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Most or the Art of Compositionality

Dutch de/het meeste at the Syntax-Semantics Interface

Most or the Art of Compositionality deals with the behaviour of the Dutch quantifier de/het meeste ‘the most’ and more specifically the different interpretations it generates. This dissertation presents a syntactic and semantic decomposition of de/het meeste into an adjective, the comparative, the superlative and the definite determiner.

This study consists of four parts. The first one presents an overview of the literature on English most, from theories that analyse it as a single lexical item lacking internal structure to proposals claiming that it is a superlative embedding the comparative and an adjective.

The second part presents a novel perspective on adjectives. Using the four Aristotelian relations, two logical models are developed that account for gaps in adjectival lexical fields. These models are visualised using 3D diagrams that give a straightforward representation of the intricate relations inside a lexical field.

The third part describes different types of adjectives at the syntax-semantics interface: positive, negative and neutral adjectives and the comparative and superlative form. Syntactically, the analysis of the superlative follows Bobaljik’s Containment Hypothesis: it embeds the comparative. Semantically, it is claimed that the superlative uses universal quantification and comparative semantics to calculate which entity is more ... than all others.

The final part describes the syntax and semantics of de/het meeste. One of the crucial observations is that it behaves like the superlative forms of other adjectives, but not entirely. The small syntactic and semantic differences account for the different interpretations and definiteness effects in Flemish Dutch.

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