

# A Constructionist Approach to Adjectival Interpretative Properties

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## 1. Introduction

Interpretative differences among adjectives are well-known to correlate with different syntactic positions in Romance. (1) and (2) illustrate some of the distinctions found in Spanish. In (1a) the prenominal adjective modifies the reference or intension of the noun, while the post-nominal adjective in (1b) modifies the referent or extension denoted by the nominal expression.

- (1) a. El viejo amigo.  
the old friend  
'The old friend.' (old as a friend)  
b. El amigo viejo.  
the friend old  
'The old friend.' (old in age)

In a predicative structure such as (2), only the extensional reading is obtained:

- (2) El amigo es viejo.  
the friend is old  
'The friend is old.'

In fact the data are more complex if we consider a case such as *pobre* 'pitiful/poor'. There is a distinction between the prenominal, and postnominal positions, as is well-known, but additionally there are two possible readings in the postnominal case:

- (3) a. El pobre actor.  
the pitiful actor  
b. El actor pobre.  
the actor poor  
a: x is poor as an actor  
b: x is an actor and is poor

Only the interpretation 'b' under (3b) may be obtained in a predicative structure such as (4):

- (4) El actor es pobre.  
the actor is poor  
'The actor is poor.'

In previous literature the adjectives illustrating this three way semantic distinction have been labeled as non predicative adjectives in (3a), subjective adjectives in the first interpretation of (3b), and intersective adjectives in the second interpretation of (3b). This case of polysemy found in the distributional data of *pobre* has been treated in two different ways. The first is to treat the distribution in (3) as a lexical matter. Higginbotham (1985) proposes the existence of three different types of

lexical adjectives related to the three distinctions that I have pointed out for (3). Intersective adjectives are defined by the mapping of properties onto entities. Subjective adjectives involve a mapping of properties onto properties, although Higginbotham argues that there is also a mapping onto entities, making subjective adjectives a kind of hybrid under his theory. And finally, non predicative adjectives also involve mapping of properties onto properties, but not mapping onto entities, as the referential variable is lexically saturated (cf. Higginbotham, 1985).

The alternative to a lexical analysis is to consider all these adjectives basically as monosemic, and to derive their interpretations in a compositional way from the syntax (cf. Martín, 1996 & 2000; Alexiadou, 2001; Bouchard, 2002). In this paper I develop a syntactic model of adjectival modification presented in previous papers (Martín, 1996 & 2000), compare this model with a lexical approach, and study its ramifications for thematic theory. I am taking Higginbotham's lexico-semantic analysis of adjectives as a point of departure, since his classification of adjectives underlies the paradigms of the main studies on the subject. My study is an attempt to account strictly within the syntax for these lexico-semantic properties, in line with other radical syntactic proposals (Martín, 1996 & 2000; Alexiadou, 2001; Bouchard, 2002). In this sense this paper refurbishes my previous proposals in Martín (1996 & 2000), and adds new arguments to these proposals. In particular I incorporate the Determiner Spreading analysis of Martín (2000) into my 1996 proposal. As a consequence, this proposal is a simplification of my 1996 paper, since there are no different theta-marking mechanisms employed. Only a predicative mechanism is used for the different structures studied in this paper. I will not be concerned here with the specifics of other analyses, with those which are purely syntactic mentioned above, or with those with a certain lexical base (Demonte, 1999 & 2008), or with those where syntax is driven by interpretation (Gutiérrez-Rexach & Mallén, 2002). However, some reference will be made in the course of the discussion pertaining mainly to differences concerning the paradigm studied. The main difference between my analysis and others concerns the post-nominal position. While, for example, Alexiadou (2001) and Demonte (2008) argue that there is only one position, mainly predicative and intersective, I argue that there are two. One is for adjectives that are predicated of NPs and bear a subjective interpretation, and another is for adjectives selected by an independent determiner that are predicated of the DP dominating the NP, and have an intersective interpretation. In theoretical terms, I am attempting to show that a constructionist analysis is more minimal, and thus superior from a theoretical point of view to a lexically driven one.

