

Exploring the Pedagogical Implications of Nominalization in The Teaching Of Composition To Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Nominalization is a grammatical process which should be incorporated into the teaching curriculum of students at all levels of formal education system/classroom learning- primary, secondary and tertiary. The description of grammar as everything a speaker knows about his/her language strengthens this argument; given that nominalization, just like other grammatical processes of passivation, topicalization, pronominalization, is important for effective academic writing. This study, therefore explores the pedagogical implications of nominalization in the teaching of composition to undergraduate students with the aim of highlighting the importance of nominalization in formal academic writing. Writing is a skill which should be acquired by students and professionals as it serves as pre-requisite to academic and professional success. In order to achieve proficiency in writing, the linguistic feature of nominalization should be employed. The theory of grammatical metaphor which accounts for the metaphorical transformation of process and property into entity/thing is a framework within the Halliday's systemic Functional Linguistic. This theory accounts for the metaphorical transformation of verbs and adjectives into nouns /nominal groups. Noam Chomsky's theory of Transformational Generative Grammar is a framework which accounts for the generation of the surface structure from the deep structure. Both frameworks are relevant for the generation of the resources for this study as well as its analysis. For the purpose of this study, data was sourced from students' essay works, while the method and design adopted were both quantitative and qualitative. Findings from the analyses identified paucity in the use of nominalization in the written composition of students, which is an indication of either a poor or inadequate knowledge of nominalization as a feature of academic discourse. Based on the findings, some pedagogical recommendations on the significance of nominalization are made.

Keywords: nominalization, transformational, grammatical metaphor, pedagogical implications.

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I. Introduction

The high frequency of nominalized structures is one distinguishing feature of academic discourse. Moveme

nts across the register continuum that is from the spoken realm to the written realm vice versa is made possible with nominalization. Nominalization is an essential part of grammar and should be applied in written texts to achieve the desired effect. It is associated with texts that require language economy and high information density (Susinkiene 2010). Passive voice constructs and conveys an objective and impersonal tone which leads to a more abstract and more formal write up. These attributes account for its preponderance in formal writing. The nominalization of verbs and adjectives are ubiquitous in academic and professional discourse in English as it helps in the development of the academic linguistic skill. (Hinkel 2002, 2004) However, it has been observed with dismay that some students write without the consciousness of the grammatical significance of nominalization, in addition to its lexico-grammatical resource for meaning potential. This observation is promptly supported by the Chief Examiners Report on the 2011 Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. According to his report, the overall performance of the candidates was below average.

Invariably, this means that the candidates have a poor grasp of the grammar, lexis, structure and mechanics of the English language .As a syntactic process, nominalization realizes its full potential in the theory of grammatical metaphor which enhances the understanding of written discourse(Ravelli,1996) and the meaning of an expression. (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). It is therefore for these and more reasons that academic writings are characterized by nominalized words which help to maintain coherence and cohesion in such texts. In addition to being used in formal discourse situations such as the sciences, politics and legalese, (Hu Zhuang in, 1989) nominalization performs certain relevant functions, among which include reduction in subjectivity to achieve information density and the transformation of underlying structures into nominals through transformations from processes and properties to entities. (Halliday 1996). As a linguistic and grammatical process, nominalization transforms events and processes into things; It also changes verbs and adjectives into nouns. This is exemplified in the sentence; ‘The high level of insecurity is alarming’; as against, ‘There is a high level of insecurity’. In transformational grammar, nominalization refers to the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause. (Leech, 2006). This process of nominal transformation explains the movement of constituents which according to Aarts (2000) “are strings of one or more words that syntactically and semantically behave as a unit ”Essentially, this movement accounts for the stylistic effects created in sentences and texts as a result of the change in the position of words and group of words. The English language identifies three broad classifications of transformations to include:

