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# From syntactic coordination to conceptual modification

## The case of the *nice and Adj* construction

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The present article investigates a construction that displays a “mismatch” between form and content/function, instantiated by expressions like *nice and comfy/clean/warm*. This *nice and Adj* pattern has a “literal” transparent meaning, which corresponds to its *coordinative syntax*, but it is on its way to becoming a full-fledged construction with unpredictable formal and conceptual attributes, where *nice (and)* functions as a *conceptual-pragmatic modifier*. This pattern is thus an *emergent* construction. We argue that an adequate treatment of the *nice and Adj* construction requires the integration of inferential mechanisms, such as implicature and invited inference, into the descriptive apparatus of construction grammar.

**Keywords:** construction grammar, emergent grammar, coordination, modification, inference, pragmatic hyperonymy

### 1. Introduction

Languages frequently exhibit incongruities between different levels of linguistic organization. For example, one may quite often observe a lack of isomorphism between morphosyntactic structure on the one hand and conceptual content and/or pragmatic function on the other. Many types of incongruity have been discovered to date, and this finding has been considered in formalist linguistics, e.g. generative grammar, as evidence that language is divided into modules or components functioning according to their own rules and principles, and, in particular, as support for the claim that syntax is autonomous (Newmeyer 1983, 2000; Jackendoff 2002).

A well-known example of syntax-semantics incongruity is the discrepancy between the number of arguments *syntactically* licensed by a lexical item and the number of *conceptually* required arguments.<sup>1</sup> Consider examples (1) and (2):

- (1) Mary threatened to cancel her talk.
- (2) \*Mary threatened the conference organizers to cancel her talk.

The verb *threaten* conceptually requires three arguments: an agent/threatener, a patient (addressee of the threat), and an action to be performed by the agent. In English, when *threaten* occurs with an infinitival complement, the patient role remains obligatorily unexpressed, i.e., (2) is considered to be unacceptable. In a language like German, however, the corresponding verb *drohen* ‘threaten, menace’ may syntactically code all three conceptually required arguments:

- (3) Maria drohte den Veranstaltern, ihren Vortrag abzusagen.  
 Maria threatened the organizers.DAT her.ACC talk.ACC to-cancel  
 ‘Maria threatened the organizers with canceling her talk’

There exist also incongruities between syntactic form and pragmatic function. Assuming that in the default case an illocutionary act is coded by an independent (main) clause, dependent clauses that function as independent illocutionary acts are “deviant”. Examples of such “mismatches” between syntactic structure and pragmatic function are (4) and (5) (see e.g. Panther and Thornburg 2005 for discussion of such phenomena):

- (4) Now, if you could just give me a little chance to finish this point. (COCA 1990, SPOK, ABC\_Nightline)<sup>2</sup>
- (5) For you to do such a thing!

In (4) there is a mismatch between form and content/function in that a (dependent) conditional clause is used with the (independent) illocutionary force of a request. Similarly, in (5) an expressive speech act is conveyed through an infinitive clause, a structure that usually functions as an embedded constituent within a larger matrix clause.

1. Arguments in conceptual structure are sometimes referred to as *participants* (Goldberg 1995), but this term is slightly misleading because it suggests that conceptual arguments are individuals (e.g. objects or humans). However, it is also possible for propositions to be conceptual arguments.

2. COCA stands for ‘Corpus of Contemporary American English’. It is a corpus compiled by Mark Davies (Brigham Young University), which contains more than 360 million words of spoken and written American English and is accessible on the Internet at: <http://www.americancorpus.org>. We make extensive use of this corpus in this article.

A third group of phenomena displays discrepancies between *coordination* and *subordination* on the levels of syntax and conceptual structure. There are two combinatorial possibilities: (i) syntactic subordination that conveys conceptual coordination, and (ii) syntactic coordination that pairs with conceptual subordination. An example of (i) is what Yuasa & Sadock (2002: 100) call ‘pseudo-subordination’, instantiated by Yiddish constructions like the following:

- (6) der tate mit der mamen  
 the.NOM father with the.DAT mother  
 ‘father and mother’ (lit. ‘the father with the mother’)

Yuasa & Sadock contrast cases like (6) with ‘simple subordination’, which structurally looks exactly the same as pseudo-subordination (101):

- (7) der rebe mit-n hunt  
 the.NOM rabbi with-the.DAT dog  
 ‘the rabbi with the dog’

The preposition *mit* ‘with’, which, in Yiddish, governs the dative case, indicates syntactic subordination of a prepositional phrase within a larger noun phrase. However, as Yuasa & Sadock point out, in (6) *mit* functions conceptually like a coordinative connective. This analysis is supported by the observation that when the noun phrase (6) functions as subject, as in (8), plural agreement with the verb is required, since the subject refers to both the father (*tate*) and the mother (*mamen*) (102). In contrast, the complex noun phrase (7) requires singular agreement with the copula (*iz* ‘is’) when used as a subject, as in (9), since the subject refers to a particular rabbi — not a rabbi *and* a dog:

- (8) Der tate mit der mamen zenen/\*iz molekheyn.  
 the.NOM father with the.DAT mother are/\*is gracious  
 ‘Father and mother are gracious’
- (9) Der rebe mit-n hunt iz molekheyn.<sup>3</sup>  
 the.NOM rabbi with-the.DAT dog is gracious  
 ‘The rabbi with the dog is gracious’

Yuasa & Sadock’s examples (8) and (9) are interesting because the formal differences in subject-verb agreement constitute prime examples of how the world view of language users, i.e. conceptual, pragmatic and cultural knowledge, can have an impact on morphosyntactic structure. The subject-verb agreement patterns in (8) and (9) appear to be motivated by a traditional western worldview of how

3. Yuasa & Sadock (2002: 102) mark this sentence as ungrammatical, but it is clear from the preceding context and argumentation of their paper that they consider it grammatical.

organisms and things in the universe are hierarchically arranged. This hierarchy goes back to antiquity and was probably the prevalent world view in the middle ages, and no doubt is still very much alive in the 21st century as a common sense view or folk theory. According to this ontological scale, humans are ranked above animals, which in turn are valued higher than plants, with inanimate things at the lowest level of the hierarchy. In cognitive linguistics, the hierarchy is often referred to as the ‘Great Chain of Being’ (Lakoff & Turner 1989: ch. 4). This culturally entrenched cognitive model entails that the rabbi and his dog do not have equal status: the dog is quite literally “subordinate” to his master. As a consequence, there is singular agreement between the subject and the verb in (9). In contrast, *father* and *mother* are, at least in sentence (8), treated as equals, and this conceptualization results in plural agreement in this example.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it seems that the (possibly subliminal) world view of language users has an influence on formal grammatical properties of sentences (8) and (9), a point worth keeping in mind — even in the investigation of “formal” morphosyntactic phenomena.

There are also well-known phenomena that combine syntactic coordination with conceptual subordination. Some examples are listed below:

- (10) You drink another can of beer and I’m leaving. (‘If you drink another can of beer, I’m leaving’) (Culicover & Jackendoff 2005: 475)
- (11) Big Louie sees you with the loot and he puts out a contract on you. (‘If Big Louie sees you, he’ll put out a contract on you’) (Culicover & Jackendoff 2005: 475)
- (12) Be careful or you’ll lose your bag. (‘If you are not careful, you will lose your bag’) (Takahashi 2004: 121).
- (13) Bring alcohol to school and you will be suspended. (‘If you bring alcohol to school, you will be suspended’) (Takahashi 2004: 121)

Sentences like (12) and (13) are often called ‘pseudo-imperatives’ and have been studied extensively (for a review and in-depth discussion from a cognitive linguistic perspective, see Takahashi 2004: ch. 4).

The present article is concerned with yet another type of discrepancy between form and content/function: *syntactic coordination* that corresponds to conceptual-pragmatic *modification*. We present a case study of a coordinate adjectival construction, which we call the *nice and Adj* construction, using elements of construction grammar and pragmatic approaches that stress the importance of inference

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4. Note however that the father is mentioned before the mother, which is probably a reflection of a social hierarchy where males rank above females.

in the construction of meaning (see e.g. the contributions in Radden et al. 2007).<sup>5</sup> Our study is based on theoretical assumptions of construction grammar and other branches of cognitive linguistics, without however making use of the formalist framework of construction grammar as developed especially by Charles Fillmore and Paul Kay.<sup>6</sup>

The *nice and Adj* pattern is an especially interesting case of an *emergent* construction, i.e. an example of ongoing linguistic change. The pattern still has a “literal” semantically transparent meaning, but is on its way to becoming a full-fledged construction (in the sense of Goldberg 1995). We argue that the *nice and Adj* pattern therefore requires more flexible analytical tools than the rather rigid apparatus of construction grammar, which, in an all-or-none fashion, focuses on conventional, i.e. totally entrenched, form-meaning pairings. In particular, what is needed in the analysis of the *nice and Adj* pattern/construction (and emergent constructions in general) are pragmatic concepts such as conversational implicature (Grice 1975; Levinson 2000; Horn 2004) or, equivalently, invited inference (Geis & Zwicky 1971; Traugott & Dasher 2002).

