

A System for Studying Adjectives in the Uzbek Language

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the development and potential for organizing the study of the adjective (sifat) in the Uzbek language. Using materials from academic grammars, university textbooks, and an explanatory dictionary, it describes four levels at which the adjective acquires linguistic characteristics: lexical-semantic, word-formation, morphological, and syntactic. It also highlights the difficulties Russian-speaking students face when applying the Russian grammar framework to Uzbek material. A proposed study sequence introduces degrees of comparison after categories and word formation and discusses the issue of part-of-speech boundaries at the end.

Keywords: Uzbek language, adjective, *sifat*, qualitative and relative adjectives, degrees of comparison, substantivization, affixation, comparative grammar.

INTRODUCTION

The adjective in Uzbek has long been a category that was more controversial than nouns or verbs. The reason is obvious. In Turkic languages, the adjective is outwardly almost indistinguishable from the object word: it does not agree with the word it modifies in either number or case, readily becomes a noun, and is just as easily used with a verb as an adverbial modifier. The combinations *oqqog' oz* “white paper” and *oqniqoradanajratmoq* “to distinguish white from black” are built

on the same basis, and only the syntactic position suggests which part of speech we are dealing with.

For a Russianist accustomed to three genders, full and short forms, and a developed system of agreement, such a picture seems unusual. L. V. Shcherba warned that parts of speech are distinguished not by a single feature, but by their totality, and that the grammarian must take into account how native speakers themselves categorize words [9]. V. V. Vinogradov based his classification on the unity of lexical meaning, morphological forms, and syntactic functions [2]. Transferring these principles to an agglutinative language requires adjustments, and the history of Uzbek grammatical thought largely consists of such adjustments.

The first systematic description of Uzbek morphology in Russian was A. N. Kononov's 2012 grammar, substantially revised in the 2020 edition [4; 5]. Kononov identified the adjective as an independent part of speech and described its categories and degree forms. N. K. Dmitriev [3] & N. A. Baskakov [1], who examined the issue on the scale of the entire Turkology, drew attention to the fact that the boundary between the name of an object and the name of a feature in Turkic languages runs along function rather than form [1; 3]. In Uzbek linguistics of the second half of the 20th century, the treatment of *sifat* as a separate part of speech was established; it was reinforced by the academic grammar of 2021 and the university textbook by Sh. Shoabdurakhmanov and co-authors [8; 10]. Later, A. Khadzhiyev, A. Nurmanov and N. Makhmudov transferred the discussion to the systemic-structural plane, linking the categories of adjectives with their derivational history and syntactic valence [6; 7; 13].

A great deal of material has accumulated, but its presentation in educational literature is uneven. Some textbooks begin the topic with semantic categories, others with degrees of comparison, and still others with a list of affixes. A philology student, especially a Russian-speaking one, ends up memorizing a list of suffixes and fails to understand why *-li* forms a new word, while *-roq* forms an existing one. The purpose of this article is to describe the system for studying Uzbek adjectives as

a hierarchy of levels and to propose an order in which these levels can be conveniently mastered in a university course. This required generalizing the treatment of *sifat* in key grammars, identifying adjective features at each level, noting areas of interference with Russian, and, based on this, formulating a sequence for presenting the topic.

METHODS

The material was drawn from the academic *Grammar of the Uzbek Language* [10], both grammars by A. N. Kononov [4; 5], university textbooks on the modern Uzbek literary language [8], theoretical works by A. Khadzhiev, A. Nurmanov, and N. Makhmudov [6; 7; 13], as well as an English-language essay on Uzbek grammar by H. Buschoten, which is useful as a perspective from general Turkology. Illustrative examples were selected from the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* [11], where adjectives are accompanied by notes and typical collocations. The terminology was verified against A. Khadzhiev's dictionary of linguistic terms [12]. Uzbek examples are given in the current Latin script; the titles of the sources retain the script of the original.

The descriptive method was the primary one, allowing for the identification of the features of units in their systemic relationships. A comparative analysis of interpretations was used to compare the categories identified by different authors, which affixes are considered word-forming, and how many levels of comparison are recognized. Elements of component analysis were needed to delineate semantic groups within qualitative adjectives. A contrastive method was used for comparison with the Russian adjective. To verify the part-of-speech assignment of polyfunctional words like *yaxshi*, *tez*, and *ko'p*, a transformational technique was employed: the word was placed in the positions of an attribute, predicate, subject, and adverbial modifier, and the indicators it acquired were recorded.

