

## Scalar Adjectives in Dutch, Bangla and English

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### Abstract

This research paper concentrates on scalar adjectives and their sub-classes from the point of semanticity. The framework by Broekhuis (2013) is followed here. The availability of the sub-classes is examined by data analysis. Two languages Dutch and English from the West Germanic group and Bangla from the eastern Indo-Aryan language family are selected for the present purpose.

**Keywords:** Dutch, Bangla and English, adjective, scalar, antonymous, context dependent, subjective/objective, measure, positive/negative valued and truly antonymous.

### Abbreviations

POSS = possessive

CLA = classifier

### Diacritics

\* = grammatically incorrect

! = odd construction

### 1. Introduction

Adjectives which vary on a given scale representing a property assigned to the entities and are shown by modification linguistically can be defined as scalar adjectives. They belong to the semantic class set-denoting adjective. Broekhuis (2013) noted that “scalar adjectives seem to have the additional property of relating entities to certain positions on the scale that they imply.”Giri (2018b) pointed out that “Scalar adjectives denote various degrees of a particular property which are possessed by the referents.” This paper revolves around the nature of scalar adjectives and their various sub-types. The following section (2) elaborates different realizations of scalar adjectives with instances from the selected languages.

### 2. Classification of Scalar Adjectives

Depending upon the scale and the nature of boundedness on each side or both sides, scalar adjectives are sub-divided into six groups: Antonymous Adjectives, Context Dependent Adjectives, Subjective and Objective Adjectives, Measure Adjectives, Positive and Negative Valued Adjectives, and Truly Antonymous Adjectives. It is seen that such a classification is overlapping sometimes though they are more general than others. However, they are discussed with instances one by one below.

## 2.1. Antonymous Adjectives

Scalar adjectives which come in pairs with opposite meanings and appear on a single scale are called antonymous adjectives. The following adjectives are the instances of the antonymous adjectives in Dutch.

### Dutch

- |    |    |                   |     |             |
|----|----|-------------------|-----|-------------|
| 1) | a. | slecht ‘evil/bad’ | a’. | goed ‘good’ |
|    | b. | klein ‘small’     | b’. | groot ‘big’ |
|    | c. | gezond ‘healthy’  | c’. | ziek ‘ill’  |
|    | d. | leeg ‘empty’      | d’. | vol ‘full’  |

In Bangla also antonymous adjectives are available.

### Bangla

- |    |    |                              |     |  |
|----|----|------------------------------|-----|--|
| 2) | a. | k <sup>h</sup> arap ‘bad’    | a’. | b <sup>h</sup> alo ‘good’              |
|    | b. | c <sup>h</sup> oto ‘small’   | b’. | b <sup>o</sup> ro ‘big’                |
|    | c. | ƶus <sup>h</sup> o ‘healthy’ | c’. | ƶus <sup>h</sup> o ‘ill’               |
|    | d. | k <sup>h</sup> ali ‘empty’   | d’. | b <sup>h</sup> ort <sup>i</sup> ‘full’ |

The adjectives given in the instance (3) are the antonymous adjectives in English.

### English

- |    |    |         |     |      |
|----|----|---------|-----|------|
| 3) | a. | bad     | a’. | good |
|    | b. | small   | b’. | big  |
|    | c. | healthy | c’. | ill  |
|    | d. | empty   | d’. | full |

It is examined that antonymous adjectives can behave differently based on contexts. The nature of the given scale for such adjectives can be expressed in many ways. They are illustrated below.

### 2.1.1. Scales that are Unbounded on Both Sides

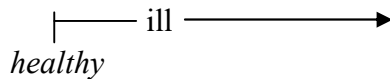
Both the adjectives of an antonymic pair have various ranges on a scale, that is, they are scalar. The scale represented as *scale a* is unbounded on both sides. The referents do not have any limit to be *bad* and *good*. Again, on the scale there is a zone where none of them is applicable. The place is actually a neuter zone which implies that *bad* and *not good* are not same. In Dutch *goed* ‘good’ and *slecht* ‘evil/bad’ are such instances.

#### Scale a:

Scale of “goodness”:







Similarly, Dutch also possesses such pair of adjectives which consists of one absolute adjective and one gradable adjective. Few examples are presented below.

