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A NOTE ON N + Adj

In his paper *Attributes and Attributive Adjectives*, S. Potter, when dealing with the comparatively high frequency of postposed attributive adjectives in English poetry, says the following: "To the speech of poetry the postposed adjective often gives a peculiar affectiveness which cannot be analysed or defined. This is one of the miracles of language. Why, I ask (but cannot answer), does 'the vision splendid' of Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, expressing, as it does, all the bright unsullied aspirations of youth, mean so much more than 'the splendid vision'? It would be illuminating to survey the whole history of English poetry with an eye to attributes alone, and more especially with an eye to the use of postposed attributive adjectives."¹ However interesting the results of the diachronic investigation may be, they will only reveal one of the facets of the problem. An adequate appreciation of such results would, for instance, be unthinkable without due regard to the place of postposed attributive adjectives within the present-day system of language.

In the present note we shall try to draw attention to the special positions occupied by postposed attributive adjectives within the three syntactic levels;² i) level of formal grammar, ii) semantic level, iii) functional level (level of functional sentence perspective or level of the organization of utterance). In order to ascertain the place of the N + Adj. sequence in the system, we must investigate, not only the mere opposition Adj. + N vs. N + Adj., but the whole gamut of phenomena connected with at least two neighbouring classes of attributive constructions—the class of attributive junctions with preposed attributive elements on the one hand and the class of semi-clausal attributive constructions on the other—keeping an eye on the transitional phenomena as well. Let us adduce some examples:

— S. I	eyes were disconcertingly inattentive at times	—
S. II	eyes, having been disconcertingly inattentive at times	—
— S. III	eyes, being disconcertingly inattentive at times	—
S. 1	eyes being disconcertingly inattentive at times	
S. 2	eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times	
S. 3	eyes, disconcertingly inattentive	
S. 4	*eyes inattentive	
S. 5	inattentive eyes	

¹ S. Potter, *Attributes and Attributive Adjectives*, Brno Studies in English 8, pp. 162–163 (Brno 1969).

² Cf. F. Daneš, *A Three Level Approach to Syntax*, Travaux linguistiques de Prague 1, esp. p. 227 (Prague 1964) and the present author's *The Hierarchy of Communicative Units and Fields as Illustrated by English Attributive Constructions* (later only *Hierarchy*), Brno Studies in English 7, pp. 49–57 (Brno 1968).

S. 1—4 and S. I—III are to show the close connection between the semi-clausal attributive constructions on the one hand and the semi-clausal and clausal non-attributive constructions on the other.³ S. 1 is regarded here as a semi-clausal attributive construction. The other examples are gradually losing their semi-clausal character, in inverse proportion acquiring the character of an attributive junction. S. 4 has acquired the latter kind of character so evidently that in normal speech it is replaced by a pure attributive junction with the attribute preceding the headword. A more detailed explanation is to follow later on. Let us have another set of examples:

- S. 6 inattentive eyes
 S. 7 disconcertingly inattentive eyes
 S. 8 (*)at times disconcertingly inattentive eyes
 S. 9 *at times disconcertingly inattentive being eyes
 S. 10 eyes being disconcertingly inattentive at times

In this set of examples we can trace a gradual loss of the character of an attributive junction on the one hand, and an increasing number of semi-clausal features on the other. At a certain point (under the circumstances at S. 8, or—as the S. 8 pattern cannot be entirely ruled out—rather at S. 9), the semi-clausal features are so strong and those characteristic of an attributive junction so weak that a purely semi-clausal pattern is to be preferred (under the circumstances S. 10 to S. 9, or S. 2 to S. 8). As the latter set of examples is not in the centre of our interest, being only introduced for the sake of making the explanation of the former set easier, we shall turn back to exx. S. 1—S. 5 and deal with each of them in more detail.