I start by presenting Higginbotham's lexical analysis of adjectives. Then I introduce some shortcomings of this theory as it stands, and I offer an alternative analysis which seems more economical and adjusted to minimalist premises as applied to thematic theory. My analysis makes use of exclusively predicative structures, hence transferring the problem from the lexical component to the syntactic component. The advantage of this move is that it only uses syntactic structure that is independently needed, such as (in)direct modification. The reduction of adjectival lexical differences to syntactic mechanisms is therefore a welcome consequence of my analysis.

## 2. Higginbotham (1985)

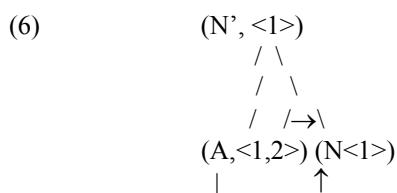
Within the Principles and Parameters framework, Higginbotham's (1985) thematic theory has probably been the most influential in the syntax of adjectives, although in terms of today's theories it is perhaps too complex and insufficiently minimal. Higginbotham's proposal is that interpretative differences between adjectives result from lexical properties. His theory added three more theta-marking modalities occurring within NPs to the traditional verbal theta-marking mechanisms.

According to Higginbotham (1985, p. 560),  $\theta$ -binding is the mechanism by which the determiner binds the referential argument of the noun.  $\theta$ -Identification is the mechanism by which the external argument of the adjective is identified with the referential variable of the noun (Higginbotham, 1985, p. 564). It is the mechanism used in the case of intersective adjectives, i.e. extensional adjectives that denote a property P, which is true of a set of elements in world  $w$  at time  $i$ . Hence, it is the device that results in a conjunctive reading, a typical example being *the black ant*, and its notation as in (5).

$$(5) \ v(x, A'') \leftrightarrow v(x, N'') \ \& \ v(x, A'')$$

Finally, Higginbotham proposes that Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking is another mechanism involved in adjectival modification. Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking occurs when the adjective discharges one of its thematic positions by  $\theta$ -marking the phrase marker of the noun. The relationship between the adjective and the nominal phrase marker is sisterhood. The open thematic position is then filled by the nominal attribute. This attribute is that against which the adjective is evaluated. Such is the case of subjective adjectives, i.e. adjectives that denote a property highly dependent on the property denoted by the nominal head or on contextual factors. For example, in *poor actor* the relevant attribute for the adjective is *actor*. The actor is poor as an actor, not as a person.

In accordance with Higginbotham, subjective adjectives also have extensional importance, hence subjective adjectives must incorporate  $\theta$ -Identification. *poor actor* says 'x is an actor, and is poor as an actor'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, there is also a conjunctive reading, and therefore, in accordance with Higginbotham, a subjective adjective has two argument positions. In the usual case of  $\theta$ -marking, the referent of the  $\theta$ -marked element becomes the value of the open position in the  $\theta$ -marker. In Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking the marked element is itself the value. (6) shows the representation of both types of  $\theta$ -assignment described above:



In a case such as *the poor actor* the semantic representation of (6) is (7).

$$(7) \quad v(x, N') \leftrightarrow v(x, N) \ \& \ v(\langle x, \wedge N \rangle, A)$$

In (7)  $\wedge N$  is the attribute of the noun that acts as an argument of the adjective. On the other hand, in the case of intersective modification, Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking does not occur and the attribute of the noun is not incorporated into the value of the adjective, as illustrated in (5).

