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SOME NOTES ON HOMONYMOUS NOUNS AND ADJECTIVES IN THE FENNO-UGRIC LANGUAGES

In the course of a special study of the adjectivization of nouns in English¹ the present writer collected some material on homonymous adjectives and nouns in various other languages, including his native Estonian. The following is a brief account of the relevant Fenno-Ugric data with particular reference to Estonian.

The attributive use of nouns or their stems as modifying elements in a genitive case relationship, as prepositional attributes or within compound words, is a commonplace feature of very many languages. Nouns in apposition are likewise of frequent occurrence. It is much more unusual to find nouns employed in the function of an adjective as a prepositive or postpositive modifier standing detached from its head-word. The adjectivization of nouns, i. e. the production of adjectives from nouns without affixation, is also far less common than the converse process of the substantivization of adjectives.

Thus, present-day English contains about 700 sets of homonymous adjectives and nouns such as *cold, light, deep, dark, quiet, damp, liberal, relative*. About 70 of these sets are the result of the adjectivization of nouns. There are only isolated instances of analogous desubstantival adjectives in the other Germanic languages (e. g. German *wert, fromm, ernst, licht, schuld, schade, brache*; Dutch *meester*; Swedish *skir, släkt*, etc.). A well-known characteristic of the English language is the use of nouns in their uninflected form (identical with that of the common case singular) as prepositive attributes, e. g. *stone wall, morning walk, London fog*, etc. Of the other Indo-European languages only French has anything comparable in its extent with this phenomenon. The use of nouns as postpositive attributes is fairly widespread and apparently on the increase in contemporary French.² All the Indo-European and especially the Germanic languages are characterized by a great facility in the production of nominal compounds where the modifying first element is a noun.³

¹ For some of the results see my paper "The Adjectivization of Nouns in English". — *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 1964, No. 4, pp. 341—349.

² E. g. *un temps record, une presse patriote, une propagande monstre, un air gamin*; see J. Marouzeau, *Entre adjectif et substantif*. — *Le français moderne* 1954, No. 3, pp. 161—171; cf. also Ф. А. Третьяк, *Имя существительное как субститут прилагательного в современном французском языке* (канд. дисс.), Москва 1966.

³ Strictly speaking, the constituents of a compound word stand in a semantic relationship to each other which differs from the attributive syntactic relationship linking the members of a group of words. From the point of view of the present discussion, however, the distinction is immaterial.

A peculiarity of the Turkic languages is their almost universal lack of any morphological distinction between nouns and adjectives. This has even led some linguists to deny the existence of adjectives as an independent class of words in the languages concerned.⁴

The Fenno-Ugric languages are of considerable interest as regards the variety and incidence of attributively used nouns. In all the languages of this family an adjectival or substantival attribute precedes its head-word. In the Baltic-Fennic and Lappish languages the prepositional substantival attribute occurs in the form of the nominative singular or genitive singular (usually with a difference in meaning) and is in the overwhelming majority of cases written jointly with the following head-word.⁵

In the Ugric, Permian and Volga languages prepositional substantival attributes are as a rule written separately from their head-words. In these languages adjectives as well as nouns in the function of a prepositional attribute do not agree in number or case with the words they modify and remain in the form of the nominative singular. E. g. Mari nom. sing. *кү пöрт* 'stone house', *у пöрт* 'new house'; gen. sing. *кү пöртын* 'of the stone house', *у пöртын* 'of the new house'.⁶

In Mordvin, Mansi, Komi-Ziryene, Udmurt, etc. the substantival attribute does not differ formally from an adjectival attribute. There are numerous instances of homonymous nouns and adjectives in these languages, e. g. Erza-Mordvin *чопода*, Moksha-Mordvin *шобда* 'darkness' and 'dark'; Erza-Mordvin *якшамо* 'the cold' and 'cold'; Moksha-Mordvin *валда* 'the light' and 'light' (opposite of 'dark').⁷

In literary Karelian, Veps and Kola Lappish substantival attributes are occasionally written separately from their head-words. E. g. Karelian *пуу ялга* 'wood(en) leg', *kezä huomneš* 'summer morning'; Veps *pehmitез знам* 'Russian letter ь', Kola Lappish *leip raz* 'bread corn'. Such cases do not necessarily reflect more than an inconsistency in orthographical tradition. In the eastern Fenno-Ugric languages likewise the spelling is variable and no safe guide in distinguishing compound words from syntactic collocations.⁸

