

Anne Aschenbrenner

**Adjectives as nouns, mainly as attested in  
*Boethius* translations from Old to Modern  
English and in Modern German**



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## *List of abbreviations*

### *Cited dictionaries, corpora & works*

BNC = British National corpus  
CB = COBUILD corpus  
CHEL = *The Cambridge History of the English Language*  
CT = *Canterbury Tales*  
DCP = *De Consolatione Philosophiae*  
DOE = *Dictionary of Old English*  
HC = Helsinki corpus of English texts  
IDS = *Institut für Deutsche Sprache*  
MED = *Middle English Dictionary*  
OALD = *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*  
OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*  
T&C = *Troilus & Criseyde*

### *Other abbreviations in the text and appendix*

absol. = absolute  
acc. = accusative  
adj. = adjective  
adv. = adverb  
AP/AdjP = adjective phrase  
art. = article  
attr. = attributive  
C<sub>o</sub> = object complement  
cent. = century  
coll. = collective  
comp. = comparative  
compl. = complement  
conj. = conjunction  
dat. = dative  
def. = definite  
dem. = demonstrative  
determiner/pronoun

dep. = dependent  
det. = determiner  
DP = determiner phrase  
eWS = early West Saxon  
fem. = feminine  
G. = German  
gen. = genitive  
got. = Gothic  
indef. = indefinite  
infl. = inflection/inflectional/inflected  
instr. = instrumental  
interr. = interrogative  
determiner/pronoun  
L. = Latin  
IWS = late West Saxon  
masc. = masculine  
ME = Middle English  
ModE = Modern English  
ModG = Modern German  
MS = manuscript  
N/n. = noun  
n.a. = not applicable  
neg. = negation/negative or non-assertive  
neut. = neuter  
nom. = nominative  
Noms = nominals  
NP = noun phrase  
num. = numeral  
obs. = obsolete  
OE = Old English  
OHD = Old High Dutch  
OHG = Old High German  
part I = present participle  
part II = past participle

pers. = person or  
personal determiner/pronoun  
pl. = plural  
poss. = possessive determiner/pronoun  
postmod. = postmodified/postmodifying/postmodification  
PP = prepositional phrase  
pred. = predicative  
premod. = premodified/premodifying/premodification  
prep. = preposition  
pres. part. = present participle  
pron. = pronoun  
ref. = reference  
rel. = relative determiner/pronoun  
rep. = repetition  
sg. = singular  
so. = someone  
st. = strong  
sth. = something  
superl. = superlative  
uninfl. = uninflected  
V = verb  
VP = verb phrase  
wk. = weak  
word-form. = word-formation  
WS = West Saxon  
< = giving origin/etymological information  
> = thus/consequently

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## I. Theoretical considerations

### 1. Introduction, methodology and structure of this study

When an adjective is used as a noun in Modern English there is – in most instances – no inflectional ending signalling to us that we are dealing with either an adjective or a noun. Nevertheless, the situation is different in examples such as *the whites* or *the blacks* where a plural *-s* is added to the lexeme *white* and *black* respectively. But these examples seem to constitute exceptions. The Modern English situation differs from Modern German, where we can distinguish an adjective like *gut* ('good') from the noun phrase *ein Guter/der Gute/die Guten* ('a good person/the good person/the good') etc. But when we compare for instance the case ModE *good* (adjective) and *the good* (noun phrase), *the good* does not show any overt derivational morpheme indicating that a word formation process turning the adjective *good* into a noun used with the article *the*, has taken place. Only the article *the* in this example characterizes the phrase as a noun phrase.

Old English adjectives, however, still had inflectional endings according to case, number and gender, as well as the distinction between strong and weak adjectival declension. Apart from the great overlaps between noun and adjective endings in the weak declension, the adjective was identifiable as an adjective by its adjectival (or pronominal) or comparative endings: *gōd/godes/godum/godne*, etc. (st. masc. sg. nom./gen./dat./acc.) – (*þa*) *godan* (wk. masc. pl. acc./nom.) or *betera/betst* (comp./superl.). In Middle English, owing to the increased loss of inflectional morphemes, inflectional endings of adjectives had almost disappeared, apart from the *-e* ending for the weak declension and the strong plural declension, but only in monosyllabic adjectives ending in a consonant (Mossé 1952, 64). As a consequence, in many cases the Middle English adjective has no inflectional ending any more (apart from the ones in the comparative and superlative). Also, in Middle English we find instances of art. + adj. + *one/ones*, similar to Modern English constructions. This shows that the classification of word-classes moves away from inflectional morphology towards syntax.

