sciendo

Comparatives in Context

Vallée on Relative Gradable Adjectives

Kepa Korta
University of the Basque Country

doi: 10.2478/disp-2022-0012
BIBLID: [0873-626X (2022) 66; pp. 239–56]

Abstract

In "Unarticulated Comparison Classes" 2018 [2009], Richard Vallée adopts John Perry's (2012 [2001]) reflexive-referential theory of meaning and content as well as his concept of unarticulated constituents (Perry 1986) to deal with certain context-sensitive elements of the truth-conditions of statements containing relative gradable predicates. I am sympathetic both with the general framework and with the assumption that unarticulated constituents are involved in the truth-conditions of *bare positives* such as "Monica is tall." I do not share, however, Vallée's main conclusions on the examples he provides as pre-theoretical evidence. This leads me to disagree with some details of his proposal for the semantics and pragmatics of relative gradable adjectives.

Keywords

comparative class; John Perry; reflexive-referential theory; unarticulated constituent

1 Introduction

I have always been fond of Richard Vallée's work: his choice of topics for investigation, his clear-cut introductions to intricate problems, his sharp and original solutions, and his clear and concise style, are all admirable. On top of that, I share his overall view on the philosophy of language, semantics and pragmatics, as well as his sympathies towards John Perry's views on language, action and mind. That's why time and time again, I cannot help feeling envious while I enjoy the display of analytical mastery in his texts. The topics he selects are not

unfamiliar to me either: "we", conventional implicatures, complex demonstratives, fiction, unarticulated constituents... and I usually find myself thinking that I should have written about them all some time ago. But Vallée has always done it first, and from the same perspective I would have adopted. So, as often as not, there is little else for me to say—my disagreements, if any, are just minutiae, little details that I would share with him in private communication. This is an exception to the rule.

The case of gradable adjectives is oftentimes mentioned in connection with what seem to be pragmatically determined elements of the truth-conditions of simple statements, such as the location in weather reports ("It is raining [in Palo Alto]"), the domain restriction parameter for quantifiers ("Everyone [in the building] came to the party") or o'clock properties ("It's 12:00 o'clock [p.m] [CET]." Relative gradable adjectives ("Monica is tall [for a white European kid her age in the 2020s]") present another intuitively clear case in which the square-bracketed element is part of the truth-conditions of the statement and/or the belief thereby expressed, without being necessarily part of the uttered sentence and/or the belief-vehicle entertained.

Different authors have slightly different terminologies and significantly different overall approaches to account for these elements. Contextualists take them to be the product of processes of *enrichment* (Carston (2002), Recanati (2004), Sperber and Wilson (1995 [1986])) or *completion* and *expansion* (Bach (1994)) that end up constituting the *explicature* (relevance theorists), the *enriched what is said* (Recanati) or the *impliciture* (Bach), while relativists take these elements out of the relativized content of statements/beliefs and locate them at the context of *evaluation* or *assessment*. Indexicalists (Stanley (2000), Stanley and Szabó (2000)) take them to be the values of indexicals hidden in the logical form of sentences/beliefs. Literalists (Cappelen and Lepore (2005)) do not consider them to be part of the literal truth-conditions.

On my view, most of these proposals are variations on a theme put forward by John Perry (1986) as the notion of unarticulated constituents, so an account of gradable adjectives using Perry's notion within the framework of his critical referentialism was due. Vallée's "Unarticulated Comparison Classes" 2018 [2010] seems to offer such an account. He approaches the issue using Perry's notion and adopting a content-pluralistic view on language. But I think that there is still much to be said. For one thing, I think that the intuitions that Vallée draws from the basic examples he discusses are not convincing. For another, even if I agree with his main framework and motivations, I find the details of his account misguided. They might be worth discussing once again.

Before summarizing Vallée's paper, I introduce its topic: gradable relative adjectives in

bare positive statements. Section 3 is where I present Richard's account as I understand it. I explain the sources of my disagreements with it in Sections 4 and 5, and, finally, I present my own proposal in Section 6.

