

## **Noun Phrase Formation in Business Letter Writing in English**

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### ***Abstract***

*The communicative functions and linguistic forms of nouns and noun phrases in letter writing in English reveal the linguistic and non-linguistic implications in the Sri Lankan English Language Teaching and English Language Learning context. This is a case study of the texts produced by the students from Tamil and Sinhala language communities of Vavuniya Campus of the University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka. This research describes the structural and functional types the respondents used, their quantity, quality and their distinct features from the universal types and functions. The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative. The findings distinguish the universal patterns from the local patterns typical of a non-native ESL learning context. It finds out the constitution of the components of the noun phrases, pre- and post-modifiers, the embedded structure of the NPs within other phrases and clauses and vice versa, and, functionally, the themes of the discourse, the subject, object and the predicative complements. The learner competence in the use and types of nouns, nominalization, the distinction between nouns and the rest of the linguistic units, within their types and within their functions, comparative use of abstract ideas over the concrete actions in the NPs are identified and analyzed for logical and pragmatic relations.*

**Keywords:**noun phrase, structure, function, position, discourse theme

### **Introduction**

Nouns (N) and noun phrases (NP) in English are created and used in considerable numbers and functions. Sri Lankan students construct and use NPs in English writing. The genre of letters in business communication in Sri Lankanized context demands contextualized and nativized forms of NPs. The patterns developed and used in the letter of complaint expect the patterns and expressions to be Sri Lankan culturally and linguistically. The texts of the respondents reflect the learned patterns of NPs and distinct localized patterns of NPs. First, the writings of the students show ambiguity in creating and using NPs in the right positions of subject, object, and complement. The implications in creating complex forms of NPs are clearly identifiable in their writing. Pre-modification and post-modification of the head of the NPs need proficiency in phrase and clause construction, especially the types of phrases and clauses to be used as pre-modifiers and post-modifiers. The creation of NPs expressing abstract or conceptual ideas

seems to be comparatively more changing than the NPs expressing concrete actions. Thus, Nouns and noun phrases are formed and in addition, make their establishments in other phrases and clauses such as prepositional phrases (PP), adverbial and adjectival phrases (AdvP and AdjP) and clauses.

There is lack of understanding of the theory and application of complex phrases and clauses structured in layers or embedded nature, for example, the phrase within a clause and the clause within a phrase or noun phrase within a prepositional phrase and vice versa. They convey syntactic, semantic and pragmatic or discourse or ideological functions. Without realizing the inherent distinctions or taxonomic diversification, the learners and users handle nouns and noun phrases which affect the teaching and learning of subjects taught in English medium. If the types and functions are not contrastively understood and applied, they impede competence and performance of the quantitative or qualitative content of an action or idea produced in written texts. Nouns are significant structural and functional elements presented in both concrete and abstract entities and in form and meaning and they are essential discourse devices so complex and diverse in producing written texts.

### **Need for the study**

Sri Lankan students use nouns in English writing without distinguishing different form and functional implications. The need for being proficient is felt in their use in intra-sentential and inter-sentential functions and relations and denotations and connotations. Business communication demands a skillful use of nouns and marketable and attention-catching nominalization. Though the use of nouns in English does not cause serious inhibitions in 'fluent communication' in English by the natives of Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and Tamil, taking this feature as granted and do have this system in similar forms, they continue to commit deviation structurally and functionally in their English discourse at the higher or complex level of communication in real life. They fail to show the form and functional distinctions in English.

### **Theoretical Background**

Jespersen (1976 [1914]: 15) defines an NP as a combination of words put together in order to form a sense unit. However, Kruisinga (1932 [1909]: 177) says that NPs are —syntactic groups as a combination of words which are part of a sentence. Hockett (1958: 152-154) states them as composite forms hierarchically organized as endocentric constructions, which is in the Immediate Constituent Analysis, an NP that has a head and an attribute.

Jucker, (1992) has studied at N+N structures and Levi, (1978) thinks of this pattern as morphological compounds. NPs assume the roles of pre-modification (Biber & Clark 2002).

Quirk *et al.* (1985) classify modifiers in terms of their position within the noun phrase. The pre-modifiers precede or the post-modifiers follow the head noun. There are restrictive modifier (e.g. *my younger sister*), and non-restrictive modifier (e.g. *my lovely dog*). Aarts & Aarts (1988: 10-14) describes the noun phrase as a headed phrase in which the head is the only obligatory constituent. In Generative Grammar, Jackendoff, (1977) discusses X-bar theory in which he says all phrases as the product of syntactic rules which are context-free, using lexical categories such as noun, verb, adjective, and preposition as the starting point of projection paths.

Halliday (1985: 158-159) makes a distinction between a *group* and a *phrase*. The former is —a word complex or a combination of words built upon the basis of a particular logical relation and —an expansion of a word, but the latter is —a contraction of a clause or *nominal groups* (1985: 159). In Cognitive Grammar, Langacker, (1990: 1) considers a different approach. CG gives importance to meaning than form. language is knowledge in the mind. Grammatical structure is the outcome of semantic structure. Grammar is non-generative and non-constructive. Grammaticality is not categorical but gradient. Grammatical structures are symbolic. Lexicon, morphology, and syntax are a continuum of symbolic units. This dual approach creates NPs as categories and functions. Therefore, the NP categories are notional rather than grammatical (ibid: 59).

Taylor (2002: 343) differentiates the lexical category *noun* from the syntactic category *noun phrase*. NPs or nominals are internally complex having grounding, quantification, specification and a type or instantiation, for example, *the ten rupee note*. Raumolin-Brunberg (1991:64) refers NPs possessing constituency (part-whole hierarchical relations), dependency (part-part relations) and linear order.