In synchronic and diachronic Old, Middle, and Early Modern English grammars (see chapter 2 on previous research), a detailed description of adjectives used as nouns and their linguistic classification is usually not given. A corpus of Old, Middle or Early Modern English has not been analyzed yet in order to verify if the existing patterns of adjectives used as nouns – as outlined in the existing diachronic as well as synchronic grammars – were actually used or were rather exceptional. This is the reason why in this study a corpus is used to analyze different instances of adjectives used as nouns quantitatively and qualitatively. For Old English, the Old English translation of *Boethius' De consolatione philosophiae* by King Alfred in Godden & Irvine's edition (2009) and for Middle English, the *Boece* by Chaucer in Machan's (2008) edition are analyzed, and also compared with each other in this respect to find out more about the actual uses of adjectives as nouns and their functions. A comparison of the Old and the Middle English version can also show if the reduction (and loss) of inflectional endings is at all related to the phenomenon of

adjectives used as nouns, i.e. if a gradual loss of inflectional endings goes hand in hand with a decrease of adjectives used as nouns.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Early Modern English translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Queen Elizabeth I in the edition of Pemberton (1899) as well as Sedgfield's (1900) Modern English rendering of Alfred's Old English version are analyzed. For contrastive purposes, a Latin version (Neitzke 1997) and Modern German translation of the *Boethius* (Scheven 1893; 2010) are consulted in order to compare the English adjectives used as nouns with their Latin and German equivalents.

Tables 1 and 2 in the appendix provide an inventory of linguistic features in order to classify the linguistic status of adjectives used as nouns in the history of English and in Modern German. Table 3 in the appendix is an index of the adjectives used as nouns in the Old, Middle, Early Modern, Modern English, Modern German and Latin (only books I and II) *Boethius*. The *Boethius* translations into Old, Middle, Early Modern, Modern English and Modern German as well as the Latin text (books I and II) are scanned and all linguistically relevant adjectives are collected and commented on in the attached tables 4 to 9 in the appendix. Not only (single) adjectives that are used as nouns (without an overt nominal head) are taken into consideration in these collections, but also noun phrases that consist of a head noun and a modifying adjective. The reason for this is to show parallels and differences to single adjectives that are used as nouns. In order to label the relevant samples for my analysis the samples are annotated in capitalized letters, viz. ABSTRACT, PERSON (sg.) or PERSON (pl.). All other usages are indicated in small letters (cf. chapter 13 for a more detailed explanation).

The tables that are established help classify whether an adjective used as a noun is in fact a 'real'<sup>2</sup> noun or not. In each table, i.e. for Old, Middle, Early Modern, Modern English and Modern German (but not Latin), nominal inflection, syntax, word-formation and semantics are taken into consideration (cf. tables 1 and table 2 in the appendix).

Before any categorization as either adjective or noun is possible, of course certain formal categories (use of articles, plural markers, modifiers, comparison of adjectives etc.) as well as semantic ones have to be considered, or rather determined in order to argue for an adjective or a noun in concrete instances of an adjective being used as a noun. Afterwards, such instances in the corpus are looked at in their syntactical surrounding and their whole context. Only then we can argue for a case of inflection, syntax, such as an ellipsis, or of a case of word formation, i.e. zero-derivation/conversion, or rather of semantics, viz. the primacy of the semantic content/denotation of the particular lexeme/phrase. In this respect, the existing studies on conversion and zero-derivation are also investigated.

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<sup>1</sup> For the rise of the propword *one* see e.g. Einkenel (1903; 1912; 1914), Luick (1906; 1913) or Rissanen (1967).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'real' noun is used in order to refer to prototypical members of the word-class noun and means that this noun has all the features of a prototypical noun, i.e. it can be used with a definite/an indefinite article, it can be premodified by an adjective and it can be pluralized (mainly by adding -s). Ungerer et al. (1984) use the term 'genuine' (1984, 93, note 2). The opposite terms 'unreal' or 'apparent' are not used though.

My analysis is primarily a qualitative and philological one rather than a quantitative one, i.e. it does not mainly aim at showing any frequency patterns of adjectives used as nouns since my corpus material are print versions and no digital corpus data. Nevertheless, I count my findings of adjectives used as nouns and provide some numbers and percentages in bar charts for this purpose (cf. chapter 13).

The core issue of this thesis is the linguistic classification of adjectives used as nouns in Old, Middle, Early Modern English, Modern English and Modern German (see chapter 14), i.e. if we can argue for a case of inflection, word-formation, syntax or semantics. We must keep in mind that the concepts for a framework are required to be valid in either of the periods of the English language and in Modern German respectively.

