

Categoriality of adjectives in Dawera-Daweloor, a language of Eastern Indonesia

Many languages of South-East Asia, Africa and North America are described as lacking an independent adjective class. The thesis that ‘adjective’ is a non-universal category is common in the linguistic literature, including the classical Dixon’s paper “Where have all the adjectives gone?” (1977). However, later Dixon (2004) has re-assessed the categorial status of adjectives. He claims that appropriate criteria can be found in each human language to distinguish an independent adjective class.

The aim of this paper is to discuss differentiating characteristics to distinguish the separate adjective class in Dawera-Daweloor, an almost undescribed¹ Austronesian language, spoken by approximately 1500 speakers of the Babar archipelago in Eastern Indonesia.

In general, in Eastern Indonesian languages property concept words (i.e. expressions of size, dimension, colour, etc.) appear to form a subclass of verbs except for few items considered as “basic adjectives” on grammatical grounds (as, for instance, in Leti, see van Engelenhoven 2004:161). In Dawera-Daweloor (hereafter Daweloor), however, the adjectival class is open and productive; the property words prototypically serving as attributes in noun phrases are normally suffixed with a class-marker *-el*; cf. *yakl-el* ‘bad’, *mil-el* ‘sweet, nice’, *lawl-el* ‘big’, *wurwur-el* ‘white’. In our wordlist not only original Daweloor property words are provided with suffixed *-el*; as a productive morpheme *-el* is also

¹ [1] an exception being Chlenova’s (2002) grammatical sketch and small vocabulary, based on her own field data obtained during the residence on Ambon island, the centre of Eastern Indonesian province of Maluku

regularly attached to loans as in *mahal-el* (<Indonesian *mahal*) ‘expensive’; *kotr-el* (< Indonesian *kotor*) ‘filthy’. When used as clausal predicates, Daweloor adjectives inflect their class marker-*el* to *-er* indicating plurality of the subject:

- (1) *Umwikre dwaler*
 um-ol~wikel-re dwalel-er
 house-NM~ new~D:PL good-PL
 ‘Those new houses are good’
 (Ind. *Rumah-rumah baru itu bagus*)

As can be seen from this example, predicatively used adjectives do not take subject-pronominal prefixes (a typical feature of Eastern Indonesian languages) that is they lack the main feature of predicatively used verbs.

In many languages where predicative adjectives are non-verbal, they require the presence of a supportive item (a copula). In Daweloor, a copula appears to be absent but multi-functional word *kede* may be categorized as a copula when it occur in equational clauses as in

- (2) *Wate kede dawel*
 Wat-ol~e kede daw-ol~el
 woman-NM~D kede wife-NM~3sgPOSS
 This woman is his wife
 (Ind. *Wanita itu isterinya*) (Chlenova 2005: 354)

Notably, *kede* is obligatory in case of nominal predicate but it is optional in the case of adjective predicate: compare above clause (1) which lacks *kede* and the following one that displays *kede*:

- (3) *Mallwurwurrel kede dwal-er*
 mallol~wur-wurrel kede dwalel-er
 hen~RED-white kede nice-PL
 ‘White hens are nice’

(Ind. *Ayam-ayam yang putih bagus*)²

The above two characteristics of Daweloor adjectives can be taken for evidence in favour of distinguishing adjectives from verbs. However, Daweloor adjectives can show as well verb-like behaviour. Similar to verbs, in predicate function adjectives bear tense, aspect and mood marking. Observe, for instance, that the perfective marker *-wes* cliticized both to verbs as in (4) and to adjectives as in (5)

(4)-*wes* cliticized to the verb *wudye* ‘to do’:

Mpudidwaltawesa yawwatrusail

m-wudye~dwalel~tawes-a yawwatol~rusak(Ind.)~ail

1plex-do~good-PERF-APP bridge~damaged long ago)

‘We have repaired the bridge broken long ago’

(Ind. *Kami telah memperkuat jembatan yang lama rusak itu*)

(5) *-wes* cliticized to the adjective *lawlel* ‘big’:

Asedol lawlelwes

as-ed-ol lawlel-wes

tree-1plincPOSS-NM big-PERF

‘Our tree is already in bloom’

(Ind. *Pohon kita sudah berkembang*)

Since Daweloor in some cases treated property words as non-verbal but in the other ones as verbal, additional criteria are needed for the defining categorical status of putative adjectives.

² Compare the stimulus Indonesian attributive constructions with the relativizer *yang* with their Daweloor equivalents (3,4). Observe, that in the case of Daweloor the attribute directly follows the noun it modified

Compare above example (7) with the following clause:

- (8) *Walkwele tuulel mers*
 walk-ol wele tuulel mers
 bench ~DEM low INTENS)
 ‘This bench is the lowest one’
 (Ind. *Bangku ini paling rendah*)

Whereas in the noun phrase (7) the adjective immediately follows the noun, in the clause (8) the noun phrase and the adjective are separated with the determiner and this is the way to show that the adjective is not an integral part of the noun phrase but it functions predicatively. In Daweloor, therefore, noun phrases with attributive adjectives differ from clauses with adjective predicate. In many languages the difference between those types of constructions correlates with the existence of separate adjective class.

Another characteristic feature of adjectives also associated with an attributive function is reduplication. As modifiers of head nouns, Daweloor attributive adjectives usually display reduplication (see examples 3 and 7) though they can occur as well not reduplicated (see example 1). Interestingly, in Leti, the language closely related to Daweloor, reduplication of attributive adjectives is strongly obligatory. In this language property concept words are categorized as process verbs. A regular way to converse them into adjectives is through reduplication. In predicating function, property concept words inflected with a subject prefix profile a dynamic process whereas in attributive function they, always reduplicated, encode an integral property of a noun they modify. Reduplication associated with prototypical attributive function seems to have a certain categorical value.

Summarizing the verbal-like and non-verbal characteristics of property concept words in Dawera-Daweloor, we conclude that there are good reasons to distinguish a separate adjectival class in this language which makes it rather

interesting in the perspective of the internal typology of Eastern Indonesian languages.

Abbreviations: 1pe — first person plural exclusive; 1plinc – plural inclusive; 3sg – third person singular; ABL — ablative; APP — applicative; DET – determiner; DEM — demonstrative; Ind. – Indonesian; INTENS – intensifier; NM – noun class marker; PERF — perfective; PL – plural; POSS — possessive; RED — reduplication.

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