Finally, in the case of the non-predicative or intensional adjectives such as *fake policeman*, the existential variable of the adjective cannot be identified because it is lexically closed, as we can see in (8).

$$(8) \quad \text{fake, +N +V, } \langle *1, 2 \rangle$$

Higginbotham argues that in this case we have only Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking, the semantic representation of non-predicative adjectives being as in (9):

$$(9) \quad v(x, N') \leftrightarrow \text{fake}(\wedge N(x))$$

Higginbotham's (1985) proposal gives an account of the thematic properties of the three classes of adjectives: 1) Intersective adjectives employ  $\theta$ -Identification; 2) subjective adjectives apply  $\theta$ -Identification and Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking; and 3) non-predicative adjectives use only Autonymous  $\theta$ -Marking. Although it has proven useful, Higginbotham's application of theta-theory to the Noun Phrase also has some shortcomings. For example, in the case of subjective adjectives, the noun attribute is incorporated into the adjective, but it is the noun that projects syntactically, resulting in a syntax/semantics interface paradox. Under more recent proposals such as Kayne's (1994), however,

<sup>1</sup> This is in fact questionable in the case of *poor actor*, which seems to have a purely subjective reading under this interpretation. There are other subjective adjectives that may appear to have two subjective interpretations, a purely subjective and a subjective-intersective interpretation. For example in *actor bueno* 'good actor', the intersective interpretation of *bueno* may also be 'good at doing something', thus providing the apparent subjective interpretation in the predicative structures. In English, unless the adjective is stressed, it seems that there is only a strictly subjective reading.

there is no such paradox, since the adjective selects the noun. In addition Higginbotham's proposal imposes a heavy burden on the lexical component, and needs further specification to account for word order and other syntactic phenomena. This model is simplified in Martín (1996), by merging non-predicative, subjective, and intersective adjectives into one lexical class with different syntactic behaviors. I will thus pursue this more constructionist approach rather than Higginbotham's lexical approach.

### 3. Intersective vs. subjective adjectives

In Martín (1996) I give two arguments for the merging of the so-called intersective and subjective lexical classes of adjectives. The most common understanding of this distinction is that, on the one hand, there are adjectives that behave consistently as intersective, such as color and provenance adjectives, and, on the other hand, there are others that consistently behave as subjective, such as size and evaluative adjectives. As a result, the distinction is taken to be lexical. However, there are arguments against this, and, rather, support the view that any adjective can behave in either an intersective or subjective manner, and that interpretation depends on the syntactic structure in which it is inserted. The first argument in Martín (1996) is that the noun attribute may modify the reference of adjectives traditionally considered intersective, such as color adjectives,<sup>2</sup> as much as it does in the case of subjective modification. A quick survey shows that it is not the same green in *the green bottle*, *the green sea*, or *the green emerald*. Hence the attribute of the noun is incorporated into the value of the adjective, just as Higginbotham claims happens in the case of subjective adjectives. The reverse case, that of typical subjective adjectives behaving as intersective adjectives, is also true, and, actually, more accepted in previous literature.

The second argument is that, in a structure with stacked modification, failure to theta-mark the noun by a so-called intersective adjective would block theta-marking of the nominal attribute by the subjective adjective, because of configurational reasons (intersective adjectives are closer to the noun than subjective adjectives, given universal word order constraints). If in a construction like *the big American car* the intersective adjective *American* does not theta-mark the noun and blocks the incorporation of the nominal attribute, this attribute would be lost for any subsequent modification. In this specific case the subjective adjective *big* would be unable to theta-mark the attribute of the noun, given the syntactic structure under which theta-marking occurs in any theoretical model (that is government, adjacency, spec-head relationship, etc.), since, with respect to the noun, *big* is in a more external position than *American*. In other words, an intersective interpretation of *American* would block theta-marking of the nominal attribute by an external subjective adjective. On the other hand, if we allow the noun attribute to be incorporated into *American*, and both of them into *big*, the structure would have the right interpretation through transitivity. In addition, there is an account for the fact that *big* is not only relative to *car*, but also to *American*, since the size of a big Italian car would be different from a big American car. Hence the interpretative conditions for a subjective reading of *big* require that *American* behaves as a subjective adjective. In conclusion then, the distinction intersective-subjective does not have a lexical base. Yet, if it is not lexical, can we then explain the difference within another component of the grammar? I argue that syntactic structures proposed in the past based on a distinction between external and internal modifiers to the determiner, such as Sproat and Shi's proposal for (in)direct modification, are useful for encoding the intersective-subjective distinction in the syntax. Specifically, the incorporation of the nominal attribute into a modifier can occur when there is a bare syntactic relationship between the noun and the modifier, such as that of direct modification, as in (10a). On the other hand, the extensional interpretation of intersective adjectives can be represented by a relationship between a theta-bound noun and a theta-bound adjective, as illustrated in (10b). In both cases the modifier is the complement of a determiner following Kayne's (1994) antisymmetrical proposals.

