Gradability in the nominal domain

Constantinescu, C.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an investigation of gradability in the nominal domain, aiming to uncover whether and how gradability is manifested in the nominal domain, as well as the implications this could have for theories of the representation of gradability.

Gradability has been studied mostly within the adjectival domain, where different proposals have been made as to its semantic and syntactic representation, though the cross-categorial nature of gradability has also been recognized (Sapir 1944, Bolinger 1972, Bresnan 1973, Maling 1983, Doetjes 1997, Sassoon 2007a etc.). To arrive at a proper understanding of gradability and its representation, its cross-categorial nature must indeed be fully acknowledged and its manifestations across the various categories systematically investigated. Since such an undertaking would extend well beyond the limits of one dissertation, we will confine ourselves to a study of gradability in the nominal domain here, hoping to make in this way one step in that direction.

While in the adjectival domain there is consensus as to what gradability is and how it can be diagnosed, the manifestations of gradability become much less straightforward outside of this domain. It is not easy to find unequivocal criteria based on which nouns can be characterized as gradable. As will be shown in this dissertation, different tests single out different sets of nouns as being gradable. The environments that have been claimed at some point or other to involve gradability often turn out to be sensitive to other factors such as the expression of a value judgment, or the evaluation of whether a property holds or not, rather than to 'pure' gradability. Even in those cases which at first sight seem to provide most reliable indications of the gradable nature of nouns, such as the type of modification seen in *a big idiot*, the facts do not ultimately support an analysis of the respective modifiers as adnominal degree modifiers or operators, and what looks like a degree interpretation (i.e. an interpretation that is similar to those obtained by degree modification in the adjectival domain) is brought about by different mechanisms. In sum, the gradability of nouns turns out to be much more elusive than in the case of adjectives, and much harder to access and manipulate grammatically, if at all. This will lead us to conclude that, at the lexical level, nouns are fundamentally different from adjectives with respect to gradability, more precisely, that they lack the kind of gradability we know from the adjectival domain.

This chapter will first introduce the notion of gradability and the ways it has been approached in the literature, mainly in relation to the adjectival domain, as well as from a cross-categorial perspective. The second part of the chapter tackles the basic

question of how to identify a gradable noun. This section will give an overview of the tests for gradability in the nominal domain that have been used in the literature and show the difficulties that emerge as to finding reliable diagnostics and establishing the status of nouns from this points of view. It thus serves to set the scene for the rest of the dissertation. Section 3 provides an outline of the dissertation.

1 Background and preliminary remarks

Gradability has been mostly approached in relation to adjectives, where it is signalled by the availability of modification by specialized elements, such as *very* (e.g. *very smart*), and by the possible occurrence of the adjective in specialized degree constructions, such as the comparative (e.g. *smarter than John*). Various semantic and syntactic proposals have been put forth in the literature in order to capture this phenomenon. The first part of this section will review the ways in which gradability in the adjectival domain has been approached, briefly outlining the main semantic approaches to the phenomenon.

Although to a lesser extent, the cross-categorial nature of gradability has also been recognized. This has been based on two types of observations. On the one hand, there are modifiers like *more* etc. which can modify not just gradable adjectives, but can also combine with other syntactic categories as in *He ate more soup than me* and *He works more than his brother*. On the other hand, expressions can be found in these other lexical categories as well which seem to denote properties that may be conceived of as holding to a higher or lesser degree. For example, one may be more or less of an idiot, one may like something more or less etc. A consideration of the cross-categorial nature of gradability has immediate consequences for its (semantic and syntactic) representation. These issues will be introduced in the second part of this section, with particular focus on the nominal domain.

A note on the terminology used is in order before proceeding. Throughout this dissertation we will use the term "gradable" to refer to expressions which denote properties that may hold of entities to a higher or lower degree, or whose domain is ordered (see also coming sub-sections for a more precise definition). These have also been referred to in the literature as "degree" (Bolinger 1972) or "scalar" expressions (e.g. Matushansky 2002a,b,c a.o.). We will, however, reserve the term "degree" for those expressions which can modify or operate on gradable expressions and give rise to this particular sort of interpretation. Therefore, we will be talking about "degree words/ modifiers/ operators/ constructions" to refer to expressions such as *very*, *too*, comparatives etc. As for "scalar", we take it to be a more general term which simply describes an expression that has some relation to a scale in the sense of Horn (1972, 1989). There are, for example, expressions which are not gradable themselves and are not degree operators either, but which are scalar in the sense that they may introduce a scale. (*Even*-elements, for example, have been

analysed by Giannakidou (2007) a.o. as imposing an ordering of individuals on P, the predicate of the clause, with respect to a likelihood scale.)

1.1 An introduction to gradability: the view from the adjectival domain

Gradability has been studied mostly in the adjectival domain, in relation to a sub-class of adjectives. In this section we will introduce the notion of gradability and the ways it has been approached in the literature, mainly from the adjectival perspective. We will subsequently turn to considering gradability from a cross-categorial perspective in §1.2, mainly in relation to the nominal domain, which is the focus of this dissertation.

Adjectives are generally assumed to fall into two categories, gradable and non-gradable (Sapir 1944, Bolinger 1972, Maling 1983, Bierwisch 1989 etc.), depending on how easily the properties they express can be viewed as holding of their subject to a greater or lesser degree. This is reflected in different distributional patterns with respect to degree expressions. Compare, for instance, (1) and (2):

(1) a. an intelligent child
b. a {very/ more/ less} intelligent child

(2) a. a parliamentary speech
a'. an Italian film
b. *a {very/ more/ less} parliamentary speech
b'. *a {very/ more/ less} Italian film

A gradable predicate such as *intelligent* in (1) expresses a property that may be manifested to a greater or lesser degree and is thus compatible with modifiers or constructions that express varying degrees of the respective property, such as *very* and the comparative, respectively. In contrast, non-gradable predicates like those in (2) are either true of an individual or not and, as such, cannot co-occur with degree modifiers like *very* and be used in degree constructions such as the comparative.

It should be noted, however, that the distinction is not as clear-cut as it may seem at first sight, and under certain circumstances non-gradable predicates can be coerced into a gradable use (in the presence of degree modifiers like *very*, *too* etc.). Consider the following example:

(3) He is so Italian!

In this sentence, the individual is said to 'have many of the properties typically associated with being Italian', rather than being said to simply have the respective nationality. The adjective is shifted into a gradable meaning. Even in (2)b above, the adjective *Italian* could plausibly be coerced into a gradable meaning so as to describe a film that is not Italian *per se*, but has a number of properties typically

associated with Italian films. This shift in meaning has been referred to as "scalarity coercion" (cf. Matushansky 2002b).

There are two main approaches to gradability in the literature: degree-based and degree-less ones. In a degree-based approach adjectives have a degree argument (Cresswell 1976, von Stechow 1984 etc.), or are analysed as functions mapping objects to degrees on a scale (Bartsch and Vennemann 1973, Kennedy 1999a,b, 2007a). In this type of approach, a sentence such as *John is tall* will mean something like 'John is tall to a degree *d*', or 'John's tallness equals *d*'. In degree-less approaches, the meaning of an adjective is that of a context sensitive or vague predicate (Klein 1980, 1982, Larson 1988, Van Rooij 2008, to appear, Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková 2011). As such, *tall* would correspond to 'a contextually determined set of tall individuals'. In what follows we will briefly outline each of these approaches.

1.1.1 Degree-based approaches to gradability

Degree-based, or 'relational', theories of gradability take gradable adjectives to have an additional open variable slot of semantic type *d* (degree) (Seuren 1973 , Creswell 1976, Hellan 1981, von Stechow 1984, Heim 1985, 1995/1999, 2000, 2006, Bierwisch 1989, Kennedy 1999, Lechner 1999, Matushansky 2002a,b, Bhatt and Pancheva 2004 a.o.). Most authors who opt for a relational account take degrees to be part of the argument structure of gradable adjectives, in addition to e.g. their external argument, therefore their semantic type is $<d,<e,t>>$. Alternatively, gradable adjectives have been analysed as measure functions from individuals to degrees, hence, of semantic type $<e,d>$ (Bartsch and Vennemann 1973, Kennedy 1999a,b, 2007a).

On either version, the degree variable is explicitly written into the lexical entry of the adjective.[1] *x is A* will be true if the projection of *x* on the scale associated with the adjective A is at least as high as the norm or standard degree d_s, for the relevant comparison class, which is the subset of the domain which is selected in a given context, and with respect to which $A(x)$ is interpreted.

As for the sort of objects degrees are, two main views have emerged: they have been analysed either as points on a scale, by analogy with temporal arguments (von Stechow 1984, Heim 1985 etc.), or as intervals (Seuren 1973, Bierwisch 1989, Kennedy 1999, Schwarzschild 2005, Schwarzschild and Wilkinson 2002).

In a degree-based system, adjectives do not start out as predicates of type $<e,t>$ and have to be turned into predicates at some point of the derivation. If they are of type $<d,<e,t>>$, then the $<d>$ argument must be bound first, before the external argument is merged.[2] In case an overt degree operator, such as the comparative, is present, this degree operator will bind the degree variable and turn the adjective into

[1] For an account of the theta-relations involved, see Zwarts (1992), Doetjes (1997).

[2] The same holds in the alternative measure-function analysis, on which they would be of semantic type $<e,d>$. For reasons of simplicity, however, we will henceforth only illustrate the degree-based approach with the $<d <e,t>>$ type.

a predicate. The comparative structure is usually analysed as involving a comparison between degrees, as in (4)a (cf. Kennedy and McNally 2005: 369).[3]

(4) a. [[-er/more than d_a]] = $\lambda A\, \lambda x.\, \exists d\, [\, d > d_c \wedge A(d)(x)\,]$
b. Chris is taller than Alex is [AP e]
c. $\exists d[d > d_a \wedge \mathit{tall}(d)(\mathit{Chris})]$
(where d_a is the maximal degree such that Alex is *d*-tall)

Similarly, measure phrases have been argued to saturate this position. This has in fact been one of the most important arguments in favour of postulating the degree argument position in adjectives (cf. Kennedy 1999a, but see Schwarzschild 2005 for a different view).[4] In the absence of an (overt) degree operator, turning the adjective into the right semantic type is taken care of by a null degree operator, *pos*. In addition, *pos* makes sure the adjective gets a non-neutral interpretation. As shown in (5), the comparative in (5)a does not entail (5)b, i.e. that Chris is tall. This is so because the positive in (5)b is interpreted non-neutrally, as in (5)c. The non-neutral, "above the standard or average" interpretation is attributed to the presence of *pos*.

(5) a. Chris is taller than Alex is.
b. Chris is tall.
c. Chris is taller than a contextually determined standard of tallness .
d. Chris is [*pos* tall]

In fact, as will be discussed in the next sub-section, most of the criticism against the degree-based approach has been directed at the postulated null operator *pos*, both due to considerations pertaining to the adjectival domain and to considerations that arise when gradability beyond the nominal domain is taken into account.

This semantics of gradable adjectives is usually associated with a particular syntax, namely with the projection of a particular functional structure, the Degree Phrase, which hosts the elements performing the relevant semantic operations. There are two main views in the literature in this connection. On one view, DegP occupies the Spec position of the AP and the comparative or other dependent clauses are complements to Deg^0 (Bresnan 1973, 1975, Jackendoff 1977, Heim 1985). On the alternative view, Deg^0 takes AP as its complement (Abney 1987, Corver 1990, 1997, Zwarts 1992 etc.).[5] Doetjes (1997) and Neeleman, van de Koot and Doetjes (2004) argue for the necessity of making syntactic distinctions among degree expressions,

[3] For a quantificational account of degree operators such as the comparative, equative, *too*, *enough* etc., see von Stechow 1984, Heim 1985, 2000, Matushansky 2002a, Meier 2003 a.o.

[4] See also Svenonius and Kennedy (2006) for a different implementation of the analysis of the syntax and semantics of measure phrases

[5] See Bhatt and Pancheva (2004) for a recent discussion and evaluation of the two approaches and a solution to their problems by proposing an intermediate analysis in which Deg is base-generated in SpecAP, without a complement, thus allowing it to be adjacent to the adjective (as in the Deg^0-AP analysis), while the complement clause is late merged in the position where the degree operator is moved to its scope position by quantifier raising (QR) (which accounts for the surface position of the clause) (but see Grosu and Horvath 2006 for criticism of such an approach).

Other types of structures have also been proposed in the literature: Lechner (1999) proposes that AP is in the Spec of DegP, and Izvorski (1995) proposes a DegP-shell analysis.

roughly in terms of their being heads or adjuncts, which reflects their selectional properties: the former would exclusively select adjectives, while the latter would be compatible with all syntactic categories as long as they have the right sort of meaning.

