NOUN PHRASE MODIFIERS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE
МОДИФІКАТОРИ ІМЕННИКОВИХ ФРАЗ У ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

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Abstract. *Political discourse, both in spoken and written form, is rich in expressive noun phrases (NPs) that serve not only to designate entities, processes, and phenomena, but also to frame them in a certain evaluative, ideological, and rhetorical perspective. Noun phrases in political communication rarely appear in their bare, unmodified forms. Instead, they are frequently expanded by modifiers that attribute characteristics, specify scope, and determine referential status in discourse. This research aims to examine noun phrase modifiers in political discourse with a focus on their descriptive and discourse-referential functions, using authentic examples from reliable printed matters and online media sources.*
***Key words:*** *modifiers, discourse, quality, quantity, entity, referent, properties.*

Introduction.

The study of noun phrase modification in political discourse is central to understanding how language constructs political reality. Through lexical choices politicians and journalists shape public opinion, frame conflicts and assign legitimacy or illegitimacy to actors and events. Most linguists [8; 9] refer both a noun and a noun phrase to the nominative units of the language. Words and phrases as nominative units have a lot in common which is vividly seen in such aspects:

1) Syntactic function of a noun phrase in a sentence can be seen via the function of the key noun of a phrase;

2) For many free phrases especially noun ones some equivalent words can be found;

3) In all languages there is a tendency to lexicalization of phrases and their changing into words or at least phraseological complexes which are functionally synonymous with the words.

Some linguists who support the idea of the nominative structure of a noun phrase think that it is based on the expression of one complex meaning. That idea was advocated by Halliday [6]. Another group of linguists assert that phrases convey one but broken meaning [7]. In this article we'll highlight the usage of a noun phrase in
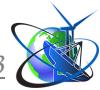
scope of pragmatic political discourse where it does not only nominate the objects and phenomena but provide emotional coloring of the context.

Main plot.

Noun phrases serve a dual purpose: first of all they provide a physical description of the referent. Besides they are constructions that speakers use to refer to an entity. This double function of NPs is reflected, among other things, in the two major kinds of modifiers we find inside the noun phrase: descriptive modifiers and discourse-referential modifiers (called ''discourse modifiers'' in Rijkhoff [10, 229]. Descriptive noun modifiers specify properties of the referent of the NP in terms of the categories like *kind*, *quality, quantity and location*. But discourse referential modifiers pertain to the referential status of entities in conversational realm. There is a concern about the special relationship between discourse-referential modifiers and certain descriptive and localizing modifiers as well as parallels between the layered structure of NPs and the layered structure of clauses. In the layered NP model descriptive modifiers are distributed over four nested layers:

– *the kind layer* has scope over the head noun and accommodates modifiers (classifying modifiers) that only relate to the property that is designated by the noun, further specifying what kind of entity is referred to by the speaker;

– *the quality layer* has scope over the layer with classifying modifiers and accommodates modifiers specifying properties concerning size, color, weight, value, age etc.;

– *the quantity layer* has scope over the quality layer and accommodates modifiers having to do with number distinctions (singular, plural) and cardinality (one, two, etc.);

– *the location layer* has scope over the quantity layer and accommodates modifiers (localizing modifiers) specifying properties concerning the location of the referent, such as demonstratives.

There is no one-to-one relationship between the form and the function of modifiers. Demonstratives can serve as localizing or discourse referential operators and possessive modifiers can be employed as classifying, qualifying, or localizing satellites [5]; vice versa, a qualifying satellite can take the form of an adjective, a possessive NP

or a relative clause. Classifying modifiers specify what kind of entity is denoted by the head noun. Some common examples of classifying modifiers in English are the adjectives cultural in ''cultural difference", or electric in ''electric car. These modifiers differ from qualifying modifiers as they do not specify some more or less objective property of an entity or the speakers' subjective attitude towards the entity but rather a particular subclass of the category denoted by the head noun.

