AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STRUCTURES OF THE ENGLISH NOMINAL GROUPS IN SELECTED FICTIONAL AND NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS

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Abstract

The nominal group is an important syntactic element for sentence formation and is used across languages by speakers of all ages. Despite this, more knowledge is still needed on its comprehensive structure and the possibility of structural similarities and dissimilarities that may exist among texts of different types. One hundred randomly sampled nominal groups from 12 different text types (six fictional, six non-fictional) were analysed using the Hallidayan experiential and logico-semantic grammatical models. Twenty-eight structural patterns were identified across texts, which were categorised into deictic-headed, numerative-headed, epithet-headed, classifier-headed, and "Thing"-only structures. The deictic-headed was the most productive and most frequently used, with 13 sub-structures identified. The "Thing"-only category was the least productive and least used. There were structural patterns that cut across texts but there were also patterns that were peculiar to some text-types. The use of SFG for analysis provided more insight into the understanding of the structure of nominal groups, and it clearly showed that every lexical element in the group structure has its syntactic and semantic role. The analysis further revealed that some text-types have tendencies for more frequent use of some structural elements than others. For example, editorials showed high frequencies of epithets and classifiers, textbooks showed high frequencies of qualifiers, religious texts showed low frequencies of epithets and classifiers, while poetry showed peculiarly low frequencies of qualifiers. An understanding of the structure and text-based structural variations of nominal groups can help in the correct use, analysis, and interpretation of nominal groups in English.

Keywords: Grammar, nominal groups, functional analysis, functional elements, fictional texts, non-fictional texts

1. Introduction

Nominal groups are a very crucial element in the formation of clauses and sentences across human languages. The more the clauses and sentences we construct in our daily natural communicative situations, the more the nominal groups we use. As important as this syntactic element is in humans' constant use of language, very limited studies have been carried out to know more about their general structural patterns and specific structural variabilities in different texts and contexts of language use. Several grammarians have made expository exploration of nominal groups with a view to describing their structural forms and syntactic functions in clauses. Four of such descriptive

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and expository approaches include Huddleston (1984), Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985), and Greenbaum and Nelson (2002) who described the phenomenon as noun phrases; and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) functional account that labels the phenomenon as nominal groups.

Leveraging these foundational theoretical approaches, an increasing plethora of studies have continued to explore nominal groups in specific communicative contexts and genres (e.g., Biber & Gray, 2011; Ruan & Jiaotong, 2016; de Oliveira & Saparas, 2018; Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg, 2018) with each making distinct contributions to linguistic knowledge in relation to the emergent structural patterns of nominal groups in such genres. Although nominal groups have been the subject of these and a few other related studies, the foci of such studies have been limited to specific text types, with the comparative and simultaneous exploration of nominal groups in texts of different genres and types largely ignored. For example, even though it is certain that both fictional and non-fictional texts are characterised by the constant use of nominal groups, what is uncertain is whether (or not) nominal groups in both categories of text have similar structural patterns. This is the gap this study attempted to fill, by sampling and analysing nominal groups in different fictional and non-fictional texts with a view to determining patterned nominal group-related inter-textual structural similarities and peculiarities.

2. Nominal groups and experiential metafunction in the Systemic Functional Grammar

Although the identification of a grammatical class known as nominal group (noun phrases in other general grammars) started from the period of traditional grammar, the use of nominal groups can be argued to be as old as language itself if considered from the point of view of their characteristics and the role they play in human's routine and other uses of language. Nominal groups are very important linguistic elements. As Ruan and Jiaotong (2016) noted, they are "a key resource for constructing texts" and are "the linguistic structure that distinguishes written language from spoken language" (p. 75). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 728) also described nominal groups as "the primary resource used by the grammar for packing in lexical items at high density".

Defined as "referring expressions used to refer to particular instances or general classes of people and things" (Carter & McCarthy, 2013, p. 318), nominal groups have continued to attract increased attention from grammarians not only because of their intra-linguistic commonality and cross-linguistic pervasiveness, but also because of their compositional flexibility and infinite extendable nature. Nominal groups play a very important role in the formation of clauses. Even though they are not an obligatory element in the formation of major clauses (like the verbal group), they can be an independent and lone element in the formation of minor sentences.

Most grammatical models have provided expository accounts on

nominal groups albeit using different nomenclatures. Several scholars have constantly referred to the phenomenon as noun phrases (e.g., Chomsky, 1957; Huddleston, 1984; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Payne, Huddleston & Pullum, 2007; Biber & Gray, 2011; Carter & McCarthy, 2013, etc.). Systemic linguists, led by M. A. K. Halliday, departed from this classification by naming the same phenomenon "nominal groups" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In terms of the general functions of nominal groups in the clause, Carter and McCarthy (2013) noted that nominal groups typically function as subjects (e.g., *The next day* was his birthday), objects (The nurse named *the next day*), complements (Today is *the next day*) and occasionally adjuncts in the clause (He travelled *the next day*). They have also been noted to function less frequently as complements of prepositions (e.g., We usually go to *our local gym* at *the weekends*), premodifier of adjective (e.g., The plane was *an hour* late), premodifier of adverbs (e.g., We bought it *two weeks* ago), etc. In summary, nominal groups function as, or within every element of the clause except the verbal group.

