

A Study of the Application Frequencies of Relative Clauses and Their Derived Phrases in English News Reports

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Abstract

Dependent clauses and modifiers have frequently been found to be embedded in sentences in various genres of formal English writing. This study finds that the English news reports under investigation contain very high percentages of relative clauses and their derived phrases, namely participial and adjective phrases. Among the sentence patterns in the 30 News reports, the analysis finds the relative clause-sentence ratio to be 29%, immediately followed by the participial phrase-sentence ratio, 26%, with the adjective phrase-sentence ratio being only 1.6%. The combined ratio of the three structures to the total sentence amounts is a surprisingly high 57%. Concerning the grammatical functions of all the relative pronouns, it is found that 80 % of them assumed the subjective case, with other cases being seldom applied. As regards to the voice of all the participial phrases, active and passive phrases are found to have similar application frequencies (81:79). Such figure-based findings, which reflect what edited journalistic writing consists in, may serve as a guide to writers, readers and teachers of English in their writing, reading and teaching of English.

Keywords: news reports, relative clauses, participial phrases, adjective clauses,
derive, frequencies

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Introduction

Background of the Study

In his analysis of the typology of language, Tsao (1979) pointed out that the English language, which is usually considered as a sentence-based language, tends to be composed of various clauses through transformational processes such as conjunction, branching or embedding. Corder (1981, p.50) mentioned that about half the sentences in most kinds of writing contain one or more subordinate clauses. This subordination shows the relationship between ideas more clearly than a series of simple or compound sentences. Effective writing, particularly standard or formal edited writing, therefore consists in an ability to apply an appropriate number of clauses to distinguish one clause from another in terms of the forms and functions. Effective reading, likewise, requires readers to be able to identify the forms and functions of the clauses in writing.

Formal or literary English is the English of literature, of dictionaries, of grammars: it is not the language of the mass (Zeiger, 1973, pp.231-232). Leggart et al also pointed out that formal English is the variety of spoken and written language which enjoys cultural prestige, and which is the medium of education, journalism and literature (Leggart et al., 1982, p.11).

Edited American English is a version of the language that you may associate with schools, good newspapers, good books, or good public speakers. It is an idiolect or dialect that has been modified to produce uniformity in sound, a consistency with such grammatical standards as have traditionally been taught in English and American schools, and a vocabulary that can be shared by people in different places and at different times. Edited American English is produced by a kind of filtering process. In the filtering process, what separates people from each other linguistically is supposed to be trapped and discarded, while what binds people together linguistically is left free for use. Few people speak edited English; many write it (Corder, 1981, p.11).

Students of high schools and applied foreign language have tended to be regarded as lacking a sufficient mastery of the knowledge base of the English language. In his investigation of high school students' common errors in relative clause, Chen (2002) found that there are 6 errors frequently made by high school students, including (a) overgeneralization, (b) simplification, (c) interference from the source language, (d) ignorance of rule constraints, and (e) negligence. In a survey of Taiwanese EFL student's writing, Chen (2003) also found that Taiwanese university students tend to (a) use right-embedded relative clauses, (b) apply

non-restrictive relative clauses more frequently, and (c) use “who” and “which”.

In their investigation of applied foreign language students in their mastery of English clauses, Chuo et al (2004), Yang (2004), and Chen (2005) found that students of applied foreign language do not have a good command of English relative clauses, noun clauses and appositive noun clauses respectively. Student’s lack of mastery of clauses may be due partly to their tech-vocational educational backgrounds, which deemphasize English instruction to a certain degree, and the educational goals of applied foreign language, which emphasize the balance of technology, business and English, thus failing to provide a sufficient knowledge base of English fundamentals, including syntax. (Wu & Chuo, 2002; Chen, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

In view of the notion that writing abounds in dependent or subordinate clauses on the one hand and the findings that students of applied foreign language have a meager ability in comprehending, applying and analyzing clauses on the other hand, the researcher regard it academically significant to observe how dependent clauses are applied in edited writing. Of the three kinds of dependent clauses, namely noun, adverbial and relative clauses, the researcher are particularly interested in how relative clauses are applied in journalistic writing. Thus, there are three research questions being proposed:

- a. How frequently do the restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, participle phrases and adjective phrases appear in the chosen thirty articles?
- b. How frequently do the subject, object, possessive, place and time relative pronouns occur in the restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses?
- c. What is the ratio between active participle phrases and passive participle phrases used in the thirty articles?

