

Nominalization in College English Writing

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Abstract

Nominalization is a very universal phenomenon in English written language as well as other languages. It has compact relations with written texts that it becomes one of important components in the formal style writing such as technical writing or legal writing. However, this does not mean that we should use as many nominalizations as possible in formal written texts. Overuse of nominalization is certain to produce some problems.

The paper studies nominalization based on the framework of functional grammar, which considers nominalization as a tool for ideational metaphor that belongs to grammatical metaphor. In order to find how to use nominalizations correctly and what is the difference between nominalization usage by foreign language learners and native speakers, two corpora samples are chosen to carry out the quantitative research and analysis :The thesis of Chinese MA candidates majoring in English linguistics who represent advanced foreign language learners, and the thesis of English speaking linguists who represent English native speakers.

By the research and analysis, it can be concluded that when native speakers use nominalization, the proportion is more than foreign language learners. But it is not so absolute because different authors' writing topics and styles are different. In addition, the usage of nominalizations in written discourse especially in scientific discourse by Chinese learners should be raised.

1. Introduction

Nominalization may be seen in many written English texts. Now nominalization has become a sign in the formal English style writing. In general nominalization is to change verbs and adjectives into nouns, but nominalization is not only a simple change of word type. Nominalization has its own broad and narrow sense. According to A Comprehensive Grammar of English Language, nominalizations are realized by the change of noun phrases which have the related correspondence with the clausal predications. To the academic research result about nominalization speaking, there are different use methods of nominalization in different styles. The related statistics show that the style is more formal, the more nominalization may be used. But what are the differences between native speakers and second language learners when they use nominalization. Under the background, the author chooses "Nominalization in college English writing" as the research topic.

The research purpose of the paper is to prove for the writers that nominalization is a tool for grammatical metaphor under the framework of functional grammar, and to find the correct use methods of nominalization and the differences of nominalization use methods between foreign language learners and native speakers. At last, the emphasis will be put forward to increase the awareness when we use nominalization in writing discourses.

The specific research questions include:

1. As far as Chinese Students concerned, what are the distributions, functions and characteristics of nominalization in their compositions?
2. Is the degree of awareness of nominalization proportionate to English proficiency with Chinese college students?
3. Compared with the native speakers, what is the primary discrepancy of use method of nominalization in Chinese college students' compositions?

2. Principle of Nominalization

From the view of nominalizations and independent clauses, nominalizations can be divided into lexical nominalization and clausal nominalization. Compared with clausal nominalization, lexical

nominalization accounts for a predominant portion of the total amount. In general, lexical nominalizations which are mainly verbal nominalizations and adjective nominalizations. so in this paper, we only research and analyze verbal nominalizations and adjective nominalizations.

The paper mainly includes the following four functions of nominalizations: abstractness, densification, cohesive device and parallelism.

Halliday (2000) considered that Nominalization is the most important resource for creating grammatical metaphor. By the tool the congruently words as verbs and adjectives are reworded metaphorically as nouns, instead of functioning in the clause, as process or attributive, they function as things in the nominal group. As a tool for ideational grammatical metaphor, nominalization may change the processes or qualities into the entities. In Halliday's research (2007), he develops his theory after comparing 13 realizations of ideational grammatical metaphor which means the involvement of interpersonal metaphor in ideational metaphor.

Nominalization is regarded by Halliday (2007) as "favorite clause type" of English scientific text writing where every figure in the metaphoric version is nominalized in the form of wording that congruently construes "things" . with nouns for the quality and process. There is another metaphoric transformation whereby the relator is metaphorized as verbal group, that is. the form of wording that congruently construes a process, for example, "resulted in" in "the driver's over quick downhill driving of the bus resulted in brake failure". This combination of metaphoric features is the most important in the semantic road that they carry in developing scientific argument though they may not be the most frequent.

The other is represented in reasoning and logical progress. Nominalization contributes to the "discursive flow": it moves forward the momentum of the argument. Grammatical resources of nominalization also help the reasoning process in the scientific text writings as exemplified in the following two sentences:

- (1) ...The units of concept information encoded in the same language should be more easily compared or integrated than the units encoded in the different languages: ... the language match between the units should not matter.
- (2) The similar characteristics are ... The similarities between

One of nominalization processes that should be worth noting is distillation. In general, in the scientific discourse, the wording which is mentioned discursively may become distilled, and this is often called a dead metaphor.

In general, the usage of nominalizations has close relations with the register. The facts are that the register is more formal, the more nominalizations are used (Yang Xinzhang, 2006). The reasons are the characteristics of nominalizations such as densification and abstractness. So comparing with the informal register and spoken language, more nominalizations are used in the formal registers such as legal and technical writings. There are few nominalizations under the oral speaking conditions or the books for children.

