Du Idiot! Din idiot! Pseudo-vocative constructions and insults in German (and Swedish)

Franz d’Avis and Jörg Meibauer

Abstract

This article analyses the German construction Du/Sie Idiot! (‘You idiot!’) and its correlates in Swedish (Din Idiot!). This construction can be used in vocative function, conveying always an expressive, derogatory and insulting meaning. Drawing on a functional distinction between Calls and Confirmations, we argue that the respective vocative construction is only acceptable as a Confirmation. This constraint motivates its categorization as a pseudo-vocative. The overall derogatory and insulting function has several sources, among them its specific syntactic make-up. Hence the idea of a pseudo-vocative construction (a pairing of a specific form and function) is suggestive. The derogatory meaning of Du Idiot! (‘You idiot!’) and Du Lehrer! (‘You teacher!’) is also connected with its semantics and pragmatics, as a comparison with the German comparative construction Du-als-NP shows. German and Swedish pseudo-vocative constructions display functional similarities, yet we find also formal differences between them.

1. Introduction

Although there have been a number of studies dealing with functional aspects of vocatives (cf. Welte 1980; Zwicky 1974) or their proper location in the grammar-pragmatics interface (cf. Hill 2007; Predelli 2008), more detailed studies on the expressive power of vocatives are still rare (cf. Corver 2008). Here we will discuss a particular vocative construction in German, namely Du/Sie Idiot! (‘You Idiot!’) as in (1c) (previously discussed in Rauh 2004) and its correlates in Swedish. In German, these constructions show three typical properties that renders them attractive for linguistic analysis. First, they can be used as vocatives (at least in one of its functions), which can be seen by its exchangeability for the bona fide vocatives in (1a) and (1b):
addition, it becomes clear that the construction under focus is by no means an idiosyncratic structure restricted to one single language.

Our third point will be the expressivity of the *du*-X constructions and how expressivity is connected to possible analyses in different functions (vocative vs. argument). We will argue that the overall insulting effect of this construction stems from a number of sources, but has always to do with its syntactic make-up.

2. Different functions of vocatives

2.1. Communication situation

We work on the basic assumption that in communication, there are at least two participants. If we reduce the situation to spoken language, these participants are the speaker and the addressee.

For face-to-face communication to work, it is not sufficient that there exists someone who is a speaker, and that there exists someone other who could be the addressee. Both participants must be connected in a situation that defines one participant as the speaker and another one as the addressee; both must be aware of the role they play in this situation. We call that a Communication-Situation (or C-Situation for short):

(2) In a communication situation (C-Situation), there exists someone who is the speaker and someone else who is the addressee. Both must be aware of their respective roles. Speaker and addressee are only defined within a communication situation.

There are possible problematic scenarios which we will not go into here, e.g.: (i) internal monologues; (ii) prayers (God as addressee); (iii) conversations with machines or animals (e.g. *Du blöde Karre!/You damned jalopy*); (iv) certain announcements (e.g. *All passengers to Bamberg, please proceed to track 11.* What if there are no passengers to Bamberg?; *Herr Schmitt, please come to the entrance*! What if Herr Schmitt already went home?). In these situations, it is either not certain if there is an addressee or the addressee’s awareness of his role in the C-Situation is questionable. Either way, they do not conform to (2).

The point is: even if someone says something and there is someone who could function as the addressee, the C-Situation needs not to be fully established. The addressee must also be instantiated within the C-Situation. Suppose I talk to you, using a second person pronoun – if you want to
identify the reference of this pronoun, namely you, it is necessary that you understand that I am talking to you and not to someone else. It is not always words we use to accomplish this addressee instantiation. We could use gestures, facial expressions, and eye-contact. But, of course, there are linguistic means, and vocatives seem to be a case in point.

2.2. Vocative functions I: establishing a communication situation/ Call-Function

If a speaker wants to establish a C-Situation, two actions have to be performed:

(i) the speaker attracts the attention of the selected addressee,
(ii) the addressee is instantiated in the C-Situation.

An addressee is instantiated in a C-Situation, if he knows that he is meant to be the addressee and if the speaker knows that the addressee knows this. In the act of addressee instantiation, the addressee is identified. These two steps are not always separated (cf. e.g. Anderson 2007: 219; Lyons 1977: 214; Zwicky 1974). But there is evidence that we are indeed dealing with two different actions. There are linguistic and non-linguistic means we can use to attract attention, step (i), but by means of which we are not able to identify the addressee, step (ii), see the selection in (3).

(3) a. linguistic means
   - Interjections: he ‘hey’, ey ‘ey’, hallo ‘hello’,...
   - Pronouns: du ‘you.SNG’, ihr ‘you.pl’, Sie ‘you.HON’,...
   - Complex forms: du da ‘you.SNG there’, Sie da ‘you.HON there’,...

b. non-linguistic means
   - whistle
   - throat clearing
   - gesticulation (waving,...)

