Semantic Classification of Adjectives: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the semantic classification of adjectives in Bangla and English. Here I have followed the framework proposed by Broekhuis (2013) which is based mainly on internal semantic features of adjectives applicable in Dutch. I have tried to examine the availability of semantic classes of adjectives in Bangla and English. This paper provides the judgment of native speakers on grammaticality concerning the linguistic constructions in the selected languages. Finally, it presents a comparative study.

Keywords: adjective, semantic classification, set-denoting, relational, evaluative, residue, Dutch, Bangla and English.

Abbreviations

CLA= classifier
N=   noun
NEG= negation
NP=   noun phrase

Diacritic

* denotes ungrammaticality.

1. Introduction

This paper concentrates on the semantic categorization of the word class adjective in Bangla (Indo-Aryan language) and English (Germanic language) with reference to Dutch (Germanic language). Depending upon the semantic domains adjectives like other word classes can be grouped into several types (Giri, 2018). But here the crux is the application of the framework by Broekhuis (2013) where binary-valued semantic features are in focus. It investigates the accessibility of the semantic categories of adjectives in Bangla and English.

2. Semantic Classification of Adjectives

The semantic categorization of adjectives is based on the semantic features called [±QUALIFYING] and [±KIND-OF-RELATION]. On the one hand, the *qualifying* feature denotes properties or characteristics of the particular referents specified by an adjective. On the other hand, the *kind-of-relation* feature expresses a relation between two different referents which is established by the adjective given.

1)   X Y   (X = adjective, Y = noun)

In a word, the *qualifying* feature indicates that the property of BEING X is assigned to the given referent Y. The *kind-of relation* feature states that the noun Y has the property X. These features have binary values positive or negative and their presence or absence determines the classification. Broekhuis (2013, p. 14) noted ''*a positive value for the first feature indicates that the adjective ascribes some property or positive/negative value to the modified noun (phrase). A positive value for the latter feature indicates that the adjective expresses some relation between the denotation of the noun and something else*''. Now on the basis of this conception, four types of adjectives are categorized semantically: *set-denoting adjectives, relational adjectives, evaluative adjectives* and *the residue* class.

Table - 1: Semantic classification of adjectives

Semantic Features	[+KIND-OF RELATION]	[-KIND-OF RELATION]
[+QUALIFYING]	Set-denoting	Evaluative
[-QUALIFYING]	Relational	the Residue

[Broekhuis (2013)]

2.1. Set-denoting Adjectives

Set-denoting adjectives refer to the class of adjectives which indicate attributes of nouns or noun phrases to modify them and can be placed both attributively and predicatively.
For examples, in Dutch *aardige* 'kind' and *blauwe* 'blue' are set-denoting adjectives. On the one hand, the property of BEING KIND is attributed to *de jongen* 'the boy'. On the other hand, *de jongen* 'the boy' has the property *kindness*. In (2), the adjective appears in two syntactic positions attributive and predicative.

Dutch

2)   a.   de aardige jongen   b. de blauwe ballon
          the kind boy   the blue   balloon
     a′. de jongen is aardig.   b′. de ballon is blauw.
          the boy   is nice   the balloon is blue

Likewise, *ʃunɖor* 'handsome' in (3) is a set-denoting adjective in Bangla. The property of BEING HANDSOME which is expressed by the adjective *ʃunɖor* 'handsome' is ascribed to *cʰeleta* 'the boy'. Again, it can be said that *cʰeleta* 'the boy' has the attribute to be *ʃunɖor* 'handsome'. This adjective has both the syntactic usages: attributive and predicative as represented in the (3) and (3a′) respectively.

Bangla

3)   a.   ʃunɖor   cʰele-tɑ   a′.   cʰele-tɑ   ʃunɖor

	handsome boy-CLA		boy-CLA	handsome

handsome boy-CLA   boy-CLA   handsome
'the handsome   boy'   'the boy is handsome'

The instance in (3) shows that *ʃaḓa* 'white' is a set-denoting adjective having both the qualifying and the kind-of relation features.

    b.   ʃaḓa   pʰul-tɑ   b′.   pʰul-tɑ   ʃaḓa
         white   flower-CLA   flower-CLA   white
         'white flower'   'The flower is white.'

