



Why would anybody take long?

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Why would anyone *take long*?

David Denison



Workshop: Category change from a constructional perspective

Introduction

Word class problem

- Draft revisions of *long* in *Oxford English Dictionary*
- Problem examples include
 - I won't be long.
 - I won't take long.
- *OED* layout requires PoS labels.
- But do we?
 - as SP/W or AD/R
 - as linguists

Matthew Bladen, *OED* (consultation 2014)

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Structure of talk

- Review straightforward uses of *long*
- Discuss two possible boundaries/changes:
 - Adj ~ Adv
 - Adj ~ N / Pron
- Discuss theoretical status of word class and word class vagueness
- Sketch Construction Grammar account

Matthew Bladen, *OED* (consultation 2014)

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Headwords for *long* in *OED*²

<i>long</i> adj. ¹ and n.	
<i>long</i> adj. ²	
<i>long</i> v. ¹	[entries first published 1903, not yet fully updated]
<i>long</i> v. ²	
<i>long</i> adv. ¹	
<i>long</i> adv. ²	
<i>long</i> prep.	
- <i>long</i> suffix	
† <i>length</i> n.	'length'

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Adjective and Adverb

long adj. in *OED* – selected senses

1. Great in spatial measurement OE-
long low rowing boats
2. Having a certain spatial extension OE-
about a quarter of an inch long
5. Great in serial extent or duration (OE) ME-
long letters
6. Having a great extent or duration OE-
her long twilight of decrepitude and decay
9. Too long, lengthy, tedious ME-
He is apt to be long in his descriptions.

All found
in OE

lang-/long-_ADJ occurs 357× in YCOE (incl. cp and spl) ⁹

long adv. in *OED* – selected senses

1. For or during a long time OE-
3et ic mei longe libben; We have long been expecting a packet.
2. a. The suppression of the qualified adj., adv., or phrase, in expressions like *to be long about one's work*, causes the adv. *long* to assume the character of an adj. compl. = 'occupying a long time', 'delaying long'. C1290-
b. *not to be long for this world* 1822-
4. At/from/to a far distant time a1400-
long since; long after (X); but he cut his teeth long before me
6. Throughout the period specified (ME) eModE-
the whole summer long; all day long

lange/longe_ADV occurs 608× in YCOE (incl. cp and spl) ¹⁰

Adverb > Adjective?

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¹²

Problem 1

c1275 Þe king sende his sonde after Brien þa wes to longe.

c1300 Sumdel þe pope was anuyd þat he hadde i-beo so longe [rhyme *onder-fonge*].

a1425 Lunet þare stode in þe thrang, Until Sir Ywayne thoght hir lang.

2008 I have to go out, · · but I won't be very long.

- *OED* currently places this pattern s.v. *long* adv.¹ 2a because of explicit morphology of earliest two.
- Editors proposed (Mar 2014) moving all but first two to *long* adj.¹, with a cross-reference between the entries.

¹³

Penn Treebank

- The Penn Parsed Corpora from ME onwards tag *long* as Adjective regardless of context, sometimes within NP-MSR brackets:

LONG is always treated as an adjective. See NP measure phrases for the conventions concerning adjectives used as measure phrases.

a long_ADJ story_N

five_NUM feet_NS long_ADJ

not_NEG long_ADJ behind_ADV

to_TO have_HV dwelled_VBN here_ADV the_D longest_ADJS

Santorini (2010)

¹⁴

Adj, 'function' = measure NP

but did not last long

((IP-MAT (CONJ but)
(NP-SBJ *con*)
(DOD did)
(NEG not)
(VB last)
(NP-MSR (ADJ long)) (..))
(ID AUSTEN-180X,175.333))

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Why Adj in Penn Parsed corpora?

- Most measure phrases of time are NPs (*all night*) or PPs (*for ten years*), but function of PPs not labelled.
- *Long* in measure NPs varies with the NP (*a long time*), therefore treat as elliptical with missing Noun head, whether the actual noun *time* or an abstract placeholder noun with that general meaning.
- But e.g. *briefly* is parsed as (ADVP (ADV briefly))

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Adj or Adv?

- What is the evidence for Adj vs. Adv, and has the PoS changed over time?
- *OED* implies that original Adv *long* was adjunct modifying such constructions as *be about one's work*, *be at a task*.
- Ellipsis of (usually) a PP *long* as complement of *be*.
- This slot is more often filled by AdjP than by AdvP.
- If *long* is here an Adj, it is a predicative-only Adj.
 - Predicate-only adjectives recognised in English linguistics as a subclass, though in Hengeveld's typological classification, only attributive use is criterial for a class of adjectives.

