Non-canonical *Very* as a Degree Modifier of NPs in English

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the meaning of constructions with a non-canonical use of *very* inside NPs and to propose a unified formal semantic analysis for the degree modifier *very*. We adopt the notion of scalar properties and take as a starting point the fact that *very* is a typical degree modifier that boosts the degree of open-scale adjectives (e.g. *tall*) (cf. Kennedy & McNally, 2005). In this work, we focus on what we name non-canonical *very*: the modification of *very* on NPs (e.g. *the very house John lived in*). Our methodology consists of three major steps: firstly, we selected sentences with non-canonical *very* from *The British National Corpus*. Then, we selected sentences from five American and British novels published in the 19th and 20th centuries, comparing the sentences with their translations into Portuguese. Based on a first analysis of these sentences and on Matthewson's (2004) methodology, we proceed to controlled elicitation of contexts with the participation of a native-English speaker of Wales. Data collected present definite DPs and complex NPs, what supports a proposal that consider modification of a scale that is closed and contextually dependent. We argue in favor of an analysis that gives a uniform lexical entry to *very* and assume that the difference on interpretation of canonical and non-canonical modification is due to scalar properties of the modified predicate. Canonical *very* modifies lexical open scales whereas non-canonical *very* modifies contextual closed scales of precision and produces an exhaustive interpretation. The study reveals the importance of logical scalar properties for the semantic investigation of degree modifiers.

Keywords: *very*, degrees, modifiers, English, formal semantics

1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the meaning of constructions with a non-canonical use of *very* inside NPs.

From a descriptive view, according to the literature, *very* is an intensifier that modifies adjectives and adverbs. Crystal (2008: 248), for instance, defines intensifiers as 'a class of adverbs which have a heightening or lowering effect on the meaning of another element in the sentence'. In (1), there is an example of *very* intensifying an adjective:

(1) John is **very** tall.

In (1), the property related to this adjective is higher than what is considered to be the standard stature in relation to a comparison class in the context.

The meaning of *very* interpreted as an intensifier can also be observed in the modification of adverbs of manner as well, such as in (2):

(2) Roger drives **very** slowly.

In (2), *very* intensifies the adverb of manner *slowly* in a way that (2) can be interpreted as Roger drives much slower than what is considered to be the standard speed in the context.

Differently from its use as an intensifier, this paper focuses on a non-canonical use of *very* in sentences such as (3):

(3) This is the **very** house where I lived in.

In (3), the sentence expresses that this is the exact house where I lived in. There is no heightening in any property.

The aim of this paper is to give a proper semantic analysis to *very* that captures both its intensifier operation and its non-canonical use. To do so, we adopt a scalar semantics following the framework of Kennedy & McNally (2005).

Following the descriptive generalizations, the modification performed by *very* is considered to be restricted to two domains (adjectives and adverbs), as seen in McNally & Kennedy (2008: 8): "The case of the degree modifier *very* is interesting because its distribution is one of the classic diagnostics for distinguishing adjectives and adverbs from nouns and verbs: the former accept modification by *very*; (…) the latter never do."

Assuming a scalar semantics on the K&M's framework, Doetjes (2008) agrees that the use of *very* is also restricted to certain scales that are typically adjectival, indicating that *very* cannot modify other domains.

Despite some description of this occurrence (e.g. Beltrama & Bochnak, 2015; Bylinina & Sudo, 2015), this paper focus on a gap in the literature on scalar semantics: the use of *very* with NPs. Therefore, the importance of this study is in its attempt to expand the use of scalar semantics to degree modification of NPs proposing a unified analysis for *very* in both uses, canonical and non-canonical. Furthermore, this study fits into a contemporary discussion involving the nature of degree modifications in the interface between Semantics and Pragmatics (e.g. McNally, 2016; Sawada, 2018).

This paper is divided as follows: section 2 presents the data selection that shows how we gathered the sentences in our study; section 3 presents the bases of scalar semantics that will be the tool for our analysis of non-canonical *very* presented in section 4; section 5 concludes addressing the open questions of the study.

2. Data Selection

Since authors of this paper are not native speakers of English, which means we are not provided with some introspective knowledge of this language to intuitively indicate whether a sentence with non-canonical *very* is grammatically acceptable or not, we proceed a selection of data aiming to demonstrate that this phenomenon exists and is quite frequent. Our data selection consists of three stages: the first one makes use of *The British National Corpus*[1], the second one makes use of some novels written in English and the third one is the controlled elicitation of contexts with the participation of a native English speaker as a consultant.

In relation to *The British National Corpus*, the first search entry of the occurrences of *very* results in more than one hundred thousand cases of sentences that illustrate modifications with *very.* Based on the fact that this number of sentences is somehow difficult to be approached, in order to lessen this number, the first 1000 sentences were selected to compose the data of this work.

At this level, the sentences were separated in two groups: the first group with the canonical modification of *very* (on adjectives and adverbs of manner) and the second one with the non-canonical modification (on NPs). Out of the 1000 sentences, the quantitative analysis shows that 72 are examples of the non-canonical modification, corresponding to 7,2% in total. Therefore, these numbers indicate that the occurrence of the canonical modification (92,8%) is much higher when compared to the non-canonical modification. In (4) and (5), there are two cases of *very* modifying NPs from the BNC:

(4) "The flexibility of the engine and the **very** nature in which the power is delivered mean far fewer gear changes are required..." (Good Adverts, 1985-1994)

(5) "But this is the first time they have been attacked by the **very** people supposed to be enthusiastic about them." (The Daily Mirror, 1992)

In (4), *very* modifies the NP *nature in which the power is delivered*. In (5), *very* modifies the NP *people supposed to be enthusiastic about them*. In both sentences, it seems that *very* is interpreted as something like *proper*. Thus, the data from *The British National Corpus* confirm the existence of this type of modification in English.

