

Angela Queisser & Monika Pleyer

8 Such an impoliteness: Evidence for the ‘evaluative *such* construction’

Abstract: There has been much debate regarding whether impoliteness can be inherently associated with particular linguistic structures. Adopting a usage-based, interactionalist approach to impoliteness, we conducted four questionnaire studies to find evidence for structurally embedded impoliteness. Specifically, we investigate the evaluative *such* construction [*such* + (article) + nominal]. Our studies examine the construction embedded in the form [PRON BE *such* ART N] in two closely related languages, English and German, using the 2nd and 3rd person singular pronouns, respectively. Our results confirm that predicative statements of the form [PRON BE (*such*) ART N] are more likely to be rated as evaluative, predominantly as negative, when they contain *such/so*. This effect is stronger in both German studies than in the English data. We also show that evaluations differ across various nouns used in the nominal slot, and that the construction has the power to even switch the interpretation of the (otherwise) same utterance from positive to negative meaning for some nouns. Chi-squared tests show statistically significant associations between the presence and absence of *such/so* and experimental ratings. We conclude that non-evaluative nouns in the nominal slot tend to be coerced into an evaluative reading. We identify the item *such/so* as a major contributor to this coercion effect.

Keywords: impoliteness, construction, conventionalized impoliteness formulae, coercion, evaluation study

1 Introduction

When encountering the string *You are such a . . .*, we have good reason to believe the completed utterance will be an insult. This intuition is based on our prior knowledge of similar utterances, specifically of the form [PRON BE *such* ART N]. The form is best attested with negatively connoted nouns (see Section 2.2.2). Compare similar sentences like *You’re such a jerk*, *I’m such an idiot*, and *He became such an asshole*.

Angela Queisser, Heidelberg University, Interdisciplinary Center for Scientific Computing, Im Neuenheimer Feld 205, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany, e-mail: angela.queisser@iwr.uni-heidelberg.de.

Monika Pleyer, Heidelberg University, English Department, Kettengasse 12, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany, e-mail: monika.pleyer@as.uni-heidelberg.de

Examples with *you* as the subject have been described by Culpeper (2011: 133, 135) as a ‘personalized negative assertion’, a type of ‘conventionalized impoliteness formula’ (see also Culpeper et al, this volume). This means it is used for explicit orientation to a target and negative evaluation thereof.

We adopt here a perspective on impoliteness informed by usage-based and interactionalist approaches (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2011). We view the proposed formula as a ‘construction’, a form-meaning pair as described in Construction Grammar (e.g. Goldberg 1995). We extend the scope of said construction by narrowing its form to [*such* + (article) + nominal], thereby allowing it to occur with different subjects, (copula) verbs, and tenses, as illustrated by the three example sentences above. We refer to the construction as the ‘evaluative *such* construction’ and propose that a non-evaluative noun in the nominal slot is coerced into an evaluative, predominantly negative, reading. Consequently, the utterance is read as making a negative statement about the subject, i.e. it is open to an interpretation as impolite. We identify the lexically fixed item *such* as a major contributor to this coercion effect.

To compile evidence for our hypotheses, we draw on previous studies of related phenomena as well as corpus evidence, and conduct our own studies. In a corpus study, Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper (2023) found corroborating evidence for the similar construction [*you* + noun phrase]. For instance, *you theoretician* is attested with an insulting meaning. Our study complements the work by Van Olmen and colleagues, but also departs from it. Their aim was to attest the existence of their construction in corpora; we use our previously compiled corpus evidence¹ as the foundation for four questionnaire studies (but see also Van Olmen and Andersson, this volume, for their questionnaire-based approach). Specifically, we are interested in coercion effects attributable to *such* in otherwise non-evaluative nouns attested in English and German. The German equivalent of the construction proposed above, [*so* (ART) Nom], is attested in German corpora (Hirschmann 2024: 199). Hirschmann (2024: 202–203) notes that an intensifying use as in *so ein Idiot* ‘such an idiot’ is comparatively rare. He also lists usages with neutral nouns, e.g. *Hans ist so ein Student* ‘Hans is such a student’; however, these are described not as evaluative, but as the subject having the properties of the noun to a high degree (compare Section 2.2.1). In investigating evaluative usages of the construction in the German data, our paper helps close a research gap.

We aim to show that conventionalization in impoliteness structures may be stable across two closely related languages. Our research questions are:

¹ A substantial part of the current contribution is based on our first author’s Master’s thesis (Queisser 2024), available in the Heidelberg University document repository.

- Do speakers evaluate otherwise identical statements conforming to the described pattern differently in the presence and absence of *such*?
- Do evaluations differ across various neutral nouns used in the nominal slot?
- Of which polarity (positive/negative) are the evaluations, and is there a discernible pattern?

In Section 2 of this chapter, we present the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for our studies. We begin by briefly discussing previous findings on the conventionalization of impoliteness (2.1) before turning to constructions and commenting on the role of *such* (2.2.1) and our current construction (2.2.2). Section 3 presents our method; we present the stimuli used in the questionnaires (3.1) as well as respondent choice (3.2). Section 4 discusses the results for the two English studies (4.1) and the complementary German studies (4.2), followed by the description of the statistics (4.3) as well as a summary and general discussion (4.4). This is followed by a brief conclusion and suggestions for future research (5).

2 Theoretical framework

This section discusses the theoretical background for our studies presented in Sections 3 and 4 below. We employ a combined approach to situate our studies, drawing on research from sociological and interactional approaches to im/politeness studies (e.g. Terkourafi 2005; Culpeper 2010, 2011) and Construction Grammar (e.g. Goldberg 1995).

2.1 Conventionalization of impoliteness

Impoliteness² has been described as a term with fuzzy boundaries (Kleinke and Bös 2015), which has drawn forth a plethora of definitions. We follow Culpeper’s (2011: 23) definition, which situates impoliteness in interpersonal interactions. We wish to highlight two key aspects of Culpeper’s definition: first, impoliteness as an intentional negative evaluation of the hearer, and second, its connection to (social) norms. Our proposed construction [*such* (ART) Nom] can be classified as the crucial

² We use impoliteness as a technical term (rather than rudeness) as it mirrors the linguistic notion of politeness (see Culpeper 2011).

part of an insult. In insults, the speaker addresses the hearer by an epithet,³ or states characteristics of the hearer in such a way that the hearer may perceive them as inappropriate and intentional (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 73). That is, insults as evaluative forms threaten the hearer's face.

There has been much debate regarding whether impoliteness can be inherently associated with particular linguistic structures (see Van Olmen et al., this volume). One position holds that impoliteness is inherent in particular linguistic expressions; see first-wave accounts, e.g. by Leech (1983: 83) or Brown and Levinson's (1987: 65) notion that certain acts intrinsically threaten face. The following second-wave position (e.g. Fraser and Nolen 1981: 96) holds that "no sentence is inherently polite or impolite"; in short, impoliteness is determined by contextual factors.⁴

Our own third-wave position acknowledges the relevance of contextual factors; however, we believe that certain linguistic structures are predisposed to an impolite reading. Normative aspects are of relevance regarding the conventionalization of particular expressions. We understand norms here as "regularities of co-occurrence between linguistic expressions and their extra-linguistic contexts of use" (Terkourafi 2005: 247). Impoliteness is normative insofar as there are certain recognizable expressions that signal the speaker's intentional negative evaluative stance: "I can only be rude to you in a way that you recognize as being rude. Otherwise, no matter how rude I think I am being, unless you concur with this evaluation, I have not been rude to you" (Terkourafi 2005: 249).

Manes and Wolfson (1981: 123) show that the structure [NP is/looks really ADJ] has become conventionalized for compliments in American English in multiple contexts. In short, politeness is created by a particular linguistic form regularly co-occurring with particular context types (Terkourafi 2005: 248). Through repeated use, speakers acquire "a knowledge of which expressions to use in which situations" (Terkourafi 2002: 197); this knowledge is bleached from particulars and generalizable to a 'default context' (see Section 3.1). Similar formulaic expressions regularly co-occur with contexts which are predisposed for impoliteness, and come to be conventionalized (Culpeper 2010: 3243), i.e. perceived as impolite in almost all contexts of use based on the hearer's previous experience of similar such contexts and usage (see Culpeper 2011: 135–136 for a non-exhaustive list of formulae).

³ We use "epithet" as described by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 380–381): "[A]n emotive expression which serves to indicate annoyance with the individual concerned rather than to give an objective description".

⁴ See also Kienpointner (1997: 225) for a supportive view, and further discussions in Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper (2023) and Culpeper (2011: 117–126).