The study does not rely on corpus statistics. The frequency of individual affixes in modern texts requires independent research.

This study focuses on the description system and the logic behind its teaching.

RESULTS

Lexical-semantic level

All the grammars considered divide adjectives into qualitative (*asliysifatlar*) and relative (*nisbiysifatlar*) [8; 10]. Qualitative adjectives name a feature inherent in an object directly. Within them, groups of color (*oq, qora, qizil, ko'k*), taste (*shirin, achchiq, nordon*), shape (*dumaloq, yassi, egri*), size (*katta, kichik, uzun, keng*), weight (*og'ir, yengil*), temperature (*issiq, sovuq*), character traits (*aqlli, dangasa, mehribon*) are usually distinguished. Most of the original qualitative adjectives are non-derivative, and it is they that provide the full set of degree forms. Relative adjectives denote a feature through its relation to an object, place, time, or action: *yozi* “summer,” *tog'li* “mountain,” *ilmiy* “scientific,” *temir* “iron” in the combination *temirdarvoza*. As a rule, they are derivative and do not form degree forms.

The boundary between the categories is fluid. The word *aqlli*, relative in origin (*aql* “mind” + *-li*), behaves as a qualitative word in speech: *aqlliyoq, engaqlli*. Similar shifts are observed in *kuchli, chiroyli*, and *mazali*. Therefore, a semantic classification should be given immediately along with a formal check: does the word accept *-roq*, and does it combine with *eng* and *juda*. This check is more reliable than any lists because it relies on the word's behavior, not its etymology.

Word-formation level

The main method of forming Uzbek adjectives is affixation. The most regular suffixes are *-li* (*suvli, kuchli*), *-siz* (*suvsiz, kuchsiz*), *-gi/-ki* / *-qi* (*kechki, ichki, tashqi*), *-iy/-viy* (*tarixiy, ma'naviy*), *-chan* (*ishchan, kuyinchan*), *-dor* (*obro'dor, mevador*), *-choq* (*maqtanchoq*), *-qoq* (*qo'rqoq, tirishqoq*). A noticeable group is formed by prefixes of Persian and Arabic origin: *be-* (*bema'ni*), *no-* (*noma'lum, noto'g'ri*), *ser-* (*sersuv, serhosil*), *ba-* (*badavlat*), *bad-* (*badbo'y*), *g'ayri* (*g'ayriqonuniy*). A. Khadzhiev emphasizes that affixes with opposite meanings of presence and absence of a

feature form regular antonymic pairs [13]: *suvli* and *suvsiz*, *sersuv* and *suvsiz*. This is a convenient support for a course, as the student immediately sees a system, not a list.

Less frequently, adjectives are formed by compounding: *ko'kko'z* "blue-eyed," *sheryurak* "brave," *xushbichim* "stately, well-built." In the latter case, the first component *xush-* is on its way to becoming a prefix, and textbooks interpret it differently. It's best not to hide such borderline cases from students: they clearly demonstrate how the status of a morpheme changes historically.

Morphological level

In the attributive position, the adjective does not change in number, case, or person: *kattaui* "big house," *kattauiylar* "big houses," *kattauiyda* "in a big house." The actual grammatical category of the adjective remains degree (*daraja*). The number of degrees distinguished varies in different grammars, but in modern university textbooks, the four-part scheme predominates [8].

The suffix *-roq* has a peculiarity that Russian-speaking students don't immediately notice. Without an object of comparison, it often expresses not superiority but a weakening of a characteristic: *oqroq* is understood as "whitish," not "whiter." The meaning of the form thus depends on the presence of the word in the original case in the sentence. Subjective evaluation affixes are described separately: *gina/ -kina / -qina* (*kichkinagina*, *yaxshigina*), which are not included in the system of degrees but impart a touch of endearment or moderation to the characteristic.

Syntactic level

The main function of the adjective is to act as a prepositional attribute without agreement: *sovuqsuv* "cold water." In predicate position, the adjective takes predicate affixes: *Suvsovuq* "The water is cold," *Mencharchoqman* "I'm tired, I'm tired." When used with a verb, it acts as an adverb of manner: *tezyurmoq* "to go quickly," *yaxshio'qimoq* "to study well." In the position of the subject or object, the adjective is substantivized and receives a

full set of nominal affixes: *kattalar* “adults,” *yoshlarga* “young,” *yaxshisinitanla* “choose the good from them.”

