

Notes on the Attributive Functions of Nouns

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(Received September 24, 1968)

I. INTRODUCTION

Of the noun-noun constructions we find the following two major types: one is the compound type to which belong those constructions which are distributed as functional units, and the other is the type of syntactic-free combination in which the first noun assumes a function of an adjective, preserving more or less the characteristics of an independent noun in most cases. In this paper, we intend to specify how a noun in the genitive as well as in the common case functions as a prenominal modifier. In the Immediate Constituent grammar¹⁾, what we mean by 'modifier' is represented by the term 'attributive' which is used to designate any endocentric function class. Then the kinds of nouns we are going to investigate constitute some of the attributives to a noun-head.

II i. THE ORDER-GROUPS OF PRE-NOMINAL MODIFIERS

Hill's 'phonological phrase'²⁾ is defined as a terminal juncture group. If a phrase is made up of two nouns, forming an endocentric construction, he seems to identify it as a syntactic as well as phonological free phrase. This is the case with our noun-noun constructions. So for convenience sake, we will start with his well-known order groups of the modifiers prefixed to a noun-head. His model phrase is as follows:

VI IV III II I N
all the ten fine old stone houses

This phrase coincides with the typical subordinate endocentric construction that Bloomfield developed in his *Language*³⁾ and serves also as a specimen of Nida's primary attributives⁴⁾ combined in a longest sequence. In this model the head is *houses* and all the rest are its modifiers, each representing one of the order groups that can stand relatively to each other in these maximal positions. What is important about this phrase is that each modifier has a direct bearing in a manner peculiar to it upon the head and that by interpolating other words, mostly adverbial or nominal modifiers, we can enrich the whole phrase. For example, we can add the following words to the first order word: *a finely chipped stone wall, the MacCormack tractor distribution agency* (cf. note 4).

II ii. SEQUENTIAL ORDER OF MATERIAL NOUNS

The assignment of *stone* to group 1 concerns us first and foremost, for this is the first noun to consider. No one will doubt that *stone* in this position

functions as a modifier, or we may not even beg the question if we do not ask whether it is a noun or an adjective. It seems to be enough to reassert this function of *stone* in the prenominal position, and such is the case with other nouns indicating material (cf. note 5). Of course, not all combinations are free: cp. *stone ax*, *stone pit*. However, we can give evidence enough to favor the view that *stone* is an adjective. The use of a prop-word after it, as in *Brick houses far outnumber stone ones in Holland* (Zandvoort, Handbook 797), and its use after *be* without an article or plural suffix, as in *The houses are all stone* (Hill, Structures, p. 235) may commit us to the view that *stone* is not a noun. Certainly some dictionaries⁵⁾ give the entry title Adj. beside N. to *stone*, but this sub-classification may not be of primary significance and we have only to recognize that *stone* occurs in both capacities. This view will be strengthened by what follows.

To the order group 1 we can admit proper names of places and persons, and common nouns denoting relational position. Examples: *a London paper*, *the Shaw plays*, *the Bottom drawer*, *mountain flowers* etc. Here Hill includes the derived forms from names of countries: *English*, *Chinese*, *Japanese*, etc., which leaves us in some doubt. These words are always placed before material nouns of group 1, as seen in *a large black Indian silk scarf* (Mitchell, Some English Phrasal Types⁶⁾, *a chinese porcelain jar* (ib), though some grammarians⁷⁾ regard material N-N constructions as compounds, or nonce compounds. What puzzles us is that there is some slight difference in meaning between *a Japan table* and *a Japanese table* and between such similar pairs, as pointed out by Jespersen in his M.E.G. II, 13.8₆. The only solution seems to be to subdivide group 1 into several minor groups, as in the case of IIa containing very few adjectives⁸⁾.

Furthermore, words denoting 'design' or 'feature' can come between group 1 material and head nouns, as *in her orange silk full Turkish trousers* (D. Defoe), *her black silk Paris dress* (A. T. Ritchie). Again these examples help explain the use of material nouns as prenominal modifier, but as far as position is concerned, Hill's classification of the order groups needs more elaboration⁹⁾.

