

A study of adjectives as post-modifiers in names of Ghanaian constituencies and districts

Harry Milton Hayford 

 University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

 hayfordharry@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study investigates the usage of adjectives as post-modifiers in administrative names in Ghana. In English grammar, adjectives typically function as pre-modifiers. Drawing on Braj Kachru's Concentric Circle of English and the framework of World Englishes, the study employs a mixed-method analysis of 276 constituencies and 261 districts in Ghana. The data reveals that 108 constituencies and 118 districts utilise post-modifier adjectives. The study finds that this naming convention is a direct inheritance from British colonial administrative practices. Historical evidence shows that post-modification in administrative nomenclature dates back to Old English, Celtic, and Norman French influences and is preserved in modern British parliamentary divisions to maintain the primacy of the central place name. This pattern is also observed in other Inner Circle (Canada) and Outer Circle (Nigeria, India, Singapore) varieties. The study concludes that the usage of post-modifier adjectives in Ghanaian administrative names is not a grammatical error or a localised nativisation, but a systemic feature of a globalised administrative English register.

Keywords

constituency toponym, districts, Ghana

How to cite this article in APA format:

Hayford, H. M. (2026). A study of adjectives as post-modifiers in names of Ghanaian constituencies and districts. *Linguistics Initiative*, 6(2), 315-323. <https://doi.org/10.53696/27753719.62403>

Introduction

According to Trudgill (2000), dialects or varieties of a language are shaped by geographical, social, and cultural factors. English language has developed distinct varieties such as British English, American English, Australian English, Singaporean English and Indian English (Jenkins, 2003). These varieties are mutually intelligible, and each has its own distinct phonological, grammatical, and lexical features. The concept of World Englishes has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of globalisation and linguistic diversity.

Kachru (1985, 1991) argues that English around the world can be grouped into three. These groupings are inner circle (native speakers), outer circle (second language speakers, mostly former colonies of Britain) and expanding circle (speakers of English in territories where it is not an official language). Outer circle users have English as an official language aside their native languages due to British colonisation and multilingual nature of their native languages. The Republic of Ghana falls into the outer circle category. Ghana uses English as an official language. All the three arms of government in Ghana use English as their official language. Aside English, Ghanaians use native languages in their day to day activities. However these languages are only used in informal settings.

English originated from England. It spread around the world due to British colonisation. The Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana creates three arms of government. These are judiciary, legislature and executive. The legislature consists of 276 members of parliament. These members of parliament represent particular constituencies. Local governance in Ghana revolves around districts. Chief Executives of the districts (sometimes called metropolitan or municipal depending on size) administer these areas on behalf of the president, who heads the executive. There are six metropolitan assemblies in Ghana. The others are mostly districts and municipals. Ghana's current constitution does not allow chief executives of districts to be directly elected by citizens. Rather, the president appoints these individuals. The names of Ghanaian constituencies and districts follow English Language noun phrase structure. Adjectives in these names occur after the head word. This practice violates English rules of grammar. A beginner or new learner of the English Language will obviously wonder why. This is because he or she would have learnt that adjectives in a noun phrase come before a noun, not after. No scholarly work has explored this practice. This study investigates the reasons why Ghanaian constituencies and districts have their adjectives coming after the noun. The study will also investigate this feature to determine whether it is a feature of Ghanaian English. The study is relevant for studies on varieties of the English Language.

Noun Phrase

The noun phrase (NP) can be defined as a grammatical unit centered on a noun or a noun-equivalent element and is one of the most central and extensively studied units in English grammar (Quirk et al., 1985; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Thakur, 2007; Yule, 2020). It functions as a core constituent in clause structure, typically serving as subject, object, or complement. A detailed understanding of noun phrase structure is therefore essential for syntactic analysis, discourse interpretation, and applied linguistic research.

Quirk et al. (1985) posit that the English noun phrase exhibits a high degree of structural complexity and flexibility, allowing for dense informational packaging. This section of the study provides a systematic discussion of the English noun phrase, focusing on the head noun, pre-modifiers, and post-modifiers.

According to (Quirk et al., 1985; Thakur, 2007), a noun phrase typically consists of three functional components:

1. Pre-modifier(s)
2. Head
3. Post-modifier(s)

This structure can be represented schematically as: Pre-modifier(s) + Head + Post-modifier(s)

Not all noun phrases contain all components. For example:

small books (pre-modifier + Head)

chain on the floor (Head + Post-modifier)

old books on the shelf (Pre-modifier + Head + Post-modifier)

Yule (2020) emphasises that noun phrases serve as “naming expressions” and play a crucial role in reference and meaning construction in discourse.