Interestingly, it is found that English also possesses set-denoting class of adjectives. For examples, *clever, green* etc. In (4) it is seen that the attribute of *being clever* is assigned to the given noun *the boy* and (4a′) shows that the boy has the property to be *clever*. The same is also true for the adjective *green*. However, they are used attributively as well as predicatively.

English

4)   a.   the clever boy   a′.   the boy is clever
     b.   the green leaf   b′.   the leaf is green

- **Sub-Classification of Set-denoting Adjectives**

Set-denoting adjectives are mainly divided into four semantic sub-categories. They are *Scalar Adjectives, Absolute Adjectives, Gradable Adjectives;* and *Stage Level and Individual Level Adjectives*. As there may have some overlapping in conception, such a semantic study of sub-classification of set-denoting adjectives is not always clear-cut.

2.1.1. Scalar Adjectives

Scalar adjectives denote various degrees of a particular property which are possessed by the referents. The primed examples of (5) present that the referents *Jan* and *Marie* in Dutch are of the same set as they both are *ziek* 'ill'. On the other hand, in the primeless examples there are intensifiers like *vrij* 'little' and *zeer* 'very' which modify the set-denoting adjective *ziek* 'ill'. The presence of the intensifiers implies that the degree of illness varies from one person to the other. This can be shown by indicating different places on the Scale (a).

Scale: a

Scale of illness:

|——————— Jan ——————— Marie ——————→
                │   │
               vrij   zeer
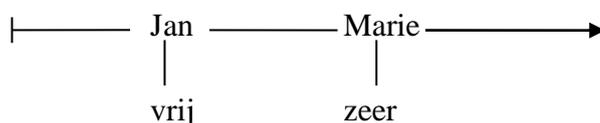
Dutch

5)   a.   Jan is vrij   ziek.   ⇒   a′.   Jan is ziek.
          Jan is rather   ill   Jan is ill
     b.   Marie is zeer ziek.   ⇒   b′.   Marie is ziek.

In Bangla the subject NPs *Piklu* and *Piu* in the primed instances of (6) belong to the same set as both of them have the property illness. Here the set-denoting adjective *ɔʃusṯʰo* 'ill' is modified by the intensifiers *kʰub* 'very' and *ektu* 'little' shown in the primeless instances.

Bangla

6)   a.   piklu ektu ɔʃusṯʰo   ⇒   a′.   piklu ɔʃusṯʰo
          'Piklu is little ill.'   'Piklu is ill.'
     b.   piu kʰub ɔʃusṯʰo   ⇒   b′.   piu ɔʃusṯʰo
          'Piu is very ill.'   'Piu is ill.'

John and Mary in English come under the same set as both of them are *ill*. Here the adjective gets modified by *little* and *very* in the examples of (7).

English

7)   a.   John is little ill.   ⇒   a′.   John is ill.
     b.   Mary is very ill   ⇒   b′.   Mary is ill

2.1.2. Absolute Adjectives

A pair of set-denoting adjectives which has absolute properties and of which either of them occurs in the complementary distribution is called a pair of absolute adjectives. They are not at all scalar adjectives as they do not vary in degree. Even they cannot be modified by the intensifiers and cannot form comparative or superlative constructions.

Dutch has absolute adjectives like *dode* 'dead' and *levende* 'living' as found in the following example of (8). They are not modified by adding adverbs like *vrij* 'rather' and *zeer* 'very' before the adjectives as well as do not permit comparative and superlative degree formations.

Dutch

8)   a.   een dode plant   b.   een levende plant
          'a dead plant'   'a living plant'
     a′. *een vrij dode plant   b′. *een zeer levende plant
          a rather dead plant   a very living plant
     a″. *dodere/de   doodste   b″. *levender/de levendste
          more.dead/the most.dead   more.living / the most.living

Bangla also possesses absolute adjectives like *mriṯo* 'dead' and *ɟibiṯo* 'alive'. They express two absolute states of the referents. The process of modification by adding adverbs like *kʰub* 'very' to the adjectives results in ungrammaticality as found in the examples of 9). Again, they do not produce comparative and superlative adjectives as seen in the instances of 9 (a″ & b″).

