The Discourse Basis for Lexical Categories Revisited: Nominalisation in epistolary prose
Anneli Meurman-Solin, University of Helsinki

1. Introduction

This study discusses nominalisation in epistolary prose from four different perspectives: (i) the theoretical and methodological implications of a discourse-based assessment of nouniness, with the system of annotation created for this assessment and applied to the Corpus of Scottish Correspondence in focus, (ii) salience of verb-like and noun-like properties in recorded patterns of variation, including a reanalysis of the so-called etymological nominalisations, (iii) degree of syntactic complexity in epistolary prose, and (iv) nominalisation in information structure in epistolary prose, highlighting its relatedness to politeness.

Research questions

- the theoretical and methodological implications of a discourse-based assessment of nouniness, with the system of annotation created for this assessment in focus
- salience of verb-like and noun-like properties in recorded patterns of variation, including a reanalysis of the so-called etymological nominalisations
- degree of syntactic complexity in epistolary prose
- nominalisation in information structure in epistolary prose, highlighting its relatedness to politeness
Despite naming a particular genre, epistolary prose, in the title of my paper, my methodological approach is not related to studies of the so-called nominal style (e.g. Biber & al. (1999: 231)), nor does it refer to the role of nouns and nominalisations in the framework of dimensions based on factor analysis (Biber 1988). Instead, each individual occurrence of a nominalisation has been investigated in context, stressing discourse properties rather than aiming to categorise by morpho-syntactic markings or lexical history. My aim is to illustrate that it is indeed quite problematic to describe continued variation and variability by using discrete category labels as the main tools. With increased quantities of corpus data, resorting to traditional categories may seem the only option. However, the present experiment aims to suggest areas in the study of nouniness which call for elaborated annotation of discourse-based categorial gradience, taking into account recorded patterns of variation.

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Variation-oriented description

- The usefulness of discrete category labels as tools in diachronic research oriented towards the description of continued variation and variability is questionable.

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1 Biber & al. (1999: 231) argue that ‘Single pronouns abound in the conversation text, while longer and more complex structures are predominant in the written registers. It is this difference in the complexity of nominal elements which is the main difference among registers, not the frequency of nominal elements.’

2 In Biber (1988: 104), nouns have a high negative weight on Factor 1, ‘involved’ versus ‘informational’, whereas nominalisations have a relatively low positive weight on Factor 3, indicating that there is ‘an explicit, elaborated identification of referents in a text’ (110), this factor distinguishing ‘between highly explicit, context-independent reference and nonspecific, situation-dependent reference’.
2. **Data source**

My paper draws on a manuscript-based corpus of chiefly sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish correspondence. The *Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* was chosen as the data source because it has been subjected to elaborated annotation of nominal structures, with the theoretical framework described in Hopper & Thompson (2004) in mind (see Meurman-Solin 2007a, b).

For a detailed discussion of annotating nominalisation in the CSC, see the manual and my article in the electronic series published by the Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change:

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**Corpus of Scottish Correspondence, 1500-1715**

- The CSC Manual  
  [http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/journal/volumes/01/meurman-solin/](http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/journal/volumes/01/meurman-solin/)

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Nominalisations are tagged by adding the comment `{rc}` ‘reduced clause’ to a core property symbol such as `/n` ‘noun, singular’, `/vn` ‘verbal noun’, `/npl` ‘noun, plural’. In English coinages, the lexel\(^3\) consists of the base element (e.g., the base form of the verb in verbal nouns), whereas in items borrowed directly from some other language the derivative (base + affix) is given. Some words may have both types of lexel in the corpus: (i) a verb, indicating that the nominalisation is a deverbal noun derivative and (ii) a borrowed noun derivative. In these cases, the two uses are distinguished according to semantic criteria. Thus, a particular word may sometimes have the comment `{rc}` and sometimes not. For example, *reversion in a letter of reversion* is a

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\(^3\) The lexel functions as a representation of the more or less numerous variant forms that a particular lexical word may have in the data. Most function words are also represented by an emic word-form in the lexel (e.g. *have* and *be* as auxiliaries in compound tenses and the passive have the lexels $have/$ and $be/$ respectively). See the CSC Manual, section 3.2.4.1.
technical term in legalese ($reversion/n<pr\_REVERSION^4$), whereas in *their reversion to sin* it is tagged as a nominalisation. However, since the noun *reversion* is a direct borrowing from French, the lexel is still $reversion/$, instead of $revert/$.

