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Training English Language Teachers to Help Adult General English Students with Complex Noun Phrases for Business Writing

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Training English Language Teachers to Help Adult General English Students with
Complex Noun Phrases for Business Writing

by

Christina Cipriani

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

General English (GE) courses are the most all-encompassing course type for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Seedhouse, 1995). They do not specifically cover English for business, science, policing, art, or another specific purpose—instead GE courses go over language used in common, everyday interactions. While some English learners (ELs) who choose GE classes need English for speaking and various informal purposes and nothing more, there are other students in my experience who choose GE classes because they are not sure how speaking English will benefit them specifically. It is the latter group that this paper and project aim to help.

Should they choose to pursue a career in which they must utilize English, one of the skills they will need to have is forming complex noun phrases. It is important for ELs who choose to conduct a job search in English to produce more complex noun phrases in their writing than GE courses prepare them for. This is an area in which ELs need help, while English language teachers have little support. Thus, my research question is the following: *How can teacher trainers instruct teachers on how to narrow the gap between noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and types of noun phrases necessary for ELs to produce effective resumes and cover letters in English?*

This chapter will cover my personal journey of becoming interested in noun phrases and particularly those used in employment documents such as resumes and cover letters. It will then touch upon the impact that an increased awareness of complex noun

phrases could have for students in their lives. I will conclude by summarizing this chapter and setting expectations for the following chapters.

My Personal Journey

Most of my experience Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has been in the private language school setting. In my initial years of teaching, I did not spend much time thinking about noun phrases. I was never asked to teach them, students did not tend to ask about them, and they were never mentioned in the textbooks used at these schools. If noun phrases did come up in class, it tended to be working on articles for students that had trouble choosing the correct one or reminding students that in English the noun comes last and adjectives describing it should precede it. For example, in a noun phrase like *a good job* we might discuss why we use *a* instead of *an*, *the*, or the zero article and why we would use *good job* rather than *job good*.

One day I attended a professional development session with a guest speaker and his aim was to help us work with students on their writing more effectively. One very small part of his session consisted of him mentioning as a side note that students often do not have very good command of noun phrases and that the type of communicative four-skills, speaking-focused textbooks frequently used by private language schools do not tend to help. Since this particular guest speaker was visiting from a major publishing house, I felt this was quite an admission of failure. I looked around the room though and nobody else seemed to be affected in the slightest. I was living abroad at the time and in the days, weeks, and months that followed I seemed to encounter inferior noun phrases in English everywhere I went, but especially in my students' writing.

In the years that have passed since then, I have thought about noun phrases on numerous occasions. Noun phrases still do not come up that often in class, so I have found that I agree that they are not often mentioned in the types of books used in private language schools. Students never complain about this lack of noun phrases in their education, so I no longer feel that this is quite the failure that I once believed it to be. This pattern that I have noticed in my own classes is the same as what I have experienced as an academic manager. Most adult students who are signing up for GE classes and fill in a survey or do a needs analysis interview at the school before being placed into a class say that speaking with other people is one of their main communicative goals and that wanting to get all the tenses right is one of their main language-related goals, so it is no wonder that they are not overly concerned with the complex noun phrases they may one day need in formal writing.

So why work on noun phrases in GE courses at all? This is a question I have asked myself a number of times. Many students who take these courses do not do high-stakes writing in English. After all, if they plan a vacation and write to an accommodation provider and ask for *an room large* rather than *a large room*, they will still be understood. As it turns out, there are multiple reasons to work on noun phrases. One very idealistic reason is my belief in a well-rounded education - it is awkward for students to have one level of English for most things and then a much lower level of English for their use of noun phrases. Another reason is that many students may not ask about noun phrases because they are unaware that they lack the ability to use complex noun phrases that are appropriate to their level of English and may appreciate increased awareness about it. Another reason is that even though conversation may be a more

immediate need, many ELs in GE classes also take these classes to improve their current or future job prospects, as shown in Chapter Two. And yet another reason is that life simply does not go as planned. In my opinion, an EL who takes a GE course could still need to learn more English for specialized purposes in the future; they may only study in GE classes initially because they have not decided what they will use English for *yet*.

Our generation may never see a more fitting example of this than we currently are seeing with the Ukrainian refugee crisis that is unfolding. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the status of English has changed in Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009). What was once a very foreign language is now a language taught commonly in public schools, having become part of the official state curriculum in 2004 (Smotrova, 2009). Even now, during a war, there are twelve exam centers moderated by Cambridge University Press & Assessment that have official exam or teaching qualifications center status in Ukraine (“Find a teaching qualification centre”, 2022). Some Ukrainians who have spent time learning English may have known they wanted to know formal English and somehow set out to learn it, noun phrases included. But many had plans to use English in casual conversation or to book vacations or ask for directions in a foreign place, and so they never focused on formal English or writing, and certainly not on noun phrases. It is partially with this in mind that in March of 2022 I started making arrangements to help Ukrainians that suddenly found themselves looking for jobs abroad unexpectedly by editing their resumes.

In an effort to do something significant in response to what is happening in Ukraine by helping average Ukrainian civilians, I put together an informal team and set up a Google Form to gather information about Ukrainian individuals and their job hunts

and asked some friends to share the link on social media. For a while I got very few responses, but then one night in April I received almost 30 inquiries overnight. Since then there have been flurries and lulls in the amount of incoming requests, but the inquiries do keep coming. Every so often I ask another friend or acquaintance to post the link on social media so that we can help more and more people. My team and I have already had the privilege of helping with nearly 30 job search-related documents (resumes, cover letters, etc.) and we still have more in the pipeline waiting to be worked on.

It is clear to me that the Ukrainians using my services, all of whom know at least some English and most of whom have an intermediate level of English or higher, feel unprepared to write their job search documents in English. They are not confident that they will actually land a job because of the lack of their knowledge of professional terminology. And I can say after personally reviewing their resumes that most of them are right about this. I can also say that my reviewers and I have seen many awkward sentences and phrases in these documents that have their roots in their authors not being skilled at crafting complex noun phrases. The quality of the resumes and other documents has varied - from just a few sentences or a stream-of-consciousness paragraph to documents that are already polished resumes just needing a final edit - but it is rare that we do not need to make changes to noun phrases.

This is obviously a very extreme situation where ELs suddenly and urgently need better noun phrases right away though they had not planned to use English for professional purposes before. But it does underscore the fact that many ELs are unprepared to use complex noun phrases, which is the case for learners outside of the Ukrainian refugee crisis as well. In trying to think of how to remedy this situation, it is

clear to me that despite the lack of noun phrase coverage in textbooks, they are still the primary learning materials used in most private language schools (Jordan & Gray, 2019). It is my opinion that to change this we must first enable English language teachers to take action on this issue, which gave rise to my research question: *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English?*

Changing Students' Job Prospects

The quality of an EL's noun phrases in their resume makes a difference in how much information job applicants can convey in the limited space they are allowed in resumes and cover letters (Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014). Whether or not they can convey all of the relevant information clearly and succinctly can affect how professional they sound overall, how well it seems they know the industry in which they are seeking employment, and how suitable they seem for the job for which they are applying. Improving how well students create their noun phrases is not about correctness for correctness' sake; it is about making a good first impression professionally. From having looked at many resume and cover letter examples from ELs fleeing Ukraine, I can say that when these documents are written without appropriate noun phrases they do not tend to make as good an impression. While on a normal day the consequences of not having written an appropriate complex noun phrase are not very severe, the life of a refugee looking for a job in a new country may be quite stressful and may also rely on their ability to become employed.

Given the importance of finding a job to support oneself after fleeing one's homeland and the connection between noun phrases and making a good first impression in writing, it may be an important issue, but it is not a priority right now. The immediate needs of Ukrainian war refugees are numerous, but understandably do not include the skill of improving noun phrases. While this may be a part of helping Ukrainian refugees in their job search efforts, on its own does not deserve to supplant items on one's to-do list such as finding safe and affordable housing. I would argue that we might instead view this as a wake-up call that is informing us as an industry that our GE classes need to have more coverage of noun phrases. If English education publishers are not going to include this material in their textbooks, then teachers need to make it part of our curriculum in other ways. The impetus that solidified this research question in my mind is born out of a very immediate need for better noun phrases. What I propose is that teachers be trained to take a measured approach to noun phrases in their courses and integrate coverage of noun phrases into an otherwise communicative and balanced curriculum that gives noun phrases minimal attention. To this end, this research project will culminate in a set of teacher development workshops which aim to raise teacher awareness about noun phrases, provide them with ways to cover them in class, and provide them with tips for best practices in integrating noun phrases coverage into a curriculum. Since there is little to no coverage of this language point, adding it should show better results for ELs and better outcomes when they engage in English professionally. Implementing this teacher training focus and providing GE students with effective coverage of noun phrases is something that will help not only future refugees, but also students applying to schools

abroad, professionals applying to multinational companies, academics attending or presenting at conferences abroad, among others.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the nature of GE classes and why creating appropriate complex noun phrases in resumes and cover letters may be challenging for students who have studied in such courses. I have also discussed my personal journey of realizing that noun phrases are an important part of grammar that unfortunately tend to be ignored in GE classes. I have further shown via the recent example of Ukrainian refugees the type of impact it may have on one's life to not know how to use appropriate complex noun phrases in English resumes and cover letters. I have demonstrated that in order for students to be able to create professional job search documents such as cover letters and resumes, they need increased awareness of noun phrases. As such, my paper discusses the following research question: *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English?*

Chapter two will discuss how my review of the literature helps shed light on exactly how little noun phrases are covered in GE textbooks and how necessary they are in writing resumes and cover letters in English, thereby demonstrating that there is a gap between what is currently being covered in regard to noun phrases and what is needed by many students. Chapter three will discuss my project, which is a series of teacher development workshops aimed at helping teachers assess their students' need for noun

phrases and help them develop this area of their language appropriately. Finally, chapter four will reflect on my project and the conclusions I have come to as a result.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This capstone project aims to produce teacher training materials that will help learners produce better complex noun phrases appropriate for business texts, such as resumes and cover letters. As such, the research question that guides this paper is: *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English?* In order to support an effective answer to this question and provide useful teacher training materials, this chapter will present background information about key topics related to this question and subsequent project. First, this chapter will examine the needs of adult General English (GE) English learners (ELs), as it is the students' needs that should guide what is covered in class. Second, the chapter will provide details about noun phrases that are necessary to understanding what they are and why they may be challenging for adult GE ELs. Third, this chapter will cover relevant information about resumes and cover letters and will specifically focus on why such documents might be difficult for adult GE ELs to use in order to convey their skills clearly. And finally, this chapter will shed light on the current status of noun phrases in adult GE textbooks by exploring how often and how thoroughly they are covered in these texts.

Adult General English Needs and Andragogy

The needs of adult GE ELs are as diverse as the learners themselves and ever changing (Eyring, 2014; Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Parrish, 2019). While students in

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes such as Business English (BE) are often given a needs analysis before or early on in their course, GE learners have historically not been given the same opportunity, partially due to the perception that if one registers for *General English*, they have no *specific* needs (Seedhouse, 1995). However, there is significant overlap as far as student reasoning for taking these two course types. In fact, multiple studies have confirmed that students enrolled in GE courses also need English for work purposes, including for seeking new or better employment (Huang, 2021; Uchidiuno et al., 2017).

This section will use andragogy as a lens through which to analyze language learners and language learning, as it provides a frame through which to see what adult GE ELs need and why they have these needs. First, it will provide a brief overview of what andragogy is. Second, it will discuss how learners' self-concept as competent adults who can make their own decisions affect their learning and needs. Third, it will discuss how learners' life experiences affect their learning. Fourth, it will discuss how learners' societal roles and their motivations affect their learning. And last, it will cover how learners' views on learning can affect their learning as well. When appropriate, this section will touch on ideas important to English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular so that a view of not just the learner but of the *English* learner will be clear.

Andragogy

Andragogy, first proposed by Lindeman and later refined by Knowles, provides a view of adult learners as whole people and information about how best to help them learn (Henry, 2011; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). It acknowledges adults as being different from children, which leads to andragogy as being different from pedagogy and focusing on

principles relevant to adults in order to provide them with the best learning experiences possible (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), although some of the principles of andragogy can be useful for other age groups as well (Henry, 2011). Being focused on humanist ideas of taking into account the whole person rather than considering just a person's learning abilities (Merriam & Bierema, 2013) matches well with adult learners' preferences, since they prefer to know their learning companions as whole people with backgrounds, preferences and lives outside of the classroom (Uchidiuno et al., 2017). Having looked at the basis of andragogy and before looking into specific principles, it is important to note that its principles are applicable in different ways given different contexts (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

The learner's self-concept

For adults, acknowledgement of the abilities and resources that come with age is important - in short, adults do not want to be treated like children. In fact, it is important to adults that other adults acknowledge that they are "self-directing human [beings]" who are capable of making their own decisions (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 47). An important tool for acknowledging precisely this concept in ELT is the *needs analysis* (NA). Doing a NA with an EL asks them to provide information about themselves, their lives, and how they view their learning in order to inform the curriculum, course structure, lesson content, and more (Fareen, 2017). This can provide a course designer or teacher with information about what language should be included, what communicative acts learners need to perform, what their target speech community is, and more (Fareen, 2017; Huang, 2021; Seedhouse, 1995). NA is commonly understood to be an important part of learner-centered, communicative language teaching methodology (Seedhouse,

1995) and makes a good starting point for beginning any language course (Huang, 2021). Dörnyei (2009) argues that in order for communicative language teaching to remain effective in modern times, “the method needs to be revised according to the latest findings of psycholinguistic research” (p. 33). Including NA as a part of a standard GE English would make an excellent addition to how communicative GE courses were originally conceived. It could help teachers plan their courses or, in scenarios where one is using a textbook, evaluate how useful the textbook is for learners and what might need to be adjusted in the material (Seedhouse, 1995).

Another reason that the learners’ concept of themselves is important is because of *learner agency*. When a learner has agency, they feel that they have control over their own learning (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021). Not only do they feel that they are allowed to have needs, preferences and opinions, but they also feel that these things can “make a difference” in their personal learning process (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021, p. 7). It is not always possible to let learners make all of the choices about their learning, but even simple choices (what topic to discuss, which game to play, etc.) can be useful (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021). Putting together the ideas of self-concept, needs analysis and agency, it is clear that learners’ concept of themselves can be expressed through the needs analysis process and that when course designers and instructors use the information expressed in the needs analysis process the learners will have a greater feeling of agency, thus supporting their self-concept as adults capable of making their own decisions.

Unfortunately, learner agency is rarely attended to in the GE classroom. Not only is learner independence not encouraged enough, but the needs of GE ELs is an area that remains largely unstudied (Ozdemir, 2018; Seedhouse, 1995). Seedhouse posits that this

may be because people do not think it possible to discern the needs of a group as diverse as a group of GE learners (Seedhouse, 1995). Merriam & Bierema (2013) support this in saying that it is “challenging” to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners (p. 10). However, Seedhouse himself has tried and succeeded in analyzing the needs of GE learners (Seedhouse, 1995). Although they were teenagers rather than adults, it is still interesting to note that in a supposedly diverse GE group, he found that they had strikingly similar needs.

Given this example and further examples that will be discussed later in this section, it is clear that a new way to conceptualize the needs of GE learners is needed. Reda (2003) has stated that whereas English and especially English vocabulary used to be taught with one monolithic and vague purpose of doing daily tasks in English in mind in GE classes, it is now understood that “English, the world language, is fast becoming English for an unlimited range of purposes” and so requires much more than this nowadays (p. 268). Reda also believes that the vocabulary taught to ELs needs to be less basic and have more variety, providing learners with a broad base of words and phrases to use in a wide variety of situations. According to Parrish (2019), this new era has already started as English classes for immigrants, for example, have broadened to include more than just language but also culture, digital skills, and more.

The Learner’s Life Experience

Adults bring a lot of life experience to the classroom; this experience is meaningful to them and they value it when it is accounted for in their language classes (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Even within just one class of learners, however, there may be great variety on what that experience is like from learner to learner, making adapting

to learners' experiences difficult for a teacher (Eyring, 2014). However, it is an effort worth making because when adult learners are able to draw on experiences from their own lives and their skills they have built up independently, they find it beneficial to their learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). One way to help learners take advantage of this is to encourage them to participate in self-directed learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), which could be part of a project in a GE course even if that course normally follows a textbook or a habit that the learner is encouraged to establish in their life outside of the classroom (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021). The important thing to remember, however, is that in participating in self-directed learning adult ELs are using their own experiences and skills that they have built over the course of their lives, and according to Gao this makes them "subjects who can act rather than objects who are acted upon" (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021, p. 12).

One more important idea connected to learners' experiences from their lives is that of the "teachable moment" (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 50), also referred to as a "learning moment" (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021, p. 19). The idea is that someone who is learning to cook needs and wants to learn about food and recipes, someone who is applying for refugee status needs and wants to learn to fill in government forms, and someone looking for a job needs and wants to learn about cover letters and resumes. In short, this is a moment in which a learner is primed to learn a particular thing "having significance for learners in terms of their goals or purpose, as determined by their history, previous experience, and future aspirations" (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021, p. 19). It is clear that incorporating learners' past, current, and future life experiences can add immense value for learners in their language classes.

