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THE NOTIONS OF PREMODIFICATION AND POSTMODIFICATION IN TEACHING THE ENGLISH ARTICLE

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Rezumat

Utilizarea corectă a articolului în limba engleză prezintă dificultăți pentru majoritatea studenților care o studiază ca o limbă străină. Chiar și acele limbi care folosesc articolele se deosebesc de limba engleză prin regulile aplicate. Una din dificultăți constă în faptul că articolul implică considerarea cuvintelor care precedează substantivul, într-o îmbinare substantivală (premodificare), sau cuvintelor, sau expresiilor, care urmează după substantiv într-o îmbinare substantivală (postmodificare). În acest articol, ne vom limita la analiza noțiunilor de premodificare și postmodificare, care explică diferența dintre articolele hotărît și nehotărît în limba engleză.

Premodification

Premodification includes any word that precedes the noun in a noun phrase. These words can be predeterminers (quantifiers such as *both, all, half, twice*, etc.), determiners, post-determiners (cardinal and ordinal numbers), or adjectives [1, p. 212].

The determiners, which include the articles, the words *no, this/that, every/each, either/neither, some/any*, and the possessives (e.g., *my, your, the doctor's*) precede any adjective in the noun phrase and are in all cases mutually exclusive.

14a. *the* red books

14b. *some* red books

14c. *no* red books

14d. *John's* red books

14e. *the boy's* red books

In 14e, the article is associated with the possessive noun, not with the head noun *books*, and hence is simply an example of a possessive determiner replacing any other determiner.

Adjectives in and of themselves, to the surprise of many EFL students, do not influence the choice of article.

15a. Your battery needs *water*.

15b. Your battery needs *distilled water*.

15c. *Your battery needs *the distilled water*.

In 15a, *water* is uncountable and indefinite/first mention. The same is true in 15b, but students will argue that *distilled water* is a definite type of water, which it of course is, and that it should therefore be preceded by *the*. At this point, the teacher must explain that, just as the distant view of *water* includes *all possible water*, the view of *distilled water* includes *all possible distilled water*. In most cases, when we use *the* with an uncountable noun phrase, we do not mean a specific subset of that noun but rather a limited quantity of it as indicated by a stated or implied postmodifier.

16a. I spilled (*some*) *water* on the table. *The water* [i.e., which I spilled] ruined the finish.

16b. Fill the bottle with *spring water*. *The (spring) water* [i.e., in the bottle] should last a few days.

This can be demonstrated graphically to students as follows.

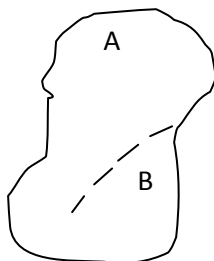


Figure 1. Premodified (A) vs. Postmodified (B) Nouns.

Draw the shape shown in Figure 1 on the blackboard to represent an uncountable noun. “A” represents the uncertain, generalized shape of an uncountable noun like *water*. “B” represents a limited quantity or portion of that uncountable noun. Elicit examples of “A” from the class (e.g., *water, air, hope, furniture, mathematics*).

Then ask the students how they would classify *lake water, dirty air, lost hope, old wooden furniture, or advanced non-linear algebra*: “A” or “B”? Students will tend to mislabel these general examples “B”. Then give the students a correct example of “B”, preferably using a “real” example (e.g., holding a piece of chalk or a glass of water in the hand, gesturing to indicate the air in the room, or pointing to the glass in the window). Allow students to realize, either with teacher’s examples or students’ spontaneous utterances, that it is usually postmodification that limits or makes definite an uncountable noun (i.e., makes an “A” noun into a “B” noun).

17a. *The piece of chalk that is in my hand* is broken.

17b. *The air in this room* is stuffy.

The model in Figure 1 filled with small circles can be used to demonstrate a similar effect with plural countable nouns.

18. Jung’s library is filled with *books*. *The books* (i.e., in Jung’s library) are mostly detective stories.

Postmodification

Postmodification includes any words or phrases that follow a noun in a noun phrase [1, p. 213]. These are most commonly relative clauses (reduced or otherwise) or prepositional phrases, most notably *of-phrases*, although there are a few occasions in English wherein single words can postmodify:

1. bare participles (e.g., *the words underlined*) [3, pp. 40-52];
2. indefinite compounds (e. g., *somewhere else, anyone new*);
3. poetic usage (“If I had *money enough* and time ...”).

