Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

Beyond Similarity and Difference: A Contrastive Syntactic Study of Noun Phrase Formation and Function in English and Acehnese

Clara Puspita[1], Risa Umami[2], Triana Lestari[3], Sempa br Perangin angin[4], M Safii[5], Edward Dolmer Panggabean[6]
[1,2,3,4,6]Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia
[5]STIM Sukma Medan, Medan, Indonesia

Article Info
Article history:
Received: September 30, 2026
Accepted: October 20, 2026
Published: November 10, 2026

Keywords:
Acehnese;
contrastive syntax;
English;
Grammatical Function
noun phrase;

ABSTRACT
This study examines noun phrase formation and grammatical function in English and Acehnese through a contrastive syntactic analysis. It investigates how the two languages express comparable nominal meanings and grammatical relations while organizing noun phrase constituents differently. The study adopts a qualitative, document-based approach using published grammatical descriptions and previous studies of English and Acehnese, with particular reference to Durie (1985) and Rizqi (2017). The analysis focuses on noun phrase heads, nominal modification, demonstratives, possession, quantity and classifiers, and post-head expansion. The findings indicate that English and Acehnese share broad functional similarities in noun phrase use, but differ in the ordering and grammatical realization of their constituents. English commonly places determiners, possessive forms, and adjectives before the head noun, whereas documented Acehnese constructions exhibit patterns in which certain modifiers follow the head and quantity expressions involve classifiers. These patterns demonstrate that functional similarity does not necessarily entail structural equivalence. The study proposes three analytical categories for interpreting the comparison: functional convergence, structural correspondence, and grammatical divergence. It contributes to contrastive syntax by emphasizing the need to describe each language according to its own grammatical organization rather than treating English constituent order as a universal model. Because the analysis relies on published descriptions and selected examples rather than a systematically compiled parallel corpus, the findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as evidence of construction frequency or of patterns shared by all Acehnese varieties. Further research using systematically collected and contextualized data is needed to examine the distribution of these constructions and their implications for language teaching.

Corresponding Author:
Clara Puspita
Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia
E-mail: clarpuspita160381@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Noun phrases are among the most frequent and structurally productive constituents in human language. They identify entities, quantify them, describe their properties, locate them in space, encode possession, and package information that might otherwise require larger clauses. In English, noun phrases are also an important resource for information density because academic prose frequently compresses relationships into premodifiers, postmodifying prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and non-finite constructions. Recent research has consequently examined noun phrase complexity as a meaningful dimension of syntactic development rather than merely a subtopic of grammar (Brato, 2020; Lan et al., 2022; Wang

& Jiang, 2024). However, the internal organization of nominal expressions is not universal. Languages may differ in the placement of modifiers, the grammatical expression of possession and deixis, the marking of quantity, and the ways in which verbal material is associated with a nominal head.

English and Acehnese provide a useful basis for investigating these differences because they can express comparable nominal meanings and grammatical functions while exhibiting different patterns of constituent ordering. English commonly places determiners, possessive determiners, demonstratives, and attributive adjectives before the head noun, as illustrated by *this book*, *my sister*, *three students*, and *an old house*. In documented Acehnese constructions, the head may precede its possessor, and certain types of attributive material may follow the noun. Durie's (1985) grammatical description of North Acehnese provides a foundation for examining nominal organization, including possessive constructions and other nominal patterns. More recent research on Acehnese pantun also documents the structural variety of noun-based expressions in cultural texts (Kartika & Mulyadi, 2024). Together, these studies provide a basis for comparison, although the structural patterns identified in individual sources must be examined in their respective grammatical and textual contexts.

The comparison is relevant to both syntactic description and language learning, although these constitute distinct areas of inquiry. Learners encounter not only differences in vocabulary but also differences in constituent order, grammatical categories, and the ways information is organized within nominal expressions. Research on second-language writing has investigated noun phrase development in relation to proficiency, genre, mode, and language background (Bao, 2024; Khushik, 2024; Wang & Jiang, 2024). Such research provides a broader rationale for examining nominal complexity across languages, but it does not by itself establish how Acehnese-speaking learners produce or acquire English noun phrases. A systematic contrastive description can instead establish a grammatical basis for identifying which constructions exhibit structural correspondence, which express comparable functions through different arrangements, and which involve language-specific grammatical resources. The implications for learning should therefore be treated as potential applications requiring further empirical investigation.

The present study adopts a structural perspective by examining how nominal expressions are organized around a head and how different types of grammatical information are distributed within the noun phrase. Rather than asking simply whether English and Acehnese have equivalent noun phrases, it investigates the relationship between nominal function and constituent structure. The analysis considers five related construction domains: (1) nominal heads and noun-based modification; (2) the position and type of modifiers, including adjectival and other attributive elements; (3) reference, demonstratives, and possession; (4) quantity and classifier constructions; and (5) post-head expansion, including relational and clause-related material where supported by the available descriptions. The grammatical functions of the resulting nominal expressions are examined across these domains rather than treated as a separate type of constituent. This organization enables the study to compare both the forms used by each language and the grammatical relationships those forms express.