The second stage consisted of verifying that the non-canonical modification of *very* is a consolidated phenomenon. To do this, the selection of five novels written in English in England and The USA in the 19th and 20th centuries became part of this work. In this stage we used the translations to Portuguese (native language of the authors) to gather some hints on the meaning conveyed by non-canonical *very*. The choice for novels of this period of time as a means of data selection can be justified by Baugh & Cable's (2002) work, in the sense that the use of vocabulary and structures in written genres characterized a type of linguistic consolidation in Modern English in the 19th century. We assumed that if we could find non-canonical *very* in novels of that period of time, we could assume that its use is consolidated.

[1] Created by *Oxford University Press*, *The British National Corpus* (*BNC*) is an online platform that contains linguistic data of English. Kennedy e McNally (2005), for instance, made use of this platform in order to verify the occurrences of *very*, *much* e *well* modifying participle adjectives.

It is worth mentioning that we do not consider that the fact that the authors are not native English speakers as a problem. Contrariwise we think that our reflection on the translations' strategies adopted in the novels could give us a perspective of uses that can maybe be difficult for an English speaker untrained in Linguistics that knows how to employ the non-canonical *very* but not necessarily how to explain their uses.

Similarly to the methodology adopted with *The British National Corpus*, the sentences from the novels were categorized according to the nature of the adoption of *very* in canonical and non-canonical.

The first novel to be analyzed was *Pride and Prejudice* originally published in 1813, by Jane Austen[2]. We found 45 sentences with the non-canonical use of *very* in this novel. Following this direction, *Northanger Abbey*, first published in 1817 and *Mansfield Park, published in 1814* (both Jane Austen's novels) were analyzed as well. In *Northanger Abbey*, 27 sentences of *very* modifying NPs were found whereas this number was 46 in *Mansfield Park.*

In order to expand our analysis in the sense of not being limited to Jane Austen's novels, we selected two other novels: *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, published in 1925, and *The Great Gatsby*, by Fitzgerald, also published in 1925. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, we found 19 sentences that represent the non-canonical use of *very* whereas 6 is the number of sentences found in *The Great Gatsby.* The table 1 below portrays the data from the novels quantitatively:

Table 1. Absolute value of the occurrences of *very* in the novels

Novels	Canonical modification	Non-canonical modification	Total
Mansfield Park	742	46	788
Mrs. Dalloway	131	19	150
Northanger Abbey	208	27	235
Pride and Prejudice	416	45	461
The Great Gatsby	51	6	57
Total	1548	143	1691

Table 1 shows 1691 sentences with *very*. Out of this total, 1548 are examples of canonical modification whereas 143 are examples of the non-canonical one. In terms of percentage, 92% represent the canonical use and 8% the non-canonical one. Similarly to the data from *The British National Corpus* (92,8% vs 7,2%), the data from the novels also show that the canonical modification of *very* is much higher compared to the non-canonical one. Although there are less occurrences of non-canonical *very*, the data indicate the existence of it and its consolidation in English, based on both temporal existence and written consolidation.

The sentences (6), (7) and (8) are examples found in Jane Austen's novels. In (6), *very* modifies *room* and, in (7), the modification is on *circumstance which had driven Julia away*. In (8), *very* modifies *first day that Morland came to us last Christmas* and *the first moment I beheld him*. In (6) and (7), *very* is translated to *mesma* 'same' in the editions consulted of *Pride and Prejudice* translated to *Orgulho e Preconceito* (1996) in Portuguese and it is also translated to *mesma* 'same' in *Mansfield Park* (2011). In (8), it was simply omitted from the translation of *Northanger Abbey* (2012).

(6) "He made her an offer in this **very** room, and she refused him." (*Pride and Prejudice*, 2005: 92)

"Ele propôs-se-lhe nesta mesma sala e ela recusou-o." (Orgulho e Preconceito, 1996: 190)

(7) "...for the **very** circumstance which had driven Julia away was to her the sweetest support." (*Mansfield Park*, 2008: 92)

"A mesma circunstância que tinha levado Julia a ir embora, era para ela o apoio mais doce." (Mansfield Park, 2011: 125)

(8) "The **very** first day that Morland came to us last Christmas — the **very** first moment I beheld him — my heart was irrecoverably gone." (*Northanger Abbey*, 2015: 71)

"O primeiro dia em que Morland nos visitou, no Natal, o primeiro momento em que o vi, meu coração tinha ido, irrecuperavelmente." (Northanger Abbey, 2012: 91)

[2] The choice for 3 novels by Jane Austen is due to the importance of her work to the consolidation of Modern English writing in Literature of the 19th century.

Sentences (9) and (10) are also examples of non-canonical *very*. In (9), *very* modifies *reason: they love life* and in (10) *tip of the egg.* In (9) *very* was translated to *simples* 'simple' in the Portuguese version *Mrs. Dalloway* (1980) and in (10) it was translated to *bem* 'much, well' in *The Great Gatsby* (2011):

(9) "...can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that **very** reason: they love life." (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 2000: 4)

"...impossível, ela o sabia, impossível salvá-las com leis parlamentares, por esta simples razão: amava a vida." (Mrs. Dalloway, 1980: 8)

(10) "...my house was at the **very** tip of the egg, only fifty yards from the Sound..."

