

li126

Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

Iria Pastor-Gómez

The Status and Development of N+N Sequences in Contemporary English Noun Phrases

Peter Lang

This volume aims to carry out a comprehensive analysis of those nouns within the structure of the noun phrase which are referred to as N+N sequences (e.g. *drug addiction*, *computer cluster*). They are studied from three perspectives, namely their status as syntactic constructs, their evolution as becoming morphological items through a process of lexicalisation – whereby they gradually acquire properties of a semantic, morphological, orthographic and phonological nature –, and their use in which several variables such as speech community, mode and textual category are in operation. Additionally, this volume touches upon the problems in establishing clear-cut boundaries between morphology and syntax in order to define their status and evolution. A comprehensive corpus analysis rounds off the study.

Iria Pastor-Gómez studied English Language and Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela and obtained her MA in 2000. She also holds an MA Degree in Journalism and Communication Studies (2002). In December 2009 she received her PhD in English Linguistics and works now as a Lecturer of English at the Galician School of Higher Studies in Hotel Management, attached to the University of Santiago de Compostela.

The Status and Development of N+N Sequences in Contemporary English Noun Phrases



Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

Edited by Maurizio Gotti,
University of Bergamo

Volume 126

ADVISORY BOARD

Vijay Bhatia (Hong Kong)
Christopher Candlin (Sydney)
David Crystal (Bangor)
Konrad Ehlich (Berlin / München)
Jan Engberg (Aarhus)
Norman Fairclough (Lancaster)
John Flowerdew (Leeds)
Ken Hyland (Hong Kong)
Roger Lass (Cape Town)
Matti Rissanen (Helsinki)
Françoise Salager-Meyer (Mérida, Venezuela)
Srikant Sarangi (Cardiff)
Susan Šarčević (Rijeka)
Lawrence Solan (New York)
Peter M. Tiersma (Los Angeles)



PETER LANG

Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Oxford • Wien

Iria Pastor-Gómez

The Status and Development of N+N Sequences in Contemporary English Noun Phrases



PETER LANG

Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

British Library and Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

A catalogue record for this book is available from *The British Library*, Great Britain.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pastor-Gómez, Iria

The status and development of N+N sequences in contemporary English noun phrases / Iria Pastor-Gómez.

p. cm. – (Linguistic insights: studies in language and communication; v. 126)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-0343-0534-1 E-ISBN 978-3-0351-0193-5

1. Grammar, Comparative and general–Noun phrase. 2. Grammar, Comparative and general–Syntax. 3. Grammar, Comparative and general–Coordinate constructions. 4. Generative grammar. I. Title. II. Series.

P271.P37 2011

425'.54–dc22

2011009455

ISSN 1424-8689 (Print-Ausgabe)

ISBN 978-3-0343-0534-1 E-ISBN 978-3-0351-0193-5

© Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern 2011

Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland

info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com, www.peterlang.net

All rights reserved.

All parts of this publication are protected by copyright.

Any utilisation outside the strict limits of the copyright law, without the permission of the publisher, is forbidden and liable to prosecution.

This applies in particular to reproductions, translations, microfilming, and storage and processing in electronic retrieval systems.

Printed in Switzerland

To my parents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to Teresa Fanego and Carlos Acuña for their constant support during the preparation of this volume. They have undoubtedly facilitated my research in a number of ways contributing with explicit and highly valuable input. This could not have been possible without their help, which I gratefully acknowledge here. I would like to thank Francisco Gutiérrez Díez, Carmen Portero Muñoz, Paloma Núñez Pertejo, Ana Martínez Insua and Paula López Rúa for their feedback in earlier versions of this work.

This volume could have not been done without the support of the research unit *Variation, Linguistic Change and Grammaticalization*, funded by the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation (grant no. HUM2007-60706 (CONSOLIDER)), the Autonomous Government of Galicia (grants no. INCITE 08PXIB204016PR; 2008-047) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

I also wish to show my thanks to my family and friends and especially my parents, Ana and Vicente, to whom I dedicate this book; without them nothing in my world would be as it is. Finally, to Laurent, because without his support, strength and contagious constancy this would not have been possible at all.

