Verbal and Nominal Modifiers in French

Syntactic and Semantic Parallels

Introduction

Our project

➢ Find examples of similarities and differences between Clauses and Nominals!
➢ Generative and functional analyses
   ▪ Functional all that is not formal
   ▪ My approach: modular and enunciative
➢ My specific problem:
   The place of
   ▪ The attributive adjective
   ▪ The VP-adverbials

Examples

Il a légèrement mangé = "he has not eaten much" vs
Il a mangé légèrement = "he has eaten lightly" (not fat)

Un pauvre homme = "an unfortunate man" vs
Un homme pauvre = "a not-rich man"

Une merveilleuse histoire = "a lovely story" vs
Une histoire merveilleuse = "a fairytale"

Parameters in the Adjective Case

➢ The adjective: semantics, morphology, syntax (valency), phonetics
➢ The noun: same
➢ Meaning of the noun phrase
➢ The syntactic function and position of the noun phrase
➢ Style
➢ ...  

A Modular Approach is called for

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1. Introduction
2. Theoretical Framework
   a) Modular Linguistics
   b) Enunciation Linguistics
   c) Focalization: an Enunciative Theory
3. The Attributive Adjective
   a) Some firmer analyses
   b) The Focalization explanation
4. VP Adverbials
5. Conclusions
   a) Syntactic parallels
   b) Semantic parallels
   c) Typological differences
Advantages of a modular approach

› It makes it possible to give very precise descriptions since the domain demarcation allows for better conceptual clarification and more precise definitions of central concepts.
› It opens up an explanatory level because it can expose systematic relations between phenomena defined independently of each other in different modules.

Methodological constraints

› Independence between the modules
› A homogeneous notational system making it possible to create precise links between the modules
› The global accessibility principle

The modules

- Lexical semantics
  - Semantics of the noun
- Morphosyntax
  - Morphosyntactic structure of the adjective
- Syntaxe of the clause
  - Syntactic functions (subject, direct object, …)
- Syntagmatic structure
  - Position of the noun phrase in the clause
- Prosody
  - Focalization

Enunciation linguistics

- The initiators
  - Ferdinand de Saussure
  - Charles Bally (MODUS-DICTUM)
  - Émile Benveniste
  - Antoine Culioli (Théorie des Opérations Énonciatives)
  - Oswald Ducrot (TAL, Polyphonie, …)

The fundamental idea

The linguistic form contains “traces” of the enunciation act l’énonciation \( \approx \) the locutionary act.
The different aspects of the enunciation act may be coded in the linguistic form.
The delicate distinction between semantics and pragmatics has never really existed in énonciation linguistics.
Within this framework discussions about the semantics-pragmatics interface do not make much sense.

Enunciation linguistics

The study of the “traces” of the enunciation act is the core subject of enunciation linguistics

The semantic approach is instructionnel semantics
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Enunciation linguistics

“Branches”
- La Théorie des Opérations Énonciatives
- La Théorie de l’Argumentation dans la Langue
- La Théorie de la Focalisation
- Le dialogisme
- Le polyphonie

Focalization: an enunciative theory

Focus is the result of the focalization act

Constituent properties of focalization

- The syntagmatic property:
  - Focus appears in the utterance as a continuous string of utterance segments.
  - The hearer must establish the extension of focus.
- The paradigmatic property:
  - Focus is presented as the result of a choice made among the elements of a paradigm.
  - The hearer must establish this paradigm.
- The intentional property:
  - The paradigmatic choice has been made with a special end in view.
  - The hearer must realize this objective.

The Focalization Domain

The focalization domain is a linear string within which a focalization takes place during the enunciation.
- The focalization domain is generated by syntax.
- Any rhythmic group corresponding to a conclusive or a continuative intonème contains a minor focalization domain.
- Any utterance contains a major (neutral) focalization domain.

Standard structure of the focalization domain:
1. Paul s’est promené (dans la forêt)
   ‘Paul has walked in the forest’
2. C’est la robe blanche que je préfère
   ‘It is the white dress that I prefer’

Lexical semantics

- The generic semantic features help establishing the paradigm.
- The specific semantic features establish the identification/distinction within the paradigm.

(3) C’est la robe que je veux
   ‘It is the dress that I want’

Semantic rule

- Only a segment containing specific semantic features can be focalized.
- The more specific semantic features a segment contains, the more it lends itself to focalization.

(4) Dans la vallée, une rivière coule.
   ‘In the valley a river flows’
The attributive adjective

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**The attributive adjective**

Certainement, après avoir bien cherché, je n’ay point trouvé que l’on puisse establir aucune règle, ny qu’il y ait en cela un plus grand secret que de consulter l’oreille.