- Deletion transformation
- Adjunction transformation
- Movement transformation

Though nominalization involves transformation which also operates within the domain of Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar, this study employed the theory of grammatical metaphor as its theoretical framework. This is justified by the fact that while the theory of Chomsky’s TGG does not deeply analyze nominalization as a result of its emphasis on the syntactic level, grammatical metaphor is situated within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics which explores both the structure and function of language in different contexts, in addition to considering language as a phenomenon of choice for meaning potential. Also, the relevance of this theory lies in its connection to discourse studies and language development. (Ravelli, 2003).Though several studies have been done in the area of nominalization, none has been able to explore its pedagogical implications in the teaching of composition to undergraduate students. The objective of this study is to explore the pedagogical implications of nominalizations in the teaching of written composition to undergraduate students. The findings showed that students who were taught nominalization write better essays than those students who lack adequate knowledge of the topic. The difference lies in the text organization, the use of impersonal tones and abstract nouns, semantic elaboration of experiences and lots more. This result will go a long way to equip researchers and language teachers with the knowledge of the relevance of nominalization in the teaching curriculum of students and undergraduates. By so doing, it will also fill in the existing gap in the literature of scholars who have carried out works in a similar field. Though this study is not exhaustive, it leaves room for further studies. The role of grammar in the teaching and learning of language is significant; as the study of grammar equips learners sufficiently in the practical use of language. There are different and varying definitions of grammar. Grammar can be referred to as the science which exposes the nature and structure of speech; it is the correct and elegant use of language. Grammar is everything a speaker knows about his or her language. This lends support to the words of Chomsky (1965), in his book, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* which states that ‘A grammar of a language purports to be a description of the ideal speaker – hearer’s intrinsic competence’. In discussing the holistic nature of grammar, Chalker and Weiner (2000) opine that grammar is ‘the entire system of a language including its syntax, morphology, semantics and phonology’. This statement corroborates the argument that grammar is language as it encompasses all levels of linguistic analysis.

The Theory of Grammatical Metaphor

The theory of grammatical metaphor was propounded by Halliday in his work ‘An Introduction to Grammatical Metaphor’, published in 1985. Grammatical metaphor (GM) as a phenomenon of System Functional Linguistics, hereafter known as SFL has been defined and classified by various linguists. Halliday and Martin (2005) espouse that grammatical metaphor is the “substitution of one grammatical class, or one grammatical structure by another”. This definition views grammatical metaphor in the light of nominalization, a grammatical process that changes a certain word class to another either through affixation or derivation. In a similar argument, Lakoff (1993) explicates that grammatical metaphor transfers meaning from a grammatical class to another. Similarly, Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) opine that grammatical metaphor “adds a further dimension of depth to semantic construal of experience”. This explains the semantic implication of grammatical metaphor, considering its relationship with nominalization. The implication therefore is that grammatical metaphor is synonymous to nominalization by virtue of the obvious similarity in their features. It is a linguistic resource that serves as a tool for the development of nominalization. Halliday (2000) further asserts that the

resource for expanding meaning potential in language lies in its metaphorical form which is the grammatical metaphor. According to him, nominalization is that resource for creating grammatical metaphor. Essentially, verbs and adjectives are metaphorically transformed into nouns. Rather than function as “process” and “attribute”, they function as “thing” in the nominal group (Halliday 2000). This aligns with the assertion of Tavernier (2004) who identifies GM as a type of metaphorical movement from a process as clause, to a process as noun phrase. According to Lakoff (1993), grammatical metaphor transfers meaning from a grammatical class to another.

Grammatical metaphor is theorized by two models which differentiates the instances of use. (Devrim, 2015). The existence of these models (stratal and semantic) affects the definition as the meaning of each model draws on the linguistic configuration that leads to grammatical metaphor. In his definition of GM from the perspective of the stratal model, Martin (1993) asserts that GM introduces a tension between grammar and semantics which results in the metaphorical and congruent interpretation of language. The ideational and the interpersonal metaphors are the two main categories of the strata model. While the interpersonal metaphors consist of the mood and modality, the ideational metaphors consist of the experiential and logical metaphors with a total of six types. Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) identify thirteen types of ideational grammatical metaphor suggested by the semantic model. This is presented in the table below:

Type	Grammatical Shift Congruent metaphorical	Semantic Shift Congruent Metaphor	
1	adjective	Noun	Quality
2	Verb	Noun	Process
3	Preposition	Noun	Circumstance
4	Conjunction	Noun	Relator
5	Verb	Adjective	Process
6	Preposition	Adjective	Circumstance
7	Conjunction	Adjective	Relator
8	Preposition	Verb	Circumstance
9	Conjunction	Verb	Relator
10	Conjunction	Preposition	Relator
11	- - - -	Noun	- - - -
12	- - - -	Verb	- - - -
13	Noun	Various	Thing
			Expansion of thing

The de-verbalization and de-adjectivation of verbs and adjectives into nouns are possible through a grammatical metaphor. Hence there is a metaphorical realization of verbs and adjectives as nouns.

