

NOUNS AND THEIR MODIFIERS IN KIRAN DESAI'S 'THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS'

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ABSTRACT



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The Inheritance of Loss" is a story rich with sadness about globalization and with joy at the small surviving intimacies of Indian village life. The action of the novel takes place in 1986. The novel is full of stylistic playfulness, touches of comedy, subtlety of logic and nature description.

The paper discusses noun phrases with reference to the syntactic and semantic relationship between adjectives and nouns. The relationship of qualifier/modifier with the qualified/ modified is *reflective* of both collocational and semantic considerations. Certain generalizations will be made with the help of the componential analysis of the adjectives and nouns.

The focus is only on those noun phrases which have an adjective and noun where the adjective is functioning as an epithet, but not determiners and nouns and nouns and nouns. For example, in a noun phrase like *arthritic knees* in chapter one, we have an adjective describing the position of a noun: *arthritic* describing the health of *knees*. Arthritic is a derived adjective referring to arthritis. As arthritis is an ailment which affects the body the noun is bound to be part of a body. On the other hand, if a special chair is designed for patients suffering from arthritis and it is called an *arthritic chair*, we have a situation where the adjective is not describing the problem of chair but classifying the type of chair. So here it is not an epithet but a classifier.

KEY WORDS: Noun Phrases, Adjectives, Noun modifiers, Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

The Inheritance of Loss spans two continents and three generations. The story cuts between New York and India, contrasting the menial jobs and meager conditions of immigrant life in the city with the political unrest engulfing an isolated Himalayan hill town. The novel strides from one life to another, present to past and back to present way by the juggling of time and space even though mind boggling is much interest to the reader. The action sways back and forth between the colonial mansion in Kalimpong, a hill town in north-east India at the foot of Himalayas

and the rodent infested kitchen of Newyork. It is to this kitchen Biju, son of mansion's cook, has been confined to make his life. The Inheritance of Loss impresses with its sumptuous language, lush metaphors and inspired turns of phrases and words. Hence, the purpose of exploring the novel is to provide an insight to the teachers and learners to empower their word power specially the adjectives while teaching and learning literature for effective communication.

Use of Noun Phrases in the novel

A noun is a kind of word that is the name of a person, place, thing, quality, or idea. An adjective is a word

that describes a noun. Nouns often need a word called an article or determiner (like the or that). An adjective is a 'describing' word, the main syntactic role of which is to qualify a noun or noun phrase, giving more information about the object signified.

Adjectives and noun modifiers

When we want to give more information than can be provided by using a noun alone, we can add an adjective to identify a person or thing, or describe them in more detail, for example, in sentences like;

The flame cast a mosaic of *shiny* orange across the cook's face, and his top half grew hot, but a mean gust tortured his arthritic knees. (p. 2)

Of course, all the boys were familiar with movie scenes where hero and heroine, befeathered in *cosy* winterwear, drank tea served in silver tea sets by polished servants. (p. 5)

Sometimes nouns can be placed before other nouns as a way of identifying a particular type of person or thing, for example, *a chocolate cake, the football player*

Nouns used in this way are usually referred to as noun modifiers. Though they are functioning in a similar way to some adjectives, we classify them as nouns. Examples like this are often referred to as compound nouns, with the first noun identifying a particular type in relation to the second noun. Most adjectives can appear before a noun as part of a noun phrase, placed after determiners or numbers if there are any, and immediately before the noun, for example,
She had a *beautiful* smile.

He bought *two brown* bread rolls.

Adjectives placed before a noun in this way are generally referred to as occurring in the attributive position.

There are some adjectives which can only be used before a noun, in the attributive position. For instance, we talk about the main problem but cannot say, the problem was main.

Adjectives which occur only in the attributive position are generally those which identify something as being of a particular type. For instance, we can talk about a financial decision where financial distinguishes this from other types of decision, For example, *medical, political*.

These groups of adjectives are often referred to as classifying adjectives, and rarely occur in the predicative position unless we specifically want to emphasize a contrast, for example,

a chemical reaction; not a reaction which was/is chemical

There are some adjectives which only usually occur in the predicative position, as complements of 'be' or other link verb.

For instance, one can say,

He felt glad.

But, wouldn't normally talk about a glad person.

Adjectives which usually occur in the predicative position include those which describe feelings, such as afraid, content, glad, ready, sure, sorry and upset, for example,

She felt afraid.

But not, for example, *an afraid girl*

Some adjectives that describe size or age can occur immediately after a noun that indicates a unit of measurement, for example,

She was about five feet tall.

There is a small group of adjectives, sometimes referred to as post nominal adjectives, which can only occur immediately after a noun. For example,

the president elect

Many other adjectives can be used immediately after a noun when they form part of a (reduced) relative clause, for example,

Let's use the time available.

