

# Indo-European microvariation in scalar expressions

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The microvariation of lexical categories and composition in property concept sentences relates to overarching issues of translatability and semantic universalism. The talk is concerned with Indo-European microvariation relating to state measurement and the noun-adjective distinction. Whereas some languages only permit the state measurement of gradable adjectives, such as Danish, other languages also permit the use of nouns and atelic verbs in such constructions, such as Norwegian. Compare the Norwegian and Danish data below:

- (1) a. *Mannen var veldig nerdete / nerd.* [Norwegian]  
man.DEF was very nerdy / nerd  
'The man was very nerd.'
- b. *Manden var meget nørdet /\*nørd.* [Danish]  
man.DEF was very nerdy /\*nerd

Only having one kind of adverb to measure high degree, Danish permits the modification of atelic verbs by *meget* 'very/much', measuring volume, whereas Norwegian permits both *veldig* 'very' and *mykje* 'much' for the measurement of atelic verbs, though with different measurements.

- (2) a. *Lars sprang mykje / veldig.* [Norwegian]  
Lars ran MYKJE / VELDIG  
'Lars ran a lot / intensely.'
- b. *Lars løb meget.* [Danish]  
Lars ran MEGET  
'Lars ran a lot.'

To produce a Danish sentence with a similar interpretation as (2b), one would need to add a manner adverb like *intest* 'intensely', like in English. The *very/much* distinction provides a separation between the measurement of state and volume. I suggest a connection between the *very/much*-distinction and the acceptability of Deg NP constructions.

The goal of the talk is to explore this adjective-noun variation in degree constructions across Indo-European, specifically considering Mainland Scandinavian, English, Spanish and Italian. The kinds of concepts modifiable by degree appear similar across these languages, in the sense that they all relate to some overarching value associated with the properties of the concept (Knobe, Prasada & Newman 2013; Del Pinal 2015). The comparative approach to degree modification is not new (see, e.g. Wellwood 2015; Fleischhauer 2016); however, observing high degree expressions cross-linguistically may provide some insight into how measurement spans across lexical categories. The *Deg NP* construction blurs the distinction between nouns and adjectives as lexical categories (cf. Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2017), and it leaves us with a more uniform theory of degree modification.

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