By using for instance the means in (3), you can get the attention of a selected addressee. But it is obvious that this alone does not identify the addressee, and so it is not enough to establish a C-Situation. Now you could argue that, if you shout hey to someone and he is turning around and looking at you, perhaps with an enquiring look, a C-Situation is already established; or you could be in a room with just one other person and start to talk without explicitly establishing a C-Situation. In the first case, it is the eye-contact or other deictic support we would interpret as the point of identification and in the second case, it is the non-linguistic context that provides for the establishment of the C-Situation: there is obviously no other interlocutor available.

For an addressee to be instantiated in a C-Situation, he has to know that he is the one the speaker means; the speaker identifies or marks the addressee. This can also be done with linguistic or non-linguistic means, compare some examples in (4).

(4) a. linguistic means
   - first (+last) name: Heinz, Maria Schmidt, ...
   - (prefix+) last name: Herr Schmidt ‘Mr. Schmidt’, Müller, ...
   - titles (+last name): Professor, Doktor Schmidt ‘Doctor Schmidt’, ...
   - kintitle (+first name): Mama ‘mum’, Onkel Peter ‘uncle Peter’, ...
   - descriptions: du/Sie mit der Brille ‘you.SNG/you.HON with the glasses’, der Junge mit der Mundharmonika ‘the boy with the blues harp’, ...

b. non-linguistic means
   - eye-contact
   - pointing gesture

Using elements of (4), a speaker can mark/identify an addressee. To take the two steps we need to establish a C-Situation, we first use one of the elements in (3), getting the attention of the selected addressee, and then an element of (4), marking/identifying the addressee.

We see the two actions as two different speech-acts. They can be used independently of one another.

You can use hey or hallo just to get someone’s attention. You can actually use all kinds of utterances just to get the attention of someone. But the ones in (3a) seem to have this as one of their main functions. You can use these expressions even if you do not know if there is somebody around who may be able to hear you or if there are a lot of people and you just want somebody, whoever, to pay attention to you.

Just as well, you can use elements of (4) to identify a specific addressee, even if you already have the attention of a set of potential addressess. Imagine a teacher in a classroom talking to his pupils. They already listen to him and now he utters a pupil’s name, say Peter, thereby marking him as the addressee, perhaps of a following question, or even as the addressee of a question already asked before.
There are also different reactions to an utterance which can be analysed as referring to the failure of different speech-acts in that utterance. Imagine a situation where a foreman calls in the direction of a few workers, supposing that getting-attention speech-act and identification are successful, cf. (5):

(5) *Hey, you with the shovel, come here!*

But none of the men reacts and the foreman walks to one of them, the one he wanted to come to him, and asks him why he did not come. Possible reactions include those in (6):

(6) a. *I did not hear you.*
   b. *I did not know that you called for me.*
   c. *I did not want to come.*

If the answer is (6a), the act of attention-getting failed, (6b) indicates that the act of identification failed, and (6c), however unlikely, suggests that the command speech-act failed.

With most of the expressions in (4), a speaker can perform both speech-acts needed to establish a C-Situation simultaneously. So, you can use *Hey Mary!* to first get Mary’s attention and then identify her as the addressee, but you can also use just *Mary!* to get her attention and identify her as addressee at the same time.

Expressions that a speaker can use to establish a C-Situation are expressions that fulfil the Call-Function. In utterances like (7a,b) both involved speech-acts are performed explicitly and can be linked to different expressions. In utterances like (7c,d) the getting-attention and the identification-speech-act are performed simultaneously.

(7) a. *He, du mit der grünen Hose!*
   hey you with the green trousers
   ‘Hey, you with the green trousers!’
   b. *Hallo, Herr Professor Schmidt-Grün!*
   hello Mr. Professor Schmidt-Grün
   ‘Hello, Professor Schmidt-Grün!’
   c. *Maria!*
   d. *Mama!*
   mum
   ‘Mum!’

Linguistic expressions that fulfil the Call-Function are vocatives in call-function (\(V_{CF}\)).

(8) An expression is a vocative in Call-Function (\(V_{CF}\)), if:
   (i) it is used to get the attention of a selected addressee,
   (ii) it marks/identifies the selected addressee.

2.2.1. Position

Vocatives in Call-Function are not integrated in a possible following sentence (cf. Duden 2005: 822; Zifónun et al. 1997: 917). A speech-act is performed that is independent from the following utterance, which in turn can be used for different speech-acts, cf. (9):

   hey Heinz I go now to home
   ‘Hey Heinz, I am going home now.’
   b. Question: *Hallo Herr Schmidt, soll ich Sie mitnehmen?*
   hello Mr. Schmidt shall I you.HON take-with
   ‘Hello Mr. Schmidt, can I give you a ride?’
   c. Request: *Du, Peter, hol doch mal die Katze rein!*
   you Peter fetch PART PART the cat inside
   ‘Peter, please get the cat inside!’

The \(V_{CF}\) keeps its function, even so the following utterance is a statement, a question, or a request. \(V_{CFs}\) have an own intonation contour and are typically separated from the following utterance by an intonation break.

The position of \(V_{CF}\) before a relevant utterance makes, indeed, sense. If a speaker wants to get the attention of a selected addressee and wants to identify him, then, positioning the \(V_{CF}\) inside or after the related \(\text{utterance would be unnecessary or too late. The } V_{CF} \text{ is unnecessary, if the } C\text{-Situation is already established, cf. (10):}

(10) Speaker to Mary: *Lass uns heute ins Kino gehen.*
   let us today in-the cinema go
   ‘Let’s go to the movies today.’
   
