

## Forums / PRAGMATICS Forum / 8\_Context Dependence / Context-Dependent Context Dependence



**Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Ari Mosbacher (am2108) 2019-04-02 14:56:24.0

This week's focus is on context-dependent gradable adjectives; words like "tall," "short," "full," "empty," and other such descriptors. However, while reading specifically the Lasersohn paper on predicates of personal taste, I was struck by a particular question: Are there adjectives that are sometimes gradable and sometimes not? Take, for example, the adjective *good*. This is pretty clearly a predicate of personal taste.

1) This food is good.

A clear truth value can't be assigned to 1), a fact that Lasersohn clearly acknowledges and addresses in his paper. However, when used in certain contexts, "good" *can in fact be a gradable adjective*.

2) This gem is of *good* quality.

3) This gem is of *better* quality.

In sentences 2) and 3), the adjective "good" is used as a kind of relative gradable adjective, as we discussed in class today. So, my questions are this: Are there other examples of adjectives that are sometimes in predicates of personal taste and other times function as gradable adjectives? Does this mean that "good" is in fact gradable, even when it doesn't look like it is, because of sentences like 2) and 3)?



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Ilana Torres (ikt6) 2019-04-02 18:31:01.0

Hi Ari!

One adjective I can think of is "beautiful". Many things can be beautiful, depending on what they are, the context they are in, and an individual's opinion.

"Beautiful" is a predicate of personal taste. Take the sentence: This painting is beautiful. Imagine it is an abstract painting. Some people might not understand the painting and may not think of it as being beautiful. The person uttering the sentence "This painting is beautiful" does, however, think that this abstract painting is beautiful.

You can also think of "beautiful" as being a relative gradable adjective. There is clearly a scale of beautifulness when regarding to humans, where someone can be more or less beautiful (or ugly). Imagine Person A saying "Wow, Alex is beautiful." and Person B responding "Not as beautiful as Sam!". We can compare this to the pile of sand example, because at what point does someone stop being beautiful? There is no clear line which indicates that. Not only that, beauty does not have to apply only to the outside qualities of a human obviously, it can take into account inside beauty as well!



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Erin Lavielle (etl37) 2019-04-02 19:44:20.0

Hey Ari!

**This is such an interesting point that you brought up!**

**Just this weekend actually, while I was riding in a friends car, we were listening to music. I thought to myself “wow this music is so loud”. However, when I mentioned something about lowering the volume, nobody else in the car seemed to think the music needed to be turned down. This made me think of the adjective “loud” as being a predicate of personal taste. This is because just because one person thinks something is loud, it doesn’t mean others think it’s loud.**

The adjective “loud” also varies depending on context. For example, if I were having a conversation with someone on a bus, and I spoke at a normal volume, that would not be considered loud. However, if I speak at the same volume in a library, that volume of voice would definitely be considered very loud for that setting.

“Loud” can also be seen as a relative gradable adjective because a certain level of volume can be louder than a different level of volume. If one person screamed and another person whispered, we can conclude that the person who screamed is louder. Like Ilana mentioned, it’s like the pile of sand and the height example: if we were to continuously lower the volume of a noise, at what point is it not considered loud anymore?



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Veronica Cardiellos (vpc19) 2019-04-02 19:55:33.0

Hey Ari!

This is a really awesome example I never thought about before. "Good" can also become more of a gradable adjective in the context of "I had a good amount of sleep last night" (A phrase I which I could say more often but I digress). In this context, you can compare two individuals amount of sleep and see which had a "better" amount this is measurable by time. Although, as the sand example depicts, at what point in time is it a good amount vs when is it not a good amount?

I believe certain character traits work the same way. Lots of people can describe themselves as being lazy. If someone was to say "call your lazy friend" well lots of them are so I would need more clarification. But it would not be surprising for people to compare and call one person "lazier" so if someone said "Call your laziest friend" I may know exactly who they are referring to.



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Abeer Mumtaz (azm22) 2019-04-03 17:23:58.0

Hi Ari!

An adjective I believe is both a predicate of personal taste and a gradable adjective is the adjective "hot". This adjective comes into play as a predicate of personal taste when describing the weather. For example, it is 65 degrees outside and someone says "it's hot outside", but someone else responds "no it's not!". This example goes back to Lasersohn's definition of PPT that "the same content can be assigned different truth values relative to different individuals", so there is actually no definite truth value for this adjective because it depends on the individual perception of the weather and their experience in that temperature.

"Hot" is also a gradable adjective, specifically, I think it is a relative gradable adjective because the level of warmth can be different for each individual. Some get hot more easily than others based on the weather outside. So, going back to the previous example I stated for PPT, it might be hotter outside for some more than others based on how much heat they can bear; there a level of degree in regards to this term and people's experience in the heat.

Please let me know if I have not properly used the adjective, "hot" in regards to predicates of personal taste and gradable adjectives.



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Eric Jimenez (ejj65) 2019-04-03 19:50:03.0

Hi Ari,

Another example of something that has that property is the word "spicy". One person could say, for example, "this pepper is spicy" and it would be a matter of personal taste (both literally and figuratively) because others could disagree and think that it is NOT spicy to them. Yet one could also say "this pepper is spicier than this other

pepper" and it could be gradable because one pepper may have more of the "spicy" property than the other.

I think that the idea of gradable adjectives in general seems to be that these adjectives need to be compared to something else in order to be measurable, otherwise they are simply matters of personal taste. Often these adjectives are vague and there is no agreed upon measure of where they may begin, but that does not mean that we reject the concept of it entirely, because even though we cannot spot where these adjectives might begin, they become much easier to measure when we are comparing two things with different levels of that property.



**Re: Context-Dependent Context Dependence** - Jina Dokko (jd1264) 2019-04-03 20:09:12.0

Hi Ari,

Your post reminded me of a Starbucks trip I went on with a cousin last week. My cousin ordered a double chocolate frap and I ordered a vanilla sweet cream cold brew. I thought my drink was just sweet enough and that my cousin's drink was way too sweet, whereas my cousin thought her drink had good amount of sweetness and that mine wasn't sweet at all. I think sweet can be a predicate of personal taste, as it cannot have one truth value since people have different parameters of what constitutes as being sweet/too sweet/not sweet enough. It can also function as a gradable adjective because there are different levels of sweetness, and it is difficult to pinpoint one specific level and label it as the definitive line between sweet and not sweet.