

Noun-Adj compounds as incorporated classifier constructions in Gunwinyguan languages

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We examine the nature of Noun-Adj compounds found in several Gunwinyguan languages (Bininj Gun-wok, Ngalakgan, Ngandi, and Wubuy), which are the primary means of modifying nouns with an adjective in these languages, as shown in (1).

(1) a. ceŋ-ŋolkko ‘big fish’ (Ngalakgan)

fish-big

b. kuŋtu-joccoŋ ‘clear (not sacred) country’

country-clear

c. laŋka-kaŋa? ‘small waterhole’

billabong-small

Compounds cross-linguistically do not typically have such interpretations. We show that their functions may be modelled with the standard LFG apparatus for Adj-modified NPs. However, even disregarding the fact that they are words, these constructions are not fully equivalent to NPs. In particular, only a smallish (c. 40) class of nouns can be directly compounded with adjectives in these languages. This class is identical in each language with the class of ‘generic’ nouns which may be incorporated into verbs, even extending to suppletive forms and special denotations. Nevertheless, as indicated by compounded loans from English (via Kriol), the class is not closed.

As with nominal incorporation into verbs, the incorporated nominal in these adjective-headed compounds can co-occur with an external nominal. This nominal may be identical in form (as in (2)), or may further specify the referent of the incorporated nominal, akin to standard generic-specific constructions (as in (3) and (4), from two varieties of Bininj Gun-wok).

(2) ma-**ŋuka**-ŋu-puraa mana-**ŋuka**

VEG-stone-EPENTH-sit.PR VEG.TOP-stone

‘There’s a stone.’ [Lit. ‘the stone sits.’] (Wubuy; Heath 1980: 435)

(3) an-**carman** ko-no **ko-ŋermej** (MM)

VEG-kurrajong flower-PRT flower-red

‘Kurrajong (*Brachychiton sp.*) trees have red flowers.’ (An alternative translation is: ‘Brachychiton flowers are red ones [flowers].’) (BGW; Evans 2003: 17)

(4) ka-**rulk**-ti an-**tupaŋ**/an-**peŋpeŋ** (Dj)

3-tree-stand.NP VEG-ironwood/VEG-ghostgum

‘An ironwood/ghostgum tree is there.’ (BGW; Evans 2003: 334)

We show how these doubled constructions can be incorporated into the above account by building on Sadler and Nordlinger’s (2006) analysis of appositional structures in Australian languages, in which both the incorporated classifier and any external nominal instantiate a set at f-structure.