

process is subject to constraints too numerous for full discussion here. The noun may acquire a special meaning, as in *impreso/un impreso* 'printed'/'a printed form', *helado/un helado* 'frozen'/'an ice-cream', *rojo/un rojo* 'red'/'a Communist'. Some noun forms are simply not used: ¿**sale con un feliz* is not said for '(s)he's going out with a happy man' = *sale con un hombre feliz*; *llegó con una chica guapa* '(s)he arrived with an attractive girl', not **con una guapa*, etc.

An adjective may remain an adjective after a determiner, it which case *uno* and not *un* is used, cf. English 'the greens' (noun = 'environmentalists' or 'green-leaved vegetables') and 'the green ones' (adjective). Thus *un parecido* = 'similarity', but *uno parecido* = 'a similar one', as in *le voy a encargar a alguna modista que haga uno parecido* (A. Buero Vallejo, Sp., dialogue) 'I'm going to get a dressmaker to make a similar one'.

See also 3.3.11 on the use of the indefinite article to distinguish nouns from adjectives, as in *es generoso* and *es un generoso*.

4.1.1 Position of adjectives in relation to nouns

4.1.1.1 General

For the position of *alguno*, *ninguno*, *cualquiera*, *mismo*, possessive adjectives, etc., consult these words in the index. For the position of ordinal number-adjectives, e.g. *primero* 'first', *sexto* 'sixth', see 10.12.3.

The rules governing the position of Spanish adjectives are much more flexible than in English and a good deal more flexible than in French, but the underlying rules that determine whether one says *un lejano ruido* or *un ruido lejano* 'a distant noise' are difficult to explain. The basic rule for all adjectives other than ordinal numbers seems to be:

(a) Restrictive adjectives follow the noun.

(b) Non-restrictive adjectives may precede or follow the noun. Some always precede the noun.

Restrictive adjectives narrow the scope of the noun that precedes them: *vino espumoso* 'sparkling wine' denotes a restricted type of wine; *odio las novelas históricas* 'I hate historical novels' refers only to novels that are historical. Non-restrictive adjectives typically refer to the whole of the thing denoted by the noun: *las aburridas conferencias del decano* 'the dean's boring lectures', *la poco apetitosa cocina británica* 'unappetizing British cooking' both attribute a quality to every member or aspect of the class of thing or things referred to by the noun. Unfortunately the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive adjectives is not always clear, and the decision about where to put the adjective often relies on a feel for the language rare among non-natives.

As a useful, though not absolutely foolproof guide to whether an adjective is restrictive, native speakers of English can apply the following test: if an English adjective sounds correct when spoken with a heavy stress (or, more accurately, with falling intonation)—'I don't like **sour** apples, but I do like **sweet** apples'—then it is almost certainly restrictive and its Spanish equivalent must follow the noun: *no me gustan las manzanas agrias, pero sí me gustan las manzanas dulces*. If an English adject-

five sounds wrong when stressed it is probably non-restrictive and its Spanish counterpart may well precede the noun. If one stresses 'beautiful' in 'the beautiful sun of Spain', it suggests that there is another less beautiful Spanish sun. This is absurd, so the Spanish adjective will probably precede the noun: *el hermoso sol de España*. Ordinal number adjectives do not follow this rule, cf. *está en el quinto capítulo, no en el cuarto* 'it's in the fifth chapter, not in the fourth'. See 10.12.3.

4.11.2 Examples of restrictive adjectives

The following adjectives are restrictive and therefore always follow the noun:

- (a) those that create a new type or sub-set of the thing described by the noun:

el pan integral wholemeal bread
el papel secante blotting paper
los cazas computerizados computerized
 fighter aircraft

la teoría cuántica quantum theory
la tracción delantera front-wheel drive

All the other examples in this section are in fact instances of this type of adjective, which can be thought of as a transformed clause: *la poesía romántica* = *aquella poesía que es romántica*, *las manzanas verdes* = *aquellas manzanas que están/son verdes*.