Nominalizations are useful in "jargony" registers for all kinds of reasons: (1) It makes you leave out the participation mentioned in a special event such as to hide their identities. (2) It makes you stand out the relations between the events as opposed to the events themselves. (3) It permits the close mention of the event which is already known by the reader. (4) It shows a lot of information compactly. Halliday (2000) considered that nominalizations play very important roles in scientific and technical registers, because nominalization makes scientific and technical registers possible to construct technical terms' hierarchies and develop an argument little by little. In general, it is considered that nominalizations pack information, which is why they are particularly useful in formal text writing.

3. Data collection

Since academic discourse is one of the most demanding fields in using nominalizations, in the research, the author selected Chinese graduate students who major in English as the representatives of high-level English learners and native English linguists for comparison. In the corpus experiment, there are two parts. One part includes six Chinese graduate students' papers, and the other part is made up of six English native speaking linguists published papers. The choices of different topics in the experiment are random.

First of all the author selected six MA different subjects in the linguistics field from China National Knowledge Infrastructure database. They are saved in word document which are named X1, X2...X6, every word document in its own file folder is named 1. 2...6. According to every word document, the published paper which is related to the writing topic by native speaking linguist is selected from Science Direct network. They are also saved in word document which are named Y1. Y2... Y6 and placed in file L 2...6 in correspondence.

After choosing the corpus material, the author makes some improvement for the sake of statistic accuracy. The corpus only composes of the body of every paper, and excludes the abstract, key words, literature review, tables, figures and annotations. Because the MA's literature reviews are mainly contextual quotations of existed linguists, the literature review part and all the contextual quotations are excluded from the MA. The word numbers in every text are counted by "word" in automatically.

During the experiment process, the author will tag the corpus. Since the identification of nominalization is one type of grammatical metaphor, it has necessary characteristics of grammatical metaphor and so on. The metaphorical meaning originates from congruent meaning. In Prof. Farfs research of grammatical metaphor (2000), he considered that the fundamental characteristics of metaphorical realizations play an important role in recognizing the certain metaphorical configurations in clauses, so the metaphorical forms carry dual-(multi) semantic characteristics. In other words, nominalizations combine different semantic meanings into one form.

To nominalization speaking, the recognition of nominalization is that if they carry a congruent meaning in metaphorical form, for example, to be a verb, an adjective or an independent clause, certainly, there are some special points to be mentioned in the process of tagging. For example, we should take some corresponding nouns into account just like "percentage, methodology", and pay attention to those misleading words such as "conversation and habits" which have obvious signals of suffixation but have not nominalization forms. In addition, some noun forms that are often transformed from verbs or adjectives have been grammaticalized and should not be considered as nominalizations. Let us see the following example, the word "acquisition" in English vocabulary is not considered as nominalization, but when expressing the particular things, it is considered as normalization. In "noun+noun" structure, even if the first noun takes nominalization form, it functions as an adjective and is not considered as a nominalization in general.

In the experiment, nominalization is tagged with "nm". At last, the total number of nominalization is calculated, and the proportion of sub-corpora can be used to compare and analyze.

4. Discussions and conclusions

- (1) The usage of nominalizations must be appropriate. It does not mean that you use more nominalizations. the composition will be better. The usage number of nominalizations will be necessary in the formal text writing. Comparing the following two sentences: "So in the project we sought answers to three primary problems" and "This project tried to answer three primary problems.", we find that the first one sentence is a more idiomatic and formal usage. So we might rewrite the sentence "The extensive and intensive researches of the characteristics of China English at syntactic level is greatly helpful to improve English teaching especially English writing in China"* to "The extensive and intensive researches of the characteristics of China English at syntactic level is a great improvement to English teaching especially English writing in China.
- (2) The usage form of nominalizations must be correct. Nominalizations can be realized in many forms, and we must select the correct form according to the context. There are some problems concerning the correct use of nominalizations especially when zero suffixation occurs. Take 'lack' for example, it could be used both as a verb and a noun. It is appropriate to say "there is a lack of something" or "something lacks a particular quality", but don't use it in this way: "It could appear under the condition that the learners have learnt some certain principles of the take lack".
- (3) Selecting the right preposition that follows. Nominalizations is often followed by the preposition "of. such as "the use of", "as a function of", "semantic representations of", etc. There are 774 out of a total of 2984 nominalization in A corpus and 547 out of a total of 2526 nominalizations in B corpus respectively, that is 25.94% VS 21.65%. It is acceptable to use the "nominalization + of"

structure, but some nominalizations collocate with particular prepositions, like “an investigation into”, “have motivation to”, “in conjunction with” and so on. In this case, the empty preposition 'of' should be avoided.

- (4) Avoid using nominalization that is the subject of empty verb. Though it is a requirement for the sake of formal register, overuse of it would still cause confusion to the readers. “A general comparison of run-on sentences in English with run on sentences in Chinese is conducted so that great similarities are detected and further analysis of nominalization will be conducted.
- (5) Avoid using translation equivalents from Chinese that are rarely used by native speakers. For example, the phrase “with the development of “or “because of the development of "occurs 11 times in the six theses by Chinese students, but it never appears in the six counterpart papers. Too much translation equivalents will not make the sentence so idiomatic though they are grammatically correct.

References

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