

Decomposing (non)restrictivity. Evaluative modifiers in post-head positions

Abstract. The notion of (non)restrictivity is decomposed in three properties and the possibility of having evaluative modifiers in post-head positions in Romance languages is described and explained. Data are borrowed from French.

1. Three definitions of (non)restrictivity. It has often been noted that the terms 'restrictive/ non-restrictive' (R/NR) are not defined in a precise and unified way (cf. e.g. Morzycki 2008, Piñón 2005). Under the most obvious definition Def 1, formalized by Piñón 2005's definition (12), the modifier M R-ly₁ modifies the head H if the set of objects denoted by the modified head MH is properly included in the set of objects denoted by H. On the other hand, M NR-ly₁ modifies H if the set of objects denoted by H equals the set of objects denoted by MH. As often observed, except in special cases (described e.g. by Demonte 2008 for Spanish, see below), postnominal adjectives have to get the restrictive reading as defined by Def1. For instance, (1a) strongly suggests that the red-hair women who ordered a beer form a proper subset of the maximal contextual set of women (whose cardinal is tree).

- (1) Trois femmes entrèrent dans le bar désert. Les femmes **rousses** ont commandé une bière.
Three women entered the empty bar. The red hair women ordered a beer.

However, as emphasised by Piñón 2005, Def 1 cannot capture the difference between the R and NR readings of adverbials, since generally, there is a single event described by an event sentence, independently of whether the adverb is in pre- or post-verbal position. Besides, it does not account for the differences between pre- and post-nominal adjectives in indefinites, since then, the set HM does not have to be contrasted with a non-empty contextual set H-M.

Under a second definition Def 2 of restrictivity, M R-ly₂ modifies H if the fact that M is satisfied contributes to explain why P is satisfied, P being the property denoted by the main clause. Under this definition, *The H (which are) M are P* triggers the inference *the H are P because they are M* or *If an H is M, it is P*. On the other hand, M NR-ly₂ modifies H if the fact of satisfying M is presented as independent of the fact of satisfying P (cf. the *by the way/ side comment*-flavour of NR modifiers). This definition of (non)-restrictivity, which is found in Geach 1968 or Harris 1970 (cited by Dominicy 1984 :202), is more apt to capture the difference between R and NR readings of adverbials. For instance, in the (a) reading of (2), the fact that the sinking *e* is rapid *explains* the fact that *e* satisfies P (Cause-great-loss-of-life) (R₂ reading), whereas in its (b) reading, this fact is presented as unrelated to/independent of the fact that *e* satisfies P (NR₂ reading).

- (2) The Titanic(s) **rapidly** sinking caused great loss of life. (Peterson 1997)
a. *restrictive* : The Titanic's sinking being rapid caused great loss of life.
b. *non restrictive* : The Titanic's sinking, which [by the way] was rapid, caused great loss of life.

The R and NR readings of modifiers are also regularly differentiated through the discursive role of the description of the referent provided by M (Def3). This discursive characterisation of the NR reading is much more consensual than the R one. On one hand, most works seem to agree with the idea that non-parenthetical (i.e. prenominal) nonrestrictive Ms provide a description which is presupposed by the common ground, not at-issue or not under discussion (Roubaud 1785, Lafaye 1841, Berlan 1992), but see Demonte 2008 for Spanish who claims that prenominal (NR) adjectives can convey new information. On the other, restrictive₃ Ms have been the object of opposite claims : Milner 1978 argues that the description of the referent provided by restrictive₃ is **given** in the CG, while Waugh 1977 or Knittel 2005 claim it is **new**.

Our claim is twofold. 1. The informational status of the description provided by a restrictive₃ M *depends on the type of NP it modifies* : in an indefinite (resp. non-weak definite) NP, the restrictive description is presented as **new** (resp. **old**). This variation explains the observed discrepancies. 2. On the contrary, the discursive profile of the description provided by a non-restrictive₃ M *is independent from the type of NP it modifies*. Prenominal nonrestrictive₃ Ms always convey a description which is not at-issue/ under discussion, no matter whether it is old or new.¹ This is why prenominal Ms are inappropriate in contexts like (3) or (4), where the description provided by the modifier is forced to be under discussion.

- (3) How did Floyd perform the nose job ? (Piñón 2005)
a. Floyd performed the nose job **easily**.
b. # Floyd **easily** performed the nose job.
- (4) Quel genre de fleurs tu vas lui acheter ?
Which type of flowers will you buy her ?
a. Je vais lui acheter des fleurs **magnifiques**.
I'll buy her magnificent flowers.
b. # Je vais lui acheter de **magnifiques** fleurs.

2. Proposal (Part I). I claim that these three definitions of (non)restrictivity are all needed to account for the differences in interpretation between modifiers in pre- and post-head positions in Romance. "Strong" (non)restrictive adjectives satisfy all of them, and "weak" ones satisfy only some. Adverbials can be (non)-restrictive only under

1. When prosodically detached, the nonrestrictive₃ M is often said to convey a new description of the referent. The differences between post-head NR modifiers prosodically detached and prenominal ones are skipped in this abstract.

Def2 or Def3. Besides, a post-head modifier can be NR under one definition, but still differ from the corresponding pre-head modifier in that it is R under another definition. This allows to capture the difference between a post-nominal adjective which is NR according to Def1 and the corresponding pre-nominal adjective. For instance, in both (4a) and (4b), *magnifique* is NR₁, but it is R₃ (and optionally R₂) in (4a) while it is NR₃ (and NR₂) in (4b).

