

Degree intensifiers and modality in Caribbean Spanish

It has been observed that the degree adverbs *tan* (< *tanto*) and *más* in Puerto Rican Spanish (PRSp) may be used indistinctively in certain grammatical constructions (1-2) (Álvarez Nazario 1992). However, intuitions by native speakers of this Caribbean dialect suggest that there are important differences in the distribution and interpretation of these adverbs of degree. In this paper we analyze the behavior of *tan* and *más* in PRSp and provide a novel account for this alternation. In addition to its superlative interpretation (Gutiérrez-Rexach 2015), we argue that *más* behaves like an elative or expression of extreme degree in PRSp, whereas *tan* does not. Elatives normally denote the highest point on a scale of degrees or a point that exceeds a conventional scale (Bosque 2002): they trigger a conventional scalar implicature to the effect that the degree property they express lies at the extreme end of a contextually-given scale (Morzycki 2012).

Ample evidence supports our claim: *más* cannot combine with other elatives, while *tan* can (5); reduplication is possible with *tan* but not possible with *más* (6-7); *más* is related with expression of strong modality and evidentiality and as such it is incompatible with expression such as *parecer*, *creer*, *duda*, *suponer* or negation (8-11); *más* cannot appear in contrastive adversative/corrective structures, while *tan* can (12); or in other structures with presuppositions that conflict with elativity (13-14). Finally, *más* does not require an adjective to be overtly expressed (15).

Syntactically, we will argue that the difference between *tan* and *más* can be captured if we assume that *más* moves from his Deg position to Spec of FocP, while *tan* remains in situ (16) (Armstrong & Pastor 2015). Semantically, *más* makes reference to the speaker's expectations about extremeness (the relevant degree goes beyond what the speaker expected). When *más* is combined with a sentence/phrase contradicting the speaker's assumptions, the discourse becomes infelicitous (17). We argue that extreme expressions entail a comparison between an actual degree and those (presupposed) degrees that the speaker expected to hold. In recent literature there has been an interest on the relationship between gradability and modality (Klecha 2012, Lassiter 2010, 2011, Portner 2009), focusing on modified gradable modals. We propose an extension of this framework to gradable expressions based on expectations. An expectation emerges when the world goes according to the speaker's knowledge, laws or desires (modal base) and follows the normal course of events (stereotypical ordering source) (Tonhauser 2011). We propose a Kratzerian (1977, 1991) possible-world semantics arguing that the relevant comparison is triggered by a measure operator *exp* mapping a stereotypical ordering source and a modal base to a set of degrees on modals bases and returning degrees (Klecha 2012).

EXAMPLES

- (1) a. ¡Qué niño tan lindo!
b. ¡Qué niño más lindo!
- (2) a. Pepe es tan idiota...
b. Pepe es más idiota...
- (3) a. Pepe es el más inteligente de la clase.
b. Pepe escaló la montaña más alta de todas.
- (4) a. Pepe es tan inteligente como Cyd.
b. Cyd lee tanto como Pepe.
- (5) a. ¡Qué niño tan extremadamente lindo!
b. *¡Qué niño más extremadamente lindo!
- (6) a. Él es tan y tan inteligente que fue admitido a una de las mejores universidades.
b. *Él es más y más inteligente que fue admitido a una de las mejores universidades.
- (7) a. Es tan pero que tan inteligente que pasó los exámenes de grado la primera vez.
b. *Es más pero que más inteligente que pasó los exámenes de grado la primera vez.
- (8) a. Ese gesto me pareció tan vulgar.
b. *Ese gesto me pareció más vulgar.
- (9) a. Dudo que ella sea tan agresiva.
b. *Dudo que ella sea más agresiva.
- (10) a. No sé si la clase es tan difícil.
b. *No sé si la clase es más difícil.
- (11) a. Eso no es tan difícil.
b. *Eso no es más difícil.
- (12) a. Pepe es tan idiota, pero (aun) así es simpático.
b. *Pepe es más idiota, pero (aun) así es simpático.
- (13) a. Por ser tan tonto te metiste en un problema.
b. *Por ser más tonto te metiste en un problema.
- (14) a. Me sorprende lo tan inteligente que eres.
b. *Me sorprende lo más inteligente que eres.
- (15) a. Tú eres más...
b. ¡Qué niño más...!
- (16) a. $\text{FOcP} [\text{FOC} \text{ más}_i [\text{DegP} [\text{Deg} \text{ h}_i [\text{AP} \text{ idiota}]]]]$
b. $\text{a. } \text{FOcP} [\text{FOC} [\text{DegP} [\text{Deg} \text{ tan} [\text{AP} \text{ idiota}]]]]$
- (17) ¡Mary está más/*tan alta! #Pero la esperaba así.

REFERENCES

- Álvarez Nazario, M. (1992). *El habla campesina del país*. San Juan, PR: Ed. Universidad de Puerto Rico.
- Armstrong, G. & A. Pastor. (2015). A Manner of Speaking About Degrees: The Degree Term Bien in Spanish. Ms.
- Bosque, I. (2002). Degree Quantification and Modal Operators in Spanish. In *From Words to Discourse*. Elsevier.
- Gutiérrez-Rexach, J. (2015). *Interfaces and Domains of Quantification*. Columbus, OH: OSU Press.
- Klecha, P. (2012). Positive and conditional semantics for gradable modals. *Proceedings S&B16*, pp. 363-376.
- Kratzer, A (1977). 'What 'Must' and 'Can' Must and Can Mean.' *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 1(3): 337-356.
- Kratzer, A (1991). 'Modality.' In A von Stechow & D Wunderlich (eds.), *Semantics*, 639-650. De Gruyter.
- Lassiter, D. (2010). Gradable epistemic modals, probability, and scale structure. *SALT 20*.
- Lassiter, D. (2011). *Measurement and Modality*. Ph.D. thesis, New York University
- Morzycki, M. (2012). Adjectival extremeness: degree modification and restricted scales. *NLLT 30*, 567-609.
- Portner, Paul. (2009). *Modality*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press
- Tonhauser, J. (2011). The Paraguayan Guaraní future marker *-ta* : Formal semantics and cross-linguistic comparison, in *Tense Across Languages*, Rathert, M. and R. Musan (eds.), Tübingen: Niemeyer, pp.207-231.