Abstract

Focusing on Spanish, this article discusses the internal syntax of adjectival projections headed by a gradable adjective. The analysis of the properties of the Spanish term *poco* ‘little’ in combination with gradable adjectives and degree terms (poco inteligente, ‘not very smart’; bastante poco inteligente ‘not so much smart’; increíblemente poco inteligente, ‘incredibly not smart’; lo increíblemente poco inteligente, ‘how incredibly not smart’) will serve as the starting point for the proposal that gradable adjectives project a quantifier phrase above AP and below DegP. The quantifier phrase adds a semantic component of scalar interpretation. From the analysis of the extended projection of gradable adjectives proposed throughout this article the following classification of degree terms in the adjectival domain is derived: (a) Quantitative terms, which head the quantifier phrase and convey an upward or downward orientation on a scale: poco ‘little’ and a phonetically null quantitative term equivalent to mucho ‘much’ in Old Spanish. (b) Degree operators, which identify a specific degree on the scale from an upper functional degree phrase. Examples are bastante ‘too’, demasiado ‘too much’, tan ‘so’, más ‘more’, etc. And (c) Elatives, which modify the degree argument of the adjective by adding an appreciative extreme degree reading. Examples are increíblemente, ‘incredibly’, buenísimo ‘tall-superlative’, enorme ‘enormous’.

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1. Introduction

Gradable adjectives show two clear differences with respect to non gradable adjectives as for their combinatorial with other linguistic elements. First, only gradable adjectives can follow a set of words and expressions related to the denotation of degree (hence “degree terms”) such as poco ‘little’, un poco ‘a little’, bastante ‘too’, muy ‘very’, demasiado ‘too much’, tan ‘so’, más ‘more’, menos ‘less’, etc.:2

(1) a. *Esta mesa es [bastante alta].
    This table is [too high]

b. *Esta mesa es [bastante rectangular].
    This table is [too rectangular]

The second difference is that only gradable adjectives can combine with sequences like those shown in brackets in (2). The gradable adjective alto is followed by a comparative clause in (2a), a resultative clause in (2b), and a prepositional phrase introduced by para ‘for’ in (2c):3

(2) a. Esta mesa es más alta [que la mía].
    this table is more high [than the mine]

b. Esta mesa es tan alta [que los pobres niños no pueden escribir].
    this table is so high [that the poor children no can write]

c. Esta mesa es muy alta [para un niño de seis años].
    this table is very high [for a child of six years]

(3) a. *Esta mesa es más rectangular [que la mía].
    this table is more rectangular [than the mine]

2. A non gradable adjective can recategorize as gradable, thus combining with degree terms. In a sentence such as Iberia es una compañía aérea española ‘Iberia is a Spanish airline’ the relational adjective español ‘Spanish’ denotes a class (‘Iberia is a company from Spain’). However, this sentence can have another reading in which the adjective español denotes a set of values that prototypically are associated to the property “being Spanish”. In this case, the adjective can combine with degree terms (Iberia es una compañía aérea muy Española. ‘Iberia is a very Spanish airline’).

3. The degree clause introduced by para in (2c) indicates the parameter with respect to which the quality denoted by the adjective is measured (Sánchez 1995).
b. *Esta mesa es tan rectangular [que los pobres
   this table is so rectangular [that the poor
   niños no pueden escribir].
   children no can write]

c. *Esta mesa es muy rectangular [para un niño de seis
   this table is very rectangular [for a child of six
   años].
   years]

Is there any specific property in the semantics of gradable adjectives that explains the different distribution of gradable adjectives and non gradable adjectives?4 Essentially, as it has been pointed out by various authors, gradable adjectives denote dimensions. Following Bierwisch (1989), a “dimension” is a property associated with the denotation of an adjective that can be graded and according to which the objects in the domain of an adjective can be ordered. In the example in (1) the adjective *alto ‘high’ denotes a dimension because an order can be established with respect to height between different tables that are predicated to be high in a given context. However, the tables in our example cannot be ordered with respect to the property “being rectangular”. A dimension, then, corresponds to a gradable property such as height, length, speed, beauty, etc. Semantically, gradable adjectives are analyzed as expressions whose semantic function is to define a mapping between objects and points on a “scale” (Cresswell 1976). Kennedy (1997: 51–52) defines a “scale” as a dense, linearly ordered set of points, or “degrees”, where the ordering is relativized to a “dimension”.5 Focusing on sequences in which gradable adjectives combine with degree terms, this article develops an analysis of the extended projection of gradable adjectives in three distinct levels that are aligned with each of the essential components of the denotation of gradable adjectives: dimensions, scales and degrees. At the lowest AP level, one finds the interpretation of a dimension, i.e., a gradable property. At the middle level or Quantifier Phrase, an interval of a scale is defined, and at the top level or Degree Phrase, a specific degree in the scale is identified by a degree operator.

The proposal developed in this article is built on a syntactic analysis in which gradable adjectives project extended functional structure headed by a degree operator, as in Zwarts (1992).6

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5. See also Westney (1986) on scales.
6. See in Corver (1991) formal arguments in favor of the syntactic structure in (4) as opposed to an analysis in which degree operators are generated in [Spec, AP] as modifiers of the adjective (Bresnan 1973).
According to this author, a gradable adjective such as *alto* ‘tall’ in (4) has two arguments in its thematic grid. The thematic argument position indicated by ⟨1⟩ represents the external argument. The adjective *alto* ‘tall’ has also a referential argument position ⟨d⟩, which is an argument position over degrees. The arguments ⟨1⟩ and ⟨d⟩ are analyzed as open thematic positions that must be discharged when the adjective is inserted in the syntactic derivation. The discharge of the open referential argument position ⟨d⟩ takes place by means of an operation called “theta-binding” (Higginbotham 1985). This process relates the open referential argument position of a lexical predicate to an operator, thus restricting the predicate’s denotation. Following Zwarts (1992), theta-binding of the degree variable of *alto* ‘tall’ by the operator *bastante* ‘too’ in (4) realizes the property denoted by the adjectival predicate along a scalar dimension of degrees. In other words, given that the referential argument ⟨d⟩ of the adjectival predicate *alto* ‘tall’ is open in (4), the adjective denotes a set of the degrees of height (i.e., a dimension). The reference of the adjectival predicate “tall” is restricted when it is theta-bound by the degree operator *bastante* ‘too’ heading the upper functional DegP, which acts as a binder of the referential argument position. Consequently, a specific degree of height is identified by the degree operator and applied to the external argument, as represented in (5):

(5) \[ \text{alto ‘tall’ } (1, d) = 1 \text{ is } d \text{-alto} \]

\[ \langle 1 \rangle = \text{Juan ‘John’, Pedro ‘Peter’, la mesa ‘the table’, etc.} \]

\[ \langle d \rangle = \text{bastante ‘too’, demasiado ‘too much’, más ‘more’, etc.} \]
Put informally, according to the formulism in (5) the interpretation of a sentence such as *Juan es bastante alto* ‘John is too tall’ is that ‘the property of being tall to the degree *bastante* is applied to the individual *Juan*.\(^8\)

Note that the analysis in (4) predicts that the co-occurrence of more than one degree operator should be ungrammatical because the open degree argument position of the adjective has already been discharged by the first degree operator. This prediction is confirmed by the ungrammaticality of the examples in (6):

\[(6) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a. } &\text{*Juan es [muy bastante alto].} \\
&\text{John is [very too tall]} \\
&\quad \text{‘*John is very too tall’}
\end{align*}
\[(6) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{b. } &\text{*Juan es [demasiado algo inteligente].} \\
&\text{John is [too a bit intelligent]} \\
&\quad \text{‘*John is too a bit intelligent’}
\end{align*}\]

If the operators *bastante* ‘too’ and *algo* ‘a bit’ theta-bind in (6) the referential argument position \(\langle d \rangle\) associated to the adjectival predicates *alto* ‘tall’ and *inteligente* ‘intelligent’, there is no argument position left for the operators *muy* ‘very’ and *demasiado* ‘too much’, which therefore remain vacuous and hence form illegitimate entities at LF.\(^9\)

In the following sections of this article, the analysis of the properties of the Spanish term *poco* in combination with gradable adjectives and degree terms *poco inteligente*, ‘not very smart’; *bastante poco inteligente* ‘not so much smart’; *incrediblemente poco inteligente*, ‘incredibly not smart’; *lo increíblemente poco inteligente*, ‘how incredibly not smart’) will serve as the starting point for the proposal that between the degree phrase and the adjective phrase in (4) the gradable adjective projects a quantifier phrase in which a semantic component of scalar orientation is added.\(^10\) Three types of degree terms will be distinguished in the adjectival domain: (a) those that convey a downward or upward orientation of a scale and are heads of the quantifier phrase: *poco* ‘little’ and a phonetically empty quantitative term equivalent to *mucho* ‘much’ found in Old Spanish; (b) degree operators (*bastante* ‘too’, *demasiado*...
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‘too much’, más ‘more’, etc.), which project a degree phrase and identify a specific degree once an interval of a scale has been selected; and (c) elatives (increíblemente ‘incredibly’, buenísimo ‘tall-superlative’, magnífico ‘magnificent’, etc.), which are responsible for degree modification by adding an evaluative extreme degree reading to the degree argument of the adjective.