Related Literature

Subordinate Clauses

From the point of view of linguistic typology, one of the most distinctive features between Chinese and English is that Chinese is a topic-comment language, while English is mainly a sentence-based language (Tsao, 1979). A sentence-based language tends to be composed of various clauses through transformational processes such as conjunction, branching or embedding. Different kinds of transformations result in different kinds of clauses. Traditionally, clauses are classified into main and subordinate clauses (Corder, 1981, p.50). Main clauses, which express completed statements and can stand alone, form the principal grammatical units of sentences. Subordinate clauses, on the other hand, are

dependent on other sentence elements and are very much like single words. They are used in sentences as modifiers, subjects, objects, or complements. On the basis of grammatical functions, they are categorized into noun clauses, relative clauses and adverbial clauses.

A modifier is meant a word, phrase or sentence that limits, describes or qualifies the sense of another word, phrase, or element in the same construction (Leggart, Mead, & Charvat, 1982; Webster's New World Dictionary, 1986; Random House Webster, 2000). Adjectives and adjective phrases or clauses modify nouns; adverbs and adverb phrases or clauses modify verbs of the main clauses. In terms of the grammatical functions, subordinate clauses such as relative clauses, adverbial clauses are modifiers, while noun clauses function as subjects, objects or complements.

Noun Clauses

A noun clause is a subordinate clause which functions as a subject, direct objects, indirect object, predicate noun, object of a preposition, object complement or appositive to a subject or object. Most noun clauses are introduced by that, but, whatever, whoever, who, what, why, when, where, and whether are also used. Noun clauses may be introduced by (1) subordinating conjunctions, (2) relative (or conjunctive) and interrogative adverbs, or (3) relative and interrogative pronouns. (NOTE: Direct quotations are sometimes classed as noun clauses; indirect quotations always are.) The different grammatical functions noun clauses have been exemplified as below (Corder, 1981, p.52):

- a. It is quite unbelievable that such an honest man should have committed such a scandal.(subject)
- b. The president said that his meeting with the Arab heads of state had been fruitful.(object)
- c. From what you have told me, I think he is making more money than he deserves.(object)
- d. Most people still accept the myth that progress is inevitable. (appositive)
- e. What he was not aware of is that normal human beings do not behave this way.(complement)

In sentence a, the noun clause functions as a subject; in b an object; in c, an object of preposition; in d an appositive; in e, a complement.

Adverbial (Subordinate Conjunctive) Clauses

According to Azar (1999), adverbial clauses are dependent clauses. They cannot stand alone as a sentence in written English. They must be connected to an independent clause. They have different modifying functions as follows:

Time: He closed the windows when it began to rain.

Cause and Effect: He went to bed because he was sleepy.

Contrast (Unexpected Result): Even though the weather was cold, I went swimming. Direct Contrast: Mary was rich, while John is poor.

Conditions: If it rains tomorrow, I will take my umbrella. (pp.360-367)

Relative Clauses

A relative clause, according to Stockwell, Schachter & Partee (1973, p.421), is a sentence embedded (in surface structure) as modifier of an NP, the embedded sentence having within it a WH-pronominal replacement for a deep-structure NP which is in some sense identical with the head NP. By imbedded sentence is meant one sentence which is inserted into another sentence to make a more complex sentence. The embedded clause is called the subordinate clause as it is considered to be subordinate to the main clause. It becomes a part of the main clause. Oshima and Hogue (1991, p.208) also mention that a relative clause is a dependent clause containing information which cannot stand alone. The sentence below embeds a relative clause:

The plane, which had never flown well anyway, finally crashed. In this sentence, the clause “which had never flown well anyway” is used to modify the preceding noun “the plane”.

Restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

Relative clauses are classified into two kinds, namely restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses (Stockwell et al, 1973, p.421; Leggett et al 1978, p.495; Swam, 2000, p.474; Quirk et al, 1985, p.233). According to them, a restrictive clause is a modifying clause that is essential to pointing out or identifying the person or thing being modified. Restrictive clauses are not set off by punctuation. A restrictive clause is one that restricts the meaning of the word it modifies. It shows exactly what particular person, thing, time or sort is meant. The omission of the restrictive relative clause would change the meaning of the main clause.

