POSTMODIFICATION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

The paper discusses two types of clauses that may function as postmodifiers of the noun phrase heads, namely attributive relative clauses and appositive clauses. In the paper we focus on the structural and functional aspects of these postmodifying clauses. Crucial attention is devoted to finite and non-finite structures of postmodifying clauses as well as their restrictive and non-restrictive functions.

Key words: *postmodification, postmodifying clauses, attributive relative clauses, appositive clauses, restrictive functions, non-restrictive functions*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper only discusses the modification of the noun phrase heads. A noun phrase (NP**)** consists of a noun or any group of words that can substitute a noun. A simple noun phrase consists of the head (H), e.g. *NP [$_H$ teachers]*, *NP [$_H$ they]*. A complex noun phrase contains the head and other phrase elements, namely determiners, complements and modifiers. The function of complements and modifiers is to complement or modify the head of a noun phrase. For example, in *NP [$_H$ claims $_C$ for compensation]* the noun phrase head *claims* is complemented by the prepositional phrase *for compensation*. However, in *NP[$_{Det}$ the $_H$ books $_M$ on the table]* the noun phrase head *books* is postmodified by a prepositional phrase *on the table*, and in *NP [$_{Det}$ the $_H$ students $_M$ who are studying abroad*] the noun phrase head *students* is postmodified by the finite relative clause *who are studying abroad.* The noun phrase heads may be modified not only by phrases (phrasal modification), but also by clauses (clausal modification). Moreover, the paper discusses the two types of clauses functioning as postmodifiers of the noun phrase heads, adjective relative clauses and appositive clauses. These clauses are discussed both from the point of view of their structures and functions. For example, in *The man that witnessed the murder is being questioned by the police* the noun phrase head *man* is postmodified by the adjective relative clause *that witnessed the murder is being questioned by the police*. The clause is restrictive and has a finite structure. Another type of postmodifying clauses that are embedded in a noun phrase is the appositive clause. For example, in *A lot of people make the assumption that poverty only exists in the Third World* the clause *that poverty only exists in the Third World* is the appositive clause introduced by *that*. Furthermore, the paper points out the distinctions between postmodifying relative clauses and postmodifying appositive clauses. In postmodifying appositive clauses *that* does not have a function within its clause. However, in the restrictive adjective relative clauses the relativizer *that* has a function within its clause. The theory of modification in English is discussed and analyzed on sample sentences taken from Online Logman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

2. MODIFICATION

The term modification is "used to refer to the structural dependence of one grammatical unit on another in which the meaning of the head of a phrase is affected by words that are used to indicate qualities and attributes of the head" (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:910).

2.1 Noun phrase modification

The noun phrase, similar to other phrase types, has its structure and function. The noun phrase may only consist of the head, or the head may be accompanied by other phrase elements, such as

determiners, complements and modifiers. Pronoun heads are only rarely accompanied by other phrase elements.

The head of a noun phrase, but also the heads of other phrase types, is its obligatory part, it cannot be omitted and may stand on its own. The head of a noun phrase may be a noun, pronoun or any other nominal element. Downing – Locke (2006:405) state that "nominal heads fall into three main categories: common nouns, proper nouns and pronouns. Common nouns are characterized by having number contrast (i.e. having both singular and plural forms) and by being countable or uncountable."

The grammatical categories of number, countability and determination are closely related because countability of nouns is closely associated with the usage of articles (the grammatical category of determination) and also with expressing number (only countable nouns have the singular and plural contrast). Therefore, not only grammatical categories of nouns, but also particular noun classes must be taken into consideration in the structural analysis of the noun phrase. The usage of articles is different in singular countable nouns, plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns functioning as the heads of noun phrases. For example, in *They have made* $_{NP}$ *[an urgent* $_{H}$ *request for international aid]* the noun phrase head *request* is a singular countable noun used with an indefinite article to express a general reference. However, in *We will need* $_{NP}$ *[*$_{H}$ *references from your former employers]* the noun phrase head *references* is a plural countable noun expressing a general, not specific reference. Therefore, it is used with the zero article (*Ø*).

