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INTERPRETATION OF PROPOSITIONAL MEANING IN ENGLISH ATTRIBUTIVE PHRASES

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Abstract

The article deals with the study of propositional meaning from the point of view of how it is conveyed by modified-adjective constructions in the English language in contrast to sentences. By propositional meaning we understand a set of semantic relations in their reference to real events and settings. It is argued that along with sentences attributive phrases with propositional meaning (APsPM) represent a type of propositional meaning (as conceived by speakers of the English language) which distinguishes *structured attributive word combinations* from sentences on the one hand and highlights universality of *structured attributive word combinations* and sentences, on the other hand. This special class of attributive phrases with propositional meaning is characterized by specific features and falls into consistent patterns with fixed elements and variables. The latter are represented by conjunctions and prepositions. In the article, we argue that there are twelve types of APsPM in the English language that are crucial for learners of the English language. *The method of structure re-modeling APsPM analysis* which includes substitution, omission, rearrangements, addition, and replacement of APsPM is believed to be efficient.

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1. Introduction

Among a wide range of Modified-Adjective Constructions there remains a need for analyzing a special type of attributive constructions in the English language that we call attributive phrases with propositional meaning (APsPM, for short) (see, for example, *a snow-covered field, the most frequently considered subject, the gas-extracting facilities*). They represent one of the greatest sources of confusion for those learning to speak fluent English (Akmajian, Farmer, Bickmore, Demers, & Harnish, 2017; Fromkin, Rodman, Hyams, & Hummel, 2018; Koenenman & Zeijlstra, 2017; McCabe, 2017; O’Grady, Archibald, & Aronoff, 2017; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 2015; Tallerman, 2014; Yule, 2016). On the one hand, on the semantic level they are, in many ways, analogous to sentences. On the other hand, syntactically, they introduce a separate class of phenomena which are abounding in English (Gelderen, 2017; Kuiper & Allan, 2017; McCune, 2016; Radford, 2016; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017; Tortora, 2018).

The characteristic feature of APsPM is that they consist of the noun (the subject / head noun) in the final position that is preceded by attributives in their quasi predicative function. The attributives that modify the head noun are exemplified by non-finite verb-forms, verbal nouns or verbal adjectives and are involved in propositional meaning-making – that is what differs APsPM from other types of “pre-noun inserts” and underlies their basic semantic structure of subordination: *a bee-keeping bachelor* → (*This*) *bachelor keeps bees*.

2. Problem Statement

In this contribution, APsPM are analyzed from two perspectives: *the semantic level* that involves the meaning itself and *the syntactic level* that designates the real situation with its participants (the action itself, the agent, the patient, etc.) centered round the predicate (mainly, the verb): *a lawn-sprinkling pump* = the predicate (*sprinkling; to sprinkle*), the instrument of the action (*pump*), the object (*lawn*). In this view, APsPM are examined as a means of propositional content activation – a feature that unites APsPM and sentences. Unlike sentences, however, APsPM represent inflexible sustainable structures typical of word combinations (constructions) with the components occupying a particular position.

The novelty of the approach lies in the interrelation of semantic and syntactic levels on which APsPM emerge as a new syntactic paradigm. All components that APsPM comprise have been scrutinized in terms of their syntagmatic and paradigmatic collocations and constraints. This perspective substantiated in the Theory of Linguistic Interpretation (Boldyrev 2016, 2018) is eligible for the study of propositional and relational meanings represented by two different constructions: that of an attributive phrase with propositional meaning and a sentence.

3. Research Questions

The research question we would like to answer is: “What makes APsPM special and different from other types of ‘pre-noun inserts’ and word combinations?” Specifically, we are interested in syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of APsPM as well as their universal and distinct characteristics.

4. Purpose of the Study

Under the new perspective we aim to analyze multi-component structured attributive word combinations in order to outline their characteristics that specify them from corresponding sentence structures. Basically, we focus on syntactically multi-component structures to identify grammatical differences among them. By taking into account a representative array of data we intend to obtain a viable type-representation of APsPM in the English language to facilitate reading and writing skills to advanced undergraduates who wish to reach a masterly level of the English language.