A nonrestrictive clause is a modifying clause that is not essential to pointing out or identifying the person or thing modified (Stockwell, 1973, p.491). It merely gives additional information about the word is modified. The omission of the non-restrictive relative clause would not change the meaning of the main clause; therefore it is really parenthetical. It is set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma or by commas (Chen, 2002, pp.23-24). The examples are as below:

- a. The old teacher, who often visits China, is an expert in Chinese archaeology.
- b. The old teacher who often visits China is an expert in Chinese archaeology.

In sentence a, the relative clause “who often visits China; is non-defining (i.e. not essential to the meaning of the sentence), and thus must have commas around it. It is thus identified as a non-restrictive relative clause. In sentence b, this

information is important to the meaning of the sentence (i.e. to distinguish the teacher who visits China from other teachers), you must use a defining modifier. "who often visits China" is thus regarded as a restrictive relative clause.

Chen further pointed out that non-restrictive relative clauses (NRRCs) differ from restrictive relative clauses (RRCs) in that:

- a. NRRCs, but not RRCs, require commas or comma intonation.
- b. NRRCs may modify proper nouns which RRCs may not so unless the proper nouns occur with a determiner.
- c. NRRCs may modify an entire proposition while RRCs may not.
- d. NRRCs do not permit the use of *that* as a relative pronoun while RRCs do.

(p.26)*Kinds of relative pronouns*

A relative clause is introduced by a relative pronoun such as who, whose, whom, that or which. It can also be introduced by relative adverbs such as when, where and why. Of the relative pronouns mentioned above, who, that and which may function as a subject, whom, that which, as object; whose as possessive (Corder, 1984, p.88). These relative pronouns may be sorted into three types. The first one is "WH", which refers to the RCs started with "which" or "who". The second one is "That", which stands for the RCs taking "that" as their relative marker. The last one is "Zero", which includes the RCs with their object relative marker omitted. It is also found that as far as occurrence frequency is concerned, Wh-headed relative clauses tend to outnumber That-headed and Zero-headed relative clauses (Chen, 2003, p.18).

High Occurrence Frequently of Subordinate Clauses

Corder (1981, p.50) mentioned that about half the sentences in most kinds of writing contain one or more subordinate clauses. Corder's notion can be evidenced below in two passages of "Deadly Virus" in Business Week (Apr. 14, 2003) and "China's P-chip Puzzle" in Times (Oct. 21, 2002), which contain various kinds of subordinate clauses. For clarity, the abbreviations, NC, AC and RC, means Noun Clauses, Adverbial Clauses and Relative Clauses, respectively; moreover, the words contained in the parenthesis are added by the researcher:

For days, Shani Brownstein brushed off her husband's pleas (1) (NC) that it was time to bolt Hong Kong. Brownstein wanted to make sure (2) (NC) that development of new products for the couple's toy-manufacturing business, Branford Ltd., stayed on track. Then came word (3) (NC) that a store employee in their building in the teeming Tsim Tsa Tsui district had contracted "severe acute respiratory syndrome," or SARS, the dreaded mystery infection (4) (RC) that has hospitalized more than 700 people in Hong Kong and killed 16. She was especially jolted by the sight of office workers in her building suddenly donning their face masks for protection. (4 sentences)

That was enough to give her the same jitters her husband was feeling. Brownstein banned her 48 staff members from traveling to China, (5) (RC) where the disease first appeared in November. She signed a stack of checks (6) (AC) so bills could be paid in her absence. Then, on Mar. 30, she flew to Thailand with her family. Brownstein, a Canadian, says (7) (NC) she knows at least a dozen others, including bankers, traders, and managers of companies from France, the U.S., and South Africa, (8) (RC) who have done the same. (9) (NC) “People are freaked out,” Brownstein says over her cell phone from Thailand. (10) (NC) “I’m worried about *how long we’ll have to lay low.*” (6 sentences)

The epidemic is, first and foremost, a source of suffering and death, (11) (AC) as many Asian families- especially those of health-care workers- are discovering. (12) (AC) But as more businesspeople put off cross-border trips or flee Asia’s cities altogether, the economic toll threatens to escalate as well. Anxiety is rising between everyone from manufacturers such as Brownstein to top executives of multinationals. (13) (NC) “The SARS situation is causing greater concern for us right now than the war is,” says Irwin M. Jacobs, CEO of phone-technology giant Qualcomm Inc. (14) (NC) “It has the potential to seriously disrupt business.” (5 sentences)

It’s a disruption (15) (RC) that could deliver another major blow to a global economy already reeling from war, fragile stock market, and stagnant demand in the U.S. and Europe. Indeed, in its own perverse way, the microscopic organism behind the disease owes its rapid spread to globalization- and epidemiologists warn (16) (NC) that it could be a harbinger of even more devastating epidemics to come. (2 sentence)

Tables 1 and 2 respectively show the clause-sentence ratio and the occurrence frequency of each kind of clause in Deadly Virus.

