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Lezione 4

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Adjectives

The adjective in predicative position

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

The adjective is in predicative position when it is linked to the noun by a verb.

When it is in the predicative position, the adjective remains unchanged. It 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.)

Unfortunately, this is a desperate statement. The next sentence could never comfort the mother:

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

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

Both examples appear in the second part of the story.

Learning vocabulary

Learning vocabulary takes precedence over learning grammar rules.

Grammar rules are essential, but they should not overshadow the primary goal of increasing your vocabulary with each lesson.

Just as we did for nouns - and will do for verbs - it is helpful to study adjectives in the text using 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	unnütz, zu nichts zu gebrauchen	unnütz, zu nichts zu gebrauchen (lazy)
depraved	verkommen	verkommen (depraved)
sick	krank	krank (sick)
virulent	schwer	schwer (virulent)
incurable	unheilbar	unheilbar (incurable)

Adjectives in the first part of the story

In the first part of the story, six adjectives introduce the three characters and two describe the child's illness. Below is the relationship between these adjectives and the nouns they refer to:

das Mädchen (lieb)

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

das Kind (krank)

die Krankheit (schwer, unheilbar)

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

Adjectives in the second part of the story

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)

The following adjectives appear in the second part of the story, which takes place in a shadowy twilight room. The scene is described so vividly that you can almost imagine it without knowing the verbs.

das Zwielight (fahl)

das Körperchen (locker, schlaff)

das Kind (tot)

der Riese (sprachlos)

die Gewissheit (schrecklich, unumstößlich)

The adjective in an attributive position

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

In the attributive position, the adjective always comes before the noun it modifies, both syntactically and semantically.

Is it like the article? Let's look at an 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 attributive position, the adjective agrees with the article. Either the adjective or the article gives all the necessary information about the gender, number and case of the noun.

In the following examples, you can use the endings of the adjective and/or the article to identify the gender of the noun:

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)

How to use adjective endings to indicate gender

The definite article indicates the gender of the noun, e.g. *der* indicates masculine. The ending of the adjective often reflects this information: In '*schöner Ruhm*' the -r in the adjective indicates masculine gender.

In the absence of an article - or together with it - the adjective in attributive position gives all the necessary information about the gender, number and case of the noun.

Examples:

sein kleines Körperchen → neuter, because the article contains -s.

schöner Ruhm → masculine, because the adjective ends in -r.

ein sprachloser Riese → masculine, because the adjective ends in -r.

die schreckliche Gewissheit → feminine, because both the article and the adjective end in -e.

Degrees of the adjective

1. Positive degree

The positive degree is the base form of the adjective, used when no comparison is made. It describes a quality as it is. For example: *Die Krankheit ist schwer*.

2. Comparative degree

The comparative degree expresses a comparison between two terms of the same quality. For example: *groß* (big) - *größer* (bigger)

In German, the comparative is formed by adding the suffix *-er* to the adjective. Many single-syllable adjectives also require an *umlaut*.

To compare two things, use the conjunction *als* ('as') before the second thing to be compared. For example:

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

Marella Feltrin-Morris' translation, "*I towered over him*", emphasises a significant difference in height, whereas the literal comparative version simply conveys that the speaker is taller.

Note: I refer to Marella Feltrin-Morris' translation for the English version: Pirandello, Luigi. "A Breath" ("Soffio"), tr. Marella Feltrin-Morris. In *Stories for a Year*, eds. Lisa Sarti and Michael Subialka, Digital Edition, www.pirandellointranslation.org, 2021.

3. Superlative degree

There are two types of superlatives: absolute and relative.

(a) Absolute superlative

The absolute superlative is formed by combining the adjective with an adverb, such as *ganz*. For example:

Alle Träume sind ganz unterschiedlich. (Each of the dreams is different from the one before.)

Da waren fremde Leute, die eine ganz andere Sprache sprachen als sie selbst. (There were other people who spoke a language different from hers.)

(b) Relative superlative

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

This form expresses the highest or lowest degree of a quality relative to a group.

In Pirandello's story, the relative superlative describes the most serious form of the child's illness:

„*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 an exercise in the appendix.

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