Second mention without first mention

A noun is typically made definite (the equivalent of second

mention) by the use of such postmodification. In other words, a noun phrase that includes a relative clause or a prepositional phrase is usually preceded by *the* even though there has been no previous mention.

19a. *The man who lives next door* is a doctor.

19b. No one expected *the results that were found*.

20a. *The circumference of a circle* equals 2 nr.

20b. We take *the collection of garbage* for granted.

20c. *The processing of information* takes time and money.

20d. Alcoholism is *the way to ruin*.

This is always true if the noun is either an abstract noun or a gerund followed by an of-phrase, as in 20b and 20c. It is also true when the object of the preposition is a representative of the head noun, as is common among proper nouns.

a. *the field* of chemistry (chemistry is a field);

b. *the idea* of sharing (sharing is an idea);

c. *the city* of Rome (Rome is a city);

d. *the Republic* of Panama (Panama is a republic).

There are, however, two very important conditions under which postmodification does not make the noun definite: (1) in definitions and (2) in partitive structures.

1. *Definitions*. Defining (restrictive) relative clauses that occur in actual definitions serve to differentiate the species being defined from other members of the class to which it belongs.

21a. A mosquito is *a gnat* that bites and infects warm-blooded animals.

21 b. Hard water is *water* containing mineral salts that prevent soap from lathering.

In 21a, a mosquito is a species that is different from other gnats in that it bites and infects warm-blooded animals. 21b is a definition of an uncountable species, hard water. Since the italicized class word implies *is a member of this class*, the postmodifying defining relative clause does not make the noun definite but states

rather than an example of the species shares the characteristics set forth in that relative clause.

When the class word in a definition is preceded by *the*, the effect is not to make the word identified or familiar but rather to indicate that only one such class word exists.

22a. A spectrum is *the band of colors* formed when white light is separated by a prism.

22b. Metamorphosis is *the physical transformation* that is undergone by various animals during development after the embryonic stage.

22a indicates that only one band of colors will ever constitute *a spectrum*, 22b that the one-word *metamorphosis* embraces all possible physical transformations of this type.

Definitions are really only concerned with generic (i.e., representative rather than actual) nouns and make up an exception to the postmodification rule. There are, however, nongeneric (i.e., specific) sentences in English which utilize differentiating relative clauses of the type found in definitions.

23a. He bought *a car that gets 40 miles per gallon*.

23b. I need *(some) glue that will not wrinkle paper*.

23c. They examined *the molecule that controls heredity* by means of x-ray crystallography.

These examples all indicate representatives of a generic class.

2. *Partitive Structures*. The second condition under which postmodification does not make the noun specific is in partitive structures. Partitive structures in English denote the limitation of indefinite plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns and the transformation of the latter into countable noun phrases. They are made by postmodifying a delimiting noun with an *of-phrase* that has a plural or uncountable noun as its object:

24a. a box of matches;

24b. a can of peas ;

24c. a deck of cards;

- 24d. a glass of beer;
- 24e. a piece of cake;
- 24f. a ray of hope;
- 24g. a splinter of wood;
- 24h. a shard of glass.

The postmodification in partitive structures, as in 24a-h, does not automatically make the noun definite as it did in 20a and 20c, which are repeated here:

- 20a. *the circumference* of a circle;
- 20c. *the processing* of information.

In 20a and 20c, the head noun is not a delimiting one and the whole phrase is one of description rather than limitation. Unlike such descriptive phrases, a partitive structure follows normal first/second-mention constraints.

- 25. I ordered *a piece of cake*, but *the piece of cake* (it) was stale.

The partitive delimitation of uncountable nouns also applies to measurement nouns in English, even though measurement nouns are quasi-abstract.

- 26a. length a length of 8 feet
- 26b. density a density of 0.78

In all cases, the inversion of the partitive noun + of-phrase is not grammatically possessive but rather leads to the generation of noun compounds .14

- 26c. population a population of 3 million
- 27a. a shard of glass *a glass's shard
 a glass shard
- 27b. a splinter of wood *a wood's splinter
 a wood splinter
- 27c. a length of 8 feet *an 8-foot's length
 an 8-foot length

It should be noted that postmodified nouns are the most common predecessors of noun compounds in English.

