From coordination to modification:

The role of hyponymy in meaning construction

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Nice and ???

short, mono-morphemic, non-derived, …

Nice and …

This is a very
nice and <u>realistic</u>
looking large plush
orangutan.

Latinate, morphologically
complex, derived …
even its antonym …

Nice and …

100 Mega Shock!

Arcade Racers!

I like my racers **nice and unrealistic**. Games like Gran Turismo are fun to a point but after a while I just want to drive off of buildings or powerslide at ludicrous speeds.

We think that

There is more to *nice and Adj* than meets the

Outline

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I. Mismatches

- Languages exhibit "mismatches" between **form** and **meaning / function**.

- In other words, form does not always **mirror** meaning/function in a one-to-one (isomorphic) fashion.

I. Mismatches:
Number of syntactic vs. conceptual arguments

English (2 syntactic arguments vs. 3 conceptual args)

1. Mary threatened to cancel her talk.

2. *Mary threatened the conference organizers to cancel her talk.

German (3 syntactic arguments & 3 conceptual args)

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'

I. Mismatches:
Form vs. illocutionary function

4. Now, if you could just give me a little chance to finish this point.
   (COCA, 1990, SPOK, ABC_Nightline)

5. For you to do such a thing!

   Dependent clause – independent illocutionary function

I. Mismatches:

Subordination vs. coordination

Yiddish

6. der   rebe **mit**-n   hunt [SG agr with following V]

    the.NOM rabbi **with**-the.DAT dog

    'the rabbi **with** the dog' (**is** coming)

Syntactic subordination – conceptual <u>subordination</u>

7. der   tate **mit** der   mamen [PL agr with following V]

    the.NOM father **with** the.DAT mother

    'father **and** mother' (**are** coming)

Syntactic subordination – conceptual <u>coordination</u>

I. **Mismatches**:
Coordination vs. subordination

8. Big Louie sees you with the loot **and** he puts out a contract on you.

    '**If** Big Louie sees you (with the stolen money), he **will** put out a contract on you'

    Syntactic coordination – conceptual subordination

I. Mismatch of the day:
Syntactic coordination vs. conceptual modification

***Focus* and *main thesis* of the talk**:

- The coordinate adjectival pattern
  nice and Adj

- is developing an **emergent** meaning that

- displays a "mismatch" between **syntactic coordination** and **conceptual modification**.

II. Syntactic functions of *nice and Adj*

Attributive

9. a. a nice and quiet walk

    b. a nice and vibey blues bar

    c. a nice and spicy Indonesian dish

Predicative
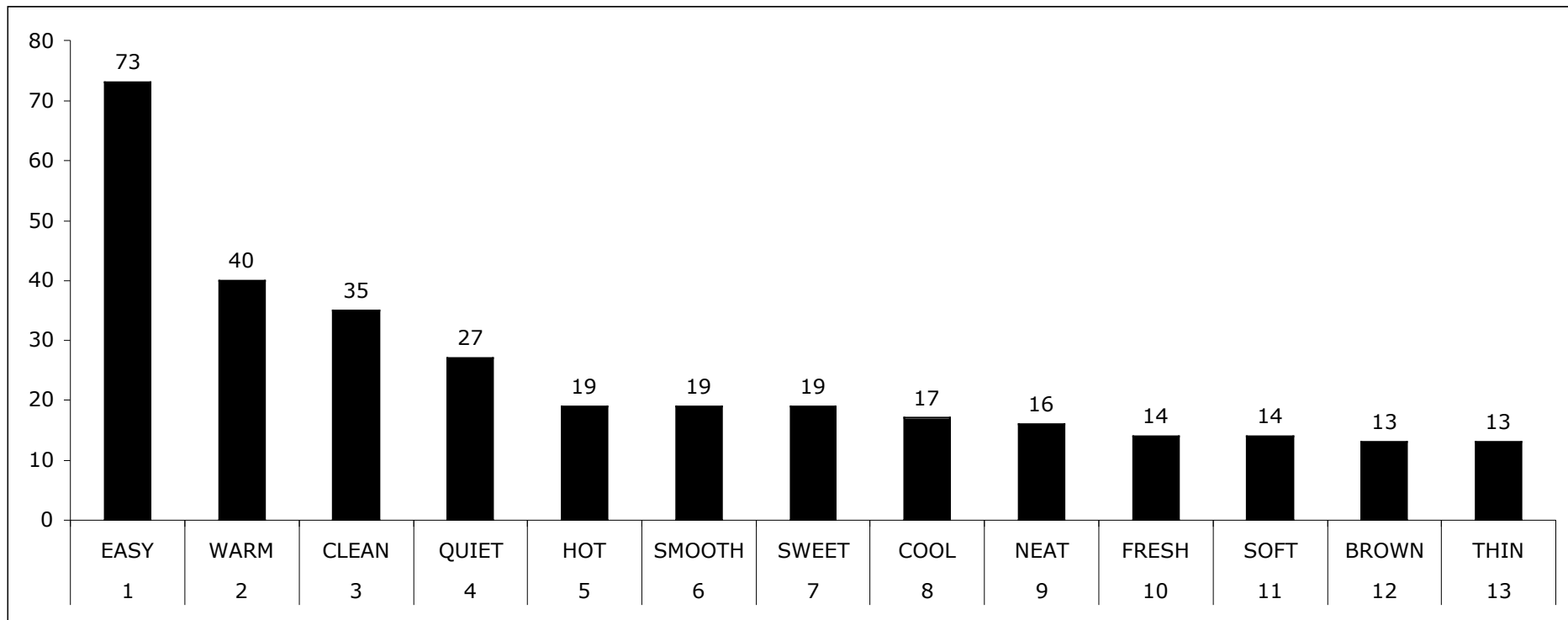
10. a. The people are so nice and appreciative.