The headword, or head noun, is the central element of the noun phrase. It determines the grammatical and semantic properties of the entire phrase. Quirk et al. (1985) state that the head noun controls: number (singular/plural), countability, gender (where relevant), selection of determiners and agreement with verbs.

An example of the role of the headword in subject-verb agreement is:

The child is playing.

The children are playing.

Here, the head noun in each sentence (child or children) determines subject-verb agreement. *Child* is singular and agrees with *is*. *Children*, a plural noun, agrees with *are*,

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) further argue that the head noun licenses dependents and defines the syntactic category of the phrase as a whole.

Pre-modification refers to elements that occur before the head noun and modify its meaning. Pre-modifiers are typically adjectives, nouns, participles, or genitives. According to Quirk et al. (1985), pre-modifiers are characteristically attributive and descriptive, providing immediate classification or evaluation of the head noun.

Adjectives are the most common pre-modifiers: *beautiful painting*, *economic policy*. Multiple adjectives may occur as pre-modifiers in a noun phrase. An example is: *small wooden chair*. Nouns also function as modifiers of other nouns. Examples of nouns serving as pre-modifiers of noun phrases are: *research paper*, *plastic ball*, *wine bottle*. Yule (2020) notes that noun-noun combinations are especially productive in English, though they often pose challenges for second-language learners due to their implicit semantic relations.

Again, ing and ed/en participial nominal clauses may act as pre-modifiers. Examples are: *boiling kettle*, *broken window*, *ironing board*, *painted tables*, *polished shoes*. These forms blur the boundary between verbal and adjectival categories, a point emphasised in functional grammar.

Post-modification refers to elements occurring after the head noun. Post-modifiers are generally more explicit and structurally complex than pre-modifiers. Post-modification allows for the addition of extensive descriptive detail (Quirk et al., 1985; Thakur, 2007). Prepositional phrases are the most frequent post-modifiers: Examples of prepositional phrase usage in post-

modification are listed below: *books on the table* , *students in the classroom*, *table beside me*. These typically express location, possession, or association.

Moreover, relative clauses also serve as post-modifiers and provide detailed information about the head noun. Examples are: *woman who lives next door* , *theory that he proposed*

Non-finite clauses also serve as post- modifiers. Examples are: *decision to resign* , *men standing by the door* , *houses demolished by the government*. Such clauses contribute to the informational density characteristic of academic prose.

The thorough analysis of English noun phrase above shows that English rules of grammar do not allow adjectives to serve as post-modifiers of noun phrases. The discussion on noun phrase will play a critical role in the analysis of data.

Research Methodology

This study utilised a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of post-modification in Ghanaian administrative names. Data on constituencies were collected from the website of the Parliament of Ghana. On the other hand, data on the districts were collected from the Ministry of Local Governance in Ghana. All districts and constituencies in Ghana were carefully looked at to aid in the identification of constituencies / districts that have adjectives appearing as post-modifiers.

The quantitative phase served as the foundation, involving a systematic audit of all national constituencies and districts. By numbering the occurrences of post-modifying adjectives, the study established the frequency and distribution of these naming patterns across Ghana. This gives the study a high degree of statistical breadth and objectivity.

Complementing this, the qualitative phase involved a descriptive linguistic analysis of the identified names. This allowed for a deeper exploration of the functions of the adjectives used. A mixed-methods approach is justified because while the quantitative data identifies how often these structures occur, the qualitative analysis explains how they function within the socio-linguistic context of Ghana. This dual approach ensures that the study is both statistically robust and linguistically insightful.

Data Analysis

This section of the study identifies constituencies and districts that have post-modifier adjectives. Then, an analysis is made based on English noun phrase structure, influence from Ghanaian Languages and occurrence of post-modifier adjectives in other varieties of English.

From the data analysis, there are 108 constituencies that have post-modifier adjectives. The table below numbers the occurrence of post-modifier adjectives in both districts and constituency names. The analysis also reveals that there are 118 district names that use adjectives as post-modifiers. The table also gives information about names that do not use adjectives and names that use adjectives as pre-modifiers.

