

Adjectives and adverbs as distinct lexical categories in Inuktitut¹

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Previous analyses of Eskimoan languages (e.g. Fortescue, 1984; Sadock, 2003; de Reuse, 1994) have posited only two lexical categories: nouns and verbs (plus a minor category of particles). These analyses made two assumptions that precluded elements with prototypically adjectival and adverbial meanings from constituting distinct lexical categories; (i) that phonological words are heads in the syntax (and consequently that subparts of words do not possess distinct lexical categories) and (ii) that distinct lexical classes will exhibit distinct inflectional morphology. However, based on syntactic data from Inuktitut I argue for the existence of both adjectives and adverbs as distinct lexical classes.

1 Introduction

1.1 Previous claims about categories in Eskimoan languages

Previous work on Eskimoan languages has claimed that these languages lack adjectives and adverbs. For instance, Fortescue (1984) recognizes only nouns and verbs as lexical categories in West Greenlandic (pp.202-3):

West Greenlandic words (excluding enclitics) fall with few exceptions into three easily distinguishable major classes: nominals, which take number, case, and personal possession inflections; verbs, which take mood, person and number inflections; and particles, which remain uninflected.

Similarly, Sadock (2003) only recognizes nouns and verbs as lexical categories in West Greenlandic (p.4):

The morphology of WG distinguishes between nominal and verbal forms. Patterns of inflection and derivation show that there are two major morphological classes in WG. To a large extent, these also correspond to the two major classes of words in the syntax [...] and will therefore be called nouns and verbs. There are subtypes of each of these major classes, but no other comparable morphological classes in WG.

Equally in the Yupik branch of the Eskimoan language family, de Reuse (1994)'s analysis of Central Siberian Yupik employs similar categories, treating elements with prototypically adjectival meanings as derivational morphemes or verbs.

¹ This paper briefly summarizes a small portion of my dissertation, currently in preparation. Unless otherwise indicated, examples are from the South Baffin dialect of Inuktitut and were elicited by the author, except for those from Spalding (1998)'s dictionary, which are from the Aivilik dialect of Inuktitut. Abbreviations include: ABS=absolutive case; ALL=allative case; ANTIPASS=antipassive; BECAUSATIVE=becausative mood; CONDITION=conditional mood; DEC=declarative mood; DEM=demonstrative; ERG=ergative case; NEG=negation; OBL=oblique/instrumental case; PL=plural; POSS=possessive; REC.PAST=recent past; SG=singular; VIALIS=vialis case. Transcription conforms to a broad IPA except that <ng> = [ŋ], <nng> = [ŋŋ], <g> = [ɣ], <jj> = [dɔʒ] and <r>=[ʁ]. Thank you to Saila Michaels (my language consultant), Alana Johns, Diane Massam, Cristina Cuervo, Simona Herdan, and Michela Ippolito.

1.2 Assumptions precluding adjective and adverb classes

Such work has often made two assumptions that precluded adjectives and adverbs from constituting separate lexical categories. First, it has been assumed that lexical categories should have distinct inflectional morphology. Second, in approaches that assume the Lexicalist hypothesis, subparts of “words” will presumably be excluded from constituting their own lexical categories.

Instead, I argue that unique inflectional morphology is not a necessary condition for being a lexical category. Furthermore, I employ Distributed Morphology’s proposal for syntactic-hierarchical-structure-all-the-way-down (Halle & Marantz, 1993) to argue that subparts of phonological words constitute adjectives and adverbs in Inuktitut.

1.3 Baker (2004) and Dixon (2004)

Baker (2004) and Dixon (2004) have argued that all languages have a discernable class of adjectives, although their properties may differ from adjectives in Indo-European languages. Nevertheless, Dixon “suggest[s] that a distinct word class ‘adjectives’ can be recognized for every human language” (p. 1). We can test these predictions against Inuktitut, which has been claimed to lack both adjective and adverb classes.