    b. There I just wanna take it nice and slow.

    c. Places are limited to just 18 people to keep the workshop nice and intimate.

II. Syntactic functions of *nice and Adj*

Attributive / predicative functions

- No formal or semantic differences between these two grammatical functions.

- In what follows we don't differentiate between attributive and predicative functions of the pattern.

II. Preferred second conjunct (COCA)

Nice and …

II. Conjunct order: *Nice* and *Adj preferred over Adj and* **nice**

	easy	warm	clean	quiet	slow	cool	hot	sweet	smooth	neat	fresh	soft
◆ nice and Adj	75	45	37	27	25	19	19	19	19	16	14	14
■ Adj and nice	0	0	8	2	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	1
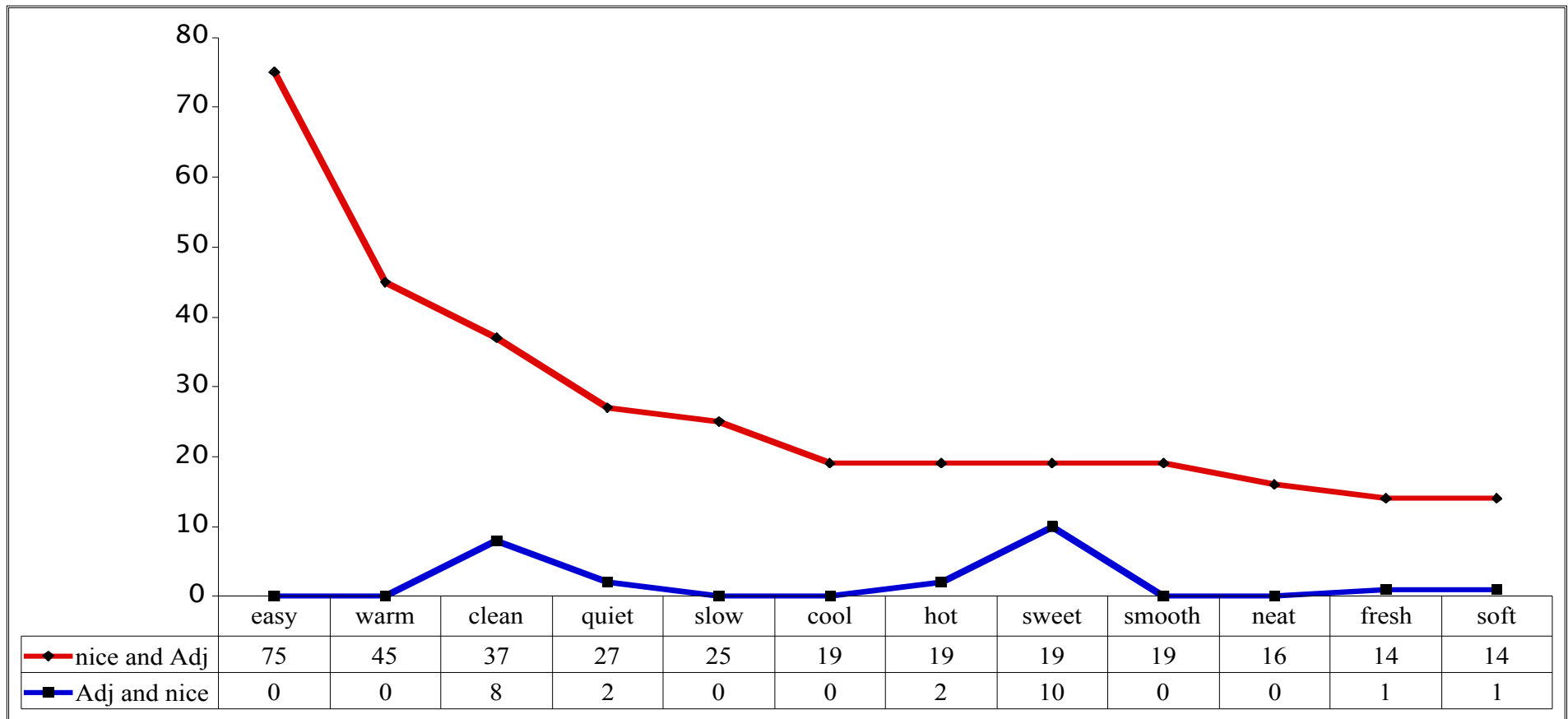
II. Phonological attrition of *and*

