A Contrastive Analysis of English and Persian Adjectives (Noun Modifiers)

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Persian and English adjectives have similarities and differences which affect language learning and translation. A contrastive study of them makes the main points clear and helps the language learners to overcome their problems when they are reading, listening, speaking, writing, and translating. This article is of some help, in the above respects, to the students of English and those who are interested in language learning. It also presents a new type of classification of adjectives in both languages that can be used in teaching especially in the course of contrastive analysis.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, adjective, Persian, English, translation.

1. Introduction

Every year, thousands of university students, majoring in literature, teaching, and translation study English, but not all of them are proficient in any of these fields, especially translation, which requires a considerable knowledge of the two languages- Persian and English.

Iranian students take it for granted that they know Persian but they do not, specifically when they have to deal with different parts of speech such as

verbs, adjectives, adverbs and nouns. They know Persian in its common and colloquial forms used in everyday life just like any other native speaker and are unable to even identify the major points, let alone the differences between English and Persian. Moreover, their teachers also ignore the facts and the problems their students encounter. Therefore, English grammar in general and applied contrastive analysis in particular need to be taught to all the students studying English, especially those who major in translation. Comparative grammatical studies on both languages need to be done carefully and practically to give the latter sutdents enough insights into both languages in order to become efficient translators [1, 2].

To reach this ogal the purpose of this study is to: 1) show the differences of noun modifiers (adjectives) in the two languages and highlight them; 2) help the students realize the problems they face in translation; and 3) make some contribution to the field of contrastive analysis and those who are interested in this field.

2. Adjectives (Noun Modifiers) in English

Adjectives (NM) are defined and classified almost unanimously by grammarians. Shawet et al [3] believe:

"Certain words and groups of words are used within a sentence to specify, qualify, or otherwise determine the meaning of another word. This relationship is known grammatically as modification. A modifier does not change or alter the meaning of the word it modifies. The purpose of a modifier is to make the meaning of a word more exact and specify within the sentence or in their overall context. The parts of speech whose basic functions are to modify by themselves are adjectives and adverbs."

Frank [4] classifies all the determiners such as articles, demonstratives, possessives, numbers, relatives and interrogatives, prepositional phrases, clauses and so on as adjectives. Rusiecki [5] defines adjectives in the following manner and says:

"Adjectives share certain properties with adverbs and certain other properties with nouns. ... in inflectional languages such as Latin, the adjective is morphologically akin to the noun. In English there are forms - such as criminal - which can function as adjectives and as nouns.

Most English adjectives can function as subject and object complements."
Huddleston [6] maintains that:

"... not all languages have a distinct adjective class ... a further characteristic of adjective class is to contain numerous pairs of gradable opposites (big-small) which may play an important role in vocabulary learning."

Adjectives may be of different types - descriptive, proper, etc. - and may have endings which mark them, - able (workable), -ful (useful), -y (risky) and so on. Quirk et al [7] say:

"Four features are generally considered to be characteristic of adjectives:

1. They can freely occur in attributive positions (e.g. the happy children).

2. They can freely occur in predicative position (e.g. The man seemed old).

3. They can be premodified by the intensifier very (e.g. The children are very happy).

4. They can take comparative and superlative forms (e.g. The children are happier now. They are the happiest children).

However, all the words that are traditionally regarded as adjectives do not possess all these four features and some of them are applied to words that are generally considered as other parts of speech. Studying various workbooks in English gives a general impression that any word, phrase, or clause which modifies a noun can be classified under adjectives [4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13].

A) Classification

English adjectives can be divided into two major classes: simple and compound. Simple adjectives are subdivided into base and derived. Compound adjectives include phrases and clauses.

B) Simple Adjectives

A) *Base*

Base adjectives serve as stems of adverbs, nouns, comparatives, superlatives, verbs, and are usually of one or two syllables. They are called attributive if they precede the noun and predicative if they follow it.

