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The Noun, Grammar and Context

Lise Fontaine[1]

Abstract

Perhaps the earliest linguistic resource we have as babies learning to mean is the noun in categorizing the objects around us. The conventional association between the noun and the entity it denotes becomes exploited in use and the speaker learns that through grammar he or she can use nominal expressions to refer. This is one of our most powerful resources. The referring nominal group has the greatest potential for complexity and can serve as a measure of a text's 'nominality' and its density, including its role as an index of register. In Halliday's 1966 paper Grammar, Society and the Noun, he sought to consider "certain questions of language from the outside" (p. 50). In this paper, I will also look at certain questions of language but instead from the inside. These two alternative views can be thought of as inter-organism orientation and intra-organism orientation (Halliday, Lamb & Regan, 1988). This paper seeks to answer questions such as what is 'nominality'? Where and how does it fit in the grammar? What relationship does it have, if any, to context? Taking an intra-organism approach, I will consider these questions by examining certain referring expressions in context. Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) demonstrated how the process of referring is collaborative; however as they point out, “social factors govern the collaborative mode” (p, 37). This paper will explore these social factors by looking at certain referring expressions in an uncollaborative context, that of a reprisal hearing. The results show that a speech partner uses different strategies following a rejected referring expression depending on the type of exchange.

KEY WORDS: NOUN, NOMINALITY, REFERENCE

1. Introduction[2]

> *One's experience is organised on many levels at once; the language has played a part in structuring it for us, not the less important because largely at a time in our lives that is now beyond the reach of recall. Halliday (1966, p. 70)*

Perhaps the earliest linguistic resource we have available to us as babies when learning to mean is the noun because of its nature in categorizing the objects (including people) around us. I remember my son eventually learning that his use of *juice* did not work efficiently when he wanted to drink milk; he could use language to specify meaning by categorizing his experience. The association between the noun and the entity it denotes becomes

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conventionalized and the speaker learns that through grammar, i.e. words put to use to create meaning, he or she can use nominal expressions to refer. As noted in the quotation above by Halliday, all of this happens at a time that is beyond our recall and this is truly remarkable.

In *Grammar, Society and the Noun*, Halliday (1966) sought to consider "certain questions of language from the outside" (p. 50). In this paper, I will also look at questions of language but rather from the inside. These two alternative views can be thought of as social and cognitive (cf. inter-organism orientation and intra-organism orientation (Halliday, Lamb & Regan, 1988)). This paper seeks to answer questions such as, what is 'nominality'? Where and how does it fit in the grammar? What relationship does it have, if any, to context? I will argue that the study of referring nominal expressions must involve both social and cognitive orientations since the very nature of nominal reference requires what we might call a 'full circle' process.

The first part of this paper will critically examine the noun and the notion of 'nominality' as discussed in Halliday's (1966) paper. The second part of the paper will examine the role of the noun in referring expressions. Using excerpts from transcripts from a hearing for an unlawful reprisal application, we will consider examples of referring expressions which were initially rejected by the speech partner due to a lack of agreement about the classification of the entity being referred to, i.e. noun selection is at the root of the problem. I will conclude by proposing that a combined cognitive and sociolinguistic approach to understanding nominals offers a stronger and more convincing solution to the core questions about nominality.

Nominality is not only about nouns (our categorization of our experience of the world around us); it is also about what we maintain in discourse as a referent (a type of objectification). These ideas can be found in Halliday's early work but they are not sufficiently articulated. We use the term to talk about nouns and to talk about 'participating entities' and this is problematic to a certain extent. Nominality is the concept that allows us to combine nouns and participating entities. This is an important endeavour and as such, it needs to become a more explicit part of our thinking about language.

2. The noun as a category

It is difficult to discuss the category of nouns without considering their use and function in the language. However before considering the grammar of nouns, it is useful to examine what is meant by the term noun and specifically what meaning it is given in this paper. After all we do not, as speakers, set out to use a noun; we set out with an intention to refer to something. In English the main grammatical resource we have for this is the noun phrase, or nominal group as it is commonly called in SFL.

When we think of the term 'noun' we may think of schooling and what is traditionally called parts of speech words. The noun category is perhaps the word class that people can identify with most easily because many nouns have typical concrete senses, e.g. *dog* and *ball*. In school most of us were told that a noun is a person, place or thing. While this definition is vague, it works reasonably well as long as the sense of ‘thing’ is taken as broad enough to encompass the real and imaginary, including feelings, thoughts, and abstract concepts such as *jealousy* or *love*. However this view masks some differences that are important if we move to a more technical definition. The term 'noun' denotes a category of words that share sufficiently similar properties. Words can be similar in a variety of ways but when we talk

about lexical categories, we generally mean a type of word that generally serves certain purposes and exhibits certain structural traits. We could say we can recognise a noun because it serves to denote a class of objects and because it is a lexical item that can carry plural information. If I say something like, *I just love those trees*, I can be confident that the person I am communicating with will understand what objects are included and which are not. For example, a house is clearly not a tree, but it might not be clear to everyone whether bamboo is a tree or a grass. This distinction in classification, or categorisation, would matter to a greater or lesser extent according to context. As has been well established in the field of linguistics, there is no direct relationship between a noun and an instance of the class. Rather, a noun denotes a class of objects that are culturally recognised (cf. for example Fawcett's cultural classification system 1980).