It goes without saying that, in spite of the contribution of those I have just mentioned to the execution, development and conclusion of this volume, any errors or inaccuracies that remain in my work are exclusively my own responsibility.

Table of Contents

<i>1 Introduction</i>	13
1.1 Aims	14
1.2 Overview of the research	14
 <i>2 Noun Phrase Structure</i>	 17
2.1 Definition, function and structural patterns of noun phrases ...	18
2.1.1 Definition of noun phrases	18
2.1.2 Noun phrases and nominals	23
2.1.3 Structural patterns	24
2.2 Premodification	30
2.2.1 Component parts of premodification	30
2.2.2 Order of premodifiers	31
2.2.3 Possible combinations	33
2.3 The role of premodification as opposed to postmodification	36
2.3.1 Previous studies	36
2.3.2 Lack of explicitness and context information	37
2.3.3 The pragmatic function of premodification	40
2.4 Summary and concluding remarks	42
 <i>3 Nominal Modifiers: Definition and Characteristics</i>	 45
3.1 Nominal modifiers	45
3.1.1 Nouns as modifiers	46
3.1.2 The variability of stress patterns	49
3.1.3 Morphological properties of nouns as modifiers	53
3.1.4 Suggested reasons for the use of N+N sequences	56
3.1.4.1 Compactness	56
3.1.4.2 Availability	57
3.1.4.3 Predictability	58

3.2	Earlier analyses of N+N structures	59
3.3	Ambiguity in N+N sequences	67
3.3.1	Syntactic ambiguity	68
3.3.2	Semantic ambiguity	70
3.3.3	Categorial ambiguity: gradience and conversion in N+N structures	74
3.4	The boundary between syntax and morphology	78
3.4.1	Criteria for the definition of the status of N+N structures	80
3.4.2	The process of acquisition of new lexicon: institutionalisation and lexicalisation	88
3.4.2.1	Compounding and compounds	88
3.4.2.2	Institutionalisation and lexicalisation	96
3.4.3	Concluding remarks. Can N+N structures be considered a method of word formation?	100
3.5	Nominal modifiers versus other kinds of modification within the noun phrase (genitive phrases, adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses)	102
3.5.1	The premodifying position	102
3.5.2	The postmodifying position	106
3.6	Summary and concluding remarks	108
4	<i>Corpus Analysis</i>	111
4.1	A hypothesis around four variables	112
4.1.1	Text category	113
4.1.2	Speech community	119
4.1.3	Time period	119
4.1.4	Mode	120
4.2	The corpus	120
4.2.1	The corpora of written English	121
4.2.2	The corpora of spoken English	122
4.2.3	Text sampling	126
4.2.4	Methodology	134
4.3	Overview of the data	137
4.3.1	Text category	140
4.3.2	Speech community	140

4.3.3	Time period	144
4.3.4	Mode	145
4.4	N+N structures and lexicalisation	146
4.4.1	Criteria for the classification of lexicalised and non-lexicalised N+N structures	147
4.4.2	General results	151
4.4.3	Text category	151
4.4.4	Speech community	152
4.4.5	Time period	154
4.4.6	Mode	156
4.4.7	Summary	158
4.5	General discussion	160
5	<i>Summary and Conclusions</i>	173
	<i>Appendices</i>	185
	<i>References</i>	205
	<i>Index</i>	215