- Attrition: [**ænd**] > [**ənd**] > [**ən**] > [**n**]
- Spelling: <**'n**>
- Popular in business names, titles of pop music albums, etc.:

  Nice 'n Rough (Tina Turner album)

  Nice 'N Naughty Fashions (retail business)

  Nice 'n' Sleazy (restaurant in Glasgow)

  Nice n Stripy (grass mowing company)

  Nice 'n Clear (head lice lotion)

II. Our thesis in more detail

- *Nice and Adj* is an **emergent** 'construction' that
- is undergoing a change from a **compositional** (transparent) sense to a **non-compositional** (more idiomatic) meaning.
- Its emergent meaning is: 'Speaker **evaluates** property denoted by *Adj* as **positive**'.
- This meaning is **motivated**, and derived via
- **metonymic** inferencing.

II. Compositional vs. non-compositional (emergent) meaning of *nice and Adj*

Consider ***nice and quiet hotel***

Two senses:

compositional: 'hotel that is both nice and quiet'

non-compositional (emergent): 'hotel with the **nice property** that it is quiet'

Our focus is on the **emergent non-compositional sense** of *nice and Adj*.

II. The notion of construction

(Goldberg 1995, 2006)

- A **construction** is a conventional form-meaning pattern.
- The **form** of the pattern is not predictable, and/or
- The **meaning** of the pattern is not compositional (i.e. not predictable from its parts).

II. Compositionality

***Adj and Adj* compositional meaning:**

11. a. This house is spacious and comfortable.

        ENTAILS

    b. This house is spacious and this house is comfortable.

***Nice and Adj* non-compositional meaning:**

12. a. This house is nice and cozy.

        NON-ENTAILS

    b. This house is nice and this house is cozy.

II. Compositionality

***Adj and Adj* compositional meaning:**

13. a. *What's spacious about this house is that it's comfortable.

   b. ?What's comfortable about this house is that it's spacious.

***Nice and Adj* non-compositional meaning:**

14. a. What's **nice** about this house is that it's cozy.

   b. *What's cozy about this house is that it's nice.

II. Compositionality

Adj and Adj compositional meaning:

15. *This house is **spacious and comfortable**, but it is not so **spacious** in other respects.

Nice and Adj non-compositional meaning:

16. This house is **nice** and cozy, but not so **nice** in other respects.

II. Commutability of conjuncts

Adj and Adj commutable:

17. a. This house is **spacious and comfortable**.

   SEMANTICALLY EQUIVALENT TO

   b. This house is **comfortable and spacious**.

II. Commutability of conjuncts

***Nice and Adj* non-commutable:**

18. a. This house is **nice and cozy**.

[**=** 'It's **nice** that the house is cozy']

NON-EQUIVALENT TO

b. This house is **cozy and nice**.

[≠ '*It's **cozy** that the house is nice']

II. "Conjunction reduction" (CR)

***Adj and Adj*: CR works**

19. a. This house is **spacious and** this house is **comfortable**.

   REDUCES TO

 b. This house is **spacious and comfortable**.

***Nice and Adj*: CR does not work**

20. a. This house is **nice and** this house is **cozy**.