	Without modifiers	With pre-modifiers	With post-modifiers
Districts	127	16	118
Constituencies	160	8	108

Examples of constituencies that have adjectives as post-modifiers are: Nkoranza North, Nkoranza South, Pru East, Pru West, Sene East, Sene West, Techiman South, Techiman North, Agona East, Agona West, Assin Central and Assin North.

Examples of district names that use post-modifier adjectives are: Ga East, Ga West, Okaikwei North, Ablekuma North, Ga North, Tema West, Nanumba North, Nanumba South, Krachi East, Nkwanta South, Bawku West, Builsa North, Builsa South, Bolgatanga East, Sissala East, Sissala West, Wa East, Wa West, Afadzato South and Akatsi North.

From a grammatical point of view, these constituencies and districts have names that violate rules of English grammar. Noun phrases in English use adjectives only as pre- modifiers and not as post-modifiers. *Gomoa West* should be *West Gomoa*. This is the standard.

Influence from Ghanaian Languages

It can be argued that this practice of naming constituencies and districts with post- modifier adjectives can be from the influence of Ghanaian Languages. Most languages in Ghana use adjectives as post-modifiers (Ameka, 1991; Bodomo, 1997; Ameka, 2001; Amfo et al, 2007; Amfo, 2010; Inusah, 2015; Ollennu, 2017(a); Ollenu, 2017(b); Appah, 2019; Nyame et al., 2022).

Asante Twi and Fante , mutually intelligible , are widely spoken by virtually every Ghanaian. Akan, just like other Ghanaian Languages, does not use adjectives as pre-modifiers. Rather, adjectives in Akan are post-modifiers. The English noun phrase, *white dress* becomes: *atar fita* (Asante Twi); *atar fufuw* (Fante). It can be argued that adjectives serving as post-modifiers in administrative names is influenced from Akan and other Ghanaian Languages. Thus, this is a feature of Ghanaian English. Kachru (1985) and Schneider (2003) argue that English undergoes changes in certain geographical areas and these changes create varieties of the language. In the example above, *atar* (dress) which is the headword of the noun phrase appears before the adjective. The adjective is a post-modifier. The adjectives “*fita*” or “*fufuw*” appear after the headword. It is logical then to conclude that the usage of adjectives as post-modifiers in Ghanaian constituency and districts names is a feature of Ghanaian English and not a grammatical error. It can be argued that Ghanaian English has undergone nativisation and has incorporated usage of adjectives as post-modifiers from Ghanaian Languages.

Inherited from British Parliament

Though it can be argued that Ghanaian Languages’ influence explains why constituencies and districts in Ghana use adjectives for post-modification, the literature provides contrary information. The literature shows that earliest English parliamentary constituencies emerged in the thirteenth century, when the Model Parliament of 1295 initiated the practice of summoning representatives from counties and certain boroughs. These units were already well-established territorial entities and their names passed into parliamentary use unchanged (Prestwich 1992). Thus, early constituency names were not constructed labels but inheritances of medieval administrative geography (Maddicott , 2010).

These names initially required no qualifiers but subdivision arose which necessitated the use of qualifiers (Butler, 1963; O’Gorman ,1989). As urban centres grew, many towns become new constituencies. These new divisions required internal geographical qualifiers to distinguish them. Thus , Liverpool Borough became Liverpool West Derby and Liverpool Toxteth. The introduction of subdivisions made the earlier single-name convention insufficient for electoral and administrative clarity. Thus, usage of adjectives as post-modifiers became the norm for identifying divisions without disturbing the primacy of the central place name.

Currently, the default practice in the United Kingdom is that the primary geographical reference—usually the main settlement or local authority—comes first, while subdivisions or directional indicators appear afterward. This is why there are constituencies like Leeds North East, Altrincham and Sale West, Bolton North East, Bolton West, Bournemouth East, Bournemouth West and Glasgow Southside. This convention maintains continuity with older constituency names, while allowing for the increasing complexity of modern electoral geography.

In Old English and Celtic languages, post-modifier adjectives were common, reflecting the linguistic heritage of place names in Britain (Clark, 1992). Though Modern English does not use adjectives as post-modifiers, it inherited the practice from Old English and this practice is used during the naming of administrative areas.

Also, the Norman Conquest introduced French linguistic patterns, including post-modifier adjectives, which persisted in administrative and formal contexts (Baugh & Cable, 2013; Crystal, 2019). Aside Old English influence, French influence played a role in the usage of adjectives as post-modifiers in constituency names. Current English words that copied French adjective post-modification are : attorney general , court martial, heir apparent.

