

Nominal Style in Francis Bacon's *Essays**

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1. Nominal and Verbal Style

In the present paper, I would like to investigate one aspect of the vocabulary used in Francis Bacon's *Essays*. What makes me want to take up the topic "Nominal and Verbal Style" is my impression that in the *Essays* Bacon seems to use noun expressions in preference to verb expressions. This tendency is called the "nominal style." The term implies that the writer chooses nouns where he could use verbs to express the same idea. The opposite is the verbal style, which tends to use verbs rather than nouns. For example, in the pair expressions: "when we arrive" versus "at the time of our arrival;" and "If he does that, he will be sorry". versus "In the event of his doing that, he will be sorry," the former cases are verbal, the latter nominal. The same idea can be described in two different ways as shown here, so if there is a tendency to use nominal expressions more than verbal expressions, we can say that it is the nominal style. It seems that Bacon's *Essays* are written in the nominal style. To examine if it is correct, we need an objective standard to measure the nominal quality of the *Essays*. Before going further, I would like to quote a passage as an example of what I judge as the nominal style; this is a passage from essay 27 "Of Friendship." Bacon expounds here the effect of friendship:

A principal Fruit of Friendship, is the Ease and Discharge of the Fulnesse and Swellings of the Heart, which Passions of all kinds doe cause and induce. We know Diseases of Stoppings, and Suffocations, are the most dangerous in the body; And it is not much otherwise in the Minde: You may take Sarza to open the Liver; Steele to open the Spleene; Flower of Sulphur for the Lungs; Castoreum for the Braine; But no Receipt openeth the Heart, but a true Friend: To whom you may impart, Griefes, Joyes, Feares, Hopes, Suspitions, Counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the Heart, to oppresse it, in a kind of Civill Shrift or Confession. (27 Of Friendship" p. 81)

The vocabulary which is focused here are nouns, which are both used in the concrete and abstract sense: Fruit, Friendship, Ease, Discharge, Fulnesse, Swellings, Heat, Passions, Diseases, Stoppings, Suffocations, Minde, Sarza, Liver, Steele, Spleene, Flower, Sulphur, Lungs, Castoreum, Braine, Receipt, Heart, Friend, Griefes, Joyes, Feares, Hopes, Suspitions, Counsels, Heart, Shrift, Confession. It seems that the ratio of nouns to the total number of the words is high. The ratio

is 36 to 111, which means that nearly one third of words in this passage are nouns. However, it cannot be said that this ratio proves the nominal style. Other readers may not feel the same way. After looking and comparing with other texts, the assessment will look similar. What is needed is a method to measure the nominal quality of a text. For example, if we can show the quality by a percentage of nouns, the assessment will become fairer.

Taking this into consideration, the aim of this paper is, first, to characterize the nominal style used in the *Essays* and then to study some of its stylistic features.

2. Measuring nominal quality

When a paired expressions such as "when we arrive" and "at the time of our arrival" are compared, no one will hesitate to say that the former is verbal and the latter nominal. However, the judgment of whether a text has the nominal style or the verbal style is difficult because there is no quantitative standard. The impression of a reader will play a major role. A quantitative measurement may be possible, if the several problems Rulon Wells points out can be cleared. He raises three main issues:

- (1) What is a noun? Pronouns and adjectives often act like nouns. Shall a noun phrase count as a single noun? For example, shall "the foot of the mountain" be reckoned as containing one noun or two?
- (2) What is a verb? Are nonfinite forms (infinitives, gerunds, participles) verbs, nouns, both, or neither? How should a periphrastic verb like "will do" or a copula "to be" be dealt with?
- (3) Could it be possible to delimit noun and verb; shall a Noun-Word Quotient and a Verb-Word Quotient be calculated? By these two quotients, which cannot exceed 1.0 and will only equal 1.0 if there are no other parts of speech, we can have an index of noun-verb proportion of a text. (214-15)