Taylor (2012: 243) discusses default contexts in connection with entrenchment. While impoliteness overall is much less frequent in everyday interactions than politeness, and may be “rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances” (Leech 1983: 105), we understand it as the more salient phenomenon. Some contexts may be especially prone to impoliteness or even license the use of impoliteness, such as exploitative TV shows (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper and Holmes 2013) or hate speech in online interactions (Kienpointner 2018). That is, speakers are assumed to have knowledge of impoliteness formulae outside of personal use.

Culpeper (2011: 134) grouped conventionalized impoliteness formulae in five languages, among them German and English, “according to structural commonalities”, here referred to as “patterns”. We align with Culpeper and understand such patterns as constructions (Goldberg 1995; see Section 2.2). We conclude by investigating one such construction, which is comprised in the personalized negative assertion “[you] [are] [so/such a] [shit/stink/[. . .]/bitch/hypocrite/disappointment [. . .]]” identified by Culpeper (2011: 135).⁵ The speaker states their opinion on the subject, and makes a predication or evaluation about the subject that is negative, i.e. it is an insulting form. Our proposed construction [*such* (ART) Nom] is an abstraction of this formula.

As Culpeper investigates impoliteness, his examples only contain negatively connoted nouns (e.g. *shit*, *stink*, *bitch*, *hypocrite*, *disappointment*), however other elements may enter the noun slot; see the positively evaluative noun in *You’re such a sweetheart*. We also acknowledge the possibility that negatively evaluative nouns may be used as banter (Leech 1983), e.g. to express solidarity between very close friends.

As “insults can also be creatively modified [. . .] to intensify their offensiveness” (Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper 2023: 25), we assume a large pool of possible candidates for the noun slot; see, for instance, neutral-valence nouns like *linguist* or *theoretician* (Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper 2023: 27, 33), which might be coerced into an evaluative reading in our construction. Culpeper (2011) does not comment explicitly on the role of *such* in the personal negative assertion; we address this further in Section 2.2.

⁵ Personalized negative assertion in the form ‘you are such a NP’ is also attested in corpus data for the nouns *bitch* and *bastard* in Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper (2023: 26), albeit with a lower frequency than the corresponding *you* + NP construction.

2.2 Constructions

We conduct our analysis within the framework of Construction Grammar, thereby taking a cognitive-linguistic, usage-based approach. While theories vary⁶ and we do not adopt a specific sub-approach, we generally follow Goldberg (e.g. 1995, 2006, 2019). Construction Grammar views linguistic expressions as pairings of form/structure and meaning/function (Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988: 507; Goldberg 2006: 3; Hilpert 2014: 2). Crucially, it emphasizes the significance of conventionalized, idiomatic expressions, as “idiomaticity in a language includes a great deal that is productive, highly structured, and worthy of serious grammatical investigation” (Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988: 501, 534).

Generally, constructions come as (a) lexically fixed, e.g. idioms, (b) partially schematic with some lexically fixed material, and (c) fully schematic templates, such as argument structure constructions (cf. Taylor 2012: 84; Goldberg 2019). The evaluative *such* construction is partially schematic as only the lexical item *such* is fixed. It matches Taylor's (2012: 84) “constructional idioms” and “formal idioms” as described by Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1988: 505–506). Construction Grammar proposes that linguistic items are stored in the mind within a *network* in which they cluster, connect, overlap, and get co-activated (Goldberg 2019: 6). Novel constructions enter the network via repeated exposure, which leads to *entrenchment* (Taylor 2012: 122; Goldberg 2019: 54). As constructions are motivated by higher-level constructions, they *inherit* formal and/or semantic features from their parent constructions (Goldberg 1995: 72–81).

Two central concepts are *non-compositionality* and *coercion*. Constructions may express meaning beyond the sum of their lexical constituents. This non-compositional, idiosyncratic meaning may lead to coercion: the meaning imposed by the construction overrides the denotational meaning of certain lexical items occurring in the construction (Taylor 2012: 95, 279; Hilpert 2014: 17; Goldberg 2019: 37). As a result of a construction's formal and functional requirements, it may impose *constraints* that limit the lexical material that is admissible in its schema (Hilpert 2014: 18–20; Goldberg 2019: 51–73). Example (1) illustrates some of these concepts.

(1) *He sneezed the napkin off the table.* (Goldberg 1995: 224)

Through coercion, the intransitive verb *sneeze* acquires a transitive, three-argument sense (Goldberg 1995: 225). Extending Goldberg's example, *He coughed the napkin off the table* sounds plausible, while *?He breathed the napkin off the table*

6 For overviews see Ungerer and Hartmann (2023) and Haspelmath (2023).

does not. Sufficient force, which breathing lacks, seems to be a constraint on the verb licensed by the construction (cf. Goldberg 1995: 29, 2006: 100).

2.2.1 Aside: on *such*

As Van der Auwera and Sahoo (2020: 2) point out, “despite the rich grammatical tradition, English grammarians do not know what to do with *such*”. Prototypically, *such* is a referential expression. The Oxford English Dictionary describes it as “a demonstrative word used to indicate the quality or quantity of a thing by reference to that of another or with respect to the effect that it produces or is capable of producing. Thus, syntactically, *such* may have backward or forward reference”. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1546) identify *such* as a modifier in a noun phrase structure that concerns either degree or kind, and connect it to a “scalar comparison of equality” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1130). Others (Altenberg 1994: 229–230; Spinillo 2003: 197–200) call this “comparative reference” (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976: 76–87). As Bolinger (1972: 62) puts it, *such* “identifies a quality rather than an object”. However, often there is no identifiable (comparative) co-referent in the discourse. A solution comes from Van der Auwera and Sahoo (2020), who outline a “demonstrative similative”: *such* creates an ad hoc, context-dependent category in discourse. For the utterance *I want such a cat*, “[t]he speaker [. . .] might well stand in front of a cat and point at it. [. . .] The speaker has just created an *ad hoc* category and the cat that (s)he wants is an indefinite exemplar of this new category” (Van der Auwera and Sahoo 2020: 2). This is similar to what Altenberg (1994: 231) calls an “exophoric”, or situational, reference (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976: 31–37). Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1546) agree that for *I’ve never had to wait such a long time before*, “the secondary term is retrieved from the situation of utterance: ‘such a long time as this, i.e. as the time I’m currently having to wait’”.

Several authors have also investigated *such* as an intensifier (e.g. Bolinger 1972: 61–77; Altenberg 1994; Ghesquière and Van de Velde 2011). They typically analyze *such* as either identifying or intensifying, depending on context. For noun phrases like “*such a X*”, Altenberg (1994: 234) states that the interpretation of *such* depends on whether there is a possible co-referent in the context or a gradable element within the noun phrase. *Such* is seen as identifying if there is a possible co-referent but no gradable element, but as intensifying if the opposite is the case. Compare *such a snob* and *such a telescope*, where *snob* is seen as gradable and a *telescope* as either there or not (Spinillo 2003: 207). A sub-entry in the Oxford English Dictionary goes further and lists a colloquial use for *such* as “an absolute intensive, the implied clause of comparison being indeterminate and quite lost sight of (‘[W]e stayed the night in *such* an inn!’)”. The absolute intensive specifies the type of mod-

ification – one to the highest possible degree. The missing clause of comparison, which still presupposes a co-referent, echoes the exophoric/situational reference mentioned. Absolute intensive further implies an exclamatory character of *such*, which has long been noted (Bolinger 1972: 68; Altenberg 1994: 233; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 923). Bolinger (1972: 91–93) and Altenberg (1994: 239) argue that the function of *such* has diachronically shifted towards intensification, and Altenberg makes a connection to a cline from propositional via textual to expressive meaning described by Traugott (1982). Ghesquière and Van de Velde (2011), adopting a data-driven, constructional view, found supporting corpus evidence for this.

Merging these analyses and viewing *such* as simultaneously identifying and intensifying may explain what the evaluative *such* construction does. *Such* creates an ad hoc category of e.g. an idiot, one that behaves in a particular way, based on the discourse situation. It identifies the subject as a specimen of this ad hoc category. Due to the absolute intensive character of *such*, this specimen is situated on the upper extreme of the scale, meaning it displays the attributes inherent or associated with the category to the highest possible degree.

