A Comparative Study of Postmodifiers Used in Business News in Leading Newspapers in Thailand, USA and UK

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบส่วนขยายที่วางข้างหลังที่ปรากฏในข่าวธุรกิจของหนังสือพิมพ์ชั้นนำในประเทศไทย สหรัฐอเมริกาและอังกฤษ

พรรณ พรพรรณ บุญพัฒนาภรณ์
อาจารย์ประจุจบัณฑิต
คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยหอการค้าไทย
Email: pornpan_b@hotmail.com

Abstract

Reading business news becomes a part of work in the business sector, since it is the main source of current business situations that affect decision making. Part of the complexity of sentences in news comes from the choice of postmodifiers. One hundred and twenty business news stories from the Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today, and The Guardian were investigated to identify type of sentence as well as types and functions of postmodifiers frequently used in business news. The study revealed that complex sentences were used most frequently in the Bangkok Post, USA Today and The Guardian while simple sentences were used most frequently in The Nation. Prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases were the most frequently used in simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences in all newspapers studied. Regarding compound sentences, prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases were used most frequently only in the Bangkok Post, The Nation, and USA Today while prepositional phrases modifying verb phrases were the most frequently used in The Guardian. News writers tended to place both phrase and clause postmodifiers, which occurred in series and included other types of embedded postmodifiers, in the predicate part more than in the subject part. Even though each news writer has a particular writing style and preference for postmodifiers, both the Bangkok Post news writers and foreign news writers tended to use postmodifiers in similar ways.

Keywords: Postmodifier, Business News, The Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today, The Guardian
Introduction

English is the communication tool for handling business interactions across the world and is now the language of e-commerce and all types of electronic communication. According to Internet World Stats (2010), English is at the top of the list of languages used on the Internet with 536.6 million users in 2010. Therefore, it is unarguable that English is the prime global language and a key to professional advancement.

With ongoing economic changes and the upcoming realization of the Asean Economic Community, the ability to make a correct and fast decision will be a key to survival and success. Fast decision making is tremendously important, since it can have an impact on ways to improve business performance as well as on how to adjust effectively to changing situations. Moreover, today’s workplace is often multicultural and multigenerational; therefore discussing current business situations in English is very common. One way to get updated information is from newspapers, either national or international, in both electronic and printed versions; reading business news becomes a part of work and daily life. As a result, business companies are looking for applicants best equipped with English skills (Baker, Resch, Carlisle, & Schmidt, 2001). It is necessary for graduates to be able to use English communicative skills (Praphal & Opanon-amata, 2001), to understand and digest information effectively as evident from all job advertisements listing English as a requirement.

Acknowledging the results of several researches, teachers have been trying to find ways to improve students’ reading proficiency. An authentic text is preferable when teachers want to increase learners’ motivation by emphasizing the real world application of the language (Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Furthermore, Nuttall (1996) also states that learners will be motivated if the reading skills are of practical use and enable learners to read text they actually require for some real-life purposes. Therefore, English newspapers are integrated as teaching materials to develop students reading skills in numerous courses at various levels of English instruction, ranging from secondary schools to universities (Kawprapan, 2006). Moreover, students at university level should experience the language that is actually being used in their field as a platform to prepare themselves for future employment.

We can notice that most sentences written in newspapers are long and complicated because modifiers, especially postmodifiers, in various forms are inserted in order to give information to the reader. Long and complicated sentences can discourage students, as Nuttall (1989) mentions, long sentences and difficult syntax can block comprehension, even when
vocabulary is familiar. Postmodifiers serve to qualify, select and limit the meaning of the head in order to make it more specific. Postmodifiers in this research are classified as either phrase or clause postmodifiers and occur after the constituents they modify.

Examples below are a simple and a complex sentence from business news showing various forms of postmodifiers with the arrow heads pointing to the constituents they modify:

Example 1

The comeback in the home-improvement business was also fueled by government stimulus programs including tax credits for home purchases and rebates for energy-efficient products.

(Chapman, 2010)

Example 2

“The airline and the two shopping malls are planning new promotions, which are expected in May or early June, aimed at encouraging customers and increasing spending after the end of the red-shirt rallies”, said Pruet Boonphakam, a THAI executive vice president.