Hengeveld (1992, etc.)

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Adj or Adv?

- Adv?
And many oþere londes þer ben , þat it were to long to telle or to nombren CMMANDEV,96.2317
Mony oþer myracles he dyd þat wer to long to tell ; CMMIRK,8.203
- Adj?
and yn mony oþer myscheves þat he suffurd , þat wern to long to tell . CMMIRK,70.1895

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Semantics

- *Long* ≈ *a long time*, but the latter is less a predicative complement than an adverbial. The sentence
Person X will be a long time (at this task)
doesn't mean that X **is** herself a period of time: it means that X will be at the task **for** a long time.
- Rough semantic equivalence may suggest a similar grammatical function but needn't mean the same word class (cf. *He's miserable/a misery*).
- On those grounds, both *long* and *a long time* would be adverbials in clause structure, and hence *long* (by itself) an Adv.

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Vagueness in PoS assignment

- I have argued that there are now dozens of former nouns which **in some contexts and for some speakers** cannot be assigned a unique word class.
- For speakers who have both N and Adj entries in their lexicon for the underlined words,
a powerhouse song
This is rubbish.
the word classes here are underdetermined.
- Neither speaker/writer nor addressee/reader needs to worry, and the linguist cannot decide in non-arbitrary way.

Denison (2013)

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Adj ~ Adv vagueness with *long*?

- The morphology doesn't help after eME
- In some cases it is a moot point whether *long* is predicated of an NP (like Adj) or modifies the verb (like Adv).
- Because relevant uses of *long* are post-verbal, word class of *long* affects the phrasal projection but arguably not the tree structure (of non-abstract *Cambridge Grammar* type).

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Noun? Pronoun?

long n. (s.v. Adj.¹ headword)

1. Phrases with prepositions variously OE/ME/ModE-
umbe long; before long; for long; at the longest
2. a. Without prep. 'much time' 1488-
Der sone, this lang quhar has thow beyne?
I do not think it will take long to ...
b. *It was/is/will be long before/until/etc.* (OE) ME-
As it was long before he could be persuaded to

4-8. *long* 'long note, long syllable, long block'
(masonry), etc. – routine elliptical formations

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Problem 2

- The following patterns are treated by *OED* s.v. *long* n. B.1-2:
before long
for long
this/that long
it will be long before
- Why label them as nouns?

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Against a noun analysis

- Morphology is like Adj/Adv and unlike N
 - Inflects for comparison in these constructions, but not for plural:
before any/much longer
at the longest
it will be longer before
- Syntax is like Adj/Adv and unlike N
 - Allows premodification by *so, how, very, too, this/that* 'very':
before very long
after too long
How long will it be?

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Against a noun analysis

- *Long* doesn't have normal noun distribution.
- Complements of a preposition can be any XP, even if NP is the default expectation:

<i>before the game</i>	NP
<i>for real; as new</i>	AdjP
<i>before now; until very recently</i>	AdvP
<i>from beyond the grave</i>	PP
<i>by trying harder</i>	VP

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Against a noun analysis

- *Long* doesn't have either morphology or syntax of a noun.
- (nor the semantics)
- Most parsimonious analysis of *before long* is as PP containing AdvP:
[_{PP} before_P [_{AdvP} long_{Adv}]]
with *long* as Adverb.
- So also Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 569).

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Against a pronoun analysis

- Note at beginning of draft *OED* entry for *long* n. says:
It may perhaps be analysable as a pronoun which always stands for the noun phrase 'a long time'; cf. similar constructions at *more* pron.
- But *more* can be a Determiner.
 - All D (except *a, the, every*) have predictable alternative role as head of NP (traditionally, Pronoun).
- And *long* is **never** a Determiner.
- NP *a long time* is functionally an adverbial. Sharing a function (if true) doesn't imply sharing same word class.

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Further claims of nounhood

long n. in *OED*

1. Phrases with prepositions variously OE/ME/ModE-
umbe long; before long; for long; at the longest
 2. a. Without prep. 'much time' 1488-
Der sone, this lang quhar has thow beyne?
I do not think it will take long to ...
b. *It was/is/will be long before/until/etc.* (OE) ME-
As it was long before he could be persuaded to
- The verb *take* is normally transitive, with NP object.
Does this make *long* a noun in *won't take long*?