This article is organized as follows: Section 2 addresses the properties of poco in combination with gradable adjectives. Poco is a degree term with a quantitative value that is associated to the denotation of a scale. Specifically, poco selects the lower end of a scale, i.e. the interval from the standard value (or degree considered to be normal in a given context) to the lowest degree on the scale. Based on the combination of poco and degree operators, and on the appearance of poco in contexts where degree operators are excluded, it is argued that poco does not belong to the class of degree operators, which theta-bind the referential degree argument of the adjective. The syntactic analysis of the sequence [poco+A] will be presented in Section 3. Gradable adjectives project a quantifier phrase in which a semantic component of scalar orientation is added. By inserting the quantitative term poco as the head of QP, the lower end of a scale is selected. Once the lower interval of a scale has been selected, the sequence [poco+A] projects an upper degree phrase where it is added the denotation of a specific degree. It will be assumed that the specification of a degree in an interval on a scale only takes place when the adjective includes a degree argument in its thematic grid. The optional nature of the degree argument is supported by the appearance of the sequence [poco+A] in contexts where degree operators are excluded. Section 4 will deal with the difference between poco ‘little’ and the expression un poco ‘a little’. In Section 5 it will be proposed that gradable adjectives by default have a positive quantitative interpretation that is obtained by merging the adjective with a phonetically empty term that projects a QP and adds a denotation of scalar upward orientation. This phonetically empty quantitative element is equivalent to the term mucho ‘much’ that is found in Old Spanish. Section 6 deals with elatives, a class of terms and linguistic expressions (increíblemente ‘incredibly’, buenísimo ‘tall-superlative’, magnífico ‘magnificent’) by means of which the adjective degree argument obtains an extreme degree reading. Conclusions and final remarks are presented in Section 7.

2. Properties of poco in the sequence [poco+adjective]

Poco ‘little’ is a word that belongs to different lexical categories in Spanish, as shown in (7), (8) and (9):

(7)  Tres estudiantes son [pocos estudiantes].
    three students are [few students]
    ‘Three students are few students.’
Split analysis of gradable adjectives in Spanish

(8)  *No le echés a ese plato sino [un poco de sal].*
    ‘Just add a bit of salt to that meal.’

(9)  *Mis alumnos son [pocos pero aplicados].*
    ‘My students are [few but hard workers]’

  Poco is an indefinite determiner in (7). Evidence in favor of an analysis of "poco" as a nominal expression can be found in (8), where it combines with the indefinite article "un" ‘a’. Besides its determiner and nominal use, "poco" has also predicative properties in (9).

  This article deals with another use of the word "poco" in Spanish: "poco" in combination with gradable adjectives. Consider the data in (10) and (11):

(10)  a.  *Juan es poco alto.*
      John is [little-tall]  ‘John is not too tall’
      Mary is [little-MASC / *little-FEM] tall  ‘Mary is not very tall’
    c.  *Juan y Pedro son [poco / *pocos] altos.*
      John and Peter are [little-M-PL / *little-M-PL] tall  ‘John and Peter are not very tall.’
      Mary and Ana are [little-M-PL / *little-F-PL] tall  ‘Mary and Ana are not very tall.’

      John is [little-SUPERLATIVE] tall  ‘John is not very tall.’
    b.  *Juan es [poquito] alto.*
      John is [little-DIMINUTIVE] tall  ‘John is not very tall.’

  The lack of agreement with the noun in (10b, c, d) and the ungrammaticality caused by the addition of superlative and evaluative morphology in (11a) and (11b) show that "poco" is not an adjective in these examples.

  When "poco" is followed by a gradable adjective, it is a degree term that has a quantitative value and is associated with the denotation of a scale, in particular with the lower end of a scale. The example in (12) illustrates this idea:

11. A quantitative value is also found in other usages of "poco" (see (7)–(9)).
In (12), the gradable adjective inteligente denotes a dimension, which in this example is the property of being intelligent to a certain degree on a scale of intelligence that is contextually oriented. Poco provides the interpretation that the individual John is intelligent to a degree located below the standard value on the scale. The standard value is, in this case, the degree of intelligence expected to be normal in the negotiation of a contract. Poco selects the lower end of the scale. More specifically, poco selects the interval of degrees from the standard value to the lowest degree on the scale.12

Therefore, the interpretation of poco in the sequence [poco+A] is related to the denotation of degree, as it is also confirmed in (13) by the fact that poco cannot combine with terms that do not denote dimensions:

(13) a. *Un coche [bastante eléctrico]
    a car [very electric]
    ‘A too electric car’
 b. *Un coche [poco eléctrico]
    a car [little electric]
    ‘A not very electric car’
 c. *Una industria [demasiado pesquera]
    an industry [too fishing]
    ‘A too fishing industry’
 d. *Una industria [poco pesquera]
    an industry [little fishing]
    ‘A not too fishing industry’

The adjectives eléctrico ‘electric’ and pesquero ‘fishing’ in (13) are relational adjectives that denote a type of cars in (13a, b) and a class of industry in (13c, d).13

The data in (12) and (13) could apparently lead to the conclusion that poco, being a degree word, belongs to the same class of degree operators (bastante ‘too’, demasiado ‘too much’, más ‘more’, etc.). However, the semantics and syntactic properties of poco will show that this is not the case. Degree operators

12. The fact that the sequence [poco+A] is sometimes interpreted as the negation of the property denoted by the adjective (Sánchez 1999) could be derived from this denotation of low degree provided by poco.
13. See Demonte (1999b) for a classification of different types of adjectives.
identify a specific degree by theta-binding the open degree argument position of the adjective (see (4) and (5)). On the other hand, *poco* selects the lower interval of a scale and has nothing to do with discharging open positions in the thematic grid of the adjective. Evidence for the different syntactic nature of *poco* and the degree operators will now be presented.

Recall from Section 1 that the co-occurrence of more than one degree operator overcomes a violation of the principles of thematic discharge (Higginbotham 1985), since the adjective’s open referential argument position of the adjective has already been closed by the first degree operator. Remember that this prediction is confirmed by the ungrammaticality of the examples in (5), which are shown again in (14):

(14) a. *Juan es [muy bastante alto].
   John is [very too tall]
   ‘*John is very too tall.’

b. *Juan es [demasiado algo inteligente].
   John is [too a bit intelligent]
   ‘*John is too a bit intelligent’

Conversely, the examples in (15) show that *poco* can combine with degree operators:

(15) a. *André Agassi está [muy poco acostumbrado] a
   André Agassi is [very little used] to
   perder. 14
   losing
   ‘André Agassi is not very used to losing’

b. La labor de limpieza fue [demasiado poco efectiva]
   the work of cleaning was [too little effective]
   ante la magnitud del vertido de petróleo.
   due to the size of the waste of oil
   ‘The cleaning was not too effective due to the size of the oil waste.’

c. Argelia es un destino turístico [bastante poco
   Argelia is a destination tourist [too little
   conocido] en España.
   known] in Spain
   ‘Argelia is not a very well-known tourist destination in Spain’

14. Besides being a degree operator, in Section 6 we will see that the degree term *muy* can also act as a degree modifier in some variants of Spanish, thus equivalent to the term *very* in English (Corver 1997a).
d. Este año ha sido [algo poco lluvioso].
   ‘This year has been somewhat rainy’

e. Es poco habitual que llueva en Murcia, y aún
   is little common that rains in Murcia, and even
   [más poco habitual] lo es que nieve.
   [more little common] it is that snows
   ‘Rain is not very common in Murcia, and snow is even less common.’

f. Es [tan poco probable] que este año gane la
   [so little likely] that this year wins the
   liga el Sevilla...
   tournament the Seville
   ‘It is so unlikely that Seville will win the championship.’

g. ... y [menos poco probable] es todavía que la
   and [less little likely] is even that it
   gane el Betis.
   wins the Betis
   ‘... and it is even less unlikely that Betis wins.’

h. Mi jefe es [mogollón de poco generoso] con los
   my boss is [lots of little generous] with the
   aumentos de salario.15
   raisings of salary
   ‘My boss is not very generous raising salaries.’

i. Mi ex-marido era [un montón de poco detallista].
   my ex-husband was [a lot of little thoughtful]
   ‘My ex-husband was not too thoughtful.’

j. ¿[Cómo de poco habitual] es que nieve en Murcia?
   [how of little common] is that snows in Murcia?
   – Bastante.
   too much
   ‘How uncommon is snow in Murcia? – Too uncommon.