The Learner's Roles and Motivations

The learner's roles and motivations are two separate principles according to andragogy (Merriam & Bierema, 2013) but they will be dealt with together here. The idea of roles is related to what Knowles called a learner's "readiness to learn" (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 52). The theory is that the adult learner has different roles that they fulfill in life that might make them more or less ready to learn, or to learn something in particular. One way of looking at this is by looking at the barriers to studying or learning that an adult may encounter because they need to work, commute, go to the doctor, check on their parents, pay the bills, remember their umbrella and more - each one of these things might drain some energy that would have been used for studying English but now cannot be because it has been spent elsewhere (Eyring, 2014; Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Another, more positive view of this is that in some of their life roles, an adult learner may have a genuine need for the content of a class they are taking, in this case an English language class. Such a situation would, instead of necessarily creating problems because of energy used, create motivation and potentially more energy and additional focus for studying English. While adults have many different roles in life such as single person, spouse, parent, grandparent, friend, etc., Merriam and Bierema (2013) argue that the role of the worker is one of the most consistent throughout adulthood and occurs in combination with many of the other life roles a learner may have. While all of an adult learner's roles might help them be ready for learning or make conflicting demands on their lives and energy, it is this consistent role of worker that makes this area so strongly connected with learners' motivation.

For adult GE classes, we have seen that there has been difficulty assessing what learners' needs, preferences, motivations etc. are for learning English. By looking at the results of three different studies here, it will be shown that it is actually not that difficult at all to figure out what adult GE students want from their English classes. Whether students are refugees, or are embarking on their careers, or anything in between, they tend to want to study English for reasons related to work (Fareen, 2017; Huang, 2021; Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Uchidiuno et al., 2017). A learner's internal motivation is often based on their perception of how they can improve their station in life, and many people perceive work as a way to do just that (Merriam & Bierema, 2013); this is why employment concerns are often an EL's primary concern even in GE classes (Huang, 2021).

For refugees, the focus on employment is a focus on survival. According to studies in Canada and Europe, refugees surveyed on arrival or soon after arriving have very low employment rates, and yet most need to find work in order to have a good life in their new location (Huang, 2021). In Huang's 2021 study, more than 80 percent of Syrian refugees in Canada who were enrolled in English classes provided by the government said they were studying English in order to secure employment. Unfortunately, both students and teachers in this government program felt that there was a significant mismatch between this main goal as perceived by the learners and the content of the program, which they felt was not sufficiently job-focused. Teachers also felt that helping their refugee learners with advanced vocabulary and formal language were often problematic. And while more than 36 percent of the students surveyed reported being

confident with writing in English, this falls well short of the 100 percent who reported needing to write in English, often to secure or maintain a job.

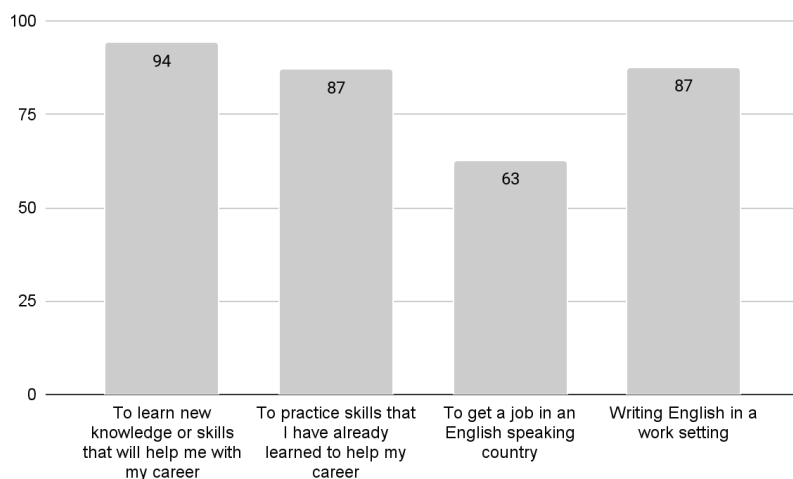
For university students embarking on a career, the focus on English is to improve their odds at a good start in their career. A qualitative study published in 2017 based on ten interviews with final year IT students at a prestigious university in India found that every student interviewed wanted to improve their English to help with future employability (Fareen, 2017). Their professors rated the students as needing help with their English as well, as they felt the students were not clear or precise enough to be hired or work in English (Fareen, 2017). Based on the results of the interviews, an English class was opened and it included units on corporate English, writing CVs/resumes, and writing cover letters (Fareen, 2017).

These two studies, even though they examined adult GE classes, clearly report on the needs and situations of very specific populations and may not reflect the needs of an average adult GE EL. There was also a study done of an English conversation class taught online, a course much more general than ones for IT students or refugees, that had similar results if not even more tipped toward a focus on employment (Uchidiuno et al., 2017). The course in question was a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), a course type that often has many different participants from a variety of backgrounds and locations, targeted toward adult GE ELs. The survey included a number of different reasons that participants might have chosen to take the course and they were instructed to select all that were true for them. Figure 1 below shows all of the work-related options from the survey. As Figure 1 shows, the most commonly selected reason for participants was to learn new skills to help with employment, followed by practicing old skills or

working on writing, and finally followed by seeking employment in another country. All of these options were selected by a clear majority of the participants, with most of them being selected by an overwhelming majority.

Figure 1

MOOC ELs' reasons for taking an English conversation course



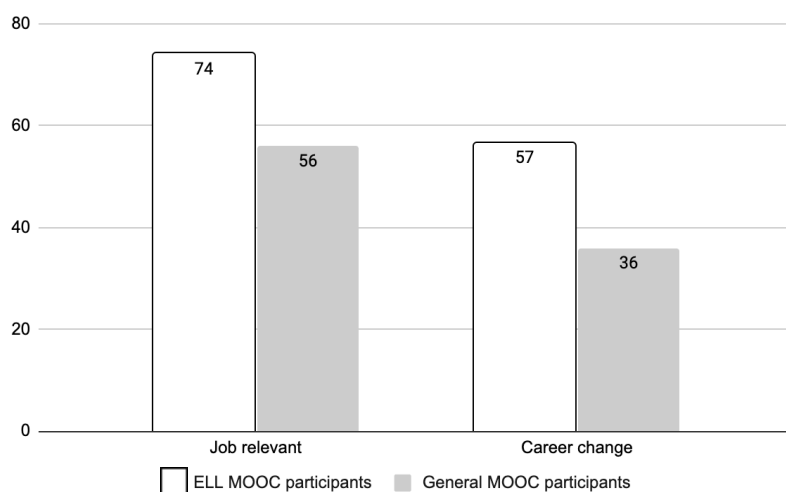
Note. Statistics from Uchidiuno, J. O., Ogan, A., Yarzebinski, E., & Hammer, J. (2017). Going global: Understanding English learners' student motivation in English-language MOOCs. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 28(4), 528-552. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40593-017-0159-7>

In the same article, the researchers compared some of their findings with those of a previous study which surveyed a general population (rather than an EL population) from a different MOOC and compared the results, aiming to show what an EL population's thoughts are in comparison to a more general MOOC population. The researchers worded their questions to the MOOC ELs so they would be similar to those questions from the general MOOC population from the previous study. As shown in Figure 2 below, the responses indicating that the choice to take the MOOC was related to a job was nearly 20 percent higher among ELs than the general population and the responses indicating that

the choice to take the MOOC was related to a career change was just over 20 percent higher among ELs than the general population.

Figure 2

EL versus general MOOC population reason for taking courses



Note. Statistics from Uchidiuno, J. O., Ogan, A., Yarzebinski, E., & Hammer, J. (2017). Going global: Understanding English learners' student motivation in English-language MOOCs. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 28(4), 528-552. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40593-017-0159-7>

This career focus in taking language classes appears to be part of a goal to excel in one's career. Adults tend to have their ideal career path laid out and want to succeed in this (Eyring, 2014). The idea nowadays is that specialized training can help someone succeed in their career and even move across borders to make this happen (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). When dealing with the study of additional languages, it is clear that even those who are highly educated in their field may need some help transferring the skills they honed to a new language before they are able to truly succeed in this field (Fareen, 2017). The need for English for work was perceived to be even higher among those who live in English-speaking countries, which researchers theorize is because there is a more prevalent need for English in their job searches and workplaces (Uchidiuno et al., 2017).

It is clear that, in line with andragogical principles, ELs view the role of worker in their adult lives as being highly motivational in their language learning.

The Learner's Views on Learning

Finally, andragogy addresses the learner's views on learning via the principles Knowles calls the "problem-centered orientation" and "the need to know" (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 55). This is very closely connected with motivation as addressed in the previous part of this section, as one thing that learners are particularly interested in and motivated by is problem-solving. Adult learners find the immediacy of problem-solving to be more engaging (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Not only is it more engaging to solve a problem rather than learn merely for the sake of learning, but it leaves learners feeling empowered to use their agency to solve problems in their lives (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021) and allows those learners living in an English-speaking community to not just survive rather to "thrive in their new communities" (Parrish, 2019, p. 1).

In addition to helping learners focus on the immediate application of their learning with the goal of problem-solving, learners tend to view relevant material more positively (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). In fact, Dörnyei (2009) says the principle of making learning "personally significant" for learners as part of communicative language teaching "is just as valid now as when it was first formulated" in the 1970s (p. 41). Seeing material as relevant can come from seeing it as a solution to one of their problems in life, meaning that it caters directly to their problem-centered orientation. Seeing material as relevant to their lives and helpful to their station in life in turn increases learners' motivation (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), creating a sort of cycle where when one principle of andragogy is supported in a course or classroom the rest are lifted up as well.

In fact, all of the principles are closely connected and an improvement in how any one is viewed by teachers and learners can help the others be viewed more positively as well (Henry, 2011).

Genre Analysis

In addition to knowing about learners' needs, it is important to know about the type of texts they need to write in order to help them succeed. Genre analysis is the study of texts that have similar aims in order to find out what similarities they have as far as content covered, type of language used, organization of ideas, and formatting (Poppi, 2015). This is commonly done with many text types, including texts commonly written for business purposes. Knowing more about genre analysis for different business text types is considered a helpful practice for those who participate in international business communication (Poppi, 2015). In my experience throughout my career and more recently with Ukrainian refugees, adult ELs writing their resumes and cover letters in English tend to be most worried about their language accuracy. However, it may behoove them to pay more attention to the content, organization, and formatting of their documents instead. In fact, many recruiters consider a document being appropriate for its genre - so a resume that seems like a resume and a cover letter that seems like a cover letter - to be more important than absolute language accuracy (Kankaanranta, 2006; Poppi, 2015). This discussion of genre analysis will first address business writing in general and then address resumes and cover letters in particular.

Business Writing

In the business world, writing is just as important as speaking and, in fact, is one of the top skills that employers are looking for their employees - both old and new - to

master (Mizrahi, 2015; Viswanathan, 2010). For all their similarities, speaking and writing in business also have their differences. Business writing involves a level of detail unmatched by speaking simply because it requires all of the pertinent information to be written down (Fox, 2022). There are no paralinguistic features such as intonation, facial expressions, props, or gestures to help convey meaning - instead, in addition to worrying about grammar and spelling, a business writer also has to worry about appropriate levels of formality, directness, tone, focus, and more (Fox, 2022). In order to assess what makes good business writing and how ELs can produce good business writing, this section will look at qualities of good business communication in general, qualities of good business writing, and processes and tips for producing such writing.

Good business communication in general, whether written or spoken, relies heavily on good content. Good content is true and honest and avoids undue bias (Mizrahi, 2015). In addition to this, good content is timely, as nobody is dying to hear about the most successful marketing trends from the last decade, the stock they should have bought last week, or their ideal job for which the closing date has just passed (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). All of this content also needs to be well organized (Viswanathan, 2010). Even with good content and organization, language used in business communication is of the utmost importance; it should be clear, direct, and straightforward (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). And finally, it is important to acknowledge that it is not just writing; rather, it is communication (Viswanathan, 2010). To communicate effectively, one should use an appropriate level of formality to the task, text type, and audience (Mizrahi, 2015) and, in many cases, specifically ask for the reader to provide feedback to what was written (Viswanathan, 2010).

In addition to embodying the qualities of good business communication generally, good business writing should be clear and simple, impactful, and oftentimes adapted for the digital age. To be clear, it should be written in the type of prose typical of a conversation and flow smoothly from one idea to the next (Mizrahi, 2015). There should be clarity in the ideas and language used to convey them (Mizrahi, 2015) - there should be no ambiguity in business writing, since those reading it would prefer not to have to read it twice (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). Some recommend that for clarity the writer should avoid the use of the passive voice (Mizrahi, 2015), although we will later see some more details about, and exceptions to this rule. To keep business documents simple, a writer should be as concise as possible (Fox, 2022; Mizrahi, 2015; Seglin & Coleman, 2012) and resist the urge to add unnecessary details (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). A good business writer should also use simple words and short paragraphs (Mizrahi, 2015).

Good business writing should also be impactful. One way to accomplish this is by using a positive voice, or by using positive constructions rather than using a negative sentence with words such as *no* or *not* (Mizrahi, 2015). Another way to do this is to generally use a variety of sentence types, which involves both starting sentences with different words each time rather than always repeating the same phrases, and also varying the length of sentences used (Mizrahi, 2015). An exception to this would be to occasionally use parallel sentences or structures to drive home a point (Mizrahi, 2015). Business writers can also add impact to their texts by using strong, specific verbs and nouns (Mizrahi, 2015) and making sure that the most important information in a sentence is either at the front or the back (and not in the middle) of a sentence (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). In an effort to adapt the many rules of business writing to the digital age,

Kankaanranta (2006) recommends following this abridged version of commonly accepted rules of business communication and writing: “(a) Make the main point early, (b) make it explicitly, and (c) make the recipient/reader feel good” (p. 222). While making the reader feel good may be accomplished by strategies such as complimenting them or their work, this paper is more concerned with making the reader feel good by means of making noun phrases clear, easy to understand, and packed with information as a way to avoid unnecessary wordiness elsewhere in a text.

As for how to accomplish the feat of creating good business writing, there are some long-term goals to aspire to and a procedure writers can use to guide them through the process of producing a business document. One common recommendation for building vocabulary in any field, which is applicable to business as well, is reading (Fox, 2022). Specifically, if a writer wants to have a broader vocabulary for their business documents, it then follows that they should read a variety of business documents. And for those who find that sitting down to write a business document is overwhelming, they should work to make a habit of thinking first and foremost about the process of writing rather than focusing on the end product (Mizrahi, 2015). This should help them to ignore the possibility of making too many mistakes in their work and instead focus just on producing a draft that can be edited later (Seglin & Coleman, 2012).

There are many who recommend similar processes, but all of the steps discussed here for producing a good business document will be described as part of Mizrahi’s (2015) system called *AWE*, which stands for *Assess, Write, Edit*. A writer can begin assessing by thinking about the purpose of the document and the audience for which it is intended, or the reader (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). They should expand on these ideas by

committing to a strong focus on the purpose of the document throughout the text and writing down all of their ideas about how to accomplish this goal, without worrying about which ones they will use in the end or what order their ideas will appear in (Dethier, 2013; Seglin & Coleman, 2012). They can then do research or information gathering as needed (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). And after this they can organize their ideas in preparation for writing (Dethier, 2013; Seglin & Coleman, 2012). When they write, they should write a draft without worrying too much about the final product, make sure they avoid plagiarism by using their own words, and then let their writing “marinate” before editing (Mizrahi, 2015, p. 4).

The importance of editing after drafting is strongly emphasized in numerous works (Fox, 2022; Mizrahi, 2015; Seglin & Coleman, 2012; Wallwork, 2019). Fox (2022) recommends editing a business document at least three times and focusing on a different area during each read of the text. Mizrahi (2015) adds to this by suggesting that the writer move from a general to a more narrow focus. They recommend moving from focusing on audience and purpose, to paragraphs, to sentences, and then to all of the little details encompassed in proofreading such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (Mizrahi, 2015). For effective proofreading, it is emphasized that spellcheck and grammar check that come with word processing programs are not sufficient in this area - writers should read their work and proofread themselves in addition to using these tools (Fox, 2022; Mizrahi, 2015; Seglin & Coleman, 2012; Wallwork, 2019). Dethier (2012) also recommends then doing one final read to make sure that the aim of the document is still being met and that its intended audience will agree that this is the case.

Resumes and Cover Letters

The goal of resumes and cover letters is clear: to get the writer hired (Mizrahi, 2015). This may include a number of other steps after submitting these documents such as filling in an application form or being interviewed, but the end goal remains the same. In the sense that the goal is to get the reader to buy into something, resumes are much like sales documents - the only difference being that the product they are selling is an employee (Dethier, 2013; Viswanathan, 2010). Writing effective resumes and cover letters is a skill that serves a person well throughout their career as they move from one job to another, seek promotions, or seek employment in new locations or companies (Mizrahi, 2015). Unfortunately for job seekers and especially for those writing in a language that is not their native language, this has the potential to require new words and phrases each time one applies to a new position. Since it is recommended to tailor these documents to each position for which an applicant seeks, it may require rewriting or editing to better describe the ways in which an applicant matches with a job or company each time (Dethier, 2013; Viswanathan, 2010).

Resumes. Derous and Ryan (2017) describe resumes as “applicant-generated, annotated career summaries of job qualifications” (p. 114). Ninety-eight percent of North American recruiters use it for their first screening of job applicants (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2006 as cited in Derous & Ryan, 2019, p. 114). According to this statistic, it is a very important document. But despite having such a high level of importance, recruiters dedicate only about two minutes to their initial reading of any resume (Viswanathan, 2010). The main goal of a resume is to summarize the job applicant and their relevant experience and skills (Dethier, 2012) but doing this in a format that is easily

readable in about two minutes can present a real challenge to some applicants.