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:51) define the noun according to its functional (semantic) and structural (grammatical) properties respectively. Semantically a noun "expresses a person, other being, inanimate object or abstraction, bounded or unbounded, etc." and grammatically a noun "is either count or mass; if count, may be either singular or plural, plural usually inflected with -s; can be made possessive, adding -'s/-s'; can take *the* in front; can be Subject in a clause, etc.". The view of noun taken in this paper is very close to this definition but with two points of further precision. First, I would argue that a noun does not 'express' the person or object, but rather serves to denote its class, its cultural classification. The speaker uses the noun in an expression in order to refer to the entity (e.g. person or object). This may seem a subtle distinction but it is in fact quite important to stress that the noun is a category of type, defined by speakers. This point will be made clear in the second part of the paper. Second, since the noun has only a denotative sense, it cannot be Subject in a clause. A noun must be 'operationalised' in a nominal group in an act of referring in order to be Subject in a clause (e.g. coding the recoverability of the referent, see Martin, 1992:98). Plural nouns and mass nouns can hide this, for example, *Trees can provide shade on a sunny day*, or *Sand can burn your feet on a hot day* but in the vast majority of cases, for any referring expression, the noun in the expression is selected as a representation of the entity being referred to and is thus a categorization of the referent. As Langacker (1991:33) explains, the function of the noun is "limited to specifying a type but a full nominal designates a grounded instance of that type, i.e., an instance distinguished from others and situated with respect to the speaker/hearer knowledge". The noun interacts, functionally, with other elements of the nominal group to construe the participating entity (cf. Davidse 2014:190) but it itself does not express a functional role at clause level. We will come back to this distinction later in the paper.

To conclude this section on the noun, it is worth discussing two other terms often discussed alongside nouns and indeed for some, they are treated as types of noun. These are proper nouns (or names) and pronouns. Proper nouns are distinguished from common nouns in the English writing system by having an initial capital letter to mark this distinction. For example, in the clause *my home town is Iroquois Falls*, it is clear from the orthography that the noun *town* is a common noun and that *Iroquois Falls* is a proper noun. This example also includes the possessive personal pronoun, *my*. Pronouns are often defined as replacing a noun but this is false. Pronouns have no content of their own and understanding their use requires recovering information from elsewhere in the text or in the situation (cf. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of reference). For example, in *I met your sister yesterday, she seems very shy*, the use of *she* does not replace the noun *sister* but rather the entire nominal expression *your sister*. Pronouns and (proper) names are not nouns for two main reasons.

First they do not fit the definition of noun as given above and as a result they cannot be classified as nouns (although they could be with a different definition). Second they differ in terms of sense and reference. Unlike nouns, they have no lexical sense and also unlike nouns, they have reference or rather they can be used directly by a speaker in an act of referring. There is also a well established word type distinction between nouns and pronouns since they are members of two different broad categories where nouns are content (or lexical) items and pronouns are function (or grammatical) items. There is only one pronoun which has a similar semantic function to nouns and this is the pronoun *one* (e.g. *She wants a red apple and I want a green one*), which is substitution (see Halliday and Hasan, 1976) rather than reference (although certainly involves cohesion). Names seem to be a more fluid category, sharing properties with both nouns and pronouns. They are like pronouns in terms of their use as complete referring expressions and like pronoun use their use is governed by considerations of recoverability on the part of the addressee. For example, I can only say, *Jaci is coming over*, if the addressee knows who *Jaci* is and can ratify the expression. English, as Halliday (1966:57) points out, readily adopts certain names as nouns, "blurring the distinction between common and proper nouns". The nominal use of *hoover* in British English is a prime example, e.g. *I just bought a new hoover,* or *skidoo* in Canadian English, e.g. *I just bought two new skidoos.* The opposite is also possible and we often find common nouns being used as names, e.g. place names such as *Beacon* (in Devon, UK). Nouns therefore are taken here as belonging to a different category to names and pronouns. Pronouns and names normally function at the group (or phrase) level as complete referring expressions, rather than the word level as nouns do[3].

There is clearly a relationship between nouns and pronouns and indeed in what is enabled to act as a participating entity in the clause. The key is to approach this from the perspective of acts of reference, i.e. referring expressions. For this, we need to turn to and expand on Halliday's (1966) account of nominals, which we will do in the next section.

3. Nominality

Why should we be interested in 'nominality'? The OED offers three definitions[4] which are of relevance to this discussion, "Of or relating to a noun or nouns" (“Nominal” Adj def.1); "relating to the act of naming" (“Nominal” Adj def. 4) and "a word or phrase that functions as a noun" (“Nominal” N def.3b). While nominality does relate to the use of nouns, it also includes "some entities other than simple nouns, and some aspect of the functioning of nouns" (Halliday, 1966:53). Clearly then, we can see that the term nominal covers anything related to noun-like behaviour. Halliday (2013a:25) explains that in addition to being about nouns, nominality includes nominalization (i.e. creating a noun from another word), neologisms (naming entities) and classification (how we use nominals to express taxonomic relationships e.g. *railway station*, where *railway* subclassifies *station* in a hypernymic relationship).

While neologisms and classification are primarily based on nouns, nominalization is the morphological process of deriving a noun from another word class such as verbs or adjectives,

[3] An exception to this is the case where a name is used as a noun as in *the Bill with red hair,* taken from Anderson (2007:324), where they are considered derived nouns (i.e. through nominalization by conversion).

[4] The most frequent sense of 'nominal' is "not substantial; very small in relation to an expected or required amount; token" (“Nominal” (Adj) def.3b).

e.g. *teach* → *teacher*, *happy* → *happiness*. While nominalization is explicitly marked by derivational suffixation (e.g*. -er, -ness, -ation*), in some cases there is no morphological indicator and we find zero derivation (or conversion), e.g. *run* (verb) → *run* (noun). English is very flexible with its lexical items and we also find that many verbs were formed from nouns, e.g. *weather* (noun) → *weather* (verb), *editor* (noun) → *edit* (verb). This feature of the English language was humorously highlighted in the well-known Calvin and Hobbs cartoon (Watterson, 1993), *Verbing weirds language*, which may now be as famous to linguists as Chomsky's (1957: 15), *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*.