1.1.2 Degree-less approaches to gradability

1.1.2.1 Vague predicates and degree functions

According to degree-less, or "vague predicate", theories, gradable and non-gradable adjectives are expressions of the same semantic type: they denote functions from objects to truth values, and are interpreted as properties of individuals (cf. Kamp 1975, Klein 1980, 1982, Larson 1988, Van Rooij 2008, to appear). What makes gradable adjectives special is that their domain is inherently organized as a partial ordering along some dimensional parameter. Such adjectives will partition the domain, according to a contextual norm value or standard, into a positive extension, including those individuals to whom A applies, a negative extension, which contains those individuals to whom A does not apply, and an extension gap, including those individuals for whom A(x) is not defined. In other words, while non-gradable adjectives denote complete functions, gradable adjectives denote partial functions.

For example, take a domain D of some model as being made up of John, Peter and Bill, and assume an ordering of D according to the dimension of height. Suppose Alex's height is 1.60m, Chris' 1.76m, and Bill's 2.01m. This will result in the set {Alex, Chris, Bill,}. A gradable adjective such as *tall* partitions this ordered domain into subsets relative to a standard *s*, whose value can vary from context to context. For example, Chris could be tall for a teenager, but short for a basketball player. In the latter context, *tall* might impose a partitioning into the positive extension cell $tall_{pos}$ = {Bill} and the negative extension cell $tall_{neg}$ = {Alex, Chris}. Then, the proposition *Bill is tall* comes out as true in the given context, because Bill $\in$ $tall_{pos}$.

In a degree-less approach, therefore, adjectives such as *tall* are interpreted as the property of being *tall*, where what counts as *tall* depends on the context. In this type of analysis, the relation between the subject of predication and the degree to which the property denoted by the adjective holds of the subject is not directly encoded in the semantics of the adjective, but specified indirectly via the ordering of the domain and the contextual standard value. In other words, gradability is not a matter of degrees but a matter of the presence of a (salient) ordering. Consequently, the adjective does not have a degree argument. As such, *pos* is not necessary in the positive form, and relations between degrees are not made use of in the semantics. Instead, degree structures, such as the comparative, are represented as relations between degree functions.

A degree function performs the role normally played by context, in the sense that it fixes the denotation of the adjective, ultimately determining how the domain is to be partitioned. To illustrate, consider a comparative such as *Chris is taller than Alex is* in (6)b. The contribution of the comparative here is to partition the domain of *tall* in such a way that Chris in (6)b is tall and Alex is not. Klein (1982) captures this by

making use of quantification over degree functions, and defining the comparative in terms of a combination of conjunction and negation:[6]

(6) a. $x_0 >_\zeta x_1$ iff $\exists\delta\ [(\delta(\zeta))(x_0) \wedge \neg(\delta(\zeta))(x_1)]$
(where $>_\zeta$ defines the comparative relation for a vague predicate ζ, and δ is a degree function)
b. Chris is taller than Alex is [AP e]
c. $\exists\delta[(\delta(\text{tall}))(\text{Chris}) \wedge \neg(\delta(\text{tall}))(\text{Alex})]$

According to (6)c, (6)b is true in case there is a degree function that, when applied to *tall*, induces a partitioning of the domain so that the positive extension includes Chris, while the negative extension includes Alex.[7]

In order to make this work, one has to make sure that the degree functions that can be made use of are consistent. This is taken care of by the Consistency Postulate in (7) (Klein 1982: 126):

(7) Consistency Postulate (CP)
$\forall x_0 \forall x_1 \forall Q\ [\exists\delta\ [((Q))(x_0) \wedge \neg\delta(Q))(x_1)] \rightarrow \forall\delta\ [(\delta(Q))(x_1) \rightarrow \delta(Q))(x_0)]]$
(where Q is a predicate variable, and δ is a degree function)

This is a general constraint to which possible degree functions are subject. For an example like *Chris is taller than Alex* this will exclude the possibility that there exist two different degree functions such that one of them would make Chris taller than Alex while the other would make Alex taller than Chris. Without the CP, this problematic possibility might arise, given the use of the existential quantifier in (6)a.

One of the advantages of such a degree-less approach is that it does not need to posit the null *pos* marker for the unmodified form of the adjective. Klein argues that a theory without *pos* has to be preferred, as proposals that make use of *pos* "fail to account for the fact that across a wide variety of languages the positive is formally unmarked in relation to the comparative" (Klein 1980: 2). In his view, *pos* is merely a device to "fix the semantics". However, one could object to this that *pos* in (5) might be seen as a default degree operator that introduces a standard of comparison, and as such might be predicted to usually surface as a null operator cross-linguistically.

On the other hand, one of the problematic parts of Klein's theory is the interpretation of the *than*-clause. When looking at the properties of *than*-clauses, there is strong evidence in favour of treating them as involving an operator–variable structure: the *wh*-operator may be overt in some languages (e.g. Italian, Bulgarian etc.), and *than*-clauses display typical locality effects (cf. Ross 1967, Bresnan 1975, Chomsky 1977, Pinkham 1982 , Izvorski 1995, Kennedy and Merchant 1997 etc.). The operator–variable structure is easily captured by degree-based approaches,

[6] We have replaced Klein's original *d* for degree function with *δ*, following Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011), in order to avoid confusion with degrees, which are usually represented as *d*.

[7] The difference between the contextual partitioning obtained in the positive, and that induced by a degree function is that the latter is bipartite, it does not contain an extension gap. In other words, the result of applying a degree function to a gradable adjective is a complete function.

which treat the *than*-clause as involving abstraction over degrees. In contrast, under a Klein-type approach, which maps the information contributed by the *than*-clause into a structure containing a conjunction plus a negation, it is less obvious how the properties of *than*-clauses can be accounted for. There is, however, a recent proposal within the degree-less framework which solves this compositionality issue, namely that of Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011), which will be presented in more detail in the next sub-section.[8]

1.1.2.2 A neo-kleinian approach to gradability

As discussed above, one of the criticisms against degree-less approaches such as Klein (1982), which represent comparatives in terms of conjunction and negation of degree functions, was that it cannot compositionally account for *than*-clauses. An alternative degree-less account that circumvents the problems faced by the original Kleinian analysis, while still not requiring the postulation of additional covert operators, has been recently proposed by Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011) and Doetjes (2009).

As usual in a degree-less approach to gradability, the meaning of a gradable expression is that of a context-sensitive or vague predicate. Gradability is not a matter of degrees but a matter of the presence of a (salient) ordering, and degree structures are represented as relations between degree functions. These can easily be translated into set inclusion relations. This is shown in (8), where δ is a degree function and A stands for a gradable adjective:[9]

(8) $\delta 1 >_A \delta 2$ iff $\delta 1(\mathrm{A}) \subset \delta 2(\mathrm{A})$
(where $>_A$ expresses an ordering relation between $\delta 1$ and $\delta 2$ corresponding to 'being more restrictive/informative')

[8] There is also a different type of degree-less approach in the literature: Neeleman, van de Koot and Doetjes (2004) propose an alternative formalization, based on second-order quantification, according to which a gradable adjective is a set of properties ordered by strength (but otherwise identical). Since a gradable adjective like *tall* denotes a set of predicates (expressing a variable degree of length, ranging from zero to infinity), it cannot be directly applied to an individual; a set must first be selected from this set of sets. This is what merger of a degree expression achieves. In the absence of an overt degree expression, i.e. in the case of APs in the positive form, a covert operation must be postulated to reduce the adjective to a single property. This is parallel to the role *pos* plays in turning the AP into the right sort of predicate in degree-based approaches. The need for this sort of mechanism therefore makes this approach prone to the same sort of criticism that has been raised in connection with degree-based approaches.

Bale (2006) similarly proposes representing gradability in terms of equivalence classes, i.e. the set of all individuals which are in an equivalence relation with respect to a particular ordering relation corresponding to an adjective. Equivalence classes have also been used to define degrees in the degree-based framework by Cresswell (1976). Bale's own account is situated in between the two types of approaches. He does not make use of degrees to define the basic type of gradable adjectives, but defines them as relations between individuals (e.g. *beautiful* is the relation *x has as much beauty as y*), which still makes them fundamentally different from non-gradable adjectives. Subsequently, though, the equivalence classes forming the basic scale associated with an adjective are mapped to degrees (on a universal scale); and degree structures, such as the comparative, are defined as relations between such degrees.

[9] Or, alternatively: $\delta 1(\mathrm{A}) \cap \delta 2(\mathrm{A}) = \delta 1(\mathrm{A})$, where $\delta 1(\mathrm{A}) \neq \delta 2(\mathrm{A})$

As already mentioned, the degree functions that can be made use of are subject to a general constraint, namely the Consistency Postulate (cf. Klein 1982) repeated here for convenience:

(9) Consistency Postulate (CP) [=(7)]
$\forall x_0 \forall x_1 \forall Q\, [\exists \delta\, [((Q))(x_0) \wedge \neg \delta(Q))(x_1)] \rightarrow \forall \delta\, [(\delta(Q))(x_1) \rightarrow \delta(Q))(x_0)]]$
(where Q is a predicate variable, and δ is a degree function)

As shown by Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011), as a result of the CP, the degree functions are nested: they are ordered with respect to one another, from least to most restricted, or maximally informative. The ordering between the different *δ*s reflects the ordering in the domain of the adjective. This is illustrated in Figure 1, where the upward arrow indicates that the highest ordered individual is on top and the brackets indicate which individuals are included when a given degree function applies to the ordered set A (corresponding to a gradable adjective) which consists of the individuals *a*, *b*, *c* and *d*. The most restricted, or maximally informative, degree functions are those which, when applied to a gradable adjective, result in the most restrictive subset that includes the individuals which are ordered highest. This would thus correspond to the highest, or maximal, degree in a degree-based approach. In the situation depicted in Figure 1, for instance, *δ1* is the most restrictive, or maximally informative, degree function.[10]

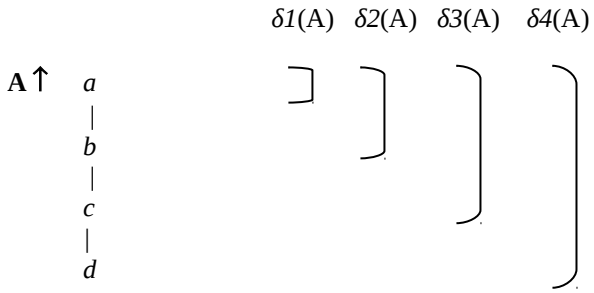

Figure 1: The ordering of degree functions (Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková 2011)

For a more concrete example, consider the English expressions *quite*, *very*, *extremely* etc.: they correspond to degree functions which can be intrinsically ordered with respect to one another. In fact, the ordering of these expressions is independent of the adjective to which they are applied: *quite* > *very* > *extremely*, that is, *extremely* always results in a more restricted set than *very* etc. Note that when a

[10] Note that Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011) define the ordering relation in terms of more or less restricted. Thus, $\delta 1 <_A \delta 2$ expresses that δ1 is more restricted than δ2, while the *than*-clause introduces a minimality operator, which selects the minimal or most restricted δ out of the set defined by the operator variable structure in the *than*-clause. Here, we use the adapted version adopted by Doetjes (2009), where the ordering between the functions ranges from the minimally informative to the maximally informative degree function (cf. Beck and Rullmann 1999). This makes the analysis more transparent to readers used to degree-based approaches.

less restrictive degree function (e.g. *quite*) is applied to an adjective, this will result in a set which includes the subsets that would result from applying a more restrictive degree function (e.g. *extremely*): e.g. $\delta_{extremely} \subset \delta_{quite}$. In other words, the individuals that are ordered highest in the domain will also be included in the subsets resulting from applying the less restrictive degree functions. This is in fact how monotonicity can be expressed in such a degree-less approach, as compared to a degree-based approach which would say that a set of degrees will include all lower degrees.

Unlike Klein's original approach, the alternative proposed by Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011) captures the semantic contribution and structure of the *than*-clause, thus removing one of the weak points of the original degree-less approach. Doetjes et al. propose that clausal comparatives involve a comparison of degree functions, thus making use of the ordering relation between the degree functions. More precisely, the *than*-clause defines the most restrictive, or maximally informative, degree function that, when applied to the adjective in the main clause, results in a set including its subject. In order for the comparative to be true, there should be a more restrictive or informative degree function that, when applied to A, includes the subject of A. A simplified version of the analysis is given in (10)b, where δ2 is the maximally informative degree function including Carmen when applied to *tall* and is provided by the *than*-clause; $>_{tall}$ expresses an ordering relation between δ1 and δ2 corresponding to 'being more restrictive, or informative' as defined in (8).[11]

(10) a. Alice is taller than Carmen is
b. $\exists\delta1[(\delta1(\text{tall}))(\text{Alice}) \& \delta1 >_{tall} \delta2]$

The immediate advantage of this modification of Klein's theory is that it predicts that *than*-clauses involve an operator variable structure, as they involve an abstraction over degree functions. The exact way the *than*-clause is interpreted depends on the type of comparative involved: (i) ordinary clausal comparatives as in (10)a; (ii) subcomparatives involving absolute comparison (such as *The table is longer than it is wide*); and (iii) subcomparatives with a relative interpretation (e.g. *Ben is funnier than Steve is rich* – cf. Kennedy's 1999a, 2001 "comparison of deviation", or Bale's 2006, 2008 "indirect comparison").

Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011) and Doetjes (2009) show that this analysis can account for certain other phenomena at least as well as degree-based approaches, in particular for comparative phenomena such as cross-polar anomalies (i.e. the impossibility to directly compare adjectives of opposite polarity: *??Alice is shorter than Carmen is tall*), comparison of deviation, incommensurability. These are phenomena in connection with which the introduction of degrees as new objects in the ontology had been argued to be necessary. Kennedy (1999a), but also Bierwisch (1989), argue that an analysis in terms of a partitioning of the domain is not sufficient to account for them. See Doetjes, Constantinescu and Součková (2011) and Doetjes (2009) for details.

[11] Given the scenario depicted in figure 1, if A is *tall*, *a* is Alice and *c* is Carmen, the sentence will come out as true, as the maximally informative *δ* such that *δ*(*tall*) includes Carmen (*c*) is *δ3*, and there is a more informative δ such that *δ*(*tall*) includes Alice (*a*) (namely, *δ1* or *δ2*).

In this dissertation, we assume a degree-less approach to gradability is, a priori, the simplest type of account, as it does not require any additional semantic and syntactic machinery, and this advantage becomes clearer especially when gradability across categories is considered. Nevertheless, alternative approaches will be discussed whenever such considerations are relevant.

1.2 Gradability beyond the adjectival domain

Although most of the semantic and syntactic work on gradability has focused on adjectives, remarks on the cross-categorial nature of gradability can be found as early as Sapir (1944) and Bolinger (1972), in particular, who studies gradability across categories in depth (though he does not provide a formal account), as well as in Bresnan (1973), Maling (1983), Doetjes (1997), Paradis (2001), Kennedy and McNally (2005), Sassoon (2007a). In this section we will raise the question of where gradability is to be found outside of the adjectival domain. The discussion serves to introduce some of the issues that will be addressed in this dissertation.

There are two directions from which gradability has been approached outside of the adjectival domain. One is prompted by the observation that cross-linguistically degree modifiers can be found which can combine with other lexical categories as well. These are expressions such as *more*, *enough*, *less* in English, *trop* 'too(much/many)' in French, *atât* 'so(much/many)' etc. in Romanian. These are the so-called "degree quantifiers", to use the term introduced by Doetjes (1997), which can combine with (gradable) adjectives, (certain types of) verbs, and with plural and mass nouns:[12]

(11)	[English]	[French]	[Romanian]
a.	more intelligent	trop intelligent	atât de inteligent
		'too intelligent'	'so intelligent'
b.	more wine (than water)	trop de vin	atâta vin
		'too much wine'	'so much wine'
c.	more books (than pens)	trop de livres	atâtea cărţi
		'too many books'	'so many books'
d.	to sleep more (than Peter)	trop dormir	a dormi atât
		'to sleep too much'	'to sleep so much'

Note that while (11)a is about the degree (of intensity) to which a property holds, and which is said to exceed the degree to which someone else is intelligent, the cases illustrated in (11)b-d involve quantity readings, or what Bolinger (1972) would call "extensively" gradable interpretations. (11)b, which contains mass nouns, compares amounts of stuff, while (11)c, with plural nouns, compares the number of entities. Verbs pattern with nouns: (11)d is not understood in terms of the degree to which the

[12] See Corver (1997a,b), Doetjes (1997) and Neeleman, van de Koot and Doetjes (2004) who distinguish two classes of degree expressions, based on distinct syntactic behaviour: those degree words that can only combine with APs and those that can combine with other lexical categories as well (though they provide different accounts).

property denoted by the verb is manifested in an entity, but in terms of "quantity" of the activity, i.e. in terms of the temporal duration of sleeping, which is said to exceed that of Peter's sleeping. And in examples like *eating more*, the comparative would apply to one of the verb's arguments, i.e. *more* refers to the quantity of the object (food) that is consumed. In sum, in examples such as (11)b-d, degree quantifiers measure and compare along a scale of quantity, while in (11)a they make use of a scale that corresponds to (the intensity of) a property.

A second type of observation is that other lexical categories also include expressions that seem to identify a scale in their lexical, conventional meaning, corresponding to a property that may hold of individuals to a higher or lower degree (of intensity), in a similar way to gradable adjectives. They may be said to be "intensively" gradable (cf. Bolinger 1972). Consider the following examples:

(12) a. a big idiot [English]
b. un gros con [French]
a big idiot
'a big idiot'
c. un mare nătărău. [Romanian]
a big idiot
'a big idiot'

The adjective *big* seems to contribute a (high) degree interpretation: *a big idiot* is 'a very idiotic person'. In other words, the relation between the adjective *big* and the noun it modifies seems to parallel the relation of a degree modifier (e.g. *very*) to an adjective – e.g. *very idiotic*. This shows that there are nouns which allow us to conceive of them as holding of an entity to varying degrees. In this they contrast with ordinary nouns, such as *person*, *lawyer* etc.; predications involving such nouns are typically felt to imply that the entity in question either is or is not identified by the noun. That is, someone is or is not a lawyer; "they may be a good lawyer or a bad one, but their being good does not make them more a lawyer, nor their being bad, less" (Bolinger 1972: 15).

A similar distinction is found in the verbal domain. Compare (11)d to (13) below. One may eat, sleep, dance etc. or not, but whether one eats or dances slow or fast, or much or little, is not reflected in degrees to which entities manifest the verbal property (cf. Bolinger 1972: 15). *Eat*, *sleep*, *dance* are non-gradable verbs, and expressions like *more* etc. only refer to the quantity consumed or the temporal duration of the activity. However, there are verbs which express processes or states that may hold of their subjects to various degrees. One can, for example, *like*, *love*, *appreciate* etc. something or someone to a higher or lower degree. Such verbs are gradable. For example, (13)a is interpreted as stating that the degree to which Peter likes chocolate exceeds the degree to which his brother likes chocolate. (13)b and (13)c similarly compare extents to which the properties expressed by the verbs (*appreciate*, *interest*) are manifested in entities.[13]

(13) a. Peter likes chocolate {more/ less} than his brother.

[13] Examples (13)b,c are from Doetjes (2008) and Sassoon (2007a), respectively.

b. John appreciated the comments less than he should.
c. Today's film interested Dan more than yesterday's film did.

In sum, these two facets of gradability may be summed up by saying that there are two types of scales with respect to which degree modifiers can be interpreted, namely the scale of quantity, as in (11)b-d, and the scale corresponding to (the intensity of) a property (or 'quality scale'), as in (11)a, (12) and (13). Focusing now on the nominal facts, (11)b,c and (12) suggest that gradability in the nominal domain becomes relevant at two different levels in the DP structure, in two different ways. That is, the two types of scales seem to be available in different layers of the structure to different types of expressions. When expressions such as *more*, which are used as degree modifiers in other contexts, combine with nouns, they appear high in the DP structure and only give rise to quantity readings not pure degree readings. Pure degree (intensity) interpretations in the nominal domain are realised by means of modification by (certain types of) adjectives, that are located lower in the DP structure (*big idiot*, *complete fool*, *great patience*, *amazing courage* etc.). This is illustrated in (14), which shows that the two types of expressions, namely degree quantifiers and "degree adjectives", can co-occur within the same DP and they do so in this specific order.

(14) a. more big idiots [English]
b. {plus/ trop} de grands cons [French]
more/ too.many of big idiots
'{more/ too many} big idiots'
c. atâția mari nătărăi [Romanian]
so.many big idiots
'so many big idiots'

Moreover, degree quantifiers like *more* have to appear at this higher structural level within the DP, they cannot appear lower in the DP structure. They only select mass and plural nouns, and cannot give rise to pure degree interpretations.

(15) a. *a more idiot [English]
b. *un {plus/ trop} idiot [French]
a more /too.much idiot
c. *un atât de nătărău [Romanian]
a so.much of idiot

This distinction in terms of structural position and the associated difference in interpretation is not found in the adjectival domain. The facts reviewed so far already raise certain questions. First of all, how can the cross-categorial distribution of (certain) degree modifiers be captured, while also taking into account the somewhat different interpretations they give rise to in the different contexts, namely degree of (intensity of) a property and (degree of) quantity, as illustrated in (11)a vs. (11)b,c above? And how to explain the fact that in the nominal domain they are actually restricted to a quantity scale? This is quite puzzling. Their exclusive

compatibility with plural and mass nouns suggests that they are sensitive to a certain semantic property of nouns, namely cumulative reference (cf. Doetjes 1997) or monotonicity as defined on the part structure of nouns (cf. Schwarzschild 2006), while this property does not condition gradability in the case of adjectives (see discussion in Doetjes 1997). Some suggestions in this connection will be made in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. A more basic question that arises is: what should "gradability" be used for in the nominal domain? Which nouns are gradable, and based on which criteria can they be categorized as such? This is the question that will in fact occupy us in the rest of this dissertation. It will already be addressed in section 2 of this chapter where the tests for gradability proposed in the literature will be presented. From that brief overview it will become apparent that these diagnostics are not unproblematic. In chapters 2-4, we will re-examine some of these environments in more detail and show that in fact they are not good tests for gradability and do not provide conclusive evidence in favour of the existence of gradable structure in nouns that would be (completely) parallel to what we know from the adjectival domain. Finally, the facts briefly above raise the question as to how gradability is to be represented in the nominal domain, semantically and syntactically, especially in view of the two types of interpretations found at different levels in the structure and realised by different means. What is the relation between degree of a property and quantity? Some suggestions in this respect will be made in the concluding chapter, where we discuss the consequences that the (negative) results of the investigation carried out in this dissertation have for the representation of gradability.

Similar issues arise in connection with the verbal domain: the locus and nature of gradability, the consequences the choices made with respect to the semantic representation of gradability will have on the syntactic structures assumed, the interaction with other semantic and syntactic components or layers of verbal structure etc. A significant amount of work has already been done in the verbal domain (see, among others: Abusch 1986, Dowty 1991, Doetjes 1997, Hay, Kennedy and Levin 1999, Vanden Wyngaerd 2001, Caudal and Nicolas 2005, Kennedy and Levin 2008, Rappaport-Hovav 2008, Rothstein 2008, Levin and Rappaport-Hovav 2010),[14] though still more research is needed to shed more light on gradability in this domain.

Indeed, for a full understanding of gradability, a systematic study of its manifestations across all categories is needed. This dissertation will take a step in this direction, by examining gradability in the nominal domain. The aim we start out with seems to be a rather simple one: we would like to know which expressions, if any, can be taken to be gradable in this domain. This is why, in the second part of this chapter, we will review the tests that have been used in the literature for diagnosing nominal gradability. As it turns out, these diagnostics raise a number of problematic issues which will provide the ground for the rest of this dissertation.

[14] In the verbal domain, a lot of focus has been on the semantics of degree achievements, which has received both degree-based (Hay, Kennedy, and Levin 1999, Kennedy and Levin 2008, Rappaport-Hovav 2008, Levin and Rappaport-Hovav 2010, Rothstein 2008) and degree-less analyses (Abusch 1986).

2 Identifying gradability in the nominal domain

The aim of this section is to delimit the domain of investigation to be carried out in this dissertation. In order to do so, it is necessary to identify the semantic and syntactic properties that can be used as diagnostics for gradability in the nominal domain and that could motivate (the linguistic relevance of) a distinction between gradable and non-gradable nouns. Several possible tests for nominal gradability have been proposed in the literature. These include the types of interpretations nouns receive when they are used in particular environments, such as *wh*-exclamatives (cf. Bolinger 1972, Milner 1978 a.o.) and with what have been argued to be degree operators, namely *such*, *quite* (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Birner and Kaplan 2004 a.o.). Another type of test consists of the availability of certain types of adjectival modifiers (i.e. "degree adjectives") which can give rise to degree readings (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Morzycki 2009). Finally, another diagnostic for gradability has been taken to be their distribution in particular syntactic structures, such as the *N of an N* construction (cf. Bolinger 1972, Milner 1978, Matushansky 2002c a.o.) and as nominal predicates with *seem* (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b). In §2.1-§2.3 we will examine each of these tests in turn, showing how they have been used in the literature, as well as confronting them with new data. This is a necessary step especially since not all of these tests have always been applied to all of the same types of nouns in the different works that we will be referring to. For example, while Bolinger (1972) studies the distribution and interpretations of a large variety of English nouns in all these environments (though less in *N of an N* structures), Milner (1978) only concentrates on epithet nouns, including nouns like *idiot*, in the *N of an N* construction (also mentioning their behaviour in *wh*-exclamatives). Morzycki (2009) only looks at nouns like *idiot* and *eater* which can be modified by adjectives such as *big* in a degree sense. Matushansky (2002b) takes a cross-categorial perspective on gradability ("scalarity", in her terminology), but she only briefly mentions diagnostics such as interpretation and distribution in *wh*-exclamatives, with the degree operators *such* and *quite*, and degree adjectives like *utter*, while trying to account for the behaviour of *seem*.

Closer scrutiny reveals that these tests yield diverging results, which raises questions as to the gradable/ non-gradable status of certain nouns, and/or to the reliability of some of the tests, as will be discussed in more detail in §2.4. The discussion suggests that a more careful and systematic investigation is needed in order to sort out cases of genuine gradability from those of only apparent gradability, and the genuine tests for gradability from those that are better treated in a different way. In the coming chapters, therefore, we will re-examine these tests in more detail and propose, in fact, that they should be analysed in quite radically different ways.