Viswanathan (2010) says that to deal with this conundrum, job applicants should strive to make their resumes informative yet brief, and easy to read. This is sound advice but potentially tricky for the average job seeker to apply well for when there will be an individual reading their resume. Then add to that the fact that many companies have software that scans resumes nowadays instead of reading them themselves. Not only do resumes need to be attractive and easy for an individual recruiter to read in about two minutes, but they also need to have all of the qualities that make it easy for software to read. The software depends on keywords input by the recruiters, and so job applicants must use not just phrases with similar meanings but must use exact phrases - often noun phrases - that have been entered into the software to register as a good match for the job (Viswanathan, 2010).

Cover Letters. Business letters follow many of the same rules for business writing in general listed above, but there are some additional considerations. As with other business texts, the writer should be brief - Seglin & Coleman (2012) recommend one page maximum. Overall, the letter should leave the reader with a good impression of the writer. A business letter, as its intent is to communicate with someone, should appear to be written by a person for one other specific person or group of people rather than a form letter that could be sent to anyone (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). It should also have what is referred to as a “‘you’ attitude”, which focuses on the reader (the *you* referred to in the title) and their needs and desires rather than on the writer (Seglin & Coleman, 2012, p. 15). These rules are still applicable today despite the fact that paper business letters are hardly sent at all these days (Poppi, 2015).

Email, it seems, has taken over as the preferred way to communicate in business (Poppi, 2015; Seglin & Coleman, 2012). With the innovation of business emails, some old rules of writing business letters have stayed the same while others have gone by the wayside, and still others are developing right now (Poppi, 2015). There are some old phrases that simply do not work in emails as they did in letters such as *enclosed*, for which we now write *attached* in an email and *under separate cover* which may also be written as *attached* nowadays (Poppi, 2015). But it is still a good idea to use polite language and not be too informal over email (Poppi, 2015; Seglin & Coleman, 2012). Overall, Poppi (2015) advises thinking of business emails as having two separate sub-genres - *email emails* and *business letter emails*. An *email email* is based on the written genre of memos and is very informal - there may be just a line or two and there may not even be a greeting (Poppi, 2015). It is the type of email one might write to someone who is a close colleague to let them know some information or make a short request. A *business letter email* follows the format of a business letter more closely and, while it trades the formal headers of a business letter for the subject line and automatically-generated headers of an email, seems more like a business letter (Poppi, 2015). It is the type of email one would write to their superior, someone in another department that they do not know well, or someone from outside the company or workplace. Cover letters surely fall under the sub-genre of *business letter emails*.

For the purpose of this paper, the cover letters referred to will be what Viswanathan (2010) calls *a solicited letter of application*, which is a cover letter accompanying a resume for a job about which an ad was made public. A cover letter should be short and be about one page in length, like other business letters, and have four

to five paragraphs maximum (Viswanathan, 2010). The tone should be humble and yet with an air of confidence (Dethier, 2013). The first paragraph must be stellar, as this is a “make or break” moment for any job applicant where recruiters will not make it past if they are not impressed already (Viswanathan, 2010, p. 225). And in order to create the ideal cover letter, a job applicant cannot use the exact same phrasing that they use in their resume - the phrasing in the cover letter must be similar but somewhat unique in order to impress recruiters (Viswanathan, 2010).

Perception of ELs’ Resumes and Cover Letters

It is difficult to say why these particular documents in these particular formats are what we use for job applications, especially since resume screening itself is not a particularly well-studied area (Derous & Ryan, 2017). But, as was mentioned before, the use of the resume is pervasive in recruitment (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2006 as cited in Derous & Ryan, 2017). And the use of cover letters, even when not strictly requested in a job advertisement, is considered a measure of how “professional” an applicant is (Mizrahi, 2015, p. 93). And while the use of algorithms to assess resumes and cover letters is theoretically fairer for job candidates, society as a whole is far from having discovered and agreed upon what information can and should be searched for by this technology (Derous & Ryan, 2017).

Minorities. Employment discrimination against any minority group nowadays may sometimes be intentional, but largely tends to happen unconsciously by using information that implies the otherness of the candidate (Derous & Ryan, 2017). While much of the available research is in regards to ethnic minorities, the principles of how such discrimination occurs could be applied to ELs and some ELs that are also part of an

ethnic minority community. Discrimination against minorities often happens early on when screening applicants and can be based on information such as an applicant's name, address, education, work history, community or organization affiliations, or skills (Davis & Muir, 2003; Derous & Ryan, 2017). When there is so little time to read resumes and cover letters (Dethier, 2012; Viswanathan, 2010) ethnic and other markers appearing on candidates' resumes and cover letters stand out more when recruiters look for a candidate who might fit in with the company culture based on very little information that they have read (Derous & Ryan, 2017). While some members of minority groups feel the ethnic markers on their resumes and cover letters may help them stand out, many find it stressful and disheartening (Davis & Muir, 2003).

Linguistic Gatekeeping. The use of language and, more specifically, language errors as a means of deciding which job candidates should move forward in the hiring process can be problematic for both Native English Speakers (NESs) and ELs (Wallwork, 2019). When working on resumes and cover letters, there is no room for error in these documents since even a minor language error may cause your application to be rejected (Mizrahi, 2015; Viswanathan, 2010). And if you are an EL who has listed their English language skills on their resume, then it is essential that all of your written work submitted as part of your application is error-free (Wallwork, 2019). Studies in the United Kingdom show that language errors on resumes and cover letters are one of the top ten things recruiters dislike in applications (Wallwork, 2019). In fact, more than half of the recruiters surveyed said it is the number one reason that they reject applicants and that more than 90 percent of applicants have too many language errors on the first page of

their application materials to proceed to the next stage in the hiring process (Wallwork, 2019).

Noun Phrases in Resumes and Cover Letters

The parts, types, and uses of noun phrases will be covered in a more in-depth way later in this chapter, but it is worth previewing some of this information and describing how noun phrases are used in resumes and cover letters. It has also been emphasized that recruiters do not read resumes or cover letters in great detail early on in the hiring process, so fitting as much information as possible into a small space is essential. Noun phrases serve to condense information (Kies, 1985), which is a useful skill when looking to fit all of this information onto one or just a few pages. And the more complex a noun phrase is, the more densely it is packed with information, and the more information you can fit on your one or few pages. For areas written in prose such as a professional summary section on a resume or in the cover letter, it is also useful to note that some noun phrases that are less densely packed with information (simple noun phrases or shorter complex noun phrases) can reference previous information and still be clearer than a pronoun would be (Kies, 1985). It should also be noted that word choice within noun phrases is important. Adjectives are pre-modifiers for noun phrases and there are many positive and negative adjectives taught in GE classes according to this author's textbook analysis, but it is not recommended to pepper positive adjectives throughout a resume and cover letter; instead an applicant should list facts and actions that portray them in a positive light (Dethier, 2013).

Another important fact to note is that many of the content areas that should be covered in resumes and cover letters (i.e. work experience, education, awards, skills, etc.)

are all nouns, so it follows that in order to list all of this information a job applicant must use noun phrases to do so (Viswanathan, 2010). As mentioned earlier, recruiters prefer that the head nouns in these noun phrases be strong choices, so they should be positive and specific rather than general (Mizrahi, 2015). As for the noun phrases, there tend to be many complex noun phrases used to describe all of these areas in both the resume and cover letter (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). Simple noun phrases are used more for the logistical arrangements involved in proceeding with the hiring process, so discussions, interviews, or further documentation that may be required, for example (Seglin & Coleman, 2012). In both documents it is common to make use of parallel phrasing, so ELs must be aware of what types of phrases and noun phrases they are using in order to replicate them in other relevant phrases (Mizrahi, 2012).

Noun Phrases

A noun phrase is made of a noun and various optional modifiers that affect its meaning. A simple noun phrase consists of a noun optionally preceded by a determiner, and a complex noun phrase is a noun optionally preceded by a determiner that is also modified, either by a premodifier that occurs before the noun or a postmodifier that occurs after the noun (Crystal, 2002). This paper will primarily focus on complex noun phrases, as these are the ones that ELs need help creating.

Noun phrases help writers condense information into shorter chunks and thus enable them to fit more information into a shorter text (Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014). It is more efficient to write “I am a detail-oriented Head Bookkeeper with 9+ years of experience working in the fishing industry” than it is to write “I am detail oriented. I have more than nine years of work experience. My experience is all in the fishing industry. I

am experienced in and seeking a position as a Head Bookkeeper.” Nominalization of verbs and adjectives as part of complex noun phrases is not a stylistic feature that ELs can disregard; rather, nominalization serves various purposes in business writing in general and in writing resumes and cover letters in particular (Kies, 1985). Without nominalization, these documents could not convey needed information to potential employers or give a professional impression of the resume writer. For example, if instead of “advanced comprehension of Spanish” (with “comprehension” being a nominalization of “comprehend”) a resume writer puts “I understand Spanish” they will appear less professional. This section will first clarify which types of noun phrases will be discussed as part of this section. Second, it will describe the different purposes for which noun phrases are used in business writing, with a focus on business writing such as resumes and cover letters. The third part of this section will discuss the parts, obligatory and optional, included in noun phrases. In the fourth part of this section, it will discuss different types of noun phrases common in business writing such as resumes and cover letters. And finally, it will touch on areas to do with noun phrases that need further research that would benefit EL resume and cover letter writers.

Noun Phrases to be Included

The guiding principle for which noun phrases to include in this paper and in the teacher development workshops that comprise the project resulting from it is the idea that some noun phrases are more useful than others when writing resumes and cover letters. Of these useful noun phrases, complex noun phrases are more difficult for ELs to create in English than for native English speakers. Complex noun phrases, those with at least one premodifier or postmodifier (Crystal, 2002), are useful for resumes and cover letters,

but they cause ELs trouble when they are writing. Below are some examples of complex noun phrases that might appear in a cover letter or resume with the head noun in [brackets]:

- An experienced math [tutor] who has worked with a variety of learners
- A great [opportunity] to be involved in the non-profit sector
- The right [fit] for your growing organization

Because the types of nouns that occur most frequently as the head of a complex noun phrase are common nouns, those are the ones that will be the focus of this section (Biber, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Pronouns are not as widely used in informational writing and proper nouns are simply not modified as frequently unless by an appositive in the news (Biber, 1999). Although common nouns comprise only one of the four types of nouns most commonly modified in writing (Biber, 1999), they are the ones that carry the most meaning as the others are pronouns and demonstratives. Informational writing, a genre that resumes and cover letters are a part of, carries a higher burden for lexical density, which means it needs to include more information in fewer words than other text types (Biber, 1999). This makes common nouns a better choice than pronouns or demonstratives used as nouns for writing a resume or cover letter.

Why Use Complex Noun Phrases

The previous part of this section already discussed in general terms the fact that complex noun phrases are useful for documents such as resumes and cover letters. This part of the section will elaborate on the various purposes that complex noun phrases can serve in these genres. At the heart of why job seekers use complex noun phrases in their writing is the issue of information density. Resumes and cover letters are genres where “space is at a premium”, which makes them perfect candidates for using complex noun

phrases (Halliday, 2014, p. 378). This is because expanding a noun phrase with pre- and post-modifiers allows a writer to add to the meaning of the sentence without adding things such as verbs and other grammatical words that come with adding a whole new sentence (Biber & Gray, 2011). In fact, informational writing has a far higher prevalence of dense noun phrases, including ones that are four words long or more (Biber, 1999). The need to pack informational writing in general so densely with information via complex noun phrases follows the trend that Biber and Gray (2011) call an “information explosion” in modern times in which the population, which has access to a massive amount of information, wants to have more information in the texts they read (p. 234).

Part of the reason why writers can achieve higher information density nowadays is that there are more noun phrases for writers to use (Biber & Gray, 2011). A 1988 study showed that complex noun phrases, especially those pre-modified by adjectives or post-modified by prepositional phrases, had already been very common in informational writing for some time (Biber & Gray, 2011). Studies since then have shown that nouns used as pre-modifiers and prepositional phrases used as post-modifiers have seen a massive increase in use in the same text types and that this increase is not merely a means of style affecting how we write information; rather, more word combinations have become acceptable in complex noun phrases, which has made many more noun phrases with new meanings available for use (Biber & Gray, 2011). This change does not affect merely how we write things; it is broadening the variety of things we are able to write about.

Another reason that complex noun phrases, as part of a wide variety of noun phrases, are useful is for textual cohesion (Biber, 1999). The exact same noun phrase,

simple or complex, may be used throughout a text simply because this is the standard or most accepted way to refer to something (Biber, 1999). Or using a slightly modified version of what was originally a long complex noun phrase is sometimes a clearer way to refer back to that original noun phrase than a pronoun (Mizrahi, 2015). In fact, Biber (1999) provides a common scheme for how what starts off as a complex noun phrase on first mention in an academic text can - mention by mention - be reduced to a pronoun later on in the same text. The examples in Table 1 below show that, although the pattern is not followed completely in resumes and cover letters, there are some tendencies that still hold true.

Table 1

Resume and cover letter examples of Biber's noun phrase progression

Noun + postmodifier	Premodifier + noun	Common noun	Pronoun
the right [opportunity] for me to pursue	a great [opportunity]		[It]
[skills] that will suit this role well		these [skills]	
[one] of the largest medical corporations west of the Mississippi River			[It]
	Administrative [Assistants]		[They]

Notes. Noun phrases in gray rows are from *Cover letter samples*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>. Noun phrases in white row are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

The examples include [brackets] around each head noun and are arranged so that each row contains different ways in which a model resume or cover letter refers to the same thing, and so that within each row the examples progress chronologically from left to

right. While not every document uses every type of noun phrase in the table, it is clear that each document starts off with a denser complex noun phrase in the beginning and then the level of detail declines (along with reader need for this complexity) with each mention later on in the same text.

And finally it is possible to use nominalizations in particular in a way similar to that in which the passive voice is used - to avoid mentioning an agent and anonymize texts to an extent (Kies, 1995). For example, below are some phrases with nominalizations in [brackets] that show why it may be convenient to avoid mentioning the agent of an action:

- [Discrimination] against People of Color
- A host of rash [decisions] have led to a number of unfortunate changes
- These [assumptions] are not helping the group dynamics

It is clear in particular that saying who is discriminating, who is making rash decisions and whose assumptions are destructive might not be well-received, so nominalizations are convenient and less accusatory.

The Parts of Noun Phrases

Noun phrases can be short, long, or anything in between. A simple noun phrase is one that has a single noun and may or may not be preceded by a determiner (Crystal, 2002). A complex noun phrase is a single noun that may or may not be preceded by a determiner and is also modified in another way by premodifiers occurring before the noun or postmodifiers occurring after the noun (Crystal, 2002).

Table 2
Sample noun phrases

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
a	useful	member	of Innovation Advertising's team
the		Director	of Program Development
	quarterly budget	reports	
		people	
your		time	

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Examples of noun phrases from resumes can be found in Table 2 above, showing phrases with some determiners, some premodifiers, head nouns, and some postmodifiers. As can be seen in Table 2, the only element necessary for a noun phrase is a head noun. Noun phrases with only head nouns (like *people*) or determiners and head nouns (like *your time*) are simple noun phrases. In addition to a head noun and optional determiner, a complex noun phrase also has a modifier before or after the head noun.

Determiners. This is one of the smaller groups of words that modify a noun in a noun phrase, as it is a closed lexical category, meaning there is actually a set list of determiners to refer to (Humphrey, 2012). Examples of both simple and complex noun phrases including determiners can be seen below in Table 3.

Table 3
Sample noun phrases with determiners

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
the		coordination	of service calls
all	applicant	information	
an	active	certification	in Basic Life Support
your		clients	
		people	

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Determiners are optional for both simple and complex noun phrases (Crystal, 2002) and can be divided into two categories: pointers and quantifiers (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The pointers can be further categorized into articles (a, an, the, etc.), demonstratives (these, those, the this, etc.) and possessives (my, your, our, etc.) (Givon, 1993). Words or phrases that clearly perform the function of quantifying such as *three/three of* can be quantifiers, as well as other words and phrases such as *all* or *some of* (Givon, 1993). Quantifiers tend to be adjacent to the nouns they modify, but occasionally are separated by an intervening word or phrase (Givon, 1993).

Premodifiers. This section will address general information about premodifiers, adjectives as premodifiers, nouns as premodifiers, and participles as premodifiers. Premodifiers precede a noun and add to its meaning, e.g. “medical skills” in Table 4 below has the premodifier “medical” modifying the head noun “skills”. Premodifiers are more common than postmodifiers, possibly because they tend to be much shorter than postmodifiers and so they do a better job of saving space (Biber, 1999; Halliday, 2014).

This can be considered a potential benefit of premodifiers - they have more word economy than postmodifiers. A potential drawback, however, is that they are not always as clear as postmodifiers; this is especially the case for nouns pre-modified by nouns (Biber, 1999). This may be the reason that premodifiers are not often used for first mentions of a noun within a text and are instead used for later mentions of a noun within the same text - because a premodifier's lack of specificity makes it inappropriate to explain as much as is needed on an initial encounter but sufficient on further encounters (Biber, 1999).

