

SYNTAX ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH NOMINAL PHRASE STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GRAMMAR LEARNING: EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis struktur frasa nomina dalam bahasa Inggris serta mengkaji implikasinya terhadap pembelajaran tata bahasa bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka melalui penelaahan dan analisis buku serta artikel jurnal yang membahas struktur frasa nomina dari perspektif sintaksis dan kesalahan yang umum dilakukan oleh pembelajar EFL. Analisis difokuskan pada unsur-unsur pembentuk frasa nomina yang meliputi unsur inti (head noun), penentu (determiner), pre-modifier, dan post-modifier. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajar EFL masih mengalami kesulitan yang signifikan dalam membentuk frasa nomina yang benar, khususnya dalam penggunaan determiner, urutan adjektiva, serta struktur post-modifier seperti frasa preposisional dan klausa relatif. Kesalahan yang ditemukan umumnya berupa omission, addition, misformation, dan misordering yang dipengaruhi oleh kompleksitas struktur frasa nomina serta interferensi bahasa pertama pembelajar. Kesalahan-kesalahan tersebut berdampak pada kejelasan makna, ketepatan gramatikal, dan kualitas penulisan akademik pembelajar. Oleh karena itu, pemahaman yang kuat terhadap struktur frasa nomina sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kompetensi sintaksis dan kemampuan menulis akademik pembelajar EFL. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada pengembangan strategi pembelajaran tata bahasa yang lebih efektif dan berbasis struktur.

Kata Kunci: *Analisis Sintaksis, Tata Bahasa, EFL*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the structure of English noun phrases and examine their implications for grammar learning for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study employs a qualitative approach using a literature study method by reviewing and analyzing books and journal articles that discuss noun phrase structures from a syntactic perspective and common errors made by EFL learners. The analysis focuses on the constituent elements of noun phrases, including the head noun, determiners, pre-modifiers, and post-modifiers. The findings show that EFL learners still experience significant difficulties in constructing correct noun phrases, particularly in the use of determiners, adjective order, and post-modifying structures such as prepositional phrases and relative clauses. The errors identified generally include omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, which are influenced by the complexity of noun phrase structures and interference from the learners' first language. These errors affect clarity of meaning, grammatical accuracy, and the quality of learners' academic writing. Therefore, a solid understanding of noun phrase structure is essential to improve learners' syntactic competence and academic writing ability. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and structure-based grammar teaching strategies for EFL learners.

Keywords: *Syntax Analysis, Grammar, EFL*

INTRODUCTION

Language structure plays a fundamental role in conveying meaning accurately and coherently, particularly in academic discourse. In English, syntactic competence is essential because grammatical accuracy influences clarity, readability, and communicative effectiveness. One of the most important syntactic units is the noun phrase (NP), which functions as a core element in sentence construction, serving as subjects, objects, and complements. Mastery of NP structure enables learners to express ideas more precisely and to organize information in a compact and logical manner, especially in written texts (Biber et al., 1999).

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), noun phrases pose considerable challenges for learners due to their internal complexity. English NPs consist of a head noun accompanied by various modifiers, including determiners, adjectives, and post-modifying structures such as prepositional phrases and relative clauses. Previous studies indicate that EFL learners often struggle to construct grammatically accurate NPs, particularly when dealing with modifier order and determiner usage (Junaid, 2018). These difficulties are more pronounced when learners attempt to produce complex or extended noun phrases in academic writing.

Research on EFL writing has consistently shown that errors in noun phrase construction are among the most frequent syntactic problems encountered by learners. Such errors commonly involve omission, addition, and misformation of NP elements, which negatively affect sentence accuracy and overall text quality. Safitri et al. (2023) report that learners frequently omit obligatory determiners or incorrectly arrange modifiers, resulting in ambiguous or ungrammatical expressions. These findings suggest that NP-related errors are systematic rather than incidental and require focused pedagogical attention.

The complexity of noun phrases also increases as learners progress to higher levels of academic writing, where dense information packaging is required. Academic texts tend to employ more complex NPs to convey abstract concepts and detailed descriptions efficiently. According to Liu and Li (2016), advanced EFL writing is characterized by greater noun phrase complexity, including the use of multiple modifiers and embedded structures. However, many learners lack sufficient exposure to such structures, which limits their ability to produce syntactically sophisticated academic texts.

Another contributing factor to NP errors in EFL contexts is the influence of learners' first language. Structural differences between English and learners' native languages often lead to negative transfer, particularly in determiner systems and adjective ordering. Parawali et al. (2024) emphasize that noun phrase construction remains one of the most challenging areas of English syntax for EFL learners due to these cross-linguistic differences. As a result, learners may rely on L1 patterns that are incompatible with English syntactic rules.