(Vaugelas, 1647, Tome I: 309)

The attributive adjective

Basis

- The "elementary" adjectives are prenominal
- The other adjectives are postnominal
- Some adjectives have different meaning in prenominal and postnominal position
  - ma propre voiture = 'my clean car' vs
  - ma voiture propre = 'my own car'

Elementary adjectives:

grand/gros/petit, bon/mauvais, vieux/jeune, vrai/faux, beau/joli, ...

The attributive adjective

Classical analysis

Rules

- An adjective may be prenominal
  - If it can be given a quantitative or purely qualitative reading
  - Une merveilleuse histoire = 'A wonderful story'
- If it denotes an inherent property of the noun ('épithète de nature')
  - De vertes pelouses = 'green lawns'
- An elementary adjective may be postnominal
  - If it is modified, for instance by très ('very')

The attributive adjective

Some linguistic analyses

Structuralists

Harald Weinrich
Erwin Reiner
Linda Waugh
Marc Wilmet

Cognitivist

Nicole Delbecque

Others

Mats Forsgren, Bjørn Larsson

The Focalization explanation

Structure of the focalization domain

( Adj ( Noun ( Adj ) ) )

A prenominal adjective never constitutes the simple focus alone: It is either focalized together with its noun, or it is outside the focus.

The result is that the specific semantic features are mitigated or disappear.
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The Focalization explanation

Structure of the focalization domain
( Adj ( Noun ( Adj ) ) )

A postnominal adjective is always focalized:
Either it constitutes the focus together with its noun,
or it is focalized alone.
The result is that the specific semantic features are enhanced.

The Focalization explanation

Basic rule
All adjectives accept in principle both structures:
- AN (prenominal construction)
- NA (postnominal construction)

Principle
The speaker chooses the structure that makes a misinterpretation least serious.

The Focalization explanation

Consequences
The innate semantics of an adjective makes it more or less suitable for the AN or the NA structure.
- “Elementary” adjectives with few or no specific semantic features (Type 1) tend to choose AN.
- Adjectives with many specific semantic features (Type 2) tend to choose NA.

The Focalization explanation

Type 2 adjectives in AN
Adjectives with (few) generic features get the meaning of these features in AN:
- “Le connu personnage de théâtre” vs “Un connu personnage de théâtre”
- “Un homme pauvre” vs “Un homme pauvre”

The Focalization explanation

Type 2 adjectives in AN
Adjectives without generic features but with specific features that are compatible with the features of the noun preserve these features, but they loose their distinctive value (épithète de nature):
- “L’inextricable jungle” vs “Un inextricable jungle”
- “Nos fidèles abonnés” vs “Nos fidèles abonnés”

Dans l’attente d’une prompte réponse =
- ‘prompt response’

The Focalization explanation

Type 2 adjectives in AN
Adjectives without generic features and with specific features that are incompatible with the features of the noun must “invent” new features:
- “Un très catholique harèm”
- “La très aristocratique maison Hélène Rubinstein”

The Focalization explanation

Type 1 adjectives in NA

Adjectives with few or without specific features can be ‘specified’ by means of adverbial modification

Una femme extrêmement jolie = ‘An extremely pretty woman’

The Focalization explanation

Type 1 adjectives in NA

Adjectives with few or without specific features can also be ‘specified’ by ‘the invention’ of new features:

Un homme grand = ‘a tall man’
Un homme bon = ‘a man who is morally good’

Anaphoric value:

J’ai vu un éléphant énorme. Cet énorme éléphant buvait de l’eau

= ‘I have seen an enormous elephant. This enormous elephant drank water’

VP-adverbials

Premodifying adverbials insist upon the generic type of modification: degree or quantification they are quantifiers or intensifiers.

Postmodifying adverbials yield specific information of manner.

NB! However only a few adverbials accept the two positions, so the choice basically depends on the adverb used.

VP-adverbials

Conclusions

Syntactic parallels

Two possible positions in relation to the nucleus of the phrase in which they function as a modifier.
Conclusions

Semantic parallels

The same basic semantic difference between the value obtained in the two positions:
- As a premodifier: No specific new information, no individualising or identifying value. **Syncategorematic.**
- As a postmodifier: Specific new information having genuine impact on truth conditions. **Categorematic.**

Conclusions

Typological differences

- Clear differences between Germanic and Romance languages
- Smaller differences between different Romance languages: The analyzed difference is much more "vivid" in French than in the other Romance language