



## A Note on *Grand* and its Silent Entourage

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### Abstract

Colloquial English monetary expressions like *twenty grand*, in the sense of *twenty thousand dollars/bucks*, are to be analyzed with *grand* as an adjective modifying a silent version of *total*, in combination with silent counterparts of *thousand* and *bucks*. This analysis supports the idea that the language faculty does not burden itself with any requirement that syntactically and semantically active elements always be pronounced.

### Keywords

silent, total, synonym, numeral, thousand

### 1. Differences between *grand* and *thousand*

Colloquial American English allows *dollars* not to be pronounced in sentences like:

- (1) How can they be asking a hundred and fifty thousand for a house with no roof?
- (2) It'll cost you a hundred just to get into the game.

In an even more colloquial or slang register, (1) can be expressed as:

- (3) How can they be asking a hundred and fifty grand for a house with no roof?  
with *grand* apparently replacing *thousand*.

The interpretation of *a hundred and fifty grand* here is necessarily that of *a hundred and fifty thousand*. Example (3) could not be interpreted as *a hundred and fifty million/billion*, etc. Similarly, *hundred* cannot be replaced by *grand* in (2) without changing the interpretation. The following is possible, but only with the interpretation of *a thousand*:

- (4) It'll cost you a grand just to get into the game.

One might be tempted to propose that a certain very colloquial American English contains an element *grand* with the same syntax and interpretation as *thousand*. Such a proposal would run into a series of difficulties. An initial relatively minor one is that *grand* can “replace” *thousand* only in monetary contexts. Just as one can omit *dollars* in (1) and (2), one can omit *years (old)* in:<sup>1</sup>

- (5) They think they're gonna live to be a thousand.

But in age contexts, *grand* is not at all possible:

- (6) \*They think they're gonna live to be a grand.

Similarly:

- (7) Even at the age of a thousand/\*grand, you'd be sharp as a whistle.

again with silent *years*.

A more major difficulty for such a proposal would come from the fact that pronouncing *dollars* in the context of *grand* is impossible:

- (8) \*How can they be asking a hundred and fifty grand dollars for a house with no roof?
- (9) \*It'll cost you a grand dollars just to get into the game.

These are of course both possible with *thousand* back in place of *grand*:

- (10) How can they be asking a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a house with no roof?

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<sup>1</sup> For relevant discussion, see Kayne (2003).

(11) It'll cost you a thousand dollars just to get into the game.

If *grand* were simply a very colloquial stand-in for *thousand*, why would (8) and (9) not be allowed?

Additional difficulties for the idea that *grand* is merely a very colloquial version of *thousand* are as follows. First, *thousand* can appear in approximative expressions as in:<sup>2</sup>

(12) They've spent (tens of) thousands on their new house just this year alone.

*Grand* is not possible here:<sup>3</sup>

(13) \*They've spent (tens of) grands on their new house just this year alone.

Second, there is a contrast between:

(14) ?Just give me a thousand-ish and we'll call it even.

and its counterpart with *grand*:

(15) \*?Just give me a grand-ish and we'll call it even.

Third, we can have, in a context of stealing dollars one by one:

(16) That may well be the thousandth that he's stolen from them.

but not:

(17) \*That may well be the grandth that he's stolen from them.

Fourth, in a way that to some extent resembles the point made in (6) and (7), *grand* cannot be used in pure counting. Thus in pronouncing *1,2,...999,1000,1001...* as an exercise in arithmetic, one says *a thousand* and not *\*a grand*.

Finally, there is the basic fact that *thousand* looks like a singular noun by virtue of its being preceded by *a* in:<sup>4</sup>

(18) There are \*(a) thousand ways to solve those problems.

*Grand* is moderately widespread in English, but in no case other than the monetary one under discussion does it look like a noun:

(19) Grand openings are always fun.

(20) The grand finale will take place in a few minutes.

(21) Our grandparents are getting old.

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<sup>2</sup> For relevant discussion, see Kayne (2006a).

<sup>3</sup> For me. There are examples on Google that are perhaps acceptable only to those who accept phrases like *three millions* (which I don't).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kayne (2007) and Zweig (2006).

