

# What language should we teach?



Systematic generative language patterns in academic writing

**Edward de Chazal**

**e.dechazal@ucl.ac.uk**

 UCL Language Centre

# [ Context & Assumptions



- Students backgrounds and futures differ: Englishes, language level, world knowledge, education, learning trajectories...
- Academic language can include *all* language
- Students and tutors need access to concise navigable materials
- Academic language in published materials is not comprehensively presented
- It is our role to address these shortcomings

# [ The Talk



- !Context and Assumptions
- What language?
- One word: A WL?
- >One word: possibilities
- →Texts]
- [Teaching →



**[ What language?**

**> One word**



# [ >One word

- Phrases
- Clause elements
- Periphrastic structures
- Phrasal & prepositional verbs
- Idiomatic and formulaic sequences

# [ Phrases I



- **noun phrases:** the bulk of informative and expository texts
- **verb phrases:** especially reporting verbs & syntax patterns  
[noun:verb = 4:1 in academic texts<sup>1</sup>]
- **prepositional phrases:** most frequent NP postmodifiers *and* adverbials
- adverb phrases
- adjective phrases

<sup>1</sup> Biber et al. 1999:65

# **Noun phrases I**



**The head noun makes it clear what sort of entity is being referred to... The determiner specifies the instance we are talking about.**

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. 1999. *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Longman. (p.241)

# **Noun phrases I**



**The head noun makes it clear what sort of entity is being referred to... The determiner specifies the instance we are talking about.**

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. 1999.  
*Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Longman.  
(p.241)

**The head tells us what entity is being referred to. The determiner specifies the kind of instance of the entity we are talking about.**

Crystal, D. 2004. *Making Sense of Grammar*. Harlow: Pearson / Longman.  
(p.177)





# Noun phrases 2

determiner	premodifiers	HEAD	postmodifiers
article	adjective		<u>phrase</u> :
possessive	<i>-ed/-ing</i> participle		prepositional ~ <sup>1</sup>
demonstrative	noun		<u>clause</u> :
quantifier			finite (relative ~)
number			non-finite ~ ( <i>to-</i> , <i>-ing</i> , <i>-ed</i> )
∅			<u>phrase</u> :
			noun (appositive)
			(adjective)
			(adverb)

<sup>1</sup> most frequent NP postmodifiers (c75% in academic texts), Biber et al. 2002: 269

# [ Noun phrases 3



This paper links changing global coffee markets to opportunities and vulnerabilities for sustaining small-scale farmer livelihoods in northern Nicaragua. Changing governance structures, corporate concentration, oversupply, interchangeable commodity grade beans, and low farm gate prices characterize the crisis in conventional coffee markets. In contrast, certified Fair Trade and organic are two alternative forms of specialty coffee trade and production that may offer opportunities for small-scale producers. A research team surveyed 228 farmers to measure the impact of sales on organic and Fair Trade markets. The results suggest that participation in organic and Fair Trade networks reduces farmers' livelihood vulnerability.

# Noun phrases 4



det.	premodification	head noun	postmodification
This	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•adjective</li> <li>•participle (-ed / -ing)</li> <li>•noun</li> </ul>	paper	<p><b>Clause: finite (relative clause)</b>  <b>non-finite (to..., -ing..., -ed...)</b></p> <p><b>Phrase: prepositional</b>  <b>noun (appositive)</b></p>
	changing global coffee	markets	
		opportunities and vulnerabilities	for sustaining small-scale farmer livelihoods
the		crisis	in conventional coffee markets
two	alternative	forms	of speciality coffee trade and production that may offer opportunities for small-scale producers
farmers'	livelihood	vulnerability	

# [ Noun phrases 5: retrospective labels



- Students have disparate backgrounds: language level, education, world knowledges, learning trajectories...
- Academic writing can include *all* language
- Students and tutors need access to concise navigable materials
- Academic language in published materials is not comprehensively presented
- It is our role to address these shortcomings



