

A constructional approach to mixed categories (between nouns and adjectives)

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Tungus Proprietives, meaning ‘with X, having X’ where X is the base noun, are regularly derived from nouns by affixation. They demonstrate a mixed behavior. As adnominal modifiers, they have the full syntactic and morphological distribution of an adjective. On the other hand, the base noun retains some nominal properties. It can trigger various anaphoric processes, pluralize, and take derivational affixes. In addition, as shown by the following example from Evenki, it can head its own syntactic phrase and control agreement on its modifier.

aja-l	oro-či-l-du	asa-l-du
nice-PL	reindeer- PROP -PL-DAT	woman-PL-DAT
to the women with nice reindeer		

The Proprietary forms present a problem for the traditional view of syntactic categories, as they have the morphosyntactic properties of more than one part of speech. They are also important for the syntax/morphology interface, because the word structure and the phrase structure do not match: the base noun selects modifiers as if it were an independent phrasal head, yet it is not an independent word in the morphology. The fact that an underlying noun is available for syntactic purposes suggests that Proprietary formation is an inflectional process, while other factors point to a derivational process.

The Tungus data has never been considered by theoretical linguists, but there are analyses of similar data from other languages. However, they do not seem to work for Tungus. Most importantly, the Proprietary morpheme is not always peripheral in the phrase. It may be followed by affixes that semantically modify the base noun, for example, *saŋari-či-ka:r* ‘with a little hole’, where the Proprietary *-či* is followed by the Diminutive *-ka:r*. Thus, the Proprietary cannot be analysed as adjoined to the entire phrase, as is implied by the syntactic affixation approach, which seems to have been adopted in Corbett (1987) for Slavonic data. Moreover, the base noun’s modifier itself may optionally take the Proprietary, cf.:

gugda-či	ugu-či	bira
high- PROP	bank- PROP	river
the river with high banks		

This also rules out incorporation analysis, additionally weakened by other independent considerations, and the Autolexical Syntax analysis of Sadock (1991).

In this paper I will develop a Construction Grammar analysis of the Tungus proprietives which is much in line with the recent HPSG proposals of Malouf (1999, 2000). This analysis is based on the assumption that the external distribution of a phrase is determined by the categorial identity of the phrasal head. Relationships among classes of words are expressed in the lexicon by means of a system of cross-cutting hierarchical types, where more specific classes inherit their properties from more general classes. Proprietives are a hybrid category, and their idiosyncratic behaviour is lexically specified by the cross-classification of head values. Categorial information is inherited from adjectives by means of the Proprietary morpheme which carries some adjectival features, but itself has no status as an independent adjective. It is lexically specified as incorporating a base noun. The categorial information determines the external distribution of the phrase, so Proprietives can occur in any place

where an AP occurs. In this sense Proprietives are a subtype of adjectives. On the other hand, they inherit the underlying noun's semantics (referentiality) and selectional properties. The resulting form takes a nominal morphology and is compatible with modifiers by virtue of being a noun. It also inherits any constraints the noun places on its modifiers. Constructional information (the Proprietary Construction) controls the combination of these properties.

The constructional approach has a number of advantages. It accounts for the data naturally, as it does not assume any additional syntactic devices but relies on the mechanisms independently provided by the grammar. It does not require syntactic word formation and thus preserves lexical integrity, and does not involve any categorial transfers. The mixed behaviour of the Proprietives simply follows from their mixed nominal/adjectival specification derived in the lexicon and the constraints on the resulting construction. The problem of mismatches does not arise either, because categorial, selectional, and constructional information is clearly separated. The interpretation of the resulting forms as constructional idioms explains the observation that they readily feed word formation processes, in particular suffixation. Another advantage of the constructional approach is that it predicts that the syntactic properties of Proprietives correlate with the properties of the nouns from which they are derived. Evidence from Tungus suggests that Proprietives derived from referential nouns inherit their ability to function as a syntactically active discourse referent, while Proprietives derived from abstract or mass nouns inherit their discourse-inert status. Instead of positing two distinct syntactic rules to account for this generalization, one can easily represent it via relations of inheritance, thus maintaining uniformity in the derivation of Proprietives.

Finally, the mixed category analysis makes the following two typological predictions which appear to be correct. First, it captures the idea that in these constructions words with the prototypical referent-establishing function (nouns) are put in a non-canonical referent-modifying use. Therefore, the mixed combination of nominal and adjectival properties is observed in other relational adjectives across languages, and in languages with "verby" adjectives similar mismatches may occur between nouns and verbs. Second, nothing in this approach restricts what kind of adjective/noun hybrids can be formed. Thus, all mixed combinations of nominal and adjectival properties should be attested in the world's languages, as seems to be the case. We can at best speak of some implicational relations between them. This raises further questions about the nature of the traditional syntactic labels such as nouns or adjectives, namely, whether we are dealing with a new and discrete category type in each instance of mixed categories, or rather whether categoriality can be represented by several cross-cutting dimensions sensitive to varying kinds of information.

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