

# A Semantic Approach to Problems of Denominal Adjectives

by Masamichi MATSUI

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## Introduction

The adjectival phrase like *beautiful dancer* is supposed to be ambiguous since it shows two possible interpretations: dancer who is beautiful and dancer whose dancing is beautiful. But the meaning of this phrase ceases to be ambiguous in the following sentences: she is a blond and beautiful dancer; She is a slow and beautiful dancer. This comparison shows that the agentive nominal in the former sentence is taken to be a simple human noun and the agent in the latter sentence is the performer of action. In another sense *a criminal lawyer* shows the ambiguous interpretation. It may express either a lawyer who is criminal or a lawyer who practices criminal laws. In the second interpretation of this phrase we cannot say 'very (or more) criminal lawyer'. Moreover the sentence like "I met five women criminal lawyers" is normal only in the second interpretation while the sentence like "I met five criminal women lawyers" is acceptable only in the first interpretation.

Thus denominal adjectives occasionally show more than one sense. The setting up of definitions only by suffixes like -y, -al, -ful, -ous, etc. seems to be inadequate. For instance the adjectives with -ic suffix derived from nouns are *metallic*, *atomic*, *cubic*, etc. *Metallic* means 'made of or resembling metal'; *atomic* means 'of or pertaining to atoms'; *cubic* means 'having the form of a cube'. These adjectives show each different interpretation.

Similarly, *presidential power*, *coastal region*, *musical theory*, *occasional publication*, present different semantic relationships between the two members of each construction although these constructions have the denominal adjectives with the same suffix. The comparison of these constructions reminds us of the complex nature of denominal adjectives. The first purpose of this study is to investigate the semantic properties and various meanings that can be expressed by means of adjectival suffixes. The second purpose is to study the nature of the adjectival construction that consists of an adjective and nounhead, and the difference between this construction and compounds. For the convenience of investigation we have classified the noun stems into four classes: concrete, abstract, animate and nationality words.

### (1)

The denominal adjectives with concrete noun stems are shown by the following words like *metallic*, *hairy*, *snowy*, *stony*, *silvery*, *wooden*, *golden*, etc.

The suffix *-y* is generally supposed to show the meaning of 'full of' or 'consist of'. But it often shows other meanings. The phrases like 'metallic substance' 'icy water' 'silvery voice' 'moss of a hairy texture of' 'metallic lustre' express the meaning of resemblance.

Z. Vendler distinguishes the meaning of 'metallic stuff' from that of 'metallic surface'. The former phrase is defined as 'stuff like metal' and the latter phrase is defined as 'surface like that of metal'<sup>1)</sup>. The definition given by dictionaries may be like this: One definition is 'having properties of metal'. Another is 'resembling metal—of a colour, or of taste, or of a sound, etc.'

For instance both *silvery voice* and *silvery hair* may be defined as 'like silver' but strictly speaking, the former *like* means 'having a tone of' and the latter *like* means 'having the colour of'. Thus the notion that is given when the meaning of resemblance is implied is complicated. The definition of 'resemblance' shows the specific meaning as well as the generalized meaning. However, the denominal adjectives showing such meaning of resemblance are formed by other suffixes. For instance *bloody* can be replaced by *blood-like*. *Sandy* can be replaced by *sand-coloured*. The suffix (or semi-suffix) *like* is most productive in forming adjectives. *-ed* is often used. On the other hand the words with the suffixes like *-y*, *-ful*, *-al*, etc. can often express the same meaning as well as the meaning of 'having unusual amount of—', thus when the words like 'leg' 'hair' 'limb' 'head' 'colour' etc. are adjectivalized a distinction is made between them and the following: *two-legged*, *black-haired*, etc.

Generally speaking, the denominal adjectives like *wooden*, *golden*, *atomic*, —which have the definitions like 'made of' or 'consist of'—make a sharp contrast with the adjectives in the phrases like 'rocky gardens' or 'roofoy houses'. The adjectival phrases like 'rocky gardens' and 'roofoy houses' can always have the adjectives in the predicative position as well as in the attributive position, and they can always be preceded by the words like 'more' or 'very'. Thus the following sentences are all grammatical: the garden is (very) rocky; the houses are (very) roofoy. In this respect these phrases can be differentiated from the constructions like 'atomic bomb' and 'wooden box'. In order to distinguish this construction from an adjectival construction, other conditions must be satisfied. In the construction like 'atomic bomb' or 'wooden box' other lexical material cannot be inserted while an adjectival phrase can intersperse other material between the adjective and its nounhead, and lastly the adjective in adjectival phrases can always be germinated<sup>2)</sup>. In order to be an adjectival phrase a word should meet most if not all these criteria. According to these criteria described by Lees it turns out that 'atomic bomb' 'daily journal' 'medical science' 'criminal investigation' are a sort of compounds. And some of them can be replaced by noun plus noun construction like 'atom bomb' or 'crime investigation'.