Adjectives. Adjective phrases are far and away the most common premodifiers in a noun phrase (Biber, 1999). Because they are short, they are extremely useful for genres or for texts where economy of words is important, which makes them ideal for use and very common for genres like news articles (Biber, 1999; Halliday, 2014). There are two basic types of adjective premodifiers: describers and classifiers (Halliday, 2014).

Table 4 below shows two examples of noun phrases where the head noun is modified by an adjective. The first example uses a describer, *personal*, and the second example uses a classifier, *medical*.

Table 4
Sample noun phrases with adjectives

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun
	personal	knowledge
my	medical	skills

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Describers are also known as gradable adjectives and a noun can embody all, none, or some of the quality they denote (Biber, 1999). Examples of describers include *good*, *smart*, and *timely*. Classifiers are also known as ungradable adjectives and a noun can embody either all or none of the quality they denote (Biber, 1999). Examples of classifiers include *American*, *best*, and *medical*.

Nouns. Historically, there were very few ways in which nouns were allowed to be used as premodifiers for other nouns, but in the 20th century the amount of acceptable uses increased in informational writing. The use of nouns to pre-modify other nouns increased hugely, and the increase, although it has leveled off some, continues to this day (Biber & Gray, 2011). Research shows that noun premodifiers account for about 30 to 40 percent of premodifiers in written news and academic prose, but no numbers were available for business writing, let alone resumes and cover letters (Biber, 1999). Table 5 below shows examples of complex noun phrases with a head noun being modified by another noun.

Table 5
Sample noun phrases with noun premodifiers

Premodifier	Head noun
travel	arrangements
business development	events
Media Relations	Coordinator
Arts	Ambassador
Sales	Manager

Notes. Noun phrases in white rows are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Noun premodifiers can cover a range of topics and functions that would be useful in business writing in general and in writing resumes and cover letters in particular. For example, Biber (1999) mentions noun premodifiers of identity, purpose, location, institution, and specialization just to name a few. Premodifying nouns of identity and purpose would be useful for writing a professional summary at the top of a resume. Premodifying nouns of location and institution would be useful in writing about previous educational institutions and workplaces in a resume or cover letter. Furthermore, premodifying nouns of specialization would be perfect for writing one's job titles and descriptions of the jobs, which are parts of the resume that this author noticed ELs struggling with significantly.

It should be noted that singular nouns are much more common than plural nouns when used as premodifiers (Biber, 1999). If a noun phrase is very dense and having the noun premodifier written as a plural rather than a singular noun helps to clarify the meaning of the complex phrase, then it would be advisable to use a plural noun (Biber, 1999). The three examples in gray rows at the bottom of Table 5 above show examples of plural nouns (*relations*, *arts* and *sales*) used as a premodifier in a complex noun phrase. Clear-cut cases include when the modifying noun is a proper noun and in the name the noun is plural, or when a noun only has a plural form (*news*, *arts*, etc.) (Biber, 1999).

Participles. Participle premodifiers are much less common than adjective or noun premodifiers (Biber, 1999). Table 6 below shows two examples of noun phrases with participle premodifiers. The first example uses a regular past participle ending in *-ed* as a premodifier and the second one uses a present participle ending in *-ing* as a premodifier.

Table 6
Sample noun phrases with participle premodifiers

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun
a	standardized	process
	filing	duties

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

These are the only types of participle premodifiers: present participle modifiers ending in *-ing*, and past participle modifiers usually ending in *-ed*. Of these two, past participle modifiers are more common in formal writing such as academic texts (Biber, 1999) although there are no statistics available for business writing such as resumes and cover letters.

Head Noun. The head noun is the only word in a bare simple noun phrase. It is the one word that is more important than all of the others in a determined and/or complex noun phrase. The head noun determines the class of the noun phrase as a whole and has the largest influence on its meaning (Givon, 2014). Sometimes it may be necessary to look through a number of dependents with noun phrases in them in order to find the ultimate head, or the noun that controls the main noun phrase and all of its dependents (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Table 7 below shows a variety of noun phrases and their accompanying verb phrases.

Table 7
Head nouns controlling verbs

Noun phrase	Verb phrase	Possible changes
[CSU]	<u>was</u> not hosting events	CSU's [departments] <u>were</u>
My efficiency [scores] in past two years	<u>were</u> at 94% and 97%	My efficiency [score] <u>was</u>
My previous [work] as a Field Technician	<u>has</u> taught me many things	My previous [jobs] <u>have</u>

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Cover letter samples*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>

One common test to see which noun in a noun phrase is the head noun is to see which of the nouns controls the verb (Crystal, 2010). In the *Noun Phrase* column on the left, the head noun is in [brackets]. In the *Verb phrase* column in the middle, the verb controlled by the head noun is underlined. In the *Possible Changes* column on the right items that would replace the head noun are in [brackets] and items that would replace the verb are underlined. It should be noted that in the third example the original head noun *work* is singular and so the verb *to have* is in the form *has*. *Work* here is uncountable so it cannot simply be changed to *works*, but it can be replaced with *jobs* to keep a similar meaning. With the head noun being changed to *jobs* then the verb changes to *have*.

Postmodifiers. This section will address postmodifiers in general, then it will go on to address prepositional phrases, relative clauses, non-finite clauses, and, briefly, complement clauses. Postmodifiers, also called *qualifiers*, follow a noun and add to its meaning, e.g. in “employment in healthcare” in Table 8 below “employment” is the head noun and “in healthcare” is a postmodifier that follows it. Postmodifiers are often longer than premodifiers (Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Their

complexity allows them to describe nouns in more detail than premodifiers but it also requires the use of more words and therefore does not offer quite the same economy of words as premodifiers do (Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Because of this, they are more common in writing than speech and extremely common in more formal informational writing such as academic prose and news articles (Biber, 1999). They are well-suited to initial mentions of nouns in texts as they are able to offer more information than a simple noun phrase or a complex noun phrase with a premodifier and are therefore better suited to orienting the reader (Biber, 1999).

Phrases. Although historically prepositional phrases were not used very heavily, their use has grown in informational writing (Biber & Gray, 2011) and today prepositional phrases are by far the most common postmodifiers in noun phrases in these genres, accounting for 65 to 80 percent of postmodifiers used (Biber, 1999). Table 8 below shows examples of complex noun phrases with prepositional phrases as postmodifiers. The examples show a variety of prepositions, all of which are underlined.

Table 8

Sample noun phrases with prepositional phrases as postmodifiers

Head noun	Postmodifier
employment	<u>in</u> health care
issues	<u>for</u> supply orders of a sum of over \$500 per year
course	<u>of</u> three years

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Prepositional phrases are very common in lexically dense texts that require great economy of words (Biber, 1999), which may be one of the reasons that they are a common cause for errors in business writing by ELs (Mizrahi, 2015).

Although there are numerous prepositions, just six prepositions alone (three of which appear in Table 8 above) introduce 90 percent of all prepositional phrases used as postmodifiers: *of*, *in*, *for*, *on*, *to* and *with* (Biber, 1999). Postmodifying prepositional phrases introduced by *of* make up 60 to 65 percent of the entire category and perform numerous functions (Biber, 1999). The other five prepositions have percentages in the single digits but perform numerous functions; there are seven more prepositions that have about a one percent share each and have multiple functions; and all other prepositions introducing postmodifying phrases are extremely rare and used only in very specific circumstances or for very specific functions (Biber, 1999). Adverb phrases, adjective phrases and reflexive pronoun phrases also exist as postmodifiers, but they are extremely rare (Biber, 1999).

Relative Clauses. Relative clauses can be divided into two types: restrictive or defining clauses, and non-restrictive or non-defining clauses (Biber, 1999). In informational writing, defining clauses are much more common than non-defining clauses, making up 85 percent of academic prose and 70 percent of journalistic writing (Biber, 1999). No statistics were available for business writing or resumes and cover letters in particular. In Table 9 below there are two complex noun phrases with relative clause postmodifiers.

Table 9
Sample noun phrases with relative clause postmodifiers

Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
shelter	animals	<u>that</u> needed medical care
additional	information	<u>which</u> increased the size of the clientele by 5%

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

Both relative clauses listed above in Table 9 are defining. Defining relative clauses are used to identify what someone is writing about, while non-defining relative clauses are used simply to provide extra information (Biber, 1999). As a result, resumes and cover letters may follow the pattern of using more defining relative clauses because they often want to identify which company, duty or object they are writing about. However, they rarely seek to add more information solely for information's sake because they seek more word economy than this would allow for.

An important part of a relative clause is the relativizer, which encompasses relative pronouns and relative adverbs (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Of all relativizers, *that*, *which* and *who* are the most common - with *which* and *who* being the most common in writing (Biber, 1999). Two of the three most common relativizers listed here are included and underlined in Table 9 above. While hard and fast rules do not exist for choosing the right relativizer, Biber (1999) provides some strong tendencies for ELs to be aware of:

- When referring to people in writing, almost always use *who*
- Almost never use *which* when referring to people
- Use *that* with defining clauses and *which* with non-defining clauses
- In British English use *which* more; in American English use *that* more

Despite these strong tendencies, relative clauses in general remain a difficult area for ELs, who frequently make errors with them in business writing (Mizrahi, 2015). One common issue is that ELs will omit the relativizer when it is not appropriate, despite the fact that one should almost never remove the relativizer in informational writing (Biber, 1999).

Relative clauses as postmodifiers in complex noun phrases are much less common than prepositional phrases used for the same purpose (Biber, 1999). One way in which they do outperform prepositional phrases, however, is when they are not right next to the noun being modified (Biber, 1999). It is possible to have a string of postmodifiers after a noun and while a prepositional phrase is the most frequent choice for the first postmodifier, for the second postmodifier or beyond a relative clause is also very likely (Biber, 1999).

Non-finite Clauses. As compared with other postmodifying clauses, non-finite clauses are relatively uncommon, perhaps because it is possible to paraphrase them by using relative clauses (Biber, 1999). Participle clauses can be defining or non-defining, but as with relative clauses, defining clauses are more common in informational writing (Biber, 1999). Table 10 shows two examples of complex noun phrases with non-finite clause postmodifiers, with the non-finite verb in each postmodifier underlined.

Table 10*Sample noun phrases with non-finite clause postmodifiers*

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
a	new	policy	<u>to contact</u> and welcome new applicants (resume)
		experience	<u>providing</u> administrative support to senior executives (resume)

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

There are two types of non-finite clauses: participle clauses (second row in Table 10) and to infinitive clauses (first row in Table 10) (Biber, 1999). Participle clauses can be further divided into past participle clauses (often ending with *-ed*) and present participle clauses (ending in *-ing*) as in the second row in Table 10 above. Past participle clauses are more common than present participle clauses, especially in academic prose (Biber, 1999). Its meaning always corresponds to that of the passive voice structure with the same verb, so in effect it is a reduced passive voice structure (Biber, 1999). Despite the literature pointing to past participle clauses being more common, this author had an easier time finding an example of a present participle clause in online resumes and cover letters to include in Table 10 above. A present participle clause does not have a meaning that always corresponds with the continuous tenses (Biber, 1999). These clauses can sometimes be less clear than a finite clause because they lack conjugated verbs, but this compromise is often made for economy of words (Biber, 1999).

The *to infinitive* clause is more common in speech than in writing, so it is not terribly relevant to the writing of resumes and cover letters (Biber, 1999). In academic prose, however, the head nouns *way* and *time* are commonly modified by *to infinitive*

clauses (Biber, 1999). There are also noun complement clauses, but they are not very common (Biber, 1999) and in this author's opinion do not cause many problems for ELs writing their resumes and cover letters in English. This may be because the two most common types of noun complement clauses in writing look just like relative clauses and *to infinitive* clauses (Biber, 1999), so learners have less trouble making these themselves than they would an entirely different type of clause they had never seen before.

Types of Noun Phrases

Complex Noun Phrases. In this author's opinion, using complex noun phrases correctly in resumes and cover letters is an area in which ELs really struggle with their English. That is why this capstone as a whole focuses on these particular noun phrases and how to create them. Examples of complex noun phrases can be seen in Table 11 below.

Table 11
Sample complex noun phrases

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
The	last two annual	conferences	for employee-client relations
their	schedule and sale	emails	
		both	of these documents

Notes. Noun phrases in gray rows are from *Cover letter samples*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>. Noun phrases in white row are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

For those ELs who studied GE, their focus was primarily on speaking and not as strong on writing, so it makes sense that this type of phrase is more difficult for them to construct. Modifying noun phrases in these ways is rare in speech and much more

common in writing, especially academic prose and news articles (Biber, 1999). This is true for premodifiers and postmodifiers and may be the case because in writing we have time to stop, think, revise and edit whereas in speech we must simply speak at the designated moment (Biber, 1999).

Noun Phrases with Multiple Modifiers. It has already been stated that complex noun phrases (noun phrases with modifiers) make texts lexically more dense, so it stands to reason that the more modifiers you attach to a noun phrase, the denser the information will be. In this pursuit of more lexical density and economy of words, writers often use multiple modifiers on the same noun (Biber, 1999). This is sometimes by using clauses or phrases that are of equal importance, and at other times by embedding modifying phrases within other modifying phrases (Biber, 1999). Multiple postmodifiers with one embedded in the other that occur in the same noun phrase are shown in [brackets] in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Sample noun phrases with multiple modifiers

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
	unparalleled	success	[that resulted [in an 18% increase in revenue]]
the	Bookkeeper	position	at Cloud Clearwater
a	multi-disciplinary	team	[scheduling appointments [for transplant patients]]

Notes. Noun phrases in gray rows are from *Cover letter samples*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>. Noun phrases in white row are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

For premodifiers, one-word phrases (e.g. *bookkeeper [position]* from the second row in Table 12 above) are the most common comprising 70 to 80 percent of premodified

phrases. Two-word phrases (e.g. *lead bookkeeper [position]*) comprise around 20 percent of premodified phrases, and less than two percent of premodified phrases use three premodifying words or more (e.g. *well-paid lead bookkeeper [position]*) (Biber, 1999). This trend, however, could be set to change. In the area of noun premodifiers specifically, they were practically unthinkable before 1800, but they since have started to become part of written texts, even if an uncommon part, and the trend of increasing the number of noun premodifiers continues today, even if slowly (Biber & Gray, 2011).

For adjectives, it is important to consider how they interact with adverbs and with each other. An adjective can be modified by an adverb, turning an adjective premodifier into an adjective phrase premodifier (Givon, 1993). For example, “qualified candidate” uses the adjective “qualified” to modify the noun “candidate” but “highly qualified candidate” uses the adjective phrase “highly qualified” to modify the same noun. As for how adjectives interact with each other, it is important to note that they go in a particular order based on the type of adjective (Biber, 1999; Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The rules themselves are unknown to Native English Speakers (NESs) and yet the results of following these rules are so recognizable to NESs that the existence of this grammar rule went viral and even made it into the news in 2016. A culture editor for the BBC at the time posted these rules on his Twitter account and it got a lot of attention to the extent that respected and varied publications like *The Washington Post*, *The BBC*, *The Conversation*, *The Guardian* and *Good Housekeeping* all did stories on it (Dowling, 2016; Finn, 2016; Forsyth, 2016; Horobin, 2016). According to online publication *Inc.*, the grammar furor that ensued that year was because this rule was an “unknown known” meaning that the general population knew it but had no idea

that it knew about it and was shocked when they learned that they had known this rule all along (Stillman, 2016, para. 6). *Quartz*, attempting to put the public's grammar fever into context, said that it was a rule that no NES needs to be able to rattle off, but that ELs need to commit to memory in order for their English to sound right (Werber, 2016). According to the original Tweet that went viral, here is the order in which adjectives tend to go (Anderson, 2016):

Opinion > Size > Age > Shape > Color > Color > Origin > Material > Purpose

The example cited in his original Tweet is “a lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling knife” (Anderson, 2016) and although it may not be a frequently used noun phrase, it does demonstrate the rule he cited perfectly. Although some grammar books leave out certain categories, insert other types of words apart from adjectives, or make some other modifications to this rule, it is generally supported by the literature on grammar (Biber, 1999; Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

For postmodifiers, it is fairly common to have multiple modifiers, as evidenced by studies of academic prose (Biber, 1999), so it is especially important that ELs be familiar with this practice. Table 12 above has examples of multiple post-modifiers in its first and third lines. Oftentimes but not always if there are multiple postmodifiers they will all have the same form, so for example all prepositional phrases, all *to infinitive* clauses, etc. (Biber, 1999), e.g. *an unparalleled success in the industry for the company*, with the prepositions underlined. If these are prepositional phrases (as in the most recent example), it is worth noting that there could be quite a few of them in a row, creating multiple embedded phrases and a lexically dense text (Biber, 1999). It is also worth noting that when there are two postmodifiers, it is very likely that the first one will be a

prepositional phrase and the second one will be a relative clause (Biber, 1999), e.g. *an unparalleled success in event planning that put the company on the map*, with the preposition and relativizer underlined. While it can be nice for ELs to have rules or tendencies to consider, it is interesting to note that this advice could be conflicting - it is impossible to have the first postmodifier be a prepositional phrase and the second one be a relative clause and also have them both be the same type of structure. Despite having statistical evidence and recommendations for ELs to follow, creating a complex noun phrase with multiple postmodifiers is not an easy task.

