Substantivization as a Manifestation of the Prototypical Nature of the Part-of-Speech System

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Abstract. One of the most important achievements of cognitive grammar is the prototypical method. It can be effectively used in describing the English system of parts of speech which contains a lot of words combining characteristic traits of two or even more parts of speech and thus making intermediary zones. An example of the kind is presented by substantivized adjectives displaying some features of nouns which are revealed in their meaning, combinability and syntactic functions. At the same time they preserve some features of the adjective. Due to their dual nature substantivized adjectives are to be found in the intermediary zone between nouns and adjectives. Other parts of speech can also be substantivized acquiring some typical properties of the noun.

1. Introduction

At present time cognitive linguistics has turned into a modern school of linguistic thought and practice which has proved to be an effective instrument of language study. It investigates the relationship between human language, the mind and socio-physical experience. This school appeared due to dissatisfaction with formal approaches to language which were dominant in structuralism. However, the term “cognitive linguistics” admits of different interpretations; some linguists consider it to be not a self-maintained theory but an approach that “has adopted a common set of core commitments and guiding principles, which has led to a diverse range of complementary, overlapping (and sometimes competing) theories” [1]. The principles of cognitive grammar are widely applied nowadays in different spheres of language. Cognitive approaches to grammar make one of the two main branches of the cognitive linguistics enterprise [1].

In the 1970s a new approach to the notion of categorization was developed by E. Rosch and her colleagues who proposed that we categorize “not by means of the necessary and sufficient conditions of the classical theory but with reference to a prototype, a relatively abstract mental representation that assembles the key attributes or features that best represent instances of a given category” [2].

So the prototype is one of the central notions of cognitive linguistics. It is characterized by certain features frequently referred to in papers on the subject, such as a family-resemblance structure; different degrees of category membership (as not every member is equally representative for a category); blurriness at the edges [3]. Some attempts have been made to account for the existence of prototypes. According to the referential theory put forward by E. Rosch and developed by other linguists, prototypicality results from the fact that some instances of a category have more in common with other instances of this category than certain members of the category occupying the periphery. They share typical features with more other examples than peripheral ones. The peripheral phenomena of a category share characteristic features with fewer other cases, they have less in common with the other members of the category that can be found close to the prototype.

So the prototypical method of investigation implies heterogeneity of the elements of a category, blurriness at its edges, the existence of peripheral and intermediary zones, the latter including the elements that combine features of adjacent fields.
2. The Notion of Prototype and Periphery in Grammar.

The prototypical approach has turned out to be helpful in investigating categories of different language levels, including the grammatical one. It can be accounted for by the fact that the prototypical character is more inherent in grammatical categories than in lexical ones. The cause of it lies in the essence of grammatical categories which are in fact the categories of natural entities reflecting the language ontology.

Grammatical categories make an effective means of fixing the most stable characteristics of the surrounding world; they possess a wide spectrum of properties that differ not only in their essence, but also in the degree of their manifestation. This makes it possible to interpret its elements like either prototypical or peripheral and to state the existence of intermediary zones.

The prototypical approach is a helpful method of analyzing the part-of-speech system. Traditionally a part of speech has been treated as a list of units with similar categorial features. Linguists of classical school considered parts of speech to be clearly defined classes of words which are demarcated from each other. However, words belonging to the same part of speech frequently manifest different grammatical properties so it is hardly possible to distribute all the language phenomena among the parts of speech limited by strict borders.

