Upgrade adjectives: At the interface of pragmatics, cognition and culture

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Word classes are a fundamental feature of natural languages, but not all word classes are equal. The basic concepts of noun, verb and adjective are readily grasped by learners at the most elementary levels of language study. Givon (2001) notes,

> …nouns and verbs are major lexical classes in all languages. Adjectives may or may not appear in all languages as a distinct word class . . . Adverbs are the least universal lexical class. (p.49)

Nouns typically and prototypically refer to concrete entities that are available to sensory perception. The class of noun can certainly extend to other items, such as substances like water or aggregate masses like gravel, as well as abstract entities such as love and information, but these concepts seem to be extensions from the fundamental concept of tangible and discrete items that are perceptible; whether they be naturally occurring items such as stones and trees, animate entities like dogs and people, parts of wholes such as branches or feet or, wrought items such as books and spears. These are the experiential/cognitive underpinnings of the class of 'noun'.

In linguistic terms, nouns can exhibit a suite of 'nouny' traits which vary according to the language. For languages that mark the singular/plural distinction, words which are nouns can undergo morphological change to reflect the concept

(e.g. *dog/dogs*; *foot/feet*). Similarly, nouns can be marked for definiteness or indefiniteness depending on the language (*the dog/a dog*), can be marked for case and can be allocated to gender classes such as the familiar masculine/feminine (and neuter) classes of most Indo-European languages or the more complex system of languages like Swahili (Wald, 1987). Defining characteristics of prototypical nouns are temporal stability, complexity, concreteness, compactness, countability. (Givon, 2001, p. 51)

By contrast, verbs are centrally concerned with some element of instability, change, movement, dynamism and so on. Prototypical items in the verb class can refer to changes that are directly perceptible in real time to humans' sensory input such as running, falling, rotating. Verbs can also refer to more abstract conceptual cases such as having, remembering, doing, owning. Human sensory perception is conceived of as essentially verbal in nature (*see, hear, feel, taste, smell*) and human social and intellectual activity is based on verbal concepts (*talk, speak, say, hear, listen, think, know, interact, share, teach, learn* and so on.) In linguistic terms, verbs have a suite of 'verby' behaviors such as being marked for tense, mood, aspect, voice, person, evidentiality and other features. Verbs can also cover a range of binary distinctions such as telic/non-telic, durative/non-durative and stative/non-stative (Vendler, 1957).

A third major class of words is that of adjective and the class can be of a rather different nature to the noun and verb class in some respects. The classes of verb and noun are open classes. That is, new items can be added to the noun and verb inventory of any language in response to cultural changes, borrowings, and other factors. The adjective category is not universally an open class. Dixon (1982) reports that in some languages, the adjectives constitute a closed class containing only a few basic terms, usually antonymic pairs that refer to fundamental categories of things like dimension, basic color terms and the like. This stands in contrast to languages like English and Japanese, which have very large and open adjective

word classes (See Backhouse, 1984 for a discussion of Japanese adjectives).

Adjectives are prototypically used to describe some aspect of a noun, to add further information about the qualities of the noun and in languages such as English can be used in either an attributive or predicative construction as in the following.

(1) The big dog barked. (Attributive)
(2) The barking dog is big. (Predicative)

A further feature of some adjectives is the way in which they can have features of gradability, combining with intensifiers or downgrade words and phrases such as:

(3) very long
(4) slightly sour

Connected to this is the use of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives to show a range of relationships between two nouns, such as:

(5) Adam is older than Zack.
(6) Adam is even older than Zack.
(7) Alice is not as old as Zoe.
(8) Ben is the tallest boy in the class.
(9) Carl is just as tall as David.

Note that not all adjectives can be subject to gradability or comparison, at least in basic sentences/utterances that do not resort to metaphorization or other rhetorical devices.

(10) *This book is more unique than that one.

(11) *The man was very dead.

(12) *The performance was a little bit perfect.

It may also be noted here that, like nouns and verbs in English, there is no base form of the word that immediately identifies it as an adjective. This contrasts with word class features in other languages such as German, where the citation form of the verb has 'en' suffixed to all verbs, or the binary distinction of *i-adjectives* and *na-adjectives* in Japanese (see Backhouse, 1984 for a discussion of the two types of adjectives in Japanese).

A further aspect of adjectives is the antonymic pairing of common adjectives, either by a matched and antonymic collocation such as *hot/cold*, *big/small*, *fast/slow*, or some morphological change such as a negation prefix found in such pairs as *comfortable/uncomfortable*, *flexible/inflexible* and so on.