(22) The grand total is 437.

Instead, *grand* otherwise looks like an adjective. To take *grand* to be a variant of noun-like *thousand*, then, in sentences like (3) and (4), does not seem correct.

One might of course entertain the thought that the *grand* of (3) and (4) has nothing at all to do with those of (19)-(22), but that would be to leave awkwardly open the question why it is *grand* that one finds in (3) and (4), and not *train*, say, or *round*, or any other randomly chosen English lexical item. In addition, the questions raised from (5)-(17) would still remain to be answered.

## 2. The link to *grand total*

The alternative that I would like to pursue will involve taking the *grand* of (3) and (4) to be very closely related to the *grand* of (22). More specifically, let me take (4), repeated here:

(23) It'll cost you a grand just to get into the game.

to be close to:

(24) It'll cost you a grand total of a thousand dollars just to get into the game.

and even closer to:

(25) It'll cost you a grand total of a thousand bucks just to get into the game.

with *bucks* a very colloquial counterpart of *dollars* and *grand* a modifier of *total* just as in (22).<sup>5</sup> One of the elements that remains unpronounced in (23), then, is BUCKS (capital letters will indicate non-pronunciation), in the sense of *dollars*.

Comparing (23) and (25) further suggests the presence in (23) of another two silent elements, namely TOTAL and THOUSAND. In other words, setting aside questions concerning *of* and *a*, we reach, as an initial approximation for the structure and interpretation of (23):

(26) It'll cost you a grand TOTAL THOUSAND BUCKS...

The key idea here is that *grand* in these monetary examples is uniformly a modifier of either overt *total* or silent TOTAL.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> At least with expressions of quantity:

- (i) Dollar bills are plentiful these days.
- (ii) \*Buck bills are plentiful these days.

<sup>6</sup> The presence of silent TOTAL has a point in common with Payne and Huddleston's (2002: 354) saying that in:

- (i) This twenty dollars isn't going to get us very far.

the phrase *twenty dollars* is conceptualised as denoting a single entity as in *sum of twenty dollars*, though they didn't give syntactic expression to their idea.

The silence of THOUSAND is keyed in turn to the presence of *grand*.<sup>7</sup> Put another way, *grand* in the register of English in question licenses silent THOUSAND (but not, as noted earlier, HUNDRED or MILLION).

On the other hand, the silence of BUCKS in (23)/(26) is a more general phenomenon, as indicated by the acceptability of (1) and (2), which contain silent DOLLARS/BUCKS even in the absence of *grand*. In what follows, I will not focus on the licensing of DOLLARS/BUCKS,<sup>8</sup> or on the choice between DOLLARS and BUCKS, which seems peripheral to the rest of the analysis.

Of note is that the silence of TOTAL in (26) must somehow depend on the rest of the structure in (26). *Grand* itself is not sufficient, as we can see from:

(27) The grand \*(total) is 437.

as well as:

(28) It'll cost you a grand \*(total) of a thousand bucks just to get into the game.

in neither of which can *total* be left unpronounced, despite the immediate presence of *grand*. The contrast, in particular, between (23)/(26) and (28) suggests that (26) needs to be modified, if we are to understand why silent TOTAL is not licensed in (28).

As a clue to how to proceed toward an understanding of the licensing of TOTAL, let us alter (23) by putting *ten* in place of *a*, yielding:

(29) It'll cost you ten grand just to get into the game.

which must correspondingly be close to:

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<sup>7</sup> The text examples are to be kept separate from instances of anaphoric silent THOUSAND, i.e. from examples in which THOUSAND has an antecedent *thousand*, as in:

(i) John paid three thousand for his car, but Mary must have paid at least ten for hers.

These anaphoric cases, contrary to the text cases, do not distinguish THOUSAND from MILLION, or from HUNDRED:

(ii) John paid three million for his house, while Mary must have paid at least ten for hers.

(iii) John is willing to spend three hundred on repairs, while his wife is willing to spend four.

<sup>8</sup> Worth noting, however, is the fact that in (1) and (2) one can pronounce *dollars/bucks*, so that one has pairs like:

(i) That car'll cost you ten thousand (bucks).