15. Pastor (2007) analyzes the preposition de ‘of’ in the degree expressions in the examples (15i)–
   (15j) as a partitive degree operator; The expressions mogollón ‘lots’, un montón ‘a lot’ and
   cómo ‘how’ are degree modifiers generated in [Spec, DegP]. Other instances of the degree
   operator de are found in sentences such as Estoy de cansado..., (“...” represents emphatic
   intonation) ‘I am so tired’ and La nueva doctora era de guapa que curaba sólo de verla ‘The
   new doctor was so pretty that she healed just by looking at her’. In these sentences, de adds
   a denotation of extreme degree to the property denoted by the adjective. Moreover, in the
   former example, de is responsible for the emphatic value of the sentence: ‘Estoy cansado...
   (“...” represents emphatic intonation); In the latter, de has a resultative feature and selects
   the resultative clause (‘La nueva doctora era guapa que curaba sólo de verla).
k. ¡Es increíble [lo poco animado] que está
   is incredible [the-neut little lively] that is
   Pedro en un día así de especial!
   Pedro in a day so of special
   ‘I cannot believe how lifeless Peter is on such a special day!’

l. ¡[Qué poco inteligente] has sido!
   [how little intelligent] have-you been
   ‘How silly you have been!’

The examples in (15) show that poco can follow other degree terms. According
to the analysis in (4), if poco were a degree operator, the sentences in (15)
should be ungrammatical since there would be two degree operators but only
one single open position available to be discharged (see (14)). Therefore, the
grammaticality of the examples in (15) shows that poco cannot be a degree
operator.

Additional empirical proof to support that poco is not a degree operator
comes from the fact that the sequence [poco+A] can appear in syntactic con-
texts that are incompatible with degree operators. First, degree operators are
incompatible with the specific reading of the definite article (Leonetti 1999):16

(16) a. He leído el libro [interesante] de Cela.
   have-I read the book [interesting] of Cela
   ‘I have read the interesting book by Cela.’

16. Note that when the gradable adjective adiestrado ‘trained’ is graded in (ib) and (iib) it is
    incompatible with the specific reading of the determiner, but it allows a generic reading (De-
    monte 1999a):

    (i) a. El perro [adiestrado] obedece a su amo. (generic/specific)
        the dog [trained] obeys to its owner
        ‘The trained dog obeys its owner.’
    b. El perro [muy adiestrado] obedece a su amo. (generic/*specific)
        the dog [very trained] obeys to its owner
        ‘The very trained dog obeys its owner.’

    (ii) a. El perro [poco adiestrado] desobedece a su amo. (generic/specific)
        the dog [little trained] disobeys to its
        amo. owner
        ‘The untrained dog disobeys its owner.’
    b. El perro [muy poco adiestrado] desobedece (generic/*specific)
        the dog [very little trained] disobeys
        a su amo. to its owner
        ‘The untrained dog disobeys its owner.’
As the example in (16b) illustrates, when a gradable adjective such as interesante ‘interesting’ is graded, it is excluded from appearing inside a DP headed by the definite article with a specific reading. On the other hand, the examples (16a) and (17a) are grammatical. Consequently, the grammaticality of the sequence [poco interesante] in (17a) leads us to conclude that, first, the property of being interesting is not graded in this case; and, second, poco does not belong to the same class of degree operators. As expected, the degree operator bastante ‘too’ cannot precede poco in this syntactic environment (17b).\(^\text{17}\)

Additionally, degree operators force the specific reading of indefinite determiners (Bosque 1996, 2001):

\[(18)\]
\[
a. \text{Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro} \\
\text{all my students have that to-read a book} \\
\text{[interesante] de Cela.} \\
\text{[interesting] of Cela} \\
\text{‘All my students have to read an interesting book by Cela.’} \\
\]
\[
b. \text{Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro} \\
\text{all my students have that to-read a book} \\
\text{[bastante interesante] de Cela.} \\
\text{[too interesting] of Cela} \\
\text{‘All my students have to read a very interesting book by Cela.’} \\
\]

\[(19)\]
\[
a. \text{Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro [poco} \\
\text{all my students have that to-read a book [little} \\
\text{interesante] de Cela.} \\
\text{interesting] of Cela} \\
\text{‘All my students have to read a not interesting book by Cela.’} \\
\]

\(^{17}\) The sentences in (16b) and (17b) are acceptable if they are pronounced in a context in which that particular book by Cela had previously defined as bastante interesante ‘too interesting’ as opposed to other books written by the same author (Leonetti 1999).
b. *Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro
   [bastante poco interesante] de Cela.
   [too little interesting] of Cela
   ‘All my students have to read a too uninteresting book by Cela.’

The example in (18a) is ambiguous. It is possible to understand that the stu-
dents have to read either a specific book written by Cela or any book by the
same author. Note that the reading in which the DP todos mis alumnos ‘all
my students’ takes scope over the DP un libro ‘a book’ (i.e., each student will
read a different book) is blocked by the degree operator bastante ‘too’ in (18b).
However, poco cannot be considered a degree operator in (19a) because both
readings are possible, and, hence, it is possible to interpret that the students
should read any book written by Cela. Again, in (19b) the degree operator bas-
tante ‘too’ blocks the distributive reading of the indefinite determiner.

Furthermore, degree operators are excluded from clauses containing a su-
perlative adjective (Bosque and Brucart 1991; Bosque 1996, 2001), as shown
in (20) and (21):

1991 a. Resolvimos el problema [complicado] más interesante
   resolved-we the problem [difficult] most interesting
   del libro.
   of+the book
   ‘We resolved the most interesting difficult problem in the book.’

b. *Resolvimos el problema [bastante complicado] más
   resolved-we the problem [too difficult] most
   interesante del libro.
   interesting of+the book
   ‘*We resolved the most interesting too difficult problem in the book.’

20 a. Resolvimos el problema [poco complicado] más
   resolved-we the problem [little difficult] most
   interesante del libro.
   interesting of+the book
   ‘We resolved the most interesting easy problem in the book.’

b. *Resolvimos el problema [bastante poco complicado]
   Resolved-we the problem [too little difficult]
   más interesante del libro.
   most interesting of+the book
   ‘*We resolved the most interesting too easy problem in the book.’
If \textit{poco} were a degree operator in (21a), this sentence should be ungrammatical like (20b) and (21b), where the degree operator \textit{bastante} is found.

Moreover, Sánchez (2006) points out that predicative adjectives introduced by a preposition (22b) cannot be graded:

\begin{enumerate}[<22>]
\item \textit{A este perro lo abandonaron por [agresivo].} \hspace{1cm} ‘They abandoned this dog for being aggressive.’
\item *\textit{A este perro lo abandonaron por [bastante agresivo].} \hspace{1cm} ‘*They abandoned this dog for being too aggressive.’
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}[<23>]
\item \textit{A este perro lo abandonaron por [poco agresivo].} \hspace{1cm} ‘They abandoned this dog for being unaggressive.’
\item *\textit{A este perro lo abandonaron por [bastante poco agresivo].} \hspace{1cm} ‘*They abandoned this dog for too unaggressive.’
\end{enumerate}

The adjective \textit{agresivo} ‘aggressive’ and the sequence [\textit{poco agresivo}] ‘little aggressive’ following preposition \textit{por ‘for’} in (22a) and (23a) are grammatical, as opposed to the ungrammatical cases (22b) and (23b), where the presence of the degree operator \textit{bastante} ‘too’ indicates that the adjective is graded in these examples.\footnote{The different nature of \textit{poco} is also shown by other contexts in which \textit{poco} can appear but degree operators are excluded. \textit{Poco} is grammatical inside constructions with expletive negation in (ib) and vocatives in (iib), as opposed to degree operators (ic, d):}

\begin{enumerate}[<i>]
\item \textit{¡Anda que no es [borde] el tío!} \hspace{1cm} ‘This guy is so mean!’
\item \textit{¡Anda que no es [poco borde] el tío!} \hspace{1cm} ‘This guy is so mean!’
\item *\textit{¡Anda que no es [bastante borde] el tío!} \hspace{1cm} ‘*This guy is not too mean!’
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}[<ii>]
\item \textit{¡Oye, tú, [guapa]!} \hspace{1cm} ‘Hey, you, pretty!’
\end{enumerate}
As a way of summarizing, based on the combination of poco with degree operators and the appearance of poco in contexts where degree operators are excluded, it is argued that poco does not belong to the class of degree operators, which theta-bind the referential degree argument of the adjective. When poco combines with a gradable adjective it is a degree term with a quantitative value that is associated to the denotation of a scale with respect to the dimension denoted by the adjective. In particular, poco selects the lower end of the scale. More specifically, poco selects the interval from the standard value (or degree considered to be normal in a given context) to the lowest degree on the scale.

