

RESEARCH TITLE

A Linguistic Study of Pre-modification in Selected English Short Stories

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Abstract

Pre-modification is a grammatical concept, it is represented by several sentence elements including adjectives, nouns, participles and genitives. These sentence elements are called pre-modifiers when they carry the pre-modification of the head noun in within the construction of a noun phrase. The aim of this research is to shed light on how pre-modification is occurred in two selected English short stories which are “The Swimmer” (1964) and “The Reunion” (1962) by the American writer John Cheever. The occurrences of the pre-modifiers, with their different types, in both short stories are noticed. It has been concluded pre- modifiers appear widely in the short stories but adjectives occupy the highest occurrence among other pre-modifiers.

Key Words: Pre-modification, Adjectives, Short stories, English language, John Cheever.

دراسة لغوية للتعديل القبلي في قصص قصيرة إنجليزية مختارة

المستخلص

التعديل القبلي هو مفهوم نحوي، يتمثل في عدة عناصر لغوية في الجملة مثل الصفات، والأسماء، وأشباه الجمل، والمضافات. تُسمى هذه العناصر التعديلات القبلية عندما تحمل صفة التعديل القبلي للاسم الرئيس في بناء العبارة الاسمية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على كيفية حدوث التعديل القبلي في قصتين قصيرتين إنجليزيتين مختارتين، هما: "السباح" (1964) و"اللقاء" (1962) للكاتب الأمريكي جون تشيفر. وقد لوحظت التعديلات القبلية بأنواعها المختلفة في كلتا القصتين. وقد خلص البحث إلى أن التعديلات القبلية تظهر بشكل واسع في القصتين، ولكن الصفات تحتل أعلى نسبة من حيث التكرار بين أنواع التعديلات القبلية الأخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعديل القبلي، الصفات، القصص القصيرة، اللغة الإنجليزية، جون تشيفر.

1. Introduction

Generally, English sentences are built with a noun phrase and a verb phrase. Noun phrases can be expanded before the main noun through a process called pre-modification, where a group of words known as pre-modifiers comes before the noun. Quirk et al. (1985) explain that a noun phrase is a phrase whose core element is a noun. These phrases can act as different parts of a sentence, such as the subject or the object. The most basic noun phrase includes an article and a head noun. This head noun can be changed or added to in two ways: by adding words before it (pre-modification) or after it (post-modification). Stageberg (1981) similarly defines a noun phrase as a noun along with any related words or groups of words that describe it. The noun itself is the central part, or head, and the other words are its modifiers.

- *The yellow tulips.*

In their analysis of noun phrase (NP) structure, Quirk et al. (1985) highlight the head as the primary component. This head element is central to the NP, with other constituents positioned around it. Notably, the head often determines grammatical agreement with other parts of the clause

- *The man in the garden is my brother.*

- *The men in the garden are my brothers.*

- *The fat man in the garden who has a black coat is my brother.*

2 – The determiner

Determiners commonly introduce noun phrases in English, with articles (a, an, the) and demonstratives being the most typical. English quantifiers (like some, all, few) also function this way, although other languages might classify them differently. Determiners usually indicate definiteness, number (singular/plural), and, for demonstratives, distance

2. Pre-modifiers: An Overview

Quirk et al (1985) state that a variety of words and phrases, from simple adjectives to even entire sentences, can come before a main noun. They then provide a list of these pre-modifiers. However, there's no complete agreement among linguists about exactly which types of words can function in this way. For instance, Bache (1978) argues against adverbs as pre-modifiers, a view that Huddleston and Pullum (2006)

2.1 Adjectives

Arnaud (2010) contends that in contrast to concrete nouns, adjectives in isolation generally resist the formation of a corresponding mental image (p. 304). This necessitates their association with other discourse elements for complete understanding (ibid.). Teyssier (1968) echoes this observation, describing the adjective as a "mere semantic addition" dependent on a noun for its full functionality (pp. 225–6). According to Arnaud (2010), when functioning as a pre-modifier, adjectives can serve either a categorizing or a qualifying role in relation to the head noun (p. 305). A case in point is:

- *We had a pleasant journey this time.*

As Quirk et al. (1973: 395–6) explain, an adjective positioned before the noun it describes, notably when it immediately follows the determiner, can itself be modified by preceding words, illustrated by cases such as:

- *His really quite unbelievably delightful cottage.*

2.2 Nouns

Nouns can also act as pre-modifiers of other nouns (Quirk et al., 1984), illustrated by phrases like "staff room" and "pencil case." Arnaud (2010) notes that frequent use of some nouns as pre-modifiers can lead to a specific dictionary entry for their modifier function. Quirk et al. (1973) also observe the close relationship between noun pre-modifiers and the nouns they modify, suggesting a compounding effect. Many of these pre-modifiers appear to be less explicit versions of post-modifying prepositional phrases.

