

Learning English through Film Titles

Chaowalit Kuemphukhieo¹, Suwaree Yordchim², Cholthicha Sudmuk³, Behrad Aghaei⁴

Abstract

This research is a document analysis of film titles in English. It intends to study English complex word structure, phrase structure, and their grammatical functions in collecting data from English film titles. The film titles are retrieved from the movies released from 2015 to 2017 in Thailand. The data includes 376 English movie titles. The morphological structures are analyzed within the theories of word formation. The structure of English film titles are analyzed both at morphological (word) and at syntactic levels (phrase and sentence). Three morphological formations (compounding, affixation, and abbreviation) and four phrase structures (noun, verb, adjectival and prepositional phrase) are recognized at the word and phrasal structure levels respectively. At the sentence structure level, a negative-imperative sentence and a statement sentence are found.

Keywords: Learning English, Film, Titles

Introduction

Learning a new language is an experience made possible through media such as films. Among the other interests of audiences, learning English seems to be the strongest motivation for watching English language movies. There are a large number of foreign films introduced into Thailand from America, Europe and Asia. The titles of these movies in English may help audiences improve their English language skills. Shi Xuedong (2014) states that film is one of the most influential mass media playing an important role in the process of cross - culture including language communication. Furthermore, the results of Jocelyn Chois's "Teaching Vocabulary with Film in the Adult ESL Classroom" article and her oral interviews (2009) have shown that there is a positive attitude towards learning vocabulary with film. Diez, et al. (2005) have also reported that films can motivate students with low literacy levels and inspire to promote student's participation in learning English. Thus, there is a strong tendency that movies might motivate students and

¹Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

^{2,3}Graduate School, Suansunandha Rajabhat University.

⁴University of Michigan

Corresponding author, e-mail: chaowalit.kp@bru.ac.th

enhance their English learning process. Drawing on works above and the collected data, this work will show that morphological awareness should not be neglected in learning English as the second language.

Research Purpose

This study aims to study English complex word structure, phrase structure, and their grammatical functions in film titles.

Research Questions

This study tries to provide the answers to the following questions: What are English complex word structures and phrase structures in film titles? and what kinds of grammatical functions do they have in these titles?

Analysis of Word Structure

Chomsky (1995) has divided words into two main types; 1) Lexical words that include content words or a head of a structure i.e. noun, verb, adjective, adverb and 2) Functional words that express a grammatical or structural relationship with other words in a sentence i.e. pronoun, preposition, conjunction, auxiliary, article, determiner. The content words are derived from many kinds of word formation. Most of content words in English are formed by affixation: prefix, base (root), and suffix. Plag (2002) has shown that word parts (root-affixes) may be added together to form new English words which may consist of a root only, a root with a prefix, a root with a suffix, or a root with both a prefix and a suffix. Morphological awareness then can assist language learners to figure out the meaning of the new words.

Roots are base words which can be added to other word parts and they have their own specific meanings. Prefix is a word part attached at the beginning of a root, it also has its own meaning. When it is attached to the root, its meaning contributes to the whole meaning of the word; as in “rewrite” = re+write (prefix + root). The prefix “re” means “again”, “rewrite” means “write (something) again”. Suffixes are word parts added to the end of a root word that may already ended in another suffix. After they are added, they change the word class of their original roots, for example the verb “environ” can be changed into a noun by adding a suffix “-ment” as “environment”, an adjective by adding a suffix “-al” as “environmental”, or an adverb by adding a suffix “-ly” as “environmentally. This kind of suffix is called derivational suffix. There is another kind of suffix, known as inflectional suffix, which is added to assign a particular grammatical property to the root such as tense, number, or comparison, e.g. attach -ed = attached, girl -s = girls, cheap -est = cheapest. Suffixes can also be added according to the following conditions;

- Some suffixes have a specific meaning, such as “-or” means “a person does what the root refer to”, as in “invent+or” = “inventor”.