   DOES NOT REDUCE TO

 b. This house is **nice and cozy**. (emergent sense)

II. "Logical" properties

Properties	Adj and Adj	nice and Adj (emergent meaning)
Compositional meaning	√	✕
Commutability of conjuncts	√	✕
Conjunction reduction	√	✕

√ property applies

✕ property does not apply

II. Why is *nice and Adj* a construction?

Unpredictable formal properties

- <u>*nice*</u> *and Adj* more frequent than *Adj and* <u>*nice*</u>
- *and* tends to be phonologically attrited [n] in spoken discourse (spelling <'n>)

Unpredictable conceptual properties

- Emergent meaning of *nice and Adj* non-compositional

Conclusion: *nice and Adj* fulfills Goldberg's (1995) definition of a construction: formal and/or conceptual unpredictability

III. Meaning of *nice*

21. a. We had a nice time.

    b. That wasn't very nice of him.

    c. Jeremy had been very nice to her.

    d. He's a really nice guy.

    e. The student made a nice distinction.
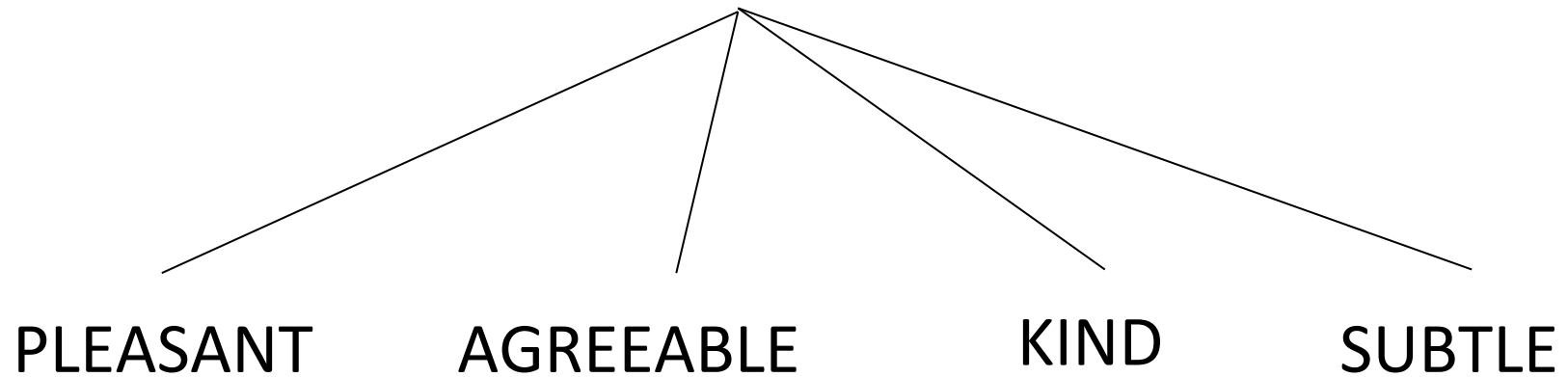
    f . This is a nice point.

Meanings:

i.   'pleasant, agreeable, satisfactory, good-natured, kind' (25a–d)

ii.   'fine or subtle; requiring careful thought or attention' (25e–f)
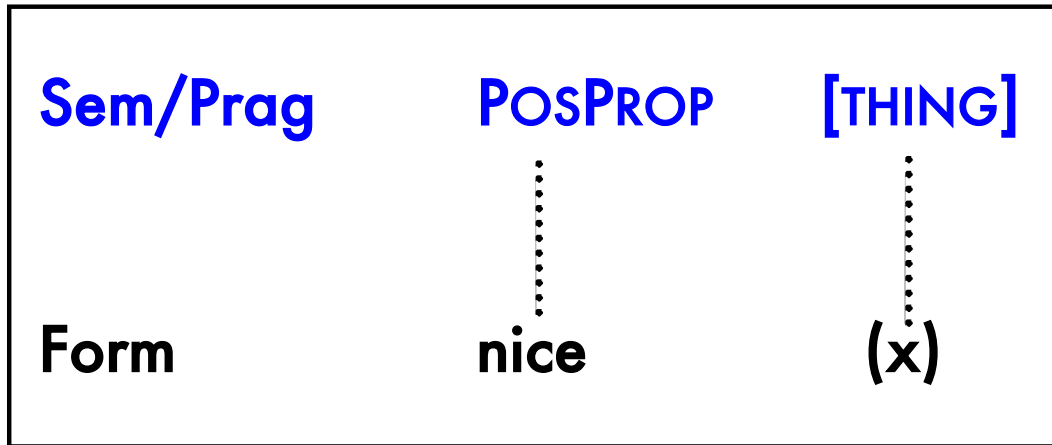
III. The meaning of *nice*

Hypernym

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTE

PLEASANT   AGREEABLE   KIND   SUBTLE

Hyponyms

III. The meaning of *nice*

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

POSPROP   positive property

THING   object, person, event, proposition
                (i.e. everything that can be reified)