Hungarian nouns may occasionally function as prepositional attributes and some such nouns can be regarded as adjectivized, e. g. *ezüst* 'silver' in *ezüst kanal* 'silver spoon'; *arany* 'gold', *arany bárány* 'golden lamb'; *csoda* 'wonder', *csoda dolog* 'wonderful thing'.⁹ The close affinity between

⁴ Cf., e. g. Bashkir *тимер* 'iron' and 'made of or like iron'; *тимер юн* 'railway' (literally 'iron road'); Uzbek *тош* 'stone' and 'made of or like stone', *тош кўприк* 'stone bridge'; Turkish *fötr* 'felt' and 'made of or like felt', *fötr şapka* 'felt hat'; see Т. Абдурахманов, Субстантивация прилагательных в современном узбекском языке (автореферат канд. дисс.), Самарканд 1950, pp. 1—2; В. М. Жирмунский, Происхождение категории прилагательных в индоевропейских языках в сравнительно-грамматическом освещении. — Известия АН СССР. ОЛЯ, 1946, № 3, p. 208; С. С. Майзел, Изафет в турецком языке, Москва 1957, pp. 13, 97.

⁵ The conspicuous similarity of word-composition in the Germanic and Fenno-Ugric languages has been variously accounted for either as a result of a direct influence of the latter on the former (D. Burch) or as due to a certain reinforcing influence of the Germanic languages (see K. Kont, Substantivide attributiivsest seosest soome-ugri keeltest. — ККИУ I, Tallinn 1956, pp. 107, 111).

⁶ K. Kont, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 122.

⁷ For most of his Mari and Mordvin examples the author is indebted to I. Galkin and N. Vajuškin; see also A. E. Шестакова, Образование существительных и прилагательных от именных основ в мордовских языках (автореферат канд. дисс.), Москва 1952, p. 11.

⁸ K. Kont, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁹ S. Simonyi, Die ungarische Sprache, Strassburg 1907, pp. 245—246; И. Балаша, Венгерский язык, Москва 1951, pp. 96—97.

nouns and adjectives in Hungarian may also be seen in cases like the following where degrees of comparison have been formed from nouns, e. g. *szamá*r 'ass', *szamarabb* 'more stupid' (literally 'more ass-like'), cf. *ez a mi falunkban a legszamarabb ember* 'this is the most stupid man in our village' (literally 'the assest man'); *róka* 'fox', *rókább* 'slier'; *rózsa* 'rose', *rózsább* 'finer, more gorgeous' as in *rózsánál rózsább* 'more gorgeous than a rose'.¹⁰

In present-day Finnish the borderline between nouns and adjectives is somewhat blurred as there are numerous homonymous nouns and adjectives. These homonyms include cases of substantivized adjectives. As in other languages, the substantivization of adjectives in Finnish is the result of elliptical use, e. g. *sairas* 'ill' and 'sick person' (< *sairas ihminen* 'sick person'), *nuoret* 'young' (nom. pl.) and 'the young' (nom. pl.) (< *nuoret ihmiset* 'young people').¹¹ In addition to such relatively recent substantivized adjectives the Finnish language also has a number of words which are used as both nouns and adjectives and in which the substantival character of the word is probably primary. Such cases are apparently survivals from an early period of the Fenno-Ugric parent language when there was as yet no differentiation between these parts of speech. The following are some pertinent cases: *kylmä* 'the cold, cold'; *vilu* 'coolness, chilliness' and 'cool, chilly'; *kuuma* 'heat, hot'; *hämärä* 'twilight, dusky'; *pimeä* 'darkness, gloom; dark, gloomy'; *mätä* 'rot, rotten'; *märkä* 'dampness, wetness; damp, wet'; *veres* 'freshness; fresh, new'.¹²

The possibility of forming degrees of comparison from some Finnish nouns (as if they were adjectives) should also be mentioned in this connection, e. g. *ranta* 'shore, strand', *rannempi* 'closer to the shore'; *syksy* 'autumn', *syksympänä* 'later in the autumn'; *päivä* 'day', *päivämällä* 'later in the day', *kevät* 'spring', *keväämpänä* 'later in the spring'.¹³

As regards their morphology, nouns and adjectives show a close affinity in Estonian. In fact they have the same declensions. Both classes of words are similarly inflected for number and case. As a rule, however, Estonian nouns and adjectives are easily distinguishable according to their meaning and function. There are also certain derivational suffixes characteristic of either class of words.

