Authors:

- joint first author: Lobke Ghesquière, University of Leuven

- joint first author: An Van linden, University of Leuven & Research Foundation –

  Flanders (FWO)

- second and corresponding author: Kristin Davidse, University of Leuven

Postal address corresponding author:

Kristin Davidse

Department of Linguistics

University of Leuven

Blijde-Inkomststraat 21, PO box 3308

B-3000 Leuven

Belgium

Tel. +3216324811

Fax +3216324767

E-mail addresses of all authors:

Lobke.ghesquiere@arts.kuleuven.be

An.vanlinden@arts.kuleuven.be

Kristin.davidse@arts.kuleuven.be

Subjective compounds and subjectivity/subjectification in the English noun phrase[*]

This paper makes a case for the category of subjective compounds, i.e. adjective-noun word units which convey subjective meaning, e.g. little bleeder, old chum, half-victory. *These compounds are characterized grammatically by their behaviour as a unit in phrase structure, their internal inseparability, and the non-attribute-like behaviour of the adjectival components. Adjective and noun have a high degree of collocational cohesion, which is reflected in high mutual information scores. This collocational cohesion is semantically motivated by the subjective evaluative features which adjective and noun share. To accommodate these subjective compounds we propose a prosodic, field-like model of the English NP, rather than a linear subjective-objective model as traditionally recognized in the literature. A prosodic model, which recognizes that subjective meaning is spread over the whole NP, can account both for the strong tendency of more subjective modifiers to precede more objective ones and for the minor countercurrent of more subjective elements to follow more objective ones. Such a model, we argue, also captures the fact that subjectification can entail both leftward and rightward movement in NP structure.*

There is an assumption of long standing in the literature that the premodifiers and head of the English noun phrase (NP) embody a continuum from subjective to objective meaning.[1] How this left-right ordering from subjective to objective is

typically envisaged can be illustrated with an example such as *some very good young English coaches* (CB, sunnow).[2] At the right end of NP structure there is the lexical head noun, e.g. *coaches*, whose general type specifications may be further subclassified by nominal or adjectival classifiers such as *English*, which are generally considered to be very objective modifiers. Next come descriptive modifiers, first the objective ones that can be recognized on the basis of objective criteria, e.g. *young*, and then, more to the left, the more subjective evaluative ones, e.g. *good*. Further to the left there may be degree modifiers, e.g. *very*, which express the speaker's subjective assessment of qualitative features of the designated entities. Most leftward is the determiner zone, whose elements, e.g. *some*, specify how the instances referred to relate to the speaker-hearer exchange.[3] This synchronic continuum was rethought by Adamson[4] as a diachronic cline, predicting the directionality of subjectification. More specifically, she proposed that elements acquiring a more subjective function – shifting, for instance, from attribute to degree modifier – will move to the left in NP-structure, while elements shifting from a more to a less subjective function – for instance from attribute to classifier – will shift to the right.

In this article we want to draw attention to a set of prenominal elements whose position and meaning do not fit in with this view. They can be illustrated with (1)–(3).

[1] e.g. Quirk et al., Dixon, Bache, Breban.

[2] All examples followed by (CB) are from the COBUILD corpus, of which 56 million words (from the period 1986–96) were made available on *Wordbanks Online* via remote log-in, cf. Clear et al.

[3] On the subjective character of the determiner zone, see Diessel.

[4] Adamson.

(1) Didn't take the Hezbollah long to use the use the cease fire to re-arm ... or did you overlook that part, ya *pommie old git*? (http://scam.com/showthread.php?t=15523)

(2) Rudd, Mate you do little to support the *Australian little battler*, sorry mate, you just have to go. (WebCorp, http://www.webcorp.org.uk/cgi-bin/view.nm?url=http://blogs.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/yoursay/index.php/dailytelegraph/comments/should_kevin_rudd_keep_400m_of_foreign_aid_closer_to_home/&term=Australian%20little%20battler, 04/04/2011)

(3) Along with a keening cry of "Had we only known!" that reaction seems to be the best French democracy can offer in the immediate wake of Le Pen's *leering half-victory*. (WB, usmags)[5]

Old in (1) and *little* in (2) clearly do not describe the objective properties of 'aged' and 'of small stature', but have a subjective value. Likewise, *half* in (3) does not have any of the objective descriptive senses associated with *half*, but modifies the degree of the *victory*. *Half* indicates that a number of features associated with a 'real' or 'complete' victory, such as number of votes and moral authority, are lacking here. In other words, all these elements have subjective semantic values which in the literature have been strongly associated with the left end of the English NP, viz. with subjective attributes and degree modifiers respectively, which occur in leftward positions in the NP. Yet, in these examples they are associated with the right end of the NP, immediately preceding the lexical head. They are even preceded by an adjective whose semantics are generally considered to be less subjective. In (1) and (2) the

---

[5] All examples followed by (WB) have been extracted from the *Wordbanks Online* corpus, the successor to the COBUILD corpus. Examples extracted earlier from the COBUILD corpus are followed by (CB). With its 553 million tokens covering the period 1972–2004, the *Wordbanks Online* corpus is much larger than the 56 million word COBUILD corpus. The British subsections, for example, contain 259,479,077 tokens in WB versus 42,099,593 in CB.

adjectives preceding *old* and *little* refer to nationalities, which are typically analysed as classifiers. In (3) the evaluative attribute *leering* precedes the degree modifier *half*, whereas the typical order is assumed to have degree modifiers in front of – subjective and objective – attributive modifiers, e.g. *pure pitiless brutality*. In this respect, examples (1)–(3) appear to challenge the claim that subjective and objective meanings are ordered from left to right in the English NP. In this article we will put forward the idea that these phenomena can be best captured by the notion of 'subjective compounding'. This notion recognizes the fact that lexical head nouns often contain or imply subjective semantic features which may be modified by elements immediately preceding them, forming a tight unit in a way that resembles the process of compound formation. The concept of subjective compounds will also allow us to reconsider the issue of the left-oriented continuum of subjective meanings in the English NP in a more nuanced way.

The structure of this article is as follows. In Section 1 we will briefly discuss the functional structure of the English NP. In Section 2 we will present diachronic-synchronic case studies of the adjectives *old* and *little*. We will make a case that both these adjectives are involved in the formation of subjective compounds such as *old git* in example (1) above, in which the adjectives display grammatical and collocational behaviour that is fundamentally different from all their other uses. We will also trace the development of subjective compounds with *old* and *little*, and confront it with Adamson's[6] hypothesis that the desubjectification of adjectives is accompanied by their rightward movement in NP structure. In Section 3 we will investigate from a synchronic point of view the use of *half* in which it modifies the degree of gradable nouns such as *win*, *victory*, *success* and *failure*. For this use of *half*, we will again

---

[6] Adamson.

argue for an analysis in terms of subjective compounding. In Section 4 we will give our – provisional – synthesis of the concept of subjective compounding and how it affects thinking about subjectivity and subjectification in the English NP.

1. The functional structure of the English NP

The English NP forms an elaborate syntagmatic structure, in which position and order tend to correlate with semantic function. Its elements are related mainly in terms of dependency, i.e. head-modifier, relations,[7] and may in their turn have submodifiers. The functional structure of the NP is visualized in Figure 1.[8]

<Please insert Figure 1 about here>

Figure 1 shows that the NP consists of three zones, serving three basic functions, viz. determination, premodification, and categorization of the NP-referent.

At the right end of NP-structure there is the head noun, which designates the type of which the referent of the NP is an instance.[9] The noun functioning as head may be simple (*idiot*, *trains*) or compound (*blackbird*). Compound nouns most commonly consist either of adjective + noun or noun + noun, and are considered to form one lexical word. The general type designated by the head can be subclassified semantically by classifying elements, e.g. *electric* in *electric trains*.[10]

---

[7] Langacker.
[8] Based on Bache, 162, 239; and modified by Ghesquière, 314.
[9] Langacker, 55-8.
[10] Halliday, 184-6.

The head noun and classifiers may be preceded by one or more descriptive modifiers. The general function of these property-assigning, or attributive, modifiers is to attribute properties and qualities to the entities referred to by the NP. As pointed out by Quirk et al.,[11] attributes can describe either more objectively recognizable properties, such as size in *the other small electric trains* or more subjectively accessible properties that are a matter of the speaker's opinion, such as beauty in *all those quite beautiful little garden flowers*. The subjective ones tend to precede the more objective ones.

Preceding the attributive modifiers, another type of modifier can occur that modifies the degree of the qualities described by the elements to their right. Degree modifiers can measure the degree of the qualities described by adjectives, e.g. *very nice*, or implied by gradable head nouns, e.g. *complete idiot*.[12]

At the leftmost end of the NP there is the determination zone. Its elements deictically and/or phorically anchor the instances of the type referred to by the NP in terms of such notions as givenness (*the*), relative quantity (*most*), etc.[13] Structurally, they occur either in the core, or primary determiner position, or as predeterminers (*such a*) or postdeterminers (*the other*). Complex determiners have an internal dependency structure of which the primary determiner is the head.