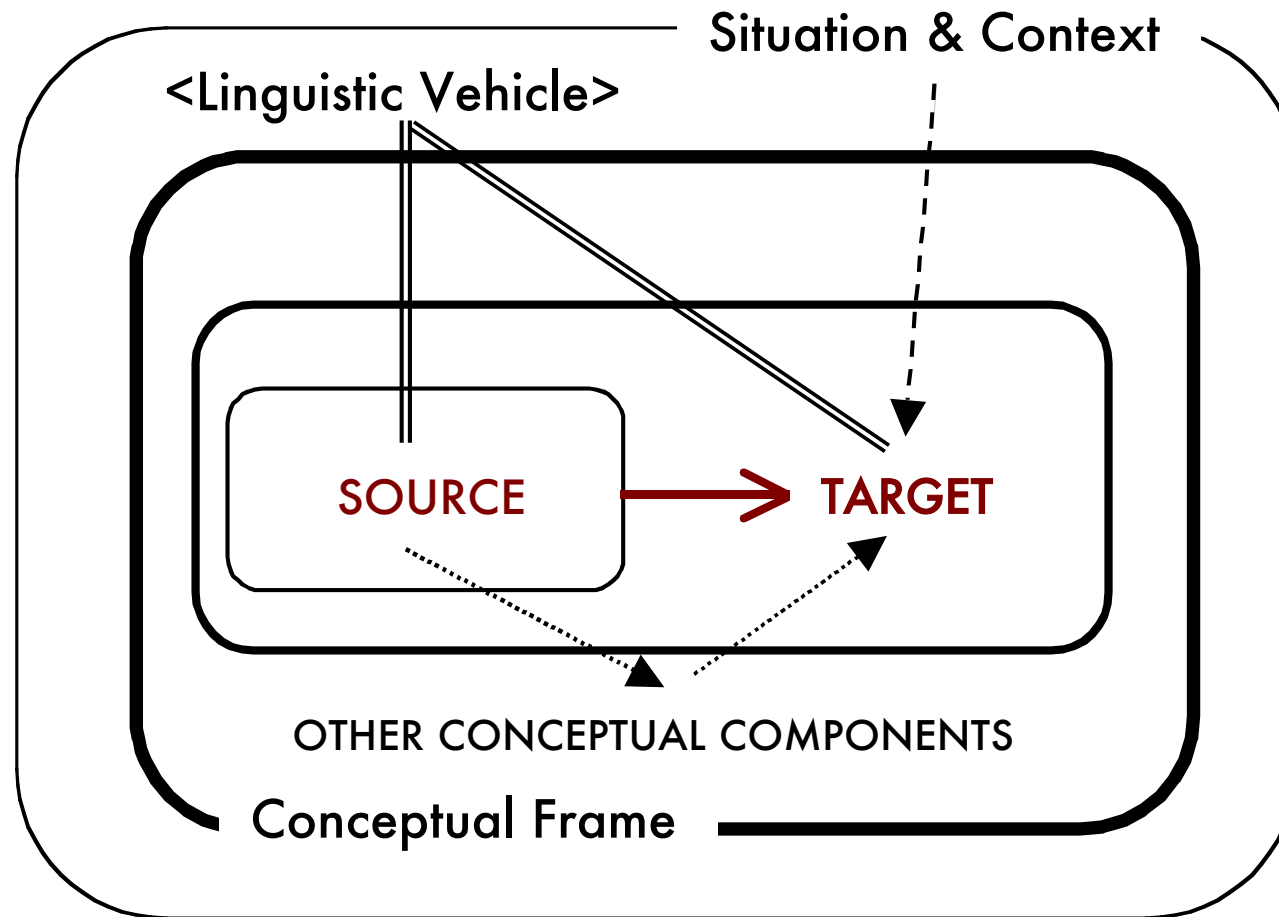x   variable for constituent that *nice*
                modifies or is predicated of

III. *Nice and Adj*:
From compositional (transparent) to emergent meaning

- Compositional (transparent) meaning:
  Source meaning

- Emergent meaning(s):
  Target meaning(s)