- *The question of partition ~ The partition question.*
- *The door of the cupboard ~ The cupboard door.*
- *A village in Sussex ~ A Sussex village.*

But not all noun pre-modifiers have prepositional phrase analogues:

- *Bernard Miles was both actor and producer ~ The actor-producer.*

Noun modifiers have certain limitations. Typically, plural nouns don't function as pre-modifiers; instead, they take a singular form, like "arms" becoming "arm" in "armchair" (Quirk et al. 1985:914). This is even true for nouns that lack a singular form altogether.

- *The leg of the trousers ~ The 'trouser leg.*

2.3 Participles

2.3.1 *ing* participles

Linguists like Huddleston (1984) and Laczkó (2001) have recently pointed out issues with simply classifying all "-ing" words that come before a noun as adjectives. They argue that from a grammatical perspective, this one-size-fits-all approach doesn't really work. For instance, the "-ing" words in phrases like "an interesting article" or "a fascinating experience" act a lot like typical adjectives. However, the "-ing" words in phrases such as "the approaching aircraft" or "the laughing man" behave differently. Because of these differences in how they function grammatically, "-ing" words that modify nouns can be split into two groups: those that act like adjectives and those that act more like verbs. Here's an example to illustrate :this

- *Freezing water* ('very cold water') Adjectival participle
- *Freezing water* ('the water's temperature is decreasing towards its freezing point') Verbal participle
- *A stimulating lecture.* Adjectival participle
- *A stimulating electrode.* Verbal participle
- *Sparkling results.* Adjectival participle
- *Sparkling quartz.* Verbal participle

Unlike the definite article (which suggests something specific or temporary), the indefinite article usually indicates a characteristic that is habitual or permanent.

- *I was wakened by a barking dog. (indefinite article)*

But it is strange to say:

- *The barking dog is my neighbour (definite article).*

2.3.2 -ed Participles

Wekker and Aurts (2013:141) state that -ed participles can only be used in pre-modification if they denote lasting characteristics or are already adverbially pre-modified.

- *A renovated house.*

- *A bought house.
- *An invited guest.
- A specially invited guest.

ed participles derived from prepositional and phrasal verbs, such as "a hoped-for takeover" or "a stuffed-up nose," can be used in pre-modification in English. Generally, these participles are only permissible in pre-modifying positions if they are adverbially modified or preceded by the prefix "un-."

- This endlessly talked- about subject.
- Un heard of achievement.
- Un hoped for success.

According to Quirk et al. (1973: 397), many rules applying to -ing participles also apply to -ed participles, but with some complexities. While -ed participles can be either active or passive, the active form is rarely used in pre-modification, as exemplified :by

- The immigrant who has arrived.

But not:

- *The arrived immigrant

:However, an exception occurs when an active participle is modified by an adverb, as seen in
The newly-arrived i .immigrant

Other examples like (born, hidden, married, troubled, darkened, etc..), they must include a permanent reference or be modified by an adverb: a married man, a newly-born child, a carefully-hidden spy.

An example include -ing and -ed participles like 'a carefully-hidden spy':

- A spy, carefully hidden in the bushes (-ed participle)
- A spy, carefully hiding in the bushes (-ing participle)

2.4 Genitives

According to Quirk et al. (1973:399) in the presence of genitives, the determiner is used to indicate the genitive, the modifiers should refer to the genitive only:

- These nasty women's clothing.

imply 'the clothing of these nasty women' and not 'the nasty clothing of these women' that would be expressed by: These women's nasty clothing.

A modifier in the middle of the construction modifies the head:

- This nasty women's clothing.

indicate 'this nasty clothing belonging to (or designed for) women'.