5. Research Methods

The methodology comprises methods of linguistic modeling and linguistic experiment as well as techniques of component transformation, i.e. *the method of structure re-modeling APsPM analysis* which includes substitution, omission, rearrangements, addition, and replacement of APsPM. We analyse word combinations that consist of a noun in postposition with several attributes that modify it. Among these attributes there is a predicative word that is represented by non-finite verb forms, verbal nouns and adjectives: *rail-road car- manufacturing plants; a bee-keeping bachelor; the knife-gashed tables; a snow-covered field; the gas-extracting facilities; see-disinfection machines; permanently water repellent cotton poplin; a fully adjustable bracket; a seat recline button; the most frequently considered subject.*

6. Findings

The analysis of the data (more than 4000 examples of APsPM) illustrates that there are twelve types and subtypes of APsPM in the English language:

I. The Subjective APsPM models comprise:

- 1) The subjective APsPM proper (P-p-S);
- 2) The subjective-objective APsPM (O-P-S);
- 3) The subjective-adverbial APsPM (A-P-S);
- 4) The subjective-objective-adverbial APsPM (A-P-O/S);
- 5) The subjective/objective – adverbial APsPM (A-O-P-S).

II. The Objective APsPM models comprise:

- 6) The objective-subjective APsPM;
- 7) The objective–instrumental APsPM;
- 8) The double–objective APsPM (O-P-O);
- 9) The objective–adverbial APsPM.

III. The Adverbial, Instrumental and Zero APsPM models:

- 10) The adverbial-objective APsPM (O-P-A);
- 11) The instrumental-objective APsPM (O-P-M);
- 12) The zero, or partially-structured, APsPM type (O-P)-H.

I. The Subjective APsPM models

1) The subjective APsPM proper (P-p-S) are represented by a two-seat structure with the first position occupied by a noun, whereas the second and the third elements comprise a composite predicative unity, which, in turn, is represented by an adjective or a noun and a linking verb, such as: *look, smell, feel, seem, taste, sound, appear*. For example:

an expensive-looking suitcase → (This) suitcase looks expensive;
the sweet-smelling liquid → (This) liquid smells of soil;
the thinnest-feeling glove → (This) glove feels the thinnest;
the unimportant-seeming incident → (This) incident seems unimportant;
a liquorice-tasting drink → (This) drink tastes of liquorice;
a venomous-sounding poison → (This) poison sounds venomous;
a fine-appearing young gentleman → (This) gentleman appears to be fine.

2) The subjective-objective APsPM model-type (O-P-S) is a three-seat structure with the first position occupied by a subjective construct (expressed by a noun, as a rule), whereas the second – by a predicative construct represented in the form of Participle I of a transitive verb or an adjective; and the third position is occupied by an objective construct (a noun, generally). The subjective-objective APsPM model-type (O-P-S) is subdivided into eight sub-groups (a-h): a) APsPM denoting people or groups of people, as in the following examples:

a truncheon-waving policeman → (This) policeman waves (his) truncheon;
a bee-keeping bachelor → (This) bachelor keeps bees;
a cigar-smoking businessman → (This) businessman smokes a cigar (cigars);
a fish-canning family → (This) family can fish;
a copper-mining group → (This) group mines copper;

b) APsPM denoting animals, insects, plants. For example:

fruit-destroying insects → (These) insects destroy fruit;
turf-forming grasses → (These) grasses form turf;
rubber-producing species → (These) species produce rubber;
the roughage-producing crops → (These) crops produce roughage;
rubber-producing trees → (These) trees produce rubber;

c) APsPM denoting natural phenomena. For example:

crop-damaging droughts → (These) droughts damage crops;
a health-giving night → (This) night gives health;
the life-giving rays of the sun → The rays of the sun give life;

d) APsPM denoting vehicles and other technical devices. The objects denoted by this semantic class of nouns primarily refer to and imply some ‘doers’ of the action that guarantee their action, its initial stage especially. For example:

a wire-recording machine → (This) machine records wires;
heat-seeking missiles → (These) missiles seek heat;
fame-stabbing gun → (This) gun stabs flame;

missile-carrying submarines → (These) submarines carry missiles;

a portable gravel-crushing and screening plant → (This) portable plant crushes and screens gravel;

e) APsPM denoting organizations, firms, institutions. The nouns that comprise these APsPM denote means of production as well as professional groups of people on the basis of which these nouns can denote agents of action:

price-determining institutions → (These) institutions determine prices;

the silk-printing company → (This) company prints silk;

meat-freezing concerns → (This) concerns freeze meat;

a gold-processing plant → (This) plant processes gold;

a bull-breeding establishment → (This) establishment breeds bulls;

f) APsPM denoting social groups with particular purposes, as in the following examples:

poultry meat-producing territories → (These) territories produce poultry meat;

food-exporting countries → (These) countries export food;

timber-producing lands → (These) lands produce timber;

hay-producing region → (This) region produces hay;

food-producing nations → (These) nations produce food;

g) APsPM denoting processes or events. For example:

fruit-destroying diseases → (These) diseases destroy fruit;

heart-breaking troubles → (These) troubles break one's heart;

a spine-chilling monologue → (This) monologue chills one's spine;

a nerve rattling assurance → (This) assurance rattles one's nerves;

the world-shaking events → (These) events shake the world;

h) APsPM denoting parts of the body or senses. For example:

those house-counting eyes of hers → Those eyes of hers were counting the house (audience);

Holden's young truth-seeking mind → Holden's young mind seeks truth.

