ON THE ASPECTUAL PROPERTIES OF ADJECTIVES
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1. Goals and hypotheses. The goal of this talk is to show that (a) the aspectual properties of adjectives [As, henceforth] are aligned with their gradability properties: the (aspectual) property of being an individual or stage-level A [IL, SL, henceforth] is aligned with the property of being a relative or absolute A (in the sense of Toledo & Sasoon –henceforth, T&S- 2011a,b); (b) the gradability properties of As are built up in the syntax, following an exo-skeletal approach (as Husband 2012, Park 2008 suggest). To achieve these goals, we focus on the distribution of As as predicates with the Spanish copulas ser and estar (be) and also with depictive secondary predicates in Spanish (henceforth DSPs) traditionally accounted for in aspectual terms (ser combines with IL As, estar with SL As; DSPs are always SL predicates). We will show that ser combines with relative As (and non-scalar ones), and estar with absolute As; so that no aspectual classification of As is needed to account for these data. Moreover, if, as T&S (2011b) claim, the connection between SL vs. IL and absolute vs. relative As also obtains in other cases, it can be proposed that the aspectual properties of As derive from their gradability properties. We will also show that virtually any adjective can combine with ser and with estar (being interpreted as a relative or absolute A in each case). We thus conclude that the relative/absolute distinction is not a lexical property of As, but is built up in the syntax via combination of a root with a functional node (where the positive morpheme [pos] generates).

2. Adjectives with ser / estar and DSPs. It has been generally claimed that As like falso ‘forged’ combine with ser; As like lleno ‘full’ combine with estar and As like alto ‘tall’ combine with ser/estar, sometimes with different interpretations and different subjects. The general claim in the literature is that the aspectual properties of As explain this distribution: IL As combine with ser, SL As combine with estar. In the same line, DSPs can be only SL adjectives; ILs adjectives are not able to appear in these environments, neither ambivalent adjectives (Juan llegó a casa contento/*inteligente ‘John arrived home happy / *intelligent’).

3. Theoretical background: adjectives and gradability. As are classified into gradable (alto ‘tall’) and non-gradable ones (semanal ‘weekly’). The former are further classified into relative and absolute As. According to T&S (2011), gradable As require a standard of comparison established in relation to a comparison class to be interpreted. The comparison class depends on the individual the A is predicated of, and can be established based on variance between individuals (this defines relative As, which are decoded relative to an extensional category, generating a ‘between individuals interpretation’ in the index of evaluation) or based on variance within the same individual (this defines absolute As; decoded relative to a counterpart comparison class and giving rise to an interpretation in which the A’s argument is compared to its counterparts in different indices). An economy principle applies in the selection of the standard of comparison for each class of As, which accounts for the default association of absolute As with endpoint standards, and relative As with midpoint standards. In This towel is wet (Esta toalla está húmeda), the A is interpreted as absolute. The comparison class includes counterparts of the towel which manifest different levels of wetness. Thus, the class is highly restricted by what is conceived as normal for that towel, including a counterpart that is regarded as minimally wet. Therefore, the economy principle dictates the sentence receives an interpretation based on a minimum endpoint standard. For The boy is tall (El niño es alto), the adjective evoke an extensional-category comparison class, there are no individuals that can be regarded as maximally or minimally tall, so that a midpoint standard is selected. It receives a relative interpretation. Relative and absolute As behave differently in comparatives, as shown by the entailments in (1), (2) and (3).

1 Relative As: X is more ADJ than Y \(\rightarrow\) X/Yis (not) ADJ
   ‘Ana es más alta/inteligente que Eva \(\rightarrow\) [A. / E. (no) es alta/inteligente
   ‘A. is\(\text{SER}\) taller/more intelligent than E’ \(\rightarrow\) [A./E.] is\(\text{SER}\) (not) tall/intelligent’

2 Absolute adjectives (Minimal standard adjectives): X is more ADJ than Y \(\rightarrow\) X is ADJ
   Mi toalla está más mojada que esa \(\rightarrow\) Mi toalla está más mojada (‘My towel is wetter than that’ \(\rightarrow\) ‘My t. is wet’)

3 Maximal standard adjectives: X is more ADJ than Y \(\rightarrow\) Y is not ADJ
   Mi vaso está más lleno que el tuyo \(\rightarrow\) Tu vaso no está lleno (‘My glass is fuller than yours.’ \(\rightarrow\) ‘Your g.isn’t full’)

