

■ Adjectives

● What Is an Adjective?

Typically, adjectives express attributes of people, events, and things, and also people's senses and emotion. They perform the word change called conjugation, and function as adnominal modifiers as well as the predicate and adverbial modifiers in sentences. As an adnominal modifier, an adjective specifies an attribute of the modified noun, and oftentimes the tense differentiation has been neutralized. As the predicate, it may predicate people's attributes, events, and things, and may predicate a temporary state of being. As an adnominal modifier, its adverbial form may modify the movement and the manner of the change that the verb expresses, and may put a boundary on the degree of the concept of the state. Depending on the conjugation type, adjectives are divided into *i*-adjectives and *na*-adjectives.

The main function of verbs is to express dynamic states of affairs such as movement and change, while adjectives express static states. Semantically, adjectives may be classified into ones that express attributes, senses and emotion, relationship and attitude, and so on. The ones that express senses and emotion exhibit restriction on the use of person, where only a first-person noun can be used as the subject when such adjectives become the predicate in the non-past 言い切り *iikiri* (terminal) form.

● Sentence Structure Using Adjectives and Their Morphological Characteristics

Adjectives possess a system of case governance, although it is not as varied as that of verbs. The most prominent characteristic manifests when an adjective is combined with a case-*ni* noun.

Yasashii 'gentle', *shinsetsuda* 'kind', *urusai* 'annoying, picky', and *nesshinda* 'enthusiastic', for example, all take nouns marked with *ni*, which denote a person, thing, or event that is the object of the attitude expressed by the adjective. Likewise, *tsuyoi* 'strong', *yowai* 'weak', *akarui* 'bright', and *kuwashii* 'knowledgeable' each establishes a connection between the object and the ability or characteristic that the adjective expresses. *Toboshii* 'scarce' and *uttetsuke* 'perfectly suitable' each establishes a connection to the criterion for evaluation of the content or purpose. Certain expressions, such as *tomodachi ni warui* 'cause the friend too much trouble,' *tomodachi ni sumanai* 'feel bad about causing too much trouble to one's friend,' may be difficult to explain to learners whose culture does not have an equivalent concept.

Case governance of adjectives creates various semantic connections when combined with case-*ga* nouns. *Atama ga itai* 'the head aches', *karada ga kayui* 'the body is itchy,' each refers to the area where the sensation occurs. *Kizuguchi ga itai* 'the wound hurts', *taiyō ga mabushii* 'the sun is glaring' each refers to the object that causes the sensation; *inu ga kowai* 'is afraid of dogs', *umare kokyō ga koishii* 'miss the hometown' each refers to the object toward which the emotion is directed, and *tenisu ga umai* 'is good at tennis', *engi ga jōzu da* 'is good at acting' each refers to the object for which an ability is demonstrated.

Adjectives are relativized because they possess the concept of stativity, and they are modified by expressions of degree and used in expressions of comparison. In modification of degree, adjectives are modified by adverbs of degree (e.g., *totemo ureshii* 'very pleased'), by the adverbial form of adjectives (e.g., *osorosiku atsui* 'terribly hot'), and by formal nouns of degree (e.g., *odorokuhodo samui* 'astoundingly cold'). "*A wa B yori* (adjective)" 'A is more (adjective) than B' and "*A wa ~ no nakade mottomo* (adjective)" 'A is the most (adjective) among ~' are typically used in constructing expressions of comparison. *Hitoshii* 'is equal', *onajida* 'is the same', *sokkurida* 'looks exactly the same', etc., are combined with a case-*ni* noun or case-*to* noun to express that there is little or no difference in the relative relationship. Conversely, *gyakuda* 'is the reverse' and *hantaida* 'is the opposite', etc., may be combined with a case-*to* noun to express that the relationship between the two objects or events is not equal.

It is not limited to adjectives, but the *kotoni* form of adjectives which express judgment/evaluation, such as *tsurai* 'is a burden', *warui* 'bad', *benri na* 'convenient', and *fuben na* 'inconvenient', may function as a sentential adverb to foretell the judgment made by the speaker regarding the content of

the predication. Expressions such as *saiwainimo* ‘luckily’ and *mezurashikumo* ‘most unusually,’ may also function as sentential adverbs.

Adjectives possess fewer grammatical categories than verbs. They possess acknowledgment (affirmation/negation), tense, politeness, and modality. They do not possess voice or aspect, which verbs of movement and change possess.

- Adjectivization

Although not recognized as a part of speech, there is a phenomenon called adjective-ness or adjectivization. *Togatta* ‘pointed’ and *magatta* ‘crooked’ in *togatta enpitsu* ‘pointed pencil’ and *magatta hana* ‘crooked nose,’ respectively, are past tense verbs, but the past form does not mark the tense. They are treated as equivalent to adjectives because semantically they express a state such as “pointed” and “crooked,” and because structurally, this form only possesses the function as an adnominal modifier.

→ 感情・感覚形容詞 Emotion/Adjectives of Emotion, 感情動詞 Verbs of Emotion (2-M)

- References

Nishio, Toraya (1972) *Keiyōshi no imi: yōhō no kijutsu* (Description of the Meaning and Usage of Adjectives). Shuei Shuppan.

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