**Dutch**

- 7) a. brandbaar ‘combustible’      a’. onbrandbaar ‘incombustible’  
 b. bereikbaar ‘attainable’      b’. onbereikbaar ‘unattainable’

Some instances from Bangla can be mentioned. Interestingly, the instances of (8) show that the gradable adjectives (given in the primed examples) are formed by ɔ-affixation of the absolute adjectives.

**Bangla**

- 8) a. pəkko ‘ripe’      a’. ɔpəkko ‘unripe’  
 b. ʃɔmpurno ‘complete’      b’. ɔʃɔmpurno ‘incomplete’  
 c. ʃɔʃt ‘honest’      c’. ɔʃɔʃt ‘dishonest’  
 d. bʰɔd̪ro ‘moderate’      d’. ɔbʰɔd̪ro ‘immoderate’

**English**

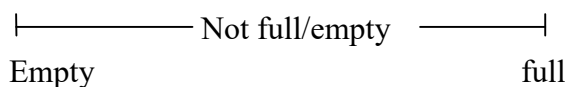
- 9) a. healthy      a’. ill  
 b. ripe      b’. unripe

**2.1.4. Scales with Two Absolute Adjectives**

A scale can be with two absolute adjectives which denote boundedness. They refer to two absolute states of an NP on the implied scale as in *scale d*. Such a pair of antonymous adjective includes *empty* and *full* which are not scalar.

**Scale d:**

Scale of “fullness”:



Dutch also has such type of adjectives which indicate absoluteness on the given scale. They are modified by the adverbs like *helemaal* ‘totally’ and *vrijwel* ‘almost’. For examples,

**Dutch**

- 10) a. leeg ‘empty’      a’. vol ‘full’

Likewise *kʰali* ‘empty’ and *bʰort̪i* ‘full’ are absolute adjectives in Bangla. They are only modified by the adverbs like *ækd̪om/ækebare* ‘entirely’.



- b. ei haṭṭita c<sup>h</sup>oto/boro.  
This elephant-CLA small/big  
'this elephant is small/big.'

In the given examples, two animals (mouse and elephant) are taken having great difference in size. But in the both cases, the same measure adjective is used to denote the property size as found in (15).

### English

- 15) a. this mouse is small/big.  
b. the elephant is small/big.

Apparently, it seems that in (16) the statement is true but the statement in (16b) is false because any tiger is bigger than other animals like cat, dog, mouse etc. But when the comparison set is defined in terms of same type, one scale will be enough to measure them. In (16) the two tigers are actually in comparison belonging to two different places (provinces) of India: West Bengal (Sundarban) and Karnataka. As a result, it is inferred that the tiger of West Bengal is bigger than the tiger of Karnataka. Here it is clear that to have the comparative sense we need some contextual information. That is why; they are named 'context dependent adjectives.'

### Bangla

- 16) a. ṣundorbōner baḡ<sup>h</sup> boro.  
Sundarban-POSS tiger big  
The tiger of Sundarban is big.  
b. karnatōker baḡ<sup>h</sup> c<sup>h</sup>oto.  
Karnatak-POSS tiger small  
The tiger of Karnatak is small.

### 2.3. Subjective/Objective Adjectives

There is another set of adjectives called *subjective adjectives* which rely on the speaker's perception. They indicate positive or negative evaluation of the modified NP. The embedded clauses with *vinden*-construction show up such type of adjectives. The examples of Dutch are presented in (17).

### Dutch

- 17) a. Ik vind Shakespeares drama's saai/boeiend.  
I consider Shakespeare's tragedies boring/exciting  
a'. Ditboek is interessant voor elke taalkundige.  
this book is of.interest to every linguist

In Bangla *b<sup>h</sup>alo* 'good' and *k<sup>h</sup>arap* 'bad' are respectively positive and negative valued subjective adjectives as the evaluations are based on the speaker's judgment.

### **Bangla**

- 18) a. bumba mone kore mampi b<sup>h</sup>alo/k<sup>h</sup>arap.  
'Bumba considers Mampi good/bad.'  
a'. ei boita šokol b<sup>h</sup>ašabiđer kac<sup>h</sup>e agrohojōnok.  
'This book is interesting to all linguists.'

