

## Dimensionality in the Semantics of Adjectives

It has been noticed long ago that there is an intuitive difference in the manner of modification of adjectives like *skilful* and *blue-eyed* in the examples below:

- (1) David is a skilful violinist.
- (2) David is a blue-eyed violinist.

Apparently, *skilful* modifies relative to some function of its argument. This function is most often suggested by the meaning of the modified noun, so the most obvious interpretation of (1) is that David is skilful *qua* violinist. By contrast, *blue-eyed* does not seem to be similarly bound to some function, since one cannot be blue-eyed *qua* violinist. In (2) David is blue-eyed (generally – as a man) and besides that, independently, he is a violinist. The intuition that adjectives like *skilful* apply to their arguments relative to some function is supported by substitution failure of co-extensive terms with these adjectives: Being both a violinist and a surgeon, one may be a skilful violinist but not a skilful surgeon.

In traditional approaches this intuition is accounted for by considering adjectives like *skilful* as a separate semantic class of adjectives that are non-intersective *intensional* modifiers as opposed to intersective extensional modifiers like *blue-eyed*, *nude*, or *red* (cf. e.g. Kamp (1975), Siegel (1976), etc.). In a more recent approach developed by Larson (1998) this intuition is accounted for by analyzing them as one-place predicates that modify the event parameter in the semantic structure of nouns, whereas adjectives like *blue-eyed* modify the individual parameter. But despite the difference in explanations, these approaches are similar insofar as they postulate a distinct semantic class of adjectives, but leave open the principal question, what is special in the semantic structure of these adjectives that distinguishes them from adjectives like *blue-eyed* and makes them modify intensions or, on the alternative explanation, event parameters.

The goal of this paper is to present a possible answer to this question. I shall argue that this special trait of their semantic structure is *flexible multi-dimensionality*. Properties like skilfulness or talent are judged based on a set of dimensions, which are not definitely settled though. E.g., a violinist may be judged as skilful if she plays with facility and expression, has a sense of rhythm and intonation, can choose appropriate repertoire, etc. – though not all of these qualities must be necessarily present in a violinist in order to be judged as skilful. For teachers this set is different, it includes clarity, patience, convincingness, etc. In this respect adjectives of the *skilful*-variety are similar to natural kinds, such as *cat*: There is a bunch of qualities that characterize cats and distinguish them from other kinds, but it is quite vague how many of them and to what extent must be present in order that an individual is successfully judged as a cat; moreover this minimally required set of qualities is context-dependent.

Thus I suggest that the conceptualization of the referent of the noun delineates the field, within which appropriate dimensions are settled, i.e., dimensions of properties like skilfulness are determined relative to the conceptualization of the referent. Therefore, a change of conceptualization induces a new combination of dimensions. This is the reason why substitution failures occur. By contrast, adjectives like *blue-eyed*, *nude* or *red* are one-dimensional: There is only one parameter for judging whether a person is blue-eyed, viz. the colour of her eyes, and only one for judging whether a person is nude, viz. the presence of clothes. The conceptualization of the referent cannot suggest a set of relevant dimensions for these adjectives, since there is only one unchangeable dimension.

This hypothesis provides a criterion for distinguishing between the two groups of adjectives and solves a number of problems that existing theories face, such as the status of gradable adjectives like *tall* or *fast* (which also pass the substitution failure test, but do not modify relative to some function) and the ability of adjectives like *skilful* to modify *non-functional semantically bare* nouns like *man*, *woman*, *person*.