

Spanish evaluative nouns denote extreme degrees

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Evaluative nouns

ENs are especial because they do not only assign a property to an individual, but also express a value judgment.

- (1) a. La vecina es una **idiota**.
 the neighbor is an idiot
- b. Tu clase es un **desastre**.
 Your class is a mess

(see Milner, 1978; Ruwet, 1982; Suñer Gratacós, 1990, 1999; a.o.)

Questions

- What makes ENs evaluative?
- What is their relation to gradability?

Plan

In this talk I

- delimit the class of ENs
- argue that ENs are gradable and denote extreme degrees of properties
- discuss the consequences of the analysis regarding degree modifiers and subjectivity

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The class of evaluative nouns

Evaluative nouns

- ENs assign a property and express a value judgment.
 - (2) a. La vecina es una **idiota**.
the neighbor is an idiot
 - b. Tu clase es un **desastre**.
Your class is a mess
- The class can be isolated based on several tests

(see Milner, 1978; Ruwet, 1982; Suñer Gratacós, 1990, 1999; Hernanz and Suñer Gratacós, 1999; a.o.)

Qualitative nominal constructions

ENs occur in the first position in the *N of an N* construction

- (3) a. la {idiota / genio} de la vecina
the idiot genius of the neighbor
'that {idiot / genius} of a neighbor'
- b. un(a) {desastre / maravilla} de vecina
a mess wonder of neighbor
'a(n) {mess / delight} of a neighbor'

(Bolinger, 1972; Hulk and Tellier, 2000; Doetjes and Rooryck, 2003; den Dikken, 2006; Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann, 2010; a.o.)

Qualitative nominal constructions

ENs occur in the first position in the *N of an N* construction

- (3) a. la {idiota / genio} de la vecina
the idiot genius of the neighbor
'that {idiot / genius} of a neighbor'
- b. un(a) {desastre / maravilla} de vecina
a mess wonder of neighbor
'a(n) {mess / delight} of a neighbor'
- (4) # la {médica / abuela} de la vecina
the doctor grandmother of the neighbor

Emphatic *un*

ENs appear in attributive constructions with the indefinite article

- (5) La vecina es *(un(a)) {idiota / genio / desastre}.
the neighbor is a idiot genius mess
'The neighbor is a(n) {idiot / genius / mess}.'

(Fernández Lagunilla, 1983; Portolés, 1994; Bosque, 1996, §3.2;
Fernández Leborans, 1999; di Tullio and Suñer Gratacós, 2008; a.o.)

Emphatic *un*

ENs appear in attributive constructions with the indefinite article

(5) La vecina es *(un(a)) {idiota / genio / desastre}.

the neighbor is a idiot genius mess

'The neighbor is a(n) {idiot / genius / mess}.'

(6) La vecina es (*una) {médica / abuela}.

the neighbor is a doctor grandmother

Verbless exclamatives

ENs occur in verbless and independent exclamatives

- (7) a. ¡Un(a) {genio / desastre}, esta vecina!
a genius mess this neighbor
'This neighbor is such a {genius / mess}!'
- b. ¡{Genio / Desastre / Idiota}!
genius mess idiot
'{Genius / Mess / Idiot}!'

(Milner, 1978; Suñer Gratacós, 1990; Vinet, 1991; Hernanz and Suñer Gratacós, 1999; Hernanz, 2001; Munaro, 2006)

Verbless exclamatives

ENs occur in verbless and independent exclamatives

(7) a. ¡Un(a) {genio / desastre}, esta vecina!
a genius mess this neighbor
'This neighbor is such a {genius / mess}!'

(8) a. * ¡Una {médica / abuela}, esta vecina!
a doctor grandmother this neighbor
'This neighbor is such a {doctor / grandmother}!'

Verbless exclamatives

ENs occur in verbless and independent exclamatives

(7) b. ¡{Genio / Desastre / Idiota}!
genius mess idiot
'{Genius / Mess / Idiot}!'

(8) b. * ¡{Médica / Abuela}!
doctor grandmother
'{Doctor / Grandmother}!'

Evaluative nouns

- Express a value judgment
- Appear in the first position in the qualitative construction
- Require the indefinite article in predicative constructions
- May appear in verbless exclamatives

Introduction
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The class of evaluative nouns
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Gradability
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Consequences
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Conclusion
○

Gradability

Gradability

- One possibility for the special behavior of ENs is that they include a degree argument in their lexical semantics (see Bolinger, 1972; Matushansky, 2002; Espinal, 2013)
- ENs pass the diagnostics for nominal gradability

Diagnostics for gradability I

Degree readings with size adjectives and downward-monotone modifiers

(9) La vecina es un(a) {idiota / genio} enorme.
the neighbor is a idiot genius huge
'The neighbor is a huge {idiot / genius}.'