Despite the availability of grammatical descriptions of English and Acehnese, a structured comparison is needed to explain how similarities in nominal function relate to differences in constituent organization. Studies of English noun phrase complexity offer insights into nominal expansion and information packaging, while descriptions of Acehnese provide evidence about the language's own grammatical patterns. These bodies of research do not automatically establish whether particular constructions correspond across the two languages. The analytical challenge is therefore to distinguish similarity of function from similarity of structure and to identify where comparable meanings are realized through

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

different grammatical arrangements. To address this challenge, the present study uses three analytical categories: functional convergence, referring to comparable grammatical functions or meanings; structural correspondence, referring to comparable constituent relationships or organizational patterns; and grammatical divergence, referring to differences in the grammatical arrangements through which comparable functions or meanings are expressed. These categories serve as an interpretive framework for the comparison rather than as predetermined findings.

The study addresses three research questions. First, what structural resources and constituent patterns are documented in the formation of noun phrases in English and Acehnese? Second, how do the two languages express comparable nominal functions while differing in constituent order and grammatical realization? Third, how can the identified patterns be interpreted through a contrastive framework that distinguishes functional convergence, structural correspondence, and grammatical divergence?

By addressing these questions, the study argues that English and Acehnese exhibit broad functional convergence in their noun phrases while differing in aspects of internal organization. Its contribution lies in distinguishing comparable grammatical functions from structural correspondence and language-specific grammatical arrangements. This distinction provides a more precise basis for contrastive syntactic description than a binary classification of similarities and differences. The study also offers a descriptive foundation for future research on language learning, while recognizing that claims about learner difficulty or instructional effectiveness require evidence from learner data rather than structural comparison alone.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Noun Phrases as Nominal Architecture

Traditional English grammars describe noun phrases as nominal constituents organized around a head, with determiners and modifiers contributing additional grammatical and semantic information (Quirk et al., 1985; Wren & Martin, 1990). The identification of nominal elements also requires attention to their grammatical roles within clauses, including the distinction between forms and the syntactic functions they perform (Perangin-angin et al., 2024). Although these descriptions provide a useful starting point, noun phrase structure cannot be understood solely in terms of the number of words surrounding a head noun. Nominal complexity may involve differences in constituent length, structural depth, and the types of elements used to expand the head. Research on English noun phrases accordingly distinguishes among attributive adjectives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and non-finite modifiers as resources for nominal expansion (Berlage, 2014; Lan et al., 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2024).

A cross-linguistic perspective further demonstrates the importance of describing nominal organization in language-specific terms. Louagie and Reinöhl (2022) examine variation in the organization of nominal expressions, while Louagie (2023) discusses the diversity of nominal constructions in Australian languages. Olsson (2022), working on a Papuan language, likewise illustrates the importance of considering language-specific constituent relationships when analyzing nominal structure. Taken together, these studies support an analytical principle relevant to the present research: nominal constructions should first be described according to the grammatical patterns documented in each language before their similarities and differences are interpreted contrastively. This principle is particularly important when comparing languages whose nominal expressions may serve comparable functions without necessarily sharing the same constituent order.

2.2 English Noun Phrase Complexity and Information Packaging

English noun phrases can incorporate different types of information through premodification and postmodification. Determiners, attributive adjectives, and noun modifiers may occur before the head, while prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and non-finite constructions can extend the nominal expression beyond it. Research on second-language English writing has examined noun phrase complexity in relation to proficiency and writing development, while also indicating that nominal elaboration needs to be interpreted in relation to genre and task conditions (Díez-Bedmar & Pérez-Paredes, 2020; Lan et al., 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2024). A study titled *Noun Phrase Complexity in English Integrated Writing Placement Test Responses* (Nguyen, 2024) is also cited in this context because it addresses the use of different nominal expansion patterns in English writing.

These studies establish the relevance of examining both the position and the type of elements associated with a nominal head. For example, the expressions *the student*, *the motivated student*, and *the student who won the national competition* differ in how much information they encode and in the structures through which that information is expressed. Such examples illustrate the descriptive distinctions involved in English noun phrase analysis; they do not, by themselves, establish how comparable structures are organized in another language. In the present study, research on English noun phrase complexity therefore provides a framework for identifying relevant construction types, while claims about Acehnese structure are grounded separately in descriptions and studies of Acehnese.

2.3 Acehnese Nominal Structure

Acehnese has an established descriptive grammatical tradition, particularly in Durie's *A Grammar of Acehnese on the Basis of a Dialect of North Aceh* (1985). This work provides a foundation for examining nominal organization and the relationships among heads, possessors, attributes, demonstratives, measure expressions, and other elements associated with nominal constructions. One important pattern discussed in descriptions of Acehnese is the ordering of a possessed noun and its possessor, in which the nominal head precedes the possessive element. Such patterns provide a basis for comparison with English possessive constructions, although individual examples must be interpreted according to their grammatical context and the analysis provided by the source.

Rizqi (2017), drawing on written and spoken Acehnese materials, examines phrase structure and reports patterns involving noun-based modification and numeral constructions with classifiers. Kartika and Mulyadi (2024), in their analysis of Acehnese pantun, identify noun–noun, noun–verb, and noun–adjective patterns in literary data. Other studies addressing Acehnese numerals, grammatical relations, and language use provide additional contexts for considering nominal expressions within the language's broader grammatical organization (Irnanda et al., 2024; Juliana & Mulyadi, 2024; Zulkhairi et al., 2024). The relevance of these studies, however, depends on the specific construction examined and the evidence reported in each source.