Wells does not go further to solve these issues, neither does he suggest an idea of measuring nominal quality. To assess the nominal character of the *Essays*, we need some index by which we can compare other texts, both of Bacon and of other authors. First, we have to devise a rule to classify each word into the nominal or the verbal group. As Wells says, we first have to determine a way to classify pronouns and adjectives, and also how to deal with nonfinite verbs and periphrastic verbs. I want to propose a rule of analysis of a given text, which is based on the explanation of "nominal style" in *Seibido's Dictionary of English Linguistics* (s.v. "Nominal style"): (1) As a unit of analysis I take an individual word, so that, a phrase or a periphrastic verb is ignored but each component becomes an object of analysis; for example the idiom "in secret" is analyzed not as an idiomatic whole functioning as an adverb but is analyzed as an individual component; therefore, "in" as a preposition and "secret" as a noun; (2) I classify each word into the following three groups, nominal, verbal and functional. The standard is the function of a target word in the context; if it is near a noun it is nominal and if it is near a verb, verbal. Therefore, an adjective is judged as a nominal word when it is a modifier of some noun, but as a verbal when it is a predicate of some verb; and an adverb is judged as a verbal; (3) the functional group are the grammatical words. These are words which belong to "closed classes," (Cf. Quirk et. al. 67), including prepositions, determiners, modal verbs, and primary verbs like "be, have, do." I will include numerals and interjections in the same group. By applying this rule, it is now possible for us to count the number of words in each group, nominal, verbal and functional, and thus to calculate the ratio of each group.

How is the above rule applied to the former quotation from the *Essays*? The classification

by using different kinds of underlines is showed here: a solid line for a nominal word, a broken line for a verbal word, and no underline for a functional word.:

A principal Fruit of Frendship, is the Ease and Discharge of the Fulnesse and Swellings of the Heart, which Passions of all kinds doe cause and induce. We know Diseases of Stoppings, and Suffocations, are the most dangerous in the body; And it is not much otherwise in the Minde: You may take Sarza to open the Liver; Steele to open the Spleene; Flower of Sulphur for the Lungs; Castoreum for the Braine; But no Receipt openeth the Heart, but a true Frend: To whom you may impart, Griefes, Joyes, Feares, Hopes, Suspitions, Counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the Heart, to opresse it, in a kind of Civill Shrift or Confession. (27 Of Frendship" p. 81)

The ratio and percentage of each group become:

Nominal words:	40	(36%)
Verbal words:	14	(13%)
<u>Functional words:</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>(51%)</u>
Total	111	(100%)

By applying this method, the nominal and verbal quality can be shown numerically. The following table is the result of five texts: first three are from three essays in Bacon's *Essays*, the fourth one is *The Advancement of Learning*, which is Bacon's theory to promote science; the fifth one is *The Booke of Psalmes* from the Authorized Version of the Bible. The last three texts are from present day conversation. In the text column, the number after the text name shows the total number of words examined for analysis, but Latin words are not counted; the numbers in the other columns are the number of nominal or verbal words followed by its percentage among the total number of words:

Text	Nominal	Verbal	Functional
(a) Essay 9 "Of Envie" (1668 words)	395 (24 %)	234 (14%)	1039 (62%)
(b) Essay 25 "Of Dispatch" (590 words)	162 (27%)	76 (13%)	352 (60%)
(c) Essay 50 "Of Studies" (503 words)	136 (27%)	84 (17 %)	283 (56%)
(d) <i>The Advancement of Learning</i> (from the beginning of Book 2, pp 169-73: 2044 words)	594 (29%)	304 (15%)	1146 (56%)
(e) <i>The Booke of Psalmes</i> (from Chapters 1-10, 2251 words)	504 (22%)	333 (15%)	1414 (63%)
(f) "Tell Me about It" (from <i>The Voice of EJ</i> , 2003 Vol. 33, No. 10: 415 words)	93 (22%)	90 (22%)	232 (56%)
(g) "Living in Madrid" (from <i>Headway Pre-intermediate: Teacher's Book</i> , p. 123: 378 words)	81 (21%)	61 (16%)	236 (63%)
(h) "Interview with a musician" (Ibid. p.124: 463 words)	96 (21%)	74 (16)	293 (63%)

From the table, we can see that the nominal ratios in the *Essays* and *The Advancement of Learning* are a little higher compared with *The Booke of Psalmes* or present day conversation (f-h). The style in *The Booke of Psalmes* is said to be that of everyday English in those days, and the last three texts (f, g, h) reflect the everyday English of the present day. In the verbal

column, we cannot see any particular difference between them although (f) has a little high percentage. However, if we compare the gap between the nominal and the verbal columns, there is a clear difference between Bacon's texts and the others. In each of Bacon's texts, the gap is more than 10%; the biggest is 14% in (b) and (d). In comparison, the other texts from (e) to (h) have the gap of less than 7%. It is the difference of these gaps that makes us feel the strong nominal style when we read the *Essays*. In the former quotation from the essay "Of Friendship," this gap was 23%, which made us feel the strong nominal style.