(10) La clase fue un(a) {?maravilla / desastre} increíble.
the class was a marvel mess unbelievable
'The class was an unbelievable {marvel / mess}.'

(Morzycki, 2008, 2009; de Vries, 2010, 2015; Nouwen, 2011; Sassoon, 2013)

Diagnostics for gradability I

Degree readings with size adjectives and downward-monotone modifiers

(9) La vecina es un(a) {idiota / genio} enorme.

the neighbor is a idiot genius huge

'The neighbor is a huge {idiot / genius}.'

(11) # La vecina es una médica {increíble / enorme}.

the neighbor is a doctor unbelievable huge

'The neighbor is a(n) {unbelievable / huge} doctor.'

Diagnostics for gradability II

Modification by degree expression *muy*

- (12) a. Se ve que Richards era *muy* genio
IMPRS see that Richards was very genius
'It seems that Richards was very much a genius.'
- b. Yo siempre he sido *muy* desastre en el colegio.
I always have been very mess in the school
'I've always been very much a mess at school.'

(see also Espinal, 2013)

Diagnostics for gradability II

Modification by degree expression *muy*

- (12) a. Se ve que Richards era *muy* genio
IMPRS see that Richards was very genius
'It seems that Richards was very much a genius.'
- (13) * La vecina es *muy* médica.
the neighbor is very doctor

Diagnostics for gradability III

Degree interrogatives with *cómo de* 'how'

- (14) a. ¿**Cómo de** {alta / guapa} es la vecina?
 how of tall handsome is the neighbor
 ‘How {tall / handsome} is the neighbor?’
- b. ¿**Cómo de** {genio / desastre} es la vecina?
 how of genius mess is the neighbor
 ‘How much of a {genius / mess} is the neighbor?’

Diagnostics for gradability III

Degree interrogatives with *cómo de* 'how'

- (14) a. ¿**Cómo de** {genio / desastre} es la vecina?
how of genius mess is the neighbor
'How much of a {genius / mess} is the neighbor?'
- b. ?? ¿**Cómo de** {médica / abuela} es María?
how of doctor / grandmother is María
'How much of a {doctor / grandmother} is María?'

ENs are gradable

- Degree readings with size adjectives and downward-monotone modifiers
- Modification by *muy*
- Degree interrogatives with *cómo de*

Gradability

Extremeness

Evaluative nouns are not just gradable

The view from adjectives

Being gradable is not enough to appear in the first position of the *A of an N* construction

(15) a. ?? la {alta / delgada / vieja} de la vecina
the tall thin old of the neighbor
'that {tall / thin / old} neighbor'

b. la {espléndida / ingrata / estúpida} de la vecina
the splendid ungrateful stupid of the neighbor
'that {splendid / ungrateful / stupid} neighbor'

Evaluative nouns are not just gradable

The view from adjectives

Being gradable is not enough to appear in verbless exclamatives

- (16) a. ¡{Fantásticas / Maravillosas}, las iglesias de Segovia!
fantastic wonderful the churches of Segovia
'{Awesome / Wonderful}, the churches of Segovia!'
- b. * ¡Románicas, las iglesias de Segovia!
Romanesque the churches of Segovia
- c. * ¡Pequeñas, las iglesias de Segovia!
small the churches of Segovia

(examples from Hernanz, 2001)

Extreme predicates

- Extreme adjectives encode extremeness as part of their lexical semantics (Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997, 2001; Martin, 2006; Morzycki, 2012; Umbach, 2012)
- Extremeness is not a property exclusive of adjectives. Nouns can also be extreme (see Constantinescu, 2011; Morzycki, 2012, 2014)
- Intuitively, in order for someone to be an idiot, just some degree of idiocy is not enough, they need to be remarkably idiotic

Diagnostics for extremeness I

Extreme predicates have their own specialized degree modifiers

- (17) a. Juan es directamente {horrible / maravilloso / ??bajo}.
Juan is downright horrible wonderful short
- b. bastante {??horrible / ??maravilloso / bajo}
fairly horrible wonderful short

(Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997; Hernanz, 2001; Morzycki, 2012; a.o.)

Diagnostics for extremeness I

Extreme predicates have their own specialized degree modifiers

- (17) a. Juan es un valiente {idiota / genio / #médico}.
Juan is a brave idiot genius doctor
'Juan is a downright {idiot / genius / doctor}.'
- b. La clase es un(a) soberano/a {maravilla / *acto}
the class is a supreme.M/F wonder event
'The class is a full-on {wonder / event}.'

