

Metadiscursive Nouns in English
-A Comparison of Various Types of Referencing Nouns-

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1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, linguists have paid increasing research attention to a class of nouns that have a broadly *metadiscursive* function. Metadiscursive nouns are so called because they have general and vague meanings, which are only recoverable by referring backwards or forwards to other parts of the text in which they occur. By doing so they function to mark or comment on the discourse in some way, hence the term ‘metadiscursive’. The concept of metadiscursive nouns can be traced back to the earlier concept of general nouns (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), and has been developed by a number of different linguists. However, each of these recent theoretical frameworks uses a different set of terminological labels, such as *anaphoric nouns* (Francis, 1986) or *carrier nouns* (Ivanic, 1991). Furthermore, it is not at all clear whether or not the metadiscursive noun items covered by each of these frameworks refer to the same or different phenomena, and if so, how similar or different they are and where any borderlines are. There is a clear need to clarify the concept and function of metadiscursive nouns. This study addresses this question by analyzing referencing nouns (RNs) in a small number (five) of English texts and applying the theory of textual colligation (Hoey, 2004) to their textual positions and functions. The study, which is exploratory rather than comprehensive in its aims and scope, can show how metadiscursive nouns actually occur in English texts through the analysis of varied patterns of RNs.

Firstly, the background and research questions are explained in more detail (Sections 2 and 3, respectively), followed by the methodology (Section 4). Section 5 demonstrates a detailed analysis of one of the English texts, an opinion column, focusing on the textual positions and functions of the RNs. Although other text analyses are not shown in the present paper, a summary of the types of RNs identified across the five texts and their patterns of use is reported in Section 6. Section 7 discusses some associated features indicating signs of metadiscursion in the use of RNs. Section 8 concludes by identifying the limitations of the current study and suggesting avenues for further research.

2. Background: Overlapping concepts

There are a number of overlapping concepts concerning the varied types of metadiscursive nouns. At a very basic level, there is general agreement that, in addition to its dictionary meaning, a metadiscursive noun is a noun that carries a specific meaning within its context. To illustrate, consider Example 1:

Example 1:

Chung Gi Sup hates holidays. That's because the 45-year-old political-science professor spends them all alone in Seoul. His wife and two daughters are halfway around the world in New Jersey, where the girls attend high school and their mother does the laundry ... (omission)... Worried about South Korea's failing education system they left three years ago in the hopes of learning English and, ultimately, winning the girls acceptance to an American university. In the meantime, Chung lives in a one-room apartment ... (omission)...
It's a sacrifice more and more Korean families are willing to make.
(What's Good for the Goose? in *Newsweek*, 2003)

The meaning of *sacrifice* is 'to live a lonely life apart from the family', as expressed in the preceding segment. Clearly, this is a much more specific and complex meaning than would be found for the noun *sacrifice* in an English dictionary.

The lexicalization of meaning is a complex phenomenon, where several factors work at the same time to play some kind of discourse signalling role in the text (e.g., what are the referents of a given expression? What is the referencing direction? What types of metadiscursive noun replace the content?). Unsurprisingly perhaps, previous studies have not attempted to produce a comprehensive account of this phenomenon but have tended to emphasize and investigate one or two aspects only. While a principled decision in itself, this has resulted in the development of a number of individual and partial perspectives on metadiscursive nouns, which may or may not be at least partly overlapping. To illustrate, consider the following comparison between the work of Francis (1986), Ivanic (1991) and Schmid (2000). Francis (1986) elaborates on the evaluative and text-forming role of metadiscursive nouns that refer to a stretch of discourse, mostly comprised of multiple sentences, and refers to such nouns as *anaphoric* nouns. *Analysis* in Example 2 (underlined is the lexicalization of the noun) is an example:

Example 2:

Opening the first conference he said: The representation at the conference had to be very wide because the people who want to use the resources of the countryside are just as involved as the people who want to conserve them. It frequently happens that the same people do both ... It is this conflict that must be resolved.
This is an impossibly glib analysis.

(Francis, 1986: 28)

The evaluation role of anaphoric (i.e., metadiscursive) nouns, as emphasized in Francis's work, is also noted in Ivanic (1991: 107). However, Ivanic refers to these nouns as *carrier* nouns, after Vendler's (1967, 1968) concept of 'container' nouns, and focuses more on their feature of taking a verbal complement (either as nominalization, *that*-clause, *wh*-clause or *to*-infinitive) and how they are expressed in the sentence. For example, when a metadiscursive noun takes a verbal complement, it occurs as Subject of the sentence, as is shown in Example 3, where *difficulty* is a carrier noun:

Example 3:

Squaring numbers involving two places of decimals is a tedious matter. This **difficulty** can be circumvented by using ...

(Ivanic, 1991:99)

Carrier nouns, however, can also refer to multiple sentences which are expressed across the sentence, as *difficulties* in Example 4 does:

Example 4:

He has to acquire groups of old dwellings, because of the high cost of individual demolition and because old houses are often so densely packed... The developer may therefore have to negotiate with a large number of owners... There is also the problem of rehousing the old tenants. Finally, when the developer does build, the house will be much more expensive than... If notwithstanding these **difficulties** when old houses are demolished, the new houses ...

(Ivanic, 1991:100)

and this is very similar to the way anaphoric nouns (Example 2) occur. This is problematic as the lack of an agreed set of terms makes it hard to establish whether these phenomena are truly comparable.

In Schmid's (2000) study of metadiscursive nouns, which he calls *shell nouns*, the sentence patterns that the nouns occur in are also in focus, but Schmid's theoretical framework is more elaborate by incorporating such factors as relations between different semantic types of shell nouns and their preferred syntagmatic patterns, and the rhetorical effects generated by certain types of syntagmatic patterns. Patterns are discussed when shell nouns occur both within and across the sentence boundary. However, the textual signposting role of shell (i.e. metadiscursive) nouns, as emphasized in Francis (1986), is paid only very minor attention (see Schmid, 2000: Ch. 16). In summary, metadiscursive nouns have been investigated from a range of different perspectives and there is a clear need to clarify differences and similarities of metadiscursive nouns that have a variety of labels.