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the *nice and Adj* construction is introduced, exemplified and distinguished from other patterns of the form *Adj and Adj*. Section 3 describes quantitative and distributional properties of *nice and Adj*, revealing that the pattern is extremely productive and providing evidence for the hypothesis that the pattern is a construction. In Section 4 we turn to the semantics and pragmatics of the construction, arguing that *nice and Adj* is in the process of developing a new conceptual and pragmatic meaning based on pragmatic inferencing. Section 5 places this research in a larger theoretical context and concludes with some desiderata for future research.

## 2. Coordinate adjective patterns and the *nice and Adj* construction

The *nice and Adj* adjective pattern occurs both in noun phrases, i.e. in an attributive function, and in verb phrases, i.e. as part of the predicate. In (14) and (15) a variety of authentic examples retrieved from online corpora and through the Google search engine give the reader a first impression of how pervasive and productive the pattern is:

5. The need for integrating discourse pragmatic information into the formalism of construction grammar has been emphasized by e.g. Östman & Fried (2004).

6. For a succinct introduction to formalist construction grammar, see e.g. Fried & Östman’s “thumbnail sketch” (Fried & Östman 2004: 11–86). For applications of this framework, see the volumes edited by Fried & Östman (2004) and Östman & Fried (2005).

*nice and Adj* in an attributive function

- (14)
- a. nice and riveting plot
  - b. a nice and knowledgeable staff
  - c. a nice and informative review
  - d. a nice and lovely car
  - e. a nice and meaningful statement
  - f. a nice and charming portrait
  - g. a nice and comfortable 3" waistband
  - h. a nice and quiet walk
  - i. a nice and swanky auditorium
  - j. a nice and chewy crust
  - k. a nice and relaxin' doodle session
  - l. a nice and relaxing atmosphere
  - m. a nice and readable summary
  - n. a nice and vibey blues bar
  - o. a nice and steady 10 knots
  - p. a nice and spicy Indonesian dish

*nice and Adj* in a predicative function

- (15)
- a. There I just wanna take it nice and slow.
  - b. This add-on [sic] makes them look nice and ajaxy.
  - c. Her fur's a little bit patchy right now as it will probably take me several days to get her nice and svelte.
  - d. The people are so nice and appreciative.
  - e. Places are limited to just 18 people to keep the workshop nice and intimate.
  - f. We are both human beings, can't we be nice and respectful?
  - g. Attractive hotel — rooms were nice and comfortable [...]

We have not detected any formal and semantic differences between the two grammatical functions that the *nice and Adj* phrase may assume in a clause. In what follows it is therefore not necessary to differentiate between attributive and predicative functions of the pattern.

The title of this section implies that we draw a conceptual distinction between *patterns* and *constructions*. Indeed, we adopt Goldberg's (1995:4) definition of a construction as a linguistic pattern whose meaning/function and/or form cannot be predicted from its components or other related constructions. The notion of pattern is thus more general than that of construction. In a more recent publication Goldberg (2006:5) loosens these definitional constraints somewhat. She now also regards patterns with predictable forms and meanings/functions as

constructions — as long as they occur with “sufficient frequency” and are stored holistically in long-term memory.

In the looser sense of Goldberg (2006) the *nice and Adj* pattern can be regarded as a construction. First, it is most likely used with “sufficient frequency”, i.e. stored as one “chunk” in long-term memory; and, second, it typically has at least one non-predictable meaning, as will be shown below. However, the construction also has a “literal” (compositional) sense, as suggested by the coordinative syntax of the pattern. In other words, the *nice and Adj* construction is an instance of a more schematic *Adj and Adj* pattern and thus inherits attributes from this pattern, but it also has its own idiosyncratic conceptual, pragmatic and phonological properties that are not predictable from the general *Adj and Adj* pattern. Incidentally, there are also instances of the *nice and Adj* pattern that are exclusively coordinative in meaning. Such cases have to be distinguished from instances of the *nice and Adj* construction that we focus on in this paper.<sup>7</sup>

As to other examples of the *Adj and Adj* pattern that do not belong to the *nice and Adj* construction, we find both semantically transparent, i.e. non-constructional, and constructional instances. The expression *good and ready* as in *I am leaving when I'm good and ready* clearly qualifies as a lower-level construction, due to its non-compositional meaning and probably also its “sufficient frequency”, but many other conjoined adjectival structures such as *tall and handsome* in *This guy is tall and handsome* do not, because they are semantically transparent.

The *nice and Adj* construction, in the sense characterized above, is exemplified in utterances such as the following (from an American television show):

- (16) What you look for in basil is *nice and fragrant*, beautiful smell and *nice and green*. (COCA 1999, SPOK, CBS\_SatMorn) (italics ours)

The phrases *nice and fragrant* and *nice and green* in (16) have no doubt a literal sense where *nice* both syntactically and semantically coordinates with the second conjuncts *fragrant* and *green*, respectively. Thus e.g. both the attributes *nice* and *fragrant* are predicated of *basil* in (16). On one reading, a sentence like *This basil is nice and fragrant* entails the two propositions ‘This basil is nice’ and ‘This basil is fragrant’. However, we contend that there is an additional emergent meaning of *nice and fragrant* in the sentence, which typically holds for many other instances of the *nice and Adj* pattern. The *nice and Adj* pattern is often pragmatically enriched by a mechanism of conceptual “feeding”: the positive sense of *nice* is inherited by the second adjectival conjunct, resulting in a semantic reanalysis of *nice* as a conceptual *modifier* of the following adjective. As the emergent modifier reading of *nice* becomes more prominent, the literal coordinative meaning suggested

7. For an example that is coordinative at the syntactic *and* the conceptual level, see Section 3.

by the syntax of the construction becomes backgrounded. Evidence for this hypothesis will be provided in Section 3 and the semantic-pragmatic analysis will be developed in detail in Section 4. Henceforth, when we use the term '*nice and Adj* construction' without any further qualification, we have the *nice and Adj* pattern in mind that has acquired a pragmatically implied *emergent* meaning and is on its way to conventionalization.

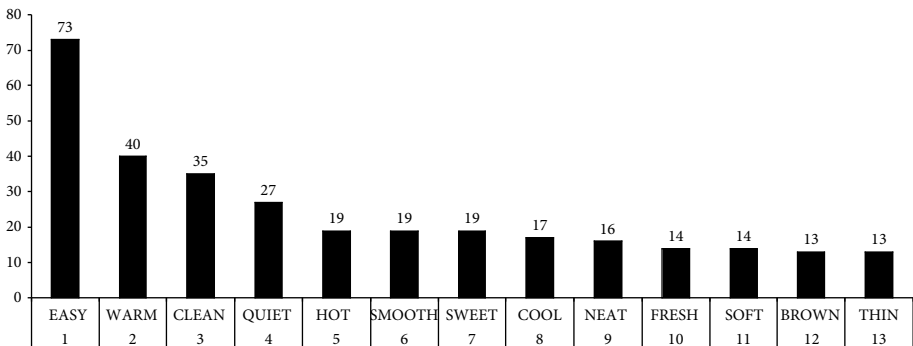
Before proceeding to the conceptual analysis of the *nice and Adj* construction, it is important to discuss some formal and distributional properties of the pattern, which will provide support for our thesis that the *nice and Adj* pattern is in fact a construction.

### 3. Formal and distributional aspects of the *nice and Adj* pattern

#### 3.1 Preferred second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern

In order to gain a first impression of the kind of adjectives that are found as second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern we searched the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for authentic spoken and written examples (see note 2). Figure 1 presents the thirteen most frequently used adjectives occurring as second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern in the COCA.

We do not claim that the quantitative ranking of second adjectival conjuncts in Figure 1 is the last word on the matter. Actually, a comparison with the ten most frequent second conjuncts as retrieved from the WebCorp (an online corpus made available by the University of Birmingham) reveals a different set of results. The only striking coincidence is that *nice and easy* is ranked first in both corpora, which points to a high degree of entrenchment of this instance of the *nice and Adj* pattern.