To sum up, adjectives in English are a large open class. They are used before the noun in attributive senses and after the noun (with a copula verb that encodes tense and number information) in predicative senses. Gradability and comparability are prototypical features of adjectives and they generally (but not always) have antonyms. A further, but little-studied aspect of the English adjective inventory is the phenomenon of upgrade adjectives. It is this aspect of adjectives that will be the main subject of this paper.

Upgrade adjectives

In simple terms, an upgrade adjective is seen as a near synonym to the non-upgrade counterpart. The difference is that nouns described with the upgrade adjective are viewed as possessing the relevant quality to a greater extent than its matching non-upgrade counterpart. Thus, if one day is described as hot and the

subsequent day is described using the upgrade adjective *boiling*, then it will be presumed that the second day had an empirically higher temperature than the day that was merely hot. This is a basic semantic account of upgrades, but there are other factors to consider.

The non-upgrade and upgrade adjectives are not entirely the same in their linguistic behavior. A simple test of whether an adjective is non-upgrade or upgrade will be the differential collocation patterns with intensifiers. In English the non-upgrade adjectives can be intensified with the word *very.* In contrast, upgrade adjectives can be intensified with the word *absolutely* (and a small number of other intensifying words and phrases). Most native English speakers would find the following exchange odd.

(13) A: It's absolutely cold today.
B: Yes, it's very freezing.

It may seem on the surface that deployment of an upgrade adjective is a matter of subjectivity. What may be merely hot for one person might be absolutely boiling for another. A comedian may be funny or hilarious depending on personal tastes, and a train may be very crowded or absolutely packed depending on one's experience and expectation. But the use of upgrade adjectives has a pragmatic aspect as well as a purely descriptive one.

In the literature of conversation analysis (CA), it is noted that certain utterances strongly adumbrate a matched response. This is the phenomenon of the adjacency pair (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Typical adjacency pairs are such exchanges as question/answer, request/ accept, inform/acknowledge, assess/agree and so on. The first pair part of any adjacency pair will invite a matched response, but in many cases the producer of the second part of the pair will have a choice. One of the choices will be 'preferred' and one of the choices will be 'dispreferred'. For

example, an invitation to take part in some social activity will be answered with either an acceptance or a rejection. In the case of invitations, acceptance is the preferred response and rejection is dispreferred. Note that the terms preferred and dispreferred here do not relate to the subjective desires of the participants. These terms are used in the CA literature to describe the different ways in which these second pair parts are produced. A preferred response will usually be quick, clear, direct and unambiguous, while a dispreferred response will often be hedged, hesitant, and often somewhat vague.

Hayano (2007), referring to numerous studies in the literature, describes the many aspects of interaction that pertain when an assessment/agreement sequence takes place, such as "the degree of agreement or disagreement…which participant has the right to discuss the subject…and whether the agreeing party formed the view independently or not" (pp. 4–5).

In a seminal paper on preference and dispreference, Pomerantz (1984) investigated the ways in which English speakers proceed through sequences involving assessments and a response of either agreement or disagreement. The analysis bolstered the argument that agreements are preferred, and disagreements are dispreferred and that as such the two options manifest themselves in different ways in talk-in-interaction. In addition to describing the differing manifestations of the production of agreeing and disagreeing turns, Pomerantz's data also revealed a trait found in agreement turns in English conversation. This is the use in the agreeing turn of a different assessor word than was used by the speaker in the first pair part. In many cases, the agreeing person agrees by using an upgrade adjective in response to the non-upgrade adjective that was used in the first pair part. The following data from Pomerantz are illustrative of this 'agreement by upgrade' practice (Pomerantz, 1984, p.56).

(14) J: T's tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?
L: Yeh it's just gorgeous…
(15) A: Isn't he cute
B: O::h he::s a::DORable

In (14) the initial assessment 'beautiful' is upgraded to 'gorgeous' in the agreeing turn and in (15) the assessing term 'cute' is upgraded to 'adorable' in the agreeing turn. The reasons why speakers carry out agreement with upgrades are rooted in the pragmatic practices of English and serve and important interactional function.

Sacks (1992, II, p.141) noted that when speakers respond to a prior utterance, they can either claim understanding or demonstrate it. Sacks' invented dialogue (p.141) shows the difference between the two responses.

