

THE NOUN PHRASE

This document supplements the lecture notes

STRUCTURE OF THE NOUN PHRASE

The noun phrase (NP) in English consists of a head and dependents. The dependents consist of a determiner construction, pre-head modifiers and post-head modifiers. The basic structure is:

DET | PRE-MOD | HEAD | POST-MOD

The | intelligent | women

The | destruction | of Carthage

A | girl | with red hair

The | strange | man | who lives down the road

DETERMINERS

The determiner can be divided into

- 1) pre-determiners: 'all', 'both', 'half', 'twice' 'such', 'what' and others
- 2) central determiners: definite and indefinite articles, demonstratives, possessives, others such as 'some', 'each', wh-interrogatives
- 3) post-determiner: cardinal and ordinal numbers, 'many', 'few' (Quirk et al 1985)

The head noun imposes restrictions on which determiners can occur with it chiefly depending on the count/non-count classification. There are restrictions on which determiners can occur together but in some cases all three can: 'all her many ideas'

The determiners are chiefly concerned with classifying the NP as definite or indefinite. They have important functions in indicating countability, specificity, genericness, boundedness etc. Nouns can also enter into partitive constructions which can act to reclassify the NP as count/non-count :

A cup of coffee (count NP)

Some coffee (mass NP)

PRE-HEAD MODIFICATION

Pre-head modifiers consist of chiefly adjectives (and adjectival phrases (AdjP)), non-finite clauses (-ing & -ed), nouns and nouns in the genitive. The adjectives are said to be 'attributive' when pre-head. There is a general order with the 'gradable' adjectives normally occurring before non-gradable which is generally fixed:

The big fat red car

* The red big fat car

But the order can be varied to give special emphasis to particular attributes, hence:

Pornographic Swedish films

Swedish pornographic films

Occasionally, nouns can pre-modify the head. Noun premodifiers can become so closely associated with the head that they can be regarded as compounded with it, as indicated by the stress on the modifier (Quirk et al p1330).

The boy actor

His 'life story

Non-finite clauses include the -ing and -ed forms:

The baked potato

The running man

Clauses of this nature in pre-head position tend to attribute properties that are more permanent (and defining) than when used post-head (Quirk et al p1242):

1) The running man

2) The man who is running

1) suggests a more permanent quality. Consider which of the following an advertising executive would chose:

An award-winning service

A service which won an award

We should recognize that modifiers can be restrictive or non-restrictive but with pre-modification it can often be difficult to determine which way it is to be taken:

I'll take you for a ride in my red car

The above includes the possibility of the speaker having just one car which is red or several cars of which one is red.

Difference between Determiners and Pre-modification

Pre-modifiers act to change the quality of the head-noun (e.g. 'red car). But determiners are related to 'determining' the head-noun. In other words, determiners give more information on the reference of the head-noun.

POST-HEAD MODIFICATION:

Post-head modification can be very extensive consisting of prepositional phrases (PP), finite clauses (relative clauses), non-finite clauses (-ing, -ed & to-infinitive) as well as occasionally nouns, adjective and adverbs.

Post-head modification is said to be more explicit than pre-head, or potentially so, especially with finite clauses:

The oil man
The man who sells oil
The man who produces oil
The man who is made from oil

Post-head modification by relative clauses (RC) is the most explicit since it can contain both tense and aspect:

The horse that was running ...
The horse that is running ...
The horse that ran ...

Non-finite clauses tend to 'neutralize' the tense and aspect (or locate it in the present):

the horse running away is..
the horse to run is ...

Restrictive

Modification can be either restrictive or non-restrictive:

- 5) The Chinese, who won the game, were applauded
- 6) The Chinese who won the game were applauded

In 5) we understand that all the Chinese won the game but in 6) only a subset of the Chinese won the game. 6) is restrictive. Pre-head modification can also be restrictive or not, but it is often more difficult to determine which way it should be taken:

Come and see my big red car

This could mean I have one car or I have several cars of which one is red.