2 Evidence for a class of suffixal adjectives

2.1 Position

As we might expect if suffixal adjectives are adjuncts within the DP, suffixal adjectives appear between a noun and its case and number marking:

- (1) nanu-ralaa-t
polar.bear-*small*-ABS.PL
‘little polar bears’
- (2) nanuq-jjua-p taku-janga nanu-ralaaq
polar.bear-*big*-ERG.SG see-DEC.3SG.3SG polar.bear-*small*(ABS.SG)
‘The big polar bear sees the little polar bear.’
- (3) pisuk-tunga kuu-ralaa-kkut
walk-DEC.1SG river-*small*-VIALIS.SG
‘I’m walking across the little river.’

They can also appear between a noun and possession marking (which is often realized by a portmanteau form agreeing with both the possessor and the noun and marking case):

- (4) ulug-jjua-ra
ulu-*big*-1SG.POSS.ABS.SG
‘my big ulu (a traditional woman’s knife)’

- (5) niqi tuni-qqau-jara uvanga nanuq-jjua-nganut
 meat(ABS.SG) give-REC.PAST-DEC.1SG.3SG 1SG² p.b.-*big*-(3SG).POSS.ALL.SG
 ‘I gave meat to my big polar bear.’

If case, number, and possessive marking are exponents of functional heads in the DP, the position of suffixal adjectives between these heads and the root noun is consistent with them being AP adjuncts.

2.2 Stacking and variable order

Further consistent with these elements being adjectives, they can be stacked on nouns in attributive function:

- (6) nanu-ralaa-nngua-t
 polar.bear-*small-pretend*-ABS.PL
 ‘small pretend polar bears’
- (7) qarisaumat-tsiavat-jjuaq
 computer-*good-big*
 ‘big good computer’
- (8) nunasiuti-nnguaq-jjuaq
 car-*pretend-big*
 ‘big pretend car’
 (consultant provided this form when asked if *nunasiuti-jjuaq* could be used to refer to a large snow sculpture of a car)
- (9) nanu-ttsiava-kulu-nnguaq
 polar.bear-*good-adorable-pretend*
 ‘good adorable pretend polar bear’
- (10) nunasiuti-ttsiava-tuqa-nnguaq
 car-*good-old-pretend*
 ‘good old pretend car’
- (11) una nunasiuti-kulu-nngua-tuaq
 DEM.SG car-*adorable-pretend-only*
 ‘this one (is) the single adorable pretend car’
- (12) qarisauja-ralaa-kulu-tuqa-nnguaq
 computer-*small-adorable-old-pretend*
 ‘old adorable small pretend computer’ (e.g. in a toy store)

Furthermore, many (but not all) combinations exhibit variable ordering without discernable effects on meaning:

² Due to a phonological change that neutralized first and second person singular possessive forms in certain oblique cases, a periphrastic structure has emerged in the South Baffin dialect to express the first person possessor in these environments using the first person pronoun *uvanga* and (presumably unmarked) third person possessor marking on the noun (Dorais, 2003, p. 95-6). For instance, Dorais gives the examples of *nuna-nni* ‘in my land’ and *nuna-ngni* ‘in your land’, which, in dialects that no longer allow velar-alveolar clusters, are both neutralized to *nuna-nni* due to regressive place assimilation. So, to disambiguate the first and second person contexts, the first person is realized as *uvanga nuna-ngani* ‘in its land of mine’.

- (13) a. iglu-ralaa-nnguaq
house-*small-pretend*
'pretend small house'
- b. iglu-nngua-ralaaq
house-*pretend-small*
- (14) a. iglu-tsiava-kuluk
house-*good-adorable*
'good adorable house'
- b. iglu-kulu-tsiavaq
house-*adorable-good*
- (15) a. qarisaajat-tsiava-ralaaq
computer-*good-small*
'small good computer'
- b. qarisauja-ralaat-tsiavaq
computer-*small-good*
- (16) a. iglu-ttsiava-kulu-nnguaq
house-*good-adorable-pretend*
'good adorable pretend house'
- b. iglu-kkulu-ttsiava-nnguaq
house-*adorable-good-pretend*

Such variation in adjective ordering is consistent with Truswell (2009) and Svenonius (2008)'s observation that adjectives of the same semantic type can combine/merge in different orders (contra Cinque (1994), Scott (2002), etc.).³

2.3 Compositionality and productivity

While a subset of the combinations of nouns and suffixal adjectives appear to be lexicalized or idiomatic, as illustrated in the following examples, we see similar adjective-noun idioms in English, e.g. *little person* 'dwarf', *grandfather*, etc.