(Sritama, 2010)

In writing news stories, postmodifiers play an important role in adding information in sentences. However, when students see long sentences, they presume that these long sentences are per se complicated and cannot be understood. Nutall (1989) states that generally postmodifiers give most trouble and he also suggests that students need to learn what kinds of postmodifiers occur. Postmodifier analysis is necessary in order to break sentences into elements, enabling students to understand the full structure. Therefore, understanding postmodifiers used in business news can make teachers and students aware of the language they will meet in reading business news and can help students achieve a higher level of understanding.

**Purposes of the Study**

1. To examine types of sentences frequently used in business news in the

   *Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today, and The Guardian*

2. To examine types and analyze functions of postmodifiers frequently used in each type of sentence.
3. To compare types and functions of postmodifiers frequently used in business news in the *Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today,* and *The Guardian*

4. To synthesize patterns of postmodifiers used in each type of sentence.

**Significance of the Study**

The results will be beneficial to students and teachers of English as well as other interested people, especially business company employees who need to read business news and who want to practice their reading skills. Teachers can use the findings from this research to match their teaching contents to authentic materials. Moreover, students’ attitudes toward long sentences as something that cannot be understood can be changed when they are able to work out the structure of sentences by being more aware of postmodifiers.

**Scope of the Study**

This study analyzes postmodifiers found in business news. The focus is on modifiers after the words, phrases or clauses they modify. Modifiers like adverb clauses and elliptical clauses which are placed before main clauses are not taken into consideration.

**Corpus**

One hundred and twenty business news stories between 305-373 words long in six areas namely economics, commerce, marketing, industry, information technology, and property between April and June 2010 were picked from two Thai English language newspapers in Thailand, the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation,* one newspaper in The United States of America, *USA Today,* and one newspaper in the United Kingdom, *The Guardian.*

**Data Analysis**

Business news stories collected were analyzed in terms of sentence types, kinds and functions of postmodifiers. An expert in linguistics was asked to analyze the same corpus in order to compare the results to ensure reliability. This expert and the researcher met, discussed, and practiced coding the corpus before analyzing the corpus individually and independently. The results of corpus analysis were compared and contrasted. An English native speaker was consulted to reach a final conclusion. The language features used for the data analysis in this study were based on grammatical structure introduced by Francis (1958) and Jotikasathira (2006).
Results and Discussion

To answer Question 1, sentences from 120 business news stories selected from four newspapers were analyzed in terms of sentence types. It was found that complex sentences were used most frequently in the Bangkok Post, USA Today, and The Guardian while simple sentences were ranked the highest in The Nation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentages of Types of Sentences Used in Business News in the Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today and The Guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Bangkok Post</th>
<th>The Nation</th>
<th>USA Today</th>
<th>The Guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex sentences</td>
<td>48.52%</td>
<td>56.62%</td>
<td>50.39%</td>
<td>58.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple sentences</td>
<td>45.99%</td>
<td>35.90%</td>
<td>42.19%</td>
<td>29.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound-complex</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>6.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound sentences</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
<td>3.42%</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted here that not only the use of adjective and adverb clauses but also the use of noun clauses as reported speech contributed to the high percentage of complex sentences.

