

**ALEX HO-CHEONG LEUNG AND WIM VAN DER WURFF (EDS),
THE NOUN PHRASE IN ENGLISH. PAST AND PRESENT.
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The noun phrase (NP) could be considered as one of the most fundamental units of English grammar. Of the numerous aspects of the English NP the book under review covers six of those which have so far received little attention or on whose adequate description and explanation a consensus is yet to be achieved. It therefore comes as a welcome contribution to English linguistics, both synchronic and diachronic.

Kristin Davidse's paper "Complex NPs with third-order entity clauses: Towards a grammatical description and semantic typology" proposes a new solution to the problem of NPs with clauses that refer to third-order entities,¹ as in (1a):

- (1a) What the 37-year-old finds most soul destroying about Haiti is *the fact that things have not changed since his childhood*.

Quirk et al. (1985: 1260–2, 1271–2) analyze such NPs as instances of apposition: *the fact* and *that things have not changed since his childhood* are treated as coreferential nominals, whose presumably identical reference is "analogous to a copular relationship" (ibid.: 1301), as witnessed by paraphrases such as the following:

- (1b) the fact is that things have not changed since his childhood

However, this account "fails to cover the whole range of NPs with third order entity clauses, as neither indefinite NPs nor NPs with nouns such as *annoyance* and *denial* exhibit the alleged equivalence relation" (Davidse, p. 15):

- (2a) A message that he would be late arrived by special delivery.
(2b) *A message was that he would be late.
(3a) The denial that unemployment is related to crime pervades the crime prevention initiatives discussed here.
(3b) *The denial is that unemployment is related to crime.

Others, including Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), thus reject this description and analyze such complex NPs as instances of nouns with complementation, based on the analogy between examples such as (4) and (5) below.

Having considered the two alternative approaches, Davidse argues "that complex NPs with third-order entity clauses divide into two distinct types defined by a different dependency structure coding different schematic semantics" (p. 33), viz. the complementation type and the appositive type (a somewhat misleading label, given

¹ That is, "such abstract entities as propositions, which are outside time and space" (Lyons 1977: 443).

that Davidse views the type as a headed construction with one head and one premodifier, not as two heads in apposition, at the same syntactic level).

The complementation type (represented by NPs with deverbal head nouns) is characterized by a complementation relation between the head noun and the third-order entity clause, as in (4). For this type, systematic alternation is available with a sentence in which the complement clause relates to a verb corresponding to the noun, as in (5). Furthermore, there is an identifiable speaker or cognizant whose presence can be made overt, as in (6):

- (4) The document below is *the order to attack Japanese cities with atomic bombs*.
- (5) They ordered to attack Japanese cities with atomic bombs.
- (6) The order by the generals to attack Japanese cities with atomic bombs.

The appositive type (with shell nouns, such as *fact*, *possibility*, *likelihood*, *axiom*, and *rule*) involves modification, as in (1a), cited above; Davidse argues that the noun “is a premodifier and functions as a base-level categorization of the following proposition” (p. 33), and the *that*-clause is the head of the NP because it “identifies the referent of the complex NP” (*ibid.*). There are two alternates that are systematically possible with the appositive type: an alternate with a copular clause, as in (1b) above, and an alternate without the shell noun, as in (1c):

- (1c) What the 37-year-old finds most soul destroying about Haiti is *that things have not changed since his childhood*.

What unifies the two types is “the very fact that they contain third order entity clauses,” and “their strong tendency to have esphorically motivated definite reference” (p. 33),² with esphora understood as “forward pointing reference within the NP” (p. 35), as in (7):

- (7) Walter and Luis Alvarez were able to propose *the claim that a collision with an asteroid 65 million years ago led to the extinction of dinosaurs*.

Davidse also proposes a semantic typology of NPs with third order entity clauses, not discussed here for lack of space.

Victorina González-Díaz’s paper “Adjective stacking in Early Modern English: Some stylistic considerations” deals with complex premodifying NP strings (as in a **big black dog**) from the diachronic perspective. The previous stages of English favoured “coordinated and ambilateral modification (e.g. *good and fast car / good car fast*) as well as the so-called *and*-adjective construction (e.g. *good car and fast*)” (p. 48). Naturally, this begs the question of what motivated the change towards adjective stacking, which, according to Fischer (2006), took place in the Middle English period, with fixed word order and fixed adjective position as possible causes. González-Díaz focuses on the “possible interaction(s) between socio-stylistic factors and the struc-

2 Cf. a similar claim put forward by Biber et al. (1999: 648).

tural development of the NP premodifying string” (p. 53), working with data from the multi-genre parsed corpus PPCEME.³

After positing some quantitative observations, González-Díaz provides a detailed analysis of 362 strings of two characterizing adjectives in premodification, including 164 instances of adjective stacking (AAN) and 198 instances of coordinated strings (A&AN). An initial analysis shows that “if any functional overlaps were to be established between stacked and coordinated strings in EModE, it would be in the context of descriptive attributive modification” (p. 58). It is shown that only the type of the head noun (concrete vs. abstract) is a statistically significant determinant of variation, with A&AN strings more frequent when the head of the NP is an abstract noun. Moreover, the (innovative) stacked AAN pattern is more prominent “in genres including texts with a high presence of involved, interactional features, such as drama, fiction and travelogues” (p. 61), and the (well-established) coordinated A&AN pattern is more frequent in genres “characterized by both high informational density and formal writing styles” (ibid.), such as educational treatises.

