

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NOMINAL MODIFICATION IN NARRATIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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Abstract:

This study deals with analysis of nominal modification in narrative and descriptive texts which are nearly of the same length. The aim is to show the type of nominal modifiers used more frequently when noun heads are equal or somehow equal in number. The study proves that the writer of the narrative text depends mainly on prenominal modifiers, whereas the use of post nominal modifiers is dominant in descriptive texts.

1. Introduction

This paper aims at analysing nominal modification in two different texts: narrative and descriptive. The analysis, as intended, is to show the type of modifiers which writers use more frequently than the other. The nominal modifiers which are not used in these two texts will be pointed out through analysis of data.

It is hypothesized that the number of prenominal modifiers and post nominal modifiers in different types of texts, though noun heads are equal or somehow equal in number, is also different.

In this paper, the researcher will shed light briefly on noun modification in general. The analysis of nominal modifiers in these two texts depends mainly on Sinclair (1972) and Quirk et al (1985). The texts are chosen from Alexander's book entitled Poetry and Prose for Overseas Students. They are nearly of the same length.

2. Definition of Modification

As stated by Hartman and Stork (1976:143), "Modification is the relationship between a headword and a modifier". It is a largely optional function achieved, for instance, by adjectives in the noun phrase. (Quirk et al 1985:65). Modification, as viewed by Fries (1952:204), provides the writer with a way to make his statements precise and accurate. To him, modification is a structure. He (Ibid.) writes:

We cannot hope to define "modifiers" in terms of meaning content. We must begin with the understanding that modification is a structure, and that, like all structures, it must be described in terms of the formal units of which it is composed and the characteristic arrangements of these units.

As he (Ibid. : 206) states, modification is “the structure in which each of the four parts of speech and certain of function words can serve as the head or nucleus.” Generally speaking, structural grammarians agree that modification is a function and a word or word group that achieves this function is a modifier. A modifier belongs not with the form-classes or the position-classes but with the function classes (Ibid.).

There are two components of the structure of modification: a head and a modifier. (Francis, 1958:297). The headword is the most important word in the nominal group, the structure of the group depends on the headword which is usually some kind of noun. (Sinclair, 1972:135).

A modifier, as stated by Stageberg (1981:246-48) is “a subordinate element in an endocentric structure.” It may be a word or a word group which influences the meaning of a headword since it describes, limits, identifies and, or adds to the meaning of the head. To clarify, in the noun phrase the blue shirt, the word blue describes the shirt, it limits by excluding other colours besides adding to the meaning of the shirt. (Ibid.). The same viewpoint is also given by Quirk et al (1985:65) when they state that modifiers add “descriptive information” to the head often restricting the reference of the head. Thus the above noun phrase, the blue shirt has a more specific meaning than a shirt. Anyhow, some linguists limit the term modifier to prenominal constructions as in the four tall girls, while calling post nominal construction qualifiers as in boys of certain age. See Hartman and Stork, (1976:143).

The viewpoint given by Fries and Stageberg represent a certain school of grammar, that is, the structural grammar.

The views of traditional and transformational grammarians are to be presented briefly because the present study is mainly concerned with discourse analysis. Traditional grammarians call the modifying units adjectives and adverbs. Accordingly, any word modifies a noun or a pronoun is an adjective, the other modifying words are adverbs. (See Al-Dilaimi 1990:12). As stated by him, Jespersen (1965:11-13) uses the term adjuncts to refer to modifiers which occur before and after the head noun. Adjuncts can be nouns, pronouns, adjectives and word groups. Following other traditional grammarians, Jespersen depends mainly on meaning in his treatment of syntax.

As stated by T.G. grammarians, most noun modifiers are derived from an “s” embedded in the noun phrase. “It is assumed by many T.G. grammarians that the relative clauses are source of many modifying phrase and words.” (Ibid.,3)

2.1 Layered Modifiers

As mentioned by Long (1971:27) “in layered modifiers of a single head, a headed unit could be said to function as head within a layer headed unit.” To clarify, let’s consider the following example:

She bought a good student magazine.

A good student magazine is a verbal complement. Following the most concise analysis, we describe a as a modifier and good student magazine as its head, good as a modifier and student magazine as its head. Besides, it is reasonable to regard magazine as the head in a complex headed unit in which a, good, and student modify it in layers.

Quirk et al (1985:916) write about what is so called “multiple premodification” in which more than one modifier is related to a simple head as in the following example:

His first new (...) poem is written.

