

A Study of *Of*-Phrase

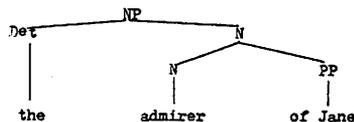
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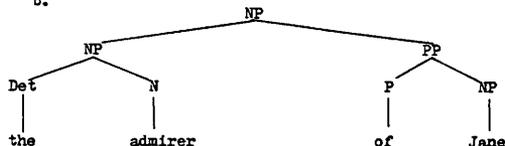
I. This paper is concerned with the classification of *of*-phrase into three kinds, *of*-phrase as complement, *of*-phrase of characteristic and *of*-phrase as quantifier. With the Middle English loss of all distinctive inflectional endings in the noun except for the -s of the genitive and the plural, prepositions became more important than they had ever been in the Old English. In fact, grammatical relationships indicated by the inflectional endings of earlier days were indicated in the early Modern English Period by prepositions, e.g. *hiere āgenne dōm fēos ond londes* (their own choice of property and land).⁽¹⁾ Prepositions occur very frequently in English and play an important role in it. The analysis of *of*-phrase in the light of actual use will be of great value for those learning English as a foreign language.

As the initial step of this study, let us review some previous arguments regarding *of*-phrases. C.F. Onions (1965)^b claims that the preposition "of" is now used very widely, while the original Genitive indicated what might have been the object of a verb— the Objective Genitive— as in "their fear of the enemy was great" (i.e. they feared the enemy greatly). Jespersen (1933) points out that *of* is appositional, as it is in *the City of Rome* (=City which is Rome), *the three of us* (=the three who are we). Analyzing idiomatic expressions, he distinguishes between "a portrait of the king" (representing him) and "a portrait of the king" (belonging to him). Nakajima (1980) argues that *of Jane* in *John is the admirer of Jane* may be regarded either as an objective genitive, [the] [admirer of Jane], or as a possessive genitive, [the admirer] [of Jane], and gives the following tree diagrams respectively: (Chapter XXVI, p. 139)

(1) a.



b.



He classifies the noun *admirer* as a derived noun as well as a substantial noun referring to a person.

George Lakoff (1965) proposes that though no preposition appears after the verb in the surface structure of the sentences, the preposition might be there on some level of analysis, in that prepositions show up when verbs are nominalized, as in (2):

(2) a. My fear of rain ↔ I fear rain

b. My liking of jazz ↔ I like jazz

He maintains, furthermore, that in English there is a late rule which drops prepositions after verbs that have not been nominalized, and that it is doubtful whether such prepositions appear in the deep structures of the above sentences or whether they are introduced by *spelling rules* which put them before the object noun phrase as a kind of case marking. Nakajima (1980), on the other hand, argues that such prepositions appear in the deep structure rather than being inserted transformationally, as shown in (1).

Treating case placement, Stockwell, Schachter and Partee (1973) claim that the preposition transformationally inserted by a general rule does not refer to a particular case, as in (3) (p. 38)

- (3) a. The destruction *of* the city
- b. The analysis *of* the equation
- c. An appraisal *of* the situation

Giving the following examples

(p. 45)

- (4) a. the brother *of* the President
- b. the leg *of* the table

they insist that (4) examples are derived by means of a rule of objectivalization, since they regard as "objects" all "post-N of-phrases" where the NP corresponds to an underlying case. Fillmore (1967) proposes that *of* is the natural marker of the "objective" case. In this paper, *of*-phrases of this type are treated as complement in that they are essential in composing noun phrases.

Incidentally it is interesting to notice that in Spanish "de (of) + root verb" functions as to-infinitive. For example:

- (5) Es la hora *de* salir.

time leave

(It's time to leave.)

- (6) Ya es la hora *de* estudiar.

study

(It's time to study.)

- (7) Fácil *de* decir y difícil *de* hacer.

easy say difficult do

(It is easy to say but it is difficult to do.)

