

Gradability across domains: The semantics of the degree modifier *čut'*

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Investigation of degree modifiers contributes to our understanding of the role of scales in natural language semantics, the range of domains in which gradability is linguistically relevant and the parallelism between these domains. In this paper I investigate the degree item *čut'* in Russian, which can be tentatively translated as 'slightly' or 'a bit'. Its properties are of interest in part because it can appear in different domains. I argue in the paper that it can be found in the AP, VP and AspP areas. *čut'*, I propose, applies to a predicate that has a degree argument and contributes the entailment that this degree slightly exceeds the standard of comparison on the relevant scale.

Adjectival *čut'*. Within the adjectival domain, *čut'* is compatible with minimum standard adjectives lexicalizing lower-closed scales, e.g. *čut' izognutyj* 'slightly bent', *čut' vlažnyj* 'slightly wet'. The argument of a *čut'*-AP is entailed to possess the property lexicalized by the adjective to a very low degree, which is above zero but still close to zero. For instance, the semantics of (1) can be represented as in (2). *čut'* is incompatible with adjectives that lexicalize upper-closed scales (e.g. #*čut' čistyj* 'slightly clean', #*čut' rovnnyj* 'slightly straight') and relative adjectives (e.g. #*čut' vysokij* 'slightly tall') **in their positive form**. But it can combine with certain types of modified adjectives (no matter what kind of scale they lexicalize), primarily comparative ones (e.g. *čut' vyše* 'slightly taller'.) Due to comparative modification, the subject is entailed to be mapped to a degree on the scale that exceeds the standard. The presence of *čut'* further specifies that the distance between the two degrees is very small. (cf. 3-4). I propose the following semantics for adjectival *čut'*:

čut' specifies that the argument possesses the property denoted by the AP to a degree that exceeds the standard of comparison (the latter is independently provided by the adjectival predicate *čut'* applies to). *čut'* further specifies that the distance between these two degrees is very small.

Formally, the analysis is represented in (5). With minimum standard adjectives, the standard is the lower boundary of the scale. With comparatives, this is the degree provided by the comparative clause. *čut'* is incompatible with upper-closed, maximum standard adjectives since it requires for the argument to possess a degree that is **higher** than the standard. If the standard is the maximal point on a scale, this is not possible. (It has been claimed that the standard with such adjectives may be a point that is below the maximum. I believe that the standard, under the literal meaning, is still the maximal point, and the flexibility results from the application of a mechanism like granularity functions (e.g. Krifka 2007, Sauerland and Stateva 2007). The behavior of *čut'* supports this view.) Further, *čut'* is bad with gradable adjectives since the comparison class standard they go with is too vague. It is thus impossible to measure a distance between this standard and another value with a high degree of precision, nor to guarantee that such a distance is indeed small.

Verbal *čut'*. Verbal *čut'* is illustrated in (6). It specifies that the change that an argument undergoes in the course of the event is very small. I propose that verbal *čut'* applies to the degree of change argument (Kennedy and Levin 2002, 2008), the degree to which a participant undergoes an increase in the relevant property in the course of the event. This is a value on a derived scale whose minimal boundary corresponds to the degree that is anchored to the beginning point of the event. This boundary, i.e. the minimal point on the scale, constitutes the standard of comparison. The change that the argument undergoes in the course of the event is entailed to exceed this standard but at the same time to remain very close to it. Essentially, this means that the change is very small. The semantics of verbal *čut'* is provided in (7), the logical form of (6) is represented in (8).