3. Analysis of poco in the sequence [poco+adjective]

There are a priori two different possibilities of analysis of the sequence [poco +A]. (24) and (25) illustrate both analyses:

\[\text{(24)}\]
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{QP} \\
\text{Q} \\
poco \\
\text{little} \\
\text{ intelligente} \\
\text{little} \\
\text{intelligent}
\end{array}
\]

\[\text{(25)}\]
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{QP} \\
\text{A} \\
poco \\
\text{little} \\
\text{intelligent}
\end{array}
\]

In (24) the quantitative term poco heads a phrase that dominates AP, while in (25) poco heads a QP generated as a modifier in [Spec, AP]. Now, constituency tests related to pronominalization (substitution) and topicalization (movement) will be applied in order to choose between the analysis in (24) and the analysis in (25). Consider first the examples in (26) and (27):

b. ¡Oye, tú, [poco guapa]! (little pretty)
   ‘Hey, you, ugly!`

c. ¡Oye, tú, [bastante guapa]! (too pretty)
   ‘Hey, you, too pretty!’
(26) a. *Sabía que Juan era [poco atento con las mujeres], pero no esperaba que lo fuera más que tú.*

‘I knew John was disrespectful with women, but I did not expect him to be so more than you.’

b. *Quería un curso [poco avanzado], pero éste resultó serlo, demasiado y no aprendí nada.*

‘I wanted an unadvanced course, but this one turned out to be too much so, and I did not learn anything.’

c. *Busco un perro [poco agresivo], pero que no lo sea mucho para que también me proteja.*

‘I am looking for an unaggressive dog, but not very much so; it also has to protect me.’

(27) a. *[Poco inteligente], Ana es aún más tía que su jefe.*

‘Stupid, Ana is even more so than her boss.’

b. *[Poco disciplinado], mi hijo es bastante/demasiado/mucho tío.*

‘Undisciplined, my son is {so much / too much/ very much} so.’

The examples of pronominalization in (26) and topicalization in (27) show that the sequence [poco+A] is a constituent; however, these examples do not allow us to choose between the analyses (24) and (25) given that in these examples poco forms a constituent with the adjective. Now we will see in the examples in (28) and (29) what occurs if only the adjective is pronominalized or topicalized in the the sequence [poco+A]:

...
(28) a. Al principio Juan estaba [ilusionado], con la boda, pero ahora lo, está poco.

'At the beginning John was very happy with the wedding, but now he is not so much so.'

b. Gasol estuvo [acertado], en el partido, aunque su equipo lo, estuvo poco.

'Gasol was successful in the game, although his team was not too much so.'

(29) a. Juan estaba dispuesto a casarse, pero, [ilusionado], está [poco τi].

'John was determined to get married but is [little]

'John was determined to get married, but now he is not so much so.'

b. Cristina se queja de que está bien pagada, pero que [reconocida], está [poco τi].

'Christine complains that, even though she is well paid, she is not recognized.'

If the correct representation of the sequence [poco+A] was that one in (25),
the grammaticality of the pronominalizations in (28) and topicalizations in (29)
could not be explained because these processes would involve movement or
substitution of an intermediate projection (A') in (25). On the other hand, the
structural representation in (24) accounts for the well-formed sentences in (28)
and (29) given that the syntactic operations of pronominalization (substitution)
and topicalization (movement) take place over a maximal phrase (AP).

Based on data presented above, the analysis in (24) – in which poco heads a
QP and takes a gradable adjective as its complement – is preferred:

19. The constituency tests applied in (28) and (29) do not suffice to exclude an alternative analysis
according to which poco ‘little’ is an adjunct to AP. One might argue in this case that the lower
segment can be fronted in (29) or substituted in (28). In our analysis, poco is not a modifier;
poco heads a functional phrase (QP) and adds scalar interpretation.
In this analysis the AP inteligente ‘intelligent’ projects a quantifier phrase in which a semantic component of scalar orientation is added. By merging the quantitative term poco with AP in (30), the scale associated with the dimension denoted by the gradable adjective is oriented downward. Specifically, poco selects the lower end of a scale, i.e. the interval from the standard value (or degree considered to be normal in a given context) to the lowest degree on the scale. The syntactic structure in (30) is consistent with tests of pronominalization (substitution) and topicalization (movement) by means of which we have seen that poco takes the adjective phrase as its complement (see (28) and (29)). Given that poco introduces scalar information and only gradable adjectives (dimensions) include scales and degrees in their denotation, the incompatibility of poco with non gradable adjectives is explained straightforwardly (see (13)). This analysis also illustrates that poco, though having a denotation related to degree (it selects an interval on a scale), is not a degree operator. Recall that the sequence [poco+A] appears in contexts where degree operators are excluded (see (17a), (19a), (21a), and (23a)), and can combine with degree operators (see (15)). The latter case occurs when the gradable adjective includes in its thematic grid an open referential degree argument that is discharged by a degree operator heading an upper DegP (see (31)). Theta-binding can take place locally (Zwarts 1992), assuming that the gradable adjective and poco incorporate at LF, thus forming a complex predicate. Another possibility is for the head of the intermediate projection QP to copy the degree argument of the adjective (Corver 1997a, b).

20. According to Doetjes, Neeleman and Van der Koot (1998), the semantics of some degree words (‘more’, ‘less’, and ‘too’) contains a reference point and an orientation. However, in this article it is argued that the denotation of orientation is not encoded within the degree terms themselves, but rather it is associated with a quantifier phrase in which an additional semantic component of scalar orientation is introduced.

21. Another possibility is for the head of the intermediate projection QP to copy the degree argument of the adjective (Corver 1997a, b).
As represented in (31), the sequence \([poco+A]\) projects an upper degree phrase headed by a degree operator (\(bastante\) ‘too’) that identifies a specific degree located in the lower interval of a scale of intelligence that is oriented contextually. It will be assumed that the specification of a degree in an interval on the scale only takes place when the adjective includes a degree argument in its thematic grid. The optional nature of the degree argument is supported by the appearance of the sequence \([poco+A]\) in contexts where degree operators are excluded and by its combination with degree operators.

The syntactic analysis in (31) is consistent with the examples in (26) and (27) – repeated in (32) and (33) for convenience – that support a hierarchical structure in which the degree operators \(más ((32a) and (33a)), demasiado ((32b) and (33b)), bastante (33b), and muy (mucho) ((32c) and (33b))\) take the constituent \([poco+A]\) as their complement:

(32) a. \(\text{Sabía que Juan era } [\text{poco atento con las mujeres}], pero no esperaba que lo fuera más que tú.}\)

‘I knew John was disrespectful with women, but I did not expect him to be so more than you.’

b. \(\text{Quería un curso } [\text{poco avanzado}], pero éste resultó serlo, demasiado y no aprendí nada.}\)

‘I wanted an unadvanced course, but this one turned out to be too much so, and I did not learn anything.’
Alberto Pastor

c. Busco un perro [poco agresivo], pero que no lo sea muy mucho para que también me proteja.
   ‘I am looking for an unaggressive dog, but not very much so; it also has to protect me.’

(33) a. [Poco inteligente], Ana es aún más tía que su jefe.
   ‘Stupid, Ana is even more so than her boss.’

b. [Poco disciplinado], mi hijo es {bastante/demasiado/mucho} ti.
   ‘Undisciplined, my son is {so much/too much/very much} so.’

4. Poco ‘little’ versus un poco ‘a little’

In this section, the distinction between poco and un poco will be used to introduce the existence of a phonetically empty quantitative term that merges with gradable adjectives and provides a denotation of scalar upward orientation. Both linguistic expressions – poco and un poco – have in common that the sequences in which they appear next to gradable adjectives have an interpretation of a low degree on a scale. However, they differ in which part of the scale such degree is located: poco selects the lower end of a scale, whereas the denotation of un poco is related to the higher end of the scale (the interval from the standard value to the highest degree in a given context). This contrast is illustrated with the examples in (34):

   ‘John is [a little tall] for his age.’

