

Indecisive Adjectives? What They Mean When and Where

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I will discuss the current, beginning stages of my MA thesis, which will generally focus on the question of pre- and post-nominal adjectives in Germanic languages. For now, I plan on comparing English, German, and Dutch. There has been a great deal of debate in the literature regarding the syntactic status of attributive and predicative adjectives. One general consensus is that attributive adjectives are direct modifiers to the noun, while predicative adjectives are indirect modifiers to the noun (Abney 1987, Bernstein 1993, Kolliakou 1995, Cinque 2010, Alexiadou 2014). The big question is how (or whether) this difference should be represented syntactically. Many interpret predicative adjectives as reduced relative clauses, and some have even explicitly proposed they are such (Sproat and Shih 1988, Baker 2003, Cinque 2003, Cinque 2008, Cinque 2010, Marušič and Žaucer 2006). In English, predicative adjectives may be pre- or post-nominal, while in German and Dutch they may only be pre-nominal.

Particularly interesting with these facts is the semantic interpretation in English when a predicative adjective is post-nominal, such that post-nominal predicative adjectives have Stage-level interpretations, while pre-nominal predicative adjectives may have Stage- or Individual-level (this also holds in Italian, though with opposite interpretations; Cinque 2010). A widely known example for this is *the navigable rivers* (I/S) / *the rivers navigable* (*I/S). Finally, I will present preliminary data for the direction in which I wish my thesis to go, which could show a flipping of these interpretations when adding a complement PP. Usually, adjectives with a complement in English must be post-nominal, e.g. *a gymnast proud of her score*, *the student accused of stealing*. However, the adjective may occasionally be pre-nominal, though it could be ambiguous what the adjective is modifying, e.g. *?a proud gymnast of her score*, *?the accused student of stealing*. If we add a PP to a predicative adjective, the Stage-/Individual-level interpretations may fully switch, as in *the navigable rivers by canoe* (I,*??S) / *the rivers navigable by canoe* (I/S). I wish to investigate these interpretations further in English and German/Dutch, as I have only briefly discussed the English interpretations with two other native (American) English speakers.

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