'), e.g. restricted passivisation possibilities, unexpected binding options
- ▶ Following Belletti & Rizzi (1988) the verbs are usually grouped based on their linking properties ((1-3))
- ▶ Theoretical explanations for peculiarities: 1. syntactic (cf. (4), e.g. Belletti & Rizzi 1988, Landau 2010), 2. semantic (e.g. Arad 1998, Dowty 1991), 3. combination of 1. and 2. (almost everyone to some degree), 4. deny existence (e.g. Grafmiller 2013)
- ▶ Often, even the data is under discussion: Authors disagree when they use the same diagnostics ⇒ experiments needed

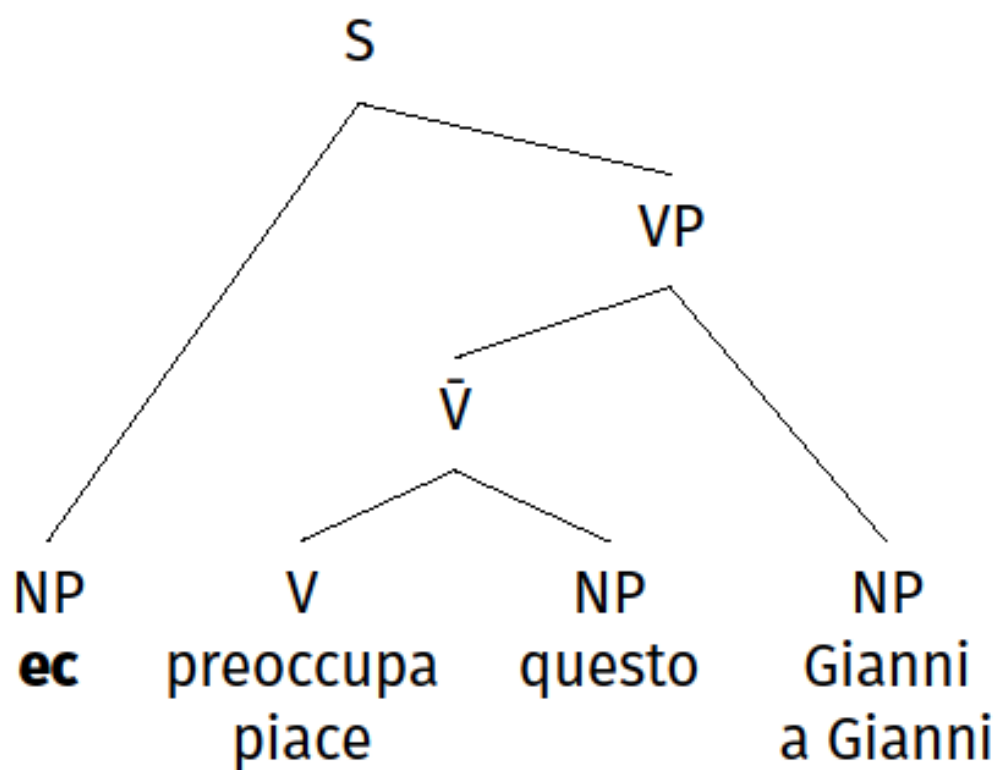
GOALS

- ▶ Perform experiments on the syntactic and semantic behaviour of German experiencer-object (EO) emotion verbs
- ▶ How can their behaviour be explained? Is there a need to propose a peculiar syntactic representation? Do the verbs even form a coherent group (cf. Hirsch 2018)?

