Extreme nouns and maximizers[1]

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Abstract. Maximizers (*completamente* 'completely', *totalmente* 'totally') are degree modifiers restricted to maximum standard adjectives. Spanish adjectives of completeness [ACs] (*completo* 'complete', *total* 'total') display a behavior similar to that of their adverbial counterparts when they combine with nouns like *idiot*. This paper argues that ACs are maximality modifiers of *idiot*-like nouns, which are defended to be gradable and denote extreme degrees of properties. Establishing a parallelism between adverbs and adjectives of completeness allows us to explore scalarity across categories and the relevance of scale structure in the nominal domain.

Keywords: extreme nouns, maximizers, adjectives of completeness, scale structure, nominal gradability.

1. Introduction

Maximizers are degree modifiers that compose only with adjectives that use a scale with a maximum (Rotstein and Winter, 2004; Kennedy and McNally, 2005). Some of these modifiers have adjectival forms that combine with nouns. These adnominal forms are thus a valuable way of exploring gradability, and ultimately scale structure, in the nominal domain. In Spanish, the adnominal counterparts of the maximizers *completamente* 'completely' and *totalmente* 'totally' appear with nouns like *idiot* (1).

(1)   Juan es un {completo idiota / total desastre}.
        Juan is a   complete idiot   total mess
        'Juan is a {complete idiot / total mess}.'

The type of modification *completo* 'complete' or *total* 'total' [henceforth, adjectives of completeness or ACs] perform in the noun seems to be degree modification. If it is so, two issues arise. First, nouns like *idiot* would be gradable. Second, ACs would be degree modifiers sensitive to scale structure. This is in conflict with the common view of nouns as non-gradable, as opposed to adjectives (see Bolinger, 1972; Matushansky, 2002; Morzycki, 2009; Constantinescu, 2011; Sassoon, 2013, a.o.).

This paper argues that ACs are maximality modifiers of *idiot*-like nouns, which are gradable and denote extreme degrees. I adopt Morzycki's (2012a) analysis of extreme adjectives for

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Spanish evaluative nouns. Nouns like *idiot* include a degree argument and a requirement that the value of this argument is above the contextually relevant scale. The degrees that are off the scale constitute a maximum for ACs, and also explain the partial maximizer behavior of these modifiers with *idiot*-like nouns. This analysis thus unifies the semantics of adverbs and adjectives of completeness and discusses the relevance of scale structure in the nominal domain.

This paper proceeds as follows. §2 introduces the data about maximizers in the adjectival domain, which is compared to the behavior of ACs when modifying *idiot*-like nouns in §3. §4 is devoted to show that nouns like *idiot* are gradable and denote extreme degrees and puts forward an analysis of these nouns as extreme predicates. It also discusses their subjectivity. The semantics of ACs is tackled in §5, which includes a discussion of previous analyses in terms of quantification over properties. Finally, §6 concludes.

2. Maximizers in the adjectival domain

The scales used by gradable adjectives differ in whether they include a maximal and/or a minimum value (Rotstein and Winter, 2004; Kennedy and McNally, 2005). These endpoints are relevant for the calculation of the standard for the predicate. Particularly, the standard of comparison of the adjective is set to the value of the upper or lower bound of the scale whenever there is one. Otherwise, the standard is computed contextually (Kennedy, 2007). From this observation, a typology of adjectives based on their scale structure can be established (2) (Rotstein and Winter, 2004; Kennedy and McNally, 2005).

(2)   a.   (Totally) open scale adjectives: *alto* 'tall', *ancho* 'wide', *bello* 'beautiful'
          b.   Lower closed scale adjectives: *sucio* 'dirty', *impuro* 'impure', *húmedo* 'wet'
          c.   Upper closed scale adjectives: *limpio* 'clean', *seco* 'dry', *libre* 'free'
          d.   (Totally) closed scale adjectives: *abierto* 'open', *lleno* 'full', *oscuro* 'dark'

Some modifiers are sensitive to the scale structure of the adjectives. For instance, maximizers such as *completamente* 'completely' or *totalmente* 'totally' only appear with upper or totally closed scale adjectives (3) (Rotstein and Winter, 2004; Kennedy and McNally, 2005).

(3)   a.   completamente {seco / oscuro / libre / abierto / limpio / lleno}
              completely   dry   dark   free   open   clean   full
         b. ??completamente {alta / ancho / bello   / impuro / sucio}
              completely   tall   wide   beautiful   impure   dirty

Maximizers convey that the referent has a maximal degree of the gradable property denoted by the adjective they modify. Formally, these modifiers set the value of the degree argument of the adjective G to the maximum in its scale S_G (4) (Kennedy and McNally, 2005). The restriction on upper and totally closed scale adjectives is accounted for by the function **max**, which only yields a value if the scale has a defined maximum.

(4) $[\![completely]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x. \exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_G) \wedge G(d)(x)]$

<div align="right">(Kennedy and McNally, 2005: 369)</div>

Maximizers share a number of properties. First, they entail that the end of the scale has been reached. Consequently, it is contradictory to assert that the referent can have a higher degree of the property (5a) (Kennedy and McNally, 2005). Second, the construction *maximizer G* is a total construct, in the sense that it has the distribution of an upper-closed scale adjective (Rotstein and Winter, 2004). This is shown by the fact that it is compatible with casi 'almost' (5b). And third, because of the universal quantification in the semantics of the max function, *maximizer G* accepts exceptive phrases (5c).

