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Gradability in the Nominal Domain

This dissertation investigates whether and how gradability is manifested in the nominal domain, as well as the implications this has for theories of the representation of gradability.

It is shown that the various gradability diagnostics proposed in the literature not only yield different results, but that they do not actually work as could be expected. In case after case, other factors turn out to underlie the noted effects: epistemicity and evidentiality (cf. the epistemic verb *seem* and real-type adjectives), the expression of a value judgment (e.g. N of an N constructions), the delineation of salient sub-kinds identifiable by natural consequences (cf. *internal such*) and abstract size modification (e.g. when a size adjective like *big* modifies a noun denoting an instance of a property or a set of individuals defined in terms of such an abstract object).

Our investigation leads to the unexpected conclusion that there are no grammatical contexts in the nominal domain that are exclusively reserved for a particular class of nouns that could properly be called gradable. As a result, there is no motivation for postulating a degree structure in the syntactic representation of nouns. In addition, there are no expressions performing the type of semantic operations familiar from degree modification in the adjectival domain that would indicate the existence of a grammatically accessible gradable structure in the semantics of nouns at the lexical level. The tale of this dissertation is therefore a cautionary one: arguments to reduce gradability in the nominal and in the adjectival domain to the same phenomenon are misguided.

This study shows the importance of a cross-categorical perspective for a better understanding of gradability. It is of interest to a general syntactic and semantic readership.

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