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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

'Shell nouns' in English written and spoken monological academic texts

‚Shell nouns' v anglickém psaném a mluveném monologickém akademickém textu

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá lingvistickým fenoménem „Shell nouns" a jeho užitím v anglických, monologických, odborných, psaných a mluvených textech. Hlavním cílem práce je porovnat užití „shell nouns" v psaném a mluveném projevu z hlediska jejich sémantické klasifikace, pozice v lexikálně-gramatických vzorcích, diskurzních funkcí a potenciální frekvence výskytu. Práce klade otázky týkající se celkového vlivu psaného a mluveného jazyka, frekvence výskytu, sémantické klasifikace „shell nouns", funkce v lexikálně gramatických vzorcích a také anaforických a kataforických vazeb.Hlavním materiálem použitým k analýze mluvené odborné angličtiny byl korpus britské odborné mluvené angličtiny („British Academic Spoken English"), k analýze psaného textu pak byl použit vlastní korpus vytvořený z odborných článků. Teoretická část vymezuje samotný pojem „shell noun" a další příbuzné pojmy, sémantickou klasifikaci, lexikálně-gramatické vzorce a diskurzní funkce související s pojmem. Praktická část poté popisuje výzkum, poskytuje kvantitativní výsledky týkající se výskytu a analýzu vybraných „shell nouns" s cílem ověřit hypotézy této práce.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

shell nouns, odborný jazyk, angličtina, diskurzní funkce, korpusová lingvistika

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the linguistic phenomenon of "shell nouns" and its use in English monological, academic, written and spoken texts. The main objective of the thesis is to compare the use of "shell nouns" in written and spoken texts in terms of their semantic classification, position in lexico-grammatical patterns, discourse functions, and potential frequency of occurrence. The thesis raises questions concerning the overall impact of written and spoken register, frequency of occurrence, semantic classification of shell nouns, functions in lexico-grammatical patterns, as well as anaphoric and cataphoric relations. The primary material used for the analysis of spoken academic English was the British Academic Spoken English corpus, while a custom corpus created from academic articles was used for the analysis of written text. The theoretical part defines the concept of "shell noun" and related terms, semantic classification, lexico-grammatical patterns, and discourse functions related to the phenomenon. The analytical part then describes the research, provides quantitative results regarding the potential occurrence, and analyses selected shell nouns with the aim of verifying the hypotheses of this thesis.

KEYWORDS

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1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of the "shell noun" phenomenon in English written and spoken monological academic texts. The prevailing motivation for the selection of this topic stems from the overall scarcity of research regarding the notion, despite its rather frequent usage and occurrence. As far as the analysis is concerned, the phenomenon can be examined from different perspectives, which presents various challenges, however, it also proves to be particularly fascinating. It was intriguing to delve into the comparison of the employment of shell nouns in spoken and written texts.

The thesis is divided into two parts, theoretical one and analytical one. The theoretical part introduces the phenomenon in general (pp. 14-18) and provides an overview of lexico-grammatical patterns, in which shell nouns usually occur (pp. 19-23). The following sections of the theoretical part look to define the different research perspectives (pp. 24-40) - the first section provides the semantic classification of shell nouns (pp. 24-36) and comments on the notion of prime shell nouns, good shell nouns, less good and peripheral shell nouns (p. 28). The second section then introduces the concept from discourse functional perspective and defines related topics (pp. 37-40). The third section then presents the phenomenon from the perspective of register and academic language and provides some existing data regarding the topic (pp. 41-43).

The analytical part firstly presents the methods and materials used to conduct the analysis (pp. 44-47).

The first segment of the analysis concerns shell nouns in spoken academic English. Firstly, an overview of quantitative data collected from the corpus is provided and discussed (pp. 49-51). Two specific shell nouns are then selected based on their frequency of occurrence and thoroughly analysed with accompanying examples. (pp. 52-72)

The second section of the analytical part shifts its focus to the phenomenon in written academic English. Adopting a similar methodology to the analysis of shell nouns in spoken English, this section maintains continuity in approach. (pp. 72-86)

The final section presents discussion and conclusions regarding the findings (pp. 87-90).

The main objective of this thesis is to confirm the hypothesis that there will be variations in all aforementioned aspects affected by the different registers.

The thesis poses research questions regarding the situational characteristics of the registers and the extent to which these characteristics affect the occurrence of shell nouns and their characteristics from the perspective of semantics, discourse-related functions, lexico-grammatical patterns and potential frequency.

The thesis aims to answer the following questions:

Is the frequency and range of (potential) shell nouns register-dependent? Do the most frequent (potential) shell nouns fall into the category of prime shell nouns?

Does the register impact the occurrence of a specific semantic class of shell nouns?

Will there be any differences in the lexico-grammatical patterns from the established norms outlined in the theoretical framework?

Similarly, does the register affect the discourse-related functions?

As far as the materials and methods are concerned, the theoretical section was primarily based on the works of Hans-Jörg Schmid (2000; 2018), a pioneering figure in the shell noun research. The sources for the analytical part were the British Academic Spoken English corpus (BASE) and a custom corpus of written academic English.

2.   Theoretical background

The following section aims to introduce the *shell noun* phenomenon in terms of its general definition, origin and classification, as well as provide different perspectives of its functions - semantic, discourse-related and register-specific ones. The majority of this section will be based on and adapted from the works of Hans-Jörg Schmid[1] (2000; 2018), who can be considered a pioneering figure in the shell noun research.

2.1.   Shell noun phenomenon

The term shell noun originates from its function to "shell" or "encapsulate" content, and was coined by Hans-Jörg Schmid (2018). Some instances of these nouns are *concept*, *idea*, *fact*, *way, aim, plan* or *reason* (Schmid, 2018). While this section of the thesis primarily references Schmid's (2000; 2018) studies, the phenomenon was, for instance, also explored by Flowerdew (2003; 2015), Francis (1986), Aktas and Cortes (2008), Kolhatkar and Hirst (2014), Tárnyiková (2018), Vergaro (2018) or Halliday and Hasan (1976). However, some of these linguists have employed a different label for the concept (Aktas and Cortes, 2008).

The understanding and definition of the linguistic phenomenon appears to be functional, therefore its classification is mainly based on the function in actual discourse and contextual information (Schmid, 2018). According to Schmid (2018), such nouns are generally recognized as abstract, however, these abstract nouns can also occur in other functions. Moreover, not every abstract noun can be used as a shell noun, since a shell noun is defined as a vague, abstract noun, whose textual function consists in opening up "an inherent semantic gap that must be filled by information from the linguistic context" (Schmid, 2018).

Their distinguishing characteristics are dependent on and differ based on the intended purpose and specific context they are used in. Schmid (2018) further proposes that there

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[1] Namely: Schmid, Hans-Jörg .2018. Shell nouns in English – a personal roundup. Caplletra 64 (Primavera, 2018), 109-128. ISSN 0214-8188.
Schmid, Hans-Jörg. 2000. English abstract nouns as conceptual shells. From corpus to cognition. Mouton de Gruyter.

are three central functions of shell nouns on "three levels of description" that need to be taken into consideration - "encapsulating function" on the "cognitive level", the "semantic function" on the "level of meaning" and "referring function" on the "level of discourse":

" [...] shell nouns serve an encapsulating function by contributing to the formation of temporary thing-like concepts. This function derives from the hypostatizing potential of nouns, i.e. their potential to suggest the existence of a bounded thing-like entity." (Schmid, 2018)

In contrast to other nouns, shell nouns "encapsulate" particular concepts that are typically "local", (mostly) "context-specific" and hence *"transient."* The linguistic context encapsulated by the particular shell noun is called the *"shell content."* Shell content is crucial when it comes to the resolution of the referent that is identified as (for instance) *a problem*, *challenge* or *aim* - the referent can vary with each instance of using these nouns.

"On the level of meaning, shell nouns serve the semantic function of characterizing the propositional content encoded in the linguistic cotext." (Schmid, 2018) The potential for characterization is not as "transient" as the encapsulating one. Rather than to the contextual meaning, it is more connected to the lexical meaning of nouns, and it can range from being very broad, such as in nouns like *thing*, *fact*, *case*, *situation*, or *event*, to being quite precise, as seen in nouns like *disadvantage*, *reassurance*, or *peculiarity*. (Schmid, 2018)

"On the level of discourse, shell nouns serve a linking and referring function by instructing readers and hearers to bind the semantic characterization provided by the noun with that encoded as shell content." (Schmid, 2018)

Shell nouns, like deictic elements, have the capacity to point to specific reference points in a given context. However, unlike typical deictic elements such as personal or demonstrative pronouns, shell nouns, in addition to their "referring" or "pointing function", possess, due to their characterising and encapsulating function, a distinct "symbolic potential." This symbolic potential becomes most apparent when comparing the use of shell nouns in anaphoric reference, such as "this idea must be pursued" or "that problem must be solved," to the use of demonstratives as the heads of noun phrases, like "this must be pursued" or

"that must be solved" alone. Merely referencing a previously mentioned proposition with demonstratives does not characterise the specific proposition and transform it into a concept that is "thing-like" yet "transient" and established within the discourse context. (Schmid, 2018)

2.1.1. Operationalization of shell nouns

Schmid (2018) provides some commentary on the "operationalization of shell nouns" and, therefore, highlights the difference between mere theoretical definition of the phenomenon, its actual demonstration and the fact that there appears to be some confusion regarding the delimitation of shell nouns. Schmid (2018) then exemplifies such confusion with Flowerdew and Forest's (2015) comparison of their definition of "signalling nouns" (i.e. their preferred term for shell nouns) with Schmid's (2000). This comparison lies in Flowerdew and Forest's (2015) focus on the lexical relations of shell nouns/signalling nouns and Schmid's (2000) "syntactically driven position" - to which Schmid (2018) opposes by providing the following argument:

"Grammatical patterns are explicitly used as a means of operationalizing by Schmid (2000), but do not serve as a definition." (Schmid, 2018)

Preferably, the operationalization of shell nouns should be based on and derived from their definition and the criteria of selecting and excluding them. (Schmid, 2018) According to Schmid (2018), such criteria include the following:

1. It is important that only *nouns* function as shell nouns, since they can, in contrast with anaphoric/reference pronouns, achieve the "strong concept-forming effects."

2. Shell nouns can only be realised by nouns that have the ability to provide a "semantic gap", which can be filled with "information from the linguistic context." The relationship formed by the shell noun and shell content is called "experiential identity" - such relation is best portrayed by linguistic features that can be provided by sentences containing shell nouns. It is possible to observe these shell noun-shell content connections in the so-called "identifying constructions", where they are established by the verb *BE*, e.g. the aim is to

provide a review (Schmid, 2018). There are, however, other patterns that can be observed regarding the relation between shell noun and shell content. Schmid (2018) then demonstrates a pattern, where the noun can be referred to as a "bivalent signalling noun'' (Flowerdew and Forest, 2015), since it is active in two different relations -

"The reason why the preceding sentences are written in such a lousy style is that I am trying to illustrate the way shell nouns work in actual use.''

In this example, the word *reason* functions as a shell noun and establishes one relation with the *that*-clause (that functions as a subject complement) and the other one with the complementing *why*-clause. However, the relation of experiential identity is certain only in the first one.

"since the *that*-clause actually provides the motivation for an action (trying to illustrate...), while the *why*-clause actually encodes the outcome of the explanatory quasi-causal relation established by the noun reason. '' (Schmid, 2018)

3. There is a restricted set of lexico-grammatical patterns that prove especially appropriate for deciphering the connection of experiential identity between shell noun and shell content. To demonstrate specifically, Schmid (2018) provides a list with six possible patterns functioning in structures with shell nouns. The recognized patterns and their examples are provided below (Table 1).

Table 1. *Lexico-grammatical patterns typical of shell noun constructions* **(Schmid, 2018)**

Patterns	Examples
a. Shell NP + BE + complementing *that*-clause, *to*-infinitive clause or interrogative clause	The problem is that I have to leave now. The idea is to have fun. The question is why you have to leave.
b. Shell NP + postnominal *that*-clause, *to*-infinitive clause or interrogative clause	The fact that I have to leave ... The aim to have fun ... The question why you have to leave ...
c. Referring item (+ premod) + shell noun	This (wonderful) idea must convince them all.
d. Referring item + BE (+premod) + shell noun	This is a wonderful idea.
e. Shell NP + *of*-PP	The notion of love ... The idea of having fun ... The question of why you have to leave ...
f. it is (+premod) + shell NP + that-clause or *to*-infinitive	It is a great idea to go out and have fun. It is quite a big problem that I have to leave.

The above lexico-grammatical patterns will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

2.1.3 Shell nouns and their lexico-grammatical patterns

Schmid (2000) proposes that for communicative purposes, shell nouns should not be interpreted in their isolated form solely, conversely, their content should be taken into consideration as well. These relations between expressions within the same piece of discourse are caused by the speaker and the linguistic devices they use. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) Speakers use lexico-grammatical patterns to link shell nouns to their shell contents.

Schmid (2000) argues that shell nouns are mainly used in four types of lexico-grammatical patterns, however, in his more recent study, he provides a list with six types of such patterns (Schmid, 2018). Therefore, this section will take all *six* aforementioned patterns (see Table 1.) into consideration.

According to Schmid (2000), the following three patterns titled *Shell NP + **be** + complementing clause; Referring item + (premod) + shell noun* and *Referring item as subject + **be** + shell noun (phrase)* seem to be rather unambiguous in terms of understanding their syntactic structure, clausal constituents, shell nouns, and content.

2.1.3.1 Shell NP + *be* + complementing clause

The first pattern (*Shell NP + **be** + complementing clause)* allows for the shell-noun phrase to function as a subject in an SVC (subject-verb-complement) clause, where the linking verb is *be.* In this SVC-clause, the shell content is included in a *that-, wh-* or infinitive clause, which functions as a subject complement. (Schmid, 2000) When using this pattern, speakers/writers can emphasise the shell content by positioning it at the end of the sentence (Schmid, 2018).

To exemplify, Schmid (2000) provides the following sentence (shell noun in bold) -

"**The advantage** is that there is a huge audience that can hear other things you may have to say."

2.1.3.2 Referring item + (premodifier) + shell noun

The second introduced pattern concerns *Referring item + (premod) + shell noun.* In this case, the link between the shell noun and its shell content is established by various linguistic elements (namely, *the, this, that, some, other, such*), which have the potential to create "demonstrative or comparative anaphoric reference." (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) The shell noun phrase in this pattern can perform various syntactic functions (Schmid, 2000).