To answer Question 2, types and functions of postmodifiers frequently used in each type of sentence, prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases were used the most and prepositional phrases modifying verb phrases were used the second highest in all types of sentences. Adverb phrases modifying verb phrases ranked third in simple and compound sentences while adjective clauses modifying noun phrases took the third place in complex sentences. Appositive phrases modifying noun phrases were the third in compound-complex sentences as in Table 2:
Table 2: Top Five Types and Functions of Frequently Used Postmodifiers in Each Type of Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Sentence</th>
<th>Compound Sentence</th>
<th>Complex Sentence</th>
<th>Compound-Complex Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prep ph modifying noun ph 45.39%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying noun ph 40.43%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying noun ph 29.66%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying noun ph 31.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prep ph modifying verb ph 19.34%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying verb ph 28.37%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying verb ph 14.63%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying verb ph 19.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv ph modifying verb ph 6.76%</td>
<td>Adv ph modifying verb ph 14.19%</td>
<td>Adj cl modifying noun ph 12.48%</td>
<td>Appositive ph modifying noun ph 8.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inf ph modifying noun ph 5.44%</td>
<td>Inf ph modifying noun ph 4.26%</td>
<td>Appositive ph modifying noun ph 9.55%</td>
<td>Adj cl modifying noun ph 7.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appositive ph modifying noun ph 5.31%</td>
<td>Prep ph modifying adj ph 2.84%</td>
<td>Adv cl modifying verb ph 7.08%</td>
<td>Inf ph modifying noun ph 5.91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that most of the prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases functioned as adjectives giving information about time and place that is common in reporting news to answer when and where questions. That these prepositional phrases were used at the highest level might be because they are easy to insert at various positions both in the subject and predicate parts in the sentence.

In all four types of sentences, postmodifiers frequently used were similar and limited to only a few types and functions of phrases and clauses as we can see from the first five frequently used postmodifiers in each type of sentence. However, it was clear that phrase modifiers were used more than clause modifiers. No matter what types of sentences were used in business news, the results showed that prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases represented the highest percentage. This is in accordance with the statistical findings of a research project by Longman, which indicated that prepositional phrases made up 65-80% of all postmodifiers in news reportage (Biber et al., 1999, p. 606). However, it has to be noted that prepositional phrases were also embedded in other types of postmodifiers. These small embedded prepositional phrases were not separated because it would make the meaning of those phrases incomplete.

It was also noticeable that past participial phrases were used at very low percentages in all four newspapers. This confirms Biber et al.’s conclusion (1999, p. 632) that full relative clauses with a passive verb are used instead of past participial phrases because a full relative clause is used whenever tense, perfect aspect, or modality are important, and also because a full relative clause is preferred when the postmodifier is separated from the head noun.
It should be noted here that adverb clauses of time and reason were used more frequently than other types of adverb clauses. This is in line with the high usage of phrase modifiers indicating time.

To answer Question 3 about types and functions of postmodifiers used in each type of sentence in the *Bangkok Post, The Nation, USA Today* and *The Guardian*, it can be concluded that, apart from prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases and prepositional phrases modifying verb phrases as the first and second most frequently used postmodifiers, adverb phrases modifying verb phrases were also included but at a different frequency. Infinitive phrases modifying noun phrases and appositive phrases occurred in three out of four newspapers as shown in Table 3.
Sentences

Compound Simple

Complex Compound

-Complex Sentences

Moreover, postmodifiers used in simple sentences in the Bangkok Post, The Nation, and USA Today tended to be similar while those in The Guardian deviated from the other three newspapers. Past participle phrases modifying noun phrases were ranked as the fifth most frequently used postmodifiers only in The Guardian. In other newspapers, instead of using past participial phrases as modifiers, news writers tended to use a past participle in a passive construction. This might be because in reporting business news, the focus is mostly on the events rather than the performers/actors in the events.
In addition, appositive phrases occurred three times more frequently in *The Guardian* compared to the other three newspapers. This might be for the reason that it was more practical to use appositive phrases to give extra information in simple sentences as the writer did not need to create a new sentence. These appositive phrases involved a proper noun with human reference to provide background information about the person in question, which is in line with the study by Biber et al. (1999, p. 639), that in news, over 90% of all appositive construction involved a proper noun with human reference. This is different from appositive noun phrases used in academic prose which rarely have human references. However, both the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* included a very low frequency of appositive phrases, especially in simple sentences. This can be assumed that Thai news writers thought that these appositive phrases would make sentences long and complicated with the added problem of punctuation, unfamiliar to Thais.

Among the four newspapers mentioned, compound sentences in business news analyzed included a different frequency of postmodifiers. Between Thai English newspapers and foreign English newspapers, it was found that foreign English newspapers used all types of postmodifiers to modify verb phrases whereas Thai English newspapers tended to use all types of postmodifiers to modify noun phrases. Furthermore, there were some postmodifiers modifying verb phrases that occurred only in foreign English newspapers. They were infinitive phrases, present participial phrases, and elliptical clauses.