The denominal adjectives such as *coastal*, *postal*, *residential*, *suburban*, *marginal*, etc. are more liable to be the first members of compound constructions than the adjectives such as *stony*, *muddy*, *rocky*, etc. In this case, however,

the semantic relationship between the two elements is various.

Let us take the word 'suburban'. The definition that occurs in a dictionary is as follows: 1. of, relating to, inhabiting, or located in the suburbs. 2. characteristic of life in the suburbs, (lacking in finish or elegance.) The first definition applies to the constructions like *suburban research* and *suburban area*. *Suburban research* means the research concerning the suburbs and the *suburban area* means the area which is located in the suburbs. According to the criteria described above these constructions are taken to be compounds. *Coastal engineering, coastal regions, polar expedition, polar regions* are the examples of compound constructions. On the other hand, the second definition applies to the phrases like *suburban life* and *suburban manners*. They are considered to be adjectival phrases.

Let us take another word 'marginal'. The definition given by a dictionary is like this: 1.a: a note written or printed in the margin of a page or sheet. b: having notes written or printed in margin.

2. a: of, relating to or constituting a margin. b1. situated at, on, or near a margin. b2. characterized by incorporation of habits and values from two divergent cultures and incomplete assimilation in either. c. running round a leaf parallel and near to the margin.

3. located at the fringe of consciousness.

4. a. close to the lower limit of qualification or acceptability.

b. (1) having a character or capacity fitted to yield a supply of goods which when marketed at existing price levels will barely cover the cost of production. b (2) of, relating to, or concerned with a limit or margin of return or reward as measured by existing price levels that is barely sufficient to yield a profit or cover the cost of production.

*Marginal notes* expresses the meaning of the first definition and it may be considered to be a compound. The second definition applies to the phrases like *marginal tribes* and *marginal manners*. The latter example *marginal manners* may be an adjectival phrase.

Concrete nouns like *margin, element, essence, substance*, etc. are used as abstract nouns and the denominal adjectives with such noun stems can show abstract meanings as well as concrete meanings. On the other hand there are concrete nouns like *base, convention, court*, etc. but the denominal adjectives with such stems almost show the abstract meanings. *Basic ideas, conventional manners, courteous manners* are the examples.

Just as *basic* and *fundamental* are synonymous, so are *essential* and *substantial* often taken to be synonymous though some discrimination may be possible. Fowler describes as follows<sup>3)</sup>.

It is natural that *essence* and *substance, essential* and *substantial* should on the one hand be sometimes interchangeable and on the other hand develop, like most synonyms, on diverging lines with differentiations gradually becoming fixed. It may be said roughly that *substance* (or

*substantial*) has moved in the direction of material and quantity and *essence* (or *essential*) in that of spirit and quality.

The word 'essential' however, has a meaning like 'containing the essence of that portion of a plant or substance which is marked by its characteristic odor or virtue' or 'being or relating to an essence'. *An essential odor* and *essential oil* are such examples. The construction like *essential investigation* or *substantial investigation* can be taken to be a compound with the meaning of 'relating to' or 'based on' as in the case of 'criminal investigation'.

## (2)

As we previously described, *beautiful dancer* and *criminal lawyer* show ambiguous interpretations. However, the ambiguity of these constructions are not of the same kind. The former phrase means either beautiful person who dances or person whose dancing is beautiful. This comparison shows that the agent has two possible interpretations, that is, it is either understood as a simple noun, or is understood as the performer of action. On the other hand, latter construction (*criminal lawyer*) is taken to be either an adjectival phrase or a compound construction.

From the general definitions given to the denominal adjectives, the adjectives like *beautiful*, *gloomy*, *dangerous*, *cheerful*, *humorous*, *joyful*, etc. are likely to be regarded as the same kind of adjectives. These adjectives show a common characteristic that expresses the meaning of 'possession'. But the meaning of possession cannot be uniformly defined. As a matter of fact *beautiful* and *cheerful* are not of the same kind. The former modifies both animate and inanimate nouns while the latter modifies only animate nouns or results of actions performed by animate nouns. The adjectives which are similar to the former example are *dangerous*, *gloomy*, *powerful*, *useful*, etc., while the adjectives which are similar to the latter example are *cheerful*, *careful*, *hopeful*, *emotional*, etc. The latter adjectives have the noun stems which refer to the emotions or qualities peculiar to humans or animals.

