

On evaluative intensification and positive polarity

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the positive polarity behavior of emphatically used evaluative intensifiers (EIs), such as *extremely*. We aim to show that polarity is a by-product of their behaving like expressive items in the sense of Potts (2005, 2007). Building on Liu's (2012, 2014) account of evaluative adverbs, we argue that EIs similarly involve subjective evaluation as side commentaries that come with their own factive presuppositions, which are not satisfied in entailment-canceling contexts. To illustrate our point, we build on the characteristics of the Catalan EI *ben* ('well'), an adjectival modifier which has been identified in the literature as a positive polarity item, and which we analyze as contributing a positive evaluation of a property ascription. In doing that, we are also able to capture the core shared meaning with the manner adverb *well* across languages, and to explain how evaluative intensification is triggered.

1. Introduction

Since Klima's (1964) seminal work on polarity sensitive items, most works on the topic have concentrated on Negative Polarity Items (NPIs), such as *any*, *either*, *lift a finger*. Positive Polarity Items (PPIs) have not received that much attention and when they do they are usually characterized as the counterpart of NPIs. So while NPIs need to be licensed in a particular context, which has been theoretically proposed to be downward entailing (Ladusaw 1980), anti-morphic (van der Wouden 1997) or non-veridical (Zwarts 1995, Giannakidou 1999), PPIs have been said to be anti-licensed in these environments. The most common such context is negation; thus NPIs (e.g. *either*) have to occur under the semantic scope of negation, while PPIs (e.g. *too*) cannot, as illustrated in (1).¹

- (1) a. I have *(not) seen the movie *either*.

¹ Depending on the syntactic theory one pursues, semantic scope can be equivalent to syntactic scope at some level of representation, even if the surface order may not reflect the underlying scope relations; in this paper we will mainly be concerned with the notion of semantic scope.

- b. I have (*not) seen the movie *too*.

Other such contexts are general entailment-canceling contexts, such as modality, interrogation or the antecedent of a conditional.

A pervasive problem both for NPIs and PPIs is the fact that these groups do not form a homogeneous class, in that some NPIs/PPIs have stronger (anti-)licensing conditions than others, which can lead to a subdivision into strong and weak NPIs/PPIs, and context can also play a role. Thus, while it is important to pin down the logical properties of particular contexts that can (anti-)license such items, it is still rather a description of particular items than actually an explanation why particular items have the polarity properties they have. In this paper, we address one group of items that are often counted among the group of PPIs, so-called intensifiers (see, for instance, Liu and Soehn 2009 for a recent empirical overview of different types of PPIs in German). We will show that a subset of these, those that we will call evaluative intensifiers (EIs), commonly display positive polarity behavior, but we will aim at explaining this behavior in terms of the particular semantics-pragmatics of these items.

Following Kennedy and McNally (2005b), intensifiers, such as *amazingly*, *rather*, or *very*, are syntactic and semantic modifiers of properties constructed out of gradable adjectives. In his book on degree words, in which Bolinger (1972, 129) comments on the behavior of certain degree expressions under negation, he observes that some intensifiers are ruled out under negation, except in an echo reading, as illustrated in (2).

- (2) a. *The girl isn't *quite* attractive.
 b. *I think she's not *pretty* good-lucking.
 c. *He's not *rather* foolish.

That is, we can only make sense of the previous examples if we assume that the speaker is repeating a sequence — here, an intensifier — that another discourse participant has pronounced in a previous discourse turn. Otherwise, the sequence is ill-formed, as indicated by * in (2).

Taking a step further, Bosque (1980, 20) includes some Spanish intensifiers among the list of PPIs, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) a. *No hemos llegado *ya*.

- neg have.pres.we arrived already
 b. *La película no me ha gustado *bastante*.
 the movie neg me has pleased quite
 c. *No tiene usted toda la razón del mundo.
 neg has.pres.3.sg you.honorific all the reason of the world

These examples show that the degree word *bastante* ('quite') and the intensification expression *toda la N del mundo* ('all the N in the world') are banned under negation.² In fact, the sentences in (3) are only possible in an echo reading, as was the case in (2).

González-Rodríguez (2006) explores in more detail the behavior of Spanish emphatically used intensifiers, which are called *elatives* in Spanish grammars and which we will call evaluative intensifiers (EIs), in entailment-canceling contexts. In (4) we render her examples of EIs under negation (González-Rodríguez 2006, 855).

- (4) a. Pablo (*no) es listo *como el hambre*.
 Paul neg is smart like the hunger
 'Pablo is (not) extremely smart.'
 b. Irene (*no) es *bien* espabilada.
 Irene neg is well bright
 '(lit.) Irene is (not) well bright.'
 c. Tu jefe (*no) *más* comprensivo!
 your boss neg is more understanding
 'Your boss is (not) so understanding!'

This restricted distribution of EIs, then, suggests an analogy with well-known instances of PPIs, such as *some* and *already*, in the same way as it is already found in Bosque's work.

Finally, Morzycki (2012, 34) claims in a paper on adjectival extremeness that extreme degree modifiers such as *downright*, *flat-out*, *positively* and *full-on* show resistance to embed under the aforementioned entailment-canceling operators, (5) (see also Liu and Soehn 2009 on German).

- (5) a. Murderers aren't (??*downright*) dangerous.
 b. Are murderers (??*downright*) dangerous?

² See also Liu and Soehn (2009) for a discussion of the PPI behavior of idioms.

- c. If murderers are (??*downright*) dangerous, you might want to avoid Harold.

He also establishes an analogy with expressives in the sense of Potts (2007) in that expressives, like his extreme degree modifiers, resist embedding under entailment-canceling operators, as shown in (6).

- (6) a. ??He isn't fucking calm.
 b. ??If he is fucking calm, you could try poking him with this stick.

This and other similarities (judge dependence, direct connection to discourse context, ineffability, etc.) lead Morzycki to suggest that extreme degree modifiers contribute “a kind of expressive meaning”. We will also entertain this idea in our analysis for Catalan *ben* (cf. Section 4), which behaves very much like its Spanish cognate *bien* in (4)b.

To the best of our knowledge, apart from descriptions that categorize EIs as PPIs or postulate a high syntactic position for these items that obligatorily make them appear above negation, there is no systematic formal semantic analysis that captures their PPI-behavior (or that of extreme degree modifiers). Our purpose is to attempt such a formal semantic analysis. Furthermore, we aim at bringing together the data presented so far with the broader set of data that belong in the literature on expressive items, so as to pin down the relationship between positive polarity and the properties of expressive meaning as instances of conventional implicatures (CI) in the sense of Potts (2005, 2007).