Diagnostics for extremeness II

Extreme predicates are not very natural in comparatives, but are better in equatives

- (18) ?? Tus zapatos son más {preciosos / horribles} que los
your shoes are more gorgeous horrible than the
míos.
mine

‘Your shoes are more {gorgeous / horrible} than mine.’

- (19) Tus zapatos son tan {preciosos / horribles} como los míos.
your shoes are as gorgeous horrible as the mine
‘Your shoes are as {gorgeous / horrible} as mine.’

(Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997; Morzycki, 2012)

Diagnostics for extremeness II

Extreme predicates are not very natural in comparatives, but are better in equatives

- (18) a. ?? Juan es más (un) {genio / desastre} que Pablo.
Juan is more a genius mess than Pablo
'Juan is more of a {genius / mess} than Pablo.'
- b. Juan es tan {genio / desastre} como Pablo.
Juan is as genius mess as Pablo
'Juan is as much of a {genius / mess} as Pablo.'

Diagnostics for extremeness III

Extreme predicates also can be intensified via prosodic prominence

(19) Kevin Spacey is {*fantaaaastic* / ??*gooooooooooooood*}!

(20) La vecina es una {*idiiioota* / ??*méeeedica*}.
the neighbor is a idiot doctor

(Cruse, 1986; Bolinger, 1972; Morzycki, 2012)

Diagnostics for extremeness IV

Extreme predicates entail their weaker counterparts.

(21) Tus zapatos son **preciosos**. \Rightarrow Tus zapatos son **bonitos**.
your shoes are gorgeous your shoes are beautiful

(22) a. La vecina es un **genio**. \Rightarrow La vecina es **lista**.
the neighbor is a genius the neighbor is smart

b. María es un **desastre** \Rightarrow María es **desordenada**.
María is a mess María is sloppy

Analysis

- ENs encode extremeness in their lexical semantics
- I implement this using Morzycki's 2012 proposal for extreme adjectives

- The basic idea is that extreme predicates use degrees that are situated beyond the relevant scale
- so if an individual exceeds the contextual scale for dumbness, she starts qualifying as an idiot

dumbness scale: ○————○- - - - -
dumb *idiot*

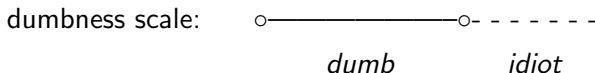
- The basic idea is that extreme predicates use degrees that are situated beyond the relevant scale
- so if an individual exceeds the contextual scale for dumbness, she starts qualifying as an idiot

dumbness scale: ○————○ - - - - -
dumb *idiot*

- Formally,

$[[idiot]] = \lambda d \lambda x. x$ is *dumb* to an extreme d

- The basic idea is that extreme predicates use degrees that are situated beyond the relevant scale
- so if an individual exceeds the contextual scale for dumbness, she starts qualifying as an idiot



- More formally,

$$\llbracket \text{idiot}_C \rrbracket = \lambda d \lambda x [d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x)]$$

Summary

- ENs encode extremeness in their lexical semantics
- This explains their distribution in the *N/A of an N* construction and verbless exclamatives
- and establishes a parallelism between extreme adjectives and nouns

Consequences of the analysis

Degree modifiers

Maximizers

- ENs are expected to combine with nominal degree modifiers
- Adjectives of completeness (*complete*, *total*) are adnominal correlates of maximality modifiers (Constantinescu, 2011; Masià, 2017)

- (23) a. Lucía tiene **completa** libertad.
Lucía has complete freedom
- b. ?? Lucía tiene **completa** sabiduría.
Lucía has complete wisdom

Degree modifiers

Maximizers

In ENs, the degrees above the contextual scale constitute a sort of maximum

- (24) a. La vecina es una **completa** idiota.
the neighbor is a complete idiot
- b. La vecina es un desastre **total**.
the neighbor is a mess total
'The neighbor is a total mess.'

(see Paradis, 1997; Morzycki, 2012 for extreme adjectives)

Degree modifiers

Maximizers

Non-evaluative nouns are ruled out with adjectives of completeness

- (25) a. ?? La vecina es una **completa** abuela.
the neighbor is a complete grandmother
- b. ?? La vecina es una médica **total**.
the neighbor is a doctor total
'The neighbor is a total doctor.'

Consequences of the analysis

Subjectivity

Subjectivity

- Subjective predicates are those for which their truth is relativized to the perspective of a judge
- Prototypical examples of subjective predicates are predicates of personal taste

(26) a. Broccoli is *tasty*.

b. Semantics is *fun*.

