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Scalar equatives in a similarity account

In German, both scalar and non-scalar equatives are based on *wie*-clauses thus calling for a uniform analysis, cf. (1a-c). We propose a generalized account of German equatives based on (i) the idea that equatives express similarity, that is, indistinguishability with respect to a given set of features and (ii) that this does not result from the construction – there is no meaning of German equatives as such – but instead from the meaning of the standard marker *wie* and its interplay with the parameter marker *so*. In this account, *wie*-clauses in equatives denote similarity classes of individuals or events – *being similar to some other mug / dancing similar to someone else* / *being similar in height to someone else*.

(1)	a.	Anna ist so groß wie Berta.	'Anna is as tall as Berta.'
	b.	Anna hat so eine Tasse wie Berta.	'Anna has a mug like Berta's.
	c.	Anna hat so getanzt wie Berta.	'Anna danced like Berta.'

In this talk we will focus on scalar equatives, as in (1a). The core issue here is that of *exactly* vs. *at-least* readings – does *A ist so groß wie B* mean that A is exactly as tall as B or that A is at least as tall as B? While both readings are attested in the data, standard degree semantics and the similarity analysis differ in which reading is predicted to be primary. In standard degree semantics equatives are assumed to have an *at-least* interpretation as their meaning and the *exactly* reading is derived by scalar implicature. In the similarity analysis, on the other hand, equatives are interpreted such that their meaning is symmetric, since similarity is an equivalence relation – *A ist so groß wie B* means that A is similar in height to B – raising the question of how to derive the *at-least* reading from the *exactly/similar* reading. It is important to realize that this problem is not specific for the similarity analysis – any analysis unifying scalar and non-scalar equatives based on classes or kinds has to face this problem.

We suggest to account for *at-least* readings by exploiting the granularity encoded in similarity. In order to get an *at-least* reading, a filter can be defined reducing granularity such that from a certain point on distinctions are filtered out, that is, all degrees above that point count as similar (technically, a filter is defined such that only right closures survive). Note that the result is still an equivalence class, even if there is no upper bound. This filter can be conceived of as a (possibly silent) operator deriving a (quasi) *at-least* reading from the *exactly/similar* reading . Take *Anna ist so groß wie Berta*. Filtering out distinctions above Berta's height has the effect of an *at-least* reading, that is, the sentence is true if Anna is at least as tall as Berta. It’s an empirical question whether this account is adequate.