The available descriptions indicate that Acehnese nominal structure should not be reduced to a single rule stating that all modifiers follow the noun. The ordering and grammatical status of possessors, demonstratives, attributes, numeral-classifier expressions, and relative material need to be examined separately. Furthermore, evidence from a particular dialect or literary text should not automatically be generalized to all varieties and contexts of Acehnese. Accordingly, the present study treats these constructions as distinct analytical domains and compares them with English patterns only where the available descriptions support a meaningful comparison.

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

2.4 Contrastive Analysis beyond a Binary Model

Contrastive analysis provides a means of identifying correspondences and differences between languages. However, a simple classification of constructions as either similar or different may not adequately represent the relationship between grammatical function and constituent organization. Two expressions may perform comparable functions while differing in constituent order, and constructions that appear structurally similar may differ in grammatical category or distribution. Research comparing English and Indonesian noun phrases illustrates the continued relevance of contrastive analysis, while studies of nominal complexity and construction-specific behavior highlight the need to examine the grammatical properties of the structures being compared (Sitanggang et al., 2022; Susilo & Isnaini, 2025).

To address this analytical issue, the present study distinguishes three categories. Functional convergence refers to cases in which nominal expressions perform comparable grammatical or referential functions, even when their forms differ. Structural correspondence refers to cases in which the constructions exhibit comparable constituent relationships or organizational patterns. Grammatical divergence refers to cases in which comparable functions or meanings are realized through different grammatical arrangements or language-specific constructional resources. These categories are intended to organize the comparison rather than to predetermine its findings. Their application therefore depends on the grammatical evidence available for each construction, including the identity of the head, the type and position of its dependents, and the function expressed by the complete nominal expression.

This framework enables the study to move beyond a binary inventory of similarities and differences. It provides a basis for examining whether English and Acehnese noun phrases converge functionally, correspond in aspects of their structural organization, or diverge in the grammatical resources through which nominal information is expressed. The framework also establishes a link between the descriptive literature reviewed above and the contrastive analysis conducted in the present study.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive and contrastive approach to examine noun phrase formation and function in English and Acehnese. The analysis focused on identifying similarities and differences in constituent structure, modifier position, grammatical realization, and the functions performed by nominal expressions. Rather than measuring the frequency of particular constructions, the study examined how comparable meanings and grammatical functions are expressed through language-specific structural patterns.

The study was document-based and relied on published grammatical descriptions and relevant linguistic studies. It did not involve primary fieldwork, experimental procedures, or the compilation of a parallel corpus. Accordingly, the findings represent a qualitative comparison of documented constructions rather than a quantitative account of noun phrase use across the two languages.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection

The analysis drew primarily on Durie's (1985) grammatical description of Acehnese and Rizqi's (2017) study of Acehnese phrases. These sources provide descriptions of nominal structure, modification, possession, demonstratives, quantification, classifiers, and related constructions. Kartika and Mulyadi's (2024) study of noun phrases in Acehnese pantun was also considered as a supplementary source for examining nominal patterns in literary material.

For English, the analysis used established grammatical descriptions and studies of noun phrase structure and complexity, including research by Lan et al. (2022) and Wang and Jiang (2024). Additional sources were consulted where relevant to specific topics, such as relative clauses, non-finite constructions, and nominal complexity.

Sources were selected according to their relevance to noun phrase formation, the availability of grammatical descriptions or examples, and their contribution to the contrastive research questions. The analysis did not treat all sources as equivalent in scope: grammatical descriptions, phrase studies, and literary analyses were considered in relation to their respective data and purposes. Examples from particular dialects or genres were not assumed to represent all varieties of Acehnese.

3.3 Units and Domains of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis was the noun phrase or nominal construction documented in the selected sources. Each construction was examined in terms of its head, dependent constituents, modifier type, constituent order, and grammatical or semantic function. Where the source provided sufficient information, the analysis also considered the relationship between the nominal expression and the clause in which it occurred.

The contrastive analysis was organized around five domains:

1. Nominal heads and noun-based modification, including the organization of the head and its nominal dependents.
2. Modifier position and type, including pre-head and post-head modification and the grammatical categories of dependent elements.
3. Reference, demonstratives, and possession, focusing on how referential and possessive meanings are expressed and structurally organized.
4. Quantity and classifier constructions, examining numeral expressions, measure elements, classifiers, and counted nouns.
5. Post-head expansion, including documented prepositional phrases, relative constructions, and other material associated with nominal heads.

These five domains formed the primary basis for examining noun phrase structure. The analysis of syntactic functions, nominal complexity, and broader theoretical implications was developed across these domains rather than treated as an additional independent source of data. English *-ing* constructions and infinitival complements were considered where they clarified the grammatical boundaries of nominal expansion; they were not assumed to have direct Acehnese equivalents without supporting evidence.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through four stages. First, relevant nominal constructions were identified and organized according to the five analytical domains. The examples and descriptions were recorded with attention to the head, dependent constituents, constituent order, and the grammatical or semantic relationships described by the original source. Second, constructions in English and Acehnese were compared according to their documented functions and structural properties. English examples used to illustrate established grammatical patterns were distinguished from Acehnese examples reported in the selected sources. Translated meanings were used to establish a basis for comparison but were not treated as sufficient evidence of structural equivalence. Third, the constructions were interpreted using three analytical categories developed for this study: functional convergence**,** structural correspondence, and grammatical divergence. Functional convergence refers to cases in which constructions perform comparable grammatical or semantic functions. Structural correspondence refers to similarities in constituent relationships or organizational

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

patterns. Grammatical divergence refers to differences in the grammatical resources, constituent order, or structural realization used to express comparable functions. These categories served as an analytical framework rather than as a pre-established theory attributed to the cited sources. Fourth, the results were synthesized to discuss patterns across the five domains, the relationship between nominal function and structural organization, and the implications for contrastive syntax. Potential applications to English language teaching and Acehnese grammatical documentation were treated as implications for further investigation, not as outcomes empirically tested by the present study.

