Extreme nouns and maximizers

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1. Introduction

Evaluative nouns (ENs) do not only assign a property to an individual, but also express a value judgment.

(1) Ana es una **idiota**. 'Ana is an idiot.'

(2) Tu clase es un **desastre**. 'Your class is a mess.'

Adjectives of completeness (ACs) modify ENs with a degree reading

(3) a. Ana es una **completa idiota**.
'Ana is a complete idiot.'

b. Tu clase es un **absoluto desastre**.
'Your class is an absolute disaster.'

- What makes ENs evaluative? What is their relation to gradability? (**????**)
- Are **??** instances of degree modification in the nominal domain?

2. Evaluative nouns

ENs occur in the first position in the *N of an N* construction **??**; attributive constructions with the indefinite article **??**; and verbless exclamatives **??**

(4) a. la {idiota / genio / #médica} de Ana
'that {idiot / genius / doctor} of Ana'

b. Ana es un(a) {idiota / genio / *médica}
'Ana is a(n) {idiot / genius / doctor}.'

c. ¡{Idiota / Genio / ??Médica}!
'{Idiot / Genius / Doctor}!

(**??????????**; a.o.)

3. Evaluative nouns are gradable

- ENs get degree readings with size adjectives and downward-monotone modifiers

(5) a. Ana es un(a) {idiota / genio / #doctor} enorme.
'Ana is a huge {idiot / genius / doctor}.'

b. Ana es un(a) {idiota / ?genio / #doctor} increíble.
'Ana is a huge {idiot / genius / doctor}.'

- ENs are compatible with degree modifier *muy* 'very'

(6) a. ? Se ve que Ana era muy genio.
'It seems that Ana was very much a genius.'

b. * Ana es muy médica.
Ana is very doctor

- ENs are acceptable in degree interrogatives with *cómo de* 'how'

(7) a. ¿Cómo de {alta / lista} es Ana?
'How {tall / smart} is Ana?'

b. ¿Cómo de {genio / ??médica} es Ana?
'How much of a {genius / doctor} is Ana?'

Selected references:
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4. Evaluative nouns denote extreme degrees

- Extreme adjectives (ExAs) encode extremeness as part of their lexical semantics (**??????**)
- Nouns can also be extreme (see **???**)
- Only ExAs are acceptable in the contexts in **????**

(8) a. ?? la {alta / delgada} de Ana
'that {tall / thin} Ana'

b. la {espléndida / estúpida} de Ana
'that {splendid / stupid} Ana.'

(9) a. ?? ¡{Pequeño / Románico!}
'{Small / Romanesque}!'

b. ¡{Fantástico / Maravilloso}!
'{Awesome / Wonderful}!'

- Extreme predicates (ExPs) have their own specialized degree modifiers

(10) a. Ana es directamente {maravillosa / ??alta}.
'Ana is downright {wonderful / tall}.'

b. Ana es bastante {??maravillosa / alta}.
'Ana is fairly wonderful / tall

(11) a. Ana es una valiente {idiota / #médica}.
'Ana is a downright {idiot / doctor}.'

b. La clase es una soberana {maravilla / *actividad}.
'The class is a full-on {wonder / activity}.'

- ExPs are out in comparatives, but better in equatives

(12) a. ?? Tus zapatos son más preciosos que los míos.
'Your shoes are more gorgeous than mine.'

b. Tus zapatos son tan preciosos como los míos.
'Your shoes are as gorgeous as mine.'

(13) a. ?? Ana es más (un) genio que Pablo.
'Ana is more of a genius than Pablo.'

b. Ana es tan genio como Pablo.
'Ana is as much of a genius as Pablo.'

- ExPs also can be intensified via prosodic prominence

(14) a. Ana es {fant*áaaa*stica / ??bu*eeeeee*na}
Ana is awesome good

b. Ana es una {idi*oooo*ta / ??m*éeee*dica}.
Ana is a idiot doctor

- I implement this using **?**'s **?** proposal for ExAs
- The idea in a nutshell: ExPs use degrees that are situated beyond the relevant scale
- If an individual exceeds the contextual scale for dumbness, she starts qualifying as an idiot
- dumbness scale: o———————o- - - - - - -
dumb *idiot*
- $[\![idiota]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x.\ x$ is dumb to an extreme d
- $[\![idiota_C]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x[d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x)]$

5. Maximizers

- *Completamente* 'completely', *totally* 'totally', *absolutamente* 'absolutely' only combine with maximum standard adjectives

(15) completamente {lleno / ??alto / ??sucio}
completely full tall dirty

- They are degree modifiers that restrict the value of the degree argument of the adjective G to the maximum on the adjective's scale S_G (K&M 2005)

(16) $[\![completamente]\!] =$
$= \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_G) \wedge G(d)(x)]$

6. Properties of maximizers

modifying gradable adj. (K&M 2005)

1. Entail that the end of the scale has been reached

(17) # El avión está **completamente** lleno, pero puede llenarse más.
'The plane is completely full, but it can be fuller.'

2. Are compatible with *almost*

(18) El avión está **casi completamente** lleno.
'The plane is almost completely full.'

3. Accept exceptive phrases

(19) El avión está **completamente** lleno, excepto un asiento en la primera fila.
'The plane is completely full, except for a seat in the first row.'

modifying *idiot*-like nouns

1. Only if comparing the same individual

(20) Juan es un **completo** idiota, #pero podría serlo más / ?pero su hermano lo es más.
'Juan is a complete idiot, but {he could be / his brother is} more of an idiot.'

2. Not compatible with *almost*

(21) ?? Juan es un **casi completo** idiota.
'Juan is an almost complete idiot.'

3. Accept exceptive phrases

(22) ? Juan es un **completo** idiota, menos en su trabajo.
'Juan is a complete idiot, except at work.'

7. ACs are maximizers of ENs

- $[\![completo]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_G) \wedge G(d)(x)]$

Explaining the data

1. Since the concrete degree of idiocy cannot be pinpoint, the maximum can be recalculated when being faced with new evidence (meeting Juan's brother)
2. *Almost* presupposes an identifiable maximum and it is not able to find it because of the extremeness of the noun
3. Expected for maximizers, oddness is due to the reduction of imprecision maximizers cause

8. ACs as degree modifiers

- Degree modifiers need to be adjacent to the gradable predicate. ACs are only possible in attributive position

(23) *Este idiota es {completo / total / absoluto}.
'This idiot is {complete / total / absolute}.'

- Some degree modifiers are not acceptable in negative polarity environment. ACs get a metalinguistic reading.

(24) # Juan no es extremadamente listo.
'Juan is not extremely smart

(25) # Juan no es un completo idiota.'
'Juan isn't a complete idiot.'