2.2.2 The evaluative *such* construction

Our proposed construction, exemplified by *You are [such an idiot]*, is hypothesized to have negative evaluation as its prototypical function. It is characterized by the modifier *such* as a lexical *pivot*⁷ and by a tendency to feature epithets. While *such* has been linked to intensification and it could be argued that the negative evaluation resides in the epithet and is merely intensified by *such*, we propose that the evaluation is also caused by the construction itself, as outlined above. The construction has been linked to negative evaluation by authors such as Culpeper (2011: 135, see Section 2.1) and Taylor (2012: 90), who even calls it an “epithet construction”. However, they do not analyze it in detail.

Formally, the construction is a noun phrase comprising *such*, the indefinite article (except with plurals and non-count nouns), and a nominal, typically a noun: [*such* (ART) Nom]. The nominal can include an attributive adjective⁸ modifying the

⁷ We adopt *pivot* from *pivot schemas* in language acquisition (cf. Hilpert 2014: 164), meaning a fixed item accompanied by open slots.

⁸ The role of the adjective is not trivial. An adjective can be disambiguating, and it would be easy to propose that the adjective becomes obligatory in the construction if coercion is to be avoided. Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper (2023) observe this effect in their corpus data for *you* + NP, and it is also apparent in the data for Queisser (2024). However, this raises the question whether the utterance remains an instantiation of the construction, i.e. if we are dealing with the same

noun, as exemplified in (02) below, or a phrasal noun like *pain in the ass*. Due to its scope, the current discussion is limited to plain nouns. The construction occurs in various syntactic contexts (see Table 1):

Table 1: The evaluative *such* construction across clause types (cf. also Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 923).

no.	example	clause type
(02)	<i>You're [such a fucking idiot].</i> (The Handmaid's Tale series)	declarative
(03)	<i>You're not [such an idiot].</i> (The Simpsons series)	declarative negated
(04)	<i>Do you have to be [such an idiot]?</i> (blog post)	closed interrogative
(05)	<i>When did you become [such an idiot]?</i> (movie review)	open interrogative
(06)	<i>Don't be [such an idiot].</i> (opinion piece)	imperative
(07)	<i>[Such an idiot!]</i> (The Dead Zone series)	exclamative ⁹
(08)	<i>Who hired [such an idiot]?!</i> (discussion forum)	non-predicative interrogative

The construction typically occurs in a predicative context. However, the copula *be* is not part of the construction. Other copular verbs occur, as shown by (05). Examples (07) and (08) are not formally predicative. However, we argue that predication is implied in (07) and that in (08), it is presupposed that the person who was hired is *an idiot*. Predication is thus a central feature of the construction's use. As predication ascribes characteristics (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 251–252), this feeds into the evaluative character of the construction, especially with the pronoun *you* as the subject. In this specific context, the speaker tells the addressee what the addressee is. This is not information-giving. What the speaker is really doing is stating an *opinion* about the addressee. This is in line with the expressive function of *such* outlined above.

A corpus analysis was conducted for Queisser (2024).¹⁰ The construction was expected to occur most frequently in informal spoken language (cf. Altenberg 1994: 235), with predominantly negative, person-denoting nouns (epithets). The find-

form-meaning pair. Compare *You are such a girl* with *You are such a pretty girl*. Goldberg's (1995: 31–39) ‘constructional polysemy’ and Hilpert's (2014: 181) “many-to-many mappings” offer good solutions for this.

⁹ Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 923) use the term “non-exclamative exclamation” due to their more restrictive definition of exclamatives.

¹⁰ Corpora used: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), TV Corpus, Movie Corpus, Corpus of American Soap Operas, News on the Web (NOW) Corpus. The COCA was used as a default, mixed-genre corpus, the entertainment corpora as examples of informal spoken language modelled after naturally occurring discourse, and the NOW as a control corpus featuring more formal, non-interpersonal language.

ings confirmed both expectations. They further showed that the subject is most frequently a personal pronoun while nouns and proper nouns are rare. Of the personal pronouns, singular *you* is the most frequent, followed by *I*. This provides evidence for frequent interpersonal use of the construction. While the construction occurs most frequently with negative nouns – in close to 80% of the data obtained, depending on the corpus and subject – there are instances with positive and neutral nouns. The positive nouns indicate that the construction is indeed evaluative on a general level rather than only impolite, while the abundance of negative nouns underscores the construction's prototypical, impolite force. The neutral nouns provide evidence for a coercion effect. They should be interpreted as evaluative, mostly negative, due to being used in the construction. A small type-token ratio and many unique instantiations (hapax legomena) indicate that the construction is very productive and that speakers use it creatively.

We briefly illustrate this. For the search string [you BE *such* ART N] in the COCA¹¹, the top ten nouns are: *asshole* (96 instances), *liar* (89), *jerk* (79), *bitch* (63), *idiot* (61), *dick* and *loser* (52 each), *baby* (50), *inspiration* (46), *child* (31), and *gentleman* (31). There are 2122 total instances, featuring 604 different nouns, with 379 nouns occurring only once, and 172 occurring twice. While the top ten nouns account for 30% of all occurrences, nouns occurring only once or twice account for 26%. Conventionalized expressions and more novel/creative examples thus occur in comparable shares, exemplifying Goldberg's (2006: 89) "cognitive anchoring": "a high-frequency type of example act[ing] as [. . .] a salient standard of comparison".

3 Method

To investigate coercion effects attributable to *such* (German *so*) we conducted four questionnaire studies. The studies investigate the construction embedded in the form [PRON BE *such* ART N] in English and German, using the 2nd and 3rd person singular pronouns, respectively.

The third-person pronouns *he/she* and *er/sie* were used in one set of studies; we shall refer to these as E3P (English 3rd person) and G3P (German 3rd person). Third person was used intentionally to avoid respondents feeling addressed by the statements. The objective was for respondents to focus on the communicative intention of the speaker rather than their own interpretation as an imagined target. Further, in conditions without *such/so*, the third-person pronoun implies neutral informa-

¹¹ Accessed 06 June 2024. This very brief analysis is purely quantitative, and context was not controlled for. Individual erroneous hits may not represent the construction.

tion-giving, which served as a control for evaluative meaning arising from factors other than *such*.

Another set of studies used the second-person singular pronouns *you* and *du*, as *you* is the most frequent subject in the corpora (see Section 2.2.2).¹² We refer to these studies as E2P (English 2nd person) and G2P (German 2nd person). Note that German uses formal and informal second-person pronouns; in G2P, we selected the informal pronoun *du* instead of the formal *Sie*. While the formal pronoun is possible in impoliteness contexts (e.g. *Sie arschloch* (‘you-V asshole’)), it is marked, and might be read as having a humorous effect. The non-binary singular pronoun *they* was not used as its prototypically plural meaning may have affected the perceived grammaticality of the stimuli.

For each study, two separate questionnaires were compiled. In Condition 1, respondents were presented with predicative sentences without *such* (*so* in the German studies); Condition 2 comprises largely the same sentences with *such* (*so*).

3.1 Stimuli and presentation

Each study featured ten experimental sentences and 20 filler items. The predicative nouns used in the experimental sentences are presumed to have either positive (2), negative (2), or neutral (6) valence (see Table 2). However, we acknowledge that no person-denoting predicative noun will be perceived as neutral in 100% of the cases. The positive and negative nouns served to verify that prototypical (i.e. frequent in the corpora) examples of the construction would indeed be rated as expected, while a higher number of neutral nouns was selected to obtain more data relevant to the study of coercion effects.

The nouns were chosen based on their frequency in the corpus data obtained for Queisser (2024). Frequent nouns (*child, girl, man*) are contrasted with likely less conventionalized but attested low-frequency nouns (*perfectionist, student, teacher*). Three of the neutral stimuli used in E3P and G3P (*child, girl, man*) were considered unsuitable for a non-evaluative context with *you*, as stating something so obvious about the addressee may imply ‘more’ meaning. For E2P and G2P, these were replaced with nouns that we considered suitable (*neighbor, guest, shareholder*). In E2P and E3P, the stimuli were randomly assigned a gender for the pronoun; the gender is retained in G2P and G3P.¹³ We acknowledge the possible influence of

¹² *You* may also increase the directness of reference to the hearer and strengthen the separation between interlocutors (see Van Olmen, Andersson, and Culpeper 2023: 38).

¹³ Note that German has obligatory gender suffixation in nouns, with *-in* being used for female referents.

gender and stereotypical ascriptions of (professional) roles to certain genders on participants' ratings (see also our concluding remarks in Section 5).

Table 2: Experimental stimuli with and without *such* in English and German.