   Mary: *Oh ja, gute Idee. Wann denn?*
   oh yes good idea when PART
   ‘Okay, this is a good idea. When?’
(13) Die Müllabfuhr, Maria/meine Liebe / du / Frau Müller / the waste-disposal Maria/my dear / you / Frau Müller / du kleiner Schnickel / du Dummkopf, kommt aber erst / you little sweetie / you fool, comes PART PART übermorgen. / the day after tomorrow / 'The waste-disposal, Maria/my dear / you / Frau Müller / you little sweetie / you fool, is coming the day after tomorrow.'

We can see that certain forms of address also appear inside the sentence (cf. Zwicky 1974: 797). More precisely, they can stand in so-called parenthetical-niches (cf. Altmann 1981; d'Avis 2004), or before or after the sentence (start- and end-parenthetics, cf. Schwyzner 1939). Even these positions can be seen as suitable for vocative expressions.

(14) (Maria,) die Müllabfuhr (Maria) kommt aber erst / Maria the waste.disposal (Maria) comes PART PART übermorgen (Maria). / the day after tomorrow Maria / '(Maria), the waste disposal (Maria) is coming the day after tomorrow (Maria).'

Please keep in mind that the C-Situation is already established. The function of the vocative-expressions is to confirm the addressee-status of the person spoken to. Consequently, we call this function confirmation of the addressee status, short: A-Confirmation. A vocative that fulfills this function we call V_{AC}.

Alongside the address confirmation other aspects can be reinforced, e.g. politeness or social relations. See the list and appropriate examples in Zwicky (1974: 795–796). What we describe as V_{ACS} Nehring ([1933] 1977) calls 'Anrede' (address). He sees the main property of elements one can use as address in characterising the addressee. This is also the main difference to expressions used as 'Anruf' (call), our V_{CF} (cf. Nehring [1933]1977: 128).

To sum up: We differentiate between V_{CF} and V_{AC}. V_{CF} establish a communication situation by getting the attention of a selected addressee and identifying him. V_{AC} on the other hand are used, when the C-Situation is already established. Their main function is to confirm the addressee status, and they can “locate the speaker and the discourse in a particular social world” Zwicky (1974: 795).
3. Du-X and vocative functions

Imagine the following situation: We are at an exhibition. Three men are standing in front of a picture looking at it. The man in the middle is wearing a green jacket. A wants to talk to this man. If A simply shouts Hey! or says Good day! loud enough, possibly all three men will turn around. Suppose the man in the middle is called Heinz and A knows this, A could pick him out and start a conversation just with saying Heinz! A could even say:

(15) **Der Mann mit der grünen Jacke! (Ihr Auto wird** just.now hauled.off
      *The man with the green jacket! (Your car is being hauled off just
      now.)*

What he cannot use in this situation, are expressions like: **Sie Dummkopf, du Trottel** etc.

(16) */[Sie Dummkopf!] [you fool] V_CF (Ihr Auto wird gerade [your.HON car is being just.now abgeschleppt.]
      haul.off
      ‘[You fool!] V_CF (Your car is being hauled off.’

In the situation we described, it would not be clear who is meant. It seems that the communication situation has to be established before you can insult someone.

Proper names, on the other hand, can be used in a Call-Function (17a) and in Confirmation-Function, cf. (17b).

(17) a. **Heinz, dein Auto wird abgeschleppt.**
    [Heinz] V_CF your car is being hauled off
    ‘Heinz] V_CF your car is being hauled off.’

b. **Dein Auto, [Heinz.] V_AC wird abgeschleppt.**
    your car, [Heinz] V_AC is being hauled off
    ‘Your car, [Heinz] V_AC is being hauled off.’

Interjections like he! are good as Calls, but seem to be not as good in Confirmation-Function.

(18) a. **He, dein Auto wird abgeschleppt.**
    hey your car is being hauled off
    ‘Hey, your car is being hauled off.’

b. **Dein Auto, [he] V_AC wird abgeschleppt.**
    your car, [hey] V_AC is being hauled off
    ‘Your car; [hey] V_AC is being hauled off.’

With du-X it is the other way round. As we have seen, it cannot be used in Call-Function.

(19) */[Du Trottel] [your fool] V_CF dein Auto wird abgeschleppt.
      [you fool] V_CF your car is being hauled off
      ‘[You fool] V_CF your car is being hauled off.’

But those expressions can easily be used as A-Confirmation. If it is clear who A is talking to, i.e. if the C-Situation is established, A could say:

(20) **Ihr Auto, [Sie Dummkopf] V_AC / [du Trottel] V_AC**
    your.HON car, [you dumbhead] V_AC / [you fool] V_AC
    wird gerade abgeschleppt.
    is being just.now hauled off
    ‘Your car, [you dumbhead] V_AC / [you fool] V_AC is being hauled off just
    now.’

This is an important property of du-X with respect to vocative constructions: With du-X, a speaker cannot establish a communication situation, that is, du-X cannot be used in Call-Function.