The dots used in the above example mean that more modifiers can be added before the noun headword. Beaugrands and Dressler (1972:50-52) depend on the head noun which they use as a control centre for the whole macro-state. They state that head noun has at least one element depending on it. Indeed, they talk about having a network of modifiers that modify the head noun. Their study is to perform the best in the simulation of language processing on computers. One main operation will be to maintain the modifier-to-head dependencies as direct links.

2.2 Prenominal and Postnominal Modifiers

Noun pre-modifiers occur in succession, they are put in a certain order as shown below:

1	2	3	4	5
Articles	Numerals	1. quantifiers or characteristics	Other nouns	Noun head
Demonstratives		2. size or shape		
Possessives		3. age		
Indefinite Adjectives		4. colour		
		5. nationality		

Before these premodifiers we may have restricters like especially, oven, just, merely, only, particularly, almost and nearly. See (Stageberg, 1981:258). As shown above, when an adjective and a noun both precede the noun head, the adjective precedes the modifying noun. (Ibid. 252). Notice the following:

Determiner	Adjective	Noun	Noun Head
Our	sturdy	garden	fence

Another group is to be added to the prenominal modifiers, one that precedes the determiners. This group is called predeterminers which consist of all, both, half, double, and a few others as in:

Predeterminer	Determiner	Adjective	Noun	Noun Head
all	my	old	school	friends

The possessive of common nouns usually appears between the determiner and the noun head. e.g.,

The summer's red roses.

(See Quirk and Greenbaum, 1983:63-65 and Stageberg, Ibid 253).

To sum up, the modifiers that precede the noun head are predeterminers, determiners, postdeterminers, adjectives, verbs and nouns. However, all classes can recur except determiners and predeterminers, that is, we may have more than one noun, more than one verb and more than one adjective modifier.

Concerning the postnominal modifiers, they are relative clauses, adjectives, participles, to-infinitive clauses, prepositional phrases, adverbs of place and appositives. We are not going to deal with them in details. The readers are referred to Al- Dilaimi's M.A thesis entitled postnominal Modifiers in Standard English and standard Arabic: A Contrastive Study.

3. A Narrative Text and Its Analysis

The following narrative text is taken from "The Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemingway:

The man dropped the line and put his foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it down with all his strength, and more strength he had just summoned into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the altitude of the man's chest(1). He felt the iron go in and he leaned on it and drove it further and then pushed all his weight after it. (2)

Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty (3). He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff(5).

The old man felt faint and sick and he could not see well(6). But he cleared the harpoon line and let it run slowly through his raw hands and, when he could see, he saw the fish was on his back with his silver belly up (7). The shaft of the harpoon was projecting at an angle from the fish's shoulder (8). First it was dark as shoal in the blue water that was more than a mile deep (9). Then it spread like a cloud (10). The fish was silvery and still and floated with the waves (11).

The old man looked carefully in the glimpse or vision that he had (12). Then he took two turns of the harpoon line around the bit in the bow and laid his hand on his hands (13).

Keep my head clear, he said against the wood of the bow (14). I am tired old man (15). But I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work (16).

To point out the noun heads and modifiers in the above narrative text, we are going to deal with sentences one by one according to their numbers.

1. man: noun head, the: definite article, old: adjective (prenominal modifier), foot: noun head, his: possessive adjective, harpoon: noun head, the: definite article, strength: noun head, all: predeterminer, his: possessive adjective, side: noun head, fish's: postdeterminer, fin: noun head, great: adjective, chest: noun (prenominal modifier), altitude: noun head, the: definite article, of man's chest: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier).
2. iron: noun head, the: definite article, weight: noun head, all: predeterminer, his: possessive adjective.
3. fish: noun head, the: definite article, water: noun head, the: definite article, length: noun head, all: predeterminer, his: possessive adjective, great: adjective, power: noun head, all: predeterminer.
4. air: noun head, the: definite article, above: adverb (postnominal modifier), man: noun head, the: definite article, old: adjective, in the skiff: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier).
5. water: noun head, the: definite article, with a crash: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), man: noun head, over: adverb (prenominal modifier), the: definite article, old: adjective, skill: noun head, over: adverb (prenominal modifier), skiff: noun head, all: predeterminer, the: definite article.
6. man: noun head, the: definite article, old: adjective.
7. line: noun head, the: definite article, harpoon: noun (prenominal modifier), hands: noun head, his: possessive adjective, raw: adjective, belly: noun head, his: possessive adjective, silver: noun head (prenominal modifier), up: adverb (postnominal modifier).
8. harpoon: noun head, the: definite article, angle: noun head, an: indefinite article, shoulder: noun head, the: definite article, fish's: genitive (postdeterminer).
9. water: noun head, the: definite article, blue: adjective, that was more than a mile deep: relative clause (postnominal modifier).
10. cloud: noun head, a: indefinite article.
11. fish: noun head, the: definite article, waves: noun head, the: definite article.
12. man: noun head, the: definite article, old: adjective, glimpse: noun head, the: definite article, that he had: relative clause (postnominal modifier).