- (b) Those used for purposes of contrast, whether explicit or implied:

Tráigame una cuchara limpia, no una sucia
Tengo un boli verde y otro azul

Bring me a clean spoon, not a dirty one
 I have a green ballpoint pen and a blue one

Adoro los ojos azules
No queremos agua salada

I adore blue eyes
 We don't want salty water

- (c) Scientific or technical adjectives:

la gramática transformativa
 transformational grammar
la crítica estructuralista structuralist
 criticism

el laboratorio lingüístico language
 laboratory
el correo electrónico e-mail

✎ *El emilio* was an ingenious colloquialism for 'e-mail' in Spain, but it has lost ground to *el correo* or *el email*. In formal Spanish one should use *el mensaje electrónico*.

Only the most far-fetched styles would use such adjectives poetically or as epithets, though some, e.g. *unilateral*, *microscópico*, *(p)sicoanalítico*, *materialista*, might conceivably be used as value judgements (see 4.11.4a).

- (d) Relational adjectives. These express the origin, substance, contents or purpose of a noun. Their use is discussed at 4.12:

la nave espacial spaceship
el túnel ferroviario railway tunnel
la guerra nuclear nuclear war

el material bélico war matériel
 (= *material de guerra*)

- (e) Adjectives of nationality, which are almost always restrictive:

el clima argentino
la paella valenciana
los monumentos mayas

the Argentine climate
 paella Valencia-style
 the Mayan monuments

Adjectives of nationality can occasionally be used as epithets (because they express allegedly typical qualities. See 4.11.4 for a discussion of epithets): *mi española impulsiva*.

sividad me hace escribir estas líneas (reader's letter in *Cambio16*, Sp.) 'my Spanish impulsiveness makes me write these lines'; *su británica reserva* 'her/his British reserve'.

4.11.3 Adjectives put before a noun to indicate impression, reaction or subjective assessment

The most common reason for putting an adjective before the noun is to emphasize its emotional content, e.g. *una tremenda tragedia* 'a tremendous tragedy', *un gran poeta* 'a great poet', *el inquietante problema del efecto invernadero* 'the worrying problem of the greenhouse effect'. These adjectives are non-restrictive in context because the speaker wants to eliminate any allusion to another tragedy, poet or problem: in the previous quotation, there is obviously no suggestion that there is also a non-worrying greenhouse effect.

Native speakers often report that such adjectives are in some way 'emphatic', but this is misleading since in the English translation the adjective is definitely not stressed, as explained at 4.11.1.

These pre-posed adjectives can describe the speaker's impression, assessment or evaluation of a thing, or its appearance. They include a vast range of adjectives indicating shape, distance, size, colo(u)r, texture, passage of time, praise, blame or subjective appraisal of any kind. The more emotional the language, therefore, the more pre-posed adjectives are likely to occur, as in poetry, poetic prose, journalism and advertising. Examples:

<i>las magníficas ruinas de Machu Picchu</i>	the magnificent ruins at/of Macchu Picchu
<i>¡No voy a permitir que a tu hija la envenenes con las ideas de tu enferma cabeza!</i> (L. Esquivel, Mex., dialogue)	I'm not going to let you poison your daughter with the ideas in your sick brain!
<i>un profesor, dueño de una amplísima cultura</i> (S. Pitól, Mex., dialogue)	a teacher, a highly educated man
<i>¡Sensacional promoción de verano!</i>	Sensational Summer Special Offer!

Sometimes the difference of meaning between post-posed and pre-posed adjectives can be significant, as in *el poético lenguaje de Lorca* 'the poetic language of Lorca' (aesthetic opinion) and *el lenguaje poético de Lorca* 'the language of Lorca's poetry' (factual), or *las decimonónicas actitudes del ministro* 'the nineteenth-century attitudes of the minister' (an opinion) and *la novela decimonónica* 'the nineteenth-century novel' (factual). But very often a pre-posed adjective is merely more poetic or dramatic, a post-posed one more matter-of-fact. The following examples will help to train the ear. In every case the adjective or adjectival phrase in bold letters could have followed the noun or noun-phrase:

<i>el casi olvidado nombre de James MacPherson</i> (J. L. Borges, Arg.)	the almost forgotten name of James MacPherson
<i>Hay barcos anclados en permanente contacto con los aviones nocturnos</i> (G. García Márquez, Col., dialogue)	There are boats anchored at sea in permanent contact with the night aircraft
<i>La revolución significó para mí una justa redistribución de la riqueza</i> (M. Vargas Llosa, Pe.)	The revolution meant for me a just redistribution of wealth

<i>una guirnalda de blancas flores</i> (L. Goytisolo, Sp.)	a wreath of white flowers
<i>La pera es de fácil digestión</i> (cookery book, Spain)	Pears are easily digested
<i>el creciente costo de la tierra urbana</i>	The rising cost of land in the cities

(i) Adjective position is arbitrarily fixed in many set phrases: *Alto Egipto* 'Upper Egypt', *el Sumo Pontífice* 'the Pope', *Baja California* 'Lower California' (cf. *América Central*, *los Estados Unidos*, *la China Popular*, 'People's China', etc.), *altos hornos* 'blast-furnaces', *en alta mar* 'on the high seas', *Dios Todopoderoso* 'Almighty God', *sentido común* 'common sense', etc.

(ii) If an adjective is qualified by an adverb it usually follows the noun in ordinary styles: *esta noticia altamente reveladora* 'this highly revealing news item', *una chica frigidamente agresiva*, 'a frigidly aggressive girl', *con tres amigos igualmente roñosos* 'with three equally stingy friends'. Compare *anuncian una útil linterna* (not *linterna útil*) 'they are advertising a useful torch/US flashlight' and *anuncian una linterna muy útil* 'they are advertising a very useful torch/flashlight'. With *más* and *menos* either position is possible: *el más popular presentador de la TV italiana* (*Cambio16*, Spain) 'the most popular presenter on Italian TV', or *el presentador más popular de la TV italiana*.

Constructions like *la altamente reveladora noticia* 'the highly revealing news item', *esa siempre sorprendente inteligencia de los perros* (S. Galindo, Mex.) 'that ever-surprising intelligence of dogs', *la sorprendente y para Julián desconocida noticia...* (I. Aldecoa, Spain) 'the surprising and—for Julian—unknown news ...' are, however, found in literary styles.

(iii) For nouns with two or more adjectives see 4.11.5.

4.11.4 Other uses of adjectives placed before the noun

The following types of adjectives are also placed before the noun:

(a) Epithets, i.e. adjectives used to describe qualities typically associated with the noun. These are not common in everyday or matter-of-fact language, except in set phrases, but they are very common in literary, poetic or other types of emotive language:

<i>mi distinguido colega</i>	my distinguished colleague
<i>el peligroso tigre asiático</i>	the dangerous Asian tiger
<i>un valiente torero</i>	a brave bullfighter
<i>los volubles dioses romanos</i>	the fickle Roman gods

Epithets describe predictable or typical qualities: one can say *un enorme elefante* 'an enormous elephant' but only *un elefante cojo* 'a lame elephant' since lameness is not typical of elephants, unlike bigness; *mi leal amigo* 'my loyal friend' but only *mi amigo vegetariano* 'my vegetarian friend'; *un difícil problema* or *un problema difícil* 'a difficult problem', but only *un problema (p)sicológico*, since problems are not typically psychological.

(b) Adjectives that clearly refer to every one of the items denoted by a plural noun: *tuvo que parar en boxes para cambiar sus deterioradas ruedas* (*El País*, Sp.) 'he had to stop in the pits to change his worn tyres/US tires' (*ruedas deterioradas* could imply that

only some of his tyres were worn), *muchas gracias por las magníficas rosas* (*rosas magníficas* suggests that some of the roses were less magnificent) 'many thanks for the magnificent roses', *sus evasivas respuestas empezaban a irritarme* 'his/her evasive replies were starting to irritate me', *las simpáticas peticiones de nuestros oyentes* 'our listeners' kind requests'.