Bangla

9) a.   mri̯to 'dead'
    a′.   *kʰub mri̯to 'very dead'
    a″.   *(beʃi/ʃɔbceje) mri̯to -t̯ɔro/t̯ɔmo '(more/most) dead-er/est'
    b.   ɟibit̯o 'alive'
    b′.   *kʰub ɟibit̯o 'very alive'
    b″.   *(beʃi/ʃɔbceje) ɟibit̯o-t̯ɔro/t̯ɔmo '(more/most) alive-er/est'

Likewise, *dead* and *alive* are absolute adjectives in English because they denote absolute properties. They do not allow modification with *very* as shown in the examples 10 (a′ & b′) and they do not also have forms in comparison as examined in the 10 (a″ & b″)-examples.

English

10) a.   dead   b.   alive
    a′   *very dead   b′.   *very alive
    a″.   *(more/most) dead-er/est   b″.   *(more/most) alive-er/est

Scalar vs. Absolute Adjectives

On the one side, scalar adjectives and absolute adjectives can be distinguished on the basis of variable states or absolute states implied on a given scale. On the other side, they are modified by two different types of modifiers. In case of scalar ones, the modification is done by intensifiers which indicate various states on an implied scale, but absolute adjectives are modified by adding *approximatives.* 'Approximative' is the lexical item which denotes that the argument has reached the condition near a particular absolute state expressed by the adjective.

The succeeding instances in the selected languages present that scalar adjectives co-occur with the intensifiers. For examples, Dutch intensifiers such as *vrij / zeer* 'rather / very' which imply several degrees of illness appear before the scalar adjectives.

Dutch

11) a.   Jan is vrij/zeer ziek.   ⇒   a′.   Jan is ziek.
          Jan is rather/very ill.   Jan is ill

The intensifiers like *kʰub* 'very' and *ektu* 'little' are in use to modify scalar adjectives such as *ɔʃust̯ʰo* 'ill' in Bangla. Their function is to indicate different degrees on the implied scale.

Bangla

12) a.   ʃe   ektu/kʰub ɔʃust̯ʰo.   ⇒   a′.   ʃe   ɔʃust̯ʰo.
          s/he little/very ill   S/he ill
          'S/he is little/very ill.'   'S/he is ill.'

In English *very / quite* are used to modify the respective class of adjectives as given in the example (13). The use of the intensifiers indicates that illness of the concerned subject varies on the implied scale.

English

13)   a.   she is quite/very ill.   ⇒   a′.   she is ill.

On the contrary, the study shows that in Dutch the absolute adjectives can be modified by the approximatives such as *vrijwel* 'almost', *zo goed als* 'as good as' and *helemaal* 'completely'.

Dutch

14)   a.   Die plant is vrijwel dood.   ⇒   a′.   Die plant is niet dood.
           that plant is almost dead   that plant is not dead
      b.   Die plant is helemaal dood.   ⇒   b′.   Die plant is dood.
           that plant is completely dead   that plant is dead

In the same way, Bangla *mriṯo* 'dead' is modified by the approximative *praj* 'almost'.

Bangla

15)   a.   gɑcʰ-tɑ   prɑj   mriṯo.   ⇒   a′.   gɑcʰ-tɑ   mriṯo noj
           tree-CLA almost dead   tree-CLA dead no-NEG
           'The tree is almost dead.'   'The tree is not dead.'

Like Bangla, absolute adjectives like *dead* in English take approximatives *almost* and *completely.*

English

16)   a.   that plant is almost dead   ⇒   a′.   that plant is not dead
      b.   that plant is completely dead   ⇒   b′.   that plant is dead

Again, modification of scalar adjectives by means of adding approximatives results in unacceptability.