	S/he is (such) a(n)	You are (such) a(n)	Sie/er ist (so) ein(e)	Du bist (so) ein(e)
positive		inspiration		Inspiration
		sweetheart		Schatz
negative		asshole		Arschloch
		idiot		Idiot
neutral		perfectionist		Perfektionistin
		student		Studentin
		teacher		Lehrer
	girl	neighbor	Mädchen	Nachbar
	man	guest	Mann	Gast
	child	shareholder	Kind	Aktionär

It proved challenging to identify suitable nouns, and for some of the resulting stimuli it may be less easy to imagine a speech situation in which they occur naturally. However, the nouns occur in the corpus data for Queisser (2024), albeit with a low frequency and with a disambiguating adjective. We selected these nouns to investigate the ratings in the absence of the disambiguating adjective and hoped to present the respondents with novel statements that would increase the reliance on constructional over lexical meaning. Thus, we do not see the peculiarity of these stimuli as a weakness of our studies. Respondents were expected to draw on their prior linguistic experience with the construction, comparable to studies which use nonce words to achieve this effect.

To mask the purpose of the study, 20 fillers were included (see Appendix). They did not share the form of the construction and were identical across studies wherever possible. Some fillers were changed to be used with *you*. The fillers were designed in such a way that there was a total of ten positive, negative, and neutral statements each in the experiment. An equal share of feminine and masculine pronouns/nouns was used.

As shown in Table 2 above, the studies used context-less examples. While we acknowledge the role (social) context plays for impoliteness judgments (see Section 2.1), we chose not to provide contexts for the stimuli for the following reasons:

First, previous research has shown that speakers can judge impoliteness outside of particular contexts; see, e.g., Jain (2022: 389) and Van Olmen, Andersson,

and Culpeper (2023: 37), who note that the *you* + NP construction may be interpreted as impolite without a specific context. Second, we assume that “people acquire a knowledge of impoliteness formulae that far exceeds *their own direct experience of usage*” (Culpeper 2010: 3238, emphasis in original; see also a similar point in Kleinke and Bös 2015: 25 on respondents’ first- and second-order understanding of impoliteness). Third, our stimuli contain pronouns, i.e. deictic expressions which by their very nature assume a speech situation with shared knowledge between speaker and hearer (cf. Traugott 1982: 248). Fourth and final, a specified context may be leading and therefore counterproductive. Based on these points we assume that speakers will draw on their pre-existing knowledge of impoliteness contexts and shared conventions about face-threats to construe for themselves a context of use for the stimuli.

In all studies, the conditions (with and without *such*) were run between-group, meaning that each respondent saw only one version of the questionnaire. Respondents were not aware of this. The questionnaires were assigned (50:50) by a random generator when the link was opened. The 30 stimuli were displayed one per page in a randomized order. The prompt accompanying each statement was “Do you think the speaker is making a positive, negative, or neutral statement about the person?” The prompt aimed to make the respondents focus on the communicative intention of the speaker. Respondents rated each statement on a five-point Likert scale with the options ‘very negative’, ‘negative’, ‘neutral’, ‘positive’, and ‘very positive’. Smiley faces accompanied each option to avoid a reverse reading of the scale.

“You are such an asshole.”

Do you think the speaker is making a positive, negative, or neutral statement about the person?



Figure 1: Screenshot of an experimental stimulus in E3P.

3.2 Respondents and data

Respondents were recruited by disseminating the survey link via social media. We asked potential respondents with a background in linguistics to refrain from taking part, as the studies’ aims might have been overly transparent for them.

Some sociodemographic data were gathered: gender (female, male, non-binary), age in years, highest educational achievement, self-identified level of proficiency in English/German with the options ‘basic’, ‘intermediate’, ‘advanced’, ‘fluent’, ‘close to native’, and ‘I am a native speaker of English/German’, and the variety of English/German spoken (optional answer). Only data sets of respondents who rated their proficiency in English/German as ‘fluent’ or higher were used for the analysis. A small number of respondents was excluded as their overall rating vastly differed from other respondents, especially in the filler items. These respondents might have miscomprehended the rating scale, or might have operated under a particular bias. We believe that exclusion is warranted as these answers are not representative of the general population we tested.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Studies on English

E3P, conducted for Queisser (2024), used *he* and *she* as subject pronouns; E2P, conducted for the current work, used *you*. We discuss both studies together. Data on the respondents are available in Table 3. All have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, most have a university degree. Gender, age, education, and variety of English spoken¹⁴ had no discernable impact on ratings. However, due to the small sample size and the heterogeneity of the respondents, it was not possible to form meaningful groups for an in-depth assessment. Due to prematurely aborted surveys and individual questionnaires that had to be excluded (see Section 3.2), the number of responses per condition differs.

Table 3: Respondent data for both studies: subject pronoun, total number of responses, number by condition, age information, gender (female/male/non-binary), and self-reported level of English (native/close to native/fluent).

subj.	tot.	w/o such	with such	ages	mean age	gender	level
<i>he/she</i>	48	27	21	22–69	37	27/20/1	31/10/7
<i>you</i>	33	17	16	24–73	40	19/8/3	19/6/8

¹⁴ Variety of English is not reported here for reasons of brevity.

With some exceptions, all fillers and control sentences with overt positive or negative valence were rated as expected. Although the fillers were not part of the experimental conditions, their mostly uniform ratings show that there is a high degree of consensus across the respondents. Some interesting ratings of the control sentences with overt positive or negative nouns occurred. *You are such an idiot* was rated as positive by two native speakers, who may have read it as banter. One native speaker rated *She is such an asshole* as positive, which most likely happened by mistake. Isolated neutral ratings occurred for *You are such an inspiration* (2) and *You are such a sweetheart* (1).

4.1.1 Overall results

We focus on the neutral stimuli for which coercion was predicted. If otherwise neutral nouns adopt an evaluative meaning when occurring in the evaluative *such* construction, these stimuli should be rated as neutral without *such* and as positive or negative with *such*. Predominantly, they should be rated as negative. These predictions are confirmed by the results of both studies, however to different degrees. The effect is strongest in E3P. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings in both studies. Detailed results follow in Section 4.1.2. As is clearly visible, the white (neutral) area of the graphs is smaller, and the dark gray (negative) area outweighs the light gray (positive) area when *such* is present.

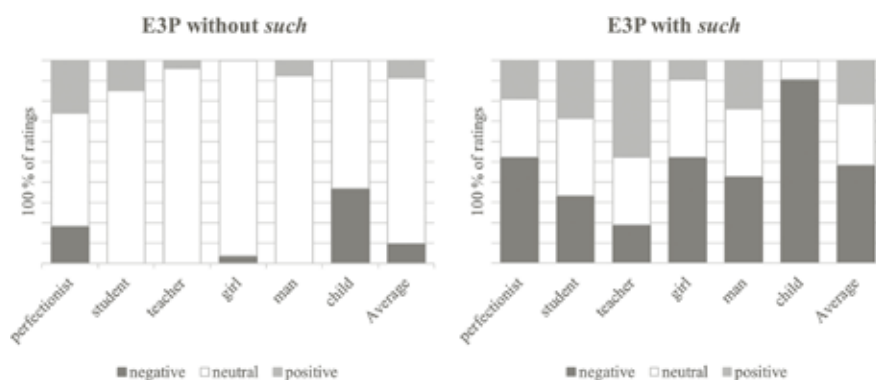


Figure 2: E3P: shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings per noun and on average.

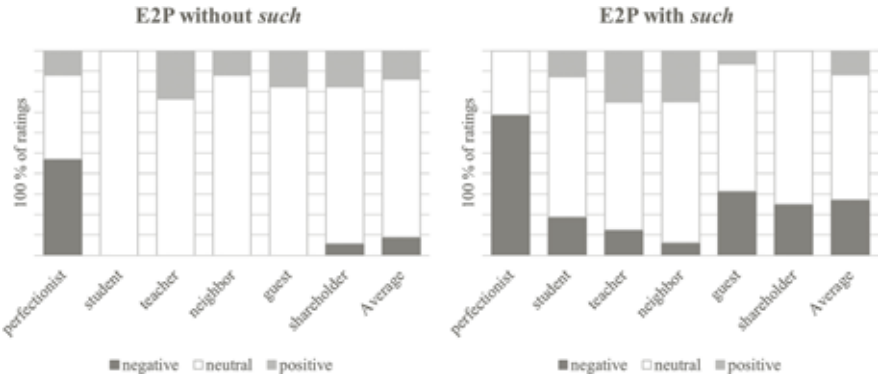


Figure 3: E2P: shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings per noun and on average.