In the interpretation of the phrases like *hopeful news* (prospects, events, etc.) the adjective and nounhead do not show the same relationship with those of phrases like *humorous person* and *hopeful smile*. The latter phrases show the definition of 'possession', but the former ones show the definition of 'causing'. In the same sense *joyful face* shows the semantic contrast with *joyful event* (news, etc.). The examples of different types are given below.

## (A)

fearful behaviour  
glorious country  
emotional person  
cheerful smile

## (B)

fearful apparition  
glorious victory  
emotional art  
cheerful surroundings

The adjectives on the left side (A) may be given the definition of 'possession' and those on the right side (B) the definition of 'causing':

When we say 'The person is cheerful' or 'cheerful smile' it may express the meaning of 'possession' but when we say 'The surroundings are cheerful' or 'The prospect is hopeful' it may express the meaning of 'causing' though it may not be 'actual causing'. The definitions that are given to such denominal adjectives may not always be so simply defined. For instance the first example of (A) expresses the meaning of 'expressing' or 'showing', and some examples of (B) may be given the definition of 'bringing'.

Such variety of semantic relationships usually depend upon the combination of adjective and nounhead. But it often happens that the same combination has not only different interpretations but also a different nature of constructions.

As we previously mentioned, *criminal lawyer* has two possible interpretations. One is given the definition of 'possession' and the other is given the definition of 'relating to' or 'concerning'. Such constructions that are given ambiguous definitions are often recognized. *Essential philosophy* means either a philosophy concerned with the essence of things or philosophy full of essence. Similarly *emotional studies* means either studies concerned with emotion or studies marked by emotion. The constructions with the former interpretations are taken to be compounds. In some cases such difference of construction involves the difference of the suffix form.

historic event (journey, spot,)	historical novel
classic book	classical literature
electric current	electrical research

Concerning the difference of these phrases, Marchand describes<sup>4)</sup>:

A thing is *historic* if it is or makes history itself, it is historical if it belongs to what narrates or deals with history. Books on history are only *historical* while events are *historic*. An engineer is *electrical*, as he has to do with electric things, but current is *electric*, is the thing itself.

As a matter of fact *electric current* and *electrical current* are interchangeable. According to Fowler's statement<sup>5)</sup>, *historic* means memorable, or assured of a place in history; *historical* should not be substituted for it in that sense; the only other function retained by *historic* is in the grammarian's technical terms such as *historic tenses, moods, sequence, present*, etc. These constructions are compounds in which it has been in general use robbed by *historical*. Besides, Fowler states that *electrical* survives only in the sense of concerning electricity and is not necessarily even in that sense except where there is danger that *electric* might mislead. But as a matter of fact such phrases as *electrical magnet, electrical storm* are in frequent use.

Nouns like *margin, convention, essence, constitution, element, rudiment*, etc.



are labeled as abstract as well as concrete, and these words commonly form adjectives with -al suffix. Some of these adjectives have a fixed meaning regardless of the modifying nounheads while some of them change their habitual meanings in accordance with the nounheads. For instance the meaning of the word *constitutional* is not the same between *constitutional exercise* and *constitutional theory* (or *government*). The meaning of *marginal* is different between *marginal note* and *marginal utility*.

The words like *daily*, *weekly*, *monthly*, *quarterly*, etc. have a common characteristic that each denotes a period of time and shows the meaning like 'appearing every' or 'issued every'.

For instance the definitions given to 'daily' are as follows: 1. occurring or being made, done, or acted upon everyday, issued everyday or every weekday, of or for everyday. 2. a. reckoning by day, b. covering the period of a day; based on a day.

The following constructions that can be derived may belong to compounds: 1. daily newspapers. 2. a daily schedule. 3. daily statistics. 4. quarterly payments. 5. a quarterly meeting. 6. occasional meeting.