3.1. Some other properties of du-X

As we have seen, du-X behaves different with respect to possible uses as vocatives. But there are also differences to standard noun phrases. The du-X-construction occurs in different cases: nominative, dative, accusative but not genitive.

(21) **du kleiner Trottel**
    ‘you little sucker’

(22) **NOM: du – du kleiner Trottel**
    GEN: deiner – ???
    DAT: dir – dir kleinem Trottel
    ACC: dich – dich kleinen Trottel
(23) a. Gestern hast du kleiner Trottel versagt.  
    yesterday have [you little sucker].NOM screwed up
    'Yesterday, you little sucker screwed up.'

    b. Gestern habe ich dir kleinem Trottel geholfen.  
    yesterday have I [you little sucker].DAT helped
    'Yesterday, I helped you, you little sucker.'

    c. Gestern habe ich dich kleinen Trottel gesehen.  
    yesterday have I [you little sucker].ACC seen
    'Yesterday, I saw you, you little sucker.'

There is a genitive form of the 3rd person pronoun, namely deiner, that appears in argument position as a genitive object, cf. (24), or as argument of a preposition like statt/instead. But it cannot be expanded with a noun.

(24) a. Ich kann mich deiner / *deiner Trottel(s) nicht entsinnen.  
    I can me you.GEN / [you sucker].GEN not remember
    'I can't remember you/you sucker.'

    b. Wir bedürfen deiner / *deiner Trottel(s).  
    we need you.GEN / [you sucker].GEN
    'We need you/you sucker.'

    c. Bon Scott singt statt deiner / *deiner Trottel(s).  
    Bon Scott sings instead [you sucke].GEN
    'Bon Scott is singing instead of you/you sucker.'

If used as a vocative, the 'du-X-construction' appears in nominative form.

(25) Peter, du kleiner Trottel / *dir kleinem Trottel  
    Peter, [you little sucker].NOM / [you little sucker].DAT
    *dich kleinem Trottel, komm mal her.  
    [you little sucker].ACC, come PART here
    'Peter, you little sucker, come here.'

But even so, there are differences between the du-X-construction and normal noun phrases in the nominative case as well as with unexpanded 2nd person pronouns in nominative case.

(i) du-X and generic meaning

There is a generic meaning of 'du' that is not available for 'du-X'.

(26) a. Hier kannst du dich echt entspannen.  
    here can you you.REFL really relax
    'Here, you can really relax.'

    → man/you: generic or addressee

    b. Hier kannst du Trottel dich echt entspannen.  
    here can you fool you.REFL really relax
    'Here, you fool can really relax.'

    → du Trottel: only addressee, no generic reading

'Du' can be used generically in (26a), but not in (26b), where it is expanded.

(ii) du-X and focus particles

Pronouns allow focus particles.

(27) Selbst / auch / nur / sogar du hast versagt.  
    even / even / only / even you have failed
    'Even/only you failed.'

du-X allows focus particles only if it is in an integrated position.

(28) a. Selbst / auch / nur / sogar du kleiner Trottel hast versagt.  
    even / even / only / even you little sucker have failed
    'Even/only you little fool failed.'

In the vocative function, du-X does not accept focus particles.

   b. Gestern, (*nur) du Idiot, haben wir wegen dir das  
      yesterday (*only) you idiot have we because you the
      Spiel verloren.
      match lost
      'Yesterday, (*only) you idiot, we lost the match because of you'

(iii) du-X Predicative usage

With the verbs sein, werden, bleiben; scheinen, dunken; heißen, there is a predicative usage of nominative NPs.

(29) a. Du bist und bleibst ein Trottel.  
    you are and remain a fool
    'You are and remain a fool.'
b. **Du dünkest mich ein Trottel.**
   you seem me a fool
   ‘You seem to me to be a fool.’

A predicative usage is not possible for *du*-X phrases.

(29) c. *Du bist und bleibst du Trottel.*
   you are and remain you fool

d. *Du dünkest mich du Trottel.*
   you seem me you fool

To sum up the properties: *du*-X can function as a vocative in the A-Confirmation function, it can function as an argument, but it has not the same grammatical possibilities as other noun phrases. These idiosyncratic properties could suggest that we are indeed dealing with a construction in the sense explicated above. There are even language specific properties which are made clear by the differences found between *du*-X and the related Swedish *din/ditt*-X construction, at which we now will have a short look.

3.2. Differences between *du*-X as vocative and in argument position in Swedish

In Swedish, the difference between the *du*-X-construction in vocative function and in other syntactic functions is easier to see. There is a phrase with a 2nd person possessive pronoun that functions as the Swedish correlate of *du*-X, namely *din/ditt*-X. *din* and *ditt* are the utrum (common gender) and neuter forms of the 2nd person singular possessive pronoun, respectively.

(30) a. ***din idiot, din dum bom***
   you idiot you fool

b. ***ditt äckel, ditt pucko***
   you stinker you asshole

In German we recognise the use of possessive pronouns in vocative phrases from 1st person singular possessives like the ones in (31).

(31) **mein Schatz, mein Lieber***
   my treasure my dear

There are also conventionalised forms in the 2nd person plural like (32).

