

## تحليل الملامح النحوية والشكلية الرئيسية للنص: رفع الوعي بأهمية الجمل الإسمية وإعداد تدريبات لمجموعة من متعلمي اللغة المتقدمين

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### الملخص:

تقدم الورقة الحالية تحليل نحوي وشكلي لنص أصلي - المقالة تحاول نقل تعليم القواعد من النهج الغير تواصللي إلى النهج التواصللي - التحليل يركّز علي الجمل الإسمية بملحقاتها السابقة واللاحقة ، الورقة تسهم – أيضا- في مجال العلم المبني علي المهام ، والباحثة ستقترح بعض التدريبات لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية المتقدمين . التحليل يرفع وعي معلمي اللغة بأهمية النصوص الأصلية في شرح الجمل الإسمية والتحليل- أيضا - يوسعهم فهم لملحقات الجملة الإسمية السابقة واللاحقة

## **Analyzing the Main syntactical and Morphological Features of a Text: Raising the Awareness about the Importance of Noun Phrases and Developing an Exercise to a Group of Advanced Language Learners**

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### **Abstract**

*The current paper presents a syntactical and morphological analysis of an authentic text. The article tries to move grammar teaching from a non-communicative approach into a communicative approach. The analysis focuses on noun phrases and their pre and post modification positions. The paper also contributes to the field of grammar teaching, particularly, the field of task-based learning. The researcher will suggest some exercises for potential advanced language learners of English. The analysis will also make language teachers aware of the importance of these authentic texts in*

*explaining noun phrases. It also broadens their understanding of the pre and post modification positions of noun phrases.*

### **1. Introduction**

Teaching Grammar is usually come as a result of introducing language learners to other skills. Language activities play a significant role in acquiring grammar for language learners (Harmer, 2007). The job is demanding due to several factors one of them is the fact that language rules are not always regular (Swan, 1994). Swan(ibid) identifies six pedagogic rules for grammar teaching one of them is that teachers cannot be always sure about what the truth is as the language rules are sometimes irregular. Teachers are also responsible of how and how much of these features they must introduce to language learners (Harmer, 2007). There is another possibility that teachers could rely on weak textbooks that use simple structures of language and ignore the more sophisticated language features. The beginners and advanced language learners often encounter challenges when they come across authentic articles. This situation may become more complex in the case of teaching foreign language learners where teachers spend a lot of time to have their students master the basics of grammar rules. The issue is that some language teachers rely on these basic rules, as they lack knowledge about more complex features. Some teachers, for example, give priority for teaching verb phrase rather than more important grammatical structures such as noun phrases (Lewis, 1997). It is important for teachers to “Provide opportunities for students to practice different grammar points” through efficient and appropriate activities (Harmer, 2007:210). It is an effective method to relate grammar teaching to studying language in a reading or listening texts. Noun phrases defined as group of words where the noun or pronoun is the head of the constituent and they are obligatory (Jackson, 1980). The noun phrase can be taught through using authentic texts. The more complex noun phrase consists of three positions; the head, the pre modification which includes items before the head and the post modification that is suited after the head (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990). Noun phrases are not as explicit as language learners expect. They sometimes fulfill the position of the subject where as in other contexts they come at the position of the object as the word order of English sentence is S V O (Subject, Verb, Object).

Using communicative language teaching approach in teaching grammar is recommended to foreign and second language learners. The main purpose of this method is focusing on grammar in practice rather than dealing with complicated treatments in grammar books (Leech, 1994; Harmer, 2007). Although teachers should learn these grammatical structures, it is not useful to introduce students to all complex structures. Teachers are supposed to know about both approaches, communicative and non-communicative, to succeed in their teaching. They should be able to analyze language rules that they teach in order to explain their practice to students, and they use these rules in classroom to overcome some grammar difficulties.

Some grammarians argue that certain language structures such as passive voice is easy to teach whereas other features such as tense/aspect morphology are not (Zhou, 1991). It is going to analyse some syntactical and morphological features of nouns and noun phrases found in an authentic piece of English. The text is adapted from The Times Higher Education magazine. The article published in December the 9th 2010, and titled “Coalition survives Lib Dem backbench rebellion to carry fees vote in Commons”. It talks about the new plan of the coalition government to raise the tuition fees in England, and has a high level of authentic language required for the current research. We will analyze some syntactical features of the noun phrase in terms of the modification of these phrases. It will also provide a morphological analysis of some chosen nouns. It will then try to link the analysis of the chosen phrases with the pedagogy of teaching grammar by drawing a sample task for a foreign language classroom. The exercise is for advanced learners of English who master the basic rules of grammar.