1. Attributive adjectives act as modifiers of nouns and include: articles, numerals (cardinal and ordinal), descriptives (general description and physical state), proper forms (nationality and religion), noun adjunct, possessives, indefinite quantity, demonstratives, and colors.

e.g.:

  a) The book is here. (article)

  b) Six girls are ready. (numerical)

  c) She is a pretty girl. (general description)

  d) He is a small boy. (physical state)

  e) Iranian students work hard. (nationality)

  f) He is a crime reporter. (noun adjunct)

  g) They brought their son. (possessive)

  h) She bought some fruit. (indefinite quantity)

  i) That pen is Ali's. (demonstrative)

  j) She likes blue cars. (color)

2. Predicative adjectives act as complements of verbs and include:

  a) Subject complements after linking verbs such as feel, look, be, etc.
     He felt happy.

  b) Object complements after verbs like find, make, keep, etc.
     They found the place calm . He made me sad.

  c) Complements to a subject in a finite or nonfinite clause.
     Whether she goes is certain. Learning English is easy.

  d) Object complements to a clause.
     He believes working hard is good .

Some adjectives can be used as attributive or predicative while some others are used only in one position.

B. Derived

Words which are formed by the addition of suffixes to stems are called derived adjectives. The most important suffixes which are used to make adjectives are:

1. ful, -less, -y, -ly, -(i) al, -ous, -ic(al), -ish, -like, -ary or -evy, -wide, -en added to nouns (e.g. useful, useless, faulty, locally, racial, national, famous, comic, childish, manlike, legendary, fishery, nationwide, woolen).

2. -ent or -ant, -able or -ible, -ive, -ed, -ing, -ile, -worthy, -some, -(at) ory added to verbs (e.g. convenient, significant, workable, visible, active, learned, surprising, trustworthy, lonesome, explanatory).

3. -er or -est added to adjective stems for comparison (e.g. faster, fastest, lighter, lightest).

It should be noted that these adjectives mostly precede the nouns, but some of them such as past participles follow the nouns they modify (e.g. The book bought yesterday is here).

C) Compound Adjectives

A. phrases

Adjective phrases may be used in the form of infinitives and participles.

1. Infinitives may function as adjectives. They may modify a word or a sentence.

There is some food for you to eat.

To drive well he must be alert.

They may also be used with participles as adjectives.

This is a noble goal to try for.

She needs more money to live on.

Infinitives can take passive and active forms too.

Here is a letter to be typed. (passive)

Here is a letter for you to type. (active)

Participial phrases modify a noun or a pronoun which functions as a subject, a verb complement, an object of verb, and an object of preposition. They usually follow the word(s) they modify and take active or passive forms.

a) The boy <u>talking to the teacher</u> is deaf.

b) The person to see is the boy <u>talking to the teacher.</u>

c) I know the boy <u>talking to the teacher.</u>

d) I am fond of the boy <u>talking to the teacher.</u>

e) They will arrest anyone <u>caught on their property.</u>

f) The man <u>caught on their property</u> was arrested.

g) I know the man <u>caught on their property.</u>

h) I sent a message to the man <u>caught on their property.</u>

i) I had my car <u>washed</u> yesterday.

Some of the participials may be used as nonrestrictive adjectives.

Mary, <u>feeling tired</u>, decided to take a vacation.

Participial phrases may indicate "time" or "cause" in place of adverbial clauses.

<u>Putting on her hat</u>, Mary ran out to see her friend. (time).

<u>Working hard all afternoon</u>, she decided to go to bed early at night. (cause)

B. Clauses

Adjective clauses function as adjectives and may modify the following antecedents: a person or a thing as subject, object, object of preposition, or possessive position.

1. A person

a$_1$) The man <u>who is coming</u> is my teacher.

a$_2$) The man <u>whom you saw</u> is my teacher.

b$_1$) I like the teacher <u>who teaches English.</u>

b$_2$) I like the teacher <u>whom you saw.</u>

b$_3$) I like the boy <u>whose father is my teacher.</u>

c$_2$) I talked to the teacher <u>who teaches English.</u>

d$_1$) I like the teacher's son <u>who is my best freind.</u>

d$_2$) I like the teacher's son <u>whow you saw.</u>

In most cases except the opssessive forms, we can use "that" in place of "who" or "whom".

2. *A thing*

a) The book which is here belongs to me.

b) I bought the book which is here.

c) I paid for the book which is here.

d) I saw her book which costs a lot.

"That" can be used instead of "which" in all the positions.

Adjective clauses can also modify a time, a place, or a reason. In this case we use "when", "where" or "why" respectively in the adjective clause.

a) This is the month when I receive some money.

b) That is a place where you can rest and relax well.

c) That is the reason why he came here.

We can also use "as" (after the same) meaning "that":

They bought the same book as she did.