INTRODUCTION

- (1) Der Student mag das Thema (experiencer-subject (ES))
- (2) Das Thema begeistert den Studenten (accusative experiencer-object (acc-EO))
- (3) Das Thema gefällt dem Studenten (dative experiencer-object (dat-EO))

(4) Belletti & Rizzi (1988:293) for Italian (D-structure)



NORMAL ORDER

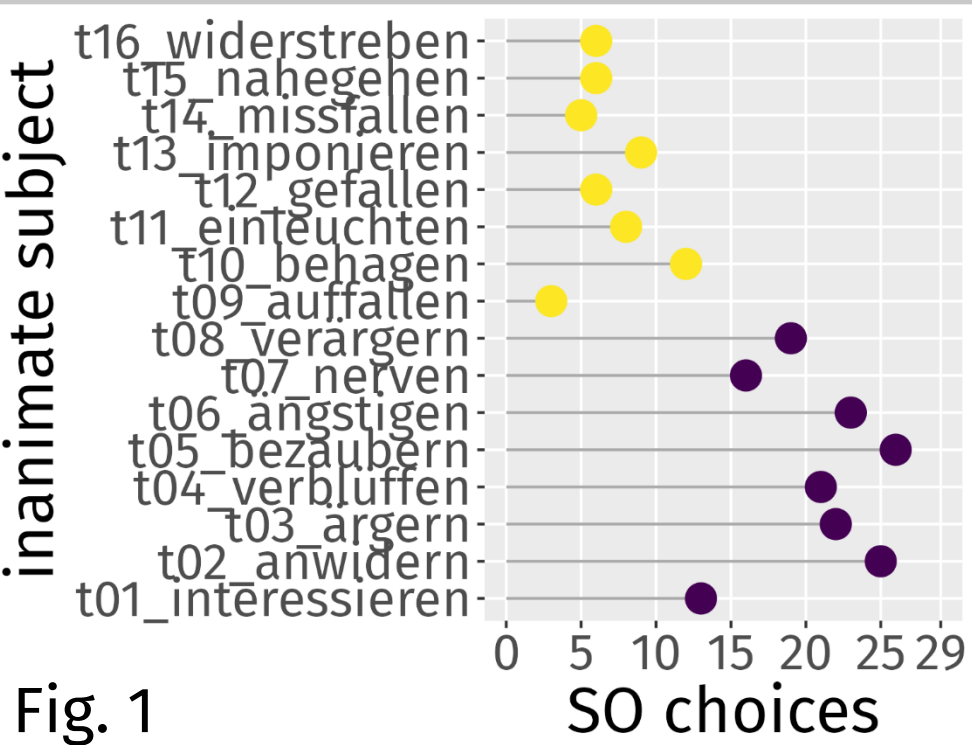


Fig. 1

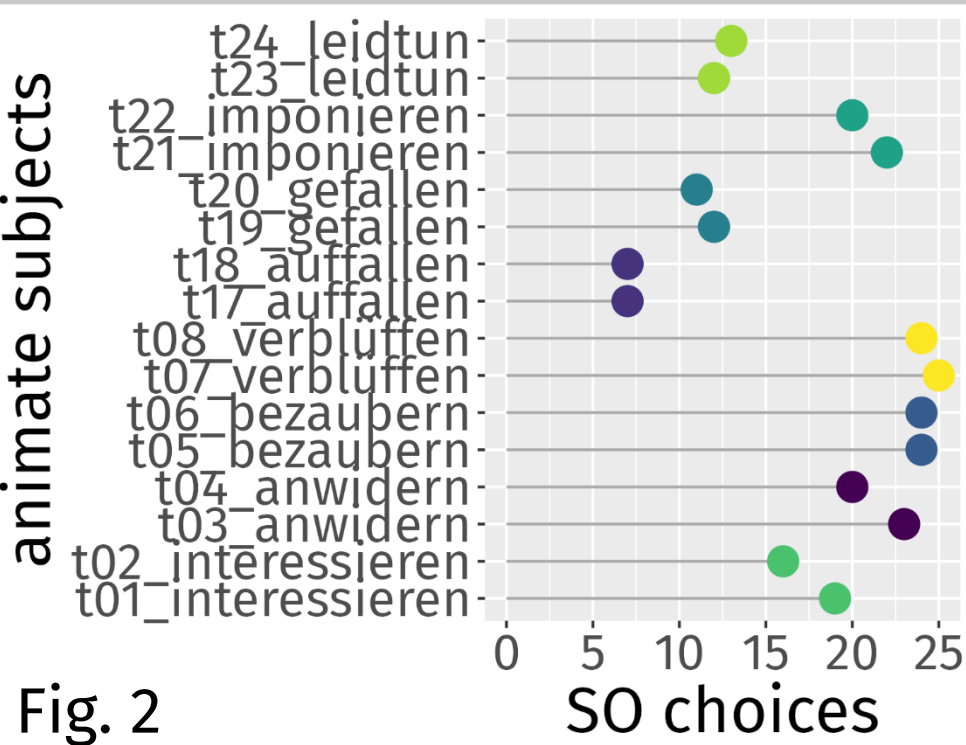


Fig. 2

What is the normal order of arguments with German EO verbs? Subject < object (SO) or object < subject (OS)

- ▶ Literature (e.g. Lenerz 1977, Haider & Rosengren 2003, Fanselow 2003, Temme & Verhoeven 2016): Disagreement over acc-EO, OS for
- ▶ 2 Forced-Choice experiments (inanimate/animate subject). Experiment with animate subject also contains action verbs, which behave as expected (always SO).
- ▶ All other factors influencing order controlled for, items like (5). Participants choose preferred variant.

(5) Was hat Sarah gehört? Sarah hat gehört, dass {ein Trainer einem Sportler | einem Sportler ein Trainer} imponiert hat.