2 Gradable adjectives

Gradable adjectives express properties that are relative to a *degree* belonging to a *scale*, that is, a totally ordered set of degrees, ordered with respect to some *dimension* (see Morzycki 2016 and citations therein, Kennedy 2007, in particular). In English, they can appear as unmarked attributive predicates, as in (1),

(1) Monica is tall,

or modifiers in a noun phrase in subject position (2), or within attributive predicates (3),

(2) The tall gymnast is nervous;

(3) Nadia is a tall gymnast

or they can occur marked with comparative morphemes ("more", "less", "as"), intensifiers ("very", "quite", "rather") and sufficiency morphemes ("too", "enough", "so"). Morphologically marked occurrences can appear in comparative constructions like

(4) Nadia is taller than Monica.

Morphologically unmarked occurrences may admit propositional phrases with "for" ("*for*-PPs") as in

(5) Nadia is tall for a gymnast,

Gradable adjectives come in two main kinds: relative and absolute. Statements with a relative gradable adjective *F* like "tall", "short", and "big" in a bare (i.e. unmarked) positive sentence like "*a* is *F*" have the following features:

i *Truth-conditional variability*. Their truth-conditions are relative to or contain[1] a certain degree in a standard of comparison which is contextually determined, that

[1] At this point I do not want to decide on what the proper place to locate this element is—the context of evaluation, as relativists claim, or truth-conditions themselves, as an unarticulated constituents-view assumes; later on, I assume the latter, with no more argument than because it is Vallée's approach.

is to say, their truth-value may vary as the standard degree of comparison may change from context to context.

ii *Borderline cases*. In any given context, besides the objects that are easily claimed to be *F* and the cases that are easily judged to be not-*F*, there will be a number of objects for which it will be impossible or at least very difficult to decide whether they are *F* or not.

iii *Sorites*. They give rise to the famous Sorites paradox. Taking for instance a case involving "tall", we can reach the following seemingly absurd pattern of inference:

(6) Monica, whose heigh is exactly 1 meter, is short.

(7) Any person with 1 cm more than a short person is short.

(8) Therefore, (almost) everyone is short.

Relative gradable adjectives, hence, are *vague*.[2] There are, however, absolute gradable adjectives like "straight", "bent", "pure", "impure", "wet" or "dry" which show none of those features in bare positives, and, hence, are not vague. They come also in two kinds. On the one hand, there are *minimum standard* absolute adjectives, which just require the object to possess the relevant property in some minimal degree, like in (Kennedy 2007):

(9) The gold is impure.

(10) The table is wet.

(11) The door is open.

(12) The rod is bent.

On the other hand, there are *maximum standard* absolute adjectives, which require the object to possess the relevant property in some maximal degree, like in:

[2] I do not pursue the issue of vagueness here, but it is worth noting that philosophers's favourite example of a vague predicate—"bald"—is a quite peculiar gradable adjective: it has a closed scale, so it is absolute in that respect, but the standard of comparison is not in one of its ends, as it happens generally with absolute gradable adjectives. Moreover, it behaves like a relative gradable adjectives, as it has the three (i–iii) features mentioned above (see Kennedy 2007: fn. 30).

(13) The platinum is pure.

(14) The floor is dry.

(15) The door is closed.

(16) The rod is straight.