- Some suffixes change the spelling of the root, such as a word with the final letter ‘y’ will become ‘i’ after adding a suffix “-es” or “-ed” , e.g. country - countries, happy – happiness, try - tried. Furthermore, English words can be formed by both prefix and suffix added to the root, e.g. “unlocked” (prefix + root + suffix). The word formation process is used to product and create new words suggested by Yule (2006) and Plag (2002) for this study as follows:

1) Coinage; it is the invention of totally new words involving the extension of a product used in generic name e.g. iPhone, airpod, youtube.

2) Borrowing; a borrowed word from another language is called loan word e.g. robot (Czech).

3) Compounding; it is the combination of two or more existing words to create a new word which one of them is a head e.g. fastfood, lipstick. Some English words are possible to compose of two or more bases or roots that function as a single unit of meaning. There are three kinds of compound words, closed, hyphenated, and open compounds. Closed compounds composed of two words together without space, e.g. green+house (base + base) = greenhouse. Hyphenated compounds composed of two or more words, using hyphen between them to prevent ambiguity, e.g. mother-in-law. Open compounds composed of two words together with a space in between, e.g. school bus.

4) Derivation; it is a process of word formation in which affixes (prefixes, infixes and suffixes) are added to the root to create a new word. A contrast between the process of derivation and inflection is as follows; derivation uses affixes to apply to words for changing one syntactic category to another one e.g. create - creative (verb to adjective) while inflection uses affixes in order to form variants of the same word e.g. watch, watch -es, watch -ing, watch -ed.

5) Blending; blend words are formed by a part of one word attached to another word e.g. brunch (breakfast + lunch).

6) Clipping; it is the reducing of a word to one of its parts e.g. ‘ad’ is a reduced form of the word “advertisement”.

7) Back-Formation; it refers to the process of creating a new word by shortening words created from longer words e.g. television – televise (removing the morpheme ‘-ion’ from a noun ‘television’ to form a verb ‘televise’).

8) Conversion; it is a change in word function without changing the original form of word e.g. paper.

9) Acronym; it is a word formation in which the initial letters of words or word parts in a phrase or name will form a new word, e.g. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), BBC

(British Broadcasting Corporation).

10) Abbreviation; it is a shortened form of a written word or phrase. It may consist of a group of letters taken from words or phrase with or without a dot after them, e.g. Prof. from “Professor”, USA from “United State of America”.

The study of the structure of English words that may consist of various combinations of word parts will tremendously help the English language learner to expand his/her Lexicon.

Methodology

This research is to focus on English complex word structure, phrase structure, and their grammatical functions in film titles. The purposive methods was used to select the samples which were 376 English film titles released in 2015 to 2017, searching from www.movie2free.com. These film titles are broken into words, phrases, and sentence structures to facilitate to analyse the complex structures in these titles with the accordance of theories of Chomsky (1995) and Plag (2002). This will lead the way to have a better understanding of word formation process in English.

Results

The structures of the film titles are studied very closely at three levels; word, phrase, and sentence structure levels. As for the word structure level, both a single word and a complex word structures are found. Three morphological processes are also found; affixation, compounding, and abbreviation. As for the phrase structure level, four phrases are recognized; noun, verb, adjectival, and prepositional phrase. As for the sentence structure level, a negative-imperative sentence and a statement sentence are observed.

Word Structure

Analyzing the data at the word level reveals that both English base words and derived words have been chosen as the titles for these movies. The only one base word film title is also found both in noun and verb categories. There are 38 one single noun film titles without any morphological process. The one single noun film titles can be divided in to two types, a proper noun such as Dunkirk, Jeruzalem, Ferdinand, and a common noun such as Spy, Lion, Home. Only 4 one single verb film titles, Wonder, Sing, Bound, and Sully are observed.

The derived word film titles are complex. Two morphological processes, affixation and compounding, are utilized as the important tools for creating the attractive film titles. Affixation is the most utilized morphological process at the word structure level in English film titles. Both inflectional and derivational processes are found. As shown before inflection in English is a process in which suffixes are added to the root to form a word to express grammatical meaning such as start -s, start -ed, start -ing, while derivation is a process in which affixes (prefix/suffix) are added to the root to form a new

word class such as move-movement. The inflectional process of the film titles data is shown in table 1.