"Before" and "after" are used to introduce adjective clauses too:

They came here the day before they were going to marry.

They came here the day after they got married.

Each adjective clause includes a subject and a predicate which modifies a noun or a pronoun antecedent. "Who" and "whom" are used for persons while "which" is used for things, but "that' is used both for things and persons. Adjective clauses may also be used as restrictve or nonrestrictive clauses in all the preceding cases:

The man who loves her very much is a teacher.

John, who loves her very much, is a teacher.

Note: The relative words "who", "whom", "which", "that", "where", etc. refer to singular and plural antecedents.

3. Adjectives (Noun Modifiers) in Persian

Persian adjectives can likewise be divided into simple and compound with simple ones subdivided into base and derived and compounds into phrases and clauses [14, 15, 16].

A) Simple Adjectives

A) Base

Base adjectives in Persian can serve as stems of nouns, adverbs, verbs (compound ones), and comparative or superlative forms. They include all the attributive, subjective or objective complements, numerals, descriptives, possessives, demonstratives, colors, interrogatives, etc. Some of them are formed by using nouns, infinitives or imperatives plus suffixes, but most of them exist in their base forms. They usually have one, two, and occasionally three or four syllables but are considered as one word. They may precede or follow a noun depending on the role they play. Definite article in Persian does not have any representation as a word or sign and the sentence as a whole gives the implication of a noun being definite or not [17], but the indefinite one has symbol of/i/ at the end of the noun (e.g./ketabi/ = a book).

Usually demonstrative, numerical (cardinals), interrogative, exclamating, comparative, and superlative adjectives come before nouns. Declaration, noun adjunct, nationality, color, shape, and attributive adjectives follow the nouns they modify. Ordinal numbers are used in both positions.

1. Preceding the noun:

  a) / <u>do</u> doxtær inja hæstænd/ (numerical)

    two girls here are (Two girls are here.)

  b) / <u>in</u> xane no æst/ (demonstrative)

    this house new is (This house is new.)

  c) / <u>meqdari</u> mive bexær/ (indefinite quantity)

    some fruit buy (Buy some fruit.)

  d) <u>čegone</u> ketabi mixahi?/ (interrogative)

    What kind book you want (What kind of book do you want?)

  e) <u>če</u> ketabe xubi!/ (exclamation)

    What a book good (What a good book!)

  f) / <u>hær</u> kæs yek maʃin daræd/ (indefinite adjective)

    each person a car has (Each person has a car.)

  g) /<u>behtærin</u> daneʃgah dær tehran æst/ (superlative adjective)

the best university in Tehran is (The best university is in Tehran.)

2. Following the noun:

a) / mæn ketabi̱ xæridæm/ (indefinite article)

I a book bought (I bought a book.)

b) / lebase q̲e̲r̲m̲e̲z̲e̲ ou inja æst (color)

dress red her here is (Her red dress is here.)

c) /ou yek lebase z̲i̲b̲a̲ xærid/ (general description)

she a dress pretty bought (She bought a pretty dress.)

d) /ou gozareʃgære v̲æ̲r̲z̲e̲ʃ̲ æst/ (noun adjunct)

he reporter sports is (He is a sports reporter.)

e) /ʃagerdane i̲r̲a̲n̲i̲ sæxt kar-mikonænd/ (nationality)

students Iranian hard work (Iranian students work hard.)

f) /abe r̲æ̲v̲a̲n̲ ra bebin!/ (attributive)

water flowing (the) see (See the flowing water!)

Note: Ordinal numbers are of two types in Persian: those which follow and those which precede the nouns. The first type is made by adding the suffix/ -om/ to the cardinals except for the first one which has an execptional form, that is/ ævæl/. The second type is formed by adding the suffix/ -omin/ to the cardinals, e.g.:

a) mæn ketabe č̲h̲a̲r̲o̲m̲ ra xandæm/

I book fourth (the) read

b) / mæn č̲h̲a̲r̲o̲m̲i̲n̲ keteb ra xandæm/

I fourth book (the) read

(I read the fourth book.)

It sould be mentioned that the first type can be used for cardinal numbers in Englsih. In fact these numbers in Persian play two roles- cardianl and ordinal, e.g.:

/mæn ketabe čæharom ra xandæm/

I book f̲o̲u̲r̲ -- read (I read book four.)