Basing on the prototypical approach, within any part of speech the prototype and the periphery can be identified. Prototypical units reveal semantic, morphological, and syntactic properties which are most typical of the given class of words. Elements whose features characteristic for the given part of speech are displayed to a less extent belong to the periphery. In the intermediary zones there are words which combine features of two or more parts of speech, that is why their part-of-speech status is defined differently. There are some examples of the kind among words traditionally recognized as adjectives. In particular, here belong the words many and much. They are often classified as adjectives due to their grammatical properties—they can form degrees of comparison, often combine with nouns, and are generally used as attributes. Besides, they have something in common with numerals as they express quantity. However, they do no name quantity but only point to it, and this deictic feature makes them close to pronouns. In modern part-of-speech descriptions these words are usually referred to as determiners and are included into the same group as, e. g., articles. So the borders between parts of speech are not distinct and the application of the prototypical method gives an opportunity to find the position for any word in the system of parts of speech, no matter how doubtful its morphological status may seem from the traditional point of view.


From the semantic point of view adjectives are traditionally divided into qualitative and relative. Each of these groups is characterized by some semantic and grammatical peculiarities. Qualitative, or inherent adjectives denote some property of a thing directly; this property can be estimated as to its degree so they combine with adverbs of degree and form degrees of comparison. They are used equally as attributes and predicatives. Relative, or non-inherent adjectives denote a quality indirectly, they are invariable as the property expressed by them has no degrees of intensity. As a rule, they function as attributes. Displaying the typical part-of-speech features, qualitative adjectives can be considered to form the prototype of the part of speech; relative adjectives belong to the periphery. However, the border between the prototype and the periphery is not strict; e. g. some qualitative adjectives have no degrees of comparison (final, vertical, blind); some of them are not used as predicatives (new, close). On the other hand, relative adjectives do occur in the comparative or superlative degree, though not often (the most grammatical topic, a more military design).
4. Substantivization and Its Types.

Language is continuously developing, and a lot of words change their grammatical character due to conversion. As a result of this process a word acquires semantic and grammatical features of another part of speech. In the sphere of the adjective these processes are especially vivid which is due to its specific ontological characteristics: adjectives express a property that we can consider only through its relation to the thing possessing this property. Consequently, the property denoted by the adjective is dependent and relative which leads to the easiness of its substantivization. Substantivization has often been regarded as a kind of conversion [4; 5]. Yet, nowadays most linguists don’t share this point of view and treat substantivization as a specific process when the noun modified is semantically weakened and consequently lost. In the process of substantivization the qualitative characteristic is generalized because in reality there are a lot of objects sharing similar qualitative properties. This peculiarity of the adjective is determined by its dependent nature as it always presupposes the presence of a noun which it modifies. This change can be carried out easily since the border between Germanic nouns and adjectives is not closed. These two parts of speech are connected as to their origin because in many European languages adjectives have developed from nouns.

Linguists suppose that in the process of communication its participants strive for brevity which makes communication more laconic, concentrated and so more productive. It is often considered to be one of the main laws of language development determined by the human’s urge towards perfecting language forms in order to reduce the expenditure of mental and physical effort while exchanging information [4]. That’s why some speech units, which are thematic and do not contain new information are omitted. There are some language processes within the limits of this tendency, and substantivization of adjectives is one of them since substantivized adjectives originally functioned as elements of attribute phrases: a permanent wave $\rightarrow$ permanent [6].

Two types of substantivization are distinguished—full and partial. In the first case the adjective acquires all the semantic and grammatical features of the noun: it denotes a thing (in the wide sense of the word), has the categories of number and case, is characterized by the combinability and syntactic functions typical of nouns: a relative, a native, a private. It is due to the word-building suffix alone that the origin of such formations can be traced: Convicts were used to being looked down on as the lowest of the low, and to their minds the natives were lowlier still (L. Pearse). This process has a renaming nature since the adjective loses its tie with the noun, becomes all-sufficient from the communicative point of view and is usually registered in dictionaries as a noun. Such words are used in the language side by side with the corresponding adjectives belonging to the prototype of the part of speech, and their lexical meanings are practically identical. However, there are exceptions when a new meaning is developed: a private, a patient. So when substantivization is full, such words are to be found in the area of the prototype of the noun.