Table 1

The clause-sentence ratio

	Type		
	Sentence	Dependent clause	Clause sentence ratio
Number	17	16	0.94

Table 2

The frequent occurrence of each kind of clause

Number	Clause Type			Total
	Noun Clause	Relative Clause	Adverbial Clause	
	9	4	3	16

A few days before the Sept. 2000 grand opening of a replica of Amsterdam’s railway station at his Holland Village property development in the Chinese rust-belt city of Shenyang, agri-business tycoon Yang Bin decided (1) (NC) he wanted the large greenhouses nearby filled with flora so visitors would get the impression the project was on track. Yang’s farm experts protested (2) (NC) there was no way to grow the requested tulip and orchid that quickly. Undeterred, Yang went out and bought them from local farmers, replanted them in the greenhouses and passed them off as his own. (3) (AC) “If you work for a guy like this,” says one of Yang’s managers, (4) (NC) “he pulls you from one surprise to the next.” (4 sentences)

It was Yang’s turn to be ambushed on Oct. 4, (5) (RC) when the 39-year-old entrepreneur – (6) (RC) *who recently was chosen by North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il to run a special free-trade zone on the Chinese border-* was escorted from his Shenyang home by the police. Chinese authorities aren’t saying (7) (NC) why he is being held under “house supervision” or (8) (NC) what crimes they think were committed. (9) (NC) “Yang Bin and his enterprises in China are suspected of being involved in various illegal activities in China,” Zhang Qiyue, China’s foreign ministry spokeswoman, said last week without elaboration. Speculation ranges from tax evasion to corruption arising from Yang’s cozy ties to provincial officials. (4 sentences)

But there’s one aspect of Yang’s misfortune (10) (RC) that is not surprising at all: (11) (NC) a Mainland private company has been embroiled in allegation of monkey business once again. Entrepreneurs like Yang – bold, flamboyant and aggressive – are heralded as the face of China’s capitalist future, and fledgling private companies are viewed hopefully as a wellspring of growth and an engine of job creation to replace the country’s decrepit state-owned enterprises. But they are also the product of a rapidly changing economy (12) (RC) in which state control left over from the days of hard-line communism mingles with freewheeling capitalism – an environment (13) (RC) where cheating is not only possible but is seemingly essential. And, (14) (AC) since Chinese corporate dealings are often murky, investors in the country’s few listed companies have come to expect (15) (NC) that behind every great Chinese

company is a great crime- or at least accounting shenanigans (16) (RC) that would make former Enron CFO Andy Fastow blush. (4 sentences)

Tables 3 and 4 respectively show the clause-sentence ratio and the frequent occurrence of each kind of dependent clause contained in China's P-Chip Puzzle.

Table 3

The clause-sentence ratio

	Type		
	Sentence	Dependent clause	Clause sentence ratio
Number	12	16	1.33

Table 4

The frequent occurrence of each kind of clause

	Clause Type			Total
	Noun Clause	Relative Clause	Adverbial Clause	
Number	8	6	2	16

Tables 5 and 6 respectively show the clause-sentence ratio and the number of clauses contained in China's P-Chip Puzzle.

Table 5

The clause-sentence ratio is combined from tables 3 and 1

	Type		
	Sentence	Dependent clause	Clause sentence ratio
Number	29	32	1.1

Table 6

The frequent occurrence of each kind of clause

	Clause Type			Total
	Noun clause	Relative clause	Adverbial clause	
Number	17	10	5	32
Percent	0.53	0.31	0.16	1.00

Certain facts can be derived from Tables 5 and 6. First, the clause-sentence ratio of the two passages is 1:1. Second, the noun clause-sentence ratio is 0.53. Third,

the relative clause-sentence ratio is 0.31. Fourth, the adverbial clause-sentence ratio is 0.16. Lastly, noun clauses are more frequently applied than relative and adverbial clauses.