3. Specific research questions

The present research attempts to inductively cast light on the general theoretical problems sketched out above, by examining how RNs of different types actually occur in a small group of texts. The examination of these patterns will be conducted by asking the following four questions:

Q1: What does each RN refer to? One factor that separates one type of metadiscursive noun from another is their referents (e.g., size, referencing direction, differences within or across sentence boundaries). Anaphoric nouns (Francis, 1986) and signalling nouns (Flowerdew, 2003) emphasize their meaning lexicalizations from stretches of discourse comprised of multiple sentences, sometimes with no strictly delimited areas; and carrier nouns (Ivanic, 1991) and shell nouns (Schmid, 2000) from the *that*-clauses of the sentence where the nouns are used. Like these examples, referents of RNs serve as a factor in determining different patterns of RNs, and this paper examines RNs from that aspect.

Q2: What paragraph position does each RN occupy? In priming theory, lexis is understood as having a preferred or dispreferred textual position, or of having textual colligation (Hoey, 2004). Lexical priming, or

positive or negative preferences of a lexical item, can form several types of combinations between lexis and linguistic units, such as words, chunks of text (e.g., paragraphs, multiple sentences), Theme position, and semantic relations (e.g., contrast, time sequence). The current research assumes that metadiscursive nouns are particularly likely to be primed at the paragraph level. This assumption is reasonable given the widely-recognised discourse structuring role of these nouns. This assumption, however, has been little supported by detailed empirical analysis yet.

One important exception is the work of Francis (e.g., Francis, 1986; 1994; see also Carter, 1998), who suggests that the discourse roles of anaphoric nouns, such as discourse summarization and evaluation, are closely related to paragraph breaks. It is for this reason that Francis (1986: 99) suggests that anaphoric nouns prefer a paragraph-initial position. Drawing on this claim of a correlation between anaphoric nouns and a paragraph-initial position, the present research investigates whether or not there are any kinds of relations between individual types of RNs and their observed position in the paragraphs in which they occur.

Q3. What is the Theme/Rheme position of each RN? Lexis in priming theory is discussed from the perspective of Theme position choice as well. This is again illustrated in reference to anaphoric nouns (Francis, 1986), although the Theme position of anaphoric nouns is not a major focus in Francis's discussion. Also, Partington (1998: 98) reports the preference of noun labels for the Theme position. Such a claim seems to be supported by studies on specific RN items, such as *reason*¹ (Hoey, 1993: 71-73) and *change*, *shift*, *failure* and *mistake* (Yamasaki, 2008), which are reported to predominantly occur as sentence-initial Subjects. The present research, thus, examines whether the variable of Theme position is also a relevant discriminator of different types of RN.

Q4. What discourse role (or roles) does each RN perform? Previous studies suggest that different types of RNs have different patterns of use for different roles: a topic maintaining role in the case of 'same item' noun repetitions, the summarization/encapsulation of previous or forthcoming meanings in the case of labels (Francis, 1994), or the summing-up of the topic in the case of superordinates (McCarthy, 1991). The present research investigates the discourse roles of each RN in reference to factors which are assumed to be closely related to each other such as referents, paragraph position, and Theme/Rheme status.

4. Methodology

4-1. Theoretical assumptions

Some studies take the position that vocabulary items have favored and disfavored positions in a text. This position finds its fullest and most theoretically coherent expression in the lexical priming theory of Hoey (2003; 2004; 2005). As collocation is a preferred combination of words with other words, and colligation is

¹ To be more specific, the preference of Subject position is when *reason* is used as 'causal' *reason* not 'rationality' *reason*.

the favored and disfavored syntactic patterns of a word, lexical priming theory proposes that lexis has favored and disfavored positions in text, which Hoey (2004) terms textual colligation. A type of lexis-textual relation is that of clause relations (e.g., contrast, time sequence, exemplification) (Winter, 1977; Hoey, 1983; Crombie, 1985). Hoey (2004), for example, finds that *years* is primed for use in comparison, particularly in contrast relations, while *ago* (when thematised) is primed in contrast relations. Some studies focus on Theme-Rheme patterns in priming theory (Halliday, 1985; Berry, 1989; Fries, 1994; Ghadessy, 1995). The main relation that the present research is concerned with is lexis-textual relations, investigating where lexis is positioned in the sentence, paragraph and overall text structure.

A recent study that takes this approach is that of Hoey and O'Donnell (2008), which reports, for example, that *once upon a time* is a high profile phrase at the text-initial position in children's stories, and *yesterday* is a high profile phrase in the text-initial position in newspaper texts (p. 302). The theoretical assumptions of the present research are consistent with those of Hoey and O'Donnell's paper. It borrows from some aspects of their study and adopts their noun classification system. One major difference, however, is that the present research is qualitative rather than corpus-based. This is because the aim is to submit each RN in each text to a detailed discourse analysis. This is a task that cannot be performed by computer but is entirely reliant on the interpretative skills and general background knowledge of the researcher.

4-2. Procedures

The text analysis in the study is conducted using the following procedure: 1) Identify RNs whose meanings are textually realized and categorise them by types of referent; 2) Examine the position of RNs in the paragraph and sentence and also Theme/Rheme positions; and, 3) Identify RN discourse roles in reference to paragraph divisions and functional shifts in textual patterns. Each stage is explained in more detail:

1) Identification and categorisation of target nouns: The present paper takes the position that any type of noun can be a potential candidate as a discourse marking noun, and therefore it investigates all RNs in the text that meet the following conditions:

- Their meanings are lexicalized in the text, either within or across the sentence boundary. Exophoric nouns, whose meanings are outside of the text, are not included in the target items;
- They refer in either an anaphoric or cataphoric direction;
- They are basically single nouns, and modified nouns or nominal phrases are examined by focusing on their head nouns. If they are not separable without losing their meaning, however, each noun in the phrase is dealt with as a single noun item.

The RNs are then categorised by the type of relations between the nouns and their referents. For example, a RN whose referent is a stretch of text comprised of multiple sentences is called a ‘Segment’ RN, as explained more in later sections. Thus, the analysis of RNs is conducted by ignoring preconceptions and previous theoretical frameworks of types and patterns of RNs, as expressed as anaphoric nouns (Francis, 1986) or shell nouns (Schmid, 2000).