The determiner (Det) is a phrase element positioned before the noun phrase head (a pre-head position). The function of the determiner in a noun phrase is to indicate the type of reference, e.g. *NP [*$_{Det}$ *the* $_{H}$ *teachers]*, *NP [*$_{Det}$ *my* $_{H}$ *students]*, *NP [*$_{Det}$ *these* $_{H}$ *books]*. As shown in the examples, the type of reference in a noun phrase may be expressed by articles, possessive pronouns, relative pronouns.

According to Downing – Locke (2006:403-404) "The determiner function particularises the noun referent in different ways: by establishing its reference as definite or indefinite, by means of the articles (*a book, an actor*, *the actor*/*the book*), or relating the entity to the context by means of the demonstratives *this*, *that*, *these*, *those* (which are deictics or 'pointing words'), signalling that the referent is near or not near the speaker in space or time (*this* book, *that* occasion). The possessives signal the person to whom the referent belongs (*my* book, *the Minister's* reasons) and are sometimes reinforced by *own* (*my own book*). Other particularising words are the *wh*-words (*which* book? *whatever* reason) and the distributives (*each, every, all, either, neither*). Quantifiers are also included in the determiner function. Quantification may be exact (*one*, *seven*, *a hundred*, *the first*, *the next*) or inexact (*many, a lot, a few, some*)." The determiners are positioned at the beginning of a noun phrase and, when present, they occur in the following sequence: pre-determiners, central determiners, post-determiners.

The noun phrase head, as it has been already mentioned, may be accompanied by modifiers, optional elements of a noun phrase structure, but also by complements, which are obligatory in the noun phrase structure. A complex noun phrase does not necessarily contain all phrase elements; however, it may contain one or more determiners and one or more modifiers. For example, there are two determiners and two modifiers in *NP [*$_{Det}$ *all* $_{Det}$ *these* $_{M}$ *clever* $_{H}$ *students* $_{M}$ *who are studying abroad]*.

Compare:

[1] *School begins at 8.30.*

[2] *The box on the left gives a short history of the battle*.

[3] *Necessity is the mother of invention.*

The noun phrase in [1] is a simple noun phrase. The noun phrase head *scho*o*l* is not accompanied by other phrase elements. However, the noun phrases in [2] and [3] are complex noun phrases in which the noun phrase heads are accompanied by other phrase elements. There are two complex noun phrases in [2]. The noun phrase head in *NP [*$_{Det}$ *the* $_{H}$ *box* $_{M}$ *on the left]* is postmodified by a prepositional phrase *on the left* and the noun phrase head in *NP [*$_{Det}$ *a* $_{M}$ *short history* $_{C}$ *of the battle]* is premodified by an adjective phrase *short* and complemented by a prepositional phrase *of the battle*.

There are two noun phrases in [3], a simple noun phrase consisting only of the head *NP [$_{H}$ necessity]* and a complex noun phrase consisting of the head and its prepositional complement – *NP [$_{Det}$ the $_{H}$ mother $_{C}$ of invention]*. The complement completes the meaning of a noun phrase head; the sentence would be ungrammatical without this phrase element **Necessity is the mother*.

There are two types of modification, premodification and postmodification, and two types of modifiers, premodifiers and postmodifiers. Premodification is a term "used to refer to the modification which occurs before the head word in a phrase. Modifiers which occur before the head are premodifiers" (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:916). By contrast, postmodification is a term "used to refer to the modification which occurs after the head word in a phrase. Modifiers which occur after the head are postmodifiers" (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:915).

In summary, the complex noun phrases may have various structural combinations. The head of a complex noun phrase may be optionally modified by a premodifier, e.g. *NP [$_{PreM}$ good $_{H}$ students]*. The head of a noun phrase *students* is premodified by an adjective phrase *good*. Then, the head of a complex noun phrase may be optionally modified by a postmodifier, e.g. *NP [$_{Det}$ the $_{H}$ students $_{PostM}$ from Slovakia]*. The head of this noun phrase *students* is postmodified by a prepositional phrase *from Slovakia*. The head of a complex noun phrase may be followed by an obligatory complement that completes the meaning of the head of a noun phrase, e.g. *NP [$_{Det}$ the $_{H}$ parents $_{C}$ of two handicapped children]*. The head of a noun phrase *parents* is followed by a prepositional complement *of two handicapped children.* Lastly, a complex noun phrase may be both premodified and postmodified by one or more modifiers, e.g. *NP [$_{Det}$ the $_{PreM1}$ loudly $_{PreM2}$ discussing $_{H}$ students $_{PostM}$ who are studying abroad]***.** The noun phrase head *students* in this last example is premodified by an adverb phrase *loudly* and by an adjective phrase *discussing*, but also postmodified by a finite relative clause *who are studying abroad***.**