A comprehensive theory of gradable adjectives should try to accommodate the semantics (and pragmatics) of these adjectives in all these constructions. I limit my focus, however, to the case of *relative* ones occurring in *bare positives*, not just for simplicity's sake, but also because that is what Vallée does.[3]

3 Vallée's account

Let's take the case of a Relative Gradable Adjective (henceforth, RGA) like "tall" in bare positives, or just RGA-statements, for short, such as (1) "Monica is tall." Different utterances of (1)—keeping the referent of "Monica" constant—can have different truth-values. In Vallée's words:

> Suppose that Monica is five years old. I see Monica playing with children of her age, notice that she is slightly taller than most of the others, and make an utterance of (1). Given her height, most people would say that my utterance is true. However, if I see Monica in a group of adults and make an utterance of (1), a standard reaction would be to reply that my utterance is simply false. (69)[4]

Different utterances of a sentence containing an RGA, then, might generate different reactions as to their truth. One can take one utterance of (1) as true; and other as false. As Vallée puts it, those two utterances differ in cognitive significance. I have some qualms with the notion of cognitive significance he uses, and I discuss them below. Let us focus on the features of RGA-statements that Vallée attempts to explain. Put it shortly, he assumes that

---

[3] If Kennedy is right, however, "the most morphosyntactically simple form of a gradable predicate turns out to be the hardest to be adequately characterized in terms of a compositional semantic analysis" (Kennedy 2007: 6).

[4] If not indicated otherwise, all page references are to the 2018 version of "Unarticulated comparison classes" 2018 [2010].

(a) RGA-sentences are context-sensitive, that is, different utterances of the same RGA-sentence might differ in truth-value;

(b) RGA-sentences—or RGAs themselves—are not ambiguous; they do not have any indexical element either. Their context-sensititivity must have some other source; and

(c) The truth of RGA-statements is relative to a comparison class.

The two main theoretical tools that Vallée uses to deal with these features are, first, Perry's (1986) notion of unarticulated constituents (henceforth, UCs) and, second, his content-pluralistic approach to utterances and thoughts known either as "Reflexive-referential theory" or "Critical referentialism" (Perry 2012 [2001]). I'll shortly introduce them using one simple example. Consider the sentence

(17) It's raining.

As it is commonly assumed, the meaning of (17) does not *fully* determine its truth-conditions. A particular location must be somehow supplied to obtain the truth-conditions of a particular utterance of (17). Perry's account takes this location to be a UC of the truth-conditions of the utterance, that is to say, a *constituent* of the truth-conditions which is not articulated or encoded by any component—phrase, word, morpheme—in the sentence uttered. According to Perry (1986), this constituent, the location in our example, need not be identical to the location of the utterance, but it is determined by the utterer's—possibly non-conscious—intention.[5] Suppose that Jim says (17) to John on a rainy day in Palo Alto. The meaning of the sentence plus the fact that Jim has Palo Alto in mind establishes the following truth-conditional content for his utterance:

(17a) It's raining in **Palo Alto**.[6]

Now, talking about the truth-conditions of Jim's utterance of (17), we can distinguish various levels of truth-conditions, depending of the kind of facts that are taken as given. At one end, there are the *referential* truth-conditions, with all the facts about meanings,

[5] See also Korta & Perry 2019a, 2019b.

[6] I adopt Vallée's variant of Perry's (2012 [2001]) notational convention and use boldface for objects as constituents of truth-conditions and italics for identifying conditions. For more on the levels of truth-conditions, see Korta and Perry's (2011).

intentions and reference fixed, as in (17a). At the other end, there are the *reflexive* truth-conditions that are provided by the meaning of the sentence uttered plus the fact that it has been uttered, as in

(17b) It's raining *at the location the speaker of* **(17)** *has in mind.*

The particular location, Palo Alto in this case, belongs to the referential truth-conditions, even if it doesn't correspond to any element, word or morpheme, of the sentence uttered. At the reflexive level, though, the UC is not fixed, since facts about the particular speaker and her intentions are not taken as given; the meaning of the sentence and the fact that an utterance of it has been produced conveys the information that there is a relevant place the speaker has in mind,[7] but does not identify it.

