Gradability in the nominal domain

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Chapter 2 GRADABILITY VS. EVALUATION

1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two case studies: we will examine *N of an N* constructions (e.g. *that idiot of a doctor*) and the small clause complement of the verb *seem* (e.g. *He seems a fool*.), both of which have been claimed to be environments that involve gradability. It will be shown, however, that it is not gradability that determines the possible occurrence of nouns in these contexts, but rather something different, which can be subsumed under the term "evaluation". The way evaluation plays a role is different in the two cases. *N of an N* constructions, which are studied in section 2, are sensitive to the expression of a value judgment. This will be argued to be the necessary and sufficient condition for a noun to occur in the first position of *N of an N* constructions. In the case of *seem*, which will be examined in section 3, the evaluation has to do with assessing whether a property or a situation holds or not. This is an evidential and/or epistemic notion that will be shown to play a role in the distribution of expressions in the small clause complement of *seem*.

2 *N of an N*

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 1 (§2.3.1) the possible occurrence of a noun in the first position (henceforth N_1) of the *N of an N* construction, illustrated in (1), has been claimed to depend on whether the noun is gradable or not (cf. Bolinger 1972, Matushansky 2002c).

(1) that idiot of a doctor

In chapter 1, however, questions were already raised concerning the reliability of this test for gradability in light of the diverging results obtained as compared to other gradability tests, such as the test of modification by degree adjectives.

In this section we will examine more carefully the overall interpretation of the construction, and, more in particular, the contribution of and semantic constraints on the nouns that occur as N_1, in order to reveal the factor(s) that determine the ability of a noun to occur in this position. It will be shown that in fact it is not gradability that constitutes a prerequisite for a noun to occur as N_1 in these constructions, but rather the expression of a value judgment (along the lines of Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982, Den Dikken 2006, Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010). Moreover, it will be shown that gradability and the expression of a value judgment (generally referred to as "evaluation" in the literature), are not the same, but partly overlap, which explains the often mixed views we can find in the literature.

2.2 Gradability and value judgement in the literature on *N of an N*

The ways in which the *N of an N* construction is treated in the literature vary considerably. Nevertheless, three main types of approaches can be identified depending on the notions used in characterizing the constraints on possible N_1s.[44] In one view, occurrence of a noun as N_1 in these structures depends on its being gradable, either inherently or due to coercion. A different line of thought takes the essence of the interpretation of these constructions to be the expression of a value judgment. In other works, the two notions are combined or used interchangeably.

This sub-section will give an overview of the literature, focusing on the notions that are used in describing potential N_1s, i.e. gradability and the expression of a value judgment. It will be revealed that some confusion is often found in studies on *N of an N*, which seems to stem from the lack of a necessary distinction between the two notions. It should be noted in this context that even when there is no confusion within one particular study and only one notion is made use of, there is often no discussion of or direct argumentation against the alternative views. In addition, a clear definition of the terms used and/or discussion of the notions they cover, especially in contradistinction to other notions used elsewhere, are generally missing. Hence, there is almost no discussion of the relation between gradability and the expression of a value judgment, which, as it turns out, is essential for a proper understanding of the interpretation of *N of an N* constructions and of the factors that determine the possible occurrence of a noun as N_1.

[44] Note that a distinction is sometimes made in the literature between different types of *N of an N* constructions, often based on different criteria, hence drawing the lines in different places (e.g. Napoli 1989, Doetjes and Rooryck 2003, Den Dikken 2006). In all cases, however, at least one of the types identified is argued to involve gradability, or evaluation, or both. We will mostly abstract away from these distinctions in this section, as we will argue that one notion is relevant for all types (see §2.3).

We will also not discuss the syntactic analyses proposed (e.g. whether a predication or modification relation is assumed to underlie these structures), since a syntactic account of these constructions is beyond the scope of our work. We will only retain the insights concerning the interpretive contribution of the N_1, and the ensuing characterization of the class of possible N_1s.

2.2.1 Gradability

As discussed in chapter 1, the gradability view on *N of an N* constructions has been most notably expressed in Bolinger (1972). He argues that only gradable nouns can be used as N_1 in this structure, as shown by the contrast in (2). He includes figurative, or metaphorical, uses of inherently non-gradable nouns in the class of gradable (uses of) nouns, as illustrated in (3):

(2) a. that fool of an engineer
b. *that lad of an engineer

(3) a. that baby of a brother of yours
b. that box of a house

Similarly, Matushansky (2002c) argues that nouns which naturally appear as N_1 are gradable, while nouns that are not natural N_1 may be coerced into being gradable. She analyses the *N of an N* construction as a modificational structure containing an emotive exclamative operator, which she defines as a special type of degree operator. Consequently, on this account, it is the exclamative environment that imposes certain gradability constraints on the construction and the *N of an N* construction is predicted to end up having a high degree interpretation given the presence of the degree operator.

There is also a different type of approach in the literature, centred on the expression of value judgment, which we will now go on to consider.

2.2.2 Value judgment

There is another line of research that takes the essence of *N of an N* constructions to be the expression of some sort of emotive, personal, or subjective, evaluation.[45] The value judgment has been shown to be typically negative (e.g. insults) (cf. Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982), though not exclusively so. The use of nouns in *N of an N* constructions is thus akin to epithet (uses of) nouns. Epithets are noun phrases used to characterize the nature of an individual (e.g. *idiot, bastard, sissy, jerk* etc.), and

[45] A note on terminology is in order here. In the relevant subset of works referred to in this section the term "evaluation" is most often used to describe the interpretive contribution of N_1. However, using terms such as "evaluation" and "evaluative" is confusing, especially in the context of a discussion that also includes references to gradability. This is because the same term is used in other works to refer to a subclass of (gradable) adjectives (e.g. *beautiful, interesting, industrious* etc.), in contradistinction to dimensional adjectives (e.g. *long, tall, wide, short* etc.) (cf. Bierwisch 1989), while in other studies it is used to refer to the standard-related or non-neutral interpretation of adjectives in e.g. the positive form (cf. Rett 2008a,b). The evaluation present in the case of *N of an N* constructions is of a different nature, and refers to the expression of a value judgment, which involves subjective appraisal and can be more or less emotionally-charged. See §2.3.1 for a definition. Therefore, we will refrain from using the term "evaluation", and favour instead the more straightforward term "value judgment". In the overview of the literature in §2.2.2 and §2.2.3, however, the term "evaluation" will still be used at times, since this is the term employed in the works referred to.

may be stereotypical; they contribute mainly affective meaning, which is typically negative: contempt, anger, irony etc.[46]

Milner (1978), for example, looking at French data, claims that only a closed class of nouns, which he calls *noms de qualité* ('quality nouns'), can appear as N_1. These are nouns like *imbécile*, which are claimed not to have their own extension or definition out of context, being inherently connected to the speech situation (hence having no referential autonomy, similarly to pronouns). They are claimed to be non-classifying nouns and to be marked with a [+quality] feature in the lexicon that distinguishes them from ordinary classifying nouns. Milner points out that no other nouns can appear in the first position of such structures, unless they undergo a shift in meaning with stylistic effects; he treats such examples as cases of recategorization ("changement de catégorie", "calembour syntaxique"), as in *ce tyran de Paul* 'this tyrannical Paul'.

Ruwet (1982) argues that almost any nouns can be inserted in the N_1 slot, as long as they are understood as insults. Hence, the class of nouns admissible as N_1 is that of possible epithets. He argues against the two-way lexical distinction Milner proposes, and claims that it is an illusion stemming from the fact that Milner only discusses extreme cases in his examples: profession nouns like *professeur*, as non-quality, on the one hand, and nouns like *idiot*, *salaud*, as quality nouns, on the other. Instead, Ruwet shows that there is in fact a continuum between these. He proposes that all nouns have their own semantic content, which, associated with certain pragmatic conditions and general world knowledge, determines whether or how appropriately a noun can be used in affective contexts, such as the *N of an N* structure, which he takes to be associated with a semantic rule that contains a (generally unfavourable) value judgment.

Recently, a similar way of viewing the semantic contribution of N_1 has been adopted by Den Dikken (2006),[47] who argues that N_1 can be any noun denoting something that is deemed suitable to compare N_2 to and that the (often metaphorical) comparison on which such constructions are based is always evaluative, often negative (see also Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010):[48]

(4) a. a jewel of a village
b. an idiot of a man

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[46] Note that much work in syntax has focused on those epithet phrases which consist of a noun (phrase) accompanied by the definite article (e.g. *the idiot*, *the bastard*) or a demonstrative (e.g. *this/that idiot*, *this/that bastard*), and which can be used as anaphors (cf. Jackendoff 1972, 1977, Lasnik 1976, 1989, Chomsky 1981, Huang 2000, Aoun and Choueiri 2000, Corazza 2005 a.o.). This aspect of their behaviour, which has in fact come to be regarded as their defining characteristic, is illustrated below:

(i) John$_i$ promised to come, but the idiot$_i$ missed the train.

In this sentence, *idiot* is understood as an anaphor, inheriting its value from *John*; in addition, it also attributes to John the property of being an idiot.

However, it has also been argued that such behaviour is not limited to epithet phrases, as it is in fact more widely displayed by "incomplete descriptions" such as *the man* (Higginbotham 1985), as well as other definite descriptions, though with some differences (see e.g. Corazza 2005).

An examination of the anaphoric properties of such phrases lies, however, outside the scope of our investigation.

[47] The approach proposed by Den Dikken (2006) combines Milner's and Ruwet's insights for different subsets of the data (see Den Dikken 2006 for details).

[48] The examples in (4) are from Den Dikken (2006).

c. a horror of a story
d. that schoolmaster of a man

In (4d), for example, *schoolmaster* stands for a set of (typically negative) properties that schoolmasters are stereotypically thought to have (e.g. being authoritarian, correcting people all the time etc.), much as in its epithetic use in copular sentences like *He's a real schoolmaster*.

In sum, these works characterize N_1s as expressing a value judgment, hence taking them to be similar or even identical to epithets or epithet uses of nouns.[49] However, they do not address at all the alternative view presented above which takes gradability to be the condition on N_1s. A notable exception in this sense is Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann (2010), who explicitly argue that these constructions (in Spanish) do not involve degree quantification but evaluation, which is lexically encoded, and hence highly idiosyncratic. This is the type of view we will defend too, but first we will also review a different type of approach that is found in the literature.

While the analyses reviewed so far take either gradability or the expression of a value judgment to be the essence of the *N of an N* construction, in other works the two notions are combined, collapsed or used interchangeably. It is to a discussion of such works that we turn now.

2.2.3 Gradability and value judgment collapsed[50]

A first example of the lack of a proper distinction that characterizes some of the literature presents itself in the work of Napoli (1989). On the one hand, she argues throughout that the nouns used as N_1 in these constructions must be predicates that express an evaluative judgment of the N_2. This, she notes, may be inherent in the meaning of the noun or not; in the latter case, it may come about by means of e.g. modification, "metaphorical extension or association". Thus, she adopts the view that "predicates fall naturally into an evaluative and a non-evaluative class with respect to their distribution and other properties" (Napoli 1989:192). However, when referring to other works in which this distinction among predicates has been proposed, she also mentions Maling (1983) and points out that she "uses the term *gradable*" (Napoli 1989:192). The problem here is that Maling talks about gradable predicates as standardly defined, while Napoli is talking about evaluative predicates, initially defined as expressing an "evaluative judgment". Unfortunately, she does not comment on the observed terminological difference ("evaluative" vs. "gradable") and whether it also reflects any other (semantic and/or syntactic) differences, hence

[49] Note that such a view cannot be upheld if "epithet" is understood in the sense in which it is generally defined in the syntactic literature, i.e. in terms of their anaphoric properties – see footnote 3 above, since not all N_1s can function as epithets in this way.

[50] This combination of the two notions is also transposed into the syntax, in the role assigned to the syntactic projections proposed in the representation of these structures. In many of the works referred to here (Doetjes and Rooryck 2003, Vinet 2003), the particular interpretation assigned to *N of an N* constructions is linked to a syntax involving an EvaluativePhrase claimed to be used in the sense of Cinque 1999, Ambar 2002, 2003. This projection, however, ends up being used in a double role, both as an evaluative phrase and as a (high) degree phrase.

whether her term "evaluative predicate" covers the same class of expressions as "gradable predicate".

Hulk and Tellier (2000) instantiate a somewhat similar case. They claim that *N of an N* constructions always convey evaluation, subjectiveness, or affectivity on the part of the speaker (i.e. amusement, irony, indignation, affection). Hence, the nominals that can occur in this construction are those that may bear an [affective] feature.[51] At certain points in their account, however, some lack of clarity creeps into the claims made or the terminology used. For example, they add that only those nouns that lend themselves to "scalar evaluation" can be N_1s. It is unclear whether the use of this term should be understood as implying that N_1s need to be both scalar, i.e. gradable, and evaluative, or whether it simply refers to evaluation which is scalar in the sense that it may differ in strength. In addition, they explicitly say that *N of an N* constructions do not involve a high degree interpretation, and do not postulate degree phrases in the syntax or a (semantic) gradability condition on N_1. However, they do not discuss at all the possible role of gradability (suggested by the term "scalar evaluation") or explicitly argue against a possible degree account either. This makes their position somewhat unclear.

The notions of gradability/degree and evaluation are most notably collapsed in the analysis proposed by Doetjes and Rooryck (2003),[52] at least for one class of the constructions they investigate, and which they label "pure degree". Here are some examples provided by Doetjes and Rooryck (2003):

(5) a. Ton phénomène de fille est distraite. [French]
your phenomenon of daughter is absent-minded
'That character of a daughter of yours is absent-minded.'

b. Ce bijou de Marie est absolument exquise.
this jewel of Marie is absolutely marvellous
'This jewel of a Mary is absolutely marvellous.'

They note that *phénomène* and *bijou* have completely lost their original lexical meaning and only contribute a strongly positive or negative evaluation of *fille* 'daughter' and a highly positive evaluation of Marie, respectively. They claim that, as such, these nouns express high or low degree of quality, and that this is a pure degree reading.