   ‘John is [little tall] for his age.’

Assuming that the standard height for a 10 year old child is 1.50 meters, the sentence (34a) means that Juan is, for example, 1.52 meters tall. On the other hand, (34b) implies that Juan’s height is, for instance, 1.30 meters. Therefore, in the former sentence (34a) Juan’s height is slightly above the standard for his
age, while in (34b) Juan is interpreted to be less tall than what he is expected to be at his age.

Another difference between *un poco* and *poco* is that only the former is incompatible with contexts in which degree operators are excluded (as we know from Section 2):

(35)  
a.  *He leído el libro [interesante] de Cela.*  
    have-I read the book [interesting] of Cela  
b.  *He leído el libro [([poco / *un poco] interesante)] de Cela.*  
    have-I read the book [[little / a little] interesting] of Cela.

(36)  
    all my students have read a book [boring] of Cela  
b.  *Todos mis alumnos han leído un libro (Distributive) [([poco / *un poco] aburrido de Cela)].*  
    all my students have read a book [[little / a little] boring] of Cela.

(37)  
a.  *Juan es el alumno [disciplinado] más inteligente de la clase.*  
    John is the student [disciplined] most intelligent of the class  
b.  *Juan es el alumno [([poco / *un poco] disciplinado)] más inteligente de la clase.*  
    John is the student [[little / a little] disciplined] most intelligent of the class

(38)  
a.  *A este perro lo abandonaron por [poco agresivo].*  
    to this dog it abandoned-THEY for [little aggressive]  
    ‘They abandoned this dog for being unaggressive’  
b.  *A este perro lo abandonaron por [un poco agresivo].*  
    to this dog it abandoned-THEY for [a little aggressive]  
    ‘*They abandoned this dog for being a little unaggressive’

In (35b) the sequence [*un poco interesante*] is incompatible with the specific reading of the definite article. The insertion of *un poco* in (36b) forces the specific interpretation of the indefinite determiner and, thus, it is impossible to obtain a reading in which every student reads a different book written by
Cela. Moreover, the graded sequence [un poco disciplinado] cannot be part of a superlative clause in (37b). Finally, un poco cannot appear next to predicative adjectives introduced by a preposition in (38b).

The combination with other degree terms is another criterion to differentiate un poco and poco. Un poco cannot combine in (39a) with other degree operators as opposed to poco in (39b).

(39)  
   a. *Este libro es [{muy / bastante / ...} un poco interesante].  
      "This book is {very / too / ...} a bit interesting.'
   b. Este libro es [{muy / bastante / ...} poco interesante].  
      "This book is not {very / too / ...} interesting.'

The reason for the contrasts between poco and un poco that have just been presented so far in this section is that the phrase un poco is generated in the specifier position of a degree phrase headed by a phonetically empty degree operator that discharges the open degree argument position in the thematic grid of the adjective, thus blocking the possibility for another degree operator to head DegP (39). Note also that this null degree operator is excluded from the syntactic environments in (35)–(38) that are incompatible with degree. The syntactic representation in (40) illustrates the analysis of the sequence [un poco]+A:24

23. Recall from Note 8 that in examples such as Juan es alto para su edad ‘John is tall for his age’ the degree clause (para su edad) is selected by a vacuous degree operator. Note that this vacuous degree operator is excluded from contexts incompatible with degree operators such as, for example, the specific reading of definite article (ib):

(i)  
   a. He have-I leído read the libro book [QP e [AP interesante interesting of Cela] de Cela]
   b. *He have-I leído read the libro book [DegP e [QP e [AP interesante interesting of Cela] de Cela para for ser de su juventud his youth].

24. The fact that the sequence [un poco] ‘a little’ can be extracted is consistent with its phrasal nature:

(i)  
[Un poco], sí que estoy tics cansado hoy.  
[a little] yes that am-I tired today
'I am a little tired today.'

The phrase un poco can also modify the interval opened by the comparative degree operator más ‘more’: un poco más alto ‘a bit taller’ (Sánchez 1999).
The analysis in (40) predicts that poco can follow the expression un poco, which is confirmed by the data in (41): 25

Note that in the syntactic structure in (40) there is an element without a phonetic content heading QP. The insertion of this vacuous element in the head of QP adds a denotation of scalar upward orientation, and corresponds to the default option in Spanish, which is selecting the upper interval on the scale. The next section will explore the nature of this empty element heading QP.

5. Selecting the upper interval on the scale

In this article it is argued that gradable adjectives always project a quantifier phrase. At the QP level scalar information is introduced. The marked option in Spanish is lexically filled by the quantitative term poco. The default option in

25. Other authors have proposed that the difference between poco and un poco has to do with the position that they occupy in the scale (Morreale 1970; Ducrot 1972; Bosque 1999; and Sánchez 1999).
Spanish comes with the insertion of a quantitative element without a phonetic content (e) in the head position of QP, as represented in (42):

\[
(42) \quad \text{QP} \\
\text{Q} \quad \text{AP} \\
\text{e} \quad \text{alto} \\
\text{e} \quad \text{tall}
\]

In (42) a gradable property (in this case, the property of being tall) is applied to an individual. By means of the empty quantitative element, it is interpreted that such property is applied to the subject of predication in a quantity that corresponds to an interval of degrees in the upper end of a scale (i.e., above the standard value). This is a type of meaning related to a more general mechanism in languages, which is to obtain a default positive evaluative or quantitative interpretation when an evaluative or a quantitative term is not expressed phonetically.

(43) a. \textit{Juan bebe} \neq \textit{Juan bebe poco.}
   \quad \text{‘John drinks} \neq \text{‘John drinks little.’}

b. \textit{Juan se porta} \neq \textit{Juan se porta mal.}
   \quad \text{‘John behaves} \neq \text{‘John behaves badly.’}

c. \textit{Juan es alto} \neq \textit{Juan es poco alto.}
   \quad \text{‘John is tall} \neq \text{‘John is a little short.’}

The sentence \textit{Juan bebe} in (43a) cannot be understood as ‘Juan drinks little’; the example \textit{Juan se porta} (43b) does not mean that ‘Juan misbehaves’. Similarly, the interpretation of (43c) can only be that the property of “being tall” is applied to Juan to a certain degree that is located above the standard of height in a particular context. Therefore, the empty quantitative term heading QP in (42) provides scalar information as well as \textit{poco}. The difference between \textit{poco} and this phonetically empty quantitative term is that \textit{poco} selects the lower end of the scale, while the insertion of the empty quantitative element is related to the denotation of a degree above the standard value.

As well as \textit{poco}, [\textit{QP e}] is associated with the denotation of gradable adjectives – given that it provides scalar information – but it is not a degree operator, as illustrated in the following examples:

(44) a. \textit{He leído el libro} [\textit{QP e [AP interesante]}] de Cela.
   \quad \text{‘I have read the} interesting \text{ book by Cela.’}
Split analysis of gradable adjectives in Spanish

b. *He leído el libro [DegP bastante [QP e [AP interesante]]] de Cela.
   ‘I have read the too interesting book by Cela.’

(45) a. Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro [QP e [AP interesante]] de Cela.
   ‘All my students have to read an interesting book by Cela.’

b. Todos mis alumnos tienen que leer un libro [DegP demasiado [QP e [AP interesante]]] de Cela.
   ‘All my students have to read a very interesting book by Cela.’

(46) a. Resolvimos el problema [QP e [AP complicado]] más interesante del libro.
   ‘We resolved the most interesting difficult problem in the book.’

b. *Resolvimos el problema [DegP demasiado [QP e [AP complicado]]] más interesante del libro.
   ‘*We resolved the most interesting too difficult problem in the book.’

If the sequence [QP e [AP A]] were graded, it would be incompatible in (44a) with the specific reading of the definite article. Additionally, it would be impossible to obtain in (45a) a reading in which every student reads a different book by Cela. And, furthermore, it would be excluded from the superlative structure in (46a).

Another argument against the consideration of [QP e] as a degree operator comes from its combination with degree operators, as shown in (47):

(47) Juan es [DegP {muy / bastante / demasiado ...} [QP e [AP alto] para su edad]].
    ‘John is very/too ... tall for his age.’
Such combination is possible because the quantitive \([\text{QP } e]\) is not a degree operator and, thus, cannot theta-bind in these examples the degree argument of the adjective, as represented in (48):

\[\text{(48) DegP} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Deg} \\
\text{QP} \\
\text{bastante}_1 \\
Q \\
\triangle \\
\text{alto} \\
\langle 1, d_1 \rangle \\
\end{array}
\]

too \quad e \quad \text{tall}

To summarize, the interpretation of gradable adjectives is not limited to the denotation of a gradable property (i.e., a dimension); a gradable property is applied to the subject of predication by default in the upper interval of a scale (from the standard value to the upper end of the scale). This positive quantitative interpretation is obtained by merging the adjective to a phonetically empty quantitative term that projects a quantifier phrase, adding a denotation of scalar upward orientation. The structure in (48) represents that \([\text{QP } e]\) is not a degree operator and that the degree argument included in the adjective thematic grid is theta-bound by degree operators heading an upper functional phrase (DegP).