(32) **Euer/Eure Majestät***
   your  Majesty

The *din/ditt*-X-construction can be used as a vocative in all functions except the Call-Function.

(33) a. **Men här kan du ju inte parkera, din idiot!**
   but here can you PART not park you idiot
   ‘But here, you can not park, you idiot!’

b. **Koka äggen dindumbom!**
   cook the egg you fool
   ‘Cook the egg, you fool!’ (from the internet)

c. **Tack ska ni ha era skitstövlar, svarade jag [...]**
   thank shall you.PL have you.PL shitheads answered I
   ‘Thank you, you shitheads, I answered…’ (SAG 4: 797)

The *din/ditt*-X construction cannot be used in argument position/as subject in Swedish.

What you can use instead is a 2nd person pronoun with a nominal, like in German.

(34) a. **Vad i helvete gör du idiot?**
   what in hell do you idiot
   ‘What the hell are you doing, you idiot?’

b. **...va fan tror du idiot jävel...**
   ...what devil think you idiot bastard
   ‘...what the hell do you think, you idiot...’

c. **...hoppas du idiot som gjorde det läser detta och...**
   ...hope.1SG you idiot that did that read this and
   ‘...(I) hope you idiot who did that are reading this and...’ (from the internet)

*din/ditt*-X can be adjoined to a personal pronoun in argument position as an apposition.

(35) a. **Och vem är du din idiot för att veta hur ateister tänker?**
   and who are you you idiot for to know how atheists think
   ‘And who are you, you idiot, for to know how atheists think?’

b. **Du din idiot vet tydligen inte vad vetenskap är...**
   you you idiot know obviously not what science is...
   ‘You, you idiot, obviously don’t know what science is...’
c. ...och du din Dummbom gick på hans lame ursäkt ...
...and you you fool went on his lame excuse ...
'... and you, you fool, fell for his lame excuse ...' (from the internet)

Even if the din/ditt-X construction exists in most Scandinavian languages (Old Danish, Old Scandinavian, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish), there is – as far as we could make out – no generally accepted analysis. Søren Beltoft (2001) compiled work that was done on this construction. This is mostly research from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Exceptions are Kjellmer (1976) and SAG (1999). The newest analysis we know of is Corver (2008). We will not go into the analyses here, but just notice that differences can be found between a vocative use, which would be din/ditt-
X and a construction with similar meaning in argument position, which is

4. du-X as pseudo-vocatives

The du-X construction has its peculiarities, but we think it can be safely classified as having at least some of the functions a vocative can have. Or let us put it the other way around. The du-X construction cannot be used in the Call-Function. Since this seems to be the basic function of a vocative phrase, the term Pseudo-Vocative seems to be justified.

For the du-X construction to be used as vocative, the communication situation must already be established. Recall the example we had in the beginning (see 1c): If we try to get the attention of someone who is not in a communication relation with us, we cannot use the du-X construction.

(36) #Du Trottel, komm mal her!
you fool come PART here
'Come here, you fool!'

Whereas in an already established communication situation, other vocative functions like A-Confirmation can be fulfilled by du-X.

(37) Gestern, du Trottel, hast du dich ganz schön blamiert.
yesterday you fool have you youREFL PART PART blamed
'Yesterday, you fool, you made a fool of yourself.'

Why is it that you cannot establish a communication situation with Du Trottel/you fool? Whatever your analysis of the internal structure of this

construction, it seems to be clear that the noun is predicative. More precisely, an evaluation on the side of the speaker is involved. But such an evaluation seems only possible, when the relation between speaker and addressee is given, i.e. when the C-Situation is already established.

Since the nominal in the du-X construction is interpreted as an evaluation predication, it suggests itself that it cannot really be used to pick out an addressee. So it cannot be used to establish a communication situation. The evaluation is subjective, related to the speaker, and it does not denote a common class of elements. How is the putative addressee supposed to know that he is meant? A speaker cannot assume that his evaluations are automatically shared by other people he wants to address.

Expressivity is one of the hallmarks of the du-X construction and this will be our next point.

5. On the expressivity of ich/du NP-constructions

In this paragraph, we will analyse the ich/du-NP construction as an expressive construction, i.e. a specific form-meaning pair. It will be compared to the ich/du als NP construction. (Note that when we talk of 'constructions' here, we are not committed to the views of construction grammar. While there are good reasons to assume their status as constructions in the sense of construction grammar, we will propose a modular approach below.) These constructions have, according to Rauh (2004), different syntactic and semantic properties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntax</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ich/du NP</td>
<td>transitive determiner + NP complement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ich/du als NP</td>
<td>intransitive determiner + als NP-apposition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While ich/du NP is best analysed as transitive determiner plus NP complement (cf. Vater 2000), ich/du als NP is an intransitive determiner plus a right-adjacent apposition. In X-bar-theoretic terms, an apposition does not lead to the projection of a further syntactic level. The main semantic difference between these constructions is that ich/du NP predicates over the referents of ich/du in a holistic way, while in the ich/du als NP-construction, the NP picks out some relevant property of the referents of ich/du. How ever this may be implemented formally into the truth con-
ditions of the respective sentences, we assume that the truth conditions do not directly encode expressive content. Being predicated in a holistic way, so we will argue, leads to certain conversational implicatures.

