

# Ancient Languages First Aid

## ADJECTIVES



### SECTION 5. DEFINITION AND PROPERTIES OF AN ADJECTIVE

An *adjective* is a describing word. An adjective 'qualifies' or 'modifies' a noun or pronoun.

For example:

The Nile is *long*.

The *golden* god; a *beautiful* temple.

In these examples, the adjective 'long' describes the noun 'Nile'; the adjective 'golden' describes the noun 'god'; and the adjective 'beautiful' describes the noun 'temple'.

Adjectives, like nouns and pronouns, have **gender, number and case**. Like pronouns, adjectives have to agree with the noun which they qualify, but unlike pronouns they will agree in gender, number *and* case.

In the first example, the adjective 'long' is in the **predicative** position. The predicate is the part of the clause which comes after the subject – in this case, after the verb 'is'. In the other two examples, the adjectives are in the **attributive** position, as they come between the noun and the article.

Like nouns, adjectives in ancient languages **decline**. Those adjectives which decline in a similar manner to each other are grouped into declensions; these declensions often correspond with similar noun declensions. Learning these declensions is a good method of learning the morphology of adjectives.

### SECTION 5.1. TYPES OF ADJECTIVES

#### SECTION 5.1.1. DESCRIPTIVE ADJECTIVES

*Descriptive adjectives* are the most common form of adjectives. In the examples above the words 'long', 'golden' and 'beautiful' are descriptive adjectives. Descriptive adjectives tell us about a particular quality of a person or thing.

#### SECTION 5.1.2. POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES

*Possessive adjectives* show possession. In the sentence 'Achilles is my hero,' 'my' is the possessive adjective. Possessive adjectives must always be used with a noun or pronoun. Possessive adjectives are also known as *pronoun adjectives* or *pronominal adjectives*.

The possessive adjectives are as follows:

	<b>First Person</b>	<b>Second Person</b>	<b>Third Person</b>
<b>Singular</b>	my	your	his, her, its
<b>Plural</b>	our	your	their

In English these adjectives decline by means of prepositions.

### **SECTION 5.1.3. NUMERAL OR NUMBER ADJECTIVES**

*Numeral adjectives* describe the number or numerical order of things. They may be *cardinal* or *ordinal*.

#### **SECTION 5.1.3.1. CARDINALS**

*Cardinal* numerical adjectives state a *number* or *amount* of things.

For example; 'There were *twelve* ducks in the mosaic'

#### **SECTION 5.1.3.2. ORDINALS**

*Ordinal* numerical adjectives state the *order* in which things happen.

For example; 'The *first* duck was the biggest'

### **SECTION 5.1.4. DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES**

*Demonstrative adjectives* demonstrate or call attention to a noun or pronoun.

In English they are:

	<b>Masculine, Feminine</b>	<b>Neuter</b>
<b>Singular</b>	this	that
<b>Plural</b>	these	those

In English these adjectives decline by means of prepositions.

Some examples of demonstrative adjectives in clauses are:

*This* tomb is the biggest.

The general berated *that* soldier.

She was the child *of these* parents.

We ran *out of those* fields.

### **SECTION 5.1.5. DISTRIBUTIVE ADJECTIVES**

*Distributive adjectives* show the effect of the verb on distinctive nouns or pronouns in a group in a clause.

Some examples of distributive adjectives in clauses are:

*Each* building was damaged.

They were chased *by every* dog.

There was no food *for either* family.

He received asylum *at neither* camp.

### **SECTION 5.1.6 INTERROGATIVE ADJECTIVES**

*Interrogative adjectives* can be indicative of both direct and indirect questions. In English they have the same morphology as interrogative pronouns, and their position in the word order of the clause dictates their meaning. However, this is not the case with ancient languages.

Some examples of interrogative adjectives in clauses are:

*Which* of these lions killed the gladiator?  
*What* does the Emperor plan to do?  
*Whose* tomb contained the most artefacts?  
*By which* road did they come?

### **SECTION 5.1.7 INDEFINITE ADJECTIVES**

*Indefinite adjectives* indicate indefinite or uncertain numbers, amounts or quantities of nouns or pronouns, but do not give exact amounts. In English the indefinite adjectives decline in the same manner as indefinite pronouns and their position in the word order of the clause dictates their meaning, but this will not be the case with ancient languages.

Some examples of indefinite adjectives in clauses are:

*Some* villagers hailed the centurion.  
The king chose *few* slaves.  
The artefacts *of many* sites were taken.  
The scribe was informed *by many* letters.

### **SECTION 5.2. ADJECTIVES AND DEGREES OF COMPARISON**

Adjectives can describe quantity and quality of a noun or pronoun. This description can be used to compare nouns or pronouns in varying degrees.

There are three degrees of comparison: **positive, comparative, and superlative**. The positive degree of comparison indicates the form of the adjective used in the nominative – for example, the temple is *large*. The comparative, as the name implies, indicates that the adjective is being used to compare the state of one noun to another – for example, this temple is *larger* than that one. The superlative indicates that the noun it describes is or has the ‘most’ of a particular quality – for example, this temple is the *largest*.

For regular adjectives in English, the comparative is formed by adding '-er' to the end of the positive form, while '-est' is added to the positive form to create the superlative. Other degrees of comparison in English are formed by adding the adverbs 'more' or 'most' in front of the positive form for the comparative and superlative respectively. Still other forms are irregular, and don't follow a predictable pattern at all. Ancient languages will also have regular and irregular forms, but there will always be a pattern to follow and learn.

Examples:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
small	smaller	smallest
big	bigger	biggest
different	more different	most different
interesting	more interesting	most interesting
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

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### **SECTION 5.3. SUBSTANTIVE ADJECTIVES**

When an adjective is standing alone in a clause and is not paired with a noun or pronoun, it is standing **substantively**. When an adjective is substantive, the noun or pronoun it is qualifying is understood. Ancient languages frequently omit words of all kinds if the missing word is expected to be easily guessed.

Some examples of substantive adjectives in clauses are:

Fortune favours *the bold*.

Understand: Fortune favours *the bold* [men].

*The righteous* will be saved.

Understand: *The righteous* [people] will be saved.

In ancient languages when a substantive adjective is used frequently enough it can become a noun in its own right. An example from Latin is the word '*deliciae*' which means '*pleasing*' or '*delicate*' women but came to stand substantively for slaves which were kept for their good looks.