This paper proposes that Southern Aymara, an understudied Andean language, has a verbal superlative degree morpheme, -su, that combines with degree achievements (DAs). I illustrate this with verbs with -cha, a suffix that derives DAs. Intuitively, -su in (1a,b) contributes the meaning of the underlined part in the informal English gloss (1c), where a maximum is reached in the events of John’s dirtying of that table (1a) and John’s straightening of the hair (1b):

1. a. Juwanu uka misa qañu-cha-su-i. John that table dirty-cha-su-3s
   b. Juwanu ñikuta llusk’a-cha-su-i. John hair straight-cha-su-3s
   c. ‘John dirtied that table/straightened the hair to the greatest (possible) degree/extent.’

I show that the sentences with -su, just like the English paraphrase (1c), have an absolute and a comparative reading—the latter interacts with focus, as adjectival superlatives in Aymara are set aside here. I propose that -su involves comparison across events.

**Verbs with -cha.** -cha takes gradable bases and derives DAs. (2,3) mean that John made the theme increase in its degree of dirtiness (2)/straightness (3). Besides the partially closed scales in (1-3), -cha takes gradable bases that have open (4a) and closed (4b) scales (Kennedy & McNally 2005).

2. Juwanu uka misa cha-su-i. John that table dirty-cha-su-3s
   ‘John dirtied that table.’
3. Juwanu ñikuta llusk’a-cha-su-i. John hair straight-cha-su-3s
   ‘John straightened the hair.’
4. a. k’acha ‘beautiful’/ k’acha-cha- ‘beautify’  b. phuqa ‘full’ / phuqa-cha- ‘fill’
   -su added to (2,3), i.e., (1a,b), conveys a maximum. Whether the base does (1b) or does not (1a) provide a maximal degree, -su expresses maximality—in (1a) the greatest possible degree is contextual; in (1b) it is lexical. Without -su (2,3) no end point reading is available. This matches telicity facts (the ablative -tha appears in in-adverbials; for-adverbials lack it): in-adverbials are good with -su (yielding a telic reading); for-adverbials are ungrammatical (yielding an atelic reading) (5a). The pattern is reversed without -su (5b). Based on this, I propose that -su is a verbal degree morpheme (see Martínez Vera to appear for an account of cases without -su).

5. Juwanu ma: ura / ma: ura-tha uka misa qañu-cha(-su)-i / ñikuta llusk’a-cha(-su)-i.
   a. With -su: ‘John dirtied that table / straightened the hair ?*for an hour / in an hour.’
   b. Without -su: ‘John dirtied that table / straightened the hair for an hour / ?*in an hour.’

Morphological evidence suggests this analysis: -su is located next to -cha preceding all other suffixes (Gonzalo 2011), including those that change the valence of the verb, as the reflexive -si, and aspectual ones, as the durative -ska (thus, -su is not aspectual marker). This is consistent with the claim that degree morphemes merge very low in the syntactic structure (e.g., Pedersen 2015).

**-su as a verbal superlative.** Adjectival superlatives have an absolute and a comparative reading (Heim 1985, a.o.)—in what follows, I use (1a) for illustration. (i) The absolute reading appears in a sentence like Bill climbed the highest mountain; this sentence has a reading that Bill climbed Mount Everest, the highest among mountains. I propose that (1a) illustrates the absolute reading of a sentence with a verbal superlative. Under the assumption that degree achievement VPs denote
predicates of events (Kennedy & Levin 2008), (1a) describes an event of dirtying that table the most (=to a maximal degree) when compared to other relevant events of dirtying that table in a comparison set (e.g., it could be a comparison of these events happening at different times or in different worlds). (ii) Adjectival superlatives also have a comparative reading, which arises in a sentence like [Bill]$_F$ climbed the highest mountain, where Bill is focalized. It means that, among a set of relevant individuals, Bill was the one that climbed the highest mountain (but not necessarily Mount Everest). (1a) with -su has a comparative reading when the focus marker -wa is added. The sentence with -wa in the object (6) means that that table was dirtied more than any other thing. The sentence with -wa in the subject (7) means that John dirtied that table more than anybody else. In these cases, that table may not be dirtied to a maximal degree in an absolute sense; what matters is that it was dirtied more than any other thing or that John dirtied it more than anybody else.