- (10) a. [DP la [AdjP [NP hormiga] [AdjP grande [NP ~~hormiga~~]]]]  
 b. [DP [DP la [NP hormiga]]<sup>1</sup> <e<sup>1</sup>> [AdjP grande ]]

<sup>2</sup> See Alexiadou (2001, p. 231) for the traditional position that does not consider color adjectives non-intersective.

In (10a) the NP has moved from the complement position within AdjP to the Specifier (or Adjunct) position of AdjP. In this way the universal order restrictions among attributive adjectives may be explained (Sproat & Shih, 1991), and in particular the mirror image in word order between Romance and English. In (10a) the existential variable of the adjective is bound by the determiner, and the adjective is a predication of the attribute denoted by the noun. This structure is a crucial difference with analyses that have explained in syntactic terms the interpretative differences among adjectives

(10b) is a completely different structure, where the adjective is predicated from the DP that dominates the NP. The overt determiner selects the noun, while a non overt determiner selects the adjective (cf. Martín, 2000; Alexiadou, 2001, pp. 241-242). Following Borer (2005), functional categories are operator-variable pairs. Functional heads are open values that can be assigned range either in a direct way by a functional morpheme or by an abstract head feature, or in an indirect way by a discourse operator, an adverb of quantification or the Spec-head agreement mechanism. The mechanism employed for the determiner head that selects the adjective in (10b) is Spec-head agreement. While other studies have supported the intersective interpretation encoded in the structure in (10b) as generally the only possible interpretation for postnominal adjectives (cf. Alexiadou, 2001; Demonte, 2008 among others), the cases that support the interpretation related to the structure in (10a) are usually not covered or given sufficient relevance.<sup>3</sup>

Cross-linguistic support for the structures in (10) is offered by languages in which there is determiner spreading, that is modifiers may be dominated by an article such as in Greek (cf. Androutsopoulou, 1996; Alexiadou & Wilder, 1998; Alexiadou, 2001; Campos & Stavrou, 2004), and their interpretation may only be intersective, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) a. Gnorises tin ore tragudistria?  
meet.2SG the beautiful singer  
b. Gnorises tin ore tin tragudistria?  
meet.2SG the beautiful the singer  
'Did you meet the beautiful singer?' (Campos & Stavrou, 2004:144)

In (11a) we can find an intersective and a subjective reading of the adjective, while in (11b) there can only be an intersective reading, with the interpretation of the singer that sings beautifully unavailable. Therefore, in (11b) there are clearly two different articles, which relates this structure to (10b). Hence, in Greek the adjectival article may be spelled out. On the other hand, (11a) may be related to either the (10a) or (10b) structures, since Greek may also have the possibility of a covert article. In fact I argue that in Spanish the structure in (10a) may not have the intersective reading. Direct modification always encodes subjective interpretation, while indirect modification is basically intersective.

Further evidence for the direct-indirect dichotomy in Spanish is that subjective interpretations of *el actor pobre* such as in (3b) cannot appear in indirect modification structures. I argue that conjoined DPs modified by one adjective are cases of structures such as (10b), and can, therefore, have only an intersective interpretation (cf. Martín, 2000). In (12) the two DPs are modified by the same adjective, the adjective occupying an external position to the DPs:

- (12)a. el libro y el cuaderno azul-es  
the book and the notebook blue-PLURAL  
'the book and the notebook that are blue'  
b. [DP [DP [DP el [NP libro]] y [DP el [NP cuaderno]]]]<sup>1</sup> <e<sup>1</sup>> [AdjP azules ]]

If this is true, the logical conclusion is that subjective adjectives cannot modify conjoined DPs, as (13) illustrates.

- (13) el actor y el director pobres (\*subjective/ok intersective)  
the actor and the director poor  
'the poor actor and the poor director'

<sup>3</sup> Demonte (2008, pp. 72-73) claims that the post-nominal position of these adjectives might be the result of a prosodic constraint.

(13) may have only an intersective reading, by which the actor and the director lack money.

Furthermore, I argue that postnominal privative adjectives, such as those in (14), are similar to subjective adjectives in their syntactic behavior. Privative adjectives do not belong to the class of subjective adjectives, since a *false friend* cannot be included in the set of *friends*, at least on first inspection<sup>4</sup>. However, I would like to argue that they form a set with subjective adjectives, since they modify the attribute or concept denoted by the noun. Privative adjectives deny the property denoted by the noun, so I claim that in these cases there is also incorporation of the nominal attribute as a first step for the property to be denied.

- (14) a. El presidente anterior.  
 the president former  
 ‘The former president.’  
 b. El amigo falso.  
 the friend false  
 ‘The false friend.’

These modifiers lack any intersective interpretation, as seen in (15):

- (15) a. [former president]  $\cap$  [president] =  $\emptyset$   
 b. [false friend]  $\cap$  [friend] =  $\emptyset$

These adjectives cannot occur in predicative positions, as shown in (16):

- (16) a. \*El presidente es anterior.  
 the president is former  
 b. \*El amigo es falso.  
 The friend is false

Hence, the nominal attribute cannot be predicated independently. For example *anterior* ‘former’, cannot appear as the predicate of *presidente* ‘president’ with the intended meaning of ‘person that occupied that position previously’ as in (16a). Again, the logical conclusion is that postnominal privative adjectives should not be able to modify conjoined DPs, as (17) illustrates:

- (17) \*El presidente y el líder de la oposición anteriores apoyaban  
 the president and the leader of the opposition former used-to-support  
 más a los sindicatos. (N-modifying interpretation)  
 more to the unions  
 ‘The former president and the former leader of the opposition used to support the unions more.’

In (14a) the NP may have the relevant interpretation ‘the person previously occupying the position of president’. The adjective modifies the attribute of the noun. On the other hand, in (17) this interpretation is not available. There are other possible context-dependent meanings, such as ‘the president and the leader of the opposition that spoke before’ if for example the context is a convention where there are different speakers. However, the relevant reading of ‘the person immediately preceding the current president, and the current leader of the opposition’ is not available. Under the relevant interpretation, the adjectives in (14) can only be analyzed as attributive, where, after checking features, the noun and the adjective are interpreted as a term, this term being predicated of a variable.

Relational adjectives are another type of adjective that can illustrate this point, since they tend to behave strictly as a modifier of the attribute denoted by the noun. Although there are exceptions,<sup>5</sup> they

<sup>4</sup> See Bouchard’s discussion (2002, pp. 74-75) of the postnominal position of this adjective in French.

<sup>5</sup> The constraints seem to be pragmatic, and to depend on how amenable the noun is to denoting a set, so that the adjective may have a restrictive value:

tend not to behave as predicates, and therefore are not acceptable, under neutral intonation, as modifiers of conjoined structures, as illustrated in (18):

- (18) a. la capacidad económica  
           the capability economic  
           ‘the economic capability’  
       b. \*La capacidad es económica.  
           the capability is economic  
       c. \*la capacidad y la consistencia económicas  
           the capability and the consistency economic

Explaining the subjective-intersective distinction in terms of the direct-indirect modification structures is a more economical account since all these interpretations are derived from the syntax using mechanisms that are independently necessary. The direct-indirect difference employs the mechanisms illustrated in (10) which are purely predicative structures encoded in the syntax by Spec-head relationships.

