A syntactically conservative approach to Bolinger effects

Timothy Leffel // tim.leffel@nyu.edu // MACSIM 3, Johns Hopkins University

Introduction/goal of talk. Word-order-sensitive adjective ambiguities are sometimes referred to as "Bolinger contrasts" or "Bolinger effects." Two especially well-known examples are the pre-/postnominal alternations between restrictive (R) and nonrestrictive (NR) interpretation ((1)), and between s(tage)-level and i(ndividual)-level interpretation ((2)).

(1)   a.   Every <u>unsuitable word</u> was deleted.   (Larson & Marušič 2004:275)
              Restrictive: "Every word that was unsuitable was deleted."
              Nonrestrictive: "Every word was deleted; they were unsuitable."
    b.   Every <u>word unsuitable</u> was deleted.   *Restrictive*, *#Nonrestrictive*

(2)   a.   the <u>visible stars</u>   *s-level*, *i-level*   (Bolinger 1967)
    b.   the <u>stars visible</u>   *s-level*, *#i-level*

(Non)restrictivity and s-/i-level are semantically unrelated properties, but the alternations appear to pattern syntactically in a parallel fashion. Furthermore, relative distance from the noun partially determines which reading(s) an apparently ambiguous adjective can receive.

(3)   *s-level>i-level*, *#i-level>s-level*

    a.   The invisible visible stars include Capella.   (Larson 1998, attributed to B. Citko)
    b. #The visible invisible stars include Capella.

(4)   *intersective>adverbial*, *#adverbial>intersective*

    a.   Olga is a blond beautiful dancer.   (*beautiful and a dancer*, *dances beautifully*)
    b.   Olga is a beautiful blond dancer.   (*beautiful and a dancer*, *#dances beautifully*)

In this talk, I argue that the syntax of Bolinger effects follows from the lexical semantics/ morphological structure of specific words, and the nature of bottom-up semantic composition. It is therefore unnecessary to posit otherwise unmotivated syntactic structure to explain Bolinger effects, as in the accounts of Larson (1998); Larson & Marušič (2004); Cinque (2010); a.o. I provide evidence for this claim by examining four case studies: *(i)* restrictive/nonrestrictive ((1)); *(ii)* s-/i-level ((2)); *(iii)* intersective/adverbial ((4)); and *(iv)* direct/implicit relative readings of *possible* and related adjectives (e.g. *Mary interviewed every possible candidate*, see Larson 2000).

Analysis sketches.

(i) **restrictive/nonrestrictive (R/NR).** I argue that this distinction is a pragmatic one; i.e. there is no grammatical difference between a R and NR reading. NR modifiers cannot be focused (Umbach 2006), and postnominal modifiers are generally not NR. I therefore hypothesize that DP is a prosodic domain in which the phrase-final position bears highest default stress. This means that postnominal modifiers are in some sense "inherently focused/contrastive," which is incompatible with NR interpretation. Other putative Bolinger effects described by Cinque (2010:19) are shown to follow from composition order on any reasonable definition of "(non)restrictive."

(ii) **s-/i-level.** I adopt Kratzer's (1995) position that what distinguishes an s- from i-level predicates is that the former has an additional davidsonian (event) argument. Combining this with the idea that (some) postnominal adjectives are reduced relative <u>clauses</u>, postnominal *visible* has an event variable in its semantics (assuming clauses denote event predicates). Prenominal adjectives need not be reduced relatives, so a prenominal adjective should be ambiguous (as in (2a)).

(iii) **intersective/adverbial.** I adopt Larson's (1998) view that some adjectives can be event- or individual-predicates. I propose that a deverbal noun like *dancer* is decomposed into *dance* and a nominalizing suffix *-er*, and that an event-predicate adjective can combine with a verbal root to the exclusion of (some) verbal affixes. So the ambiguity of *beautiful dancer* is structural:

(5)   a. $[_N [_V [_{Adj_{adv}}$ beautiful $] [_V$ dance $]] [_{V \to N}$ -er $]]$ (*adverbial*, "dances beautifully")
     b. $[_N [_{Adj_{int}}$ beautiful $] [_N [_V$ dance $][_{V \to N}$ -er $]]]$ (*intersective*, "beautiful and a dancer")

This simple analysis derives a number of Bolinger effects, e.g. (4) and others to be discussed.
(iv) **"direct"/"implicit relative (IR)"** *possible.* Following Larson (2000) and Romero (2011), I analyze IR *possible* (type $\langle t,t \rangle$) as an ACD construction. Direct *possible* ($\langle \langle e,t \rangle, \langle e,t \rangle \rangle$) is simply an attributive modifier that operates on the denotation of N.

(6)   a.   *IR reading:* $[_{DP}$ every candidate $\lambda x [_{CP}$ possible $[_{IP}$ PRO $[$ TO $[_{VP}$ interview $x]]]]]$
                                    . $\lambda x [_{IP}$ Mary PAST $[_{VP}$ interview $x]]$
     b.   *Direct reading:* $[_{IP}$ Mary PAST $[_{VP}$ interview $[_{DP}$ every $[_{NP}$ possible candidate $]]]]$

The Bolinger effects for *possible* fall out from the distinction between "attributive"/"propositional" *possible*, and the observation that ACD relative clauses always scope above other modifiers.
Significance.
Examples like (1)-(4) have been taken to constitute powerful evidence for an articulated nominal skeleton containing silent structure, empty operators, and requiring stipulated ordering restrictions (Larson 1998; Cinque 2010; a.o.). "Two-domains" theories of modification claim that "direct modifiers" are associated with NR/i-level/adverbial/etc. interpretation, and receive these semantic properties from covert syntactic material. "Indirect modifiers" are structurally more distant from the noun and are associated with the opposing set of readings (R/s-level/etc.).

(7)   *Syntactic two-domains theories of modification/Bolinger contrasts*
     a. $[_{DP}$ D $[$ AP$_{indirect}$ $[[_{XP}$ AP$_{direct}$ $[_{X'}$ X NP $]]$ AP$_{indirect}$ $]]]$ (Cinque 2010)
           (functional head X imposes semantics on AP$_{direct}$)
     b. $[_{DP} \exists e [$ AP$_{indirect}$ $[\Gamma e [_{NP}$ AP$_{direct}$ N $]]$ AP$_{indirect}$ $]]$ (Larson & Marušič 2004)
           (Only AP$_{direct}$ is in the scope of generic event quantifier Γe)

By showing that the syntactic properties of *(i)-(iv)* follow from semantic and architectural considerations, we obviate the need for covert syntactic operators and an articulated DP structure in the analysis of (1)-(4). This result provides preliminary evidence that closer inspection of <u>all</u> Bolinger contrasts will reveal that they can be explained without positing an articulated and semantically enriched syntax, allowing for a more transparent mapping from lexical meaning and overt morphological/syntactic structure to truth-conditional meaning.

References: Bolinger, D. 1967. Adjectives in English: Attribution and predication. *Lingua*. ● Cinque, G. 2010. *The syntax of adjectives*. ● Kratzer, A. 1995. Stage-level and individual-level predicates. In *The generic book*. ● Larson, R. 1998. Events and modification in nominals. *SALT 8*. ● Larson, R. 2000. ACD in AP? *WCCFL 19*. ● Larson, R. & F. Marušič. 2004. On indefinite pronoun structures with APs. *LI*. ● Romero, M. 2011. Decomposing modal superlatives. *NELS 41* ● Umbach, C. 2006. Non-restrictive modification and backgrounding. *LoLa 9*.