3. Abstract and generic nouns

As we have seen the high percentage of nominal words used in the *Essays*, now I will examine the semantic feature of the nouns used. Let me quote a passage from the essay "Of Truth," in which Bacon argues that humans prefer lies to truths in one half of their nature; but in the other half of their nature they have sincere respect of truths (Underlines are mine.):

But howsoever these things are thus, in mens depraved Judgements, and Affections, yet Truth, which onely doth judge it selfe, teacheth, that the Inquirie of Truth, which is the Love-making, or Wooing of it; The knowledge of Truth, which is the Presence of it; and the Beleefe of Truth, which is the Enjoying of it; is the Sovereaigne Good of humane Nature. (1 "Of Truth" p. 8)

There are two other nouns which I have not underlined, "things" and "men." Borrowing the grammatical terms for noun classes from Quirk et al. (247), they are so-called count concrete nouns and therefore different from those underlined which are so-called count or non-count abstract nouns. If we look at the underlined nouns individually, we notice that they have a root verb or adjective from which they are derived. The table shows the derivation:

<Derivative>	<Root>
Judgements	judge
Affections	affect
Truth	true
Inquirie	inquire
Love-making	make love
Wooing	woo
knowledge	know
Presence	present
Beleefe	believe
Enjoying	enjoy
Good	good
Nature	n.a.

Thus, the character of these nouns are abstractness which comes from the sense of their root words. From the table a question could be asked; why does Bacon not use the root forms? He could express his ideas by using verbal expressions, for instance, "to inquire truth" instead of "the Inquirie of Truth," "to make love with or woo it" instead of "the Love-making, or Wooing of it," "that it is present" instead of "the Presence of it," etc. It might not be incorrect to say that Bacon did not choose the verbal diction for his composition.

When we look at a nominal phrase, that is, a larger unit, instead of an individual noun, it is again a general or abstract expression, having no particularity or concreteness. Look at the

following table of noun phrases from the above quotation, this time, in the form of a phrase:

mens depraved Judgements, and Affections
 the Inquirie of Truth
 the Love-making, or Wooing of it
 The knowledge of Truth
 the Presence of it
 the Beleefe of Truth
 the Enjoying of it
 the Sovereigne Good of humane Nature

These phrases are all nominal expressions describing the work of men's mind; none of them describes a concrete case of a particular person. Bacon is describing either conditions or a quality of human mind in general such as "mens depraved Judgements, and Affections," "the Sovereigne Good of humane Nature," or he describes the mental attitude such as "the Inquirie of Truth," "the Love-making, or Wooing of it," and "the Enjoying of it." Thus these are wholly inductive statements derived from his observation of many men. Without quoting any particular cases which he has seen, he abruptly mentions abstraction and generalization which he has arrived at as a result of his observation. The following quotations are some examples of similar noun phrases from other essays. (Underlines are used here to identify the nominal phrase):

(a) Nominal words or phrases in the generic sense

Groanes and Convulsions, and a discoloured Face, and Friends weeping, and Blackes, and Obsequies, and the like, shew Death Terrible. (2 "Of Death" p. 9)

Unmarried Men are best Friends; best Masters; best Servants; but not alwayes best Subjects; For they are light to runne away; And almost all Fugitives are of that Condition. (8 "Of Marriage And Single Life" p. 25)

Wives are young Mens Mistresses; Companions for middle Age; and old Mens Nurses. (8 "Of Marriage And Single Life" p. 26)

Men in Great Place, are thrice Servants: Servants of the Sovereigne or State, Servants of Fame; and Servants of Businesse. (11 "Of Great Place" p. 33)

An Ant is a wise Creature for it Selfe; But it is a shrewd Thing, in an Orchard, or Garden. And certainly, Men that are great Lovers of Themselves, waste the Publique. (23 "Of Wisdome for a Mans selfe" p. 73)

Plantations are amongst Ancient, Primitive, and Heroicall Workes. (33 "Of Plantations" p. 106)

There are no worse Instruments, then these Generall Contrivers of Sutes: For they are but a Kinde of Poyson and Infection to Publique Proceedings. (49 "Of Sutours" p. 152)

Cursed (saith the Law) is hee that removeth the Land-marke. The Mislaiier of a Meere Stone is to blame. But it is the Unjust Judge, that is the Capitall Remover of

Land-markes, when he Defineth amisse of Lands and Propertie. (56 "Of Judicature" p. 166)

(b) Nominal words or phrases in the abstract sense

It is good, in Discourse, and Speech of Conversation, to vary, and entermingle Speech, of the present Occasion with Arguments; Tales with Reasons; Asking of Questions, with telling of Opinions; and Jest with Earnest: For it is a dull Thing to Tire, and, as we say now, to Jade, any Thing too farre. (32 "Of Discourse" p. 104)

