This dissertation explores the structure and semantics of constructions based on
the positive form of gradable adjectives, such as tall, long, interesting or smart.
Such forms – and constructions that are based on them – contain an element of
semantic indeterminacy regarding the standard of comparison that they make
reference to. At the same time, there are a number of phrases that can participate
in constructions with such adjectives and remove some of this indeterminacy.
Examples include ‘judge’ phrases, as in “The ride was fun for John”; purpose-
clauses, as in “This is a long book to assign”; comparison-class phrases, such as
“John is tall for a 4-year-old”. The dissertation investigates these constructions,
providing a syntactic and semantic analysis for each of them, motivated by
an array of empirical cross-linguistic evidence. Despite the apparent similarity
between these ‘standard-affecting’ phrases in terms of their overall interpre-
tational effect, the linguistic machinery behind these effects turns out to be
very different in each case upon closer examination. The linguistic perspective
taken in this dissertation on the problems of the standard of comparison in the
positive construction uncovers various intricacies of the standards of gradable
predicates and opens up new directions for studying the semantics of adjectives
and standards of comparison.