1. A: Where are you staying?
2. B: Pacific Palisades
3a A: Oh at the west side of town
vs.
3b A: Oh Pacific Palisades

Mondada (2011), with reference to this sequence, comments (italics in original),

> Whereas in 3a, by re-describing the location given by B, A displays that he recognizes the place referred to, in 3b, by merely repeating it, A does not. In the former case, he *demonstrates* understanding, in the latter case he just *claims* it. (p. 534)

Seen in interactional terms, the demonstration of understanding reveals an underlying pragmatic reason for the use of an upgrade in the agreeing turn. If one did

not hear or did not understand an assessing term in the prior turn, then clearly it would be impossible to deploy an upgrade adjective in response. Thus, an upgraded agreement of 'cold' to 'freezing' is not to be interpreted as signaling that the responder agrees with the main idea of the assessment but disagrees with the assessing person's characterization of the degree of assessment, i.e., "Your assessment of today's temperature is correct insofar as the temperature is objectively low, but incorrect in that the temperature is sufficiently low to warrant the assessment of freezing." Consider the following adjacency pair.

(16) A: It's cold today.
B: Yeah, it's absolutely freezing.

In this case B's responsive turn is signaling several different things. Firstly, B heard A and recognized that A's utterance was an assessment (the first pair part of an adjacency pair) which invited either agreement or disagreement, with agreement being the expected, sought-after and preferred response. Secondly, B also signals that he has heard and understood the assessing term 'cold', and he wished to demonstrate (rather than merely claim) understanding of that word, and finally the upgrade adjective shows that B agrees with A's assessment of that day's weather as cold. As mentioned above, B's response may also indicate a stance of having reached the assessment independently and perhaps even prior to A, in line with Wierzbicka' s (2006, pp. 50–52) analysis of English as a language that orients to a high degree of personal autonomy.

It was mentioned with reference to example (13) above, that native English speakers would find the mis-colocation of the intensifiers *very* and *absolutely* to be odd. Apart from the issue of collocation, there is another matter of agreements that native English speakers would probably find odd — repetition. McCarthy (1998, p. 113) states that in the case of assessments and agreements, "It is important to note

that exact repetition is not always pragmatically appropriate." McCarthy then goes on to provide an invented exchange with exact repetition (using upgrade adjectives with identical prosody), commenting on its oddness. While repetition of assessing adjectives in agreements might be a marginal or odd, but not unheard-of occurrence in spoken English, (see Heritage and Raymond, 2005 p.24 for an example of repetition), the situation may be different in other languages. In the case of Japanese, daily spoken interactions regularly feature just such repetitions of assessing terms and Japanese informants report that reduplication in the agreeing, second turn is a common practice, seen as not only agreeing but also demonstrating understanding.

Hayano (2007) focuses on aspects of assessments and agreements in Japanese spoken interactions. The author addresses the differential pragmatic functions of agreement by repetition and agreement by anaphor. To illustrate the phenomenon, Hayano provides the following examples (pp. 12–13).

(17) 04 Mari: **kowai ne.=**
scary FP
It's scary.
05 -> Nami: **=kowai yone:. dakara ne=**
scary FP so FP
It's scary. So,

(18) 01 -> Kayo: **sugoi ne.**
amazing FP
(The car that passed them) is amazing.
02>> Saki: **sugoi yo.yappari ano bariki ni wa=**
amazing FP after all that horse power DP TP
03 **=ikura nandemo [kate nai].**
No matter how win not

(It) is amazing. After all, (I/my car) can't beat that horse-power no matter what.

(19) 03 -> Rika: **oishii mon ne:.**

delicious FP FP

(It's) delicious.

04->> Aki: **oishii mon ne:.**

delicious FP FP

(It's) delicious.

In excerpt (17) Mari gives her assessment of the amount of practice that an orchestra does, using the assessor adjective *kowai* meaning scary. As an agreement response, Nami repeats the assessing term. In excerpt (18) a car speeding past is assessed as *sugoi* or amazing and the agreeing turn deploys exactly the same adjective, and in (19) there is a similar assessment/agreement pattern repeating the positive gustatory assessment term *oishii.* In my experience these kinds of repetitional agreement sequences are typical of mundane Japanese spoken interaction and seem to occur more commonly than repetition agreements in English spoken interaction. Hayano comments that although there may be some instances where other options for agreement exist, "The majority of agreements include either repetition of or anaphorical reference to the descriptor in the first assessment" (p. 17). This differential of agreement strategies that exists in English and Japanese is a first point of departure. Further investigations into agreements, adjective and upgrades will reveal a complex picture of usage, culture and cognitive language issues that will flesh out some interesting differences between the two languages.