- (17) qimmiq-jjuaq
dog-*big*
'horse' (also: 'big dog')
- (18) pi-nnguaq (Spalding, 1998)
thing-*pretend*
'plaything; toy; doll'
- (19) ataata-ttiaq (Spalding, 1998)
father-*good*
'grandfather'

³ In particular, Truswell (2009) argues that "subsecutive adjectives dominate intersective adjectives" in English, but within each of these classes, ordering is relatively free. Based on cross-linguistic data on adjective ordering Svenonius (2008) reaches a similar conclusion, with intersectives merging lower than subsectives.

However, despite the presence of such idiomatic expressions, most combination of noun and suffixal adjectives appear to be fully compositional and fully productive:

- (20) uqalimaarvig-jjuaq
library-*big*
'big library'
- (21) qarisaajat-tsiavaq
computer-*good*
'a very good computer'
- (22) aanniavi-tuqaq
hospital-*old*
'old health facility'
(Legislative Assembly of Nunavut, 2005, p. 1783 translation from English)

Generally, there appear to be no restrictions (except those resulting from real world knowledge and blocking by idiomatic expressions⁴) on possible combinations of nouns and suffixal adjectives.

2.4 Noun-incorporation

Compton & Pittman (2010) argue that noun-incorporation in Inuktitut is actually NP-incorporation. Part of the evidence that the incorporated constituent is larger than a root includes the ability to incorporate proper names and complex/derived nominals. Consistent with this analysis, suffixal adjectives incorporate along with nouns:⁵

- (23) nunali-ralaa-vinir-taqar-mat (Legislative Assembly of Nunavut, 2001, p. 1974)
camp-*little-old/former*-have/exist-BECAUSATIVE.3SG⁶
'There is an old [small] campsite, because [...]'
- (24) iglu-jjuaq-liu-ruma-junga
house-*big*-make-want-DEC.1SG
'I want to build a big house.'
- (25) 'Barbie-doll' iglu-tsiava-nngua-qaq-tuq
B.(ABS.SG) house-*good-fake*-have-DEC.3SG
'Barbie has a nice [toy] house.'

2.5 Degree modifiers, comparatives/superlatives, depictives/resultatives?

Suffixal adjectives in Inuit exhibit similar constraints to strictly attributive adjectives in English in that they don't appear to be compatible with degree modifiers, comparatives and superlatives, or depictive/resultative constructions.

⁴ In fact, even idiomatic noun+adjective combinations can potentially express their non-idiomatic compositional meaning (e.g. *qimmijjuaq* can in fact mean 'big dog' in a context where dogs are salient or where the meaning of 'horse' is otherwise excluded).

⁵ This is predicted under the analysis in Compton & Pittman (2010) whereby DP and CP phases are spelled out as phonological words in Inuktitut.

⁶ Although the meaning of 'because' is not typically associated with mood, the becausative mood occurs in complementary distribution with other mood markers in Inuit. I adopt the term *becausative* from Manga (1996) and Nowak (1996).

- (26) the (*very) live/mere/former specimen
 (27) the (*more/most) live/mere/former specimen
 (28) *proved the specimen live/mere/former

Despite their incompatibility with these three constructions, which are typically associated with adjective classes in more familiar languages, the high degree of compositionality and variable ordering of suffixal adjectives illustrated above point away from them being functional heads or derivational morphemes (in the Lexicalist sense). Similarly, their optionality and variable ordering are properties normally ascribed to adjuncts, such as adjectives.

