

# Analysis of noun phrase in english and vietnamese education essay



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Noun phrases as well as other phrases play an important role in mastering any language. Without noun phrase, there would have no agents, no patients, and no recipients. Additionally, no matter how wide our vocabulary may be, a single word is often insufficient in expressing our thought.. A contrastive analysis between English and Vietnamese is necessary and interesting for teaching and studying. Almost every language has noun phrases, however, despite having the same basic structure, they have some differences.. This study aims to explore internal and external structure of English and Vietnamese noun phrases then make a comparison between two kinds of NP as well as suggest some teaching implications. I hope through this assignment, both I and the readers will learn something helpful which can apply to English teaching and learning.

## **Noun phrase in English**

### **Definitions :**

Le (2002) defined noun phrase (NP) as a group of words beginning with a noun and functioning appositive. This NP often goes right before or right after the noun it expresses.

Ex: A victim of war, he hated the sight of soldiers. (A victim of war = he)

According to L. H. Nguyen (2004), a NP is a group of words with a noun or pronoun as the main part (the head). In his book " Analyzing English", Jackson added some more deal about the head which is " the minimal requirement for the occurrence of a noun phrase". Despite the NP is in simple form such as " students" or in complex form such as " the story about

the girl who used to live there”, it must have a noun or pronoun expressing the main idea.

## **Structure :**

Basically, a noun phrase consists of 3 main parts : Pre – Modification, Head, Post – Modification. But in some complex NPs, we can see that the Pre – Modification may contain other elements. Based on the theory of NP in the book “ Analyzing English” by Howard Jackson, we have a detailed formula of NP as following :

### **Pre – Modification**

#### **Head**

### **Post – Modification**

Pre – determiner

(A)

Identifiers

(B)

Numeral/Quantifier

(C)

Adjectives

(D)

Noun modifier

(E)

N/pro

(F)

Relative clauses, non-finite clause, prepositional phrase, adjectives, adverbs.

(G)

Table 1 : The structure of a NP in English

Now, we will go into details of the structure of a NP.

## **Pre – Modification**

This part basically has 5 elements as shown in the above table. The first element is pre-determiners. They are a small group of words which may occur before the identifier in a NP. They also have quantifier reference (all, both, half, ...); fraction numerals (one-third, ...).

Next element is identifiers. This element includes articles (a, an, the); demonstrative (this, that, these, those); possessives (my, your, his,...). But there is one thing we should pay attention. In any NP, just only one identifier may occur, it means that articles, demonstrative and possessives are mutually exclusive. We can't say " that my house" but if we use " of-phrase" with the possessive pronoun, we can express that NP in another way " that book of mine".

In some NPs such as " five cats", " several books", the pre - modification here is numeral (five) or quantifier(several). Also, sometimes, we can see the

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combination of these two elements in some NPs. The frequent sequences are ordinal numeral (especially " first" and " last" ) + indefinite quantifier ( eg " the first few hours"), ordinal + cardinal (eg " the second five days"), indefinite quantifier + cardinal numeral, especially round number (eg " several thousand people") (Nguyen, 2004, p. 44).

To amplify the head noun in some way, the next element, adjectives, come after the identifier and numerals/quantifiers. However, in case that several adjectives co-occur in a NP, there is a rule for their order.

**epithet**

**Size**

**shape**

**age**

**colour**

**origin**

**substance**

**present participle**

charming

Small

round

old

brown

French

oaken

writing table

Table 2 : The adjective order

The last element is noun modifiers which come between the adjectives and the head noun. As we can see, nouns may function not only as heads of NP but also modifiers in NP. For example, in NP “ a children book”, “ children” modifies “ book” and “ a children book” means a book for children.

Beside 5 basic elements mentioned above, there is one further kind of pre-modification that is NP in genitive case. This kind is marked by an ‘ s added to the its final word (eg my friend ‘ s bicycle).

## **Head :**

The most usual kind of head of NP is noun, but in some NPs such as “ She is my best friend”, the head may be a pronoun of some kind, usually a personal pronoun (he, she, you...). Similarly, Jacobs (1995) stated that many NPs in English are single forms consisting perhaps just of a noun or a pronoun.

When the head is a pronoun, it doesn’t need any modification, especially the pre-modification.

## **Kinds of pronoun functioning as the head**

### **Examples**

Personal pronoun

He, she, you, they, we, ....

Indefinite pronoun

Someone, something, nobody,.....