The linear left-right ordering of the functional categories of the NP as illustrated in Figure 1 is often considered to form a semantic subjective-objective continuum,[14] a characterization that holds for the examples typically given. However, this left-right claim is seriously challenged by a number of NP types in which elements with subjective meaning immediately precede the nominal head, as in (1)–(3), to form what

---

[11] Quirk et al., 924.
[12] Bolinger.
[13] Langacker, 81-9, Davidse.
[14] Quirk et al., Dixon, 37-9, Adamson.

we call 'subjective compounds'. In the next sections we will present arguments based on empirical evidence in support of this new functional category. We will also offer some reflections on how thinking about subjective and objective meaning in the English NP has to be modified to accommodate the notion of subjective compounds.

2. Subjective compounds with *old* and *little*

2.1. Subjective compounds with *old*: A synchronic and diachronic case study

The functional category of subjective compounds[15] was first posited by Van linden and Davidse[16] with regard to examples such as (4)–(8). Contemporary data contain quite a number of examples in which *old* forms a tight combination with nouns that have either inherently positive, e.g. (4), (6), or negative, e.g. (7), (8), connotations.

(4)   The contrast is poignant but, I don't doubt, theatrically calculated by the *old master* with the exuberant energy and stamina of his dancers. (CB, times)

(5)   Anxious to let me know he's up-to-date. What a boring *old queen* he was. I was never happy about our using him. (WB, brbooks)

(6)   Still it hasn't deterred me, for I was well aware that my opponents were *old hands* at such manoeuvres. (CB, times)

---

[15] Van linden and Davidse actually used the term 'interpersonal compound', which González-Díaz, 389, referred to in her study of the position and meaning of *old* and *little* in sequences of two adjectives.
[16] Van linden and Davidse.

(7)   The second part of the divorce drama is my bit. Right at the start dad tried to get me involved, to back him up, the *old fool*, and get me to persuade mum not to do it. (CB, ukephemera)

(8)   he was sacked two months later in January last year after allegations that she called the ladies' captain "an *old bitch*" and the club officials "a load of *old sods*" (CB, times)

There are both grammatical and lexicosemantic reasons for positing this new functional category. We will first consider the *grammatical* arguments for analysing the *old* + noun combinations in question as compounds rather than as modifier-head phrase structures.

First, *old* and the following noun conform to Robins's[17] grammatical criteria for forming one word: they are internally inseparable but function as a unit in NP-structure. No adjectives can intervene between adjective and noun. For instance, if the ladies' captain in (8) had been called *an old stupid bitch*, the nature of the insult would have been quite different. Other adjectives can only precede the unit as a whole, modifying the entire sequence of *old* + noun, as in (9)–(10).

(9)   A comic reprise of Fifteen Minutes, with elements of Beverly Hills Cop and 48 Hours, it would pair Murphy as a reckless rookie with *tough old hand* De Niro as stars of a 'reality' TV show designed to improve the force's public image. (WB, brbooks)

---

[17] Robins, 148-54.

(10) Mr Kennet is a *gossipy old woman*. Mr Patterson is a *gossipy old woman*. Mr Jamieson is a *gossipy old woman*. They're all *gossipy old women*. (WB, brbooks)

This internal stability and external unitary behaviour show that the *old* + noun sequences grammatically behave like one compound word.

Secondly, the typical grammatical tests for attributive adjectives, viz. gradability and alternation with predicative use,[18] do not apply. It is impossible to grade the adjective *old* or use it in a predicative construction without changing the specific semantics they invoke. In (7) dad could not be referred to as *the very old fool*, and neither could De Niro in (10) be called *a very old hand*. Likewise, corresponding to these examples, we could not get *the fool that is old* or *the hand that is old*. These are serious arguments against analysing *old* as subjective attribute, semantically the only possible alternative. Moreover, the adjective does not have all its systematic paradigmatic variants anymore. For instance, we do not speak of *a young fool* or *a new hand*. In this respect, the use of *old* in (4)–(10) differs fundamentally not only from attributive but also from classifying modifiers. Classifiers typically are part of culturally entrenched taxonomies, as in *old cheese – young cheese*, *old wine – new wine*.

A third grammatical argument against a modifier-head analysis and for our alternative account in terms of compounding comes from the test proposed by Huddleston and Pullum[19] for distinguishing phrases from compounds, viz. the pro-*one* test. We cannot say *an old hand and a tough one*, or *an old bitch and a stupid one*, but

---

[18] Bolinger.

[19] Huddleston and Pullum, 1449-564.

this is possible with both attributive and classifying modifiers, as shown by *a silly man and a mean one*, and *old wines and new ones* respectively.

A final formal issue to be considered is that of stress. It has often been claimed that compounds can be distinguished from phrases on the basis of stress, with compounds having forestress and phrases endstress. However, Giegerich[20] has convincingly shown that this is a tenacious myth. Compounds with endstress are neither anomalous nor even exceptional, but are a commonly attested type of compound, e.g. *apple 'pie, Madison 'Avenue*, *avian influ'enza*. The units for which we claim compound status are similar to this latter type in that they all have endstress, e.g. *old 'hag, old 'chum*.

Besides their specific grammatical behaviour, the *lexical semantics* of these combinations are also a reason for introducing a new functional category to account for them. *Old* and the noun following it strongly share subjective meaning components. According to Sinclair,[21] such semantic feature sharing goes together with a high degree of collocational cohesion. In examples such as (4)–(8), the adjective does not simply add to or restrict the meaning of the noun. "The meaning of the words chosen together is different from their independent meanings. They are at least partly delexicalized".[22] Importantly, the semantic features that are shared between *old* and the following noun are subjective, evaluative ones. The combination of *old* + noun foregrounds these specific evaluations at the expense of the original descriptive meanings, which are backgrounded or bleached.

As just noted, the sharing of subjective semantic features implies a high degree of collocational cohesion between *old* and the following noun, in terms of which it can be distinguished from the descriptive attribute uses of *old*. The degree to which

---

[20] Giegerich.
[21] Sinclair, 15, also Bublitz.
[22] Sinclair, 16.

the occurrence of one word predicts the occurrence of another can be measured by means of mutual information (MI)-scores. "MI is a measure of *the strength of association between two words*."[23] As such, they are the appropriate tool to identify idioms and fixed phrases.[24] A number of combinations of *old* + noun and their MI-scores in the British sections of the contemporary *Wordbanks Online* corpus are listed in Table 1, together with the MI-scores of some randomly selected combinations of clear descriptive uses of *old* and noun. The latter are added to demonstrate the considerable discrepancy in MI-score between combinations like *old stagers* (12.578) *old fogey* (11.586), *old hag* (10.575) and frequent combinations of *old* as objective attribute + head noun, like *old buildings* (5.875) or *old house* (4.507).

It has been remarked that because the MI-score ignores absolute frequency, high MI-scores sometimes single out relatively uncommon combinations one of whose component elements is strongly – or uniquely – associated with the other. Therefore Table 1 also includes the T-scores, in which the main factor is the absolute frequency of joint occurrences and which measure the productivity of collocations.[25] Table 1 shows that common attribute + head noun sequences have a higher T-score than the subjective compounds. However, the T-scores of the subjective compounds are all well above the 2-value, which is as a rule of thumb taken to indicate inguistically interesting phenomena.[26] Subjective compounds are thus by no means marginal in terms of productivity. .

<Please insert Table 1 about here>

---

[23] Clear, 280.
[24] Clear, 280-2, Stubbs, 35.
[25] Stubbs, 33-39.
[26] Clear, Stubbs.

The high degree of collocational cohesion indicated by the MI-scores is a final argument for characterizing these combinations as units, i.e. compounds. Because of the subjective, affective nature of the semantic features shared by the component elements, we characterize them as subjective compounds, distinct from ordinary compounds such as *town hall* and *blackbird* with more objective, descriptive meaning.

Although MI-scores could not be consulted for the historical periods studied, it was possible to identify a number of combinations of *old* + noun as subjective compounds on the basis of all the other criteria, such as internal inseparability and unit status, subjective semantic feature sharing, recurrence in the different periods studied, etc. The chronology and relative proportion of the subjective compounds vis-à-vis the other uses of *old* in the various periods of our dataset are represented in Table 2. The historical data were drawn from the *Helsinki Corpus* (HC) (750–1710)[27] – with exhaustive extractions – and from the *Corpus of Late Modern English texts* (CLMET) (1710–1920)[28] – with random samples of 100 hits per subperiod.[29]

<Please insert Table 2 about here>

Table 2 shows that no subjective compounds are attested prior to the Middle English period.[30] Di Paolo Healey[31] claims that "a reader of Old English has a very different concept of 'old' than a reader of later English texts" and that this is why "Old English

---

[27] Kytö and Rissanen.