Sensory assessments

In excerpt (19) above the two speakers both aligned with the view that some

plum wine that they had drunk was to be assessed in positive terms. The two speakers both used the *i-adjective oishii* to express this positive view. The agreement is repetitional. The English gloss of this word in the original transcript is "delicious", but this may not be the only or even best translation of this word. In my experience the word *oishii* is an extremely frequent word in Japanese discourse and it is a word that foreigners in Japan very soon add to their Japanese vocabulary inventory. Any instance of communal dining will very likely be accompanied by multiple and choral expressions of *oishii.* The word can be used in either attributive or predicative function and it is also very common as a pre-assessor, in the formulation *oishi soo,* assessing that the food in question looks like it will taste good. The common translation of *oishii* is "delicious" but I suggest that a simple one-to-one correspondence is not warranted. Consider the following transcript from YouTube in which a celebrity chef invites restaurant owners to sample a pasta dish that he has prepared.

Excerpt 1
(Thewackdoctors, 2013. 0:05–0:13)

01.	S1:	Irene I want you to taste that first
02.		I want you to taste it as well (.)
03.		So, it's a fresh vibrant tomato sauce
04.	S2:	It's very good=
05.	S3:	=It's awesome

We can see in lines 04 and 05 the assessment with agreement by upgrade pattern (*very good– awesome*) that was described above. What is interesting to note here is that the two speakers who offer their assessments do not use gustatory specific adjectives, but general positive assessors. This seems typical for English speakers when giving positive gustatory assessments. A small-scale study of assessment terms featured in a YouTube video (The Magic Geekdom, 2023), supports this claim. In a 13-minute video where the American hosts, in unscripted talk, offer assessments of various foods and drinks they try during their trip to the UK, the

positive assessment adjectives were found to be as follows:

Table 1. *Sense-specific vs. Non-sense-specific Assessors*

General positive assessment adjectives	Number of Occurrences	*Gustatory specific assessment adjectives*	Number of Occurrences
Amazing	3	Delicious	2
Awesome	1	Tasty	2
Delightful	3		
Good	3		
Great	1		
Nice	4		
Lovely	1		
Total	16		4

Words such as *good* and *nice* seem to appear as the non-upgrade positive assessments and these are general rather than sense specific assessors.

The word *delicious* appears to be mainly an upgrade adjective, collocating readily with *absolutely* (191 examples in the Corpus of Contemporary American English, Davies, 2008. All corpus data in this paper is from this source). However, there are examples from this corpus that show that the word can also collocate with *very* (86 instances), introducing an uncharacteristic blurring of the category membership that is not found in other upgrade/non-upgrade pairs. Still, if one flavor of ice cream was described as *nice* and another was described as *delicious* it would be felt that the delicious ice cream was in some way better than the one that was merely nice.

If *delicious* is fundamentally an upgrade adjective, then its non-upgrade, but still gustatory sense-specific partner is possibly the word *tasty*, but this is a rather marginal word in English usage with 4991 instances in COCA compared to 15,511 instances of delicious. A further issue is that both *oishii* and *delicious* can be used in more abstract and non-sensory specific ways such as the English expression 'delicious irony'.

In sum, we can discern that Japanese speakers tend to carry out positive gustatory assessments with a sense-specific term (*oishii*), while English speakers have a wider variety of terms available for such positive assessments, including a number of general rather than sense-specific positive adjectives. This may lead Japanese speakers of English to overuse the word *delicious*, apply it to more mundane food items that might not warrant an upgrade assessment, use the word in a non-upgrade sense (*very delicious*), and avoid using other more common assessors.

Negative sensory assessments

In addition to making positive assessments of sensory stimulus, speakers may also wish to make negative assessments. In this case, the variation between Japanese and English assessment practices reveals an interesting difference in the conception of the sense modalities. In Japanese there exists the *i-adjective mazui.* This word is used to give a negative assessment of some gustatory sensation. This may be used for items that would be considered negatively by all persons, such as rotten or adulterated foods and drinks. The word can also be used for items that the speaker, but not necessarily others, would assess negatively, grounded in personal preferences. For the olfactory sense modality there exists the *i-adjective kusai*, again referring to generally accepted negative olfactory stimuli such as sewage or vomit and also for stimuli based on personal dislike. A third term is also available for negative assessments — *kimochi warui* (気持ち悪い).This term literally translates as 'spirit/sense takes bad' and can be used for a variety of sense modalities such as tactile and visual stimuli as well as for general sensibility. Thus, we can see that Japanese has the tendency to separate the sense modalities when making negative assessments. The situation is different in English where the sense modalities tend be conflated for negative assessments. Words such as *disgusting*, *horrible, foul* and the like are generally applicable to the gustatory, olfactory, tactile,

visual and, more marginally, audio modalities, as well as to general sensibility, as in the following:

(20) He urged me to taste the soup. It was disgusting.
(21) And when I opened the toilet door, the smell was disgusting.
(22) I was barefoot and stood on a slug. It was disgusting.
(23) I could see hundreds of cockroaches scurrying across the walls. It was disgusting.
(24) His behavior at the party was absolutely disgusting.