- The relation between **source** and target is established via **metonymic inferencing**.
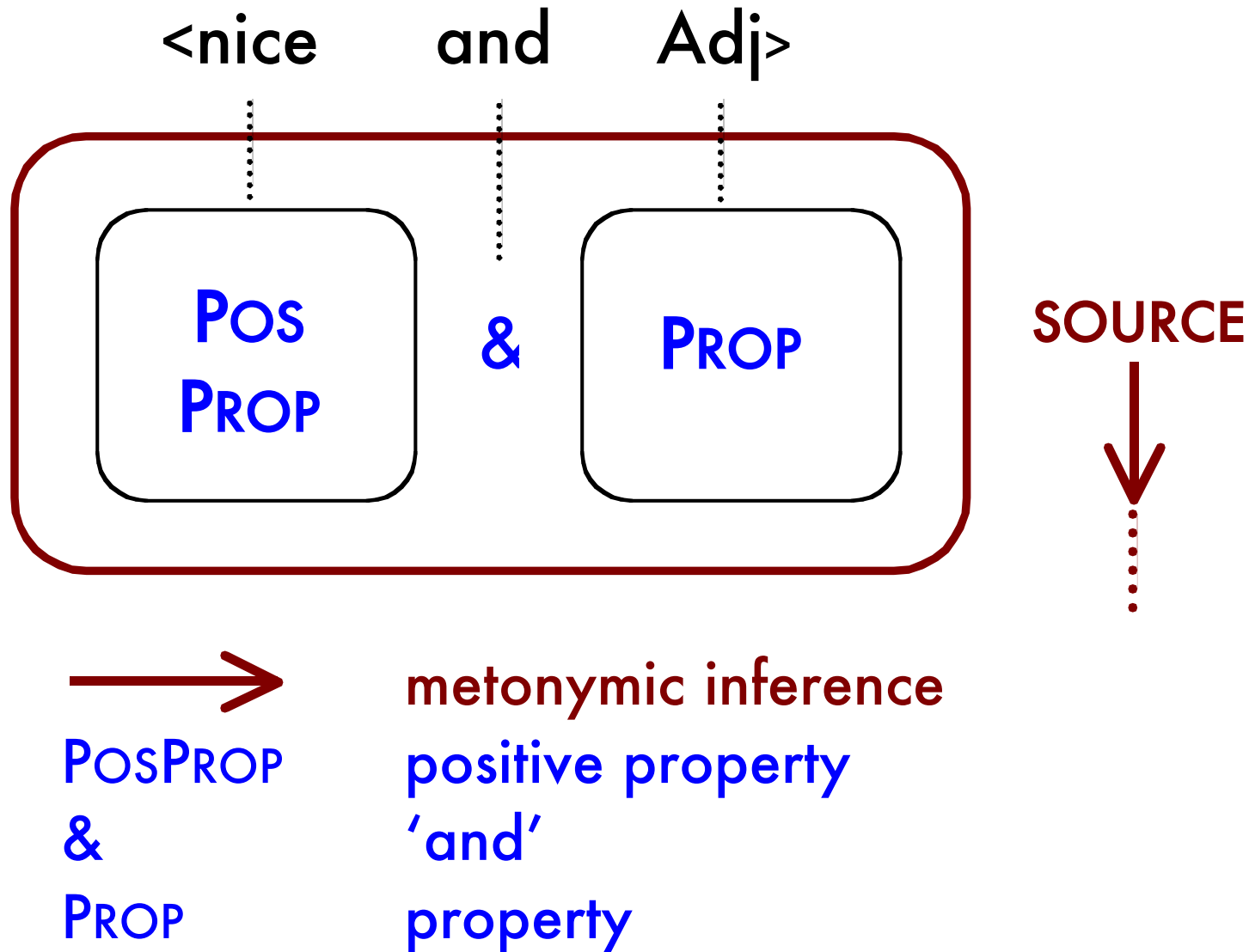
III. The basic metonymic relation