From the viewpoint of formal syntax (formal grammar), S. 1 shows the kind of grammatical dependence characteristic of semi-clausal attributive constructions, the verbo-nominal *being* serving as an indicator of this kind of dependence.⁴ Following the same pattern, S. 2 bears a great resemblance to S. 1 in spite of the missing indicator, the dependence being indicated by the juxtaposition of the headword and the attributive elements (as is the case with attributive junctions). The very limited possibility of using this pattern in the position before a headword (see S. 8) makes us regard it rather as a semi-clausal attributive construction than as an attributive junction. In the case of S. 3, the situation is rather similar, but owing to the nearly unlimited possibility of its being used prepositively S. 3, retaining its semi-clausal features, comes still nearer to the sphere of attributive junctions than S. 2 does. In S. 4 the semi-clausal character is preserved due to the same direction of dependence as in the preceding examples. On the other hand, the prevailing possibility, or rather necessity, of using a single adjective prepositively and the one-to-one relation so typical of S. 5 enable S. 4 to display also the characteristic features of an attributive junction.

On the level of semantic syntax, predication (or determination as its inverse quality⁵) is the most important relation corresponding to that of grammatical dependence. ('Correspondence' is to be understood here in terms of 'affinity', not 'equality'.) Roughly speaking, we distinguish three kinds of predication; i) verbal

³ For a more detailed explanation of S. I—III, S. 1—3, 5 and other similar examples, see *Hierarchy*, pp. 64—66.

⁴ For an explanation of the term 'indicator', see *Hierarchy*, esp. pp. 65—66, 72—76.

⁵ See *Hierarchy*, pp. 50—52.

predication of sentences and clauses, ii) non-verbal predication of semi-clausal constructions, and iii) primitive (non-verbal) predication of attributive junctions. The attributive semi-clausal construction of S. 1 displays the relation of non-verbal predication, *being* serving as a mere indicator of this relation. In contrast with S. 1, the non-attributive semi-clausal constructions of S. II and S. III contain more than a mere indicator of non-verbal predication: the verbal forms *being* and *having been* are not entirely devoid of temporal and modal exponents.⁶ Despite of the change of formal dependence and the change of the indicator of predication (*being* is replaced by the juxtaposition of elements), the kind of predication in S. 2 remains practically the same as in S. 1. (Cf. the difference between *I think that he is right* and *I think he is right*, where the formal dependence is partly changed, but the semantic relation remains the same.) The kind of predication, however, is determined not only by formally expressed indicators (words, juxtaposition of words), but also by the semantic character of elements taking part in creating the predicative relation. In S. 1 and S. 2, the elements remain unchanged. In S. 3 the absence of the element *at times* shifts the non-verbal predication nearer to the sphere of primitive predication. This shift is carried out still further in S. 4, where either kind of predication (non-verbal or primitive) may be found. S. 5 is a typical example of primitive predication. As may have been gathered from the above explanation, formal dependence and semantic predication do not fully coincide in the gradual change from S. 1 to S. 5; yet there is one common point (S. 4) at which we are at a loss to decide which kind of dependence or which kind of predication is the prevailing one.

On the functional level, we distinguish communicative fields (CF's) containing, apart from thematic and rhematic communicative units (CU's), also a transitional CU,⁷ and communicative fields without the transitional CU, i.e. such as contain only thematic and rhematic CU's. (Under the heading of the former come verbal sentences, attributive and non-attributive subordinate clauses, and non-attributive semi-clausal constructions; cf. exx. S. I—III. Under the heading of the latter come attributive semi-clausal constructions and attributive junctions; cf. exx. S. 1—5. It is worth noticing, however, that S. 1 must be looked upon as a transitional phenomenon between CF's with a transitional CU and those without it.) In our previous paper⁸ we did not need to go beyond this rough division of CF's, because our main task was to bring all the attributive constructions to a common denominator and to show that all of them represent a CF which may appear as one CU (thematic or rhematic) in the nearest superior CF. This is why we only touched upon the problem of the double function of the antecedent (or the headword) in attributive clauses and attributive constructions of semi-clausal character. In the present note, however, this problem is of great importance. The possibility or impossibility of regarding the whole CF provided by an attributive construction as one CU in the nearest superior CF and the respective headword as another separate CU may serve as a criterion of the division of the CF's without a transitional CU into two groups: i) one group is constituted by the CF's of attributive junctions, representing only one CU in the superior CF, with the headword being predominantly thematic and the other element(s) rhematic: ii) the other group is constituted by the CF's

⁶ For the term 'temporal and modal exponents', see J. Firbas, *A Note on Transition Proper in Functional Sentence Analysis*, *Philologica Pragensis* 8, pp. 170—176 (Prague 1965).