### (3)

The suffix-ly often forms the denominal adjectives with the meaning of 'having the qualities of' when they take animate noun stems as well as inanimate noun stems. But the same sense can be represented by other suffixes like -ish, -ic, -like, etc., namely, *childish*, *heroic*, *ladylike*, etc. Strictly speaking, some discrimination can be made in accordance with the suffixes. *Manly* means 'possessing the virtues proper to a man as distinguished from a woman or a child'. *Manlike* has a neutral sense: 1. same meaning 2. 'resembling a human being'. And *gentlemanly* refers to mainly about inner qualities, while *gentlemanlike* refers to appearance, dress, etc. The suffix -ish often shows less unfavourable sense—*roguish*, *snobbish*, *brutish*, etc. The meaning of *childish* is sometimes differentiated from *childlike* which shows colourless meaning. Concerning the difference between them, Fowler states as follows:<sup>6)</sup>

The rule that *childish* has a bad sense is misleading and *childish* used of adults or their qualities and *childlike* which should always be so used, have the opposite implication of blame and approval; *childish simplicity* in an adult is a fault; *childlike simplicity* is a merit; but *childish simplicity* may mean also simplicity in a child, and convey no blame; *childish enthusiasm* may be either a child's enthusiasm or a man's silly enthussiasm.

However, according to M. Ljung *childish simplicity* shows ambiguity between the meaning of 'resemblance' and that of 'concerning' or 'relating to'<sup>7)</sup>. Both *childish simplicity* and *childish enthusiasm* seem to have two possible interpretations. The examples of different constructions are shown below.

(A)	(B)
artistic style	artistic subject
managerial power	managerial problems
heroic courage	heroic legend
poetic drama	poetic personality
presidential power	presidential policy
childsh answer	childish enthusiasm (simplicity)

The phrases on the left side (A) seem to show the meaning of 'resemblance' but the constructions on the right side (B) can express the meaning of 'concerning' as well as the meaning of 'resemblance'. Under the interpretation of 'concerning' the constructions (B) are taken to be compounds. Also in the case of nationality words the same kind of interpretation usually applies: *very Italian paintings* (in style), *very Swedish manners*, etc.

## (4)

As we have described, nationality words like *Polish*, *Scottish*, *Finnish*, etc. express the meaning of 'resemblance' in the same way as *childish*, etc. do. But there are some characteristics that distinguish the nationality words from adjectives like *childish*.

First, in the sense of 'the woman is childish' it is always possible to say 'very childish woman' while in the sense of 'the woman is Polish' it is not always possible to say 'very Polish woman'. Secondly, the underlying base of 'Polish woman' or 'Scottish girl' may be 'the woman is Polish (or a Pole)' or 'the girl is a Scot.' But in the case of *childish man*, it is impossible to say 'the man is a child'.

Thirdly, when we say *childish group* or *girlish group*, it does not mean 'group of children' or 'group of girls'. But in the case of 'Polish group or 'Scottish group' it means 'the group of Poles' or 'the group of Scots'.

Nationality words like *Polish*, *Scottish*, *American*, etc. can become either the first member of adjectival phrases or the first member of compounds. As the following examples show the nationality words modify various kinds of nouns beside the words denoting people or their actions. According to M. Ljung, these nationality words have the dual function of being either adjectives with the meaning of 'resemblance' or the first elements of compounds with locative meaning<sup>8</sup>. The following are such examples.

1. American girl
2. Polish town
3. Scottish accent
4. Turkish coffee
5. Swedish iron

The first example may be taken to be either an adjectival phrase with the meaning of 'like all girls from America' or a compound with the the meaning of 'girl from America'. The same argument applies to all other examples. When these constructions are taken to be compounds it is possible to insert

other lexical material between the two members only on condition that the inserted word in itself form a compound with the last word or form a compound adjective with the first member.

*Swedish cast iron* may be grammatical as a triple compound but *Swedish strong iron* may be ungrammatical. *Prussian blue uniform* is as grammatical as *blue Prussian uniform*.

## (5)

The change of meaning caused by the alternation of the member of a phrase is not restricted to nationality words. *A golden yellow box* is an example similar to *Prussian blue uniform*. We shall take the following examples. *A small beautiful house* is as grammatical as *a beautiful small house*. *Criminal women lawyers* is as grammatical as *women criminal lawyers*. In the former case there is no real difference between the two constructions except that the latter form is likely to have a strong stress on the first adjective. On the other hand in the latter case not only the meaning of the adjective but its function changes as we mentioned earlier. It is generally the case that noun or nominal compound comes immediately before the nominal as the following examples show: *a lovely silk dress*, *the delightful April sky*, *a nice wooden chair*. Thus the following phrases are all ungrammatical: *a silk lovely dress*, *the April delightful sky*, *a wooden nice chair*. It also holds true with the following examples: *powerful mathematical computers*, *fine experimental devices*, *a beautiful coastal district*, *an effective nuclear weapon*. In the construction like *a beautiful and comfortable wooden chair* the ordering of clusters is fixed since the final adjective and headword form a compound construction. In this case the word *and* cannot be placed anywhere other than where it is.

