

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF NOMINAL GROUPS IN OPEN TOPICS FOUND IN JOURNAL WRITING: A SMALL-SCALE STUDY AT ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

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## Abstract

The main aim of this research was to identify the range of nominal groups in the fixed topic and open topic journal writings of Thai EFL learners. The data of this study is in the form of 30 fixed-topic and 30 open topic journal entries from Basic English students at Assumption University. These entries were taken from three phases (the first, midterm and final) of a semester and the analysis was based on functional grammar (Halliday 1998).

The findings indicate that more extensive nominal groups were being gradually used by the participants during their journal writings. Nominal groups become more complex and longer in the final part of the semester, namely two or more elements of pre-modifier and complex post-modifier were used. Nominal groups as Topical Theme and Marked Topical Theme in the journal writing were also analyzed to see the variety of use of such themes in the students' writing as this was important for cohesion in their texts. The development of nominal groups shows that improvement with the open topic journal writing task allowed greater scope for the students to express themselves and had a consequent effect on the types and range of nominal groups used.

**Key words:** fixed-topic journal, open-topic journal, nominal groups, Topic Theme (TT), Marked Topical Theme (MTT), Thai EFL learners.

Introduction

In any university in Thailand, there is a need to solve EFL learner’s writing problems and improving their English writing. Consequently, a “Basic English” courses are often provided. One of these is in Graduate School of English (GSE) at Assumption University (ABAC/AU) in Thailand. The target students in this particular study are freshmen. Most of the students are Thai. They were a group of EFL learners who have low proficiency in English writing and do not have enough confidence in English. In journal writing, fixed-topic journal is normally used as a means to improve their writing at this level. The researcher wanted to find out if the open-topic approach to journal writing would improve the development of the nominal groups rather than the restrictions imposed by a fixed-topic approach.

Theoretical and Practical Issues Relevant to EFL Journal Writing and Nominal Groups

In *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (1992: 251), noun phrase is “a group of words with noun or pronoun as the main part (the HEAD).” “The noun phrase may consist of only one word or it may be long and complex.”

Foley (2011: 8) explains a nominal group can be the single noun and the noun with modifiers. The constituent of single noun is a noun or pronoun. As for the noun with modifiers, two main constituents are involved. One is the noun as the HEAD word of the nominal group. The other is the modifier. The modifier contains pre-modifier and post-modifier.

Pre-modifier refers to words that go before the head word, involving one or more elements of Deictics (D), Numeratives (N), Epithets (E), and Classifiers (C) (Halliday 1998: 181-186; Foley 2011: 8-9). Following is an example given by Halliday (1998: 180):

|         |            |          |          |            |        |
|---------|------------|----------|----------|------------|--------|
| those   | two        | splendid | old      | electric   | trains |
| Deictic | Numerative | Epithet1 | Epithet2 | Classifier | Thing  |

Foley (2011) further explains the four elements in nominal groups with some examples:

1) Deictics (D) point to the noun functioning as the “Thing”.

|          |                |                                  |
|----------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Deictics | Articles       | e.g. a, an, the                  |
|          | Demonstratives | e.g. this, that, these, those    |
|          | Possessives    | e.g. my, her, their, my father's |

2) Numeratives (N) tell how many of the “Things” there are or in what order they occur.

|             |                         |  |
|-------------|-------------------------|--|
| Numeratives | Cardinal numbers        | e.g. one, two, three, a thousand               |
|             | Ordinal numbers         | e.g. first, second, third                      |
|             | Indications of quantity | e.g. lots of, many of, a few, some, every, all |

3) Epithets (E) describe the quality of a “Thing”. Epithets mainly consist of adjectives. For example, young, clean, blue, happy, interesting.

4) Classifiers (C) establish the “Thing” as a member of a class.

|             |                                    |   |
|-------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Classifiers | Adjectives                         | e.g. Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, public, financial |
|             | Nouns (functioning as Classifiers) | e.g. car park, home party                         |

Nominal groups can also have a post-modifier. The post-modifier is namely words that come after the head word. According to Foley (2011), there are several types of post-modifier. One type of post-modifier is the preposition phrase [pp+ng]. A preposition phrase consists of a preposition followed by another nominal. For instance, *the little dog [in her room]* “in” is preposition, “her room” is a nominal group. Other post-modifier can be finite and non-finite relative clauses. For example, “*The man **who is speaking now** [finite relative clause] is the president. The man **speaking** [non-finite relative clause] **now** is the president.*” (2011: 9)

To make it clear, Table I.I provides an overview of constituents of nominal groups.