## **2. Syntactical Analysis**

The distinction between utterances and sentences is not obvious and linguists’ attempt to distinct between them is only for the purpose of analyzing texts (Hudson, 1984). The syntactic structure of the sentence is not easy to analyze, and the structure of the phrases within that sentence is also hard to analyze as a result of its complexity. The author will try to analyze some complex noun phrases in an attempt to shed light on their modification positions. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) distinguish between pre modification and post modification position within the noun phrase where the former

precedes the noun and the later follows it. The paper will extract some examples from the article in order to illustrate this classification and later present them as a task for advanced language learners. This step may raise the awareness of the complex syntactic features of the noun phrase among teachers hoping that it may help them in teaching grammar for some advanced learners of English. This step comes in line with what some researchers recommend that teachers should present grammar using effective efficient and appropriate activities (Harmer, 2007; Leech, 1994). The following sentence presents a good example of how complex the noun phrase could be:

1. *The tuition fee cap in England is set to rise to 9,000 after the coalition government survived a rebellion from Liberal Democrat backbenchers to win a House of Commons vote.*

The total number of nouns in this sentence is thirteen, but it has only seven noun phrases. Four of them drawn as noun phrases whereas the remaining three are acting as a complement for the prepositional phrases. The first underlined point in the current sentence found in the noun phrase “the tuition fee cap”, which acts as the subject of the sentence. This noun phrase consists of a central determiner “the”, two noun phrases “tuition fee” and a head “cap”. The noun phrase is pre modified by a determiner which is the definite article “the”, and the same noun phrase is pre modified by a noun and the latter is already modified by another modifier “tuition fee cap”. The noun phrase can be pre modified by a modified modifier (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990). The same noun phrase in this sentence is post modified by a prepositional phrase “in England” which contains a preposition and a noun phrase. A single noun phrase can contain all this complexity in one position, and could result in difficulties for beginner learners of the language. For instance, the difficulty can be in determining the position of the subject when drawing the sentence tree. The second noun phrase “the coalition government”, which acts as a subject for the second clause provides another example of the previous issue that the noun phrase can be pre modified by another noun phrase. This constituent is a combination of a central determiner, a noun phrase and a head.

The next noun phrase “a rebellion” which fulfills the object position and consists of a central determiner and a noun. The post modification position

is more complicated as it has more than one element. It is post modified by the prepositional phrase ‘‘from Liberal Democrat backbenchers’’, where the latter consists of a preposition, two proper nouns, and a head. The same noun phrase ‘‘a rebellion’’, is also post modified by a non-finite, infinitive clause (to win a House of Commons vote) which can be analyzed to an infinitive, a possessor noun, and a head.

This sentence can become two main clauses conjoined by ‘‘after’’. It is clear that the real syntactical structure of the first clause according to the traditional word order in English is ‘‘The tuition fee cap is set to rise to 9.000 in England’’. The noun phrase ‘‘the tuition fee cap’’ is post modified by the prepositional phrase ‘‘in England’’ to emphasize the place. The current sentence is useful in raising the awareness about the elements that can come in the pre or post modification position of the noun phrase. The noun phrase is pre modified by either a noun as a modifier or a modified modifier as in ‘‘The tuition fee cap’’. Teachers can also use this sentence with a group of advanced learners to illustrate that the noun phrase can be post modified by another phrase such as a prepositional phrase or a non-finite clause such as an infinitive clause.

***2.The new fee cap – which is still subject to a vote in the House of Lords next week – will enable universities to charge undergraduate tuition fees of up to 9.000 from 2012-13.***

The second sentence has seven nouns where five of them drawn as noun phrases but the rest occurred within the prepositional phrase. The first noun phrase ‘‘***The new fee cap**which is still subject to a vote in the House of Lords next week***

that contains a central determiner and a head,” a vote”. The second prepositional phrase “in the House of Lords” consists of a determiner and a possessor noun. The last prepositional phrase” next week” consists of a preposition and a noun. The whole clause is used to give more information about the first noun phrase “the new fee cap”, which is acting as the subject of the main clause.

The noun phrase “undergraduate tuition fees” consists of an adjective phrase, a noun phrase and a head. This phrase is also having another useful instance of a noun phrase “fees” that is pre modified by a modified modifier “undergraduate tuition”. The previous sentence can be used to aware advanced language learners about another element that may post modify the object “universities” which is the finite relative clause “to charge”. It is useful to make students understand that the noun phrase can be post modified not only by a prepositional phrase, but also by both the finite and non-finite clauses. It also provides an important example of the items that may pre modify the noun phrase such as the adjective phrase and the noun phrase.