Our main claims are the following:

- a) Intensifiers exhibit a varied behavior in entailment-canceling environments. Some can be in the scope of NPI-licensing operators and yield a litotes interpretation. Others cannot be in their scope.
- b) The reason why certain intensifiers resist embedding is because of the presupposition of the CI content they convey (building on Liu 2012, Liu 2014 regarding evaluative adverbs).
- c) Catalan intensifying *ben* ‘well’ positively evaluates a property ascription and delivers this content at the CI tier.

In the next section, we contextualize our research by briefly sketching the previous literature on EIs. In Section 3, we discuss the scope interactions between intensifiers and negation so as to formulate a typology we can work with, since as far as we know the previous literature has not provided such a typology. We then turn to *ben* in Section 4. First, we establish empirical differences between Catalan intensifier *ben* and English *well*. Second, we present empirical differences between *ben* and prototypical degree modifiers. Third, we describe the subjective behavior of *ben*, and finally we spell out our proposal. Section 5 summarizes what the previous literature has said about evaluative predicates and relates these findings to our observations about *ben*. The article resumes in Section 6 by zooming out to address the main questions regarding extreme degree and polarity.

2. Evaluative intensifiers: previous literature

Intensifiers are often taken to be degree expressions that have a degree-boosting effect; that is, they manipulate a contextual standard of a gradable property to a higher value (we will qualify this claim below). Characteristically, intensifiers yield a subjective and vague — rather than objective and precise — predication. We will call *evaluative intensifiers* (EI, hereafter) those hyperbolic and emphatic expressions that modify properties and which usually yield ill-formedness in entailment-canceling environments. In the following, we will briefly discuss two approaches to EIs that treat them either as extreme degree expressions or as PPIs, and we will argue that these treatments do not adequately explain the whole range of data.

2.1. EIs vs. other extreme degree expressions

EIs are characteristically vague, subjective, and, as said, emphatic and often also hyperbolic (e.g. *exceptionally*, *terribly*). In some cases (though not in all, as we will see shortly) their lexical semantics makes reference to an extreme degree (e.g. *extremely*). We argue, however, that they have to be distinguished from those non-vague degree expressions, such as *completely* and *totally*, which select for absolute (e.g. *full*, *certain*) rather than relative (e.g. *tall*, *nice*) adjectives (cf. Kennedy and McNally 2005) (we will come back to this difference in Section 4). For example, in (7)a we see that the EI *extremely* is compatible with the relative adjective *tall*, whereas *completely* is not, because the latter directly relies on an endpoint on a scale provided by the scale structure of the adjective it applies to, which relative adjectives simply lack. (7)b in turn illustrates that *completely* is compatible with

the absolute adjective *empty*; the EI *extremely* is not, because it can only modify open scale adjectives.

- (7) a. John is extremely / *completely tall.
 b. The pool is *extremely / completely empty.

Nevertheless, the fact that in some cases EIs seem to be similar to degree expressions that are sensitive to extreme endpoints, such as *completely*, has led González Rodríguez (2010) to assume that both classes of modifiers express quantification to the highest degree. Faced with the *paradox* in (7), then, she argues that endpoint-oriented degree words like *extremely* (our EIs) have two functions. On the one hand, they close the open scale denoted by the relative adjective they modify (i.e. they turn a relative adjective into an absolute one), and on the other hand, they relate the subject of predication to the highest degree on the scale that has been closed. In fact, she adds that EIs “subjectively close the scale” and, thus, the associated evaluative component or emphasis is not lexically encoded in them, but it is a consequence of the fact that EIs are “oriented to the speaker.”

While the facts are indisputable, the initial paradox may not be a real problem. Certainly, *extremely* includes some lexical reference to an extreme, but this need not be mapped into a lexical semantics whereby the subject is located in the maximum degree of the scale. Assuming that the judgment in (8) is crisp enough as an indication that *extremadamente* ‘extremely’ points at the extreme end of the scale, this could also be compatible with a semantics in which the EI conveys that Ángeles is sweeter than the speaker expects anyone else to be. Crucially, this superlative meaning does not necessarily involve making reference to a bounded scale.

- (8) Ángeles es extremadamente dulce, #aunque no tanto como María. (González Rodríguez 2010: 134)
 ‘Ángeles is extremely sweet, #although not as much as María.’

Moreover, it is not clear to us how the two putative functions of EIs can be formally spelled out. Most importantly, it does not seem descriptively adequate to assume that all *elatives* (our EIs) involve extreme degrees, in which case this analysis would not be able to capture the meaning of some of the intended data. We will see that in particular the EI that we will be concerned with, *ben* (and similarly its Spanish counterpart *bien*) does not make reference to extreme degrees on a scale, and we will argue in more

detail in Section 4 that EIs like *ben* do not directly operate on degrees, unlike regular degree expressions.

Since other EIs do not mention extremeness, then, even if they are emphatic and evaluative (e.g. *surprisingly*, *admirably*, *unusually*, and Catalan *ben*, as will see shortly), we will approach the analysis of EIs from the inverse perspective; it is precisely the expressive character of EIs what yields the other related properties, such as the subjective notion of a degree that exceeds certain expected boundaries (cf. Morzycki's 2012 'zone of indifference' to characterize degrees that are off the scale).

Let us then turn to proposals that treat EIs as PPIs.

2.2. EIs as polarity items

The previous literature on Spanish EIs has embraced the idea that they are PPIs and that this explains their inability to appear in such contexts. Hernanz (1999), for example, analyzes the similarities between polarity particles such as *sí* ('yes') and *bien* in its various uses, and proposes for Spanish ad-adjectival *bien* a [+INT] ('intensifier') feature that triggers its (covert) movement to the specifier of Laka's (1990) higher polarity projection ΣP .³ The incompatibility of such terms with negation is thus explained by the impossibility of negative words to occupy the same syntactic position. As pointed out by Mingya Liu (p.c.), however, this does not explain why it is also ruled out in other entailment-canceling contexts (as we will discuss in more detail in Section 4), since in those contexts there is no negation occupying the same position.

González Rodríguez (2006 and 2010) argues that EIs satisfy all their requisites on their base position, and so movement is not licensed because it would not trigger any interpretive effect. In fact, it is shown that EIs may occur in a negated sentence as long as they remain out of the focus of negation. In this account, the PPI behavior of extreme degree words is not related to the syntactic checking of a polarity feature. Instead, it is tied to the lexical semantics of EIs, and more specifically, to the unavailability of a well-formed interpretation on the basis of the possible scope relations. Her explanation is impressionistically laid out in (9) (González Rodríguez 2010: 143, our translation).

³ In her 2007 paper, Hernanz argues that *bien* sits in the specifier position of a Polarity Phrase.