The word *nominalization* has an interesting story to tell since it is itself a nominalization; i.e. it was formed by derivation. It first entered the English language in the early 15th century as an adjective borrowed from classical Latin *nōmināl*is, meaning "of or belonging to nouns" ("nominal"). This adjective was then verbalized through morphological derivation giving us the verb, *nominalize.* Finally the noun form *nominalization* was morphologically derived from the verb. Therefore it is a noun that carries with it features of the word formation process, which in this case is the process of nominalizing or making nominal. With nominalization, the one doing the nominalizing is the speaker, i.e. it is the speakers of a language who nominalize words, concepts and experience. Essentially nominalization, like other types of derivational processes, is a word formation device, allowing for the creation of new lexical items and as a consequence, the expansion of the lexicon.

Within SFL literature, nominalization tends to be discussed primarily in terms of verbal nouns (nouns formed from verbs) and as though a nominalization is really a verb that has nominal status assigned to it. However, as explained above, not all derived nominalizations have verbal or event properties (e.g. relational nouns such as *happiness*). Perhaps more importantly, other nouns can have event-like properties without having been derived from a verb, e.g. event nouns or indeed an abstract noun such as *theft*. This highlights an important distinction between talking about different word categories (nouns vs. verbs) and different ways of encoding meanings (thing meaning and event meaning).

Some scholars suggest that lexical items relating to events are stored in the lexicon differently and that they have different grammatical behaviours as compared to lexical items relating to objects. If this is the case then the lexical distinction between nouns and verbs is either not clear or not well motivated. It is generally assumed that the only nouns with any kind of verbal properties are those that have been derived from a verb. Here I will briefly present three very different studies related to event nouns which seem to challenge this assumption. The first of this is work done by Vendler (1967) on the classification of events and of particular interest here is his work on nominalizations. He set up criteria by which to determine whether a lexical item behaved more like an object or an event. His work in this area is based on the assumption that "events and their kin are primarily temporal entities" and that objects are primarily spatial (Vendler, 1967:144). When contrasting objects and events, he argues that

> there are certain nouns that are not verb derivatives, yet behave like nominalised verbs; that is, they can enter container contexts without suggesting suppressed nominals. Fires and blizzards, unlike tables, crystals, or cows, can occur, begin, and end, can be sudden or prolonged, can be watched and observed – they are, in a word, events and not objects (Vendler, 1967:141).

The second study comes from neurological linguistics. Bedny, Dravida and Saxe (2014) found that the event nouns in their study (e.g. *hurricane*) behaved more like verbs than entity nouns such as *dog*. Based on these results they claim that "verbs and event nouns depend on similar

neural machinery", despite the fact that "the majority of event nouns in the present study did not share a lexical root with verbs (e.g., “rodeo” and “concert”)". We might then be tempted to imagine far more continuity between nouns and verbs than approaches to grammar would have us believe. Finally, in psycholinguistic research, Frisson, Pickering & McElree (2011) show that event meaning may be dissociated from the lexeme and that it can be coerced by an event-selecting adjective such as *difficult* when used in an adjective-noun phrase with a common noun that typically does not itself carry event meaning, e.g. *difficult mountain*. However as they point out, "processing is more effortful when the adjective–noun phrase does not have a straightforward compositional interpretation (e.g., difficult mountain), than when it does (e.g., difficult exercise)" (ibid.:1176). What this shows is that event meaning is not solely a property of verbs, and hence not only the result of verb-based noun derivations. What the claims made here suggest is that event meaning is not a property of a particular word class. The category of noun is useful but we mustn't forget that we invented it. One potential implication of this is that we may not have the right conceptualisation of these categories. This discussion suggests that the categories must be more fluid than we usually consider. The distinction of verbs encoding events and nouns encoding objects is an important one in the literature and we will come back to it below.

As many scholars have pointed out (e.g. Halliday, 1966 and Vendler, 1967, among others), it is not only single lexical items that can be nominalized, it is possible for an entire clause to be nominalised as in, for example*, My dog died last year. Her death was very upsetting for our family*. In this case, we are no longer using nominalization as a process of lexical derivation. Here, the nominal group, *her death,* is a nominalization of the entire situation expressed by the clause, *my dog died last year*. What is meant here by nominalization extends beyond morphological processes. It is not merely a word formation device but a way of conceptualising and encoding our experience. In SFL terms, this is a choice, a choice of representation. These choices in nominality relate to the multifunctional nature of the clause, i.e. experientially as participants in transitivity, interpersonally as Subject and textually as Theme.

Another aspect of nominality includes the notion of choice in the lexicalisation of our experience. What gets encoded as an object, as a noun? For example, Halliday (1966:69) discusses kinship terms as an example of the "nominalization of social relations". The term *father* is relational, i.e. is father to, and the relation is encoded as a nominal (a common noun). As Halliday (1966:72) points out, "it is possible to conceive of a language in which *uncles* are verbs". If this seems absurd, then we could consider the word *wind*, which offers a good example of how English tends to have a nominalized construal of experience in certain domains. While we do have *rain* as a noun and as a verb, in English we do not say **It is winding today* but rather *It is windy today* or *The wind is strong today*. It is worth noting that there are tendencies towards verbality as well. For example in Toronto, Canada, the TTC is an initialism for the Toronto Transit Commission but TTC is far more common. At times speakers prefer to verbalise TTC (by zero conversion) and you will often hear people talking about how they get to some location as *TTCing*, as in *I TTCed it to work today*, which is shorter than saying something like *I travelled to work with the TTC*. New words are formed all the time such as *Brexit*[5], coined in 2012, which has yet to make it into the dictionary but has been used extensively since then in print media in the UK and in Europe.

[5] Brexit is a blend (Britain/British exit) which is based on Grexit, also a blend (Greek Exit), it is used to mean the exit of Britain from the EU.