**Figure 1.** Absolute frequency of occurrence of second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern (COCA)

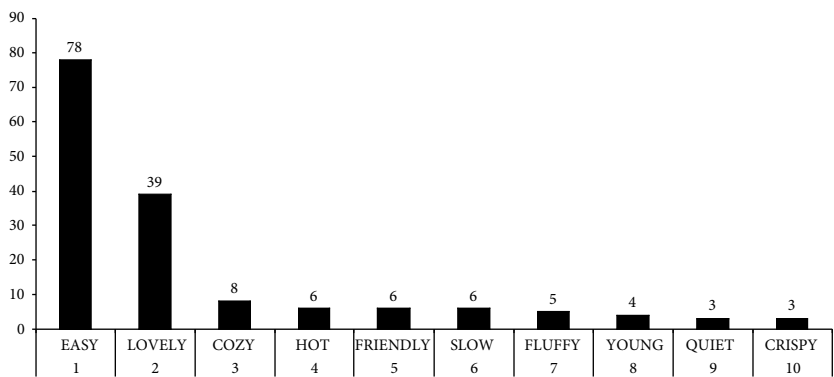


Figure 2. Absolute frequency of occurrence of second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern (WebCorp)

The adjectives that collocate with *nice and* seem to form an open set, i.e., the pattern is extremely productive. In fact, we demonstrate in what follows that there seem to be few, if any, conceptual restrictions on the adjectives that can appear as second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern.

3.2 Ordering of adjectival conjuncts

Support for the claim that the *nice and Adj* pattern constitutes a construction comes from a comparison of the frequency of the conjunct order *nice and Adj* with that of the reverse order *Adj and nice*. We contrasted the twelve most frequent adjectives found as second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern (COCA) with their frequency of use as first conjuncts in the pattern *Adj and nice*. The numbers are plotted in Figure 3.

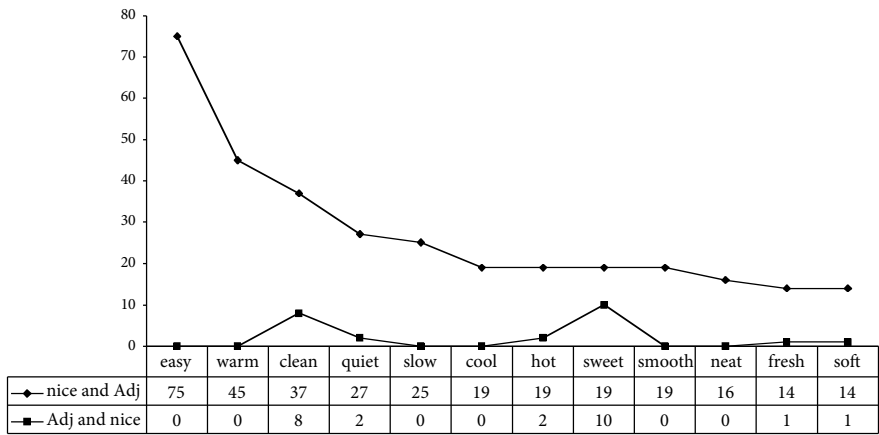


Figure 3. Absolute frequency of occurrence of conjunct ordering (COCA)

The quantitative results graphed in Figure 3 are quite revealing: It turns out that *nice and Adj* is overwhelmingly (93.2 %) the preferred conjunct order. The reverse order *easy and nice* seems to be unacceptable because of the high degree of idiomatization of *nice and easy*, but other semantically and pragmatically possible combinations such as *warm and nice*, *slow and nice*, *cool and nice*, *smooth and nice*, and *neat and nice* are not attested in COCA.

The tendency for *nice* to occur preferentially as the first conjunct is confirmed by usages retrieved in a Google search. See Figure 4.<sup>8</sup>

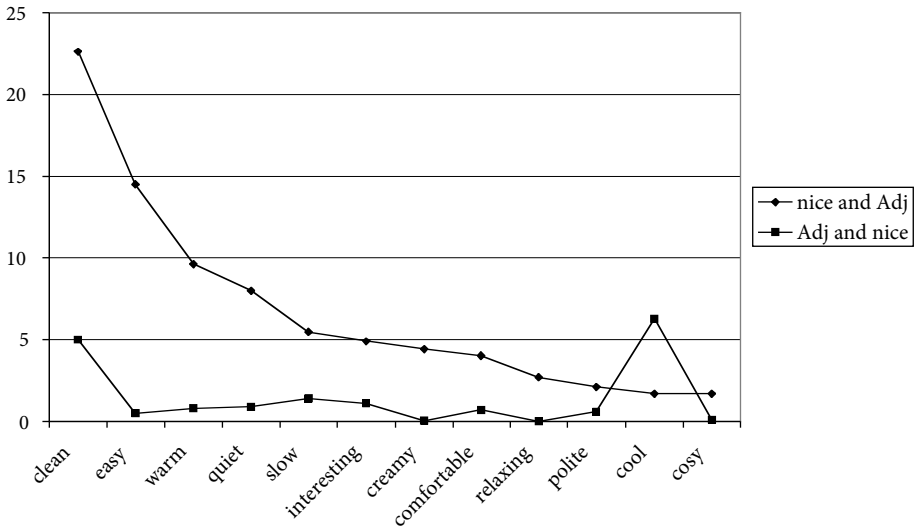


Figure 4. Frequency of occurrence of conjunct ordering in percentages (Google search)

In conclusion, the constituent order *nice and Adj* is, in actual usage, preferred over the order *Adj and nice*. This is an unpredictable formal feature of the pattern and thus supports the hypothesis that *nice and Adj* has construction status in the sense of Goldberg (1995, 2006).

### 3.3 Phonological attrition and cliticization of *and*

An additional formal property of the *nice and Adj* pattern that can be regarded as evidence of its status as a construction is the tendency of *and* in spoken discourse to develop phonologically reduced forms and even cliticize to its preceding host *nice*: [ænd] > [ənd] > [ən] > [n]. In the written language, this cliticization, if it is

8. We are aware that the absolute numbers provided by Google are probably unreliable because of the numerous repeated postings of identical sources. Nevertheless, the predominance of *nice* in first conjunct position is also evident in the Google data.

marked at all, shows up as 'n. Phonological attrition and cliticization can be regarded as formal indicators that the two adjectival conjuncts are tightly connected conceptually and that the pattern *nice and Adj* has developed an idiosyncratic meaning, a characteristic property of a construction.

#### 4. The conceptual-pragmatic meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction

##### 4.1 The non-compositional nature of the *nice and Adj* construction

The question whether the *nice and Adj* pattern qualifies as a construction can be elucidated further by comparing its *logical* behavior with other *Adj and Adj* patterns. As already mentioned, we assume that the pattern retains a transparent coordinative meaning, which isomorphically maps onto its syntactic form. Yet we also claim that there is a conceptual “drift” away from this transparent meaning towards a sense where *nice* modifies the second adjective rather than being conjoined with it. It is this latter meaning of the *nice and Adj* pattern that is not (solely) predictable from its parts and the structural relations obtaining among them. In what follows, we focus on this “unpredictable” or, as we also say, “emergent” meaning of the *nice and Adj* pattern, which we call the ‘*nice and Adj* construction’. Our methodology in this section is to contrast the *nice and Adj* construction with “ordinary” conjoined adjectives whose semantics is transparent.

As a first distributional criterion, let us consider what in classical generative grammar is known as *conjunction reduction*. The basic idea encapsulated in this term is that sentences containing coordinate conjunctions such as *and* and *or* have an underlying structure in which the conjuncts or disjuncts are assumed to have the form of fully-fledged clauses. Semantically, these clauses are thus considered to be carriers of propositional content. This generativist approach to conjoined structures has some theoretical problems, but what is relevant in the present context is that conjunction reduction can be used as a heuristic to determine whether the *nice and Adj* pattern has a compositional meaning. According to the rule of conjunction reduction, instances of the *Adj and Adj* pattern, such as (17a), are derivable from and truth-conditionally equivalent to (17b), where *this house* refers to the same house in both clauses (indicated by identical subscripts):

- (17) a. This house is spacious and comfortable.
- b. This house<sub>i</sub> is spacious and this house<sub>i</sub> is comfortable.