Table 1 The Inflectional Process in the Film Titles

Inflectional Process	Example	Grammatical Function
(N+Suf)	Chips (chip+s)	PN
(V+Suf)	Renegades (renegade+s)	PN
(V+ Suf)	Snatched (snatch+ed)	V (PT)

Table 1 shows that two functions of inflectional process, number and tense, are represented in the film titles. There are 17 plural nouns and 6 past tense verbs film titles in the data. Besides, the inflectional suffix can be found in 13 compound words of the film titles as shown in table 2.

Table 2 The Inflectional Process in the Compound Word

Inflectional Process	Example	Grammatical Function
(N+(N+Suf))	Goosebumps (goose+(bump+s))	PN
(N)+(N+Suf)	Eastern Promises ((eastern)+(promise+s))	PN
(ADJ)+(N+Suf)	Nice Lives ((nice+(live+s))	PN

Table 2 shows that only one function of the inflectional process, number, exist in the noun compound. The derivational process is found in 21 nouns, 4 verbs and 8 adjectives in data as shown in table 3.

Table 3 The Derivational Process in the Film Titles

Derivational Process	Example	Grammatical Function
(Pre+N+Suf)	Extraction (ex+tract+ion)	N
(N+Suf)	Hacker (hack+er)	N
(V+ Suf)	Survivor (survive+or)	N
(ADJ+Suf)	Security (secure+ty)	N
(N+Suf)	Breathe (breath+e)	V

(ADV+V)	Overdrive (over+drive)	V
(N+Suf)	Demonic (demon+ic)	ADJ
(Pre+V+Suf)	Unforgettable (un+forget+able)	ADJ

Table 3 shows that different word classes are derived via the derivational process. Moreover, the derivational process of English words is very rich since it is also found in 28 compound words as shown in table 4.

Table 4 The Derivational Process in the Compound Word

Derivational Process	Example	Grammatical Function
(N+Suf)+(N+Suf)	Personal Shopper (person+al)+(shop+er)	N
(Pre+N+Suf+Suf)+(N)	Avengers Grimm (a+venge+er+s)+(grimm)	N
(V+Suf+Suf)+(N)	Collateral Beauty (collate+er+al)+(beauty)	N
(ADJ+Suf)+(V+Suf)	Confidential Assignment (confident+ial)+(assign+ment)	N

Table 4 shows the derivational process in the compound words. Furthermore, the English film titles can be constructed by both the derivational and the inflectional processes on a single or a compound word. Only five cases are found, see table 5.

Table 5 Both Derivational and Inflectional Process in the Film Titles

Derivational and Inflectional Process	Example	Grammatical Function		
(N+ (N+Suf+Suf))	Ghostbusters (ghost+(bust+er+s))	PN		
(V+Suf+Suf)	Descendants (descend+ant+s)	PN		
(Pre+V+Suf)	Unlocked (un+lock+ed)	V (PT)		
(N)+(V+Suf+Suf)	Bounty (bounty)+(hunt+er+s)	Hunters PN		
Num+(N+Suf)+	Fifty	Shades	Darker	N
(N+Suf)	(fifty)+(shade+s)+(dark+er)			

Table 5 shows a more complex word structure of the film titles can be formed by both derivational and inflectional processes. The second morphological process of word structure in English film titles is compounding. There are two categories of compound words in the film titles, noun and verb compound, were recognized. A noun compound composes of a head noun with one or more word from other categories. There are 123 noun compounds film titles found, as shown in table 6.