Thus in SFL, nominalization is not limited to morphological nominalization but is rather a broader term that captures what happens when anything is 'objectified', including entire clauses, events, attributes, etc. Once something is nominal or is made nominal, it inherits "the potentialities otherwise reserved to persons and objects" (Halliday, 1966:69). The potentialities of 'objectifying' include functioning as a participant in transitivity, as subject interpersonally, and as theme textually. As Halliday explains (ibid.) "nominality means freedom of movement" and increases the range of semantic options available. In the example given above about our family dog, after having expressed the clause, *My dog died last year,* I could have said *It was really upsetting*, where the use of the pronoun *it* refers anaphorically to the entire situation expressed by the clause. This is a type of nominality that is not a word formation process such as is traditionally thought of with the term nominalization, but rather a way of making meaning nominally. It is not that some things are nominal and some things are verbal, the English language is highly flexible. Making meaning nominal is a choice and it affords certain things, it enables certain things. It has the potential to mask certain things as well but fundamentally it is a resource for meaning making, nominal meaning making. This is an area that merits greater attention because so far little work has been done on nominality and how meaning is made nominally but also because much of the work done on nominalization, one small aspect of nominality, is based on assumptions that have not yet been fully tested.

Most work on nominalization in SFL is based on an association between nominalization and grammatical metaphor. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:658) describe grammatical metaphor as instances where "some aspect of the structural configuration of the clause, whether in its ideational function or in its interpersonal function or in both, is in some way different from that which would be arrived at by the shortest route — it is not, or was not originally, the most straightforward coding of the meanings selected". While there is more to grammatical metaphor than nominalization (see Taverniers, 2006), there is a tendency in SFL literature to equate the two. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:656) explain nominalizing grammatical metaphor as a device whereby "processes (congruently worded as verbs) and properties (congruently worded as adjectives) are reworded metaphorically as nouns; instead of functioning in the clause, as Process or Attribute, they function as Thing in the nominal group". This implies that any metaphorical realization will have an agnate congruent realization. However according to Heyvaert (2003:71), "the metaphorical view on nominalization is almost exclusively aimed at unpacking individual syntagms into congruent agnates, rather than on elucidating the choices behind nominalized". The association between nominalization and grammatical metaphor is potentially problematic if it is not critically examined within the theory.

One possible issue concerns how grammatical metaphor is based on an assumption that processes are congruently realised by verbs and entities are congruently realised by nouns. From the discussion above, it would be understandable to assume that i) in English the system is skewed in favour of nominal expressions and ii) the relationship between nominalizations and so-called grammatical metaphor is not necessarily one of congruence. For example there may well be some nominal forms that may appear to be metaphoric realizations because we are able to find an agnate form with a more 'congruent' meaning but where in fact, it is the congruent form. This might be because of how we initially modelled our experience. For example, *wind* and *war* are both nouns that are etymologically originally nouns, they were not derived from verbs or any other word. Is it reasonable to say then that in using *war*, there is any kind of metaphorical rewording? This is not to suggest that an example like *war* would

be considered an instance of grammatical metaphor but I hope it highlights one of the potential problems with the concept of congruence.

What we might glean from the three approaches to event meaning mentioned above is that lexical items with event-like properties are wired differently in the lexicon than non-event-like lexical items, irrespective of whether there is any verbal or process basis involved. Where there is a verbal basis involved historically as in the case of nominal derivation (nominalization), what we end up with is a new lexeme, a new word is formed. For example *investigation,* is derived from the verb *investigate,* but it is still a noun and it meets all the criteria of 'noun-ness'. The way in which nominalization is discussed as grammatical metaphor almost suggests a transformational approach, i.e. a re-wording, a re-structuring, and I believe this is not intentional. We need to know where and when such a selection in wording would take place? There is scope for a critical examination of the claims being made about what is underlying these processes.

What is clear is that the English language maintains a kind of flexibility or elasticity in its grammar, allowing a variety of entities, events, situations and attributes to be represented as participating entities in the transitivity system. This is possibly the most significant point; nominality is a way of making meaning nominally and it fundamentally concerns what kinds of things we can refer to. Consequently this necessarily involves having a model of referring and in SFL terms this means working with the system network that leads to the realization of a nominal group. For example, in Fawcett (1980) this is modelled in the 'referent thing' system network. I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Fontaine 2007 and in press) in favour of approaching these issues from the perspective of referring. After all, this is the primary function of nominals. Nominality is the unifying concept that brings together nominal expressions, whether at the word level in the choice of noun or at the group or phrase level in the choice of referring expression.

4. In grammar and context

In this section we will move on from the discussion of the noun to the grammar and context by considering the role of the noun in referring.

The nominal group is the "grammatical resource for representing things" (Halliday, 1994:193-194), introducing them to the discourse and for maintaining them once they are there (see Martin, 1992). It is therefore the key resource for referring. Within the clause, the nominal group is the most frequent unit for expressing simultaneously a participant in transitivity, the Subject of the clause in mood and the Theme element in textual meaning, making it the only unit that can simultaneously express the main elements for all three main metafunctions of the clause (i.e. experiential, interpersonal and textual). The main description of the nominal group in SFL is given through the experiential metafunction, which is illustrated in the example given below in

Table 1. The Thing element functions as the "semantic core" of the nominal group (Halliday, 1985:167). The modifiers in the nominal group are Epithet, Classifier and Qualifier and the determiners are Deictic and Numerative. A detailed account can be found in Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), see also Fontaine (2012 and in press). The Thing element, as the semantic core, can be thought of as the speaker's conceptualisation of the referent (see below) and related to Fawcett's cultural classification (1980 and 2007). The Deictic element "indicates whether or not some specific subset of the Thing is intended; and if so, which"

(Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:312) and this serves to signal to the addressee whether "the identity of that participant is explicitly recoverable from the context or not" (Martin, 1992:98). Qualifiers characterize the Thing "in terms of some process within which the Thing is, directly or indirectly, a participant" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:324). In the following example, the <furniture> being referred to is classified by the noun, *rockers*, it is marked as being recoverable by the use of the definite article, *the*, and it is being described by the quality, *lovely.* The use of the Qualifier adds to the complexity of the expression by representing the referent as being involved in a process of *making* for the purpose of representing the referent as a participating entity in the process of *using*. It often also has an identifying function as it can signal 'which one' is being referred to.