(*The Great Gatsby*, 1994: 11)

"Minha casa ficava bem na ponta do ovo, a menos de cinquenta metros do Estreito..."

(The Great Gatsby, 2011: 6)

When the translations to Portuguese are taken into consideration, it is noticeable that *very* is translated as *mesma* 'same', *própria* 'proper', *simples* 'simple' and *bem* 'much'. Curiously *bem* is also an intensifier in Portuguese (*bem necessário* – 'much needed'[3]). The importance of translations to this work is that they provide us a wider perception on how non-canonical *very* is interpreted. Thereby, the first conclusion is that there is a correlation between the canonical modification of *very* and its Portuguese version *muito*. However, non-canonical *very* is not captured by the same notion in Portuguese.

After a reflection on the data collected in the previous stages (*The British National Corpus* and the novels), we observed the presence of definite determiners, such as the definite article *the*, the demonstrative determiners *this/that* and the possessive ones *his/her* along with NPs modified by *very*. Strawson (1950) states that all these determiners encode a semantics of uniqueness. Coppock e Beaver (2015) also agrees with the notion of oneness as a semantic property of the article *the*. However, the notion of unique reference to defined phrases is a subject matter that had already been addressed by Russell (1905).

We observed the presence of definite determiners along with *very* and noticed that the NPs in our investigation indicate the presence of complex NPs. In this work, we assume the definition of Complex NPs (cf. Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2007) described as noun phrases modified by noun modifiers, such as premodifiers, which occur before the head noun, like attributive adjectives (*e.g. a small house*) or postmodifiers, which occur after the head noun, such as relative clauses (*e.g. the house (which) I bought yesterday*) and prepositional phrases (*e.g. the house of my dreams*), among others[4]. Our data indicate that the Complex NPs related to non-canonical *very* are the ones combined with postmodifiers. For instance, *the very circumstance which had driven Julia away* in (7), whereby *the circumstance* is modified by the relative clause *which had driven Julia away.*

After gathering these general properties of the distribution of non-canonical *very*, we proceed to the 3rd stage of data collection which consists of controlled elicitation of contexts with the participation of a native English speaker of Wales. With the aim of verifying the proper cases in which *very* can modify NPs, the contexts created by us are based on our assumption of the semantic contribution of non-canonical *very*.

The controlled elicitation of contexts in this work is based on Mathewson's (2004) proposal. In this type of elicitation, we provide our consultant with contexts which we presume to be related to scenarios involving non-canonical *very*. Each context is equipped with 3 or 4 sentences so that the consultant is supposed to choose the sentences that he considers to be appropriate to the context given. The consultant is told about the possibility of choosing more than one sentence to each context, in case he considers it suitable. After choosing the proper sentences, the consultant is required to paraphrase them as our attempt to capture his interpretation to the meaning of non-canonical *very*.

Based on our data from *The British National Corpus* and *the novels*, we assumed that *very* modifies NPs with definite determiners and its modification with indefinite articles (*a*/*an*) or simply without determiners would potentially be inadequate. Although we had these clues, the absence of negative data was something we attempted to sort out with the controlled elicitation. We focused on the presence or absence of definite determiners, but we also paid close attention to the adequacy of Complex NPs along with non-canonical *very*. Here is important to highlight

[3] For a description of *bem* see Quadros Gomes (2011) and Quadros Gomes & Sanchez Mendes (2015).

[4] Biber, Conrad & Leech (2007) also list other postmodifiers which we do not intend to go further here, such as *to*-infinitive clauses, *ing*-clause, *ed*-clauses and appositive noun phrases.

that we also came up with inadequate sentences in order to check out syntactic adequacy, combining Mathewson's (2004) proposal for judgment of contexts with a grammaticality test, in order to observe sentences which probably would not be produced by a native English speaker. In (11), there is an example of one context created by us and the consultant response to it:

(11) Context: You are 30 years old. You decide to visit the school where you used to go when you were a teenager. You enter a classroom and say:

( ) This is very classroom.

( ) This is the very classroom.

( ) This is a very classroom in which I had classes.

(x) This is the very classroom in which I had classes.

Paraphrase given: I have had classes in this very classroom while I was younger.

Having analyzed the consultant's response to contexts like (11), we could notice that non-canonical *very* seems to require definite DPs, insofar as neither the sentences without articles nor the sentences with indefinite articles were chosen. Moreover, we could also notice that the NP would need a complement to become more restricted in the context in which the sentence is delivered, as the role of the relative clause *in which I had classes* in *This is the very classroom in which I had classes.*

In respect with the paraphrase, even though the consultant made use of non-canonical *very* in *I have had classes in this very classroom while I was younger,* demonstrating that this type of modification is produced by a native English speaker, it does not enable us to fully understand his interpretation of non-canonical *very*. Probably, this behavior of the consultant might have occurred due to his caution of doing more than requested.

For better comprehension of the consultant's interpretation on the meaning of *very*, we elaborated a new stage of tests. We provided him with the same contexts from the first test. However, we only presented the sentence(s) chosen by the consultant in the first test. We explained that we would like to know his interpretation to *very* in the sentences and he should express it with the paraphrase. In (12), there is an example:

(12) Context: You are 30 years old. You decide to visit the school where you used to go when you were a teenager. You enter a classroom and say: 'I have had classes in this very classroom while I was younger.'

Paraphrase given: 'I have had classes in this very classroom while I was younger' means I've had classes in this exact classroom while I was younger.