In Persian it means the book which is used in grade four, or in another word, the reading book of class four.

3. Predicative adjectives may act as complements of verbs and include:

a) subject complements along with the linking verbs such as/ budæn/ (to be), /daʃtæn/ (to have) and so on which can be equal to English ones. Of course, the infinitive forms always change when they are conjugated in different tenses.

/an æks ziba æst/

that picure pretty is (That picture is pretty.)

b) object complements after some words such as / yaftæn/ (to find), /didæn/ (to see), / kærdæn/ (to make):

/mæn ou ra xoʃhal yaftæm/

I him -- happy found (I found him happy.)

c) simple adjectives in Persian are used to complement a phrasal subject or object:

/ zæban amuzi asan æst/

language learning easy is (Language learning is easy.)

/ou motæqede ke sæxt kar kædæn xub æst/

he believes (that) hard working good is

(He believes that hard- working is good.)

B) Derived

Adjectives formed by the addition of suffixes or prefixes to stems are categorized as derived adjectives. The most common ones are:

1. suffixes such as:

(a) /-an/, /-a/, /-ar/, /-e/, and /-i/, added to the main part of the verbs after omitting the infinitive sign/ (i) dæn/ or/ (t) æn/ except for the last one which takes /i/ after the infinitive/:

/pors an /, /gereftar/ , /ʃenæva/, /poxte/, /xordaeni/

(b) /-nde/, /-gar/, /gær/, /-kar/, /-saz/, /-ju/, /-soz/, /-nak/, /baxte/, /-i/, /-e/, /-ane/, / či/, /-ani/, /-gan/, /-in/, /-gir/, /-mænd/,/-alud/, /-gu/, /æfza/, /-avær/, /-ængiz/, /-bæx/, /-and/ /-nig/ added to nouns:

/pærhizgar/, /ʃærmæ nde/, /dadgar/, /bedehkar/, /ænduhgin/, /rast gu /, /ʃærm avær /, /væhʃætængiz/, /færæhbæxʃ/, /karsaz/, /daneʃju/, /pakbaxte/,

/isfæhani/, /pæ∫malud/, /yek∫æbe/, /sal ane /, /post či /, /nur ani /, /gero gan /,

/næmækin/, /bæhane gir /, /dane∫mænd /, /dærd nak /, /∫adiæfza/, /rængin/.

Note: Some grammarians believe that a few of these suffixes are words, but others maintain that they are all suffixes because they are used only when added to complete words and are not used by themselves and do not carry a complete meaning alone as-ful, etc., in English do.

B) Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives can be divided into two categories in the Persian language-- phrases and clauses.

A) phrases

Adjective phrases may be formed and used in the follwoing manners:

1. Combination of two nouns such as /∫irdel/ (brave) which is formed by using two nouns--/∫ir/ (lion) and/ del/ (heart), e.g.:

/ou mærdi ∫irdel æst/

he a man brave is (He is a brave man.)

2. Combination of a noun and an adjective or vice versa such as/ / sær bolænd / (honored) or/ xo∫ lebas / (well-dressed), e.g.:

/an mærd xo∫ lebas æst/

that man well-dressed is (That man is well-dressed.)

3. Various prepositional phrases can serve as noun modifiers or adjectives:

a) /banke rubeuye mænzele ∫oma/

the bank opposite house your (the bank opposite your house)

b) / ketabe ruye miz/

(the book on the table)

4. Infinitives preceding by the Persian word/bæraye/ are used as adjectives, e.g.:

/nan bæraye xordæn/

(bread to eat)

/namei bæraye tayp (kærdæn)/

(a letter to (be) type(d))

5. Participial phrases are not common in Persian but occaionally past participles are used with the word/ʃodæn/ (bceome). Past participles usually have single word equivalents which might be of Arabic origin, e.g.:

/koʃte ʃode/=/mæqtul or koʃte/=killed

/poxte ʃode/=/poxte/=cooked

A present participle may be used as a single/ simple adjective in Persian:

/mærde istade moaleme mæn æt/

the man standing teacher my is (The man standing is my teacher.)

(The standing man is my teacher.)

This form is never followed by the Persian word/ʃode/ and is not very Common. Usually both participles are substituted by adjective clause in Persian.

