Attributive Modifiers

English allows pre-head modification of nouns by adjuncts of various categorial types:

Adjective Phrase (AdjP):
\textit{those nice new green sandals you bought}

Nominal (Nom, i.e. $\overline{N}$):
\textit{a labor union organizer}

Gerund-participial Verb Phrase (VP$\text{GPL}$):
\textit{several quietly sleeping children}

Past-participial Verb Phrase (VP$\text{PPL}$):
\textit{the university’s hastily developed pay reduction plan}
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With the ordering of attributive modifiers we find a phenomenon that appears to be syntactic at first but is, I think, truly semantic through and through — or at least, sensitive to both semantic and syntactic properties.

For example, in *nice new green sandals* it seems hard to reorder any of the adjectives:

- `nice new green sandals`
- `nice green new sandals`
- `new nice green sandals`
- `new green nice sandals`
- `green nice new sandals`
- `green new nice sandals`
One suggested operational semantics for the ?? prefix would be “profoundly unlikely to get more than a tiny handful of non-spurious Google hits.”

For example: 100 instances of friendly little white + Noun can be found using Google; but for ?? little white friendly, only 10 hits, most spurious.
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The conditions on sequencing of attributive modifiers are not strict like the condition that says the Determiner precedes the Head. They are labile constraints: violating them creates special effects, or lowers acceptability, but does not clearly mark the result as not being English.

Early modifiers (determinatives such as numerals; superlative adjectives; ordinal adjectives; primacy adjectives) have a strong tendency to precede residual modifiers (all others):

- the two vital facts [D + residual]
- the largest known meteorite [sup + residual]
- the second abortive attempt [ord + residual]
- a key new proposal [prim + residual]
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And within the residual modifiers, there is a weaker tendency to adhere to an order like this:

**evaluative** modifiers before

**general** modifiers before

**age** modifiers before

**color** modifiers before

**provenance** modifiers before

**manufacture** modifiers before

**type** modifiers

*CGEL* cites this NP:

*an attractive tight-fitting new pink Italian lycra women’s swimsuit*
Shifting any modifier leftward in its sequence tends to suggest it is being used contrastively with the following constituent presupposed:

*pink Italian swimsuit* if Italian swimsuits are under discussion;

*Italian pink swimsuit* if pink swimsuits are under discussion.