(5)   a.   #El avión está completamente lleno; hay   un asiento libre en la primera fila.
             The plane is   completely   full   there.is a seat   free in the first   row
             'The plane is completely full; there is an empty seat in the first row.'
       b.   El avión está casi   completamente lleno.
             the plane is   almost completely   full
       c.   El avión está completamente lleno, excepto un asiento en la   primera fila.
             the plane is   completely   full   except a seat   in the first   row
             'The plane is completely full, except for a seat in the first row.'

In short, maximizers are degree modifiers restricted to adjectives that lexicalize a scale closed (at least) in its upper end. They set the degree of the property denoted by the adjective to its maximum value. Next section is devoted to show the behavior of ACs with *idiot*-like nouns.

3. Adjectives of completeness and *idiot*-like nouns

As shown in (1), nouns like *idiot* combine with ACs. The question is whether these modifiers are acting like maximizers when appearing with nouns like *idiot*. This section compares the properties of ACs modifying these nouns to those of maximizers modifying adjectives.

First, maximizers entail that the end of the scale associated with the predicate has been reached (5a). Consequently, the referent cannot have more of the property denoted by the predicate than it already has. As expected, there is a contradiction in asserting that Juan could be more of an idiot than a complete idiot (6a). However, when Juan's complete idiocy is compared to someone else's, the examples become more acceptable, although not perfect (7a).

(6)   a.   #Juan es un completo idiota, pero podría   serlo más.
             Juan is a complete idiot   but   could.3SG be CL more
             'Juan is a complete idiot, but he could be more of an idiot.'
       b.   #La clase es un absoluto desastre, pero podría   serlo más.
             the class is a absolute mess   but   could.3SG be CL more
             'The class is an absolute mess, but it could be more of a mess.'

(7)   a.   ?Juan es un completo idiota, pero su hermano lo es más.
               Juan is a   complete idiot   but   his brother CL is more
               'Juan is a complete idiot, but his brother is more of an idiot.'
        b.   ?La clase es un absoluto desastre, pero la   de María lo es más.
               the class is a   absolute mess   but   the of María CL is more
               'The class is an absolute mess, but María's is more of a mess.'

Second, although maximality modifiers are compatible with *casi* 'almost' (5b), they are ruled out with nouns like *idiot* (8a). And third, expressions including maximizers accept exceptive phrases (5c). As for *idiot*-like nouns, exceptives are acceptable, yet slightly degraded (7a).

(8)   a.   ??Juan es un casi   completo idiota.
               Juan   is a   almost complete idiot
               'Juan is an almost complete idiot.
        b.   La clase es un casi   absoluto desastre.
               the class is a   almost absolute mess
               'The class is an almost absolute mess.

(9)   a.   Juan es un completo idiota, menos en su trabajo.
               Juan is a   complete idiot   except in his work
               'Juan is a complete idiot, except at work.'
        b.   La clase es un absoluto desastre, excepto el día del   examen.
               the class is a   absolute mess   except the day of the exam
               'The class is an absolute mess, except for the day of the exam.'

The data shows that the modification of an *idiot*-like noun by an AC resembles modification by maximizers, but only partially. The issue is whether an analysis of ACs as maximizers can be maintained. In this paper I defend that it can. In order to show how the data in this section would be explained, the semantics of nouns like *idiot* is discussed next.

4. Extreme nouns

Evaluative nouns like *idiot* constitute a class of nouns that do not only assign a property to an individual, but also express a value judgment. Several contexts set them apart from non-evaluative nouns.[2] First, nouns like *idiot* appear in the first position in qualitative nominal constructions such as the so-called *N of an N* construction (10) (Bolinger, 1972; Doetjes and Rooryck, 2003; den Dikken, 2006; Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann, 2010, a.o.). Non-evaluative nouns such as *doctor* only receive a possessive reading (e.g., 'Juan's doctor').

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[2]The class of evaluative nouns has been referred to as *degree nouns* (Bolinger, 1972) or *scalar nouns* (Matushansky, 2002), and *quality nouns* (Milner, 1978; Ruwet, 1982). The class includes other nouns (nouns like 'matasanos' *quack* or ethnic slurs) that I set aside from the discussion (see Masià, forthcoming). For this reason, I mostly refer to the nouns under discussion as *'idiot'-like nouns*, and *extreme nouns* once the analysis is presented.

(10) el {idiota / genio / desastre / #médico} de Juan.
      the idiot genius mess   doctor of Juan
      'that {idiot / genius / mess / #doctor} Juan.'

In addition, in Spanish *idiot*-like nouns appear in attributive construction with the indefinite articles (11a), in the so-called *'un' enfático* ('emphatic *un*') construction (Portolés, 1994; Fernández Leborans, 1999, a.o.). This contrasts with the behavior of nouns expressing a specific role in society, which appear bare (11b) (Déprez, 2005; de Swart et al., 2007, and references therein).

(11) a. Juan es *(un) {genio / desastre}.
          Juan is a   genius mess
          'Juan is a {genius / mess}.'
      b. Juan es (*un) {médico / secretario}.
          Juan is a   doctor secretary
          'Juan is a {doctor / secretary}.'