One of the problems of research into the nominal group has been that the expressions themselves are often considered without any consideration of their use in the context of situation. Hasan (1999:224) argues "that to describe the nature of human language we need to place it in its social environment". This is a very important point because referring is context dependent and so any nominal group functioning as a referring expression will depend on its context of use. This is true not only for deictic items such as *me* and *you* but also fully lexical expressions.

Table 1 Experiential analysis of *the two lovely wooden rockers that my father made for us* (Fontaine, 2017)

the	*two*	*lovely*	*wooden*	*rockers*	*that my father made for us*	*[are now being used by my grandchildren]*
Deictic	Numerative	Epithet	Classifier	Thing	Qualifier	
Goal						
Subject						
Theme						

In what follows, I will first describe the context from which I have drawn the examples I will use in this discussion. Then I will briefly summarise the key contributions to the study of referring expressions from the literature. Finally we will examine the data by considering nominality and its role in referring expressions.

The data under examination in this section comes from transcripts from a public hearing for an "unlawful reprisal application"[6]. This type of hearing occurs when a worker believes he or she has been penalized "in reprisal for obeying the law or exercising [his or her] rights" and when as a consequence the worker has filed a complaint with the Ontario Labour Relations Board. The hearing is a legal proceeding which is led by a vice-chair, who is appointed by the Labour Relations Board. At the hearing, normally the applicant (the worker) and the employer are each represented by a lawyer of their choice. In the hearing under study here, the applicant is a former employee who has brought a claim of unlawful reprisal against his employer. In this case, the applicant is representing himself because he could not afford legal representation (which is a common occurrence); therefore the only qualified lawyer involved is the employer's legal representative. The representatives of the employer and the applicant (here it is the applicant) call on witnesses during the hearing. Hearings at the Ontario Labour Relations Board are public and the final decision is available in the public domain. In this case, the hearing was transcribed but the names of the individuals participating and/or mentioned in the transcripts as well as the company have been made anonymous[7] in order to prevent any individual person or company from being identified here.

[6] Under the Ontario Ministry of Labour's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/reprisal.php

[7] The data collection has been approved by the Cardiff University Ethics Committee. The data is presented here with permission.

The data consists of the referring expressions which have been selected because they involve a rejection of an expression for some reason. The reason for this is that this gives some insight into the nature of the nominal group by considering those instances where its use is contested.The number of referring expressions in any text will generally exceed 50% of the text and with a very long text such as a hearing, the number of such expressions is very large. Restricting the data to a specific type of exchange, i.e. the negotiation of an expression, means that there is a more manageable number to work with. In any case, the data analysis here is not meant to be exhaustive or of any statistical significance. The examples are illustrative of what they tell us about the nature of nominality in referring expressions. The section of transcript used was selected because it included examination in chief (direct examination or primary questioning of a witness) and then cross examination of the same witness over one afternoon. This gives a more balanced sample to work with given that the witness was the same throughout and both the lawyer (during examination in chief) and the applicant (during cross examination) had the opportunity to ask the witness questions. The total word count for this excerpt was 134,692 words (52,347 words and 82,345 words in the examination in chief and cross examination respectively). A total of 28 refashioned expressions were selected. Of these, 11 were during examination in chief by the lawyer with his witness and 17 were during cross examination by the applicant. It is important to note that the intention here is to consider the role of the nominal expression rather than to determine the frequency or nature of refashioning referring expressions. Refashioning is not a frequent feature of discourse. If it were, spoken interaction would be disrupted rather than fluid.

Before moving to discuss samples of the data examined in this paper, a brief overview of some key research on the nature of referring will be presented.

Perhaps the most significant finding from psycholinguistics is the understanding that the process of referring is collaborative (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986), i.e. speech partners work together to accept an expression. Any initial referring expression is seen as provisional; they are only deemed to have been satisfied when the addressee has ratified the expression (Brennan, 2000:4). There is evidence that once the expression is ratified, speakers tend to converge on the use of a particular expression. In other words, if one speaker uses one way of referring to something, unless there are reasons to change it, the other speaker will also use the same expression. Brennan and Clark (1996) have shown that in some experiments, referring expressions vary considerably more across conversations than they do within a given conversation. This has led researchers to suggest that there is a kind of contract that is developed between two speakers in conversation, whereby there is a kind of established agreement as to how objects will be referred to. We will return to this important point when we consider the data presented below.

In relation to the noun and the lexicalisation of the expression, Brennan and Clark (1996) observed that when speakers are referring, they are not describing a class of object, they are making choices, both lexical and syntactic choices, based on the current purposes of the referring expression; they are "conceptualizing an object" (ibid.:1482). They point out that in terms of lexical choices, "there is still a great deal of variability … the problem is that most objects can be conceptualized in indefinitely many ways" (ibid.). If we relate this to what has been said in this paper about nouns and the nominal group, the Thing element will be central in understanding referring expressions since it is the semantic representation of the object (referent).