symbolic relation

metonymic inference
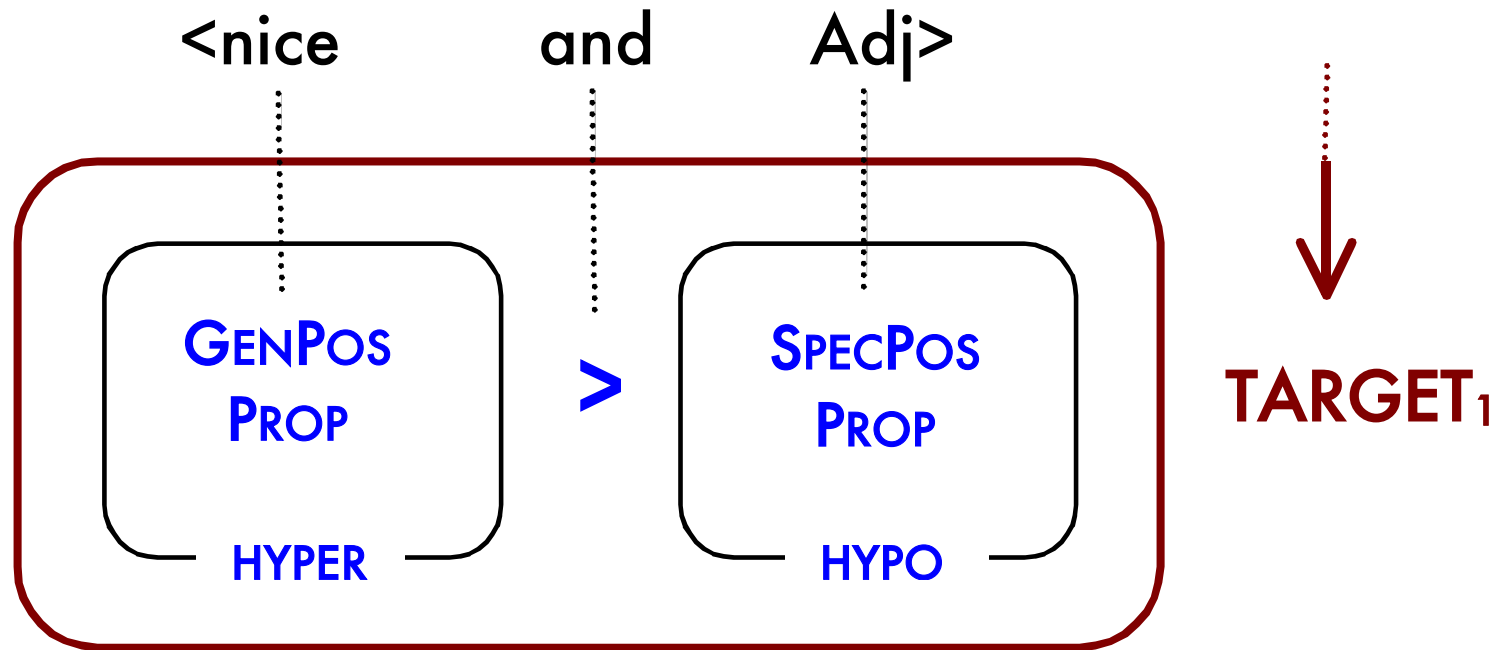
possibly non-activated metonymic links

situational and contextual triggers of target meaning

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III. Source meaning of *nice and Adj*

<nice   and   Adj>

POS PROP   &   PROP

SOURCE

metonymic inference

POSPROP   positive property

&   'and'

PROP   property

III. Target meaning$_1$ of *nice and Adj*

<nice   and   Adj>

GENPOS PROP   **>**   SPECPOS PROP

HYPER   HYPO

TARGET$_1$

⟶   metonymic inference

GENPOSPROP   generic positive property
>   'and more specifically'
SPECPOSPROP   specific positive property
HYPER   hyperonym
HYPO   hyponym

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III. Target meaning₂ of *nice and Adj*