Table I.I Constituents of nominal groups

| Nominal groups (Ng) |                    |                                    |      |  |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|------|--|
| Single noun         | Noun with modifier |                                    |      |  |
| A Noun/Pronoun      | Pre-modifier       |                                    | Head | Post-modifier  |
|                     | Deitic             | Article                            |      | Preposition phrase (pp+ng)                           |
|                     |                    | Demonstrative                      |      | Finite relative clause                               |
|                     |                    | Possessive                         |      | Non-Finite relative clause (reduced relative clause) |
|                     | Numerative         | Cardinal number                    |      |  |
|                     |                    | Ordinal number                     |      |  |
|                     |                    | Indication of quantity             |      |  |
|                     | Epithet            | Adjective                          |      |  |
|                     | Classifier         | Adjective                          |      |  |
|                     |                    | Nouns (functioning as classifiers) |      |  |

Modified from Foley (2011)

Method of Data Collection

In the present study, data collection is in the form of respondents’ journals.(Table I.2). The open topic journals as a primary source of data were collected by the researcher at the end of the course. Around 60 entries which the researcher used were selected from 120 journal entries for the study. The researcher used two classes to collect the data. They were in the same trimester and the same English level. One class teacher asked them to write fixed topic journal (F) .The other class teacher asked them to write open topic journal (O). Because of the constraints of space only a small sample of students using Open or Fixed topic can be discussed here.

Table I.2 Summary of Data Sources

| Data Sources  |   | Type of Data   | Number of Participants |
|---|---|--|------------------------|
| Journals from AU Basic English                              |   | Fixed-topic Journals                                     | 10 students(F1-F10)    |
|   |   | Open topic Journals                                      | 10 students(O1-O10)    |
| a (20 entries)  | b (20 entries)  | c (20 entries)   |                        |
| the first phase of journal entry: the 1 <sup>st</sup> entry | midterm phase of journal entry: the 6 <sup>th</sup> entry | final phase of journal entry: the 12 <sup>th</sup> entry |                        |



## Method of Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data by looking at the expansion of the nominal group on the students writing in their open topic journals: at the beginning, middle and end of the course to answer whether open topic journals produced longer nominal groups. It was also expected that the number of nominal groups from the beginning, middle and end of the journal writing would show some measure of the increase in usage. The researcher could then compare the results with fix topic journal writing.

**Table I.3 Matrix for the categorization of nominal group**

Single Noun & Noun with Pre-modifier

|     |           |                                       |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| *N2 | D+H       | e.g. a girl,, my friends              |
| N3  | N+H       | e.g. one apple                        |
| N4  | E+H       | e.g. old machine                      |
| N5  | C+H       | e.g. orange juice                     |
| N6  | D+N+H     | e.g. the second lady                  |
| N7  | D+E+H     | e.g. a huge seal                      |
| N8  | D+C+H     | e.g. Clash's music video              |
| N9  | N+E+H     | e.g. some small shoes                 |
| NI0 | N+C+H     | e.g. many water activities            |
| NI1 | E+C+H     | e.g. black nail polish                |
| NI2 | D+N+E+H   | e.g. these three remote controls      |
| NI3 | D+N+C+H   | e.g. the first pine tree              |
| NI4 | D+E+C+H   | e.g. one small cute phone             |
| NI5 | N+E+C+H   | e.g. two opened circuit air-condition |
| NI6 | D+N+E+C+H | e.g. this first little baby boy       |

Noun with post-modifier

|     |                            |  |
|-----|----------------------------|--|
| NI7 | preposition phrase [pp+ng] | e.g. the baby [in the room]                                    |
| NI8 | relative clause            | e.g. My teacher who teach music ask me                         |
| NI9 | reduced relative clause    | e.g. You just press the Talk button, located at the middle top |

(D means Deictic, N is Numerative, E stands for Epithet, C represents Classifier and H is instead of the head noun.)\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier.

Modified from Wang Xiujie, 2009)

The categories of nominal groups are from N2 to NI9. The development of nominal groups was looked at using various categories of nominal groups, using more complex pre-modifiers or post-modifiers or both, and expanding the length. In terms of pre-modifiers: N2 to NI6, more

complex nominal groups, namely, increasing elements of the pre-modifiers are a sign of nominal groups’ development. In the pre-modifier group, N2 to N5 contained one element of the pre-modifier. N6 to N11 belong to two elements of the pre-modifier. N12 to N15 are in the class of three elements of the pre-modifier. N16 is involved in four elements of the pre-modifier. As for the post-modifier, N18 and N19 can be seen as the developmental forms of N17.

