

THE FORMATION OF ADJECTIVES FROM NOUNS IN ENGLISH THROUGH SUFFIXATION: A QUALITATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

The process of creating adjectives in English by adding suffixes to nouns was reviewed qualitatively in this study. Finding the morphological patterns, the difficulties students encounter, and the educational ramifications of employing these derivative suffixes are the primary goals. Through a survey of numerous scholarly works, the study demonstrates the high productivity of suffixes like -ful, -less, -ous, -ic, -al, and -y in enhancing English vocabulary. However, a lack of knowledge of morphological principles sometimes hinders their proper usage, resulting in a number of typical mistakes, including misspellings, phonological faults, and mismatches. The results highlight how crucial it is for students to have a thorough understanding of morphological patterns in order to recognize, use, and steer clear of mistakes when creating new words. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will aid in the creation of more potent teaching resources and methods for English language learners.

Keywords: *Derivational suffixation, Adjective formation, English learning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Word formation is an important aspect of English morphology that enables the language to develop its vocabulary and express meaning more precisely. One significant process is derivational suffixation, which transforms nouns into adjectives by adding suffixes to existing words (Kusumawardhani, 2020). Unlike inflectional morphology, this process can change both the grammatical category and meaning of a word, allowing speakers and writers to describe qualities, characteristics, and relationships more accurately.

The formation of adjectives through suffixation demonstrates the systematic and productive nature of English word formation. Different suffixes contribute specific grammatical and semantic functions, while the process may also involve phonological or spelling changes (Nafisah, 2015; Maharani et al., 2022). Examining these patterns provides insights into how English develops its vocabulary and how meanings are constructed through the relationship between base nouns and derived adjectives.

Despite its importance, adjective formation through suffixation can be challenging for English as a second language (ESL) learners. Difficulties in recognizing and applying derivational suffixes may lead to errors in word

formation and communication. Moreover, morphological awareness is associated with reading comprehension and broader language proficiency, highlighting the importance of understanding these processes in English language learning (Stoffelsma et al., 2025; Xue & Jiang, 2017).

Therefore, this qualitative review aims to examine the formation of adjectives from nouns through suffixation by synthesizing relevant literature on its patterns, semantic changes, and linguistic characteristics. It also explores the implications of these processes for English language teaching and learning, particularly in developing learners' morphological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and reading and writing skills. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for linguistic analysis and the development of instructional materials that support effective English learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the main processes in derivational morphology is suffixation, which forms adjectives from nouns and often changes their grammatical category and meaning (Kusumawardhani, 2020). Unlike inflectional morphology, which modifies grammatical features without changing a word's basic category, derivational suffixation expands the English vocabulary through systematic and predictable patterns. The selection of suffixes is influenced by the phonological characteristics, semantic categories, and etymological origins of the base nouns (Plag, 2002; McCarthy, 2002). For example, -ful in beautiful and -less in hopeless produce adjectives with contrasting meanings, while -ish in childish indicates similarity and -ous in courageous expresses possession of a quality (Nafisah, 2015). The productivity of these suffixes also varies, as some can be freely applied to new words, whereas others are restricted to particular contexts. Maharani et al. (2022) highlight the frequency and predicative functions of adjective-forming suffixes, demonstrating how suffixation changes nouns into words that describe qualities or characteristics.

For English as a second language (ESL) learners, adjective formation through suffixation presents challenges related to morphological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and accurate word formation. Stoffelsma et al. (2025) emphasize the need for contextually appropriate assessment instruments, while Al-Jarf (2019) identifies common learner errors, including incorrect suffix selection, spelling problems, blank responses, and the use of inappropriate noun- or adverb-forming suffixes. Learners may also struggle to distinguish subtle semantic differences, such as historic and historical, or recognize pronunciation changes in words such as nation and national. These difficulties suggest that memorization alone is insufficient and that learners need to understand how suffixes affect both the meaning and grammatical category of base words.

Although morphological awareness is associated with reading comprehension and broader language skills (Xue & Jiang, 2017; Zhang, 2021), the specific challenges of adjective formation require further attention in language instruction.