1 Introduction

The English language is a boundless source of investigation. As with many other fields of scientific study, new discoveries simply lead to new questions, and hence open up further avenues of research. The phenomenon under investigation in this volume has been present in the English language for centuries and has been a major source of word formation, along with borrowing and derivation. However, during the 20th century a sudden and very significant increase in the use of these devices was noted (cf. Biber/Clark 2002). Trends and fashions emerge constantly in contemporary society, and language, as an essential component of social interaction, is also governed by fashion. By implication, the use of nouns in modifying position in Present Day English seems to be the result of a trend, with the use of such forms increasing and spreading through the language. However, this only constitutes a superficial explanation of a linguistic phenomenon which merits a far more detailed and analytical assessment. As we will see in this volume, there is only a small available literature on this topic, and most extant research only deals in a relatively superficial way with it. Indeed, some studies have looked at N+N structures as part of a wider investigation (cf. Jucker 1992; Biber/Clark 2002), while others have addressed very specific issues (cf. Warren 1978 and Benczes 2006, an assessment from a semantic point of view; Giegerich 2004, from a phonetic perspective; Rosenbach 2007, a comparison of N+N sequences to genitive phrases); other studies adopt earlier approaches (cf. Levi 1978, from a Generativist perspective), while others have contributed to the literature with small, although valuable, articles (cf. Varantola 1993; Rosenbach 2005). For this reason, a large-scale monographic study on the topic is now in order.

1.1 Aims

This volume aims to study those nouns which function as premodifiers in noun phrase structure and which, in combination with the head noun they modify, are referred from hereafter as N+N structures or N+N sequences (e.g. *university library*). Their function as premodifiers is far from being prototypical, since nouns usually function as heads of noun phrases, whereas premodifying position is prototypically filled with adjectives. However, the present research will show that their frequency of use in contemporary English is high.

In order to do so, N+N sequences are studied from three different perspectives: their status, their evolution, and their use. In terms of their status, the structures are considered here as syntactic constructs (cf. Huddleston/Pullum 2002), in contrast to other scholars, who have considered them to be morphological compounds (cf. Levi 1978; Warren 1978; Benczes 2006). As for their evolution, some may become part of the lexicon through a gradual process of lexicalisation, acquiring properties of a morphological, semantic or orthographic nature. Finally, from the point of view of their use, it will be shown that several different variables are in operation.

1.2 Overview of the research

Chapter 2 serves as an introductory review of the theoretical framework adopted, and offers some considerations on the structure of the noun phrase. It focuses on the definition, function and structural patterns of noun phrases as well as their dependents, among which premodifiers are emphasised. A summary of different interpretations of the noun phrase in the literature is offered. These have proposed, variously, that noun phrases may be defined in terms of their component parts (head and dependents), their dependency relations (modifiers depend on the head), and their order relations (modifiers may precede or succeed the head noun).

Chapter 3 discusses nouns as modifiers and provides a thorough analysis of their principal features. It also includes a definition of N+N sequences, as well as a series of explanations which justify their use. A review of previous literature on the matter is also given. This chapter also deals with the ambiguity arising from the use of N+N sequences from three points of view: syntactic, semantic and categorial. The problems in establishing clear-cut boundaries between syntax and morphology when trying to define the status of N+N structures are discussed, and in connection with this, the questions of institutionalisation and lexicalisation will also be considered. Finally, nouns as premodifiers are compared to other dependents such as genitive phrases, adjectives, prepositional phrases and relative clauses.

Chapter 4 is in fact the empirical complement of the previous chapter, since it presents and discusses the findings from a corpus study of English texts on the evolution and use of N+N sequences. Firstly, it offers an explanation of the main hypothesis in terms of four different variables: text category, speech community, time period, and mode. Secondly, a thorough description and explanation of the corpora that have been chosen for the research, as well as of the methodology employed here, is given. Next, there is an overview of the data derived from the corpora. Also included is an explanation of findings from the perspective of the above-mentioned variables, as well as findings obtained after the application of various criteria to test the degree of lexicalisation N+N sequences have.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the investigation as well as the main conclusions reached. It also offers a number of suggestions for further research.

2 Noun Phrase Structure

In this chapter a brief account of the structure of the noun phrase (NP) is offered. The main goal of the current volume is the analysis of nouns which are embedded as modifiers in those larger units called noun phrases. In order to understand how a noun may act as a modifier in a noun phrase, attention must be paid to the processes which make this possible. Nouns prototypically function as heads of noun phrases, but the object of study here is their role as modifiers. In order to appreciate the differences between these two functions that nouns can perform, an initial analysis of noun phrases is therefore useful.