In summary, *very* is used with complex noun phrases forming definite DPs and have an interpretation that can sometimes be captured by *exact, proper, same.* Next sections will present formal analysis to this meaning. We will take into account all this properties in order to seek a unified analysis to *very.*

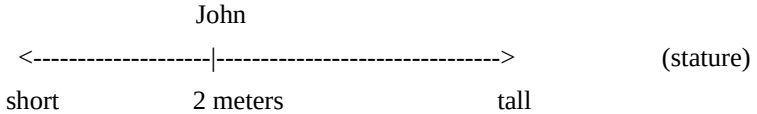
3. Literature Review

3.1 Scalar Semantics

The aim of this section is to present the scalar semantics adopted in this paper to analyze non-canonical *very*. Scalar semantics is a recent approach in Formal Semantics to degree modification (Kennedy, 1999; Kennedy and McNally, 2005). Scales are theoretical constructs that capture the notion of how certain linguistic phenomena can be graded in natural languages. They are sets of ordered degrees in a certain dimension than can be metaphorically conceptualized as a ruler. Take for instance the sentence in (13). In a scalar semantics it is analyzed as making a statement about the relation between *John* and the degree *2 meters* in the stature scale.

(13) John is **2 meters** tall.

(14)



One way to formally implement this idea is considering that degrees (type **d**) are part of the semantic domain in the same way as individuals (type **e**), events (type **s**), and true values (type **t**).[5] In this approach gradable adjectives such

[5] We are adopting a type driven interpretation in the sense of Heim and Kratzer (1998). The only rule used in this paper in

as *tall* denote a relation between individual and degrees (type **<d,<e,t>>**)[6] (15a) gives the lexical entry of *tall* in this proposal. (15b) offers the general formula for gradable adjectives. $\mathbf{m_g}$ is the relevant dimension associated to the scale's adjective.

(15) a. $[\![tall]\!]_{<d,<e,t>>} = \lambda d_d \lambda x_e$. "stature" (x) = d

b. $[\![Adj_g]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x.\ m_g (x) = d$

The derivation of (15) is given below.

(16) $[\![2\ meters]\!]_d =$ 2 meters

$[\![2\ meters\ tall]\!]_{<e,t>} = [\![tall]\!] ([\![2\ meters]\!])$

$[\![2\ meters\ tall]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda d \lambda x.$ "stature" (x) = d (2 meters)

$[\![2\ meters\ tall]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda x.$ "stature" (x) = 2 meters

Scales are useful to treat sentences that make explicitly reference to degrees such as (13), and also to provide a proper analysis to comparatives and degree modification. In a seminal work, Kennedy & McNally (2005) (henceforth K&M) proposed that different logical properties of scales related to gradable predicates can have an influence on English grammar. They gave light to the study of the degree modifiers *very*, *much* and *well* modifying participle adjectives in English. According to K&M, participles encode semantic properties that have an influence on their selections by these modifiers. For instance, in sentences (17a-c), there is the modification of the adjective *behaved*:

(17) a. # John is **very** behaved.

b. # John is **much** behaved.

c. John is **well**-behaved.

The examples in (17a) and (17b) indicate that *behaved* is an predicate that cannot be modified by *very* or *much*. On the other hand, when it comes to the degree modifier *well*, the meaning of the sentence (17c) can be interpreted: there is a person who has a certain degree of behavior denoted by the degree modifier *well*. The restriction observed is associated to a feature associated to the participle. *Behaved* is a property that can be associated to a scale that is closed in its ends.

(18) |----------| (behavior)
misbehaved well-behaved

In (18), there is a scale (the set of ordered degrees) of behavior closed at both endpoints, one associated to misbehavior and one associated to good behavior. There is, once an individual is considered well-behaved, it cannot be related to a higher degree of behavior. The same can be said for misbehaved. Thus, according to K&M, *well* is a degree modifier that selects totally-closed scale predicates.

A scalar description is also provided by K&M for *much* in order to explore its semantic properties in terms of semantic selection, as shown by the sentences in (19):

(19) a. # This is a **very** needed action.

b. This is a **much** needed action.

c. # This is a **well** needed action.

Both sentences (19a) and (19c) are examples that illustrate cases of semantic restrictions related to degree modification. In (19a), *very* does not modify the participle adjective *needed*, similarly to (19c), whereby *well* does not modify *needed*. On the other hand, in (19b), the truth conditions of the modification of *much* on *needed* can be interpreted: there is a highly necessary action. In (20), there is the representation of the scale of necessity. This scale is closed at its lower endpoint, but open at its upper endpoint, which means that *needless* stands for 0% of necessity on the scale, whereas any other value different from 0% qualifies something as necessary. Thus, K&M's scale proposal to *much* indicate that it is a degree modifier which selects partially-closed adjectival scales.

Functional Application.

[6] We are assuming Kennedy and McNally (2005) and considering that the measure function is part of gradable adjectives. This is not the only way to formalize gradable adjectives. In Kennedy (1999, 2007), for instance, adjectives denote measure functions of type <e,d>. An adjective such as *tall* denote *λx. "stature" (x)* in this approach.

(20) |----------> (*necessity*)

0% Value > 0%

needless *needed* →

Regarding canonical *very*, K&M also proposes that its semantic adequacy in sentences selecting predicates is related to scalar properties. Sentences in (21) illustrate its distribution:

(21) a. This is **very** interesting.

b. # This is **much** interesting.

c. # This is **well** interesting.

Sentences (21b) and (21c) indicate that *interesting* is an adjective which cannot be modified by *much* or *well*. In terms of scales, *interesting* is a predicate that does not fit the necessary conditions required by *much* (partially-closed scale) or *well* (totally-closed scale). *Interesting* is an open-scale adjective, as shown in (22). There is a scale of interest varying from less to more interested that leaves open the possibility of being more and more or less and less interested.