What will be noticed here is that the negative sensory assessors such as *disgusting*, *horrible*, *foul*, *vile* and the like are all upgrade adjectives. There seems to be a paucity of options in the non-upgrade inventory of negative assessment adjectives in English, with little beyond the general adjective *bad* available for such basic assessments. So, on the one hand, English, unlike Japanese, does not automatically separate the sense modalities for negative assessments and has adjectives that apply across the modalities, but within this conflated sensory domain English has a variety of upgrade adjective options, but very little in the non-upgrade inventory.

Now, there are some caveats to this description. It may be pointed out that English does have the olfactory sense-specific adjective *stinky.* But, I argue, the word *stinky* is not an equivalent to the Japanese term *kusai.* In the author's opinion, the word has a rather juvenile sense. On a less subjective level, corpus analysis shows that the word (1,513 instances in COCA) is primarily used in attributive rather than predicative statements as in the following invented examples.

(25) Attributive
The gym bag is full of stinky socks.

(26) Predicative

Those socks are very stinky.

Neither of the examples is wrong in any strictly grammatical sense, but corpus analysis shows that attributive use (25) is a more common construction than predicative use (26). This is relevant to the discussion here because (26) might likely be recognized by an interlocutor as an assessment statement, and thus one requiring a response of either preferred agreement or dispreferred disagreement. In short, *stinky* if used at all, is less used as the first or second pair part of an assessment/agreement sequence and more likely to be found in an attributive, and thus informing, rather than assessing sense. It is also clear that the adjective *stinky* is derived by affixation from the verb *stink*. Indeed, we find that for the negative olfactory evaluation, English readily deploys a verbal rather than an adjectival assessor.

(27) Those socks stink.

Other, more marginal or dialectal verbs available for negative olfactory assessment are words such as *reek* and *hum.* In addition, the verb *smell* can also signal negative olfactory assessment. Interestingly, used without an adjective, the verb *smell* implies negative assessment, but when used with an adjective, it can refer to either negative or positive assessment.

(28) This room smells. (Negative meaning)
(29) This room smells bad. (Negative meaning)
(30) This room smells nice. (Positive meaning)

Viberg (p.154) notes the same pattern is observed in Swedish with the verb *Lukta* (smell) used without a modifier implying negative assessment while the opposite

is true in Polish, where the verb *pachna* used without an adjective implies a good smell. (*ibid*, p.155). In Japanese the olfactory verb *niou* can be used with either a positive or negative adjective. With no adjective it is likely to be negative. A counterpart verb *kaoru* is used to refer to positive olfactory assessments only, either with or without a positive adjective

So, once again we find a complex set of interrelationships in assessments when looking at the assessment strategies of Japanese and English. The Japanese negative assessment system separates the gustatory and olfactory sense modalities clearly, using *mazui* for the former and *kusai* for the latter but conflates the tactile and visual senses with *kimochi warui*, which can also be used for a more general sensibility. English tends to rely on upgrade adjectives such as *disgusting*, *vile*, *horrible*, *gross* and the like. But these upgrade adjectives conflate the sense modalities as well as covering a more general sensibility, such as *disgusting behavior*. For the olfactory sense, English also deploys verbs such as *stink* and *smell*. *Stink* is automatically negative, while *smell*, when unmodified by any adjective is a negative assessor. Separation or conflation of the sense modalities, reliance on upgrades rather than non-upgrades, and switch of word class from adjectival to verbal assessments are some of the elements of complexity that exist when looking at the assessment systems of the two languages.

Assessments of amount, distance and time

So far, I have focused on adjectives, specifically sense modality adjectives, and the way in which adjectival assessments and their agreements are performed. In the next section I will expand upon the theme of assessments and agreements and move beyond a narrow concern with sense modality adjectives and focus on assessments of amount, time and distance.