Word-composition, including that of nouns, has been and is very productive in Estonian. Definite rules govern the spelling of compounds. The hyphen is used only sparingly. In nominal compounds the attributive substantival first component usually stands in the form of the nominative singular or that of the genitive singular. The nominative singular in Estonian (as well as in the other Fenno-Ugric languages) is not morphologically marked, i. e. it has no specific inflectional ending and coincides with the basic form of the word.

As a general rule, nouns in the nominative case singular are not employed in Estonian to modify nouns or noun-equivalents otherwise than as attributive first components within nominal compound words.

¹⁰ И. Балашша, *op. cit.*, p. 97; cf. also O. Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, London—New York 1925, p. 81.

¹¹ Lauri Hakulinen, *The Structure and Development of the Finnish Language*. (= Indiana University Publications. Uralic and Altaic Series, Vol. 3), Bloomington 1961, p. 51.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*; cf. also O. Jespersen, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

It is against the background we have just outlined of the relationships of nouns and adjectives that certain usages and groups of words attract attention in contemporary Estonian.

To begin with, there is a conspicuously large number of homonymous nouns and adjectives in the language. A provisional count of pertinent cases registered in the latest orthological dictionary of Standard Estonian¹⁴ yielded a total of at least 350 word-pairs. This number comprises words that are homonymous due to a variety of reasons, such as the substantivization of adjectives (for examples see below), adjectivization of nouns (see below, p. 255), or mere coincidence (e. g. *kile* 'membrane' and 'shrill'; *kõrb* 'desert' and 'reddish-brown in colour, bay'; *matt* 'mate, checkmate, etc.' and 'dull, lustreless').¹⁵ In the absence of a reliable etymological dictionary of Estonian, it is not always possible to make definitive statements about the genetic relationships between homonymous nouns and adjectives in the language. Because of the variety of possible developments leading to homonymy, deciding the chronological priority of either noun or adjective in individual cases may require special comparative-historical investigation. At this stage we merely wish to draw the reader's attention to the existence of this type of homonymy in Estonian and to some of its implications.

Practically any adjective in Estonian can be turned into a noun, at least for the nonce. Substantivization is usually the outcome of ellipsis of the head-word in an attributive collocation, e. g. *haige* 'ill person, patient' from *haige inimene* 'ill person'; *noor* 'young person, adolescent' from *noor inimene* 'young person'. Scores of adjectives have acquired permanent substantival homonyms in this manner. Some additional relevant instances are the following: *vanem* (the comparative form of *vana* 'old') 'elder' and 'headman, parent'; *ülem* 'higher — superior, chief'; *tark* 'wise — wise person, wizard'; *pime* 'blind — blind person'; *lombak* 'limping — lame person'; *väeti* 'feeble, helpless — feeble, puny, helpless person'; *püha* 'holy, sacred — holiday'; *võõras* 'strange, foreign — stranger, visitor'; *kõver* 'crooked, curved — curve'; *kurt* 'deaf — deaf person'; *tuttav* 'known, familiar, acquainted — acquaintance'.

In addition to such adjectives and their substantivized homonyms the vocabulary of contemporary Estonian contains about a score of words which can function both as nouns and as adjectives depending on the context.¹⁶ Such words include *külm* 'cold'; *vilu* 'coolness, chilliness' and 'cool, chilly'; *mäda* 'purulent matter, pus; rotten, purulent'; *kuum* 'heat, hot'; *hämär* 'dusk, dusky'; *vale* 'lie, falsehood; false, wrong, counterfeit'; *märg* 'wetness, dampness; wet, damp'; *kuiv* 'dryness, dry'; *valge* 'whiteness, daylight' (as in *suur valge väljas* 'it is broad daylight') and 'white, light (= not dark)'. There is evidence (mainly of a comparative-historical character)¹⁷ which suggests that many of these words go back to a stage in the development of the parent language when the original nouns had not yet become differentiated into nouns and adjectives. Consequently the adjectival members of the homonymous

¹⁴ Oigekeelsuse sõnaraamat, Tallinn 1960.