4.1.2 Detailed results

The results in percentages are available in Tables 4 and 5. We first discuss E3P. As the column ‘Average’ shows, positive and negative ratings account for under 10% each (18.5% total) without *such*. However, there is an interesting variation between the stimuli, indicating that some of the nouns do lean towards a positive or negative evaluation. This is not surprising and could be due to a conventionalized or individual interpretation. *Perfectionist* is the only item to receive both positive and negative ratings without *such*. None of the stimuli are rated as ‘very positive’ or ‘very negative’. The majority (81.5%, on average) of ratings are neutral, as was predicted.

Table 4: E3P: percentages of positive, negative, neutral, and total evaluative ratings with and without *such*, and the difference (Δ) of percentages. Potential discrepancies in sums are caused by mathematical rounding to one decimal.

	<i>perfectionist</i>			<i>student</i>			<i>teacher</i>			<i>girl</i>		
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ
pos.	25.9	19.0	-6.9	14.8	28.6	+13.8	3.7	47.6	+43.9	0.0	9.5	+9.5
neg.	18.5	52.4	+33.9	0.0	33.3	+33.3	0.0	19.0	+19.0	3.7	52.4	+48.7
neut.	55.6	28.6	-27.0	85.2	38.1	-47.1	96.3	33.3	-63.0	96.3	38.1	-58.2
eval.	44.4	71.4	+27.0	14.8	61.9	+47.1	3.7	66.7	+63.0	3.7	61.9	+58.2

Table 4 (continued)

	<i>man</i>			<i>child</i>			Average			Legend
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	
pos.	7.4	23.8	+16.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	21.4	+12.8	w/o: without <i>such</i> w: with <i>such</i> Δ: delta/difference
neg.	0.0	42.9	+42.9	37.0	90.5	+53.4	9.9	48.4	+38.5	
neut.	92.6	33.3	-59.3	63.0	9.5	-53.4	81.5	30.2	-51.3	
eval.	7.4	66.7	+59.3	37.0	90.5	+53.4	18.5	69.8	+51.3	

This changes clearly when *such* is present. The average share of neutral ratings drops to 30.2%, while positive (21.4%) and negative (48.4%) ratings increase. Individual statements are also rated as stronger, meaning 'very positive' or 'very negative'. For better legibility and to meet the sample size requirements of our statistical test (see Section 4.3), we include 'very negative' ratings in the 'negative' ratings and 'very positive' ratings in the 'positive' ratings in all experiments. Negative ratings now account for almost half of all ratings. This is crucial as it provides evidence for the hypothesis that the evaluative *such* construction has a particularly negative connotation, and that coercion will work in favor of negative polarity. *Teacher* is an interesting exception that may have to do with prestige. The delta (Δ) columns show the differences between the two conditions¹⁵. The final column best illustrates the overall effect. The increase in total evaluative ratings, quite logically, corresponds to the decrease in neutral ratings.

In E2P, the results without *such* are comparable. The average share of positive ratings (13.7%) is slightly larger and the share of negative ratings (8.8%) slightly smaller than in E3P. Only two stimuli are rated as negative, while five are rated as positive. The average share of neutral ratings is 77.5%, which is not much lower than in E3P (81.5%). An even smaller share may have been expected, as using *you* as a predicand should not be interpreted as informational but implies opinion-giving. For the stimuli used in both studies, a direct comparison is possible. *Perfectionist* is rated more negatively with *you*, *teacher* is rated more positively. While an analysis of the lexical meaning of the items is beyond the scope of the current discussion, it is interesting that the interpretation of the stimuli also varies with the subject pronoun.

¹⁵ The difference is calculated by subtraction of the percentages. It should be noted that the number of respondents per condition differs (27 vs. 21). This means that fewer individuals account for the percentage obtained for the condition with *such*. In E2P, the numbers were almost even (16 vs. 17). This slight imprecision is remedied by the statistical test (see Section 4.3).

Table 5: E2P: percentages of positive, negative, neutral, and total evaluative ratings with and without *such*, and the difference (Δ) of percentages. Potential discrepancies in sums are caused by mathematical rounding to one decimal.

	<i>perfectionist</i>			<i>student</i>			<i>teacher</i>			<i>neighbor</i>		
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ
pos.	11.8	0.0	-11.8	0.0	12.5	+12.5	23.5	25.0	+1.5	11.8	25.0	+13.2
neg.	47.1	68.8	+21.7	0.0	18.8	+18.8	0.0	12.5	+12.5	0.0	6.3	+6.3
neut.	41.2	31.3	-9.9	100	68.8	-31.3	76.5	62.5	-14.0	88.2	68.8	-19.5
eval.	58.8	68.8	+9.9	0.0	31.3	+31.3	23.5	37.5	+14.0	11.8	31.3	+19.5

	<i>guest</i>			<i>shareholder</i>			Average			
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	
pos.	17.6	6.3	-11.4	17.6	0.0	-17.6	13.7	11.5	-2.3	Legend
neg.	0.0	31.3	+31.3	5.9	25.0	+19.1	8.8	27.1	+18.3	w/o: without <i>such</i>
neut.	82.4	62.5	-19.9	76.5	75.0	-1.5	77.5	61.5	-16.0	w: with <i>such</i>
eval.	17.6	37.5	+19.9	23.5	25.0	+1.5	22.5	38.5	+16.0	Δ : delta/difference

Like in E3P, we see an increase in evaluative ratings when *such* is present. Surprisingly, the overall effect is smaller, with neutral ratings still accounting for 61.5% in E2P (versus 30.2% in E3P). Interestingly, native speakers were roughly 10% more likely to rate the stimuli as neutral than non-native speakers. Unlike in E3P, only average negative ratings increase, while average positive ratings *decrease*. One ‘very negative’ rating was obtained for *guest*. *Perfectionist* is rated particularly negatively. As the delta (Δ) columns show, there is a decrease in neutral ratings for each stimulus, despite the smaller effect. With the exception of *neighbor*, all stimuli gain more negative than positive ratings. While in E3P only *perfectionist* changes from being rated more positively to more negatively, this effect of switching polarity is observed for two stimuli in E2P: *guest*, and *shareholder*. The results of this study therefore confirm the effects observed in E3P, albeit to a lesser degree.

4.2 Studies on German

In line with the studies discussed in Section 4.1, this section presents the German data on the evaluative *such* construction. G3P used the German third-person pronouns *er* and *sie* ‘he/she’ as subjects; in G2P, the second-person pronoun *du* ‘you’ was used. Both studies will be discussed together below. Respondent data are dis-

played in Table 6. As in the English studies, all respondents have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, with most having completed a university degree. The variables gender, age, education, and variety of German spoken had no discernable impact on ratings.

Table 6: Respondent data for both studies: Subject pronoun, total number of responses, number by condition, age information, gender (female/male/non-binary), and self-reported level of English (native/close to native/fluent).

subj.	tot.	w/o <i>so</i>	with <i>so</i>	ages	mean age	gender	level
<i>er/sie</i>	101	48	53	19–65	39	73/27/1	99/2/0
<i>du</i>	57	23	34	20–84	38	34/23/0	54/1/2

The mostly uniform ratings of the fillers show that there is a high degree of consensus across the respondents. While some exceptions occurred in filler ratings, they have no bearing on respondents’ performance in the experimental conditions. Of the control sentences with overt positive or negative nouns, one native speaker rated *Sie ist ein arschloch* ‘She is an asshole’ as positive, which may have been a mistake. Isolated neutral ratings occurred for the lexeme *Idiot* ‘idiot’, specifically in *Er ist ein Idiot* ‘He is an idiot’ (2), *Du bist ein Idiot* ‘You are an idiot’ (1) and *Du bist so ein Idiot* ‘You are such an idiot’ (1).

4.2.1 Overall results

We focus here on the stimuli including nouns with neutral valence for which we predicted coercion effects. Both studies confirm that these otherwise neutral statements adopt an evaluative meaning in the condition with *so*. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings in both studies; detailed results follow in Section 4.2.2. As is clearly visible, the white (neutral) area of the graphs is smaller, and the dark gray (negative) area outweighs the light gray (positive) area when *so* is present. The effect is stronger in G3P, just like in the English set (see Section 4.1); overall, the coercion effect is stronger in both German studies than in the English data.