The following example demonstrates the pattern (see shell noun in the subject function in bold) -

"(Mr Ash was in the clearest possible terms labelling my clients as anti-semitic.) I hope it is unnecessary to say that **this accusation** is also completely unjustified." (Schmid, 2000)

2.1.3.3 Referring item as subject + *be* + shell noun (phrase)

In the *Referring item as subject + be + shell noun (phrase)* pattern, the link between the shell noun and its shell content spans across three sets of elements. Schmid (2000) clarifies that in this case, pronouns, such as *this*, *that*, *it*, function as mediators between the text that actually expresses the shell content and the shell noun. These pronouns function as subjects at the onset of Subject-Verb-Complement clauses, referencing the shell content through "extended reference", "text reference" or "reference to fact" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). This reference is then transmitted through the linking verb *be* to the shell noun phrase. In the clausal structure, the shell noun phrase serves as a subject complement. Schmid (2000) then further proposes that this pattern could be considered a mixture of the copular type *Shell NP + be + complementing clause* pattern and the anaphoric type of *Referring item + (premod) + shell noun pattern.*

"(I won the freshmen's cross-country. - Mm.) That was **a great achievement** wasn't it?" (Schmid, 2000)

2.1.3.4 Shell noun + postnominal clause

This pattern, as noted by Schmid (2000), is considerably less clear than the preceding ones, since it includes an abstract head noun and a following *that*-clause*, to*-infinitive or *wh*-clause which conveys the shell content. However, the syntactic status of the clauses and the syntactic relations appear to be somewhat more complicated, since some linguists consider both noun complement and appositive modifiers as potential roles/functions within the clauses (Schmid, 2000).

"This may seem somewhat paradoxical, especially if one thinks of complements as giving necessary, and of appositions as giving non-necessary, additional information, as many linguists have traditionally done. It must be added, however, that Quirk et al. (1985) allow for cases of restrictive appositive clauses." (Ibid.)

It is also relevant to mention the degree to which a specific pattern chooses abstract nouns, and therefore serves as a predictor of their function as shell nouns. This pattern distinguishes itself from the other patterns by creating the ideal conditions for shell nouns to prosper (Schmid, 2018).

Schmid (2018) acknowledges that the previously mentioned pattern of *Shell NP + be + complementing clause* falls under the same concept.

The pattern *Shell noun + postnominal clause* can be observed in the example below:

"Mr Bush said Iraq's leaders had to face **the fact** that the rest of the world was against them." (Schmid, 2000)

In his most recent publication on shell nouns, Schmid (2018) introduces two additional lexico-grammatical patterns. Namely - *Shell NP + of-PP* and *it is (+premod) + shell NP + that-clause or to-infinitive.*

2.1.3.5 Shell NP + *of*-PP

The reliability of this pattern as an indicator for a noun being a shell noun is, according to Schmid (2018), significantly lower than that of the previously mentioned patterns since it admits a broad array of abstract as well as concrete nouns. The lower "predictive potential" of the *NP of NP* pattern is due to the fact that the preposition *of* is polysemous and often signifies "possession" or "part-whole relation", rather than indicating identity. Schmid (2018), however, argues that this weaker reliability as an indicator predicting the presence of a shell noun does not imply that there are not any valid instances of shell noun usage.

To illustrate such shell noun structure -

"The idea of having fun …" (Schmid, 2018)

2.1.3.6 *It is* (+premod) + shell NP + that-clause or *to*-infinitive

The pattern often incorporates a "premodifying adjective", which enables speakers to introduce additional evaluations and descriptions that emphasise their perspective on the content encapsulated as shell content.

When using this pattern, the speaker/writer can emphasise the shell content - the most valuable piece of information - by shifting it to the end of the sentence. Furthermore, the pattern draws attention to both the shell noun and its content, a characteristic identified by Schmid (2018) as "double-focus."

To illustrate -

"It is a great idea to go out and have fun." (Schmid, 2018)

2.2 Research perspectives

The aim of this thesis is to explore the selected linguistic phenomenon from several viewpoints - to analyse the *semantic classification* of *shell nouns*, the *discourse functional perspective* of them and to study the notion from the perspective of *register*. The following chapters will provide theoretical background for these perspectives.

2.2.1 Classification of shell nouns from semantic perspective

Schmid (2000; 2018) proposes a semantic classification of shell nouns into six categories, which are then sub-categorized into groups (see Table 2 below). For each category, Schmid (2018) provides a "preferred complement type."

"This classification was mainly based on the meanings of the nouns themselves,

but it was also supported by their preferences for the different types of complements

listed in the right-hand column. It must be emphasized that these preferences are

indeed what the term suggests, i.e. tendencies rather than strict rules." (Schmid, 2018)

Other findings have proven that these nouns grouped together can vary significantly in their interaction with complements.

Table 2: Classes and groups of shell noun uses with preferred complement types (Schmid, 2018)

Classes	Groups	Examples	Preferred complement type
Factual	Neutral	*thing, fact, phenomenon*	*that*-clause
	Causal	*reason, result, upshot*	
	Evidential	*evidence, proof, sign*	
	Comparative	*difference, similarity*	
	Partitive	*aspect, part, example*	
	Attitudinal	*problem, advantage, irony*	
Linguistic	Propositional	*news, argument, rumour*	*that*-clause
	Illocutionary	*statement, question, order, offer, complaint*	dependent on type of illocution
Mental	Conceptual	*idea, theory, notion, mystery*	*that*-clause
	Creditive	*belief, knowledge, view, illusion*	*that*-clause
	Dubitative	*doubt, question, disbelief*	*that*-clause
	Volitional	*aim, plan, solution*	*to*-infinitive
	Emotive	*surprise, regret, delight, fear, worry*	*that*-clause
Modal	Epistemic	*possibility, danger, truth, reality*	*that*-clause
	Deontic	*permission, mission, need*	*to*-infinitive
	Dynamic	*ability, capacity, opportunity, destiny, fate*	*to*-infinitive
Eventive	General	*event, act, situation*	*to*-infinitive
	Specific	*attempt, effort, struggle, priority*	
	Attitudinal	*trouble, problem, success, mistake*	
Circumstantial	General	*situation, context, position*	varied
	Specific	*place, time, way, procedure, provision*	

According to Schmid (2000; 2018), the general six semantic categories of shell nouns are *factual*, *linguistic*, *mental*, *modal*, *eventive* and *circumstantial*. As mentioned above, there are some general tendencies regarding the complementation of the nouns. These concern, for instance, the *to*-infinitive complementations and the fact that they are mainly preferred in structures with shell nouns representing notions of "manipulation" or "wanting", whereas nouns encapsulating features of "knowing, believing, saying" are usually complemented by *that*-clauses (Schmid, 2018).

Schmid (2018) then further divides the categories into two larger sections, the first section including the first four classes of shell nouns, namely *factual*, *linguistic*, *mental* and *modal*. The shell nouns within those categories can be considered very frequent. They can be defined by encoding "abstract states of affairs rather than actions or events." (Schmid, 2018) The second section includes *eventive* and *circumstantial* nouns which can be, according to Schmid (2018), regarded as marginal.

Each semantic category specifies the type of experience intended to be portrayed by the shell noun. For instance, the *mental* classification encompasses ideas and cognitive states, while the *linguistic* category pertains to utterances, linguistic acts, and their resultant products (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014). Each category mentioned is then further separated into more precise semantic groups focusing on the subtle differences in how shell nouns are used within that category (Table 2).

 It is important to mention that the classification suggested by Schmid (2000), allows shell nouns to belong to more than one category - especially those that can carry different meanings - for instance *point* or *position.* Schmid (2000) also acknowledges the fact that very specific nouns (in terms of their semantic features), such as *irony* or *gripe*, are less common than the general ones.

"The property of intensional unspecificity is both a curse and a blessing for the classification and description of shell-noun uses. " (Schmid, 2000)

Schmid (2000) uses the word "curse" to emphasise the challenge of analysing the meanings of shell nouns, which proves to be quite difficult because they often have very broad and thus seemingly similar meanings. This is then exemplified by the shell nouns *aim* and

attempt and their apparent similarities in some shared features. On the other hand, Schmid (2000) regards the "unspecificity" as an advantage as well, since there is only a limited number of semantic features required to classify all the nouns identified as shell nouns (*factual*, *mental*, *linguistic*, *modal*, *eventive* and a peripheral one - *circumstantial*).

"It is apparent that these classifying features are neither primitive nor precise in the way usually aimed at by feature semanticists. Nor do they reflect ideological or philosophical assumptions concerning the nature of meaning. Instead they are conceived as elements of a metalanguage which provide fairly rough but economical characterizations of fundamental types of experiences." (Schmid, 2000)

The following subchapters will comment on the classes of shell noun uses in greater detail, which will also include a level of classification introduced by Schmid (2000) - "families."

A family categorises shell nouns that share similar semantic characteristics. Each family takes its name from the main noun within that group. Additionally, a shell noun is not limited to being a part of one family only (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014).

Kolhatkar and Hirst (2014) also provide an example of a shell noun family - *Idea* family. In such family, all the nouns are *mental* and *conceptual* - they are categorised as *mental* due to the fact that ideas can only be accessed through thoughts, and as *conceptual* because they represent contemplation or the application of a concept (see classification in Table 2). These families then also trigger a so-called "semantic frame." A semantic frame outlines conceptual structures, their components, and the way they relate to each other.

"For instance, the *Reason* family invokes the causal frame, which has cause and effect as its elements with the attentional focus on the cause" (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014).

2.2.1.1 Prime shell nouns, good shell nouns, less good and peripheral shell nouns

Both Flowerdew (2015) and Schmid (2000) comment on the levels of "typicality" of shell nouns and distinguish "prime shell nouns", "good shell nouns" and "less good and peripheral shell nouns."

Prime shell nouns, the central core of the class of shell nouns, are unique, since they are nominal concepts, which are not, from morphological perspective, derived from verbs or adjectives that express the same experience. Another distinguishing feature of prime shell nouns concerns the clear relation of experiential identity between shell nouns and their content. In terms of semantics, the majority of prime shell nouns are categorised as *factual nouns* (Flowerdew, 2015), thus forming the main focus of the following chapters.

Some examples of prime shell nouns are: *concept, fact, issue, principle, problem* (Flowerdew, 2015).

The second level concerns good shell nouns, which are, in contrast to prime shell nouns, easier to replace or substitute. Prime shell nouns are, therefore, more essential for their intended purpose, whereas good shell nouns can be paraphrased by verbal or adjectival structures, since they usually have related adjectives and verbs. Good shell nouns usually fall into the categories of *linguistic*, *mental* and *modal* shell nouns. (Schmid, 2000)

Some examples of such *shell nouns* are: *order, proposal, guess, belief, assumption, plan, likelihood, certainty, permission* (Schmid, 2000).

Thirdly, less good and peripheral shell nouns often represent events rather than abstract concepts. Since they cannot combine effectively with abstract shell contents, their usefulness is more limited than that of prime and good shell nouns. In comparison to the prime and good ones, less good shell nouns are encountered less frequently in the patterns *Shell noun + postnominal clause* and *Shell NP + be + complementing clause* (see patterns in the above chapters).

Some of the examples are: *move, measure, reaction, situation, way, procedure* (Schmid, 2000).

Schmid (2000) also mentions some very peripheral shell nouns, which are not abstract, but can be understood as shell nouns in some structures - "temporal nouns" (such as *time*, *stage*) and "locative nouns" (such as *place* or *area*).

2.2.1.2 Factual shell nouns

Factual shell nouns are used to establish conceptual shells for "abstract state of affairs" and "factual information." They distinguish six subgroups: *neutral*, *causal*, *evidential*, *comparative*, *partitive* and *attitudinal* (see classification in Table 2). In his earlier work, Schmid (2000) includes the category of family as well, the examples of which will be provided below.

For *neutral uses*, Schmid (2000) suggests a *Thing* family*,* where the leading shell noun is *thing.* Other examples of such shell nouns are *thing, fact* or *phenomenon.*

The *neutral shell nouns* in the *Thing* family are some of the most vague nouns in English. Their only shared characteristic is the factual feature. The noun *thing* is especially vague and seems to convey very little information when used as a shell noun. This vagueness highlights its role in forming concepts, but raises doubts about its ability to describe experiences.

However, Schmid (2000) suggests that upon closer examination, it becomes clear that truly neutral uses of the noun *thing* as a shell noun are extremely uncommon. Such uses can be often observed in the "pattern *th-N* - with the referring items *this* and *that*, *one* and *(an)other, different* and *same,* and *first*, *next* and *last*" (Schmid, 2000).

 Nevertheless, even in these structures, there can be a subtle indication of a negative assessment, which can be exemplified by the following sentence:

"If **this thing** is a fraud it is a very expensive ... " (Schmid, 2000)

Moreover, every shell noun appears in a typical grammatical pattern - these grammatical patterns have been discussed in the previous chapters. Kolhatkar and Hirst (2014) provide the standard patterning for the *thing* family, namely *N-that, N-be-that.*

Schmid's (2000) study states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *fact, point, case, thing, business, phenomenon*

In *causal* uses, the collocation **fact** *+ that-clause* is frequently used. (Schmid, 2000) Quirk et al. (1985) suggest a number of semi-fixed phrases containing the *fact that* that are available to speakers and used to convey *causal* meaning. For instance - *because of the fact (that)…; in view of the fact (that).* (Quirk et al., 1985) However, the important thing is to observe causality as a connection between two events or facts. In this connection, we distinguish between the "cause", which is understood as something happening before, helping to cause, or being responsible for another event/action, called the "effect." The distinction is particularly relevant in this sense, since it results in division of three of the four families within the category of *causal shell nouns* - when speakers use the nouns in the *Reason* family*,* the focus is directed on the cause, however, when they employ shell nouns from the *Result* family, the effect aspect within the *clausal* relation is emphasised. When using the nouns *link* and *connection*, which are the only two nouns in the *link* family, the speakers can direct attention to both parts of the relation, i.e. to cause as well as to effect. The nouns in the fourth family, *reward* family, are used to combine the effect with an attitude element (Schmid, 2000).

Schmid (2000), then also adds that many of the collocations in the *reason* family reference the cause as well as the effect, which can be seen in the following example.

"...use a number of technical terms. **The reason** for this *(effect)* is that in this chapter we *(cause)*…" (Schmid, 2000)

Schmid's (2000) study states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *reason, thing, cause, ground, result, effect, outcome, consequence, up- shot, impact, sequel, payoff*

The third, *evidential* use, Schmid (2000) argues, is more complex than the *causal* one. It is because of the fact that the *causal* use is a component of the frame that represents the *evidential* relation. In other words, in the "evidential frame", the general idea is this: an observable "fact" *or* "state of affairs" is seen as a cause for a mental state. Unlike the *reward* family (from the *causal* group), this mental state is more about intellect than emotion.

Schmid's (2000) study states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *proof, evidence, reminder, indication, implication, sign*

In the *comparative* group*,* the shell noun use is determined by the basic process of comparison. We distinguish two groups of nouns in the *difference* family - the first group of nouns expresses "similarity" (such as *similarity*, *analogy*) and the nouns in the other group express "differences" (Schmid, 2000). Schmid's (2000) study shows that expressions of difference are much more common than expressions of similarity.

Schmid's (2000) study also states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *difference, alternative, distinction, contrast, analogy, discrepancy, similarity, inconsistency*

The *partitive* use of shell nouns concerns for instance the *aspect* family. Nouns in these families are highly relational, meaning they often come with prepositional phrases that express specific relationships, which was, according to Schmid (2000), problematic in corpus study, since the corpus query did not include such postmodifiers, therefore the actual frequency of these nouns could actually be higher that what Schmid (2000) originally suggested.

There is a certain ability that suggests an attributive relation that the *aspect* family members share and that unites them semantically. This relation leads to the use of prepositional

phrases with the preposition "of." This relation could be understood as a "metaphorical extension" of the "PART-WHOLE relation."

