

Determinerlessness in German predicative nominal expressions

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Predicative nominal expressions in copula clauses

In copula clauses, certain nouns can appear without a determiner:

(1) *Susanne ist (eine) Ärztin.*

Susanne is a doctor

(2) *Susanne ist *(eine) Frau.*

Susanne is a woman

Both types of nouns need a determiner in argument position:

(3) a. **(Eine) Ärztin / Frau betrat eine Bar.*

a doctor / woman entered a bar

b. *Sebastian sah *(eine) Ärztin / Frau.*

Sebastian saw a doctor / woman

(similar pattern other languages, e.g., Dutch, French, Italian; Kupferman 1991; Munn & Schmitt 2005; de Swart, Winter & Zwarts 2007; Mari & Martin 2008; Zamparelli 2008; Hallab 2011; Le Bruyn 2013; Geist 2019, 2014)

Questions raised and answers

Contrast in (1) vs. (2): explained in the literature via a difference of the two types of nouns

- ▶ *Ärztin* 'doctor' describes an established social role (role noun)
- ▶ *Frau* 'woman' describes a natural class (class noun)

This difference is encoded in the semantics of the two types of nouns, which has an effect on their syntax:

- ▶ **Role nouns** describe roles, and when used as descriptions of roles, they are not accompanied by a determiner.
- ▶ **Class nouns** describe individuals and, hence, always co-occur with a determiner.

(see, e.g., de Swart, Winter & Zwarts 2007; Geist 2019, 2014 for formal proposals)

Plan for today

Take a closer look at predicatively used nouns (and complex nominal expressions) in German and show:

- ▶ It is difficult to subsume all nouns that can be used determinerless in copula clauses under the notion “established social role” as described in the literature.
- ▶ Copula clauses differ from *a/s*-phrases with respect to which nouns can be used without a determiner.

↪ call into question the current analyses of (1) vs. (2) for German

Introduction

Extant proposals

Established social roles

Formal analysis: de Swart et al. 2007

Study 1: determinerless nominal expressions with *sein* 'be'

Studies 2&3: other predicative environments

Study 2: *werden* 'become' & *bleiben* 'remain'

Study 3: predicative *als*-phrases

Discussion

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Established social roles: theoretical description

de Swart et al. 2007 offer a suggestive description for nouns (in Dutch) that denote *capacities* (i.e., established social roles):

- ▶ culturally defined
- ▶ are not based on inherent properties of an individual, but on institutionally determined social positions
- ▶ restricted to humans

Types of nouns covered by this description are a.o.:

- ▶ professions
- ▶ occupations
- ▶ nationalities
- ▶ religious denominations

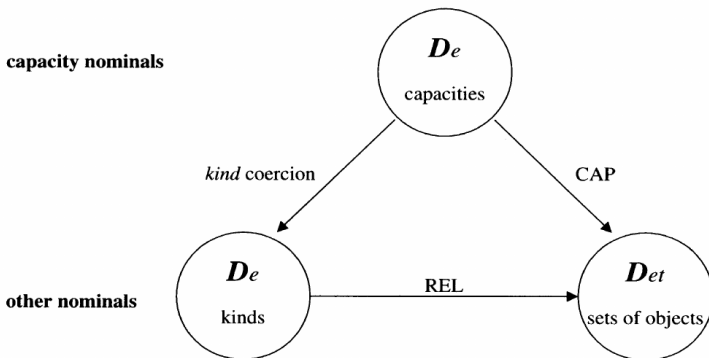
Established social roles: extensional definition

Hallab (2011) and Geist (2014, 2019) form lists of classes of nouns that, according to them, describe established social roles in the broadest sense:

- ▶ professions (e.g., *Koch* 'cook'); functions (e.g., *Bürgermeister* 'mayor'); family roles (e.g., *Mutter* 'mother'); economic roles (e.g., *Mieter* 'tenant'); political affiliations (e.g., *Kommunist* 'communist'); ethnic/religious affiliations (e.g., *Ägypter* 'Egyptian'); roles that imply relative uniqueness (e.g., *Papst* 'pope'); other established social roles (e.g., *Laie* 'layperson', *Weinliebhaber* 'wine lover') (Hallab 2011: 103–104)
- ▶ professions (e.g., *Übersetzer* 'translator'); functions (e.g., *Minister* 'minister'); nationalities (e.g., *Italiener* 'Italian'); religious affiliations (e.g., *Katholik* 'catholic'); hobbies (e.g., *Alpinist* 'mountaineer'); occupations (e.g., *Student* 'student'); illnesses (e.g., *Alkoholiker* 'alcoholic'); character traits (e.g., *Pessimist* 'pessimist'); and others (Geist 2019: 2)