Given the central role of noun phrases in sentence construction and academic discourse, a systematic analysis of NP structure is essential. Understanding common patterns and errors in NP formation can provide valuable insights for improving grammar instruction in EFL classrooms. Studies have shown that targeted syntactic analysis can help identify persistent learner difficulties and inform more effective teaching strategies (Syafutri et al., 2022). Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the structure of English nominal phrases and examining their implications for grammar learning among EFL learners.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method to analyze the structure of English nominal phrases and their implications for grammar learning among EFL learners. The data are derived from secondary sources, including linguistics textbooks,

grammar references, and relevant national and international journal articles that discuss noun phrase structure from a syntactic perspective as well as common noun phrase errors made by EFL learners. Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by carefully reading, selecting, and classifying theoretical explanations and empirical findings related to the components of noun phrases, such as head nouns, determiners, pre-modifiers, and post-modifiers. The data were analyzed through an interpretative qualitative process involving data identification, categorization, comparison, and synthesis to identify recurring patterns of noun phrase construction and error types, including omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. To ensure the validity of the analysis, triangulation of sources was applied by comparing findings from multiple references. The analysis focuses on explaining how the complexity of English nominal phrase structures contributes to grammatical difficulties faced by EFL learners and how a clearer understanding of these structures can support more effective grammar instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The results of the analysis of nominal phrase structures in the data studied show that EFL learners still face significant difficulties in forming and developing nominal phrases (NPs), especially in terms of determining the head noun, using modifiers, and ensuring the correct order and function of the constituent elements. Initial findings show that most errors occur in the area of pre-modification, particularly in the placement of determiners and adjectives. Many learners place articles incorrectly, such as using “the” in generic contexts or omitting “a/an” in singular head nouns that should require an indefinite article. In addition, errors were also found in the order of adjectives, such as “blue beautiful dress” instead of “beautiful blue dress,” indicating a lack of understanding of adjective ordering rules in English. Table 1 summarizes the categories of noun phrase errors identified in the analysis, along with examples, correct forms, types of NP structures involved, and their theoretical explanations.

Table 1. Findings Table and Discussion on Nominal Phrase Errors in EFL Learners

Error Category	Example of an Error	Correct Form	NP Structure Type	Theoretical Explanation
Omission	Beautiful dress	A beautiful dress	Pre-modifier	The omission error occurs because Indonesian does not require determiners in noun phrases, leading learners to exclude articles that are obligatory in English.
Omission	Students tired of doing assignment	The students who are tired of doing assignments	Post-modifier	Learners omit relative pronouns and auxiliary verbs due to limited awareness of relative clause structures in English noun phrases.
Addition	The my book	My book / The book	Determiner stacking	This addition error results from the application of double determiner patterns, which are influenced by learners’ misunderstanding of determiner usage rules in English.
Misformation	Blue beautiful dress	Beautiful blue dress	Adjective ordering	Learners have not fully acquired the hierarchical rules governing adjective order in English, causing incorrect arrangement of adjectives within the noun phrase.
Misordering	The car red big	The big red car	Pre-modifier	This misordering error occurs because learners apply Indonesian syntactic patterns, in which modifier order is more flexible, to English noun phrase construction.

The next finding indicates that errors also occur in post-modification. Learners often experience confusion in using participial phrases and relative clauses as modifiers. For example, some students produce constructions such as “the students tired doing assignment” instead of the correct form “the students who are tired of doing assignments.” The same thing is also seen in the incorrect use of prepositional phrases as complex NP formers, such as “the discussion about how to solve,” without completing the head noun element, thus making the phrase incomplete.

In addition to the internal structure of NPs, other findings also show that learners' understanding of the syntactic function of NPs in sentences is still not optimal. Many NPs are grammatically incorrect when placed as subjects, objects, or complements, which ultimately disrupts the clarity of meaning and coherence of the sentence. These errors are closely related to the categories of omission, addition, and misformation as proposed by Syafutri et al. (2022). For example, learners often omit important elements such as determiners (omission), add unnecessary elements (addition), or form NPs in structures that do not follow the rules (misformation). These findings are in line with Arisman's (2023) research, which shows that nominal phrases are one of the most dominant sources of syntactic errors in EFL students' academic writing.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that there are differences in error patterns influenced by the learners' first language (L1 interference). In Indonesian, nominal phrases do not have strict adjective order rules, so learners often apply L1 patterns to English. This is one of the causes of NP structures that do not conform to English syntactic rules. These findings confirm that the complexity of nominal phrase structures remains a major challenge for EFL learners, especially in academic contexts that demand syntactic accuracy and precision.

Discussions

Noun phrase (NP) mastery is a crucial aspect of syntactic competence in English academic writing, as NPs serve as the primary vehicles for conveying information density and conceptual meaning. In academic discourse, ideas are frequently compressed into complex nominal structures rather than expressed through extended clauses. According to Biber et al. (1999), proficient academic writing relies heavily on elaborated noun phrases to organize information efficiently. In line with this view, Dartey (2023) emphasizes that learners who demonstrate greater control over NP complexity tend to produce texts that are more concise, cohesive, and academically appropriate. When learners lack control over NP construction, their writing often becomes repetitive and structurally weak.