González-Díaz also shows that stacked adjectives first tended to function as descriptive modifiers (a *rych couetous merchante*), and only later started to have interpersonal functions, e.g. unitary modification (where two adjectives with a very similar meaning form a single unit with an intensifying function, as in *the most grave and serious matters*). This conforms to the well-established diachronic ideational-to-interpersonal trend. González-Díaz concludes that “it is clear that the history of stacked strings in English is a development in which written-based, discourse-oriented constraints play an important role” (p. 72).

Christine Günther’s paper “*The rich, the poor, the obvious: Arguing for an ellipsis analysis of ‘adjectives used as nouns’*” argues against the view that adjectives such as *rich* and *obvious* in the title of her paper undergo conversion, claiming that the adjective remains an adjective while premodifying a phonologically null head noun. Günther speaks of the Human Construction and the Abstract Construction, providing a detailed corpus-based description of both and a thorough comparison with their German counterparts, and, more interestingly, rejects their prevailing traditional analysis in terms of (partial) conversion or nominalization, based on these arguments:

- a) while *the lonely* is possible, *the alone* is presumably not; if *lonely* in *the lonely* and the like were nouns, “the fact that predicative-only adjectives are not allowed would be left unaccounted for” (p. 88);
- b) “the elements under consideration display adjectival [...] properties” (p. 87): while e.g. *the rich* has a plural meaning, there is no plural marking; moreover, the elements can be graded (*to help the poorer; new aid to the poorest*);
- c) numerals can be used as clear instances of ellipsis with an identifiable antecedent, such as *the many outcomes* in (8), but they can also be used without an antecedent,

3 Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English (1.7 million words of historical British texts written between 1500 and 1700); see <<http://www.ling.upenn.edu/hist-corpora>>.

in which case they receive a [+human] interpretation just as *the rich* and the like do, cf. (9):

- (8) Among the many outcomes under discussion, *only two* were really possible.
 (9) Eventually the tornado went away. Amazingly, *only two* died.

Günther acknowledges some weaknesses of her analysis, including the obvious one: if *the rich* and *the obvious* present instances of ellipsis, “overt lexical material should be freely insertable without having any crucial effect” (p. 96). Nevertheless, the Human Construction often allows the insertion of *people* (cf. *the rich* — *the rich people*), and Günther quotes examples allowing the insertion of overt lexical material even for the Abstract Construction:

- (10) May you make meaning in *the ordinary of our extraordinary days*.
 (11) both artists plant their feet firmly in *the ordinary stuff of everyday life*.

Günther concludes that “it appears to be fully justified to analyze the Human and Abstract Constructions as nounless noun phrases, i.e. along the lines of noun ellipsis” (p. 98).

Marianne Hundt’s paper “Variable article usage with institutional nouns: An ‘oddment’ of English?” challenges the traditional claim that British English prefers the bare NP use with institutional nouns such as *church* or *hospital* whereas American English tends towards the variant with the definite article. Hundt points out that “corpus data indicate that this is not simply a case of regional variation” (p. 114), and illustrates that, despite another traditional claim,⁴ not even semantics can reliably predict whether the article is used. Furthermore, “article use may vary with individual head nouns, which may, in turn, be diachronically motivated” (p. 118). Hundt’s analysis is based on data from the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English, and examines instances of *be at* or *go to* followed by up to four optional words and *hospital*, *church* or *university*.

As a variable rule analysis indicates, there are significant differences among the head nouns: *university* and *church* tend to be used in bare NPs while *hospital* tends to have the definite article. Furthermore, “[p]ostmodification of the head noun strongly increases the likelihood of article usage” (p. 132), and the institutional noun is more likely to be used without an article when following *go to*. Importantly, the variable rule analysis shows that the choice of the head noun (followed by the type of modification) is the most significant predictor of whether the definite article is used, and

4 Traditionally, it is assumed that the bare NP has “a general or ‘stereotypical’ activity reading” (p. 123), so e.g. *in prison* means ‘in the social institution,’ while *in the prison* means ‘in the building’ as “the definite article gives us the referential use” (ibid.); the contrast is illustrated by the following example: *We go to **church** together every Sunday, one week going to **the Catholic church** the next to the Protestant one*. As illustrated by several examples, however, this cannot be the whole story, e.g.: *I went to **church** with the bridesmaids and left my daughter alone in the house with her father. I am at **university** in Dresden*.