3.5 Scope and Limitations

The study was limited by its reliance on published descriptions and examples rather than a systematically compiled parallel dataset. The English and Acehnese examples were not drawn from a matched corpus, and the analysis did not measure construction frequency, test statistical differences, or investigate learner performance. Consequently, the findings do not establish the relative frequency of particular structures or demonstrate that specific grammatical differences necessarily cause learning difficulties.

The analysis also recognizes variation in the scope and context of the selected sources. Durie's (1985) description is based on a North Aceh dialect, while other studies examine particular types of linguistic or literary data. Their findings were therefore interpreted in relation to the contexts documented by the respective authors. Where the grammatical status of a construction or the equivalence between examples could not be established confidently, the comparison was treated cautiously.

Within these limits, the study provides a qualitative framework for examining how English and Acehnese noun phrases express comparable functions through potentially different structural arrangements. It also identifies areas where further research using systematically collected data, explicit grammatical annotation, and broader dialectal coverage would be needed to validate and extend the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Noun as the Shared Organizing Center

The noun provides a common point of departure for examining noun phrase formation in English and Acehnese. In English, nouns such as teacher, river, and student can function as complete noun phrases in appropriate contexts or serve as heads that combine with other constituents. Similarly, Acehnese nominals such as *ureueng* (“person”) can function as heads of noun phrases and participate in larger syntactic constructions (Durie, 1985).

Despite this functional similarity, the internal organization of nominal expressions must be examined separately in each language. English noun–noun constructions, such as coffee shop and school building, commonly place the modifying noun before the head. In Acehnese, Rizqi (2017) documents constructions such as *keudè beusoe* (“iron shop”) and *aneuk raja* (“child of a king”), in which the modifying constituent follows the head noun. These examples demonstrate that comparable nominal meanings may be organized differently.

The comparison therefore begins with a shared grammatical function rather than an assumption of identical structure. Nouns serve as organizing centers in both languages, but the ordering and grammatical properties of their dependents require construction-specific analysis.

4.2 Premodification in English and Post-Head Expansion in Acehnese

English noun phrases commonly use premodifiers, including determiners, possessive determiners, adjectives, and nouns. Examples include *this book*, *my old house*, and *a school*

building. These elements precede the head and contribute information about reference, possession, description, or classification.

Acehnese noun phrases exhibit more than one modifier position. Rizqi (2017) reports that modifiers in noun–noun constructions follow the head, although other nominal constructions may place modifiers before or after it. This finding is important because it qualifies any claim that Acehnese uniformly uses post-head modification. Durie (1985) likewise provides a grammatical description of Acehnese nominals, including possession, demonstratives, quantification, and relative modification.

The contrast is consequently not an absolute opposition between English premodification and Acehnese postmodification. Rather, the two languages differ in the distribution of particular construction types and in the grammatical relationships expressed by their constituents. The position of a modifier must be interpreted together with its category and function.

4.3 Reference and Deixis: Demonstratives

Demonstratives identify or locate referents in relation to a speaker, an addressee, or a discourse context. English examples include this book, that child, and those houses. In these expressions, the demonstrative precedes the head noun.

Acehnese has demonstrative forms including *nyoe* (“this”) and *nyan* (“that”), as described by Durie (1985). However, the distribution and grammatical status of these forms should be established from the relevant construction rather than inferred from an English translation. For example, *aneuk lön nyan*, previously glossed in the draft as “that child of mine,” contains both possessive and demonstrative material. It therefore cannot be used as an uncomplicated example of demonstrative position without further structural analysis.

At the functional level, both languages can express demonstrative reference. At the structural level, however, the order and interaction of demonstrative, nominal, and possessive elements may differ. This distinction illustrates why equivalent translations should not automatically be treated as structurally equivalent noun phrases.

4.4 Possession

Possession is another domain in which functional convergence may coexist with structural divergence. English commonly expresses possession through prenominal possessive determiners, as in my book, her house, and their teacher. It can also use postnominal possessive constructions, including certain of-phrases, as in the roof of the house.

Acehnese possesses grammatical resources for expressing possessive relationships, and Durie (1985) discusses possessed nominals as part of the language's nominal system. The example *aneuk lön*, glossed in the original draft as “*my child*,” is potentially useful for comparison because the possessor follows the possessed noun. Its precise interpretation and segmentation should nevertheless be checked against the source before publication.

The comparison demonstrates that the semantic relationship between possessor and possessed entity can be shared without identical constituent ordering. For contrastive analysis, the relevant questions are which constituent expresses the possessor, where it occurs, and how the relationship is grammatically realized. These questions are more informative than direct word-for-word comparison.

4.5 Number, Measure Phrases, and Classifiers

English typically expresses the quantity of countable entities through a numeral followed by a noun, as in three students, five books, and seven people. Plural marking may also appear on the noun, depending on the construction.

