Arguments of Adjectives in Degree Expressions

The aim of my talk is to provide a unified analysis for the structure of degree expressions, with special attention to arguments of adjectives; the survey will be centred on − though not limited to − English data. Using a Minimalist framework, I will show that absolute, comparative, and superlative degree expressions can be analysed in the same way and that the arguments of adjectives not only fit into the established framework but they also provide additional evidence for it.

Certain adjectives are known to take arguments of their own. Consider:

(1) Liz is proud [PP of her husband].

In this case, the PP *of her husband* is an argument of the adjective *proud*.

I will discuss three major questions in connection with this. First, such adjectives can be attributive modifiers in nominal expressions only without their arguments:

(2) Liz is a proud woman.

(3) *Liz is a proud [PP of her husband] woman.

Second, it must also be clarified how arguments of adjectives can be accommodated into degree expressions containing other obligatory elements, such as a comparative subclause (a CP introduced by *than*): the PP must precede the CP. Compare:
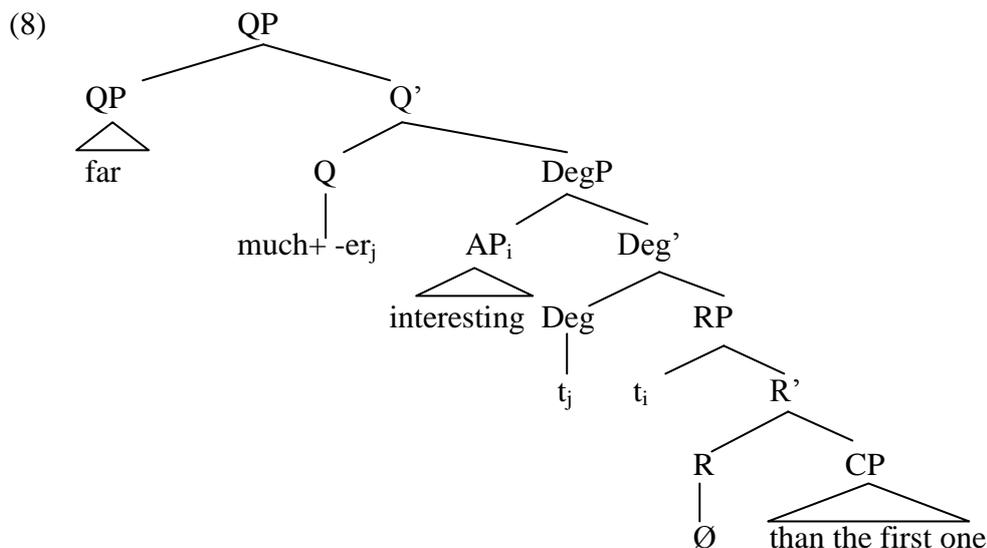
(4) Liz is prouder [PP of her husband] [CP than Mary is].

(5) *Liz is prouder [CP than Mary is] [PP of her husband].

Third, in some cases the PP argument may be separated from the adjective head, unlike in (5). In (6), *enough* appears between the adjective and the PP; in (7), the subclause contains the PP *of Peter* without the AP it is supposed to be part of (i.e. the AP *x*-proud, *x* referring to a certain degree of pride):

(6) Liz is proud enough [PP of her husband].

(7) Liz is prouder [PP of George] than Mary is ___ [PP of Peter]. (___ = x-proud)

As for the syntax of degree expressions, I will adopt the following structure, using the example of the QP *far more interesting than the first one*:

(8)

```
                    QP
                  /    \
               QP        Q'
               |        /   \
              far      Q      DegP
                       |     /     \
                   much+-er_j  AP_i    Deg'
                            |        /    \
                      interesting  Deg     RP
                                   |      /   \
                                  t_j   t_i    R'
                                            /    \
                                           R      CP
                                           |     /   \
                                           Ø   than the first one
```

The AP and the CP are generally taken to be arguments of the degree head (cf. Lechner 2004). These are − following den Dikken (2006) − located in a Relator Phrase (RP), the head

of which is empty here. The AP moves up the specifier of the DegP, generated right above the RP, in order to agree with the head. This agreement relationship is necessary to rule out impossible configurations such as a non-scalar adjective combining with a comparative head (e.g. *more pregnant*). The Deg head moves up to the Q head: here it combines with *much* to form *more*; in morphological comparatives, the Q head is zero and the degree morpheme is morphologically merged with the AP in PF (e.g. *good + -er* will give *better*). Optional QP modifiers are located in [Spec; QP]; these also agree with the Q head, i.e. a QP like *very* can occur in absolute constructions but not in comparatives (*very tall* vs. **very taller*), which is the other way round for *far* (**far tall* vs. *far taller*).

If the adjective has a PP argument of its own, the adjective establishes a predicative relationship with it. I will show that in this way the adjective acquires a predicative feature [+pred], which percolates up to the QP and which is interpretable on the whole QP as well. Though QPs can generally be modifiers in nominal expressions, a [+pred] QP cannot agree with a [–pred] noun phrase, which would be necessary for an attributive relationship involving agreement. Hence the ungrammaticality of (3), as opposed to the grammatical predicative usages in (1) – or, as postnominal (adjunct) modifiers, in (9):

(9) Liz is a woman proud [PP of her husband].

The feature-based approach also explains the behaviour of certain adjectives that are inherently predicative, i.e. they cannot be used as attributes even on their own:

(10) *I saw an afraid girl.

(11) *I saw an afraid [PP of snakes] girl.

(12) I saw a girl afraid [PP of snakes].

I will show that the proposed analysis is applicable to all degree expressions and that the difference between pronominal vs. postnominal appearance is truly dependent on the [±pred] features and not on the Deg heads; the Deg heads define the subtype of pronominal appearance only (e.g. in the case of *too*, the QP moves to a higher functional position than the NumP, resulting in structures like *John is too proud a man*, as opposed to **proud a man*).

As (4) shows, the CP, if any, is extraposed from within the degree expression; I will adopt the analysis of Kántor (2008), who claims that this is due to the fact that the CP is a phase spelt out on its own, hence extraposition is due to the nature of PF mechanisms and not to syntactic movement. I will show that the same applies to the extraposition of certain PPs (cf. Lee-Schoenfeld 2007), which are invariably predicative (i.e. arguments of adjectives). Nevertheless, the CP and the PP are sent earlier to the interfaces and will thus appear rightmost at PF (the CP sent first will be the very last). Due to separate Spell-Out, QPs can be deleted without affecting the PP, as in (7).

Since Deg heads precede PPs anyway, the extraposition of the PP is normally not visible. The only exception is *enough*, as in (6), which I will show to be a RELATOR head and hence appearing after adjectives, unlike Deg heads (e.g. *too*, *how*, *more*); in addition, *enough* can appear together with its subclause (e.g. *a big house, enough for us to live in*), an option not available for Deg heads.

References

den Dikken, Marcel (2006) *Relators and Linkers: The Syntax of Predication, Predicative Inversion, and Copulas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kántor, Gergely (2008) A Phase-based Approach to Rightward Movement in Comparatives. *Newcastle Working Papers in Linguistics* 14. 81–99.

Lechner, Winfried (2004) *Ellipsis in Comparatives*. Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Lee-Schoenfeld, Vera (2007) *Beyond Coherence: The Syntax of Opacity in German*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.