

Metaphoric Noun Variants and Modification Types in Undergraduate ESL Students' Academic Writing Texts

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ABSTRACT

Significant grammatical innovations over the years have been a reaction to changes in purposes of communication due to demands from the reading public. It is assumed such changes are embraced in English used by undergraduate students in readings they are exposed to, and texts produced during their studies. In analyzing data, comprising ESL undergraduate students' writing scripts, the study seeks to find how such grammatical innovations are manifested in selection of nouns and modification types. A noun is a compulsory element, contributing meaning to text and over the years, constituents comprising nominal groups have evolved from prototype noun to the compressed metaphoric variant. Data is analyzed, against the backdrop of Halliday and Matthiessen's metaphor taxonomy. Results indicate, majority of students have yet to move from overuse of prototype to more metaphoric noun variants. Noun modification choices are restricted and this is a language gap that needs addressing. Awareness of contemporary grammatical innovations pertaining to nouns and modification strategies are imperative in order to improve ESL students' text quality and effectiveness.

Key words: Experiential, Logical, Nominalization, Grammatical Metaphor, Systemic Functional Grammar, Nominal Group

INTRODUCTION

Language is a critical tool for meaning making and it is used differently depending on the purpose of communication, target audience and situational context of the communicative event. This suggests choice of grammar and lexis will be influenced by the context in which it is used. Halliday & Hasan (1985) argue appropriacy in choice of language could be better understood against the backdrop of register theory and its three major components - field, tenor and mode. A register realizes a particular organizational structure and a set of lexical and grammatical features that are determined by the situational context in which it is used (Hasan, 1989). This means register varies from context to context, and according to Fang & et al. (2006: 259) 'register emerges from the social context of a text's production and at the same time realizes that social context through the text'. Understanding significance of register is critical especially when writing academic essays at tertiary institutions.

Expository essay, a text typical of academic contexts adheres to certain standards which require the use of compressed nominal groups. Previous researches agree compressed and elaborated nominal groups are common in informational texts (Biber & Gray, 2011). Findings have shown an increase in noun functions, variants and lexical associations. ESL students therefore while being aware of the prototype noun matrix

should also be cognizant of alternative metaphoric variants, as grammatical resources in writing academic essays. Data for this study comprises 100 ESL writing scripts. Noun types are evaluated, using Halliday & Matthiessen's (1999) metaphor taxonomy and Halliday's (1994) experiential and logical noun structure. Through analyses of student texts, the current study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

- (i) What noun types and premodification strategies are common in ESL student texts?
- (ii) What postmodification strategies are predominant or lacking in texts analyzed?
- (iii) How do metaphoric noun variants contribute to text quality and effectiveness?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Varieties of English required at tertiary institutions and academic discourse communities adhere to certain norms and conventions. Hence, students aspiring to be part of an academic discourse community need to acquire skills and writing conventions specific to this context. Mastery of knowledge, skills and accepted norms is the passport that initiates a student to becoming a member of their selected discipline or academic discourse community. Developing academic literacy related to the required norms, however is often problematic for English as a Second Language

(ESL) students because language through which subjects are presented is markedly different from everyday commonsense language use (Schleppegrell, 2001). This is clearly evidenced in the various reports gathered on status of academic writing in European Higher Education (HE), illuminating one third of students failed to complete their dissertation due to lack of academic writing skills (Bjork, Brauer, Reinecker, & Jorgensen, 2003). In Australia as highlighted by Jones (2005), standards of students' generic skills and attributes in academic writing were declining. Similar problems are reported for international students in Japan (Baker, 2003) and Chinese students studying in Canada (Yang, 2006). Common language problems identified include; morphosyntactic (Hu et al., 1982), lexicosemantic (Dennett, 1985), errors in cohesive device use (Scarcella, 1984), and more verb, noun-pronoun, article, and preposition errors (Silva, 1990). Although there was evidence in Non Native English (NNE) speakers' texts of metaphoric awareness, this knowledge was not fully explored to fill in the gaps in second language vocabulary (Silva, 1997).