To make the compiler/tagger’s decision-making maximally transparent, information about the early history of a particular lexical item in English is based on the OED. It is assumed that the database of Scottish letters will frequently be used in conjunction with data representing other varieties of English, and lexels reflecting OED evidence are believed to be more useful in research across varieties than those based exclusively on the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (DSL).

- Thus, while the lexels reflect views recorded in the OED, grammels^5 provide information about the tagger’s discourse analysis.

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4 The main principle in the CSC is that the manuscript text is given in upper case, while emic representations of contracted elements are in lower case. An asterix is attached to initial capitals. An expansion of a contracted element in a word in the original manuscript is in lower case. The symbol ~ is used for a flourish that permits more than one expanded form, and the symbol ” for word-final tails. A question-mark indicates that the preceding character is unclear or ambiguous in the manuscript original. A forward slash is a punctuation mark, a backward one indicating line-break.

5 The order in which properties are specified in the grammel is fixed, and the boundary between the lexel and the grammel is marked by a forward slash ($sister/n$). The first item immediately following the slash states the core property of the item in terms of word class or part of speech. A set of co-ordinates on a cline is often required to provide relevant information about a particular feature in a particular context; the components are listed in a hyphenated string of properties. The order of components in the grammel is carefully controlled, and the hierarchy between different types of information is transparent. See the CSC *Manual*, section 3.2.4.2.
3. **Categorial gradience and discourse analysis**

The general assumption is that any system of categorisation must allow for gradience within and between categories (cf. Denison 2006 and 2007). Discourse analytic tools in the annotation procedure have permitted me to create a system in which categorial gradience is treated as an inherent feature of how words are used in a text.

Thus, degree of nounhood, ‘nouniness’, is assessed in context.

Let us consider the deverbal nouns in the following slide:

- *they were present at the weding*
- *Cf. at Jhon achainutis wading to sir williams docther*
- *your hapie deliuuerie of a young Charles*
- *to daith ‘until death’ varying with until I die, as long as I live, until life’s end, in letter-closing formulae in the corpus data*
  - $\text{to\{until\}/pr-cj\_TO}$
  - $\text{death/n\{rc\}-av\_DAITH}$

The word *wedding* is categorised as a noun when it refers to the ceremony and somebody’s presence there: **THEY WER PRESENT AT THE WEDING**

However, the verb-like properties of this word become more salient when elements reflecting the type of verb complementation are incorporated in the nominalisation:

**AT *JHON ACHAINUTIS WADING TO Sir WILLIAMS DOCTHER***

(cf. to wed somebody [Jhon Achainut] to somebody else [Sir Williams dochter])

In addition to the presence of various clause elements in an NP with a nominalization as head, a whole range of factors affect the relative dominance of noun-like and verb-like properties. One such factor is the productivity of particular word-formation patterns; in other words, nounhood can be assessed by the degree of productivity of the derivational morphemes.
The decisive factor is evidence provided by the variational patterns recorded in the data. Let us consider delivery, as used in the example below, and the word death in the expression to death:

YOUR HAPIE DELIUYERIE OF A YOUNG *CHARLES

TO DAITH ‘until death’

In assessing these items by the frequency of the two formation patterns in the CSC data, delivery is a more transparent nominalisation than death, but both alternate with finite clauses such as that you have delivered or until I die. In the tagging of the latter, the verb-like properties are indicated in the grammel of the preposition (pr-cj), the element cj ‘connective’ indicating a clause-combining function. The comment {until} specifies the semantic role of the temporal connective, the string of core properties signalling that finite adverbial clauses introduced by a subordinator in the role of time alternate with nominalisations as complements of prepositions in the same semantic role.