The various expository accounts of nominal groups in terms of their compositional elements have also been found to vary from scholar to scholar. While Carter and McCarthy (2013) identified a pre-head (including determiners and premodifiers), head, and post-head (including complements and postmodifiers) elements, Burton-Roberts (2016) recognised premodifier (determiners, pre-determiners, pre-modifiers), nominal, and postmodifier (prepositional phrases, adjectival phrases, etc.). For Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), nominal groups comprise a wide-ranging variety of lexical resources that are configurable into different functional outlines to construe different kinds of experience. They can also be assigned experiential status (with potentials for construing participants: actor-goal, sayer-verbiage), interpersonal status (e.g., serving as the Subject) and textual status (e.g., constituting the Theme, Given and New).

In their classification, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) noted that a nominal group is divisible into a noun (technically referred to as "Thing"), which may be "preceded and followed by various other items all of them in some way characterising the "Thing" in question (p. 364). In the experiential structure, the functional elements that precede the "Thing" specify "a class of things" and "some category of membership" within the class. The functional elements serving in this experiential sub-structure are identified as Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier, while the element expressing the class is called "Thing". The Deictic element is used to indicate specificity (with resource possibility ranging from demonstratives- *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, etc. to possessive determiners- *his*, *her*, *whose*, *its*, etc.), and non-specificity (with resource possibility ranging between total determiners- *each*, *every*, *all*, *both*, etc.- and partial determiners- *some*, *a*, *an*, *any*, etc.).

The Numerative element indicates the numerical feature of the Thing and it has a possible range of choices between quantitatives (definite- *one, two, a quarter of, a third of,* etc. and indefinite- *few*, *several*, *more*, etc.)

and ordinatives (definite- *first, second, next,* etc. and indefinite- *following, preceding, subsequent,* etc.). The Epithet element indicates the quality or attribute of the Thing. It is classified into experiential epithets (a depiction of the experience or an objective property of the entity) and interpersonal epithets (indicating the speaker's subjective attitude towards the Thing); and is most often realised by adjectives. The Classifier element indicates not only the particular subclass of the Thing but also such semantic relations as "material, scale and scope, purpose and function, status and rank, origin, mode of operation" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 377). The Qualifier element follows the Thing and it is characteristically realised by phrases and clauses which, in both cases, are down-ranked or embedded elements in the nominal group. A further illustration and exemplification of all the functional labels in the experiential structure of the nominal groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The illustration and exemplification of functional labels in the experiential structure of nominal groups

the	*first*	*possible*	*economic*	*gain*	*from currency devaluation*
deictic	numerative	epithet	classifier	"Thing"	qualifier
determiner (def. article)	numeral (def. ordinative)	adjective	adjective	noun	phrase (prep. phrase, embedded)

Linguists have continued to apply the various theoretical expositions on nominal groups for the analysis of a wide range of texts, with each coming up with distinct or sometimes corroborative findings. These studies can be classified into non-corpus based (e.g., Yusvitasari, 2013; Shamdama, 2015; Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg, 2018) and corpus-based (e.g., Biber & Gray, 2011; Ruan & Jiaotong, 2016). Within these broad categories, some studies (including de Oliveira & Saparas, 2018) have adopted a comparative inter-language approach aimed at investigating the structure (and perhaps, functions) of nominal groups in two or more languages.

Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg (2018) investigated the structure of nominal groups in the 2013 speeches of John Kerry and Ban Ki'moon at the UN General Assembly meeting held in Washington. With analytical focus being on the experiential structures and logical structure elements of inherent nominal groups, the study reported findings that included the identification of nominal groups with one modification, nominal groups with two modifications, nominal groups with three modifications and nominal groups without modifications as the basic emergent structures in the texts analysed. The study also identified twenty-seven different experiential structures containing all kinds of experiential elements (that include: deictic, numerative, epithet, classifier, etc.) in the text, with the conclusion that "T structure becomes the most frequent structure that occurs followed by D+T and D+T+Q structure," Suryadewi, Netra and Rajeg (2018, p. 12).

Hussein (2017) explored the structure of nominal groups in literary

genre using the poem "There Was a Saviour" as a case study. In his attempt to describe some aspects of literary meaning in terms of linguistic features (p. 22), Hussein notes that "There are subtle shifts in the religious attitudes concerning the image of the Saviour, and these shifts are associated with changes in the functional structure of the nominal groups used throughout the poem." The study further found that the poet's lexico-syntactic choices in the configuration of nominal groups in the poem is a stylistic ploy and the various structural patterns found in the nominal groups help in the conveyance of the various authorial messages in the poem. In other words, a conscious structural patterning of nominal groups can be a stylistic strategy in literary genre that not only creates poetic effect but also helps in the encoding of authorial intentions and messages.