Up to this point, I have argued that direct modification is the result of predication within a DP, or a bare structure, with no determiners mediating the relationship, hence only the subjective/privative interpretation is available. Although, I have shown that the modifiers of the attribute denoted by a noun cannot be external to the determiner projection, still I have not demonstrated that the intersective reading is barred within the determiner domain. The adjective *falso* ‘false’ in Spanish is ideal to test this hypothesis. This adjective in its postnominal position can have either a purely subjective reading, since it may be a privative adjective (with the interpretation of ‘fake, false’), assuming that privative adjectives have a subjective behavior in syntactic terms, or a purely intersective reading (‘deceitful’). To check my hypothesis a determiner that binds two conjoined nouns would provide the right unambiguous syntactic environment for the privative reading. An adjective modifying the first conjunct can only be internal to the DP. Hence the only possible interpretation of *falso* in (19) should be subjective/privative.

- (19)<sub>[DP el [XP amigo falso tuyo y colega mío]]</sub>  
       the friend false of-yours and colleague of-mine  
       ‘the false friend of yours and colleague of mine’

In (19) *falso* can have only a privative interpretation. It cannot have the intersective reading of ‘deceitful’, unless the second conjunct is parenthetical. On the other hand, as (17) illustrated, a privative adjective cannot be external to two conjoined DPs. These facts confirm that the subjective/privative interpretation can be explained in syntactic terms.

A further theoretically-based argument, that would explain why privative adjectives in particular<sup>6</sup> are unacceptable in predicative environments, is if this analysis adopts a framework that uses phases. Chomsky (2001) proposed that the syntactic component maps lexical arrays to derivations in phases.

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- (i) El problema/conflicto es económico.  
       the problem/conflict is economic

The interesting fact is that the constraint is uniform across predicative structures. If the predicative structure is possible, then the conjoined structure is also possible.

- (ii) El problema y el conflicto económicos.  
       the problem and the conflict economic

The presupposition in (i) and (ii) is that the nature of the problem and the conflict may be open to other possibilities. This does not occur in (18). *La capacidad económica* is a term. (*capacidad* does not exist by itself.)

<sup>6</sup> The fact that subjective adjectives seem to be more acceptable than privative adjectives in predicative structures might be due to the fact that the open variable for the attribute may be filled pragmatically or the structure is understood as the remnant of an elided structure (for example: *pobre en recursos interpretativos* ‘poor in interpretative resources’)

These phases are sequences within a sentence that are themselves propositional in nature. After computation of every phase, transfer of the phase to the phonological and semantic components takes place. Let us assume that CPs, vPs, and DPs are phases. As argued above, indirect modifiers involve two DPs. This is tantamount to saying that they involve two different phases. The DP that selects the noun is first transferred to Interpretation, and then to the DP that selects the adjective. If each phase has a propositional nature, then the existence of the noun is asserted independently of the modifier, since it constitutes a phase by itself, as illustrated in (20a). On the other hand, attributive adjectives are functions of properties to properties, and involve only one variable, hence only one determiner system is transferred to Interpretation, and noun and modifier are transferred together within that phase, as shown in (20b) and (20c). There is then an explanation for the non-predicative behavior of privative adjectives. In this case, the noun cannot be transferred alone to Interpretation, otherwise the assertion of its existence would act as a presupposition for the interpretation of the privative modifier spelled out later on, resulting in a contradiction at the interpretative level. (20d) illustrates this case.