5. Semantic and Grammatical Peculiarities of Substantivized Adjectives.

If substantivization is partial, the adjective obtains the lexico-grammatical meaning of the noun and usually denotes a group of people sharing some specific property. Some of them are names of nationalities or ethnic attribute and are often characterized by some phonetic peculiarity—they end in a sibilant: -(i)sh (British, Welsh), -ese (Portuguese), -ch (French), -s (Swiss) [7]. A partially substantivized adjective can also denote an abstract notion; in this case it is invariable. If the substantivized adjective performs the function of the subject, the form of the predicate varies: it depends upon the meaning of the adjective. If it denotes a group of people (or other living beings) the predicate has the plural form. (There are some fixed phrases in which the adjective has a singular meaning, e. g. the former and the latter). If it denotes an abstract notion, the predicate is in the singular. So substantivized adjectives have some restrictions related to their morphological categories and combinability.
Substantivized adjectives can perform many syntactic functions typical of nouns and be used as:

- **subject:** *The rich, the beautiful, the notorious and the well-born might wait in vain to be signaled out and paid special attention (A. Christie)*;
- **predicative:** *It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more (J. Rowling)*;
- **object:** *In the seven years since she [the ship] had been launched, she had been travelled by the great and elite, the rich, the spoiled, the elegant, lovers of beauty and of the sea (D. Steel)*.

Some linguists assert that a partially substantivized adjective cannot function as an attribute. However, the analysis of fiction shows that it can enter an of-phrase and be used in post-position: *Simultaneously, their shared sense of the ridiculous bubbled to the surface and brother and sister dissolved into giggles (R. Pilcher)*.

Like nouns, substantivized adjectives combine with the definite article; like adjectives, they can be modified by adverbs. So their combinability is dual though restricted (they are not used with the indefinite article): *The very young are likely to catch contagious diseases [8]. It was a revelation to discover what a great divide there was in our city between the comfortably situated and the wretchedly poor (V. Holt)*.

So in this sphere we observe the phenomenon of syncretism. Such substantivized adjectives resulting from the process and combining features of two parts of speech belong to the intermediary zone. The range of these adjectives is rather limited, their list is traditional: *the old, the young, the poor, the rich, the blind, the deaf, the small, the great, and some others*. However, it is constantly changing, as the degree of substantivization can vary. The words *sensitive* and *innocent* present an example of the kind, manifesting sometimes the characteristics of full substantivization: *He was a regional man, a man who wrote about sensitives who live away from the places where things happen (M. Bradbury). He had thought her a complete innocent, and young innocents like her didn’t appeal to him in the least (J. Lindsey)*.

Substantivized adjectives are invariable, but occasionally take the form of the genitive case: *the deceased’s particular merits [7]*.

Some linguists consider substantivized adjectives to be nominal adjectives whose most characteristic feature is the ability of being the head-word of a phrase [7]. In such contexts their various features are manifested—both substantive and adjectival. In the examples below substantivized adjectives form phrases with an adjective and with a prepositional group in accordance with the combinability of nouns: *It is the ‘old old’ or those over 75 who are most likely to experience major health and mobility problems. A recent estimate puts the proportion of the literate in Egypt at around half of a percent certainly no more than one percent.* On the other hand, they are frequently accompanied by an adverb like typical adjectives: *the very poor, the terminally ill, the so-called ‘chronic sick’ [7]*. It is worth mentioning that substantivized adjectives denoting nationality cannot combine with adverbs [6]. Besides, there is a tendency to use such adjectives without the definite article if they are used in pairs connected by prepositions or conjunctions: *Things went from bad to worse [9]. Education should be for both young and old [9]. So I thought this is an interesting idea of bringing disabled and abled together [7]*. The mixed nature of such formations also becomes apparent due to the ability of such substantivized adjectives to have degrees of comparison: *the poorest of society [7]*.