Kreyer (2010:78) shows that pre-modification by the genitive is a specific case of pre-modification by noun phrase:

- Our local boy's school.
- Our lovely friend's bike.

In the first case, the genitive is a pre-modifier of *school*. This indicates the 'classifying genitives' in contrast with 'specifying genitives' which is obvious in the second case.

'Friend's bike' does not mean a class of bikes but a special one. The genitive refers the head. Thus, it can be concluded that classifying genitive is a pre-modifier while the specifying genitive is usually a determiner (ibid:79).

3- Data Analysis of “The Swimmer” (1964) and “The Reunion” (1962)

Table (1) Pre-modification in “The Swimmer” and “The Reunion”

NO	The Swimmer	Pre-modifier	Type of Pre-modifier	The Reunion	Pre-modifier	Type of Pre-modifier
1	<i>It was one of those <u>midsummer</u> Sundays when everyone sits around saying, “I drank too much <u>last night</u>.”</i>	Midsummer, last	Noun, adjective	<i>The <u>last time</u> I saw my father was in Grand Central Station</i>	last	Adjective
2	<i>You might have heard it whispered by the parishioners <u>leaving church</u></i>	leaving	ing-participle	<i>I was going from my <u>grandmother's</u> In the Adirondacks</i>	grandmother's	genitive
3	<i>heard it from the <u>golf</u> links and the <u>tennis</u> courts, heard it from the wildlife preserve where the leader of the <u>Audubon</u> group was suffering from a <u>terrible</u> hangover</i>	Golf, tennis, Audubon, terrible	Noun, noun, noun, adjective	<i>he would meet me at the <u>information booth</u> at noon</i>	information	Noun
4	<i>The pool, fed by an <u>artesian</u> well with a <u>high</u> iron content, was a <u>pale</u> shade of green.</i>	Artesian, high, iron, pale	Adjective, adjective, adjective, adjective	<i>He was a big, good-looking man</i>	a big, good-looking	Adjective
5	<i>It was a <u>fine</u> day.</i>	fine	Adjective	<i>It was a <u>rich</u> compound of whiskey.</i>	rich	Adjective
6	<i>a city seen from a distance— from the bow of an <u>approaching</u> ship— that it might have had a name.</i>	approaching	Ing-participle	<i>There was one very <u>old</u> waiter in a <u>red</u> coat down by the <u>kitchen</u> door.</i>	Old, red, kitchen	Adjective, adjective, noun
7	<i>Neddy Merrill sat by the <u>green</u> water,</i>	green	Adjective	<i>my father hailed the waiter in a <u>loud</u> voice</i>	loud	Adjective
8	<i>He was a <u>slender</u> man, he seemed to have the <u>especial</u> slenderness of</i>	Slender, especial	Adjective, adjective	<i>His boisterousness in the <u>empty</u> restaurant</i>	empty	Adjective

	youth—			<i>seemed out of place</i>		
9	<i>he had slid down banister that morning and given the <u>bronze</u> backside of aphrodite on the <u>hall</u> table a smack, as he jogged toward the smell of coffee in his <u>dining</u> room</i>	Bronze, hall, dining	Adjective, noun, ing-participle	<i>Could we have a <u>little</u> service here</i>	little	Adjective
10	<i>He might have been compared to a <u>summer's</u> day, particularly the <u>last</u> hours of one</i>	summer's, last	Genitive, adjective	<i>We would like a couple of <u>Beefeater</u> Gibsons."</i>	Beefeater	Noun
11	<i>he lacked a <u>tennis</u> racket or a <u>sail</u> bag the impression was definitely one of <u>youth</u>, <u>sport</u>, and <u>clement</u> weather.</i>	Tennis, sail, youth, sport, and clement	Noun, noun, noun, adjective, adjective	<i>I have a whistle that is audible only to the ears of <u>old</u> waiters</i>	old	Adjective
12	<i>He seemed to see, with a <u>cartographer's</u> eye, that string of swimming pools (p.2)</i>	cartographer's	Genitive	<i>Now, take out your little pad and your little pencil</i>	Little, little	Adjective, adjective
13	<i>He was not a <u>practical</u> joker</i>	practical	Adjective	<i>"That," said my father, "is one of the most <u>brilliant</u> suggestions I have ever heard</i>	brilliant	Adjective
14	<i>He was determinedly original and had a <u>vague</u> and <u>modest</u> idea of himself as a <u>legendary</u> figure.</i>	Vague, modest, legendary	Adjective, adjective, adjective	<i>He then struck the edge of his <u>empty</u> glass with his knife</i>	Empty	Adjective
15	<i>The day was beautiful and it seemed to him that a <u>long</u> swim might enlarge and</i>	long	Adjective	<i>"I have some very <u>interesting</u> news for you.</i>	interestin g	Adjective