Beauchamp & Dressler (1984) state that there is a need for cohesion in the language use. It is very essential to language development (Crossley & McNamara, 2009). Arnold (2007) explains about two major cohesions in relation to NPs: grammatical cohesion, (nominal or pronominal reference chain) and lexical cohesion, (the lexeme reference chain). However, the NP patterns do not follow a 'simple repetition to create cohesion', but there is 'a range of discourse factors operating' on the patterns of noun phrases in English discourse cohesion. (Arnold & Griffin, 2007). Further, this classification of cohesion is originally explained in Halliday and Hasan's (1976).

The distance between one noun phrase to another create the different discourse patterns of lexical and grammatical NP forms (Chafe, 1985; Givon, 1990). They found that pronouns are prioritized over lexical repetition of an NP. However, the latter is used dominantly in academic writing (Mizapour & Ahmer, 2011). Collins and Hollo (2009) state that genre influences the choice. Business communication in English is a professional language use similar to academic language use so the use of NPs dominates over the pronoun use based on the findings of Mizapour & Ahmer, (2011).

Payne & Huddleston (2002: 326) classify NPs functioning as subject, object or predicative complement. They further state that *nominal* is intermediate between the noun phrase and the noun, filling another syntactic function, that of nominal modifiers. The determiner plays a significant role in the NP and is obligatory in many instances. There is an argument that the head of the NP which has a determiner, the determiner is the real head, not the noun which is the type or instance. They classify determiners as determiner proper (e.g. *this man, the son's bed*), predeterminers (e.g. *both these factors*), and central determiners (e.g. *both these factors*) and postdeterminers (e.g. *the many coins you have*) (Quirk *et al.* 1985). They further subclassify premodifiers in terms of proximity: (1) General (*small, big*), (2) Age (*old, young*), (3) Colour (*black, red*), (4) Participle (*disturbing, closed*), (5) Provenance (*Spanish, English*), (6) Noun (*air, Paris*), (7) Denominal (*personal, human*)

One more notable discovery is the declining grades of agency in the English subject roles (Payne, 2011). The object or complement roles of agency are more visible assuming transitive, intransitive and copulative agent roles. However, the third role qualifies its subject, in other words, a cohesive subject (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The single word lexical NPs are used more to reduce the information in the repetitive use of the same idea as the NP (Christensen, 2011). On the other hand, the multiple word NPs carry the highest amount of new information. The syntactic role of subject in English is a cohesive NP or a transitive subject (Ashby & Bentivligio, 2003).

Jo-Anne Hutter (2015) talks about 'language socialization' and accepts the previous research establishing the importance of the nouns and noun modification because of their commonness and complexity. She catalogs six types of noun modification: relative clauses, *ing*-clause post-modifiers, *ed*-clause post-modifiers, prepositional post-modifiers, pre-modifying nouns, and attributive adjectives.

In addition to the simple classification of the NPs, De Mönnink (2000) classifies NPs in terms of complex movement and position: NP with a deferred modifier: H + (AP, ADVP, NP), NP with a floating deferred

modifier: a clause or a phrase is outside the NP boundaries, NP with a fronted modifier: a clause precedes the head, NP with a discontinuous modifier: the constituents of an AP do not occur adjacent to each other, NP with a deferred determiner: part of the determiner follows the NP head, NP with floating deferred determiner: the determiner occurs outside the NP boundaries, NP with a discontinuous determiner, NP with a deferred limiter: the limiter occurs after the NP head, and NP with a floating deferred emphaziser: the emphaziser occurs outside NP boundaries

## **Methodology**

This study is based on the texts of business letter writing exercise in English performed by the second-year students of the Bachelor of Business Management program of the Faculty of Business Studies of the Vavuniya Campus of the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

The methodology is qualitative and quantitative. It is a textual analytical approach under applied linguistics. During a Business English examination, as a part of the test, the students were asked to write —a letter of complaint to the Branch Manager of the Ceylon Electricity Board of their district regarding power cuts. As a customer and consumer of electric power supply in their respective area, over the last three months, they have experienced severe, unscheduled, sudden and prolonged power cuts which have caused immense difficulties in managing the day to day life in the area.

This research investigates the quantity of the types of nouns (465) used by the percentage of the respondents (84). They were analyzed for authentic functional and structural patterns and types of NPs and their textual and linguistic relations in the discourse of business letters.

## **Analysis and findings**

### **Noun use and types in the discourse of a letter of complaint**

Noun phrases can function as subject, object and subject or object complements. The noun phrase is used as components like adjectives, adverbs, adjectival and adverbial phrases or clauses, prepositional phrases or parts of these components (Gnanaseelan, 2017). This study derives its data from one-worded NPs to ten-worded NPs used by the respondents. Table 1 illustrates them with the percentage.

Table 1. One worded NPs to 10 worded NPs

S N	Type	No. of wo rds	%	Examples
1	One word	125	27	<i>action, announcement, arrangements, banking, benefit, company, computer, employees, examination, generators, hospitals, inconvenience,</i>
2	Two words	153	33	<i>businessmen, drinking water, early warning, factory owners, good facilities, huge loss, main reason,</i>
3	Three words	85	18	<i>a favorable solution, a big problem, Advanced Level students, every branch manager, most of the customers,</i>
4	Four words	48	10	<i>a villager of the area, any substitute for electricity, consideration about that problem, delay in our work, educational activities of children,</i>
5	Five words	26	6	<i>all of the company's works, all the parents and children, labor of maintaining current life, loudspeakers and vans for announcing,</i>
6	Six words	10	2	<i>big trees near the current line, some arrangements for power cut period,</i>
7	Seven words	08	2	<i>high marks in the advanced level exam, providing light bill service and repairing damages,</i>
8	Eight words	06	1	<i>lot of problems in unstable arrangements of power, our business work, and school children education work, people who live in the Colombo 4 area,</i>
9	Nine words	03	1	<i>the consumer of Colombo 7 areas of your company, the electrical items we use such as refrigerator, television, power cut by the different time of different days</i>
10	Ten words	01	.2	<i>wholesalers, retailers, industries, factories, officers, banks and daily users</i>

