The Interpretation of the Comparison Class in Degree Predication
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In this paper, I show that when degree predication (superlatives, comparatives, and the positive form of gradable adjectives) is inside a restrictive relative clause (RRC), the comparison class must receive its interpretation from the external head of the RRC.

**Empirical Observations:** When a predicative superlative is in a matrix context (1a) or is inside a non-restrictive relative clause (NRRC) (1b), the comparison class argument of -est can be supplied by any contextually salient set. It can, for example, be the set of things that are sold at the bakery (e.g., cakes, muffins, croissants, etc.).

(1) a. The cake was the most expensive. \[\text{[Matrix predicative]}\]
   b. John bought the cake, which was the most expensive. \[\text{[NRRC]}\]
   ‘The cake was/J bought the cake that was more expensive than any other (contextually relevant) thing (at the bakery, for example) (e.g., muffin, croissant, etc.)’

However, when the predicative superlative is inside a RRC as in (2a), the comparison class argument must be restricted to the external head of the RC: cake. This parallels the interpretation of the comparison class of attributive AP modifiers (2b).

(2) a. John bought the cake that was the most expensive. \[\text{[RRC]}\]
   b. John bought the most expensive cake. \[\text{[Attributive AP]}\]
   ‘J bought the cake that was more expensive than any other (contextually relevant) cake.’
   # ‘J bought the cake that was more expensive than any other (contextually relevant) thing (at the bakery, for example) (e.g., muffin, croissant, etc.)’

This restriction on the comparison class in RRCs is observed with other types of degree predication as well: comparatives (3) and the positive form of gradable adjectives (4).

(3) John bought the cake that was more expensive. \[\text{[RRC]}\]
   ‘J bought the cake that was more expensive than the other (contextually relevant) cake.’

(4) John bought the cake that was expensive. \[\text{[RRC]}\]
   ‘J bought the cake that was expensive for a cake.’

**Analyses:** Existing theories about how the comparison class is determined in predicative superlatives (e.g. overt syntax in Matushansky 2008 or context in Heim 1999) do not predict the contrast between (1) and (2a). In this paper, I pursue the argument that certain properties of RRCs are involved in the observed comparison class restriction.

for (1): Following Matushansky (2008), I assume that when superlatives appear in a predicative position, they actually modify a null head noun and that NP-ellipsis (NPE) is involved (e.g., *The cake was the most expensive N*). It then follows from general properties of NPE that the ellipsis can take an extralinguistic antecedent (i.e., contextually supplied). This explains the context-dependent interpretation of the comparison class in (1).

for (2a): Neither the Head-raising (e.g., Bhatt 2002) nor the Matching analysis (e.g., Sauerland 2000) of relative clauses provides a satisfactory explanation for why N (the argument of the adjective) must be linked (via movement or non-movement) to the external head of the RRC, as (2a) is a subject gap relative and N is by no means the subject of the relative clause. I consider a novel restriction on NPE resolution that when an NPE site is in the predicate position inside a RRC, it must take the external head of the RRC as its antecedent and cannot take an extralinguistic antecedent.

**References**
- Heim, I. 1999. Notes on superlatives. ms. MIT.