Errors mentioned resonate with those faced by ESL students studying at universities in Fiji (Alifereti, 2013; Deverell, 1989; Khan & Mugler, 2001). These include; grammatical errors, unsatisfactory referencing, inadequate research to support arguments, problems in cohesion and structuring of text, vagueness in expression, inability to use the appropriate style, recycled vocabulary and lack of abstract and metaphorical concepts.

Nouns and Nominal Groups

Nouns or nominal groups refer semantically to those aspects of our experience we perceive as entities (Downing & Locke, 2006). The term 'entity' refers here not only to concrete entities such as persons, objects, places, institutions and other 'collectives', but also to names of actions such as - swimming, laughter, abstractions – thought, experience, qualities - beauty, speed, emotions - anger, excitement and phenomena – thunder and lightning, among others (p. 401).

It is also important to note how various linguists define nominal groups because literature indicates there are differences prevalent in the identification of head nouns amongst schools of linguistics and grammarians. Sinclair (2006) for instance argues it is important to identify head noun in the nominal group because it is the principal reference point to the physical world. The head in the English nominal group according to Quirk et al. (1985) is the part around which other elements in the clause cluster and dictates concord. This presupposes if the nominal group functions as subject in the clause the predicate verb must agree in relation to person, gender and number. On a similar note Richards & Schmidt (2002) define head noun as the central part of the phrase and other elements are in some grammatical relation to the head. Listed below are two examples to illustrate the choices one can adopt in selecting the head noun that would agree with the main verb (Li, 2015).

- (1) a number of those books
- (2) five of those books

A common stance would be to treat 'a number of' in (1) as premodifier and 'books' as head noun. But Huddleston &

Pullum (2005) regard 'a number' as head noun and 'of those books' as the postmodifier and similarly in example (2) 'five' is the head noun and 'of those books' is treated as postmodifier. The various explanations from different grammarians clearly indicate head noun as an essential and obligatory element that determines the syntactic structure not only of the nominal group but the clause as a whole.

Studies on Noun Functions

Noun, as one of the two essential elements in a clause plays a pivotal role in dissemination of meaning. Forming a grammatically correct sentence requires both a verb and a noun and prepositional phrases, adverbials or other circumstantial elements are optional (Halliday, 1994). As students transition from everyday to classroom use of language, selection of nouns also change depending on the context it is used. Historically, noun as a linguistic domain has shown developments in the choice of modification structural devices (Biber & Gray, 2011). The increasing focus on shifts of noun structure and function is shown through various scholarships, with the likes of Lieber (2016) and Gunther (2011) where they refer to numerous readings of nominalisations. Lately, Gunther, Kotowski & Plag (2018) have also expanded the conversation on noun functions by discussing 'phrasal compounds', which refer to complex words that combine lexical head and a phrasal non-head, for instance 'a "chicken and egg" situation' (Trips, 2014: 44). In the English language, there are three major structural types of noun pre-modifiers: attributive adjective, participial adjective and nouns. Subsequently, post modifiers can be clausal: finite relative clauses, non-finite participial clauses, to-clauses, or phrasal: prepositional phrases and appositive noun phrases. Noun modifiers are more common in informational written register than in other registers (Schleppegrell, 2001). On the same vein, this study agrees mastery in the use of nouns, accepted in education contexts is always a challenge for ESL students, given that it requires reconstrual of nouns used in the immediate context to that which creates its own context in text (Fang, Schleppegrell & Cox, 2006). This is also supported by Christie (2002) and Schleppegrell (2004) highlighting students' inability to fully explore and select nominal groups to encode intended meaning is found to be a significant factor in poor quality academic writing texts.

Grammatical Metaphor and Nominalization – A Systemic Functional Perspective

In Systemic Functional (SF) grammar, nominal group is the grammatical unit that allows the widest range of meaning in the clause and it may function as subject, object, complement or other. A noun could be very simple with only one word such as 'car' or it could be quite complex consisting of a group of words as in '*the first beautiful and expensive red chevrolet car*'. The group has a noun as head and additional elements could be placed before or after the head noun. It has a very complex structure, comprising of various elements identified within specific slots in the group. The experiential structure of the nominal group (refer Figure 1) has

the function of specifying (i) a class of things, and (ii) some category of membership within this class (Halliday, 1994).