- a. a store that sells books = *a bookstore*;
- b. an engine that runs on diesel = *a diesel engine*;
- c. a supply of oil = *an oil supply*;
- d. particles of dust = *dust particles*.

Although not all transformations of nouns + of-phrases into their equivalent possessive (i.e., Saxon genitive) or noun compound forms are used in English, e.g.

- 28a. *The bulk of the work* is finished. (*the work's bulk).
- 28b. Caffeine is *the cause of an unusually high incidence of miscarriages*. (*an unusually high incidence of miscarriages' cause).

a simple possessive/nonpossessive test can determine if a head noun is partitive or descriptive. In other words, if the transformation is logical, the article must be *the*; if not, the article must be *a(n)* or \emptyset

- 29a. *The height of the room* is 8 feet. (descriptive) .
- 29b. The room has *a height of 8 feet*. (partitive).

Obviously, *the room* can possess height as an attribute (*the room's height*), but *8 feet* cannot, like in 27c. The possessive/nonpossessive test is accurate in predicting the correct article before most nouns + of-phrases. However, if we consider the following examples:

- 20b. We take *the collection* of garbage for granted.
- 20c. *The processing* of information takes time and money.

we can see that in 20b, "the garbage's collection," and in 20c, "information's processing," are not acceptable possessives and would therefore predict *a(n)* or \emptyset as the correct article. But since *collection* is an abstract noun and *processing* is a gerund, we can apply the already established rule for this case – obligatory *the* – which takes precedence over the possessive/nonpossessive test.

The test does not apply when the *of* in the of-phrase actually means *which has* and therefore represents a differentiating relative clause.

- a. He wore a coat *of many colors* (i.e., which has many colors).

b. It is a river *of muddied eddies* (i.e., which has muddied eddies).

The following exercises will give students practice with postmodification and the possessive/nonpossessive test.

Directions: Assuming that the phrase is mentioned for the first time, fill the blanks with *a(n)*, *the*, or \emptyset [2, p. 93].

- a. _____ cup of coffee
- b. _____ capital of France
- c. _____ area of a circle
- d. _____ signs of turbulence
- e. _____ sharp stab of pain
- f. _____ underlying character of the doctor
- g. _____ rate of growth
- h. _____ plane of our galaxy
- i. _____ three-year supplement of iodine
- j. _____ reverse side of this page

Directions: Fill the blanks with *a(n)*, *the*, or \emptyset [2, p. 93].

The earth is made almost entirely of rock and metal. _____ outside of the earth has _____ thin covering of soil. Inside this covering, there is _____ layer of solid rock 30-50 miles deep. Below this crust of soil and rock lies _____ mantle of the earth, which has _____ thickness of about 600 miles. Next comes an intermediate layer with _____ depth of about 1,200 miles. Scientists have learned something about this layer by tracing _____ patterns of earthquake shocks. At _____ center of the earth lies the white hot core. It has _____ pressure of 45 million pounds per square inch (psi) and consists mostly of nickel and iron. Scientists believe that the earth is made of the same material as _____ smaller members of the solar system called meteorites. _____ series of solid and liquid layers is held together by _____ force of gravity.

Notice that in this exercise we have restricted the blanks to those concerned with postmodification. This is done in order to focus

the students' attention on such structures. The same exercise can be modified so that blanks are placed before such now familiar structures as *the earth* (shared knowledge: world), *ϕ rock and metal* (first-mention uncountable), *ϕ scientists* (first-mention plural), *the white-hot core* (shared knowledge: special), *the same material* (ranking adjective: unique), and *the solar system* (shared knowledge: world). The exercise modified in this way could be given to practice all the article usages learnt up to this point.

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PRIORITIES FOR METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH PHONETICS TO BEGINNERS

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Rezumat

Articolul dat reflectă posibilități optime de prezentare ale modalităților de asimilare eficientă a foneticii engleze pentru începători. În marea sa parte, cele expuse mai jos descriu modalități de pronunție ale sunetelor foneticii engleze prin prisma unor metode tradiționale. De asemenea, sunt expuse abordările și prioritățile metodice, care contribuie la realizarea obiectivelor didactice de studiere a foneticii engleze.

*“Human behaviour flows from three main sources:
desire, emotion and knowledge.”*

Plato