II. Let us examine in detail the following class of *of*-phrases:

- (A) *Of*-phrase as Complement
- (B) *Of*-phrase of Characteristic
- (C) *Of*-phrase as Quantifier

Chomsky (1970) claims that derived nominals have the internal structure of noun phrases. We may assume that when derived nominals have *of*-phrases, the preposition *of* may exist in the deep structure from the beginning. Such *of*-phrase functions as complement. For example, *of life* in *The loss of life increased each day* is a complement, because this *of*-phrase semantically tells the content of *loss* and at the same time, syntactically it is an essential part in the noun phrase *the loss of life*. In cases in which *of*-phrases occur as complement, we may analyze the noun phrase as shown in (8):

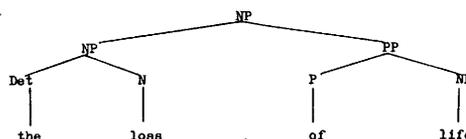
- (8) NP → NP PP

For this reason the deep structure of noun phrase like

- (9) the loss of life

must be something like

(10)



In actual language use, NP's are often modified by adjectives, possessive proper nouns, possessive pronouns, as are nouns following the preposition *of*. Some of the following show this phenomenon. Here we have some examples in which *of*-phrases occur after derived nouns. And also in each of the following, the noun before *of*-phrase has a marked character of a derived nominal, e.g. their unfair treatment of the black ↔ they treat the blacks unfairly.

(2)

(11)

- a. The great challenge of the next 100 years will be "the advancement" *of individual independence* in this sweet land of liberty.
- b. Ford brought up with Park during their talks the Korean President's suppression *of dissent*.
- c. It is not uncommon for Japanese students to criticize the white in American for their unfair treatment *of the blacks*.
- d. Washington's conduct at Valley Forge is an illustration *of courage*.
- e. He got an impression *of its great size and beauty*.
- f. His slow pace was an indication *of his weariness*.
- g. His indurance *of the pain* was remarkable.
- h. Freedom *of speech* does not mean liberty to gossip or tell lies.
- i. We waited there during his consideration *of the matter*.
- j. Most people have an abhorrence *of snakes*.
- k. The announcement *of his death* has appeared in the paper.
- l. Passage *of the bill* seems absurd.
- m. The proof *of a diamond* is that it will cut glass.
- n. There is a reminiscence *of his father* in the way he walks.
- o. Have the option *of Greek or Latin*.

- p. During the winter, navigation *of the North Sea* is dangerous.
- q. He suggested that they should kneel and ask the guidance *of the Lord* in the matter.
- r. In other words the introduction *of new words* does not mean a new policy.
- s. The Soviet leader cited the continuing deployment *of U.S. missiles* in Western Europe as evidence for his arguments.

Besides, English has a number of idioms which contain *of*-phrases functioning as complement. Here are some examples:

- (12)
- a. He has a good grasp *of mathematics*.
 - b. May I have the honor *of your company* at dinner?
 - c. The youngsters made fun *of their teacher*.
 - d. Will you take care *of this money* for me?
 - e. We must take stock *of the situation* and decide what to do.
 - f. Won't you have a taste *of this cake*?
 - g. Our neighbor kindly allowed us to have the use *of his tennis court*.
 - h. The crops gave promise *of a good harvest*.
 - i. Don't take advantage *of smaller children*.

Now let us consider *of*-phrases which occur after prepositional phrases, and which function as complement of the prepositional phrases as in (13):

- (13) In the event *of rain* the ceremony will be held indoors.

In this case, the *of*-phrase *of rain* may be considered as an essential element of the prepositional phrase *in the event of rain* semantically as well as syntactically, in that this *of*-phrase indicates the content of *the event* and functions as complement of the prepositional phrase. Presumably the phrase structure rule required to deal with prepositional phrases consisting of two prepositional phrases is something like.

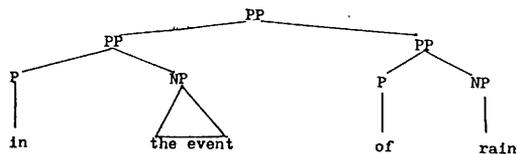
(14) $PP \rightarrow PP \ PP$

Therefore, the structure of the prepositional phrase, repeated here as (15):

(15) in the event of rain

could be shown in the following diagram:

(16)



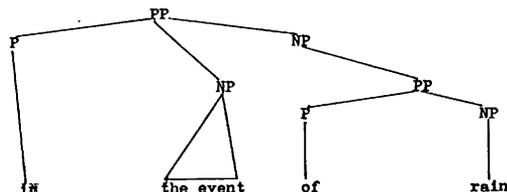
Alternatively, the PS rule can be represented as in (17):