Nominalizations. Nominalizations are nouns made from adjectives or verbs (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). They have been studied more than other noun phrase types (Biber, 1999). Since all of the head nouns in Table 13 below are nominalizations, it can be seen that they can be used as a simple noun phrase on their own, or as either a head noun or a premodifier in a complex noun phrase (Biber & Gray, 2011).

Table 13
Sample noun phrases with nominalizations

Determiner	Premodifier	Head noun	Postmodifier
	end-of-day	reconciliation	
		absence	of discrepancies
a	new	opportunity	
		direction	

Notes. Noun phrases in gray rows are from *Cover letter samples*.
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>. Noun phrases in white row are from *Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application*.
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>

And, importantly for EL resume and cover letter writers, they are very common in business writing (Biber & Gray, 2011; Kies, 1985). As with other types of writing, they make it more lexically dense, serve a cohesive function, and can change the emphasis of a sentence - in fact with its similarities to the passive voice it is possible to avoid mentioning an actor responsible for an action altogether (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Kies, 1985).

Appositives. An appositive is a noun phrase inside commas that gives an alternate or more detailed explanation of the noun phrase immediately preceding (Biber, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Table 14 below has three examples of noun phrases from cover letters. They all feature a head noun, both of which are proper names of companies, and an explanatory noun phrase afterward. In the appositive, the noun phrase after the proper nouns in these examples, a comma precedes the phrase as a whole in these examples and the head noun is in [brackets].

Table 14
Sample noun phrases with appositives

Head noun	Postmodifier
Retail Ocean	, a [studio] in town
Crane & Jenkins	, a trusted [name] in geriatric care since 1990

Notes. Noun phrases are from *Cover letter samples*.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>

While these examples of appositives feature determiners, singular nouns and prepositional phrase postmodifiers starting with *in*, an appositive could actually come in various forms just like any noun phrase. Although historically they were not very important, in the past two centuries they have seen a large increase in usage in

informational writing (Biber & Gray, 2011). While it is possible to have defining or non-defining appositives, they are almost always non-defining (Biber, 1999). They are extremely common in genres requiring lexical density because they are “a maximally abbreviated form of postmodifier” (p. 639), indicating that they could be very helpful in business writing such as resumes and cover letters.

Current Status of Noun Phrases in General English Material

In many adult GE teaching contexts, the material provided by the school provides the bulk of the curriculum covered in a course and, in both content and format, has remained consistent over many years (Jordan & Gray, 2019). While this may be good in some ways, in other ways it is not serving its target audience well. Noun phrases are a necessary grammatical area and, instead of treating it as such, according to this author’s textbook analysis which will be detailed here, textbooks tend to teach nouns and noun phrases as separate lexical items rather than dealing with how a complex noun phrase is formed. This simplistic view of noun phrases is not thorough enough for the students in GE classes (Reda, 2003). This section will first identify the texts to be analyzed. The second part will then provide an overview of what these textbooks are like in general, including a summary of the debate as to whether they are still useful in the language classroom. The third part of this section will assess how much coverage textbooks give to noun phrases and their various parts. The fourth part of this section will provide an analysis of how noun phrases are covered in these books. And finally this section will posit how important the presence and quality of noun phrases in textbooks are to learners.

Methodology

This section of the paper is in part a traditional literature review and in part the results of a study this author did for the purpose of writing this paper with the second edition of the *Speakout* series of textbooks, published by Pearson for the British English market. In the textbook analysis, it was noted how much coverage was given to noun phrases and their elements in terms of the number of pages dedicated to each. To determine how many pages were dedicated to nouns, their modifiers, and noun phrases, the analysis made note of how many pages were dedicated to each of the following areas to the nearest quarter page:

- Nouns (single word)
- Determiners
- Premodifiers
- Postmodifiers
- Noun phrases

Notes were also made about the nature of the coverage in each instance, including whether the activity was categorized as a grammar or vocabulary activity in the book.

English Language Textbooks in General

While there are many different GE textbook series with varying qualities, it is possible to make some generalizations about them by looking at what the literature says in combination with the results of the textbook analysis project. This part of the textbook analysis section will look at the prevalence of textbooks in English language teaching, how useful textbooks are generally, and the role of profits in the ELT publishing industry.

Prevalence of Textbooks in ELT. Textbooks have been called things such as “ubiquitous” (Connolly, 2021, p. 284) and “unchallengeable” (Jordan & Gray, 2019, p. 438), and they are set to stay that way (Jordan & Gray, 2019). Schools often choose to

sell textbooks with their courses, sometimes separately and sometimes packaged with the course, meaning the decisions about whether or not to use a textbook and if so which one is made on an institutional level rather than by teachers of individual courses (Connolly, 2021). This means that teachers of all types - native English speakers, non-native English speakers, highly qualified teachers, teachers with no qualifications, and everywhere in between - all use textbooks in their teaching (Jordan & Gray, 2019). Something that all of these teachers tend to have in common, however, is that they take textbook material and information at face value. Doing extra reading on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is not a common part of lesson planning for English language teachers; instead they rely on the textbook or, at most, on high-profile industry practitioners who take SLA and other research and “translate” it into an easier-to-understand form for them (Connolly, 2021, p. 285).

Given the broad variation between different instructors as well as their specific differences as far as education and industry background, textbooks are often used in an attempt to “standardize instruction” (O’Loughlin, 2012, p. 256). In fact, whereas classroom decisions used to be made more by teachers, textbooks now make a large portion of the methodology decisions in the classroom (Jordan & Gray, 2019; Molavi et al., 2014). Textbooks have a very significant impact not only on what is covered in the classroom, but also on how these things are taught (Mares, 2003, cited in O’Loughlin, 2012).

Usefulness of Textbooks. However, saying that textbooks *are* used ubiquitously and that they *should* be used ubiquitously are two different things. There are those who say textbooks are still useful, those who say they have outlived their usefulness, and those

who fall somewhere in between. For those who are in favor of textbooks, they often justify their opinion with the idea of “quality assurance” (O’Loughlin, 2012, p. 256). Whereas having a new (or experienced) teacher create their own course each time they taught could create a situation fraught with difficult choices and stress, a textbook provides what Jordan and Gray (2019) refer to as “a beginning and an end, and a clear way through” (p. 442). They come in different levels, normally from very low to very high, providing a systematic, logical syllabus and “appropriate instruction” at each level (O’Loughlin, 2012, p. 256) as well as revision throughout (Jordan & Gray, 2019). In addition to all of this, it provides the confidence that only expertise can provide (Connolly, 2021). Textbooks are “written by experts” and “based on sound learning principles” (Richards, 2001 as cited in O’Loughlin, 2012, pp. 256, 286). And, at the end of the day, as Connolly (2021) put it, “What else would we use?” (p. 284).

Those who say that textbooks are not useful also have a wide variety of reasons for believing this. One reason for this is that, in exchange for the consistency they offer, textbooks formats are so tried and true that they are actually old and boring, and in addition to their assertion that this is generally true, they also point out that schools tend to use textbooks for too long, making the content in them outdated as well (Reda, 2003). They also have qualms with the way language is covered, saying that the choices of what vocabulary to include are random (Folse, 2004 as cited in O’Loughlin, 2012) and that in general the language in a textbook has more in common with the language in other textbooks than it does with real language that people actually use outside of the classroom (Reda, 2003). And even when a textbook does cover vocabulary that is both useful and frequently used, it is only covered once and so may not become a lasting part

of students' vocabulary (O'Loughlin, 2012). It should be noted that this claim by O'Loughlin is in direct contrast to the claim above about the inclusion of revision (Jordan & Gray, 2019). In this author's opinion, Jordan and Gray describe grammar coverage accurately but O'Loughlin's point is valid as far as vocabulary coverage in general and it is an extremely good point as far as coverage of complex noun phrases is concerned.

So the question remains, are textbooks good for the students? The best possible answer from those who are against textbooks is this: not exactly. Connolly (2021) writes, "The textbook is a tool and like any tool it should be used with care" (p. 286), meaning that one can use the textbook as a basis for a course but still "adapt, modify, and supplement" (Jordan & Gray, 2019, p. 443) it to be better suited to their own students and to be more effective in general. Addressing supplementing in particular, there are studies that show that there is simply not enough high-frequency vocabulary or attention to common collocations in textbooks to prepare students for the real world (Molavi et al., 2014; O'Loughlin, 2012). Molavi et al. (2014) go so far as to say it would be "impossible" to teach collocations effectively with just textbooks (p. 77). Considering that Folse (2004) calls collocation "[perhaps] the single most important aspect of knowing a word for non-native learners", this is no small issue (p. 16).

Others take a more measured stance and say that to teach vocabulary effectively teachers need to recommend preferred approaches for studying vocabulary and also provide students with extensive reading material (O'Loughlin, 2012). Still others are simply disappointed that there are so many tools and there is so much research available that should enable publishers and textbook writers to provide more and better vocabulary instruction, but it seems as though it is not being used for this purpose (O'Loughlin,

2012). There is actually a movement, fronted by Scott Thornbury, a prominent ESL scholar and teacher trainer, that “[seeks] alternatives to models of instruction that are mediated primarily through materials” (Thornbury, 2010, para. 3). They want to move away from what they view as a profit-driven, book-centric classroom and instead use the students’ needs and interests as the basis for teaching and learning (McCabe, 2005).

The Role of Profit. The first inherent question in discussing profit in the ELT publishing industry is whether or not that is a problem. After all, as Connolly (2021) says, “The aim of a publisher, like any business, is to make money” (p. 285). And they do make money. In 2016 Pearson estimated that English language teaching was an industry worth \$194 billion US dollars annually (Jordan & Gray, 2019). Rather than viewing money as being so inherently problematic, some view the way in which that money is made as problematic. They claim that books that are marketed as being appropriate for all contexts are really just appropriate for some and that they require some changes to be appropriate, motivating, and useful for other contexts (Connolly, 2021). Still more people claim that English, quite an amorphous product to sell, seems like a neat and tidy (and marketable) package when put into a textbook, but, as has been shown here, textbooks alone do not an effective language course make (Jordan & Gray, 2019).

Amount of Noun Phrase Coverage

Information on how noun phrases are covered in GE textbooks is hard to find. For this reason, the assertions in this section will be partially supported by a traditional literature review and partially supported by a textbook analysis study done by this author. It is also for this reason that this section will first cover the prevalence of lexical chunks in textbooks, how noun phrases are classified in textbooks, how many different elements

of noun phrases are covered, and how thoroughly noun phrases are covered when compared to other language items.

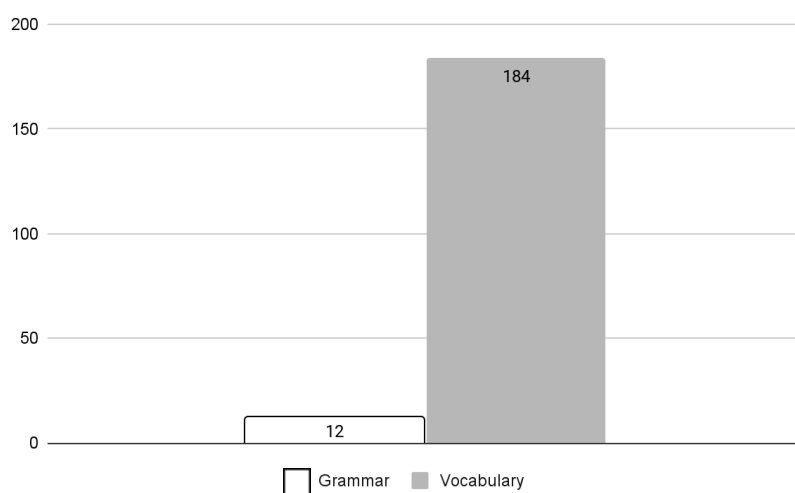
Coverage of Lexical Chunks. Although a refined definition of lexical chunks is not something that linguists agree on today, a general definition would be that lexical chunks are common combinations of different words that are two or more words long (Koprowski, 2005). As of the early 2000s textbook publishers had begun to realize that lexical chunks were everywhere and they were important to include in their textbooks (Koprowski, 2005). Certain types of lexical chunks have enjoyed more coverage than others. A 2005 study of the inclusion of lexical chunks in textbooks studied three textbook series at two levels each and determined that compound nouns alone actually made up more than ten percent of the books' coverage of lexical chunks (Koprowski, 2005).

Grammar or Vocabulary? Noun phrases, which can be considered types of lexical chunks, are not clearly classified as grammar or vocabulary. Since they can be classified as types of lexical chunks, one would assume that they could be categorized as vocabulary. But there are also many grammar rules to know in order to make an effective and correct noun phrase. In fact, the knowledge of how to assemble a good noun phrase is a grammatical issue (Biber, 1999; Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). This part of the section will address how work on noun phrases overall tends to be classified and how coverage of particular parts of a noun phrase tend to be classified. As for how work on noun phrases tends to be classified overall, it is overwhelmingly classified as vocabulary (rather than grammar) in textbooks. As can be seen in Figure 3 below which reports the total number of activities related to noun phrases from all

Speakout books in the series, with 184 noun phrase activities being classified as vocabulary and only 12 being classified as grammar. This means that an overwhelming majority of textbook work on noun phrases and their components is classified as vocabulary rather than grammar work. This is in contradiction to the expert view of grammarians (Biber, 1999; Givon, 1993; Halliday, 2014; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) that forming a noun phrase is grammar.

Figure 3

Noun phrase work classified as grammar or vocabulary



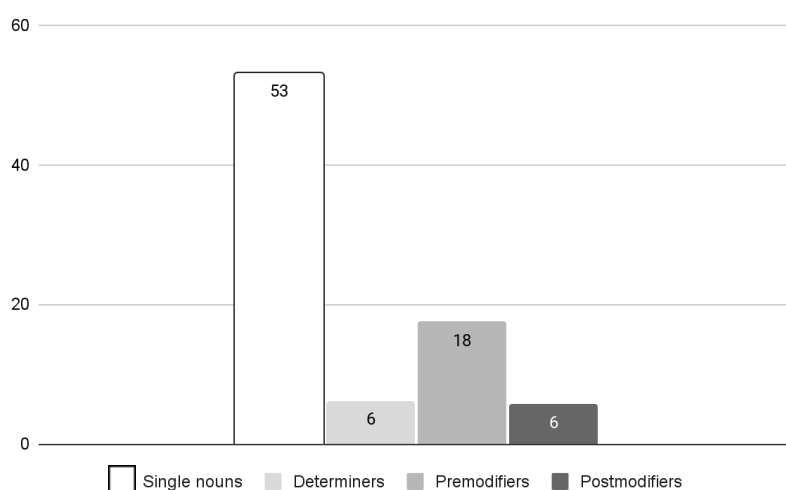
As for how different elements of noun phrases are covered, this is more varied, and depends on how these elements are classified. The textbook analysis showed that there are certain tendencies for different parts of noun phrases. Determiners and relative clauses, for example, are classified as grammar. Single nouns and adjectives, on the other hand, are classified as vocabulary. Adjective phrases where an adjective is modified by an adverb, however, might be classified as vocabulary or grammar. The same is true for participle clauses and prepositional phrases.

Which Parts of Noun Phrases are Covered Most? Using data from the textbook analysis, it is also possible to analyze whether noun phrases or single elements of noun

phrases are covered more, and which elements of noun phrases are covered more than others. As can be seen in Figure 4 below which shows the number of pages for the entire textbook series dedicated to each element of noun phrases, the amount that different parts of noun phrases are covered in textbooks varies widely. Single nouns are covered most commonly at 53 pages for the whole series, which is more than three times the amount of pages than the next element of noun phrases. At a very distant second are premodifiers with 18 pages, the majority of which is made up of adjective phrases. After that, tied for third, are determiners and postmodifiers with six pages each in the whole series.

Figure 4

How much each element of a noun phrase is covered

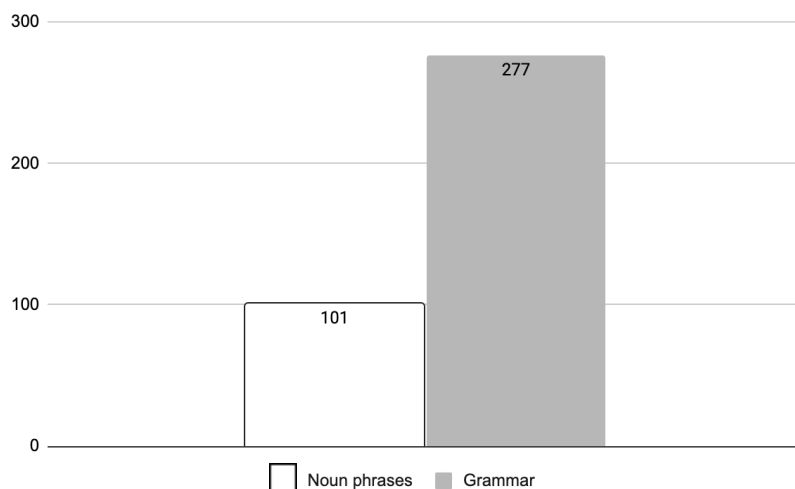


Noun Phrase Coverage Versus Other Items. It is also important to note how much coverage noun phrases and their parts receive versus other items in textbooks. As can be seen below in Figure 5, coverage of what textbooks define as grammar (many times not including noun phrases or noun phrase elements) and coverage of noun phrases is also very different. Whereas the coverage of grammar as defined by textbooks is at 277 pages for the *Speakout* series as a whole, there are only 101 pages dedicated to noun

phrases and their elements. That means that there are about 2.75 times as many pages on traditional grammar than there are about noun phrases and their elements.