Finally, these nouns can be used in verbless exclamatives (12a) (Vinet, 1991; Hernanz, 2001, a.o.) and independent ones (12b) (Milner, 1978; Suñer Gratacós, 1999; Hernanz, 2001, a.o.).

(12) a. ¡Un {idiota / genio / desastre / *médico}, este tío!
          a   idiot genius mess   doctor   this guy
          'A(n) {idiot / genius / mess / doctor}, this guy!'
      b. ¡{Idiota / Genio / Desastre / *Médico}!
           idiot   genius mess   doctor
          '{Idiot / Genius / Mess / Doctor}!'

These tests set apart the class of evaluative nouns, of which *idiot*-like nouns are a subset (for more diagnostics, see Milner, 1978; Ruwet, 1982; Suñer Gratacós, 1999, a.o.). Part of the literature considers that evaluative nouns contain some sort of affective feature that allows them to appear in the above constructions (Milner, 1978; Hernanz, 2001, a.o.; cf. Ruwet, 1982; den Dikken, 2006). Others have argued that the relevant characteristic is a degree argument (Bolinger, 1972; Matushansky, 2002; for discussion, see Constantinescu, 2011).

In this section, I argue that nouns like *idiot* denote extreme degrees of properties. In order to do so, I first give arguments in favor of a degree analysis of these nouns. Then I compare their properties to those of extreme adjectives. Afterwards, the analysis of *idiot*-like nouns is provided. Finally, the subjectivity of these nouns is addressed.

4.1. *Idiot*-like nouns are gradable

As just mentioned, some authors take the properties and distribution of evaluative nouns to be linked to the presence of a degree argument (e.g. Bolinger, 1972; Matushansky, 2002).

Certainly, if some nouns are more likely candidates than others to denote gradable properties, those are evaluative nouns, *idiot* being the quintessential example (Bolinger, 1972; Morzycki, 2009, 2012b, 2014; de Vries, 2010; cf. Constantinescu, 2011, 2013; Sassoon, 2013). This section provides arguments in favor of nouns like *idiot* containing a degree argument.

Because of their monotonicity, gradable predicates obtain degree readings when modified by downward-entailing modifiers such as *surprisingly* or *unbelievable* (de Vries, 2010, forthcoming, Nouwen, 2011). Nouns like *idiot* are interpreted in a degree sense when modified by the adnominal versions of those modifiers (13), unlike nouns like *doctor*. For instance, *un idiota increíble* 'an incredible idiot' is an idiot to a high degree.

(13)   Juan es un {idiota / ?genio / desastre / #médico} increíble.
         Juan is a idiot   genius mess   doctor incredible
         'Juan is an incredible {idiot / genius / mess / doctor}.'

Degree readings are also obtained with size adjectives (Morzycki, 2009; de Vries, 2010; Sassoon, 2013). When a noun like *idiot* combines with an adjective like *enorme* 'huge', the interpretation is that the referent has a high degree of the property. Compare this to *médico enorme* 'huge doctor', where only physical size is available as an interpretation (14).

(14)   Juan es un {idiota / genio / desastre / #médico} enorme.
         Juan is a idiot   genius mess   doctor   huge
         'Juan is a huge {idiot / genius / mess / doctor}.'

The modification in the examples above is subject to the two properties that characterize degree uses of size adjectives (see Morzycki, 2009). First, the bigness generalization asserts that only adjectives of bigness get degree readings, adjectives of smallness do not. This is true of size adjectives modifying *idiot*-like nouns. The examples in (15a), although odd, only get a physical size interpretation. Second, the position generalization states that degree readings of size adjectives are only possible in attributive position. That is again the case with *idiot*-like nouns. Examples (15b) only present a physical size reading.

(15)   a.   Juan es un {#pequeño / ??diminuto / ??minúsculo} idiota.
               Juan is a   small   tiny   minuscule idiot
               'Juan is a {small / tiny / minuscule} idiot.'
         b.   #Este idiota es {grande / enorme / gigantesco}.
               this   idiot   is big   huge   gigantic

Interrogatives provide further evidence for the gradability of *idiot*-like nouns. In particular, just like gradable adjectives (16a), these nouns appear in degree interrogatives with *cómo de* in Spanish (16b). Regular nouns like *doctor* are excluded from this construction. The same happens with quantity exclamatives with *cuán* 'how' (17).

(16)   a.   ¿Cómo de {alto / amable} es Juan?
              how   of tall   kind   is Juan
              'How {tall / kind} is Juan?'
        b.   ¿Cómo de {idiota / genio / ??médico} es Juan?
              how   of idiot genius   doctor   is Juan
              'How much of a(n) {idiot / genius / doctor} is Juan?'

(17)   ¡Cuán {alto / amable / genio / desastre / ??médico} (que) es Juan!
         how tall   kind   genius mess   doctor   that is Juan
         'How {tall / kind / genius / mess / doctor} Juan is!'

So far, it seems that nouns like *idiot* are gradable. At this point, it is reasonable to question what type of scale structure they use (see §2). The data in §3 already showed that ACs do not have a clear-cut behavior as maximizers when modifying *idiot*-like nouns, not completely supporting the idea that they use upper-closed scales.