The notions of "evaluation" and "degree" (of a quality) are used interchangeably in this account. Evaluation is translated in terms of degree, and vice versa, as can be seen from their claims that N_1s express "an evaluation in terms of high degree over the qualified noun" (p. 285), and that "in the qualitative domain, 'pure degree' is interpreted as a strongly positive or negative evaluation" (p. 285). At any rate, "degree" is used to cover more or, rather, different things than it normally does when standardly used to talk about e.g. gradable adjectives. Therefore, while we will retain the intuition that N_1 contributes a strongly positive or negative evaluation, we

[51] Similarly to Milner (1978), who distinguishes between "quality" and "non-quality" nouns, they claim that nouns divide into two subclasses: those that may bear the [aff] feature and those that may not; this account therefore faces the same sort of problems – see Ruwet 1982 for criticism of such an approach.

[52] See also Vinet (2003) for a very similar approach to *N of an N* constructions, combining the notions of evaluation and degree, without a discussion of the relation between the two.

consider it necessary to disassociate this from the expression of "pure degree", as will be shown in more detail in §2.3.

Finally, Corver (2008) looks at a family of constructions including *N of an N* constructions and "evaluative vocatives" (e.g. *you idiot!*) and claims that the nouns that can be used there are (and, in fact, must be) "evaluative epithet nouns" in that their "use is intended as a judgment of value". These nouns have "an evaluative function", as well as "an intensifying meaning and may be qualified as [gradable] noun[s]". Therefore, the notions of evaluation and gradability are also combined in this characterization of potential N_1s as epithets, which, apparently, are required to be both evaluative and gradable.

To conclude, this sub-section has shown, firstly, that two recurring notions are used in the literature on *N of an N* constructions, namely evaluation (i.e. the expression of a value judgment) and gradability, and, secondly, that sometimes there is confusion in handling these notions: they are combined or used interchangeably, with no clear distinction being made. Even in the works where only one notion or the other is used, there is no discussion of the relation between them, which makes it hard to identify the exact factor determining the possible occurrence of a noun as N_1. This is a gap that needs to be filled. In order to gain a proper understanding of *N of an N* constructions, and of the constraints on possible N_1s, we need to clarify and distinguish these two notions. Only then can we proceed to identifying the decisive factor enabling a noun to appear in the *N of an N* construction. This is what the remainder of this section will undertake.

2.3 The essence of *N of an N*: value judgment, not gradability

The aim of this sub-section is two-fold. First of all, we will show that the expression of a value judgment and gradability are distinct, yet intersecting, notions, hence the confusion often found in the literature. Secondly, we aim to show that it is the expression of a value judgment that is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for N_1, while gradability is neither necessary nor sufficient. For ease of exposition, we will structure our argumentation following the syntactic complexity of the expression occupying the first slot of the *N of an N* construction, starting with an investigation of non-modified nouns as N_1, and going on to examine modified nouns, as well as cases where the first slot is solely occupied by an adjective. For each of these cases it will be shown which is the sufficient and necessary condition for an expression to occur in this position.

2.3.1 Clarifying the relevant notions

Before trying to isolate the factor that determines the ability of a noun to occur as N_1 in the *N of an N* construction, we need to clarify and distinguish between the notions that have been claimed to play a role.

First of all, the notion of "evaluation" which we take to be relevant for the interpretation of *N of an N* constructions refers to the expression of a value judgment (along the lines of Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982, Den Dikken 2006, Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010). Such speaker-based evaluation is necessarily subjective, or emotive in some sense. Examples of expressions that convey a value judgment include "affective" adjectives, and expressives in general:

(6) a. this damned dog [English]
b. ce foutu professeur [French]
this fucking teacher
'this fucking teacher'

Similar expressions can be found in the nominal domain – e.g. E *devil*, or F *sapristi*, *diable* etc. Here are some examples from English, French and Dutch which show that such expressions can occur in the first slot of the *N of an N* construction: (7) and (8) express a negative value judgment, while (9) conveys a positive judgment.

(7) that devil of a child [English]

(8) a. cette sapristi de femme [French]
this good.grief of woman
'this damned woman'
b. ce diable de moteur
this devil of engine
'this wretched engine'

(9) een kei van een meid [Dutch]
a cobble of a girl
'a fantastic girl'

We take this as a first indication that N_1s in *N of an N* constructions do not merely denote a property that is attributed to an individual, but they express a value judgment of the quality of the individual referred to by the N_2. Such evaluation may differ in polarity, i.e. it can be either positive or negative (in fact more often than not negative, as already mentioned in §2.2.2).[53] More evidence in this sense will be provided in the coming sub-sections.

Gradability, on the other hand, is a notion that applies to those expressions, usually adjectives, which express properties that can manifest in differing degrees and, as such, are compatible with degree modifiers like *very* and degree constructions like the comparative, which express varying degrees, or intensities, of the respective property.

[53] It has been shown extensively in the literature that the value judgment is typically negative (so most N_1s are pejorative and are interpreted as insults – cf. Milner 1978, Ruwet 1982, Napoli 1989, Den Dikken 2006 etc.), though there are also cases of positive evaluation, as can be seen from many of the examples used in the main text. (See Ruwet 1982 for discussion of the rather idiosyncratic behaviour of positively evaluative nouns, and Ruwet 1982, Napoli 1989, Corazza 2005 for discussion of various factors that may influence the positive vs. negative interpretation of N_1, such as the choice of determiner.)

(10) a. John is (very) tall.
b. John is taller than Mary.

In the case of nouns, the previous chapter has shown that there are certain classes of nouns which come out as gradable according to several tests, one of them being modification by degree adjectives. Here are some examples:

(11) a. a big (cheese) eater
b. a big jazz enthusiast

These examples show that nouns like *enthusiast*, *eater* etc. can be modified by adjectives like *big* in a degree sense. That is, the interpretation of such modificational structures occurs seems to parallel the interpretation obtained when an adjective is modified by a degree word like *very*. So *a big jazz-enthusiast*, for instance, is 'someone who is very enthusiastic about jazz'.

The examples in (10)-(11) and (6)-(9) show, respectively, that there are expressions which are only gradable, without expressing a value judgment, and expressions which only express a value judgment without being gradable. To illustrate the latter point, take the adjectives in (6), for example: they do not accept degree modification, as illustrated below, which indicates that they are not gradable:

(12) a. *this very damned dog [English]
b. *ce très foutu professeur [French]
this very fucking teacher

All this suggests that gradability and the expression of a value judgment are distinct notions.

However, the two categories intersect to some extent, in the sense that there are also expressions which are gradable as well as expressing a value judgment. A quite clear case (and one of the typical examples used in discussions of *N of an N* constructions) is the noun *idiot*, which categorizes individuals based on a gradable property, namely idiocy, and came out as gradable according to all the tests reviewed in chapter 1 (section 2). That this noun also expresses a value judgment is obvious particularly in its use as an epithet, for example in evaluative vocatives:

(13) a. John missed the train again, {the/ that} idiot!
b. You idiot!

If gradability and the expression of a value judgment are distinct notions (though intersecting in the way illustrated above), it is to be expected that there are contexts in which either one or the other will be exploited. Here we will argue that the *N of an N* is one such environment, which requires the expressions occurring in its first slot to convey a value judgment.

In the next three sub-sections, it will be shown that gradability is neither sufficient nor necessary, and that it is the possible expression of a (positive or negative) value judgment that is the sufficient and necessary condition for the

occurrence of an expressions in the first position of the *N of an N* construction, whether it is a non-modified noun, a modified noun or an adjective.

2.3.2 Non-modified nouns as N_1: *[N_1] of N_2*

In this sub-section we will examine *N of an N* constructions containing unmodified nouns in the first slot and aim to show that the requirement imposed on these expressions is that they express a value judgment. To start with, consider again our first example:

(14) that idiot of a doctor

As already discussed above, the N_1 used in this example, *idiot*, is gradable as well as expressing a value judgment. Consequently, based on such examples we cannot isolate the decisive factor that enables the noun to occur as N_1. We need to tease the two apart in order to see which one is the sufficient and necessary condition for N_1.

First of all, we will show that gradability is not sufficient for N_1. Evidence for this comes from the fact that not all gradable nouns can be N_1, as illustrated by the following examples repeated here from chapter 1 (§2.3.1):

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

(16) 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

(17) *that wisdom of a saying

The intended interpretation of such examples would be something like 'a doctor who is enthusiastic about jazz', 'a fragrant breeze', or 'a problematic decision', 'a wise saying' etc., similarly to (14) which is interpreted as 'a doctor who is idiotic'. However, the examples are ungrammatical; this sort of meaning cannot be expressed in the shape of an *N of an N* construction with these nouns occupying the first slot. This is so in spite of the fact that the examples contain nouns which come out as gradable according to almost all other gradability tests reviewed in chapter 1, such as modification by degree adjectives (cf. (11)). As for (17), it could be objected that mass nouns generally cannot occur as N_1 in *N of an N* constructions and this is what rules out the example. However, mass nouns can undergo a mass-to-count shift associated with 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. Following such a shift, some originally mass nouns can occur as N_1, as

illustrated in (18), which is interpreted as 'a beautiful {boat/ performance}' (cf. also Hulk and Tellier 2000 for French):[54]

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

For some reason, though, this does not seem possible in (17). Moreover, this still does not explain the unacceptability of the other examples given above.

Having suggested that gradability is not sufficient for a noun to occur as N_1, we will now show that it is not necessary either. This can be seen from the fact that N_1 need not be gradable. Consider the following examples:

(19) a. a box of a house
b. a stealth submarine of a car
c. that balloon of a {head/ bridal gown/ building}
d. that tower of a {song/ burger/ cake/ man}

These examples do not receive a (high) degree interpretation, as predicted by a degree approach such as Matushansky (2002c) (cf. §2.2.1). (19)a, for example, is not about a house which is 'a box to a high degree', or one which is 'very box-like'. In all these examples the N_2 is somehow qualified by metaphorically being compared to N_1. We will shortly make more precise what the exact contribution of the N_1 in such examples is. First though, let us mention one more fact which suggests that these nouns are not gradable. This consists of their failure to pass other gradability tests. For instance, they cannot sustain modification by adjectives like *big* in a degree sense as shown in (20)-(21). *Big* can only receive a concrete, size interpretation, not a degree one, and the nouns do not receive the interpretation they get in (19). These examples are not about being a box, submarine etc. to a high degree or about being very box-like, submarine-like etc.; they are simply about boxes, submarines, etc. which are large in size. As such, the examples in (21), which would require a figurative interpretation of the nouns, are not acceptable.[55]

(20) a. a big box
b. a big stealth submarine
c. a big balloon
d. a big tower

(21) a. #This house is a big box.

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[54] Note however that the gradability of these nouns in fact becomes questionable when they are used in the N_1 position. This can be seen from the fact that, although these nouns are gradable when shifted to the count interpretation too, when used in the N_1 position, modification by adjectives such as *big* does not contribute a degree interpretation in relation to N_1. Instead, such adjectives are interpreted literally, i.e. in terms of size, with respect to N_2:

(i)	that big beauty of a boat				[big boat]
(ii)	une énorme	saleté	de	moustique	[a big mosquito]
	an enormous	filth	of	mosquito	
	'a huge filthy mosquito'				

[55] Modification by size adjectives like *big* will be examined in more detail in chapter 4 (section 2); an explanation for these facts will be proposed there.

b. #This car is a big submarine.
c. #{His head/ That building} is a big balloon.
d. #{That song/ burger} is a big tower.

Based on the evidence presented thus far, we can conclude that gradability is neither sufficient nor necessary for a noun to occur in the N_1 position of the *N of an N* construction. In what follows, we will show that it is the expression of a value judgment that is the sufficient and necessary condition for N_1.

Upon closer consideration of the grammatical examples above, it can be observed that what they all share is the expression of a value judgment. The examples in (19) in particular attest to the fact that the expression of a value judgment is sufficient for a noun to occur as N_1. As already demonstrated, none of the nouns in these examples is gradable; they all, however, clearly convey some sort of value judgment, either positive or negative. Take (19)a, for instance: the qualification of a house in terms of a box – whether understood with respect to size or shape – conveys a negative value judgment (unless one can come up with a scenario in which looking like a box would be desirable so that *that box of a house* could acquire a positive, appreciative value). The presence of this type of interpretation is enough to make the examples grammatical. This is particularly clear with nouns that lose (all or most of) their lexical content and only end up expressing a general positive or negative value judgment. Consider the examples in (22) below (most of them taken or adapted from Napoli 1989):

(22) a. a pearl of a sister
b. one hell of a story
c. a flower of a girl
d. a peach of a day

In (22)a, for instance, the speaker is expressing a general positive value judgment of Maria as a sister of lovely or valued qualities (similar to 'a sister as lovely as a pearl') (Napoli 1989: 229).