Effective teaching of derivational suffixation should therefore focus on learners' recurring errors, the meanings and functions of common suffixes, and the relationship between base nouns and derived adjectives. Teachers can support learning through explicit explanations, visual materials, contextual examples, and structured practice that encourages learners to identify and use suffixes appropriately. Understanding suffix meanings and their effects on word formation can help learners develop stronger morphological awareness and lexical competence (Schmitt, 1997). By identifying frequent suffixes, semantic changes, and difficulties in adjective production, teachers can design targeted instructional activities that improve learners' vocabulary use and support their academic achievement in English.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative review to examine the formation of adjectives from nouns through suffixation in English. The method involved analyzing previously published academic literature, including research articles, books, and dissertations on English morphology, word formation, and applied linguistics. No primary data were collected through surveys, experiments, or interviews. The review aimed to identify recurring patterns, theoretical perspectives, challenges, and gaps in existing research.

Relevant literature was identified through academic databases and citation searches using keywords such as derivational suffixation, adjective formation, noun-to-adjective conversion, and English morphology. Studies were selected based on their relevance to adjective formation, theoretical contributions, empirical findings, and pedagogical implications. Particular attention was given to the types of suffixes used, semantic and grammatical changes, phonological or orthographic modifications, and difficulties encountered by language learners.

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis. First, relevant information was coded to identify common suffixes, including -ful, -less, -ous, -ic, -al, and -y, along with their meanings and formation patterns. Second, the codes were grouped into broader themes concerning morphological processes, productivity, semantic changes, learner difficulties, and pedagogical implications. Finally, the themes were compared and synthesized to develop an overall understanding of adjective formation from nouns and its implications for English language teaching and learning.

IV. FINDINGS

Consistent conclusions about the common patterns of adjective formation from nouns via suffixation were drawn from the review of the 10 articles. Examining the particular suffixes used, the semantic changes they cause, and the grammatical categories they affect is necessary to gain a thorough grasp of this derivational process.

Common Derivational Suffixes:

A common group of derivational suffixes that change nouns into adjectives was identified by several research. Suffixes like -able, -al, -ful, -ic, -ish, -less, -ous, and -y are especially mentioned by Nafisah (2015) in "Adjective Derivational Affixation in English" as being commonly employed for adjective construction. Similar to this, Maharani et al. (2022) in "Derivational Suffixes Forming Adjectives in User Reviews of Selected M.A.C Foundation: Syntactic Function Analysis" attest to the fact that a large number of these suffixes are productive in a particular linguistic domain (user reviews). The article "Freshman Students' Difficulties with English Adjective-Forming Suffixes" by Al-Jarf (2019) focuses on students' challenges in learning these suffixes, which subtly supports their widespread use. A common theme in the pertinent literature is the focus on derivational suffixes for adjective construction, even though some of the papers (e.g., Stoffelsma et al., 2025; Kolářová, 2024; Moehkardi, 2016) go deeper into word formation processes or broader morphological awareness.

Semantic and Syntactic Impact of Suffixation:

The studies consistently show that suffixation changes the underlying noun's semantic and grammatical characteristics, going beyond a simple formal modification. "Affixes Analysis In A 'Hansel And Gretel' Story To English Young Learners: A Morphology Perspective" by Kusumawardhani (2020) makes it clear that derivational affixes, such as suffixes, result in semantic change. This semantic change frequently entails giving the noun a quality, trait, or connection. For example, adding -ful (beautiful > beautiful) suggests that a quality is possessed, whereas adding -ish (child > childish) frequently shows similarity or trait.

The conversion of a noun into an adjective gives the new word the syntactic ability to modify nouns or serve as a predicate adjective in a sentence. Studies looking at morphological awareness and literacy development (Stoffelsma et al., 2025; Zhang, 2021, cited in Stoffelsma et al., 2025) make this implicitly clear because higher-order literacy abilities depend on the capacity to recognize and utilize adjectives that are produced from nouns. Despite concentrating on Czech, Kolářová (2024) offers a comparative linguistic viewpoint on how derivational processes affect the syntactic behavior of derived forms, which is comparable to how English adjectives are formed.