Apposition

Post-head modification can also said to be in apposition:

- 7) the news that Leeds won the game... (or 'the opera Carmen')
- 8) the news that appeared in the newspaper...

7) is in apposition with the head noun whereas 8) is defining.

Hyphenated Pre-modification

Post-modification is more specific, but pre-modification is more permanent and defining. English allows for post-modifying elements to be brought in front of the head noun in order to create modification that is both specific and defining. In the following for example phrases and even clauses can be fronted:

A broken-homed society
He's an in-your-face sort of guy
Those I-don't –care-what-you-think kids are at it again

COUNTABILITY AND BOUNDEDNESS

Common nouns can be subclassified into count and non-count. Count nouns denote individual whole entities whereas mass nouns denote an undifferentiated mass or stuff. For example:

I bought some equipment last week

I bought a dog last week

Countability is an inherent property of the noun. However, certain nouns can be reclassified or a mass interpretation can be forced on them. Thus in actual use a noun heading a noun phrase may take on a bounded interpretation or an unbounded interpretation. This interpretation can be through the choice of determiner, modifier or through the reclassification of the noun itself. Thus coffee is traditionally seen as being non-count (unbounded) as in 1 below but can take on a bound interpretation when used with the indefinite article

Give me coffee

Give me a coffee

Similarly a partitive may force a different interpretation:

Give me coffee

Give me a cup of coffee

GENERICNESS

Noun phrases can be said to have generic reference if they refer to the class of objects represented by the head noun as a whole rather than one or a subset of members. Thus in:

The tiger is a fearsome beast

My tiger is a fearsome beast

The first example is generic in that it refers to the whole class of tigers whereas the second is non-generic in that it refers to one specific tiger.

Genericness interacts with the notion of specificity. Specific NPs are not generic and generic noun phrases are by definition non-specific (although non-specific noun phrases are not necessarily generic). Some grammarians consider genericness to be a special case of non-specificity.

Since genericness refers to a class of species as a whole, the distinction between definite/indefinite and singular/plural becomes less important. Generic noun phrases involving count nouns can be observed with the definite, indefinite and zero article:

The tiger makes a good pet

A tiger makes a good pet

Tigers make a good pet

But we should note that in non subject positions, only the definite article tends to retain its genericness:

1. I am studying the tiger
2. I am studying a tiger
3. I am studying tigers

However, a good deal of genericness depends on the interpretation of the sentence and in particular the semantics of the predicate. Example 3 above could be generic and refer to the class of tigers and equally the first example could refer to a specific tiger that had been mentioned before.

Non-count nouns can be generic only when determined by the zero article, but the noun retains its genericness in all positions:

Velvet is a good material to work with
I like to use velvet.

Definite Article

The definite article occurs with singular noun phrases and takes the typical specimen of a class:

The mind is a strange thing
Nobody knows when the wheel was invented

It also occurs with musical instruments and dances:

She's learning the piano
We dance the samba

It's combination with plurals however, causes some problems. Quirk et al say that it can only occur in two constructions: to refer to a group of countrymen and to a group of people thus:

The Chinese are thrifty people
The unemployed are under great strain at this time of year

Chesterman however, claims that if a sub-species of a genre is classed as generic then it can indicate generic reference in the following:

Among the lizards, iguana are the most popular.

The obvious reading here is 'family of lizard-types'. But this throws up problems because it also allows unstressed *some* which is normally classed as inherently non-generic:

Some lizards, unlike the iguana are unpopular

Indefinite Article

The indefinite article 'a' acts to pick out a representative example from a class. A gloss for 'a' is 'a typical X':

When we speak a language we use our minds

'Any' can usually be substituted for it.