(i) *Ich/du-NP* constructions appear as a single speech act and as an argument within a sentence.

(38) a. *Ich Idiot! Ich Glückspilz!*
   
   I idiot I lucky.man
   ‘Stupid me! Lucky me!’

b. *Du Idiot! Du Glückspilz!*
   
   you idiot! You lucky man
   ‘You idiot! You lucky man!’

c. *Ich Idiot habe schon wieder vergessen, das Licht*
   
   I idiot have already again forgotten the light
   auszumachen.
   to.switch.out
   ‘Stupid me, I forgot to switch off the light again.’

d. *Du Idiot könntest auch besser aufpassen!*
   
   you idiot could MP better watch.out
   ‘Watch your step, you idiot!’

In (38c,d), *ich/du Idiot* appear in the prefﬁeld and as subject. However, their position in the middleﬁeld and their status as an object is also possible. Hence the expressive effect is independent of the topological position and subject- vs. object-status.

(39) a. *Habe ich Idiot schon wieder vergessen, das Licht*
   
   have I idiot already again forgotten the light
   auszumachen?
   to.switch.out
   ‘Stupid me, did I forget to switch off the light again?’

b. *Hast du Idiot schon wieder vergessen, das Licht*
   
   have you idiot already again forgotten the light
   auszumachen?
   to.switch.out
   ‘Did you idiot forget to switch off the light again?’

c. *Ich könnte mich Idiot auf den Mond schießen!*
   
   I could me idiot to the moon shoot
   ‘Stupid me, I could launch me into outer space.’

d. *Ich könnte dich Idiot auf den Mond schießen!*
   
   I could you.REFL idiot to the moon shoot
   ‘I could launch you idiot into outer space.’

In (39a,b), the utterances constitute expressive speech acts of blaming or praising the speaker himself or the addressee. In fact, utterances like *Du/Sie X*, with X as a swearword, make use of a common pattern for insulting someone else (cf. Havrylyk 2003, 2009).

(ii) The NP-part of the *ich/du-NP* construction is more often a NP with expressive content than not.

(40) a. *Ich Idiot/Trottel / Arschloch!*
   
   I idiot / fool / asshole
   ‘I idiot/ fool/ asshole!’

b. *Du Idiot/Trottel / Arschloch!*
   
   you idiot / fool / asshole
   ‘You idiot/ fool/ asshole!’

c. *Ich Lehrer / Angestellter / Mensch!*
   
   I teacher / employee / human
   ‘I teacher/employee/human!’

d. *Du Lehrer / Angestellter / Mensch!*
   
   you teacher / employee / human
   ‘You teacher/employee/human!’

(41) a. *Ich beschissener Lehrer / Angestellter / Mensch!*
   
   I fucking teacher / employee / human
   ‘I fucking teacher/employee/human!’

b. *Du beschissener Lehrer / Angestellter / Mensch!*
   
   you fucking teacher / employee / human
   ‘You fucking teacher/employee/human!’

All the examples are, in principle, fine as insults. However, (40c,d) need a speciﬁc context where the insult makes sense, for instance someone hating teachers has become a teacher himself, etc. Note that the expressive touch may made visible by adding the expressive adjective *beschissen* ‘fucking’, as in (41a).

Since in (40c,d) the NP is not expressive, it must be the construction itself that contributes expressivity. Note that this assumption does not lead automatically to a constructional grammar analysis. Quite on the contrary, we will propose a modular (projectionist) analysis below.
(iii) As an argument within a sentence, the _ich/du-NP_ construction competes with the _ich/du als NP_ construction.

The _ich/du-NP_ construction may also appear as an argument within a sentence. Rauh (2004) argues at length that it may appear here without any expressive flavour and presents the following examples:

(42) _[Ihr Literaturwissenschaftler] mögt den jetzigen Zustand für angemessen halten,_

_might the actual state for adequate hold_

_aber [ich Linguist] halte die Linguistik für weit_ but [I linguist] hold the linguistics for widely

_untersprämtiert._ underrepresented

‘You, as literary scholars, might consider the actual state as adequate, but I, as a linguist, consider linguistics as widely underrepresented.’

We suspect that the _ich/du als NP_ construction is more common, as in (43):

(43) _[Ihr als Literaturwissenschaftler] mögt den jetzigen Zustand für angemessen halten._

_might the actual state for adequate hold_

_aber [ich als Linguist] halte die Linguistik für weit_ but [I als linguist] hold the linguistics for widely

_untersprämtiert._ underrepresented.

‘You, as literary scholars, might consider the actual state as adequate, but I, as a linguist, consider linguistics as widely underrepresented.’

In (43), the pronoun is an intransitive determiner, and _als N_ is an apposition. Roughly, as Rauh (2004) points out, _ich/du NP_ codes holistic properties of being _X_, while _ich/du als NP_ denotes _X_ with respect to the property of being an _X_. The point is that the latter construction is never expressive.

(iv) In isolation, as well as within the sentence, _ich/du als NP_ with expressive meaning is ruled out.