465 %

Source: Primary Data

Out of the one-worded NPs, 73% (91) is concrete and only 27% (34) is abstract. Flavell (1970) defines concrete noun in terms of its denotation to tangible objects and abstract noun to non-tangible objects in its extension. This balance of presentation of the concrete and abstract nouns is natural as it is a letter of business communication complaining about a concrete event. However, the respondents have developed the competence to relate the concrete experience to abstract ideas. In one of the previous studies on the multi-worded NPs, the use of the single word NP was 63% (Sampson, 1987) but in this study, it is 27%. It is significant to note that the

respondents have used the two-worded NPs at the largest (33%). Even the one-worded NP is next to it (27%). However, both together become the majority of the NPs (60%) used in the whole exercise. The three-worded and four-worded NPs show the next highest level of use (28%). Thereafter, even though the usage becomes insignificant from the five to ten, there is a positive observation that the respondents have tried to create larger NPs. On the other hand, academic or professional writing demands the use of lesser complex, simple NPs for clarity, conciseness, and preciseness. Overall, the table 1 provides the evidence of linearity, reliability, natural progress and increase from simple to complex forms in the use. The lemmatization of the multiword NPs used by the respondents gives some insights into their way of construction of the NPs.

Though table 1 shows the quantitative account of the NPs, it does not explain the qualitative account of the types of the NPs developed by the respondents though it has examples for each NP type from one to ten. The respondents developed 465 NP expressions. The total number of the NP expressions with different content words used correctly is 298 (65%). However, there are 90 expressions linguistically wrong and deviant (19%). The rest of the 77 expressions (17%) were more or less duplicated from the question given to the respondents for writing the letter of complaint.

The respondents developed 59 types of NPs qualitatively. They all are different from each other structurally and sequentially. Table 2 shows the first seven patterns of the types.

The first seven patterns were the most dominant (46%) to have been used. The percentage of the created NPs show a decreasing trend as the quality of the type is an increasing one. On the ascending order from the simple phrases to the complex ones, these seven types are simple and easy to form by the second language learners and users.

Table 2. The first seven patterns of the NP types.

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Examples	46%
1	Det	N		<i>those things, no action</i>	15%
2	Pron	N		<i>our bills, their clothes,</i>	12%
3	Art	N		<i>a call, a solution, the darkness</i>	9%
4	Adj	N		<i>big problems, difficult situation</i>	6%
5	Art	Adj	N	<i>a big problem, this severe problem</i>	5%
6	N	N		<i>businessmen, electricity service,</i>	5%

7      Art    N      N      *the village people,the electricity facility,*      4%

Source: Primary Data

The determiner, pronoun, article, and adjective, single-worded, pre-modify the single-worded nouns in the first four respectively forming the two-worded NPs. Type 5 is a next significant development consisting of three single words: both the article and adjective in a sequence pre-modify the noun. This creation shows the competence developed for beginning to write complex phrases where two modifiers have to be written in an order of sequence acceptable to the morpho-syntactics and semantics of the English language. In addition, the proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + adjective] as the pre-modifier of the noun head is seen. However, the type 6 is distinct from all the preceding types. It has two single-worded nouns the former pre-modifying the latter. At this stage, they learn that a noun can function as an adjective or a pre-modifier. Type 7 demands their application knowledge of fronting an article to qualify the succeeding first pre-modifying noun or both the pre-modifying noun and the pre-modified head noun of the NP together. The proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + noun] as the pre-modifier of the noun head is seen.

Table 3 describes the types of the NPs from 8 to 15.

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Examples – 23%	23%
8	N	PP		<i>attention to our problems, resident of Kollannawa area, loss of the light,</i>	12
9	Pron	PP		<i>most of the children,some of our families,</i>	
10	Det	N	PP	<i>any plan about power cut,this news for you,</i>	
11	Adj	N	PP	<i>big trees near the current line,educational activities of children,</i>	5
12	Art	N	PP	<i>the people of our area,a villager of the area,</i>	
13	Pron	Det/Adj	N	<i>our basic job, our many foods,</i>	6
14	Pron	N	N	<i>our area people, their self-employment task,</i>	
15	Adv	Det/Adj	N	<i>very difficult problem,so many difficulties,</i>	

Source: Primary Data



Type 8 requires knowledge of applying post-modification. In addition, the post-modifier is a new linguistic component, prepositional phrase. It expects the next level of linguistic awareness of the increasingly complex structure of the noun phrase in the English language. It is noted that instead of using a PP consisting preposition plus single worded Noun, for example, *of Kollannawa*, the respondents have used the two-worded NPs mostly, here, *of Kollannawa area*. Type 9 uses a pronoun as the head of the NP post-modified by a prepositional phrase. Again a PP consisting of a preposition plus two worded NPs is used. The type 10 similar to the type 8 has an additional determiner as pre-modifier. On the other hand, these three types have only 12% of the total number of all the 59 types.

The types 11 and 12 (5%) are further extended in complexity having both the pre- and post-modifiers: an adjective or an article as the pre-modifiers and a prepositional phrase as the post-modifier. However, the percentage of its use is less at this stage. The types 13, 14 and 15 (6%) lack complexity considerably containing a pronoun and a determiner or an adjective in a sequence or a pronoun and a noun in a sequence or an adverb and a determiner or an adjective in a sequence as the pre-modifiers to the last unit, Noun, the head of the NP.