Similar facts are found in other Germanic and Romance languages. Consider, for instance, the following Dutch and French examples:[56]

(23) a. een dijk van een {huis/ salaris} [Dutch]
a dike of a house/ salary
'a hell of a house/ salary'
b. een dijk van een {vrouw/ film/ idee}
a dike of a woman/ movie/ idea
'a hell of a woman/ movie/ idea'

(24) a. ce bijou d'église [French]
this jewel of.church
'this jewel of a church'

[56] The examples in (24) are from Doetjes and Rooryck (2003).

b. ce bijou de Marie
this jewel of Mary
'this jewel of a Mary'

In (23)a, *dijk* seems to retain some of its lexical content, so that an interpretation in terms of a (positive) evaluation based on some concrete properties (e.g. size) can be obtained, resulting in a meaning similar to *massive*. In (23)b, however, *dijk* only expresses a general, extremely positive value judgment, similarly to *fantastic*. In other words, it seems to have lost all of its other semantic features, i.e. no specific properties related to being a *dijk* are retained, or in any way relevant, for the interpretation.[57] (This type of interpretation in terms of a general positive value judgment is also available in (23)a). As for the French examples, as pointed out by Doetjes and Rooryck (2003:280), while (24)a can be paraphrased in terms of a comparison ('the quality of the church is such that it resembles a jewel') where *bijou* retains part of its lexical meaning, for (24)b it is hard to maintain that 'Marie is like a jewel' without losing the lexical interpretation of *bijou* 'jewel'. A qualitative comparison between animate and inanimate entities is much harder to interpret as a true comparison. Thus, the use of *bijou* 'jewel' here only involves a highly positive value judgment of Marie.[58]

Recall also, in this context, the examples in (7)-(9), repeated here for convenience: they host in the N_1 slot expressions that clearly only make an expressive, affective contribution:[59]

(7) that devil of a child [English]

(8) a. cette sapristi de femme [French]
this good.grief of woman
'this damned woman'
b. ce diable de moteur
this devil of engine
'this wretched engine'

(9) een kei van een meid [Dutch]
a cobble of a girl
'a fantastic girl'

[57] This is also unlike the way metaphors are generally conceived to work (cf. Henry 1971, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1990, 1994, 1996; for a different type of approach to metaphor, see Recanati 2003, Romero and Soria 2007 a.o.).

[58] Interestingly, the expressions that occupy the N_1 slot in some of the examples in this sub-section cannot be used in this way outside of the *N of an N* construction, e.g. in predicate position, sometimes not even with *such*, which can otherwise be used with nouns under a figurative interpretation (see chapter 1, §2.1.2). This is the case for the Dutch noun *dijk*, as well as some of the English nouns (e.g. *peach* – ??*The day was (such) a peach.*; *hell* - ??**That story was {(such) a/ one} hell*.). This suggests that the sort of interpretation found is not simply exploited in the *N of an N* construction, but actually created in this environment.

Note also that *sapristi* cannot be used predicatively at all, as pointed out by Hulk and Tellier (2000) and Doetjes and Rooryck (2003), who even question its status as a noun.

[59] The examples in (20)-(21) have demonstrated that the nouns in (19) are not gradable; the facts are completely parallel concerning the nouns used in the other examples, i.e. (22)-(24), as well as (7)-(9).

The facts discussed so far make it clear that the expression of a value judgment is sufficient for a noun to occur as N_1. It remains to be shown that this is also a necessary condition.

To start with, recall, for instance, the examples in (15) above, repeated here for convenience:

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

These examples, which contain gradable nouns, are ungrammatical unless we can construe a possibly figurative, metaphorical meaning under which the nouns could be interpreted as conveying some sort of value judgment. While for a noun like *eater* it is not easy to construe such an interpretation, other agentive *–er* nouns are more likely to have such uses; even for *eater* such epithet uses may be coined in compounds, as illustrated below:

(25) a. that {dancer/ performer} of a politician
b. that man-eater of a woman

Likewise, the examples in (16), partly repeated below, can be contrasted with the examples in (26):

(16) a. *that problem of a decision
b. *that success of an attorney

(26) a. that mistake of a relationship/ child
b. a failure of an attorney

What makes the difference between the grammatical examples in (26) and the ungrammatical ones in (16) above is that the nouns in (26) have a judgmental value, which is clearly negative in connotation; this is lacking in (16). While this is quite straightforward in the case of (16)b vs. (26)b, the nouns *problem* and *mistake* in (16)a and (26)a seem to be quite similar at first sight and would not be expected to behave very differently. However, we would like to suggest that the contrast between (16)a and (26)a can be explained by the fact that *problem*, unlike *mistake*, does not necessarily have a negative judgmental connotation. *Problem* is more objective, and can be used to simply make a factual observation (similar to *challenge*), while *mistake* is generally felt as making a rather negative comment. Note also, in this context, the difference in interpretation when a (positive) evaluative adjective is used to modify the two nouns, as in *a nice/ fascinating problem* and *a nice/ fascinating mistake*. In the former case we are referring to something which presents us with a challenge, but which is, at the same time, intriguing, fascinating (in terms of its contents, the implications, the quest for a solution etc.). In the latter case, we are referring to a mistake, and the adjective is speaker-oriented, in the sense that it conveys the speaker's attitude, possibly ironic (in fact exclusively so with *nice*), rather than describing the intrinsic qualities of the

object. In sum, the former can be used in a positive sense, while the latter retains a negative flavour coming from the choice of noun.

The facts illustrated in (26) also point up another problem for a gradability approach to *N of an N* constructions, such as the one put forth by Matushansky (2002c) who assumes that the structure involves a degree operator. Recall from §2.2.1 that, while Matushansky expresses the intuition that these constructions also involve an emotive dimension of meaning, she in fact reduces the entire phenomenon to the presence of a (special) degree operator in the syntactic structure. This would predict that occurrence in this position should always trigger a high degree interpretation of N_1, given the contribution of the degree operator. This is, however, not the case. The sentences in (26) above, for example, are not about an attorney who is 'a failure to a high degree', or a relationship/ child that is a 'high degree mistake'. Instead, the attorney is judged as a failed one/ a failure, and the relationship as being a mistake, and these qualifications carry a particular (here: negative) value judgment. The same holds, in fact, for all the examples considered so far.

More data clearly indicating that it is the expression of value judgment that is the essence of the interpretation of N_1s comes from Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann's (2010) discussion of Spanish *N of an N* constructions. They take it to be a lexically encoded, and hence highly idiosyncratic, property of the nominal. Typical instances involve negative evaluative nominals like *idiota* 'idiot', *bruja* 'witch', *gilipollas* 'asshole', *burro* 'silly' (lit. 'donkey'), whereas non-evaluative nouns like *médico* 'doctor' or *político* 'politician' are forbidden. Crucially, when a deprecatory morphological marker like *-ucho* or *-astro* is added, the *N of an N* construction becomes perfect:[60,61]

(27) a. #el {médico/ político} de tu hermano [Spanish]
the doctor/ politician of your brother
b. el {medicucho/ politicastro} de tu hermano
the bad.doctor/ bad.politician of your brother
'that disaster of a doctor that your brother is'

So far, we have shown that the expression of a value judgment is the sufficient and necessary condition for a non-modified noun to occur as N_1. In what follows we will show that when N_1 is modified, the effect of the modifier (i.e. adjective) on the acceptability of the [A N] in the first slot of the *N of an N* construction depends on the same aspect of meaning, i.e. whether it can convey a value judgment.

[60] Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann (2010) also note that the contrast has nothing to do with gradability, as neither nominal is gradable:
(i) *Juan es muy {médico / medicucho}.
John is very {a doctor/ bad.doctor}.

[61] The examples in (27) are from Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann (2010).

2.3.3 Insertion of adjectives in the first position: *[A (N_1)] of N_2*

The preceding sub-section has shown that a noun can only be used in the first position of the *N of an N* construction if it can express a (positive or negative) value judgment; this is the necessary and sufficient condition. We will now show that this conclusion is confirmed by an examination of cases where a noun is modified in the N_1 position, or when an adjective is used on its own in the first slot of the construction.

To start with, compare the following examples:

(28) a. *that eater of a doctor
b. that huge eater of a doctor

The contrast between the two examples suggests that modification can license a noun as N_1 that otherwise would not be able to occur in this position. The question is: what is the decisive contribution of the adjective: that it is gradable or that it contributes a value judgment? Just like in the previous sub-section, we need to tease the two apart in order to see which one is the sufficient and necessary condition for an adjective to be able to license a noun in the N_1 position.

First of all, we will show that gradability is not sufficient. This can be seen from the fact that simply adding a gradable adjective does not automatically license a noun as N_1, as shown by (30) in comparison with (29). The fact that these are gradable adjectives is indicated by the availability of degree modification in (31).

(29) a. *that eater of a doctor
b. *a duck of a president
c. *that problem of a {decision/ financial crisis}

(30) a. ?that big eater of a doctor
b. *a/that friendly duck of a president
c. *that interesting problem of a {decision/ financial crisis}

(31) a. a very big eater
b. very friendly
c. a very interesting problem

On the other hand, gradability is not necessary. This is shown by cases of modification by affective, or expressive, adjectives (e.g. English *damned* etc., French *foutu*, *sacré*, *fameux*, *beau*, *pauvre* etc., but also *prétendu*, *soi-disant*). Such adjectives can license as N_1 nouns that otherwise would not be able to occur in this position, as shown by the contrast between (32) and (33), although they are not gradable, as shown again in (34) below:[62]

(32) a. *that democrat of a mayor [English]

[62] The examples in (33) are taken or adapted from, or inspired by, Ruwet (1982).

b. *ce linguiste de Noam [French]
this linguist of Noam
b'. *ce {démocrate/ médecin} de Paul
this democrat/ doctor of Paul

(33) a. that damned democrat of a mayor [English]
b. ce sacré linguiste de Noam [French]
this bloody linguist of Noam
'this bloody linguist of a Noam'
b'. ce prétendu {démocrate/ médecin} de Paul
this pretended democrat/ doctor of Paul
'this pretended democrat/ doctor of a Paul'

(34) a. *a very damned democrat [English]
b. *le plus sacré linguiste [French]
the most bloody linguist
b'. *un très prétendu {démocrate/ médecin}
a very pretended democrat/ doctor

In what follows, we will show that the expression of a value judgment is the sufficient and necessary condition. That it is sufficient can already be seen from the acceptability of "affective" adjectives in (33). These adjectives are not gradable. They only express the speaker's attitude. So it is due to this particular semantics that they can license nouns which may be completely neutral in terms of value judgments and would otherwise be barred from the N_1 position (e.g. *democrat*, *linguist*, *doctor* etc.): the [A N] combination will be interpreted as a whole as conveying a value judgment, namely a depreciatory one. The examples in (35) illustrate similar cases, where the adjectives contribute a negative attitude (e.g. despise):[63]

(35) a. a lame duck of a president
b. a {sorry/ lame /poor} excuse of a man

Finally, if an adjective can be interpreted as expressing a value judgment (possibly in addition to being gradable), then it can also license a noun as N_1. This is in fact the case for (28)b above, which is to be contrasted with (30)a.[64] Conversely, if such a value-judgmental interpretation is missing, as in (30) above, the examples are not acceptable.[65] This shows that the expression of a value judgment is necessary.

[63] Example (35)a is from Napoli (1989).

[64] Such adjectives seem to be "emotive" adjectives (cf. Vendler 1968 who classifies adjectives like *horrible*, *awful*, *delightful* etc. as "emotive" adjectives, and notes that other adjectives, like *beautiful*, *lovely* as well as *ugly*, *dirty* etc. may also carry an emotive load), or "evaluating" (or quality) adjectives (cf. Cinque 1994, Hetzron 1978; e.g. English *beautiful*, French *joli*), or adjectives expressing "subjective comment" (cf. Scott 1998, 2002; e.g. *nasty*, *magnificent*, *beautiful*, *great*, *excellent* etc.). These adjectives seem to be (a subset of the class of) evaluative adjectives distinguished by Bierwisch (1989), or "extreme" adjectives (cf. Cruse 1986, Paradis 2001, Morzycki 2010).

[65] A treatment of such adjectives as degree modifiers of the gradable nouns (a view suggested in chapter 1, and to be examined more seriously in chapter 4) would also raise a problem for a (high) degree analysis of *N of an N* constructions (such as Matushansky 2002c): the fact that adding a degree modifier improves

In sum, the investigation of modified N_1s has shown that, when an adjective can license a noun in this position, which otherwise would not be able to occur here, the sufficient and necessary condition for it to do so is, once again, the expression of a value judgment, not gradability.

Additional evidence that supports this conclusion comes from a related structure, where the first slot is only occupied by an adjective, i.e. *A of N* constructions. These are not found in English, but they exist in Romance languages, e.g. Romanian and Spanish (especially when N_2 is a proper name or a personal pronoun). Consider the following examples:

(36) a. ??înaltul de Petre [Romanian]
tall.the of Peter
b. ??slabul de Petre
thin.the of Peter

(37) a. săracul de {mine / Petre} [Romanian]
poor.the of me / Peter
'poor me / poor Peter'
b. pobrecitos de nosotros [Spanish]
poor of us
'poor us'

On the one hand, the first series of examples contain clearly gradable adjectives (like *înalt* 'tall', and *slab* 'thin'), but are not acceptable, thus showing that gradability is not sufficient for an adjective to occur in this position. On the other hand, the acceptability of (non-predicative) adjectives like *poor*, which are not gradable, in (37) shows that gradability is not necessary. These examples also show that the expression of a value judgment, or speaker attitude, however, is a sufficient condition, since this is what the meaning of these adjectives only consists of. That this is also a necessary condition is shown by the fact that if, possibly in addition to being gradable, an adjective can also convey such a (subjective) value judgment, then it may occur in the construction. Contrast, for example, the ungrammaticality of the (dimensional) adjectives *înalt* 'tall' and *slab* 'thin', which tend to be rather neutral, in (36) above, with the grammaticality of the corresponding words derived by means of an augmentative suffix, namely *înăltan* 'very tall (person)' and *slăbănog* 'very skinny (person)':

(38) a. înăltanul de Petre [Romanian]
tall.AUG.the of Peter
'that really tall Peter'
b. slăbănogul de Petre
thin.AUG.the of Peter
'that really skinny Peter'

---

the examples is unexpected in such an analysis where a (high) degree projection is assumed to be present in the structure in all cases.

The difference between (36) and (38) lies in the contribution of the augmentative suffix, which adds a negative connotation, plausibly related to the idea of an (undesirable) excess in height etc. as compared to some average or standard (in fact *înăltan* or *slăbănog* may be used to indicate that the individual is '*too much* taller/ skinnier than would be normal').[66] The ungrammatical examples in (36) above can also be contrasted with the acceptable example in (39) below, which contains the adjective *gras* 'fat', which expresses a property that is conventionally regarded as rather negative; the presence of this negative connotation (which is absent in (36)) licenses the use of the adjective in the first slot of the construction:

(39) grasul de Petre [Romanian]
fat.the of Peter
'that fat Peter'

All these examples show that what makes the difference between acceptable and unacceptable examples of *A of N* constructions, in those languages where such structures exist, is the presence vs. absence of an interpretation in terms of value judgment. Gradability does not play a role. This confirms the conclusion that the ability to convey a value judgment is the sufficient and necessary condition for an expression to occur in the first position of these constructions.

