

61. Adjectives without Nouns

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1. Introduction

Adjectives may occur either as predicates, for example *This apple is red*, or within noun phrases. When within noun phrases, they typically function as attributes to nouns, for example *I want the red apple*. However, in some cases, when the noun is either unimportant or is reconstructible from the discourse, it is absent from the construction, and, as a result, the adjective remains as the main lexical item within the noun phrase, denoting the understood object. An example of such a construction is the following:

(1) *I want the red one.*

In English, as suggested by the preceding example, adjectives without nouns generally occur in construction with a grammatical marker, the proform *one*. However, in some other languages, adjectives without nouns may occur with different kinds of construction markers, and in yet others they may occur without any such markers whatsoever. Moreover, in a small number of languages, adjectives without nouns do not occur at all. This map displays the distribution of adjective-without-noun constructions, and the kinds of markers such constructions contain.

2. Feature values

@ 1. Adjective may not occur without noun	1
@ 2. Adjective may occur without noun, and without marking	73
Adjective may occur without noun, obligatorily marked by	
@ 3. prefix	7
@ 4. suffix	13
@ 5. preceding word	18
@ 6. following word	7
@ 7. mixed or other strategies	5
total	124

In languages of the first type, there are no adjectives without nouns; when occurring within a noun phrase, the adjective must always occur in construction with the noun that it qualifies. In the present language sample, there is but a single instance of such a language, Kayardild (Tangkic; Queensland, Australia; Evans 1995: 234).

The remaining six types contain languages that have adjective-without-noun constructions, providing a classification of their formal properties. In many languages, a bare adjective may occur without any additional construction markers, as a complete noun phrase denoting an understood object; such languages constitute the second type. Following is one such example:

(2) Hebrew (own knowledge)

Ani roce et ha-adom.
 1SG want.PRES.M.SG ACC DEF-red
 'I want the red one.'

Other examples of such languages include Lucazi (Fleisch 2001: 79–80), Basque (José Hualde p.c.), Burmese (Okell 1969: 84–87), Gaagudju (Harvey 1992: 318), Lillooet (Matthewson 1998: 217) and Bare (Aikhenvald 1996: 40).

The remaining five types contain languages in which adjectives without nouns cannot occur in bare form, but instead must occur with a particular marker that enables them to assume a more nominal function. Accordingly, such markers are commonly referred to as **nominalizers**. Of these five types, the first four provide a cross-cutting classification of the construction marker, depending on whether it is affixal (including clitics) or a separate word, and whether it precedes or follows the adjective that it marks.

The third type contains languages in which adjectives without nouns are marked with one or more prefixes. One such language is Semelai (Mon–Khmer; Malaysia), in which adjectives such as *tʰəy* 'big' are preceded by the comparative marker *raʔ* and the relative marker *mə* (historically derived from the numeral 'one') yielding forms such as *mə=raʔ-tʰəy* 'big one', as in the following example:

(3) Semelai (Nicole Kruspe p.c.)

Jon yɛ mə=raʔ-tʰəy.
 give 1SG REL=COMPR-big
 'Give me the big one.'

Other examples of such languages include Koyra Chiini Songhay (Heath 1999b), Hatam (Reesink 1999: 46), and Gavião (Moore 1984: 143–144).

The fourth type contains languages in which adjectives without nouns are marked with one or more suffixes. One such language is Kolyma Yukaghir (isolate; Siberia), in which adjectives such as *pojne* 'white' are marked with a participial

suffix *-j* and then a nominalizing suffix *-ben*, resulting in forms such as *pojne-j-ben* 'white one', as in the following example:

- (4) Kolyma Yukaghir (Elena Maslova p.c.)
Pojne-j-ben lew-din erd'-ije.
 white-PTCP-NMLZ eat-INF want-1 SG.INTR
 'I want the white one.'

Other examples of such languages include Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993: 312–314), Imonda (Seiler 1985: 59, 185–193) and Yagua (Doris Payne p.c.).

The fifth type contains languages in which adjectives without nouns are marked with one or more preceding words. One such language is Iraqw (Cushitic, Afro-Asiatic; Tanzania), in which adjectives such as *ùr* 'big' are preceded by a dummy word in the construct state bearing the number and gender of the understood noun, yielding constructions such as (for a singular feminine object) *ar ùr* 'big one', as in the following example:

- (5) Iraqw (Maarten Mous p.c.)
Ar ùr a hláa.
 CONSTR.F.SG big OBJ.FOC want.1 SG
 'I want the big one.'

Other examples of such languages include Albanian (Oliver Iggesen p.c.), Vietnamese (own fieldwork) and Maybrat (Dol 1999: 147, 307).