Sentences (17a) and (17b) mean indeed the same thing — even if the latter is stylistically awkward. The “reduced” version (17a) entails both that the house is

spacious and that it is comfortable. However, this synonymy relation does not appear to hold between (18a) and (18b):

- (18) a. This house is nice and cozy.  
 b. This house<sub>i</sub> is nice and this house<sub>i</sub> is cozy.

While (18b) entails both that this house is nice and that it is cozy, we claim that (18a), in one of its meanings, implies only that this house is cozy — not necessarily that it is also nice in all other respects, such as spaciousness, good location, etc. The main point of the message conveyed by (18a) is that the coziness of the house is a nice property, which is not the same as the conjunctive meaning that the house is both nice and cozy. By means of *nice* the speaker expresses a *positive evaluation* of the attribute ‘cozy’, and by extension, of the proposition that the house is cozy. It seems possible to say (19a) without contradiction, but not (19b):

- (19) a. This house is nice and cozy, but not so nice in other respects.  
 b. #This house<sub>i</sub> is nice and it<sub>i</sub> is cozy, but it<sub>i</sub> is not so nice in other respects.

It is important to note that the emergent meaning of (18a) cannot be computed by semantic composition alone; rather it is the result of inferential enrichment (discussed in Section 4.3). The emergent meaning of *nice and Adj* as exemplified in (18a) is not only different in pragmatic meaning from the clausal conjunction (18b), but it may differ from (18b) even in truth-conditional meaning, i.e., (18b) may be true in a situation where (18a) is false. The following utterance, which comes fairly close to the point we want to make with the constructed example (19a), was retrieved from the Internet (July 13, 2008):

- (20) PDF is nice and well supported but it's a bitch to edit. ([www.linux.com/feature/29685](http://www.linux.com/feature/29685))

The writer of (20) wants to convey the view that the attribute ‘well-supported’ is a nice feature of PDF, but implies that another feature, the editing function, cannot lay claim to the attribute ‘nice’.

Note that the same kind of *but*-clause as in (19a,b) is pragmatically odd when added to (17a):

- (21) #This house<sub>i</sub> is spacious and comfortable, but it<sub>i</sub> is not so spacious in other respects.

Consider next the behavior of the adjectival conjuncts with regard to their *commutability*. Commutability of conjuncts is a well-known property of *logical* conjunction, i.e., the truth value of two conjoined propositions *p* and *q* remains the same, independent of whether they are conjoined in the order *p* & *q* or *q* & *p*. We have already seen in Section 3.2 that *nice* preferably occurs in first conjunct position in

actual usage, although this fact does of course not preclude the possibility that the reverse conjunct order is semantically coherent and pragmatically acceptable.

The order of the adjectival conjuncts *spacious* and *comfortable* in (17a), repeated here as (22a), can be reversed without any change in meaning as in (22b) (at least in truth-conditional terms), but a reversal in conjunct ordering has some impact on meaning when the position of *nice* is switched from first to second conjunct, as in (23a,b):

- (22) a. This house is spacious and comfortable.
- b. This house is comfortable and spacious.
- (23) a. This house is nice and cozy.
- b. This house is cozy and nice.

When *nice* occurs as the second conjunct, as in (23b), it is semantically understood as a conjunct, on a par with the first conjunct *cozy*. In other words, the meaning of the coordinate structure *cozy and nice* is transparent. Sentence (23b) is true in a situation where both ‘The house is cozy’ and ‘The house is nice’ express true propositions. In contrast, (23a) conveys the emergent meaning that the speaker positively evaluates the house as cozy. In other words (23a) is not merely a simple assertion, but in addition, an expression of speaker attitude. The meaning of (23a) can be paraphrased as (24a) whereas (24b) is not a possible paraphrase of (23b):

- (24) a. What’s nice about the house is that it is cozy.
- b. #What’s cozy about the house is that it is nice.

As already pointed out in Section 3.2, when the meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction is highly idiomatized, as in the case of *nice and easy*, the conjuncts cannot be commuted at all:

- (25) a. The difference is now I *take it nice and easy*... I only run six to eight miles a day. (COCA 1993, MAG, SatEvenPost) (italics ours)
- b. #The difference is now I *take it easy and nice*...

Table 1 summarizes the distributional and logical properties of the *nice and Adj* construction in contrast to “ordinary” *Adj and Adj* patterns discussed above.

Before we turn to the analysis of *nice* (Section 4.2) and of the *nice and Adj* construction (Section 4.3), a word of caution is in order. Not everything that looks formally like an instance of the *nice and Adj* construction actually is one. Consider the following headline from the online edition of the magazine *Nature News* (November 21, 2007, retrieved via the WebCorp):

- (26) Babies can spot nice and nasty characters.

**Table 1.** Logical properties of the *Adj and Adj* pattern vs. the *nice and Adj* construction

Distributional, logical and semantic properties	<i>Adj and Adj</i>	<i>nice and Adj</i> (emergent meaning)
Commutability of conjuncts	√	×
Conjunction reduction	√	×
Compositional meaning	√	×

√ property applies

× property does not apply

According to the criteria established above, the adjectival phrase *nice and nasty* is clearly not an example of the *nice and Adj* construction in the sense intended here. First, the two conjuncts *nice* and *nasty* are commutable without any change in truth-conditional meaning. In (26) *nice* is on a par with *nasty*, both of which modify the head noun *characters*. This interpretation is supported by the subtitle following the headline, viz. *Infants as young as six months instinctively prefer helpful characters*. Second, the content of (26) can also be expressed by two conjoined clauses *Babies<sub>i</sub> can spot nice characters and they<sub>i</sub> can spot nasty characters*. And third, the meaning of (26) is transparent, i.e. compositional.

#### 4.2 The meaning of *nice*

The previous discussion has provided some evidence that the *nice and Adj* pattern is a construction in the sense of Goldberg (1995, 2006). It fulfills two criterial conditions of constructionhood: (i) formal non-predictability, i.e. a clear preference for the sequence *nice and Adj* rather than the order *Adj and nice*, and (ii) a drift towards semantic-pragmatic non-predictability, i.e., some aspect of its meaning is not computable from its components.

A good-starting point for elucidating the non-predictable meaning of *nice and Adj* is to consider the semantic contribution of *nice* to the construction.<sup>9</sup> The lexeme *nice* is typically illustrated by sentences such as the following (adapted from the online dictionary *Oxford American Dictionaries*):

- (27) a. We had a nice time.  
 b. That wasn't very nice of him.  
 c. Jeremy had been very nice to her.

9. It is interesting albeit not directly relevant to our topic to look briefly at the etymology of *nice*. The word goes back to the Latin adjective *nescius* (from *ne-* 'not' and *sci-* 'know') and came into the English language via the Old French form *nice* 'silly, simple' in the 13th century. In Middle English the sense of *nice* 'foolish, stupid' is still prevalent and it is as late as the 18th century that the word acquires its positive sense 'delightful, agreeable, etc.'

- d. He's a really nice guy.
- e. The student made a nice distinction.
- f. This is a nice point.

The sense of *nice* is usually characterized in dictionaries as 'pleasant, agreeable, satisfactory, good-natured, kind' (27a–d) and 'fine or subtle; requiring careful thought or attention' (27e–f).<sup>10</sup> All these senses share the feature POSITIVE PROPERTY (or alternatively POSITIVE ATTRIBUTE). *Nice* can be regarded as a cover term (hyperonym) for a fairly open set of more specific conceptual attributes whose contextual meanings depend on the THINGS they apply to. A THING is understood here in the sense of Langacker (2000: 10) as an object of some sort or, more abstractly, a "conceptual reification" (see Figure 5).

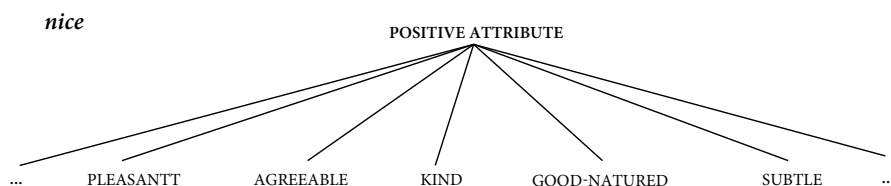


Figure 5. Some contextually specified senses of *nice*

To summarize, the meaning of *nice* as a predicate adjective and adjectival modifier can be characterized as in Figure 6.

We claim that this semantic characterization of *nice* is inherited by the *nice and Adj* construction.