"The underlying idea is that aspects, features or characteristics 'are parts of or 'belong to' abstract entities in the same way as parts 'belong to' the objects which they make up or to which they are attached." (Schmid, 2000)

Schmid's (2000) study states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *point, aspect, factor, feature, distinction, characteristic, essence, attribute*

The last group of *factual* shell nouns concerns *attitudinal* ones - *attitudinal* factual shell nouns are characterised by speakers expressing their opinions and "attitude" about certain situations (or parts of them) and incorporating them into the nouns they use. Schmid (2000) distinguishes five families within this group - the first two families mostly include very common shell nouns, which are not morphologically derived, and some of them are used very frequently. The *problem* family includes nouns used to show facts as obstacles to achieving a goal. In contrast, the nouns in the *advantage* family describe facts as helping to make progress easier. The third group that Schmid (2000) proposes, is called the *irony* family, where the nouns are usually derived from adjectives, however, there are some very notable examples of shell nouns within this grouping. These nouns have the ability to encapsulate/shell what is noteworthy, intriguing or interesting about a fact without expressing any particular emotion. On the other hand, the two remaining families let speakers express their either positive (*miracle* family) or negative (*tragedy* family) emotions on the particular matter. The nouns in *tragedy* family can, however, occur within the *factual* or *eventive* category. In *factual* use, they are usually combined with *that*-clauses (Schmid, 2000).

Schmid's (2000) study states these nouns as some other examples of shell nouns in this group: *point, thing, problem, trouble, difficulty, snag, dilemma, drawback, catch, disadvantage, burden, obstacle, hurdle, handicap, downside, complication, predicament, crux*

2.2.1.3 Linguistic shell nouns

Linguistic shell nouns enable speakers to depict various linguistic actions and their outcomes. The contents of the shell-content structures depict utterances, typically in patterns like *N-that, N-be-that, th-N or th-be-N* (Schmid, 2000).

"The linguistic shell nouns themselves contain the reporting speakers' characterization of the utterances they report." (Schmid, 2000)

Schmid (2000) demonstrates this and explains using the following example:

"To counter the apparent dynamism of the Democrat team, the best the White House has been able to conjure up is **the tired accusation** that they are liberals and lackeys of special interest groups."

The *linguistic* shell noun phrase "the tired accusation" characterises the utterance "that they are liberals and lackeys of special interest groups."

Linguistic shell nouns are then further sub categorised into *propositional* and *illocutionary* (Flowerdew, 2015). *Propositional* shell nouns are used to direct hearer's focus towards the "propositional content" of the utterance, while *illocutionary* shell nouns shift the hearer's attention towards the "illocutionary force" of the utterance (Schmid, 2000).

Some instances of the *propositional* shell nouns are: *Point, report, news, argument, information, story, message, intelligence* (Schmid, 2000)

The *illocutionary* shell nouns are closely related to speech act verbs, therefore, these verbs, established by Searle (1969) and Austin (1962), can possibly be turned into shell nouns (Schmid, 2000).

These are some instances of such shell nouns: *question, offer, promise, demand, call, request, order, motion* (Schmid, 2000)

2.2.1.4 Mental shell nouns

Schmid (2000) introduces the mental uses by comparing them to the linguistic uses (presented above). The main similarity is in their primary purpose - namely linguistic shell nouns report "utterances", while mental shell nouns report "ideas." Schmid (2000) then extends the connection further and proposes that the distinction between propositional and illocutionary uses can be applied to the mental domain as well. Mental shell nouns that encapsulate the propositional contents of ideas, akin to propositional linguistic shell nouns, are termed *conceptual* shell nouns. Similarly, akin to illocutionary uses in language, there are *mental* shell nouns that allow speakers to convey the attitudes attributed to experiencers. These mental shell nouns depict psychological states and processes such as believing, wishing, or doubting. These psychological states are then further sub categorised as *creditive*, *dubitative*, *volitional* and *emotive* (Schmid, 2000).

Some examples of *conceptual* shell nouns are: *point, idea, position, issue, theory, notion, thought, principle, rule, subject, image, myth, law, theme, concept, secret, scenario, wisdom, hypothesis, thesis* (Schmid, 2000)

Examples of psychological state shell nouns: *idea, belief, hope, feeling, impression, speculation, knowledge, assumption, view, notion, line, opinion, conviction, experience, attitude, perception, philosophy, instinct, faith* (Schmid, 2000)

2.2.1.5 Modal shell nouns

Despite the term, modal shell nouns are not used solely to shell "modalities", but rather to convey speakers' opinions about how likely it is for the facts they mention to be true and to which degree it is possible, probable or certain that the facts are true or for the events they shell to occur. The nouns used in modal shell-noun constructions are closely semantically linked to modal verbs. This connection is evident because descriptions of modal verbs often involve the use of words like *possibility*, *necessity*, *permission*, *obligation*, and *ability* in a metalinguistic context. In terms of morphology, however, modal shell nouns are not associated with modal verbs, but with adjectives that convey modal meaning (for instance *possible - possibility, necessary - necessity*) (Schmid, 2000).

Modal uses are then sub categorised into *epistemic* uses*, deontic* uses and *dynamic* uses, respective examples of which are: *possibility, chance, probability; permission, right, freedom; ability, capacity, potential* (Schmid, 2000)

2.2.1.6 Eventive shell nouns

In Schmid's study (2000) the term event is used broadly to refer to observable happenings with a specific temporal duration. Although in his study, Schmid (2000) distinguishes "event" from "fact", it is also highlighted that in *generative grammar*, the term event is not just contrasted with fact, but also with "action", "act", and "process." Essentially, it refers to activities where the focus is on what is happening rather than who is doing it. This understanding also stems from how these entities can be expressed in syntax, mainly through "that- clauses, infinitives, gerunds, and nominalizations" (Schmid, 2000).

Eventive shell nouns can be further distinguished in three subgroups, namely *general eventive* uses*, specific eventive* uses*, attitudinal eventive* uses*.

The following nouns represent instances of the aforementioned subcategories: *event, change, action; attempt, effort, move; trouble, problem, difficulty* (Schmid, 2000)

2.2.1.7 Circumstantial shell nouns

Circumstantial shell nouns indicate a few different aspects, such as "situations, times, locations, manners of doing things and conditions for doing things" (Schmid, 2000). However, Schmid (2000) excludes *temporal* and *locative* nouns from the shell noun class, since they (especially locative nouns) do not seem to be abstract, it is also questionable whether these locative and temporal nouns exhibit the required semantic gap inherent in shell nouns. Additionally, from a syntactic perspective, the *wh-clauses* following nouns like *time* and *place* are not always straightforward examples of complements or appositive postmodifiers, they are often better understood as relative or adverbial clauses (Schmid, 2000).

In some cases, however, Schmid (2000) regards these nouns as *peripheral* shell nouns.

In general, *circumstantial* shell nouns provide shells that encapsulate circumstantial information about particular events. Essentially, they encapsulate information often conveyed by adverbials in simple declarative sentences (Schmid, 2000).

Schmid (2000) distinguishes between *general* and *specific* circumstantial uses. The following nouns are some instances of general circumstantial nouns - *position, situation, context. Point, place, area, region, spot, site*, on the other hand, are some examples of specific circumstantial nouns (Schmid, 2000).

2.2.1.8 Semantic classification from Flowerdew and Forest's point of view

Although the above semantic classification was based mainly on Schmid's study (2000), the reason for that being his study could be regarded as first extensive and fully shell noun devoted study, it is still worth mentioning that Flowerdew and Forest (2015) provide another semantic classification of *shell nouns* (which they, however, call *signalling nouns*). Their classification essentially corresponds to Schmid's classification, nevertheless, their basis lies in systemic functional grammar, which results in their occasional incorporation of nouns in different categories than Schmid. For instance, Flowerdew and Forest (2015) classify

agreement, deal, contract as *locution*, whereas Schmid (2000) classifies them as *mental*. Both studies have, however, come to the same conclusions.

Flowerdew and Forest (2015) have also arrived at a six-term classification: *acts, ideas, locutions, facts, modal facts,* and *circumstantial facts.*

2.2.2 Shell nouns from discourse functional perspective

While the previous chapter discussed primarily semantic aspects of shell nouns, the following chapter will concentrate on the phenomenon from the perspective of its function in discourse. Attention has also been given to the lexico-grammatical patterns of shell nouns, however, it is insufficient to describe the notion solely from a lexical and grammatical standpoint, since its contribution to coherence and textual development also needs to be examined (Flowerdew and Forest, 2015). Shell nouns certainly hold significance in structuring and organising discourse (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014).

2.2.2.1 Discourse structure, cohesion and coherence

2.2.2.2 Shell nouns as cohesive devices

The significance of shell nouns in text cohesion stems from the impact word selection has on the seamless continuity and connectedness of a text. Shell nouns serve a textual function which allows them to link nominal concepts with clauses that then provide specific information (Aktas and Cortes, 2008). Flowerdew and Forest (2015) also add that shell nouns are most effectively understood as lexical indicators of coherence relations.

As mentioned earlier, the formation of referential relations between expressions is crucial for creating text cohesion. Shell nouns establish these relations through "anaphoric" and "cataphoric" functions (Aktas and Cortes, 2008). These relations concern the link between a shell noun and its shell content (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014), i.e. the content encapsulated by the shell noun (Schmid, 2018).

Although anaphoric relations can be best observed in instances with personal pronouns and "full nouns", on the other hand, are better suited for "exophoric references", in linking, shell nouns resemble anaphora more than full-content nouns. Similar to anaphora, shell nouns rely on textual links and cannot function independently. Moreover, their interpretation heavily depends on the context in which the shell content is expressed (Schmid, 2000). These anaphoric and cataphoric links are endorsed by specific lexico-grammatical patterns (Schmid, 2000; Aktas and Cortes, 2008; Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014).

2.2.2.3 Brief classification of shell nouns in anaphoric and cataphoric lexico-grammatical patterns

The following subchapter briefly revises the lexico-grammatical patterns from the perspective of cataphoric and anaphoric links.

The cataphoric links, where the shell content follows the shell noun phrase, are supported by the following lexico-grammatical patterns - *N-be-to, N-be-that, N-be-wh, N-to, N-that, N-wh, N-of* (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014) as exemplified by the following sentences[2] (in the respective order):

"**Our plan** is *to hire and retain the best managers we can*."
"**The major reason** is *that doctors are uncomfortable with uncertainty*."
"Of course, the central, and probably insoluble, **issue** is *whether animal testing is cruel*."

"**The decision** *to disconnect the ventilator* came after doctors found no brain activity."
"Mr. Shoval left open **the possibility** *that Israel would move into other West Bank cities*."
"If there ever is **any doubt** *whether a plant is a poppy or not*, break off a stem and squeeze it."

"**The concept** of *having an outsider as Prime Minister* is outdated."

(Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014)

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[2] The shell noun phrase is in bold, the shell content is in italics.

The anaphoric links, where the shell content precedes the shell noun phrase, are supported by the following lexico-grammatical patterns - *th-N, th-be-N, Sub-be-N* (Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014) as exemplified by these sentences[3] (in the respective order):

"*Living expenses are much lower in rural India than in New York*, but **this fact** is not fully captured if prices are converted with currency exchange rates."

"*People change*. This is **a fact**."

"If the money is available, however, *cutting the sales tax* is **a good idea.**"

(Kolhatkar and Hirst, 2014)

2.2.2.4 Additional discourse-related topics

This section aims to introduce some additional discourse-related topics, which will not be the primary focus of the analytical part, mainly due to limitations regarding the scope of the analysed data.

One of the topics concerns cohesive chains.Cohesive chains can be composed of a repetition (Hoey, 2005). Shell nouns can enter cohesive chains and Flowerdew and Forest (2005) suggest that their role in cohesive chains can be analysed in relation to repetition. One of the functions of shell nouns is to label the participants in discourse, perhaps by means of repetition, allowing them to be tracked throughout the text (Flowerder and Forest, 2015).

"[...] an SN may be repeated in the environment of its realisation and again throughout the text. The SN itself may be repeated, or it may be reiterated via paraphrases and synonyms." (Flowerder and Forest, 2015)

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[3] The shell noun phrase is in bold, the shell content is in italics.

Another study dealing with shell nouns within the realms of discourse is Tárnyiková's (2018) paper regarding their roles and functions in discourse. Tárnyiková (2018) proposes that shell nouns have a "dual role in discourse" - this duality involves both "focalization", and their function as "discourse signposts participating in a number of pragmatic strategies associated with facework". These topics were also studied by Schmid (2000) and inspired Tárnyiková's paper (2018). Schmid (2000) devotes one of the chapters in his study to "focusing and topicalizing" and delves into the ways in which shell noun patterns can be employed by speakers to distribute and construct information with the aim of achieving specific pragmatic and rhetorical goals.

Schmid (2000) argues that shell noun phrases are more frequently found as "topics" - at the beginning of the clauses. However, it is also exemplified that in certain patterns shell nouns function as the focus of the clause and carry new information.

"For a while there <u>I was thinking, you know. I'm gonna write pop songs</u> [...] And <u>that</u> was **a big mistake."** (Schmid, 2000)

While some shell noun phrases may seem redundant in terms of information distribution (for instance *thing*, *point*), they remain frequently used because they enable speakers to emphasise the shell content (Schmid, 2000).

Schmid (2000) offers an explanation for why focus may be directed towards specific information: to simply highlight or emphasise its relevance; to contrast with preceding statements ("contrastive focus") or as a results of hesitation, allowing speakers to simply use the structure to gather their thoughts and organise ideas.

2.2.3 Shell nouns from the perspective of register, spoken and written academic language

To discuss the significance of shell nouns within spoken and written academic registers, it is necessary to introduce some general terms.

2.2.3.1 Register

In general terms, register can be defined as "variety according to use" (Halliday, 1978). It refers to a specific way of using language that is linked to a particular situation or purpose. Understanding register involves exploring three main aspects: "the situational context, the linguistic features, and the functional relationships between the first two components" (Biber and Conrad, 2009). Registers are identified based on their typical linguistic features, as well as their situational contexts, including, for instance, whether they occur in spoken or written form (Biber and Conrad, 2009).

The registers can differ in their degree of generality. This fact is relevant for the purposes of this thesis, since Biber and Conrad (2009) provide "academic lectures" as an example of a "specialized sub-register" of a "general spoken register" and academic prose, on the other hand, as a very "general register" within writing.

2.2.3.2 Differences in spoken and written register

The most obvious difference between registers lies in the so-called "channel" or "mode" - in other words the differences between speech and writing.

Biber and Conrad (2009) demonstrate the situational differences between spoken and written language via the following instances - in spoken mode, usually, there is an "addressor" and a "specific addressee", and some interactivity, while in registers of written mode, we usually deal with "institutional addressor", an unspecified addressee and the instances are not usually interactive. Moreover, when speaking, there is a certain degree of spontaneity, but also improvisation and there is definitely less planning involved as well, the speaker cannot

withdraw what had once been said, whereas in written discourse, there is time for editing, revision and possible deletion (Biber and Conrad, 2009). Overall, writing is considered more "decontextualized", "explicit" and "autonomous", while speech relies on "situational context" (Biber and Gray, 2010).