As far as modifiers in political discourse are concerned they are not merely optional embellishments; they function as meaning-shaping devices [1]. A bare noun like *decisions* or a *shift* communicates very little, while a modified form such as *high-stake decisions* or *era-defining shift* highlights the gravity and risk involved. Similarly, *movement* becomes ideologically loaded when expanded to *insurgent populist movement*. Thus, NP modifiers serve to intensify, evaluate, classify, and contextualize political concepts. Here are some vivid examples where classifying modifiers place the head noun into a specific category narrowing down its meaning. In political discourse classification is crucial for ideological framing: *political touchstone, insurgent populist, movement, caretaker president.*

Qualifying modifiers describe inherent or evaluative qualities of the noun. They are presented by phrasal or lexical noun modifiers that specify more or less inherent properties (qualities or attributes) of the referent of the noun phrase, such as size, value or quality, age or color: *gruesome destructions, bright international spotlight, provoked outrage, red tape, white flag, heavy encroachment.* These examples illustrate, that the same function can be performed by constituents of different form classes, such as adjectives or participles. One more feature worth paying attention to is the fact that political discourse contains a great number of idiomatic expressions which become clear only within the context. Thus, *red* in *red flag, red herring* and *red tape* denotes completely various ideas where only in the *red flag* it bears the notion of a colour while *red herring* implies a piece of information which is intended to be distracting or misleading and *red tape* is used to express official rules that do not seem necessary and make things happen very slowly.

Quantifying modifiers specify quantitative properties of the referent and relate to

the material in the quality layer (including the head noun). Grammatical expressions of the notion quantity are referred to as quantifying operators; phrasal or lexical expressions as quantifying satellites like cardinal or ordinal numerals. There are cases where quantifying operators like plural and other number distinctions are either optional or altogether absent [10; 106–119, 146–155], but if nominal number is a relevant category in some languages it is commonly expressed by some grammatical element like a nominal affix, numerals (ordinal or cardinal) and an adjective (often expressed by participles). Examples of quantifying modifiers which specify the scope, degree, or number of the referent are: *30-day ceasefire, landslide victory, big shake-up.*

Localizing modifiers and operators specify location properties of the referent and relate to the material in the quantity layer (which has scope over the quality layer and head noun). In most cases they are demonstratives and grammatical manifestations of the notion of location. As is the case with other modifier categories, they require the presence of a classifier expressed by another noun, adjective or a definite article [10; 182–185]. Localizing modifiers situate the referent in space, time, or institutional context. In such a way they place the referent within the scope of extra-linguistic reality describing the notion in the precise manner and specifying the location of the object described like in the following examples: *internal deliberations, diplomatic flurry, European public wrangling, Germany's balanced budget.* Restrictive relative clauses and possessive modifiers are also typically used as localizing modifiers though there is no one-to-one relationship between the form of a modifier and its position in the layered representation of a linguistic structure. The vivid examples are*: Russia's Nord Stream 2, US policy sharp reversal, lifting sanctions debates, Donald Trump's high-sky tariffs*. In the mentioned examples we can trace the proper nouns category which borders between the localizing and qualifying modifier that proves that there is no distinct borderline between the types of modifiers which accompany the noun phrase.

While descriptive modifiers have a referential value, focus on semantics and refer to the certain entity or introduce it into conversational space, discourse-referential modifiers concern the status of entities in the discourse world [4]. They relate to the

interpersonal function of modifiers in the NPs that are concerned with the pragmatic status of the referent in the shared world of discourse. Moreover, they indicate whether the referent is already known, assumed, new, or uniquely identifiable to the discourse participants. As in the case of the descriptive noun modifiers at the representational level, we distinguish between grammatical and lexical manifestations of discourse referential modifiers. Definite and indefinite articles, which indicate whether or not the referent of the NP is identifiable in the world of discourse, are good examples of grammatical instances of discourse-referential modifiers. There is basically one reason why the referent of an indefinite NP is not identifiable: because its referent has not been properly introduced in the shared world of discourse [10]. There are, however, various reasons why the referent of a definite NP is deemed identifiable. For example, because the referent was introduced earlier in the discourse. Here is a vivid example from The Guardian:

- *"Lawmakers use <u>a deadly arrack</u> as the latest evidence to convince president he must increase pressure....."*

- *"....advisers and allies have been vocal in condemning <u>the attack</u>...."(The Guardian, April 14, 2025*) [11]. In the second example *the* is used before *attack* as the referent was mentioned earlier. Other vivid examples: *an/the ultimate determinant, a/the credible security guarantee, a/the political touchstone, an/the existential struggle.*In political discourse, NP modification is rarely neutral. Evaluative adjectives encode political stances and shape audience perception [2]. Moreover, NP modifiers often carry metaphorical meaning (*landslide victory, shake-up spotlight, tub-thumbing issue*), strengthening persuasive impact by making abstract concepts tangible.