The figures clearly indicate that the number of subordinate clauses, namely noun clauses, relative clauses, and adverbial clauses may be equal to or outnumber that of total sentences. However, since modifiers include both clauses and phrases, the above figures may not truly reflect the real extent to which a passage may contain clauses as modifiers. This is especially true if we take relative clauses, which may take the forms of participle and adjective phrases, into consideration. The following sentences coined from the Yahoo Web-news show how certain phrases, which are derived from relative clauses, through certain transformational rules, modify the nouns preceding them; the researcher also added the words contained in the parenthesis:

- a. The study, (which was) presented at the annual meeting of the European Society of Cardiology in Vienna, is the largest experiment ever to test the power of co-called ACE inhibitor drugs—(which has been) already recommended for coronary heart patents over 55.(Dohney, K. 2003)
- b. Experts said the results would dramatically increase the number of people (who take) taking ACE inhibitors.(Dohney, K. 2003)
- c. The new drug, Levitra, is in the same family as Viagra, both by targeting an enzyme (which is) important for maintaining an erection.(Reuters, 2003)
- d. The FDA approved Levitra, known chemically as Vardenafil, (which is) based on studies (which shows) showing that men were on average five times ore likely to achieve erection (which is) suitable for intercourse when taking the pill compared with those given a dummy medicine. (Reuters, 2003)
- e. You know, every day we can send some command that has results (which is) not desirable for us.(Liston, B. 2003)
- f. Shuttle Columbia broke apart over Texas, (which killed) killing all seven astronauts on board. Independent investigators blamed wing damage (which was) caused by foam insulation that fell from an external tank on liftoff. (Liston, B. 2003)

Passages (a) to (f) contain various phrases that may be regarded as deriving from relative clauses, whether restrictive or non-restrictive. Since these participial phrases (a, b, d and f) and adjective phrases (c, d and e) obviously modify the nouns, phrases or sentences preceding them, and, since the subjects are deleted, there is no doubt that we may regard them as variants of relative clauses.

Methodology

Samples and data collection

This study adopted three sampling processes. First, the researcher targeted news reports on the Yahoo Web-news as the sample population. Articles that were not related to news reports were excluded from selection. Second, three categories were judgmentally selected. To avoid homogeneity of document selection, the researcher identified three categories of news reports, namely Health, Science and World Reports. Third, clustered sampling was utilized to meet this purpose. Starting from Aug 15 through Sep 30, 2004, the researcher downloaded from the Yahoo Websites 90 articles, with each area containing 30 articles. Then, ten articles were randomly picked up from among the 30 articles of each area.

Data Analysis

For clarity, the following abbreviations are used to represent the clauses and phrases under investigation:

NRRC: non-restrictive relative clause

RRC: restrictive relative clause

PP-NRRC: participial phrase derived from non-restrictive clause

PP-RRC: participial phrase derived from restrictive relative clause

AdjP-RRC: adjective phrase derived from restrictive relative clause

Research Question One

How frequently do the restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, participial phrases and adjective phrases occur in the thirty articles?

The data analysis of Research Question One is based on the three steps. First, the researcher must identify and underline all the NRRCs, RRCs, PP-NRRCs, PP-RRCs, and AdjP-RRCs occurring in all the thirty reports. Second, the researcher must count the frequencies of the NRRCs, RRCs, PP-NRRCs, PP-RRCs and AdjP-RRCs that occur in the ten reports of each category. Third, the researcher must totalize the NRRCs, RRCs, PP-NRRCs, PP-RRCs and AdjP-RRCs of the three categories.

Research Question Two

How frequently do the subject, object, possessive, place and time relative pronouns occur in restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses?

The data analysis of Research Question Two is based on the four steps. First, the researcher must identify NRRCs and RRCs in all the thirty reports. Second, the researcher must differentiate the grammatical functions of the relative pronouns occurring in the relative clauses. Third, the researcher must count the frequencies of subject pronouns, object pronouns, possessive pronouns, time adverbial pronouns and place adverbial pronouns in the ten reports of each category. Fourth, the researcher must totalize the frequencies of subject pronouns, object pronouns, possessive pronouns, time adverbial pronouns and place adverbial pronouns of the three categories.

Research Question Three

What is the ratio between active participle phrases and passive participle phrases used in the thirty articles?