Additional support for the existence of an empty quantitative term is found in Old Spanish. The examples in (49) and (50) show that the position of the head of the quantifier phrase was occupied by the quantitative term \text{mucho} in previous stages of Spanish. The sequence \{[\text{muy/ tan}]+\text{mucho}+\text{A}\}\text{26} was particularly common. This idea will be illustrated with the following data found in the CORDE database:\text{27}

26. \text{Mucho} ‘much’, as well as \text{poco} ‘little’, has a multicategorical nature. It can be an indefinite determiner (\text{Muchos de mis estudiantes aprobaron el examen}, ‘Many of my students passed the exam’; \text{Han venido muchos estudiantes}, ‘Many students have come’; \text{Tres estudiantes son muchos estudiantes}, ‘Three students are many students’), an adjective (\text{Tres estudiantes son [muchos/muchísimos]}, ‘Three students are many’; \text{Los muchos pero valientes estudiantes que se enfrentaron al decano}, ‘The many brave students that faced the dean’) and a noun (\text{No es que te quiero un poco es que te quiero un mucho}, ‘I do not love you a little, I love you a lot’).

27. Similar data is provided and commented by Bosque and Masullo (1998).
Split analysis of gradable adjectives in Spanish

(49) a. *E andó en él una muger moça [muy mucho fermosa],
and found in him a woman young [very much beautiful]
‘... and found a very pretty young woman...’
(1467–1475, Escavias, Pedro de, *Repertorio de príncipes de España*)

b. *Y yvido estar una donzella [muy mucho fermosa]
and saw to-be a maiden [very much beautiful]
y bien apuesta a una ventana y salvóla.
and well elegant at a window and saved-her
‘And he saw a very beautiful and very elegant maiden standing
by a window and saved her.’
(1500, Anonim, *Libro del conde Partinuplés*)

c. *Que en dezir Yaro Uillca es dezir que es [muy mucho alto],
that in saying Yaro Uillca is to-say that is [very much tall]
‘... said that Yaro Uillca was very tall.’
(1595–1615, Poma de Ayala, Felipe, *Guamán El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*)

(50) a. *Una donzella [tan mucho fermosa] que es loco
a maiden [so much beautiful] that is crazy
 quien osa otras beldades laurar.
who dares other beauties to laud
‘A woman so beautiful that whoever dares to laud other beauties
must be crazy.’
[1444, Mena, Juan de, *Laberinto de fortuna o las trescientas*]

b. *Mediantes los muy leales e provechosos servicios
through the very loyal and beneficial services
vuestrros [tan mucho redundantes] al reino.
your [so much redundant] to-the kingdom
‘Through your very loyal and beneficial services so redundant to
the kingdom’
(1445, Mena, Juan de, *Tratado sobre el título de Duque*)

c. *Muchos son tan mezquinos e [tan mucho
many are so petty and [so much
auarientos] que aunque ayan infinitos bienes...-
avaricious] that although there-are endless goods
* ‘Many are so petty and so very avaricious that although they
had endless goods...’
(1452, Alfonso Gómez de Zamora Morales. BNM 10144)
The difference between Modern and Old Spanish regarding a sequence formed by a gradable adjective and a quantitative term that selects the upper interval of a scale plus a degree operator comes as a result of a different lexical choice with respect to the head of the quantifier phrase. It is empty in Modern Spanish (51a) and lexically filled with mucho in Old Spanish (51b).\footnote{Bosque and Masullo (1998) suggest that the difference between examples such as tan útil ‘so useful’ and tan poco útil ‘so little useful’ in Modern Spanish is that in the former, but not in the latter, QP and DegP would conflate as a result of the incorporation of the head of QP and Deg.}

\begin{align*}
(51) & \quad \text{(Modern Spanish)} \\
& \quad \text{DegP} \\
& \quad \quad \text{Deg} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \text{QP} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{muy/tan}_1 \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{AP} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{e} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{hermosa} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad (1, d_1) \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{too} \\
& \quad \quad \text{e} \\
& \quad \quad \text{beautiful} \\
& \quad \text{b. DegP} \\
& \quad \quad \text{Deg} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \text{QP} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{muy/tan}_1 \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{AP} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{mucho} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{fermosa} \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad (1, d_1) \\
& \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{too} \\
& \quad \quad \text{mucho} \\
& \quad \quad \text{beautiful}
\end{align*}

\section{Elatives}

This section focuses on a set of terms and expressions related to the denotation of extreme degree frequently referred to as elatives. There are three types of elatives: syntactic elatives, morphological elatives and lexical elatives (Bosque 2001:18). In syntactic elatives the adjective is modified by an extreme degree denoting adverb such as increíblemente ‘incredibly’, tremendamente ‘tremendously’, enormemente ‘enormously’, etc. Adjectives formed with the superla-
tive suffix -ísimo (alt-ísimo, ‘all-superlative’) belong to morphological elatives. Lexical elatives are those adjectives that denote extreme degree without having specific morphological markers, such as estupendo ‘marvelous’, gigante ‘gigantic’, grandioso ‘splendid’, colossal ‘colossal’, fenomenal ‘fantastic’, exhausto ‘exhausted’, enorme ‘enormous’, magnífico ‘magnificent’, supremo ‘supreme’, etc. This section will begin by describing general properties of all elatives. Then it will be shown that the syntactic and semantic properties of elatives are thoroughly accounted for under the analysis of the extended projection of gradable adjectives proposed in this article.

6.1. General properties of elatives

As for their distribution, elatives combine with certain degree operators. Specifically, elatives can appear inside exclamative expressions:29

(52) a. ¡[Lo estupenda / increíblemente guapa] que está mi hija!
   ‘My daughter looks stunning!’

b. ¡[Lo guapísima] que está mi hija!
   ‘My daughter looks stunning!’

(53) a. ¡[Qué exageradamente caro] está el precio de la vivienda!
   ‘How extremely expensive is the price of housing!’

b. ¡[Qué carísimo] está el precio de la vivienda!
   ‘How extremely expensive is the price of housing!’

The exclamative sentences in (52) and (53) express amazement, surprise or incredulity caused by the extreme degree in which the properties of being beautiful (52) and expensive (53) are applied to the subject of predication. It is precisely the denotation of extreme degree that allows exclamative degree operators to combine with elatives, as shown by the anomaly of sentences like

En estos ejemplos los adjetivos templado ‘lukewarm’ y intermedio ‘intermediate’ denotan grado medio.

De igual manera, los elativos pueden aparecer dentro de expresiones adjetivas con lectura resultativa:

(54) a. La gasolina está [tan {incrediblemente cara / expensive-SUPERLATIVE} que no puedo pagarla.]
la gasolina está [so incredibly expensive that I cannot afford it]
‘The price of gasoline is so incredibly expensive that I cannot afford it’

b. Con este vestido me veo [tan estupenda que no me reconozco ni yo misma.]
With this dress I look so gorgeous that I do not even recognize myself
‘In this dress I look so gorgeous that I do not even recognize myself’

El operador de grado tan ‘so’ identifica un grado extremo de valor económico en (54a) y de belleza en (54b), de modo que las frases resultativas introducidas por que ‘that’ denotan la consecuencia asociada a esos grados extremos.

Los elativos, sin embargo, son incompatibles con otros operadores de grado, como se muestra en (55):

John is {very / too / … } {tall-SUPERLATIVE / extremely dangerous}

Maradonna is {more / less} magnificent than Pelé

La ingramaticalidad de los ejemplos de (55) viene como resultado de la incompatibilidad semántica entre los elativos y los términos de grado que no denotan grado extremo de modo como más ‘more’, menos ‘less’, muy ‘very’, bastante ‘too’, lo bastante ‘enough’, demasiado ‘too much’, etc.