The verb-like properties of the phrase to death are highlighted by the fact that it frequently occurs in letter-closing formulae, its function being to intensify assurances of loyalty or willingness to serve:

*Your WO/ [worship’s] MOST AFFECTIONAT \ BROTHER TO SERW YOW \ TO DEATH

In fact, this variational pattern also includes expressions such as as long as I live, until life’s end, etc. In the present tagging system, variation of this kind has been considered to be evidence of the verb-like properties of items the nouniness of which is explicitly indicated by derivational morphemes.

- Thus it is this attested pattern of variation that suggests the position of a derivative on the cline of verbhood versus nouniness.

Reification and lexicalisation

Transparency of both noun-like and verb-like properties is a decisive factor in considering an item a nominalisation; thus lexicalised uses of items are not classified as nominalisations. For example, the high-frequency word writing, meaning ‘letter’, is classified as lexicalised, whereas the action or process of writing is considered a nominalisation. However, a deverbal noun may have undergone a semantic process of reification or objectification and has lost all its verb-like properties.

In the majority of cases in CSC data, lexicalised nominalisations refer to legal or financial documents:
To illustrate the role of reification, let us examine a zero-derived item *account* and the noun- and verb-like properties in its various uses in the data. Unfortunately, a relatively brief summary of the findings will have to suffice in the present context; a more detailed analysis would allow the examination of all the very interesting examples whose semantic and discourse features suggest a particular position on the cline of nouniness.

Among the examples on the slide, the first two illustrate reified uses, whereas ‘to alter one’s account’ and ‘to be a true account’ retain verb-like properties as suggested by paraphrases such as ‘to alter the way I have counted’. The monotransitive collocation ‘to give an account’ will be discussed in more detail later. In general, giving or offering an account retains verb-like characteristics, whereas in getting or receiving an account the action of accounting is objectified, the use in epistolary prose suggesting that a report is given in written form in a document, i.e. a letter. Similarly in sending or enclosing an account.
Reification and lexicalisation: ACCOUNT

- W'T THE ANUELLRENT YarOF SETT DOUNE IN THE ACCOMPT MEY BE DEDUCED FROM THE TOTALL OF THE ACCOMPT

- J WILL SHOW YOU HOW j DID NOT COMPT WRONG NEITHER IF WE AGREE DOE j RESOLVE TO ALTER MY ACCOUNT

  ‘to alter the way I have counted’; the presence of subject increases verbhood

- IN PART OF PEYMENT OF *A HUNDER FOUR SCOR AND SEWINTEINE POUND SCOTS FYFTEINE SHILLINGES WHICH IS THE TRUE *ACOMPT THAT j AM RESTING HIM

- AND LYKWAYS BEFOR THIS TYME j COULD GIVE YOU NO ACCOUNT OF MY BUSSINES

  ‘to account’ versus ‘to give an account’

The assessment of degrees of nouniness focuses here on the following four properties:

Properties for assessing nouniness

- source and coinage type
- acceptance of modification
- syntactic function and position
- discourse type, chiefly with reference to formulaic language use

I will focus on the first group of properties:

**Source and coinage type**

Questions central to the present approach aim to find answers to positioning nominalisations on such clines as that from verbal nouns in *-ing* to deverbal nouns in
-ing, another from borrowed nouns which retain verb-like properties to English coinages, chiefly zero-derived or suffixed deverbal and deadjectival nouns, and, at a more general level, yet another cline from transparent nominalisations to reified or lexicalised nominalisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>COINAGE TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>zero-derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ing</em>-form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>borrowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>borrowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>derived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>borrowed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To illustrate the transparency of nominalisations, let us examine the example on the slide (CSC; NLS MS Dep 175/65/Bundle 2/114; Alexander Gordon of Navidale, 1623), which contains two nominalised structures:

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6 For a discussion of the cline of *ing*-forms in Present-Day English, see Quirk et al. 1985: §§ 17.53–17.54.
And now finding the commoditie of Master Robert ferquharis going to edinburgh, I thot goode to wryt this letter

‘as I found how commodious it was that Master Robert Farquhar should go to Edinburgh’

In the CSC annotation system, the items commoditie and going have the comment {rc} in their grammel, which makes it explicit that, instead of finite adverbial clauses, variants representing a higher degree of nominality in this particular variational pattern have been chosen (cf. variants in the Present-Day English equivalent: as I found how commodious it was that Master Robert should go to Edinburgh).

**Etymological nominalisations**

I have found it necessary to reconsider the concept of etymological nominalisation.
Etymological nominalisations

- "AS FOR THE *COMMISSION THAT CULLODEN HATH GOTTEN TO TAKE OUR OATHES FOR MY OWEN PAIRT j AM CLEIR"
- "to get a commission’ or ‘to be commissioned’"

According to Hopper & Thompson (2004: 286fn), etymological nominalisations are ‘lexical Ns in their own right – which have broken their productive relationship with the Vs from which they are derived’. They point out that ‘a commission does not necessarily commit anything’ and argue that ‘[a]ccordingly, most analysts would not describe such a form as a nominalisation, even though its history is revealed by its form’. However, my analysis of historical data shows that a word like commission frequently retains verb-like properties:

Etymological nominalisations

- AND ON Y^T SAMYn DAY YAIR COME ANE GENTILMAN" FRA YE KYNG OF FRANCE W^T comMISSIOUN" TO PRESENT Our ACCEPTATIOUN" OF YE comPREHENSIOUN"
  ‘committed to present our acceptance’

- MY LORD HYM SELFF PASSIT W^T YAм TO YE WALLIS QUHLK j BELIEFF WES BY YE comMYSSION & ProMYSS he MAID TO MY LADY AND WES BY MY AWICE
  ‘because he was committed to serve my lady and had promised to assist her and because this was also what I had advised him to do’
The nouns commission, promise and advice are here considered to have retained verb-like properties. Especially in such collocations as to give commission and to have (something) in commission, verb-like properties are quite transparent.

As will also be discussed below, nominalisations and their transparency can be usefully examined by paying attention to the semantic categories of verbs they form collocations with. Thus to deliver one’s commission is fuzzier regarding salience of noun- versus verb-like properties than to give commission.

- Thus the present approach differs from the traditional ones by submitting the so-called etymological nominalisations to a detailed analysis in context and then including those with verb-like properties in the category of transparent nominalisations. English coinages and borrowed derivatives do not form two discrete categories; instead their position on the cline of nouniness can be defined by structural, semantic, syntactic and discourse properties, the position of a particular item thus varying in discourse.

- I suggest that we use the term “polyfunctional nominalisations” to refer to nominalisations in which the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions of the verbs they have been derived from are active in discourse.

4. Annotation and the assessment of degree of complexity

Degree of complexity also reflects properties of categories and is chiefly assessed by the number of clause elements integrated into a nominalisation:
Acceptance of modification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEGREE OF COMPLEXITY</th>
<th>Pronouns as predeterminer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premodification</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>genitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quantifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodification</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indirect object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adverbial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nominal clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relative clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>modifier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structural properties such as these are annotated in the corpus. This annotation is illustrated by the example below:

they say the victual is something spoiled in regard of the long lying of it in the bark