Importantly, evolution in language has seen congruent nouns with alternative metaphoric variants. Major shifts involve nominalization of processes to arrest dynamism and fluidity, thus can be categorized, classified and quantified. The concept of grammatical metaphor can be compared to metaphor in traditional rhetoric, where a concept could be mapped to two meanings – a literal and figurative as shown below.

- (i) ‘Vanesa is a rose.
 - literal – flower
 - figurative – beautiful lady

However, in the case of grammatical metaphor, it refers to two words with one meaning as illustrated in the words underlined below.

- (ii) Savannah imitated Hannah’s smile.
- (iii) Savannah’s smile was an imitation of Hannah’s.

At the lexical level of analysis, it is apparent the ‘behavioural process ‘imitated’ in sentence (ii) has shifted to becoming an abstract noun ‘imitation’ in sentence (iii). Halliday (1994), through a metalanguage he developed from the standpoint of Systemic Functional grammar has enhanced understanding of language, as a meaning system, where we make choices, dependent on context of culture and the specific situation.

METHOD

This study adopts a Systemic Functional framework to analyse texts. It replicates previous researches conducted on analysis of nouns and modification types following Fang, Z, & et al. (2006), Douglas, B. & et al. (2008) and Smet, H. & et al. (2014) to name a few.

Data Selected

Corpora include *n*(100) scripts obtained from ESL second year undergraduate students, enrolled at a University in Fiji. These students have a mother tongue they speak at home. In terms of Fiji Language policy, three languages are recognized as official; *iTaukei*, Hindi and English, but English is the official language of instruction in education. Although policy states students are to use their mother tongue in the first three years of primary education, this is not always the case, since teachers attempt to expose students to English language as early as they possibly could. Despite attempts to engage students with English language in school, there is not much chance or environments where they could practise English other than in school, and this often affects competency and fluency.

Samples selected were those submitted for term papers, including argumentative writing texts, which require selection of appropriate rhetorical devices to facilitate attainment of the writing purpose. Additionally, this entails incorporation of densely packaged nominal groups that embrace abstraction and metaphor. Experiential analysis of nominal group identifies ‘thing’ as head which corresponds to head in Huddleston & Pullum’s (2005) noun structure. Given the fact that a noun contains the most important information, it is claimed to form the nucleus of the nominal group (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Analysis Procedure

Firstly, analysis examines the prototype noun matrix, by analysing experiential and logical structure of nominal groups, and premodification types selected in student texts (refer Figure 1). Second, it explores choices of post modification strategies and lastly it explains contribution of metaphoric variants, including abstraction in text quality (refer Figure 2).

	<i>the</i>	<i>first</i>	<i>beautiful</i>	<i>red</i>	<i>chevrolet</i>	<i>car</i>	<i>that my father bought</i>
			<i>and</i>				
			<i>expensive</i>				
Experiential	deictic	numeration	epithet	classifier	classifier	thing	qualifier
Logical	← premodifier →					head	→ postmodifier →

Figure 1. Experiential and Logical Structure of a Nominal Group

Congruent		Metaphorical			
		→	→	→	→
		Circumstance	Process	Quality	Thing
Quality	→ unstable				1. instability
Process	→ absorb			3. absorptive	2. absorption
Circumstance	→ instead of ; on the surface		6. replaces	5. alternative; superficial	4. replacement; surface
Relator for/because because a) so [a,so b]	→ b, for	10. because of as a result	9. causes, proves ensues, follows from	8. causal; consequent	7. cause, proof, result
∅			12. occurs; imposes does, has		11. phenomenon, fact
Thing, circumstance	→ drive [be safe] decided [today]	13. expansion of Thing< in Environment of 1 or 2> driver [safety] driver's [safety] [safety of the driver] today's [decision] [decision of today]			

Figure 2. Domains of Elemental Metaphors (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 245)