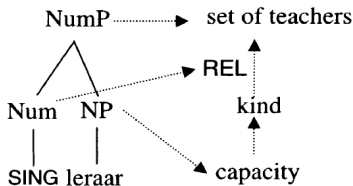
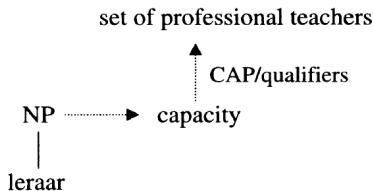
Two types of nouns

de Swart et al. 2007 distinguish nouns that describe kinds from nouns that describe capacities. (de Swart et al. 2007: 213)



Two uses for capacity nominals

Capacity nominals can occur in two different syntactic structures depending on the operators applied to them:



Other nominals, which describe kinds, can only occur a structure with a NumP and, thus, a determiner (on the right).

Objectives for the corpus studies

1. Find out which German nouns are actually used predicatively in copula clauses without determiners, and how they fit the idea of 'established social roles'.
2. Compare the nouns that can occur predicatively without determiners across contexts.
 - ↪ If potential determinerlessness is a property of nouns, then we expect subset-relations for the sets of nouns across contexts.

⇒ three corpus studies comparing four different contexts

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Details of the study

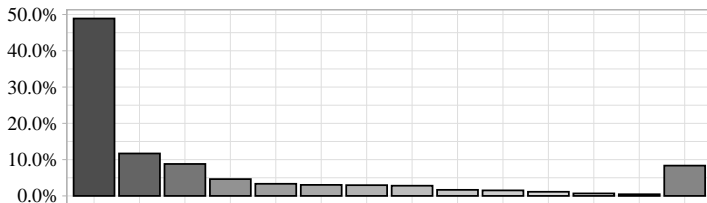
- ▶ journalistic corpus “Die Zeit” (DWDS)
- ▶ search pattern:
(4) er/<Eigename> ist <Nomen> [...]
- ▶ 3,633 relevant corpus items:
 - ▶ 3,379 clauses with human subjects
 - ▶ 254 clauses with non-human subjects
- ▶ Clauses with human subjects annotated for:
 - ▶ the semantic class of the noun
 - ▶ presence of post-nominal material
 - ▶ presence of coordination inside the predicative expression

Clauses with human subjects

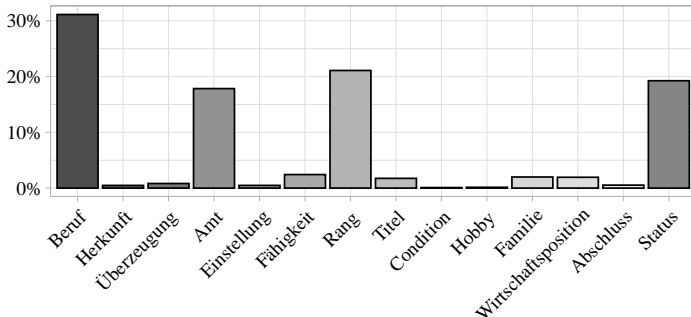
- ▶ 3,379 (93%) of the relevant corpus items
- ▶ Nouns classified into **14 semantic classes** based on Hallab 2011 and Geist 2014, 2019: [▶ Examples](#)
 - (5) Abschluss (degree), Amt (function), Beruf (profession), Condition (condition), Einstellung (attitude), Fähigkeit (ability), Familie (family), Herkunft (origin), Hobby (hobby), Rang (rank), Status (status), Titel (title), Überzeugung (mindset), Wirtschaftsposition (economic position)
- ↪ Status: nouns that did not fit into another class (507 items, 15%)
- ▶ The majority of these items had **post-nominal material**:
 - ▶ 2,063 items (61%) with genitive DPs or PPs
 - ▶ 1,317 items (39%) without post-nominal material