(22) <----------> (*interest*)

less interested more interested

In this case, the modification of *very* in *very interesting* indicates an operation in which *very* boosts the degree of *interest* on the scale. The same can be sad about cases with adjectives. Although K&M's proposal is an analysis for participles, they expand it to other types of open–scale adjectives, such as *tall* in (23):

(23) John is **very** tall.

In (23), *very* boosts the degree of the adjective *tall* to a degree above the standard of comparison, which can be considered the normal standard. For example, if we consider a context in which 1,70m is the normal standard and John is 1,90 meter-height, so one might say that John is very tall in this context. However, when the context is related to basketball players whose standard of comparison is 2m, John is not considered tall. Thus, this example demonstrates that open-scale adjectives are context dependent on a comparison class[7], which makes them relative gradable adjectives.

When it comes to gradable adjectives which do not fit the conditions proposed for canonical *very* by K&M, there is a clash, as shown by the example (24):

(24) ? The glass is **very** empty/full.

Example (24) indicates that *empty*/*full* are adjectives that cannot be modified by *very*.[8] This restriction is associated to the nature of the scale related to these adjectives. *Empty* and *full* compose a closed scale of capacity. This way, if one states that *the glass is empty*, it means that the glass is at the minimum degree of its capacity, whereas *the glass is full* means that the glass is at the maximum degree of its capacity. In summary, it is not necessary to take a comparison class into account to interpret the meaning of these sentences. K&M consider adjectives that share the same properties of *empty*/*full* as absolute gradable adjectives.

(25) |----------| (*capacity*)

empty *full*

The same can be said about partially closed scales such as *needed*. An adjective that show the scalar property of this participle is *dirty.* In this case the comparison is also given by the nature of the scale. Then this is also an absolute predicate.

(26) |----------> (*dirtiness*)

0% Value > 0%

clean *dirty* →

Therefore, this section presented the nature of 3 different scales proposed by K&M for the modification of gradable predicates. In sentences without modification, in turn, the scalar nature must also influence the interpretation of the

[7] Objects that share similar properties to whatever is being discussed (Klein 1980).

[8] The only way to do so is to make a relative use of these adjectives, such as *The restaurant is very empty these days* in which *empty* is used considering a normal occupation of the restaurant not its absolute minimum and maximum capacity.

sentence. A sentence with a relative/open-scale adjective such as *John is tall* must also manipulate a degree associated to a standard of comparison (like the sentence with *very* discussed above). Sentences with absolute/(partially-)closed predicates on the other hand handles with degrees that are present in their own scales.

One way to formally capture this difference in sentences without modification is assuming that a silent morpheme *pos* applies to gradable predicates of type <d,<e,t>> to form individual predicates of type <e,t> and to provide the proper interpretation based on the standard and the scales degrees. We propose that *pos* has the following lexical entry (based on Kennedy, 2004 and adapted for a gradable predicate of type <d,<e,t>>).[9]

(27) $[\![pos]\!] = \lambda G_{<d,<e,t>>} \lambda x.\exists d [G (d)(x) \& d \geq d_{stand\text{-}out}]$

The degree $\mathbf{d_{stand\text{-}out}}$ is the relevant degree according to the type of the scale and is defined according to the following.

(28)

$$d_{stand\text{-}out} \begin{cases} d_{max}(m_g) \text{ if } max(m_g) \text{ is defined} \\ d_{min}(m_g) \text{ if } min(m_g) \text{ is defined} \\ d_{std}(m_g) \text{ elsewhere} \end{cases}$$

m_g = dimension

Kennedy (2007) proposes an Interpretive Economy that combined with the description above ensures that the relevant scalar information encoded in the adjective lexicon is considered.

(29) Interpretive Economy**:**

Maximize the contribution of the conventional meanings of the elements of a sentence to the computation of its truth conditions.

(Kennedy 2007, 36)

Examples in (30) show how Interpretive Economy is implemented in open (30a) and closed (30b) scales predicates. In open scales the $\mathbf{d_{std}}$ of the scale is selected whereas in closed scales the maximum degree in attained.

(30)

a. $[\![tall]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x.$ "stature" $(x) = d$

a'. $[\![pos]\!]([\![tall]\!]) = \lambda x.\exists d [$ "stature" $(x) = d \& d > d_{std}(stature)]$

b. $[\![full]\!] = \lambda d \lambda x.$ "fullness" $(x) = d$

b'. $[\![pos]\!]([\![full]\!]) = \lambda x.\exists d [$ "fullness" $(x) = d \& d = d_{max}(fullness)]$

Then, a sentence like *Jonh is tall* has the following semantic derivation:

(31) $[\![tall_{pos}]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda x.\exists d [$ "stature" $(x) = d \& d > d_{std}(stature)]$

$[\![John\ is\ tall]\!]_t = \lambda x.\exists d [$ "stature" $(x) = d \& d > d_{std}(stature)]$ (John)

$[\![John\ is\ tall]\!]_t = 1$ sse $\exists d [$ "stature" (John) $= d \& d > d_{std}(stature)]$

In words, *John is tall* is true if there is a degree **d** associated to the stature of John that is higher than a standard degree $\mathbf{d_{std}}$ of the stature dimension.