Regarding complex sentences, the top five most frequently used postmodifiers in complex sentences in all four newspapers were of the same type, which were prepositional phrases modifying noun phrases, prepositional phrases modifying verb phrases, appositive phrases modifying noun phrases, adjective clauses modifying noun phrases, and adverb clauses modifying verb phrases. The only difference was that they occurred at different frequencies. The *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* tended to include almost the same types of postmodifier and they had the same ranking. This shows that Thai news writers tended to have similar writing styles regarding the use of postmodifiers in complex sentences. Foreign or native language news writers tended to use adjective clauses more than Thai news writers as they might not regard adjective clause postmodifiers as too complicated while Thai news writers tended to use phrases instead.

However, regarding subordinate clauses, business news in the *Bangkok Post* contained embedded clauses at the highest percentage. News writers might think that these subordinate clauses are short and uncomplicated, but using several subordinate clauses and
various other types of postmodifiers in the same sentence can cause difficulty for the reader as in the example below:

*Pol Col Suchart Wong-ananchai, the committee chairman, said it was looking into amendments made to mobile telephone and satellite concessions in light of Supreme Court ruling that Thaksin Shinawatra abused his authority while being prime minister to press for changes that helped affiliates of Shin Corp, which he founded and later sold to Temasek Holdings of Singapore in 2006.*

(Tortermvasana, 2010)

It is obvious that most postmodifiers in compound-complex sentences are in the form of phrase modifiers. Clause modifiers occurred only at a very low percentage. Therefore, it can be concluded that though news writers write compound-complex sentences, they tend to use short easy forms of postmodifiers. Although each news writer has his or her own writing style and preference for postmodifiers, all in all, the *Bangkok Post* news writers and foreign news writers tended to have similar ways of using postmodifiers.

With reference to Question 4, various types of postmodifiers were used in order to give information, since news stories need to present a lot of information in a limited space. There are numerous structural variants possible with postmodifiers. In fact, there are no exact patterns used in the sentence, but depends on the writers’ preferences. Multiple structures found in postmodifiers represented either a series of forms modifying a single word, embedded phrases or clauses.

From the data analyzed, phrase postmodifiers occurred in both subject and predicate parts. Prepositional phrases, present participial phrases, past participial phrases and appositive phrases were frequently used in both parts. However, elliptical clauses and adverb phrases were always placed at the end of a sentence. Various types of postmodifiers in series were used after verb phrases, placed both after verb phrases and after objects. These were also applied to simple sentences with linking verbs and a compound predicate.

Most types of postmodifier modified the immediately preceding words or phrases. In some cases, a series of postmodifiers modified the same word or phrase; consequently, there was a gap between the second or third postmodifier and the word or phrase it modified. It is
noticeable that infinitive phrases were rarely found as postmodifiers after subjects. This might be because infinitive phrases offer a limited use of indicating purpose, which was not mentioned much in business news. Postmodifiers in the subject parts were mostly appositive phrases and prepositional phrases. Prepositional phrases occurred both as ‘stand alone’ phrases and as embedded phrases within other types of postmodifiers.

Regarding clause postmodifiers, adjective clauses were included most both in the subject and predicate parts. Adjective clauses also modified noun phrases embedded in other modifiers in the sentence. Relative pronouns replacing objects of the clauses were omitted, therefore ‘whom’ or ‘which’ representing objects was rarely found. This should be emphasized in class so that students are aware of the relative pronoun omission and can avoid misinterpretation. The example below shows the underlined part as an adjective clause with relative pronoun omitted.

*The mother and baby products retailer reported underlying profits of £ 37.2 m, virtually unchanged from the £ 36.9 m it made last year but almost £ 1 m lower than analysts’ forecasts.*

(Fletcher, 2010)

Some adjective clauses modified the whole idea in the previous clause rather than only one noun phrase, in it as in the example below:

*Nokia said the gadgets infringe five patents related to technology that makes voice and data communication more efficient, [which allows the devices to be more compact.]*

(Vanacore, 2010)

Adverb clauses mainly function as modifiers of verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. However, in the business news analyzed, some adverb clauses modified the entire main clause. These adverb clauses began with subordinate conjunctions like *while*, or *even if* as in the following example:

*As well as office space, firms must also secure risk-free staff travel and facilities such as cables, while other requirements are met by the owner of office buildings, she said.*

(Katharangsiporn, 2010)
In fact, language is creative; therefore, there is really no fixed slot for most adverbials, since moveability is one of their most noticeable characteristics. Their positions depend on the writer’s emphasis and the desire for sentence variety (Kolln, 1982).