Distribution without and with post-nominal material

No post-nominal material
(1,317)



With post-nominal material
(2,063)



Presence of coordination: a potential problem

- (6) *Mit Annas Gepäck waren **Notebook und Brille** verloren gegangen.*
with Anna's luggage were laptop and glasses lost gone
'Together with Anna's luggage, her laptop and her glasses
disappeared.'
(Ehrich 2007: 11)
- ▶ 391 items (11.6%) with coordination
 - ▶ all items distributed across the 14 semantic classes
 - ▶ only 6 items contain a noun in the first conjunct that cannot be determinerless by itself
- (7) a. *Berlioz ist **Bekenner und Beobachter, Kämpfer und Spötter, ...***
Berlioz is confessor and observer fighter and mocker
b. *Berlioz ist Bekenner. (DWDS: Die Zeit, 11.12.2007, Nr. 50)

The class Status

- ▶ nouns that describe a relation between an individual and other entities that cannot be (clearly) classified as either professional, private, or economic
 - ↪ often dependent on the context: *Gast* 'guest', *Mitglied* 'member'
 - ▶ nouns that are used figuratively/metaphorically to describe a relation between an individual and other entities
- (8) *Pat Garrett ist Vater und Vorbild der Polizei von New Mexico.*
Pat Garrett is father and role.model of.the police of New Mexico
(DWDS: Die Zeit, 04.12.2003, Nr. 50)

Unexpected finding: clauses with non-human subjects – I

- ▶ 224 relevant items with non-human subjects were found
- ▶ subjects denote institutions, places, inanimate objects, and non-physical objects

- (9) a. *Der Reisekonzern Tui ist Hauptaktionär bei der fünftgrößten Linien-Reederei der Welt.*
 the travel.company Tui is principal.shareholder at the fifth.largest line-ocean.carrier of.the world (DWDS: Die Zeit, 02.10.2009, Nr. 41)
- b. *Selbst Calella an der Costa Brava ist Bahnziel.*
 even Calella at the Costa Brava is train.destination (DWDS: Die Zeit, 26.12.1975, Nr. 53)
- c. *Der kahlrasierte Schädel, er ist Auszeichnung der buddhistischen Mönche.*
 the shaved head he is distinction of.the buddhist monks (DWDS: Die Zeit, 30.08.1985, Nr. 36)

Unexpected finding: clauses with non-human subjects – II

- ▶ compounds describing places: nouns that cannot be used determinerless by themselves appear determinerless as head nouns of compounds

- (10)
- a. *Bezirk* '': Arbeiterbezirk;
 - b. *Gebiet* 'area': Krisengebiet, Notstandsgebiet, Vulkangebiet;
 - c. *Land* 'land': Exportland, Einwanderungsland, Haupttransitland, Vorreiterland;
 - d. *Punkt* 'point': Ausgangspunkt;
 - e. *Ort* 'place': Geburtsort;
 - f. *Stadt* 'city': Hauptstadt, Kulturstadt, Grenzstadt, Entlastungsstadt

- ▶ same pattern also arises with nouns describing humans or animals

- (11)
- a. *Madeleine Steinmetz ist Kamerafrau.*
Madeleine Steinmetz is camera-woman
(DWDS: Die Zeit, 29.04.2004, Nr. 19)
 - b. *Mein Pferd ist Kutschpferd und hat es in den Knien.*
my horse is carriage-horse and has it in the knees
(www.fuetternundfit.de)

Main upshot of Study 1

1. The notion of a established social role as described by de Swart et al. 2007 (and others) is too restrictive for the nouns that can be used determinerless in German:
 - ▶ not necessarily “established”
(12) *Professor Boris Culik ist Walleiter.*
Professor Boris Culik is whale.leader
(DWDS: Die Zeit, 15.02.2008, Nr. 42)
 - ▶ not necessarily institutionally determined: illnesses, hobbies, attitudes, ...
 - ▶ not restricted to humans: animals, places, inanimate objects, ...
2. No easily identifiable commonality between the semantic classes.

