

## Rhythmic alternation or *alternation rythmique*? Prosodic factors in the positioning of a sub-class of attributive adjectives in French

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This study investigates the prosodic factors determining the positioning of a subset of attributive adjectives in French. Previous research has revealed that a variety of factors play a role in the positioning of attributive adjectives, although most of them were semantic and syntactic in nature [1, 2, 3, 4]. However, we propose that Prosody constitutes a decisive factor.

The paradigm of adjectives can generally be categorized into three groups. First, in the most straightforward case, only one position is acceptable. For instance, adjectives describing the colour in (1) or nationality in (2) must obligatorily appear in postnominal position. Furthermore, there are adjectives that are allowed to appear in both the prenominal and the postnominal position. Among this group of adjectives, there are cases, where the adjective displays distinct interpretations in the two positions, as the example in (3) shows. This change of interpretation, however, cannot be characterized as being systematically linked to the position, as stated by [5] and [6]. It is rather linked to particular noun-adjective combinations. As example (4) shows, if *gros* ('big') is combined with another noun, the intensifying value that it has in prenominal position when modifying *fumeur* ('smoker') as in (3), is absent. Consequently, a third group can be postulated. This last group is characterized by the fact that the adjectives can occur in both positions with no apparent change of interpretation, as shown in (5). Our interest lies in the third group of adjectives. Is the placement of this group of adjectives affected by phonological/ prosodic factors?

First, we will examine the role of absolute/ relative length, which have previously been claimed to affect the positioning of words and constituents [7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. Our hypothesis is that adjective-noun pairs obey the so-called *short-before-long Principle* [6, 14]. An acceptability judgment task meant to test this hypothesis is currently in progress. Participants are asked to rate item and filler sentences with a 7-point Likert scale, the sentences are displayed in a Latin Square design. The 24 experiment items are designed according to six conditions, consisting of three length configurations (i. A is longer than N, ii. A is shorter than N, iii. A and N are equally long) that will each be presented in two orders (A-N or N-A).

Second, we will investigate the impact of rhythmic alternation and especially the role of stress clash avoidance in the presence of a monosyllabic noun or adjective. Interestingly, a prosodic effect on the positioning of our class of adjectives is already visible when the noun is monosyllabic, as only one order (noun adjective) tends to be acceptable (see example (6)). At the same time, it has been previously stated that monosyllabic adjectives are inclined to occur in prenominal position [15, 16, 17]. We propose that the inadmissibility of some monosyllabic elements in the second position of the adjective-noun pair is due to the so-called *Principle of Rhythmic Alternation* [18, 19] and more precisely to the avoidance of stress clashes. Namely, nouns and adjectives are preferably placed in a way that creates alternating stressed and unstressed syllables and avoids the juxtaposition of two stressed syllables. This principle has otherwise been shown to affect syntactic ordering [18, 19]. We are currently designing an acceptability judgment task that will test this hypothesis and whose preliminary results will be presented in our talk.

This hypothesis is consistent with the idea that both prenominal and postnominal adjectives constitute their own phonological phrase and will allow us to revisit the traditional asymmetry in the phrasing of noun-adjective and adjective-noun pairs [20, 21, 22].

### Examples:

- (1) a. une boulangerie française  
a bakery French  
'a French bakery'  
b. \*une française boulangerie  
a French bakery
- (2) a. une voiture rouge  
a car red  
'a red car'  
b. \*une rouge voiture  
a red car
- (3) a. un gros fumeur  
a big smoker  
'a heavy smoker'  
b. un fumeur gros  
a smoker big  
'a fat smoker'
- (4) a. un gros coiffeur  
a big hairdresser  
'a fat hairdresser'  
b. un coiffeur gros  
a hairdresser big  
'a fat hairdresser'
- (5) a. un agréable garçon  
a nice boy  
'a nice boy'  
b. un garçon agréable  
a boy nice  
'a nice boy'
- (6) a. ?/\*un agréable homme  
a nice man  
b. un homme agréable  
a man nice  
'a nice man'

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