

THE CAMBRIDGE GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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function of adjectives seems to be to provide terms for individual properties of the kinds just listed, and usually other properties as well: physical properties like hardness and heaviness, human tendencies like kindness and cruelty, properties like speed of movement, and so on.

As a general definition, the above provides a basis for deciding which lexical category in a language (if any) we should call 'adjective', but it does not enable us to decide whether some particular lexeme in English is an adjective or not. For this purpose we need to consider the distinctive syntactic properties.

Central members of the adjective category have the cluster of syntactic properties given in [1], where the adjectives in the examples are all underlined:

- [1] i FUNCTION They can appear in three main functions: attributive (happy people), predicative (They are happy), postpositive (someone happy).
- ii GRADABILITY They are gradable, and hence accept such degree modifiers as *very*, *too*, *enough*, and have inflectional or analytic comparatives and superlatives (happier, happiest, *more useful*, *most useful*).
- iii DEPENDENTS They characteristically take adverbs as modifiers (*remarkably happy*, *surprisingly good*).

No one of these properties is unique to adjectives, and many adjectives do not have the full set of properties. However, words that do have this combination of properties are clearly distinct from words of other categories. And of course adjectives also have negative properties that distinguish them from other categories: for example, they don't inflect for number or tense, they cannot be modified by (other) adjectives and, with a very small number of exceptions, they do not take NPs as complement.

We will take in turn the three groups of properties given in [1], and then examine the criteria for distinguishing adjectives from nouns and determinatives.

2.1 Function

■ The three main functions: attributive, predicative complement, and postpositive

- [2] i *my new job* *all other possibilities* *good work* [attributive]
 ii *This is new.* *They seem suitable.* *We found it easy.* [predicative comp]
 iii *something important* *a man full of his own importance* [postpositive]

Attributive adjectives are those functioning as pre-head internal dependent in the structure of the NP. Internal dependents are those which are part of a nominal, and hence in NPs containing a determiner they are located between the determiner and the head noun, as in the first two examples in [2i]. Attributive AdjPs are almost always modifiers rather than complements (cf. Ch. 5, §14).

Predicative complements are dependents in clause structure, licensed by particular verbs, such as intransitive *be* and *seem* or transitive *find* in [2ii].

Postpositive adjectives function as post-head internal modifier in NP structure. They commonly occur after the compound determinatives *something*, *anyone*, *nobody*, etc.,

[2] ATTRIBUTIVE-ONLY USE

- i a. *the late queen* ("recently deceased")
- ii a. *my old school* ("former")
- iii a. *a hard worker* ("one who works hard")
- iv a. *complete nonsense* ("absolute")
- v a. *the lawful heir* ("lawfully determined")

PREDICATIVE USE

- b. *She is late.* ("behind schedule")
- b. *He is old.* ("has lived a long time")
- b. *The work is hard.* ("difficult")
- b. *The work is complete.* ("finished")
- b. *It is quite lawful.* ("legal")

Thus *She is late* cannot mean "She recently died", *This school is old* cannot mean "This is the school I (or someone else) formerly attended", and so on.

■ Potential differences between attributive-only and ordinary attributive adjectives

Ordinary attributive adjectives can be used predicatively with the same sense: we can call these **ascriptive** adjectives since they can occur as complement to the verb *be* in its ascriptive sense (Ch. 4, §5.5.1). Ascriptive attributive adjectives characteristically have the four properties illustrated summarily for *shy* in [3], whereas most attributive-only adjectives lack one or more of them.

- [3] i ENTAILMENT *X is a shy N* entails *X is an N* (e.g. *Tom is a shy man* entails *Tom is a man*).
- ii SUBSET *A shy N* gives an answer to the question *What kind of an N is X?* (e.g. *A shy man* is an answer to the question *What kind of a man is Tom?*)
- iii MODIFIABILITY *Shy* can itself be modified (e.g. *a very shy man*).
- iv PRO-FORM *Shy* can modify the pro-form *one* (e.g. *Tom is the shy one*).