- (9) *Roberto no es extremadamente generoso.
 ‘Robert is not extremely generous.’
- a. #‘There exists a degree *d*, such that Robert is generous to this degree, and *d* is not the maximum degree on the generosity scale.’ [*Neg > EI]
 - b. #‘There is not a degree *d*, such that *d* is the maximum degree on the generosity scale, and Robert is not generous to this degree.’ [*Neg > EI]
 - c. #‘There is a degree *d*, such that *d* is the maximum degree on the generosity scale, and Robert is not generous to this degree.’ [*EI > Neg]

Theoretically, (9) could have three different readings but none of them is available. Under the reading in (9)c the degree argument associated with the modified degree expression, even though it syntactically appears below negation, semantically outscopes negation; this is not possible for reasons we will get back to in the next section. The other two readings involve negation scoping over the degree argument, but in the two different ways described in the paraphrases. According to González Rodríguez, the main difference between a plain intensifier like *my* (‘very’) and an EI is that *my* has an available paraphrase corresponding to (9)a. (i.e. *John is not very tall* can be paraphrased as ‘There is a degree *d*, such that John is tall to this degree, and *d* is not a high degree on the generosity scale’, cf. Subsection 3.2. for the details).

First, it is not clear to us why negation should be able to target both the existence of a unique maximum degree, as in the paraphrase in (9)a, and Robert’s height, as in the paraphrase in (9)b. If this were the case, it should follow that the sentence *The pool is not completely full* has a denotation where the existence of a unique maximum degree of fullness is also negated, which seems counterintuitive. Rather, what negation contributes is the fact that the fullness of the pool does not reach its maximal capacity. Second, since there is no such thing as a maximum degree of generosity, it is implausible that this paraphrase yields the right interpretation in positive contexts, unless we posit that this is part of the lexical semantics of EIs.

In the present paper, we follow González Rodríguez’s strategy in that we attempt a semantic explanation of the PPI behavior of EIs, and in particular, of Catalan *ben*, but we propose a different semantics. While treating them as PPIs may be descriptively sound, we doubt that integrating EIs in

the set of PPIs will help pin down what PPIs have in common as a semantic class. Also, we believe that an analogy with other evaluative and expressive items, with which EIs seem to form a natural class, may yield a principled explanation for a number of relevant properties, including their PPI behavior, but also their emphatic value and their subjectivity. Thus, we will argue that PPI-hood is not the *explanation* for the behavior of EIs in entailment-canceling contexts, rather we treat their PPI behavior as a *consequence* of their expressive character.

In the following section, we provide a broader description of the behavior of different types of intensifiers in negative contexts.

3. A typology of intensifiers under negation

Our purpose in this section is to discuss the available meanings of intensifiers (more generally, so as to include EIs) when they interact with negation. This broader picture will give us a notion of what readings we should expect for EIs, which will help us identify the causes of their ill-formedness in entailment-canceling contexts.

3.1. The metalinguistic reading

As hinted at in the previous sections, intensifiers behave in different ways under negation, depending on scope and lexical properties. Foremost, there is the option of having negation affect the use of the specific intensifier. This corresponds to a metalinguistic or echo reading, mentioned by Bolinger (1972) in (2), and illustrated again in (10).

- (10) a. Patricia is not VERY tall, she is EXTREMELY tall.
 b. I didn't meet a REALLY handsome man, I met a DROP DEAD handsome man.

Crucially, any linguistic string — including morphemes and phonemes — can be targeted by metalinguistic negation, so the specific interpretive outcome of the combination of negation and intensifier in this particular case is not going to be revealing for our purposes. In the cases of (10), the interpretation can be paraphrased as follows: Patricia should not be characterized by the expression 'very tall', but rather 'extremely tall', in (10)a, and I met a man that should not be characterized as 'really handsome' but rather 'drop dead handsome', in (10)b. Finally, observe that stress on the intensifier is flagging that this is not a case of regular negation (cf. Horn

1989 for additional features of metalinguistic negation). For the remainder of the paper, we will not be further concerned with metalinguistic negation.

3.2. Negation under the scope of intensifiers

Moving on to scope considerations, we see that Sánchez-López (1999, 2582) identifies a contrast in terms of the scope of negation depending on whether we are dealing with ‘individual quantifiers’ or ‘degree quantifiers’ (her terminology). This is illustrated for Spanish in (11) and (12). While (11) has two possible readings, which rely on two possible scopes of negation, (12) only has one reading, whereby negation takes scope over the intensifier, so that the surface order reflects the semantic scope of the sentence.

- (11) El presidente no respondió muchas preguntas.
 the president neg answered many questions
 ‘The president didn’t answer many questions.’
 a. There are many (specific) questions the president didn’t answer. (MANY > NEG)
 b. The president answered few questions. (NEG > MANY)
- (12) Roberto no es muy generoso.
 d. NOT: There is a high degree of generosity that doesn’t hold of Robert. (*VERY > NEG)
 e. Robert is rather greedy. (NEG > VERY)

This shows that the NEG > intensifier scope is possible for an intensifier like *muy* in Spanish; a further example is given in (13)a and (13)b shows that English *very* behaves like this as well.

- (13) a. Los empleados de esa empresa no están muy satisfechos con su sueldo.
 the employees of this firm neg are very satisfied with their salary
 ‘The employees of this firm aren’t very satisfied with their salary.’
 (From González-Rodríguez 2006, 857).
 b. My food is not very good.

In sum, it seems to be the case that intensifiers cannot outscope negation, but at least some of them (plain intensifiers like *muy* or *very*) can occur

under its scope. This, however, is not the case for all intensifiers, and furthermore, the interpretation we get is actually not the one we would expect if we merely combined the denotations of negation and *very* compositionally, as we will see in the following.

3.3. Intensifiers under the scope of negation

The question we turn to now is whether the interpretation of *not very* and its Spanish counterpart *no muy* is compositionally derived from the denotation of *very* and the denotation of negation. Assume the contribution of *very* to amount to boosting the standard of comparison of the gradable predicate with which it combines. More technically, it shrinks the class of comparison relative to the gradable predicate to include only those individuals that meet the contextual standard.⁴ For instance, *very satisfied* denotes the set of individuals who are at least as satisfied as the standard of satisfaction that is calculated from a collection of individuals — the comparison class — who are all satisfied. In other words, *very satisfied* implies exceeding considerably the contextual standard of satisfaction. Now, imagine we want to compositionally derive the meaning of *very satisfied* with negation. The truth conditions that we expect would be as follows: *not very satisfied* should yield the set of individuals whose degree of satisfaction is below the standard of comparison that is calculated from a collection of individuals — the comparison class — who are all satisfied. Hence, *not very satisfied* should be able to characterize an individual who is satisfied but does not reach the boosted standard. Therefore, the sentences in (14) should be acceptable, contrary to fact.

- (14) a. ??I'm satisfied, but not very satisfied.
 b. ??I'm not very satisfied, but I'm satisfied.

Instead, *not very satisfied* is equivalent to *rather unsatisfied*. That is, what is obtained is the rhetorical figure called litotes. Bolinger (1972, 116) observed that “the litotes tends to deny one end of a polarity to imply an encroachment on the other end.” A selection of his examples is presented in (15), (16), and (17).