13. turns: noun head, two: determiner, of the harpoon line: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), bitt: noun head, around: adverb (prenominal modifier), the: definite article, in the bow: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), head: noun head, his: possessive adjective.
14. head: noun head, my: possessive adjective, clear: (postnominal modifier), wood: noun head, the: definite article, of the bow: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier).
15. man: noun head, a: indefinite article, tired: adjective, old: adjective.
16. fish: noun head, this: demonstrative, which is my brother: relative clause (postnominal modifier), work: noun head, the: definite article, slave: adjective (prenominal modifier).

The analytical study of the above narrative text shows, through statistical data, the number of nominal modifiers and their noun heads as clarified in Table (1) below:

Table (1)

Noun head	Prenominal modifier 66		%	Postnominal modifiers 11		%
41	predeterminers	5	7-57	Relative clauses	3	27-27
	Determiners	40	60-6	Prepositional phrases	5	45-45
	Postdeterminers	3	4-51			
	Adjectives	12	18-18	Adjectives	1	9.09
	Nouns	3	4-54	Adverbs of place	2	18-18
	Adverbs of place	3	4-54			

According to the data available in Table (1), we notice that the total number of noun heads is forty-one. The number of nominal modifiers is seventy-eight. The majority of nominal modifiers are prenominal ones (84.61%). We just have eleven postmodifiers (14.10%). It is noted that certain types of nominal modifiers are not used in this text like participles, to-infinitive clauses and appositives. Another important note which draws the attention of writer of this study is that the predeterminer all followed by the determiner (possessive adjective) his is more frequently used than the other types of prenominal modifiers. Adjectives, as prenominal modifiers, are used thirteen times (18.18%). Whereas the writer of the above narrative text (Hemingway) used them only once as postnominal modifiers (1-51%). Even adverbs of place which are almost used as postnominal modifiers, are used three times (4.54%) as prenominal modifiers but only twice (3-63%) as postnominal modifiers. Concentration on the use of prenominal

modifiers rather than postnominal modifiers may have relationship with the type of text used here, i.e, narrative.

4. A Descriptive Text and Its Analysis

The following descriptive text is entitled “A Buyer’s Market” written by Antnony Powell.

He was not rich, although his income, in these days, allowed the preservation of a fairly independent attitude towards the more material side of being an artist (1). He had once, for example, turned down the opportunity to decorate the interior of a fish restaurant in Brighton where he lived-on ground that the sum offered was incommensurate with the demeaning nature of the work demanded (2). His means had also enabled him to assemble what was said to be an excellent little collection of hour-glasses, silhouettes, and bric-a-brac of various kinds(3). At the same time he liked to describe now, from time to time, in order to avoid the expense and responsibility of domestic staff, he deliberately underwent long periods of undertaking his own cooking (4). “I could always earn my living as a chef”, he used to say, adding, in joke, that he would look ‘enormously ornamental’ in a white cap (5). When traveling on the continent he commonly went on foot with a haversack on his back, rather than by trains, which he found stuffy and infinitely filled with tedious persons (6). He was careful, even rather fussy, about his health, especially in relation to personal cleanliness and good sanitation, so that some of the more sordid aspects of these allegedly terre-a-terre excursions abroad must at times have been a trial to him (7). Perhaps his continental visits were, in fact, more painful for managers of hotels and restaurants frequented by him, for he was a great believer in insisting absolutely upon the minute observance by others of his own wishes (8). Such habits of traveling, in so much as they were indeed voluntary and not to some degree enforced by financial consideration were no doubt also connected in his mind with his own special approach to social behaviour in which he was guided by an aversion, often expressed, for conduct that might he looked upon either as conventional or conservative (9).

In the above descriptive text we specify the following noun heads and their modifiers:

1. income: noun head, his: possessive adjective, in those days: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifiers), preservation: noun head,

the: definite article, of a fairly independent attitude: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier), side: noun head, the: definite article, more: postdeterminer, material: adjective, of being an artist: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier).