For EFL learners, noun phrase construction presents persistent difficulties due to the internal complexity of English syntax. NPs consist of a head noun accompanied by determiners, pre-modifiers, and post-modifiers, each governed by specific grammatical rules. Junaid (2018) notes that many learners struggle to distinguish the head of a phrase from its modifiers, leading to incomplete or misordered structures. These difficulties often become more evident as learners attempt to produce longer and more complex sentences. Empirical studies consistently show that errors in noun phrase construction dominate learners' grammatical inaccuracies in writing. Safitri et al. (2023) identify omission of determiners and incorrect adjective ordering as the most frequent NP-related errors among Indonesian EFL students. Such errors indicate that learners have not yet internalized the hierarchical nature of English noun phrases. As a result, grammatical inaccuracies at the phrase level accumulate and weaken overall sentence structure.

The challenge of noun phrase construction intensifies in academic writing contexts where syntactic compression is required. Corpus-based research demonstrates that higher proficiency writers employ more complex noun phrases to convey abstract meanings efficiently. Liu and Li (2016) argue that NP complexity is a key indicator of academic writing development in EFL contexts. However, many learners remain dependent on clause-based constructions, which limits the sophistication of their academic texts. Genre also plays an important role in shaping learners' use of noun phrases. Academic genres, particularly argumentative and expository writing, demand a higher level of noun phrase complexity than narrative writing. Nguyen (2024) shows that integrated academic writing tasks elicit denser nominal structures, increasing learners' cognitive load.

Another major source of difficulty in noun phrase construction lies in learners' limited understanding of syntactic categories and phrase boundaries. Kusumawardhani and Rakhmanita (2022) report that learners frequently misidentify modifiers as heads, resulting in structurally ill-formed phrases. This problem is closely related to inadequate mastery of basic syntactic concepts, such as parts of speech and phrase structure, which are fundamental to accurate NP formation (Sidabalok et al., 2025). Cross-linguistic influence further complicates noun phrase acquisition in EFL contexts. Indonesian, for instance, does not require obligatory determiners or enforce strict adjective ordering, which leads learners to transfer L1 patterns into English. Zainuddin (2016) demonstrates that such transfer results in systematic NP errors that persist even at advanced levels.

Persistent noun phrase errors have serious implications for overall writing quality. Sundari et al. (2021) argue that grammatical inaccuracies at the phrase level disrupt textual cohesion and weaken argument development. When noun phrases are poorly constructed, the flow of information becomes fragmented, making academic texts difficult to follow. This reinforces the importance of addressing NP accuracy as part of broader writing instruction. Recent research emphasizes that noun phrase development is a gradual process influenced by exposure, practice, and instructional input. Durrant and Brenchley (2023) show that learners' ability to produce complex noun phrases improves when they are exposed to genre-specific models. Similarly, Bozdağ et al. (2025) find that higher proficiency learners use more layered noun modifiers, contributing to greater discourse density. Supporting this claim, Laso and Díez-Bedmar (2024) demonstrate that increased noun phrase complexity is closely associated with lexical diversity and syntactic maturity across proficiency levels, highlighting the importance of sustained NP development in academic contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, improving learners' noun phrase competence requires explicit and systematic instruction. Studies indicate that weaknesses in NP construction often reflect broader limitations in sentence-level grammar control (Akmal et al., 2020). Furthermore, syntactic restructuring research suggests that developing NP complexity requires conscious reorganization of linguistic elements and heightened syntactic awareness (Maulidiyah & Garnida, 2021). As learners gradually develop syntactic competence, their ability to produce accurate and sophisticated academic writing also improves (Sari et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of English nominal phrase (NP) structure in EFL contexts demonstrates that learners face persistent and multilayered challenges due to the complexity of NP components and the influence of first-language transfer. Frequent errors including article misuse, incorrect adjective ordering, and misplacement of post-modifying structures show that learners struggle to internalize the hierarchical rules governing NP construction. These

weaknesses are closely linked to gaps in syntactic awareness, limited exposure to complex NP models, and cognitive load when processing long or embedded noun phrases. As a result, errors in nominal phrases directly affect the clarity, coherence, and overall grammatical accuracy of EFL learners' academic writing.

These findings indicate that explicit and systematic instruction in NP structure is essential for effective grammar learning. Teaching approaches must move beyond isolated rule memorization and instead incorporate contextualized practice, genre-based modeling, and meaning-focused tasks that reveal how NPs function within academic discourse. Strengthening learners' understanding of NP hierarchy, modifier order, and post-modifying clauses can significantly improve their ability to construct complex and precise sentences. Therefore, enhancing NP instruction contributes not only to improved syntactic competence but also to the development of higher-level writing skills needed for academic success among EFL learners.

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