'Good' as an evaluative intensifier

Goals and claims. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the semantics of evaluative modifiers from the perspective of the interaction between meaning types, and in view of two related Catalan modifiers, namely the ad-nominal *bon* 'good'(e.g. *una bona estona* 'a good while') and the ad-adjectival *ben* 'well' (e.g. *ben clar* 'well clear'). We build on the lexical semantics of the predicate **good** and the subsective composition mode to claim that **good** selects the good instances in the extension of N/A. This yields intensification whenever the extension is ordered. Moreover, a monotonicity inference is conveyed through a Conventional Implicature, which makes evaluative modifiers unacceptable under negation.

The phenomenon. We are concerned with the differences in interpretation of the modifier *bon* in (1). (1-a) is the evaluative subsective modifier *good*; (1-b) is what we call INTENSIFYING GOOD (bon_{int}), roughly paraphrased as 'big'; (1-c) is ambiguous between the two readings. Unlike English (on which see McNally and Kennedy, 2013), Catalan additionally has an ad-adjectival modifier, INTENSIFYING WELL (ben_{int}), roughly paraphrased as 'really', modifying genuine adjectives, irrespective of their scale structure, (2) (Castroviejo and Gehrke, 2015).

(1)   a.   un bon   actor, un bon   moment, un bon   dia, una bona solució
              a   good actor   a   good moment   a   good day   a   good solution

         b.   un bon   autocontrol, un bon   nombre de liberals, un bon   grapat   d'exemples,
              a   good self-control   a   good number of liberals   a   good handful of examples
              una bona part, una bona estona, un bon   ensurt, un bon   maldecap
              a   good part   a   good while   a   good shock   a   good headeache

         c.   un bon   pernil, un bon   massatge, una bona embarcació
              a   good ham   a   good massage   a   good ship

(2)   a.   Closed scale As: ben clar 'lit. well clear', ben segur 'lit. well sure', ben ple 'well full', ben explícit 'well explicit'

         b.   Open scale As: ben lluny 'well far', ben content 'well glad', ben alt 'well tall'

Castroviejo and Gehrke (2015) analyze ben_{int} as non-truth-conditionally imposing a 'good property ascription'. Here we intend to make this notion more precise by taking into consideration the analogous semantics of bon_{int} as an ad-nominal modifier. We will show that the distribution of ben_{int} and bon_{int} — both resist being under negative operators, (3) — can be explained if we assume that they include a monotonicity Conventional Implicature. This could in fact extend to other evaluative modifiers such as *surprisingly* (Nouwen, 2005, 2011).

(3)   a.   (#No) hem   tingut un bon   ensurt.
              neg   have.we had   a   good shock

         b.   En Pau   (#no) és   ben   alt.
              the Paul neg   is   well tall

Background. We rely on the morpho-syntactic opposition between prenominal *bon* 'good' and postnominal *bo* 'good' and the respective subsective vs. intersective interpretations, (4), (cf. Demonte, 1982, 1999, for Spanish *buen–bueno*) to draw some conclusions about the right analysis of bon_{int} and, by extension, ben_{int}.

(4)   a.   un bon   amic   b.   un amic   bo
            a   good friend   a   friend good
            ≈ good as a friend   ≈ good as a human being

Good has also been studied as an evaluative adjective (one that gives rise to faultless disagreement) with a quasi-denotation. According to Umbach (2015), while there is not a property that all good things share, *good* is able to refer because speakers assign to objects different *criteria* for goodness, which make 'good N' informative, albeit highly context-dependent.

Analysis. We propose that the difference between bon_{int} and ben_{int} is merely syntactic. They are both modifiers of type $\langle et, et \rangle$ that take in a set of individuals and select good instances thereof. This alone does not yield intensification. On the one hand, we want to restrict Ns to sets of objects that are naturally ordered (this comes for free in gradable As). On the other hand, we posit a monotonicity inference encoded as a Conventional Implicature, which cannot be under the scope of operators such as negation. We assume that *bon* has the subsective denotation in (5-a) (adapted from Morzycki's 2016 denotation for *skillful*), plus the restriction in the characteristics of N, and the addition of the non-truth-conditional inference in (5-b).

(5) a. $[\![\text{bon}_{int}]\!] = \lambda P_{\langle e,t \rangle} \lambda x_e : \forall y, z \in P[y > z \lor z > y].(\textbf{good-as}(P))(x)$
     b. $\forall y[P(y) \land y > x \rightarrow (\textbf{good-as}(P))(y)]$

Let us start with bon_{int}. Regular subsective *bon* would yield the right meaning for the sentences in (1-a). If John is a good friend, he is good as a friend (only the good instances of friend individuals are selected). To determine whether an individual is a good friend, we take into account many criteria, depending on which different individuals can score differently in the various dimensions (listening abilities, remembering your birthday, helping out, etc.). In (1-b), the N's extensions include individuals that are ordered; self-control instances are different according to their sizes. The same holds for numbers (any measurement nominals) and shocks. When bon_{int} applies to such Ns, there is just one criterion to determine goodness, namely the position in the ordering (such Ns are uni-dimensional). Interestingly, the cases of (1-c) are ambiguous, because these Ns are multi-dimensional, so the subsective interpretation is fine. However, they still can be interpreted as uni-dimensional if the speaker takes a ham, a ship or a massage to only be good if their size is remarkable. If this happens, then bon_{int} arises.

Moving on to gradable As, the first consequence of this analysis is that ben_{int} does not combine with A directly (it is not a degree modifier that binds the A's degree argument). To parallel the ad-nominal case, we assume that ben_{int} selects for POS+A, so, again, what ben_{int} operates on is individuals, and it selects good instances thereof. If A has an upper bounded scale, ben_{int} will have the effect of removing slack (Lasersohn, 1999). When it modifies a relative A, the speaker will take the subject to be a good instance of an A individual, and the monotonicity inference will ensure that any individual that is ordered above her on the scale also counts as good.

We argue that the monotonicity inference is non-truth-conditionally conveyed, because it cannot be targeted by sentence operators such as negation. In fact, this is how we explain the resistance to embed under negative contexts (i.e. the PPI behavior) of bon/ben_{int}: if the at-issue content is negated, then the non-truth-conditional meaning, which cannot be detached, yields a falsity. That is, if x is not a good instance of a shock, then it does not follow that any bigger shock will count as good. This, we put forth, is the reason why evaluativity-based intensifiers behave as positive polarity items. They share the expression of intensification as a secondary meaning, which yields falsity if the at-issue part is challenged by sentential operators, (6).

(6) a. $\neg \exists x[(\textbf{good-as}(\textbf{shock}))(x) \land \textbf{had}(\textbf{I}, x)]$ (cf. (3-a))
     b. $\forall y[\textbf{shock}(y) \land y > x \rightarrow (\textbf{good-as}(\textbf{shock}))(y)]$

Conclusions: We have proposed an analysis of INTENSIFYING GOOD/WELL that draws on the subsective interpretation of the modifier and on the upward-directed inferences that operate as a secondary meaning. Far-reaching consequences include the over-arching attempt to derive intensification or emphasis of predicates without appealing to degrees.

Selected Refs: Castroviejo & Gehrke (2015). A GOOD intensifier. *New Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*. Springer • Morzycki (2016). *Modification*. CUP • Nouwen (2011). Degree modifiers and monotonicity. *Vagueness and Language Use*. Palgrave McMillan • Umbach (2015). Evaluative propositions and subjective judgments. *Subjective Meaning*. De Gruyter.