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On the nouniness of Hungarian adjectives*

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1. Goals of the paper

The status of adjectives as a word class has recently been a much-debated issue in language typology. It has been recognized that not all languages have adjectives and that in many of those languages that do, adjectives are not a separate category on a par with nouns and verbs; instead, they form a class either with nouns or with verbs (Hengeveld 1992, Bhat 1994, Wetzer 1995, Stassen 1997).

Both in the Hungarian grammatical tradition (e.g. Tompa 1968:42-83) and in the recent typological literature, Hungarian has been characterized as a language that does have adjectives and whose adjectives are nouny. However, typologists have based the claim about the nouniness of Hungarian adjectives only on the behavior of predicatively used adjectives (cf. Wetzer 1995:109, 266, 290, Stassen 1997:378-380). The goal of the present paper is to complement existing work by offering a more comprehensive comparison of the grammar of adjectives and nouns in Hungarian. The emerging picture will be incomplete in detail but it is aimed to be complete in the coverage of the types of relevant evidence.

2. Definitions

Three categories will figure centrally in our study: adjective, noun, and nouny adjective. What will be meant by these labels?

a/ A language will be taken to have **adjectives** if it has words whose primary or only use is nominal modification relative to an overt noun head. The utility of the concept may vary depending on the number and kinds of grammatical generalizations that make crucial use of this class.

b/ A language has **nouns** if it has words whose primary or only use is to refer to entities. Just as for adjectives, additional utility of the concept may come from other properties that are found to cluster with the definitional ones.

For related definitions of nouns and adjectives, see Schachter 1985:7, 13, Wierzbicka 1988:484, Lehmann 1990:166, Croft 1991:67, Hengeveld 1992:58, Bhat 1994:18-19.

c/ Adjectives will be taken to be **nouny** as opposed to verby if at least one grammatical generalization makes joint reference to some or all adjectives and some or all nouns but not to verbs. Adjectives are more or less nouny depending on the number and nature of generalizations of this kind.

- (3) (a) noun phrase head:
 - noun: A ház -ak-at látom.
 the house PL ACC I:see
 'I see the houses.'
 - adjective: A nagy-ok-at látom.
 the big PL ACC I:see
 'I see the big ones.'
- (b) attributive:
 - noun: Ezt a bestia nő -t utálok.
 this:ACC the beast woman ACC I:hate
 'I hate this beast of a woman.'
 - adjective: A kék ház -ak-at látom.
 the blue house PL ACC I:see
 'I see the blue houses.'
- (c) appositive:
 - noun: A ház -at, a szülőhely -em-et, látom.
 the house ACC the birth:place S1 ACC I:see
 'I see the house, my birth place.'
 - adjective: A ház -at, a kék -et, látom.
 the house ACC the blue ACC I:see
 'I see the house, the blue one.'
- (d) predicate:
 - noun: Ez -ek a ház -aim.
 this PL the house S1/PL
 'These are my houses.'
 - adjective: Ez -ek kék -ek.
 this PL blue PL
 'These are blue.'
- (e) predicate complement:
 - noun: A fiú-k diák -ok-nak látszanak.
 the boy PL student PL DAT they:seem
 'The boys look like students.'
 - adjective: A fiú-k vidám -ak-nak látszanak.
 the boy PL cheerful PL DAT they:seem
 'The boys look cheerful.'

Regarding (3a): adjectives may figure as noun phrase heads in two ways. On the one hand, they can be used in a referentially dependent sense, as in (3a) and in (4). The second, referentially independent use of adjectives is exemplified in (5).

- (4) A hideg-et add!
 the cold ACC give:IMP
 'Give (me) the cold one!'
- (5) (a) Sok gazdag van itt.
 many rich is here
 'There are many rich (people) here.'
- (b) Magyar -ok-at hívtam meg.
 Hungarian PL ACC I:invited PRTCL
 'I invited Hungarians.'