Productivity and Frequency of Suffixes:

It is frequently noted that some suffixes are productive in creating new adjectives from nouns. The formation of these adjectives and the base forms to which they might be attached are described in depth by Nafisah (2015). The frequent use of suffixes like -able, -al, -ful, and -y in a variety of sources (Nafisah, 2015; Maharani et al., 2022) implies their high productivity even though they do not specifically offer a quantitative study of frequency. The dynamic nature of affixation, even in informal language, is further highlighted by the study "The Productive Use of Prefixes and Suffixes in Modern English Slang" by Buxorova and Mamadjanova (2023), which shows that the process of forming adjectives from nouns through suffixation is an active and changing aspect of English morphology.

Challenges in Acquisition:

Al-Jarf (2019) focuses on the challenges EFL first-year students encounter when learning English adjective-forming suffixes. Common faults including mismatching nouns and suffixes, spelling errors, phonetic spelling, and inserting erroneous noun or adverb-forming suffixes are identified in this study. These results highlight the intricacy of derivational morphology for language learners and imply that, despite the existence of the rules, phonetic, orthographic, and semantic subtleties can make it difficult to apply them.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this qualitative review provide compelling evidence that suffixation is an important and highly productive mechanism for creating adjectives in English from nouns. Strong evidence of the significance of certain suffixes to English morphology may be found in the constant identification of these suffixes across a variety of research, from general linguistic analyses to studies on learner difficulties and user-generated content.

The observed syntactic and semantic changes are essential to language's communication function and are not coincidental. One essential mechanism for linguistic economy and expressive power is the capacity to change a noun that represents a concept into an adjective that describes a quality. Rather than expressing "a person with beauty," for example, one could simply say "a beautiful person." This demonstrates how the derivational process can improve vocabulary and enable more complex conversation.

Al-Jarf (2019) describes the difficulties in learning these suffixes, which highlights the necessity for more focused pedagogical strategies in English language instruction. It might be more helpful to concentrate on the semantic purposes of these suffixes, their typical noun bases, and frequent exceptions or irregular spellings rather than just listing them. "Mismatching the word and

suffix" and "spelling mistakes," among other errors, indicate that learners can have trouble understanding the fundamentals of allomorphy and the phonetic changes that frequently accompany suffixation. For instance, learners must internalize the vowel change that occurs when the word "beautiful" replaces "beauty."

Additionally, the findings of slang research (Buxorova & Mamadjanova, 2023; Kemalatinova & Alimova, 2023) indicate that the process of suffixation is dynamic and ever-changing. A dynamic linguistic system where speakers actively construct new forms to communicate modern social and cultural conceptions is shown by the appearance of new adjectives formed from nouns in informal circumstances. This continuous output highlights how crucial it is to appreciate derivational morphological mechanisms in order to understand language change.

Future study could benefit from a more quantitative investigation of suffix production across various corpora and registers to identify the most active suffixes in modern English, even if the reviewed publications offer a solid foundation. Furthermore, comparative research among other learner populations may provide additional insight into the particular challenges associated with learning these morphological norms. On the other hand, the current review effectively outlines the fundamental elements of adjective generation from nouns by suffixation, stressing its systematic character, its consequences for syntax and semantics, and its applicability to theoretical linguistics and language instruction.

VI. CONCLUSION

Suffixation is an important morphological process in English that expands vocabulary and enhances expression by transforming nouns into adjectives through suffixes such as -ful, -less, -ous, -ic, -al, and -y. Although these patterns are relatively systematic and predictable, ESL learners often experience difficulties with suffix selection, spelling, pronunciation, and matching suffixes to base words, which can affect their communication and language development. Therefore, educators should provide explicit explanations, contextual examples, and practical exercises to strengthen learners' morphological awareness and ability to use adjectives accurately. Understanding these patterns can also support the development of dictionaries and learning materials, improve learners' reading and writing skills, and contribute to overall English language proficiency.

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