

## SO (TOTALLY) an Exclamative

**Introduction:** Among the many uses of *so* in American English, there is a use among younger speakers that involves emphatically stressing the word, as shown in (1). I call this use “stressed *so*”:

- (1) a. I’m SO going to ace that physics exam tomorrow.  
b. You SO don’t know what you’re talking about.

This paper has two goals: (1) to point out the existence of the construction and describe its basic properties, since this usage has not been remarked on in the literature; and (2) to propose that an analysis of this construction involves an unpronounced but syntactically relevant lexical item (in the sense of Kayne 2005), TOTALLY.

**Basic properties of the construction:** In discussing the distribution of stressed *so*, I first note that stressed *so* is fully productive in all tenses and aspects and with verbs having different argument structures. Stressed *so* does not have the same distribution as other uses of *so* in that *so* in this construction appears to modify the IP or something in the IP, rather than modifying an AdjP or an AdverbP, as *so* is standardly assumed to do (Bresnan 1973, Corver 1997). I also note word order facts about stressed *so*; for example, stressed *so* can occur before a tensed main verb, but not after it (2).

- (2) a. Vincent pulled SO an all-nighter last night.  
b. \*Vincent pulled SO an all-nighter last night.

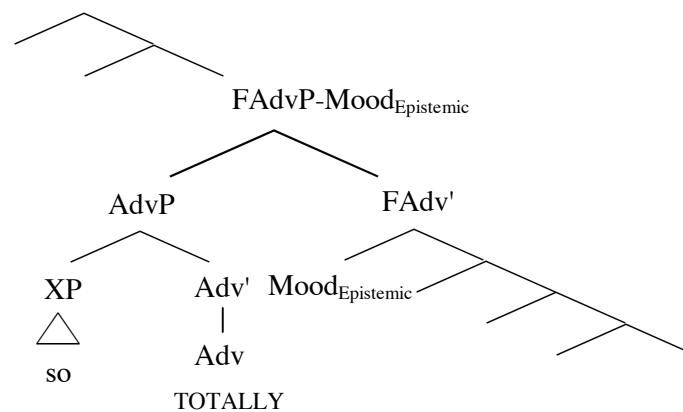
After laying out the basic distribution of stressed *so*, I then use the criteria for exclamatives set out by Zanuttini & Portner (2003) to show that the construction can only occur as an exclamative: Stressed *so* is ungrammatical when embedded under non-factive predicates (3); it evokes a scale and raises a non-defeasible implicature (4); and sentences with stressed *so* cannot be made into questions (5).

- (3) a. I know we are SO going out tonight.                   OK: *know* is factive  
b. \*I think that we are SO going out tonight.           BAD: *think* is not factive
- (4) a. We are SO going to party tonight.... we’re even going to get out the grill.  
b. #We are SO going to party tonight ... though maybe we won’t.
- (5) a. That is SO like them lately.  
b. \*Is that SO like them lately?

Although stressed *so* differs from other uses of *so*, it shares some properties of other uses of *so*, such as polarity (it cannot follow negation) and scalar implicature, as noted above. The latter quality suggests that *so* here functions as a degree element. Degree elements like the *so* that occurs pre-adverbially and adjectivally are often analyzed as containing unpronounced elements, such as “much” (Bresnan 1973, Corver 1997). I consider the possibility that stressed *so* involves unpronounced or deleted *much*, and then show that this analysis is not tenable, for two reasons. First, *much* never appears overtly in stressed *so* constructions, under any circumstance (unlike the case of comparatives, in which the *much* can appear overtly). Second, a derivation in which the *much* in a [*so much*] constituent starts out overt, moves, and then deletes would appear to violate A’ “ criterial freezing” (Rizzi 2002); on the other hand, if *much* deletes before the [*so much*] constituent raises to the IP domain, this would seem to violate a version of left branch extraction (Bošković 2005).

**Proposal:** My proposal builds on Bresnan’s 1973 analysis (and Corver’s 1997 update) of deleted *much* in comparative constructions; I propose, however, that the unpronounced element in stressed *so* is TOTALLY, and that *totally* here is a Mood<sub>epistemic</sub> adverb in Cinque’s (1999) adverbial hierarchy, not a completive aspectual modifier, as it is standardly considered Cinque (1999, 34, 100). One of the advantages of the TOTALLY analysis over the *much* analysis is that TOTALLY is grammatical in the construction, even when it is overtly pronounced.

(6)



**Conclusion:** This paper shows that a new construction involving emphatically stressed *so* has a unique distribution and has properties of exclamation. I consider and reject analyses of this construction that either involve unpronounced or deleted *much*, or that analyze *so* as an adverb. I propose that the stressed *so* construction involves an unpronounced but syntactically relevant word TOTALLY, which can be overtly pronounced under some conditions.

## References

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