This section, therefore, is intended to set the scene for the issues that will be dealt with in this dissertation, by critically evaluating the received view on (the diagnostics for) gradable nouns.

2.1 *Wh*-exclamatives, *such*, *quite* and *more of an N*

This sub-section will examine the first type of environment which has been claimed to point to a linguistic distinction between gradable nouns and ordinary, non-gradable common nouns. This includes *wh*-exclamatives, structures with *such* and *quite* containing unmodified nouns, as well as structures of the type *much/ more of an N*. These have been argued to give rise to different types of interpretations depending on the type of noun used. Consequently, the different interpretations found in the context of these elements, which have generally been analysed as degree operators, can be used to identify the type of noun, namely gradable vs. non-gradable. In addition, in the case of *such*, this difference in interpretation also correlates with a difference in distribution: it has been claimed that only when such structures contain gradable nouns can they be used as exclamatives and with result clauses.

2.1.1 *Wh*-exclamatives

It has been argued that nominal *wh*-exclamatives (i.e. those containing unmodified nouns) receive different types of interpretations depending on the type of noun used (Bolinger 1972, Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982, Matushansky 2002b etc.); this distinction in interpretation can thus be used as a test to identify the type of noun, namely gradable or non-gradable.

Consider, to start with, the following example:

(16) What an idiot John is!

In this example, the exclamation is about the degree to which John has the property denoted by the nouns *idiot*. The sentence is equivalent to one containing the corresponding adjective: *how idiotic John is!* In other words, the *wh*-exclamative is interpreted as intensifying some gradable property inherent to the lexical meaning of the noun, namely idiocy. Bolinger (1972) calls this the "intensifying" use of *what*; we will henceforth refer to it as the "internal degree" interpretation. Now compare this to the following example:

(17) What a guy John is!

Here, John is simply identified as a particular type of individual, as characterized by some external property which is left implicit. Being a guy is assumed, and the surprise is directed at this implicit quality, external to the fact of being a guy, such as being extraordinarily or surprisingly reckless, inventive, amusing etc. Bolinger (1972) calls this the "identifying" use of *what*. This label is somewhat misleading though, since with *wh*-exclamatives there is always a sense of intensification. The difference between cases like (16) and (17) lies rather in whether the property which triggers the exclamation is contained in the meaning of the noun itself, or whether it is external to the lexical meaning of the noun and is to be somehow inferred from

the context. For this reason, we will use the term "external (degree)" interpretation to refer to the sort of interpretation found in examples like (17).

Bolinger (1972) notes that what may have an external reading in (16) too: the sentence could be uttered when what is unexpected is not the high degree of idiocy, but some other property someone who is idiotic may be distinguished by – e.g. he is a very friendly idiot. Nevertheless, this is not an easily available interpretation (cf. also Matushansky 2002b); the degree interpretation is clearly the default one. Crucially, however, the reverse is not found: the internal degree interpretation is simply not available in (17).

(18) Therefore, while the external interpretation is available to practically any noun, of any type, [+/-mass], [+/-human], concrete or abstract, the internal degree interpretation is restricted to a subset of common nouns. Intuitively, these are nouns that include a gradable property in their lexical, conventional meaning which can be targeted by *what*. These are then assumed to be gradable nouns. The nouns which do not allow the internal degree interpretation and can only give rise to an external interpretation in *wh*-exclamatives, such as (17) above, are taken to be non-gradable. They include no inherent gradable property in their meaning which can be intensified by *what*; the entity under discussion is simply identified as a particular type of N, and the evaluation is always made with respect to some external property that has to be recovered from the context.[15] In sum, this test for gradability consists in the availability of the internal degree interpretation in *wh*-exclamatives. This is what would identify nouns as gradable.

The example in (16) has already illustrated a sub-class of such nouns, namely those which categorize individuals via a salient gradable property, and which are often derived from or otherwise related to gradable adjectives. Other examples include *fool*, *genius*, *(jazz-)enthusiast* etc., as well as certain nouns derived from other gradable nouns (e.g. *blunderer*) or from gradable or non-gradable activity verbs by means of the agentive suffix *–er* (e.g. *liar*, *eater* etc.):

(19) a. What a blunderer!
b. What a liar John is!
c. What {an eater/ a drinker} John is!

(19)a expresses surprise at what serious, embarrassing mistakes or how many such mistakes someone makes; (19)b exclaims at how much someone lies or what outrageous lies they tend to tell; and (19)c at how much someone eats or drinks. So some inherent gradable meaning seems to be targeted with these nouns too, with the difference that, in cases like (19)c especially, it is a notion of quantity that seems to be built into the meaning of the nouns, rather than a gradable property such as idiocy. Another subclass of nouns that qualify as gradable according to this test consists of mass nouns such as *nonsense*, *misbehaviour*, *abundance* (cf. Bolinger 1972), and the whole series of abstract mass nouns naming properties or qualities, such as *wisdom*, *courage*, *dedication*, *patience* etc. (cf. Van de Velde 1996, Tovena

[15] The sense of the evaluation is not predetermined; it may be either positive or negative, depending on context, and usually indicated by the intonation. So (17) above for example may be interpreted as 'what a *great* guy' or 'what an *awful* guy'.

2001). The examples below get an internal degree interpretation, where what is exclaimed at is the high degree of nonsensicality and courage, respectively:

(20) a. What nonsense he's talking!
b. What courage they showed!

In addition to these two classes of nouns, there is another large and more heterogeneous class of nouns that have been claimed to give rise to internal degree interpretations; we include here (mostly count) nouns denoting (abstract or concrete) objects, such as *smell*, *prize*, *deal*, *bargain*, *effort*, *scowl*, *difficulties*; *mistake*, *failure*, *success*, *blunder*, *masterpiece*, *blaze*, *inconvenience*, *extremes*, *trivialities*, *harangue*, *flare-up*, *appetite*; *stink*, *fragrance*, *boon*, *gyp*; *disaster*, *chaos*, *impertinence*, *mess* etc. (cf. Bolinger 1972):[16]

(21) a. What a {deal/ bargain} we got!
b. What efforts they had to make!
c. What a mistake he made!
d. What a failure their enterprise was!

In sum, all the nouns illustrated in (16), (19)-(21) would qualify as gradable by this test since they can receive an internal degree interpretation, though they may differ somewhat with respect to how salient or easily accessible the relevant interpretation is.

An interesting class of nouns is that of nouns denoting professions. Consider the following examples:

(22) What a {doctor/ attorney/ monarch/ teacher/ informant} John is!

These examples all give rise to an external interpretation. What is interesting to note is that the most prominent interpretation is one in which what is being exclaimed at is the quality with which John performs the respective jobs, i.e. he is good or bad as a doctor etc. Unlike other non-gradable nouns, a profession noun makes easily available what we may call the 'function' dimension along which the individual can be evaluated. Interestingly, informants in fact find examples of profession nouns in *wh*-exclamatives significantly easier to interpret (in the absence of any other overt modifiers) than other non-gradable nouns such as *person*, *house*, *dress* etc.

Profession nouns have also been claimed to give rise to other types of interpretations in *wh*-exclamatives. Bolinger (1972:72-73) points out that in an example like (23) below the exclamation may refer to the essence of being a lawyer – he is the perfect example, the embodiment of a lawyer; he is the perfect lawyer. In other words, it receives what may be called a prototypical interpretation.

(23) What a lawyer John is!

[16] Both interpretations may be available in fact, but nouns may differ as to how salient or easily accessible either one of these interpretations is – see Bolinger (1972) for extensive discussion of the data.

It seems that unlike in the usual external interpretation, in this prototypical interpretation the property targeted by the *wh*-exclamative can be retrieved without the help of context.[17] However, it is not completely clear that this should be treated as a different sort of interpretation. Given that in the usual cases the interpretation can be paraphrased by means of adjectives such as *extraordinary*, *outstanding* etc., and that with profession nouns it is the quality as an N that is being evaluated, it is not unlikely that this may come close to understanding that *x* is a 'perfect N'. The picture is also complicated by the existence of yet another type of interpretation. Consider the following examples:

(24) What a {lawyer/ prince/ scholar/ informer/ clown} John is!

The nouns in these examples may be interpreted metaphorically or figuratively. The exclamation applies to the subject's having properties stereotypically associated with being N, for example being a litigious person in the case of *lawyer*, a nice, well-mannered fellow for *prince*, a very knowledgeable person for *scholar*, someone who tells on people for *informer*, and a funny fellow for *clown* (cf. Bolinger 1972, see also Matushansky 2002b). John is not an actual lawyer, prince, scholar, informer or clown; and the examples may be paraphrased by *–like* adjectives: 'John is lawyer-like' etc. In this respect, this type of interpretation differs from the interpretations discussed in relation to examples (22) and (23) above, where John has the respective profession. In other words, there seems to be a difference in truth-conditions between them. Note also that not all profession nouns can have such uses – cp. e.g (22) to (24). The availability of such interpretations depends not only on lexical or semantic factors, but also on pragmatic ones; it depends on speakers' world knowledge,[18] and as such it is expected that they would be encountered more easily with nouns that refer to professions that are more readily associated with stereotypical images due to clear social status or to being associated with one particularly clear function (e.g. making people laugh in the case of clowns).[19] However, nouns which refer to the same or very similar professions may behave differently with respect to whether such a figurative interpretation is (easily) available, as witnessed by pairs such as *lawyer* vs. *attorney*, *informer* vs. *informant* etc.[20], where the former but not the latter have such uses.

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[17] Bolinger (1972) also notes that the same type of interpretation is encountered in (i) where the noun is prosodically stretched:

(i) That man's not just a lawyer, he is a **l a w y e r** !

This is particularly interesting since the same prosodic treatment is typically accorded to gradable nouns such as *idiot, fool* etc., while a non-gradable noun like *lad* would not be prosodically stretched in the predicate:

(ii) a. *He's a **l a d** !
b. He's a **f o o l** !

[18] Consequently, we also expect the profession nouns that have such uses to differ to some extent from one language to another. In Romanian but not in English, for example, *engineer* may be used figuratively to indicate that someone does not have a very imaginative or flexible thinking.

[19] We will return to a more detailed discussion of stereotypical interpretations in chapter 3.

[20] It seems that the nouns in these pairs which allow the relevant interpretation are those that are more general terms, possibly hyperonyms in the respective semantic field, while those that do not are more specific or specialized either in terms of their meaning or of the registers in which they are used (e.g. *lawyer* vs. *attorney* or *sollicitor*; *scholar* or *artist* vs. *teacher* or *painter* etc.); sometimes this difference

Such metaphorical or figurative interpretations, whereby an individual is attributed properties stereotypically associated with being N, can also be found with other basically non-gradable nouns, whether [+human] (e.g. *man*, *boy*, *child*, *baby* etc.) or [-human] (e.g. *hut*, *palace*, *pigsty* etc.). Nouns are normally used in this way to convey some kind of evaluation, whether positive or negative, and are thus close to epithets.[21]

(25) a. What a {man/ baby} John is!
b. What a {palace/ pigsty} this place is!

To conclude, this section has shown how the interpretations obtained in *wh*-exclamatives may be used as a test for gradability and which nouns would qualify as gradable by this test. In addition to nouns that quite straightforwardly encode a gradable property in their lexical meaning, such as *idiot*, *jazz-enthusiast*, *courage*, *blunder*, *mess* etc., another class that seems to give rise to the relevant interpretation is that of nouns that receive figurative stereotypical interpretations which seem to correlate with some sort of evaluation (e.g. *pigsty* etc.), i.e. the case of (quasi-)epithet uses. In chapter 3 we will return to a discussion of *wh*-exclamatives and suggest that they involve a mechanism which arguably applies in the same way to both gradable and non gradable nouns. As for figurative stereotypical interpretations and (quasi-)epithetic uses of nouns, questions will arise concerning their status when other tests are considered too, namely *such*, and especially *N of an N*. The issue will be taken up in the re-examination of *N of an N* in chapter 2 and in the analysis of *such* in chapter 3, where it will be argued that these are not gradable meanings.

2.1.2 *Such*

Another possible test for gradability consists of the possible co-occurrence, under a particular interpretation, with *such*. Similarly to *wh*-exclamatives, it has been observed that with *such* there is a difference in available interpretations depending on the type of noun used. In fact, based on this observation, it has been proposed in the literature that there is a distinction between a kind or "identifying" *such* and a "degree" or "intensifying" *such* (Bolinger 1972, Carlson 1977, Siegel 1994, Landman and Morzycki 2003, Wood 2002, Landman 2006 a.o.).[22]

correlates with a difference in the morphological make-up of the nouns (e.g. *informer* vs. *informant*). The latter aspect will not be investigated here; for more discussion of (the availability of) the type of interpretation found in examples like (24) above, see chapter 2 (§3.3.1.2, §3.3.2.2). chapter 3 (§3.4.1), chapter 4 (§2.1).