Regardless of the field within which work is being done on referring expressions, one recurring theme is consistent; what is going on in the speaker's mind and what the speaker believes is going on in the addressee's mind. Both approaches are essential when considering referring expressions. As Searle explains (1990:xvi),

> since an essential part of referring consists in invoking in the hearer's mind a representation of an object, the recognition by the hearer of such an intention automatically produces such a representation: as soon as the hearer recognizes that a noun phrase is being used as a referring expression he knows that the speaker is referring to a specific object he has in mind.

In experimental conditions, the process of building a referring expression has been shown to always begin with an initial referring expression (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986), which is then either accepted or rejected by the addressee, or even rejected by the speaker. Rejecting a referring expression can happen in two ways. Either the speaker monitors and self-repairs, in other words, the speaker rejects his or her own initial referring expression (re-selection), or the addressee rejects the initial referring expression for some reason. This leads to a process of recovering or "refashioning" (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986: 20). Speakers will jointly "refashion" the referring expression until an expression is found that is accepted. The collaborative model of referring accounts nicely for interactions which are in nature collaborative but this leads us to ask two main questions. First how does this model of referring work in spontaneous (and non-experimental) language use? Second, does the collaborative model account for referring when the context is not itself collaborative? In the remainder of the paper we will address these two questions by reconceptualising and extending the role of the noun in the initiating expression and in the process of ratifying the expression.

The issues concerning referring expressions are complex involving intention, beliefs, cooperation, collaboration and power relations. However as Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986:37) point out, "social factors govern the collaborative mode". In the data under examination here, it will become clear that the social context is complex. The excerpts from the hearing under study here are taken from a naturally occurring (not scripted) dialogue in an adversarial context. The fact that there is an applicant (a kind of plaintiff) and a defendant means that the two parties do not share the same goals. In a sense they are adversaries. Ehrlich (2002:738) explains that "whereas the adversarial nature of cross examination means that the purpose of a cross-examiner's questions will be to challenge and undermine the truth of witnesses' evidence, in examination in chief the purpose of questions, by contrast, will be to presuppose the truth and adequacy of witnesses' evidence". This is a significant point because by comparing instances of refashioning referring expressions between examination in chief and cross examination we can gain an understanding about whether these different roles have an impact on the nature of collaboration in referring.

Although the number of rejected expressions identified in the excerpt is relative small, the context of refashioning was not the same in examination in chief as compared to those in cross examination. The majority of expressions that were rejected (i.e. ones that then had to be refashioned) were ones initially expressed by the witness in examination in chief; in other words, the lawyer would interrupt the witness leading to a refashioned expression. In cross examination we find the inverse where most rejected expressions were initially given by the applicant, who in this context has the same questioning role as the lawyer. Further, in examination in chief, the lawyer was the 'rejector' in all instances during lawyer-witness interaction and in cross examination, the witness was the rejector in the majority of cases during the applicant-witness interaction.

The most common reason for refashioning an expression was due to lack of sufficient specification. Of the 28 expressions examined, 15 (53.6%) were refashioned for identification. Identification refashioning happens when the speaker assumes the expression he is using is sufficient for identification by the addressee but the addressee rejects it as inadequate. For example, in example (1), the lawyer is questioning his witness during examination in chief and it is clear that when the witness says *the order number five*, it is clear to him which order he is referring to. However the lawyer either does not know or would like it clarified for the record that the specific order being referred to is *the compliance plan*. Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) refer to expressions such as *The compliance plan?* as trial noun phrases since they are tentatively offered and which then has to be ratified by the speaker, which is done here by *yes*.

(1) Q. Okay. Were these.... Have these orders been complied with?

A. All except the order number five.

Q. The compliance plan?

A. Yes.

The refashioning expressions of most relevance to nominality are those in which the nominal used to classify the referent is questioned. In these cases it is not so much that the referent cannot be identified but that the way in which it is being represented is objectionable, as illustrated in example (2) below. This is different from identification refashioning because in those cases, even though by refashioning there may be a different lexicalisation of the expression (e.g. *order* vs. *plan* in example (1) above), the refashioning is being done to identify the referent. With nominal refashioning, the choice of the Thing element is being challenged. In (2) the issue with the expression is whether or not the referent can be classified as *defendant* or *applicant*; the referent identification is not an issue (i.e. it's not a question of 'which one?'). This was the second most frequent refashioning strategy among the 28 instances in the data with five total occurrences (17.9%). Nominal refashioning will be discussed in detail in the next section but before moving on to that, the remaining two strategies found in the data will be briefly described. The next most frequent strategy involved modification by expanding the nominal group to include an Epithet, a Classifier or a Qualifier. In these cases the Thing element remains unchanged. An example of this is given in (3), where the refashioning brings in modifiers to the expression, expanding it with more detail. Note that the Thing element, *infraction*, remains in the expression. Finally, the last type of refashioning strategy found in the data involved defining the terms used in the initial expression, i.e. the refashioning relates to clarification concerning the semantics of the term used. This type is illustrated in example (4) where the witness responds to the question by the applicant with the expression *uptime reports,* which is an appropriate expression in terms of identifiability for the witness and applicant since they were co-workers but the Vice-Chair is not familiar with this term and seeks a definition.

(2) After the **defendant**[8]--sorry, the **applicant** was terminated there was a lengthy time before the applicant provided a long list of people with his s.50 complaint.

(3) A. ... a lock-out infraction that took place sometime prior to this.

Q. A different lock-out....

A. A different lock-out infraction at the four-foot glue machine.

(4) Q. How, how would maintenance see these comments?

A. They should be on uptime reports.

V-C: Q. A which?

A. It's a report called an uptime report.

Having provided a general overview of the data sample, we will now turn to a more detailed look at the particular case of nominal refashioning; i.e. examples where a referring expression is rejected due to the nominality of the referent.

[8] This refashioning is particularly interesting. The speaker rejects his own expression (self-corrects); however, the speaker (the witness) is in fact the defendant in the hearing as the representative of the company's management team. The applicant is the person who is claiming to have been wrongfully dismissed.