- (15) He's not *overly* bright. \equiv He's rather underly bright, rather stupid.
 (16) It isn't much *a whole lot* better. \equiv It's rather worse.

⁴ This idea, which dates back to Klein (1980), can be formulated as in (i), from McNally (2016).

(i) $[[\text{very}]] = \lambda G \lambda x [G(x) \geq d_{s(\{x: \text{pos}(G,y)\})}]$

(17) They weren't *too* convinced of it. \equiv They were pretty unsure of it.

Bolinger illustrates this effect with intensifiers such as *very*, *overly*, *particularly*, *awfully*, etc. Interestingly, if we treat intensifiers as scalar quantifiers in a Horn scale (Horn 1972), litotes is not the expected interpretive outcome. Let us go step by step. If intensifiers behaved like regular quantifiers, we would predict the same entailments and conversational implicatures as the ones in scales such as <all, most, some>, <always, often, sometimes> or <must, should, may>. In such cases, the leftmost element entails the scalars on its right, and any lexical item on the scale conversationally implicates the negation of the scalars on its left. On a scale of the form <extremely tall, very tall, quite tall, tall>, we would expect 'extremely tall' to entail 'quite tall', and 'very tall' to conversationally implicate the negation of 'extremely tall'. Likewise, on a scale like <not quite tall, not very tall, not extremely tall>, 'not very tall' would in principle entail 'not extremely tall', and conversationally implicate 'quite tall'. However, what we have seen with the litotes cases does not go along these lines. For example, if we assume an ordered sequence of the shape: *overly* stupid, *somewhat* stupid, *overly* bright, then 'overly bright' entails 'somewhat bright', and 'not somewhat bright' entails 'not overly bright'. Nevertheless, 'not overly bright' does not really imply 'somewhat bright'. Rather, it implies 'somewhat stupid' or an expression even further down on the scale. We thus conclude that, even when intensifiers are acceptable under the scope of negation, the interpretation we get is not the one we would expect compositionally, but a litotes interpretation.

3.4. NPI intensifiers

While we saw in the previous subsections that English *very* and Spanish *mu*y are intensifiers that can appear under the scope of negation, this is not possible in all languages even for those plain intensifiers. This is so because in certain languages, there are specific intensifiers that are only licensed in entailment-canceling contexts, that is, NPI intensifiers. This is the case of Catalan *gaire* ('much'), which is absent from PPI environments, and which delivers the litotes inference just outlined. We illustrate this case in (18).

(18) Els empleats *(no) estan gaire satisfets.
 the employees neg are NPI-very satisfied
 'The employees are(n't) very satisfied.'

The example in (19) presents evidence of the necessary inference from *no gaire satisfets* ('not very satisfied') to *bastant insatisfets* ('rather unsatisfied').

- (19) #Els empleats no estan gaire satisfets, però estan satisfets.
 the employees neg are.they NPI-very satisfied but are.they satisfied

Finally, let us turn to those intensifiers that simply cannot appear under the scope of negation.

3.5. Intensifiers that cannot be under the scope of negation

In many languages, the option of having negation scope over (certain) intensifiers is plain ungrammatical, such as English **not rather*, **not fairly*, **not pretty*, **not tolerably*, **not sort of*, **not somewhat* (Bolinger 1972: 124), or Catalan **no molt* 'not very'.⁵ Certain emphatic, evaluative or hyperbolic intensifiers (i.e. EIs) have the same behavior, such as Spanish **no extremadamente* 'not extremely'. But note that this is a language-specific lexical restriction, because French *pas extrêmement* and its English counterpart *not extremely* are acceptable — under a litotes interpretation.

In this paper we focus precisely on the ill-formedness of EIs under negation, as noted by González-Rodríguez (2006), and, especially, the case of (20)c, which contains Spanish *bien* 'well'. However, we will deal with Catalan *ben* instead, which is more productive than its Spanish counterpart.

- (20) a. Sus alumnos (*no) son *rematadamente* tontos.
 his students neg are extremely stupid
 'His students are (not) extremely stupid.'
 b. Aquel hombre (*no) es cortés *hasta la adulación*.
 that man neg is polite until the flattery
 'That man is (not) extremely polite.'
 c. Sus compañeros de trabajo (*no) son *bien* arrogantes.
 his colleagues from work neg are.they well arrogant
 '(lit.) His work colleagues are (not) WELL arrogant.'

⁵ This is not possible in normative Catalan, which has the NPI intensifier *gaire* illustrated in the previous subsection, but it is nevertheless heard colloquially in certain areas.

To recap, we have shown that intensifiers (unlike individual quantifiers) cannot take scope over negation. Whenever we find an intensifier under negation, the compositional combination of the denotation of negation and the intensifier is not triggered, but litotes is yielded instead. Finally, those intensifiers that do not yield litotes when negated resist embedding under negation, and a subset of these, EIs, are the ones we want to concentrate on in this paper. As a case study we will move on to the Catalan EI *ben*.

4. The case of *ben*

In the verbal domain, Catalan *ben* ‘well’ is a manner adverb which modifies participles, (21)a, and its allomorph *bé* ‘good, well’ is the manner adverb that modifies verbs, (21)b. Observe that *ben* precedes its modifyee, whereas *bé* follows it.

- (21) a. *ben fet*
 WELL done
 b. *La Maria treballa bé.*
 the Mary works WELL
 ‘Mary works well.’

Alongside these uses, amenable to English *well*, Catalan *ben* (and also Spanish *bien*, to some extent⁶), as an ad-adjectival modifier, can convey amount or degree intensification, as exemplified in (22).

- (22) *Marxem amb el cap ben alt.*
 we.leave with the head WELL high
 ‘(lit.) We leave with our head WELL high.’ (We leave with dignity)
<http://www.esport3.cat/video/4619973/futbol/Boadas-Marxem-amb-el-cap-ben-alt>

In our analysis, we attempt to provide a semantics of degree intensification, which maintains its relation to other uses of *well* across languages. Specifically, we consider its manner use, illustrated for English in (23), which can be informally rendered as ‘in a good manner’, and which is available across languages and eventive verb classes, and its ‘degree’ use (Bolinger 1972, Kennedy and McNally 2005), exemplified for English in (24), which can be paraphrased as ‘to a good degree’, and which is only

⁶ As we have already discussed in previous sections; Cf. also *bien* in different varieties of Spanish, as analyzed in González-Rivera and Gutiérrez-Rexach (to appear).

available under certain conditions (cf. McNally and Kennedy 2013 and Gehrke and Castroviejo 2016).

(23) He has written the article well.

(24) They are well acquainted.

In what follows, we lay out the main empirical differences between Catalan *ben* and the apparent counterpart ‘degree’ *well*, on the one hand, and regular degree modifiers, on the other hand. We complete its characterization by appealing to its subjective behavior, and then we turn to our proposal.

