Discourse and Premodification

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1. Introduction

According to Bolinger (1967), establishment in discourse is a matter of usage which may help to determine how the grammatical resources of referent-modification and reference-modification can be tapped. Let us look at the following citation:

(1) Short book, as we have seen, is normally taken as 'short qua book', short in number of pages, lines, paragraphs, etc. One would be unlikely to say, on moving into an apartment and distributing articles among the shelves along the walls, This short book is about right for that low shelf, though This book is short—it's about right for that low shelf would be normal enough. Later, Hand me that short book you had would follow from the prior predication. On the other hand, This short stick is about right to prop up the shelf would cause no surprise. Stick selects from the semantic range of short only on the basis of Material Object. (Bolinger 1967: 24)

Thus, certain usage of adjectives will be possible in prenominal position with the help of discourse establishment.

Similar premodification can be found in other cases. Take a look at each underlined portion of the following examples:

(2) Because of its fast-growing economy, China saw a three-fold increase in urban development in less than 10 years. This rapid development has led to urban sprawl. (CIOCI, p.42)

(3) Early in February, 2000, the Kobe District Court passed a ruling that the central government and the expressway corporation should reduce vehicle exhaust emissions in the city of Amagasaki in Hyogo Prefecture. People who suffered from pollution-related diseases were overjoyed at this first-ever court case. (CIOCI, p. 6)

In each of these two examples, the underlined adjective naturally appears in prenominal position because of the prior context, though it is only related to referent-modification. This article is a brief survey of the relation between discourse and premodification in English.

2. Types of Prenominal Modifiers in English

The prenominal modifiers which are available with the help of establishment in discourse can be divided into three types: single words, compounds, and phrases. Notice, however, that there are some cases where prenominal modifiers are available without recourse to discourse establishment.

In this section, we will begin with single words (section 2.1.), then consider compounds (section 2.2.) and phrases (section 2.3.). Finally, we will mention some cases of prenominal modifiers available without recourse to discourse establishment (section 2.4.).

2.1. Single Words

In (4)-(7), each underlined single word can appear in prenominal position because of some discourse establishment. Notice that there is a comment bracketed at the end of (5)-(7) each.
(4) Because of its fast-growing economy, China saw a three-fold increase in urban development in less than 10 years. This rapid development has led to urban sprawl. (CIOCI, p.42)

(5) "We were never informed about radiation and health risks," she said, adding, "We need to be able to make informed decisions." (CIOCI, p. 51) [informed= "after or on the basis of being informed about radiation and health risks"]

(6) In estimating one's fitness, the Ministry uses an index calculated by dividing body weight (in kilograms) by one's height in meters squared. The standard is set at 22, so a person is considered overweight if the figure is 25, and underweight if the figure is below 18.5. The Ministry is urging people to better understand their appropriate body weight, nutrition, and diet as a first step to being truly healthy. (CIOCI, pp. 1-2) [appropriate= "appropriate by referring to an index calculated by dividing body weight (in kilograms) by one's height in meters squared"]

(7) A combined 11 percent said that they had thought nuclear power should be 'gradually abolished' or 'immediately abolished'. (CIOCI, p. 61) [Interestingly, combined refers to, and is based on, the following two phrases 'gradually abolished' and 'immediately abolished'.]

2.2. Compounds

In (8)-(10), each underlined compound is available with the help of discourse establishment. Notice that there is a bracketed comment at the end of each example.

(8) The crab spider lies in wait on flowers and spears bees with its fangs. Members of the bee-eating bird family defeat their prey by whacking them against a branch to remove their sting. (RD, p. 19) [the bee-eating bird family = "the bird family which eats bees"]

(9) Early in February, 2000, the Kobe District Court passed a ruling that the central government and the expressway corporation should reduce vehicle exhaust emissions in the city of Amagasaki in Hyogo Prefecture. People who suffered from pollution-related diseases were overjoyed at this first-ever court case. (CIOCI, p. 6) [pollution-related= "related to vehicle exhaust emissions in the city of Amagasaki (more generally, related to pollution)"]

(10) Bigger males created genetically are more likely to mate, but these fish have genetic deficiencies. The species, as a whole, would be in jeopardy if a few of these larger, but inferior, genetically-modified fish were to escape and breed with fish in the wild. (CIOCI, p. 36) [genetically-modified = "(which are) modified genetically like created genetically in the first line of (10)"]

2.3. Phrases

In (11) the underlined phrase is possible based on some discourse establishment and other factors. (There is a bracketed comment at the end.)

