DEVERBAL NOUNS WITH POSTMODIFYING PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

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It has often been pointed out\(^1\) that deverbal nouns (nouns derived from their corresponding verbs, with or without suffixation) often require complements\(^2\), as the following example shows.

(1) The second development was the election in September 1978 of a Polish Pope. (Thatcher 1995:371)

This construction has at least two characteristic properties. One is that most complements in this construction are of prepositional phrases. The second is that prepositional phrases denoting time and place often cut into the more immediately connected phrases of deverbal noun and complement phrase. I shall focus on the second point in particular, briefly referring to the first point.

For this purpose, I have collected all the 100 examples to be analyzed from my readings of various sources. While I am concerned with the analysis of this construction in present-day English, I shall pay attention to the construction in 18th and 19th century English, to see whether or not such a construction was already used in earlier periods.

1. Previous studies. Quirk et al. (1985:1290) discuss the co-occurrence of deverbal nouns with postmodifying phrases, showing degrees of awkwardness as follows (slightly modified).

(2) ? the(ir) arrival for a month
(3) ? the(ir) behaviour with courtesy
(4) * the(ir) contribution out of kindness

They comment as follows:

It appears that adjuncts relating to duration, manner, or cause are awkward or inadmissible as postmodifiers. Deverbal nouns… might be described as mere records of an action having taken place rather than as descriptions of the action itself.

But as I discuss later, prepositional phrases relating to time and place in particular are admissible as postmodifiers. These phrases agree with the nature of deverbal nouns.
Webster (1977) also discusses the ordering of prepositional phrases as follows:

(5) Reorganisation by the civil servants of the machinery
(6) Reorganisation by the civil servants of the machinery for their salary negotiations

She considers the length of prepositional phrases to be a determining factor. She further comments that locative and temporal prepositional phrases occur most naturally, which, incidentally, agrees with my observation.

From slightly different perspectives, Hopper and Thompson (1984:738) give three types of argument structure with nominalizations as follows.

(7) Susan’s arrival
(8) the introduction of leavened bread
(9) his discussion of breads

They comment that the (8) type (one argument) is far more frequent than the (9) type (two arguments). Most of my data contain only (8) type nominalizations.

Fries (1999) discusses the following patterns of complement structure in relation to relative information.

(10) the reluctance of some to accept his own unsupported testimony
(11) a very moving appeal to all Christians to do all they can
(italics are Fries’s)

The structure consisting of deverbal noun + prepositional phrase + to infinitive was found in my data as follows:

(12) Our failure in the 1960s to consider as an alternative government
where… (Thatcher 1995:140)
(13) …witness a partly unconscious decision by the government to base
the administration more than ever… (Anderson: 149)

But in this paper I have excluded this kind of structure from the discussion, partly because this structure differs slightly from the one I am discussing.

Regarding terminology, the term ‘nominalization’ is often used to include both deverbal and de-adjectival nouns (i.e., kind = kindness) on the basis of their systematic morphological correspondence. The functions of deverbal nouns and de-adjectival nouns, in this respect, are similar to each other. I shall, however, be concerned with the functions of deverbal nouns in this paper. As regards the functions of nominalization, see Quirk et al. (1985:1288–92) and Francis (1989).
Also as regards genres, nominalizations are often used in written language. Chafe (1982) mentions that the uses of nominalization as a device for detachment and of sequences of prepositional phrases characterize written language.

2. Analysis and discussion. First of all, look at the patterns of this construction in my data. As Table 1 shows, the most frequent pattern is ‘the + deverbal noun + time + of’, and the next most frequent patterns are ‘the + deverbal noun + place + of’ and ‘the + deverbal noun + by np + of’.

The following are some representative examples of each pattern.