Each section below is devoted to one specific aspect of the noun phrase. Due to limitations of space and time, I will focus on the definition, function and patterns of noun phrases as well as the modifiers inside them, and will pay special attention to premodification. Accordingly, Section 2.1 deals with the definition and structural patterns of noun phrases. The phenomenon of premodification, where nouns also play an important role, is then discussed in Section 2.2; issues such as the order of premodifiers, their component parts and their possible combinations are also examined. Section 2.3 is then devoted to the role of premodification as opposed to postmodification; there is a reference to previous works (such as Raumolin-Brunberg 1991 or Biber/Clark 2002) that have made a quantitative analysis of the use of premodifiers. Those earlier works will place nominal modifiers *vis-à-vis* the rest of modifying devices. I will also analyse aspects such as the lack of explicitness and context information as well as the pragmatic function of premodification.

2.1 Definition, function and structural patterns of noun phrases

The following subsections offer an account of the different approaches that grammars have made to noun phrases. It should be borne in mind, whilst discussing these different approaches, that the present study of the noun phrase is based on the idea that constituents in an NP are built up of a continuous and recursive sequence of items, and that they may be studied from the point of view of their form and function.

2.1.1 Definition of noun phrases

The concept of phrase has been defined in a variety of ways over time. Jespersen (1976 [1914]: 15) defined it as a combination of words put together in order to form a sense unit. Similarly, Kruisinga (1932 [1909]: 177) distinguishes “syntactic groups” as a combination of words which are part of a sentence. On the other hand, Hockett (1958: 152–154) refers to composite forms which are hierarchically organised. As an illustration, *the old dog* in *the old dog lay in the corner* is a composite form as well as *lay in the corner*. Both of them are part of a construction type, that is, a group of constructions which are similar in some specified way, since both constructions involve the modification of one immediate constituent by the other. Thus, in *the old dog*, *old* is a descriptive adjective which functions as the second immediate constituent, whereas the noun *dog* is the first immediate constituent. Hockett also adds that the composite form yields a constitute, which also belongs to the class of singular nouns. What is thus implied is that the form-class of the composite form is identified with one of its immediate constituents; this is why *the old dog* is a singular noun phrase just as *dog* is. These constructions are called endocentric. However, it seems that, at the time when Hockett was writing, the boundary between syntax and morphology was somewhat unstable, Hockett himself including constructions such as *the old dog* and *blackbird* within the label “endocentric constructions” (1958: 185). Despite this, what consti-

tutes a major advancement in the study of the noun phrase is that he refers to the concepts of **head** and **attribute** when observing that “the constituent whose privileges of occurrence are matched with those of the constitute is the head or centre; the other constituent is the attribute.” (1958: 184). One way or another, this notion of endocentrism has survived to the present day.

More recently, Aarts and Aarts (1988: 10–14) refer again to the idea of the noun phrase as a headed phrase in which the head is the only obligatory constituent. They also use categories and functions to describe sentence units. The general idea is that the component parts of syntactic groups can be divided into lower units until the moment at which indivisible units are reached. Within the context of Generative Grammar, X-bar theory (Jackendoff 1977) views all phrases as the product of syntactic rules which are context-free, and makes use of lexical categories such as N, V, A, P (noun, verb, adjective, and preposition) as the starting point of projection paths. These categories are assigned bars and often prime symbols also (X', X'', etc.), leading to a three-level structure. Thus for nouns, the noun phrase would be equivalent to N'' (N-double-bar), N''' or possibly N'''. It allows any constituent in the X-bar hierarchy to contain another constituent of a lower or even higher level. Example (1) may serve as an illustration of this.

- (1) a broadcast of the new show

This is an N'' which contains an N' which contains a P'' (*of the new show*) and an N'' (*the new show*) within it.

Other approaches to the noun phrase have been made within the framework of Functional Grammar, which focuses on the communicative function of language. With Functional Grammar a new pragmatic perspective is added to the study of language. It seeks to find an explanation for phenomena according to their function in language use. Functional Grammar describes the English clause as a combination of three different structures deriving from distinct functional components, namely:

- (i) Ideational. Clause as representation → transitivity.
- (ii) Interpersonal. Clause as exchange → mood.
- (iii) Textual. Clause as message → theme.