(11) The WEBSITE for the American Heart Association has a new tool to help people with heart disease research the latest medical information. When you sign up, you will be asked to create a personal profile including a medical history (all information is confidential). Your case is compared with thousands of scientific studies on a database; then you can access easy-to-understand summaries of those relevant to you with just one click. (RD, p. 18) [easy-to-understand summaries= "summaries (which are) easy to understand because of computerized research of the latest medical information or comparison with thousands of scientific studies"]

2.4. Prenominal Modifiers Without Recourse to Discourse Establishment

It is worth mentioning that prenominal modifiers are not always driven by discourse.
In (12)-(14) each underlined expression appears without recourse to discourse establishment.

(12) A new technology always has a major impact upon language, whether written or spoken. (EL, p. 127)

(13) Katzenbach is the sort of novelist who drives creative-writing teachers mad, a wonderful storyteller whose art is marred by self-repetition (a fault which is curable) and an ear for talk that is pure tin (a fault which probably isn’t). (OW, p. 169)

(14) Fish in rivers throughout Japan have been found to have high levels of dioxin, a cancer-causing chemical that is produced when plastic is burned. (CIOCI, p. 11)

3. Concluding Remarks

In this article we mainly have surveyed the prenominal modifiers that are available with the help of discourse establishment (or driven by discourse), which can be divided into three groups: single words, compounds, and phrases.

Now let us consider several reasons why certain modifiers come to appear in the prenominal position of cases like (4)-(11). First, these modifiers express old information in that they have already been given in prior context, and in accordance with the general principle that information is presented from old to new in a phrase or sentence they tend to appear in prenominal position rather than in postnominal position. Second, in order for the modifiers in question to express the classifying property of the nouns they modify, they tend to appear in prenominal position because it is suitable for classifying the nouns they modify.

It should be noticed that there are two economical tendencies concerning the discourse-driven premodifiers which seemingly do not conform to the Principle of Compositionality. One is that a discourse-driven premodifier comes to “drop” the complement to the head of the phrase it formed as a predication in the preceding context (e.g. (5)) or to “suppress” the understood adverbal modifier to the head of the phrase it could hypothetically form (e.g. (6)). The other is that a discourse-driven modifier comes to form a compound by incorporating a “complement” (e.g. (8), (9)) or an adverb (e.g. (10)) into the compound.

As for (11), further comments are in order because easy-to-understand is an ACCEPTABLE phrasal prenominal modifier, though it is generally said that phrasal modifiers cannot appear in prenominal position. In addition to the reasons given above (“from old to new” and “classifying”), the phrase easy-to-understand may be conventionalized or lexicalized, and moreover facilitated by the motivations of structural necessity, disambiguation, and economy. Structural necessity makes only the prenominal position (not the best but) valid; other positions (e.g. [*NP summaries easy-to-understand of those relevant to you]) could not be available. Next, the noun phrase easy-to-understand summaries of those relevant to you which are easy to understand (the underlined relative clause can be “classifying” or “temporal”; its antecedent can be summaries or those). Furthermore, some principle of economy applies to the noun phrase in question (as brief as possible: without using a relative clause).

Finally, we can suggest that discourse-driven modifiers open up a possibility that premodification like (15) is acceptable.

(15) retarded classrooms (Lakoff 1977: 241-242) [“classrooms where retarded children are taught”] The whole meaning of (15) is not fully determined by the meanings of retarded and classrooms. In addition, it may be possible even if it is not driven by discourse. It seems that the genuinely non-compositional premodification like (15) will be acceptable if it is pragmatically established or conventionalized.
要約

談話構造と前位修飾

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本論文は、英語において談話構造が形容詞等による名詞の前位修飾にどのような影響を与えるかを論じたものである.
次の2つの例を見てみよう.
(i) Because of its fast-growing economy, China saw a three-fold increase in urban development in less than 10 years. This rapid development has led to urban sprawl.
(ii) Early in February, 2000, the Kobe District Court passed a ruling that the central government and the expressway corporation should reduce vehicle exhaust emissions in the city of Amagasaki in Hyogo Prefecture. People who suffered from pollution-related diseases were overjoyed at this first-ever court case.

これらの例において、下線部の形容詞は名詞の前に置かれ、その名詞を限定・分類する機能を果たしているが、そこには談話構造に関わる制約や統語的位置に固有な制約が働いている。すなわち、名詞の後ろでなく前に置かれるのは、先行文脈との関係で既知情報を表すためであり、統語的位置としても限定・分類機能にふさわしいからである。なお、談話構造の制約はすべての前位修飾に適用されるわけではない。

最後に、このような談話構造によって駆動される前位修飾は、たとえばretarded classroomsのようない合成性の原理に完全には従わない表現が、語用的に条件を満たせば容認可能となるという可能性を与えることも示唆した。