[28] De Smet, "A corpus of Late Modern English texts"; "Diffusional change," 17–19, 21–9.

[29] It can be noted that in Table 2 the total number of Late Modern examples per subperiod does not amount to 100. This is because we excluded irrelevant data from the table, such as uses of *old* in postposed or predicative position, in nominalized uses or uses in appositions.

[30] In addition to subjective compounds, Table 2 also includes information on objective compounds. More details on this category will be given in Section 2.4.

[31] di Paolo Healey, 44.

has nothing which might be compared to such disparaging uses" as the early subjective compounds. We argue that another reason why subjective compounds are attested only in Middle English is the fact that subjective compounds are the result of processes of contextual modulation and routinization.

Contextual modulation has been defined by Croft and Cruse[32] as the activation of semantic features of a word, triggered by the context. The meaning of the word is enriched, as it were, by "specifying features ... contributed by the context".[33] It is not hard to imagine how *old*'s subsense 'of long standing' was enriched with notions such as 'dear' and 'close' when combined with a positively connoted and affectively coloured noun such as *chum*. The evaluative meaning inherent in the noun foregrounds a similar evaluative meaning in the adjective.

Routinization is defined by Bybee[34] as the repetition of a multi-word sequence, which leads to "reanalysis of the sequence as a single processing chunk". The recurrence of these combinations in our diachronic datasets supports the idea that they were routinized. As a consequence of their repeated co-occurrence, adjective and noun gradually lost "certain specific features of meaning ..., leaving a semantic core".[35] This semantic core is the affectively coloured categorization designated by the subjective compound. In other words, as the result of routinization, new single lexical items with evaluative meaning were formed. This analysis of the *old* + noun units as subjective compounds is compatible with the fact that a considerable number of them are listed as a separate entry in dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners,* not as an elaboration of either the noun or the adjective.

---

[32] Croft and Cruse, 140.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Bybee, 603.
[35] Ibid., 607.

Mainly three subsenses of *old*, both more objective and subjective descriptive uses, seem to have fed into groups of what are listed as "familiar combinations" in the OED from about the sixteenth century onwards, viz.

(i)   *old* in the sense of 'having the mental or physical characteristics of old age in a negative sense: *old codger*, *old fogey*, *old trout*, *old hag*, *old fool*, etc.

(ii)   *old* in the sense of 'knowing, experienced': *old hand*, *old stager*, *old master*, etc.

(iii) *old* in the sense of 'acquaintance of old standing': *old chum*, *old boy*, *old chap*, etc.

These subsenses were contextually modulated by the affectively coloured nouns following them, yielding combinations with strongly negative connotations in (i) and positive connotations in (ii)–(iii).

In our diachronic dataset, the Middle English data contained the first attestations of *old* + noun that persisted into the following centuries as subjective compounds, viz. *old dotard* and *old lecher*. It is interesting to note that all Middle English examples appear in contexts of direct speech representation, with the subjective compound used as a term of address, like in (11)–(13). According to Vendler,[36] this confirms the (petrified) compound status of the *old* + noun sequences, as other adjective + noun combinations generally cannot be used to address people.

(11) Treitour! þow *olde dote*! Þow schelt ben hanged be þe þrote. 'Traitor! You old dotard! You shall be hanged by the throat.' (HC *c*1330 [?*c*1300] *Bevis* [Auch])

(12) But folk of wyves maken noon assay, Til they be wedded – *olde dotard shrewe*! – And thanna, seistow, we wol oure vices shewe. 'But the folk of women causes

---

[36] Vendler, 132.

no affliction until they are married – shrewd old dotard! – and then, you say, we

will show our vices.' (HC *c*1390 Chaucer *CT.WB.* [Manly-Rickert])

(13)   Sire *olde lecchour*, lat thy japes be! 'Sir, old lecher, let your tricks be!' (HC

*c*1390 Chaucer *CT.WB.* [Manly-Rickert])

The negatively evaluative subsense of *old* that fed into these subjective compounds

was 'having the negative physical and mental characteristics of having lived long'.

Such meanings were first attested as subjective attributes in Late Old English. The

processes of contextual modulation and routinization operating on such subjective

attribute-head structures triggered reanalysis into subjective compounds, which in our

dataset were attested a few centuries after the emergence of subjective attribute uses

(see Table 2). This gradual reanalysis entailed all the other changes that led to the

distinctive formal and semantic characteristics of subjective compounds, viz. loss of

gradability and possibility of predicative use, and reduction of systematic

paradigmatic variants such as *new* or *young*.[37]

From the Modern English period onwards, the set of subjective compounds with

old becomes more diversified. In terms of referential properties, their uses also extend

from terms of address, with clear second-person reference (11)–(14), to uses with

generic reference (15) (first attestations in 1500–1570), and later to uses with specific

third person reference (16)–(18) (first attestation in 1570–1640).

(14)   What haue I stolne fro[m] the or thine: thou *ilfauored olde trot*. 'What have I

stolen from you or yours, you ill-favoured old trout!' (HC 1551–61 Stevenson,

Gammer Gvrtons needle)

---

[37] Interestingly, *old* and *little,* which do not serve as systematic paradigmatic variants of each other, have a tendency to compound with the same nouns, e.g. *old/little sod, old/little bugger, old/little blighter.*

(15)   (Mage Mumble) "I dyd nothyng but byd hir worke and holde hir peace." (Tibet

Talk) "So would I, if you coulde your clattering ceasse: But the deuill can not

make *olde trotte* holde hir tong." '(Mage Mumble) "I did nothing but bid her to

work and hold her peace." (Tibet Talk) "So would I, if you could cease your

clattering; but the devil cannot make old trouts hold their tongue."' (HC *a*1553

Udall, *Roister Doister*)

(16)   Upon my life! I believe there is actually some truth in what this *old ruffian* says.

(CLMET 1751 Smollet, *The adventures of Peregrine Pickle*)

(17)   Met a lunatic just now. *Queer old fish* as ever I saw! (CLMET 1889 Carroll,

Sylvie and Bruno)

(18)   But the *old vixen* has shown her hand, so now he must fight. (CLMET 1870

Meredith, *The adventures of Harry Richmond*)

All examples listed above feature subjective compounds with a negative undertone,

presumably the result of reanalysis of subjective attribute uses of *old* with the

meaning 'having the negative mental or physical characteristics of old age', which

formed compounds with an increasing range of evaluative nouns.

Subjective compounds with a positive connotation, such as *old chum* and *old

hand*, start to appear in the Present-day English data only and even then they play a

minor part. This also transpired from Table 1, which lists the subjective compounds

with the highest MI-scores in *Wordbanks Online*: the ones with negative connotations

clearly predominate. In the contemporary data, we can witness softening and affective

melioration of compounds with negative connotations in some cases, as in (19)–(21).

Intrinsically positive compounds, as in (22)–(24), are a minority.

(19) "Shut up maundering, you *daft old twat*," he said, almost affectionately. (WB, brbooks)

(20) "What started your mind moving along those lines?" "Richard, primarily." "The *interfering old sod!*" (WB, brbooks)

(21) Suppose she lives to eighty: does she really want to come back as a *wrinkled old hag*? (WB, brbooks)

(22) Gradually the friendship had developed. "You know, Toddy *old boy*," Leo would say. "Katrina deserves someone like you. Solid, dependable, reliable –" (WB, brbooks)

(23) "You were inexperienced. Voss ... yes ... he should have known better. A terrible risk he took. Madness, really, for *such an old hand*." (WB, brbooks)

(24) Now Raoul Loveday was one of Crowley's most brilliant pupils. When he first came to the *Old Master*, as the latter was sometimes mockingly called, Raoul was already in possession of the very essence of magic - or 'magick', as Crowley rather charmingly wrote it. (WB, brbooks)

The synchronic corpus results are presented in Table 3, in terms of two sets. The data in set (i) are instances of the pattern *old* + noun, without further elements intervening between *old* and its head noun. 200-hit samples were taken from three British subcorpora of the COBUILD corpus, viz. Times, UK ephemera and UK spoken. The data in set (ii) are instances of the pattern *old* + at least one more prenominal element + noun. As the query for this pattern yielded a manageable number of data, we took exhaustive samples from the same three subcorpora of the COBUILD corpus. Of course, subjective compounds were only found in the first dataset in which *old* immediately precedes the noun. However, we added the second dataset to have a full

picture of the relative frequencies of the various prenominal uses of *old*. When we relate the relative frequency of *old* in subjective compounds to the proportions of the other prenominal uses of *old* in the full synchronic sample, we can see that with 2.2% the compounds account for a much smaller proportion of uses than the freely variable combinations in modifier-head structures.

