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'l'-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. We assume that both attributive and predicative adjectives require a SUBJ (following Zweigenbaum (1988) and Wechsler (2009)). For adjectives in predicative position where a 'double tier' analysis is motivated we assume an open XCOMP analysis, rather than one involving PREDLINK (the term 'double tier' is due to Nordlinger & Sadler (2007), for the XCOMP vs PREDLINK analysis, see Butt et al. (1999); Dalrymple et al. (2004); Attia (2008)) In such an analysis, the SUBJ argument is automatically available either directly or via a control relation. For attributively used adjectives, on the other hand, an additional mechanism is required, and it is this that is contributed by the attributive licenser. The mechanism we propose involves the attributive licenser contributing a SUBJ function and a pronominal PRED value to it. The process is akin to that proposed for relative clauses by Dalrymple (2001), and our analysis can then be said to capture the semantic intuition behind the old transformational reduced relative clause analysis, but without the unmotivated structure (for a summary of analyses see Sussex, 1974). The fact that many attributive markers developed from relative markers supports this analysis.

Data: We first consider Old Persian (521-338 BC, examples from Kent (1953)), where adjectives standardly follow the head noun. The attributive marker (nominative masculine singular form *hya*), 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 (4a), but otherwise optional, as in (4b). Extraposed examples such as (4c) show that the attributive marker forms a constituent with the adjective. Predicative adjectives are always unmarked, as in (4d).

(4) a. 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]
     b. kāram   hamiçiyam   hya   manā   naiy
         army.M.SG.ACC rebellious.M.SG.ACC. REL.M.SG.NOM 1SG.GEN NEG
         gaubātaiy
         call.SUBJ.PRES.3SG
         'the rebellious army which shall not call itself mine' [DB2.83-84]
     c. hau=maiy   ima   xšaçam   frābara
         3.M.SG.NOM=1SG.GEN PROX.N.SG.ACC kingdom.N.SG.ACC grant.IMPERF.3SG
         tya   vazrakam   tya   u-vaspam
         ATTR.N.SG.ACC great.N.SG.ACC ATTR.N.SG.ACC good-horsed.N.SG.ACC

u-martiyam
good-manned.N.SG.ACC
'He [Ahuramazda] granted me this great kingdom possessed of good horses, possessed of good men.' [DSf.10-11]

d. 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, illustrated in (4b), 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.

The historical trajectory of this element is interesting not just in that it is a development from a relativiser, hence supporting our analysis, but also in that it develops into the head marker we find in the modern Persian 'ezafe' construction, illustrated in (3). This gradual transfer from dependent to head marker can be seen in Middle Persian.

We turn now to Iranian Talishi (SW Iranian, examples from (Paul, 2011:175)), where the attributive licenser takes the form of an affix on the adjective. Adjectives are otherwise indeclinable, but in attributive function they are obligatorily marked by the attributive affix -*a*, as in (5). Predicative adjectives are unmarked, but require a copula, as in (6).
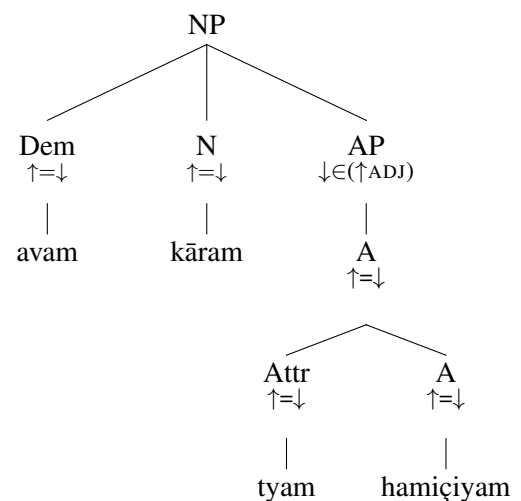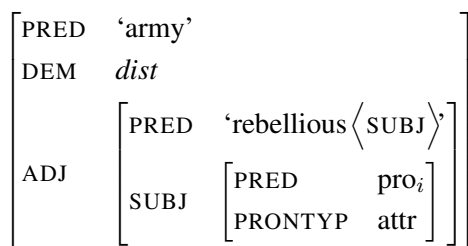
(5) az sər-a bar-i vind=əm=a
    I red-ATTR door-OBL see.PST=1SG=TR
    'I saw the red door.'

(6) əštə ba sə=yə
    your door red=COP.3SG
    'Your door is red.'

Talishi (Iranian and Azerbaijani) is one of several Iranian varieties surrounding the western and southern shores of the Caspian Sea which have this same attributive marking (others are Tati, Gilaki and Mazanderani). It appears not to be a reflex of an earlier relative or demonstrative, but rather of the Old Iranian genitive singular marker in an entirely new function (Grjunberg & Davydova, 1982:252). The same marker is already an optional attributive marker in Middle Persian, but has not survived into Modern Persian.

Analysis: The Old Persian attributive licenser takes the form of an overt attributive pronoun. It functions somewhat like a relative pronoun, but it is not a TOPIC which needs to be identified with an arbitrary GF. It is never anything other than SUBJ. We assign a new value of the feature PRONTYPE to it, viz. ATTR. Ignoring agreement features, the lexical entry for *tyam* is as in (7), the tree we assume is found in (9) and the resulting f-structure as in (8).

(7) *tyam*   Attr   ($\uparrow$SUBJ PRED) = pro$_i$
              ($\uparrow$SUBJ PRONTYP) = *attr*

(8)
$$
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{PRED} & \text{'army'} \\
\text{DEM} & \textit{dist} \\
\text{ADJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'rebellious}\langle\text{SUBJ}\rangle\text{'} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{pro}_i \\ \text{PRONTYP} & \text{attr} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

(9)

The semantics of the attributive pronoun is the same as that of a relative pronoun (Dalrymple, 2001:418):

(10)

[hamiçiyam]	$\lambda y.\text{rebellious}(y)$
[kāram]	$\lambda z.\text{army}(z)$
[attr]	$\lambda P.\lambda Q.\lambda x.P(x) \wedge Q(x)$
[att-hamiçiyam]	$\lambda Q.\lambda x.\text{rebellious}(x) \wedge Q(x)$
[kāram-att-hamiçiyam]	$\lambda x.\text{rebellious}(x) \wedge \text{army}(x)$

In the case of morphological attributive marking the attributive adjective constructs its own SUBJ f-structure, illustrated by Talishi in (11):

(11)

$s\partial r\text{-}a$ A   ($\uparrow$PRED) = 'red <SUBJ>'
($\uparrow$SUBJ PRED) = 'pro$_i$'
($\uparrow$SUBJ PRONTYPE) = ATTR

The analysis is straightforwardly extendable to attributive adjectives which are not explicitly marked as such, as in English, or languages in which attribution is marked outside the AP (either on the head noun or via an independent linker).

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