Effects of Focus on Adjective Ordering Restrictions

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I. Introduction

Predicative Adjectives appear in an underlying fixed order in unmarked prosodic contexts. This order changes when contrastive focus is involved, and in English, all orders of a pair of adjectives are possible when one of the adjectives is focused. This paper addresses the larger question: how can focus be represented such that flexibility of ordering is accounted for?

Proposal Regarding Focused Adjectives
- Adjective ordering in focused contexts is better represented by a process of reduplication followed by complementary deletion (Vergnaud 2008) than movement to FocusP, which cannot account for the data
- A binary pair of linkers (den Dikken 2006) is used in the structure of focused adjectives
- Adjective Ordering Restrictions arise from intersectivity, following Svenonius (2008) (See box VII)

II. English Data

Unmarked prosodic context (Canonical ordering):
    (a) the pretty yellow hat
    (b)*the yellow pretty hat

Contrastive Focus:
    (c) the PRETTY yellow hat (not the UGLY one!)
    (d) the pretty YELLOW hat (not the RED one!)
    (e) the YELLOW pretty hat
    (f) the yellow PRETTY hat

While canonical ordering in English is preferred in focused contexts, both orders are acceptable. The order of the noun/D and the adjective are preserved:
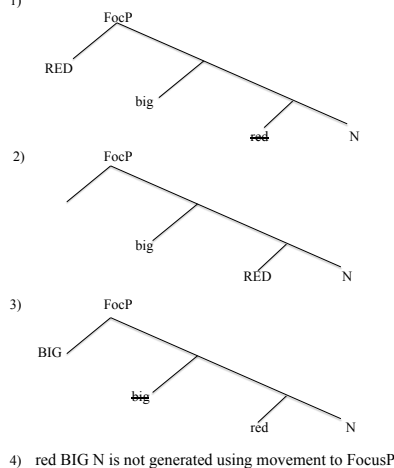   (g) *PRETTY the hat   (h) *the hat PRETTY
    (i) *YELLOW the hat   (j) *the hat YELLOW

III. FocusP
(Scott (2002), Laenzlinger (2005), Svenonius (2008), etc)

Movement to a FocusP:
- Does not explain why the focus transformation is optional
- Cannot generate all the orderings seen in English

1)

2)

3)

4)   red BIG N is not generated using movement to FocusP

IV. Phase Reduplication (Vergnaud 2007)

Chomsky (1995):
Reconstruction relies on copying a larger constituent, with a process of copying and PF deletion similar to ellipsis (Chomsky 1995: 203, his 31)):

    [In which house] John lived [in which house]

Two options for PF deletion:
    [In which house] John lived [~~in which house~~]
    [~~In~~ which house] John lived [in ~~which house~~]

Vergnaud (2007):
Standard wh-movement can be recast, using Chomsky's idea of copying a larger constituent, in this case the entire vP phase:

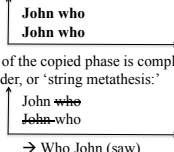   [$_v$ saw who]

    [$_v$ saw who] [$_v$ saw who]

PF deletion/movement to lower phase edge:

    [$_v$ ~~saw~~ who] [$_v$ saw ~~who~~]

Higher phase merges in the same manner, although this time the edge of the lower phase is visible (cf. Chomsky's PIC):

    [John   [who saw]

    [John   [who …

The standard copying-and-deletion movement analysis, recast, can be represented using a set of axes that represent the copies in (X):

PF deletion of the copied phase is complementary; to get the linear PF order, or 'string metathesis:'

    → Who John (saw)
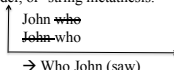
In this sense, movement chains involving quantified wh-structures are linearized through a process of reduplication and deletion

V. Linkers (den Dikken 2006)

Three types of predication:
    Predicate-Specifier
    Predicate-Complement
    Predicate Inversion: involves focus

He argues against using focus as a trigger for movement because there are other ways of showing focus that don't always involve predicate inversion (den Dikken 2006: 88, his (15)):

a. The case was judged, and then a LAWYER appeared in the courtroom
b. The case was judged, and then in the courtroom appeared a LAWYER
c. The case was judged, and then there appeared a LAWYER in the courtroom.

