The topic of our talk is what happens to clauses headed by non-verbs (e.g. adjectives or case forms of nouns) in Udmurt, in contexts where a verbal head would be nominalized and marked for case.

In Udmurt, there is a productive nominalization in -m, which attaches to verbal stems and is used, among other things, for nominalizing verbal heads of subordinate clauses under certain circumstances. Any nominal suffixes, i.e. possessiveness, case and (quite infrequently) number, can follow the -m marker in such contexts. The adverbial modifiers and the arguments of the nominalized head stay unchanged, except for the subject. The subject in the nominalized clause has to receive possessor-like marking, either attaching the genitive suffix, or forming a structure with the nominalized head, which can be analyzed as incorporation or a compound (Georgieva 2017):

(1u) pinal-jos-len  tros=ges  vord-išk-ińı  kutsk-em-ţi-li <...>

kid-PL-GEN  many=CMPR  bear-PASS-INF  begin-NMLZ-P.3PL-DAT

gosudarstvo  daś  ĕvĕl=ńi

state  ready  not.be=already

‘The state was not ready to the fact that more kids are born.’

Such nominalizations usually take place when it, together with a certain case marker, is required by the head of the matrix clause, which happens e.g. with verbs of emotion or the predicative daś ‘ready’ (1). Another frequent context where such nominalizations appear is clauses with the causal meaning marked by the instrumental, treated as a separate converb by Alatyrev (1983:585):

(2u) berd-jaśa  ġad’-em-en-ţi

weep-CVB  get.tired-NMLZ-INS-P.3PL  that-PL

şunıt  gur  viñ-ı̆n=ı̆k  iţi-ţi

very  oven  up-LOC=EMPH  sleep-3PL

‘They fell asleep right on the warm oven because they were tired of weeping.’

Adjectives in Udmurt normally do not inflect for case. An only exception recognized in the literature are contrastive contexts and contexts with topicalized nominal head, often with ellipsis of the head, in which the adjective can copy case and number markers from the head, but has to be marked with a 3sg possessive suffix (even if the head bears another possessive marker). It has also been stated that this “discourse” 3SG possessive is obligatory in case compounding and case-inflected adjectives (Perevoshchikov 1962:128), which led some researchers to recognize it as a nominalizing device (Winkler 2001:43).

Our research shows that there is another scenario in which adjectives can have nominal marking. Whenever a clause headed by an adjective appears in a context where a verb would have been nominalized with the -m marker and further marked with nominal suffixes, the adjective can just attach these suffixes without any overt nominalization. The arguments and adverbial modifiers in this case behave the same way:

(3b) gord  jablok-ez  mon  so-len  jun  č’eskőť-ez-łå  jarat-ışıko

red  apple-ACC  I.NOM  that-GEN  very  sweet-P.3SG-DAT  like-PRS.1SG

1 The examples marked with U are in literary Udmurt and come from the Udmurt corpus. The examples marked with B are in Beserman Udmurt and were collected by the authors in the field in 2017.
'I like red apples because they are very sweet.'
Moreover, the same thing can happen to other non-verbal heads:
(4b) mon ta plát’á-os-tó bašt-i lóz šaška-jen-zó-ló
I.NOM this dress-PL-ACC.PL buy-PST.1SG blue flower-INS-P.3PL-DAT
'I bought these dresses because they have blue flowers on them.'
This latter case is especially interesting because it contains an instance of case compounding without the ‘discourse’ P.3SG, which proves that it is not in fact a nominalizer.
The facts that adverbial modifiers may stay in place, and that such nominalization-by-conversion is available for any adjective (we checked several dozen adjectives in the field) or adjective-like form such as attributives in -o or -tem, proves that in the general case, it is indeed a syntactic process rather than adjective-noun homonymy which pertains to the dictionary. Nevertheless, we have to postulate the adjective-noun homonymy for some of the adjectives, based on both syntactic (they can easily be modified with adjectives) and semantic (they may develop other meanings beside the standard factual interpretation “the fact that X is Y”) grounds. Such cases include weather adjectives/predicatives (šunit ‘hot’, kežit ‘cold’), which can even be pluralized and become subjects, and a number of other adjectives like čéber ‘beautiful = beauty’. In fact, a handful of frequent adjectives which can be said to also work as nouns, accounts for most of the occurrences of adjectives with nominal morphology in the corpus, cases of genuine nominalization being very rare. It seems that for all adjectives that appear in such contexts frequently enough, a nominal homonym is quickly developed in the dictionary. If this is not the case, speakers often prefer other alternatives to adjective nominalization, such as using a finite clause with the complementizer šusa or nominalizing the copula luínj (which cannot be used as copula in independent clauses in the present tense, and which means ‘become / happen from time to time’ rather than ‘be’ when used as the predicate):
(5u) kot’ku paim-ísko viž.nod-zj-lí, mudron lu-em-zj-lí
always be.surprised-PRS.1SG cleverness-P.3PL-DAT wise COP-NMLZ-P.3PL-DAT
'I am always surprised by their cleverness and wisdom.'
The nominalization described here seems to be an areal feature, probably arising due to the the Turkic influence. It exists in some way e.g. in Mari, Khakas (Maltseva 2017), and Buryat (Maria Privizentseva, p. c.). On the other hand, this phenomenon has not been attested in Komi varieties so far.

References