

Adjective Classes and Ordering Restrictions: Exploring relevant syntactic-semantic interactions

There is a lack of consensus in the literature as to which classification of adjectives is directly relevant for the observed syntactic restrictions on their ordering. In this paper, I argue that adjectives are divided into four classes of relevance for syntactic ordering (following Svenonius 2008, Alexiadou et al. 2007). I show that previous proposals have failed to identify the relevant semantic dimensions.

Adjective ordering restrictions have often been explained by positing a large number of ordered nominal functional projections mirroring the various classes of adjectives, e.g., *SizeP*, *ColorP* (Cinque 1994, Scott 2002, Laenzlinger 2005, etc) and postulating that adjectives attach to the corresponding functional projections. However, Svenonius (2008) shows that ordering among multiple stacked adjectives is more flexible than Scott (2002) claims, arguing that a small number of ordered functional projections determines the ordering of adjectives along semantic lines: essentially, gradability, intersectivity and whether the adjective can merge with a count noun. I show that of these properties, only intersectivity is relevant to the syntax, and I motivate this using the distribution of ordered versus non-ordered adjectives, PP-modification, and behavior in comparative constructions (Alexiadou et al 2007, Kennedy 1999, 2001, etc).

1) Intersective/Non-intersective adjectives: Within the class of predicative adjectives (in the sense of Kamp 1975), some combinations display ordering restrictions, e.g. (1-3), while others seem to have a less rigid ordering, e.g. (4-8). Considering the property of gradability and the mass-count feature, one finds cases of gradable adjectives that are ordered in the syntax (when *green* has a gradable interpretation, cf. Kennedy & McNally (to appear), one still has the contrast between (9) and (10)) and that behave differently within comparatives, (11)-(12). Furthermore, there are non-gradable adjectives that cannot merge with mass nouns (**square water*). I look to *for*-PPs (cf. Higginbotham 1985), (13)-(16) to show that the intersective/non-intersective distinction within predicative adjectives matches syntactic ordering restrictions.

2) Analysis: I propose a DP structure that involves merging intersective adjectives with N, after classifying adjectives (cf. Bosque & Picallo 1996). Non-intersective adjectives merge with a copy of N within a silent *for*-PP. The *for*-PP merges, semantically creating the comparison class for N that a non-intersective adjective requires. This analysis predicts that adjectives within classes are not ordered, (4-8). However, the syntactic categories (PP/AP) predict the observed ordering across classes, following the hypothesis that more complex structures merge later (cf. Prinzhorn & Vergnaud 2009). There is a certain type of vagueness with respect to both classes, e.g. red hair/truck, where the shade of red appears to rely on a prototypical property of the noun. This different semantic dimension does not have the same effects on ordering as the properties above. Finally, non-predicative adjectives adjoin freely in this structure, much like adverbials, which predicts the distribution observed in (17)-(19)

This paper questions the semantic properties which have been claimed to drive syntactic ordering of adjectives, and argues that distributional restrictions for adjectives come from whether or not the noun plays a role in defining the standard and measurement of the adjective.

Data

- (1) the big red ball / *the red big ball; (2) the tall round statue / *the round tall statue;
- (3) the long French movie / *the French long movie

- (4) a long thick rope / a thick long rope; (5) thin long legs / long thin legs (from Svenonius 2008)
- (6) red round hat / round red hat; (7) beautiful cold snow / cold beautiful snow;
- (8) a tall slow runner / a slow tall runner

- (9) the big green dog tipped over a can of paint; (10) *the green big dog tipped over a can of paint

- (11) The red/purple/#blue notebook is redder than the yellow pen.
- (12) That short statuette is taller than the short vase.

- (13) That big butterfly is big for a butterfly. (in a painting of a butterfly)
- (14) ??That green butterfly is green for a butterfly. (in a painting of a butterfly)
- (15) ??A big butterfly is big.
- (16) A green cat is green.

- (17) The future former mayor (will finish his term soon)
- (18) The former future mayor (is now the mayor).
- (19) (former) beautiful (former) tall (former) model.

Selected References:

Alexiadou, Artemis, Liliane Haegeman and Melita Stavrou. 2007. Noun Phrase in the Generative Perspective. New York: Mouton de Gruyter. **Bosque, Ignacio and Carme Picollo. 1996.** *Postnominal Adjectives in Spanish*. Journal of Linguistics 32. 349-385. **Higginbotham, J. 1985.** *On Semantics*. Linguistic Inquiry 16. 547-594. **Kennedy, C. and L. McNally. To appear.** Color, Context and Compositionality. Synthese. **Kennedy, C. 1999.** Gradable Adjectives Denote Measure Functions, Not Partial Functions. Studies in the Linguistic Sciences 29.1. Laenzlinger, Christopher. 2005. *French adjective ordering: perspectives on DP-internal movement types*. Lingua 115. 645-689. **Scott, G-J. 2002.** *Stacked Adjectival Modification and the Structure of Nominal Phrases*. Functional Structure in DP and IP : the cartography of syntactic structures. ed. Guglielmo Cinque. Oxford University Press. 91-116. **Svenonius, P. 2008.** *The position of adjectives and other phrasal modifiers in the decomposition of DP*. in Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics, and Discourse. ed. McNally and Kennedy. OUP. **Prinzhorn, M & Vergnaud, J-R. 2009.** Some Explanatory Avatars of Conceptual Necessity: Elements of UG. Dept. of Linguistics, University of Southern California. Summer 2009. Ms.