⁷ Our transitional CU corresponds to J. Firbas's term 'transition proper'. For explanations of the terms 'CU' and 'CF', see *Hierarchy*, pp. 58ff.

⁸ *Hierarchy*, see note 2.

of semi-clausal and similar attributive constructions, which permit of being regarded as one CU in the superior CF, their headword allowing of being interpreted as another CU of the same rank.

S. 11 $\frac{T^{\circ} \quad Tr^{\circ}/R^{\circ}}{He \quad had} \frac{R_p^{\circ}}{\text{sherry-coloured eyes}}$
 $\frac{R^1}{R^1} \quad \frac{T^1}{T^1}$

S. 12 $\frac{T^{\circ} \quad Tr^{\circ}/R^{\circ}}{He \quad had} \frac{R^{\circ}}{\text{sherry-coloured eyes}} \frac{R_p^{\circ}}{\text{disconcertingly inattentive at times}}$
 $\frac{R^1/R^2}{T^1} \quad \frac{T^1/T^2}{T^1} \quad \frac{R^1}{R^1} \quad \frac{R^1}{R^1}$

(T = thematic CU, Tr = transitional CU, R = rhematic CU, R_p = rheme proper; the index denotes the rank.)¹⁰

Due to the relation of strong formal dependence observable on the grammatical level and to the relation of primitive predication—being the reverse quality of a strong determination—observable on the semantic level, the CF¹ of the attributive junction *sherry-coloured eyes* in S. 11 is to be regarded as, and only as, one CU^o in the CF^o of the whole sentence. On the other hand, the attributive construction *sherry-coloured eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times* in S. 12 may be regarded as two CU^o's (one formed by the headword *sherry-coloured eyes*, the other by the CF¹ of the whole attributive construction with its headword functioning as a thematic CU¹) owing to a looser bond of formal dependence and the changed kind of non-verbal predication. As the situation in S. 12 is complicated by the fact that the headword of one of the attributive constructions is an attributive construction as well, we shall adduce another example, in which, formally at least, the situation seems to be much clearer.

S. 13 $\frac{I^{\circ} \quad Tr^{\circ} \quad R_{p-1}^{\circ} \quad R_{p-2}^{\circ}}{\text{There was a blackbird perch-ed on the cherry-tree, sleek and}} \frac{T^{\circ}}{R_p^{\circ}}$
 $\frac{R_p^{\circ}}{\text{glstening as if it had been bathed in oil.}^{11}}$

(..... connecting the parts of one CU, I = indicator of the communicative position of a CU).

Viewed in the light of the above explanation, on the one hand, the CF of S. 4 shares certain features with the indivisible CF of S. 5; on the other hand, however, its resemblance to the CF's of S. 3, S. 2 and S. 1 does not exclude the possibility of regarding it as comprising two separate CU's.

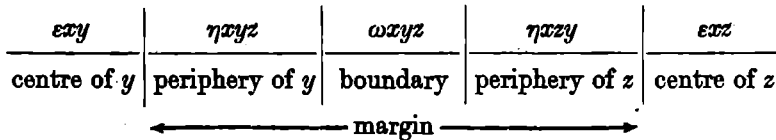
To sum up the investigation on the three levels, we shall employ J. V. Neústupný's linguistic terms *centre*, *periphery*, and *boundary*, based on T. Kubiński's

⁹ J. Galsworthy, *The Man of Property* (B. Tauchnitz, Leipzig 1909), p. 20, line 6.

¹⁰ For further details see *Hierarchy*, esp. pp. 68–70.