Dutch

17)   *Jan is vrijwel /zo goed als / helemaal aardig.
      Jan is almost / as good as / completely nice

In Bangla *ʃunḏor* 'beautiful' is a scalar adjective which cannot be modified by the approximatives like *ækebɑre* / *ʃɔmpurnobʰabe* 'almost / completely'. Such modification is not accepted by native speakers.

Bangla

18)   *Mɑnʈu ækebɑre ʃunḏor.
       Mantu almost beautiful
      'Mantu is almost beautiful.'

When English scalar adjectives such as *nice* are modified by approximatives like *almost / completely,* native speakers do not accept it as shown below.

English

19) a. *John is completely nice.
     b. *John is almost nice.

2.1.3. Gradable Adjectives

Gradable adjectives include colour terms and words related to geometrical shapes which cannot appear in antonymous pairs. They cannot be measured by the implied scale as is done in case of scalar adjectives. The instances of gradable adjectives are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table –2

Languages	Colour terms	Geometrical shapes
Dutch	rood 'red'	rond 'round'
	geel 'yellow'	driehoekig 'triangular'
	blauw 'blue'	vierkant 'square'
Bangla	ʃad̪a 'white'	gol 'round'
	kɑlo 'black'	couko 'square'
	nil 'blue'	t̪inkonɑ 'triangular'
English	black	round
	white	triangular
	blue	rectangular

2.1.3.1. Colour Terms and Natural Objects

In Bangla there are many colour terms which come from natural objects. Such examples can be listed in the next table.

Table – 3

Colour terms	Natural objects
kɔmolɑ 'orange'	kɔmlɑlebu 'orange'
mete 'like soil'	mɑti 'soil'
ɑkɑʃi 'sky blue'	ɑkɑʃ 'sky'
golɑpi 'pink'	golɑp 'rose'
tija 'parrot'	tija 'parrot'
koci kɔlɑ pɑtɑ 'green banana leaf'	koci kɔlɑ pɑtɑ 'green banana leaf'
ʃonɑli 'golden'	ʃonɑ 'gold'

2.1.3.2. Other Colour Terms

There are several colour terms which are derived from the basic colour terms. It is seen that they have –*ce* or –*te* ending comparable to -*ish* in English.

Bangla

20) a.   kɑlce 'blackish'   a′.   nilce 'bluish'
     b.   ʃaḓate 'whitish'   b′.   holḓete 'yellowish'

Likewise, some English examples can be mentioned.

English

21) a.   blackish
     b.   whitish

2.1.3.3. Modifiers of Colour Terms:

• Colour terms can be modified by adding lexical items (intensifiers) like *halk*ɑ 'light', *gʰɔno* 'deep' and *garo* 'deep' before the colour adjectives in Bangla as given below.

Bangla

22) a.   hɑlkɑ ʃobuɟ 'light green'
     b.   gʰɔno nil 'deep blue'
     c.   gɑro nil 'deep blue'

• There are also shades of some colour terms that are expressed by natural objects.

Bangla

23) a.   ɟɔlpai ʃobuɟ
              'olive green'
     b.   mojurkontʰi nil
              'peacock blue'
     c.   ḏuḓʰ ʃadɑ
              'milky white'

• **Reduplicated Constructions:**
        Some reduplicated constructions like *kætkæte, tɔktɔke* which are available in Bangla modify the colour terms and they especially indicate deep shades of colours.

Bangla

24) a.   kætkæte lɑl 'dark red'
     b.   tɔktɔke lɑl 'deep red'
     c.   ḏʰɔbḓʰɔbe ʃaḓa 'bright white'

The derived colour terms can be found as modifiers in the given examples.

Bangla

25)   a.   kɑlce ʃobuɟ
             'blackish green'

2.1.4. Stage-level / Individual-level Adjectives

The adjectives having transitory (stage-level) property ascribed to the given entity are called stage-level adjectives. On the other hand, adjectives which signify more permanent (individual-level) property of the referents are named individual-level adjectives. The adjectives like *ɔʃusʈʰo* 'ill' and *ʃarʈʰopɔr* 'selfish' in Bangla are stage-level and individual-level adjectives respectively.