Except, the flexibility of placement of a LAWYER in the above examples could be coming from reduplication of the phase (Chomsky 1995 & Vergnaud 2007), so what was not unified could now be unified under an analysis of focus reduplication. I argue that the LINKER has a wider distribution and is the focus quantifier connective. In cases of adjectival focus, the LINKER is silent.

Selected References:

Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In Ken Hale: A life in language, ed. Kenstowicz, 1–52. MIT Press.
den Dikken, Marcel. 2006. Relators and linkers: The syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and copulas. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA.
Rooth, Mats. 1992. A Theory of Focus Interpretation. Natural Language Semantics 1. 75-116.
Scott, Gary-John. 2002. Stacked Adjectival Modification and the Structure of Nominal Phrases. Functional Structure in DP and IP : the cartography of syntactic structures. ed. Guglielmo Cinque. Oxford University Press. 91-116.
Svenonius, Peter. 2008. The position of adjectives and other phrasal modifiers in the decomposition of DP. in Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics, and Discourse. ed. McNally and Kennedy. OUP.
Vergnaud , Jean-Roger. 2007. The architecture of syntax. Conference on Resumptive Pronouns at the Interfaces. Université Paris 7, 20-21 June 2007.
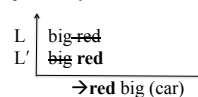
VI. Analysis

The movement-as-phase-reduplication, following Vergnaud (2007), can account for all four orderings observed with focused English adjectives, contrasting with the FocusP analysis. I assume that adjectives merge in phases (McKinney-Bock forthcoming), and that the adjective is in the margin of a lower phase which is visible to the higher phase (cf. Chomsky's PIC).
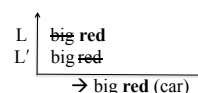

Reduplication of the phase containing *big*, to which *red* is visible. The chain can be represented using the same graphical axes (<L, L'> are a pair of linkers):
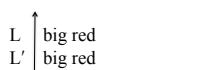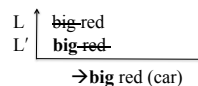

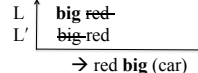Complementary deletion across visible constituents

or

With the inner adjective focused, this appears no different than movement to a FocusP, with the option to pronounce the top or the bottom of a movement chain. However, when the outside adjective is focused this phase-based analysis generates both orderings:

or

- 'Blind Deletion': All non-focused material is deleted from the axis where the focused adjective is pronounced
- The deletion is not non-recoverable deletion, but rather the linearization that occurs at Spell-out to PF. The reduplicated structure exists in its entirety at LF.

VII. Syntactic Ordering Restrictions & Semantic Classes

Svenonius (2008):
  GRADABLE, NON-INTERSECTIVE, CANNOT MERGE w/ MASS N
              >
  NON-GRADABLE, INTERSECTIVE, CAN MERGE w/ MASS N

I argue that the only semantic feature that is relevant to syntactic ordering is

      NON-INTERSECTIVE > INTERSECTIVE

- Mass/Count distinction appears independent:

big red table   *red big table   red water
big square table   *square big table   *square water

- Both gradable and non-gradable green are ordered with respect to big.

The big green/*green big light is flashing
The big green/*green big cat just tipped over a can of paint.   (gradability cf. Kennedy & McNally 2008)

- Intersectivity

Different syntactic distribution in *for*-PPs and with predicative adjectives:
(1) That (big) butterfly is big for a butterfly.
                    (cf. Higginbotham 1985)
(2) ??That (green) butterfly is green for a butterfly
(3) ??A big butterfly is big.
(4) A green cat is green.