Conceptualizing Nominalization

Nominalization is a noun phrase generated from another word class. It is a major resource for movement across the register continuum, used to realize more abstract meanings in the written discourse and construct technical meanings across fields. It is the realization of the linguistic resource, grammatical metaphor. (Halliday, 1993; Martin. 2008). As a grammatical process, it converts verbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions into nouns. It is a linguistic process of realizing a noun group from a clause, with or without undergoing the process of affixation or conversion. Jespersen (1924, 1937) referred to nominalization as “nexus substantives” in his book, *Analytic Syntax*. This term explains the transformation into a noun of verbs and adjectives. Bloomfield(1993) identified it as common noun groups while Chomsky (1970) limited it to the sentence level. Nominalization takes the nominalized through lexical-grammatical and semantic change which leads to various discourse patterns, leading to the re-arrangement of ideas. This corroborates with the assertion of Egbe (1996) that “nominalization is important for the creation of a discourse because the verb and all the lexical items that relate to it can be changed in various ways.” The change from the active to the passive makes for the sharing of *given* and *new* information, where *given* information is that which is known by both the speaker and the listener, and *new* information is that which is known only by the speaker. Consequently, while given information occupies the subject position of a sentence, new information occupies the predicate position. Therefore, “a sentence that contains an example of nominalization lacks the vigour that goes with an active sentence containing new information”. Egbe (1996:122). Nominalization has been defined and also described in diverse ways based on varying perspectives by scholars and linguists over time. Based on the foregoing, different schools of thoughts have emerged who analyzed the concepts of nominalization from their view points. For Jespersen(1924), nominalization is the transfer of verbs and adjectives into a noun. This explains his focus on the formation of nominalization which is the major concern of some other linguistic theories on the notion of nominalization. Busman (2000) opines that nominalization is the conversion into nouns of all parts of speech. In

another development, Biber (1998) states that nominalization involves the addition of suffixes to verbs and adjectives. Similarly, McArthur (1996) asserts that “nominalization is the process or result of forming a noun from a word belonging to another word class”. In his opinion, Hayvaert (2003) states that although nominalization has been a popular discourse topic, its theoretical and descriptive approach has been totally ignored. According to him, its transformation from being a non-nominal to a nominal should be viewed in a better perspective. He further asserts that the tripartite functions of language as propounded by Halliday (1985) are the sources from which nominalization derive its meaning. The observation in the conceptualization of nominalization so far is that the linguists under review considered nominalization solely at the lexical level which among other things is quite limiting. Conversely, Halliday (2004) defines nominalization as a phenomenon in which “any element or groups of element, phrase or clause can function as a nominal structure”. This definition is mind blowing as it goes beyond the lexical level to incorporate other grammatical units as elements of nominal transformation considering its function as a nominal group in a clause. In line with Halliday, Junic (2010) describes nominalization as a type of grammatical metaphor where nouns express the same process as verbs. Consequently, verbs and adjectives are metaphorically realized as nouns when either de-verbalized or de-adjectivized. Here are a few examples of nominalization:

- A: The girl discussed the issue with her father and it yielded no results.
- B: The girl's discussion of the issue with her father yielded no results.
- A: The IPOB announced that the sit-at-home policy will continue.
- B: Announcement by the IPOB is on the continuation of the sit-at-home policy.
- A: Most graduates are out of job because we have bad leaders.
- B: Bad leadership is the cause of graduate high unemployment rate.
- A: Peter felt embarrassed and it was obvious.
- B: His embarrassment was obvious.

In the sentences above, the verbs, adjectives and conjunctions in “A” are metaphorical transformed in “B” and so are realized by nouns

Towards a Classification of Nominalization

Different linguists have come up with different classifications of nominalization as a syntactic process. Halliday (1996), identifies five types of nominalizations to include: quality, process, circumstance, relator and zero.