Table –4

Language	Stage-level	Individual-level
Dutch	ziek 'ill'	intelligent 'intelligent'
Bangla	ɔʃusʈʰo 'ill'	ʃarʈʰopɔr 'selfish'
	kruddʰo 'angry'	medʰabi 'meritorious'
English	ill	intelligent

2.2. Relational Adjectives

Relational adjectives express a *kind-of-relation* between two distinct referents, but they do not signify any property like set-denoting adjectives. Syntactically, they have only attributive usage. In Dutch *dagelijkse* 'daily' attributes an NP *krant* 'newspaper' that appears daily.

Dutch

26)   a.   de dagelijkse krant   b.   het morfologische handboek
             the daily   newspaper   the morphological companion
       a′.   *De krant is dagelijks.   b′.   *het handboek is morfologisch

In Bangla too, such kind-of-relation can be described. They can be interpreted as "N appears daily" in (27a) and "N belongs to geography" in (27b). So, it is evident that the NPs are in relation to other things. In the primed examples it is shown that such relational adjectives cannot occur in the predicative position.

Bangla

27)   a.   ḍoinik poṭrikɑ   b.   bʰougolik   gʰɔtonɑ
             daily   newspaper   geographical fact
       a′.   * poṭrikɑtɑ ḍoinik   b′.   * gʰɔtonɑtɑ bʰougolik

Similarly, the (a)-example of (28) can be paraphrased as 'N appears everyday' in English, that is, a newspaper appears daily. Here a relation is made in between two entities newspaper and each day.

English

28)   a.   daily newspaper   a′.   *the newspaper is daily

Again, it is seen that relational adjectives can set up two different types of relation between particular entities. The first relation depends on the specific context or culture and the second relation is based on the metaphoric one.

2.2.1. Contextual or Cultural Relation
Sometimes contextual or cultural information is needed to understand the meaning of the relational adjectives.

Dutch

29)   Chomskiaanse taalkunde
       Chomskyan   linguistics

The example (30)a refers to the thought developed by the litterateur Rabindranath Tagore. In (30)b the philosophy which is of Indian tradition is dealt with. So, it is clear that in case of relational adjectives to grasp the relation between two entities, the concerned cultural or subjective knowledge is required.

Bangla

30)   a.   rabinḏrik   cinṯa   b.   bʰaroṯio ḏɔrʃon
             'thought of Rabindranath Tagore'   'Indian philosophy'

The example in (31) in English deals with a branch of linguistics which is developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers. Then, the instance (31) talks of a genre called comedy specially authored by William Shakespeare.

English

31)   a.   Chomskyan linguistics   b.   Shakespearean comedy

2.2.2. Metaphoric Relation
In some relational adjectives, the relation is metaphoric in nature. The (32)-example implies an admonition given by someone who acts like a father. The example in (32b) has more or less fixed combinations indicate a certain jargon related to the grammar of a language.

Dutch

32)   a.   een vaderlijke terechtwijzing
             a   fatherly   admonition
       b.   bezittelijk voornaamwoord
             possessive pronoun

In Bangla also, such instances are found of which few are mentioned below. In the (33)-example the speaker is talking about someone's behaviour who is not at least a father. In (33) a certain category of pronoun is dealt with. Lastly, (33) refers to the behaviour which is appropriate for a king.

Bangla

33)   a.   piʈɽiʃulɔbʰ acorɔn   b.   ʃɔmmɔnɖʰobacok ʃɔrbonam
                    fatherly   behaviour   possessive   pronoun
        c.   raɟokio habbʰab
                    kingly behavior

The English examples have similarity to those of Dutch and Bangla examples.

English

34)   a.   fatherly admonition   b.   possessive pronoun
        c.   princely salary

2.3. Evaluative Adjectives

Evaluative adjectives only provide some subjective evaluation (with positive or negative value in an intended context) of the entity in question. A characteristic feature of such adjective is that they can only be used as a modifier within a noun phrase but not as a predicative one as in a copular construction. Neither it attributes any property to the given noun nor does it express any kind-of relation.