Table 6 The Structure of Noun Compounds

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
(N)+(N)	Hacksaw Ridge	64	52.03
(N)+(N)+(N)	Justice League	7	5.69
	Dark		
(N+Suf)+Num	Spectre 007	1	0.81
(N)+(N)+Num	Death Race 2050	2	1.62
Num+(N+N)+(N)	10 Cloverfield Lane	2	1.62
(N)+(N)+(N)	Barbie Dolphin Magic	3	2.44
(N)+(ADJ)+(N)	Home Sweet Hell	1	0.81
(V)+(N)	Skiptrace	2	1.62
(ADJ) + (N)	Stronger Land	24	19.51
(ADJ)+(N)+(N)	Deep Water Horizon	3	2.44
(N)+(ADJ)	Doctor Strange	2	1.62
(ADJ)+Num	Fantastic Four	1	0.81
(ADV)+(N)	Back Hat	2	1.62
(N)+(ADV)	Miles Ahead	2	1.62
(V)+(N)	Sing Street	3	2.44
((V)+(N))	Skiptrace	1	0.81
((ADJ)+(V))	High-Rise	1	0.81
(PossP)+(N)	Your Name	1	0.81
(PossP)+(ADJ)+(N)	Our Little Sister	1	0.81
Total		123	100%

Table 6 shows that there are four structures of noun compounds in film titles. The first structure composed of a noun and one or more than one nouns. The second structure composed of an adjective with one or more than one noun or number. The third structure composed of a verb and a noun or an adjective. The last structure composed of a possessive pronoun and a noun or an adjective with another noun.

A verb compound composed of a head verb with one or more than one word category. Only 3 structures of verb compounds are found in the data, as shown in table7.

Table 7 The Structure of Verb Compounds

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
(ADJ)+(V)	High Strung	1	33.33
(ADV)+(V)	Overdrive	1	33.33
(NP)+(V)	48 hours to live	1	33.33
Total		3	100%

Table 7 shows that verb compound does not occur very often in the data. The first and the second title composed of a head verb and another word category, an adjective and an adverb respectively. The structure of the third title is more complex than the first two in the sense that it is composed of noun phrase, NP (NUM+N) and a head verb.

Analyzing the structure of compound words (noun and verb) in the film titles, shows that three kinds of compounds, closed, hyphenated and open compounds exist in the data. The last morphological process of word structure in English film titles is abbreviation. Only one film title is found, “The BFG”. The abbreviation “BFG” comes from “Big Friendly Giant”. This movie is about the friendship between a little girl and a big giant. The abbreviation “BFG” is made up closely to “BFF” (Best Friend Forever), which seems very popular among the teenagers in almost all over the world.

To sum up, there are both one single word and compound word in English film titles. For the single word, both noun and verb are found as a base form. The morphological process of the word structures in the film titles data are affixation, compounding, and abbreviation. As for the affixation, words are created by either inflectional or derivational process or both. As for the compounding, there are two kinds of compound words, noun and verb compounds, are observed and finally only one film title shows the abbreviation as its word formation process.

Phrase Structure

Studying the English film titles has revealed that there are four different kinds of English phrases, noun, verb, adjectival and prepositional phrases can be recognized in these titles. The structures of noun phrases are shown in table 8.

Table 8 The Structure of Noun Phrase in the Film Titles

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
[Det+N]	The Gift	27	19.70
[Det+N+Num]	The Magnificent Seven	2	1.45
[Det+N+N]	The Lego Batman	14	10.21
[Det+N+N+(N+Suf)+N]	A Street Cat Named Bob	1	0.72
[Det+ADJ+N]	The Finest Hours	13	9.48
[Det+ADJ+N+N]	The Last Witch Hunter	2	1.45
[Det+ADJ+ADJ]	The Big Short	1	0.72
[Det+N+ADV]	The Night Before	1	0.72
[Det+N+PREP+N]	The Light Between Ocean	7	5.10
[Det+N+PREP+(Det+N)]	A Hologram for the King	4	2.91
[Det+N+N+PREP +(N+Suf)]	The Secret Life of Pets	1	0.72
[Det+N+N+N+PREP +(Det+ADJ+N)]	The Lion Guard Life in the Pride Land	1	0.72
[Det+(PREP+Suf)]	The Intern	1	0.72
[Det+[(PREP+Suf)+N]+(N+Suf)]	The Internship Games	1	0.72
[N+PREP+N]	Goddess of Love	26	18.97
[ADJ+N+[PP (PREP+N)]]	Free State of Jones	2	1.45
[Num+(N+Suf)+PREP+N]	90 Minutes in Heaven	1	0.72
[N+PREP+N+N]	House on Willow Street	3	2.18
[N+PREP+(Det+N)]	Birth of the Dragon	8	5.83
[N+PREP+(Det+ADJ+N)]	Alice through the Looking Glass	4	2.91

