

PHRASE STRUCTURE RULES FOR NOUN PHRASES IN ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN

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Abstract

Noun phrases occupy a precarious position in syntactic theories. The attention in this paper is focused on the issue of internal structure and syntactic functions of noun phrases in English and Albanian as well as other aspects related to them such as headedness and definiteness. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the most frequent rules that generate noun phrases in English and Albanian, thus revealing the points of contact and departure between these two languages. The aspects dealt with here predominantly concern the phrase structure rules for noun phrases and their syntactic functions viewed from the perspective of Generative Grammar. The central concept is Universal Grammar. All human beings share part of their knowledge of language, regardless of what language they speak. As such, it is hoped, this paper will not only offer plausible and revealing analyses of specific NP constructions, but will also contribute to our understanding of the relations between and functions of the various elements within the NP in English and Albanian.

Keywords: phrase structure rules, syntactic functions, structure, generative grammar, noun phrase

Abbreviations: NP = Noun Phrase, PP = Prepositional Phrase, ADJ = Adjective, UG = Universal Grammar.

Introduction

The main concern in this paper is the internal structure of noun phrases in English and Albanian, as well as the most frequent patterns of NPs in both languages. They are viewed from the perspective of Phrase Structure Grammar (Generative Grammar). The paper is about one aspect of how language works – how sentences are structured: *syntax*. The particular version of generative grammar that we will mostly look at here is roughly the *Principles and Parameters* approach. The underlying thesis of generative grammar is that sentences are generated by a subconscious set of procedures (like computer programs). These procedures are part of our minds (or of our cognitive abilities). The goal of syntactic theory is to model these procedures. In other words, we are trying to figure out what we subconsciously know about the syntax of our language. In generative grammar, the means for modelling these procedures is through a set of formal grammatical *rules*. These rules are nothing like the rules of grammar one might have learned in school. These rules don't tell us how to properly punctuate a sentence or not to split an infinitive. Instead, they tell us the order in which to put our words (in English, for example, we put the subject of a sentence before its verb; this is the kind of information encoded in generative rules). These rules are thought to generate the sentences of a language, hence the name *generative grammar*. They tell us step by step how to put together words into a sentence. We'll look at precise examples of these rules in the next chapter.

The structure of NPs in English and Albanian

As mentioned above, this paper presents a contrastive analysis of noun phrases in English and Albanian. We hope it will contribute to a better understanding of these structures in both languages. Based on a thorough description and comparison of noun phrases in English and Albanian, particularly on the rules or patterns that generate these

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phrases and their grammatical functions, there can be drawn some conclusions about the structure and behaviour of these structures in Albanian which seem to be similar to those in English as to the major types of noun phrases, but different as to the way they are realized in both languages. We mention here these similarities and differences of NPs in both languages, emphasising the universal character of the basic grammatical principles on the one hand, and the individual, special character of each language on the other. In both languages an NP consists of the **head** (a noun + other dependent pre- or post-posed elements, or a pronoun):

[<i>the house</i>]	[She] speaks fluently.
[<i>shtëpia e re</i>]	[Ajo] vallëzon bukur.

NPs can use the same determiners: pronouns (demonstrative, indefinite, possessive adjectives), numbers:

[<i>this girl</i>]	[<i>kjo vajzë</i>]
[<i>some students</i>]	[<i>disa studentë</i>]
[<i>my book</i>]	[libri im]
[<i>two criminals</i>]	[<i>dy kriminelë</i>],

as well as the articles *a (an)*, *the* in English and the indefinite articles *një* (singular) or *ca* (plural) in Albanian. As far as determiners are concerned, English is different from Albanian in the way it uses the indefinite article *the* as a determiner. In Albanian definiteness is expressed by the definite endings of nouns. The definite article in this language is an ending attached to the stem of the noun performing simultaneously two other grammatical functions, that of singular or plural form of the nouns as well as their case. Albanian has got a rich system of inflections for the definite and indefinite declension of nouns. As mentioned above, the latter is accompanied by the determiner words *një* (singular), *ca* (plural). Similarity between the two languages is shown in the use of indefinite articles *një* and *a (an)* when they refer to a general example of something not a specific one:

[<u>A lion</u>] is a ferocious beast.
[<u>Një luan</u>] nuk mposhtet lehtë.

The most frequently used determiners in both languages are the definite and indefinite articles in English and indefinite articles as well as the definite and indefinite endings in Albanian. Both languages share the type of NP patterns consisting of a Proper Noun (NP → Np). English differs from Albanian structures of this type in that proper nouns in English are by their nature definite; Albanian makes use of grammatical markers to express definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns depending on their function in the sentence.

