15. Adjective Usage
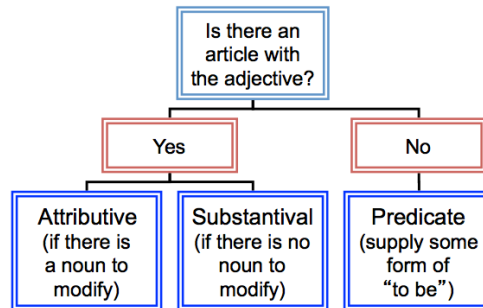
Lesson in a Nutshell

Adjectives may be attributive, substantival, or predicate.

Usage	Definition	English Example
1. Attributive Adjectives	"attribute" some quality to a noun	the good man
2. Substantival Adjectives	"stand in" for a noun.	God rewards the good.
3. Predicate Adjectives	involve some form of "to be"	God is good.

The article is an important clue to determine what kind of adjective it is.

Adjectives are words that modify nouns. They give us useful clarification about the noun in question. Greek adjectives are very similar to English adjectives with the exception we have come to expect: Greek adjectives change forms to show us their case, number and gender.

This lesson focuses on the three ways that adjectives are used in Greek

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Attributive Adjectives

Attributive adjectives modify a noun. They "attribute" some quality to a noun.

<p align="center">The green tree
The little grammar
The lovely wife</p>

In English, the adjective immediately precedes the noun it modifies (word order again!) In Greek, attributive adjectives may follow English word order or may reveal themselves in other ways.

Here is an example that follows English word order:

<p align="center">ὁ ἀγαθός ἄνθρωπος
the   good   man</p>

Here is another common example of an attributive adjective that is unlike English word order:

<p align="center">ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθός
the   man   (the)   good</p>

<p align="center">Attributive adjectives usually have the article.</p>

Substantival Adjectives

Substantival adjectives "stand in" for nouns. They have substance!

<p align="center">The diligent will do well in this class.</p>

Diligent what? Students, of course. But the word "student" is not in this sentence. It is assumed. The adjective is left on its own, and performs the function of the noun in the sentence.

 Here are a few more examples of substantival adjectives.

<p align="center">The righteous are treated better than the sinful.
The good, the bad, and the ugly.</p>

If there is no noun to modify, the adjective takes on substance of its own — a substantival adjective!

Here are a few examples in Greek.

$$\text{ὁ ἀγαθός ζήσει}$$
the good (man) will live

$$\text{ἡ ἀγαθή ζήσει}$$
the good (woman) will live

$$\text{αἱ ἀγαθάι ζήσει}$$
the good (women) will live

The case, number and gender will match the missing noun. Notice in the examples above that

In the first example ἀγαθός is singular masculine so we assume a singular masculine subject.

In the second example ἀγαθή is singular feminine so we assume a singular feminine subject.

In the third example ἀγαθάι is feminine plural so we assume a feminine plural subject.

Substantival adjectives usually have the article.

If there is no noun for an adjective to modify there is a good chance it is substantival.

Predicate Adjectives

Predicate adjectives involve some form of "to be." For example,

The man is good.
That ice cream was delicious!

In Greek, it looks like this:

$$\text{ὁ ἀνθρωπός ἐστίν ἀγαθός}$$
the   man   is   good

$$\text{ὁ ἀνθρωπός ἀγαθός}$$
the   man   (is) good

In the first example, the "to-be" verb is expressed (ἐστίν "is"). In the second, it is not. Greek will often leave the verb unexpressed if it believes it to be obvious.

The predicate adjective
<u>never</u>
has the article.

To summarize…

Usage	Definition	English Example
Attributive Adjectives	"attribute" some quality to a noun"	the good man
Substantival Adjectives	"stand in" for a noun	God rewards the good.
Predicate Adjectives	involve some form of "to be"	God is good.

The article is an important clue to determine what kind of adjective it is.

Is there an article with the adjective?

Yes → Attributive (if there is a noun to modify) / Substantival (if there is no noun to modify)

No → Predicate (supply some form of "to be")