Although many English adjectives have an upgrade version, not all do. One of

the most common of these group is the word *long*. No particular word suggests itself as an upgrade for inclusion in the parentheses in the following invented exchange.

(31) A: Her hair is really long.
B: Yeah, it is absolutely (_____)

The word *long* has several different uses. It can be used for describing a physical dimension of an item. This may be its most basic sense. This meaning readily invokes the antonymic adjective *short*. The word can also be deployed for descriptions of distance (a long way) and for temporal referents (*a long wait*) and more abstract senses such as *a long article*, which could mean that it takes up a lot of subsequent pages in a publication, or that it takes a long time to read.

These distance and temporal uses have a grammaticalization pattern in common with descriptions of number and amount in English that create an assessment and upgrade system that might not be readily available to the intuition of learners of English as an L2, or indeed their teachers. The system is described below.

A fundamental distinction in the noun system of English is the difference between count and mass nouns. The system can be manipulated with mass nouns becoming countable (e.g. *two beers*) and count nouns becoming mass (*there was cat all over the driveway*) (see Pelletier 1975) but this is a manipulation of the default count/mass setting of the nouns. The relevance for the current paper is that English has the words *much* and *many* to refer to mass and count nouns respectively. The word *many* is referred to as "the most primitive relative adjective" (Bartch and Vennemann 1972, cited in Rusiecki 1985, p. 35) and one must assume that the description also applies to the mass word *much*. But the ways in which these words are used is not straightforward. Swan (1980, section 393) notes that the words *much* and *many* tend to be used in the following situations.

- Questions
- Negatives
- Affirmative sentences with *too, so* and *as*
- Comparatives

I will term these usages as the Q/Neg uses. For simple, affirmative sentences, English speakers often refer to a large amount or number with multi-word construction such as *a lot of, lots of, a load of, tons of, heaps of* and the like. Several of these can collocate with the upgrade intensifier *absolutely* meaning that they are available for upgraded agreements.

(32)
A: She's really popular.
B: Yeah, she has absolutely tons of friends.

The same pattern of use applies to assessments of distance, with questions, negatives, affirmatives with *too*, *so* and *as* and comparatives tending to use the word *far* and basic positive statements tending to use the expression *a long way* (See Swan, 1980, section 233).

Now, for distance assessments the tendency for Japanese speakers of English is to use the English word *far*, which is seen as the antonym of *near* and counts as a straightforward rendering of the Japanese antonymic adjective pair 遠い (*tooi* = distal) and 近い(*chikai* = proximal). However, apart from the Q/Neg uses, in English, the word *far* is generally not used to describe and assess physical distance in basic, affirmative sentences. Corpus sampling reveals that *far* is rarely used for basic assessments of distance. Instances of (33) would be unusual and the concept would more normally be expressed as (34).

(33) My house is far from the station.

(34) My house is a long way from the station.

The word *far* is not generally used in such concrete situations and is more likely to appear in a range of abstract uses such as:

(35) As far as I can tell/see.
(36) So far so good.
(37) It is far hotter than last year.

Although *far* as an assessor of distance is not that common, there is an upgrade word that can be used in assessments and agreements of distance — *miles*.

(38) A: It's such a long way back to the station.
B: Yeah, it's absolutely miles. We should have taken a taxi.

Moving on from distance to time, the same pattern is found again, with the Q/Neg constructions tending towards use of the adjective *long* and the simple, affirmative sentences tending to be expressed with *a long time* to which there is the matching upgrade word of *ages*.

(39) A: They kept us standing in the queue for a really long time.
B: Yeah, us too, we had to wait ages to get in.

So, the assessment system of amount, number, distance and time, has a complex and nuanced pattern of usage in English as shown in table 2.

Table 2. *Amount/Distance/Time upgrades*

Q/Neg/Too/So/As (+ Comparative)	Basic affirmative sentence	Upgrade
	Amount/Number	
Much/Many	A lot of	Lots of/Tons of/Loads of/ Millions of, etc.
	Distance	
Far	A long way	Miles
	Time	
Long	A long time	Ages

In the author's experience, Japanese learners of English tend to use the *much/ many/far/long* options and avoid (or be unaware of) the other expressions and the particular situations of usage.

The number/amount concepts are expressed separately in Q/Neg usages with *much* and *many*, but the distinction disappears, and expressions of number and mass are conflated in basic affirmatives and in some but not all upgrades. The temporal and distance senses of *long* are clearly differentiated in the Q/Neg etc. uses, (*far* versus *long*) but they converge in the basic affirmative use patterns, the combination of *long* with either *way* or *time* being the indicator of which concept is invoked. The upgrade expressions are clearly differentiated again, (*miles* versus *ages*). It must be noted that the words are not adjectives in these usages. Although they can be collocated with *absolutely*, they cannot be used attributively.