BINDING

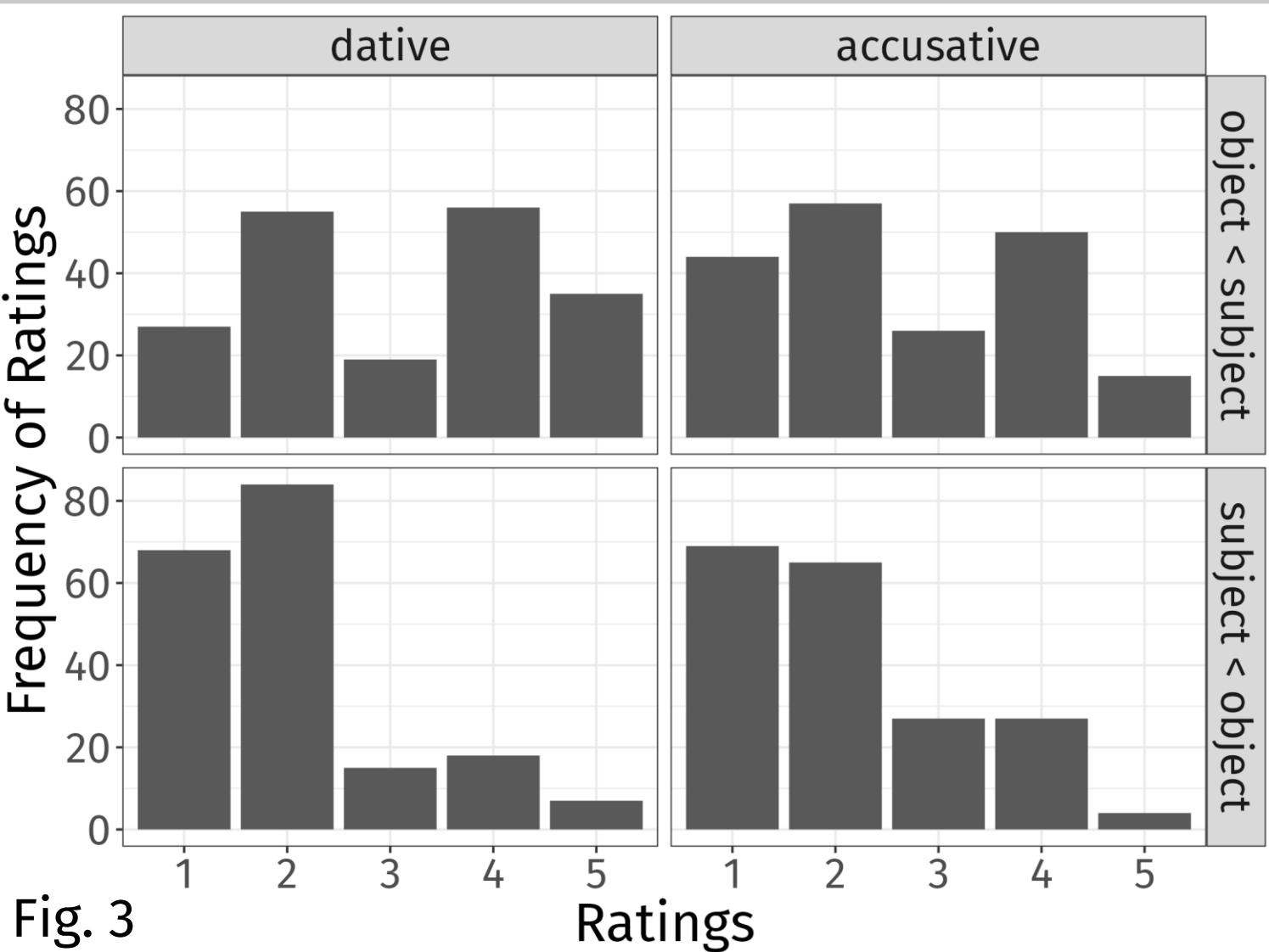


Fig. 3

- ▶ Results: inanimate subjects (fig. 1): dat-EO primarily OS, acc-EO primarily SO. Variation; animate subjects (fig. 2): acc-EO primarily SO, dat-EO no tendency. Verb-specific variation
- ▶ Analysis: No functional heads in midfield between V and C, binary-branching verbal projections, head-final (Haider 2010)
- ▶ Violable linear precedence rules modelled as weighted constraints
- ▶ Relevant here: ActorFirst, CauserFirst, AnimateFirst
- ▶ With *most* acc-EO verbs, the subject is a causer, with *most* dat-EO verbs not (but an *object of emotion*, cf. Pesetsky 1995)

- ▶ Acceptability-Judgement Task: Is reflexive binding into the subject of EO verbs possible in German as Belletti and Rizzi (1988) claim for Italian?
- (6) a. [...], dass das Gerücht über sich den Professor genervt hat.
- b. [...], dass den Professor das Gerücht über sich genervt hat.
- ▶ Only if the reflexive is c-commanded by its antecedent!

DONE

Scope

- ▶ Theories of the syntax of EO verbs and theories of word order in German make predictions for the possible interpretation of sentences like the ones in (7) when combined with a theory of scope (e.g. Frey 1993, Bobaljik & Wurmbrand 2012)