In both the referentially dependent and the referentially independent uses, the adjective modifies a noun but in the former, ((3a) and (4)), the noun that the adjective modifies must be given by the discourse or situational context: if the sentence is isolated, the referent cannot be reconstructed. In referentially independent use ((5)), however, the referent - which is 'people' in (5a) and (5b) - is invariant regardless of context.

The data in (3) illustrating the alternative use of adjectives and nouns in five positions can be taken to be evidence for the nominal versus verbal nature of adjectives only if verbs do not also occur in the same slots. This is true in part: verbs can be used in noun-head, attributive, appositive, and predicate-complement function only if they are derived into adjectives or nouns. However, the predicate position is different: it is characteristically verbal. The predicability of adjectives and nouns is therefore not an argument for the nouny nature of adjectives; instead, it argues for the fact that adjectives, nouns, and verbs all form a single superclass.

The (sub)classhood of predicatively used adjectives and nouns within this larger superclass is nonetheless borne out by the distribution of the copula: in present tense sentences with a third person subject, it is equally absent with adjectival and nominal predicates ((6a), (6b)) while in all other tenses and persons, it is obligatory ((6c), (6d)).

- (6) (a) Ö fiatal.
 he/he young
 'He is young.'
- (b) Ö mérnök.
 he/she engineer
 'He is an enigneer.'
- (c) Te fiatal vagy.
 you young are
 'You are young.'
- (d) Te mérnök vagy.
 you engineer are
 'You are an engineer.'

So far we have considered the broad syntactic contexts in which adjectives and nouns can occur. We have found that both adjectives and nouns can occupy any of five syntactic slots: nominal head, nominal modifier, apposition, predicate, and predicate complement. Frequency of use, however, does vary. The clearest asymmetry pertains to nominal head and nominal modifier positions: the first is primary to nouns and while the latter is primary to adjectives. As noted in section 3, this differences serves to distinguish the two classes in the first place.

As we now turn to the immediate, phrase-internal context of adjectives and nouns, we will see that differences loom larger. As an overall generalization, it may be noted that

relative to inflectional affixes

Hungarian nouns in argument position inflect for case, number, and person-number of the possessor. Adjectives do not inflect for any of these when used adnominally but when used as nouns, they are inflected for all three. This is exemplified in (10) for number and case; cf. also (3).

(10) (a) A régi könyv-ek-et eltettem.
the old book PL ACC I:put:away
'I put away the old books.'

(b) A régi-ek-et eltettem.
the old PL ACC I:put:away
'I put away the old ones.'

The actual inflectional exponents do, however, show minor differences (such as whether a linking vowel is present or not) depending on whether the word is an adjective or a noun. (On nominal and adjectival inflection in Hungarian, see Papp 1975:82-83, 103, 136, Dressler 1985:8-12, Abondolo 1988:256-259, Elekfi 1994:55-58; Moravcsik, to appear.)

Why are the satellites of nominally used adjectives like those of attributively used ones but their inflection is like that of nouns? As noted by Croft (1991:72-73), inflectional categories such as case and number say something about the referent of the nominally used adjective rather than about the adjective's modificational content. For example, in the word *régi-ek-et* 'old ones (ACC)' in (10b), plurality does not modify 'old' but the referent of 'old'. Similarly, what the accusative marker indicates is that the referent is a direct object and not anything related to the particular description of the referent. The assignment of case and number inflections reflects this fact in that these inflections are keyed to syntactic positions regardless of what the filler of the slot may be. Comparative and superlative inflections, on the other hand, do have to do with descriptive content rather than the referent itself. Correspondingly, they are near-exclusive to adjectives as opposed to nouns even when the nouns are used as adnominal modifiers.