<Please insert Table 3 about here>

2.2. Subjective compounds with *little*: A synchronic and diachronic case study

In contemporary English, we find combinations of *little* + noun, illustrated in (25)–(29), which are grammatically and semantically very similar to those discussed in Section 2.1 for *old* + noun. The arguments given for analysing the latter as subjective compounds also apply to these units of *little* + noun.

(25) "I know the way, Turon. I hardly need an *obsequious little toad* like you to guide me" (WB, brbooks)

(26) Like the backstage essays of David Mamet, these are *little gems* of practical experience: no luvvie gossip, just a brief guide from one of the great masters, and even a diagram or two. (CB, ukspoken)

(27) How touching it is to watch the mothers collect their little ones at the end of another day's hard learning <p> Come here you *little bleeder*, before I fg kill yer <p> What child worthy of the name could resist such an invitation? (CB, ukspoken)

(28) The hilarious sequel to 'How to be a "*Little Sod*"', follows our miniature despot's development into tyrannical toddlerhood – complete with tantrums, potty training and unidentifiable rashes, abundantly illustrated with cartoons. (WB, brephemera)

(29) "He was a *little bugger* as a baby, screaming all the time" Clarke Sr once said. "That was until he was circumcised. That quietened him down a bit." (CB, times)

The same reasons as those adduced in Section 2.1 argue against analysing these units as head nouns modified by subjective attribute uses of *little*. Firstly, unlike attribute-head structures, *little* + noun in (25)–(29) are internally inseparable: no qualitative or classifying modifiers can come in between them without fundamentally changing their meaning, e.g. *little diamond gems of practical experience* (26), *little criminal bugger* (29). It can also be noted that in, for instance, *a little exhausting bugger*, *little* no longer shares the specific affective colouring of *bugger*, and *bugger* on its own has a different affective value than *little bugger*. The pro-*one* test[38] likewise identifies the units as compounds rather than phrases. One cannot, for instance, speak of *a little sod and a cranky one.*

Secondly, the sequence *little* + noun can be prefaced by attributive modifiers that modify the sequence as a whole, as in *an obsequious little toad* (25). Moreover, these modifiers can be coordinated with other modifiers, e.g. *a tired and cranky little bugger*, or be stacked with other recursive modifiers, e.g. *poetic literary little gems*. In other words, externally too the sequence *little* + noun functions as a unit.

---

[38] Huddleston and Pullum, 1449-564.

Thirdly, in these combinations, the adjective *little* loses its gradability and the possibility to be used predicatively. For example, *a very little bugger* and *a bugger that is little* do not have the specific semantics of the subjective compound *little bugger*.

Fourthly, the *little* + noun units do not contrast with the systematic paradigmatic variants of *little*. For instance, corresponding to *little bleeder* we do not find *great bleeder* or *big bleeder*.

Semantically, finally, adjective and noun clearly share subjective meaning components. The evaluative features inherent in the noun foreground corresponding features in *little*. The sequence *little bugger*, for instance, consists of the evaluative noun *bugger*, which is used in informal language 'to describe a person who has done something annoying or stupid' (Sinclair et al.)[39] and *little*, whose negative affective features of e.g. irritation and contempt are pulled to the fore as well in this combination. These fixed collocational units are characterized by much higher MI-scores than even very common attribute-head structures. Table 4 shows the MI-scores, T-scores and joint frequencies of a number of *little* + noun sequences as they occur in the British sections of the *Wordbanks Online* corpus. For the unit *little bleeder*, for instance, the MI-score is 10.33, indicating very strong internal cohesion, but its T-score is 2.234, reflecting moderate productivity. By contrast, a common objective attribute-head combination like *little pieces* with T-score 8.359 has an MI-score of only 4.85. Exceptional MI-scores above or around 8 greatly support the proposed analysis of these units as subjective compounds.[40]

<Please insert Table 4 about here>

---

[39] Sinclair et al., "Collins Dictionary," 210.
[40] Clear, 279, in practice uses a cut-off point of 6 for what he views as "high MI-scores". Stubbs, 53, even notes that MI-scores above 3 are "likely to be linguistically interesting".

Subjective compounds with *little* start to appear with a certain degree of regularity only from the Present-day English period onwards. This is shown by Table 5, which gives the absolute and relative frequencies with which *little* is attested in its various prenominal functions in the different historical periods.[41]

<Please insert Table 5 about here>

An individual example of what looks like a subjective compound is attested as early as Early Middle English and the odd subjective compound also occurs in Late Modern English:

(30) How go you on with the *amiable little blot*? (CLMET 1751 Chesterfield, *Letters to his son*)

(31) I saw they had never laid down, though it was past midnight; but they were calmer, and did not need me to console them. The *little souls* were comforting each other with better thoughts than I could have hit on. (CLMET 1847 Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*)

In our contemporary dataset, the subjective compounds with *little*, like those with *old*, form only a small fraction of all the prenominal uses (1.7%), as shown by Table 6. The synchronic data, selected in terms of the same two patterns as for *old*, were again extracted from three British subcorpora of the COBUILD corpus, viz. Times, UK ephemera and UK spoken. Unlike with *old*, we took exhaustive samples,

---

[41] Like Table 2, this table also includes information on objective compounds. The reader is referred to Section 2.4 for more details on this category.

the total number of examples looked at amounting to 3,460. In the Present-day data, subjective compounds with *little*, like those containing the adjective *old*, can express both negative (*little bleeder*) and positive feelings (*little gem*) of the speaker. With Bolinger[42] and González-Díaz,[43] we can observe that with some of the compounds *little* has an effect similar to that of the diminutive suffix. As noted by González-Díaz,[44] "['r]ightmost' *little* conveys nuances of affection (as opposed to dimension)" which are "translated into other Germanic languages, like Dutch, by an affective diminutive suffix". Thus, *little gems* in (26) would be translated in Dutch as *juweeltjes*, and *little sod* in (28) as *ettertje* (lit. an 'etter' + diminutive suffix). The compounds with *little* predominantly display a rather negative semantic prosody, most often featuring nouns like *bugger*, *creep*, *monster*, *bleeder*, *blighter* and *sod*. In the large majority of instances, these subjective compounds refer to human beings rather than material objects.

<Please insert Table 6 about here>

2.3. Subjective compounds with *old* and *little*: Subjectivity and subjectification in the NP

In the introduction we noted that the affectively coloured units of *old/little* + noun appear to challenge the claims that have been made about subjectivity and subjectification in the English NP. In this section we will also consider additional phenomena that affect the hypotheses of the left-oriented continuum of subjective

---

[42] Bolinger, 59.
[43] González-Díaz, 383.
[44] Ibid.

meanings and the correlation between subjectification and leftward movement. Instead, we propose an alternative, prosodic model of the English NP, which recognizes that subjective meaning is spread throughout the whole NP.

Let us first consider the question of *subjectivity*, more specifically, of the synchronic ordering of elements with subjective meaning in the English NP. A possible position might be to say that the existing hypotheses do not need to be adapted much if only one stresses that they apply strictly to the modifiers and not to the head of the NP. In this scenario, one would have to point out that the existence of subjective compounds shows very clearly that the head noun – either simple or compound – can have predominantly subjective meaning, but it would allow one to hold on to the claim that within the modification zone objective modifiers always come after, never before, subjective ones. Examples in which objective attributes modify subjective compounds do not offend against this principle, as in examples such as (1) and (2) in the introduction, and other ones attested in *Wordbanks*, e.g. *a raddled old crone*, *a thin little cunt*, *a sturdy old gaffer*. In the majority of cases, subjective compounds attract subjective modifiers, but this too is in keeping with the principle as formulated above, e.g. *a boring old fart*, *the dozy old boy*, *a dotty old buffer*, *a cunning old fox*, etc.

However, in addition to the subjective compounds discussed here, yet other phenomena have been noted that argue against maintaining the subjectivity hypothesis in its present form. In her study of the adjectives *little* and *old* and subjectivity in the NP, for instance, González-Díaz[45] observes that *old* can form embedded clusters with other adjectives in the prenominal string such as *good old*, *grand old*, *high old*. Such clusters have been described before and analyses have been put forth, viewing them

---

[45] González-Díaz, 387.

either as paratactic, balanced structures (Matthews p.c., quoted in González-Díaz)[46] or as hypotactic structures, with *old* functioning as a 'reinforcing' submodifier (OED, *old*, a.III.15). Investigation of our data suggests that some of these combinations, as in *a **funny old** world*, ***poor old** fellow*, ***good old** Lemsip*, *a **great old** song*, are frequent, which will affect their strength of collocational cohesion and make them subject to routinization. It may well be that the paratactic and hypotactic analyses represent two stages of a possible historical development.