Even new constituencies created in the 2023 Review in the United Kingdom followed this convention. An example is Doncaster East. Gelling & Cole (2000) note that such forms tend to appear in legal or administrative contexts. The analysis shows that adjectives serving as post-modifiers in administrative toponyms are normal in English language.

Nevertheless, there exist constituencies in the House of Commons that use pre-modifier adjectives. Examples are: West Suffolk, East Renfrewshire. Thus for administrative purposes, English language allows noun phrases to either use adjectives either as pre-modifiers or post-modifiers. Examples of pre-modifier adjectives usage in Ghana are: Lower Manya, Upper Manya, West Gonja , Central Tongu , Upper Manya, Upper West Akim, East Mamprusi , West Mamprusi and Central Gonja. As is done in UK, Ghana also uses both post-modifier and pre-modifier adjectives for names of administrative areas in the country.

Comparison Amongst Varieties of English

Data from the US House of Representatives show that there is no usage of adjectives for post-modification for names of areas or constituencies. Rather, they bear the name districts. Examples are: 12th District of California, 7th District of Texas, 14th District of New York, 5th District of Florida, 3rd District of Illinois, 6th District of Georgia, 1st District of Arizona, 10th District of Pennsylvania, 13th District of Ohio and 7th District of Washington.

For Canadian English, an inner circle variety, the data show that adjectives are used for post-modification of constituency names. Examples are: Don Valley North, Don Valley West, Milton West and Burnaby Central.

The data show that outer circle varieties like Indian English, Nigerian English and Singaporean English also use adjectives for post-modification for their constituencies. For Nigerian English, examples are: Kaduna North, Kaduna South, Lagos East, Lagos West, Oyo Central, Anambra South. For Indian English, examples are: Chennai Central, Mumbai South, Bangalore Rural, Ahmedabad East, Tripura West. For Singaporean English, examples are: Jurong Central, Jurong East–Bukit Batok, Sembawang West, West Coast–Jurong West.

In Liberia due to their history with USA, they also use numbering for their constituencies. Liberian constituency names function as noun phrases with a zero determiner. Structurally, they

consist of a county or region-based proper noun head followed by a numerical post-modifier, like Bong-3, Montserrado-11. This resembles USA's congressional district naming pattern.

The data show that usage of post-modifier adjectives in names of administrative regions or areas is common in most varieties of English. Thus, post-modifier adjective usage is a common feature of the various varieties of English.

Results

The study confirms that a significant portion of Ghanaian administrative names—108 out of 276 constituencies and 118 out of 261 districts—utilise post-modifier adjectives. Examples are: Asunafo North, Gomoa West, Krachi West and Ga West. In Standard English, adjectives typically function as pre-modifiers. While these structures appear to violate the general rules of English grammar taught to beginners, they align with a specific administrative register used by English Language speakers globally for geographical subdivision. Although Modern English typically favours adjectives as pre-modifiers, the literature shows that the use of post-modifier adjectives in administrative names does not constitute a grammatical error.

The study finds that the noun + adjective pattern is a direct inheritance from British Colonial Administration. UK parliamentary names like Leeds North East or Bolton West established a precedent where the primary location remains the *head* and the directional qualifier is added as a *post-modifier* to maintain administrative clarity. This convention allows for the creation of new subdivisions (Doncaster East in 2023) without changing the primary identifier in legal records. The study demonstrates that post-modifier adjective usage is a common thread across inner and outer circle varieties of English: Post-modifier adjective usage occurs across inner-circle (UK, Canada) and outer-circle (Ghana, Nigeria, India, Singapore) varieties of English. This indicates that the pattern is systemic and conventional, not localised deviation.

Despite the dominance of post-modification, the study notes that Ghana also utilises pre-modifier adjectives for certain administrative areas. Examples: *Lower Manya*, *Upper West Akim*, *East Mamprusi*.

American English avoids adjectival post-modification by using numerical district labels, a pattern also adopted in Liberia. This difference reflects administrative convention rather than grammatical constraint.

