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ADJECTIVAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Adjectives play an important role in describing reality. However there are two problems when dealing with adjectives in foreign language classes:

1. There is no organized arrangement of the adjectival construction
2. Students tend to use adjectives usually in the same position: after a linking verb or before a noun as a noun modifier.

To solve the above problems professors should organize this content in some way and then provide a methodological framework to work the topic out with the students.

This paper intends to determine which the adjectival constructions are, to find out the types of adjectives that are included in these constructions as well as grouping them, so that teachers may find a framework from where to proceed in their lessons when dealing with the topic.

ADJECTIVAL CONSTRUCTIONS

By adjectival constructions we mean here the different types of structures in which the adjective is a constituent either the head constituent of the construction or just another constituent in the construction.

They can become part of a lexical collocation occurring attributively or predicatively or belong to grammatical collocations in the predicate or as an attribute usually in a verbless clause.

DEFINITION OF ADJECTIVE

Since the adjective is the main constituent in these constructions, it is indispensable to approach its definition.

The term adjective is not actually defined in the bibliography analyzed for this paper, but at least linguists agree on its being one of the major parts of speech or word classes existing in numerous languages.

Instead of conceptualizing the word it will be better to describe the features that characterize it. Some of these features are peculiar only to adjectives, but some are shared with other word classes, so it turns out that only a multisided approach will prove if any word object of analysis belongs to the category in question.

The features that characterize the adjective may be grouped into the ones that have to do with the content which suggests meaning and the ones which have to do with its form which embrace its position and function.

CONTENT FEATURES

It is in the semantic field that there is general agreement as to its main feature which is expressing property or in more practical words "to indicate quality or to specify a thing as distinct from something else"(WEBSTER'S SEVENTH NEW COLEGIATE DICTIONARY)

It is evident that in expressing property they do not have a full nominative value, since this meaning acquires significance in the context only by denoting the property of a referent(s). This means that adjectives are semantically bound.

FORMAL FEATURES

One of the formal features of adjectives is the one related to word formation since only derived adjectives have formal suffixes which is said to be typical of adjectives. The rest of the adjectives themselves lack an external trace of their belonging to this word class.

Another feature is the position they occupy in the sentence. Regarding this aspect, they usually occupy the position before the noun, occasionally after the noun and after a linking verb. The position of adjectives determines their syntactic function as noun modifier: predicative, complement and predicative respectively.

There is a third feature which becomes possible only in two word classes: in adjectives and in adverbs. This is their possibility of expressing degrees of comparison, but still not all adjectives are susceptible of expressing it. This feature combines content and formal characteristics.

CLASSIFICATION OF ADJECTIVES

Adjectives form an open word class set. They are present almost in any utterance which makes them indispensable for communicative purposes. However their complexity does not only rely on their wide range of meanings or on their vast variety, but also on their position in the sentence as well as on their grammatical collocation.

CLASSIFICATION

The features mentioned above, in one way or another, account for the classification of adjectives into sub-groups, some of which interlay and have a bearing on communication.

POSITION

A- The syntagmatic classification of adjectives taking into account their position in the sentence as a point of departure is found in the bibliography studied although not always explicitly stated. In this case the reference for the classification is the noun referent, since it is mainly in keeping with this relation that the adjective is classified as to position. By extension the reference can also be the verb.

The sub-classification is the following:

I POSITION

I. 1. IN THE SENTENCE

I.1.1. ATTRIBUTIVE POSITION:

Before the noun acting as a modifier of the noun in the noun phrase (NP) (pre-modifier)

After the noun which it modifies (Post modifier)

I.1.2 PREDICATIVE POSITION

- In the verbal phrase (VP) predicate unit after a linking verb and performing the syntactic function predicative (Pve), traditionally called subjective complement
- In the VP predicate following the nouns which occur after certain verbs like consider, believe, find

This post-modification is obligatory in some cases, preferably in others and may even change in meaning (AUGOE 1.2.)

ADJECTIVES WHICH OCCUR PREDOMINANTLY IN THE ATTRIBUTE POSITION:

- Adjectives that do not characterize the referent directly called non-inherent adjectives
- my old friend → an old friendship, but necessarily an old person
- Stative adjectives, that is, adjectives that tend to refer to a possibly temporary condition rather than to characterize. The most common are those referring to health or lack of health (except sick)

the main reason
the only occasion

the same student

- Adjectives related to adverbials
an occasional visitor → occasionally a visitor
the late president
a fast road
- Some adjectives derived from nouns (denominal adjectives)
an atomic scientist
a medical school
- Adjectives that have a heightening or lowering effect on the noun they modify when non-inherent (amplifiers scaling upward from the norm)

pure (sheer) fabrication

a real (undoubted(c)) hero

- Some adjectives with purely emotive value

ADJECTIVES WHICH OCCUR PREDOMINANTLY IN THE PREDICATIVE POSITION:

Adjectives that can take or must take complementation by means of a preposition.
These adjectives are parallel with verbs

I.2-POSITION IN THE SYSTEM

I.2.1. CENTRAL

Adjectives that may occupy any of the positions above, that is to say, attributive or predicative

- Adjectives which are central
- Inherent amplifiers, the ones which characterize the noun directly
a complete victory

I.2.2 PERIPHERAL

Adjectives which are limited to one of the two positions only

I.2.3. COMMON

The rest of the adjectives

II-FORM-MEANING

II.1. STATIVE

Adjectives that denote states of temporary duration, characterized by the prefix a (which do not have right combination with nouns)

afoot
ablaze
afraid

II.2 NON-SATIVE

The rest of the adjectives

II.3.GRADATIVE

This group is related to the possibility of gradation of the property the adjective denotes. Gradability is most of the times expressed in the category of comparison

II.3.1 GRADABLE

Adjectives that can be relatively submitted to quantitative estimation (qualitative adj.?)