2) Identification of textual positions: As mentioned earlier, the current investigation of target RNs focuses on their textual position (e.g., in the paragraph and the sentence) using a system following Hoey and O’Donnell (2008). While Hoey and O’Donnell’s study distinguishes target noun paragraph positions between text-initial (T), paragraph-initial (P) and non-paragraph initial (N), the present research adds the paragraph-final (F) sentence to this classification. This is because there are some cases where noun items function as summaries of the preceding discourse in the final sentence of the segment, as shown in Example 5 below:

Example 5:

There was a fine old **rocking-chair** that his father used to sit in, a desk where he wrote letters, a nest of small **tables** and a dark, imposing **bookcase**. Now all this **furniture** was to be sold, and with it his own past.
(McCarthy, 1991: 66)

Furniture, which is a superordinate noun including the hyponyms *rocking chair-tables-bookcase*, serves a discourse summarising role, as McCarthy (1991: 66) states ‘[in] the case of reiteration by a superordinate, we often see a summarising or encapsulating function in the choice of words, bringing various elements of the text together under one more general term’. McCarthy does not pay attention to the textual position of the noun, and therefore it is not clear whether *furniture* occurs in the last sentence of the paragraph before a paragraph break. So, it is interesting to see whether or not some types of RN, such as superordinate nouns, occur in the final part of a paragraph.

For the examination of the sentence position of each RN, each sentence in each text is divided into the first half (-1) and the second half (-2), also following Hoey and O’Donnell (2008: 298). Table 1 is a schematic view of the noun position classification system in the present research:

Table 1: Schematic view of the noun classification system

Para. 1	
T1	T2
N1	N2
F1	F2
Para. 2	
T1	T2
N1	N2
F1	F2
text-initial (T), paragraph-initial (P) and non-paragraph initial (N); paragraph-final (F); 1= first half of the sentence, 2= second half	

In examining Theme/Rheme positions, the focus is on whether an RN occupies the Theme position (either Unmarked or Marked) or not, following the Hallidayan definitions of Theme/Rheme proposed in Bloor and Bloor (1995, Ch. 4), Eggins (2004, Ch. 10) and Thompson (2004, Ch. 6).

3) Identification of a discourse shift: A fundamental assumption of the analysis is that there are some types of RN that play a role in signalling the discourse in some way. The problem is how we can tell when and where discourse has actually shifted, and what counts as a signal for such a shift, as these have not been clearly defined in the previous literature. Looking for a paragraph division is one way as it is an expression of the writer's cognitive perception, and can be an indicator of where the discourse shift occurs (Hoey, 1983: 11, 130-131; Francis, 1986: 99). Unfortunately, it is not entirely reliable and it is not uncommon for a shift of discourse to occur where there is no paragraph division. This means that in one case a RN **occurs** at a paragraph division, as shown with *sacrifice* in Example 1 above; and in another case a paragraph division **does not occur** at a discourse shift, as shown in Example 6:

Example 6

<p>a) Original text Helicopters are very convenient for dropping freight by parachute but this system has its problems. Somehow the landing impact has to be cushioned to give a soft landing. The movement to be absorbed depends on the weight and the speed at which the charge falls. Unfortunately most normal spring systems bounce the load as it lands, sometimes turning it over. <paragraph end></p> <p>b) Re-arranged into organizational structures [Situation]: Helicopters are very convenient for dropping freight by parachute. [Problem]: but this system has its problems. Somehow the landing impact has to be cushioned to give a soft landing. The movement to be absorbed depends on the weight and the speed at which the charge falls. Unfortunately most normal spring systems bounce the load as it lands, sometimes turning it over. <paragraph end></p>	<p>Hoey (1983: 36-37)</p>
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a) and b) are the same text: a) shows the paragraph as it is in the original text, and b) is the text re-structured into functional segments. The functional segment occurring at (*this*) *system* does not coincide with the orthographic paragraph division. Thus, in order to judge whether a discourse shift occurs at a RN, the present study relies on a shift of functional segments in text patterns, such as Problem-Solution, General-Specific, and Claim-Counterclaim (McCarthy, 1991; Hoey, 1994), as well as paragraph breaks.

5. Description of the study

The present research analyses five English texts: an opinion column on the outlook of the economy (Text 1); an information report on environmental protection (Text 2); an abstract for a scientific paper (Text 3); a newspaper report on protection from skin cancer (Text 4); and, a review of an English language coursebook (Text 5). They are different in specific categories of text type, but all can belong to argumentative, academic or media discourse, and are generally considered types of texts where metadiscursive nouns occur frequently. The present paper uses Text 1 to demonstrate how the text analyses were conducted and the data was summarised.

5-1. Analysis of an opinion column (Text 1)

In the opinion column (Text 1), which is shown below, the writer expresses his view on whether the U.S. economy at the time the article was written is on the recovery or not. He claims that there is a recovery, while most experts disagree:²

Text 1: Our view on the Great Recession: Don't look now, but the economy's bouncing back (USA TODAY)

<1> [1] In the past two years, good economic news has been about as rare as a hedge fund manager on food stamps. [2] But guess what? [3] The most recent data show real signs of recovery. [4] Some 162,000 jobs were created last month, the best showing in three years. [5] Housing prices have stabilized. [6] Retail sales are up. [7] Corporate profits look better. [8] And the stock market has surged since its bottom in March 2009.

<2> [9] Yet much of **the commentary** from economists, government officials and financial pundits is that the nation faces, at best, a slow and unsatisfying rebound.

<3> [10] Call it **the springtime of our discontent**. [11] The job gains, we are told, are too modest. [12] Housing prices will fall again. [13] The economy will sag when the fiscal and monetary stimulus ends and interest rates rise. [14] Consumers and governments have too much debt.

<4> [15] All **these arguments** have some validity. [16] But there is reason to believe that **the predictions of prolonged stagnation** err on **the side of pessimism**.

<5> [17] Much of **the negativity** can be explained by what might be called rearview mirror syndrome. [18] Lacking crystal balls, and dealing with ambiguous data, forecasters and the public naturally see the recent past and present as a guide to the future. [19] **The problem** is that past trends tend to continue — until they don't. [20] Then the conventional wisdom, now so gloomy, quickly and belatedly shifts.

<6> [21] Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said last week that the economy was “far from being out of the woods”. [22] He was a little more optimistic Wednesday in testimony to Congress' Joint Economic Committee. [23] It's easy to see why Bernanke might say this. [24] We've been in the woods so long, they are beginning to feel like home.

