This won’t take long
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Research questions
1. Are the PoS labels for long in OED correct?
2. If not, what should labels be?
3. If some are underdetermined (vague), what are the consequences?

• Slides of talk available on http://tinyurl.com/UMan-DD
• comments welcome
• Thanks to Matthew Bladen of OED for drawing my attention to problematic PoS labels for long.

Headwords for long in OED

| long adj. and n. | great in measurement from end to end, etc. |
| long adj.² | long/along (of) ‘attributable to’ |
| long v.¹ | lengths, ‘years’ |
| long v.² | ‘to be appropriate to’ |
| long adv.¹ | ‘for a long time’ |
| long adv.² | ‘along’ |
| long prep. | ‘along’ |
| long suffix | endlong, headlong, etc. |
| length n. | ‘length’ |

The OE noun leng(e), lengu (26x in YCOE) survives to 17th century. OED has a brief entry but does not bring it into the history of long. Will ignore.

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)

long adv. in OED – selected senses

1. For or during a long time OE-
   Jet ic mei longe libben; We have long been expecting a packet.

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)

Adverb > Adjective?

Problem 1

c1275 The king sende his sonde after Brien þa wes to longe.
c1300 Sumel þe pope was anuyd þat he hadde i-beo so
   longe [rhyme *onder-fonge].
a1425 Lunet þare stode in þe thrang, Until Sir Ywaine
   thought 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.

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)
Adj, ‘function’ = measure NP

( (IP-MAT (CONJ but)
  (NP-SBJ "con")
  (DOD did)
  (NEG not)
  (VB last)
  (NP-MSR (ADJ long)) (.)
  (ID AUSTEN-180X,775-333))

Why Adj in Penn Parsed corpora?

- (My speculation)
- 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))

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 left 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 (1992, etc.), only attributive use is criterion for a class of adjectives.

Adj or Adv?

- Adv?
  And many opere londes þer ben , þat it were to long to telle or to nombren CMMANDEV,96.2317
  Mony oþere myracles he dyd þat wer to long to tell ; CMMIRK,8.203

- Adj?
  and yn mony oþere myscheves þat he suffurd , þat wern to long to tell . CMMIRK,70.1895

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 themself 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.

Vagueness in PoS assignment

- I have argued (Denison 2013) 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 hearer/reader needs to worry, and the linguist cannot decide in non-arbitrary way.
Adj ~ Adv vagueness with *long*?

- The morphology doesn’t help.
- 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 H & P type).

Other Adj ~ Adv interchange

- Two OED senses s.v. *look* v.
  9a. intr. To have the appearance of being; to seem to the sight. [...] Const. a predicative n. or adj., or a predicative adv. (as *well, ill* = ‘in good, bad health’).
  b. with adv. of manner (for adv. phr.); to have a certain look or appearance.
  Things had, by that time, begun to *look badly* for all concerned. (1891)
- Perhaps cf. German *wütend* ‘angry/angrily’ in *Die Frau kam wütend näher.* (ex. Eva Schultze-Berndt)
- Probably not a sufficient reason to abandon the Adv–Adj distinction in English (cf. Giegerich 2012) if conventional PoS are maintained at all.

Noun? Pronoun?

*long* n. (s.v. Adj.¹ headword)

1. Phrases with prepositions variously OE/ME/ModEng-: *before long; for long; at the longest*
2. a. *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

Problem 2

- The following patterns are treated by *OED* s.v. *long* n.
  1.1–2:
    - *before long*
    - *for long*
    - *this/that long*
    - *it will be long before*
- Why label them as nouns?

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?*
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:
  - before the game NP
  - for real; as new AdjP
  - before now; until very recently AdvP
  - from beyond the grave PP
  - by trying harder VP

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:
  \[[\text{PP before\,}][\text{AdvP long}_\text{Adv}]\]
  with long as Adverb.
- So also Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 569).

Further claims of nounhood

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.

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

Against a noun analysis

- No, though more troubling than PP data, and also found with ?transitive have, need, spend and give (H & P 2002: 569).
- 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).
But ...
- 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.

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.)

Analogical spread by construction

Tentative explanation
- Most likely origin of It won't take long and similar patterns is a gradual analogical spread, always in post-verbal position, from one construction type to another.
- Not really helpful to try to pin down the PoS at every stage, but if a single label is insisted on, Adv is still probably closest.
- Some of the possible steps are illustrated in following slides, with sample illustrations.
- Relative chronology needs checking, though corpus data may be sparse.

Verb be + long\textsubscript{Adv}
- (Examples and definitions from OED draft.)
- ‘As complement of impersonal uses of the verb to be, expressing the notion of the passage of a long period of time’ OE-
  It was not long afterwards, that ... (1636)
- ‘As complement of the verb to be, expressing the notion of protracted occupation in some task, or of absence or delay’ c1275-
  Goe, Ile not be long. (1612)

Verb be + long\textsubscript{Adj}
- (Examples and definitions from OED draft.)
- ‘With implication of excessive duration: continuing too long; tediously lengthy; (of a speech, a literary work, etc.)’ OE-
  The sad catastrophe were long to tell (1738)
- ‘Hence, of a speaker or writer: prolix, long-winded.’ a1586-
  He is apt to be long in his descriptions. (1717)
‘Intransitive’ verb + long

Pe dom sal ben some idon, ne last hit nowiht longe.
(a1200, OED)

Pe maumates ne mi3hte no leng duyre (c1300, MED) as long as I live (c1450, MED)

- Associated with non-affirmative contexts
- Post-verbal long in PDE is explicitly called an NPI (negatively-oriented polarity-sensitive item) by Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 823, 825).

‘Transitive’ verb + long

Pe member · nedeh longe or it be souded. (?a1425 MED)
too little for us to spend long upon (1694 OED draft)

How long will it take to be full in this case? (1763 OED draft)

What there she did, took full thrice as long. To ravel out. (1832, OED)
which did not take long (1834, OED)

They didn’t spend long over it. (1922 COHA)
But I don’t have long to stay in Chicago. (1953, COHA)

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 + lange adv.:
  Det vil ikke vare lange/længe ‘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.
- Many thanks to Sten Vikner (pers. comm., 19 May 2014)

† Native umlauted form of adv., but Ger. Länge n. ?Secondary source.

References


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comments welcome

Thank you