Obviously Frequent Smokers and Possibly Heavy Drinkers

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This talk concerns the semantics of epistemic adverbs such as *obviously* and frequency adjectives such as *frequent*. We begin with the observation that *obviously* modifies only those prenominal adjectives that can be used predicatively (e.g. *an obviously beautiful/*mere child ∼ The child is beautiful/*mere*). On some accounts (Beesley 1982; Cinque 2010), this is explained by assuming that the prenominal adjectives that can be modified by *obviously* originate within relative clauses, but I will argue for an alternative hypothesis, namely that *obviously* selects for predicative adjectives. The predictions of the two hypotheses diverge when it comes to prenominal adjectives that can be used predicatively but do not combine intersectively with the noun they modify (i.e. via Predicate Modification). The hypothesis I advocate predicts that *obviously* should be able to modify predicative adjectives (adjectives of type $\langle \sigma, t \rangle$ for some possibly restricted set of types σ), even when do not combine via Predicate Modification.

There are several cases in which the prediction of the latter hypothesis is borne out: (i) degree-size adjectives, as in *huge fan,* which do not license inferences to the predicative construction but modification by *obviously* is possible: *an obviously huge fan.* (ii) event-manner adjectives, as in *Olga is a beautiful dancer, though she is not beautiful,* for which the non-intersective reading is still available under modification by *obviously*: *Olga is an obviously beautiful dancer, though she is not beautiful.* (iii) frequency adjectives, like *frequent* and *heavy*, as in *He is a frequent/heavy smoker*; cf. *He is an obviously frequent/heavy smoker.*

I propose that *obviously* is a modifier of type $\langle \langle \sigma, t \rangle, \langle \sigma, t \rangle \rangle$, and the adjectives of interest are all of type $\langle \sigma, t \rangle$ for some type σ, and although they have the option of combining intersectively (via Predicate Modification) with the noun they modify, they are also capable of combining with the noun via other modes of composition. For degree-size adjectives, σ is the type of degrees (Morzycki 2009), and for frequency adjectives, σ is the type of sets of events.

In the case of both event-manner adjectives and (the 'internal reading' of) frequency adjectives, it has often been argued (Schäfer 2007, i.a.) that they participate in a kind of bracketing paradox, so that semantically, the agentive suffix *-er* attaches after the adjective has combined with the noun: *[beautiful dance]-er; [frequent smoke]-er.* I argue for a different analysis, based on the observation that frequency adjectives can modify non-deverbal nouns: *She is an **occasional guest** here; The planet was a **frequent victim** of cometary impacts*; *This has been a **constant theme** of the Infada policy,* etc. My proposal includes a special composition rule that applies the meaning of the adjective to the set of events whose existence is implied by the instantiation of the participant noun in question. Even though the adjective does not combine via Predicate Modification in such constructions, it can be modified by *obviously* because, as hypothesized, *obviously* can modify any adjective of type $\langle \sigma, t \rangle$.

References

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