(14) the + (adj.) + N + time prepositional phrase + of:
    a. Yet another was the attempted assassination in 1878 of the police chief, General Trepov. (Bullock: 32)
    b. …eventually led to the foundation in 1978 of the European Democratic Union (EDU). (Thatcher 1995:340)
    c. The bombing at dawn of the previous day of the nuclear engineering plant at Al Qubai, so cunningly disguised that… (Forsyth: 448)

(15) the + (adj.) + N + place prepositional phrase + of:
    a. The early 15th century also saw the development in England of a school of predominantly religious music. (Hindley: 97)
    b. …the growth in Russia of the Posolski… Prikaz and… (Anderson: 241)
    c. …the existence in these early languages of certain very similar terms relating amongst other things to ritual and religion… (Renfrew: 250)

(16) the + (adj.) + N + agent prepositional phrase + of:
    a. …in the run-up to the expected ratification by the US Senate of the treaty. (Thatcher 1995:245)
    b. …a result of the crushing by its rulers of any social institution… (Anderson:380)
    c. …but a device which allows the handling by the individual of symbolic concepts and… (Renfrew: 274)
(17) possessive + N + time/place prepositional phrase
   a. I had successfully persuaded President Regan in the course of our discussions in Washington of the importance of attending the Cancun summit… (Thatcher 1995:168)

(18) other
   (a) …a translation into Gothic of the Bible, made in the fourth century a.d., parts of which still survive. (Renfrew: 68)
   (b) …saw the establishment on a hitherto unknown scale of the practice of creating… (Anderson: 126)
   (c) …caused a Protestant anti-Irish reaction even in 1865 against the party which seemed more closely identified with the Irish. (Blake: 111)

The preposition attached to a deverbal noun is identical to that found with the corresponding verb, such as react against = reaction against, participate in = participation in, and resign from = resignation from. In this case, unlike those of of, the deverbal noun does not often take the, which partly explains that the noun often takes either no article, the indefinite article or plural number. That is, other prepositions than of weaken the restriction of modification of the deverbal noun.

As regards the order of prepositional modification, Jespersen (1961 V: 68–72) discusses subject and object order in nexus-substantives with reference to prepositions:

(19) S (possessive) + of + O
    our rare admission of strangers

(20) S (pos.) + preposition (other than of) + O
    his resemblance to my confessor

(21) S (with of) + O (with of) …very rare

(22) S (with of ) + O (with some other prepositions)
    the hatred of Hyde for Jekyll

(23) S (with by) + O (pos.)
    his expulsion from power by the Tories

(24) S (with by) + O (with of)
    the accidental discovery by Miss Knag of some correspondence

(25) S (with by) + O (with some prepositions other than of )
    a monstrous arrogance that could not tolerate any approach to her by others

Jespersen’s data are old and are not based on frequency, and therefore are different from my results.

Francis (1989:205) discusses a function of nominalization as encapsulation of given information which often serves as departure of point in the discourse. This
statement gives the expectation that a deverbal noun is accompanied by the definite article and demonstratives.

From the viewpoint of information structure, it is generally known that the end position of a sentence contains new information, often with lengthy NPs. This is often called a principle of end-focus or end-weight. Wales (1989:318) states that ‘new information most commonly occurs towards or at the end of an utterance (end-focus)’. In the same vein, Quirk et al. (1985:1357) also say:

‘it is common to process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value. We shall refer to this as the principle of end-focus.’

From these statements given above, it is expected that a prepositional phrase complement with a long range of modifiers come at the end of a sentence. The reason for the frequency of time and place prepositional phrases is that, first of all, these phrases often co-occur with verbs, and consequently verblike nouns (i.e. deverbal nouns), and that the in-between position of time and place adverbial phrases is appropriate in the flow of discourse, introducing more informative parts towards the end of a sentence.

While deverbal nouns often become subjects, many deverbal nouns of this construction come after the verb. Table 2 shows the positional frequency of deverbal nouns in my data.

It turns out that deverbal nouns are placed towards the end of sentences. Categories (d) and (e) include the following examples.