Let us now speake of the Inconveniencies of Counsell, and of the Remedies. The Inconveniencies, that have been noted in calling, and using Counsell, are three. First, the Revealing of Affaires, whereby they become lesse Secret. Secondly, the Weakening of the Authority of Princes, as if they were lesse of Themselves. Thirdly, the Danger of being unfaithfully counselled, and more for the good of them that counsell, then of him that is counselled. (20 "Of Counsell" pp. 64-65)

Ambition is like Choler: Which is an Humour, that maketh Men Active, Earnest, Full of Alacritie, and Stirring, if it be not stopped. (36 "Of Ambition" p. 115)

Nature is Often Hidden; Sometimes Overcome; Seldome Extinguished. Force maketh Nature more violent in the Returne: Doctrine and Discourse maketh Nature lesse Importune: But Custome onely doth alter and subdue Nature. (38 "Of Nature in Men" pp. 118-19)

Beauty is as Summer-Fruits, which are easie to corrupt, and cannot last: And, for the most part, it makes a dissolute Youth, and an Age a little out of countenance: But yet certainly againe, if it light well, it maketh Vertues, shine, and Vices blush. (43 "Of Beauty" p. 133)

Houses are built to Live in, and not to Looke on: Therefore let Use bee preferred before Uniformitie: Except where both may be had. (45 "Of Building" p. 135)

In the Youth of a State, Armes doe flourish: In the Middle Age of a State, Learning: And then both of them together for a time: In the Declining Age of a State, Mechanicall Arts and Merchandize. (58 "Of Vicissitude of Things" p. 176)

These nominal words or phrases show how Bacon's description is full of generic and abstract terms. This tendency of Bacon's, that is, the quality of being abstract and general rather than being particular and concrete, seems to be a unique feature of the *Essays*. The same tendency can be seen not only in the nominal nouns and phrases as were given above but also in other types of nominal form; that is, in infinitives, "nominal *-ing* clauses" (Quirk et al. 1063), or in phrases which have a relative clause. Because these forms are composed of several words which include at least a verb, they do not always agree with the character of the nominal style. However, in terms of Bacon's tendency of seeing things generically, they can be viewed in the same way. Here are examples, which are classified into those which express generic persons (c), and those which express abstract notions (d). (Phrases to be noted are underlined):

(c) generic persons using a relative clause

He that dies in an earnest Pursuit, is like one that is wounded in hot Bloud; who, for the time, scarce feelles the Hurt; And therefore, a Minde fixed, and bent upon somewhat that is good, doth avert the Dolors of Death: But above all, beleeve it, the sweetest Canticle is, *Nunc dimittis*; when a Man hath obtained worthy Ends, and Expectations. (2 "Of Death" p. 11)

They that are the first Raisers of their Houses, are most Indulgent towards their Children; Beholding them, as the Continuance, not only of their kinds, but of their Worke; And so both Children, and Creatures. (7 "Of Parents and Children" p. 23)

He that hath Wife and Children, hath given Hostages to Fortune; For they are Impediments, to great Enterprises, either of Vertue, or Mischiefe. (8 "Of Marriage And Single Life" pp. 24-25)

A man, that hath no vertue in himselfe, ever envieth Vertue in others. (9 "Of Envy" p. 27)

To give moderate Liberty, for Griefes, and Discontentments to evaporate, (so it be without too great Insolency or Bravery) is a safe Way. For he that turneth the Humors backe, and maketh the Wound bleed inwards, endangereth maligne Ulcers, and pernicious Impostumations. (15 "Of Seditious And Troubles" p. 48)

He that travaileth into a Country, before he hath some Entrance into the Language, goeth to Schoole, and not to Travaile. (18 "Of Travaile" p. 56)

Certainly, who hath a State to repaire, may not despise small Things: And commonly, it it lesse dishonourable, to abridge pettie Charges, then to stoope to pettie Gettings. (28 "Of Expencc" p. 88)

(d) abstract notions using an infinitive and a nominal *-ing* clause
<infinitive>

To be Master of the Sea, is an Abridgement of a Monarchy. (29 "Of the true Greatnesse of Kigdomes and Estates" p. 97)

To be free minded, and cheerefully disposed, at Houres of Meat, and of Sleep, and of Exercise, is one of the best Precepts of Long lasting. (30 "Of Regiment of Health" p. 100)

For their [kings'] Nobles; To keepe them at a distance, it is not amisse; But to depresse them, may make a King more Absolute, but lesse Safe; And lesse able to performe any thing, that he desires. (19 "Of Empire" p. 62)