Reflexive and referential truth-conditions do not constitute stern limits. We can consider truth-conditions of the utterance that do not take sentential syntactic structure or even the particular language being used as fixed. We can take truth-conditions that go beyond reference and take facts about denotation as fixed, for example. Or, depending on our theoretical purposes at hand, we can consider some "intermediate" or hybrid truth-conditions that are the result of fixing some but not all facts about reference. We can fix, for instance, the speaker's identity and obtain the speaker-bound truth-conditions:

(17c) It's raining *at the location* **Jim Perry** *has in mind.*

Vallée's account of RGA-statements employs those three levels of truth-conditions: reflexive, speaker-bound and referential.[8] His theory assumes that, on the one end, the referential truth-conditions of RGA-statements contain utterance-specific comparison classes as UCs. On the other end, the reflexive truth-conditions are given by the linguistic meaning of the sentence uttered, with facts about reference undetermined and an unspecified comparison class. In the hybrid truth-conditions, he considers facts about reference fixed, but not the specific comparison class. Adapting a bit the example (and the terminology) he uses,

---

[7] By "has in mind" in (17b), I don't mean that the speaker has the location articulated in her thought. That would go directly against the spirit and the letter of Perry's (1986) paper that is entitled "Thought without representation". In the sense I'm using the term here, the child who states "It's 12 o'clock" has her time zone in mind, even if she has no representation of time zones whatsoever.

[8] He calls these three levels *indexical*, *referential* and *designational*, respectively. They do not correspond to Perry's 2012 [2001] use of those terms, but, perhaps, Perry's—or Korta & Perry's 2011—terminological volatility do not help much in sticking to an "orthodox" one, anyway.

(1′a, b, c) are, respectively, the reflexive, hybrid and referential truth-conditions of the first utterance of sentence (1)—call it (1′):

(1′a) *The origin of the notion associated to the name "Monica"* is tall relative to *the comparison class specific to* (**1′**).

(1′b) **Monica** is tall relative to *the comparison class relative to* (**1′**).

(1′c) **Monica** is tall relative to **kids her age**.

This analysis offers a clear view on the issues about context-sensitivity of RGA-statements. Different utterances of the same RGA-sentence can have different truth-values because they can have different-truth-conditions. First, their referential truth-conditions include a specific comparison class for each utterance. Different utterances might include different comparison classes—e.g. the class of kids her age versus the group of the adults surrounding her—, and, hence, differ in truth-value. Second, this comparison class comes as an unarticulated constituent of RGA-statements. That is to say, "**kids her age**" in the referential truth-conditions (1′c) is "not a lexically determined, articulated part of this content", and it is not optional but mandatory (89). The role that the class of kids Monica's age plays relative to "tall" in (1′) would be analogous to the role Palo Alto plays relative to "raining" in (17): gradable adjectives require specific comparative classes much like weather predicates require locations. Hearers must rely on extra-linguistic information pertaining to the wide context to ascertain the speaker's intentions that determine the utterance's referential truth-conditions. Just based on their linguistic knowledge, they would solely identify the utterance's reflexive truth-conditions (1′a), which would include a yet unspecified comparison class. The truth of RGA-statements is relative to a specific comparison class that enters into the referential truth-conditions of the utterance, and is unspecified at the reflexive and hybrid levels of truth-conditions.[9]

---

[9] Vallée, however, adds a further qualification, that may complicate the view of comparison classes as unarticulated constituents.

He claims that

> "relative to *the comparison class specific to* **u**" is encoded in all relative gradable predicate utterances. Knowledge of that information builds on the category of terms used by the speaker, not on the conventional meaning of specific predicates. (86)

4 Cognitive significance

Needless to say, the notion of cognitive significance is related to Frege's (1892) discussion of the cognitive value of identity statements such as (18a) and (18b) and the substitution of co-referential expressions in simple declarative sentences as in (19a) and (19b):

(18a) Hesperus is Hesperus.

(18b) Hesperus is Phosphorus.

(19a) Hesperus is a planet.

(19b) Phosphorus is a planet.