Figure 2 demonstrates 13 metaphoric shifts. For instance (1) *instability* a non-conscious pseudo thing or noun is derived from an adjective (*un*) *stable*. While there are two expressions noted – an adjective and a noun, the meaning remains the same for both expressions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). In (13) *decision of today* – a verb *decide* is realized as a thing or noun 'decision' and post modified by a prepositional phrase. This noun phrase is further condensed to a noun where *today* the object of the prepositional phrase becomes the possessive adjective for the nominal group *today's decision*. The various shifts of lexis from initial to the derived are variants of the same, located on a continuum from congruent to more abstract metaphoric variants.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Complexity in structuring nominal groups has been noted over the years as a response to changes in readership, from lay to an increasingly specialized audience. This analysis attempts to capture how these developments in complexity of noun structures, both prototypical and metaphorical are realized in this particular ESL cohort's academic writing texts, by answering research questions posed by this study under three sub-headings:

- (i) Noun types and pre modification commonly employed
- (ii) Predominant post modification strategies
- (iii) How metaphoric noun variants contribute to text quality?

Nouns and Pre Modification Types Commonly Employed

This section answers Research Question One – regarding noun types commonly selected as 'head' and premodification types used.

Nouns and nominal groups are important grammatical resources in making meaning. As one of the two essential elements in the clause, it is critical that students are made aware, not only of the prototype noun structure, but also the abstract and metaphoric noun variants and how each element contributes meaning to one's writing text.

Analyses of nouns and nominal groups reveal students are still in favour of selecting concrete nouns as head,

evidenced in Figure 3 below. The choice of premodification indicates prototype noun structures as predominant, where no tension is noted in lexico-grammatical mapping. For instance in S1 '*student*' is a noun premodified by a comparative adjective '*younger*'. This adjective indicates the evaluation of the speaker on the status of 'students' and it could be either interpersonal or experiential, depending on the context and situation in which it is used. The use of deictic 'the' implies we are referring to a group of 'students' the addresser has already mentioned and which the participants in the communicative act are familiar with. In example S2 the head noun 'class' takes its point of reference from the demonstrative 'this' which expresses proximity and further modified by an adjective 'single' functioning as classifier. It is labeled classifier, as it cannot be intensified unlike an epithet (Halliday, 1994). These noun modifiers are commonly used in everyday conversation and because findings indicate its use by almost 60% of texts, it points to the need for improvement in use of this grammatical resource.

However, a shift is noted in S3 and S4. While the head nouns are still concrete, tension is noted in the lexico-grammatical mapping where the role of adjective, in S3 is adopted by a noun '*effect – effective*' and in S4, a verb is functioning as an adjective '*reflect - reflective*'. In essence this characterization is shared with adjectives (Smet & Vancayzeele, 2014). According to Halliday and Matthiessen's (1999) metaphor taxonomy, such premodifications are labeled metaphoric because of the junction in meaning adopted between the initial noun form to the derived adjective in S3, and similarly from verb to adjective in S4. Although the use of participles has been cited to be a common strategy for premodification by Smet & Vancayzeele (2014), it was not obvious in ESL texts analysed. The shift of verbs to function as nouns boosts students' vocabulary repertoire and allows them to be creative in manipulating and expanding lexis to function as premodifiers and/or classifiers. Importantly, incorporation of abstraction and metaphoric variants creates technical terms specific to a particular text type, and also a space for packing as much information as possible into a nominal group.

Results indicate the need for students to move beyond selection of concrete to more metaphoric noun variants. This is similar with analysis of premodification, where attributive

Script	Nominal Group Structure		
S1	the	younger	students
<i>Grammatical label</i>	<i>determiner</i> (det)	<i>adjective</i> (adj)	<i>noun</i> (n)
S2	this	single	class
<i>Grammatical label</i>	<i>det</i>	<i>adj</i>	<i>n</i>
S3	the	effective	teacher
<i>Grammatical label</i>	<i>det</i>	<i>adj</i>	<i>n</i>
S4	the	reflective	teacher
<i>Grammatical label</i>	<i>det</i>	<i>adj</i>	<i>n</i>

Figure 3. Concrete nouns and premodifications

adjectives are still the predominant choice. The next section presents samples of abstract head nouns.