<7> [25] But not long ago, the Fed chairman had a hard time seeing that we were in the woods. [26] In February 2008, he told Congress that the economy would avoid a recession. [27] It was later determined that it had already been in recession for two months at **that point**.

<8> [28] By June of that year, when it was clear that the economy was sagging, then-Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said he was “moderately optimistic that at the end of the year, we will have signs of an economic recovery”. [29] That was one crash and 7.5 million jobs ago.

<9> [30] As a general rule, the faster and further the economy falls, the more robust the recovery. [31] And vice versa. [32] The past two recessions, in the early 1990s and in 2001, created fairly anemic job recoveries. [33] But the unemployment rate never got very high in **those downturns**. [34] It was 6.8% at the end of the first and 5.5% at the end of the second, versus 9.7% now.

<10> [35] Before the current recession, the only other time since the Great Depression when the unemployment rate topped 10% — in fact, the only time it topped 9% — was the recession of the early 1980s. [36] As the graphic accompanying this editorial shows, the comparisons between the two are almost eerie. [37] The unemployment rates, beginning in early 1982 and early 2009, rise in tandem for about a year and then plateau.

<11> [38] The stock market, which is often a harbinger of future economic activity, behaved similarly as well. [39] The 60% run-up starting in June 1982 looks a lot like the current bull market.

<12> [40] If **the comparisons** continue, the recovery could well be stronger than the conventional wisdom suggests. [41] By December 1983, the unemployment rate had dropped to 8.3%, whereas the Fed sees 9.3% to 9.7% at the end of this year.

<13> [42] Part of **the pessimism** is explained by the politics of the moment. [43] Republicans, of course, are loath to give President Obama any credit for anything. [44] Democrats don't want to appear insensitive to the unemployed, or to crow too soon. [45] Economists want to be cautious because substantial risk remains.

<14> [46] In any event, virtually each day brings better news on the economic front. [47] This isn't to say that a robust national recovery is guaranteed, that huge regional disparities don't exist, or that storm clouds — mainly in the form of excessive government debt — aren't on the horizon.

<15> [48] But an objective look at **the evidence** indicates that **the greenshoots of economic recovery** are blossoming nicely.

The text is argumentative, and has the structural pattern of *Claim – Counterclaim* (McCarthy, 1991: 79-80). Table 2, below, shows the text laid out in terms of organizational structures, which are different from the original. While the original text is organized into 15 paragraphs, the text in Table 2 is comprised of 11 organizational segments:

² In the texts < > indicates paragraph number, and [] indicates sentence number.

Table 2: Structural organization in a Claim-Counterclaim pattern of Text 1

Claim	<1> [1] In the past two years, good economic news has been about as rare as a hedge fund manager on food stamps. [2] But guess what? [3] The most recent data show real signs of recovery. [4] Some 162,000 jobs were created last month, the best showing in three years. [5] Housing prices have stabilized. [6] Retail sales are up. [7] Corporate profits look better. [8] And the stock market has surged since its bottom in March 2009.
Counter-claim	<2> [9] Yet much of the commentary from economists, government officials and financial pundits is that the nation faces, at best, a slow and unsatisfying rebound.
Common ground	<3> [10] Call it the springtime of our discontent . [11] The job gains, we are told, are too modest. [12] Housing prices will fall again. [13] The economy will sag when the fiscal and monetary stimulus ends and interest rates rise. [14] Consumers and governments have too much debt. <4> [15] All these arguments have some validity.
Claim	[16] But there is reason to believe that the predictions of prolonged stagnation err on the side of pessimism.
Reason 1 for Claim [Problem]	<5> [17] Much of the negativity can be explained by what might be called rearview mirror syndrome. [18] Lacking crystal balls, and dealing with ambiguous data, forecasters and the public naturally see the recent past and present as a guide to the future. [19] The problem is that past trends tend to continue — until they don't. [20] Then the conventional wisdom, now so gloomy, quickly and belatedly shifts.
[Example 1, of Problem]	<6> [21] Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said last week that the economy was “far from being out of the woods”. ([22] He was a little more optimistic Wednesday in testimony to Congress’ Joint Economic Committee.) [23] It’s easy to see why Bernanke might say this. [24] We’ve been in the woods so long, they are beginning to feel like home. <7> [25] But not long ago, the Fed chairman had a hard time seeing that we were in the woods. [26] In February 2008, he told Congress that the economy would avoid a recession. [27] It was later determined that it had already been in recession for two months at that point .
[Example 2, of Problem]	<8> [28] By June of that year, when it was clear that the economy was sagging, then-Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said he was “moderately optimistic that at the end of the year, we will have signs of an economic recovery”. [29] That was one crash and 7.5 million jobs ago.
[Example 3, of Problem]	<9> [30] As a general rule, the faster and further the economy falls, the more robust the recovery. [31] And vice versa. [32] The past two recessions, in the early 1990s and in 2001, created fairly anemic job recoveries. [33] But the unemployment rate never got very high in those downturns . [34] It was 6.8% at the end of the first and 5.5% at the end of the second, versus 9.7% now.
[Example 4, of Problem]	<10> [35] Before the current recession, the only other time since the Great Depression when the unemployment rate topped 10% — in fact, the only time it topped 9% — was the recession of the early 1980s. [36] As the graphic accompanying this editorial shows, the comparisons between the two are almost eerie. [37] The unemployment rates, beginning in early 1982 and early 2009, rise in tandem for about a year and then plateau. <11> [38] The stock market, which is often a harbinger of future economic activity, behaved similarly as well. [39] The 60% run-up starting in June 1982 looks a lot like the current bull market. <12> [40] If the comparisons continue, the recovery could well be stronger than the conventional wisdom suggests. [41] By December 1983, the unemployment rate had dropped to 8.3%, whereas the Fed sees 9.3% to 9.7% at the end of this year.
Reason 2 for Claim	<13> [42] Part of the pessimism is explained by the politics of the moment. [43] Republicans, of course, are loath to give President Obama any credit for anything. [44] Democrats don’t want to appear insensitive to the unemployed, or to crow too soon. [45] Economists want to be cautious because substantial risk remains.
Conclusion /Claim	<14> [46] In any event, virtually each day brings better news on the economic front. [47] This isn’t to say that a robust national recovery is guaranteed, that huge regional disparities don’t exist, or that storm clouds — mainly in the form of excessive government debt — aren’t on the horizon. <15> [48] But an objective look at the evidence indicates that the green shoots of economic recovery are blossoming nicely.