“contrary to common textbook wisdom, ‘regional variety’ is not the most important factor triggering the use of a definite article” (p. 133). However, the noun *hospital* in fact does fit the textbook wisdom as “it is frequently used without a definite article in BrE but strongly prefers one in AmE” (p. 134). Furthermore, the noun *church* is preferred without an article after forms of *go to*, regardless of regional variety, possibly because “the bare NP use of *church* with the specialized meaning of ‘church service’ has a long and continuous history in English” (p. 136). These findings “underscore the fact that a lot of grammar has a lexical base” (p. 135), which, I believe, supports the adequacy of the construction grammar perspective, with its usage-based view that “linguistic structure is fundamentally grounded in the language user’s experience with concrete lexical expressions,” and “constructions are often immediately associated with particular words” (Diessel 2015: 312).

Alex Ho-Cheong Leung and Wim van der Wurff’s paper “Anaphoric reference in Early Modern English: The case of *said* and *same*” focuses on the anaphoric *the said* + N (12) and *the same* + N (13), which “were frequent in sixteenth-century English but declined afterwards” (p. 143). The authors investigate the causes of this decline, thus contributing to attempts at explaining the decline of grammatical(ized) forms and constructions.

- (12) the king of sclauonye sente hys propre messenger vnto the fair mirro [...] than
the sayde messenger departed
- (13) First I wil write the tokenes of this infirmyte; The second the causes wherof
 it cometh; The thirde remedies for *the same*.

The authors track the proportion of anaphoric vs. non-anaphoric tokens of the relevant forms at different points within the EModE period, relying on data from Early English Books Online. As for *the said* + N, the data show “vigorous use of this anaphoric expression until 1570 but more limited use afterwards” (p. 158); the anaphoric use of *the same* is shown to be “dominant in the sixteenth century, rising further to more than 80% of all cases towards the end of the century, but then halving by the mid-seventeenth century and declining further after 1680” (p. 159). Furthermore, the authors identify a functional difference between the two expressions: while for the more explicit *the said* + N, the average distance from the antecedent is 48 words, for *the same* the distance is only 11 words on average. This difference in the referential profiles of the two expressions suggests that their decline might not be attributable to the same cause.

As for *the said* + N, meaning ‘the N that has been mentioned,’ the authors suggest that this anaphor declined “because the semantics of participial *said* as used in this anaphor had come to fall outside the semantic range covered by the verb *say* in its other forms and uses, and because the transience inherent in the semantics of anaphoric *said* would trigger an expectation of postnominal rather than prenominal positioning of the word” (pp. 175–176). For anaphoric *the same*, the authors propose that its grammaticalization was hampered by form–function problems: “Its close similarity in form (and distribution) to equivalence *the same* entailed relatively heavy processing costs and it did not have the right kind of phonological shape to

act as a minimal-distance anaphor.” (p. 176) Nevertheless, the authors point out that “further study of the exact contexts and conditions for use of anaphoric *the same* during the period of its productive use is still needed,” and, generally, “fuller work on textual reference in EModE will be needed to support, refine or disprove [their] ideas” (ibid.).

The last paper is Annette Mantlik and Hans-Jörg Schmid’s “*That*-complementiser omission in N + BE + *that*-clauses: Register variation or constructional change?” The paper investigates the omission of *that* in sentences such as *the truth is she never wanted to come anyway*. Previous research on *that*-omission in verb complementation (as in *I think she went home*) is guided by “the assumption that the omission is mainly a matter of stylistic choice and the assumption that it represents a case of diachronic change that can be described as constructional change” (p. 187). The authors use data from the Corpus of Historical American English to test these assumptions for *that*-omission in subject complement clauses; the first attested example of *that*-omission in a relevant context comes from 1605:

(14) But *the truth is*, they be not the highest instances that give the...

The analysis shows that “before 1810, complementiser omission is largely restricted to the noun *truth*, with *fact* gradually beginning to pick up and *thing* boasting its first appearance towards the end of the period” (p. 197). The meaning of the construction is primarily one of epistemic certainty in argumentative discourse with adversative and emphatic function. Notably, “once uses of the noun *truth* in the zero variant are introduced, they prove such a strong competitor for the full variant that they outnumber the full variant by a factor of two during the period between 1605 and 1810” (ibid.). Stylistically, “there is a clear tendency for *that* to be omitted in written text composed in casual spoken style and for it to be retained in more formal contexts” (p. 212). However, the stylistic-choice explanation is not enough to account for the data, and further factors need to be taken into consideration, including, for instance, collocational preferences as well as semantic (and possibly pragmatic) constraints, such as the argumentative function, an important property of the zero variant without *that*.

Around the 1830s, further nouns (*point*, *thing*, *trouble*) appear with *that*-omission, thus adding new, attitudinal meanings to the construction, and the development continues for both the full and the zero variant of the construction until the 1980s and 1990s, during which *that*-omission gains the upper hand; the last decades have witnessed “a strong increase in the relative frequency of the zero variant across a number of different nouns” (p. 210).

I have attempted to summarize the arguments and findings that I found most interesting and important — in strokes too broad, no doubt. Generally, I would like to express my belief once again that the papers, most particularly those by Hundt and by Mantlik and Schmid, underscore the construction grammarian’s mantra that a lot of grammar has a lexical basis.

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