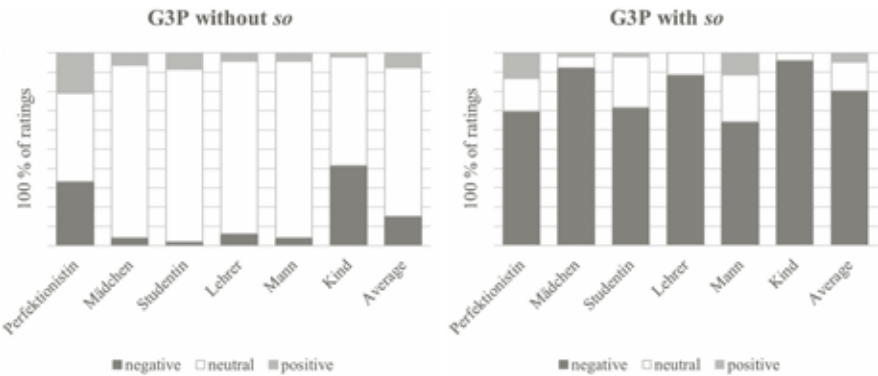


Figure 4: G3P: shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings per noun and on average.

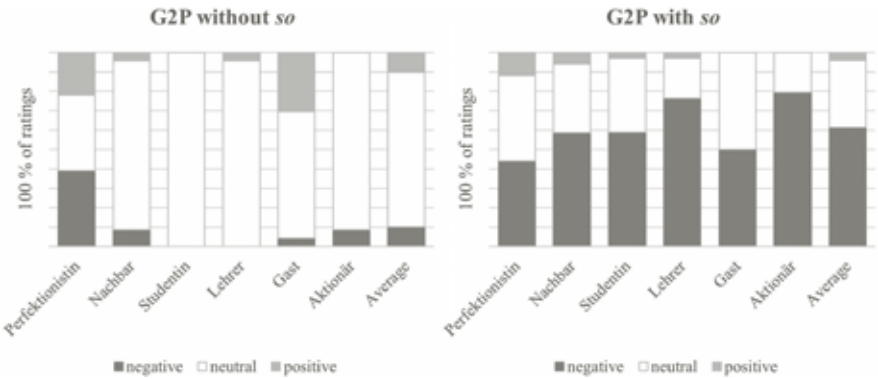


Figure 5: G2P: shares of positive, negative, and neutral ratings per noun and on average.

4.2.2 Detailed results

The results in percentages are given in Tables 7 and 8. We first discuss G3P. As the column ‘Average’ shows, evaluative ratings account for 22.9% in the condition without *so*, which is similar to the average in E3P (18.5% evaluative ratings). In the German data, we also find variation between the stimuli. The stimulus *Kind* ‘child’ has a negative rating of 41.7%, while *Perfektionistin* ‘perfectionist’ is again the only item to receive both positive and negative ratings over 20%; this could be due to a conventionalized or individual interpretation of the stimuli’s semantic content. In contrast to E3P, some of the stimuli received few ratings as ‘very positive’ or ‘very negative’ (*Perfektionistin* ‘perfectionist’, *Mädchen* ‘girl’, *Mann* ‘man’, *Kind* ‘child’). The majority (77.1%, on average) of ratings is neutral, as was predicted.

Table 7: G3P: percentages of positive, negative, neutral, and total evaluative ratings with and without *so*, and the difference (Δ) of percentages. Potential discrepancies in sums are caused by mathematical rounding to one decimal.

	<i>Perfektionistin</i>			<i>Studentin</i>			<i>Lehrer</i>			<i>Mädchen</i>		
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ
pos.	20.8	13.2	-7.6	8.3	1.9	-6.4	4.2	0.0	-4.2	6.3	1.9	-4.4
neg.	33.3	69.8	+36.5	2.1	71.7	+69.6	6.3	88.7	+82.4	4.2	92.5	+88.3
neut.	45.8	17.0	-28.9	89.6	26.4	-63.2	89.6	11.3	-78.3	89.6	5.7	-83.9
eval.	54.2	83.0	+28.9	10.4	73.6	+63.2	10.4	88.7	+78.3	10.4	94.3	+83.9

	<i>Mann</i>			<i>Kind</i>			<i>Average</i>			
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	
pos.	4.2	11.3	+7.2	2.1	0.0	-2.1	7.6	4.7	-2.9	Legend w/o: without <i>so</i> w: with <i>so</i> Δ : delta/difference
neg.	4.2	64.2	+60.0	41.7	96.2	+54.6	15.3	80.5	+65.2	
neut.	91.7	24.5	-67.1	56.3	3.8	-52.5	77.1	14.8	-62.3	
eval.	8.3	75.5	+67.1	43.8	96.2	+52.5	22.9	85.2	+62.3	

Confirming our expectations, we can observe a clear change in the condition with *so*. Neutral (14.8%) and positive ratings (4.7%) both drop, while we see a sharp increase in negative ratings (80.5%). There is also a slight increase in ‘very negative’ ratings; no statement was rated ‘very positive’ in the condition with *so*. The overall increase in negative ratings ($\Delta +65.2\%$) is stronger than for the comparable English study ($\Delta +38.5\%$).¹⁶ We see the sharpest increase in negative ratings for the stimuli *Lehrer* ‘teacher’ and *Mädchen* ‘girl’; here we see a difference to the English data, where *teacher* is evaluated more positively. *Perfektionistin* ‘perfectionist’ shows the smallest increase in negative ratings, and retains the highest share of positive ratings of all stimuli.

In G2P, the results without *so* are comparable (see Table 8). Average shares of evaluative ratings account for 20.3%, with an equal share of positive and negative evaluations (10.1% each). The majority of ratings (79.7%) are neutral, which is as predicted. A comparison of the stimuli used in both studies shows that *Perfektionistin* ‘perfectionist’ behaves like in G3P, with 39.1% negative and 21.7% positive ratings. *Studentin* ‘student’ has a 100% neutral rating in G2P.¹⁷ *Lehrer* ‘teacher’ was rated slightly more positively in G2P; it receives no negative ratings. Of the neutral stimuli only used in this study, *Gast* ‘guest’ has a positive rating of 30.4%; the informal second-person pronoun invites the reading of ‘house guest’, i.e. a person one

¹⁶ Calculations of percentages follow the procedure discussed in Section 4.1.2.

¹⁷ See a similar rating of this item in E2P.

voluntarily invites to one's residence, thus respondents may attribute more positive value to the item. Two stimuli received one rating each as 'very negative' (*Perfektionistin* 'perfectionist', *Aktionär* 'shareholder'); *Gast* 'guest' was rated 'very positive' once.

Table 8: G2P: percentages of positive, negative, neutral, and total evaluative ratings with and without *so*, and the difference (Δ) of percentages. Potential discrepancies in sums are caused by mathematical rounding to one decimal.

	<i>Perfektionistin</i>			<i>Studentin</i>			<i>Lehrer</i>			<i>Nachbar</i>		
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ
pos.	21.7	11.8	-10.0	0.0	2.9	+2.9	4.3	2.9	-1.4	4.3	5.9	+1.5
neg.	39.1	44.1	+5.0	0.0	58.8	+58.8	0.0	76.5	+76.5	8.7	58.8	+50.1
neut.	39.1	44.1	+5.0	100	38.2	-61.8	95.7	20.6	-75.1	87.0	35.3	-51.7
eval.	60.9	55.9	-5.0	0.0	61.8	+61.8	4.3	79.4	+75.1	13.0	64.7	+51.7

	<i>Gast</i>			<i>Aktionär</i>			Average			Legend
	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	w/o	w	Δ	
pos.	30.4	0.0	-30.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.1	3.9	-6.2	w/o: without <i>so</i> w: with <i>so</i> Δ : delta/difference
neg.	4.3	50.0	+45.7	8.7	79.4	+70.7	10.1	61.3	+51.1	
neut.	65.2	50.0	-15.2	91.3	20.6	-70.7	79.7	34.8	-44.9	
eval.	34.8	50.0	+15.2	8.7	79.4	+70.7	20.3	65.2	+44.9	

Like in G3P, evaluative ratings increase in the condition with *so*. 65.2% of ratings are evaluative, of which 61.3% are negative evaluations; 34.8% of ratings are neutral. No stimulus was rated 'very positive' in this condition. The overall share of evaluative ratings is comparable in the two German studies. However, the overall effect in negative ratings is higher in G3P (compare Δ +51.1% to Δ +65.2%), which also happened in the English equivalent.