In English *exciting* and *interesting* are positive valued subjective adjectives and *boring* is negative valued subjective adjective.

### **English**

- 19) a. I consider Shakespeare's tragedies boring/exciting.  
a'. This book is interesting to every linguist.

On the other hand, the measure adjectives which can be modified by nominal measure phrases are *objective* ones as they have certain measurement implying a point on the scale. *lang* 'long' in Dutch is an objective adjective.

### **Dutch**

- 20) De weg is twintig meter lang.  
the road is twenty meters long

In Bangla *lamba* 'long' is an objective adjective because nouns like *fari* 'saree' can be measured by a scale. The measurement may turn into falseness as not having the measurement *baro haṭ* 'twelve hands' as stated in the following example.

### **Bangla**

- 21) šarita baro haṭ lamba.  
Saree-CLA twelve hand long.  
'The saree is twelve hand long.'

In English *long* is an objective adjective because it indicates a certain point on the scale and it can be modified by the nominal measure phrase like *twenty meters*. Such measurement can be true or false.

### **English**

The road is twenty meter long.

## **2.4. Measure Adjectives**

Study shows that measure adjectives may have different functions in languages. They can be sometimes used neutrally and sometimes to form natural questions. Now the following sub-sections represent them with instances.

### 2.4.1. Neutral Interpretation

The measure adjectives are used as complements losing the meaning expressed by the antonymic pair. Moravcsik (2013, p. 52) stated: “*this neutral interpretation is possible only for one member of each pair of adjectives – the one that designates ‘larger extent’ as opposed to the one referring to ‘less extent’.*”

Dutch shows that positive valued adjective are used to make neutral form where the negative valued adjective is not applicable.

#### *Dutch*

- 22) a. De weg is twintig meter lang!/kort.  
the road is twenty meters long/short  
b. De weg is maar twintig meter lang!/kort.  
the road is only twenty meters long/short

In Bangla *cōra* and *foru* make a pair of antonymous adjectives. But the first one of them only can be used in neutral sense. The presence of the adverb *maṭro* ‘only’ before the nominal measure phrase *ægaro mitar* ‘eleven meters’ denotes that only the positive valued adjective can occur in such context.

#### *Bangla*

- 23) a. raṣṭata ægaro mitar cōra!/foru.  
‘The road is eleven meters wide!/narrow.’  
b. raṣṭata maṭro ægaro mitar cōra!/foru.  
‘The road is only eleven meters wide!/narrow.’

#### *English*

- 24) a. the road is twenty meters long!/short  
b. the road is only twenty meters long!/short

In the example in (24) in English signifies that the NP *the road* has a certain measurement which is denoted by the adjective *long* in general sense. There is no sense of comparison rather it implies a neutral meaning. This becomes evident from the use of adverbs like *only*. So, it can be said that *long* is the neutral form of the relevant antonymous pair: *long* and *short*. Besides, the other element *short* with negative evaluation cannot be used to imply neutral meaning.

### 2.4.2. Natural Questions

The measure adjectives which have positive value can be used to form natural questions in interrogative sentences.

#### *Dutch*

- 25) Hoe lang!/kort is dezeweg?



how long/short is this road

In Bangla also the positive valued measure adjectives are used in interrogative constructions as given below.

### **Bangla**

26) raṣṭata kəto cəora/!foru?  
road-CLA how long/short

Similarly,

### **English**

27) How long/short is this road?

### **2.4.3. Contextual Information**

The negative valued adjectives are used to mean that the speaker has some prior information about the measurement of a particular entity. The example in (28) presupposes that s/he knows beforehand that the road is short.

### **Dutch**

28) Hoe kort is dezeweg?  
how short is this road

If a question is formed with a measure adjective like *foru* 'narrow' by a speaker as presented in (29), it signifies that s/he has prior information that the road is actually narrow.

### **Bangla**

29) raṣṭata kəto foru?  
Road-CLA how narrow

### **English**

30) How short is the road?