The order of modifiers in English noun phrases is not random; it follows both syntactic conventions and pragmatic tendencies. This ordering contributes to following political meanings which are emphasized and processed. Demonstratives, numerals, and articles are discourse-referential modifiers that anchor the noun. For example: this existential struggle, *those high-stake decisions.* Numerals such as in *'30-day ceasefire'* both quantify and anchor the entity. Adjectives follow determiners and precede the noun, providing evaluative or descriptive force: *the heavy encroachment, a bright*

international spotlight, an insurgent populist movement. Idiomatic noun phrases in politics function as cultural and rhetorical shortcuts that embrace the whole piece of utterance with expressiveness and highlights the ultimate uniqueness of the case*: short-term pain, long-term gain, a dog-whistle message, a pipe dream political touchstone [12].* Further examples from political discourse illustrate how different types of modifiers such as articles, demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, and idiomatic expressions, interact to create nuanced rhetorical effects:

- *"This year supply chain"* (Demonstrative + Temporal + Noun): emphasizes immediacy and situates the referent in the current economic frame, underscoring the relevance of global trade issues.

- *"2025 Alaska summit"* (Numeral + Proper Noun + Head Noun): anchors the political event both temporally and geographically, projecting certainty and anticipation about international negotiations.

- *"A war-footing program"* (Article + Idiomatic Compound Modifier): introduces an indefinite initiative, framed with military readiness, which mobilizes urgency and national resolve.

- *"Sky-high suggested tariffs"* (Idiomatic Adjective + Evaluative Modifier/Participle + Noun): employs hyperbolic idiomatic description to emphasize excessiveness, reinforcing criticism of economic policy.

- *"The blink of an eye moment"* (Article + Idiomatic Modifier + Noun): a metaphorical idiom that foregrounds swiftness and unpredictability in political or military actions.

- *"First-hand witness"* (Adjectival/Idiomatic Modifier + Noun): appeals to credibility and reliability of testimony, a frequent strategy in parliamentary and judicial discourse.

- *"Era-defining shift"* (Compound Adjective + Noun): elevates political or economic change to the level of historical importance, positioning it as pivotal for future developments.

- *"The groundbreaking expenditures"* (Article + Idiomatic Adjective + Noun): frames budgetary policy as innovative and path-breaking, lending positive evaluative

weight.

- *"Heavy civilian casualties infliction"* (Adjective + Noun + Nominalized Verb): underscores scale and severity of conflict outcomes, placing moral and political responsibility at the center of the discourse.

Summary.

This article highlights the general tendency for discourse-referential modifiers (articles, demonstratives, numerals) to precede descriptive or idiomatic modifiers, while adjectives and idiomatic compounds shape evaluative framing. The balance of these layers allows political discourse to project authority, urgency and critical approach in a compressed and rhetorically powerful linguistic form. Noun phrase modifiers in political discourse serve as effective instruments that describe entities and anchor them in discourse allowing political actors to shape perception with precision and persuasive impact.

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Анотація. Політичний дискурс, як в усній, так і в письмовій формі, багатий на експресивні іменникові фрази, які служать не лише для позначення сутностей, процесів та явищ, але й для їхнього опису в експресивній ідеологічній та риторичній перспективі. Іменникові фрази в політичній комунікації рідко з'являються у спрощених формах. Натомість вони часто розширюються модифікаторами, які надають їм специфічноі характеристики, уточнюють обсяг та визначають референційний статус у комунікативних ситуаціях. У цьому дослідженні було розглянуто модифікатори іменникових фраз у політичному дискурсі з акцентом на їх описові, емоційно-забарвлені та дискурсивно-референційні функціï, використовуючи автентичні приклади з надійних друкованих видань та онлайн-джерел ЗМІ.

Ключові слова: модифікатори, дискурс, якість, кількість, сутність, референт, властивості.