¹¹ J. Braine, *Room at the Top* (Moscow 1961), p. 34, line 3. For the functional evaluation of *there is ... and it is ... that* constructions, see J. Firbas, *It was yesterday that ...*, SPFFBU, A 15, pp. 141–6 (Brno 1967) and the present author's *Hierarchy*, pp. 77–78, 86.

logical functors ϵ (ϵxy to be read "x is undoubtedly y"), η (ηxyz —"x is rather y than z") and ω (ωxyz —"x is y and z in the same degree"). J. V. Neústupný demonstrates the situation graphically as follows:¹²



Let S. 1 be x_1 , S. 2 = x_2 , S. 3 = x_3 , etc., y = semi-clausal attributive construction with the necessary consequences on all three levels, z = attributive junction with the necessary consequences on all three levels, thus

$\epsilon x_1 y$	(centre of y)
$\eta x_2 yz$	(periphery of y)
$\eta x_3 yz$	(periphery of y)
$\omega x_4 yz$	(boundary)
$\epsilon x_5 z$	(centre of z)

While S. 1 is situated in the centre, S. 2 and S. 3 in the periphery of semi-clausal attributive constructions and S. 5 in the centre of attributive junctions, S. 4 occupies its position on the boundary between these two classes. The absence of the periphery of z is to be regarded as a consequence of the asymmetry of the relevant linguistic features in our set of examples. Similar asymmetry may be ascertained in S. 6—10 (this time, however, we focus our attention more on the general patterns of examples than on their actual wordings).¹³

$\epsilon x_6 z$	(centre of z)
$\epsilon x_7 z$	(centre of z)
$\eta x_8 zy$	(periphery of z)
$\omega x_9 zy$	(boundary)
$\epsilon x_{10} y$	(centre of y)

If we trace the gradual change of one class into another, it does not seem to be an exceptional case to find that linguistic phenomena do not always follow the symmetric pattern *centre-periphery-boundary-periphery-centre* and that the spheres of periphery and boundary are not always independent of the starting point of investigation, because the marginal (non-central) cases do not lie on a straight line connecting the centres of classes under discussion.

Let us, however, come back to S. 4 and say once again that this construction is situated on the boundary of two classes of attributive constructions and reveals the characteristic features of both of them, being, therefore, either an attributive junction and a semi-clausal attributive construction at the same time or, from another angle, neither of them. In accordance with the communicative requirements of

¹² Cf. J. V. Neústupný, *On the Analysis of Linguistic Vagueness*, Travaux Linguistiques de Prague 2, esp. pp. 41—42 (Prague 1966).

¹³ It is to be borne in mind that the present evaluation holds good only for English. The situation in other languages (even in closely related German) will be more or less different.

everyday life, the language user prefers to employ central or peripheral constructions in order to express the extra-lingual reality as clearly and unambiguously as possible. Boundary cases of ambiguous and blurred character seem to be rather rare. On the other hand, writers and especially poets endeavouring to express the extra-lingual reality in its complexity employ the whole gamut of language phenomena, including peripheral and boundary cases as an integral part of the language whole. Last but not least, boundary cases may also represent one kind of means that enable language to perform other functions than those purely communicative.

That is, in our opinion, why the poetic *the vision splendid*, which represents the boundary between the classes of attributive junctions and semi-clausal attributive constructions, being looser and more dynamic than the former and more compact and static than the latter, means—from the viewpoint of synchronic syntax, at least—so much more than *the splendid vision* or any similar semi-clausal or clausal attributive construction. And that is why we cannot find any other equivalent construction oscillating between the two, in a sense contradictory, classes of phenomena, and creating the same 'undefined and undefinable' impression as *the vision splendid* does.

POZNÁMKA O N + Adj

Z hlediska tří syntaktických rovin (gramatické, sémantické, funkční) zkoumá autor postavení přívlastkové vazby N + Adj. (substantivum + postponované adjektivum) v současném systému anglického jazyka. Na základě srovnání s přívlastkovými vazbami polovětnými a s přívlastkovým spojením prostým (Adj. + N) dochází k závěru, že přívlastková vazba N + Adj. zaujímá v angličtině místo právě na předělu mezi těmito dvěma sousedními třídami, z nichž ovšem každá zahrnuje jak jevy centrální, tak také jevy periferní. Poměrně plynulý přechod z jedné třídy do druhé ztěžuje přesné určení pozice vazby N + Adj. na straně jedné, pomáhá však vysvětlit onen zvláštní dojem, kterým tato vazba v angličtině působí na straně druhé.