When we speak any language we use our minds

Indefinite 'a' is therefore restricted in that it cannot be used to attribute properties to the class as a whole:

Tigers are becoming extinct

The tiger is becoming extinct

* A tiger is becoming extinct

Zero Article

The zero article can be used with plural nouns and non-count nouns to signal an undifferentiated whole:

Cigarettes are bad for your health

Petrol is on the rise again

The possessive determiner *your* can also occur in generic constructions:

Take you average professor - he never goes on strike now does he. Not like your miner.

Further problems

The notion of genericness is normally thought of as a property of noun phrases that is either present or not present i.e. +/- GENRIC. But there can be many disagreements on what constitutes a generic phrase and its binary status. Consider the following example which often cause disagreement:

A beaver built dams in prehistoric times

Time elapses more quickly in old age than childhood

There may be some evidence to suggest that genericness is a more on a cline than a binary feature (Chesterman):

Bachelors are not married

Dodos eat peanuts

Italians make fine furniture

Finns always do well in ski-jumping competitions

In the above there is a gradual decrease in the genericness of the NP as we move from the top example to the bottom. That is the NP refers to less and less of the genre. In the first example, all bachelors are by definition not married so this applies to the whole species. Most if not all Dodos eat peanuts (or did). But not all Italians make furniture: actually only a small subset do. And less still Finns do well in Ski-jumping competitions. Only those at the top of their class.

SPECIFIC AND NON-SPECIFIC NOUN PHRASES

Specific noun phrases make reference to a particular item whereas non-specific noun phrases don't:

Max bought a house in Leopold St

Max wants to buy a house in Leopold St

In the first example, we understand that Max bought a particular house, and there can only be one even though we cannot identify it. In the second, however, we are to understand that Max is thinking of buying a house but doesn't have any particular one in mind. The first example is a specific NP, the second non-specific. We must qualify this by saying that the second is ambiguous somewhat and could be interpreted as Max wanting to buy a specific house in Leopold St.

We can replace *a* with *the* in the second example:

Max would like to buy the house in Leopold St.

and this renders it specific without a doubt. Nevertheless, we can still have a non-specific noun phrase if we chose the right predicate:

Max is looking for the right kind of wife

The interpretation on a NP as specific or non-specific depends to some extent on the determination but also on the semantics of the sentence.

There are two determiners however, that are inherently non-specific: *any* and *either*.

I'm looking for any woman

Do you know either of the women Ed danced with last night?

The notion of specificity in NPs and genericness cut across each other. NPs that are specific and non-generic and NPs that are generic and non-specific. However, not all non-specific NPs are generic and not all non-generic NPs are specific. The relationship can be shown below:

Non generic		Generic
OVERLAP		
Specific		Non-specific

RELATIVE CLAUSES

Definition

A relative clause is a subordinate clause that acts to post-modify the head noun of a noun phrase by linking the noun to the content of the clause through a relative pronoun.

Relative clauses can be restrictive or non restrictive. Also we can contrast relative clauses with appositional clauses which Huddleston terms 'content clauses'.

In the following:

The man who hit me is here

who is a relative pronoun and *who hit me* the relative clause. As a first approximation, we can say that the relative pronoun is doing the job of a noun and a conjunction:

The man hit me and he is here

although this definition is not strictly true.

RESTRICTIVE V NON-RESTRICTIVE

Relative clauses can be restrictive or non-restrictive. A restrictive clause 'restricts' the referent that the noun can refer to. A non-restrictive simply provides more information:

See the manager who deals with complaints

See the manager, who deals with complaints

The first example is restrictive. We are to see one particular manager, the one who deals with complaints and not any of the other manager. The second is non-restrictive and tells us that there is (probably) only one manager. The two types are normally distinguished by orthographic means (commas) or intonation.

Restrictive

Prototypical restrictive relative clauses are introduced by relative pronouns chosen from a) *who*, *which*, *who* b) *whose* c) *where*, *when*, *why*

1. The man who hit me
 2. The computer which broke down
 3. The man whose car I hit
- The place where I am from

There is some gender concord in type a) in that *who* is selected for human referents while *which* is selected for non-human referents (with a small amount of reclassification such as in the case of pets or very small babies).