(18a) is analytic and trivial; (18b) is synthetic and informative—they differ in cognitive value. Given the truth of (18b), i.e. given that "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" are co-referential names—they both refer to Venus—, (19a) and (19b) must have the same reference, they must have the same (referential) truth-conditions, and, hence, the same truth-value—true. However, as Frege, points out, a rational and competent speaker can accept one as true without necessarily accepting the other as true, as long as she ignores that (18b) is true. (19a) and (19b) share a reference, they share a truth-value, but they differ in cognitive significance. (18a) and (18b) share a reference, they share a truth-value, but they differ in cognitive value and, hence, in cognitive significance. A rational and competent speaker accepts the truth of (18a) without having to accept the truth of (18b) for that reason.

Vallée draws from Perry (2000, 2012 [2001]) the appeal to reflexive and hybrid contents to account for differences in cognitive significance. Utterances of (18a) and (18b) differ in reflexive—and also hybrid—contents, which explains why one can take different attitudes toward their truth, as well as why a speaker can use one instead of the other and cause different cognitive impact on the hearer. As Vallée points out, Perry has applied the reflexive-referential account for problems of cognitive significance involving, not only the

---

This sounds very much like claiming that the comparison class is articulated. Being encoded is very much like being articulated, even being encoded not by each specific RGA, but by the category of RGAs itself. That does not sound very different from a hidden-indexical view, according to which all RGAs include a comparison class parameter x which is contextually saturated. However, this conclusion seems unwanted by Vallée, as he points out more than once—72, fn. 8, for instance—so I leave the issue aside, and consider his proposal for RGA-statements to include UCs in their truth-conditions.

substitution of co-referential singular terms such as proper names and definite descriptions, but also co-referential uses of the same indexical or demonstrative. A rational and competent speaker can deny the truth of an utterance of "That dog is that dog", even when both sub-utterances of "that dog" refer to the same dog—see the example of Stretch, a dog at the Stanford bookstore veranda (Perry 2012 [2001]: 73–5, 101–5). Now, my problem with Vallée's account in this respect is that RGA-statements seem to have little to do with Fregean problems of cognitive significance, even according to Vallée's own proposal.

It is quite obvious that one can accept the truth of utterance (1′), while taking another utterance of (1) that involves adults—(1″)—as false. But there is more to say about these two utterances. (1′) and (1″) differ in truth-value because they differ in truth-conditions, so any rational and competent speaker who identifies the referential truth-conditions of those utterances, not only can but also *must* assign them different truth-values. In other words, the difference in cognitive attitude towards the truth of (1) in these two utterances is explained by the difference in referential truth-conditions: (1′) includes the class of kids as a UC; (1″) includes the class of adults. Different referential content, different truth-values, different attitudes. No problem of cognitive significance involved.

To be sure, Vallée seems to be aware of some conceptual tension here:

> My argument takes, as it[s] starting point, differences in cognitive significance, whatever the intuitive truth conditions and truth value may be, and is based on the cognitive aspect of utterances, not on what explains divergence in truth conditions and in truth-value of different specific utterances. … different utterances of (1) … can differ in cognitive significance, whatever their intuitive truth conditions and truth-value. (81)

Once we have distinguished different truth-conditional contents as the result of involving different comparison classes as UCs, I don't see what is left of the problem of the cognitive significance of RGA-statements. I think, the issue of cognitive significance is irrelevant here. The difference in cognitive attitude towards different utterances of the same sentence seems to be perfectly explained by their difference in truth-conditions and truth-value. But I might be missing something here.[10] Be that as it may, I think the issue is not relevant to assess the rest of Vallée's account.

