The Syntax of Adjectives

Adjectives in CDZ are most frequently found in a noun phrase where they modify a nominal, but can also appear in the function of the predicate. Below some of these properties are outlined in more detail.

14.1 Adjectives in a Noun Phrase

Adjectives in a noun phrase function mostly as modifiers of the head noun. They are placed after the noun and display full agreement in number and gender, so long the adjective is inflected for these categories. The same order is displayed when a pronoun appears in a noun phrase preceding the head noun, or when it functions as the head, e.g.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{xa-naša güra} & \quad \text{‘a big man’} \\
\text{xa-brata sürta} & \quad \text{‘a small girl’} \\
\text{ʾanne naše basime} & \quad \text{‘these nice people’} \\
\text{ʾawwa güra} & \quad \text{‘this big one’} \\
\text{ʾe sürta} & \quad \text{‘the small one’}
\end{align*}
\]

A free-standing adjective is not attested as the head but it is rather combined with a quantifier or pronoun. This indicates that an adjective in a noun phrase is attributive rather than referential, e.g.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{xa güra} & \quad \text{‘a big one’} \\
\text{ʾanne basime} & \quad \text{‘some nice ones’}
\end{align*}
\]

14.2 Comparatives and Superlatives

Both comparatives and superlatives are expressed by a periphrastic construction in CDZ. The comparative degree marker is \textit{buš–biš ‘more’} and it precedes the adjective, frequently bearing the nuclear stress, e.g.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{buš güra} & \quad \text{‘bigger’} \\
\text{buš zirej} & \quad \text{‘smarter’}
\end{align*}
\]
buš can also modify a noun to mean ‘more’. Note that it can be separated from the noun it modifies by a verb, e.g.:

šare buš y-awe šaxina ‘Dry dung brings more warmth.’

The nuclear stress can be sometimes placed on the constituent expressing the standard for the comparison, e.g.:

šare buš y-awe šaxina mǝn-tàna ‘Dry dung brings more warmth than mud.’

The nuclear stress may shift to the adjective in clauses expressing the contrastive or counter-presuppositional statements, e.g.:

‘awǝn buš gȗrel’e bas ‘ayǝn buš zìrej-ila’ ‘He is bigger but she is smarter.’
‘awǝn buš gȗrele’ (la buš zìrej) ‘He is bigger (not smarter).’

The preposition mǝn- introduces the standard of the comparison, also when inflected or shortened to m-, e.g.:

bùš gȗra mǝnni ‘bigger than me’
čawǝšǝšča bìš-ila sùrta m-qaqwànà ‘The čawašǝšča-bird is smaller than the partridge.’

bùš zìrej mǝn-čulle ‘šìratte’ ‘cleverer than all other tribes’

The last example could in fact be interpreted as a superlative degree since the standard is the rest of the tribes, i.e. all other entities compared against. Thus, if the opposition is only binary, it is difficult to decide which of the degrees is expressed. Another example of this ambiguity is:

‘ana … halbat len xa-naša lipa bìš mǝn-čullu naše ‘I … of course, I am not educated more than others/all other people.’ (A 18.8, 26)

The employment of the quantifier čuíl- before the pluralised standard is one of the ways of forming the superlative. Note that similarly to the above example, the superlative phrase can follow the predicative clause containing the adjective and be added as an afterthought, e.g.: