Adjectives and adverbs

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Word classes

• Groups of words that behave the same in the grammar of a language
• Main classes across languages are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs
• All languages have nouns and verbs but lots of languages don’t have adjectives or adverbs
• Our job when describing a language is to work out which classes the language has, and which words belong in them
How do we decide?

- Look at how the word behaves in the grammar
- Which endings can it occur with?
- Which other words can it combine with?
- Where does it go in the sentence?
- Don’t decide based on the meaning!
Adjectives in English

• The **big** dog followed me
• That dog is **big**
Adjectives in English

- The **big** dog followed me
- That dog is **big**

- The **happy** dog followed me
- That dog is **happy**
Adjectives in English

- The **big** dog followed me
- That dog is **big**

- The **happy** dog followed me
- That dog is **happy**

- The **slow** dog followed me
- That dog is **slow**
Adjectives in English

• The **big** dog followed me
• That dog is **big**

• The **happy** dog followed me
• That dog is **happy**

• The **slow** dog followed me
• That dog is **slow**

• The **brown** dog followed me
• That dog is **brown**
Adjectives in English

- ✗ The **bite** dog followed me
- ✗ That dog is **bite**
Adjectives in English

• ✗ The bite dog followed me
• ✗ That dog is bite

• ✗ The slowly dog followed me
• ✗ That dog is slowly
Adjectives in English

• ✗ The **bite** dog followed me
• ✗ That dog is **bite**

• ✗ The **slowly** dog followed me
• ✗ That dog is **slowly**

• ✗ The **big** followed me
Adjectives in English

- big, bigger, biggest
- ✗ dog, dogger, doggest

- dog, dogs *bigs
Adverbs in English

- The dog ran **slowly**
- The fast dog ran **slowly**
Adverbs in English

- The dog ran slowly
- The fast dog ran slowly
- The dog ran happily
- The dog ran angrily
Adverbs in English

- The dog ran **slowly**
- The fast dog ran **slowly**
- The dog ran **happily**
- The dog ran **angrily**

- ✗ The dog ran **happy**
- ✗ The dog ran **big**
Australian languages

- Often work very differently to English in this respect
- Usually no class of adjectives (group with nouns)
- Adverbs are hard to identify, and often these group with nouns too
- Things can get confusing though because different researchers make different decisions about what to call things
Yankunytjatjara

• No separate adjectives class
• Most of the meanings that use adjectives in English, just use nouns
  o Take the same case endings
  o Can occur without a noun
  o Can do all the same things in the sentence that nouns can do
Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1985)

papa pulka-ngku kuka kati-ngu
dog big-ERG meat take-PAST
‘The big dog took the meat’

pulka-ngku kuka kati-ngu
big-ERG meat take-PAST
‘The big one took the meat’

wati tjilpi-ngku kuka kati-ngu
man old.man-ERG meat take-PAST
‘The old man took the meat’
Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1985)

Wati-ngku  **wala-ngku** kayi-nyi
‘the man is bringing it quickly’

* wala-ngku kayi-nyi
‘the quick one is bringing it’

• Takes case marker in agreement
• But doesn’t seem to be in the same phrase
• Different to nouns but shares some endings
Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1985)

- **Nominals**
  - Occur with case endings
  - Can be the head of the noun phrase, or describe something about the head of the noun phrase
  - Can occur together with just one case marker at the end
  - Includes words like wati ‘man’, pulka ‘big (thing)’, tjiipi ‘old man’

- **wala ‘quickly’**
  - Occurs with case endings (in agreement)
  - **Cannot** be the head of the noun phrase
  - **Cannot** occur together with the noun with one case marker at the end
Options

- Wala is a subtype of nominal (because it takes case endings)
  - ‘active adjective’, ‘action nominal’

- Wala is a different class, let’s call it a verb
  - Adverbs can take (some) case endings like nouns, but are different because they can’t be the head of a noun phrase
In your language

- How would you say:

- The **big** dog chased me
- The dog is **big**
- The **big** dog ran **quickly**
- The dog chased me **quickly**

- Can you say ‘big (one) ran’ or ‘quick (one) ran’?
Things to remember

- Languages do not have to have the same word classes - it’s OK if your language does it differently to English.
Things to remember

- Don’t base word classes on meaning, look at how the word behaves in the grammar
  - the endings that it can take
  - the other words that it can or must combine with
  - the jobs that it does in the sentence
Things to remember

• It is normal to find a few words that don’t clearly fit into one class or another
  o You can consider them a subtype of one of the classes, or a different class if there are lots of differences

  e.g. English adverbs can end in -ly, but what about ‘he ran fast’
Things to remember

- It is also normal to find a few words that seem to belong to more than one class.

  The **fast** car **drove** **fast**

  - ‘fast’ in English is both an adjective and an adverb.
Things to remember

• Don’t worry too much about what you call things, just:
  o describe clearly what they do and what they combine with
  o Use a term consistently and explain how you are using it