# **[Noun phrases 6: in coursebooks**

- Felicity O'Dell. 1998. *English Panorama*. CUP. p.50 – 51  
**‘A noun phrase is simply a collection of words focusing on a noun.’**
- Diana Hopkins with Pauline Cullen. 2007. *Grammar for IELTS*. CUP. p.98 – 106 and p.173 – 179  
**‘A noun phrase is a group of words with a noun as its main part. Information about the noun can be before the noun and/or after the noun.’**

# Noun phrases 7: in coursebooks



■ John Allison, Rachel Appleby and Edward de Chazal. 2009. *The Business Advanced Student's Book*. Oxford: Macmillan p.122

## 'Longer noun phrases

In order to “pack in” information, we can build up long noun phrases by adding words *before* the main noun, and/or *after* it. For example, the noun *climate* can become the centre of a long noun phrase:

*a difficult investment climate characterised by over-regulation*

We can replace the whole noun phrase with a pronoun, based on the head noun. Noun phrases often begin with a determiner, after which we can add adjectives and/or nouns, then the head noun, possibly followed by a prepositional phrase or a relative clause. Relative clauses are often used when giving definitions.

We use these long phrases in many kinds of writing, particularly academic writing. They can function as the Subject, Object, or Complement in a sentence. Noun phrases are also the most frequent type of structure to follow prepositions.'

# Phrases 2



- nouns: head noun phrases; modify nouns
- noun phrases: function as S, O, C, A; constitute complement in prepositional phrases
- verbs: head verb phrases; constitute parts of >one word verb phrases
- prepositional phrases: postmodify noun phrases; function as adverbials
- adverbs: modify adjective, adverb, prepositional and other phrases; head adverb phrases
- adverb phrases: function as adverbials
- adjective phrases: modify noun phrases; head adjective phrases

# Verb phrases: focus on Complements of *be*<sup>1</sup>



*be* + 1 *that* clause, 2 prepositional phrase, 3 prepositional phrase + *that* clause, 4 & 5 noun phrase, 6 adjective phrase, 7 adverb phrase

- 1 The paradox **is** that we increasingly demand predictability
- 2 The epidemic **was** in decline
- 3 It **is** in this area that social science has had the greatest impact
- 4 This **is** an improvement, but a limited one
- 5 The first **is** controlled epidemiological intervention studies
- 6 The answers **may be** surprising
- 7 The time for this work **is** now

<sup>1</sup>sentence fragments from *Nature* essay ‘Capturing human behaviour’ by Neil Ferguson (12<sup>th</sup> April 2007)



# Reporting verbs: meanings [and patterns]



- **'neutral' reporting:** say, state, talk about, report, show, indicate, summarise, define, relate, characterise, trace, describe, demonstrate, list, mention, name, outline
- **expressing degrees of certainty:** prove, show, suggest, indicate, speculate, conjecture, intimate, hypothesise, reflect on, reason
- **explaining:** account for, explain, elucidate, illustrate, clarify, describe, make clear, enlighten
- **persuading:** argue, propose, put forward, discuss, express, contend, claim, maintain
- **analysing:** analyse, deduce, determine, examine, infer, suggest, examine, study, probe, investigate, scrutinise, explore
- **classifying:** classify, define, order, identify, group, categorise, class, arrange
- **comparing:** compare, contrast, differentiate
- **evaluating:** evaluate, assess, measure, appraise, weigh up, judge, estimate, calculate
- **quantifying:** quantify, enumerate, estimate, calculate, measure, compute
- **reflecting:** reflect, consider, believe, feel, observe, think, seem, be, speculate
- **responding:** comment on, respond to, question, echo
- **confirming:** confirm, verify, corroborate, support
- **self-positioning:** defend, justify, promote, position
- **emphasising:** emphasise, underline, underscore, highlight, stress, point out
- **criticising:** criticize, attack, condemn, critique, dispute

# Prepositional phrases I



optional

premodifier | HEAD |

adverb

noun phrase

complement

noun phrase

*wh*- clause

prepositional phrase

(adjective phrase)