- i. Quality nominalization refers to any word derived from an adjective; as in poor – poverty, great -greatness, etc.
- ii. Process nominalization involves the transformation of a verb into a noun. E.g., kill- killer, dance-dancer, etc.
- iii. Circumstance nominalization is realized from a preposition or a prepositional phrase.
- iv. Relator nominalization is derived from a conjunction.

v. Zero nominalization is the transfer of zero to noun. Another linguist, Hayvaert (2003) identifies three major classifications of nominalization to include:
i. Lexical nominalization: This is the nominalization of a word; as in *killer*, *hindrance*, *obstruction*, etc.
ii. Structural nominalization: This nominalizes a structure that lies between a word and a clause; as in *Ken's smoking in the sun*, *Jane's dancing in the rain*, etc.
iii. Clausal nominalization: This involves the nominalization of a clause; as in *that Ken smoked in the sun*, *that Jane danced in the rain*, etc.

Other classifications are:

i. Through the process of affixation: This type requires the addition of a derivational suffix. E.g. apply – application, difficult – difficulty, careless – carelessness, etc. ii. Through the process of conversion: Also known as zero derivation, the word does not change but is used in different ways. E.g., poor – the poor, rich – the rich, wise – the wise, etc.

Reduction and Transformation Processes in Nominalization

Considering its linguistic peculiarities, nominalization is significant in formal, technical and academic. As an instrument for information density, it enables the construction and production of brief and concise academic work. Susinkiene (2009). Several scholars who have argued in line with Susinkiene include Locke (2002), Hayvaert (2003), Banks (2003), etc. This argument is highlighted in the following sentences:

A: Many workers could not go to work because there were no commercial buses to convey them to their various places of work. B: Lack of transportation means resulted in poor attendance to work. Nominalization calls for the linguistic skill that transforms verbs and adjectives into abstract nouns; while forming noun phrases from clauses. When this happens, the nominalized is taken through lexical-grammatical and semantic change. This is exemplified in the sentence: A: He was commended for forgiving the robbers. B: His forgiveness of the robbers was commendable. The nominalization of verbs can also be achieved through the transformation of underlying structures into gerundive nominals as illustrated in the sentences below:

A: John is eager to learn and everyone knows it. B: John's eagerness (derived nominal) to learn is obvious. In the sentence above, Noam Chomsky's grammatical description of the deep and surface structure plays a transformational role; a phenomenon that aids the transformation of the deep structure to the level of the surface structure which allows for a passive construct.

Source of Data

The data collected were sourced from the essay works of undergraduate students of Evangel University, Akaeze, Ebonyi State. A total number of one hundred and fifty scripts were randomly selected from about three hundred scripts. These scripts were grouped into two, A and B. The A scripts are those who scored above the pass mark, while the B Scripts are those who scored below the pass mark.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The data for this study consists of one hundred and fifty scripts which were selected from about three hundred essay works of year one undergraduate students of Evangel University Akaeze, Ebonyi State. For the purpose of the analysis, the scripts were grouped into two; A and B. Group A scripts scored above the pass mark, while group B scripts scored below the pass mark. Below is a breakdown of the scripts:

G R O U P	N O O F S C R I P T S	% P E R F O R M A N C E
A	6	5 4 3 . 3
B	8	5 6 . 7
T O T A L	1 5 0 1 0 0	

The analysis is a break-down of the scripts into group A and B. Group A are scripts that recorded above the pass mark and Group B are those scripts that recorded below the pass mark. In group A, there is preponderance in the use of nominalization in the essay work submitted by the students for assessment, while the group B category showed little or no knowledge of nominalization. The paucity in the poor performance of the students in their essay writing is an indication that the students have not acquired adequate linguistic skills which would enhance their writing skill. The implication is a lack of proficiency in the academic writing of students occasioned by either little or no knowledge of the grammatical process of nominalization.