In the process of data analysis, for the convenience of data analysis, firstly, the researcher typed students’ journal entries into the computer. Secondly, the researcher applied manual analysis to identify categories of nominal groups in each respondent journal entries in terms of the framework presented above. There are three entries for each student: the first journal entry, midterm journal entry and final entry. Considering the two-page length of journal entries, the researcher took several paragraphs in each entry as the samples. In order to highlight the nominal groups in the writing samples, italics were used in the data analysis. Thirdly, the researcher compared the difference of nominal groups in three entries according to each participant. How frequently the students use NG in their journal writing task and how many times the students use NG as topical theme or marked topical theme in their journal writing was also examined. The rationale for identifying common errors of nominal groups is hoped help researchers further understand the problems of using nominal groups with Thai EFL learners.

Analysis and Discussion

Open Topic

Participant (OI)

Table 1.4 Nominal groups’ development of OI

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| O 1a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    | +    |      |
| O 1b | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |      | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| O 1c | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      |      | +    |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

Participant OI originally used NG from N2 (D+H) to N5 (C+H), but also has more complex pre-modifier from N6 (D+N+H) to NI2 (D+N+E+H) and post-modifier NI7 [pp+ng] is used in the journal. In midterm phase of journal entry OIb add N6, N7, N8, N9 and NII. In the final entry OIc, NI2 appears, But no N6, N8 and N9.

*Table I.4.I Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in OI journals.*

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | OIa        | TT/MTT | OIb | TT/MTT | OIc | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 13         | 5      | 6   | 2      | 19  | 3      |
| N3    | 1          |        | 4   |        | 3   | 1      |
| N4    | 5          |        | 4   |        | 2   |        |
| N5    | 9          | 1      | 8   | 5      | 4   |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | 1   |        | 0   | /1     |
| N7    | 9          | 1      | 6   |        | 7   |        |
| N8    | 3          |        | 3   | 2      | 1   |        |
| N9    | 0          |        | 1   |        | 0   |        |
| NII   | 1          |        | 3   |        | 0   |        |
| NI2   | 0          |        | 0   |        | 1   |        |
| NI7   | 6          | 2      | 6   | 3      | 6   | 2      |
| NI8   | 1          |        | 0   |        | 1   |        |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within an adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

From *Table I.4.I*, we can see that student OI is using NG from N2 to N8 frequently as well as N6. Post-modifier NI7 and NI8 are also used. In the midterm phase of journal entry, the student used N2 less than in the first, but used N3 to N9 frequently. The topic of the midterm phase is about Thailand, and is very familiar for the student, so the student uses more complex NG like NII in the midterm. And we also can see that student is use TT in whole journal writing, like “*And than on the mountain have more adventure* (OIa), *Then the modern of Thailand have....* (OIb), *Even in this modern world we search for....* (OIc)”. In the final journal writing, the students used MTT “*Even in this modern world we search for chat sites and make chatting friends*”

Participant (O2)

Table I.4.2 Nominal groups’ development of O2

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| O 2a | +   |     | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| O 2b | +   |     |     | +   | +   | +   |     |     | +    | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    | +    | +    |
| O 2c | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |     | +   | +   |      | +    |      |      | +    |      |      | +    | +    |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

Participant O2 uses N2 to N5, and more complex pre-modifier from N6 to NI4. Much of this is used in the article and post-modifier [pp+ng]. In midterm phase of journal entry the writer add NI0, NI8 and NI9. In the final entry, N8, N9, NII and NI4 appear, But N6 and NI0 are unused.