(adverb phrase)

(*to* – infinitive)

# Prepositional phrases 2



optional

premodifier

HEAD

complement

in

countries with porous borders

in the wake of

the tsunami

by

travelling hundreds of kilometres

except

to escape from extreme danger

from

outside the region

at

best

until

then

particularly

in terms of

where the displaced people migrate

not only

with regard to

what had happened earlier

several years

before

the actual discovery

# Prepositional phrases as adverbials: meanings I



Time – point in time, duration, frequency, time relationships: *from now on; in recent years; for a considerable period of time; at present; by the end of the decade; during the night*

Space – distance, direction, position: *from here ; to the north ; in the introduction ; among indigenous populations; throughout the world; at home*

Process – manner, means, agent, instrument: *in a careful manner, by excluding students with learning disabilities; with a blunt instrument; by means of whatever method he could use*

Contingency – cause, reason, purpose, concession, condition, result: *of a heart attack; because of a lack of sugar in the bloodstream; despite monitoring; as a result of his enquiries; for show; owing to his indecision; on account of her bravery*

Degree: *only to a limited extent; by 25%*

Addition and restriction (typically formulaic or idiomatic): *in particular; in addition; as well*

Recipient: *for single parents; to HM Customs and Revenue*

# Prepositional phrases as adverbials: meanings 2



Epistemic – certainty and doubt, actuality and reality; source of knowledge, limitation; viewpoint or perspective; imprecision: *without doubt; beyond reasonable doubt; in fact; in the opinion of this writer; according to Chomsky; from the perspective of the practitioner; only under certain conditions*

Attitude (evaluation and assessment): *in truth; in general*

Style: *in all honesty; in a technical way*

Enumeration and addition: *for one thing; in addition; in the first instance*

Summation: *in summary; in conclusion; in brief; in short; on balance; as a rule*

Apposition: *in other words; for example; such as in high-starch content carbohydrates*

Result and Inference: *as a result; in consequence*

Contrast and Concession: *in contrast; by comparison; on the one hand / on the other (hand)*

Transition: *by the way (informal); with reference to this theory; with regard to our new venture; in the next section*

# Clause elements



- Subject
- Verb
- Object
- Complement
- **Adverbial:**
  - Meanings: circumstance, stance, linking
  - Forms: prepositional phrases, adverbs, adverbial clauses, non-finite clauses

# [ Adverbials I



- 90% of adverbials are circumstance
- Prepositional phrases comprise 50% of all adverbials; single adverbs (30%); adverbial clauses (15%); other (5%)
- Most adverbial clauses are in the final position, except *if* & purpose clauses
- Circumstance adverbials mainly in final position; stance, medial; linking, initial

(Biber et al. 1999: 766; Biber et al., 2002: 359; Biber et al., 1999: 772)

# Adverbials 2



Place (distance, direction, position)	Time (point in time, duration, frequency, time relationships)	Process (manner, means, agent, instrument)	Contingency (cause, reason, purpose, concession, condition, result)	Degree	Addition & Restriction	Recipient
<i>Examples of prepositional phrases functioning as adverbials</i>						
from (here) to (the north) in (the introduction) among (local peoples) at (home) throughout (the world)	in (recent years) for (12 minutes) on (occasion) after/before (that) at once / at present by (then) during (the interview) subsequent to (the trial) in the wake of (9/11)	with (dignity) in (a careful manner) by (excluding them) with (a sharp knife) by (mammals)	of (a heart attack) because of (his heart) in spite of (difficulties) as a result of (the plan) owing to (outside pressure) in case of (organ failure) in view of (this objection) in the light of (these views) on account of (the attack)	to a (limited) extent by a (small) amount	in particular in addition as well (only) in terms of (cost)	for (single parents) to (the government) for (democracies)
<i>Examples of adverbs and adverb phrases functioning as adverbials</i>						
there, here backwards worldwide universally	then just nowadays recently afterwards soon occasionally never finally first meanwhile simultaneously	(fairly) slowly gradually (very) carefully dangerously (quite) obviously	admittedly	just completely very much partially dramatically partly slightly / hardly significantly exponentially entirely negligibly altogether	too also only especially particularly additionally	
<i>Examples of other phrases etc. functioning as adverbials</i>						
a long way 100 metres	the following night every day 24/7 (informal)		to... (infinitive of purpose)	a bit a small amount	a bit more / less	