The analysis showed that the prevalent usage of post-modifier adjectives in the names of constituencies and districts in Ghana is not due to influence of indigenous languages. Though in Akan and other Ghanaian Languages the headword of a noun phrase consistently precedes the adjective, post-modifier adjective usage for administrative purposes in Ghana is an inherited practice from British colonisation. Indigenous languages did not influence this pattern. Rather, it is a coincidence. The analysis also shows that pre-modifier adjectives are also used in naming administrative areas in Ghana.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the occurrence of post-modifier adjectives in the names of Ghanaian constituencies and districts, a pattern that appears to contradict the canonical rule of English noun phrase structure which restricts adjectives to pre-modifier position. The study has conclusively proved that the usage of post-modifier adjectives in naming constituencies and districts in Ghana does not violate English grammar. Rather, it is common among a number of

English speaking countries. This is because Modern English inherited Old English's usage of post-modifier adjectives. Also, this influence is also from Celtic languages and the Norman Control of England.

The analysis reveals that a substantial proportion of Ghana's administrative units employ adjectives as post-modifiers. Historical evidence from British parliamentary naming conventions shows that post-modifier adjectives have been used since the medieval period to indicate subdivision while preserving the primacy of the core place name (Prestwich, 1992; Maddicott, 2010).

While Ghanaian Languages employ post-modifier adjectives, the study finds that indigenous language influence does not adequately explain the Ghanaian data. Rather, the pattern observed in Ghanaian constituency and district names is best understood as an inheritance from British colonial administrative practices. The fact that similar post-modifier adjective structures occur across both inner-circle varieties (British and Canadian English) and outer-circle varieties (Nigerian, Indian, Singaporean, and Ghanaian English) supports the conclusion that this is a systemic feature of administrative English rather than a localised deviation or result of influence from indigenous languages.

References

- Ameka, F. K. (1991). *Ewe: Its grammatical constructions and illocutionary devices* (Doctoral dissertation, Australian National University).
- Ameka, F. K. (2001). Ideophones and the nature of the adjective word class in Ewe. In *Typological Studies in Language* (Vol. 44, pp. 25–48). John Benjamins.
- Amfo N. A, Boateng S. & Otoo Y.A. (2007). A Comparative Study of the Morphosyntactic Properties of Adjectives in Three Kwa Languages. In *Studies of the Languages of the Volta Basin. Proceedings of The Annual Colloquium of Trondheim Project 2006*.
- Amfo, N. A. A. (2010). Noun phrase conjunction in Akan: The grammaticalization path. *Pragmatics*, 20(1), 27–41.
- Appah, C. K. I. (2019). A survey of exocentric compounds in three Kwa languages: Akan, Ewe and Ga. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*, 8(2), 1–26.
- Baugh, A. C., & Cable, T. (2013). *A history of the English language* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Bodomo, A. (1997). *The structure of Dagaare*. CSLI Publications.
- Boundary Commission for England. (2023). *2023 Review: Final Recommendations Report*. London: BCE.
- Butler, D. (1963). *The electoral system in Britain since 1918* (2nd ed.). Clarendon Press.
- Butler, D., & Kavanagh, D. (1997). *The British General Election of 1997*. London: Macmillan.
- Clark, C. (1992). Onomastics. In R. M. Hogg (Ed.), *The Cambridge history of the English language: Vol. 1. The beginnings to 1066* (pp. 452–489). Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gelling, M., & Cole, A. (2000). *The Landscape of Place-Names*. Stamford: Shaun Tyas.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Inusah, A.-R. (2015). The structure of noun phrase in Safaliba. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(14).
- Jenkins, J. (2003). *World Englishes: A resource book for students*. London: Routledge.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kachru, B. B. (1991). Liberation linguistics and the Quirk concern. *English Today*, 7(1).
- Maddicott, J. R. (2010). *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924–1327*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nyame, John & Ebule, Charles. (2022). The Structure, Classification and Functions of the Nzema Noun Phrase. *Journal of Universal Language*. 23. 35-76.
10.22425/jul.2022.23.1.35
- O’Gorman, F. (1989). *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734–1832*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ollennu, Y. A. A. (2017)a. Adjective sequencing in Ga. *The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.5750/bjll.v10i0.1384>
- Ollennu, Y. A. A. (2017)b. On predication of adjectives in Ga. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 9(2).
- Prestwich, M. (1992). *English Politics in the Thirteenth Century*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Schneider, E. W. (2003). The dynamics of New Englishes: From identity construction to dialect birth. *Language*, 79(2), 233–281
- Thakur, D. (2007). *Linguistics simplified syntax*. New Delhi: Bharati Bharan.
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society* (4th ed.). Penguin Books
- Yule, G. (2020). *The Study of Language* (7th ed.). Cambridge: CUP.