

Degrees and State Kinds

Across a number of languages, there are suspicious cross-categorial correspondences among expressions used to talk about degrees, manners, and kinds. The principal aim of this talk is to develop an understanding of the ontology of degrees that would make such connections less surprising. It is of course standard to assume that adjectives have a degree argument. It is less typical but nevertheless uncontroversial to assume that adjectives have a state argument. These are very rarely discussed simultaneously. Yet taken together, these assumptions suggest that adjectives must actually have both degree and state arguments. This rather unappealing conclusion is not inevitable, however. States are complex objects that, inescapably, must encode more information than degrees as they are ordinarily construed. Perhaps, then, they alone can suffice. To pursue this possibility, it will be necessary to reconceptualize degrees in terms of states. Building on the idea that manners can be understood as Carlsonian kinds of events (Landman & Morzycki 2003, Landman 2006), I will explore the possibility that degrees can be understood as Carlsonian kinds of states. Together, these ideas constitute a synthesis on which the correspondences between degrees, manners, and kinds are expected.

The most striking of these correspondences involve a single form used across all three domains. In English, this is the case for *as*:

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|----------|
| (1) | a. such things as this | (kind) |
| | b. as ugly as Clyde was | (degree) |
| | c. behave as Clyde did | (manner) |

This homophony is not a local idiosyncrasy of English. In Polish, a single form, *jak*, also occurs in all three uses:

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| (2) | a. takie rzeczy jak te | |
| | such things as these | |
| | b. taki brzydki jak był Clyde | |
| | so/as ugly as was Clyde | |
| | c. zachowywać się jak Clyde | |
| | behave oneself as Clyde | |

Indeed, precisely the same form is the principal *wh*-word used to form degree, manner, and kind questions. German *wie* manifests similar behavior. Moreover, both languages use a single anaphor across all three domains: *tak* in Polish and *so* in German (Landman & Morzycki 2003). English nearly does too—*so* has a degree use (*so tall as this*) and a manner use (*stand so as not to block your view*), and it is cognate with the kind anaphor *such*. French *comme* ‘like’ also has uses across the three domains. Alongside its kind use (*comme ça*), it has degree and manner uses (examples from Desmets & Moline 2007):

- (3) a. Comme il travaille!
 like he works
 ‘How he works!’ (degree exclamative)
- b. Jean travaille comme son père.
 John works like his father
 ‘John works like his father/as his father did.’

There are also many cases in which a single form operates across two of these three domains. *How*, for example, has both a degree and manner use, and, as Landman (2006) shows, *like* has both a kind and manner one (*dog like this, behave like this*). In Japanese, a single *wh*-expression (*dono-yoo-na/i*) can form both manner and kind questions. It seems profoundly unlikely that these patterns of systematic homophony are accidental in all of these languages.

To account for the manner-kind connection, Landman & Morzycki (2003) assimilate manners to kinds by simply assuming that they are kinds of events. I will extend this analysis to the degree domain. The crucial property of degrees is that they are ordered. Kinds are naturally associated with a subkind relation, which provides an ordering of its own. Following Chierchia (1998), I’ll assume subkinds can be defined by tracking relations among pluralities across worlds. Any state of being six feet tall is, across worlds, also a state of being five feet tall, and of being four feet tall, and so on. This means that, unintuitively, being six feet tall is a subkind of being five feet tall. This provides the basic ingredient from which the necessary properties of degrees can be derived. Importantly, this conception changes the compositional picture dramatically, with consequences for the interpretation of measure phrases and degree constructions. It may also shed light on some otherwise mysterious forms of AP modification (e.g. *compulsively honest*).

The core idea, then, is to enrich the ontology of degrees in fundamental way, one that reconciles the usual assumptions about state and degree arguments and that makes sense of the crosslinguistic connections among kinds, degrees, and manners. This line of reasoning converges on a common conclusion with Moltmann (2009), who advances an enriched understanding of degrees on independent grounds, which include nominalization of adjectives. While the proposed enrichments are quite different, together they suggest that there may be substantially more to degrees than is usually assumed.

References

- Chierchia, G. 1998. Reference to kinds across languages. *NaLS*.
- Desmets, M. & E. Moline. 2007. Manner and degree in French comparison and in exclamative constructions. ‘Manner’ in the Theory of Language. Abstract, symposium at the Univ. of Tampere.
- Landman, M. 2006. *Variables in Natural Language*. Diss., UMass.
- Landman, M. & M. Morzycki. 2003. Event-kinds and the representation of manner. *WECOL 2002*.
- Moltmann, F. 2009. Degree structure as trope structure: a trope-based analysis of positive and comparative adjectives. *L&P*.