# Adverbials 3



Place (distance, direction, position)	Time (point in time, duration, frequency, time relationships)	Process (manner, means, agent, instrument)	Contingency (cause, reason, purpose, concession, condition, result)	Degree	Addition & Restriction	Recipient
--	---	---	--	--------	---------------------------	-----------

*Examples of subordinators (with rest of clause omitted) functioning as adverbials*

<p>where, wherever, anywhere, everywhere</p>	<p>when, as, after, before, while, until, since once, till, whenever, whilst, now that, immediately, directly, as soon as, as long as, as and when, the minute</p>	<p>as, as if, as though, like, just as, much as</p>	<p>because, since, for, though, even though, although, while; if, unless, so, as, even if, so as to, so that, in order to, in order that, for, with, in that, such that; whereas, while, whilst, except that, save that, but that, not that, as long as, as soon as, (just) in case, in spite of / despite the fact that, in the event that, lest, on condition that, once, provided / providing (that), whenever, wherever, whether, given / granted (that), supposing (that), if and when</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>-</p>
--	--	---	---	----------	----------	----------

# [ Adverbials 4



Dinosaur research — and indeed a whole swathe of palaeontology — has been revolutionized by recent discoveries in China. Most famous are the feathered dinosaurs, early flowering plants, various mammals and other spectacular fossils from the 128- to 110-million-year-old lake deposits in Liaoning Province in the northeast<sup>1</sup>. Less well studied, however, are the many-coloured badlands of Xinjiang on the far western side of the country. These rocks contain fossils dating to the beginning of the Late Jurassic epoch, roughly 161 million to 156 million years ago.

From the Wucaiwan locality in Xinjiang come fossils of a new carnivorous dinosaur, described by Xu Xing and colleagues on page 715 of this issue<sup>2</sup>.

# Adverbials 5



Tyrannosaurids were the dominant group of predators in eastern and central Asia and North America during the last 20 million years of the Late Cretaceous epoch. Their morphology (enlarged skulls with enormous, robust teeth; highly reduced arms ending in two-fingered hands; and elongated hindlimbs), and above all their great size (9–13 metres long for the most completely known species), have made them among the most recognizable of fossil groups<sup>3</sup>. This distinctiveness, as well as their relatively rich fossil record, both in completeness of skeletons and numbers of individuals, has made the tyrannosaurids the subject of numerous palaeobiological studies.

Unfortunately, the uniqueness of the Tyrannosauridae has obscured their origin within the larger evolutionary tree of Theropoda — the clade (group) of carnivorous dinosaurs, including birds. The evolution of the distinctive adaptations present in the better-preserved Late Cretaceous forms such as Tyrannosaurus, Gorgosaurus and Tarbosaurus has transformed their skulls, limbs and vertebrae, thereby 'overwriting' much of the anatomical traces of their ancestry.



# [ **Periphrastic language I** ]

**What:** fixed and variable sequences of two or more words, especially auxiliary verbs, to some degree indirect

e.g. modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives

**Why:** to express tentativeness, to hedge, to speculate, to talk about the future, to evaluate

**Where:** in academic and journalistic contexts

# [ Periphrastic language 2



Could oil mania be coming to an end? Speculation has driven up prices - but things could be about to change, some analysts say.

What Gordon Brown has described as the most serious financial crisis since the 1930s, appears to be over as suddenly as it began. While the slowdown in Britain and Europe has only just started, the US economy now seems likely to avoid an outright recession... As these measures start gaining traction we should see fewer of the panicky headlines about a return to the Great Depression, even if the worst is still to come for the British housing market...

