

Context, Convention and Coordination: Insights from Gradable Adjectives

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Gradable adjectives denote properties that are relativized to contextual thresholds of application: how long an object must be in order to count as 'long' in a context of utterance depends on what the threshold is in that context. But thresholds are variable across contexts and adjectives, and are in general uncertain. This leads to several questions about the meaning and interpretation of gradable adjectives in particular contexts of utterance, including: what truth conditions are they understood to introduce, what information are they taken to communicate, and how (if at all) do language users adapt their understanding of these expressions over time? In this talk, I will report on a series of studies that my colleague Ming Xiang and I have carried out that are prompted by these questions, which provide insights on the role of context, convention and coordination in our use and understanding of this particular class of context-dependent expressions.