2.3.4 Final remarks on the interpretation of N_1

It has been shown in the preceding sub-sections that the essence of the *N of an N* construction is the expression of a value judgment. As such, possible N_1s are those nouns that have or can acquire such an interpretation. The value judgment may be inherent in the meaning of the noun, i.e. some nouns (whether gradable or not) make a value judgment easily available due to their inherent, lexical meaning. Such an example is *idiot* which categorizes individuals based on the (gradable) property idiocy, which is an intrinsically negative quality, hence the negative value judgment this noun is associated with by definition. Another example is provided by *tyran* 'tyrant', which, as shown Ruwet (1982), can be used as N_1 both with a metaphorical interpretation and a non-metaphorical one:

(40) a. Ce tyran de Hiéron terrorisait Syracuse. [French]
this tyrant of Hieron terrorised Syracuse
'This tyrant Heron terrorised Syracuse.'

---

[66] Note that a similar contrast is found in Italian, where neutral agentive nouns like *mangiatore* 'eater' do not like to appear as N_1 (unless they are modified), while the nouns derived from the same verb by means of the augmentative suffix (e.g. *mangione* 'big eater') do:

(i) a. ??/*questo mangiatore di Gianni
this eater of Gianni
b. questo mangione di Gianni
this eater.AUG of Gianni
'this huge eater (of a) Gianni'

And recall also the Spanish examples in (27).

b. Ce tyran de Paul terrorise sa famille.
this tyrant of Paul terrorises his family
'This tyrannical Paul terrorises his family.'

If a value judgment is not inherent in the meaning of the noun, as in the case of basically neutral nouns the lexical meaning of which involves no value judgment, such as *schoolmaster*, *box, doctor* etc., it may come about by means of modification (by e.g. affective adjectives – cf. (33), (35)), by adding an evaluative suffix (as in the Spanish examples in (27)), or as the result of a shift in meaning, usually by "metaphorical extension or association" (cf. Ruwet 1982, Napoli 1989) (e.g. (19), (22)-(25)).

Some supplementary observations may be added that further support the conclusion that what is necessary is for N_1s to be able to express a value judgment, as well as showing other aspects correlated with this sort of interpretation. First, as pointed out by Napoli (1989), those inanimate objects which are colloquially used with the sense of a value judgment can appear in the N_1 position, while the names of inanimate objects which are typically used for specific purposes are not generally employed with such an interpretation and are, therefore, also barred from the N_1 position. This is illustrated for Italian and English by the contrast between the (a) and (b) examples below (with the exception of (41)a', the examples are from Napoli 1989):

(41) a. un fiore di ragazza [Italian]
a flower of girl
'a flower of a girl'
a'. un capolavoro di quadro
a masterpiece of painting
'a masterpiece of a painting'
b. *un tulipano di ragazza
a tulip of girl
'*a tulip of a girl'
b'. *un quadro d'opera d'arte
a painting of work of art
'*a painting of a work of art'

(42) a. a pistol of a lecturer
b. *a revolver of a lecturer

Similarly, proper names (and pronouns) cannot occur as N_1 in these constructions precisely because they cannot be used to convey value judgments. The only exception are proper names that by connotation have become evaluative in this sense (Napoli 1989):

(43) a. *quello Carlo d'uomo
that Carlo of.man
'*that Charles of a man'

b. un Hitler d'uomo
a Hitler of.man
'a Hitler of a man'

In addition, as Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann (2010) remark, what counts as a proper expression of value judgment has a cultural conditioning. They note, in this sense, the contrast between the masculine *brujo* 'wizard' and the feminine *bruja* 'witch', illustrated below. Whereas the latter is easily and frequently used in *N of an N* constructions, the former is awkward (and unattested), because of the fact that it has no pragmatically attributable negative interpretation:

(44) a. la bruja de mi suegra [Spanish]
the witch of my mother-in-law
'that witch of a mother-in-law of mine'
b. #el brujo de mi suegro
the wizard of my father-in-law

Moreover, speaker-variation can sometimes be observed in correlation with the availability of an interpretation in terms of value judgment. Napoli (1989) notes that while in many cases the value judgment is inherent in the word for all speakers (as in most of the examples above), sometimes speakers will vary, which influences the acceptability of the example. Consider (45) below, for which Napoli reports variation that she puts down to the fact that "for many speakers the word *sexist* is not (yet) inherently evaluative" (p. 224):

(45) a sexist of a director

Another interesting property of the interpretation of N_1s in *N of an N* constructions is the fact that it varies depending on the choice of N_2. This could already be seen in the variable interpretation of the N_1s in the Dutch and French examples in (23)-(24) above. More examples illustrating this point are given below for English:

(46) a. a cupboard of a house
b. a cupboard of a man

(47) a. a whale of a time
b. a whale of a lesson
c. a whale of a tale
d. a whale of a bug
e. a great white whale of a hotel
f. a whale of a problem
g. a whale of a mystery
h. a whale of a woman

It can be observed that the exact relevant properties that make up the basis for the value judgment may differ for the same N_1 with different N_2s. In (46)a what is relevant is size (namely, insufficient or small, and possibly crammed, space), while in (46)b it is shape, and, possibly, also (large) size. In (47) it can be shape, size, quality etc. What stays constant throughout, however, is that the *N of an N* conveys a negative or positive value judgment, with a greater or lesser emotive load.

Note that these facts constitute a problem for a degree approach, which would take such figurative meanings to be the result of scalarity coercion triggered by the presence of a degree operator. According to Matushansky (2002c), as a result of scalarity coercion the nouns would come to express properties typically associated with being N, with the notions of stereotype or prototype coming into play. It is not obvious, however, how, for the same N_1, it could yield a different output depending on the choice of N_2. In addition, it is also sometimes rather hard to determine the relevant properties that would be "*stereotypically* associated with being N_1"; this can be seen in the case of *cupboard* in (46) or *peach* in (22)d – *a peach of a day*. Prototypicality does not seem to play a role here either. Moreover, in some cases, there is a strong connotational value. Take (47)e for instance: *white whale* is an allusion to Moby Dick, hence, we are not simply dealing with a big hotel, but with one that is unmanageable etc.; someone without knowledge of the relevant fiction, however, would not be able to interpret the example in this way, and would probably only get a size + colour qualification out of it. In sum, the dependence of the resulting interpretation of N_1 on the choice of N_2 is hard to capture on such an approach. It is also, in fact, rather unexpected given that scalarity coercion is supposed to be triggered by the presence of a degree operator that combines with N_1, and then the [Deg + N_1] as a whole acts as a predicate or as a modifier of the N_2 (depending on the analysis one adopts). Finally, note that the cases where N_1 loses all of its lexical semantic content, and ends up expressing only a very general positive or negative value judgment (recall examples (22)-(24), as well as (7)-(9)) also present a problem for such a degree account since there is no property related to being N_1 which can be identified.

Before concluding the section, we would like to add a note on the source of the confusion sometimes found in the literature between "evaluation", defined as the expression of a value judgment, and degree. In our view, the confusion stems from the fact that, although the expression of a value judgment and gradability are distinct, they are intersecting notions, in the sense that there are expressions which are gradable as well as expressing a value judgment (e.g. *idiot*). If one chooses examples containing such expressions in the first slot of the *N of an N* construction, it is not easy to pinpoint which is the relevant factor enabling the expression to occur in this position. In addition, it is likely that what has been confused is the (possibly varying) strength of appreciation or depreciation carried by the "value-judgmental" expression and the high degree of a property the respective expression denotes or is associated with. This is because strong appreciation or depreciation and high degree may be associated by inference – though such implications are not necessary. Thus, an expression of high degree, such as *very beautiful* or *very stupid* or even *very/ extremely tall*, to take simple examples from the adjectival domain, may implicate,

or be associated with, a strongly positive or negative value judgment.[67] Conversely, a strong judgmental expression may be understood in the sense that property holds to a high degree. For example, the use of an evaluative vocative such as *that idiot!* may be interpreted as implying that (the speaker thinks that) the individual in question is 'very idiotic'. In other words, the strength of speaker involvement as suggested by the use of a value judgmental expression may be taken to reflect the degree to which the property expressed applies.

2.4 Concluding remarks

The investigation carried out in this section has yielded two main findings.

First of all, it was shown that "evaluation", understood as the expression of a value judgment, and (pure) gradability, understood as referring to the possibly varying degrees to which a property may hold, can and should be distinguished. This can be done in spite of the fact that the classes of expressions they delimit intersect to some extent, in the sense that there are expressions which are gradable and may express a value judgment at the same time (e.g. *idiot*). This is significant as it fills a gap in the literature on the topic of *N of an N* constructions, which had led to some confusion in the characterization of the *N of an N* construction.

Secondly, once this distinction has been established, the exact requirement on the first slot of the *N of an N* construction can be identified. It has been shown that possible N_1s must be expressions that lend themselves to being interpreted as expressing a value judgment (usually negative, but not exclusively so), irrespective of whether they are gradable or not. In other words, the expression of a value judgment is the necessary and sufficient condition on N_1, while (pure) gradability is neither sufficient nor necessary.

Consequently, occurrence in the N_1 slot of the *N of an N* construction cannot be used as a test for nominal gradability. This is rather an environment where expressive/emotive evaluative meanings are exploited or even created.

3 *Seem*

3.1 Introduction

The second case we examine in this chapter is the distribution of expressions in the non-sentential (i.e. small clause) complement of *seem* in English. As discussed in chapter 1, it has been claimed in the literature that only gradable expressions can be used in this environment (Bolinger 1972, Maling 1983). Matushansky (2002b), however, shows that the facts are more complicated and argues that semantic

[67] For a discussion of expressives and their possibly varying degree of expressivity, or strength see, for example, Potts (2007).

selection alone (i.e. lexical gradability) cannot account for the restrictions that are found. Instead, she proposes a syntactic degree account, claiming that *seem* requires the presence of a DegP in its small clause complement in the syntax.

The main consequence of such an account, which requires the presence of a DegP, is that the small clause complement of *seem* will have to contain either a gradable noun or a noun modified by a gradable adjective, since these are the types of elements that are assumed to project a DegP in the syntax in Matushansky's account.[68] Alternatively, it will have to contain a noun or adjective that has become gradable by means of scalarity coercion triggered by the presence of a (covert or overt) degree operator.

In this section, we will re-examine (the core idea of) Matushansky's syntactic degree account in light of some additional empirical facts and show that her proposal cannot account for (all) the data or makes the wrong predictions. This will lead us to suggest an alternative way of capturing the restrictions on the small clause complement of *seem* in which gradability, either lexical semantic or syntactic, does not play a role.

3.2 The syntactic degree account and its problems

3.2.1 Introducing the syntactic degree account

The following examples illustrate the basic contrasts, presented in chapter 1, which led to the claim that only gradable nouns and adjectives are acceptable in the non-sentential complement of *seem*, as in (48), while non-gradable ones are not, as in (49) (cf. Bolinger 1972, Maling 1983):

(48) a. Eric seems a fool. [NP]
a'. What he writes seems nonsense.
b. The music seems beautiful. [AP]
b'. His nationality seems irrelevant.

(49) a. *Eric seems a {man/ wizard/ doctor/ dancer}. [NP]
a'. *What he writes seems history.
b. *The music seems choral. [AP]
b'. *His nationality seems French.

Matushansky (2002b), however, draws attention to some complications in the data. For example, adding adjectives like *good*, *capable*, *bad* etc. to a non-gradable noun improves the examples in (49)a significantly:

(50) Eric seems a {capable/ good/ lousy/ exceptional} {wizard/ doctor/ dancer}.

[68] Prepositional phrases can also occur in this position, but we will not discuss these cases here.

As also noted by Bolinger (1972), adding a degree modifier to the non-gradable adjectives in (49)b, as well as to nouns, makes them acceptable, as illustrated in (51). In addition, Matushansky observes that comparatives, equatives etc. are possible in the small clause complement of *seem*, as illustrated in (52).[69]

(51) a. The music seems *almost* choral.
a'. Eric seems *exceptionally* French.
b. You'd seem *such* a linguist!

(52) a. Frank Sandow seems (twice) as tall as Lady Karle.
b. She seems more eager to learn than you are.

This is significant since, as a whole, these predicates can no longer be considered gradable. Let us see why. Matushansky adopts a degree-based approach to the semantics and syntax of gradable predicates, which takes them to be of type <*d*, <*e*,*t*>>, and to project a DegP in the syntax (even in the case of the unmarked, positive form, for which a null degree operator is posited). On such an account, at the point of the derivation when *seem* is merged with its complement, the degree argument of the adjective has been bound by the equative, or comparative, operator. No longer having an unsaturated degree argument, it no longer counts as a gradable predicate.

Based on such facts, Matushansky concludes that semantic selection alone cannot account for the restrictions on the small clause complement of *seem*, so a simple lexical gradability approach cannot be maintained. She argues, instead, that it is necessary to separate the underlying (i.e. lexically specified) gradability of the lexical head of a predicate from its syntactic behaviour, hence from the licensing of a predicate in the complement of *seem*. She proposes that what licenses the complements in the examples above is the presence of a DegP in the syntax (e.g. containing the equative or comparative operator).

In Matushansky's syntactic degree account, *seem* is treated as a case of lexical ambiguity: there is an epistemic *seem*, which takes an IP/ CP complement, and a perception *seem*, which takes a small clause complement. The restrictions on the small clause complement of perception *seem* are formulated as a syntactic requirement: "Perception verbs, including the perception *seem*, are lexically specified for an uninterpretable [degree] feature. This feature is checked by (covert) QR of a DegP from its complement." (Matushansky 2002b: 256)

In the next sub-section we will show how Matushanky accounts for the complications in the data that she notes, and point out some problems that arise from the analysis she proposes.