(17) $PP \rightarrow P \ NP$

$NP \rightarrow NP \ PP$

because the prepositional phrase (*of rain*) is so closely attached to an NP (*the event*) that a PP (*of rain*) is a constituent of an NP, namely, $NP \rightarrow NP \ PP$ rather than a PP, which is directly dominated by a PP, namely, $PP \rightarrow PP \ PP$. This analysis seems more convincing since the first NP requires a complement as shown in the following examples. For instance, the underlying structure of the string in the event of rain may be shown by the tree diagram in (18):

(18)



Here are some examples:

(19)

- a. There was a sponge on the edge *of the sink*.
- b. He was in the employ *of the government*.
- c. In explanation *of his absence*, he alleged that message did not reach him.
- d. In the light *of recent discoveries* it may be necessary to revise our previous theory.
- e. In case *of fire*, ring the alarm bell.
- f. Send my mail *in care of Mr. Preston*.
- g. The children were left in the care *of an aunt*.
- h. In the course *of my life*, I have seen many strange things.
- i. Bob hurried off the the right, in the direction *of the men's washroom*.
- j. In the absence *of Mr. Smith*, his wife gave us a lesson.
- k. Flocks fly southward at the approach *of winter*.
- l. I thank you on behalf *of my friends*.

- m. There were some tea leaves in the bottom of *the cup*.
- n. A white flag is used as a token of *surrender*.
- o. At the outbreak of *World War II* he was staying in London.

(B) *Of*-phrase of characteristic

In some environments, the preposition *of* is followed by abstract noun such as a man *of ability*, news *of significance*, a country *of character* and so on. Adjectives are also used before abstract nouns like a matter *of considerable importance*, a newspaper *of high rank*, an effect *of quite distinction*, etc. Nakajima (1980) points out "of + abstract noun" construction plays a role of post modifier and that such construction is used as predicate as well. He gives the following examples:

(p. 145)

(20) a matter *of great importance*

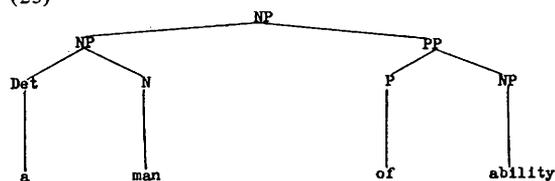
(21) The matter is *of great importance*.

Furthermore, he claims that the PS rule necessary to treat this type is

(22) NP → NP PP

Thus, the underlying structure of *a man of ability* might look like this:

(23)



In the case of a derived nominal plus *of*-phrase as complement, the *of*-phrase in *the destruction of the city* may be replaced by the genitive *the city's destruction* without changing meaning involved. However, the *of*-phrase functioning as post modifier, say in *a man of significance*, can not obtain the same result as in the example shown above:

* significance's man

Here are some examples:

(24)

- a. A smile *of triumph* spread over his smooth and swarthy face.
- b. They fall into a state *of not complexity, but of perplexity*.
- c. She seemed to be a woman *of some beauty and power*.

- d. I never saw anyone wear an expression *of such deep gloom*.
- e. It's news *of rare significance*.
- f. Today, youth, however, are living under the dark shadow *of disillusionment*.
- g. President Ford is seeking an image *of strength*, but seems to have forgotten the humanity.
- h. He is a man *of character*.
- i. The headaches *of primacy* have been just as bad.
- j. At home, a diplomacy *of spectacle and surprise* was bound to lose support as soon as it stumbled.;
- k. Carter is a man *of religion and principle*.
- l. The space capsules are a marvel *of technology*.
- m. It implies a shocking contrast between the light *of life* and the darkness *of death*.
- n. He had felt a sense *of injustice* and a thrill *of fright*.
- o. This machine is a miracle *of efficiency*.
- p. There was a note *of self-satisfaction* in his speech.
- q. Hart sees himself as a unique example of a man *of thought* who seeks the arena of presidential action.

In some circumstances, *of*-phrases containing other than abstract nouns just behave as post modifier.

(25)

- a. He had really the eyes *of an eagle*.
- b. We saw the flowers *of a beautiful color*.
- c. He was a man *of considerable means*.

On the other hand, *of*-phrases containing abstract nouns are not necessarily post modifiers. Suppose of *happiness* in (26)

(26) She has a strange idea *of happiness*.

is a post modifier of *a strange idea*, we may obtain the following result which is irrelevant to the original sentence:

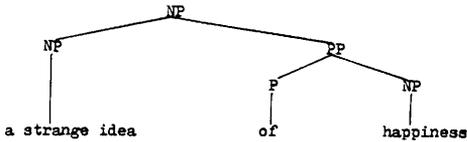
(27) She has a strange happy idea.