Figure 5

Grammar versus noun phrase coverage



It has already been shown that there is relatively little coverage of noun phrases and their elements as opposed to more traditional grammar items. It has also been shown that work on noun phrase elements dwarfs work on complex noun phrases, and that the work on noun phrase elements is strongly dominated by work on single nouns. It has further been shown that most of this work on noun phrases and their elements has been labeled as vocabulary rather than grammar. In doing this, textbooks neglect the grammar rules that help students to make their own noun phrases outside of the classroom. In fact, in the whole of the noun phrase coverage, this study found only one page in all of the *Speakout* series dedicated to the grammar rules of how to make a complex noun phrase. Not only does this mean that a paltry one percent of the series is dedicated to how to make a noun phrase, but it is also placed on page 33 of the advanced book, the final book

in the series, very far along the series at a stage of learning that many learners will not reach.

Without more explicit work on how noun phrases are structured, it is unlikely that learners will become competent in making their own complex noun phrases. While there are complex noun phrases in textbooks, one page out of nearly one thousand pages is not enough explicit instruction. As Dörnyei (2009) says, in regards to implicit versus explicit language instruction, “mere exposure to L2 input accompanied by communicative practice is not sufficient” (p. 36). Instead, he advocates “the cooperation of explicit and implicit learning” in order to maximize what learners get from communicative language teaching (p. 36). Dörnyei sees this combination of activity types as essential theoretical way to “bridging the gap” between an extreme communicative (i.e. with no focus on form) and what effective teachers actually do in the classroom, which he calls a “principled communicative approach” which allows for a focus on form as part of the communicative classroom (p. 37).

Qualities of Noun Phrase Coverage

This section will discuss not how much coverage there is, rather it will describe what that coverage is like. Because there is little description as to what the coverage of noun phrases is like, this section will begin by describing what the coverage of lexical chunks is like in general and then move on to describing what types of noun phrases are focused on. Finally it will offer some thoughts on how useful this coverage is to an EL looking to be able to create their own noun phrases in varied contexts.

Qualities of Lexical Chunk Coverage. When considering how textbook coverage of lexical chunks fares, it is important to first take into account what ideal

coverage may look like. There is not much information about ideal coverage of lexical chunks, so instead the tenets of covering vocabulary in general will be considered. When covering vocabulary in general, frequency and range of vocabulary items are the two benchmarks that are the most important indicators of whether or not an item needs to be taught (Kaprowski, 2005). *Frequency* can be defined as how often the item occurs in the real world (Kaprowski, 2005; Reda, 2003). This means that one of the major features a vocabulary item should have to be included in a textbook is whether or not and how often ELs might encounter this item outside of the classroom. *Range* can be defined as how many different genres a vocabulary item might be found in (Kaprowski, 2005). This means that another major feature a vocabulary item should have to be included in a textbook is being used in many different speech or text types ELs will see it in or be able to use it in themselves outside of the classroom. In general, textbooks seem to follow these ideals. There are numerous lists of words based precisely on these two indicators, frequency and range, and in general textbooks seem to cover items from these lists (O'Loughlin, 2012).

Having looked at some ideas for vocabulary inclusion in textbooks, it is possible to evaluate how well these principles are applied when dealing with lexical chunks. When looking at frequency and range as the most important indicators of whether or not a vocabulary item should be included in a textbook, even when following these procedures as part of following best practice for the industry, it is important to note that this favors the simple over the complex. The words and phrases used over and over in speech and in writing and which can be used in all different types of speech and texts are overwhelmingly simple words and phrases (Reda, 2003). So even when following best

practice, textbook writers and publishers may not end up with the best results, especially for higher-level learners.

However, potentially in trying to deal with this issue, textbook writers and publishers do seem to have strayed from best practice. Kaprowski (2005) went so far as to call the decisions about which lexical chunks are included in textbooks “arbitrary” rather than reasoned (p. 323). In a study published in 2014 of three different textbook series analyzing two books from each series, it was found that most collocations appeared in just one series and only eight collocations appeared in more than one series, with none of them appearing in all three of them (Molavi et al., 2014, p. 74). The only noun phrases covered in multiple textbook series in the study were “good idea” and “wrong number”, one of which seems useful in a number of situations and the other of which seems mostly limited to a very specific type of phone conversation.

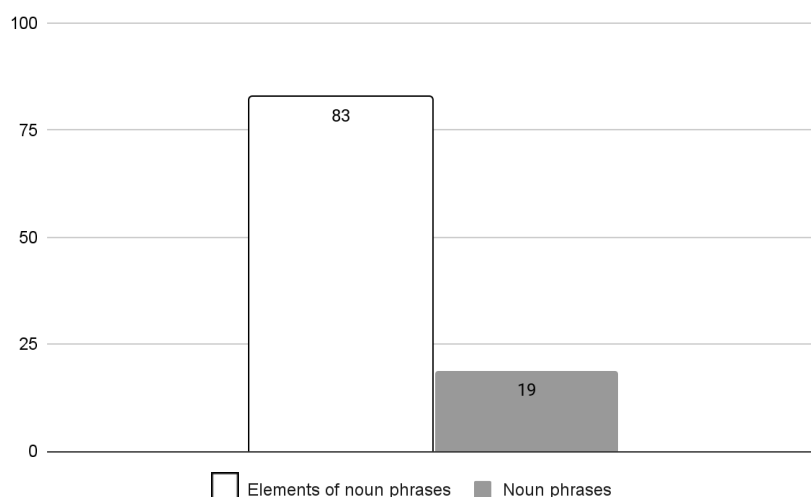
To the researchers, this indicated that there “was no high agreement” over what lexical chunks should be included in textbooks (Molavi et al., 2014, p. 74). Other researchers argue that this situation is practically akin to ignoring the research, as finding out what lexical chunks have high frequency and range is not that hard in this day and age using published lists and modern software (Kaprowski, 2005). In fact, taking a data-driven approach to teaching collocations is exactly what Folse (2004) recommends for teachers looking to help their learners with collations. It seems time for publishers to do this for, as Kaprowski (2005) has written about this situation, “Intuition can only go so far” (p. 329).

Types of Noun Phrases Covered. As logical as it may seem to take indicators like frequency and range into account for what phrases to cover, there are those who

argue that there are undue and unfortunate consequences to this. Reda (2003) claims that the process of looking for the most common vocabulary items and recycling them throughout one book or many books at different levels leads to entire textbook series that cover all or mostly basic vocabulary, even at higher levels. While this was written about vocabulary in general, the statistics from the textbook analysis of how noun phrases are covered support this idea. As can be seen in Figure 6 below, individual elements of noun phrases are given more than four times as much coverage in textbooks than complex noun phrases. This indicates that the noun phrases covered in the series as a whole, from the *Starter* to the *Advanced* level books, are overwhelmingly simple rather than complex.

Figure 6

Noun phrase elements versus noun phrases

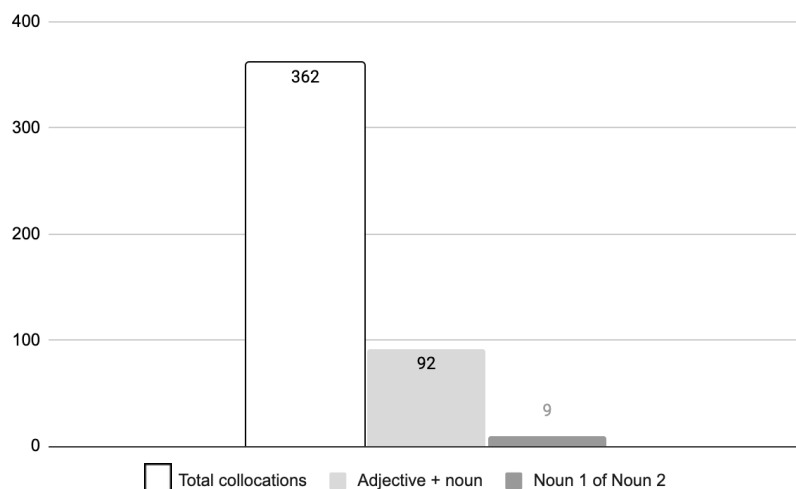


Within this small space devoted to complex noun phrases, there is a lot of variety as to how different types of noun phrases are covered. Molavi et al's 2014 study of three textbook series at two levels showed that coverage of different types of noun phrases, in addition to being simplistic, was also very uneven. Of the types of collocations analyzed as being the most common in textbooks in the 2014 study, only two were types of noun

phrases: *adjective + noun* noun phrases such as *ideal candidate*, and *noun 1 + of + noun 2* noun phrases such as *Director of Education*. As shown below in Figure 7, of the total number of collocations noted in the six textbooks included in the study, the noun phrases included comprise 27 percent of the total. The *adjective + noun* noun phrases number 92 while the *noun 1 + of + noun 2* noun phrases number a mere nine. Coverage is very uneven indeed.

Figure 7

Collocation coverage in textbooks



Note. Statistics are from Molavi et al. (2014). A comparative corpus-based analysis of lexical collocations used in EFL textbooks. *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning*, 7(1), 66-81.

Usefulness of Noun Phrase Coverage. Regardless of how much coverage there is or what types of noun phrases are covered most, anything covered in a textbook should be useful. Since there is not much information about noun phrases in particular in this area, this part of the section will use information about lexical chunks and collocations instead. It has been shown in previous parts of this section that information about these areas does include information about noun phrases covered, so it is still relevant to them.

A study published in 2005 ranked the lexical chunks covered in textbooks by analyzing their frequency and range and assigning each chunk a usefulness score (Kaprowski, 2005). The usefulness of lexical chunks included in the textbooks ranged from being very useful to not very useful at all, indicating that when it comes to lexical chunks, these hallmarks of good practice for selecting vocabulary overall do not seem to have been applied to the selection of lexical chunks. Shockingly, the study showed that almost 25 percent of lexical chunks included in textbooks is “of limited pedagogic value to learners” (Kaprowski, 2005, p. 322). In the study, which included three different textbooks, it was found that less than one percent of the lexical chunks counted were present in two of the three books and none were found in all three books (Kaprowski, 2005). If the textbook writers or publishers had been using phrase lists and modern software they would have come up with more similar phrases, so they clearly did not use these tools that were at their disposal.

Some theorize that this may be in part due to the process of *prototyping* used in textbook creation (Reda, 2003). *Prototyping* is a process of deciding on the main themes the textbook will be based on, which are always common topics for the majority of the target audience, and then building out the book’s language coverage based on these topics and continuing the same topics and pattern throughout each series of the level (Reda, 2003). While this is very good for revisiting and expanding on themes and for reviewing language covered from one unit or book to the next, it is not very good for covering new vocabulary at higher levels or even for making sure the vocabulary covered is useful (Reda, 2003). One of the big arguments against *prototyping* is that choosing topics first and then trying to think of language afterwards would hamper any effort to include useful

vocabulary by putting extra requirements on the effort that precede and take precedence over the requirement that vocabulary be useful (Kaprowski, 2005; Reda, 2003). This idea holds true for vocabulary chosen to match with a topic and for vocabulary chosen to match with a grammar point that was chosen to match with a topic (Kaprowski, 2005).

In addition to issues with choosing vocabulary based around certain book topics, there may be issues with choosing lexical chunks all together. Unfortunately, in the 2005 study of lexical chunks in textbooks, the researchers noted an inverse relationship between the number of lexical chunks included in the books and the usefulness scores of vocabulary in the textbook (Koprowski, 2005). This means that the more lexical phrases are included in a book, the more a book seems to cover vocabulary that is not very useful to students. Based on this finding, it seems that an effort to cover more lexical chunks would actually doom a textbook to being less useful. This makes a very interesting case for whether noun phrases should be covered as grammar or vocabulary in textbooks, possibly urging textbook writers and publishers to take a *more is less* approach and covering fewer noun phrases of their own creation. After all, if covering lexical chunks as vocabulary leads to presenting learners with less useful vocabulary, then it could be a useful change to cover the grammatical features of noun phrases in a way that lets learners create their own noun phrases.

Importance

As in other areas, there is a dearth of information about the importance of noun phrases to learners, so this part of the section will address this issue via available information about collocations. Learners need a large amount of collocations to be able to understand and produce language that conveys their ideas accurately and richly (Nakata,

2006 as cited in Molavi et al., 2014). And unfortunately, learners at high level still have trouble producing collocations in speaking and writing (Molavi et al., 2014). Although SLA theory indicates that a lot of learning lexical chunks is done implicitly by encountering or using the chunks, there is also evidence that this can be sped along by bringing new language to learners' attention and helping them with tasks that encourage them to analyze the meaning of the phrases (Long, 2015, as cited in Jordan & Gray, 2019). Folse (2004), among others, recommends that learners receive explicit instruction in collocations to aide their language development in this area and underscores their importance by noting that words "[do] not usually occur alone" (p. 18).

Since useful collocations and coverage of noun phrases have been shown to be missing from textbooks, it is evident that useful coverage of noun phrases is also missing. Molavi et al. (2014) say that using better collocations not only make a student's writing sound more "natural" and "precise" but make their writing clearer and make them seem more intelligent (p. 68). Knowing that lexical chunks such as collocations can have these effects on one's writing and having already seen that noun phrases are important to business writing such as resumes and cover letters and that they are not commonly found in textbooks, it is clear that the coverage needs to improve to better serve students in GE classes.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered adult GE EL needs, resumes and cover letters, noun phrases, and textbooks. It is important to understand that although all of these topics may seem disparate, in answering this paper's research question they show themselves to be closely connected. In analyzing GE EL needs, the principles of andragogy offer a guide

to help see how best teachers and curriculum designers can go about meeting those needs. While there is some advice that the industry as a whole can follow that encourages educators to acknowledge adult ELs' humanity and independence and to make materials and lessons motivating and relevant, there are also areas where the industry is not doing as well of a job. One such area is needs analysis, a practice that is not done often for GE classes despite being useful and which does not even have a lot of literature written about it to advise teachers on how to best implement it.

Despite this lack of needs analysis, it is clear that many learners in adult GE English classes consider learning English for work purposes to be important, and have an interest in using it in a future job or job search. Given this and the role of resumes and cover letters as gatekeepers in the employment market, it would be useful to include information on resumes, cover letters, and common language features used for both in adult GE courses. One clear missing link in helping adult GE ELs with language to help them in business writing overall and specifically in resumes and cover letters is the noun phrase. Noun phrases are almost endlessly complex and yet they are worth learning because they can help learners write better and more concisely, a feature that is common in all business writing and especially resumes and cover letters. However, this is a language feature that rarely appears in adult GE material and when it does the material tends to teach set phrases and rarely teaches the rules about how to compose a good noun phrase.

Given the necessity of this material in learners' lives and the lack of coverage in textbooks and therefore language courses, it is necessary to ask the question: *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult*

ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English? The author's personal quest to answer this research question was explained in Chapter One, and the available literature on this topic was covered in Chapter Two. Chapter Three details the participants, context, and content of the teacher development workshops that are the product of this capstone project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

As was shown in Chapter Two, there is no significant body of work on how to help English Learners (ELs) or teachers deal with the lack of noun phrase material in General English (GE) textbooks in order to write professional resumes and cover letters, which is a need that so many adult GE ELs have. There is enough information, however, to argue that this is a need that should be met, and teachers should receive guidance in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry. This capstone project aims to fulfill this need by answering the following research question: *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English?* The answer to this question comes in a series of teacher professional development workshops showing teachers how to teach ELs about the grammar behind creating complex noun phrases.

This chapter provides an overview of the project along with a rationale for how the training workshops are structured, including the theories that informed their creation. There are also descriptions of the training context for these workshops, as well as the target audience for participants in these workshops. The overview is followed by a more in-depth description of the project, a timeline for implementation, and methods for evaluating the success of various individual workshops, as well as for the series of workshops as a whole.

Project Overview and Goals

This project consists of three two-hour teacher workshops focused on training teachers to teach ELs how to create their own complex noun phrases. Because the teachers participating in these workshops work in different contexts, it would be impossible to focus on what certain levels of students need or how to integrate this work with courses following certain textbooks. Instead, the workshops focus on language awareness, teaching techniques, and practical teaching ideas that can be adapted into each teacher's context. These three workshops are only part of a free teacher development program available for teachers who graduated from the Cambridge CELTA teacher training program from a prominent Jewish Orthodox seminary for women in Jerusalem. The workshops make up the language awareness strand of the first run of the teacher development program which is tentatively scheduled to run throughout the 2023-2024 school year. The goals of these three workshops are:

- to raise teachers' awareness of the grammar of noun phrases
- to provide teachers with techniques they can use in class
- to allow teachers to try out different noun phrase activities
- to encourage teachers to follow best practices for teaching their students noun phrases

Theoretical Rationale

Much of what was mentioned in the section about andragogy in Chapter Two is relevant here as well. At its core, andragogy is about “[creating] good learning experiences for adults” (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 44), which is as relevant to adult GE ELs as it is to their English teachers. However, instead of taking principles directly from andragogy itself, this section will look at qualities of effective teacher professional development and note where it overlaps with andragogy and the principles of andragogy

as espoused by Knowles. These qualities are taken from a 2017 report that analyzed 35 effective professional development schemes for teachers to find what they had in common (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The first principle from the 2017 study is that the training should be content-based (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knowles, 1992). This tends to pay off more for teachers with a better grasp of the content to begin with (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Perry & Hart, 2012), which bodes well for the target participants who are graduates of an English teaching certificate course. However, as some teachers have more experience than others, another feature of the workshops is collaborative work. Teachers collaborating together makes for good results in teacher professional development (Crandall & Miller, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knowles, 1992; Murphy, 2014; Perry & Hart, 2012). While it is clear that collaboration for collaboration's sake is beneficial as it helps teachers in their "search for multiple perspectives" (Murphy, 2014, p. 68), it is also important to note that this should help those teachers with less content knowledge about grammar benefit from the workshops by being grouped with other teachers who have more content knowledge.