30. Hay un caso especial que requiere una explicación diferente: la aparición de elativos en frases comparativas como ‘¡No se puede trabajar con unas temperaturas [tan {exageradamente altas/altísimas/extremas} como las que estamos teniendo este verano! ‘There is no way to work with temperatures as high as those that we are having this summer’’. El término comparativo tan ‘so’, aunque no denota grado extremo per se, es compat-
Also note that, contrary to elatives, the insertion of degree terms like *demasiado*, *muy* and *bastante* inside exclamative and resultative sentences is ungrammatical, as shown in (56):

(56) a. ¡[[Lo/Qué] [increíblemente / *demasiado / *muy]] cara que está la gasolina!
   expensive that is the gasoline
   ‘How expensive the price of gasoline is!’

b. Con este vestido me veo [tan tremendamente / *bastante / *muy guapa] que no me reconozco.
   with this dress me see-I [so extremely / too / very pretty] that no me recognize
   ‘In this dress I look so gorgeous that I do not recognize myself’

The ungrammaticality of *demasiado*, *muy* and *bastante* in (56) is due to vacuous quantification – a quantifier failing to bind a variable. *Demasiado*, *muy* and *bastante* function as degree operators, and, thus, cannot theta-bind the degree argument of A at the same time as the degree operators *que*, *lo* and *tan* that head the exclamative and resultative clauses.

Based on the combination of elatives with degree operators inside exclamative ((52), (53)) and resultative constructions (54), as well as the ungrammaticality caused by the co-occurrence of two degree operators in those same contexts (56), it can be concluded that elatives are not degree operators. In other words, they do not theta-bind the degree argument of the adjective. Otherwise, the grammatical sentences in (52), (53) and (54) should be unexpected.

However, as opposed to *poco* and [*a* *e*], elatives do force the projection of an upper functional DegP. Evidence is found in the ungrammaticality caused by the insertion of elatives in contexts that are incompatible with degree:

(57) a. *He leído el libro [estupendo] de Cela.
   have-I read the book [marvelous] of Cela
   ‘I have read the marvelous book by Cela.’

b. *He leído el libro [increíblemente interesante] de
   have-I read the book [incredibly interesting] of
   Cela
   Cela
   ‘I have read the incredibly interesting book by Cela.’

Evidence is found in the ungrammaticality caused by the insertion of elatives in contexts that are incompatible with degree: because two extreme degrees are compared: the extreme degree expressed by the elative (*exageradamente altas/altísimas/externas*) and the extreme degree implicit in the comparative clause (*como las que estamos teniendo este verano*).
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c. *He leído el libro [interesantísimo] de Cela. ‘I have read the incredibly interesting book by Cela.’

(58) a. A las dos siempre había un programa [fantástico] en la TV. ‘At two, there was always a fantastic program on TV.’
b. A las dos siempre había un programa [tremendamente interesante] en la TV. ‘At two, there was always an extremely interesting program on TV.’
c. A las dos siempre había un programa interesantísimo en la TV. ‘At two, there was always a very interesting program on TV.’

(59) a. *La academia censurará al director [excelente] más contrario a la guerra. ‘*The academy will censure the excellent director most opposed to war’
b. *La academia censurará al director extremadamente premiado más contrario a la guerra. ‘*The academy will censure the extremely awarded director most opposed to war’
c. *La academia censurará al director premiadísimo más contrario a la guerra. ‘*The academy will censure the very awarded director most opposed to war.’
Elatives are incompatible with the definite article with specific reading in (57), force the specific reading in indefinite determiners in (58), and are excluded from superlative structures in (59). Therefore, it can be concluded that the adjectives in the examples in (57)–(59) are graded.

In summary, the data provided in this section show that elatives are not degree operators, although adjective phrases with elatives are always graded. The solution for this apparent paradox is to suppose that the semantics of elatives requires the introduction of a degree argument in the thematic grid of the adjective that must be theta-bound by either a degree operator that belongs to the type of exclamative or resultative operator ((52), (53), (54)), or a null degree operator in sentences like John is extremely tall/tall-superlative/gigantic). In the following subsections the analysis for each type of elative (syntactic, morphological and lexical elatives) will be presented.

6.2. Syntactic elatives

Syntactic elatives are adjectival phrases in which the adjective is modified by an extreme degree-denoting adverb:

(60) a. ¡Lo [imensamente / *mínimamente / *medianamente] preocupado que está Pedro!
     *moderately] worried that is Peter
     ‘How [immensely/*minimally/*moderately] worried Pedro is!’

b. ¡Qué [tremendamente / *ligeramente / *discretamente]
     how [extremely / *slightly / *moderately]
     cara que está la vivienda!
     expensive that is the housing
     ‘How [extremely/*slightly/*moderately] expensive the price of housing is!’

The difference between the adverbs imensamente ‘immensely’ and tremendamente ‘extremely’ with respect to mínimamente ‘minimally’, medianamente ‘moderately’, ligamente ‘slightly’ or discretamente ‘moderately’ in (60) is that the latter do not denote extreme degree, but rather medium or low degree. Therefore, they are excluded from exclamative clauses since the meaning of exclamative clauses is related to the denotation of extreme degree.32

31. These examples become grammatical when the elatives appear in prenominal position.
32. See Kovacci (1999) for a classification of -mente adverbs according to maximum degree, medium degree, and minimum degree.
The analysis of syntactic elatives is represented in (61):³³

(61) 

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{DegP} \\
\text{Deg} \\
\text{QP} \\
\text{AdvP} \\
\text{Q'} \\
\text{Q} \\
\text{AP} \\
\text{e/poco} \\
\text{e/lo/que/tan_i} \\
\text{-mente} \\
\text{1, d_i} \\
\end{array} \]

The structure in (61) is coherent with the distribution shown by this type of adverb with other elements in the extended projection of gradable adjectives, such as the quantitative term *poco*:³⁴

(62) a. *Juan es [DegP e [QP extremadamente e [Q e [AP alto]]]].*  
    'John is extremely tall.'

b. *Juan es [DegP e [QP extremadamente e [Q poco e [AP alto]]]].*  
    'John is not extremely tall.'

(63) a. *¡Lo [AP extremadamente e [AP alto]] que es Juan!*  
    'How extremely tall John is!'  

b. *¡Lo [AP extremadamente e poco e [AP alto]] que es Juan!*  
    'is John'

³³ Adverbs in *-mente* can also modify the interval opened by comparative degree operators *más* ‘more’ and *menos* ‘less’ (Sánchez 1999): *Mi hijo es {incrediblemente más/menos alto} que el tuyo* ‘My son is {incredibly taller/less tall} than yours’.

³⁴ The interpretation of a sequence like *extremadamente poco alto* is that the property of being tall is applied to the subject of predication in an extreme degree within the lower interval of the scale.
How extremely short John is!

(64) a. *Resultó ser un marido [poco extremadamente caballeroso].
   turned out-he to-be a husband little extremely gentle
b. *Llegamos a unas playas [poco increíblemente contaminadas].
   arrived-we to some beaches little incredibly polluted

By generating degree adverbs in [Spec, QP], the analysis in (61) also accounts for a fundamental difference between elative degree adverbs and degree operators: the latter combine with any gradable adjective, while the former show lexical restrictions with respect to the adjective they can modify, as it is illustrated in (65).35

   am [too / terribly] in love
   ‘I am too much in love’
   am [too / #extremely] in love
   this book is [too / extremely] interesting
   this book is [too / #terribly] interesting

Furthermore, the analysis in (61) shows that degree adverbs are not degree operators since the degree argument of the adjective is theta-bound by a degree operator heading DegP.

It will now be explained how syntactic elatives force the projection of a DegP; in other words how a sequence formed by a degree adverb and an adjective (as well as any other type of elatives) is always graded. Recall first that at QP, scalar information is provided to the dimension denoted by the adjective.

