

ADJECTIVES

This document discusses adjectives

INTRODUCTION

An adjective has four features:

1. It can occur in attributive function (pre-mod noun) to modify a noun:

The happy monster

2. It can occur in predicative function (complement) after copula verbs.

The monster is happy

3. They can be pre-modified by intensifier 'very':

The very happy monster

4. Take comparative and superlative forms:

Happy, happier, happiest

(But not all adjectives possess these features) From Quirk et al p402

Adjectives and participles

From Quirk et al (p413-): Some adjectives have the same form as the verbal participles ending in -ing and -ed.

His views were surprising

The man seemed offended

In cases where there is a direct object of the -ing form or a by-agent phrase of the -ed form, then the verbal force of the participle is felt. If these are not present and the word can be modified by *very* then it is probably an adjective

The man seemed offended by the policeman (verb participle)

The man seemed (very) offended (adjective)

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and Adverbs: Part of the Same Category?

In much work on syntactic theory, there is no significant distinction made between adjectives and adverbs. This is because it isn't clear that they are really distinct categories. While it is true that adverbs take the *-ly* ending and many adjectives don't, there are other distributional criteria that suggest they might be the same category. They both can be modified by the word *very*, and they both have the same basic function in the grammar – to attribute properties to the items they modify. The issue is still up for debate. To remain agnostic about the whole thing, I use A for both adjectives and adverbs, with the caveat that this might be wrong. If you want to distinguish them, use Adj for adjectives and Adv to abbreviate for adverbs. If you do make a distinction between adjectives and adverbs, you will have to slightly modify the phrase structure rules I have given in the text. What would these rules look like?

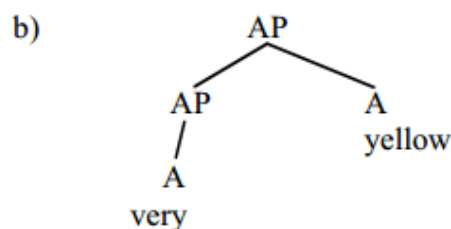
ADJECTIVE PHRASES (APS)

Consider the following two NPs:

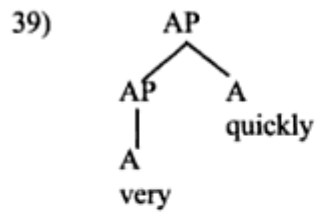
- 33) a) the big yellow book
 b) the very yellow book

On the surface, these two NPs look very similar. They both consist of a determiner, followed by two adjectives³ and then a noun. But consider what modifies what in these NPs. In (33a) *big* modifies *book*, as does *yellow*. In (33b) on the other hand only *yellow* modifies *book*; *very* does not modify *book* (**very book*)—it modifies *yellow*. On an intuitive level then, the structures of these two phrases are actually quite different. (33a) has two adjective constituents that modify the N, whereas (33b) has only one [*very yellow*]. This constituent is called an adjective phrase (AP). The rule for the adjective phrase is given in (33):

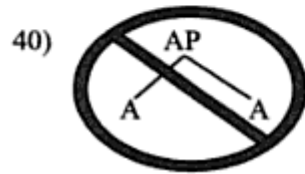
- 34) a) $AP \rightarrow (AP) A$



38) very quickly



Here is a common mistake to avoid: Notice that the AP rule specifies that its modifier is another AP: $AP \rightarrow (AP) A$. The rule does NOT say $*AP \rightarrow (A) A$, so you will never get trees of the form shown in (40):



Syntax: a generative introduction By Andrew Carnie

SOURCES