The noun that is present in the APsPM of this group can also denote a subject of state or some characteristic that are named by a predicative word, as in:

sound-absorbing materials → (These) materials absorb sounds;

three new silver-bearing vein structures → (These) three new vein structures bear silver;

quartz-bearing sand stones → (These) sand stones bear quartz;

sun-resisting plants → (These) plant resist sun.

A predicative adjective is often activated in the function of a predicative construct, as in:

London-bound passengers → (These) passengers are bound for London;

this coal-rich country → (This) country is rich in coal;

disease-prone fish → (This) fish is prone to diseases;

profit-greedy operators → (These) operators are greedy for profits;

a fashion-conscious daughter → (The) daughter is conscious of fashion.

All these and many other examples indicate that the subjective construct of APsPM correlates with the subject of the sentence, whereas the objective construct – with the direct or indirect object, depending on the lexical meaning of the predicative construct. The predicative construct corresponds to the simple verbal predicate on condition that it is represented by Participle I or verbal adjective. The predicative construct represented by the predicative adjective corresponds with the compound nominal predicate.

3) The subjective-adverbial APsPM (A-P-S) include verbs of motion and intransitive verbs. The subjective-adverbial APsPM model can be of three sub-types: L-P-S (subjective-locative model); T-P-S (subjective-temporal model); Q-P-S (subjective-qualifying model). For example, the subjective-locative model is exemplified by the APsPM comprising an adverb:

a left-moving Labour party → (The) Labour party moves to the left;

backward-looking politicians → (These) politicians look backwards;

a left-branching constituent → (This) constituent branches to the left;

a far-seeing man → (This) man sees far.

The subjective-locative model can also be exemplified by the APsPM comprising a noun that denotes a place of action or action direction, as in:

the sea-going trout → The trout goes to the sea;

the field-circling plane → (The) plane circles over the field;

those city-dwelling folks → Those folks dwell in the city;

the inner-city working person → (This) person works in the inner city.

In contrast, the subjective-temporal model of APsPM exclusively comprises adjectives; time duration is expressed by a predicative word – Participle I, as in:

this long-suffering nation → (This) nation has been suffering for a long time;

the long-standing policy → (This) policy has been standing for a long time;

early-maturing strains of layers → (These) strains of layers mature early;

late-maturing crops → (These) crops mature late.

The subjective-qualifying model comprises an adverb, as in:

a wetly-gleaming runway → (This) runway gleams wetly;

fast-growing dusk → (The) dusk grows fast;

steadily-blowing winds → (The) winds blow steadily;

quickly-maturing varieties of plants → (These) varieties of plants mature quickly.

The predicative construct of this model can be exemplified by Participle I of intransitive (as in the examples above) and transitive verbs (see below) as well:

hard-drinking people → (These) people drink hard;

a continuously absorbing book → (This) book absorbs (you) continuously.

4) The subjective-objective-adverbial APsPM (A-P-O/S) is more complicated, for it involves a four-seat structure A-O-P-S, as in:

Permanently water repellent cotton poplin → (This) cotton poplin repels water permanently;

a successfully driver-training school → (This) school trains drivers successfully;

an efficiently salt-producing mine → (This) mine produces salt efficiently.

Among the data the examples of this model are not numerous due to the qualifying adverb in the position of the adverbial construct which describes qualitative characteristics of the action.

5) The subjective/objective – adverbial APsPM (A-O-P-S) model is illustrated by the following examples:

the Monaco-based group → *(This) group based themselves in Monaco = (This) group is based in Monaco;*

the far-flung settlements → *(These) settlements are flung far away;*

a long-established dealer → *(This) dealer was established long ago;*

the splendidly dressed occupants → *(These) occupants dressed themselves splendidly.*

II. The Objective APsPM

6) The objective-subjective APsPM model is a three-seat construct (S-P-O). the first position is occupied by the objective construct represented by a noun; the predicative construct in the second position is represented by Participle II of transitive verbs, whereas the third position is occupied by the subjective construct represented by a noun, as in:

Government-subsidized units → *(These) units are subsidized by government;*

the partisan-controlled region → *(This) region is controlled by the partisans;*

a wind-driven plant → *(This) plant is driven by the wind;*

a storm-tossed ship → *(This) ship is (was, has been) tossed by the storm;*

the bomb-pitted road → *The road is (was, has been) pitted with bombs.*

As these examples illustrate, the objective-subjective APsPM model correlates with Passive sentence structures.