Table I.4.3 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in O2 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | O2a        | TT/MTT | O2b | TT/MTT | O2c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 28         | 5      | 9   | 2/I    | 16  | 8/I    |
| N3    | 1          | 1      | 1   |        | 9   |        |
| N4    | 3          |        | 2   |        | 10  |        |
| N5    | 4          |        | 8   |        | 8   |        |
| N6    | 2          | 1      | 2   |        | 0   |        |
| N7    | 3          | /2     | 6   | /1     | 1   |        |
| N8    | 1          |        | 0   |        | 2   |        |
| N9    | 0          |        | 0   |        | 2   |        |
| N10   | 0          |        | 1   |        | 0   |        |
| N11   | 0          |        | 0   |        | 2   |        |
| N14   | 0          |        | 0   |        | 1   |        |
| N17   | 3          | 3      | 3   | 3      | 3   | 4      |
| N18   | 0          |        | 1   |        | 2   |        |
| N19   | 0          |        | 1   |        | 0   |        |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student O2 is using NG from N2 to N7 frequently. In the midterm phase of journal entry, the student used NG less than first and last phase, but used N2 to N5 more frequently. In the last phase, the student is using more complex pre-modifier like N8, N9, NII, NI4 and post-modifier from NI7 to NI9. The midterm topic is about friend and the last topic is about favorite city, so we can see that student is using more complex pre-modifier

and post-modifier. TT/MTT in journal writing are using “*my leg suddenly feel heavy* (O2a), *in the weekend we always sleep in each house....*(O2b), *history f this country have many channel.....*(O2c)”

Participant (O3)

Table I.5.1 Nominal groups’ development of O3

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| O 3a | +   | +   |     | +   |     | +   |     | +   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| O 3b | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    | +    |      |
| O 3c | +   |     |     | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      |      | +    | +    | +    |      |      | +    |      | +    |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

From the analysis of nominal groups in the three entries of the third participant, it can be seen that the nominal groups are not used consistently.. Participant O3 use NG just N2 in the writing, but also has more complex pre-modifier N7 and post-modifier [pp+ng] are used. In midterm phase of journal entry the writer add N4 and N5. In the final entry, NI2, NI3 and NI4 appear.

Table I.5.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in O3 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | O3a        | TT/MTT | O3b | TT/MTT | O3c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | I6         | 2/I    | I4  | I2     | 4   | I      |
| N3    | 3          |        | 3   |        | 6   |        |
| N4    | 0          |        | 4   |        | 0   | /I     |
| N5    | 8          |        | I   |        | 6   |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | I   |        | 0   |        |
| N7    | 5          | 2      | 5   | /I     | 3   |        |
| N8    | 0          |        | 0   |        | 2   | I      |
| N9    | I          |        | 0   |        | 0   |        |
| NI3   | 0          |        | 0   |        | I   |        |
| NI4   | 0          |        | 0   |        | I   |        |
| NI7   | 4          | 4      | 4   | 5/I    | 4   | I      |
| NI8   | 0          |        | I   |        | I   |        |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student O3 is using NG few, but more N2 is using more frequently, in the last phase the student does use complex pre-modifier N13 and N14 each time and the student is using TT/MTT, specially N17 as topic theme, like “in my family have 6 people there are my father....(O3a), the computer have the negative way and positive way. ....(O3b),So that everybody should be save water and use water worthwhile. (O3c)”

Participant (O4)

Table 1.6.1 Nominal groups’ development of O4

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| O 4a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   | +   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| O 4b | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    | +    |      |
| O 4c | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +    |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

From the analysis of nominal groups in the three entries of the fourth participant, Participant O4 use NG from N2 to N3, complex pre-modifier N7, N8 and post-modifier N17 [pp+ng] are used. In midterm phase of journal entry the writer adds N6 and N18. In the final entry, N9 and N10 appears.

Table 1.6.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in O4 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | O4a        | TT/MTT | O4b | TT/MTT | O4c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 14         | 8      | 6   | 3/2    | 6   | 6/I    |
| N3    | 5          | /I     | 5   |        | 6   |        |
| N4    | 4          |        | 3   |        | 2   |        |
| N5    | 3          | /I     | 2   |        | 3   |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | 2   |        | 2   |        |
| N7    | 3          | /I     | 3   | I      | 2   |        |
| N8    | I          |        | 2   |        | I   | I      |
| N9    | 2          |        | 0   |        | 2   |        |
| N10   | 0          |        | 0   |        | I   |        |
| N17   | 5          | 4/I    | 2   | I      | 3   | I      |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student O4 is using NG from N2 to N9, post-modifier NI7. In the midterm phase of journal entry is using NI8 one time. N2 and NI7 as TT/MTT as “no one in the world can survive without love.(O4a), the idea about adaptation in transport did not have more.(O4b), but the plane ticket is more expensive. ....(O4c)”

### Participant (O5)

Table I.7.1 Nominal groups' development of O5

|    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 5a |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | +  | +  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 5b |   | + |   | + |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 5c |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

From the analysis of nominal groups in the three entries of the fifth participant, it can be seen that the use of nominal groups without any consistently. Participant O5 used NG from N2 to N4, but also has more complex pre-modifier from N6 to NI4 and post-modifier [pp+ng]. In midterm phase of journal entry the writer add N6, NI4 and NI9. In the final entry, N9 is use.