Contrasting the items used in both studies, we see that for *Perfektionistin* 'perfectionist', the share of positive ratings decreases to 11.8%, with only a small increase in negative and neutral ratings. *Lehrer* 'teacher' has a roughly equal share for evaluative ratings, but retains a small amount of positive ratings (2.9%) in G2P. For *Studentin* 'student', which had a 100% neutral rating without *so*, negative ratings increase to 58.8 %; the stimulus also received a small share of positive ratings. For items used only in G2P, we observe an increase in negative ratings for *Nachbar* 'neighbor' and *Aktionär* 'shareholder'. *Gast* 'guest', which received 30.4% positive ratings in the condition without *so*, now has an equal share of negative and neutral ratings (50% each), i.e. the stimulus loses all positive ratings in the condition with *so*.

4.3 Statistical significance

We performed a separate chi-squared test for association for each of the four experiments. To conduct the analyses, we used JASP¹⁸, due to its user-friendly interface. Our null hypothesis was that there would be no association between the condition (with or without *such*) and the ratings. Our alternative hypothesis was that there would be an association between the two variables. Only the experimental stimuli (see Table 2) were included, not the controls with overt positive or negative nouns. All experimental stimuli feature nouns with supposedly neutral valence. The noun was not used as an additional variable, but all sentences under the same condition were treated as identical (*‘no such’* versus *‘such’*). This was done to test the average effect of the construction across all neutral nouns, while also improving the sample sizes. We detail the variation between nouns in Section 4.4.

The chi-square value and p-value for each experiment are provided in Table 9. We found a statistically highly significant association between the condition and the ratings for experiments E3P, G3P, and G2P. We found a slightly weaker but still statistically significant association for experiment E2P. Due to the smaller sample size and the overall smaller effect of *such* in the second-person experiments, this is not surprising. Therefore, there is strong evidence to suggest a significant influence of the presence of *such* on ratings for items with neutral valence.

Table 9: Chi-square value at two degrees of freedom χ^2 (2) and p-value for all four experiments.

Experiment	χ^2 (2)	p-value
E3P	79.1	< 0.001
E2P	11.3	0.003
G3P	261.4	< 0.001
G2P	89.3	< 0.001

4.4 Summary and general discussion

The comparison performed in the studies shows that predicative statements of the form [PRON BE (*such*) ART N] are more likely to be rated as evaluative when they contain *such/so*. Moreover, there is also a tendency for the ratings to be negative rather than positive.

¹⁸ JASP is open-source and available at <https://jasp-stats.org/>.

As shown in Tables 4 and 5 for English and Tables 7 and 8 for German, positive ratings increase comparatively little or even decrease when *such* is present. In German, only one noun, *Mann* ‘man’, increases its positive rating in the condition with *so*.

For English, all stimuli except *teacher* and *neighbor* increase more strongly in their negative rating than in their positive rating. This effect is even stronger in G3P, where all neutral stimuli experience an increase in negative ratings with *so*. *Child*, which is already rated quite negatively without *such*, is rated so in 90% of the cases with *such* in E3P; in the German data, its negative rating is increased to 96.2%. In G2P, negative ratings exceed positive ratings for all stimuli in the condition with *so*. In the English data, no negative ratings at all occur for *student*, *teacher*, *man*, *neighbor*, and *guest* without *such*. With *such*, however, all these stimuli receive negative ratings. In G2P, only two nouns, *Studentin* ‘student’ and *Lehrer* ‘teacher’, receive no negative ratings at all in the condition without *so*; in the condition with *so*, they follow the pattern of the nouns in the English data and receive a majority of negative ratings.

Perfectionist, *guest*, and *shareholder*, the stimuli losing positive ratings in the English data, are even more interesting. This observation indicates that *such* may not just tip a neutral noun towards negative polarity, but may even override an otherwise positive reading. This also holds for *Perfektionistin* ‘perfectionist’ and *Gast* ‘guest’ in German; in addition, *Lehrer* ‘teacher’ also loses positive ratings in the condition with *so*.

The different outcomes across the stimuli within each study indicate that the lexical meaning and the constructional meaning interact. This is not surprising and has been noted by Goldberg (1995: 224–225) for verbs. Overall, the tendency towards negative evaluation remains apparent and supports the hypothesis that the coercion effect proposed for the evaluative *such* construction does indeed enforce a negative reading. The use of different pronouns as subjects introduces another dimension. It is interesting that while the construction occurs most frequently with singular *you* across the corpora examined in the preliminary corpus study in Queisser (2024), the proposed coercion effect is smaller in E2P and G2P. A likely reason is the choice of noun. A predicative statement of the type *You are...* can be expected to be understood as evaluative even without *such*. Hence, it was even more important than in E3P and G3P to use nouns that could be read as neutral. As these nouns may represent marginal examples of the construction (see Section 3.1), respondents may have chosen a neutral meaning because they were more unsure in their evaluation. However, as the data still confirm the predictions, we believe that we were successful in making our respondents rely on the constructional meaning. Finally, as Culpeper (2011: 113) points out, “it is not, of course, the case that any particular linguistic form guarantees an evaluation of impoliteness in all contexts”. The evalu-

ative *such* construction therefore describes a tendency of how these utterances are likely to be used and understood. It does not constitute a general rule.

There are several limitations to the current studies. The sample of experimental stimuli comprised only six sentences each. The selection of nouns was by design deliberate, and the possible influence of personal biases should be noted. A conventionalized connotation of the nouns may have influenced the ratings. For instance, the Oxford English Dictionary lists negative uses for *child* and *girl*. Different nouns may have elicited different ratings while a larger number of stimuli may have yielded a more fine-grained overall result. However, to motivate respondents to complete the survey, a short duration was considered essential. The sample size poses a further limitation. Although 48 and 33 respondents in the English studies may be satisfying for a small-scale project, a larger sample would have made the results more robust. With 101 and 57 respondents, the German studies were more successful. In general, individual interpretations and biases towards the nouns used may have influenced the results, so that the effects observed may not be attributable solely to the proposed constructional effects.

5 Conclusion

As the results of all four studies have shown, there is strong evidence for the proposed coercion effect of the evaluative *such* construction. We answered our research questions positively by illustrating that otherwise identical statements are rated more evaluatively and more negatively when they conform to the evaluative *such* construction. We also showed that evaluations differ across various nouns used in the nominal slot, and that the construction has the power to even switch the interpretation of the (otherwise) same utterance from positive to negative meaning for some nouns. One aspect that could not be investigated is the presence or absence of an adjective in the nominal slot of the construction. As was briefly mentioned in Footnote 8, the function of the adjective is not a trivial question. However, the significance of the adjective should maybe not be overestimated. The proposed construction is a model to help conceptualize linguistic knowledge, after all. As a model, it must allow for flexibility to accommodate emerging evidence. The constructional polysemy described by Goldberg (1995: 31–39) and the many-to-many mappings mentioned by Hilpert (2014: 181) can easily accommodate varying manifestations of similar-enough patterns.

The adjective, the noun, and the subject pronoun are interesting targets for further research. As the construction is very productive, as shown by the low type-token ratio and large number of unique instances in the corpora, a corpus or

survey approach may not be suitable. Instead, a more qualitative approach such as a detailed discourse analysis is needed. Ideally, this will incorporate not only a wider discourse context in writing, but also auditory information (e.g. prosody) and visual (extralinguistic) information to identify speaker intent, recipient reaction, sarcasm, or banter. Imagine, for instance, *You are such a man* being uttered by a chauvinist versus a radical feminist. As many corpora feature material from movies and television whose original video sequences should be accessible, this is a feasible yet work-intensive task. To obtain more quantitative or quantifiable data, studies such as the ones conducted here could be repeated using methods such as recording reaction times or eye tracking. Reaction times may differ depending on the frequency with which nouns occur in the construction, and thereby their entrenchment and acceptability. Eye tracking may help discover which parts of the utterance respondents orient to in different configurations, and if it is indeed the word *such*. The use of nonce words is a further option that was hinted at above. Subsequently, the resulting toolbox can be extended to other formally and/or functionally related constructions, and to the current construction in other languages (see Ghesquière and Van de Velde 2011 for Dutch). Ultimately, compiling evidence that is as comprehensive as possible may help establish with some certainty that meaningful structures like the one(s) investigated here have cognitive reality and are therefore of significance for various forms of social interaction. This may require the involvement of other disciplines such as psycholinguistics and neuropsychology.

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to Michael Pleyer and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback throughout the writing process, and to Suhasini Subba Rao for her support in the statistical analysis.

Appendix

Table 10: Experimental stimuli with and without *such/so* in English and German.