3. The problem of evaluative modifiers in post-head positions. It has often been claimed that the NR reading of evaluative adjectives (EAs) is strongly preferred, and even sometimes the only one possible, cf. e.g. Milner 1978 :301 for French, Demonte 2008 for Spanish and Castroviejo and Schwager 2008 for Catalan. An argument for this claim is that EAs are often odd in the post-nominal position, which is supposed to trigger the R interpretation, cf. e.g. ex. 7.82 of Milner *ibid* for French. Milner 1978 is one of the few authors who try to explain this dispreference of EA for R modification. His claim is that EAs lack a descriptive content — they are pure expressive — and are therefore unable to contrast a set of elements of HM with a set of elements of H–M. This account, which clearly targets Def1 of restrictivity, is unsatisfactory for three reasons. (a) It cannot account for the differences between pre- and post-head adjectives in indefinites (where the set HM does not have to contrast with a non-empty contextual set H–M) ; (b) it cannot be extended to evaluative adverbials for the same reason ; (c) it cannot explain why EAs become acceptable in post-nominal positions (i) in indefinites or demonstratives in contrastive contexts, cf. (5a), (ii) when they are modified by a relative or a *de*-phrase like the one in (5b)-(5c), (iii) when the fact that the referent satisfies M is conceived as an explanation of the fact that it satisfies P. For instance, (6a) does not convey any explanatory relation between the fact of being stupid and the fact of having called me, and the post-nominal modifier is therefore odd, while (6b) strongly suggests that the fact of being stupid explains the fact of persisting in a stupid plan ; the same modifier is then acceptable.

- (5) a. J'ai vu cette/une/# la fille **magnifique**, pas cette/une# la fille affreuse.
I saw this/a/the magnificent girl, not this/a/the horrible girl.
 b. J'ai acheté le chapeau **magnifique** ? ?(que voilà).
I bought the marvelous hat (that you see here).
 c. L'invention **merveilleuse** ? ?(de la greffe) m'épate.
The marvelous invention (of the transplant) impresses me.
- (6) a. Ce matin, le type **idiot** m'a téléphoné.
This morning, the stupid guy called me
 b. [the speaker relates a car accident] j'ai envie de [k]laxonner pour l'insulter mais le type **idiot** bien entendu va jusqu'[au] bout d[an]s sa connerie. (Internet)
I want to too to insult him but the stupid guy of course goes to the end of his doghit.

4. Proposal (Part II). Our claim is twofold. Firstly, although we agree that evaluative modifiers cannot be restrictive under Def1 *only*, they can if they are not used only for the purpose of picking up the right referent in the superset M (cf. *infra* for an explanation). This is why they are (very) regularly found in post-head positions in natural corpora. The intuition behind our second claim is the following. Non-evaluative, factual modifiers like *blond* can be used regardless of their descriptive content : *blond* can be used for the simple purpose of designating the single blond element of a contextual set, *regardless* of the fact that x is blond, which can be totally irrelevant in the discourse. This is not the case for evaluative adjectives : *these cannot be used for a pure referential purpose only*. The description provided by the modifier has to be relevant for the discourse, either because it is newly introduced, or because it has an explanatory value (constraint C1). The data can then be explained as follows :

- In (5a), the definite NP is problematic because the description provided by the evaluative modifier is presented as discursively not relevant : it is presented as given and the causal relation between M and P is un-plausible (the fact that she is magnificent cannot explain that I see her). The demonstrative NP is acceptable because it provides a new description of the referent (Corblin 1987, same explanation for the indefinite)
- In (5b) and (5c), I claim that if the relative clause *que voilà* and *qui venait d'entrer* or the *de*-phrase make the definite NP acceptable, it is because they make it *weak* (Poesio 1994) : they are used to introduce a new referent under a new guise (but still differ from indefinites because of the presupposition of uniqueness)
- (6a) is odd for the same reason as (5a), but (6b) is acceptable because although presented as given, the description provided by the modifier is discursively relevant given the causal relation between M and P.

5. Conclusions. Differentiating the three core properties of R/NR modification allows to understand better the possibility to have an evaluative modifier in post-head position. However, although different, these three properties are interrelated. If the property M contrasts the set HM with a non-empty set of H–M, it is more likely to enter a causal relation between M and P than in the case where M has no contrastive value. Besides, the property M is more likely to be 'not at-issue' if it has no contrastive or explanatory value.

Selected references. Castroviejo E. and M. Schwager, 2008, 'Amazing DPs', *Salt XVIII* • Corblin, F., *Indéfinis, définis, démonstratifs*, Vrin • Demonte, V., 2008, 'Meaning-form correlations and adjective position in Spanish', in McNally, L. and Kennedy, C., *Adverbs and Adjectives : Syntax, Semantics and Discourse*, OUP • Milner, J.C., 1978, *De la syntaxe à l'interprétation*, Seuil • Morzycki, M. 2008, 'Nonrestrictive Modifiers in Nonparenthetical Positions', in McNally, L. and Kennedy, C., *Adverbs and Adjectives : Syntax, Semantics and Discourse*, OUP • Piñón, C., 2005, *Comments on Morzycki and Katz*, Ms, <http://pinon.sdf-eu.org/covers/cmk.html> • Thompson 1971, 'The deep structure of relative clauses', in Fillmore, C. and T. Langendoen (eds), *Studies in Linguistics Semantics*