

## Towards a measurement-theoretic typology of adjectives

Donnerstag,  
05.03.2020  
12:15–12:45  
ESA1 O 121

Ivan Kapitonov

University of Melbourne / ARC CoEDL

moving.alpha@gmail.com

I present a novel cross-linguistic typology of gradable adjectives. It is based on scales of the measurement theory and offers an empirically superior alternative to the degree-based parametric proposal of Beck et al. (2009), the main current *semantic* typology of comparison constructions.

Beck et al. (2009) capture the cross-linguistic variation by offering several parameters, which form an implicational hierarchy that produces an implicational hierarchy of constructions available in a language. I draw on data from Kunbarlang (original field work) and Nez Perce (Deal & Hohaus 2019) to challenge Beck et al.'s implicational hierarchy and argue for the need for more fine-grained distinctions. I also argue that these unexpected 'gaps' cannot be analyzed as accidents of lexicalization, since such treatment would render their original proposal unfalsifiable.

We adopt a delineation analysis of gradable adjectives as vague context-sensitive predicates (Klein 1980). They are associated with different ordering structures, i.e. scales of the measurement theory (Stevens 1946, Krantz et al. 1971), thus allowing for individual treatment of each adjective, that is, it affords the level of granularity not only necessary for cross-linguistic comparison, but also admitting of language-internal variation between adjectives (e.g. positive and negative forms, predicates that allow for measure phrases in positive/comparative form, etc.; e.g. Sassoon 2010). These scales form a natural progression of increasing informativeness.

Implicit (or conjoined) comparatives are the ones that employ nominal scales, which can only classify individuals into unordered classes (John is tall, Paul is short). The comparison meaning arises via inference. "Degreeless" languages (such as Motu (Beck et al. 2009) or Kunbarlang) only have adjectives and constructions pertaining to nominal scales. In Kunbarlang, however, some units of measure are lexicalized, which allows for Measure Phrase modification. Ordinal scales, which can express ordered relations, are expressive enough for the morphological comparatives (as in Nez Perce). Differential comparatives require that the adjective associate with an interval scale; ratio comparatives — with a ratio scale.

**References:** Beck, S., S. Krasikova, D. Fleischer, R. Gergel, S. Hofstetter, Ch. Savelsberg, J. Vanderelst & E. Villalta (2009). Cross-linguistic variation in comparison constructions. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 9, 1–66. Deal, A. R. & V. Hohaus (2019). Vague predicates, crisp judgments. In M. T. Espinal, E. Castroviejo, M. Leonetti, L. McNally & C. Real-Puigdollers (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 23, 347–364. Klein, E. (1980). A semantics for positive and comparative adjectives. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 4, 1–45. Krantz, D. H., R. D. Luce, P. Suppes & A. Tversky (1971). *Foundations of measurement*. Vol. 1: Additive and polynomial representations. New York & London: Academic Press. Sassoon, G. W. (2010). *Measurement theory in linguistics*. *Synthese* 174(1), 151–180. Stevens, S. S. (1946). On the theory of scales of measurement. *Science* 103(2684), 677–680.