3. POSTMODIFICATION BY CLAUSES

According to Biber et al. (2011: 645), the post-modifying clauses serve "to identify the reference of the head noun, or to add some descriptive information about that noun." Downing & Locke (2006:49) state that "the potential postmodifier elements in the nominal group either provide information that helps to identify the referent of the nominal group, or else they add supplementary information not essential for identifying it." We distinguish two types of clauses functioning as postmodifiers of the noun phrases heads: relative clauses and appositive clauses.

Compare:

[4] Do you know the people *who live over the road?*

[5] I discussed it with my brother, *who is a lawyer.*

[6] That's the man *whose house has burned down.*

[7] Jurors, *whose identities will be kept secret,* will be paid $40 a day.

[8] There is a growing realization *that we must manage the earth's resources more carefully.*

[9] We are working on the assumption *that the conference will take place as planned.*

[10] I like the car *that is parked infront of our house.*

The relative clauses in [4] and [6] are restrictive postmodifiers embedded in the structure of the noun phrase. These postmodifying clauses identify the reference of the noun heads *people* and *man* respectively. On the other hand, the relative clauses in [5] and [7] are non-restrictive postmodifiers whose function is to add some descriptive, supplementary information to a referent which is already defined. These non-restrictive postmodifying clauses are not embedded in the structure of the noun phrases and can be omitted. The clause in [10], introduced by *that*, is a relative clause used in the restrictive function. However, the clauses in [8] and [9], also introduced by *that*, are appositive, and not relative clauses.

The appositive clause resembles the restrictive relative clause because it, too, is introduced by *that.* However, the appositive clause also differs from the relative clause. In the appositive clause *that* does not have a function within its clause. On the other hand, in the restrictive adjective relative clauses the relativizer *that* has a function within its clause.

Compare:

[11] Most people accept the proposition *that we have a duty to protect endangered an*imals.

[11a] We have a duty to protect endangered animals.

[12] My calculations were based on the assumption *that house prices would remain steady.*

[12a] House prices would remain steady.

[13] I like the car *that is parked in front of his house.*

[13a] * *Is parked in front of his house.*

[14] What is the address of the woman *that left this message?*

[14a] * Left this message?

The clauses in [11] and [12] are appositive clauses; the particle *that* does not have a function in the clause structure. If we omit the particle *that,* the clauses may be used on their own, as illustrated in [11a] and [12a]. However, in [13] and [14] the relativizer *that* functions as the subject of the restrictive adjective relative clause. Therefore, if we omit this *that* functioning as the subject of the restrictive adjective relative clause, the sentence would be ungrammatical, as illustrated in [13a] and [14a] .

4. POSTMODIFICATION BY ADJECTIVE RELATIVE CLAUSES

Adjective relative clauses function as postmodifiers of the noun phrase heads. They are introduced by the relative pronouns *who, whom, which, that,* or by the relative adverbs *where, when* and *why.* The choice of relativizers depends on whether the noun phrase head is animate or inanimate, whether the relativizer refers to the subject or object in the main clause, or whether the adjective relative clause is used restrictively or non-restrictively. The relativizer *that* can be used only in the restrictive relative clauses for both personal and non-personal reference. The zero relativizer is only used with non-subject referents.

It should be pointed out that the relative adverbs *where, when* and *why* can not only introduce adjective relative clauses, but also nominal relative clauses and adverbial clauses of place, time and reason.

Compare:

[15] Solar energy is an idea *whose time has come.*

[16] Desperate for money, she called her sister, *whom she hadn't spoken to in 20 years.*

[17] Did you see the letter *which came today?*

[18] He wondered *where they could have come from.*

[19] She was standing exactly where you are standing now.