Focusing on data from entailments of the comparative construction (Kennedy and McNally, 2005), nouns like *idiot* pattern with minimum-standard adjectives in triggering entailments to the unmarked form (18) (Constantinescu, 2011, de Vries, forthcoming). In other words, if someone is more of an idiot than someone else, it is entailed that the first person is an idiot.[3]

(18)   a.   La habitación está más sucia que la cocina. → La habitación está sucia.
              the room   is more dirty than the kitchen   the room   is   dirty
        b.   ??Juan es más un idiota que Sofía. → Juan es un idiota.
              Juan is more a idiot than Sofía   Juan is a idiot

To sum up, *idiot*-like nouns are gradable and seem to have minimum standards. That is, having only a small degree of the relevant property (idiocy, messiness, etc.) is enough to qualify as an idiot, a mess, etc.[4] In the next section I argue that *idiot*-like nouns denote extreme degrees.

4.2. *Idiot*-like nouns denote extreme degrees

Adjectives such as *wonderful* or *horrible* refer to a very high or the highest degree of a property (Cruse, 1986) and, in this sense, are close to superlatives. This class of adjectives that includes extremeness in their lexical semantics are often referred to as *extreme adjectives* (Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997, 2001; Morzycki, 2012a). In this section, I argue that nouns like *idiot* also denote extreme degrees of properties (see also Constantinescu, 2011; Morzycki, 2012a, 2014).

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[3]Although nouns like *idiot* in comparative constructions in Spanish are somewhat degraded (especially if the determiner appears), speakers find that the entailments still come through.

[4]De Vries argues that this is related to the fact that these nouns do not have a prototype that may constitute an upper bound (for details, see de Vries, 2010, forthcoming).

Intuitively, for someone to qualify as an idiot, just some degree of dumbness is not enough, the individual needs to be remarkably dumb.

To begin with, some of the contexts in §4 allow adjectives in the relevant positions. However, being gradable is not enough for adjectives to appear in these constructions. Rather, they need to denote extreme degrees. For example, non-extreme adjectives such as *tall* are excluded in the *N of a N* construction (19a) (cf. (10)) (Constantinescu, 2011). The same is true of verbless or independent exclamatives (19b) (cf. (12a)) (Vinet, 1991; Hernanz, 2001, a.o.).

(19)   a.   el   {??alto / ??amable / horrible / magnífico} de Juan
              the   tall   nice   horrible   great   of Juan
              'that {tall / nice / horrible / great} Juan.'
        b.   ¡{??Alto / ??Amable / Horrible / Magnífico}(, este chico)!
                 tall   nice   horrible   great   this guy
              ' {Tall / Nice / Horrible / Great}(, this guy)!'

In addition, extreme predicates display several specific properties. First, they have their own specialized degree modifiers. While modifiers such as *directamente* 'downright' do not appear with non-extreme adjectives, regular degree modifiers like *bastante* 'fairly' do not occur with extreme adjectives (20) (Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997; Hernanz, 2001; Morzycki, 2012a, a.o.). In the same way, nouns like *idiot* combine with equivalent adnominal modifiers, which are impossible in their degree reading with non-gradable nouns such as *doctor* (21).

(20)   a.   Juan es directamente {maravilloso / ??alto}.
              Juan is downright   wonderful   tall
        b.   Juan es bastante {??maravilloso / alto}.
              Juan is fairly   wonderful   tall

(21)   a.   Juan es un valiente {idiota / genio / #médico}.
              Juan is a brave   idiot   genius   doctor
              'Juan is a downright {idiot / ??doctor}.'
        b.   La clase es una soberana {maravilla / *actividad}.
              the class is a   supreme   wonder   activity
              'The class is a full-on {wonder / *activity}.'

Second, extreme predicates are somewhat unnatural in comparatives, with different degrees of acceptability among speakers, but more acceptable in equatives (22) (Cruse, 1986; Paradis, 1997; Morzycki, 2012a). *Idiot*-like nouns are also slightly more degraded in comparative than in equative structures (23).

(22)   a.   Juan es más {??maravilloso / ??horrible / alto} que Sofía.
              Juan is more   wonderful   horrible   tall   than Sofía

b. Juan es tan {maravilloso / horrible / alto} como Sofía.
Juan is as wonderful horrible tall as Sofía

(23) a. ??Juan es más (un) genio que Sofía.
Juan is more a genius than Sofía
'Juan is more of a genius than Sofía.'
b. ?Juan es tan genio como Sofía.
Juan is as genius as Sofía
'Juan is as much of a genius as Sofía.'

Third, extreme predicates can be intensified through prosodic prominence (24a) (Cruse, 1986; Bolinger, 1972; Morzycki, 2012a). *Idiot*-like nouns behave accordingly (24b).

(24) a. Kevin Spacey is {fan*taaaa*stic / ??*gooooooooooood*}! (Morzycki, 2012a)
b. Juan es un {i*dioooo*ta / ??*méeeee*dico}.
Juan is a idiot doctor

In short, nouns like *idiot* denote extreme degrees of properties. The tests in this section showed that they behave like extreme adjectives. It can be thus concluded that these nouns encode extremeness in their lexical semantics. This idea is implemented in the next section.