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

Acehnese numeral phrases provide a useful contrast because classifiers may occur between the numeral and the counted noun. Rizqi (2017) documents examples such as *si ôn keureutah* ("one sheet of paper") and *dua krèk pulpèn* ("two pens"). In these constructions, *ôn* and *krèk* contribute classificatory or measure-related information. Durie (1985) also discusses numeral classifiers as part of Acehnese nominal structure.

These examples indicate that the expression of quantity involves more than numeral placement. A comparison must account for the contribution of the numeral, the classifier, and the counted noun. The English expression two pens and the Acehnese expression dua *krèk pulpèn* share a quantifying function but differ in their overt constituent structure.

The findings should not be generalized to every Acehnese numeral construction without examining the relevant contexts and varieties. Nevertheless, classifier constructions constitute a clear domain in which grammatical differences can be described without assuming that one language has a direct word-for-word counterpart for every expression in the other.

4.6 Adjectival Attributes

Attributive adjectives commonly precede nouns in English, as illustrated by a beautiful village, a difficult question, and a tall tree. They provide descriptive information while remaining within the noun phrase.

Acehnese descriptions also document nominal constructions containing descriptive elements after the head. Rizqi (2017), for example, identifies *cicém ubit* ("small bird"), in which *ubit* follows *cicém*. Kartika and Mulyadi (2024) also examine nominal patterns in Acehnese pantun, including noun–adjective combinations. These studies provide a basis for investigating how descriptive meanings are organized in Acehnese.

The contrast between *a small bird* and *cicém ubit* illustrates comparable descriptive meanings expressed through different constituent orders. However, the grammatical classification of the Acehnese element should follow the analysis in the relevant source. Semantic similarity alone does not establish that two constituents belong to precisely the same grammatical category.

The analysis therefore distinguishes the meaning contributed by an attribute from its formal grammatical realization. This distinction is essential for avoiding the assumption that every descriptive word in Acehnese behaves exactly like an attributive adjective in English.

4.7 Nominal Modification by Verbal and Relative Material

English noun phrases can be expanded by relative clauses and other clause-related constructions. Examples include the student who arrived late and the students waiting outside. Although both expressions identify students through additional information, their modifying structures are not identical: the first contains a finite relative clause, whereas the second contains a non-finite participial construction.

Acehnese also has relative-clause constructions, which Durie (1985) discusses in the broader context of clause structure. Kartika and Mulyadi (2024) report noun–verb patterns in their analysis of Acehnese pantun. Such evidence makes verbal and relative material relevant to contrastive analysis, but the presence of a noun followed by a verbal form does not by itself establish a relative-clause construction.

The expression *ureueng nyang sakêt*, glossed in the original draft as "people who are sick," may be relevant to this comparison. Before it is treated as a confirmed example, however, the source analysis of *nyang* and *sakêt* must be checked. The example should be classified according to its documented grammatical structure, not solely according to its English translation.

A reliable comparison must distinguish finite relative clauses, non-finite modifiers, and other noun–verb combinations. The available descriptive literature establishes the relevance of these construction types, but a complete account requires verified examples and explicit analysis of the relationship between each head and its dependent material.

4.8 Prepositional and Adpositional Postmodification

English noun phrases can contain post-head prepositional phrases, as in the book on the table, the woman in the room, and the house near the river. These phrases add information about location, relation, or other circumstances associated with the head noun.

Acehnese also has prepositional phrases that may occur in attributive constructions. Durie (1985) documents an example containing *ureueng lam gampöng* ("people in the village"), demonstrating that a prepositional phrase can be associated with a nominal expression. The preposition lam contributes the meaning "in," while the following nominal material identifies the location.

This example offers a more defensible starting point than a general claim that all English postmodifying prepositional phrases have direct Acehnese equivalents. The precise attachment and syntactic function of the phrase should be established from its complete context. A phrase that modifies a noun must also be distinguished from a prepositional phrase functioning as a clause-level adjunct.

The comparison suggests that relational information can be expressed through prepositional constructions in both languages. Nevertheless, the grammatical distribution of these constructions should be described using language-specific evidence. Additional examples would be needed to establish the range of relational meanings and attachment patterns in Acehnese.

4.9 English Nominal Expansion and the Special Status of -ing Forms

English uses several constructions to expand nominal expressions, including noun–noun combinations, participial modifiers, and other forms derived from verbs. Examples include a swimming pool, the changing climate, and the students waiting outside. These examples should not be treated as a single grammatical category simply because they contain an -ing form.

The expression swimming pool, for instance, is a compound noun, whereas the students waiting outside contains a participial modifier. The grammatical status of -ing therefore depends on the construction in which the form occurs. Research on English noun phrase complexity examines the contribution of different types of modification and expansion (Lan et al., 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2024).

The Acehnese comparison requires equivalent care. The absence of an English-style -ing form in an example does not demonstrate that Acehnese lacks a means of expressing the same meaning. It only shows that the particular English morphological form cannot be assumed to have a direct counterpart. A valid comparison must identify the construction used in Acehnese and establish its grammatical function from a documented example.

Accordingly, this subsection treats English -ing constructions as a distinct component of English nominal expansion. Any claim about their Acehnese counterparts should remain limited to cases supported by the available grammatical descriptions.