Table I.7.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in O5 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | O5a        | TT/MTT | O5b | TT/MTT | O5c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 4          | I/2    | 6   | 2/I    | II  | 4/I    |
| N3    | 0          |        | 4   | /I     | 3   | I      |
| N4    | 2          |        | 2   |        | I   |        |
| N5    | 3          |        | 4   | 2      | 2   |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | I   |        | 2   |        |
| N7    | 2          |        | 3   |        | 8   | I      |
| N8    | 2          |        | 0   |        | 3   |        |
| N9    | 0          |        | 0   |        | I   |        |
| NI0   | I          |        | 0   |        | 0   |        |
| NI1   | I          |        | 0   |        | 0   |        |
| NI4   | 0          |        | I   |        | I   |        |
| NI7   | 0          | I      | 3   | I      | 2   |        |
| NI8   | 2          |        | 0   |        | 4   |        |
| NI9   | 0          |        | I   |        | 0   |        |

(\*NI is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student O5 is using few of NG, NG as TT/MTT are using few in journal writing, as“*although their incomes are still low by...* (O5a), *the answer may vary from person to person.*(O5b), *some people asked me why I chose to study at ABAC.*(O5c)”

Fixed Topic

Participant (F6)

Table 2.1.1 Nominal groups’ development of F6

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | NI 0 | NI 1 | NI 2 | NI 3 | NI 4 | NI 5 | NI 6 | NI 7 | NI 8 | NI 9 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| F6 a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |     | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| F6 b | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   |     |     |      | +    |      |      |      |      | +    | +    | +    | +    |
| F6 c | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +    |      |      |      | +    | +    |      | +    | +    |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

In the first entry, the participant uses few pre-modifier. In the midterm entry, two elements of the pre-modifier are increasing, and the pre-modifier NI6 appear in the entry. In the final entry, various pre-modifier are applied.

Table 2.1.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in F6 journals.

| Style | Frequently |    |     |    |     |    |
|-------|------------|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|       | F6a        | TT | F6b | TT | F6c | TT |
| *N2   | 6          | 5  | 22  | 11 | 41  | 14 |
| N3    | 2          |    | 3   |    | 11  | 1  |
| N4    | 3          |    | 5   |    | 7   |    |
| N5    | 6          |    | 5   |    | 6   |    |
| N6    | 0          |    | 0   |    | 4   |    |
| N7    | 0          |    | 2   |    | 5   | 3  |
| N8    | 1          |    | 0   |    | 4   | 2  |
| N9    | 0          |    | 0   |    | 3   |    |
| N10   | 0          |    | 0   |    | 1   |    |
| N11   | 0          |    | 1   |    | 0   |    |
| N14   | 0          |    | 0   |    | 2   |    |
| N15   | 0          |    | 0   |    | 1   |    |
| N16   | 0          |    | 1   |    | 0   |    |
| N17   | 3          |    | 3   | 2  | 5   | 9  |
| N18   | 0          |    | 3   |    | 7   |    |
| N19   | 0          |    | 1   |    | 0   |    |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)



Student F6 is using NG frequently from N2 to NI5 in whole topic. In the last phase of journal entry, the student increase NG a lot. N2 as TT is using in whole topic frequently, others is using few, like “*her mouth is red ad she is white. (F6a), the area in my home has a small garden.... (F6b), the top floor is mine.... (F6c)*”. The student did not use MTT in the journal writing.

Participant (F7)

Table 2.2.1 Nominal groups’ development of F7

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | NI 0 | NI 1 | NI 2 | NI 3 | NI 4 | NI 5 | NI 6 | NI 7 | NI 8 | NI 9 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| F7 a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| F7 b | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |      | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| F7 c | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +    | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

In the first entry, the categories of nominal groups are limited. However, noun with pre-modifier is increasing in the midterm entry. But also do not have post-modifier. In the final entry, various pre-modifier is applied. Post-modifier NI7 appears in this entry.