III i. THE GENITIVE AS DETERMINATIVE

The words in group V, which must be confined to those occurring between any group VI word (examples: *all*, *half*, *both*) and any one of group IV (examples: the numerals, both ordinal and cardinal), are collectively called the determiners. Here are also two subdivisions Va and Vb. Va comprises the articles *a* and *the*, the demonstratives *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, etc. and some others¹⁰⁾. Vb contains all the singular or plural nouns in the genitive. The chief reasons for this distinction are as follows: (1) the Va members usually receive weak or tertiary stress while the Vb members always have secondary stress in common with all the other order groups; (2) no two Va members occur in the same phrase, but a Vb can occur after any Va; (3), the most important reason, for which both

Va and Vb can be included in the general group V—that is, a sequence of Va-Vb together modifies its noun head and accordingly, the I.C. analysis of such a construction results in

the | child | 's | parents

(4) all the members in Va can be listed but it is practically impossible to list all the Vb members. Another curious characteristic of a Va-Vb combination is that all members, each representing one of the four order groups IV, III, II, I, can come in the regular sequence between the two V members as illustrated in *the ten fine young American children's parents*. Now we can include in group Vb some of the meaning-based subclasses of the genitive nouns. These are the possessive genitive (ex. the young man's parents), the subjective genitive (ex. the boy's application), the objective (ex. the son's discharge), the genitive of origin (ex. the neighbor's story), etc. It is noteworthy that the usage of genitive nouns with no noun following, known as the independent genitive, is illustrative of their determinant power, and that in the case of proper names such as *Harrod's*, *St. Paul's*, the usual absence of the following nouns (i.e. their heads) may be the cause of the apostrophe dropping off, as can be seen in *Harrods*, *Longmans*.

III ii. THE GENITIVE AS PRE-NOMINAL MODIFIER

On the other hand, there are phrases containing genitive nouns but having different structure from that illustrated above (i.e. the child's parents). The I.C. analysis result in, for example,

his | child | 's | face

It is characteristic of a phrase of this pattern, as seen in the analysis, that the genitive doesn't exert any determinative influence upon its head, which part in function must be had by a member of group V prefixed to it. Examples :

Pete's bachelor's life	(C. Brönte)
my preacher's tone	(A. C. Swinburne)
my mother's housekeeper's room	(H. G. Wells)

We clearly recognize these two distinct uses of the genitive form of a noun and distinguish one from the other by naming them the 'determinative' genitive and the 'descriptive' genitive respectively. The distinction is the clearer for the fact that the stress pattern taken by these descriptive N's-N constructions is primary-tertiary in contrast to the characteristic secondary-primary pattern of determinative N's-N constructions. This stress pattern is significant also in that it manifests the closeness of linkage between the descriptive genitive and the immediately following head noun. In most but not all cases, the descriptive N's can provisionally be said to belong to group 1, and especially in the case of nouns denoting measures or values, their genitive forms fall within group 1. Examples : *a month's rent*, *a hundred yards' distance*, *about thirty shillings' value*. The

genitive of measurement is always descriptive and this can clearly be understood on comparing it with the common case in the following pair of phrases: *a five minutes' walk*, *a five-minute walk*; the latter of which Hill regards as belonging to group 1. It must be added that genitive nouns of measurement can only be placed immediately before their heads, and nowhere else, which is their only characteristic as to their place in order, while circumstances are different with the other genitive nouns.

So far we have explained that *his child's face* is a free phrase, more accurately a subordinate endocentric construction; namely, that *child's* describes *his face* as a modifier. However, the fact that *child's* is still a noun and not an adjective proper, though it functions as such, can only explain the following examples: *a new old men's house*, *two stones' throw* (W. Thackeray). It can also be said that *men*, *stones* in the above examples are made plural because of their individuality as constituents and thus *men's*, *stones'* approach the function status of group Vb genitive modifiers. If this is the case, we can now distinguish from the other uses such descriptive genitive as bears partial resemblance to group Vb, and we can not utterly deny it the possibility of periphrasis by prepositions, which may seem unnatural and inefficient in view of the universal validity with which the genitive forms are used. Examples are given by Curme in his *Syntax*: *a man's shoe*, *a shoe for a man*; *a man's roughness*, *the roughness of a man*; etc.

