

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE NOUN PHRASE

Duong Tuan Son *

Summary: *The English syntax, a part of structural linguistics plays an important role in language studies. That students could master the syntax enables them to speak and write English more accurately. Its areas cover the English phrases and clauses. The English phrases have various divisions, such as Noun Phrase (NP), Verb Phrase (VP), Adjective Phrase (Adj P), Adverb Phrase (Adv P), and Prepositional Phrase (Prep P). This study was intended to provide sufficient information about syntactic features of the noun phrase in English and Vietnamese and clarify the similarities and differences between them as well. The results show that both English and Vietnamese noun phrases have a head noun; a noun phrase may consist of only one word in both languages; a noun phrase can be made from 2 nouns. It also indicates that English and Vietnamese noun phrases differ in classifiers and numerals, focus marker, and the order of the constituents.*

Key words: *structural, phrase, syntactic, features, structural linguistics.*

PART A: INTRODUCTION

For many years of studying and using English, I realize that noun phrase is one of the English grammar basics, yet it plays an important role at the beginning of advanced English level and ESL learners often ignore its usage or are lack of understanding about it. Moreover, there seems to be little interest in Vietnamese counterpart. Therefore, this study is conducted to provide sufficient information about syntactic features of the noun phrase in these two languages and clarify the similarities and differences between them as well.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

I. Literature review

1. Definition

a. English noun phrase

- According to Gelderen (2002),

Noun Phrase is a group of words centered around a noun.

- Sentences can be divided into groups of words that belong together. For instance, in the ‘nice unicorn ate a delicious meal’, the, nice, and unicorn form one such group and a delicious, and meal form another. (We all know this intuitively). The group of words is called a phrase. If the most important part of the phrase, i.e. the head, is an adjective, the phrase is an Adjective Phrase; if the most important part of the phrase is a noun, the phrase is a Noun Phrase, and so on.

b. Vietnamese noun phrase

- Mai, Vu, and Hoang (2006) defined NP (danh ngữ) as a phrase in which the noun functions as the main part.

- Also, NP in the theory of Doan, Nguyen, Pham (2001) is a “free combination

* Faculty of English Language Studies, HUBT

of a noun nucleus and one or more than one subordinate element” which can be front elements standing before the nucleus noun or can be end elements standing after the nucleus noun.

2. Syntactic features of English and Vietnamese noun phrase

2.1. English noun phrase

The main word in a noun phrase is a noun or a pronoun. The structure of the typical noun phrase may be represented schematically in the following way, where the parentheses indicate elements of the structure that may be absent:

|(determiners)| |(pre-modifiers)|
|noun| |(post-modifiers)|

Determiners (words like the, a, those, some) introduce noun phrases. Modifiers are units that are dependent on the main word and can be omitted. Modifiers that come before the noun are pre-modifiers, and those that come after the noun are post-modifiers

2.1.1. Pre-modifiers

In English grammar, a *premodifier* is a modifier that precedes the head of a noun phrase or word that determines the meaning of a phrase. Premodifiers are most often adjectives, participles, and nouns. When used as an adjective to characterize a person or thing, this part of speech is also referred to as an epithet.

- Identifiers:

Used to identify the noun, to express which one(s), or whether the thing or person is known to the recipient). Articles, possessives, and demonstratives can all function as identifying determiners.

Articles: a/an, the

I like the horse.

It's a great day.

Possessives: my, your, his, her, its, our, your, their, one's, whose etc.

My car and motorbike

Your friend.

Demonstratives: this, these, that, and those

She loves this house in particular.

Those guys are great.

- Quantifiers

Quantifiers express the ‘amount’ or ‘quantity’ of a noun; both thing and person. They can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

Would you like *some* more coffee?

He doesn't have *any* bicycles left.

She has *no* news to talk about.

I've got *enough* ice-cream, thanks.

This is just a very small portion of ‘quantifiers’. Others include less, least, all several, little, few, etc.

- Noun modifier

A noun can modify another noun that follows it. As a modifier, the first noun gives specific information about the following noun. In nearly all cases, the noun that acts as the modifier is in singular form.