---

[10] In this respect, I find the closing sentence of section 7 particularly puzzling: "cognitive significance is known *a priori*". (82)

5 Comparative classes and beyond

My problems with Vallée's account start at the very beginning, with his description of the basic case involving utterances of (1) "Monica is tall." Let me repeat Vallée's initial words:

> I see Monica playing with children of her age, notice that she is slightly taller than most of the others, and make an utterance of (1) [(1′)]. Given her height, most people would say that my utterance is true. However, if I see Monica in a group of adults and make an utterance of (1) [(1″)], a standard reaction would be to reply that my utterance is simply false. (69)

I do not find the examples convincing. Let's start with (1′). The mere fact that Monica is *slightly taller* than *most* of the other kids would not make most people say that (1′) is true. Monica needs to be not just taller, but *significantly* taller. And how much is that? Well, the most we can say is that that can vary from one utterance to another, even from utterances involving the same comparison class. This suggest the existence of another truth-conditional unarticulated ingredient beyond the comparison class. But, before I deal with that, I want to mention a couple of points about comparison classes.

The way Vallée describes the examples makes it sound as if the specific comparison classes involved are determined by external circumstances, which are part of the context of utterance. The fact that the speaker and hearers of (1′) see Monica with children her age seems to be enough, according to Vallée, to determine the kids her age or, maybe, even *those* kids she is playing with, as the relevant comparison class.

In the same vein, if the speaker of (1″)—and the hearers, I assume—"see[s] Monica in a group of adults" (69) that would be enough to determine adults—or, perhaps, *that* group of adults—as the relevant comparison class, and thus "the standard reaction would be to reply that my utterance [(1″)] is simply false" (69). But this cannot be right. Vallée himself talks of the specific comparison class the speaker *has in mind* as the one that enters the referential truth-condition of the utterance. The fact that the speaker is seeing one group or the other does not automatically make the truth of an utterance relative to one group of the other. It just makes the fact that the speaker has those groups in mind as the relevant comparison class plausible. And it is that, the speaker's intention, what the speaker has in mind, what determines the specific comparison class. And not only that.

Suppose that the speaker's intention determines the kids of Monica's age—5-year olds—as the specific comparison class in (1′). As I said above, I think it is not enough to be "slightly taller than most of the others". It seems we need more than just a comparative class to compare Monica and determine whether she is taller—*significantly* taller—than them.

Comparison classes are supposed to set a standard of height that Monica should exceed in order to qualify as tall. Those are likely different for (1′) and (1″). And I believe Vallée is wrong when he simplifies the examples as if they were just a matter of comparison classes:

> The sentence (1) or utterances of (1) are true or false depending on what or whom Monica is compared to, that is a comparison class. It is true if Monica is tall when she is compared to a group of five-year-old children, and it is false when compared to human adults. (70)

"Tall" is a vague predicate, which means that not any height exceeding that standard will do. Some cases might count as borderline cases, *neither tall nor not-tall*, depending on the particular utterance. All this suggests that the referential truth-conditional content of an utterance like (1′) includes not just a comparative class, but a degree that exceeds the standard provided by a comparative class in a contextually relevant way. That's the core of my proposal, which I turn now to sketch.

6 A modest proposal

Suppose, once again, that Monica is playing basketball with other 5-year olds.[11] She is neither slightly nor significantly taller than most of the other kids in the two teams. She is, in fact, slightly shorter than all the other kids in the basketball game. I utter

(1‴) Monica is tall,

and, contrary to what Vallée would likely conclude, my utterance seems true to me. Here is how I explain it. (1‴) involves as a UC of its referential truth-conditions, not the group of kids she is playing with, but the class of kids Monica's age—5-year old kids—which establishes a standard of height. She is shorter than her playmates but taller than most kids her age. Is she *significantly* taller? Well, in this case, she is tall enough to play basketball—even if he is the shortest of the present group—and that makes her, in fact, significantly taller than most kids her age. By (1‴) I am stating that Monica is taller than most kids her

[11] I have been told that 5 years must be a bit too early for kids playing basketball. If you think so, please adapt the example and take Monica to be a bit older—and taller—. A bit of internet research, however, tells me that "Many modern basketball programs enroll kids when they are around five to six years of age. This is because it is the best age to build the primary skills of the game and develop their enthusiasm". So, the example might be good, after all.

age, in a way established by the comparison between the 5-year old basket players and the average for that age. In general, I contend that a RGA-statement involves various elements beyond comparison classes as UCs of its truth-conditions. In particular the following:[12]

(a) a dimension with a maximum or minimum standard (height and a minimum standard, in our example);

(b) a comparison class (5-year old kids); a relevant way to consider an individual with respect to a standard (Monica's height as a basket player compared to average 5-year-olds);

(c) a relevant way to consider an individual with respect to a standard (Monica's height as a basket player compared to average 5-year-olds);

(d) a degree determined with respect to (a), (b), and (c) (a degree that exceeds the normal height for 5-year old kids as compared to basketball players that age).