$/P23N\_THE$
$Say/vps23<P+>_SAY $vps23<P+_0$
{zero that}$
$/T\_THE$
$Vvictual/n[coll]_VICTUALL$
$She(n)/vp03<n[coll]+_IS$
$Some/pn-aj>pn-av SOME+$
$THING/pn-av<pn-aj>_THING$
$Spoil/vpp{pass}->aj_SPOIL+ED $vpp{pass}->aj_+ED$
{[]}$
$Sin/pr\_IN$
$Regard/n[rc]->av-pr->pr->cj REGARD$
$So/avr->cj<n-av->pr_OF$
$/T\_THE$
$Long/aj LONG$
$INclude/pr[rc]=av-pr->pr->pr->LY+ING $v[rc]=av->pr->pr->ING$
$So/pr<n-av->OF$
$/P130I\_IT$
$Sin/pr<n-av_IN$
$/T\_THE$
$Shark/n BARK$
5. Statistical analyses of degree of complexity

Various data retrieval methods were applied to the corpus data to create a sub-corpus which would be of a manageable size but still valid for discussing the research question. Items transparently retaining verb-like properties such as *ing*-forms and native English coinages (e.g., deadjectival noun derivatives with the suffix *-ness*) provide us with comprehensive inventories, which in fact benefit from being analysed separately because of particular usage features related to transparently English formations. The chief data retrieval method in the present study provides inventories of all nominalisations with an initial A-, C-, and P-. A sub-corpus of this kind is viewed as valid for investigating position in clause structure, degree of complexity and discourse function. Moreover, this data will permit us to illustrate the more general question concerning degree of nouniness.

The total mean frequencies of nominalisations decrease from the mid-sixteenth century to the first decades of the eighteenth century:

![Mean frequency (/10,000) of nominalisations](#)

**Figure 1.** Mean frequencies (/10,000) of a selected set of nominalisations in the CSC.
It is of interest that the same trend has been attested in the mean frequency of *ing*-forms, their general frequency being lower.

By source and formation pattern, deverbal zero-derived and derived nominalisations represent consistently a proportion varying from 74 to 90 per cent, the zero-derived ones being the most frequent type, their proportion increasing in the period 1650-1715.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>zero-derived/V</th>
<th>derived/V</th>
<th>borrowed/V</th>
<th>derived/Adj</th>
<th>borrowed/Adj</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500-1549</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550-1599</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-1649</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1715</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Percentages of nominalisations by source in the CSC.

Figure 2. Mean frequencies (/10,000) of nominalisations by source in the CSC.

The proportion of items the use of which allows us to interpret them as English coinages remains constantly higher than that of borrowings, that of nouns derived from verbs without suffix being the most frequent type in the last subperiod.
Besides source, the statistical analysis of derived and zero-derived nominalisations provides information about the clause type in which nominalisations occur and its syntactic function (Table 2, Figures 3–6). In addition, Figure 8 reports on the presence or absence of a possessive pronoun as a predeterminer and its syntactic function in relation to the verb the nominalisation is derived from. Tables 3–4 and Figures 9–10 illustrate the complexity of noun phrases including a nominalisation as regards pre- and postmodification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties the analysis focuses on:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- clause type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- syntactic function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- presence or absence of a possessive pronoun as a predeterminative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- elements in premodification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- elements in postmodification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- formulaic or non-formulaic language use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- These features are assumed to provide relevant information about nouniness in general. They also permit us to put a more focused question of how degrees of nouniness relate to discourse properties.

- AS-FOR zOUR WISCHING OF ME YAIR *ZIE DID NOT WISCHE ME OFTINER NOR j DID MY SELF TO HAUE BEINE WTH zOW (1617 #165 - HayWA61701e.tag)

AS-FOR zOUR WISCHING OF ME YAIR adverbial

zOUR possessive pronoun as a predeterminer, S of wish
ME in postmodification, O of wish, S of [BE]
YAIR in postmodification, predication adjunct of [BE]

This example is especially interesting as it illustrates a female writer’s choice of a nominalisation of high complexity to refer to the addressee’s wishes expressed in a letter this letter is an answer to.