The first is that the recent bout of food and energy inflation does not seem to reflect a permanent imbalance in global supply and demand any more than did the price spike of the 1970s.

“Could oil mania be coming to an end?” Anatole Kaletsky *The Times* May 1<sup>st</sup> 2008

# [ Periphrastic language 3



The key factor, as in the last great commodity inflation of the 1970s, appears not to be any immediate supply shortage but panic buying by consumers, governments and financial investors, in anticipation of possible future shortages of supply.

The second item of good news is that the recent run-up in commodity prices may already be reversing, even as the public protests and panic headlines intensify.

It seems quite likely that all four of these trend-following speculations have been related and that all four of them would turn at around the same time. This now appears to be happening. About a month ago, the market for high-grade credit began to improve after the rescue of Bear Stearns. Two weeks later the yield on US Treasury bonds suddenly began to rise. Last week the dollar seemed to make a low against the euro and has since risen sharply.

Could it be that the commodity speculation will now also reverse?

# ['Reverse-engineering': evaluative language



- Evaluative adjectives, adverbs and lexical verbs
- Modal verbs, modal verbs + adverbials
- Adverbials
- Clauses: complement ~, *it* and *there* ~, embedded ~
- Noun phrases
- 'Retrospective labels'
- Style, tone and phonology

# **[ Phrasal & prepositional verbs**



**Phrasal verbs are most commonly used for physical activities, while prepositional verbs cover a wide range of semantic categories.**

**Phrasal verbs occur 800 words per million in academic texts.**

**Prepositional verbs occur 4800 words per million in academic texts.**

**Prepositional verbs follow two patterns:**

■ **NP + verb + preposition + NP**

Jones deals with such issues.

■ **NP + verb + NP + preposition + NP**

Paletsky bases his conclusion on methodologically flawed findings.



# [ Phrasal verbs



**Examples of phrasal verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs used in academic contexts:**

*point out*

*bring up*

*find out*

*carry out*

*take up*

*set out*

*set up*

*come up with*

*back up*

*bring together*

*put together*

*water down*

*wipe out*

*put across*

*tail off*

*put up*

***is/are:***

*made up of*

# [ Prepositional verbs



## Examples of prepositional verbs used in academic contexts:

<i>look at</i>	<i>comply with</i>	<i>account for</i>	<i>depend on</i>	<i>look into</i>
<i>refer to</i>	<i>contribute to</i>	<i>look for</i>	<i>result in</i>	<i>lead to</i>
<i>come across</i>	<i>deal with</i>	<i>fit in</i>	<i>turn to</i>	<i>talk about</i>
<i>take after</i>	<i>join in</i>	<i>arrive at</i>	<i>go through</i>	<i>abide by</i>
<i>go after</i>	<i>lay down</i>	<i>differ from</i>	<i>occur in</i>	<i>belong to</i>

## (typically passive) – *is/are*:

<i>based on</i>	<i>used in</i>	<i>regarded as</i>	<i>known as</i>
<i>derived from</i>	<i>applied to</i>	<i>considered as</i>	<i>associated with</i>
<i>composed of</i>	<i>involved with</i>	<i>related to</i>	<i>included in</i>
<i>required for</i>	<i>aimed at</i>	<i>divided into</i>	<i>expressed in</i>



# [ Idiomatic and formulaic sequences

- Idiomatic prepositional phrases (adverbials)  
on the whole, in effect, by contrast, on the one hand, for the most part, by the same token, as well, in particular, on balance, in other words
- Sentence stems and signalling language  
[Hint: use the function word in the exponent]  
I would **recommend** a change of strategy to focus on the causes rather than the symptoms.
- Sentences.
- >Sentence = discourse...

[ >One word



- Phrases
  - Clause elements
    - Periphrastic structures
      - Phrasal & prepositional verbs
- Idiomatic and formulaic sequences