For this reason, adjectives applied to unique entities are likely to be pre-posed, unless they apply only to an aspect or part of the thing:

*Se veía el imponente Everest
el izquierdista Frente Farabundo Martí
tu alarmante edad...* (you have only
one age)

One could see imposing Mount Everest
the left-wing Farabundo Martí Front
your alarming age...

But

*Existe un Unamuno político y
comprometido, y otro contemplativo
También visitamos la ciudad moderna*

There is a political, committed Unamuno,
and another contemplative one
We also visited the modern (part of the)
city

(c) Intensifiers, hyperboles and swear words—which are extreme examples of adjectives used emotively and often stripped of all real meaning:

*mi increíble suerte
jeste maldito ordenador!* (Lat.
Am. *computadora* or *computador*)
*Valiente soldado eres tú
tu dichosa familia
estas condenadas hormigas
cinco cochinos/piojosos euros*

my incredible luck
this damned computer!
A great soldier you are (I don't think...)
your blessed family
these damned ants
five lousy euros

4.11.5 Position of adjectives with nouns connected by *de*

Choice of position here depends on whether the noun phrase is a compound word, i.e. a new concept, or merely a loose cluster of words. Thus *las flores de España* 'the flowers of Spain' is not a compound, so one says *las flores silvestres de España* 'the wild flowers of Spain' not **las flores de España silvestres*. But *una casa de muñecas* 'a dolls' house' is a compound and is inseparable: *una casa de muñecas barata* 'a cheap dolls' house', not **una casa barata de muñecas*. Only long familiarity with Spanish provides a guide as to what is or is not a compound noun. Some noun phrases are uncertain: one can say *una bicicleta amarilla de hombre* or *una bicicleta de hombre amarilla* 'a yellow man's bicycle' (the Spanish is unambiguous!). Further examples:

*un cochecito de niño verde
un buque de asalto anfíbio
un médico de cabecera simpático
un libro lleno de curiosas referencias de
índole personal* (J. L. Borges, Arg.)

a green pram/baby carriage
an amphibious assault craft
a nice family doctor
a book full of curious references of a
personal nature

NB: Relational adjectives cannot be separated from their nouns: one cannot say **un virus peligroso informático* for *un peligroso virus informático* or *un virus informático peligroso* 'a dangerous computer virus': see 4.12.

4.11.6 Position of *bueno, malo, grande, pequeño*

The general rule applies: when they are clearly restrictive, they follow the noun. When used restrictively, they usually indicate objective qualities. When they pre-

cede the noun they usually express a subjective evaluation (which is usually the case, but see note iv for the special case of *pequeño*).

According to the GDLE, 3.4.2.2, in the case of *bueno* and *malo*, the preposed adjective may unambiguously refer to competence rather than moral qualities. So *un buen poeta* may be a scoundrel but a competent poet, whereas *un poeta bueno* may be a good poet and a good person. Likewise *un mal músico* and *un músico malo* 'a bad musician', *un buen amigo* = 'good as a friend' and *un amigo bueno* = 'a good friend and a good person'. The distinctions do not seem so clear-cut to us.

(a) Objective qualities

*Tengo un abrigo bueno para los fines de
semana, y uno regular para los laborables*
*Oscar Wilde dijo que no hay libros buenos o
malos sino libros bien o mal escritos*
(J. L. Borges, Arg., contrast)
Ponlo debajo del árbol grande
Trae la llave grande
Era un hombre grande
mi hermana mayor/menor

I've got a good coat for weekends, and
a so-so one for weekdays
Oscar Wilde said there are no good or
bad books, only well or badly
written books
Put it under the big tree
Bring the big key/spanner
He was a big man
my elder/younger sister

(b) Subjective qualities

un buen carpintero
un gran éxito
un gran ruido/poeta/embustero
los grandes narcotraficantes
un pequeño problema (see note iv)
el mayor poeta mexicano
ni la menor impresión de insinceridad

a good carpenter
a great success
a great noise/poet/fraud
the major drug dealers
a slight problem
the greatest Mexican poet
not even the slightest impression of
insincerity

(i) With *hombre* and *mujer*, *bueno* tends to mean 'good' after the noun and 'harmless' before: *un buen hombre* means 'a harmless/simple man'. *Malo* is weaker before the noun, e.g. *pasamos un mal rato* 'we had a bad time'. *Mala mujer* may be a euphemism for prostitute.

