
The role of phonological factors in the positioning of a sub-class of French attributive adjectives

Anna Prebler¹, Frank Kügler¹ & Fatima Hamlaoui²

¹Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, ²University of Toronto

pressler@lingua.uni-frankfurt.de, kuegler@em.uni-frankfurt.de,

f.hamlaoui@utoronto.ca

French speakers are permitted creativity when it comes to the positioning of a sub-class of attributive adjectives. This sub-class is characterized by the fact that the adjectives can occur in pre- and postnominal position with no apparent change of interpretation, as shown in (1).

- (1) a. un charmant garçon b. un garçon charmant
 a charming boy *a boy charming*
 ‘a charming boy’

This study investigates whether the placement of these adjectives is affected by phonological factors. First, we will examine the role of length/ phonological weight, that has previously been claimed to affect the positioning of words (Thuilier, 2012; Yao, 2018, a.o.). Our hypothesis is that adjective-noun pairs preferably appear in order of increasing weight (Hawkins, 2000, a.o.). Second, we will investigate the impact of rhythmic alternation in the presence of a monosyllabic noun or adjective. Interestingly, when the noun is monosyllabic only one order (N A) tends to be acceptable (see example (2)).

- (2) a. ?/*un agréable homme b. un homme agréable
 a nice man *a man nice*
 ‘a nice man’

At the same time, it has been previously stated that monosyllabic adjectives are inclined to occur in prenominal position (Thuilier, 2012; Wilmet, 1981). We hypothesize that the inadmissibility of some monosyllabic elements in the second position of the A-N pair is due to the so-called *Principle of Rhythmic Alternation* (Schlüter, 2005). Reporting on frequency counts on adjective position in NPs, this talk will present the results of an acceptability judgment task designed to test the impact of both factors.

References: • Hawkins, J. A. (2000). The relative order of prepositional phrases in English: Going beyond Manner–Place–Time. *Language Variation and Change*, 11(3), 231–266. Schlüter, J. (2005). *Rhythmic grammar: The influence of rhythm on grammatical variation and change in English*. Mouton de Gruyter. Thuilier, J. (2012). *Contraintes préférentielles et ordre des mots en français*. Université Paris-Diderot-Paris VII. Wilmet, M. (1981). La place de l'épithète qualificative en français contemporain: Étude grammaticale et stylistique. *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 45, 17–73. Yao, Y. (2018). NP weight effects in word order variation in Mandarin Chinese. *Lingua Sinica*, 4(1), 5.