

## Distributional modifiers

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(joint work with Berit Gehrke)

Previous semantic analyses of frequency adjectives (e.g. *occasional*, *frequent*, *daily* in English; see Bolinger 1967, Stump 1981, Larson 1998, Zimmermann 2003, Schäfer 2007, Gehrke & McNally 2011) have focused on the question of how to account for their three putative readings: the internal reading ((1a)), the generic reading ((1b)), and the adverbial reading ((1c)):

- (1) a. Elena is a frequent visitor to Barcelona. (= someone who visits frequently)
- b. A daily glass of wine is good for you. (= a glass of wine on a daily basis)
- c. We saw an occasional car on the road. (= Occasionally, we saw a car....)

The most significant debate has been whether the adverbial reading requires assigning the adjective a determiner-like semantics (as Stump, Larson, and Zimmermann all argue) or not (as Schäfer and Gehrke & McNally contend). However, all of these works fail to explain a number of puzzling facts about these adjectives, such as why some of them are compatible with the adverbial reading and others are not (see e.g. (1c) vs. (2)), why some of them are more restricted than others in the determiners they combine with (compare (1c) with (3a) and the contrast involving the adjective *odd* in (3b,c)), and why there exist rather idiosyncratic restrictions on the availability of the adverbial reading (see e.g. (4a) vs. (4b)).

- (2) We saw a daily car on the road. (≠ Daily, we saw a car on the road.)

- (3) a. We saw the occasional car on the road. (= (1c))
- b. We saw an odd car on the road. (≠ (3c))
- c. We saw the odd car on the road.

- (4) a. She baked frequent batches of cookies.
- b. ??She bought frequent boxes of cookies.

The goal of this talk is to argue that these puzzles disappear once we stop focusing on the three putative readings and instead treat frequency adjectives as fundamentally distributional modifiers. Distributional modifiers will be shown to fall into two general categories: Those that entail particular distributions of entities over time, and those that entail particular distributions of entities over space or eventualities. The differences between the different frequency adjectives will be shown to correlate with whether they fall into one, the other, or both of these categories. Along the way, we will incorporate into the analysis an account of when predicative uses of frequency adjectives are and are not possible. We will also provide an alternative analysis of examples such as (5), which Stump 1981 classified with the generic reading, as non-restrictive modifiers.

- (5) John's daily cup of coffee left a stain on the table.

By making our previous analysis sensitive to the sort of distribution these adjectives entails, we can preserve the most important aspects of the account we offered in earlier work, notably avoiding a determiner-like semantics to account for the so-called adverbial reading, while offering an alternative analysis for data that previously seemed problematic.