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Details of the study

- ▶ journalistic corpus “Die Zeit” (DWDS)
- ▶ search pattern:
(13) *er/<Eigename> wird/bleibt <Nomen> [...]*
- ▶ 403 relevant corpus items for *werden* and 535 for *bleiben*
- ▶ Nouns in clauses with human subjects annotated for semantic class
(14) a. *Göhlert wird Arzt, sein Traumberuf.*
Göhlert becomes doctor his dream.profession
(Beruf, DWDS: Die Zeit, 11.05.2016 (online))
b. *Japan bleibt Gastgeber der Club-WM.*
Japan stays host of.the club-world.cup
(DWDS: Die Zeit, 23.05.2011 (online))

Comparison: semantic classes found in Study 1 vs. Study 2

- ▶ all nouns of Study 2 fall into one of the 14 classes, but not all classes are represented
- ▶ additional searches result in attested examples for the missing classes
- ▶ *bleiben* seems to place lexical-semantic restrictions on the nouns it can combine with: only roles/properties that could cease to obtain are compatible

(15)?? *Susanne bleibt (eine) Absolventin der Akademie.*
Susanne remains a graduate of the academy

→ plausibly a subset-relation for Study 1 and both parts of Study 2

(for detailed analyses of *werden* and *bleiben*, see Krämer 2004, Schlücker 2008)

Details of the study

- ▶ journalistic corpus “Die Zeit” (DWDS)
- ▶ search pattern:
 - (16) <Ausdruck> [...] als <Nomen> [...]
- ▶ 498 relevant corpus items:
 - ▶ 247 clauses with human associated individuals
 - ▶ 251 clauses with non-human associated individuals
- ▶ Nouns in clauses with human subjects annotated for semantic class

(17) *Gewinnt er nun wieder, steht* *Rosberg vorzeitig als*
 wins he now again is.determined Rosberg early as
Weltmeister fest.
 wold.champion PRT (Titel, DWDS: Die Zeit, 10.11.2016 (online))

Comparison: semantic classes found in Study 1 vs. Study 3

▶ Clauses with human associated individuals:

- ▶ 11 of the 14 classes are represented, examples for the remaining three classes can be found easily
- ▶ 20 items (8.1%) do not fit into any of the 14 classes and cannot occur determinerless in copula clauses with *sein*

(18) *Anfang des Jahrhunderts ging er als Greis an der Spitze*
 beginning of.the century walked he as old.man at the lead
einer Massendemonstration.
 of.a mass.demonstration (??, DWDS: Die Zeit, 13.05.1994, Nr. 20)

(19) *Er ist *(ein) Greis.*
 he is a old.man

▶ Similar data with non-human associated individuals:

(20) *Geschichte tritt hier als Prozess zutage.*
 history appears here as process PRT
 (??, DWDS: Die Zeit, 26.04.2010, Nr. 17)

Main upshot of Studies 2&3

- ▶ Copula verbs *werden* 'become' and *bleiben* 'remain' are only slightly more restrictive than the copula *sein* 'be' regarding determinerless predicative nominal expressions.
 - ↪ plausibly subset-relations
- ▶ Predicative *als*-phrases allow more nouns to occur determinerless than all three copula verbs.
 - ↪ definitely no subset-relation

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Conclusion 1: more than previously assumed

- ▶ In copula clauses with *sein*, *werden*, and *bleiben*, more types of nominal expressions can occur without a determiner than covered by the previous descriptions in the literature.
- ▶ Not restricted to humans, established roles, or institutionally determined roles.
- ▶ **Attempt at describing the nouns:** nouns that describe individuals depending on previous and potential participation in eventualities

(21) *Selbst Calella an der Costa Brava ist Bahnziel.*

even Calella at the Costa Brava is train.destination

(DWDS: Die Zeit, 26.12.1975, Nr. 53)

Conclusion 2: no semantic restriction on the nouns

- ▶ Predicative *als*-phrases are the least restrictive context regarding determinerless nominal expressions.
- ▶ If there is a semantic property regulating a possible determinerless use, it should be visible in this context.
- ▶ **But:** unclear whether any nominal expression is blocked from occurring determinerless in *als*-phrases

(22) a. *Susanne ist *(eine) gute Ärztin.*
 Susanne is a good doctor

b. *Susanne gilt als (eine) gute Ärztin.*
 Susanne is considered as a good doctor

(23) *Wer sich nicht in die Villa traut, wird als Feigling verhöhnt.*
 who SELF not into the villa dares is as coward ridiculed
 (DWDS: Die Zeit, 11.05.2012, Nr. 18)