Premodification of Abstract Nouns

This analysis focuses on selection of abstract nouns, which showcases a further shift towards the metaphoric pole. It is evident that the second set of data is more complex compared to the first in its structure. Figure 4 showcases samples of head nouns that are metaphoric and abstract, as illustrated by the following - ‘*approach, contribution, assumption and concept*’ and according to lexicogrammatical mapping, they have shifted from being a verb to become a noun (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). In their initial role as verbs, expansion was restricted within verb forms in terms of tense, aspect and polarity. But in the shift from initial to the derived form, lexical items now have the potential to expand and be categorized, classified and quantified into taxonomies as manifested in S7 and S8.

One is able to classify ‘*concept*’ into ‘foreign concept, indigenous concept and so on. On the same note ‘*assumption*’ in its new role as a noun can be classified further into ‘religious assumption or traditional assumption’ and many more expansions of the author’s choice, appropriate for the situational context of text.

Another finding, even though not too frequent, is the utilization of the four slots to make up the nominal group structure. In S5, a verb ‘*mentioned*’ in its past participle form is adopting an alternative role as an adjective to give more meaning to the head noun ‘*approach*’. S6 exemplifies two verbs in apposition but functioning differently in this nominal group - ‘*contribution*’ as head noun and premodified by another verb ‘*influence*’, functioning as an adjective ‘*influential*’. Moreover, density which commensurate with texts acceptable at tertiary institutions could be revealed through unpacking of metaphoric noun variants, as illustrated in nominal groups S5 and S6 through alternative rewordings: (i) ‘The approach that was mentioned above’. (ii) ‘He contributed the most.’ The derived figures or clauses have been downgraded in order to pack as much information into the nominal group.

It is obvious from the alternative rewordings, when compared to corresponding nominal groups that the two variants

Script	Nominal Group Structure			
S5	the	above	mentioned	approach
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>det.</i>	<i>adj.</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>head noun</i>
S6	his	most	influential	contribution
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>possessive det.</i>	<i>adj.</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>head noun</i>
S7	the	adapted	foreign	concept
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>det.</i>	<i>adj.</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>head noun</i>
S8	an	important	cultural	assumption
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>det.</i>	<i>adj.</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>head noun</i>

Figure 4. Abstract and metaphoric noun premodifications

demand different contexts. Shifting of lexis to become nouns are referred to by Halliday (1994) as nominalization and Martin (2007) agrees this shift is typical of texts accepted in academic contexts, since it is the process where technical terms and jargons specific to a discipline or subject-specific contexts are created. The nominal groups analysed are representative of examples expected at tertiary institutions such as ‘*assumption, approach, concept, contribution*’ and etc. Fang & et al. (2006) when talking about language appropriate for social science, postulate incorporation of abstraction, technicality and authoritativeness in student texts is achieved in a great part through use of nominal elements.

It is clear from this analysis that approximately 40% of students are using more complex noun structures compared to the first set of analyses. This is commendable and should be encouraged. It reflects progression in selection of nouns and nominal groups within the congruent-metaphoric continuum and the pivotal role they play in improving text quality. It is critical for tertiary students to be aware of the various noun modification strategies and importantly to note how abstraction and metaphor are embedded within the nominal group matrix.

Post Modification of Nouns

Although Biber & Gray (2011) discussed both clausal and phrasal post modifiers such as; finite relative clauses, non-finite participial clauses, to-clauses, prepositional phrases and

Script	Nominal Group Structure			
S9	the		combination	of the two processes
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>Det.</i>	...	<i>head noun</i>	<i>post modification</i>
S10	reading	in this technological oriented society
<i>Gram. label</i>			<i>head noun</i>	<i>post modification</i>
S11	a	focal	emphasis	of linguists
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>Det.</i>	<i>Adj.</i>	<i>head noun</i>	<i>post modification</i>
S12	the	extracted	piece	of information
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>Det.</i>	<i>Adj.</i>	<i>head noun</i>	<i>Post modification</i>
S13	the		controversy	over which reading approach to employ
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>Det.</i>		<i>head noun</i>	<i>Post modification</i>
S14	a	...	child	who has gone hungry for days...
<i>Gram. label</i>	<i>Det.</i>		<i>head noun</i>	<i>post modification</i>
S15		...	semantics	the core of the top-down reading approach
<i>Gram. label</i>			<i>head noun</i>	<i>Post modification</i>

Figure 5. Noun post modifications

appositive noun phrases as typical in academic writing texts, the only two post modifiers commonly employed in texts analysed include prepositional phrases and relative clauses.