- (20) a. <el amigo> <falso> (intersective: *falso* as ‘deceitful’)  
 b. <el amigo falso> (privative interpretation)  
 c. <el actor pobre> (subjective interpretation)  
 d. <el presidente> <es anterior>

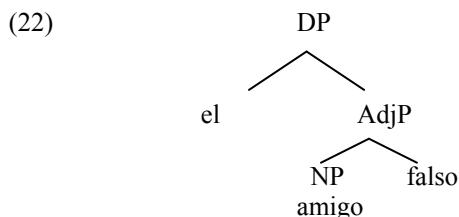
This syntactic account for direct and indirect modification and the distribution of intersective and subjective interpretations in nominal complexes with overt determiners is empirically further supported by the behavior of Spanish bare plural and singular nouns.

An analysis based on (in)direct modification has interesting consequences for bare plurals if we combine the DP-Hypothesis (Abney, 1987; Longobardi, 1994) with Higginbotham’s proposal, by which the determiner position binds the referential variable of the noun. This binding operation may take place only if there is a functional determiner position headed by a variable. Then any noun that bears a referential variable should be dominated by a DP. According to the DP-Hypothesis bare plurals are also selected by a DP. If this is true then, when they are modified by an adjective, they may have an intersective or a subjective interpretation. (21a) shows that this is right, and when there is no overt determiner, both intersective and subjective readings are available, as long as the noun is plural.

- (21) a. Buscamos estudiantes buenos. (ok intersective/ok subjective)  
 we-look-for students good-PLURAL  
 ‘We are looking for good/well behaved students.’  
 b. Buscamos estudiante bueno. (\*intersective/ok subjective)  
 we-look-for student good-SINGULAR  
 ‘We are looking for a good student.’

In (21a) the intersective interpretation results from the modifier being a predicate of a DP, and the subjective reading, from a structure where the modifier is predicated of an NP, and the DP dominates both the noun and the modifier, and does not mediate in the noun-modifier relation. In contrast, in (21b) there is a bare singular noun. This structure is possible only in the object position in some Romance languages such as Romanian and Spanish, and the interpretation of the noun can only be attributive. The object is a bare singular noun that is not related to a DP, since it doesn’t bear an existential variable. Hence, the adjective in (21b) can have only a subjective interpretation, the intersective readings (‘well-behaved’ among others) being excluded. This is consistent with my hypothesis, since only attributes, but not referential variables and their binders, are involved in this structure. Therefore, the crucial factor determining the specific type of modification is defined by how determiners and modifiers are interleaved. In the case of intersective/indirect modification there is always a determiner mediating the syntactic relationship between noun and modifier. This entails the presence of an existential variable, which is theta-bound by a determiner, in accordance with the DP-Hypothesis (Abney 1987), in combination with Higginbotham’s theta-binding mechanism. In the case of direct modifiers there is no determiner mediating the modifier-modifiee relationship.

Therefore the postnominal subjective/privative interpretation can be explained in syntactic terms. Strict subjective/privative adjectives have to be internal to DP, where they act as predicates of the nominal attribute, as (22) illustrates.



So far Higginbotham's thematic theory has thus been reduced to more minimal mechanisms such as binding and predication, syntactically represented by the configurational relationships of dominance and Spec-head relationships. If, as I have argued above, there is no lexical difference between subjective and intersective adjectives, one of the empirical arguments for the distinction between autonomous  $\theta$ -marking and  $\theta$ -identification is missing. The interpretative differences can be explained within the syntactic component.

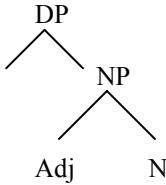
#### 4. Prenominal intensional adjectives

The other argument for the distinction between autonomous  $\theta$ -marking and  $\theta$ -identification is the difference between non-predicative and subjective adjectives. As explained above, in accordance with Higginbotham's analysis, subjective adjectives are defined by autonomous  $\theta$ -marking and  $\theta$ -identification. In the case of non-predicative adjectives, such as *pobre hombre* 'pitiful man,'  $\theta$ -identification is blocked because the existential variable of the adjective is lexically closed.