Table 4 explains the extended versions of the Complex NPs used. The proficiency in the use of adjectival phrases [noun + noun], [adjective + noun], [determiner + noun], and [determiner + adjective] as the pre-modifiers of the noun head is seen. The type 16 a triple Noun formation of the NP is normally rare in use. The first two nouns are pre-modifiers to the third noun, the head of the NP. The mother tongues of the students, Tamil and Sinhala, could play a role here to form NPs like these. The ten types given in Table 4 are seen for 10% of the total use.

The Table 4 The extended versions of the Complex NPs used 1

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Examples - 10%
16	N	N	N	<i>year-end examination, Rambaikulam area people,</i>
17	Adj	N	N	<i>continuous power supply, electric grinder company,</i>
18	D	N	N	<i>every branch manager, some error connection,</i>
19	N	PP	PP	<i>lot of inconveniences of electricity power supply, lot of problems in day to day life,</i>
20	gerund			<i>banking, fishing,</i>
21	Pr PCL	N		<i>Drinking water, working people,</i>

<b>22</b>	Num	N		<i>eight banks,fifteen computers,</i>
<b>23</b>	Pron	N	PP	<i>our problem in your mind,your attention to this cause,</i>
<b>24</b>	D	Adj	N	<i>some illegal event,some small factories,</i>

Source: Primary Data

Type 17 contains an adjective to join the noun as pre-modifiers to the last noun. Type 18 is an extended version of type 01 (see Table 2). With the determiner, a noun joins as pre-modifiers to the last noun. The type 19 is unique because of its embedded double prepositional phrases as the postmodifier of the fronted Noun. Another often used expression is the gerund (the type 20). Type 21 needs a clear understanding of the use of the present participle as a gerund and as an adjective. The type 22 is also a simple NP as the first four types in Table 2 requiring a number as the pre-modifier or qualifier. Type 23 needs a pronoun as the pre-modifier and a prepositional phrase as the postmodifier. It is an extended version of type 9 where the head of the NP becomes a noun causing the pronoun as a qualifier unlike that in type 9 where the pronoun is the head. Type 24 belongs to the group of the types 13 and 15.

Table 5 displays three types of complex NPs. The proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + past participle] and [determiner + adjective + noun] as the pre-modifiers of the noun head is seen. In type 25, the newly introduced pre-modifier is the past participle which is always preceded by an article or a determiner. In type 26, a four worded NP, a sequence of determiner-adjective-noun pre-modifies the last noun. The type 27, again, a simple NP structure, in which, a conjunction joins two nouns. However, the use is minimal (2%).

Table 5. The Extended Versions of the Complex NPs Used 2

<b>Type</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Examples – 2%</b>
<b>25</b>	Art/Det	Pst Pcl	(N)	N	these unexpected power cuts, the Advanced Level
<b>26</b>	D	Adj	N	N	some small business owners,any sudden power cut,
<b>27</b>	N	Con	N		fluctuation and cuts,ice-cream and other foods,

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 continues the four worded NP structure in all its 16 types from 28 to 43. The types 28, 29, 30, 35, 39, and 43 mostly contain nouns as pre-modifiers. The types 31 and 32 and the types 44 and 47 in Table 6 do have articles, adjectives, nouns and numbers as pre-modifiers and prepositional

phrases as post-modifiers. The type 33 and 48 in Table 6 are different as they have apostrophes to include possessive nouns as pre-modifiers. Type 34 has numerals as pre-modifiers. Type 36 constitutes a nominal clause as the post-modifier along with other usual forms as the pre-modifiers. The use of this type of clause shows fluency in the use of the NPs in the English language. The types 37 and 40 have embedded doubled or tripled prepositional phrase as the post-modifiers. Type 38 reveals another evidence of mastery in the use of NP as it has a past participle along with an article and a noun as a sequence to pre-modify the last noun. However, this cannot be confirmed as this particular past participle form is so popular because it is part of the Sri Lankan education level called the Advanced level so the respondents might have used it without understanding the function of the past participle used as a modifier or a qualifier in NPs. The types 41 and 42 do not have anything new in their structure except the extension.

Table 5 The Extended Versions of the Complex NPs Used 3

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	Examples – 5%
28	N	con	N	N	<i>children and office workers,</i>
29	N	N	N	N	<i>night time power cut,</i>
30	Adj	N	N	N	<i>electric power supply problem</i>
31	Art	Adj	N	PP	<i>an appropriate solution for this problem,</i>
32	Adj	N	N	PP	<i>electricity power cut in the area</i>
33	pron	N	s'	N	<i>our children's education,</i>
34	num	con	num	N	<i>two or three weeks,</i>
35	Art	N	N	N	<i>the light house objective,</i>
36	Art	Adj	N	NomC	<i>the electrical items we use such as refrigerator, television,</i>
37	Art	N	PP	PP	<i>the consumer of Colombo 7 areas of your company,</i>
38	Art	Pst pcl	N	N	<i>the advanced level examination,</i>
39	N	N	N	PP	<i>electricity power cut in the area</i>
40	N	PP	PP	PP	<i>lot of problems in unstable arrangements of power,</i>
41	N	con	N	PP	<i>loudspeakers and vans for announcing,</i>
42	Adj	N	con	N	<i>my customers and I,</i>
43	pron	N	N	N	<i>our lifetime activities,</i>

Source: Primary Data

Table 6 contains new types of NPs which are more or less simple except the types 46 and 53. The former contains a present participle form fronted with an adverb pre-modifies the last noun. The latter has a relative clause as the post-modifier. Type 45 is an indefinite pronoun used as an NP. The type 49, 50 and 51 are re-ordered structures of the already used NPs explained in the previous Tables.