4.10 Infinitival Complements Infinitival Constructions and Their Limits in Contrastive Analysis

In English, infinitival constructions can occur within noun phrases, as in *the decision to leave* and *the opportunity to study*. In these examples, the infinitival clauses specify or elaborate the meaning of the preceding nouns. However, the available Acehnese descriptions examined in this study do not provide sufficient evidence to establish a direct structural

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

equivalent for these English constructions. Therefore, the comparison does not assume that English infinitival clauses and Acehnese post-head constructions have identical grammatical forms.

Durie (1985) documents Acehnese constructions involving *keu* in purpose-related contexts. Such constructions are relevant to examining how purpose or intended action can be expressed in Acehnese, but they should not automatically be treated as direct equivalents of English infinitival postmodifiers. The distinction is important because a similar meaning does not necessarily indicate the same syntactic structure.

Accordingly, infinitival constructions are considered a boundary case in the present analysis rather than a fully established point of structural correspondence. Further analysis using systematically collected Acehnese data would be needed to determine how these constructions compare with English infinitival postmodification.

4.11 Syntactic Functions and the Limits of Direct Equivalence

Noun phrases can perform several syntactic functions in English, including subject, object, and complement. For example, in *The children arrived*, the noun phrase *the children* functions as the subject of the clause. In *She read the book***,** *the book* functions as the object. These examples illustrate how noun phrases participate in clause structure, although their functions depend on their position and grammatical relationship within the clause.

Acehnese constructions must be analyzed according to their own grammatical patterns rather than matched with English examples solely on the basis of their lexical content. For instance, *Gopnyan guru* ("He is a teacher") illustrates a nominal predication in which the expression *Gopnyan* refers to the person being described and *guru* provides the identifying or descriptive predicate. It is therefore not a direct structural equivalent of *The children arrived*, where the noun phrase *the children* is the subject of a verbal clause.

This distinction demonstrates that identifying noun phrases requires attention to both their internal structure and their grammatical role in the larger clause. The present study consequently distinguishes between similarities in the functions expressed by noun phrases and similarities in the syntactic structures through which those functions are realized. Where the available sources do not establish a direct correspondence, the examples are treated as illustrations of language-specific patterns rather than as equivalent constructions.

4.12 Functional Equivalence Does Not Guarantee Formal Equivalence

The preceding sections demonstrate why functional equivalence should be distinguished from formal equivalence. Two expressions may identify the same entity or communicate comparable descriptive, possessive, or quantitative meanings while using different grammatical arrangements.

Three analytical categories are proposed here. Functional convergence refers to comparable grammatical or semantic work. Structural correspondence refers to similarities in constituent relationships and organization. Grammatical divergence refers to differences in the grammatical resources or constituent arrangements used to express comparable functions. These categories constitute the analytical framework adopted for this study rather than a theory attributed to any single cited source.

For example, the comparison between English my child and Acehnese *aneuk lön*, subject to verification of the Acehnese gloss, illustrates how a possessive relationship may be expressed with different constituent orders. Likewise, the English expression two pens and the documented Acehnese *dua krèk pulpèn* show comparable quantity meanings with different internal structures.

Hypothetical examples of learner errors may help illustrate the pedagogical relevance of these contrasts, but they must not be presented as observed errors in the absence of learner data. The study supports a grammatical comparison; it does not directly measure the incidence of transfer errors or establish their causes.

4.13 Nominal Complexity as Language-Specific Architecture

Nominal complexity involves more than the number of words in a noun phrase. It also concerns the types of dependent constituents, their grammatical relationships to the head, and the ways information is distributed across a construction. English noun phrases may be expanded through adjectives, noun modifiers, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and non-finite constructions (Lan et al., 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2024).

Acehnese nominal complexity must be described using its own grammatical resources. Rizqi (2017) documents variation in modifier position, classifier constructions, and different constituent types within Acehnese phrases. Durie (1985) provides further descriptions of nominal structure, quantification, possession, and relative clauses. Together, these works demonstrate that nominal organization cannot be reduced to a single rule about whether modifiers occur before or after the head.

The contrastive implication is that complexity should be evaluated in relation to construction type and grammatical organization. A phrase with fewer overt constituents is not necessarily less complex in every grammatical respect, and two phrases with the same number of words need not have equivalent internal structures.

The present study does not calculate complexity indices or compare corpus frequencies. Its contribution is descriptive: it identifies constructional domains in which English and Acehnese nominal expressions can be compared and specifies why constituent relationships must be considered alongside surface order.

4.14 Implications for English Language Teaching

The findings may inform English language teaching by drawing attention to the relationship between grammatical function and constituent order. English noun phrases such as *a small house*, *my book*, and *three students* provide accessible examples for teaching modification, possession, and quantity. Comparisons with documented Acehnese constructions can help learners examine how similar meanings may be expressed through different structures.

However, these pedagogical implications remain proposals rather than experimentally established outcomes. The present study does not include learner corpora, classroom intervention, or tests of grammatical acquisition. It therefore cannot conclude that a particular contrast necessarily causes difficulty for Acehnese-speaking learners.

A teaching application could use verified parallel examples to encourage learners to identify the head noun, classify dependent constituents, and explain the relationship between each modifier and the head. Such activities would focus on grammatical analysis rather than word-for-word translation. Their effectiveness would need to be assessed in future classroom-based research.

4.15 Implications for Acehnese Documentation and Grammatical Description

The comparison also has implications for the description and documentation of Acehnese. Published sources provide valuable information about nominal structure, but they differ in their data, scope, and analytical purpose. Durie (1985) provides a detailed grammatical description based on a North Aceh dialect, whereas Rizqi (2017) examines phrase structures using written and spoken materials, including folklore. Kartika and Mulyadi (2024) investigate noun phrases in Acehnese pantun.