A comparable historical development was noted by Vandewinkel and Davidse[47] for sequences of *pure* + adjective. They first occurred in paratactic structures such as *pure fresh water*, *pure and chaste esposage* (HC 1500–1710). The two adjectives in such sequences share semantic features, which led, through contextual modulation, to delexicalization of *pure*. The repetition of two near-synonymous adjectives such as *pure* and *fresh*, *pure* and *chaste* can be considered a weak form of emphasis.[48] It is therefore easily conceivable that *pure* started losing in descriptive meaning in such sequences and was felt to reinforce the sense of its accompanying adjective rather than to independently attribute a quality, as in *pure Celtic fury*, *pure unbridled hell* (CB).

We propose that similar processes are operative in strings of an adjective followed by *old*, which gradually lead to a reinterpretation of *old* from attribute to reinforcer. The degree modifying effect of *old* on adjectives preceding it is particularly clear when it 'interrupts' a sequence in which modifier and noun collocate with each other, such as *a bloody load of* in (32) or *not such a bad stick* (i.e. quite a good stick) in (33).

---

[46] Ibid.
[47] Vandewinkel and Davidse.
[48] cf. Martin.

(32) "At first I thought it was *a bloody old load of you-know-what*. – I mean, a woman has a mid-life crisis all her life long – and then I thought, well, maybe there's something to it?" (WB, brbooks)

(33) I'm *not such a bad old stick* once you get to know me. (www.roadstergal. info/misc/lies.htm - Cached)

As noted in the introduction, degree modifiers, or reinforcers, are generally assumed to be more strongly subjective than descriptive modifiers, be they objective or attitudinal. This is because descriptive modifiers specify properties, or recognition criteria, to which the instance referred to corresponds. Degree modifiers, by contrast, invoke a scale on which the speaker locates the 'degree of the properties', which is a matter of speaker assessment and stance.[49]

Sequences in which a modifier is *followed* by a subjective submodifier are not exceptional in the English NP. This type of syntagmatic structure is also found in examples such as (34)–(35), in which *sort/kind/type + of* is used by the speaker to hedge the classifier preceding it, indicating that the term or description is only approximate.[50]

(34) Listen, we have had sudden employment in the nature of developing a *European-typa* film. (WebCorp, http://www.thegoonshow.co.uk/scripts/string. html)

(35) It's a *Spielberg Kinda* Christmas. (WebCorp, www.netribution.co.uk/features/ carnal_ cinema/96.html)

---

[49] De Smet and Verstraete support this distinction between descriptive, or ideational subjective meaning and stance taking, or interpersonal, subjective meaning with crucial formal differences correlating with it.

[50] De Smedt, Brems and Davidse.

In such examples, the type noun string is felt to submodify the modifier preceding it, to which it may be linked by a hyphen, as in (34). Denison[51] refers to this construction with type nouns as the 'semi-suffix' use.

What is of interest to us here is that both in the clusters of adjective + *old* (32)– (33) and those of classifier + *sort/kind/type of* (34)–(35), an element generally considered to be more subjective is to the *right* of one that is less subjective. This puts, in our view, too big a hole in the hypothesis that modifiers order from right to left in terms of increasing subjectivity to hold on to it. We propose that a more accurate view on the ordering of subjective meaning was formulated by Halliday. In his view, "[i]nterpersonal meanings tend to be scattered prosodically throughout the unit" of the NP,[52] in what Pike called a 'field'-like pattern. "Prosody" is used here in a semantic sense, as in Sinclair's notion of semantic prosody, which applies the notion of 'suprasegmental' patterning, known from phonology, to semantics. This is analogous to what Pike meant with 'field-like structure', for which he transferred the concept of field from semantics to structure: "structure viewed as a total FIELD".[53] The idea is that subjective meaning elements may occur in the whole structure of the NP: subjective meaning may be present, and may intersperse with objective meaning, throughout the whole NP. Deictic elements, subjective attributes and subjectively coloured heads form the primary subjective elements of structure, while degree modifiers and related elements such as hedges can apply to all main functions of the NP. One can modify the degree of quantifiers (*very many*), of attributes (*very nice*) and gradable nouns (*complete idiot*) and even of classifiers. The latter has tended to

---

[51] Denison, 4.
[52] Halliday, 190.
[53] Pike, 37.

be overlooked, but was noted by Sinclair.[54] With submodifiers of classifiers such as *largely*, *strictly*, *almost*, the speaker assesses to what extent the subcategorization applies, as in **purely** *emotional problems*, *a* **largely** *Buddhist organization.* The submodification of classifiers constitutes another subjective element in what used to be thought of as the objective part of the modifier zone according to the linear model of subjective-objective meaning in the NP. In the prosodic, field-like model, by contrast, the fact that subjective meaning is scattered all over the NP is not problematic. It allows one to accommodate the strong tendency of more subjective modifiers to precede more objective ones, but it equally does justice to the minor countercurrent of more subjective elements following less subjective ones. It can also easily build in the important point that the head of the NP often incorporates subjective meaning.

The other main issue to consider in this section is that of the diachronic process of *subjectification* in the English NP. Adamson put forward the hypotheses that subjectification processes are accompanied by leftward movement in the NP, while desubjectification is characterized by rightward movement. A productive example of the latter shift is that from attribute to classifier, e.g. from *a criminal act* to *a criminal court*. However, the processes of change by which subjective compounds emerge show that Adamson's claim of desubjectification always entailing rightward movement cannot be maintained. Historically, subjective compounds originate in attribute-head structures. The adjectives *old* and *little* clearly travel right in NP-structure to form subjective compounds. Likewise, reinforcing *old* has viated towards a position to the right of the adjective being modified. We therefore propose that the prosodic, field-like model also captures the diachronic subjectification trends more

---

[54] Sinclair et al., "Collins Grammar," 95.

accurately than the strictly linear left-right model. This is the logical consequence of the insight that the degree of subjectivity does not increase linearly in NP-structure. Rather, there are various subjective elements spread over the whole of NP-structure ,which may attract items into new subjective word formations, or into new (sub)modification clusters in which the more subjective element may either precede or follow the less subjective one. A precise model of subjectification in the English NP will have to account for the multiplicity of mechanisms that can accompany subjectification such as leftward, and occasionally rightward, movement, reanalysis of parataxis into hypotaxis, new word formations, etc.

2.4. Objective compounds with *old* and *little*

Although the focus in this paper is on subjectivity in the English NP and, more specifically, on subjective compounds, we briefly want to draw attention to the fact that *old* and *little* engage not only in subjective compounding but also in objective compounding.[55] Interestingly, these compounds are again predominantly used with reference to people. Some examples are given in (36) to (39). The objective compounds with *old* and *little* have been included in both diachronic Tables 2 and 5 and synchronic Tables 3 and 6.

(36) I can't do it, *old man*; or I would, I presume, if I'd been made that way. (CLMET 1897 Kipling, *Captains courageous*)

(37) A youth of frolics, an *old age* of cards. (CLMET 1733-4 Pope, *An essay on man*)

---

(38) We haven't got anything for you, *little girl*. Be off! (CLMET 1848 Dickens, *Dombey and son*)

(39) In the will of Nicholas Gimcrack the virtuoso, recorded in the *Tatler,* we learn, among other items, that his eldest son is cut off with a single cockleshell for his undutiful behaviour in laughing at his *little sister* whom his father kept preserved in spirits of wine. (CLMET 1821-2 Hazlitt, *Table talk*)

As with the subjective compounds, these sequences of *old/little* + noun are firmly established in English and processed as single units. However, unlike the subjective compounds, objective compounds are not always characterized by high MI-scores. In contrast, as shown in Table 7, they tend to have high T-scores, reflecting their productivity in English.

<Please insert Table 7 about here>

Further evidence for the compound status of the adjective-noun sequences is found in the fact that they are often listed as separate entries or special units in dictionaries, with mention of their specialized meanings. Objective compounds such as *little boy* and *little girl* can refer not only to young people in general but, more specifically, to someone's son or daughter, as in (40). Similarly, the compound *old man* has acquired the specialized meaning of father, as in (41).