### **2.5. Positively/Negatively Valued Adjectives**

Subjective adjectives which depend on language user's view may have either positive value or negative value ascribed to the property. They do not imply subjective scale but express some evaluation by the speaker. However, the primeless and primed examples will gradually present negative and positive valued adjectives. Examples are found in Dutch.

### **Dutch**

31) a. ongehoorzaam a'. gehoorzaam  
'disobedient' 'obedient'

In the instance (32), the adjectives *kot<sup>h</sup>in* ‘difficult’ and *ɔbad<sup>h</sup>o* ‘disobedient’ are negative valued adjectives as given in the primeless examples and *foja* ‘esay’ and *bad<sup>h</sup>o* ‘obedient’ belong to the positive valued adjective group.

### **Bangla**

- |     |    |   |     |  |
|-----|----|---|-----|--|
| 32) | a. | kot <sup>h</sup> in kaɽ                               | a’. | foja kaɽ   |
|     |    | difficult work  |     | esay work  |
|     | b. | ɔbad <sup>h</sup> o c <sup>h</sup> at <sup>h</sup> ro | a’. | bad <sup>h</sup> o c <sup>h</sup> at <sup>h</sup> ro |
|     |    | disobedient student                                   |     | obedient student                                     |

In English *difficult* and *disobedient* have negative value and on the other hand, *easy* and *obedient* are positive valued instances as given in (33).

### **English**

- |     |    |                     |     |                  |
|-----|----|---------------------|-----|------------------|
| 33) | a. | difficult work.     | a’. | esay work        |
|     | b. | disobedient student | a’. | obedient student |

## **2.6. Truly Antonymous Adjectives**

Truly antonymous adjectives make a pair of adjectives where an adjective and its opposite ones appear in complementary distribution. They are also termed as ‘polar adjectives.’ It can be inferred: ‘*X is more A than Y*’ implies ‘*Y is more A’ than X*’. Thus, the inference explains the situation where A and A’ represent antonymous adjectives. In the following instances in Dutch, Bangla and English the primeless examples and the relevant primed examples make pair of truly antonymous adjectives.

### **Dutch**

- |     |    |               |     |                        |
|-----|----|---------------|-----|------------------------|
| 34) | a. | veilig ‘safe’ | b’. | gevaarlijk ‘dangerous’ |
|-----|----|---------------|-----|------------------------|

In Bangla *nirap<sup>o</sup>o* ‘safe’ and *bip<sup>o</sup>oɽnok* ‘dangerous’ occur in complementary distribution. When one element is used in a sentence, the other element cannot appear in that particular context.

### **Bangla**

- |     |    |                                 |     |                                   |
|-----|----|---------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|
| 35) | a. | b <sup>h</sup> alo ‘good’       | a’. | k <sup>h</sup> arap ‘bad’         |
|     | b. | ei ɽajgata nirap <sup>o</sup> o | b’. | oi ɽajgata bip <sup>o</sup> oɽnok |
|     |    | this place-CLA safe             |     | that place-CLA dangerous          |
|     |    | ‘this place is safe.’           |     | ‘that place is dangerous.’        |

### **English**

- |     |    |      |     |           |
|-----|----|------|-----|-----------|
| 36) | a. | good | a’. | bad       |
|     | b. | safe | b’. | dangerous |

## Outcomes

The findings of this research paper can be outlined here. Firstly, it is evident that scalar adjectives belonging to the semantic class set-denoting adjectives are found in all the three selected languages Dutch, Bangla and English. Secondly, when the question of semantic classification of scalar adjectives comes, it is seen that the categorization also prevails in Bangla and English like Dutch. That is, antonymous adjectives, context dependent adjectives, subjective and objective adjectives, measure adjectives, positive and negative valued adjectives and truly antonymous adjectives are found in the mentioned languages. Thirdly, when antonymic adjectives are scrutinized in them, the study exhibits that the application of Dutch framework is also pertinent to Bangla and English.

## Data Representation

In the present paper, examples are catered from the three selected languages Dutch, Bangla and English. Here Dutch data is collected from secondary resource, Bangla data is transcribed with International Phonetic Association symbols and finally English data is given in Roman script. Besides, some scales are represented with English glosses.

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