

STRONG ADJECTIVES, AND SIMILAR PHENOMENA, IN THE SECOND GENERATION IE LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘strong adjective’ usually refers to a special morphological class of adjectives in Germanic languages, which manifest as nominal bases with pronominal endings. This formal feature is likely to be associated with the marking of definiteness, even though the exact function of the opposition between weak and strong adjectives remains unclear. The real *raison d’être* of the morphological categories and processes, such as classificational (lexical) and inflectional gender (‘controller gender’ and ‘target gender’ in terms of Corbett 1991), definiteness, number, etc., is simply that of keeping the words together in a sentence. In PIE there was no separate morphological class of adjectives, and the quality predicates and modifiers were expressed by stative verbs and nominal epithets (see Alfieri 2011). Therefore, there was no morphological means that kept the words together in an NP. If we consider what I suggest to call “Second generation IE languages” — i.e. the “middle” continuants of the oldest IE languages, such as Middle Indian and Middle Iranian varieties, plus some other groups which lack an “Old” (i.e. contemporary with Old Indo-Aryan, Ancient Greek etc.) attestation, for instance Balto-Slavic and Germanic — we can observe a general tendency to create new morphological means in order to mark explicitly the constituency of an NP. The exact outcomes of this diachronic process vary from one language to another. However, if we parametrize the variation, a common pattern becomes clearly observable. In all cases, the pronominal element undergoes the grammaticalization. What can differ is 1) the position of such element with respect to the nominal base (pre- vs. post-posed); 2) the degree of agglutination (bound vs. free morpheme); and 3) the locus of marking (head vs. modifier). With this approach, a number of, at first glance, unrelated phenomena can be interpreted as different manifestations of the same morphological isogloss. These include:

- Germanic and Balto-Slavic adjectives (considered analogous already by Leskien 1876: 130ff);
- Persian *ezāfe* (together with its Old Iranian antecedents, whose similarity to the Slavic adjectives was observed already by Meillet 1934: §509; see also West 2011: §237ff, Nyberg 1900: 105ff);
- Greek article (especially in certain positions);
- some morphological innovations attested in Pali and Prakrits (for instance, the “infiltration” of pronominal endings into the declension of the NP modifiers, see Pischel 1900: §366a);
- Khotanese special adjectival declension, which closely resembles the strong adjectives in Germanic (see Sims-Williams 1990).

It is debatable whether this is a natural development or, as I suggest, an areal isogloss.

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