Dutch has evaluative adjectives like *verdomde* 'damned' and *dekselse* 'confounded' that are negative valued adjectives. The predicative use of such examples results in unacceptability.

Dutch

35)   a.   die verdomde / dekselse   jongen
                    that damned /   confounded boy
        a′.   *Die jongen is verdomd / deksels.
                    'That boy is damned / confounded.'
        b.   die (*erg) drommelse   jongen
                    that very damned/devilish boy
                    'that damned boy'
        b′.   *Die jongen is drommels.

Bangla possesses some evaluative adjectives. Here the adjective *ɟɔlɟænʈo* 'burning' and *biɖɖʰoŋʃi* 'devastating' have negative evaluation and they cannot appear in the predicative position.

Bangla

36)   a.   ɟɔlɟænʈo uɖahɔron

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'burning example'

  a′. *uḍahɔron-tɑ ɟɔlɟænṯo
     example-CLA burning
     'This example is burning.'

  b. biḍḍʰoŋʃi ɑgun
     'devastating fire'

  b′. *ɑgun-tɑ biḍḍʰoŋʃi
     fire-CLA devastating
     'The fire is devastating.'

There are a few evaluative adjectives which signify positive value in Bangla. As for example,

37) a. ɟalamoji bokṯriṯa
     'inflamatory speech'

  a′. *bokṯriṯa-tɑ ɟalamoji
     'The speech is inflamatory. '

In English also, evaluative class of adjectives are found. The adjective *damned* in English does not refer to the properties which specify set-denoting adjectives but it has a negative value attributed to the noun *article*.

English

38) a. This damned article
  a′. *This article is damned.

2.4. The Residue

There are some other adjectives which can be in comparison with adverbs. They are left with *"a residue of adjectives that neither attribute a property to the head noun, nor express a KIND-OF-RELATION, nor imply some negative or positive evaluation"* (Broekhuis, 2013, p. 61).
In the following example, the person in question is supposed to be a culprit.

Dutch

39) a. de vermeende dader   a′. *De dader is vermeend.
    the alleged culprit   the culprit is alleged

  b. de vorige vergadering   b′. *De vergadering is vorig.
    the previous meeting   the meeting is previous.

In Bangla *ʃɔmbʰabbo* 'probable' is such an adjective which does not ascribe any property and cannot be predicated of the given noun. So, it is not a set-denoting adjective. It does not express a *kind-of-relation*. Therefore, it cannot belong to the class of relational adjectives. Besides, it does not signify any subjective notion and so it is not an evaluative adjective. Rather it expresses that the fact may probably occur. Due to this, *ʃɔmbʰabbo* 'probable' is a modal adjective.

Bangla

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40) a. ʃɔmbʰabbo gʰɔtonɑ   a′.   *gʰɔtonɑ-tɑ ʃɔmbʰabbo
         probable fact   fact-CLAprobable
                                     'The fact is probable.'

In the same way, some instances are found in English.

English

41) a. his possible departure
         *his departure is possible
     b. the former queen
         *the queen is former.

3. Conclusion

After analyzing the data the main findings for this research paper can be noted down briefly. The semantic classification of adjectives in Dutch by Broekhuis (2013) is applicable to the selected languages Bangla and English. All the three languages possess *set-denoting, relational, evaluative* and the *residue* semantic classes of adjectives. Even, the sub-classification of set-denoting adjectives has analogy to Bangla and English with Dutch. The above data analysis exhibits that the over-all semantic categorization of adjectives in Dutch, Bangla and English is similar to the greatest extent. Interestingly, the last three semantic classes of adjectives do not permit predicative use. Here the unacceptability is taken depending on the intuition of native speakers of respective languages.

Representation of Data

Dutch data is taken from the secondary resource. Bangla data is transcribed by IPA symbols with some changes. English data is presented in Roman script.
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Colophon

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