

## Similes, affixoids and debonding:

a corpus-based analysis of 'giant' in Dutch,  
German, Swedish and French

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## Introduction

### Research objectives:

- To account for the free uses of intensifying prefixoids ('debonding')
- To compare the construction types, productivity, degree of bleaching and degree of 'debonding' of comparable prefixoids in different languages

### Today's talk:

- Synchronic corpus study of 'giant' in Dutch (*reuze*), German (*riesen*), Swedish (*jätte*) and French (*géant*)
- Contrastive analysis
  - bound forms versus free forms
  - cross-linguistic comparison
- Discussion of diachronic developments leading to observed synchronic differences

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## Outline

### Part 1: Preliminaries

- 1.1 Similes and non-similes
- 1.2 Affixoids
- 1.3 Debonding

### Part 2: Contrastive analysis

- 2.1 Construction types
- 2.2 Productivity and semantic bleaching
- 2.3 Debonding

### Conclusions

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## Part I: Similes, affixoids and debonding

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## 1.0. Etymology



- German *Riese*, Dutch *reus*: < PGmc *\*rīsi-*, related to *\*rīsan* 'to rise'
- Swedish *jätte*: < PGmc *\*etuna-*, related to *\*etan* 'to eat'
- French *géant*: ultimately Lat./Greek *Gigas* (pl. *Gigantes*) 'son of Gaia'; possibly pre-IE

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## 1.1. Similes and non-similes (1)

### Simile compounds:

- [[N] [N]]<sub>N</sub> compounds:
  - *reuzenstap* 'giant step'; *Riesenweib* 'huge woman'; *jättekyrka* 'huge church'
  - [older stages of French: *kangourou(-)géant* [Frantext, 1805]]
- [[N] [Adj]]<sub>Adj</sub> compounds:
  - Dutch, German and Swedish only
  - *reuzegroot*, *riesengroß*, *jättestor* 'huge'

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## 1.1. Similes and non-similes (2)

### • Non-simile compounds:

- [[N] [N]]<sub>N</sub> compounds:
  - Dutch, German, Swedish:
    - *reuzetijd* 'great time', *Riesen-Sauerei* 'big mess';
    - *jätteförkylning* 'terrible cold'
  - [French: *mystère géant* 'big mystery']
- [[N] [Adj]]<sub>Adj</sub> compounds:
  - Dutch and Swedish only
    - *reuzecharmant* 'very charming', *jättemysig* 'very cosy'
  - (marginally) possible in German, but not in sample

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## 1.2. Affixoids

### • Definition:

- "morphemes which look like parts of compounds, and do occur as lexemes, but have a specific and more restricted meaning when used as part of a compound" (Booij 2009: 208; also Booij 2010, Booij & Hünning fc., Leuschner 2010)

### • Examples: non-simile constructions with intensifying meaning

- *reuzecharmant* 'very charming', *jättemysig* 'very cosy'

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## 1.3. Debonding (1)

### • Definition:

- "a composite change whereby a bound morpheme in a specific linguistic context becomes a free morpheme" (Norde 2009 : 186)

- Autonomous use of prefixoids considered as a case of debonding (cf. Norde & Van Goethem fc., Van Goethem & De Smet fc., Van Goethem & Hiligsmann 2014, Van Goethem 2014)

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## 1.3. Debonding (2)

### • Examples:

#### • Attributive cxns:

- *Onder de sedimentlagen dook een verbazingwekkende en geheimzinnige steenstructuur op met **reuze** megalitische [sic] steenblokken*
- '(...) gigantic megalithic blocks of stone'

#### • Predicative cxns:

- *Maar ik vind het **reuze** wat je presteert.*
- 'But I think it is great what you are achieving'

#### • Adverbial cxns:

- *Onze kinderen hebben zich **reuze** vermaakt.*
- 'Our kids enjoyed themselves tremendously'

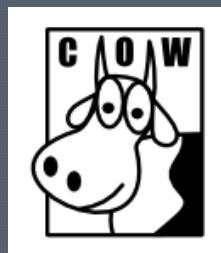
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## Part II: Contrastive analysis

bound vs free forms  
crosslinguistic comparison

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## Method



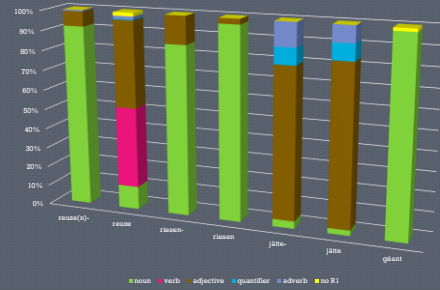
- COW corpus, FU Berlin (Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012)
- <http://hpsg.fu-berlin.de/cow/>
- 1000 sentences for each language (*reuze(n)*, *jätte*, *r/Riesen*, *géant(e/s)*)
  - bound form
  - free form
- discard irrelevant hits (e.g. *géant* as N)
- analysis of remaining ones
  - Construction types
  - Productivity
  - Bleaching
  - Debonding