De Oliveira and Saparas (2018) examined the structure and functions of nominal groups in English and Portuguese languages. The authors used selected texts from journal articles, advertising, and newspaper editorials to investigate constituent and function similarities among nominal groups and analysed the data using the experiential metafunction approach (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Their focus was only on the translated versions of the texts from English to Portuguese. The study revealed that even though nominal groups were used prevalently in both languages, "the order of its constituents in both languages differs considerably." (p. 27). In other words, the order of constituents between the original version (English) and the translated version (Portuguese) were not similar. They noted, for example, that "the vast majority of nominal groups in English occurred in the order: Ideational Epithets – Classifier (2-3) in relation to the head (4)" while "Translation postpones the Classifier and the Ideational Epithets (3-2) to the head (4), resulting in the order 4-3-2" (De Oliveira & Saparas, 2018, p. 35).

Nominal groups have also been investigated in texts of varying forms using a corpus driven approach. Studies from this analytical perspective include Biber and Gray (2011) and Ruan and Jiaotong (2016). Biber and Gray (2011) explored nouns as nominal premodifiers and prepositional phrases as nominal postmodifiers in noun phrases in a corpus of academic writing using a diachronic analytical approach that spanned four centuries. The aim of the study was principally to examine the historical development of noun phrases with a specific focus on the function and variability of both premodification and postmodification elements in the corpus. One interesting finding reported in the study is the identification of evident increase in the types of nouns that can "occur as nominal premodifiers" and "the range of meaning relationships underlying noun–noun sequences". In addition, the study observed an extension in the use of single nouns as premodifer to accommodate "two and three premodifying nouns, and this extension seems to be continuing up to the present time" (Biber & Gray, 2011, p. 240). An observation of a similar grammatical and semantic functional extension of prepositional phrases used as nominal modifiers in the corpus was equally documented.

Ruan and Jiaotong (2016) explored the structures of complex nominal

groups with "business"-head in a million-word corpus of corporate annual reports of banks. The outcome of the study helps in the understanding of the register features of Business English as a genre. Such outcomes include, among others, the findings that the qualitative features expressed by the Epithet occur much less frequently than the attribute of Classification, and the identification of preferential co-occurrence patterns particularly evident in the frequent association between definite articles and the Classifier, and between indefinite articles and the Epithet. The study also identified distinct functional and logical structures in complex "business"-headed nominal groups in the corpus investigated (Ruan & Jiaotong, 2016).

Just as their resourcefulness for meaning making cannot be over-emphasised, the potentialities of nominal groups for linguistic scholarship remain inexhaustible. What the studies above and many others show evidently is that nominal groups can be studied through a synchronic approach (e.g., Shamdama, 2015; Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg, 2018), diachronic approach (e.g., Biber & Gray, 2011), corpus-based approach (Biber & Gray, 2011) and comparative linguistics approach (e.g., de Oliveira & Saparas, 2018). Even though the study reported here also had nominal groups as its subject-matter and similarly adopted the systemic functional approach analysis, what largely distinguishes it from most other works is its comparative multi-genre approach was aimed at discovering whether (or not) texts of different genres share any similarities and (or) dissimilarities in terms of their structural patterning of nominal groups.

3. Methods

The approach adopted for the study is multi-textual. The analytical choice was necessitated by the fact that most of the existing studies on nominal groups used samples from single text-types, without consideration for probable inter-textual similarities and variations in the structural patterns of nominal groups. The data for this study comprised sampled nominal groups from selected fictional and non-fictional texts. To represent the fictional category, a hundred nominal groups were randomly selected from a collection of six fictional text types (that included novels, short stories, comic plays, tragic plays, and poems written by English and African poets) all written in English, thus making a total of 600 nominal groups. For the non-fictional texts, six different text types were selected, and a hundred nominal groups were randomly sampled from each, making a total of 600. These include texts of natural conversations, newspaper editorials, textbooks, autobiographies, legal texts, and religious texts.

The texts selected for analysis were all written in English and not limited to any sociolinguistic group. This is because the purpose of the study was not to investigate how specific sociolinguistic variables determine structural variability of nominal groups; rather, it was to look at nominal groups from the broad perspective of English and its associated linguistic and structural peculiarities. Therefore, authorship of selected texts for analysis comprised

both users of English as first and second language. The selected texts largely represent the use of English in the last one century except in the case of *She Stoops to Conquer*, which was published in 1771. The details of the data composition are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Data structure for the study

S/N	Text Categories	Text Types	Texts Selected	Sampled Nominal Groups
1.	Fictional	Poems by English poets	15 poems	100
		English poems by non-English poets	15 poems	100
		Novels	Achebe's *Arrow of God* Ngugi Wa Th'iongo's *Weep Not Child*	100
		Non-novel prose	10 short stories (retrieved online)	100
		Drama (Comedy)	Wole Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero* Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*	100
		Drama (Tragedy)	Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*	100
2.	Non-Fictional	Conversations	10 random spoken conversations from the British National Corpus	100
		Editorials	5 Editorials from Nigeria's "The Punch" and 5 editorials from "Ghana Times"	100
		Textbooks	*An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Wardaugh & Fuller, 2021) *History of the English Language* (Albert C. Baugh & Thomas Cable)	100
		Autobiographies	Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* & M. K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*	100
		Legal texts	Nigeria's 1999 Constitutions & a British Parliamentary debate extracted from the British National Corpus	100
		Religious texts	Holy Quran and Holy Bible	100
		Total		**1200**

Each of the nominal groups sampled per text-type was closely analysed following Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) experiential and logical structure, which are both sub-functions under the ideational metafunction.

