Evaluative adjective sentences: A question-based analysis of projection (Review)

Summary: This paper adduces experimental data to argue against the view that the prejacent of EAS is a lexically specified presupposition, instead claiming that the prejacent is a lexical entailment that projects just when it is not at-issue.

Overall assessment: I believe this paper has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the field. At the same time, I find (i) there are often swiping claims that obscure what has actually been achieved and (ii) there is a lot of confusion about theory, data, and mostly how the two connect. I elaborate on these points below.

#1: The authors claim to show that the prejacent of EAS is not a lexical presupposition but rather a lexical entailment of EAS. (The crucial term "lexical entailment" is never defined in the paper, so I take it to simply mean an entailment of an expression that lacks any projection triggers.) In reality however, all that is shown is that the prejacent of EAS is not highly projective (although somewhat different from presuppositions associated with "soft" triggers like *know*) and that it projects just when not at-issue. But discourse status alone doesn't explain why the prejacent of EAS is able to project in the first place, given that lexical entailments never do that. The authors cite the Projection Principle of Tonhauser et al. 2018:499 below, but the formulation overstates Tonhauser et al.'s actual claim, which only about *projective* contents, or contents that in general have the potential to project.

(1) *Gradient Projection Principle*: If content *C* is expressed by a constituent embedded under an entailment-canceling operator, then *C* projects to the extent that it is not at-issue.

The point can be made quite clearly on the following example (a version of what is cited in the paper on pp.6-7). In B's response, the complement does not answer the Discourse Question (only the matrix does), so the complement is not at-issue, but it projects only with discover, not with think. If (1) were allowed to apply indiscriminately to all contents (including lexical entailments), the contrast below would be a puzzle, so the above principle needs to be circumscribed to projective content.

(2) Context: Henry and Harriet are an academic couple that lives on the West Coast.
A: Why is Henry in such a bad mood?
B: He discovered/thinks that Harriet was at Princeton for a job interview.

In sum: We know from previous literature that the prejacent of EAS can project, and Karttunen et al. 2014 tell us that projection need not arise. The novel contribution of the current paper is the empirical observation that the projection of an EAS prejacent is correlated with the lack of at-issueness. Still, we are offered no mechanism that explains what makes the prejacent of EAS able to project in the first place, so we are left in the dark on the nature of this inference. Whether or not presuppositional, it is clearly not a lexical entailment.

#2: The paper claims to provide evidence for the gradable nature of projection, and because of that it is also assumed that "at-issue" and "follows from the common ground" are gradient properties as well. I don't see what warrants that or how it is supported by the data. There are two choices of how gradience can enter the picture, and it seems to me that the first leads to bizarre implications (and is at odds with the two experiments) and that the second does not require gradience at all.

On p.8 the paper mentions two ways to interpret gradient projection: as pertaining to the data itself or as quantifying the agent's uncertainty about the data. The authors go on to say: "we remain agnostic about the underlying interpretation of projectivity as a gradient property, though our discussion of projection variability will be in line with

the first interpretation" (p.8). The former choice, which the authors seem to make, leads to things that I find difficult to parse. For example, what would it mean for a prejacent to follow from the common ground to 30%? So, by Non-redundancy, it should be 70% at-issue? And by the Gradient Projection Principle it will project to 30%? Given the complementary nature of prejacent and generalization, does that also mean that the generalization follows from the common ground to 70%, is at-issue to 30%, and projects to 70%? What would be a good example of that?

In addition, even if these things can somehow be defined, I don't see how the two experiments support gradient projection. Both predictors in Experiment 1 are binary, so we cannot set a third intermediate value and observe its effect on the response variable. In Experiment 2, both the predictor and the response are binary, so gradience cannot arise either.

On the other hand, if we interpret gradience as quantifying uncertainty, we can stick with the binary options for projection and all the supplementary concepts mentioned about. It seems to me that that the paper doesn't offer any evidence for gradient projection after all.

#3: As far as I can tell, the examples cited to show that EAS may be read in two different ways (prejacent projects/generalization at-issue, prejacent at-issue/generalization projects) include negation. Since the claim is that EAS have those two entailments by virtue of their lexical semantics, we should be able to see the same kind of "ambiguity" with modal operators as well, for example in EAS like *Perhaps/Most likely/Mary thinks Feynman was stupid to dance on the table*. This omission should be easy to fix by just citing a few appropriate examples.

#4: There are several unclarities in the semantic analysis in (10), p.8. First, I don't know why *VP'* takes two arguments in (10a) but only one argument in (10b). Second, the prose after (10b) does not corresponds to the simple formula that precedes it. I don't see why we need to talk about degrees, but if these are important for some reason, why not elaborate the formula so it has all the necessary information in it? Finally, I don't understand in what sense the generalization is "timeless", given that the generalization of an EAS may get different truth values depending on when it is uttered. Example: The generalization of *John was smart to marry Sue* (which can be rendered informally as *It was smart of John to marry Sue*) may be true before the divorce and false after the divorce. This goes back to my second point that the generalization in (10b) needs to be properly spelled out formally, just like the prejacent in (10a) is.

#5: On p.12 it is stated that Experiment 2 investigates the prediction that "The more likely the generalization is taken to be at-issue, the less likely the prejacent is taken to be at-issue."

In reality, Experiment 2 only manipulates the extent to which the generalization follows from the common ground. These are not the same things, and it takes an extra step to get from common ground status to at-issue status, otherwise we won't need Non-redundancy.

#6: "the prejacent and the generalization of EASs are independent of one another in that neither is a precondition for the truth of the other. Consider (1) *Feynman was stupid to dance on the table*: it is neither necessary for Feynman to have danced on the table in order for the generalization of this EAS to be true, nor is it necessary for the generalization to be true in order for Feynman to have danced on the table."

The latter statement is clearly true, but I was surprised to read the former statement. If generalization and prejacent are indeed logically independent, as claimed, what would be a context in which the generalization of a (unmodified past tense) EAS is true but the prejacent is false?