Liz went out
Liz-a doli. (subject - definite form, nominative case)

In this respect, definiteness and indefiniteness of Albanian proper nouns depends on their syntactic function in the sentence and resembles definite and indefinite markers of common nouns in this language. There is a major difference between the two languages in structures of the kind NP → N genitive + N. The difference lies in the different form of these constructions in English, with the inflectional morpheme 's. This typical form determines

the different position of genitive in English and Albanian; in English the genitive noun precedes the head of the phrase, whereas in Albanian it follows the head:

Pyle's dog

Qeni *i Pailit*

In English the genitive noun makes up a noun phrase by itself, whereas in Albanian it is a dependent element within the structure of the noun phrase. One of the most productive patterns of NPs in both languages is that of noun phrases consisting of a noun or noun phrase and an adjective NP → N(NP) + ADJ. They differ as to the position of adjectives. In English adjectives are elements that precede the head of the noun phrase, in Albanian they follow the head. In contrast to English which lacks the grammatical markers of agreement between adjectives and nouns, the Albanian adjectives agree with the noun they modify in gender, number and case (unarticled adjectives take only gender and number inflections). Consequently, the order of adjectives in English noun phrases of this type is more rigid as compared to Albanian.

[*a long way*],

[*ditë e lodhshme*],

[*a tall boy/girl*]

[*vajzë e gjatë*] – [*djalë i gjatë*]

A common type of NPs to both languages is that of the type NP → N(NP) + PP, i.e. noun phrases in which the head of the phrase is followed by a prepositional phrase(PP). This pattern is very productive in both languages. The similarity lies in the position of the prepositional phrase after the head of the phrase in English and Albanian. There is a different realization in Albanian of the English structure consisting of a noun + *of* + noun. In Albanian it follows the pattern noun + noun in ablative case.

[*a message of regret*]

[*mesazh keqardhjeje*]

Some phrases with the preposition *for* in English [*the name for it*] are realized in Albanian by a noun or pronoun in genitive:

[*the name for it*]

[*emri i saj*]

Patterns of the type NP → NP + Relative clause are similar in both languages and the relative clause is the dependent post-posed element of the noun phrase:

[*the student who arrived early*]

[*studenti që arriti herët*]

The similarity of this type of NPs lies in the existence of almost the same relative pronouns in both languages. The only difference here is the abundance of grammatical forms of relative pronouns in Albanian because of its rich

inflectional system.

[*the student who arrived early*]
 [studenti *që/i cili mbërriti herët*],

Common to both languages are the patterns of the type NP → N + Apposition. English and Albanian non-restrictive apposition shows profession, title, family relations, proper noun:

[*the opera “Carmen”*]
 [*Kolonel Petroja*]

In English the position of the non-restrictive apposition is usually after the head of the phrase, whereas in Albanian the most frequent position of the apposition is before the head of the phrase, but a post-posed apposition is also possible:

[*the opera “Carmen”*]
 [*rruga “Zoti Princ”*]

Another pattern of noun phrases, common to both languages, is NP → Pronoun (the head is a pronoun). They are similar as to the type of the pronouns that can be heads of noun phrases, mainly personal, interrogative, demonstrative, and indefinite pronouns. The difference between these phrases in English and Albanian lies in the abundance of grammatical forms of these pronouns in Albanian as compared to a limited number of forms in English:

he told <u>us</u>	(ai) na tha <u>neve</u>
for <u>us</u>	për <u>ne</u>
from <u>us</u>	prej <u>nesh</u>

The position of the pronoun in English is indicative of its syntactic function:

I don't get you.
I – subject *You* - object
 **You don't get I.*

The order of English noun phrases in a sentence is rigid and determines their syntactic function. Albanian has a relatively free word order due to its abundant inflections. The contrastive analysis of syntactic functions of noun phrases in English and Albanian shows that Albanian and English are similar in this respect because they function and behave like nouns in both languages i.e. they perform syntactic functions that are typical of nouns: subject, object, complement. In cases of noun phrases used as complements, Albanian uses a zero article instead of the indefinite article in English:

Ai është doktor. (zero article)

He is *a doctor*. (indefinite article *a*)

Conclusions

All the languages of the world share certain properties (for example they *all* have subjects and predicates. These properties are called *universals* of Language. If we assume UG, then the explanation for these language universals is straightforward – they exist because all speakers of human languages share the same basic innate materials for building their language’s grammar. The above mentioned conclusions are strong evidence in support of the generative theory of universal grammar. They cast light on the fact that the grammatical system of different languages like English and Albanian is based on a set of absolute principles (UG) that apply to all languages; but they are realized in specific *parameters* that vary from one language to another, thus revealing their individual character.

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