**Evaluativity and Structural Competition**

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**Introduction.** Certain degree expressions are associated with unexpected evaluative presuppositions which are not predictable from the semantics traditionally assumed. Evaluativity is the phenomenon by which the interpretation of an adjective in a given construction is dependent on a contextual standard (Rett 2008, 2015; Breakstone 2014).

(1) a. Athos is taller than Porthos
   b. Porthos is shorter than Athos
   c. Athos is less short than Porthos ⇝ Athos and Porthos are short
   d. Athos is more tall than Porthos ⇝ Athos and Porthos are tall

The goal of this paper is to account for the distribution of evaluative presuppositions in the environments described in (1) using a (de)-compositional analysis of degree expressions.

**A previous approach.** Rett (2008, 2015) proposes that evaluativity is contributed by an independent morpheme eval (4), which can optionally modify gradable properties:

\[ \text{J}_{\text{tall}} K(x) = \lambda d. \text{tall}(x,d) \]
\[ \text{J}_{\text{short}} K(x) = \lambda d. \text{short}(x,d) \]
\[ \text{J}_{\text{eval}} K = \lambda \text{Adj}. \langle d,t \rangle. \lambda d. \text{Adj}(d) \wedge d > s, \text{for some contextual standard } s. \]

The use of eval is conditioned by a markedness competition in which marked adjectives or marked degree heads are licensed only if they yield different truth conditions than those obtained with their unmarked counterparts. For example, the non-evaluative parse of (5) is precluded by the non-evaluative parse of (6) because the two LFs are semantically equivalent and less/short are marked whereas -er/tall are unmarked.

(5) Aramis is less short than Porthos. (without eval)

\[ \text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{short}(aramis,d)) < \text{MAX} (\lambda d'. \text{short}(porthos,d')) \]

(6) Aramis is taller than Porthos. (without eval)

\[ \text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{tall}(aramis,d)) > \text{MAX} (\lambda d'. \text{tall}(porthos,d')) \]

**Weaknesses of the analysis.** The pragmatic competition account does not fully provide us with a way of deciding what competes with what. Instead, it must stipulate the candidates for competition without providing a theory of markedness.

**Analysis.** I will argue with Rett (2008, 2015) that evaluativity is contributed by eval, and that it is sometimes obligatory because of a semantic competition. I will show that a decompositional approach of degree expressions introduces the right metrics for competition: structural complexity. I will offer a principled way for generating the candidates that are subject to semantic competition. I will provide further arguments for the morpheme eval by showing that its distribution can be explained by independently motivated claims about morphology.

**Motivating Structural competition.** According to the Syntactic Negation Theory of Antonymy (Heim 2007, 2008; Büring 2007), the semantic primitives of comparison are the comparative head (‘-er’) (7) and positive antonyms (like ‘tall’). In addition, a negative operator little, which amounts to a negation for gradable adjectives, relates positive antonyms to their negative counterpart. That is, short is derived from the complex underlying structure: [A little [A t subj tall]] (see (9)).

\[ [\text{-er}] = \lambda D'_j.D' D \supset D' \]
\[ [\text{little}] = \lambda \text{Adj}(d). \lambda d. \text{Adj}(d) = 0 \]
\[ [\text{little}]( [\text{tall}](x)) = \lambda d'. \neg \text{tall}(x,d') \]
Independently of its semantic contribution, LITTLE exhibits a flexible morphological distribution: it is pronounced short or less depending on the constituent it gets spelled out with (Heim 2008, Bobaljik 2013) ((11) and (10)). In addition, following Bresnan (1973), I assume the spellout of more in (12) where much is semantically vacuous.

(10) [little tall] = short (11) [-er little] = less (12) [-er much] = more

The decompositional analysis provides us with a metric for comparing degree expressions:

(13) Hierarchy of DegPs in term of Structural complexity
[-er tall](taller)<[-er little tall](shorter, less tall)<[-er little little tall](less short)

The competition between pairs of degree expressions is governed by Minimize DegPs! (adapted from Scope Economy, Marty (2017)), a grammatical principle which rules out redundant DegPs under semantic equivalence with structurally simpler alternatives. For example, one of the competitors for LF2 in (15a) includes an LF that contains the degree expression taller as in (14a). The competitor in (14a) is derived via deletion of sub-constituents (in accordance with Katzir (2007)’s definition of Structural alternatives) and is therefore simpler than LF2. As it is also semantically equivalent to LF2, predicting that LF2 is ruled out by Minimize DegPs!.

(14) Aramis is taller than Porthos is.
   a. LF1: [λ2. Aramis is -er tall] -er [λ3. Porthos is wh big tall]
   b. Assertion: {d: a is d-tall} ⊃ {d: p is d-tall }

(15) Aramis is less short than Porthos is.
   a. LF2:*[λ2. Aramis is -er little little tall] er [λ3. Porthos is wh big little little tall]

(16) Aramis is more tall than Porthos is.
   a. LF3:*[λ2. Aramis is -er much tall] er [λ3. Porthos is wh big much tall]

Argument for eval. I adopt a new entry for EVAL: the standard is a contextually provided interval of degrees called the Standard Set (Stdc) (von Stechow 2005).

(17) [EVAL] = λAdj_{(d,t)} : Adj ⊃ Stdc. Adj

I contend that EVAL is a zero morpheme, subject to Myer’s (1984) generalization according to which ‘A zero-derived form cannot undergo further affixation’. It follows that whenever EVAL occurs in a structure, it blocks further -er-affixation of the form it attaches to. As a result, much-support is a structure detector: a) In the perspective of Myer’s generalization, it allows EVAL to occur in a position it would not be allowed otherwise (compare ‘more tall’ in 18b and 18c), and b) in the perspective of Minimize DegPs!, it forces the evaluative parse (compare ‘taller’ in 18a and 18d).

(18) Taller vs. more tall
   a. [-er tall] b. [-er much \(\varnothing\) EVAL-tall]  c. *[-er EVAL-tall]  d. *[\(\varnothing\) EVAL-tall]

The analysis improves upon previous analyses of evaluativity in the degree domain by connecting semantic complexity of degree expressions to already known redundancy effects in grammar. In particular, it is argued that both PF and LF viewpoints are necessary to understand the distribution of evaluative presuppositions in degree constructions. An analysis of equatives is proposed in the present framework that relies on the decomposition of as into [no -er little] as shown in the table of decompositions (19).
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<td>[no -ER LITTLE] (∅ EVAL) LITTLE TALL]_{AP}</td>
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References