This section introduced how logical differences on scales associated to gradable predicates can influence the grammar of a language and one way to provide a proper formal treatment to this contrast. In the next section we will present a proposal to *very* that takes into account its canonical use as a degree intensifier of open-scale adjectives with relative standard as a starting point to the analysis of non-canonical *very.*

4. A proposal for *Very*

This section presents our proposal for *very* based on a scalar semantics (Kennedy & McNally, 2005, Doetjes 2008). The analysis assumes two main steps: (i) *very* has a unified meaning and the interpretation of the modified sentence depends on the modified predicate; and (ii) the scale modified by non-canonical *very* is closed and contextually defined. The interpretation of exhaustivity is derived by the combination of these steps as a sub-product of the modification. Each of the subsections below details these steps.

4.1 The Unified Contribution of Very

According to Quadros Gomes and Sanchez-Mendes (2015), degree modification can be affected by the scalar nature

[9] Kennedy (2004) assumes the lexical entry of gradable adjectives of being of type <e,d>.

of the modified phrase in 3 ways: (i) the scalar nature of the modified phrase determines the distribution of degree modifiers, such as *very*, *much* and *well* in English (K&M); (ii) the scalar nature of the modified phrase determines the output meaning of the modified phrase, such in sentences with *pita(t)* in Karitiana; and (iii) the scalar nature of the modified phrase determines the properties of the whole modified phrase such as in the case of *muito*, *bem* and *well* in Brazilian Portuguese.

In order to give an appropriate analysis to *very* we assume that the product of a modified phrase can have different interpretations according to the predicate under modification (cf. Sanchez-Mendes, 2015; Quadros Gomes & Sanchez-Mendes, 2015 for *pita(t)*).

In Karitiana, for example, the same modifier *pita* can be applied to open and to closed scales predicates with different effects. When it is applied to open scale adjectives it boosts the degree of the scale above the normal (as the canonical *very* in English) (32a). When it is applied to closed scales it attains the maximum degree (as *completely* in English) (32b).

(32) a. Õwã se'a **pita** i-otam-Ø. KARITIANA
boy good pita PART-arrive-ABS
'The very good boy arrived'

b. Karamã akydop **pita** i-pot-Ø.
door open pita PART-break-ABS
'The completely open door broke' (Sanchez-Mendes, 2015: 70)

In order to capture this property, Sanchez-Mendes (2015) offered a unified lexical entry to *pita* similar to *pos* morpheme (cf. Kennedy, 2007) discussed in the previous section and assign its differences of interpretations to the scalar properties of the modified predicate. Based on Kennedy's (2007) proposal, the proper reading in (33) is derived by the standard-fixing function **s** that varies according to the properties encoded by the modified adjective and fixes the degree $\mathbf{d_s}$.

(33) $[\![pita]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d\ [\ G\ (d)(x)\ \&\ d \geq d_s\ ]$

(Sanchez-Mendes, 2015: 70)

Our analysis of *very* goes in the same direction. First, we assume that *very* has the semantics suggested by K&M, namely that the difference, for example, between *John is tall* and *John is very tall* is that the relative standard of the former sentence is further boosted. A way to implement this is considering that *very* takes the *pos + A* individuals as a comparison class (cf. K&M).

(34) $[\![very]\!]^C = \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d\ [\mathbf{standard}(d)(x)\ (\lambda y.[\![pos(G)(y)]\!]^C)\ \ \&\ G(d)(x)\ ]$

Kennedy & McNally (2005: 370)

K&M leaves open how **standard** can be defined in their proposal. In order to capture how it can be defined, we assume Kennedy's (2004, 2007) proposal to *pos* morpheme to give a proper semantics for *very* that will be useful to derive its readings on step 2 (cf. Sanchez-Mendes, 2015 for Karitiana). Based on the *pos* lexical entry assumed before we present the following lexical entry to *very*.

(35) $[\![very]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d\ [\ G\ (d)(x)\ \&\ d \geq d_{stand\text{-}out}]$

This is identical to *pos* in (27) except for the following definition of $d_{stand\text{-}out}$:

(36) $d_{stand\text{-}out} = \begin{cases} d_{std}\ (m_g) \text{ in its canonical use with relative adjectives} \\ d_{max}(m_g) \text{ if } max(m_g) \text{ can be defined on a predicate} \end{cases}$

It is important to mention that the application of *very* on a closed scale $\mathbf{max(m_g)}$ is different from its relative uses in cases such as *very full* discussed in K&M. As it will be developed in the next section, we are assuming that non-canonical *very* has a true absolute meaning in its non-canonical use.

Notice that this is also different from attributing the maximum degree attachment in the meaning of the modifier, such as *completely*. We are offering an analysis that considers the contribution of the predicate under modification to derive the proper use of the modified phrase compositionally.

(37) $[\![completely\ ]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x.\exists d\ [d = \mathbf{max}(S_G)\ \&\ G(d)(x)\ ]$

4.2 Scales Modified by Non-canonical 'Very'

The second step of our analysis consists of associating a closed scale to NPs that are not lexically gradable and are modified by non-canonical *very*.[10] Despite being a contextual correlation, this is based on the type of scales that can be associated to different types of grammatical classes. According to Doetjes (2008), open scales are an attribute exclusive of adjectives. Other predicates such as NPs and VPs are typically associated to closed scales. The relation of NPs and VPs with a "zero" reading (38) bases them like lower closed scale predicates.