Another principle that is especially important for the target participants who come from a more traditional educational background is that of active learning. One of the first steps to successful active learning with adults is acknowledging that they are adults who are capable of making their own decisions about their education and other issues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Engaging adult learners in an "active process of inquiry" is one of Knowles' (1992) foundational principles for effective adult education (p. 11) and is "an umbrella term" for everything which modern

educators consider to be the opposite of “sit-and-listen lectures” that exist in so many traditional learning environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 7). Although collaboration, coaching, models, feedback and reflection are listed separately here, they also fall under this umbrella term “active process of inquiry” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). One very important fact that is not listed elsewhere is that using active learning in teacher development means that the teachers in the program should share their experiences and be involved in defining their own needs (Crandall & Miller, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knowles, 1992; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). This principle is relied on heavily as teachers are asked to bring in samples of their learners’ language and to share what they know of their own learners as well as their learners’ needs, preferences, and goals regarding their English education.

There are two principles of effective professional development that are also qualities of the Cambridge CELTA program that the participating teachers have said they enjoyed in the past: modeling and coaching. Modeling is used heavily in the workshops, as part of each session involves trying out activities that teachers can then use with their learners. This should help teachers understand the practices encouraged in the workshops and take them back to their classrooms and use them effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This type of modeling is something that many teachers of varying educational levels and backgrounds want from their professional development sessions (Perry & Hart, 2012). For a variety of reasons, one of which is that the presenter and the teachers are geographically spread out, coaching is not used as much. There is, however, an opportunity to utilize a limited amount of coaching in helping the teachers analyze ELs’ language, which can be an effective combination (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). To

provide this opportunity for coaching, teachers are asked to bring in some examples of their ELs' written work so that they can receive coaching in how to interpret their ELs' work and how to provide useful feedback on it. Many teachers who had coaching as part of their initial teaching qualification miss this when they begin to actually teach their own classes (Perry & Hart, 2012), longing for someone to help them with the problems they encounter in their classes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). All of this support in the literature combined with the fact that coaching was such an effective part of the initial teacher training course for all of the potential participants in these workshops indicates that such an approach would be effective in this context.

The final two principles of effective teacher development are incorporating feedback and reflection, and making sure the training is “of sustained duration” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 4). When engaging in teacher development, Mills (2018) finds it important to know “where you have been, what you have learned, and where you are going” (p. 223) and others agree that this is an effective practice to include whenever possible (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knowles, 1992; Murphy, 2014). These workshops encourage teachers to look back on past lessons and plan for future lessons, engaging in what Murphy (2014) calls “reflection on action” and “reflection for action” respectively (p. 616). And while three teacher development workshops may not seem like a very long stint in professional development, they are part of a larger program spanning the academic year and will be spread out throughout the program. In this way, they allow for better understanding of ideas, better implementation of new classroom practices, and better results from students (Crandall & Miller, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Perry & Hart, 2012).

Context: An Orthodox Jewish Seminary in Jerusalem

These professional development workshops are designed with a Jewish Orthodox women's seminary in mind. This seminary accepts students who have completed high school or secondary studies and offers bachelor's-level courses or, for some who choose to take a longer program, offers programs equivalent to a bachelor's degree. It is located in Jerusalem and has a department for religious studies as well as departments focused on various career paths such as science, business, and teaching. The education department also offers the Cambridge CELTA course, an internationally recognized certification course moderated by Cambridge University Press & Assessment in England. The school is run mainly in English and so has a good number of students who have sufficient English language proficiency to teach the language. Numerous CELTA graduates from the seminary remain in Israel, but others return to their home countries after graduation. Because the program graduates are so geographically spread out, these workshops will be delivered online so that more people will be able to attend. Many of the graduates who make their careers as teachers lack a long-term professional development option. Most opportunities for English language teachers in Israel are short conferences of between one and three days organized by the English Teachers' Association in Israel (ETAI). There are some longer-term teacher development classes offered as well, but in this author's opinion many times they are focused on areas other than the English language and often offered in more of a lecture format than an interactive format. For those entering more mainstream Jewish education but working with English learners, professional development classes often focus on areas other than English language development.

The seminary has a vested interest in helping their CELTA graduates continue to develop. In this author's opinion, which is from outside the Jewish Orthodox community in Israel, the school is genuinely interested in helping its students and graduates live their best lives and have the best opportunities. In addition to this, the ELT programming they offer is relatively new and while they have staff available to teach for now, some of these people have more availability than others and some of them are closer to retirement than others. The seminary is looking to help course graduates who make their careers in ELT continue developing so that they might one day be able to qualify with Cambridge as CELTA teacher trainers so that the program can continue for years to come.

Participants: Cambridge CELTA Graduates from the Seminary in Jerusalem

Most of the seminary's students are from English-speaking countries. The vast majority come from the United States and Canada, but there are also some from English-speaking countries such as England and South Africa as well as non-English speaking countries such as Chile. There are numerous graduates of the CELTA program and the seminary who choose to stay in Israel, but there are also many who return to their home countries after they graduate. Many go on to enter the teaching profession in some fashion, and some of these graduates enter the teaching profession as English language teachers, usually in Israel or the United States, but sometimes in other countries. Although their teaching contexts are varied, in a situation like this the presenter can often trust that the participating teachers will be able to share enough information about their contexts to make the session useful (Murphy, 2014). This author began the CELTA program at the seminary, maintains a good working relationship with the school, and has personally met each graduate of the seminary's CELTA program. When they sign up for

courses, they tend to bring motivation in the form of what Merriam and Bierema (2013) say is a humanist philosophy that education should be able to help them become better at fulfilling their various life roles which for these students might be teacher, wife, and mother.

All of the graduates of the CELTA have a reasonable proficiency with technology as they often typed lesson plans and handouts for their teaching practice and were required to type and submit four longer written assignments on the course. There are, however, differences within the group, with some graduates being familiar with a range of online educational tools among others, partially from having attended their seminary studies virtually during the pandemic. There are a handful of graduates who mainly do word processing and not much else. One group of graduates attended the school's pilot hybrid CELTA program earlier in 2022 and as a result are familiar with the exact educational tools that will be used for these workshops including Zoom and various Google tools.

It should be noted that the school makes every effort to use modern teaching methodologies in their English language classes and teacher training, but that there are certain restrictions regarding content as it is an Orthodox religious institution. While the school uses modern, communicative, student-centered textbooks (like the ones analyzed by this author in Chapter Two), it should be noted that some topics appearing in these textbooks or on websites that may be used for the course might not be appropriate or interesting for these participants.

Positionality

In the planning of these teacher development workshops in this particular setting, it is important to recognize that while I am a good fit for working at this institution in many ways, in other ways it is not an obvious pairing. In doing this I will also be able to recognize my position in relation to the school and course participants. I am a good fit for the institution in that I am respected by the school as an authority in English language teaching and teacher development. This is partially because I owned a language school along with two friends in Tel Aviv when I lived in Israel and together we brought the Cambridge CELTA program to Israel for the first time. They are also aware that I have been an English teacher since 2002, a CELTA teacher trainer since 2009, a CELTA course assessor since 2012 and recently became one of twelve Joint Chief Assessors (the highest position for a CELTA practitioner in the Cambridge University Press & Assessment system) for the Cambridge CELTA program this year. Furthermore, I orchestrated the sale of the Tel Aviv school's teacher training assets to the seminary in Jerusalem, effectively starting their English teacher training program. Because the institution and its stakeholders have a firm respect for authority, the positions I have held and actions I have taken mentioned above make me a good fit for working with this institution and its students.

However, in this particular Orthodox Jewish seminary many teachers are subject matter experts and also very well educated in what it means to live a good Jewish life by Orthodox standards. While I do consider myself knowledgeable about English language teaching, I am neither knowledgeable about what it takes to live a good Orthodox Jewish life nor someone who conforms to ideals of the Orthodox community. There is a potential

for a bit of confusion, as the participants could take me as an authority in multiple spheres as they do many of their teachers when they should only take me as an authority in English language teaching.

It should also be noted that there is a significant difference between the community represented by this seminary and my community. I am a cis female of mixed race (white and Asian) who had some Christian and some Buddhist influences from different sides of my family early in life, followed some tenets of Christianity for a few years, and eventually converted to Judaism through a Reform conversion. This is a conversion that the Orthodox community does not recognize, so to the staff and students at the seminary I am not Jewish. While I have sometimes felt racial tension between myself and some elements of Israeli society in the past, I never have at this seminary. There is, however, significant tension between the Orthodox and Reform Jewish communities in Israel. Because of the disconnect between these communities in Israel it is highly unusual for anyone from outside of the Orthodox community to teach at an Orthodox school, let alone a seminary.

While my expertise in English language teaching and teacher training are a large part of why it is possible for me to work at this particular school, I feel it is also my responsibility to be sensitive to any community in which I work. I take great care to dress appropriately, speak appropriately, choose appropriate materials for classes, and more. On the one hand, it is similar to how I would approach any teaching or training situation, but on the other hand with this particular community it does require more adjustment on my part than usual. As of now, the head of English teacher training at the seminary and I have a good system in place for our CELTA courses, and this is a system I will use for the

teacher development workshops for CELTA graduates as well. I show my materials to her and get her feedback about whether there is anything that needs adjustment according to the rules and norms of the community, and she provides me with tips as to what the students might be more or less interested in. While it is an extra step in my preparation, it is worthwhile because it helps to ensure that the materials I use and the way I conduct my class will be appropriate for the community, relevant to students' lives, and motivating for them. It should also be noted that the example resumes and cover letters are based off of real resumes and cover letters from appropriate careers and industries as I understand them from having worked with the seminary for years in order to keep the workshop material appropriate, relatable and useful for the participants.

Project Description

This project is a series of three teacher professional development workshops focused on helping teachers teach their students about the grammar of noun phrases. There are three different sessions covering noun phrases used to describe the following topics:

1. You and your experiences
2. Your skills and abilities
3. Opportunities and organizations

These topics mirror the types of noun phrases this author has seen in resumes written by adult GE ELs and in resume examples online (“Cover letter samples,” n.d.; “Resume samples and examples to inspire your next application,” n.d.). They are very closely related to resumes and cover letters and would help teachers improve their learners’ ability to search for jobs in English, a need that so many adult GE ELs have. However, the noun phrases covered in these three sessions could also be used in other text types

such as articles, academic papers, college applications and more. Each workshop has the following stages:

- Genre Analysis: Looking at how noun phrases feature in real cover letters and resumes
- Language analysis: Comparing student work with noun phrases from texts
- Activities: Demonstrating activities with teachers acting as students
- Discussion: Small group discussions about their teaching contexts and how to adapt techniques and activities for their classes
- Reflection: Filling out the exit ticket

Material for each workshop is provided digitally, as the sessions take place online.

Most of the program participants have Gmail addresses and many have experience using Google Education tools online. This is because some of the seminary's classes during the pandemic were offered via Google Classroom and because the pilot run of the hybrid version of the Cambridge CELTA course at the seminary included many Google tools in its online sessions. Many of the materials are provided in a format where teachers can create their own copies of the material should they wish to and store them in their own Google Drive. This is useful in two respects. First, they can take (virtually) some of the activities from the sessions back with them to use in their classrooms, which is integral to them being able to implement these activities in their own context (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Second, it allows them to look back at session materials and do further reflection on what was covered as part of their own self-study, and helping teachers do more self-study is something that Knowles (1992) considers an essential takeaway for any good professional development session.

Content

The three teacher development sessions for noun phrases all have a similar structure. Because in the past the group of possible participants has not exhibited great grammar awareness, having a similar structure for these sessions may reduce their anxiety and lower their affective filter during the sessions as the tasks are familiar and they do not have to understand a completely new session structure and set of instructions in each grammar session. All small group work occurs in breakout rooms so that participants can discuss grammar and teaching issues more privately at first rather than having the pressure of discussing these things in front of the whole group, while still learning about these topics themselves. We begin each session by looking at a slide that outlines the stages of that day's session to provide reassurance that this consistency of routine has been upheld in the session so that they can focus less on the mechanics of what they need to do in each session and instead focus on session structure.

Each teacher development session then moves on to looking at example cover letters and resumes. If possible, participants are put in groups based on the interests and job prospects of their students as related to the example texts. For example, if someone teaches English to teachers they could be placed in a group looking at a cover letter and resume from the education industry. The cover letters and resumes selected are based on the career paths available at the seminary through which the sessions are delivered, which are based on popular careers among women in the Orthodox Jewish community, which makes this beneficial sort of grouping possible. However, this cannot be certain until a list of participants is finalized.

The first item on the agenda after outlining the session is genre analysis. In the first session participants first read their assigned cover letter and resume for gist with the task of deciding how strong a candidate each writer is for the job they are seeking. For subsequent grammar sessions, participants are asked to recall this information at the start as re-reading them with the same or a similar task would likely seem repetitive. After reading or recalling the content of the cover letters and resumes, participants are shown a copy of the texts with certain noun phrases highlighted according to the focus of the session (*You and your experiences*, *Your skills and abilities*, or *Opportunities and organizations*). By doing genre analysis first and thereby attending to the communicative success of the resumes and cover letters before attending to focusing in-depth on grammar, these procedures are in line with Dörnyei's (2009) contention that "[an] important hallmark of good teaching is finding the *optimal balance* between meaning-based and form-focused activities in the dynamic classroom context" (p. 41).

After this the sessions move on to language analysis. At this point participants are asked to break down complex noun phrases that appear in their assigned cover letter and resume along with their group. They can then check their progress with answer keys and present some of their learning as well as ask any questions they have in feedback to this activity. At this point, participants have already been invited to bring texts or lists of noun phrases with them from or inspired by their learners' work to the session and I also have lists available of noun phrases written by or inspired by my learners' work for any group that does not have their own lists to work off of. In the second part of language analysis, participants are then asked to compare learners' noun phrases with the noun phrases from the example cover letters and resumes in terms of complexity of the phrases and if there

are any words or structures that are commonly used in the examples and/or in their learners' work. This should help the group establish and subsequently remember why this work is useful for their learners.

The next stage focuses on activities that the participants can take back to their classrooms and use with their learners. There are two main areas of work for these activities: deconstructing the noun phrases used in the example cover letters and resumes, and building up unique noun phrases similar to what learners could use in their cover letters and resumes. Tables useful for deconstructing noun phrases were already used in the language analysis part of each session as a transition between language analysis and related activities. These language analysis activities help separate out the different pre- and postmodifiers included in the noun phrases and notice what types of structures are commonly used in cover letters and resumes for that session's topic. Tasks for building unique noun phrases to use in cover letters and resumes include activities such as brainstorming different facts that job candidates should include in their cover letters and resumes, choosing modifiers that learners could use in their texts, putting nouns and modifiers together to construct noun phrases similar to the ones they have analyzed, and using online resources to check which phrases are more common or useful.

After this, the session allows for small group discussions about the tasks and participants' learners. Participants are asked to talk about which tasks can be used just as they were used in the teacher development workshop, as opposed to tasks that would need adaptation and tasks that would not work well for their learners. Ideally, participants can be divided up so that each group has similar learners (similar ages, interests, job prospects, etc.) but this cannot be confirmed until a list of participants is finalized.

At the end of each session, participants are asked to fill in an exit ticket about their experience. Because of my history at this school, I can say that in general the CELTA graduates from this institution are willing to take time at the end of class to answer questions but do not tend to do so if asked to fill in a survey after class time. Participants are given five to ten minutes to fill in the exit ticket at the end of each session. There are three questions on each exit ticket:

1. What activity helped you learn most effectively today?
2. What's an activity or idea you can use in your classroom?
3. What would help make today's development session more effective?

The first two questions are meant to help participants reflect on their learning and help them solidify their thinking as to how they plan to use what they learned in their own classes. The exit ticket also aims to elicit ideas for how to improve future teacher development sessions in the series with the third question.

When the program ends at its entirety, there is a slightly longer survey with four questions:

1. Which session had the biggest impact on your teaching?
2. What ideas from the sessions have you implemented in your classes?
3. What changes to the program do you think would help it be more effective?
4. What other topics would you like to see in future programs?

The first two questions aim to discover which sessions and activities have been the most effective and impactful on the teacher development course, with an eye toward knowing what sessions and activities to keep in future iterations of the course. The last two questions aim to discover how the program might be changed in future iterations of the course. Because there is an additional question in this survey and it would require more

time to reflect on the entirety of the course, the time given for this survey will be between ten and fifteen minutes.