(i) **CLAUSE TYPE**
Table 2 provides a statistical analysis of the data by clause type:

**Table 2. Percentages of nominalisations by clause type.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Main clause</th>
<th>Adverbial</th>
<th>Nominal</th>
<th>Od+infinitive</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Modifier</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500-1549</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550-1599</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-1649</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1715</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of nominalisations varies between 37 to 45 per cent in main clauses; approximately 20 to 25 per cent have been recorded in nominal clauses and 17 to 22 per cent in adverbial clauses. These are reflected in the mean frequencies (/10,000 words).

![Mean frequency (/10,000) of nominalisation by clause type](image)

**Figure 3. Percentages of nominalisations by clause type in the CSC.**

(ii) **SYNTACTIC FUNCTION**

In analysing nominalisations by syntactic function, we find that nominalisations in thematic elements represent only 10 per cent.
Figure 4. Syntactic functions of nominalisations in the CSC.

The proportion of nominalisations in structures functioning as object varies between 40 and 53 per cent, that as adverbial between 26 and 43 per cent.

Figures 5–6 permit us to compare the mean frequencies of nominalisations in monotransitive collocations of the type *give an account* and other nominalisations as object:

Figure 5. Nominalisations in object collocations of the type *give an account* in the CSC. Percentages.
Figure 6. Mean frequencies (/10,000) of nominalisations in object collocations of the type *give an account* in the CSC.

A more detailed analysis is required for identifying potential linguistic or non-linguistic conditioning factors in collocations of this kind.

There is no significant correlation between nominalisation and utterance-initial\(^7\) position, as is illustrated by the frequency of nominalisations in left-located and right-located adverbials (e.g., *at his arrival there* positioned before the subject of a main clause contrasted with clause-medial and -final positions), the pre-subject position being quite infrequent:

\(^7\) For a definition of “utterance” in epistolary prose, see Meurman-Solin 2011 http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/journal/volumes/08/meurman-solin/
See also Meurman-Solin 2012.
Further research is required for providing evidence of positioning adverbials in the Corpus of Scottish Correspondence (cf. Lenker 2010, 2011).

(iii) **PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF A POSSESSIVE PRONOUN AS A PREDETERMINER**

Let us now turn to the analysis of the determinative elements in noun phrases containing nominalisations. The figure below provides evidence of the proportion of possessive pronouns in the predeterminer position and also specifies their function as subject, object, or indirect object:
Figure 8. Possessive pronouns as predeterminers in noun phrases with a nominalisation as head. Percentages.

There is a decrease of the zero-pronoun type in the predeterminative over time; if there is a possessive pronoun as predeterminer it is mostly in the function of subject (e.g. *at his arrival*), object pronouns remaining relatively rare.

(iv) **ELEMENTS IN PREMODIFICATION**

As regards premodification, there is a clear increase of the type with no elements in premodification, the occurrence of both adjective and genitive attributes decreasing. Multiple premodifiers are rare.

Table 3. Premodification in noun phrases with nominalisation as head in the CSC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Quantifier</th>
<th>Genitive</th>
<th>Multiple</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500-1549</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550-1599</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-1649</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1715</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finding suggests that degree of complexity decreases over time in noun phrase structures with nominalisations as head.
A clear decrease in objects in postmodification can be contrasted with a slight increase in postmodifying subjects.
Thus a general trend towards simpler noun phrases with nominalisation as head has been attested. In order to assess complexity in general, nominal that-clauses as second units in appositive structures have been included here, even though I find their grammatical description in Quirk et al. (1985) appropriate, appositive structures being both semantically and syntactically quite different from complex noun phrases with their head +/- modifiers structure.

(vi) **FORMULAIC OR NON-FORMULAIC LANGUAGE USE**

Since the frequency of conventionalised expressions is a salient feature in epistolary prose, I examined whether there is a correlation between the occurrence of nominalisations and formulaic language use:
Figure 11. Nominalisations in conventionalised formulae in the CSC. Percentages.