4.1. *Ben* vs. ‘degree’ *well*

First, ‘degree’ *well* modifies participles (24), but not genuine adjectives (25)a (cf. Bolinger 1972, Kennedy and McNally 2005). In contrast, *ben* can modify genuine adjectives, as exemplified in (25)b.

(25) a. *The train is well blue / long / beautiful.

b. El tren és ben blau / llarg / bonic.

the train is WELL blue long beautiful

‘The train is *quite* blue / long / beautiful.’

From these facts, it would seem that, while *well* is a VP modifier (i.e. a predicate of events), *ben* can be an ad-adjectival modifier.

Note further that ‘degree’ *well* is only possible with closed-scale adjectives without a maximum standard, as observed in Kennedy and McNally (2005). In their example in (26), for instance, we see that *well* has the same distribution as certain degree expressions (namely *partially* and *fully*) that can only modify closed-scale adjectives. In (27), in turn, while both examples are acceptable, (27)a only has a manner interpretation, since, according to Kennedy and McNally, events of loading stuff have only one standard, which is necessarily the maximum on the scale. (27)b, on the other hand, has both a degree and a manner reading.

(26) a. The truck is well / partially / fully loaded.

b. ??Marge was well / partially / fully worried when she saw the flying pig.

(27) a. The hay is well loaded.

ONLY MANNER

b. The truck is well loaded.

MANNER / ‘DEGREE’

Crucially, in (27)b, there is a degree of the truck being loaded, which can be differentiated from other degrees of loadedness (e.g. partially), whereas this is not the case with hay being loaded, as in the case of (27)a (cf. McNally and Kennedy 2013, Gehrke and Castroviejo 2016 for different explanations).

Turning to *ben*, observe in (28) that it does not obey the same restrictions as ‘degree’ *well*, for it can combine with both open scale and closed scale adjectives, and it is also compatible with maximum-standard adjectives.

- (28) a. Open scale: *ben a prop* ‘WELL close’, *ben amunt* ‘WELL up’, *ben sonat* ‘WELL nuts’, *ben simpàtic* ‘WELL kind’, *ben trist* ‘WELL sad’, *ben viu* ‘WELL alive’, *ben idiota* ‘WELL idiotic’.
 b. Closed scale, maximum standard: *ben tancat* ‘WELL closed’, *ben buit* ‘WELL empty’, *ben recte* ‘WELL straight’, *ben pla* ‘WELL flat’.

Finally, *well* but not *ben* can be further modified by a degree modifier such as *very*, as shown in (29).

- (29) a. They know each other (very) well.
 b. En Pere és (*molt) ben alt.
 the Peter is very WELL tall

Gehrke and Castroviejo (2016) argue that *well* cannot be a degree modifier in and by itself. This is accounted for under an event predicate analysis of *well*, also under its ‘degree’ reading. As to *ben*, the data just shown could suggest that *ben* has the semantics of a regular degree modifier, like *very* or *completely*. In the next subsection, we provide arguments also against this idea.

4.2. *Ben* vs. degree modifiers

In this section, we show that *ben* is different from ordinary ad-adjectival degree modifiers (say, of type $\langle\langle d, et \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle\rangle$), such as standard boosters and slack regulators.⁷ The former readjust the contextual standard of relative adjectives (for instance, *very* or *quite tall*), as we have already seen in

⁷ Cf. Lasersohn (1999), Kennedy and McNally (2005), Sassoon and Toledo (2011), and literature cited therein on such modifiers.

Section 3. The latter eliminate pragmatic slack in the case of absolute adjectives (for instance *completely full*).

Let us first start by focusing on how the standard of comparison is determined for both types of adjectives. In the case of relative adjectives, the standard is set contextually, by taking into consideration a comparison class of individuals. Take, for example, (30).

- (30) En Pere és alt.
the Peter is tall
'Peter is tall.'

To determine whether or not Peter is tall, we invoke a set of similar individuals so Peter can be compared to them in terms of tallness. Of course, if Peter is a basketball player, the comparison class will include taller individuals than if Peter is a kindergarten child. In the first case, (30) could be true if, say, Peter is 2 meters tall. In the second case, it would be enough for Peter to be at least 1.15 meters tall.

With absolute adjectives, the standard of comparison is conventionally determined (Kennedy 2007).⁸ For example, in (31), we do not need to invoke a collection of stadiums to know whether or not the sentence is true.

- (31) L'estadi està ple.
the stadium is full
'The stadium is full.'

The stadium is full if it reaches its maximum degree of fullness. However, since we often speak loosely, some pragmatic slack is allowed, and we are allowed to utter (31) even if there are some empty seats, because we are still close enough to the truth.

Now, let us put *ben* into play, and compare it to *very* and to *completely*. When a relative adjective is modified by *very*, the standard of comparison is raised. As shown in Section 3, the comparison class of *very tall* is not a collection of individuals that are similar to Peter, but rather, it only in-

⁸ We ignore recent literature that counterargues this claim (cf. McNally 2011, and Sassoon and Toledo 2011), since the main point of this section can also be made within their alternative approaches.

cludes the individuals that are tall, and a new standard is computed on the basis of such individuals. The result is a higher standard than the standard for the positive predication. For instance, if Peter is a kindergarten child, he could be 1.25 meters tall. When absolute adjectives combine with *very*, these adjectives are turned into relative adjectives in that their standard is no longer determined conventionally but rather contextually. Hence, in (32), the stadium could be 80% full, so in effect, the turnout would be smaller than in the positive form.

- (32) L'estadi està molt ple.
 the stadium is very full
 'The stadium is very full.'

Interestingly, if we replace *molt* 'very' with *ben*, as presented in (33), there is no relativizing effect and there is no standard boosting. Rather, the effect is that no pragmatic slack is allowed.

- (33) L'estadi està ben ple.
 the stadium is WELL full

The obvious follow-up question, which we turn to now, is whether *ben* behaves like a slack regulator. A prototypical case of a slack regulator would be *completely*. As we see in (34), *completament* 'completely' can only modify absolute adjectives.

- (34) a. L'estadi està completament ple.
 the stadium is completely full
 'The stadium is completely full.'
 b. *En Pere és completament alt.
 the Peter is completely tall

This is so because, as we have already noted in Section 2, *completely* directly operates on a closed scale; and in this case it states that no slack is allowed anymore, the stadium has to be 100% full with no empty seats.

The pattern presented in (34) is thus not parallel to the one we find with *ben*, which, as shown in (28), does allow modification of relative adjectives, and therefore *ben* does not seem to be sensitive to the scale structure of the adjective it applies to. We therefore conclude that unlike standard degree modifiers, *ben* never directly operates on degrees. Instead, we pro-

pose that in examples such as (35), the effect of *ben* is to focus on the most typical instances of the property in question, and to exclude borderline cases.