2.2.3.3 Spoken and written academic registers

Academic registers, especially written, are generally perceived as "grammatically complex, with elaborated structures" (Biber and Gray, 2010). These structures are tailored to specific academic disciplines (Scarcella, 2003). Overall, academic language differs depending on various factors, including disciplinary norms, author's expertise and linguistic skills (Schubert, 2016).

2.2.3.4 Use of shell nouns in spoken and written registers

While the shell noun phenomenon has not been studied extensively, some linguists have explored the concept within both spoken and written registers, as well as in academic English, the results of which may serve as a useful foundation for the analytical part of this thesis.

In general terms, anaphoric relations are believed to occur more frequently than the cataphoric ones. Additionally, the "to-pattern" and "that-pattern" are regarded to have similar frequencies of use (Flowerdew and Forest, 2015).

Flowerdew and Forest (2015) have explored the use of shell nouns ("signalling nouns" in their terms) and their patterns in academic discourse. In comparing the genres of "journals" and "lectures" (similarly to the point of interest of this thesis), they discovered that the cataphoric uses of shell nouns were primarily featured in the journals. This was noticeable and observed especially in "titles, opening sentences of academic articles, abstracts and

introduction sections." This tendency is likely assigned to the "forward-pointing" nature, found in sections such as abstract or introduction (Flowerdew and Forest, 2015).

The spoken nature of the genre of a lecture might be responsible for the frequent occurrence of the pattern SN + be + *that*-clause*,* particularly in terms of clausal structure - while speaking, we tend to put "shorter, less dense noun groups" in the position of a subject and the "longer, heavier material" towards the end of clauses (also known as "end weight" or "end-focus principle"). However, according to Flowerdew and Forest (2015), instances of cataphoric use seem to be rather rare in spoken data .

It is important to clarify that this thesis will focus on instances from the domain of humanities, while Flowerdew and Forest (2015) analysed shell nouns in the domain of social and natural sciences. It appears that the higher employment of technical terms in natural sciences contributed to the prevalence of shell nouns in the domain of social sciences (Flowerdew and Forest, 2015). Although the scope of the thesis is rather limited, the difference in the analysed domains offers potential for some new discoveries.

Furthermore, Benítez-Castro (2014) analysed shell nouns in writing and in speech and discovered more instances in the former.

Another important aspect to consider, mainly in terms of the spoken register, is the distinction between monological and dialogical text. The thesis predominantly focuses on monological ones. This notion was taken into consideration in Fang and Dong's (2021) study, leading to a higher number of shell noun tokens observed in spoken monological texts. Monological texts are also considered more formal compared to dialogical ones, which is also relevant for the purposes of this thesis as academic English is associated with formal register (Fang and Dong, 2021). Moreover, Fang and Dong (2021) also suggest that the frequency of *SN+that* patterns is also influenced by the level of formality - more patterns of this kind tend to occur in more formal texts. However, more shell nouns can also be observed in formal, written texts than in "less-formal, non-printed" texts (Fang and Dong, 2021). All this leads to the fact that increased formality increases the occurrence of shell nouns.

3. Analytical part

3.1 Methods and material

3.1.2 Materials

In order to effectively compare the use of shell nouns in both spoken and written academic English, it was necessary to work with corpus data for observing shell nouns within their respective context. The research was restricted to lectures representing spoken academic English and journal articles representing written academic English, focusing exclusively on monological texts and the "arts and humanities" academic division. The selection of this division was based on a deeper comprehension of such context, as well as the thematic proximity to literature, linguistics and didactics.

For the spoken English analysis, I worked with the British Academic Spoken English Corpus (BASE)[4] via the Sketch Engine website. The corpus provides a collection of transcripts of 160 lectures (in four academic divisions) that were recorded at two British universities. Each academic division comprises 40 transcribed lectures (Sketch Engine, n.d.).

To be able to provide comparable written data, a custom corpus of written monological academic texts was compiled. The corpus consists of 40 articles sourced from high impact academic journals within the arts and humanities division[5]. Ten articles were then selected from each of four distinct areas within the division - Classics and ancient history, (English) Literature, Media/Film and television studies, Philosophy (see journals below). These areas were similar to those within the lectures in BASE.

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[4] *British academic spoken English corpus (base)*. Sketch Engine. https://www.sketchengine.eu/british-academic-spoken-english-corpus/#toggle-id-1
 "The corpus was developed at the Universities of Warwick and Reading under the directorship of Hilary Nesi and Paul Thompson. Corpus development was assisted by funding from BALEAP, EURALEX, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.)" (Sketch Engine, n.d.)

[5] selection based on journal ranking website The SCImago Journal & Country Rank: https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?area=1200&type=j&category=1207

Table 3: Selected journals for written corpus (+ number of articles used)

Classics and ancient history	(English) Literature	Media/Film and television studies	Philosophy
Journal of Roman studies (5)	Literature Compass (5)	Feminist Media Studies (5)	Secularism and Non-religion (5)
Journal of Helenic studies (5)	Victorian Literature and Culture (5)	Studies in Documentary film (3)	Journal of Aesthetics and Culture (5)
		Studies in art education (2)	

The selected journals were accessed via the website UKAŽ.[6]

Both BASE and the custom written corpus contain English academic monological texts, with the primary distinction (apart from the obvious one in medium) being the target audience. While BASE consists of lectures directed at students, the articles in the written corpus are oriented towards peer scientists. The authors of both types of texts are professional academics.

3.1.3 Methods

The entire process in each corpus was then divided into three main parts - firstly, I needed to peruse the list of singular nouns[7] in BASE. This thorough observation allowed me to only select the nouns, which had the potential to function as shell nouns (this was based on Schmid's (2000) classification). These potential shell nouns were then arranged in a table (see Table 4 below) according to their frequency of occurrence, frequency per million tokens and semantic class (based on Schmid's classification [2000]). According to the semantic classes of the (potential) shell nouns, I selected one factual and one mental shell noun for detailed analysis (see reasoning in 3.2.1.1).

Secondly, data collection for the analysis was initiated. The analysis was structured around the lexico-grammatical patterns in which shell nouns occur. In order to conduct the analysis, I attempted to find some concordance of the selected shell nouns within each pattern in the corpus, while specifying the noun's right and left context. The aim was to explore the surrounding context of the shell nouns and explore some new patterns. Subsequently, tables were created to comment on the surrounding context and nuances of each noun (see in the following chapters). Additionally, the tables include quantitative data regarding only potential frequency of occurrence in the particular pattern. The number is based on the amount of potentially analysable results after entering a particular query in the corpus.

Where feasible, examples were included for each pattern, providing variations in the syntactic functions of the shell nouns.

The third part concerned more detailed commentary and on the selected shell nouns and my own interpretation of the instances.

The process for the written data analysis followed a similar approach, albeit with the additional step of creating a custom corpus. Therefore, the three-step analysis was preceded by collecting articles to form the corpus (see detailed explanation in 3.1.2 Materials) Once

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[7] In this thesis, only singular nouns were taken into consideration, as Schmid (2000) suggests that plural shell nouns exist, however, are not as frequent.

gathered, the articles were uploaded into the Sketch Engine website, which allows one to create one's own corpus, facilitating smoother navigation through the data.

Subsequently, the analysis proceeded similarly to that of the spoken corpus. The discussion of the results, comparison of the spoken and written corpora and conclusion are presented in the last chapter.

3.2 Analysis

The following section of the thesis will delve into the interpretation of the findings concerning shell noun usage in both spoken and written English monological texts.

The first part of the section will analyse the results regarding spoken English texts, while the second part will provide the analysis of written English texts. Both parts will then be followed by discussion and conclusion regarding the findings.

The analysis is based mainly on the lexico-grammatical patterns in which shell nouns occur. There is a table for each pattern, which describes the noun phrase and its surroundings (see tables below).

As mentioned in section 3.1.3, it is also important to note that the quantitative data mentioned with the individual patterns in the analysis are approximate in nature, since they are derived from the frequency of particular noun queries in the given corpus.

3.2.1 Shell nouns in English spoken monological academic texts

3.2.1.1 Overview of quantitative data

The table below presents the most frequent nouns used in the spoken academic texts that have the potential to function as shell nouns (cf. Schmid, 2000; Schmid, 2018).

Table 4 presents the most frequent potential shell nouns, and their semantic class.

Table 4: Frequency of occurrence of potential shell nouns in spoken academic texts and their default semantic class

(possible) "SHELL NOUN"	frequency of occurrence (in spoken academic texts) source: BASE	frequency per million tokens source: BASE	default semantic class (according to Schmid's classification)
way	578	329.06	circumstantial
time	406	231.14	circumstantial
idea	402	228.86	mental
fact	312	177.62	factual
thing	305	173.64	factual
point	233	132.65	factual
example	231	131.51	factual
part	187	106.46	factual
art	162	92.23	mental
period	154	87.67	circumstantial
right	148	84.26	modal
power	131	74.58	modal
case	123	70.02	factual
problem	119	67.75	factual
question	118	67.18	mental
reason	117	66.61	factual

view	114	64.90	mental
theory	109	62.05	mental
duty	107	60.92	modal
order	96	54.65	linguistic
place	91	51.81	circumstantial
action	89	50.67	eventive
cause	88	50.10	factual
moment	82	46.68	circumstantial
argument	79	44.97	linguistic
approach	79	44.97	modal
context	77	43.84	circumstantial
position	77	43.84	circumstantial
story	77	43.84	linguistic
notion	72	40.99	mental
information	71	40.42	linguistic
evidence	69	39.28	factual

(Only nouns that occur more frequently than 68x are included, mainly because of the higher probability of their shell-nounhood.)

Table 4 presents 32 nouns (types) that could potentially function as shell nouns, 10 of which (31,25 %) fall into the semantic class of factual shell nouns, 6 (18,75 %) into the class of mental shell nouns and 4 (12,5 %) into the linguistic class (cf. Figure 1). All of these semantic classes can be regarded as the main contributors of the "prime shell nouns" category (Schmid, 2000), therefore the majority (62,5 %) of the potential shell nouns would be regarded as prime ones, which is what the analysis will focus on.
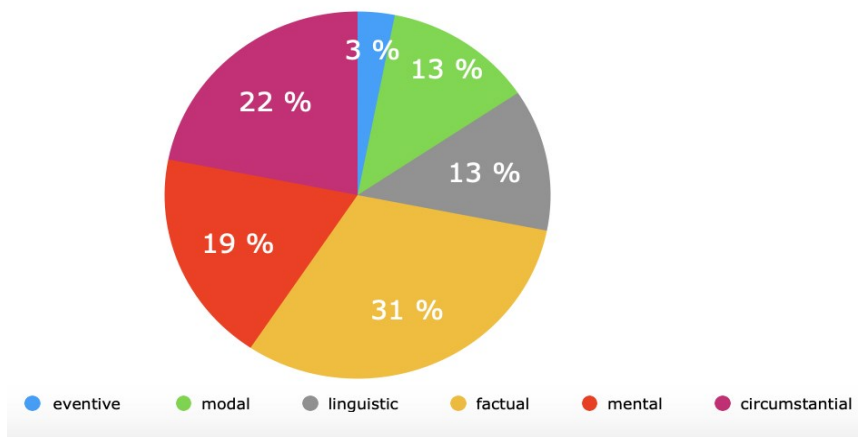
Figure 1: The representation of semantic classes of (potential) shell nouns in academic lectures (types)

On the other hand, it could be observed that there are also instances of potentially circumstantial nouns (21,88 %), with *way* being the most frequent noun of all the nouns. This is relevant mainly because of the fact that circumstantial shell nouns usually fall into the category of "less good and peripheral shell nouns", i.e. they do not function as shell nouns very often, because they are not as abstract as the usual shell nouns, however, they have the potential to do so (see section 2.2.1.1). These nouns are very frequent (Figure 2), however, their potential of shell-nounhood is rather low (Schmid, 2000). Because of this fact, they will not be taken into consideration in this thesis.
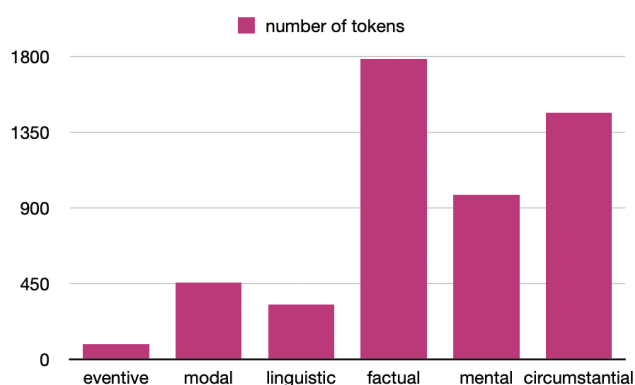
Figure 2: The frequency of (potential) shell noun classes in academic lectures (number of tokens)

For the purposes of the analysis, two (potential) shell nouns have been selected - *idea* (third most frequently used noun, falling into the mental semantic category) and *thing* (fifth most frequently used noun, falling into the factual semantic category.)

3.2.1.2 Detailed interpretation and analysis of selected shell nouns

Both of the selected nouns (*idea, thing*) will be analysed in lexico-grammatical patterns found in the corpus, and the possible deviations from Schmid's (2018) classification of the patterns. Schmid (2018) proposes some preferred complement types of each semantic class - for both *idea* and *thing* that-clause is proposed. The analysis shall provide some clarification about that as well.

It is also important to note that since we are dealing with a corpus of spoken English, sentence or clause boundaries cannot be observed, and the instances lack punctuation.

3.2.1.2.1 Idea

Table 5: Idea - [det. (+ mod.) + IDEA] + BE + *that*-clause, *to*-infinitive clause or *what*-clause

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell nouns	Reference	Example	Frequency of pattern in corpus
Definite article - the; Possessive case/pronoun	premodification - typically none (1x *big*)	IDEA	none	SUBJECT	cataphora	[...] the **idea** is that kids love video games. (ahlct009)	13

In this lexico-grammatical pattern, the most usual determiner is the definite article. Premodifiers appear to be rare, and the shell noun is not postmodified. The shell noun only occurred as a subject in the clause pattern SVCs.

From the semantic perspective, we are dealing with a mental shell noun. As far as the discourse-related functions are concerned, the relations triggered by the shell noun in this pattern are cataphoric, which means that the shell content comes after the shell noun, in subject complement.

(1) [...] and the **idea** is that he is the the executive arm of a of an elected assembly [...] (ahlct020)

(2) [...] the **idea** is that kids love video games [...] (ahlct009)

In both of these instances, shell nouns are in the subject position, followed by a finite verb in the present tense. In both (1) and (2) the shell content is expressed as the subject complement in the form of a nominal content *that*-clause. The shell noun, therefore, has a cataphoric function. It is also possible to observe the "cataphoric use" of the definite article *the* (Quirk et al., 1985). These examples also highlight the importance of context, i.e. the meaning of the noun *idea* is different in each instance. In (1), *the idea* encapsulates the content *he is the the executive arm of a of an elected assembly*, whereas in (2) the same noun encapsulates the content *kids love video games*.