[N+PREP+[Det+(N+Suf)+ N]]	Master of the 1 Shadowless Kick	0.72
[N+PREP+[Det+N+ PREP+[Det+(N+Suf)]]]	War for the Planet 1 of the Apes	0.72
[N+(N+Suf+Suf) +(N+Suf)+PREP+N]	Starship Troopers 1 Traitor of Mars	0.72
[N+N+N+PREP+(Det+N)]	King Arthur Legend 1 of the Sword	0.72
[PossP+N+PREP+(N+Suf)]	Our King of Traitor 1	0.72
[Pro+PREP+Pro]	Me Before You 1	0.72
[V+PREP+N+N]	Return of Xander 1 Cage	0.72
[N+Conj+N]	Batman and Harley 3 Quin	2.18
[N+Conj+(ADJ+N)]	Hell or High Water 1	0.72
[N+Conj+N+Conj+(N+Suf)])	Pride and 1 Prejudice and Zombies	0.72
[N+Conj+[Det+N+PREP+ [Det+Num+(N+Suf)]]]	Valerian and the 1 City of a Thousand Planets	0.72
[(ADJ+N)+(Det+ADJ+N)]	Resident Evil the 3 Final Chapter	2.18
[N+N+Conj+(Det+ADJ+N)]	Professor Marston 1 and the Wonder Woman	0.72
Total	137	100%

Table 8 shows that the structure of noun phrases in the film titles are both simple and complex. There are three kinds of the simple structure, 1) Det+N, Det+N+N and Det+ADJ+N, 2) N+PREP+N, N+PREP+N+N, N+PREP +(Det+N) and N+PREP+(Det+ADJ+N), and 3) N+Conj+N or N+N with high degree of frequency. On the other hand, the noun phrase with a complex structure varies from form to form with the exception that not more than one instance of each form has been found in the data.

The second phrase structure, which is found in the film titles data, is verb phrase structure, as shown in table 9.

Table 9 *The Structure of Verb Phrase in the Film Titles*

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
[V+ V]	Knock Knock	1	7.69
[V+N]	Kill Switch	1	7.69
[V+(Det+N)]	Pay the Ghost	3	23.07
[V+PREP+N]	Live by Night	3	23.07
[V+PREP+(Det+N)]	Lost in the Sun	2	15.38
[V+[PossP+(N+Suf)]]	Kill Your Friends	1	7.69
[(V+Suf)+PREP]+[PREP+(Det+N)]	Keeping Up with the Joneses	1	7.69
[ADV+V+ADV]	Better Watch Out	1	7.69
Total		13	100%

Table 9 shows that not many film titles are composed of a verb phrase. The most common English verb phrase structures, V+NP and V+PP, appear in the form of a V+N, V+(Det+N), V+PREP+N and V+PREP+(Det+N). As for the two complex verb phrase structures, V+[PossP+(N+Suf)] and [(V+Suf)+PREP]+[PREP+(Det+N)], only one film title is created by utilizing these two structures. Besides, there is only one film title in which the head verb is modified by an adverb, ADV+V +ADV.

The third phrase structure that is found in the film title is an adjectival phrase. There is only one adjectival phrase film title, “Absolutely Fabulous” (ADV+ADJ), in data. The last phrase structure in the film titles is prepositional phrase, as shown in table 10.

Table 10 The Structure of Prepositional Phrases in the Film Titles

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
[PREP+(Det+N)]	After the 3 Storm	3	50.00
[PREP+(Det+ADJ+N)]	For a Few 1 Bullets	1	16.67
[PREP+(Det+N)+PREP+(Det +N)]	In the 2 Heart of the Sea	2	33.33
Total		6	100%

Table 10 shows that the structure of prepositional phrase in the film titles is similar to a typical English prepositional phrase that only includes a preposition and a noun phrase. In sum, there are four kinds of the phrase structures, noun, verb, adjectival, and prepositional phrases, recognized in data.