There are some uncommon characteristics of postmodifiers derived from the business news analyzed. These characteristics are difficult for students as they do not follow the grammar rules taught and they may cause confusion, which leads to misinterpretation. Student understanding of these characteristics below will prepare the ground for reading business news with more understanding.

1. Structure of Phrase Modifier

Postmodifiers found were mostly phrase modifiers. However, some phrases are not in an ordinary simple phrase structure but phrases with embedded clauses. An appositive phrase and a present participial phrase are shown below as examples:

Perhaps most striking was that trucks—*a category that includes pickups, minivans, SUVs and cargo vans*—powered April’s boom.  

Appositive phrase  

(Healey & Woodyard, 2010)

Late last year, Lee was reported to have reprimanded managers at the group’s financial subsidiaries, asking why they were unable to perform like their sister firms in the manufacturing sector on the global stage.  

Present participial phrase  

(The Nation reporter)

2. Embedded Subordinate Clauses

Embedded subordinate clauses as postmodifiers were numerous in number and type. Some complex sentences contained more than one subordinate clause of the same type as in the example below:

*Exports remain strong as Thai political violence only marginally affected the business, while the company is monitoring the financial crisis in Europe as it is a key market.*  

(Praiwan, 2010)
Some contained many subordinate clauses of different types such as

Apple is competing for market share in the smartphone arena with RIM, maker of the BlackBerry brand: Google’s Android software, which is used by multiple handset makers; and Nokia, which has the lion’s share of the smartphone market but which has seen its share and profitability shrink since Apple and Google entered the market in 2007. (Arthur, 2010)

Some contained an adjective clause with the subject gap in the main clause as in the following example:

The Wi-Fi access, which will eventually include a new network of news and entertainment content exclusively for customers, comes as Starbucks works to take business back from rivals like McDonald’s and independent cafes that have long offered free Internet. (Heher, 2010)

3. That-Complement Clauses

There were several that-complement clauses in business news stories which on the surface look like adjective clauses but they were not used as postmodifiers of nouns. The difference is that that-complement clauses begin with ‘that’ but do not identify the reference of the head noun and do not add some descriptive information about the noun. Below is an example of a that-complement clause

Two countrywide companies will pay $108 million to settle allegations that they inflated the fee that homeowners paid. (Yost, 2010)

Most that-complement clauses were used as noun complements. In some clauses, ‘that’ was omitted as in the following example:
"The moment the service can be restored, we will inform the public, but currently we are not scheduled to open," Chartchai said. (Chanjindamanee, 2010)

Recommendations

Teachers teaching business English should integrate business news from both Thai and foreign newspapers into their reading materials. Moreover, students should be prepared by studying structures and patterns, including uncommon characteristics, of postmodifiers in business news. However, teachers should be well aware of the complexity of postmodifiers; selecting business news and example sentences to be used in class must be done carefully so that students are not overloaded with language complexity. In addition, students should be provided with opportunities to discuss the use and variation of postmodifiers in business news in order that they can become familiar with numerous ways of using postmodifiers.

Teachers teaching journalism should encourage their students to use simplified language patterns as the target group of business news is not limited to only people in business professions. It can be broadened for the general public if the language used is not too complicated.

Class discussion between business news writers and students should be organized to enhance understanding between writers and the audience. This will create opportunities for the news writers to get direct feedback from the reader and also to strengthen the teaching of business English and journalism.

Concerning further research, researchers may study postmodifiers and premodifiers in business news in other leading newspapers to see whether modifiers are used in the same way. Further research can also be in-depth interviews with news writers to understand the reasons for choosing each type of sentence and each type of postmodifier used in business news.


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