But examples of the following type are relatively many, in which the one or more preceding adjectives modify the head, not the descriptive genitive: *those soft watchful woman's eyes* (A. T. Ritchie), *his sharp actor's face* (H. Walpole). A survey of these examples shows that the union of the genitive and the head noun is strong, and yet the genitive is felt to be rather an adjective than a modifier-noun by the co-existence with the preceding adjectives. It is also to be noted that these constructions are of such a nature that they are capable of free transformation by the preposition-periphrasis and that the use of the preposition in place of the head is admissible under necessary conditions.

However, the unity is broken in the following examples: *his boy's trim little jacket* (W. Collins), *grey shepherd's check trousers* (C. Doyle). The surrounding modifiers certainly strengthen the function of the genitive as the descriptive modifier, and these examples could be used to reject the inclusion of the descriptive genitive in group 1. But we assume that the genitive in question is still nominal, though the structure is very much complicated. Our explanation is that *his boy's trim little jacket* is a combination of the two separate inner speech forms¹¹): one is *his boy's jacket* and the other is *the child's trim little jacket*. The former is relatively a fixed construction compared with the latter which is a free, casual combination (for *his little jacket* is not necessarily *trim*). Thus, the whole construction is created in accord with the regular pattern of word-order, because the writer's (here Collin's) emphasis is put on the trimness of his boy's little jacket. It can also be said that the phrase in question is a specimen of the so-called 'meliorative-pejorative' type. Phrases which are similar in structure to this are found. Examples:

a dear old lady	dear old+old lady
a pretty little house	pretty little+little house
a sweet little lady	sweet little+little lady

Our explanation may not be complete but it is evident that the established function of the genitive as a modifying word has made these complex combinations possible.

IV. COMPOUNDS AND PARALLEL FREE PHRASES

Here some brief remarks must be made about compounds consisting of two nouns. For a combination to be a compound there is one condition to be satisfied as the first and foremost requirement: it must be syntactically as well as morphologically isolated in distribution. Stress may not be the only criterion, but it is still dominant in most cases. By this criterion we can distinguish *bull's(-)eye*, *cat's-paw*, *dog's(-)ear*, etc. from the many discussed above. And at the same time we must take into consideration some grammatical concept underlying certain groups of compounds in common. In *steel production*, *art critic*, *tea merchant*, *traffic control*, etc. for example, a verbal nexus (here object \times verb) is implied, while *party leader*, *concert performance*, *contract violations*, etc. in which the same verbal nexus is expressed, do not receive the compound stress pattern.

Compare the following two pairs: *dog-ear*, *dog's-ear*; *ship biscuit*, *ship's tobacco*. Both of the first pair are compounds, but the latter is the more syntactic compound because of the presence of 's. On the contrary, both of the second pair are free phrases and yet the former is the more syntactic-free combination by the absence of 's. *Trade union* is a free phrase with its characteristic stress pattern, but *trade unionist*, *trade unionism* are being compounded by the addition of the suffixes *ist* and *ism* respectively, (details to be discussed later). This phenomenon of compounding is very frequent with adjective-noun free phrases: *civilized nation*, *civilized national education*. Now, we will discuss in more details the problematic use of the apostrophe in free phrases. We find pairs of the descriptive genitive and the corresponding common case contained in much the same phrases:

black winter's mornings (W. M. Thackery)	a black winter morning (R. L. Stevenson)
a fine summer's night (R. L. Stevenson)	a calm golden summer evening (W. M. Thackery)

The presence or absence of the genitive suffix seems to make a difference, though a very small one, between the above pairs. These have been pointed out only as irregular, but we assume that they are not merely free variations. Jespersen mentions in his M.E.G. VI, 16.9, that he observed a rule governing the use of the genitive: that is, when preceded by adjectives, the genitive is preferred to the common case: cp. a winter day; a cold, winter's day. The rule is not

always observed as can be seen in the examples above. Moreover, it is to be noted that there is the increasing tendency toward the use of the common case, (cf. note 13) and thus there must be something more than the rule about these alternative uses of nouns in these phrases. It is important to note that *winter's day*, preceded by adjectives or by no adjectives, is more compounded with the following noun, or more specified in sense, than *winter day*.