	<i>celebrate its beauty.</i>					
16	<i>He had an <u>inexplicable</u> contempt for men who did not hurl themselves into pools.</i>	inexplicable	Adjective	<i>Here the waiters wore <u>pink</u> jackets like <u>hunting</u> coats</i>	Pink, hunting	Adjective, ing-participle
17	<i>He swam a <u>choppy</u> crawl, breathing either with every stroke or every fourth stroke and counting somewhere well in the back of his mind the one-two one-two of a <u>flutter</u> kick.</i>	Flutter, choppy	Adjective, adjective	<i>there was a lot of <u>horse</u> tack on the walls.</i>	horse	Noun
18	<i>It was not a <u>serviceable</u> stroke for <u>long</u> distances</i>	Serviceable, long	Adjective, adjective	<i>I want two <u>Beefeater</u> Gibsons</i>	Beefeater	Noun
19	<i>To be embraced and sustained by the <u>light green</u> water</i>	Light, green	Noun, adjective	<i>Things have changed in <u>jolly</u> <u>old</u> England.</i>	Jolly, old	Adjective, adjective
20	<i>He would cross <u>Ditmar</u> Street to the Bunkers and come, after a <u>short</u> portage, to the Levys, the Welchers, and the <u>public</u> pool in Lancaster</i>	Ditmar, short, public	Noun, adjective, adjective	<i>it is an <u>impudent</u> domestic</i>	impudent	Adjective
21	<i>Mrs. Graham said, "what a <u>marvelous</u> surprise</i>	marvelous	Adjective			
22	<i>The Lears heard him splashing past the open windows of their <u>living</u> room</i>	living	Ing-participle			
23	<i>The <u>Bunkers'</u> pool was on a rise and he climbed some stairs to a terrace where twenty-five</i>	Bunkers'	Genitive			

	<i>or thirty men and women were drinking</i>					
24	<i>. The only person in the water was Rusty Towers, who floated there on a rubber raft.</i>	rubber	Adjective			
25	<i>Prosperous men and women gathered by the sapphirecolored waters while caterer's men in white coats passed them cold gin.</i>	Prosperous, white, cold	Adjective, adjective, adjective			
26	<i>A smiling bartender he had seen at a hundred parties gave him a gin and tonic and he stood by the bar for a moment</i>	smiling	Ing-participle			

4. Results of the Analysis

4.1. The pre-modification in English Short Stories “The Swimmer” and “The Reunion”

Table (2) Types of pre-modifiers the English Short Stories

Types of Pre-modifiers	The Reunion	%	The Swimmer	%
Adjective	18	72%	32	64%
Noun	5	20%	10	20%
ing-participles	1	4%	5	10%
ed- participle	null	0%	null	0%
Genitive	1	4%	3	6%
Total	25	100	50	100

5. Conclusion

Pre-modification is a crucial grammatical concept in English. It is widely used with constructions that include noun phrases. Pre- modification can be expressed by adjectives, nouns, ing- participles, ed- participles as well as genitives. It has been concluded that pre-modifiers are used widely in English short stories. Adjectives are the most repeated pre-modifiers with excessive occurrences, they rate (64%) in “The Swimmer” and (72%) in “The Reunion”. Secondly, noun pre-modifiers constitute (20%) in both short stories. On the other

hand, ing- participle are less used with the percentage (10%) in “The Swimmer” and (4%) in “The Reunion”. ed- participle scores no occurrences in both short stories, this indicates that there is a wider tendency to pre-modify by ing- participle than using ed- participle. Pre-modification by genitives occupies low percentage with little occurrences in both short stories, they rate (6%) in “The Swimmer” and (4%) in “The Reunion”.

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