The empirical nature of the claimed pattern - that case, number, and agreement inflections are keyed to syntactic positions rather than to the class of the filler - is shown by the fact that it does not always hold. An exception is predicate agreement with the subject: if the Hungarian predicate is a verb, it agrees in number and person but if it is a noun or adjective, it agrees in number but not in person. In other words, person of the subject, as well as tense, is an inflection of a different sort which is not simply keyed to a position in the sentence: it is also sensitive to the word-class-hood of the filler of the position.

4.3. Morphology: the distribution of adjectives and nouns relative to derivational affixes

The question that we are addressing here is whether derivational affixes that can be added to adjectives can

also be added to nominal bases. If so, this would strengthen the adjectival nouniness claim; if not, it would weaken it. (For lists of Hungarian derivational affixes, see Tompa 1968:105-135, Velcsov 1976:121-150.)

There is one fact that shows that adjectives and nouns form a superclass in this regard: while there are no affixes that can join only adjectives and verbs, there are four that can be added to adjectival and nominal bases only: the diminutive [-ka] and the verbalizers *-kodik*, *-ul*, and *-al* (vowel-harmony alternants are omitted here). One of these four affixes is exemplified in (11).

(11) adjectival base: *ideges -kedik* 'he/she is nervous'
nervous AFF

nominal base: *mester-kedik* 'he/she contrives'
master AFF

On the other hand, there is also evidence for adjectives being distinct from nouns: there is one derivational affix -*lik* - which joins only adjectival bases; e.g. *piros-lik* "red-AFF" 'it is red.' These facts strongly support noun-adjective as a superclass and only weakly support a separate adjectival subclass.

4.4. Internal structure: the bases and affixes that serve to derive adjectives and nouns

Is the internal morphological composition of adjectives unique or is it similar to nouns? In particular, are the word class types of the bases from which adjectives can be derived unique to adjectives or do they also serve for the derivation of nouns? And do the affixes that derive adjectives derive only adjectives or do they also derive nouns? (For this test of adjectival nouniness, see Bhat 1994:178-186).

The relevant facts bear out the adjectival category and there is no evidence for the super-category adjective-noun. There are two indications of the classhood of adjectives.

(i) All adjectivalizing affixes are unique to adjectives. This means, among others, that none are unique to adjectives and nouns. For example, the affix *-talan* 'without' makes only adjectives; as, for example, in *kalap-talan* 'hatless'.

(ii) While almost all derivational base types included in adjectives can yield words of other types as well, there is one base type - postpositional phrase - which is unique to adjectives. (12) illustrates this.

(12) *a kék ház mögött-i kert*
the blue house behind AFF yard
'the yard behind the blue house'

(cf. *A kert a kék ház mögött van.*
the yard the blue house behind is
'The yard is behind the blue house.'

Postpositional phrases are the only example in Hungarian of a multi-word derivational base. As Dressler observes

(Dressler 1982:174), multi-word bases are crosslinguistically rare.

The absence of an adjective-noun class is supported by the fact that the derivational base types found in both adjectives and nouns are never unique to these two word classes; they can also be found in other word types. This is illustrated in (13): from nominal bases, not only adjectives and nouns but also verbs can be derived:

- (13) ember-i 'human' /Adj/
 man AFF
- ember-ség 'humanness' /N/
 man AFF
- ember-edik 'becomes an adult' /V/
 man AFF

4.5. Internal structure: phonotactic constraints on adjectives and nouns

There are no phonotactic constraints on adjectives as opposed to nouns, or on adjectives and nouns as opposed to verbs. Thus, neither the category adjective nor the supercategory adjective-noun is borne out by phonotactic evidence.

5. Typological context

In sum: Hungarian has been found to have and the adjective-noun differentiation has been found to fall between maximal and minimal. The main difference between adjectives and nouns is the definitional one itself: adjectives having the primary function of adnominal modification and nouns being primarily referential. While both the satellite structure of adjectives and their content-related inflection (comparative and superlative) remain invariant across adnominal and nominal uses, reference-related inflection (case and number, as well as possessor agreement) is used on nominal adjectives but not on adnominal ones. Adjectives and nouns tend to form a class from the point of view of their distribution as derivational bases but differ in their internal morphological structure. From the point of phonotactic structure, neither of them forms a class by itself nor do the two together.

