

## ‘Something interesting’: Insights on the Position of Adjectival Predicates in Romance

In this paper, some issues related to the position and the meaning of Italian adjectival predicates are discussed within the generative syntax framework.

It is shown that Cinque’s (1994) N-raising hypothesis, as well as its later adjustments as a NP-raising hypothesis are problematic for several reasons, especially when meaning change is taken into account.

This proposal, however, does not reject Cinque’s account *in toto*, since its main claim is that the so-called non-restrictive (appositive) pre-nominal adjectives are base-generated pre-nominally, whereas restrictive (referential) post-nominal adjectives are base-generated post-nominally.

### 1. Assumptions

a. This paper starts from a semantic typology of Italian adjectives and adjective uses (predicative vs. non-predicative, intersective vs. non-intersective, along the Montagovian tradition), and takes into account the S-level/I-level distinction (Larson 1998; Larson and Marušič 2004) as well.

b. More importantly, this hypothesis is couched in den Dikken’s (2006) Predication Theory, according to which the predication relationship is asymmetrical and non-directional, so that structures (1) and (2) are generated by UG:

(1)  $[_{RP} [_{XP} \text{SUBJECT} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} [_{YP} \text{PREDICATE}]]]]$  (canonical, predicate-complement structure)

(2)  $[_{RP} [_{XP} \text{PREDICATE} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} [_{YP} \text{SUBJECT}]]]]$  (‘reverse’ or predicate-specifier structure)

The RELATOR is an abstract, semantically empty element that can be silent or overt.

### 2. Main hypothesis

Adjectival predicates in Romance languages exhibit a striking correlation between syntactic position and change of meaning. In this paper, I argue for a 1:1 mapping analysis between syntax and semantics. To this aim, I will take (1) and (2), always with an **empty** RELATOR in my cases, as the basic structures for a noun phrase modified by an adjective. In particular, with the support of semantic, syntactic, and phonological data, I will show that pre-nominal adjectives are DP-internal (i.e. syntactically linked to the bare NP) and feature a ‘reverse’ predication: they merge directly in [Spec, RP], whereas the whole RP acquires its referentiality when D later merges, as in (3). Post-nominal adjectives, on the other hand, are DP-external (i.e., have a DP-subject) and they merge in [Comp, RP], featuring a ‘canonical’ predication as in (4):

(3)	<i>un</i>	<i>rosso</i>	<i>tramonto</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>grande tavolo</i>
	a	red	sunset	a	big table
	‘a red sunset’			‘a big table’	

$[_{DP} [_{D'} D [_{RP} AP [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \emptyset] NP]]]$

(4)	<i>un</i>	<i>tramonto</i>	<i>rosso</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>tavolo grande</i>
	a	sunset	red	a	table big
	‘a red sunset’			‘a big table’	

$[_{RP} DP [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \emptyset] AP]$

I argue that there is **always** a meaning difference, although subtle, in the pre- vs. post-nominal alternation of an adjective in Italian (and presumably in other Romance languages), to which the above syntactic structures correspond. Such results seem to confirm what is shown, within a different framework and with different tools, by Bouchard (1998; 2002) for French.

### 3. Subjective adjectives

The predication structures in den Dikken (2006) are particularly fruitful for an understanding of Romance adjectives’ syntax if we consider subjective adjectives like (5) (Siegel 1980; Kamp and Partee 1995, among others):

(5) skillful liar ~ skillful surgeon; big butterfly ~ big elephant; small butterfly ~ small elephant

Thus, sentences (6) and (7) have respectively the structures in (6') and (7'), where the relative interpretation is captured through the embedding of a small clause RP2 within the complement of RP1; the null RELATOR, on the other hand, surfaces respectively as an overt *for* and *as* in (6'') and (7''):

(6) *Jumbo is a small elephant*

(6')  $[_{RP1} \text{Jumbo} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{is} [_{DP} [_{D'} \textit{a} [_{RP2} [_{AP} \textit{small}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \emptyset [_{NP} \textit{elephant}]]]]]]]]]$