When it comes to English word-formation, I use both terms zero-derivation and conversion, but with the different underlying concepts (see chapter 5 for more details). For analogies to a compound, I will also speak of word-formation. Furthermore, I will distinguish between total and partial conversion (cf. Sweet 1891), allocating cases where an adjective adopts all prototypical features of a noun to total conversion and cases where it only partially shows nominal characteristics as partial conversions. On a morphological basis no overt change is made on the adjective that is said to have turned into a noun, i.e. no suffix is added. A great deal is also devoted to semantics as it is indispensable for arguing of a word-formation process, syntax or (simply) inflection. Also, it needs to be clarified that there is a difference in the use of adjectives as nouns when we are dealing with ellipsis or with anaphoric or cataphoric references.

After having outlined the starting point and methodology of the present study, I will sketch the subsequent parts. The thesis is divided into two major parts, viz. I. Theoretical considerations (chapters 1-8), II. Historical contexts and analyses of the *Boethius* texts (chapters 9-15) and III. Bibliography and appendix (chapters 16-17).

Chapter 2 gives an overview of previous research on the linguistic problem of classifying adjectives used as nouns throughout the periods of the English language. After that, the formal, syntactic as well as semantic features of adjectives and nouns in Old, Middle, Early Modern and Modern English as well as in Modern German are illustrated in order to approach their typically established features (chapter 3). Chapter 4 deals with the formal, syntactic and semantic relations and overlaps between adjective and noun in English and Modern German. Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with conversion/zero-derivation; first of all, chapter 5 gives an overview of different theoretical concepts of the the phenomenon in English as well as in Modern German. Second, chapter 6 goes into detail about conversion/zero-derivation and related phenomena in Old, Middle and Early Modern English in particular. The chapter on other linguistic concepts that play a role when classifying adjectives as nouns comprises the role of word-classes and their distinctions, nominalization (substantivization), grammaticalization and ellipsis (chapter 7). Chapter 8 provides a summary of the theoretical considerations of the previous chapters.

In the next chapters (9-15) the major part of the analysis begins (Part II of the thesis). This part contains the background, Neoplatonic context of the Latin

*Boethius* and a brief summary of contents (chapter 9), the historical backgrounds of the Old English *Boethius* (chapter 10), of the Middle English *Boece* (chapter 11) and the the Early Modern English *Boethius* (chapter 12). Chapters 13 and 14 form the two main parts of the analysis. The first analysis part (chapter 13) consists of the quantitative collection and comparison of the samples taken from the English, Modern German and Latin<sup>3</sup> corpus and contains bar charts that illustrate the percentages of the findings according to certain semantic and syntactic categories. The second part of the analysis (chapter 14) provides the qualitative linguistic analysis of the corpus samples. The last subchapter illustrates adjectives used as nouns in other English texts, i.e. apart from the *Boethius*, in order to give an insight into the distribution and frequency of substantivized adjectives in a number of other text genres. Chapter 15 closes off with a summary.

The last chapters comprise the bibliography (chapter 16) and the appendix (chapter 17). The appendix consists of the tables that have been established to help classify the linguistic status of the substantivised adjectives in all periods of the English language as well as in Modern German (tables 1 and 2 in chapter 17.1) and all corpus material I have collected from the chosen *Boethius* translations including an index of the substantivized adjectives and an overview of the bar charts (tables 3-10 in chapter 17.2).

## 2. Previous research

The linguistic classification (cf. tables 1.1-1.4 in the appendix for the relevant criteria) of adjectives used as nouns in Old, Middle and (Early) Modern English has not been systematically analyzed so far. As far as historical grammars are concerned, such as Jespersen (1949), Brunner (<sup>2</sup>1962), or synchronic grammars of Old, Middle and Early Modern English like for instance Campbell (1959), Mitchell/Robinson (1964) or Hogg & Fulk (2011) for Old English, Mossé (1952) or Obst & Schlebürg (<sup>2</sup>2010) for Middle English and Barber (1976), Görlach (1994) or Nevalainen (2006) for Early Modern English, they neither explicitly state the linguistic status of adjectives as nouns nor do they resort to completely analyzed corpora that serve as a reliable basis for a linguistic classification. Brunner (<sup>2</sup>1962, 73) states in his chapter on the use of adjectives as nouns that their use is possible to an unrestricted extent in Old English and becomes more restricted towards Middle English.

Below, I will give a chronological overview of previous research/studies on adjectives used as nouns.

Wülfing (1894) states that the Old English adjective can be used as a noun in each of its forms of comparison, e.g. *þa rihtwisan* ('the righteous'), *ða eldran* ('the older') or *þa weorþestan* ('the worthiest'). They can denote persons (*þa rihtwisan*), abstract and neuter terms (*unrihte*). The use of the article with those adjectives as

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<sup>3</sup> Since Latin does not play a major role in this thesis, only books I and II are analysed.

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