

Verbal and nominal modifiers in French - syntactic and semantic parallels

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The choice between the prenominal and postnominal position of the French adjective has given rise to much debate during almost 500 years. Until now, no satisfactory explanation seems to have been found. In this paper, it is argued that no explanation is likely to be given in a unitary theoretical framework because so many parameters are involved. I argue that a modular approach is called for. Furthermore it is argued that enunciation linguistics is particularly well suited for this kind of analysis because it opens up for taking more analytical levels into account in a systematic way. Indeed, most aspects of the problem seem to find their explanation in the enunciative focalization theory, which is therefore incorporated as the central module in the explanatory modular model.

An analysis in terms of focalization, which takes into account information retrieved in other modules, is given. The descriptive and explanatory power of the analysis is discussed based on a number of authentic examples and on examples found in the abundant literature on the subject.

As a side effect, it is shown that the same analysis can also be applied to the study of the position of the VP adverbial preceding or following the participle in clauses with composed verbs, a phenomenon that, to my knowledge, has never been related to the problematic of the position of the attributive adjective.

Finally, I briefly discuss some typological differences between Germanic and Romance languages and between different Romance languages.