

Licensing attributive adjective marking

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A number of linguists take the modifying, rather than the predicative, use of adjectives to be unmarked (e.g. Croft 1991, Bhat 1994). In this paper we will argue that — at least in the languages we consider — it is the predicative adjective that is, in some sense, unmarked. In order for an adjective to occur attributively, some licensing element may be required. English is a language where attributive and predicative adjectives are not formally distinct, but in languages that require an attributive licenser, it can take many shapes. It can be a syntactic element associated with the adjective, as with weak adjectives in Old Icelandic (1), morphological marking on the modifier as in Kildin Saami (2) or morphological marking on the noun itself, as in Persian (3). Further variation can be observed as to whether the marking is obligatory or optional, and whether it is conditioned by additional grammatical properties of the noun phrase as a whole, but that is a level of detail we will not go into here.

- (1) hinir skírlífustu ok hinir postuligustu menn
ATTR most chaste and ATTR most apostolic man.PL (Marta, 805) (IcePaHC)
- (2) ēl'ī-es' pērrht (3) xâne-ye bozorg
high-ATTR house (Rießler 2016:42) house-ATTR big (Rießler 2016:40)

In this paper, we focus on Old Persian, which has a syntactic attributive licenser, and Iranian Talishi, which has a morphological licenser. Our analysis is formulated within the framework of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG).

We assume, following Zweigenbaum (1988) and Wechsler (2009), that both attributive and predicative adjectives are lexically specified as requiring a subject argument (SUBJ). For adjectives in predicative position, depending on the complexity of the predicative construction, SUBJ is automatically available either directly or via a control mechanism. For predicative adjectives which also permit an attributive function, on the other hand, an additional mechanism is required, and it is this that is contributed by the attributive licenser in the languages we consider. The mechanism we propose involves the attributive licenser assigning a pronominal interpretation to SUBJ, which is then linked co-referentially to the interpretation of the modified nominal. Our analysis can then be said to capture the semantic intuition behind the old transformational reduced relative clause analysis of attributive adjectives (for a summary of such analyses see Sussex (1974) and for a modern adaptation within the Minimalist framework see Struckmeier (2010)). By exploiting the separation of syntactic and functional/semantic levels within LFG, though, it avoids unmotivated syntactic structure. The fact that many attributive markers developed from relative markers supports the analysis.

Data: We first consider Old Persian (521-338 BC, examples from Kent (1953)), where adjectives standardly follow the head noun. The attributive marker (*hya* for NOM.M.SG), which has a transparent origin as a conflation of a PIE demonstrative and relative pronoun, is obligatorily found when the head noun is preceded by a distal demonstrative, as in (4), but otherwise optional. Predicative adjectives are always unmarked as exemplified in (5). Examples involving extraposition of the attributive show that the attributive marker forms a constituent with the adjective.

- (4) avam kāram tyam hamiçiyam
DIST.M.SG.ACC army.M.SG.ACC ATTR.M.SG.ACC rebellious.M.SG.ACC
'that rebellious army' [DB2.35]
- (5) pasāva kāra arika abava
afterwards people.M.SG.NOM evil.M.SG.NOM become.IPFV.3.SG
'After that the people became evil.' [DB1.33]

The attributive marker is formally identical to its source, the relative marker, but differs from it in that the attributive marker agrees in case, like the adjective itself, with the head noun. The relative marker assumes the case required within the relative clause.