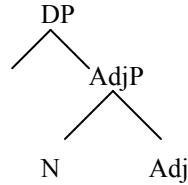
However, if we consider that nouns modify the intension of subjective adjectives, and non-predicative adjectives modify the intension of nouns, there is then no empirical evidence to support this distinction among  $\theta$ -marking mechanisms. Following my analysis in Martín (1996), in the case of subjective adjectives, the noun is an argument of the adjective, and, in the case of non-predicative adjectives, the opposite holds, where the adjective is an argument of the noun.<sup>7</sup> In contrast with postnominal subjective adjectives, the interpretation of prenominal non-predicative adjectives is not affected by the attribute denoted by the noun (cf. Dumitrescu & Saltarelli, 1998). *El gran rey* 'the great king' and *el rey grande* 'the big king' clearly show such a contrast. In the first example, there is semantic incorporation of the adjectival attribute into the noun. In the second example, it is the other way around. The nominal attribute incorporates into the adjective, resulting in subjective modification. This basic difference can be explained in terms of selection and/or projection, following Chomsky (2000). In the case of prenominal non-predicative adjectives, the noun selects the adjective and heads the maximal projection, as in (23a). The adjective identifies an attribute of the nominal predicate through predication. In the case of subjective adjectives, it is the adjective that selects the noun, and heads the maximal projection, as in (23b). The noun identifies an attribute of the adjectival predicate through predication. In accordance with Chomsky (2000), regarding prenominal non-predicative adjectives, the NP projects, since the noun is the selector for Merge, while for subjective adjectives, it is the AdjP that projects, since the adjective is the selector. In both cases, the noun and the adjective share the same existential variable, bound by the determiner, and, therefore, they denote just one set.

<sup>7</sup> See Demonte (1999) for a similar proposal within a more lexical type of analysis.

(23) a.



b.



Theta-theory, viewed at the outset of Minimalism as a questionable remnant of D-structure, has therefore survived in a new minimal way. The most accepted view today is that theta-roles should be replaced by elementary configurations within XP-shells, along the lines of Hale & Keyser (1993), and Chomsky (1995). Predicates act as selectors and bear theta-features that must be checked. Hence, in a conceptual sense a simplification of Higginbotham's theta-theory should be welcomed. The lexical differences are reduced to syntactic differences, since, as I have argued, the mechanisms that Higginbotham proposed can be reduced to the predicative mechanism.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that there are three different adjectival positions in Spanish: a prenominal position that is dominated by NP and has an intensional interpretation; a postnominal position external to the NP, but internal to DP dominating the NP with a subselective (sometimes privative or relational) reading; and finally a postnominal position external to the DP dominating the noun. The interpretation of this third type is that of a restrictive, predicative, and intersective modifier. This analysis is illustrated in (24):

- (24) a. [DP la [NP [AdjP pobre] hormiga]]  
 b. [DP la [AdjP [NP hormiga] [AdjP grande [NP ~~hormiga~~]]]]  
 c. [DP [DP la [NP hormiga]]<sup>1</sup> <e<sup>1</sup>> [AdjP grande ]]

While I have said very little about the DP that selects the modifier, its existence does seem to be confirmed by structures such as *tu amigo el falso* 'your friend the deceitful one', with a possessive selecting the noun, and an overt determiner the modifier. *falso* can have only a strictly intersective interpretation in this case, as predicted by my hypothesis.

Under this proposal, the traditional lexical differences among adjectives are subsumed under the direct and indirect modification distinction, and furthermore can be accounted for under a minimal compositional theory with a simplified thematic theory, where the semantics can be read off the syntax. This entails that the polysemy of adjectives is, for the most part, a syntactic affair, giving further support to constructionist theoretical frameworks (cf. Borer, 2005), rather than to the more traditional lexical approach.

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