¹⁵ Such accidental homonyms usually have different paradigms, i. e. homonymy is confined to the nominative case singular. Cf., e. g., the partitive singular forms *kilet* 'membrane', *kiledat häält* 'shrill voice'; *kõrbet* 'desert', *kõrbi hobust* 'bay horse'.

¹⁶ Cf. such Modern English words as *light*, *cold*, *dark*, etc. in the contexts *a light room* and *he turned on the light*; *a cold day* and *she had a bad cold*; *the room was dark* and *they waited in the dark*.

¹⁷ See above, p. 253, for mention of similar words in the Finnish language.

noun-adjective pairs in the present-day language are of relatively more recent origin.

When Estonian *külm*, *vilu*, *hämar*, *märg*, etc. are used attributively, they function to all intents and purposes as "pure" adjectives, i. e. they can be used prepositively and predicatively, they are inflected for case and number in agreement with their head-words, etc. E. g. *külm toit* 'cold food' (nom. sing.) — *külmad toidud* 'cold dishes' (nom. pl.); *toit on külm* 'the food is cold'; *märg särk* 'wet shirt' (nom. sing.) — *märgades särkides* 'wet shirts' (inessive pl.); *särgid on märjad* 'the shirts are wet'.

So far as we know there is as yet no exhaustive catalogue of those Estonian nouns that have adjectival homonyms. Neither do the words under discussion appear to have been studied in detail with regard to their degree of adjectivization or the semantics involved. As a non-specialist the present writer can only offer a few tentative observations.

One such observation is that the Estonian nouns capable of being employed attributively do not constitute a homogeneous group as regards their ability to combine with other words to form compounds. Our provisional list of such words comprises some 6—8 nouns that seem to constitute a subgroup of their own, viz. *kelm* 'rascal, swindler'; *koer* 'dog'; *logu* '(old) crock'; *lorts* 'soft, textureless substance or thing, slush'; *loru* 'oaf, blockhead'; *näru* 'rag, tatter'; *räbal* 'rag, tatter'; *sant* 'beggar, cripple'. All these nouns can be used attributively or predicatively with a pejorative meaning, e. g. *koer poiss*, literally 'dog boy', i. e. a naughty, mischievous boy; cf. also *see poiss on päris koer* 'this boy is quite naughty' (literally 'this boy is a real dog'); *räbal asi* 'wretched thing' (literally 'rag thing'); *sant tervis* 'poor health' (literally 'cripple health').

The words under discussion do not occur in their nominative singular form as attributive first components in compound words (*kelm*, *koer*, *logu*, *lorts*, *loru*, *räbal*) or they can be met with in only a few compounds (*sant* and *näru* in one each). In this respect they differ conspicuously from the vast majority of nouns in the language.

When attributively used, all the words of this subgroup are inflected like "pure" adjectives. They can also form degrees of comparison (when logically possible), e. g. *koerem kui koer*¹⁸ 'naughtier than a dog' (literally 'more dog-like than a dog'); *kõige sandim* 'worst, poorest, most wretched' (literally 'most beggar-like, most cripple-like'), and they agree with their head-words in number and case just as "pure" adjectives do, e. g. *koerad poisid* 'naughty boys' (nom. pl.); *räbalaid väljavaateid* 'poor (bad) prospects' (part. pl.).

Attributive collocations containing these words are widely used in contemporary Estonian in the presence of a well-developed system of adjectives and nominal compounds.

Pending a more detailed investigation of the functioning and semantics of words such as these, it appears safe to maintain that quite a number of nouns in Estonian have acquired adjectival homonyms. The latter deserve to be studied more closely as one of several peculiar types of adjectives in the Estonian language.¹⁹ Material from dialects,

¹⁸ F. J. Wiedemann, *Ehstnisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, St. Petersburg 1869, column 351.