II.3.2.NON-GRADABLE

- Denominal adjectives(those directly related to substance)
wooden house
- Adjectives(r) of indefinitely moderated quality
whitish
half-ironical
- Adjectives) which are grading marks of evaluation
- Adjectives expressing the highest degree of the quality
the ultimate decision

This section will focus on grammatical collocations in the predicate

III-GRAMMATICAL COLLOCATIONS

III.A- WITH PREPOSITIONS

The typical complement expansion of adjectives. is carried out by prepositions. Most combinations demand for a specific prepositional form derived from usage. They are usually similar in meaning to corresponding verb combinations.

be found of- love→ like
be envious of → envy

III. B- WITH THE TO INFINITIVE

- "It" constructions
Anticipatory "it" as the grammatical subject in the sentence.

The organization of the sentence provides end-focus to the infinitive phrase.

Some adjectives frequently used in this construction are:

kind	silly,
naughty	impossible
necessary	nice (ifml.)
important	right,
convenient	wise
possible	wrong
good,	clever
rude,	

Ex.It was necessary to work

Some adjectives can be used with a PP with OF or FOR as the subject of the clause before the infinitive.

Ex. It was stupid of them to go.
It was impossible for us all to go by car.

Negative elements may be inserted between the adjective and the infinitive.

Ex. It was convenient not to repeat that mistake.

III .4 Other infinitive constructions

- This structure also occurs with the animate subject in its typical position

He is hard to convince→ It is hard to convince him.

Adjectives of this group:

difficult	enjoyable
good	fun
impossible	pleasant
easy	
convenient	

- Sometimes the construction with the animate subject is felt as the result of a transformation where the affected in a transitive construction is transformed into the subject of the construction.

To hear about it made him furious→ He was furious to hear about it.

Adjectives used in a similar fashion:

glad	pleased
amazed	sorry
delighted	surprised
angry	worried
annoyed	
disappointed	

An external force makes the phenomenon in question take that state.

- With another set of adjectives the agentive in an intransitive construction has become the subject of the sentence.

He reacted slowly→ He was slow to react.

Adjectives of this set:

Slow
Quick
willingly

The relational property of the subject in reference to something is expressed.

- There are some adjectives which occur with animate and inanimate subjects where there seems to be an objective reason for the resulting state.

Adjectives. :

destined
known
liable

likely
anxious

- A frequent combination is the use of too" adj." infinitive phrase or adjective+ enough" + infinitive

He was too small to answer.
I am unable to answer your questions.
The accident was bound to happen.
He was alert enough to see it.

- Another combination is the adjective position before the NP referent followed by a PP.
This is too heavy a box for me to carry.

C- WITH THAT CLAUSES

Adjectives combine with that clauses in the following ways

A -The referent denoted by the adjective is personal and the construction is formed by the adjective + the that-clause (The introductory element of the clause may be perfectly deleted.

Adjectives used in this combination or Prep. Phrases:

I'm sure that he'll be late.

certain
confident
proud
sad
alarmed

annoyed
astonished
disappointed
pleased
shocked.

Observe that in other collocations some of these adjectives. would combine with prepositions.

B- Very often empty "it" introduces the sentence(r). In such occasions the introductory word is not commonly deleted

It was nice that he was able to attend.

Adjectives which frequently occur in this construction:

true
possible
certain
evident

likely
obvious
probable

The modal implications of the adjectives listed above are self-evident.

C-Adjectives preceded by *so* and whose NP referent follows them including a that-clause.

He was so eloquent a speaker that even his enemies listened with respect.

This is the formal construction that is informally rendered by such.

This is such a heavy box that I can't carry it.

Adjectives related to the subjunctive mood

It is common for any of the *that* clauses mentioned in A and B to express subjectivity through the formal form of the verb for the subjunctive or through analytical forms by the use of modal auxiliaries, mainly should

It's odd that he should be late.

It's necessary that he be replaced immediately(r)

Other adjectives in similar constructions:

curious	embarrassing
extraordinary	fitting
fortunate	frightening
important	irritating
sad	shocking
alarming	surprising
disconcerting	

Some adjectives coincide in form with the ing-participle

IT-WITH -ING PHRASES

Some sentences that are introduced by empty "it" include the -ing form after the adjective similarly to the infinitive phrase

It's nice working here.

It's nice to work here.

The tendency to end focus the ing-form as an expression of a durative process is perceived.

As it has been explained before, adjectives occur in a vast number of constructions, each with its own peculiarities. It is quite important for the teacher and for the student of English to understand and make use of all the varied possibilities that the adjective provides to convey properties of reality and therefore use them as a means of a richer and livelier form of communication