3.2.2 Some problems

In addition to the contrasts illustrated in (50)-(51) above, Matushansky (2002b) points to some more complications in the data. Despite what (50), may suggest, it is

[69] The examples in (51)-(52) are from Bolinger (1972) and Matushansky (2002b).

in fact not the case that simply adding an adjective to a non-gradable noun will automatically improve the examples, as shown by (53), though adding a degree modifier to the adjective does, as illustrated in (54) (examples taken or adapted from Matushansky 2002b):

(53) a. Eric seems a {*French/ *tall/ ??handsome} {wizard/ doctor/ dancer}.
b. ?Eric seems a handsome man.

(54) a. Eric seems an *exceptionally* {French/ handsome}{wizard/ doctor/ dancer}.
b. Eric seems a *more* {French/ handsome} dancer than anyone I have ever met.

Matushansky (rather misleadingly) calls the adjectives in (53)-(54) "dimension" adjectives, and those in (50) above "value" adjectives (which seem to include evaluative adjectives generally interpreted subsectively). "Dimensional" adjectives, unlike "value" ones, require an overt degree operator to license inherently non-gradable DP-complements of *seem*. However, with certain light head nouns or if stressed, they also function as licensers (as in (53)b vs. (53)a); she also notes that examples containing "dimension" adjectives are better than those with nationality ones (compare *French* and *handsome* in (53)a).

These facts raise certain questions, which Matushansky tries to address. We will consider two of them here, and show that the solutions she offers to these problems are unsatisfactory, and raise additional problematic issues that cast doubt on the analysis.

Before considering these issues, we need to introduce two ingredients of Matushansky's account. Firstly, she claims that a degree operator in the complement of *seem* cannot be interpreted in situ and needs to undergo Quantifier Raising (QR). This movement is in fact caused by two factors: (i) there is a type mismatch between the degree operator and its complement (as generally assumed on the quantificational view of degree operators – cf. Heim 2000); (ii) the feature on *seem* needs to be checked. Secondly, she argues that in order to extract an item out of a DP (which is assumed to be a phase), it must first be raised to its periphery, presumably to Spec,DP.

The first question raised by the data above on an account like Matushansky's is: why is it impossible to use the DegP of the adjectives in (53) to license the noun in the complement of *seem*? Her answer is that, for whatever reason, the null degree operator present in (certain classes of) adjectives cannot be raised in the way indicated above. This, however, reveals an inconsistency in the account, since at other points in the paper, and for other contexts, she in fact claims that the degree operator present in the DegP of positive adjectives does generally need to raise for interpretability. In addition, she offers no explanation for the contrast between (53)a and (53)b. The second question then arises: if the default null degree operator of positive adjectives projected within a DP, as in (53), cannot check the uninterpretable feature of *seem*, then (i) why can gradable nouns (for which she assumes a similar syntax-semantics) appear in the complement of *seem*, and (ii) how

come there is a class of adjectives that do not require an (overt) degree operator to license non-gradable DP-complements of *seem*, as in the (50) examples? Her answer, building on Bierwisch (1989), is that "value" adjectives like those in (50) and gradable nouns contain a different kind of degree operator than the null operator proposed for positive "dimension" adjectives such as those in (53). However, the proposed typology of gradable adjectives, namely "dimension" and "value", does not fully match the classifications proposed in the works she refers to, namely Bierwisch (1989). In addition, she does not discuss the actual properties/nature of the special null degree operator postulated for the sub-class of value adjectives and its interaction with or relation to the null degree operator postulated for the positive form of gradable adjectives in general.

Having pointed out these problematic aspects of the analysis proposed by Matushansky (2002b), we will, in the remainder of this section, mostly abstract away from other details concerning the particular technical implementation, and will mainly focus on the core idea of the proposal and its predictions in the light of some additional empirical facts.

3.2.3 Measure phrases

Matushansky (2002b) points out that adjectives modified by measure phrases (henceforth MP), as in (55), are not possible in the small clause complement of *seem*. But when a MP contains its own degree operator such as *almost*, *about* etc., as in (56), it becomes possible (all examples below are from Matushnsky 2002b):

(55) a. *Frank Sandow seems 5'10" tall.
b. *Thumbelina seems two inches tall.
c. *Mount Everest seems {8848 m/ 8.8 km/ 29,028 feet} high.

(56) a. Frank Sandow seems {almost/ about} 5'10" tall.
b. Thumbelina seems about two inches tall.

Based on these contrasts, she argues that adjectives modified by MPs are "absolute" predicates, i.e. they are not gradable. Therefore, their syntax does not involve a DegP projection, and they are, consequently, barred from the small clause complements of *seem*. When a degree operator is present, however, as in (56), it licenses the entire AP in the complement of *seem* (even if the degree operator is actually embedded in the specifier of AP). This effect is similar to the influence of explicit scalarity coercion in other contexts, e.g. APs and DPs – recall the examples in (51) and (54), where adding a degree modifier licenses an adjective or noun which could otherwise not appear in the small clause.

These facts, however, may also be taken to support an alternative, vagueness-based, view. Such a view would link the ungrammaticality of (55) to the fact that the precision of the measure phrases used is too high for the embedded proposition to be epistemically or perceptually at issue. This would amount to treating *seem* similarly

to the *seem* of other languages (e.g. Modern Italian *sembrare*),[70] which imposes no gradability restriction on its complement. In these languages or dialects *sembrare*/*seem* means 'it can be deduced from perceptual evidence that P holds'. The constraint then becomes a pragmatic one of perceptual or epistemic uncertainty.

But Matushansky rejects this view, on the basis of two arguments. Firstly, she points out that using smaller, larger or different units of measurement, as in (55)c, or even a vague plural, as in (57) below, which should have influenced the grammaticality if it truly relied on precision of perception, has no effect. Secondly, measure phrases used as part of a comparative are grammatical in the complement of *seem* as in (58) (both examples are from Matushansky 2002b).

(57) *Mount Everest seems thousands of meters high.

(58) Thumbelina seems two inches taller than expected.

She uses this as evidence in favour of her view that in the case of adjectives modified by MPs no DegP is projected. They will, therefore, not make good small clause complements to *seem*. In cases like (58), however, there is a DegP hosting the comparative, and the whole phrase can be licensed as a complement.

We would like, however, to raise some objections to Matushansky's arguments. First of all, her judgment of the example in (57) is questionable: speakers we have consulted as well as internet and corpus searches show that such examples are in fact acceptable:

(59) a. It seems years to me since I have seen you.[71]
b. A place where the hustle and bustle of city life seems thousands of miles away.[72]
c. But as they sit here, they seem a million miles from their tranquil Northwich base.[73]

More in general, in fact, it is not completely correct to say that adjectives modified by MPs are not allowed in the complement of *seem*.[74] We do find such examples, as illustrated below. Interestingly, they get an interpretation of the type 'X seems very *A*' or '(much) *A*-er than it/he/she (really) is':

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[70] Or the *seem* of other dialects such as Victorian English, written media English according to Matushansky (2002b).

[71] Source: http://www.classicreader.com/book/2438/1/

[72] Source: http://www.atlasdowel.com/pages/blog/

[73] Source: British National Corpus

[74] As already indicated, Matushansky (2002b) excludes MP modification from the domain of gradability, and argues that no DegP is projected in these cases; hence such expressions are barred from the small clause complement of *seem*, contrary to fact as can be seen from the examples in the main text.

In other works on the syntax and semantics of gradable adjectives and MP modification, however, it has been argued that MPs are in fact hosted within degree projections – cf. Kennedy 1999a, Kennedy & Svenonius (2006). Adopting such a view of the syntax of MPs would still not be able to rescue a syntactic degree approach to *seem*, since, if all MPs were to involve a DegP, then all examples should be equally grammatical (or ungrammatical), which is not the case either.

(60) a. O'Callaghan is that rare actor who seems ten feet tall on stage; his sublimely talented, effervescent performance is reason enough to see the show…[75]
b. She's got a stride that seems 60 feet long. It's effortless.[76]
c. The table seems 20 feet long. There is no eye contact between them.[77]

The interpretation, and hence acceptability, of such examples seems to be facilitated by certain factors. One is expressing or implying a contrast between appearance (wrong or false impression) and reality (real dimensions), as in (61). Another is turning the predicate into a stage-level one, or one that is otherwise relativized or can be evaluated with respect to different times and/or locations (e.g. by the addition of temporal adverbs), as in (62).

(61) a. Notice how the front of the van distorts into a circle and seems 20 feet long.
b. Although he is only five and a half feet tall, when he shares his thoughts his face becomes animated, his arms start moving about and he seems seven feet tall, larger than life.[78]
c. She is standing on a small pedestal hidden under her gown and seems eight feet tall.[79]
d. … she was so polite and so short, about five foot three, nothing like her character here, who seems twelve feet tall and so powerful![80]
e. Also, the dust jacket on my edition features a painting by T. Thompson in which the proportions are all wrong and the boat seems 100 feet long, not 72.[81]

(62) a. For a guy who seems 100 feet tall when he's fighting, I could not believe how short Wanderlei Silva was in person.[82]
b. He seems ten feet tall at points and I think that is really how you would feel if you came face to face with him.[83]
c. Sister G is only four feet, ten inches tall. But sometimes she seems six feet tall as this reporter soon discovered.[84]

These may all be regarded as means of introducing some relativization with respect to different times or possible worlds, which creates room for imprecision and epistemic uncertainty. We would like to suggest that this is what makes them compatible with the meaning of *seem*, which encodes epistemic uncertainty.

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75 Source: http://www.johnnyocallaghan.com/press.htm
76 Source: http://www.bloodhorse.com/…articles/30050/wilson-can-put-stamp-on-big-woodbine-meet
77 Source: http://www.mnblue.com/laurie+coleman+edited+into+her+husbands+ad
78 Source: http://www.mindfulhealthinstitute.com/Pillars_Mindful_Health.htm
79 Source: http://www.scribd.com/doc/13651346/The-EightFoot-Bride-an-original-screenplay
80 Source: http://www.amazon.com/.../product-reviews/B002ZG4Q5W?pageNumber=20
81 Source: http://www.amazon.ca/product-reviews/0393046133
82 Source: http://communities.canada.com/saskatoonstarphoenix/print.aspx?postid=279055
83 Source: http://reversethieves.com/2008/07/21/batman-gotham-knight-pow-splat-kerplop-flurb/
84 Source: http://www.mcintoshwriting.com/portliferow/ABOUT_US/SisterG.htm

Still, there is indeed a contrast between the two following examples that needs to be accounted for:[85]

(63) a. *John seems 5 foot 8 tall.
b. John seems two inches taller than his brother.

In view of the grammaticality of the examples in (59)-(62) above and the sort of interpretation associated with them, we can in fact maintain that (63)a is indeed out due to the precision of the measure, just like Matushansky's examples given in (55) above, for that matter. As for (63)b, it is likely that the comparative has scope over the measure phrase, and, since comparatives are generally allowed in the complement of *seem*, this example is (not unexpectedly) also grammatical; it is (the meaning of) the comparative that is primarily visible, and not the MP differential. Admittedly how exactly this works needs to be made more precise.

To sum up, the distribution of adjectives modified by MPs in the small clause complement of *seem* does not conform to Matushansky's description of the facts and, as such, it does not support the syntactic degree account she proposes. Instead, the facts seem to favour the type of approach she rejects, namely the one based on vagueness, or imprecision.

We will next examine the main prediction of the syntactic degree account and show that it actually runs amiss of the facts.

3.2.4 Non-gradable expressions in the complement of *seem*

The syntactic degree account requires the presence of a DegP in the small clause complement of *seem*. Consequently, this complement will have to contain either an inherently gradable noun or adjective, since these are the types of elements that can project a DegP in the syntax; or it should contain a noun or adjective that have become gradable due to scalarity coercion triggered by the presence of a degree operator. Therefore, the case of basically non-gradable expressions which can appear in the small clause complement of *seem* becomes an essential testing ground for the syntactic degree account and its predictions. In this sub-section, we will examine the case of adjectives, and show that the syntactic degree account makes the wrong prediction with respect to the acceptability of some data and/or to the interpretation assigned to certain examples. We will also briefly consider some cases of DPs that are clearly inherently non-gradable, and which cannot be claimed to have coerced gradable meanings either. We will give a more precise indication of what we think

[85] The examples in (63) are from Matushansky (2002b). However, not all speakers agree with these judgments. On the one hand, (63)b is not completely fine. On the other hand, (63)a may become better if a context can be created where there is doubt as to his height. Such judgments are in accordance with the facts illustrated in (60)-(62) as well as confirming the explanation we propose for (63). Normally, the MP used in (63)a is too precise to be used with *seem*; however, if the context can be manipulated so as to force doubt or uncertainty of evaluation (cf. also the influence of contrast or relativization with respect to time and/or location illustrated in (61)-(62)), this may override the precision of the MP and the example becomes better. If this is easier to do in (63)b, it is presumably due to the use of the comparative which the MP modifies, as we suggest in the main text.

the appropriate interpretation of the cases of non-gradable adjectives is, as well as examining the case of nouns, in §3.3.1.1 and §3.3.1.2, respectively.

Consider the following example containing a basically non-gradable adjective:

(64) Lucy seems Spanish.

Matushansky (2002b) treats such examples as cases of scalarity coercion, whereby the adjective becomes semantically gradable, meaning something like 'having (many) properties (stereo)typically associated with being Adj'. Hence, Lucy seems to have some properties one would stereotypically associate with being Spanish, without that necessarily referring to her actual nationality. (This is similar to the interpretation obtained when such normally non-gradable adjectives are used in the context of overt degree modifiers like *very* or in the comparative etc. – cf. the discussion around example (3) in chapter 1, §1.1) As a result, the adjective is assumed to also project a DegP in the syntax thus qualifying for use in the small clause complement of *seem*.