Table 6 The Extended Versions of the Complex NPs Used 4

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Examples – 3%
44	N	N	PP	<i>power cut of electricity,</i>
45	Pron			<i>anything</i>
46	adv	PrePcl	N	<i>very exciting time,</i>
47	Num	N	PP	<i>two hours per day,</i>
48	N	s'	N	<i>Thieves' activities,</i>
49	D	Num	N	<i>these three months,</i>
50	D	Pron	N	<i>many other issues,</i>
51	Num	Adj	N	<i>one important matter,</i>
52	Pron	N	N	<i>our area electricity problem,</i>
53	N	RelCl		<i>people who live in the Colombo 4 area,</i>

Source: Primary Data

Table 7 contains the five worded NPs. All the types except 58 have a conjunction to join two NPs into one lengthy complex NP. The type 54 is unique in which two present participle forms perform pre-modification. Type 58 has a past participle form as a pre-modifier along with other forms.

Table 7 The Extended Versions of the Complex NPs Used 5

Type	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	Examples – 2%
54	PrePcl	Ns	con	PrePcl	N	<i>providing light bill service and repairing damages,</i>
55	Pron	N	N	con	Ns	<i>our business work and school children education work,</i>
56	Art	N	con	N	N	<i>the industries and household works,</i>
57	Art	Adj	con	Adj	N	<i>the proper or sharp electric power</i>
58	D	N	Pst Pcl	N	N	<i>this year advanced level students,</i>
59	Adj	N	con	Det/Adj	N	<i>ice creams and other foods,</i>

Source: Primary Data

Table 8 shows the percentage of the popular forms used as the first form of the NPs. Though these forms occur within the complex NPs repeatedly or within an NP repeatedly, this finding reveals that the Sri Lankan students use the articles (19%) and determiners (23%) dominantly in a formal letter of communication. Next, they prefer personal pronouns (15%) because the letter is a genre which needs personalization. However, it is notable that they have used other forms of determiner, adjective, noun, and pronoun (38%) which may be or may not be unique to the population it represents.

Table 8 the popular forms used as the first form of the NPs

SN	The first word of the NPs	% (465)
1	the indefinite article, <i>‘a or an’</i>	5
2	the definite article, <i>‘the’</i>	14
3	<i>moremostthat</i> many, any, every, one, these, this, those, some as determiners and pronouns	23
9	my, our, their, your	15
4	<i>lot</i> as noun, pronoun	2
5	<i>very</i> as adverb and adjective	3
6	other forms of determiner, adjective, noun, pronoun,	38

Source: Primary Data

### The Examples for the Sri Lankan localization of the NPs in use

In creating and using the NPs in the letter writing, the students produced some NPs which are typical of Sri Lankanization and localization. Some may be acceptable in informal use and some are deviant.

Table 9. The Examples for the Sri Lankan localization of the NPs in use

<p><b>Nouns as adjectives and modifiers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning food arrangement (N+N+N)</li> <li>• night student lessons (N+N+N)</li> <li>• Please give <i>consisten(t)cy electricity power supply in this area.</i> (N+N+N+N+PP)</li> </ul> <p><b>Nouns as Verbs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please <i>concern</i> this letter</li> </ul> <p><b>Verb as Noun</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So it take huge <i>lost</i> to me</li> <li>• Some <i>office organization</i> (are) mostly depend on the electronic method such hospital, banking etc.</li> <li>• We all are expect <i>the proper or sharp electrical power</i> to do our casual work</li> <li>• Women also cannot do <i>the home service.</i></li> <li>• Some time <i>higher power electricity</i> was come and destroyed our electriciv equipments</li> </ul>
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### Clause Structure within NPs

• *The people who do (ing) their self employment work face lot of problems.* (06)  
(Art+N+RelCl/-ingCl)

• In the Jeyasegara mawatha, there are (a) lot of trees damaging the electricity wires.(Art+ProN+PP(+ingCl)

• *The school children facing lot of problems for the education.* (08)  
(Art+N+N+-ingCl(+PP)

• Someone unable to do their small industrial activities. (ProN+AdjCl)

### 'to' infinitive vs 'to' preposition

• I like to explain (complain) (about the) power supply (cut) in our area.  
NP=PP

• I hope you will discuss and fulfill our needs with *the power board.*  
(13)

• We need *current*; I think main reason is labors of maintaining *current light.*

• Majority people have to do *their self-employment task*

• Power cut by *different different time of different different days*

• We can't do *our business work and school children education work* properly

• when the power cut held on days the criminal cases like *stealing robbery* are increasing in this area

• Power cut (is) distorted *our all work activity* (61)

• *Night time power cut* affect(s) *the light house objective* so we can't arrive in our port place.

• I am doing *a food shop in Vavuniya town* (67)

• *Our many foods* spoiled

• You can use *loud speaker and vans for announcing*

• *Every people are going working.*

• That is one of *the reason(s)* (for) to (the) power cut.(N+PP(+PP)

### NP as PP

• I should be glad if you would give (bring) *this matter (to) your consideration*

• I kindly request please give (the) right solution (*for/to*) *this problem.*

### The omission of 'the' in NP

• *Please pay (the) attention about this situation.* (02) (Art+N+PP)

• *I am writing (the) letter regarding (the) power supply in an area.*

Source: Primary Data

### Thematization of the NPs

The discourse of a letter of complaint in business communication generally contains *problem –solution, communication, customer/consumer, trade, commerce and development, cause and effect, and time and duration* as the major themes. The minor themes consist of *person and position, general and indefinite, location and place, positive ideas and action, organic objects, and mechanical objects*. The minor themes buttress the major

themes. The percentage of the expressions used for each aspect of the discourse of complaint is considerably balanced.