(40) She allows her *little girl* to have tantrums in public, and she is amazingly rude to the family. (WB, times)

(41) But I'm put in mind of what my *old man* said about Britain during and after the Second World War. "For as long as it lasted, everyone put aside their differences and helped one another." (WB, times)

Translations provide additional evidence for the single word status of the objective compounds. As noted for subjective compounds such as *little sod*, a number of objective compounds with *little* can also be translated by means of a diminutive suffix. *Little girl* and *little boy*, for instance, are best translated as *meisje* and *jongetje* in Dutch. The objective compounds found for *old* also have one-word counterparts in other languages. As noted by Wierzbicka,[56] the objective compound *old man* is translated as *vieillard* in French and *starik* in Russian. Similarly, *old age* is best translated as *vieillesse* in French and *ouderdom* in Dutch. Note that, as with *old*, it is the age rather than the size meaning of *little* which is foregrounded in the objective compounds. That exactly this age meaning is prone to objective compounding might be due to the fact that "for human beings age tends to be treated as a crucial determinant ..., rather than as one feature among many".[57]

Additional grammatical arguments for treating the adjective-noun sequences as compounds are their unit status and internal inseparability. One can talk about 'the good old days' or 'a pretty little girl', but not 'the old good days' or 'a little pretty girl' without changing the meaning of the sequence. Similarly, as with the subjective compounds, the pro-*one* test is infelicitous with objective compounds (**a little girl and a beautiful one*, **an old man and a strange one*).

---

[56] Wierzbicka, 368.
[57] Ibid.

3. Subjective compounds with *half*

As noted above, degree modification is a paradigm example of the 'prosodic' way in which subjective meaning is scattered over the whole NP. In this section, we will see that, due to subjective compounding, degree modification is also found *within* the head noun. We will look at the case of degree modifying compounds with *half* and nouns such as *win*, *victory*, *success*, and *failure*.[58] Consider examples (42) to (44).

(42) Tim remembered vividly how the coach's jersey had borne a blood imprint of his daughter's face, a *crimson half mask*. (WB, usbooks)

(43) This Seattlest located himself in the middle of the Washington Dem's HQ at the Westin Hotel on election night to take in the vote ... The young (and very persuasive) Marcelas Owens, who lost his mom due to a lack of health care coverage, had the privilege of introducing the Senator before her *timid half-victory speech*. (WebCorp, http://seattlest.com/2010/11/03/murray_brings _senate_race_to_a_clos.php)

(44) He's a proven premier league manager, and with Bolton he consistently finished in the top 8 top 6 spots year in year out. He's an excellent man manager and people hate on him merely because of his *half-failure* at newcastle. (WebCorp, http://sunderland.theoffside.com/team-news/keano-steps-down-just-before-reds-game.html)

In (42), *half* is used in its objective lexical meaning, i.e. that of 'being one of the two equal parts into which a thing is or may be divided; forming a half or moiety' (OED).

---

[58] We thank Hendrik De Smet (p.c.) for alerting us to the compound status of expressions such as *half victory*, in contrast with head-modifier phrases such as *a complete victory*.

The adjective-noun combination *half mask* is a compound, but not of the subjective type we are concentrating on in this article. In the OED entry of *half-* it is defined as 'a mask covering part of the face, such as is worn with a domino'. In examples (43) and (44), by contrast, *half* is not used in its literal meaning. Instead, it measures the degree to which the properties inherent in *victory* in (43) and *failure* in (44) apply to the specific instance referred to by the whole NP. In (43), the speaker uses the phrase *half-victory* (as a classifier of the nominal head *speech*) to indicate that Senator Murray's electoral result was not good enough to be called a 'true victory'. In (44), the speaker's use of the phrase *half-failure* shows that to his or her mind, the manager in question, Sam Allardyce, did not perform so badly with his Newcastle soccer team. This type of speaker involvement, we believe, forms an important argument to assign such combinations of *half* + noun as in (43) and (44) to the proposed category of 'subjective compounds'.

Further arguments in support of a subjective compound analysis are briefly repeated from Section 2. Firstly, *half* + noun in (3), (43) and (44) are inseparable internally (e.g. **a half, undecided victory*) but form a single unit externally (e.g. *Le Pen's* leering *half-victory* in [3]). Another argument is formed by the impossibility for *half* to be graded or used predicatively: **Le Pen's leering very half-victory*, **Le Pen's leering victory that is half*. The question of paradigmatic contrasts is revealing with regard to the status of *half* as part of a compound. At first sight, one might think of adjectives such as *complete* and *total* as standing in paradigmatic contrast with *half*. The compound *half-failure* (tellingly, written with a hyphen) in (44), for example, can be contrasted with the phrase *a complete failure*. In such phrases, *complete* does not function as a descriptive attribute, but as a degree modifier (like *a complete idiot* in Figure 1), which does not allow for grading or predicative alternation either.

However, unlike the subjective compound *half-failure*, sequences like *complete failure* are not inseparable units, as they still allow for intervening words, such as the classifier *US* in (45).

(45) Underscoring the public's negativity, four times as many predicted the war in Iraq would be judged as a *complete US failure* as the number who saw a complete success, 28 percent to 7 percent. (WebCorp, http://www.boston. com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/09/12/poll_results_on_surge_differ_ sharply_from_generals_view/)

This confirms that *half failure* and *half victory* are compounds, whereas *complete failure* is a modifier-head phrase. Taking the recognition criteria of compounds into account, we find that there is variation *within* the paradigm of degree modifying compounds, illustrated by expressions such as *a **near** success* and *an **almost** win*, as in (46)

(46) Congrats on an *almost-win* tonight :D (WebCorp, http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=zPV5l2--sx4)

With regard to stress, it can be noted that these compounds tend to have forestress on the degree modifying element, in contrast with those with *little* and *old*, which have endstress.

Finally, the adjective *half* is often orthographically attached to the noun by means of a hyphen, as in (3), (43) and (44). This way of spelling the *half* + noun sequence lends further support to an analysis in terms of a (subjective) compound. We

checked the spelling of three *half* + noun strings in Present-day English data, drawn from the Internet by using the WebCorp application (http://www.webcorp.org.uk/).[59] We took exhaustive samples of the strings *half success*, *half victory* and *half failure*, with WebCorp accessing 500 webpages, using the AltaVista/Yahoo search engine. The results are detailed in Table 8. Note that for each string the number of subjective compounds is much lower than the total number of examples that were retrieved. This is because many instances were not relevant to our study, such as *first-half victory*, or *second-half failure*.

<Please insert Table 8 about here>

The data show that the hyphen spelling is fairly frequent, amounting to almost 40% in the cases of *half success* and *half failure*, and nearly 50% in the case of *half victory*. We take this as quantitative evidence in support of the analysis of subjective compound proposed here. Interestingly, the Internet dataset also includes examples that give an evaluative categorization of persons, just like the subjective compounds with *old* and *little* (see Section 2).

(47) In one paragraph, Josh is a child; in another, he's an adolescent with a masturbatory habit that would impress Alexander Portnoy; in the end, he's a *depressed half-failure*. What define him are his habits, conspicuously consump- tive and occasionally desperate. (WebCorp, http://www. webcorp. org.uk/cgi- bin/view.nm?url=http://www.forward.com/articles/1401/&term= half-failure)

---

[59] Renouf, Kehoe and Banerjee.

The degree modification expressed by *half* in subjective compounds can be situated neatly into the general semantic system of degree modification. According to Kennedy and McNally,[60] degree modification is inherently scalar. Their study applies primarily to degree modification of adjectives (e.g. *quite beautiful* in Figure 1), but allows for extension to degree modification of nouns, such as *victory* or *failure*. Degree modifiers "measure" the degree of properties in terms of "points or intervals partially ordered along some DIMENSION",[61] more precisely, in terms of two types of scales.

The first type of degree modification invokes 'open scales', measuring the actual degree of the properties on a scale with some form of assumed measure units. This is the mode of degree modification found in *very short* (of an adjective) and *a mere pittance* (of a noun). In both expressions the small size evoked by the word being modified is further reduced in size by the degree modifier. The degree modifier activates a range going up or – as in these examples – down from a reference point on an open scale defined by measuring units, not by maximum or minimum values.

The second type of degree modification invokes 'closed scales', comparing the degree to a boundary as either approximating or reaching it. Closed scale degree modifiers "calculate differences relative to minimum and maximum values on the scale" of properties conveyed by adjectives.[62] The scalar nature of this type of degree modification lies in the various values (*half*, *almost*, *complete*, etc.) that can be indicated for the difference between actual degree and maximum or minimum. Applied to properties conveyed by adjectives, this gives expressions such as *fully dead*, *semi-alive*, *more dead than alive*, and applied to properties conveyed by nouns,

---

[60] Kennedy and McNally.
[61] Kennedy and McNally, 349.
[62] Kennedy and McNally, 353..

it yields compounds such as those under consideration here, e.g. *half failure*, or phrases such as *a complete failure*,

In sum, the degree modification of nouns always involves the speaker in assessing the degree of the properties conveyed by a gradable noun vis-à-vis a scale, which makes it a subjective function. Hence, it appears fully justified to classify compounds in which *half* locates the properties conveyed by the noun on a closed scale as subjective compounds.