(a) The entailment property

If some entity falls within the denotation of a nominal containing an ascriptive adjective, it also falls within the denotation of the nominal formed by omitting that adjective. Most attributive-only adjectives also have this property, but some do not. Compare:

- [4] i *Tom is a lone parent* entails *Tom is a parent*.
- ii *Tom is the putative father* does not entail *Tom is the father*.

(b) The subset property

The nominal *man* denotes the set of all men, and *shy man* denotes a smaller set included within it. The adjective here is thus semantically restrictive. Ascriptive adjectives are not always used restrictively. For example, *the industrious Chinese* can be interpreted restrictively or non-restrictively. In the former case it denotes just a subset of the Chinese, whereas in the latter it denotes the full set of Chinese, who are said to have the property of being industrious. All ascriptive adjectives have the potential to be used restrictively, however. As for attributive-only adjectives, many also have this property, but there are a good number that do not. Compare:

- [5] i *A marine biologist* is an answer to the question *What kind of a biologist is she?*
- ii *A mere child* is not an answer to the question *What kind of a child is she?*

We must of course distinguish between a genuine answer and a jocular response. One might say *A mere child* in response to the question in [ii], but it doesn't answer the question. *Mere child* does not denote one subset of children.

(c) Modifiability

Shy accepts modifiers by virtue of being gradable, but non-gradable ascriptive adjectives generally accept modifiers of some kind, as in *strictly alphabetical order* or a *wholly European initiative*, and so on. Some attributive-only adjectives are gradable or otherwise modifiable, but a significant number are not. Compare:

- [6] i a. a hard worker
 ii a. the late queen
 b. a very hard worker
 b. *the very/apparently late queen

(d) Pro-form

One is a count noun, so this property is relevant only in the case of count NPs. With that limitation, it normally applies with ascriptive adjectives, whereas attributive-only adjectives again give mixed results. Compare:

- [7] i a. the main objections
 ii a. an utter disgrace
 b. the main ones
 b. *an utter one

Some types of attributive-only adjectives

Attributive-only adjectives are too numerous and semantically heterogeneous to permit a simple and exhaustive classification. Instead we will here illustrate and comment on some of the most important semantic types.

(a) Degree and quantifying attributives

One group has to do with the degree to which the property expressed in the head nominal applies in a given case. *Kim is an absolute genius*, for example, is comparable to *Kim is absolutely brilliant*, where *absolutely* is an adverbial degree modifier of the adjective *brilliant*. In this sense *absolute* cannot be used predicatively: **The genius is absolute*. NPs containing adjectives of this kind are given in:

- [8] i a complete fool a definite advantage the extreme end
 an outright lie a perfect stranger a positive joy
 a pretty mess pure nonsense a real help
 a right idiot sheer arrogance total disarray
 a true heroine an utter disgrace the very edge
 ii a blithering idiot a crashing bore a thumping majority

Those in [i] for the most part indicate maximum degree, and thus have an emphatic effect; *pretty*, however, indicates moderate degree, like the adverb in *pretty messy*. Those in [ii] express high degree, and are again emphatic. They are representative of a set of attributive-only adjectives ending in the suffix *-ing* belonging to informal style; they tend to combine with only one or two nouns as head (cf. also *raving lunatic*, *gibbering idiot*), though *thumping* and *whopping* have a wider distribution.

The degree adjectives in [8] have the entailment property (an *absolute genius* is a *genius*), but mostly lack the other properties in [3]. Thus *absolute genius* is not understood as defining a particular kind of genius; we don't find **a very absolute genius* (though a *very definite advantage* is quite normal); and we can't substitute *one* for the head (**Kim is a genius, in fact an absolute one*). *Precise* (as in *the precise moment*) and *proper* (*I want a proper job*) bear some resemblance to this group.