- In general, evaluative adjectives (*beautiful, dumb*) are subjective

(Lasersohn, 2005, 2009; Stephenson, 2007; Stojanovic, 2007; Bylinina, 2014; Kennedy, 2013, 2016; Gutzmann, 2016; a.o.)

Tests for subjectivity

Subjective attitude verbs

Subjective predicates can be embedded under subjective attitude verbs (*find*, *consider*)

- (27) Los dinosaurios me parecen **aterradores**.
the dinosaurs DAT.1SG seem.3PL terrifying
'I find dinosaurs terrifying.' (Lit. 'Dinosaurs seem terrifying to me.')
- (28) # Los dinosaurios me parecen **extinguidos**.
the dinosaurs DAT.1SG seem.3PL extinct
'I find dinosaurs extinct.'

(Stephenson, 2007; Sæbø, 2009; Bouchard, 2012)

Tests for subjectivity

Subjective attitude verbs

ENs can also be embedded under subjective attitude verbs

- (29) a. La vecina me parece una **idiota**.
the neighbor DAT.1SG seem.3SG a idiot
'I find the neighbor to be an idiot.'
- b. Encuentro que la vecina es un **desastre**.
find.1SG that the neighbor is a mess
'I find the neighbor to be a mess.'

Tests for subjectivity

Faultless disagreement

Subjective predicates give rise to faultless (rather than objective) disagreement

(30) A: Broccoli is **tasty**.

B: No, it's not.

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

(Kölbel, 2002; Lasersohn, 2005; Stephenson, 2007; Stojanovic, 2007; Bylinina, 2014)

Tests for subjectivity

Faultless disagreement

Subjective predicates give rise to faultless (rather than objective) disagreement

(31) A: Broccoli is green.

B: No, it's not.

CONTRADICTION

(Kölbel, 2002; Lasersohn, 2005; Stephenson, 2007; Stojanovic, 2007; Bylinina, 2014)

Tests for subjectivity

Faultless disagreement

ENs also give rise to faultless disagreement

(32) A: La vecina es un(a) {idiota / desastre}.

'The neighbor is a(n) {idiot / mess}.'

B: No, no lo es.

'No, she's not.'

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

Tests for subjectivity

Faultless disagreement

ENs also give rise to faultless disagreement

(32) A: La vecina es un(a) {idiota / desastre}.

‘The neighbor is a(n) {idiot / mess}.’

B: No, no lo es.

‘No, she’s not.’

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

(33) A: La vecina es médica

‘The neighbor is a doctor.’

B: No, no lo es.

‘No, she’s not.’

CONTRADICTION

- The source of subjectivity in ENs is related to the use of evaluative measure function in their semantics

(34) a. $\llbracket \textit{idiota} \rrbracket = \lambda d \lambda x. x$ is **dumb** to an extreme d

b. $\llbracket \textit{genio} \rrbracket = \lambda d \lambda x. x$ is **smart** to an extreme d

- They are thus expected to be subjective in two ways
 - wrt the cut-off point
 - wrt the ordering

Subjectivity

Subjective wrt the cut-off point

(35) A: Lucía es {*inteligente* / *divertida*}.

Lucía is smart funny

B: No, no lo es.

'No, she's not.'

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

Subjectivity

Subjective wrt the cut-off point

(35) A: Lucía es {*inteligente* / *divertida*}.

Lucía is smart funny

B: No, no lo es.

'No, she's not.'

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

(36) A: La vecina es un(a) {*idiota* / *desastre*}.

the neighbor is a idiot mess

B: No, no lo es.

'No, she's not.'

FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

Subjectivity

Subjective wrt the ordering

(37) A: Lucía es más {inteligente / divertida} que Anna.

Lucía is more smart funny than Anna

B: No, Anna es más {inteligente / divertida} que Lucía.

'No, Anna is {smarter / funnier} than Lucía.'

FD

Subjectivity

Subjective wrt the ordering

- (37) A: Lucía es más {inteligente / divertida} que Anna.
Lucía is more smart funny than Anna
B: No, Anna es más {inteligente / divertida} que Lucía.
'No, Anna is {smarter / funnier} than Lucía.' FD
- (38) A: La vecina es más (una) {idiota / desastre} que
the neighbor is more a idiot mess than
Anna.
Anna
B: No, Anna es más (una) {idiota / desastre} que la vecina.
'No, Anna is more of a(n) {idiot / mess} than the
neighbor.' FD

Summary

- ENs combine with degree modifiers
- ENs are subjective both wrt to the cut-off point and wrt to the ordering

Conclusion

- ENs are gradable
- In particular, ENs denote extreme degrees of properties
- As a consequence, they combine with degree modifiers and are subjective

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