They do not have vegetable soup, but they do have chicken soup and tomato soup.

In the sentence, the nouns vegetable, chicken and tomato are modifiers. They modify soup. Without the modifiers, we would not know what soup they have or do not have, and all we would know is they have soup.

- Adjective

Adjective appears before or after the word it modifies. When it appears before the word is called pre-modifier and when appears after the word is called post-modifier.

Examples of Adjective as Modifier:

Suzan gave an outstanding performance in the program. (pre-modifier)

How beautiful the scenery is! (pre-modifier)

Anna is looking gorgeous. (post-modifier)

Jack is exhausted. (post-modifier)

1.1.2. **Head noun**

All noun phrases (NPs) have a noun or pronoun as the head. The noun is the anchor of the phrase and the phrase will not be grammatical without it. For example, the NP *a really lovely dress from my favourite shop* is ungrammatical if the word *dress* is omitted: * *a really lovely from my favourite shop*.

Pronouns can stand in place of an NP. An easy way to see how pronouns can substitute for larger constituents is to try substitution. We can substitute *it* for the NP *that house on Plenty Road* in the clause *I have to paint that house on Plenty Road* so that we have *I have to paint it*.

1.1.3. **Post-modifiers**

Relative clauses

One very common type of post-modifier is the relative clause: He had a nasty gash which needed medical attention.

The relative clause is embedded in the noun phrase. As an independent sentence it might be:

[1] *The wound needed medical attention.*

We might think of the embedding as a process that takes place in stages. The first stage puts the sentence close to the noun it will be modifying:

[1a] *He had a serious wound. The wound needed medical attention.*

You will notice that the two sentences share nouns (wound) that refer to the same thing. The next stage changes the noun phrase into a relative pronoun (cf. 5.24) – here which:

[1b] *He had a serious wound which needed medical attention.*

The relative pronoun whose functions as a subject in the relative clause just as the gash functions as a subject in [1a].

Here is another example: [2] *The woman is an engineering student. The woman was sitting next to you. [2a] The woman (The woman was sitting next to you) is an engineering student. [2b] The woman who was sitting next to you is an engineering student.* In both [1b] and [2b] the relative pronoun can be replaced by a relative that: [1c] *He had a nasty gash that needed medical attention.*

[2c] *The woman that was sitting next to you is an engineering student.*

Appositive clauses

Another type of clause that is often embedded in a noun phrase is the appositive clause. It is introduced by the conjunction that:

The assumption that people act out of self-interest.

The fact that she rejected his offer of marriage the realization that miracles don't happen the news that agreement has been reached.

The conjunction in appositive clauses differs from the relative 'that' because the conjunction does not have a function within its clause. The appositive clause can be a sentence without that:

[1] *You must have heard the news that agreement has been reached.*

[1a] *Agreement has been reached.*

In contrast, the relative clause cannot be a sentence without the relative that:

[2] *He had a serious wound that needed medical attention.*

[2a] **Needed medical attention.*

We can convert the noun phrase containing the appositive clause into a sentence by inserting a form of the verb be before the clause:

[3] *The assumption that people act out of self-interest.*

[3a] *The assumption is that people act out of self-interest.*

Apposition

Apposition is a relationship between two noun phrases which have identical reference:

Bono, the lead singer with U2, also took part.

As with the appositive clause, we can show that the lead singer with U2 is in apposition to Bono by converting the two phrases into a sentence:

Sarah is the lead singer with U2.

2.2. Vietnamese noun phrase

NP = Pre-modifier + Head + Post-modifier

2.2.1. Pre-modifier: Classifiers, articles, numerals, the particle “cái”, quantifiers, measure phrases

- Classifier :

+ Is an optional element in a noun phrase that immediately precedes the noun (cuốn sách, cái bàn)

+ Cannot stand alone in a noun phrase (Con, cuốn)

+ Among the most common Vietnamese classifiers are: cái, chiếc, con bài, câu, cây, tòa, quả, cuốn, lá, việc, chuyện.