4.2.1. Analysis

In order to account for the semantics of nouns like *idiot*, I adopt Morzycki's (2012a) analysis of extreme adjectives. The basic intuition is that different subsets of scales are relevant in different contexts, and extremeness consists of going off the relevant scale, to a point where no further distinctions between degrees are made (Morzycki, 2012a). For instance, in order to qualify as an idiot, someone has to be dumb to a degree above any expectation, off the relevant scale for the adjective *dumb*, in a zone of indifference between degrees of dumbness.

This idea connects with contextual domain restriction. In the same way quantifiers are contextually restricted (e.g. von Fintel, 1994), degree quantification is also subject to contextual variation in its domains (e.g. Zanuttini and Portner, 2003). Contextual domain restriction is thus introduced in the denotation of ordinary adjectives (Morzycki, 2012a). The semantics for *dumb* in (25a) includes the restriction that the degree d has to be in the salient set of degrees in the contextual scale C. In the absence of degree morphology, the null morpheme POS saturates the degree argument and establishes the requirement that the degree exceeds the standard (25b).

(25) a. $[\![dumb]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x [d \in C \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x)]$
b. $[\![\text{POS } dumb_C]\!] = \lambda x. \exists d [d \in C \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x) \wedge d \succeq \mathbf{stnd}([\![dumb_C]\!])]$

(Morzycki, 2012a)

Extreme predicates exceed the contextually-provided set of degrees. This is reflected in the condition that their degree *d* of the property is greater than the maximal degree in the contextual scale *C* (Morzycki, 2012a). Extending the analysis to nouns like *idiot*, their denotation would be as in (26).

(26)   a. $[\![idiota_C]\!] = \lambda d\lambda x[d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x)]$
       b. $[\![genio_C]\!] = \lambda x\lambda d[d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{smart}(d)(x)]$

Under this analysis, like gradable adjectives in a degree-based framework, nouns like *idiot* have degree arguments and are lexically associated with scales. Just like in the case of adjectives, a degree morpheme is necessary to get to a property of individuals. If no overt degree word is present, I assume a null POS morpheme saturates the degree argument (Morzycki, 2009).[5] According to (27), an individual is an idiot if, and only if, she is dumb to a degree *d* that exceeds the standard for the predicate in *C* and that is greater than the highest salient degree of dumbness in *C*. In this case, the standard and the domain restriction interact: for the standard to be relevant, it must be beyond the perspective scale.

(27)   a. $[\![\text{POS } idiota_C]\!] = \lambda x.\exists d[d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x) \wedge d \succeq \mathbf{stnd}([\![idiota_C]\!])]$
       b. $[\![\text{POS } genius_C]\!] = \lambda x.\exists d[d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{smart}(d)(x) \wedge d \succeq \mathbf{stnd}([\![genius_C]\!])]$

Nouns like *idiot* are fundamentally adjective-like, as manifested in their similar distribution in inversion constructions (10), (19a), exclamatives (12), (19b), and questions (16). The denotations in (27) reflect this adjectival condition of these nouns not only by providing them with gradable semantics, but also by using adjectival measure functions. Besides this, by including the measure function of the non-extreme or more neutral adjective, the denotation of extreme nouns accounts for the entailments to the non-extreme form (28). Any individual dumb enough to be an idiot must have a degree of dumbness beyond *C*; by monotonicity, any individual dumb to that degree is dumb to all the degrees below, including the standard for *dumb*.

(28)   a.   Juan es un idiota. → Juan es tonto.
            Juan is a   idiot   Juan is dumb
       b.   Juan es un genio. → Juan es listo.
            Juan is a   genius   Juan is smart

Hernanz (2001) argues that evaluative expressions have a *wh*-feature that explains their occurrence in inversion constructions, exclamatives, and other *wh*-like behavior. In the analysis of nouns like *idiot* put forward here, they include a widening in the domain of degrees. In particular, these nouns refer to degrees that exceed the maximal degree in the salient set of degrees. This connects with Zanuttini and Portner's (2003) analysis of *wh*-exclamatives, according to which exclamatives involve domain widening by the combination of a *wh*-word and a factive

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[5]Looking ahead, ACs are argued to be overt degree morphemes in the next section. Morzycki (2009) actually already considers ACs to be adnominal degree morphemes, but his analysis differs from ours in that his gradable nouns do not denote extreme degrees.

operator. Thus, there seems to be a connection between *wh*-behavior and evaluativity that could be made explicit by our analysis.

One way of doing this could be to link extremeness to mirativity (DeLancey, 1997; for analyses of exclamatives as mirative constructions, see Michaelis, 2001; Castroviejo Miró, 2006), and, ultimately, to expressivity (see Martin, 2007 for extreme adjetives). More specifically, the fact that the individual has a property to an unexpectedly high degree is accompanied by an emotion (surprise, but also other emotions like annoyance) by part of the speaker. This emotional attitude arises from the truth-conditional meaning of evaluative nouns and constitutes their expressive meaning.[6] For instance, if someone is smart to so extreme a degree to qualify as a genius, it causes in the speaker an emotional attitude of surprise or admiration towards that individual.

To summarize, nouns like *idiot* have been given a denotation that involves extreme degrees, following the analysis for extreme adjectives in Morzycki (2012a). In particular, they are gradable properties of individuals, with the requirement that the degree of the property exceed the contextually salient set of degrees. Next section discusses subjectivity of extreme nouns.