### 4.3 The meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction

In dictionaries of idiomatic or colloquial English one rarely finds *nice and Adj* as a separate entry. Two exceptions are the idiomatic English dictionaries compiled by Cowie, Mackin & McCaig (1985) and Harmon (1995). The former contains an entry *nice and quiet etc./quietly etc.* and characterizes *nice and* as an "adv[erbial] mod[ifier] (of degree, extent) of adj[ective]/adv[erb] it precedes"; the latter work has a subentry s.v. *nice* under the heading *nice and*, whose meaning is defined as "quite, very (esp. regarding s/thing positive)". These definitions form useful

10. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (Stein & Urdang 1967) lists one sense of *nice* that has a negative connotation, 'having dainty or fussy tastes', as well as the pejorative synonyms *fastidious*, *finical*, *finicky*. To our thinking, such negative senses typically come about when *nice* is used with *too* or when an excess degree of 'niceness' is implied. These peripheral negative meanings of *nice* do not seem to be inherited by the *nice and Adj* construction and are irrelevant to our analysis of the construction.

Sem/Prag	POSPROP	[THING]]
	⋮	⋮
Form	nice	(x)

POSPROP	positive property
THING	object, person, event, proposition (i.e. everything that can be reified)
x	variable for constituent that <i>nice</i> modifies or is predicated of

Figure 6. The meaning of *nice*

starting-points for an adequate semantic-pragmatic characterization of the *nice and Adj* construction, but Cowie, Mackin & McCaigs's (1985) claim that *nice and* functions as an adverbial modifier confounds the levels of form and meaning. Syntactically, *nice* is a conjunct and *and* a coordinative connective, but semantically the authors are, in our view, on the right track. More importantly, it is by no means evident, as claimed by the above-mentioned lexicographers, that *nice and* systematically displays a meaning of intensification (see Section 4.5 for a discussion of these issues).

To get a flavor of the meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction consider the following WebCorp examples, some of which are reduplicated from (15). The *nice and Adj* expressions are italicized for ease of readability.

- (28) a. Places are limited to just 18 people to keep the workshop *nice and intimate*.  
 b. [...] I just wanna take it *nice and slow*.  
 c. [...] staff was *nice and accommodating*.  
 d. Let me take you to a place *nice and quiet* [...].  
 e. This add-on [sic] makes them look *nice and ajaxy*.  
 f. Her fur's a little bit patchy right now as it will probably take me several days to get her *nice and svelte*.  
 g. The people are so *nice and appreciative*.  
 h. We are both human beings, can't we be *nice and respectful*?  
 i. Attractive hotel — rooms were *nice and comfortable* [...]  
 j. Serve immediately so it's *nice and crunchy*.  
 k. The king bed room I had was very *nice and clean*.  
 l. Finally, the OS looked a heck of a lot like the Mac OS, all *nice and graphickey*.

- m. The front desk employees and valet guys were very *nice and polite*.
- n. The keypad is also *nice and responsive* (unlike the buggy previous version).
- o. [...] there's some way to insert a cooling element into it so that you can keep that white wine *nice and chilly*.

In Section 4.2 it was claimed that *nice* is a semantic device of positive evaluation. In many of the sentences in (28), the second conjunct is clearly semantically and pragmatically congruent with *nice* in that it also denotes a positive assessment. For example, *clean* in (28k) has a positive connotation in probably most human cultures. Similarly, *accommodating* (28c), *svelte* (28f), *appreciative* (28g), *respectful* (28h), *comfortable* (28i), and *polite* (28m) all express positively rated properties.

The examples in (28) might suggest that it is some inherent conceptual trait of positive evaluation in the second conjunct that licenses its co-occurrence with *nice*. One could therefore be tempted to draw the inductive generalization that the second conjunct in the *nice and Adj* construction *must* carry this inherent semantic feature. On closer inspection, this turns out to be the wrong prediction. To see this, consider (28o), which contains the attributes *nice* and *chilly* predicated of *white wine*. The property denoted by *chilly* is surely not an inherently positive attribute. On the contrary, in many contexts *chilly* is loaded with negative associations, as in the sentence *Summers in Hamburg are often rainy and chilly*. But in the context of the right drinking temperature of white wine, the attribute *chilly* has a positive ring. The linguistic indicator that *chilly* is to be understood as a positive quality here is the first conjunct *nice*.

We therefore conclude that the second conjunct of the *nice and Adj* construction is not licensed by virtue of its inherent meaning, but that it is dynamically, i.e. pragmatically, construed by the speaker as a positively rated attribute in a specific communication situation. This kind of dynamic pragmatic construal is especially conspicuous in brand names, names of businesses, titles of pop music albums, and the like, which frequently exploit the *nice and Adj* construction. Examples retrieved from the Internet abound and include the following (spellings have not been standardized):

- (29) a. *Nice 'n Rough* (album of pop singer Tina Turner)
- b. *Nice 'N Naughty Fashions*
- c. *Nice 'N Wild Music Online*
- d. *Nice 'N Easy* (Frank Sinatra album)
- e. *Nice 'n' Greazy* (pop group Big Papa album)
- f. *Nice 'n' Sleazy* (restaurant in Glasgow)
- g. *Nice 'n Tight* (1985) (movie title)
- h. *Nice n Stripy* (grasscutting company)

- i. *Nice 'n Naughty* (name of adult shop)
- j. *Nice 'n Clear* (head lice lotion)
- k. *Nice 'n Simple Subscribe Badges*
- l. *Nice 'n Natural Spain* (travel company)
- m. *Nice 'N' Ugly* (pop music album)

The second conjuncts in (29a–m) do not inherently possess positive evaluative features, but their positiveness is pragmatically implied in the presence of the preceding *nice*. Sometimes the second conjunct has even negative connotations, at least in the mainstream culture, but in the context of subcultures that want to distance themselves from the mainstream culture these negative attributes acquire a positive connotation. Consider for example *Nice 'n Sleazy*, the name of a restaurant in Glasgow. *Sleazy* is usually applied to persons with the meaning ‘sordid, corrupt or immoral’ and to places, such as cafés and bars, with the reading ‘squalid and seedy’. Despite its inherently pejorative sense, within the *nice and Adj* construction *sleazy* is construed as a positive attribute of the culinary establishment in question — perhaps with a tinge of self-deprecating humor and irony. An analogous analysis holds for *Nice 'n Naughty*, which conveys that naughtiness is an attractive feature of the shop thus named. What happens here is that the positive meaning of *nice* “feeds” into, or is inherited by, the subsequent adjectival conjunct even if, in terms of its standard meaning, the second conjunct does not seem to lend itself to or even contradicts a positive evaluation. Note that the reduced and cliticized *'n* instead of *and* in (29) indicates a tight conceptual connection between the first and the second conjunct, as discussed in Section 3.3.

As two more mundane examples demonstrating that the second conjunct does not have to be intrinsically positive, consider *nice and cheap* and *nice and chewy*. Neither *cheap* nor *chewy* are inherently positively evaluated attributes. We found the latter in the WebCorp, collocating with *pizza*, and obviously ‘chewy’ is construed here as a positive attribute of the food item in question. Similarly, *cheap* is not by itself regarded as a positive attribute, but in using *nice* as the first conjunct the speaker signals that ‘cheap’ is a desirable property in the communicative context.

What remains to be done then is to spell out in more detail the conceptual-pragmatic meaning and its derivation from the “literal” meaning of *nice and Adj*. This is the focus of the following section.

#### 4.4 Source and target meanings of the *nice and Adj* construction

We propose that the (emergent) meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction is the result of inferential processes triggered by the *source meaning* of the pattern re-

sulting in a *target meaning*. We assume that the *nice and Adj* pattern goes through (at least) three stages of meaning development. The first stage (source meaning) is transparent; *nice and Adj* has a coordinative meaning, i.e., the relation between syntactic structure and conceptual structure is isomorphic. The second and third stages involve successively higher degrees of discrepancy between syntactic form and conceptual-pragmatic content. Our model allows for one and the same *nice and Adj* expression to exhibit these successive stages of meaning change simultaneously.