- (35) En Pere és ben alt.
the Peter is WELL tall

In sum, degree modifiers (including slack regulators) directly operate on degree arguments and thus manipulate standards. In contrast, *ben* only indirectly affects the standard, by focusing on the core cases to which the adjective in question can apply. This can be semantically modulated, we propose, by our account of *ben* as positively evaluating a property ascription.

4.3. A subjective evaluation

In order to fully characterize *ben*, we need to include a last bit of information regarding a parallelism between the distribution of *ben* and that of subjective meaning as instantiated by predicates of personal taste (PPT). So far, it seems that *ben* is quite flexible in allowing modifyees that can have just any scale structure. This should be qualified.

Ben does not felicitously modify an adjective out of the blue (36) unless it is a clear case of a PPT (37).

- (36) A: Com és en Carles?
how is the Charles
'How is Charles like?'
B: {Molt/#ben} intel·ligent.
very WELL intelligent
'Very / #WELL intelligent.'
- (37) A: Com és el pastís?
how is the cake
'How do you like the cake?'
B: {Molt/ben} bo.
very well good
'Very / WELL tasty.'

On the other hand, such predicates, which at first sight sound marginal with *ben*, improve drastically when there is an overt disagreement on

whether or not the adjective can be truthfully predicated of the subject. This is illustrated in (38) and (39).

- (38) A: Ahir vaig estar parlant amb en Pere. No em va semblar particularment brillant.
 yesterday was.I talking with the Peter neg me seemed.he particularly bright
 ‘I had a conversation with Peter yesterday. He didn’t seem particularly bright.’
 B: Doncs jo el trobo ben intel·ligent.
 actually I him find WELL intelligent
 ‘Actually, I find him WELL intelligent.’
- (39) La Marta ha resultat ser una noia ben intel·ligent. M’ha sorprès com ha solucionat aquest trencaclosques.
 the Martha has turned to.be a girl WELL intelligent me.has surprised how has.she solved this puzzle
 ‘Martha has turned out to be a WELL intelligent girl. I was surprised at how she solved this puzzle.’

We assume with the literature (e.g. Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007) that PPTs have a built-in evaluative or subjective meaning component. This makes them readily embeddable under predicates like *find* (cf. Kennedy 2015, and literature cited therein; we will come back to this point in Section 5). This is illustrated for Catalan in (40).

- (40) Trobo el pastís bo.
 find.I the cake good
 ‘I find the cake tasty.’

There is an interesting correlation between the compatibility or incompatibility of those adjectives that can be embedded under *find* and those adjectives that allow modification by *ben*, as shown in (41).

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| (41) a. ben ridícul | cf. El trobo ridícul. |
| WELL ridiculous | him find.I ridiculous |
| | ‘I find him ridiculous.’ |
| b. *ben just | cf. *El trobo just. |
| WELL fair | him find.I fair |
| c. *ben solidari | cf. *El trobo solidari. |
| WELL solidary | him find.I solidary |

To wrap up, *ben*, when combined with an adjective, involves a subjective evaluation with analogous properties to those of PPTs.

4.4. An expressive proposal

Recall that *ben*, aside from being an intensifier whose meaning effect is to predicate goodness of a property ascription, cannot occur under negation or within an interrogative, (42).

- (42) a. *En Pere no és ben simpàtic.
 the Peter neg is WELL nice
 b. *En Pere és ben simpàtic?
 the Peter is WELL nice

This has led some researchers, such as Hernanz (1999, 2010) and González-Rodríguez (2006), to treat *ben* (or its Spanish counterpart *bien*) as a PPI.

Our analysis rejects this claim. We argue that *ben* contributes content at the Conventional Implicature (CI) tier of meaning, and that its PPI properties follow from it being a factive evaluative (building on Liu 2012, 2014). More specifically, infelicity in entailment-canceling contexts is the result of a contradiction between the meaning conveyed at the at-issue tier (by the rest of the sentence excluding *ben*) and the presupposition triggered by the CI item *ben*.

More generally, in order to unify the semantics of WELL across languages and uses, we propose an underspecified semantics in terms of a predicate of events, where *ben* has the same general lexical semantics as the underlying adjective **good**, interpreted, roughly, as approval by some judge.⁹ For Catalan intensifying *ben* we also assume that it modifies an event, just not the lexical event associated with a verbal predicate, but an implicit event of saying. We build on Piñón's (2013) account of performative uses of speech-act adverbs like *frankly*, as in (43).

⁹ In Castroviejo and Gehrke (2015), and in Gehrke and Castroviejo (2016), the denotations assumed are the ones in (i).

(i) a. $[[\text{good}]] = \lambda d.\lambda x[\text{good}(x) \geq d]$

b. $[[\text{well}]] = \lambda d.\lambda e[\text{good}(e) \geq d]$

Whether or not evaluative predicates like *good* contain a degree argument (d) is a matter of debate; see also Section 5.

(43) Frankly, Facebook is overrated.

Piñón proposes that such adverbs are also predicates of events and that they involve a self-description of the given utterance as a saying event.

Unlike *frankly*, however, *ben* is not a sentential adverb, but an ad-adjectival modifier; and it does not evaluate a proposition, but a property ascription. Roughly, we propose to analyze *ben* as a modifier which takes a property (the denotation of the adjective) and returns a new property. Crucially, *ben* does not restrict the denotation of the adjective, but rather the saying event involved in the utterance of the adjective, by positively evaluating the ascription of the adjective to its subject.¹⁰

We propose that positively self-evaluating a property ascription yields emphatic assertion and thus our analysis encodes the notion of emphasis as the self-evaluation of a property ascription. Emphatic statements, however, are only felicitous if emphasis is justified, unless we can accommodate that it is a matter of taste whether or not x should be considered within the denotation of the adjective. Therefore, *ben* is felicitous in contexts where contrastive statements are being discussed and/or with predicates of personal taste, which are clearly judge-dependent, as we have seen in Subsection 4.3.

Furthermore, *ben* operates on the speech act event. We assume with Piñón (2013) that a performative verb is semantically represented in every utterance. Its output meaning is not part of the at-issue content of the assertion, however, but conventionally implicated (in the sense of Potts 2005 and further elaborations). This will ultimately explain its resistance to appear in entailment-canceling contexts, as we will see in the following.

4.4.1. Liu's proposal for evaluative adverbs

The fact that *ben* resists to be embedded in entailment-canceling contexts parallels such resistance of expressive items (cf. Potts 2007), e.g. evaluative adverbs (Liu 2012, 2014) and extreme degree modifiers (Morzycki 2012), as we have already seen in the examples in (4) and (5). These examples,

¹⁰ Technically, our proposed denotation, adapted from Piñón's (2013) analysis of the performative adverb *frankly*, is as in (ii). See Castroviejo and Gehrke (2015) for the details.

