CHAPTER FOUR

WORD ORDER IN MULTIPLE-MODIFIER NPS

4.1. Introduction: an overview of the literature on the order of modifiers

Regarding the ordering of the constituents in multiple-modifier NPs, the grammars only observe that everything is possible. Smyth (1956: 294), for instance, describes the various possibilities in the following way:

(1) Two or more attributives of a substantive are variously placed: (1) εἰς τὰς ἄλλας Ἀρκαδικὰς πόλεις to the other Arcadian cities X. H. 7.4.38. (2) τὸ ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ τὸ τοῦ Δίω τοῦ Λυκαιῶν ἱερὸν the sanctuary of Lycean Zeus in Arcadia P.R. 565d. (3) ἐς τὸν ἐπὶ τὸ στόματα τοῦ λιμένος στενοῦ ὄντος τὸν ἐτέρον πύργον to the other tower at the mouth of the harbour which was narrow T. 8.90. (4) ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τῆς Χαρμίδου τῇ παρα τὸ Ὀλυμπείον in the house of Charmides by the Olympiaion And. 1.16. (5) ἀπὸ τὸν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ πόλεων Ἑλληνιδῶν from the Greek cities in Asia X. H. 4.3.15. (6) πρὸς τὴν ἐν τῆς Σικελίας τῶν Ἀθηναίων μεγάλην κακοπορχίαν with regard to the great failure of the Athenians in Sicily T. 8.2. (7) τὸ τεῖχος τὸ μακρὸν τὸ νότιον the long southern wall And. 3.7.

The other grammars describe, in similar terms, how the modifiers can all precede or follow the noun, or partially precede and partially follow the noun, and that each of them can or cannot be preceded by an article (cf. Gildersleeve 1900: 328 ff., Goodwin 1879: 210, Kühner-Gerth 1904: I 621–622). Regardless of how true these observations may be, they immediately raise the question of what determines the various possible arrangements. This question, however, has never been dealt with.

The order of multiple modifiers has received very little attention, not only regarding Ancient Greek, but also regarding other (Indo-European) languages. And if grammars discuss this topic, they discuss how the various modifiers are ordered, not why (cf. Quirk et al. 1985, Haeseryn et al. 1997 and Biber et al. 1999). This lack of attention may be a consequence of the fact that in most Indo-European languages the order of multiple modifiers is rather fixed. Fixed orderings evoke perhaps less need for understanding of the principles behind the ordering than flexible ones. This idea is supported by the fact that there is discussion on that aspect of
word order in which most Indo-European languages do allow variation, viz. the order of multiple adjectives.

In most publications that discuss adjective order, the semantics of the adjectives is presented as the main factor determining their ordering, although phonological and pragmatic factors (like euphony, idiomacy and emphasis) are generally thought to have some influence as well.\footnote{For the influence of these other factors on the order of adjectives, see De Jong (1983), Hetzron (1978: 175–178), Risselada (1984: 224) and Wulff (2003: 251–256 and 266–270).} The publications do not agree, however, on the nature of the semantic factor that is responsible for the order of the adjectives.\footnote{In some publications, the semantic factor on which the classification is based is left implicit. Dixon (1977), for instance, sets up a detailed classification of adjectives, but does not discuss the principle behind this classification. Fries (1986) is also not very explicit on the semantic factor that determines the order of adjectives in his corpus. In his conclusion, he states that the closer the adjective stands to the noun, the closer in meaning it is to the noun, but what is meant by being closer in meaning remains undiscussed.} Biber et al. (1999) argue that (English) adjectives expressing inherent features have to stand closer to the noun than those expressing non-inherent features (e.g. a new red ball). Martin (1969), Posner (1986) and Sproat and Shih (1988), on the other hand, assume that the crucial factor for adjective ordering is their (in)dependence on comparison (i.e. the degree in which recognition of the feature asks for comparison with other objects).\footnote{The difference between adjectives that are and those that are not dependent on comparison can be illustrated by the following examples. The identification of a red bag in a set of bags need not be preceded by a comparison of the colours of the various bags. Perceiving the red bag alone suffices. A heavy bag, by contrast, can only be selected out of a set of bags by comparing the weight of the various bags. Therefore, Martin and Posner name red independent from comparison, and heavy dependent. Sproat and Shih (1988), by contrast, describe the same difference in terms of ‘apparentness’: an adjective like red is more and an adjective like heavy is less apparent.} They argue that the less dependent on comparison, the nearer the adjective is placed to the noun. Hetzron (1978) and Risselada (1984), in their turn, suppose that the subjectivity/objectivity of the adjectives controls their position: the more objective the quality expressed by the adjective (i.e. the more a matter of recognition instead of opinion), the closer to the noun it has to be expressed (e.g. a nice green shirt, *a green nice shirt). Wulff (2003), finally, concludes on the basis of a statistical corpus analysis that various factors affect adjective ordering, of which (in)dependence on comparison, affective load\footnote{The affective load of the adjective is understood to be the (possible) positive or negative connotation of the adjective (possible in that the adjective can also be neutral} and the subjectivity/objectivity of the adjective are most influential.

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