Similar characteristics can be observed in examples (3) and (4), however, in these, the verb is in the past tense. Example (4) illustrates complementation by an infinitival clause which conveys the shell content.

(3) the camera stays back and the the importance of this really is that it it emphasizes people as social performers rather than as individual psychologies [...] the **idea** was that <u>this</u> always meant the people were seen in their context in their social context and they were often seen interacting with other people they weren't just isolated individuals [...] (ahlct015)

(4) [...] and as i said the **idea** was to write about the sea [...] (ahlct001)

Example (3) can also serve as an illustration of the way shell nouns contribute to the cohesion of the spoken text. While the shell noun *idea* refers cataphorically to the complex *that*-clause, the subject of the *that*-clause, *this*, establishes an anaphoric link to the preceding context (i.e. the camera staying back to emphasise the people as social performers).

As illustrated by example (5), the complement content clause can be attached to the verb asyndetically, which can be attributed to the characteristics of spoken texts. The omission of the conjunction *that*, however, does not appear to have any impact on the shell noun construction.

(5) [...] and the **idea** is they should be cured [...] (ahlct028)

Furthermore, another additional point can be made about the following instance (6) -

(6) [...] the **idea** will be and i'll give you an illustration of that in a in a minute that people in the sixteenth century have a set of mentalities of mentalities [...] (ahlct028)

The noun *idea*, again, functions as a subject, it is followed by a verb phrase, however, the verb is not followed by *that*-clause right away, since there is a parenthesis in between the clauses - *and i'll give you an illustration of that in a in a minute*.[8]

A similar notion can be seen in the additional example:

(7) [...] his **idea** was that there isn't and i quote him now an essential tendency of the human mind to make the world conform to thought[...] (ahlct030)

However, in (7), the parenthesis is included in the *that*-clause - *and i quote him now*. We can also observe the determiner *his* in (7), which is different to the other examples.

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[8] It is presumed that this is connected with the spontaneity and less planning of speaking.

Table 6: Idea - [det. + IDEA + *that*-clause]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article - *the*; *this*, *that*; possessive case/pronoun; indefinite article - *a*	premodification - typically none (1x *whole*, 1x *simple*)	IDEA	nominal content clause (*that*-clause)	subject; object; subject complement	cataphora	[...] the **idea** that history is organic [...] (ahlct024)	167

Typically, no premodifiers occur in this lexico-grammatical pattern, which is, according to Schmid (2000) typical[9] for such patterns. It is probably because of the fact that the post nominal clauses carry the majority of information, so there is less capacity to provide additional information before that (Schmid, 2000). The determiner most frequently used is the definite article *the,* however, there were instances of *this*, *that* or also an indefinite article[10] found as well. The postmodification was realised by nominal content *that*-clauses. In this pattern, the shell noun can fulfil various syntactic functions, namely the subject, object, and subject complement.[11]

In this pattern, we encounter cataphoric relations again - the shell content encapsulated by the shell noun, however, is mentioned in the *that*-clause in the right context within the shell noun phrase.

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[9] In general, it is possible for premodification to occur, however, there were no such instances in the corpus. Nevertheless, shell nouns that are postmodified by that-clauses are more likely to be premodified by adjectives than the ones postmodified by to-infinitive clauses (Schmid, 2000).

[10] Attested in the data-set, albeit marginally, due to a first mention of the idea.

[11] The functions of the object complement and the adverbial noted by Schmid (2000) were not attested in the BASE data-set.

(8) [...] the **idea** that history is organic that it in other words that it works itself out in the same way that a human life does by a process of development maturity and decline so in effect history is parallel to human lives [...] (ahlct024)

In ex. (8) the shell noun *idea* is a part of a noun phrase which functions as a subject. The shell noun is postmodified[12] by two coordinated nominal content clauses, which are in an appositive relationship. These clauses encapsulate the shell content of *idea*.

(9) [...] Vico's The New Science in seventeen-twenty-three which has the **idea** that a nation or a society develops through time <u>this idea of progress</u> [...] (ahlct024)

(10)   [...] one of these shared ideas with the idealists includes the **idea** that God is present in all of humanity as and all of history as the tutor of mankind [...] (ahlct024)

Examples (9) and (10) illustrate the object function of the noun phrase which comprises the shell noun idea as the head, and postmodification by a nominal content *that*-clause. From the discourse perspective, it is interesting to note that example (9) includes two shell nouns *idea*, the latter one postmodified by an *of*-phrase. The latter noun phrase, *this idea of progress*, plays a dual role in establishing the cohesive ties in the text. Its head *idea* is related cataphorically to the shell content expressed by the postmodifier *of progress*. The shell content ('progress'), however, is notionally identical to that encapsulated by the former noun phrase headed by *idea*, namely, *that a nation or a society develops through time*, thereby establishing an anaphoric tie, as indicated by the determiner *this* preceding the latter shell noun *idea*.

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[12] The nominal content clause can be analysed as a postmodifier of the head noun *idea* (cf. Dušková et al. 2009, chapter 16.21.13) or as an appositive clause (Quirk et al. 1985: 1260).

Table 7: Idea - [*This* + IDEA]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
this, that	premodification very rare	IDEA	none	subject; prepositional object	anaphora (shell content in preceding text)	[...]the idea of the world spirit which supposedly controlled all human progress which in German is known as geist which can be translated as ghost but i think spirit is probably better here and this **idea** was adapted again by[…] (ahlct024)	39

In this pattern, the shell noun *idea* was neither premodifed nor postmodified. The definite reference of the noun phrase is indicated by the determiner *this*. The syntactic functions of the noun phrase were mainly subjects and also some prepositional objects .

As far as discourse related functions are concerned, this pattern triggers anaphoric relations, which means that the phrase with the shell noun (*this idea* in ex. (11)) comes after the shell content (underlined in ex. (11)) in the text, and refers back to it. The determiner *this* helps establish the anaphoric relation.

(11)   [...] the idea of the world spirit which supposedly controlled all human progress which in German is known as geist which can be translated as ghost but i think spirit is probably better here and **this idea** was adapted again by […] (ahlct024)

Interestingly, there is another shell noun *idea* noun at the very onset of the underlined structure in ex. (11). In this case, the shell noun is postmodified by the prepositional phrase *of the world spirit* [...] which expresses the shell content. In this way, the shell content (*the world spirit which supposedly controlled all human progress* [...]) is referred to twice - cataphorically within the first noun phrase with the shell noun *idea*, and anaphorically by

the latter noun phrase *this idea*, which contributes to maintaining strong cohesive ties in the text.

(12) [...] in ancient Rome if you were a slave you got freedom you could wear the red bonnet to show that you were emancipated as a slave and the revolutionaries pick up on **this idea** because [...] (ahlct020)

Example (12) illustrates shell nouns which function syntactically as prepositional objects. The determiner *this* helps the noun encapsulate the shell content, which precedes the shell noun. The shell noun refers to the content anaphorically.

Table 8: Idea - *This/that* + BE [(+det.) (+mod.) + IDEA (+mod.)]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the;* indefinite article *a*	premodification found (in BASE) - *relatively little known; new*	IDEA	0; of-PP; non-finite participle clause	subject complement	anaphora	[...] use the biggest piece of Carrara marble so it was d cut out at the quarry and then it was dragged by oxen through the towns of Italy it was something which was reported in Italian magazines and in the Italian press it was an event in itself to actually bring this thing by road through the towns north of Rome and the spectacle it's almost like the spectacle of the monolith of Mussolini this is going to be the new **idea** of the obelisk [...] (ahlct004)	67 (with an adjective before the noun) + 12 (with a referring item, no BE)

This pattern was not as frequent as expected.[13] The noun idea was found to be premodified by adjectives in this pattern. The referring item in this pattern was mainly *this*, which functions as the subject in the clause pattern SVCs. The usual syntactic function of the shell noun phrase appears to be subject complement. Within the shell noun phrase, the determiners were realised by the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a*. The shell noun was not necessarily postmodified.

In discourse, shell nouns in this pattern refer anaphorically to what has been mentioned before, similarly to the previous pattern (see Table 7).

(13)   [...] use the biggest piece of Carrara marble so it was d cut out at the quarry and then it was dragged by oxen through the towns of Italy it was something which was reported in Italian magazines and in the Italian press it was an event in itself to actually bring this thing by road through the towns north of Rome and the spectacle it's almost like the spectacle of the monolith of Mussolini this is going to be the new **idea** of the obelisk where as we're going to talk about think about how that relates to obelisks from antiquity in a moment it was set up in a way which was used by the Popes to set up obelisks [...] (ahlct004)

In (13), we can explore the shell noun from different perspectives - *this is going to be the new idea* provides an exemplification of the shell noun in the analysed pattern with the syntactic function of subject complement. From this perspective, the pronominal subject *this* provides the anaphoric reference. However, we can have a closer look at the postmodification of the noun, which is realised by a prepositional phrase - the *of*-PP postmodification is analysed as a separate lexico-grammatical pattern. Example (13), therefore, combines two different patterns: the shell noun *idea* plays a dual role in that it relates anaphorically to the shell content which is represented by the proform *this*, and at

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[13] Schmid (2000) describes this pattern as having the most characterizing potential, predominantly in spoken language, since the pattern itself is ideal to provide a characterization of a specific piece of information, however, it is also suggested that the nouns that attract this pattern the most are highly descriptive (which is not the case of the nouns *idea* or *thing*).

the same time cataphorically to the content of the postmodification (*the obelisk*). The content of the postmodification is related to that summarised by the pronoun *this*.

Table 9: Idea - [det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *of*-phrase/*about*-phrase]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article (68%) *the*; *this*, *that*; possessive case/pronoun; other: *a, some, no*	premodification found (in BASE) - in approx. 13% instances (mostly with an indefinite article - typically evaluative adjectives *complex, great, clear*, focusing *very*	IDEA	PP (*of*-PP/ marginal *about*-PP)	subject, object, prepositional object, subject complement	cataphora	[...]society develops through time this **idea** of progress [...] (ahlct024)	174 nouns (followed by the preposition *of*) +4 (followed by the preposition *about*)

The PP postmodification appears to occur rather frequently , although this occurrence does not guarantee the employment of shell nouns.[14]

The shell nouns were usually premodified by adjectives in this pattern, and used with definite articles, indefinite articles and the determiner *this*. The postmodification is an *of*-prepositional phrase or *about*-prepositional phrase. The shell nouns in this pattern can fulfil several syntactic functions - i.e. subject, object, prepositional object, subject complement.

The shell noun refers cataphorically to its shell content encapsulated in the prepositional phrase.

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[14] It has already been mentioned that this similar pattern (Shell NP + *of*-PP) established by Schmid (2018) has a low predictive potential, however, this does not mean that there are not any instances of shell nouns in this pattern.

Examples (14), (15) and (16) illustrate the use of the shell noun phrases with *of*-postmodification as the direct object, the subject, and the prepositional object of the clause, respectively.

(14)   [...] before the French Revolution had been replaced by a new struggle between revolution and counter-revolutionary forces so having started out by rejecting the **idea** of progress [...] (ahlct024)

(15)   "[...] this **idea** of historicism was practised in the universities [...]" (ahlct024)

(16)   [...] so wonderful work i think which is picking up on this **idea** of mentalitalities which can only be understood in a way in long t periods of times and by breaking up breaking apart completely fragmenting the normal way in which history is done [...] (ahlct028)

(17)   [...] so again it's an **idea** of turning that disadvantage in a way to an aesthetic purpose [...] (ahlct015)

In example (17), the shell noun functions as the subject complement. The example is particularly interesting, since it displays an employment of an indefinite article preceding the shell noun probably due to the first mention of the shell content (i.e. *turning that disadvantage in a way to an aesthetic purpose*).

(18)   [...] a particular **idea** about religion and spiritual status where the child is posited as not innocent [...] (ahlct009)

In example (18), we can observe an indefinite article *a,* premodifying adjective *particular* and a postmodifying *about*-phrase.

Table 10: Idea - *it* (anticipatory) + BE + [a + mod. + IDEA] + *that*-clause

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a*	premodification found (in BASE): *lovely*	IDEA	none	subject complement	cataphora	[...] a great bas-relief that we could not transport unless we reduce its height he's actually talking about the centre of the east frieze of the Parthenon it's such a lovely **idea** that they had this practical problem we oh take ten centimetres off the top and then it'll work [...] (ahlct002)	9

This pattern was encountered less frequently in the corpus. The relation between the shell noun and the shell content is cataphoric.

(19)　　　[...] a great bas-relief that we could not transport unless we reduce its height he's actually talking about the centre of the east frieze of the Parthenon it's such a lovely **idea** that they had this practical problem we oh take ten centimetres off the top and then it'll work [...] (ahlct002)

In ex. (19), *such a lovely idea* fulfils the function of a subject complement in the SVCs construction with anticipatory *it* and extraposed subject expressed by a nominal *that*-clause. *Idea* cataphorically refers to the shell content *they had this practical problem*. The anticipatory it helps introduce some new information, therefore, the shell noun is preceded by an indefinite article *a*.

3.2.1.2.2 Thing

The following section will analyse the shell noun *thing* in the same manner as the shell noun *idea.*

The shell noun *thing* is classified as a factual neutral shell noun, therefore, one of the most frequently occuring. The preferred complement type of the shell noun is *that*-clause. The analysis below will provide some findings regarding (not only) this notion.

Table 11: Thing - [*det.* + (mod.) + THING (+mod.)] + BE + *that* (content clause)/*to*-infinitive

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the*; *another*	premodification found - evaluating adjectives (e.g. *important*, *interesting*, *good*, *key*, *remarkable, crucial*)	THING	*to*-infinitive; *about*-phrase	subject	cataphora	[...] the most important **thing** is that you laugh at my jokes [...] (ahlct039)	22

This pattern should potentially provide the most instances of the use of the shell noun *thing*, since the default complementation is *that*-clause. The corpus provided some instances with such complements, as well as with *to*-infinitive. The determiner function was predominantly fulfilled by the definite article *the* (81%) in a cataphoric use, which helps the shell noun to refer to the following shell content in the complementing clause. Premodifiers (adjectives) occur rather frequently (45%) in the shell noun phrase.

In this pattern, the syntactic function of the shell noun is always the subject; it is followed by a copular predication (ex. 20). The complementation is then realised by a *that*-clause, which establishes the shell content. Alternatively, the subject complement can be realised by

an infinitival clause (ex. 21) or a nominal interrogative clause (ex. 22). Examples (20) - (22) also illustrate the two dominant types of premodifiers of the shell noun *thing*, viz. evaluative adjectives (ex. 20, 22, other examples include *interesting*, *remarkable*, *key*), and numerals indicating sequence and order (ex. 21, and also, e.g., *first*, *second*, *third*).

(20)   [...] the most important **thing** is that you laugh at my jokes [...] (ahlct039)

(21)   [...] but the other **thing** is to step back and look at what's actually going on [...] (ahlct021)

(22)   "[...] the crucial **thing** is what's going on out there in the world [...]" (ahlct021)

In example (23), we can observe postmodification by an infinitive (*to signal to you now*).