The last element gives a cue to what can be taken to be the referential truth-condition of (1‴):

(1‴a) **Monica** is tall to *a degree that exceeds the normal height for 5-year old kids when compared to basketball players that age*

Now, in a content-pluralistic framework like the one that Vallée and I favour, we would distinguish between the referential truth-conditions of (1‴) and its reflexive truth-conditions:[13]

(1‴b) **Monica** is tall to *a degree that exceeds the normal height for a comparison class and in a way specific to* (**1‴**)

Similar reflexive conditions would apply to (1′) and (1″), which would result in diverging referential truth-conditions and, in the case of (1″), possibly a different truth-value. Let us focus on this last case to further illustrate the difference with Vallée's proposal.

He claims that "if I see Monica in a group of adults and make an utterance of (1), a standard reaction would be to reply that my utterance is simply false". (69) I think there are

---

[12] See Graff 2000 for a proposal along those lines.

[13] For the sake of simplicity we are taking the facts about the reference of the name "Monica" as fixed, so, strictly speaking, these would not be the reflexive but some *hybrid* truth-conditions of (1‴)

two reasons why I don't find his claim plausible. The first is that with such a poor context I cannot make much sense of the speaker's rationality. Why should anyone make such an obviously false claim, if it is indeed that obvious? Is the speaker being ironic? Is the speaker under a very wrong impression due to, say, long distance or lack of perspective? Given Vallée's austere description of the context, we cannot tell. All we know is that, according to his account, the group of adults Monica is with, and nothing else, enters into the referential truth-conditions of (1″) and that, Monica being shorter than all of them, (1″) is *simply* false or so would be "standardly" rendered. But—and this is my second reason—I do not take the falsity of (1″) to be simple or obvious.

Suppose that the average height of 5-year-olds in the country and the generation of Monica is 1.10m. Monica is 1.30m, and that puts her well above the average. The group of adults she is with are all women from an older generation with an average height of 1.60m. In this particular group they are all below the average, with a couple of them a bit below 1.50. If (1″) had this particular context, I would not take it simply as false. I would take the speaker to mean something else, and not merely that Monica is tall with respect to the height of the members of the group she is with. The speaker might mean that Monica is tall considering that she is a tall five-year-old and these particular women's "normal" height is within Monica's reach. You can say that she's even *proportionally* taller than the women in the comparison class. All these nuances would have a place in my account as specifications of the elements (a)–(d) above, with something like the following referential truth-conditions as a result:

(1″a) **Monica** is tall to *a degree that exceeds the normal height* of **the adult females she's with** *when they were kids*.

If that's what the speaker meant, I would take (1″) to be true.

To sum up, the reflexive truth-conditions of RGA-statements, like the reflexive truth-conditions of any statement, are determined by the meaning of the sentence uttered and the fact that certain speaker has uttered it. If Vallée and I are on the right track, they include slots for UCs—one slot, according to Vallée, several according to me—which are not identified at this level. It is at the referential level where the referents and the UCs are fixed. (1″) is about Monica, and about her height relative to her age and to the height of females she is with. We can suppose that the speaker might even have an approximate value for the degree of height she is talking about for a girl, say, above 1.25 m. That would pertain

yet to another level of truth-conditions: the *designational* truth-conditions:[14]

(1‴d) **Monica**'s height is more than **1.25 m**,

A content-pluralistic theory such as Perry's together with his notion of unarticulated constituents offers an adequate framework to account for the complex truth-conditional meaning of RGA-statements.