4. Conclusions

This article had two main aims: to make a case for the category of subjective compounds and to review the hypotheses of the left-oriented ordering of subjectivity and subjectification in the light of this new category and related phenomena.

For units such as *old fogey*, *little bleeder* and *half victory*, we have shown that there are strong formal arguments for assigning compound status to them, viz. their internal inseparability, their external single-unit status, and the non-attribute-like behaviour of the adjectives in them. We have also given lexicosemantic arguments for viewing them as subjective compounds, viz. their high degree of collocational cohesion, which foregrounds subjective meaning. Semantically, the subjective compounds with *old* and *little* are a different subtype from those with *half*, *near*, *almost*, etc. In the former, affective uses of *old* and *little* are merged into one unit with an evaluative noun, foregrounding subjective semantic features shared by both, such as the positive features 'experienced, knowledgeable' in *old hand*. In degree modifying compounds like *half victory* and *near win*, by contrast, the gradable features implied by the noun are located on an implied closed scale as halfway or near the upper end of the scale.

The existence of subjective compounds challenges hypotheses of the left-oriented ordering of subjectivity and subjectification in their present formulation. We have proposed to adopt instead a prosodic model, which recognizes that subjective meaning elements are spread over the whole NP. Not only deictic elements and subjective attributes but also subjectively coloured nominal heads are subjective elements of structure in the NP, which may attract elements of other classes and cause them to subjectify. The positional shifts involved in forming subjective compounds are rightward ones, which goes against the claim that rightward movement entails desubjectification. Instead, it has to be recognized that subjectification may involve either leftward or rightward movement. Degree modification is another 'prosodically' distributed device, causing subjectification in both leftward direction (intensifiers of adjectives and quantifiers, reinforcers of nominal descriptions) and rightward direction (*old* reinforcing the adjective it follows, degree modifying compound nouns).

Clearly, there is a lot to be uncovered yet with regard to subjectivity and subjectification in the English NP. Future research will have to give more attention to neglected pockets of subjective meaning such as the ones touched on in this article. More descriptive attention will have to go to subjectification and rightward movement. Equally, the importance of morphological processes such as compounding and affixation will have to be re-evaluated for the English NP, whose analytical structure may have been overstated. On the theoretical level, a model will have to be developed that does justice to the prosodic nature of subjective meaning elements and the consequences of this for subjectification processes.

References

Adamson, Sylvia. "*A lovely little example*. Word Order Options and Category Shift in the Premodifying String." In Olga Fischer, Anette Rosenbach and Dieter Stein, eds. *Pathways of Change. Grammaticalisation in English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000. 39-66.

Bache, Carl. *Essentials of Mastering English. A Concise Grammar*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000.

Bolinger, Dwight. "Adjectives in English: Attribution and Predication." *Lingua* 18 (1967): 1-34.

Bublitz, Wolfram. "Semantic Prosody and Cohesive Company: 'Somewhat Predictable'". *Leuven Contributions to Literature and Philology* 85, no.1 (1996): 1-32.

Breban, Tine. *English Adjectives of General Comparison: Lexical versus Grammaticalized Uses.* Topics in English Linguistics Series 63. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010.

Bybee, Joan. "Mechanisms of Change in Grammaticization: The Role of Frequency." In *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics*, edited by Brian Joseph and Richard Janda. London: Blackwell, 2003. 602-23.

Clear, Jeremy. "From Firth Principles – Computational Tools for the Study of Collocation." In *Text and Technology: In honour of John Sinclair*, edited by Mona Baker, Gill Francis and Elena Tognini-Bonelli. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1993. 271-92.

Clear, Jeremy, Gwyneth Fox, Gill Francis, Ramesh Krishnamurthy and Rosamund Moon. "COBUILD: The State of the Art." *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 1, no. 2 (1996): 303-14.

Croft, William, and Alan Cruse. *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Davidse, Kristin. "The Interaction of Quantification and Identification in English Determiners". In *Language, Culture, and Mind*, edited by Michel Achard and Suzanne Kemmer. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2004. 507-33.

De Smedt, Liesbet; Lieselotte Brems and Kristin Davidse. "NP-internal functions and extended uses of the 'type' nouns *kind*, *sort*, and *type*: Towards a comprehensive corpus-based description". In *Corpus linguistics 25 years on*, edited by Roberta Facchinetti. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 227-57.

De Smet, Hendrik. "A corpus of Late Modern English Texts." *ICAME Journal* 29 (2005): 69-82.

De Smet, Hendrik. Diffusional Change in the English System of Complementation. Gerunds, Participles and *For...to*-infinitives. PhD dissertation, University of Leuven, 2008.

De Smet, Hendrik, and Jean-Christophe Verstraete. "Coming to Terms with Subjectivity." *Cognitive Linguistics* 17 (2006): 365-92.

Denison, David. "History of the *sort of* construction family". Paper presented at the Second International Conference on Construction Grammar (ICCG2), Helsinki, 7 September 2002. Available at http://www.llc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/lel/staff/ david-denison/papers/thefile,100126,en.pdf.

Diessel, Holger. *Demonstratives: Form, function, and grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999.

di Paolo Healey, Antonette. "Words, story, history: The mapping of meaning and Toronto's *Dictionary of Old English*". In *To explain the present: Studies in the changing English language in honour of Matti Rissanen*, edited by Terttu

Nevalainen and Leena Kahlas-Tarkka. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1997. 35-49.

Dixon, Robert. "Where have all the adjectives gone?" *Studies in Language* 1, no. 1 (1977): 19-90.

Ghesquière, Lobke. "From determining to emphasizing meanings: The adjectives of specificity". *Folia Linguistica* 43, no. 2 (2009): 311-343.

Giegerich, Heinz. "The English compound stress myth**.**" *Word Structure* 2 (2009): 1-17.

González-Díaz, Victorina. "Little Old Problems. Adjectives and Subjectivity in the English NP." *Transactions of the Philological Society* 107 (2009): 376-402.

Halliday, Michael. *An introduction to functional grammar*. 2nd edition. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.

Huddleston, Rodney and Pullum, Geoffrey. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Kennedy, Christopher and Louise McNally. "Scale Structure, Degree Modification, and the Semantics of Gradable Predicates." *Language* 81 (2005): 345-81.

Kytö, Merja and Matti Rissanen. "A Language in Transition: The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts." *ICAME Journal* 16 (1992): 7-27.

Langacker, Ronald. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. *Volume II: Descriptive Application*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Martin, James. Forthcoming. "What Kind of Structure? Interpersonal Meaning and Prosodic Realization across Strata." *WORD*.

Murray, James, Henry Brodly, William Craigie and Charles Onions (eds.). *The Oxford English Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Pike, Kenneth. "Language as Particle, Wave and Field." *Texas Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1959): 37-54.

Quirk, Randoph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. *A Grammar of Contemporary English*. London: Longman, 1972.

Renouf, Antoinette, Andrew Kehoe and Jay Banerjee. "WebCorp: An Integrated System for Web Text Search." In *Corpus Linguistics and the Web*, edited by Marianne Hundt, Nadja Nesselhauf and Carolin Biewer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 47-68.

Robins, Robert H. *General Linguistics. An Introductory Survey*. 3rd edition. London: Longman, 1980.

Rundell, Michael (ed.). *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Oxford: Macmillan, 2002.

Sinclair, John. "Trust the text." In *Advances in Systemic Linguistics. Recent Theory and Practise*, edited by Martin Davies and Louise Ravelli. London: Pinter, 1992. 5-19.

Sinclair, John et al. *Collins COBUILD English Grammar*. London: HarperCollins, 1990.

Sinclair, John et al. *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary*. London: HarperCollins, 1995.

Stubbs, Michael. "Collocations and Semantic Profiles: On the Cause of the Trouble with Quantitative Studies." *Functions of Language* 2 (1995): 23-55.

Van linden, An and Kristin Davidse. "Degrees of subjectivity of prenominal adjectives: Diachronic change, linear order, and syntagmatic relations." Paper presented at FITIGRA (From ideational to interpersonal: Perspectives from grammaticalization), University of Leuven, 10-12 February 2005.

Vandewinkel, Sigi and Kristin Davidse. "The interlocking paths of development towards emphasizer adjective pure". *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 9 (2008): 255–87.

Vendler, Zeno. *Adjectives and Nominalizations*. The Hague: Mouton, 1968.

Wierzbicka, Anna. "What's in a noun? (or: How do nouns differ in meaning from adjectives?)". *Studies in Language* 10 (1986): 353-89.