4.3. Consequences of the analysis: subjectivity

Before proceeding to the analysis of ACs, let me briefly discuss one consequence of the analysis above, which helps clarify the connection between being extreme and being evaluative. Subjective predicates are predicates whose truth is relativized to the perspective of a judge (Lasersohn, 2005; Stephenson, 2007; Bylinina, 2014, a.o.). For instance, a sentence like *Roller-coasters are fun* may be true for one speaker but false for another, and both can be right at the same time.

Extreme nouns pass the tests for subjectivity. They can appear as the complement of subjective attitude verbs (29a) Sæbø, 2009 and they give rise to faultless disagreement (29b) (Lasersohn, 2005; Stephenson, 2007). Regarding the latter, speaker B's does not constitute a contradiction, because both speakers can be right.

(29) a. Juan me   parece {divertido / un idiota / un genio / un desastre}.
          Juan DAT.1SG find   funny   a idiot   a genius   a mess
          'I find Juan {funny / an idiot / a genius / a mess}.'
      b. A: Juan es {divertido / un idiota /un genio / un desastre}.
              'Juan is {funny / an idiot / a genius / a mess}.'
          B: No, no lo es.
              'No, he's not.'   FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

Adjectives can be subjective in two ways (Bylinina, 2014; Kennedy, 2016). They can be subjective with respect to the threshold for its application or with respect to the ordering of the

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[6]In this paper, I leave the expressive component of *idiot*-like nouns aside, but see Masià (2017b) for an analysis.

individuals in their extension. For instance, *fun* is subjective regarding its standard: two speakers may disagree on whether roller-coasters are above the standard for *fun* because one places the standard higher than the other. In addition, the ordering of the set {roller-coasters, climbing, reading} for *fun* may be ⟨roller-coasters, climbing, reading⟩ for one speaker, but ⟨reading, roller-coasters, climbing⟩ for another. Since *idiot*-like nouns have been argued to use adjectival scales from evaluative adjectives in their semantics (26) and these adjectives are subjective in the two ways (Bylinina, 2014; Kennedy, 2016), extreme nouns are expected to be two-way subjective as well.

The tests in (29), using the positive form of the adjective and a positive construction for the noun, show that extreme nouns are subjective with respect to their standard. Subjectivity with respect to their ordering is detected by the acceptability of the comparative form in the diagnostics above. Since extreme nouns in the comparative form are slightly degraded, so are the examples in (30) including them. Nevertheless, they are not ruled out with subjective attitude verbs (30a) and they give rise to faultless disagreement (30b).

(30)   a.   Juan me   parece más {divertido / ?genio / ?desastre} que Sofía.
              Juan DAT.1SG find   more funny   genius   mess   than Sofía
              'I find Juan {funnier / more of a genius / more of a mess} than Sofía.'
        b.   A: Juan es más {divertido / ?genio / ?desastre} que Sofía.
                    'Juan is {funnier / more of a genius / more of a mess} than Sofía.'
              B: No, no lo es. 'No, he's not.'   FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT

Just like evaluative adjectives, extreme nouns seem to be subjective in two ways. I suggest that this fact can be related to the presence of adjectival measure functions in the lexical semantics of nouns like *idiot* in the analysis put forward in §4.2.1. Next section presents the analysis of ACs as adnominal maximizers.

5. Back to adjectives of completeness

5.1. Adjectives of completeness are maximizers

Since *idiot*-like nouns denote gradable properties, an analysis of ACs as degree modifiers is sustained. However, there are some difficulties. Maximizers are sensitive to scale maximums, but the nouns under discussion seem to use scales with no upper-bound (§4.1). Therefore, either the maximum for ACs must be provided by something other than a bound in a lexical scale, or, alternatively, ACs need to be analyzed as non-maximizers. In this section I argue for the first option, showing that the special behavior of ACs with nouns like *idiot* can be derived from the particularities of the extremeness the latter include in their lexical meaning.

Paradis (1997) observes that extreme adjectives have an inherent superlativity, and, in this sense, they represent the ultimate point of a scale. She argues that maximizers combine with adjectives such as *wonderful* to reinforce their extremeness. In the approach to extremeness

adopted in the previous section (Morzycki, 2012a), the contextually provided scale contributes a sort of maximum: the degrees above it. Since these degrees are undifferentiated, they can be thought of as a single one. For instance, for a noun like *idiot*, it is not the case that there is a ceiling of idiocy, but rather that, above certain degree, we do not introduce any distinction between the degrees of idiocy of the individuals. In a sense, that set of indistinct degrees acts as a maximum (see Morzycki, 2012a: 606).

If the degrees above the salient scale form a kind of boundary, this may constitute an appropriate maximum for maximizers. I argue that it is in fact a degree that can be returned by the **max** function in the semantics of maximality modifiers. ACs can thus be analyzed as maximizers (31) (see also Morzycki, 2009).

(31) $\llbracket AC \rrbracket = \lambda G_{\langle d,\langle e,t\rangle\rangle}\lambda x.\exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_G) \wedge G(d)(x)]$

The composition of an AC with an extreme noun is then as in (32a). The AC saturates the degree argument of the noun and sets its value to the maximum of the scale. Two restrictions apply on the degree d. It must be above the relevant set of degrees in C and it must be the maximum (of the degrees off the scale lexicalized by *dumb*).[7] According to this semantics, Juan is a complete idiot if, and only if, he has a degree of dumbness above the salient set of degrees in the context (32b).