(38) a. John read no books. (no books = zero books)

b. John did not read. ('zero' reading by John)

(Doetjes, 2008: 152)

Notice the difference between (38) and (39). Since *tall* is an open scale adjective and has a relative standard, (39a) is not contradictory. John has some degree on the scale of stature and can be compared to the standard degree of the scale and with other individuals. Differently from the examples in (38), there is no "zero" degree in the stature scale. (39b) on the other hand has an absolute standard determined by the minimum degree, then the object must have a non-zero degree of the property or it cannot be applied. Similarly, in (39c), the modified scale is determined by the minimum degree of appreciation involved in the verbal predicate *to appreciate* hence the sentence is also odd.

(39) a. John is not tall, but he is taller than Peter.

b. #This towel is not wet but is its wetter than that one.

c. #John did not appreciate the movie, but he appreciated it more than Peter did.

(Doetjes, 2008: 153)

Assuming Doetjes's (2008) proposal that closed scales are found both in adjectival and other domains such as NPs we propose that they are found in non-canonical uses of very. We take NPs modified by very to be associated to an absolute standard determined by not only a minimum (similarly to what was sad about NPs in (38a)), but also by a maximum degree. NPs can then be associated to a 0-1 scale involved in an identity operation. Recall that the difference between dstd and dmax in (36) induce the difference between greater than (>) and equals to (=). Crucially in the case of NPs combined with very we have a closed scale involved in an identity operation.

We propose then that very has a semantic and a pragmatic use. This is in accordance with Sawada (2018) that noted that pragmatic scalar modifiers usually perform a "dual use", one semantic (at-issue) and one pragmatics (not-at-issue). We will not go deep on the pragmatical composition of very on the direction of Sawada (2018). We just assume that a pragmatical use can be found in some degree modifiers. Specially in the case of very, the pragmatic nature concerns the possibility of complex NPs that are not lexically gradable of being contextually associated to a closed scale.

In this sense *very* is similar to *totally* in English, an intensifier that is also engaged in a commitment/precision use. In its semantic use *totally* selects a specific type of adjective, an upper-bounded scale predicate and it encodes the same content as *completely* (40a) (K&M). On its pragmatic use (40b) it is applied to the proposition level and strengths the speaker's engagement to the utterance and expresses something like *unquestionably* (Beltrama, 2018).

(40) a. The bus is **totally** full.

b. You should **totally** click on that link! It's awesome.

However, *very* and *totally* differ in the sense that *totally* attaches to isomorphic scales on the semantic and pragmatic domains. The maximum degree available by the lexicon in (40a) is mapped in the universal quantification proposed to capture the speaker's commitment on the pragmatic level (cf. Beltrama, 2018). *Very* on the other hand acts on different types of scales according to each domain. It attaches to open scales on the semantic domain (K&M) and on closed ones on its pragmatic use according to our proposal. Besides, *totally* is attached to a scale related to the speaker's commitment and it is, then, a propositional level modifier. *Very*, on the other hand, has a narrower scope and indicates a property of the individual denoted by the NP. Next section shows how this formally works putting the 2 steps together.

4.3 Putting the 2 Steps Together

[10] We are considering that the order of semantic composition follows the word order: *definite article (very (complex NP))*. Any other proposal would have to deal with linearization.

This section shows how the steps suggested above can adequately derive the interpretation of sentences of both canonical and non-canonical *very*. We are going to show how a unified lexical entry such as the one proposed in (41a) [=(35)] works with both adjectives and NPs.

(41) a. $[\![\textit{very}]\!] = \lambda G \lambda x. \exists d [G(d)(x) \ \& \ d \geq d_{stand\text{-}out}]$ = (35)

b. A more specific version for (36)

$$\{ \begin{array}{l} d_{std}\ (m_g) \text{ in its canonical use with relative adjectives} \\ m_g \text{ is lexically defined by the adjective} \\ d_{max}(m_g) \text{ if } max(m_g) \text{ can be defined on a predicate} \\ m_g \text{ is contextually defined by the NP} \end{array}$$

First, (43) illustrates the derivation of canonical *very* modifying a relative adjective.

(42) John is **very** tall.

(43) $[\![\textit{very tall}]\!]_{<e,t>} = [\![\textit{very}]\!] \ ([\![\textit{tall}]\!])$

$[\![\textit{very tall}]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda G \lambda x. \exists d [G(d)(x) \ \& \ d \geq d_{stand\text{-}out}] \ (\lambda d \ \lambda x.$ "stature" $(x) = d)$

$[\![\textit{very tall}]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda x. \exists d [\lambda x.$ "stature" $(x) = d \ \& \ d > d_{std}(\text{stature})]$

$[\![\textit{John is very tall}]\!]_t = \lambda x. \exists d [\lambda x.$ "stature" $(x) = d \ \& \ d > d_{std}(\text{stature})]$ (John)

$[\![\textit{John is very tall}]\!]_t = 1$ sse $\exists d [$ "stature" (John) $= d \ \& \ d > d_{std}(\text{stature})]$

In words, *John is very tall* is true if there is a degree **d** associated to the stature of John that is higher than a standard degree $\mathbf{d_{std}}$ associated to the stature dimension in the context.

Now turning to the derivation of non-canonical *very* in (44) in which the DP encodes, for example, that there is a unique house in the context in which John lived in when he was younger.

(44) I saw [the very house John lived in].

The first obvious obstacle in this derivation is that even if we assume that *very* can be associated to different types of predicates as it is stated in (41b), the NP *house John lived in* is a predicate of individual of type <e,t> and has no degree variable.

(45) $[\![$ *very house John lived in* $]\!] = [\![$ *very* $]\!] \ ([\![$ *house John lived in* $]\!])$

undefined - type mismatch

In order to solve this kind of type mismatch, we follow Sanchez-Mendes's (2014) type-shifting rule $\mathbf{Deg_{noun}}$ that takes predicates of type <e,t> and gives a gradable predicate of type <d,<e,t>> associated to a precision dimension (following Morzycki, 2011; Masià, 2013).

