

***“It's not a great exciting picture, you know”***  
**Grammaticalisation, subjectivisation and DIMENSION adjectives in English**

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Research on the nature and distribution of adjectives in English has traditionally focused on synchronic considerations. Two topics seem to have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, namely, the order of adjectives in complex N(oun) P(hrase) strings (e.g. *long hot bath* vs. *hot long bath*; cf. Goyvaerts 1968, Hatzron 1978, Vandelanotte 2002) and the semantic differences between attributive and predicative adjectives (cf. Bolinger 1967, Markus 1997).

It is only recently that the diachronic implications of the above-mentioned synchronic issues have started to be explored. Fischer (2000, 2001, 2006) focuses on the position of the adjective in Old and Middle English and the extent to which it is motivated by iconicity, whereas Adamson (2000) and Breban (2006) investigate the collocational shifts of adjectives undergoing processes of grammaticalisation and subjectification. However, as Adamson (2000: 59) observes “the question of how ... word[ ] order options relate to pathways of syntactic or semantic change...has been very little studied as yet, either in terms of the history of particular items or of the categories of premodifiers that they represent.”

In line with Adamson (2000), in previous work I examined the diachronic behaviour of the adjective *little* in NP strings and concluded that, at least from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, *little* is grammaticalising into an affective (diminutive) marker. Building on the latter research and in combination with a corpus-based case-study of the behaviour of the adjective *great* (1500- present), the present paper (a) explores the grammaticalisation clines and the pathways of subjectivisation of DIMENSION adjectives in English and (b) in keeping with Matthews (forthc.), questions the accuracy of ‘adjective stacking’ (cf. Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 561) as a suitable procedure for describing premodification processes in the English NP.

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