Timeline

The professional development workshop series is tentatively set to run over the course of the academic year in Israel and is to be launched in Fall 2023, with some changes occasionally being made for holidays. The academic year there typically runs from around the beginning of September until the end of June. It is likely that there will be no workshop in September 2023 because of holidays, and instead the professional development workshops will run from October to June, allowing for nine workshops total. There are three different strands for the workshops: language, materials, and students. Each workshop offers a blend of theory and practical advice as well as activity and lesson ideas. The workshop types would go in the following order:

- Materials
- Language
- Students

The language workshops (comprised of the three noun phrase workshops making up this project) are placed in the middle and at the end because the CELTA graduates, while they acknowledge the need for language work, are not interested in it enough for it to be the lead workshop in the series, but should attend if the workshops are placed in the middle and at the end of the program, since they like to finish a program on a high note.

Feedback and Assessment

Assessing the effectiveness of teacher professional development can be very useful (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Data collection to assess the effectiveness of these workshops is done using exit tickets. While it would be useful to include a

beginning-of-program survey, historically this author has found that none of the program graduates have completed any of the work assigned before other programs when it has been assigned. In addition to this, her observations at conferences indicate that in general, the target market of English teachers in Israel is not used to taking brief surveys at the beginning of a workshop. And since I have met every potential participant in these workshops, I am aware that their language awareness is not particularly strong and I am confident that starting with some basics about noun phrases is useful for the majority if not all of the participants.

Quick surveys or forms at the end of a session or program, however, have been feasible with these program participants in the past. Data will be collected using a digital exit ticket based on the Google *Exit Ticket Template* offered as part of Google's *Forms Template Gallery* available online for free ("Google Forms Template Gallery", n.d.). The form asks for information about what was learned in the workshop just completed, what the participants would change, if anything, and what they hope to see more of in future workshops.

There is also an end-of-program survey. In this author's experience, these participants are very likely to fill in short exit tickets, have literally never completed any pre-course work for their English teacher training programs, and sometimes may fill in end-of-course surveys. Because the culture does not support filling in long surveys very thoughtfully, the final survey is slightly longer than the exit tickets but not much. Questions are mainly easy-to-answer, closed-ended and ask participants to enter their own thoughts and ideas at the bottom.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I have discussed the project I have chosen to answer the research question, *How can teacher trainers support teachers in narrowing the gap between the noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and the types of noun phrases that they need to produce in professional job search documentation in English?* This project follows best practices for andragogy in general and for teacher development workshops in particular. This chapter provided an overview of the teacher development project, the goals it aims to achieve, the theoretical rationale for this project, a description of the context and participants for the project. It also provided further details about the project and information about data collection and assessment that can be used to evaluate the project, as it is ongoing, and to potentially revise it for further runs at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year. In Chapter Four I will describe what I learn as I progress throughout the capstone process, I will revisit the literature surrounding this topic, and finally discuss what I think are the main takeaways from and limitations of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

While sometimes English Learners (ELs) in General English (GE) classes really just want to know a bit of English to use while they are on vacation, many of them have a wide variety of needs that teachers and school administrators cannot anticipate, and that ELs themselves may not even be aware of. One such need that is not being addressed is the need for more information on the grammar of how to form complex noun phrases.

This gap that I initially viewed as a quirk in some textbooks seems now to be an industry wide trend that is not doing justice to our learners and their needs, nor to the teachers that aim to meet these needs. In my experience, learners do not approach their teachers to ask for more information on noun phrases, even if they need to improve in that area. Instead, with publishers seemingly unwilling to address the issue in more depth, teachers are the ones in the best position to address this issue. In order to help teachers meet these learner needs I developed the following research question: *How can teacher trainers instruct teachers on how to narrow the gap between noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and types of noun phrases necessary for ELs to produce effective resumes and cover letters in English?*

In this chapter, I will first discuss my major learnings from the capstone project. Then I will revisit the literature review from Chapter Two, and make a number of new connections to the research I did. After that I will discuss the potential implications of my project, and then the limitations of my project. After that I will address how future research and projects could address this issue. I will then share how the results of this

project might be communicated with others and how this might benefit the industry. And finally, I will conclude with a summary of this chapter.

Major learnings

I have learned an extensive amount during the course of the capstone process, from small facts to larger themes. These learnings are based not only on the research I did for my literature review in Chapter Two or the description of my project in Chapter Three, but also on the process of creating my project. I will address three of these major learnings in this section.

Where rules are lacking, patterns can help

When I first started formulating my research question, I mainly had grammar rules on my mind; however, my research showed me that grammar patterns can be equally helpful. Over time I have encountered learners and teachers who seem to think that English is entirely random and has no rules of any substance. These are people who look at something difficult in English or something that deviates from a previously learned rule and say to themselves that this is just the sort of nonsensical thing one would expect to find in this language. I will also admit to having had these thoughts myself on occasion. However, my investigation into complex noun phrases has caused me to view grammar rules differently. When I cannot find a rule that fits the language samples I have available, all is not lost. There are often tendencies that can help one understand how to use the language and can help learners do better producing it.

One very clear memory I have of this realization has to do with prepositional phrases used as postmodifiers in complex noun phrases. In the past, I would have assumed that the correct prepositions to use would involve an endlessly complex web of

information about different prepositions, phrases, contexts and more. And in many ways this is true. But it is also true that just six prepositions (*of, in, for, on, to* and *with*) introduce 90 percent of all prepositional postmodifiers in complex noun phrases (Biber, 1999). This is a tiny detail with a potentially huge impact for learners. If they have a choice between two prepositional phrases for postmodifiers and do not know which one to use, they can choose one with one of the above prepositions and you have a better chance. If they are not sure which preposition to use in a prepositional phrase postmodifying a noun, choose one of these six and your odds are good. If they are taking a high-stakes exam and need to choose which preposition goes in a slot right after the head noun in a noun phrase, statistically one of these six prepositions is a much safer bet.

In addition to finding meaningful information on noun phrase tendencies when poring through volumes of research, I also found this to be true according to my search for example noun phrases for use in this paper and my capstone project. I tried to find a variety of different noun phrases to exemplify the different parts of noun phrases and different types of noun phrases learners might encounter, but patterns often appeared. For example, *a Master's Degree in TESOL* is a good example of the common pattern of *indefinite article/possessive adjective pronoun + type of degree + in + subject* that I found time and time again. In theory, since the preposition *in* can also be used for location, someone could write “I got my Master’s degree in Kentucky”, but they do not tend to. There are other patterns used in writing about one’s education, but this is certainly one of the common ones.

There are other areas where patterns are even clearer. For example, the only time appositives were used in any of the example cover letters and resumes that I read was

when the job applicant was describing the company or organization to which they are applying (“Cover letter samples”, n.d.). I tried very hard to find other examples of appositives that were used for a different purpose and was unsuccessful. As a result, I now feel confident that if I see an appositive elsewhere in an EL’s cover letter or resume, I can tell them that they should change this.

There is a rationale for complex noun phrases

My second major area of learning is about noun phrases as part of formal language. I sometimes have the feeling that formal language exists merely for the sake of formality. And in the context of job searches, it could also serve a gatekeeping function. But in doing research for my literature review and in looking so closely at so many resume and cover letter samples for my project, I could see that there really was a purpose to it all. The research said that complex noun phrases existed so that writers could make their writing more dense (Halliday, 2014) and in looking at the sample resumes and cover letters I found that this was true.

Not only did I see a wealth of good examples of complex noun phrases that did just this, but I could also see how much information the professional samples were able to provide in a small space. This was not always but often in stark contrast to the resumes and cover letters that I have read from learners over the years, and that I receive as part of my project to help Ukrainians looking for jobs abroad. Formal language still can fulfill a gatekeeping function, but I also now have a very clear and simple rationale for complex noun phrases that I feel comfortable using with my learners in class as well.

Adult learning principles are important in TESOL

My third major area of learning is adult learning principles. I have often thought of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as an area so specialized within education that some of the usual rules may not apply. I did in fact go back and forth initially about whether to include significant research into adult learning principles in my literature review, but now I am very glad that I did. Doing this helped me see the relevance of what I now see are more generalized tendencies of adult learners that often form the basis of more specific tendencies of these same types of learners in TESOL. And while I might have seen slightly different terminology in TESOL over the years from what I read for my literature review in Chapter Two, the connection is very clear. Adult learners are adult learners, whether they are studying English or any other subject.

In addition to seeing this in how adult ELs learn, I can also see it in the principles applied to my teacher professional development (PD) sessions that I created for my capstone project. I found many clear connections between what makes for effective PD for teachers and what makes for effective learning experiences for adults in general. The principles laid out by Darling-Hammond et al. in *Effective Teacher Professional Development* (2017) served as the backbone for my theoretical rationale for my project and they are very clearly related to the work of Knowles and others in andragogy (Henry, 2011; Knowles, 1992; Knowles & Tough, 1985). Adult learning principles hold in TESOL, teacher training, and TESOL teacher training. Andragogy is relevant as long as one is working with adult learners.

Revisiting the literature

While the above realizations were a product of the capstone process as a whole, there are also other learnings that have come about directly as a result of having done the research required for Chapter Two, the literature review. In revisiting my research from the literature review after working on my capstone project, I have noticed two significant ways in which the research in particular has influenced my thinking.

Language research and awareness are key

There is no replacement for language awareness. I searched online and in grammar books that I had at home for information about complex noun phrases. I even bought a couple of smaller books and all this helped, but I knew that I needed more information than they were providing. I could not have done Chapter Two in the depth that I wanted to without searching through encyclopedic grammar reference books such as the *Longman grammar of spoken and written English* (Biber, 1999) and *The Cambridge grammar of the English language* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Studies, articles and sections of smaller grammar books are useful, but on their own they are not enough. I was not able to purchase one of these encyclopedic volumes about grammar while working on my capstone project, but I did commit to driving more than an hour away to get access to them, which I can say was definitely worthwhile. Without these resources, I could not have finished my paper or project.

Collocations are easier than grammar

When analyzing coursebooks as part of my literature review in Chapter Two, I found that most work on noun phrases is focused on specific collocations or sets of collocations rather than on the grammar of how to compose different types of complex

noun phrases. This research supported my instincts as an experienced teacher, so the trend was not surprising to me. However, the tendency was even more extreme than I had expected it to be. Out of nearly 1000 pages in a series of five TESOL textbooks, only one was dedicated to the grammar of noun phrases. That means that noun phrases as a grammar point were only worthy of .1 percent of the series in the eyes of the publisher.

However, when working on my own PD sessions as part of my capstone project, I found myself at times leaning on collocations exercises rather than the grammar of noun phrases. Part of the reason for this was that I wanted to be mindful of what teachers would have seen in the past and create a bridge between collocations exercises, which were much more common, and the type of exercise where learners would find themselves analyzing how to compose a noun phrase. For this reason, the first session in particular relies heavily on activities to work with specific collocations and the following two sessions rely solely on activities that require analyzing and creating complex noun phrases. Looking back on the time and effort I spent making the collocations activities as opposed to the other activities that focus on the grammar of noun phrases, the collocations exercises were much easier to make than the others. It may have been at least in part because I have more exposure to collocations exercises from working with textbooks over the years, but it is also in part because they do not require much understanding of language rules and tendencies. My idea in using these activities in the first session is to enable teachers to more quickly integrate more noun phrase activities into their lessons, which may be part of why they are included more often in textbooks as well.

Implications

As shown in Chapter Two, there are adult GE ELs who truly do need general instruction in English, but there are also many who need English to further their professional ambitions. For teachers with the willingness and bandwidth to take on the challenge of adapting GE materials to include material for this latter group of learners, the PD sessions created through this project will help them provide their learners with some of the professional language they so need.

While I was in the process of creating my capstone project, I happened to go on a family trip to Washington, DC and visit, among other people, a teacher who I used to manage at a language school there. We talked about various things, including my capstone project, and when I told her my topic she said, “I was just thinking about noun phrases the other day!” It turns out we both remember all too well a time when I tried to talk her into doing an activity on noun phrases with a class of hers and, although we fit in a few short conversations about noun phrases for a few days prior to the lesson in question, it was simply not enough. And without having seen other examples of teaching noun phrases before, she never ended up doing the activity with her class. When I told her about the PD sessions I was making about noun phrases and how everything would be presented, she responded by telling me that this would have gone a lot further in providing her with the language awareness and confidence she would have needed to cover noun phrases in class. This is exactly what I hope this project will bring about. I hope that teachers who want to help their learners with noun phrases but do not know where to start will be able to find the path to a place where they can start planning activities or even entire lessons about noun phrases for their classes.

Limitations

One of the biggest challenges throughout my capstone process was doing research for the literature review. There was very little to be found about noun phrases in cover letters and resumes. Kies (1985) wrote an article including nominalization as an important part of business writing. Numerous authors wrote about the need to write dense, informative text in cover letters and resumes (Coleman & Seglin, 2012; Fox, 2008; Mizrahi, 2015; Viswanathan, 2010). And big, thorough grammar books had a lot of information about how various types of noun phrases were used in formal writing, but they focused on areas such as journalistic writing or literature rather than on cover letters and resumes (Biber, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). While these areas are easier to access as many texts are part of the public domain, most ELs do not write literature or news articles in English in my experience. Resumes and cover letters are usually a crucial need for adult GE ELs, but there is not much information about using noun phrases in these documents. For high-stakes documents, cover letters and resumes feature very little in these grammar sources. Perhaps these authors, too, face limitations and have trouble accessing significant numbers of these documents for analysis.

Another challenge that occurred as part of the literature review was the work I did analyzing a coursebook series. I chose the *Speakout* series because it was one I had used recently for work and had access to. I analyzed all five levels in the series, which was a lot of work but worthwhile. It is, however, still just one series. Although I believe the results of this study are at least somewhat representative of the ELT publishing industry as a whole, it is impossible to say for sure given that this is just one book series.

Future research/projects

Because of the dearth of information on noun phrases, there are many different directions that one could pursue as part of research that would contribute substantially to the body of knowledge in this area. The first such area would be further quantitative studies of adult GE coursebooks, including how and to what extent they cover noun phrases. It would be good to study books from additional publishers rather than just from Pearson Education. It would also be good to study books containing varieties of English. I studied a series I had used recently for work and had access to, but it should be noted that this was a British English book and could be different from American English books or books with other English varieties.

Another way to add to the scholarship in this area would be to do research into how noun phrases are used specifically in cover letters and resumes. There is some literature addressing noun phrases in general, types of noun phrases, and noun phrases in professional writing. There is also literature about cover letters and resumes, but it does not address noun phrases. Having studies addressing how different nouns, modifiers and types of noun phrases are used in cover letters and resumes would certainly add to the literature in a substantial way. Perhaps a viable path forward, considering most cover letters and resumes are not part of the public domain, would be to use online repositories like the ones I used to get my professional noun phrase examples for my paper and project.

Finally, it would be good to help teachers further integrate noun phrases into their curriculums. There are two clear paths for doing this. One is to create further Professional Development (PD) sessions for teachers. The ones included in my project focus on noun

phrases in cover letters and resumes, and address formal writing. Further PD sessions could focus on different text genres or different levels of formality. They could also have a similar focus, but divide the content up differently or have a micro-focus on writing a professional summary, for example. In addition to PD sessions for teachers, actual curriculums for teachers to use with their adult classes would be an excellent addition to the professional resources available in this area. They could be used for GE classes or for Business English (BE) classes, which focus more on professional English.

Communicating results

As happy as I am with the topic I chose and the project I created, I do not think that noun phrases are set to take the world by storm anytime soon. I have my project available on a Google Site (<https://sites.google.com/view/nounphrases/home>) with a setting I can use to make it publicly available as part of Google Search results, but I do not expect to get many hits for this. The main goal for this project was to use it as part of a proposal for a continued professional development (CPD) scheme for English teacher graduates from the CELTA program run at a particular school in Jerusalem. Although I am not yet sure if they will choose to run a whole academic year program, I do think we will at least be able to fit individual sessions or activities into sessions that I do in that context as well as other contexts in which I teach and train as a freelancer. I also plan to make the site available to participants who attend any noun phrase sessions that I do so that they can use the materials to spread the word to their colleagues in the future.

Benefit to the profession

There are numerous benefits to the profession stemming from this capstone project. One is simply giving learners and teachers the option of a more well-rounded

English education than they would have otherwise. Another reason is so that teachers can be more knowledgeable and confident in their overall language awareness. Learning about complex noun phrases will not only improve their awareness of noun phrases, but also of other areas since there is significant overlap between noun phrase modifiers and other areas of grammar. And finally, and potentially much more importantly, is improving teachers' ability to meet their learners' needs. Adult GE ELs have a documented need for more professional English for use in job searches (Fareen, 2017; Huang, 2021; Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Uchidiuno et al., 2017). Since there is currently not much scholarship in this area, my capstone project will help to bridge that gap for participants so that they will be able to supplement textbooks and other course materials to help their learners in this area.

Summary

In this chapter, I reflected on my journey of deciding on, researching, and answering my research question: *How can teacher trainers instruct teachers on how to narrow the gap between noun phrases adult ELs are typically able to produce in GE classes and types of noun phrases necessary for ELs to produce effective resumes and cover letters in English?* I first discussed my major learnings from the capstone process and then revisited my learning specifically from my literature review in Chapter Two. I then reviewed the implications of my project and the limitations that I observed during my capstone process. After that I provided some ideas for future research and projects on this topic. And finally, I addressed how the results of this project might be communicated with others and how this might benefit the industry. What I learned on this journey and was able to create as my product for the capstone process goes beyond what I had

anticipated at first. I hope this paper and accompanying project will help me and others bridge the gap between what learners need and what textbooks currently offer them on complex noun phrases.

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