Conclusion 3: different semantic restrictions on the contexts

- ▶ Whether or not a predicative nominal expression can occur determinerless, is determined by the copula verb / *als*.
- ▶ Unlike *als*, the copula verbs restrict the determinerless use.
- ▶ Theoretical analyses of the contrast in (1) vs. (2) should encode the necessary restrictions in the semantics of the copula verbs and *als*.
- ▶ **Note:** does not deny the existence of different semantic classes of nouns (see Zobel 2016, 2017)

- (24) a. *Susanne arbeitet als Ärztin.*
Susanne works as doctor
- b.??*Susanne arbeitet als 33-Jährige.*
Susanne works as 33-year.old

(pace de Swart, Winter & Zwarts 2007 and Le Bruyn 2013, Geist 2019)

Summary

- ▶ Three corpus studies investigating the determinerless use of predicatively used nominal expressions:
 - ▶ copula clauses with *sein* 'be'
 - ▶ copula clauses with *werden* 'become' and *bleiben* 'remain'
 - ▶ predicative *als*-phrases
- ▶ The studies revealed that the determinerless use in German is less restricted than previously claimed and that it varies depending on the predicative context.
- ▶ The variation found in the data suggests that the restriction is best encoded in the copula verbs and *als* and not as part of the syntax and semantics of the nominal expressions.
- ▶ For more details, see: [Zobel 2021](#) and the data in [Zobel 2020](#)

Thanks!

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The 14 semantic classes – I

I. Nouns that describe for an individual which actions they regularly perform and/or for which actions they are trained
(classes: Amt, Beruf, Hobby)

- (25) a. *Helmut Ebeling ist Bürgermeister von Wefensleben.*
 Helmut Ebeling is mayor of Wefensleben
 (Amt, DWDS: Die Zeit, 16.08.2009, Nr. 34)
- b. *Achim Schubert ist Chirurg in einer Münchner Klinik.*
 Achim Schubert is surgeon in a Munich clinic
 (Beruf, DWDS: Die Zeit, 09.04.1982, Nr. 15)
- c. *Peter Sawicki ist Fliegenfischer.*
 Peter Sawicki is fly.fisherman
 (Hobby, DWDS: Die Zeit, 29.03.2007, Nr. 14)

◀ back

The 14 semantic classes – II

II. Nouns that describe physical, psychological, or mental states of an individual

(classes: Condition, Einstellung, Fähigkeit, Überzeugung)

(26) a. *Timm ist Autist.*

Timm is person.with.autism

(Condition, DWDS: Die Zeit, 12.02.1988, Nr. 07)

b. *Herr Malthus ist Menschenfreund.*

Mister Malthus is philanthropist

(Einstellung, DWDS: Die Zeit, 03.02.1995, Nr. 06)

c. *Mina Salehpour ist Expertin für bittersüße Gefühle.*

Mina Salehpour is expert for bitter.sweet emotions

(Fähigkeit, DWDS: Die Zeit, 22.07.2015 (online))

d. *Maren Kroymann ist Feministin.*

Maren Kroymann is feminist

(Überzeugung, DWDS: Die Zeit, 24.09.1993, Nr. 39)

The 14 semantic classes – III

III. Nouns that describe the social relations between that individual and other human and non-human entities

(classes: Familie, Herkunft, Rang, Wirtschaftsposition)

- (27) a. *Taugwalder ist Ururneffe eines*
Taugwalder is great.grand.nephew of.a
Matterhorn-Erstbesteigers.
Matterhorn-first.climber (Familie, DWDS: Die Zeit, 23.01.2014, Nr. 05)
- b. *Rainer Groothuis ist Friese.*
Rainer Groothuis is Frisian (Herkunft, DWDS: Die Zeit, 13.10.1995, Nr. 42)
- c. *Gratzl ist Kapitän der Betriebsfußballmannschaft.*
Gratzl is captain of.the company.football.team
(Rang, DWDS: Die Zeit, 05.01.1996, Nr. 02)
- d. *Gerhard Landert ist Inhaber einer Research-Firma in Zollikon*
Gerhard Landert is owner of.a research-company in Zollikon
bei Zürich.
near Zürich (Wirtschaftsposition, DWDS: Die Zeit, 04.01.2001, Nr. 02)