(6'')  $[_{RP1} \text{Jumbo} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{is} [_{RP2} [_{AP} \textit{small}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{for} [_{NumP} \textit{an} [_{NP} \textit{elephant}]]]]]]]]]$

(7) *Olga is a beautiful dancer*

(7')  $[_{RP1} \text{Olga} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{is} [_{DP} [_{D'} \textit{a} [_{RP2} [_{AP} \textit{beautiful}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \emptyset [_{NP} \textit{dancer}]]]]]]]]]$

(7'')  $[_{RP1} \text{Olga} [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{is} [_{RP2} [_{AP} \textit{beautiful}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} = \textit{as} [_{NumP} \textit{a} [_{NP} \textit{dancer}]]]]]]]]]$

In my analysis of Italian adjectives, which follows Bouchard 2002 *contra* Siegel 1980, I claim that it is not the case that evaluative adjectives rigidly correspond to *as*-phrases and scalar adjectives to *for*-phrases, but it is also possible to have *for*-phrases with evaluative adjectives. *Bravo* ('skillful'), in *Finalmente un bravo chirurgo* (= 'Finally a skillful surgeon') vs. *Finalmente un chirurgo bravo* (= 'Finally a surgeon skillful'), is one of such examples: with an appropriate contextual information, I will show that pre-nominally it only has an 'as a' interpretation, whereas post-nominally it gets a 'for a' interpretation, because it externally modifies the whole DP-subject, which refers to **an individual** who happens to be a surgeon. According to the approach taken in this paper, the two structures are respectively represented in (8) and (9):

(8)  $[_{DP} [_{D'} \textit{un} [_{RP} [_{AP} \textit{bravo} [_{R'} \emptyset [_{NP} \textit{chirurgo}]]]]]]]$

hence  $[_{RP} [_{AP} \textit{bravo}] [_{R'} \textit{come} [_{NP} \textit{chirurgo}]]]$

(9)  $[_{RP} [_{DP} \textit{un} \textit{chirurgo} [_{R'} \emptyset [_{AP} \textit{bravo}]]]]]$

hence  $[_{RP} [_{AP} \textit{bravo}] [_{R'} \textit{per} [_{DP} \textit{un} \textit{chirurgo}]]]$

#### 4. Consequences

If on the right track, two outcomes follow from the above analysis:

a. Under this approach, the two modified noun phrases (1) [*un [ignorante dottore]*] (= 'an ignorant doctor') and (2) [*[un dottore] ignorante*] (= 'a doctor ignorant'), with a pre-N and a post-N evaluative adjective, semantically (and syntactically) correspond to den Dikken's (1) attributive QBNPs (Qualitative Binominal Noun Phrases): *quell'ignorante di dottore* = 'that idiot of a doctor' (with *di* as a RELATOR) and (2) comparative QBNPs (*quell'ignorante del dottore* = 'that idiot of a doctor'), where the presence of the article defines the doctor as **an individual** and where Predicate Inversion is then performed. From what I discussed in Section 3., I claim that the context-dependent *for*-phrase *skillful for a surgeon* can be considered another case of comparative QBNP.

b. The above structures (8) and (9) also straightforwardly solve a *crux* in syntax, namely the Head-Final Filter, which precludes a pre-N adjective from taking a complement in Romance: *\*una brava in matematica ragazza* = \*a good at math girl. In fact, this constraint is expected in a structure in which the AP is very closely linked to the bare NP and 'frozen' in [Spec, RP].

#### 5. Conclusions

Finally, this paper seeks to apply the above considerations to English, which is clearly **opaque** in its generalized pre-N adjectival position. Given (3) and (4), we are led to the apparently anti-economical conclusion that English has two different structures for one surface form. My tentative solution hinges on the few, but crucial cases of post-N adjectives that offer evidence for the DP-external nature of S-level and subsecutive adjectives (in their intersective reading), with respect to NP-internal I-level and non-intersective adjectives (Larson, 1998; Larson and Marušič, 2004).

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