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## 2.1. Construction types

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### R1: POS



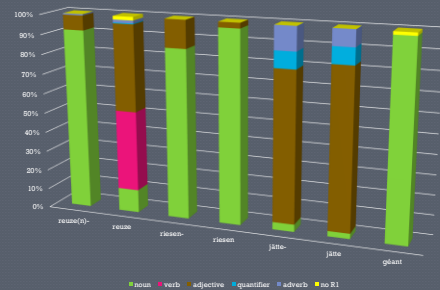
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### Dutch

- Large difference between bound and free forms
- Bound forms: mostly [N+N]<sub>N</sub> compounds:
  - *reuzenschildpad* 'giant tortoise'; *reuzenrad* 'Ferris wheel'; *reuzetijd* 'great time'
- Free forms: mostly intensifying adverbs with scope over Adj/V
  - *reuze interessant* 'very interesting'
  - *het valt reuze mee* 'it turns out much better than expected'
- difference between compound forms and free forms is significant ( $p < 0.001$ )

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### R1: POS



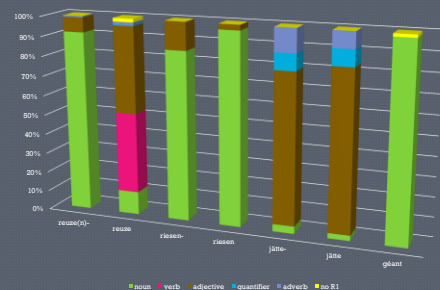
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### German

- Mostly nouns as R1 in both compound and free forms:
  - *Riesen-Partyzelt* 'huge party tent'; *Riesenerfolg* 'huge success'
  - *riesen Schritt* 'giant step'; *riesen Verlust* 'big loss'
- rarely adjectives as R1:
  - only *riesengroß* in compound form, in free forms one other example (*riesen positiv* 'very positive')
- However, difference between compound forms and free forms is still significant ( $p < 0.001$ )

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### R1: POS



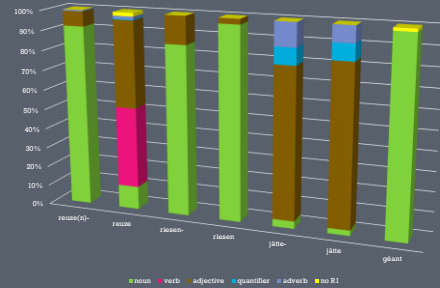
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## Swedish

- Mostly adjectives, adverbs and quantifiers as R1, both in compound forms and free forms:
  - *jättemysig* 'very cosy'; *jättemånga* 'very many'
  - *jätte söt* 'very sweet'; *jätte ofta* 'very often'
- nouns as R1 far less frequent:
  - *jättehäst* 'giant horse'; *jätte äpple* 'giant apple'
- difference between compound forms and free forms non-significant

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## R1: POS



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## French

- Free forms only
- *Géant* mostly used as attributive adjective (98,48%)
  - *Ces 6 éoliennes géantes* 'these 6 gigantic wind turbines'
  - *Google ouvre sa librairie numérique géante* 'Google opens its gigantic digital library'
- Predicative use (1,51%)
  - *C'était vraiment géant !* 'It was really great!'

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## 2.2. Productivity and semantic bleaching

collocations with adjectives, quantifiers and adverbs  
Dutch, German and Swedish

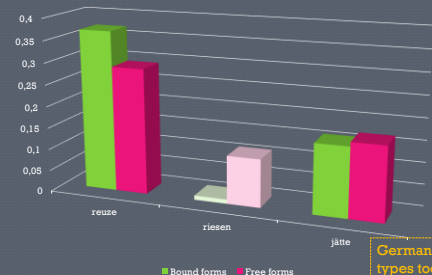
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## Productivity and bleaching

- Productivity:
  - R1 (types and tokens)
  - Type/token ratio ~ degree of productivity
- Semantic bleaching:
  - Type/token ratio ~ degree of bleaching (pure intensifier)
  - Proportion similes / non similes ~ degree of bleaching

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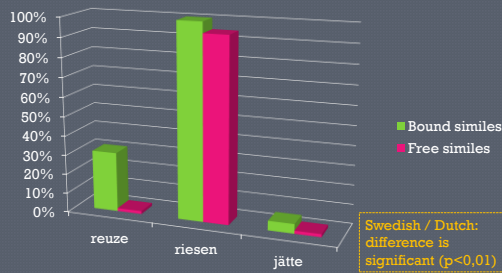
## Type/token ratio



German: no of types too low?