The data analysis of Research Question Three is based on the four steps. First the researcher must identify the participle phrases in all the thirty reports. Second, the researcher must differentiate active and passive participial phrases. Third, the researcher must count the frequencies of active and passive participles in the ten reports of each category. Fourth, the researcher must sum up the frequencies of active and passive participles of the three categories.

Results

Research Question One

How frequently do the restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, participial phrases and adjective phrases occur in the thirty articles?

Table 7

The frequent occurrence of the restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, participial phrases and adjective phrases in the 30 news reports

Category	Form				
	Sentence	RRC	NRRC	PP	Adj-P
Health	203	39	22	51	8
Science	153	36	20	37	2
World	261	42	21	72	0
Sub-total		117	63	160	10
Total	617 ^a		350 ^b		

Note. ^a represents the total of all sentences.

^b represents the total of RRC, NRRC, PP and Adj-P.

Certain facts can be shown from Table 7. First, the relative clause: sentence ratio is 0.29 (180/617). Second, the participial phrase: sentence ratio is 0.26 (160/617). Third, the adjective phrase: sentence ratio is 0.016 (10/617). Fourth, the relative clause and derived phrase: sentence ratio is 0.57 (350/617).

The figures reveal that journalistic writing abounds in relative clauses and the phrases derived from them to a great extent. For every two sentences in journalistic writing, there exists at least a relative clause, a participial or an adjective phrase (57%). This may confirm Corder’s (1980) notion that subordination shows the relationship between ideas more clearly than a series of simple or compound sentences.

Research Question Two

How frequently do the subject, object, possessive, place and time relative pronouns occur in restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses?

The analyses of the 30 health, science and world reports with respect to the grammatical functions of the relative pronouns of the relative clauses, both restrictive and non-restrictive, yield the results as shown in Table 8 and 9 respectively:

Table 8

The grammatical functions of the restrictive relative pronouns in the 30 news reports

Category	Function				
	Subject	Object	Possessive	Place Adverb	Time Adverb
Health	31	4	0	3	1
Science	29	1	1	3	2
World	28	8	1	3	2
Sub-total	88	13	2	9	5
Total	117				

Table 8 shows that, of the 117 restrictive relative clauses found in the 30 articles, 88 (=0.75) have their pronouns functioning as the subject.

Table 9

The grammatical functions of the non-restrictive relative pronouns in the 30 news reports

Category	Function				
	Subject	Object	Possessive	Place Adverb	Time Adverb
Health	21	0	0	1	0
Science	17	0	0	2	1
World	18	1	0	1	1
Sub-total	56	1	0	4	2
Total	63				

Table 9 shows that, of the 63 non-restrictive relative clauses found in the 30 articles, 56 (=0.89) have their pronouns functioning as the subject.

Table 10

The grammatical functions of the restrictive and non-restrictive relative pronouns in the 30 news reports

Clause	Function					Total
	Subject	Object	Possessive	Place adverb	Time Adverb	
Restrictive	88	13	2	9	5	117
Non restrictive	56	1	0	4	2	63
Total	144	14	2	13	7	180

Therefore, of the 180 relative clauses, 144, or 80%, are found to have their pronouns functioning as the subject. Object and place adverbial relative pronouns, respectively, are applied only one tenth as subject relative pronouns. Relative pronouns functioning as possessives or time adverbs are seldom applied. Obviously, writers, in general, prefer to apply relative clauses containing subjective relative pronouns.

Research Question Three

What is the ratio between active participial phrases and passive participial phrases used in the thirty articles?

Table 11

The participial phrases in the 30 news reports

Category	Kinds of participial phrases			
	Active Participle		Passive Phrase	
	RRC	NRRC	RRC	NRRC
Health	16	6	19	10
Science	10	3	17	7
World	14	32	20	6
Sub-total	40	41	56	23
Total	160			

Table 11 shows that the ratio between active participial phrases and passive participial phrases is 1.03 (81/79). This means that writers in general evenly apply both active and passive voice participial phrases.

Conclusions

This study reveals that journalistic writing abounds in relative clauses and the phrases derived from them to a great extent. For every two sentences in journalistic writing, there exists at least a relative clause, a participial or an adjective phrase (57%). This may confirm Corder's (1980) notion that subordination shows the relationship between ideas more clearly than a series of simple or compound sentences.