John that table-FOC dirty-cha-su-3s  ‘John dirtied that table more than any other table.’

‘John dirtied that table more than anyone else did.

Proposal. I assume the LF in (8) for vPs/VPs of DAs with -su (I assume the external argument is an agent, being introduced by v (Kratzer 1996)). Here I sketch an analysis à la Heim (1999): -su moves above vP leaving a trace $t \in D_i$.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{[(vP Agent(-wa) [VP [Theme(-wa) [gradable base -cha ] ] \text{t_i} ] v ] -\text{C} ] [ \cup \text{C } -\text{su } ] \text{]}]
\end{array} \]

I assumegradable bases $P$ denote relations between individual $x$ and degree $d$ (I assume that $d$s are downward monotonic). I adapt Kennedy & Levin’s (2008) proposal to DAs under this approach: I assume that the core meaning of DAs is derived from $P$ (labeled $P_\Delta$, which I also use as a variable below), which denotes a relation between $x$ and $d$ in event $e$, where $d$ is the result of subtracting the degree $x$ holds at the end of $e$ minus the degree $x$ holds at the beginning of $e$ (i.e., for gradable predicate $P$, individual $x$, degrees $d,d',d''$ and event $e$, $P_\Delta(x,d,e)$ holds iff $P(x,d',\text{ini}(e))$ & $P(x,d'',\text{fin}(e))$ & $d''-d'=d$). I assume $P_\Delta$ results from combining $P$ with -cha (cf. Pedersen 2015) and $P_\Delta \in D_i(e,\{d,d''\})$ ($\text{t_i}$ saturates its $d'$ argument; I use i for the type of events). I propose -su is a superlative morpheme involving comparison of events where degree of change $d$ of $P_\Delta$ in event $e$ is not held in any other event $e'$ in comparison class $X$ (9). I link this to the absolute reading, where a maximum is reached: with top open scale bases, this degree corresponds with the contextual maximal degree (1a); with top closed scale bases, I assume with Kennedy & Levin that lexical means are maximized, which guarantees that lexical maximums are reached (1b). The absolute reading is exemplified in the denotation of (1a) in (10): (10) says that in event $e$ of John’s dirtying of that table, that table was dirtied to a degree (of change) of dirtiness not reached in any other (relevant) event $e'$ in comparison class $X$ (where $X=\cup C$).

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{[(vP Agent(-wa) [VP [Theme(-wa) [gradable base -cha ] ] \text{t_i} ] v ] -\text{C} ] [ \cup \text{C } -\text{su } ] \text{]}]
\end{array} \]

Turning to -wa, I assume it is a focus marker (Klose 2015) in the sense of Rooth (1992), but adapt the proposal in terms of events here. Expressions like (6,7) have an ordinary $o$ and a focus $f$ value, where the former is the standard meaning of the expression under consideration and the latter is the set of alternatives. Of importance here for $f$ are focalized individuals, so $f$ of (6,7) will vary depending on which individual is focalized with -wa, i.e., the theme (6) or the agent (7). The set of event predicate alternatives are represented in (11,13) for (6,7), where comparison class $X$ is a subset of these sets (Heim 1999). $o$ of VP/vP of (6,7) (cf. (8)) is represented in (12,14). The
relative reading follows from this. It depends on the focus alternatives: what is relevant is that that table is dirtied more than any other thing (12) or that John dirtied that table more than anyone else (14). Thus, only a relative (not an absolute) maximum need be reached.

(11) \[ f = \{ \lambda e [ag(j,e) & dirty_A(x,d,e)] \mid x \in D_e \land d \in D_d \} \]

(12) \[ \forall e \exists d [ag(j,e) & dirty_A(t,d,e)] \]

(13) \[ f = \{ \lambda e [ag(x,e) & dirty_A(t,d,e)] \mid x \in D_e \land d \in D_d \} \]

(14) \[ \forall e \exists d [ag(j,e) & dirty_A(t,d,e)] \]

**Conclusion.** This paper proposes to extend the domain of superlatives beyond adjectives. Aymara illustrates the case of a language with a verbal superlative combining with DAs. I claim that it involves comparison of events, which can be sensitive to focus, just like adjectival superlatives.

**References**