6. A noun and a past pariciple combine and form an adjective, e.g.:/jæhan dide/ (experienced). An adjective plus the present stem of a verb/ tiz ro/ (speedy) and also an imperative combined with its negative /keʃ mækeʃ / (struggle) make adjectives:

7. There is a miscellaneous type of adjectives formed of a) a verb and a noun such as/ bezæn bæhador/; b) two imperative verbs plus a connective, begu o bexænd/; c) a combination of preposition, noun and possible adjective or adverb like/az jan gozæʃte / (self sacrificed), /az xod razi / (conceited); and d) a particle plus a noun, / hæm æqide / (the same opinion).

8. A rhyming compound, the second part of which may be meaningless and beginning with an/m-/ or /p-/ sound like/tar o mar / (scattered) or / qati pati / (mixed or confused) is used as an adjective in Persian.

B) clauses

Adjective clauses are used to modify nouns or antecedents-- a person, a thing, a subject, an object, an object of preposition, or a possessive form. These clauses are preceded by a Persian relative pronoun/ke/(= who, which, whom, whose, or that). An /-i/ sound is added to the antecedent if definite except to the proper, personal, singular demonstrative, pronoun substitute, a word with prononminal suffix, an unparticularized plural, and generic noun [17]. If the

antecedent is modified by an adjective or adjectves the/ -i/ sound is added to the last modifying word. If the antecedent is definite and the direct object of the main clause, the word /ra/ can be used after it. Moreover, if the antecedent is used as the predicate of the main clause, the verb of the clause follows /ra/ and comes before /ke/. One more point is that in Persian, there is no punctuation to discriminate the "restrictive" clauses from "nonrestrictive" ones. Anyhow, there is a difference between "descriptive" and "restrictive" clauses where in the former only the pronoun /ke/ is used and there is no /-i/ sound added to the subject. This is also true of the plural antecedents referring to a class or group as a whole [17]. But it can be added in order to specify a special number of a group.

> a) / mærdi ke inja bud bæradære mæn æst/
>
> the man -- whom you saw brother my is
>
> (The man whom you saw is my brother.)

> b$_2$) /mærdi ke didid bæradære mæn æst/
>
> the man whom you saw brother my is
>
> (The man whom you saw is my brother.)

> c) / ketabi ke mæn xæridæm gomʃod/
>
> the book which I bought lost is
>
> (The book which I bought is lost.)

> b) / in mærdi æst ke æz ou æsb xæridid /
>
> this the man is whom from him horse you bought
>
> (This is the man from whom you bought the horse.)

In the last example, the pronoun /ou/ meaning "him" or "he" is always used in Persian and has no literal equivalent in Englsih. Therefore, it is a major source of mistake or error in translation, especially from Persian into English.

> e) / mærdi ke pesæræʃ duste mæn æst inja æst/
>
> the man whose son friend my is here is
>
> (The man whose son is my friend is here.)

> f) / moallefi ke nevisænde xubi æst in sæbk ra entexab kærdeh æst/

the author who a writer good is this style Chosen has

(The author who is a good writer has chosen this style.)

The relative pronoun /ke/ is used with singular or plural antecedents in all types of sentences from simple present to past perfect or even more sophisticated ones. The Persian relative pronoun is also used with anecedents referring to place, time, person, etc.

/ in xanei æst ke mæn dær an zendegi mikonæm/

this house is where I in living am

(This is the house where/ in which I am living.)

/zæmani ke ʃoma inja budid hæva xub bud/

the time when you here were weather good was

(The time when you were here the weather was good.)

4. Conclusion

Comparing the functions of adjcetives in English and Persian shows that there are more derived adjectives in Persian, especially in case of suffixes, which can cause trouble for the language learners and those who translate English into Persian. Also the lack of present participle in Persian as it exists in English is another source of confusion and making errors. Persian is richer in adjective phrases and sometimes students may have difficulty in using adjective clauses and, in particular, the relative pronouns with different roles they play in English, while there is only one form /ke/ in the Persian language. Moreover, language learners sometimes repeat the subjective of objective pronouns along with the relative pronouns in English because they do so in Persian. All the differences manifest themselves in writing and specifically in translation. Teachers have to be aware of the major and even the minor points and try to give the students enough practice to overcome the barriers and realize the obstacles in order to write English and translate from one language to the other more efficiently. Giving sufficient drills and comprehensive exercises while teaching grammar, especially to those who major in translation, can be the only way to prepare them for the job they are looking for.

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