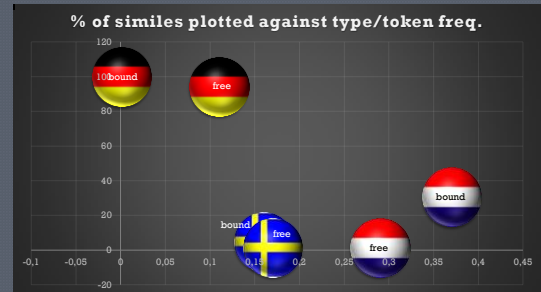
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## Similes and non-similes



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## Summary



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## 2.3. Debonding

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## Formal factors

- Bridging contexts (Heine 2002):
  - can the free variant be reanalysed as an adjective and /or adverb?
- Recategorialization:
  - does the free form acquire morphosyntactic properties such as inflection?
- Insertion (when R1 is a noun):
  - can the free variant be separated from its R1?
- Other factors

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## Dutch

(cf. Van Goethem &amp; Hilgsmann 2014)

- Bridging context:
  - **Yes**, *reuze* is a plausible adjectival form
  - -e most frequent marker for Dutch attributive adjectives (*een grote/reuze stap*)
- Recategorialization:
  - **Yes**, extension to new (adjectival/adverbial) contexts
  - Predicative use (*het was reuze* 'it was great')
  - Scope over V (*het viel reuze mee* 'it turned out great')
  - But no full inflection (\**een reus meisje*)
- Insertion:
  - **Yes** (cf. *reuze megalithische steenblokken*)
- Other factors:
  - Vowel clash (+20%): *reuze interessant* 'very interesting'
  - Spelling of complex compounds: *reuze vakantie anekdote* 'great holiday anecdote'

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## German

- free forms, mostly N as R1
  - free *riesen* may be reanalysed as adjective
- bridging context: **yes**, *riesen* is a plausible adjectival form
  - out of 32 possible adjectival constructions, 19 have an adjectival form in -en
  - *bis man einen riesen Unterschied bemerkt*
  - 'before one notices a huge difference'
- recategorialization: **yes**, cf. forms with endings other than -en
  - *ein rieses Dankeschön*
  - 'a huge "Thank you"'
- insertion: **yes**
  - *das spiel hat eine riesen deutsche community*
  - 'a huge German community (not: 'a very German community)'

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## Swedish

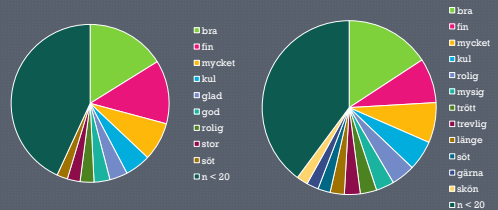
- bridging context / recategorialization:  
**no**, *jätte* is not a plausible adjectival form
  - definite forms end in -a; indefinite forms mostly in a consonant
- insertions: not found
- Hence: no debonding???

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## Swedish: R1

COMPOUND FORM

FREE FORM



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## French

(cf. Van Goethem &amp; Hiligsmann 2012)

- No debonding (no bound forms)
- Gradual N>A category change
  - Bridging context: attributive use of N (*oiseau géant* 'giant bird')
- Advanced degree of recategorialization
  - All typical Adj uses since 19th century
    - Predicative use: *la conscience peut être géante* [Frantext, 1874] 'Consciousness can be huge'
    - Intensifying meaning, anteposition: *Géante République* 'Great Republic' [Frantext, 1853]
- Formal resemblance (analogy) to French Adj/Part ending in -ant
  - cf. *payant* 'lit. paying', *marrant* 'crazy', etc.

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## Conclusions

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## Conclusions

- Debonding of prefixoids correlates with
  - ✓ High degree of **bleaching** (few similes, intensifying meaning)
  - ✓ High degree of **productivity**; low degree of lexicalization
  - ✓ Formal **bridging context** (e.g. language-specific inflection) in favor of N > Adj/Adv reanalysis

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## Summary

|                  | Dutch | German | Swedish |
|------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| Bleaching        | ✓     | -      | ✓       |
| Productivity     | ✓     | -      | ✓       |
| Bridging context | ✓     | ✓      | -       |

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**Reuze bedankt!**

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