4 Ser/estar and the gradability properties of adjectives. Our claim is that the gradability properties of As explain their combination with ser/estar. Non-gradable As (4) and relative As (5) combine with ser. Estar combines with absolute As (7); therefore the As in the examples in (7) are absolute As with respect to their behaviour in comparatives, see (2), (3), (8). Note, (9), (10), that even those adjectives claimed to combine only with one of the copulas can in fact combine with both ser and estar, but the A is interpreted as relative with ser and as absolute with estar. So, in (9)a John’s cautiousness is evaluated with respect with
counterparts of John, and in (9)b interpreting the adjective requires taking into account previous stages of the house as a class of comparison (absolute interpretation). In 0b, the adjective gets a between-individuals interpretation.

(4) *El periódico es/stá semanal (‘The newspaper is/ser ESTAR weekly’)  
(5) Juan es {inteligente/alto} (Juan is/ser inteligent/tall), El clima es húmedo (‘The climate is/ser humid’).

(6) a. Juan es más inteligente que Pedro, pero ninguno de los dos son inteligentes.  
‘Juan is more intelligent than Pedro but none of them are intelligent’  
b. El clima en Guadalajara es más húmedo que el de Madrid, aunque los dos son secos.  
‘The climate in Guadalajara is more humid than the climate in Madrid, but both are dry’

(7) La toalla está húmeda (‘The towel is/ser ESTAR wet’). El niño está alto (‘The boy is/ser tall’).  
(8) *Mi hija está más alta que tu hijo, pero mi hija no está alta.  
my daughter is/ser more tall than your son, but my daughter not is/ser tall  
(9) a. Juan está cauto desde su divorcio (‘Juan is/ser cauto since his divorce’)  
d. Cuenta 1, 2, 3 y la casa estará grande (‘Say: one, two, three… and the house will be/ser ESTAR big’)

(10) a. El vaso es lleno (‘The glass is/ser full’) [Someone says to the waiter in a restaurant, who is putting only a little amount of water in the glasses: “No, no, echa más agua, el vaso es lleno; la copa en cambio es solo hasta la mitad” Lit: No, put more water, the glass is/ser full; the cup is only to the middle’].

b. La camisa es arrugada (‘The shirt is/ser wrinkled’).

The variable behaviour of adjectives in this context allows us to propose that the property of being a relative/absolute adjective is not a lexical one, that is, even assuming that the scalar structure of adjectives is a lexical property encoded in the root, the property of being a relative or absolute adjective should be severed from the lexical items (roots) themselves and is carried instead by functional structure. We claim that being a relative or absolute A is a consequence of the root occurring in the environment of a particular type of pos(itive) morpheme (see Husband 2010, Park 2008). The pos morpheme is the functional node that also provides category (A) for the root and introduces the external argument.

(11) Relative tall [posrelative, √[tallopen scale]] – Absolute tall [posabsolute, √[tallopen scale]]

5. DSPs. McNally (1993) defines DSPs as adjuncts that “express a state the referent of their controller is in at the time the state of affairs described by the main predicate holds”. In this sense, since the controller is compared with other stages of it, it seems adequate to propose that a comparison between individuals must be the one we get. In this line, T&S (2011b) point out that DSPs can be absolute adjectives but not relative ones (and argue that this follows from the fact that, as they show, an adjective that denotes transient properties is likely to have an absolute interpretation whereas an adjective that denotes enduring properties is likely to have a relative one). However, as McNally (1993) shows, there are some cases in which an IL A - that is interpreted as relative - can appear as a DSP. Most of these DSPs are licensed when the appropriate context is met. Our claim is that it is the context what gives the adjective the interpretation as a relative or an absolute A, as (12) shows. As the entailments in (13) shows, inteligent behaves as absolute in (12)b:

(12) a. Juan llegó al examen cansado/ inteligente (‘John arrived at the exam tired/ *intelligent)  
b. Juan era un muchacho inteligente, pero el día anterior al examen de selectividad sufrió un shock que le hizo perder toda su inteligencia. Afortunadamente, pasó la noche en el hospital sometido a un tratamiento y, al día siguiente, Juan pudo llegar al examen inteligente.

(13) a. Después del tratamiento nocturno, Juan pudo llegar al examen más inteligente que el día anterior  
Después del tratamiento nocturno, Juan llegó al examen inteligente.  

5. Conclusions. (A) the distribution of As with the Spanish copulas ser/estar can be explained on the basis of the relative/absolute distinction; (B) the relative/absolute distinction is not a lexical property of adjectives.