7) In the objective–instrumental APsPM (M-P-O) model, the noun is in the first position, the predicative word, that is Participle II, is in the second position, whereas the instrumental construct, that is the noun, is in the third, as in:

knife-gashed tables → *(These) tables are (were, have been) gashed with knives;*

ink-stamped cards → *(These) cards are (were) stamped with ink;*

foil-backed insulation → *(This) insulation is (was, has been) backed with foil;*

a coin-operated television set → *(This) television set is operated with a coin;*

a nail-shut office → *(This) office is (was, has been) shut with a nail;*

hand-pumped container → *(This) container is pumped by hand;*

zink-plated steel → *(This) steel is (was, has been) plated with zink.*

8) The peculiar feature of the double–objective APsPM (O-P-O) model is that the nouns in the first and third positions denote objects that are bound by socially dependent relationships. They are established by a person, implicitly present, and are ascribed to the object, that is the noun in the first position. Participles II in this model activate passive meaning. For example:

a results-based bonus → *(This) bonus is based on results;*

a dollar-based system → *(This) system is based on dollar;*

asbestos-related health problems → *(These) health problems are related to / with asbestos;*

protein-related projects → (These) projects are related to / with protein.

9) As with the subjective-adverbial APsPM, the objective-adverbial APsPM (A-P-O) model is represented by three sub-types: L-P-O (objective-locative model); T-P-O (objective-temporal model); Q-P-O (objective-qualifying model).

The objective-locative model is represented by a noun or an adverb, as in:

sea-based missiles → (These) missiles are (were, have been) based in the sea;

barn-baled hay → (This) hay is (was, has been) baled in the barn;

a home-cooked delicious meal → (This) delicious meal is (was, has been) cooked at home;

right-extraposed relative clauses → (These) relative clauses are extraposed to the right;

his back-thrown head → (His) head is thrown back (He throws his head back).

The same structure is obvious for the objective-temporal model. Consider the following examples:

summer-tilled land → (This) land is (was, has been) tilled in summer;

fall-sown grains → (These) grains are (were, have been) sown in the fall;

late-seeded grains → (These) grains are (were) seeded late;

their long-deserted garden – Their garden was deserted long ago;

a recently-published book → (This) book has been published recently.

The objective-qualifying model includes adverbs, Participles II and adjectives ending in –able (-ible) that carry passive meanings.

III. The Adverbial, Instrumental and Zero APsPM types

10) The adverbial-objective APsPM (O-P-A) is characterized by its independence and nonconformity with a sentence structure. Depending on the meaning of the adverbial construct (locative or temporal) the model is subdivided into locative-objective (O-P-L) or temporal-objective (O-P-T). Consider the examples on the locative-objective model:

the poultry-packing house → The house where they (you) pack poultry;

racehorse-training yards → The yards where they (you) train racehorses;

Car Hire Station → Station where they (you) hire cars;

a plant exhibition hall → a hall where they exhibit plants.

Consider the examples on the temporal-objective model:

Leaf-raking-and-burning time → time when they (you) rake and burn leaves;

the crop-growing seasons → the seasons when they (you) grow crops;

contract-reopening dates → dates when they (you) reopen contracts;

transport question time → time when they question on transport (in the Commons).

11) In the instrumental-objective APsPM (O-P-M) model the first position is occupied by a noun denoting objects of every-day usage, as in:

a shoe fitting stool → a stool for fitting shoes;

car-parking facilities → facilities for parking cars;

the oil-filling equipment → the equipment for filling with oil;

information transmission medium → medium for the transmission of information.

12) The zero, or partially-structured, APsPM type (O-P)-H denotes: a) public organizations and social services (with no particular responsible agent):

Central Electricity Generating Board → *Central Board which is responsible for generating electricity;*

Ontario Milk Marketing Board → *Ontario Board which deals with marketing milk;*

Federal Farm Loan Board → *Federal Board which is concerned with loaning farms;*

the federal mine protection agency → *the federal agency which is concerned with the protection of mines.*

The nouns carry the meaning of ‘control, being in charge’ with no specific person mentioned;

b) APsPM containing abstract words with broad meaning:

share purchase schemes → *schemes for purchasing shares;*

field-testing standards → *standards for testing fields;*

a profit-sharing plan → *a plan for sharing profits;*

seabed-mining technology → *technology for mining the seabed;*

wage-cutting policy → *policy of cutting wages;*

natural gas export license → *license for the export of natural gas;*

the plant-building process → *the process of building plant(s);*

the asbestos-mining operation → *the operation of mining asbestos.*

In contrast to sentence structure (S-P-O), all the APsPM demonstrate the so-called ‘backward’ movement: the attribute of the predicative word (objective, adverbial or subjective construct depending on a particular model-type) – the predicative word – the noun (the subjective, objective, adverbial, instrumental constructs).

