How does inferential information expressed by nominal expressions serve to structure different English texts?

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Inference as a cognitive process of deriving information is important in discourse comprehension. It has been explored from multiple perspectives over the past decades, such as the inferential phase of comprehension (Wilson and Sperber 2012), the role of general knowledge (Graesser and Clark 1985) and global and local coherence in text (e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1976; Graesser and Kreuz 1993; Cain *et al.* 2001). In contrast, less attention has been paid to how much our inferential information represented by nominal expressions, such as *the driver* in *I got on a bus and the driver was drank* given by Prince (1981: 233), is activated in texts. This research aims to explore how Inferential information flows through nominal constructions in different texts. Specifically, this research will address the following questions:

(i) How is inferential information expressed by nominals distributed across texts of different genres?
(ii) What is the difference between texts of different genres in terms of type of inferrable information expressed by their nominals?
(iii) How is inferrable information expressed by varied linguistic forms of nominal expressions in texts of different genres?

This research adopts a multi-method approach by combining text analysis with corpus linguistic methodology together with Prince's (1981) classic model of information taxonomy. This model is used to classify inferential information (Inferrable in Prince's term) expressed by nominals in text. Nominal expressions in written texts of four genres selected from the Open American National Corpus (OANC), namely essay, government document, newspaper and travel guide, have been manually analyzed by using the MMAX2 Annotation Tool (Müller & Strube, 2006). The analytical results show different distributions and types of inferential information expressed by varied linguistic forms of nominal expressions across texts. This study contributes to a better understanding of how inferential information expressed by nominal expressions works in the context(s) of the texts themselves and provides some insight in applications related to language production and comprehension.

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