7 Conclusion

The last section briefly introduces an alternative way to build a content-pluralistic account of the truth-conditions of RGA-statements, using the notion of UCs. It is just a picture, rather than an account, since it is still a bit too simple. A theory of RGAs cannot be limited to the case of bare positives, and it needs an accompanying account of absolute gradable adjectives too, of course. This is just a modest amendment to Vallée's original and insightful proposal. In its simplicity, I hope it adds some constructive qualifications to Vallée's picture, in order to accord better not only with facts concerning the truth-conditional content of RGA-statements but also, perhaps, with the reflexive-referential account introduced by Perry (2012 [2001]). Be that is it may, the fact that the same framework can be used to build different accounts of the same phenomena is not a shortcoming, but a sign of its power.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to María de Ponte, Joana Garmendia, John Perry, Rob Stainton, Arthur Sullivan, Richard Vallée, Larraitz Zubeldia and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments and criticisms. This works has been partially supported by grants of the Basque Government (IT1612-22) and the Spanish Government (grant PID2019-106078GB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033).

[14] Perry (2012 [2001]: 99) employs this level of truth-conditions to distinguish between the two possible propositional contributions of definite descriptions: a Russellian contribution, as an identifying condition of an individual—at the referential level—, or a Strawsonian one, as the individual denoted, if any—at the designational level. See also Korta & Perry (2011: chapter 8).

Kepa Korta
University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)
ILCLI and Philosophy Department
Tolosa hiribidea 70
E-2018 Donostia
kepa.korta@ehu.eus

References

Bach, Kent. 1994. "Conversational impliciture". *Mind and Language 9*: 124–62.

Cappelen, Herman and Ernie Lepore. 2005. *Insensitive Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Carston, Robyn. 2002. *Thoughts and Utterances*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Frege, Gottlob (1892). "Über Sinn und Bedeutung". *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Kritik 100*(1): 25–50. Translated by Max Black, 1948, "Sense and Reference". *The Philosophical Review 57*: 207–30. Also in Michael Beaney (ed.) 1997. *The Frege Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell: 151–71.

Graff, Delia. 2000. "Shifting sands: An interest-relative theory of vagueness". *Philosophical Topics 28*: 45–81.

Kennedy, Christopher. 2007. "Vagueness and grammar: The semantics of relative and absolute gradable adjectives". *Linguistics and Philosophy 30*: 1–45.

Korta, Kepa and John Perry. 2011. *Critical Pragmatics. An Inquiry into Reference and Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Korta, Kepa and John Perry. 2019a. "Our alleged methodological flaw". *Journal of Pragmatics 139*: 175–9

Korta, Kepa and John Perry. 2019b. "Our response to Devitt". *Journal of Pragmatics 139*: 183–4.

Morzycki, Marcin. 2016. *Modification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perry. John. 1986. "Thought without representation". *Supplementary Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 60*: 263–83. Reprinted in Perry, John. 2000: 171–88.

Perry, John. 2000. *The Problem of the Essential Indexical and Other Essays. Expanded Edition*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Perry, John. 2012 [2001]. *Reference and Reflexivity. 2nd edition*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Recanati, François. 2004. *Literal Meaning. Cambridge*: Cambridge University Press.

Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. 1995 [1986]. *Relevance. 2nd edition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Stanley, Jason. 2000. "Context and logical form". *Linguistics and Philosophy 23*: 391–434.

Stanley, Jason and Zoltán Szabó. 2000. "On quantifier domain restriction". *Mind and language 15*: 219–61.

Vallée, Richard. 2018 [2010]. "Unarticulated comparison classes". *Pragmatics and Cognition 18*: 340–64. Reprinted in Vallée 2018: 69–94.

Vallée, Richard. 2018. *Words and Contents*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

van Heijenoort, Jean 1967. *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.