Structure re-modeling of APsPM provides evidence for consistent patterns and variables.

Compare:

hay-receiving organizations ≠ **receiving hay organizations;*

a fish-canning family ≠ **a canning fish family;*

a phosphorus-containing fat ≠ **a containing phosphorus fat;*

fruit-destroying insects ≠ **destroying fruit insects.*

However, omission does not always violate the semantic ties of the components. For example:

a machine-building industry → *a machine industry;*

coal-producing mines → *coal mines*

squab-producing plants → *squab plants;*

a paper-making industry → *the paper industry;*

a bull-breeding ranch → *a bull ranch.*

The replacement is possible within APsPM, the components of which belong to the same logical and semantic category:

fashionably (poorly, well, soberly, smartly, expensively)–dressed people;

a brightly (friendly, dimly)–lit room.

The evaluative meaning is expressed by: a) the linking verbs (*seem, appear, smell, taste, feel, sound*) in the following APsPM:

this is so innocent-seeming spot of nightmare → (This) spot of nightmare seems (to somebody) so innocent;

It seems (to somebody) that this spot of nightmare is so innocent;

a fine-appearing man → (This) man appears (to somebody) to be fine → *It appears (to somebody) that this man is fine;*

the soil-smelling shed → (This) shed smells (to somebody) of oil;

liquorice-tasting drink → (This) drink tastes (to somebody) of liquorice;

a thinnest-feeling glove → (This) glove feels (to somebody) the thinnest;

a venomous-sounding poison → (This) poison sounds (to somebody) venomous → *It sounds (to somebody) that this poison is venomous;*

The evaluative meaning can also be expressed by adverbs (*obviously, apparently, unfortunately, really*), as in:

an obviously frightened person → (This) person is obviously frightened → *It is obvious (to somebody) that this person is frightened;*

apparently uncoordinated official actions → (These) official actions are apparently not coordinated → *It is apparent (to somebody) that these official actions are not coordinated;*

an unfortunately dislocated elbow → (The) elbow was unfortunately dislocated → *It was unfortunate (to somebody) that the elbow was dislocated;*

the evidently exaggerated admiration → *The admiration is evidently exaggerated* → *It is evident (to somebody) that the admiration is exaggerated;*

the really impoverished peasants → *The peasants are really impoverished* → *It is real (to somebody) that the peasants are impoverished;*

The evaluative meaning can also be expressed by adjectives with the suffixes *-able, -ible*, as in:

easily understandable books → (These) books can be understood easily;

a fully flexible hose → (This) hose may be flexed fully;

a practically inexhaustible store of bottles → (This) store of bottles cannot be practically exhausted;

a properly analyzable position → (This) position can be analyzed properly;

The evaluative meaning can also be expressed by the prefixes (*un, non* for example, to express negation), as in:

the fully unexpected visitors;

non-sentence-initial adverbial constructions.

APsPM can indicate whether the actions are simultaneous or completed before the main action, as in:

He straddled the shoe-fitting stool → *He straddled the stool which (was used, meant) for fitting shoes;*

A home-cooked delicious meal was served → *A delicious meal, which had been cooked at home, was served.*

7. Conclusion

The findings illustrate that there are twelve APsPM models typical of contemporary English language. They all represent a separate type of multi-component syntactic units of a propositional nature, the components of which cannot be omitted or replaced. Being rather stable in virtue of the order of the components, APsPM altogether are subjected to transformations. In this case, the relationships between the components can be consolidated into four types: subjective, objective, adverbial and attributive.

We conclude that APsPM as a syntactic paradigm can express modal (evaluative) meanings as well as temporal meanings by lexical units and grammatical means.

In contrast with sentences, APsPM do not abound in a variety of relational grammatical meanings. Unlike the predicate in a sentence, the predicative construct does not explicitly express aspect, time and modality; it names the action rather than makes reference to the real world, as is in the sentence. However, modality and time can be expressed lexically.

Further research of APsPM can emphasize their characteristics in terms of communicative preference: what makes participants opt for particular APsPM in the process of discourse construction.

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