There are five crosslinguistic generalizations that may be invoked to help make sense of some of these findings about the nouniness of Hungarian adjectives and about the occurrence of adjectives in the language to begin with. There are two features of Hungarian that have been offered as predictive of adjectives not being a unique class: the agglutinating nature of the language and the fact that it has tense. Scalicka repeatedly pointed out that agglutinating languages (a category which Hungarian fits, more or less (cf. Dressler 1985:8-12)) make a weak differentiation among word classes (Skalicka 1979a: 117, 120; 1979b:259). While in his more specific statements he

refers to the noun-verb distinction being weak, his more general statements refer to word classes in general and thus can be taken to cover adjectives as well.

While Skalicka's proposal predicts adjectives that are weakly differentiated from other word classes, both adjectival nouniness and adjectival verbiness would be equally consistent with his proposal. Harrie Wetzter and Leon Stassen, however, offer a generalization which specifically predicts noun-like behavior of adjectives albeit only in predicative position. According to them, if a language has tense, its adjectives are nouny in that their predicative form is like that of nouns and unlike that of verbs (Wetzter 1995:281, Stassen 1997:343-358). The criterion set by Stassen for a language having tense is that it makes a verb-inflectional difference between at least past and non-past (Stassen 1997:350-351). Hungarian fulfils this requirement and thus the shared predicative form of nouns and adjectives (cf. (6) above) is predicted by this generalization.

A third relevant principle serves to make sense of the fact that adjectives are inflected for case, number, and number-person of the possessor if used in nominal position. As pointed out by William Croft (Croft, to appear; cf. also Croft 1991:67, 93-95) and by D.N.S. Bhat (Bhat 1994:92) adjectives share properties with nouns, verbs, and adverbs mostly when they carry out their functions. While it would be logically possible for nouns to be inflected for case, number, and possessor agreement but for adjectives to remain uninflected even when used as nouns, the tendency toward form-function correlation noted by Croft and Bhat disfavors the occurrence of this logical possibility and fosters the occurrence of adjectives that are nominally inflected in nominal use.

But why are Hungarian adjectives not inflected in adnominal position? In other words, why is Hungarian not like, say, Latin or Russian, where adjectives show noun-like inflection in both nominal and adnominal positions? Abondolo (1988:258) calls Adjective in Hungarian a "nascent grammatical category". According to Benkő & Berrár (1967:203), the noun-adjective split may not have been complete in the Uralic or even in the Finno-Ugric protolanguage. If, as Hajdú suggests (Hajdú 1988:135), the categorial differentiation started with nouns beginning to be used as adnominal modifiers, then the earliest of these adnominal nouns may be assumed to have been inflected just as head nouns were; so what happened to their inflection? The attributivization of nouns is analysed by Christian Lehmann (1995: 68-74) as an instance of grammaticalization. At least three of the common features of the grammaticalization process seem evident: semantic bleaching - in that the referential element is lost while the descriptive one remains - the tightening of the construction, evidenced by the uninterruptability of the adjective-noun sequence, and formal simplification, which is where the loss of inflection fits in. While I know of no principle that would explain why Hungarian should have already reached the point where adnominal adjectives are uninflected, the grammaticalization process predicts the

possibility, if not the necessity, of such a language type to exist.

In addition to why Hungarian adjectives are nouny, a second, broader question which calls for an answer is why Hungarian has adjectives to the first place. In recent work (Rijkhoff, to appear), Jan Rijkhoff suggests a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the occurrence of adjectives: in order for a language to have them, it must not have sortal classifiers of the Thai or Japanese type. Hungarian does not have such classifiers and this fact therefore permits - but does not force - the language to have adjectives. The discovery of a sufficient condition for the emergence of the adjectival category remains the task of future typological research.

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