This is in contrast to:

(ii) That car'll cost you ten grand (\*thousand).

recalling:

(iii) You don't have (\*much) enough money to qualify.

(vs. (?)*You have little enough money to qualify*)

From the anti-optionality/last resort perspective of Chomsky (1986; 1995), the lack of optionality seen in (ii) and (iii) is expected. Why (i) is different remains to be understood.

(30) It'll cost you a grand total of ten thousand bucks just to get into the game.

An apparently straightforward modification of (26) would, if we drop the *a* and add *ten* to precede THOUSAND, yield:

(31) It'll cost you grand TOTAL ten THOUSAND BUCKS...

Spelled out mechanically, (31) yields, however, the unwanted:

(32) \*It'll cost you grand ten.

instead of the desired:

(33) It'll cost you ten grand.

What this suggests is that instead of (31), we should have (setting aside *a* again):

(34) It'll cost you ten THOUSAND BUCKS grand TOTAL

the pronunciation of which does yield the desired (33). The new relative order of “ten THOUSAND BUCKS” and “grand TOTAL”, in addition to correctly leading to (33), recalls the possible:

(35) It'll cost you ten thousand bucks total.

which heightens the plausibility of (34).<sup>9</sup>

Thinking of the resemblance between (35) and the following:

(36) It'll cost you ten thousand bucks in total.

(37) It'll cost you ten thousand bucks in all.

let us replace (34) by:<sup>10</sup>

(38) It'll cost you ten THOUSAND BUCKS IN grand TOTAL

which continues to yield (33) as desired. (The silent IN in (38) will not be important for subsequent discussion, however.)

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<sup>9</sup> Even though (i) is less good:

(i) \*?It'll cost you ten thousand bucks grand total.

for reasons that will need to be discovered.

<sup>10</sup> There may be a link between the *in*/IN of (36)-(38) and the following pairs:

(i) They were seventeen in number.

(ii) They numbered seventeen.

(iii) They were four feet in height.

(iv) They were four feet high.

Whether “ten THOUSAND BUCKS IN grand TOTAL” in (38) reflects external merge alone or a combination of external and internal merge is left an open question here, and similarly for (i) and (iii).

### 3. *Grand* is not a numeral

In section 1, I mentioned considerations that argued against taking *grand* to be a variant of *thousand*. The proposal in (38) instead takes *grand* to be a modifier of *total/TOTAL*, with the interpretation as *thousand* coming from the presence of silent THOUSAND. Let me now return to those earlier considerations one by one.

The contrast in (16) vs. (17) concerning *thousandth* vs. *\*grandth* is now seen to reflect the fact that, unlike *thousand*, *grand* is not a numeral at all and hence cannot participate in the formation of ordinals. Similarly, it is the fact that *grand* is not a numeral that prohibits it from being used in arithmetic counting.

The contrast in (14) vs. (15) between *?a thousand-ish* and *\*?a grand-ish* may also be traceable back to the numeral status of *thousand* vs. the non-numeral status of *grand*, even though the adjectival, non-numeral status of *grand* is not sufficient, given *greenish*, *tallish*, etc. On the other hand, if we add *-ish* to (30), the result seems to me to be ill-formed, except perhaps as a joke:

(39) \*It'll cost you a grand-ish total of ten thousand bucks just to get into the game.

Therefore the deviance of (15) is not surprising, from the perspective of (38).

As for the contrast in (12) vs. (13) concerning *thousands* vs. *\*grands*, the core of the answer is again that *grand* is not a numeral, and so presumably cannot cooccur with the (silent) suffix that turns *thousand* into an approximative.<sup>11</sup>

### 4. Silent numerals

A rather different kind of question is posed by the contrasts given earlier in (8)-(11), and repeated here as:

(40) You shouldn't be asking thirty grand for that car.

(41) \*You shouldn't be asking thirty grand bucks/dollars for that car.

Although having *\*grand dollars* in (41) might involve a register clash, the impossibility of *\*...grand bucks...* does not, and calls for an account. There is some

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<sup>11</sup> On the silent suffix in *thousands*, see Kayne (2005b, sect. 3.1).