As an example of how the non-compositional meaning of *nice and Adj* constructions can be derived, consider the following utterance:

- (30) And they are energy efficient, this office which is usually sweltering HOT no matter what the temp is outside, is actually *nice and comfy*. (WebCorp; italics ours)

The compositional meaning of *nice and comfy* in (30) can be characterized as follows. The phrase *nice and comfy* is predicated of some THING (here: ‘the office’) and approximately has the meaning ‘the thing is both nice (has a positive property) and it is comfy’. Using a simplified predicate calculus notation, we can represent this meaning as in (31):

- (31) [NICE [THING (x)]] AND [COMFY [THING(x)]]

We call (31) the *source meaning* of the construction *nice and comfy*, which in more general terms can be diagrammed as in Figure 7. This “literal” reading, which conveys that the office is both nice and comfy, is a possible interpretation of *nice and comfy* in (30). This is the input for further pragmatically enriched interpretations.

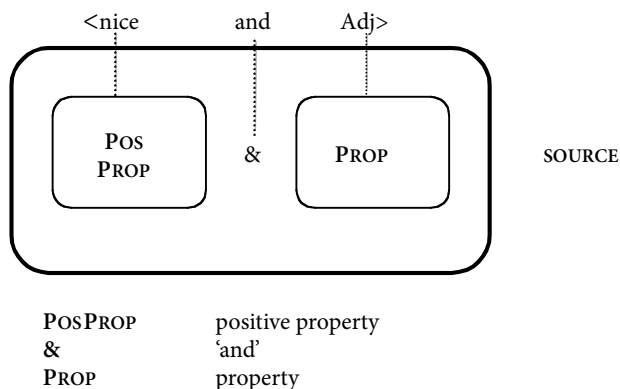


Figure 7. Source meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction

In many contexts the phrase *nice and comfy*, as the *nice and Adj* pattern in general, goes beyond the source meaning diagrammed in Figure 7. The phrase may trigger an *implicated* sense paraphrasable as ‘generally nice and, more specifically, comfy’, i.e., the connective *and* is pragmatically elaborated and *nice* is construed as a *hyperonym* of the subsequent attribute denoted by *comfy*.<sup>11</sup>

- (32) [[NICE [THING (x)]]] AND [[COMFY [THING (x)]]] +> [[NICE [THING(x)]]] AND MORE SPECIFICALLY [COMFY [THING (x)]]]

Pragmatically, this first inferential step involves an implicature that, in Neo-Gricean terms, is based on the maxim or heuristic ‘Don’t say more than you must’ (Grice 1975; Levinson 2000; Horn 2004). The connective *and* codes minimal information, but this information can easily be elaborated inferentially in the given context: *nice* is a generic positive attribute (hypernym) and the following adjective *comfy* is interpreted as a specific instantiation (hyponym) of the generic property expressed by *nice*. In general terms, the inferential step from the source to the first target meaning can be diagrammed as in Figure 8.

The inference diagrammed in Figure 8 is *invited* by intrinsically positively evaluated second conjuncts such as *comfy*, *clean*, *swanky*, *quiet*, etc. These adjectives can be easily construed as hyponyms of the superordinate semantic category *nice*. We hypothesize that second conjuncts with an intrinsic positive value, which are semantically compatible with *nice*, are prime candidates for being interpreted as hyponyms. However, as shown especially in Section 4.7, adjectives that are neutral or even negative in value can appear as second conjuncts in the construction and are contextually reinterpreted as positive.

From the interpretation of the relation between *nice* and the second conjunct as one of hyperonymy, it is only one step to a reading of *nice* as a conceptual modifier of the property denoted by the subsequent adjective, in our example *comfy*. Thus, there is a second implicature/invited inference of the following sort:

- (33) [[NICE [THING(x)]]] AND MORE SPECIFICALLY [COMFORTABLE [THING (x)]]]  
+> [NICE [COMFORTABLE [THING (x)]]]

In the implicatum of (33), NICE functions as a higher-order property. What *nice and* ultimately does is introduce a generic frame of positive evaluation into which the more specific property and the thing it applies to is inserted. We call the result of this second inferential step TARGET<sub>2</sub>. In the process of inferential elaboration, target meanings become progressively conceptually prominent (foregrounded) and at the same time the source meaning becomes more and more backgrounded,

11. The symbol ‘+>’ stands for the relation of implicature.

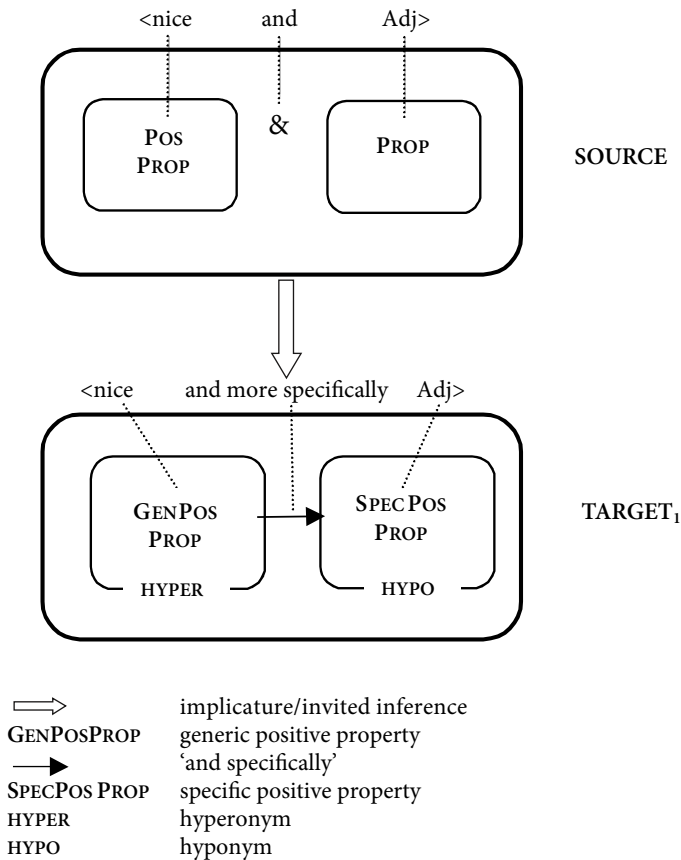


Figure 8. First target meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction

albeit still accessible. In general terms, the derivation of the pragmatically construed meaning of *nice and Adj* is diagrammed in Figure 9.

#### 4.5 Subjectification and information structure of the *nice and Adj* construction

It was pointed out in Section 3.1 that the order *nice and Adj* is preferred over the order *Adj and nice* in naturally occurring discourse. This formal property has important semantic-pragmatic correlates. First, the first conjunct *nice* has less communicative weight than the second conjunct. The second conjunct has end weight and conveys the central part of the message (evaluated positively by means of *nice*). In Langacker's (2000) terms, one could say that *nice* is a *conceptually dependent* element elaborated by the second conjunct; syntactically, however, *nice* is on a par with the second conjunct. The development of *nice and* can be regarded as

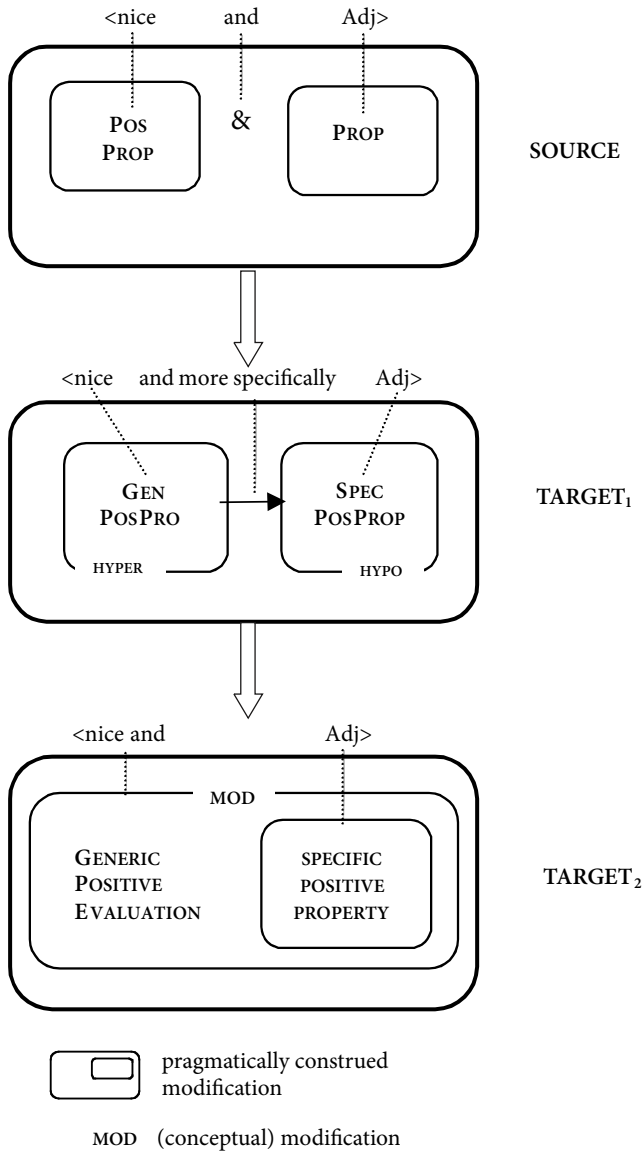


Figure 9. Second target meaning of the *nice and Adj* construction

a process of subjectification (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 89–99, et passim) in the sense that *nice and* has come to express a mental evaluative attitude of the speaker, a movement away from a more “objective” assessment of a *THING* to a subjective evaluation of a *PROPOSITION*.