Type c) acts as possessive determiner. In 3 we can paraphrase this as *The man, I hit his car...* and *which* does the job of *his*.

Subject, Object, Compliment, Adjunct

English is fairly unique in the world's language in that the relative clauses can relativise on the subject, object, compliment, adjunct and just about anything.

The man who saw me (subject)

The man who I saw (object^D)

The man who I gave the apple to (object^I)

The man who I became (compliment)

The day the sun shines again I'll be happy (adjunct)

Keenan introduced the relative clause accessibility hierarchy as below

$S > O^D > O^I > C > A$

which states that a language that can relativise on a constituent at position *i* in the above order can also relativize on all constituents to the left of this.

That can also function to introduce a relative clause:

The tree that fell on the house has been removed

The dog that he bought died

The man that we appointed

However, some grammarians (notably Huddleston) analyse *that* as not a pronoun but a subordinating conjunction because (1) it doesn't allow prepositions to be fronted when it is the compliment of a PP:

The dog to which he gave the food

* The dog to that he gave the food

When RC relativizes on the object the relative pronoun can often be omitted:

The tree (that) he poisoned is dead

The letter (which) he wrote has arrived

* The man (who) spoke to me has gone

Non-restrictive relative clauses

Non restrictive RCs cannot normally drop their relative pronoun even when relativizing on the object

* The man, (who) I hit, complained to the police

Appositive Clause

Appositive clause can appear similar to relative clauses:

The news that we had won was well received

The news that appeared in the paper was well received.

In 1) the subordinate clause is an appositive clause whereas in 2) it is a relative clause. We can see that 1) will not allow replacement by *which*:

* The news which we had one was well received

Also, we can see that *that* in the appositive clause is not functioning as subject or object or whatever. It has no function but to link the noun with the clause.

Only a small number of nouns allow apposition. Usually nouns that have been deverbalized such as *appear, belief* and a few nouns such as *fact, idea*.

The belief that the Beatles are mightier than God is not widespread

Despite their similarity with relative clauses, there is rarely any misunderstanding in actual use:

The message that she sung was heard by all

This example is potentially ambiguous. It could mean *She sang the message rather than speaking it* or it could mean *the message was about the fact that she sung*. Normally intonational prominence on *she sung* would signal the second meaning.

Some grammarians (Huddleston) call appositive clauses 'content clauses'.

POST MODIFICATION BY NON-FINITE CLAUSE

All three non-finite clauses *-ing*, *-ed* and *infinitive* can post-modify a noun

-ing participle

The *-ing* post-modifying clause draws parallels with the relative clause but is simpler and less explicit:

1. The man who wrote the reports
was writing the reports
is writing the reports
will be writing the reports

The man writing the reports

In 1) the RC can express past, present and future but in 2) we take the time of the non-finite clause as being the present. The non-finite status of the clause tends to neutralize tense as well as aspect as seen in the following:

- The man who writes the report
The man who is writing the reports
The man writing the reports

Here the non-progressive and progressive aspect expressed in the RCs is 'neutralized' by the non-finite clause.

Normally, the *-ing* modifying clause can only have as its implied subject the head noun it is modifying but the use of the passive is one exception:

The man writing the reports is ready

*The reports writing are ready

The reports being written are ready

-ed participle

Like the -ing participle, the -ed participle draws parallels with corresponding RC constructions in that it can only have as its implied subject the noun it modifies:

The fish eaten by the cat...

The fish that was eaten

will be eaten

had been eaten

The -ed modifying clause is seen to be less explicit than the finite RC. Also, the -ed clause is firmly in the passive voice as opposed to the -ing which is in the active. Since intransitive verbs cannot be passivized there is no corresponding -ed construction:

The train that has arrives at platform 2...

* The train arrived at platform 2...

Infinitive

Unlike the -ing and -ed clause, the to-infinitive can take as subject, object, complement or adjunct.