Possessive pronoun

His, her, your, their,...

Demonstrative pronoun

This, that, ...

Table 3 : Kinds of pronoun functioning as the head of NP

## **Post-modification**

This part is most frequently followed by phrases or clauses. Three kinds of phrasal/clausal post-modification we often see is: relative clauses, non-finite clauses, and prepositional phrases, sometimes we also see an adjective or an adverb functioning as a post-modifier in NP (Jackson, p. 15).

A relative clause consists of a relative pronoun (who, whom, which, that, whose,...) as a head, which mentions back to the head noun of NP. If the relative pronoun's function is object in the relative clause, we can omit that relative pronoun.

Non-finite clause is clause usually without subjects introduced by a non-finite form of the verb. That kind of clause include 3 kinds : infinite clause, present participle clause, past participle.

In a NP, prepositional phrase occurs most frequently functioning as post-modifier.

### **Some examples:**

All the schools in town

### **A B F G (prepositional phrase)**

The last few days

### **B C C F**

Dong Bang Shin Ki, my favourite music band.

### **F G (appositive NP)**

My noisy 4-year-old white Siamese cat

### **B epithet age colour F**

This mischievous tax collector's grabbing hand

### **NP Genitive D F**

The Korea history which has just been published.

### **B D F G (relative clause)**

Something important to do

### **F (indefinite pro) G (adjectives) G (non-finite clause)**

The girl behind you

### **B F G (adverb)**

Two horses eating grass.



**A F G (non-finite clause : present participle)**

A theme song composed by Lee So Man

**B E F G (non-finite clause : past participle)**

One-third of the population

**A B F****Noun phrase in Vietnamese****Definitions :**

Mai, Vu and Hoang (2006) defined NP (danh ngá»́) is a phrase in which the noun function as the main part.

Also, NP in the theory of Doan, Nguyen, Pham (2001) is a “ free combination of a noun nucleus and one or more than one subordinate elements ” which can be front elements standing before the nucleus noun or can be end elements standing after the nucleus noun.

**Structure :**

As a phrase, NP in Vietnamese also has three main parts : Pre-Modification (Front Element), Head (Nucleus), Post-Modification (End Element). More detailed, according to Mai et al. ‘ s theory (pp. 276-280), the structure of NP in Vietnamese can be described as following :

Tá»t cá»f

nhá»ng

Cái

con mèo

Ä' en

á<sup>o</sup>Ƴy

(-3)

(-2)

(-1)

Head noun (0)

(1)

(2)

Table 4 : The structure of a NP in Vietnamese

## Front elements

As we can see from the table, the elements in the position (-3), (-2) and (-1) are called front elements, while the elements standing after the nucleus (1) and (2) are called end elements. Those elements are placed in a stable way as shown in the above table.

In terms of the front elements , we have three kinds. In the position (-1), quantifiers such as “ tá<sup>o</sup>Ƴt cá<sup>o</sup>ƒ”, “ tá<sup>o</sup>Ƴt thá<sup>o</sup>ƒy”, “ há<sup>o</sup>¿t thá<sup>o</sup>ƒy”, “ há<sup>o</sup>¿t cá<sup>o</sup>ƒ”, “ cá<sup>o</sup>ƒ”,..... are used. Those words can occur before:

definite numerals : má»™t, hai, ba, bá»' n,...

Ex : táº¥t cáº£ bá»' n mÆºÆji sinh viên (1)

collective nouns : Ä' àn, lÃ©, bó, bá»™, náºm, ....

Ex: cáº£ lÃ© con trai

general nouns : quáºn, áo, binh, lính, xe cá»™, máy móc,...

Ex: háº¿t tháº£y máy móc

Let's pay attention to the quantifiers such as " táº¥t cáº£", " táº¥t tháº£y", " háº¿t tháº£y", " háº¿t cáº£", " cáº£",.... From the examples above, we can see that such those quantifiers occur before the head noun. Now, taking the first example, is it right if we say it in such a way " bá»' n mÆºÆji sinh viên táº¥t cáº£" ? Actually, in terms of grammar, it is correct but the meaning is different. The NP " táº¥t cáº£ bá»' n mÆºÆji sinh viên" means that no students are left, but in " bá»' n mÆºÆji sinh viên táº¥t cáº£", there are some students left. So, we can conclude that " táº¥t cáº£" can stand before and after the head noun depending on the speaker's attention.