Figure 11 shows that there is a clear trend towards less nominalisation in formulaic language use and more nominalisation in non-formulaic language use in the CSC data.

To shed more light on this finding and the observations concerning object collocations in Figures 5 and 6, let us re-examine nominalisation in verb complementation. The proportion of collocations of the following kind is a salient feature in the data analysed for the present study:

**VERB-LIKE PROPERTIES RETAINED IN MONOTRANSITIVE COLLOCATIONS:**

- care: have care, take care, remit something to somebody’s care
- cause: give (somebody) cause, make cause
- caution: set caution, give caution, get/find caution
- certainty: have certainty
- charge: have charge (of something), lay (down) (to somebody’s) charge, bear charge, give charge, take charge
- choice: make choice, have one’s choice, give somebody their choice
- close: put a close to something
- command: get command, give command
- commission: give commission
- commodity: have commodity (of somebody)
- company: have somebody’s company, bear somebody company, get somebody’s company
- conceit: take conceit
concord: make concord
concurrence: make concurrence
confidence: have confidence
congratulation: join one’s congratulation with somebody
conscience: make conscience to do something (conscientiously do something)
consent: give one’s consent
consideration: have consideration, take (in/to) consideration, leave something to somebody’s consideration
contentment: give/render/breed contentment, get contentment, have contentment
continuance: have the continuance of something
contravention: do contravention
convocation: make convocation
correspondence: have correspondence to something, keep correspondence with somebody
corroboration: take in corroboration of something
counsel: make counsel, give somebody counsel
count: make count, take to count
credence: give credence, have credence
credit: have credit, give credit, remit something to somebody’s credit
cumber: have cumber, put to further cumber with (my longer writing); (Fin. ‘nähdä vaivaa’)
cure: take cure on somebody

In epistolary discourse, a number of these expressions containing a nominalisation are directly related to conventionalised politeness strategies.

Thus instead of saying ‘I shall not cumber you with longer writing’, the writer expresses this more politely:
Nominalisation in collocations and politeness

- *THS [thus] WILL j NOCHT PWT zOW^R GRACE TO FORDIR [further] CUmMYR W^T MY LANG [long] WRITTYNG BOT SALL TREWLY jMPLOY MY PWRE [poor] WITT TO DO zOW^R G [grace] SerUICE
- ALLWAYIS j REMIT ALL TO YOur OWIN WISDOME & GOODE conSIDERATON’’
- MY PWER [poor] SerUICE QUHLK [which] SALBE FWNDDYIN [found] GOD WILLYNG TO zOW^R GRACE COntENTAcioNE & comMANDEnT
- GOD GYF [give] zOW^R GRACE LANG HEILL [heal] W^T conTENTAcioNE OFF zOW^R *DESYRRis
- NOTHING TILL MEITING OFF MY AWIN FASCHRIE [fashery] & PERTICULAR ESTEIT QLK [which] j THINK SALL NO^T BE TO zOur COntENTTMEnT

Objects in collocates of this kind represent relatively low categoriality in the class of nouns by frequently allowing no article (cf. Hopper and Thompson (2004: 261). That to give content(ment) is preferred, instead of to content, in polite language use reflects the important role of nominalisation in conventionalised expressions in epistolary prose. Even though there is no quantitative evidence of a correlation between nominalisations and formulaic language use (see Figure 11), there is qualitative evidence of the preference of the give contentment type in epistolary politeness strategies.

However, further study is required to trace reification and lexicalisation processes as well as collocations in general in order to understand more fully the discourse functions of nominalisation.