(40) We walked absolutely miles.
(41) *A miles walk.
(41) We waited absolutely ages.
(43) *An ages wait.

Thus, we can see that the basic, straightforward antonymic Japanese adjective pair

of distance and proximity (遠い *tooi* = far and 近い*chikai* = near) does not find such a straightforward manifestation in English. Upgraded assessments of time and distance rely on nouns (*miles* and *ages*) rather than adjectives, revealing that adjectives are not the only option for making assessments. The patterns of usage, collocation, word class membership and upgrade strategies, the conflation and/or separation of concepts, and so on, add complexity to the English methods of assessing amount, number, distance and time and also in agreeing with those assessments.

Other sense modality upgrades

The visual sense modality in English is complex and nuanced in its linguistic expression, balancing durative/non-durative, telic/non-telic, and intromissive/extramissive concepts (See Campbell-Larsen 2017 for discussion). For assessments of visual stimuli there are two luminary polarities that can be assessed–insufficient amount of light, and overabundance of light, represented by the non-upgrade adjectives *dark* and *bright.* It should be noted that the common antonymic pairing of *dark* with *light* can refer to hue as well as luminosity and these two adjectives are commonly combined with basic color terms such as *dark blue, light brown* et cetera. The antonymic pair of *dark/ bright* are more narrowly concerned with luminosity. That is, they refer to some assessment of the amount of light entering the observer's eye rather than some property of the observed item. Both adjectives can be upgraded when making assessments of luminosity as in:

(44) A: It was so dark in the forest.
B: Yeah, it was absolutely pitch black.
(45) A: The low sun was so bright that driving was difficult.
B: Yeah, it was absolutely blinding, wasn't it?

What is interesting here is that although the two upgrades (*pitch black* and *blinding*) represent the ends of a putative luminosity scale, they converge on the concept of visual perception becoming impossible. When an environment is described as *pitch black*, the idea is that zero light is entering the observer's eyes and thus the visual sense modality is nullified. At the opposite polarity, so much light is entering the observer's eyes that it incapacitates the visual sense completely, rendering the observer blind. A similar conceptual landscape applies to the auditory sense. *Quiet* and *loud* are a non-upgrade antonymic pair, with *loud* especially dealing with context-sensitive audio stimuli. A loud cough is a very different kind of loudness to a loud explosion. As with the visual stimuli, the polar extremes are expressed using upgrade adjectives that can collocate with *absolutely*.

(46) A: The forest was eerily quiet.
B: Yeah, it was absolutely silent.
(47) A: The music in the bar was so loud.
B: Yeah, it was absolutely deafening.

And, as with the visual sense terms, the lower item on the scale (*silent*) encodes zero auditory stimuli, while the upper item (*deafening*) encodes such a magnitude of stimuli that the sense is no longer able to function, and the perceiver is rendered deaf. The special status of the visual and auditory senses in this regard can be seen by the availability of the words *blind* and *deaf*. No similar terms are available for complete non-functionality of the other sense modalities in humans.

Conclusion and discussion

Adjectives are seemingly a less stable class of words than nouns or verbs and the class has many complexities and subtleties in morphology, syntax, as well as in

underlying cognitive bases and in pragmatics. In languages such as English the word class is large and open. In other languages, the class is small and closed (Dixon, 1982). The qualities of a referent that are expressed by adjectives can be expressed by verbs or nouns in other languages or adjectives with verbal or nominal tendencies. The qualities of nouns that are expressed by adjectives in languages such as English range from largely empirical and descriptive uses such as *red car* or *smooth surface* to highly subjective such as *interesting book* or *ugly building*. Assessments can be intensified with a range of strategies from intensifying adverbs, reduplication, redundant collocations and so on (see Bollinger, 1972). In this paper I have focused on the phenomenon of upgrade adjectives in English and some of the pragmatic and cognitive aspects that emerge when looking at the systems of upgrading, aspects that are thrown into sharper relief when comparing to Japanese assessments.