#### 4.6 Is *nice and* an intensifier?

At the beginning of Section 4.3, two dictionary definitions of *nice and* (*Adj*) were given, both of which emphasize the role of *nice and* as an intensifier. In this section we argue that the intensifier reading of *nice and* is not impossible, but in those contexts where it applies, it is conceptually and pragmatically based on the meaning of positive evaluation that we regard as the core meaning of the emergent *nice and Adj* construction. The intensifier meaning is quite often a side effect of the evaluative construction meaning (TARGET<sub>2</sub> in Figure 9), derivable via pragmatic inference. To see this, consider the following examples:

- (34) [...] and then flip to the other side so it'll get *nice and crusty*. Ok? (COCA, 2007, SPOK, CBS\_early)
- (35) They said it was because it was hot and miserable in Dallas in the summer and *nice and cool* at the cabin, but she knew it wasn't true. (COCA 1993, FIC, Mitigating Circumstances)

In (34) the property 'crusty' of the food is based on a subjective positive evaluation of the speaker. Similarly, what is most relevant in the context of utterance (35) is the expression of the subjective feeling that the temperature is *pleasantly* cool. Both (34) and (35) imply a sufficient degree of "crustiness" and "coolness", respectively, which correlates with the pleasantness of the experience conveyed in these sentences. The general reasoning process from a positive evaluation of a property of a THING to the conclusion that the thing possesses this property to a sufficient or sometimes a high degree is thus quite natural, but it is certainly in principle cancellable (see Figure 10).

That the implicature of degree is not an entrenched pragmatic component of the meaning of *nice and Adj* constructions can be seen also from the fact that *non-gradable* adjectives may appear as second conjuncts in the construction. The following were retrieved from the Internet:

- (36) [W]ell I made the list really *nice and alphabetical* using MS Works spreadsheet but it won't let me copy and paste into here. (italics ours) [www.cheapassgamer.com/forums/showthread.php]
- (37) The entire festival lineup is available here, all *nice and alphabetical* [...] [twitchfilm.net/site/archive/date/2005/03]

The second conjunct *alphabetical* is non-gradable (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:531), i.e. cannot not be modified by a degree adverb such as *rather*, *very*, *quite*, etc. Obviously then, *nice* cannot have a 'degree' sense in examples (36) and (37).

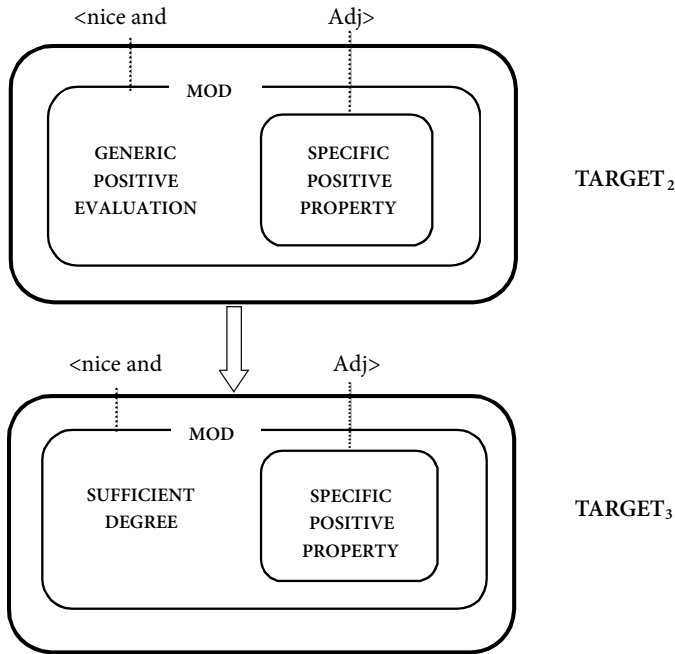


Figure 10. Implicature of degree (in certain contexts)

In conclusion then, *nice and* may have an additional implicature of intensification of the second conjunct when used with gradable adjectives, but this meaning is not systematically conveyed by the *nice and Adj* construction.

#### 4.7 Are there constraints on second conjunct choice?

The *nice and Adj* construction is a very productive pattern, but this does not mean that *any* adjective can function as the second conjunct of the construction. In this section we discuss some semantic-pragmatic factors that might possibly constrain the range of adjectives allowed to occur in the second conjunct slot of the construction. It turns out that the *nice and Adj* construction is pragmatically very flexible in that *nice* is a powerful tool for imposing its semantic value on the second conjunct.

We have pointed out repeatedly that *nice* functions as a superordinate term for the second conjunct, the latter spelling out the conceptual specifics of what is generally positively evaluated by the former. The second conjunct is not necessarily inherently ameliorative in meaning. We thus do not have textbook examples of hyperonymy-hyponymy relations (e.g. Saeed 2003: 68–70), i.e. relatively stable meaning relations among lexical items. There are many cases where the second conjunct acquires its ameliorative meaning only through an effect of “feeding”

from the first conjunct. In other words, *nice and* creates a superordinate conceptual frame that prompts the listener to understand the second conjunct as a positive property (see also Croft & Cruse 2004: 141–150 on the dynamic construal of hyperonymy).

Nevertheless the construction does not seem to work, at least in serious non-ironic communication, if the second conjunct is conceptually incompatible with the meaning of *nice*. For example, cases like the following should rarely if ever occur:

- (38) a. #She's nice and despicable.  
 b. #The weather is nice and horrible.  
 c. #This book is nice and awful.  
 d. #John is nice and cruel.  
 e. #Bill is a nice and immoral person.

We searched the COCA for instances of the *nice and Adj* construction, focusing on some conceptual spaces typically opened up by *nice*: the domains of (i) aesthetic visual perception, (ii) taste, (iii) manner of action/activity and (iv) emotion.<sup>12</sup> We chose three adjectives in each of these four conceptual domains with intuitively positive and negative connotations, respectively, and checked whether they are attested in the COCA as second conjuncts in the *nice and Adj* pattern. The interpretation of the results has to remain somewhat provisional and tentative because the raw frequencies are rather low and do not always square with native speakers' intuitions about what is a possible instance of the *nice and Adj* pattern. But again the results support our hypothesis that positively evaluated adjectives are the preferred option as second conjuncts. Table 2 lists the number of hits (if any) and provides one example per pattern from the corpus.

Notice that some of the positive adjectives, here *careful*, *meticulous* and *conscientious*, which one would expect to be possible in the *nice and Adj* construction, do not occur in the COCA but, in fact, they are frequently found on the Internet (Google search) and sound perfectly natural (italics ours):

- (39) They were really *nice and careful* with our stuff. The move went extremely smoothly.  
 (40) Dr. Howze is so *nice and meticulous* with his work!  
 (41) Everyone here is so *nice and conscientious*.

12. The adjectives chosen were listed as belonging to the same lexical field as to *nice*, according to Roget's *Thesaurus* (Lloyd 1982).