(26) The pronoun choice was clearly motivated by the predominance at the time of women teachers, a situation which led… (Baron: 175)

(27) I had successfully persuaded President Reagan in the course of our discussions in Washington of the importance of attending the Cancun summit which was held that October in Mexico. (Thatcher 1993:168)

The subject position is fairly frequent, and this is mainly explained by the fact that the subject is in old information position4 and that the deverbal noun used in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Occurences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. object position</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. subject position</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. complement position</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. past participle + prep + DN</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. other</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Positional frequency of deverbal nouns.
that position often serves the function of linking the sentence to the previous one(s), as in example (28). From time to time, a deverbal noun appears in subject position with new information, but that deverbal noun is turned into an old information noun, as in example (29).

(28) Rapid and forcible integration of conquered territory with that of the conqueror at any level, religious, economic or social, was exceptional. Certain political and fiscal obligations had of course to be accepted by the newly acquired area; but they did not as a rule involve any drastic change in its social organization. Thus, for example, the conquest by Russia during the great Northern War (1700–21) of the Swedish provinces of Livonia and Esthonia had little influence on society in these areas. (Anderson: 34)

(29) A control by landlords of the life of their own localities as complete as that in England or Prussia can be seen in many other parts of Europe. In Hungary and Poland this control was absolute, unchallenged and unchallengeable. (Anderson: 54)

So far I have discussed the structure of deverbal nouns with postmodifying prepositional phrases from the perspective of end-weight informativeness. But from a different perspective, I should briefly look into the possibility of reduction of postmodification by prepositional phrases (cf. Quirk et al. 1985:1274).

The example given before, repeated here, can be considered as omission of a verb phrase, as in,

(30) \[\approx (1)\] The second development was that the election of a Polish Pope took place in September 1978.

A prepositional adverbial phrase usually co-occurs with a dynamic verb. Because of its verbal nature, a deverbal noun, which is different from an ordinary noun (e.g., boy), is allowed to co-occur with a prepositional phrase of time and place, but the cooccurrence is economically based and slightly condensed. In this elliptical construction, more emphasis is placed on the recording of an event including time and place than the happening of the event. What kind of verb should be supplemented depends on the deverbal noun.5

Finally with regard to this construction in the 18th and 19th century English, I examined approximately 50,000 words of each in Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations, and George Berkeley’s Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues as 18th century data, and John Stwart Mill’s On Liberty and Other Essays and Charles Darwin’s The Origin of Species as 19th century data. I found only two examples of this construction in 19th century English as follows.
(31) In the modern world, the greater size of political communities... prevented so great an interference by law in the details of private life...
(Mill: 18)

(32) We see this in the recent extension over parts of the United States of the species of swallow having caused the decrease of another species.
(Darwin: 127)

Because of the scarcity of examples, we cannot tell to what extent this construction was prevalent in Late Modern English. More data should be collected to confirm the trend.

3. Conclusion. I have discussed deverbal nouns with postmodifying prepositional phrases in terms of information structure and have demonstrated that sentence parts are not randomly arranged, but meaningfully placed in sentences according to communicative purposes. Generally speaking, given/old information comes first, and new information comes late. The structure of postmodification of deverbal nouns as central accords with this flow of discourse. I also hinted at the possibility of analysis of the postmodification structure as reduction of a verb phrase. As regards the older stage of this structure, more data will be needed.

1 I am grateful to Laurel Brinton, Peter Robinson and anonymous reviewers for reading and commenting on an earlier version of the present paper.
2 The ‘complement’ in this paper refers to any completing function of prepositional phrases.
3 This group shows heterogenous patterns not included in the types given above, with a variety of meanings.
4 In this paper, given/old information and new information have been taken for granted. For detailed discussions on this topic, see Lambrecht 1994:43–50 and Wales 1989.
5 Usually, omission suggests several possibilities, but in the case of the deverbal noun construction when a verb is retained, it seems that a low content verb is most prototypical.

TEXTS

REFERENCES


