

In some of these examples, the variation is not stylistically free: for example, in relation to (a), many would prefer (at least in a more formal context) the continuous order [1] to the discontinuous [1a]:

- { facilities *comparable to ours* [1]
- { *comparable facilities to ours* [1a]

The prepositional phrases and other structures function here as complements to adjectives, not as modifiers of noun-phrase heads, as in *new routes to London*. Thus we have *routes to London* but not **facilities to ours*.

Compare now the following pairs:

- { the *handsome* man that she kissed [2]
- { the *first* man that she kissed [2a]
- { an *extraordinary* discovery that I made [3]
- { an *early* discovery that I made [3a]
- { The *most recent* play I know well is *Betroom Farce*. [4]
- { The *most recent* play I've seen is *Hamlet*. [4a]

The superficial resemblance within each pair must not prevent us from seeing that, in each case, the second member has an adverbial relation in what is a plausible corresponding sentence:

- the man was the { *first* } that she kissed
- { **handsome* }
- a discovery that I made { *early* }
- { **extraordinary* }
- The play I { 've seen } *most recently* is *Hamlet*.
- { *know }

Note Comparatives of adjectives with comparative clause complements like [5] and [6] can have as ad hoc 'compounds' the normally postponed comparative constructions in [5a] and [6a] (cf 17.111; regarding the use of hyphenation, cf App I.17):

- Her salary is *higher than average*. [5]
- His car looks *worse than ever*. [6]
- her *higher-than-average* salary [5a]
- his *worse-than-ever-looking* car [6a]

Note that with a copular verb other than *be* [6a], the verb is included in the premodification.

But:

- *her *higher-than-average-being* salary [6b]

Conclusion

Reduced explicitness and increased economy structure

17.123 The noun phrase, then, is potentially very complex indeed. It is hoped that by now enough has been said to give some clear indication of the relationship that exists between types of noun-phrase structure and the forms of

predication to which they appear to have an essential if often indirect correspondence. By means of the structures that have been developed in the noun phrase, we can take an indefinitely wide range of grammatical and semantic data which have either been previously established in the discourse or which can be assumed as knowledge held in common between speaker/writer and hearer/reader, and then express them, or refer to them, with greatly reduced explicitness, and consequently increased economy. To illustrate the degree of complexity that occurs quite readily in English prose, here are three examples:

- At the mouth of the respiratory tube is a *series of velar tentacles, corresponding exactly in position to those of amphioxus, and serving to separate the mouth and oesophagus from the respiratory tube while the lamprey is feeding.* [1]
- It was the *beginning of an operation in which the power of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in the person and words and actions of a human character, Jesus of Nazareth.* [2]
- Subsequent work by Huisgen (1951) and Hey, Stuart-Webb and Williams (1951, 1952) on the dependence of the rate of rearrangement on both the aryl and acyl groups of the acylarynitrosamine, and on the catalysis of the reaction by bases such as piperidine, has led to the formulation of the rearrangement as an intramolecular process, as indicated in equation (6), involving nucleophilic attack, by an internal S_N2 mechanism, of the oxygen of the . . . nitrosyl group on the carbonyl carbon atom. [3]

In the italicized noun phrase of [1], we are expected to understand that the tentacles form a series and that they correspond to the tentacles found in the species amphioxus. More interestingly, we are expected to relate the tentacles to the velum without prejudice as to whether they are appended to it (a partitive relationship) or actually constitute it (an appositive relationship), on which distinction some biologists would not wish to commit themselves.

Types of noun-phrase structure in relation to variety

- 17.124 It must be emphasized that anything approaching full exploitation of the potentiality existing in noun-phrase structure is relatively rare and relatively confined to specific fields of discourse. A sample of some 17 000 noun phrases in the Survey of English Usage files yielded the striking contrasts that are summarized in Table 17.124.

'Simple' is here defined as nouns without modification, *ie* simple noun phrases (*eg: John, she, the man*). In view of their numerical and distributional importance, pronouns and names are distinguished as a subclass of 'simple'. 'Complex' embraces all other noun phrases, but a subclass is distinguished comprising those having multiple modification (more than merely a single adjective premodifier or prepositional phrase postmodifier). Table 17.124 shows that:

- (a) Less than one-third of the 17 000 noun phrases in the sample are 'complex', even within these modest limits of 'complexity'.