As expatiated by Bloor and Bloor (2013, p.13), while the experiential sub-function is concerned with content or ideas, the logical sub-function is concerned with the relationship between ideas in units. The analytical procedure was not extended to the other two metafunctions (interpersonal and textual) because the application of the ideational metafunction was found to be adequate for the kind of analysis intended in the study. This is in conformity with the position of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) that "in analysing group structure it is not necessary to set up three distinct 'lines' corresponding to the experiential, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. A single structural representation will suffice" (p. 387).

Halliday and Matthiessen as well as other systemic functional grammarians are not the only linguists who have provided descriptive and analytical accounts of nominal groups. The choice of this grammatical model was however based on a step further of "working out the relationship between the functional elements and the structural units" of the nominal group (Fontaine, 2013, p. 22) and the fact that the full potentials of nominal groups in terms of combinatorial possibilities of component elements are more detailed in the model. In other words, SFG's multifunctional approach to the analysis of the clause (i.e., the clause as representation, exchange, and message) is extended to other units of analysis including the nominal group (which is analysable with the experiential and logical sub-functions of the ideational metafunction).

For the experiential analysis, each constituent of the 1200 nominal groups was categorised into the functional elements: Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing and Qualifier (examples in Table 3). For the logical analysis, the nominal groups were sub-categorised in terms of the logico-semantic relations holding among pre-Thing, modifying elements. Following this, the comparative frequencies of each of the functional elements were determined to be able to identify patterned similarities and variations of functional elements across text-types.

Table 3: Categorisation of nominal group constituents into functional elements (examples)

Nominal Groups					
Deictic	**Numerative**	**Epithet**	**Classifier**	**Thing**	**Modifier**
-	*any*	*voluntary*	*muscular*	*movement*	*when constantly repeated*
a	-	-	*special*	*agent*	*with the Federal Bureau of Investigations*
-	*another*	*wretched*	*global*	*rating*	*for Nigeria*

the	-	*monstrous*	-	*anger*	*of the guns*
the	-	*little*	-	*children*	*in his compound*
our	-	*most unreliable*	-	*husband*	-
the	-	-	-	*cities*	*in which Lot dwelt*
	some	*cool*	*Carlo Rossi*	*wine*	*after the award*
a	-	*new*	*elite boarding*	*School*	*established in 1929*

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Emergent structural patterns of nominal groups across texts

From the 1200 nominal groups analysed, a total of twenty-eight (28) structural patterns were found (Table 4, Appendix 1). In this study, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)'s classification of the obligatory element of the nominal group as "Thing" was adopted as against some other studies (e.g., Carter & McCarthy, 2013) which labelled similar elements as "Head". Consequently, the label "Head" was used in this study to refer to the functional element that appears first in the nominal group. For example, while the "Thing" in the nominal group *equal opportunities in state appointments* is *opportunities*, the nominal group is introduced by *equal* as the first word, hence we took it as the head and classified the nominal group as Epithet-headed since the introductory/head word is an adjective. Following this, five (5) broad categories based on the element heading each group were identified. These included deictic-headed (introduced by deictic elements, e.g. *the little children in his compound*), numerative-headed (introduced by numerative elements, e.g. *three government officials*), epithet-headed (introduced by epithets, e.g. *delicious orange*), classifier-headed (introduced by classifier-elements, e.g. *British nationals*), and Thing-headed (with "Thing"-only or "Thing"+qualifier configurations). A diagrammatic illustration and exemplification of each of these categories is presented in Tables 5a-5c.

4.1.1 Deictic-headed nominal groups

These are nominal groups whose first or introductory element is deictic. Deictic elements usually come first in the experiential structure of nominal groups. As revealed in this study, they are the most productive type of nominal group, with thirteen (13) identified structural patterns and a total frequency of 75.3%. Deictic-headed nominal groups have both modifying and qualifying elements, and they exhibit combinatorial possibilities with any of the pre-"Thing" elements. For example, a deictic element (such as indefinite article *a*) can be combined with numerative elements (such as *third*), epithet (such as *possible*) and "Thing" (e.g., *factor* or *relationship*) to form *a third possible*

relationship. Presented in Table 5a are the identified thirteen deictic-headed structures with their in-data examples and their overall frequency expressed in percentages in the study.