Study sequence

The data, when combined, allows us to construct a sequence for presenting the topic, with each subsequent step building on the previous one:

1. semantic categories with formal category verification;
2. word formation, whereby each affix is marked as to what category it creates;
3. degrees that are introduced only for qualitative adjectives and for relative ones that have become them;
4. syntactic functions and substantivation;
5. controversial cases of part of speech affiliation.

DISCUSSION

The proposed order diverges from how the topic is often structured in textbooks, where degrees of comparison are placed first as the most “grammatical” material. In practice, early discussion of degrees leads to errors: the student forms *ilmiyroq* or *engyozi*, because I haven't yet learned that *-roq* only works with qualitative features. If the ranks and the *-roq* check are given in advance, the degrees are perceived as their continuation.

There's another reason to prioritize word formation over degrees. A Russian-speaking student knows the difference between a word-forming and a form-creating suffix well from their native material, but in an agglutinative word, it's not immediately obvious: *-li* and *-roq* are attached to the stem in the same mechanical manner, without alternations or fusion of morphemes. The difference must be demonstrated through the result. The suffix *-li* produces a word that appears in the dictionary as a separate entry (*tuzli*, *kuchli*), whereas *-roq* produces a form that isn't and can't be found in the dictionary. Working with an explanatory dictionary [11] during a practical lesson makes this difference clearer than any explanation.

The most difficult question concerns multifunctional words. In combinations of *yaxshiodam* “good person” and *yaxshigapiradi* “speaks well” uses the same stem. A. N. Kononov and authors of academic grammar consider the second case as the use of an adjective in the function of an adverb [5; 10]. Other researchers talk about the transition to an adverb. N. Makhmudov and A. Nurmanov propose resolving the issue taking into account the valence and position of the word in the sentence structure [6; 7]. In our opinion, the first interpretation is more convenient for educational purposes: it does not multiply homonyms and preserves for the student a clear rule according to which part-of-speech belonging is determined by the lexical meaning of the feature, and the function depends on the position. For a theoretical course, the second interpretation is more interesting, and it makes sense to discuss it at the final stage, when the main material has already been mastered.

Interference with the Russian language requires special attention. Russian-speaking students most often make four types of errors. The first is related to the search for agreement: constructions like *kattalar appear.Uylar*, where the plural marker is repeated in the definition. The second type arises when transferring Russian short forms: the student tries to find a special predicative form where Uzbek uses the same *sifat* with a predicate affix. The third concerns the diminutive degree. In Russian grammar, the nuance of incompleteness of a feature is conveyed word-formationally, by suffixes *-ovat/-evat-* (whitish, bluish), and in school tradition, this is not considered a degree of comparison. Russian-speaking students tend to consider the Uzbek *-(i) sh* and *-mtir* simply suffixes, not a degree form. The fourth type of error concerns the intensive degree: the partial repetition *qip- qizil* has no direct equivalent in Russian and is often translated descriptively (very red) or replaced by a combination with *eng*. A comparative commentary on each of these points removes most of the difficulties, and therefore it is better to give contrasting remarks in the course of the presentation, rather than in a separate section at the end.

The status of relative adjectives formed without an affix also raises questions. In the combination *temirIndarvoza* “iron gates,”

the word *temir* remains a noun in its attributive function, and some authors don't classify such cases as adjectives at all. This example clearly demonstrates to students that in Turkic languages, the position of an attribute doesn't necessarily make a word an adjective. The criterion is the ability to denote a feature outside of this position and participate in the word-formation and form-building processes characteristic of *sifat*.

The study has obvious limitations. It relies on descriptions and textbooks, not a corpus of texts, and therefore says nothing about how often, for example, forms ending in *-imtil* are used in modern speech compared to forms ending in *-(i) sh*. School traditions also deserve separate study: textbooks for comprehensive schools with Russian as the language of instruction present the topic in their own way, and comparing them with the university curriculum could provide practical recommendations for teacher training.

The Uzbek adjective is best studied as a system of four levels, where semantics determines word-formation possibilities, word-formation determines the category, category limits the range of degree forms, and syntax defines the limits of the part of speech. This order is consistent with the treatment of *sifat* in major grammars and simultaneously addresses the difficulties of the Russian-speaking audience. A corpus-based study of the productivity of word-formation and form-forming adjective affixes appears promising, as it would help clarify which models should be taught first in the curriculum.

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