

Corpus-based approaches to English adjectives: meaning, grammar, and sound

In this workshop, a special focus will be given to English adjectives, particularly with respect to their meaning, grammar, and sound. The workshop consists of four presentations, drawing on cognitive-functional linguistics (Croft and Cruse 2004), each of which makes its case based on a sample from diachronic/synchronic corpora. Through this workshop, we seek to make a contribution towards a better understanding of the historical development of English adjectives, their use in present-day English, and finally how phonology can help characterize them.

The first paper (*Diachronic change of English attributive and predicative adjectives from 1710 to the 1990s*) discusses diachronic change of English adjectives with respect to their development in attributive use (prenominal) (e.g. *the real motive*) and predicative use (subject complement) (e.g. *Energies are low*). Traditionally, adjectives have often been studied in synchronic terms. Previous accounts have also had a tendency to be small in scope, often discussing a small number of adjectives (e.g. Bolinger 1967; Taylor 1992). This paper sets out to contribute comprehensively to the study of English adjectives from a diachronic perspective, by explicating how English adjectives, as we know them today, have developed. Based on quantitative analyses of a sample from the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts* (CLMET3.0) and the *British component of the International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB), the author explains which adjectives and what semantic types of adjectives remain or have become attracted to (or repelled by) attributive and predicative uses.

The second paper (*Choosing between two forms: competition in English comparative constructions*) discusses English comparative constructions from a synchronic perspective by focusing on the choice between the analytic type (e.g. *more accessible*) and the synthetic type (e.g. *younger*). It was customary to assume that the number of adjectival syllables was an important factor in choosing between the two types (Quirk *et al.* 1985). As Mondorf (2003) points out, however, the “syllable” approach is not free from counterexamples, because there are cases where the same adjective takes both forms, as illustrated by *more sexy* and *sexier* (Taylor 2012: 11). Since the publication of Quirk *et al.* (1985), a number of other factors have been proposed in the literature (e.g. Kytö and Romaine 1997; Lindquist 2000; Hilpert 2008; Mondorf 2003, 2009). Nevertheless, there have been few accounts on collocation patterns and semantic factors on this matter (an important exception is Mondorf 2003, 2009). The author discusses the collocation patterns with respect to meaning of adjectives, based on quantitative analyses (e.g. collocation analysis, Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004). It is argued that the synthetic type favors adjectives with abstract/subjective meaning (e.g. *severe*, *intense*) while the analytic type seems associated with adjectives with less subjective meaning (e.g. *low*, *old*).

The third paper (*This construction is too hot to handle: a corpus study of an adjectival construction*) presents another synchronic study. The author discusses the [too ADJ to V]-construction (e.g. *Tommy was too full to walk*), which expresses a causal relation where the

ADJ-element, drawing on the adjectival property of scalarity, specifies a degree of ADJ-ness that prevents the proposition expressed by the V-element from happening. The author suggests that there are subconstructions at play. There are even cases, where [*too ADJ to V*] expresses a relation of enablement rather than prevention between the ADJ- and the V-elements, which suggests another subconstructional division. Drawing on data from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and descriptive techniques from corpus linguistics, the author, investigating the role of the ADJ-element and relations it enters into, seeks to provide an overview of the symbolic and usage-based features of the construction.

The fourth paper (*What do adjectives sound like? Towards an understanding of the phonology of word classes*) brings phonology into the study of adjectives. Cognitive linguistic research on word classes is mostly based on semantics or semantics-pragmatics (Langacker 1987, 2008; Croft 2001), whereas generative grammarians usually focus on distribution (Baker 2003; Aarts 2007). However, psycholinguists have also pointed to the relevance of phonological cues in categorisation, at least of nouns and verbs (Kelly 1992; Monaghan et al. 2005), e.g. English nouns tend to contain more syllables than verbs, fewer stressed front vowels, and more nasals. The evidence has come from corpora and comprehension experiments. This paper sets out to advance the cognitive linguistic understanding and modelling of the category of (English) adjectives in relation to their phonology. To this end, the author will extend Berg's (2000) analysis of the English part of the CELEX database: while he analysed only a few of the properties found in the literature, the author will consider all — including the 'new' property of word-final obstruents. Ultimately, comprehension and production experiments involving adjectives will be desirable; the present corpus-based characterisation of their phonology will provide a valuable foundation for such work in future.

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