Table 17.124 Noun-phrase structure and distribution

		TOTAL	SIMPLE NOUN PHRASES		COMPLEX NOUN PHRASES	
			All	Names and pronouns	All	Multiple modification
Whole sample	subject	7898 46.6%	6749 39.8%	5821 34.3%	1149 6.8%	456 2.7%
	not subject	9063 53.4%	4753 28.0%	2193 13.0%	4310 25.4%	1777 10.5%
	total	16961 100%	11502 67.8%	8014 47.2%	5459 32.2%	2233 13.2%
Informal speech	subject	2984	2064	1941	148	62
	not subject	2220	1169	677	811	327
Fiction	subject	4466	2220	1943	211	92
	not subject	3991	1682	754	1121	434
Serious talk	subject	3693	1745	1478	343	127
	not subject	3602	1273	599	1238	492
Scientific writing	subject	1831	720	459	447	175
	not subject	2456	629	163	1140	524

- (b) Less than one-eighth have multiple modification.
- (c) Nearly one-half of the sample consists of pronouns or names.
- (d) The majority of simple noun phrases – and the overwhelming majority of names and pronouns – are subjects of clauses or sentences, but only rather less than a quarter of complex noun phrases are subjects.
- (e) When the whole sample is broken down into four types of text, one such type ('serious talk and writing') very closely follows the pattern of distribution for the sample as a whole.
- (f) In respect of these particular noun-phrase parameters, prose fiction and informal spoken English agree closely and are sharply distinct from the other two varieties represented in the sample; they have a much higher proportion of simple to complex and a much stronger association of simple with subject, and complex with nonsubject, than the other varieties.
- (g) Scientific writing differs greatly from the other varieties in having a distinctly higher proportion of noun phrases with complexity (and multiple complexity); a distinctly lower proportion of names and pronouns among its simple noun phrases; and the weakest association of simple with subject and complex with nonsubject.

A survey of prepositional phrases highlighted a difference between speech and writing. In a corpus of half a million words, prepositional phrases were found to be considerably more frequent in written than in spoken material, respectively about 140 and 100 phrases per 1000 words. Also, in written texts, 40 per cent of the prepositional phrases functioned as postmodification in noun phrases, as compared with only 3.3 per cent in speech.

Even such coarse-grained comparisons as these make clear how sensitive is the noun phrase as an index of style and how responsive it can be to the basic purpose and subject matter in varying types of discourse.

Bibliographical note

On relative clauses and other types of postmodification, see Aijssen (1972); Bresnan and Grimshaw (1978); Downing (1978); Flakness (1982); Hartvigsson (1979); Huddleston (1971); Jacobson (1983); Jacobsson (1963, 1970); Karlson (1965); Kjellmer (1975a); Michiels (1975, 1977); Olofsson (1981); van Roy (1969); Roggero (1967); Romaine (1980); Rydén (1970, 1974); Schachter (1973); Sears (1972); Taglicht (1972, 1977); Weisler (1980); Young (1980).

On premodification, see Ahberton (1977); Bache (1978); Bolinger (1967a); Coates (1977); Dierickx (1970); Fries (1970); Johansson (1980); Levi (1978); Martin and Ferb (1973); Muir (1967); Pennanen (1980); Sampson (1980); Sørensen (1980); Warren (1978); Wyler (1979).

On modification in relation to function, see Aarts (1971); Fries (1972); Williams (1979); on special relations between heads and modifiers, see Aarts and Aarts (1982); Christophersen (1974); Seppänen (1978).

On nominalization, see Chomsky (1972); Colen (1984); Downing (1977); Fraser (1970); Kjellmer (1980); Lees (1960a); Vendler (1968); Webster (1977); Wunder (1970).

On the genitive and *of*-construction, see Allenberg (1980, 1982); Dahl (1971); Jahr Sørlheim (1980).

On apposition, see Austin (1980); Du Bois (1974); Haugen (1953); Hockett (1955); Lee (1952).