In this connection, we must refer to Hill's rule¹²⁾ that a reversal of order in the natural sequence of the order groups is accompanied by a change in stress: for instance, in *poor little rich girl* there is a reversal of order, for *little* is a member of group II which should follow *rich*, because *rich* is usually distributed as a word belonging to group III; hence the stress shift, thus making *rich girl* a fixed phrase.

To our thinking, Hill and Jespersen seem to be interested in the process of compounding due to certain syntactic circumstances. They do not seem to insist that *rich girl*, or *winter's day* should be a compound only on that account. Compounds must be units in distribution! though they are casually behaving like ones. *Winter's* in *a cold winter's day* do have some prominence both in stress and in sense which is absent in *winter* in *a cold winter day*. We can ascribe the prominence to the use of the genitive suffix, which suffix we shall consider to be functionally more of an adjectival suffix. This can be compared with the 'emphatic' use of the genitive pronouns as in *in his excitement*, (cp. in excitement.) So far our concern has been to point out the linguistic fact that the descriptive N's-N and the parallel common case N-N are about equally syntactic-free in structure:

cp. Pelet's bachelor's life ;	Silas' dull bachelor mind
(C. Brontë)	(G. Eliot)
in a great floundering boy's hand ;	in his big school-boy handwriting
W. M. (Thackery)	(W. M. Tackery)

And also we note the growing tendency¹³⁾ since ME toward the free use of the common case as group 1 modifier:

brisk, business tones	her tender, sweet child heart
(A. C. Doyle)	(H. Caine)
these Wordsworth appearances	eyeglass young lady
in London (T. Carlyle)	(W. P. Ridge)

To our stock of free phrases, we can now add the 'copulative' type of N-N combinations, which have been usually treated as compounds owing to their peculiar characteristic in composition. We assume that they are combinations of only additive type as in *the actor-director-author* (L. Lyons), *scientist-explorer*, *blue-black*, etc. There is no subordination between the two or more component nouns as seen either in stress or in sense. The point of our discussion is that these are rather freely composed on this pattern in spite of its uniqueness. Lees explains in his *Nominalizations*¹⁴⁾ that some of these compounds may be best

understood as conjunctive in structure, adding that "such clearly conjunctive constructions (he cites *north-west*, *fighter-bomber*, etc in addition to the last two examples above) are to be treated as a special form of conjunction, not as compounds." He says also that "it is difficult to find many bona fide conjunctive nominal compounds." We again take note of the relative independence of the two (or more) constituent parts as nouns and the lack of oneness of a compound, which are part of our reason for regarding them as free phrases.

Combinations of this conjunctive type, however, tend to be more compounded when they enter into larger constructions as noun modifiers such as *export-import trade*, *bus-truck collision*, but the whole constructions remain to be free nominal phrases in accord with the above-said current tendency toward the use of the common case as prenominal modifier. The same criterion can be applied to the following examples :

the boy-girl attitude (W. B. Maxwell)	their bride-and-groom picture (G. Ade)
a cock and bull story (R. Herrick)	their street and house foulness (J. Ruskin)

It is characteristic of these phrases that *boy-girl*, etc. are meaningful combinations only within the constructions in which they are contained, being merely juxtaposed nouns by themselves. On the contrary, a combination, of which the second element is itself a compound, is evidently a free phrase as in *house doorkeeper*, *night watchman* ; which may be the rule of phrasal construction.

It is doubtful whether *boy-king* is a genuine appositional compound, which may be best exemplified by *page-boy*, for in the case of *boy-king* we may not clearly observe the logical relation of special vs. general recognizable between the two components of the typical compound just cited (i. e. page-boy). The same relation is found in *the Times newspaper*, but it is a free phrase for no special reason but that the tie is much looser. We can assume that the second element of this phrase is a postnominal modifier. A *page-boy* means a page who is more generally or in popular language understood as a boy ; but *boy-king* is perhaps a king who is also a boy, and *boy* is taken for a modifier indicating age, so felt under the influence of similar free phrases such as *boy friend*, *woman writer*, *child wife*, *pupil teacher*, *fellows student*, etc. whose first elements denote sex, age, rank, etc.