[21] Epithets are noun phrases used to characterize the nature of an individual (e.g. *bastard*, *sissy*, *jerk* etc.; often based on stereotyped metaphors: *trash*, *wreck*, *angel*, *jewel*, *mouse*, *pig*, *dog* etc.) and contribute mainly affective meaning, which is typically negative: contempt, anger, irony etc. (cf. Bolinger 1972, see also Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982, and chapter 2 for a discussion of epithets). As such, when they are used in exclamatives, there is no ambiguity as to the orientation of the evaluation (cf. Milner 1978).

[22] Bolinger (1972) actually points out that while "identifier" *such* identifies a particular (type of) individual, "intensifier" *such* also identifies, though not with a particular individual, but with a particular degree, and the difference can be assigned to the semantic component of the noun that is determined by *such*: "individuality" with non-gradable nouns, "degree" of some quality with gradable nouns.

Consider the following example taken from Bolinger (1972):

(26) Such a person always frightens me.

Here, *such* is used to identify a particular type of individual based on (or, more precisely, by co-reference with) some external property that is to be recovered from the linguistic or extra-linguistic context, i.e. anaphorically or deictically. This is the "identifying" use of *such*, or the "kind" *such*. In (27) below, on the other hand, a different interpretation is available:

(27) We cannot hire such an idiot.

This example can be interpreted in terms of the high degree to which the property denoted by the noun, namely idiocy, holds of the individual in question. *Such an idiot* is equivalent to a structure containing the corresponding adjective: 'someone who is *so idiotic*'. This is the "intensifying" use or "degree" interpretation of *such*, which parallels the interpretation of *what* in (16) in §2.1.1.

Just as in the case of *wh*-exclamatives, the availability of a degree interpretation has been taken as a test to identify gradable nouns. As noted above for *wh*-exclamatives, a kind interpretation may be available with gradable nouns too, as in (27), though maybe not as prominently. In other words, kind *such* can be used with any noun. But, crucially, there are nouns which are only compatible with kind *such* and not with degree *such*; for example, no degree interpretation is available with nouns like *person* in (26). The nouns that do not allow the degree interpretation and can only give rise to a kind interpretation are assumed to be non-gradable nouns.

Unlike *wh*-exclamatives, where there is always some sense of intensification, even if in relation to an external property, kind *such* receives a completely neutral kind interpretation ('a person of that kind') without any additional tinges of meaning. Under this interpretation, *such* NPs cannot in fact be used in exclamatives, while degree *such* can. They also resist the use of result clauses, again in contrast with degree *such*, and combine instead with *as*-clauses. In other words, the difference in interpretation correlates with an additional difference in distribution. The contrast is illustrated below:

(28) a. *He is such a person that I can't trust him. [kind]
b. *He's such a person!

(29) a. He is such a fool that I can't trust him. [degree]
b. He is such a fool!

The nouns which were seen to allow the internal degree interpretation in *wh*-exclamatives can also co-occur with degree *such*, i.e. with result clauses and in exclamatives, on a degree interpretation of *such*. These are [+human] gradable nouns like *idiot*, *fool*, *genius*, *enthusiast*, *liar*, *eater* etc.,[23] and [-human] nouns, including

[23] Bolinger also notes the following examples of compound agentive nouns that can be intensified in the same way:

mass and count nouns – e.g. *nonsense*; *courage*, *patience* etc.; *smell*, *prize*, *deal*, *bargain*, *effort* etc.; *mistake*, *failure*, *success*, *blunder*, *masterpiece*, *blaze*, *extremes*, *trivialities*, *appetite* etc.; *stink*, *fragrance*, *boon*, *gyp*; *disaster*, *chaos*, *mess* etc. Some examples are given below, which may be compared with examples (19)-(21) in the previous sub-section.[24]

(30) a. We can't afford to hire such an eater to wait on customers; he wants to sample everything in the candy counter.
b. He is such a liar!

(31) a. He was talking such nonsense that everybody laughed at him.
b. He showed such courage in battle that he was awarded the highest distinction.

(32) a. He spent such a fortune on it that he went bankrupt.
b. He committed such a blunder that the department lost prestige.
c. There was such a {stink/ mess} in the room!

By contrast, the nouns that came out as non-gradable according to the previous test cannot be used with with degree *such* in this way, as illustrated in (33), but can only co-occur with the anaphoric or deictic kind use of *such*, as in (34). These are [+human] or [-human], count or mass, concrete or abstract, nouns, such as *individual*, *person*, *guy*, *lad* etc., *house*, *dwelling*; *dress*, *telescope*; *scent*, *award*, *purchase*, *sale*, *transaction*, *attempt*(*s*), *expression*, *situation* etc., *wine* etc.; *information*; *behaviour* etc..

(33) a. *It is such a telescope! (that everyone would want to have it)
b. *They made such attempts!

(34) a. We need such a telescope (as they have at the other station).
b. They have been trying to improve the education system by introducing new reforms for years now, but all such attempts have failed so far.

Nouns referring to professions, such as *attorney*, *doctor*, *farmer*, *postman*, *monarch*, *teacher*, *informant* etc., are also incompatible with degree *such*:

(35) *He is such a postman!

However, some examples are found, such as the ones in (36). Matushansky (2002b) claims that (36)a is interpreted as 'such a *typical* linguist', a paraphrase which is similar to the prototypical interpretation identified above for *wh*-exclamatives.

(i) a. He is such a woman-chaser.
b. He is such a weaver of lies.

[24] Examples (30)a, (31)a, (32), and (33)b are taken from Bolinger (1972).

(36) a. He's such a linguist! (he'd ask for grammaticality judgments even while the plane he's on is being hijacked!)
b. But I'm such a linguist that I'd start subconsciously mimicking the sounds they'd make.

In the previous sub-section some doubts were expressed as to whether this is the proper way of understanding such examples, or whether this interpretation can be reduced to one of the other types of interpretations identified, namely the external interpretation of *wh*-exclamatives (which, in the case of profession nouns is most saliently restricted to an evaluation of the quality which which a given individual performs the respective job or function) or the figurative, stereotypical interpretation. We are now in a position to provide an answer to this question in relation to examples like (36). The former interpretation basically rests on the possibility of retrieving and interpreting an implicit external property. This strategy is not available in structures with *such*, as shown by the ungrammaticality of non-gradable nouns in the specific contexts (e.g. (28), (33), (35)). Otherwise, i.e. if the option to fill in a contextual property were available, they should be acceptable, just as they are in *wh*-exclamatives, and only receive a different interpretation. This suggests that this is not how the interpretation found in (36) is obtained. The latter sort of interpretation, however, is found in the typical degree *such* contexts. That is, if a noun can be construed in a figurative sense, in which it would describe someone who has properties stereotypically associated with being N, then it becomes compatible with degree *such*, i.e. with result clauses and exclamations. Just as noted in connection with *wh*-exclamatives, such metaphorical, stereotypical interpretations can be obtained with (certain) profession nouns, such as *prince*, *lawyer*, *scholar*, *informer*, *clown* etc., but also with non-profession nouns, whether [+human] or [-human], such as *man*, *baby*, *child* etc., *hut*, *palace*, *mansion*; *hovel*, *pigsty* etc., including nouns which are typically used as epithets. These are all illustrated in (37)-(40).

(37) He is such a clown!

(38) Don't be such a baby!

(39) a. Their new house is such a palace!
b. Those '50s Cadillacs were such boats! (you couldn't ride in them for a few minutes without getting sick!)

(40) a. She is such an angel!
b. He is such a {lamebrain/ bastard}!

We would like to propose, therefore, that cases like *He's such a linguist!*, which have been claimed to have a prototypical interpretation, in fact share the same sort of interpretation exhibited by examples like (37)-(40), namely one which involves stereotypical properties associated with N. In the case of *linguist*, these could be showing extraordinary sensitivity to or interest in language, including sounds,

grammar etc. In fact, if one allowed for prototypical interpretations, it would be hard to explain why not just any noun that denotes (a set of) objects which come with prototypes, or prototypical examples, but which lack stereotypical associations, (e.g. *bird* etc.), can be used with degree *such*:

(41) #This robin is such a bird!

We would like to suggest that the apparent difference in interpretation between examples like (36) and (37)-(40) stems from an independent difference concerning the individuals they are predicated of. If the individual referred to by the subject DP is already an actual N, then predicating *such an N* of this individual will result in what looks like a prototypical interpretation. This is because the sentence ends up being about someone who is an actual N, i.e. has the core, definitional properties of N (e.g. the respective job in the case of *linguist*), as well as having stereotypical, non-essential properties usually associated with being an N.[25] It is this conspiracy of factors that makes the respective individual look like the perfect exemplar of the category denoted by the N, i.e. the prototypical N. In case the individual denoted by the subject DP is not actually an N, however, the sentence will only contain a predicate that attributes stereotypical, non-essential properties of N to that individual. This is the figurative use of the nouns in (37)-(40) (and (24)-(25) in §2.1.1). While a figurative use implies a stereotypical interpretation, the reverse does not hold: a stereotypical interpretation does not necessarily imply a figurative use. Nothing excludes that in the domain covered by the stereotypical interpretation of a noun N there will also be individuals that are actual Ns, as long as they exhibit the required type of properties too, i.e. stereotypical properties associated with the kind.

Judging by the distribution and interpretation in *wh*-exclamatives and with degree *such*, it can be observed that nouns which can be viewed as encoding a gradable property in their meaning (cf. examples (27), (29)-(32)) and nouns with a stereotypical interpretation pattern together. In fact, Bolinger (1972) and Matushansky (2002b) argue that the latter are gradable (uses of) nouns. If these stereotypical interpretations are to be regarded as shifts in meaning, then one way to capture this is to say that they arise as the result of scalarity coercion triggered by the degree operator *such*, as proposed by Matushansky 2002b, for example. What would happen in such cases is the following: attempting to combine a non-gradable noun with a degree modifier results in a type mismatch; the repair strategy is this type-shifting operation, which changes the meaning of the non-gradable nouns so that they can be interpreted as gradable. In other words, basically non-gradable nouns are coerced into a gradable meaning. In Matushansky's view, the meaning shift that is typical of scalarity coercion, whether in the nominal domain or in the adjectival domain (cf. *He's so Italian*), corresponds to 'having many of the *typical* properties associated with' being N or A, where "the notion of a prototype or a stereotype comes into play".

[25] Note that we will not have much to say about prototypes in this dissertation, hence we will not elaborate any more on the exact sense in which this notion is used in e.g. prototype theory – cf. Kamp and Partee (1995).

The discussion above shows that this cannot be (completely) correct, since, in fact, an interpretation in terms of prototypical properties cannot be obtained. In chapter 3, we will discuss this class of interpretations in more detail and show that stereotypical meanings are in fact not gradable, in the sense that the domain of these nouns is not ordered (i.e. the individuals in the domain are not ordered by degrees of a property). Moreover, it will be shown that such interpretations are also found in the absence of *such*, which argues against an analysis in terms of scalarity coercion, which views these meanings as 'created' due to the use of the degree operator. It will in fact be argued there, more generally, that *such* itself is not a true degree operator.

2.1.3 *Quite*

A third test that has been used to identify gradable nouns is their possible occurrence with *quite* – once again under a particular interpretation. Similarly to *wh*-exclamatives, *quite* can be used with a variety of nouns, but the interpretation differs depending on the type of noun it modifies (Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Birner and Kaplan 2004), and the availability of a degree interpretation has been taken to identify a noun as gradable in this context too.

The examples below show that nouns which came out as gradable according to the tests considered previously can also be modified by *quite* (some of the examples are taken from Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Birner and Kaplan 2004). In all of these examples, *quite* has been claimed to be interpreted as indicating a high degree to which the property denoted by the noun holds.[26]

(42) a. Adam is quite a genius.
b. John is quite a fool.
c. He is quite a giant.
d. He's quite a drinker.

(43) a. It was quite a flop.
b. Quite a temper he's got!
c. They left quite a mess behind.
d. His new book was quite a success.

Quite is generally assumed to be a degree modifier which denotes a high value on a scale[27]. When it modifies gradable nouns, it can be interpreted with respect to the

[26] It is not always clear where and how the line between gradable and non-gradable nouns is drawn. Matushansky (2002b) claims that the interpretation of the *quite an N* construction differs depending on the inherent gradability of the noun modified, but subsequently adds that it is interpreted as indicating a high degree to which the predicate holds "if the predicate noun expresses personal evaluation". If nouns expressing personal evaluation are assumed to be scalar, one may wonder whether expressing personal evaluation and being gradable are one and the same thing, and/ or what the environments she examines actually test for. The issue of the blurry borders between the notions of evaluation and gradability will come up again in the course of this investigation – see chapter 2 for discussion in the context of *N of an N* constructions.

[27] It seems, however, that the particular intonation and context may influence the exact interpretation of *quite*. Thus, in examples like (i), it may be interpreted, depending on intonation, either as indicating high

scale identified in their conventional meaning (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Birner and Kaplan 2004).

Quite, however, can also modify ordinary, non-gradable nouns, as illustrated in (44). Such examples have been argued to receive a different interpretation. They do not convey the extent to which the referent is an N; instead, the interpretation can be paraphrased as 'a remarkable N' (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b, Birner and Kaplan 2004).[28]

(44) a. That's quite a shirt.
b. That (building/ house) is quite a building.
c. He's quite a guy.
d. That's quite a car!