6. **Substantivization of Other Parts of Speech.**

Substantivization is especially typical of adjectives; however, other parts of speech can also undergo this process, most often pronouns. Personal pronouns, which possess some grammatical properties characteristic of nouns (the categories of number and case, combinability and syntactic function), can acquire even more features of the kind. Among them there is:

- the use with an article: *‘What did he do?’ ‘It wasn’t a he,’ said Mrs Dane Calthrop (A. Christie)*;
• the combinability with an attributive adjective in pre-position: But that’s not the real you, is it, Lynn? “Oh, what is the real me? What’s the real you, if it comes to that?” (A. Christie);
• the combinability with a negative pronoun: I don’t know where I want to go. I don’t even know if there is a me. There’s just my name, Anna, but no me. Can you see one? (M. West);
• the combinability with a possessive pronoun: “That means everything to me. To us.” “Us? You know what, Marc, I don’t even believe there is an «us». There is a you and a me, but there is no ‘us’. Your only ‘us’ is with that girl” (D. Steel).

Other semantic groups of pronouns are also capable of displaying unusual morphological and syntactic properties which make them close to nouns: “What happened, exactly?” asked Miriam. “It’s so hard to say, but the something big and intense that changes you when you really come together with somebody else” (D. Lawrence). Here an indefinite pronoun is used with the definite article. He murmured a few tactful nothings and then managed unobtrusively to leave the two friends together (A. Christie). Someone could steal it.—Someone? There aren’t many someones around (N. Roberts). In these sentences an indefinite pronoun and a negative one take the plural form.

The adverb can also be substantivized which is manifested in its combinability with prepositions; besides, this process is observed when the adverb is used in the functions typical of nouns, such as:
• subject: Right now isn’t the time to go away and leave him (R. Pilcher);
• object: I think it’s time we went and found somewhere pleasant to have our tea (R. Pilcher)—in this sentence the adverb is modified by an attribute expressed by an adjective; this peculiarity is evidence of its substantial meaning. Another characteristic of the kind is the use of articles: You must try to deal with the here and now (P.D. Cornwell). You’ll like the after much better, I assure you (J. Lindsey);
• predicative: It was almost like the hither and thither of a leaf that comes unexpected (D. Lawrence).

It is mostly pronominal adverbs that become substantivized. This peculiarity may be ascribed to the comparative vagueness of their lexical meanings.

The meaning of substance becomes even more vivid due to the use of the parallel construction where the adverb is connected with the noun by means of coordination (the conjunction and): … how to fill the hours between now and the time when he could legitimately leave for work (D. Leon). Here and his bedroom were the only rooms in the house she allowed his toys (C. Ahern).

Even if the adverb is used in its typical function of an adverbial modifier, it can be introduced with the help of a preposition (which is also a feature of the noun): The two men appeared out of nowhere (J. Rowling). It wouldn’t be a mess until then (D. Steel).

Among the nominal parts of speech subject to substantivization there is the numeral. The mechanism of the process is the same: the numeral substitutes for the noun not represented in the surface structure: Pilar had been an exuberant nine (D. Steel). They had passed Chinle now, Leaphorn driving the white carryall at a steady seventy (T. Hillerman). He took his wallet out and laid a twenty carefully on the bar (S. King). Substantivized numerals do not make a special list, and in the sentences above the omitted noun can be restored with the help of the context alone.

Even formal words can undergo substantivization; in such cases the preposition can perform the function of the whole phrase a cup of tea + with / without + sugar. The other elements are omitted: Would you like a with or a without? [6].

Here is an example of substantivization of a conjunction: I read between the lines, hear between the words and know when a full stop is not a full stop but more like a but (C. Ahern).

7. Conclusion

So the adjective and some other parts of speech can be substantivized which is due to the specific characteristic of the noun: its grammatical meaning is universal and implies not only names of things
proper, but also names of abstract notions, qualities, actions. Such formations combining features of different parts of speech are to be found in the intermediary zones and testify to the prototypical nature of the part-of-speech system.

References


