Introduction to Part 3

The distinction between nouns and verbs is crucial to Aymara grammar. It is this very division that is also a good candidate for one of the few universal distinctions across the languages of the world (viz. Sapir (1921:119) although there are a few languages that could be considered as candidates for counterexamples).

As this part of the grammar is dedicated to nouns and nominal morphology, let us focus on nouns. The traditional course is to identify a word as a noun when it denotes a person, place or thing. However useful such heuristics are in some cases, they are inadequate and oftentimes fuzzy within and across languages. Following Schachter and Shopen (2010:1), grammatical criteria are comparatively sharp. Therefore, in assigning a root to either a nominal or verbal category, it is relevant to take into account the syntactic functions (i.e. the grammatical relationship between constituents in a syntactic construction) and morphological categories to which it is specifiable. Consider the phrase in (53). While it is possible to change the case inflection and, optionally, the word order, of the words Akhawana and Rumulu as in (54) to switch the subjects, the final word, i.e. the verb, may never receive case inflection. That is, only the words Rumulu and Akhawana can function as subjects. This observation is sufficient reason to motivate the categorization of words which can act as subjects and objects and receive, e.g. case suffixes, into a different category from those which cannot.

(53) Rumulux Akhawan jiwayawch …
{Rumulu-x(a) Akhawan(a)-∅ jiwa-ya-w(a)-ch(i)-(i)}
Rumulu-TOP Akhawana-ACC die-CAUS-BFR-CNJ-3>3SIM
‘Romulu must’ve killed Akhawana …’ [NM1.1]

(54) Akhawanax Rumul jiwayawch …↑
{Akhawana-x(a) Rumul(u)-∅ jiwa-ya-w(a)-ch(i)-(i)}
Akhawana-TOP Rumulu-ACC die-CAUS-BFR-CNJ-3>3SIM
‘Akhawana must’ve killed Romulu …’

Continuing to the issue of syntactic function, nouns typically act as heads of arguments (Schachter and Shopen, 2010:7). As an illustration, consider the words that directly follow any of the three determiners functioning as the demonstratives, aka ‘this’, uka ‘that’, kha ‘yonder’. The final example of this set, (58), features the word ma ‘one’ with the meaning ‘some’ (this is discussed in
more detail on page 110 with the description of the meanings attributable to the number *ma ~ maya* ‘one’) preceding a noun. Words inflected with TAM morphology (i.e. verbs), for example, never follow the determiners or *ma*.

(55) *¡Aka is tajsam!*  
   {aka is(i)-c ∅ t'ajsa-m(a)}  
   this clothing-ACC wash-2IMP  
   ‘Wash this clothing!’

(56) *Uka ar janiw yatktti.*  
   {uka ar(u)-c ∅ jani-w(a) yat(i)-k(a)-t-ti}  
   that word-ACC no-decl know-ncpl-1sim-NEG/IR  
   ‘I don’t understand that word.’

(57) *¿Khax lik’iti?*  
   {kha-x(a) lik’i-ti}  
   yonder-top fat-NEG/IR  
   ‘Is yonder lard?’

(58) *ma yawlunakax*  
   {ma yawlu-naka-x(a)}  
   one devil-pl-top  
   ‘some devils’ [EBF4.100]

Additionally, in (59), the word *t’una* ‘small’ modifies the head *papa* ‘potato’. Likewise, in (60), *jach’*a ‘big’ modifies the head *nayra* ‘eye’. In this construction, the head, and not the modifier, is the constituent that is marked for number (plural) and case (comitative). As with the previous set of examples, it would not be grammatical to replace the head in the constructions below with, for instance, a word inflected with any TAM morphology. (Nominal phrases are described in more detail Section 15.3 on page 596.)

(59) *Ukham manq’tasist t’una pap ...*  
   {uk(a)-jam(a) manq’(a)-t’a-si-s.(k)(a)-t t’una pap(a)-c ∅}  
   that-CP eat-M-REFL-PROG-1SIM small potato-ACC  
   ‘Thus I was eating (a) small potato/es’ [FBV5.50B]

(60) *Ukham Qamaqix uñch’ukischix*  
   {uk(a)-jam(a) qamaqi-x(a) uñ(a)-ch’uki-s.(k)(a)-ch(i)-i-x(a)}  
   that-CP fox-TOP see-STR-PROG-CNJ-3>3SIM-TOP