6. Nominalisation and information structure

8 Cf. also Hopper and Thompson (2004: 263): ‘the more autonomous the entity symbolised by N, with respect to the discourse context, the more highly categorial it is in terms of its morphology.’ Absence of morpho-syntactic features of prototypical nouns in collocations of the type have care is of course a well-known fact.
A tagged corpus permits the investigation of nominal *ing*-forms in structures sharing the function of an adverbial. Drawing on this data, it is possible to examine whether adverbials containing explicitly thematic elements favour initial position, whether degree of complexity, semantic role, or particular discourse properties correlate with position.

In letters, time adverbials with a nominalised verb of motion as head (*coming, going, departing, arriving, etc.*) are particularly frequent. These include variation between such types as *at his coming here* and *at his here-coming*. While, both syntactically and communicatively, initial position would be preferred in Present-Day English, in this data we find these adverbials after the verb complementation and even between the predicate verb and object.

Information structure

- *AND THAJ PUT ME IN SUIR BELEVE AT YAR DEParTING YAT YAJ SULD BRYNG MY LORD GOUerNOur TO YIS TOVN" W^TIN YIR TWA DAIS
  Cf. And at their departing they put me in sure belief that …

- AND j HAVE THE BAYE PONIE IN thE PARCK OF STRUTHORS SINCE MY COMING HEAR
  Cf. And since my coming here I have …

- j HAD NA LASur TO WriTE FOR YE HAISTY DEParTING OF THE BERAR OF Yir LErTerIS TO DIEP
  Cf. Since the bearer of these letters was in haste to depart …

Information structure based on the given – new order is not quantitatively the preferred pattern in the CSC data, so that the temporal or logical order of events is not necessarily reflected in the position of adverbial phrases containing a nominalisation:
Positioning given information: Percentages of ing-nominalisations in adverbials in initial and final position

Figure 12. Proportions of adverbials containing a nominalisation in initial and final position in the CSC.

The quantitative analysis was restricted to instances which permit positional variation.

A finally positioned adverbial may contain explicitly thematic elements such as the demonstrative pronoun this in at the making of this present letter:

I HAID NO=T= GOTTIN zOW^R GRace WREITTYNGis TO YE QUYN” zOW^R G DOCHTYR & SOVERANE NOR YE SCOITTis *LORD+is AT YE MAKKYN OF YIS PreseNT (1549 #14 - GordonCA54903e.tag)
j GAT NA AnSUR FRA zOW^R GRACE AT YE MAKKYN OF YIS PreseNT (1549 #15 - GordonCA54904e.tag)

As large a proportion as 72 per cent of the instances represent temporal expressions, which frequently refer to action related to the moment of writing (e.g. At my coming home I have not received your letter). By being positioned initially such time relators would structure the text in a communicatively most efficient way in the story-line of letters. That this is not the preferred position may be due to the structural complexity of the adverbials including ing-nominalisations, which leads to the preference of end-position in accordance with the end-weight principle.

A taxonomy based on the semantic properties of nominalisation in adverbials introduced by the preposition at illustrates further dimensions for the analysis of nominalisation in discourse:

1. Time, types such as
   at the first putting on of my instrument
   at his being last in Inverness
   at your here coming
   at the writing hereof
at the cry of the oppressed

2. Volition, types such as

at the desire of your letter
at your grace’s commandment
at your majesty’s pleasure
at the desire of a number of friends
at the solicitation of milord of Orknay
at will
at the advice and counsel of George Douglas
at the request of good friends

3. Circumstance, types such as

at your majesty’s disposal
at your lordship’s sight
at the pains

A taxonomy of this kind suggests that there is correlation between semantic role and frequency of nominalisation as a structural realisation. Further study is required for examining nouniness in grammars of prose, especially as regards the conditioning of sociolinguistically relevant language-external factors such as the writer’s membership in a particular speech community, discourse community, and text community type (Meurman-Solin 2004), the evolution of syntactic complexity in various registers, and the interplay between syntax and information structure.

Sources


For further information, see Meurman-Solin 2007a and Meurman-Solin 2007b.

DSL = Dictionary of the Scots Language; available at <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/index.html>


References