Therefore, the expectation under the syntactic degree account would be that the basically non-gradable expressions that can occur in the small clause complement of *seem* should have the interpretation normally associated with scalarity coercion. In what follows we will test this prediction by examining more examples of adjectives that are generally taken to be non-gradable. Consider first the following examples containing nationality adjectives, similarly to (64) above.[86]

(65) a. The name seems French.
b. The accent seems French, but there is something strange about it.[87]
c. Her accent seems Spanish.[88]

The adjectives in these examples cannot be said to have become gradable and to have acquired the type of interpretation associated with scalarity coercion. Instead, they retain their basic nationality interpretation, and the examples simply convey uncertainty as to whether the referent belongs to the respective category (i.e. nationality) or not. (65)b, for instance, could be uttered in a context where the speaker is not sure about whether the accent is actually French because s/he cannot hear it properly; it is not about the accent exhibiting properties (stereo)typically associated with being French. The examples could be paraphrased as 'I {think/ am not sure} the {name/ accent} is {French/ Spanish}'; in other words, based on the available evidence the speaker cannot decide with certainty whether it should be assigned the respective nationality.

The next sets of examples contain relational adjectives which normally have classificatory uses (generally assumed to map kinds into sub-kinds – cf. Bosque and Picallo 1996, McNally and Boleda 2004 a.o.) that are taken to be basically non-gradable:

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[86] The same observation can be made in connection with the attributive use of such adjectives, which is normally excluded:
(i) The collocation seems a Spanish borrowing (to me).

[87] Source: http://gaming.thecasavants.com/char.htm

[88] Source: http://garabatoz.deviantart.com/art/Paulina-vs-Trixie

(66) a. The basic problem seems mathematical; their members constitute less than 15 percent of the House of Commons...[89]
b. What to do about setting posting limits? do you see this as an anti-spam method? I really don't know what to do with it. The problem seems mathematical to me.

(67) a. The type of music seems classical, but I like how Lionhead adds sort of a fantasy element to it.[90]
b. At times, her music seems classical in its form and structure, and at others, her soaring, skating vocal dancing seems almost angelic. [91]
c. His music seems classical to me, but I'm not sure.[92]

The examples of unacceptable adjectives in the complement of *seem* given in (49)b from Bolinger (1972) (see also chapter 1), are in fact of this type. As (66) and (67) show, however, we do find grammatical examples containing such adjectives. In fact, Matushansky (2002b) remarks, in a footnote, that the examples indicated as ungrammatical in Bolinger (1972) are odd, rather than completely ungrammatical. Significantly for us here, again, the interpretation of these adjectives does not seem to go along the lines proposed for cases of scalarity coercion by Matushansky. Rather they seem to somehow stretch the concept. For example, as soon as the nature of a problem can be conceived of as being open to evaluation, examples like (66) are possible, and the interpretation they get is something like 'this problem belongs to the general realm of mathematics' but based on the available evidence or knowledge, the speaker cannot make an unequivocal decision; and likewise for (67). The uncertainty of assessment which is at stake is quite straightforwardly indicated by the second part of the sentence in (67)c: *I'm not sure*.

Finally, here are more examples containing other adjectives which are generally considered to be non-gradable, such as *pregnant*, or absolute, such as *dead*, and whose use in the complement of *seem* cannot be regarded as the result of scalarity coercion:

(68) a. The man seems dead.[93]
b. The woman seems pregnant.
c. The bar seems closed to me... big padlocks on door during supposed opening hours…
d. The case seems closed.[94]
e. The store seems open only 2-3 days per week.[95]

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89 Source: http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/15/world/tories-experiment-in-ailing-scotland.html
90 Source: http://lionhead.com/forums/p/240229/3042281.aspx
91 Source: http://www.johneverson.com/bug6.htm and http://www.popstops.net/dcdbox.htm.
92 Source: http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080921162723AAHB6q3
93 Here are some complete examples found on the internet:
(i) a. A body has been found in the left corner of the bar. The man seems dead but we don't have a cause of death. (http://www.roleplaygateway.com/roleplay/the-multiverse/characters)
b. In the end Peaches the man seems dead or passed out while androgynous Peaches cleans her face in front of a mirror. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downtown_%28Peaches_song%29)
94 Source: http://www.thefreelibrary.com/cafe+serves+up+vivid+characters+surroundings
95 Source: http://www.yelp.com/user_details?userid=jZjVBILxo-KVSbMQPFKuMg

Dead, for example, in (68)a does not receive the type of gradable interpretation it does in cases of overt degree modification like *more dead than alive*, where its meaning is coerced; it is not the case here that the man could be more or less dead in (68)a. All the adjectives in (68) retain their basic, literal meaning. What is involved is uncertainty in ascertaining whether the property holds.

Finally, we would like to bring in some nominal cases which present a serious problem to the syntactic degree account proposed by Matushansky (2002b), as well as a simple gradability approach in fact (cf. Bolinger 1972, Maling 1983). These are cases such as those illustrated in (69), which do not seem to contain an expression that could be argued to project a DegP in the syntax, or that could be considered to be gradable in the first place.

(69) a. This seems the end for us.
b. Wind seems a species of light.[96]
c. And this seems the explanation of the fact that the marine shells […] are much larger than the shells of the same species now inhabiting the weakly-saline Caspian.[97]
d. This seems the sense of "God is love" Wallace is considering.[98]
e. There is plenty of that brand of homespun common sense that seems a trait of chemical engineers of that generation (regular readers of ChemTech will feel at home with this book).[99]
f. This seems {the way to do it/ the only way out/ the only option}.
g. This proposal seems the opening shot in an upcoming campaign against any measure that doesn't offer Omaha's black community autonomy over their home district.[100]

In all these cases it could hardly be claimed that gradable meanings are involved. What is at stake is, just like in the examples containing basically non-gradable adjectives considered above, uncertainty as to whether the (abstract) entity under discussion has been correctly identified as being what the definite DPs express.

In sum, closer examination of the interpretation of basically non-gradable adjectives that may occur in the complement of *seem* shows that the main prediction of the syntactic degree account is not borne out. Grammatical examples of basically non-gradable adjectives are not necessarily interpreted in a sense that would correspond to the meaning predicted by Matushansky if they were subject to scalarity coercion triggered by the presence of a degree operator. The same holds for the examples of non-gradable DPs. Therefore, what is at stake is not having a higher or lower degree of a property, or a bigger or smaller amount of properties (stereo)typically associated with A or N, but rather uncertainty as to whether A or N applies or not (given the available evidence).

In view of the problems facing the syntactic degree account, and of the additional facts that have been presented so far, it becomes desirable to find an alternative

[96] Source: British National Corpus
[97] Source: *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* on http://books.google.com/
[98] Source: http://secularoutpost.infidels.org/2011/01/say-what.html
[99] Source: British National Corpus
[100] Source: http://newnebraska.blogspot.com/2007/01/sifting-through-ops-mess.html

account. In the remainder of this section, we will suggest a possible direction, which takes *seem* to always be epistemic.

3.3 Towards an alternative account

In this section we would like to show that an epistemic analysis of *seem* can be maintained, and that the restrictions on its small clause complement stem from how properties (as expressed by AP or DP), differently from propositions (IPs), are evaluated. We suggest that the evaluation of properties requires encyclopedic knowledge that can be expressed either in terms of "objective", definitive criteria, or in terms of "subjective" criteria. Expressions denoting properties defined by means of the second strategy are compatible with the epistemic uncertainty encoded by *seem* and can, therefore, appear in its small clause complement.

3.3.1 Two types of predicates

It was shown in the previous section that the small clause complement of *seem* is not restricted to lexically gradable expressions or expressions that may be argued to project a DegP in the syntax. It was also shown that the grammatical examples of basically non-gradable expressions (mainly adjectives) in the small clause complement of *seem* (e.g. (65)-(67)) do not involve a shift in the meaning of the adjective in the sense of a gradable interpretation. They suggest instead that the meaning of *seem* involves uncertainty in assessing whether the property expressed applies to a given individual, or, in other words, uncertainty as to whether the instance referred to is of the type denoted by the AP or DP. What seems to matter, therefore, for the acceptability of these expressions in the small clause complement of *seem* is that they (come to) express properties whose application in particular circumstances may be subject to uncertainty. We would like to propose that what underlies this is whether the property expressed by the adjective can be verified by "objective" or by "subjective" criteria. In what follows we will illustrate the distinction between the two types of predicates in the adjectival and nominal domain and show that it indeed correlates with the possible occurrence of adjectives and nouns in the small clause complement of *seem*. We will also show how a "subjective" interpretation may be introduced and license the use of "objective" predicates, which would otherwise not be able to occur in this environment.

3.3.1.1 The interpretation of non-gradable adjectives

The difference between the two types of expressions can be most easily illustrated by comparing the adjective dead, whose possible occurrence in the small clause complement of seem was shown in (68)a, and its antonym, alive, which is ungrammatical in the small clause complement of *seem* when it is used in its basic, literal sense:

(70) He seems alive *(and well).

We propose that what underlies this contrast is a difference in the types of criteria that may verify the two properties. There are various "subjective" criteria which are normally associated with death and may be used towards establishing death. These possible "signs" of death include e.g. that the person is not breathing, that s/he is lying motionless on the floor, or that blood is pooling under him/her, etc. These may vary over different contexts/ possible worlds; it is not the case that in all possible worlds these properties (criteria) are exclusively associated with death. On the one hand, therefore, such a "subjective", vague condition is normally sufficient for the property *dead* to be predicated with reasonable certainty. On the other hand, such conditions also allow room for uncertainty in establishing death in certain situations.[101] This makes the adjective compatible with the uncertainty expressed by *seem*. By contrast, to establish that someone is alive, there is one definitive criterion that must be satisfied: if the person is still breathing, s/he is *ipso facto* alive. In other words, a definitive condition, one that is both necessary and sufficient, is required to conclude that someone is alive, but a vague condition may be enough to conclude that someone is dead. Expressions denoting properties defined in the latter, but not in the former, way are compatible with *seem*.

What underlies the acceptability of the examples in (66)-(67) are similar. Although these cases involve concepts that are generally considered to be sharp (e.g. *mathematics/ mathematical*, *classical music*), if the nature of certain objects can be stretched or somehow made fuzzy, by the introduction of "subjective" criteria, such expressions become acceptable in the small clause complement of *seem*. Take (66)a, for instance. What it says is that the problem exhibits some properties that are normally, superficially associated with mathematics, such as involving numbers or calculations, and that are normally sufficient for predicating the respective property of an object.

Sets of vague, "subjective" conditions are typical of predicates whose boundaries are fuzzy and difficult to establish with certainty, while definitive conditions apply to predicates that have clear-cut defining characteristics.[102] The former, but not the latter, are compatible with *seem*. What is at stake in such examples is uncertainty as to whether the respective property applies, i.e. whether the conditions for predicating it are satisfied – e.g. due to insufficient access to evidence. As already shown, the distinction between these two types of predicates cross-cuts the distinction between gradable and non-gradable expressions. In §3.3.2.2 we will discuss in more detail the relation between such criteria and the properties they verify as well as the role they play in the evaluation of the predication.

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[101] Of course there are also "objective", definitive conditions that allow to establish death (medically/ scientifically) with certainty, such as the absence of any neural activity, but the point is that for the layperson, a vague condition allows for the property 'dead' to be predicated with reasonable certainty.

[102] Johan Rooryck (p.c.) suggests that the distinction between the two types of predicates may be illustrated by using the test of contradiction. In (ia), the evaluation that Sue was dead can be contradicted quite easily. That is not the case for the sentence in (ib), where adding the second sentence leads to infelicity.

(i) a. We saw that Sue was dead, (but it later turned out that she wasn't).
b. We saw that Sue was alive, (#but it later turned out that she wasn't).

3.3.1.2 The case of nouns in the small clause complement of *seem*

Similar observations can be made about the distribution and interpretation of nouns in the small clause complement of *seem*.

Recall first the contrast usually pointed out in the literature:

(71) a. Eric seems a fool.
b. *Eric seems {a man/ a doctor}.

The nouns used in these examples may indeed contrast in terms of gradability; for instance, a noun like *fool* consistently passes, while nouns like *doctor* fail various gradability tests, such as e.g. modification by degree adjectives.

Consider now, however, the contrast between the following sets of examples:

(72) a. He seems a Christian.
b. He seems an artist.
c. He seems a gambler.
d. He seems {a Casanova/ a ladies' man}.
e. He seems {a friend/ an ally}.

(73) a. *He seems an Anglican.
b. *He seems {a painter/ a doctor}.
c. *He seems a blackjack player.
d. *He seems a polygamist.
e. *He seems an enemy.

It is highly questionable that the difference in acceptability between these two sets of examples is due to (non)gradability. Applying other gradability tests to these nouns, such as modification by degree adjectives, gives diverging results. In each set there are nouns that seem to admit such modification (e.g. *a big gambler*, *a big/ huge enemy*), and others that do not (e.g. **a big Christian/ ally/ polygamist* etc.). If both occurrence in the small clause complement of *seem* and modification by degree adjectives are taken to be due to gradability, then their differing results require an explanation.

We propose that, just as in the case of adjectives examined previously, it is not gradability that plays a role in the acceptability of nouns in the small clause complement of *seem*. Instead, the explanation of the contrast lies in the same type of difference as noted above. Namely, the nouns in the first series involve more complex, and vague, sets of "subjective" criteria based on which one can decide whether an individual belongs to the respective category. As such, there is more room for uncertainty of assessment, which makes them compatible with the meaning of *seem*. The nouns in (73), on the other hand involve definitive, clear-cut criteria that verify whether the properties apply or not (e.g. relevant diploma in the case of *doctor*).The contrast between (72)a and (73)a also suggests that hyperonyms are more likely to be verified by vague criteria than hyponyms, which are more specific.

3.3.1.3 Modification

Interestingly, under particular conditions, expressions that are normally barred from the small clause complement of *seem* may be licensed in this environment.