Subjective compounds and subjectivity/subjectification in the English NP

Table 1: Joint frequency, T-scores and MI-scores for *old* + noun in British sections of *Wordbanks Online*

old + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score	*old* + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score
stagers	25	4.999	12.578	biddies	10	3.161	11.300
dodderers	7	2.645	12.370	fuddy-duddies	7	2.644	10.971
codgers	31	5.567	12.276	farts	41	6.400	10.833
stager	25	4.999	12.240	hag	44	6.629	10.575
codger	35	5.915	12.221	fogies	8	2.827	10.563
mucker	24	4.898	11.963	chum	104	10.190	10.249
fogey	17	4.122	11.586	bangers	25	4.996	10.206
banger	60	7.743	11.503	gits	8	2.826	10.189
biddy	18	4.241	11.464	buildings	155	12.238	5.875
fogeys	13	3.604	11.330	house	383	18.710	4.507

Table 2: The diachronic development of the uses of *old* in prenominal position

Period		postdet	subj attr	subj/obj attr	obj attr	class	obj comp	**subj comp**	Total
750–850	n	0	0	0	3	0	0	**0**	3
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	**0.0**	
850–950	n	0	0	0	9	1	3	**0**	13
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	69.2	7.7	23.1	**0.0**	
950–1050	n	0	0	2	54	8	1	**0**	65
	%	0.0	0.0	3.1	83.1	12.3	1.5	**0.0**	
1050–1150	n	0	0	0	9	0	1	**0**	10
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	90.0	0.0	10.0	**0.0**	
1150–1250	n	0	0	0	27	13	5	**0**	45
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	28.9	11.1	**0.0**	
1250–1350	n	0	0	1	11	5	1	**1**	19
	%	0.0	0.0	5.3	57.9	26.3	5.3	**5.3**	
1350–1420	n	1	3	3	44	13	11	**4**	79
	%	1.3	3.8	3.8	55.7	16.5	13.9	**5.1**	
1420–1500	n	1	0	4	30	9	13	**1**	58
	%	1.7	0.0	6.9	51.7	15.5	22.4	**1.7**	
1500–1570	n	6	0	3	38	11	5	**4**	67
	%	9.0	0.0	4.5	56.7	16.4	7.5	**6.0**	
1570–1640	n	5	2	7	36	2	19	**4**	75
	%	6.7	2.7	9.3	48.0	2.7	25.3	**5.3**	
1640–1710	n	6	0	3	56	3	14	**2**	84
	%	7.1	0.0	3.6	66.7	3.6	16.7	**2.4**	
1710–1780	n	5	1	1	44	9	24	**7**	91
	%	5.5	1.1	1.1	48.4	9.9	26.4	**7.7**	
1780–1850	n	6	1	2	51	13	21	**0**	94
	%	6.4	1.1	2.1	54.3	13.8	22.3	**0.0**	
1850–1920	n	5	3	0	43	12	20	**4**	87
	%	5.7	3.4	0.0	49.4	13.8	23.0	**4.6**	

Table 3: Synchronic uses of *old* in prenominal position

		postdet	postdet/ attr	subj attr	obj attr	class	obj comp	**subj comp**	Total
(i) *old* + noun									
Times	n	28	1	11	36	14	21	**7**	118
	%	23.7	0.8	9.3	30.5	11.9	17.8	**5.9**	
UK ephemera	n	20	3	11	49	19	11	**2**	115
	%	17.4	2.6	9.6	42.6	16.5	9.6	**1.7**	
UK spoken	n	37	4	13	43	7	48	**4**	156
	%	23.7	2.6	8.3	27.6	4.5	30.8	**2.6**	
(ii) *old* + adj (+ adj) + noun									
Times	n	29	4	8	39	1	0	**0**	81
	%	35.8	4.9	9.9	48.1	1.2	0.0	**0.0**	
UK ephemera	n	11	0	5	41	0	0	**0**	57
	%	19.3	0.0	8.8	71.9	0.0	0.0	**0.0**	
UK spoken	n	33	0	15	28	0	0	**0**	76
	%	43.4	0.0	19.7	36.8	0.0	0.0	**0.0**	
Total	n	158	12	63	236	41	80	**13**	603
	%	26.2	2.0	10.4	39.1	6.8	13.3	**2.2**	

Table 4: Joint frequency, T-scores and MI-scores for *little* + noun in British sections of *Wordbanks Online*

little + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score	*little* + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score
Hitlers	13	3.604	11.081	pipsqueak	3	1.730	9.421
blighters	14	3.740	10.965	scamp	4	1.997	9.265
blighter	10	3.160	10.702	buggers	20	4.464	9.148
minx	24	4.896	10.692	stirrer	3	1.729	8.965
bleeders	2	1.413	10.506	bugger	46	6.765	8.614
tyke	14	3.739	10.487	smasher	3	1.728	8.573
twerp	11	3.314	10.380	twat	4	1.994	8.365
bleeder	5	2.234	10.333	fucker	9	2.990	8.271
tykes	8	2.826	10.158	pieces	75	8.359	4.847
darlings	44	6.626	9.763	shop	74	8.182	4.357

Table 5: The diachronic development of the uses of *little* in prenominal position

Period		subj attr	subj/obj attr	obj attr	obj attr/class	class	obj comp	**subj comp**	Total
750–1050	n	0	0	45	0	2	0	**0**	47
	%	0.0	0.0	95.7	0.0	4.3	0.0	**0.0**	
1050–1250	n	0	0	36	1	1	0	**1**	39
	%	0.0	0.0	92.3	2.6	2.6	0.0	**2.6**	
1250–1500	n	3	12	38	1	3	1	**0**	58
	%	5.2	20.7	65.5	1.7	5.2	1.7	**0.0**	
1500–1710	n	2	4	36	1	2	4	**0**	49
	%	4.1	8.2	73.5	2.0	4.1	8.2	**0.0**	
1710–1780	n	2	6	34	0	0	3	**1**	46
	%	4.3	13.0	73.9	0.0	0.0	6.5	**2.2**	
1780–1850	n	6	5	48	0	0	8	**2**	69
	%	8.7	7.2	69.6	0.0	0.0	11.6	**2.9**	
1850–1920	n	7	3	38	0	2	6	**1**	57
	%	12.3	5.3	66.7	0.0	3.5	10.5	**1.8**	

Table 6: Synchronic uses of *little* in prenominal position

		subj attr	subj/obj attr	obj attr	obj attr/class	class	obj comp	**subj comp**	Total
(i) *little* + noun									
Times	n	48	6	223	0	21	73	**15**	386
	%	12.4	1.6	57.8	0.0	5.4	18.9	**3.9**	
UK ephemera	n	9	11	110	0	1	18	**4**	153
	%	5.9	7.2	71.9	0.0	0.7	11.8	**2.6**	
UK spoken	n	27	20	313	0	10	55	**4**	429
	%	6.3	4.7	73.0	0.0	2.3	12.8	**0.9**	
(ii) *little* + adj (+ adj) + noun									
Times	n	96	14	106	0	2	11	**1**	230
	%	41.7	6.1	46.1	0.0	0.9	4.8	**0.4**	
UK ephemera	n	52	10	55	0	2	5	**0**	124
	%	41.9	8.1	44.4	0.0	1.6	4.0	**0.0**	
UK spoken	n	15	2	72	0	4	1	**0**	94
	%	16.0	2.1	76.6	0.0	4.3	1.1	**0.0**	
Total	n	247	63	879	0	40	163	**24**	1416
	%	17.4	4.4	62.1	0.0	2.8	11.5	**1.7**	

Table 7: Joint frequency, T-scores and MI-scores for objective compounds in British sections of *Wordbanks Online*

little + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score	*old* + noun	Freq	T-score	MI-score
little girl	2310	47.887	8.098	old man	4074	63.295	6.903
little boy	1497	38.510	7.737	old age	1784	42.014	7.560
little girls	514	22.418	6.485	old lady	1093	32.999	9.068
little sister	306	17.272	6.308	old woman	1091	32.576	6.184
little ones	302	17.068	5.808	old days	1049	31.771	5.713
little brother	276	16.284	5.656	old people	1157	31.686	3.869
little boys	274	16.229	5.676	old men	570	22.893	4.605

Table 8: Spelling of subjective compounds with *half* in WebCorp data

string	total	subjective compounds		written as two words		written with a hyphen	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
half success	250	97	100	60	61.86	37	38.14
half victory	242	85	100	44	51.76	41	48.24
half failure	251	171	100	108	63.16	66	38.60

Subjective compounds and subjectivity/subjectification in the English NP

Figure 1: The functional structure of the English NP

determination			premodification			categorization	
predeter-miner	primary determiner	postdeter-miner	degree modifier	subjective attribute	objective attribute	classifier	head
all	*those*		*quite*	*beautiful*	*little*	*garden*	*flowers*
	a		*complete*				*idiot*
	the	*other*			*small*	*electric*	*trains*
such	*a*		*very*	*nice*			*blackbird*