3 Evidence for a class of verb-like adjectives

3.1 Comparatives and superlatives?

We might expect adjectives to be uniquely compatible with comparative and superlative constructions. However, while verb-like adjectives are compatible with such constructions, as shown in (29)-(30), so are verbs, as illustrated in (31)-(32):

- (29) John taki-niqsaq Miali-mit
 John tall-COMPARATIVE⁷ Mary-OBL.SG
 ‘John is taller than Mary.’
- (30) John taki-niqpaaq (asivaqti-nit)
 John tall-SUPERLATIVE (hunter-OBL.PL)
 ‘John is the tallest (of the hunters).’
- (31) John sining-niqsaq asivaqti-mit
 John sleep-COMPARATIVE hunter-OBL.SG
 ‘John slept more than the hunter.’
- (32) John sining-niqpaa-ng⁸u-juq asivaqti-nit
 John sleep-SUPERLATIVE-COPULA-DEC.3SG hunter-OBL.PL
 ‘John slept the most of all the hunters.’
 (“That day the other hunters got up before John.”)

Accordingly, comparative/superlative constructions don’t allow us to differentiate verb-like adjectives from verbs.

⁷ Comparative and superlative constructions involving the copula are also possible, suggesting that the comparative and superlative morphemes are actually nominalizers:

- (i) John taki-niqsa-u-juq Miali-mit
 John tall-COMPARATIVE-COPULA-DEC.3SG Mary-OBL.SG
 ‘John is taller than Mary.’
- (ii) John taki-niqpaa-ngu-juq
 John tall-SUPERLATIVE-COPULA-DEC.3SG
 ‘John is the tallest.’

⁸ The segment ‘ng’ [ŋ] is inserted before the noun-incorporating copula ‘u’ to avoid a phonologically illicit sequence of three vowels.

test inconclusive. However, one difference that did emerge was that while the verb-like adjectives were compatible with the nominalization construction below modals, real verbs were not:

- (39) taki-ju-u-qu-guviuk taki-ju-u-gunnaq-tuq
tall-DEC-COPULA-want-CONDITION.2SG.3SG tall-DEC-COPULA-can-DEC.3SG
‘If you’d like it to be tall, it can be tall.’
- (40) angi-ju-u-qu-guviuk angi-ju-u-gunnaq-tuq
big-DEC-COPULA-want-CONDITION.2SG.3SG big-DEC-COPULA-can-DEC.3SG
‘If you want it to be big, it can be big.’ (e.g. cooking bannock)
- (41) *sini-ju-u-qu-guviuk sini-ju-u-gunnaq-tuq
sleep-DEC-COPULA-want-CONDIT.2SG.3SG sleep-DEC-COPULA-can-DEC.3SG
(INTENDED: ‘If you want him/her/it to sleep, he/she/it can sleep.’)
- (42) *pukta-ju-u-qu-guviuk pukta-ju-u-gunnaq-tuq
float-DEC-COPULA-want-CONDITION.2SG.3SG float-DEC-COPULA-can-DEC.3SG
(INTENDED: ‘If you want it to float, it can float.’)

Consequently, compatibility with nominalization under a modal appears to be a diagnostic for differentiating verb-like adjectives from intransitive verbs.

3.5 Compatibility with negative marker *-it-*

Yet another distinguishing property of verb-like adjectives appears to be their compatibility with the negative marker *-it-*. This morpheme creates antonyms, as illustrated in the following examples from Spalding (1998)’s dictionary:

- (43) a. akau-juq
good-DEC.3SG
‘it is good’
- b. aka-it-tuq
good-NEG-DEC.3SG
‘it is bad’
- (44) a. akłu-juq
poor-DEC.3SG
‘he is poor’
- b. akłu-it-tuq
poor-NEG-DEC.3SG
‘he is rich’

While *-it-* also occurs with nouns, it never modifies a real verb directly¹⁰, thus distinguishing them from verb-like adjectives.

