

Introduction

The indefinitely complex noun phrase

- 17.1 Just as the sentence may be indefinitely complex, so may the noun phrase. This must be so, since sentences themselves can be restaped so as to come within noun-phrase structure. For example, the following sentences [1a–e], simple and complex, can become one simple sentence [2] with a very complex noun phrase as subject:

| | |
|--|------|
| The girl is Mary Smith. | [1a] |
| The girl is tall. | [1b] |
| The girl was standing in the corner. | [1c] |
| You waved to the girl when you entered. | [1d] |
| The girl became angry because you knocked over her glass. | [1e] |
| <i>The tall girl standing in the corner who became angry because you</i> | |
| <i>knocked over her glass after you waved to her when you entered is</i> | |
| Mary Smith. | [2] |

Moreover, starting from [2], we could reconstruct any of the sentences listed in [1a–e] – and in fact we could not understand the noun-phrase subject (printed in italics) of [2], unless we recognized its constituent parts as they are set out in [1a–e].

Yet [2] has introduced many changes. We have, for example, suppressed all or part of the verbs in [1c] and [1d]; we have put *tall*, which is complement in [1b], as a modifier before the noun *girl*; we have replaced *the girl* of [1e] by *who*.

After describing determinatives and nouns in Chapter 5, the purpose of the present chapter is to state the conditions governing the making of noun phrases by processes such as those indicated above.

Noun-phrase constituents

- 17.2 In describing noun phrases we need to distinguish the following constituent parts:

(A) The **HEAD**, around which (for the most part) the other constituents cluster and which dictates concord with other parts of the sentence:

[The tall *girl* standing in the corner] is my sister.

[The tall *girls* standing in the corner] are my sisters.

[The tall *girl* in the corner $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{who} \\ \textit{*which} \end{array} \right\}$ has a blue sweater] is my sister.

I saw the tall girl in [the *corner* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{which} \\ \textit{*who} \end{array} \right\}$ was full of people].

(B) The **DETERMINATIVE**, which includes

(a) **predeterminers**, *ie* all items which can precede any central determiner (including zero article) in a noun phrase, *eg*: *all, both, double* (*cf* 5.15*ff*):

all the furniture *both* those musicians

(b) **central determiners**, including those items listed in 5.11*ff*, *eg* the articles, *this, some*:

some new office furniture *all those* fine musicians

(c) postdeterminers, which follow central determiners but precede premodifiers, *eg* adjectives. Postdeterminers include *eg* numerals, *many, few, several* (*cf* 5.20ff):

the *many* new offices the *few* survivors

(C) The PREMODIFICATION, which comprises all the items placed before the head other than determinatives, notably adjectives (or, rather, adjective phrases, *cf* 7.20) and nouns:

some furniture
 some *expensive* furniture
 some *very expensive* furniture
 some *very expensive office* furniture
 some *very very expensive office* furniture

(D) The POSTMODIFICATION, comprising all the items placed after the head, notably:

prepositional phrases: the car *outside the station*
 nonfinite clauses: the car *standing outside the station*
 relative clauses: the car *that stood outside the station*
 complementation (*cf* 15.63ff): a bigger car *than that*

Restrictive and nonrestrictive modification

17.3 Modification can be restrictive or nonrestrictive. The modification is RESTRICTIVE when the reference of the head is a member of a class which can be identified only through the modification that has been supplied. The girl in example [2] in 17.1 is only identifiable as Mary Smith provided we understand that it is the particular girl who is tall, who was standing in the corner, and who became angry. Such modification would not have been actually necessary unless there had been other girls present, tall but not in the corner, or in the corner but not tall, or who had not become angry. Restrictiveness, then, indicates a limitation on the possible reference of the head.

Alternatively, the referent of a noun phrase may be viewed as unique or as a member of a class that has been independently identified (for example in the preceding context). Any modification given to such a head is additional information which is not essential for identification, and we call it NONRESTRICTIVE. For example, the relative clause *who is in the corner* in [1] is nonrestrictive:

Mary Smith, *who is in the corner*, wants to meet you. [1]

By reason of being designated by a proper name, Mary Smith's identity is independent of whether or not she is in the corner (though the information on her present location may be useful enough). If a man says [2], the daughter is identified as being one out of two daughters in the family and also as younger than the other daughter:

Come and meet my *younger* daughter. [2]

[2] is thus an example of restrictive premodification. If, on the other hand, a

man (in a monogamous society) says [3], the premodifier *beautiful* is understood as nonrestrictive:

Come and meet my *beautiful* wife. [3]

Another example:

I don't want him to put his *ugly* nose into my house again. [4]

Sentences [1], [3], and [4] are inevitably nonrestrictive since - being treated as unique - *Mary Smith*, *wife*, and *nose*, in these sentences will not admit restriction. But almost any head that can be restrictively modified is also susceptible of nonrestrictive modification, eg:

The tall girl, *who is a dentist*, is Mary Smith. [5]

Here the only information offered to identify the girl as Mary Smith is the allusion to her tallness; the mention of her work as a dentist is not offered as an aid to identification but for additional interest.

