

Using adjectives for reference: A cross-linguistic perspective

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Adjectives are most often used for modification or predication. But they are also used in referential expressions that lack an overt noun, both to refer to entities using a property that they manifest (e.g., "the sick", "the exotic"), and to refer to properties themselves (e.g. Dutch "Het bittere van het bier" 'the bitter (taste) of the beer').

In this talk, based on work with Henriette de Swart and Veronika Richtarcikova, I begin by discussing in some detail Dutch Det+Adjective constructions and our analysis of them, in order to highlight especially some of the lesser-known aspects of reference using adjectives. I then briefly discuss various parameters of semantic and morphosyntactic variation with examples mainly from English, Spanish, and Slovak, highlighting the need to contextualize the variation within the specific features of the grammars of each language. Finally, I mention some of the challenges we faced in carrying out empirical research in this data area.