Building Adjectives:

A Typological Overview of Adjectival Constructions

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It is well known that languages do not only differ in the features whereby they define their parts of speech (PoS) and in the number of PoS that they define, but also – and perhaps more importantly – in the levels of language structure at which they do so. As a confirmation, quite a few studies discussed the levels at which the noun can be defined across languages (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Mithun 2000, Lazard 1999). However, barring some notes in Thompson (1988) and Alfieri (2014), a similar approach to the study of the adjective class has never been proposed (exception made for Krasnoukhova 2022), although adjectives are missing more often than nouns across languages (see, e.g., Dixon 1982, Bhat 1994, Hengeveld 1992, Beck 2002; Dixon & Aikhenvald 2004, Haspelmath 2012).

The aim of the talk is to fill this gap and present a typology of the levels of language analysis at which adjectival constructions can be coded across languages.

Following Croft (2001: 66ff.), the "adjective" is defined as the most typical quality modifier construction in a language. A variety sample of 100 languages is, thus, gathered for the present talk and languages are classified on the level of language structure at which the most typical adjectival construction (i.e. quality modifier) is fixed. In the sample, the quality modifier construction is fixed at six main levels. In Latin, Amele, Dyirbal and Lavukaleve the typical adjective is a simple stem; simple stem adjectives are marked by agreement in gender (Latin, Amele) or classifier (Dyirbal), and they can share most of their properties with nouns (Latin, Amele, Dyirbal) or verbs (Lavukaleve). In RigVedic Sanskrit, Classical Arabic and Yimas, the typical quality modifier is a derived stem that is formally different from a relative clause (that is, different markers code the two functions); derived stem adjectives agree in gender (RV Sanskrit, Arabic) or classifiers (Yimas). In Garo and Urarina the typical quality modifier construction is a derived stem that is also a relative clause (that is, a single affix code both functions, as in the relative-participles of Tibetan languages, Genetti 1992, 2005). In Tuscarora and Jamul Tiipay, the typical quality modifier construction is a clause that differs from a derived stem (i.e. a relative clause or a word-sentence marked for switch-reference). In Chukchi and, partly, in Nivkh, the typical quality modifier is a verb stem incorporated into a noun. Finally, in Vietnamese, Lao and Quechua, the quality modifier is a phrasal constituent that is, a quality lexeme settled in the modifier slot of the phrase without overt marking, as in Hengeveld's "flexible" strategy (see Rijkhoff & Van Lier 2013). Phrasal adjectives can share most of their properties with nouns (Quechua) or with verb (Vietnamese, Lao).

If the preliminary results will be confirmed, the simple stem (i.e. the lexicon), the derived stem, the relative-stem, the phrase and the clause represent the focal layers of the lexico-syntax continuum defined by Croft (2001: 17), and the first sketch of a cross-linguistic theory of the levels of language structure.

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