One type of factor which influences the acceptability of examples containing measure phrases, dimensional adjectives, or nouns that are normally not very good with *seem* is the use of negation and focus (e.g. using the particle *only* or contrastive stress on *seem*).[103] Compared with the unacceptable examples in (74), the examples in (75) and (76) show the effect of negation (either used on its own, or in combination with contrast/focus or with temporal modification), and of focus, respectively.[104]

(74) a. *He seems a tall man.
b. *He seems a {radical/ doctor}.
c. *Obama seems a Bill Clinton.

(75) a. He doesn't seem a tall man (but his legs seem long).
b. He doesn't seem a radical.
c. Obama doesn't seem a Bill Clinton quite yet.

(76) a. He SEEMS a tall man, but in fact he is wearing platform shoes.
b. He only SEEMS a tall man.
c. He only SEEMS a doctor.

It is not clear how these facts could be accounted for either in a simple gradability approach to *seem* (e.g. Bolinger 1972) or in a syntactic degree analysis like Matushansky's, which requires the presence of a DegP to check an uninterpretable degree feature. It is not likely that negation or focus could be influencing the gradability of the complement of *seem*, or that such elements could (syntactically) check a degree feature. The view we have suggested above can offer a way to understand them. As usual, focus determines the introduction of a set of alternatives. We suggest that in the cases under investigation here the alternatives that are introduce bear on the conditions for verifying the properties that are being evaluated. In case this is a property defined by "objective", definitive criteria (e.g. *doctor*), this will result in forcing the addition of alternative, "subjective" criteria consisting of properties superficially associated with the respective property (which would normally not count towards concluding that the property holds of an individual). This is what creates room for uncertainty about their applicability and makes them compatible with *seem*. Thus, an example like (76)c will say that the individual in

[103] Modifiers like *sure*, which have an epistemic interpretation, also have a similar effect.

[104] Here are some additional examples. (i) contains the focus particle *only* and MPs in the small clause complement, and (ii) shows that contrast enables a DP containing a non-gradable and non-vague noun modified by a nationality adjective to appear in this environment:

(i) a. But if someone with longer arms uses the same string at arms' length, suddenly it only seems 8 inches long! (http://www.meteorobs.org/maillist/msg09977.html)
b. Sometimes, he has to remind himself that she only seems ten feet tall because she carries her head that high. (http://fanfictioncdn.fictionpressllc.netdna-cdn.com/community...)

(ii) To an outsider their province seems a French dependency, a French colony, rather than part of France. (http://www.gourmet.com/magazine/1940s/1947/08/alsace)

question may exhibit such superficial properties, but not satisfy the actual definitive criterion for qualifying as an N. As a result, such examples will imply that the individuals are in fact not A or Ns. As already pointed out (cf. §3.2.3), an explicit or implied contrast (between apparent, superficial and actual properties) often facilitates the use of expressions in the small clause complement of *seem*. *Seem*, therefore, ends up being used when one lacks the grounds for using *be*.[105]

Consider now the following contrast:

(77) a. *She seems a Catholic.
b. "And though she seems a Catholic in public, I have a strong suspicion that in private she is a Lutheran"[106]

The contrast introduced by the two PPs *in public* vs. *in private* restricts the application of the predicate: it applies under this restriction, but not in other cases. This has the effect of introducing uncertainty about the subject's Catholicism, thus turning a predicate that is evaluated in terms of definitive criteria out of context into a predicate that responds to vague, "subjective" criteria, i.e. Catholic in public, not Catholic in private.

The same sort of effects (i.e. of contrast and "relativization" obtained by means of temporal or locative modification) were already noted in examples of measure phrases and non-gradable adjectives used in the small clause complement of *seem* in §3.2.3 and §3.2.4 – cf. examples (61), (62), (67)b etc.

3.3.2 The alternative view

The proposal we would like to suggest in view of the facts observed so far consists of two parts, both of which go against the claims made by Matushansky (2002b). First, gradability, either lexical or syntactic, has been shown not to be a prerequisite for expressions occurring in the small clause complement of *seem*. Instead, what underlies the distribution of expressions in this environment whether the criteria verifying the applicability of the predicate are "subjective", vague criteria (consisting of properties normally/ superficially associated with the property expressed by the predicate in question) or "objective", definitive criteria. If an AP, NP or PP predicate is verified by the first type of criteria, it is compatible with *seem*. We argue that this is because *seem* is always epistemic and includes an evidential meaning component, namely it involves the expression of uncertainty and inference, and the expressions in its small clause complement need to be compatible with the uncertainty of assessment inherent in the meaning of *seem*. The vagueness inherent in gradable expressions will make them good candidates; however, it is not the case

[105] This suggests that the verbs *seem* and *be* may be regarded as forming a scale, similarly to how quantifiers like *all* and *some* are assumed to be related to a scale. As such, there may be scalar implicatures holding between them. Thus, we have (i)a in a parallel way to (i)b:
(i) a. He SEEMS but is not {a doctor/ a tall man}.
b. Some, but not all, answered my question.

[106] Source: Alison Shell, Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660 Cambridge University Press, 1999.

that only gradable predicates are, nor that all gradable predicates are vague in a way that makes them compatible with *seem*. In what follows, we will first examine the epistemic nature of *seem* and subsequently show what accounts for the particular restrictions on its small clause complement.

3.3.2.1 *Seem* is always epistemic/ evidential

Recall that Matushansky (2002b) claims that *seem* is a case of lexical ambiguity: there is an epistemic verb *seem*, which takes IP or CP complements, and a perception verb *seem*, which takes small clause complements. She discusses the difference in interpretation between the two on the basis of the following examples:

(78) a. The squire seems sick.
b. The squire seems to be sick.
c. It seems that the squire is sick.

She claims that (78)a cannot be felicitously used if there is no perceptual evidence available. For example, one cannot enter a room, look at Kleenexes and medicine bottles strewn all over the floor and utter this sentence. One can, however, utter (78)b or (78)c under such circumstances. She concludes that (78)a implies perception of the subject's condition by the experiencer (*I perceive that P holds*), while (78)b and (78)c, which are truth-conditionally and pragmatically identical, are epistemic deductions (*from what I see I conclude that P holds*).

However, this is not a completely accurate rendition of the interpretation of (78)a. Such examples are not simply factual statements of perception (of P holding), unlike similar examples with verbs of perception such as *look*, *sound* etc. which simply involve the attribution of a property based on visual or oral perception. *Seem*, even when it takes a small clause complement, as in (78)a, also implies some epistemic evaluation of the evidence available, i.e. based on the available evidence it is inferred that P may hold. So the paraphrase Matushansky proposes for (78)b-c in fact extends to (78)a too. If there is a difference between the two, it does not consist of the absence vs. presence of an epistemic meaning component.

In addition, her definition of *seem* as a verb of perception needs to be wide enough to include what she calls "metaphorical" uses, such as (79), where it is quite unclear that it is actually perception that is involved.

(79) The law seems unfair.

Thus, the line between an epistemically derived conclusion and a perceptually derived one becomes almost impossible to perceive. In fact, Matushansky acknowledges that she finds it "next to impossible to formulate the difference between [the two]" (p. 225). She also notes that the distribution of epistemic *seem* encompasses that of perceptual *seem*. This significantly weakens her argument, and casts doubt on the proposed distinction between two verbs.

We would like to suggest instead that all instances of *seem* share a basic semantic core which consists of an epistemic/ evidential meaning component:[107] *seem* expresses the modal value of uncertainty, correlated with the evidential notion of inference.[108] What differs is the level on which this meaning component operates. In case *seem* takes a sentential, IP or CP, complement, this meaning component will operate on full propositions, or complex situations. When *seems* takes a small clause complement, it will apply to the predication expressed by the small clause. We assume that *seem* is a raising verb in all cases, which may select for a sentential complement (infinitival or finite clause) or for a bare small clausal complement. For the small clause complements, which we are interested in here, we adopt Den Dikken's (2006, 2008) analysis of bare small clauses as phrases headed by a functional head RELATOR. The small clause predicate is the complement of this functional head, while the subject is base-generated in its specifier, but subsequently raises to the subject position of the main clause predicate.[109] The structure of (78)a would therefore be as schematically represented below:

(80) … [$_{VP}$ seems [$_{RP}$ t$_{\textit{the squire}}$ [RELATOR [sick]]]]

Small clauses are, therefore, quintessential predications, and the epistemic evaluation contributed by the selecting verb *seem* will bear on the predication relation they contribute. This boils down to evaluating whether the property expressed by the small clause predicate holds of the subject.
In the next sub-section, we will show how the noted restrictions can be derived from the interaction of the epistemic meaning component with the different types of complements; now we will focus on the epistemic content of *seem*.

The felicitous use of *seem* requires uncertainty with respect to the evaluation of the proposition or property in its complement. Take the following example:

(81) The squire seems (to be) sick.

In either of its two versions, this sentence can only be uttered felicitously in a context where the speaker has indirect evidence: upon noticing that the squire suddenly looks very pale (after eating), or hearing certain noises from the next room etc. But it cannot be uttered if one directly witnesses the squire throwing up, or the doctor giving a diagnostic. Therefore, *seem* exhibits a dependency on the information that is available in the context and which can be used as a basis (i.e. as

[107] Interestingly, some English grammars note that *to be* deletion in the complements of verbs such as *seem, consider, think, imagine* etc. is only possible with adjectives and nouns that make a judgment. *Seem* is used "when the Arbiter is not fully certain whether the adjectival description is appropriate, or whether the statement of the complement clause [e.g. *like/ as if* clauses] is correct – perhaps when there is not enough evidence. *Appear* has the same syntactic possibilities and a very similar meaning, but may imply 'can be observed by me' in contrast to *seem* 'can be inferred by me'." (Dixon 1991/2002:202) The intuition expressed here is similar to the one underlying our attempt to find an alternative account.

[108] Hence, the experiencer of *seem* is not just an experiencer, but also the epistemic agent: the one who observes / perceives the evidence, and also evaluates it and makes an epistemic judgment based on it.

[109] Heycock (1994) proposes that the small clauses selected by *seem* (also by *consider*) involve even more minimal structures, namely that they are simply the projection of a lexical predicate (an adjective or a noun) (see also Stowell 1991, Guéron and Hoekstra 1995).

evidence) for making an inference that a property or a situation holds. This is parallel to the behaviour of epistemic modals. Von Fintel and Gillies (2007) a.o. observe that in a context in which we see people coming into the building carrying umbrellas, it would be perfectly acceptable to say *It must be raining.* But if we look out of the window and see the pouring rain, it would be very strange to utter such a sentence. What one should say in the latter scenario is the non-modalized sentence *It is raining*. They suggest that the dependency of epistemically modalized sentences on the information available in the contexts in which they occur can be understood if epistemic modals are taken to include an evidential component in their meaning, in the sense that they signal the presence of an indirect inference or deduction rather than of a direct observation. In more recent work (von Fintel and Gillies 2010), they reformulate this by saying that the kernel (or privileged information – which corresponds, more or less, to the modal base in Kratzer 1977, 1981) "does not directly settle whether *p*". They treat this evidential signal that epistemic modals contain as a presupposition, and impose its satisfaction as a definedness constraint on the assignment of truth values in a context at a world. We propose that von Fintel and Gillies' account of epistemic modals as containing an evidential signal also applies to *seem*. With sentential *seem*, the evidential meaning component is related to general indirect inference or hearsay. The small clause *seem* is also evidential/ epistemic in this sense; it appears to involve inference based mainly on evidence that is available through perception, but not exclusively so: there are also cases like (79) above, which do not involve perception in the literal sense. More about what can count as evidence (and why) will be said in the next sub-section.

The relation between *seem* and its complement may be understood as in Rooryck's (2000) 'comparative' account of sentential *seem*. In the case of small clause complements, what is involved is uncertainty in assessing (in view of some evidence) the resemblance of a particular instance (i.e. the state holding of the subject) to the type of property expressed by the predicate in the complement of *seem*, i.e. whether the instance referred to is of the type denoted by the AP or NP. When *seem* takes an IP/ CP complement, the relation is established at the propositional level – comparing (complex) situations. What is involved in these cases, is uncertainty in evaluating the resemblance of a given situation (the one referred to via the "demonstrative components" of the sentence – e.g. the tense on *seem*, the raised subject DP) to a typical situation of the type described by the complement CP (cf. Rooryck 2000).

3.3.2.2 Evaluation of properties vs. (complex) situations

In the preceding paragraphs, we have discussed the common core of all uses of *seem*, i.e. both with sentential and with small clause complements. But there is also a fundamental difference between the two, which is reflected in the noted difference with respect to selectional restrictions imposed on what can appear in its complement: when it applies to propositions (situations) there are no restrictions, but when it applies to properties there are.

Note, in this context, that such behaviour is in fact not unique to *seem*. On the one hand, the same modal or evidential expression may differ in the selectional restrictions it imposes on different types of complements. On the other hand, a

modal expression or an evidential marker may occupy different positions in the syntactic structure, and, depending on the level at which they occur, the resulting interpretation may differ. For example, in Dutch modals which can take not only infinitival, but also AP or PP complements. In the latter case, however, they can only get a deontic interpretation. In the evidential domain, Blain and Déchaine (2006) propose that evidential markers can be introduced in a number of different positions in the clause, namely in the CP, IP, AspP, and vP domains; and they analyse the nonvolitional force of nonvisual evidentials in the first person as an instance of vP-external evidentials.

We would like to suggest that the difference found between the cases where *seem* takes a sentential complement and those where it takes a small clause complement is due to a difference with respect to how complex situations/ propositions (sentential complements) vs. predications (small clause complements) are evaluated, and what counts as evidence in doing so. There is a difference in the range as well as in the nature of the knowledge based on which the felicitous epistemic use depends (i.e. on which uncertainty can be assessed).

