

Category-Extending Adjectives and Reference-Point Structure

English is known to have a peculiar class of premodifying adjectives. The following are NPs that contain such adjectives:

- (1) an alleged Communist (Higginbotham 1985: 565; Kishimoto and Kikuchi 2008: 108; cf. Yasui, Akiyama and Nakamura 1976: 54)
- (2) a self-styled prince (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 557)
- (3) a suspected case of swine flu
- (4) an apparent heart attack
- (5) a would-be actor
- (6) an aspiring musician
- (7) a frustrated novelist
- (8) an expelled student
- (9) an overgrown small town
- (10) a former president

The underlined adjectives in these structures are generally characterized by (i) having a unique semantic relationship with the nominal they modify; (ii) showing a resistance to predicative use; and (iii) indicating a failure of entailment between related propositions. These points are illustrated by the following:

- (1') an alleged Communist \neq a Communist that is alleged to be a Communist
= a person that is alleged to be a Communist

(1'') *The Communist is alleged.

(1''') He is an alleged Communist. \rightarrow *He is a Communist.

- (2') a self-styled prince \neq a prince that describes himself as a prince

= a person that describes himself, perhaps falsely, as a prince

(2'') *The prince is self-styled.

(2''') He is a self-styled prince. \rightarrow *He is a prince.

(cf. Higginbotham 1985: 565; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 557)

- (6') an aspiring musician = a person that is trying to become a musician

(6'') *The musician is aspiring.

(6''') She is an aspiring musician. \rightarrow *She is a musician.

- (7') a frustrated novelist = a person that has not succeeded in becoming a novelist

(7'') *The novelist is frustrated.

(7''') He is a frustrated novelist. \rightarrow *He is a novelist.

(1'), (2'), (6') and (7') show that the adjectives are related to the following nominals in a different way from adjectives such as those in *a white wall* and *a tall student*. (1''), (2''), (6'') and (7'') are unacceptable if they involve a predicative use of the adjective found in (1), (2), (6) and (7) respectively. In (1'''), (2'''), (6''') and (7''') the left-hand sentence does not entail the right-hand sentence, which is the modifier-free counterpart of the left-hand one. The peculiarities of these adjectives arguably qualify them as modifiers with the function of extending, rather than restricting, the category represented by the subsequent nominal: *an alleged Communist* does not presuppose the existence of a Communist (properly so called) and the set of alleged Communists is not a subset of the set of Communists, but there is a sense in which *an alleged Communist* can represent an extension of the category *Communist*; *an alleged Communist* can be an extended member of that category. Similarly, *a self-styled prince*/*an aspiring musician*/*a frustrated novelist*, although not being a prince/musician/novelist in the strict sense of the word, can nevertheless be understood as an extended version of the stated entity.

In this paper, I will attempt to explore the semantics of nominal structures in English involving the kind of premodifying adjectives exemplified above—what may be called category-extending adjectives—in terms of the notion of reference-point structure as proposed in Langacker’s theory of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1999; Langacker 2008; Yamanashi 2000; Yamanashi 2004). I will first examine in some detail some semantic properties of this kind of adjectives and point out that they are generally characterized by a modal or temporal (aspectual or tensual) function, meaning that nominals with the modifiers are modally or temporally (aspectually or tensually) different from those without. For example, *an alleged Communist* is not a person who is a Communist in the real world; *an aspiring musician* is not a person who has reached the goal of becoming a musician (that is, a person who has already become one). Based on these observations, I will then argue that the semantics of the former set of nominals can be described in terms of reference-point structure, that is, by first establishing the entities denoted by the latter set of nominals, corresponding to existing categories, as reference points and those denoted by the former, characterized modally or temporally and not readily corresponding to existing categories, as their targets and then gaining access to the target via the reference point. This leads to the conclusion that existing categories (that is, categories represented by nominals without the premodifiers), by being construed as cognitive reference points, extend themselves, albeit ad hoc, to cover entities which are denoted by nominals with those modifiers and which are usually regarded as being outside the category (ex. *an alleged Communist*, *a self-styled prince*, *an aspiring musician*, *a frustrated novelist*). Category extension by premodifying adjectives with a modal or temporal function can thus be shown to be adequately captured by invoking the cognitive notion of reference-point structure.

References

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