# Dog-tired and bad-ass: Nouns as adjective intensifiers

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In other Germanic languages (e.g. German, Dutch or Swedish), nouns serving as adjective intensifiers are or used to be productive schemas (e.g. Booij 2010; Booij & Hüning 2014; Hüning & Booij 2014; Norde & Goethem 2014). However, in English this schema is less common and not yet systematically explored in the literature. This study aims at filling this gap with an explorative corpus study within a Construction Morphology framework (e.g. Booij 2010). It analyses the present-day usage of English adjectival compounds with a noun serving as the adjective intensifier in relation to other intensifying constructions.

Deeply conventionalized examples like 'pitch-black' show a very restricted number of collocates (e.g. Partington 1993: 180) and often originated in a comparative meaning that becomes bleached over time in favour of an intensifying meaning. Some of these schemas show a greater variety of collocating adjectives that have a clear intensifying meaning such as 'stone-drunk' or 'dog-tired' (cf. Plag 2003; Hüning & Booij 2014). This is particularly evident in cases where the schema is used for adjectives that are semantically incompatible with the original comparative meaning such as in 'pitch-white'.

Another example is the use of the '-ass' affixoid. This pattern deviates from the more general [NA]$_A$ compound schema because in this case the noun as the right constituent modifies the adjective which is head and the left constituent of the compound. The schema originates in metonymic and metaphorical expressions developed from 'bad-assed' to 'bad(-)ass' where the affixoid's meaning tends to be bleached in favour of an intensifying meaning. The semantic bleaching is particularly apparent in examples such as 'wild-ass guess' where the second constituent has just an intensifying function and no longer carries its original metonymic and metaphorical meaning.

The project aims at answering the following research questions:

I.      Which (sub)schemas can be identified in the English [NA]$_A$ construction?

II.     How do the subschemas differ regarding collocating adjectives and degree of productivity?

III.    How are these schemas and subschemas related to other intensifying schemas in a constructional network of English adjective intensifiers?

To answer these questions, data from the enTenTen web corpora (Kilgarriff et al. 2014; Jakubíček et al. 2013) is analysed. Entrenchment effects (approximated by combining results from absolute frequencies and attraction measures between intensifiers and adjectives (cf. e.g., Schmid 2000; Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003; Arppe et al. 2010; Uhrig 2020)) and different productivity measures (cf. e.g., Barðdal 2008; Baayen 2009) are used to identify different subschemas of the NA construction and to compare it to other adjective intensifying constructions.

I argue for the existence of a highly schematic intensifying construction which licenses a number of different subconstructions with varying degrees of schematicity. The subconstructions differ in their proximity to each other within the constructional network. Some, like many of the subconstructions using taboo expressions, are assumed to be closely connected, whereas others, like the subconstructions using compounds (for example the NA construction), are loosely connected, possibly only through their common mother, the schematic intensifying construction.

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