The objects referred to in (44) are remarkable, exceptional, or noteworthy in some way. Birner and Kaplan (2004) propose that, in such cases, *quite* is interpreted with respect to an external, contextually salient scale; as Ns, the objects referred to in such examples rank high on some (unspecified) scale. In this respect, they resemble (the external interpretation of) *wh*-exclamatives. The shirt, for instance, might be one that is particularly ornate, expensive, tacky, old etc. (Birner and Kaplan 2004:93). Similarly, the object referred to in (44)d must be an impressive car; more often than not, it would be for some incredible design or technical feature.[29] In sum, the sentences assert that the objects referred to somehow stand out among cars due to some feature they have, or their quality, as shirts/ buildings/ guys/ cars.

Consider now the following examples containing profession nouns:[30]

(45) a. William is quite a doctor – last time he performed a surgery, he operated on four patients at once!
b. Martin is quite a linguist.

As Matushansky (2002b) puts it, (45)a "does not mean that William is a doctor to a high degree whatever that might mean, but rather that he is an exceptional doctor". (45)b is also interpreted in terms of Martin being an excellent linguist. For the sentence to be felicitous, he has to have published an impressive number of papers, or sacrificed his life in the field, or done something else that is outstanding. Therefore, such examples seem to involve an interpretation like 'remarkable/ impressive (as an) N'. As also seen in the case of *wh*-exclamatives, with nouns

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degree (i.e. intensifying) or low degree (i.e. attenuating the intensity of a gradable property).
(i) He is quite {an idiot/ a genius}.
In addition, an example like (ii) [see (44)d] may be used to convey either a positive or a negative attitude of the speaker:
(ii) That's quite a car you've got there.

[28] Examples (44)a,b are from Birner and Kaplan (2004) and Bolinger (1972), respectively.

[29] But it could also look ridiculous, for a car – maybe it is as high as a bus, or it is tiny and very slow and some people would be inclined to even call it a car. It would then be outstanding in a reversed sense (cf. fn. 27 concerning the possible positive or negative interpretation, depending on the context, and as indicated by the intonation). This is probably best treated as a case of irony where the speaker implies the opposite of what s/he says.

[30] Example (45)a is from Matushansky (2002b).

denoting professions the salient dimension which is picked by default is the quality with which the individual in question performs the respective job, function etc. In fact, speakers report that a sentence like (45)b would not be felicitous if Martin were remarkable in some respect totally unrelated to being a linguist, for example if he were a very eccentric person (i.e. 'a linguist and an eccentric person').[31]

To sum up, the nouns that come out as gradable according to this test, namely those that give rise to a degree interpretation with *quite*, are the same as those identified by the *wh*-exclamative and *such* tests. Differently from the previous tests, however, nouns used with figurative, stereotypical interpretations are not always easily allowed, though not completely excluded either. In chapter 3, we will return to a discussion of *quite*, and suggest extending the interpretation of *quite* in terms of evaluating an individual as being 'remarkable as an N' (i.e. the sort of interpretation that has been associated with its occurrence with non-gradable nouns) to all cases.

2.1.4 *Much/ more of an N*

Another environment which may bring out a distinction between gradable and non-gradable nouns is what we will call predicative partitive structures. These are structures which tend to appear in predicate position or in positions where a predicative, i.e. property, (re-)interpretation is possible. They consist of a quantity expression (e.g. *much*)[32] and the preposition *of*, so they appear to have the structure of a (pseudo-)partitive. But unlike ordinary (pseudo-)partitives, they combine with an indefinite singular NP. An example is given below:

(46) He's more of an idiot than I thought.

Although these structures have not received much attention in the literature (but see Bolinger 1972, Sassoon 2007a), they are interesting they enable the use of expressions like *much*, *little*, *more*, *less* etc. with nouns on a non-quantity interpretation, which is the interpretation they usually get in the nominal domain: these structures seem to quantify over properties rather than measuring the size of the usual sets of entities in terms of quantity. This makes them more similar to degree modifiers, therefore, and raises the question whether this is indeed how they should be treated. This issue will be taken up in chapters 3 and 5. In what follows, we will briefly examine the distribution and interpretation of these expressions relative to various classes of nouns with a view to seeing whether this can be used as a test for gradability.

Unlike degree *such*, and similarly to *wh*-exclamatives (and *quite*), predicative partitive structures may be used with a variety of nouns. The meaning has been

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[31] This parallels the subsective interpretation of adjectives in cases like *a beautiful dancer*, i.e. when it is interpreted as 'beautiful as a dancer', as opposed to the intersective interpretation (i.e. 'beautiful and a dancer').

[32] The first slot of the structure can be occupied not only by *much*, but also by *little*, *something*, or by such elements modified by degree words like *too*, *how*, *enough*, *very*, *terribly*, comparative forms etc. As Bolinger (1972) points out, this structure enables the incorporation of degree words that are not otherwise used as (degree) modifiers of nouns.

argued to differ along similar lines, depending on the type of noun, namely gradable or not (e.g. Bolinger 1972), so this is what makes the basis of this potential test for gradability.

The following examples (taken from Bolinger 1972) show that nouns that have come out as gradable according to the previous tests can be used in these structures:

(47) a. He's more of a fool than I thought.
b. She's too much of a blunderer for me to feel comfortable with her.
c. He was as much of a liar as all the other church founders.
d. He's {somewhat/ something} of a nitwit, don't you think?

(48) a. How much of an adventure was it?
b. He's less of a burden than it was feared he might be.
c. It was so much of a failure that he decided never to try again.
d. It's too much of a nuisance.

The interpretation of such examples has been argued to be in terms of the degree to which the property denoted by the NP (e.g. foolishness, shock etc.) holds of a given individual. This is similar to the interpretation obtained when a (corresponding) adjective is modified by a degree word (e.g. 'more foolish', 'how adventurous', 'that shocking', 'less burdensome', 'too annoying' etc.) or when a degree adjective modifies the gradable noun (e.g. 'a bigger/ worse fool' etc.). (cf. Bolinger 1972)

The examples below contain nouns that qualify as non-gradable according to the previous tests:[33]

(49) a. It isn't much of a telescope.
b. The BMW is more of a car than the Smart.

(50) a. How much of a doctor is he?
b. Martin is more of a linguist than anyone I know.

The interpretation of these examples has been argued to be different from (47)-(48). According to Bolinger (1972), (49)a can be paraphrased as 'for something called a telescope, it hardly deserves the name'. He also notes that in (50)a, for example, the interpretation cannot be paraphrased in terms of a corresponding adjective modified by a degree word, e.g. '*how medical is he?', as in (47)-(48) above. The examples in (49)-(50) can, in fact, be understood as saying something about the appropriateness of applying the description expressed by the noun to the individual in question, in virtue of the individual exhibiting the qualities or attributes that typically go to make a telescope, a car, a doctor, or a linguist (as Bolinger himself suggests in connection with example (50)a), or meeting the requirements for being called a telescope, a car, a doctor, a linguist.[34,35]

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[33] Examples (49)a and (50)a are from Bolinger (1972).

[34] These include, for example, better quality – not unexpectedly, especially for the nouns denoting professions (similar effects have been seen in *wh*-exclamatives and with *quite*). Better quality also seems to contribute to a car coming closer to the idea one might have of a typical, or "real" car.

Predicative partitive structures therefore seem to quantify over the set of all and any properties that may be associated with a noun. This includes prototypical and stereotypical properties. The former case is illustrated in (51), which asserts that the robin is more appropriately called *a bird* than a penguin, in virtue of it having more of the properties prototypically associated with the kind *bird* than the penguin, i.e. approaching the prototype more than the penguin. In this they differ from *such*, for example, which does not allow for prototypical interpretations:

(51) The robin is more of a bird than the penguin.

(52) #This robin is such a bird! [=(41)]

The latter case is illustrated in (53), which shows that these structures are also easily used with nouns under a metaphorical, figurative interpretation.[36] In all these examples, what counts for the appropriateness of being called an N is properties stereotypically associated with being a child, a boy, a palace, a boat, though the individuals in question are not actual children, boys, palaces, or boats.

(53) a. Marlene is still terribly much of a child.
b. How much of a pigsty is your room?
c. The old Cadillac that my grandpa owned was more of a boat than my dad's old Lincoln Continental.

In sum, predicative partitive structures have been argued to be interpreted differently depending on the type of noun, and as such to identify gradable nouns. The type of interpretation seen in (47)-(48) seems to be about the degree to which the property encoded in the lexical meaning of the nouns holds. Take *idiot*, for example; idiots are individuals characterized by idiocy, which is, intuitively, a gradable property, given that it may be manifested to differing degrees. Thus, if someone is characterized by more idiocy, s/he will be *more of an idiot*, and the other way round. This degree interpretation seems to be restricted to nouns that also came out as gradable according to other tests, and not available to other (non-gradable) nouns. With the latter types of nouns, the interpretation is rather in terms of the appropriateness of calling the individual in question an N. It has been shown in this section that any properties associated with the noun, including stereotypical ones (often associated with figurative uses) as well as prototypical ones, count for this evaluation. As such, these structures have a very wide distribution, much wider than

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Note also that such nouns cannot be used with degree *such* (unless they can be assigned a stereotypical interpretation), as illustrated by the contrast in (i) below:
(i) a. *He is such a lawyer that I know he will win the case.
b. He is enough of a lawyer to win the case.
b'. He was too much of a lawyer not to be able to win that case. (Bolinger 1972)

[35] This makes the interpretation of these structures similar to metalinguistic comparison, where what is compared is not the extent to which two individuals satisfy a certain property, but the appropriateness of applying one or the other description to an individual, as illustrated in (i):
(i) My problems are more legal than financial.
See chapters 3 and 5 for more discussion of predicative partitive structures.

[36] Examples (53)a,b are from Bolinger (1972).

what has been seen with *such*, *quite*, as well as degree adjectives, which will be considered in the next sub-section. This makes this potential test for gradability less reliable – less of a clear indication of the gradability of nouns. These structures will be re-examined in chapter 3 (along with *wh*-exclamatives and *quite*-structures), as well as in the concluding chapter where we discuss the consequences for the representation of gradability.

2.2 Degree adjectives

Another phenomenon which has been argued to be restricted to the class of gradable nouns, and which can, therefore, be used to identify such nouns is modification by certain adjectives with a degree interpretation. To start with, consider the following examples:

(54) a. a big idiot
b. a terrible braggart
c. a complete idiot

In these examples, the adjectives contribute a (high) degree interpretation. For example, *a big idiot* is 'a very idiotic person'. In other words, the relation between the adjective and the noun it modifies parallels the relation between a degree modifier (e.g. *very*, *terribly* etc.) and a gradable adjective (e.g. *idiotic* etc.). This reading differs from the regular use of the adjectives illustrated below:

(55) a. a big lad
b. a terrible doctor
c. a complete description

In these examples the adjectives *big*, *terrible* and *complete* receive their literal interpretation: in (55)a *big* is refers to physical size, *terrible* in (55)b negatively evaluates the quality of the doctor, while *complete* in (55)c describes something which is not missing any of its component elements.

The difference in interpretation correlates with a difference in the type of nouns modified. More precisely, the nouns illustrated in (54) and (55) are nouns which were shown to be gradable and non-gradable, respectively, by previous gradability tests. So the availability of the degree reading of such adjectives identifies gradable nouns.

"Degree adjectives" make up a rather heterogeneous class.[37] Bolinger (1972), Paradis (2001) show that the adjectives that are most often adapted to this use are the ones that refer to extremes, or embody the notions of absoluteness and extremity (what Bolinger calls "hyperbolic boosters"). In this section we will mainly focus on the distribution of three classes of adjectives on the relevant degree reading. The

[37] It should also be noted that the use of these adjectives is often collocational in nature and, consequently, there are many lexical irregularities in their distribution, as well as some differences across English and Romance among otherwise similar adjectives. More examples will be provided in chapter 4.

first class consists of adjectives which in their literal sense express size (e.g. *big*, *great*, *huge*, *colossal*, *enormous* etc.). The second class includes adjectives which in their basic use express purity, totality and veracity (*utter*, *pure*, *total*, *complete*, *perfect*, *sheer*, *true*, *real*, *veritable*, *positive*, *regular*, *absolute*, *outright* etc.). The third class of adjectives that will be discussed includes adjectives which, in their literal use, express psychological or sensory impact, singularity and quality evaluation (*surprising*, *astonishing*, *amazing*, *terrific*, *incredible*; *remarkable*; *exceptional*, *extraordinary*, *unusual*; *awful*, *terrible*, *horrible*, *unspeakable*, *wonderful*, *gorgeous*, *magnificent* etc.); we will henceforth refer to these as "evaluative adjectives". As often noted in the literature (Doetjes 1997, Paradis 2001, Katz 2005 a.o.), these modifiers seem to lose most of their lexical meaning and only retain the high degree component. As can be easily seen, most of these adjectives also have adverbial counterparts that can be used as degree modifiers of gradable adjectives and verbs or of the entire nominal predicate: *utterly*, *totally*, *completely*, *real/ly*, *absolutely*, *surprisingly*, *incredibly*; *extraordinarily*, *unusually*; *awfully*, *terribly* etc. Size adjectives do not (all) have such direct adverbial counterparts, though semantically they seem, at least intuitively, to correspond to degree modifiers like *much* and *very* (but see Morzycki 2009 for a different view).