(32)   a. $\llbracket completo \rrbracket(\llbracket idiota_C \rrbracket) = \lambda x.\exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_{idiot_C}) \wedge \llbracket idiota_C \rrbracket(d)(x)] =$
           $= \lambda x.\exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_{idiot_C}) \wedge d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(x)]$
    b. $\llbracket Juan\ es\ un\ completo\ idiota \rrbracket =$
           $= \exists d[d = \mathbf{max}(S_{idiot_C}) \wedge d > \mathbf{max}(C) \wedge \mathbf{dumb}(d)(\text{Juan})]$

The fact that no distinction is made among the degrees above the relevant set of degrees in C has the consequence of blurring the difference between the unmodified and the modified extreme noun. Put differently, there is not a sharp distinction between being an idiot and being a complete idiot. This does not mean that ACs have no effect. By means of the maximality function, the degree of idiocy of *complete idiot* is always higher than that of *idiot*. But due to the fact that these degrees do not have exact, determinate values, the contrast is fuzzy. This may explain the oddness of the sentences in (33).

(33)   a. ??Juan es un idiota, pero no   un completo idiota.
           Juan is a idiot but NEG a complete idiot
           'Juan is an idiot, but not a complete idiot.'

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[7]This analysis of ACs is different from considering them extreme degree modifiers in Morzycki's (2012a)'s terms. Under his analysis, modifiers such as *downright* widen the domain of degrees to accommodate a new standard for the predicate. Roughly, the standard for *downright gigantic* is situated above the already expanded domain for *big* in the semantics of *gigantic*. In my analysis, ACs target the widened set of degrees used by extreme nouns, but do not have a widening effect themselves. This analysis is compatible with other degree uses of ACs (see §2; see also Masià, 2017a, 2018).

b. ??La clase es un desastre, pero no   un absoluto desastre.
   the class is a mess   but NEG a absolute mess
   'the class is a mess, but not an absolute mess.'

5.2. Explaining the data

We can now explain the nonmaximizer behavior of ACs described in §3. Regarding the entailment that the end of the scale has been reached, recall that sentences with ACs and extreme nouns result in a contradiction when the degree of the property of the same individual is being compared (6a), but not when the comparison is drawn between the degrees of two different individuals (7a). For instance, saying that Juan is a complete idiot, but he could be more of an idiot is as contradictory as saying that a plane is completely full, but could be fuller (5a). By contrast, there is not so strong a conflict when asserting that Juan is a complete idiot, but someone else exceeds his degree of idiocy.

If Juan is a complete idiot, he has a maximal amount of idiocy, although the particular corresponding degree cannot be pinpointed, due to the fact that that degree is beyond the salient scale. It feels unnatural to recalculate that maximum when considering the same individual (unless some new facts are learned about Juan) because the speaker is contradicting her own property assignment. However, given that the maximum is undetermined, the speaker can situate it at a higher value than she originally did if the context changes (for instance, she meets Juan's brother). In fact, note that the sentences improve if *todavía* 'even' is added (34).

(34)   Juan es un completo idiota, pero su hermano lo es todavía más.
        Juan is a complete idiot but his brother CL is even   more
        'Juan is a complete idiot, but his brother is even more of an idiot than him.'

As for the incompatibility with *casi* 'almost' (8a), I suggest that it has to do with this expression presupposing an identifiable maximum. *Almost* targets a value that is close to the maximum, but has not reached it. If the maximum for, say, being an idiot cannot be singled out, the expression *un casi completo idiota* 'an almost complete idiot' would not return a concrete value either, and the difference between being a complete idiot and being an almost complete idiot would be trivial (see also Paradis, 1997: §3.3.3).

Exceptive phrases were fairly acceptable with ACs and extreme nouns (9a), as expected from a total construct. The presence of an AC usually has the side effect of decreasing the amount of imprecision allowed in the context. As a consequence, the number of exceptions is reduced, making exceptives slightly less felicitous than in the sentences without the maximizer.

Coming back to the scale structure of extreme nouns, the data in (18) pointed to them having a minimum standard. Although that still holds, their combination with ACs and the maximality interpretation that the latter receive provides evidence for them having a maximum as well. As

mentioned above, this is not a conventional maximum, but one made of degrees off the relevant contextual scale.

In short, ACs are maximizers of extreme nouns. They set the degree of the property denoted by these nouns to its maximum value. However, since those degrees exceed the contextually provided scale and no distinctions are made among them, the combination of ACs and extreme nouns presents a mixed behavior with respect to maximality. In the next section, I discuss a couple of alternative analyses.

5.3. Alternative analyses

Previous analyses of ACs take them to universally quantify over dimensions associated with the noun. This section reviews a non-degree and a degree proposal along these lines and shows that they are not sufficient to capture the distribution of ACs with extreme nouns.

Constantinescu (2011) argues that ACs in their intensifying use with *idiot*-like nouns signal the extent to which the property denoted by the noun holds of the object in question. She puts forward that ACs apply to the characteristic function included in the meaning of the noun (e.g. Bouchard, 2002; Demonte, 2008) and assert that the properties displayed by the individual match those associated with the noun, in the speaker's opinion. However, the noun's defining criteria does not have to be exhaustively satisfied, as shown by the nonmaximal behavior of ACs in these uses (see §3), it is enough if the relevant properties are clearly manifested in a salient way. For instance, for a workshop to be a complete failure, it may be enough if it is a failure in an aspect especially relevant to the speaker (e.g., quality of the talks), even if it is not in other less salient respects (e.g., quality of the coffee).