Diep Quang Ban (2000) stated that position (-2) is the place taken by word class as following :

**Definite numeral/ cardinal number (tá»« chá»%o sá»' lÆºá»£ng xác Ä' á»<nh/sá»' tá»«)**

Má»™t, hai, ba, bá»' n, mÆºá»£i, trÃfm .....

MÆºá»£i con mèo

## Estimate quantifier (tá»« chá»%o sá»‘ phá» ☒ ng Ä‘ á»<nh)

Vài, vài ba, dĂfm, mÆ°Æji, ...

vài ba khách hàng

## Allocating words (tá»« hàm ý phân phá»‘ i)

Má»-i, má»™ t, tá»« ng,...

Má»-i công dân

## Articles (quán tá»«)

Nhá»¯ng, các, má»™ t,..

Nhá»¯ng bác sĂ©

## Word “ má°¥y”

Má°¥y con gà này

Table 5: the position (-2) in a NP in Vietnamese

However, we should pay attention that such elements as “ vài, vài ba, dĂfm, ...” can not co-exist with the quantifiers such as “ tá°¥t cá°F”, “ tá°¥t thá°Fy”, “ há°¿t thá°Fy”, “ há°¿t cá°F”, “ cá°F” in the position (-3).

In terms of the position (-1), Diep Quang Ban (2000) stated that it is taken by the deictic word “ cái” (tá»« chá»%o xuá°¥t) in order to emphasize things mentioned in the head noun. However, sometimes, “ cái” is replaced by another deictic word such as “ con” in NP “ con ngÆ°á»i á°¥y”. In Vietnamese NP, “ cái” occurs before the head noun and can intervene between a numeral (if there is one) and the classifier or a measure phrase. It

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may be preceded by other pre-noun modifiers such as quantifiers, numerals, and articles. It must always co-occur with a classifier as in "ba cái cuá»™ n len kia" or "ba cái thùng nÆ°á»c này". Besides, "cái" is sometimes mistaken with the homonymous classifier "cái", but it's different from classifier cái as well as other classifiers in term of distribution and function. When "cái" precedes a count noun, the use of a classifier is obligatory, as shown in (a). However, "cái" cannot be used before the homonymous classifier as shown in (b)

ba cái cuá»™ n len (correct)

ba cái cái chén (incorrect)

Usually, with the presence of the deictic word, the noun is demonstrative like "này", "kia", "á»y", ....(eg: cái thá»ng nhóc này) . But, in spoken language, we often see that the demonstratives are omitted, like "cái thá»ng nhóc".

### **The nucleus (head noun) :**

According to Dinh Dien (n. d), the nucleus (position (0)) may be a noun(boy, teacher, cat, house...) or a combination between a classifier (danh tá»« chá»%o loá»i) and the head noun such as "con ngÆ°á»c i", "quyá»fn sách", "máy sá»y". Otherwise, the head noun may be a classifier followed by a descriptive free word cluster (tá»• há»p tá»« tá»± do miêu tá»£) such as "hai ngÆ°á»c i Ä' ang ngá»" i nói chuyá»fn Ä' á»ng kia", "nhá»ng viá»c bàn hôm bá»a" Additionally, words which are not nouns can also be the head due to the speaking habit of Vietnamese. For example, we can

shorten the NP "hai cá»' c cà phê Ä' en" into the NP "hai Ä' en".

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Some Vietnamese classifiers are commonly used:

cái : used for most inanimate objects (cái bàn, cái ghế,...)

con: usually for animals and children (con bé), but can be used to describe some inanimate objects (con dao, con đường)

bài: used for compositions like songs, drawings, poems, essays, etc (bài thơ, bài hát,...)

cây: used for stick-like objects (cây phôi, cây súng,...)

tòa: buildings of authority: courts, halls, “ ivory towers” (tòa nhà,...)

quả/ trái: used for globular objects (quả chuối, trái táo,...)

quyển/ cuốn/ quyển: used for book-like objects (cuốn sách, quyển tạp chí,...)

tờ: sheets and other thin objects made of paper (tờ giấy, tờ báo,...)

lá: smaller sheets of paper (lá thơ, lá bài,...)

việc: an event or an ongoing process (việc kinh doanh, việc học,...)