Sentence Structure

The last structure found in the film titles is sentence structure. There are two kinds of sentence structures as shown in table 11.

Table 11 The Structure of Sentence in the Film Titles

Structure	Example	Frequency	Percentage
Negative- Imperative	Don't Breath	6	75
Statement	3 Headed Shark 2 Attack	2	25
Total		8	100%

Table 11 shows that the negative imperative sentence (to forbid someone to do something) is often appeared in the film titles. The statement sentence is found only in two titles.

Discussion

This study aims to find out the English complex word structure, phrase structure, and their grammatical functions in film titles. It is found that at the morphological level, the very complex word structures are found in both compounding and affixation. As for compounding, the ADJ+N+N in “Deep Water Horizon” shows a complex noun compound. The (NUM+N)+PREP+V in “48 Hours to live” is an instance of a complex verb compound. As for affixation, the complex structure is found in both derivational and inflectional word formation such as [(Pre+N+Suf+Suf)+N] as in “Avengers Grimm” (A+venge+er+s) + (Grimm). At the syntactic level, the complex structure is found in the noun phrase such as [N + PREP+ (Det + ADJ + N)] in “Alice through the Looking Glass” or [N + N + Conj + (Det + ADJ + N)] in “Professor Marston and the Wonder Woman”.

It is also noteworthy to mention that film titles are named by a noun phrase which reflects the genres that they belong to; action/adventure, animation, comedy, comic book movie, classic film, documentary, drama, family film, fantasy, horror, musicals, romance, romantic comedy, science fiction, thriller/suspense movie. But, on the other hand, a sentence film title such as a negative-imperative sentence is mostly found in the suspense movies. The word formation for a film title is largely related to the plot of the film. Masaë R. et al., (2018) said that each film title is a tool for communicating with the audience, allowing them to guess the tale in the style that the film want to present. Jongthakul P. (2019) also said that it creates interest to moviegoers and film titles can attract audience by recognizing film titles and enabling natural language learning from film titles.

Recommendation

The result of this research can be used as a guide for the study of language knowledge in film, for example, word formation, affixation, English sentence structure. And the knowledge of the word formation in the film titles will help the language learners to have a more meaningful guess of the complex words and predict the plot expressing through these titles beforehand. In addition, the structure of phrases or sentences that appear in movie taglines, tagline usage methods, is another interesting study for the further research.

เอกสารอ้างอิง

Choi, J. (2009). Teaching Vocabulary with Film in the Adult ESL Classroom. (Doctoral dissertation), Caldwell College.

Chomsky, N. (1995). Bare Phrase Structure. In Campos, Héctor and Paula Kempchinsky (eds.). Evolution and Revolution in Linguistic Theory. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

Diez, K. S., Pleban, F. T., & Wood, R. J. (2005). Lights, Camera, Action: integrating popular film in the health classroom. *The Journal of school health*, 75(7), 271.

Jongthakul, P. (2019). The process of naming and signifying of Thai film titles and Thai names of American films. The 14th UTCC National Graduate Research Conference, Bangkok. 286 – 292 [in Thai]

Katamba, F. (2005). English Word Structure, History, Usage. Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk.

Masae R. et al., (2018). An Analysis of Strategies Used in Translation HollywoodMovie Titles From English to Thai. The9th Hatyai National and International Conference. 111 – 118. [in Thai]

Plag, I. (2002). Word-Formation in English. Cambridge University Press.

Stewart, David M. (2006). Film English: Using Films to Teach English. *Electronic Journal of English Education*, National Central University, Taiwan.

Xuedong, S.H.I. (2014). Film Title Translation Methods from the Cultural Difference Aspects. Canadian Academy at Oriental and Occidental Culture.

Yordchim, S. (2012). Inflections in English Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives. *The Journal of The Royal Institute of Thailand*. (4), 135 – 144.

Yousefi, M. (1991). Word Formation Processes in English. [Online], from:
<https://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article1991.php>. {August 1st, 2018}

Yule, G. (2006). The Study of Language. (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Online], from: www.movie2free.com, {August 1st, 2018}