2. opportunity: noun head, the: definite article, to decorate: to-infinitive clause (postnominal modifier), interior: noun head, the: definite article, of a fish restaurant: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier), restaurant: noun head, fish: noun, Brighton: noun head, where he lived: relative clause (postnominal modifier), sum: noun head, the: definite article, offered: participle (postnominal modifier), nature: noun head, the: definite article, demeaning: participle (prenominal modifier), of the work: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), demanded: participle (postnominal modifier).
3. means: noun head, collection: noun head, an: indefinite article, excelled: adjective, little: postdeterminer, of hour glasses: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier).
4. time: noun head, the: definite article, own: adjective, same: postdeterminer, expense: noun head, the: definite article, responsibility: noun head, of domestic staff: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier), precious: noun head, long: adjective, of undertaking his own cooking: prepositional phrase (postmodifier), cooking: noun head, his: possessive adjective, own: adjective.
5. living: noun head, my: possessive adjective, chef: noun head, a: indefinite article, cap: noun head, a: indefinite article, white: adjective.
6. continent: noun head, the: definite article, trains: noun head, which he found: relative clause (postnominal modifier), persons: noun head, filled: participle (prenominal modifier), tedious: adjective.
7. health: noun head, his: determiner, cleanliness: noun head, personal: adjective, sanitation: noun head, good: adjective, aspects: noun head, some: determiner, the: definite article, more: postdeterminer, sordid: adjective, of these allegedly terre-a-terre excursions: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier), excursions: noun head, terre-a-terre: adjective, abroad: adjective.
8. visits: noun head, his: determiner, continental: adjective, managers: noun head, more: postdeterminer, painful: adjective, of hotels: genitive phrase (postnominal modifier), believer: noun head, a: indefinite article, great: adjective, observance: noun head, the: definite article, minute: adjective, by others of his own wishes: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), wishes: noun head, his: determiner, own: adjective.
9. habits: noun head, such: determiner, of travelling: prepositional phrase (postnominal modifier), consideration: noun head, financial: adjective, approach: noun head, his: determiner, own: adjective, special:

adjective, behaviour: noun head, social: adjective, conduct: noun head, that might be looked up: relative clause (postnominal modifier).

The number of nominal modifier and their noun heads in the above descriptive text is clarified in Table (2) below:

Table (2)

Noun Heads	Prenominal Modifiers 55		%	Postnominal Modifiers 18		%
38	Determiner	26	47.27	Relative clauses	3	16-66
	Postdeterminers	6	10-90	Adjective	1	5-55
	Adjectives	19	34-54	participles	2	11-11
	Nouns	2	3-63	to-infinitive clauses	1	5-55
	Participles	2	3-63	Prepositional phrase	11	61-11

The analysis of data in table (2) above leads to certain remarks and conclusions. The total number of noun heads is thirty-eight. The number of nominal modifiers is seventy-three. Prenominal modifiers are fifty-five (75.34%), whereas postnominal modifiers are only eighteen (24.05%). Certain types of nominal modifiers are not used in the above descriptive text like predeterminers, adverbs of place (in both positions) and appositives. The number of determiners used in the text is less than expected since we don't have only twenty-six (47-27%). The most influential remark we get is that there are eleven prepositional phrase which are used as postnominal modifiers. This forms (61-11%) of the total number of postnominal modifiers. However, the number of postnominal modifiers seems reasonable as compared to the number of prenominal modifiers. This is due to, as we believe, the type of text, i.e, descriptive.

5. Summary and Conclusions

The study undertaken here deals with the analysis of nominal modification in two different texts: narrative and descriptive. The investigation reveals the following results.

1. The analytical study of the above texts has shown through statistical data that the descriptive text comprises more postnominal modifiers than the narrative one.
2. In both types of texts, the writers didn't use two types of nominal modifiers, namely, restricters and appositives.
3. Although there is a little difference in the number of noun heads in both narrative (41) and descriptive (38), determiners are more frequently used in the narrative text than in the descriptive one in which predeterminer are not used.
4. In the narrative text, both participles and to-infinitive clauses are not used, whereas they are used in the descriptive text.

5. Adverbs of place as nominal modifiers are used in the narrative text only. In the descriptive text, they are not used by the writer in either position.
6. In the narrative text, concentration is given to prenominal modifiers. More attention is given to postnominal modifiers in the descriptive text.
7. Writers use certain nominal modifiers rather than others according to the type of text, i.e, narrative, descriptive ...etc.

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