Other nouns which have nonrestrictive postmodification include those with generic reference:

The giant panda, *which is to be found in the remote parts of China*, lives exclusively on bamboo shoots.

Note In popular narrative style, there is a nonrestrictive use of premodifying adjective in cases like the following (cf cleft sentences, 18.26 Note [b]):

Reporters hounded an *embarrassed* Ben Miles over his TV gaffe last week and in reply to one questioner the *unhappy* Miles made things still worse by . . .

17.4 The fact that nonrestrictive relative clauses are not essential for identification enables us in [1] and [1a] to make different parts of the sentence into a relative clause:

My brother, *who is an engineer*, lives in America. [1]

My brother, *who lives in America*, is an engineer. [1a]

Semantic equivalence is still preserved in [1] and [1a] (although there is a difference in focus). A nonrestrictive relative clause may resemble an adverbial clause (cf simultaneous meaning, 15.28), eg:

My brother, *who has lived in America for over 30 years*, can still speak Italian. [2]

In [2], the relative clause is grammatically optional, like any other nonrestrictive item, but semantically obligatory as the correlate of *still* in the superordinate clause. The relative clause here can be paraphrased as an adverbial clause [2a], with initial position (unlike the relative clause) [2b], or as an adverbial prepositional phrase [2c]:

My brother can still speak Italian, *although he has lived in America for over 30 years*. [2a]

Although he has lived in America for over 30 years, my brother can still speak Italian. [2b]

After over 30 years in America, my brother can still speak Italian. [2c]

The predications of the two clauses [2a] and [2b] are contrastive.

Nonrestrictive relative clauses may also imply other adverbial functions, such as cause ('because he had been very helpful', 'for being very helpful') in [3]:

Ann thanked her teacher, *who had been very helpful*. [3]

By contrast, restrictive relative clauses with general antecedents (*cf* 17.21) express conditional relationship, *eg*:

Students *who work hard* pass their exams. ['If students work hard, they pass their exams.']

- 17.5 Proper nouns cannot have restrictive modification when they have the normal unique denotation. However, when the proper noun temporarily takes on features of a common noun, restrictive modification is possible (*cf* 5.64):

the Springfield that is in Illinois [1]

the Johnson who wrote the dictionary [2]

Nor are restrictive relative clauses possible with nonnominal antecedents (*cf* 'sentential relative clauses', 17.9):

He likes dogs, which surprises me. [3]

Nonassertive heads cannot have nonrestrictive modification:

*I won't see $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{any person,} \\ \text{anyone,} \end{array} \right\}$ who has not made an appointment. [4]

By contrast, nonrestrictive modification is possible with assertive heads:

Someone, who sounded like your mother, called to say she wanted to see you. [5]

Nonspecific determiners like *any*, *all*, and *every* usually have only restrictive modification:

**Every book*, which is written to deceive the reader, should be banned. [6]

**All the students*, who had failed the test, wanted to try again. [7]

However we may occasionally find nonrestrictive as well as restrictive modification, as in:

All the students, who had returned from their vacation, wanted to take the exam. [8]

But positional variation of *all* is possible only with a nonrestrictive clause (*cf* 5.16, 6.50):

The students, who had all (of them) returned from their vacation, failed the test. [7a]

**The students who had all (of them)* failed the test wanted to try again. [8a]

- 17.6 We shall draw attention to the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive in the description of the modification types later on, but two general points may be of value now.

First, modification at its 'most restrictive' tends to come after the head:

Any person *who wishes to see me* must make an appointment.

By contrast, our decision to use an item as a premodifier (such as nonrestrictive *silly* in *a silly fool*) often reflects our wish that it be taken for granted and not be interpreted as a specific identifier.

Secondly, restrictive modification tends to be given more prosodic emphasis than the head, since there is a built-in contrast, as in (*cf* examples in 17.3):

Susan is my *Ét. Der* daughter.

John is my *LÄZY* son.

Nonrestrictive modification, on the other hand, tends to be unstressed in prehead position:

my *beautiful* **WIFE**

In post-head position, its 'parenthetic' relation is endorsed by being given a separate tone unit (frequently with reduced prominence and narrow pitch range); or, in writing, by being enclosed by commas (*cf* 17.22).