Pragmatically, upgrades in English are often used as agreements to prior assessments, but the upgrade itself does not show any misalignment with the initial assessment. That is, there is no hint that the agreeing person thinks that the scale or intensity of the initial assessment was insufficient and that a more intense assessment is warranted. Rather, the upgrade is deployed as a means of demonstrating rather than merely claiming understanding and it may also have bearing on the implied epistemic and ontological status of the agreeing person (Heritage 2012) and cultural norms regarding autonomy and individuality (Wierzbicka 2006). The pragmatics of Japanese agreement systems are complex in different ways (Hayano 2007) and repetition, as well as reduplication of the initial term in the agreement turn is common. In addition to the pragmatics of upgrading in English there are interesting cognitive/usage dimensions.

The realm of sensory perception reveals certain nuances of usage that may not be readily apparent to native speakers of English. There is an extensive literature on the phenomena of synesthesia, whereby adjectives from one sensory

domain are applied to another sensory domain. The area is summed up by Williams (1976),

> One of the most common types of metaphoric transfer in all languages is synaesthesia—the transfer of a lexeme from one sensory area to another*: dull colors, brilliant sounds, sharp tastes, sour music*. (p.463)

The underlying notion is that a sensory adjective has a source domain in one of the sensory modalities, but it can be utilized in another modality with no difficulty in terms of comprehensibility. The relevance to the discussion here is the ways in which languages can view the sense domains. For Japanese speakers, positive assessments of gustatory experience are generally carried out by a domain specific assessing adjective *oishii.* By contrast, the way that English speakers perform positive gustatory assessments is usually carried out with general rather than sense-specific adjectives such as *good*, *nice, great* and the like. The gustatory- specific assessing adjective *delicious* is an upgrade adjective that seems to be used far less than the general positive adjectives.

Moving to negative sensory assessments, the Japanese language tends to use sense-specific adjectives for gustatory and olfactory assessments (*mazui* and *kusai* respectively) and a periphrastic expression (*kimochii warui*) for tactile and visual senses, as well as general sensibility. The reason for this delineation of the gustatory and olfactory senses from other sense modalities is unclear. It may be that the physical intimacy of these modalities, the sense of a crossing from the external to the internal, and the danger in transgressing these boundaries (Douglas, 2003) may make these modalities more salient than the other modalities in negative assessments. Smells and tastes are indicative of physical inhalation and ingestion and fumes and foods can be poisonous and harmful to the person in a way that visual, auditory and tactile stimuli are not.

In contrast to the Japanese system, English tends to conflate the sense modalities for negative sensory assessments. Words like *disgusting, gross*, *foul*, *horrible*

and so on are usable for several different modalities. These words are all upgrades, and English seems poorly provided with non-upgrade adjectives or domain specific adjectives for negative assessments of gustatory, olfactory, tactile and visual stimuli. I specifically mentioned several rather than all modalities. The auditory modality may have a somewhat special status when it comes to negative assessments. Consider the following.

(42) That sounds absolutely awful.

This is clearly a negative assessment, but it could be assessing the nature of the audio stimulus itself as in assessing the sound produced by a low proficiency violinist. Alternatively, this assessment could be a response to a telling of an accident or other misfortune. In this case the assessment is not so much assessing the audio stimulus as assessing the informational content encoded in that stimulus. Given the auditory, information-bearing nature of spoken language and centrality of spoken language to human communication, the auditory sense modality may have special characteristics when it comes to assessments in that both sound quality and encoded information can be negatively assessed.

A similarity to the conflation or separation of the sense modalities revealed by upgrade adjectives is found elsewhere. The word *long* is applicable to the dimensionality of tangible objects (*long fingernails*, *a long stick*, *a long rope*) and also to assessments of distance and time. Basic, positive statements of all three senses can use the word *long— long nails*, *a long way*, *a long time*, but certain marked utterances like questions, negatives and utterances with *too*, *so* and *as* differentiate the distance sense from the physical dimension and temporal senses i.e., *How **far** is it?* versus *How **long** are your nails?* and *How **long** did you wait?* In the upgrade assessment distal and temporal senses are clearly differentiated (*miles* versus *ages*), while no immediate upgrade for the dimensionality of tangible objects is available.

As the foregoing has shown, upgrade adjectives (and other upgrade words) may seem on the surface to be used quite simply to indicate that a referent has more of the quality that is represented by the non-upgrade term. The non-upgrade term may be conceived of as somehow basic while the upgrade version may be viewed as a kind of superordinate term, representing mere scalar difference. Upon investigation, upgrading is a much more complex phenomenon than mere scalar difference. The usage and collocation patterns of upgrade terms reveals nuanced aspects of cognition, conflation or separation of sense modalities and fine-tuned pragmatic stances that are largely invisible when considering the non-upgrade words and expressions.

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