

The distribution of evaluativity in subcomparatives

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Subcomparatives minimally differ from exponents of comparatives in that both the matrix clause and the comparative complement embed phonologically overt - and usually distinct - adjectives. The subcomparative provided in (1) for instance, involves the contrastive positive (POS) predicates *long* and *wide*.

- (1) The rope is **longer** than the gap is **wide**. POS-POS

The POS-POS subcomparative in (1) interestingly contrasts with the subcomparative in (2) that involves the negative (NEG) adjectives *short* and *narrow*: Contrary to (1), (2) comes with the (obligatory) presupposition that the gradable property contained in the *than*-clause holds of its subject (Doetjes 2009). This semantic property also called *evaluativity*, famously arises in a variety of other degree constructions (see Bierwisch 1989, Rett 2008, 2015 a.o).

- (2) The rope is **shorter** than the gap is **narrow**. NEG-NEG
↷ The gap is narrow.

Independently, Doetjes (2009) observes that the replacement of the negative antonym in the standard clause of (2) by its positive counterpart as in (3) does not induce a change in the truth-conditions associated with the sentence; but the resulting cross-polar subcomparative loses the evaluative interpretation. Why this difference?

- (3) The rope is **shorter** than the gap is **wide**. NEG-POS
↷ The gap is wide.

In this talk, I will provide an account of the contrast observed. To start off, I will offer an analysis of subcomparatives that capitalizes on Heim's (2008) *Negation Deletion Account* and Bacsikai-Atkari's (2014, 2018) account of (sub)comparative deletion, according to which the predicate in the standard clause of subcomparatives resists deletion by virtue of being focus-marked for recoverability reasons. From this analysis, it will appear that NEG-NEG and NEG-POS subcomparatives share the same syntax/LF modulo F-marking of their standard adjective. I will then adopt Rett's (2008) assumption that evaluativity is contributed by a silent freely-occurring operator EVAL. Finally, I will show that in absence of EVAL, NEG-NEG subcomparatives always violate the economy condition on focus placement AVOIDF, by availability of the more optimal NEG-POS competitor. The presence of EVAL in NEG-NEG subcomparatives however, forces the focus placement of a constituent that must be phonologically realized as the negative antonym.

From a more general perspective, this analysis will be shown to support a modular theory of evaluativity (see Moracchini 2018, contra Rett 2015). Time allowing, I will discuss the consequences of the proposal on related phenomena such as standard comparatives and metalinguistic comparatives.