Table 5a: Deictic-headed nominal groups identified with examples and comparative frequency percentages

Deictic	+Numerative	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	Examples	Frequencies
Deictic	-	-	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*A stone grasped firmly*	26.1%
Deictic	-	-	+Classifier	+Thing	-	*A Beethoven symphony*	12%
Deictic	-	-	-	+Thing	-	*The economy*	8.9%
Deictic		+Epithet		+Thing	+Qualifier	*The monstrous anger of the guns*	6.7%
Deictic	-	-	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*A cosmopolitan dictionary of English*	3.1%
Deictic	+Numerative	+Epithet	-	+Thing	-	*A third possible relationship*	1.6%
Deictic	-	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*any voluntary muscular movement when constantly repeated*	1.3%
Deictic	+Numerative	+Epithet	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*A further important point to note*	0.1%
Deictic	-	+Epithet	-	+Thing	-	*Your new glasses*	7.4%
Deictic	+Numerative	-	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*The only man I ever met*	2.3%
Deictic	-	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	-	*the famous Waterbury clock*	1.9%
Deictic	+Numerative	-	-	+Thing	-	*My first husband*	3.5%
Deictic	+Numerative	-	+Classifier	+Thing	-	*Her second American friend*	0.4%
Total Frequencies							75.3%

Deictic-headed patterns were found in all text-types investigated. This shows the importance of deictics as a veritable resource for marking specificity and non-specificity of information in the grammar of English, with such specificity or non-specificity expressed through the system of determination.

The identified deictic-headed patterns varied in frequencies across texts. For example, whereas such patterns as Deictic+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *the tenderness of patient minds*), Deictic+Classifier+Thing (e.g. *the mid-forest brake*) were not only found across texts and very high in frequencies, patterns like Deictic+Numerative+Classifier+Thing (e.g. *the first British Prime Minister*) and Deictic+Numerative+Epithet+Thing (e.g. *the first autocratic leader*) were very low in frequencies and were restricted to specific texts. What this clearly indicates, as shown in Table 4 (Nos. 1-13), is that there were nominal groups with structural patterns not only found in texts of all types but were also of high frequencies of use, and there were nominal groups which were not only less commonly used but were also text-specific. For example, while such deictic-headed patterns as Deictic+Classifier+Thing, Deictic+Thing+Qualifier and Deictic+Epithet+Thing were found across text types, such deictic-headed patterns as Deictic+Numerative+Epithet+Thing+Qualifier and Deictic+Numerative+Classifier+Thing were only found in few text types. Some examples of the restricted patterns include the Epithet+Classifier+Thing+Qualifier (e.g., *Corrupt NIS officers who take passport racketeering as a way of life*), found only in editorials; and Numerative+Classifier+Thing (e.g., *multiple messaging platforms*) found only in editorials and legal texts. One similarity that this study shares with some other studies is the observation that there can be a wide-ranging number of experiential structural patterns of nominal groups in texts, and that the structure Deictic+Thing+Qualifier is one of the most frequently used across texts (Yusvitasari, 2013; Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg, 2018).

4.1.2 Numerative-headed nominal groups

These are nominal groups with numerative elements as head. Numeratives are part of the modifying elements, and they precede the "Thing". A total of seven (7) structural patterns were identified: Numerative+Thing+Qualifier, Numerative+Epithet+Thing, Numerative+Epithet+Thing+Qualifier, Numerative+Classifier+Thing, Numerative+Thing, Numerative+Classifier+Thing+Qualifier and Numerative+Epithet+Classifier+Thing+Qualifier. Overall, they had a total frequency of 8.7%. Compared to deictic-headed structural patterns, numerative-headed patterns were found to be less productive, less frequently used and more text-restrictive. In terms of text-restrictiveness for example, whereas patterns like Numerative+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *some shape of beauty*) and Numerative+Thing (e.g. *three men*) were found in all texts, such patterns as Numerative+Epithet+Classifier+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *another wretched global rating for Nigeria*) and Numerative+Classifier+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *several international charters to which Nigeria is signatory*) were only found in both editorials and textbooks. Of the seven (7) patterns identified (Nos. 14-20 in Table 4), the Numerative+Thing+Qualifier structure was the most frequently used and most non-text-restrictive pattern. The identified structural patterns with their comparative frequencies in the data are presented in Table 5b.

