

Left-dislocated Noun Phrases in Modern English: Discourse functions and genre

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Left Dislocated Noun Phrases (LDNPs) have been frequently considered a word-order design characteristic of spoken discourse (Geluykens 1992, Lambrecht 1994). In historical data from the Early Modern and Late Modern periods, LDNPs (e.g. *After it was dark any Ship that came to us we engaged them*) may fulfill rhetorical purposes within the text very different from those they would take up today in either written or spoken English discourse (Montgomery 1982, Kies 1988, Prince 1997, Gregory and Michaelis 2001) such as, for example, parenthetical uses (e.g. *Moreover these Creatures [rather Sheep than Goats as they breed greater or lesser Stones,] they discover it by their Gate...*). Nonetheless, all LDNPs share one particular feature regardless of where they are attested, namely their topic-setting function (Lambrecht 1994). In an attempt to assess their contribution to the categorization of historical genres, this paper divides the foregrounding default role of LDNPs into two hyper-functions: (a) a discourse-organisational function (Prince 1997, Gregory and Michaelis 2001, Netz et al. 2011) and (b) an affective role (Keenan-Ochs and Schieffelin 1976; Geluykens 1992; Kim 1995).

The analysis focuses on genre distribution and discourse functions of the 989 LDNPs extracted from the Penn Parsed Corpora of Early Modern English (PPCEME), Modern British English (PPCMBE) and Early English Correspondence (PCEEC). As for the distribution of LDNPs across historical genres, the findings suggest that the frequency of LDNPs in speech-like texts (letters and diaries) is lower (0.13; norm. freq. per 1,000 words) than in speech-purposed (drama and sermons; n.f.: 0.94) or mixed (fiction and trial proceedings) and written ones (biography, educational treatise, handbook, history, law, philosophy, science and travelogue; n.f.: 0.64) in the recent history of English. However, concerning their discourse function, those LDNPs that deploy an affective or highlighting role (in the sense of Keenan-Ochs and Schieffelin 1976:245; Geluykens 1992:95; Kim 1995:285), rather than a more neutral discourse-organisational role, have been found to be more frequent in speech-like (58.2%) and speech-purposed (55.8%) genres (only 35.2% in mixed genres and 37.5% in written genres). Additional variables suggest that the form and function of LDNPs reflect differences between speech-related and purely written genres. For instance, a tally of the element which may precede LDNPs (usually a conjunction or a complementiser) shows that 34.2% of all instances of LDNPs preceded by a conversational item such as clause-level *and* (Culpeper and Kytö 2010:166) is attested in letters and diaries (by far the highest percentage for any genre). In addition, bare LDNPs (i.e. with no previous conjunction) are most frequent in speech-purposed (70.2% in sermons and drama) and mixed texts (67.6% in fiction and trial proceedings), while those that have a previous marker of any kind are more likely to convey a highlighting functional shade (44.1% of the total for affective roles) rather than a neutral discourse-organisational role (35.8% of the total for discourse-organisational roles). These findings suggest that LDNPs seem to have been particularly useful as deictic rhetorical devices in written-to-be-spoken texts such as sermons and drama, and that other conversational clause-initial markers such as *and* interacted more regularly with LDNPs when the authors/speakers felt freer to innovate (i.e. in genres with less editorial control).

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