Table 10. Themes of the NPs Used

S N	Themes	%	Examples
1	<i>problem -solution</i>	21	<i>an appropriate solution for these problems, labor of maintaining current life, so many difficulties, suitable decision about this</i>
2	<i>communication</i>	5	<i>a call, letter of complaint about power cut, announcement, apology</i>
3	<i>customer/consumer</i>	11	<i>any substitute for electricity, continuous power supply, fluctuation and cuts, your electricity service, most of the customers, the consumer of Ceylon electricity</i>
4	<i>trade, commerce, and development</i>	9	<i>Companies, educational activities of children, restaurants, our business, an internet café,</i>
5	<i>cause and effect</i>	8	<i>inconvenience, a good effect, an action, delay in our work, high marks in the A/L exam, benefits for both parties,</i>
6	<i>time and duration</i>	5	<i>a long year, future, hours, early morning,</i>
7	<i>location and place</i>	4	<i>a rural area, district, home, Kollanwa area, our country, hospitals,</i>
8	<i>person and position</i>	17	<i>businessmen, school students, branch manager, job, their home works, the industries and household works,</i>
9	<i>general and indefinite</i>	11	<i>concerns, matter, day to day life in the area, many other issues, anything</i>
10	<i>organic objects</i>	2	<i>big trees near the current line, drinking water, ice creams and other foods,</i>
11	<i>mechanical objects</i>	2	<i>generators, loudspeakers, and vans for announcing,</i>
12	<i>positive ideas and action</i>	4	<i>hope, immediate decision, kind consideration, consideration, my request, our request,</i>

### The Quantity of the Nouns Used

Table 11 shows a case study of the texts of seven students. There is uniformity between the increase of marks in both the total test and the essay and that of the number of words used. There is a balance in using

prepositional phrases in par with noun phrases (around 10-15 in number) (Gnanaseelan, 2017).

Table 11. The SOC Positions of the NPs used

Code	Marks for the letter	Words	Subject Position	Object Position	Complement Position
83	3	70	5	5	1
31	4	84	3	5	-
2	4	96	7	5	1
18	4	110	12	10	1
41	5	122	9	10	-
37	7	116	8	7	1
79	8	148	8	8	-
Average	5	70-150	7	7	1

(Total: the total marks of the complete test (3 hours testing all the four skills plus grammar); the letter: the marks given for the letter out of 10 marks; words: the number of words in the letter; Av: the average)

Source: Primary Data

The investigation of the seven scripts reveals that there is a balance in using NPs as subject and object positions. However, the respondents have rarely used NPs in Complementary positions. They have rarely used the sentence patterns with complements: SVC and SVOC. It is significant to see that those who have got the average marks (04 or 05 out of 10) have used the NPs in subject and object positions largely.

## Findings

The findings reveal that the respondents are skillful enough to use noun phrases as subject, object and subject or object complements at the moderate level but linguistically they lack the competence to distinguish the different functions of them. They moderately use noun phrase in adjectives, adverbs, adjectival and adverbial phrases or clauses, prepositional phrases or parts of these components. They use multi-word NPs significantly in par with that of one-worded NPs.

However, the usage becomes insignificant beyond five-worded NPs and there is a positive observation that the respondents have tried to create larger NPs but it is unintentional. On the other hand, it is expected that the quantity should balance the quality and diversity of the NPs. Academic or professional writing demands the use of lesser complex, simple NPs for



clarity, conciseness, and preciseness. However, the students should be aware and capable of developing complex NPs where necessary in the writing at the tertiary level. The respondents show the evidence of linearity, reliability, natural progress and increase from simple to complex forms in the use. The respondents lack sufficient competence in developing or using abstract entities as NPs. That is an expected proficiency level in the undergraduate education in English medium. However, the respondents have developed the competence to relate the concrete experience to abstract ideas considerably.

This research primarily gives the quantitative account of the NPs and describes the qualitative nature of the types of the NPs developed by the respondents with the examples. The respondents developed 59 types of NPs. They all are different from each other qualitatively, quantitatively, structurally and sequentially. The first seven patterns are the most dominant to have been used. The percentage of the created NPs show a decreasing trend as the quality of the type is an increasing one. On the ascending order from the simple phrases to the complex ones, these seven types are simple and easy to form by the second language learners and users.

Following the use of a single word NP, an NP in which conjunction joins two nouns. Thereafter the pre-modification takes place. The determiner, pronoun, article, and adjective, single or double-worded, pre-modify the nouns acceptable to the morpho-syntactics and semantics of the English language. A number functions as the pre-modifier. In addition, the proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + adjective or noun + noun] as the pre-modifier of the noun head is seen. It confirms their skill in using a noun or nouns functioning as an adjectival phrase or a pre-modifier.

Their application knowledge, of fronting an article to qualify the succeeding first pre-modifying noun or both the pre-modifying noun and the pre-modified head noun of the NP together, is visible. The proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + noun] as the pre-modifier of the noun head is seen. The pre-modifier of [pron+ det or adj] or [pron + noun] or [adv+ det or adj] is developed to the last unit, Noun, the head of the NP at the next level of competence and performance (6%).