+ Vietnamese nouns are unmarked for number, a bare noun can have several interpretations such as singular, plural, definite or indefinite. However, where there is a classifier precedes a noun, this noun phrase is apparently considered singular with either definite or indefinite => To form a plural noun phrase, it's obligatory to add “các, những” before Classifier-N

- Article:

+ Must precede the classifiers and the head noun

Art - Cl - N

+ *Một, những, các* : Like any other articles “những” and “các” does not bear phonological stress and cannot stand alone as the only element in the noun phrase.

- Numeral:

+ From classifier cái as well as other classifiers in term of distribution and word order [Num-Cl-N]. They are express through system called cardinal number such as một, hai, ba, ect

+ The use of numerals and articles is mutual exclusive. In other words, in Vietnamese noun phrases where there is presence of numerals, the articles are not used and vice verse.

- The particle “cái”:

+ Occurs before the head noun and can intervene between a numeral (if there is one) and the classifier or a measure phrase.

+ Is sometimes mistaken with the homonymous classifier “cái”, but it's different function.

+ Can also follow the articles “những”, “các”, “một” as in “những CÁI cuốn sách kia” ..

+ Serves as a formal device to signal that there is a focus in the NP so the use of a noun in the NP is obligatory.

- Quantifiers:

+ Occur within a noun phrase before a head noun (with or without a classifier).

+ Some can combine directly with any nouns (tất cả, toàn bộ, tổng thể, ít, nhiều) whereas others require the use of an intermediate classifier. => the quantifiers precede the classifier

+ Appear as the leftmost positions in noun phrases so do they occur before plural articles and cardinal numbers

+ Some can stand alone when the context is clear.

- Measure phrases: are expressions that indicate quantity.

2.2.2. Head

- It is the central and core element of nouns

- It indicates which modifiers may be used and carries a heavy semantics load.

1.1.3. Post-modifier

- Noun adjuncts: immediately follows the head noun.

- Adjective phrases:

+ Modified by an adjective phrase (AP) following it and the adjective may be preceded by an intensifier such as *rất*, *hơi*, *khá*.

+ In case, there is a noun adjunct, the AP must follow the Noun adjunct: NP-NA- AP

- Prepositional phrases:

+ Vietnamese grammar accepts the use of prepositional phrases as post modifiers in NPs,

+ In case there is an adjective phrase, a modifying PP obligatorily follows an AP or NA.

- Relative clauses:

+ If both AP and RC modify the head noun, the order will be as follow: N- AP- RC

+ In case, PP and relative clause co-occur in a Noun phrase, both PP- RC and RC- PP are acceptable

Eg: Căn nhà trong huyện mà anh ấy vừa mua

Căn nhà mà anh ấy vừa mua trong huyện

+ RC restricts the meaning of the head noun.

- Demonstratives:

+ Have the function of identifying a referent with respect to another contextual point or position.

+ Are free morphemes including *này*, *đó*, *kia*, *ni*, *nó* and always follow the head nouns.

+ They are not distinguished in term of number but in term of degree of distance.

Proximal: *này* ‘this/these’

Medial: *đó*, *đấy*, *ấy* ‘that/those’

Distal: *kia* ‘that over there’

Indefinite: *đâu* “where, *nào* “which, *sao* “how”

+ When there are others modifiers co-occurring with demonstratives, the demonstratives obligatorily occur after these modifiers.

- Possessives:

+ They are expressed by a prepositional phrase consisting of preposition “*của*” (of) plus a possessor. The possessor can be a personal pronoun, a kinship term, a proper name, or a full NP.

+ To avoid confusion, we usually left out or keep the first preposition “*của*” when there are two possessive phrases in the same NP

+ If there is co-occurrence between a PossP and an AP or PP in a noun phrase, the PossP always follows the AP or PP.

E.g: *Nó là cháu của mẹ của tôi.*

II. The second word “*của*” can be left out. So that sentence becomes “*Nó là cháu của mẹ tôi.*” This way is often used in spoken Vietnamese because it makes a smooth speech. **Findings**

2. Similarities

Both English and Vietnamese noun phrases have the same structure: endocentric structure which means they have a head noun

- The noun is always the head

- Other elements help the head noun have a clear meaning

E.g: *Tuyên bố bằng văn bản* – Written statement

b. A noun phrase may consist of only one word in both languages. That word will be either a noun or a pronoun.