Taking as a starting point the results of the previous tests, it can be observed that degree adjectives may modify both [+human] gradable nouns (e.g. *idiot, fool, enthusiast*, *genius* etc.; *eater*, *drinker* etc.) and [-human] gradable nouns, both mass and count (e.g. *nonsense*, *courage*, *negligence* etc.; *deal*, *bargain*, *effort* etc.; *mistake*, *failure*, *success*, *blunder*, *masterpiece*, *blaze*, *extremes*, *trivialities*, *appetite* etc.; *boon*, *gyp*; *disaster*, *chaos*, *mess* etc.)[38] (cf. Bolinger 1972, Van de Velde 1996, Tovena 2001, Giry-Schneider 2005, Grossman and Tutin 2005, Marengo 2005, Morzycki 2009). Below are examples of all three classes of adjectives modifying nouns from each class:

(56) a. a {big/ enormous/ huge} {idiot/ jazz enthusiast/ beer-drinker}
b. great {courage/ patience}
c. an {enormous/ huge} {problem/ blunder}

(57) a. a {complete/ real} {fool/ idiot}
b. real {courage/ nonsense}
c. a {complete/ total/ real} {failure/ success/ blunder}

(58) a. a {terrible/ amazing} {fool/ coward/ bore/ blunderer}
b. {incredible/ amazing} {courage/ patience/ nonsense}
c. an {awful/ terrible} {mess/ failure}

[38] When an abstract mass noun denoting a property is modified by adjectives like *great* the interpretation is equivalent to that obtained when a quantity expression like *a lot* is used (cf. Van de Velde 1996). This may be why the two types of expressions cannot co-occur, unlike with other types of nouns:

(i)	[English]		[French]
a.	great courage	a'.	un grand courage
b.	a lot of courage	b'.	beaucoup de courage
c.	*a lot of great courage	c'.	*beaucoup de grand courage

There is another class of nouns that seemed to behave like gradable nouns according to (some of) the other gradability tests reviewed, namely nouns that are interpreted in terms of stereotypical properties associated with the respective class (on a possibly figurative, metaphorical interpretation). An important difference now arises once the test of modification by degree adjectives is applied. Consider the following examples which contain nouns that were shown to allow such interpretations:

(59) a. a big {lawyer/ man/ child/ palace}
b. a terrible {lawyer/ linguist/ prince/ clown/ man/ child}

These examples show that these nouns cannot be modified by degree adjectives on the relevant interpretation. The resulting interpretation is fundamentally different. In (59)a, with *big*, only the basic, literal meaning is available, namely size, either concrete, physical size (as with *man* and *palace*), or more abstractly as importance or fame (as with *lawyer*, *linguist*). In (59)b the nouns can also only be interpreted in their basic, literal meaning and the adjective *terrible* also receives its basic qualitative, evaluative interpretation: the examples say something about the professional or personal quality of the individuals. Consequently, the nouns so modified cannot be used in examples parallel to examples with *such* encountered in §2.1.2, which would require a figurative, stereotypical interpretation of the nouns. The contrast is illustrated in (60) and (61):

(60) a. Their new place is such a palace!
b. Don't be such a child (about it), dad!

(61) a. Their new place is a big palace.
b. Dad is a big child.

The stereotypical interpretation of *palace* and *child* is not available in (61). When acceptable, (61)a forces a literal interpretation, where the place is said to belong to the category of actual palaces that are large in size. Such a literal interpretation is totally deviant in (61)b though.

One adjective which stands out in this context is the adjective *real*: unlike the other degree adjectives considered above, *real* can modify nouns used with a figurative interpretation (it embraces metaphorical extensions – cf. Bolinger 1972 from whom example (62)a is drawn):

(62) a. He is a real lawyer, the way he goes about proving his case.
b. This boy is a real clown!
c. Their new house is a real palace!
d. This place is a real pigsty!

In this, it also differs from the closely related adjective *true*: the entity described by *true* must belong to the category that is named and is then described as typical of its

essence. Thus, while in (62)a he may be just a student, in (63) he must be a lawyer by profession.

(63) He is a true lawyer, a credit to his profession.

The adjective *true* does not seem to be sensitive just to gradability, but to another sort of meaning, as suggested by the contrast between the following sets of examples which contain nouns that are otherwise non-gradable (cf. Bolinger 1972 who notes that it is restricted to gradable nouns and "semantically rich" non-gradable nouns):[39]

(64) a. It was a true symphony.
b. I had a true vacation.
c. A true doctor would not prescribe that kind of treatment.

(65) a. ?He's a true farmhand.
b. ?That is a true telescope.
c. ??That's a true car.

In fact, *real* can also modify nouns that do not qualify as gradable by other criteria:[40]

(66) That's a real car!

In chapter 4 we will examine the distribution and interpretation of the adjectives *true* and *real* in more detail and argue that they are in fact not true degree adjectives, in the sense that they do not depend on, or make use of, a gradable meaning, i.e. the presence of an ordering of the individuals in the domain of the noun with respect to the degree that a gradable property holds of them. This, however, raises an additional question, concerning the (non-)gradable status of nouns interpreted stereotypically (possibly figuratively): since the only adjective that seems to be compatible with them finally turns out not to be a degree adjective, then it may be concluded that the test of modification by degree adjectives excludes this set of noun interpretations from the realm of gradability. Does this mean that the tests considered in the preceding sub-sections, which seemed to accommodate this class of nouns, would also need to be analysed in a different way? This is, in fact, what will be argued for in chapter 3 (for independent reasons).

It should be noted that modification by degree adjectives is often marked by lexical variations and restrictions, and some problematic cases arise too in relation to some of the (non-figurative uses of) nouns that came out as gradable according to other tests. There are irregularities among [-human] count nouns with respect to the acceptability or exact interpretation of some of these adjectives. Consider the following examples which contain nouns that have qualified as gradable according to previous tests:

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[39] The examples in (64) and (65)a,b are from Bolinger (1972).

[40] The example in (66) is also significant in that it also points to a difference between *real* and *such*. While the examples in (62) contain nouns that, on a similar interpretation, can be modified by *such*, the noun *car* cannot:
(i) #That's such a car!

(67) a. *a {big/huge} stink
a'. ??{huge/ great} trivialities
b. a terrible smell
b'. a terrible mistake

These nouns do not seem to accept modification by adjectives like *big*, *terrible* etc. in the relevant degree sense. With adjectives of size the result is, however, infelicitous, as in (67)a-a'. In (67)b-b', with the adjective *terrible*, an interpretation in terms of qualitative evaluation is available. For example, *a terrible smell* is most easily understood as a *bad smell*, as opposed to *a pleasant smell*, i.e. the adjective is interpreted in its regular modificational sense. With *mistake*, the intended degree interpretation is more likely than a purely qualificational interpretation of the adjective *terrible* (or even *bad*) since we do not normally contrast *bad mistakes* with *good mistakes* (cf. Bolinger 1972). The regular qualificational interpretation is not completely excluded, however, as one may oppose *terrible mistakes* to *harmless/ insignificant mistakes* etc. In addition, other restrictions may be noticed. For example, certain [+human] nouns, especially those derived from (activity) verbs (e.g. *eater, drinker* etc.), but not only, cannot be modified by adjectives of totality, though they accept other degree adjectives:

(68) *a {complete/ perfect} (cheese-)eater

Finally, there are often rather collocational restrictions occurring in these adjective-noun combinations:

(69) a. high acclaim
b. *deep acclaim
c. deep disgrace
d. *high disgrace

In sum, however, if one puts these idiosyncrasies aside, some patterns emerge quite clearly, and the test of degree modification by adjectives appears to be the most restricted one so far, in the sense that it applies to the nouns that qualified as gradable to the previous two tests too, with the exception of figurative, metaphorical interpretations of nouns. They seem to only combine with those nouns that quite straightforwardly include a gradable property in their lexical meaning (e.g. *idiot*, *fool*, *enthusiast*, *eater*, *mess*, *blunder* etc.), or directly name such a property (as is the case with abstract mass nouns referring to properties – e.g. *courage*, *patience*, *negligence* etc.). In chapter 4, such modification will be re-examined in more detail in order to see whether it provides evidence in favour of the existence of adnominal degree modifiers/ operators.

2.3 *N of an N* and *seem*

The two contexts that will be presented in this last sub-section involve more complex syntactic structures, where gradability would become relevant outside of the N. These consist of the possible occurrence of nouns in the first slot of the so-called *N of an N* construction (e.g. *that idiot of a doctor*) and in the non-sentential complement of *seem* (e.g. *He seems a fool*.). While the former is found cross-linguistically, the latter context and its restrictions are rather specific to English. These possible tests for gradability turn out to be the most problematic. This is why they will be only briefly examined here and will be provided a more detailed account in chapter 2, which will completely exclude them as tests for gradability.

2.3.1 *N of an N*

There is a line of research in the literature which claims that the *N of an N* construction illustrated in (70) is a typical environment for gradable nouns (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002c, Corver 2008 a.o.), i.e. only gradable nouns can appear in the first slot of the construction (henceforth, N_1); non-gradable nouns cannot, as ilustrated in (71).[41]

(70) a. that idiot of a doctor
b. that fool of an engineer

(71) a. *that lad of a brother of yours
b. *that lawyer of a son of yours

This suggests that the possible occurrence of nouns in the N_1 slot of the *N of an N* construction can be used as a test for gradability. However, the results turn out to diverge from the outcome of the tests considered so far, and cross-cut the distinctions arrived at previously.

To start with, there are nouns that categorize individuals based on a gradable property which came out as gradable according to the previous tests but which cannot be used as N_1s:

(72) a. ??*that (jazz-)enthusiast of a doctor
b. *that eater of a doctor

Similarly, among the [-human] nouns identified as gradable before, some but not all can be used as N_1s, and the distinctions do not seem to follow any of the possible sub-classes identified before in terms of how salient the degree interpretation is in contexts such as *wh*-exclamatives.

(73) a. that mistake of a {relationship/ child}

[41] The examples in (70)-(71) are from Bolinger (1972).

b. a failure of an attorney

(74) a. *that problem of a decision
b. *that success of an attorney
c. *that mismatch of a fixture
d. *that {stink/ fragrance} of a breeze

Abstract mass nouns denoting properties can generally not be used as N_1, as indicated by (75), though we do find the noun *nonsense* used as N_1, as in (76):

(75) *that wisdom of a saying

(76) that nonsense of a definition

The problem with examples like (75) may be that mass nouns are generally not good as N_1 in *N of an N*, unless they can undergo a mass-to-count shift associated to a change in meaning from designating the property to a concrete instantiation of it, i.e. denoting an individual which is characterized by the respective property, as in (77), which refers to a 'beautiful boat/ performance'. For the examples in (72) and (74), however, such an explanation is not available, and the reasons for the differentiated acceptability must still be sought elsewhere.

(77) a beauty of a {boat/ performance}

More complications arise in the data. Consider, for instance, the following examples:

(78) a. a peach of a day
b. a flower of a girl
c. one hell of a story

The nouns are used metaphorically here, though it is hard to identify exactly what properties they attribute to the given individuals, apart from conveying some sort of emotive, subjective evaluation, either positive or negative. According to other tests, these nouns do not qualify as gradable: they cannot be modified by degree adjectives like *big*, as shown by (79). This is not surprising given that it has already been shown that nouns under a figurative, stereotypical interpretation are generally not compatible with modification by degree adjectives. But, in addition, some also fail to combine with *such*, which was seen to be otherwise compatible with noun interpretations of a similar sort (i.e. figurative, stereotypical), as shown in (80).

(79) a. #The day was a big peach.
b. #The girl is a big flower.
c. #The story was {a/ one} big hell.

(80) a. ??The day was such a peach!

b. ?That girl is such a flower!
c. ??The story is such (a) hell!

In sum, the proposal that occurrence in the N_1 position is determined by the gradability does not seem to be straightforwardly supported by the data. In chapter 2, section 2, we will re-examine *N of an N* constructions in more detail and show that it is in fact not gradability, but a different factor, namely the expression of a value judgment, that determines the possible occurrence of a noun in the N_1 position. As such, occurrence in the *N of an N* construction is not a test for gradability.

2.3.2 *Seem*

The last potential test for gradability to be considered consists of the possible occurrence of nouns in the complement of *seem*. It has been argued in the literature that when *seem* takes a non-sentential complement, generally assumed to be a small clause, only gradable expressions can be used (e.g. Bolinger 1972, Maling 1983, Matushansky 2002b). The examples below illustrate the basic contrast between the acceptability of gradable adjectives, nouns and prepositional phrases in the small clause complement of *seem*, and the unacceptability of non-gradable expressions.[42,43]

(81) a. The music seems nice. [gradable AP]
b. His nationality seems irrelevant.