III. Target meaning$_2$ of *nice and Adj*

<nice and   Adj>

MOD

GENPOS
EVALUATION

SPECPOS
PROPERTY

TARGET$_2$

MOD   pragmatically construed modification

(conceptual) modification
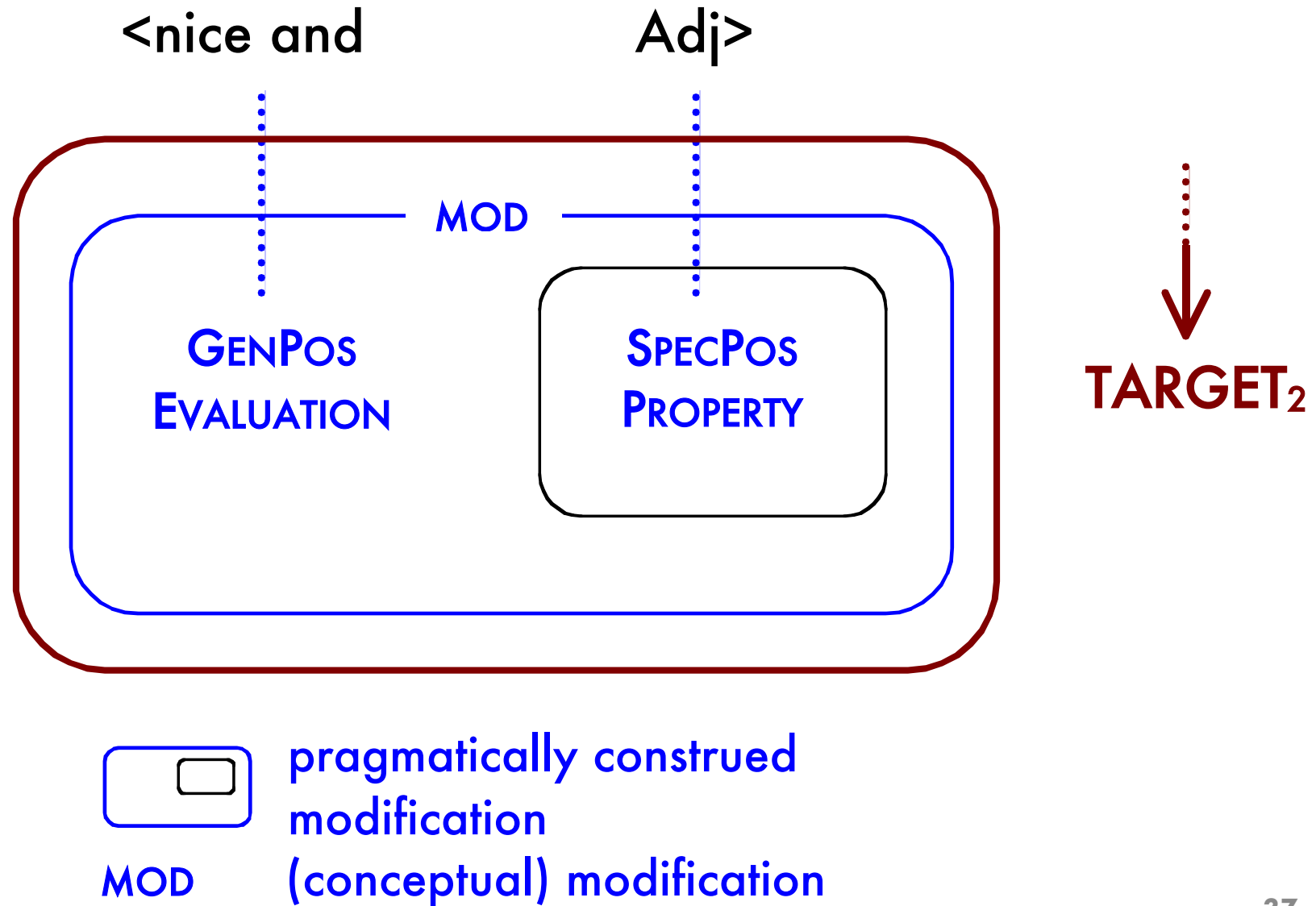
III. From Source (S) to Target (T) meaning: Example

The pizza is nice and chewy.

S: 'The pizza is both **nice and chewy**'

⬇

T_1: 'The pizza is **nice–and more specifically–chewy**'

⬇

T_2: 'The pizza has the **nice property of being chewy**'

III. Target meaning of *nice and Adj*

- In Langacker's (2000) terms: *nice* is a **conceptually dependent** element elaborated by the second conjunct. It has come to express an evaluative speech act.

- Syntactically, however, *nice* is on a par with the second conjunct. (mismatch: syntactic coordination vs. conceptual modification)

- The development of *nice (and)* can be regarded as a process of **subjectification** (Traugott and Dasher, 2002: 89–99).

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it be inherently positive?

22. 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. The people are so nice and appreciative.

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it
be inherently positive?

23. 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.

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it be inherently positive?

24. [...] there's some way to insert a cooling element into it so that you can keep that white wine **nice and chilly**.

chilly is not inherently positive, e.g.:

Summers in Hamburg are often chilly.

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it be inherently positive?

Positiveness is "in the eye of the beholder".

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it
    be inherently positive?

25. 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.

    (from Google search)

III. Constraints on second *Adj*: Must it
   be inherently positive?

26. What a ***nice and distressing*** music,
      danny elfman is wonderful ... (Google search)

Inherits positive qualities from *nice*: Target$_2$

27. 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! ...

Does not inherit positive qualities from *nice*.

III. Emergent meaning of *nice and Adj*

Our examples have shown that

- the second conjunct need not possess inherent positive qualities, but that

- positive features may be **pragmatically construed**, and that

- *nice and* is an evaluative operator signaling the conceptualizer's positive attitude towards a THING or situation.

IV. Conclusion & broader implications

- The emergent meaning of *nice and Adj* demonstrates a **grammaticalization** process: lexical > functional meaning.

- The emergent meaning of the construction has a non-predictable yet **motivated** meaning.

- The emergent meaning is motivated by inference, in particular **metonymic inference**.

Finally ...

You have been a really

nice and receptive

audience!

And now my talk is

Nice and over!