

RELATIVE *MOST* COMPARED

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Following Bobaljik (2012); Hackl (2009), Roelandt (2016) claims that the the Dutch quantifier *meeste* ‘most’ should be analysed as a superlative.

- (1) Jan heeft de meeste bergen beklommen.
John has the most mountains climbed
‘John climbed (the) most mountains.’
a. John climbed more mountains than he didn’t climb. (proportional)
b. John climbed more mountains than the other climbers did. (relative)
- (2) Jan heeft de hoogste berg beklommen.
John has the highest mountain climbed
‘John climbed (the) highest mountain.’
a. John climbed the mountain that is higher than all other mountains. (absolute)
b. John climbed a higher mountain than anybody else. (relative)

De meeste (1) displays behaviour similar to other superlatives such as *de hoogste* ‘the highest’ (2). The former has a proportional interpretation instead of an absolute one (compare (1a) and (2a)), but both constructions have relative interpretations, cf. (1b) and (2b). In Flemish, however, *meeste* can also appear with the neuter definite article *het* ‘the’, that normally does not appear with plural nouns.

- (3) Jan heeft het meeste bergen beklommen.
John has the_{NEUT.SING} most mountains_{MASC.PLURAL} climbed
‘John climbed the most mountains.’
a. - (proportional)
b. John climbed more mountains than the other climbers did. (relative)
- (4) *Jan heeft het hoogste bergen beklommen.
John has the_{NEUT.SING} highest mountain_{MASC.PLURAL} climbed

The sentence in (3) only has the relative interpretation and a similar construction is unavailable for sentences with the superlative *hoogste* (4). Moreover, definiteness tests for DPs with superlative structures in (1) and (2) indicate that they are definite, whereas *het meeste bergen* (3) is indefinite despite the presence of the definite article *het*. The exact nature of *het meeste* remains unclear and a satisfactory syntactic and semantic analysis is still lacking.

Even though I will only discuss mild progress in solving the puzzle, I will add new pieces by presenting related data from North Germanic languages, showing that the indefinite

superlative *het meeste* is no exception and that the phenomenon is wide-spread across languages.

REFERENCES

- Bobaljik, Jonathan David. 2012. *Universals in comparative morphology: Suppletion, superlatives, and the structure of words*. Current Studies in Linguistics. MIT Press.
- Hackl, Martin. 2009. On the grammar and processing of proportional quantifiers: *Most* versus *More Than Half*. *Natural Language Semantics* 17:63–98.