For instance in Figure 5 scripts S9-S13 are examples of prepositional phrases functioning as post modifiers for head nouns, which are either concrete or abstract. Prepositional phrases can function in two different ways when used in the clause, as an adverbial and as a noun/nominal group post-modifier. In the above examples, prepositional phrases are functioning as noun post modifiers, a feature typical of academic texts. Among post modifiers, prepositional phrases are by far the most common, occurring about 4 times more than all others combined (Biber et al. 1999). The demand for expository register over the years has led to the development of elaborated and over reliance on compressed noun post modification constructions.

An example is S9, *'the combination of two processes'* has been downranked from a clause with the following alternative rewording *'The two processes were combined'*. Similarly, S10 engenders a condensed nominal group *'reading in this technological oriented society'*. These postmodification strategies are recommended and favorably accepted at tertiary institutions, as a tool for compression and condensing of information into a nominal group.

Unpacking of the nominal group in S10 can derive a clause that has been downranked; *'The society is mostly inclined towards technology'*.

The next example indicates clausal post modification discussed by Biber & et.al (2008). Script S14 explores postmodification by relative clause, which can either be restrictive or non-restrictive. If a relative clause is used restrictively, a comma is required and non-restrictive does not require a comma before the relative clause. In Functional grammar terminology, this refers to defining and non-defining relative clauses (Halliday, 1994). A comma is used before the relative clause if it is non-defining, meaning that we can do without the relative clause and the meaning is still intact. The relative clause is employed as a descriptive gloss. On the other hand, if it is a defining clause the use of a comma is not needed. It is crucial for students to use clausal post modification as a grammatical resource to package information into their nominal groups. Script S14 explores postmodification by relative clause, which can either be restrictive or non-restrictive. It is apparent from S14 that a relative clause which is of a higher rank is post modifying a noun at a lower rank. Halliday describes the relative clause in a rankshifted role, a defining relative clause and its function equivalent to an adjective.

Although found to be the most common in Biber et al.'s study (2008), the appositive noun phrase postmodification exemplified in S15 is not often found in these ESL student texts. While previous studies highlighted various other post modification strategies, these were not embraced in ESL student texts analysed. Apart from relative clause and noun phrase post modification, samples collected did not show a wide selection from the list cited by Biber & Gray (2011) such as; finite relative clauses, non-finite participial and to-clauses. Given that the use of noun modifiers was almost non-existent, it is important to bring this grammatical

resource to the attention of students, to enhance academic writing texts. Schleppegrell (2001) posits noun modifiers are more common in informational written register than in other registers. But, texts analysed indicate this post modification strategy was scarcely used by students in their writing texts. Importantly, this study has identified this gap which could be negotiated to enhance students' text quality in academic writing.

Effect of Abstraction and Metaphoric Noun Variants in Student Texts

The inadequate use of abstract and metaphoric noun variants in ESL student texts could be further understood from cognitive linguistics' point of view in relation to 'prototype theory' (Ungerer & Schmidt, 1996; Brown, 1990; Rosch, 1975). The inability to violate the prototype noun structure suggests students' use of English language has yet to move beyond concrete to more abstract and metaphoric grammatical resources. This lack could be a result of the socio-cultural context of language learning, in terms of received instruction and exposure influencing cognitive categorization. Johnson states we are what we are and our world is what it is only because of our embodied interaction (1993). This indirectly presupposes the mappings of inference patterns from more concrete domains to more abstract domains are motivated by and grounded in our bodily experiences (Lakoff, 1994; Johnson, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Halliday (1994) developed grammatical metaphor, a concept he is well renowned with. In language and learning this refers to a metaphoric shift where processes, adjectives, adverbs and logical relations are nominalized (Martin, 2007). This shift characterizes and categorizes the lexical items as abstract metaphoric nouns. Functional linguists postulate that both concepts nominalization and grammatical metaphor involve condensing of information. This means moving away from language use that is context dependent, to one that is self-contextualized, embodying abstract and metaphorical concepts (Schleppegrell, 2004; SimonVandenberg, Taverniers & Davies, 2003; Maton, 2000; Painter, 1999). The reliance of nominalization and grammatical metaphor on the use of abstraction and metaphoric concepts categorize them with the elaborated and high registers. From the explanations given, it could be confidently asserted that embedding abstraction and metaphoric variants enhances text quality.