The idea that ACs indicate that the referent fully matches the definition of the noun is problematic. All nouns have a set of criteria an individual must satisfy to qualify as them. However, this reading of ACs is only available for extreme nouns. If the role of ACs were to assert that the noun is right for the individual, they would be expected to have this function with all nouns. For instance, the examples in (35) would be predicted to convey that those particular instances deserved to be referred to as *a novel* and *a conference*, respectively, but that is not the case.

(35)   ?Esta es una completa {novela / conferencia}.
        this is a   complete novel   workshop
        'This is a comprehensive {novel / workshop}.'

The intuition that ACs indicate that the referent is an N in all the relevant dimensions associated with the noun can be recast in a degree-based framework. Sassoon (2013, 2017) argues that nouns like *idiot* are similar to adjectives in their occurrence with *with respect to* phrases (36).

(36)   Dan is an idiot {with respect to money / in every respect}.   (Sassoon, 2013)

Relatedly, de Vries (2010, forthcoming) claims that *idiot*-like nouns are gradable and use open scales (see also Morzycki, 2009). ACs are analyzed as modifiers that assert that the individual has every dimension associated with the noun. For instance, a *total nerd* would be someone who is nerdy with respect to his looks, social skills, intelligence, hobbies, etc. This predicts that nouns modified by ACs do not accept *with respect to*-phrases, but this is not borne out (37). Someone can be a total idiot or a complete mess only with respect to one dimension.

(37)   a.   Era un idiota total en cuanto a   calorías, alimentos y   cosas de esas.[8]
              was a   idiot   total with regard to calories food   and things of those
              'I was a total idiot regarding calories, food, and things like that.'
        b.   Soy un completo desastre con respecto a las lanas y   los proyectos.[9]
              am a   complete mess   with respect to the yarns and the projects
              'I'm a complete mess with respect to yarn and (DIY) projects.'

This said, it is not completely clear to me that all the *with respect to* phrases in (36), (37) target actual dimensions of the noun. What properties make someone an idiot? Someone may consider that not knowing how to manage money makes you an idiot, but that is certainly neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to qualify as one. Rather, it seems one of the many ways in which someone can be an idiot. Consider a noun like *smoker* instead, which has clear(er) dimensions (Morzycki, 2012b). A smoker is someone who smokes a certain amount of cigarettes with a specific frequency. Some degree in both dimensions is necessary for someone to qualify as a smoker. A complete smoker would be someone who has a high degree in both dimensions. However, ACs are not felicitous with this noun (38).

(38)   ??Juan es un completo fumador.
          Juan is a   complete smoker

Morzycki (2012b) argues that nouns like *idiot* are only associated with one dimension (e.g., idiocy). ACs are analyzed as modifiers that assert that the measurement of the individual along the dimension associated with the noun is large (39). For instance, Clyde is an utter idiot if, and only if, his measure along the unique dimension associated with idiot, idiocy, is large. ACs include the requirement that the noun have only one dimension (represented by the iota operator), accounting thus for their distribution.

(39) $[\![utter]\!]^c = \lambda f_{\langle e,t \rangle} \lambda x.\mathbf{large}_c(\mu(\iota D[D \in \mathbf{dimensions}(f)])(x))$

The analysis put forward here resembles Morzycki's (2012b) in that it assumes that the only dimension of measurement relevant for extreme nouns is the one provided by the measure function of their related adjectives. However, we have considered nouns like *idiot* to be gradable (extreme, in particular) (cf. Morzycki, 2009), and have argued that ACs can be analyzed as maximality modifiers, unifying them to the analysis of their adverbial counterparts.

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[8]http://1medbio.blogspot.com.es/2012/09/medicina-biologica-dr-german-duque_22.html
[9]http://www.waselwasel.com/crisis-tejeril/

In short, an analysis of ACs as quantifying over the characteristics or dimensions associated with the noun does not fully cover the data. For this reason, ACs are better understood in terms of maximality modifiers of extreme nouns.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that ACs are maximality modifiers of nouns like *idiot*. The latter have been analyzed as extreme predicates. That is, *idiot*-like nouns are gradable and denote extreme degrees. This means that their degree arguments have values above the relevant scale in the context. ACs modifying extreme nouns behave only partially as maximizers because of the type of maximum those nouns provide. In particular, the set of degrees off the relevant scale constitute a sort of maximum, but the degrees in that interval are undifferentiated to one another.

Providing an analysis of ACs as maximizers has reinforced the parallelism between adverbial and adjectival modification and unraveled the ways in which nouns can be gradable and the significance of scale structure in their semantics. Nevertheless, gradability in the nominal domain is still a controversial issue and its connection to evaluativity and subjectivity is not fully understood. Exploring other instances of evaluative nouns, such as expressive variants (*quack* as the variant of *doctor*), ethnic slurs or nouns formed by an affective suffix (e.g., Spanish *politicastro* 'politician.PEJ'), their contribution to the expressive dimension of meaning (Potts, 2005; Gutzmann, 2013), and their combination with adnominal degree modifiers may shed light in that direction.

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