(23)   "[...] the thing the first thing to s just one **thing** to signal to you now is that of course melodrama means drama with music [...]" (ahlct015)

Table 12: Thing - [det. (+ mod.) + THING + *about*-PP]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a*; definite article *the;* other	premodification found - adjectives (*romantic*)	THING	*about*-phrase	Subject	cataphora	[...] a **thing** about whores in a in a in a booth a set of booths [...] (ahlct001)	6

The data revealed a previously unrecognised lexico-grammatical pattern. What distinguishes this pattern is its postmodification by an *about*-phrase. The functions of this pattern are analogical to the shell noun + *of*-phrase and shell noun + *that*-clause patterns, in which the (previously analysed) shell noun *idea* frequently occurs. The determiner was realised as either the definite article *the*, the indefinite article *a* or *one*, *another*.

(24)   [...] and there's a **thing** about whores in a in a in a booth a set of booths [...]
        (ahlct001)

In example (24), the shell noun *thing* functions as a notional subject and refers cataphorically to the shell content in the postmodifying *about*-phrase. The *there* construction allows for the introduction of new information, which possibly explains use of the indefinite article.

(25)   [...] trying to connect up to the cosmos again in terms of kind of you know
        the romantic **thing** about the love for the moon [...] (ahlct001)

Example (25) illustrates the premodifying adjective *romantic* preceded by the definite article *the*. The shell content can again be found in the *about*-phase postmodification, which is referred to cataphorically.

Table 13: Thing - [*This* + mod + THING]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
this	premodification found (*whole*; *kind of*)	THING	none	subject; object	anaphora	"[...]John believes that Cicero went to the market so this whole sentence is true okay **this whole thing** is true[...]" (ahlct033)	14

It is indicated in the title of this pattern that there has to be a referring item (functioning as the determiner), and a premodifier as well. The most common determiner within this pattern is *this*. There were no postmodifiers found in the corpus. Contrastingly to the previous patterns, the shell content in this pattern occurs in the surrounding context, specifically before the shell noun, therefore the shell noun refers to the content anaphorically.

(26) [...]John believes that Cicero went to the market so this whole sentence is true okay **this whole thing** is true[...] (ahlct033)

In (26) the shell noun phrase *this whole thing* functions as a subject. It refers back to the underlined section of the example - from a semantic point of view, the premodifying adjective *whole* also helps understand that the reference regards the entire underlined section - *John believes that Cicero went to the market.*

(27) [...] have ever seen in my entire life i know you've experienced a few you think but i tell you this was stellar this was absolutely stellar and it was by someone

who's widely believed to be one of the greatest historians in practising today and because he was you know a great man enormous quantities of people were there it was in the senate house in of every historian you've ever read i think who's still alive was there watching **this thing** [...] (ahlct028)

In (27), it is possible to observe the shell noun with the referring item (in bold) in the object function, however it is rather difficult to identify precisely the shell content that the noun refers to anaphorically. (This is caused by the incomplete examples in the corpus. Moreover, since we are dealing with speech, there are a few parentheses and subordinate clauses, which prevent us from being able to analyse the whole section.)

It is, however, possible to see some other co-referential ties that probably all refer to the same thing as *this thing* - *this* (in *this was stellar*), *it* (in *it was by someone*…).

Table 14: Thing - *That/it* **+ BE + [** *the* **(+mod.) + THING (+mod.)] /** *That/which* **+ BE + [** *a* **+ mod. + THING (+mod.)]**

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples (see more below)	Frequency of (possible) pattern in corpus
definite article *the*	premodification found - e.g. *most ordinary*	THING	0; to-infinitive; postmodified by relative clause (SN - antecedent)	subject complement	anaphora	"[...] giving your own intervention as they say these days that that **that's** probably **the thing**[...]" (**ahlct012**)	41 (applies to both patterns)
indefinite article *a*	premodification found - evaluative adjectives (*bad*; *strange*)	THING	0; to-infinitive	subject complement ; object complement	anaphora	[...]he then offers a very famous counter-example to his own argument **which** is a bit of a **a strange thing to do**[...] (ahlct037)	

Table 14 comprises two very similar patterns with a difference in determiner. The referring items found in the corpus were *that*, *it* and *which*. Premodifiers were found in both patterns, although they are more frequent in the pattern with the indefinite article, since they allow for further evaluation. The definite article, on the other hand, is assumed to attract postmodifiers, in order to provide identification. The shell noun functions either as a subject complement or an object complement. The referring items refer anaphorically to something that has previously been mentioned and are not included in the shell noun phrase, which contributes to the cohesion of the text.

(28)   [...] <u>where the person's coming from how they're pitching their arguments how they're organizing their material how they're organizing historical evidence to back up the particular ideas that they hold</u> so **that's the important thing** [...] (ahlct002)

That's the important thing in (28) anaphorically refers to the whole preceding section (underlined). The shell noun is premodified by an adjective and functions as a subject complement.

(29)   [...] if you communicate that sense in the in in the answer that a as it were as if you were in a kind of debate but <u>giving your own intervention</u> as they say these days that that **that's** probably **the thing** that will come over well thinking about essays perhaps in some ways these are even more tricky because you invest more time in it and essays are just about long enough by the time you're doing your second and third year essays you [...] (ahlct012)

Example (29) again seems rather unclear in terms of the shell content, however, the underlined section is the most probable option. What is interesting about ex. (29) is that the

shell noun is further described by a relative clause that postmodifies it. *The thing* also functions as an antecedent of the potential (due to the absence of punctuation and sentence boundaries, the whole context is rather unclear) relative clause. However, the presence of a relative clause would be appropriate, given the absence of premodification.

(30)   [...] looking at is evangelical it has to do with a particular idea about religion and spiritual status where <u>the child is posited as not innocent as fallen already so the child has to aspire to spiritual redemption it has to be saved okay so this is not a vision of a child who is innocent this is an idea of childhood that it is fallen it is in the fallen state of man and it has to be redeemed</u> so **that's the first thing** to look at [...] (ahlct009)

In (30), the shell noun phrase refers to the underlined shell content anaphorically. Moreover, it is postmodified by a *to*-infinitive clause.

The second identified pattern with referring item includes an indefinite article *a* and an obligatory premodifier.

(31)   [...] <u>he was prepared to condemn massacres and other actions which were evil by standards which he held to be universal</u> now we may not m consider **that to be necessarily a bad thing** but [...] (ahlct024)

The shell noun in ex. (31) functions as an object complement and is premodified by an evaluative adjective *bad*, there is no postmodification present. The referring item *that* helps refer back to the shell content (underlined).

(32)   [...]<u>he then offers a very famous counter-example to his own argument</u> **which** is a bit of a a **strange thing to do**[...] (ahlct037)

In example (32) *which* initiates the anaphoric reference to the shell content. The shell content is encapsulated by the shell noun phrase *a strange thing to do*, which functions as a subject

complement. Similarly to ex. (31), the shell noun is premodified by an evaluative adjective (*strange*).

Table 15: Thing - *it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod. + THING] + *to*-inf

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a*	premodification found (in BASE) - *good*	THING	0	subject complement	cataphora	"[...] **it's a good thing** <u>to be Victorian</u> [...]" (ahlct009)	57

In this case, the *it* does not help refer anaphorically to the shell content, contrastingly, it functions as an "anticipatory it", therefore, it extraposes the shell content in the subject position.

> (33)   [...] **it's a good thing** <u>to be Victorian</u> [...] (ahlct009)

In ex. (33), the shell noun is premodified by an adjective, which adds more description about the shell content. The "anticipatory it" allows to shift more focus on the shell content (*to be Victorian*), which is referred to cataphorically. The shell content is, therefore, in an extraposed subject position, while the shell noun functions as a subject complement.

Table 16: Thing - Shell content in NP + BE + [*a*+ mod. + THING (+mod.)]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples (see more below)	Frequency of (possible) pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a/an*	premodification found (in BASE) - *good*	THING	0; relative clause	subject complement	anaphora	"[...] that justice was a **good thing** [...]" (ahlct038)	18

In this pattern, the shell noun refers anaphorically to the shell content in a preceding noun phrase, it is premodified by an evaluative adjective, therefore, the determiner is an indefinite article. The shell noun performs a function of a subject complement, while the shell content is the subject of the clause.

In ex. (34), (35) and (36) the premodified shell noun *thing* anaphorically refers to the shell content in the noun phrase in subject position (*justice; the Sicilian expedition; the camera obscura in Edinburgh*). In ex. (35), we can also observe the negative form of the verb *be*, which does not affect the shell noun function of *thing*.

(34)   "[...] that justice was a **good thing** [...]" (ahlct038)

(35)   [...] ah well maybe the Sicilian expedition wasn't **such a bad thing** after all [...] (ahlct003)

(36)   [...] the camera obscura in Edinburgh is indeed **a fascinating thing** because [...] (ahlct034)

(37)   [...] allegory in The Faerie Queene isn't just **a sort of special thing** that only creatures from the planet Zog and specialists in Reformation theology know about [...] (ahlct010)

In ex. (37), the shell noun is postmodified by a relative clause.

3.2.2 Shell nouns in English written monological academic texts

3.2.2.1 Overview of quantitative data

The following section will provide quantitative results concerning English written monological academic texts. The data presented are collected from my own corpus of articles from academic journals (see Methods and materials).

Table 17 presents the overview of frequency of occurrence of potential shell nouns in written academic texts, as well as their default semantic classes (cf. Schmid, 2000; Schmid, 2018).

Table 17: Frequency of occurrence of potential shell nouns in written academic texts and their default semantic class

(possible) "SHELL NOUN"	frequency of occurrence (in written academic texts) source: academic articles in created corpus (see in Methods and materials)	frequency per million tokens source: own corpus - academic articles (see in Methods and materials)	default semantic class (according to Schmid's classification)
way	337	613.57	circumstantial
time	333	606.29	circumstantial
art	321	584.44	mental
example	285	518.90	factual
power	258	469.74	modal
part	245	446.07	factual
context	223	406.01	circumstantial

fact	212	385.99	factual
point	206	375.06	factual
order	191	347.75	linguistic
case	190	345.93	factual
place	178	324.08	circumstantial
experience	168	305.87	mental
story	167	304.05	linguistic
analysis	164	298.59	mental
practice	159	289.49	circumstantial
role	151	274.92	modal
theory	151	274.92	mental
line	149	271.28	mental
space	145	264.00	modal
question	142	258.54	mental
understanding	139	253.08	mental
tradition	138	251.25	eventive
idea	130	236.69	mental
concept	122	222.12	mental
notion	114	207.56	mental
approach	112	203.92	modal
period	111	202.10	circumstantial
knowledge	110	200.28	mental
change	107	194.81	factual
view	102	185.71	mental
action	101	183.89	eventive

The table presents 32 noun that could potentially function as shell nouns, 6 of which (18,75%) fall into the semantic class of factual shell nouns, 12 (37,5%) into the class of

mental shell nouns and 2 (6,25%) into the linguistic class (cf. Figure 3) - comparably to the potential shell nouns in spoken texts, the majority of found nouns (20 nouns - 62,5%) belong to the category of "prime shell nouns" (Schmid, 2000). However, there is a slight difference in the results: there are more (potential) shell nouns belonging to the mental semantic class (37,5%) than to the factual semantic class (18,75%), which is the opposite of what was observed in the previous analysis (see Table 4).
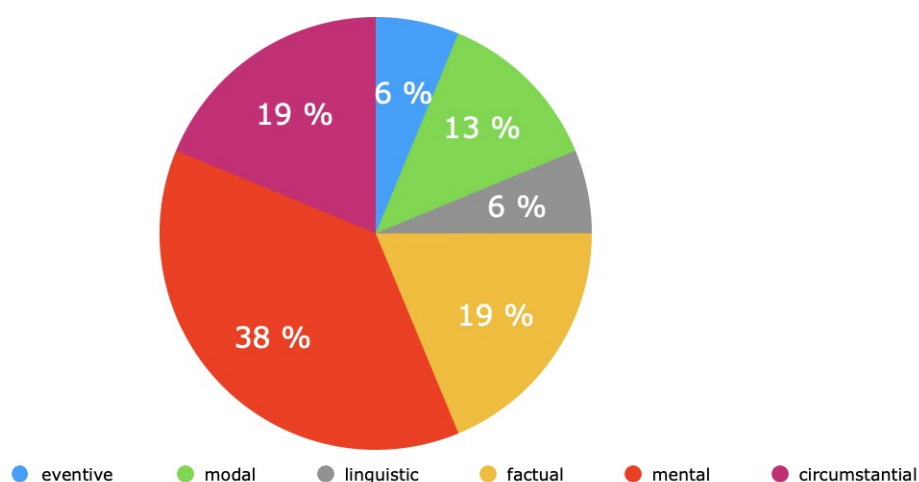
Figure 3: The representation of semantic classes of (potential) shell nouns in written articles (types)

Again, similarly to Table 4, we can also observe rather frequent (potential) circumstantial nouns (18,75%), however, as they fall into the category of "less good and peripheral shell nouns", they will not be taken into consideration (see sections 2.2.1.1 and 3.2.1.1)
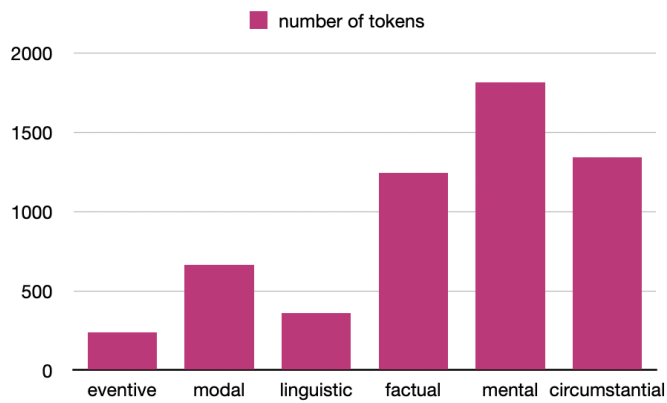
Figure 4: The frequency of (potential) shell noun classes in written articles (number of tokens)

To be able to provide a comparative analysis, the following section will concentrate on the interpretation of the (mental) noun "idea" and the (factual) noun "fact" used in written monological academic English.

3.2.2.2 Detailed interpretation and analysis of selected shell nouns

The method of analysing shell nouns in written English will employ the previous approach - the selected nouns (*idea, fact*) will be analysed in the lexico-grammatical patterns in which they occur. The principle of the analysis is identical to the one described in 3.2.1.2.

3.2.2.3 Idea

From a semantic perspective, *idea* is a mental shell noun.There were 130 occurrences (236.69 per million tokens) of the noun in the written corpus.

Table 18: Idea (written) - [*the* + IDEA] + BE + *to*-infinitive

| Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples (see more below)	Frequency of (possible) pattern in corpus
definite article *the*	no premodification found	IDEA	0	subject	cataphora	"The **idea** is to recognise more than one specific identity." (wclass202)	5

In this pattern, the shell noun phrase always comprised the definite article as the determiner, and no pre- or postmodifiers were observed. Syntactically, the shell noun phrase functions as the subject in the copular clause pattern SVCs, with the subject complement realised by an infinitival clause. As far as the discourse-related functions are concerned, the shell noun in this pattern refers cataphorically to its shell content encapsulated in the *to*-infinitive clause (e.g. *to recognise more than one specific identity* in ex. 38).

