On the order of prenumeral adjectives

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The order of attributive adjectives is long known to be universal (Hetzron 1978, Sproat and Shih 1991, Cinque 1994, etc.), but linguists are not in agreement as to where this order comes from. Cartography claims it comes from a universal hierarchy of functional projections (FPs) which host specific types of adjectives (Scott 2002), but it does not explain where the order of functional projections comes from. We explore the origin of this hierarchy, i.e., the origin of the specific ordering of individual FPs hosting various adjectives. Possible origins of the various hierarchies of FPs have been discussed in Cinque & Rizzi (2008), a.o., who suggest general cognition as one option. If the hierarchy indeed derives from general-cognition restrictions, then the order of the projections hosting adjectives should also be reflected in various non-linguistic cognitive processes related to the properties these adjectives express. We report on an experiment with which we tested this hypothesis. The question of the origin of the strict ordering of adjectives remains even if one rejects functional projections as the grammatical tool to model the strict ordering of adjectives, and general cognition is still one of the candidates for the answer (the one advocated by Scontras et al. 2017).