Table 5b: Identified numerative-headed nominal groups with comparative frequency percentages

Numerative	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	In-Data Examples	Overall Frequencies
Numerative	-	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Many troubles of these days*	4.8%
Numerative	+Epithet	-	+Thing	-	*Several possible relationships*	1.5%
Numerative	+Epithet	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Many genuine travelers including the sick*	0.8%
Numerative	-	-	+Thing	-	*Many incidents*	1.1%
Numerative	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	-	*Many brilliant Nigerian youths*	0.3%
Numerative	+Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Another wretched global rating for Nigeria*	0.2%
Numerative	-	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Two Ghanaian scholars of note*	0.2%
Total frequencies						8.7%

4.2 Other types of nominal groups identified

The three (3) other nominal groups identified included Epithet-headed, Classifier-headed and "Thing"-only nominal groups. Epithet-headed patterns included the patterns Epithet+"Thing" (e.g. *ripe fruit*), Epithet+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *equal opportunities in state appointments*) and Epithet+Classifier+"Thing" (e.g. *rich green leaves*) and Epithet+Clas sifier+Thing+Qualifier (e.g. *hardworking Nigerian women in diaspora*). These types of nominal groups had a low frequency of 2.6% indicating a less frequency of use across texts. They were also not found across texts, thus suggesting that they were also text-restrictive. As shown in Table 4, none of these classes of nominal groups were found in short stories and novels while only one instance was found in religious texts. The patterns were however predominantly found in editorials thus marking out editorials as the text type which favoured most the use of epithets.

Other types of nominal groups identified were those with Classifier as head, which had only two sub-types: Classifier+Thing+Qualifier (e.g., *American soldiers in Afghanistan*) and Classifier+Thing (e.g., *apple orchard*). Both patterns were found across texts, but with the highest frequency again in editorials (Appendix 1). The last type of nominal group identified was the "Thing"-Only type, where the only element realising the group is either a noun or a pronoun. Instances of this type were found across texts too but with very low frequencies of occurrence. Examples of these three categories are shown in Table 5c.

Table 5c: Other structures of nominal groups identified with examples

Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	Examples	Percentages
Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Hardworking Nigerian youths in diaspora*	0.2
Epithet	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Equal opportunities in state appointments*	0.9
Epithet	+Classifier	+Thing	-	*Rich green leaves*	0.5
Epithet	-	+Thing	-	*Soft deceitful wiles*	1.0
-	Classifier	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Nigerian women in the UK*	1.0
-	Classifier	+Thing	-	*Apple orchard*	2.1
-	-	+Thing	+Qualifier	*Violations of religious rights*	6.7
-	-	Thing-Only	-	*Everyone*	2.4
Total frequencies					14.8

4.3 Comparative frequencies of experiential elements across texts

A further comparative analysis of the frequencies of all experiential elements across texts showed some text-based preferential patterns that can be used for textual characterisations within the scope of the data. Details of the comparative frequencies per element are shown in Table 6. The results of the analysis showed that of all the elements, Deictic has the highest frequency averaging 75% of the total nominal groups analysed. The percentage frequencies of Deictic per text ranged between 61 (editorials) and 81 (textbooks). As noted by Ruan and Jiaotong (2016), the occurrence of the Deictic element is used to identify the context in which the "Thing" element is described by means of its functional characteristics, with a variety of lexical resources provided by specific and non-specific determiners. They also reported that "the Deictic occurs much more frequently than other elements" (p.80) and identified 82% of the occurrence of Deictic elements in their study. The result of this current study corroborates what Ruan and Jiaotong (2016) already documented. The highest preference for the Deictic element was found in textbooks (at 81% with such examples as *The term identity*, *our special focus*, *this extension into the area of grammar*, etc.) followed by poetry (at 78% with examples as *a berry seed*, *an apple bright*, *the clear blue sky*, etc.), while the lowest preference for it was found in editorials (at 61%) and religious texts (66%). This suggests that even though Deictic elements are generally used across texts, their frequency of use varies from text to text.

Table 6: Frequencies of functional elements of nominal group per text type

S/N	Text Category	Text Type	Element Frequencies					
			"Thing"	Deictic	Numeratives	Epithet	Classifier	Qualifier
1	Fiction	Poems by Anglo-poets	100	78	18	26	34	37
		Poems by other poets	100	80	17	28	36	38
		Novels	100	80	15	27	22	57
		Short stories	100	79	12	25	24	46
		Drama (Comedy)	100	76	26	26	11	49
		Drama (Tragedy)	100	78	28	25	14	44
2	Non-Fiction	Conversations	100	75	23	22	27	54
		Editorials	100	61	14	28	40	59
		Textbooks	100	81	13	24	23	81
		Autobiographies	100	74	13	18	24	52
		Legal texts	100	68	14	18	39	66
		Religious texts	100	66	15	8	6	73
Total			1,200	900	208	275	310	653
Comparative %ages of "Thing"				75%	17.3%	22.9%	25.8%	54.1%

The Qualifier element is next after the Deictic element in terms of frequency of use. This functional element, also called postmodifier (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), follows the "Thing" element and is usually realised by rankshifted or embedded phrases (e.g., *all the hollow of the sky*) and clauses (e.g., *the green world they live in*) that further characterise the "Thing". Qualifiers were found across texts in the study, but also at varying frequencies that suggested text-based characterisable preferences. The highest frequencies of qualifiers were found in textbooks and religious texts at 81% and 73% respectively (with examples like *the key issue addressed here*, *the generations of Noah*), whereas they were found at very low frequencies in the two types of poetry analysed (being 37% in poems by Anglophone poets and 38% in poems written in English by other poets).