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Against a noun analysis

But ...

- **No**, though more troubling than PP data, and also found with ?transitive *have, need, spend* and *give*.
- Morphology is like Adj/Adv and unlike N
 - Inflects for comparison in these constructions, but not for plural:
This won't take any longer; The form-filling took (the) longest.
- Syntax is like Adj/Adv and unlike N
 - Allows premodification by *so, how, very, too, this/that* 'very':
It didn't need very long; We won't spend that long.
How long do we have?
- Verb *take* not **always** transitive (*take against, take off, take sick*).

Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 569)

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- Some V + *long* idioms do marginally allow a passive:
?Longest was taken by the form-filling.
How long was spent filling in forms?
- *how long* = AdvP internally but behaving a bit like NP externally
- Because this only occurs in relation to these idioms, probably no need to argue for a mixed category.
- Cf. also
Tomorrow never comes;
When shall we meet? Tomorrow should be OK
- Functional slot of subject most often and readily filled by NPs, but can sometimes be filled by another class.

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Further evidence of PoS

- PPs can occur in the same slot as the alleged NP:
Will it take long?
It should only take until next Thursday.
This too argues against a noun analysis of *long*.
- Parallel Danish data suggests that *long* is an adverb:
Hvor længe tog det at komme igennem det?
how long took it to come through it
Umlauted *længe* adv. is clearly distinct from *lang* adj.
- (Thanks to Sten Vikner, in comments at SHES and later communication.)

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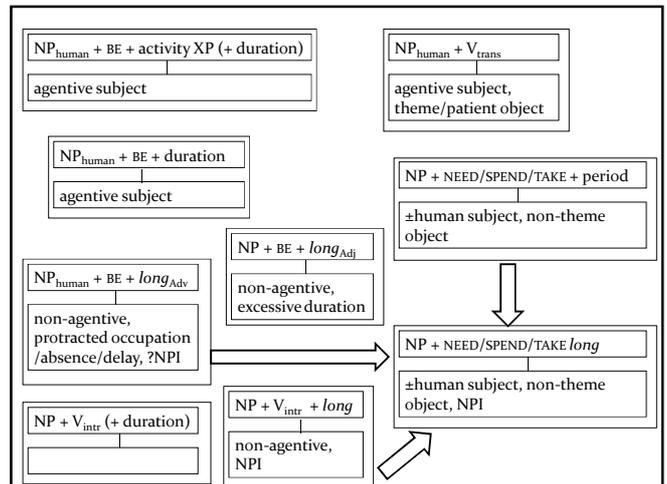
Danish going the same way?

- Both trans. and intr. verbs occur with period of time as NP:
Det vil ikke vare/tage lang tid 'It won't last/take a long time'
- Intr. verb also fine + *længe* adv.[†] :
*Det vil ikke vare længe/*lang* 'It won't last long'
- Trans vb. with inanimate subjects starting to appear + *længe*, but odd:
**Det vil ikke tage længe* 'It won't take long'
- Corpus examples all show reduced salience of adverb as 'object', either through fronting of *hvor længe* 'how long' or by indirect object intervening. (Cf. English data on previous slide; corpus work needed!)
- Only *tage* 'take' found so far in corpus, and never with human subject, but *bruge* 'use' (i.e. 'spend time') with human subject sounds possible.
[†]Native umlauted form of adv., but Ger. *Länge* n. ??secondary source.

Sten Vikner (pers. comm., 19 May 2014)

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Constructions



Closing remarks

Further work and observations

- Only sketched possible diachronic derivation. Need series of synchronic networks, if enough data available.
- The *long* material demonstrates (i) partial recategorisation, (ii) vagueness.
- Clear decategorisation in *take long*, but not in a grammaticalisation context.
- Word classes are not primitives, merely a useful heuristic (both for users and for linguists).
 - Is there good psycholinguistic evidence for word classes in mental lexicon / construction?

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Questions

- What is added value of CxG?
 - Focus on construction rather than words allows for underspecification of word classes [?]
 - Network model with multiple inheritance. Psychologically more plausible than algorithmic model designed for elegance and parsimony
- Valid to use 21C Danish data to corroborate early English developments?
 - NB. usage-based model of **English**

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Presentation available

- slides online at

<http://tinyurl.com/DD-download>

- work-in-progress
- comments very welcome, but please don't quote

Thank you!

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