With propositional complements, one is quite free to use any type of circumstantial indications, hearsay etc. as evidence in a context based on which to make an inference 'that *p*', expressible by *seem*. The fundamental uncertainty that is required for a felicitous epistemic interpretation depends on what the speaker broadly knows contextually; a context is needed that spells out the knowledge of the speaker with respect to the prejacent, e.g. *[the squire to be sick]*.

When *seem* takes a small clause complement whereby the predication is being evaluated, i.e. whether the property expressed by the small clause predicate holds of the subject, one is restricted to properties which are observed to be manifested in the subject itself and which are somehow associated with *P* and may be used as indications that *P* holds of that subject. Other, subject-external, circumstances cannot be used as evidence that *P* holds of the subject. This is why, for example, (78)a can be uttered upon perception of the subject's condition by the experiencer, but not upon entering a room and seeing Kleenexes and medicine bottles covering the floor. In a sense, then, evidence for properties is less flexible than evidence for (complex) situations. What counts as *P*, or what is a "sign" of *P*, is largely part of speakers' encyclopedic knowledge (rather than being strictly linguistic). Therefore, unlike with sentential complements, here the uncertainty that is required for a felicitous use depends much more strictly on what the speaker knows encyclopedically. This requirement of uncertainty accounts for the impossibility of certain AP and DP predicates in the small clause complement of *seem*: if it is a predicate that must be interpreted out of context in terms of definitive, purely objective criteria (as discussed in §3.3.1), the sentence will be semantically infelicitous. Unless, as the discussion in §3.3.1 has shown, the right context is obtained where even "strict" concepts may be "relativized" (recall the influence of focus, temporal modification etc.) which would create room for uncertainty as to whether the *P* applies in a particular case, as required by *seem*.

In other words, what seems to be needed is an expression which comes with associated manifestations or properties, which form vague sets of vague, "subjective" criteria for application of *P*. On the one hand, these should be

observable properties.[110] On the other hand, they may apply only part(ial)ly and they are not exclusive "symptoms" of just one particular P.[111] Thus, they allow for uncertainty in evaluating whether the predicate holds or not. This is quite easy to see with adjectives like *sick* and *dead* vs. *alive* (as discussed in previous sub-sections). Or take the nouns discussed in §3.3.1.2. The fact that some involve vague criteria (e.g. *Christian*, *artist*, *friend* etc.) may have to do with the fact that, in addition to the definitional core, e.g. the actual occupation or religion, they involve a whole series of associated attitudes, manifestations, properties based on which it can be ascertained whether X is N. In other words these may count as evidence compatible with the property holding of the subject, and still allow for uncertainty. Others (e.g. *doctor*) only have definitive criteria, that are at once necessary and sufficient conditions (e.g. the relevant diploma), based on which it can be decided whether an individual belongs to the class of Ns or not. One cannot conceive of any associated, "signalling" properties which may be manifested by an individual and which may be used as evidence indicating that this P holds of an individual. Hence, such nouns are not compatible with *seem* in a small clause structure. Recall, however, that a contrast was noticed between the unmodified and the modified use of such nouns in the small clause complement of *seem*, as illustrated below:

(82) a. *Eric seems a doctor.
b. Eric seems a good doctor.

Modification by an adjective (especially an adjective like *good*) ensures an interpretation in terms of less objective, more vague or subjective criteria. This allows for a lot of space for uncertainty of assessment, and the DP can occur in the complement of *seem*. However, as one may recall from §3.2.1-3.2.2, and as illustrated again below, simply adding a gradable adjective does not automatically license the use of a noun like *doctor* in the small clause complement of *seem*.

(83) *He seems a {tall/ handsome} doctor.

The adjective introduces some fuzziness, in virtue of it being gradable, hence vague, but this is not relative to and does not carry over to the concept of 'doctor', which heads the phrase located in the small clause complement of *seem.* So the NP as a whole still does not make a good complement for *seem*. Note also that the

[110] It should be noted that *seem* is not confined to strictly perceptual, concrete evidence, but accepts more general(ly observable) sorts of evidence. In this it differs from the verb *look*, for example, which is strictly specified for direct visual perception. In evaluating *He looks tired* only information based on direct visual perception of the subject's state will count, while in evaluating *He seems tired* the inference that he may be tired can be based on information derived not only from physically visually perceptible features, but also from more general behaviour that may be related to tiredness (e.g. he cannot find the right words etc.). If the evidential component is made part of the lexical meaning of the verb (as suggested above), and if this type of approach is also extended to verbs like *appear*, *look*, *sound* etc., this would allow us to capture the differences among these verbs (i.e. with respect to the specification of evidence).

[111] Take, for instance, the relation between *being pale* and *being sick*, where the former may serve as evidence based on which it may be inferred that the latter may hold (and which would make a sentence with *seem* felicitous). The idea would be that one does not necessarily and exclusively imply the other; in other words this is a relation that holds in some possible worlds, not in all possible worlds.

corresponding sentence with the copula *to be* (*He {seems to be/ is} a tall doctor.*) is also very odd, especially when uttered out of the blue. *Tall doctor* becomes better when more context is provided: this can be seen in (84)a, where what is being evaluated is whether the subject belongs to a rather vague category that is being proposed ("those tall country doctors that all the village women fall in love with"). The difference in the possibility of establishing a category, that may have vague criteria of application, is probably also what makes (84)b better than (83): *handsome men* vs. *handsome doctors*. Note, incidentally, that, again, the more general term is better suited for such uses than the more specific one.[112]

(84) a. He {is/ seems} one of those {tall/ handsome} country doctors that all the village women fall in love with.
b. ?He seems a handsome man.

This also shows, once again, that gradability tends to make an expression well suited for use in the small clause complement of *seem*, in virtue of the vagueness associated with gradable expressions, but that gradability as such (and the type of vagueness it introduces) is not sufficient, in addition to not being necessary, as shown throughout this section. To illustrate again the latter point, take the adjective *pregnant* (cf. (68)b). Adjectives like *pregnant* or *dead* have very precise (scientific, medical) definitions and are typical examples of non-vague, or "all-or-nothing" adjectives: they are not contextually variable; someone is definitely either pregnant/ dead or not pregnant/ dead, there is normally no in-between, grey area; and it does not give rise to the Sorites paradox.[113] The vagueness which is relevant for *seem* is related to the (un)certainty of assessing whether the property holds, and arises from the point of view of an epistemic agent trying to gather evidence and evaluate a state of affairs based on it. The states denoted by adjectives like *pregnant* or *dead* involve a series of accompanying manifestations, symptoms etc. that may be observed, and these may be used as evidence for assessing whether the respective state holds of someone, and this assessment may open to uncertainty. This is what makes such expressions compatible with *seem*.

In fact, this set of manifestations of properties somehow associated with *P* may be all that is needed, and may even be completely stripped from the basic, definitional core of the N. This is what happens in the case of nouns used under a

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[112] Note also:

(i) He seems like a doctor.

Like relativizes, by introducing a class based on resemblance to doctors and it can be under debate whether or how much of it applies.

[113] Sentences involving gradable predicates, in particular those associated with relative standards (cf. Kennedy and McNally 2005, Kennedy 2007a), are characterized by three main features that point to their vague nature. First, they display contextual variability in truth conditions. Second, they are characterized by the existence of borderline cases: for any context, in addition to the sets of objects that the predicate is clearly true of and clearly false of, there is typically a third set of objects for which it is difficult or impossible to make these judgments. And finally, sentences containing vague predicates give rise to the Sorites paradox. This due to the uncertainty about the boundaries of a vague predicate's extension, about the cut-off point between P and non-P. (cf. Klein 1980, Kennedy 2007a, van Rooij to appear a.o.)

Note that, in fact, a noun like *heap* which is typically used to illustrate the Sorites paradox does not make a good small clause complement to *seem*: *??That seems a heap.*

figurative interpretation, where *x* is actually not an N, but (only) has properties stereotypically associated with Ns:

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

The interpretation of these examples involves the observation of some sort of behaviour or some properties that are in some way associated with being N; based on this, it may be said that X resembles N.[114]

These semantico-pragmatic differences between "complex situations", as expressed by IP or CP complements, and predications, as expressed by small clauses, are correlated with a difference in syntactic complexity. For example, sentential complements (even infinitivals) contain a series of clausal and verbal functional projections, which small clause complements lack. This follows from the analysis of small clauses as bare predications which we have adopted following Den Dikken (2006, 2008) and it is a hallmark of small clauses (especially small clause complements of verbs like *seem* and *consider*) and a fact widely accepted in the literature: small clauses lack clausal and typically verbal functional projections. In particular they lack aspect and tense, which has been invoked in the literature to explain their dependence on a higher verbal projection. Guéron and Hoekstra (1995), for example, argue that small clauses are clauses that, due to their smallness, cannot survive by themselves and must be licensed by a temporal or aspectual head in the structure that dominates them. A small clause can be licensed only by having its functional head incorporated into the T-chain of the verb. In Den Dikken's theory this amounts to incorporation of the RELATOR into the verb (this is in fact a reformulation of "small clause restructuring" initially proposed by Stowell (1991) in order to explain facts such as the scope of small clause subjects, something which, however, goes beyond the scope of our investigation here).[115] What is relevant for us here is that that small clauses do not contain projections hosting independent temporal or aspectual information, let alone modal or evidential. Therefore, while the content of the sentential complement can constitute a full, independent situation, the small clause complement is dependent on (the parameters set in) the main clause. Thus, if situations are conceived of as world-time pairs, then the small clause predicate is interpreted with respect to the same world and time as the main-clause predicate.[116] If this is on the right track and the small clause predicate and main-

[114] Again, world knowledge influences the availability of the relevant sort of interpretation. For more discussion of stereotypical interpretations, see chapter 3.

[115] See also Sportische (2005), who, in a discussion of reconstruction facts, argues that small clauses are functionally too small and simply lack the functional structure that introduces quantification. He suggests that this assumption is supported by the fact that, under normal intonation, high adverbs in the sense of Cinque's adverbial hierarchy (e.g. *probably*, *perhaps*) are disallowed in such clauses.

[116] This may be another instance of the Intersective Predicate Generalization proposed by Keshet (2010), which states that two predicates interpreted intersectively (i.e. via Predicate Modification) may not be evaluated at different times or worlds from one another. (Keshet's 2010 generalization, which covers noun-intersective modifier combinations, existential *there*-constructions and depictives, is based on and extends Musan's 1997 work.)

clause predicate (i.e. *seem*, which is an epistemic verb, with an evidential meaning component) make up one situation, then this may be what underlies the restrictions on the possible evidence that can be used to evaluate the predication. Predications can only be evaluated encyclopedically, that is, on the basis of what is known about the property expressed in their predicate. This can consists of either subjective criteria (i.e. necessary but not sufficient conditions for application of P) or objective criteria (i.e. both necessary and sufficient). Only the former type are compatible with the epistemic verb *seem*. In addition, the discussion above concerning the syntactic properties of small clauses can now help to further understand the restrictions on the type of evidence that can be used: it is evidence that can be gathered from the same situation of which the evaluated property is a part (namely to observed properties or behaviour manifested by the subject).

We think this is a promising direction, but have to leave a more detailed investigation of and account for the correlations between the semantic and syntactic properties of these constructions to future research.

3.4 Concluding remarks

This section has shown that the requirement placed on the small clause complement of *seem* is not that it be gradable or that it project a DegP in the syntax. Hence, occurrence in this environment cannot be used as a test for gradability.

Instead, *seem* always contains an epistemic/ evidential meaning component. As such, it involves uncertainty in assessing whether the property expressed by the small clause complement, or the complex situation denoted by the sentential complement, holds.

The noted restrictions on the small clause complement of *seem* can then be viewed as reflecting a need for compatibility of this complement with the basic meaning of *seem*, namely the requirement of uncertainty it places on the evaluation of the property. This will rule out AP and DP predicates that are interpreted in terms of or verified by definitive, purely objective, unequivocal criteria, which allow no room for uncertainty of assessment. Gradable predicates are particularly suitable as small clause complements to *seem* due to their inherent vagueness; however, they are not the only ones and they are not all so either.

A difference has also been revealed concerning the evaluation of complex situations (sentential complements) vs. predications (small clause complements), in the sort and range of evidence that can be used as a basis. The former allow a broader knowledge base to assess uncertainty contextually, while the latter are more restricted, and depend on encyclopedic information.

Although more work is needed in order to provide a more precise account of the intuitions expressed here rather informally, we think that the direction suggested in this section is promising as it seems to capture the facts more accurately than a simple gradability approach or the syntactic degree account.

4 Conclusions

In this chapter we have studied two environments that had 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 and the small-complement of *seem*. It has been argued here, however, that the distribution of nouns in these contexts is not determined by gradability – whether at the lexical or syntactic level – but by other factors.

In the case of *N of an N* constructions, it was shown that the necessary and sufficient condition for a noun to be able to occur in the first slot is that it can express a value judgment. It was shown that the two categories, i.e. gradability and value judgment, though they may overlap to some extent, can and must be distinguished. Once this is done, the confusion that was seen to exist in some of the literature can be removed and the underlying factor can be clearly identified, and that is the expression of a value judgment.

In the case of *seem*, it was argued that what underlies the restrictions on the distribution of expressions in its small clause complement is of an epistemic and evidential nature. *Seem* is an epistemic verb that contains an evidential meaning component, and the expressions in its small clause complement must be compatible with the uncertainty of assessment involved. Gradable expressions are particularly suitable, as they introduce vagueness, but they are not the only ones, and it is also not the case that all gradable expressions make good complements to *seem*. Here again, therefore, the category of expressions that may occur in the small clause complement of *seem* overlaps, partially but, crucially, not entirely, with the class of gradable expressions. It was also shown that that there is a difference in the way one evaluates whether a predication vs. a complex situation holds, which determines the differences in restrictions on the small clause complement and the sentential complement of *seem*.

Consequently, these two environments have been 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. The two case studies addressed in this chapter have also shown how various factors may conspire so as to make believe that gradability and degree are involved. In the coming chapters this will turn out to be a recurring theme.