For every ten sentences in journalistic writing, there exist approximately three relative clauses, whether restrictive or nonrestrictive. If relative clause-derived participial and adjective phrases are also taken into consideration, we find that for every ten sentences; there exist approximately 3 relative clauses (29%) and 3 relative clause-derived phrases (27.6%) as indicated in Table 7. This suggests that journalists tend to apply a lot of modifiers to restrict or add further information in their writing.

Participial phrases, which are derived from relative clauses, are also found to be implemented frequently as shown in Table 7. For every ten sentences, there exist approximately two and a half relative clause-derived participial phrases (26%). The application frequency of relative clauses, at 29%, is only a little higher than that of participial phrases. Adjective phrases, which are derived from relative clauses, are found to have rare applications (1.6%), if any. This may have to do with writers' attempt to avoid confusing readers. Adjective phrases, which follow the preceding head, tend to be short and seemingly incomplete in meaning, so writers prefer to use relative clauses.

Concerning the voice of participles used, active and passive participial phrases are found to have very similar frequent occurrence (81:79) as revealed in Table 11. This can be explained that journalists sometimes are oriented to apply passive participial phrases to make their objective statements.

Lastly, with respect to the case of relative pronouns, this study finds the fact in Table 10, that the majority of relative clauses have their pronouns assuming the subjective case (80%). Relative clauses contain whose, whom, when or where are seldom found in journalistic writing. This means that possessive, dative and accusative cases are scarcely applied by writers. Writers scarcely apply possessive, dative and accusative cases, because such constructions may sound either awkward or old-fashioned.

Therefore, relative clauses and participial phrases play a very important role in writing because of their structural syntactic complexity and high frequency of occurrences. This not only deserves teachers' attention to teach relative clauses (RCs) effectively with practical techniques, but also deserves learners' attention to have a thorough understanding of RCs to help them precisely read articles and write sentences containing various forms of RCs or translate them appropriately into Chinese.

However, it was pointed out by Chuo et al. (2004) that a majority of Taiwanese English majors had difficulty comprehending, applying and analyzing relative clauses. Students' lack of mastery of relative clauses will no doubt exert a negative impact on their understanding of English writing and their ability to write formal English. English teachers, therefore, should emphasize relative clauses and their derived structures and their applications in writing. Writers, of course, should place more emphasis on those constructions or cases in general. Learners of English are likewise advised to possess a solid mastery of clauses, relative clauses in particular.

In a word, such figure-based findings, which reflect what edited journalistic writing consists in, may serve as a guide to writers, readers and teachers of English in their writing, reading and teaching of English.

Suggestions

Since RCs have been regarded as a symbol of syntactic complex English structure and to some extent, the indicator of mastery in English; thus English teachers should help learners acquire considerable concepts of RCs with the constant practices and drills of the basic grammatical rules and the process of RC formation step by step. Chen (2002) introduces some pedagogical implications to the teachers and provides learners various kinds of drills or activities to help them to use RCs

forms correctly, which will be very useful for teachers and learners in their English education.

Limitations of the study

There are three limitations to this study. First, due to the scope of this study, no detailed descriptions of the forms and functions of relative clauses are provided. Second, the study does not provide rationale why certain relative clauses are more frequently applied in news reports than others. Last, there is no comparison between health, science and word reports, with respect to the frequent occurrence of relative clauses and their derived phrases.

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新聞報導裡關係子句及其衍生語法使用頻率之研究

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摘要

研究某一特定語法結構在正式寫作裡出現之頻率及方式，有助於我們了解英文語言之發展。本研究藉由分析英文新聞報導所呈現出之語言，來深入探討關係子句及其所衍生之分詞片語與形容詞片語在此一特定文體所呈現之頻率及方式。研究顯示，在三十篇報導中，關係子句數與所有句子數比為 29%，分詞片語數與所有句子數比為 26%，形容詞片語數與所有句子數比僅為 1.6%。三結構與所有句子數比為 57%。就關係代名詞之文法功能而言，代名詞為主詞之關係子句佔了 80%。就分詞片語而言，主動與被動分詞出現次數為 81：79。此數據反映新聞英文之語法成份，可作為英文寫作者、讀者、教學者寫作閱讀及教學之參考指標。

關鍵詞：新聞報導、句子、關係子句、分詞片語、形容詞片語、衍生、頻率

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