## End elements:

Doan et al. classified the end elements in terms of part of speech, structure, way of connection, order of some elements.

c. 1) In terms of part of speech :

noun

lá»»p ngoáº; i ngá»»

verb

lá»»p giao tiáº; p

adjective

lá»»p Ä' ông

cardinal numeral

lá»»p 4

noun of place

lá»»p trên láº; u

noun of time

lá»»p buá»»•i tá»»' i

pronoun

lá»»p cá» a tôi

Table 6 : The end elements in Vietnamese NP in terms of part of speech

c. 2) In terms of structure:

A principal – accessory phrase: sách vÄfn há»» c Má»»<sup>1</sup>

A coordinated phrase: sách nghe và nói

A S-V phrase: sách má<sup>o1</sup> tôi vá»« a mua

c. 3) In terms of way of connection:

Direct ways ( eg: tinh tháºn thép, máºt bá»“ câu...)

Indirect ways (eg : bá»™ phim mà anh thích, bài viá»t mà tôi vá»« a hoàn thành)

c. 4) In terms of the following order:

The nucleus f A f B (a, b, c, d) f C

**A**

**B**

**C**

goes with the nucleus to form a phrase (a compound noun)

describes the characteristics of the object that the nucleus mentioned

Ex: phòng khách rá»™ ng, bàn làm viá»t sang trá»ng,....

demonstrative pronouns such as “ này, áºy, Ấ’ ó”...

a

b

C



d

a noun, a verb or an adjective

“ vá» ĩ + noun” or “ bá<sup>o</sup>±ng + noun”

“ cá» a + noun” or “ á» Ÿ + noun”

Clauses

Table 6 : The end elements in Vietnamese NP in terms of some elements' order.

Something about demonstratives may cause you misunderstanding if we arrange them in different order. For example, compare two NPs “ viá»±c á<sup>o</sup>Ÿy cá» a anh” and “ viá»±c cá» a anh á<sup>o</sup>Ÿy”, we can see the difference in meaning here due to our speaking intonation. In the first NP, if we speak with a flat intonation, we can understand it as “ his work”, whereas, if we speak with a raising intonation at “ á<sup>o</sup>Ÿy” in the second NP, it can be understood that “ it's your work, not others' work”.

### Some examples :

Tá<sup>o</sup>Ÿt cá<sup>o</sup>£ nhá»±ng cái váy Ä' en bá<sup>o</sup>±ng jeans á» Ÿ shop Cass mà cá<sup>o</sup>u

**(-1) (-2) (-3) (0) (1) (af bf cf d)**

th<sup>o</sup>á»±ng thá<sup>o</sup>Ÿy Ä' ó

**(2)**

b) Ä' th<sup>o</sup>á»±ng Ä' ua sá»' 2 á» Ÿ tr<sup>o</sup>á»±c má<sup>o</sup>-t (Diep, 2000, p. 60)

**(0) (1) ( cardinal number f c)**

c) Nhà» ́ng thá»±ng nhóc nhà»«ch ngá»£m á»¥y

**(-2) (0) (1) (adjective) (2)**

d) Sàn nhà chi má»»i lau

**(0) (1) (S-V phrase)**

e) Cái cuá»' n tá»p chí á» Ỗ trên ká»‡ Ä' ó

**(-1) (0) (1) (c) (2)****A comparison of English NP and Vietnamese NP**

From what we discuss above about the NP in English and Vietnamese, we can see that both of them have a basic structure : pre-modification, head, post-modification. . However, there are still some differences between them. We will discuss some remarkable similarities and differences in the positions of pre-modification and post-modification in English and Vietnamese NP.

**Firstly, in both English and Vietnamese NP, quantifier, numerals, fractions stand before the head noun.**

(a) All those old chairs

**Quantifier head noun**

(b) Several thousand people

**numeral head noun**

(c) One-third of my students

**fraction head noun**

(a) Tá»¥t cá»£ nhà» ́ng cái ghá»¿ cÄ© Ä' ó

**quantifier head noun adjective**

(b) Vài ngàn ng<sup>o</sup>á»i

**numeral head noun**

(c) Má»™ t phá<sup>o</sup>n ba sá»' há»<sub>1</sub>c sinh cá» a tôi

**fraction head noun**

**Secondly, demonstrative, ordinal numbers, possessives come before the head noun in English but after the head noun in Vietnamese.**

That large brick house

**demonstrative head noun**

The second tour to Korea

**ordinal number head noun**

My favourite spicy food

**possessive head noun**

(a) Ngôi nhà bá<sup>o</sup>±ng gá<sup>o</sup>ich to lá»n Ä' ó

**head noun demonstrative**

(b) Chuyá<sup>o</sup>¿n du lá»<ch thá»© hai Ä' á<sup>o</sup>¿n Hàn Quá»' c

**head noun ordinal number**

(c) Thá»©c Äfn cay yêu thích cá» a tôi

## head noun possessive

**Thirdly, in terms of adjectives, we put them in front of the head noun in English NP but in Vietnamese, we put them after the head noun.**

Ex : cái bàn màu nâu làm bằng gỗ - xoài

## head noun. adjectives

A brown oaken table.

