

## THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF GRADIENCE IN LINGUISTICS

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**ANNOTATSIYA:** Ushbu maqola tilshunoslikda gradatsiya (darajalash) bo'yicha nazariy ma'lumotlardan tashkil topgan. Xususan, gradatsiya tushunchasi tarixiga nazar tashlanib, uning mazmun mohiyati, qo'llanilishi va turlari haqida bir qator nazariyalar yoritib berilgan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Gradatsiya, gradient, lingvistik, nazariya, tur, baholash, darajalar, hukm, tahlil, faktlar.

**АННОТАЦИЯ:** Эта статья содержит теоретическую информацию о градации в лингвистике. В частности, рассмотрена история понятия градации и объяснен ряд теорий о ее содержании, применении и видах.

**Ключевые слова:** Градация, градиент, лингвистика, теория, тип, оценка, степени, суждение, анализ, факты.

**ABSTRACT:** This article consists of theoretical information on gradation in linguistics. In particular, we have a look at the history of the concept of gradation, and a number of theories about its content, application and types are explained.

**Keywords:** Gradation, gradience, linguistic, theory, type, evaluation, degrees, judgement, analysis, facts.

**Introduction**

The potential benefits of a theory of gradient grammaticality include an expansion of the empirical base of linguistics and an increase of the predictive power of linguistic theory. As Hayes puts it: "Linguistics at present is not hard enough; we are not presenting our theories with sufficient demands to distinguish which ones are true. The task of analyzing data with gradient well-formedness puts a theory to a stiffer test."<sup>1</sup> Note that accounting for gradience was part of the research program of early generative grammar. Chomsky, for instance, insists that "an adequate linguistic theory will have to recognize degrees of grammaticality"<sup>2</sup> based on the observation that "there is little doubt that speakers can fairly consistently order new utterances, never previously heard, with respect to their degree of 'belongingness' to the language" However, the issue of gradience has become increasingly difficult to accommodate in contemporary formal models of grammar. While

<sup>1</sup>Hayes, B. P., 1997. Gradient well-formedness in Optimality Theory, unpubl. handout, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, N., 1975. The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory. Plenum Press, New York.

the Principle and Parameters model left some limited scope for gradience and optionality), more recent models (e.g., Minimalism, Optimality Theory) assume a set of candidates competing for well-formedness and an evaluation metric, based on economy principles, which selects only one candidate as the winner.

In language studies, *gradience* is the quality of indeterminacy (or blurred boundaries) on a graduated scale connecting two linguistic elements. Adjective: *gradient*. Also known as *categorical indeterminacy*.

Gradient phenomena can be observed in all areas of language studies, including phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, and semantics.

The term *gradience* was introduced by Dwight Bolinger in *Generality, Gradience, and the All-or-None*.

Bolinger argued that linguistic categories have blurred edges more often than not, and that apparently clear-cut categories often have to be replaced by non-discrete scales. Bolinger identified **gradient** phenomena in various domains of grammar, such as semantic ambiguities, syntactic blends, and in phonological entities, including intensity and length, among others."<sup>3</sup>

### Gradience in Grammar

"Grammar is prone to fuzziness; there are often degrees of acceptability. Many syntacticians deal in terms of binary judgments. Either an expression is grammatical, or it is ungrammatical, in which case they put an asterisk on it. There is no third value. This is unrealistic and can falsify the data. There are some quite simple expressions about which native speakers have genuine uncertainty. In my own case, if I want to describe the house that Sue and I jointly own, I am not sure whether? *My and Sue's house* is OK or not. Something about it feels odd to me, but it can be readily understood, and no more compact way exists to express its clear meaning. This uncertainty is itself a fact of grammar."<sup>4</sup>

- "**Gradience** is the situation where there is no one-to-one relationship between the different levels of symbolical organization. Thus, the subject marker *for* and the preposition *for* are semantically and syntactically distinct, but they are formally identical and converge in their collocational behavior. In other words, a formal category does not map uniquely onto a single semantic, syntactic, and distributional category. Similarly, the phrasal verb particles *out* and *forth* are formally distinct, but they converge collocationally and semantically. Here, semantic and collocational categories map onto distinct formal categories.

