



THE PROBLEM OF SUBSTANTIVATION OF ENGLISH ADJECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the linguistic phenomenon of substantivation of English adjectives, focusing on its morphological, syntactic, and semantic characteristics. The process of substantivation enables adjectives to function as nouns and expand the lexical system of the English language. The paper explores the history, mechanisms, and types of substantivation, including complete and partial substantivation. Special attention is given to the issues of classification, article usage, translation challenges and their implications for linguistic theory. The study also reviews existing scholarly approaches and highlights the importance of substantivized adjectives in modern English.

Introduction. In modern linguistics, the boundaries between grammatical word classes are not always rigidly defined. One of the most striking examples of the fluidity of these boundaries is the phenomenon known as **substantivation**, whereby an adjective acquires the properties and functions of a noun. English, being a highly analytical language, provides productive mechanisms for such transformations. The process reflects the language's historical evolution and structural tendencies, where form remains constant but function changes. The substantivation of adjectives has long attracted the attention of researchers such as O. Jespersen, B. Ilyish, R. Quirk, and others, because it demonstrates how lexical categories can shift depending on syntactic and semantic conditions. Despite its productivity, substantivation presents several linguistic problems, including classification challenges and the ambiguity of article use. This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the substantivation of English adjectives, outlining its features, types, and problematic aspects, as well as offering a detailed overview of existing linguistic interpretations.

1.Theoretical Background of Substantivation. The term **substantivation** (or nominalization) refers to the process by which a word from another part of speech—most commonly an adjective—comes to function as a noun. This phenomenon is universal across many languages; however, its form, productivity, and syntactic behavior differ widely. In English, substantivation develops primarily through syntactic reanalysis rather than morphological change.

According to classical linguistic theory, substantivation occurs when:

- 1.A word retains adjectival morphology,
- 2.But functions as a noun within a sentence.

Thus, substantivation is not merely a morphological process but a syntactic and semantic one.

Linguists distinguish between **lexical substantivation** (where an adjective becomes a dictionary-recognized noun) and **contextual substantivation** (where the noun-like behavior appears only in specific constructions).

2. Types of Substantivation in English

2.1. Complete Substantivation

Complete substantivation occurs when an adjective fully transforms into a noun and gains all nominal properties. Such words can:

take plural forms,
occur with an indefinite article,
function naturally as dictionary nouns.

Examples include:

final → *finals*

native → *a native, natives*

criminal → *criminals*

In these cases, the original adjectival meaning is often weakened or lost entirely. For instance, *native* originally meant “born in a particular place,” but as a noun it now refers to “a person born in a place.”

Complete substantivation is closely tied to diachronic lexical change and the historical development of English vocabulary.

2.2. Partial Substantivation

Partial substantivation is the more common and productive type. Here, the adjective keeps its purely adjectival form but acquires a nominal function only within a specific syntactic pattern, usually:

the + adjective

Examples:

the rich

the poor

the elderly

the homeless

the unknown

These forms typically denote:

1. social groups (*the unemployed*)
2. collective categories (*the supernatural*)
3. abstract phenomena (*the impossible*)
4. legal **or formal statuses** (*the accused, the deceased*)

Unlike fully substantivized adjectives, these forms:

cannot take plural -s

cannot take possessive 's

always require the definite article in a collective meaning

For example:

The rich are getting richer. (plural meaning, but plural marker absent)

We must support the disabled.

These constructions demonstrate the analytical nature of English: grammatical meaning is conveyed through syntax, not morphology.

3. Morphological and Syntactic Characteristics

3.1. Morphological Features

Partially substantivized adjectives retain their base form without noun morphology.

Completely substantivized adjectives may take suffixes such as **-s**, **-'s**, and can function freely within nominal paradigms.

Morphologically, partially substantivized adjectives occupy a unique place, behaving as nouns syntactically but resisting noun inflection.

3.2. Syntactic Features

Substantivized adjectives can serve as:

subject: *The elderly need protection.*

object: *We should help the poor.*

predicative complement: *The accused is present.*

agent or patient in passive constructions*

These words often denote human categories, allowing English to express collective meaning concisely.

4. Semantic Characteristics

Semantically, substantivized adjectives express:

1. Generic human categories

e.g., *the blind, the rich, the young*

2. Abstract notions

e.g., *the unknown, the extraordinary*

3. Groups defined by status

e.g., *the accused, the deceased*

4. Concepts without direct equivalents in many other languages

e.g., *the beyond, the infinite*

This semantic flexibility shows how substantivation enriches English expression and facilitates conceptual generalization.

5. Problematic Aspects of Substantivation

Despite its frequency, substantivation raises several linguistic issues.

5.1. Classification Ambiguities

Different linguists classify substantivized adjectives in competing ways:

as nouns,

as adjective-based noun phrases,

as hybrid lexical-syntactic units.

This lack of consensus complicates grammatical description.

5.2. Article Usage Issues

The definite article plays a crucial role in substantivation. However:

the rich refers to a group,

the accused may refer to either one person or multiple people,

a native uses the indefinite article because it is fully substantivized.

Thus, article usage varies depending on the type of substantivation, causing ambiguity for learners of English.

5.3. Translation Difficulties

Languages like Uzbek and Russian do not allow pure adjective nominalization without a head noun. Therefore:

the elderly → *qariyalar* / *пожилые люди*

the unknown → *noma'lum narsa*

the rich → *boylar* / *богатые люди*

This structural discrepancy requires translators to insert implied nouns, demonstrating the grammatical uniqueness of English.

5.4. Diachronic Complexity

Many fully substantivized adjectives became nouns centuries ago, making it difficult to distinguish between:

historically developed nouns,
and newly substantivized adjectives.

For example:

public, native, criminal, final

started as adjectives but now function as nouns.

Conclusion. The substantivation of English adjectives is a complex and multifaceted linguistic phenomenon. It reflects the analytical character of the English language and demonstrates how syntactic context can convert adjectives into noun-like forms. Substantivized adjectives enrich the language by enabling concise expression of collective and abstract meanings. However, the phenomenon also presents several theoretical challenges, including issues of classification, article usage, and cross-linguistic equivalence.

Understanding substantivation is essential not only for linguists but also for translators, teachers, and advanced learners of English, as it reveals deeper patterns of how English organizes meaning and structure. Further research in this field continues to highlight the dynamic nature of word classes and the ongoing evolution of English grammar.

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