The impossibility (for me - v. note 3) of plural *-s* in:

(i) That'll cost you ten grand(\*s).

may be related to:

(ii) The grand(\*s) openings will take place tomorrow.

though there exist cases in which an adjective can be followed by *-s* if the noun is silent (cf. Kayne (2003, sect. 4):

(iii) They have two four-year-olds.

Alternatively, or in addition, note:

(iv) They'll all give you a grand total/\*grand totals of ten thousand bucks.

evidence that such an account need not be specific to *grand*. Consider the fact that in phrases in English consisting of numeral + noun, the noun can readily be left unpronounced,<sup>12</sup> but not the numeral by itself:

(42) Mary has written four papers this year, whereas John has written only three.

In (42), the noun *papers* is left unpronounced in the second clause. Yet starting from:

(43) Mary has written four papers, whereas John has only written four squibs.

one cannot have:

(44) (\*)Mary has written four papers, whereas John has only written squibs.

More exactly, (44) is fairly acceptable, but not at all with the interpretation of (43). That a numeral by itself cannot be left unpronounced in the context of an overt noun is shown even more sharply by the following:

(45) Mary has four thousand dollars in her account, and John has four thousand (dollars) in his.

(46) \*Mary has four thousand dollars in her account, and John has thousand (dollars) in his.

Returning to (40) and (41), we can now see how (41) is excluded parallel to (46) and to the impossible interpretation of (44). In (41), the numeral THOUSAND is unpronounced (given my analysis of *grand* as an adjective modifying TOTAL), as in all the relevant sentences with *grand*, yet the associated noun *bucks/dollars* is pronounced. In the impossible interpretation of (44), the numeral FOUR is unpronounced, while the noun *squibs* is pronounced. Example (46) again has the numeral FOUR unpronounced, while the noun(-like numeral) *thousand* is pronounced.

These three examples differ crucially from (40) insofar as in (40) both the numeral THOUSAND and the noun BUCKS are unpronounced. In other words, (41) follows from:

(47) Numerals cannot be left silent unless their (following) associated noun is also left silent.

which may have general validity, beyond English.<sup>13</sup> This account of (41) (that links

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<sup>12</sup> On the possibility that the language faculty need not countenance deletion operations as such, see Kayne (2006b).

<sup>13</sup> If sentences like:

(i) Seventeen linguists and physicists attended the talk.

allow an interpretation in which 34 people attended (which for me is marginal at best), then coordinate structures will fall outside (47).

Also relevant here is the question of gapping, in the interpretation (again marginal at best for me) where the numeral is gapped:



it to (46)) depends on (41) containing a silent numeral THOUSAND. Had *grand* itself been a numeral, such an account of (41) would not have been possible.

As for the question why (47) should hold, there might be a link to familiar left-branch effects, as in:

(48) \*Three John has sisters.

depending on how best to understand left-branch effects in general.<sup>14</sup> (An immediate question is whether languages in which numerals follow their associated noun work the same as languages in which the numeral precedes (and what the implications of the answer are). Languages in which some numerals precede and some follow will be particularly interesting to study.)

An alternative to a left-branch approach to (48), (46), (44) and (41) might, thinking of Perlmutter (1972), rest on the idea that movement (cf. note 14) invariably involves a shadow (resumptive) pronoun, combined with the fact that numerals have the property that there are no pronoun-like elements that can take them alone as antecedent:<sup>15</sup>

(49) Mary has been there for three years and John has been there for three months.

(50) \*Mary has been there for three years and John has been there for them/it/that months.

## 5. Landing sites for silent elements

*Grand* licenses THOUSAND in the context of BUCKS, as in (38). The contrast between (5) and (6), repeated here:

(51) They think they're gonna live to be a thousand.

(52) \*They think they're gonna live to be a grand.

shows that *grand* cannot license THOUSAND in the context of YEARS. If (38) is exactly right, it may be that the licenser of THOUSAND is really the phrase “*grand* TOTAL”.

