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

Ulrike Stange (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany)

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 Gonzálvez-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