(46) $[\![\textit{Deg}_{NOUN}]\!] = \lambda P_{<e,t>} \lambda d \ \lambda x.$ P(x) & "precision_P" $(x) = d$

Crucially we are adapting this function to *very* assuming that precision is taken to be a 0-1 closed scale that is not lexically available but is contextually determined. Its pragmatic counterpart lies in the way this precision is interpreted in each situation. This goes in hand with the fact that *very* modifies complex NPs that help enriching the context and describing the modified scale. The derivation in (47) shows the implementation of $\mathbf{Deg_{NOUN}}$ with a complex NP modified by non-canonical *very*.

(47) $[\![$ *house John lived in*$_{DEG}$ $]\!]_{<d,<e,t>>} = [\![\textit{Deg}_{NOUN}]\!] \ ([\![$ *house John lived in* $]\!])$

$[\![$ *house John lived in*$_{DEG}$ $]\!]_{<d,<e,t>>} = \lambda P_{<e,t>} \lambda d \ \lambda x.$ P(x) & "precision_P" $(x) = d \ (\lambda x.$ house (x) & lived-in (x) (John)) [11]

$[\![$ *house John lived in*$_{DEG}$ $]\!]_{<d,<e,t>>} = \lambda d \ \lambda x.$ house (x) & lived-in (x) (John) & "precision_{house}" $(x) = d$

Now *very* can be applied on the gradable version of the NP turning it to a predicate of individuals to be attached by the determiner.

(48) $[\![$ *very house John lived in* $]\!]_{<e,t>} = [\![$ *very* $]\!] \ ([\![$ *house John lived in* $]\!]_{<d,<e,t>>})$

$[\![$ *very house John lived in* $]\!]_{<e,t>} = \lambda G \lambda x. \exists d [G(d)(x) \ \& \ d \geq d_{stand\text{-}out}] \ (\lambda d \ \lambda x.$ house (x) & lived-in (x)(John)

[11] For sake of simplicity we are ignoring tense and aspect in the denotation.

& "precision$_{house}$" (x) = d)

⟦ *very house John lived in* ⟧$_{<e,t>}$ = λx.∃d [house (x) & lived-in (x)(John) & "precision$_{house}$" (x) = d & d = d_{max}]

(49) shows the derivation of the DP.

(49) ⟦ *the very house John lived in* ⟧$_s$ = ⟦ *the* ⟧(⟦ *veryhouse John lived in* ⟧)

⟦ *the very house John lived in* ⟧$_s$ = λf. the unique x for which f(x)=1 (λx.∃d [house (x) & lived-in (x) (John) & "precision$_{house}$" (x) = d & d = d_{max}][12]

⟦ *the very house John lived in* ⟧$_s$ = the unique x for which ∃d [house (x) & lived-in (x) (John)

& "precision$_{house}$" (x) = d & d = d_{max}]

In words, the DP *the very house John lived in* denotes the unique **x** for which **x** is a house, John lived in **x**, and **x** is associated to a degree **d** that is maximum is a contextual scale of precision associated to **x**.

We consider that the joint of the semantics of the definite article and the contribution of the maximum degree in a scale enriched by modification of the NP generates exhaustivity as a sub-product. That is why the speaker paraphrased sentences with non-canonical *very* considering that the DP in case denotes a unique individual (or group) and discards other possibilities.

This section showed a proposal to non-canonical *very* based on its canonical denotation. Scalar semantics enabled an unified analysis based on logical properties of the scales associated to the modified predicates. The analysis presented support the general idea that scalar properties are relevant to the compositional computation of the meaning of sentences with degree modifiers.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we analyze the use of non-canonical *very*. Firstly, we presented and explained the three methodological steps involved in our data collection exemplifying sentences with non-canonical *very*. As described, we selected sentences from *The British National Corpus* and from some British and American novels written in the 19th and 20th centuries that helped us proceed to the third step which was the controlled elicitation of contexts with the participation of a native speaker of Wales. Our data indicate that non-canonical *very* modifies definite DPs with complex NPs.

We offered an analysis for non-canonical *very* not focusing on its difference with the canonical intensifier but on their similarity. We were very much inspired by an intuition that was beautifully captured by Beltrama (2018): "An outstanding issue concerns the relationship between the lexical and the pragmatic use, and in particular whether, beneath their obvious differences, the two flavors of the intensifier still share a semantic kernel." (Beltrama, 2018, 37).

We left open some important questions though. The first concerns on how the pragmatic nature can be compositionally captured. We incorporated the context in a precision scale that could be better developed in other terms. One could argue for example in favor of an analysis on the line of conventional implicatures (cf. Potts, 2005 and Sawada, 2018). The second is on the proper role of definite determiners that attach to NPs modified by non-canonical *very.* It is not clear if they have the same presuppositional function as nonmodified version (e.g. *the house John lived in*). If *very* selects a maximum degree by an identity operation providing a unique element on the contextual scale, it remains open what is the precise operation performed by the definite article in phrases like this. The answer can either assume that definite articles are expletives in phrases with non-canonical *very* (cf. Longobardi, 1994) or either consider it is related to exhaustivity as a conventional meaning rather than a sub-product as it was interpreted in this paper. These are all topics for further research.

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[12] We are adopting a very simple notion of the definite article. Please see Heim & Kratzer (1998) and the works cited in it for discussion.

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