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

These sources should be treated as complementary rather than interchangeable. A construction documented in one dialect, genre, or register should not automatically be generalized to all Acehnese varieties. Literary data may also exhibit stylistic or poetic patterns that require interpretation in relation to genre.

Future documentation could compile systematically annotated examples of nominal constructions across speakers, varieties, and communicative contexts. Such a dataset could record the head, dependent constituents, constituent order, grammatical function, source context, and relevant dialect information. The current study provides a preliminary comparative framework that could guide this work, but it does not itself constitute a comprehensive Acehnese corpus.

4.16 Toward a More Precise Model of Contrastive Nominal Syntax

A more precise contrastive model should ask three questions about each construction: what grammatical or semantic function does it perform, where is the relevant information expressed, and what grammatical category carries that information?

The first question identifies the function, such as reference, possession, description, or quantification. The second identifies the structural realization, including constituent order and the position of dependent material. The third distinguishes grammatical categories such as nouns, adjectives, classifiers, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses.

This approach avoids assuming that similar meanings necessarily arise from equivalent grammatical categories. For example, the presence of a descriptive element after a noun does not by itself establish whether the element is an adjective, a verb, or part of a larger clause. Likewise, the presence of a classifier in a numeral phrase must be analyzed in relation to the counted noun and the construction as a whole.

The three analytical categories proposed in this study, functional convergence, structural correspondence, and grammatical divergence, provide a way to organize the resulting observations. Their value depends on consistent application to verified examples rather than on treating them as fixed classifications of the two languages as a whole.

4.17 Functional Convergence and Structural Divergence in Nominal Syntax

The evidence examined in this study indicates that English and Acehnese nominal expressions can perform comparable functions while differing in particular aspects of their grammatical realization. Possessive constructions express relationships between entities, numeral phrases express quantity, and attributive constructions add descriptive information. These shared functions provide a basis for contrastive analysis.

Structural divergence is most clearly illustrated where the documented constituent order differs. English noun–noun combinations commonly place the modifying noun before the head, whereas Rizqi (2017) documents Acehnese noun–noun constructions in which the modifier follows the head. The English construction school building and Acehnese examples such as *keudè beusoe* (“iron shop”) illustrate the relevance of this contrast, although their precise semantic relationships are not identical and should not be treated as direct lexical equivalents.

Other domains require more qualified interpretations. Classifier constructions provide evidence of differences in the realization of quantity, while demonstrative, possessive, and relative constructions require analysis of their complete constituent structures. The evidence therefore supports neither the claim that the two languages are structurally identical nor the claim that their nominal systems are wholly different.

The main argument is that functional convergence and structural divergence can coexist. A contrastive account becomes more precise when it identifies the function shared by

two expressions and separately explains the structural evidence for any correspondence or divergence.

4.18 Consolidated Contrastive Map

Table 1 consolidates the main constructional domains examined in the preceding sections. The examples are intended to illustrate the types of comparison available from the cited literature, not to imply that every English construction has a fully matched Acehnese counterpart. English examples are illustrative unless otherwise indicated; Acehnese examples should be interpreted according to their original grammatical descriptions.

Table 1

A Contrastive Analysis of English and Acehnese Noun Phrase Constructions

No.	Construction	English example	Acehnese example	Contrastive observation	Source
1	Nominal head	Teacher	*ureueng* (“person”)	Both examples illustrate a nominal head. They are illustrations of the category, not exact lexical equivalents.	Durie (1985); Rizqi (2017)
2	Noun–noun modification	school building	*keudè beusoe* (“iron shop”)	English places the modifying noun before the head in school building, whereas the Acehnese example has the modifier after the head. The examples illustrate different ordering patterns rather than identical meanings.	Rizqi (2017)
3	Descriptive modification	a small bird	*cicém ubit* (“small bird”)	Both expressions convey a bird described by size. In the Acehnese example, ubit follows cicém. Durie (1985) analyzes some Acehnese attributive forms as relative clauses rather than as a distinct adjective category.	Durie (1985); Rizqi (2017)
4	Quantity and classifier	one sheet of paper	*si ôn keureutah* (“one sheet of paper”)	Both express quantity using a unit or classifier. The examples are comparable in meaning, but their internal grammatical structures should be analyzed separately.	Rizqi (2017)
5	Quantity and classifier	two pens	*dua krèk pulpèn* (“two pieces/sticks of pens”)	The Acehnese expression uses the classifier krèk after the numeral dua. This illustrates the role of classifiers in Acehnese quantity expressions.	Rizqi (2017)
6	Verbal attributive / relative construction	the person going to the rice field	*ureueng=jak u=blang* (“a person going/who goes to the rice field”)	The English example uses a participial modifier. Durie analyzes the Acehnese construction as a relative clause in which the relative marker can be omitted. The expressions are comparable in meaning, but their grammatical analyses are not identical.	Durie (1985)

Journal of Language
Volume 8 Number 2 pp: 327-342
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14435

5. Conclusion

This study has examined noun phrase formation and function in English and Acehnese, focusing on the relationship between shared nominal functions and language-specific structural patterns. The analysis indicates that noun phrases in both languages can perform comparable grammatical functions, while differing in how nominal information is organized and expressed. The documented constructions reveal contrasts in modifier position, demonstrative and possessive patterns, adjectival description, and quantity expressions involving classifiers. These findings suggest that similarities in nominal function do not necessarily correspond to similarities in constituent order or grammatical realization.