35. Rodríguez Ramalle (2001) points out that certain -mente adverbs such as terriblemente emocionado ‘terribly moved’, horriblemente ruidoso ‘horribly noisy’, and extraordinariamente interesante ‘extraordinarily interesting’ are derived from adjectives that obtain a degree reading when applied to certain mass nouns: Una terrible emoción ‘a terrible emotion’, un ruido horrible ‘a horrible noise’, un extraordinario interés ‘an extraordinary interest’. In a sequence like, for example, [una terrible emoción] the adjective terrible has a degree reading, and consequently it does not mean ‘an emotion that causes fear’, but rather ‘a big emotion’. Likewise, the -mente adverb in the sequence [terriblemente emocionado] introduces information concerning the (extreme) degree of the property denoted by the adjective emocionado.
In particular, at this level of projection the following interpretation is given: the gradable property denoted by the adjective is applied to the subject of predication at a quantity that corresponds to an interval of degrees either in the upper interval of the scale (when the null quantitative term \([Q_e]\) is inserted) or in the lower interval of the scale (when \(poco\) heads QP). At this stage of the derivation (QP), the property denoted by the adjective is not graded yet. Being graded means that a specific degree is identified in the scale, either in the upper or in the lower interval of the scale. Therefore, the insertion of a degree argument in the thematic grid of the adjective is needed, which requires a degree operator that theta-binds it, as shown in (66). Elatives, in turn, are modifiers of the degree argument of the adjective. By means of an elative, the degree argument is predicated to be extreme.

\[(66)\]

\[
\text{DegP} \quad \text{Deg} \quad \text{QP} \\
\text{AdvP} \quad \text{Q'} \\
\text{increíblemente} \quad \text{e/poco} \quad \text{A} \\
\text{e/h} \quad \text{how incredibly} \quad \text{e/h} \quad \text{little} \\ \\
\text{tall}
\]

In the structure in (66) the gradable adjective denotes a dimension (the property of being tall) and merges with a quantitative term (\(e/poco\)) that heads a quantifier phrase and introduces a notion of scalar orientation. The adjective includes a degree argument in its thematic grid that is theta-bound by a degree operator heading an upper functional DegP. Through the operation of thematic-binding, the interpretation that a specific degree in the scale is selected is provided. Furthermore, the degree argument of the adjective is predicated to be extreme by the degree adverb \(\text{increíblemente}\) that theta-identifies it from [Spec, QP].\(^{36}\)

To sum up, the denotation of a sequence formed by a gradable adjective and a degree adverb like, for example, [\(\text{DegP e/lo/que/tan}_i\) \(\text{aP increíblemente}\) \(\text{a e}_\text{AP}\)]

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\(^{36}\) The modification of an argument is explained by means of the mechanism “theta-identification” (Higginbotham 1985; Zwarts 1992). The idea that degree adverbs modify the degree argument of the adjective is also found in Corver (1997a, b).
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inteligente]]] is that the property of being intelligent is applied to the subject of predication in a specific degree in the upper interval of the scale, and that such degree is extreme.37

We will finish this section dealing with the following data (67) that attracted the attention of Leonetti (1999) and Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999):

(67) a. ¡Lo muy antipático que estás hoy!
   the-NEUT very mean that are-YOU today!
   ‘You are so mean today!’

b. Juan se dio cuenta de lo muy estúpida que era tu pregunta.
   John realized the-NEUT very stupid that was your question
   ‘John realized how very stupid your question was.’

These authors point out that lo combines with muy in some variants of Spanish in Latin America. According to Leonetti, these sentences are also found in colloquial Spanish. Canonically, muy is a degree operator (see (32) and (33)) and, consequently, it is incompatible with the exclamative and resultative degree operators in (56). However, note that the sequence [muy+A] acts in (67) like a syntactic elative in being grammatical inside an exclamative sentence. In the examples in (67) muy seems to be equivalent to the term very in English that Corver (1997a) analyzes in constructions such as how {very/extremely} interesting! According to Corver, very is a modifier that occupies the same position as degree adverbs (i.e., [Spec, QP]). We will adopt this analysis for cases in which muy acts as a degree modifier such as in (67).

6.3. Morphological elatives

Morphological elatives are gradable adjectives formed by an adjective base plus the affix -ísimo, such as altísimo ‘tall-superlative’. Eguren (2001) analyzes the superlative suffix -ísimo found in morphological elatives as an evaluative predicate that modifies the adjective base in the formation of the elative prior to its insertion in the syntactic derivation. Adopting this analysis, the evaluative suffix -ísimo would modify the degree argument of the gradable adjective degree at the level of lexical syntax in a similar way to how degree adverbs accomplish it in post-lexical syntax from [Spec, QP]. The structural representation in (68) shows the analysis of this type of elative:

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37. Our analysis predicts that degree adverbs cannot be generated in [Spec, AP] (*[DegP "lo/lo/lo" [QP [Q poco [Q increíblemente [AP inteligente]]]]]) because they modify a degree located in the interval on the scale opened by [Q poco] or [Q e].
As it is observed in (68), an elative adjective such as altísimo ‘tall-superlative’ is completely formed prior to being inserted in the syntactic derivation and denotes the extreme degree in which the property of being tall is applied to the subject of predication. Such extreme degree denotation implies that a degree argument is included in the thematic grid of the adjective so that such argument is predicated to be extreme. Consequently, an upper functional DegP is projected so that a specific degree in the scale of height is identified. Empirical evidence for the proposal that morphological elatives are graded is their exclusion in contexts that are incompatible with degree ((57), (58) and (59)).

6.4. Lexical elatives

As it was previously mentioned at the beginning of this section, examples of lexical elatives are estupendo ‘marvelous’, gigante ‘gigantic’, grandioso ‘splendid’, colosal ‘colossal’, fenomenal ‘fantastic’, exhausto ‘exhausted’, enorme ‘enormous’, magnífico ‘magnificent’, supremo ‘supreme’, etc. The analysis of morphological elatives will be extended to lexical elatives, as shown in (69):

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38. According to Chomsky’s (1993) approach towards inflectional morphology, a word enters the syntactic derivation with its morphological properties associated with it.
In the structure in (69) lexical elatives project an upper degree phrase (as well as in the case of the other elatives) since their interpretation of extreme degree requires the modification of a degree argument in the thematic grid of A, which is in turn theta-bound by a degree operator in Deg (e, lo, qué and tan). However, note that while the denotation of extreme degree is provided explicitly by degree adverbs in syntactic elatives or by means of an affix in the case of morphological elatives, with lexical elatives the denotation of extreme degree is lexically encoded in the adjective itself (Bosque 1999; Demonte 1999b). In other words, in a sentence like *Juan es un profesor estupendo ‘John is a marvelous professor’, for example, there is no explicit element modifying the degree of “being good”; the degree argument is predicated to be extreme because this information is already included in the denotation of the adjective estupendo ‘marvelous’.39

7. Conclusion

Gradable adjectives project a quantifier phrase in which a semantic component of scalar orientation is added: a gradable property (i.e., a dimension) is applied to an individual in a quantity that corresponds to an interval of degrees on a scale.

39. The ungrammaticality of a sequence like *[poco estupendo] – as well as the ungrammaticality of sequences like *[poco altísimo] – is caused by semantic incompatibility produced by the low degree denotation of the quantitative element poco and the extreme degree reading conveyed by lexical elatives.
The interpretation by default in Modern Spanish is that a gradable property such as *alto* ‘tall’ in (70) is applied to an individual in an indeterminate degree that is located in the upper interval of a scale, that is, above the standard value (of height, in this case) in a given context. This positive quantitative interpretation is conveyed lexically by a quantitative element that lacks a phonetic content and is equivalent to the word *mucho* that is found in Old Spanish in combination with gradable adjectives. The marked option comes with the insertion of the quantitative term *poco* ‘little’ in the position of the head of QP. *Poco* adds a denotation of scalar downward orientation by selecting the lower interval on the scale (i.e., below the standard value).

The appearance of the sequence [QP [AP]] in contexts that are incompatible with degree, and the combination of the sequence [QP [AP]] with degree operators lead to the conclusion that the degree argument of the adjective is optional. Thus, two different interpretations of gradable adjectives are distinguished:

(a) A scalar (quantitative) interpretation in which the delimitation of an interval (upper or lower) on a scale takes place (see (70)).

(b) A graded reading in which a specific degree on the scale is determined by means of a degree operator that theta-binds (Higginbotham 1985; Zwarts 1992) the referential degree argument of the adjective, as represented in (71).
From the analysis of the extended projection of gradable adjectives proposed throughout this article the following classification of degree terms in the adjectival domain is derived:

(a) Quantitative terms, which head the quantifier phrase and convey an upward or downward orientation on a scale: poco and a phonetically null quantitative term equivalent to mucho in Old Spanish.

(b) Degree operators, which identify a specific degree on the scale from an upper functional degree phrase. Examples are bastante ‘too’, demasiado ‘too much’, tan ‘so’, más ‘more’, etc.

(c) Elatives, which modify the degree argument of the adjective by adding an appreciative extreme degree reading. Examples are increíblemente, ‘incredibly’, buenísima ‘tall-SUPERLATIVE’, enorme ‘enormous’.40

In conclusion, this article has developed an analysis of the extended projection of gradable adjectives in three levels that are aligned with each of the essential components of the denotation of gradable adjectives: dimensions, scales and degrees. At the lowest AP level, the interpretation of a dimension is provided. At the middle level or Quantifier Phrase, an interval of a scale is defined, and at the top level or Degree Phrase, a specific degree in the scale is identified by a degree operator.

Southern Methodist University

40. Some degree terms and expressions can also modify the interval opened by comparative degree heads más ‘more’ and menos ‘less’. See Notes 32 and 24.
References


