



FACULTY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MASTER THESIS:

The order and zones of premodifiers in English nominal phrases

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Abstract

It is a fact that nominal phrases are a crucial part of natural language. However, noun phrases are known for exhibiting extremely complex structure in many cases. Given to this fact, it is also important to consider semantic relationships among the words that serve as premodifiers in nominal phrases. Despite the fact that pronominal modifiers are often marked by explicit semantic and lexical clues – in nominal phrase that are premodified with one or few premodifiers. Nevertheless, when students of English as foreign language, study complex nominal phrases - that exhibit a string of premodifiers, the clues appear to be vague – unless we manage to clearly divide them into zones of premodification.

The importance of nominal phrases and nominal premodifiers has already been well-established due to their commonness in one hand and their complexity on the other. Nonetheless, herein – I have in addition sought further explanation for the order of the premodifiers in English nominal phrase. Moreover, the aim of this thesis is to truly attempt the validity of rather divergent explanations suggested by well-renowned authorities in English linguistics.

The method employed in this thesis was to conduct a wide survey of English nominal phrases that I could collect from many varieties and registers of English. However, I have focused my research on nominal phrases that, by observation, exhibit a long string of premodifiers, and then analyze the order of premodifiers at all levels, including semantics, pragmatics, syntax, etc., for the purpose of ascertaining the accuracy of the gained results against the one hundred million word British National Corpus.

Based on the conducted research, this thesis suggests how the elements of the approaches - used in the past by the recognized academicians – can be integrated into a comprehensible scholarly explanation, and offers a new and important element that may bridge the gaps found in previous explanations. Namely, that the words' semantic structure, which indeed is a combination of various types and dimensions of meaning – that builds up the sense of each premodifier.

The new elements included in this research are nominal phrases that are nominal phrases that are premodified by a long string or long groups of nominal premodifiers – up to ten words that enabled me to analyze them and attempt to ascertain why premodifiers occur regularly in various positions in the order. Moreover, I have sought to explain also the historical development of premodifier order in English nominal phrases.

Conclusion:

As the linguistic data and evidence - supported by the world renowned authorities - treated throughout the body of this thesis demonstrates English is a unique language when it comes to its flexibility to admit lengthy string of numerous nominal phrase premodifiers. Nevertheless, as the facts in this thesis suggest, those premodifiers may not be used loosely and anyhow, but rather there are rules that govern their order. The rules that govern their order are supported by the evidence adduced from various researches and experiments in every branch of linguistics. Moreover, the rules have not appeared overnight, but they were created gradually throughout the evolution of the English language, starting from the Anglo-Saxon period and culminating in the 19th century when English became lingua franca of the modern world.

From the chapters dealing with the zones of modification, we have found enough evidence to support assertion for the four zones of premodifiers, asserted originally by Quirk et al. (1985) and further treated by Fiest (2012). Therefore, when conducting deep structure analysis of nominal phrase premodifiers in English language - there are four zones that control the order of premodifiers, and they are known as the following:

1. The classifier zone (the prehead zone) – the zone located closest to the noun head, i.e.,

The actual military grade fully automatic assault rifle.

P P P P P P P H

2. The descriptor zone (the postcentral zone) - the zone situated right before the last premodifier, which precedes the actual headword, i.e.,

The actual military grade fully automatic assault rifle.

P P P P P P P H

3. The epithet zone (the central zone) – is the zone of premodifiers which has two other premodifiers between it and the headword, i.e.,

The actual military grade fully automatic assault rifle.

P P P P P P P H

4. The reinforcer zone (precentral zone) – it is the zone that is the farthest from the headword, from the noun head, and it is preceded only by a determiner, i.e.,

The actual military grade fully automatic assault rifle.

P P P P P P P H

Hence, we may safely conclude that the order of nominal premodifiers is indeed determined by their zone membership, and on the other hand, it is the specific use of the word itself – its semantic application - that determines its slot in the given zones. This also tells us that there are numerous words that may fit in various zones, depending on the wider-angle of possible uses in English language.

In addition to the zones – where a given premodifier may be placed, there are generally three types of order:

1. The unmarked order – which is:

- ✓ a grammatically required order;
- ✓ in this order, the premodifiers are ordered in accordance with the four premodification zones, even if the nominal phrase is premodified with more than four premodifiers;
- ✓ the premodifiers may be coordinated with conjunctions, punctuation or not at all;
- ✓ the order of zones is semantic – depending on: constituent types, dimensions of meaning and semantic structure;
- ✓ the order of zones is syntactic – premodifiers do not impact only the headword, but also all premodifiers that follow it – as a group;

2. The marked order – is used when an English user want to alter the normal order – the unmarked order – for the purpose of achieving a certain desired stylistic purpose. From the point of view of syntax, the marked order refers to placing a modifier into a premodification zone, which might be considered as violation of conventionalized use;

3. The free order – is employed when the one is writing a nominal phrase with multiple premodifiers, and there is more than one word in a single premodification, it is writer's prerogative to place them in a style that is suitable for his intentions and purpose, but without violating generally established grammatically acceptable principles and conventions. In other words, the freedom of choice of the order of premodifiers is restricted by four types of restrictions, conventional order, time order, order derived from English user's personal experience and explanatory order, which if violated would generate an unconventional or grammatically unacceptable order.

Nevertheless, when translating the English nominal phrases in synthetic languages, i.e. Albanian, the order of modifiers has to match the grammatically acceptable norms and principles of the L2.

Therefore, as the chapter thirteen demonstrates, most of the premodifiers in English nominal phrases, when translated into Albanian, they occupy the position of postmodifiers. Nevertheless, the zones of modification may be utilized also in Albanian, but unlike in English – where the pattern of zones is stringent – in Albanian language, the pattern of zones varies from nominal phrase to nominal phrase and may be altered in order to meet the norms of standard Albanian language.