Table 2. Compatibility with *nice*: positive vs. negative second conjunct

Conceptual domain	Positive	N	Example	Negative	N
Esthetic visual perception	<i>beautiful</i>	1	[...] make sure that the skin looks nice and beautiful. (1999, SPOK CBS_Sat-Morn)	<i>ugly</i>	0
	<i>handsome</i>	1	[That] guy has done rotten things for his whole life and he still looks nice and handsome (2003, SPOK, NPR_Saturday)	<i>hideous</i>	0
	<i>pretty</i>	7	This area is so nice and pretty, with a lot of trees. (2004, NEWS, Atlanta)	<i>distorted</i>	0
Taste	<i>tasty</i>	1	Jim gets a London Fizz, and I get a Pink Ginger. Nice and tasty for \$8. (2006, MAG, Sunset)	<i>tasteless</i>	0
	<i>sweet (including metaphorical uses)</i>		When selecting a strawberry, you smell it. It's nice and sweet, firm, no dents, ready to go. (1999, SPOK, CBS_SatMorn)	<i>sour</i>	0
	<i>crisp (including metaphorical uses)</i>	12	SEED BISCOTTI These low-fat cookies are twice baked, so they're nice and crisp. (1993, MAG, MotherEarth)	<i>bitter</i>	0
Manner of activity	<i>careful</i>	0		<i>careless</i>	0
	<i>meticulous</i>	0		<i>neglectful</i>	0
	<i>conscientious</i>	0		<i>sloppy</i>	0
Emotions	<i>pleasant</i>	3	They thought Ellie was so nice and pleasant (2003, FIC, BkGen)	<i>worrying</i>	0
	<i>happy</i>	3	I wish I could believe in that. I mean, that's something nice and happy, but that's not the way life is. (1999, SPOK, NPR_ATC)	<i>distressing</i>	0
	<i>enjoyable</i>	0		<i>annoying</i>	0

In contrast, and this again is evidence that positiveness is “in the eye of the beholder”, the attribute *bitter* (which is not attested as a second conjunct in the COCA) is absolutely natural in the following example retrieved from a Google search:

- (42) Fullers Chisick Bitter is a great session bitter, the appe[a]rence is of dark blond and the smell a nice hoppy aroma and the taste *nice and bitter* with a full burst of hops.

Even properties that, at first sight, look totally incompatible with *nice* (all “negative” adjectives in Table 2) and actually do not occur as second conjuncts in the COCA are pragmatically possible in certain contexts. Take *distressing* as an example (Google search):

- (43) What a *nice and distressing* music, danny elfman is wonderful ...

This is a clear example in which the positive value of *nice* feeds into the following conjunct *distressing*, an interpretation supported by the second clause in (43), *danny elfman is wonderful*. However, a word of caution is in order concerning patterns like *nice and distressing*. Consider (44) (Google search):

- (44) One wall was all mirrored, which was both *nice and distressing*: we found that some poses which we thought we did well didn't look as good as they felt! ...

In (44) the mirrored wall is regarded as having both nice and distressing aspects at the same time. In this case, contrary to (43), *distressing* does not inherit positive qualities from *nice*. In other words, (43) has reached the final stage in meaning development diagrammed in Figure 9, whereas in (44) *nice* and *distressing* are both syntactically and conceptually conjoined (as diagrammed in Figure 7 above).

As a final case let us consider adjectives that do not look biased positively or negatively in any way, such as *open*. Again we hypothesize that the acceptability of *open* as a second conjunct in the *nice and Adj* construction depends on the speaker's attitude. At first sight, an utterance such as (45) seems somewhat infelicitous:

- (45) ?The door is nice and open.

Still, we believe there are contexts in which (45) constitutes a contextually appropriate speech act. If the speaker intends to express his/her belief that the openness of the door is a positive attribute, the utterance becomes quite acceptable. In other contexts, the positive evaluation of *open* is immediately accessible to the addressee. The following examples (46) and (47) were again found through a Google search:

- (46) Reduced — NICE AND OPEN! VAULTED CEILINGS! \$135000...  
 (47) That place is very *nice and open* but the other 3 districts in that expansion are very closely-packed.

Example (46) is an advertisement for open vaulted ceilings, a feature of houses not to everyone's taste, but obviously considered to be a very attractive feature by the construction firm that launches the ad. In (47), reference is made to open spaces as a positive feature of a suburb or neighborhood.

To conclude, all the examples discussed in this section reinforce our hypothesis that the second conjunct need not possess inherent positive qualities but that these positive features are contextually construed. In the emergent *nice and Adj* construction, i.e. the final stage diagrammed in Figure 9, *nice* is an evaluative operator that signals the conceptualizer's (normally, the speaker's) positive attitude towards a state-of-affairs or situation. Hence, the second conjunct is automatically (intended to be) interpreted as a highly valued feature of the *THING* it applies to.

## 5. Conclusion: Some broader implications

In this final section we briefly touch upon three broader implications of the research presented in this article. First, we address the distinction between “core” grammar and the “periphery”, and the importance of studying idiosyncratic linguistic phenomena. Second, we consider our analysis of the *nice and Adj* construction in the light of recent research on grammaticalization and semantic change. And finally, we argue for the necessity of incorporating processes of ongoing formal and/or conceptual change into the description of constructions.<sup>13</sup>

One of the insights of cognitive linguistics in the last twenty years has been that the study of “peripheral” grammatical phenomena is in fact highly illuminating for a deeper understanding of language. A major contribution of cognitive linguistics to linguistic theory is the recognition that linguistic structures are *gestalts*, i.e., their meanings are often not compositionally derivable from their parts. This holds not only for idiomatic expressions but also for constructions in general. The non-predictability of complex formal and/or conceptual structures does however not entail that such structures are arbitrary. On the contrary, we hope to have made a strong case for the *motivation* of the *nice and Adj* construction, both in formal and conceptual-pragmatic terms. The construction we have studied stands for many other constructions with non-predictable idiomatic meanings, and detailed and painstaking analyses of such linguistic patterns further our understanding of the nature of individual languages and language.

The *nice and Adj* construction displays some characteristics that, in other contexts, have been observed by researchers on grammaticalization and semantic change.<sup>14</sup> Hopper (1991:28–30) has coined the notion *persistence* in connection with grammaticalization processes. He observes that the development from a lexical item to a grammatical morpheme goes through various intermediate stages

13. An ongoing change towards a more grammaticalized meaning can also be observed in certain *V and V* constructions, especially *try and V* and *go and V*, which are investigated in depth by Newman & Rice (2008). According to these authors, *try* and *go* as first conjuncts in the *V and V* construction “either have become or are destined to become auxiliaries” (22). These verbs exhibit some of the same traits that we have observed in connection with *nice*. They are used preferably as first conjuncts (i.e. are not commutable), they are developing a grammatical meaning without having lost their original sense (persistence), and they function conceptually like a modifier or operator, i.e. open up the conceptual space in which the denotatum of the second verb is located.

14. Certain kinds of adjectives such as *absolute*, *awful* or *terrible* are known for having undergone a certain degree of grammaticalization. Witness such noun phrases as *absolute bliss*, *awful mess* or *a terrible bore*, in which the adjectives have developed an intensifying and evaluative meaning (see Paradis 2000).

during which “it may be expected that a form will be polysemous, and that one or more of its meanings will reflect a dominant earlier meaning” (28). Traugott & Dasher (2002: 11) generalize Hopper’s idea, hypothesizing that “[e]very change, at any level in a grammar, involves not ‘A > B,’ i.e. the simple replacement of one item by another, but rather ‘A > A ~ B’ and then sometimes ‘>B’ alone”. The preservation of an older meaning is exactly what is happening, on a synchronic level, with the *nice and Adj* construction: the “original” (i.e. source) positive meaning of *nice* survives (as a more schematic sense) across the successive stages of the semantic-pragmatic evolution of the construction. In fact, given Hopper’s criterion of persistence, it is legitimate to regard the ongoing shift in the *nice and Adj* construction as a grammaticalization process: *nice* changes from a content word to a more abstract, i.e. more grammatical, function word; in the third stage it becomes a kind of evaluative operator that modifies a proposition, or, in speech act theoretic terms, an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) that marks the utterance as a speech act of evaluation.

A formal symptom of the grammaticalization of the construction can be seen in the fact that the position of *nice* as a more “grammatical” word is preferentially in the first conjunct of the construction, a position that might also be prosodically motivated by the fact that *nice* is monosyllabic, i.e. shorter than most of the adjectival conjuncts it collocates with. Another formal property of the *nice and Adj* construction is that *and* frequently occurs in a phonologically reduced shape and becomes an enclitic of *nice* (see Section 3.3 above). It is well known that phonological attrition evolves concomitantly with grammaticalization; it can be regarded as a formal reflex of a semantic and grammatical change.

Finally, our study has revealed that the notion of construction has to be adjusted so as to account for dynamic aspects of constructions that are synchronically in the process of developing additional forms and meanings. It thus seems that the common view of constructions as conventional pairings of form and meaning or, in Langacker’s terms “symbolic assemblies” is too narrow. We advocate a more dynamic conception of the linguistic sign, which incorporates *emergent* constructions with layers of different inferentially connected meanings, i.e. cases of “diachrony in synchrony”.

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