(38)   The **idea** is to recognise more than one specific identity [...] (wclass202)

Interestingly, in three instances[15] of the pattern the predicate was negative (ex. 39).[16]

(39)   The **idea** is not to look up the declarations of first-order scholars about, say, the nature of musical works and then call it a day [...] (wphil902)

Table 19: Idea (written) - [det. + IDEA + *that*-clause]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the*; genitive - possesive (*Lodge's*)	no premodification found	IDEA	nominal content clause (*that*-clause)	subject, object, prepositional complement	cataphora	"[...]we may doubt the **idea** that conicting rumours about the divine authorship of the event found expression in imperial art." (wclass203)	22

The shell noun in this pattern is usually preceded by a definite article (90%), or a "possessive determiner" (Quirk et al., 1985). The shell noun is postmodified by a nominal content *that*-clause.

The shell noun proved to function as a subject, an object and a prepositional complement.[17]

In this pattern, the shell noun, again, refers to the shell content cataphorically.

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[15] The three instances come from the same article.

[16] Although Schmid (2000; 2018) does not address its usage within this particular pattern.

[17] The shell noun phrase can, according to Schmid (2000), fulfil different syntactic functions.

(40)   The literary sources are confused, and we may doubt the **idea** that conicting
        rumours about the divine authorship of the event found expression in imperial art
        [...] (wclass203)

The shell noun phrase in (40) serves as an object. The shell noun *idea* encapsulates the
shell content in the postmodification (*that conicting rumours about the divine authorship
of the event found expression in imperial art*).

(41)   This feeling of despondency is caused by the **idea** that the social world he
        has grown up in is crumbling away. (wlit404)

Ex. (41) is constructed as a passive sentence, with the shell noun phrase following the verb
in the passive voice and the preposition *by*; the *by*-prepositional phrase functions as an
adverbial. The other characteristics remain the same.

(42)   The **idea** that phalanx warfare could only take place on flat plains[...] is
        contradicted by various real battles. (wclass105)

Ex. (42) demonstrates the shell noun phrase functioning as a subject.

Table 20: Idea (written) - [*This* + IDEA (+mod.)]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples (see more below)	Frequency of (possible) pattern in corpus
this	no premodification found	IDEA	0; prepositional phrase; non-finite participle clause	subject, object, prepositional complement	anaphora	"[...]it is this foggy horizon that Miles suggests can be changed and enriched through repeated viewing, and Ricoeur's mimesis reinforces **this idea**" (wmed603)	21

In written academic texts, *this* emerges as the predominant determiner. No examples of premodification were found in the corpus.[18] The shell noun in this pattern does not necessarily require any specific postmodification, yet it can occasionally be postmodified by a prepositional phrase (allowing for a combination of lexico-grammatical patterns) or non-finite participle clause. The shell noun can fulfil various syntactic functions, including a subject, object or prepositional complement. Moreover, this pattern triggers anaphoric relations, typically of inter-clausal nature.

(43)   It is this foggy horizon that Miles suggests can be changed and enriched through repeated viewing, and Ricoeur's mimesis reinforces **this idea.** (wmed603)

Ex. (43) demonstrates the use of the shell noun with the referring item *this* (*this idea*) in an object position. From this position, the shell noun anaphorically refers back to the shell content in the preceding clause.

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[18] Although the pattern allows for some premodification. (Schmid, 2018)

The following instance can be considered a combination of two patterns -

> (44)   There were [sc. divinely inspired] <u>peals of thunder, rainbow tints showed, and lightning, rain-storms, hail and thunderbolts descended upon the Romans as often as they made assaults'</u> [...] This **idea** of <u>countervailing divine forces</u> is not allowed. (wclass203)

In ex. (44), *this idea* serves as a subject of the sentence, however, it is then postmodified by a prepositional phrase, which not only triggers a cataphoric relation, it also allows for two patterns to combine and create this "dual focus" construction. The referring item *this* anaphorically refers to the shell content preceding the shell noun phrase, while the postmodification is referred to cataphorically and summarises the shell content in anaphora.

(This instance could be understood as falling only into the category of "Shell noun phrase + *of*-PP" or only into this category. It depends on whether we only analyse the right context, left context or both at the same time.)

> (45)   Turning to Coleridge, the clearest statement he makes on the function of lyric resonates with <u>this theory of dramatic semblance</u>: In **this idea** originated the Lyrical Ballads, [...]. (wlit405)

Ex. (45) seems particularly interesting, since the shell noun functions within a prepositional phrase that realises a fronted adverbial *in this idea*.[19] The fronted adverbial refers anaphorically to the shell content in the previous sentence, and its position appears to strengthen the tie between the two clauses.

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[19] While inversion (and fronting) is common (even) in informal speech, AVS structures such as ex. (50) tend to be used in rather "mannered" language (Quirk et al., 1985).

Table 21: Idea (written) - [det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *about*/*of*-PP]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the;* indefinite articles (*a,an*); genitive - possessive (e.g.: *Mark Fisher's; his;her*); no	premodification found (e.g. *generalized, romantic*)	IDEA	prepositional phrase (*of*-phrase / *about*-phrase)	subject; object	cataphora	[...]the **idea** of feeling subject to some form of organised or oppressive rules that they would not wish to follow. (wphil805)	73

The shell noun seems to occur in this pattern rather frequently. It does not require premodification, however, there was one example with a premodification. The shell noun is predominantly preceded by the definite article *the* (84,9%). The postmodification is a prepositional phrase with *of* (98,6%) or *about*. The shell noun phrase serves a syntactic function of a subject or an object. The shell content follows the shell noun and is referred to cataphorically.

(46)   [...]but rather feared the **idea** of feeling subject to some form of organised or oppressive rules that they would not wish to follow. (wphil805)

(47)   How far can we extrapolate a generalised **idea** about dying [...] (wclass202)

Examples (46) and (47) illustrate the shell noun phrase fulfilling the function of an object. In (46) , the shell noun is preceded by the definite article *the* and the shell content in postmodification realised by an *of*-phrase. Example (47) illustrates the shell content in

postmodifying *about*-phrase and the shell noun is premodified by an evaluative adjective (*generalised*), which also triggers the indefinite article *a*.

Table 22: Idea (written) - *it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod + IDEA + mod] + *that*-clause

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a*	premodification found (*new)*	IDEA	prepositional phrase	subject complement	cataphora	It is not a new **idea** in the poem *that gods in disguise might either impersonate Odysseus or punish the Suitors' transgressions* (wclass103)	1

There was a very rare occurrence of the pattern with anticipatory *it* in the written corpus. The only example illustrates the shell noun *idea* functioning as a subject complement, while the shell content is in the position of an extraposed subject and is referred to cataphorically. The verb is in the negative form, which, however, does not impact the shell-nounhood of the noun. The shell noun is also preceded by an indefinite article and a premodifying adjective *new* (example 48).

(48)   It is not a new **idea** in the poem that gods in disguise might either impersonate Odysseus or punish the Suitors' transgressions; [...] (wclass103)

3.2.2.4 Fact

To illustrate the use of a factual shell noun in written English, the following section will analyse the noun *fact*. While the noun appears frequently in the corpus of written academic English, its shell-nounhood within the corpus needs to be explored.

Table 23: Fact (written) - [*the* + FACT + *that*-clause]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the*	no premodification found	FACT	nominal content clause (*that*-clause)	subject, object, adverbial	cataphora	the **fact** that lyric can only achieve an 'illusion' of alienation, but in truth cannot escape from social life, is key to what Adorno elsewhere calls 'the utopia of its form[...] (wlit405)	106

Out of the 212 occurrences of the potential shell noun 'fact' in the written corpus, 106 nouns (50%) were postmodified by *that*, indicating a relatively high probability of the shell noun function. In some cases, however, *that* is a pronoun introducing a relative clause, which can be misleading.

In this pattern, the noun *fact* typically appears after the definite article *the* and is not premodified.

The noun in this pattern has the ability to perform various syntactic functions, e.g. subject, object, adverbial.

As mentioned earlier, the shell noun refers cataphorically to the shell content in the postmodifying *that*-clause.

> (49)   The **fact** that Muslims are represented, under European laws, as citizens like other citizens, however humanly imperfect the system, seems to be uninteresting [...] (wphil804)

Ex. (49) illustrates one of the most common structures with the shell noun *fact*, where the shell noun phrase performs the syntactic function of a subject. The definite article *the* triggers cataphoric relations.

> (50)   [...] approach denies the **fact** that there must be some objective reality attached to the label of religion that individuals are choosing to reject. (wphil805)

In ex. (50), the shell noun phrase fulfils the syntactic function of an object. All the aforementioned characteristics about the noun can also be applied to this instance.

> (51)   Despite the **fact** that the families of nonreligious transgender people in moderately religious households were not as deeply connected to religious institutions, respondents in these situations still reported some negative experiences with family members. (wphil801)

Example (51) demonstrates the use of the shell noun phrase within an adverbial in a complex sentence. In this function, the shell noun sometimes complements the preposition *despite.*[20]

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[20] In the corpus, the shell noun complemented the preposition *despite* in 3 cases.

Table 24: Fact (written) - *it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod. + FACT] + *that*-clause

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
indefinite article *a*	modification found - *social*	FACT	0	subject complement	cataphora	"It is a (social) **fact** <u>that US inflation is increasing</u>[...]" (wphil902)	18

The "anticipatory it" construction in this pattern allows to emphasise the shell content and provide some new information, therefore the shell noun is usually preceded by an indefinite article. The shell noun functions as a subject complement and the shell content in *that*-clause performs the function of an extraposed subject.

The following instance includes three phrases in the same pattern.

(52)   It is a (social) **fact** that US inflation is increasing, and it is a (social) **fact** that "sneachd" means snow in Scots Gaelic. Likewise, it is a (social) **fact** that the masala is mellow in Goan cuisine, [...]. (wphil902)

The shell noun in ex. (52) is premodified by an adjective *social*, which is in brackets, however, it is important for the analysis to take it into consideration, since it allows *it* to function as an "anticipatory it" and postpone the subject (*that US inflation is increasing;that "sneachd" means snow in Scots Gaelic; that the masala is mellow in Goan cuisine*), the shell content always functions as an extraposed subject. [21] The pattern established cataphoric relations.

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[21] This excerpt (52) provides an excellent example of the shell noun usage - it is possible to observe the noun *fact* in three different contexts and in each of these contexts, the noun encapsulates something different.

Table 25: Fact (written) - [det. (+mod.) + FACT+ *of*-PP]

Determiner	Modification	Noun	Postmodification	Syntactic function of the shell noun	Reference	Examples	Frequency of pattern in corpus
definite article *the*	premodification found (e.g.*initial*, *strange*)	FACT	prepositional phrase (*of*-phrase)	(prepositional) object; adverbial	cataphora	[...] they discussed the "poetess" as a figure distinguishable either by the **fact** <u>of her female sex</u> [...] (wlit303)	6

The shell noun in this infrequent pattern is preceded by the definite article *the*, it can be premodified by an adjective and it is postmodified by the prepositional *of*-phrase which encapsulates the shell content. The shell content is referred to cataphorically.

> (53)   [...] they discussed the "poetess" as a figure distinguishable either by the **fact** <u>of her female sex</u> [...] (wlit303)

In ex. (53), the shell noun *fact* functions within a prepositional phrase and is preceded by the definite article *the,* which helps establish cataphoric relations. The shell content is expressed in the postmodifying *of*-phrase.

> (54)   [...] the desecration did not lie in the rainbow Virgin's image, but in the initial **fact** <u>of decorating the tomb of Christ with messages inciting hatred.</u> (wphil804)

Example (54) illustrates the shell noun in the function of prepositional object, as it is preceded by a prepositional verb (Quirk et al., 1985). The shell noun is premodified by the adjective *initial* and postmodified by the prepositional phrase *of decorating the tomb of Christ with messages inciting hatred*, which expresses the shell content.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The detailed analysis of the similarities and differences of shell noun use in different registers was presented in the preceding two chapters.The following section aims to answer the research questions stated in the introduction part, comment on the hypothesis regarding the impact of the registers and summarise the findings.

Regarding the frequency and range of (potential) shell nouns, the data indicates a higher frequency of shell nouns in general in written texts. Among the 32 selected types of (potential) shell nouns, even the least frequently used one in the written register exhibits a relative frequency almost five times higher (*action* - 183.89 per million tokens) than that observed in the spoken register (*evidence* - 39.28 per million tokens). However, this observation cannot be generalised, as it is necessary to consider individual types and their frequency of occurrence - for instance, the noun *idea* was the third most frequent potential shell noun in spoken texts (with the relative frequency 228.86 per million words), but it occupied the 24th position on the frequency list in written texts (although its relative frequency, 236.69 per million words, was not significantly different). The most frequently occurring (potential) shell noun in both registers was *way* (578 tokens in spoken texts, 337 tokens in written texts), however, since it does not semantically fall into the category of prime shell nouns, its probability of shell noun-hood is significantly lower. The most frequent shell nouns in the two registers overlap to a large extent (66% of the most frequent nouns occur in both lists), probably due to the academic character of both types of texts.

The majority of (potential) shell nouns in both registers fall into the semantic category of prime shell nouns (62,5% in both registers), however, there are slight differences in the representation of individual subclasses (factual, mental, linguistic) within this category. In written texts, the majority of (potential) shell nouns were represented by mental (38% out of all the potential shell noun types), factual (19%) and linguistic (6%) shell nouns, while in spoken texts, there appears to be the highest occurrence of factual shell nouns (31%), followed by mental shell nouns (19%) and linguistic shell nouns (13%).

The analysis of lexico-grammatical patterns in which the selected shell nouns appeared revealed some deviations from the patterns documented in literature. In spoken texts the data revealed the occurrence of a new pattern, '[det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *of*-phrase/*about*-phrase]',

with the shell content encapsulated in the postmodifier realised by an *about*-phrase. The original pattern '*it is* (+mod) + shell NP + *that*-clause or *to*-infinitive' was also slightly adjusted. The analysis revealed a more specific pattern with an anticipatory *it* alongside an obligatory shell noun premodifier ('*it* (anticipatory) + BE + [a +mod. + IDEA] + *that*-clause'), thus introducing a new, more detailed pattern.

The shell noun *thing* in spoken texts also occurred in the '*it* (anticipatory) + BE + [a+mod + THING] + *that*-clause' pattern.

Furthermore, the research revealed two new patterns - one that could be understood as analogical to '[det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *of*-phrase/*about*-phrase]' or '[det. + IDEA + *that*-clause]', which is '[det. (+ mod) + THING + *about*-PP]', where the shell noun can only be postmodified by *about*-phrase. The second discovered pattern that was not mentioned by Schmid (2000; 2018) is the anaphoric pattern 'Shell content in NP + BE + [*a*+ mod + THING (+mod)]'. This thesis, therefore, contributes to the shell noun research by uncovering new patterns in which shell nouns occur in spoken academic texts.

The analysis also distinguished between two patterns, differing only in the article used - '*That/it* + BE + [*the* (+mod.) + THING (+mod.)]' / '*That/which* + BE + [*a* + mod. + THING (+mod.)]'. The former proved to be more likely to appear with a postmodifier and provide identification, whereas the latter attracts an obligatory premodifier, which helps provide evaluation.