Table 2.2.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in F7 journals.

| Style | Frequently |    |     |    |     |    |
|-------|------------|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|       | F7a        | TT | F7b | TT | F7c | TT |
| *N2   | I3         | 2  | I3  | 2  | 25  | 6  |
| N3    | I4         | 3  | I7  | 7  | I2  | 6  |
| N4    | I          |    | 6   |    | 3   |    |
| N5    | 9          |    | 9   |    | I3  |    |
| N6    | 0          |    | I   |    | 2   | I  |
| N7    | 2          |    | I   |    | I   | I  |
| N8    | I          | I  | I   |    | I0  | 5  |
| N9    | 0          |    | 0   |    | 2   |    |
| NI0   | 0          |    | 0   |    | I   |    |
| NI1   | 0          |    | 2   |    | 2   |    |
| NI7   | I          |    | 7   |    | 2   | I  |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student F7 is using NG from N2 to N5 frequently. In the last phase of journal entry, the student increase NG a lot. N2 and N3 as TT are using frequently in the journal writing, in the last phase of journal entry NG as TT increase a lot, as “*the Chinese flag is red and there are five stars.... (F7a), many students come here to buy.... (F7b),the traffic policeman wears policeman’s suit.(F7c)*”.

Participant (F8)

Table 2.3.1 Nominal groups’ development of F8

|     | N2 | N3 | N4 | N5 | N6 | N7 | N8 | N9 | NI0 | NI1 | NI2 | NI3 | NI4 | NI5 | NI6 | NI7 | NI8 | NI9 |
|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| F8a | +  | +  | +  | +  |    |    | +  |    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | +   |     |     |
| F8b | +  | +  | +  | +  |    | +  |    |    |     | +   |     |     | +   |     |     |     |     |     |
| F8c | +  | +  | +  | +  |    | +  | +  |    |     | +   |     |     |     |     |     | +   |     |     |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

In the first entry, few pre-modifier and NI7 are used. In the midterm entry, two or more elements of the pre-modifier are increasing. But post-modifier do not use. In the final entry, the student begins to use NI7 again. Two or more elements of the pre-modifier are used more frequently.

Table 2.3.2 Frequently of Nominal Groups appearing in F8 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | F8a        | TT/MTT | F8b | TT/MTT | F8c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 30         | 10/1   | 3   |        | 17  | 2/1    |
| N3    | 4          |        | 1   |        | 2   | 1      |
| N4    | 2          |        | 2   |        | 2   |        |
| N5    | 1          |        | 9   |        | 1   |        |
| N7    | 0          |        | 1   |        | 2   |        |
| N8    | 3          | 1      | 0   |        | 1   |        |
| NI1   | 0          |        | 2   |        | 2   |        |
| NI2   | 0          |        | 1   |        | 0   |        |
| NI3   | 0          |        | 4   |        | 0   |        |
| NI4   | 0          |        | 1   | 1      | 0   |        |
| NI7   | 6          | 1      | 6   | 1      | 4   | 2      |

(\*NI is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student F8 is using N2 and NI7 frequently. N2 and NI7 as TT are using in the journal writing, as “*the chair is very old.(F8a), a true coffee shop is very good location. (F8b), in the picture I saw a sea and sand. (F8c)*”.The student also used N2 as MTT in the first and last journal writing phase.

Participant (F9)

Table 2.4.1 Nominal groups’ development of F9

|      | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| F9 a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      | +    |      |      |
| F9 b | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| F9 c | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

In the first entry, few pre-modifier and NI7 are used. In the midterm entry, two or more elements of the pre-modifier are increasing. But post-modifier do not use. In the final entry, the student begins to use NI7 again. Two or more elements of the pre-modifier are used more frequently.

Table 2.4.2.1Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in F9 journals.

| Style | Frequently |        |     |        |     |        |
|-------|------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|       | F9a        | TT/MTT | F9b | TT/MTT | F9c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | 5          | 2      | 3   |        | I0  | 2/I    |
| N3    | 9          | 3      | 8   | 4      | 5   |        |
| N4    | 2          |        | I   |        | 3   |        |
| N5    | 7          |        | 2   |        | 3   |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | I   |        | 0   |        |
| N7    | 0          |        | 4   |        | 2   |        |
| N8    | 0          |        | I   | I      | 2   |        |
| NI1   | 0          |        | 0   |        | I   |        |
| NI4   | I          |        | 0   |        | 0   |        |
| NI7   | 3          | 2      | 0   |        | 2   | I      |

(\*NI is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

Student F9 is using NG frequently from N2 to N5. In the midterm phase of journal entry, the student is using NG average. NG as TT is using in the journal writing, as “*some people want buy things at the shop. (F9a),*

*some people want to go to office... (F9b), my brother buys electric guitar ... (F9c)*". In the last journal writing phase, the student did used N2 as MTT.