(ii) $\lambda P \lambda z [\text{utterance}(C) = e \ \& \ \text{speaker}(C) = x \ \& \ \text{hearer}(C) = y \ \& \ \text{say}(e, P(z)) \ \& \ \text{now} \subseteq \tau(e) \ \& \ \text{agent}(e, x) \ \& \ \text{recipient}(e, y) \ \& \ \text{good}(e)]$

and similarly our examples in (42), can only be rescued under an echo-reading.

Expressive items convey meaning through a CI. The ill-formedness of the sentences in (4) and (5), then, arises due to a mismatch between the two meanings conveyed (at-issue and CI), as illustrated in (44).

- (44) ??He isn't fucking calm. (= (6)a)
 a. At-issue tier: He isn't calm.
 b. I express a negative attitude at him being calm.

Liu (2014) establishes the division of evaluative adverbs into at least two types (in, e.g., German, but also in Chinese).¹¹ Factive evaluatives, like *leider* 'unfortunately', are banned from all entailment-canceling contexts, e.g. those in (45). Non-factive evaluatives, like *unglücklicherweise* 'unfortunately', on the other hand, are only banned from negation, cf. (45)a vs. (45)b,c.

- (45) a. Otto ist nicht {*leider/*unglücklicherweise} krank.
 Otto is not unfortunately sick
 b. Otto ist vielleicht {*leider/unglücklicherweise} krank.
 Otto is maybe unfortunately sick
 c. Ist Otto {*leider/unglücklicherweise} krank?
 is Otto unfortunately sick

Under Liu's account¹² only factive evaluative adverbs presuppose the at-issue content in affirmative sentences. In (46), for instance, *leider* conveys a CI, (46)b, whose presupposition is that Otto is sick, (46)c, which in contexts like (45) clashes with the asserted content that negates or questions the at-issue meaning in (46)a. This explains the infelicity of factive evaluative adverbs in contexts where the presupposition and the at-issue meaning do not coincide anymore, as in the entailment-canceling contexts in (45), and this leads to a presupposition failure.

¹¹ Liu notes that this two-way division might be too coarse-grained, but it will suffice for our purposes. See Section 5 for more general considerations concerning evaluative predicates.

¹² Liu proposes the denotations in (i).

- (i) a. [[*leider*]]: $\lambda p.$ unfortunate(p)
 b. [[*unglücklicherweise*]]: $\lambda p. p \rightarrow$ unfortunate(p)

- (46) Otto ist leider krank.
 Otto is unfortunately sick
 a. At-issue tier: Otto is sick.
 b. CI tier: It is unfortunate that Otto is sick.
 c. CI's presupposition: Otto is sick.

Non-factive adverbs receive a different explanation for their incompatibility with negation, inspired by Bonami and Godard (2008). They propose a conditional semantics for non-factive evaluative adverbs (cf. footnote 11) which makes the CI tier completely independent from the at-issue tier, so in principle, (47) does not represent a logical contradiction.

- (47) Otto ist unglücklicherweise krank.
 Otto is unfortunately sick
 a. At-issue tier: Otto is not sick.
 b. CI tier: If Otto is sick, then it is unfortunate that he is sick.

However, it has the status of an incongruence, which Liu (2014) calls 'a semantic clash'. Note that in one tier we are stating that Otto is not sick and in the other tier we are entertaining the idea that he is sick, and what would follow from that. We will come back to some general considerations concerning evaluatives in Section 5, after we have provided our account of *ben*.

4.4.2. *Ben* as a factive evaluative

Returning to *ben*, (48) shows that its distribution is parallel to that of factive evaluatives.

- (48) a. *En Pere no és ben simpàtic.
 the Peter not is well nice
 b. *És possible que en Pere sigui ben simpàtic.
 is possible that the Peter is.pres.subj well nice
 c. *Si en Pere és ben simpàtic, estaré contenta.
 if the Peter is well nice be.fut.1sg glad

Building on Liu's account of factive evaluatives, then, we propose the following account for the infelicity of *ben* in entailment-canceling contexts, such as negation in (49).

- (49) *En Pere no és *ben* simpàtic.
 the Peter not is well nice
 a. At-issue tier: Peter is not nice.
 b. CI tier: ‘nice’ is well ascribed to Peter.
 c. CI’s presupposition: Peter is nice.

Just like the factive evaluatives described by Liu, *ben* conveys meaning at the CI tier, namely that the property conveyed in the at-issue content is well ascribed to the entity in question. At the same time, this CI meaning presupposes the at-issue content. If this content is negated or questioned, however, we arrive at a presupposition failure, which makes *ben* infelicitous in entailment-canceling contexts. In fact, this makes *ben* an adjectival modifier that takes at-issue content, and returns CI as well as presupposed meaning.

5. Zooming out again: Subjective evaluation

Our analysis of *ben* as a non-restrictive modifier that expresses an emphatic subjective evaluation of a property ascription brings us to the characterization of evaluative predicates more generally. Evaluative predicates can be adjectives but also adverbs related to such adjectives. In the following, we will briefly discuss what the literature has said about such predicates, beyond what we have already discussed in the context of Liu (2012, 2014), and to see how this relates it to our analysis of *ben*.

Bierwisch (1989) divides gradable adjectives (As) into dimensional and evaluative ones, exemplified by *tall* and *short* vs. *lazy* and *good*. While dimensional As operate on one clearly defined dimension (e.g. *height* for *tall* and *short*) so that one can establish a norm for a given dimensional A, as we have seen in the determination of the standard for *tall* in Section 4, this is not the case for evaluative As. As a consequence, we have precise units of measurement only for dimensional As, and only with dimensional As can we talk about a positive value on a scale and thus a certain degree on that scale (e.g. a degree of height for *tall* as well as for *short*). In contrast, we cannot say, as Bierwisch notes, that someone who is *lazy* has a certain degree of industriousness. Evaluative As, then, according to Bierwisch, do not have a syntactically specified comparison class but merely specify an ungraded condition, though their truth can be parametrized with respect to context (e.g. *good as a doctor*).