## adjectives head noun.

However, in some cases, adjectives come after the head noun in English NP such as “ something strange”, “ somebody brave”,... Additionally, the order of adjectives modifiers in English is rather fixed (epithet, size, shape, age, colour, origin, substance, present participle) whereas that in Vietnamese NP may be exchanged, based on the speaker’s attention. For example, in English, we just have only one order “ a pretty blue skirt” but when we say in Vietnamese, there are 2 ways “ má»™t chiếc váy màu xanh da trời»™i xinh xắn” and “ má»™t chiếc váy xinh xắn màu xanh da trời»™i”.

Moreover, in English NP, the occurrence of nouns and determiners is obligatory but optional in Vietnamese NP. So, if we translate the phrase “ cuốn sách trên bàn” into Vietnamese, it will be “ book on table”. Is it right? As you see, the true phrase should be “ the book on the table” .

In Vietnamese, classifiers are generally obligatory in numerated NP whereas in English, we don’t normally use classifiers before nouns, except some special words “ a pair of shoes”, “ a loaf of bread” ....

EX: In English, we say “ two books” but in Vietnamese, we say “ hai cuốn sách”.

The next difference I want to mention is the position of noun modifiers. In English NP, they come before a head noun but in Vietnamese, they come after the head noun. Nevertheless, in some cases in Vietnamese, noun modifiers precedes the head noun (eg má»™ t thi nhân, má»™ t cá» 𠄎 thá»,..)

A ballet class

A package tour

A summer campaign

(a) Má»™ t lá»»p ba lê

(b) Chuyá»n du lá»»ch trá»»n gói

(c) chiá»n đá»»ch mùa hè

Last but not least, sometimes there are some ambiguous structures that cause us confused. In Vietnamese, what comes into people’s mind first is spoken first is the common rule, which is also a natural order of people’s thinking (Dinh, n. d, p. 11). Let’s take a NP as an example. How many ways you can say the English NP “ a new Korean leather coat” ? We have “ má»™ t cái áo khoác má»»i bá»ng lông thú cá» a Hàn Quá»’ c” or “ má»™ t cái áo khoác Hàn Quá»’ c bá»ng lông thú má»»i” and “ má»™ t cái áo khoác bá»ng lông thú Hàn Quá»’ c má»»i”.

It seems that in the English NP, the position of pre-modifiers and post-premodifiers are not so free and flexible as that in Vietnamese NP

## **Implication in English teaching and learning**

Learners of English may have some difficulties such as how to translate from

English into Vietnamese and vice versa due to the differences in the position of pre-modifiers and post-modifiers we have just mentioned above (for example: má»™ t quyá» fn sách hay – a book good or a book interesting.

They may also be in trouble with the order of the adjectives in a rather long noun phrase with many adjectives. Which adjective come first? Which one will come next? Where should we put those adjectives. Vietnamese students may find it difficult to remember all the positions due to the habit of placing the adjectives after the head noun and using them flexibly.

Knowing clearly about English NP and Vietnamese NP, especially the differences as well as the common mistakes that Vietnamese learners often meet will help the teachers guide their students correctly. In other words, learners can know their mistakes from the beginning so that they can find it easy to learn English later, especially grammar. Based on the knowledge of English NP and Vietnamese NP, the teachers also design the tasks for students to consolidate and practice knowledge of phrases and sentences in both two languages.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, although NP in English and Vietnamese has the same basic structure (pre-modification, head, post-modification), they are not the same

in the word order of pre-modification and post-modification. These differences are caused by the dissimilarity in thinking and speaking habit of English and Vietnamese. As a student as well as a teacher-to-be, this research helps me a lot. When doing this assignment, I have a chance to consolidate my knowledge of both English and Vietnamese and know something new and helpful. With what I learn from this research, I will apply to my study and teaching career.