

Grading by *gewiss* – how does specificity relate to degree modification?

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German *gewiss* and *bestimmt*, when occurring in indefinite NPs, are commonly considered as specificity markers – *ein gewisses N* / *ein bestimmtes N* roughly correspond to English *a certain N*, conveying the idea that the speaker, or some other agent, is able to identify the referent. But although indefinite NPs with *gewiss* and *bestimmt* are very similar in meaning, they are not equivalent (nor does either of the two correspond to English *a certain N* in a one to one fashion). There are, first, differences in scope taking – *gewiss* NPs must take widest scope whereas *bestimmt* NPs may also take intermediate scope. Secondly, in the case of *gewiss* the identifying agent must be the speaker whereas in the case of *bestimmt* it may also be some other agent. Thirdly, *gewiss* may be combined with proper names, as in *ein gewisser Müller*, which is impossible for *bestimmt* (cf. Ebert et al., submitted).

This talk focuses on another distinctive characteristics which has gone unnoticed up to now: *Gewiss*, but not *bestimmt*, seems to turn into a degree modifier when combined with gradable nouns. In (1a) the risk is a particular one, e.g., being attacked by polar bears, while in (1b) the use of *gewiss* indicates that there is a certain level of risk, which is, however, below the level of a definite risk.

- (1) a. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein bestimmtes Risiko.*
b. *Die Teilnahme an der Polarexpedition birgt ein gewisses Risiko.*
'Joining the polar expedition has a *bestimmt* / *gewiss* risk.'

The grading effect of *gewiss* raises the question of why a specificity marker is turned into a degree modifier when combined with gradable nouns. First of all, is it genuine gradability or is it a particular form of hedging what is brought about by *gewiss*? Since *gewiss* serves as a hedging operator when used as a sentence adverb, it might also have a hedging interpretation in (1b). More general, the question has to be addressed of what the meaning of *gewiss* and *bestimmt* is such that they induce specificity.

Ebert, Christian, Cornelia Ebert and Stefan Hinterwimmer (submitted) German specificity markers: "*bestimmt*" vs. *gewiss*", in: *Different kinds of specificity across languages*, submitted to *Studies in Linguistics & Philosophy*, Springer.