(44) a. _Ich Trottel!_

_I fool_

‘Stupid me!’

b. _Du Idiot!_

_you idiot_

‘You idiot!’

c. _*Ich als Trottel!_

_I as fool_

d. _*Du als Idiot!_

_you as idiot!

Note that in certain contexts, exclamations showing the structural pattern in (44c,d) may occur, e.g. in the following dialogue: A: _Du könntest doch Literaturwissenschaftler werden! ‘You could become a literary scholar!’_, B: _Ich als Literaturwissenschaftler! Gequärte Kacke! ‘I as a literary scholar! Bullshit!’_. But here, _Literaturwissenschaftler_ is not expressive. Moreover, the possibility of becoming a literary scholar is already mentioned in the previous utterance of A, hence yields an echo effect when taken up by B.

This presupposing effect is also seen with (45):

(45) a. _Du Idiot hältst den Zustand sicher für angemessen._

_you idiot consider the state surely as adequate._

‘You idiot consider the state as surely adequate.’

b. _*Du als Idiot hältst den Zustand sicher für angemessen._

_you as idiot hold the state surely for adequate._

_Du als NP_ presupposes that the denotation of _NP_ is correctly predicated with respect to the addressee. If such a predication is plausible in the context, such utterances become acceptable. This is in contrast to _du NP_, where the addressee is evaluated by the denotation of _NP_. Being an idiot cannot be presupposed as a general property of the addressee, thus ruling out (44c, d) and (45b). The case _ich als NP_ vs. _ich NP_ behaves in the same way.

(v) Even if _ich/du NP_ appears as an argument within a sentence, the _NP_ not displaying expressive content, it inherits an expressive flair.

Rauh (2004) argues at length that the difference between (42) and (43) is purely semantic, having to do with the holistic versus specific reading. But we would like to argue that _ich/du NP_, even if it appears as argument within a sentence, still inherits its expressive flair.

Thus, (46) potentially is a more pejorative way to express the information that the addressee having the status as student is relevant to the discourse than (47). Recall that the insulting meaning is due to the construction, without being a part of the truth conditions.
(46) Du Student (du Idiot) hältst den Zustand sicher für angemessen.
you student (you idiot) hold the state surely as adequate
‘You, as a student, surely consider the state as adequate.’

(47) Du als Student (*du als Idiot) hältst den Zustand sicher
you as student (you as idiot) hold the state surely
für angemessen.
for adequate
‘You, as a student, surely consider the state as adequate.’

In sum, we argue against the following hypotheses of Rauh (2004):

(H1) Isolated occurrences of Du Linguist! or Du Mensch! are impossible
(Rauh 2004: 100).

(H2) When embedded, these constructions have no expressive touch at all.
(Rauh 2004: 83–84)

Rauh (2004: 98–102) points out that (H1) may be explained by referring to
Grice’s maxims. Since the maxims of Relevance and Quantity prescribe
that something relevant and informative should be uttered, isolated ut-
terances like Du Linguist! or Du Mensch! are ruled out, because in every
discourse situation it can be presupposed that the addressee is a linguist or a
human being. Hence the information in these utterances is redundant.

Quite on the contrary, we would like to argue that these utterances still
have an expressive touch. For our explanation, we may partly rely on
Rauh’s semantics for the ich/du NP-construction vis-à-vis the ich/du-als-
NP construction (see Table 1). She points out that with the intransitive
variants, the referent is characterized as relatively unspecified with respect
to the set of entities fulfilling the predicate PERSON (x). In contrast, the
transitive variant is characterized by a restriction to a more specific set of
elements, which comes about through the denotation of the NP-comple-
ment, for instance LINGUIST (x) (Rauh 2004: 97).

The holistic meaning connected with du Student fits well with insulting,
because many insults go together with abstracting away from individual
properties. (Focusing on individual properties is also possible, as an
anonymous reviewer remarks.) In fact, the addressee is reduced to having a
certain property. Moreover, it is not only a property, but the decisive
property. This explains also, why du als Idiot (‘you as an idiot’) is an im-
possible insult. An expressive attitude is dealt with as if it were a (presup-
posed or inalienable) property of the addressee.

As a parallel case, consider ethnic slur terms like spic, boche, nigger,
etc. Their derogatory force general meanings like ‘being part of the x-group
& x-group-members being despicable because of belonging to the group’
which obviously are abstracting away from any particular properties of the
individual referent. By the same token, groups like teachers, linguists or
human beings may be constructed as groups with despicable properties (cf.
Hom 2007; Saka 2007).

The question is, whether this evaluative effect has to do with the con-
struction proper, or is an implicated meaning.