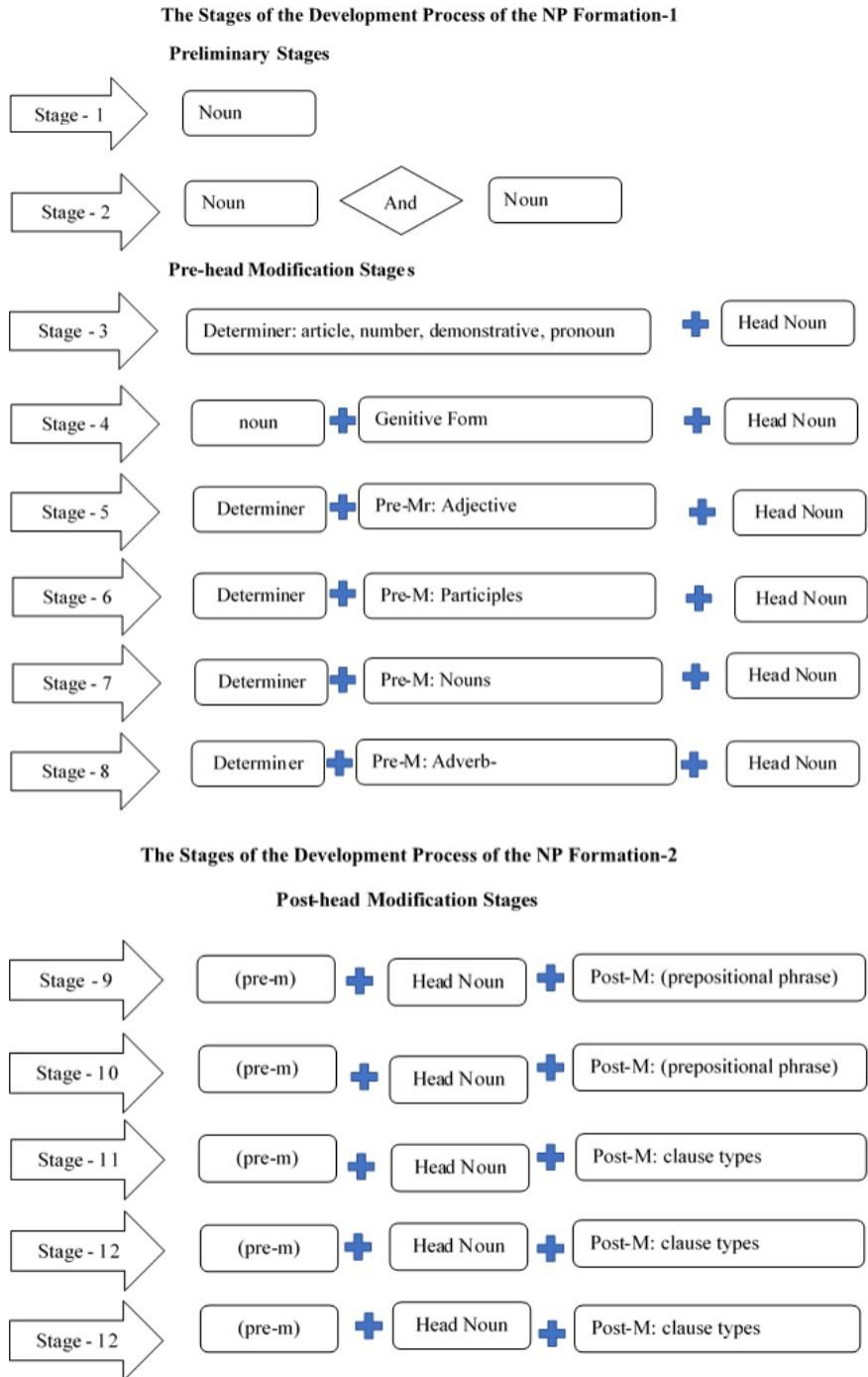


Figure 1 : The Stages of the Development Process of the NP

At the next stage of the development of pre-modifiers, the proficiency in the use of adjectival phrases [noun + noun], [adjective + noun], [determiner + noun], and [determiner + adjective] as the pre-modifiers of the noun head is seen (10%). A triple Noun formation of the NP is normally rare in use. The mother tongues of the students, Tamil and Sinhala, could play a role here to form NPs like these. Using complex NPs, the students show the proficiency in the use of adjectival phrase [article/determiner + past participle] and [determiner + adjective + noun] as the pre-modifiers. It is interesting to see that the students have further expanded the complexity of the NPs (from three worded NPs to four worded NPs) by adding nouns mostly and articles, adjectives, and numbers moderately. The new types of NPs contain a present participle form fronted with an adverb pre-modifies the last noun. One unique form shows that two present participle forms performing pre-modification. Some have a past participle form as a pre-modifier along with other forms. Another distinct application noted is the use of apostrophes to include possessive nouns as pre-modifiers.

Further, they show the potential in the knowledge of applying post-modification. This is the next key stage of development. However, compared to the use of an adjective as the post-modifier, a new linguistic component, prepositional phrase, is dominant in their use. It expects the next level of linguistic awareness of the increasingly complex structure of the noun phrase in the English language. It is noted that instead of using a PP consisting preposition plus single word Noun, the respondents have used the two-worded NPs mostly. The reason for this structure could be that the students might have perceived a two-word construction after a preposition in forming a PP. The use of a pronoun as the head of the NP is the next development. The use of determiner as pre-modifier is followed. However, only 12% of the total number represents these applications.

The next stage of development is observable in using both the pre- and postmodifiers in NPs (5%): an adjective or an article as the pre-modifiers and a prepositional phrase as the post-modifier. The embedded double prepositional phrases functioning as the postmodifier of the fronted Noun is the next stage in post-modification. At the next stage, a pronoun functions as the pre-modifier and a prepositional phrase as the postmodifier. Another development is the use of a nominal clause as the post-modifier along with other usual forms as the pre-modifiers. The use of this type of clause shows fluency in the use of the NPs in the English language. The embedded doubled or tripled prepositional phrase as the post-modifiers are observed. Some have a relative clause as the post-modifier.

