

Adjectives of veracity as vagueness regulators
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Introduction: Adjectives of veracity (AVs) such as Spanish *verdadero* ‘true’ or *auténtico* ‘authentic’, in prenominal position, signal that the referent is an outstanding exemplar of the category denoted by the noun (1-2).

- (1) Paloma es una verdadera artista. ‘Paloma is a true artist.’
- (2) El tráfico es un auténtico problema. ‘Traffic congestion is a real problem.’

English equivalents of these adjectives have been analyzed as degree (Morzycki, 2009) or epistemic (Constantinescu, 2011) modifiers. However, nouns are arguably not gradable (in the sense that degrees are not arguments of the semantic composition) (Constantinescu, 2011), and adjectives of veracity do not behave as epistemic modals do (McNabb, 2013).

The aim of this talk is to offer an analysis of the intensifier use of AVs that accounts for their modification of nouns in terms of domain restriction. I will focus on Spanish data and adopt Sassoon’s 2013 proposal for the internal structure of nouns, which provides them with the same parts of interpretation as adjectives (standard, dimension set, etc.). I will argue that *verdadero* restricts the domain in which the standard of the noun is calculated. Consequently, the standard rises and the denotation is restricted to entities ranking high in the dimensions of the noun.

The data: AVs in Spanish display their literal or root reading (i.e. ‘not fake’) mainly in postnominal (cf. 3) and predicative positions (4).

- (3) Esther sintió auténtico dolor / dolor auténtico.
‘Esther felt real pain [very intense] / real pain [not a fake one].’
- (4) Su dolor era auténtico. ‘Her pain was real.’

However, in prenominal position, they behave as intensifiers. In (1), Paloma is said to present every quality the context associates with being an artist: creativity, perspicacity, maybe success. When the noun is modified by *verdadero*, only individuals ranking high as artists are allowed in the denotation of *artista*. Occurrence with slack regulators (5) shows that the modified noun is interpreted in a strict sense — vagueness about what qualifies as an artist is no longer available. Note that the strict denotation of the noun that AVs impose is not based on objective characteristics, but on subjective ones: (6) can be true even if John wasn’t born in the US but nevertheless shows a stereotypical American behavior.

- (5) a. Paloma es una artista, pero no en sentido estricto.
‘Paloma is an artist, but not in a strict sense.’
b. Paloma es una verdadera artista, #pero no en sentido estricto.
‘Paloma is a true artist, but not in a strict sense.’
- (6) John es un verdadero americano. ‘John is a real American’

This is not the only reading available: in combination with some particular nouns (such as *father* or *identity*) and the definite article, the adjective may have its literal meaning ‘not fake’:

- (7) Quiso conocer a su verdadero padre. ‘He wanted to meet his true father.’

There are few semantic restrictions on the expression AVs can modify. But, crucially, natural category nouns, whose standard is usually fixed by convention, are incompatible with AVs (8), unless their cutoff point is being discussed (the noun was used in a vague way) (9).

- (8) ?? $\forall i$ un verdadero planeta por el telescopio. ‘I saw a true planet through the telescope.’
- (9) Ceres fue considerado demasiado pequeño para ser un verdadero planeta.
‘Ceres was considered too small to be a real planet.’

Proposal: Examples (5), (8), and (9) show that AVs are sensitive to the vagueness of the predicate. In this talk, I will propose that these modifiers reduce the vagueness of a noun by restricting the domain in which its standard is calculated.

I will assume that nouns are multidimensional predicates that map entities to their weighted mean on a set of dimensions (Sassoon, 2013). Nouns thus denote gradable concepts, in the sense that entities in their denotation can be ordered according to their values in the different dimensions and the relative weight assigned to them. This is formalized by a function f^+ that assigns degrees to entities reflecting the extent to which their degrees in the predicate’s dimensions match P’s ideal values. AVs impose an ordering in the domain based on the speaker’s (or judge’s) criteria (6), so the denotation of the noun is relativized to the judge (P^j) and the predicate is interpreted subjectively (see Bylinina (2014) for predicates of personal taste).

I will adopt Sassoon’s 2013 full vagueness model, consisting of a ground context c_0 , partial contexts C , total contexts T . In each c , P’s degree is either a real number or it is undefined, giving thus rise to vagueness. The standard of any predicate P (noun or adjective) for a partial context c and assignment function g is calculated based on a salient set of entities (the domain): $Standard^+(P, c, g) = S(P, c, g, Domain^+(P, c, g))$. I will argue that AVs restrict the domain to entities that are already in the positive extension of P, according to j , in the context: $Standard^{\prime+}(P^j, c, g) = S(P^j, c, g, \{x | P^j(x)\})$. In this way, the new standard of the predicate is based on a set of entities whose degrees in the dimensions of the predicate already exceed the standard and, thus, the standard is raised by some amount. As a consequence, P’s denotation is shrunk to entities ranking high in the dimensions of the predicates, according to the speaker’s criteria. In this sense, the proposed analysis for adjectives of veracity resembles that of *very* in the adjectival domain, which also calculates a new (higher) standard by restricting the comparison class to entities that are already P (Klein 1980; Kennedy and McNally 2005, a.o.).

The intensifying reading (1) is derived from the fact that, after the standard is boosted, entities in the new denotation of P have, on average, higher degrees in the dimensions of the noun and are thus closer to the ideal values (according to j) than those in the previous denotation of P. The literal reading (7) is enabled when, in combination with the uniqueness presupposition of the definite determiner, the denotation is shrunk to the best ranking exemplar of P, which in most contexts is an actual P. Finally, natural category nouns (8) are usually not vague, as there is no uncertainty about where the cutoff point for the category is (what counts as P). As the standard of membership is fixed, modification by *verdadero* becomes trivial.

Consequences: The analysis could be extended to modification by adverbs of veracity in the adjectival domain. If these modifiers are vagueness regulators, we would expect that they only combine with vague predicates, such as gradable adjectives (10a). Non-gradable adjectives (10b) have fixed standards and modification by adverbs of veracity is, as predicted, ruled out.

- (10) a. Juan es realmente alto. ‘Juan is really tall.’
b. ??Este problema es verdaderamente geopolítico. ‘This problem is truly geopolitical.’

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