The sixth type contains languages in which adjectives without nouns are marked with one or more following words. One such language, illustrated in (1) above, is English; another is Mandarin, in which adjectives such as *hóng* 'red' are followed by an associative marker *de*, resulting in constructions such as *hóng de* 'red one', as in the following example:

- (6) Mandarin (Violet Poo, Geraint Wong p.c.)

Wǒ yào hóng de.

1SG want red ASSOC

'I want the red one.'

Other examples of such languages include Hindi (Anvita Abbi p.c.), Korean (Hak-Soo Kim p.c.) and Ndyuka (George Huttar p.c.).

Finally, the seventh type contains languages in which adjectives without nouns are marked with combinations of the above types of strategies, or with yet other morphosyntactic devices. An example of the former kind is Eastern Kayah Li (Sino-Tibetan; Myanmar and Thailand), in which adjectives such as *bē* 'yellow' are marked with the nominalizing prefix *ʔa-* and also a following word *təpɔ* consisting of *tə-* 'one' plus classifier *pɔ*, yielding constructions such as *ʔabē təpɔ* 'yellow one', as in the following sentence:

- (7) Eastern Kayah Li (David Solnit p.c.)

Vē sɿɰ ʔa-bē təpɔ.

1SG want NMLZ-yellow one-CLF

'I want the yellow one.'

An example of the latter kind is Epena Pedee (Choco; Colombia), in which the adjective loses its final vowel and undergoes a stress shift from final to penultimate, as in *phaimáa* 'black', *pháima* 'black one' (Harms 1994: 24).

3. Geographical distribution

The most salient geographical fact is the widespread distribution, in every major region, of the most common type, in which adjectives without nouns may occur in bare form, without any additional construction marker. In many parts of the world

this type occurs intermingled with other types; however, in Australia it occurs almost exclusively.

Some of the other types occur with insufficient frequency to enable clear geographical patterns to be discerned. One clear pattern, though, is the widespread occurrence of the fifth and sixth types, involving periphrastic marking, across the eastern part of Asia. Moreover, within this region, there is a clear split, with following words concentrated in northeastern Asia and preceding words in Southeast Asia. A possible additional cluster of the preceding-word strategy may be observed in parts of eastern Africa.

4. Theoretical issues

Adjectives without nouns represent a type of construction that has so far attracted relatively little attention in the general linguistic literature.

One set of questions involves the search for typological correlates of the various language types displayed in this map. Some correlations are obvious. For example, among the languages that do not allow adjectives without nouns to occur in bare form, the morphosyntactic strategy to mark such nouns will be consistent with the overall morphological typology of the language: isolating, prefixing or suffixing.

A more substantive proposed correlation suggests that languages will allow adjectives without nouns to occur in bare form if and only if adjectives are the target of morphological agreement controlled by the noun. While this may hold as a statistical tendency, counterexamples to this correlation can be adduced in both directions (Gil 1994d). Thus, for example, Hunzib is a language with adjectival inflection in which adjectives without nouns are obligatorily suffixed (van den Berg 1995: 57), while Minangkabau is a language without adjectival inflection in which adjectives without nouns may occur in bare form (own knowledge).

Another possible correlation suggests that languages will allow adjectives without nouns to occur in bare form if and only if adjectives are themselves noun-like in their grammatical behaviour. To be in a position to test such a hypothesis, it is necessary to identify specific characteristics of noun-like adjectives, distinguishing them from other kinds of adjectives, such as verb-like ones.

A second array of questions relates to the proper analysis of the adjective-without-noun construction. One issue, alluded to in the preceding paragraph, is the category membership of the adjective: is it really an adjective, or is it a noun, or perhaps a member of some other, less differentiated part of speech? In this chapter, we have been using the terms *noun* and *adjective* in the traditional manner, as labels for semantic categories rather than syntactic ones; however, such terminology sometimes has the unfortunate effect of obscuring important distinctions in the grammatical behaviour, across different languages, of words and phrases with similar meanings.

Another issue is that of headedness: whereas most linguists would agree that in a construction such as *red apple*, *apple* is the head and *red* its modifier, it is less obvious what the head is in a construction such as *red one* in (1). Since the grammatical marker *one* has many nominal properties, one might wish to argue that it, too, is the head of the construction. But what of the parallel Mandarin construction *hóng de* in (6)? Although in the present map, English *one* and Mandarin *de* are characterized similarly, as following words, they are quite clearly birds of a different feather. In particular, the Mandarin associative marker *de* has fewer nominal properties than English *one*; its functions are more clearly grammatical in nature. Accordingly, in Mandarin, the adjective would appear to have a stronger claim to be the head of the construction.

Thus, like all typologies, the one presented here focusses on certain features to the exclusion of others; it is just a

preliminary step towards a better understanding of the adjective-without-noun construction.