Exploring the Pedagogical Implications of Nominalization/ Recommendations

Nominalization is a linguistic feature identified with "every academic writing. This underscores its importance in pedagogy. As a type of grammatical metaphor, the knowledge and application of the different models of GM is significant in language development and language education. Some of the major functions of nominalization according to Martin (2008) include: knowledge construction, text organization, evaluation and facilitation of flow of information. As a matter of necessity, language teachers should endeavour to teach students the nominalization process in order to equip them with the skill of efficient writing considering its role in academic writing. This aligns with the opinion of (Hinkel 2002, 2004) who espouses that nominalization of verbs and adjectives are ubiquitous in academic and professional discourse in English as it helps in the development of the academic linguistic skill.

Nominalization encourages the use of the passive process and aids in a fluid chain movement as a result of the transformation of the verb into a noun. By so doing, it shifts focus from one direction of a sentence to another. This is exemplified in the following sentences:

A: The man died because he was poor.

B: Poverty killed the man.

Nominalization plays a vital role in the information structure of sentences and texts such that what is new in sentence 'A' can be treated as old in sentence 'B'. This is illustrated in the sentences below:

A: The wealthy politician built the new lodge by the back gate.

B: The new lodge by the back gate was built by the wealthy politician.

In addition, it enables the use of processes in the context of participant in another process

A: The Vice-chancellor suspended the erring students to serve as a deterrent to the newly admitted ones.

B: The suspension of the erring students by the Vice chancellor deterred the "Freshers." Furthermore, nominalization is a lexico-grammatical means of cohesion as it enables the connection of ideas and unification of texts which enhances the comprehension of a text as a whole. Here are two sentences:

A: The Dean set up a committee. The committee is to investigate the case of examination malpractice during the first semester examination.

B: The committee set up by the Dean is to investigate examination malpractice.

Nominalization could be used to improve linguistic style. In formal writing, for instance, the writer deliberately avoids the use of the personal pronoun as in the following:

A: I analyzed the data which revealed that the numbers of hypertensive people had increased.

B: An analysis of the data revealed an increase in hypertension. In addition to compacting language and condensing information, the use of nominalization in the sentence above, creates a peculiar stylistic effect.

Finally, nominalization helps to create a distance between the writer and the reader. This establishes a more formal, objective and credible text which are identified as features of academic writing. Example:

A: The University Management decided to expel erring students in order to deter "freshers" from committing similar offences.

B:

The decision to expel erring students is to serve as deterrent to" freshers."

II. Recommendations

There is need to employ language teachers who have been trained adequately as professionals in the language field, and not those who see teaching as all-comers profession. 2. In-service training should be occasionally organized for language teachers in order to constantly keep them abreast of current linguistic needs which should be passed down to students.

3. Emphasis should be laid on the importance of the knowledge of grammar as a basic tool for the acquisition of effective writing skill.

4.

Drawing from the pedagogical implication of teaching nominalization and its significance in academic writing, more attention should be given to language teacher education so as to equip teachers with the pedagogic content knowledge to drill their students in order to write effectively.

III. Summary

This work explored the pedagogical implications of nominalization in the teaching of composition to undergraduate students. It relies heavily on the theory of grammatical metaphor, which according to Halliday and other notable linguists enhances the understanding of nominalization as it involves the metaphorical transformation of verbs and adjectives into nouns/ nominal group. This study covers the concepts, definitions and meaning attributed to nominalization and the importance of teaching nominalization as a linguistic process to students. The data is sourced from the essay composition written by undergraduate students of Evangel University, Akaeze, Ebonyi state. These works were selected by random sampling and findings generated from the analyses indicate paucity in the use of nominalization in the written composition of students.

IV. Conclusion

Nominalization enables the reduction and transformation of grammatical elements which account for economy of words and information density used in achieving proficiency in academic writing. As an ideational type of grammatical metaphor, it enables the transformation of processes and properties into a nominal group through a metaphorical process. Its characteristic feature of reduction brings about information density for effective communication and easy comprehension. Being a linguistic resource for meaning potential, nominalization functions as a cohesive device, as it coheres texts and textual elements to achieve unity of purpose. In exploring the pedagogical implication of nominalization in the teaching of written composition to undergraduate students, the study shows paucity in the use of nominalization, which accounts for the lack of proficiency in the written composition of students. This implies the absence of text organization, brevity, information density, use of passive voice construct, among other features which characterize academic or formal writing. These findings underscore the significance and implications of teaching nominalization as a linguistic process; as it equips students with adequate linguistic skills for academic proficiency.

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