[20] The treatment will continue until the patient reaches the point *where he can walk correctly and safely.*

The relativizer *whose i*s typically used to mark a possessive relationship between an animate noun phrase head and some other noun phrase. However, it can be also used to mark other genitive relationships with inanimate, usually abstract noun phrase heads, as in [15]. The non-restrictive adjective relative clause in [16] is introduced by a relativizer *whom* referring to an animate object in the main clause. On the other hand, the relativizer *which* in [17] refers to an inanimate noun phrase head in the main clause. The relative adverbs *where, when* and *why,* as it has been already mentioned,

can introduce three different types of clauses. This is illustrated in sample sentences [18], [19] and [20]. The relative adverb *where* in [18] introduces the nominal interrogative clause; the relative adverb *where* in [19] introduces the adverbial clause of place. Lastly, the relative adverb *where* in [20] introduces the adjective relative clause.

4.1 Restrictive and Non-restrictive Postmodification by Relative Clauses

"Modificastion can be restrictive or non-restrictive. That is, the head can be viewed as a member of a class which can be linguistically identified only through modification that has been supplied (restrictive). Or the head can be viewed as unique or as a member of a class that has been independently identified; any information given to such a head is additional information which is not essential for identifying the head, and we call it non-restrictive" (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 364).

Compare:

[21] Shortly after the shooting, the man *who had done it was arrested.*

[22] I met a girl *who knew Mrs Townsend.*

[23] Mooresville is the town *that John Dillinger came from.*

[24] She asked friends *whose opinion she respected.*

[25] In theory anyone *who lives or works in the area may be at risk.*

[26] Karen Blixen was being feted by everyone *who knew her work.*

[27] Like many *who met him in those days* I was soon charmed.

[28] The old lady *driving the horse* was all in black.

[29] The bus *carrying the freedom riders* arrived just before noon.

The postmodifying relative clauses introduced by the relativizer *who* in [21] and [22] are restrictive relative clauses. The postmodifying relative clause in [21] belongs to the subject; however, the postmodifying relative clause in [22] belongs to the object. The restrictive relative clause introduced by *that* in [23] belongs to the subject complement. The relativizer *whose* in [24] introduces the restrictive relative clause with a finite structure and signals a possessive relationship. In [25], [26] and [27] the postmodifying restrictive relative clauses are preceded by the pronoun heads, not by the noun phrase heads as in [21] to [24]. The post-modifying relative clauses in [28] and [29] are also restrictive relative clauses; however, they have a non-finite structure.

"Restrictive and non restrictive relative clauses differ in both meaning and expression. With regard to meaning, non-restrictive relative clauses do not define subsets, as does the restrictive type. While the restrictive clauses give us essential information, the function of the non-restrictive type is to add a further specification (additional information) of something that is already presented as specific" (Rafajlovičová, 2004:99).

Compare:

[30] Heath Robinson, *who died in 1944*, was a graphic artist and cartoonist.

[31] The treatment, *which is being tried by researchers at four hospitals*, has helped patients who have been failed to respond to other remedies.

[32] British Rail, *which has launched an enquiry*, said one coach was badly damaged.

Unlike restrictive relative clauses, non-restrictive relative clauses cannot be used without relativizers. The postmodifying non-restrictive relative clause in [30] refers to an animate antecedent; however, the postmodifying non-restrictive relative clauses in [31] and [32] refer to inanimate antecedents. The non-restrictive relative clauses in [30], [31] and [32] have a finite structure.

5. CONCLUSION

Adjective relative clauses and appositive clauses function as the postmodifiers of the noun phrase head. Therefore, crucial attention was devoted in the paper to the structure of the noun phrase and particular noun phrase elements which may operate as a modifier. Using sample sentences, the paper pointed out that the noun phrase heads may not only be modified by phrases, but also by clauses.

Moreover, the paper discussed the two types of clauses functioning as the postmodifiers of the noun phrase heads: adjective relative clauses and appositive clauses. These clauses were discussed both from the structural and functional viewpoint. The necessary attention was devoted to the finite and non-finite structural types of postmodifying clauses, but also to their restrictive and non-restrictive functions.

Furthermore, the paper pointed out the distinctions between the postmodifying relative clauses and postmodifying appositive clauses. The appositive clause resembles the restrictive relative clause because it, too, is introduced by *that.* However, the appositive clause also differs from the relative clause. In the appositive clause *that* does not have a function within its clause. On the other hand, in the restrictive adjective relative clauses the relativizer *that* has a function within its clause. The sample sentences in the paper were taken from Online Logman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

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