The man to see you is Mr Wilson S

The man (for you) to choose is Mr Wilson O

The thing (for you) to be is a linguist C

The time (for you) to go is in July A

In addition, the to-infinitive can take an optional subject in the case of (but not in the subject case) using the *for* complementizer.

There can be some ambiguity with infinitive construction:

The man to choose is Mr Wilson

Here we can mean we should choose Mr Wilson or Mr Wilson is the best man to make decisions.

NOUN CLASSES

In the following, the whole noun phrase: *the two large black dogs* serves to refer to the entities under question. We say that the NP refers. The noun *dog* has denotation but does not refer by itself. The modifiers *large* and *black* act to modify the noun and restrict the members of the class. But *two* does not specify further the properties of the NP, rather it acts to determine the number of entities referred to (two in this case); and likewise *the* does not specify further properties of the noun. Thus *large* and *black* are modifiers, whereas *two* and *the* are determiners.

The two large black dogs were sleeping peacefully

We can distinguish between nouns semantically. We note that nouns can be classified according to their referential property. Viz: proper nouns, pronouns or common nouns. Pronouns are anaphoric at two levels, one at a discourse level where they refer to some previously mentioned item and one within the sentence itself. Thus reflexives are anaphoric at the sentence level.

We can also divide nouns into count and non-count although many nouns can be reclassified from one into the other. Thus we have

a cup of coffee
two coffees

Partitives

Nouns may enter into partitive constructions that denote part of a whole. This may be partition with respect to quality or quantity. With **quantity** partitive nouns such as *kind*, *type* are used followed by *of* and the noun. Thus we have

Singular	Plural
a kind of computer	kinds of computers
a type of cheese	types of cheeses

Partitives denote a part of a whole. Partitives can either be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitatives can modify count and non-count:

a kind of computer
kinds of computers
a type of bread

Quantitative partitives can modify non-count nouns thus:

a piece of cake

The partitive construction takes on the number of the partitive noun and this will be reflected in the verb agreement. Mass nouns can go through either reclassification or partition to allow them to function in count environments:

France has many types of cheeses
France has many cheeses

Note, partitives can force a mass interpretation in some cases and numerals can force a count interpretation.

Plural count nouns cannot take *piece* however and instead have their own partitive:

- A herd of cattle
- A group of people

Singular count can take *piece* amongst others:

- A piece of a computer
- A branch of a tree

Gender

Words can be classed into groups based on gender although this is not a particular feature of English. In English suffixes can change the class from concrete to abstract: *neighbour*--> *neighbourhood*

Concord

Within the noun phrase there are certain dependency relations between the head and other parts of the phrase. This leads to marking on the head and the modifiers to reflect concord and case.

In inflectional languages, there is concord (agreement) between head and modifiers for gender, number and case.

NOUN CLASSIFIERS

In many languages classifiers are required in the context of numeral classifiers. Some nouns lie on the threshold between classifiers and specific nouns.

Noun Classifiers:

- * Always free form - a classifier will occur in the same noun phrase as the noun it qualifies but it is always a separate constituent, never forming a morphological unit with the noun.

Scope: If a noun class indicates class by affix on itself, then this affix will also apply concordially to some other words in the phrase.

- * Classifiers however: there is never any reference to them outside the phrase.

Noun classes are obligatory - noun classifiers depend on style/mode

Exception: (1) one lang family has verb classification

incorp of classifying noun into verb

Indo-euro family is noun class system

Agglutinative and Inflectional languages prefer noun classes

Isolating prefer classifiers

Noun classes and classifiers are late developments in languages. Creoles do not have them.

P114 Seven features of classification: material - shape - consistency - arrangement - location - quanta

p241 The difference between noun classes and classifiers is that classifiers add no information and have no meaning other than 'unit'. Definition: of numeral classifiers as items which are shown to be redundant when translation into a non-numeral classifier language like English.