"Gradience can, therefore, be thought of as a kind of mismatch, consisting in the absence of a one-to-one correspondence between the different layers of grammatical organization within and across the representations of grammatical elements"  
Gradience in Phonetics and Phonology: Compounds and Noncompounds  
"**Gradience** [is a] series of instances intermediate between two categories, constructions, etc. E.g. *blackboard* is, by all relevant criteria, a compound: it has stress on its first element..., its precise meaning does not follow from those of *black* and *board* individually, and so on. *Fine weather* is equally, by all criteria, not a compound. But many other cases

<sup>3</sup> *Gradience in Grammar: Generative Perspectives*, ed. by Gisbert Fanselow. Oxford University Press, 2006

<sup>4</sup> James R. Hurford, *The Origins of Grammar: Language in the Light of Evolution II*. Oxford University Press, 2012

are less clear. *Bond Street* is in meaning as regular as *Trafalgar Square*, but stress is again on the first element. *Able seaman* has stress on its second element, but does not simply mean 'seaman who is able.' *White lie* is likewise not in meaning 'lie which is white'; but it too has stress on its second element and, in addition, *white* might be separately modified (*a very white lie*). So, by such criteria, these form parts of a gradience between compounds and non-compounds."<sup>5</sup>

### Two Kinds of Lexical Gradience

"[David] Denison (2001) distinguishes two kinds of [lexical] **gradience** and discusses changes in English during the narrow time span from 1800 on, distinguishing some that are gradual from some that are not. . . . The two types of gradience are 'subsective' and 'intersective' (terms Denison attributes to Bas Aarts) (a) Subsective gradience is found when X and Y are in a gradient relationship within the same form class. This is a question of prototype vs. marginal members of a category (eg., *house* is a more prototypical N than *home* with respect to determiners and quantifiers; *house* is also less subject to idiomatic use). (b) Intersective gradience is found when X and Y are in a gradient relationship between classes; see the notion of 'category squish.'" (Laurel J. Brinton and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change*. Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Gradience, which presupposes the recognition that suboptimal candidates have grammatical status, is therefore incompatible with these models. On the other hand, a number of experimental studies demonstrate that by taking gradient judgment data into account, one can both discover new linguistic facts that have eluded the conventional, informal approach to data collection, and resolve data disputes that exist for certain linguistic phenomena in the literature. The underlying hypothesis is that such disputes arise because conventional linguistic analysis fails to do justice to the gradient nature of these phenomena, both in its data collection methodology and in its analytic approach. Note that there is an important methodological caveat here. Arguably, the aim of formulating precise, testable theories of linguistic competence is at the heart of the generative enterprise. We have to make sure that this aim carries over to an extended theoretical framework that is capable of dealing with gradience. In other words, we have to make sure that a formal theory of gradience is possible, countering "critics of generative grammar who might take the existence of gradient well-formedness judgments as an indication that the entire enterprise is misconceived. In this eliminativist view, gradient well-formedness judgments constitute evidence that generative linguistics must be replaced by something very different, something much 'fuzzier' " in adopting the guiding assumption that "we don't have to trash existing theories of what constraints are like just to get gradient well-formedness". The challenge is to develop a grammatical framework that is permissive enough to account for gradient data without idealizing it, but restrictive enough to allow us to formulate precise, testable linguistic analyses. Section 4 discusses this issue in some detail, focusing in particular on the question of how existing linguistic frameworks such as Optimality Theory can be extended to deal with gradient data.

In conclusion, based on a series of recent experimental findings, we argued that gradient data make it possible to distinguish two kinds of linguistic constraints, viz., soft and hard ones. Both types of constraints are subject to constraint ranking and show cumulativity and ganging up effects. However, soft and hard constraints differ with respect to context effects,

<sup>5</sup> P.H. Matthews, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, 1997

crosslinguistic variation, and developmental optionality. This means that the notion of constraint type can be operationalized using gradient data: if a constraint violation induces strong unacceptability and fails to show context effects and developmental optionality, then it can be classified as a hard constraint. If a constraint triggers only mild unacceptability and is subject to contextual variation and developmental optionality, then the constraint is soft. The classification can be verified by investigating the crosslinguistic behavior of the constraint; the type of a constraint (soft or hard) should remain the same across languages.

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