

Topic 9: The noun phrase - Handout

The noun phrase (NP) can be indefinitely complex, since sentences themselves can be reshaped so as to come within noun-phrase structure.

That girl is Angela Hunt.

That girl is tall.

That girl was standing in the corner.

You waved to that girl when you entered.

That girl became angry because you waved to her.

That tall girl standing in the corner who became angry because you waved to her when you entered is Angela Hunt.

In describing complex noun phrases, we distinguish three components:

a/ **The head**, around which the other components cluster and which dictates concord and other kinds of congruence with the rest of the sentence outside the noun phrase:

that tall girl standing x those tall girls standing ...

b/ **The premodification**, which comprises all the items placed before the head, namely determiners, adjectives and nouns: *some very expensive office furniture*

c/ **The postmodification**, comprising all the items placed after the head, namely PPs, nonfinite and relative clauses:

the chair by the wall

a car which she bought recently

Restrictive and nonrestrictive modification

The head can be viewed as a member of a class which can be linguistically identified through the modification that has been supplied (**restrictive**) or the head can be viewed as unique or as a member of a class that has been independently identified; any modification given to such a head is additional information which is not essential for identifying the head (**nonrestrictive**).

Come and meet my famous mother.

Angela Hunt, who is in the corner, wants to meet you.

Postmodification

the taxi which is waiting outside x the taxi waiting outside

Personality is ascribed basically to human beings but extends to creatures in the supernatural world which are thought of as having human characteristics such as speech: *Rover, who was barking, frightened the children.*

This is the baby which needs inoculation.

Case in the relative pronoun

the girl who spoke to him

the girl to whom he spoke

the girl who(m) he spoke to

the girl he spoke to

The relative pronoun can be replaced by special adjunct forms for place, time, and cause:

That is the place where he was born. x That is where he was born.

That is the period when he lived here. x That is when he lived here.

That is the reason why he spoke. x That is why he spoke.

Restrictive relative clauses

The boy that/who is playing the piano.

The boy (who(m), that) we met.

The table that/which stands in the corner.

The table (which, that) we admire.

Nonrestrictive relative clauses

The loose nonrestrictive relationship is often semantically indistinguishable from coordination or adverbial subordination, as in the examples below:

Then we met Barbara, who invited him to a party/and she invited him to a party.

He got lost on Snowdon, which he was exploring/while he was exploring it.

Sentential relative clauses

This type has as its antecedent not a noun phrase but a whole clause or sentence or even sequence of sentences.

He admires Mrs Brown, which surprises me/which I find strange.

Appositive clauses

The appositive clause resembles the relative clause in being capable of introduction by *that*, and in distinguishing between restrictive and nonrestrictive. It differs in that the particle *that* is not an element in the clause structure (S, O, etc.) and it must be in a relative clause, and the head of the NP must be an abstract noun such as *fact, proposition, reply, remark, answer*, and the like.

The belief that no one is infallible is well-founded.

A message that he would be late arrived by special delivery.

Postmodification by nonfinite clauses

-ing participle clauses

The man who writes/is writing the obituaries is my friend.

The man writing the obituaries is my friend.

-ed participle clauses

The only car that will be repaired by that mechanic is mine.

The only car repaired by that mechanic is mine.

infinitive clauses

The next train which arrived/to arrive was from York.

The man for John to consult is Wilson. x The man to consult is Wilson.

Postmodification by PPs

A prepositional phrase is by far the commonest type of postmodification in English
e.g. *the road to Lincoln, a tree by a stream, this book on grammar, action in case of fire*

Minor types of postmodification

These minor types are by adverb phrases, postposed adjectives, postposed 'mode' qualifiers: *the road back* (which leads back), *something strange* (the indefinite pronoun followed by adjective modification), *Lobster Newburg* (a French model, confined to cuisine)

Multiple modification

the girl and the boy in the corner nearest the door talking to Peter

Apposition

Two or more NPs are in apposition when they have identity of reference. The appositives may be juxtaposed, separated, the apposition may be indicated by a conjunction or by forms such as *that is* and *namely*, e.g.

A professional singer, someone trained in Paris, had been engaged for the concert.

His birthday present lay on the table, a book on ethics, the work of his professor.

Linguistics or the study of language attracts many students.

Premodification

Types of premodifying item: adjective, participle, -s genitive, noun, adverbial, sentence: *his delightful cottage, his completed cottage, his fisherman's cottage, his country cottage, his far-away cottage, his pop-down-for-the-weekend cottage*

Multiple premodification

With single head: *his last brilliant book*

With multiple head: *the new table and chairs*

With modified modifier: *his really quite unbelievable delightful cottage*

Discontinuous modification

It is not uncommon for a NP to be interrupted by other items of clause structure, e.g.

You'll meet a man tomorrow carrying a heavy parcel.

I had a nice glass of beer but in an ugly glass.

different production figures from those given earlier