3. *As the debate carried on inside the Commons, masses of students, lecturers and other activists outside were confronted by lines of police in riot gear and on horseback.*

The third sentence is divided into two main clauses conjoined by the conjunction “as”. The initial clause has two noun phrases, the first one consists of a head “*debate*” pre-modified by a central determiner “*the*” and the other one is acting as a complement for the prepositional phrase (“*inside the Commons*”). The latter consists of a head” commons” and a central determiner “the”. The important issue is found in the second clause which has a compound noun phrase “masses of students, lecturers and other activists”. It is post modified by non-finite clause “*outside*”. This non-finite clause is implicit, as the verb of the original clause “protesting outside” which make it clearer has disappeared. The non-finite clause that is post modified the noun phrase may be explicit as in the first analyzed sentence in this paper or implicit as in the current sentence (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990). The third sentence offers an appropriate example to teach advanced language learners implicit non-finite clause that may post modify noun phrases.

## **1. Morphological analysis**

The first morphological feature highlighted in the text is the zero derivational morphology between some nouns and their verbs. Jackson (1980) pointed out that there are some lexical items in English which can be changed from one word class to another without adding any new morphemes and he lists example of “net” which can be a noun as well as a verb. The current text is rich of examples that explain the previous point. For example, the nouns: result, vote and support can stand as nouns and verbs without any effect on the semantic as well as the phonology of these words. They have the same free morphemes. These examples can be useful to raise awareness among advanced learners, particularly, in the foreign language classroom where their first language may have not the same feature. It can be also useful for teachers to show these learners that some words are not classified under specific word class by just looking at its shape. Crystal (1987) argues that the class of the word depends on its position in the sentence. In other words, the context of the word will decide its form.

The second morphological issue in the same text is found in the noun “stand-off”. This noun formed by combining a free morpheme “stand” and a bound morpheme “off”. If we break this noun down, the result will be the word “stand” which can be a noun as well as a verb and the preposition “off”. The deletion of one of the morphemes will lead to semantically and morphologically distinct words.

Another example is the noun “set to” which consists of a free morpheme "set" and a bound morpheme “to”. The first morpheme "set" alone can also stand as a noun and a verb, and the morpheme “to” can stand as a preposition. Each morpheme has a different meaning and different word class alone. Hudson (1984) mentioned that the relationship between the morphological structure of some words and other properties such as semantics is complex in English. The previous words have no semantic relationship between their morphemes, but they give together a certain meaning. They provide a useful example for teaching advanced language learners that some words could give different meaning when combined with certain prepositions. However, the same words give different meaning when these prepositions deleted.

The last morphological point is the plurality of some nouns. Plural nouns in English can be recognized by either the presence or the absence of the inflectional morpheme “s’ (Crystal, 1987). Some nouns in the current paper, morphologically, do not have this morpheme but semantically known as a plural. For example, the noun “government” has no an inflectional morpheme to be a plural but semantically is identified as a plural noun. Such a point can present a good example to teach for advanced language learners.

The discussion of the syntactical and morphological structure of some noun phrases in the previous text reveals that the noun phrase is a very important and complex pattern of the sentence in English. These patterns can be useful to grammar teaching in the language classroom. The complexity of these words depends on different issues such as the number of morphemes and the relationship between them. These nouns can be also pre or post modified by more than one morpheme at the same time, and they require more attention from language teachers. They could be beneficial for the advanced language classroom to raise the Awareness about the Importance of (NPs) in grammar teaching.

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#### **4. The exercise**

This part of the paper will suggest exercise for potential advanced language learners. The focus of the task should be on the grammar in practice as it is recommended to use the communicative approach in teaching grammar (Harmer, 2007; Leech, 1994).

##### **4.1 Exercise 1:**

The teacher in this task will give the students an authentic article as the current one asking them to do the following:

1. Underline each pre-modified noun phrase in the text.
2. In pairs, compare your answers.
3. In pairs, classify each pre-modifier of each sentence.

This task aims to make students learn the items that may pre modify the noun phrase by drawing a sentence tree. It also provokes them to correct their answers by working in groups so they benefit from their peers' feedback (Harmer, 2007). The last section of the task could help them recognize the different elements that might occur in the pre modification position. Finally, the teacher explains their answers to make sure they understand the pre-modification position of the noun phrase.



## **4.2 Exercise2:**

The second task is designed to assure students' understanding of the elements that may post modify the noun phrase. For example, the prepositional phrases, the finite clauses and the non-finite clauses. The teacher could create sentences that have a noun phrase post modified by one of the previous elements. He may start with the following sentences and ask the learners to think of similar examples:

The car that he bought from Germany is very expensive.

The car waiting outside is my car.

The flowers in that garden have been destroyed.

## **4.3 Exercise3:**

This part of the task designed to focus on the morphology of the noun phrase. The teacher asks students to list some nouns that have the same free morphemes as their verbs. He could also ask the students to search for nouns that have semantic meaning of plurality such as the word people.

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