Thirteen RNs whose meanings are recoverable from the text are identified, though the degree to which each is textualized lexically varies considerably. Each of the RNs will now be analysed in turn, focusing on their referents, paragraph and Theme/Rheme positions, and discourse roles in the text.

1.1³ Commentary

The reference noun *commentary* appears in Text 1 in the following sentence:

<2> [9] Yet much of the commentary from economists, government officials and financial pundits is that the nation faces, at best, a slow and unsatisfying rebound. <3>

³ 1.1 means item 1, Text 1.

Commentary is in paragraph initial (P-1) position,⁴ and is part of the longer Unmarked Theme. It refers cataphorically to the meaning expressed in the *that*-clause at the end of the sentence. Accordingly, we will call it a **That-clause RN**. *Commentary* is used at the start of Paragraph 2, which, as shown in Table 2, expresses the Counterclaim by pessimistic economists to the positive Claim about the economy being made by the writer of this text. So *the commentary* refers in two directions. First of all, it explicitly evaluates the topic in Paragraph 2 as a point of view, and thus as open to question. To describe a series of propositions as a commentary is to draw attention to the fact that someone has said or written them. At the same time, the use of this noun to evaluate the propositions in paragraph 2 sets up an implicit contrast with the writer's own more positive point of view as expressed in Paragraph 1, which is presented not as a 'commentary' on the economic situation, but as simply relating matters of fact.

1.2 *Springtime of our discontent*

<3> [10] Call it the springtime of our discontent.

The springtime of our discontent is at P-2 position, and in Hallidayan terms is part of the Rheme of this sentence. It refers to the negative view on the economy expressed in the *that*-clause in the previous sentence 'the nation faces, at best, a slow and unsatisfying rebound' (Counterclaim) and also to the positive view in the Claim, shown in 'jobs newly created' and 'housing prices that have been stabilized'. Occurring at the start of the Common Ground between two Claims, this noun phrase is where the propositions of Paragraphs 1 and 2 converge. Thus, it is a reference item whose referent is a stretch of discourse (or in this case, two stretches of discourse, expressing Claim and Counterclaim respectively) comprised of multiple sentences. We will call a noun of this type of meaning realization a **Segment RN**.

Though referring anaphorically, it also directs the discourse forward. The noun phrase plays on the stock phrase (originally coined by Shakespeare) 'the winter of our discontent', and is the writer's evaluation of the referents. The reader may already know what this means from its Shakespearean echo, and that the succeeding discourse explains why the time period in question can be described in this way.

1.3 *Arguments*

<4> [15] All these arguments have some validity.

These arguments is at P-1 position, and is the Unmarked Theme. Although occurring at the paragraph shift, functionally *arguments* belongs to the preceding Paragraph 3: Common Ground. The proposition in Paragraph 3 that explains *the springtime of our discontent* converges into *arguments*, and thus *arguments* is a Segment RN. At the same time the RN brings a new line to the discourse: the RN is an expression of the writer's subjective view about the current economic situation, and this leads to a more objective argument.

⁴ If a paragraph is comprised of one sentence, the sentence is taken as paragraph-initial sentence.

1.4 Prediction

[16] But there is reason to believe that the predictions of prolonged stagnation err on the side of pessimism.
<5>

*The prediction*⁵ occurs at F-2 (though whether -1 or -2 is not clear), and is the Rheme.⁶ Occurring at the start of the Claim segment, where it refers back to the proposition in Paragraph 3 (comprising the Counterclaim), it summarizes and evaluates this as a ‘prediction’. It is a Segment RN. The ‘stagnation’ is denied by ‘err’ in the sentence, to be explained in the succeeding segments.

1.5 Pessimism (1)

[16] But there is reason to believe that the predictions of prolonged stagnation err on the side of pessimism.
<5>

(*The side of pessimism* is at F-2, the Rheme position. Similar to *prediction* (1.4, above), occurring at the start of the Claim segment, it is a summary and an evaluation of the proposition in the Counterclaim. With the judgment of *err* as the evaluation, it is carried over to the next paragraph as is explained in more detail below.

1.6 Negativity

<5> [17] Much of the negativity can be explained by what might be called rearview mirror syndrome.

The negativity occurs at P-1, and is part of the Unmarked Theme. It refers to *pessimism* in the previous sentence, and we call *negativity* a **Synonym RN**. It marks a functional shift from the Claim to the Reason 1 for the claim, which is an embedded shift.

1.7 Problem

[19] The problem is that past trends tend to continue — until they don’t.

The problem is used in the Reason for Claim segment, where the writer explains why the counterclaim, or the negative view of the current economic situation, is wrong; thus expressing denial to the counterclaim by stating that it has a ‘problem’. Thus *problem* makes explicit the line of argument within the Claim segment.

Problem is lexicalized in the *that*-clause within the sentence. Accordingly, we will call it a *That*-clause RN. Its reference is cataphoric, but it also seems to have an implicit anaphoric reference to such an expression as ‘*This is a problem*’. So the full sentence could be paraphrased as follows:

This is a problem. The problem is that past trends tend to continue — until they don’t.

⁵ In the noun phrase *prediction of prolonged stagnation*, this paper considers *prediction* is the head noun.

⁶ *The predictions of prolonged stagnation* is the Unmarked Theme in the embedded clause, but following Halliday (1994: Ch. 3) who proposes that the internal thematic structure of embedded clauses is of little significance, the referencing noun is the Rheme. Besides, this paper does not go into details of the Theme/Rheme status of the RNs, other than simply to note that it is either Unmarked/Marked Theme or Rheme.

In other words, in the original text, the sentence ‘*This is a problem*’ is left out and is assumed as a matter-of-fact judgment by the reader. Such a use of *problem* seems to be geared towards making explicit the writer’s view, judgment or evaluation that the situation being described is a ‘problem’. Though bringing about a shift of focus it does not cause a shift of functional segments. It occurs at N-1, the Unmarked Theme and does not affect a shift of functional segments.