	E3P	G3P	E2P	G2P
positive	She is (such) an inspiration.	Sie ist (so) eine Inspiration.	You are (such) an inspiration.	Du bist (so) eine Inspiration.
	He is (such) a sweetheart.	Er ist (so) ein Schatz.	You are (such) a sweetheart.	Du bist (so) ein Schatz.
negative	She is (such) an asshole.	Sie ist (so) ein arschloch.	You are (such) an asshole.	Du bist (so) ein arschloch.
	He is (such) an idiot.	Er ist (so) ein Idiot.	You are (such) an idiot.	Du bist (so) ein Idiot.

Table 10 (continued)

	E3P	G3P	E2P	G2P
neutral	She is (such) a perfectionist.	Sie ist (so) eine Perfektionistin.	You are (such) a perfectionist.	Du bist (so) eine Perfektionistin.
	She is (such) a student.	Sie ist (so) eine Studentin.	You are (such) a student.	Du bist (so) eine Studentin.
	He is (such) a teacher.	Er ist (so) ein Lehrer.	You are (such) a teacher.	Du bist (so) ein Lehrer.
	She is (such) a girl.	Sie ist (so) ein Mädchen.	You are (such) a neighbor.	Du bist (so) ein Nachbar.
	He is (such) a guest.	Er ist (so) ein Mann.	You are (such) a guest.	Du bist (so) ein Gast.
	He is (such) a shareholder.	Er ist (so) ein Kind.	You are (such) a shareholder.	Du bist (so) ein Aktionär.

Table 11: Filler items used in the studies.

	E3P	G3P	E2P	G2P
positive	She makes great art.	Sie macht großartige Kunst.	You make great art.	Du machst großartige Kunst.
	She quickly solved our problem.	Sie hat unser Problem schnell gelöst.	You quickly solved our problem.	Du hast unser Problem schnell gelöst.
	She brings the best gifts.	Sie bringt die besten Geschenke mit.	You bring the best gifts.	Du bringst die besten Geschenke mit.
	She was there when I needed her.	Sie war da, als ich sie brauchte.	You were there when I needed you.	Du warst da, als ich dich brauchte.
	He makes the best pizza.	Er macht die beste Pizza.	You make the best pizza.	Du machst die beste Pizza.
	He gave a great speech.	Er hat eine großartige Rede gehalten.	You gave a great speech.	Du hast eine großartige Rede gehalten.
	He helped me move.	Er hat mir beim Umziehen geholfen.	You helped me a lot.	Du hast mir sehr geholfen.
	He inspired me to write a book.	Er hat mich dazu inspiriert, ein Buch zu schreiben.	You inspired me to write a book.	Du hast mich dazu inspiriert, ein Buch zu schreiben.

Table 11 (continued)

	E3P	G3P	E2P	G2P
negative	She has bad breath.	Sie hat Mundgeruch.	You have bad breath.	Du hast Mundgeruch.
	She stole my idea.	Sie hat meine Idee gestohlen.	You stole my idea.	Du hast meine Idee gestohlen.
	She stood me up again.	Sie hat mich schon wieder versetzt.	You stood me up again.	Du hast mich schon wieder versetzt.
	She is always late.	Sie kommt immer zu spät.	You are always late.	Du kommst immer zu spät.
	He is balding.	Er wird kahl.	You are balding.	Du wirst kahl.
	He can't keep deadlines.	Er kann Deadlines nicht einhalten.	You can't keep deadlines.	Du kannst Deadlines nicht einhalten.
	He drinks too much.	Er trinkt zu viel.	You drink too much.	Du trinkst zu viel.
	He is annoying.	Er ist anstrengend.	You are annoying.	Du bist anstrengend.
neutral	She is from Australia.	Sie kommt aus Australien.	You are in group B.	Du bist in Gruppe B.
	She submitted the report.	Sie hat den Bericht eingereicht.	You are in charge of part 2 of the report.	Du übernimmst Teil 2 des Berichts.
	He works as an accountant.	Er arbeitet als Buchhalter.	You work the early shift.	Du arbeitest in der Frühschicht.
	He lives in Denver.	Er lebt in Denver.	You are in room 19.	Du übernachtetest in Zimmer 19.

References

- Altenberg, Bengt. 1994. On the functions of such in spoken and written English. In Nelleke Oostdijk & Pieter de Haan (eds.), *Corpus-based Research into Language*, 223–239. Amsterdam/ Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Bolinger, Dwight. 1972. *Degree Words*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Bousfield, Derek. 2008. *Impoliteness in Interaction*. Amsterdam/New York: John Benjamins.
- Brown, Penelope & Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2010. Conventionalised impoliteness formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42. 3232–3245.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2011. *Impoliteness. Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan & Oliver Holmes. 2013. Impoliteness and exploitative TV in Britain and North America: *The X Factor* and *American Idol*. In Nuria Lorenzo-Dus & Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich

- (eds.), *Real Talk: Reality Television and Discourse Analysis in Action*, 169–198. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fillmore, Charles J., Paul Kay & Mary Catherine O'Connor. 1988. Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of let alone. *Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America* 64(3). 501–538.
- Fraser, Bruce & William Nolen. 1981. The association of deference with linguistic form. *International Journal of The Sociology of Language* 27. 93–109.
- Ghesquière, Lobke & Freek van de Velde. 2011. A corpus-based account of the development of English *such* and Dutch *zulk*: Identification, intensification and (inter)subjectification. *Cognitive Linguistics* 22(4). 765–797.
- Goldberg, Adele E. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, Adele E. 2006. *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldberg, Adele E. 2019. *Explain Me This: Creativity, Competition, and the Partial Productivity of Constructions*. Princeton/ Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood & Ruqaiya Hasan. 1976. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2023. On what a construction is. *Constructions* 15 (1). No pagination.
- Hilpert, Martin. 2014. *Construction Grammar and Its Application to English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hirschmann, Hagen. 2024. Das pränominal so und seine lexikalischen Varianten im Deutschen – eine syntaktische, konstruktions- und variationslinguistische Beschreibung. In Dagobert Höllein, Klaus Welke & Marc Felfe (eds.), *Regelbasierte Konstruktionsgrammatik. Musterbasiertheit vs. Idiomatizität*, 183–230. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter.
- Huddleston, Rodney & Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jain, Kate H. 2022. You Hoboken! Semantics of an expressive label maker. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 45(2). 365e391.
- Jucker, Andreas H. & Irma Taavitsainen. 2000. Diachronic speech act analysis: insults from flying to flaming. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1(1). 67e95.
- Kienpointner, Manfred. 1997. Varieties of rudeness: Types and functions of impolite utterances. *Functions of Language* 4(2). 251–287.
- Kienpointner, Manfred. 2018. Impoliteness online. Hate speech in online interactions. *Internet Pragmatics* 1(2). 329–351.
- Kleinke, Sonja & Birte Bö. 2015. Intergroup rudeness and the metapragmatics of its negotiation in online fora. *Pragmatics* 25(1). 47–71.
- Leech, Geoffrey. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Manes, Joan & Nessa Wolfson. 1981. The compliment formula. In Florian Coulmas (ed.), *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech*, 116–132. Mouton: The Hague.
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “child (n.),” March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5645033063>. (accessed 25 May 2024)
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “girl (n.),” March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7744946133>. (accessed 25 May 2024)
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “man (n.1),” February 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1034670116>. (accessed 25 May 2024)

- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “such (adj. & pron.),” March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4195345364>. (accessed 21 April 2024)
- Queisser, Angela. 2024. *Such a construction! Evidence for an exclamatory evaluative construction with pivotal such*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University master thesis.
- Spinillo, Mariangela. 2003. On *such*. *English Language and Linguistics* 7(2): 195–210.
- Taylor, John R. 2012. *The Mental Corpus: How Language Is Represented in the Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2002. Politeness and formulaicity: evidence from Cypriot Greek. *Journal of Greek Linguistics* 3(1). 179–201.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2005. Beyond the micro-level in politeness research. *Journal of Politeness Research* 1(2). 237–262.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1982. From propositional to textual and expressive meanings: Some semantic-pragmatic aspects of grammaticalization. In Winfred P. Lehmann & Yakov Malkiel (eds.), *Perspectives on Historical Linguistics*, 245–271. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ungerer, Tobias & Stefan Hartmann. 2023. *Constructionist Approaches: Past, Present, Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van der Auwera, Johan & Kalyanamalini Sahoo. 2020. Such similatives: A cross-linguistic reconnaissance. *Language Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Forum* 81. No pagination.
- Van Olmen, Daniel, Marta Andersson & Jonathan Culpeper. 2023. Inherent linguistic impoliteness: The case of insulting YOU+NP in Dutch, English and Polish. *Journal of Pragmatics* 215. 22–40.