Temporary and permanent modification

- 17.7 There is a second dichotomy that has some affinities with the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive but rather more with the contrast of nonprogressive and progressive in predication (*cf* 4.25*ff*), or permanent and temporary in agential nouns (*cf* App I.34*f*). Modification in noun-phrase structure may also be seen as permanent or temporary (*cf* 7.21), such that items placed in premodification position are typically given the status of PERMANENT or, at any rate, characteristic features. Although this does not mean that postmodification position is committed to either temporariness or permanence, those adjectives which have to be predicative have a notably TEMPORARY reference. Thus [1] would be understood as [1a]:

the *courteous* man [1]

the man *who is courteous*
[*ie* 'normally and not merely at this moment'] [1a]

In contrast, [2] would be understood as having reference only to a specific time, and this corresponds to the nonoccurrence of [2a]:

The man is *ready*. [2]

*the *ready* man [2a]

(On the relevance of the distinction in determiners between indefinite and definite, *cf* 5.26*ff*.) On this basis, we see that timidity and fear are contrasted in part according as the first is seen as permanent [3], the second as temporary [4]:

a man *who is timid* ~ a *timid* man [3]

a man *who is afraid* ~ *an *afraid* man [4]

Just as some modifiers are too strongly identified with temporary status to appear in prehead position, so there can be modification constrained to prehead position because it indicates permanent status. Thus the toe which is characteristically (and permanently) big in relation to the rest is called *the big toe*, and we cannot say of it **The toe is big* without destroying this permanent characteristic and making the expression seem to refer only (for example) to a temporary swelling. Compare also *the original* ['first, earliest'] version beside *His work is quite original* ['of a new type'], which would permit adverbial indication of time span (*now, always*, etc: cf 7.87).

The explicitness of postmodification

- 17.8 In general, premodification is to be interpreted (and, most frequently, can only be interpreted) in terms of postmodification and its greater explicitness. That is, *some tall college girls* will be interpreted as 'some girls who are tall and who are (studying) at a college'. The premodified noun phrase [1] may include, for example, all of the relations which are explicit in the postmodified noun phrases [1a-e]:

| | |
|---|------|
| an <i>oil man</i> | [1] |
| a man <i>who sells oil</i> | [1a] |
| a man <i>who delivers oil</i> | [1b] |
| a man <i>who produces oil</i> | [1c] |
| a man <i>who investigates oil</i> | [1d] |
| a man <i>who advocates the use of oil</i> | [1e] |

What normally happens, as in the case of *big toe* (in 17.7) and *oil man* [1], is that ambiguity does not arise since one sense is selected in a specific context (cf lexicalization, App 1.9ff). Thus, for example, the question 'Will the oil man call today?' will normally carry only one interpretation in any given context.

Explicitness in postmodification varies considerably, however. It is greater in the finite relative clause [2] than in the nonfinite *-ing* clause [2a], from which the explicit tense (*is?/was?*) is absent, though this in turn is more explicit than the prepositional phrase [2b], from which the verb indicating a specific posture is absent:

| | |
|--|------|
| the girl <i>who was standing in the corner</i> | [2] |
| the girl <i>standing in the corner</i> | [2a] |
| the girl <i>in the corner</i> | [2b] |

Reduction in explicitness in the noun phrase is closely related to the linguistic and situational context. There is, typically, a progression from 'more explicit' to 'less explicit' in a discourse. One instance of such sequential and gradual reduction from sentence [3], via relative clause [3a], via prepositional phrase [3b], to pro-form [3c], can be seen in Anthony Burgess's novel *Inside Mr Enderby*. When flying to Rome, the main character of the novel is warned by an American passenger:

| | |
|--|-----|
| 'Your ticket does not entitle you to undisputed monopolization of the john.' [ie the lavatory] | [3] |
|--|-----|

The fellow passenger who issued this warning is subsequently referred to as:

the American who had ousted Enderby from the job [3a]

to be further reduced to:

the American from the job [3b]

and finally:

an American, not *the job one*, poised his camera to shoot [3c]

The order of presentation in this chapter will be from most explicit to least explicit. We therefore start with the most explicit type of noun-phrase modification, *ie* postmodification by finite clause.

Postmodification by finite clauses

Types of postmodifying finite clauses

- 17.9 We distinguish two major types of finite clauses as noun-phrase postmodifiers, RELATIVE clauses [1] and APPOSITIVE clauses [2]:

The news *that appeared in the papers this morning* was well received. [1]

The news *that the team had won* calls for a celebration. [2]

Although superficially similar, the difference between these two types of finite clause becomes apparent, for example if we try to replace *that* by *which* in the two examples:

The news *which appeared in the papers this morning* was well received. [1a]

*The news *which the team had won* calls for a celebration. [2a]

Thus *that* is not replaceable by a *wh*-pronoun in appositive clauses, as it is in relative clauses. More significantly from a general point of view, *that* in [2] has no function as clause element within the *that*-clause, as it has in relative clause structure. Thus in [1], the relative pronoun is subject; in [1b] it is object:

The news *which we saw in the papers this morning* was well received. [1b]

Appositive clauses will be further discussed in 17.26*f*. The type of relative clause represented by [1] is called an ADMINIMAL relative clause, and will be discussed below.

In addition to adnominal relative clauses, we distinguish NOMINAL relative clauses, as in [3], and SENTENTIAL relative clauses, as in [4]:

What surprises me is that they are fond of snakes and lizards. [3]

They are fond of snakes and lizards, *which surprises me*. [4]

Nominal relative clauses are unique among relative clauses in that they 'contain' their antecedents. They are discussed, with other nominal dependent clauses, in 15.8*f*.