

ON THE ASPECTUAL PROPERTIES OF ADJECTIVES

Silvia Gumiel-Molina; Norberto Moreno-Quibén; Isabel Pérez-Jiménez

University of Alcalá; CCHS; University of Alcalá / CCHS

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 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/Y is (not) ADJ

Ana es más alta/inteligente que Eva \rightarrow {A. / E.} (no) es alta/inteligente

‘A. is_{SER} taller/more intelligent than E’ \rightarrow ‘{A./E.} is_{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 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/*está semanal* ('The newspaper is_{SER}/*ESTAR weekly')

(5) *Juan es {inteligente/alto}* ('Juan is_{SER} {intelligent/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_{ESTAR} wet'), *El niño está alto* ('The boy is_{ESTAR} tall).

(8) **Mi hija está más alta que tu hijo, pero mi hija no está alta.*

my daughter is_{ESTAR} more tall than your son, but my daughter not is_{ESTAR} tall

(9) a. *Juan está cauto desde su divorcio* ('Juan is_{ESTAR} cauto since his divorce')

d. *Cuenta 1, 2, 3 y la casa estará grande* ('Say: one, two, three... and the house will be_{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* [*pos*_{relative} [$\sqrt{\text{tall}}_{\text{open scale}}$]] – Absolute *tall* [*pos*_{absolute} [$\sqrt{\text{tall}}_{\text{open scale}}$]]

5. DSPs. McNally (1993) defines DSPs as adjectives 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, *intelligent* 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.

6. References. Husband, M. (2012). *On the compositional nature of states*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins · Kennedy, C. & L. McNally. (2005). "Scale structure, degree modification, and the semantics of gradable predicates". *Language* 81, pp. 345-381. · Kennedy, C. (2007). "Vagueness and grammar: the semantics of relative and absolute gradable adjectives". *L&Ph*, 30(1), 1-45. · Park, S. Y. (2008). *Functional Categories: The Syntax of DP and DegP*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern California. · Toledo, A. & G. Sasoon (2011a): "Absolute vs. Relative adjectives – Variance within vs. Between Individuals", *Proceedings of SALT 21*, 135-154. · Toledo, A. & G. Sasoon (2011b): "Absolute and relative adjectives and their comparison classes", ms. ILLC-U. of Amsterdam & Utrecht U.