A distinction between relative and absolute gradable predicates has been discussed a lot since (Rothstein and Winter 2004, Kennedy and McNally 2005). The distinction is meant to describe the difference in scale structure associated with various gradable adjectives – open scale for tall, wide, old etc., scale that is closed on the lower end, like sick, bent, upper-closed – healthy, straight, and totally closed (full, empty, open, closed). Totally open scales are compatible only with vague, context-sensitive standards used in a positive form of the adjective, which is thus a relative adjective; adjectives with closed scales use scalar endpoints as sharp, absolute standards, and form a class of absolute adjectives.

Recently, new insights regarding relative/absolute distinction have been formulated, suggesting that there are deeper reasons for the differences between the two classes of predicates. (Toledo and Sassoon 2011) propose that classification under absolute predicates involve variance within individuals (relevant counterparts being realization of \( x \) in other indices/worlds), and relative ones involve variation between individuals (members of a comparative class as relevant alternatives). Another view, described in (McNally 2011), attributes the contrast to the differences in categorization encoded in the adjective predicates – while relative adjectives have to do with similarity-based classification, absolute adjectives involve rule-based classification. We believe that the construction we will be describing in this paper might help to decide between the two views.

‘**FUNCTIONAL STANDARD’** (**FS**) CONSTRUCTION. The FS construction (term coined in Kagan and Alexejenko 2010) involves a relative gradable adjective and a for-phrase, and very often a low degree modifier is present:

(1) a. This soup is hot for a child.
   b. This car is expensive for someone like me.
   c. This puzzle is complicated for a 3-year old.

(2) a. This swimming pool is {slightly / a little bit / somewhat} deep for a 3-year old.
   b. This mountain is {slightly / a little bit / somewhat} far for me.
   c. The music is {slightly / a little bit / somewhat} loud for me.

The meanings of (1-2) resemble that of constructions with too: in (2a), the swimming pool slightly exceeds the degree that a pool should have on the scale of depth in order for it to be suitable for a 3-year old to swim in. We now turn to the properties of FS construction.

**MEASURE PHRASE** (**MP**) DISTRIBUTION. However similar the too- and FS constructions, they are not identical in distribution. Compatibility with MPs is a distinguishing parameter:

(3) a. This car is $5000 too expensive for someone like me.
   b. This swimming pool is 2m too deep for a 3-year old.

(4) a. *This car is $5000 expensive for someone like me.
   b. *This swimming pool is 2m deep for a 3-year old.

Too-constructions have quite often been analysed as having comparative semantics (von Stechow 2003), and MP distribution supports this analysis, if we adopt the view that MPs are differentials and are thus tailor-made for comparison (Schwarzschild 2005). Non-comparative (bare) adjectives have been argued to not be systematically compatible with MPs, and cases when they do appear together are cases of quite random adjectival type-shift. The conclusion we want to draw from it is that FS construction is a positive rather than a comparative construction, despite the superficial similarity with the latter.

**MODIFIER DISTRIBUTION.** If FS construction is a positive construction, we can try to find out what kind of standard it makes use of. Degree modifier distribution groups it with lower-bound absolute adjectives:

(5) a. {slightly / very / perfectly} {tall, deep, expensive}
   b. slightly / very / perfectly {bent, dirty, worried}
   c. {slightly / very / perfectly} {straight, clean, calm}

(6) a. This swimming pool is {slightly / very / perfectly} deep for a 3-year old.
   b. This mountain is {slightly / very / perfectly} far for me.

The point used as **min** on the scale on (6) is a **max** degree compatible with a certain purpose:
Relative Adjectives - Variance Within vs. Between Individuals.

of gradable adjectives.

Selected References

full

between books (in general) and children of a certain age (typically), that is probably of

individuals (contrary Toledo and Sassoon 2011):

out to have the adjectives interpreted absolutely, and that is what FS construction does. The reasoning behind both

a standard, but have these rules fixed lexically, while for other adjectives there are actual explicit ways to spell them

suggest that genuinely absolute adjectives like

in question needs to be evaluated over a certain 'scale-structuring' (here, 'purpose') proposition. This is very close

what it takes to be an absolute predicate. (10) means that to get shifted to an absolute adjective, the property

of genuinely absolute predicates or getting rid of the solution in (10). This brings us back to the discussion on

keeping them uniformly typed would require either introducing a similar propositional parameter into the semantics

Importantly, FS sentences without modifiers have a slightly different interpretation than expected. They do not

mean that a certain point (fixed on the scale by a purpose proposition) is exceeded, which makes the purpose

impossible to realize. Rather, the meaning of, say, (1b) could be put as ‘with a certain perspective (purpose,

interest) in mind, this car counts as expensive’. Which does not necessarily mean that the price is too high for the

purpose to be reached. The difference is subtle, but there can be a truth-conditional contrast found:

The ‘perspective’ here is introduced by the for-phrase, very much like the judge is introduced, which also provides a

perspective of a kind. However, this cannot be a judge-PP in a standard sense, because expensive is not a predicate

of personal taste – the ordering of PRICE is world-based rather than subjective (Stephenson 2007). However, as

argued in (Paenen 2011), ordering is not the only source of subjectivity in positive constructions. The theory of

split subjectivity identifies a second point of subjectivity – namely, the standard used by POSrel.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION. We split FS construction into two: ‘subjective POS’ construction, where the for-phrase

targets the subjective relative standard, and the adjective remains a relative one; and the actual FS construction,

where the relative adjective shifts its interpretation and becomes an absolute one, the purpose proposition introduced

by the for-phrase providing a min degree. A straightforward mechanical way to account for this would be to add

a purpose proposition as an argument of the type-shifted adjective:

\[
\lambda x. \text{LENGTH}(x) \rightarrow \lambda P_{(x)} \lambda x. \text{LENGTH}(x) - \max \{ d | w', \text{LENGTH}_{w'}(x) = d \land P_{w'}(x) \} 
\]

However, the FS-type-shifted adjectives behave in a way similar to other absolute adjectives with a min, and

keeping them uniformly typed would require either introducing a similar propositional parameter into the semantics

of genuinely absolute predicates or getting rid of the solution in (10). This brings us back to the discussion on

what it takes to be an absolute predicate. (10) means that to get shifted to an absolute adjective, the property

in question needs to be evaluated over a certain ‘scale-structuring’ (here, ‘purpose’) proposition. This is very close

to the view in (McNally 2011) that absolute predicates crucially make use of rule-based classification. One could

suggest that genuinely absolute adjectives like full or clean also refer to certain propositional ‘rules’ that determine

a standard, but have these rules fixed lexically, while for other adjectives there are actual explicit ways to spell them

out to have the adjectives interpreted absolutely, and that is what FS construction does. The reasoning behind both

‘purpose’ in FS construction and ‘rule’ in absolute adjectives are of typical or generic kind, rather than referring to

individuals (contrary Toledo and Sassoon 2011): The book is slightly expensive for a 3yo addresses typical relation

between books (in general) and children of a certain age (typically), that is probably of byuing-for: The glass is full

adresses a rule that refers to a type of glass that is relevant, as well as its usual purpose (wine glass etc.).

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