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Lezione 4

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Adjectives

Adjective in attributive position

The adjective adds a quality to the noun to which it refers.

The function of the adjective is predicative when the connection between the noun and the adjective is made by a verb.

The adjective is not declined when it is in the predicative position. The position of the predicative adjective is at the end of the sentence.

For example, in this sentence:

Das Kind ist tot. 'The child is dead.'

Das Kind ist tot. (The child is dead.)

It contains a desperate statement. The next sentence can never be a comfort to the mother:

Das Kind ist selig. 'The child is at peace.'

Das Kind ist selig. (The child is at peace.)

The two examples are in the second part of the story.

As we have said, the adjective in the predicative position is not declined, just as in dictionaries where we find the verb in the infinitive and the noun not declined.

Learning vocabulary

Vocabulary learning takes precedence over grammar learning.

They may be essential rules, but they are not so essential as to overshadow your interest in learning so many new words in each lesson.

As we did with nouns and as we will do with verbs, it is worth studying the adjectives in our text by making lists. The more lists you make, the easier it will be to remember new words.

sweet	lieb	lieb (sweet)
big ugly stranger	fremder Riesenkerl	fremder Riesenkerl (big ugly stranger)
dumb	dumm	dumm (dumb)
lazy	zu nichts zu gebrauchen	zu nichts zu gebrauchen (lazy)
depraved	verkommen	verkommen (depraved)
sick	krank	krank (sick)
virulent	schwer	schwer (virulent)
incurable	unheilbar	unheilbar (incurable)

In the first part of our text we find six adjectives to introduce the three characters in the story and two adjectives (in German) to define the little boy's illness. Below we can see the relationship between these adjectives and the people or things they refer to:

das Mädchen (lieb)

der Riesenkerl (dumm, zu nichts zu gebrauchen, verkommen)

das Kind (krank)

die Krankheit (schwer, unheilbar)

Pirandello offers us a wide range of carefully chosen adjectives. These adjectives effectively convey certain qualities of the characters and enrich the narrative.

livid	fahl	fahl (livid)
loose	locker	locker (loose)
soft	schlaff	schlaff (soft)
dead	tot	tot (dead)
bewildered	sprachlos	sprachlos (bewildered)
terrible	schrecklich	schrecklich (terrible)

irrevocable

unumstößlich

unumstößlich (irrevocable)

We find these adjectives in the second part of the story, which takes place in a shadowy room at twilight. We can almost imagine the scene in the room without knowing the verbs.

das Zwielight (fahl)

das Körperchen (locker, schlaff)

das Kind (tot)

der Riese (sprachlos)

die Gewissheit (schrecklich, unumstößlich)

The attributive adjective

An attribute is used to qualify, determine or characterise a noun.

In attributive position, the adjective is always placed before the noun on which it depends syntactically and which it defines semantically.

Is it like the article? Let's look at the example:

Das Zimmer ist dunkel.

In the predicative position, the adjective has no ending.

Das ist ein dunkles Zimmer. Das dunkle Zimmer ist der Schauplatz der Tragödie.

In the attributive position, the adjective agrees with the article: either the adjective or the article gives us all the information we need to define the gender, number and case of the noun.

In fact, by looking at the ending of the adjective and/or the article, it is possible to identify the gender of each noun in the short list below.

his little body

sein kleines Körperchen

sein kleines Körperchen (his little body)

blessed glory

schöner Ruhm

schöner Ruhm (blessed glory)

a bewildered giant	ein sprachloser Riese	ein sprachloser Riese (a bewildered giant)
the terrible certainty	die schreckliche Gewissheit	die schreckliche Gewissheit (bewildered)

In our list of nouns, we noticed that the definite article is used to indicate the gender of the noun. For example, the article *der* indicates the masculine gender. We find the *-r* of the article in the *-r* of the adjective ending. The expression '*schöner Ruhm*' gives us the correct information: *Ruhm* is masculine.

With or without the article, the adjective in attributive position can help provide all the information needed to define the gender, number and case of the noun.

And it is easy to find out:

sein kleines Körperchen = is neutral because the definite article contains the *-s*;

schöner Ruhm = is masculine because the adjective ends with *-r*;

ein sprachloser Riese = is masculine because the adjective ends with *-r*;

die schreckliche Gewissheit = is feminine because both the article and the adjective contain the *-e*.

Adjective degrees

1. Positive

The positive degree is the basic form of the adjective, used when no comparison is made. It describes something as it is: *Die Krankheit ist schwer*.

2. Comparative

The comparative is used to compare two things or people. In German, it is usually formed by adding *-er* to the adjective. For many one-syllable adjectives, the vowel often takes an umlaut in the comparative form: *groß* (big) - *größer* (bigger)

To make a comparison between two terms, the conjunction *als*, which corresponds to 'than' in English, is placed before the second term of comparison.

Ich fühlte mich viel größer als der Riese. (literally: *I felt much bigger than the giant*; or in the Morris translation: *I towered over him.*)

In this case, 'bigger' is the comparative form of 'big', used to show that the speaker is taller than the person they are comparing themselves to. In this case, 'bigger' is the comparative form of 'big', used to show that the speaker is taller than the person they are comparing themselves to. The original sentence translated by Marella Feltrin-Morris, "*I towered over him*", emphasises a significant difference in height, while the comparative version simply indicates that the speaker is taller.

Note: I am using Marella Feltrin-Morris' translation for the English version.

3. Superlative

The superlative expresses the highest degree of a quality. There are two forms of the superlative:

(a) The absolute superlative is formed by adding an adverb to the adjective. Look at the example with the adverb *ganz*.

You can put *ganz* in front of the adjective used predicatively or in front of the adjective used attributively.

Die Träume sind alle ganz unterschiedlich. (The dreams are all very different.)

eine ganz andere Sprache sprechen (to speak a completely different language)

(b) The relative superlative is formed by adding the suffix -st to the adjective. It precedes the noun and is declined like an attributive adjective.

It expresses the maximum or minimum degree of a quality, relative to a group.

In Pirandello's story, the relative superlative expresses the worst form of the disease the child suffers from, compared to other less serious forms.

„Morbus Pot“ in einer seiner schwersten und unheilbaren Formen. (“Pot’s disease,” in one of its most virulent, incurable forms.)

Good to know!

There is one exercise after the lesson.

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