

“Holding grudges is so last century” – On the use of GenX so as modifier of nouns and noun phrases

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GenX so (Zwicky 2011) as a modifier of NPs is a recent innovation commonly associated with informal American English (*OED online 2005 Draft additions*, s.v. *so*, adv. and int.). Following up on Wee & Ying Ying (2008) and González-García (2014), the present study provides an in-depth empirical analysis of over 1,200 emphasised NPs (*absolutely*, *totally* and *very* are also considered). As instances of innovative language use are more likely to be found in soap operas than in natural spoken language (cf. Al-Surmi 2012: 131f.), the data are drawn from SOAP (Davies 2011-). Note also that media language 'does represent the language scriptwriters imagine that real women and men produce' (Rey 2001: 138). The results show that GenX so most frequently occurs with object pronouns (1), simple NPs (2), and names (3).

- (1) Mom, all this resentment stuff, anger - it's so not me. (*OLTL* 2004)
- (2) Everything I have is so last month. (*AMC* 2004)
- (3) Wow. That is so Adam Chandler. Your daddy must be real proud. (*AMC* 2009)

In line with Labov's (2001) Principle II, female speakers are the most prolific users of this “non-standard” (*OED*) emphasiser in general. While utterances like (1) and (2) are associated with younger speakers, (3) is common with older speakers, The so TIME-construction (as in (2); Wee & Ying Ying 2008) occurs exclusively in affirmative uses, while other types of simple NPs are virtually restricted to negated uses ($p < 0.001$). In fact, there is a significant preference for negation in noun phrases (simple, complex and idiomatic) and reflexive pronouns, while affirmative uses commonly occur with nouns (bare, proper and numeral) and possessive pronouns ($p < 0.001$). Last, the data reveal that, in affirmative uses, GenX so competes with *totally* in noun phrases (simple, complex and idiomatic) and with *very* as a modifier of names.

References

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