The findings of the analysis further corroborate Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) observation that the Classifier elements are used in all text types and that they are "put to hard work in registers where space is at a premium … and in registers where classification is an important aspect of the field of discourse" (p. 378). In this study, the Classifier elements were more predominantly found in editorials. Examples of nominal groups with classifiers in the data include *the safety protocol*, *arbitrary blasphemy charges* (editorials); *Illicit money exchangers, a certified non-immigrant visa*, *a cyber-crime squad*, (legal texts); and *a berry seed, a mid-forest brake* (poetry). This class of elements was non-determinative but generalising in

their "Thing" characterising function, and it was realised across the data by nouns (e.g., *an apple orchard*), adjectives (e.g., *the Federal government*) and some gerund verbs (e.g., *a dehumanising condition*). The lowest occurrences of classifiers were found in religious texts and drama. It can therefore be argued that classifiers are more commonly used in editorials, legal texts, and poetry, whereas they are less commonly used in religious texts and drama.

Both Epithet and Numerative were also found across texts, but some texts showed a relatively high association with these elements while some showed peculiarly low frequencies of use. For example, while editorials, conversations and poetry show relatively high association with epithets, religious texts show peculiarly low association for it. The Epithet element was realised mainly by adjectives, categorised into experiential epithet indicating "an objective property of the thing itself" (e.g., *the hot sun*) and interpersonal epithet indicating "an expression of the speaker's subjective attitude" towards the "Thing" (e.g., *delicious orange*) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 376). The results further showed that poetry contained far less numeratives than other text types, an indication that poems make far less use of numbers as modifying elements in nominal groups than most other text types.

The foregoing results lead to some important findings on nominal groups in different text types. First, all texts investigated contained a great number of nominal groups, thus suggesting the characteristic prevalence of the use of nominal groups in texts of all types in English. Second, even though all nominal groups in all text types contained instances of experiential and functional elements (deictic, numerative, epithet, classifier, thing, and qualifier), the patterns and frequencies of use varied. In terms of structure, five categories that included deictic-headed, numerative-headed, epithet-headed, classifier-headed, and Thing-only structures were identified with both deictic-headed and numerative-headed as the most frequently used. In terms of frequency-based variation, whereas the Deictic element and the Qualifier element were most frequently found in all texts, such elements as the Numerative, Epithet and Classifier were not as frequently found as the Deictic and Qualifier elements.

This analytical evidence is indicative of certain characterisations per the text analysed. However, as Glynn (2010) and Desagulier (2017) note, the emanating generalisations in this respect may be within the limits of the data used for the study. First, even though the usage frequencies of the deictic elements vary across texts, the finding that in each text such frequency is above 60% (at 61-81 range) suggests not only that the element is optional in the formation of nominal groups, but also that it is commonly used in texts of all types in English. Deictic elements are conscious authorial/speaker choices used to differentiate

the "Thing" element from other members of the "Thing" set (e.g., *her fiancé* (not your fiancé)*, the concept of solidarity* [not of democracy], *the term identity* [not the term gender], *these symptoms* [not those symptoms], etc.). This also suggests that in English, there are more nominal groups with the deictic elements than those without them. Within this range, however, it is easy to note that editorials, legal texts, and religious texts show peculiarly less association with the use of deictic elements compared to other types of text.

Second, the qualifier element, the element that follows the deictic element in usage frequency, which was found in all text types, is also an optional element. Like the deictic element, qualifiers also largely help to differentiate terms and concepts from other sub-sets (e.g., *the key issue addressed here*, *the point to be noted, the causes of aphasia*, etc.), which are both needed for topical focus and clear understanding. This accounts for the peculiarly high frequencies of qualifier elements in textbooks since textbooks contain in-depth knowledge on specific subjects and topics which must be clearly distinguished from other related subjects and topics.

Third, newspaper editorials showed high preference for epithets. An editorial represents a body of opinions on specific issues of public concern. Such opinions are generally from the perspectives of authorial approval (e.g., *the good-intentioned devaluation policy*) or disapproval (e.g., *egregious violations of constitutional provisions*) indicated by means of some adjectives. Editorials also exhibited a preponderance of classifiers which are used to express certain semantic relations that include "material, scale and scope, purpose and function, status and rank, origin, mode of operation – more or less any feature that may serve to classify a set of things into a system of smaller sets" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 377). Examples of these from the data include *economic growth*, *state appointments*, *corrupt African leaders*, *long expected national rebirth*, etc. which are more commonly found in editorials than any other type of text.

Fourth, religious texts exhibited much less association with classifiers and epithets. This is likely because such texts do not contain opinionated contents but blunt, non-judgmental, and generalised pronouncements as well as historical narratives from an omniscient perspective. The Biblical examples include *the voice of Sarai*, *the gate of Soddom*, *a mother of nations,* etc. while examples from the Quranic

texts include *children of Israel*, *my favour which I bestowed on you*, *the sea*, *the people of Pharaoh*.