Some compound constructions with the suffix *-en* can be replaced by noun plus noun construction as follows: *wooden ship*; *wood ship*, *flaxen thread*; *flax thread*, etc. But there is a subtle difference between *golden crown* and *gold crown*. Some adjectives are liable to be used only or often in a metaphorical sense (e.g. *golden opportunity* *brazen impudence*). It often happens that the suffix form of the first member changes depending upon the modifying nounhead or its nearby words (e.g. *oaten pipe*; *oat bread*, *a birchwood bench*, *waxen skin*; *wax candles*).

With other constructions the same phenomena occur. Some compound constructions like *Swedish iron*, *suburban area*, etc. cannot be replaced by noun plus noun construction while *air research* and *cloud studies* cannot be replaced by such construction as *airy research* and *cloudy studies*. According to M. Ljung, though the most common way to express the notion like 'being in' or 'coming from' is by means of noun plus noun construction (e.g. *city wall*, *mountain cottage*), the construction with a suffix tends to be used when the first noun is what we have called a 'well-defined area'<sup>9)</sup>. *London office* and *New-York apartment* are rather exceptions.



Such discrimination is often made by different suffixes, and the restriction that the suffix form imposes upon the selection of the modifying nounhead is sometimes optional and sometimes obligatory. First we must discriminate *official* from *officious*. The latter word has a meaning quite different from its ordinary meaning in terms of diplomacy and the meaning of *an officious statement* is entirely opposed to that of an *official statement*.

*Momentary* means 'lasting only for a moment' while *momentous* means 'of great consequence'.

*Elemental* is in some cases differentiated from *elementary*. The reference of *elemental* is to the element either in the sense of earth, nature, air and fire, or as representing to the great forces of nature. On the other hand the reference of *elementary* is to the elements in the more general sense of simplest component parts or rudiments. There may be difference between *effective* and *effectual*. *Effective* may indicate the power to produce an effect or the actual production of an effect (e.g. *effective speech*, *effective speaker*). *Effectual* may usually apply to what has accomplished an intended result and may approach the connotation of decisive.

The following each pair of words may show similar definitions but there exists subtle differences: *gracious*; *graceful*, *beauteous*; *beautiful*, *wonderous*; *wonderful*. *Earth* has three different adjectival suffixes: *earthen*, *earthy*, and *earthly*. *Earthly* shows the figurative sense and can be differentiated from other forms. *Brute* has also three different forms: *brutish*, *brutal*, and *brute*. *Brutal* differs from *brute* in its adjectival and attributive use, and from *brutish* in having lost its simplest sense of the brutes as opposed to man and being never used without implying moral condemnation. Thus while *brute force* is contrasted with skill, *brutal force* is contrasted with humanity. In torturing a mouse, a cat is *brutish* and a person is *brutal*<sup>10</sup>. *Ceremonial* means 'connected with or constituting or consists of or fits for a ceremony or ceremonies' (e.g. *ceremonial law*, *ceremonial occasion*, for *ceremonial reasons*). *Ceremonious* means 'full of or resulting from ceremony, i.e. attention to forms' (e.g. *ceremonious people*, *ceremonious politeness*). *Ceremonious court* is differentiated from *ceremonial court* in that the former means a sovereign's court in which ceremony is much observed; *ceremonial court* would be a judicial court set up to regulate ceremonies.

A large number of denominal adjectives may be formed by other suffixes. But the suffixes that are very productive in forming denominal adjectives are -less and -able. The former suffix takes as stems lexical and derivative nouns with no apparent semantic restrictions (e.g. *cloudless*, *heedless*, *boundless*, etc.). There are a large number of words with the stems of derivative nouns but in this case there are some restrictions on the productivity of -less. Nominalization in -ness and -ity as well as those in -ment are excluded, though nominalization in -tion is very productive (e.g. *actionless*, *foundationless*, etc.)<sup>11</sup>

The suffix -ane (e.g. *germane*, *humane*, *urbane*) which shows original or

orthographic variant of *-an* has now been differentiated from *-an* and the adjectives are liable to denote the meanings quite different from the related nouns.

*Wooden* of *wooden style* and *leaden* of *leaden atmosphere* are so detached from their original meanings that they are no longer regarded as denominal adjectives. In the case of metaphoric phrases like *golden opportunity* or *stony heart* the relationship involved between the referents in each member of the phrases is more complicated than that involved in phrases like *golden watch* or *stony gardens*.

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