The licensing of TOTAL itself is not a simple matter, as indicated in particular by (28), repeated here:

(53) It'll cost you a grand \*(total) of a thousand bucks just to get into the game.

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(ii) Mary wrote seventeen novels and John squibs.

and somewhat similarly for pseudo-gapping:

(iii) Mary has written seventeen novels and John has poems.

(iv) People who will write seventeen novels are not to be compared to people who will poems.

<sup>14</sup> And on whether Kayne (2006b) is right to take movement to necessarily be part of silence.

<sup>15</sup> If so, it must be the case that an entire phrase like *that many* cannot count as a shadow (resumptive) pronoun.

The fact that silent TOTAL is impossible here, in opposition to its availability in (38) and, for example, (40), may again be a (subtype of) left-branch effect.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, the impossibility of silent TOTAL in (53) recalls:

(54) Mary is seven.

(55) Mary is a seven-year-old child.

(56) \*Mary is a seven child.

Silent YEARS is possible (in combination with OLD or AGE<sup>17</sup>) in (54), but not in the left-branch context of (56). If left-branch violations necessarily involve movement, then (54) vs. (56) supports the idea that the silent YEARS in (54) must have moved up from its expected position following the numeral.<sup>18</sup>

Taking the left-branch violations in (53) and (56) to involve movement leads to the question of landing site for that movement. Examples from baseball shed light on this question. Consider:

(57) The Yankees won the game with two home runs in the seventh (inning).

*Inning* can be silent in such examples, which contrast with:

(58) The Yankees won the game with two seventh inning home runs.

(59) \*The Yankees won the game with two seventh home runs.

When *seventh inning* is on a left branch, *inning* must be pronounced. So far, this is just like (53)-(56). Adding something new are the following:

(60) The Yankees won the game with two home runs in the top of the seventh (inning).

(61) The Yankees won the game with two top-of-the-seventh-inning<sup>19</sup> home runs.

(62) The Yankees won the game with two top-of-the-seventh home runs.

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<sup>16</sup> How to integrate:

(i) \*?They have five hundred bucks (in) grand \*\*(total).

remains to be seen. It may be that TOTAL in the relevant cases depends (fairly) directly on THOUSAND.

<sup>17</sup> For the choice between the two, see Kayne (2003, sect. 2).

Akin to (54) vs. (56) is:

(i) They have a million-dollar house.

vs.

(ii) \*They have a million house.

(vs. *Their house is worth a million*)

<sup>18</sup> For the idea that all (comparable) instances of silence involve movement, see Kayne (2006b).

<sup>19</sup> Although the use of hyphens feels natural here, the presence of *the* indicates a sharp difference as compared with familiar compounds:

(i) They love Brooklyn/the Bronx.

(ii) They're real Brooklyn lovers.

(iii) They're real (\*the) Bronx lovers.

In (60), containing *the top of the seventh (inning)*,<sup>20</sup> *inning* can be silent, just as in (57). Yet, surprisingly, (62) is appreciably better than (58). The reason may be that in (62) there is a landing site available for the moved silent INNING within the complex phrase beginning with *top*, whereas no such landing site is available in (59).<sup>21</sup>

## 6. The lack of absolute synonyms

If *grand* in sentences like:

(63) They've got twenty grand stashed away somewhere.

is a modifier of silent TOTAL,<sup>22</sup> rather than a variant of *thousand*, then the learner of English evidently must choose for this *grand* the “modifier of TOTAL” analysis and must not choose the “variant of *thousand*” analysis. Yet against the background of what we know about syntax, both of these analyses would seem at first glance to have immediate plausibility. How, then, does the learner make the choice?