Fifth, poetry exhibited very low association with qualifiers than all other text types. This is indicative of the unique textual peculiarity of poetry. Lastly, spoken conversations are characterised by frequent numeratives but infrequent qualifiers, perhaps because physical and casual interactions often make use of numbers for specificity (e.g., *I need three apples and five eggs*).

5. Conclusion

This study has further deepened knowledge about nominal groups generally, and their varying text-based structures and usage frequencies across texts. A few conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the systemic functional approach adopted for analysis has further confirmed that nominal groups have structural patterns that are analysable both experientially (in terms of how functional elements are linearly patterned to form complete semantic and syntactic units) and logically (in terms of the logico-semantic relations holding among pre-modification elements) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2013; Yusvitasari, 2013). Beyond this, however, the approach has shown in more detail that every lexical element in nominal group structures has its distinct syntactic and semantic role. This contrasts with such other approaches as Greenbaum and Nelson (2002), who, for example, classify all sub-elements coming before the obligatory element (noun) as either determiners or pre-modifiers; Carter and McCarthy (2013) who identify pre-head, head, and post-head elements; and Burton-Roberts (2016), who classifies such elements as pre-modifiers, nominal and post-modifiers.

Second, the multi-text based approach adopted has shown that the use of nominal groups cuts across text types, with the implication that the study outcomes are descriptive rather than prescriptive, since all nominal groups sampled and analysed were from instances of language use. The approach has also shown that while certain patterns consistently dominate in all text types (such as the pattern Deictic+Thing+Qualifier and Deictic+Thing), there are patterns that are used sparingly across texts (e.g., Deictic+Epithet+Classifier+Thi ng). This corroborates what some previous studies (such as Ruan & Jiaotong, 2016; Yusvitasari, 2013) have documented.

Lastly, within the limits of the data used for the study, it can be argued that some text types have tendencies for more frequent use of some structural elements of nominal groups than others. For example, while editorials show high frequencies of epithets and classifiers; textbooks show high frequencies of qualifiers. While religious texts show peculiarly low frequencies of epithets and classifiers, poetry shows peculiarly low frequencies of qualifiers. Notwithstanding these important findings, further investigation into the structure of nominal groups in English is recommended, as such can help not only in their correct use, but also in their analysis and interpretation.

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APPENDIX 1 – Table 4: Emergent structural patterns of nominal groups and their distributions across text types

S/N	Structural Patterns	Non-fictional texts						Fictional texts						%ages
		Textbooks	Editorial	Autobio.	Convs.	Legal Texts	Religious Texts	Novels	Short Stories	Poems by Anglo-Poets	Poems by Other Poets	Drama (Comedy)	Drama (Tragedy)	
1	DCT	8	11	13	10	11	6	13	16	20	14	13	10	12.0
2	DETQ	15	6	2	4	6	2	12	7	7	8	4	8	6.7
3	DT	1	2	15	17	1	7	11	7	11	12	15	8	8.9
4	DTQ	40	20	23	23	34	43	25	23	14	24	23	22	26.1
5	DET	3	3	5	8	2	4	8	21	10	6	7	12	7.4
6	DCTQ	10	6	4	-	7	2	3	2	2	2	-	-	3.1
7	DNTQ	5	2	-	7	-	-	2		-		8	4	2.3
8	DNET	1	-	1	5	-	-	1	1	-	3	6	2	1.6
9	DECTQ	2	-	1	-	2	-	1		2	2	-	-	1.3
10	DNT	-	7	3	7	1	2	2	1	7	6	-	6	3.5
11	DNETQ	-	-	-	-	-	-	2		-		-	-	0.1
12	DECT	-	2	1	-	3	-	2	1	5	5	-	4	1.9
13	DNCT	1	1	-	-	1	-	-		-		-	2	0.4
14	NET	1	-	2	5	-	1	1		1	2	4	2	1.5
15	NECT	-	2	-	1	2	-	2	1	-	-	1	6	0.3
16	NETQ	1	1	1	3	-	-	-		-	-	4	-	0.8
17	NECTQ	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-		-	-	0.2
18	NCT	-	1	-	-	1	-	-		-		-	-	0.2
19	NT	-	-	1	-	-	2	2	3	1	1	-	4	1.1
20	NTQ	5	1	6	4	7	9	3	5	7	6	3	2	4.8
21	ECT	1	2	-	-	3	-	-		1	-	-	-	0.5
22	ETQ	-	5	2	1	-	-	-		-		1	-	0.9
23	ECTQ	-	2	-	-	-	-	-		-		-		0.2
24	ET	-	2	-	-	1	1	-		4	2	-	2	1.0
25	CTQ	1	4	1	-	4	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1.0
26	CT	2	5	2	-	5	1	1	1	3	4	-	2	2.1
27	T	-	4	7	-	4	5	2		-	-	5	2	3.4
28	TQ	6	10	10	5	4	15	9	7	4	3	6	2	6.7