Since it is unlikely that generalising attributions are evaluative per se,
we propose to derive these expressive meanings as an implicature (see
Meibauer 2006). At a first shot, we consider triggering the implicature by
way of the M-maxim (Levinson 2000)

It could be argued that (46) and (47) roughly mean the same, because
someone is addressed and a certain property is predicated. In du Student as
well as in du als Student someone is addressed (the referent of du) and it is
implied that the referent is a student. (As a parallel case, think of pairs like
Bill stopped the car versus Bill caused the car to stop. Both sentences de-
note the same event.) Then the M-principle (in the sense of Levinson 2000)
would apply, du Student being the (syntactically) more marked message in
comparison with du als Student:

(48) The M-Principle
Speaker’s maxim: Indicate an abnormal, nonstereotypical situation by
using marked expressions that contrast with those you would use to
describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situation.
Recipient’s corollary: What is said in an abnormal way indicates an
abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations,
specifically:

Where S had said „p” containing marked expression M, and there is an
unmarked alternate expression U with the same denotation D which
the speaker might have employed in the sentence-frame instead, then
where U would have I-implicated the stereotypical or more specific
subset d of D, the marked expression M will implicate the complement
of the denotation, namely d’ of D.

The problem with the application of the M-principle is whether du Student
and du als Student have, strictly spoken, the same denotation. Following
Rauh (2004), we argued that this is not the case.

However, in standard cases like causative constructions (Bill caused to
stop the car vs. Bill stopped the car), it may be also questioned whether the
criterion of ‘the same denotation’ would apply. What matters more is the
observation that in certain contexts, there is indeed a competition between the two alternatives. Moreover, we suspect that ich/du is more syntactically marked, less frequent or usual, and less neutral in register in comparison to ich/du als NP. This has to be empirically investigated. If this approach is on the right track, we can account for the data in the following way.

For (49) versus (50), competition does not exist.

(49) Du Linguist/Idiot!
you linguist/idiot
‘You linguist/idiot!’

(50) *Du als Linguist/Idiot!
you as linguist/idiot
Sentence (50) is ungrammatical because it does not fit into the pattern of an evaluative act: it is presupposed that the addressee is a linguist or idiot. In contrast, the utterance Du Linguist! in (49) gives new information on the speaker’s evaluative attitude. This is in line with Rauh’s assumption that relevance and quantity play a role (or a maxim that requires that one should not tell what may be presupposed).

In (51) versus (52), however, we have indeed a competitive situation, albeit only with respect to du Linguist versus du als Linguist. Here, the M-principle applies, yielding an evaluative interpretation for (51).

(51) Du Linguist/Idiot hast da bestimmt keine Ahnung von.
you linguist/idiot have PART definitely no idea of
‘You linguist/idiot are clueless about that.’

(52) Du als Linguist/Idiot hast da bestimmt keine Ahnung von.
you as linguist idiot have part definitely no idea of
‘You as linguist/idiot are clueless about that.’

The different effect connected with du Linguist versus du als Linguist is a subtle one. It goes without saying that it lends itself to experimental corroborations, a task that we cannot go into here.

6. Conclusions

What we arrived at in this contribution, focusing on constructions like German Du Idiot! and Swedish Din idiot!, is the following. First, we have drawn a distinction between two functions of vocatives, namely the function of Call and the function of Addressee-Confirmation. What we found was that Du NP! never can be used in Call-Function. Since this seems to be the most basic function of a vocative phrase, the term Pseudo-Vocative seems to be justified. Second, we have pointed out that there are several differences between the German Du Idiot! and its Swedish correlate Din idiot! These data show that there are language-specific ways of conveying the evaluative force typically connected with these constructions. Third, we discussed German data showing the expressiveness of the Du-NP-construction. In comparison with the comparative construction Du-als-NP, it became clear that the derogatory force of constructions like Du Idiot! (‘You idiot!’) and Du Lehrer! (‘You teacher!’) is connected with its semantics as well as with pragmatic processes.

Notes

1. That we use language in cases like that at all has possibly other reasons. In prayers, we hope that there is someone hearing us, talking to machines is like expressing our thoughts or feelings analogue to ordinary interpersonal communication.

2. It is not obvious if this is part of the communicative intention described by Grice (1957) or if this is a condition that must be satisfied independently.

3. Cf. Nehring ([1933] 1977: 101): “So läßt sich für die Funktion des Vokativs eine erste Bestimmung geben: Er dient dazu, eine zweite Person auf sich selbst als den vom Sprecher Gemeinten hinzuzuweisen.” [So we can give a first definition of the function of the vocative: It indicates to a second person that she/he is meant by the speaker.]

4. The requirement that speaker and addressee ‘know’ is probably too strong, but they should at least have good reasons to suppose that the mentioned relations hold.


7. Cf. also Schaden (2010) who proposes three basic functions of vocatives: identification of the addressee, predication of a property w.r.t. the addressee, activation of the addressee.
8. That is the first part, getting attention. In this case, identification must be
taken care of by non-linguistic means.

9. There are a few predicates in German that require an object in the Genitive
case: sich annehmen (‘minister to’), bedürfen (‘need’), beschuldigen (‘ac-
cuse’), sich bewusst sein (‘be aware’), bezichtigen (‘accuse’), sich enthalten
(‘abstain’), entheben (‘depose’), sich entledigen (‘dispose’), entraten (‘lack’),
sich entsinnen (‘recall’), sich erfreuen (‘rejoice’), sich erinnern (‘remember’),
gedenken (‘commemorate’), harren (‘await’), kundig sein (‘know’), verwei-
sen (‘expel’).

10. See also Corver (2008) who cites two other Swedish informants.

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