(ii) There are many set expressions: *lo hizo de buena gana* '(s)he did it willingly', *oro de buena ley* 'pure gold', *en buen lío te has metido* 'you're in a fine mess', *a mí siempre me pone buena cara* '(s)he always makes an effort with me', *¡qué mala pata!* 'what bad luck', etc.

(iii) *Grande* is pre-posed when it means 'great', but it may mean 'big' in either position.

(iv) *Un pequeño problema* is normal since *problema* is an abstract noun. However *una pequeña casa* is less usual than *una casita*. For discussion of this phenomenon see 38.2.

4.11.7 Position of *nuevo* and *viejo*

The usual explanation is that these are pre-posed when they mean 'another' and 'previous'/'long-standing' respectively, but in practice it is doubtful whether the distinction is always clear-cut: *tenemos un nuevo presidente/un presidente nuevo* 'we've got a new president', *nuevos progresos técnicos* 'new (i.e. more) technological

developments', *un viejo amigo* 'an old friend' (i.e. long-standing, not necessarily old in years).

Nuevo is usually post-posed when it means 'brand-new' as is *viejo* when it means 'not new': *un coche nuevo* 'a brand-new car', *un coche viejo* 'an old car'. But *viejo* may be pre-posed when it means 'not young': *un viejo americano* 'an old American'. This distinction is overridden for purposes of contrast: *prefiero el coche nuevo al viejo* 'I prefer our new (i.e. latest) car to the old (i.e. previous) one'.

4.11.8 Adjectives whose meaning varies according to position

The following are some common cases of changes of meaning determined by adjective position, but in many cases the distinction is not rigid and a good dictionary should be consulted for further information:

	After noun	Before noun
<i>antiguo</i>	ancient	former or ancient
<i>medio</i>	average	half
<i>pobre</i>	poor (= not rich)	miserable/wretched
<i>puro</i>	pure/clean	sheer
<i>raro</i>	strange/rare	rare
<i>rico</i>	rich	delicious
<i>simple</i>	simple-minded	simple (= mere)
<i>triste</i>	sad	wretched
<i>valiente</i>	courageous	'great' (ironic)
<i>varios</i>	assorted/various	several

For *mismo* see 9.11, *propio* 9.14, *sólo/solo* 9.15.

4.11.9 Adjectives that occur only in front of the noun

The following phrases contain adjectives that normally occur only in front of a noun:

<i>Lo haré en ambos casos</i>	I'll do it in both cases
<i>las llamadas democracias</i>	the so-called 'democracies'
<i>la mera mención del asunto</i>	the mere mention of the topic
<i>Llevaba mucho dinero</i>	(S)he was carrying a lot of money
<i>Busquemos otro médico</i>	Let's look for another doctor
<i>Me dejó en pleno centro</i>	(S)he left me right in the town centre/US center
<i>el presunto culpable</i>	the allegedly guilty person
<i>pocas veces</i>	rarely
<i>poca paciencia</i>	little patience
<i>el pretendido autor</i>	the alleged/supposed author
<i>un sedicente budista</i>	a self-styled Buddhist
<i>Trajeron sendos paquetes (literary)</i>	They brought a parcel each
<i>el supuesto ladrón</i>	the alleged thief
<i>ante tamaña tontería</i>	in the face of such a great act of stupidity
<i>No puedo comer tanta cantidad</i>	I can't eat such a quantity

4.12 Relational adjectives

'Relational' adjectives are usually equivalent to *de* plus a noun: *la vida familiar* = *la vida de familia* 'family life'. Spanish has numerous relational adjectives formed from

nouns cf. *mañana* 'morning' - *matinal* (la televisión *matinal* 'breakfast TV'), *impuesto* 'tax' - *impositivo* (política *impositiva* 'taxation policy'), *agua* 'water' - *hidráulico* (avión *hidráulico* 'firefighting aircraft'), or *acuático*: *planta acuática* 'water-plant'.