Adjectives are often called 'describing words' because they provide information about the qualities of something described in a noun, a noun phrase or clause. Kiran Desai has used many noun phrases which have an adjective and noun. Some adjectives refer to the 'colour' as the following sentences illustrate:

He saw nothing of the English countryside, missed the beauty of carved colleges and churches painted with gold leaf and angels, didn't hear the choir boys with the voices of girls, and didn't see the *green* river trembling with replications of the gardens that segued one into the other or the swans that sailed butterflyed to their reflections. (p.40)

The caterpillars were mottled green and white, with fake *blue* eyes, ridiculous fat feet, a tail, and an elephant nose. (p. 66)

Kesang with her crazy *brown* teeth going in different directions and her shabby stained clothes and funny topknot perched precariously on the nob of her head. (p. 67)

"These *white* people!" said Achootan, a fellow dishwasher, to Biju in the kitchen.(p. 134)

Biju began to quake, and fumbling, tripping, he took off the last items of clothing, stood in his *white* underpants. (p. 317)

His destiny would be interwoven with a femail Tamil Tiger in more intimate fashion than anything Mrs. Sen with her *yellow* sweater could have dreamed of. (322).

The *yellowed* paper imparted a faint acidic tingle and fell easily into mosaic pieces, barely perceptible between the fingers-moth wings at the brink of eternity and dust. (p. 198)

Some of the adjectives refer to the 'size' as in the sentences given below;

The caterpillars were mottled green and white, with fake blue eyes, ridiculous *fat* feet, a tail, and an elephant nose. (p. 66)

Their washing line sagged under a load of Marks and Spencer panties, and through *large* leg portholes, they were favoured with views of Kanchenjunga collared by cloud. (p.44)

To guard all this and their dignity, the sisters had hired Budhoo, a retired army man who had seen action against guerrilla factions in Assam and had a *big* gun and an equally fierce mustache.(p. 44)

These noun phrases describe the size of a thing or a part of the body. There are gradable adjectives that describe 'qualities' that one can measure or grade in some way.

For example, quite *wet*, very *calm*,.

In the novel, along with a noun refer to 'quality' in the sentences given below;

A *great* salesman, he told them, a *wealthy* landowner who gave his family property away, a freedom fighter who left a position of immense power in court as he did not wish to pass judgment on his fellow men-he could not, not with his brand of patriotic zest, jail congresswallahas, or stamp out demonstrations.(p.55)

The usual stories: *jealous* husband cutting off wife's nose or falsified record claiming death of a widow who was still alive so her property might be divided among *greedy* descendants. (p.57)

The girl who answered the buzzer smiled, *shiny* teeth, *shiny* eyes through *shiny* glasses.(p.49)

It was a little after 1 A.M. when he left Freddy's Work for the last time, the street lamps were haloes of light filled with starry scraps of *frozen* vapour, and he struggled between snow mountains adorned with empty take-out containers and solidified dog pee in surprised yellow. (p.52)

The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of *luminous* light that made you feel,if briefly, that truth was apparent. (p.324)

The flame cast a mosaic of *shiny* orange across the cook's face, and his top half grew hot, but a mean gust tortured his arthritic knees. (p.2)

All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the *great* flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths.(p.1)

It assumed a certain pride in simplicity among the *wealthy* classes. (p.135)

At lunch and dinner the space filled with young *uniformed* businesspeople in their twenties and thirties. (p.135)

He began to walk farther across town to more anonymous shops, and when he bought a shaving brush and the shop girl said her husband owned the same item exactly, at the acknowledgment of their *identical* human needs, the intimacy of their connection, shaving husband, he was overcome at the boldness of the suggestion. (p.40)

In this country poor people eat like kings! General Tso's chicken, emperor's pork, and Biju on a bicycle with the delivery bag on his handlebars, a *tremulous* figure between heaving buses, regurgitating taxi-what growls, what sounds of flatulence came from this traffic.(p.49)

He put on the nightgown. It had large, faded pink flowers and yellow, *puffy* sleeves, ruffles at the neck and hem. (p.318)

The cook pointed out the *defunct* pisciculture tanks, the army encampment, the monastery on top of

Durpin hill, and down below, an orphanage and henhouse. (p.41)

No visitor came, with their *rich* city fat, to burden scabied nags on pony rides. (p. 237)

Some adjectives have irregular comparative forms. For example in the following sentences;

They believe they are good people and you get some relief. (p.134)

"I'm a *bad* man," cried the cook, "I'm a *bad* man, beat me, sahib, punish me." (p.319)

"I'm a *wicked* man, a *weak* man. (p.320)

The above adjectives describe the character and the qualities of a person.

Likewise, some of the adjectives refer to 'appearance'.