The question may appear to be a difficult one, if only because the evidence that I've presented against the “variant of *thousand*” analysis consists entirely of unacceptable sentences (or interpretations), as illustrated by (13), (15), and (17),

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<sup>20</sup> If *the top of the seventh inning* is to be analyzed as in:

- (i) the top HALF INNING of the seventh inning

as is very likely, the question arises as to why there is no left-branch violation there. It may be that it is the anaphoric relation between (HALF) INNING and *inning* in (i) that is the key distinction between (i) and (53)/(56)/(59), which lack that anaphoric relation.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the account proposed in Kayne (2002) for (i) vs. (ii):

- (i) \*John<sub>i</sub> often criticizes him<sub>i</sub>.  
 (ii) John<sub>i</sub> often criticizes him<sub>i</sub>self.

where the phrase containing *self* provides a landing site for the double *John* that is not available in (i). Perhaps akin to (62) is:

- (iii) Ten-grand bills are no longer in circulation.

with *ten-grand* on a complex left-branch, and similarly for:

- (iv) ten grand's worth of diamonds  
 (v) a thirty-grand-a-year job

More clearly similar to (62) is:

- (vi) *two \*(West) 79th buses*

with silent STREET.

<sup>22</sup> Silent TOTAL may also be present in:

- (i) Three students went into the store and bought sixteen books.

in the interpretation in which the total number of books bought is sixteen. A silent distributor has been suggested for the distributive interpretation of sentences like (i) by Beghelli and Stowell (1997) in their discussion of “pseudo-distributivity” (cf. Heim et al. (1991)). The representation of the “cumulative” reading of (i) as:

- (ii) ...and bought A TOTAL OF sixteen books

would give syntactic expression to both interpretations of (i).

as well as by (8) and (9), and by the fact that *grand* cannot be used in arithmetic counting. Negative evidence of this sort is not directly available to the learner of English, who nevertheless invariably (if I'm right) chooses the "modifier of TOTAL" analysis. Why is that?

The simplest answer, as in all such cases, is that the losing analysis (here the "variant of *thousand*" analysis) is not UG-compatible in the first place, i.e. that it is not one that the learner can even entertain, much less choose.

The next question is, what exactly is it that makes the "variant of *thousand*" analysis unavailable in principle? That analysis would make the *grand* of (63) (taken to be a numeral) a homonym of the adjectival instances of *grand* given in (19)-(22). Yet it's not the case that numerals can never be homonyms with other elements (cf. *one/won*, *two/to*, *four/for*, *eight/ate*). In other words, no general ban against numeral homonyms could exclude the "variant of *thousand*" analysis, without excluding too much else. A ban on homonyms involving numerals ten and above might be accurate, but would seem ad hoc.

A more plausible alternative, I think, would be to invoke the long-standing idea that there can be no absolute synonyms. There are many pairs of lexical items that seem synonymous, but they arguably always turn out to be subtly different in interpretation. Assume, now, that numerals invariably have a fixed interpretation that admits no flexibility. Then there can be no numeral near-synonyms. Since, by the long-standing idea alluded to, there can be no numeral absolute synonyms,<sup>23</sup> it follows that *grand* cannot be a variant of *thousand*.

Consequently, the learner has no need to weigh the relative merits of a "variant of *thousand*" analysis against the merits of the "modifier of TOTAL" analysis whose essence is represented in (38). The learner of English immediately chooses the "modifier of TOTAL" analysis (or something close to it), utilizing the option made available by the language faculty of not pronouncing certain syntactically and semantically active elements, and thereby providing the *grand* of monetary expressions with its entourage of silent elements.

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<sup>23</sup> If there are varieties of French that have, for 70, both *soixante-dix* 'sixty-ten' and *septante* 'seventy', then the text prohibition would have to be limited to non-complex numerals (and non-complex items more generally), in the sense in which *soixante-dix* is complex and *thousand* is not. Alternatively, there must exist a sense of "arithmetic equivalent" that is distinct from "synonym" and that would allow the putative French case without allowing *grand* as *thousand*.

Note that *dozen* and *twelve* are clearly not synonymous, though there's a question concerning a possible root *doz-* that will need to be looked into.

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## 英語“Grand”一詞及其伴隨之無聲成份

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### 提要

英語口語中的“twenty grand”用於表示財富時，指“twenty thousand dollars/bucks”。當中的“grand”是修飾無聲成份“total”的形容詞，跟同樣是無聲的“thousand”和“bucks”結合。以上分析旨在說明，語言機制不要求所有活躍的句法語義成份都要唸出來。

### 關鍵詞

無聲，總數，同義詞，數詞，千位數