1.8 Point

[27] It was later determined that it had already been in recession for two months at that point. <8>

That point is used at F-2 position as the Rheme. It refers to the point in time at which the Chairman made the statement and is a replacement for the specific time phrase *February, 2008*, with a more general meaning noun. Accordingly, we will call *point* a **General RN**. By referring to the time that the Federal Reserve Chairman made the comment, it sums up the topic and concludes the Specific Reason, which is embedded in the Claim segment.

1.9 Downturns

[33] But the unemployment rate never got very high in those downturns.

The downturns occurs at N-2 and is the Rheme in the functional segment of one of the Specific Reasons for the Claim. By referring to (*past two*) *recessions* (Sentence 32), it is a Synonym RN. It is used in passing and does not affect a discourse shift but functions to maintain the topic.

1.10 Comparisons

<12> [40] If the comparisons continue, the recovery could well be stronger than the conventional wisdom suggests.

The comparisons occurs at P-1 and is part of the Marked Theme. It refers to the same item in Sentence 36, and we call it a Same Item RN. Although it falls on the paragraph initial position (P-1), it does not start a new segment and functions to maintain the topic.

1.11 Pessimism (2)

<13> [42] Part of the pessimism is explained by the politics of the moment.

This *pessimism* (2) is at P-1 and is the Unmarked Theme. It is a Same Item RN, occurring at the start of the Reason 2 to the Claim, which argues that ‘pessimism about the prolonged stagnation of the economy is wrong’. Used for the first time after the previous use in Paragraph 4, *pessimism* (2) clearly brings back the topic to the current discourse and signals the start of the functional shift, which is an embedded one in the Claim that has been continued from Sentence 16.

1.12 Evidence

<15> [48] But an objective look at the evidence indicates that the greenshoots of economic recovery are blossoming nicely. <Text End>

The *evidence* is at P-1 and is part of the Unmarked Theme. Its meaning is expressed in the whole text, referring to positive signs in the economy such as job creation and corporate profits, and thus it is a Segment RN. The writer labels these ‘signs’ of economic recovery as *evidence*, which allows the writer to direct the line of the discourse. Although at a paragraph-break (P-1), it does not coincide with a functional shift but it summarises the discourse with an evaluation.

1.13 Greenshoots of economic recovery

<15> [48] But an objective look at the evidence indicates that the greenshoots of economic recovery are blossoming nicely. <Text End>

The *greenshoots of economic recovery* is at P-2 and is the Rheme. Its meaning is recoverable from the whole text and the writer uses the metaphor as an evaluation. It has a discourse summary effect and this may be in part attributed to the role of metaphor. As Drew and Holt (1998: 506) state, ‘the production of a figurative expression [seems] one of the available techniques for summarizing a current topic’.

5-2. Summarisation of the analysis of Text 1

A total of 13 RNs were identified in Text 1, comprised of five types of RN: **Same Item RN** (whose referent is a same item); **Synonym RN** (whose referent is a co-synonym); **Segment RN** (whose referent is a stretch of discourse of multiple sentences); **That-clause RN** (whose referent is the *that*-clause in the sentence); and, **General RN** (which replaces a referenced noun with a general meaning noun). The patterns of use of RNs are summarised by focusing on the textual positions along with functions, as shown below in Tables 3.1 to 3.5:

Table 3.1: Same items in Text 1

Noun items*	Posit.	T/Rheme	Function
1.10 Comparisons	P-1	M. Theme	Maintains the topic within a single functional segment
1.11 Pessimism (2)	P-1	U. Theme	Brings back the topic and signals an embedded shift (Starts a Reason in the Claim)

* The numbers before the nouns correspond to those in the analyses of Text 1.

* M. Theme means the Marked Theme, U. Theme means the Unmarked Theme.

Table 3.2: Synonym RNs in Text 1

Noun items	Posit.	T/Rheme	Function
1.6 Negativity	P-1	U. Theme	Signals an embedded shift (from Claim to Reason for claim)
1.9 Downturns	N-2	Rheme	Maintains the topic and forms a cohesive discourse

Table 3.3: General RNs in Text 1

Noun items	Posit.	T/Rheme	Function
1.8 Point (1)	F-2	Rheme	Sums up the topic and concludes the functional segment

Table 3.4: Segment RNs in Text 1

Noun items	Posit.	T/Rheme	Function
1.2 Springtime of discontent	P-2	Rheme	Summarises and encapsulates the previous paragraph, and directs the discourse forward to be explained in the paragraph; starts a new functional segment
1.3 Arguments	P-1	U. Theme	Summarises the previous discourse, and directs the line of discourse from the writer's subjective evaluation to objective argument
1.4 Prediction	F-2	Rheme	Summarises and evaluates the previous discourse; starts a new segment
1.5 Pessimism (1)	F-2	Rheme	Summarises and evaluates the previous discourse; starts a new segment
1.12 Evidence	P-1	U. Theme	At the text final; evaluates and shifts the focus of the discourse; summarises and closes the segment
1.13 Greenshoots of recovery	P-2	Rheme	At the text final; summarises and evaluates the proposition in the whole text

Table 3.5: *That*-clause RNs in Text 1

Noun items	Posit.	T/Rheme	Function
1.1 Commentary	P-1	U. Theme	Explicitly expresses the point of view, and shifts the discourse focus by expressing implicit contrast to the preceding discourse; signals from Claim to Counterclaim
1.7 Problem	N-1	U. Theme	Makes explicit the line of argument; no functional shift

By applying the same analysis method, as shown in this section, the present study analysed the remaining four texts. This paper does not show the details of this analysis but the next section reports on the main results.

6. Findings: General patterns of use for each type of RN in the five texts

6-1. Types of RN

The present study identified seven types of RN in the five texts, consisting of **Superordinate RN** and **Evaluation RN**, in addition to the five types in Text 1 (**Same Item RN**; **Synonym RN**; **Segment RN**; **That-clause RN**, **General RN**). **Superordinate RN** refers to a noun which replaces its referent with the widest meaning noun in its lexical family. Examples of Superordinate RNs are *shrimp* and *decapods* (Text 3), referring to *A. nuttingi*, a specific type of shrimp, and *shrimp*, respectively; or *cancer* referring to *melanoma* (Text 4). **Evaluation RN** refers to a general meaning noun whose antecedent is a specific noun item, not a clause and above level segment.