In written texts, the patterns in which the shell noun *idea* occurred were (apart from a few minor differences - see analysis) identical. The shell noun *fact*, however, occurred in significantly fewer patterns than the rest of the shell nouns, as its predominant occurrence (50%) was in the '[*the* + FACT + *that*-clause]' pattern.

The patterns in spoken text were more challenging to identify, likely due to the characteristics of spoken register and the related tendencies to interject afterthoughts, parenthetical remarks or perhaps disrupt the flow by additional sentences or clauses.

To address the final research question, the discourse-related functions, which vary depending on the pattern, also exhibited differences in their occurrence. Cataphoric relations were predominant in both registers, occurring in seven patterns each. However, anaphoric

relations were more prevalent in spoken texts compared to written texts, with only one pattern exhibiting anaphoric relation in the latter (see Table 26).

Additionally, the analysis revealed instances where the patterns may be combined or exhibit a dual focus function, contributing significantly to text cohesion and overall discourse relations.

Table 26: Anaphoric and cataphoric relations in spoken and written registers (summary)

SPOKEN		WRITTEN	
ANAPHORA	**CATAPHORA**	**ANAPHORA**	**CATAPHORA**
[*This*+ IDEA]	[det. (+ mod.) + IDEA] + BE + *that*-clause, *to*-infinitive clause or *what*-clause	[*This* + IDEA (+mod)]	[the + IDEA] + BE + *to*-infinitive
This/*that* + BE[+det.(+mod)+IDEA(+mod)]	[det. + IDEA + *that*-clause]		[det. + IDEA + *that*-clause]
	[det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *of*-phrase/*about*-phrase]		[det. (+mod.) + IDEA + *about*/*of*-PP]
	it (anticipatory) + BE + [a+mod. + IDEA] + *that*-clause		*it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod. + IDEA + mod.] + *that*-clause
[*This* + mod. + THING]	[det. + (mod.) + THING (+mod.)] + BE + *that*(/*to*-infinitive)		[*the* + FACT + *that*-clause]

That/it + BE + [*the*(+mod) + THING (+mod)] / *That/which* + BE + [*a* + mod + THING (+mod)]	[det. (+ mod) + THING + *about*-PP]		[*the* (+mod.) + FACT+ *of*-PP]
Shell content in NP + BE + [*a*+ mod. + THING (+mod.)]	*it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod. + THING] + *to*-inf		*it* (anticipatory) + BE + [*a* + mod. + FACT] + *that*-clause

To conclude, the thesis verified the main hypothesis regarding the impact of the different registers. While the conclusions are limited to the scope of the thesis and materials used, the thesis emphasises the need for further research on the phenomenon in spoken register.

From a didactic perspective, researching the shell noun phenomenon could also benefit the development of teaching English for academic purposes, as it may contribute to improving comprehension and production skills.

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6. Appendices

Appendix A

BASE: Examples - list of references

File ID in BASE	Lecture title (module name)	Department
ahlct001	A Reading	Centre for Caribbean studies
ahlct002	Elgin Marbles (Uses and abuses of classical art)	Classics
ahlct003	How important actually was Pericles?	Classics
ahlct004	Foro Mussolini	Classics
ahlct009	Children's literature (19th century fiction)	English
ahlct010	Allegory in the Faerie Queene (Elizabethan Literature)	English
ahlct011	Representations of Elizabeth I (Renaissance literature)	English
ahlct015	Introduction to new realism	Film and television studies
ahlct016	French film noir: the 1950s French gangster film	Film and Television Studies

ahlct020	The French revolution	History
ahlct021	Introduction to Historiography (Historiography)	History
ahlct024	Ranke (Historiography)	History
ahlct028	The Annales: the early years	History
ahlct030	Contemporary Approaches to the History of Art 1: Iconography	History of Art
ahlct033	Frege (Philosophy of language)	Philosophy
ahlct034	Theories of representation	Philosophy
ahlct037	Hume's Treatise (Early Modern Philosophy)	Philosophy
ahlct038	Kant's categorical imperative	Philosophy
ahlct039	Descartes: mind and body: meditation 6	Philosophy

Appendix B

List of journal articles with codes (for referencing in the text)

JOURNAL	AREA	ARTICLE (author: title)	CODE	Citation
Journal of Hellenic Studies	Classics and ancient history	Schmitz TA: Aristophanes' Frogs and reading culture in Athens	wclass101	Schmitz TA (2023). Aristophanes' Frogs and reading culture in Athens. The Journal of Hellenic Studies 143, 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426923000691

Journal of Hellenic Studies	Classics and ancient history	Claire Catenaccio: Dreams in Plutarch's Lives of Alcibiades and Demosthenes	wclass102	Catenaccio C (2023). Dreams in Plutarch's Lives of Alcibiades and Demosthenes. The Journal of Hellenic Studies 143, 105–120. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426923000538
Journal of Hellenic Studies	Classics and ancient history	Bruno Currie: Recognizing Odysseus, reading Penelope: the anagnōrisis in the 23rd book of the Odyssey	wclass103	Currie, B. (2022). Recognizing Odysseus, reading Penelope: the anagnōrisis in the 23rd book of the Odyssey. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, *142*, 1–29. doi:10.1017/S0075426922000040

Journal of Hellenic Studies	Classics and ancient history	Daniel Jolowicz: Spartans in the ancient Greek novels	wclass104	Jolowicz D (2023). Spartans in the ancient Greek novels. The Journal of Hellenic Studies 143, 121–146. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426923000630
Journal of Hellenic Studies	Classics and ancient history	David Lewis: The Cretan way of war: status, violence and values from the Classical period to the Roman conquest	wclass105	Cite this article: Lewis D (2023). The Cretan way of war: status, violence and values from the Classical period to the Roman conquest. The Journal of Hellenic Studies 143, 24–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426923000654

Journal of Roman studies	Classics and ancient history	Rebecca Fleming: Biography, Women and Power	wclass201	Flemming, R. (2023). Biography, Women and Power. *Journal of Roman Studies*, *113*, 171–186. doi:10.1017/S0075435823000758
Journal of Roman studies	Classics and ancient history	Emily Clifford: Death by Analogy: Identity Crises on a Roman Sarcophagus	wclass202	Clifford, E. (2023). Death by Analogy: Identity Crises on a Roman Sarcophagus. *Journal of Roman Studies*, *113*, 107–136. doi:10.1017/S0075435823000114

Journal of Roman studies	Classics and ancient history	Thomas Runeckles: Divine Representation in Documentary Style: Gods on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius	wclass203	Runeckles, T. (2023). Divine Representation in Documentary Style: Gods on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. *Journal of Roman Studies*, *113*, 79–106. doi:10.1017/S0075435823000229
Journal of Roman studies	Classics and ancient history	Peter Heslin: Metaquotation: Homer and the Emperor	wclass204	Heslin, P. (2023). Metaquotation: Homer and the Emperor. *Journal of Roman Studies*, *113*, 51–77. doi:10.1017/S0075435823000321

Journal of Roman studies	Classics and ancient history	Astrid Van Oyen:Roman Failure: Privilege and Precarity at Early Imperial Podere Marzuolo, Tuscany	wclass205	Van Oyen, A. (2023). Roman Failure: Privilege and Precarity at Early Imperial Podere Marzuolo, Tuscany. *Journal of Roman Studies*, *113*, 29–49. doi:10.1017/S0075435822000958
Victorian Literature and Culture	(English) Literature	Carolyn Betensky and Talia Schaffer: Gaskell, Ghosts, and the Common Good	wlit301	Betensky, C., & Schaffer, T. (2023). Gaskell, Ghosts, and the Common Good. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *51*(4), 569–576. doi:10.1017/S1060150323000608

Victorian Literature and Culture	(English) Literature	John-Charles Duffy: GAY-RELATED THEMES IN THE FAIRY TALES OF OSCAR WILDE	wlit302	Duffy, J.-C. (2001). GAY-RELATED THEMES IN THE FAIRY TALES OF OSCAR WILDE. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *29*(2), 327–349. doi:10.1017/S1060150301002054
Victorian Literature and Culture	(English) Literature	Charles LaPorte: GEORGE ELIOT, THE POETESS AS PROPHET	wlit303	LaPorte, C. (2003). GEORGE ELIOT, THE POETESS AS PROPHET. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *31*(1), 159–179. doi:10.1017/S1060150303000081

Victorian Literature and Culture	(English) Literature	John McBratney: RACIAL AND CRIMINAL TYPES: INDIAN ETHNOGRAPHY AND SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S *THE SIGN OF FOUR*	wlit304	McBratney, J. (2005). RACIAL AND CRIMINAL TYPES: INDIAN ETHNOGRAPHY AND SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE SIGN OF FOUR. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *33*(1), 149–167. doi:10.1017/S106015030500077X
Victorian Literature and Culture	(English) Literature	Jesse Oak Taylor:WHERE IS VICTORIAN ECOCRITICISM?	wlit305	Taylor, J. O. (2015). WHERE IS VICTORIAN ECOCRITICISM? *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *43*(4), 877–894. doi:10.1017/S1060150315000315

Literature Compass	(English) Literature	Michael Goodrum: 'Delicate ironies quite imperceptible on its surface': Henry S. Whitehead's weird tales and American empire in the Caribbean	wlit401	Goodrum, M. (2024). 'Delicate ironies quite imperceptible on its surface': Henry S. Whitehead's weird tales and American empire in the Caribbean. *Literature Compass*, e12751. https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12751
Literature Compass	(English) Literature	Brandon Katzir, Lindsay Katzir: Tracing social connections in the *Victorian Jewish; Writers Project*	wlit402	Katzir, B., & Katzir, L. (2024). Tracing social connections in the *Victorian Jewish Writers Project. Literature Compass*, e12741. https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12741

Literature Compass	(English) Literature	Aleena Achamma Paul, Swathi Krishna S.: Rainbow in Gethen: Queer utopia and community collectivism in Ursula K. Le Guin's "Coming of Age in Karhide"	wlit403	Paul, A. A., & Krishna S, S. (2024). Rainbow in Gethen: Queer utopia and community collectivism in Ursula K. Le Guin's "Coming of Age in Karhide". *Literature Compass*, e12746. https://doi. org/10.1111/lic3.12746
Literature Compass	(English) Literature	Stefano Rossoni: A novel for an ageing population? Masculinity and demographic shift in David Lodge's *Deaf Sentence*	wlit404	Rossoni, S. (2023). A novel for an ageing population? Masculinity and demographic shift in David Lodge's *Deaf Sentence* (2008). *Literature Compass*, *20*(10-12), e12755. https://doi. org/10.1111/lic3.12755

Literature Compass	(English) Literature	Chris Townsend:Semblances of truth: The Romantic lyric revisited	wlit405	Townsend, C. (2024). Semblances of truth: The Romantic lyric revisited. *Literature Compass*, e12702. https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12702
Feminist Media Studies	Media/Film and television studies	Helen Warner: An indie voice for a generation of women'?: Greta Gerwig, and female authorship post #Metoo	wmed501	Helen Warner (04 Apr 2023): 'An indie voice for a generation of women'?: Greta Gerwig, and female authorship post #Metoo, Feminist Media Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2023.2196605

Feminist Media Studies	Media/Film and television studies	Sophie Hindes & Bianca Fileborn: "Girl power gone wrong": #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and media reporting of (grey area) sexual violence	wmed502	Sophie Hindes & Bianca Fileborn (2020) "Girl power gone wrong": #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and media reporting of (grey area) sexual violence, Feminist Media Studies, 20:5, 639-656, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2019.1606843
Feminist Media Studies	Media/Film and television studies	Olivia Belton: Metaphors of patriarchy in *Orphan Black* and *Westworld*	wmed503	Olivia Belton (2020) Metaphors of patriarchy in *Orphan Black* and *Westworld*, Feminist Media Studies, 20:8, 1211-1225, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2019.1707701

Feminist Media Studies	Media/Film and television studies	Imogen Wara & Joost de Bruin: From a slap to a punch: preparing Hermione Granger for postfeminist Hollywood	wmed504	Imogen Wara & Joost de Bruin (05 Apr 2023): From a slap to a punch: preparing Hermione Granger for postfeminist Hollywood, Feminist Media Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2023.2194572
Feminist Media Studies	Media/Film and television studies	Robyn Stacia Swink: Lemony Liz and likable Leslie: audience understandings of feminism, comedy, and gender in women-led television comedies	wmed505	Robyn Stacia Swink (2017) Lemony Liz and likable Leslie: audience understandings of feminism, comedy, and gender in women-led television comedies, Feminist Media Studies, 17:1, 14-28, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2017.1261832

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Studies in art education	Media/Film and television studies	Ye Sul Park: Creative and Critical Entanglements *With* AI in Art Education	wmed701	Ye Sul Park (2023) Creative and Critical Entanglements *With* AI in Art Education, Studies in Art Education, 64:4, 406-425, DOI: 10.1080/00393541.2023.2255084

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Secularism and Non-religion	Philosophy	Lain A. B. Mathers: Expanding on the Experiences of Transgender Nonreligious People: An Exploratory Analysis	wphil801	Mathers, L. A. B. (2017). Expanding on the Experiences of Transgender Nonreligious People: An Exploratory Analysis. *Secularism and Nonreligion, 6*(3), 1–10. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.84

Secularism and Non-religion	Philosophy	Sergio Pérez and Frédérique Vallières: How Do Religious People Become Atheists? Applying a Grounded Theory Approach to Propose a Model of Deconversion	wphil802	Pérez, S., & Vallières, F. (2019). How Do Religious People Become Atheists? Applying a Grounded Theory Approach to Propose a Model of Deconversion. *Secularism and Nonreligion, 8*(3), 1–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.108
Secularism and Non-religion	Philosophy	Kenan Sevinç*, Thomas J. Coleman III† and Ralph W. Hood Jr.‡: Non-Belief: An Islamic Perspective	wphil803	Sevinç, K., Coleman, T. J., III, & Hood, R. W., Jr. (2018). Non-Belief: An Islamic Perspective. *Secularism and Nonreligion, 7*(5), 1–12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.111

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Secularism and Non-religion	Philosophy	Bethan Juliet Oake: The Relationship Between Holistic Practice and 'Spiritual but not Religious' Identity in the UK.	wphil805	Oake, B. J. (2021). The Relationship Between Holistic Practice and 'Spiritual but not Religious' Identity in the UK. Secularism and Nonreligion, 10(9), 1–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.150

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Journal of Aesthetics and Culture	Philosophy	Erik Wallrup: On patheme: affective shifts and Gustavian culture	wphil903	Erik Wallrup (2023) On patheme: affective shifts and Gustavian culture, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 15:1, 2209945, DOI: 10.1080/20004214.2023.2209945
Journal of Aesthetics and Culture	Philosophy	Marco de Waard: Staging division: power, violence, and theatricality in *The Baby of Mâcon*	wphil904	Marco de Waard (2024) Staging division: power, violence, and theatricality in *The Baby of Mâcon*, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 16:1, 2318816, DOI: 10.1080/20004214.2024.2318816

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