E.g: *Cheese* is expensive – *Phô mai* thì đắt

She has left – *Cô ấy* đã rời đi

c. In both languages, a noun phrase can be made from 2 nouns

E.g: In Vietnamese: hợp đồng thi công

In English: construction contract

3. **Differences**

a. Head noun

- Vietnamese: a bare noun in Vietnamese does not indicate number (“mèo đang leo tường kia”) since the noun doesn’t change form whether it is singular or plural.

Classifiers and numerals are employed to make the head noun countable (Vietnamese is a classifier language. The use of classifiers is generally obligatory in numerated noun phrases): Một đàn vịt, ba con cừu...

- English: indicate number through the use of inflectional morphemes “s”, “es”

b. Focus marker “Cái” (Cái thằng ôn ấy) (differ from the classifier “cái”, as in “cái bút”: used to emphasize the head noun. The word does not have an equivalent in English.

- Can occur with any kinds of nouns

- CÁI cuốn sách này
- CÁI con mèo này
- CÁI người lính này

- Commonly accompanied by demonstratives (này, ấy, đó ...) which come after the head noun. (Cái quyển sách ấy)

c. The order of the constituents of the noun phrase differs between Vietnamese and English:

- Demonstratives:

- English: before head noun (this boy)
- Vietnamese: after head noun (cô gái này)

- Possessives

• English: mostly before head noun (my daughter; some exceptions: a book of mine)

• Vietnamese: only occur after head noun (cô gái của tôi)

- Adjective phrases:

• English: pre-modifier (an extremely bright guy)

• Vietnamese: post-modifier (con mèo)

CONCLUSION

In short, according to the differences between English and Vietnamese language, the structure of noun phrases also differentiates, which students have to pay attention when learning the target language. From this, students will be able to improve their academic writing and deliver better English-Vietnamese translation work./.

References

English:

1. Greenbaum, S & Nelson, G. (2018). *An introduction to English grammar*. Routledge.
2. Payne, T. E. (2011). *Understanding English grammar: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Quirk, R., & Greenbaum, S. (1973). *A university grammar of English*. Harlow: Longman.

Vietnamese:

1. Dinh, D.V.(2001). *Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt - Từ Loại*. Ha Noi, HN: National University Hanoi, Publishing House.
2. Mai, N.C., Vu, D.N., & Hoang, T.P. (2006). *Cơ sở ngôn ngữ học và tiếng Việt*. Ho Chi Minh city: Education Publishing House.

NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỐI CHIẾU CỤM DANH TỪ TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

Dương Tuấn Sơn

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu về cú pháp tiếng Anh - một bộ phận của ngôn ngữ học cấu trúc, đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong các nghiên cứu về ngôn ngữ nói chung. Việc nắm vững cú pháp sẽ giúp người học nói và viết tiếng Anh chính xác hơn. Phạm vi nghiên cứu của cú pháp học không ngoại trừ các cụm từ và mệnh đề tiếng Anh. Các cụm từ tiếng Anh có thể được chia thành nhiều loại khác nhau, như Cụm danh từ (NP), Cụm động từ (VP), Cụm tính từ (Adj P), Cụm trạng từ (Adv P) và Cụm từ giới từ (Prep P). Nghiên cứu này tập trung làm sáng tỏ các đặc điểm cú pháp của cụm danh từ trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, đồng thời so sánh, đối chiếu làm nổi bật những điểm giống và khác nhau giữa chúng. Kết quả cho thấy cả cụm danh từ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt đều có danh từ chính; một cụm danh từ có thể chỉ gồm một từ trong cả hai ngôn ngữ; một cụm danh từ có thể được tạo thành từ 2 danh từ. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra rằng các cụm danh từ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt khác nhau về phân loại từ và số từ, chỉ tố tiêu điểm và thứ tự của các thành tố phụ.

Từ khóa: cấu trúc, cụm từ, đặc điểm, cú pháp, ngôn ngữ học cấu trúc.