Nay, it were better, to meet some Dangers halfe way, though they come nothing neare, then to keepe too long a watch, upon their Approaches; For if a Man watch too long, it is odds, he will fall asleepe. On the other side, to be deceived, with too long Shadowes, (As some have been, when the Moone was low, and shone on their Enemies backe) And so to shoot off before the time; Or to teach dangers to come on, by over early Buckling towards them, is another Extreme. (21 "Of Delayes" pp. 68-69)

<nominal *-ing* clause>

Certainly, the Politique and Artificiall Nourishing, and Entertaining of Hopes, and Carrying Men from Hopes to Hopes; is one of the best Antidotes, against the Poyson of Discontentments. (15 "Of Seditious And Troubles" p. 48)

Generally, the Dividing and Breaking of all Factions, and Combinations that are adverse to the State, and setting them at distance, or at least distrust amongst themselves, is not one of the worst Remedies. (15 "Of Seditious And Troubles" p. 49)

Things will have their first, or second Agitation; If they be not tossed upon the Arguments of Counsell, they will be tossed upon the Waves of Fortune; And be full of Inconstancy, doing, and undoing, like the Reeling of a drunken man. (20 "Of Counsell" p. 63)

Reading maketh a Full Man; Conference a Ready Man; And Writing an Exact Man. (50 "Of Studies" p. 153)

These are other ways to express generic or abstract notions. The difference between groups (a) (b) and groups (c) (d) is that the latter groups are like clauses, and therefore the sense is felt more active, while the former is semantically similar to a single noun and the sense is felt more static. We do not know why and when Bacon uses one way of description or another; he may decide this by random choice, for some rhetorical reason or for other reasons. At one time he writes "Unmarried Men," which is a phrase form, but at another time he writes "He that hath Wife and Children," which is a noun phrase but has a relative clause; both expressions, however, express a generic idea.

4. Conclusion

The statistical comparison has shown that the *Essays* is written in the nominal style. And the semantic investigation of the nominal expressions has indicated that they are characterized by the abundant use of generic and abstract nouns or noun phrases. To conclude the argument, we have to think of the relationship between the nominal style and the *Essays's* literary style which is generally judged as the "gnomic style" (Routh, IV. 348). Routh, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, describes the feature of the *Essays* as "The true importance of his style is to be found in its pregnancy" (ibid, 346). "Nominal" is a grammatical term, while "gnomic" is a semantic term although it may also imply a rhetorical meaning. These two terms therefore indicate two different aspects of the same object; one is that of grammar and the other is that of sense or implication. Then, how are these two terms closely related? Jespersen seems to answer the question. In *The Philosophy of Grammar*, he compares the following two sentences: one written in the nominal style and the other in the verbal style:

Nominal style:

The Doctor's extremely quick arrival and uncommonly careful examination of the patient brought about her very speedy recovery.

Verbal style:

The Doctor arrived extremely quickly and examined the patient uncommonly carefully; she recovered very speedily. (137)

And his semantic analysis of the two styles is:

When we express by means of nouns what is generally expressed by finite verbs, our language becomes not only more abstract, but more abstruse, owing among other things to the fact that in the verbal substantive some of the life-giving elements of the verb (time, mood, person) disappear. (139)

Jespersen precisely explains what happens in the *Essays*. Bacon's diction is quite similar to "The Doctor's extremely quick arrival and uncommonly careful examination of the patient" and "her very speedy recovery," where the main words are abstract nouns: "arrival" and "recovery." The difficulty which we find in reading the *Essays*, is explained by his remark, "Our language becomes not only more abstract, but more abstruse." This explains the "gnomic style" of the *Essays*, for abstract or abuse quality frequently leads to a gnomic expression. When Bacon writes "Studies serve for Delight, for Ornament, and for Ability." in the very beginning of the essay "Of Studies," any reader will be at a loss as to how to interpret from this short aphoristic sentence. The difficulty comes from the abstract nouns such as "Studies, Delight, Ornament, Ability." By reading the passage which follows, the reader can grasp the meaning:

Their Chiefe Use for Delight, is in Privatnesse and Retiring; For Ornament, is in Discourse; And for Ability, is in the Judgement and Disposition of Businesse. For Expert Men can Execute, and perhaps Judge of particulars, one by one; But the generall Counsels, and the Plots, and Marshalling of Affaires. come best from those that are Learned. (50 "Of Studies" p. 152)

Because a lot of noun phrases are used again in the explanatory passage, the difficulty to clearly understand the first sentence still remains, but the explanation still helps. The nominal style can be regarded as one of the elements to create the *Essays's* literary style.

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