

ON THREE KINDS OF QUANTIFIERS INTERACTING WITH COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

RICK NOUWEN
JOINT WORK WITH JAKUB DOTLACIL

Where quantifiers and comparison meet, lie many puzzles. The classical puzzle amounts to the question why “This table is longer than every door is wide” means that the table in question is longer than the width of the widest door. In particular, it has turned out to be incredibly challenging to arrive at a compositional account of such a more-than-the-maximum reading (Larson 1988, Schwarzchild & Wilkinson 2002, Heim 2006, Beck 2010/2012/2014). To make things worse, some examples have a more-than-the-minimum reading, such as “This table is longer than it needs to be” (i.e. the table exceeds the *minimally* required length). This distinction between the two readings is not one between nominal and modal quantifiers, nor is it tied to quantificational force. In fact, as far as I can see, we have very little understanding of what decides whether an interpretation is about a minimum or a maximum.

These observations are not a quirk of comparatives. They are closely connected to observations of scope effects in the matrix clause of a comparative (Heim 2000, Lassiter 2010, Alrenga & Kennedy 2014) and they also occur in certain kinds of superlatives, as in “the fastest John should drive” (more-than-the-maximum) versus “the fastest John needs to drive” (more-than-the-minimum).

Although I will discuss what I think is mild progress in solving some of these and related puzzles (Dotlacil and Nouwen 2016), my main contribution in this talk will be to add a new conundrum. In particular, I will discuss data that indicate that there is an unexpected split in the interpretative effects of nominal and modal quantifiers in comparatives: nominal quantifiers, whether they trigger more-than-minimum or more-than-maximum readings are still different from all the modal quantifiers.