Relational adjectives cannot normally precede a noun (**matinal televisión* is not Spanish); they usually cannot be made comparative by using *más* or *menos*, and many of them cannot be predicates of verbs like *ser*: one can say *tasas universitarias* 'university fees', but not **estas tasas son universitarias*. There are exceptions like *constitucional*, *acuático*.

New relational adjectives constantly appear, probably because the combination noun + adjective more effectively translates English compound nouns of the type 'computer virus' (*virus informático*), 'film text' (*texto fílmico*). Some of these formations are short-lived or are rejected as jargon by educated speakers.

There is no fixed rule for forming relational adjectives from nouns, and Latin-American coinages occasionally differ from Peninsular ones, cf. Sp. *presupuestario*, Lat. Am. *presupuestal*; Sp. *programa de radio*, Lat. Am. *programa radial* 'radio program(me)'. In a few cases, e.g. *viento-eólico* 'wind' as in *la energía eólica* 'wind energy' (from *Eolo* 'Aeolus', the Roman god of the winds), *caza-cinegético* 'hunting', the adjective is derived from a completely different root. The following are taken from various printed sources:

de + noun

carestía del petróleo
crisis de la banca
defectos del oído
estancia en la cárcel
industria de automóviles
industria de hoteles
peces de río
política de energía
programa de informaciones
programa de televisión
sindicato de pilotos

Relational adjective

carestía petrolera high oil prices
crisis bancaria bank crisis
defectos auditivos hearing defects
estancia carcelaria prison term
industria automovilística car industry
industria hotelera hotel industry
peces fluviales river-fish
política energética energy policy
programa informativo information program(me)
programa televisivo television program(me)
sindicato piloteril pilots' union

In both languages an adjective may be descriptive or relational according to context: compare 'theatrical equipment' (relational) and 'theatrical reaction' (descriptive). Such pairs seem to be more common in Spanish, and this may confuse English-speakers, who tend to misinterpret a phrase like *calidad constructiva* as meaning 'constructive quality' when it in fact means 'quality of construction'. Further examples:

<i>lenguaje shakespeariano</i>	Shakespearean language/the language of Shakespeare
<i>una cantidad masiva</i>	a massive quantity
<i>los medios masivos</i>	the mass media
<i>un gesto hospitalario</i>	a hospitable gesture
<i>un centro hospitalario</i>	a hospital centre/US center
<i>política defensiva</i>	defence/US defense policy
<i>actitud defensiva</i>	defensive attitude
<i>poesía amorosa</i>	love poetry
<i>una sonrisa amorosa</i>	a loving smile
<i>educación infantil</i>	infants' education
<i>actitud infantil</i>	childish attitude

(i) The *GDLE*, 3.3.1.1, points out that other adjectives cannot separate a noun + a relational adjective: one says *los medios masivos americanos* not **los medios americanos masivos* for 'the American mass media'.

4.13 Translating the English prefix 'un-'

The Spanish prefix *in-* is much less common than the English 'un-' and English speakers should resist the temptation to invent imaginary words like **ineconómico* from 'uneconomical' (*poco económico*). The two languages often coincide: *inimaginable* 'unimaginable', *insobornable* 'unbriable', *intocable* 'untouchable', *irreal* 'unreal'. But often a solution with *poco*, *no* or *sin* must be found:

no autorizado/sin autorizar
unauthorized
no usado/sin usar unused
poco amistoso unfriendly
poco apetitoso unappetizing
poco atractivo unattractive
poco caritativo uncharitable
poco elegante inelegant
poco favorable unfavo(u)rable

poco inteligente unintelligent
poco práctico impractical (not
 **impráctico*)
poco profesional unprofessional
sin comprender uncomprehending
sin convencer unconvinced
sin principios unprincipled
sin probar untried

The above list shows that *poco*, like the French *peu*, negates an adjective: *poco deseable* means 'undesirable', not 'a bit desirable'. A preceding indefinite article restores the meaning 'little': *un poco cansado* 'a bit tired'/'slightly tired'.