V. TWO FUNCTION TYPES OF THE NUMBER FORMS

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen that the attributive functions of a noun contained in a subordinate endocentric construction are classifiable into two distinct types : the descriptive and determinative function¹⁵⁾. Now in conclusion, attention may be called to the number forms, a comparative survey of which is here made between the descriptive type 1 and the determinative type 2. Nouns denoting sex, age, rank, or some other relations do not take the plural

forms when they occur prenominally. Examples: *boy friend* (s), *child father* (s), *queen mother* (s), *neighbor king* (s), *officer fellow* (s), etc. These combinations were (or are still) treated as compounds and their plural forms were (or are still) regarded as regular in accord with the rule that compounds inflect the last elements only. However, we may assume that the first nouns function as type 1 modifiers and so they are not to be inflected, though we also admit the view held by Jespersen that these nouns, if number-inflected with the sibilant suffix, are liable to be mistaken for the possessive forms: cp. *lady doctor* (s), *ladies' doctors*; but this seems to have nothing to do with our problem.

On the other hand, with *man* and *woman*, the use of the number forms seems irregular as seen in *woman friend* (s) (cited by Curme and Lees), *two women friends* (B. Franklin); *my man-servants and maid-servants* (W. Pater), *men and women singers* (W. Scot). But the singular forms, though rare in distribution, may not be duly put aside as instances of vacillation, for in the example from Pater, *man* is used in contrast to the following *maid*. So we assume that a descriptive force is recognizable in the singular form (here in *man* as well as in *maid*) which comes under type 1. But in spite of all this, the use of the plural forms *men* and *women* is the general rule. Examples are many: *women artists*, *men cooks*, etc. These forms belong to type 2, whose characteristic in structure is shown by the use of the plural forms: that is, individuality, or independence as component nouns. The same can be said about other nouns in the following examples:

some Arabian-night magician (C. Dickens)	the Prisons Blue Book (E. Carpenter)
barrack architecture (H. G. Wells)	the Highways Committee (Review of Reviews)

The same distinction, namely between type 1 and type 2, holds between the descriptive N's-N constructions. Examples:

a man's society (W. Thackery)	men's society (Outlook)
their woman's smile (J. Galsworthy)	women's hearts (W. Thackery)

Thus *a man's club* by the side of *a men's club*¹⁶, *a woman's college* by the side of *a women's college*; though some scholars explain that this is to some extent a matter of sound symbolism, or that the plural forms are weak while the singular ones connote ideas of strength and nobility.

Nouns which denote time, distance, money values and such like, get compounded with numerals preceding them in the position of group 1 modifiers as in *a ten-mile walk*, *a five-pound note*, *the hundred-meter dash*, etc. They do not take the plural suffix like type 1 nouns, so that their descriptive power is strengthened. *A ten-mile walk* means a kind of walk. On the other hand, the corresponding genitive forms are more syntactic-free as in *a hundred yards' distance*, *about thirty shillings' value*. Lastly we can add genuinely type 2 attributive nouns in the plural common case. Examples:

ten thousand pounds prize (C. Dickens)	the Women's Rights movement (G. B. Shaw)
twenty years difference in their age (S. Grand)	good roads agitation (Curme)

Notes

1) Nida's Synopsis of English Syntax (1951) is one of the few and the best applications of the Structural-Descriptive techniques to the whole of English syntax. There the Immediate Constituent analysis is the basic principle on which his whole description is built up. Though problems still remain to be settled about the I.C. analysis itself as so powerful a technique for language description, it can at least be said to be a most successful one for the structures of some endocentric constructions, especially those of the attributives to the subject-heads.