The study contributes to contrastive syntax by applying an analytical distinction among functional convergence, structural correspondence, and grammatical divergence. This distinction provides a way to examine which aspects of noun phrase formation are functionally comparable and which are structurally different without treating English as a universal model for nominal organization. The findings also suggest that explicit comparisons between English and Acehnese may provide a useful basis for discussing differences in constituent order and nominal modification in English language teaching, although this pedagogical implication requires further empirical investigation.

A limitation of this study is its reliance on published grammatical descriptions and related studies rather than a systematically compiled parallel corpus of naturally occurring English and Acehnese data. The findings therefore describe patterns documented in the sources examined and should not be interpreted as frequency-based evidence or as representative of all Acehnese varieties. Future research should develop a systematically documented dataset from specified Acehnese varieties, establish comparable English and Acehnese constructions, and investigate their distribution and use in context. Such research could further evaluate the analytical distinctions proposed here and provide a stronger empirical basis for their descriptive and pedagogical implications.

References

Bao, G. (2024). Differential effects of EFL proficiency and mode on noun phrase use. *System, 121*, 103244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103244

Berlage, E. (2014). *Noun phrase complexity in English*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139057684

Brato, T. (2020). Noun phrase complexity in Ghanaian English. *World Englishes, 39*, 377–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12479

Díez-Bedmar, M. B., & Pérez-Paredes, P. (2020). Noun phrase complexity in young Spanish EFL learners' writing: Complementing syntactic complexity indices with corpus-driven analyses. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, 25*(1), 4–35. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.17058.die

Durie, M. (1985). A grammar of Acehnese on the basis of a dialect of North Aceh. Foris.

Irnanda, S., Muliawati, I., Yulsafli, Y., Muthalib, K. A., & Inayah, N. (2024). The Acehnese numerals in the Aceh Jaya District. *PAROLE: Journal of Linguistics and Education, 14*(2), 43–55. https://doi.org/10.14710/parole.v14i2.43-55

Juliana, J., & Mulyadi, M. (2024). Unveiling Acehnese subject properties: A typological analysis of grammatical relations and behaviors. *REiLA: Journal of Research and Innovation in Language, 6*(2), 207–223. https://doi.org/10.31849/reila.v6i2.20550

Kartika, R., & Mulyadi, M. (2024). Noun phrases in Aceh language pantun collections. *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 3*(4), 1633–1648. https://doi.org/10.55927/eajmr.v3i4.7544

Khushik, G. A. (2024). Is the variation in syntactic complexity features observed in argumentative essays produced by B1 level EFL learners in Finland and Pakistan attributable exclusively to their L1? *Assessing Writing, 60*, 100839. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100839

Lan, G., Zhang, Q., Lucas, K., Sun, Y., & Gao, J. (2022). A corpus-based investigation on noun phrase complexity in L1 and L2 English writing. *English for Specific Purposes, 67*, 4–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2022.02.002

Louagie, D. (2023). Multiple construction types for nominal expressions in Australian languages: Towards a typology. *Studies in Language, 47*(3), 683–742. https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.21008.lou

Louagie, D., & Reinöhl, U. (2022). Typologizing nominal expressions: The noun phrase and beyond. *Linguistics, 60*(3), 659–714. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling-2020-0147

Olsson, B. (2022). Noun phrase complexity and contiguity in a Papuan language. *Linguistics, 60*(3), 829–863. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling-2020-0134

Perangin-angin, S., Lestari, T., Puspita, C., Umami, R., Panggabean, E., & Efrizah, D. (2024). Students' proficiency in identifying pronouns in English sentences: A study of SMA Swasta Cerdas Bangsa. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching, 8*(2), 768–776. https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v8i2.10323

Nguyen, P. (2024). Noun phrase complexity in English integrated writing placement test responses. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 72*, Article 101452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2024.101452

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). A comprehensive grammar of the English language. Longman.

Rizqi, M. (2017). Frasa bahasa Aceh. *Ranah: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, 6*(1), 55–83. https://doi.org/10.26499/rnh.v6i1.261

Sitanggang, A., Situngkir, A. Y. T., & Situmorang, D. M. (2022). A contrastive analysis of using noun phrase in English and Indonesian language by using YouTube video. *Indonesian Journal of Education, Social Sciences and Research, 3*(2). https://doi.org/10.30596/ijessr.v3i2.11056

Susilo, A., & Isnaini, R. (2025). The challenges of Indonesian learners in constructing English noun phrase: A literature review study. *PPSDP Undergraduate Journal of Educational Sciences, 2*(2), 244–259. https://doi.org/10.59175/pujes.v2i2.672

Wang, Y., & Jiang, J. (2024). Exploring the development of noun phrase complexity in L2 English writings across two genres. *Assessing Writing, 62*, 100892. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100892

Wren, P. C., & Martin, H. (1990). High school English grammar and composition. S. Chand.

Zulkhairi, Z., et al. (2024). The Acehnese language use in South Aceh Regency: A sociolinguistic analysis. *Buletin Al-Turas, 30*(1), 131–144. https://doi.org/10.15408/bat.v30i1.34246