COMPLIMENTS OF NOUNS

Typically, deverbalized nouns take compliments:

She envied Peter

Her envy of Peter

They believed in God

Their belief in God

Some nouns not derived from verbs can take complements though: *author, king, fact*. Compliments are typically realized by PPs usually headed by *of* and subordinate clauses, finite or non-finite.

When we compare nouns with complements with verbs with compliments we run into problems. Our criteria for compliments of verbs was a) the presence of a particular compliment depends on the presence of a verb of the appropriate subclass b) compliments are obligatory in most circumstances, c) prototypical compliments are NPs and AdjP.

Considering c) first. NPs compliments of nouns are appositional and are not at all like objects. B) most compliments of nouns can be dropped. C) Nouns that take subordinate clause compliments are normally nouns derived from verbs that allow clause compliments such as *belief, knowledge* as well as a few morphologically simple stems: *fact, idea*. Thus:

the fact that John had overeaten (comp)

the fact that John had overlooked (mod)

Huddleston defines the first as a content clause (traditional grammar treats it as apposition rather than complementation) and the second as a relative clause. We find that only a small subclass of nouns can take content clauses as compliments whereas all can take relative clauses. We cannot replace *fact* in 1 with *king* for example. With PPs it is a bit more tricky:

Her reliance on her father (comp)

The book on the table (mod)

In 2) the prep is a common prep and can be replaced with any other prep. In 1) however, we cannot change the prep so easily: **Her reliance under her father* The prep *on* is dependent on selection of a head from appropriate subclass whereas *of* in 2 is not. In the following:

a king of England (comp)

a king of considerable importance (mod)

the prep in the 2 is like *with* and is in paradigmatic contrast with *without*. Thus we can say *a king without considerable importance* but not *a king without England* without changing the meaning of 1. Conversely, part of the complement in 1 can be fronted in questions: *What country was he a king of?* whereas this is not possible with 2: **What considerable importance was he a king of?* Thus we analyze 1 as a complement and 2 as a modifier.

One last point on compliments. The linear order of compliments and post-modifiers is always complement-modifier:

a king of England of considerable importance

* a king of considerable importance of England

PRONOUNS

Traditionally a pronoun is a word which substitutes for a lexical noun. The pronouns function syntactically in a similar way to noun phrases. However, they do not normally allow determiners or modifiers. In fact, it is best to think of the pronouns as having their own internal determiner.

	Personal 1. Subjective 2. Objective	I we you he she it they who me us you him her it them whom
CENTRAL	Possessive 3. Determinative 4. Independent	my our your his her its their whose mine ours yours his hers its theirs whose
	5. Reflexive	myself ourselves yourself himself herself itself themselves
RECIPROCAL		each other one another
DEMONSTRATIVE	Singular Plural	this that these those
RELATIVE		who which whom whose that (zero)
INTEROGATIVE	Determinative Independent	who whom whose what which who whom whose what which
INDEFINITE	Universal Assertive	everybody everyone everything all each both somebody someone something some many much more few little
	Nonassertive Negative	anybody anyone anything any either nobody no one nothing none few little

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are: *who*, *which*, *whom*, *whose*, *what*. They function in interrogative sentences. There are two sets, those with determinate function (i.e. appearing before a noun as determiner) and those with independent function (i.e. acting as head of the noun phrase)

Whose car is that What newspaper do you read?
Whose is that What do you read?

Interrogative pronouns can have indefinite or definite reference.

Who is your favourite conductor? (indefinite)
Which is your favourite conductor (definite)

Indefinite Pronouns

The indefinite pronouns have indefinite reference, unlike all the other pronouns. They consist of compounds with two morphemes (e.g. somebody) or single morpheme words (e.g. more).

Numerals

Numerals can function as determiners or heads of NPs. They consist of cardinal (one, two, three...) and ordinal numbers (first, second, third).

SOURCES

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik. (1985) *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*.

Huddleston *Introduction to the grammar of English language*. CUP