16. What is a Descriptive Adjective?

A descriptive adjective describes qualities or characteristics of the noun or pronoun it modifies. It is called an attributive or predicate adjective depending on how it is linked to the noun or pronoun (see What is a Predicate?, p. 30).

An attributive adjective usually precedes or, less commonly, comes immediately after the noun it modifies.

The tsar lives in a large palace.

attributive adjective modifies palace

The house, large and old, was sold cheaply.

attributive adjectives modify house

A predicate adjective follows a linking verb: to be, seem, appear, become, etc. (see p. 30). It refers back to the subject of the sentence.

The apartment is *large*.

subject

predicate adjective

The teacher seems strict.

subject

predicate adjective

IN ENGLISH

Descriptive adjectives, whether attributive or predicate adjectives, singular or plural, do not change form regardless of their function or the noun or pronoun they modify.

The *cold* wind blew.

attributive adjective modifies wind, the singular subject

He threw me a cold look.

attributive adjective modifies *look*, the singular direct object

I like cold winters.

attributive adjective
modifies winters, the plural direct object

Russian winters are cold.

predicate adjective modifies winters, the plural subject

IN RUSSIAN

There are two types of adjectives, long-form adjectives and short-form adjectives.

A long-form adjective agrees in gender, number and case with the word it modifies.

A **short-form adjective** agrees in gender and number. It has only one form and does not decline.

Attributive adjectives can only be in the long form. These long-form adjectives agree in gender, number and case with the word they modify.

Predicate adjectives can be either in the long-form or in the short-form. The meaning of the adjective will be different depending on the form you use. Your textbook will clarify these differences.

Not all adjectives have a long-form and a short-form; study your textbook carefully. Adjectives are listed in the vocabulary section of your textbook and in the dictionary in the masculine singular nominative case form of the attributive adjective. That form ending must be removed to find the stem of the adjective on which to add other endings to agree with the noun or pronoun that the adjective modifies.

To choose the form of the adjective here are a series of steps to follow:

- 1. Type—Determine whether the adjective is an attributive or a predicate adjective.
 - If it is an attributive adjective, you will use the long-form adjective.
 - If it is a predicate adjective, you will have to determine whether you should use the long or the short-form adjective.
- 2. Long-form—If you use the long-form adjective, determine the gender, number and case of the word it modifies.

subject → nominative case (or for certain predicates the instrumental case, see p. 30)

direct object → accusative case indirect object → dative case agent or means → instrumental case object of a preposition → case will vary

- Short-form—If you use the short-form adjective, determine the gender and number of the word it modifies.
 - If the word modified is singular, the adjective will reflect its gender.
 - If the word modified is plural, the adjective will be plural.
- Selection—Attach the proper ending based on the steps outlined above.

Let us apply these steps to some sample sentences.

She lived in a big house.

- 1. Type: $big \rightarrow attributive$; adjective $\rightarrow long$ -form
- 2. Gender/number: house, дом, is masc. sing.
- 3. Function/case: **дом** is the object of the preposition **B** (in), which here takes the prepositional case.

Она жила в большом доме.

She was glad to see me.

- Type: glad → predicate adjective → short-form
 The predicate adjective glad, pag, is only short-form.
- 2. GENDER/NUMBER: she, ohá, is fem. sing.

Она была рада меня видеть.

the fem. sing. ending -a agrees with oná

The weather was fine.

Type: fine → predicate adjective
 The predicate adjective for fine may be long-form or short-form.

2. GENDER/NUMBER: weather, погода, is fem. sing.

3. Function/case: погода is the subject of the sentence.

Погода была корошая.

long-form adjective the fem. sing. nominative case ending -as agrees with ποτόμα

Погода была хороша.

short-form adjective the fem. sing. ending -a agrees with погода She is writing to an old girlfriend.

- 1. Type: $old \rightarrow attributive adjective \rightarrow long-form$
- 2. Gender/number: girlfriend, подруга, is fem. sing.
- 3. Function/case: подруга is the indirect object → dative case

Она пишет старой подруге.

She ate the soup with a large spoon.

- 1. Type: $large \rightarrow attributive adjective \rightarrow long-form$
- 2. GENDER/NUMBER: spoon, ложка is fem. sing.
- FUNCTION/CASE: πόκκα is the instrument of the action → instrumental case

Она ела суп большой ложкой.

A big cat is sitting on the stairs.

- 1. Type: $big \rightarrow attributive adjective \rightarrow long-form$
- 2. GENDER/NUMBER: cat, KOT, is masc. sing.
- 3. Function/case: **kot** is the subject \rightarrow nominative case

Большой кот сидит на лестнице.

Notice in the last three examples that the same adjectival ending -on is used for three different cases. Case endings of adjectives in Russian must be studied very thoroughly to avoid confusion.

Circle the attributive adjectives in the sentences below.

- Underline the predicate adjectives.
- Draw an arrow from each adjective to the noun or pronoun described.
- 1. The young woman seemed sad.
- 2. The younger students are especially eager to learn.
- 3. I am tired after my morning run.
- 4. All international flights will be late.