5. Nominality of the referent

As stated above, nominal refashioning involves re-nominalising the referent, i.e. the nominal item (noun) that is selected to classify the entity being referred to. In Excerpt 1 presented below, the applicant and the witness are discussing why there are protective guards on certain machinery and what the implications are of having damaged or malfunctioning guards. The specific incident being discussed relates to an occasion where the applicant stopped a certain type of machine called a 'patcher' due to unsafe work conditions. What we find here is a tension between wanting to minimise the effort of collaboration (i.e. reducing the number of steps to reaching agreement) and the implications of the classification, which can make a big difference when considering safety risks. The expressions of particular interest are highlighted in bold font.

Excerpt 1, limb vs. body part

Applicant.	Now, I believe you testified that these guards were particularly serious because it's a punching machine; you could lose **a finger or a hand or something**.	
Witness.	I don't know if I testified that, but I would agree with you that they're serious.	
Applicant.	Okay. Now, was that the first time you were made aware of problems with patcher guards?	
Witness.	I don't recall any other incident, no.	
Applicant.	Okay. Do you recall an incident where the applicant did exactly the same thing just prior to this order being issued? No, I don't.	
Witness.	I'm sorry. Did exactly the same what?	
Lawyer.	Stop. Well, I.... Okay, I'm sorry.	
Applicant.	Were you aware of an occasion in late May or early June, I would say late May--in May, where the applicant shut down all the patchers because the guards were improper?	
Witness.	No, I do not recall that.	
Applicant.	Okay. If I said to you.... If I put to you that I had done that, and when Mr. J. came back the guards were bent up and we had to make guards really heavy duty so that the workers couldn't bend them up? What would you say to that? Would you remember that?	
Witness.	Yes, I do.	
Applicant.	Okay.	
Vice-Chair:	Just hold on.	
Witness.	I remember that the workers themselves would modify the guards.	
Applicant.	Why?	
Witness.	I don't know why.	
Applicant.	Did anybody ask?	
Witness.	Maybe. I didn't.	
Applicant.	Well, you agree it's, it's a potential for **a loss of limb**. I'm not sure I understand. You agree there's a potential for **loss of limb**...	initial RE repeated RE
Witness.	**Finger**.	renominalization
Applicant.	...or **hand**.	renominalization
Witness.	Yeah, fair enough.	

Applicant:	Okay.	accept RE
Witness.	**Finger or hand** but...	
Applicant.	Okay.	
Witness.	...I don't think you can get **your arm** in there.	renominalization
Applicant.	No.	
Witness.	Okay.	
Applicant.	Okay, I'm sorry. **Limb** would be **arm**, I'm sorry. Okay. So we knew we could lose **some body parts**. And we knew that the workers were bending the guards up.	renominalization
Witness.	We knew that was happening at the time of this inspection because of the stop order.	accept RE

This example illustrated a type of collaboration in ratifying the referring expression. Both speech partners are working together and the discourse does not progress until this is resolved. However it is also clear that in this case there is some reluctance to ratify the expression. The witness refuses to accept that without the safety guards on the machines, a worker could lose a limb, yet he accepts *finger*, *hand* and even *body parts* as the classification of the referent. The shift from the initial use of *lose* as a verb in the first instance to a nominalized representation of the situation, i.e. *loss of limb*, is only temporary. It appears to be triggered by having already established *it's* as Subject which cannot function as the subject of *lose*. The expression, *a potential for*, is typically completed by a nominal expression[9], not a clausal one. This marks a kind of aside in the discourse, a temporary suspension of the general aims, in order to establish the nature of the referring expression. Once there is agreement on the nominality or the lexicalisation of the referent, the speaker returns to what is considered in SFL terms as the more congruent form of *lose* as a verb. The discourse then resumes its normal course.

In Excerpt 2, we also find that until the referring expression is ratified, the discourse is sidelined until the issue is resolved. Here, the problem concerns the classification of the referent. As in Excerpt 1, there are potential implications related to the choice of noun expressing the Thing element. The purpose of the questioning in this excerpt relates to whether or not a dangerous incident had been formally recorded. The witness offers the expression, *a very long training session,* to explain where and how the incident had been recorded but the applicant rejects this classification. It is worth noting that both the witness and applicant both know exactly what event they are referring to so it is only the way in which it is being referred to that is at question. This is in fact emphasized by his response, i.e. *a very long what*, making it clear that it is the use of the term *training session* that is not being accepted. It is also clear that in both their minds, a supervisors' meeting is considered less significant than a training session when it concerns a serious safety violation. They both know that the supervisors' meetings cover various topics and that they are therefore a more general exchange of information, rather than a dedicated training session.

Excerpt 2, training session vs. meeting

Applicant:	But this supervisor, with 15 years of experience, puts no less than three lives at risk and, in your opinion, it's not serious enough to record.	
Witness:	That's incorrect. The incident, itself, was recorded in great detail in **a very long training session** held with all of the supervisors.	initial RE
Applicant:	**A very long what**?	Simple Reject
Witness:	**A training session with all of the supervisors**.	Repeated and expanded NP

[9] The most significant collocations immediately following *potential for* include: *abuse, harm, misuse, contamination, greatness, growth, conflict, disruption,* and *confusion* according to Sketchengine's Word Sketch using the enTenTen corpus [http://the.sketchengine.co.uk]

Applicant:	Oh, I thought.... I thought you said it was just reviewed at **a supervisors' meeting**.	Replaced NP
Witness:	Exactly. And **that supervisors' meeting** generally covers a variety of topics. **This meeting** was--this was the focus.	Accepted

It is also interesting to note that both nouns, *session* and *meeting*, are encoding event meaning and they are each being used in an expression to refer to the same referent, i.e. a workplace event which included supervisors at the plant and an event that had a beginning and an end, lasting for a particular duration. However, the noun *session* is not a nominalized verb, whereas *meeting* is. In other words, the noun *meeting* in English was derived from the verb *meet* and we can consider that it carries with it some verbal properties. The same cannot be said for *session* which does not get its event properties from its verbal counterpart. Therefore the use of *session* here must be considered as congruent to some extent. In the ongoing discourse here and in the use of the expressions for referring to the particular event, both nouns are being equated. It is very difficult to argue that one of these carries metaphorical meaning while the other does not. We are forced to see both as having metaphoric meaning or neither. As discussed above, nouns can carry event meaning and they can be coerced by neighbouring words to have event meaning by association. In this case *session* has inherent event meaning without recourse to a metaphor. It is simply the case that English opted for nominal meaning rather than verbal meaning in encoding the denotation of this type of thing.