Another often used expression is the gerund. The students reach the stage of distinguishing the use of the present participle as a gerund and as an adjective. In the five worded NPs, many have a conjunction to join two NPs

into one lengthy complex NP. In some forms, an indefinite pronoun is used as an NP. The use of fused heads in the formation of the NPs is very rare. The use of the appropriate cases of the pronouns in the NPs is seen as acceptable.

The percentage of the popular forms used as the first form of the NPs occurs within the complex NPs repeatedly or within an NP repeatedly. The Sri Lankan students use the articles and determiners dominantly in a formal letter of communication. Next, they prefer personal pronouns because the letter is a genre which needs personalization. However, it is notable that they have used other forms of determiner, adjective, noun, and pronoun considerably.

In the discourse of a letter of complaint in business communication, the main theme of this type of discourse is *problem –solution* (21%). It is indispensable that the person who complains should describe and explain the problem and seeks a solution. The related theme is the discourse of *customer or consumer* (11%). The writer positions himself or herself as a customer or consumer of the service commercially provided. Therefore, allocating more space and time for developing this theme in this discourse is essential. The theme of *communication* is another crucial need for the genre, the letter. The expressions are needed to send ideas, feelings, facts, and attitudes from the source to the recipient logically, constructively and critically.

The third theme developed for 9% of the total discourse is *trade, commerce, and development*. Since it is a letter of complaint as a customer and consumer of a purchased service, the theme of trade, commerce and development have to be the part of the discourse, especially, the terms and conditions of the service, their benefits and obligations to both the trader and the buyer. Another key theme the writer focuses on is *cause and effect*. This theme is related to the first theme Problem – Solution. The complaint arises due to a bad effect or ill-effect of the poor service. The poor service is the cause. The negative effects can be many. The last major theme is Time and Duration. The problem occurs within a certain time duration and the solution is sought again within the expected time duration.

The minor theme, *person, and position* (14%) elaborates the major theme of customer-consumer. It clarifies and exemplifies the people affected and their disrupted positions or multiple roles in the family, working place and in the society. The minor theme of *general and indefinite* (11%) is indispensable to any discourse or genre as to relate the specific, the power cut, to the general nature, system of the personal, professional and social life and the concrete and abstract words and ideas have to be connected with the words and expressions of general and indefinite nature.

The minor theme of *location and place* (4%) specifies the context or space which has been affected and need to be focused. The theme of *positive ideas and action* (4%) is an expectation in the discourse of complaint which may cause accusation and incrimination. Instead, a refined customer of social morality needs to accommodate the expression of polite requests for constructive action, service appreciation, positive ideas, and hope. The minor themes of *organic objects and mechanical objects* (4%) refer to and complement the two major themes, *problem-solution and cause and effect*.

The analysis shows that the students show moderate competence in creating and using number, countability, definiteness, genericness, definite quantification, distance, and specific selection. In using NPs of number, reference, quantification, they lack experience in using the exact determinatives such as *both, half, either, every, cardinal and ordinal* but the improvement is seen in using the non-exact quantifiers such as *much, some, any, many, more, most, little, few*. The adjectival determinatives are classified in terms of similarity, difference, totality, familiarity, usuality, particularity, and uniqueness. The students generally show their competence in using them. The superlative adjectives play a significant role (Downing and Locke (1992: 440). This use is also quite good in their writings. Quirk *et al.* (1985:253-264) distinguish three types: pre-determiners, central determiners, and post-determiners. The respondents are good at the first two. Further, though the respondents have used the NPs in the Subject and Object positions, their application knowledge in using the NPs in the complement position within the sentence is insufficient, however, within the NPs, considerable.

## **7. Conclusion and suggestions**

This paper analyses the functions and linguistic forms of nouns and noun phrases developed by the students from Tamil and Sinhala language communities of Vavuniya Campus of the University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka. The stages of the pre-and post-modification and complementation processes of the NP formation developed from their use reveal the linguistic and non-linguistic implications in the Sri Lankan ELT and ELL context especially in the areas of using the dependent structure, determiners, pre-and post-modifiers, and complements. It makes an assessment of the development of the NPs in their writings in comparison to the established conventional functions and forms of the prototypical NPs in the English Language. The findings distinguish the general patterns and pragmatic uses or localization, typical of a non-native ESL learning context. The students mostly intuitively or without the linguistic competence of the functions and the forms of NPs, use them as subject, object, complement and adjectival functions or positions. It reveals that the students lack of concern for using the sentence patterns of SVC and SVOC. They use the types of determiners

and modifiers before and after the types of NPs. The implications are clearly identifiable. The results show that their creation and use of the NPs do not confirm their competence in NPs but their habitual nature. It affects the teaching and learning of subjects taught in the English medium.

The limitation in methodology is that the data were collected from One batch of students numbering within hundred and the business letter writing genre was chosen. Further the texts were taken from a formal university assessment which conditions the writing process and product within the temporal and special limitations. It is not a letter written for a realistic purpose or in a real situation. It is a simulated situation. Therefore the process and product of the real time use may show significant different results because they may have enough time and the genuine need for the complaint. The limitation in the findings is that the NP formation and function vary L1 to L2, genre to genre, context to context, and purpose to purpose. The results of this research paper have these limitations.

The learners' distinction between nouns and pronouns generally meets the standard of the conventional forms. However, they lack the application knowledge in nominalization, the theoretical and application distinction between nouns and the rest of the linguistic units, within their types and within their functions. Their comparative use of the abstract ideas over the concrete actions in the NPs is smaller and they need to improve in composing complex abstract NPs needed for communicating the advanced business management knowledge and for understanding the logical and pragmatic relations. The ELT and ELL in Sri Lanka should incorporate a step by step approach to cover the stages of the processes of the NPs formation developed in this paper, comparing the counterparts available in Sinhala and Tamil languages.

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