4 Evidence for a class of suffixal adverbs

4.1 Stacking and variable order

As shown above for suffixal adjectives, elements with prototypically adverbial meanings also exhibit stacking and variable order:

- (45) a. ani-kasa-kkanni-ngaaq-tuq
 go.out-*almost-again-instead*-DEC.3SG
 ‘He/she almost left instead again.’
- b. ani-kasa-ngaa-kkanniq-tuq
 go.out-*almost-instead-again*-DEC.3SG
- c. ani-kkanni-kasa-ngaaq-tuq
 go.out-*again-almost-instead*-DEC.3SG
- d. ani-kkanni-ngaa-kasak-tuq
 go.out-*again-instead-almost*-DEC.3SG
- e. ani-ngaa-kkanni-kasak-tuq
 go.out-*instead-again-almost*-DEC.3SG
- f. */?ani-ngaa-kasa-kanniq-tuq
 go.out-*instead-almost-again*-DEC.3SG
 (consultant said: “better if *kkanniq* is before *kasak*”)

This data coincides with Ernst (2002)’s arguments that adverbs are adjuncts and can surface wherever their semantic type, scope, and morphological weight permit, contra Cinque (1999). In particular, Cinque analyses such morphemes in the related dialect/language of West Greenlandic as functional heads. However, if these are functional heads then the variable ordering we observe here should not be possible (without distinct meanings¹¹), since under Cinque’s account variable adverb orderings result from movement and such movements would appear to violate the Head Movement Constraint (Travis, 1984).

4.2 Degree modifiers

We can also find what appear to be degree modifiers modifying suffixal adverbs, as illustrated in the following examples:

¹⁰ For instance, *-it-* can modify an adverbial such as *gajuk* ‘frequently’ that is in turn modifying a verb:

(i) pi-gajuk-tuq (Spalding, 1998, glossing added)

do-*frequently*-DEC.3SG

‘he does *s.t.* or gets *s.t.* frequently or always’

(ii) pi-gaju-it-tuq

do-*frequently*-NEG-DEC.3SG

‘he does *s.t.* or gets *s.t.* hardly ever or seldom’

¹¹ In Cinque’s system homophonous adverbs can instantiate distinct functional heads with distinct meanings, leading to apparent variation in adverb ordering.

- (46) a. ani-qatta-runniq-tuq
 go.out-HABITUAL-*anymore*-DEC.3SG
 ‘He/she doesn’t go out anymore.’
- b. ani-qatta-tsia-runniq-tuq
 go.out-HABITUAL-DEGREE¹²-*anymore*-DEC.3SG
 ‘He/she doesn’t really go out anymore.’
- (47) a. tigu-si-kallak-tuq
 grab-ANTIPASS-*quickly*-DEC.3SG
 ‘He/she grabs (it) quickly.’
- b. tigu-si-kalla-vijjuaq-tuq
 grab-ANTIPASS-*quickly*-DEGREE-DEC.3SG
 ‘He/she grabs (it) very quickly.’

Note that in (47) the degree modifier is modifying the adverb *kallak* ‘quickly’. Degree words are the typical modifiers of adverbs cross-linguistically.

4.3 Speaker-oriented meanings

In other languages we observe adverbs with speaker-oriented meanings. If these elements are in fact adverbs we might expect to find such meanings, and we do:

- (48) ani-ruluujaq-tuq
 go.out-*finally/luckily*-DEC.3SG
 ‘{Finally/surprisingly/thank God} he went out.’
- (49) tilli-qatta-qquuq-tuq
 steal-HABITUAL-*apparently/probably*-DEC.3SG
 ‘I think he steals.’

Alana Johns (p.c.) has observed that a number of such elements in the Utkuhiksalingmiutut dialect appear to refer back to the speaker, despite the lack of any type of first person marking.

5 Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that position, stacking, variable order, productivity, and noun-incorporation behaviour are evidence for a lexical class of suffixal adjectives in Inuit. While it is more difficult to conclusively demonstrate that a subclass of stative intransitive verbs forms a separate class of verb-like adjectives, compatibility with the negator *-it-* and with nominalization under modals distinguish them from verbs. Finally, stacking, variable order, degree modification, and the presence of speaker-oriented meanings also points to a class of suffixal adverbs.

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¹² This morpheme is also used as a suffixal adjective meaning ‘good’.

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