- (7) a. Es hat genau ein Rocksänger jedem Jurymitglied gefallen.
- b. Es hat jedem Jurymitglied genau ein Rocksänger gefallen.
- ▶ Test these predictions in a Truth-Value-Judgement Task

Intensionality

- ▶ Cheung and Larson (2015) and Cosma & Engelberg (2014) discuss (but reject) the possibility that nominal subjects of EO verbs are interpreted intensionally.
- ▶ But at least for some verbs this seems to be the case: (8a) but not (8b) may be true in a world without werewolves
- (8) a. Werwölfe faszinieren Paula.
- b. Werwölfe verärgern Paula.
- ▶ Apply intensionality tests to many verbs introspectively
- ▶ Since judgments may be controversial: Truth-Value-Judgment Task

Aktionsart

- ▶ Widely-held that the aktionsart (aka aspectual class) of a verb/VP is grammatically relevant
- ▶ All possible aktionsarts have already been proposed for EO verbs (Kailuweit 2015)
- ▶ Possible reasons: verbs are ambiguous (Arad 1998), verbs form latent sub-classes (Hirsch 2018), lectal variation
- ▶ Perform experimental studies using aktionsart tests (Acceptability- or Truth-Value-Judgment Task depending on test)

TODO

- ▶ Analysis: How do the results relate to each other? How can all of this be formalised and explained?