¹⁹ Cf. the peculiar groups of so-called invariable or uninflected adjectives in Estonian, e. g. *eri* 'special', *kogu* 'whole', *valmis* 'ready'; *eesti* 'Estonian', *vene* 'Russian', etc.; for details see, e. g. A. Viies, *Käändumatud omadussõnad*, *Keel ja Kirjandus* 1958, No. 6, p. 357; E. Nurm, *Käänamatutest omadussõnadest*, *Keel ja Kirjandus* 1958, No. 10, pp. 620—624.

folk-lore, colloquial and substandard usage both in Estonian and various related languages should be examined in this connection.²⁰ A variety of problems associated with the predicative and appositional use of nouns likewise remain to be considered.²¹

On the whole, the numerous borderline cases between what are traditionally known as nouns and adjectives in Estonian and its cognate languages are of considerable interest. If undertaken against a broad background of, e. g., the Ural-Altai, Turkic and Indo-European languages, a closer examination of these phenomena should be of some value for general contrastive structural-typological studies.

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НЕКОТОРЫЕ ЗАМЕТКИ ОБ ОМОНИМИЧНЫХ СУЩЕСТВИТЕЛЬНЫХ И ПРИЛАГАТЕЛЬНЫХ В ФИННО-УГОРСКИХ ЯЗЫКАХ

Исследуя адъективацию существительных в английском языке, автор ознакомился с аналогичными явлениями в других индоевропейских и неиндоевропейских языках. В данной статье приводятся некоторые наблюдения омонимичных существительных и прилагательных в ряде финно-угорских языков. Более подробно рассматриваются случаи омонимии этих частей речи в эстонском языке. Особое внимание уделяется субстантивации прилагательных вследствие эллиптического употребления их (например: *haige* 'больной' < *haige inimene* 'больной человек'; *noored* 'молодые' < *noored inimesed* 'молодые люди') и словам, которые выступают в современном языке как в качестве прилагательных, так и в качестве существительных и, очевидно, представляют собой пережитки раннего периода развития языка-основы, когда границы между частями речи еще не были такими четкими, как теперь (например: *külm* 'холод, холодный'; *mäda* 'гниль, гнилой'). Выделяется особая подгруппа существительных с уничижительным значением, которые употребляются в функции препозитивного определения (например: *koer* 'собака; шаловливый, непослушный'; *räbal* 'тряпка; плохой, паршивый'; *sant* 'нищий, калека; плохой, скверный, убогий'). В форме номинатива единственного числа эти слова почти никогда не пишутся слитно с определяемым словом, т. е. они фактически не употребляются в качестве первого компонента сложных слов. Это отличает их от большинства имен существительных эстонского языка.

²⁰ E. g. superlative degree forms of "pure" nouns occur as nonce-formations in Estonian folk-songs, e. g. *hiirim* 'most mouse-like' (< *hiir* 'mouse'), *rottim* 'most rat-like' (< *rott* 'rat'). In emotional Estonian speech one can occasionally hear emphatic locutions such as *ta on paavstim kui paavst*, literally 'he is more papal than the pope' (cf. the French expression *il est plus royaliste que le roi*); *eeslim kui eesel*, literally 'more ass-like than an ass', i. e. as stupid as stupid can be, an egregious ass. In these cases the forms *paavstim* and *eeslim* are actually superlatives produced from the corresponding nouns.

Cf. also such substandard or vulgar locutions as *asi (on) vask* 'the matter is settled' (< *vask* 'copper'), *maru film* 'splendid film, a film that is super' (< *maru* 'tempest, storm'), *sitt ilm* 'nasty, disgusting weather' (< *sitt* 'excrement, dung'), *kihvt lugu* 'swell story' (< *kihvt* 'poison').

²¹ In this connection one could also mention the fairly wide-spread use as prepositional attributes of Estonian agent nouns ending in *-ja*, e. g. *võitleja hing* 'fighting (literally: fighter) spirit', *hakkaja poiss* 'enterprising or adroit boy', *latraja eit* 'prating, garrulous old woman', *kempeja mees* 'bragging, swaggering man'. In the majority of such cases the same agent nouns can also be employed in a predicative function: *poiss on hakkaja* 'the boy is enterprising', *eit on latraja* 'the old woman is garrulous', etc.