2) No definition of a phrase may be complete. This is also true of Hill's phonological phrase, if we take it for the usual morphological and syntactic phrase.

$$\overset{2}{\text{He's}} + \overset{1}{\text{a}} + \overset{3}{\text{very}} + \overset{1}{\text{old}} + \text{man} \#$$

as he illustrated, is a phonological phrase, a terminal juncture group, occurring under a single pitch morpheme. Hence the phonological phrase. Hill speaks of 'potential phrases', but he does not say a word about how to delimit methodically, a *very old man*, *very old* as such, rejecting a *very* and other partial sequences, though he seems to insist that they are 'potentially' capable of standing under a pitch morpheme. He calls them nonminimal potential phrases.

3) See L. Bloomfield, *Language*, p. 194, 195.

4) The endocentric classes are named *primary*, *secondary*, *tertiary*, (etc) by order as with the subject-heads, (which resembles the three ranks initiated by Jespersen). For example, in *the MacCormack tractor distribution agency*, all the three classes are represented by each constituent, the attributive function of which doesn't go beyond the immediately following attributive. So the whole phrase is an accumulation of three smaller phrases such as *the distribution agency*, *tractor distribution*, *MacCormack tractor*. So we see that there is a subordinate relation between any two constituents in the process of the I.C. analyses, which is absent in Hill's model phrase. Thus one endocentric class consists of various parts of speech which also belong to another class. This may be counted as one of the undesirable results from the mechanical application of the I. C. analysis.

5) The table below shows how the treatment of each lexical item is different in COD, ACD and UED.

	COD	ACD	UED
stone (wall)	adj.	adj.	adj.
silver	attrib./adj.	adj.	adj./attrib.
tin	attrib.	adj.	attrib.
silk	attrib.	adj.	adj.
cotton	/	/	adj.

6) Cf. T. F. Mitchell, 'Some English Phrasal Types', In *Memory of J. R. Tirth*, p. 352. Longman's Linguistic Library.

7) Cf. O. Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, VI 8.2₂

8) Hill distinguishes only the three adjectives *old*, *little* and *new* from all the other group II words because they tend to be compounded with the following noun-heads, as in *old maid*, *little man*, *New Deal*. And if such is the case, *grey old man* is more natural in sequence than

old grey man, so the above two *old*'s must be differentiated from each other as positional homonyms and we assume that the latter *old* is identical with the *old* in *the old Roman* coin which undoubtedly goes in group II.

9) Hill himself pointed out that the *same* in the *same* *ten* houses, or the *more* in *ten more beautiful women*, doesn't belong to any group. As for the numerals, an ordinal usually precedes a cardinal when they both occur in a phrase: *the first two days*.

10) In group Va go the possessive forms of all personal pronouns and the limited members such as *any, some, no, either, which, what*, etc.

11) It often happens that the same structural pattern that is made up of a certain members of the same form classes convey two or more different meanings owing to the corresponding different inner speech forms i.e. different functional patterns, working behind it. In *his child's trim little jacket*, the one and the same structural form *child's* is assumed to be performing its functions both as a Vb and as a group I at the same time.

12) See Hill, *Introduction to Linguistic Structures*, p. 181.

13) It is clearly pointed out by H. Marchand in his *Notes on Nominal Compounds in Present-Day English* and by O. Jespersen in his *M. E. G. II*, 13.11 13.23 that there have co-existed two contrastive types of N-N combination: one is the compound type represented by *rainbow* with forestress, the older German type of word-formation, which denotes an intimate, permanent relationship between the two signified; the other is the new syntactic type represented by *stone wall* with even stress, denoting an informal, non-committal meeting of the two nouns. Compare the contrastive pairs:

summer house~summer residence

Christmas tree~Christmas traffic

14) See R. B. Lees, *The Grammar of English Nominalizations*, p. 178.

15) The determinative function is clearly recognizable especially in proper nouns used as attributive: *the Shaw plays, Book Exhibitions Department, Times editor*, etc. It is also clear in the plural common case, which is exemplified in the last paragraph.

16) Jespersen seems to consider the singular genitive as in *man's club* (cp. *men's club*) and the plural genitive as in *in her men's clothes* (cp. *in man's clothes and man's boots*) to be irregular from the logical point of view. See Jespersen, *M.E.G.* 7.4.

We are indebted to the scholars listed below, especially to O. Jespersen, G. O. Curme and E. A. Nida for the examples quoted so as to meet the purposes of this paper.

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