There is no space here to discuss each of the 28 examples of refashioning found in the data sample. One potentially significant finding is that refashioning occurs in both examination in chief and in cross examination. However one important difference is that the witness never rejected an expression that was produced by his lawyer during examination in chief and this same witness rejected the most expressions during cross examination. In order to extend these claims about the nature of refashioning referring expressions would require a much larger data sample. Even in this relatively small sample, we find that although the need for rejecting and refashioning a referring expression arises in both examination in chief and cross examination, the nature of the two different micro contexts suggests different strategies are involved in mutually collaborative contexts (examination in chief) as compared to more adversarial contexts (cross examination). The refashioning strategy that was most common in both settings concerns the identification of the referent. In these cases, the speaker did not make the expression specific enough for the addressee to identify the referent. However there were some differences between examination in chief and cross examination. For example, expanded referring expression through modification was exclusively found in examination in chief (see example (3) above) whereas lexical reselection, or what I have called renominalization above, was exclusive to cross examination. This suggests that during examination in chief the lawyer encouraged the witness to refashion certain expressions in order to make the expressions more informative (i.e. by adding modifiers) without changing the classification of the referent. However in cross examination, both the applicant and the witness rejected expressions and required the speaker to refashion the expression, not by adding more information but by changing the classification of the referent (e.g. *limb* vs. *body part* and *training session* vs. *meeting* as in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2 above). As Brennan and Clark (1996) showed, in experimental conditions where both speech partners are effectively collaborating on a given task, they generally accept the classification put forward by the speech partner even if they would normally use another one (e.g. use of *penny loafer* vs. *shoe* ibid. p. 1487). In collaborative or mutually supportive contexts, speech partners engage in a conceptual pact in terms of lexical selection (see Brennan and Clark, 1996: 1492). However in cross examination, as we have seen in the two excerpts above, there is disagreement concerning lexical selection. In this more adversarial (i.e. not mutually supportive) context, while the two speakers are collaborating to an extent on referring, it seems they are only doing so because to not do so stops the flow of discourse. They are in fact picking on each other's lexical choice.

All referring is collaborative[10] because it requires "actions by both speakers and interlocutors" (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986:2) and this is true even when the social relationship is adversarial. The strategies for ratifying an expression can be different and in some cases, as shown in the excerpts presented here, some of the strategies may even be antagonistic because of a resistance to converge on a conceptualisation of the referent in a given lexical representation.

In a non-guided, non-experimental and adversarial setting such as discussed here, we have seen that speakers can be quite concerned with the specific detail of the noun phrase (nominal group). Especially in the cross examination interaction, the choice of noun was negotiated and there was some reluctance to agree on the lexical expression, or it may be the case that to accept the expression would somehow imply responsibility or other consequences which would have been undesirable. What is clear, however, is that any disagreement or lack of consensus on the nominal, will stop the flow of discourse. The classification of the referent is critically important.

6. Concluding remarks

Urbach (2013:301) defines context of situation as the "immediate relevant social context of the linguistic interaction" and clearly the context under study here is complex. As Berry (2013:376) points out "in certain types of situation, notably face to face situations, the context can in fact be negotiated, making the contextual configuration a joint creation of the interactants". Indeed here, one might argue that the context of referring is different in examination in chief as compared to cross examination; the tenor is clearly different. Nominality is inherently tied to context. While it is not possible to pursue this in detail in this paper, as I have argued elsewhere, "the study of referring expressions is a rich area for exploring the compounding tensions of the different systems and different strata of language. [...] Developments are needed in terms of a contextual model which includes a model for the speaker's understanding of the addressee" (Fontaine, 2013: 114).

What we know about the production of referring expressions is that the speaker knows who or what the referent is and has a conceptual representation for it. He or she knows whether the reference is specific and identifiable or not and if there is doubt, the speaker has the lexicogrammatical resources to manage this, as does the addressee. As discussed above, the conceptualisation of the referent can be done in "indefinitely many ways" (Brennan and Clark, 1996:1482). This leads us to the concept of choice, which is a "theoretically motivated term in SFL" (Hasan 2013:298). Can we assume that the lexicalisation of the referent is selected first? This would suggest that the Thing element must be selected, at least tentatively, prior to, for example, the selection of any features in the determiner system. There is no scope to explore this further here but see Fontaine (2013) for a discussion of how the elements of the nominal group interact and relate to system. As Halliday (2013b:36) explains, "the meaning-making power of language is activated by the choices we make - or rather by our 'choosings'". Nominality is not only about the fact that something is objectified or nominalized but ***how*** it is. The selection of the noun which serves to express the Thing element of the nominal group is a choice. It is through this choosing that we find one way of connecting the inner (cognitive) processes of nominality (and referring) with the outer (social) processes of convention and social context.

About the Author

[10] This includes written contexts where writers anticipate the reader's knowledge and ability to identify a given referent (or not). The collaboration is virtual and there is often no direct feedback on the expression.

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