The group structure is also a combination of these three components. *Group* is a term which Halliday (1985: 158–159) uses instead of *phrase*, arguing that “a group is in some respects equivalent to a word complex – that is, a combination of words built up on the basis of a particular logical relation.” The differences between *group* and *phrase* are mainly that “whereas a group is an expansion of a word, a phrase is a contraction of a clause.” (1985: 159). Halliday recognizes the existence and relevance of noun phrases, which he calls *nominal groups*. He emphasizes the value of groups (or *phrases* in the terminology employed here) since they provide very important aspects of meaning. Were it not for phrases, the lack of an intermediate level between clause or sentence and word would entail an enormous loss of insight. That is, describing a sentence as a construction of words is rather like describing a house as a construction of bricks, without recognizing the walls and the rooms as intermediate structural units (Halliday 1985).

Cognitive Grammar offers a different approach to the study of noun phrases. In principle, it starts from the same premise as do the generativists when it conceives of language as knowledge in the mind. However, it differs in its conception of grammatical organisation and of the specific proposals concerning semantic structure (Langacker, 1990: 1). In fact, Langacker regards grammar as non-generative and non-constructive, not an algorithmic device giving a well-defined class of expressions as output, and contends that there is no such a thing as a form without meaning. Since meaning drives grammatical encoding, judgements about the grammaticality of some structures are not categorical but simply a matter of gradience. Grammatical structures do not constitute an autonomous formal system but, rather, are symbolic. Thus, lexicon, morphology and syntax belong to a continuum of symbolic units.

This notion of grammar gives a new perspective to the definition and use of noun phrases, both in terms of the categories of which they are comprised as well as the functions of each of their component parts. Thus, Langacker points out that categories such as nouns may be defined in notional, rather than grammatical, terms (Langacker, 1990: 59). As far as functions are concerned, the consideration of the determiner as the head of the noun phrase will be explained later in this chapter.

Traditionally, there is a distinction between the lexical category *noun* and the syntactic category *noun phrase*. As Taylor (2002: 343) points out, noun phrases, or nominals, may exhibit considerable internal complexity. In terms of their conceptual organisation noun phrases have four components:

- (i) Specification. A given noun is a type that may be specified by using an adjective modifying it (e.g. *red apple* still designates an apple but it is more specific).
- (ii) Instantiation. The relation between the type and its instances (i.e., those which are candidates to be selected by the noun phrase). While the noun designates a type, a noun phrase designates an instance of the type (e.g. *red apple* refers to a specific apple and not any other).
- (iii) Quantification. Refers to the quantity of the designated instances (e.g. *a red apple* vs. *some red apples*).
- (iv) Grounding. The speaker locates the designated instance from the perspective of the speech event (e.g. whether it is definite or indefinite as in *this red apple*).

These four aspects stand in relation to one another. Thus, specification is internal to instantiation, and quantification is internal to grounding. Dependents define specification, determiners specify grounding, while quantifiers specify quantification. Figure 1 serves as an illustration.

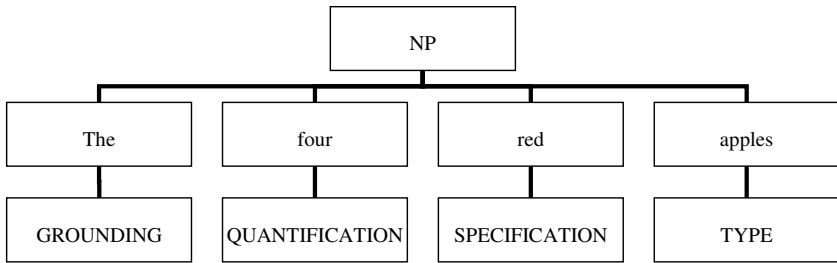


Figure 1. Noun phrase components regarding their conceptual organization.