Evaluation RNs represent a straightforward evaluation of the writer. An example is *(the) chance*, in an information report on environmental protection issues (Text 2), as shown in Example 7:

Example 7:

But it's hard to avoid the conclusion that with <u>less than six months</u> left in office, the Bush Administration is set to dismantling some established environmental protections while it has the chance .

(Walsh, 2008: 7)

The referent of *chance* is the noun phrase *six months (left in office)*. With little of its meaning lexicalized in the text, *chance*, which is used in a negative or sarcastic sense, is an expression of how the writer perceives the referent in the specific context where it is used. In other words, the noun is a direct expression of the writer's evaluation based on his extraneous knowledge. Other examples of Evaluation RN are *tool* and

impediment, which are in a review (Text 5) of an English teaching textbook. They occur as shown in Example 8:

Example 8:

Furthermore, teachers who prefer an English only textbook may not like the Japanese used in the book. I felt that it was a teaching tool rather than an impediment to students' learning, so I believe it helps rather than hurts.
(Gorham, 2010, 64)

The two nouns refer to the same referent, *the Japanese (used in the book)*, and express the writer's evaluation in two different ways based on his extraneous knowledge.

How the individual types of RN occurred in each text is shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Types of RN in Texts 1 to 5

Type of RN (Word counts)	Text 1 Opinion (700)	Text 2 Information report (300)	Text 3 Abstract (300)	Text 4 Newspaper report (350)	Text 5 Book review (800)	Sum
Same Item RNs	2	3	0	4	6	16
Synonym RNs	2	4	2	0	4	12
Segment RNs	6	3	1	2	0	12
That-clause RNs	2	1	1	1	1	6
General RNs	1	0	2	0	2	5
Superordinate RNs	0	0	2	1	0	3
Evaluation RNs	0	1	0	0	2	3

Even though the texts are of different lengths and raw frequencies should be treated very carefully (please refer to lengths of texts, or word counts, shown in Table 13), some types of RN may indicate tendencies in preference for certain genres. **Same Item RNs** are preferred in Text 5 (book review) and Text 4 (newspaper report) but not in Text 3 (abstract); **Superordinate RNs** occur mostly in texts on scientific topics as in Text 3 (abstract); **Segment RNs** are preferred items in Text 1 (opinion column) but are not so common in the other types, and there are none in Text 5 (book review). This invites the speculation that the data indicate genre-based preferences for certain types of RNs. Clearly, this can only be regarded as a very tentative hypothesis at present, as firm conclusions cannot be drawn on the basis of an analysis of only one text per genre. This will be an interesting line of inquiry for further studies to pursue, however.

6-2. Patterns of use of RNs: Position in paragraph, Theme/Rheme and discourse roles

The following is a summary of paragraph position, Theme/Rheme preference and the discourse roles of individual RNs:

- **Same Item RNs** prefer N (with no clear preference of -1 or -2, Theme/Rheme) and maintain the discourse. They also occur at P (-1, Unmarked Theme) which sometimes causes an embedded shift.
- **Synonym RNs** prefer N (-1, Unmarked Theme) and mostly maintain the discourse.
- **Superordinate RNs** occur at F and sum up the topic. They do not occur at a functional shift.
- **General RNs** occur at N and F but not at P. They sum up the discourse and sometimes cause an embedded shift.

- **Evaluation RNs** are all the Rheme. They occur at N or F but not at P. They do not often cause a functional shift (sometimes embedded shifts occur).
- **That-clause RNs** occur at any paragraph position (often -1, more often Theme). They explicitly evaluate the referents, and cause a shift of the topic. They do not often cause a functional shift .
- **Segment RNs** mostly occur at P (-1), followed by F. They often indicate a shift of functional segments.

No clear tendencies can be stated with such a small number of examples, but the preference of Theme position by Same Item, Synonym, and *That-clause* RNs is shown. Noteworthy in particular for the purpose of the present paper is that P, paragraph-initial, was preferred by **Segment RNs** and **That-clause RNs**, to a lesser degree, and the discourse roles of the two types of RNs indicated a difference: **Segment RNs** occurred at major shifts of functional segments, while **That-clause RNs** caused topic shifts but did not occur at functional shifts. In addition, the study showed a preference of F, paragraph-final, by **Superordinate**, **General** and **Evaluation RNs**.

7. Discussion: Associate features of RNs

This section discusses associate features of RNs, some of which indicate metadiscursive features. The assumption in this section is that words have some basic inalienable meanings, or fixed or core essential meanings, which Aitchison (1994: Ch. 4) calls fixed meaning assumptions.⁷ My argument is that some types of RNs have a different type of association to their referents – that is, conceptual association – and that this is a defining characteristic of metadiscursive nouns. RNs that have word-meaning associations to referents (let us call them meaning-based RNs) are **Same Item**, **Synonym** and **Superordinate RNs**. This may be obvious with **Same Item RNs**. **Synonym RNs** are also easily identifiable as meaning-based RNs, as can be seen in comparison between *negativity* and its referent *pessimism*, and *downturns* and *recessions* in Text 1. **Superordinate RNs** cover wide meanings and their core meanings are not as clear as **Same Item** and **Synonym RNs**. However, they are identifiable as members of their respective lexical families, such as between *cancer* and its referent *melanoma* (Text 4), and can still be considered meaning-based RNs. Conversely, some types of RNs are **not** meaning-based, though to varied degrees. **Segment RNs**, as shown with 1.2 *Springtime of discontent*, and 1.3 *Argument*, actually refer to concepts or ideas expressed in the referents, despite the fact that their physical referents are segments comprising more than two sentences (we will call them concept-based RNs). **That-clause RNs** are also concept-based RNs. 1.7 *Problem* in Text 1, for example, is a conceptual representation of the content in the *that-clause*. The current study suggests that **Segment RNs** and **That-clause RNs** have concept-based associations to their referents, and that this is a general feature of metadiscursive nouns.

⁷ Although some argue for an alternative viewpoint, or fuzzy meaning assumption (Aitchison, 1994: Ch. 4), where words are not considered to be assigned a firm meaning, this paper takes the position of firm-meaning assumption.