(82) a. *The music seems choral. [non-gradable AP]
b. *His nationality seems British.

(83) a. What he writes seems nonsense. [gradable NP]
b. He seems a {genius/ fool}

(84) a. *What he writes seems history. [non-gradable NP]
b. *He seems a {wizard/ doctor}.

(85) a. Lee sure seems out of his mind. [gradable PP]
b. Lee sure seems under the weather.

(86) a. *Lee sure seems out of the house. [non-gradable PP]
b. *Lee sure seems under the old apple tree.

The ungrammatical examples above become good if *to be* is supplied, which shows that the restriction only applies to small clause complements of *seem*.

[42] Note that plural count nouns are not normal after *seem*:
(i) a. The thing he did seemed a mistake.
b. *The things he did seemed mistakes.
In addition, while NPs of the right type are generally accepted in the small clause complement of *seem* in British English and Canadian English, they are generally rejected in American English.

[43] Most of the examples in (81)-(86) are taken or adapted from Bolinger (1972), Maling (1983), Matushansky (2002b).

(87) a. The music seems to be choral.
b. He seems to be a doctor.
c. Lee seems to be out (of the house).

The examples also improve if an expression of approximation, or a degree modifier, is used, i.e. an expression which shows the degree of applicability of the predicate, as in (88) (Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002b). The addition of a degree modifier has been argued to trigger scalarity coercion, which changes the meaning of the non-gradable expressions so that they can be interpreted as gradable (Matushansky 2002b). As a result, the expressions count as gradable and can be used in the small clause complement of *seem*.

(88) a. The music seems almost choral.
b. You'd seem such a linguist!

The picture is, however, more complicated than it might look at first sight. And the complications in the data do not seem to follow a distinction between gradable and non-gradable expressions along the lines suggested by the tests considered previously. For example, adding an adjective seems to improve examples containing non-gradable nouns, as illustrated in (89)a. However, not all adjectives, even if gradable, behave alike with respect to licensing a noun in the small clause complement of *seem* (Matushansky 2002b), as illustrated in (89)b:

(89) a. Eric seems a {capable/ good/ lousy/ exceptional} {wizard/ doctor/ dancer}.
b. Eric seems a {*French/ *tall/ ??handsome} {wizard/ doctor/ dancer}.

Conversely, adding an adjective to a gradable noun seems to remove the ability of that DP to appear in the complement of *seem* (Matushansky 2002b), though, again, this does not hold for all adjectives, as shown in (90).

(90) a. Eric seems a {*French/ ??handsome} fool.
b. He seems {a big fool}/ {a real idiot}.

In addition, one may find examples of nouns which came out as gradable according to other tests, but which do not seem to be able to occur in the small clause complement of *seem* (though they can otherwise be used predicatively):

(91) a. ??He seems a cheese-eater.
b. ??Her new perfume seems a stink to me.

On the other hand, there also seem to exist cases of non-gradable nouns that are acceptable in this environment, as illustrated in (92) and (93).

(92) a. He seems a Christian.
b. He seems an artist.

(93) a. This seems the end for us.
b. This seems the way to do it.

Note also that the nouns in (92) are not interpreted figuratively, like those in (94) below; the latter show that nouns under this interpretation are also allowed in the small clause complement of *seem*.

(94) a. This house seems a palace after the shelters where we have passed our nights for the last couple of weeks.
b. This child seems a clown (at times).

In sum, such facts shed doubt on the view that distribution in the small clause complement of *seem* is determined by the gradability of the lexical items involved, hence on the reliability of this possible gradability test. In chapter 2, section 3, we will investigate the distribution and interpretation of expressions in the small complement of *seem* in more detail and show that an alternative account is needed.

2.4 Summary and discussion of results

It can be observed from the discussion in the preceding sub-sections that the various gradability tests that have been proposed turn out to yield different results. This raises questions concerning the status of the nouns involved and/or the reliability of the tests themselves. In what follows we will summarize the results of the tests, as well as indicating the problematic issues that arise from this brief examination.

Among the tests for gradability discussed, the *N of an N* and *seem* tests turn out to be rather problematic: their results do not seem to pattern in any obvious way with the others, which makes their reliability as tests for gradability questionable. Modification by degree adjectives seems to be the most restricted test, in spite of certain idiosyncrasies and irregularities. Degree adjectives seem to provide a good indication of inherent gradability. The nouns which can be thus modified are generally a subset of the nouns that come out as gradable according to other tests, namely, *wh*-exclamatives, *such*, *quite*, and predicative partitive structures. Degree adjectives thus seem to be good candidates for elements that function as degree operators or modifiers in the nominal domain, similarly to expressions like *very* or *terribly* in the adjectival domain. Recall, however, that for *real*, it was suggested that its distribution and interpretation do not seem to be reducible to gradability. Finally, the distribution of *wh*-exclamatives, *quite*, and predicative partitive structures with respect to classes of nouns seems to be very wide. Consequently, it is hard to use them in order to single out a specific class of nouns that we might want to classify as gradable.

Among the classes of nouns or noun interpretations discussed, a problematic case is that of figurative, stereotypical interpretations, including epithets, or epithetic uses of nouns. These pass some, though not all of the tests reviewed. Nouns under such interpretations can be used in *wh*-exclamatives and with degree *such*, but they cannot be modified by degree adjectives with the exception of the adjective *real*.

There are two logically possible ways to approach these facts. One would be to regard them as gradable meanings, possibly as the result of scalarity coercion, whereby basically non-gradable nouns are coerced into a gradable meaning. This would be triggered by the *wh*-degree operator or by the degree operator *such* (as proposed e.g. by Matushansky 2002b), as well as *real*, while other degree adjectives would not be able to coerce the meaning of the modified nouns in this way. This would account for their differentiated distribution in these environments. Alternatively, it might be concluded that figurative interpretations are not gradable, and then *real* and the other two tests would need to be analysed in a different way.

Putting these problematic cases aside, the results of the tests examined in this section may be summarized as in Table 1 below which indicates the classes of nouns that come out as gradable according to most tests:

	Type of noun		Examples
I.	[+human] [+count]	categorize, or qualify, individuals based on a gradable property	*idiot*, *fool*, *genius*, *coward*, *(jazz-)enthusiast*, *blunderer*, *liar*, *eater* etc.
II.	[-human] [+/-count]	denote qualities, states, situations, emotions, or other sorts of more or less abstract objects	*courage*, *patience*, *negligence* etc.; *chaos*, *disorder* etc. *nonsense*, *mess*, *flop*, *fiasco*, *disaster; surprise*, *shock*, *shame*, *appetite*, *extreme*, *difficulty; stink*, *fragrance*, *boon*, *gyp*; *mistake*, *failure*, *success*, *blunder*, *masterpiece*, *inconvenience*, *appetite*; *deal*, *bargain*, *effort* etc.

Table 1: nouns that qualify as gradable according to most tests

Class I contains nouns which categorize, or qualify, [+human] individuals based on a gradable property. They are generally derived from or otherwise related to adjectives (e.g. *idiot*, *enthusiast* etc.), derived from gradable or non-gradable activity verbs (e.g. *liar*, *eater* etc.), or from other (gradable) nouns (e.g. *blunderer*). Class II contains [-human] nouns of various sorts. At least some of the nouns in class II may be understood as qualifications applying to [-human] entities in a parallel way to how the nouns in the first class denote [+human] individuals characterized by a property: e.g. *mess*, *flop*, *fiasco* etc. qualify objects or situations via a certain property or state, similarly to how nouns like *idiot*, *fool* etc. categorize individuals via a property. Their meaning can often be paraphrased in terms of a more general term (a hyperonym) plus an adjective expressing some kind of qualification: e.g. *deal/ bargain* – 'advantageous transaction'; *fortune* – 'great wealth/ large sum of money', *failure* – 'unsuccessful attempt' etc. The presence of a gradable property in the meaning of the nouns can be quite transparent since they are often morphologically derived from or otherwise related to an adjective or a verb. This is particularly clear with abstract mass nouns denoting qualities, such as *courage*, *patience*, *wisdom* etc., but also with nouns like *extremes*, *difficulty* etc.

To conclude, on the one hand, it has been shown that there is a general category of nouns that seem to qualify as gradable based on their similar behaviour (i.e. interpretation and distribution) in certain environments. On the other hand, it has also been shown that some problematic issues arise concerning the reliability of the tests reviewed, and there are indications that some of the tests should be given alternative accounts. The discussion in this second part of the chapter thus provides the ground for the coming chapters, as outlined in the next section.

3 Outline of the dissertation

In chapter 2 we examine two environments that have been claimed to involve gradability, and where gradability would be relevant for the well-formedness of more complex structures containing the nouns, namely *N of an N* constructions (e.g. *that idiot of a doctor*) and the small-complement of *seem* (e.g. *He seems a fool.*). In §2.3 it was already pointed out that using these as tests for gradability appears to be rather problematic in the sense that their results do not seem to pattern in an obvious way with those of the other tests. This is why we start out with these cases: we would like to know immediately whether they say anything about gradability in nouns or whether they should be eliminated as possible tests for gradability. In chapter 2 it will be argued that that the distribution of nouns in these contexts is not determined by gradability – whether at the lexical or syntactic level – but by other factors which partly overlap with gradability and, under certain circumstances, create similar effects. In the case of *N of an N* constructions, it will be shown that the necessary and sufficient condition for a noun to occur in the first slot of the structure is that it can express a value judgment. As for *seem*, this will be argued to be an epistemic verb that contains an evidential meaning component. The restrictions on its small clause complement will be shown to follow from the necessary compatibility with the uncertainty of assessment involved in the meaning of the verb combined with certain limitations that exist on what may be used as evidence based on which one can evaluate whether a property holds; these limitations do not exist when it comes to evaluating complex situations or propositions, as expressed by sentential complements – hence the lack of restrictions on these complements. Gradable expressions are only a subset of the expressions that may occur in this environment; in addition, it is no the case that all gradable expressions automatically make good small clause complements to *seem*. Consequently, these two environments will be excluded as tests for gradability. The distribution of nouns in these contexts cannot be used evidence in favour of positing a gradable structure in their semantics or of a degree projection in their syntax. These two case studies show how various factors may conspire so as to make believe that gradability and degree are involved.

Chapter 3 focuses on an examination of "degree" *such* and argues that it is not a degree operator. Its distribution will be shown not to be limited to gradable nouns, or nouns that can be modified by other (potential) degree modifiers, and the interpretation not to be in terms of degree. It will be argued instead that all instances

of *such*, including the so-called "degree" *such*, are in fact cases of kind-reference. What accounts for the differences in distribution (and interpretation) between the so-called "degree" and "kind" *such* is that the semantics of the former comes with particular requirements concerning the construal of sub-kinds it can select. More precisely, this *such* selects salient sub-types that can be identified by natural consequences, which may be explicitly expressed by result clauses or left implicit, as in the exclamative use. Once again, gradable nouns are only a subset of the nouns that make available the required sort of sub-types. Consequently, co-occurrence with *such* in exclamatives or with result clauses is not a test for gradability either. This proposal immediately raises questions concerning other structures which have been analysed in a similar way to *such* in the literature, namely *wh*-exclamatives and *quite*-structures, as well as predicative partitive structures (i.e. *more of an N*). These will be briefly examined in the last part of the chapter, where it will be suggested that they offer no evidence for the presence of gradable structure in nouns that would be similar to that found with gradable adjectives.

Chapter 4 turns to an examination of degree adjectives, which, from the overview in section 2 of this chapter, appeared to offer the most reliable test for gradability and the most promising candidates for adnominal degree expressions. However, the more detailed investigation of degree adjectives in three classes (namely, size adjectives, *real*-type adjectives and evaluative adjectives) will shed doubt on this starting hypothesis. It will be shown that the distribution and interpretation of size adjectives do not support a degree analysis of these expressions, but rather favour an alternative account in terms of (abstract) size of properties, on which the adjectives do not manipulate gradable structures in a way that would be parallel to what happens in the case of degree modification of gradable adjectives. *Real*-type adjectives will also be argued not to be adnominal degree operators, but rather epistemic/ evidential adjectives. As for evaluative adjectives, the facts are less conclusive. They may be analysed as adnominal degree modifiers, but the facts do not exclusively require such an analysis. In addition, they also show differences as compared to their adverbial counterparts that function as degree modifiers in the adjectival domain (e.g. *terribly* etc.). An alternative, non-degree account is possible, which capitalizes on their evaluative meaning. In sum, the behaviour of "degree adjectives" does not provide conclusive evidence for the existence of adnominal degree operators or modifiers. Even though in these cases similar interpretations are obtained to those obtained in the adjectival domain via degree modification, they are brought about by different mechanisms. This suggests that there is no parallel between the nominal and adjectival domains with respect to gradability, whether semantically or syntactically.

The investigation carried out in chapters 2-4 points to the same conclusion, namely that there is a fundamental difference between nouns and adjectives with respect to gradability, and that nominal gradability is an illusion rather than a grammatical reality. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, discusses the implications of these results for a theory of gradability that wants to account for the difference between the two domains.