Such an *of*-phrase functions as complement rather than modifiers, because it tells us the content of an NP (a strange idea) and it has its own constituent in the base rule. Therefore, the structure of the noun phrase, repeated here as (28):

(28) a strange idea of happiness

could be shown in the following diagram:

(29)



We have some examples of *of*-phrases which function as complement but which behave somewhat differently from those mentioned in (11) and (12).

(30)

- a. A sigh is the expression *of sadness*.
- b. He has great hopes *of success*.
- c. Wealth is sometimes considered a barometer *of success*.
- d. He told the telephone operator that his call was a matter *of life and death*.

(C) *Of*-phrase as Quantifier

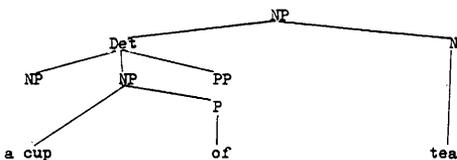
Finally, let us examine how the *of*-phrase can play the part of quantifier. Quantifiers can be paraphrased by a prepositional phrase of the form "numeral + noun + of" such as *a cup of* or *a pound of*. At first glance, *a cup of tea*, for example, seems to share the same PS rule discussed above, namely, NP → NP PP. However, taking account of the behavior of quantifier, we may assume that it is a kind of determiner, and that this determiner is nothing but an NP. Therefore, the phrase structure rule might be:

(31) a. NP → Det N

b. Det → NP

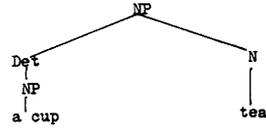
with regard to the underlying structure, *a cup of tea*, for instance, has something like the following:

(32)



Contreras (private discussion, at the 1977 Summer Institute, University of Washington) proposes that the preposition *of* is later inserted by the *of*-insertion rule, therefore, the example above mentioned (*a cup of tea*) will be represented in the tree diagram in the following manner:

(33)



However, in my opinion, the preposition *of* is not transformationally inserted but it has its constituent in the base rule from its start. The preposition *of* always exists as shown below, so there is no need to assume that *of* is inserted later.

(34)

- a. Give me *a piece of* chalk.
- b. Father got *a pair of* gloves.
- c. He gave me *an item of* information.
- d. I am going to give you *a piece of* advice.
- e. She ordered *a dish of* ice cream.
- f. He got *a roll of* film and *a package of* cigarette.
- g. We must find a man who could eat *a whole mountain of* bread.
- h. I want *a glass of* water.
- i. I should like *a sack of* potatoes.
- j. May got *three dozens of* the red roses.
- k. I should like *a bowl of* porridge.
- l. Did he steal so much as *a loaf of* bread?

What has been discussed in this paper is that the *of*-phrases following certain kinds of derived nouns function as complement, while the *of*-phrases containing the preposition *of* and abstract nouns frequently assume the role of post modifier. Such noun phrases are generated by the PS rule, NP → NP PP. We have also treated *of*-phrases as quantifier, which has the PS rule, NP Det N. Although English is a language which has a relatively fixed word order indicating grammatical relationships, the *of*-phrase cannot always be considered as a unit; rather it has a sort of double-status, that is in some environments *of* is closely attached to the preceding noun as in *a cup of tea* and on the other hand, *of*-phrase functions as a part of complement as in *a strange idea of happiness* and as postmodifier as in *a man of ability*.

Jakendoff (1973) also claims that prepositions may determine a much larger range of structures in English than the traditional P-Np construction. Since English prefers nominalization, *of*-phrases may play an im-

portant part in constructing noun phrases such as *my understanding of the problem, the remedy of social evils, the beauty of Joseph's coat* and so on. The examples discussed above hopefully have elucidated the functions of *of*-phrases.

NOTES

- (1) Marckwardt, A. H. & Rosier, J. L. *Old English Language and Literature*. W.W. Norton & Company INC: New York. (1972) p. 37.
- (2) Most examples are from *An English Collocational Dictionary on Prepositions* by Tomoshichi Konishi and some from *The Japan Times* and so on.

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 - 8) Jakendoff, Rays. "The Base Rules for Prepositional Phrase" in *A Festschrift Morris Halle*. ed. Anderson and Kiparsky. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. INC: New York. (1973)

本稿は昭和59年9月2日に急逝された市村洋子教授の遺稿である。