Participant 20 (F10)

Table 2.5.1 Nominal groups’ development of F10

|       | N 2 | N 3 | N 4 | N 5 | N 6 | N 7 | N 8 | N 9 | N 10 | N 11 | N 12 | N 13 | N 14 | N 15 | N 16 | N 17 | N 18 | N 19 |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| F1 0a | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      | +    |      |      |
| F1 0b | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |
| F1 0c | +   | +   | +   | +   |     | +   | +   |     |      | +    |      |      |      |      |      | +    |      |      |

(“+” means the category of nominal group is used in the entry)

In the first two entries, N5 is used frequently. In the midterm entry, the writer does not use more complex pre-modifier. In the final entry, the application of pre-modifier makes progress. More complex pre-modifier is appeared, especially N11.

Table 2.5.2 Frequency of Nominal Groups appearing in F10 journals.

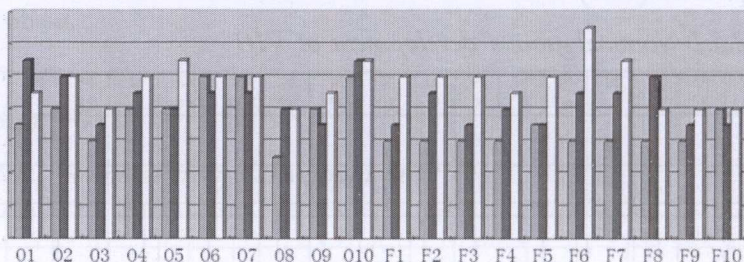
| Style | Frequently |        |      |        |      |        |
|-------|------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|
|       | F10a       | TT/MTT | F10b | TT/MTT | F10c | TT/MTT |
| *N2   | I2         | I      | 20   | /I     | I4   | I      |
| N3    | 6          |        | I    |        | 4    |        |
| N4    | 4          |        | 2    |        | 2    |        |
| N5    | I4         |        | 7    |        | I    |        |
| N6    | 0          |        | 0    |        | 0    | /I     |
| N7    | 4          |        | 3    |        | 3    |        |
| N8    | 3          |        | I    |        | 4    |        |
| N11   | 0          |        | 0    |        | I    |        |
| N14   | I          |        | 0    |        | 0    |        |
| N17   | 3          |        | 2    |        | 4    |        |

(\*N1 is simple noun or pronoun without any modifier; TT is topic theme in subject position; MTT is NG within adverbial clause placed at the beginning of the clause)

We can see that student F10 is using NG from N2 to N8 frequently except N6. Post-modifier N17 also used. We also can see that in the first phase of journal entry, the student used N5 more than other phases, NG as TT is using each times in first and last phase journal writing, there are “*a man is walking on a mobile phone shop (F10a), a car drive to the zoo...(F10c)*”. In the midterm and last writing phase, student used N2 and N6 as MTT.

## Discussion

*Overall Summary of nominal groups' development of all the students involved in the study*



(OI-OI0= open topic students FI-FI0= fixed-topic students □=the first phase of journal entry □=midterm phase of journal entry □=final phase of journal entry.)

20 Thai learners did seem to make progress in using nominal groups in their opened-topic and fixed-topic journal task. Such improvement can be seen in 60 journal entries from the three phases of a semester. There are 19 categories of nominal groups used in the writing task. N2 (D+H) is used in all the entries.

As can be seen from the analysis, writing the opened-topic and fixed-topic journals during the semester, all of the 20 students have made some progress in using the nominal groups. However, not all the students expand their nominal groups in same way. Some students have obviously changed. F6 make the most progress in increasing categories of the nominal groups among the 20 students. The categories of nominal groups for F6 are from 6 categories in the first entry to 13 categories in the final entry. OI0 use the most categories of the nominal groups.

1. Opened-topic students used NG more frequently than fixed-topic students
2. Opened-topic students used NG more complex than fixed-topic students
3. Opened-topic students used post-modifier more frequently than fixed-topic students
4. Opened-topic students can use NG as TT when they are writing. But fixed topic students tended to be rest meted, because the topic is fixed, so they use "T" a lot in the journal writing.
5. Fixed-topic students also repeat the same NG again and again such as N2 (D+H).