Nouns and nominal groups are important grammatical resources in making meaning. As one of the two essential elements in the clause, it is critical that students are made aware, not only of the prototype noun structure, but the abstract and metaphoric noun variants as well, and how each element contributes meaning to the written text. As students move up the hierarchy of schooling, selection and structure of nouns also evolve from everyday noun choices to those accepted in school and educational institutions. Therefore, it is crucial that students have available a repertoire of nouns and nominal groups they could access to suit a particular target audience, situational context and register.

Although, majority of students have yet to fully explore and utilize how to make meaning through appropriate selection of nouns, nominal groups and modification types, examples discussed should raise awareness on how prototype noun matrix and its metaphoric variants significantly contribute to meaning making in text. From a systemic functional perspective, this is indicative of a deficit in students' meaning system, restricting them to select from alternative metaphoric variants.

CONCLUSION

Demands of language at tertiary institutions continue to evolve and it is a challenge ESL teachers and students must negotiate and master in order to produce texts accepted at tertiary institutions. One of these demands explored in this study involve choice of nouns and modification strategies required for reading and writing in classroom and education contexts. A noun, as a grammatical resource has undergone many syntactic and semantic changes which should be embraced in the various academic registers. It is noted to be an area attracting much scholarship, and highlights the shift and emphasis put on noun modification and expansion types ESL students need to be familiar with in order to negotiate requirements pertaining to academic writing at tertiary contexts. Nevertheless, despite shifts and changes in forms and functions of nouns over the years, not much is noted in noun choices analysed in this study.

Overall, findings in regards to research questions are summarized below.

- (i) Nouns selected for head positions are still restricted to concrete nouns as illustrated by more than 60% of student texts.
- (ii) There was some evidence of metaphoric noun variants inhabiting head noun slots but needs to be enhanced.
- (iii) Premodification strategies explored by majority of students follow the prototype noun matrix, using attributive adjectives.
- (iv) In addition to attributive premodifying adjectives, there were some instances of participles functioning as adjectives.
- (v) Postmodification selection were limited to prepositional phrase and relative clauses.
- (vi) While data showed an urgent need to complement concrete nouns with abstract and metaphoric noun variants, it should be acknowledged that this study has identified gaps and corresponding solutions that could be employed to improve student texts.

The findings indicate students' awareness and selection of noun constituents are predominantly at the basic or concrete level. Use of language still relies on direct lexicogrammatical mapping, which entails commonsense language use. While it is noted students are already using abstract and metaphors as head nouns in some texts, it is clear from scripts analysed that there was a lack in premodification strategies. The few choices explored by students include shift of verbs and nouns to function as adjectives in the noun matrix. Participles were not fully explored as

premodifiers, although literature highlights frequent use of participles in this role in previous studies. In terms of noun postmodification strategies, prepositional phrases were commonly explored and clausal postmodification shows a few instances where relative clauses were employed in this function. Apart from relative clause postmodifications, there was a lack in selection of clauses and nouns in this function.

Text analysis undertaken has shed light on some language gaps that may have contributed to poor quality of texts produced by undergraduate students. These findings should inform staff and students on specific areas they need to address to improve writing quality. It is critical that students are made aware of noun structures, modification strategies, and the shift from prototype to metaphoric noun variants. It must be embraced that language is dynamic and thus vulnerable to change. Therefore, it is anticipated students' awareness and incorporation of expanded and compressed nominal groups into their texts should further enhance and improve text quality and effectiveness. Findings from this study should be communicated widely to ESL teachers and students through workshops and conferences and the explicit teaching of these grammatical resources should be embedded as an English topic of study in high schools and tertiary institutions in Fiji.

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