The following sentences are the best examples;

In the kitchen, the cook's calendar of gods began to kick on the wall as if it were alive, a plethora of arms, legs, *demonic* heads, *blazing* eyes. (p.105)

The priest sat on an inflatable swimming ring, for his gaunt rear ached from riding in that rough jeep running on diesel, just a few skeleton bars and sheets of metal and a basic engine attached, the windscreen spider-webbed with cracks delivered by stones flying up off the *broken* heads. (p.193)

The manager believed that when something came in a factory tin with a name stamped on it, when it was showcased in a national advertising campaign, naturally it was better than anything made by the farmer next door, some dubious Thapa with one *dubious* cow living down the lane. (p. 193)

Huge, spread-open Easter lilies were sticky with spilling anthers; insects chased each other madly through the sky, zip zip; and *amorous* butterflies, cucumber green, tumbled past the jeep windows into the deep marine valleys; the delicacy of love and courtliness apparent even between the lesser beasts. (p. 194)

First it had been owned by the Gaekwad kings of Baroda and then the British, but though the revenue headed for one owner and then another, the landscape had

remained unaffected; a temple stood at its heart, and by its side, a several-legged banyan tree; in its pillared shade, *white*-bearded men regurgitated their memories; cows moored oo aaw, oo aaw; women

walked through the cotton fields to collect water at the mud-muddled river, a *slow* river, practically asleep. (p. 57)

To guard all this and their dignity, the sisters had hired Budhoo, a retired army man who had seen action against guerrilla factions in Assam and had a big gun and an equally *fierce* mustache.(p. 44)

Here, at the back, inside the *cavernous* kitchen was the cook, trying to light the damp wood. (p.1)

An orgy of blood and feathers ensued, a great skauwauking kerfuffle, *headless* birds running about spilling guts and excrement. (p.237)

Some adjectives refer to the 'state' as in;

In this country poor people eat like kings! General Tso's chicken, emperor's pork, and Biju on a bicycle with the delivery bag on his handlebars, a tremulous figure between *heaving* buses, *regurgitating* taxis-what growls, what sounds of flatulence came from this traffic.(p.49)

The cook, known for the fine quality of his product, would buy millet, wash and cook it like rice, then, adding yeast, would leave it to ferment overnight in *hot* weather, longer in winter. (p. 54)

It filled him with pride to see men sitting in the steam and smoke with their bamboo mugs full of his grain topped with *hot* water. (p.54)

He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick *milky* scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke and impregnated the fabric of his pajamas. (p.40)

Some adjectives refer to 'material'.

For example,

He saw nothing of the English countryside, missed the beauty of carved colleges and churches painted with *gold* leaf and angels, didn't hear the choir boys with the voices of girls, and didn't see the green river trembling with replications of the gardens that segued one into the other or the swans that sailed butterflyed to their reflections. (p.40)

He spoke about as much English as Biju did, so between Spanish, Hindi, and wild mime, jacinto's *gold* tooth flashing in the late evening sun, they had settled the terms of rental. (p.51)

A single *bald* light bulb dangled on a wire above (p.1)

Here, at the back, inside the cavernous kitchen was the cook, trying to light the *damp* wood. (p.1)

He began to walk farther across town to more *anonymous* shops, and when he bought a *shaving* brush and the shop girl said her husband owned the same item exactly, at the acknowledgment of their identical human needs, the intimacy of their connection, shaving husband, he was overcome at the boldness of the suggestion. (p.40)

Some adjectives refer also to 'effect' as in the following sentences;

She said to his mumble, leaned forward to scoop up his words, but his voice ran back and out as he dissolved into tears of self-pity at the *casual* affection. (p. 40)

With Budhoo on the roof fiddling with the aerial, the sisters shouted to him out of the window, "Right, left, no, back," as he swayed, poor fellow, amid the tree branches and moths, the outfall of *messy* Kalimpong weather. (p. 45)

The above discussed adjectives that are referred to 'colour, size, appearance, material, quality, effect, and state' may enhance the vocabulary knowledge of the learners.

The learners may need time and considerable exposure to English in order to become familiar with the usual sequence of information in English noun phrases (adjectives before nouns).

This may cause them difficulty in processing information, particularly in listening to English (in reading the text they have the opportunity to stop in order to study phrases and work out how information is ordered), and particularly when they come across a string of two or more adjectives before a noun.

Speaking and Writing-Plural forms

Learners may create a plural adjective form. For example,

They are olds books.

This is particularly common among people whose first language has a plural form of adjectives.

Comparative and superlative forms

Learners may over-generalize the rules which determine the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. For example,
She is more old than me.

Sentence position

Some learners often place adjectives after the noun where this is inappropriate in English. For example, It is a building very old.

Combining adjectives

Learners some time use conjunction like 'and' inappropriately in a sequence of adjectives. For example,

They were playing with a big and red ball.

However, the difficulties of comprehending the meaning of adjectives given in any literature text can overcome by wide reading the novels like 'The Inheritance of Loss'. These types of novels are very useful to enhance the vocabulary of the learners while teaching literature in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Integrating vocabulary learning in literature class certainly builds students' vocabulary as vocabulary is central to communication. The purpose of this paper is to present the usefulness of learning adjectives in a novel or any other literature for effective communication. Novels are the rich source to build the vocabulary of the learners.

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