If evaluative *As* (and thus evaluative predicates more generally) are not specified for a comparison class, we also derive the non-restrictive bias for such predicates, given that restrictive modification generally relies on alternatives, which are associated with comparison classes. Martin (2014) provides a detailed investigation into evaluative predicates and shows that this bias is quite strong, especially with subjective evaluatives (see below). She argues more generally that evaluative predicates are often (though not always) strange in true (i.e. non-rhetorical) questions due to their ‘mirative’ flavor.¹³ ‘Miratives’ are commonly found when the speaker expresses that his or her “expectations are exceeded in front of an unanticipated or novel information”, and they usually come with exclamative prosody. As Martin points out, it is pragmatically odd to question whether something holds to some degree while at the same time expressing that the expectations with respect to that degree have been exceeded. She does not provide a formal account of this particular aspect though, since the main aim of her paper is to provide a formal account of restrictive and non-restrictive modification.¹⁴

As has already been hinted at and is also reflected in Liu’s (2012, 2014) work, there is a further division among evaluative predicates, which affects their embeddability in entailment-canceling contexts. In his account of speaker-oriented adverbs as PPIs (see also Nilsen 2004), Ernst (2009) makes a distinction between weak and strong PPIs. Evaluative predicates can be found in both groups, depending on whether they express objective or subjective evaluation. Building on Giannakidou (1999, et seq.), he argues that strong evaluatives are blocked in all non-veridical contexts, such as negation, questions, and antecedents of a conditional; examples are *unfortunately*, *amazingly*. Weak evaluatives, in turn, are argued to be blocked in antiveridical contexts, i.e. under negation, but to sometimes be acceptable in strictly nonveridical contexts; examples are *mysteriously*, *famously*. Ernst states that the fact that such adverbs are speaker-oriented makes them PPIs, since they involve a subjective commitment to the truth of the evaluation, which is incompatible with doubt expressed by nonveridical operators. Since we find it rather counterintuitive to assume that

¹³ Cf. Delancey (1997), who coined the term, and Peterson (2010) and references cited therein for further developments.

¹⁴ The facts are slightly more complicated than that. Martin shows that subjective evaluatives can convey an at-issue content directly when they address a question under discussion, so that they are also acceptable in questions, and they are also better when they modify indefinites.

these adverbs express a subjective commitment to the truth of the evaluation (of a proposition p), rather than to the truth of p itself (see also Liu 2014), and since we believe that their PPI-behavior is a secondary effect of their involving a subjective evaluation at the CI tier, we will leave it at that.

Umbach (2006) (see also discussion in Martin 2014), differentiates between factual and evaluative predicates. Only factual predicates are empirically testable, while evaluatives express some ethical or aesthetical judgment, usually ascribed by the speaker. In Umbach (2015), she refines this picture. Building on Barker (2013) (and Kant), she differentiates more generally between interpretational and descriptive uses of predicates. For example, the descriptive use of the dimensional adjective *tall* in e.g. *Natalie is tall* involves the assertion that Natalie's height exceeds a contextually given standard of tallness, while its interpretational use is truly evaluative since it provides information about what counts as tall in a given context. She defines two different context update rules, where descriptively used expressions reduce the set of possible worlds, while interpretationally used ones reduce the set of interpretations.

Dimensional predicates in their positive form have both uses, but in their comparative form they only have a descriptive use and thus cannot be used evaluatively, since neither their dimension nor the order on the scale are negotiable anymore. Evaluative predicates, on the other hand, as argued by Umbach, have both uses in either form. This explains the differences in their embeddability under *find*, as illustrated in (50).

- (50) a. Ich finde Natalie groß/#größer.
 I find Natalie tall/taller
 b. Ich finde Natalie schön/schöner.
 I find Natalie beautiful/beautiful-er

In German, Umbach argues, *find* can embed interpretationally used predicates, whereas in English, it seems that *find* is more restricted as it requires evaluative predicates (Kennedy 2015), as we have already mentioned in Section 4.

Umbach makes a two-way division within the group of evaluatives which is reminiscent of the distinctions we have discussed so far. In particular, general evaluatives, such as *beautiful*, express judgments that are intended to enter the common ground, whereas subjective evaluatives, such as *wonderful*, are public commitments of the speaker that are stored in the indi-

vidual discourse commitments (building on Farkas and Bruce 2010). General judgments, then, are “regular assertions waiting for confirmation or denial”, whereas subjective judgments are mere opinions, not intended to enter the common ground and they therefore cannot be debated or denied.¹⁵

Umbach also comments on Hare’s (1952) reflections on *good*. According to Hare, there is no denotational meaning of *good*, since there is no property shared by good things, rather *good* has a commending function. Umbach holds that *good* still has a quasi-denotational meaning, since even though there is no property denoted by *good*, there are criteria related to factual properties, such as comparison class and speaker community, which establish a standard for what counts as *good*. She also notes that the commending function of *good* (or also *beautiful*) “appears to be beyond the scope of denotational semantics” as it “gives the impression of a speech-act like element”.

All these observations taken together, then, make evaluative intensifiers like *ben* appear to belong to the larger group of evaluative predicates, even though this link, as far as we know, has not been explored in previous literature. And as we see in the literature on PPIs, which makes a distinction between weak and strong PPIs, we also find a division among evaluative predicates between objective vs. subjective evaluatives (Ernst, Martin), general vs. subjective evaluatives (Umbach), or non-factive vs. factive evaluatives (Liu). It remains to be seen whether this division is too coarse-grained, as already hinted at in Liu (2014), but we have to leave this for future research.

6. Concluding remarks

We argued that Catalan ad-adjectival *ben* ‘well’ yields intensification by positively self-evaluating a property ascription, where the predicate **good** applies to the saying event available to any utterance. The output of this modification is a manipulation of the performative (or interpretational, cf. Umbach 2015) rather than descriptive content of the utterance (a CI rather than at-issue meaning). The PPI behavior of *ben* follows from its

¹⁵ As pointed out by Mingya Liu (p.c.), the information that the speaker finds Natalie beautiful obviously enters the common ground, it is just not a general acknowledged fact that she is beautiful, and thus this is the part that does not enter the common ground.

being a factive evaluative: it presupposes the at-issue content, so that it is infelicitous in entailment-canceling contexts.

Returning to the big questions, our answer as to why EIs resist to embed is that they convey expressive (emphatic, hyperbolic) meaning that presupposes its at-issue content, so they are unavailable in entailment-canceling contexts. Furthermore, the link between CI-ness and PPI-hood comes about, following Liu (2012, 2014), in that whenever expressive CI content presupposes the at-issue meaning, NPI contexts will yield a presupposition failure (of the expressive presupposition). Recall that EIs can never outscope negation and, if grammatical, the sole interpretation is litotes. Therefore, in our attempt to identify the source of and an adequate theoretical account for the apparent PPI behavior of EIs — and, more specifically of *ben* — we have shown that these intensifiers belong to the broader category of expressives, which have scope constraints related to the presuppositions of their CI content.

At this point, we envisage several future endeavors. For example, additional inferences may arise from the predication of **good** such as satisfaction or else irony depending on whether the adjective is positive or pejorative. Furthermore, also the adjective *good* and its Catalan counterpart *bon* can have a similar intensifying meaning, as illustrated in (51).

- (51) a. a *good* while, a *good* thirty minutes
 b. una *bona* estona, un *bon* misteri, un *bon* embolic
 a good while a good mystery a good mess

Finally, a more general question is whether the account can be extended to elements that are used in other languages to render the meaning effect of *ben*, such as German *ganz schön* ‘lit. totally pretty’, *richtig* ‘correct’, *schon* ‘already’, or English *pretty*.

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