

# ‘Very Monday feeling’: The degree modification of complex nominals

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The study of degree modification has increased in popularity in later years, with focus spreading to other categories than adverbs and adjectives. Nominal predicates have long been considered to be gradable; Morzycki (2009, 2012) reviews constructions where nouns are modified by size adjectives (as in *huge idiot*), leading to a larger discussion by de Vries (2010, 2018) and Fadlon & Sassoon (2016) on the nature of gradable concepts. One specific construction which has not been studied through this lens is one in which a bare noun is modified by an a degree word which would traditionally be seen modifying an adjective or an adverb, like *very*. In English, these are most frequently found among proper nouns, like in (1a). For some languages, like Norwegian and Spanish, these are found relatively frequently among common nouns as well, as illustrated by (1b) and (1c).

- (1)
- a. That jacket you’re wearing is very Michael Jackson.
  - b. *Av og til kan Kari vera veldig nerd.*  
off and on can Kari be very nerd  
‘Sometimes Kari can possess traits typically associated with being a nerd.’
  - c. *Miguel es muy fan.*  
Miguel is very fan  
‘Miguel possesses traits typically associated with being a fan.’

The degree word used here, *very/veldig/muy*, is associated with the modification of adjectives and adverbs, creating a categorial mismatch in the phrase structure of the standard varieties of these languages. These degree words can either combine with simple, social nouns such as *nerd* and *teacher* or with complex expressions such as compounds and NPs already including adjectival modification. See the following examples from Norwegian (2a-b) and English (2c):

- (2)
- a. *Josefine var veldig flink pike.*  
Josefine was very good girl  
‘Josefine was a typical example of someone who works hard and stresses over deadlines.’
  - b. *Det var veldig måndagsfølelse i dag.*  
there was very Monday.feeling in day

‘There was a feeling today very typical of what one would feel on a Monday (tiredness, stress, etc.).’

Some generalizations can be made about the type of nominal which is modifiable by *very*: these are social, multidimensional concepts. When such a predicate is complex, the elements combined usually create an idiom or expression familiar to speakers. Both *flink pike* and *måndagsfølelse* are terms that are familiar to speakers of Norwegian.

The data present the issue of the combinatorial features of *very*. Behaviorally, the nouns involved do not appear to be a result of coercion, as they do not receive  $\varphi$  features like number or gender, despite being modified by degree. This raises the question of whether these nouns are interchangeable with their adjectival or adverbial counterparts. That is, whether the complex expression *flink pike* carries the same interpretation as a ‘full’ relative clause like *veldig som ei typisk flink pike* (‘very like a typical good girl’).

Wellwood (2015) states that all comparative sentences contain instances of a single morpheme that compositionally introduces degrees, in her case investigating why *much* introduces the degree modification of different categories. I argue that *very* showcases a similar ability to modify across categories. In Doetjes’s (2008) degree expression continuum, the French degree word *très* (‘very’) is treated as initially originating from the role of a modifier of gradable adjectives to now largely being able to modify gradable nominal predicates and gradable verbs as well (p. 138). I argue that the same can be said for Norwegian *veldig* and possibly Spanish *muy*, with English *very* only extending to gradable nouns due to the unacceptability of *\*It was very discussed* but its acceptability in Norwegian (*Det blei veldig diskutert*) and Spanish (*Es muy discutido*).

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