Evaluation RNs are also concept-based RNs. However, their referents are noun items and **Evaluation RNs** have meaning associations with the referred nouns. Their conceptual associations to the referents are mostly based on the external knowledge of the writer/reader (as found between *chance* and *six months*, and *tool* and *Japanese*; see Examples 7 and 8), and little is based on textual realizations. This type of conceptual association to their referents can suggest that **Evaluation RNs** may not be metadiscursive nouns in the same way that **Segment** and **That-clause RNs** are. If **Evaluation RNs** are not metadiscursive, their discourse summary role may be in the ‘discourse terminating role of evaluation’ as a previous study (Hunston, 1994: 209) suggests. The realization of such a role of evaluation will be in the Problem-Solution pattern (Hoey, 1979), where functional segments are terminated by evaluation, though this is an area for further research.

General RNs associate to their referents in a similar way to **Superordinate RNs**, with both covering various meanings. However, the range of meanings of **General RNs** is too wide to identify which types of lexical families they belong to, as shown between *point* and its referent *February, 2008* (see 1.8 Point, Text 1), and between *way* and its referent (*pairwork*) *activity* (in book review, Text 5). In this regard, **General RNs** are not considered meaning-based RNs but seem not to be concept-based RNs either as they refer to nouns. **General RNs** can therefore be considered in the borderline between the two types of associations. The ambiguous status of this type of **RNs** seems to have a link to findings in previous studies such as Schmid (2000). He categorises two **General RNs**, *point* and *way*, into ‘circumstantial’ shell nouns,⁸ which are ‘less good and peripheral’ shell nouns with restricted functions, as opposed to ‘prime’ and ‘good’ shell nouns, which have fuller propositional and conceptual functions (see Schmid, 2000: Ch. 13, for more detail). Also in terms of the typicality of metadiscursive nouns based on their abstractness (Lyons, 1977: 445; Schmid, 2000: 65), these nouns belong to a specific abstract category. That is, they are more abstract than persons, animals or physical objects, which are concrete nouns, and less abstract than concepts, propositions or ideas, which are abstract nouns (see Schmid, 2000: Ch. 5, for more detail).

It has been argued so far that being a concept-based RN and, accordingly, having a content summarization and evaluation role of the referent, are major defining characteristics of metadiscursive nouns; and it has been shown how these metadiscursive features are reflected, fully or partially, in some RNs: **Evaluation RNs**, which are concept-based RNs, have a discourse evaluation role, but this evaluation does not come from a summarisation of the discourse and is not fully metadiscursive; **General RNs** are not fully metadiscursive either, as they are in the gray zone in terms of meaning- and concept-based associations and do not have either a summarization or evaluation role; while **Segment** and **That-clause RNs** are concept-based RNs, and have summarization and evaluation roles. This can be seen in Table 5:

⁸ Circumstantial nouns refer to situations, times, locations, manners of doing things, and conditions for doing things.

Table 5: Metadiscursive features of Segment and *That*-clause RNs

Ref. nouns	Same Item RNs	Syno. RNs	Supero. RNs	General RNs	Segment RNs	<i>That</i> -clause RNs	Evaluation RNs
Referents	Noun items	Noun items	Noun items	Noun Items	Stretch of discourse	<i>That</i> -clauses	Noun items + External knowledge
Association types	Meaning-based			Gray zone	Concept-based		
Summarize	×	×	×	×	○	○	×
Evaluate	×	×	×	×	○	○	○

* Darkened segments indicate metadiscursive features.

Taking into account these features of **Segment RNs** and ***That*-clause RNs**, it is reasonable to classify them as metadiscursive nouns, while metadiscursive status of other types of RN are either not clear or they are not metadiscursive at all.

8. Limitations and conclusions

The present study aimed at clarifying overlapping concepts of English metadiscursive nouns by analyzing RNs in five English texts for their patterns of use focusing on their referents, text positions and discourse roles. The study is exploratory and clearly the results can only be regarded as a very tentative hypothesis at present, particularly as the study was based on an analysis of only five texts of different lengths and word frequencies cannot be compared on the basis of raw frequencies. Firm conclusions cannot be drawn on the basis of an analysis of only one text per genre and there is an inevitable degree of subjectivity with regard to analytical decisions; an inter-rater reliability check would be helpful in order to establish the validity of these decisions.

Acknowledging these limitations, however, the study identified seven types of RN and showed that individual types of RN have some common tendencies in their patterns of use: the preference of **Segment RNs**, and to a lesser degree, ***That*-clause RNs** for the P position; the preference of **Superordinate**, **General**, and **Evaluation RNs** preference for the F position; and the Theme position for **Same Item**, **Synonym**, and ***That*-clause RNs** (Section 6). We then focused on some associated features of RNs (Section 7), and argued under the hypothesis that metadiscursive nouns are concept-based RNs and have a summarization and evaluation role, that **Segment** and ***That*-clause RNs** can reasonably be identified as metadiscursive nouns. Meanwhile, although being concept-based RNs, **General RNs** occupy a ‘gray zone’ position. The present paper suggests a link between their ambiguous state and a discussion of ‘less good and peripheral’ shell nouns (Schmid, 2000) and Lyon’s (1977) 2nd-order abstract noun argument. This categorisation of metadiscursive nouns is an area to be explored more in further research. **Evaluation RNs** are another ‘gray zone’ RN. It is argued that they may not be a metadiscursive noun but their discourse marking role was in evaluation (Hunston, 1994), and this is also an area for further study. Lastly, the study also suggests the hypothesis that preferred noun referencing strategies differ across genres: **Segment RNs** are preferred items in an opinion column (Text 1) but are not so common in other types, and **Superordinate RNs** occur mostly

in texts on scientific topics as in Text 3 (abstract). This will also be an interesting line of inquiry for further studies to pursue.

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Source Texts:

- Text 1: 'Our view on the Great Recession: Don't look now, but the economy's bouncing back'. In USA TODAY. http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2010-04-15-editorial15_ST_N.htm updated April 14, 2010.
- Text 2: Walsh, B. 'The Moment: 8/11/08: Washington'. In *TIME*, August 25, 2008.
- Text 3: Pavanelli, C., Mossolin, Emerson C. and Mantelatto, F. (2010) 'Maternal investment in egg production: Environmental and population-specific effects on offspring performance in the snapping shrimp *Alpheus nuttingi* (Schmitt, 1924) (Decapoda, Alpheidae)'. *Animal Biology* 60 (3): 237-247.
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