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# THE PREDICTABILITY OF PREDICATIVITY*

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## CLAIM

### THE PREDICATIVITY PRINCIPLE

**An adjective is syntactically predicative if and only if it is semantically predicative**

Contra Goldberg 2006, p. 50: "we must learn the distributional properties of these words and phrases [e.g. mere] individually"

### SYNTACTIC PREDICATIVITY (WORKING DEFINITION)

An adjective is syntactically predicative if it can appear as the complement of a copular verb such as be, e.g. *John is tall/*mere*.

### SEMANTIC PREDICATIVITY

An adjective is semantically predicative iff it
(i) is of type <e,t> (post-context) and
(ii) combines intersectively with the noun it modifies.

## METHODS

### TESTS RELATED TO SEMANTIC PREDICATIVITY

**Substitution Test (Siegel 1976)**
**Diagnoses: pre-context intersectivity**

Absolute adjectives: PASS
Suppose singers and dancers are co-extensional.
YES: Olga is a married dancer ⇒ Olga is a married singer.

Measure adjectives: FAIL
Suppose singers and dancers are co-extensional.
NO: Olga is a beautiful dancer ⇒ Olga is a beautiful singer.

**Sentence-level Adverb Test (Beesley 1982)**
**Diagnoses: <e,t>-status, post-context**

Absolute adjectives: PASS
YES: an obviously tall man

Degree-specifying adjectives: FAIL
NO: an obviously utter fool

***One*-anaphora Test (Beesley 1982)**
**Diagnoses: <e,t>-status, post-context**

Absolute adjectives: PASS
YES: here's a tall man, and there's a short one

Degree-specifying adjectives: FAIL
NO: here's an utter fool, and there's a fat one

## RESULTS

| Class | Examples | Pred.[a] | Subst.[b] | Adv.[c] | One[d] | Type[e] | References |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| absolute | deciduous, dead, awake, blonde, fluorescent, red | + | + | + | + | <e,t> | Beesley 1982 |
| measure | tall, heavy, hot, bright, wet, glad, polite, long, big | + | - | + | + | <e,t>* | Beesley 1982, Kennedy 1999 |
| evaluative | good, remarkable, beautiful, excellent, honest | + | - | + | + | <e,t>* | Beesley 1982, Kennedy 1999 |
| privative | fake, false, counterfeit, toy, mythical, imaginary | + | - | + | + | <e,t> | Partee 2003 |
| event manner | hard (worker), beautiful (dancer), smooth (operator) | - | - | + | + | <e,t> | Larson 1998 |
| psychological experience | sorry (sight), happy (coincidence), proud (moment) | - | - | + | + | <e,t> | Bolinger 1967 |
| modal | former, future, alleged, possible, probable, putative | - | - | - | - | <p,p> | Dowty et al. 1981 |
| predicate-evaluating | mere (child), common (soldier) | - | - | - | - | <p,t> | Bolinger 1962 |
| degree-specifying | utter, pure, total, sheer, perfect unmitigated, regular | - | - | - | - | <d,t> | Matushansky 2002 |
| selection | prime, principal, chief, topmost, same, main, very | - | - | - | - | <p,t> | Bolinger 1962 |
| nominal | nervous system adhesive tape, maritime law | - | - | - | - | ? | Levi 1973, 1978 |

[a] Syntactically predicative; [b] Substitution test; [c] Sentence-level adverb test; [d] *One*-anaphora test; [e] Proposed semantic type, with e: individuals; t: truth values; p: properties; d: degrees. Asterisks mean "post-context".

## CONCLUSIONS

### THE IF PART:

Every **syntactically predicative** adjective is **semantically predicative.**

### THE ONLY IF PART:

If an adjective is not **syntactically predicative** then it is not **semantically predicative.**

### GENERAL CONCLUSION

Whether or not an adjective is syntactically predicative can be predicted based on its meaning; no arbitrary exceptions in this domain. (See Coppock 2009 for other domains)

**Implications of no arbitrary exceptions**

(i) The learner need not memorize arbitrary exceptions;
(ii) The grammar need not be set up in such a way as to accommodate them.

Alternative suggestion
The *explanation-seeking learner* (Coppock 2009): The child uses positive and negative evidence to develop theories of his or her language.

## FURTHER SUPPORT

### GRADABLE ADJECTIVES: SEMANTICALLY PREDICATIVE?

A tall midget is not tall; a good thief is probably not a good man.
But comparison class can be given by context:

CONTEXT: School specializing in teaching musicians; basketball game.
✔ We get some good lutists and some bad lutists (Beesley 1982)

CONTEXT: Smith is a violinist playing the piano after dinner.
✔ Smith is a remarkable violinist. (Kamp 1975:152)

Kennedy's (1999) analysis of positive-form gradable adjectives:
<e,d> pre-context: $[_{A}\ \text{tall}] \rightsquigarrow \textbf{tall}$
<e,t> post-context: $[_{DegP}\ \text{tall}] \rightsquigarrow \lambda x.\ \textbf{tall}(x) > d_s$
where $d_s$ is a contextually-determined degree.

### PRIVATIVE ADJECTIVES: SEMANTICALLY PREDICATIVE?

*Fake* gun not a gun? If so, *fake* is not semantically predicative.
But, *are there privative adjectives?* (Partee 2003)
✔ *Is this gun real or fake?*
✔ *the obviously fake gun*

NP-SPLIT IN POLISH:
bad: alleged, potential, predicted, etc.
good: large, skillful, healthy, etc.
good: imaginary, counterfeit, etc.

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