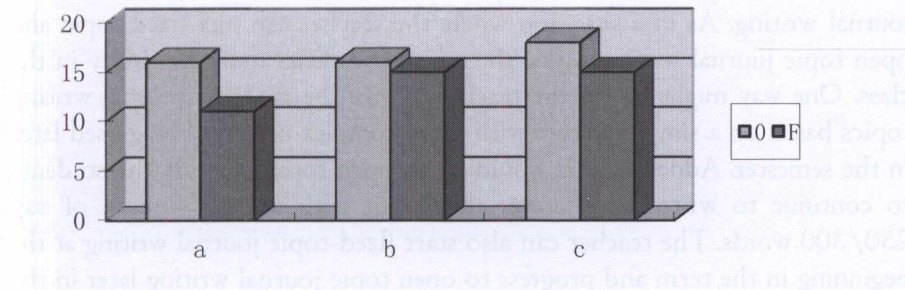


Nominal Groups used in Thematic position in the clause

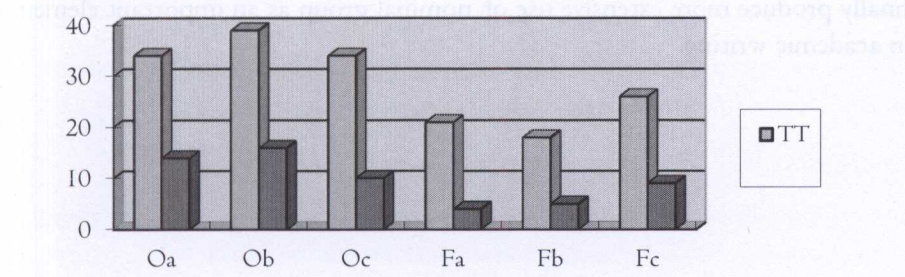
An important aspect of the development of the students’ writing is the function that the nominal group plays in the overall discourse of the text. The thematic development in terms of the organization of the discourse helps to give text cohesion and can thus result in a coherent message. Within the limitations of this article we can only point out that open topic students used Topical Themes and Marked Topical Themes more frequently than fixed topic students in the journal writing.

|   | First phase | Midterm phase | Final phase |
|---|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| Open Topic                                    | 16          | 16            | 18          |
| Fixed Topic                                   | 11          | 15            | 15          |
| Marked Topical Theme in Open journal writing  | 14          | 16            | 10          |
| Topical Theme in Open journal writing         | 34          | 39            | 34          |
| Marked Topical Theme in fixed journal writing | 4           | 5             | 9           |
| Topical Theme in fixed journal writing        | 21          | 18            | 26          |

Variation of nominal groups’ categories in open topic and fixed-topic



The frequency of Topic Theme & Marked Topic Theme categories in open topic and fixed-topic



## Conclusion

From the data analysis presented here, it can be said that Thai learners' nominal groups show some development in their writing skills as reflected in their journals. Students use more categories in terms of nominal groups and more complex modifiers. That is, there are more elements of the pre-modifier, especially two or more elements of pre-modifier in the final stages of their journal writing. In addition, noun with post-modifier becomes more complex. Students not only use simple form NI7 (pp+ng), but also the more complex form: NI8 (finite relative clause) and NI9 (non-finite relative clause) in their final entries.

The study of nominal groups in Thai EFL learners' open topics journal writing has been examined in this small-scale research because journal writing is widely adopted by English teachers. However, fixed-topic is used more frequently because it is assumed the students need more guidance. The indications from this study are that open topic approaches to writing have potentially more benefit in terms of allowing creativity in the students' writing and in developing the strategies of discourse organization through the use of the thematic development.

Future study could further explore the difference in Thai EFL learners' journal writing. As in a situation where the teacher can mix fixed topic and open topic journal writing tasks, thus giving students more flexibility in the class. One way might be for the teacher to give the students journal writing topics based on a simple picture with more complex pictures being used later in the semester. Added to this would be an open topic allowing the students to continue to write on whatever they want with a word limited of say 250/300 words. The teacher can also start fixed-topic journal writing at the beginning in the term and progress to open topic journal writing later in the trimester.

The supposition here is that such a degree of 'open-endedness' would finally produce more extensive use of nominal group as an important element in academic writing.

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